

March 2016

Volume IV Issue IV

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Voting: the Quick and Dirty Primaries Edition | spotlight

Zoe Kovacs | contributing officer

Voting is important. REALLY important. The right to vote is the essence of a democracy, and assuming you are 18 or older, a legal citizen of the United States, and not a felon or otherwise declared ineligible by a court of law, you can and should take full advantage of it. Why wouldn't you have a say if you're able? Sometimes the ins and outs of voting can be a little murky, so I'm here to clear that up for you. (*Disclaimer: The following apply to voting in Pennsylvania. Rules for other states will likely vary.*)

First things first: Registration. In order to vote, you must first register. If you are a college student, you can register using your school address, even if you are from out of state. Online registration forms are available via several websites including <https://www.pavoterservices.state.pa.us>. Note that some websites require the online form to be printed and mailed to your local elections office upon completion. You may also register in person at a DMV, elections office, or certain other government offices. To register, you will need a license or other state ID. *The deadline to register is 30 days prior to an election. Mailed registration forms must be post-marked no later than that date. If you plan on voting in the primaries on April 26, you must register by March 28.*

What are primaries? Primary elections are held by individual states to narrow down the pool of candidates to the two who will ultimately compete for the presidency. One Democrat and one Republican are chosen. Pennsylvania holds what are called "closed" primaries, meaning that people can only vote within their registered party. In other words, Democrats can only vote for Democrats and Republicans for Republicans. Independents cannot vote in Pennsylvania primaries.

When and where do I vote? Primaries will take place on April 26. To vote, you must go to a polling place. Allegheny County polling locations can be found at <http://apps.alleghenycounty.us/website/VoteDistricts/Look-up.aspx>. One will be located inside Soldiers and Sailors.

What if I can't make it? If you registered somewhere you cannot be on election day, you can still vote via absentee ballot. To do so, you must apply to a County Board of Elections *no later than 5 p.m. on the Tuesday before the election.* (In extenuating circumstances like unexpected illness or disability, the office will accept applications no later than 5 p.m. the Friday before the election.) You will then receive a paper absentee ballot, which you must complete and return to the County Board of Elections. *Absentee ballots must be physically turned in by 5 p.m. on the day before the election, or by the 7th day before the election if mailed or faxed.*

What should I bring to the polling location? If it is your first time voting at a polling location, you must bring an acceptable form of ID. This includes a PA driver's license or state-issued ID, government-issued ID, U.S. passport, U.S. Armed Forces ID, student ID, or employee ID. Acceptable non-photo identification includes a voter's identification card, non-photo ID issued by the U.S. government or commonwealth, a firearm permit, or current utility bill, bank statement, paycheck, or government check. ♦

NOTICE:

Finals Week is April 25-30, so if you are lucky enough to be going home early and are registered to vote in Pittsburgh (and home is not Pittsburgh), you will need to vote by absentee ballot! When in doubt, double check!

Mailing address for registration and absentee ballots:

Division of Elections - Voter Registration Section
Allegheny County
542 Forbes Avenue, Room 609
Pittsburgh PA 15219-2953

- March 28 — last day to register to vote
- April 19 — last day to mail or fax absentee ballot
- April 25 — last day to physically hand in absentee ballot
- April 26 — primary elections

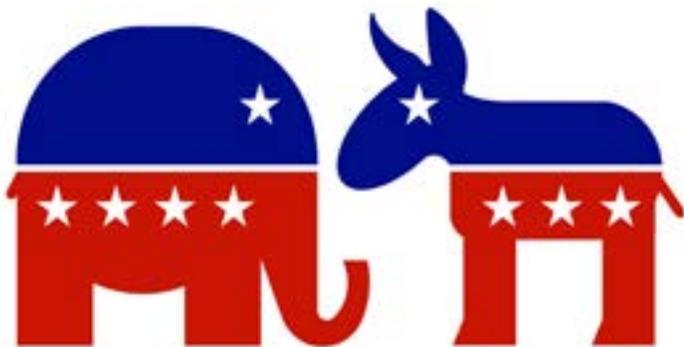


Photo by DonkeyHotey, released to Creative Commons.

The Fourth Wave

The Fourth Wave is a monthly feminist publication produced by Pitt students. Our goal is to break gender stereotypes, write thoughtful and informative articles, and empower the oppressed through sharing a collection of diverse perspectives. We are answering to a need for a premiere feminist publication on college campuses.

Letter from the Layout Editor

I recently went through some things in my life that changed the way I go throughout my days and the way that I view things. Long story short, I now identify as bisexual. I am happy with who I am, relieved to now know a bit more about myself. You're probably thinking, why the *hell* would I come out in this fashion? Well, my answer is not as in-depth as you may have hoped. I have received nothing but love and support from my fellow feminists, and can only expect the same from lovely feminists out there who take the time to read this. I have already begun to face objectification, from people I would have never expected, but with the support of those who love and accept me, I can move forward and live my life to its fullest. Thanks for reading, friends.

— Emily Perdue

Feminist Vocab of the Month

Asexual (*adj.*): term used to describe a sexual orientation in which a person does not feel sexual attraction towards persons of any gender identity; different from celibacy in that celibacy is a choice, while asexuality is an identity, and sexual attraction is not necessary for a person to be healthy.

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Special thanks to Dr. Bishop for supporting our endeavors.

A Week in the Red Light District | opinion

Ashley Johnson | staff writer



Photo by Ashley Johnson.

I had the opportunity to study abroad this past summer in Copenhagen. One of the classes I took there, Prostitution and the Sex Trade, included a five-day study tour in Amsterdam, the capital of Holland. Amsterdam is known world-wide for prostitution. This made it a perfect place for my class to gain an in-depth knowledge of the bustling European sex industry. We spent most of our time in the infamous Red Light District. The Red Light District is the epicenter of legal sex work in Amsterdam, and attracts a bulk of the city's annual tourists. It was an experience I won't soon forget, in a city that made me question my understanding of sex work.

Before I went to Amsterdam, I was of the opinion that prostitutes were inherently incapable of consent. I had just gotten out of a class on human trafficking, and in my mind, all prostitutes were

victims. When I arrived, my perspective was immediately questioned. My class met with former sex workers who adamantly defended their position as voluntary entrepreneurs. While both of them recognized that human trafficking often results in involuntary prostitution, it does not negate the fact that the vast majority of sex workers in the Red Light district are there because they choose it.

I was initially really nervous to walk around the district, especially at night. By the end of the week, though, it became a sort of home-base for my class, and I grew more and more comfortable walking around there. The district is basically one street, maybe half a mile long. There are narrow streets, and even narrower sidewalks, framing one of Amsterdam's many canals in the middle. The area comprises of sex shops, selling various sex toys and other sex-related products; a Red Light Museum, which used to be a brothel; a handful of theatres, featuring either peep shows or sex shows; and, the most well-known part of the district, the high-windowed houses where prostitutes stand provocatively, waiting for customers.

The first thing I did in the district was take the Red-Light Museum tour. The museum is set up the same way as a typical red-light house. The window rooms, framed by red lights, each have a curtain in the back leading to individual bedrooms. The rooms are simple and clean, and each one has its own adjoining bathroom with a tub. The people (mostly women) who advertise themselves in the windows are essentially independent contractors. They pay rent on their window for a specific time slot based on how high in demand space in the district is, and work however many of those allotted hours needed to cover window rent and their living expenses.

In addition to providing a great deal of information on how working in the district actually works, the Red Light Museum also gave some information on trafficking in the area. Considering how visible the Red Light District is, there is not much room for illegal activity; while it is difficult to know exactly how many people are trafficked in any given area, most people working in the district agree that roughly 8% of sex workers in the area are Victims of Trafficking.

Another place of interest in the Red Light District is the Prostitution Information Center (PIC). Founded in 1994, PIC aims to provide assistance and community for sex workers in the area, as well as give spread information to the general public about the condition of sex workers. The center works very closely with PROUD, the sex workers' union in Amsterdam. Some of the key issues currently being taken on by PROUD are: The criminalization of underage prostitution,

A Week in the Red Light District (cont.)

legislative efforts to raise the minimum age to 21, and the publicity of city's prostitution registry.

The most eye-opening part of my Red Light experience was attending a sex show at a club called Moulin Rouge. The one-room theatre features a stage surrounded by rows of benches on three sides, which were completely filled with patrons. The club rotates six acts throughout the night; four strip acts and two sex acts, where heterosexual couples have sex on the stage. While this may sound like a very uncomfortable experience, it was actually a lively and fun atmosphere. Any awkwardness felt by the audience was quelled by the relaxed tone emitted by the performers. In a way, the laid-back approach to sex and sex work in the club was a reflection of how the city as a whole treats prostitution. ♦

Black Hermoine and Whitewashing in the Entertainment Industry | opinion

Julia Lee | staff writer

The film adaptations of the *Harry Potter* novels spanned 10 years, ending in 2011, but the magical world and much-loved characters are coming back in a new medium — *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*. The eighth and newest installment in the series will make its first appearance on stage at the Palace Theatre London in July 2016.

Cast as Hermione Granger at the age of 36 is Noma Dumezweni, an English actress born to South African parents.

Fans and bigots alike condemned Dumezweni's new role, claiming her brown skin and thick, curly hair don't match those of Emma Watson. But the play's entire cast is new, and neither of Watson's main co-stars — Daniel Radcliffe and Rupert Grint — have exact lookalikes on stage, and still, the focus of the criticism remains on Dumezweni.

Watson and Rowling both publicly lauded Dumezweni's new role. Rowling tweeted about Hermione's description in the novel, pointing out that the character's skin color was never specified in the book, and she was described as having "bushy hair" and "brown eyes."

Still, Rowling's tweet doesn't erase the initial backlash, which calls into question an issue that requires serious discourse.

In film, whitewashing is the casting practice in which white actors are cast in non-white roles. The trend dates back to the beginning of the Hollywood film industry, starting with blackface. Whitewashing is not a new phenomenon, but common recognition of its problematic nature is newer.

Matching the ethnicity of the actor with the ethnicity of the character is something that has proved inconsistent. Assistant professor of telecommunications in Indiana University's College of Arts and Sciences Andrew J. Weaver said in an interview that films are whitewashed to the point where even minority characters written into them are being cast by whites.

An example of this can be seen in "The Social Network" — the biographical drama directed by David Fincher that portrays the founding of Facebook and the lawsuits that ensued. Facebook co-founder Divya Narendra, who is of Indian descent, voiced his initial surprise at seeing a white actor — Max Minghella — play him on screen.

Weaver conducted two studies to test whether the racial makeup of a film's cast could influence the decisions of white audiences. In one aspect of the study, researchers presented a scenario in which a romantic comedy to be screened contained a high percentage of black actors, and upon being given this information, white participants were less interested in seeing the movie than they would have been if there weren't as many actors of color.

He states, "There is an assumption in Hollywood that whites would avoid movies with majority black casts, or any minority cast for that matter," and from this concludes that minority cast members led white audiences to be less interested in seeing certain films because they perceive themselves as not a part of the intended audience.

While his findings speak to an audience's general perception of movies, he also suggests that discrimination occurs in the casting process which suggests that they try to maximize the audience in a white nation by casting all white people. According to the New York Film Academy, only 12.4 percent of speaking characters from the top 500 grossing films released from 2007-2012 were portrayed by black actors, while 75.8 percent of these roles were portrayed by white characters.

Additionally, according to the 2014 Hollywood Diversity report, dominant agencies tended to load their talent rosters with white male directors, show creators, writers, and leads, all largely to the exclusion of minority and female talent. When confronted with these numbers, industries often justify themselves by saying there is a "shortage of diversity takers out there," but the marginalization of diverse talent and representation is still cyclical and guaranteed.

Geena Davis theorizes that the big imbalance that exists when it comes to female presence in movies is normalized since that's all anybody has been exposed to from the start. 17 percent of women are represented in crowd scenes in movies, and that same ratio also applies to professions in different segments of society, namely the number of cardiac surgeons and tenured professors.

Whitewashing leads to a severe lack of representation by people of color in the film industry, even when certain roles were explicitly created and written for them. This kind of representation matters because although films primarily serve as a source of entertainment, the industry is continuing to expand and possesses a significant amount of influence because of the magnitude of the audiences it reaches. When people are exposed to media and see only what they are offered — a lack of variance — what the media is showing them is an inaccurate reflection of the diverse world in which we live, and normalizing such an illusion molds and contributes to our warped perception of reality. ♦



Tweet from J.K. Rowling on Noma Dumezweni in the role of Hermione Granger. Photo from twitter.com.

On Relationships | opinion

Max Chis | staff writer

I have autism. My younger years were often spent in a state of real or perceived social isolation. The kind of socializing that was normal and easy for others had to be painstakingly learned over the course of many years and often required a great deal of mental effort to apply. I felt disconnected, and often I was. So relationships came rarely to me.

For a long time I felt like this made me a failure. I felt like, since I wasn't in a relationship, I must be unlovable, less worthwhile, and should be ashamed.

Those feelings are, were, and will continue to be, bullshit. But it's bullshit that a lot of us have trouble shaking. Not surprising, given how virtually every aspect of our culture is permeated with this myth of the absolute importance of the relationship.

Nearly every popular film ends with the guy getting the girl and the two of them going on to live happily ever after. Romantic comedies in particular are built on the premise of someone who is single and miserable, or in an unhappy relationship, but then *someone* comes into their lives, sweeps them off their feet and imbues their life with happiness and meaning. Commercials of every sort advertise the allure and joy of relationships, which they tell us will be improved if we buy their product. We have a holiday devoted entirely to celebrating love, suffused with an army of flowers, chocolate and cards which the culture tells us must be purchased in large quantities in order to truly declare our affection. And for how much these cultural pressures exert themselves on men, in our society they exert themselves on women many more times over.

For the time being, let's pass over how so much of our culture's obsession with relationships is a scheme to sell bullshit we don't need, and focus instead on the problem of holding up relationships as the key to a meaningful and happy life. The reverse of this view of relationships is that people who are single, for whatever reason, must therefore have a life that is less meaningful and happy. So in other words people who have difficulty making relationships for whatever reason, people who are asexual or aromantic or otherwise uninterested in relationships, or people who simply never had the chance to be in a relationship, are consigned to some empty other-life, permanently excluded from the meaning and joy that allegedly permeates the lives of those in committed relationships.

"Alleged" is the key point here. Even in committed relationships, it doesn't always work out. To be sure, relationships can be wonderful, enjoyable things. But they aren't always. In fact, some relationships are abusive, or unhealthy, or simply unsatisfying and draining. These are situations where the people within them would be better off without them. Yet our love-worshipping culture tells them they should stay in, they should try to make it work, because they'll just feel unhappy and alone if they leave it. When a relationship falls apart, as it sometimes does, the surrounding culture tells us that the value of its former participants, particularly for the women, has dropped. They are no longer part of the privileged class of people whom romance stories,



"Lonely At The Top, Eh?" by Harsha K R. Photo released to public domain via flickr.com.

holidays and giant, heart-shaped boxes of overpriced chocolate are all about. As a result, they might feel cut off from our society, and may even think they're the less for it.

So our culture serenades these unfortunates with films of unhappy relationships that got a spark put back in them and then everything was good and happy again! Of people who broke-up and were so unhappy and all they wanted to do was be back together with their old love again! The underlying message being that even if you think the relationship isn't working out, deep down you *need* it. So people stay in bad relationships, hurting themselves and possibly hurting the other person as well, because the culture tells them that, despite the unhappiness, despite how draining or outright hurtful it is, it's still better than being single. I recall speaking once to a friend who felt like she had to "lower her expectations" and be with someone who would make her unhappy, just so she could be in a relationship.

There's something dangerous about having so much of our happiness be dependent on other people. As Mr. Rogers observed "Love is generally confused with dependence." And if we look to other people, and their willingness to be in a relationship with us, as an indicator of our worth and our right to happiness, we're bound to be miserable, because we can't control other people. We can't make people love us, and we can't make people stay with us. By being dependent, we give someone else the power to determine our own happiness — or, more often, our "happiness" — and when has that ever worked out?

Even with relationships that are healthy and happy, they're not everything. Anyone who's in a relationship can attest to the fact that being in a relationship didn't solve all of their problems, didn't make them unilaterally happy all the time, and it didn't suddenly fill their life with meaning. Again, relationships can be a wonderful thing in a person's life. So can a healthy diet and regular exercise. So can a satisfying job and financial security. And so can mental health and emotional stability that not all relationships necessarily provide. We don't celebrate those, but they can be just as valuable to a happy life, if not more.

In the end, we don't need relationships. We may want them, but we can and do live without them, and have just as much an opportunity to live meaningful and fulfilling lives. ♦

Return of Kings: Familiar Foe, New Name | opinion

Katherine Apperson | guest writer — Illinois State University



Daryush "Roosh" Valizadeh in Warsaw, Poland (2014). Photo by Bartek Kucharczyk - Bartek Kucharczyk, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Imagine living in a world where men are the sole bread-winners, flaunting masculinity while women are housewives who exist solely to clean and reproduce. No, this is not a rerun of "Leave it to Beaver"; it is the ideal world of Return of Kings (ROK), a regressive group that has recently exploded in the media due to their pro-rape stances and attempted gatherings.

Return of Kings, founded in October of 2012 by Dayrush (Roosh) Valizadeh, is made up of "heterosexual, masculine men" who believe Western culture is focusing too much on equality of sexes. They

claim that "yesterday's masculinity is today's misogyny". ROK members are held together by a set of neo-masculine beliefs that can be summed up in one word: Patriarchy. In addition to discriminating against women and feminists, ROK views homosexuals as a threat because of their inability to conform to ROK culture.

While scanning through the website, there is an eerie realization that people whole-heartedly believe in these ideals and we may be interacting with them daily. One article states, "that ex-boyfriend who stole your heart? One of us. That charming married man at your office, with the beautiful wife? One of us. That wise mentor who helped you more than you'll ever know? One of us." This thought can be quite jostling for anyone, but we must realize feminists have faced this obstacle for decades. However, this time the foe is more a virtual threat than an overly menacing public one.

Upon further exploration of the putrid website, it is quite clear that every opinion can be sorted into the categories of fat shaming, women submitting to men, owning a gun, and viewing feminists as shrieking harpies that can be blamed for all societal woes. You're welcome, I have saved you from having to read them yourself.

However, the topic that brought Return of Kings to public scrutiny is their position on rape. In February 2015, Roosh posted a highly controversial entry on his blog entitled, "How To Stop Rape"; which argued that the government should legalize rape when done on private property. He states, "if rape becomes legal under my proposal, a girl will protect her body in the same manner that she protects her purse and smartphone". According to a February 2016 interview, Roosh denies any pro-rape stance for himself or ROK, claiming that the article was meant to be satirical. Whether or not you believe his defense, the message that violently taking a woman is approved in the ROK community resonates through several entries on the group's website; such as "When Her No Means Yes" by Vincent Vinturi. This

**Trigger Warning:
Rape
Graphic depictions of
sexual violence**

piece references Vinturi's experiences of forcing himself on women after they clearly said "no". He wrote, "when all is said and done, the woman is invariably happy...I barreled through her protest and drove the ball right to the basket". Blatantly telling men to ignore women's refusals seems a clear endorsement of rape by the ROK community.

Despite their ludicrous ideas regarding women and sex, the men of ROK continue to gain support as evidenced through their spike in site views this past month. They continue to lurk online and in various bars or clubs, but all hope is not lost. Fortunately, there are vast arrays of ROK critics that see these men as misogynistic trolls who use the first amendment to spew their ideals online. My advice is to steer clear of their filth rather than encourage them. Just as feminists have done for years, we must band together and stand strong in the face of these lonely patriarchs. ♦

March Feminist Events to Attend:

"In Search of the Clitoris" Lecture — Feb. 5 from 3-4:30 p.m. in WPU Lower Lounge

Feminist Theory Reading Group — Feb. 9 & 23 from 4-5:45 p.m. in 402E Cathedral of Learning

Dr. Bernice King Talk — Feb. 5 at 5:30 p.m. in O'Hara Ballroom

The Vagina Monologues — Feb. 11 & 12 at 7 p.m. in WPU, and Feb. 13 at 7 p.m. in O'Hara Ballroom

One Billion Rising — "Rise and dance to express solidarity with the one billion [sexual assault] victims" — Feb. 14 at 9 p.m. in WPU Assembly Room

"Career Porn: Blogging and the Good Life" Lecture — Feb. 18 from 4-5:30 p.m. in 401 Cathedral of Learning

It's On Us Unveiling Event — Feb. 22 at 12 p.m. in WPU Kurtzman

Stacy Nadeau — Embracing Real Beauty — Feb. 23 at 7 p.m. in O'Hara Dining Room

"Are My Pants Lowering Your Test Scores?" Lecture — Feb. 25 from 4-5:30 p.m. in 1228 CL

Eating Disorders Awareness Week Vigil — Feb. 26 at 6:30 p.m. in 548 WPU

"Queer/Asian Filipinos in Oregon: A Trans* Colonial Approach" Lecture — Feb. 29 from 6-7:30 p.m. in 602 Cathedral of Learning

If you know of an iconic on-campus feminist you'd like to see in The Fourth Wave, send us an email at thefourthwavepitt@gmail.com.

Powdered and In Power | personal

Sam Garzillo | guest writer — American University

At nearly every conference I attend, there is one thing I can guarantee — I am wearing pink heels.

When pre-teen, pre-feminist me saw *Legally Blonde* for the first time, I thought, “Great, another pretty blonde, cutesy-ing her way to the top.” The film’s main character, Elle Woods, is over-the-top bubbly, highly concerned with her appearance and bases her aspirations on her love interests. Any time we use the phrase “I’m not like other girls,” this is the “other girl” we think we’re so much better than.

It would take me until high school to realize her femininity made me ignore that she was also brilliant, hard-working, and unyielding. Since she looked and acted a certain way, I had decided she couldn’t be any of these other traits, preventing her from being as dynamic as she was.

When I too was becoming a female leader, I was heavily concerned with what I had to be like:

I wanted to be warm, but I didn’t want to be walked over.

I wanted to look presentable, but I didn’t want to be considered vain.

I wanted to be confident, but I didn’t want to be aggressive.

I wanted to be a woman in power, but I didn’t want to be an Elle Woods.

The women of power who are respected are often stripped of their sexuality and femininity. They inhabit this sort of non-gendered space. Men can be macho and handsome and still be in command, often times more so because of their masculinity, but women have to be beyond their gender. They have to be the Margaret Thatcher type, who demanded her gender be treated as irrelevant, or an Eleanor Roosevelt, a brains over beauty rather than a brains *and* a beauty. Appearance is not the most important part of female leaders, a female leader should be heralded for her abilities not her beauty, but every female leader has the right to value her appearance and be proud of her gender without having her authority or character questioned.

While I respect the right of women, trans or cis, to express their gender as they please, the lack of positive Elle Woods-type role models is a problem. When we’re presented with a feminine, gender role-abiding woman, we have a harder time accepting her intelligence and leadership. Instead, she gets labeled shallow, bitchy, slutty, meek, or dumb.

In my journey to fill this role model hole, to stand at a podiums in a skirt and heels, hair curled, and makeup done, I’ve sought to deliberately show that I am feminine and in power, and one does not negate the other. While I’ve largely obtained positive results, it hasn’t been foolproof.

I’ve had people I managed try to sleep with me.

I’ve had participants at conferences treat me like I’m stupid, or directly call me so.

I get more questions on what makeup I use than the work I’m doing.

These responses highlight numerous other issues. We can’t look at beautiful women beyond their sexual appeal. We believe beautiful women



“Pink” by idreamlikecrazy from Flickr, released to Creative Commons.

are vain and stupid. We assume if a woman cares about her appearance, that is her highest priority.

But regardless of how sexualized or discredited I am, I worked to get where I am and I do not have to assume an exterior that supposedly better suits my credentials. I will continue making an example of myself until these harmful narratives end.

We need to respect female leaders of all types for the quality of their work, not the way they look or carry themselves. Whether their skirt is tight or floor length, their lipstick bright red or their face untouched, their hair bouncing or pixie cut, their demeanor warm or down to business, we need to stop looking and start listening.

Whether you’re an Eleanor or an Elle, there is nothing more damaging than thinking you can only be one in order to be taken seriously, or criticizing which person other women choose to be. For every female leader, be proud of your gender and how you choose to express it, and know that your abilities alone take you from a woman in power to a woman empowered. ♦

Renaissance French Literature *au féminin* | opinion

Emily Prestley | guest writer — Tufts University

In 1555, the French *poétesse* Louise Labé saw the publication of *Œuvres*, her sole collection of poems and prose to be published before her death in 1566. Today, *Œuvres* represents one of the most significant contributions of the Renaissance to the development of the feminine narrative across French literature. Labé’s poetry, in large part due to the opportune arrival of the printing press in France, spread throughout Western Europe from her home in Lyon, France, a cultural center geographically situated between Paris and Italy. In the preface of *Œuvres*, Labé shed light upon the intellectual virtue of her comrades *féminins*: “Women occupy an exceptional position...not contented by a decorative and honorific place of courtly society, they participate in artistic life and the debate of ideas...One recognizes and asks of women the talents and personality superior to what, in general, is accorded to them by French society... We ask of them elegance, intelligence, culture, the talent of holding a salon...they have their word to say...and on occasion, they write.”¹ With this call to arms of sorts, Louise Labé became the voice of French female writers during the Renaissance, and to this day, her poems published in *Œuvres* — three elegies and 24 sonnets — remain one of the only traces of the female writing during this period.

Labé’s poetry was a true representation of the spirit of the Renaissance. At its very core, the Renaissance was the product of a simple formula: a reprisal of tradition inscribed in an accelerating current of renewal, upheaval, and growth. The development of the female

Cont. on pg. 7

Renaissance French Literature *au féminin* (cont.)



By Pierre Woeriot - File: Pierre_Woeriot02.jpg, released to Public Domain.

began to deconstruct the idealized image of the single-faceted woman in literature and develop a powerful female narrative.

Sonnet XIV, one of Labé's lesser-celebrated sonnets, highlights the facultative expression of a woman — her eyes, her sobs, her signs, her hands:

While these eyes can pour out fountains of my tears,
mourning our shared peace, gone now, so long gone;
while my slow sobs and sighs can still bemoan
this loss (and in a voice that someone hears);
while my hands can still caress the lute, with clear
praises for the grace that you have shown;
and while my spirit's thoughts can bend alone
on you, on nothing that's outside your sphere—
I'll never want to reach the point of death!
But when my eyes grow dry and my quick breath
forsakes my voice and my hand is powerless,
and my poor spirit, in its mortal flight,
beats with no more signs of love — then I will press
death to come cover my clearest day with night.²

The *bien-aimé* is referenced from a distance just four times — “our” (line 2), “you” (lines 6, 8), “your” (line 8), and therefore it is instead the narrator with whom the reader shares the closest proximity. In this way, Louise Labé rediscovered the raw humanity of women and the inherent power of pain across her poems, allowed to develop in stark contrast to the idealized, statuesque female image of traditional Renaissance sonnet.

Louise Labé's perspective, echoing the sentiment of the preface of *Œuvres*, celebrates the power of expression of women. The development of the feminine narrative evolved significantly through the poetry of Labé, assuming a level of complexity, dynamicity, expression, and power that it had not been widely afforded before the Renaissance. With Labé's inflection of the male construct of the *bien-aimée* in French literature, a female voice — fundamentally human and flawed — was found. ♦

¹ Translated by Emily Prestley (not perfect, but you get the gist)

² Translated by Annie Finch

narrative through the poems of Louise Labé occurred often through traditional poetic forms, common themes, and the universal influence of the great Greek and Roman poets of *l'Antiquité*. Traditionally, the male poet of the French Renaissance wrote poetry concerning his beloved — his *bien-aimée*. He assumed the classical sonnet form and spoke love through poetry to a woman wholly abstract, transcendent, and sublime. The *bien-aimée* of these productions was an idealized object, lacking inherent value beyond her *beauté*.

In her sonnets, Louise Labé reprised her contemporaries' form from a female perspective, writing poems that spoke not to a *bien-aimée* (feminine) but instead to a *bien-aimé* (masculine). The inflection of this binary renewed the amorous discourse of the Renaissance in France and

Sources

Black Hermoine and White-washing in the Entertainment Industry

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**“Women come from a whole range of backgrounds.
If our visions of peace don’t include these
differences, then our peace will be partial.”
- Kimberlé Chrenshaw**

