



# Spotlight on Lost Love but Love not Lost

Heroines from Antiquity  
to Anne of Bretagne

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Manuskripte und seltene Bücher

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# Lost Love but Love not Lost

come and see us  
at TEFAF New York, stand 336





Octovien de Saint-Gelais,  
*Epistres d'Ovide* together with three  
French poems,  
Manuscript made for Anne of  
Brittany, Queen of France,  
made between 1492 and 1497

f. 55r, Queen Anne and her ladies-in-  
waiting illuminated by the Master of the  
*Chronique scandaleuse*, Paris, c. 1493.







The Latin poet Ovid wrote a text (c. 25-16 BCE) containing 15 letters from unfortunate heroines of Greek and Latin mythology to their faithless lovers. Six more letters presented an exchange between three couples.

The present manuscript consists of five of those letters, translated into French verse by Octovien de Saint-Gelais (1468-1502).

Churchman and poet, Octovien was courtier to Anne's husband, Charles VIII, who awarded Octovien the bishopric of Angoulême in 1494.

Throughout the ages, Ovid's heroines and their letters inspired writers and artists - Heloise used them as a model for her letters to Abelard.

f. 21r, Dido mourns over Aeneas' betrayal, illuminated by the Master of the *Chronique scandaleuse*. Paris, c. 1493.





The Heroïdes chosen by  
Octovien de Saint-Gelais are:

- f. 2r Oenone writing a letter to Paris (Heroïde 5)
- f. 13r Ariadne writing to Theseus (Heroïde 10)
  - f. 21r Dido's letter to Aeneas (Heroïde 7)
- f. 32r Phyllis writing to Demophoon (Heroïde 2)
- f. 40r Hypsipyle's letter to Jason (Heroïde 6)

Followed by three poems:

- f. 50r *L'Epitaphe de Madame de Balsac*
- f. 53r *L'Arrest de la louenge de la dame sans sy*
- f. 55r *L'Appel ... contre la dame sans sy*

Title (added later). Illuminated manuscript on vellum,  
265 x 190 mm, 59 leaves, 8 of which full-page  
miniatures, some with pictorial borders.





Oenone writes the unfaithful Paris, who left her for Helen of Troy, the most beautiful woman in history. Oenone was of divine origin and married Paris, a mere shepherd, for love. Although he had sworn his eternal love to her, he shamefully betrayed her with Helen.

In the margin: scenes from the life of Paris. Above: Paris' mother, Hecuba, wife of King Priam of Troy, dreams she will give birth to a burning torch, prophesying her child will bring fire and destruction to the kingdom. The baby, Paris, was to be killed after birth and is taken away from the mother, to be left in a forest. A shepherd finds the boy and raises him with his wife.

In the last image at the bottom left, Paris meets Oenone. He is dressed as a shepherd and is unaware of his royal descent.

f. 2r, illuminated by the Master of the *Chronique scandaleuse*, Paris, c. 1493.





To her despair, Ariadne discovers that Theseus left her all alone on the island of Naxos – having sailed away without a word.

Her face is grief-stricken. Her hands are hidden in the wide sleeves of her sumptuous dress.

Cleverly, in the background, the painter inserts the events that happened shortly before the discovery of Theseus' flight: at top left, she wakes up to find Theseus' side of the bed empty; at top right, she runs to the shore only to watch his ship disappear and so she attaches a white cloth to a branch to attract the sailors' attention.

In the *bas-de-page*, another earlier scene: at right, Ariadne hands a coil of wool to Theseus, who then kills the Minotaur (at left).

f. 13r, illuminated by the Master of the *Chronique scandaleuse*, Paris, c. 1493.





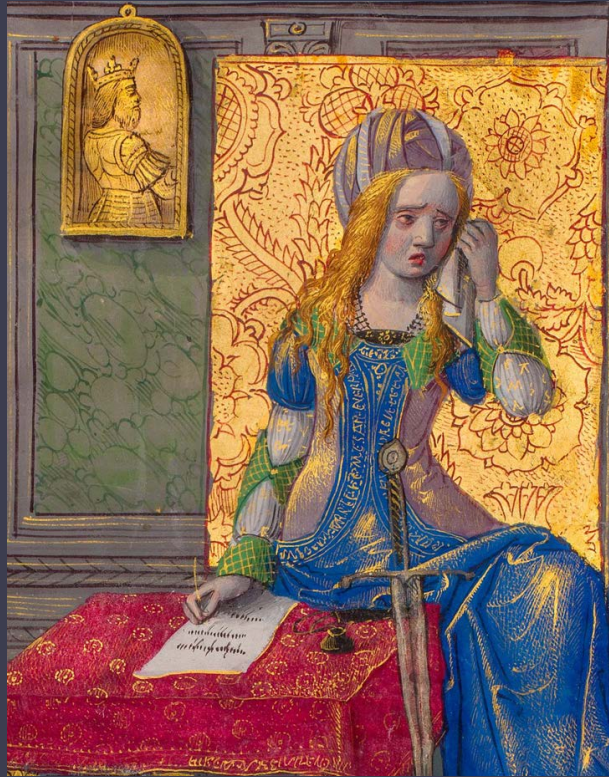
Dido weeps into her handkerchief with her letter on the desk in front of her. Aeneas' sword stands next to her.

His departing ship can be seen through the opening to the right.

In the *bas-de-page*: Dido throws herself on Aeneas' sword, killing herself.

f. 21r, Manuscript illuminated by the Master of the *Chronique scandaleuse*. Paris, c. 1493.





This excellent Parisian illuminator, whose actual name still remains unknown, expertly presents an endearing depiction of the grieving lady, with the portrait of Aeneas behind her. He also shows a love for small details such as the men on board Aeneas' ship, and a sailor climbing the ropes.

Details of Dido mourning Aeneas (f 21r), miniature by the Master of the *Chronique scandaleuse*, Paris, c. 1493.



In Phyllis's letter to Demophoon – who left her on her wedding day – she wonders what became of him and why he did not return to her as promised. She blames herself for having helped him to rebuilt his fleet in order to leave. She also refers to Demophoon's father Theseus and how he had planted the seed of disloyalty in his son's heart.

Like Dido in the previous letter and miniature, Phyllis ends her life, as shown in the lower left corner.

f. 32r, illuminated by the Master of the *Chronique scandaleuse*, Paris, c. 1493.





The pregnant Hypsipyle is given a farewell embrace by Jason, who is dressed in silver armour and is about to board his ship. Jason wraps one arm around her waist while the other rests on the unborn offspring.

Scenes in the *bas-de-page* refer to her letter of distress: (from the left) how she and Jason were married, how a messenger told her that Jason was alive, how she gave birth to twin boys, and how she watches the sea from her tower in expectation of his return.

f. 40r, illuminated by the Master of the *Chronique scandaleuse*, Paris, c. 1493.





The five stories of Heroides are followed by three more poems.

*L'epitaffe de feu madame de Balsac* praises the young Madame de Balsac, born Marie de Montberon, lady-in-waiting of Anne de Bretagne, who died only one month after her wedding to a courtier of Charles VIII.

The author writes from the perspective of her mourning lover and describes how the fierce Atropos, goddess of death, entered the lady's bed chamber and took away the life of this "*dame sans pareil*".

"Death chooses whom she will  
and beauty is of no avail"

f. 50r, illuminated by the Master of the *Chronique scandaleuse*, Paris, c. 1493.





The mourning male figure dressed in black and wringing his hands wears a hat with a golden crown decorated with *fleurs-de-lys* identifying him as Charles VIII – while the verses refer to an “*amant royal portant livrée noire*” (a royal lover who wears a black livery), who is also addressed as “*prince*” and “*sire*”. Not surprisingly the lady’s name is Mary – and the scene should be understood in the tradition of courtly (‘unattainable’) love.

f. 50r, illuminated by the Master of the *Chronique scandaleuse*, Paris, c. 1493.





In the *bas-de-page* from right to left: a blindfolded, winged figure (Cupid?, as mentioned in the text) carries a spear just like Atropos. He is accompanied by an almost identical character, but without wings and with ankles in chains - They symbolize two aspects of ardent love: blindness and bondage or captivity. In the next scene, the mourning poet commissions a portrait of the lady painted in gold and then, to the left, gazes upon it, referring to Pygmalion, who fell in love with a portrait.

Finally, a funeral procession is headed by the royal lover / author carrying a black banner.

f. 50r, illuminated by the Master of the *Chronique scandaleuse*, Paris, c. 1493.





The Arrest for the '*Dame de Sans Sy*' – possibly referring to Madame de Balzac – declaring her

*"Seul sans Per, la plus Belle des Belles".*

In this ballad, poets act as legal representatives of a divine assembly. They are asked to elect the most stunning woman of all and choose the lady in question as being without peer: *la plus belle des belles*. In other words, they repeat Paris' judgement of Antiquity, in which the author links to the preceding stories of the five Heroines.

That this judgement is a male verdict, without women having a say, is highlighted in the text.

f. 53r, illuminated by the Master of the *Chronique scandaleuse*, Paris, c. 1493.





The Peerless Lady, '*Seul sans Per*' stands before a golden cloth of honour in the middle of the room. To her right three golden idols stand on a pedestal. They symbolise the committee that has chosen her as the most beautiful of all. A scribe adds the verdict to a scroll.

In the lower register, the scribe is accompanied by a man in blue. Each has a book in his hands – symbols of their learning. They are greeted by the same mourning nobleman who agrees with their judgment through his gesture towards the central scene.

f. 53r, illuminated by the Master of the *Chronique scandaleuse*, Paris, c. 1493.





*L'appel contre la dame sans sy* is a protest by three ladies against singling out one as most beautiful, and thus creating discord and strife.

The three ladies accompanying the Queen, Anne of Brittany, are Jeanne Chabot de Montsoreau, Blanche de Montberon, and Françoise de Talaru. They plead against the author's judgement and accuse him of partiality. All three are mentioned by name and are documented in court registers between 1492 and 1498.

Below, the Queen and her ladies object to the royal lover's choice and demand redemption and apology.

f. 55r, illuminated by the Master of the *Chronique scandaleuse*, Paris, c. 1493.



Tous les escriptz ne sont pas veritables  
Que vous fatistes mectres dedas voz tables

**A**insi men pars sans propos leur toucher  
Riens neult seruy mō replicuer pour leur  
Tantost apres le roy se alla coucher  
Doncqs men vms sans faire aultre demeure  
Lors tant me peme et si tressort labeure  
Qu'en celle nuyt leur appel redigay  
Lequel enuers pour vous sire mis ay  
Voyez que cest la cause se remuoie  
Par deuant vous faictes que lon yvoie

**C**y finist l'apex des trois dames  
Contre l'abbelle sans ly

At the end the author writes that not all  
of what is written is true...  
"Tous les escriptz ne sont pas  
veritables"

Manuscript illuminated by the Master of the  
*Chronique scandaleuse*, Paris, c. 1493.  
265 x 190 mm, 59 leaves with 81 illuminated  
pages, some with pictorial borders.





Whatever the enigmas the three final poems bring, the superb miniature of Anne de Bretagne as the final image in this splendid manuscript, is, by itself, the most persuasive visual promotion.

It offers “a dramatic staging of the French Queen that rivals and perhaps counteracts that of the *Dame sans sy*” (cf. Cynthia Brown, *The Queen’s Library*, 2011, p. 192)

Likely, this manuscript was made for husband and wife, the King and Queen of France!

When Cupid fires arrows, as Ovid put it:  
 “In my heart that had been my own,  
 Love sits on his throne.”

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