

POLITICS AND POETICS OF EPIC IN THE FRENCH RENAISSANCE:

RONSARD, DU BELLAY, AND D'AUBIGNÉ

by

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Abstract

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Politics and Poetics of Epic in the French Renaissance: Ronsard, Du Bellay, and d'Aubigné

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This dissertation examines the epic genre and its mutations from poetic and political perspectives during the sixteenth century. Renaissance poetic treatises acknowledged epic as the highest poetic form and the greatest aspiration of poets. A French imitation of the *Aeneid* would be the mark of national greatness, a poem to confirm France as the literary, cultural, and political successor to ancient Rome. It would both capture and foster national sentiment for a nation with imperial ambitions. However, any attempts to compose such a work either produce mediocre poetry or are so mutated in form that they can barely be labeled epic.

The three texts that form the focal point of this dissertation (Pierre de Ronsard's *Franciade*, Joachim du Bellay's *Antiquitez de Rome*, and Agrippa d'Aubigné's *Tragiques*) provide different angles to approach this problem. The *Franciade* represents an incomplete attempt at a strict imitation of the *Aeneid*, written by a court poet under the patronage of the king. As a relatively short sonnet sequence, the *Antiquitez* may be a surprising inclusion in a discussion on epic, but the text is set apart by its ability to draw on epic themes to lament the lost Roman Empire while providing a warning to France as a nation on the brink of civil war. As a Protestant account of the Wars of Religion, the *Tragiques* allows consideration of the conflict between national and religious sentiment as d'Aubigné ignores national and generic constraints to compose a text that is itself martial action.

This thesis uses David Quint's theories of epic's politicization to explain France's failure to produce its long-awaited epic. I conclude that despite the professed desire for a Virgilian epic, the political and social circumstances of sixteenth-century France render a true epic impossible. Politically, there is no victory and no empire, only the descent into civil war rather than emergence from one. The Reformation divides French society along faction lines, replacing a collective sense of Frenchness with the collectivity of distinct religious groups that transcends political boundaries. In sum, a study of epic's politicization can illuminate Renaissance French conceptions of national identity.

This dissertation is dedicated in
memory of my mother,
Linda Appleby.

Though you only saw the beginning,
you would be the most thrilled to see it finished.

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INTRODUCTION

THE QUESTION OF EPIC IN RENAISSANCE FRANCE

This dissertation examines the epic genre and its mutations from poetic and political perspectives during the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth centuries. Such a study explains the discrepancy between the privileged position afforded to Virgilian epic in the century's poetic treatises and the failure of any such text to appear. Though epic maintains a real presence in literature throughout the century, it fails to achieve its ultimate goal (as understood by the poets themselves) of creating a collective cultural history that glorifies the nation. Renaissance poetic treatises universally acknowledged epic as the highest form of poetry and the greatest professed aspiration of poets. A French imitation of the *Aeneid* would confirm France as the literary, cultural, and political successor to ancient Rome. For French poets, the creation of a Virgilian epic was the project "qui donne le prix, et le vrai titre du Poète" (Peletier *Art poétique* 280). The grandest of poetic forms would validate both the poet and his nation; for these poets, a great nation needed and deserved an epic to sing its praises. As Du Bellay says, "Tel œuvre certainement serait à leur [the poets'] immortelle gloire, honneur de la France, et grande illustration de notre langue" (*Deffence* 267). Such a poem would establish French as a language as worthy of great literature as Greek and Latin. It would both capture and foster national sentiment for a nation with imperial ambitions. And yet, every attempt to compose a work along these lines either produced mediocre poetry, as in the case of Pierre de Ronsard's incomplete *La Franciade*,

or as with Agrippa d'Aubigné's *Les Tragiques*, mutated so dramatically as to make it hard to tell whether it could properly even be labeled epic at all. Why, then, was even the *Prince des Poètes*, Ronsard, unable to produce a satisfactory French epic? This is part of the question that this project hopes to answer.

To account for the dearth of texts fulfilling the prevailing ideas of the genre's goals, I turn to the political functions of epic in light of the socio-political situation in sixteenth-century France to determine that the epic they desired was simply not possible. This thesis revisits the period's own conceptions of the *œuvre héroïque* in the light of David Quint's study of the political functions of epic and romance in *Epic and Empire*. Quint's analysis of the *Aeneid* as the quintessential example of the epic winner's teleological account of their victory, contrasted with the loser's turn to the unnarratable circularity of romance provides the context within which I explain France's failure to produce its own long-awaited epic. By examining the broader political, social, and religious experience of France during the sixteenth century, I use Quint's visions of epic's teleological account of history as narrative force to explain the period's inability to produce an epic – or least not one that fulfilled the expressed public and political goals of such a project.

Each of the three texts that form the focal point of this dissertation – Pierre de Ronsard's abandoned 1572 *Franciade*, Joachim Du Bellay's 1558 *Antiquitez de Rome*, and Agrippa d'Aubigné's 1616 *Tragiques* – provides a different angle from which to study this problem. The *Franciade* represents an incomplete attempt at a strict imitation of the *Aeneid*, written by a court poet under the patronage of the king. Bound by his imitation of Virgilian topoi, Ronsard ignores the larger socio-political contexts that epic requires, advancing the project on the belief that imitation of its parts will produce an effective whole. As a relatively short sonnet sequence, the *Antiquitez* may be a surprising inclusion in a discussion on epic, but the text is set apart by its

ability to draw on epic themes to lament the lost Roman Empire while providing a warning to France as a nation on the brink of civil war. Writing during a more optimistic period in the middle of the century, Du Bellay warns his nation about the destruction of civil war through the lens of his travels to Rome. This simultaneous imperial optimism and dire warning allows for successful genre blending that suits the situation in France at the time. Finally, as a Protestant account of the Wars of Religion, the *Tragiques* allows consideration of the conflict between national and religious sentiment as d'Aubigné forgoes any attempt to write a collective Frenchness into his poem, composing instead a text for and about fellow persecuted Protestants regardless of national affiliations. D'Aubigné rebels against the epic genre itself, embracing his faction's loss to appropriate the winners' teleology for himself.

Each of these texts has received attention in isolation, but not in relation to each other. Several critics have examined the failure of the *Franciade* (Denis Bjaï, Ullrich Langer, Brice Leslie, David Maskell, Phillip John Usher, to name a few), others have debated the genre of the *Tragiques* (Keith Cameron, I.D. McFarlane, Malcolm Quainton, David Quint) or treated the *Regrets* as an Odyssean journey (notably George Hugo Tucker) (though not the *Antiquitez*, despite the fact that the texts were published at the same time). However, none have looked at the biggest question: when so many talented poets demanded, hoped for, and attempted a national epic for France, why does none exist? Through the examples of these three texts, this dissertation provides at least the beginning of an answer.

Virgil in Sixteenth-Century France

As the first chapter will shortly demonstrate, Virgil provided the primary model for epic in the sixteenth century, but this should be put into the context with the period's perception of the

significance of his work. Indeed, it is difficult to overstate Virgil's position in sixteenth-century France. When Montaigne chooses Homer over Virgil in his essay on "Des plus excellens hommes," he spends nearly the entire discussion of Homer justifying his choice; Montaigne concludes that since Homer had no source to follow and yet provides the source for so many, he is the superior man.¹ The length and form of the argument indicates it is counter to the common conception of Virgil as the foremost poet. However, Montaigne's argument is undermined by his own admission that his only encounters with Homer were through the intermediary of Virgil since his Greek was not strong enough to read Homer directly.

Virgil's fame was not limited to poets and scholars; as Alice Hulubei describes his importance in the period, "Virgile initie à la poésie, à l'utilité, à la majesté de la vie" (Hulubei 73). More critical editions of Ovid were published in sixteenth-century France and he "may have been the most popular poet of the Renaissance, but Virgil was consistently the first poet of the Renaissance. He [Virgil] seems also to have been taught more often and illustrated with more frequency" (Wilson-Okamura 23). In the sixteenth century, Virgil's body of work "constituait une encyclopédie des connaissances de l'antiquité et un excellent modèle à imiter" (Hulubei 6). The eagerness with which Virgil was studied at the time is evidenced by the numerous publications of both his poetry and commentaries: "The market for Virgil's text was apparently inexhaustible; it was matched, moreover, by an overwhelming appetite for commentaries on the text... the numbers are overwhelming, and they testify to the importance of Virgilian poetry in Renaissance culture" (Wilson-Okamura 24). The ubiquity of Virgilian verse naturally led to the

¹ I must also note that in the "Apologie de Raimond Sebond," Montaigne reaches a different conclusion about Homer, insisting that he could not possibly have been all the versions of authority that so many claim (theologians, captains, philosophers, and legislators). Thus the same argument that causes Montaigne to place Homer among the 'most excellent men' elsewhere indicates to him that his reputation is over-stated.

Aeneid's status as principal epic model, especially as its politicization suited the period's perception of literature's role in establishing national greatness. This is the status French poets desired for themselves through the creation of Virgilian poetry, especially France's own epic.

This sixteenth-century celebration of Virgil is tied to the appropriation of his poetry into French culture, in particular the assimilation of the Aeneas myth in medieval French romance and early modern theatre. The frequency with which French writers incorporate ancient thought, literature, and mythology into their own texts indicates a sense of propriety over the ancient world, as if it is as much a part of French culture as it was for Romans or Greeks. For an author such as Du Bellay, sixteenth-century France was poised to become the great cultural successor to Rome (a central idea of his *Antiquitez de Rome*), so the appropriation of ancient culture seems, in some ways, a natural step. The *Karolus Magnus et Leo Papa*, an imitative Latin text that envisioned Charlemagne as a new Aeneas, appeared in the ninth century. The *Aeneid* itself was retold as a medieval romance in the 1160 *Roman d'Eneas*. This adaptation signifies the appropriation of the myth in two ways: its composition in French and the elimination of the original political and dynastic elements that made the *Aeneid* a celebration of the Roman Empire. This led to a focus on the romantic elements of the Aeneas story and shifted the perception of the hero into the role of villainous traitor for his abandonment of Dido, a perception that persisted in sixteenth-century tragedy in France (with Etienne Jodelle's 1555 *Didon se sacrifiant*) and England (with Christopher Marlowe's 1587 *Dido, Queen of Carthage*). During the early French Renaissance, "On lit... l'*Énéide* pour l'intérêt historique qu'elle comporte et pour l'exemple de patriotisme que nous donne les héros troyens" (Hulubei 27); this emphasis on the patriotism of the *Aeneid* fostered the French desire for an epic of their own as a symbol of France's equivalence to Rome as a political and cultural power.

Translation has several important functions at this time, the first of which is making ancient texts accessible to a much larger audience. As only scholars could read Greek and Latin, the translation of texts into French (a practice that began with medieval writers) played an essential role in encouraging their ubiquity in Renaissance French culture. On a poetic level, translation was seen as a useful tool for the aspiring poet who hoped to compose in the style of the ancients. Both Peletier and Du Bellay discuss the merits of translation, though they differ in their opinions on its ultimate value.² By the mid sixteenth century (contemporaneous to Du Bellay's *Antiquitez* and the beginnings of Ronsard's work on the *Franciade*), translating the *Aeneid* directly into French gained popularity as a poetic exercise and signified a new sort of appropriation that opened the text to an even wider audience. Though there were complete translations as well, the most frequently-translated books (the sack of Troy in Book 2, the Dido affair in Book 4, and the underworld journey in Book 6) reflect the tastes of the French audience at this time. It is thus upon this trajectory of the *Aeneid*'s appropriation that the French compositions rest.

This veneration and appropriation of the Aeneas myth combined with the relationship between nation and language that was central to the Pléiade to create a desire for a distinctly French epic. Though France would succumb to civil war in the later part of the sixteenth century, the Renaissance was a period in which French scholars looked both to the ancient world for culture and inspiration and to the future of their own nation, which they saw as poised on the verge of greatness. For the Pléiade, the foremost group of scholars and poets of the century, the

² Peletier declares translation to be the truest form of imitation. He admits it will never bring glory to the poet, but he encourages the practice because the difficult endeavor will greatly enrich the French language. Du Bellay, however, argues that though translation can be a useful tool for practice, it should generally be avoided, especially in poetry, because a translation can never do justice to the original.

cultivation of language and vernacular literature was a key part of ensuring the greatness of their emerging nation. In the Pléiade's manifesto, *Deffence et illustration de la langue française* (itself divided into 24 books in imitation of Homer), Du Bellay describes in detail how contemporary and future poets should imitate the ancients with the express purpose of enriching and validating their language. He looks to Ariosto and Petrarch as examples, having successfully accomplished for Italian what the Pléiade hoped to achieve for French, yet insists in the final chapter that France has been greater than Italy for some time and therefore deserves a worthy language. He claims that by the same natural law that makes people defend their homeland itself, they should likewise defend its language, particularly through the creation of vernacular literature (*Deffence* 286-287). Thus it is clear that these poets saw the creation of literature as a public practice that would serve an important role for the state.

As the focus of this study is the French Renaissance, it is their *perception* of the importance of epic that matters more than the reality of the *Aeneid* in either its own time or in ours. The wealth of commentaries on Virgil during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries gives insight into what these poets believed Virgil's intention to be, highlighting their focus on the idea of authorial intention (Wilson-Okamura 3-4). Wilson-Okamura highlights the various allegories that the Renaissance read into the *Aeneid*: Troy represented sensuality (147), Turnus was read as the dangers of private war and decentralized feudal power (191-196), and the underworld signified a range of things including (among others) Purgatory, contemplation of mortality, man's impure soul, and resurrection (152-184). Thus, Christian readers of the Middle Ages and Renaissance read their own world view into the ancient poems.

This understanding of Aeneas as a model for Christian virtue also relates to the tendency to read the *Aeneid* on an allegorical level. For W.T.H. Jackson, the presumed morality presented

in the *Aeneid*, that Aeneas is the best leader due to his sense of moral responsibility, is what made Virgil's work so appealing to Christian audiences and scholars (116). Though Tasso argues in his *Discorsi del poema eroico* that only Christian heroes are proper exemplars for a Christian audience, he concedes that the universal relevance of ancient culture (an attitude natural to his Renaissance contemporaries) allows its heroes to be accepted as virtuous as well if the Christian reader approaches the text from his own perspective. Timothy Hampton studies the importance of exemplarity from the ancient world for early modern readers; for Hampton, exemplarity represents a distinctly different type of rhetoric that establishes ties between the text and the early modern reader: "Allusion to the virtuous or heroic model sets up an implicit moral comparison between modern reader and ancient exemplar... Thus, the evocation of an exemplary figure constitutes that textual moment at which the authority of the past is brought to bear on the reader's response to the text" (Hampton *Writing from History* 3). Thus Aeneas' pagan virtue was understood in early modern France as a direct reflection of the reader's own Christian virtue. Alone among the ancient epics, Virgil's hero follows a path based entirely on his own piety, and though such piety is directed towards pagan gods, the action still provides a model for a hero guided purely by virtue. While French perceptions of Virgil's work are examined thoroughly in the first chapter, these general tendencies are helpful for understanding with what attitude and preconceptions the French Renaissance encountered the *Aeneid* as we begin our own study of the French imitations.

Of course, the *Aeneid* was not the only classical epic widely circulated during the Renaissance. Ovid enjoyed immense popularity at the time, including his episodic epic *Metamorphoses*. Homer's importance for Renaissance poets existed both as a model for Virgil and as epic in its own right; since his works gained popularity at the very end of the Middle

Ages, the *Iliad* in particular was lauded alongside the *Aeneid* and provided the basis of the triumvirate that a French epic would complete. However, as few scholars were as proficient in Greek as in Latin, the *Iliad* was not imitated like the *Aeneid*; as I mentioned previously, even Montaigne admitted his interactions with the Homeric texts were restricted to an abstract knowledge through the *Aeneid* as an intermediary. The epics of Apollonius of Rhodes and Hesiod were also in circulation at the time, as evidenced by sixteenth-century imitations of their texts, though they diverged from Homeric tradition.³ The impact of Lucan's *Pharsalia* and its treatment of civil war certainly cannot be ignored, especially in light of France's own civil strife during the latter half of the sixteenth century. In a time ill-suited to an epic glorifying a national collectivity, an epic of a nation torn apart by civil war resonated with many readers on social, political, and poetic levels.

Epic and Nation⁴

The tie between epic and national sentiment is essential to proceeding in this study; the genre celebrates collectivity and national exceptionalism, thereby fulfilling a public function not as pronounced as in other genres (although the Pléiade especially understood all literature to serve a public function for the nation and its language). Hampton's study *Literature and Nation* examines the relationship between emerging nationhood and developing national literature, both of which were beginning to take shape at the dawn of the early modern period; he argues that France provides the most influential model of the rising nation state, "of the close bonding of

³ As we will see, Ronsard's *Franciade* in particular draws heavily upon the *Argonautica* for the courtship between the hero and the pagan priestess who provides his imperial prophecy.

⁴ This relationship between nation and epic often leads to use of the term 'national epic.' Though this term has fallen out of vogue for studies of this nature, I will continue to use 'national epic' as a short hand for the definition arrived at in Chapter 1.

literary culture and national spirit. Indeed, the blending of nationalism with the sanctification of literature is a central feature of French identity that has been exported with great success” (Hampton *Literature and Nation* x). This particularly pertains to epic as “that genre most closely associated with notions of public action” (Hampton *Writing from History* 84); this is true for both sixteenth-century literary critics and our own modern conceptions of the genre. As this section explains, epic represents public action both in terms of its composition for and about the nation and in terms of the action as the hero’s journey becomes a teleological narrative that stands for the supremacy and glory of his people. Such a text would confirm France’s relationship to the great empires of the ancient world: “Greece has the *Iliad*, Rome has the *Aeneid*, and France, too, as the inheritor of Antiquity’s cultural prestige and political legitimacy..., needed a work of literature written in the grand style to extol national heroism and the political and cultural superiority of the Valois monarchy” (Usher xvii). As we turn to epic during this period, it is important to remember that this genre was considered the ultimate literary form to embody this shared sense of literature and national sentiment as one and the same.

Due to epic’s moral purpose, public function of celebrating the nation, and its primary audience, the ruler himself, “That epic was the supreme literary genre was accepted almost unanimously by critics in the sixteenth and sevenths centuries” (Maskell 19). The Renaissance venerated Virgil for the combination of poetic skill, political relevance, and perceived moral themes. Peletier praises the Roman with exclamatory phrases such as “Ô digne voix et impériale!” (Peletier 291), thereby associating the poetic quality with the poem’s imperial function. While praising the natural ease of Homer’s verse, Peletier describes Virgil as “plus laborieux que nul autre des Poètes du monde” and explains that this diligence allows his poetry to “dire quelque chose de plus” (Peletier 228). Thus the poetic quality of Virgil’s work permitted

equal appreciation of the greater public function of the genre, particularly the preservation of national exceptionalism and the moral instruction of the prince through exemplary heroism and piety.

To complete the sixteenth-century's goal of tying language, nation, and literature together to establish and celebrate the cultural and political supremacy of France, poets turned naturally to the epic, the genre Langer describes as "the incarnation of national aspirations" (210). Hampton ascribes this relationship between epic and nation directly to Virgil: "From the time of Virgil... epic has provided the narrative model for defining new communities and building national identities" (*Literature and Nation* 29). Virgil deliberately politicized his imitation of Homer⁵ and is therefore generally credited with establishing the nationalistic side of epic. Gregory Nagy is often held responsible for imposing this same sense of patriotism on the Homeric texts as Virgil's model, but Herodotus gave the *Iliad* its name in the fifth century BCE (some three hundred years after its composition) to mean 'a poem about Ilium' or 'the matter of Ilium.' Therefore, the idea of epic action as representative of a nation predates the *Aeneid* by several hundred years. This relationship between epic and nation continued into the Renaissance where Ronsard's similarly-named *Franciade* was intended to be a poem of, about, and for France. In the introduction to his translation of the *Franciade*, Philip John Usher explains that "Ronsard's *Franciade* was thus born from both a collective desire for a national epic and from a poet's own career goals" (*Francaid* xvii). As Chapter 1 explains, this dual image of epic as both a national project and a personal one was part of the prevailing mindset that a *long poème* would bring glory to both the poet and his nation.

⁵ For the purposes of this study, I ignore the subversive elements in the *Aeneid*, following the example of the French poets I study. This gives the impression of a more straightforward message in Virgil's text than is necessarily true, but it more accurately reflects how the *Aeneid* was read during the Renaissance.

Epic takes many forms over the millennia, so which type forms the central focus of this particular study of the genre's political functions? Both Quint and Maskell divide their analyses of epic into categories. Quint's division (to be explored next in greater detail as he provides the theoretical framework of this study) reads romance as a subcategory of epic. Epic itself falls into two categories, that of the winners and that of the losers, both of which ultimately emphasize the importance of empire; however, in an attempt to make sense of their own loss, the losers' epic inevitably turns to romance's cyclical narratives. Maskell's study explores historical epic (as opposed to Biblical), breaking this primary category into three subcategories: annalistic, heroic, romanesque (4). The first is repeatedly scoffed at by the Renaissance poets, as I show in the first chapter, but the second and third subcategories reflect those of Quint, without the heavy emphasis on their political relationship to each other. For the purpose of this study, the heroic category is the most essential to understanding sixteenth-century conceptions of epic.

Epic heroism serves several related public functions: moral instruction for both princes and the audience, preservation of heroic deeds through the nation's exceptionalism embodied in heroic figures, and celebration of the nation through collective sense of cultural identity. Concisely put, the primary purpose of epic was "to excite princes to virtue" (Maskell 19) or "to instruct and glorify" (Maskell 4). In early modern Europe, "Heroism is a rhetoric – a deliberative rhetoric intended to provoke action" (Hampton *Writing from History* 4); therefore epic (known as *œuvre héroïque* or *poema eroico* during the Renaissance) must be considered from this perceived rhetorical function. Epic action, performed by exemplary and exceptional heroes, aims to produce two specific effects upon its readership: the desire to imitate such actions and the appreciation of the current monarchy (Hampton *Writing from History* 95) whose leadership is reflected in the national epic's heroes. Epic composition also serves a public function of

collective memory as it preserves the nation's heroic deeds: "In the sixteenth century the emphasis was on the celebration of warlike deeds which without the poets' help might be lost forever" (Maskell 18). This preservative function is again reflective of the public nature of action within the narrative; public deeds, not private ones, are worth preservation for the nation's posterity. Thus the actions within the narrative preserve the mythico-historical deeds of the nation's exceptional figures, the poet ensures their longevity, and the audience's consumption of the text furthers its ability to both foster and preserve a sense of collective national identity and pride in its exceptionalism.

Quint's genre analysis in *Epic and Empire* provides context by which I explain the difficulties epic encounters in Renaissance France. This will provide the theoretical framework for understanding French goals for a national epic and the socio-historical situation that creates insurmountable difficulties for the genre's success during this period. Quint's examination focuses on the politicization of epic which he argues began with Alexander's appropriation of the *Iliad* and was completed with the *Aeneid* as Virgil deliberately politicized his imitation of Homer to fit the new Roman Empire (7). Ronsard followed Virgil's example by using the genre to legitimate the Valois dynasty and claim France's cultural and political supremacy in Europe.

Quint's analysis juxtaposes epic and romance in terms of conflict, defining epic as the teleological narrative of the winner and romance as the wandering adventures of the loser, explaining that the loser's attempts to write their account of conflict lean inevitably into the circular narratives of romance. The *Aeneid* serves as Quint's example of the teleological epic and the *Pharsalia* as the source for the losers' epic and its turn to romance, texts composed from opposite sides of the same conflict, the Roman civil war. The genres are ways of attempting to understand the conflict from opposing perspectives, the winners declaring their victory assured

and prophesized in their epic, and the losers claiming no winner by refusing to apply a narrative structure to their romance (Quint 46). Quint explains this saying, “the stories projected by and for the defeated have no place to go; they lack the teleology of the victor’s epic narrative, and they fall into cyclical romance patterns that are finally *nonnarratable*” (11).

France’s situation in the sixteenth century first reflects the emerging nation’s optimism as it hopes to fulfill Henri II’s imperial ambitions, but mounting tensions towards the middle of the century between the Catholic majority and the growing Huguenot minority combined with Henri’s premature death put the nation at risk of civil war. Indeed, from 1562 onward, France found itself consumed with a messy civil war, the French Wars of Religion, rather than pursuing a glorious war of imperial conquest. In Quint’s terms, the teleological epic narrative of the winner is impossible because there is no victory (or even a resolution to conflict) during the time of these texts’ composition. In each of this dissertation’s chapters, I use Quint’s conceptions of the genre to examine the difficulties and successes each poet encounters with their epic ventures against the background of this socio-historical situation and its impact on literary composition.

Chapter Breakdown

The initial chapter analyzes the poetics of epic from a sixteenth-century perspective in an attempt to strip away modern understanding of the genre to focus on how these three authors (Ronsard, Du Bellay, and d’Aubigné) and their contemporaries understood their own projects. This chapter thus establishes the theoretical framework with which the texts in the other chapters will be examined. Several main points stand out as particularly noteworthy as a summary. First is the issue of problematic terminology as neither the French word for epic (*épopée*) nor the adjective *épique* existed at the time, so poets use a variety of terms including *œuvre héroïque* or

simply *long poème*. Second, each poetic treatise I examine establishes epic as the pinnacle of poetic forms, calling it the form that establishes immortal glory for the poet and his nation (Du Bellay) and the sea into which all other forms flow (Peletier). Third, despite the equivalent professed veneration of Homer, the *Aeneid* remains the standard for epic, though no poets specifically mention the political ramifications of Virgil's imperial telos. However, the goals stated in the treatises firmly align epic with this type of narrative, particularly those claimed by Ronsard as he declares writing the *Franciade* to "honorer la maison de France, & par sur tout le Roy Charles neufiesme, mon Prince" (*Au lecteur*, 1572). Most important is that poets conceived of epic as the sum of its parts, believing the correct meter, verse form, subject, ornaments, topoi, and imitations would extol the nation in the way the *Aeneid* did for the Roman Empire.

After establishing the poetic foundation in the first chapter, I analyze each text from the perspective of the dialogue and tension between the poetic constraints of the genre (as problematic as they are to define) and its political functions. By imitating the continued push towards destiny experienced by Aeneas, Ronsard firmly aligned his work with the epic genre and its teleological narrative structure, despite labeling it *roman*. Like Aeneas, Francus is entirely driven by his divinely prophesized destiny to found a great empire, though several essential factors combine to undermine the intended teleology that provides the political context for an epic. First, I show how Ronsard's strict adherence to the poetic expectations of a Virgilian epic restricts his 1572 *Franciade* to the point of strangulation. Ronsard appropriates Aeneas' journey, sending his hero Francus from the fall of Troy to found Paris in Gaul and deviating little from the original context of each imitated topos and episode. His belief that imitation of the pieces will give the effect of the whole causes him to ignore the political contexts from which epic springs. Charles IX, as a boy king, penultimate of his long-standing dynasty, ruling a fractured country

from under his mother Catherine de Medici's thumb, cannot provide a telos comparable to Augustus, one strong enough to anchor epic's necessarily teleological narrative. Ronsard's status as love poet and the period's tastes for *roman courtois* exacerbate the weakness of the telos by pushing the narrative repeatedly into the realm of romance; this leaves the narrative open to alternative possibilities (as found in romance), thereby undermining the attempted teleological version of France's history.

Du Bellay's *Antiquitez* then provides a bridge between the poetic *Franciade* and the political *Tragiques*. Published in 1558 during the period of rising tensions before the outbreak of the first War of Religion in 1562, this sonnet sequence draws inspiration from ancient epics as the author contemplates the ruins of ancient Rome, using the Empire as both encouragement of Henri II's imperial ambitions and warning to avoid the destruction of civil war. I therefore read the *Antiquitez* as an 'imperial romance' in sonnet form, an imitation of the *Aeneid*'s first half before the turn to empire-founding that Du Bellay leaves open for Henri to complete in the physical world rather than the literary one. By refusing to create a telos where none exists and by acknowledging the fracturing society, Du Bellay creates a text that speaks honestly to the times, even if a short sonnet sequence can hardly be mistaken for a complete imperial epic. It does, however, capture the nation under Henri II, torn between increasing civil strife and idealistic imperial ambitions, through meditations on the defunct Roman Empire as a warning to France.

Finally, d'Aubigné's status as a persecuted and defeated Protestant allows him to upend the epic genre, appropriating its own norms to turn the genre against itself, commandeer the winner's teleology, and transform defeat into a mark of divine favor. Here, the heroic genre is transformed as epic action moves beyond the text so the very act of composition constitutes a heroic action. Only by abandoning the attempt to embody national pride in favor of religious

faction can a poem come close to fulfilling its goals; however, this replacement of national sentiment by the factional means that the *Tragiques* did not enjoy any more success in its time than the *Franciade*, despite its better quality. Though the poem certainly feels ‘epic’ in a casual sense of the word, the text has no hero, no narrative, nor many other elements expected in an epic; the poem varies wildly through genres, drawing on biblical prophecy, satire, and drama (even invoking Melpomene rather than Calliope). Though writing from a position of defeat, d’Aubigné undermines the very genre itself to establish an eschatological telos, using the persecution of Protestants across Europe in the wake of the Reformation as proof that the ultimate end, the Final Judgment, is the true telos by which their status as victor will be confirmed.

The conclusion I draw from this study is that despite the professed desire for a Virgilian epic for France, the political and social circumstances of sixteenth-century France cannot allow such a text to form. Two factors render epic’s necessary teleology impossible at this time: politics and religion. Politically, there is no victory and no empire, only the descent into civil war rather than emergence from one. The Reformation divides French society along faction lines, replacing a collective sense of Frenchness with the collectivity of distinct religious groups that transcends political boundaries: “In France, the political and cultural unity briefly established by Francis I was destroyed by the onset of religious fanaticism” (Hampton *Writing from History* 81-82). For the purposes of this study, this collapse of unified cultural identity creates an impossible situation for the collective goals of the epic genre. The following chapters explore the junction of this particular socio-political situation and the literary world as their crossroads is most pronounced here in the epic.

CHAPTER I

UNDERSTANDING THE HEROIC GENRE IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

In order to embark upon a discussion of epic in sixteenth-century France, I must first attempt a definition of this problematic term. A comprehensive definition of the genre could fill (and has filled) several books, as has the question if such a definition can actually exist; however, my goal lies elsewhere. For the purposes of this study, I set specific parameters rather than attempt an actual definition, *per se*. Since the goal is to understand Renaissance French poets' encounters with the genre, it matters much less what an epic actually *is* than what they imagined it to be. Disentangling the genre from other forms of poetry is challenging because poetry is more often treated as a whole in the period's various *arts poétiques*, including digressions concerning specific poetic forms. Additionally, the poetic treatises of the time are primarily concerned with technical aspects of poetry (precise rules for rhyme, meter, etc) rather than its purpose. Due to this preoccupation with technicalities, it can be difficult to discern what sixteenth-century intellectuals felt poetry was supposed to accomplish, especially as opposed to other art forms. For this study, I highlight some of the technical aspects (since the poets themselves emphasize this so heavily), but the crucial discovery lies in determining what sixteenth-century intellectuals believed epic was *for*. While the terminology necessary for this study is problematic (both on a linguistic and a conceptual level), this introductory chapter provides a cohesive summary of what French poets meant when they spoke of *grand œuvre* or

œuvre héroïque. While my principal discussion and analysis concerns poetry in France, the interlocution between texts and authors of the era requires a step outside these somewhat arbitrary geographical boundaries.

Let me begin by stating what variations of epic rest firmly outside the boundaries of this study. It is unnecessary to consider texts or traditions unknown or without significant influence in Renaissance Europe; this includes spatial and temporal restrictions. This stipulation therefore excludes most oral traditions, unless the stories were eventually transmitted textually. As the Renaissance was less explicitly interested in medieval tradition, preferring to look further back into antiquity, the only medieval texts that will be of interest are those whose wake was still felt in the Renaissance; for instance, the popularity of medieval reinterpretations of Aeneas colored interpretations of his character into the Renaissance. Only Du Bellay suggests looking to Frankish legend and *chansons de geste* for inspiration for epic, so I largely ignore those traditions aside from their aesthetic legacy. Neither do I focus on religious epics (such as *La Pucelle*), nor cosmology epics (such as *La Sepmaine* of Du Bartas) as both are concerned with a different type of world view than that which anchors this study of the relationship between epic and national thought.

This chapter is organized as follows. First, I discuss issues of terminology as there are two distinctly problematic layers: first, terms vary between languages since this study discusses French poetry in English, and secondly, current words like ‘epic’ and ‘*épopée*’ are anachronistic in both languages. Next, I examine the ancient thought that shaped Renaissance conceptions of poetry, notably Aristotle and Horace. Aristotle arrives at his definition of epic through a comparison with tragedy, which he considers the ultimate poetic form. From him, Renaissance poets would take rules of composition, unity of plot, and emotional variety, though they would

reverse Aristotle's hierarchy to place epic above tragedy. From Horace, the Renaissance adopted the format of a poetic treatise, Horace's emphasis on the essential poetic function as *mimesis*, and the public and didactic roles of poetry. The importance Renaissance poets placed on the imitation of ancient texts explains how definitions of genre derived from readings of texts and lists of their essential imitable elements. Peletier's *Art poétique* derives its definition of the *œuvre héroïque* from a close reading of Virgil; Peletier determines that the necessary elements of epic create a text with three primary functions, imitation of nature and the universe, didacticism, and praise of the king and the empire. Then, I explore French appropriation of ancient myth as France hoped to claim kinship with Rome through shared Trojan ancestry, while simultaneously adapting the Aeneas myth to fit medieval French aesthetics. Finally, I examine Du Bellay's, Ronsard's, and d'Aubigné's writings on epic to situate their definitions (and their works) within the period's context.

Problematic Terminology

Before diving into the poetic theories, I must immediately address the issue of terminology since it is particularly problematic for a study with this focus. As nuances are lost between languages and usage of words changes over time, the terminology used in English to describe French texts and poetic theory from several hundred years earlier cannot be completely accurate. As such, it is impossible to avoid anachronism during the course of this study. Even the term *littérature* is problematic since the French Renaissance did not share our contemporary concept of 'literature' as such, but spoke rather of *lettres*, *art*, or *Écrits*. Terms are problematic even when they appear to be the same; sixteenth-century writers did not conceive of genre in the manner of more recent scholarship, despite using the same term. The early part of the century had not yet distinguished between rhetoric and poetry, and the period continued to divide writing

as simply prose or verse. Thomas Sébillet was the first to call his treatise an *Art poétique* in 1548; prior to this, our ‘poetry’ was discussed under the category of rhetoric. Poets were more concerned with distinguishing the hierarchy of verse meters and which poetic forms were best suited to which subjects than discussing poetry as a whole.

For the purposes of this study, I cannot avoid using terms like ‘genre’ and ‘literature’. For the sake of simplicity, I regularly resort to the English term ‘epic’ to describe the genre of primary interest here, though the term is imprecise, and ‘national epic’ even more so. The French translation *épopée* is problematic since it did not enter the language until the seventeenth century and was not popularized until the nineteenth. The poets of the Renaissance generally referred to this sort of text as *long poème* or *œuvre héroïque*. The implications of this terminology are interesting in that it suggests a less rigid conception of the type of text under consideration. While this chapter explores in detail the important elements of these ‘heroic works’ to the poets of the day, it is important to note that the terms they themselves used appear much broader than the modern terms ‘epic’ or ‘épopée’. While summarizing the poetic theory of each writer, I employ their own terms to illustrate how each conceived of the genre in relation to others. Often however, for the sake of simplicity, I use ‘epic’ and attempt to ignore modern associations with the word that derive both from recent genre theory and the ubiquitous contemporary usage that has drastically altered the term.

To illustrate the lack of satisfactory terminology, I offer the range of terms used during the Renaissance to describe the same type of text. Peletier calls it alternately *Poème Héroïque*, *Œuvre Héroïque*, or simply *Œuvre*, always capitalizing the term, as he does consistently with all nouns of importance. For Peletier, heroic action provides the focal point of the genre, which is shown through the subject of war; he arrives at this definition through the reading of the primary

epic models, Homer and Virgil. Italian epic poet Torquato Tasso similarly underlines the importance of heroism and refers to the genre as *poema eroico*. Du Bellay calls it simply the *long poème français* in anticipation of a French version of the genre. His terminology casts a wider net than Peletier's *Œuvre Héroïque* and allows his classification to add a few medieval romances and Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* to the list of imitable texts.

Sébillet's *Art poétique françois* categorizes appropriate imitable models for what he labels a French *grand'œuvre*. Sébillet encourages translation of epics, a symptom of the period's blurred lines between translation and imitation, indicating that the *Iliad*, the *Aeneid*, the *Metamorphoses*, and the *Roman de la Rose* belong to the same category of imitable models for the *grand'œuvre*. The suggestion to imitate *Roman de la Rose* in addition to Homer and Virgil is surprising, even more so is his claim that the medieval romance is an example of a *grand'œuvre français*, as Sébillet's contemporaries saw this goal as yet unfulfilled. Though Du Bellay would also acknowledge the value of the *Roman de la Rose* the following year, it would be difficult to categorize it as an *œuvre héroïque*.

In his *Abrégé de l'art poétique français*, Ronsard refers briefly to a *grand poème*, and the related advice about invoking the Muse at its beginning suggests that he is referring to epic. In the various introductions to and apologies for the *Franciade*, Ronsard refers to the text as *mon ouvrage*, *ce livre*, and, surprisingly, *Roman*. I return to the implications of this terminology upon examination of Ronsard's poetic theory later in this chapter. D'Aubigné simply refers to his *Tragiques* as *livre*, indicating that the author considers the text apart from typical generic conventions, or that he rejects generic classification altogether (as I argue in the final chapter).

Even more significant is the fact that d'Aubigné alone refers to the genre as “poèmes épiques, ou heroïques” in Letter XI of his *Lettres touchants quelques poincts de diverses sciences* (*Œuvres Complètes* 863). According to the etymology of the adjective *épique* in the Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales, the use of the word as an adjective began in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century, and the first written example is this one in d'Aubigné's letter. The English word may have been derived from the French *épique*, or directly from the Latin *epicus* or Greek *ἐπικός*, as the French form clearly was. What is important to keep in mind is that the term was in its nascent stage in both languages during the period in question, so contemporary connotations of the terms in both languages are not the same, though this study necessitates their usage.

Ancient Sources

To understand sixteenth-century conceptions of literature and genre, we must briefly look to the ancient world. The scholars of the Renaissance turned to ancient Greek and Roman writers to develop their own ideas about language and literature, so it is impossible to understand their concept of genre without acknowledging their sources. Of greatest interest are those classical ideas about epic that most shaped later thinking on genre, notably Aristotle and Horace. In his introduction to the *Poetics*, Malcolm Heath calls Aristotle's influence on literary theory from the Renaissance to present day “massive” and argues that most Western conceptions of poetry are impossible to understand without understanding this text which forms their foundation (viii). This section expands upon Heath's claim to show how the principal models, Homer and Virgil, serve as examples of epic's perceived form and function during the sixteenth century.

Renaissance poets would later repeat Aristotle's hierarchical approach to genre division but reversed his hierarchy by placing epic above tragedy while faithfully adopting rules for unity, mimesis, and pathos. The reappearance of Aristotle's ideas in many Renaissance *arts poétiques* evidences their ubiquity in scholarly thinking during this period. Aristotle recognized epic as one of the three main types of poetry, along with tragedy and comedy. Overall, his description of epic relies on its similarities to and differences from tragedy, particularly how these establish epic as an elevated genre, surpassed only by tragedy. Interestingly, Aristotle raises tragedy above epic for the same reason that later authors would consider epic to be the superior genre. For Aristotle, tragedy is the highest poetic form because it achieves its goal of *mimesis* more quickly than an epic. The Renaissance poets in question, however, accord a higher position to epic because of its length; their own poetic treatises declare that epic's ability to provide a complete vision of the world is what sets it above other genres. In contrast, Aristotle prefers tragedy's concise unity of action, insisting that epic has less unity because several tragedies can often be drawn from a single epic. Though he argues that the determinant of quality in tragedy is the same in epic, Aristotle declares that all the elements of epic exist in tragedy, though the inverse is not true (10).

Aristotle presents a specific set of rules for what should be included in epic, and many of these would resurface in Ronsard's and Peletier's definitions of the genre. Like Peletier later draws his definition from a reading of Virgil, Aristotle does likewise from an analysis of Homer. Aristotle begins his definition at the most basic level, noting that both epic and tragedy must be the versified *mimesis* of a single action. Later writers no longer feel the need to specify that an epic must be in verse, probably because by that time, this particular element is considered to be both fundamental and self-evident. For Aristotle, the subject matter of an epic must be grave, and

likewise, the characters must be admirable and serious, each speaking and behaving naturally according to their station. He insists upon the unity of the action in order to set epic apart from history, highlighting the fact that Homer does not include the entire story of Odysseus, only those elements relevant to the primary action of the text; the role of the historian is to recount all the events of a single time period, so the epic poet must take care to avoid such an approach. For Ronsard, this contrast between poet and historian will translate to epic's purpose to recount the *vraisemblable* (plausible) rather than the *vrai* (true); the first is the task of the epic poet where the second is that of the historian.

From Aristotle, the Renaissance would also adopt ancient ideas on the essential emotional and pathetic role that poetry should play. As Aristotle states early in the *Poetics* that all elements of tragedy are present in epic, his thoughts about the role of plot to inspire both pity and fear are applicable to both genres, though later theory associates them primarily with tragedy, largely ignoring their role in epic. As the fundamental purpose of all poetry is pleasure for the audience, *mimesis* should inspire emotions that ultimately give pleasure, whether directly or through their purging. It is for this reason that Blair Hoxby declares that for early modern readers of Aristotle, *pathos* is “the one indispensable element of tragedy” (Hoxby 5). Events should occur for a reason so that they inspire the astonishment that leads the audience to feel pity and fear. In the creation of astonishment, epic has a rare advantage over tragedy in that it can present the irrational, the best source of astonishment, because the audience does not actually see the events on stage and can suspend their disbelief.⁶ As astonishment is pleasurable for an

⁶ Hoxby notices that many early modern commentators maintained that tragedy was capable of purging emotions in a way that epic cannot (Hoxby 13, 19), though their reasoning that this was due to visual representations on the stage is contradicted by this and other aspects of the *Poetics*. Aristotle repeatedly insists that plot structure and characters are most important for inspiring pity and fear (thereby purging them); as these elements are common to both epic and tragedy, the

audience, its creation is essential to the success of a play or an epic. The characters created by the poet (in both tragedy and epic) are essential for determining the emotions the audience feels; he should create neither decent nor depraved individuals who suffer a change of fortune, but characters with whom the audience can identify. For Aristotle, seeing a person like us invokes fear, and watching their undeserved suffering is what inspires pity. Where a person would likely respond to genuine suffering with disgust, witnessing such pain well-represented on a stage is pleasurable. In epic form, the *Iliad* provides a model of a simple plot structure that is based on suffering. The audience follows the characters through their trials at the end of the war, but there are no major reversals or recognitions.

Though the *Iliad* represents a simple plot structure, Aristotle prefers complex plots to simple ones because their emotional variety, based on the reversals and recognitions of tragedy, maintains audience engagement. Here, the *Odyssey* is the prime example for Aristotle of a complex structure based on character that allows for many recognitions and reversals throughout the action. Peletier later takes this idea of reversals in the plot and explains that the poet should alternate episodes of joy and sadness, good fortune and bad, so that the plot is not dominated by one emotion. While the variety of emotions is important to maintain interest in the story, the fundamental purpose of inspiring pity and fear is to purge them from the audience members as they witness the events; though pity and fear can be upsetting, this purging is ultimately a pleasurable experience. Epic should have a similar goal; however, as this form of poetry is necessarily much longer than tragedy, Aristotle considers it to be less effective and efficient at accomplishing this end. While this use of contrast between epic and tragedy to form a definition

assumption that epic cannot purge emotion as tragedy can appears unfounded, at least in the *Poetics*. Aristotle insists both genres have the same goal, though epic takes longer to achieve it.

would later be dropped, the ideas put forth by Aristotle had a clearly profound impact on the poetic theory of French poets in the Renaissance.

Of similar importance in sixteenth-century France is Horace's epistolary poem to Lucius Calpurnius Piso, known as the *Ars Poetica*. Though not as comprehensive and theoretical as Aristotle's *Poetics*, the influence of the *Ars Poetica* is no less significant to Renaissance poetic theory. Indeed, his set of specific practical instructions to an aspiring poet would provide the model for Renaissance *arts poétiques* more so than Aristotle's theoretical approach. Though writing over 300 years after Aristotle, Horace similarly turns to Homer as the ideal model of epic. In fact, he strongly encourages the poet to turn to Greek models again and again. Since Virgil died in 19BCE, the same year in which Horace wrote his *Ars Poetica*, it is understandable that he does not turn to the *Aeneid* for inspiration; though he does mention Virgil, it is likely in reference to other works which were well-known in their time, notably the *Georgics* and the *Bucolics*. While the text mentions other styles of poetry, Horace's primary concern is epic and dramatic poetry, though he does not declare this fact as explicitly as Aristotle.

The Latin works of Horace, including his poetic treatise, existed in France in manuscript form as early as 1442. In 1545, ten years before completing his own *Art poétique*, Peletier published his French translation of Horace's. As Peletier was a member of the Pléiade, one can assume this translation was read by the others whose own treatises came later (Du Bellay's in 1549, Ronsard's in 1565). Though the poets themselves would likely have preferred the original Latin text (indeed, Latin editions continued to be printed throughout the century), a French translation would have made the ideas contained within more readily accessible to a broader section of the population. The fact that the text reappears several times in various languages

during the sixteenth century and that Horace is mentioned in innumerable works from the period attest to his role in shaping Renaissance poetic thought throughout Europe.

The *Ars Poetica* highlights mimesis above all other poetic functions. Horace, being less focused on the purgative aspect of poetry, centers his discussion of emotion on the part it plays in the larger purpose of accurately imitating life. Like his Aristotle, Horace places the utmost importance on the unity of action, beginning his text with an explanation of this essential aspect. It is not enough that a poem be beautiful, it must also move the audience to emotion, though Horace does not specify which emotions are most essential to enhancing the quality of the poetry. The poem must have charm through which the poet brings his audience to emotions by showing them on the stage because humans naturally echo the emotions they see. In this way, the poet can control the emotions of the audience, provided that he portrays them accurately; if the characters and their emotions do not reflect nature, the poet has failed in his purpose. Likewise, he agrees that the words and attributes of a character must fit his or her social standing. To this end, nature must be imitated by the poet who should “respicere exemplar vitae morumque” (Horace *Ars Poetica* l.317).

Horace also offers some insights into what the purpose of poetry may be. He argues for a balance between a text that is pleasing and didactic, suggesting that he sees these two goals as the purpose of poetry: pleasure and instruction. A poet must instruct his audience while taking care not to be pedantic because the mind naturally learns quickly. Horace summarizes this advice saying, “omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci, / lectorem delectando pariterque monendo” (Horace l.343-344). He candidly claims this is a work that will both earn money and bring fame to the writer, two personal goals for poetic composition that should not be ignored; any national sentiment proclaimed by later poets in their composition of an epic does not entirely overshadow

the poet's more self-serving goals. Horace's reflections on the origins of poetry also give some insight into its purpose. He claims that poets became associated with the word *divinis* when they became able to separate public matters from private and sacred matters from the profane. Horace claims that poetry serves a public function by helping to write law and build cities. For him, the role of the poet, as exemplified by Homer, is to give oracles and point out the path of life. By encouraging the young poet to take Homer's work very seriously, Horace indicates his belief that this is the ideal role the poet should play.

So influential was Horace that it is thanks to him that many Latin terms are used today, even in English. One of the most impactful pieces of specific advice that Horace gives to the young poet is the importance of beginning the text *in medias res* rather than *ab ovo*, referring to Leda's egg from which Helen was born; he insists that to begin the story at the beginning would be boring. He advises against using a god's intervention to resolve a situation unless it is absolutely necessary. While Horace has a clear and demanding set of rules for the poet to follow, he also allows room for some fault, especially on the part of the epic poet, suggesting that to have some weaker parts is only natural in a poem of such length as an epic; even parts of Homer are weaker than others, "uerum opera longo fas est obrepere somnum" (Horace 1.360). The attention paid to this portion of the text has given rise to the proverb "Even Homer nods", implying that even the most seemingly infallible source is subject to occasional error. As Du Bellay will similarly recognize, epic's length makes it the ultimate challenge for a poet, so Horace conceded that some small lapses, even by the greatest of poets, do not necessarily diminish their status. As imperfection is a natural part of human nature, such lapses can even aid the poem in its purpose of *mimesis*.

The importance of these ancient theorists is relevant to this study because of the role both had in shaping sixteenth-century poetic theory. Through studying Aristotle and Horace, Renaissance poets were inspired by both compositional rules (starting point, verse style, character development) and theoretical considerations on the role and purpose of epic poetry. Horace's practical rules for authors provided a different sort of guidelines than Aristotle's more theoretical ruminations. As I continue to explore the predominant ideas about poetry in the Renaissance, the impact of these two classical texts will become clear.

Imitation

In a time where imitation was an essential aspect of artistic creation, it is important to understand how the authors of the time understood the works they imitated. Greene compares communities to amnesiacs; each needs to recover its memory (or history) to recover his identity, and this need explains the Renaissance obsession with what they understood to be their cultural history (10). Though "intertextuality is a universal literary constant" (Greene 16), some texts "insist on their own intertextual composition" (Greene 16); such a text "can be said to be affirming its own historicity" (Greene 16) while others "lack historical self-consciousness" (Greene 17). Examples of the former include the *Aeneid*, *Orlando Furioso*, and all the texts of our study, while examples of the latter include the *Iliad* and the *Chanson de Roland*.

To limit his definition of imitation, Greene maintains that an imitative text must demonstrate the "major presence" of the earlier poem (50); it must be noted that this definition causes him to not distinguish between translation and imitation, practices that were similarly overlapping in the Renaissance. For Greene, the practice of Renaissance *imitatio* was a specific art form that he reads an attempt to deal with the problem of anachronism, providing the author

“a convenient and flexible stance toward a past that threatened to overwhelm him” (2). Such a text “reaches across a cultural gap” (Greene 37) by “act[ing] out a passage of history that is a retrospective version or construct” (19). This practice arose at this time because “the advent of humanism conferred a keener historical consciousness upon the literary mind” (Greene 33), though Greene views this period as exemplary of a universal human situation (34). He further explains, “imitation could mean many things: the adoption of a given author’s vocabulary, syntax, and stylistic mannerism, the adoption of his themes, his *sententiae*, his moral style, or the adoption of his characteristic genre with its associated topoi, of the specific adaptation of a single work” (Greene 171). Hulubei provides a similarly expansive définition of imitation:

Au XIV^e siècle l’idée d’imitation a une sphère très large. Elle accueille la traduction... l’adaptation... l’imitation proprement dite, qui a pour bornes extrêmes le plagiat et l’imitation libre. La gamme des possibilités de la dernière est infinie ; on imite un vers, une comparaison, un ton, une cadence rythmique, des thèmes, des constructions logiques, une affabulation, une attitude. (56-57)

Thus, when we attempt to discuss ‘imitation’ at this time, we employ an impossibly large term. Throughout this study, it will be important to keep all these variations in mind as I continue to reference our authors’ imitation of their ancient sources.

The principal models of epic poetry for Renaissance poets, both within France and without, are clearly Homer and Virgil; understanding these models is essential as the model supplies the definition. For insight into readings of Virgil, I turn to Jacques Peletier du Mans’ 1555 *Art poétique*, a text described by Greene as expressing the “wistful optimism” that was shared by many of his contemporaries (189). As a member of the Pléiade, Peletier’s association with Ronsard and Du Bellay sheds light on Virgil’s position as a model for them and their

contemporaries. Early in the treatise, Peletier stresses the importance of both imitation and translation in the development of a vernacular literature, and the role of imitation is most clear in the chapter on the *œuvre héroïque*. For Peletier, a language cannot stand the test of time if it has not treated the subject of war through poetry; this is the public linguistic function of the epic. As the key to successful imitation was improvement upon the original, Peletier explains how Virgil took elements from Homer and improved upon them to create his consummate work. As Virgil imitated Homer, so should the French poet imitate and improve upon Virgil.

Peletier explains each poetic form and their appropriate subject matter, and while it is unnecessary to examine far beyond the heroic genre, I turn briefly to his idea of the sonnet. Since the third chapter of this study reads Du Bellay's sonnet sequence as epic, it is important to establish the relationship between sonnet and heroic subject, if indeed one exists. Though the sonnet is traditionally the form for love poetry, Peletier maintains that it allows much flexibility because it is naturally capable of grander discourse than other short forms. In setting Petrarch as the example that defines the genre, Peletier is impressed that the amorous sonnet can produce such "grande variété sur un seul Sujet" (*Art Poétique* 270). Both the sonnet and the ode are "deux genres d'ouvrages élégants, agréables, et susceptibles de tous beaux arguments" (*Art Poétique* 272). This flexibility will allow the sonnets of the *Antiquitez* to slide into epic territory.

Peletier treats the sonnet and the ode in the same chapter, indicating a relationship between the two. He specifies that the ode should treat subjects such as gods, demigods, and princes, as should epic. However, he makes clear the distinction between the two genres despite their similar subject matter; the ode should sing the praises of these noble figures, while the *Œuvre Héroïque* should recount their deeds. As deeds are a grander subject than general praise, it follows that the epic is the higher genre. The ode is, however, "le genre d'écrire le plus

spacieux pour d'élaborer, qui soit au dessous de l'Œuvre Héroïque" (*Art Poétique* 273). As elsewhere in the treatise, the *Œuvre Héroïque* is the genre used to describe the others' situations in the hierarchy. Though Peletier does not make a direct comparison between the sonnet and the epic, the grouping of epic, sonnet, and ode in this section announces a relationship between the three; when compared to the other forms described, it becomes evident that these are the three of most elevated style, though they vary in the treatment of their lofty subject matter.

Peletier sees his historical moment as representing a shift or an evolution from medieval poetic forms; both sides of this shift demonstrate the inherent link between the *sujet héroïque* and *vers héroïques*. War as a subject matter is "le plus digne et le plus grave de toute la Poésie : à raison que les hautes personnes y entrent, comme Rois et Princes : lesquels seuls ont puissance de faire la guerre" (*Art Poétique* 232). Peletier's reasoning behind the suitability of war for poetic treatment is telling; great men are the only ones capable of war, so this necessarily elevates the subject matter. For Peletier, the length of a line (which varies from two to twelve syllables in French) determines the subjects for which it is suited. Shorter forms such as epigrams must not exceed ten syllables per line as an alexandrine would be "impertinent" because the heroic subject cannot possibly be treated in such a short form. This statement is noteworthy because it implies an inherent relationship between the alexandrine and the *Sujet Héroïque* (though he acknowledges its use for other subjects elsewhere in the treatise). The decasyllable, insists Peletier, was best suited to describing heroic action up until his historical moment, in reference to medieval *chansons de geste*. Peletier's description indicates a shift in meter-subject relationships taking place in his time as the twelve-syllable alexandrine begins to take over the role of the medieval decasyllable. He similarly mentions several medieval forms that evolve into new Renaissance forms: farce to *Comédie*, *Jeu de Martyr* to Tragedy, and the

roman into *œuvre héroïque*. Of key importance here is that Peletier sees these transformations as an evolution from baser medieval forms to more elevated Renaissance ones.

Ronsard will later claim personal responsibility for the popularity of the alexandrine, but here Peletier explains that because the form was first used to recount the deeds of Alexander the Great, it has been recently accepted as *héroïque*, a designation he declares “son vrai et propre usage” (*Art Poétique* 266). The text to which Peletier is referring is the twelfth-century *Li romans d’Alixandre*, another medieval romance version of an ancient figure. Though this text marks the first apparition of the twelve-syllable line (whose name comes either from the hero or the author, Alexandre de Bernay), the alexandrine would not gain popularity until its adoption by the Pléiade four hundred years later. It is therefore interesting to see that this time period is looking to imitate a genre that belongs to and incarnates other historical moments with a meter particular to its own.

The explanation of the various genres culminates in Peletier’s description of the epic, indicating its elevated position in the hierarchy of poetic styles. The section entitled “De l’Œuvre Héroïque” is not explicit advice to an aspiring epic poet, but rather a close reading of Virgil, clearly designed to put the *Aeneid* forth as the quintessential example of an *Œuvre Héroïque* and therefore an ideal model for imitation. Peletier highlights the aspects of the *Aeneid* that he considers to be the most essential and shows how they are improved imitations of Homer, whom he labels “inventeur, et premier écrivain du genre Héroïque” (*Art Poétique* 289). Maskell understands the structure of epic in the sixteenth century to be “an assemblage of topoi derived from the ancients” (23). Therefore, if an author successfully imitates Virgil by following the implicit guidelines found within the *Aeneid*, he ipso facto creates an epic. This line of thinking is

what derails Ronsard and causes him to miss the political contexts so essential to the teleology that gives epic its form.

Most important in Peletier's *Art poétique* are his thoughts on the genre's role in the greater scheme of literature; here, he established epic's privileged position as it serves the grandest purpose of reflecting nature and the universe. As this is epic's purpose, it is the genre against which all others are compared in the treatise and from which all others are derived. It is noteworthy that Peletier considers the *Œuvre Héroïque* to be the genre "sur lequel s'entendront les autres genres" (*Art Poétique* 237) and for this reason, he advises the poet to be well-versed in Homer and Virgil regardless of their intended style of composition. It is clear that Peletier, like many of his contemporaries, holds epic above all other genres, though it is hard to know how seriously we should take such claims considering how few poets actually attempted this sort of project.⁷

Whether or not the position of epic is truly as privileged as it appears, Peletier opens his section on epic with the pronouncement "L'Œuvre Héroïque est celui qui donne le prix, et le vrai titre de Poète" (*Art Poétique* 280). Earlier in the treatise, Peletier claims epic as the genre from which all others are derived; in this section, he uses the metaphor of the sea to reverse this idea: "Nous disons donc les autres genres d'Écrits être les Rivières et ruisseaux : et l'Héroïque être comme une Mer, ainçois une forme et image d'Univers" (*Art Poétique* 280). This metaphor is key to understanding epic in the Renaissance as it "correspond[s] to the expansionist ideology underlying the praise of epic poetry" (Langer 210). Peletier's metaphor therefore reflects not

⁷ Hulubei claims this is a sign of modesty on the part of sixteenth-century French poets. As they saw epic as the culmination and combination of other genres, they felt it necessary to train themselves with lesser genres before attempting the greatest (Hulubei 64). And Maskell insists that expectations for Ronsard's epic dissuaded others from their own attempts (6).

only his own ideology, but the general changing attitude towards epic at the time. Langer continues: “The metaphors of expansion, on the aesthetic level, imply a practice of *varietas*; the epic poet must know all sorts of things and introduce all sorts of things into his poem” (210). Not only is war the ultimate subject matter, but the length and large groups in epic allow this necessary variety. He also explains that since great men are accompanied by a variety of others into war, the subject also allows for a variety of *arguments*. In the *Iliad*, this is the catalogue of ships, and in the *Aeneid*, it is the list of armies that prepare for battle in Latium. Peletier remarks that Virgil re-invokes the Muse at this point in the text owing to the particular difficulty of the passage (*Art Poétique* 283). That Peletier considers this passage to be especially difficult shows the importance he places on its large and comprehensive scale.

This variety is what distinguishes the poet from the orator; the former can tie in other subjects related to the primary one (the gods, Hell, love, etc.), where the latter treats one subject alone. This then ties the orator to history, which Peletier labels “le Sujet le moins proper pour le Poète” (*Art Poétique* 232), a distinction upon which Ronsard will later expound. This large-scale goal of epic is both what accords the genre its privileged position and renders it among the most difficult to compose. For Langer, a particular danger is incoherence in a poem that demands a huge amount of variety within a consistent, unified plot. This idea that the *Œuvre Héroïque* should reflect the universe and nature is stated four times throughout the chapter, indicating that Peletier considers this to be the primary function of the genre; the particular elements of epic all aid the text in this ultimate purpose. For Peletier, the primary reason for Virgil’s great success in the genre is his ability to create a perfect and complete vision of life.

As the universe itself provides the form for an epic, Peletier too acknowledges the difficulty of the genre. To imitate the universe, the poet should begin with the invocation of gods

or the Muses “pour montrer, qu’en toutes entreprises doit être implorée l’aide et reconnue la puissance divine” (*Art Poétique* 280). The incursion of Christian values into ancient tradition is evident here; as God is the beginning and creator of the universe, the text, as its reflection, must begin similarly. Such a beginning also indicates the piety of the poet by recognizing God in the undertaking of all endeavors. This invocation of the divine in poetry stems from Plato’s *Ion* in which he establishes the idea that true poetry is divinely inspired and does not require skill or training on the part of the poet. French poets, in particular the Pléiade, adopted this idea as *fureur poétique*. As we will see shortly, this connection to the divine led Ronsard to understand poetic composition as an intrinsically virtuous process.

Beyond the question of appropriate meter, Peletier includes rules for composition derived from his reading of the *Aeneid*. As the Renaissance definition of epic was the sum of the various parts (a fact problematically apparent in the *Franciade*), it is important to understand what they considered to be the essential elements of a text to fulfill the public goals of celebrating France. The beginning should include an invocation of the muses and should clearly announce what is to come. A proper *poème héroïque* should begin *in medias res* rather than at the beginning of the action, as Horace previously informed us. Epic must also imitate nature by having a modest beginning and then advancing towards a happy ending.⁸ An epic’s plot must also alternate between joy and hardship “pour montrer les choses du monde, ou plutôt les faits humains” (*Art Poétique* 282). This element appears to be drawn from Aristotle’s thoughts on *pathos* as an important element of both epic and tragedy. For Peletier, the variety of emotions the audience

⁸ Indeed, the *Aeneid* and the *Odyssey* end on a clearly positive note, though the end of the *Iliad* is less completely resolved. Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, a widely-read work in sixteenth-century France remains unfinished, but the overall pessimistic tone of the epic’s representation of Rome’s great civil war suggests it would not have had a happy ending. It is worthwhile to make this comparison because Peletier repeatedly uses Lucan as a counter example of what an epic should not be.

feels helps keep them engaged in the story, but more importantly, it reflects the human experience; the world is not all joy or all sorrow.

For Peletier, a modest and clear beginning imitates nature and helps the reader enter willingly into the story. Virgil's opening lines⁹ announce clearly to the reader the main argument of the text. The reader is also informed that the end will be happy, something Peletier believes is the natural order of things. Peletier stresses the importance of alternating between joy and adversity, which he considers to be "le jeu du Théâtre de ce monde: dont le Poème est le miroir" (*Art Poétique* 284). This statement is followed by a summary of the *Aeneid*'s entire plot in order to show how success and hardship must alternate "pour montrer les choses du monde, ou plutôt les faits humains" (*Art Poétique* 282). The plot summary allows Peletier to touch on other aspects that make epic, as the longest poetic genre, best suited to reflecting the world itself. Peletier reiterates the Horatian topos "Even Homer nods" but applies it to Virgil instead, declaring that the divine poet sometimes shows himself to be merely human. However, Peletier insists that any weak aspects in a long text only aid its representation of the world, for the Earth itself is both fertile and sterile in places, and the quality of verse reflects the diverse terrain of the world.

Different episodes allow the poet to show all sides to the world: men and gods, the world and the underworld, the past and the future. Both Aristotle and Peletier are concerned with the characters' admirability; though Aristotle is primarily concerned with each character behaving

⁹ ARMA virumque cano, Trojae qui primus ab oris
 Italiam, fato profugus, Laviniaque venit
 litora – multum ille et terris jactatus et alto
 vi superum, saevae memorem Junonis ob iram,
 multa quoque et bello passus, dum conderet urbem,
 inferretque deos Latio – genus unde Latinum,
 Albanique patres, atque altae moenia Romae. (Virgil 1.1-17)

appropriately to their station, Peletier underlines the didactic intent of epic by reading each character as an allegory for a different virtue. For Peletier, an epic should be instructional by representing admirable traits through different characters; for example, Dido represents hospitality, and Aeneas, piety. These elements have all been highlighted because, in Peletier's opinion, they are fully realized by Virgil and thus serve as examples of the necessary elements for a successful *Œuvre Héroïque*. Aeneas can show proper filial piety by honoring Anchises and can respect conjugal love by his search for Creusa. The development of other characters allows the poet to include a variety of virtues in the text, and the diversity of episodes allow the hero in particular to exhibit a wide range of human qualities such as royal dignity, proper judgment, constancy, courage, and majesty (*Art Poétique* 285).

To complete its complete reflection of the universe, epic must include elements from the divine world as well as the human world. First, the epic permits insight into the world of the gods; though Peletier does not speak in Quint's terms, this inclusion of the gods permits the epic's necessary teleology to form. According to Peletier's reading of the *Aeneid*, the Dido episode allows the poet to show that the Fates cannot be deterred by man (*Art Poétique* 282). Scenes between Jupiter and Mercury, or Venus and Vulcan, demonstrate the immutable will of the gods that determine man's action. Peletier points to the underworld episode in Book 6 as being essential to showing the immortality of the soul (*Art Poétique* 285). This episode furthers the purpose of a complete vision of the universe in several ways. First, the immortality of the soul proves that the life shown on earth is only part of one's entire existence; this is an important distinguishing factor of epic as the underworld sequence is particular to the genre. Second, by visiting the underworld, the poet can show life after this one: the suffering of those left unburied, the punishments of the wicked, the beauty of Elysium for heroes ["Voilà les travaux de vertu"]

(*Art Poétique* 283)]. Third, the underworld episode's parade of heroes complements the description of Aeneas' shield that follows in Book 8. Upon arrival in Elysium, Aeneas sees the Ancestral founders of Troy who point the way to his father. Anchises in turn shows his son the future of the Trojan race. This acknowledgement of past, present, and future presents a concept of history as linear and dynastic. This is precisely the element of epic that leads Quint to single out a linear, teleological narrative as epic's most essential feature. Though Peletier fails to mention the parade of heroes, he highlights Virgil's imitation of Homer in the shield of Aeneas; while Achilles' shield depicts a variety of scenes from life (themselves often interpreted as another complete view of the world), Aeneas' shows "tant de choses mémorables des faits Romains à venir" (*Art Poétique* 284). By including history up until his own time, Virgil included the past, present, and future for Aeneas, he is able to situate his hero in the greater scheme of history, thereby representing a complete reflection of the universe, or at least a Roman-centric version of it, and thus imply the teleological drive of this history.

What we can conclude from Peletier's detailed analysis of Virgil is this: the prevailing conception of the *œuvre héroïque* in the Renaissance was derived from readings of the *Aeneid*, the text considered to be the quintessential example of the genre. After enumerating its essential elements, Peletier concludes "Voilà comment se bâtit l'Œuvre Héroïque et immortel. Voilà comment une Idée de sagesse et de vertu conçue par le grand esprit Poétique, se forme le grand et parfait image de la vie" (*Art Poétique* 287). This idea of epic as representing both nature and the universe is evidently the essential aspect of the genre that governs and determines the others. Peletier highlights the importance of imitation and especially how Virgil improved upon Homer in order to encourage poets to do the same to Virgil in turn. As a conclusion to his analysis, Peletier recommends "Soit donc Virgile patron et exemple au Poète futur" (*Art Poétique* 290).

Peletier also suggests that some sort of ultimate divine subject must exist, greater than the known heroic subject, “qui ne saurait être dû à un Poète, sans une faveur singulière des Cieux” (*Art Poétique* 233). Believing French poetry to be still in its infancy, he fears this ultimate subject will be “pour un autre Siècle et une autre Langue” (*Art Poétique* 233), but the French should attempt an *Œuvre Héroïque* as it is currently the highest known subject for poetry. He ends the section by quoting Augustus’ praise of the *Aeneid*, an interesting conclusion because it brings up the important link between the composition of an epic and its patronage, a relationship we will explore shortly. The final lines echo a sentiment we will see in Du Bellay’s *Deffence et Illustration*, an unfulfilled yearning for another Augustus “pour voir s’il se pourrait encore trouver un Virgile!” (*Art Poétique* 291). Epic, as a genre that celebrates public matters and interests, is often patronized by a member of the ruling faction as a means to celebrate their dynasty and ancestry. Peletier’s statement is a reflection on the role of a patron to recognize and encourage exceptional talent in an artist. This relationship between patron and poet will be explored further shortly, especially Charles IX’s patronage of Ronsard’s *Franciade*.

Appropriation

As I touched upon in the introduction, the appropriation of ancient epic into French tradition is a noteworthy aspect of the development of the genre in Renaissance France. By acknowledging the presence of translations and adaptations of ancient epic in medieval and Renaissance France, we can see how these shape our poets’ encounters with epic. While past readings of epic myth clearly leave a mark on interpretations that follow, new analyses also impose their own vision onto the past. For instance, the Renaissance poets who were drawn to the imperialist aspects of the *Aeneid* decided the poem was an entirely nationalistic endeavor and extended this interpretation back to Homer (as Virgil’s model), regardless of how the *Iliad* and

the *Odyssey* were intended or regarded in their own time. We have seen this process at work with the transformation of Aeneas into romance figure in the Middle Ages as this reflects the preferences of the medieval audience rather than Virgil's intentions for his hero. It is also the Middle Ages that give us the figure of Francus, or Francion, modeled on medieval understandings of Aeneas' role for Rome. The idea that Francus survived the fall of Troy to become founder of the Frankish empire was an idea birthed by Merovingian scholars to legitimate Charlemagne and his line. This is clearly modeled on Aeneas' role in establishing the line leading to Augustus, so the very existence of this myth is yet another form of appropriation. As this myth will form the basis of Ronsard's attempt at epic (whose only completed books ironically focus in the romance aspects of Francus rather than the imperial destiny Ronsard himself intended to privilege), it is important to note this use of another culture's mythological history to validate a new nation.

The maintained presence of Virgil through the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance makes the appropriation and adaption of the *Aeneid* particularly interesting; while the focus of our study is not medieval adaptations of epic, they are nonetheless necessary to explore because of the legacy they leave to later times, particularly in shifting the focus from empire to Aeneas' romantic interests. To acknowledge the temporal distance between the French Renaissance and Ancient Rome, we must remember that everything the sixteenth century inherited of Virgil, "il n'en hérite que par l'intermédiaire du moyen âge" (Hulubei 4). A fourteenth-century French manuscript, *Histoire ancienne ; Les Faits des Romains*, covers history from the Christian creation of the world to Caesar and demonstrates the period's interest in Ancient Rome; it includes both Aeneas and Jason's quest with his Argonauts, indicating that the presence of both epics was strong enough to include in a history. The fact that the author includes only Aeneas'

sojourn in Carthage as companion to Dido (with little reference to his founding of Rome) evidences the medieval preoccupation with Aeneas as romance hero, a legacy of interpretation that would cause problems for Ronsard, as I demonstrate in Chapter 2.

This reinterpretation of Aeneas as a primarily romantic figure is largely rooted in the popularity of what many consider to be the first written French romance, the twelfth-century *Roman d'Énéas*. Here, the focus is on the hero's relationships with Dido and Lavinia, and even Virgil's key moment when Aeneas gazes upon the future history of the Roman Empire engraved upon his shield is removed from the medieval version. In her article on the *Roman d'Énéas* as a translation of Virgil, Nancy P. Pope argues that the shift in genre during such a translation is a natural move that reflects the popular taste and expectations of the day rather than a misunderstanding of the original text (249). For Pope, it would be unnatural to include the patriotism and ideals of a perpetual and eternal Roman Empire in a text intended for a medieval Anglo-Norman audience.

Likewise, the popularity of the romance genre in medieval France would have caused medieval readers of Virgil to be drawn to the romance aspects in the original story. Romance (in the medieval sense) is a genre particular to this cultural moment, especially in France, due to the development of *fin'amor* in several regions at this time. This practice of courtly love shaped many forms of popular literature, even coming to dominate one of the three main medieval cycles, the *matière de Bretagne*. While the Matter of Rome was concerned with continuing the scholarly tradition of the ancients and the Matter of France described the exploits of Charlemagne and his entourage, the Matter of Britain followed King Arthur's court, often using elements of *fin'amor* to structure the tales of Arthur's knights. It was a new literary style that reflected the social and cultural norms and interests of the day, thereby gaining wide-spread

popularity across the Anglo-Norman population. In an increasingly mercantile society, the rising bourgeoisie became less interested in the epic heroism associated with the warrior aristocracy and more receptive to tales of love. Even if such stories recounted the adventures of knights at court, the practice of courtly love itself extended into the rich merchant class (as demonstrated in the dialogues of Andreas Capellanus' twelfth-century *De Amore*) whose newfound social mobility allowed them to participate in the amorous activities of the nobility, but not the martial ones.

This audience therefore found common ground between their own popular tastes and similar elements in the *Aeneid*, despite the romance clearly being of secondary importance in the original text. When Aeneas breaks his promises to Dido, Virgil leaves no question that the hero's imperial destiny outweighs any personal attachment he has to the Carthaginian queen. Therefore, Virgil's hero is decidedly *not* a romance hero because his relationship with Dido is detrimental to his true purpose, another in a series of obstacles to overcome; at Mercury's command, Aeneas abandons her without hesitation, though Virgil admits that it pains him to do so. However, a medieval audience, predisposed towards the amorous adventures of its heroes, would enjoy more engagement with Aeneas' anguish at leaving Dido and the queen's reaction to his departure. The medieval interest in Ovid's *Heroides*, popularized in the late eleventh century in France, reinforces the idea of Aeneas as a vile traitor by providing readers with Dido's emotional version of his abandonment. In the fifteenth-century, this epistolary work was first translated into French as *Les Vingt et Une Epistres d'Ovide* by Octavien de Saint-Gelais; as several more French translations followed during the first half of the sixteenth century, enough interest existed in this version of the Aeneas-Dido affair (among the stories of other wronged ancient women) to warrant

multiple editions of the text in French. This combination of factors naturally led to retellings of the story that explored more deeply these themes that recall the medieval *roman*.

Theatre in the sixteenth century confirms continued impressions of Aeneas as a villain and Dido as hero lasted into the time of this study's poets. We see this tradition of Aeneas-the-romance-hero continue into Renaissance adaptations of the story. Etienne Jodelle, for instance, takes the Dido story and focuses his 1555 tragedy, *Didon se sacrifiant*, on the ill-fated queen. While Jodelle's text is less of a direct translation than Christopher Marlowe's 1593 *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, the influence of the medieval interpretation Aeneas on both tragedies is clear. Not only has Aeneas been transformed from an epic hero into a romantic character, but he is no longer the hero of the story at all. Having ceded his place as protagonist to Dido, Aeneas becomes the antagonist as he abandons the queen, an action that becomes all the more cruel following the removal of Virgil's emphasis on dynastic empire in the medieval versions of the story. The tradition established in the thirteenth century with the *Historia Destructionis Troiae* of Aeneas as a traitor who betrayed the Trojans to the Greeks clearly left its mark upon the collective image of Aeneas that maintained its influence into the sixteenth century. It is essential to acknowledge these medieval traditions that conflict with Virgil's because, though Renaissance authors would be reading the *Aeneid* for themselves, they would also have been aware of the alternative medieval interpretations of the story. These likely colored their reading of the text, even if they tried to understand it as they believed Virgil intended.

Like medieval romance tradition, Christianity similarly leaves its mark on sixteenth-century scholarship of Virgil. As literacy was limited mostly to religious orders throughout the Middle Ages, the task of copying and editing ancient texts fell largely to monks who felt obligated to infuse the pagan stories with Christian morals. Hulubei explains that this search for

Christian morality led scholars to read Virgil's poetry as allegory as early as the sixth century when the moralist Fulgentius read the *Aeneid* as an allegory of man's eternal struggle against evil; representing science and virtue, Aeneas overcomes his enemies, the passions (Hulubei 5). This particular allegorical reading found popularity again in the late fifteenth century among some early Italian humanists, thus the sixteenth century begins with a continued tendency to read Virgil's works as allegory. In France, these allegorical interpretations continued to dominate Virgilian scholarship through the first half of the century until the focus shifts around 1550 to more literal readings. For Hulubei, this medieval legacy led to a profound misunderstanding of Virgil's collective works in sixteenth-century France:

Mais le sens des œuvres de Virgile a échappé aux imprimeurs et aux humanistes du XVI^e siècle. Ils n'y ont vu que les allusions à l'histoire ou à la mythologie, l'analogie avec les modèles grecs, les particularités de langue, de syntaxe et de versification. Pas une mention sur la beauté des vers ou de la pensée, sur le charme de l'inspiration virgilienne. (Hulubei 23)

As I examine sixteenth-century scholars' interpretations of Virgil in their own words, this is a point to keep in mind. As this study's goal is to find what epic meant to the poets of sixteenth-century France, this medieval legacy sheds an interesting light on their priorities while reading Virgil.

The presence of numerous Latin editions evidences Virgil's importance and popularity throughout the French Renaissance. As this study leads into the early part of the seventeenth century with the publication of *Les Tragiques* in 1616, it is essential to acknowledge that interest in the *Aeneid*, even in the original Latin, does not wane over the course of the sixteenth. It is not only reinterpretations of the story that maintain a presence at this time; study of the text itself

remains popular and dominates editions of Virgil's work through the first half of the sixteenth century. During this period, at least Latin sixty editions of Virgil's work are published in France (Hulubei 22). The most common practice was to publish his three principal works (the *Georgics*, the *Bucolics*, and the *Aeneid*) together, sometimes accompanied by additional poems. The most notable of these editions is the first one in the century by Josse Badius Ascensuis, first printed in 1501. From 1501 to 1529, nearly all readings of Virgil in France were this edition; they were destined primarily to young students as Badius' commentary served as an introduction to the poet (Hulubei 14). His commentary also shows the influence of the Middle Ages and early Italian humanists in explaining Virgil's moralizing structure to the first half of the *Aeneid*, designed, Badius believed, to represent six stages of life (*infantia*, *puertia*, *adolescentia*, *iuventas*, *virilitas*, *senectus*).¹⁰

The other Latin edition worth mentioning is that of Henri Estienne, who followed in the footsteps of his father Robert whose own edition was printed in 1532. Henri Estienne's *Virgile* is noteworthy as "le résultat définitif des recherches de tout un siècle, destiné au grand public qui s'intéresse de plus en plus aux œuvres anciennes et surtout à celles de Virgile" (Hulubei 21). Printed in 1577, 1583, and 1599, the *Virgile* bears witness to the maintained popularity and presence of Virgil's work throughout the sixteenth-century in France. Where Badius' early editions were intended for young students, Estienne's text is destined for the public at large, indicating that interest in and study of Virgil shifts from the classroom to scholarly circles to the general public during the course of the sixteenth century.

¹⁰ Badius lists this as the third compulsion for Virgil to compose the *Aeneid*. The first was to produce a work of the genre Badius calls "sublimis". The second was to rival Homer (Hulubei 11).

The popular practice of translation leaves its mark on epic as a form of appropriation due to the practice of “correcting” Virgil in translations to conform to the tastes and Christian morals of the sixteenth-century audience. These translations represent varying degrees of fidelity to the original (Hulubei 23), if fidelity is even an appropriate question in translations, especially at this time. The distinction is so blurred between translation and imitation in the sixteenth century that it is often difficult to decide where one begins and the other ends, especially as even translations would often adapt the source material: “Tant pis si les faux sens abondent, si des notions francisent et christianisent le monde archaïque et païen de Virgile” (Hulubei 52). This Gallicizing and Christianizing of Virgil reveals important information about appropriation of the ancient world; for Renaissance scholars, ancient thought mattered much less in the context of its own time than it did as a reflection of the contemporary reader’s worldview.

For French translations in the first half of the century, the most important goal was to please the public at large (Hulubei 35). Noteworthy translations from this period include a 1483 prose adaptation printed by Guillaume Leroy. Leroy’s edition reflects the public interest in the historical aspects of the *Aeneid* by removing Aeneas’ tale of the destruction of Troy in Book 2 and replacing it with an historical account of the Trojan War that now opens the text. In 1509, the first versified French translation of the *Aeneid*, composed by Octavian de Saint-Gelais (first translator of Ovid’s *Heroides*), was printed in Paris. This translation, largely faithful to Virgil’s text, was well-respected and widely-read among writers and poets throughout the first half of the century (Hulubei 29); it was reprinted in 1529 and 1540 with the addition of other Virgilian texts in translation.

While continued Latin editions show that scholarly interest in Virgil is maintained, the popularity of French translations bears witness to the fact that this fascination with the ancient

poet extends beyond the intellectual community and into the population at large. The translation that leaves the most noticeable mark on sixteenth-century France is that of Louis Desmasures. Beginning with the publication of the *Aeneid*'s first two books in 1547, Desmasures continued expanding, publishing, and reprinting his work throughout the century. These first two books were reprinted with the *Georgics* in 1574. His collection of the *Aeneid*'s first four books was published in 1552, then reprinted in 1555 and 1556. An edition with *Aeneid* books five through eight was published in 1557, followed by Desmasures' first complete translation in 1560, which was then reprinted in 1567, 1569, and 1572 (the same year the *Franciade* first appeared). Including its publication with other works, the complete Desmasures translation was printed seven times in less than twenty years (Hulubei 47). The continuing translation project and its frequent reprinting over a period of nearly thirty years evidence the popularity of Desmasures' work; indeed, Hulubei informs us it was highly praised by his contemporaries (47). More importantly, this shows the persistent relevance of Virgil in sixteenth-century France and the continued interest in a French language version of his work.

Numerous partial translations, touted as a poetic practice exercise by Peletier in particular, highlight the thematic and narrative interests of poets and the public; indeed, translation of the entire text was not the most prevalent practice. Indeed, many poets chose sections of the *Aeneid* rather than translate the text as a whole, especially between 1540 and 1560 (Hulubei 53). The portions of the text most often translated give significant insight into the popularity of certain episodes. These most popular episodes in France were the fall of Troy (in Book 2), Aeneas' affair with Dido in Carthage (in Book 4), and the trip to the underworld (in Book 6) (Wilson-Okamura 146). Hulubei confirms that these books had a greater chance of success with the audience and were therefore translated most frequently (53). Despite his general

aversion to translation, Du Bellay published translations of *Aeneid* Book 4 and Ovid's letter from Dido to Aeneas in 1552. Du Bellay's selective translations from the *Aeneid* and the *Heroides* show the continuation of the medieval focus on Aeneas as traitorous lover rather than founder of empire. Textual adaptations of the Dido story then tended to preference recovering Dido's honor, lost by Aeneas' abandonment, by painting the queen as tragic hero. Highlighting this tendency, particularly prominent in Italy at this time, Hulubei explains that, in the decision to publish these pieces together, "Du Bellay, se faisant lui aussi le *Deffenseur* de cette princesse, désapprouve Virgile" (39). This choice also corresponds to the career of Du Bellay as its publication comes shortly after his amorous sonnet collection *Olive* and before his departure to Rome in 1553 that would so greatly alter the tone of his poetry. This translation of the fourth book appeared again, accompanied by a translation of *Aeneid* Book 6, in a posthumous publication in 1569 of Du Bellay's opus.

The presence of the Homeric texts in Renaissance France is not as noticeable as Virgilian poetry, though this is truer of the *Odyssey* than of the *Iliad*. Though Homer was not read in Western Europe until the very end of the Middle Ages, his stories were well-known, particularly the story of Odysseus (Wilson-Okamura 148). Towards the end of the fifteenth century, a few French scholars who could read Greek introduced the epics to France and began production of partial texts intended for student use, though most French encounters with Homer transpired through Italian texts (Ford 1-2, 4). However, even into the Renaissance, "Homer was certainly more talked about than read... Translations of Homer seem to have done little to make him more widely used" (Maskell 27). In the middle of the century, the Council of Trent had an unexpected impact on the reading of Homeric texts as it expressly forbid Catholics from reading the Greek and Hebrew versions of the Bible, and this injunction caused Greek to become synonymous with

heresy, even leading to the execution by François I of some Greek scholars as heretics in 1546 (Manguel 110). Conversely, among Protestant communities, “Not knowing Greek... became a mark of ignorance” (Manguel 110). However, as France remained predominantly Catholic, French interactions with Homeric poetry were colored by this religious division.

The religious or heretical associations with Greek did not entirely prevent scholars from studying Homeric, though these associations explain Homer’s position behind Virgil at the time. Commentaries on Homer were somewhat popular (Ford 6-7), as they were for Virgilian poetry as well. Ronsard was one of the few to study Homer in Greek; even in arguing Homer’s superiority to Virgil, Montaigne admits that his only knowledge of the Greek poet is through the Latin text. Montaigne’s approach to the study of Homer represents the majority of interactions with the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* at the time. However, I will point out a few noteworthy editions of Homer that were printed in France at this time.¹¹ Peletier, who championed translation as the purest form of imitation, considering it to be “l’un des arts les plus délicats et les plus difficiles” (Hulubei 38), is one of the few poets of the time to publish a French translation of the *Odyssey* and two books of the *Iliad*. His first collection of poetry, *Œuvres Poétiques*, published in 1547, includes a translation of the first two books of the *Odyssey*. “The *Odyssey* left its mark by consecrating travel as an epic theme” (Maskell 28). This epic travel journey is evident especially in Camões’ *Lusiadas* and somewhat in Rabelais’ mock-epic *Tiers Livre*, but the interest in travel adventure also manifests in the rising popularity of travel journals that go hand-in-hand with the sixteenth century’s interest in exploration.

¹¹ For a complete publishing history of Homer in sixteenth-century France, see Philip Ford, “Homer in the French Renaissance.” *Renaissance Quarterly*. Vol.59, no.1, Spring 2006, p.1-28.

The direct influence of Homeric text in France during the Renaissance seems to be founded more in the *Iliad*, especially thanks to a translation by Hugues Salel early in the century. François I personally requested this translation by Salel (Hulubei 45). Salel's translation work was popular enough to have been published several times, each edition including more books and indicating that he continued his translation project until his death in 1553. In his correspondence, d'Aubigné evaluates the poetry of Ronsard's secretary, Adamis Jamyn, declaring him to be a fair Greek scholar due to his translation of Homer; however, d'Aubigné mocks the poet, asserting that while Jamyn understood the Greek well, he "n'a rien fait d'heureux en français" (*Lettres touchantes quelques poincts de diverses sciences* 861). The sparsity of other translations may be another indication of the popularity of Salel's, also evidenced by the repeated publication of his translations over a thirty-year period.

Interestingly, Latin translations of Homer also enjoyed relative success at the time. The first Homeric text printed in France in 1510 was actually a Latin translation by an Italian, Niccolò della Valle (Ford 4). In 1523, another Latin translation of the *Iliad*'s first two books was published in Paris. As a larger portion of even the educated population spoke Latin than Greek, this translation increased accessibility of the text. As Latin was still the preferred language of literature at this point in the century, it is perhaps not surprising that a Frenchman would undertake a translation project from Greek to Latin rather than to French. Ford's catalogue of all Homeric publications in sixteenth-century France highlights the popularity of bilingual editions (Greek and literal Latin) in the later part of the century (Ford 8), again revealing the linguistic priorities of the period's scholars.

Patronage

Consideration of patronage's role in the creation of epic is important to establish the ties between the heads of state and this particular literary genre. A brief look around Europe around the same time can establish context for the *Franciade*. Indeed, many among the nobility would have been familiar with the *Aeneid* and its contribution to its patron's legacy. In a period of engaging dialogue between authors and texts across temporal and geographical boundaries, it is difficult to isolate the literature of one nation from the rest. By looking briefly at similar attempts to produce an epic in the sixteenth century, in particular the patronage for these works, we can begin to understand what an epic meant to a nation at this time. Claiming responsibility for another such great work would have undoubtedly been appealing, especially in an age where art was a sign of power.

Dante Alighieri found a faithful patron in Cangrande I della Scala, ruler of Verona. The house of Este, the ruling family of Ferrara, was responsible for both Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*, patronized by Cardinal Ippolito d'Este and Duke Alfonso II respectively. It is worth noting that the heroes of both these Italian works are, in fact, historically (and mythologically) French; this indicates that it was not necessary for an epic to praise the ancestry of a leader in order to be seen as augmenting the honor and prestige of that house; the production of a great work was sufficient to achieve this goal.¹² Luís de Camões' *Os Lusíadas* begins with a tribute to King Sebastião and ends with advice to the young ruler. Though Camões was not officially patronized by Sebastião during the writing of his epic (which was composed mostly in the Far East), its publication after his return to Portugal earned the

¹² Though *Orlando Furioso* is a romance rather than an epic, its popularity and privileged position accorded by Du Bellay warrant its inclusion in this list.

author a royal pension. The significance of this text can still be felt today as the Portuguese national holiday, June 10, is celebrated on the anniversary of the poet's death. Moving across the Channel, Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, in many aspects a flattering allegorical representation of Elizabeth I's court, was patronized by Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, a particular favorite of the queen who hoped to become her consort.

The tie between poet and patron is stronger and more relevant for an epic text than other forms of poetry because of the public political function of epic that I established in the introduction. This is important in order to contextualize the goal of French poets, particularly Ronsard. It is, of course, logical that the patronage of these (and indeed all) artistic works comes from the upper echelons of society as they are the only ones with the financial means to support the arts. However, for the genre fundamentally concerned with public action, the implications of this source of patronage are greater than for other artistic forms. Where the patron of a love sonnet might require the poet to praise the object of the patron's affection, the patron of an epic demands (explicitly or implicitly) that the epic celebrate their rule. Additionally, the sheer size of an epic project requires funding the extensive cataloguing of ancient epics (Langer 210), which is the primary service Ronsard's secretary Jamyn performed during the composition of the *Franciade*. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, the importance of glorifying ancestors completely overshadowed other elements of epic which "became primarily a means of flattery and became self-advertisement rather than a real attempt to rival Homer or Virgil" (Maskell 3), as evidenced by the continuations of the *Franciade*, each poet seeking favor from the new king Henri IV through poetic flattery rather than actually attempting to finish Ronsard's incomplete epic.

Both Peletier and Du Bellay articulate this relationship between patron and epic poet by hoping for a second Augustus for France; this desire for a patron who inspires and anchors (but is not a character in) the epic implies that the patron's status determines the significance of the text more than the poet. Peletier hoped that a new Augustus might exist to discover a second Virgil; Du Bellay's expression varies only slightly: "Certainement si nous avons des Mécènes et des Augustes, les cieux et la nature ne sont point si ennemis de notre siècle que nous n'eussions encore des Virgiles" (*Deffence* 268). Du Bellay suggests that the existence of great patrons like Augustus and his friend Gaius Maecenas would naturally lead to great poets like Virgil, or that the deeds and exemplary figure of such a powerful leader would inspire great poetry. In Ronsard's *Franciade*, an invocation of his patron Charles IX following the invocation of the muse reaffirms this tie between poem and patron noted by Ronsard's contemporaries. This association reflects Quint's idea of epic's teleology that must extend beyond the narrative and into the poet's and patron's history. This is a large factor of the genre's difficulties at this time, most evidenced by Ronsard's *Franciade*, as I explain in the following chapter; the patron must not only finance the epic, but he must also provide a historical telos strong enough to anchor the narrative, and one simply does not exist in sixteenth-century France.

Prefatory poems to the *Franciade*'s first book establish the text as a political product and tool, directed by the ruler to glorify his personal ancestry and by extension his people. Below portrait of Charles (facing one of Ronsard) is the following quatrain composed by Ronsard's secretary, Adamis Jamyn:

Tu n'as, Ronsard, composé cet ouvrage,
 Il est forgé d'une royale main,
 CHARLES scavant victorieux & sage,

En est l'auteur, tu n'es que l'escrivain. (in Ronsard *Œuvres complètes* 27)

While this is partially obligatory flattery of the sovereign, Jamyn's lines highlight the importance of a patron for a work of such magnitude, claiming patron and poet equally responsible for the text. Without financial backing from the king, the *Franciade* would not exist even in its partial form; indeed, progress ceased when Ronsard lost his first patron, Henri II and his successor François II had no interest in the project. While it is unclear exactly how much input Charles had over the direction of the plot, this dedication also gives us insight into the importance of the patron's role as director of the project, a role that establishes him as the true author of the work, at least in Jamyn's terms. Ronsard references stylistic changes imposed upon him by his patron, so it is likely that Charles influenced the direction of the action as well. The link between Charles and Ronsard is also noteworthy because the first few lines of the text announce the poet's goal to sing the line of French kings descended from Francus, son of Hector. As we explore the progression of Ronsard's epic, we will understand more thoroughly the relationship between patron and poem, especially as it becomes problematic within the *Franciade*.

Du Bellay

While Du Bellay's 1549 poetic treatise *Deffence et illustration de la langue françoise* only briefly addresses issues surrounding epic, the manifesto as a whole is essential to understanding the professed symbiosis between literature and nation that establishes the desire for a national epic. As founding members of the Pléiade, Du Bellay and Ronsard were particularly concerned with the ties between language, literature, and nation, a tone set for the early years of the Brigade/Pléiade and articulated in the *Deffence*. The first book, containing twelve of the chapters, is a passionate defense of the French language's potential for literature as great as ancient works composed in Greek or Latin. Du Bellay sees French as a young language

that needs careful cultivation for it to achieve its full potential. This leads to the argument of the second book, the deliberate *illustration* (in the sense of rendering more illustrious) of the language. In his introduction to the work, Jacques Borel calls the *Deffence* a work of a “néophyte extasié” (8), claiming the manifesto represents “ces fiançailles d’un poète avec son langage” (10). Greene agrees that the text shares the optimism he noted in Peletier’s *Art poétique* (190). Though the attitudes of Du Bellay and the group would change over time, the text is essential to understand both the poetic movement and larger intellectual concerns of the period.

Regardless, Du Bellay’s text marks a starting-off point for the direction their poetic goals would take, at least in terms of language as reflective of nation. In epic however, Du Bellay diverges sharply from Ronsard by suggesting that a combination of medieval French romance and historical information written in a style to imitate Virgil and Homer would be the ideal method for creating a French epic: “The Renaissance *long poem*, as Du Bellay defined it, was thus a hybrid that brought together romance, epic, and chronicle, seemingly occupying the space between the wandering we associate with romance plots and the single-mindedness of epic destinies” (Usher xviii). As I return to Du Bellay in Chapter 3, this concise definition will encourage my application of Quint’s theory to Du Bellay’s *Antiquitez de Rome*.

The *Deffence et illustration de la langue françoise* has several ties to epic that are clear at first glance; the twenty-four-book structure mimics the Homeric epics, and the title recalls the most important text tying France to Rome, Jean Lemaire de Belges’ *Illustrations de Gaule et singularitez de Troyes*. The similarities between the titles of Du Bellay’s poetic manifesto and Lemaire’s celebration of Gaul align the poets’ goals of national exaltation. Du Bellay’s comments on Lemaire illustrate the important public function of poetry as the Pléiade understood it within the greater scheme of national literature. Du Bellay explains that Lemaire “me semble

avoir premier illustré et les Gaules et la langue française” (*Deffence* 257). His *Illustrations de Gaule* famously ties the French nobility to Hector, endowing the French and their literature with illustrious ancestry. This concretely demonstrates the purpose of poetry for Du Bellay and the primary motivation for the creation of a French epic. Though however successfully Lemaire sings the praises of a mythic/historic France, the work itself cannot satisfy the emerging nation’s need for a *long poème français* for one essential reason: the work is in prose.

For Du Bellay and his fellow members of the Pléiade, careful imitation of the best Greek and Roman writers in French is the best way to improve and enrich their language. Greene maintains that the *Deffence* remains an interesting text to study because “it brings an acute consciousness of linguistic difference to bear on an *imitation* represented as creative and crucial” (189). Unlike some contemporaries, Du Bellay is less interested in the specific process or in limiting models; instead, he is “consciously iconoclastic, consciously the spokesman of a movement taking shape” (Greene 190). Though Peletier claimed translation as “La plus vraie espèce d’Imitation” (243), Du Bellay argues against the practice, insisting that translation can never convey the beauty of the original in its own language.¹³ He goes so far as to assert that even Homer and Virgil would be unable to adequately translate Petrarch into their respective languages. This suggests an essential difference between languages and their suitability to very specific things; as Petrarch was inherently Italian and Homer Greek, so must a French epic be fundamentally French. Even among the very best poets, too much is lost in translation, and the entire practice is not sufficient for the Pléiade’s goal of elevating the language; therefore,

¹³ It is worth noting that espousing this belief did not prevent Du Bellay from practicing translation himself. We have already noted his translation of selections from the *Aeneid* and the *Heroides*, and his poetry collections contain many other examples of his translations. His argument would be that as a skilled and educated poet, he was among the elite few capable of proper translations. Though admittedly, the line between translation and imitation was so thin at the time that it is hard to distinguish the activity in which a poet believed himself to be engaging.

translation is most suitable as a poetic exercise. Instead, poets must carefully study the style of the very best authors and attempt to imitate them without translating, a distinction rarely made at the time; only in this way can French hope to stand with Greek and Latin as one of the great literary languages.

Though Du Bellay claims that poets should write sonnets and odes above all other poetic forms, only the epic receives its own chapter. He begins the chapter on the *long poème* with an appeal to the poet who cares for his language to do for French what Ariosto did for Italian in creating a modern epic to rival those of the ancients. However serious the professed desire for a project of this magnitude, the idealized hope (or even national need) for an epic still existed. Du Bellay admits that such a project is “de si laborieuse longueur, et quasi de la vie d’un homme” (*Deffence* 267). This opening is crucial to understanding the push for a vernacular epic, even if this can be dismissed as part of Du Bellay’s youthful enthusiasm that marks the *Deffence*.

Naturally, Du Bellay turns to Homer and Virgil as examples, but unlike many of his contemporaries, he casts a wider net when looking for sources of inspiration for both poetic style and subject matter. In particular, his inclusion of *Roman de la Rose*, singled out from other medieval romances for its poetic quality, has implications beyond those expressly stated by Du Bellay. Elsewhere in the *Deffence*, Du Bellay claims that of the *anciens* (here: medieval) French poets’ work, only *Roman de la Rose* is worthy of scholarly attention (256). Du Bellay explains that this romance should be read not as a source for imitation by the modern poet, but as an example of “une première image de la langue française, vénérable pour son antiquité” (*Deffence* 257). While the text shares a common basic structure with typical romances (a man attempting to win a lady’s love), the philosophical discourses that populate Meun’s portion of the text distinguish it from a traditional *roman*. Du Bellay is certainly not the only sixteenth-century poet

to comment on the merit of the text; in his correspondences, d'Aubigné acknowledges that there are many knowledgeable men who claim to “tirer de belles et doctes inventions du *Rouman de la Rose* et de livres pareils” (*Lettres sur diverses sciences* 857). D'Aubigné declares that he follows their example in his own writings.

While *Roman de la Rose* is worthy of poetic attention, Du Bellay suggests aspiring epic poets turn to other medieval romances to provide French subject matter in imitation of Ariosto, who was able to create a “long poem” for his contemporary Italy by turning to medieval tradition. Du Bellay dares [in his words, “j’oserais” (*Deffence* 266)] to associate Ariosto with Homer and Virgil, thereby implying the contentious nature of this comparison in his time. Du Bellay recognizes potential in other medieval works, particularly *Lancelot* and *Tristan*. Though Du Bellay previously declared that only *Roman de la Rose*’s authors are “dignes d’être lus” (*Deffence* 256), he referred to the poetic value of their verse; for Du Bellay, these other medieval romances should serve as inspiration because of their inherently French stories, not their poetry. By using the example of Ariosto, “qui a bien voulu emprunter de notre langue les noms et l’histoire de son poème” (Du Bellay *Deffence* 266), French poets too should look back to medieval romances to create a new *Iliad* or *Aeneid*. In doing so, the poet must be careful not to create a simple “belle histoire” (Du Bellay *Deffence* 266) that he considers suitable only for entertaining young ladies.¹⁴ If poets take a French story from medieval romance and infuse it with information from historical annals and chronicles, “Tel œuvre certainement serait à leur immortelle gloire, honneur de la France, et grande illustration de notre langue” (Du Bellay

¹⁴ Perhaps this is why he fails to mention the popular medieval *Roman d’Aeneas* at any point in the *Deffence*; it is an entertaining romance derived from an established epic and thus not worthy of his attention.

Deffence 267). Du Bellay thus understands the importance of national culture for an epic better than Ronsard who looks to the ancient world and Roman mythic history rather than his own.

Du Bellay asserts that the right combination of factors would create a work that would speak to the honor of the poet, of France, and of the French language; this is one of the most important aspects of the way epic was viewed in his time. He highlights specific aspects of an epic that should be imitated and included in order to create an epic to fulfill the goals of establishing and preserving French cultural supremacy. He arrives at his conclusions from reading Homer and Virgil in addition to ancient poetic theorists and his contemporaries (like Peletier and Sébillet). Most important is the symbiotic relationship between poet and patron that will immortalize national glory in the nation's own language. We must remember that *this* is the ultimate goal for Du Bellay; he directs this poetic advice to enriching the language so that by extension, France confirms its cultural supremacy. It is here that Du Bellay expresses his wish for another Augustus. A patron aims to recognize and encourage talent, so a great poet cannot exist without his patron. Inversely, Du Bellay insists that great men require a poet to immortalize their public deeds for posterity. He cites Plutarch's anecdote from *The Life of Alexander* about the titular ruler at the tomb of Achilles, lamenting the absence of a poet to glorify him as Achilles had Homer. To Du Bellay's mind, though physical monuments crumble and fall subject to the ravages of time (a predominant theme in the *Antiquitez de Rome*), poetry remains to continually celebrate the glory of its subject.

Due to the written word's capacity for longevity, the creation of an epic to celebrate France would celebrate the nation better than any physical monument; this theme will return in Du Bellay's *Antiquitez* as he considers the lasting presence of Rome's poetry compared to its monyments. The *long poème* would enrich the language in which it is written and glorify France

(and its rulers) for posterity. This link between language and nation is Du Bellay's most essential argument. He concludes the *Deffence* with a final chapter imploring the French to write in their native language and to praise their nation. Citing Themistocles, Du Bellay asserts his belief that "la même loi naturelle, qui commande à chacun défendre le lieu de sa naissance, nous oblige aussi de garder la dignité de notre langue" (*Deffence* 286-287) for a nation's legacy can only be as great as its language. Of all the poetic forms discussed in the *Deffence*, the *long poème* would be the best to accomplish this; after all, it did so for Greek, Latin, and Italian, according to Du Bellay's evaluation of Homer, Virgil, and Ariosto.

Several important characteristics of the *Deffense* establish poetic composition itself as epic action. We have already seen that the twenty-four book structure is deliberately modeled on the Homeric epics. Additionally, Du Bellay opens his theoretical text with a reference to his Muse contained within the dedicatory letter to the cousin he would later follow to Rome, Cardinal Jean du Bellay; the poet acknowledges the Cardinal's preoccupations with affairs of the state but hopes he will read this text as "ma Muse a pris la hardiesse d'entrer au sacré cabinet de tes saintes et studieuses occupations" (*Deffense* 219). By equating the Muse's entry to the Cardinal's study with the arrival of the text, Du Bellay implies that the text itself, though theoretical rather than poetic, is divinely inspired. The previous paragraph explored the text's call to arms to defend the language, so Du Bellay likens his text to epic as it is both divinely inspired and constitutes heroic action through the defense of the language. Finally, the text concludes by reaffirming its loose relationship to epic, likening the manifesto to an odyssey of its own: "Or sommes-nous, la grâce à Dieu, par beaucoup de périls et de flots étrangers, rendus au port à sûreté. Nous avons échappé du milieu des Grecs, et par les escadrons romains pénétré jusques au sein de la tant désirée France" (Du Bellay *Deffence* 267). Du Bellay uses the sacking

of the Roman city, the stripping and plundering of its best artifacts, as a metaphor for the writing process described throughout the text. Poets should take the treasures from the Roman temples and use them to decorate their own. This final image of conquest, plunder, and return voyage home to France would clearly have recalled the works of Homer and Virgil to the Renaissance reader.

Ronsard

Ronsard's consideration of epic is interesting due to the amount of energy he spent justifying his own aborted epic project. As leader of the Pléiade, Ronsard had encouraged Du Bellay in the composition of his *Deffence et illustration*, so many of the latter's ideas were also shared by the former, especially early in their careers. Ronsard's own poetic manifesto, the 1565 *Abregé de l'art poétique françois*, offers insight into the poet's thoughts on the role of poetry and the poet, though its advice focuses on the minutiae of composition rather than analysis of various forms. The *Abregé* reflects study of ancient poetic theory, and the epistolary structure of advice to a young poet is directly modeled upon Horace's *Ars Poetica*. As the following chapter examines Ronsard's poetic engagement with epic in detail, here I focus on his theoretical ideas that set the stage for the *Franciade* and his other works. The *Abregé* and the *Franciade*'s metatext are of primary interest to understand the evolution of his thoughts and his self-stated purpose. I will therefore examine the various pieces chronologically in terms of their publication to understand what additions and changes he made throughout his career.

Most essential of Ronsard's opinions of poetry is that it is essentially public in nature and exists for posterity. In the *Bocage* of 1554, Ronsard insists that poetry is necessarily larger than the poet himself. While later work shows changes in his perception of himself as poet, this early

poem stresses the importance of writing for the future: “...la postérité rend l’honneur sans envie” (*Bocage (1554)* 1.14). Poetry is often not appreciated in its time, but for Ronsard, the poet’s primary concern should be writing for posterity, not his own brief moment in history. Ronsard’s emphasis on poetry’s role in preservation inspires Andrea Frisch to label him “surtout le poète de la mémoire collective” (*Les Discours de Ronsard* 47). This is an evolution from the *rhétoriciens* of the early 1500s who, as poets of the court, primarily composed poems of circumstance to celebrate specific events. Like his friend Du Bellay, young Ronsard emphasized poetry’s broader impact. This is, of course, related to Hampton’s pronouncement cited in the introduction that epic is most closely tied to public action (*Writing from History* 84); not only does its narrative recount public actions undertaken by public figures, but the act of its composition is itself an inherently public gesture.

As we saw through study of Peletier’s hierarchy of poetic genres, Renaissance poets saw different styles and meters as being naturally suited to subjects of different gravity. The poem’s purpose and subject matter therefore mandate a particular poetic form; many of the sections of the treatises that I have ignored for this study discuss precisely the types of subjects that befit various poetic forms and styles. To express the cultural and political supremacy of France as successor of ancient Rome, only the most elevated style and meter would be appropriate to accomplish the poem’s rhetorical goals. Like Peletier, Ronsard associates the alexandrine with the highest style, appropriate to the most dignified of subjects. Ronsard insists that the composition of such verse “doit être grave [et] hautaine” (*Abregé (1565)* 442). He declares the alexandrine the equivalent of the Greek and Latin heroic verse, distinguishing it from the *vers commun*, or the decasyllable: “...comme les Alexandrins sont propres pour les sujets héroïques, [les vers communs] sont proprement nés pour les amours” (Ronsard *Abregé (1565)* 422). From

this first edition of the *Abregé* in 1565, it appears clear that Ronsard ties his interpretation of the heroic text with the alexandrine verse. It is therefore surprising that he composes his own epic in the *vers commun*, the decasyllable, while his love sonnets are composed in alexandrines.

In the long letter to the reader that accompanies the first edition (and *only* the first edition) of the *Franciade* in 1572, Ronsard explains his choice of verse, acknowledging that the court prefers the alexandrine (while also claiming personal responsibility for their popularity). In the 1572 *Franciade* preface, Ronsard insists the alexandrine has become too easy for him as it too closely resembles prose: "...il m'eust esté cent fois plus aisé d'escire mon œuvre en vers Alexandrins qu'aux autres, d'autant qu'ils sont plus longs, & par consequent moins sujets, sans la honteuse conscience que j'ay qu'ils sentent trop leur prose" (*Œuvres complètes* 9). This claim, however, is contradicted by Ronsard's edit in the second edition of the *Abrégé* in 1567 in which he asserts that he would have preferred the alexandrine for his *Franciade*, but that he was instructed to compose in decasyllables:

Si ie n'ay commencé ma Franciade en vers Alexandrins, lesquels i'ay mis (comme tu sçais) en vogue & en honneur il s'en faut prendre à ceux qui ont puissance de me commander & non à ma volonté : car cela est fait contre mon gré, esperant vn iour la faire marcher à la cadance Alexandrine : mais pour cette fois il faut obeyr. (*Abrégé* (1567))

It is difficult to judge the honesty of these contradictory statements. Laumonier insists that Ronsard's patron, Charles IX, strongly encouraged Ronsard to return to his epic project that he had previously abandoned after the death of his original patron, Henri II, but that Charles' support was contingent upon using decasyllabic verse to pay homage to old French *chansons de geste* (*Œuvres complètes* xiv). Maskell however urges caution in our interpretation of Ronsard's

remarks on Charles' influence in the text, arguing that these remarks are colored by his own frustrations and disappointment in the project (70). During the examination of the *Franciade*, I will return to this question of verse style its impact on the poem's composition.

The *Franciade*'s metatext provide direct insight into Ronsard's thoughts on epic poetry – though it often takes the form of explanations for not following his own rules. The combination of these metatextual justifications, from 1572 to the *Franciade*'s final posthumous edition in 1589, demonstrates the evolution of his thoughts as he encountered difficulties during the composition of the epic. In the long *Au lecteur* of the first edition in 1572, Ronsard addresses his expectant readers in order to justify many of his compositional choices. In the second edition of the text, published in 1573, the long letter to the reader is replaced with a single paragraph also entitled *Au lecteur*. In the next editions of 1578 and 1584, even the short paragraph to the reader disappears. With the fifth edition, published posthumously in 1587, a long preface appears that would be printed in all following editions. While this is certainly of interest because it reflects specific thought on the heroic genre, it is not entirely Ronsard's work. Claude Binet, an executor of Ronsard's estate, admits in his *Vie de Ronsard* that the poet left disorganized notes about the text and genre theory that Binet organized into the *Preface sur la Franciade, touchant le Poëme Heroïque* (Laumonier *Œuvres complètes de Ronsard* 3, 331). Longer even than the 1572 *Au lecteur*, this posthumous preface offers the most detailed vision of the genre, though it is impossible to distinguish Ronsard's thoughts from Binet's, or indeed if he added to Ronsard's own notes. However, the distinction is largely irrelevant as it is important here to understand how epic was viewed in the time period. I now turn to each preface in detail.

In the first of these prefaces, published with the 1572 edition, Ronsard already shows himself uncomfortable with some of his choices and attempts to justify his project to his readers

before they even begin. He admits several faults in his own work that help define key aspects of the genre. Like Horace and Peletier, Ronsard agrees that an epic should not begin at the beginning of the story, though the *Franciade* does indeed begin with Francus' youth.¹⁵ The poet also excuses the length of the books, claiming that as Latin is more efficient than French, he should not be faulted for such a long work. Ronsard also pays homage to the traditional orality of the epic genre, suggesting that his audience read the *Franciade* aloud in order to best appreciate its verse. Ronsard highlights the importance of imitation, declaring his work to be based “plustost sur la naïve facilité d’Homere que sur la curieuse diligence de Virgile” (*Œuvres complètes* 5). Despite this pronouncement, the next chapter demonstrates how the *Aeneid* serves as both primary narrative source and model for epic's political function. As the poem was highly anticipated by his contemporaries, the need to justify his compositional choices suggests the poet's discomfort with the poem from the first publication.

In the 1573 *Au lecteur*, Ronsard expressly offers his own epic up to public opinion and criticism; if the *Franciade* is to be the national epic of the French people, they should collectively contribute to its development. Much shorter than the previous year, this single paragraph *Au lecteur* contains some revealing clues about Ronsard's conception of poetry as a public process, an assertion he made in the *Bocage* 1554 and reinforced in the 1572 *Franciade* preface. He declares that with the first edition, “J’ay... exposé mon ouvrage au public, affin d’entendre le jugement & l’arrest d’un chacun, qu’aussi volontairement je reçois, que je le pense candidement prononcé” (*Œuvres complètes* 3). The frequent re-publication of revisions of the first four books shows that he was receptive to public and personal criticism and continued to improve the work in order in hope of attaining the high standards he had set for himself. Since

¹⁵ Perhaps this contributes to the *Franciade*'s failure to gain momentum in the story. This is a key point to which I return in the following chapter.

poetry was understood to serve a public function at this time by pushing the boundaries of the French language, Ronsard encourages his compatriots to follow his example and seek public criticism and advice for all their poetic endeavors.

To return to the lengthier *Au lecteur* of 1572, Ronsard builds upon Du Bellay's idea of *fureur poétique* to depict the composition of poetry as the pursuit of moral virtue. Castor maintains that this is a unique view of poetry that Ronsard here espouses (26). The Pléiade at large adopted the Platonic idea of divine inspiration as described in the *Ion*; most notably, Pléiade member Pontus de Tyard adapted Plato's idea into the basis for his *Solitaire premier*. Within the Christian context, this *fureur poétique* transforms the muse into an allegorical figure representing the Christian divine; the act of poetry thus establishes direct contact between the poet and God. Ronsard therefore understands poetic composition as pursuit of virtue, an inherently noble endeavor.

Also in the 1572 edition, Ronsard distinguishes between the epic poet and the historian, following Aristotle's example. Ronsard insists upon this distinction to assure the reader that his poem does not create a dynastic history of France that traces "les gestes de nos Rois" (*Œuvres complètes* 5) in succession. Here, the Aristotelian idea of verisimilitude encourages further distinction between poet and historian; Ronsard articulates his goal to describe the believable rather than the true, using Francus founding the city of Paris as an example. Yet Ronsard also cautions against straying too far from the truth; as poetry is itself a form of rhetoric, "...le Poëte ne doibt non plus que l'Orateur falsifier the vray" (*Œuvres complètes* 3). Thus the poet must walk a fine line in separating his narrative from historical fact without diverging into the realm of the unbelievable.

Ronsard offers Ariosto as an example of straying too far from the truth in his “Poësie fantastique” (*Œuvres complètes* 3). Clearly, Ronsard’s opinion of the Italian treatment of Orlando differs from Du Bellay who looked to Ariosto as an example of a successful *long poème* taken from medieval tradition. Ronsard admits that *Orlando Furioso* is, at least in part, a beautiful work, but he maintains that its departure from its genre is too drastic to be an appropriate model for imitation: “...les membres [de ce poème] sont aucunement beaux, mais le corps est tellement contrefaict & monstrueux qu’il ressemble mieux aux resveries d’un malade de fièvre continue qu’aux inventions d’un home bien sain” (*Œuvres complètes* 4). By insisting that Ariosto failed to respect the proper forms of the genre, Ronsard indirectly indicates what the genre should be. It is therefore curious that, while separating his work from Ariosto’s, he then refers to the *Franciade* as “un Roman comme l’Iliade et l’Æneide” (*Œuvres complètes* 5). According to modern conceptions of genre, the *Orlando Furioso* would be described as a romance, following the medieval tradition of *roman*, but the three texts placed in this category by Ronsard would, for us, be considered epic. It is interesting to note that Ronsard appears to flip the term *roman*, maintaining the same distinction between the two genres, but using it in the opposite way as one would now. Though he draws the distinction, the following chapter will explore the notion that the only completed parts of the *Franciade* resemble our concept of romance more than epic.

In the posthumous edition of 1587, the shift in tone is noteworthy; the first two *Au lecteurs* address the *Franciade*’s reader, but this preface, addressed *Au Lecteur apprentif*, gives advice to an aspiring epic poet and engages this reader more actively with the text by inviting him to use the *Franciade* and this preface as a tool to learn about the genre and its construction. Ronsard/Binet repeats the same arguments from the 1572 edition, but adds many more. In

addition to previously-mentioned conventions such as the plausible story, the beginning *in medias res*, and the unity of action that sets an epic apart from a history, Ronsard now specifies, like Peletier, that a work of this genre must always treat the subject of war, describing it as “tout guerrier” (*Œuvres complètes* 335). Additionally, Ronsard emphasizes other ideas aligned with Peletier’s: the importance of variety of style, appropriateness of language, and admirability of characters. He also articulates his idea of a single plot in order to align his language more with Aristotle; likewise, Ronsard adds the requirement that an epic’s action should take place within one year, similar to the single day restriction Aristotle places on tragedy.

Building on the 1572 *Au lecteur*, the *Au Lecteur apprentif* of the 1578 and 1584 editions separates the *Poëte heroïque* from a simple *versificateur* who writes rhymed prose. Ronsard again emphasizes Platonic ideas of divine inspiration; to this end, the action of the work must begin and end with God. The epic poet must also take inspiration from older texts in order to begin with quality source material: “Le bon Poëte jette toujours le fondement de son ouvrage sur quelques vieilles Annales du temps passé... laquelle a gagné crédit au cerveau des hommes” (*Œuvres complètes* 339). As expected, Ronsard cites Virgil as an imitable example; as Virgil took a character mentioned by Homer to create his own epic, he drew from source material already considered valuable in the same way French poets should do. Yet the poet must also be prudent when drawing from and imitating another text because “le Poëte heroïque invente & forge arguments tous nouveaux” (*Œuvres complètes* 336) – precisely what Ronsard fails to do in the *Franciade*.

While Ronsard uses this idea of invention to distinguish the poet from the versifier, Castor sees the above quote as representative of the ties between the poet and the orator that

were common in the fifteenth century and persisted into the beginning of the sixteenth.¹⁶ Castor argues that this indicates one of the purposes of poetry (for Ronsard) is to find persuasive arguments to convince an audience (Castor 21). While this is a potentially interesting insight into Ronsard's ideas on purpose of epic, the word *argument* has several different nuances of meaning that make the question more complex than Castor acknowledges. Jamyn wrote the section *Les argumens des quatre premiers livres de la Franciade* which precedes each edition of the text. In this context, *argument* is clearly best translated as 'synopsis', and it was typical to include such synopses in epics at the time. This distinction between poet and versifier is expanded to explain the rhetorical function of poetry, particularly in the use of the word *argument*. This word's usage can be understood in two different ways; either the meaning is completely different from modern contexts and refers just to a synopsis, or the word refers to the purpose the plot was intended to fulfill. Through our study of the various poetic treatises of the century, we can see that this idea of following a set of pre-established constraints and rules to present one's reasoning is fitting to the way these writers conceived of poetic production. The poets may therefore see plot and epic action as a type of argument that is meant to lead the reader to a particular conclusion. This is at least partially supported by the fact that Jamyn opens his summary by describing Ronsard's intent in writing the text, to compose in the style of the *Anciens* by selecting the best parts from various texts in order to enrich the French language. The manner in which Jamyn introduces these synopses indicated that this enrichment of the language is the primary goal and purpose of creating a national epic for France.

Ronsard's metatext is accompanied by prefatory poems by his contemporaries that provide insight into the public anticipation of Ronsard's project. These demonstrate that the

¹⁶ As acknowledged earlier in the chapter, Sebillet's 1548 *Art poétique* was the first treatise published to refer to the art as *poétique* rather than *rhétorique*.

intellectual community understood the purpose of a French epic to be rebirthing high culture, linking France historically to Troy, and serving as a mirror to reflect the nation's greatness. While the poems are mostly filled with hyperbolic praise claiming Ronsard is Virgil and Homer reborn, surpassing both without contest, there are some smaller noteworthy points about what an epic would accomplish. The second Latin poem of the Abbé de Pimpont highlights Ronsard's role in allowing a rebirth of the glory and splendor of ancient civilization, naming the text a trophy won from the Greeks ["de Danao... victore trophaeum" (Germain Vaillant de la Guesle "In P. Ronsardi Franciada" 1.5, *Œuvres complètes* 21)].

The second purpose of a French epic as found in the dedicatory poems is the establishment of French ancestry tracing back to Troy. While this was a popular medieval tradition, the intended gravitas of Ronsard's text endows the invention with greater legitimacy. The last of these sonnets makes the tie between past and present glory clear; the author, De Troussilh, claims that Ronsard owes his glory to the deeds of Francus, the ancestors of the French, and mostly to Charles IX, "Qui leve par ses faits ton esprit jusqu'aux cieux" (De Troussilh "Sonnet à P. de Ronsard" 1.6 in Ronsard, *Œuvres complètes* 24). This establishes the perceived ties between the past, the poet, the patron, and the nation in a text of this genre. The role of the poet is clearly defined in the final tercet: "Un sçavant escrivain n'est rien que le miroir / Qui la morte vertu vive nous fait revois, / Et de l'auteur des faits il enfante sa gloire" (De Troussilh 1.12-14). The role of the epic poet is therefore to bring to life ancient virtue and, in recounting great deeds, earn his own glory by extension. Earlier, Peletier referred to an epic poem itself as a mirror to reflect a complete vision of the world, but in De Troussilh's words, the poet (Ronsard) is the mirror who reflects virtue to his audience.

The second of Jamyn's prefatory poems establishes a link between poetry and greater national glory, insisting that a French epic would complete a cultural trinity and thereby increase the glory of Greece and Rome's epics as well. In the first quatrain, Jamyn presents Ronsard as Virgil and Homer reborn and united in one person. The importance of the grouping of three becomes more important in the second quatrain of Jamyn's sonnet:

Trois unitez en tout font la perfection

Et pour la Poësie en ces trois un parfaire

Il faillloit ce troisieme au nombre satisfaire

Egal à la Romaine & Greque nation. (*Œuvres complètes* 23, 1.5-8)

Each epic poet is taken as representative of his nation, and the existence of a French epic allows that nation to join the ranks of Greece and Rome. In the third chapter, I further explore this popular image of France as the cultural successor to Rome since the concept is essential to the discussion of epic's perceived role at this time. It is interesting that Jamyn suggests that even the glory of the *Aeneid* and the *Iliad* would be heightened by the existence of a third comparable epic to complete the ideal number three. The role of the epic poet was therefore seen as elevating the nation to equal ancient Greece and Rome, whose worth and valor was also validated by the existence of great poetry. While Ronsard's epic would not fulfill the public's expectations, it is essential to understand how his project was viewed by both himself and his eager (if eventually disappointed) audience.

D'Aubigné

Though d'Aubigné's poetic theory is less explicit than Ronsard's or Du Bellay's, it is possible to deduce some of his thoughts on epic, or at least on *Les Tragiques*, whatever its genre may be. As I previously acknowledged, d'Aubigné's letter is the earliest extant use of the

adjective *épique*, though he does not apply it to his own long poem. The letter in which the word appears is addressed to an unknown recipient who had presumably asked d'Aubigné for his opinion on the poets of the day. In his response, d'Aubigné lists many of the poets working in France since the time of François I, dividing them into groups based on their merit and insisting not to include any before this time because of their “barbare grosserie” (*Lettres touchants quelques poincts de diverses sciences* 859). These poets, already scorned by the Pléiade as mere *versificateurs* and *rhymeurs*, do not fulfill d'Aubigné's vision of the poet's role either. Interestingly, d'Aubigné declares Ronsard the best poet of the century, one that his correspondent should read and reread. Indeed, the influence of the Pléiade was to change the role of poetry in France, and their projects laid the groundwork that made the *Tragiques* possible (McFarlane 25), as I explore in Chapter 4. As a conclusion to the letter, d'Aubigné expresses his wish that the poets of the new century¹⁷ will live up to those of the previous one, and specifically “que nous voyons de leurs mains des Poëmes epiques, heroïques ou quelque chose qui se puisse apeller œuvre” (*Lettres* 863). This statement indicates that d'Aubigné believed an epic project to be necessary and as yet unfulfilled.

The emphasis on *fureur poétique* becomes central to the construction of the *Tragiques* itself, though for d'Aubigné it adopts an emphatically Christian meaning. In the same letter above, he stresses the importance of *fureur poétique* “sans laquelle nous ne lisons que des proses bien rimees” (*Lettres* 860). D'Aubigné insists that the entire work, especially the prophetic vision of heaven, came to him during a spiritual ecstasy while wounded during the Wars of Religion. D'Aubigné establishes the importance of this divine inspiration immediately; on the

¹⁷ Though unclear precisely when the letter was written, d'Aubigné intended to publish his correspondence sometime after 1616, as he announced this intent in the preface of *Les Tragiques*'s first edition.

very title page, he claims that the text itself is a divine artifact, given to the public “par le larcin de Prométhée” (*Tragiques* 51). The poet goes beyond the traditional claim of divine inspiration to insist that the text itself is the very fire stolen from the gods to enlighten mankind, claiming his only role was to enrich the text for publication. This claim to divinely-inspired truth is essential to d’Aubigné’s role as Biblical prophet and ensuing eschatological teleology, as I explore in the final chapter of this study.

In the *Tragiques* itself, d’Aubigné announces the text’s goal to ensure that all martyrs, even those not well-known, are not forgotten; this is noteworthy as he takes the genre of extolling national sentiment and transforms it into an epic of Protestantism that transcends national allegiance. D’Aubigné thus mutates epic to justify the Protestant cause and bring comfort to those who suffered during the Wars of Religion. In the fourth book *Feux*, d’Aubigné asserts that his most important function as poet is to immortalize Protestant martyrs:

Je ne t’oublierai pas, ô âme bienheureuse !

Je tirerai ton nom de la nuit ténébreuse ;

Ton martyre secret, ton exemple caché

Sera par mes écrits des ombres arraché. (*Feux* 993-996)

The procession of martyrs entering heaven is reminiscent of the parade of heroes in *Aeneid* Book VI; Aeneas watches the heroes of the Trojan War who validate the empire he is destined to found, and d’Aubigné similarly sees the victims of the Wars enter into heaven. This imitation of an epic element serves to validate the Protestant cause by transforming the typical structure of immortalizing a dynasty and redefining it on sectarian religious terms. Indeed, the empire to be founded here is the eternal Kingdom of Heaven that will serve as recompense for the Protestants’ suffering on Earth. While there is much more to be said on this subject, it is sufficient here to

note that though d'Aubigné recognizes the same nationalist aspects of epic as Ronsard, Peletier, and Du Bellay, he reinterprets them along religious rather than national lines.

Conclusions

In summary, what did the Renaissance believe to be the purpose of this elusive genre? It is essential to have some answer before analyzing those authors' encounters with epic in their various texts. The popular preoccupation with technical rules makes it much harder to discern the perceived purpose of any particular kind of text. Indeed, these analyses are so technical that, in the 1587 *Préface*, Ronsard goes so far as to encourage the ample use of specific letters (A, O, U, M, B, and double S) because they are "les vraies lettres Heroïques" (*Œuvres complètes* 347). With this level of specificity, it is difficult to determine the broader picture of what they felt the *purpose* of epic to be.

It is clear, however, that poets and patrons alike extol the genre because it served a collective public purpose (in terms of the poet, patron, nation, and language) that would validate French culture while also being didactic. This emphasis on national collectivity was read into epic specifically because of the *Aeneid*'s status as archetype and imitable model. As Wilson-Okamura summarizes, sixteenth-century writers firmly believed that Virgil had a specific intent in composing his *Aeneid*, and it is this perceived intent that drove their own conception of the genre (3-4). For the Pléiade, this included not only the advancement of France's national status, but of its language as well. This larger purpose of epic poetry has been articulated by recent literary critics whose analyses will be essential to our study of the texts themselves. We have already mentioned Hampton's definition of epic as "that genre most closely associated with notions of public action" (*Writing from History* 84). We have likewise seen Langer's description

of epic as “the incarnation of national aspirations” (Langer 210). In his study of the hero’s role in epic, Jackson acknowledges that “Epics always have strong social overtones. They are always thought of as presenting some kind of model for behavior in a particular society” (Jackson vii). This is applicable to Renaissance conceptions of the genre as we have seen the period’s theorists highlight the didactic nature of epic. Though Quint does not concern himself with a definition of the genre, his division of epics into categories of winners and losers (corresponding to epic and romance) will provide an important structure to combine the poets’ thoughts on France’s cultural position as successor to Rome with their encounters with the genre in their own writing. With this in mind, let us move on to examine Ronsard’s work in closer detail, in particular his own attempt at a Virgilian epic for France.

CHAPTER II

RONSARD AND VIRGILIAN IMITATION: *LA FRANCIADE*

Moving beyond poetic theory, the obvious direction in which to begin is with Ronsard's direct attempt at a strictly Virgilian epic, *La Franciade*. Modeled closely on the *Aeneid*, Ronsard's epic follows Hector's son, now christened Francus, as he comes out of hiding to fulfill his destiny to found a new Trojan dynasty in France. The most important of Ronsard's goals for the genre is the purpose expressly stated in the 1572 *Au lecteur*: "d'honorer la maison de France, & par sur tout le Roy Charles neufiesme" (*Œuvres complètes* 8). Unfortunately, the challenge of such a lofty goal proved too much; Ronsard's abandonment of the enormous project (after completing only four of the planned twenty-four books) leads Pléiade historian Henri Chamard to call the project a "naufage littéraire" (97), bluntly stating, "Personne, de nos jours, ne lit plus la *Franciade*" (112). This nearly complete lack of readership, even more than Ronsard's abandonment of the project, is enough to prove his failure to create a French epic to stand alongside the *Aeneid* as a great masterpiece of European literature.

In this chapter, I aim to understand why the poem failed to gain the necessary momentum to move beyond the first few books and to excite its audience to national pride. First, I explore the *Franciade* in relation to the sixteenth-century theory examined previously in order to determine its successes and failures in fulfilling France's desire for a national epic. Though aesthetically pleasing in its parts, it is the *Franciade*'s overall composition that hinders the

poem's success, largely due to Ronsard's compulsive and uncreative imitation of epic topoi and episodes. In this chapter I explore the compositional problems that arose from the conflict between sixteenth-century tastes that privileged romance and the essential role of epic teleology to achieve the intended goals of fostering national sentiment through celebrating a collective ancestral past. Finally, I examine how Francus (as heroic representation of the poem's patron, Charles IX) fails to fulfill the essential role as the embodiment of national pride due to his youth and lack of commitment to the hero's mission. In short, the *Franciade* cannot find success due to the combination of the period's aesthetics and political situation.

Introduction to the Text

As the *Franciade* is seldom read, especially compared to Ronsard's other works, a brief introduction is necessary to situate the text in the context of the period's literature and Ronsard's own career. Though the epic has not managed to leave its mark in the way the *Amours* have, this does not lessen the importance placed upon the project by Ronsard himself; as Laumonier describes in his introduction to the *Franciade*, "la plus chère ambition de Ronsard était précisément de doter la France d'une épopée, qui, jetant une belle lumière sur notre poésie, ne manquerait pas d'en immortaliser l'auteur" (Laumonier v). For Ronsard (and other poets), the creation of an epic was the ultimate way to establish the renown of the nation, the language, and the poet for posterity. The project must therefore be understood primarily in terms of its public function (embodying pride and legitimacy for the nation and the ruling family), without ignoring the private function of epic for the poet (establishing his personal identity as poet equal to Virgil). Plenty has been written about the *Franciade* on its quality as a poem, but this study is unique in its focus on the *Franciade*'s failure on the level of embodying national sentiment.

The previous chapter studied in some detail the different prefaces published with various editions, but these still fall short of conveying exactly how long and complex the project was for Ronsard. Altogether, five different editions were published reflecting changes and reworkings of the same four books, though the final edition in 1589 was published four years after Ronsard's death. Work on the *Franciade* lasted, with interruptions, for a period of approximately forty years. As Ronsard's first complete collection of poems, *Les Odes*, was published in 1550 (the year after Du Bellay's *Deffence*), we can see that work on the *Franciade* lasted throughout most of his career, during which his poetry evolved and changed drastically. While it is difficult to establish an exact date when Ronsard began the *Franciade*, we know that he undertook the project under Henri II and likely began developing the foundations for the text in the 1540s. Ronsard's 1549 *Hymne de France* includes the poet's first reference to Hector's son as founder of the French race, indicating the establishment of the genealogy on which he would base the *Franciade* (Usher xix). Chamard describes this reference as an indication that Ronsard's "obsession" with Francus had already begun (97).

Cassandra's prophecy in Ronsard's 1550 *Ode de la Paix* concerning the glorious race descended from Hector indicates an outline for the *Franciade*. This poem requests Henri II's support and patronage, though the king showed no interest in the project until 1554 (Maskell 70, Langer 211). In the *Cinquiesme livre des Odes*, published in 1552, the title of "Franciade" was officially announced, and Chamard assumes this indicates Ronsard already began work on the poem (98). Ronsard was discouraged by Henri II who took little interest in the project and failed to indicate any compensation for the project (Chamard 101-103). Ronsard set aside the poem after Henri's accidental death while jousting at a tournament in 1559 and did not resume work on the poem for at least six years, when he received the priory of Saint Cosme near Tours. Charles

IX's visit in November of 1564 indicated the beginnings of his interest in the French epic (Chamard 106), though the outbreak of the first War of Religion two years earlier colors the text less than the shift to a younger patron.

At this point, Charles was fifteen years old and in the fifth year of his reign, though the first three were under the regency of his mother, Catherine de Medici. Charles encouraged Ronsard to return to the text, imposing restrictions such as the decasyllabic verse and the inclusion of the young king's ancestors, as we saw in the previous chapter. Bjaï explains that continuing the *Franciade* under a different and much younger king required a reworking of the original project because a royal patron should see himself in the hero (20), and I discuss the implications of this reworking in the final section of this chapter. Chapter 1 acknowledged Charles' imposition of the decasyllabic verse form to imitate the medieval *chanson de geste*, though Ronsard claimed this was a personal choice in the introduction to the 1572 edition (one of only two editions to appear before Charles's early death in 1574).

Following the death of his patron (whose successor and brother, Henri III, had no interest in the project), Ronsard found his desire to provide France with an epic could not be sustained without support and reward for his efforts. In the editions of 1578 and 1589, Ronsard concludes the final book with the following quatrain:

Si le Roy Charles eust vescu,
 J'eusse achevé ce long ouvrage :
 Si tost que la mort l'eut veincu,
 Sa mort me veinquist le courage. (*Œuvres complètes* 330)

Chamard argues that the death of Charles was a convenient, face-saving excuse for Ronsard to stop work on the *Franciade* after the chilly reception of his first four books (112). In light of the

continuing violence in a fractured society, I suggest throughout this chapter that Ronsard's vanquished courage also stemmed from the inability to capture French identity through a genre that demanded a collective sense of Frenchness.

Ronsard's public embarkation on the project and the general critical desire for a French national epic meant that the *Franciade* was highly anticipated. Both Du Bellay and Guillaume des Autelz mention their hopes for Ronsard and the *Franciade* in their own poetry, and Chamard tells us that as most of Ronsard's contemporaries were aware of the project, they hoped he would prove to be the Homer France anxiously awaited (99, 104-105); in fact, many of Ronsard's contemporaries already envisioned him as the Homer of France, as did Ronsard himself, simply by embarking on such a project (Chamard 96). Copies of extracts from the *Franciade* circulated around court in the four years before the first publication. Even as work stalled on the poem and Ronsard became discouraged, "ses contemporains persistaient à vanter l'épopée future" (Chamard 104). Maskell believes this anticipation and wide advertisement of his project over so long "doubtless deterred his friends and most others from competing in this field" (6) though the following chapter demonstrates how Du Bellay playfully challenges this in the *Regrets*.

As epic fulfills a perceived public function of the genre and to be "le poème de tout un peuple" (Bjaï 61), the poet must attract a large audience for his work. Bjaï describes Ronsard's hopes: "...la voix du poète, si elle célèbre le passé national, peut surmonter l'obstacle [of believing the mythical history] et trouver des échos, des relais, jusqu'au cœur de la nation, comme le *Roland furieux* et bientôt la *Jérusalem délivrée*" (60-61). Of course, it is impossible to speak to and for an entire population so violently divided along religious lines; admittedly, we can also wonder if it is even truly possible for write for and to even a relatively homogenous population. Bjaï also argues that in transforming the *Franciade* into an epic specifically

addressed to and staged for Charles IX, Ronsard undermined his own public desires for the project by making it speak directly to the king, thereby inadvertently excluding other readers (61-62). Thus interest in the creation of a true French epic extended well beyond just the poet and his patron, yet part of Ronsard's mistake was creating a poem for the king rather than the nation as a whole.

Ronsard's many apologies and explanations for the *Franciade* offer proof of his concern with the text's reception. The very public nature of epic demanded involvement and acceptance by the literary community at large; though he claims to write for posterity, a national epic only works if it is considered such by the nation at large. The public was indeed invested in Ronsard's project, as evidenced by the large number of anticipatory sonnets by poets eagerly awaiting the final project. Ronsard's defense of his unexpected decisions (the decasyllable, the failure to begin *in medias res*, the inclusion of the long prophecy of kings, the action lasting over a year, etc) indicate where his contemporaries found fault with the epic, or at least where Ronsard anticipated critiques. The long 1572 *Au lecteur* was replaced in the second edition of 1573 with an explanation that Ronsard had greatly edited the text "par le conseil de mes plus doctes amis" (3). He describes the publication of the first edition as having "exposé mon ouvrage au public, affin d'entendre le jugement & l'arrest d'un chacun" (3) and encourages all French poets to do the same with their works. Despite Ronsard's professed receptivity to critiques from the public, he was discouraged enough at the reaction to his work that he did not seek a new patron after the death of Charles IX. Whether this was due to the public's opinion of the epic or his own, it is impossible to say.

The question of the *Franciade*'s reception does not have a straight-forward answer. While there were critiques of the poem's particulars, the ambition of the project and its unique

adherence to ancient models made sure it demanded attention. Maskell demonstrates that the *Franciade* was hugely influential on sixteenth-century conceptions of epic for about 50 years until Tasso (who published *Gerusalemme liberata* shortly after in 1581) earned wide-spread popularity (6). Indeed, Ronsard's "Franciade was considered by his admirers, if not by posterity, to be the authentic example of a French epic poem" (Maskell 1). Charles IX himself reacted favorably to the reading of Book 4 in Blois in September of 1571 (Chamard 108-109). Langer notices that the royal patronage required of epics make expectations and anxieties high, and the *Franciade* clearly fell short of those expectations (213). Laumonier describes judgments of the text as "généralement défavorable" (xvii), but in spite of critical reception, the work also had "malgré tout, un certain succès de librairie" (xvi). Clearly, the text was widely read (enough to warrant multiple editions), and the continuations mentioned earlier in the chapter prove that at least some poets continued to read the *Franciade* after Ronsard's death. Overall, the reception seems mixed; though considered an interesting technical example of a modern epic poem, it did not excite people enough to fulfill its own goals for embodying the national spirit. For an epic to be truly successful in this sense, it must maintain its place in history; the *Franciade*'s distinct lack of a later audience proves its failure to do so.

The choice of myth that gives France Trojan origins is essential within the larger cultural context of Ronsard's day and reinforces the intended public function of the *Franciade*. Sixteenth-century France saw itself as the cultural, literary, and political successor to ancient Rome, and the Francus myth allowed the French to claim kinship with the Romans through shared Trojan ancestry. The previous chapter discussed the myth of Francus (created in the Middle Ages to validate and celebrate the Merovingian dynasty) as a form of cultural appropriation. Ronsard uses this myth as the basis for his imitation of Virgil, noticing the

teleological and political aspects of the *Aeneid* that make it a better foundational story and narrative source for imitation than the Homeric texts, despite Ronsard's claim to imitate Homer more than Virgil. Ronsard claims that the French people "tient pour chose tres-assurée selon les Annales" (*Œuvres complètes* 7) that Francus escaped Troy to found his destined city in Gaul. While several earlier writers, most notably Jean Lemaire de Belges, had endowed France with Trojan origins, it is Ronsard who fashions Francus into the son of Hector in his 1549 *Hymne de France*. In the 1587 preface, Ronsard argues that an appropriate subject for epic must predate the poet by at least three or four hundred years (*Œuvres complètes* 345), so naturally he looks far into the past for suitable pseudo-historical material, rather than composing on recent history, as d'Aubigné does. Even Ronsard's historian friends who did not lend credence to the myth of Trojan ancestry accepted it as reasonable basis for such a poem (Maskell 68) as Aeneas was no more historical than Francus.

As few are familiar with the *Franciade*'s plot, a short summary is useful to ground the discussion in some context. The first book opens with Jupiter's explanation of how he disguised Hector's infant son to save him from the sack of Troy, leaving an imposter in his place so the invading Greeks would believe him dead. Francus is now a young man, and Jupiter urges him, through his uncle Helenus, to abandon his idleness and fulfill his destiny to found a new Troy in Gaul. Francus and his fleet of Trojans leave his place of hiding but are quickly caught in a storm, brought about by Neptune's wrath. While most of the fleet is lost, Francus and one hundred of the best knights¹⁸ manage to reach the shore of Crete where they are welcomed into the

¹⁸ Several such anachronisms exist throughout the text as the ancient Trojans wear Renaissance armor and joust as knights. Maskell insists this does not mean that people of the sixteenth century lacked historical perspective (41). Rather, this indicates that the ancient heroes needed to reflect the audience's cultural ideals so as not to appear ridiculous. As the hero is meant to reflect and honor the poet's king, this is all the more important.

household of king Dicæe. Cupid, sent by Venus to ignite Francus's love for the king's daughters, strikes the two girls instead. After Francus fights a giant to save Dicæe's son, the third book focuses on the sisters' anguish in their love for Francus, ultimately leading to Clymene's suicide after being rejected by the hero. Francus is instructed by the gods to pursue Hyante so that she will reveal to him the prophecy of the great French kings who will be his descendants. The final book then ends rather abruptly with Pepin le Bref, son of Clovis, France's first Christian ruler, followed by an enigmatic warning to the young king on the ephemeral nature of all things.

While Ronsard only completed the first four of a planned twenty-four book epic, Jupiter's warning speech to Juno early in Book 1 indicates where the remaining books were likely to lead the hero. Jupiter insists that even Juno's wrath will be unable to prevent the Trojan from fulfilling his destiny. He will suffer hardships on the sea (some of which occur in the extant books), then arrive at the Danube where he must marry a German. Francus will then do battle in the fields of Franconia, giving his name to the area upon his victory. Leaving his wife, he will found Paris on the banks of the Seine where he will face many more battles, always victorious. Francus will win eternal fame and become a citizen of heaven, leaving his line to grow in honor from the Merovingians to Charles IX.

The incomplete status of the poem invited several different continuations of the project after Ronsard's death, all of which met even less success than the original text. In 1604, Claude Garnier, a co-editor of Ronsard's posthumous *Œuvres*, wrote Book 5 to continue the story of Francus. However, Maskell labels this continuation "a hopeless diversion of Ronsard's plot" (7) as its primary function is requesting patronage from Henri IV; the text stops abruptly with Hector's shade opening his mouth to sing the destiny of Henri de Bourbon, clearly implying that Garnier awaited royal patronage ["attendant que la grace / D'un vent fecond fauorise à nos veus"]

(Garnier 48)] before immortalizing the king through epic. Maskell also claims that this *Livre de la Franciade à la suite de la celle de Ronsard* was not a true attempt to continue Ronsard's work, but a demand for patronage to complete his own separate epic. It does, however, have enough ties to Ronsard's books to indicate that Garnier did not entirely neglect the original text; the central focus of this book, the appearance of Hector's shade, relies upon the action in the earlier books as the Trojan hero recognizes Francus because he wears Hector's own cloak that he received in Book 1. However, continuing an epic whose goal was to legitimize and honor the Valois dynasty to seek royal favor from the new Bourbon king is an unusual choice and suggests Garnier's request for patronage would have spurred a separate poem about Henri IV. Indeed, the *Franciade* itself became even more impossible under Henri IV; not only was there never the Valois empire that would have served as Ronsard's telos, but the dynasty itself was defunct after the assassination of Henri III. Perhaps this change in dynasty could have provided the *Franciade* with a proper telos to anchor the poem, but Ronsard was not alive to attempt it.

Jacques Guillot's *Suite de la Franciade de Pierre de Ronsard Gentilhomme Vendosmois* is a more faithful attempt to continue Ronsard's work. His version of Book 5 was published in 1606, but no copies of this text remain. Guillot's Book 6 appeared in 1615 and still exists today, though copies are difficult to find. In the dedicatory letter of his Book 6, Guillot explains that the fifth book sang of the "gloire du victorieux Charlemagne, & de ses descendants" (Guillot, microfiche p.3), indicating that the lost book must have continued Hyante's prophetic vision of French kings to follow Francus. In Book 6, Dicæe blames Francus for Clymene's death and prepares Crete for war against the Trojans. Francus hears the prophecy of French rulers through Louis XIII and prepares to leave Crete, only to find the Cretans are approaching to attack. The extant portion of the continuation suggests Guillot's familiarity with Ronsard's text and his

intention to continue the original plot while adding inventions of his own. Though dedicated to Henri IV, Guillot's work, like Garnier's, failed to earn royal favor for the poet. Despite the miscarriage of both continuations, their existence shows that Ronsard's text left its mark for a time.

Theory and Practice

The most natural place to begin this analysis of the *Franciade* is to see how it compares to Ronsard's own theory of the heroic genre (as explored in the preceding chapter), as well as the theory he studied from his contemporaries and the ancients he so respected. As the many explanatory and apologetic metatexts indicate, such a theoretical examination of genre was important to Ronsard, especially as it related to his own epic. Leslie's principal argument in examining the general problems with the *Franciade* is that Ronsard fundamentally misunderstands epic as a genre, believing it to be merely the sum of its parts (15-27). I therefore begin with Ronsard's fragmented view of genre theory before looking at the deeper issues behind the text's problems, particularly as this definition of epic as the sum of its parts leads to Ronsard's problematic imitation. By examining the following pieces of epic, I demonstrate how Ronsard misses the larger picture – epic rests on a teleological view of history that arises from the conclusion of conflict, as Quint's theory demonstrates when applied to the *Franciade*. Though Leslie does not analyze the text through the lens of Quint's terminology, he also notices that "Ronsard has nothing to say in the *Franciade* which requires an epic to express" (113). Without a decisive historical event to produce a French empire that would merit commemoration via epic, Ronsard merely looks to the pieces and applies them to his subject.

To satisfy sixteenth-century terminology, the *Franciade* must fit the descriptors *œuvre héroïque* and *long poème*. As the *œuvre héroïque* must be concerned with heroic action, Ronsard gives Francus a battle with a giant in Book 2 and anticipated battles in the later books for him as well. The plot can also be described as heroic in its intended complete structure, the journey to fulfill divine destiny by leading a lost people to found a great empire. Even more obvious is the text's fulfillment of Du Bellay's terminology, the *long poème français*; totaling 6,150 lines (1572 edition), the first four books show that the completed text would have been significantly longer than its ancient models.¹⁹ The *Franciade* thus fulfills the epic length requirement, if rather too well, even in its unfinished state. This length is symptomatic of two major flaws in the text: Ronsard's check-list imitation of episodes and topoi that pushes him to include too much from his sources, and the lack of telic force both within the narrative and without that would normally drive the text forcefully to a definitive conclusion.

Ronsard addresses the issue of excessive length in the 1572 *Au lecteur*, claiming that Latin's grammatical efficiency accounts for the relative brevity of Virgil's text and that he (Ronsard), writing in French, should not be faulted for his own work being significantly longer. Despite Ronsard's insistence that the two languages are naturally inclined towards works of different concision, it can make for a tedious read. In over six thousand lines, Francus has only managed to shipwreck in Crete, fight a giant, and witness Hyante's prophecy of French kings; in roughly the same number of lines, Aeneas has recounted his escape from Troy and subsequent wanderings to Dido's court in Carthage, abandoned Dido, held funeral games for his father, traveled to the Underworld, arrived in Italy, made treaties with Latinus and Evander, and

¹⁹ The twelve books of the *Aeneid* include a total of 9,896 lines. The *Iliad*'s twenty-four books total 15,693 lines and those of the *Odyssey* come to 12,110. The *Franciade* seems on track to have rivaled *Orlando Furioso* (totaling 38,736 lines) in length, had it been completed.

received his prophetic shield from the gods. However, the *Franciade*'s excessive length does not prevent the text from maintaining the same unity of action as the *Aeneid*; it remains focused on the story of Francus setting out to found a Frankish empire.

Ronsard follows his own assertion that the epic poet should concern himself with the *vraisemblable* rather than the *vrai* by modeling the plot on medieval and ancient myth rather than historical fact. However, though Ronsard explains in the 1572 *Au lecteur* that he does not intend to recount the deeds of French kings like a historian, most of Book 4 is taken up with Hyante's prophecy that takes the form of a list of French kings and their deeds that would have also filled at least Book 5. Though history may sometimes be versified, the tone of this chronological list remains didactic as Hyante speaks to Francus and Charles alike. Unlike histories, epic is part of an oral tradition, and Ronsard uses this tradition to further separate his poem from history when, in the 1572 *Au lecteur*, he begs his audience to read the text aloud: "Je te suppliray seulement d'une chose, lecteur, de vouloir bien prononcer mes vers & accommoder ta voix à leur passion... vouloir un peu eslever ta voix pour donner grace à ce que tu liras" (*Œuvres complètes* 12).

Though Ronsard's request is unenforcable in a literate society, it was at least respected at court. It is documented by Girard du Haillan, the historian present at the event, in *Promesse et desseing de l'Histoire de France* that Jamyn read Book 4 to Charles at Blois in September 1571, a year before the first publication of the text (Chamard 108). It is interesting to note that this tradition of oral readings of poetry at court follows more closely late medieval and early renaissance tradition; Ronsard himself initiated a change in tradition by addressing his early works to unknown readers in multiple publications, even though "la tradition orale [était] encore très vivante à la cour de Henri II" (Parent-Charon 131). His advice on the *Franciade*'s orality therefore represents this private reading, but hopes the reader will read the words aloud even in

his own home. While it is impossible to know how much of Ronsard's audience followed his request that each reader read the text aloud, it is noteworthy that the book most specifically intended as advice to a young king was read aloud to Charles at court, following the older traditions of court poetry.

Ronsard's concern with divine inspiration is the basis for his assertion that the text should begin and end with God. The *Franciade* begins with a traditional invocation of the Muse, understood in the Renaissance as a symbol for the Christian divine rather than an actual resident of Parnassus. He asks the Muse "Guide ma langue, & me chante la race / Des ROYS FRANCOYS yssuz de Francion / Enfant d'Hector, Troyen de nation" (*Franciade* 1.2-4) in a manner similar to Virgil's "Musa, mihi causas memora..." (*Aeneid* 1.8). Homer also asks the Muse to sing for him of the rage of Achilles (*Iliad* 1.1). Apollonius asks Apollo, as leader of the Muses, to help begin his story (*Argonautica* 1.1), and Ovid asks the gods, "...di, coeptis (nam vos mutastis et illas) / adspirare meis prima..." (*Metamorphoses* 1.2-3). Thus Ronsard's invocation sits firmly upon an ancient foundation.

Bjaï, however, sees an important and striking difference between the similar invocations of Ronsard and his primary model, Virgil. While the invocation is similar, the subject matter is not; the opening lines of the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and the *Aeneid* announce the action surrounding one man, Achilles, Odysseus, and Aeneas, respectively. Bjaï notices that Ronsard specifically does not ask the Muse to sing the deeds of Francus, but rather those issued from Francus; he asks if the text can therefore be "la double épopée de Francus et des rois de France" (Bjaï 82). While this reinforces the idea that the epic hopes to serve a purpose larger than itself, being an epic of a nation, the nature of this invocation also indicates a lack of focus in the text. Once again, this evidences Ronsard's mistake to write specifically for Charles and announces a key problem I

address later in the chapter: Ronsard intends Charles' reign alone to serve as the epic's telic force. If Ronsard tries to make the *Franciade* the epic of all French kings (as Book 4 confirms), it fails to become the epic of France.

Ronsard highlights the importance of the king in a second unusual invocation of Charles himself²⁰ that mimics the traditional invocation:

CHARLES MON PRINCE, enflez moy le courage,

En vostre honneur j'entrepren cet ouvrage,

Soyez mon guide, & garder d'abismer

Ma nef qui flotte en si profonde mer. (1.13-16)

As Ronsard's patron, this address to the king is, on one level, a supplication for continued funding; to cut off financial support would effectively shipwreck the project, and first Henri II's and then Charles' early deaths did exactly this. Here, at the beginning of the text, Ronsard again emphasizes the purpose of epic in clarifying that the project exists for the honor of Charles, not only as a patron, but as ruler of the French. Ronsard's reference to his project as a ship reminds the reader of the popular Platonic metaphor of the ship of state, thereby underlining the relationship between a national epic and the nation with Charles as the guide for both. Thus the poet needs his patron as much as the state needs its king.

However, the style of this passage goes beyond the financial and generic relationship between the king and the epic poem to mimic an invocation whereby the king is "invoked on the same footing as the Muses" (Leslie 79). The first line asking Charles "enflez moy le courage" recalls the imagery associated with divine inspiration; the poet acts as an instrument through which the inspiration of a Muse, or here a king, can act. In the previous chapter, we explored

²⁰ Langer too reads this as an invocation rather than a simple address or dedication (212).

Charles' heavy hand in the formulation of the *Franciade's* argument and style, so his relationship to the text extends well beyond merely providing financial support. He amplifies Ronsard's courage for the project while also guiding the poet through the argument of the text. While the ancient epics do not have such an appeal to the ruler, the *Georgics* begin in a similar manner: Virgil asks Augustus "da facile cursum atque audacibus adnue coeptis" (1.40). Though Ronsard imitates Virgil in addressing his ruler, there are important differences. Virgil's appeal is passive compared to Ronsard's, asking Augustus not to impede the smooth advancement of his work by giving his assent to the project. Ronsard begs Charles to take a more active role in sustaining the poet's fortitude and guiding him through the project. This furthers the implication that the head of state is necessarily and inextricably tied to a poem with such ambitions, yet similarly contributes to the text's lack of a clear direction.

Surprisingly, there are many aspects of Ronsard's own theory of epic that he fails to follow in the *Franciade*. Though Leslie finds fault with Ronsard's understanding of epic theory, he also notices that "for some reason, Ronsard did not conform theory to experience; where his theory was sound, he failed to apply it" (59). Ronsard agrees with Horace and Peletier that a story should not begin at the beginning, but rather *in medias res*; he associates the act of beginning a work at the action's inception with the historian who recounts events in chronological order, and Ronsard is determined to set himself apart from historians. Contrary to this assertion, the reader joins Francus as an idle youth before deciding to set out on his journey to Gaul; admittedly, the true beginning would be perhaps Francus's miraculous rescue from the sack of Troy, but of epic heroes, only Jason's story begins with his departure. However, when compared to the Homeric openings, both in the final year of a decade-long adventure, Ronsard's beginning certainly qualifies as *ab ovo*. In the 1572 preface, Ronsard admits this failure to follow

his own advice, insisting he preferred beginning with a young and untested prince (1572 *Au lecteur* 11); however, this is more a restriction imposed by the age of his patron rather than an actual preference, as Ronsard claims. I will return to this narrative choice and its implications while examining the role of Francus as epic hero, but it will suffice here to say that Ronsard likely ‘chooses’ a young hero at the beginning of his journey to better reflect his king and patron. In beginning so early in his hero’s journey, Ronsard is also forced to break another of his own rules. In the 1587 *Préface sur la Franciade*, Ronsard applied the Aristotelian unity of time to epic, insisting the action should take place within one year. Virgil achieves this by having Aeneas recount his past adventures at Dido’s court, but Francus’ journey will clearly take much longer than one year to complete; without the recital flashbacks of a text that begins near the end, Ronsard is forced to recount events in order, despite his professed desire to avoid such a narrative structure that to him, recalls the task of the historian rather than the poet.

Despite Ronsard’s scathing critique of Ariosto that I noted in the previous chapter, Ronsard borrows liberally from romance as its norms enjoyed popularity at the time. While Du Bellay set the Italian poet beside Homer and Virgil as a poet worthy of imitation, Ronsard blames Ariosto for his wild departure from the genre and the extravagant changes he makes to the semi-historical story of Roland. Ronsard insists that a story, while still recounting the *vraisemblable*, should avoid straying too far from the truth. Maskell asserts that one of the difficulties with the *Franciade* for Ronsard was the scarcity of historical information (embellished or not) on Francus (79), so the poet is forced to wander far from the truth, once again failing to heed his own advice. Ronsard’s critique of *Orlando Furioso*’s “corps monstrueux” suggests that this form of romance adventure is a deformed version of true epic. Yet Ronsard capitalizes on the genre’s popularity by borrowing elements from romance for his

epic (Maskell 72-73). This leads to an irresolvable tension in the text that contributes to its inability to fulfill Ronsard's goals, a question that will be examined in depth later in the chapter. For now, it is important only to understand that despite Ronsard's thorough set of instructions to the aspiring epic poet, Ronsard often strays from his own advice.

Stylistic Considerations

Thus far, I have focused this analysis of the *Franciade* on its close relationship to ancient epic, but Ronsard's project was quite unique in its own time. There were many historical epics in the early sixteenth century that told of contemporary heroes, but "they owe their structure to the sequence of historical events [whereas Ronsard's epic is] an example of a wholly poetic structure in which the part played by history in shaping the epic was minimal" (Maskell 67). That is to say, Ronsard is the first in his time to be guided by poetics rather than historical accuracy. In this context, the style of his poetry is essential. Maskell notes that the contribution of ancient epic is overstated for sixteenth-century France, with the exception of Ronsard who "alone made ancient epic the substance of his poem and bequeathed the Storm–Shipwreck–Recital structure to his successors" (31) and "gave an emphatically poetic structure to historical epic" (46). This study of national epic in the Virgilian tradition begins with the *Franciade* because of Ronsard's stylistic uniqueness, not because it is the only epic. In fact, I ignore the vast majority of epic projects at this time because they exist in a multitude of variations. Ronsard, however, is alone in the attempt to recreate ancient epic, from the perspective of both its poetics and its (perceived) public function. It is this public function that makes a unique comparison with the authors of the following chapters. In terms of the *Franciade*, this deliberate and careful imitation of both the *Aeneid*'s political function and its poetic style creates tensions I explore in detail in this section. As the poetic structure marks this project as unique, I begin the analysis on this level in order to

examine popular stylistic choices that, either alone or in combination, undermine the intended public function.

Decasyllables

I turn first to the verse style since the question of the decasyllable was raised in the first chapter through Ronsard's own complaints about Charles's imposition of the meter, and though an argument of cultural heritage exists for this choice, it is noteworthy that Ronsard instead makes a stylistic argument later undermined by his own work. The poetic theory of the sixteenth century discussed in the previous chapter established an inherent link between the heroic subject and the heroic verse, the twelve-syllable alexandrine. The French alexandrine is reminiscent of the Greek and Roman dactylic hexameter, the meter used in the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and the *Aeneid*. As Greek and Latin are stress-timed languages while French is not, dactylic hexameter is less rigid in syllable count than the alexandrine as each of the six feet may consist of two spondees or a spondee and two dactyls. Despite the flexibility of the hexametric line, the alexandrine's twelve syllables recall Homeric and Virgilian verse, though the meter was relatively new in Ronsard's time. The first use of the dodecasyllable in France was in the twelfth-century *Roman d'Alexandre*, but it was Jean-Antoine de Baïf, a member of the Pléiade, who introduced the style to sixteenth-century France. Ronsard claims responsibility for putting the alexandrine "en vogue & en honneur" (*Abrégé* 1567), referring to the popularity of his sonnet sequence *Les Amours* which had already been published in several editions with continuations by the time he wrote the *Abrégé*.²¹ Though this second edition of the *Abrégé* expresses Ronsard's frustration with Charles's insistence upon the decasyllable and his hope to rework the *Franciade*

²¹ While the first collections of the *Amours* (1552 and 1553) are written in decasyllables, both the *Continuation* (1555) and the *Nouvelle continuation* (1556) are primarily in alexandrines.

in alexandrines, by the time the epic was first published five years later, Ronsard claims to have chosen the verse himself.

The poet's assertion that he finds the twelve-syllable alexandrine too similar to prose is noteworthy more for its argument than its claim. That Ronsard genuinely believed the alexandrine to feel like prose is difficult to believe because he continued to compose in this verse form throughout his career; indeed, Laumonier describes his aesthetic argument as "très contestable" (xiv), and Leslie argues that is a desperate and unsuccessful attempt to persuade his audience that the decasyllable was appropriate as it was too awkward to blame his patron for the decision (77-78). However, I note that Ronsard justifies the verse with a poetic argument *against* the alexandrine rather than a cultural argument *in favor of* the decasyllable. Laumonier makes the logical conclusion that Charles insisted upon the decasyllable to recall medieval *chansons de geste* (xiv), so it is interesting that Ronsard, so concerned with cultural heritage, chooses not to make this argument in the *Franciade's* introduction. Regardless of the Renaissance's supposed neglect of the Middle Ages in favor of the cultural legacy of the ancient world, Ronsard's professed desire to honor France with his epic would logically lead to an argument referencing the relationship between earlier French heroic poems and the decasyllable. Such an argument would be appropriately aligned with Du Bellay's suggestion that an aspiring epic poet turn to medieval romance for inspiration; this would create a truly French poem by combining their own cultural heritage with that of Greece and Rome. Use of a meter particular to French epic tradition would reinforce the inherent Frenchness of the poem and further its ties to Ronsard's goal of creating and embodying national identity. Therefore, the absence of this argument is, within the context of Ronsard's goals, surprising. Ronsard knew his audience would expect an *oeuvre héroïque* to be composed in *vers héroïques*, as evidenced by the fact that he justifies their

absence. So why make a poetic argument rather than a cultural one? Perhaps the lack of argument expresses his displeasure at the verse form; why invent an argument he did not believe himself? On the contrary, perhaps the very argument I am looking for was already too obvious to be made then. Regardless, it is worth underlining that Ronsard does not ignore the question of verse entirely, indicating his belief that some explanation was necessary.

The choice of decasyllabic verse, even imposed by Charles, contributes to the attempted appropriation of epic by sixteenth-century French culture. Though Ronsard chooses not to make a cultural argument in favor of the decasyllable, the young king, only seventeen at the appearance of the 1567 *Abrégé*, was familiar enough with medieval *chansons de geste* to declare their verse most appropriate for a French national epic. This pre-alexandrine decasyllable was the heroic verse of the time as opposed to the octosyllable typical of the *roman courtois*. Though Ronsard calls his *Franciade* a *roman*, the verse attempts to place it within the distinctly French medieval heroic tradition. Despite this association, it is noteworthy that out of Renaissance epic poets, Ronsard alone composes in a shorter verse.²²

Length of Text – Epic and Sonnet in Tension

As Leslie identifies “unnecessary length” as the most serious of the *Franciade*’s derivative flaws (28), we must explore the tensions between a poem of epic length and the period’s popular preference for shorter poetic forms. Langer sees a fundamental (and irresolvable) discrepancy between the demands of the genre and the tastes of the day that privileged shorter forms like sonnets and odes. Here, I focus on the sonnet for two reasons: its popularity in the court and literary circles in sixteenth-century France and Ronsard’s own

²² Ariosto, Tasso, Camões all use ottava rima, the traditional Italian heroic verse. D’Aubigné uses the alexandrine. Milton composes in blank verse. *The Faerie Queene* established the Spenserian stanza, eight lines of iambic pentameter followed by an alexandrine.

particular ties to the form that contribute directly to his failure as an epic poet. As the aborted poem is on track to be significantly longer than the ancient epics it imitates, its length is especially at odds with the sonnet, one of the most popular poetic forms of the early Renaissance. Additionally, Ronsard's skill with the sonnet, the distinguishing feature of his career for both his contemporaries and ours, derails his narration from its intended imperial teleology as the love poet allows Petrarchan description to supersede narrative. Rather than focus on advancing the plot to create a compelling epic narrative, Ronsard essentially stitches descriptive sonnets together with loose strands of narrative.

Though Ronsard composed a range of poetry, his expertise in the Petrarchan sonnet defines his career. Langer therefore advocates caution while reading the metatext around the *Franciade*: "In spite of all his self-aggrandizement Ronsard obviously feels more secure as a love poet; it is his patron who motivates the epic" (218). Indeed, Ronsard declared his motivation defeated following the death of Charles IX in 1574. Though Ronsard repeatedly professed his desire to create a French epic, his experience in love sonnets allows description to supersede narrative. In addition to Ronsard's own skill is Langer's argument that the court aesthetic of the time demanded a certain charmingness (to use Langer's word) surrounding the hero so that he would not be considered boring; I argue that the combination of the preference for charm and Ronsard's comfort as love poet is profoundly detrimental to the imperial teleology necessary for epic, so much so that Usher suggests reading the *Franciade*'s extant books as a continuation of Ronsard's love poetry rather than fitting them into a strict definition of epic (Usher 1). Ronsard proves unable to move beyond his area of established talent and into imperial narrative, causing his friend and rival Du Bellay to ask, "Jamais ne verra-t-on que Ronsard amoureux?" (*Regrets*

23.4). In the *Franciade*, we will not. As the individualism of love poetry runs counter to the collective goals of epic, this tendency proves fatal to the project as a whole.

Despite Ronsard's arguments concerning the grammatical efficiency of Latin over French, Langer looks to this length as an essential problem that leads to the text's disappointing reception. Langer's thesis is that though epics of various sorts (religious, historical, scientific) exist in abundance in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France, indicating a certain success for the genre as a whole, the texts themselves are too boring to be considered truly successful beyond technical considerations. For Langer, epic is a social gesture, as evidenced by the royal patronage and public anticipation of a genre whose purpose was understood to be the praise and validation of the society that provides the context for its creation: "The problem is the ambivalence of that social gesture: whereas the cultural and political investment in the expansionist nature of epic encourages poets to devote themselves to writing new *Aeneids*, the reception of epic was determined by esthetic concerns that militated against their success" (Langer 222). A longer text requires more prolonged attention by both the poet and the audience. Both a cause and symptom of this lengthy attention is the seriousness of the text; while a sonnet could provide a brief diversionary entertainment, the sheer length of an epic (particularly the excessively-long *Franciade*) can lead to boredom.

As a love poet, Ronsard habitually practiced poetry filled with Petrarchan descriptions of beauty and desire, so the epic's love plot privileges these elements. While a love plot is a standard element of epic, here the transformation of epic into Petrarchan love poetry prevents the narrative poem from settling into an epic tone. The secondary effect is the hyper-eroticization of the hero and his even more detrimental feminization; as Ronsard was accustomed to typical descriptions of females, he often misplaces the same language onto the male hero, at great cost to

Francus' heroic stature. Anticipating their fight in Book 2, the giant Phovère faces off against Francus and sees that he is neither strong nor physically imposing, rather “De gresle taille & d’œil serain & beau, / Fresche la main & bien fresche la peau, / Et d’un regard qui les Graces surmonte” (2.1179-1181). This passage has the unfortunate effect of feminizing the hero in the only heroic passage of the extant text. Langer points to the description of Francus in Book 3 (555-566, 1573 edition) as an example of a sonnet-like passage that eroticizes Francus for his physical features, all of which are compared to Jason and Theseus. In comparing his hero to two others known as much for their abandonment of Medea and Ariadne as for the heroic deeds those women helped them accomplish, Ronsard (perhaps accidentally) minimizes Francus' heroism in favor of romantic entanglements. Langer focuses on the importance of an epic hero to be charming (to avoid becoming the opposite – boring), but notices also that the “erotic subtext subverts the overtly exemplary, imperial glory of Francus's models” (218). Yet, Langer insists that without the emphasis on the erotic, the text would no longer be charming, rendering the *Franciade* boring and its hero “an epic dullard” (218).

The privileged position accorded these erotic and emotional descriptions has detrimental effects on Ronsard's imperial goals for the text as their frequency repeatedly undermines the narrative's teleological presentation. As Quint articulates, epic action is driven entirely by its imperial end, and romance's circular diversions represent a subversive threat to that destiny (34). Ronsard, and therefore Francus, is sidetracked from the imperial narrative focus by allowing the incursion of so much description. As Charles IX provides a telos too weak to anchor an epic narrative (an insurmountable problem I discuss in the final section of this chapter), both poet and hero fall into the trap of endless romantic diversions rather than follow the linear progression towards empire that epic requires. Despite the erotic descriptions of Francus designed to make

him charming, Usher notices that the love plot also fails to render the hero a convincing romantic protagonist (xxxvi). Francus violently spurns Clymene, causing her suicide, and is instructed to pursue Hyante to receive the prophecy of French kings to come, so the reader remains unpersuaded by his attempts at both heroism and wooing. In modern parlance, the would-be hero simply has no game.

Ronsard's penchant for descriptive love poetry causes the text to feel in places like a series of sonnet- or ode-like passages stitched together. These reveal Ronsard's disposition towards shorter forms that reflects the cultural tastes of the day, but it is redundant to cite them all in detail. A few examples would be another description of Francus through the eyes of a distressed Clymene (3.859-870) that mirrors the one cited by Langer above. While much longer than a sonnet, Francus's romantic declaration to Hyante (4.71-112) relies on traditional amorous language such as being conquered by the invincible enemy of love, praise of the woman's grace and physical features, and the suffering that leaves him unable to hold his silence. Other than the brief reference to Francus's shipwreck, the passage could be an entreaty to any female love object. However, the best example of sonnet's incursion into epic is a description of Dicæe's daughters, so I will focus my analysis on this example.

This passage is not complicated by the problematic representation of the hero, and it reveals a more traditional side of Ronsard's love poetry as a description of women. The passage, totaling the appropriate fourteen lines, is as follows:

De ces deux sœurs, par un art nompereil
 Les beaux cheveux surmontoient le Soleil,
 Enlassez d'or : semblable estoit leur jouë
 Au teint vermeil de la roze qui nouë

Dessus du laict, et sortoit de leurs ris
 Je ne scay quel enchanteur des esprits.
 De ronds tetins messagers de jeunesse
 S'enfloit leur sein : une gaillarde presse
 D'amours, d'atraits, de graces, et de jeux,
 Une embuscade avoient en leurs cheveux :
 Le doux parler en leurs bouches habite,
 Et l'homme auroit le courage d'un Scythe
 Et seroit né des tygres et des ours
 Si les voyant ne s'alumoit d'amours. (3.567-580)

This passage could refer to any pair of beautiful sisters, and nothing in these lines ties the girls to the story of Francus. They are defined by their irresistibility to men and by their youthful beauty, particularly their cheeks, breasts, and hair. These lines reflect traditional aspects of Renaissance love poetry, specifically Ronsard's own; indeed, he used many of the descriptions in other works, notably Marie who also has "la joüe aussi vermeille / Qu'une rose de mai" (*Continuation des Amours* 10.1-2) and the "dous ris" of Cassandre in *Amours* 38 and 47.

In "La célébration du corps féminin dans les Amours de Ronsard", Henri Weber analyzes Ronsard's descriptions of the fragmented female bust, noticing a formula of imagery throughout the *Amours* that similarly applies to sections of the *Franciade* without variation. The unity of Ronsard's sonnets is grounded in his ability to give an emotional coherence to a fragmented female body (Weber 8). This aspect of his love poetry resurfaces here in the epic; Ronsard presents the girls' bodies in fragmented parts, reunified as sonnet by the predominant emotion of longing. The above description becomes formulaic because it is not presented from the hero's

perspective; the poet, rather than the hero, is intrigued by the desirability of the women who drive the love plot. The (somewhat forced) love story therefore performs two functions: making Francus desirable as hero and incorporating typical sixteenth-century love poetry (where Ronsard feels most comfortable) through the praise of the Cretan sisters.

Since this and many other passages can be removed from the text to stand on their own, the poem overall feels like a series of shorter works stitched together. It is worth noting that some of the passages would perhaps be more interesting or appealing if published separately, but Ronsard fails to weave his skillful poetry into a compelling narrative. His other works provide no evidence for his ability to tell a story. While these sonnet-like sections within the *Franciade* contribute to the variety that Ronsard says is so important to epic in the 1572 *Au lecteur*, Langer argues that this variety will certainly bore some people while pleasing others. Unlike in a sonnet sequence where sonnets are judged individually, the epic is judged as a whole, so the more parts are unpleasing, the more its entire reputation suffers, even if there are many pleasing parts as well. This is exacerbated by the uninspired borrowing of epic episodes, and held together by thin strands of narrative. Since the narrative lacks the necessary teleology for a victors' epic already, Ronsard's poor story-telling skills and penchant for description cause the would-be epic to stall on the books of emotional description. This distraction is additionally detrimental to achieving the nationalistic goals set forth by the Pléiade's longing for a French epic; a plot filled with erotic descriptions and tortured emotions cannot extol the nation in the way epic poets intend.

Language

Yet another angle from which the *Franciade* fails in its public goals, despite Ronsard's skillful verse, is in the Pléiade's goal of calculated evolution of the French language. From Du

Bellay's *Deffence et illustration*, we know that the enrichment of the French language was seen by the Pléiade as the principal purpose of poetic endeavors in the middle of the sixteenth century. The final chapter of the *Deffense* is entitled "Exhortation aux Français d'écrire en leur langue; avec les louanges de la France" (286); in this chapter, Du Bellay explains how the Romans used Latin to increase their nation's status, arguing that France must do the same. A Virgilian national epic in French would be the achievement to secure its place alongside Latin and Greek as a great literary language. As Du Bellay claimed the prestige of a language would, by extension, glorify its nation, the epic poem would honor its nation twofold – directly through its teleological action and indirectly through the language of composition. With Ronsard, the question of language is complicated by his status as one of the greatest French poets of all time. It is certainly absurd to question his linguistic competence as a poet when that is so firmly established by the elegance of his sonnets and odes, and that is not my intent. However, it is worth asking whether the *Franciade* fulfills its purpose of furthering the French language and thereby glorifying the nation with a language worthy of epic composition.

In explaining his abandonment of the project, Ronsard references the original linguistic goals of the Pléiade and suggests they remain unfulfilled. He expresses his frustrations with French as a language, claiming it lacking the favor of the Muses. He refers to French as a "langue peu riche" (cited by Leslie 67). While this may refer to the grandeur of the language, rather than its vocabulary or syntax, Bjai disagrees with that interpretation, specifically in regards to the *Franciade*. Bjai summarizes Ronsard's feelings: "Mais il a été trahi par le français, cet outil poétique encore trop pauvre, trop fruste..." (23). On the other hand, Hulubei's discussion of the Pléiade's linguistic goals calls into question Ronsard's frustration; she notices that by 1579, French had established itself as a literary language, and all calls for its enrichment

had stopped. The Pléiade's grand project of the early century was considered realized and "le français peut aller de pair avec le latin et surpasser même l'italien" (Hulubei 48). It is difficult, then, to find Ronsard's complaints about the language credible, especially as he continued to compose successful collections throughout his life. Maskell also argues that Ronsard's style cannot be blamed for the *Franciade*'s failure, insisting that "as a manipulator of words Ronsard commanded unrivalled technical resources and could harmonize an endless diversity of inspiration" (73). His comments on language then become just another of Ronsard's excuses for failing to complete his grand project.

On a linguistic level, the failure is clearly not in the quality of verse itself, despite the constraints of the decasyllable, but in the failure of the project as a whole; as it is unable to achieve the status of great national epic, the poem does not fulfill the goal set by the early Pléiade and articulated in the *Deffence*. Du Bellay offered Lemaire as the example to emulate as the first to 'illustrate' the French language (257); by tying French itself to ancient Troy through the *Illustrations de Gaule*, Lemaire began the work Du Bellay envisioned as the Pléiade's primary goal. Du Bellay and Ronsard argued that imitation of ancient works in French would establish their vernacular's equal worth. The key however was to improve upon this poetry in French, and here the *Franciade* fails the linguistic goal by falling well short of the *Aeneid*. The *Franciade* is not necessarily bad poetry; indeed, Ronsard continues to prove himself a skilled poet in many isolated sections of the epic. It is the other issues with the text and its ultimate abandonment that make the poem a linguistic failure, but only in terms of the Pléiade's goals. While French did indeed establish itself as a great literary language, the *Franciade* itself played no part in that. It is not widely read and celebrated like the *Aeneid* or like much of Ronsard's other poetry. Therefore, the epic's linguistic failure lies in the fact that it never stood as the

pinnacle of French cultural output that would validate the language's quality; other works of the period managed that without the *Franciade*'s help.

Imitation

In terms of the *Franciade*'s style, the last element to consider is the role of imitation. On this level, Ronsard demonstrates his typical successful imitation on a linguistic level, but the overly-strict preoccupation with recreating epic topoi and episodes undermines any sense of 'Frenchness' about the poem and contributes to its failure to fulfill national identity goals. Ronsard's detailed imitation of a wide variety of ancient models slowed the writing process and demanded significant financial support from a patron. The process of collecting and indexing similes, epithets, stylistic ornaments, and the like from the ancient sources was an enormous task that required help from his secretary, Adamis Jamyn. Though Ronsard was well-versed in Roman and Greek literature, the process of imitation in the *Franciade* remained demanding, despite the poet's insistence that the text was modeled "plustost sur la naïve facilité d'Homere que sur la curieuse diligence de Virgile" (*Œuvres complètes* 5). However, the careful imitation reflects a difficult and structured work rather than the natural ease with which Ronsard claims to write. As this method lacks the inherent flexibility of the art that Greene noted, this form of structured imitation fails in a lengthy work where it so often succeeds in shorter forms. In a sonnet, such imitation is either a poetic exercise (as Peletier suggests is the purpose of such activity) or a witty treatment of an ancient text in the vernacular. Again, Ronsard succeeds in these smaller imitated sections, but the plot as a whole is uninspired; simply transferring Rome's foundational myth to France is not enough to sustain a compelling epic narrative.

As Ronsard does not create new contexts for his borrowed narrative elements, the audience becomes distracted by the obvious borrowing throughout the poem rather than enjoying it as they might in shorter forms. While the style may be harmonious (as Maskell insists), I argue that, to an audience well-versed in ancient literature, the incessant stream of bits collected from other works becomes distracting. Maskell's analysis of the *Franciade*'s failure focuses on the role of imitation, defining three categories to describe Ronsard's use of ancient epic: as historical sources for ancient legends, as examples of episodes and topoi to provide the structure for his own epic, and as stylistic sources from which to imitate epithets and other ornaments (71). The audience, even one so accustomed to imitation and borrowing, is too aware of the ties to the sources, and this distracts the reader from approaching the text as a single unit, a work in its own right.

Here, the length of the poem again negatively affects the audience's encounter with the text; a single sonnet which draws from one or two sources is easier to digest than a constant barrage of mixed sources over six thousand lines. Though Ronsard specifies in the *Abrégé* that the good poet must combine imitation and invention, Leslie argues that in the *Franciade*, much unlike Ronsard's other works, he relies purely on imitation with almost no invention (68-69). As Ronsard fails to find this balance, the audience is too aware of the sources for the text to feel like an original and inspired work. Unlike imitation in love poetry, epic's contribution to a nation's political and cultural status requires a greater level of invention; instead, Ronsard gives us less. While love is a universal sentiment that allows, say, a Petrarchan sonnet to speak to a diverse audience, the national sentiment that manifests in an epic requires invention particular to the nation and its own heritage. While the *Franciade* flows stylistically as Ronsard blends epithets and ornaments from various sources, the overall text resembles a clunky amalgamation of other

authors' ideas. Though diligent imitation was highly valued at this time, an author had to fully appropriate his source's style and make it his own, improving on the original.

Looking at the poem overall, the first two of Maskell's categories of imitation are obvious and do not necessarily exacerbate the problems of the third. The ancient epics' treatment of the Trojan War as a historical episode forms the basis for Ronsard's linking of this mythic-historic past to his contemporary history. Francus's escape from Troy to found Paris is overtly modeled on Aeneas' similar hero's mission. This choice makes sense for French epic's primary goal, establishing France as the cultural and literary successor to Ancient Rome; however, this prevents Ronsard from inventing a new foundational myth or drawing from French medieval myth, as Du Bellay suggests, so the text fails to become uniquely French.

Within this overall Virgilian structure are episodes and topoi taken from ancient sources, primarily the *Aeneid*, the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and the *Argonautica*. For them to be established as topoi, clearly they must exist in most of these source epics. Ronsard is the first in centuries to make use of the Storm-Shipwreck-Recital structure (as defined and explained by Maskell) that is so essential to the *Aeneid* (Maskell 29, 31). The epic opens with a council of the gods, like we see early in the *Aeneid* and throughout the *Iliad*. Francus builds his ships in Book 1, recalling both the Argonauts' departure and Dido's construction of a new fleet for Aeneas. Upon arrival in Crete, Francus battles a giant in an episode that vaguely recalls Polyphemus, but is more directly modeled on the popular Ariosto and romance topoi. Dido's role is split into two as Clymene first commits suicide and Hyante is later abandoned by the hero after she has served her purpose, a tradition also aligned with Ariadne and Medea. Hyante is further modeled on Medea as a temple priestess willing to forsake family ties to aid the epic hero. Hyante's magic also allows Ronsard

to include the topos of prophetic dynastic vision; she shows Francus the line of future kings as Anchises shows Aeneas in the underworld.

For Maskell, it is the third level of imitation, that of epic episodes and topoi, that explains the *Franciade*'s failure. The evidence of failure for him is the fact that Ronsard abandons his project in frustration at its disappointing reception, despite years of revisions and edits (73). Maskell sees Ronsard's ideas as original, his choice of hero as well-suited to the subject (a point of contention to which I return shortly), and his style as faultless; instead, he argues:

It is the structure of the *Franciade* which is clumsy. The bareness, even barrenness, of the historical account of Francus obliged Ronsard to construct an epic structure that was entirely dependent on literary models. His dependence on Virgil prevented that creative tension which might have resulted from a greater tension between historical sources and epic structure. Certainly he tried to shake himself free from the Virgilian structure, but in a manner that suggests a plodding critic who knows that a poem should be varied, rather than a poet inspired by divine frenzy. (Maskell 73)

I argue that this problem arises from the foundation of Ronsard's motivation for creating a French epic. The drawback of the ubiquitous call for such an epic in the first chapter is that this theoretical desire for an epic becomes the primary drive behind the project rather than the story. As Leslie noted earlier in the chapter, Ronsard has no event to inspire him to an epic as the historical moment has nothing that requires expression in an epic form (113); without a decisive or imperial victory, other forms are actually better suited. As we saw, there was even little consensus about which story could provide the inspiration for a French epic. This issue will resurface at the end of the chapter as I explore how the events of the time do not provide a natural moment for a story (like the beginning of the Roman Empire); this leaves a lackluster

narrative and, more importantly, creates a teleological void in the epic. Since there is no natural story to tell that arises from the historical moment, the burden of invention lies on Ronsard. Unfortunately, despite his skill in descriptive and philosophical poetry, he is simply a poor storyteller. Lacking both historical and internal inspiration, Ronsard assembles his story piecemeal from other epics without saying anything either new or particularly French.

This non-innovative use of epic topoi, each presented in the same context as in the source, gives the reader the impression that Ronsard is following a stagnant checklist of episodes and fits them into whatever order seems to make them work to loosely recreate Aeneas' journey (Mercury's push towards destiny? Check. Wrath of Juno? Check. Shipwreck? Check. Ill-fated love story? Check. And so on.). Yet these episodes do not feel included organically into the natural rhythm of the story. Leslie insists that had Ronsard adhered to his own theory of *invention* expressed in the *Abrégé*, "Ronsard could set himself apart from the ancients, but in the *Franciade*, he does not" (69). Maskell blames this on the lack of tension between history and poetry that would otherwise force a poet to find a creative and original approach to reconcile the two; instead, Maskell accuses Ronsard of "accept[ing] the topoi passively and serv[ing] them up in contexts not much removed from the original" (74), though he fails to analyze specific examples of this problem. Though Greene does not discuss the *Franciade*, he describes the highly successful imitation in Ronsard's other works as "brilliant instances of imitative discovery" (198). The failure of the *Franciade* can be understood in terms of this last word; here, Ronsard fails to discover anything new through his imitation. Maskell points to Tasso as a counter example, where the historical basis for the First Crusade helps the poet rearrange epic topoi into new, inventive contexts; I will later demonstrate a similar result with d'Aubigné's poetic account of the Wars of Religion as a counterpoint to Ronsard failure to create new

contexts. Imitation of poetic forms is an undisputed strength for Ronsard, but his inability to develop his own story reinforces his idea that repetition of Virgilian episodes and narrative will alone produce a comparable epic.

Since Maskell does not provide examples, I turn to the roles of the goddesses Juno and Venus to demonstrate exactly how Ronsard's use of epic episodes feels forced rather than inspired. In the *Aeneid* in particular, both goddesses play an essential role in the story, and the conflict between the two serves as a more intimate and subtle imitation of the *Iliad*'s gods, firmly pitted against each other on opposite sides of the war. Virgil's inclusion of both goddesses serves to reinforce the dynastic vision of the epic, Venus through direct bloodline and Juno through the promise of Rome's imperial future. Venus protects and encourages Aeneas because he is her son; her role as mother is drastically more important to the story than her typical role as goddess of love. When Venus sends Cupid to Dido disguised as Ascanius, her intention is that the queen of Carthage will care for Aeneas and provide him with a new fleet because of her love. The romance becomes a tool through which Venus will help her son achieve his (and Rome's) destiny.

Ronsard's Venus similarly sends Cupid to make Hyante and Clymene fall in love with Francus. However, with no direct motivation for Venus' intervention on behalf of Francus, the episode lacks the clear purpose of the original; the only reason for its inclusion is to imitate Virgil. Francus enlists her help through prayer, appealing to her past support of Troy and her love for Anchises ["un pasteur Phrygien" (2.723)] when he pleads "Aie pitié du mesme sang Troyen" (2.724), calling upon his Trojan blood alone to enlist divine help. It is surprising that Francus does not remind Venus of her aid given to Aeneas, referencing only Jason, Theseus, and Paris; this is perhaps due to Ronsard's attempt to distance himself from Virgil, especially since

the primary motivation for enlisting Venus is her Virgilian intervention in the Aeneas-Dido affair. Overall, the episode feels forced, even stale, as Ronsard uses Venus in precisely the same role as Virgil does. The episode then lacks the inspired and original twist that would make it more appealing and natural.

Likewise, Ronsard's wrath of Juno fails to capture the essence of the original, especially in terms of its historical poignancy; while Virgil's Juno reflects the real enmity felt by his audience for Carthage, Ronsard lacks a contemporary context for the imitated tension. Written roughly a century after the conclusion of the Punic Wars, Virgil's Carthage episodes are colored by recent history in the author's time. The wrath of Juno serves to reinforce the imperial future of Rome and therefore resonates beyond the plot as a reference to the great rival empires' future. She is aware of Aeneas' destiny to establish Rome, the empire fated to destroy her favorite city, Carthage, and her anger is therefore public and political. Indeed, the role of Juno's wrath is so essential to the story that it is introduced in line 4 as one of the major plot points in Aeneas' journey, making her the only character besides the hero to be mentioned in this famous opening. Her role serves as a means of introduction to the city of Carthage, specifically her determination to prevent Rome's very existence in order to save her beloved city.

In contrast, Ronsard's Juno plays a forced role. Without the imperial implications so essential to the *Aeneid*, Juno has little reason to hate Francus, other than his uncle's judgment over two decades earlier; this indicates Ronsard's attempt to replace a public and political anger with a personal and private one. As private matters are the realm of romance, such a small and individual matter cannot drive the plot of the genre concerned with public action and collective destiny. Even the presentation of her wrath is awkward; Book 1 opens with Jupiter's explanation of his role in saving Francus from the sack of Troy, followed by a 122-line attack on Juno

explaining Francus's journey to found Paris and her inability to prevent it. Despite Juno's surprisingly complete silence in the text, Jupiter blames her wrath ["ton courroux" (2.169)] and threatens her with physical punishment if she tries to interfere. The episode reads as misplaced and illogical as Juno has no reason to seek vengeance upon Francus other than the fact that her Virgilian counterpart does so against Aeneas. Nor indeed is there any evidence that she is actually wrathful beyond Jupiter's accusation. Ronsard too seems to recognize that it is an artificial, misguided, a poorly-executed imitation; the passage is cut after the first publication.

Evidence of Ronsard's detailed knowledge of ancient epic is spread throughout the text, and examination of a single passage can demonstrate Ronsard's skill in combining parts from several texts to form a cohesive section within the larger (more clunky) text. The fact that these borrowed ornaments and epithets [such as "l'Aube aux doigts de roses" (2.465), of frequent use in Homer] read so smoothly as part of the larger poem is a testament to Ronsard's incontrovertible skill as a poet. Francus' departure from Crete in Book 1 offers one of many examples illustrating this skill. After Mercury has come to urge Francus on his way (*Aeneid* 4.219-278) and the constructed fleet has been launched into the ocean (*Argonautica* 1.371-400), Francus says his farewells with his mother, Andromache. The 90-line passage is filled with textual references of varying degrees of subtlety that create a unified, multi-layered imitation; in examining the passage's details, I will move from the most general to the most specific forms of imitation in the passage.

At the most general level, the farewell passage is imitated from the *Argonautica* where Alkimedee says an anguished farewell to her son Jason. While Jason has been chosen out of spite by King Pelias for a dangerous mission, Francus has been chosen by the gods to undertake his journey, and this clearly affects the tone of the passage. The Greek's mother is less accepting

than the Trojan's, though Andromache's fate is more immediately tragic. As a close imitation of the *Aeneid*, echoes of Dido are heard throughout the *Franciade*, and this farewell is no exception. While the Carthaginian queen is not mentioned, Andromache's pain and passion at Francus's departure remind the educated reader of Dido, especially in such a Virgilian context. While Dido does everything in her power to stop Aeneas from leaving, Andromache accepts her son's destiny: "Mais pour mon corps qui n'attend que sa fin / Ne laisse, fils, à suivre ton destin" (1.999-1000). As soon as she has fulfilled her purpose and sent her son on his path, she faints and dies. While this style of death recalls more precisely medieval female characters who swoon and die of grief or heartbreak, the timing upon the hero's departure reminds the reader forcibly of Dido's violent suicide; their roles in the narrative complete, both women die as the hero departs.

To examine the imitation on a more detailed level, I turn to the cloak given to Francus by Andromache as an imitation of Aeneas' shield; though similar in many ways, Ronsard makes small changes that undermine once again his text's intended imperial teleology. The cloak follows an epic tradition of gifts received by the hero that reinforce his dynastic importance. Like Jason, Francus receives a cloak upon the occasion of his departure. As in the *Aeneid*, the gift is given by the mother, yet while Aeneas' shield is inscribed with the future of the hero's Roman descendants, the cloak Francus receives is imbued with the ancestral past. The cloak belonged to his father, Hector, and was made by Andromache, highlighting the importance of Francus' blood to his status as hero. Woven into the cloak is a picture of Troy and its surrounding area, furthering Francus' associations with Trojan heritage. While the imperial future is theoretically as important to Francus as to Aeneas (within the context of their respective poems), the circumstances of each poet account for the different emphases; Ronsard needs to convince his audience of their own ties to ancient Troy by insisting upon Francus's ancestry as a member of

the Trojan royal family. Virgil's primary concern is establishing Augustus' ties to Aeneas rather than Aeneas' to Troy. It is therefore logical that where Aeneas' shield makes clear the imperial future tying Aeneas to Augustus, Francus' cloak becomes a symbol of the hero carrying the weight of cultural heritage on his back. Aeneas' gift represents the moment when he accepts the weight of imperial future after his reluctant departure from Carthage, but Francus' represents acceptance of his ancestral cultural burden after an idle youth.

As the shield of Aeneas is itself an imitation of Achilles' shield, Ronsard blends the Homeric and Virgilian sources together in this imitation. The Greek hero's shield depicts neither the lost past nor the promised future, but rather a variety of images that represent a complete vision of the universe by including opposite pairs: the earth and the heavens, war and peace, etc. On the cloak, the idyllic image of Troy with the Scamander River and surrounding mountains recalls the image of two cities on Achilles' shield, one at war and the other at peace. The Troy of Hector's cloak is clearly an image of a city at peace, but all references to the lost city are tainted in the minds of both characters and readers by the knowledge of the city's complete annihilation; the image of peaceful Troy cannot exist without the secondary mental image of its destruction that resonates across the centuries more than its previous glory. The cloak represents the abduction of Ganymede, whose presence recalls the three-part wrath of Juno in the opening of the *Aeneid*; Juno seeks to deter Aeneas to protect Carthage, punish the Trojans for the judgment of Paris, and spite Jupiter for his affection towards his young cupbearer. These are references that Ronsard's well-read audience would recognize as evidence of his skill on a poetic level.

This passage also demonstrates the detailed precision of Ronsard's imitation of ancient epic. Ronsard takes the image of Dido swooning and being laid in her bed by her servants and applies it to his Andromache:

His medium dictis sermonem abrumpit et auras
 aegra fugit seque ex oculis avertit et aufert,
 linquens multa metu cunctantem et multa parantem
 dicere. Suscipiunt famulae conlapsaque membra
 marmoreo referunt thalamo stratisque reponunt. (*Aeneid* 4.388-392)

Ainsi pleurant, Francus elle acola,
 Puis espasmée au logis s'en alla,
 Où de son corps l'âme estant destachée
 Dessus un lit ses servans l'ont couchée,
 Pour la donner au sommeil adoucy
 Qui des mortels arrache le soucy. (*Franciade* 1.1043-1048)

Ronsard's inspiration for Andromache's death is clear from these lines. Both Dido and Andromache speak and turn away from the hero. There is an emphasis on the women's bodies; Dido's collapses and is caught by her servants, and Andromache's soul detaches itself from hers. Both are then carried by their servants and laid on their beds. Ronsard compares Andromache's death to a sweet sleep that recalls Dido's unconsciousness. Ronsard's borrowing from Virgil is evident here, and the passage serves as an example of both the positive and negative aspects of the *Franciade's* imitation. We see that Ronsard takes elements and images from Aeneas' departure scene and skillfully applies them to that of Francus, all the while avoiding an exact replica. However, the situations and contexts are so similar in each text that, however skillful the imagery, the scene lacks the fresh context Maskell declared so essential.

This particular group of lines shows us that the idea of imitation consists of much more than copying plot points and turns of phrase. Though there is little of the invention so essential to

poetic composition, Ronsard blends Homeric imitation with the Virgilian throughout the text, and this scene is again a typical example. Ronsard's Andromache recalls Homer's as she addresses Hector in *Iliad* Book 6. She begs him not to join the fighting and leave her a widow, reminding him that Achilles has already robbed her of all her family: "Hektor, thus you are father to me, and my honored mother, / you are my brother, and you it is who are my young husband" (*Iliad* 6.429-430). Still mourning the loss of all her relatives in the *Franciade*, Andromache turns to Francus to fill the roles of various family members:

Seul tu estoit mon plaisir & ma peur
 Enfant, mary, seul mon frère, & ma seur,
 Seul pere & mere, & voyant la semence
 De tout les miens germer en ton enfance,
 Me consolais de t'avoir enfanté
 Me restant seul de toute parenté :
 Du grand Achil' les armes & l'audace
 Desoubs la terre ont envoyé ma race. (1.971-978)

This passage not only imitates Andromache's grief at losing her family to Achilles, but it also places Francus in the same important role as his father – or at least that is the intention. In the *Iliad*, Hector is the great hero of Troy upon whom the entire city's hopes rest. Hector not only stands in for all of Andromache's lost family, but for all of Troy as well. When he falls to Achilles, the city is lost. Francus too is all that remains of the city (at least within the context of Ronsard's story), so he embodies the displaced Trojan people as well as Andromache's lost family; he is "seul de toute parenté" for the lost city's surviving population as much as for his

mother. In ensuring the continuance of Hector's line, Francus will also secure the future of the Trojan race.

These examples, though only few of many in the text, demonstrate the multi-faceted imitation Ronsard practices throughout the *Franciade*. However, most important is that the natural weaving of the story is not what inspires Ronsard to include certain episodes; rather, the story is framed around their status as *topoi* and the subsequent 'necessity' of their inclusion. This costs the text both its flow and its ability to stand as a truly *French* epic. The overall Virgilian plan is a logical choice for an epic about the foundation of empire and the poetry itself reflects Ronsard's skill by fusing a variety of sources into a single flowing passage, but the larger picture that makes the text feel overworked. Pléiade poetic theory stresses the preference of natural poetic inspiration over diligent and laborious composition, but the *Franciade* gives the reader an overwhelming impression of the second. The key point here is the tension between Ronsard's imitation and his ultimate goal for epic. France needs an epic of its own to fulfill the (perceived) function of Virgil's for the Roman Empire, but Ronsard is too concerned with imitating Virgil's poetry to find a unique and inspired voice through which to sing the praises of France and the ruling Valois dynasty. Indeed, the lack of empire or decisive victory in Ronsard's time renders an inspired epic voice essentially impossible. Because of the necessity of borrowing narrative (whether the fault of Ronsard's poor story-telling skills or the historical moment), the poem fails to become inherently French; it is too busy trying to be Roman and Greek.

Ronsard's *Roman* – Considerations of Genre

One of the most interesting debates that can alter the way we understand the *Franciade* is one of genre as the incursion of popular romance tropes and aesthetics detracts from the

nationalistic goals set forth by the Pléiade. Epic and romance are related yet opposite genres in two distinct ways that indicate the problems of the *Franciade*: the dichotomies of winner/loser and public/private matters. Epic should be born from a winner's teleological perspective at the conclusion of a conflict; Ronsard ignores conflict and finds himself accidentally attempting to celebrate the twilight of the Valois dynasty, embodied in his epic by an unimpressive telos, Charles IX and his problematic representation in Francus. Epic should also be the genre of public matters, as opposed to romance's concern with the private. Caused both by popular aesthetics and Ronsard's status as renowned love poet, these romance diversions detract from the teleological narrative Ronsard hopes to create to extol the virtues and glory of France; they have the double effect of providing alternative possibilities and distracting from this teleology by focusing on Francus's private concerns rather than his imperial destiny. Yet without a ruler who unites the nation after conflict, the text lacks the all-important telos that would give the narrative its power. Ronsard tries to make a telos out of his young patron and king, but the position of France in the midst of civil war leaves entirely too much uncertainty in the current political situation to make a convincing telos. This section explores how Ronsard is caught between elevated epic and popular romance, and this position leads to an unsuccessful imitation of either genre.

Generally, the text is unquestioningly considered an epic because of its heavy imitation of Virgil and Ronsard's own description of his public goals for such a work. Ronsard and his contemporaries clearly understood a French epic project along the same lines as modern theorists; Langer described the genre as "the incarnation of national aspirations" (210), and Hampton's description, "the genre of public action" (*Writing from History* 84), is equally fitting. Virgil politicized his imitation of Homer to fit the new Roman Empire, and Ronsard followed his

example by using the genre to legitimate the Valois dynasty and claim France's cultural and political supremacy in Europe. Ronsard stated his goals in the 1572 edition's *Au lecteur*: "d'honorer la maison de France, & par sur tout le Roy Charles neufiesme" (8). By imitating the continued push towards destiny experienced by Aeneas, Ronsard firmly aligned his work with the epic genre and its teleological narrative structure, despite labeling it *roman*. Like Aeneas, Francus is entirely driven by his divinely prophesized destiny to found a great empire. Since Ronsard and his contemporaries use different vocabulary to discuss genres (as we recall, the French word *épopée* did not yet exist), it is this point more than any other which indicates that Ronsard's goals for the project are aligned with the genre we call epic, or sometimes 'national epic'.

In the *Franciade*, others (particularly Maskell) have noticed a conflict between Ronsard's intention to create a national epic and the popularity of the romance genre. In Silver's words, "the *Franciade* refused to adopt the epic atmosphere in which [Ronsard] sought to clothe it. His poem remained closer in spirit and in gait... to the *roman courtois* of France" (17). Interestingly, the *roman courtois* is itself a distinctly French form, but not one that fulfills the national literary goals of an epic. In the poetic treatises of the period, the French poets disparage these medieval stories as a frivolous, and therefore inferior, genre; Du Bellay chides poets who embellish these medieval romances, claiming they are "beaucoup plus propres à bien entretenir damoiselles qu'à doctement écrire" (266). However, Du Bellay is alone in suggesting "ces beaux vieux romans français" (266) as a source of inspiration for French epic; additionally, his suggestion is *not* adopting the form of these poems, only "les noms et l'histoire" (266). Yet despite the disdain for the *roman courtois* form, many of its aesthetics find their way into the *Franciade*. Most

importantly, Ronsard's difficulties arise from the incursion of romance that detracts from the intended teleology that provides the political context for an epic.

To study the incursion of romance into epic, it is useful to reexamine Ronsard's theory as he distinguishes sharply between 'real' epic and *Orlando Furioso*, yet also puts the *Franciade* seemingly into the same genre as Ariosto's text. In the first edition's *Au lecteur*, Ronsard associates his poem with epic, distinguishing this genre from history and from *chanson de geste*: "Bref ce livre est un Roman comme l'Iliade et l'Æneide, ... d'autant que mon but est d'escrire les faits de Francion, & non de fil en fil, comme les Historiens, les gestes de nos rois" (*Œuvres complètes* 5). Leslie does not draw such sharp distinctions between genres here, calling the *Franciade* "a versified historical romance" (65) in that Ronsard takes poetic material and tries to make it historical. Ronsard's description of the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid* as 'Roman' is noteworthy as this term has come to refer to epic's counter-genre, the romance.²³ While epic is the genre concerned with public duty and national issues, romance is the genre of private honor in which the hero strives to achieve more personal goals, generally securing his reputation in order to win the love of lady, especially in the context of the medieval French *roman courtois* that left its mark on Renaissance tastes. Though Aeneas and later Francus begin their adventures as the wandering survivors of the sack of Troy, their stories are primarily driven by divinely-ordained destiny; each is driven by unalterable fate to found his respective empire. In the prefaces of 1572 and 1587, Ronsard insisted upon Aristotle's unity of action when describing his project, and Quint helps articulate the importance of this unity to epic: "telling a full story, epic claims to possess *the* full story" (33-34), thereby implying there could be no alternative version of events.

²³ When it does not refer to its most common usage, the contemporary novel, that is. For the linguistic relationship between the two genres in French and other European languages, see Miller *The Epic Hero* 45.

Ronsard finds himself in a difficult position as medieval romance tradition changed the tastes of Renaissance audiences. Miller explains the increasing appeal of romance beginning in the twelfth century: “a social group, conceiving itself as separate, that is, unwilling to accept the heroic scenarios and other themes of a previously dominant social elite, seems to demand the various releasing mechanisms and experimental modes that romance newly provides” (Miller 51). Though Miller recognizes that this tendency began in the twelfth century, he informs us that the romance genre grew significantly more in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance. In a changing society, the militaristic genre of the nobility became less appealing to an increasingly mercantile bourgeois literate population; Quint argues that in the Renaissance, the wandering of romance plots transformed (at least partially) into the mercantile discovery epics, especially since he reads the wandering ship as particularly emblematic of romance.

Additionally, Quint remarks that in the sixteenth century, the distinction between epic and romance became largely based on the pleasure of reading them (179-180); we have already seen Du Bellay refer to romance as a mere distraction for ladies, suggesting that epic should be more serious in its subject matter. Miller identifies a space between the genres by labeling *Orlando Furioso* an “epic-romance” and claiming such a text is different from the medieval *roman courtois* (Miller 47). His continuing assessment of this mixed genre offers a version of epic that is enriched by the pleasurable distraction (to use Du Bellay’s interpretation) of *romans courtois*: “The epic-romance palette is richer, and the emotional ambience, as we would expect, is less controlled and certainly less predictable than that in other, strictly and sternly epic form” (Miller 47). This style of literature distracts Ronsard as he aims to please his audience, but the cost is epic’s single-minded focus on the hero’s teleological mission that makes the story of greater importance for the nation and therefore more serious.

Usher, however, is quick to note that a love plot is still essential to an epic, reminding us that the *Iliad* cannot exist without Helen, the *Aeneid* without Dido, or the *Argonautica* without Medea (xlvii). Therefore, Ronsard is obligated to include a love plot if he wants to imitate ancient epic, but he over-privileges the love plot so that it detracts from the imperial teleology so much that neither the hero nor the poet manage to move beyond it. Miller highlights the purpose of the love plot as a primary distinction between epic and romance; while the epic hero strives to attain a public or political goal (such as the founding of his city), the romance hero's mission becomes the woman itself. Miller specifies that when we talk about 'love' in romance, "we seem to understand that the motivations of the hero will begin to include his desire to *win* a woman..., not merely to possess her, and then she becomes the goal of a variation on the heroic quest theme" (45). To demonstrate Miller's point, I turn to the women in the *Aeneid*. Aeneas' wife Creusa represents the first obstacle figure, and the hero is conveniently stripped of the narrative restrictions her presence imposes before he even escapes Troy. Aeneas does not 'win' Dido so much as overcome the obstacle she presents to his destiny as his dalliance with the Carthaginian queen is created by Juno to thwart his true mission to found a new Troy in Italy. Finally, Aeneas' marriage to Lavinia is not his victory of securing the woman, but securing his political position within the invaded culture as embodied by the woman; her unimportance as an actual woman is evidenced by her silence in the poem.

In romance, the woman largely drives the narrative by presenting tasks to or demanding service of the hero; often she herself becomes the goal of the hero's mission. Most importantly, the woman does not stand as the embodiment of political power or as an obstacle that the hero must overcome or avoid to complete his mission. Though Hyante serves a purpose in Franucs' story by showing him the prophetic line of French kings, Clymene only exists to increase the

hero's desirability, leading to the problem we discussed earlier of Ronsard's excessive eroticization of Francus. As Francus is a young and untried (and also unimpressive) hero, the sisters' love exists primarily to make him an attractive and appealing character. Here, the courtly love element of the *roman courtois* is evident in its incursion into Ronsard's narrative; a defining feature of courtly love is that the man's love for the woman is fundamentally ennobling. Seeing his love, the romance hero is strengthened and emboldened. His trials exist to prove his heroic worth so that he might finally win the woman's love. Though Francus' goal is not winning these women, Ronsard's goal with this love plot is this romance-fashioning of his inexperienced hero. To return to Langer's argument, this focus is necessary to render Francus charming rather than boring, but it further transforms him into a romance hero establishing his private honor through the love of a woman rather than an epic hero driven by his great destiny. However, Francus is never actually threatened by the sisters (in the manner of epic's female obstacles) because he is not tempted to stay with them like Aeneas is with Dido. Thus the Cretan sisters fail to fulfill the epic's woman-as-obstacle role and instead attempt to ennoble the hero like the women of romance.

Ariosto and Virgil were considered the imitable models of the time for some Pléiade members, though the French theoretical works cannot resolve the popularity of *roman* with the elevated position of Virgil. Maskell argues that despite Ronsard's use of the term *roman* to describe his own text, "when in practice he had to choose between the irreconcilable examples of Virgil and Ariosto, guided by the elevated pretensions of epic, he invariably leaned toward the superior status and greater antiquity of Virgil" (24). While Ronsard clearly favored Virgil over Ariosto, his epic is influenced more heavily by romance tradition than Maskell (and even Ronsard) admits. Ronsard indeed expresses his own disdain for the most popular romance of his

time, *Orlando Furioso*, describing the text as a deformed monster of its own genre. From his use of the word *roman* to describe his own work, then his reference to Ariosto's text as *monstreux*, it is evident that Ronsard did not distinguish between the genres in the same way we do. Bjaï argues that the term *roman* should be read in opposition to history rather than epic; he sees Ronsard's word choice as a continuation of lengthy explanations which set the *Franciade* and its sources apart from histories and chronicles: "*Roman* doit s'entendre d'abord comme l'antonyme d'*histoire*, du double point de vu de la matière (« les faits de Francion » vs « les gestes de nos rois ») et de la manière (« *ordo artificialis* » vs « de fil en fil »)" (Bjaï 83). Usher reads Ronsard's appropriation of the term *roman* differently still, insisting this indicates Ronsard's desire to redefine the genre as an extension of his own popular love poetry (1). Maskell, on the other hand, maintains that in applying this term to the *Aeneid* and the *Iliad*, Ronsard argues that romance's current popularity was founded in those texts (24).

Despite Ronsard's professed disdain for the genre, his use of *roman* may also be read as an attempt to capitalize on its popularity or, as Miller says, its 'richer palette.' If we agree with Quint that the pleasantness of the text separates *roman* from epic in the sixteenth century, then Ronsard is also announcing the *Franciade* as a pleasurable text. The problem with this distinction becomes the simultaneous suggestion that the *Franciade* as a *roman* is not as serious. Alternatively, perhaps Ronsard was simply dissatisfied with his friends' vague categories of *long poème* and *oeuvre héroïque*. Du Bellay's *long poème français* calls for a fusion of ancient epic with medieval romance tradition to blend French tradition with ancient. As a poet concerned with Francus's imperial destiny, Ronsard employs a term less broad than Du Bellay's. Whatever Ronsard's thoughts behind using an unexpected term, it is still the tension between the genres

(according to contemporary understanding of their political functions) that causes the largest problems with the text.

I now turn to the epic elements by which Ronsard attempts to create the Virgilian teleology that is ultimately undermined by the incursion of romance. Both Virgil's and Ronsard's narratives begin with the gods in order to emphasize their role in driving the action. We have already seen the importance of Virgil's Juno that begins in the very first lines of the text; her wrath both drives the action and underlines Rome's greater imperial destiny reaching far beyond the epic hero alone. Ronsard follows the invocation with the council of the gods during which Jupiter explains how he saved Hector's son from the Sack of Troy because of "les destinées / Qui pour Francus au ciel sont ordonnées" (1.165-166). The narrative is thus driven by this end, the ultimate destiny of Francus and the future French empire.

Prophecy is essential to focusing the narrative on the accomplishment of a single task and in establishing a telic drive for the narrative, and Ronsard imitates this element from Virgil with significant variations. In both the *Aeneid* and the *Franciade*, the gods' predictions for the future are not confined to the beginning, but rather continue throughout both narratives, thereby reinforcing the underlying teleology. Quint describes the importance of a linear progression of history to epic: "epic linearity – the sequential linking of events – becomes a teleology: all events are led, or dictated, by the end that is their cause. The parade of history reaches a transhistorical or eschatological finish line" (33). This applies to both epic narrative and prophecy (particularly Hyante's prophecy of future kings to Francus); the combination shows a linear progression of destiny that is not merely contained within the text, but extends far beyond the hero and into history as well. This 'finish line' is Augustus for Virgil and Charles for Ronsard, though a

comparison of the two finds Charles unquestionably lacking, and even the *Franciade*'s parade is unable to prophesy beyond Clovis.²⁴

Without a decisive victory on which to rest his teleological narrative structure, Ronsard attempts to fashion a telos from the mere existence of Charles's reign, an anticlimactic 'finish line' when compared to Actium and the creation of the Roman Empire. Virgil celebrates the end of civil war and the beginning of a new era in the Roman Empire under Augustus. Quint highlights the importance of the "autocratic *princeps*" for establishing the teleology illustrated by Aeneas' shield, with the figure of Augustus leading the navy into the battle of Actium positioned in the middle of the shield, holding it (both the scene and the empire) all together: "Virgil's epic ideology is thus doubly "imperial," calling for both emperor and empire, as if neither could exist without the other" (Quint 27). For the *Aeneid*, the decisive moment is the victory at Actium; having been inscribed upon the shield by the gods so long ago, Augustus's victory is assured and Virgil insists the outcome could not possibly have been any other. Quint explains that epic draws its power from the narrative structure, presenting an end to conflict in order to show how everything necessarily led to this point, meaning that for the epic genre, this teleology is itself the narrative (45). Epic winners naturally embrace a narrative that presents their victory as foretold and inevitable.

Ronsard attempts to imitate this aspect of his primary source text, but fails to do so effectively, perhaps due to misunderstanding how the nuances of Augustus's political situation impact epic teleology. Virgil writes to establish and legitimize a new political era, one born from conflict. Ronsard's France is not emerging victorious from conflict at the time of the poem's

²⁴ It is likely that, had Ronsard completed his project, Book 5 would have continued the line of kings through Charles IX.

composition, so it is difficult for the poet to write fixedly from the winner's perspective; winner of what? Quint explains that epic draws its power from the narrative structure, presenting an end to conflict in order to show "that the struggle had all long been leading up to its victory and thus imposing upon it a narrative teleology – the teleology that epic identifies with the very idea of narrative" (45). Ronsard, as court poet, showed concern about the nation's impending conflict in his 1562 *Discours des misères de ce temps*; however, his miscalculation with the *Franciade* is ignoring the political situation entirely while trying to construct an imperially teleological epic. The *Franciade*'s fundamental problem is that it must completely ignore both the building tension (in the early years of composition) and the outright violent conflict continuing during its years of publication and revision; Ronsard is forced to ignore the fractures in society because the genre demands a unified vision of collective national sentiment. However, rather than a new emperor who restores peace to a divided nation, Charles is an untried child-king of a nation fracturing into civil war. Though Ronsard follows Virgil's example in culminating his epic plot in the reign of his patron, the telos lacks a sense of definitive climax as it sits on the brink of conflict rather than at its conclusion.

This lack of exceptional and decisive moment is evidenced by the imitation of key artifacts described within the texts as the epic narrative structure makes the imitation weak; while Virgil's shield establishes the narrative's telic drive into the author's time, Ronsard's imitation in Francus' cloak shifts the focus to Troy's past rather than France's future. Aeneas' acceptance of the shield symbolizes his acknowledgement of his role in the future of his people: "attollens umero famamque et fata nepotum" (8.731); Aeneas carries the Trojans' fate quite literally on his shoulder. Francus carries the same symbolic burden for the exiled Trojans in his own band, but Ronsard burdens him with the past rather than an imperial future. By depicting Troy in its glory

on the cloak worn by his hero, Ronsard emphasizes the Trojan heritage for the French people. Rather than sending his hero's gaze forward, he sends his sixteenth-century readers' gaze back to encourage their connection to ancient Troy and thereby foster national pride. Ronsard's choice is logical considering the Pléiade's goal for epic was to confirm France's position as cultural and political successor to Rome, and he does so by insisting on a shared Trojan ancestry that furthers French associations with Rome.

While the image on the cloak is effective symbolism for establishing France's cultural heritage, it is detrimental to the essential epic narrative. Ronsard's attempt to create a teleological narrative for Francus and France is precisely what establishes the *Franciade* as an epic, but the pivotal moment from the *Aeneid* on which Virgil's teleology rests is here transformed into a reminder of the past. Quint explains the important tie between romance and the past; the wandering adventures represent a narrative purging of the past and its trauma (65). The insistence on the Trojan past therefore associates the supposed epic hero more firmly with his own defeat as a survivor of a sacked city rather than his people's eventual victory. Perhaps the completed text would have made the turn to more imperial narrative as Virgil's does, but Ronsard's comfort with amorous poetry caused him to continually edit the first four books rather than continue composing towards Francus' supposed telos.

This is not to say that a teleological epic narrative cannot blend elements from the wandering romance. Indeed, Virgil's imitation of Homer includes both the martial *Iliad* and the travel adventure *Odyssey*; however, as the *Odyssey* is also teleological in its own way, it is medieval romance that presents a greater threat to the linear narrative of epic. Aeneas and Francus both begin on the losing side, having narrowly escaped the destruction of their homeland. By beginning with the wandering romance of the loser, Virgil is able to build the

story to its ultimate end in Italy, using the underworld episode at the middle point of the text as the transformative moment from one genre to the other. This allows the blending of two styles to produce a text that is “unified, nationalistic, and elevated in style” (Maskell 24). Maskell sets this apart from romance (both medieval and that of Ariosto) which is, by contrast, “disordered, entertaining and, by comparison, less elevated” (24).

Virgil achieves unity in his narrative by insisting on the end-driven destiny even throughout the early books’ wandering adventures. Though Aeneas follows Odysseus’s path through the Mediterranean, both he and the gods guiding his destiny know where he will ultimately arrive and to what purpose. It is for this reason that the text begins with the wrath of Juno; by insisting from the beginning that it is Juno who drives the action, Virgil is able to ensure the ultimate end of Aeneas’ tale ends not with him, but in the poet’s own time. As the first lines of the text establish the importance of Aeneas’ arrival in Italy to begin the Roman race, Juno’s wrath continually reminds the reader of Rome’s eventual destiny through the Punic wars that will see her favorite city destroyed. As the first thirty-three lines of the text explain the significance of the hero even beyond his own time, the wandering that will follow in the next six books takes place all within the sphere of this ultimate linear destiny. They are not truly romance diversions because we know where they will ultimately end; they do not risk falling into the cyclical romance patterns described by Quint. Aeneas’ romantic entanglements, as we saw earlier, are obstacles for the hero to overcome and therefore serve as threshold guardians rather than cyclical romance diversions. Even as Aeneas looks backwards to recount the fall of Troy to Dido and her court, the imperial future is present; during the sack, the ghost of Hector tells Aeneas to seek a new city, indicating that the future of the Trojan race has shifted from one hero

to the other. All this leads to a unified (epic) story that remains focused on imperial destiny despite the fact that the hero begins as the wandering loser following conflict.

In contrast, Ronsard's incorporation of romance elements is much less successful. Granted, the text remains less than one sixth complete, but the confusing mix is nonetheless apparent. Ronsard clearly intends to send Francus on a journey mimicking that of Aeneas; each sets out to his destiny after the loss of their shared homeland. The *Franciade* even imitates the *Aeneid*'s opening lines, insisting on the hero's hardships before arriving in the destined location. While Aeneas' wandering immediately follows the war, Francus has remained stationary for years in exile with other Trojan refugees while he grows into a young adult – and idles away his youth. His departure is therefore a deliberate decision (one forced by Mercury), rather than a wandering of necessity, as with Aeneas. Francus then lacks the urgency of Aeneas' mission; Virgil's hero *must* find a new home, having just lost the old one. Ronsard's hero has spent some fifteen to twenty years²⁵ in a comfortable new settlement, so his departure and wandering are less desperately necessary. Francus is content where he is; it is Ronsard who is desperate to see him in France.

To understand how the *Franciade*'s inclusion of romance topoi follows Maskell's 'disordered' description of romance rather than the 'unified' one of Virgilian epic, let us turn to the giant episode in Book 2. Having shipwrecked on the shores of Crete, Francus wins Dicæe's alliance by offering to fight a giant that has kidnapped the king's son. Like Polyphemus, Phovère

²⁵ Francus escaped Troy as an infant and is now described as a youth in the text, though the amount of time passed is never specified. He is called "ce jouvenceau" (1.698) and is described with "un beau menton / Crespu de soye" (3.555-556). He may be of similar age to Charles IX who was twenty-two when the first edition was published, though younger still when work began on the poem, having ascended to the throne at age ten and having assumed patronage of the epic at fifteen.

is said to be of Neptune's race, cruel and violent. On the surface, the episode seems similar to that in the *Odyssey* (in that there is a conflict between the hero and a giant), but there are important differences that show it is imitated from medieval romance tradition more than ancient epic. After the shipwreck, Dicæe brings the surviving Trojans to his palace for a feast, during which a singer moves him to tears. Like the heroes of medieval romance, Francus finds himself in a position to offer unsolicited help to his host after being driven by fortune (rather than fate) to his castle.

From here, the parallels with Chrétien de Troyes' thirteenth-century romance *Yvain* are pronounced and serve as evidence that the episode is more similar to romance tradition than epic. Both heroes find themselves in the castle of a host who alternates between joy at their arrival and some unknown sadness. The heroes beg the lord to reveal the source of their sorrow which turns out to be the kidnapping of their sons by a malicious giant. Phovére had captured Orée and his men, tying them up with "vergongneux liens" (2.1064) and leading them away like a shepherd with a stick. In *Yvain*, the four sons are tied together by their horses and beaten by the giant's cruel dwarf. The heroes joust their respective giants wearing medieval armor, which is certainly odd for an ancient Trojan, both in action and arms. Francus fights Phovére for over two hundred lines, finally piercing the giant's eye with his lance (a climax certainly reminiscent of Odysseus), though the giant can only be killed by slicing the vein in his heel (in an awkwardly inserted imitation of Achillean tradition). The entire episode in the *Franciade* takes up a full third of the second book, seeming to drag on in a desperate attempt to find something exciting and heroic for Francus to do following his departure and immediate shipwreck. Though the episode is awkwardly inserted into the narrative, it provides the only action sequence in the first four books;

this again highlights the surprising lack of heroism in a genre known at the time as *oeuvre héroïque*.

Beyond the mere details of the scene, it is the circumstances for the episode that declare it imitated from romance rather than epic. Romance episodes differ from epic ones in that they are undertaken for their own sake: “It is a serial and not linear process by which these adventures are invented... this separates the romantic epic from the epic proper, which operates in its own enclosed and brutally predictable world” (Miller 47). This description of non-linear episodic adventure is noticeably applicable to this scene from the *Franciade*; it is adventure for the sake of adventure rather than necessity. Odysseus must fight Polyphemus to escape and save his men, but Francus, as an untried youth, must volunteer to fight Phovère in order to test himself and begin building his reputation as a knight. The adventure is *sought* because the hero has not yet established an identity, and medieval romance heroes do this by seeking trials and adventure. Like the common romance hero, Francus is fighting to save a kidnapped noble. This is also reminiscent of Rogero’s fight with the giant orc in Canto 10 of *Orlando Furioso*. Having been kidnapped by an enchanter, Angelica is bound naked to a rock to be eaten by a sea monster²⁶ when she is saved by Rogero in one of his long series of romance adventures through which he attempts to earn the hand of Bradamant. Though contemptuous of Ariosto’s romance, Ronsard was clearly not above borrowing elements from his “corps monstrueux”.

When considering the problematic incorporation of romance (the genre) into an imperial epic, we would be remiss to ignore Ronsard’s principal status as a love poet, or as Greene labels him, “one of the greatest erotic poets” (210). We have already seen how this tradition manifests

²⁶ This episode is itself modeled on the ancient Greek myth of Perseus and Andromeda that can be found in Book IV of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.

in several passages that can be taken and read as separate sonnets, but now we must look on a larger scale. Usher, as I noted earlier in this section, stresses the importance of a love plot to epic, citing Dido, Medea, Helen, and Penelope as one of two reasons Ronsard *must* include a love plot in his epic, even as an obstacle to be overcome; the second is his status as “sixteenth-century France’s most celebrated love poet” (xlvi). Thus, Francus needs the love of Hyante to show him the prophecy of future kings and the eventual union with the German princess with whom he is destined to begin the new French line. Yet the necessary inclusion of such plot points does not account for their hijacking of three of the extant books.

Langer reads the privilege given to the romance plot as indicative of the court aesthetic as to what makes a text interesting. In short, in order to avoid being boring, the poem (and its hero) must be the opposite, charming. This again ties to Miller’s explanation of the late medieval/Renaissance distinction between epic and romance as serious or pleasurable. Additionally, Ronsard’s friend Du Bellay indicates that the ‘pleasurable’ aspects of romance make them mere diversions for ladies, not the stuff of serious national celebration. As Langer describes the situation,

The preoccupation with charmingness and its opposite, boredom or languor, produces an intense interest in epideictic rhetoric, and more specifically with description of persons. This description, in Renaissance epic, is often infused with the erotic, in a way that suggests the Italian romance tradition, especially Ariosto, and also how the love lyric tends to dominate poetry in general in the French Renaissance. (Langer 217)

This tendency leads to a sacrifice in plot for description, and the third book is almost entirely dominated by physical and emotional descriptive passages. Francus is irresistible to the Cretan sisters, with “Sa large espaulle, et sa greve, et sa main, / Et le relief honneste de son sein” (3.563-

564). There are several such descriptive passages about Francus, and there are similarly many lengthy descriptions of the sisters (such as the one already cited) which “draw the reader away from epic and into close analysis of the love plot” (Usher 1), especially in Book 3. Most importantly, nearly 900 of the book’s 1520 lines illustrate the emotional state of the sisters, especially Clymene, whose accidental suicide concludes the chapter.

Not only do these erotic and emotional descriptions account for nearly all the book, they also have detrimental effects on Ronsard’s imperial goals for the text; such descriptions repeatedly undermine the narrative’s teleological presentation by keeping both poet and characters focused on private desires rather than collective destiny. Quint’s concept of the genres again illuminates the tensions caused by the inclusion of love plot into epic. Though he does not suggest that the end-driven epic should spurn amorous relations for the hero (indeed, a marriage is necessary for Aeneas to secure his new power in Italy), Quint argues that, as in the Dido episodes, “Epic views all such romance alternatives as dead ends..., stories that, unlike epic’s own narratives of missions accomplished, have no place to go” (34). Indeed, Clymene’s infatuation ends in suicide, and Hyante is fully aware that Francus will abandon her even as she helps him. Quint sees these romance diversions as fundamentally subversive to the primary epic narrative, in that they suggest alternate possibilities to the winner’s teleological view of history. Though Ronsard presented the sisters as irresistibly desirable in the ‘sonnet’ I examined earlier, Francus violently spurns Clymene and appears to feign interest in Hyante only to obtain the prophecy of future kings from her; therefore, Ronsard’s love plots do not risk pushing the hero from his course as much as Virgil’s Dido does. However, though Aeneas is arguably more tempted to remain in Carthage than Francus is in Crete, the *Aeneid* is not nearly as consumed by emotion and description as the *Franciade*.

Epic diverted by romance is not necessarily to be avoided, especially if we look to the success of the epic romance *Orlando Furioso*, but it is detrimental to achieving the nationalistic goals set forth by the Pléiade's longing for a French epic. Problematically, Ronsard's own historical period and recent history fails to provide a clear idea of what such an epic should look like since France experiences no major dynastic change or the arrival of the anticipated Valois Empire. Ronsard seems to think that appropriating ancient Rome's foundational myth will suffice, neglecting the fact that a national French epic needs a fundamentally French foundation. As the *roman courtois* is a truly French, Ronsard's narrative naturally falls into those circular diversions, aided by the poet's own experience in love poetry, and there is no true telos to pull the poet and his hero out of them. Whatever a true French epic would look like, a poem of personal eroticism and individual emotions cannot fulfill the perceived functions of the *Aeneid*.

We must also remind ourselves that the *Franciade*'s four books represent not only an unfinished text, but a narrative barely begun. The first four books of the *Aeneid* depict the hero's path similarly diverted by shipwreck and subsequent amorous entanglements, but the remainder of the text exists to establish the ultimate primacy of imperial future over romance diversion. The obvious question for Ronsard's epic is whether the completed text would have read more as epic with the fulfillment of the hero's destiny that would have overshadowed the early romance plot lines. It is important to note however that it is not merely the inclusion of infatuated female characters that pushes the text into the realm of romance; these moments are less focused on plot and more on the eroticism and emotion that reflects contemporary tastes. This again reflects the fact that Ronsard is not a natural story-teller, and the historical moment does not lead him to a natural narrative. Ronsard stalled on these four books, continuing to revise and edit them rather than moving on to the more martial and imperial plot lines that should have come later in the

text. Even Ronsard declared his motivation defeated following the death of Charles in 1574, whose attempted position as telos had weakened the text from the start. We can, therefore, read the extant books as a continuation of Ronsard's love poetry that claims to be a prelude to an epic narrative.

Even if the completed *Franciade* would have more firmly settled within the boundaries of epic rather than romance, there is a greater problem at the crux of the matter. Quint's genres are defined by the outcome of conflict; the winner writes his teleological epic and the loser, his non-narratological romance. As a point of comparison, most of his analysis rests on the alternative visions of the *Aeneid* and the *Pharsalia* as two products of the same civil conflict. Under the patronage of the first Roman Emperor, Virgil constructs his narrative so that Augustus's victory is always assured; history could not possibly have had another outcome. Lucan composes a counter-narrative to this winner's determinism that Quint describes as "an episodic dismemberment of narrative" (11). This distinction will become essential to my analysis of the *Tragiques* in Chapter 4, but for now, it is important only to understand that the distinction exists. That epic and romance are both the products of resolved conflict is, I believe, essential to understanding the failure of Ronsard's project.

When Ronsard began his project in the early 1550s, he was not writing from the context of conflict. France was enjoying a moment of cultural and political power which, we remember, was the motivation for a national epic to establish the nation's position as the true successor to Rome. However, tension was building between Catholics and Protestants in France as early as the 1520s as persecutions of the new minority group began, and the first divisions in French society were beginning to appear by the time Ronsard began his outline and announced his epic's title. In the next chapter, we will see that Du Bellay was acutely aware of the dangerous tensions

mounting in society in his *Antiquitez de Rome*, though he died two years before the first war breaks out in 1562. Being a poet of the court, it is impossible that Ronsard was ignorant of the nation's position on the brink of conflict²⁷, and his major mistake with the *Franciade* is ignoring the political situation entirely while trying to construct an imperially teleological epic, a goal made all the more impossibly by the fact that there *is* no such French empire, only the hope of one under Henri II.

Combined with the anticlimactic historical moment, the distraction of the ancient world ultimately undermines Ronsard's project by failing to create truly French contexts for the epic. In his examination of the political situation in sixteenth-century France, *Society in Crisis*, Salmon claims that the people's apprehension about the instability of their time led to the interest in the ancient world as a distraction (14). While this distraction led to the production of a great number of artistic works including many by Ronsard, but it also presents yet another obstacle to embodying a sense of Frenchness, especially when considered in light of the socio-political climate of the time. As Hampton notes, "France undergoes a complete political and social collapse in the last years of the sixteenth century. French identity is always at risk during the Renaissance, never quite able to take shape. One cannot "write" the French Nation because, haunted as it is by discontinuity, violence, and fragmentation, it escapes representation" (*Literature and Nation* xi). Ronsard, determined to celebrate a shared cultural ancestry of the French people, ignores completely this increasing fragmentation of identity as the century descends further into violence and disorder. Within this context, it is unsurprising that his plodding efforts fail to advance beyond the romance chapters and into the narrative of imperial teleology.

²⁷ His *Discours des misères de ce temps* first appears in 1562, proving Ronsard is indeed concerned with the sociopolitical situation of the time.

The *Franciade*'s fundamental problem is not only that it ignores societal tension and the violence, but that epic *must* ignore these divisions if it is to celebrate a shared cultural heritage and national sentiment. This contradiction effectively renders the genre impossible at this time. It is particularly unlucky that the first edition of the long-awaited epic was published just one month after the worst and most famous episode of the Wars of Religion, the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre of 1572. However, the problem runs deeper than just the timing of publication and Ronsard's ignoring of the political situation. Even more serious is his ignorance of the necessary context for epic teleology. Ronsard wants to assign the teleological narrative to the Valois dynasty, embodied at the time by a teenage king, all the while ignoring the ongoing conflict that would eventually end with the start of a new dynasty, embodied in one currently fighting for the Huguenots. Yet unlike Augustus, the Valois Charles IX does not emerge victorious from conflict to claim a place as the pinnacle of French power. Salmon describes this troubled period of the end of the Valois dynasty as "seem[ing] almost irrelevant to what came before and after – an interlude, as it were, in a long evolutionary train" (13). While Ronsard could not understand his own time with the same historical perspective, he should still have noticed the circumstances for his epic were wildly different from Virgil's. With no exceptional victory to mark Charles IX (or even his dynasty) as special, the attempt at Virgilian teleological narrative falls flat, like much else that is imitated in the *Franciade*.

The Epic Hero

The last aspect of Ronsard's poem that must be examined to understand its failure to achieve its own goals of extolling national pride is the hero, as the political demands of the genre and its patronage leave Ronsard in an impossible position, that of creating a hero worthy of epic who reflects a young and untried king. In epic perhaps more than any genre, the figure of the

hero is absolutely essential to the text's success; it is the presence of a hero that establishes a text as heroic. Hampton's study of exemplarity in the Renaissance defines textual heroism during this period as "a deliberative rhetoric intended to provoke action" (*Writing from History* 4). As a representative of both the king (also the poem's patron) and the nation he embodies, the hero must be truly exemplary and exceptional. He must be both a source of national pride and its embodiment. He must be the best of his race and stand above his people rather than among them. He must also provide the nation with a shared ancestor who endows the people with a sense of collective identity. Yet as the poem exists to glorify its commissioning ruler and the nation he represents by extension, the hero must in some way reflect or represent the ruler. As Bjaï argues, it is essential that the king be able to see himself in the poem's hero, so the character must be "construit à son image" (19). Aeneas is a proven warrior who emerges victorious from conflict to establish a new age, mirroring Augustus's own rise to power, but Francus' status is preemptively diminished by Charles' lack of accomplishments. In this section, I examine Ronsard's choice of subject, the impact of romance diversions on the hero's mission, and the effect of creating a didactic text for a young king.

Ronsard himself acknowledges the importance of both kings (within the text and without) in the composition of an epic as he highlights the ties between king, epic hero, and nation that were understood even then. In the 1572 *Au lecteur*, the poet states his intentions and motivation for the project:

Ayant donc une extresme envie d'honorer la maison de France, & par sur tout le Roy Charles nefiesme, mon Prince, non seulement digne d'estre loué de moy, mais des meilleurs escrivains du monde pour ses heroïques & divines vertues, & dont l'esperance ne promet rien de moins aux François que les heureuses victoires de Charlemagne son

ayeul, comme scavent ceux qui ont cet honeur de le cognoistre de pres, & ensemble desirant perpetuer mon renom à l'immortalité : fondé sur le bruit commun, & sur la vieille creance des Chroniques de France, je n'ay sceu trouver un plus excellent sujet que cestui-cy. (*Œuvres complètes* 8-9)

The poem's primary purpose is to honor the House of France and especially Charles, as its current head. Ronsard insists (albeit hollowly) that Charles's heroic virtues are worthy of such praise, and the choice of the adjective *heroïques* makes the obvious tie between the king and the genre. Ronsard insists that Charles's virtues *promise* much to his people; this idea of *future* glory and heroic *potential* is reflected in the construction and presentation of Francus in the text. Finally, this passage also indicates Ronsard's desire for a shared cultural identity through his narrative; he chooses "le bruit commun" of belief in old French chronicles as the foundation of the *Franciade*, implying that a national investment in the story already exists; however, I will show that this insistence is a fatal flaw in the poem, for an appropriated and invented Roman myth (however contradiction that description appears) cannot capture the essential Frenchness that a truly French hero, such as a Lancelot or a Tristan, could have done.

Choice of Subject

The relationship between textual hero and patron-king leads to a problem in the choice of subject matter for the *Franciade*'s hero, and while there are aspects of Francus that render him an appropriate choice, others undermine his heroic stature and ability to represent France's exceptionalism through his own. Ronsard needed to endow his hero with a noble ancestry, and as the greatest of the Trojans, Hector is an appropriate father for an epic hero. Even the name serves a hero well in several ways; in the 1587 preface, Ronsard explains the importance of the actual sounds of a name, insisting Francus's is filled with "vrayes lettres Heroïques" (*R*, *U*, and *S*)

(*Œuvres complètes* 347). Within the text, Ronsard explains that Francus is a mispronunciation of the Greek *Phere-Ankos* (lance-bearer), a name intended to provide martial connotations before the hero becomes a proper warrior. Bjaï insists this name represents the idea that Francus is always heroically armed and associates his lance with the scepter of Charles IX (123). Maskell argues that the choice of hero is “entirely appropriate to the aspiration towards national epic which Ronsard dreamed of” and does not contribute to the poem’s ultimate failure (79). Laumonier disagrees, believing Ronsard overly excited by the *Illustrations de Gaule*; because of this text, Ronsard assumed this subject was “essentiellement national” (*Œuvres complètes* v), as he later argued in the passage above. Laumonier pinpoints this misunderstanding of appropriated pseudo-Roman legend (as if it were inherently French) as an essential problem with the *Franciade*. Like Du Bellay, Laumonier argues that a more specifically French subject from medieval tradition would have formed a more appropriate (and therefore more successful) base for an intended national epic.

Despite Francus’ appropriate lineage for an epic hero, there are consequences of this choice that prove detrimental to the exaltation of king and nation that Ronsard hoped to accomplish. In Ronsard’s source material, Astyanax is merely an infant during the sack of Troy; fashioning Francus from Astyanax leads to a hero still waiting to assume his heroic role. The choice to ignore the convention of *in medias res* exacerbates the problem, even though it is necessitated by the similar youth of the poem’s patron. I demonstrated earlier that the delay during Francus’ maturation removes the urgency felt by Aeneas’ band of Trojans. Aeneas and his compatriots are in desperate need of a new home, but Francus’ newly-assembled fleet has little motivation for leaving the comfortable home they have enjoyed since the war. Indeed, they depart to immediate disaster, a shipwreck only a hundred survive. Aeneas’ men are lost from

necessity as they have nowhere to go, but Francus removes his people from safety merely for the purpose of his own eventual glory. Without the desperate need to find a new home, the telos of Paris' foundation is weakened; only the French poet needs Francus to found France rather than remain in the east. Even the gods' push makes little sense when this nation will replace them with its own god (and in the poet's time, claim status as the most Christian nation), leaving the pagan behind to find separate glory in a way Aeneas' new civilization does not. Had Gabriel pushed Francus' departure rather than Mercury, perhaps the telos would resonate more truly with a Christian audience.

While a hero is marked by his exceptionalism, Francus' youth and removal from action undermine any later attempt at heroism as his only claim to exceptionality is his idleness. As James M Redfield summarizes in his foreword to Nagy's *Best of the Achaeans*, "The hero... is not a model for imitation but rather a figure who cannot be ignored; his special excellence is not integration but potency" (ix) (such as an Achilles, wrathful and ferocious, or a Roland, arrogant and brave to a fault). This definition is fundamentally at odds with the character of Francus. First, he is a fully integrated member of society, not exceptional in any way; Helenin describes him to the Trojan refugees as "Ce jeune homme qui par la populace / Vit sans honneur" (1.698-699). Francus's true identity as Hector's son has been kept secret until Mercury's push for departure, so these Trojans are asked suddenly to follow an untried boy who has not been raised to leadership.

Not only does Francus live without honor, he is idle to the point that idleness becomes his defining feature; Ronsard insists upon this idleness no less than eight times in the first book. The first mention of the hero is Jupiter's explanation of saving the boy, and even the king of the gods describes him as hiding without honor among the people, insisting "Je ne veux pas qu'il

languisse en paresse / Comme incogneu, sans Sceptre & sans honneur” (1.150-151). Despite the fact that Helenin tells the Trojans Francus has traveled and learned to be a warrior, he also describes his nephew thus:

Depuis un an ce Prince est de retour
 Acazané, qui mange en vain le jour,
 Lent, nonchalant, sans imiter la trace
 De sa tresnoble & vertueuse race,
 Bien qu’il soit braue, heureusement bien né,
 Et pour hauts faits hautement destiné : (1.723-728)

Francus’ only exceptionalism among his people is his failure to display any trace of their noble heritage. This is an unsettling introduction for a hero meant to represent French national glory. Indeed, this passage begins a theme throughout the text of the promise of Francus’s future glory, all the while showing none in the moment. While this stalling and idleness is clearly modeled on Aeneas’ idling in Carthage, its position at the beginning of the text sets the wrong tone for an epic intended to glorify France. Francus must be young because Charles is as well, so Ronsard begins by showing growth in his hero in an attempt to provide an exemplary figure to inspire his king.

Though the first book shows Francus’ progression from idleness to departure as he assumes command over the Trojan fleet, the young prince remains an unimpressive figure throughout all four books. Nowhere is this more evident than during the fight with the giant, an episode specifically inserted to give the young prince something heroic to do; the blame lies largely on Ronsard, whose talent for romantic and philosophical poetry does not translate into skill at recounting adventures. In Miller’s analysis of the epic hero through the ages, he claims

that in an ideal epic, “the protagonist is indubitably human, though almost always invested with oversized and probably superhuman characteristics and powers” (32). It is often these special characteristics that define the hero (Achilles’ wrath, Odysseus’ cunning, Aeneas’ piety) and ensure that he can be neither ignored nor integrated.

However, in the giant episode, Francus fails to stand out as something greater than human as Ronsard reverts to an eroticized description that highlights his physical weakness. Phovère contemplates his opponent:

Ne le voyant de corps massif ny fort,
 De fier visage, ou d’un horrible port,
 De front severe aux joustes bien à craindre,
 Ains d’un poil blond qui commençoit à poindre,
 De gresle taille & d’œil serain & beau,
 Fresche la main & bien fresche la peau,
 Et d’un regard qui les Graces surmonte (2.1175-1181)

While in many ways this description sets up a David-and-Goliath situation, it undercuts any impression of Francus as a formidable force. Francus is not only physically unimposing, he is described as erotically delicate in a manner befitting medieval romance heroes rather than formidable epic ones. This passage again falls within Langer’s argument that Francus must be charming so as not to be boring, but it therefore feminizes the hero in the lone heroic passage of the extant text. Ronsard’s poetic celebration of the female body (shown in the *Amours* and the description of the Cretan sisters) continues here as he applies the same process to the male epic hero. Francus’ body is fragmented into pieces (his hand, skin, forehead, cheeks, etc), and each is celebrated for its beauty in the manner typical of female love objects. The celebrated body is

then recomposed through the anaphora (here, the repeated “de”) to create an emotional picture of a beautiful young man. Thus Francus becomes an erotic figure (rather than a martial one) during his only heroic passage as the love poet fails to adapt to an epic tone.

Though Ronsard attempts a turn towards heroic strength when Francus defeats the giant, the attempt is undermined by continued eroticism and a return to idleness. Ronsard sets up the giant’s monstrous strength in opposition to Francus, reinforcing the passage’s echoes of David defeating Goliath. Phovère is likened to a “flot courroucé” (2.1283) and Francus “sembloit au bon pilot expert, / Qui plus d’esprit que de force se sert” (2.1287-1288), suggesting his intellect allows him to win the battle. Ronsard however fails to describe exactly how Francus’s intelligence helps him defeat Phovère, leaving the audience to be convinced by the raging-sea/wise-captain analogy; again Ronsard’s talent lies in description, not action. Though both combatants are injured, Francus suddenly finds “la prouesse” (2.1426) and “la vigoureuse force” (2.1442) he appeared to be lacking. After the description of Francus’ delicate beauty, it is difficult to accept this sudden turn, especially as Book 3 immediately follows with more erotic descriptions of the hero through the sisters’ eyes.

Francus wins the battle by remembering Phovère’s weakness in the vein of his heel, and Dicæe praises him as “Vray heritier de la gloire Hectorée” (2.1473). Such descriptors should indicate a shift in Francus, marking the moment when he begins to accept his destiny and assume his role as hero and king for his people. However, the following book proves him not quite so ready to leave behind the idleness of Book 1. Francus despairs that he will never reach Gaul (despite his wandering lasting a small fraction of the sea voyage of either Aeneas or Odysseus) and expresses a desire to die in Crete and “D’un peu de sable entombé sur ce bord” (3.240). The

audience cannot therefore lend credence to Francus' potential to complete the hero's mission and become the foundation of French national glory.

Francus' failure is partially caused by the youth of Charles that the hero is meant to represent, but the inverse problem is also true, that in representing the patron, an eroticized romance hero marked by idleness fails to extol the virtues of Ronsard's ruler as Aeneas does for Augustus. Francus is young and lacks the typical strength of a mature epic hero so that he may be associated with Ronsard's young patron, and Usher in particular notices the problems with this (unfortunately necessary) aspect of the hero: "The first and most obvious problem with that association is that Francus is hardly a stouthearted warrior, not even a dreamy and love-struck wanderer, but some (slightly pale) amalgam of both and which, if supposed to relate to Charles IX, hardly offers a flattering portrait" (xxxvi). Despite the erotic descriptions of Francus designed to make him charming, the love plot fails to render the hero a convincing romantic protagonist; Francus violently spurns Clymene, causing her suicide, and is instructed to pursue Hyante so he can see the prophecy of French kings to come. Therefore, Francus fails as both romantic lead and epic hero, and yet he is still meant to represent Charles. As we have seen Ronsard establish his patron as the telos of the epic, the unimpressive hero, created in the image of Charles IX, only exacerbates the previously-discussed problems of an anticlimactic telos.

Private Romance Hero

Not only does Charles provide a weak telos through the personage of Francus, but the prominence of the romance diversions continues to detract from this telos. As romance is the realm of private matters, compared to the public matters of epic, Francus' representation as romance hero undermines the narrative's telic force that is ostensibly anchored by the public

matter of the future French nation. Maskell argues that Virgil's most important contribution to epic was the importance of the hero's mission, and he pinpoints this as the most fundamental aspect of the *Aeneid* that Ronsard borrows (29). This same idea can also be understood in terms of Quint's analysis of epic teleology, but here it is important to highlight the hero's role specifically.

In order for epic teleology to be convincing, the hero must be fully committed to his mission. This hero's mission is always of a *public* nature; as Hampton articulated earlier, epic is fundamentally a genre of public action. As Jackson summarizes, "A deep-seated principle of all epic poetry is... that public matters are more important than private, and that the great men of epic must subordinate their private desire to their public duty" (11). Quint reads the deaths of Creusa, Anchises, and Dido as the erasure of self that allows Aeneas to become the completely public figure that epic demands (84, 91). Epic teleology only makes sense in the context of public matters; the narrative cannot be driven by a small private matter important only to the hero, it must be driven by a large public matter, like the outcome of a civil war. The romance, with its circular narrative diversions, is the appropriate space for issues of private honor. The French *roman courtois* centers on establishing private honor and identity for the hero with the end goal of winning a woman's love.

Francus, beginning as an untried adolescent with the mere traces of his first beard, is a typical romance hero trying to establish his private heroic identity. Other epic heroes have previously-established honor on which to rest their identity (especially since the texts begin *in medias res*), but Francus, as a reflection of a young Charles, does not: "*La Franciade* met en scène un héros inexpérimenté, un adolescent qu'il faut encore former" (Bjaï 111). Though Aeneas is temporarily sidetracked by a personal relationship with Dido, he had previously saved

his people from the fall of Troy and led the survivors through the wanderings of Book 3, so Dido becomes another obstacle to overcome rather than the focus of the text. Francus has accomplished nothing, remaining hidden and integrated amongst the people; the early romantic diversion therefore becomes the focus of the text rather than another in a series of obstacles.

Epic is held together by the hero's commitment to the mission that should convince the reader that the narrative is truly driven by its end; however, Francus lacks Aeneas' commitment to his hero's mission, so the audience is unconvinced of its capacity to provide a telos in which epic's linear narrative can be anchored. Quint's analysis of epic teleology is essential to understanding the importance of the hero's mission to which he must fully commit; the hero must believe in his own telos for the audience to believe in the text's. From the beginning of the text, Francus seems oddly uninvolved in his own hero's mission. He is content to idle away his youth, and furthermore, he does not receive the divine push towards destiny directly. While Virgil's Mercury visits Aeneas to encourage his departure from Carthage, Ronsard's Mercury appears to the hero's uncle rather than the hero himself; similarly, the shade of Hector comes to Helenin rather than Francus to give assurances of the hero's destiny. In the 1248 lines of Book 1, Francus does not appear as a character until line 793 when a disguised Mars comes to finally motivate the hero. Though Ronsard informs us that Mars' speech "*De Francion enflama tout le cueur*" (1.832), the motivation for the mission has already been undertaken by Helenin. This is supposed to indicate the moment when Francus accepts his destiny and finds the courage to lead his people, but the scene is quickly followed by Andromache's gift of the cloak that highlights Francus's past rather than his future. Even though Ronsard shows Francus motivating the men to depart, the audience has already seen this very thing accomplished first by Helenin while

Francus remains repeatedly tied to his past rather than his future. The *Franciade*'s mission is thereby undertaken without the hero's involvement.

This questionable commitment to the mission transforms Francus into a romance hero set to wandering through events beyond his control as he seeks to establish his personal heroic identity rather than an epic hero driven by the telos of France's future. As previously noted, romance diversions threaten the epic winner's teleological perspective by suggesting alternative possibilities, and these diversions become more dangerous for a hero uninvested in his own mission. Francus' fight with Phovére is a clear example as it plays no role in the hero's mission and therefore represents a romance diversion; lacking prior accomplishments, Francus volunteers for the fight to prove his heroism, but the episode in no way advances the journey towards France's destiny. Instead, it threatens the epic telos in two ways: first, Francus could be killed on this diverted mission, and second, Dicæe offers a betrothal to his daughter as recompense (another trope of the *roman courtois* rather than epic). Even though Francus refuses the marriage offer, insisting destiny requires his marriage to a German, the episode represents the danger Quint sees in romance diversions by suggesting alternative possibilities for a narrative that should be end-driven. Without the hero's complete commitment to his mission, the attempted teleology falls apart.

Ronsard's previously-discussed comfort as a love poet exacerbates the anti-teleological nature of the unconvincing hero's mission; rather than minimize the danger by leaving the question settled at Francus's refusal of marriage, Ronsard allows this diversion to dominate Books 3 and 4. Though Francus has the sense to refute Clymene's sexually aggressive advances, he is at the same time divinely instructed to pursue Hyante. Ronsard draws on Apollonius of Rhodes' dynamic between Jason and Medea to provide the structure for the story in Book 4.

Francus meets Hyante at the temple and begs her to reveal the essential prophecy for France, surprisingly using talk of love rather than imperial glory to persuade the young priestess. In privileging Francus's charmingness over imperial destiny, Ronsard attempts to make his hero less boring, but the cost is his hero's mission. Fighting giants and winning the love of women is a task for the wandering romance hero, not the end-driven epic one.

Not only does Francus use love rather than empire to secure the prophecy (revealing again Ronsard's habit of reverting to the comfort of love poetry), but he fully undermines his own mission by actively denying his own imperial interests, declaring,

Je ne requires richesses ny thresors,

Ny grand empire enflé de larges bors :

Je veux sans plus que ta bonté me face

Voir ces grans Rois qui naistront de ma race,

Et par sur tous un CHARLES DE VALOYS

Qui tout le monde envoira sous ses loix. (4.347-352)

Since the impressive destiny of a large kingdom is reserved for Charles, Francus assumes the role of romance hero, concerned more with private desires than public glory. He seeks no treasure or empire for himself, a problematic claim as the hero's mission rests on his destiny to found Paris; this passage therefore presents Francus actively denying investment in his own mission. Though the hero refuses to stay in Crete with Hyante, the sisters' prominent position within books 2-4 represents such a diversion of epic narrative that the reader is never quite convinced of the mission's importance. Indeed, these diversions proved so destructive to the epic's teleology that Ronsard too found himself unable to move past them and compose beyond Book 4.

Instruction of a Prince

The combination of lack of decisive victory and a teenage patron/king leads to an emphasis in didacticism that puts the final nail in the teleological coffin. An adolescent king required a young untried hero to encourage Charles' own growth. Ronsard had elsewhere proved himself concerned with Charles's education in his 1563 *Institution pour l'adolescence du roi très chrétien*. This desire to contribute to his king's instruction is especially tied to the representation of the young hero who must learn to establish his heroic identity for the future of his people. Maskell's analysis of epic concludes that the genre's purpose was "to excite princes to virtue" (19), and that earlier epics strove to do so in a moral sense while later ones did so in a political sense; either way, the didactic element is not unusual for the genre.

However, the *Franciade* is rare as an epic in that it takes on the structure of a bildungsroman. In attempting to fulfill the didactic role of epic, Ronsard destroys his already feeble attempt at grounding the work in a telos. In order to serve as an epic telos, Charles must have at least the *promise* of greatness, so Ronsard rests his hero's glory upon this promise. As such, Ronsard uses the text to instruct his king on rising to honor, though Leslie observes that "Ronsard's chronicle grows increasingly didactic, as if grasping at the epic tone which eludes it" (26). This becomes the primary function of Ronsard's epic, undermining his intended goal of exciting national pride.

Francus's idleness in Book 1 is an important reflection of Ronsard's impression of his king; he intends to inspire Charles to action in the same way that Mars does for Francus. Usher reads Francus' idleness in Book 1 as a warning to Charles to remove himself from his overbearing mother, Catherine de' Medici. Mercury specifies to Helenin that Jupiter's anger at

Francus's laziness is directed "Contre sa mere & ceux qui le retiennent" (1.293 and repeated again 1.357); Bjaï argues that Jupiter's words are a direct address to Charles. Though Francus appears an unimpressive hero, Ronsard places the blame for his shortcomings firmly on his mother; Andromache neglects Francus' destiny and forces him to live integrated among the people. Bjaï recognizes that mothers often represent an obstacle to epic action, like Thetis' attempt to keep Achilles from war, and he notes that Francus must remove himself from the world of women in order to undertake a heroic adventure (131). Though the hero's mission is indeed a fundamentally male space, his departure fails to remove Francus as successfully from female space as Bjaï seems to think; as the romance diversions demonstrated, the hero's sojourn in Crete constitutes more time spent in the world of women. Despite Ronsard's attempt to incite his king to action along with his hero, his desire to include the prophecy of French kings keeps Francus stuck in the romance plot and spaces dominated by women.

I maintain that the tension between didacticism and imperial narrative undermines the attempt at epic narrative. The main purpose of the Crete episode is to provide Hyante's prophecy of future kings. Throughout the prophetic speech, Hyante uses instructional language that reminds the reader that the parade of kings is primarily instructional: "Pource, Troyen, ne commetz telle faute" (4.1589), "Apren, Troyen" (4.1689). As this was the only book to be read aloud to Charles at court, clearly Ronsard considered this instructional parade of kings to be the most important part of his epic, at least in terms of its public function for the king. The extant text ends with Clovis, who will give birth to France as the most Christian race, but Ronsard follows the prophecy with a direct address to Francus about the ephemeral nature of life:

N'espere rien au monde de certain:

Ainsi que vent tout coule de la main :

Enfant d'Hector, tout se change et rechange :

Le temps nous fait, le temps mesme nous mange :

Princes et rois et leurs races s'en vont,

De leurs trespas les autres se refont.

Chose ne vit d'éternelle durée.

La vertu seule au monde est assurée ! (4.1891-1898)

At no point in the text is the conflict between epic teleology and moral instruction of the prince more pronounced. Ronsard ends the most essential part of the extant poem, the line of kings that will culminate in the glorious reign of Charles IX, with a warning that time destroys all and nothing but virtue is certain in the world. While this is an appropriate sentiment for a text designed to incentivize action and virtue in a young monarch, the teleological epic should recount an unalterable version of history. In giving Charles both advice and warning about what sort of king he should grow to be, Ronsard dismantles the very teleology on which his epic is based. How can Charles serve as the *Franciade*'s telos when it is still so uncertain what type of king he will be? Even his grand future empire is called into question by the prophecy's conclusion. It is perhaps keenly ironic then that Charles will indeed die in 1574, less than three years after the reading, undermining once and for all Ronsard's attempt at imperial teleology. With the death of his already unconvincing telos, it is understandable that Ronsard lost his motivation to write another twenty books; since Charles no longer needed the poem's promise of his future glory or its instruction, there was little point to continuing the composition.

CHAPTER III

DU BELLAY'S *ANTIQUITEZ DE ROME*: THE EPIC, THE ROMANCE, AND THE SONNET

To include in a discussion on epic a text that is not, in any usual sense of the term, an epic may seem at first glance like an odd choice, but Du Bellay's 48 sonnet cycle *Les Antiquitez de Rome* (including the dedicatory *au roy* and the companion piece *Songe*) represents an interesting crossroads between genres that will provide a unique comparison to Ronsard's overly strict adherence to Virgilian epic tradition. The intersection between the form of Petrarchan love sonnet and the imitation of epic subject matter, especially of Lucan's *Pharsalia*, creates a unique literary space in which we can consider both the fascination that Renaissance poets had with various epic traditions and the problems this genre encountered in France. While the *Antiquitez* was not the only work in which a reader could find sonnets about subjects other than love (even Petrarch's *Canzoniere* speaks of more than his love for Laura), it was, however, the first sonnet sequence entirely concerned with non-amorous subject matter. The *Antiquitez*'s elements discussed in this chapter lead me to read the sonnet sequence as an imperial romance; by this term, I mean a romance in the sense of the *Aeneid*'s first half, Virgil's imitation of the *Odyssey* before the transformative *katabasis* in Book 6 that shifts the focus from wandering to empire-building. Similarly, Du Bellay will use the sequence to represent France's cultural wandering, ending with his own other-worldly journey, but he leaves the text open (in romance fashion) for Henri II to continue the shift to his anticipated French empire.

Despite the format, Du Bellay's genre-blending more successfully tackles epic themes as they relate to France's political and social situation in the sixteenth century than Ronsard's strictly epic project. The product of a four year diplomatic sojourn in Rome (1553-1557) as secretary to a cousin, Cardinal Jean Du Bellay, the *Antiquitez* is at the same time an epic of exile, a love poem from a Humanist to Ancient Rome, a meditation on the national suicide that civil war represents, and council to his home country experiencing the beginnings of civil strife in the wake of the Reformation. The text enjoyed great success in France, and was more respected among Du Bellay's contemporaries than the *Regrets*, composed and published at the same time (Hartley 83). Tucker calls the *Antiquitez* "the climax of Du Bellay's poetic achievement in French" (52), noting too that the particularly erudite nature of the work was appealing to both the poet and his contemporaries (4).

It is the *Antiquitez*'s political engagement, particularly notable through the imitation of Quint's archetypal loser's epic (Lucan's *Pharsalia*), and Du Bellay's status as exile that are most responsible for the text's inclusion in this study of epic poetry. As Quint considers epic and romance as two rival versions of the same tradition (8), his generic divisions will allow us to analyze how the *Antiquitez* occupies a space between both. The loser's epic (a story of conflict told from the perspective of the loser) inevitably falls into romance forms of narrative because they want to leave the story open to alternate possibilities so their defeat is not ensured. Of course, there are other ways of conceiving of these genres, but as my primary focus is on the political engagement of epic in France, Quint's terminology is most pertinent. Some critics, like Miller (42-43), are understandably opposed to this tendency to sort 'epics' into dichotomies, as Quint does (though he too acknowledges their interdependence and frequent mixing); however,

this dichotomy of epic and romance provides a useful framework and vocabulary for articulating the blending of traditions.

This chapter considers Du Bellay's genre-blending from the perspective of the poet's own exile in Rome that allows him to reflect on both his home country and epic topoi from new personal and poetic contexts. David Hartley's reading of Du Bellay's poetry concludes that he was the most patriotic member of the Pléiade (xi), and his status as voluntary exile endows his poetry with unique perspectives on France (Hartley 33, 83) that merit attention in this study. In the first section, I consider the *Antiquitez* from the following three poetic perspectives; first the importance of the sonnet as his choice of form and what the tradition of Petrarchan love poetry brings to his subject, then Du Bellay's blend of epic topoi into his love letter to the Rome from which he is exiled, and finally the role of narrative structure in the *Antiquitez* in light of Quint's analysis to examine how the sequence represents an imperial romance.

The second section focuses on the importance of the poet as hero and the hero as poet, drawing ties between Du Bellay and ancient epic heroes as he confronts his dual exile from his contemporary France and from ancient Rome. The final section examines the acknowledgement of political instability in the poems as a counterpoint to Ronsard; where the *Franciade* fails in its refusal (and perhaps inability) to account for the political situation of the day, the *Antiquitez* confronts the problem directly. Du Bellay thus creates a text that speaks to both the aesthetic tastes and sociopolitical concerns of the poet's time. While the ambiguous representation of civil war (as both a destabilizing threat and ordeal through which power may be consolidated) creates a complex system of imagery in the text, Du Bellay's entirely non-traditional 'epic' more innovative than his friend's strict adherence to the genre's perceived norms.

Du Bellay's *Genera Mixta*

Many genre studies focus on classification, defining genre by lists of “do” and “do not”. Renaissance poetic treatises were nearly entirely concerned with these strict demarcations between genres and arranging them into a suitable hierarchy according to theme and purpose. In *La loi du genre*, Derrida declares a second school of genre theory that attempts to understand genre as a product of culture, and Ronsard's desire to see genre as a natural phenomenon causes him to force his writing into a genre that is the product of a different culture. This idea ties to Lukács' that the epic is a product of and specific to ancient times; once a totalizing world view was no longer possible, epic died and the novel was born. Quint too argues that epic died with the warrior aristocracy (322), so the genre only exists successfully in mutated forms. Derrida argues that instead of maintaining focus on strict classifications as most theorists and writers are wont to do, genre benefits from intermingling. This is particularly true when considering a genre out of its time period, as this study does with attempts to revive ancient epic in the sixteenth century. In the previous chapter, Langer articulated the irresolvable tensions between the length of the epic and the aesthetics of the sixteenth-century French court. Langer also notes Du Bellay's change in attitude in the “Poète courtisan” of 1559 when he argues in favor of the sonnet over a long epic that risks becoming tedious in a court that prefers shorter forms (222). As that poem appeared in the year after the *Antiquitez*, we can understand Du Bellay's choice to treat epic subject matter in sonnet form, thereby avoiding the tedium of an excessively long singular poem, like the *Franciade*.

To understand the complex blending of genres Du Bellay effects in this particular text, I will first revisit his poetic theory. In *Deffence et illustration de la langue françoise*, Du Bellay first set forth the Pléiade's goals for advancing French as a great literary language; Smith draws a

parallel between the *Deffence* and the *Antiquitez*: "...the *Deffence* advances a claim that France can aspire to cultural supremacy over all other nations; that patriotic sentiment is found in the *Antiquitez*, ... which hints that the future status of France will rival that of the ancient Romans" (8). Hartley labels the *Deffence* "a patriotic rallying cry" (49) and reads its arguments as a form of national propaganda (20). We saw that Du Bellay clarifies his thoughts on epic under the title *long poème français* (the only form to receive attention in its own chapter) and focuses on the ultimate linguistic benefits to creating a text to stand alongside those of Virgil and Homer, accomplishing for French what Ariosto did for Italian.

Unlike Ronsard, Du Bellay stressed the importance of incorporating medieval French romance tradition into an ancient-style epic to create a text that would bring honor to poet, nation, and language. As Usher notes in his introduction to the *Franciade*, "The Renaissance *long poem*, as Du Bellay defined it, was thus a hybrid that brought together romance, epic, and chronicle, seemingly occupying the space between the wandering we associate with romance plots and the single-mindedness of epic destinies" (xviii). In this, the *Antiquitez* is well-placed to fulfill his definition in all but the poem's length; even read as one long poem (a practice potentially encouraged by the original publication's lack of numbering to separate the poems)²⁸, it only totals 672 lines, including *Songe*. Indeed, Smith argues that the *Deffence* anticipates the *Antiquitez* and *Songe* in its blending of love, politics, and theology (8). As I explore later in

²⁸ Du Bellay's original printing was formatted to deliberately encourage non-linear readings and pairings. While the dedicatory *Au roy* was found on its own page, the remainder of the sonnets were printed two to a page without the numbers now traditionally associated with them. For the most part (the final sonnets break the pattern), the decasyllabic poems (now the odd ones) sat above the alexandrine sonnets, so the reader would see four at once. Thus the group of poems could be read vertically (as current numbering encourages), or horizontally, placing the two top poems in dialogue, or diagonally, or in all of these directions to give different meaning and context to each poem. The sonnets are therefore meant to illuminate the others in its group, not to stand entirely alone.

detail, the *Antiquitez* is indeed positioned between Quint's definition of romance as unnarratable, circular dead-ends and epic's privileging of imperial destiny, though unlike the teleological epic, this sonnet sequence remains open to alternative possibilities (a narrative choice associated with the losing side of conflict); the *Antiquitez* simultaneously insists upon France's imperial destiny, yet repeatedly warns against both pride and civil war that risk tearing it apart. The cyclical structure of the poems' overarching narrative reflects both a characteristic of romance and Du Bellay's conception of history; as the Roman Republic falls, the Empire that takes its place also eventually falls to make way for the next Roman power, that of the Church. The poet highlights the Christian divine as the only possibility of true eternity; this aids the warning, given to both Church and France, to avoid the Roman Empire's hubris that destroyed it. Unlike the teleological epic, the *Antiquitez* must remain open to possibility as the outcome of France's social strife and Henri II's imperial ambitions were yet undetermined; thus he avoids Ronsard's mistake of trying to create a telos where none exists. The sonnet series adheres to Petrarchan traditions while simultaneously steering them into epic and narrative territory. The result is a unique blending of genres that provides an innovative context within which Du Bellay can define his relationship to ancient Rome and his own homeland.

Du Bellay's Choice of Petrarchan Sonnet

In articulating the Pléiade's views on *imitation* as a poetic practice, Du Bellay speaks of the importance of 'adopting' foreign poetic forms into French, forgoing inferior French medieval styles such as the *rondeau*, the *chanson* and the *ballade*. Such forms, he argues, should be reserved for common subject matter, employing instead the "antique érudition" of the *ode* or *élegie* for subjects such as the gods and virtuous men. Du Bellay cites specifically poets such as Horace, Ovid, Virgil and Catullus among those worthy of imitation. Also mentioned is Petrarch

and “quelques moderns Italiens” (*Deffence* 265) (the only contemporaries included), possibly due to their production of successful poetry in the vernacular.

Du Bellay discusses the sonnet specifically, imploring the poet, “Sonne-moi ces beaux sonnets, non moins docte plaisante invention italienne, conforme de nom à l’ode, et différente d’elle seulement pource que le sonnet a certains vers réglés et limités, et l’ode peut courir par toutes manières de vers librement” (*Deffence* 264). Most interesting is the link Du Bellay draws between the sonnet and the ode; though these forms are generally considered much less similar than Du Bellay suggests, he encourages poets to write in these two forms above all others. Sébillet claims the sonnet to be the same as the French *épigramme*, but describes it separately since it is an Italian form borrowed by the French. He insists that any light subject matter is “répugnante à la gravité du sonnet, qui reçoit plus proprement affections et passions graves” (Sébillet 105). While this holds true in the *Antiquitez*, Du Bellay takes this grave passion so far in the *Regrets* as to deliberately mock it, as we will see later. Peletier alters Sébillet’s argument, claiming the sonnet to be “plus hautain que l’Épigramme: a plus de majesté: et est capable de discours grave” (Peletier *Art poétique* 270). Peletier praises Petrarch as the greatest sonneteer, refusing to judge his French contemporaries so that time alone may do so. The most important part of his analysis of the form is that each sonnet should come to illustrious philosophical conclusions, and this chapter demonstrates how the sonnets of the *Antiquitez* illustrate this point.

Since the primary subject of *Antiquitez* is the rise and fall of an empire, a traditional epic format would seem a logical choice. Du Bellay, however, makes a calculated decision to employ a format previously used almost exclusively for love poetry, the sonnet. If Du Bellay preferred a

shorter poetic form,²⁹ a series of odes or elegies would be the next most likely generic candidates. Indeed, Tucker's analysis rests on his label of the *Antiquitez* as "epic-elegy" (53), creating his own term for the unique genre blend. Perhaps Du Bellay's view on the tie between the sonnet and the ode influenced his decision to write as he did. Believing the same subject matter to be appropriate to both poetic forms, the sonnet's structure makes it preferable to the ode's freedom to "courir librement" in this particular sequence. Not only does the set structure of the sonnet reflect the architectural theme so predominant in the *Antiquitez* (indeed, both Sébillet and Peletier insist upon the sonnet's strict structural guidelines in terms of lines, verse divisions, and possible rhyme schemes), but the sonnet's traditions immediately establish a particular relationship between the poet and his subject matter/love object, Rome.

First, it is important to examine the relationship between the *Antiquitez* and Petrarchan conventions that explain Du Bellay's choice of sonnet series for this work. In the classic Petrarchan sonnet and the majority of its imitations, the pained poet expresses his unfulfilled longing for his unattainable mistress, describing her beauty and perfection with hyperbolic, but often vague, praise. Wayne A Rebhorn has argued that the choice of form allowed Du Bellay to shape and conceptualize his relationship with Rome in a way no other form could allow; he refers to Rome as Du Bellay's "imperial mistress" and shows how the poet addresses the ancient city as a lover (612). Rebhorn argues that the *Antiquitez* is not as radical a departure from Petrarchan sonnet tradition as it appears to be at first glance; the choice of form deliberately defines the poet's relationship to the lost empire. This unique usage of an empire as mistress brings a new perspective to the text and allows Du Bellay to engage with epic topoi in a

²⁹ Indeed, he never attempted the type of *long poème* he described in his *Deffence*, perhaps dissuaded by Ronsard's own attempt, as Maskell suggested. However, in *Regrets* s.22, Du Bellay says he is poised to take up the work from Ronsard if he abandons it.

completely fresh context (which Maskell argued was the primary failing of the *Franciade*). Where Ronsard lets romance run away with his epic narrative, Du Bellay does the opposite, infusing epic elements into a traditionally romantic genre, and he does so to great effect. Though the *Antiquitez* breaks with Petrarchan tradition in many ways, I first explore how it provides the foundational tone to the sonnets before acknowledging the incursion of other genres.

In two of the sonnets, Du Bellay addresses Rome directly, much in the manner of a Petrarchan lover. Upon arriving in Rome, the poet discovers that the grand city that had captured his imagination through his study of classical texts has long since disappeared. In the first quatrain of s.5, Du Bellay addresses the city as if lamenting his lover's absence:

Qui voudra voir tout ce qu'ont pu nature,

L'art et le ciel, Rome, te vienne voir :

J'entends s'il peut ta grandeur concevoir

Par ce qui n'est que ta morte peinture. (*Antiquitez* 5.1-4)

This quatrain creates a three-way dialogue between the poet, the reader, and the personified Rome. Many of the sonnets anthropomorphize Rome, here describing the city's body in 5.7 and 5.9. The preoccupation with Rome's body emphasizes its role as the object of the poet's desire, culminating in the word "idole" in 5.12. The poem shifts in the second quatrain to a third-person contemplation of the city as the poet acknowledges the impossibility of direct communication between himself and a Rome more than a thousand years dead: "Rome n'est plus" (*Antiquitez* 5.5). The death of Rome only reinforces the ties between Du Bellay's subject matter and his choice in poetic form; Petrarch's Laura also died within the series of sonnets that immortalize her.

Tucker notices that one of the most important aspects of this sonnet series is the “interdependence of the poet and his possible future readers” (193), and the early poems in the series seek to establish this relationship before the reader continues deeper into the poems. In s.3, Du Bellay encourages the reader to imagine himself a newcomer to Rome who will accompany the poet through his experiences:

Nouveau venu, qui cherches Rome en Rome
Et rien de Rome en Rome n’aperçois,
Ces vieux palais, ces vieux arcs que tu vois,
Et ces vieux murs, c’est ce que Rome on nomme. (*Antiquitez* 3.1-4)

Though s.5 does not directly address the reader, the above lines recall the first quatrain of s.3 so that a clear tie is established between the “nouveau venu” of s.3 and the person “qui voudra voir” of s.5; this connection draws the reader into the conversation between the poet and Rome, if only for the poet to share the irresolvable absence of Rome with his audience. This separation becomes a fundamental part of Petrarchan sonnet tradition as “the space between the courting poet and the worshiped lady becomes immense, the distance between earth and heaven” (Rebhorn 611). Thus the poet is separated impossibly from the object of his desire. Like the Petrarchan lover, Du Bellay is marked by painful solitude in the face of Rome’s irreversible absence.

The direct address to a personified Rome is even more prominent in s.13 where the use of a second person pronoun occurs in every section of the poem, seven times total. Much like the object of desire in a love sonnet, Rome is a passive participant while she is sacked, covered by waves and left with nothing. Du Bellay’s anaphora (lines 1-10 begin with “Ny...”) builds suspense throughout the poem as he describes various tragedies that have befallen Rome until the

complex final tercet: none of these tragedies “Ont tellement ton orgueil abaissé, / Que la grandeur du rien qu’ils t’ont laissé / Ne fasse encore émerveiller le monde” (*Antiquitez* 13.12-14). Throughout the work, *orgueil* reoccurs as a common theme, on both a national and an individual level, as the greatest reason for Rome’s downfall. Yet in this poem, Du Bellay praises Rome’s pride and especially her ability to withstand centuries of destruction; even her greatest fault is twisted into a positive. The very nothingness with which she has been left is now imbued with such grandeur that even Rome’s *rien* is a wonder to the world.³⁰ This type of hyperbolic and antithetical praise is another common element of Petrarchan love sonnets and recurs throughout the *Antiquitez* when Rome is referenced.

The descriptions that Du Bellay uses to refer to Rome represent a common point between the traditional love sonnet and the *Antiquitez*’s imperial subject matter. Such descriptions help define the relationship between poet and Rome. The *Antiquitez* can be seen as either a series of vague descriptions that emphasize impressions rather than the concrete, as Chamard reads them, or as a highly visual emblematic work, as Daniel Russell argues in his article “Du Bellay’s Emblematic Vision of Rome.” While the language often implies a visual image³¹, the specifics of this image are never clearly articulated. In amorous poetry, the poet’s mistress is often described in superlative or hyperbolic terms without any concrete information about her features. For example, Du Bellay’s Olive has “cheveux d’or” and eyes “qui me transperce[nt] l’âme” (*Olive*

³⁰ This recycles a theme from s.2 in which Du Bellay replaces the Seven Wonders of the World with the seven hills of Rome: “Les sept coteaux romains, sept miracles du monde” (*Antiquitez* 2.14).

³¹ Russell notes that visual verbs like *regarder*, *voir*, and *apercevoir* occur in more than three-fourths of the sonnets in *Antiquitez* and *Songe* (98). We must also keep in mind the full title of the *Antiquitez*’s companion piece, *Songe ou vision sur le mesme sujet*. Clearly Du Bellay intends to emphasize the visual aspect of both works repeatedly.

10.1, 4), but descriptions of her are never more specific. The ideal of beauty she represents is much more important than her earthly physical features.

While Du Bellay has moved away from his younger love sonnets in the *Antiquitez*, the style in which he describes his new mistress Rome is similar. The vocabulary used privileges the physical, with frequent repetition of words such as *murs*, *architecture*, *arcs*, *palais* and especially *tombeau*. Their destruction is also physical, a repeated insistence on *poudre* and *cendre*, metonyms for death that are particularly appropriate for the death of monuments. Yet despite the physicality of the words, there are no specific descriptions and the reader is left to conjure up images herself based on the *grandeur* so often invoked. Rome is described in such superlative terms that its very name becomes a hyperbole: “Rome seule pouvait à Rome ressembler, / Rome seule pouvait Rome faire trembler” (*Antiquitez* 6.9-10). Continuing the hyperbolic and antithetical descriptions, the city even serves as its own tomb: “Rome de Rome est le seul monument” (*Antiquitez* 3.9). This statement is both literal and poetic. The city that Du Bellay (and even a modern visitor) sees is not only situated on top of the ruins of the old, but the dead monuments remain visible and incorporated into the newer city. While the physical city serves as a monument (or tomb) for the old, the line also conjures a Petrarchan hyperbole: only Rome is worthy of commemorating itself. Tucker however calls attention to the ambiguity in this line, arguing that the poet intends the name itself to stand as monument after the disappearance of its physical splendor (85). Both interpretations fit Du Bellay’s line and the themes highlighted throughout the text.

The vague imagery of the *Antiquitez* is thrown into sharper relief when immediately followed by *Songe ou Vision*, a highly visual series of fifteen sonnets, as the secondary title implies. An apocalyptic and prophetic dream sequence, *Songe* describes a series of destructions

shown to the sleeping poet when “un démon apparut à mes yeux” (*Songe* 1.5). Almost every sonnet begins with some variation of “je vis” and the verb “voir” is repeated several times in each poem; both the poet and his sight are consistently present throughout the series.³² While the *Antiquitez* mentions the monuments and buildings of Rome without any specificity, *Songe* is filled with detailed descriptions such as the following:

Sur la croupe d’un mont je vis une fabrique
De cent brasses de haut : cent colonnes d’un rond
Toutes de diamant ornaient le brave front :
Et la façon de l’œuvre était à la dorique. (*Songe* 2.1-4)

Gone are the vague descriptions of the *Antiquitez* in favor of precise details. The specificity of the descriptions in *Songe* reflect another popular aspect of romantic poetry from the early Renaissance, the blazon, a form dedicated to separating and praising precise parts of a woman’s body. Du Bellay describes the temple of s.2 and the great obelisk of s.3 in detail. As pieces of Rome, they bear the same synecdochial relationship to the larger city as the parts of a woman described in separate blazons do to her body as a whole. The major difference is that each partitioned aspect of Rome then meets with destruction.

Most of the sonnets have equally precise descriptions of marvelous structures that are subsequently humbled, not merely covered in ash and dust as in the *Antiquitez*, but in a specific manner: “...un soudain tremblement / Faisant crouler du mont la plus basse racine, / Renversa ce beau lieu depuis le fondement” (*Songe* 2.12-14). Human pride is repeatedly crushed by heaven throughout *Songe* in a prophetic warning to would-be empires like Rome. As we are now moving into epic territory with the question of empire, I will continue this discussion in the following

³² We will explore the importance of the poet’s position as witness both later in this chapter and in our discussion of d’Aubigné’s first-hand account of the civil war in France.

subsection to see the role *ekphrasis* plays in the genre. This sort of visual prophecy, represented here in *Songe* as the destruction of human grandeur, is the first of several elements which tie the *Antiquitez* with epic.

Epic Topoi in the “Antiquitez”

Despite so many borrowings from the traditional sonnet form, the *Antiquitez* as a whole does not read like a love sequence. While the pain of the poet at the unattainability of the lost Roman Empire is palpable and strongly reminiscent of the Petrarchan lover's inability to approach the object of his desire, the *Antiquitez* is primarily concerned with the fall of a great civilization. Before understanding the sonnet series within the context of epic and romance theory, let us examine the epic topoi Du Bellay incorporates into his text. While the poetic descriptions of artifacts is not as much a standard element of epic as, say, the invocation of the muses, the beginning *in medias res* or the battle scenes, I begin our discussion here because it follows directly from the examination of Du Bellay's Petrarchan descriptions of Rome.

The physicality of the imagery in the *Antiquitez* as well as *Songe* can be tied to an element found in several epics, ekphrasis of a physical artifact (a decorated shield or a painting) that often serves a prophetic purpose. Horace's declaration *ut pictura poesis* became an important staple for Renaissance poets, despite the fact that their idea was a slight misinterpretation of the original assertion; this point will be important for understanding the visual aspect of the *Antiquitez* and several epics. Horace defended the merits of poetry against the prevailing belief that painting was the only art form worthy of critical attention. Renaissance poets took a slightly different lesson from these words and tied painting and poetry even closer together, insisting that they were, in fact, fundamentally the same. Thus, poets frequently

described their poetry in visual terms that claim the poem to be essentially a painting for the reader.

At several points in the *Antiquitez*, Du Bellay articulates precisely this belief that poetry is a painting in words. In the dedicatory sonnet *au roy*, he describes his intention to present “...ce petit tableau / Peint, le mieux que j’ai pu, de couleurs poétiques” (*Au roy* 3-4). Not only do these lines show clearly that Du Bellay thought of his poetic words as colors to a painter, but the enjambment in the sentence stresses the word “peint” so that it cannot be ignored. By introducing the *Antiquitez* in this way, Du Bellay forces the reader to engage with the work as a painting, or a series of *tableaux*; the breakdown of epic subject matter into separate sonnets mirrors the breakdown of empire into ruins and scattered artifacts. This theme of poetry as painting is repeated throughout the work, despite the general vagueness of the descriptions that we have already seen. In s.5, Du Bellay addresses Rome and describes its lost grandeur in similar terms as a still life, calling it “ta morte peinture” (*Antiquitez* 5.4). In s.25, he laments his inability to sing Rome as Orpheus would, to rebuild it as Amphion, or to paint its portrait like Virgil: “Pussé-je au moins d’un pinceau plus agile / Sur le patron de quelque grand Virgile / De ces palais les portraits façonner” (*Antiquitez* 25.9-11). This passage is remarkable because Orpheus was a musician and Amphion a builder through his music, but the language used to describe the poet Virgil is that of a painter. Since Virgil was a major poetic source for Du Bellay, the emphasis on the visual aspect of poetry is evident. Additionally, the emphasis on creating *portraits* of palaces rather than palaces themselves reflects Du Bellay’s poetic process in the *Antiquitez*; rather than make Ronsard’s mistake of trying to rebuild the Roman Empire in a non-imperial France, Du Bellay embraces ruin to create something new.

The tradition of ekphrasis associated with epic action can be traced back to Homer and his description of the shield of Achilles in *Iliad* Book 18. After Patroklos is killed by Hector, Achilles vows to rejoin the battle, and his goddess mother Thetis asks Hephaestus to forge him the armor that will allow his aristeia and the defeat of the Trojan prince. The final two hundred lines of the book describe the shield in detail, and the overall effect is that of a miniature cosmos, as discussed in the previous chapter. Centuries later, Virgil imitated this scene and gave it greater depth, adding the element of imperial prophesy to Aeneas' shield, likewise forged by Vulcan. We have already seen the importance Quint assigns to this scene as the key to the *Aeneid's* imperial teleology. The dual point of view, that of the hero who does not understand the images he sees and that of the reader who does, is explained by Vulcan's prophetic capabilities which begin the description of the shield:

illic res Italas Romanorumque triumphos
 haud vatum ignarus venturique inscius aevi
 fecerat ignipotens, illic genus omne futurae
 stirpis ab Ascanio pugnatique in ordine bella. (*Aeneid* 8.626-629)

Here, the past and future are in play with each other; the "futurae" represents the perspective of Aeneas and even Vulcan, but the perfect participle "pugnat" plays off the fact that, for the poet and the reader, the actions described on the shield have already happened. Many of the events depicted on the shield were described by the shade of Anchises in Book 6, but their inscription on a physical artifact adds gravity to their content. The art here allows Aeneas to appreciate his descendants' destiny in a way words alone cannot do. It allows the poet to communicate with the reader through the hero as he gazes on the images meant for the reader, not the hero, to comprehend in their entirety. Similarly, in the reader's imagination, the prophecy becomes a

comprehensive image rather than a series of events described sequentially. Of course, for the reader, even the physical shield is composed of only words, but it nevertheless allows Aeneas, so reluctant to fulfill his purpose throughout the first half of the text, to communicate the acceptance of his destiny by picking up the shield and literally carrying the future on his shoulders.

The importance of this moment is evidenced by Ronsard's imitation in Francus' cloak that I examined in the previous chapter. In his attempt to recreate ancient epic as precisely as possible, Ronsard clearly identified the ekphrastic description as an essential imitable moment. While the description of physical artifacts takes a different approach in the *Antiquitez*, the prominence of such descriptions throughout the text underlines the incursion of epic into Du Bellay's sonnets. While some epic artifacts prophesy the future, as with Aeneas' shield, and others underscore the hero's ancestral past, as Francus' cloak does, Du Bellay's artifacts embody both past and future; their destruction serves as a symbolic reminder of the pride that destroyed the Roman Empire and as a warning to France to avoid the same fate that befell her cultural ancestor.

The diamond obelisk described in *Songe* s.3 is a quintessential example of how such descriptions function in the text. The diamond is "dix piedz en carré" (*Songe* 3.2) with a golden urn at the peak containing the ashes of Julius Caesar. The base is a pedestal of "quatre grans lyons d'or" (*Songe* 3.10) so that the impressive monument is surrounded by the precious metal at both top and bottom. Despite the grandeur of the obelisk, the poet sees it suddenly struck by a flash of lightning from heaven, thereby destroying the monument to Rome's great leader for its ostentatious pride. The poet's intent is ambiguous; the *memento mori* encourages France and Henri II (to whom the text is dedicated) to avoid the same fate as Rome while simultaneously insisting on the necessity of such hubris to create a grand empire like Rome's. Perhaps then Du

Bellay warned against *individual* hubris of a ruler, in the manner of Julius Caesar, while simultaneously understanding that the national pride is necessary to rival a civilization such as Rome; indeed, as Tucker labels Du Bellay the most patriotic of the Pléiade, this interpretation follows logically. Regardless of the nature of such hubris, the description of physical artifacts allows Du Bellay to tie the past and the future together effectively as it speaks simultaneously to both. As this relationship between Rome's past and France's future is central to the *Antiquitez*, the role that ekphrastic descriptions play is essential.

Though visual imagery and physical artifacts often play an essential role in prophecy for epic, there are several more elements common to the *Antiquitez* and epic that are more clearly established topoi than the ekphrasis. One such element is the traditional invocation of the muse or muses (a popular tradition continued by Renaissance poets), though once again, Du Bellay finds an innovative context for the tradition. After the dedicatory sonnet to Henri II, the first sonnet in the actual text is an invocation of the "Divins esprits" (*Antiquitez* 1.1). Since classical epic begins with an invocation of the muse or muses, a natural assumption is that Du Bellay follows tradition in asking the muses to inspire him with *fureur poétique*.³³

³³ For Renaissance poets, the idea of *fureur poétique* was a popular way of conceptualizing the idea of divine inspiration. Derived from Plato's *Ion* and *Phaedrus*, many poets espoused this belief that all poetic inspiration and skill came directly from a divine source (the muses for the ancients and the Christian divine they represented for later poets) rather than any innate skill of the poet. Du Bellay's fellow Pléiade member Pontus de Tyard is particularly associated with the concept through his *Solitaire premier, ou Discours des Muses, et de la fureur poétique* (1552), and Castor specifies that he provides the background against which Pléiade attitudes about divine inspiration should be understood (33). Tyard defined four types of *fureur*: poetic from the Muses, religious mysteries from Bacchus, prophecy from Apollo, and romantic frenzy from Venus. Tyard describes poetic frenzy as "un ravissement de l'âme" (*Solitaire premier* 4.2) that provides the only way for the soul to approach the realm of Platonic ideals (Chamard 145). Ronsard too discusses *fureur poétique* in the *Abregé*, when he defines poetry itself as a moral virtue, indicated by the willingness of the muses to enter into the poet's soul to direct his work. Castor underlines the importance of this to Ronsard, claiming him to be "most emphatic about this" (26). This idea

The second half of the first line, however, indicates that the poet is speaking to dead humans, not muses, whose “poudreuse cendre” (*Antiquitez* 1.1) lies in tombs under the ruins of their city. In citing the immortality of their “beaux vers” (*Antiquitez* 1.3), it becomes apparent that Du Bellay is speaking to the ancient poets. He walks three times around their tombs and speaks to them directly throughout the poem, culminating in the declaration, “J’invoque ici votre antique fureur” (*Antiquitez* 1.12). It is interesting that here Du Bellay does not invoke the *fureur* of the muses directly, but rather uses the ancient poets as an intermediary between himself and these ancient pagan deities.

There could be several reasons for this, one being the profound connection Du Bellay feels with the ancient poets, who, through study and imitation, are Du Bellay’s own muses as they inspire and direct his writing like the muses did for the ancients. As indicated by the writing of his *Deffence*, the ancient poets served as evidence of the supremacy of Greek and Latin for the Pléiade. Hoping to achieve the same for French through his own poetry, Du Bellay clearly feels a kinship with the ancient poets and hopes to recreate their status on a public level (for France) and a personal level (for his own prestige and legacy). As we saw with the *Franciade*, this was precisely the envisioned dual goal for a French epic. It is through these imitable poets that Du Bellay discovered Rome, and this sonnet makes clear his intention to sing of their glory, not just Rome’s. The poem closes with the line “Je vays chantant vostre gloire plus belle” (*Antiquitez* 1.14), and its position indicates the emphasis Du Bellay puts on the singing of the poets’ glory.

Alternatively, perhaps Du Bellay believes the influential power of the Muses to have died with their civilization, so he avoids attempting an unsuccessful invocation of them (as at the

of *fureur divine* is essential for understanding how Pléiade poets conceived of the writing process and by extension Du Bellay’s textual encounters with the ancient poets.

beginning of the *Regrets*); instead, he invokes the poet themselves in an attempt to find inspiration through their *fureur*. A third possible explanation is that the devout Catholic did not wish to directly invoke a pagan deity, but this explanation seems unlikely for two reasons: by this time, the muse Urania had already been re-appropriated as the muse of Christian poets, and in the *Regrets*, Du Bellay does not hesitate to call upon the muses directly in the dedicatory ode and again (in an unsuccessful invocation) in s.6.

The fourth explanation is a degree of caution the poet displays in regards to *fureur*. In the sonnets that focus on the destruction of the civil war, notably s.23 and s.24, Du Bellay cites the “fureur de la civile rage” (*Antiquitez* 23.28) as the reason for the auto-destruction [“l’aveugle fureur, qui cause les batailles” (*Antiquitez* 24.1)]. Interestingly, d’Aubigné too uses the phrases “la fureur civile” and “la bêtise civile” (*Fers* 424, 601) when describing the French civil war, indicating that the association between *fureur* and violence was well-established beyond Du Bellay’s writings. Since the word is so strongly associated with the cause of civil war, an obvious concern in Du Bellay’s time, it makes sense that the poet distances himself from the concept at the beginning.

This introductory sonnet will be the first of several interactions the poet has with the dead Romans, a theme which brings us to the next topos of traditional epic, the journey to the underworld. While there is neither a physical journey as described in the *Aeneid*, nor the ecstatic journey of the poet’s soul to heaven as in the *Tragiques*, there is nonetheless a rapport established between the poet/visitor and the defunct city and its citizens. Indeed, the second quatrain of the first sonnet opens a connection between the poet and the underworld as he attempts to invoke the souls of the ancient poets:

Si des humains la voix se peut étendre

Depuis ici jusqu'au fond des enfers,

Soient à mon cri les abîmes ouverts

Tant que d'abas vous me puissiez entendre. (*Antiquitez* 1.5-8)

Here Du Bellay opens the abyss between himself and the underworld to make himself heard by the long-dead Romans. Like Odysseus calling the souls with an offering of blood, Du Bellay offers his own voice to the poets; as his muses, they will speak again through the Frenchman. He hopes the ancient poets can hear his supplication for inspiration, but also so they can hear his address to their city. The text begins this way to establish the line of communication between the living and the dead that will be maintained throughout the poet's reflections on the collapsed civilization.

Sonnet 15, in which Du Bellay addresses the builders of Rome, is the other most explicit example of the dialogue between the living and the dead. Though Aeneas' *katabasis* in Book 6 is the most famous of underworld journeys, we cannot neglect the influence of Odysseus' differently-formatted journey, especially in conjunction with s.15. In Book 11 of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus and his men travel to the underworld to consult the prophet Teiresias, but where Aeneas wanders through the land of the dead guided by the Sybil, Odysseus' *nekylia* calls the dead souls to him at the place where the river Styx meets the Acheron. Odysseus describes "... the souls / of the perished dead gathered to the place, up out of Erebus" (*Odyssey* 11.36-37). There is a clear division maintained between the living who control access to the sacrificial blood and the dead souls who come to drink it before retreating back down into the underworld.

The emphasis on irreversible division between living and dead is key to the themes of the *Antiquitez*. This division was mimicked in s.1 as Du Bellay calls over the abyss in an attempt to call the souls of the dead poets to him, and it is expressed even more acutely in s.15. Lamenting

the physical ruins of the once-great city, Du Bellay addresses the “Pâles esprits, et vous ombres poudreuses” (*Antiquitez* 15.1) who built Rome and repeatedly asks them to speak. He calls the dead, but they are stuck beyond “les ténébreuses / Rives de Styx non passable au retour” (*Antiquitez* 15.5-6) and do not answer his inquiry into their feelings about the destruction of their hands’ work. This distinct divide between the worlds of the living and the dead is significantly better-suited to the tone of the *Antiquitez* than a Virgilian journey of the hero’s living flesh into the world of the dead. The predominant theme in the series is the inability to reconnect with a lost past, so it is fitting that such a clear and impassable line be drawn between the living and the dead, the present and the past.

For the third epic topos in the *Antiquitez*, I turn to s.21, in which Du Bellay uses a common metaphor of the ship of state. Many epics include an important scene in which the hero’s ships are buffeted by a storm at sea; a storm drives Aeneas and the surviving Trojan fleet to Carthage, Odysseus suffers several sea storms that prevent him reaching Ithaka, the Argonauts’ homecoming is likewise delayed by storms, Lucan’s Caesar sets sail in a storm only to end up back where he started,³⁴ and Francus’ departure is immediately met by the storm that lands him on Crete. In all cases, the hero weathers the storm and eventually arrives where he needs to be. Maskell labels this the storm-shipwreck-recital structure and, as we saw in the previous chapter, notes the importance of Ronsard’s use of it in the *Franciade*. Interestingly, the wandering ship (or sometimes boat) is the image Quint most forcefully associates with romance, and he highlights its frequent incursion into the loser’s epic. As the *Antiquitez* is an epic of loss of empire, the ship buffeted by waves is doubly fitting.

³⁴ Though it is worth noting that in this epic where the identity (and even existence) of the hero is debatable, Caesar is clearly the villain of the conflict as he is responsible for the end of the Republic.

Where Ronsard served up this epic topos in a standard (and therefore stale) manner, Du Bellay finds the new context for his idea that provides intriguing originality. By combining the metaphor of the ship of state and the epic topos of the storm at sea, Du Bellay places the state of Rome itself in the position of the epic hero buffeted by the waves. The ship of Rome is “par tant d’ondes ravie” (*Antiquitez* 21.5) but does not succumb to foreign adversity during its imperial campaigns, specifically regarding the Punic wars. However, upon returning home, “Dessus le port se void faire naufrage” (*Antiquitez* 21.14). Like Agamemnon, Rome survives a lengthy foreign war only to be destroyed by discord within its own home, in this case, the civil wars that begin as a result of the destruction of Carthage; without a foreign enemy, Rome turns on itself. This is a key point in the *Antiquitez* to which we will return shortly when we examine the political engagement of the text.

In *Songe*, Du Bellay uses the same imagery of the ship to refer to the Church of Rome,³⁵ though the poem’s imagery is deliberately equivocal to encourage multiple simultaneous readings. In *Songe* 13, he witnesses a ship laden with treasure overcome by a storm. *Antiquitez* s.13 also saw ancient Rome covered by a wave, but in *Songe* the ship of Rome resurfaces from beneath the wave once the riches have washed away into the sea. The storm in this sonnet is generally understood to represent the Reformation that will attack the Church; the fact that Du Bellay’s ship resurfaces without its superfluous treasure indicates his hope that the Catholic Church will purify itself of excess and corruption when confronted by the Reformation. Like the epic hero buffeted by the waves, the Church-as-hero is ultimately strengthened by the ordeal. Another possible interpretation can easily follow the theme of the *Antiquitez* and *Songe*; both strongly stress the dangers of hubris for a civilization, specifically citing such pride as the reason

³⁵ The religious imagery in *Songe* is more pronounced than in the *Antiquitez*, and I examine both works’ theme of Catholic Rome as the successor to ancient Rome later in the chapter.

for the fall of ancient Rome. The vision's ship can therefore represent ancient Rome's grand monuments and earthly pride swept away as the ship resurfaces as the new Catholic Rome.

Like much of the *Antiquitez*'s imagery, this ship also references the past in addition to the future; the Roman Republic succumbed to the violence of civil war, but eventually emerged even more powerful as the Roman Empire. This past-looking interpretation leads to another forward-looking one as Du Bellay therefore simultaneously suggests the same example from France; as the self-appointed 'most Christian' nation is buffeted by the Reformation with the Church, Du Bellay anticipates it will emerge stronger from conflict as well. Just as the poems are positioned to encourage multidirectional dialogues, so are the symbols equivocal so that the reader can appreciate the ambivalence of the images. In all interpretations, Rome has, like the epic hero, survived the storm that might have destroyed it only to reemerge with consolidated power and free of decadent excess.

As in the sonnet described above, there are moments in the text where Rome itself serves as epic hero. Rome is frequently personified as both city and empire (the city being both center and synecdoche of the Empire), and the multi-layered meanings of the name are often simultaneously invoked for the reader. The most important tie between personified Rome and epic lies in the common sixteenth-century term for the genre, *œuvre héroïque*. Rome most frequently takes an active role as Du Bellay describes its martial and imperial successes. In s.4, Rome-as-empire is personified as a giant whose head reaches above the stars, "Et d'un pied sur Thetis, l'autre dessous l'Aurore, / D'une main sur le Scythe, et l'autre sue le More" (*Antiquitez* 4.2-3). By placing Rome's hands and feet at the extremities of the world, Du Bellay turns the Empire into an imposing humanoid figure that literally encompasses and dominates the globe. This powerful body established in s.4 takes a more active role in s.8, conquering the world "Par

armes et vaisseaux” (*Antiquitez* 8.1) and “ayant rangé tout pouvoir sous sa main” (*Antiquitez* 8.9). Again personified in a physical body, Rome is able to achieve the martial acts associated with the epic hero. In each epic poem, the hero’s fulfillment of his role includes martial encounters and hardships at sea.

To a Renaissance Humanist, Rome means both Catholic Rome as the seat of the Church and the ancient Rome of texts; they are both the same and separate in the mind, a fact Du Bellay plays on in his own descriptions of the city/Empire. Du Bellay and his reader are both consistently aware of the multiple connotations for each encounter of the word ‘Rome.’ As the Roman Republic fell and arose strengthened as the Empire, so did the Empire fall and opened the way for Catholic Rome to establish its global dominance. In Du Bellay’s time, this new version of an imperial Rome is under assault from the Reformation (again arriving from the north as the Goths who sacked Rome and ended the Empire). In the final section of this chapter, I explore the dual successors of ancient Rome as France and the Church while examining the political engagement of the *Antiquitez*. For here, it is enough to highlight the multiple, simultaneous implications of each reference to Rome in the sonnet sequence.

Playing on the idea of the body politic, Du Bellay gives both Imperial and Catholic Rome an actual body so that it can take on the role of hero at different parts throughout the text. While Du Bellay himself serves as hero in the overall series (a theme explored shortly), many individual sonnets, like the episodes of an epic or romance, place Rome itself in that role. This can be read as part of Du Bellay’s attempt to resurrect the dead Empire by giving it a body, in addition to a useful poetic device to encourage the reader’s emotional connection to ancient Rome; in taking a human form, its death becomes all the more potent. Though as personified

Rome is frequently a passive recipient of violence as it is sacked and torn down by barbarians from the north, perhaps tragic hero is a more appropriate label here than epic one.

Narrative Structure

The final and most important element of the *Antiquitez* to explore in terms of poetic genre is the narrative structure of the sonnet sequence. If we return to Quint's analysis of epic and romance, we can understand Du Bellay's text as simultaneously fitting both in contradictory and complementary ways. Quint understands the genres as "two rival traditions of epic" (8), indicating that the loser's epic, whose narration tends towards romance, is in fact a subgenre of epic and not entirely separate. As Miller explains the relationship between the genres, "romance intends to be literally diverting, and its diversions don't fit well with the linear plotting of epic and the epic's relentlessly etiological imperative. Yet the two genres are continually mixed, if not confused" (47). Thus it is not entirely surprising that Du Bellay's already genre-breaking sonnet sequence is able to blend elements of both at once.

Here I explain the reasons for calling the *Antiquitez* an imperial romance, modeled on the *Aeneid*'s first half before the turn to the more martial (and importantly, imperial) second half in Italy. Enough of the *Antiquitez* is imitated from the *Pharsalia*, Quint's archetypal 'loser's epic', to associate the sonnet series with loss and exile, but the anticipation of future empire (under Henri II) leads me to read the *Antiquitez* in this manner; there is loss and wandering at the apparent mercy of Fortune, but all while the text maintains the promise of an eventual imperial future that proves Fate directed the action all along. Indeed, Hartley explains, "there is no doubt that the vision of increasing dominion for France which informs Du Bellay's patriotism owes

much to Virgil” (15). Of course, civil war and Henri’s premature death will prevent this true French dominion, but the poet knew neither of these at the time of composition.

For Quint, one of the major distinguishing factors between the genres is the fact that the loser’s account is fundamentally unnarratable (11). Where the winner creates a teleological narrative in which all events lead to their inevitable victory, the loser creates a circular, wandering non-narrative that remains open to alternate possibilities, driven by Fortune rather than epic’s Fate. To make sense of his loss, the loser must wander in a non-linear progression, as that linearity would suggest their defeat was as assured as the victors’ epic insists. However, we must remember that even though it is the quintessential model of imperial politicized epic, the *Aeneid* is indeed a romance in its first half. Quint points to this assignment of the romance wandering to the loser’s side of conflict as the cultural legacy of the *Aeneid* (9, 137); it is specifically this shift in the *Aeneid* (from loser’s circularity to epic’s linearity) that is picked up as the defining characteristic by later poets, though not necessarily consciously. Fleeing the destruction of their home, the Trojans wander in a romance circular fashion, trying unsuccessfully to recreate their lost city, before Aeneas passes through the underworld and accepts his linear destiny that will lead to the telos of Augustus.

This pre-epic romance in the *Aeneid* will be the key to understanding the combination of the circular non-narrative structure of the *Antiquitez* and its imperial overtones. It is specifically the *Antiquitez*’s dialogue with both lost ancient Rome and the poet’s contemporary France that allows both genres to exist simultaneously in the same poem; much in the same way that the Trojans wander and lament their loss before leaving the past behind to accept their fate, France must lament the irreversible loss of ancestral Rome before solidifying its own imperial destiny as Rome’s cultural, political, and literary successor.

As the telos or lack thereof is the key to the politicization of epic in Quint's argument and provides the framework for the narrative structure of any epic or romance, let us begin there. We saw in the previous chapter that Virgil's telos is the founding of the Roman Empire, embodied in its first emperor Augustus, and that Ronsard failed to create an equivalent telos in Charles IX due to the lack of strong leadership, the absence of a decisive victory to incite a change in status quo, and the disappearance of even the promise of future empire. The *Antiquitez*'s dedicatory sonnet *au roy* implies that the great French empire under Henri II would serve as an appropriate telos, yet Du Bellay leaves the narrative turn to such a telos to the king himself; as we will see in detail at the end of the chapter when we examine the political dialogue within the text, the poet intends Rome's destruction through civil war as both warning and hope to Henri and the Church to avoid the fate of destruction and emerge from the conflict stronger.

The warning is all the more potent because of this first sonnet's promise of imperial glory to which Henri II aspired (as evidenced by the motto on his emblem, *Donec totum impleat orbem*). Du Bellay offers the poems of Rome to his king "Que vous puissent les Dieux un jour donner tant d'heur / De rebastir en France une telle grandeur" (*Au roy* 9-10). It is telling that Du Bellay suggests a French empire will bring glory to the *gods*, not *God*. In some ways, this is another tie between the text and epic; the reference to the gods is a nod to ancient culture and the gods' heavy hand in steering epic narrative. Secondly, this emphasizes the distinction between the Church's role as spiritual empire and France's as secular power. Since both were major political powers in Europe, Du Bellay had to be careful not to present France as a rival to Rome's power.

As Smith explains, "The *Antiquitez* (Du Bellay declares) are patriotic poems: in bringing back to life the ancient Romans, he prefigures that universal dominion... which France will

enjoy” (19). Hartley too notices Du Bellay’s tendency towards the patriotic, devoting an entire book to this element of his poetry; surprisingly, his analysis omits the *Antiquitez* despite Du Bellay’s own declared patriotism in hoping Henri II will reconstruct the glory of Rome through an imperial France. Rather than repeat Ronsard’s mistake in creating a telos of an empire that does not yet exist, Du Bellay essentially writes the first half of France’s Virgilian epic, the part focused on purging the past, and leaves the imperial future to his king to create. Unfortunately, both Henri II and Du Bellay met with untimely deaths, and the dream of a truly imperial Valois France was never realized.

Du Bellay taps into the Virgilian idea of the inevitable glory of the Roman Empire (thereby implying the same for France) in s.16. The sonnet uses the dominating form of each element (a tidal wave, a violent storm, and a raging fire) as similes for the power of Rome; each builds in power and magnitude until it crashes down. First, a great wave, “Une montagne d’eau” (*Antiquitez* 16.2), rises and builds as the power of Rome, only to come crashing against a rock, pushed by the wind. In the next quatrain, a raging storm builds momentum until the wind suddenly stops and causes it to cease. This simile is followed by a hundred flames that seem to burn as one towards the sky until they are suddenly extinguished. The final tercet, often holding the key to an *Antiquitez* sonnet, drives the point home:

.... Ainsi parmy le monde

Erra la Monarchie, et croissant tout ainsi

Qu’un flot, qu’un vent, qu’un feu, sa course vagabonde

Par un arrest fatal s’est venue perdre icy. (*Antiquitez* 16.11-14)

The tie between the natural elements and empire³⁶ here is important in that it insists that human institutions are subject to the same cycles of nature which create and destroy. The elements seem valued more for their destructive properties rather than as the building blocks of the cosmos, as they are in creation epic. S.16's insistence on the play of elements as both creation and destruction again underline the cyclic pattern of the cosmos.

This rise and fall is the most frequently repeated theme throughout the *Antiquitez* and *Songe*, but this sonnet is noteworthy in that the *rise* to power is as inevitable as the fall. Once begun, the tidal wave can only continue to build until it reaches a shore on which it breaks. For Smith, the intent of the sonnet is to illustrate that "universal dominion came inevitably to Rome – and inevitably ended there" (50). This inevitable rise of Rome represents an adoption and continuation of the *Aeneid*'s teleology; at least in s.16, Du Bellay agrees with Virgil that history was driven towards the Empire's domination of the world, but he goes further to insist that its destruction is equally inevitable and predictable. The world is in a constant state of creation and destruction, so the only true teleology possible for epic lies in God, as Du Bellay will indicate in *Songe*; as we will see in the next chapter, d'Aubigné takes this even further create a telos in Christian mythology of the destruction of the cosmos.

Though in places Du Bellay acknowledges the Virgilian teleology of Rome's inevitable power and dominion, the end Du Bellay most commonly underlines is the fall, so it is hard to argue that he assigns an epic's teleology to his sonnet sequence, in spite of the fact that he presents the Empire's history as part of a teleological narrative leading to its downfall. Tucker draws a distinction between the *Antiquitez* as pagan and *Songe* as Christian (183, 230), and this

³⁶ "Monarchie" here is synonymous with Empire, as it was generally understood by the educated French court at this time (Hartley 52). This gives an indication of how the relationship between sovereign and empire was thought of by Du Bellay and his contemporaries.

can illuminate the themes of rise and fall; the *Antiquitez* shows that all human endeavors will eventually succumb to the ravages of time, and *Songe* responds that only the Christian God is eternal, thereby implying this is the only true telos possible.³⁷

As we have seen, a major difference between epic and romance for Quint is that the losers must leave their account of history open to alternative possibilities; the winner represents his success as an inevitable telos, but the loser presents the story in a way that anyone could have won, or as Quint suggests “the absence of an organizing teleology proposes the answer ‘Nobody wins,’ which might be seen as a deep truth (or cliché) about the absurdity of war and history” (46). Quint goes on to explain that the loser’s account of conflict consoles his side with the knowledge that even the strongest empires are bound to fall eventually. The cyclic repetition of this theme in the *Antiquitez* places the sonnet sequence firmly within the realm of romance. Other sonnets describe the events leading to the fall of Rome, presenting this fall as an inevitable historical reality. In the previously-cited third sonnet, in which Du Bellay addresses the newly-arrived visitor, he describes Rome as “proie au temps, qui tout consomme” (*Antiquitez* 3.8) and suggests that the Tiber is the only piece of Rome to survive because it is continually fleeing into the sea. Since Du Bellay is removed from the events by more than a millennium (unlike Virgil or Lucan), he can place them within a greater context that shows how all of Rome’s history, even the rise, was only leading to the real telos, its fall. He also begins to see the cyclical nature of history, one that associates his text with Quint’s idea of romance: every empire falls, and another rises to take its place.

³⁷ In this, the *Antiquitez* provides a bridge between the *Franciade* and the *Tragiques*. D’Aubigné will respond to the problematic lack of telos at the time by turning to the Protestant divine to find the focal point for his eschatological telos, as we will see in the following chapter.

Yet this theme extends beyond this one historical instance; both the cyclic nature of individual sonnets and the sequence as a whole insist that though this inevitably befell Rome, it will inevitably happen again as part of the repeating cycles of human history. This general theme that all is subject to the decay of time figures prominently throughout the *Antiquitez*. He repeats that “le temps détruit les républiques” (*Antiquitez* 8.11) and “Que toute chose au dessous de la lune / Est corrompable et sujette à mourir” (*Antiquitez* 9.10-11). The series of sonnets 18, 20 and 22 is an interesting grouping because they treat a single theme together, broken up by the loss of the Golden Age in s.19 and the sinking ship of state in s.21. All three reinforce the destructive power of time, but they add a cyclic element as well by ending each narrative with the idea that everything returns to its origins in the final line of each sonnet: “...tout retourne à son commencement” (*Antiquitez* 18.14), “...tout en rien doit un jour devenir” (*Antiquitez* 20.14) et “Les semences qui sont mères de toutes choses / Retourneront encore a leur premier discord, / Au ventre Du Chaos éternellement closes” (*Antiquitez* 22.12-14). Du Bellay manages to lament the destructive power of time while also acknowledging that it is a natural part of the world.

Here, a minor non-sequester is necessary to consider Du Bellay’s situation in Rome where he suffers from the melancholy, disappointment, and cultural exile that color the *Regrets*. Greene describes Du Bellay’s frustration with his work, primarily dealing with creditors and money-lenders; he claims the poet was “morose, ill, homesick, and self-pitying” (Greene 220). Undoubtedly, such an emotional state colored Du Bellay’s writings from the time. I will therefore admit to potentially reading too much of the political into the constant *memento mori* of the *Antiquitez*. This is perhaps a much more personal lament, a continuation of the poet’s sense of exile from both his actual and cultural homeland (France and Ancient Rome, respectively) in the *Regrets*. It is equally easy to read the theme of cyclic rise and fall as a

personal lamentation, a way to make sense of Du Bellay's own disappointment in the Rome he inhabits. Greene articulates the difficulty of Du Bellay's position in Rome: "If the Renaissance began with the discovery of cultural distinctions, this poet's rueful and perplexed dealings with the alien face of Rome can epitomize that discovery. It was all the more painful in this instance because it revealed the conjunction of past and present as deeply problematic" (Greene 221). The repetition then becomes a way of understanding and, importantly, purging the past in order to move forward. Therefore, even this more personal reading brings us right back to Quint and the cyclical repetition of the past to purge its trauma, a narrative tendency particular to romance and evident in the romance half of the *Aeneid*. Thus Du Bellay's experience as a humanist in Rome becomes representative of the intellectual culture of France at large.

Quint reminds us that the underlying structure of the *Aeneid*, despite its claim to imperial teleology, insists upon the repetition of history. As the losers of the Trojan War, Aeneas' band of survivors can only overcome the trauma of the past by *repeating* it and reversing their own role, thereby transforming the Latins into the losers of foreign invasion and Turnus into a new Hector (Quint 65-83). Quint is careful to specify that this repetitive process is less a compulsive repetition, but rather "a cumulative process of purgation of their doomed past" (64). The losing poets Quint examines (primarily Lucan, Ercilla, and d'Aubigné) are still within the context of their own history, so they can only anticipate that the empire will fall, and they do so in a less-recognized topos of epic, the loser's curse. The loser of conflict (Polyphemus, Dido, d'Aubigné himself, etc) hurls a curse at those who have defeated them in an attempt to anticipate their own ability to reenact their trauma of loss on the winner, thereby purging it as the Trojans do in Italy. However, Du Bellay's distant perspective allows him to assign a teleological perspective to this fall of empire rather than a prophetic one.

Part of this cyclical, non-concluded narrative is the importance that the story be open to alternative possibilities and a variety of outcomes. To understand how the sequence can both present Rome's downfall as inevitable and yet remain open to alternative possibilities, we must remember the plurality of dialogues contained within the poem. Looking back to the past, to completed actions, Du Bellay can write Rome's history with the dual telos of both its rise and fall. Yet the primary purpose of this dialogue with the past is not for its own sake, but to open a dialogue with Du Bellay's France. In the final section of this chapter, we will discuss in detail the political engagement of the text, but here we must understand that as citizen of a nation in a precarious situation, Du Bellay opens his text to possible futures. We have already seen Du Bellay's announcement to Henri II in *au roy* that declares his intent that Henri might reconstruct the grandeur of ancient Rome in his own empire. *Songe* s.5, to which we will return later, presents Rome as a great oak that it cut down by barbarians. From the trunk spring two saplings, signifying France and the Church, the respective secular and spiritual (both of them also political) successors of the ancient Empire.

Reading the representation of civil war in the *Antiquitez* offers several ambiguous possibilities. Civil war and pride destroyed Rome and will do so to France with the same certainty unless France is more careful and learns from the mistakes of the past. The representation of civil war is ambiguous as the Roman Empire was born from civil war. However, the text's emphasis on Rome's eventual destruction by the Goths suggests that the development of the Empire led to the hubris that eventually led to its downfall. Thus the warning to Henri II walks a fine line. France and Henri are still free to choose their nation's hoped-for imperial future, and Du Bellay intends Rome's fall to serve as an example to his own nation while fully acknowledging that France's future is far from assured. Such possibilities are

associated with the world of romance and are required by Du Bellay's position writing on the verge of conflict rather than at its conclusion, like Virgil could do. But the *au roy* and its promise of the fulfillment of Henri II's imperial ambitions color the text and imply that he will eventually fulfill the *Aeneid*'s second half by creating the corresponding history once he learns from Rome's past.

A previously-mentioned distinction between the epic and romance narrative here requires further explanation; epic's narrative structure is linear where romance's is circular. Du Bellay's depictions of history are cyclical, but there are moments in the text that draw on epic linearity even as they remain cyclic in their structural interplay, not unlike the episodic wanderings of Aeneas' band of Trojan refugees before their arrival in Italy. At several points, Du Bellay's sonnets take on the form of a mini-narrative, an epic condensed into sonnet form. We will focus on just one example, a series of three sonnets which are grouped by the theme of soldiers born from the earth. These three would be found together in the original, preceded by s.9 in which Du Bellay questions the heavens for having created a world that lasted longer than Rome. As introduction to the following three, s.9 presents the theme of the earth itself, then is followed by three narratives of beings that spring from the soil itself. The first narrative sonnet is s.10 which takes an episode from both the *Argonautica* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in which Jason must sow dragon's teeth in a field and fight the soldiers born from the earth. The episode is a common one to cite in the argument against civil war because the soldiers kill each other for lack of an outside enemy upon whom they can direct their aggression. Given that a similar myth exists around the figure Cadmus (also found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*)³⁸, it is interesting that Du

³⁸ Ronsard will later use this myth of Cadmus in his *Discours des misères de ce temps*, once in the *Continuation* and once in *Prière à Dieu*, to lament civil strife in France.

Bellay chose the myth from the Greek epic when he himself was more of a Latinist and was composing his verses about Rome.

The following sonnet is likewise narrative in nature and recounts the invasion of Rome by the Goths in a mere 14 lines. Mars sees the great pride of the Roman people, so he creates a “nouveau fils de la Terre” (*Antiquitez* 11.9), the Goths,³⁹ who overcome Rome’s walls but then “se perdit dans le sein de sa mère” (*Antiquitez* 11.12) so that they themselves cannot succumb to the same hubris as the Romans. Sonnet 12 also continues the theme of “les enfants de la Terre” (*Antiquitez* 12.1), this time narrating the gigantomachy. Here, the giants are the children of the earth who, in their arrogance, attempt to reach heaven by piling hills upon each other. Jupiter battles and defeats them in only five lines, and the remaining tercets are used to compare the giants’ actions to the pride of Rome and its own hills.

This series of three sonnets then represents a sort of episodic narrative in the middle of the work which is much more reminiscent of epic (especially Ovid – if indeed the *Metamorphoses* can be called an epic) than Petrarchan tradition. Each describes martial events leading to the rise and fall of a great (and especially proud) people, like the Trojan War itself. Yet these mini linear narratives remain circular in nature because they all return to the same point, the destruction of what has risen, as opposed to Ovid’s episodic progress through the creation of the world to the apotheosis of Caesar. Like the Trojan attempts to build a new Troy outside of the destined Italy, the result is always the same. These circular narratives therefore fit within the overall narrative structure of the *Antiquitez* to lend the text a distinct association with romance.

³⁹ Of course, coming from the north, this invasion also has overtones of the Holy Roman Empire and later the Reformation hitting Rome as well. The Goths are, however, significant as they end the Empire.

To understand the full effect of the epic-romance blend, I turn to the overall narrative structure of the sequence, as much as one can be said to exist in a thematic collection of sonnets. Though both the poet and the reader are exiled from the lost Rome, repeatedly witnessing its destruction through pride and civil war, the promise of France's imperial future hangs over the text, marking these sonnets with a similar tone as the *Aeneid*'s first six books. Though the next section explores the role of Du Bellay as hero and poet, we must note here that his addresses to the reader (some of which we have cited above) invite his audience to accompany him on his journey, transforming him from visitor into "poet-guide" (Tucker 229). The reader is therefore placed in the same position as the author, both exile from the cultural bounty of ancient Rome and witness to its destruction.

After the address to Henri II, the first sonnet provides the invocation of the ancient poets, through whom the ancient muses will work. The second sonnet sets the background information of the text; as the opening lines of the *Aeneid* announce the subject of war and the man who sails from Troy to found Rome and as the *Iliad*'s opening promises to describe the wrath of Achilles, s.2 announces that the poet's subject matter will be the wonders of ancient Rome. We remember here that the *au roy* explained that this resurrection of the ancient Empire's achievements is performed in the hope that they will be reborn in France through the empire Henri II hopes to amass. Like Aeneas, the poet and reader of the *Antiquitez* must contemplate the traumatic destruction of the past, consciously deciding to leave it behind, before they can truly look to their nation's future.

It is then s.3 that specifically invites the reader to join the poet on his journey through the ruined empire; Du Bellay begins the poem by addressing the "Nouveau venu" (*Antiquitez* 3.1) and drawing the reader into his imagery by insisting on the monuments "que tu vois" (*Antiquitez*

3.3). Much like Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*, Du Bellay alludes to the gigantomachy early in the sequence.⁴⁰ As one of the earliest stories (chronologically speaking) in the mythical history of the world, its position in s.4 is reminiscent of the origin stories of the world in Ovid's episodic poem. Du Bellay uses the fall of the giants and their burial under the Seven Hills of Rome as the first instance of the cyclical rise-and-fall imagery associated with pride and excessive grandeur, the true cause of Rome's fall; Tucker notes that these seven tombs of s.4 represent a deliberate transformation of the Seven Wonders of s.2 (130), especially as the original publication's format would place these two sonnets facing (and therefore mirroring) each other at the bottom of the page.

Like the repeated attempts to reestablish Troy throughout the *Aeneid*'s initial books (Thrace, Carthage, etc), the *Antiquitez* offer cycles of rise and fall throughout the text. In s.9, Du Bellay asks the heavens, nature, and the gods, why they made a world that lasted longer than Rome, thereby seeming to lament the destroyed teleology of the *Aeneid*. The implied answer is grounded in the theme of cycles, suggesting that another great empire is bound to rise and take its place. This cyclic view of history is associated with romance and is supported by the Troy-to-Republic-to-Empire representation of Roman history. Additionally, this represents a secondary imitation of Virgil, here of the *Georgics*; as Virgil expects the bee hive to be pruned through conflict, Du Bellay too acknowledges and anticipates that conflict will strengthen a nation. This is reinforced by the previously-cited s.16 that highlights the inevitability of Rome's rise with the hopeful implication that France's will be as well; the tidal wave, once begun, can only continue to grow until it reaches something upon which it will crash. Quint highlights the importance of wandering cycles in romance as the process of forgetting, especially as it pertains to the *Aeneid*'s

⁴⁰ It is also worth noting that this linear narration of the giants is (like nearly all the even-numbered sonnets) composed in alexandrines, the traditionally epic register.

Book 3; he explains that living in the past, as the lost Trojans do as they attempt to found a new Troy, is equivalent to inhabiting a state of death (58).

Like the Trojans who intend to build a new city at Thrace but build instead the tomb of Polydorus, Du Bellay's attempts to resurrect (or perhaps only disinter) the lost city of Rome result only in the construction of its own tomb: "Rome de Rome est le seul monument" (*Antiquitez* 3.9). The only way to move beyond the role of loser is to forget the past, and thus the narrative wandering represents a kind of purging of this past and its patterns:

The escape from this repetition still hinges on a repression or forgetting of the past (of the Trojans forgetting their past as losers), and the narrative process... merely acts out at length what is symbolized by a single draught from the waters of Lethe. It is only when the past has been successfully repressed – when it ceases to repeat itself in its former version – that it can be repeated *with a difference* in order to be reversed and undone. The Trojans now become winners, and so Augustan Rome is restored to national health after years of internal strife. At this point, the *Aeneid* moves from romance to epic. (Quint 65)

Du Bellay is essentially engaged in the same process as Virgil, the Trojans, and his contemporary Romans; they all seek to move beyond the confines of the past by forgetting them. Just as the Trojans must learn from and forget their past as Trojans to become Romans, the French must learn from the mistakes of its cultural ancestor Rome (specifically its civil strife), to be able to build their own French empire. It is for this reason that Du Bellay takes the reader (and most importantly Henri II as the dedicatory recipient of the poem) on the journey with him. Du Bellay is distraught at the realization that Rome is lost, so the past must be purged through cyclical narrative before the transformation from romance to epic can occur, opening the possibility of France's imperial future.

An important part of the cycle of forgetting the past to move beyond it is the death of the father. For Quint, the deaths of Creusa, Anchises, and Dido represent the stripping-away of the romance (or similarly the Homeric) hero's individualism to make way for the collectivity valued by epic and required by epic destinies (57, 90-93). As the first half of the *Aeneid* can be read as "an attempt to deal with the father and the past that he represents" (Quint 57), so too is the *Antiquitez* an attempt to deal with the cultural father, Rome. Tucker refers to parts of the *Antiquitez* as a *nekyia*, insisting that the series as a whole "remains faithful to the spirit of Aeneas' triple 'salvete' to his dead father (*cineres, anima, nombra*)" (214-215), particularly sonnets 1, 5, and 15 in which Du Bellay calls out to the spirits of the past. Anchises becomes a greater source of inspiration to Aeneas once he is dead and no longer in conflict with his son; similarly, France could not have survived in competition with ancient Rome, but it benefits from the artistic and political inspiration of the long-defunct Empire.

Three sonnets in the sequence focus on the active destruction of Rome rather than its lost state. In s.18, Du Bellay presents another mini-narrative in the form of a condensed version of Rome's history. The Empire began as fields before giving birth to the Imperial eagle which then ceded its place to Peter, representing a return to the control of pastors, but of a different sort. The pastoral imagery returns in s.30 where Rome is described as a fertile, flourishing field that is ravished by invading barbarians, a triple reference to Rome's fall, the Holy Roman Empire's own domination of Catholic Rome, and the Reformation that similarly arrives from the north. Though this sonnet places the action of destruction in the hands of the barbarians, the following sonnet (penultimate in the series) places blame firmly upon Rome itself and the "civile fureur" (*Antiquitez* 31.9) that weakened it. With the death of the Roman Empire, France's cultural father

figure, Catholic Rome (in s.3) and the ancient writings (in s.5) are all that remain as both tomb and monument.

Like the *Aeneid*'s first romance half, the *Antiquitez* concludes with a special vision given in the underworld, which serves as the transformative moment from one genre to the other; characters, poet, and audience cease their preoccupation with the past to focus forward on the destined future. As the shade of father Anchises gives Aeneas the prophetic explanation of the souls of his eventual descendants, the lessons of the deceased Rome itself offer the didactic vision to the poet in *Songe*. The secondary title of this companion piece – *Vision sur le mesme sujet* – emphasises both the visual and prophetic aspects of the 15 sonnets within. While the enigmatic series has been met with many different readings, several elements are particularly pertinent to this study. First, the vision is brought to the poet in his sleep by an other-worldly spirit, “un Daemon” (*Songe* 1.4).⁴¹ The final sonnet concludes the series on a similar note as Morpheus brings dreams at his most truthful moment of the night, showing Du Bellay a powerful female giant that startles him from his sleep. As the series is formulated along the lines of a divinely-inspired dream, we can read this in a similar way to the privileged information given to other heroes by a superhuman authority in the underworld, a journey only a select few worthy heroes are permitted to make.

Like Dante, Du Bellay is guided through visions by an ancient Roman authority, Dante by Virgil himself and Du Bellay by the location of the dream as the spirit appears to him on the banks of the Tiber. Tucker reads the spirit as that of Father Tiber himself (169); though this reading is primarily supported textually in *Songe* s.1 by the location of the spirit's appearance.

⁴¹ Du Bellay uses the same word in the *Regrets* to describe the supernatural power that inspires Ronsard, claiming it is the same spirit that inspired Virgil, Horace, “Et tout ceux qui du temps de ce bon siècle d’or / Etaient tenus pour bons” (*Regrets* 147.10-11).

Du Bellay could be relying on the Virgilian imitation here to make clear that the spirit with whom he speaks is indeed Tiber. As the river god comes to Aeneas in Book 8 to advise the hero on his course of action in war with the Latins and to assure him of his future, so too does the river god appear to Du Bellay to advise him on France's future by avoiding the mistakes of Rome. Thematically the Tiber itself serves as the most appropriate representative of the city itself as it is both permanent and perpetually transient at the same time; Du Bellay touched on this in *Antiquitez* s.3 when he claims the new arrival will find nothing of Rome but the famous river: "Le Tybre seul, qui vers la mer s'enfuit, / Reste de Rome" (*Antiquitez* 3.11-12).

The spirit instructs the poet "Voy... et contemple" (*Songe* 1.9), promising to show that nothing in the material world is constant "Puis que Dieu seul au temps fait resistance" (*Songe* 1.13). As Aeneas sees the heroes of the Trojan War and Rome's future in Elysium (including Julius Caesar and Augustus), Du Bellay sees the golden monument to Caesar's ashes in *Songe* 3 and a triumphal arch of Roman Emperors in *Songe* 4. In a scene imitated from the shield of Aeneas (*Aeneid* 8.630-634), Du Bellay witnesses the she-wolf nursing two boys; this sixth sonnet of the sequence also reminds the reader of Aeneas seeing Romulus during Anchises' prophetic explanation of souls in the underworld.

The theme of the destruction (death) of all earthly endeavors continues over from the *Antiquitez*, but this time within the additional Christian context of the spirit's invitation in *Songe* 1. Time shows that final causes are not as final as victors would like to believe they are, despite their efforts to immortalize their telos through epic. Du Bellay reinforces this with the motif of cycles throughout the sequence, and finally *Songe* shows that the only possibility of permanence is through the Christian divine; all man's works will inevitably crumble, but God is eternal. As Quint tells us, the victors project their prophetic vision into the past and the future (45), and in

this way, Du Bellay is at least partially aligned with epic by insisting on Rome's past and France's future as continuations of the same cycle. However, this very projection relies on the cycles of romance narrative, the insistence that history will repeat itself. It is further aligned with romance by remaining open to the possibility of imperial France's rise, while still maintaining the inevitability of its eventual fall.

Du Bellay also hints at the theme that will form the cornerstone of the *Tragiques*, that a truly eternal and final telos can only be found through the divine. Du Bellay awakens at the end of the dream vision having learned from Rome's mistakes of pride and grandeur. It is this message he brings back to his king, who can now build the French Empire so hoped for in shifting the national narrative from romance to epic, as the *Aeneid* does. The hope for this transformation rests upon the return from exile, just as Aeneas transforms the narrative in returning to his ancestral home in Italy. In *Regrets* 137, Du Bellay equates his return to France with Aeneas coming back up from the underworld, so this emergence from the prophetic dream of *Songe* allows Du Bellay to return to France with the knowledge to encourage Henri's imperial aspirations.

Though there are moments of narrative linearity within the *Antiquitez* and *Songe*, the overarching structure falls clearly among the episodic, cyclical patterns associated with romance. This, however, does not preclude an eventual turn to epic's teleology. Like the *Aeneid*'s early promise of Rome's founding, the *Antiquitez* too begins with the anticipation of a similar imperial future for France, but Du Bellay leaves this for Henri II to forge. Where Ronsard forces a telos from the young Charles IX even in the midst of civil conflict, Du Bellay creates a more powerfully resonating text by ceding this epic teleology in favor of romance's open possibilities. Only the king, not the poet, can create an empire.

Du Bellay's intended political function for his work is evidenced by the fact that the original 1558 printing, including solely the *Antiquitez* and *Songe*, was dedicated directly to Henri II.⁴² Hartley informs us that Henri held a heroic status in Du Bellay's mind (22), so his anticipation of the king's future role as epic hero, forging a Valois Empire for France, fits the poet's beliefs within the text and without. Du Bellay emerges from his own exile (or perhaps *katabasis*) in Rome armed with the prophecy of the *Antiquitez* that will encourage the national transformation to epic. When the chapter concludes with a political examination of the sonnet sequence, it will be useful to keep this narrative structure (and especially its generic implications) in mind.

Poet as Hero – Hero as Poet

Building on my reading of the overall narrative structure of the *Antiquitez* and *Songe*, such a structure leads to understanding the poet as hero. As the epic hero is always an exile (Jackson 5), Du Bellay's dual exile from France and Ancient Rome combined with his desire to return home as expressed in the *Regrets* positions him within epic tradition. In a mission-focused romance like the *Odyssey* or the first half of the *Aeneid*, the hero's mission takes the form of a similar return home; Aeneas too is returning to his ancestral home as, according to Roman legend, Troy itself was originally founded by Italians. While disappointed in his impressions of Rome, Du Bellay suffers in exile from his homeland, a sentiment acutely felt throughout the *Regrets* that will clarify the context within which the *Antiquitez*'s descriptions of ruined Rome were composed. The poet's mission in both texts becomes a return to home, thereby

⁴² It is worth noting here that this first printing was so popular that it called for a second edition printed in the same year (Tucker 2). Indeed, as Hartley informs us, the *Antiquitez* was held in higher regard by Du Bellay's contemporaries than the *Regrets* (83), despite the fact that the opposite is frequently true now.

transforming Du Bellay into an Odyssean hero. While the poet is the wandering romance hero, lost in a circular narrative in the *Antiquitez*, it is up to Henri II to become the imperial epic hero, a role not appropriate for a non-warrior poet. Du Bellay also serves as witness to Rome's destruction; the account he brings back to his king will help Henri achieve the great French Empire. As the first chapter demonstrated, the tie between great patron and great poet was equally necessary for a successful epic. In this section, I first examine how Du Bellay explores his role as exiled hero, especially as the *Regrets* shine light on this theme in the *Antiquitez*. I then demonstrate how this role rests upon a foundation of epic tradition of hero as both poet and witness.

Poet as Hero

As Jackson notes in his study of the epic hero, *The Hero and the King*, "There is no major epic in which the hero is not in some sense an exile" (5). Achilles is apart from the rest of the Greek army due to a disagreement, Odysseus repeatedly encounters difficulties as he tries to return home, and Aeneas, stripped of his home, attempts to return to his ancestral origins. Du Bellay is in the unique position of a double exile; he faces a literal exile from his homeland, France, to which he can return, but he experiences a second cultural exile from the ancestral and artistic heritage of ancient Rome. It is this second exile that is the most painful for the poet as he travels to Rome only to find that the Rome he believes he knows is lost to the ravages of time. This exile is of course impossible to resolve as Rome is gone; however, the *Antiquitez* can be read as an attempt to recover the lost civilization in the way the Trojans attempt, unsuccessfully, to re-create their own lost home. As I noted in Chapter 1, Greene explained that the very process of *imitatio* provided an opportunity to deal with such problems of anachronism. He presented Du Bellay's *Antiquitez* as experiencing the problem even more acutely; we might say that his

encounter with Rome (or more specifically, his failure or inability to encounter the Rome he anticipates) represents an actual crisis in the way the sacked ruins of Troy are for Aeneas. Indeed, even the Trojan spends a significant portion of the early books weeping and lamenting his loss. Thus, we cannot fault Du Bellay for his melodramatic tone in both the *Antiquitez* and the *Regrets*.

Each of Du Bellay's two exiles has a foundation in ancient epic, or more specifically, romance; like Odysseus, Du Bellay is destined to return to his homeland, but like Aeneas' attempts to resuscitate the destroyed Troy, the poet's attempt to revive Rome through his writing are similarly unsuccessful. Since the exile from the cultural heritage of ancient Rome is as permanent and irreversible as the destruction of Troy, Du Bellay must look elsewhere to recreate a new empire; as Aeneas establishes a new Troy in Italy, so does Du Bellay encourage building a new Rome in France. Tucker reads the *Antiquitez* as "a literary re-enactment of the Odyssey" (14), but his analysis remains focused on poetic intertextuality; Tucker explores in great detail the texts that Du Bellay imitated and draws upon in the series, but he ignores the politicization of epic. I expand upon Tucker's reading to reinforce the previous section's claim that Du Bellay creates a new Virgilian romance; while this first half of the *Aeneid* is unquestionably modeled on the *Odyssey*, the *Antiquitez*'s anticipation of France's imperial future is the essential added dimension that aligns the sonnets with the Latin text over the Greek. To understand how we can read the *Antiquitez* as an actual Odyssean journey on the part of the poet, let us use the *Regrets* to examine Du Bellay's personal experience of Rome.

Written during the same sojourn in Rome and published like the *Antiquitez* upon Du Bellay's return to France in 1558, the *Regrets* illuminates the poet's feeling of exile from France, especially in face of the decadent court life in Rome. While I am primarily concerned with the

shorter sonnet series, the *Regrets* is worth discussing for two reasons: it identifies the context within which Du Bellay composed the *Antiquitez*, and “generic hybridization is a fundamental characteristic of the *Regrets*” (Bizer 108). Therefore, the *Regrets* helps clarify the same hybridized status of the *Antiquitez*. Many of the 191 sonnets are addressed to Du Bellay’s literary friends in France, especially Ronsard, and to Marguerite de France, sister of Henri II and Du Bellay’s principal patron.

Du Bellay laments his absence from the French court, worrying in s.8 that his poetry is no longer read there due to his absence. He frequently expresses the difficulty of being so far from his patron and muse [“...moi, qui suis absent des rais de mon soleil” (*Regrets* 8.9)]. In s.5, he plainly announces his plan for the series: “Moi, qui suis malheureux, je plaindrai mon malheur” (*Regrets* 5.14). Slavitt clarifies that Du Bellay is playfully treating this distress in the *Regrets*, “a gesture in the direction of légèreté and good manners” (xi); though we should not take the lamentations too seriously in their extravagance, they still shed light on the *Antiquitez* as a distinct product of exile. While Bizer reads the *Regrets* themselves as a form of epic poetry,⁴³ itself perpetuating the cycle of wandering associated with romance and that resists empire building (120), I maintain focus on the *Antiquitez*, using the longer and significantly more personal sonnet series as a key to understanding the context within which Du Bellay composed the shorter.

Many points throughout the series emphasize Du Bellay’s feelings of exile, though nowhere is it more pronounced than in the early sonnets. He compares himself to the “prisonnier

⁴³ Like I do with the *Antiquitez*, Bizer reads the *Regrets* in opposition to the *Franciade*, claiming that in formatting the *Regrets* as a sort of mock epic, Du Bellay to “neatly avoids the challenges that Ronsard would find insurmountable” (127). Though the *Antiquitez* varies in tone from the *Regrets*, the statement can be said to apply there as well.

maudissant sa prison” (*Regrets* 12.14) and frequently repeats the length of his exile, at one point claiming his three years in Rome “me sont plus qu’un siege de Troie” (*Regrets* 36.6). He refers to his journey as “un malheureux voyage” (*Regrets* 32.14), a “longue demeure” (*Regrets* 33.2), and “un exil volontaire” (*Regrets* 50.11), though due to his volume of poetic production, Du Bellay also acknowledges “Fertile est mon séjour” (*Regrets* 40.5). The wandering hero calls out in vain to his homeland: “France, France, réponds à ma triste querelle. / Mais nul, sinon Écho, ne répond à ma voix” (*Regrets* 9.7-8). As I mentioned previously in the analysis of *Songe* as the poet’s *katabasis*, Du Bellay reinforces this idea of exile in Rome as the underworld in the *Regrets* as he describes finally arriving in Lyon to fellow poet, Maurice Scève, the central figure of the so-called *École lyonnaise* group of poets: “Scève, je me trouvai comme le fils d’Anchise / Entrant dans l’Élysée et sortant des enfers” (*Regrets* 137.1-2). Thus, the relationship between the poet and his nation is established as one of longing exile, marked by the desire to return home. This is the emotional framework within which Du Bellay encounters the Roman ruins and contemplates their loss throughout the *Antiquitez*.

In several sonnets of the *Regrets*, Du Bellay invokes epic heroes as a way to express his own exile. Du Bellay encourages his association with Odysseus, first in the opening ode that precedes the sonnets, and most notably upon his return to France; s.129 describes the poet’s joy at seeing his friends upon his arrival, and s.130 continues:

Et je pensais aussi ce que pensait Ulysse,
 Qu’il n’était rien plus doux que voir encore un jour
 Fumer sa cheminée, et après long séjour
 Se retrouver au sein de sa terre nourrice.
 Je me réjouissais d’être échappé au vice,

Aux Circés d'Italie, aux sirènes d'amour,
Et d'avoir rapporté en France à mon retour

L'honneur que l'on s'acquiert d'un fidèle service. (*Regrets* 130.1-8)

Like Odysseus' own mission, Du Bellay's hero's mission has been the return home; the trappings of the decadent Roman court became the goddesses and sirens from which he had to escape before reaching his homeland. Such a comparison reinforces the exile Du Bellay feels in Rome, but it also encourages further connotations between the *Antiquitez* and the wandering romance narrative.

Tucker explains his label of 'literary re-enactment,'⁴⁴ clarifying that Du Bellay's voyage is three-fold, "a geographical, spiritual, and literary odyssey" that represents "the very hallmark of Du Bellay's poetic *persona*" (15). Therefore, Tucker's analysis of the journey represented in the *Antiquitez* is less physical (as I argue) than poetic as Du Bellay wanders stylistically through an impressive variety of literary sources. Bizer describes Du Bellay's structure of the *Regrets* in that he "gives an epic dimension to the ostensibly prosaic *Regrets*... by framing his sonnets as an Odyssean quest for home" (111). Interestingly, as part of Du Bellay's playful mockery of Ronsard's slow progress on the *Franciade*, the exiled poet compares his friend back home to Penelope: "Retissera-t-on toujours, d'un tour laborieux, / Cette toile, argument d'une si longue peine?" (*Regrets* 23.5-6). While Du Bellay is miserable in exile, he still establishes his separate and unique poetic identity, especially in the innovative generic hybridity of the *Regrets* and the *Antiquitez*, while Ronsard meticulously weaves and reweaves the same verses.

⁴⁴ Tucker's analysis of the *Antiquitez* focuses primarily on the textual interplay between Du Bellay's sonnets and his sources, reading the poet's journey through the sources themselves as the *Odyssey*. He examines the poetry of Du Bellay and his contemporaries as he prepares to leave for Rome, then turns to both his French and Latin poetry written in Rome as he searches for the lost city in the new one and experiences a linguistic exile.

To align Du Bellay-as-hero solely with the homeland-seeking Odysseus is to limit the representation of the poet and how he constructs his identity in both sonnet series. In addition to the above ties to Aeneas and his underworld journey, Du Bellay associates himself with Jason, but specifically in relation to the homecoming following a journey:

Heureux qui, comme Ulysse, a fait un beau voyage,
 Ou comme celui-là qui conquiert la toison,
 Et puis est retourné, plein d'usage et raison,
 Vivre entre ses parents le reste de son âge ! (*Regrets* 31.1-4)

This association here between Odysseus and Jason colors the *Odyssey's* ending. The immediate connotations of Odysseus' homecoming, the accomplishment of his hero's mission and the reunion with wife and son, are here overshadowed by the violent aspects of this homecoming. Jason's story after the successful recovery of the fleece is dominated by Medea's murder of their children and Jason's intended bride. Odysseus' homecoming is similarly violent, though here the hero performs the slaughter of Penelope's many suitors. We remember also that as one of only a few Greek heroes to return home from Troy, Agamemnon also arrives home to violence, murdered by his wife and her lover. Though Du Bellay's sonnet above focuses on the positive representation of epic voyage by emphasizing the knowledge gained during the journey, it also reflects a certain anxiety about the homecoming process. Like the ship of *Antiquitez* s.21, Du Bellay risks arriving home from a perilous journey only to crash into the port and sink in the harbor.

Du Bellay's emphasis on the knowledge acquired during the journey sheds light on the *Antiquitez* as specifically romance journey. The romance hero is largely concerned with individual identity construction; he must accomplish the tasks presented to him by Fortune in

order to establish himself. Du Bellay's exile in Rome does exactly this for his identity as an innovative poet. Bizer emphasizes the rivalry with Ronsard as a reason for Du Bellay's fruitful poetic experimentation during this time (110); Du Bellay's principal goal was to distance himself from Petrarchan lyric and establish a unique poetic identity different from his friend's. Bizer explains, "The *Odyssey* fits the *Regrets* so well as a model not only because it parallels Du Bellay's meanderings but also because it both gave him a space in epic apart from Ronsard's and made possible a sort of royal patronage different from that of the official bard of the monarchy" (110). As another product of this time period, Tucker also notes the role of the *Antiquitez* in Du Bellay's "development and *self-representation* as a poet..., one consistent feature of which is both implicit and explicit contrast with his fellow poet Ronsard, whilst the decisive event in that whole process is his transplantation from Paris to Rome" (4). Du Bellay's wandering as an exile allows him to develop his unique identity in the same way a romance hero constructs his before being able to complete the journey and return home.

The *Regrets* references this fruitful rivalry with Ronsard at several points in the *Regrets*. We already saw Du Bellay compare his friend to Penelope, repeatedly weaving the same lines. This playful teasing of his friend allows Du Bellay to interact directly with the epic genre and to claim a link between it and his own work. In s.8, Du Bellay envies Ronsard for receiving the king's commission while he himself is so far removed from his own patron. He later claims, "Courage, Ronsard, la victoire est à toi, / Puisque de ton côté est la faveur du roi" (*Regrets* 20.9-10). However, the following several sonnets tease Ronsard for his inability to advance in the *Franciade*, even with royal favor.

Since Henri II appreciates great literature and supports the project, Du Bellay tells Ronsard, "...le tardif labeur que nous promet ta main / Desormais pour Francus n'aura plus nulle

excuse” (*Regrets* 22.7-8). The following sonnet continues questioning Ronsard’s stalled project, asking “Jamais ne verra-t-on que Ronsard amoureux?” (*Regrets* 23.4), an appropriate challenge considering Du Bellay’s own efforts to distance himself from Petrarchan love lyric. He mocks Ronsard’s poem, embodied by its hero: “Ton Francus, cependant, a beau hausser les voiles, / ... Il est encor pourtant sur le troyen rivage, / Aussi crois-je, Ronsard, qu’il n’en partit jamais” (*Regrets* 23.9, 13-14). Chamard examines these lines, claiming Du Bellay regularly encourages Ronsard as Ronsard awaits funding for his project (103), but as the earlier poem concedes Ronsard’s victory in securing a royal commission, this supportive reading is harder to accept. The friendly rivalry between the two poets encouraged both their production and fits the tone of these mocking sonnets much better.

Most interestingly, Du Bellay goes beyond merely teasing Ronsard’s lack of progress to insist upon his own in the genre. In Odyssean fashion, Du Bellay compares the writing of epic to a long sea journey, insisting to Ronsard that “...j’ai devant toi en cette mer nagé / Et que déjà ma nef découvre le rivage” (*Regrets* 26.7-8); where Du Bellay has successfully navigated the epic waters, he warns that Ronsard is “Trompé du chant pipeur des monsters de Sicile, / Pour Charybde éviter tu tomberas en Scylle” (*Regrets* 26.12-13). Du Bellay uses the Odyssean image of the sirens as another reminder that Ronsard is stuck in love poetry and unable to avoid the pitfalls of epic, thereby mirroring my own critique of the *Franciade*’s diversion into love plot.

As explained in the *Deffence*, Du Bellay did not distinguish epic from romance, but rather incorporated romance (especially *Orlando furioso* and the medieval romances *Tristan* and *Lancelot*) into his definition of the *long poème français*. For the Pléiade, the dichotomy I explore did not exist; thus by comparing his poetry to Ronsard’s, Du Bellay claims more successful progress in the same genre. Bizer reads this as evidence of his own (not incorrect) thesis that the

Regrets is itself a “romance epic” (as opposed to his other distinction, “warrior epic”) (110). However, since the claim of successfully navigating epic waters is made within the first quarter of the *Regrets*, I argue that Du Bellay intends it to reference another work. As the *Antiquitez* places Du Bellay in the role of double exile, confronting the cultural past to encourage his nation’s imperial future, this claim to have navigated the epic waters can easily refer to this shorter text.

As an exile from his homeland, Du Bellay also assumes the role of explorer and archeologist in the *Regrets*, but this role is especially pronounced in the *Antiquitez*. This secondary role may seem like a stretch, but not within the context of Du Bellay’s time. The period of the Renaissance was marked by great exploration of the world and with this came the rise of the travel journal as a distinct literary genre. Montaigne published his own *Journal de voyage* documenting his journey throughout Europe and especially Italy where his meditations on Rome echo Du Bellay’s own. To create his country’s national epic *Os Lucíadas*, Camões chronicled the Portuguese voyages of exploration in fantastical Homeric fashion while traveling through the Indies himself. Quint associates this Renaissance voyage of exploration with romance, particularly those of a bourgeois mercantile nature, as they exist in opposition to the aristocratic voyage of imperial conquest (248). Du Bellay traveled to Rome on a diplomatic mission (attached to the household of Cardinal Du Bellay, sent to Rome to represent France at the papal court), and there he engaged with the local culture – both contemporary Catholic Rome and the ruins of ancient Rome – as an explorer, tourist and archaeologist.

Du Bellay’s engagement with ancient Rome is most aligned with this idea of discovery as he arrives in Italy with preconceived notions about what he will find based on his extensive Latinist studies. When he addresses the new arrival in s.3, he is describing his own experience

and shock of discovery: “Nouveau venu, qui cherches Rome en Rome / Et rien de Rome en Rome n’apperçois” (*Antiquitez* 3.1-2). Like the explorer, the poet has arrived in search of the cultural riches described in his texts, but he is immediately disappointed in their existence only in ruined form. Du Bellay laments that “Rome n’est plus” (*Antiquitez* 5.5) and that “Le corps de Rome en cendre est devallé” (*Antiquitez* 5.9) as all its grand architecture has crumbled, leaving only writings.

Like the exploring traveler, Du Bellay attempts to visit the monuments and triumphal arches of Rome, but finds only “sainctes ruines” (*Antiquitez* 7.1) as described in his imitation of Castiglione’s *Superbi colli* in s.7. So heavily is Du Bellay’s poetry associated with the archaeological process that Barkan opens his book on Renaissance archaeology with a quote from the *Antiquitez*. Du Bellay repeatedly seeks the wonders of the ancient world, only to find they have been destroyed by time. Lowenthal describes Du Bellay’s “ecstatic” reaction to these ruins: “Ruined Rome seemed both alive and dead, its bygone greatness recalled in its monuments. Reconstruction, modern emulation, and poetic celebration would revive it” (242). Du Bellay therefore assumes an archaeological role in his attempts to uncover the ruined monuments and bring images [“ce petit tableau” (*Au roy* 3)] of his discovery back to France. Greene focuses his analysis of the *Antiquitez* on Du Bellay’s attempt to disinter the defunct civilization: “The *Antiquitez de Rome* constitute a poem not so much about the Roman ruins as about an individual responding to ruins, trying... to resurrect them” (Greene 221). Greene reads the work as an imitation of history as well as poetry, as Du Bellay disinters the ruined monuments and reconstructs them in the imitated for his reader (222). This active role places Du Bellay firmly within his own poems; he is not a distanced narrator, but an active participant in the journey of discovery that he shares with his readers.

Though his explorations find only ruins in the *Antiquitez* (they find court decadence too in the *Regrets*), Du Bellay also acknowledges that though many great forces attempted to destroy Rome, “la grandeur du rien qu’ilz t’ont laissé / Ne face encor’ émerveiller le monde” (*Antiquitez* 13.13-14). As was reflected by the narrative structure, the poet has no goal of conquest and only seeks to explore, so he falls into cyclical reflections on his exploration; guided by Fortune rather than Fate, an important distinction for Quint between the romance hero and the epic one, Du Bellay explains “Maintenant la fortune est maîtresse de moi” (*Regrets* 6.9). Despite this role of poet-as-explorer, Tucker clarifies that this is not merely a travel journal or diary as the “poetic *persona*” of Du Bellay is on a quest to resuscitate the lost Rome (18), like the archaeologist who reconstructs the temples and artifacts he uncovers. These cycles seek to contemplate the exile through repeated (unsuccessful) attempts to contact the dead Romans and their city, but not to conquer or rule it, as would the epic hero. In this, Du Bellay is clearly a romance hero, steered through explorations of a foreign land (contemporary Rome) by Fortune’s wandering rather than Fate’s linear path as he attempts to end his exile and regain his homeland.

This permanent exile from ancient Rome due to its destruction is yet another factor that ties Du Bellay to the first half of Aeneas’ journey and distinguishes it from that of Odysseus. While the *Regrets* is indeed largely Odyssean, this text also provides the context within which the *Antiquitez* was composed, so the longer text’s feelings of exile from homeland still apply, but with the added dimension of the second, simultaneous exile from the lost civilization. For Quint, this process of looking to the past (and the subsequent wandering) is an essential purging process of the *Aeneid* that allows the transformation of genre with the imitation of both Homeric epics; here let us specifically examine the links between the two heroes in regards to their lamentations on their respective lost cities.

Both heroes (Aeneas and Du Bellay) engage in emotional contemplation of their lost civilization through visual stimuli within the narrative. For Aeneas, this occurs when he arrives in Carthage and sees the scenes of the Trojan War painted on the city walls. Similarly, Du Bellay encounters an emotional visual reminder of loss upon his arrival in a new city, ancient Rome's ruins. As we have seen, the first several sonnets confront his impressions of disappointment and irreversible loss: "Rome n'est plus" (*Antiquitez* 5.5). Both heroes take comfort in the fact that the lost civilization is known throughout the world; Aeneas reassures Achates that they will find succor in Carthage because their story has already spread across the world: "Constitit, et lacrimans, 'Quis iam locus' inquit 'Achate, /quae regio in terris nostri non plena laboris?'" (*Aeneid* 1.459-460). Like the Trojan's tragic story in their time, the story of Rome is known throughout Du Bellay's world.

Du Bellay similarly assigns importance to the cultural legacy of Rome even centuries after its destruction: "Rome fut tout le monde, et tout le monde est Rome" (*Antiquitez* 26.9). Ancient Rome covered the world and became essentially the entire world (from the Eurocentric perspective of both the Romans and Du Bellay). However, the second half of the line, like much of Du Bellay's imagery, is deliberately ambiguous. The switch from past to present tense in the verb clearly reflects Du Bellay's thoughts on Rome's role in his own time, but he likely refers to two roles simultaneously. The European intellectual community felt a shared cultural connection to ancient Rome, but the Catholic community similarly experiences a sense of collective belonging to Rome as the seat of (and metonym for) the Church. Thus the parallels between past and present in this line reflect the evolution from the Roman Empire's universal power to that of the Catholic Church's in the poet's own time.

Additionally, Du Bellay emphasizes the sense of cultural collectivity Rome inspires through the lasting importance of Rome's artistic output. In s.5, he laments the reduction of physical monuments to dust, but consoles himself with the knowledge that the writings of ancient Rome have spread throughout the world: "Mais ses escripts, qui son loz le plus beau / Malgré le temps arrachent du tombeau, / Font son idole errer parmy le monde" (*Antiquitez* 5.12-14). This demonstrates clear ties between Aeneas' realization that the world knows of the Trojans' plight and Du Bellay's insistence that ancient Rome lives on through the wide-spread knowledge of its writings.

Both heroes speak for their people about this destruction and shared loss so that the cultural and political heir to the lost civilization can thrive. What separates the Odyssean *Regrets* from the Virgilian *Antiquitez* is the issue of collectivity; the struggle for Aeneas and the Trojans to deal with the destruction of the past "is the struggle not of the individual psyche but of a collective political nation" (Quint 53). While the Du Bellay of the *Regrets* is an exile on a hero's mission to return home, the Du Bellay of the *Antiquitez* attempts to cope with the permanent loss of the ancestral culture as a representative of his nation. The importance of Rome is two-fold in the *Antiquitez* (and the *Regrets*): it serves as both a symbol of mankind and as a microcosm of the world as a whole. As such, Du Bellay presents the Empire as an essential piece of the cultural heritage of Europe and especially France.

Hero as Poet (and Witness)

The personal nature of Du Bellay's emotional encounter with Rome provides an intimate look into the mind of the poet that draws the reader in. Du Bellay deliberately fosters the sense of collective yearning-in-exile we saw above, especially since the hero should serve as a

representative of the people as a whole. It is therefore important that both the *Regrets* and (less-obviously) the *Antiquitez* are deeply personal poems, despite the political overtones I examine next. Not only does Du Bellay serve as his poem's hero, but the hero's dual role as poet (specifically witness to and story-teller of events) is founded in epic tradition as well. While this seems similar to the point above, I examine this as a separate theme; after all, both Odysseus and Aeneas tell their own stories, yet neither is the actual poet as is Du Bellay. Therefore, I demonstrate how Du Bellay's decision to write himself as hero who then tells his own story is a decision rooted in ancient epic tradition. I then examine the importance of a first-hand account to providing the collective cultural essence an epic demands.

The importance of the hero's speech can be most clearly seen through comparison with other characters. The hero speaks because his story is representative of his people's collective experience; as captain, Odysseus recounts the adventures (and misadventures) of his crew, and as future king, Aeneas tells his personal story of the Fall of Troy to share the story of his band of wandering survivors. As a counterpoint, female characters are specifically denied the right to tell the story; Penelope's contribution is cyclic reworking of the same cloth, and Dido's shade turns from Aeneas without a word, despite his direct requests to hear her story. Odysseus' skill as a story-teller is particularly essential to his identity as hero, though he is known more for his cunning lies than his truths. Dido's enthusiastic questioning of Aeneas upon his arrival in Carthage demonstrates the importance of the hero's story-telling. She asks a series of questions, but then corrects herself and asks to hear the entire story from the beginning: "Immo age, et a prima dic, hospes, origine nobis /insidias,' inquit, 'Danaum, casusque tuorum, / erroresque tuos;" (*Aeneid* 1.753-755). Odysseus tells of his own wanderings, similarly spurred by a third-party account of the fall of Troy. In both cases, the poet avoids beginning *ab ovo* by having the hero

recount his own story, but it also serves the second purpose of making the account personally emotional.

Du Bellay imitates these ancient examples of first-person narrative in the *Regrets*, describing his own exile directly to his friends who will read the poems upon his return to France. While the poet discusses his personal experiences less overtly in the *Antiquitez*, his reflections on Rome are blatantly informed by the poet's own perspective during his travels there. For example, Du Bellay does not describe himself arriving in Rome, preferring instead to place the reader inside his own experience in s.3; while the "nouveau venu" is addressed in the second person, the experience offers a transference of Du Bellay's own arrival from the poet to the reader. This aids in the goal of fostering a shared collective loss through the assumption that any compatriot would suffer the same shock due to the privileged position Rome held throughout educated sixteenth-century France. Du Bellay brings his own point of view directly into the text in the opening lines of *Songe* as the Daemon appeared to him, allowing the poet's *katabasis* and testimony as witness to destruction.

Du Bellay's status as exile from the cultural richness of ancient Rome is linked to his role as witness to its destruction, just as both Odysseus and Aeneas are witness to the destruction of Troy. The prophetic vision of destruction in *Songe* demonstrates Du Bellay's status as witness. As the person upon whom this special vision is bestowed by a supernatural source, Du Bellay takes on the role of epic hero. Like Aeneas who brings his story of destruction to Dido's court, Du Bellay brings his own story back to the court of Henri II. Both heroes are instructed by a spirit to leave the destruction behind to look towards a more eternal structure. The shade of Hector tells Aeneas to flee the dying city and preserve its heritage: "sacra suosque tibi commendat Troia penatis; / hos cape fatorum comites, his moenia quaere / magna pererrato

statues quae denique ponto” (*Aeneid* 2.293-295). The Daemon in *Songe* s.1 similarly warns Du Bellay to look beyond the destruction of all things human for only God is eternal. Both heroes witness the destruction with their own eyes so that they may understand the full impact of events and begin the process of leaving them behind to look to the future.

That these stories are recounted by a first-hand witness adds poignancy to the reader’s experience. This is partially why Virgil does not himself recount the fall of Troy, but he gives the role of poet (story-teller) to his hero. While Virgil’s perspective is far-removed from events, he places the story in the mouth of his hero so the audience has a more visceral response to Aeneas’ own emotions. Aeneas weeps and shudders through the telling; as this emotional context provides the introduction to Book 2, the audience is immediately drawn into the story by emotion, not a timeline of facts. The poet intends the audience to respond emotionally as well, so the reader essentially joins Dido and her court as the audience for the story. In the *Regrets*, Du Bellay establishes himself as “suffisant témoin” (*Regrets* 11.7) to the challenges of having a Muse for a mistress, and this role as witness continues into the *Antiquitez*. While Du Bellay bears witness to a prophetic apocalyptic vision rather than the active destruction of his homeland, the emotional effect is similar. The reader of either the *Aeneid* or the *Antiquitez* is actively drawn into the story through the first-hand account of the great city’s destruction.

It is the personal connection via the hero’s testimony to the destruction that (somewhat ironically) allows the sense of cultural collectivity necessary to engage the reader with the loss of shared culture and collective political history that Quint finds so essential to the imperial function of epic. As Smith notes, “like all the great writers of the French renaissance, [Du Bellay] requires a response from his reader... his aim above all is to stimulate, to provoke, to move... For, just as he was moved to write by an intimate kinship with the ancient Romans, he

invites his readers to develop a kinship with him” (7). We have seen how the early sonnets in *Antiquitez* invite the reader into the three-way dialogue between the poet and Rome, and this transformation of hero-poet into witness furthers the reader’s involvement. Du Bellay’s repetition in each *Songe* sonnet of some variation on the word *voir* or *j’ai vu* paints the picture (as he promised to do in *au roy*) for the reader so that he too visualizes the imagery seen by the poet.

As the act of wandering represents a narrative purging for the hero, reading said wanderings enacts the same process on the reader. Thus the text speaks to the collective cultural experience of lost connection to the cultural father, Rome. The unique position as both hero and poet (the teller of his own story) allows a particular dialogue with the subject matter and the poem’s audience, including the king for whom it was intended and the public at large who so admired the text. While the intent to foster a collective national pride is not as obvious as in Ronsard’s Virgilian imitation, Du Bellay’s predominantly Catholic audience would be moved to religious pride through the insistence on Rome’s enduring power. Additionally, the poet-as-hero’s personal interaction with ancient Rome and testimony of its destruction encourage readers to reflect on France’s own future at the same time as they reflect on the shared experience of cultural loss. Du Bellay’s reflective wanderings are not meant to be his alone; they should be shared so that reader, poet and hero may (like Aeneas) learn from the destruction of the past through its cyclic repetition that allows the transformation into future empire.

Political Engagement in the *Antiquitez*

The most interesting aspect of the *Antiquitez* to our study is the political engagement of the text. While we have touched on this briefly in our previous sections, particularly while

reading the series as a pre-imperial half of an *Aeneid*, it is now time to explore more thoroughly Du Bellay's political concerns, advice, and meditations. Just as the *Franciade* was meant to teach the young Charles IX, so too the *Antiquitez* were meant to be instructional to Henri II as French society became increasingly divided in the years following the Reformation, though not only along sectarian lines. Smith explains the appeal of Rome as textual inspiration to Du Bellay, arguing that in his poetry, "Rome is also a macrocosm: its destiny offers a model – and a warning – to anyone who reflects on that destiny" (9); the poems force the reader to engage in such reflection.

The Reformation is the key event that provides the context for the two primary concerns of the *Antiquitez*, the role of the Catholic Church in a recently-fractured Christendom and the dangers civil discord poses to a great civilization. Thus the *Antiquitez*'s reflections on civil war speak not only to France, but also to the Church, experiencing its own civil conflict in the form of the Reformation. Du Bellay's reflections on ancient Rome and particularly its fall due to hubris provide advice to both the poet's Church and his nation. Both the reflections on the Church and civil war contain elements of national sentiment; the French saw their nation as holding a privileged position within Christendom (Hartley 5), and Du Bellay, like many of his compatriots, anticipated a true *pax gallicana* to mirror the achievements of Augustus' Rome (Hartley 16, 57). Since the national engagement is more aligned with the focus of our study and provides a bridge to the next chapter's Protestant reflections on the conflict, let us begin with a brief examination of the Church before moving on to the nation.

Reflections on Catholic Rome

A devout Catholic, Du Bellay naturally reflected upon the role of Rome as head of the Church and a major political power during his stay in the city. His poetic reflections fall primarily into two categories: frustration at the opulence and hubris of the papal court and affirmations of the Church's continued position of importance in Europe. These tie together for Du Bellay in the wake of the Reformation as he considers the question of how the Church will maintain its power in a fractured Christendom. It is within this context that we can best understand the ambiguous representation of civil war throughout the *Antiquitez*; though the Roman civil war destroys the Republic, it is precisely this war that allows the formation of the Roman Empire, an even greater power than its predecessor. However, Du Bellay also highlights the fall of the Empire through repeated references to the Goths and northern barbarians that recall the Reformation. Du Bellay's admonitions of earthly pride and papal corruption suggest that for him, the answer lies in cleansing the Church of its sins, sins that mirror those of ancient Rome and preceded the Empire's downfall. Catholic Rome, like France, must learn from the mistakes of its predecessor.

In many of the sonnets of the *Antiquitez*, Du Bellay consoles himself about the permanent loss of ancient Rome with the assurance that the city itself has maintained its leadership position throughout the world in its transformed version as seat of the Church. *Antiquitez* s.8 describes the martial and naval might of the Roman Empire that covered the whole world; though that political power has faded, its descendants (embodied by the Church) hold power that "mesura le hault ciel à la terre profonde" (*Antiquitez* 8.8). This opposition of the horizontal, earth-covering power of the Empire and the vertically-measured power of the Church highlights the differences between mortal political power and true divine power that reaches up to heaven.

Smith argues that the primary message of this sonnet is that “time destroys political communities, but Rome remains the ‘head’ of humanity” (34). This idea is repeated in s.26, where we have already seen the inability of Rome to be measured by mortal instruments because “Rome fut tout le monde, et tout le monde est Rome” (*Antiquitez* 26.9). The chiasmus draws a parallel (rather than a division) between the ancient political power of Rome and the current religious power as all humanity falls under the universal power of the Church’s ‘truth’. In the past, ancient Rome had conquered the world, but now that power extends, including the whole world as its citizens regardless of nationality, through the Catholic Church. While he asserts this as fact in the statement “tout le monde est Rome”, this should also be read as a call for unity in face of the Reformation; Du Bellay is reminding faithful Catholics that they should unite ideologically to weather the attacks on the faith. His representation of civil war thus illuminates how this unity should be achieved; as Rome restructured from Republic to Empire and thereby consolidated its power in the wake of division, so too must the Church reform itself to maintain its own power.

Both s.17 and s.18 continue the insistence that Roman power and influence were not truly destroyed with the fall of the Empire, but rather transferred to the Church. These two were originally printed on the same page, with the decasyllabic s.17 on top of s.18’s alexandrines. In style, subject, and narrative form, s.18 is reminiscent of epic; in the elevated verse, it tells a mini-narrative of the rise and fall of Rome. Beginning as fertile fields for farmers and shepherds, Rome rises through the leadership of kings, consuls, and dictators before returning (in typical cyclic fashion) to the leadership of pastors: “Mais le Ciel s’opposant à tel accroissement, / Mist ce pouvoir es mains du successeur de Pierre, / Qui sous nom de pasteur... / Monstre que tout retourne à son commencement” (*Antiquitez* 18.11-14). God’s anger at the vanity of human

empire removes that mortal political power and places Rome's importance in the hands of the clergy. S.17 equates the power of the Church with the power of ancient Rome through the symbol of the Roman imperial eagle. The suggestion that the German rook is a poor imitation can either be read as an attack on Luther, whose heretical ideas tried to oppose the Church, or on the Holy Roman Empire, whom Du Bellay considers unworthy in its claim to be the true successor of Rome. Du Bellay reserves this particular honor for France.

Songe continues the religious theme, and makes it clear that the Church is the true successor to ancient Rome in Du Bellay's eyes. We have already seen the Daemon of s.1 explain to the poet that only God is immune to the ravages of time (*Songe* 1.13), and this sonnet sets the tone for the shorter series; divine forces strike down grand man-made monuments in each sonnet. While many are a rebuke of human pride, two in particular attack the hubris and corruption within the Church that Du Bellay so abhorred. As evidence of the poet's attitudes towards his contemporary Rome, let us return briefly to the *Regrets*.

Exiled in the papal court in Rome, Du Bellay explains in s.77 that his intent is to discuss the vices he finds there rather than religious truths; he later reiterates this saying, "Je n'écris de l'honneur, n'en voyant point ici: / ... / Je n'écris de vertu, n'en trouvant point aussi, / ...entre les gens d'Église" (*Regrets* 79.11, 13-14). He complains of "tant de chétifs de cour" (*Regrets* 17.2) and insists "Je n'aime point la cour, et me faut courtiser" (*Regrets* 39.2). The poet describes himself wandering Rome, "ne voyant que l'orgueil" (*Regrets* 19.12), especially in the Vatican "...je n'y trouve qu'orgueil, / Que vice déguisé... / Et de rouges habits un superbe appareil" (*Regrets* 80.1-2, 4). He accuses the Church of opulence and the clergy of corruption, seeing everywhere "cardinaux en vente" (*Regrets* 81.14). It is important to note that Du Bellay never attacks or questions Church doctrine, focusing only on the corruption and vice within the

institution. We must bear in mind these complaints in the *Regrets* while examining Du Bellay's descriptions of the Church during his vision in *Songe*.

As *Songe* was originally printed in the same format as the accompanying *Antiquitez*, the two sonnets dealing with the Church should be on the same page, with the decasyllables of s.13 above the alexandrines of s.14. Both these sonnets, while clear enough in their own right, are put into sharp focus by the above comments (and others) about contemporary life in Rome in the *Regrets*. The vision shows the poet a ship carrying riches and treasures, but a great storm arises and sinks the ship under the waves. The final tercet adds a twist to the destruction shown in the other sonnets of *Songe*: “Je vy sous l'eau perdre le beau thresor, / La belle Nef, et les Nochers encore, / Puis vy la Nef se ressourdre sur l'onde” (*Songe* 13.12-14). While we have seen the Roman ship of state sink in the harbor in *Antiquitez* s.21, the ship can also stand as a symbol of the Church,⁴⁵ especially as Peter, the first pope, was a fisherman before becoming Jesus' primary disciple and founder of his Church. The ship is laden with useless treasure, but Du Bellay sees it reemerge from under the waves with neither its riches nor its sailors. As the *Regrets* clearly demonstrate Du Bellay's disgust at the excesses of the court and the “cardinaux en vente,” he here expresses the hope that the Church will be cleansed of its corruption and worldliness. Like the Roman Republic, the internal conflict will lead to a strengthened, consolidated power for the Church.

The storm is easily understood as a symbol of the Reformation as it comes from the north; it is an “aquilon mutin” (*Songe* 13.7), god of the northern wind, that assaults the ship and causes it to lose its opulent treasures beneath the waves. Du Bellay therefore encourages the Church to use the force of the Reformation to cleanse itself of greed and hubris to return to its

⁴⁵ “Nef” of course has the dual meaning of ship and nave.

simpler origins. Montaigne too compares the Reformation to a storm: “C’est un effet de la Providence divine de permettre sa sainte Eglise estre agitée, comme nous la voyons, de tant de troubles et d’orages...” (*Essais* II.xv p.615). Montaigne argues that the storm will reveal the faithful, waking them from their slumber in much the same way that Du Bellay hopes the Reformation will cleanse the Church of vice.

The following sonnet similarly depicts a northern storm that comes to destroy a great city built on sand. The city is described as “une Cité quasi semblable à celle / Que vid le messenger de la bonne nouvelle / Mais basti sur le sable estoit son fondement” (*Songe* 14.2-4); Du Bellay claims that the city nearly resembles the heavenly Jerusalem described by John in Revelation 21, but its foundation on sand reveals it to be another earthly monument, likely the Church in Rome. As Hartley emphatically clarifies, the poetry Du Bellay composed in Rome is *not* anti-papal (96). Du Bellay again attacks the false divinity within the human aspect of the Church; he does not seek the destruction of Church doctrine, only hoping that the Reformation will wash away the false human pride within the institution. These sonnets nearly end the series, as s.15 concludes with the poet’s awakening from his dream, and this position indicates their importance within the *Antiquitez* and *Songe* as two pieces of the whole.

The Christian divine plays a second role of importance in the *Antiquitez* that will become the cornerstone of d’Aubigné’s narrative, albeit from an opposing perspective. I have already mentioned the Dæmon’s insistence that only God is immune to the destructive passage of time, but here I briefly highlight the larger importance of this theme that provides the framework for *Songe* and the wisdom for the *Antiquitez*. In the Renaissance, authors need to turn to Christianity to provide any sense of teleology within their epics. Perhaps since they studied both Virgil and the historical fall of the Empire that was the teleological end to his narrative, they understand, as

Du Bellay clearly states throughout the *Antiquitez*, that time destroys all human creations. In the final sonnet of the *Antiquitez*, Du Bellay questions the immortality of his own verse, insisting that if immortality were possible, it would have been realized in Rome's marble monuments (s.32). I read this repeated *memento mori* in the text as a method for France (and the Church) to avoid the destructive hubris of the Roman Empire; as earthly Christian powers, they can keep their pride in check by this reminder that only God is truly eternal.

Du Bellay and d'Aubigné both turn to Christianity to give a sense of final purpose to their 'epics.' It is interesting to consider the two together since they are writing from opposite sides of the Reformation, before analyzing the *Tragiques* in the following chapter. Both authors acknowledge the ephemeral nature of even the largest empires. Both look for consolation in the divine in face of loss; for Du Bellay, this is the loss of the cultural father Rome, and for d'Aubigné, the Protestant loss in the Wars of Religion. As the French believed their country to be the supreme Christian nation and therefore themselves to be God's chosen people (Hartley 6),⁴⁶ it is logical that Du Bellay chooses this turn to the focus on divine power. Though the anticipated French Empire will eventually fall as Rome did, the privileged position of France in God's kingdom secures France's ultimate spiritual survival. Thus, Du Bellay adds teleological twist to the end of the *Antiquitez* by the inclusion of *Songe*, one rather different from the imperial French future we already suggested.

Reflections on Civil War

For Du Bellay, the heritage of ancient Rome takes two forms, religious and political, though the Church's political power in the sixteenth century blurs the lines between the two.

⁴⁶ It is interesting to note that of course, the idea of God's chosen (or *élus*) will take on an entirely different meaning from d'Aubigné's Protestant perspective.

Songe s.5 establishes Du Bellay's dual hopes for the Church and France, therefore providing an introduction to his political engagement throughout the series. A great oak spreads over seven hills until it is cut down by "une troppe barbare" (*Songe* 5.10) and from its trunk spring "deux arbres jumeaux" (5.14). While the large oak is clearly ancient Rome, the two saplings can be read in different ways. Smith's reading of the twin trees as the political and religious heirs of ancient Rome, France and the Church respectively (96) is the interpretation best supported by the other sonnets in the *Antiquitez*, *Songe*, and the *Regrets*. France's belief in its special role within Christendom makes the pairing of France and Catholic Rome as two twin saplings emerging from the ancient trunk a logical choice. In *Deffence et illustration*, Du Bellay argued that France could and should become a great nation (particularly through cultivation of its language). The *Antiquitez* continues this idea, particularly in *au roy*, by suggesting that France would be the successor to Rome. This idea aligned with Henri II's own vision for France. Du Bellay says that since he cannot bring back the treasures of ancient Rome for the king, he brings him his poetic *tableau* to honor the fallen Empire in the hope that Henri will one day recreate its grandeur.

However, Du Bellay is very aware of the tense social divides (as shown by his discussions of the Reformation) and the fact that civil war threatens to prevent that future. Hartley asserts that Du Bellay felt national unity was the most important priority for France (as evidenced by his poem *Ample Discours*, written after Henri's death). Prior to the king's premature death, Du Bellay believed firmly in Henri's imperial abilities, both as a warrior and as a peace-maker (Hartley 131-132); by uniting Europe with his French empire, he would (theoretically) bring peace by removing the political rivalries that were so frequently in conflict. Towards the beginning of Du Bellay's sojourn in Rome (1553-1557) when he composed the *Antiquitez*, this grand imperial future seemed possible for France under the guidance of Henri II.

By the time Du Bellay returned and published the work, the effects of the Reformation had manifested and civil war seemed already a distinct possibility. Though Du Bellay died in 1560, two years before the beginning of the wars, his anxiety about civil war is already felt acutely in the *Antiquitez*. In this final section, we will see how, much unlike his friend Ronsard, Du Bellay uses the religious tensions in his time to create innovative contexts for his imitation of ancient texts and to spur a thought-provoking dialogue among his compatriots.

The most important text to discuss in relation to the *Antiquitez* is clearly Lucan's *Pharsalia* (or *De Bello Civili*), a widely-read and respected epic for French Renaissance poets. Its meditations on civil war struck a chord with the French audience at large during their own period of social unrest. Though Virgil and Homer certainly provided structure, characters, and topoi for Du Bellay, the tone and themes of the *Antiquitez* reflect more directly Lucan's angst at the destruction of his homeland through civil war and the end of the Republic. Du Bellay laments the same fate, but the two share distinctly different perspectives; Du Bellay can see clearly the result of civil war on Rome, since he views it from a distance of some 1500 years, and apply its lessons as a warning to his own nation. Lucan is much closer to the events and feels their effects in a different way, though not necessarily any more acutely; Du Bellay himself saw his people on the brink of civil war and therefore has an emotional response to his own meditations on the auto-destruction of Rome. The primary (and important) difference between the two poets is that Lucan, as a Republican, laments the creation of the Empire that Du Bellay celebrates and offers as a guide to the Church's recovery after the Reformation.

Faced with the realization that Rome was in ruins and his country on the brink of civil war, it is clear why Du Bellay chose Lucan as his main textual source rather than Virgil or Homer. Though the Odyssean narrative is imbued with enough promise of imperial future to read

like the *Aeneid*'s first half, the tone and imitative instances rely more directly on Lucan. Book 1 of the *Pharsalia*, in which the Roman poet enumerates the causes and beginnings of the civil war, is a particular source of inspiration. Many of Du Bellay's sonnets are directly imitated from here, and even an inattentive reader can find many thematic similarities between the two. While the *Iliad* is an epic of conquest and the *Aeneid* an epic celebrating (while sometimes critiquing) a newly-founded empire, the *Pharsalia*, written under the emperor Nero (who d'Aubigné will later compare to Catherine de' Medici), is an epic of the destruction of a civilization from within. As several detailed studies have analyzed the direct borrowings of Du Bellay from Lucan,⁴⁷ there is no need to repeat them here beyond the key imitations that pertain to this study.

The most powerful of these imitations occurs in s.28; indeed the first three stanzas are, in effect, a translation of *Pharsalia* 1.135-143. Lucan describes Pompey as a great oak that is still admired by the people, even though it is falling before Caesar. Du Bellay, however, takes this image of the dying oak and applies it to Rome itself, and the final tercet's references to cities make this clear. While not quite anthropomorphized as in previous sonnets, Rome here takes the place of tragic/epic hero in replacing Pompey directly in Lucan's imagery. We will see more borrowings from Lucan as we continue our study.

For both authors, even more important than destruction through civil war is the idea that time destroys all. Lucan, an anti-Caesarian Republican, invokes this theme as consolation that the Empire too will eventually fall. Quint identifies this as a characteristic of romance: "The losers console themselves that in the long run empire is a no-win affair and that its conquests are bound to perish, and even the staunchly imperialist epic may concede this possibility" (46).

⁴⁷ See Frank McMinn Chambers "Lucan and the Antiquitez de Rome." *PMLA*, Vol.60 No. 4 (Dec, 1945), pp.937-948, and Joseph Vianey "*Les Antiquitez de Rome: leurs sources latines et italiennes.*" *Bulletin italien*. Bordeaux, Feret et fils. Vol. 1. 1901. pp.187-199.

Indeed, Lucan lists this as the principal cause of the war that destroyed the Republic: “It was the jealous chain of fate, the law that opposes / Long-lived eminence, the fall that attends what has grown too / Heavy, and Rome was not able to bear the weight of her greatness” (*Pharsalia* 1.78-80). Though Du Bellay insists more on Rome’s destructive hubris than Lucan, this idea of pride leading to downfall is reflected in Lucan’s idea that it is the weight of greatness that crashes in upon itself. In this, Lucan depicts the idea of critical mass; anything that reaches a certain amount of grandeur is bound to collapse upon itself, much like the four elements of *Antiquitez* s.16. Of course, Du Bellay laments the destruction of the Empire more than of the Republic; despite his critiques of civil war, Du Bellay is acutely aware that the conflict led to a more impressive Rome. It is then the sin of pride that causes its downfall, a sin Du Bellay hopes France will avoid.

The majority of the sonnets in the *Antiquitez* reflect one of two themes, destruction through hubris or through civil war. We must consider both in the dual context of the series’ dedication to Henri II and the poet’s position as devout Catholic appalled by the vices of the papal court. Both poet and king hope for an imperial France, and the poems attempt to demonstrate that pride and civil discord threaten that potential future. We saw earlier the minigigantomachy of s.4 and the insistence that the pride of the giants led directly to their downfall. Images in *Songe* display the grandeur of human monuments (the diamond obelisk, Caesar’s golden urn, the triumphal arch), each representative of human pride, as they are struck down by a violent force (lightning, earthquake, etc) representing God’s judgment. Smith points to this and other points in the entire sonnet sequence, noting “an abundance of reflection on divine intervention in human affairs” (8); the message from a devout poet is not merely that pride eventually falls, but that God will ensure such a fall. Du Bellay uses the image of Icarus to attack

the pride of grand nations in s.17; first the Roman Eagle and later the German rook fly too close to the sun and are destroyed.⁴⁸ Thus, as a Christian nation, France can remain humble and avoid the hubris of Rome by recognizing that eternity lies only with God.

There are more direct references to the dangers of pride as well, such as s.13's direct address to Rome that describes "ton orgueil abbaissé" (*Antiquitez* 13.12); Rome's pride has been humbled, but it still amazes the entire world. The Daemon in *Songe* 1 informs Du Bellay that "tout n'est rien que vanité" (*Songe* 1.11) in the mortal world, as he will prove to the poet throughout the prophetic vision. The repeated insistence throughout both the *Antiquitez* and *Songe* that time will destroy all human endeavors serves as an antidote to the dangers of pride that threaten a great empire. France can avoid the hubristic sin of Rome by being aware of its own eventual destruction. Rather than destroying the potential for imperial teleology that Du Bellay leaves open for Henri to fulfill, this insistence shifts the focus from human empire to spiritual one. Yes, France may achieve greatness only to fall, but as the greatest spiritual/Christian nation (a position Hartley earlier informed us Du Bellay's compatriots believed France occupied within Christendom), it takes consolation in its eternal place as God's chosen people.

As the dangers that come with the pride of a great far-reaching empire are more distant in the poet's time, Du Bellay's warnings about civil war are the most immediately relevant to the

⁴⁸ While I have read the German rook here as a symbol for empire since it immediately follows the Roman imperial eagle, this is also commonly read as a reference to Martin Luther, thereby suggesting that the eagle stands as a symbol for the popes and the corruption in the Church that Du Bellay so abhorred (Smith 52), an idea I examined previously when discussing Du Bellay's criticisms of the Church. Known for his layers of symbolic imagery, it is most likely that Du Bellay intended the Roman eagle to be read simultaneously as an indictment the pride of ancient Rome and of the papacy. As we have seen, much of Du Bellay's imagery has intentional dual meanings that play off each others.

historical context within which he was composing. One of the most prominent themes throughout the *Antiquitez* is the destruction of the Roman Republic as a direct result of civil war. Though there are several references as well to the gothic invasion that officially put an end to the Empire, the assertion is clear that it was the civil wars several hundred years earlier that weakened Rome enough to allow her downfall. Though the conflict initially led to Rome's strengthening through the Empire, this Empire then collapsed under the weight of its own pride, like the four elements of s.16 and the monuments of *Songe*. As representations of civil war, we have already seen Jason's earth-born men slaughter each other for lack of an outside enemy in s.10; the soldiers spring from the dragon's teeth sown in the ground "Mais qui finalement, ne se trouvant au monde / Hercule qui dontast semence tant feconde, / D'une horrible fureur l'un contre l'autre armez" (*Antiquitez* 10.9-11). Du Bellay explains that the soldiers are consumed in "la fraternelle rage" (*Antiquitez* 10.13) that ends in the destruction of them all. This episode can similarly refer to the division in Christianity; d'Aubigné will often describe the Catholic/Protestant conflict in fraternal terms. Though medieval Christendom was unified in its confrontations with Islam, later conflicts shift from this external foe to internal ones.

Civil war at this time is often discussed in terms of fractured familial ties. This idea of civil violence due to lack of an outside enemy is frequently repeated in the *Antiquitez* and is a theme Du Bellay borrows from a few lines in the *Pharsalia*:

Such a people took no pleasure
in peace and tranquility, no delight in liberty free from the sword.
Thus they were quick to anger, ...
it was a virtue to take up arms and hold more power
than the State, and might became the measure of right. (*Pharsalia* 1.171-175).

Hartley makes clear that Du Bellay is not fundamentally opposed to war, only within a nation; Hartley claims it was impossible for a citizen of sixteenth-century France to be both patriot and pacifist due to frequent international conflicts (91). Indeed, once Henri II died and France's foreign wars ceased, the country fell into civil war. Du Bellay of course hopes that internal conflict within both France and the Church will strengthen both, as civil war did for Rome. However, both must take heed not to repeat Rome's other sin of pride.

The most important section for this theme of the destructive power of civil war is the series of sonnets 21-24, each of which treats the subject from different and complementary perspectives. It is important to remember that with the deliberate formatting choices in Du Bellay's original printing, these four sonnets would be on facing pages, with the decasyllabic odd sonnets on top and the alexandrine even sonnets on the bottom, though the numbering system is modern and not of Du Bellay's original design. I examine them linearly, but without numbers in the original publication, Du Bellay encourages readers to engage with these sonnets in a variety of directions as each of the four can stand in opposition to any of the others.

As noted during the examination of epic topoi in the *Antiquitez*, s.21 relies on the popular ship of state metaphor. Du Bellay borrows a reference from Lucan (*Pharsalia* 1.24-32) about the failure of both "Pyrrhe et le Mars de Libye [Hannibal]" (*Antiquitez* 21.1) to conquer Rome. The ship is buffeted by fierce foreign waves, and yet never succumbs. It is only upon returning home that the ship is struck by a "trop grand vent" (*Antiquitez* 21.13), crashing into the shore to sink in its own harbor. This becomes a frequent motif: violence at home is significantly more dangerous than foreign disputes. Like Jason's earth-born soldiers, a nation that cannot find an external enemy (or like Rome who defeated its enemy) turns on itself. The sonnet below describes the land and riches accumulated by Rome through conquest, yet those conquered watched "anima

contre soy d'un courage mutin / Ses propres nourrissons..." (*Antiquitez* 22.5-6). Rome's destruction by its own mutinous children allows the spoils to be reclaimed by those from whom they were taken.⁴⁹

As the second decasyllabic sonnet of this grouping faces the first, s.23 ties back to s.21's themes of destruction *following* the Punic wars rather than during. Du Bellay discusses an ancient Roman who was "cautement sage" (*Antiquitez* 23.1) in arguing against the Punic wars, believing that Rome would "se laisseroit saisir / A la fureur de la civile rage" (*Antiquitez* 23.7-8) when faced with too much idleness once the threat of Carthage was removed. This sonnet also borrows from Lucan the repeated emphasis on the familial relationship between Caesar and Pompey; the final line, always the key in the *Antiquitez*, refers to the pride that "Rompit l'accord du beupere et du gendre" (*Antiquitez* 23.14). While the details are interesting within the sonnet, the larger implications are even more pertinent to our study. It is important to mention that the wise Roman was Scipio Nasica Corculum, who did indeed argue to leave Carthage standing lest Rome destroy itself out of sheer idleness.⁵⁰ If we read the *Antiquitez* as a warning to Henri II and France to not fall into civil war, this sonnet seems to set Du Bellay himself up as an equivalent figure to Scipio Nasica, whose prophetically accurate advice was ignored. In dedicating an entire sonnet to this historical figure, Du Bellay is insisting that his king heed the same advice that the Roman Senate ignored to their own detriment.

⁴⁹ This is another image that d'Aubigné will use to describe civil conflict. An anthropomorphized mother-France is torn to shreds by the combative twin sons at her breast in *Misères* 97-130.

⁵⁰ Interestingly, it was Cato, the closest person to a hero in the *Pharsalia*, who argued the opposite side of this debate and called for the complete destruction of Carthage, according to Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History* (15.23).

These dual references to the destruction of the Roman Republic as a result of the end of the Punic wars are interesting in how they relate (perhaps indirectly) to the *Aeneid* and especially its imperial teleology. Quint devotes an entire chapter of *Epic and Empire* to the ‘epic curse’ cast by the vanquished that undermines the epic’s own attempt at a teleological narrative by implying the continuation of the story beyond the telos presented within the text. Many epics include such a curse, though it prevents the story from ending fully with the poem’s conclusion. Polyphemus condemns Odysseus to another journey, and the reader knows that despite his return to Ithaka, he will be compelled to leave again. Dido’s curse at the end of *Aeneid* Book 4 operates similarly, though with the added dimension that history itself allowed the realization of her curse, one that becomes fully articulated not by Virgil or Lucan, but by Du Bellay. Virgil composed shortly after the end of the civil wars that Lucan (writing a hundred years later) bitterly laments. Virgil includes Dido’s curse despite the teleology implied by the shield of Aeneas, but he cannot see the full aftermath of the Punic Wars as clearly as Lucan, who sees the negative aspects of the Empire and one-man rule through the incompetence of Nero and therefore profoundly regrets the end of the Republic through the civil wars. Du Bellay, visiting Rome 1500 years later, is able to see most clearly the long-term effects of the descent into civil war.

Both Lucan and Du Bellay destroy the illusion of Virgil’s teleological narrative, a destruction to which Virgil himself alluded through Dido. As the Trojan fleet sails away, Dido curses the future Roman people:

Nullus amor populis nec foedera sunt.
 Exoriare aliquis nostris ex ossibus ultor
 Qui face Dardanios ferroque sequare colonos,
 Nunc, olim, quocumque dabunt se tempore vires.

Litora litoribus contraria, fluctibus undas

Imprecor, arma armis: pugnent ipsique nepotesque. (*Aeneid* 4.624-629)

Dido's call for eternal war between her people is strengthened by her suicide immediately following her curse. In her article "The Rope and the Sword", Nicole Loraux discusses classical representations of female suicide (notably in tragedy), noting that for a woman, the traditional suicide by hanging represents an implicit silencing of her voice, one which could often be used to give testimony. By choosing suicide by sword, a death usually reserved for male heroes alone, Dido (and by extension, Virgil) simultaneously refuses to silence herself in death and gives power to her curse. Like the wise Roman of s.23, Du Bellay's advice remains unheeded, his prophetic voice silenced by his own early death at the age of thirty-seven.

For Virgil, the teleology of the *Aeneid*'s story lies in the foundation of the Roman Empire under Augustus. As a republican, Lucan believes that the start of the Empire signals the downfall of Rome, not the beginning of its glory. Quint claims that Lucan continues his episodic wandering narrative long after the titular battle in an attempt to avoid any sense of teleology in the narrative; he also argues that this is, in some ways, an explicit warning against the very temptation of epic poets to ground their poem in a telos (151). Lucan left the poem unfinished after Nero compelled the poet to commit suicide, and the teleological void is so pronounced that critics can only speculate about where the poem would have ended if complete.

While Lucan begins undermining the *Aeneid*'s telos, Du Bellay's sonnets complete the task to show Dido's curse fully realized, though perhaps not how Dido intended. For Rome, becoming the clearly dominant force in the Mediterranean through the destruction of Carthage (and the concurrent victory of the Syrian war) meant that Rome found itself with no distractions from internal rivalry, like Jason's earth-born soldiers in s.10. We have already seen how Du

Bellay demonstrates throughout his text that civil war, much more than the eventual invasion of the Goths, is responsible for the fall of Rome. There is “rien de Rome en Rome” (*Antiquitez* 3.2), and Virgil’s attempt at teleology has been completely undermined. Dido’s curse turns out more powerful than she could have imagined; rather than eternal war between the two peoples, the eventual destruction of her city causes the fall of Aeneas’ descendants as well, a historical truth mirrored by her textual suicide. As in the cyclical sonnets 18, 20 and 22, this divinely-promised second Troy has fallen like the first. Of course, neither Dido nor Virgil could anticipate the newest iteration of empire seated in Rome as the Catholic Church.

Du Bellay reaches further back to Rome’s mythological origins for another representation of civil war in s.24 (the last in this essential series of 4), the fratricide of Remus by Romulus, a story often associated with Jacob and Esau for Christians. Placed below the final line of s.23 that references “beaupere et gendre,” this sonnet continues the theme of familial strife. The Romulus and Remus story is here presented as a version of an ‘original sin’ myth; the very founder and namesake of Rome was guilty of fratricide and built its walls with blood: “Ne permettant des dieux le juste jugement, / Vos murs ensanglantés par la main fraternelle / Se pouvoir assurer d’un ferme fondement” (*Antiquitez* 24.12-14). The idea of “juste jugement” suggests that auto-destruction through civil war is not only right for Rome, but is the inevitable destiny of its people, one founded on fratricide.

The breakdown of the family unit mirrors civil wars; the main opponents in the war, Julius Caesar and Pompey, are mentioned twice in *Antiquitez*, but never by name, only by their familial ties “beaupere” and “gendre” (*Antiquitez* 23.14 and 31.11). This comes from *Pharsalia* as much as from history; at the beginning of Book I, Lucan lists six causes of the civil war, the fourth being the death of Julia:

... If only she could have been granted
 Longer life, she alone would have had the power of restraining
 Husband and father alike, of returning them to their senses,
 Dashing their swords to the ground and joining their hands in friendship-
 Just as the Sabine women united their fathers and husbands,
 Taking their stand between them. By Julia's death was abolished
 Any prospect of trust, and the marshals' consciences gave them
 License to start the fighting. (*Pharsalia* 1.126-133)

Here Lucan gives great power to Julia in insisting that only she had the power to prevent the outbreak of civil war. He accords the same power to Crassus, had he lived, but the final lines of this passage indicate that a familial bond had the greatest chance of preventing fighting. He even cites the Sabines as precedent to confirm that a woman could indeed reconcile a broken family and thus prevent war. For Du Bellay, this insistence on the opposition within a broken family unit reinforces the connection between the foundational fratricide and the civil war. Lucan prefers a historical argument of cause and effect over destiny, but this in no way minimizes the role of familial breakdown in the beginning of war.

The cyclical narration of the *Antiquitez* indicates that, like the Roman Empire that follows the collapse of the Republic, another imperial power is always poised to rise and assume the place of the last. Thus, the cycles of *Antiquitez* and *Songe* indicate Du Bellay's cyclical view of history, as romance poets do. Troy must fall to give rise to Rome. First kingdom, then Republic, then Empire all rise and fall to make way for Catholic Rome, the seat of God's power on Earth. Though Du Bellay represents this empire in a period of turmoil due to both opulent pride and internal conflict, he hopes the ordeal will strengthen the Church's power as it did for ancient

Rome. This Catholic empire, both spiritual and political in the poet's time, announces the final Kingdom of God that alone can end the cycle.

Du Bellay would not live even two years after the publication of his *Antiquitez*. He would not see the start of the civil wars he so clearly feared would destroy France. Like his wise Roman counselor of s.23 who warned against the destruction of Carthage, Du Bellay's message to Henri II would also go unheeded. The secondary warning, that the French empire avoid the hubris that destroyed the Roman, becomes moot as such an empire is never realized. Hartley can clarify the problems with the political situation through Du Bellay's eyes; the power of France and patriotism is entirely grounded in the monarchy itself (151). The cornerstone of the French belief in their superiority as both political and spiritual nation is the royal hereditary line, therefore "the monarch serves as a focus for patriotic sentiment" (Hartley 5). As Henri died leaving his throne to a young son (15 year-old François II who would reign for less than two years), the dreams of imperial France died with him, furthering the nation's descent into a civil war. The following chapter will now examine a representation of this war itself and the *Tragiques*' engagement with the political situation from the opposite perspective Du Bellay's Catholic point of view.

CHAPTER IV

D'AUBIGNÉ AND THE PROTESTANT VISION FOR EPIC

Let us turn now from the Catholic perspective on sixteenth-century national sentiment to examine that of the century's persecuted minority where the tension between France's emerging nationhood and its civil unrest is most apparent. D'Aubigné's political position allows him to create a moving and unique poem that defies genre traditions by appropriating epic's norms and victorious teleology to undermine the very institutions it exists to uphold. As the poet declares in the *Tragiques*'s second book, "Ce siecle, autre en ses mœurs, demande un autre style" (*Princes* 77). As we saw in Chapter 1, d'Aubigné rejects all the terms used by his contemporaries and calls his poem simply *livre*; indeed, "d'Aubigné was not writing epic as the other poets understood it" (Maskell 13). In McFarlane's opinion, he "succeeded in creating a poetic world of unique quality and character" (45); I argue that 'unique genre' follows from McFarlane's assessment.

The poet's passion and personal investment in his subject are palpable in this text, contrary to Ronsard whose passion is for the poetics of his poem rather than its subject matter. To invoke the vocabulary of Chapter 1, d'Aubigné represents inspired composition over the diligent handiwork of Ronsard; thus the Huguenot follows Ronsard's advice on epic composition more than Ronsard did himself. D'Aubigné's incorporation of the civil wars allows him to make use of the tension between history and poetry to find the new contexts for epic topoi that were so

problematically absent in the *Franciade*. Unlike Ronsard who was desperate to make an ancient poetic form fit his time, d'Aubigné recognizes that this atypical historical period demands a genre of its own, or at least a drastic departure from the genre's norms.

Steeped in religious imagery and Christian soteriology, d'Aubigné's *Tragiques* is a distinctly Protestant representation of the civil wars in which the Catholic majority sought to exert their continued authority over the increasing Huguenot population (estimated around ten percent of France at this time). This seven-book description of the French Wars of Religion does not commit the fault of the *Franciade* by ignoring the conflict, and yet its very position as the loser's story of conflict prevents it from falling under Quint's definition of epic's linear teleological narrative. Though the *Tragiques* is the only text of this study to be discussed directly by Quint, I insist the poem defies categorization more than he suggests by moving epic action out of the narrative and into the poet's hands, where the act of poetic composition itself becomes epic action; here, both poet and text serve as hero. While d'Aubigné's poetic account of defeat in a devastating civil war can hardly be called an imperial epic, his personal status as Huguenot soldier allows him to commandeer the genre of national sentiment and transform it into a unique text that validates the losing minority's cause rather than the establishment.

In this chapter, I first examine the fundamental shift in heroism that completely alters epic traditions, those of the winners or losers. D'Aubigné gives us no hero beyond the collective Protestant group in the text; rather, the principal heroic action becomes the composition of the poem itself. Though d'Aubigné fought as a soldier in the civil wars, neither he nor any other character joins battle within the lines of the poem. Instead, the hero d'Aubigné attacks the responsible with his new weapon, his verse. Then, I examine the roles d'Aubigné's *je* assumes within the poem itself, as martyr, witness, and prophet. The instructional role of prophet causes a

shift in epic's didacticism that impacts other poetic elements and epic topoi such as the text's representation of collective identity and a linear narrative structure. The dismemberment of narrative aligns the text with Quint's conception of romance, but d'Aubigné's Calvinist faith in vocation and predeterminism allows him to reclaim the winner's teleology. A world where sin rules over virtue is clearly a world inverted contrary to divine intention, and d'Aubigné uses this claim to establish his faction's defeat as proof of their ultimate salvation as God's true elect. Since only God and the Final Judgment can truly offer a telic force in the world, human history is largely irrelevant and unnarratable. Therefore, not only does d'Aubigné claim defeat as a sign of true victory, but he undermines the victors' victory by claiming their own genre's teleological narrative to do so.

The poet's unusual treatment of genre, breaking epic's rules and using them in a mutated form to claim Protestant victory at the end of the cosmos, cleverly links the rebellious role of the soldier/poet with that of his text; one is a rebel against political oppression, the other in face of generic constraints that define poetry in the time and strangle Ronsard's epic. In sum, this chapter builds on the classifications of this study to understand d'Aubigné's challenge to the winner's genre, focusing on the poet's particular situation within his historical moment that permits his flexibility with a venerated genre, embracing parts while rejecting others to support his politico-religious faction and undermine both the establishment and its quintessential genre.

To introduce my argument that the *Tragiques* represents a text deliberately in opposition to traditional genre lines, it is useful to examine where other critics have landed in the debate. The fact that most studies of the poem include a discussion of its genre indicates already that the question demands asking. To my mind, the *Tragiques* fits into a category only to the extent that the poem subverts the very category to which it lays claim. Much current criticism tends to

assume the poem is an epic, likely due to its length, style, and martial subject matter. The simple fact that Langer concludes his study of “boring epic” with the *Tragiques* as a counterpoint to Ronsard’s *Franciade* sets the two texts in the same category. Langer maintains that the *Tragiques* is difficult to read, but certainly not boring like the *Franciade* (225). Garnier and Plattard openly label it an *épopée* (i.I.xi). Keith Cameron argues that the poem fits Ronsard’s description of epic, but a distinctly Christian form of the genre (68-69). However, because it breaks so dramatically with Virgilian tradition, I note that it does not fit the *spirit* of Ronsard’s conception of epic for a nation, especially since d’Aubigné undermines and vehemently attacks the institutions that a national epic would celebrate as a telic force for both the narrative and history.

McFarlane and Quinton both skirt a proper answer, noting the difficulty of defining epic and focusing on d’Aubigné’s usage of “devices associated with epic tradition” (McFarlane 41). For Quinton, d’Aubigné’s vision is “of epic and cosmic proportions” (109); he acknowledges that the style is new and speaks to the tragedy and horror of the time period (18), yet situates the *Tragiques* alongside the epics of Dante, Tasso, and Milton (107) since they all fall into the same category of religious epics. McFarlane calls it “one of the few successful ventures by a French poet into the field of epic composition – difficult though it may be to define this term satisfactorily” (45), leaving the question of genre rather unresolved. Quint’s solution is his label “loser’s epic,” a sub-genre that tends towards romance patterns (which is itself a sub-genre of epic); for him, the label is justified by the poem’s attempt to “undo the triumphalist historical narrative of the victors, ...to deny a meaningful epic teleology to that history and break it down into nonnarratable violence” (Quint 188). I take his study further to explore d’Aubigné’s engagement with the genre as he uses epic itself to overturn and undermine not only the winner’s

teleological version of history, but also the genre that extols and legitimates this interpretation of history.

D'Aubigné himself thought of his project as an epic, or at least as contributing to the Pléiade's goals of furthering the French language and national literature (Cameron 40). In other words, the poem is "something made possible by the revolution of the Pléiade" (McFarlane 25); though d'Aubigné was not a member of Ronsard's elite group and his poem privileges religious faction over national sentiment, the *Tragiques* builds on the group's poetic and linguistic foundation. D'Aubigné announces his purpose for the text early in *Misères*, contrasting the *Tragiques* with his previous (and naïve) love poetry:

Je n'escris plus les feux d'un amour inconnu,
Mais, par l'affliction plus sage devenu,
J'entreprends bien plus haut, car j'apprens à ma plume
Un autre feu, auquel la France se consume. (*Misères* 55-58)

In contrasting this text's heroic (and tragic) theme with love poetry as a youthful folly, d'Aubigné nods towards the tension explored in Chapter 2. The *Tragiques* is a highly rhetorical poem, representing a break from his earlier amorous poetry in the poet's own mind. The above announcement sets d'Aubigné firmly on the path away from lyric and towards epic, a path Ronsard never found.

A brief summary of the text's historical situation explains Quint's label as an epic of the loser. Since the writing of the *Tragiques* lasted from around 1577 (when d'Aubigné was wounded at the battle of Castel-Jaloux) until its 1616 publication in Geneva, the text was completed in full awareness of the Catholic victory. Despite the fact that the wars technically ended in 1598 with the Edict of Nantes' establishment of tolerance towards the Huguenot

population, many Protestants continued to flee France, feeling, like d'Aubigné, that this uneasy truce was actually a defeat. As France experienced some smaller-scale religious unrest and rebellious activity for another thirty years, it is easy to see why many felt the so-called conclusion of the Wars to be unsatisfactory. Though d'Aubigné did not know that the Edict would be entirely overturned less than a century later to recommence open persecution of French Protestants, his impression of defeat is a reasonable one.

Before analyzing the poem's particulars, it is useful to note a few details about its overall structure. The poem is divided into seven books (*Misères*, *Princes*, *La Chambre Dorée*, *Feux*, *Fers*, *Vengeances*, *Jugement*) and is prefaced with a letter to the reader from "le larron Promethee" and a 414-line octosyllabic poem from the author to his *livre*. As the seven books total over nine thousand lines, the text handily fulfills Du Bellay's definition of *long poème*. Cameron calls the text a "mammoth work" (38), both for its finished length and for the time spent by the poet. The thirty-nine years d'Aubigné dedicated to its composition firmly recall Du Bellay's description of epic work that lasts "quasi de la vie d'un homme" (*Deffence* 267).

In the prefatory *Aux lecteurs*, d'Aubigné offers the reader an outline of the seven books and describes their individual styles. For the poet, *Misères* is "d'un style bas et tragique", *Princes* and *La Chambre Dorée* are both "d'un style moyen mais satyrique," *Feux* is "d'un style tragicque moyen" compared to *Fers*' "tragicque eslevé, plus poëtique et plus hardi que les autres," while *Vengeances* is "théologien et historial," and the "style eslevé, tragicque" returns in the final book *Jugement* (*Aux lecteurs* 6-7). McFarlane equates this to the 'elevation' of each book, seeing a progression from lower register to higher that reflects the poem's treatment of earthly matters progressing to a more heavenly focus. Like elsewhere, d'Aubigné insists upon his poem as apart from the literature of its time: "Vous trouverez en ce livre un style souvent trop concis,

moins poli que les œuvres du siècle” (*Aux lecteurs* 4). Though the author admits the style diverges from the period’s norms, the alexandrines throughout recall the dactylic hexameter of ancient epic and are well-suited to elevated subject matter (as discussed in Chapter 1) than the *Franciade*’s decasyllables. This question of overall style and length as a versified account of war justifies the general classification as epic, but this examination of the details will demonstrate how traditional elements of epic are mutated or undermined to suit the poet’s rhetorical purpose rather than used in their traditional context.

Les Tragiques as Œuvre Héroïque

This section examines the heroic quality of the poem as this element provides the fundamental mutation of epic that sets the text apart from poems that appear similar. While the *Tragiques* is heroic, it is decidedly not martial; instead, a collective group suffers against a backdrop of war. The prominence of the *je* allows the text to mutate epic to the personal so text, reader, and poet become complicit in the poem’s external action. The *je* plays several essential roles in the *Tragiques*, notably as hero, martyr, witness, and prophet, but all but the first are discussed in the following section. The transformation to collective heroism of martyrs rather than a select few exemplars from the warrior aristocracy additionally shifts the epic action outside the text. D’Aubigné’s presence is palpable both in and out of the text; the *je* hero follows several important epic topoi and the poet hero attacks the responsible rulers in perpetuity through the poem itself.

Towards a New Heroism

If we take the Middle French terms for epic of *œuvre héroïque* and *poème héroïque*, the focus on the Wars of Religion and in particular the Protestant martyrs of *Feux* situate the text

neatly under both those descriptions. D'Aubigné introduces the martyrs of *Feux* as “Valeureux chevaliers, non de la Table ronde, / Mais qui estes, devant les fondemens du monde, / Au rooelle des esleus” (*Feux* 9-11). Thus in adherence to faith alone, the Protestant martyrs are counted among warriors. The war treated within the lines is, however, atypical for epic; it is not a war of conquest and vendetta (as in the *Iliad*) or foundation of empire (as in the *Aeneid*), but rather a civil war in which a nation striving for greatness is instead tearing itself apart.

D'Aubigné is not alone in his creation of an anti-epic as a genre befitting civil war; his text is inspired by Lucan's *Pharsalia* (or *De Bello Civili*), a text widely circulated in sixteenth-century France where the author's treatment of the Roman civil wars struck a chord with a people who were themselves experiencing civil strife. Lucan's poem is more typically an epic (as Quint's archetypal losers' epic) in that it actually depicts epic topoi such as a storm at sea and the titular battle. As Quint demonstrates, the poets' positions as losers of conflict push both disjointed narratives into the realm of romance's circularity than epic's linearity as they try to make sense of their faction's defeat. While Lucan serves as a model for d'Aubigné on the treatment of civil war in epic from the perspective of its losers, d'Aubigné dismantles the genre even further than his source text.

Though the subject matter is war, the *Tragiques* depicts no battles or martial action as the true war is one of ideology, the battle of good and evil that will end in eternal salvation for God's elect. Instead of explicit martial action, d'Aubigné highlights scenes of horror (in *Misères*), martyrdom (in *Feux* and *Fers*), and injustice (in *Princes* and *La Chambre Dorée*) against the backdrop of war. Though his subject may be inspired by the Wars of Religion in his own country, the real war within the poem is between true and false Christianity. D'Aubigné suggests that the “combats de fer” (*Feux* 1109) are in fact a clever trick of Satan, or “l'ennemi ruzé”

(*Feux* 1107), to distract the faithful from the true “combats de l’Eglise” (*Feux* 1109). In a mindset where only God’s plan matters, human wars are of little consequence – particularly if one finds oneself on the losing side.

Moreover, as the poem’s title draws upon theatrical themes, the French civil war provides the scene while smaller actions play out in front of it. Though I examine overall narrative structure later in the chapter, it is important to note that the text is comprised of small-scale episodic narratives set against the backdrop of war. As such, they highlight individuals more than groups; however, rather than signal a turn to romance individuality, these episodes reinforce the collective Protestant struggle and become exemplary of the group. D’Aubigné does not limit his representation of man to the exemplary in order to highlight the eternal struggle or good and evil that is the poem’s true war; he spends nearly as much time admonishing the ‘unfaithful’ who have been deceived by the anti-Christ and persecute ‘true’ Christians. Here d’Aubigné again twists epic tradition by condemning the enemy. Homer’s Trojans (particularly Hector and his family) are tragic, noble figures, and Virgil’s Latins are heroic in their defeat and subsequent assimilation. D’Aubigné alone damns rather than ennoble his enemy, and he does so incessantly throughout the poem.

As the poem concludes with the eternal separation of the elect and the false Christians into heaven and hell, it is only fitting that d’Aubigné maintains the dichotomy of the good and the sinful throughout the entire text. The sinful rulers are misguided by the Pope, or “L’Antechrist” (*Feux* 623) to the poet. D’Aubigné’s wrath is particularly directed at Catherine de’ Medici and her three sons: “Mais nos princes... / Massacrent l’autre mere, et la France a senti / De ses fils le couteau sur elle appesanti” (*Princes* 836-838). Charles IX is a viper and tyrant “qui n’herita du pere / Le cœur, mais les poisons et l’ame de la mere” (*Princes* 863-864).

Henri III, known for his *mignons* of the court, is “hypocrite bigot, / Qui aime moins jouër le Roy que le cagot” (*Princes* 985-986). These degenerate rulers present a foil to the martyrs. Their exemplarity is increased by their adherence to virtue and subsequent sacrifice, for who “La foy demeure ferme” (*Feux* 179). Even the title of the martyrs’ chapter maintains the antithesis between heaven and hell; the very flames that martyr the faithful ensure they will not endure the flames of hell as “Les Feux qui vous brusloyent vous ont rendus candides” (*Feux* 14). Thus while the subject matter is ostensibly the wars on earth, the true war between good and evil insists upon its greater importance throughout the text, culminating in the poem’s teleological Final Judgment.

Though the *œuvre héroïque* tends towards heroism because the subject of epic is war, the most essential aspect is that war allows for the representation of exemplary figures and their heroic deeds. Here, the difference between the *Tragiques* and traditional epic is evident. Epic normally features the actions of traditional heroes, the warrior aristocracy. However, to align with both the emphasis on religious themes and the tragic tone of the text, d’Aubigné turns to those who were martyred for the Protestant cause across Europe and the Americas to avoid limiting his exemplary figures to France or the wars affecting his nation. In this choice, sectarian allegiance takes precedence over national, a motif the text repeatedly reinforces and to which I return in detail shortly. As d’Aubigné himself explained in the first chapter of this study, immortalizing the heroism of these martyrs is the poem’s most important goal. In some ways, this simultaneously ties the *Tragiques* to medieval epic (particularly French *chansons de geste*) and represents a sharp break from medieval tradition; chivalry demanded conquest and sacrifice in the name of God, granting martyrdom to those who died in service of the faith, but these martyrs were, like traditional epic heroes, warriors.

Further, d'Aubigné's martyrs are not warriors and not distinguishably noble; this fact only emphasizes the text's collective function by assuring martyrdom to the faithful of any social class, not merely the warrior aristocracy: "whereas pagan heroes are heroic throughout their lives, martyrs are only exemplary at the moment of death" (Hampton *Writing from History* 117). D'Aubigné opens martyrdom to all, regardless of social class, by highlighting the bravery of those killed for adhering to their faith. This representation of martyrdom that transcends social lines reflects the anti-hierarchical faith of Protestantism. D'Aubigné makes a promise to any unsung martyr he has omitted:

Je ne t'oublieray pas, ô ame bien heureuse!

Je tireray ton nom de la nuit tenebreuse;

Ton martyre secret, ton exemple cache

Sera par mes escrits des ombres arraché. (*Feux* 993-994)⁵¹

D'Aubigné thus confirms for his contemporaries the *Tragiques*' purpose "to erect a monument to those martyrs who might otherwise remain unsung" (McFarlane 25, 32). This gives courage to fellow persecuted Huguenots, especially those who may have wavered in their faith following the conclusion of the wars, as Henri IV did. Though these heroes are not warriors or rulers, their martyrdom fosters sectarian pride in faith in a similar way that Aeneas' heroism on the battle field was a source of pride for the newly-established Roman Empire.

The major schism between epic and d'Aubigné's representation of heroism is that it is not embodied by a single figure; while the hero's exceptionalism in the typical epic is meant to represent his people's, d'Aubigné chooses an approach to better respect Protestantism's

⁵¹ Though obliged to leave out many martyrs from this poem, d'Aubigné would write a second text on the Wars of Religion, *Histoire universelle depuis 1550 jusqu'en 1601*, a more historical and less emotional account. The passage cited above is often read as a promise to sing the heroes left out of the *Tragiques*, a promise fulfilled by this second account of the Wars.

transnationalism. Though the *Iliad* features many heroes, the narrative is centered on one action, the wrath of Achilles (as announced by the opening lines). Aeneas' companions display heroism during battle, but again, the linear narrative is focused on the single action of the titular hero's journey to found Rome. Weber labels the *Tragiques* "une épopée sans héros" (xxviii) (though he neglects debating if such a thing is possible), and suggests the collective group of persecuted Protestants is closest to being read as hero.

D'Aubigné does not focus on a story of one hero, but instead represents the moment of martyrdom of Protestants ranging geographically from Brazil to Prague, beginning with description of common martyr experiences before singling out specific martyrs. *Feux* opens with d'Aubigné debating his conscience in a dream:

.... Mais comment....

Veut-il faire le choix? oses-tu bien eslire

Quelques martyrs choisis, leur triomphe décrire ?

Et laisser à l'oubli comme moins valeureux

Les vainqueurs de la mort, comme eux victorieux ? (*Feux* 27, 29-32)

D'Aubigné's dilemma in choosing which martyrs to include when all are equally deserving of his attention reinforces and makes transparent the poet's belief that all martyrs are equally worthy, and unlike in conventional epic, one does not stand out among his already exceptional peers. Whereas a single figure can embody national sentiment through his exemplarity, the transnationalism of d'Aubigné's Protestant audience (whose factional sentiment he wanted to inspire and embody) requires the abandonment of a single-hero structure whose heroism could be mistaken for national strength rather than religious.

Still, like the martial heroes of ancient and medieval epic, d'Aubigné's martyrs are intended to inspire fellow Protestants through their adherence to faith that brings them directly into heaven. *Feux* begins as the poet watches lines of martyrs enter through heaven's gates to join their fellow *élus*, God's chosen. As Cameron understands the epic heroism of the martyrs, "The Protestants possess the same stoical firmness of character and are at least the equals, if not the superiors, of those great heroes of antiquity" (74). The martyrs are exceptional in their poise, regarding the angels' paintings of their own deaths: "Les zelateurs de Dieu, les citoyens peris / En combatant pour Christ, les lois et le pays, / Remarquoyent aisement les batailles" (*Fers* 301-303). This passage is remarkable for the faithful's reaction to the painting, but even more so for the link that d'Aubigné draws between fighting for Christ, law, and one's country. Their cause is justified as God himself observes their martyrdom and fortifies the faithful through their ordeal: "Du Tout-Puissant la force, au cœur mesme des femmes, / Donna vaincre la mort et combattre les flammes" (*Feux* 1313-1314). Here, political dissent in the name of God has become patriotic.

For an example, I turn to the most often-cited of d'Aubigné's martyrs, Montalchine, whose profession of faith comes at the very center of the text and of *Feux* to provide a focal point for Protestant courage. Giovanni Mollio de Montalcino was a Franciscan professor at the University of Bologna who was burned at the Campio de' Fiori in Rome on September 5, 1553. Brought before the Inquisition at Santa Maria sopra Minvera with a large number of other heretics, Montalcino was only one of two who refused to recant their faith and were burned at the stake the same day. He gave an impassioned speech in self-defense, notably speaking in Italian, rather than Latin, so that all present could understand. Though his actual speech has little to do with the words that d'Aubigné places in his mouth, the poet's choice to use a well-known martyr

to express the key profession of faith reflects his desire to ground the *Tragiques* in historical account, even if he presents a dramatized version.

Montalchine is not only Italian, but is martyred in the very “nid de Satan” (*Feux* 1112), Rome, so his refusal to recant, even to save his life, is an attack on the very heart of the Church’s power. While his entire speech fifty-two line speech is worth citing for its rhetorical energy, I cite only a few lines for the sake of space. Like an orator, Montalchine establishes his argument clearly from the beginning: “Trois mots feront par tout le vray department / Des contraires raisons: *seul, seule et seulement*” (*Feux* 655-656). Attempting both a defense and conversion of his audience by describing his past sermons, Montalchine declares, “J’ay dit qu’en la foy *seule* on est justifié, / Et qu’en la *seule* grace est le salut fié” (671-672), “J’ay dit que Jesus *seul* peut la grace donner” (675) and “J’ay dit que l’Ancien et le Nouveau Testament / Sont la *seule* doctrine et le *seul* fondement” (679-680). Montalchine cites his own previous attacks on the clergy, the idea of purgatory, and even the Pope himself: “J’ay presché que le Pape en terre n’est point Dieu / Et qu’il est *seulement* evesque d’un *seul* lieu” (687-688). Finally, d’Aubigné reflects both Protestant doctrine and Montalchine’s own speech to the Inquisition in Italian when the martyr explains, “Le tyran des esprits veut nos langues changer / Nous forçant de prier en langue estranger” (691-691). As we can see from the selected citations above, d’Aubigné employs the rhyming couplets as a rhetorical device to emphasize the profession’s points, clearly reflecting the five *solae* of Protestant faith: *sola scriptura, sola fide, sola gratia, solus Christus, soli Deo gloria*.

The emphatic repetition of *seul, seule, and seulement* endows the passage with a rousing energy that culminates in the declaration of martyrdom, “Vive Christ, Vive Christ! et meure Montalchine!” (*Feux* 706); this line comes at almost precisely the half-way point of the 1420-line

Feux. D'Aubigné describes the spectators of Montalchine's martyrdom as "tous esmeus" (*Feux* 707), just as the poet intends his own audience to be after reading this passage. Montalchine's martyrdom, and those of all the other martyrs of *Feux*, reflects the collective identity epic is intended to foster and extol through adherence to doctrine, refusal to abandon faith, and pride at their shared fortitude. By positioning this speech at the center, d'Aubigné intends Montalchine to serve as a representative of the other martyrs as well; so he should not be singled out as an epic hero, but as a faithful hero whose memorable profession of faith speaks for all.

The closest the *Tragiques* comes to celebrating martyrdom during martial action is the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacres throughout France that began with Admiral de Coligny's assassination, itself represented as an exemplary martyrdom. Unlike an epic hero whose heroic death is often preceded by a formidable aristeia, Coligny is murdered and defenestrated at the wedding of Marguerite de Valois (sister of the dynasty's final three kings) and Henri de Navarre, future Henri IV of France. Instead of diminishing Coligny's honor, this ignoble assassination reflects on the cowardice of the Catholic perpetrators and increases the rightness of the persecuted. The title of this book, *Fers*, emphasizes the martial theme, though no battle action takes place. However, d'Aubigné again distances the episode from explicit martial action through a unique perspective. Though the event serves as "one of the emotive mainsprings" (McFarlane 31) of the poem and "la tragedie / Qui efface le reste" (*Fers* 702-703), d'Aubigné does not follow his characters through the massacre to draw the audience into the thrilling action, as is the typical epic style. Rather, he presents Coligny, not during his martyrdom, but after he has arrived in heaven with fellow Protestants as they observe the scenes from the war painted by the angels. D'Aubigné shifts the perspective to Coligny's as he sees the painting of his death and laments the wars in a "prophetique voix" (*Fers* 704). Though the reader is distanced from the

death, he ‘hears’ the description of the painting from the murdered man himself. In a further separation from epic, we see none of the deaths from the war directly, only through the angles’ testimony.

Though this section is where the text touches on martial action, d’Aubigné does so to distance this massacre from traditional war; he describes armies made of normal laborers and emphasizes that “Ici les deux partis ne parlent que françois” (*Fers* 803). This simultaneously invokes and ironizes the Pléiade’s views of language and nation, using the situation of shared language to emphasize the unnatural state of civil war and compatriots fight their own rather than a foreign enemy. D’Aubigné’s presentation of the massacre “criticizes epic warfare itself... [as] this warfare is reduced to murder” (Quint 195). To present such a pseudo-battle from within the action would be inappropriate in its suggestion of legitimizing or normalizing the war through more traditional narration.

Je and His Poem as Epic Hero

In accordance with d’Aubigné’s dismantling of the genre, he also changes entirely what it means to be a hero, shifting from descriptions of martial acts within a poem’s narrative to presenting the very act of composing as fundamentally martial. As in the traditional epic, the poet invokes the muse to arise to the challenge of poetic composition, but here d’Aubigné gives another twist on this topos to invoke tragedy and the Christian divine with the goal of turning his poetic voice and poem into a weapon by which he attacks the winning faction. Instead of the muse filling him with poetic *fureur*, God fills him with his own divine vengeance. D’Aubigné joined the Wars of Religion as a teen, serving from standard bearer to general, indicating “a varied experience of military life” (Cameron 13). The poet’s real-world military role is not only

noteworthy, but renders his lack of martial action within the text all the more surprising on one level, and logical on another. Though the collective Protestant population can be read as a heroic figure, the author himself presents as hero, though this role exists more outside the boundaries of the text. In addition to attacking his enemies with the poem itself, d'Aubigné's *je* functions as epic hero within the *Tragiques* in two ways: conflict with the king and a journey to the underworld.

I maintain that three reasons explain d'Aubigné's lack of heroic action within the text. First, and perhaps most importantly, presenting a single hero (especially himself) would undermine the collective Protestant experience which is made more profound by d'Aubigné's role as eye-witness. Second, as an actual soldier with a long military career, the stylized heroism of epic poetry rings false to a poet all too well versed in the realities of war. After all, epic's battles set a stage for a series of exemplary duals, alternated with long list of fighters' names, but they stray far from the messy reality of war. D'Aubigné references his own military service early in the prefatory letter to the reader, calling attention to "l'amour loyal et la fidélité que j'ai montrée par mon épée à mon grand Roi jusques à la fin" (*Aux lecteurs* 54). Having faced real battle and horrific violence, it becomes inappropriate or even absurd to recreate a traditional epic hero in his text; this idealization of a heroic figure does not suit or fit with d'Aubigné's experience in his time. As an actual soldier, his heroic acts were done in battle alongside his brothers in arms; knowing the horror that lies there, a Roland or an Odysseus would appear absurd in real life. This idealized military action would be disjointed with the tragedy of the losing side's account; martyrs are better-suited to this task.

Third, the rhetoric within the poem establishes its composition as a martial act in itself, one in which the verse serves as weapon. D'Aubigné opens *Misères* by comparing himself to

Hannibal in his attack on Rome: “Puis qu’il faut s’attaquer aux legions de Rome, / Aux monsters d’Italie, il faudra faire comme / Hannibal, qui par Feux d’aigre humeur arroser / Se fendit un passage aux Alpes embrasez” (*Misères* 1-4). However, d’Aubigné’s attack, marked by his “courage de feu” (*Misères* 5), becomes the poem itself; like an epic hero, he attacks his enemy, but only *with* the poem rather than in it. D’Aubigné describes his verse as a sword in the opening of *Princes*, calling upon “l’acier de mes vers” (*Princes* 19) to attack those responsible for the horrors described within the poem. Unlike Camões, whose hero Vasco da Gama follows a similar (though more fantastical) route to the East as the poet, d’Aubigné does not insert his military actions (only their repercussions) into the poem, despite being the rare epic poet who was actually a soldier himself. Rather, the composition of the poem serves as continuation of the poet’s own martial deeds. Even the martial images conjured by the fourth book’s title *Fers* invokes the similarly-pronounced *vers*, a more potent and lasting weapon than physical arms. As the words immortalize the courage and fortitude of Protestant martyrs, they also immortalize the sins of the Catholic rulers who caused their nation to tear itself apart, proving that the poetic composition is in fact the most powerful attack d’Aubigné could make.

The mutated version of heroism and exemplarity represents a departure from one of the most important Aristotelian unities for epic; here, the unity of action is replaced by an emotive unity of shared tragedy. Without a hero to achieve his end-driven mission, the text cannot represent the fulfillment of a single action. As d’Aubigné similarly seeks to validate and immortalize the collective Protestant experience of persecution, the focus of action on one man would reduce the sense of shared experience that was intended to comfort his brothers-in-faith. This is not epic of one man (Francus’ *Franciade*, Odysseus’ *Odyssey*, Aeneas’ *Aeneid*, Roland’s *Chanson de Roland*) or even of one nation (Ilium’s *Iliad*), but of shared tragedy. Though

traditional epics' heroes are supposed to represent the nation's exemplarity, the narrative focuses on one action, the action of one man. D'Aubigné makes his story about the actions of many, human and divine (and diabolical). The emphasis on collective experience (an essential function of epic) then ironically prevents the poem from focusing on a single hero's mission that would provide narrative structure and, in a winner's epic, its teleology. In spite of this shift away from action (or indeed narrative at all), d'Aubigné creates a focal telos in *Jugement*, as I examine in detail at the end of this chapter.

To transform his verse into a weapon and instrument of divine justice, d'Aubigné twists the epic topos of invoking the muse. D'Aubigné does not call upon the muses in general or on the expected Calliope; rather, d'Aubigné invokes Melpomene, the muse of tragedy, "en sa vive fureur" (*Misères* 79) in a traditional position at the beginning of the poem. This is not a poet who sings triumphantly *arma virumque*, but one who invokes Melpomene to emphatically and emotionally capture the Protestants' suffering. D'Aubigné breaks again with tradition by giving the tragic muse an actual voice within the text; unlike the poets of old, d'Aubigné has no need of her poetic voice, only the vengeance and truth of God, so she is free to speak for and to France directly. The poet awakens Melpomene from her slumber in a cold tomb; as she emerges, she laments what she sees of the poet's nation: "O France desolee ! ô terre sanguinaire, / Non pas terre, mais cendre ! ô mere, si c'est mere / Que trahir ses enfans aux douceurs de son sein" (*Misères* 89). This choice thus highlights the horrors of war, not its glorious representation that Calliope would produce.

The unusual choice of muse announces the poem's ties to theater, both reflecting the new century's aesthetic preferences and introducing the *Tragiques*' staging of scenes from the war. Though the invocation of a tragic muse befits the title, tragedy (in the sense of the Melpomene)

applied to tragic theater, certainly not an epic of teleological victory. As the text is largely meant to comfort d'Aubigné's losing faction, the choice of Melpomene nods to tragedy's cathartic purpose as well. Therefore, while the invocation itself is a gesture towards epic tradition, the choice of muse highlights the text's focus on the horrors endured by the Protestants. Rather than a single mission-focused narrative (again, the domain of Calliope), the *Tragiques* present a series of scenes linked only by the shared backdrop of civil war and its horrors. Where some critics see tableaux throughout the *Tragiques* in a manner that mimics the celestial ones of *Fers*, Quainton sees miniature stage productions, thus tying together the invocation of Melpomene and the movement within the disjointed scenes of the poem (26-29). One prominent example is the ekphrasis of the heavenly painting depicting the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre, where d'Aubigné uses theatrical language [such as "rideau" (779), "le spectacle" (780), and "spectateurs" (788)] to describe the action.

The invocation of the muse traditionally results in the poetic fureur through which a poet found his skill, but d'Aubigné turns instead to his god earlier in the poem to be filled with a Christian fureur rather than the ancient poetic one invoked by Du Bellay in *Antiquitez* s.1. The poet recognizes his own "vice naturel" and "cœur vicieux" (*Misères* 48) and asks God, in a Christian version of a traditional epic invocation of the muse, to purge him through fire and "zele tres saint" (*Misères* 49). This is the first invocation, before that of Melpomene, indicating that it is primarily this Christian fureur that animates the poet. Coming so early in the poem, these lines establish the religious zeal with which he confronts the Catholics throughout the text. This fiery rage manifests as a holy activity by which the Catholics are held accountable for their actions and the poet's own natural sin is purged by fire. This Christian invocation is repeated again at beginning of *Vengeances* as d'Aubigné asks God to show him divine truth as he assumes the sin-

free state of a child and asks for “les fureurs d’un enfant” (*Vengeances* 64). D’Aubigné articulates the role of divine fureur, asking God “Mets au lieu de ma langue une langue de flamme, / Que je ne sois qu’organe à la celeste voix / Qui l’oreille et le cœur anime des François” (*Vengeances* 58-60); in both Platonic and biblical fashion, d’Aubigné serves as an instrument through which God speaks the truth.

It is precisely this Christian fureur that gives the poem the “vehement energy” Quint describes as “a brilliance that can be found almost wherever one chooses to sample *Les Tragiques*” (187). Montalchine’s profession of faith cited above evidences this energy’s positive side. The impassioned attacks on France’s leadership demonstrate the negative direction this energy also takes. D’Aubigné’s blame-laying passages reflect this vehemence as the poet exposes his nation’s betrayal; much of *Princes* displays this anger, such as the blame placed on “les Rois voluptueux, / Yvres d’ire et de sang” (*Princes* 691-692). D’Aubigné is roused throughout the entire poem, and his frustration is both palpable and deliberately contagious.

Jackson’s study of epic maintains that the conflict between hero and king is the backbone of narrative structure and makes an epic possible; his insistence that epics are thus fundamentally born in times of conflict is similar to Quint’s vision of epic and romance as conclusions to conflict. Jackson’s analysis is aligned with my own of the *Franciade* that maintained the lack of decisive victory in Ronsard’s time prevented epic teleology from existing. However, contrary to Quint’s assertion of epic as the winner’s side of conflict, Jackson maintains that defeat is more likely to produce an epic than victory (2); Jackson agrees that “epic themes spring from turmoil” (4), often in the form of the hero’s intrusion into an established culture that puts him fundamentally at odds with the ruler both in terms of values as well as personality.

In the *Tragiques*, the epic hero's conflict with the king (or dynasty of kings) is evident, as well as the intrusion of the poet's Protestant values into the established Catholic culture as attacks on both persist throughout the poem. In the prefatory *Aux lecteurs*, d'Aubigné clarifies that his stance is not republican; he claims to pass on a message from Henri IV, who himself read the text several times before its publication, to d'Aubigné's "ennemis" who accuse him of attacking the aristocracy and the monarchy: "Ce Prince, qui avoit desjà leu *les Tragiques* plusieurs fois, les voulut faire lire encore pour justifier ces accusations : et n'y ayant rien trouvé que supportable, pour en estre plus satisfait, appeal un jour notre auteur... Nostre auteur, interrogé promptement quelle estoit de toutes administrations la meilleure, respondit que c'estoit la monarchie" (*Aux lecteurs* 8). Though he rails against the current monarchy, he does so to admonish its tyrannical behavior, not because he is opposed to the institution.

The epic loser's challenge to French leadership is embodied in the words of the attack itself; thus, the poem's composition becomes the epic action by which d'Aubigné attacks the tyrants. The words themselves become swords as d'Aubigné attacks with "l'acier de mes vers" (*Princes* 19). His critique of the Valois dynasty runs throughout the poem as a repeated theme, particularly in *Princes*. D'Aubigné's principal blame lies on the flatterers who have corrupted the kings, now "Esclaves de peché" (*Princes* 460). The dismemberment of the body politic reflects d'Aubigné's opinions of the religious oppression as the king cuts up his own body. The poet explains that "Ce Roy donc n'est plus Roy, mais monstrueuse beste, / Qui au haut de son corps ne fait devoir de teste" (*Princes* 485-486). True (non-tyrannical) kings are subject to their own laws, but in d'Aubigné's France, they are "Yvres d'ire et de sang" (*Princes* 692). In *Feux*, d'Aubigné proclaims that constancy in faith "a fait les bergers vainqueurs sur les tyrans" (*Feux* 1356), and thus the outsider's conflicting values can overcome the established ruling class.

D'Aubigné's critiques of Rome ["le nid de Satan" (*Feux* 1112), ruled by "la beste de Rome" (*Misères* 1213) the "tyran des esprits" (*Feux* 691), a pope likened to Nero] are similarly situated under this umbrella of the epic loser's anti-establishment stance. Thus the critique of king and Church fits the oppositional dichotomy of hero and king that, for Jackson, is the fundamental conflict in epic.

In his firm opposition to the establishment, d'Aubigné also aligns this *je* with the hero of the winners' epic, twisting the representation of winners and losers as he does throughout the text. The conflict between the poet and Henri IV, a former brother in arms, recalls the discord between Achilles and Agamemnon that is central to the *Aeneid*. Both heroes feel slighted by their former commanders. This conflict with the ruler establishes both d'Aubigné and Achilles as exiles within their own society, a standard trait of the epic hero that Jackson highlights (5). While Agamemnon's crime was personal in taking Achilles' female prize, Henri's is a crime against the collective Protestant group rather than the poet/hero alone: his conversion to Catholicism to ascend the throne. This abandonment of faith provides an antithetical contrast to the martyrs of *Feux* and even the *je*'s own martyrdom for the transmission of the poem's divine insight.

Both Henri IV and Agamemnon fail to appropriately recognize the devotion shown by their heroes. In *Princes*, d'Aubigné describes Henri's abandonment through the collective experience, accusing the former Huguenot leader of ingratitude towards his soldiers who "Ont prodigué leurs os aux bouches du canon" (*Princes* 600). These men who lost limbs for Henri (reprising the motif of dismembered bodies) are now thrown from the council chambers and ignored by their king. In an example of the *Tragiques*' use of rhetorical questions as emotional appeal to the reader, d'Aubigné asks, "Prince comment peux-tu celui abandonner / Qui pour toy perd cela que tu ne peux donner?" (*Princes* 615-617). While d'Aubigné uses the collective

experience better suited to his poem's tone, it is likely that he refers to his own inconsistent relationship with Henri. These lines recall the tension between Achilles and Agamemnon; the hero feels unrewarded for his military service when his king claims his desired prize. While Agamemnon fails in his public duty to his soldiers, Achilles (as hero) demonstrates proper kingly behavior (Jackson 13). D'Aubigné establishes an antithetical dichotomy of kings and martyrs, demonstrating effectively that the collective group of Protestant martyrs (to which the textual *je* also belongs) provides the model for imitable behavior, not the kings.

The *extase* episode ties the *je*'s role to that of epic hero, particularly in its similarities to Aeneas' *katabasis*, as the traditional journey to the underworld allows the prophetic experience (such as Anchises' parade of heroes) that gives the hero information essential to the teleology of his journey. For the *Tragiques*, this insight into the divine world allows d'Aubigné to reverse the Protestant position as loser and assign a teleological victory to his defeated faction. The poet claims that the *Tragiques* came to him as a prophetic vision (a religious ecstasy) after being gravely wounded at the Battle of Castel-Jaloux in 1577. This is essential to understanding the text, especially its appropriation of the winners' epic teleology in the final book *Jugement*; d'Aubigné insists that his work contains absolute truth as it comes directly from God rather than his own mind. The information imparted to d'Aubigné by the angels is used as evidence that God supports the rebellious Protestant faction, despite their earthly defeat (or even because of it, as I explore at the end of this chapter). Near the end of *Fers*, the reader learns that the celestial paintings described were shown directly to the poet by an angel. D'Aubigné uses this moment to describe his soul's return to the body witnessing divine truth, but the textual *je* continues to serve as witness through the remainder of the poem.

Most importantly, the out-of-body experience as the poet's soul travels to heaven associates the *je* with the epic hero as he travels to the underworld: "Sept heures me parut le celeste pourpris / Pour voir les beaux secrets et tableaux que j'escris" (*Fers* 1199-1200). Even the amount of time passed reflects the journey's divine associations. Like the epic hero, d'Aubigné has a supernatural guide through his underworld journey, here an angel. The *je*'s return to its body most associates the experience with a physical journey as the last thing the angel shows to the poet is his own body: "...voilà ton corps sanglant et blesme / Recueilly à Thaley, sur une table, seul" (*Fers* 1426-1426). The fact that the body is visible to the poet who is unaware of its location emphasizes the actual travel of the *je* into the world of the divine, associating the episode with imperial Aeneas' *katabasis* rather than the wandering Odysseus' *nekyia*. As Aeneas completes his journey to transform from loser to winner, the text experiences its own shift from wandering romance to imperial epic. For d'Aubigné, this *katabasis* validates the experience and represents a similar turn for his people from the earthly losers' position to the celestial winners'. This underworld (or overworld, to the Christian mindset) journey establishes his privileged position as witness and prophet upon which the teleology of the final books rest. Essential to such a journey is the knowledge that the hero brings back, as we saw Du Bellay highlight in the previous chapter. To fully appreciate d'Aubigné's role as prophet with the knowledge he brings from heaven, we must first consider the roles of martyr and witness.

Je as Martyr, Witness, and Prophet

The poet's heroic role sets up d'Aubigné himself as one among the heroic martyrs he immortalizes with the poem. In addition to martyrdom, the *je* functions as hero due to d'Aubigné's real-life military career (as explained above) and due to the essential epic topos of the journey to the underworld, symbolized here by the religious ecstasy that provides privileged

insight into the divine. D'Aubigné prefaces the text with a letter to the readers and a poem to his book that present the poet as a martyr, risking punishment and death so that the truth contained in his text may survive. In both the real world and the heavenly one of the *extase*, the *je* serves doubly as witness: as eyewitness to events and as one who bears witness to the truth for his faction. The frequent repetition of *j'ai vu*, *je vis*, or *je vois* allows d'Aubigné to insist upon the text's veracity. This truth claim lays the groundwork for the *je*'s final and most important function, that of prophet. The privileged insight into heaven combined with the poet's determinist protestant perspective allows the *je* to act as Old Testament prophet rather than creatively-inspired poet. This distinction permits the teleological turn to a winner's perspective examined at the end of the chapter.

Je as Martyr

The poet announces his role as martyr on the title page by likening himself to Prometheus, eternally punished for enlightening man with divine secrets. Below the title on the first page is the subtitle "Donnés au public par le larcin de Prométhée" (*Tragiques* 51). As preface to the poem, d'Aubigné offers a letter signed by Prometheus, claiming his own role is only to avow and enrich this divine artifact (meaning the text itself) that Prometheus stole from heaven. By aligning himself with this famous mythological rebel before the poem begins, d'Aubigné highlights his own role in challenging political and religious authority. This text is purported to be the very fire taken from the gods to enlighten mankind ["ce feu que j'ay volé" (*Aux Lecteurs* 3)], a crime for which the author expects to be punished. It is no coincidence that this fire of enlightenment and divine truth foreshadows the fires of *Feux* in which the Protestant martyrs are burned for their faith; like Prometheus, martyred daily for enlightening man as the eagle consumes his regenerating liver, d'Aubigné expects to face exile and punishment in his

native land for the transmission of this divine message. It is additionally fitting that the *Tragiques* was published in Geneva, where d'Aubigné himself fled following the 1620 parliamentary condemnation of his more historical work on the Wars of Religion, *Histoire universelle depuis 1550 jusqu'en 1601*.

Word play ironizes Catholic belief while establishing the poet as martyr for the text. Similarly, the playful semantics introduce the theme of inverted world order that is essential to the poem's teleology, as the next two sections explore. His *œuvre* (the poem) is evidence of his salvation as one of God's chosen, but Catholic faith in *Œuvres* (good works) is misplaced. In the first line, d'Aubigné claims that he does not seek *grâce* (mercy) for his promethean crime, though his textual transmission of God's prophetic promise to Protestants insists upon the *Grâce* (divine grace and salvation) bestowed upon the poet as one of God's chosen. Additionally, d'Aubigné describes the work as "mon cheritable peché" (*Aux Lecteurs* 3); with this description of the act of composition (here described as a theft rather than a product of his own person), d'Aubigné blurs the lines between sin and charity. Again, d'Aubigné ironizes the Catholic conception of good works through use of the word "cheritable"; charity is, of course, an essential form of good works. However, d'Aubigné's sin of charity is committed to enlighten God's chosen people and comfort the Huguenots after the violence suffered during the wars. Though technically rebelling against an authority, such dissidence is acceptable (and even charitable) if it serves a purpose of good – or at least good from d'Aubigné's perspective. His transmission of divine secrets to the public is a blasphemous theft to Catholics who require the clergy as intermediary between themselves and God. This Promethean role therefore plays with the Catholic belief that an individual cannot have direct contact with God, so the Protestant personal connection between the *je* and God would, for the winners of France's conflict, be a sin.

However, d'Aubigné uses this moment to reassert the Protestants as the 'true' victors who celebrate this individual relationship to the divine.

D'Aubigné's claim to martyrdom not only puts the *je* on equal ground with the Protestant martyrs of *Feux*, but it also permits the claim of divine Truth on which the poem's teleology rests. Grounding the tragic drama in a hybrid biblical/pagan mythology allows d'Aubigné to assert his claim to fulfill the role of Prometheus; the poet draws divine Truth from his reading of the Bible (itself a heretical action from the Church's point of view) and from the *je*'s experience as witness during his spiritual ecstasy. Though the text begins with the mythological reference to the god who gave fire to humans, the rest of the *Tragiques* breaks entirely from Greek and Roman tradition. Cameron highlights d'Aubigné's intent to ground his poem in real-life experience rather than a fiction "based on the systematic reconstruction of Greek and Roman myths" (41); in doing so, d'Aubigné avoids the trap into which Ronsard fell. Rather than attempt to recreate the literary accomplishments of a long-gone era, d'Aubigné composes a text grounded in the values of his time and turns to the Bible as the only source of truth, following the Protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura*. D'Aubigné's claim to have stolen his poem to enlighten mankind reinforces this insistence upon the truth claim of his text. This claim to charitable theft also begins d'Aubigné's associations with prophetic martyrdom that continue throughout the text.

In the dedicatory poem that follows the preface *Aux lecteurs*, d'Aubigné articulates the martyrly relationship between poet and poem. The 414-line octosyllabic poem begins thus:

Va Livre, tu n'es que trop beau
 Pour estre né dans le tombeau
 Duquel mon exil te delivre ;

Seul pour nous deux je veux perir :

Commence, mon enfant, à vivre

Quand ton pere s'en va mourir. (*Auteur à son livre* 1-6)

D'Aubigné insists that his death will allow the poem to live, spreading the truth declared in the prefatory letter. Rather than take the divine insight to which he is privy to his grave, the poet births the *Tragiques* in a tomb so that it may escape its father's fate. D'Aubigné intends that his son (the poem) survive to continue the transmission of its truth long after the poet himself is gone: "Encores vivrai-je par toi, / Mon fils, comme tu vis par moi" (*Auteur à son livre* 7-8). The poem's continued existence, of course, grants immortality to the poet; this assertion is encouraged by Du Bellay's that while monuments crumble, poetry stands the test of time.

This symbiotic relationship between poem and poet implies that each lives by the other; thus in creating the text, d'Aubigné provides himself the same immortality he bestows upon the martyrs of *Feux* by recording their heroism for posterity. As we saw earlier, d'Aubigné articulated his intent for the poem to recount those martyrdoms, lamenting that he is unable to sing them all. At the beginning of *Feux*, the poet expresses his hope that the martyrs will be more universally remembered than kings: "Alors ces heureux noms sans eslite et sans choix / Luiront en mes escrits plus que les nom des Rois" (*Feux* 47-48). The record of their heroism recalls the dilemma of Thetis; like Achilles living in obscurity and hidden from war, they can recant and be saved, or they can maintain faith, but live on only through a glorious death: "Les feux qui vous brusloyent vous ont rendu candides" (*Feux* 14). The very act of recording affords this *je* the same martyrly status; such a status is bestowed by exile and death. The prefatory letter to the reader illuminates the opening strophe of this poem; the author's promethean role, condemned to eternal

(earthly) punishment for sharing divine truth, confirms this *je*'s belief that his death is necessary to the text's success.

Since d'Aubigné would not seek refuge in Geneva until four years after the *Tragiques*' publication and he would live another ten years beyond that, how should we interpret this insistence on the poet's exile and death, especially addressing the poem from "Ton pere, en exile, en prison (*Auteur à son livre* 12)? I maintain this can be read in several ways. First, the first edition was published in Geneva with no authorship claimed, only L.B.D.D (generally assumed to be the initials of d'Aubigné's nickname known to friends, "le bouc du désert"), a name that reinforces the poem's martyr motif, offering the poet as a sacrificial goat. The insistence upon the author's exile implies that he resided in the place of publication and could not be persecuted in France; he was indeed persecuted for his 1620 *Histoire universelle*, also about the Wars of Religion. This reading is supported by the fact that the second edition included the poet's true name, but was marked neither by date or place of publication, protecting the text with a different sort of anonymity. Both also imply this anonymity itself as a form of exile, in which d'Aubigné is not free to tell the truth with his own voice and must therefore metaphorically exile himself to allow the text to speak for him.

Alternatively, this insistence upon exile indicates d'Aubigné's feelings of cultural exile in his own nation during the resurgence of the Counter Reformation after Henri IV's assassination in 1610. Though a Frenchman, the poem indicates that he largely rejects national identity in favor of his transnational Protestantism. Thus, d'Aubigné maintains a predominantly Calvinist identity outside of the Protestant refuge in Geneva. Third, the exile reference may apply to the Prometheus figure, exiled and imprisoned for the crime of bringing the text from heaven to man. This reading is well-aligned with the martyrdom forcibly associated with the author figure of the

Tragiques. Finally, though this explanation does not preclude any of the others, the introduction's invocation of death and exile set the melodramatic tone for the whole poem. This simultaneous claim to exile, prison, and martyrdom serves as introduction to the emotional response the poem intends to solicit from its audience.

Je as Witness

D'Aubigné's otherworldly experience allows the telos to be forged by emphasizing the *je*'s most important role, that of witness. The narrative, its teleology, and the emotional appeals to the reader all draw their power from this role. While d'Aubigné's Catholic counterparts witnessed the war indirectly from the safety of the royal court, d'Aubigné's direct involvement in the war allows him to rely on his dual status as witness and participant to validate his arguments; he bears witness to the truth with the transmission of the text in addition to serving as eyewitness to events on earth and in heaven. Throughout his accounts of both the war on Earth and his heavenly visions, d'Aubigné relies heavily on the presence of the *je* to give credibility to his descriptions. Quainton describes the poet's role as "an authentic and privileged witness" (85); both adjectives are essential to this study as the former allows d'Aubigné to recount with veracity (or at least professed veracity) the horrors he saw during the war, and the latter forms the basis of the poem's teleology as poet becomes biblical prophet.

D'Aubigné's status as long-time soldier justifies Quainton's description of the poet as an authentic witness. D'Aubigné's rhetorical power lies in his experience as witness to the war's horrors in the real world; he can evidence with his own eyes what the conflict has done to his nation and its people. In *Misères*, the poet describes the horrors of the war as they play out among the common people. Eight first person singular pronouns in the first twenty lines establish

the importance of the *je*'s personal experience of war as he explains, "Ici je veux sortir du general discours" (*Misères* 367). He proclaims, "Car mes yeux sont tesmoins du sujet de mes vers" (*Misères* 371). This begins a portion of the text in which the word *je* appears every few lines, often in varying forms of *j'ai vu*, a pattern repeated in the final book as the poet bears witness to the Final Judgment.

This repetition prevents the reader from forgetting the personal experience of the author, upon which the text's claim to veracity lies. He witnesses a mother forced to eat her own child to save them both from starvation. He describes watching soldiers burn the land, finding children huddled around the long-dead body of their mother, and encountering many dying people who beg for his aid. Reprising the theatrical themes in the text in a form reminiscent of stage directions, d'Aubigné highlights his physical movement through the scenes of horror: "J'entre" (*Misères* 409), "je la suive" (*Misères* 381), "J'appelle Dieu" (*Misères* 430). These horrific images are an essential starting point from which d'Aubigné can accuse the oppressive Catholic rulers whose intolerance and arrogance cause the nation's suffering; again, d'Aubigné lays these scenes out like evidence to build a legal case against the establishment, though we find the court overrun by vice in *La Chambre Dorée*.

The role as privileged witness provides the epic teleology as the *je* continues to serve as witness in heaven, again authenticating the experience with his own eyes. Again, d'Aubigné's epic journey to the underworld provides d'Aubigné this claim to privileged information. Throughout the text, d'Aubigné emphasizes his role as "divine agent" (Quainton 22), transmitting his "spiritual insight into truth" (Quainton 16). Thanks to the author's out-of-body religious ecstasy, the *je* of the battlefield is offered access to heaven and the divine perspective on the war. Again during this vision of the celestial paintings, we find repeated insistence on the

words *j'ai veu/je voi* as in *Misères*. He sees well-known protestant martyrs and political figures entering into heaven. He sees angels creating fabulous paintings of famous scenes from the war, like the murder of Admiral Coligny in 1572 and the ensuing Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre. Like the author's eye-witness account, the angels' artistic testimony validates the author's Protestant interpretation of the wars; the angels' attention to events in France and their permanent record in heaven proves their importance to God. After showing the paintings to the poet, the angel announces prophetic secrets that are open only to "la troupe angelique" (*Fers* 1258). Though this role as witness is less pronounced in *Vengeances* and *Jugement*, the *je* retains a distinct presence that reinforces the eyewitness account, especially as the angel's words in *Fers* announce the divine secrets that follow in these final two books.

This role as privileged witness allows the incursion of another epic topos, *ekphrasis* of a divine and prophetic artifact. The *ekphrasis* in the *Tragiques* differs from traditional epic in that it deals primarily with events contemporaneous to the poet. Early in the first book *Misères*, d'Aubigné makes the same comparison between painting and poetry as Du Bellay; he tells the reader, "Je veux peindre la France une mere affligee" (*Misères* 97), establishing his poetic descriptions as a series of paintings. While much of the work reads as a combination of painting and dramatic staging, painting takes center stage in *Fers*. D'Aubigné sets the scene for the descriptions of the paintings:

Les yeux des bien-heureux aux peintures advisent
 Plus qu'un pinceau ne peut, et en l'histoire lisent
 Les premiers fers tirés et les emotions
 Qui brusloyent d'un subject diverses nations ;
 Dans le ciel, desguisé historien des terres,

Ils lisent en leur paix les efforts de nos guerres,
 Et les premiers objects de ces yeux saints et beaux
 Furent au rencontrer de ces premiers tableaux. (*Fers* 319-326)

This passage represents a reprisal of epic themes and demonstrates d'Aubigné's use of antithesis in the text. D'Aubigné draws a clear distinction between the peace of the martyrs in heaven and the wars below, which the poet claims as 'ours', reinforcing the collective nature of the Protestant experience. This transnationalism is explicitly emphasized in the antithesis of *un sujet* and *diverses nations*; many nations burn for the same cause.

This passage also shows a modified continuation of the painting/poetry relationship that invokes the Aristotelian rhetorical device of *enargeia* combined with the epic device of *ekphrasis*.⁵² D'Aubigné's poem creates the dual visual for the reader of the protestant martyrs examining the angels' paintings. Simultaneously, the reader sees the paintings through the eyes of the Protestant martyrs who are themselves reading the paintings to interpret the events depicted; the words 'eyes' and 'read' are both repeated twice to describe not only the relationship of the reader to the text, but also that of the observer to the painting. The double-layered visual increases the emotional impact for the reader as the martyrs she 'observes' in the poem have their own emotional responses to the scenes of horror they themselves lived (or died) through. The *tableaux*, already text for the reader, have become text for the observing martyrs within the narrative as well. As Du Bellay constructs a poetic monument to Rome through the *ekphrasis* of its crumbling monuments (similarly claiming poetry to last longer than physical monuments), d'Aubigné paints the celestial tableaux with his verse so that these images too will survive.

⁵² Of course, *ekphrasis* is not unique to epic, though in this study, I consider it an epic topos due to the importance of the shields of Achilles and Aeneas in the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid* respectively.

The first of the paintings d'Aubigné describes demonstrates the *ekphrasis* as epic imitation; d'Aubigné's portrait of Bellona, goddess of war, recalls that of Discord in *Aeneid* Book 6 and Medusa in *Pharsalia* Book 9. Following the Protestant martyrs' gaze upon the paintings, d'Aubigné describes each in succession so the reader has the impression of walking down a gallery as each is described in its turn. The poet intends the reader to become immersed in the visual effect, stating "Le premier vous presente une aveugle Belonne" (*Fers* 326) and making rare use of the second person plural pronoun. Bellona is tearing her nails, skin, and hair, an action d'Aubigné describes using another personal pronoun: "On la void..." (*Fers* 330). A she-wolf drinks the goddess' blood as her body is destroyed by vipers; this represents an inversion of Discord and Medusa, both emphasized for their hair of vipers in the *Aeneid* and the *Pharsalia* respectively, while recalling Cato's army attacked by poisonous snakes in the latter.

Though d'Aubigné does not compose a close imitation of these passages, his description of the goddess of war is inspired by a reading of the ancient epics. Bellona's dismembered body is described in fragmented pieces unified by the dominant emotion of horror, like a twisted version of Ronsard's Petrarchan descriptions. The emotional unity of the dismembered female body conjures a distinct visual image in the reader's mind, designed intentionally to place him in the same position as the martyrs in heaven who look upon them already. The poet therefore serves as eyewitness to what the angel shows him, and he uses this position to transmit the same images to the minds of his readers.

Je as Prophet

The roles of hero, martyr, and witness combine to the ultimate effect of transforming the poet into a biblical prophet, recalling those of the Old Testament. At the end of *Fers*, d'Aubigné

provides his own profession of faith in response to the angel's privileged prophecy, thanking God for this insight and promising to serve as his voice on earth: "Tu m'as donné la voix, je te louërai, mon Dieu, / Je chanteray ton los et force... / ...le peuple bas / Sçaura par moy comment les tyrans tu abas" (*Fers* 1435-36, 1439-40). This moment provides the foundation for the poem's teleology and indicates that "above all he saw himself as the mouthpiece of God, conveying the message of Truth" (McFarlane 25). To serve God's will fully, d'Aubigné must abandon his earthly desires and be purged of his natural vices; he begs, "Change-moy, refai-moy, exerce ta pitié / Rens moy mort en ce monde, oste la mauvaistié/ ...Lors je songeray songe et verray ta lumiere" (*Vengeances* 35-36, 38). This claim to complete self-abandonment establishes the poet's role as divine prophet, speaking with the authority of God, not from his own human experience, again inflamed with a Christian *fureur* not unlike the pagan one.

The celestial paintings serve as a subtle form of prophecy to validate the Protestant experience. The textual context of the paintings establishes them as prophecy rather than merely an inspired poetic way to recount the major events of the Wars of Religion. D'Aubigné contrasts the paintings in the Vatican, the work of Satan, with the celestial tableaux painted by the angels in heaven. The paintings are described in *Fers* as the most perfect record ever made of historical events, "...tout l'ordre des faits / Est si parfaitement par les Anges parfaits / Escrit, deduit, compté..." (*Fers* 313-315). As the divine is infallible, the paintings' presence in heaven validates the Protestants' experience and suffering. In claiming that these visions come directly from God, the poet gives them prophetic value and thereby legitimizes the Huguenot cause. Observing the Protestant martyrs among the angels inherently asserts that they have been accepted into heaven, as will their fellow *élus*.

In addition to recalling epic, the choice of *ekphrasis* establishes permanent evidence of Protestants' persecution. Rather than an oral account, the paintings indicate the importance of these events to God by fixing them in a lasting, tangible, and accessible medium. The images provide proof that their pain is not ignored, that it is essential to God and his plans for heaven. These wars represent the key moment in all history by proving definitively God's election of the Protestant people, a selection proved by their suffering and the divine attention given to it. The angels' paintings represent a promise from God (who sent the angel to guide d'Aubigné through his underworld journey) that he acknowledges their suffering and will provide their reward. Though Francus' cloak looks to the distant past, these paintings depict the recent past and events contemporaneous to the action in the poem (as its composition lasted some thirty-six years). Unlike Aeneas' shield, the scenes do not provide a linear or visual prophecy; rather, their recognition of the present provides a prophecy for the future, that an eternal reward will be forthcoming.

This prophecy of the Protestants' salvation is continued more explicitly in *Vengeances* and *Jugement*. Here, d'Aubigné is also shown the future that is drawn in the stars and known only to the angels, portraits that show eventual Protestant success and punishment for the kings and other culpable parties. *Vengeances* provides a promise to Protestants in much the same way as the tableaux by turning to the past for proof of God's righteous punishments. The book advances somewhat chronologically, examining tyrannical figures from first the Old Testament, then the early years of the Church during the Roman Empire, and finally in d'Aubigné's own time. This historical presentation (according to Ronsard's distinctions between the poet and the historian who presents events in order) validates the promise of the book, that the current French and Catholic leadership responsible for the persecution of the faithful will indeed be punished;

God has always done so in the past, so he will not fail to exact his vengeance in the current situation as well.

In *Vengeances*, the Christian interpretation of *fureur poétique* is fully realized; d'Aubigné asks God to speak through him, insisting “Que je ne sois qu’organe à la celeste voix / Qui l’oreille et le cœur anime des François” (*Vengeances* 59-60). The book begins with a prayer to God that allows d'Aubigné to claim that his descriptions of past punishments are spoken with the voice of God himself and therefore constitute a promise of retributions to come. In the prayer, the *je* presents an offering of milk, a gift from a poor shepherd, as he has neither the gold nor the myrrh of kings. Thus the poet creates another antithesis in the separation of the *je* as humble faithful servant of God and the royalty who try to cover their faithlessness with riches. The personal relationship between poet and divine is both essential and explicitly Protestant; in the twelve-line prayer, forms of the first person singular pronoun appear four times, and the second person singular forms appear ten times.

Combining his experience as witness with the Book of Daniel to speak directly to kings [“Apprenez de luy, Rois” (*Vengeances* 391)], d'Aubigné describes the antithetical punishment of Nebuchadnezzar as his palace becomes mud, his dominion becomes desert, and himself the former hunter becomes the prey (*Vengeances* 390-418). Roman Emperor Hadrian, accused of crucifying ten thousand Christians, receives ten thousand wounds to his heart in eternal punishment (*Vengeances* 555-566). Like these ancient rulers, the current French dynasty will suffer punishments appropriate to their crimes. Charles IX, rumored to have taken bloodthirsty delight in the Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacre, is blamed in the plural as representative of the degenerative state of royalty: “Princes qui comme le jeu ont aimé le carnage” (*Vengeances* 806); for this, he will drown in rivers of blood. L’Aubépin, a parliament member of Grenoble known is

choked by a giant mass of worms⁵³ (*Vengeances* 845-860). These punishments serve as prophecy as d'Aubigné claims to see these punishments for himself, like Dante in his own underworld journey.

The final book, *Jugement* similarly begins with a Christian invocation, in which the poet asks God to descend from heaven “Pour me faire instrument à ces effects divers / Donne force à ma voix, efficace à mes vers” (*Jugement* 7-8). To emphasize the importance of the divine in guiding these visions, *Jugement* contains a second Christian invocation two thirds of the way through the book:

Condui, très saint Esprit, en cet endroict ma bouche,
 Que par la passion plus esprés je ne touche
 Que ne permet ta regle, et que, juge leger,
 Je n’attire sur mon jugement pour juger.
 Je n’annoncerai donc que ce que tu annonce,
 Mais je prononce autant comme ta loy prononce ; (*Jugement* 803-808).

By insisting that the Holy Spirit guides his words, d'Aubigné distances the text's prophecy from his own personal judgment before describing the Antichrist's arrival to condemn the sinners to hell. D'Aubigné thus appropriates the popular image of divine poetic inspiration to transform the textual *je* into a prophet for God's chosen people.

In the first three hundred lines of *Jugement*, d'Aubigné offers a prophecy, antithetically contrasting the good and the wicked. Again, the *je*'s role as witness is highlighted during the prophecy for the sinful; the poet physically turns from the saved [“Je retourne à la gauche”

⁵³ It is worth highlighting that this “gros amas de vers” (*Vengeances* 856) is contextually ‘worms’ but simultaneously recalls that the poet's *vers* (verse) are his weapons against tyranny in France.

(*Jugement* 81), reprising the stage-direction style of *Misères*] and describes the damned sinners with personal pronouns that stress the immediacy of their relations [“Je vous voy” (*Jugement* 85)]. While this early section is written in a mix of present and future tense (highlighting the current wickedness of d’Aubigné’s contemporaries), the majority of the book utilizes the future tense to describe the actions that will occur at the Final Judgment.

As the repeated invocations stress, this represents a prophecy delivered from God through the poet, not through the poet’s own estimation of France’s situation. Since d’Aubigné is a Protestant adhering to the idea of predestination and God’s choice for salvation, the prophetic representation carries even more weight. Throughout *Jugement*, d’Aubigné’s role as divine prophet mimics those of the Old Testament;⁵⁴ this role applies to the entire poem, though *Jugement* recalls more specifically the role of John in establishing Christian eschatology in the book of Revelations. Here, the Protestant emphasis rests on God’s election that saves them. The poet’s prophetic role comes to an end with the unmaking of the *je* itself in the last lines of the poem. Here, we note a return to the present tense as the prophecy is concluded and “...je me fonde / Pour de mon ame voir la grand’ ame du monde” (*Jugement* 1211-12). The fact that the text concludes not with the unmaking of the world, but with the dissolution of the *je* reinforces its importance throughout the text; the poem begins and ends with *je* because the poet’s roles as witness and prophet are most essential to the *Tragiques*’ ability to fulfill its role.

Epic Elements: Absence and Mutation

Though the preceding discussion has naturally led to considerations of epic elements and their mutation in the *Tragiques*, I now turn to other topoi that are worth mention for their unusual

⁵⁴ The religious ecstasy simultaneously recalls the visions of Joseph’s dreams and Moses’ return from Mt. Sinai as he transmits divine ruling to the people.

treatment within this text. Following the poetic theory of the previous chapters, let us analyze the *Tragiques* and understand why so many critics are inclined to refer to it as an epic, despite the ambivalent commitment to the label. By examining the text's didacticism, representation of collective identity, and dismemberment of narrative, I demonstrate the problems with a straightforward categorization of the *Tragiques*' genre; indeed, the poem neglects or mutates as many epic requirements as it fulfills, leaving it in a generic chimera that highlights its fundamental uniqueness.

Didacticism

Though Maskell described the primary goal of epic as inspiring action and virtue in rulers (19), d'Aubigné insists the *Tragiques* presents a break from such didacticism. From the beginning, d'Aubigné sets up his text as one that will break traditional generic conventions. In the same prefatory letter that ties the author to Prometheus, d'Aubigné announces his plan to break with typical literature by responding to a public cry, “nous sommes ennuyés de livres qui enseignent, donnez-nous en pour esmouvoir, en un siecle où tout zele chrestien est peri, où la différence du vray et du mensonge est comme abolie...” (*Aux lecteurs* 3). The author recognizes that the troubled times call for a literary form that breaks traditional boundaries. That d'Aubigné prefers emotional treatment of his subject matter over constraints of the genre is evident throughout the text. He therefore stands as a counterpoint to Ronsard whose stubborn adherence to genre norms undermines the true purpose of his project. D'Aubigné himself mentions both Ronsard and Du Bellay by name in the *Aux lecteurs* (along with fellow Pléiade member Étienne Jodelle and celebrated Calvinist Théodore de Bèze), critiquing that they “imposassent des lois sur les poëmes” (*Aux lecteurs* 56). While Ronsard wrote for and about Charles IX via epic tradition that forced him into teleology-undermining didacticism, d'Aubigné's text is not *for* any

ruler, but is directed to his fellow Huguenots in order to move and comfort them after defeat and persecution.

D'Aubigné is not alone in composing for his faction. This causes Quint to the category of losers' epic in the tradition of Lucan who composed the *Pharsalia* for his fellow Republicans after their loss in the civil war that established the Roman Empire. Yet despite d'Aubigné's professed break from didacticism, Quainton demonstrates the rhetorical quality of the emotional appeal and maintains that this serves a didactic function in the text (43, 95); specifically, rhetorical questions incite the audience to reflect on the Protestant experience during the Wars and to lay blame along with the poet (Quainton 95). Though d'Aubigné does indeed write *about* the rulers, his primary goal is to identify those at fault and persuade others of his accusations, not to instruct.

The ramifications of this shift from didacticism reverberate throughout the poem. We have already seen how d'Aubigné's text serves as a weapon to attack tyrannical (or also fickle) leaders; such an attack prevents d'Aubigné from offering advice to these same men. The time for sage advice has long since passed. The emotive preference is both cause and symptom of the shift from national to factional sentiment. From there, the didactic element is more *informative* than *formative*; d'Aubigné's role as prophet transmitting divine truth is more important than instruction to shape a ruler's or a people's behavior. After all, salvation is for the *élus*, not for those who alter their behavior to secure entry to heaven.

Collectivity

This turn from didacticism to emotional inspiration leads to another epic element that takes a unique spin in the *Tragiques*; d'Aubigné transforms epic's emphasis on collectivity and

celebration of national sentiment into a focus on what Quint calls “transnational Protestantism” (192). This turn is necessitated by two situational truths: d’Aubigné’s losing status and the fracturing of French identity. As Hampton articulates, “In France, the political and cultural unity briefly established by Francis I was destroyed by the onset of religious fanaticism” (*Writing from History* 81-82). This transnationalism takes shape as a collective heroic body where “le héros est l’ensemble des fidèles persécutés” (Weber xxviii), as I began to explore in the description of the martyrs’ courageous adherence to their faith. In Chapter 2, I cited the fractured sense of French identity as an explanation for Ronsard’s inability to write a shared French sentiment. Here, d’Aubigné replaces the idea of writing Frenchness with Protestantness as this fracturing of France itself leads to an adherence to faith over nation. This represents a major shift from the Middle Ages where nation and religion were often one and the same; the medieval epic heroes served and fought for their divinely-ordained king, an action feudalistically representative of fighting for God.

Herein lies a distinction between epic and romance (in medieval tradition) that Quint’s analysis ignores; medieval epic action is defined by fighting for king and God, where romance is individualistic and concerned with private honor. D’Aubigné, in situating his conflict along religious lines, aligns his poem with epic, despite the mutation of narrative structure. However, unlike the medieval dichotomy of Christian/Saracen, now the dichotomy exists within Christendom itself; now fighting for God and for nation become separate actions. What is more, the king is attacking the people of his own nation rather than another. How could a poet like d’Aubigné possibly write Frenchness at all? This persecution and fractured national identity causes French Protestants (generally Calvinists) to develop and label their own particular identity as Huguenots. The *Tragiques* is therefore an attempt to poeticize, legitimate, and immortalize the

shared Protestant experience, regardless of national affiliation. It becomes so focused on supporting the Protestant cause that Cameron lists exaggeration and partisanship as the text's biggest flaws (80); however, as d'Aubigné announces this as the poem's fundamental purpose, it is unfair to fault such partisanship.

Before launching his furious accusations at the nobility for causing the situation, the poet establishes the violence inflicted upon France itself through imagery of bodies dismembered, mirroring the fracturization of French identity. D'Aubigné describes walking into a house to see a mother's body; he observes "l'horrible anatomie / De la mere assechee : elle avoit de dehors / Sur ses reins dissipez trainé, roulé son corps, / Jambes et bras rompus" (*Misères* 414-417). We discover the body of France, her "membres mi-mangez" (*Misères* 435). This violent dismemberment (and more examples repeated throughout) reflects the text's imitation of Lucan who uses frequent imagery of dismembered bodies to mirror the nation's dismemberment at the hands of civil war. For Quint, the motif of dismemberment reflects the episodic nature of the loser's epic, though I demonstrate shortly that the *Tragiques* presents a more thorough narrative dismemberment than the *Pharsalia*.

While dismemberment as representative of narrative is important, this imagery is even more essential to establishing d'Aubigné's abandonment of national sentiment. Tyrants have sucked the blood from France's body as a wolf does its prey, leaving her a dried-out cadaver: "Les païs ruinez sont membres retranchez / Dont le corps sechera, puis qu'ils sont assechez" (*Misères* 607-608). D'Aubigné begins his poem not with factional sentiment, but with a lament for all of France, the one we have already seen spoken by Melpomene. The tragic muse questions France's competence as a mother, accusing the nation of luring her children with a nourishing breast only to let them murder each other (*Misères* 91-96). D'Aubigné repeats this theme of

France-as-mother, painting her portrait as “une mere affligée” (*Misères* 97) and insisting on the ties between all French citizens through “Nostre commune mere” (*Misères* 439). France-the-mother (modeled on Lucan’s personified Roma) nurses her twin sons at her breast [archetypally, “cet Esau” and “son Jacob” (*Misères* 103, 107)], when the stronger prideful brother refuses to share the mother’s milk. Between his unprovoked attempt to kill his brother and the smaller one’s attempt to defend himself, the mother is destroyed as her body serves as battleground, transforming France-the-mother as “d’un corps divisé les funebres moitez” (*Misères* 132); the mother’s breast, ostensibly a symbol of life and nourishment, is here transformed into a representation of death. The juxtaposition of nourishing and destructive imagery allows d’Aubigné to express his primary lament for the self-destruction of his homeland.

This family imagery also allows another pointed attack on the nation’s leadership as rulers were considered parental figured to the familial nation. While d’Aubigné laments the violence inflicted upon the nation itself, the betrayal of France’s leadership firmly steers the text away from any attempt to embody a collective Frenchness. D’Aubigné blames the kings for the civil discord, insisting that kings “sont du peuple et les Rois et les peres” (*Misères* 197); their failure to their people is the failure of a father. In the horror of civil war, “Le pere estrangé au lict le fils” (*Misères* 212) as the king kill their own citizens. This image of king-as-father translates into the dual imagery of the ruler as the head of the state and the family, and therefore the head of the body politic. Not only is France’s national body dismembered, it is also rotten by the infection of the head: “Ce vieil corps tout infect” (*Misères* 146); this infected body is a giant transformed into a beast that “A sur ce vaste corps une petite teste” (*Misères* 158) as the weakness of the political head allows the horrific infection and bestialization of the body. The

body politic has similarly been infected by “cett’ autre peste” (*Misères* 995), the clergy. Thus betrayed and infected by the father-king, the poet can only lament his nation, not celebrate it.

D’Aubigné sets the specific descriptions of violence throughout *Misères* under this umbrella of loss of nation to recount the wars’ horrors through a non-partisan lens (at least in terms of the representation of victims, not of the purveyors of violence). Though d’Aubigné firmly blames the Catholic nobility for the violence, those suffering throughout *Misères* are not identified by religious faction; the fault lies with one faction, but the suffering is shared by all. D’Aubigné assumes his important role as eyewitness, claiming to find a man half-dead as unspecified others killed him “par faute de viande” (*Misères* 393), leaving his wife and children slaughtered and half-eaten in their home. D’Aubigné again transposes typical war imagery onto the home, comparing women to besieged soldiers who eat their faithful dogs and horses; the poet witnesses a mother who tenderly kills her own infant to save them both from starvation: “N’avoir plus rien de mere, et avoir tout de louve / ... / Elle n’appreste plus les levres, mais les dents, / Et des baisers changés en avides morsures” (*Misères* 534-537). An allegorical earth witnesses the horror and tries to shelter her children, imploring them to hide in her dress and to return to “l’obscur de mon ventre” (*Misères* 302). The purpose of these graphic scenes of unidentified victims is to evidence the Catholic leadership’s disastrous impact on the nation at large, not just on its Protestant citizens, through the disturbingly-relatable imagery of family.

With the nation too fractured for shared identity, d’Aubigné turns towards his Protestant identity to form the basis of his poem’s collectivity, using rhetorical structure to draw others into his cause. He sides with his religious faction in celebrating his religion that transcends national boundaries: “Patriotic sentiments here give way to the poet’s sectarian allegiance: the fate of France takes second place to the destiny of a transnational Protestantism” (Quint 192). This

focus turns the poem in the direction of rhetoric, an aspect of the *Tragiques* central to Cameron's study: "Rhetorical appeals to the reader ... immediately play upon his emotional responses and encourage him to be sympathetic toward the cause" (74). Rhetorical questions interspersed throughout the text with frequency ["Mais quelle ame auriez-vous?" (*Princes* 231), "Vous leur avez vendu, livré, donné en proye / Ame, sang, vie, honneur : où en est la monnoye?" (*Jugement* 83-84), etc.] draw the reader into the Protestant cause (or at least attempt to), regardless of his membership in the marginalized group.

D'Aubigné plays upon the reader's emotions to emphasize collective suffering and common cause in a Protestant audience and to foster empathy in others. Cameron also notices that d'Aubigné strives to make the action of reading a "memorable experience" through "the dramatic presentation of certain scenes [and] the idea that the reader is taking part in the drama rather than taking a seat as a spectator" (Cameron 80). I maintain that the reliance on family imagery has a similar effect, being relatable to all readers. It is important to note that the *je*'s essential role as witness begins with the universally relatable family imagery as d'Aubigné claims to have seen these scenes of familial horror himself. D'Aubigné draws the reader into the experience on a personal level through the repetition of "j'ai vu." Though d'Aubigné speaks as the poet, the reader experiences the first-person point of view by encountering the *je* in their own minds while reading. Though accounts of martyrdom are moving for Protestants, the horror of brother slaying brother or mother slaying her children resonates with all readers.

The most important function is not the mere depiction of French suffering, but the fact that the experience of the Huguenots speaks for Protestants everywhere in a manner reminiscent of national epic. Quainton highlights the repeated rhetorical device of amplification and argues that this device allows France's experience to speak for Europe at large (91). The list of martyrs

in *Feux* is arranged geographically between Europe and the Americas to represent the transnational Protestantism so essential to the poem's message. Recognizing that the difficulty lies in choosing martyrs to extol in his poem when they are so numerous and diverse, d'Aubigne calls upon God to help bring eternal glory through his lines:

Condui mon oeuvre, ô Dieu! à ton nom, donne moy
 Qu'entre tant de martyrs, champions de la foy,
 De chasque sexe, estat ou aage, à ton saint temple
 Je puisse consacrer un tableau pour exemple. (*Feux* 19-22)

This passage, before the poet describes on a single individual martyrdom, underscores the diversity of the Protestant martyrs; they come from all nations, ages, sexes, and social classes. As persecution of Protestants was not limited to France in d'Aubigné's time, the collectivity represented within the poem must speak to a larger audience to encourage fortitude in faith: "*Les Tragiques* represent an effort by an ardent and committed Protestant to bring consolation to his religious party and to record for all time in literature the great deeds of the faithful and the extent of their suffering" (Cameron 39). Cameron expresses d'Aubigné's goals in terms that recall the epic, especially the author's intent to preserve the great Protestant deeds (specifically martyrs before and during the Wars) for all time. In this historical preservation and laudation, d'Aubigné aligns the *Tragiques* with epic, replacing the *Aeneid*'s sense of unity in newly-forged empire with collective Protestant sentiment that supersedes earthly affiliations; as only God is eternal, mankind's nations mean nothing compared to the Kingdom of Heaven for God's chosen faithful.

Dismemberment of Narrative

As described by both Aristotle and Quint (albeit in different terms), epic's narrative is marked by a single-minded focus on the accomplishment of one task, and here d'Aubigné

presents his biggest (and most conspicuous) break from the genre's traditions. Rather than an end-driven epic narrative or the circular narrative indicative of romance, the *Tragiques* gives us no narrative at all, meaning "le poème n'est pas, comme les épopées classiques, une histoire racontée" (Weber xxviii). In place of narrative, d'Aubigné's emotive rhetoric and sense of collective Protestant struggle unite its diverse and disjointed scenes. The poem constitutes a series of descriptive tableaux or theatrical scenes that lament the wars and rage against them from an array of angles, but there is no actual plot – certainly not one focused on a single action or hero's mission, unless the single action can be considered the ultimate salvation of God's chosen people and the poet's mission, the dissemination of divine truth. The *Metamorphoses* is alone among ancient sources to share a similar episodic structure rather than a linear narrative, though each of Ovid's episodes have a distinct narrative in themselves. Even the relatively disjointed *Pharsalia* has an overall narrative arc (even though its intended ending point is unclear) as there is a group of main characters who do things and move throughout the poem.

Quainton argues that the stylistic progression from *Misères*' lower-tone earthly scenes to the increasingly elevated style as the poem moves towards heaven and the divine is the closest approximation of a narrative arc (34, 39-40). Quint suggests that d'Aubigné invokes the romance to set the tone for his text; the losers' attempt to make sense of their own defeat through the denial of the winner's teleology naturally leads them into the circular wandering characteristic of romance. As I previously cited in the second chapter, Quint dubs romance narrative circular and nonnarratable as "the stories projected by and for the defeated have no place to go" (11). The *Tragiques* go beyond romance's circularity and let narrative crumble into dramatically-staged vignettes.

This is not to say that the breakdown of narrative structure mimics that of Ronsard. While the *Franciade* failed to move beyond lengthy Petrarchan description for lack of an anchoring telos to draw the narrative along, the *Tragiques*' episodic structure is a deliberate choice designed to present evidence against the Catholic leadership and in favor of the eventual Protestant victory. I argue that the rhetorical nature of d'Aubigné's verse transforms what Quint calls romance circularity into a legal case against Rome and the French royal family. This provides a logical way to read the complete breakdown of narrative; there is no wandering circular action in the *Tragiques*, but a collection of evidence put into permanent record by the poet. However, d'Aubigné's Protestant view of a world determined by predestination means that even his story of defeat does indeed have somewhere to go; as the end of this chapter examines, this application of religious teleology to the loser's story allows the poet to transform earthly defeat into a sign of eventual and eternal victory in heaven.

While the penultimate section of this chapter explores the question of the *Tragiques*' teleology, it is worth mention here as teleology is essential to the epic narrative to unify the action. In this matter, the uniqueness of the *Tragiques* is evident; d'Aubigné offers a completely de-structured narrative, but assigns a Protestant teleology to the Final Judgment, thereby claiming status as both loser and eventual victor. Thus, the only true narrative is that of divine plan. Episodic human dramas are inconsequential when God alone determines history. Though the *Aeneid* begins with the Trojans' status as losers of the Sack of Troy, their circular wanderings still fall neatly under the umbrella of Aeneas' ultimate destiny; the gods' involvement establishes from the beginning that the wandering will cease as the Trojans reverse history to claim their foretold position as victors. D'Aubigné's position after the Edict of Nantes does not allow him to promise an eventual end to the loser's position maintained by his fellow Huguenots. As I show

shortly, he transforms this loser's position into a mark of divine favor that allows him to promise eventual Protestant victory at the end of all things.

This represents an apparent contradiction within the text by beginning with a non-narrative, yet transforming it into a telos at the end. D'Aubigné fully assumes his (and his faction's) position as loser of conflict (despite the apparent truce of the Edict of Nantes) to claim that this earthly defeat is precisely what marks them as eventual heavenly victors. Unlike the typical epic narrative where the poem's action and history are all driven to a certain end, the fact that the unnarratable loss itself becomes a mark of eventual eschatological teleology. Though the non-narrative is not directed anywhere, the Bible indicates that all history is leading to the Final Judgment, so d'Aubigné is able to claim that history leads to Protestants' irreversible victory, not just in spite of the loss, but because of it. Only to the damned does worldly history appear teleological.

Ce monde pervers: Inversion of the Natural World Order

In one of the text's most pervasive motifs, d'Aubigné upends the natural world order to present a world in which nothing is as nature intended, thereby securing the teleology of the Final Judgment at the poem's conclusion. The *Tragiques*' antitheses so closely studied by many critics are, I argue, more important due to the pattern of inversion they establish; not only is good poised in antithesis to evil, but here sin reigns over virtue, so that the state of d'Aubigné's world becomes the exact opposite of what God intended. Quainton reads these antitheses as more than stylistic or rhetorical, but as reflecting "the expression of a mental attitude, of a way of perceiving reality" (46). As I explored with the role of *je* as martyr and witness, d'Aubigné insists that his work is adorned by what he calls "la seule vertu" (*Auteur à son livre* 44), truth. As

it has been divinely inspired and stolen from the heavens, only this work contains absolute truth in a world “où la difference du vray et du mensonge est comme abolie” (*Aux lecteurs*). For announcing these divine truths, the text cannot hope to protect itself from this “monde pervers” (*Auteur à son livre* 96) where vice reigns over virtue. D’Aubigné’s repeated use of the expressions *monde pervers* and *monde à l’envers* establishes the text’s central idea that civil war has turned the very essence of the world upside down.

For d’Aubigné, civil war is itself indicative of the world’s de-natured state; a nation attacking itself is fundamentally contrary to the laws of nature. As civil war is rooted in Cain’s fratricidal crime, d’Aubigné declares that such a war “destach[e] de nature les lois” (*Misères* 504). “Quand Nature sans loy, folle, se desnature” (*Misères* 485), the very nature of the world has ceased to be natural. In the perverse state of civil war, the world is populated by “meres non-meres” (*Misères* 497) where the people are “Tous nobles et tous Rois, sans nobles et sans Rois” (*Misères* 144). The world itself becomes antithetical, where each natural element serves as its own contradiction; even the very blood of life has become “sang non sang” (*Misères* 143). Thus, nature is reduced to a “parody of herself,” allowing realism to be replaced by caricature (McFarlane 40).

This idea of caricature ties into the partisanship for which d’Aubigné has been faulted; like a political cartoonist, the Huguenot poet’s caricatures are blunt and designed to propagate the author’s viewpoint. For McFarlane, “D’Aubigné’s world is a *monde cassé*, a world in which man’s civilized mask has been removed to reveal his essential barbarity” (25). D’Aubigné maintains that in this unnatural state of civil war, true vice is pervasive and those most sinful thrive. In such a world, false rulers (tyrants) “chassent la vertu” (*Princes* 96) while flatterers, the true devils of the court, maintain the authority of these failed princes. Flatters infect the king,

turn vice into virtue, and massacre into justice. On Earth, those who claim to be the most righteous (notably princes and popes) are the most sinful, yet the turmoil caused by religious civil war allows them to maintain their privileged positions despite the atrocities they commit. Though McFarlane implies this “essential barbarity” is the natural state of man, d’Aubigné insists that Satan himself has forced the unfaithful to their natural state of sin, and only the true faith of God’s chosen can move beyond this world’s perversions and find salvation in heaven.

To illustrate the unnaturalness and barbarity of fratricidal civil war in a more accessible form, d’Aubigné uses the image of familial dismemberment as a microcosm for the family of nationhood, with France as mother and king as father; this alters and builds upon the imagery of dismembered bodies as representing the body politic. We remember here that Du Bellay’s references to the Roman civil war in the *Antiquitez* used the familial imagery of *beau-père* and *gendre* to equate familial and civic breakdown, as did Lucan before him. D’Aubigné thus builds upon established tradition in his insistence upon horrifically-destroyed family imagery. This chapter already explored Melpomene’s lament of France-the-mother torn apart by the twin sons at her breast and the Valois’ failure as fathers to the French people. *Je*-the-witness first describes the entire population as “les humains privez de tous autres moyens, / Assiegez...” (*Misères* 487-488) who are reduced to eating their faithful dogs and horses. However, France besieged by itself is more horrifying still. The family horrors culminate with a scene of a starving peasant mother who tenderly kills the child she loves to save them both from starvation, the mother disturbingly regarding her still-living child for “Les entrails d’amour, les filets de son flanc, / Les intestins brulans par les tressauts du sang” (*Misères* 507-508). The passage ends with the rhyme “mere” and “meurtriere” (*Misères* 541, 542) to poetically emphasize the tie between the two functions in a world consumed by destruction rather than nourishment.

The dysfunctional family imagery culminates in the banquet of Thyestes as an example of the ultimate breakdown of a family unit. Though d'Aubigné only mentions Thyestes briefly, his intended audience would understand the loaded name in all its layers. In revenge for Thyestes' affair with his wife and subsequent usurpation of his own throne, Atreus then fed his brother Thyestes his own children at a banquet. In cyclical retaliation, Thyestes raped his own daughter to beget Aegisthus, destined to kill Atreus. This brief reference to Thyestes is also a nod to epic as Atreus was father to Menelaus and Agamemnon. For sacrificing his own daughter for a favorable wind to take the Greek army to Troy, Agamemnon was in turn murdered by Aegisthus and his own wife upon his return from the war – a war that was, of course, sparked by infidelity in Menelaus' own marriage. As d'Aubigné's contemporaries conceived of the nation as family, these images of familial self-destruction are essential to the resonance of the poem with its audience.

D'Aubigné's vision of a world ruled by vice is most fully demonstrated in the allegory of *La Chambre Dorée*. Earth's allegorical court room has become a Pandora's Box of vice and sin. Chased away by humans, Piety and Peace plead with God to be restored to their rightful place, while angels show him the desecrated body of Justice, "Meurtrie et deschiree" (*Chambre Dorée* 35); though God established Justice's rightful position of power, humans have murdered her and desecrated her body. In her place, Injustice sits enthroned, attended by Treachery, Vanity, Cruelty, Hypocrisy, Vengeance, and a long list of other vices; contrary to nature, Injustice rules by force, not by right. D'Aubigné describes the court to the reader as if both can see the scene together: "là se void decider / La force et non le droit ; la void-on preside / Sur un throsne eslevé l'Injustice impudente" (*Chambre Dorée* 235-237). Here we notice d'Aubigné's work in deliberate dialogue with both Ronsard's and Du Bellay's in their respective "Hymne de la

Justice” and *Antiquitez de Rome*; the Huguenot adapts their theme of Justice in exile during civil war to support his Protestant cause. This interpretation of Injustice’s rule over earth confirms the Protestant viewpoint that establishes the poem’s teleology as earthly defeat serves as proof of victory in heaven. In this inverted world, only the Final Judgment can right the wrongs and provide the teleological turn explored in the following section.

D’Aubigné’s careful rhetoric emphasizes the inversion in the world by presenting the Protestant martyrs in direct antithesis to the tyrannical Catholic leaders of both Church and state in *Princes* and *La Chambre Dorée*. It is no accident that the martyrs of *Feux* immediately follow the description of Injustice’s reign. D’Aubigné presents the martyrs’ fortitude and resilience in faith as an antithesis to the vices that rule over fickle men. In *Feux*, Rome and the Pope are the most distinct villains. Rome is described as ‘infidel’ and ‘pagan,’ though not in reference to the actual pagan Rome of the ancient world. D’Aubigné’s contemporary Catholic Rome has lost its faith through the persecution of fellow Christians. Montalchine declares the Pope a “tyran des esprits” (*Feux* 691), and the entire Catholic population is compared to Nero, just one of many comparisons to the famous Roman Emperor in the text. While they themselves are guilty of horrible crimes like incest and adultery, they are content to watch good, true Christians burn.

D’Aubigné’s position as a member of the oppressed group offers him a unique opportunity to justify any supposed sin or crime committed by his fellow Huguenots. In this sense, the inversion of the world order is useful to excuse the violence perpetrated by the Huguenots on the grounds of self-defense. In the closing lines of *Fers*, d’Aubigné calls upon the “justes vengeurs” (*Fers* 1549) to join his attack on the French Cains who murdered their own brothers because of their poisoned souls. In a world where Injustice rules, the villains are easily identifiable by their positions of power, so the oppressed are free to exact their violence upon

them in retaliation. The Huguenot role in the war serves as prelude to God's own vengeance and justice in the final two books, announced multiple times as "la vengeance de Dieu" (*Vengeances* 264, 1006), "celestes vengeances, / Vengeances qui du ciel descendent" (*Vengeances* 906-907), and "la vengeance divine" (*Vengeances* 821); the collective Protestant hero then becomes an agent of God as d'Aubigné does with his prophetic poetry.

The Eschatological Telos – the Ultimate Final Cause

The inversion of the world is the essential element on which d'Aubigné's appropriated teleology rests; if the world is the opposite of God's intent, then it *must* eventually be righted. This juxtaposition of the denatured earth and d'Aubigné's prophetic insight into heaven adds poignancy to righting the inverted world order in pursuit of an eschatological telos anchored in the Final Judgment. D'Aubigné is only able to invoke this telos with such surety because his Protestant worldview is grounded in predestination; he combines the previously-explored roles as witness and prophet with the inversion of the world that is taken as proof that God favors the defeated. As his fellow Protestants have suffered persecution and defeat on this inverted earth, they *must* meet salvation with the world is righted. As God alone can determine history, it is explicitly the poet's Protestantism that allows him to commandeer the winner's teleological narrative to assure the eventual validation of his defeated faction. For Quint, it is the turn to romance's de-structured narrative that provides "an alternative narrative to an apparent history of defeat" (185), but I argue that the combination of the inverted world and the poet's privileged, first-hand prophecy cast the entire poem under the telic force of the Final Judgment.

This is not the circular narrative of romance that opens the door to alternate possibilities as characters are driven by fortune rather than fate; rather, d'Aubigné presents a vision of history

that is divinely assured and will itself refuse to allow romance possibilities for the opposing faction in light of their ultimate loss at the end of creation. With vice and injustice thoroughly ensconced on Earth, the poet uses his claim to first-hand experience in heaven to bring a prophetic vision of the Final Judgment back to earth to console his fellow Huguenots by emphasizing the righting of this inverted world order. D'Aubigné's Protestant world view maintains the motif of God's *élus*⁵⁵ to validate the prophecy and insists upon his ecstatic vision as a teleology for both the poem and human history. Finally, by placing the poem's teleology in the afterworld (though forced to do so by earthly defeat), d'Aubigné insists that his faction's teleological victory is a true telos as it comes at the end of time and cannot be overturned like the attempted teloi of human history.

As this study's adhesion to Quint's definition of epic and romance has demonstrated, the telos is essential to the epic form; as such, I have referenced elements of the *Tragiques* that contribute to the poem's teleology throughout this chapter. First was the discussion of narrative structure, particularly how the *Tragiques* breaks the Aristotelian unity of action; though Quint does not use Aristotle's term, his idea of epic's teleology as narrative structure is similar as both focus on the accomplishment of a single task, what Maskell called the hero's mission. This relates to another unusual element of the *Tragiques*, the lack of hero or an abstract collective hero; however, as d'Aubigné himself assumes the role of hero/poet and prophet, his mission becomes the transmission of truth to the people, thereby replacing plot with its early modern synonym, argument. The salvation of God's chosen people most closely approximates the unity

⁵⁵ Both Quint and Coats notice the paradoxical nature of this motif as divine election is necessarily unknown and unknowable to man. Further exploration of this potential subversion of Calvinism itself is beyond the scope of this study. Though I focus on poetic appropriation of the winners' genre to commandeer their teleology for the losing side, Quint's and Coats' arguments are worth noting for further consideration.

of action for a typical epic, but the mission accomplished by the hero is to make his argument, demonstrated through the world's inversion and d'Aubigné's own privileged *katabasis*, that the Protestants are indeed the elect who will be saved at the end of time.

This salvation does, however paradoxically, provide the teleology for both history and the poem, despite its break from the traditional epic hero's mission. Though the *je* functions primarily as hero in his journey to the underworld, this hero's function lays the foundation for the poem's truth claim by allowing the *je*'s role as witness to move from the battlefield to heaven. Without the insistence upon divine truth that transforms the poet into biblical prophet, the teleology could not form. The increasing frequency of Christian invocations as the text builds to its telos emphasizes d'Aubigné's role as mouthpiece of God, insisting that the poem's truth comes directly from the divine, and not the poet's own mind. Similarly, d'Aubigné's vision of the Final Judgment is based firmly in biblical mythology, placing the poem's appropriated teleology in the Protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura*. With that summary in mind, let us look in more detail at how d'Aubigné's unique teleology functions in the text.

The turn to eschatology to create a telos is necessary (as there is no victory on earth) and definitive (because unlike human empires that crumble with time, God's divine kingdom is eternal). Finishing the *Tragiques* after the end of the Wars of Religion, d'Aubigné presents the Huguenots as the clear losing side in the wars, despite the ascension of the erstwhile Protestant Henri IV to the throne of France. The poet again attacks Henri for abandoning his former comrades: "Bourbon, que dirois-tu de ta race honteuse? / Tu dirois, je le sçai, que ta race est douteuse" (*Jugement* 159-160). Though the Edict of Nantes established an official policy of religious tolerance, it was clear to d'Aubigné that the persecution of his people would go unpunished in his time; this position on the losing side of a tentative peace prevents the

perspective of traditional teleological epic, so d'Aubigné turns to Christian soteriology to establish an undisputed Protestant victory in the future. The poet uses his privileged eyewitness testimony from heaven to describe the Final Judgment as shown to him by an angel, claiming God's punishment of the Catholic majority responsible for the civil war as absolute truth. D'Aubigné witnesses the righting of the world's previous inversions: "Les tyrans abatus, pasles et criminels, / Changent leurs vains honneurs aux tourments eternels" (*Jugement* 741-742). The eschatological turn is therefore necessary because the Protestants have clearly lost on earth, and the belief in predestination opens the door for a possible telic force in the poet's future.

The eschatological basis for teleology allows d'Aubigné to create a definitively *final* cause; the text concludes with the unmaking of the material world, thereby guaranteeing that this "ultimate teleology" (Quint 189) for the Protestants can never be reversed. Like Ronsard and especially Du Bellay, d'Aubigné fully acknowledges the destruction of all things human; for the Catholic poets, this sixteenth-century worldview fundamentally undermined the teleology of their own projects. However, d'Aubigné's Calvinist belief in predetermination permits an eschatological telos where all man's works will fall, but God's end game is immutable by human events. Beyond the teleological question, this also represents an inspired incorporation of the poet's contemporary worldview into the ancient genre, avoiding the (ultimately insurmountable) anachronistic faults of the *Franciade*.

D'Aubigné is unique to use the divine to create a true final telos; though its truth is established by a tautology, d'Aubigné's is the only one of this study to acknowledge his own belief structure and still make the teleology work. Though Virgil presented a successful teleology for human history grounded in the Roman Empire, the continuation of human history guarantees it can only provide teleological sense *within* the context of its narrative. However, by

incorporating the protestant perspective into epic teleology, d'Aubigné insists that all of history leads to the Final Judgment when God's pre-determined chosen will be saved. Building on his claims to divine truth established throughout the poem, d'Aubigné leaves no room for dispute, and the Protestant kingdom of heaven becomes as inevitable as Augustus' great Empire, at least within the context of these epics that are designed to immortalize them.

Following the pronouncement of past retributions in *Vengeances*, Jesus himself arrives in *Jugement* to judge humanity, vividly witnessed by the poet ["Voici le Fils de l'homme et du grand Dieu le Fils" (*Jugement* 697)]. God then un-makes the material world, proving the poet's assertion that human endeavors have no bearing on eternity:

Tout ce qui fut mortel se perd esvanoui.
 Les fleuves sont sechés, la grand mer se desrobe,
 Il falloit que la terre allast changer de robe.
 Montagnes, vous sentez douleurs d'enfantemens ;
 Vous fuyez comme agneaux, ô simples elemens !
 Cachez vous, changez vous ; rien de mortel ne supporte
 Le front de l'Eternel ni sa voix rude et forte. (*Jugement* 710-716)

Here, d'Aubigné presents the material world as a sacrificial lamb, unmade so God's elect can enjoy eternity in the kingdom of heaven. By setting the final victory of the faithful Protestants at the very end of the cosmos, d'Aubigné establishes a teleology that cannot be overturned (as Virgil's is by Lucan, Du Bellay and the mere passage of time), but neither can it be fulfilled or proven in human terms.

Jugement is an essential conclusion to the chaos that reigns throughout the text by righting the upended world order. It is an attempt to understand and cope with the Huguenot

defeat and the perceived victory of vice over virtue: “If [d’Aubigné] has stressed throughout the topsy-turvy nature of the world, it is to show that paradoxically real life in the real world where Justice and joy exist is after mortal death” (Cameron 67). Since sin and vice have taken the earthly victory, it is only through God that order can be restored at the end of days, a fact reinforced by the repeated Christian invocations throughout *Jugement*. In *Vengeances*, d’Aubigné highlights the divine justice that he and his contemporaries have already witnessed as a way to validate *Jugement*’s prophecy.

D’Aubigné’s faith is essential to the reestablishment of proper world order: “la religion apparaît alors comme l’assurance du renversement de l’injustice” (Weber xxv). The Holy Spirit removes Satan’s son (the Pope) from his throne in Rome and sends the Church leaders to hell to pay for their sins. God confronts these perpetrators of violence directly and damns them to eternal punishment: “Vous qui avez laissé mes membres aux froidures, / Qui leur avez versé injures sur injures / ... Allez, maudits...!” (*Jugement* 887-8, 891). God’s chosen are finally recognized for their faith and are brought to heaven. The unnatural destruction of family units in *Misères* is here corrected as families of the faithful are reunited in heaven (*Jugement* 1107-10). Even the original sin of Genesis is reversed as “Adam, ayant encor sa condition pure, / Conut des animaux les noms et la nature...” (*Jugement* 1127-28). The *monde pervers* d’Aubigné described throughout the text is now unmade as the entire cosmos returns to nothingness: “le feu s’enfuit dans l’air, / L’air en l’eau, l’eau en terre” (*Jugement* 929-30). The prophesy in *Jugement* therefore promises the correction of the perverted world in a manner that cannot be overturned; the cosmos are corrected by a divine hand before their unmaking that precludes any further reversal of the intended world order.

Most importantly, the inversion and subsequent righting of the world is what allows the loser's appropriation of winner's teleology; victory on Earth indicates loss, and in turn, loss is a sign of true, eternal victory in heaven. This inversion plays an essential role in maintaining a telic focus throughout the text; though the first reading appears completely disjointed, subsequent readings bring this repetition to the forefront and provide a teleological umbrella to the rest of the poem in much the same way as the wanderings of the *Aeneid*'s first six books. The reversal of the natural world order has assured the earthly victory of vice over virtue, setting up the hijacking of the epic structure to undermine the epic winner's version of history and the genre that maintains it. The righting of the world is inevitable and foretold, becoming a true telos because of the unnatural state of the world so emphasized throughout the poem. As the world is *not* as God intended (as the poet demonstrated in *Chambre Dorée*), its reparation is a necessary condition of the Final Judgment.

The fact that the Bible represents d'Aubigné's only source of truth (as evidenced by both the poem's biblical themes and the poet's Calvinist belief in *sola scriptura*) legitimizes his claims that all will be repaired. This inversion then allows the poet to claim earthly defeat as a sign of heavenly victory when all shall be righted during the Final Judgment: "...cheated of earthly victory, the poet welcomes the defeat that assures him of a celestial reward" (Quint 190). The repeated insistence upon the world as contrary to nature is what assures the reversal of fortunes. Interestingly, the allegory d'Aubigné uses in *La Chambre Dorée* to emphasize Injustice's rule on earth is imitated from Ronsard and Du Bellay's own imagery of Justice's conspicuous absence during periods civil war. If even the Catholic majority recognizes that the world is not as it should be when marked by civil violence, d'Aubigné's teleology is then supported, however accidentally, by his opposition. Of course, Catholic denial of predestination

undermines the ultimate conclusion of teleology, but the premise is at least supported by similar allegorical representation.

The poem's persistent reminders of God's preference for his elected faithful culminate in the group's salvation as recompense for their earthly suffering at the hands of the oppressive Catholic leadership. D'Aubigné insists that the elect will sit in God's presence, thus reinforcing and validating the Protestant idea of predetermination. The insistence upon defeat as a sign of true victory both follows and confirms the Protestant belief in their status as God's chosen people, a theme reinforced by d'Aubigné's frequent repetition of the word *élus*. Though d'Aubigné's Protestantism prevents his poem from assuming the traditional form of winner's epic, it also positions him uniquely well to create a truly *final* cause that explains the Huguenots' Job-like suffering during the Wars as proof of God's ultimate favor: "...d'Aubigné saw God's grace working in complete opposition to earthly honors" (Cameron 75-76). From the poet's perspective, it is due to the inherent virtue of Protestants as God's chosen that they are oppressed and slaughtered. This becomes a necessary tautology in the text:

The wounds of martyrdom, the violence that history visibly inflicts upon the defeated Huguenots, are taken to be signs of a divine election that, according to strict doctrine, is in fact invisible and inscrutable.... History marks those whom God chooses; or, conversely, to be of the elect is to be a marked man... The narrator... embraces affliction and death as the tokens of a final triumph and victory in the afterlife: while earthly victory is itself a manifest sign of eternal damnation. (Quint 188)

By adding the previously-noted insistence upon the world's inversion to Quint's argument, I demonstrate d'Aubigné's reinforcement of his text's professed truth. By grounding the salvation of the "martyres aimez" (*Vengeances* 703) in biblical mythology from the Book of Revelation,

d'Aubigné engages his personal Calvinist interpretation of the Bible to bring consolation to his faction secured by his tautological arguments. Quainton describes this as a methodology used by d'Aubigné to insist that his nation's experience is, in fact, "part of a historical pattern and of divine order" (39). By combining Protestant belief in predeterminism with biblical representations of the Final Judgment, d'Aubigné creates a decisive and divine telos that refuses to allow any other.

Repurposing Genre

These arguments combine to support the chapter thesis that the *Tragiques* represents a unique text that undermines not only the epic winners' institutions and teleology, but also their very genre. This simultaneously moves the epic action outside the text as the poet and poem attack the victors and their genre. D'Aubigné invokes, recalls, draws upon, and appropriates epic, but his position within the socio-political situation "demande un autre style" as the poet himself announced in *Princes*. Though Quint analyzes the *Tragiques* as a member of the *Pharsalia*'s particular genre, I argue that the poem is not as closely tied to Lucan as Quint suggests. While it is certainly true that d'Aubigné draws upon Lucan's treatment of his own experience of civil war, the Huguenot goes beyond Lucan's dismantling of the winners' teleological understanding of history and claims such teleology for himself and his defeated faction. Through the poet's privileged insight into the divine plan for mankind, the poem insists that "Divine Reason, and not Fortune, is in control of terrestrial activity" (Quainton 39). This is in direct conflict with Quint's understanding of romance's incursions into the losers' epic; he demonstrates that the losers' turn to romance is precisely to undermine the victors' insistence upon Fate as driving their victory by claiming that Fortune is truly in control, and therefore the outcome could have been otherwise. Thus, though Quint demonstrates the various echoes of the *Pharsalia* throughout the *Tragiques*, I

argue that d'Aubigné's poem represents a different generic form. While it is indeed an epic of the loser, d'Aubigné does not engage in the same dismantling of narrative form and telic drive as Lucan, instead emphasizing that the loss is a triumphalist teleology in itself.

To demonstrate how d'Aubigné's unique approach to epic dismantles the genre itself, not merely the institutions the genre upholds, I return to this chapter's considerations of epic mutated elements. As we saw, d'Aubigné incorporates many of epic's tropes and themes, but always with a unique twist that only emphasizes the breaks from the tradition rather than the similarities. For example, the clearly heroic subject of war only highlights the fact that there is no single hero within the confines of the verse. Rather than depict a single battle, d'Aubigné chooses to use his pen to attack the victors as poetic composition itself becomes epic action. Additionally, the poet's real-world martial action emphasizes the lack of martial action in the text. Instead, the war serves as a theatrical backdrop for the smaller scenes that play out in front of it. Even the collective heroic identity of Protestant martyrs around the world highlights the distinction between medieval epic heroes who fight for Christendom and nation as one and the same; similarly, the martyrs' variety of backgrounds have a popularizing effect on heroism in their stark contrast to epic's emphasis on exemplarity among the nobility.

Rather than repeat Ronsard's mistaken attempt to simultaneously represent and celebrate national sentiment during a period marked by fractured national identity, d'Aubigné embraces epic's collectivity over romance's individuality, but vehemently rejects national sentiment for a factional identity that transcends national boundaries. While the losers' epic's turn to romance represents an attempt to undermine the winners' teleological victory through deconstruction of teleology as a driving force in history, d'Aubigné refuses to submit his losing faction to the whims of Fortune, instead emphasizing his faction's loss as basis for their own telic force. This

represents an important break from Lucan's tradition; d'Aubigné does not simply dismantle the victors' teleology in imitation of his ancient source text, but commandeers the victorious teleological narrative for himself. The combined effect of the ostensibly losing elements within the *Tragiques* (the terrestrial loss, the first-hand account of the war's horrors, the rule of Injustice and her court of vices) permits a mounting turn to teleological victory in the text. On a theological level, only the poet's Calvinism allows such insistence upon a future telos; without this belief in divine predetermination, the losers' appropriation of teleology could not hold. This belief structure combines with the inversion of the world order that allows d'Aubigné to use the winners' genre to subvert both the genre itself and the teleology on which it rests.

Epic's public and political function, celebrating the nation and legitimating the heads of state (an aspect that fatally constrained the *Franciade*), makes it interesting to see the genre (albeit a mutated form) being used to uphold the rebellious side in a civil war. D'Aubigné thus transforms epic in the *Tragiques* into a rebel against its own genre by using it to destroy everything an epic should stand for. D'Aubigné takes the very genre that is supposed to glorify the nation and legitimate the ruling class and uses it to validate his own persecuted minority during a period of civil war, undermining the very institutions the genre exists to uphold. By focusing on the ways in which d'Aubigné dismantles fundamental aspects of epic, we can gain a unique perspective on the relationship between political or religious rebellion and literary genre during this tumultuous period in France's history.

CONCLUSION

Through examination of three different variations on epic poetry in sixteenth-century France, we have begun to explore the tensions between the poets' professed desire for a French Virgilian epic and the realities of such projects. Of course, many more variations on epic at this time remain outside the scope of this dissertation, but the three texts examined suffice to begin drawing some conclusions. By examining three different approaches from Ronsard, Du Bellay, and d'Aubigné, I conclude that an epic as defined by both recent scholarship (as in the dissertation's introduction) and the sixteenth century (as explored in Chapter 1) is simply not possible at this time. The social and political situation in France offered no empire, no decisive victory, no change in status quo that could provide a contemporary historical telos in which a poet could ground a Virgilian imitation. Rather than emergence from civil conflict, like the conditions of the *Aeneid*'s composition, France experienced the descent into conflict and the waning of the Valois dynasty. Thus, the sixteenth-century goals for the genre led to the failures and mutations examined in this study. As I considered each of the texts from the same angles, I will conclude with a summary of their comparisons to understand the bigger picture.

The discussions of the *Franciade* and the *Antiquitez* focused more on poetic form than the analysis of the *Tragiques*, though a comparison of the three together is worthwhile. The discussion of Du Bellay's *Antiquitez* and its complicated relationship with epic sheds some additional light on the failure of the *Franciade*. Du Bellay suggests that the form of the

Franciade is itself problematic. I explored Langer's argument that the long poem is inherently tedious, and Ronsard's four finished books of a planned twenty-four (themselves already half the length of the *Odyssey*) fail to offer much variety, even in spite of their length. Part of this tedium stems from Ronsard's disappointing skill as a story-teller; he is recognized for his accomplishments in philosophical or descriptive amorous poetry for good reason. To not place all the fault on Ronsard, the socio-political situation in France does not provide him with a story of French imperialism that would give his poem a natural telos; therefore, the *Franciade* relies purely on Virgil for its plot.

In contrast, Du Bellay's use of the short sonnet form allows for great variety within the *Antiquitez*. While the *Antiquitez* cannot be called an epic in the normal sense of the word, Du Bellay's fusion of genres creates a much more compelling series of poems than Ronsard's attempt at a single long narrative. Du Bellay's criticism of Ronsard in the *Regrets* accuses his rival of tedium within his subject matter as well, suggesting that Ronsard is capable of producing no more than love poetry.⁵⁶ Du Bellay's *Antiquitez* clearly show how effective the mixing of amorous poetry and epic traditions can be, though the *Franciade* also shows how poorly the blend can be executed. Ronsard, obsessed with overly-faithful imitation of the ancients, constrains his own work to the point of strangulation. Forced to confront the anachronism between himself and the ancient world during his exile in Rome, Du Bellay steers his project into alternative territory. Though Du Bellay claimed successful navigation of the epic waters while Francus remained stranded on the shores of Troy, he adapted the form to fit the time. Finding

⁵⁶ Du Bellay would not live to see Ronsard's powerful political poetry in his *Discours des misères de ce temps* which address similar issues as d'Aubigné in the *Tragiques*. Writing from opposite sides of the conflict, the dialogue between these texts is a subject worthy of much greater attention than I have time for here.

himself facing the ruins of Rome, he similarly constructs the ruins of epic, broken into sonnets, as befits the disjunction between him and the ancient world.

D'Aubigné's chimera follows traditional epic in the sense of a long versified account of war, and the entire poem's elevated style and meter reflect those traditionally associated with epic. However, from the perspective of narration, its episodic stage productions distance the *Tragiques* from both the winners' and the losers' epic. This dismembered narrative reflects Quint's commentary on the losers' tendency to dismantle the winners' teleological version of history, but d'Aubigné is unique in imposing a final teleology on top of this disjointed narrative. In terms of the poem's form, the seven-book structure choice is important for its reflection of Christian/Biblical inspiration rather than ancient, as seen in the twenty-four book *Deffence* and *Franciade*. Though the episodic structure divests the *Tragiques* from traditional epic, it has the positive side effect of ensuring the long poem does not suffer the tedium of Ronsard's.

The overarching problem with the conception of epic as a public action representing and extolling the collective national identity is that, as many critics noticed in my previous citations, French identity is fractured at the time of these poems' composition. The best idea may have been Du Bellay's suggestion to draw a *long poème français* from a figure of French medieval tradition such as Lancelot or Tristan; however, such a poem never even began. Ronsard's attempted appropriation of the Roman foundational myth, with remarkably little deviation, fails to make the *Franciade* feel even remotely French. Even his desire to create a shared cultural identity through teleological narrative is misguided within the context of civil war. While Du Bellay's project began before the outbreak of war, the *Antiquitez*'s message makes it clear that social unrest was a preoccupation for poets, one Ronsard ignores completely in the *Franciade*. Du Bellay's exile in Rome makes all the difference between the two friendly rivals: "Exile gives

Du Bellay a poetic persona, a persona largely defined by means of contrast with Ronsard” (Hartley 152). Hartley explains that this exile leads to the poet’s most vigorously-expressed patriotism as his interactions with Italy convince him of France’s exceptionalism. Though the *Antiquitez* incorporates no more French legend than the *Franciade*, the sonnet series connects more clearly with a sense of national sentiment by coloring the work with the anticipation of France’s imperial future.

D’Aubigné, however, most accurately reflects these poets’ time in two ways. First, the Calvinist laments for all of France; his descriptions of the wars’ horror and the destruction of France-the-mother that run throughout *Misères* speak for the nation at large, despite the blatant partisanship of the text as a whole. Secondly, d’Aubigné’s shift from national interests to extolling transnational Protestantism reflects the changing sense of identity through much of Europe. Interestingly, the period’s most successful epic, Tasso’s *Gerusalemme Liberata*, similarly sets aside national sentiment for transnational Christendom by focusing on the First Crusade, even giving the poem a Frankish hero rather than an Italian one.

The shifting sense of national to religious identity reflects not only the civil unrest of post-Reformation Europe, but more importantly demonstrates the dominance of Christian interpretations of the world. For the purpose of epic, Christian soteriology and eschatology alter the possibility of imposing a teleological understanding of history onto epic’s narrative. For Catholics and Protestants alike, only God is eternal, so the claim to an earthly, historical telos (essential to the winners’ epic) is undermined by Christian eschatology. Both our Catholic poets are forced to concede this ephemeral nature of man’s works, even as they (particularly Ronsard) try to imitate the ancient teleological view of human history. As member of the losing side of

conflict, d'Aubigné embraces this temporary state of human affairs and takes consolation in insisting that God's choice will eventually provide the only true victory to the elect.

Ronsard clearly intends for his epic to be as teleological as he reads Virgil's to be; the insistence upon Charles IX as triumphant telos of French history demonstrates how desperately he clings to this conception of epic. In recreating a narrative grounded in ancient values, Ronsard's own Christian mindset (so prominent in the last lines as Hyante warns Francus/Charles that only divine virtue is eternal) undermines the very teleology he intends to establish. For Ronsard, whose stubborn adhesion to a Virgilian narrative restricted his choice of telos, this admission in the last lines of book four undermines any attempt at a French telos; even one stronger than Charles IX would end anyway. Rather than incorporate a Christian worldview into his would-be teleological narrative, Ronsard places his characters in the philosophical mindset of the ancients, forgetting that these gods could not drive an assured victory for a Christian audience like their prophecies and meddling could in Virgil's time. Ronsard should have noticed two essential issues: Charles was certainly no Augustus, and even Virgil's telos of Roman Empire already collapsed from Ronsard's perspective. Thus, nothing is quite as teleological as it may seem.

Du Bellay recognizes this problem and therefore grounds his 'imperial romance' in cycles; as each empire falls, another is poised to take its place until the eternal divine empire finally arrives. Du Bellay similarly warns of the ephemeral nature of all human endeavors even while opening the door to Henri II's imperial future. In the *Antiquitez*, it served as motivation to encourage French humility in grandeur to avoid Rome's error of pride. As a Catholic, human actions can determine the course of history and even one's salvation. Du Bellay therefore leaves his poem open to the possibility of an imperial telos for his king to determine. Time destroys all

mortal things, but careful actions and learning from the mistakes of Rome can positively impact this life and the next.

Only the Protestant author, whose worldview is grounded in determinism, can create a teleological epic. D'Aubigné uses the idea of God alone as eternal to cement his eschatological teleology, thereby aligning the grand vision of history with the values of the author's period. Importantly, d'Aubigné's ability to create an eschatological telos exists not only in spite of his position as loser of conflict, but *because* of it. In a world where sin rules, those marked by defeat are necessarily marked for salvation as well. The acceptance and incorporation of a sixteenth-century Christian world-view is what allows the *Tragiques*' teleology to hold while the *Franciade*'s falls apart. The basis of Catholicism is that deeds change the individual's outcome in the Final Judgment, so it could not serve as telos for a poet like Ronsard, but as a Protestant, this judgment is divinely predetermined and verified by the persecution of the sixteenth century, and therefore only d'Aubigné's prophecy can serve as true eschatological telos.

This dissertation represents the start of a larger research agenda on the role of epic poetry for nations and their literatures. This study immediately leads to new perspectives on French thinking about Frenchness through the lens of epic's attempt to speak to collective national consciousness and identity. It is not only the problematic composition that says something about the time, but more importantly, the texts' chilly receptions. Therefore, my assumptions about French conceptions of shared cultural identity are not limited to the authors' assumptions, but also to the public's inability to connect with the images they offer or propose. As this line of research continues to grow into a book, I will take these tensions between poetic representations of national sentiment and the socio-political realities of the time to shed new light on French ways of thinking about their nation.

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