

Maurice Scève

Selected Poems from ‘Délie’

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Translator's Introduction



'Portrait of Scève'

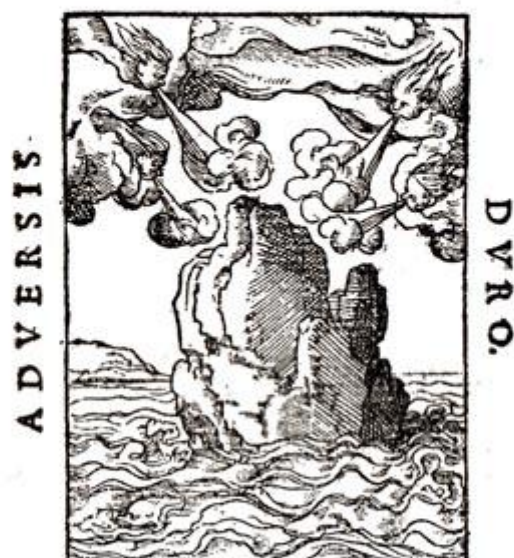
Scève's *Délie*, a collection of 449 ten-line 'dizards' deeply influenced by Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, appeared in 1544, and forms the first significant collection of its kind in French. The emblem of the juniper replaces Petrarch's laurel, adopted by the Italian poet to represent his lady, Laura. The book contains fifty allegorical woodcuts, presented here with a selection of the poems; each woodcut presenting both a pictorial emblem and a motto. The secular and humanist French Renaissance, soon to be illuminated by the sonnets of the Pléiade, and later Montaigne's essays, is here already in full flow.

DELIE

OBIECT DE

PLVS HAULTÉ

VERTV.



À LYON

Chez Sulpice Sabon, pour An-
toine Constantin.

1 1 4 4.

Avec privilege pour six Ans.

‘Frontispiece’

A Sa Delie (To His Délie)

Not Venus' burning dart
Nor less the arrow Cupid fires,
But the deaths in me you start
To those this work aspires.

I know you'll find, in this verse I sire,
Error enough in such ingenious games,
Yet Love, knowing I write for you entire,
Tempered them, for your sake, in his flames.

Suffer – not – to suffer



‘Engraving of Scève (M. S.)’

‘L’Oeil trop ardent en mes ieunes erreurs’ (Délie: I)

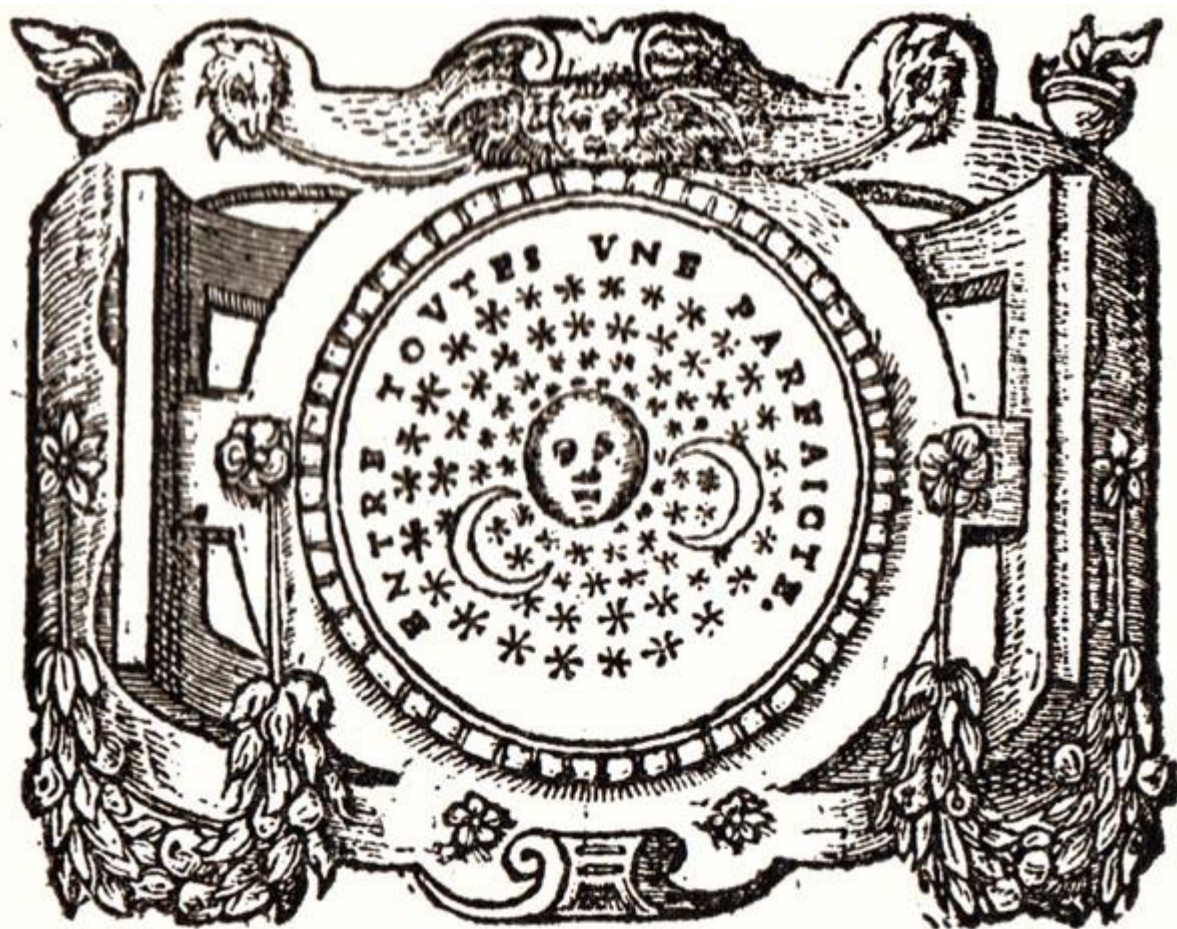
The eye too ardent in its youthful error
Wandered, idly and in vain:
When see (O with what delight and terror)
That fateful gaze, the blade that arraigns,
Piercing body, heart, scattered reason, came
To penetrate the soul of my soul.
Mighty was the blow that takes its toll,
Killing the spirit without the fatal knife,
Though body survives to face you, whole,
Lady, appointed Idol of my life.



Emblem I: The Lady and the Unicorn
'To gaze on this I lose my life'

‘Libre viuois en l’Auril de mon aage’ (Délie: VI)

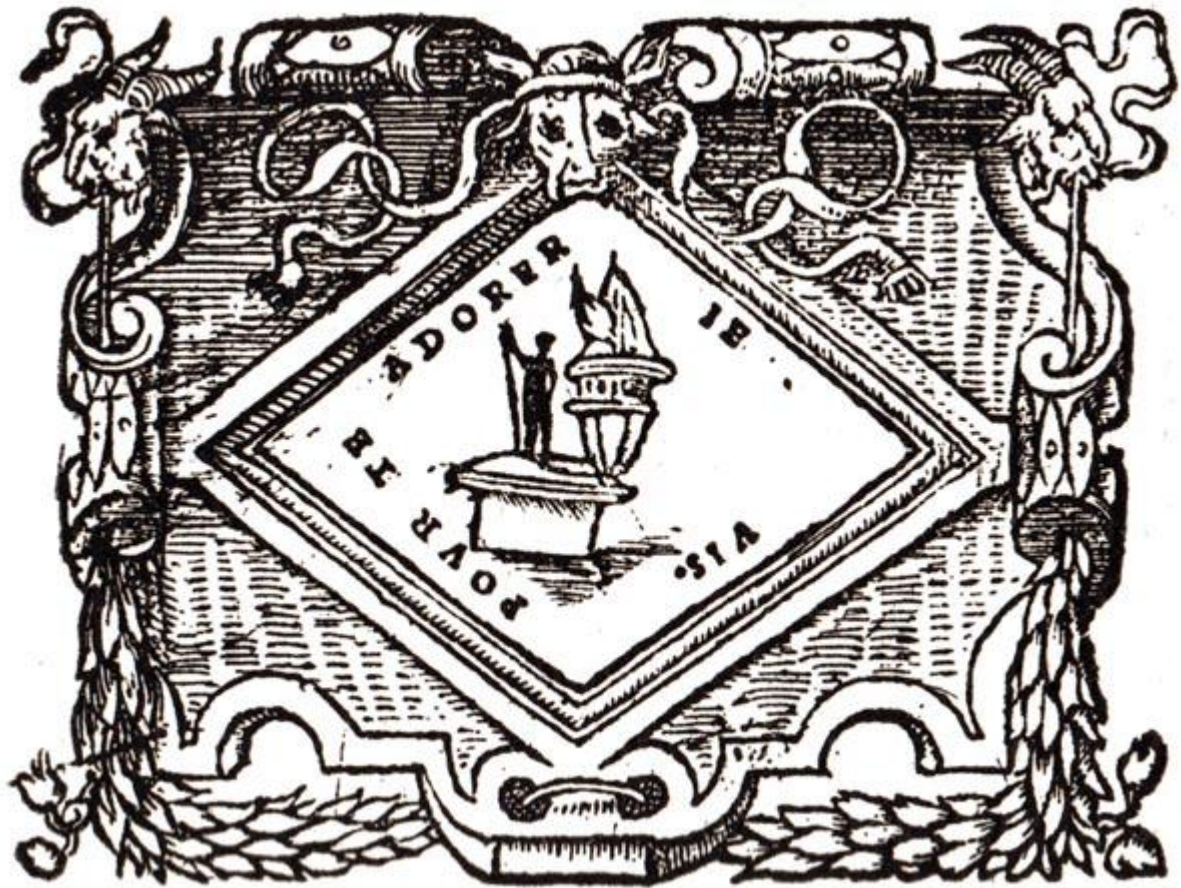
Freely I lived in the April of my days,
Exempt from every care my adolescence,
Until my eye, unschooled in pity’s ways,
Was surprised by that sweet presence,
Which by its high divine excellence
So stunned my soul and what sense I prize,
That the cruel archer of her eyes
Ever stole my freedom, so continually
That from that very first sunrise,
My life and death lie in her beauty.



Emblem II: The Moon with Two Crescents
'Amongst all, one perfect one'

‘Celle beaulté, qui embellit le Monde’ (Délie: VII)

That beauty which embellished the earth
When she was born in whom I live and die,
Did not merely of itself give birth
To its living lineaments in the eye:
But has bewitched me so wondrously,
Every faculty marvelling admiringly,
That, near death, stunned by her divinity
I wake to the light of fatal desire,
Where she plunges me, amazingly,
Deeper in shade the more I am on fire.



Emblem III: The Lamp and the Idol
'I live to adore you'

‘Comme Hecat   tu me feras errer’ (D  lie: XXII)

You, as Hecate, doom me to stray
A hundred years, live and dead, among the shades:
As Diana, in the sky you’d have me stay,
From which you stoop to these our mortal glades:
As the Queen of these infernal masquerades,
You will augment or lessen all such pain.
But as the Moon, infused in every vein
You were, and are, and shall be D  LIE,
Whom Love so entangles with my brain
That death itself could never set me free.

‘Quand l’œil aux champs est d’esclairs esblouy’ (Délie: XXIV)

What the eye sees seems only night
When lightning, on the field, dazzles the eye,
But, little by little, regaining sight
It guards against those flames from the sky.
So the path, where I go safely by
Beneath your most rare and private rays
Which so obscured my primal gaze
With the sharp flares of your sweet fire,
Accustomed to them now, never strays,
For only to worship you, is my desire.

‘Je voy en moy ester ce Mont Foruiere’ (Délie: XXVI)

Mount Fourvière in myself I see,
My thoughts tracing it in form and line.
At its feet the Rhône and Saône run free,
While two streams of tears descend to mine.
On its slopes those marble ruins shine,
Ice in me: cold nearer the sun is its high
Summit; I congeal the closer to your eye,
Or smoulder here distant from that fire.
One night of flames saw all in ruins lie,
Yet I burn always, all intact my pyre.



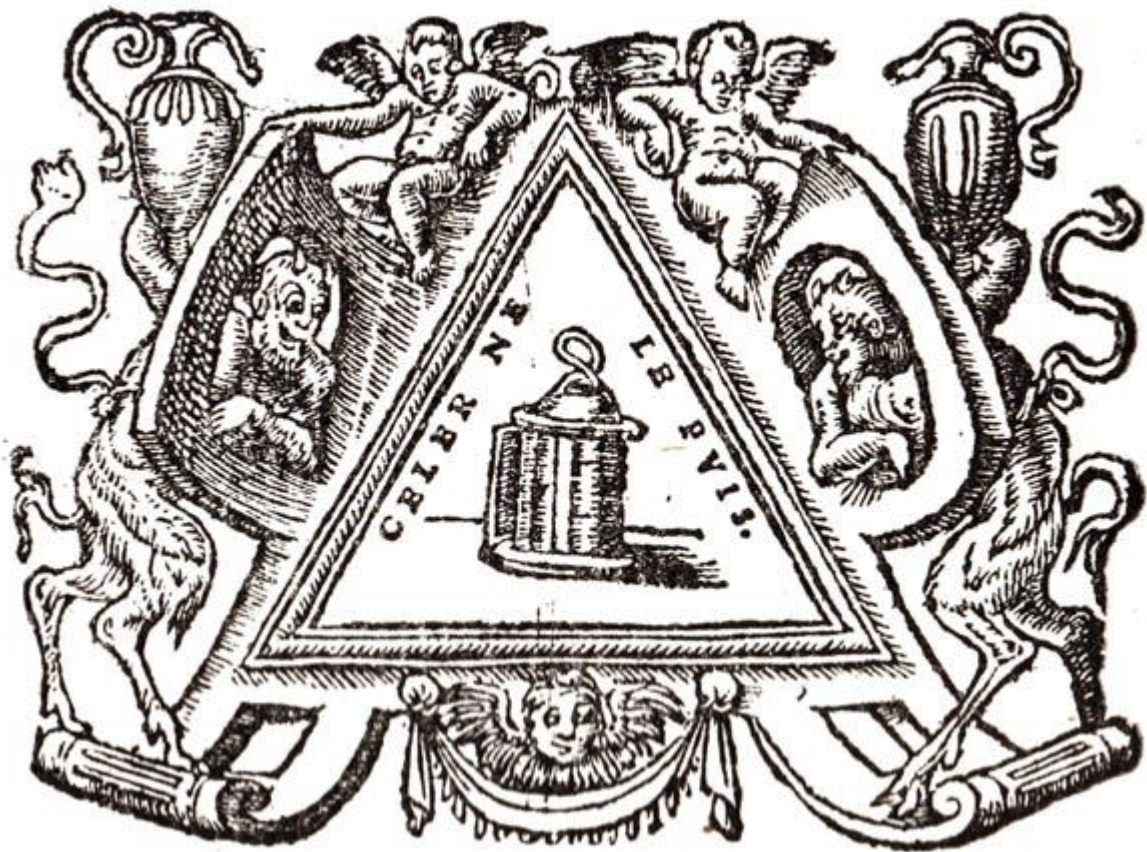
Emblem IV: The Man and the Ox
'The more I rein it in the more it draws me'

‘Moins ie la voy, certes plus ie la hays’ (Délie: XLIII)

The less I see of her, the more I hate:
The more I hate, the less she troubles me.
The greater my esteem, the less its weight:
I wish her near, the more from her I flee.
Opposing arrows strike me momentarily,
Love and hatred, pleasure and ennui.
Strong is the love, then, that seizes me,
When hatred comes and ‘Vengeance!’ cries.
Thus vain desire forever forces me
To hate the one my heart would have me prize.

‘Si le soir pert toutes plaisantes fleurs’ (Délie: XLIV)

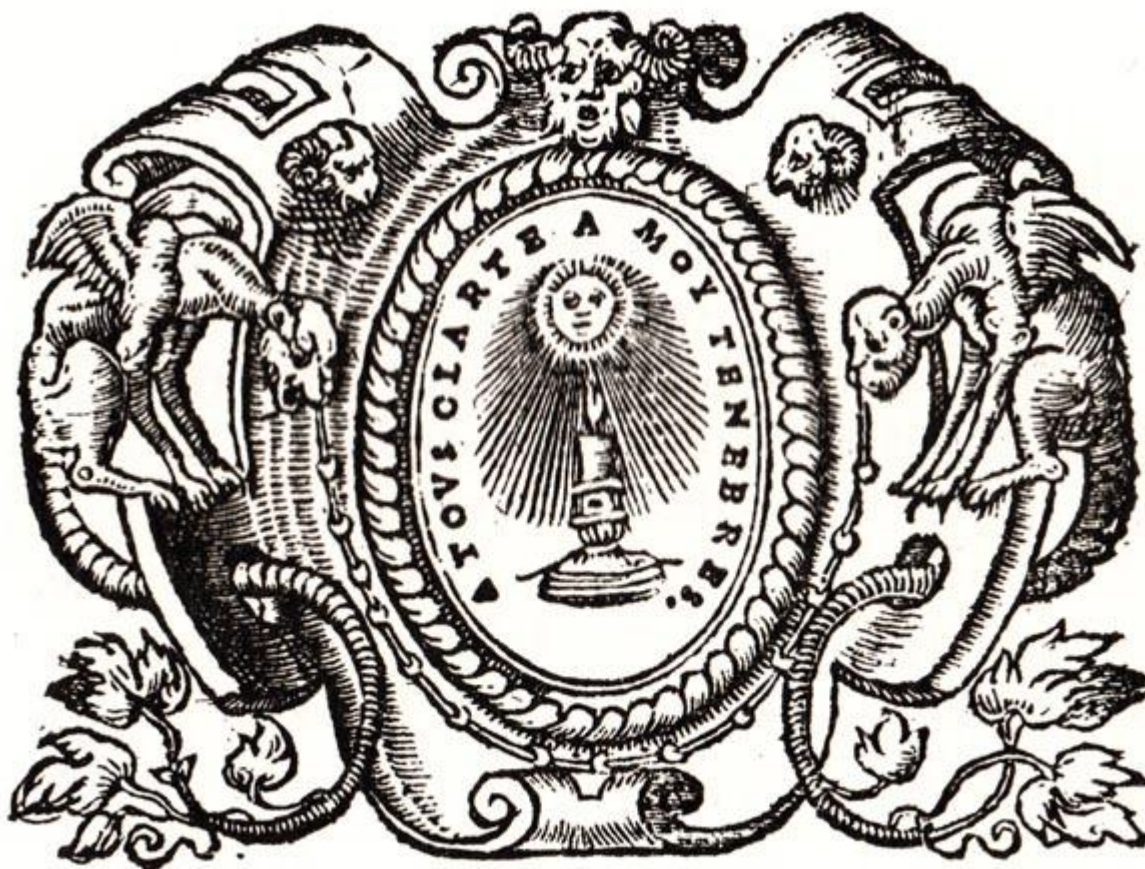
If night steals all the lovely flowers,
And time as well each mortal creature,
Why induce in me such plaintive hours,
Calling her no less subject to nature?
He who sets his mind or eye on her,
Be he a man lost in love’s joyousness,
Or be he languishing in blind sadness,
Would say she is descended from the skies,
Only erring in not deeming her a goddess
Could he but only see her with my eyes.



Emblem V: The Lantern
'I cannot hide'

‘Si le desir, image de la chose’ (Délie: XLVI)

If desire, the image of the thing
One most loves, mirrors the heart
Where memory shows her, apart,
Who to my life’s spirit rest can bring,
Why are my vain wishes always lending
Distance to that which brings me most delight?
The faster the stag, the more we chase its flight,
The better to render it in close duress:
The more I’m absent, the more fresh ills alight
From that sweet good, the god of bitterness.



Emblem VI: The Candle and the Sun
'To all others light, to me darkness'

‘Tant ie l’aymay, qu’en elle encore ie vis’ (Délie: XLIX)

Such is my love, I yet live in her
Such is the sight, despite myself I love.
Mind and soul were so ravished there,
The eye ensures the heart cannot remove.
Is it possible for fixity to prove,
In such a case as ours, ready to forego
Its state? Such the mutual flame in both,
That my fire flares when hers grows bright,
And when hers dies, so mine is loth.
Thus she, in fading, steals my light.



Emblem VII: Narcissus
'He dies enough who loves in vain'

‘Si c’est Amour, pourquoy m’occit il donques’ (Délie: LX)

If it be Love, why then murder me,
Who, ever, loved and knew not how to hate?
To me it proves sufficient mystery
Who never gave offence soon or late.
Yet I suffer him, with scarce a plea,
To swallow me, as wax melts in a fire.
And killing me, he wills I live entire,
And loving others, hate myself again.
What need for him to sustain such ire,
He’s seen enough of death, who loves in vain.



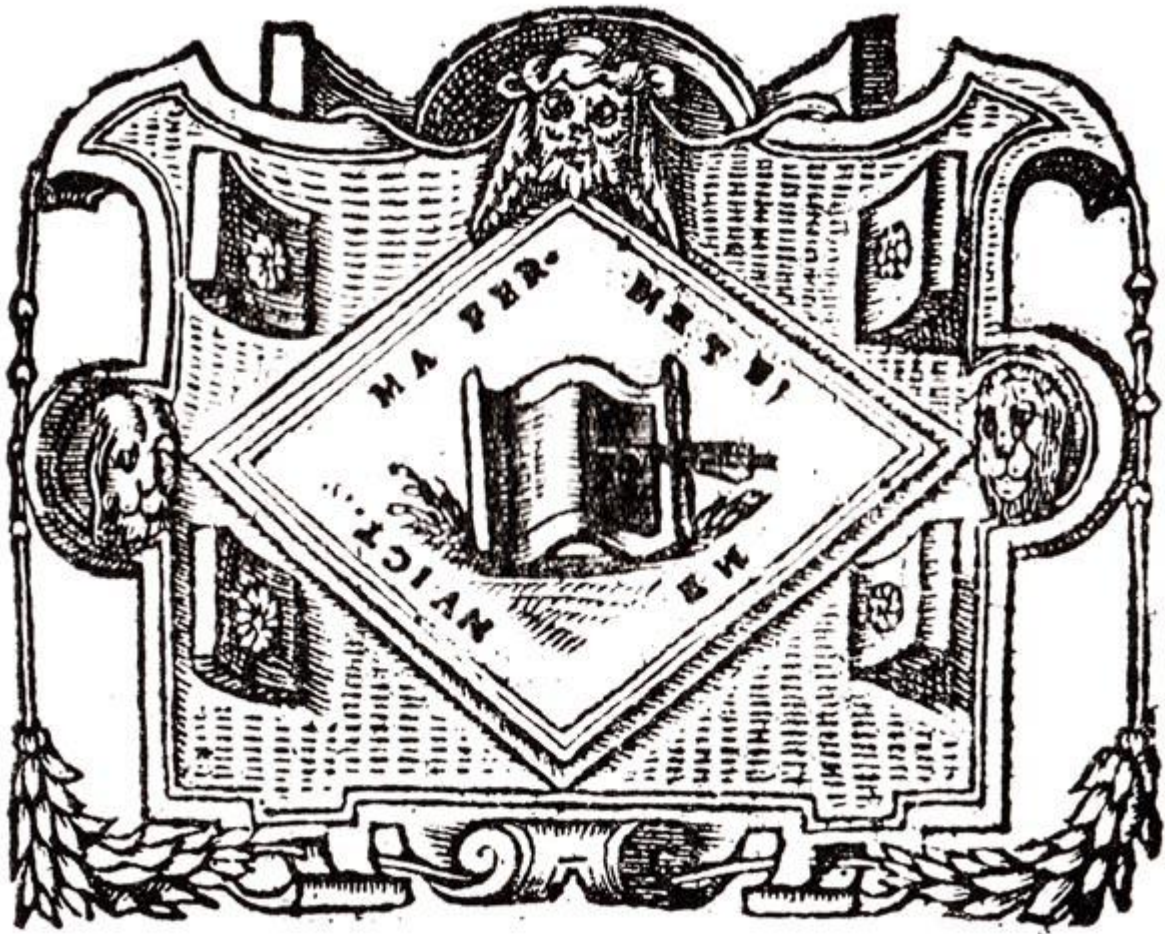
Emblem VIII: The Woman Winding Yarn
'After long labour, an end'

‘Si en ton lieu i’estois, ô doulce Mort’ (Délie: LXXI)

‘O sweet death, held I your place instead,
You would not be disarmed of your scythe.’
‘O fool, your life’s spirit is already dead.’
‘How so?’ ‘I see that she has seized your eyes.’
‘I speak, at least!’ ‘Yet all speech in her lies.’
‘Then shall I live always?’ ‘The answer’s no,
Far distant lies your end.’ ‘Where?’ ‘Oh,
Do not ask. Without body, heart, or soul,
You’ll live a death sweeter than life, for so
Your Lady wishes, such then is her goal.’

‘Fuyantz les Monts, tant soi peu, nostre veue’ (Délie: LXXIII)

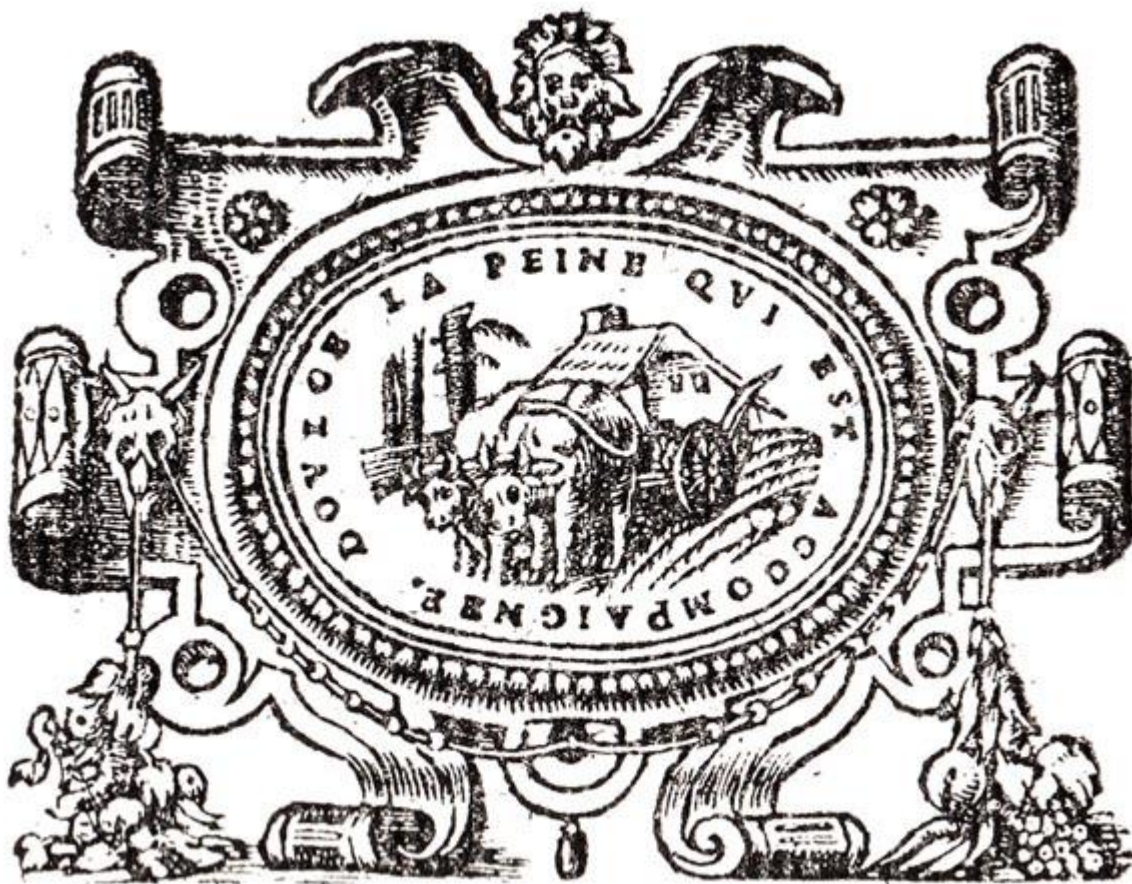
Gently the hills receding from our view
Change their green for soft azures,
Which, further from us, turn to white from blue,
Through the perspective distance assures.
The immeasurable love in me ensures
That you appear to see a hint of verdure
Which, far from you, seems to hide my ardour
Though nearer to you it burns hot as death.
Though you see clearer, for your grandeur
Achieves the impossible nonetheless.



Emblem IX: The Target
'My steadfastness harms me'

‘Au Caucasus de mon souffrir lyé’ (Délie: LXXVII)

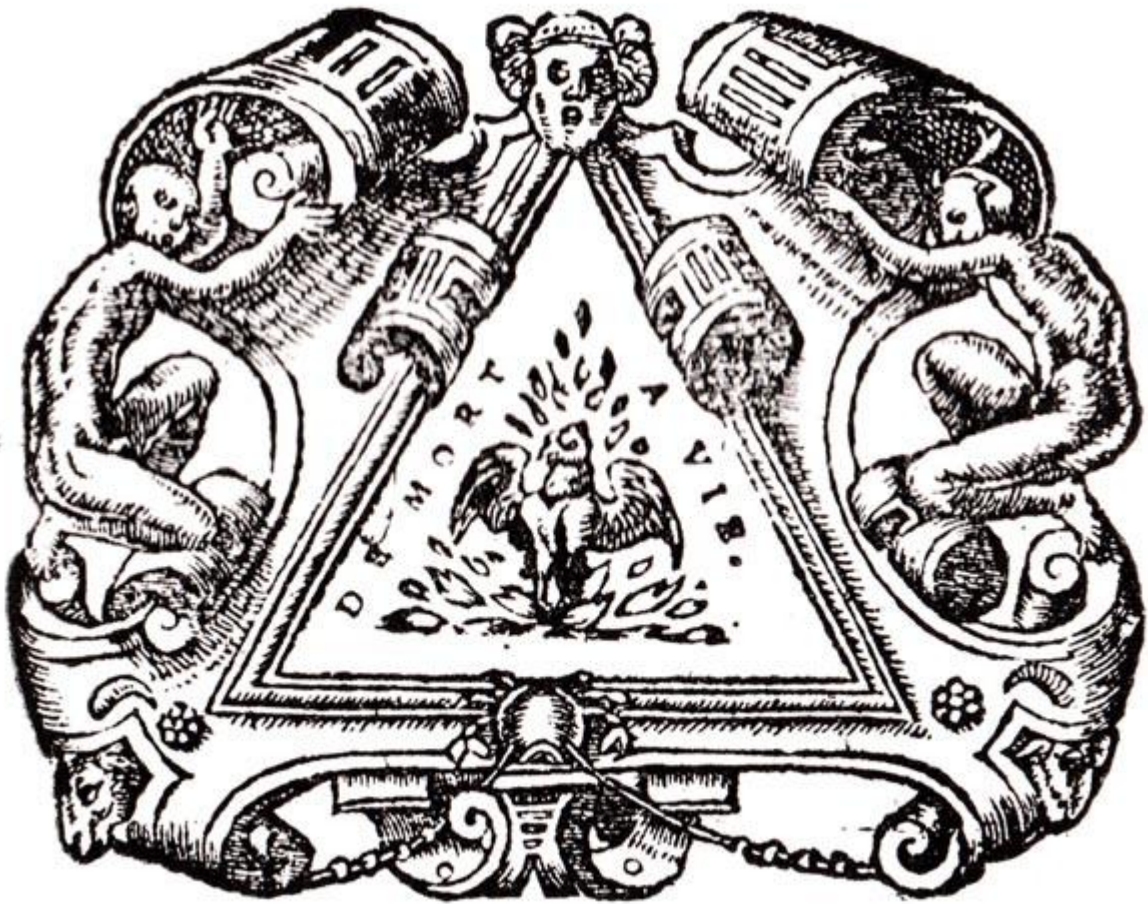
To the Caucasus of suffering bound
In the Hell of my eternal pain,
The deep desire for my lost good is found,
The author now of my immortal wane,
With such fierce fury gnawing at my brain
That, consumed by this fierce torment,
Hope renews, but never to good intent,
Rather reborn to ill, incessantly,
Such that the wretched life within me blent
Tortures Prometheus insidiously.



Emblem X: Two Oxen Yoked
'Sweet is the pain that's shared'

‘L’Aulbe estaingnoit Estoilles a foison’ (Délie: LXXIX)

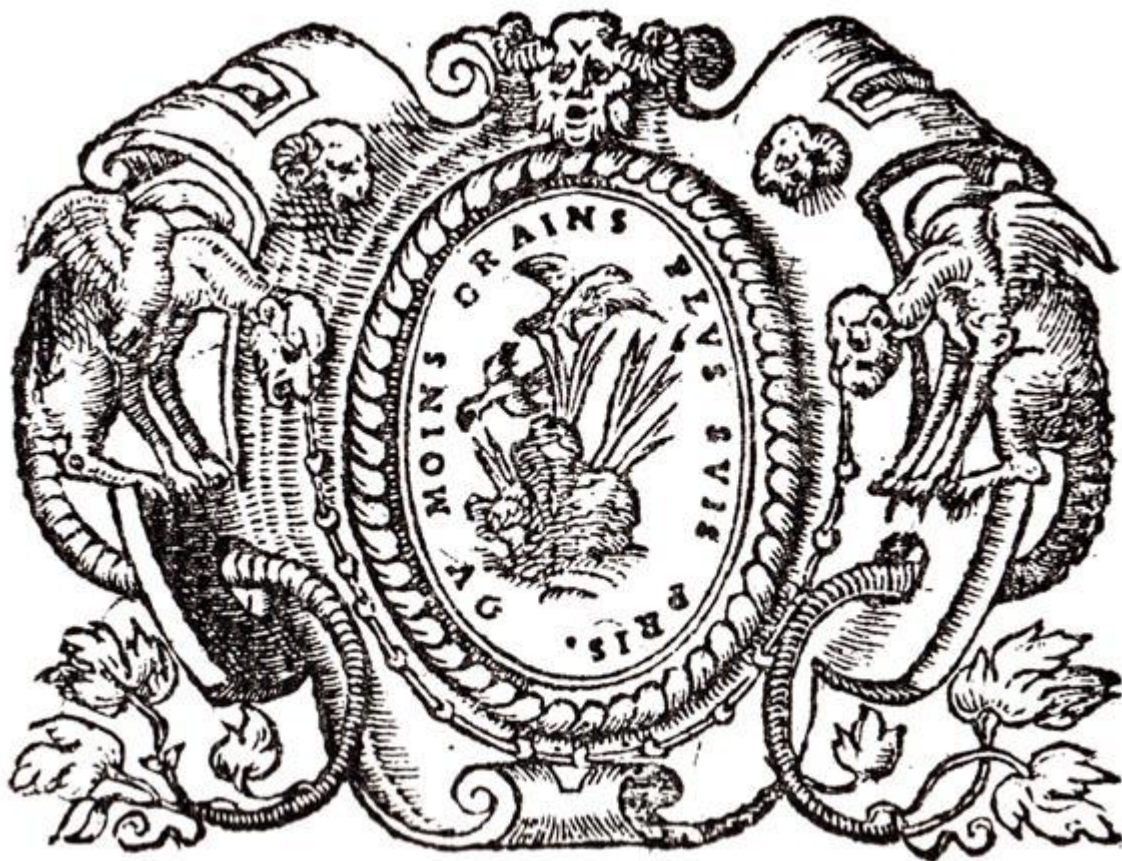
Dawn was quenching stars in profusion,
Bringing light from regions below,
While Apollo, rising over the horizon,
Gilded the high horned summits with his glow.
Then, from the depths of Abysmal shadow,
In which my mind, when the tedium bites,
Often commands me to spend long nights,
Again, I summoned my ravished soul near;
That, brushing flowing tears from my sight,
Allows me to view my life’s sun, full clear.



Emblem XI: The Phoenix
'From death to life'

‘L’oysiueté des delicate plumes’ (Délie: C)

The soft comfort of this downy bed
Blessed less with rest than with travail,
Tending the fire in me you fed,
Often, at all hours, and to no avail,
Held fast in these sheets without fail
By idleness, my mighty enemy,
My mind here leaves its sleeping body,
Transformed to the image of death,
To show you that, now half a man, only
For you I live, yet for myself lack breath.



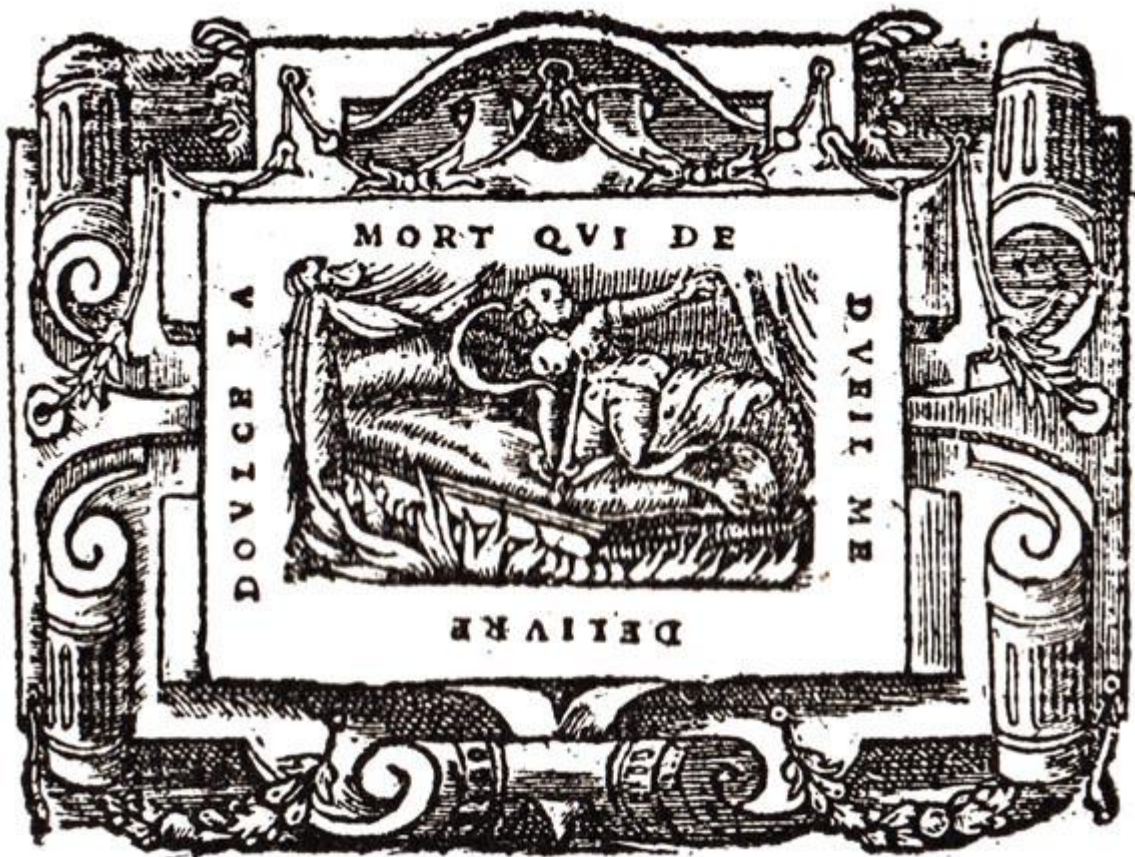
Emblem XII: The Bird in Lime
'Captured by what I fear least'

‘Bien qu’on me voye oultre mode esiourir’ (Délie: CII)

Though I’m seen as carefree beyond measure,
Ever in my labours I suffer pain,
Hearing your sweet words must give me pleasure
Falling so tenderly cruel on my ears again:
And I take pains that the intent remain
Of all of our long discourse through the years.
But racing to the goal I wish, perforce,
Now elsewhere inclined, your desire
Explains why, in my laboured course,
Daphne, you flee the Apollonian fire.

‘Lors que le Soir Venus au Ciel r’apelle’ (Délie: CXI)

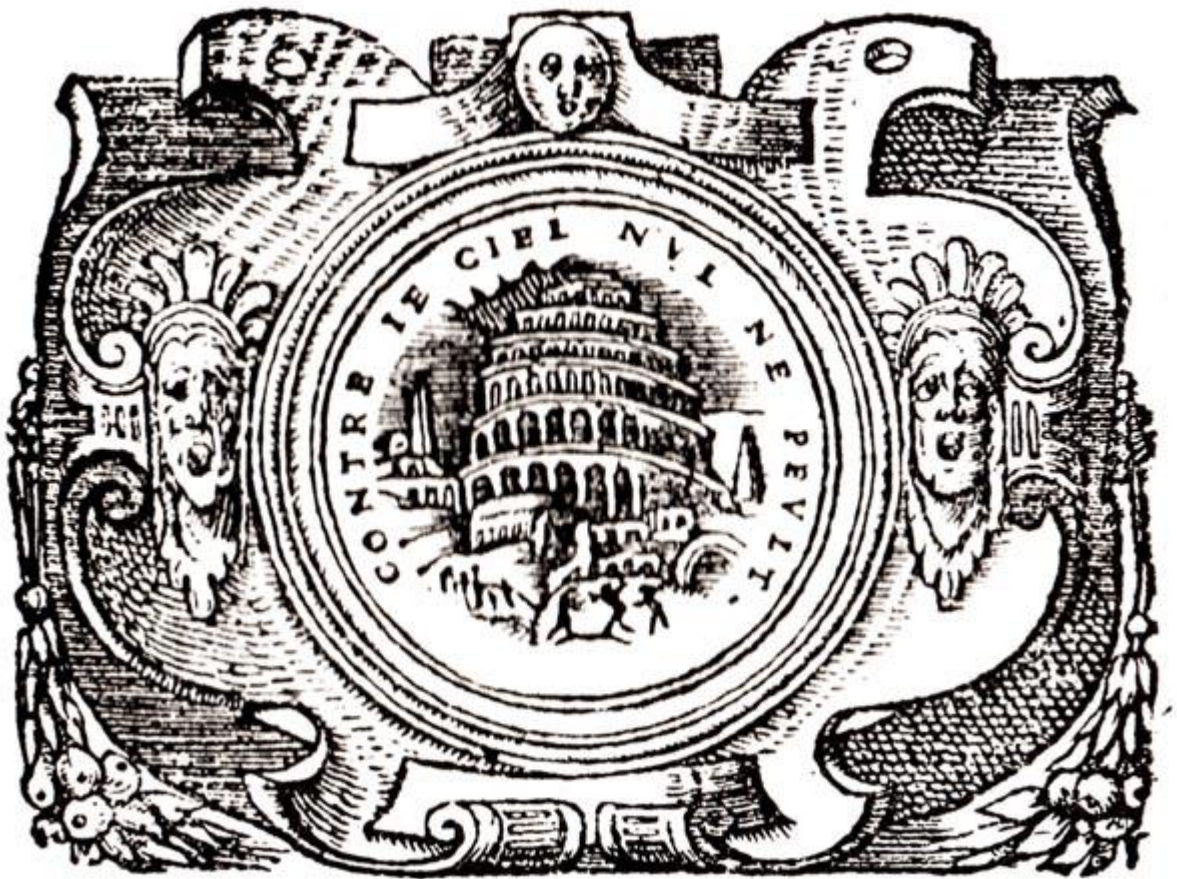
When evening recalls Venus to the sky,
Bringing rest to every mortal creature,
I see the Moon in beauty rise on high,
Renewing my immortal cares whose nature
Show far less of death’s dark features
Than those that in my thoughts lie furled.
Would you were, Vesper, in this lower world,
When she appears to light my Hell.
Then you would see, around the globe en-curved,
The smoke of my sighs blown from Etna’s shell.



Emblem XIII: Dido in the Flames
'Sweet the death freeing me from grief'

‘O ans, ô moys, sepmaines, iours, & heures’ (Délie: CXIV)

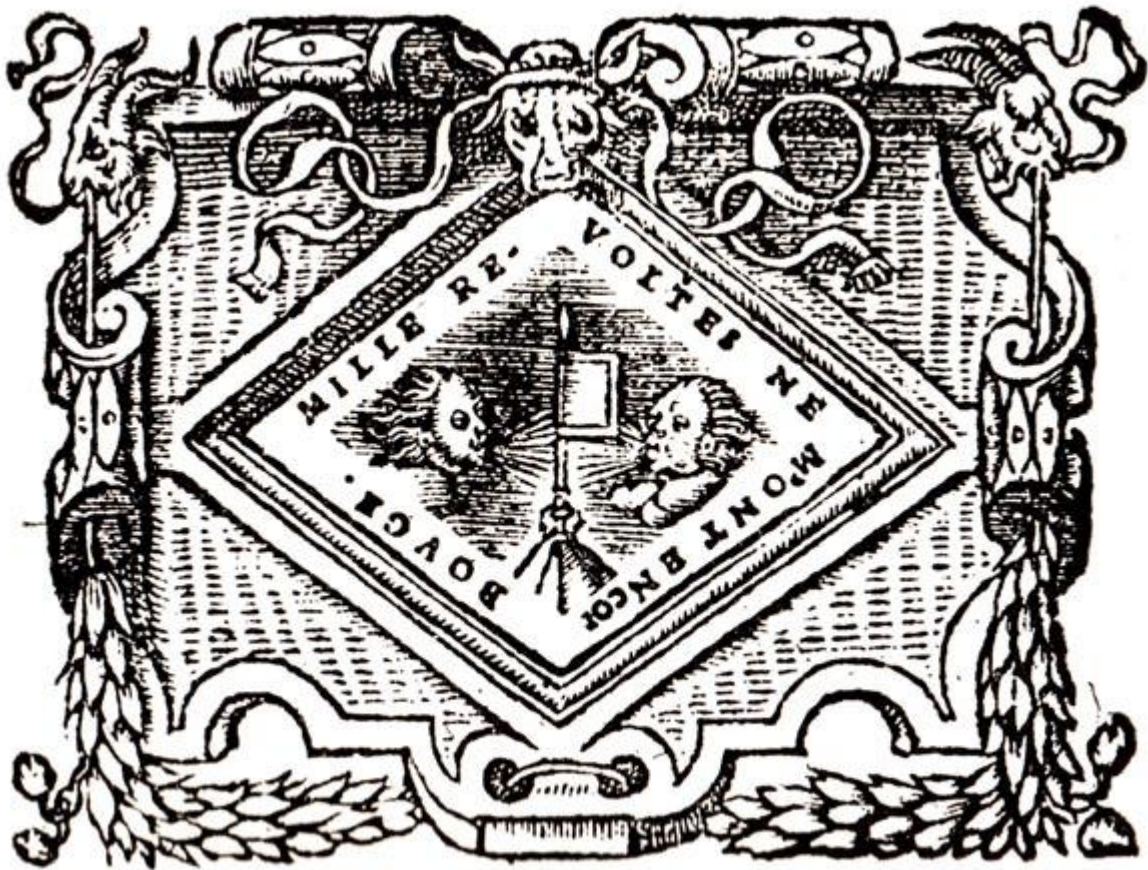
O years, O months, weeks, days and hours,
O intervals of time, O minutes, moments,
That swallow the hurts, whatever sours,
Without our ever knowing where they went,
Do you not feel how this, my sweet torment,
Reduces you in me, dilutes your force?
If then, the heart, of its own course,
Chooses the pleasures of its misery
Be certain Death is sweet, at the source,
That frees the soul from such agony.



Emblem XIV: The Tower of Babel
'Against the heavens none succeed'

‘De ces haultz Montz iettant sur toy ma veue’ (Délie: CXXII)

Casting my gaze abroad from these high hills,
I see the heavens moistened with my tears:
From shady woods, unforeseen, thought spills
And gently ripples, with the wheat’s ripe ears.
Such is the hope with which she re-appears,
Before she swiftly snatches all away;
At every sound convinced she makes her way
To me, still I see all promise of her fleeing.
O mad desire, which would have reason say
Constancy lives where light winds have being.



Emblem XV: The Weathervane
'A thousand reverses have still not moved me'

‘Le iour passé de ta doulce presence’ (Délie: CXXIX)

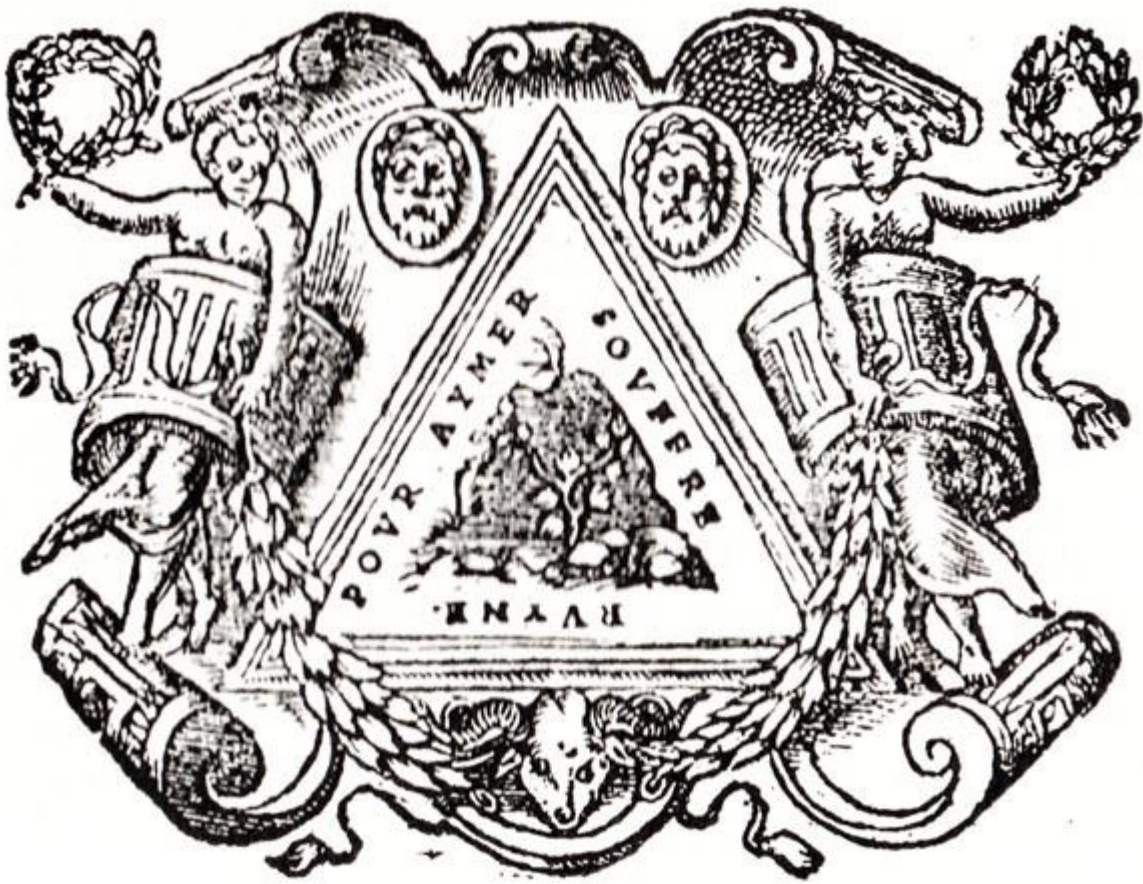
The day gone by, with your sweet presence,
Was a cloudless sky in winter shadow,
Which proves the night of your absence
Is darker to the eye of the soul,
Than the burden of the body here below,
That body of which I find myself bereft.
For, from the very instant that you left,
Like a hare, crouching in its form,
I listen now to strange sounds adrift,
Lost in the dark of this Egyptian storm.



Emblem XVI: The Chicory Flower
'Everywhere I pursue you'

‘Bien fortuné celuy se pouuoit dire’ (Délie: CXXXIX)

He might count himself most fortunate,
Who should say: I came, I saw, I conquered:
Yet I was granted more by fate
A gift, all unexpectedly, offered,
For fate persuaded her for whom I suffered,
To make her cruelty seem tender, human.
Not that my path is harsher than that Roman,
Nor a road that leads to greater glory,
To fall thus, and be vanquished by her,
To me was: coming, seeing, victory.



Emblem XVII: The Ivy and the Wall
'To love, I suffer ruin'

‘Si de sa main ma fatale ennemye’ (Délie: CLIX)

If with her hand my fatal enemy,
And yet the delight of my soul,
Should touch me lightly in my sleep
My mind itself, more dead and cold
Than a corpse beneath its heavy stone,
Leaps in me, my deep sleep scorched by fire.
My spirit then, fills with a strong desire
To flee both her and me, its closest friend,
And at that point (to grasp the briar)
Fleeing my death, I hasten to my end.



Emblem XVIII: The Deer
'Fleeing my death, I hasten to my end'

‘De ce bien faict te doibs ie aumoins louer’ (Délie: CLXIII)

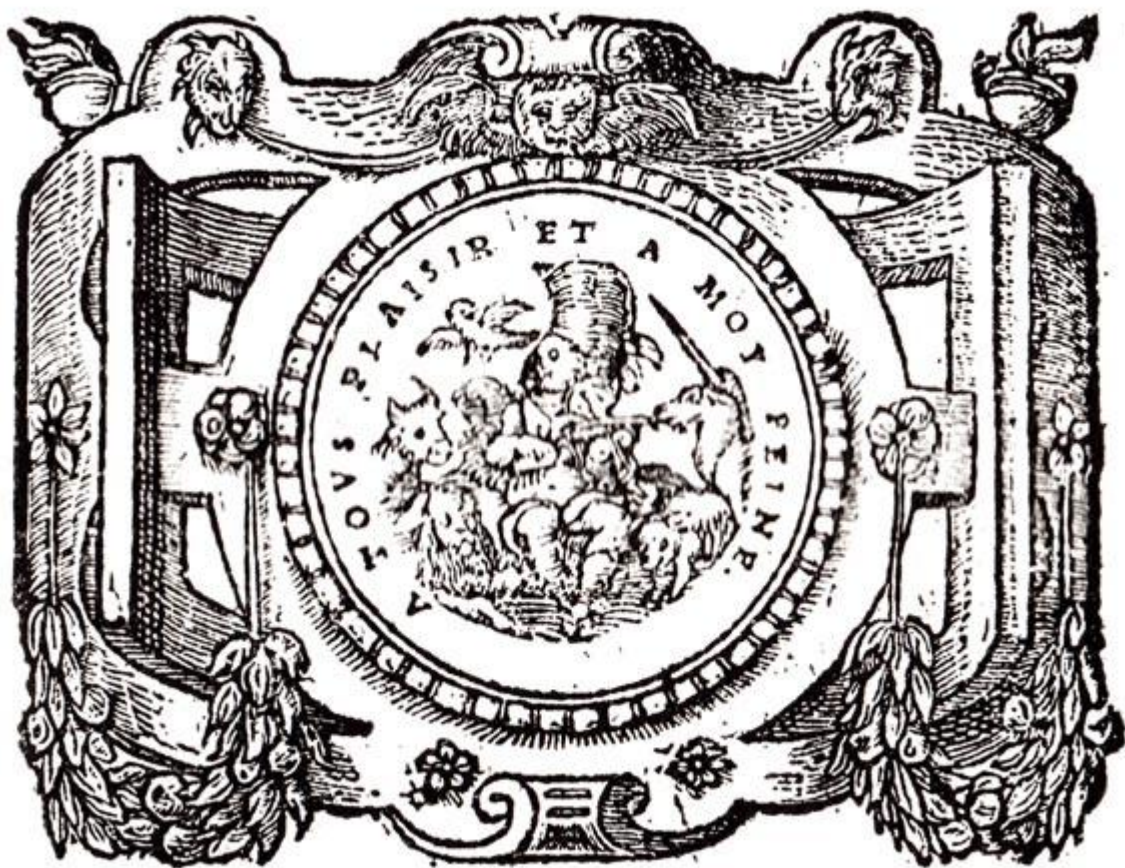
For this kindness, at least, let me commend you,
Of which I now note the time and place
Where, trembling, you heard me undo
That knot with which my heart was interlaced.
I saw you, as I, grown weary of my waste
Of labour, though more from compassion
Than any sense of this grand passion,
Alive, though less than at its beginning.
For, in so extinguishing my ashen
Heart, you welcome me, a burnt offering.



Emblem XIX: Actaeon
'Fortune pursues me with my own'

‘Comme corps mort vagant en haulte Mer’ (Délie: CLXIV)

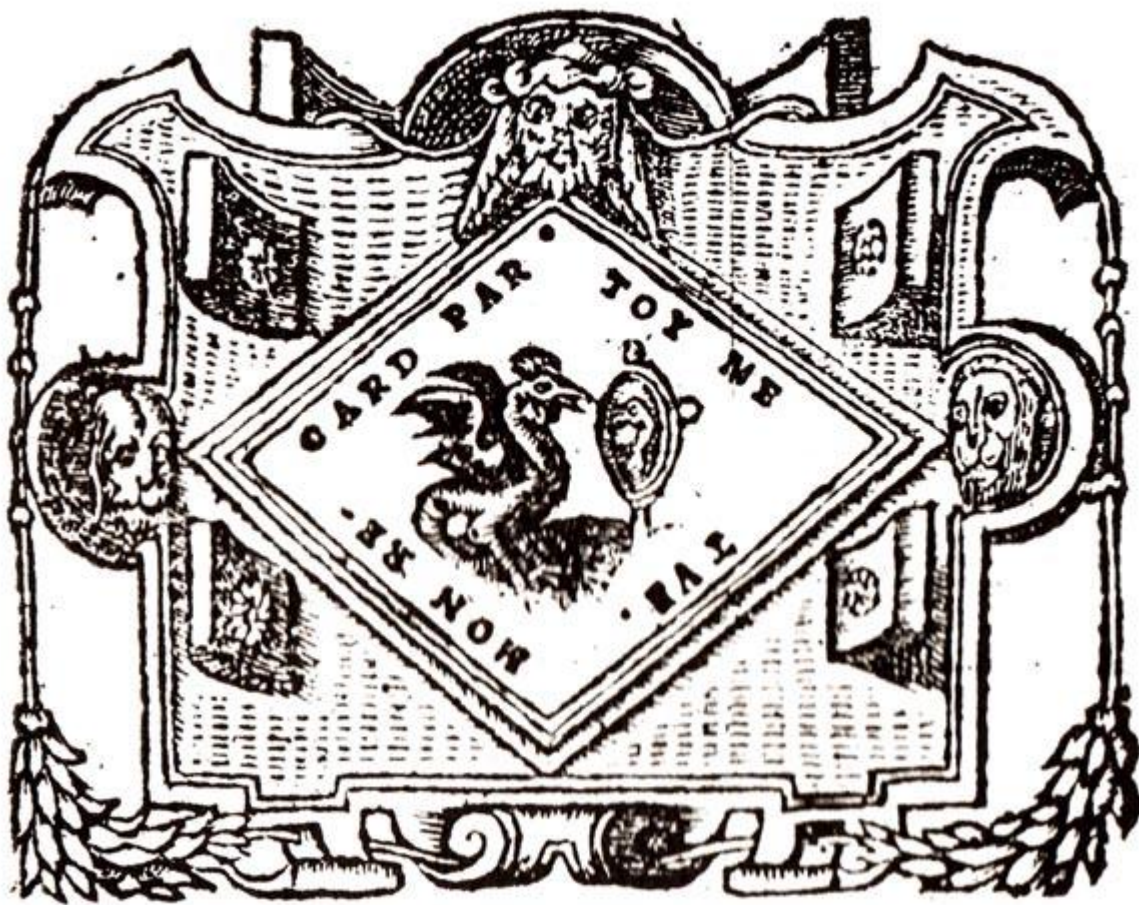
A dead man, adrift on the open waves,
Plaything of winds, pastime of the sea,
In this bitter abyss I float, always,
Borne on the depths of my misery.
Then you, Hope, you who rise for me
From the mind's idle visions, at her name,
Suddenly now, to wake me, you came,
From the deeps in which I died,
And, at the sound, my senses claim
I know not who I am, all stupefied.



Emblem XX: Orpheus
'Pleasure to others, agony to me'

‘Tout iugement de celle infinité’ (Délie: CLXVI)

No analysis of that infinity
Where concepts prove superfluous,
No acuteness of perspicuity,
Adds to her superiority to us.
A merest hint of the marvellous,
The first snow in its sovereign white
On her pure hands, delicate with light,
Would shame Bathsheba’s nakedness:
Or the fragrance of her breath in flight
Eclipse Arabia’s perfumed excess.



Emblem XXI: The Basilisk and the Mirror
'My gazing into you slays me'

‘Voy ce papier de tous costez noircy’ (Délie: CLXXXVIII)

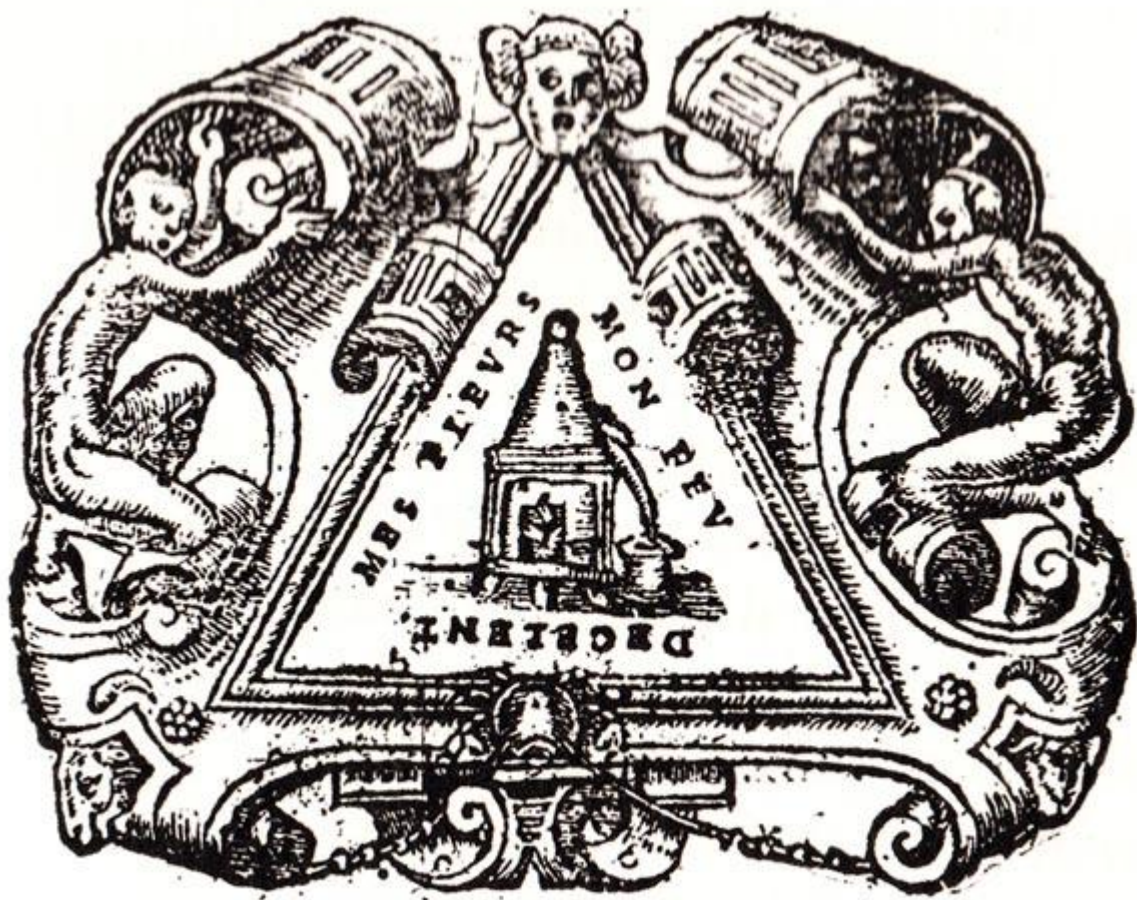
See this text, blackened by all things
By the mortal grief of my just demands:
Benumbed, as I am, at the margin,
Fearing your piteously cruel hands.
See how sorrow in me ever expands
To serve you, day by day, which again
Pity alone should lead you to constrain,
Drawing me to pursuits more agreeable,
As if there might be conquered by pain
What, by merit alone, proves unachievable.



Emblem XXII: The Boat with Broken Oars
'My strength ebbs from day to day'

‘En diuers temps, plusieurs jours, maintes heures’ (CCXVI)

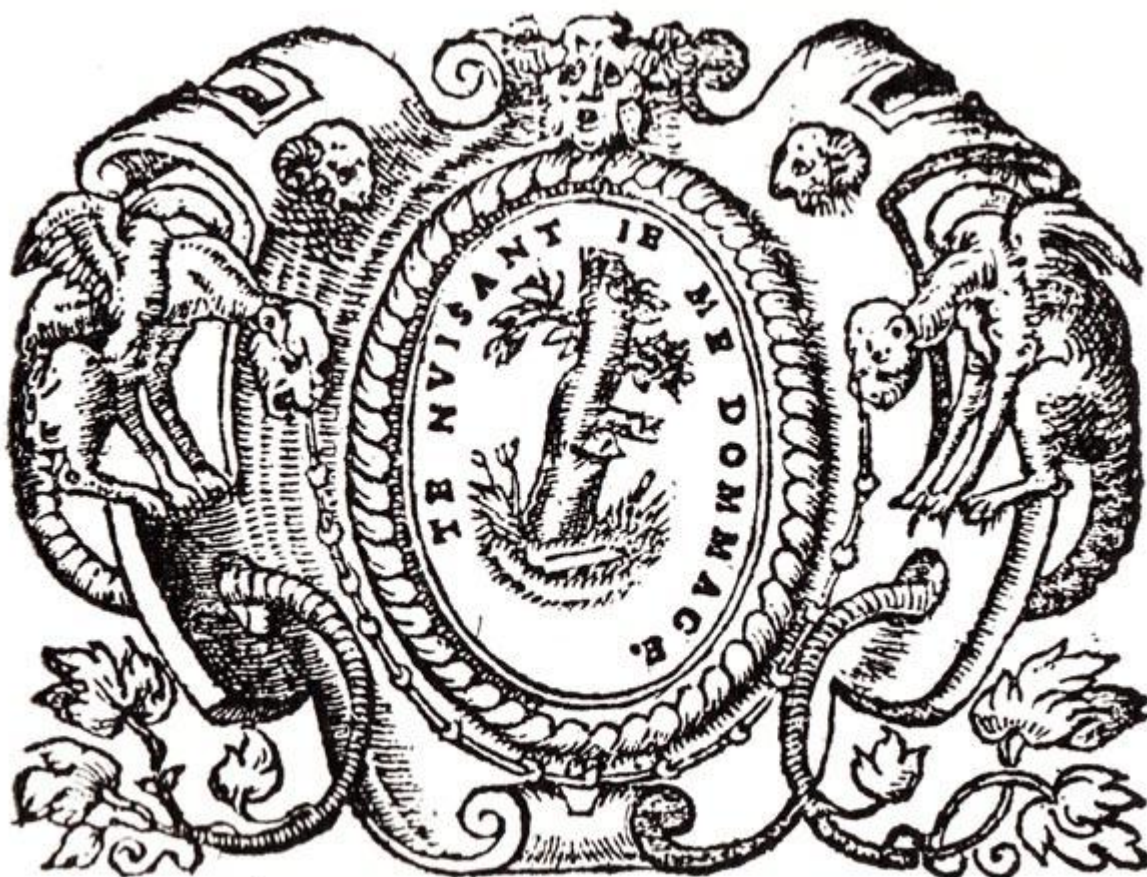
At diverse times, for long days and hours,
Hours into moments, moments without end,
You live, O Lady, in this soul of ours,
Yet both to contraries must tend.
For here you live, day and night you spend,
Exempt from the least annoyance:
Yet here I die, in such disturbance
That my delight can only prove entire
If the Furies further their advance,
Unleashed by my incandescent desire.



Emblem XXIII: The Alembic
'My tears my flame disclose'

‘Nouvelle amour, nouvelle affection’ (Délie: CCXXIV)

New love and new affection
New flowers amongst fresh grass:
Still renewed, and yet long past,
Is my springtime’s verdant action.
This despite the resurrection,
Of my ancient ills, my lesion,
That detains me in her season,
Where the murderer murders me,
Darkening a heart, the Egyptian
Plague, each pain, hardens readily.



Emblem XXIV: The Axe and the Tree
'Hurting you, I harm myself'

‘Tout le repos, ô nuict, que to me doibs’ (Délie: CCXXXII)

All the repose, O Night, to me you owe,
My thoughts consume with the hours:
My fingers count the clock, from the glow
Of evening to Aurora’s white towers.
And, without perceiving her powers,
I lose myself in such sweet fantasies
My waking soul, unstartled, is free
To forbid my body to feel the storm
Of pain, rewarding vain expectancy
As long as Earth has colour and form.



Emblem XXV: Two Men and a Chair
'Easily deceived, one who believes'

‘Par long prier lon mitigue les Dieux’ (Délie: CCXXXIX)

Lengthy prayers appease the Gods:
Eloquence damps the Martial fire:
Long sermons pacify those at odds,
And songs allay the sorrows of desire:
While verse can even quench the ire,
And charm the venom, of the snake.
Why, O Heart, weep for her and ache,
Dissolving into pitiable rhyme,
As though you might, in her, awake
Pity, who is as harsh as she’s sublime?

‘Nature en tous se rendit imparfaicte (Délie: CCXLVII)

Nature accepted every imperfection
Perfecting you, singing Her own praise:
And yet Love, so perfect in election,
Deems beauty less than loyalty always.
For, as proof of what this verse displays,
Simply contemplate the lovely parrot
That crosses the sea to our cold Europe,
From the East, beyond the Red Sea,
With black and ugly ravens to mope,
Beneath some harsh impetuous Northerly.

‘Si le blanc pur est Foy immaculée (Délie: CCLIV)

If pure white is Faith, immaculate,
And delightful Hope is joyous green,
Then ardent red must designate,
By its bright colour, Charity:
And if, of diverse substances, these three
Each bear within a virtue that is special,
Virtue, an attribute divinely royal,
Where might each achieve its power complete,
Yet allied, according to their merit, equal,
If not in one alone, our Marguerite?



Emblem XXVI: The Unicorn Viewing Itself
'With myself, I terrify myself'

‘Tu es, Miroir, au cloud tousiours pendant’ (Délie: CCLVII)

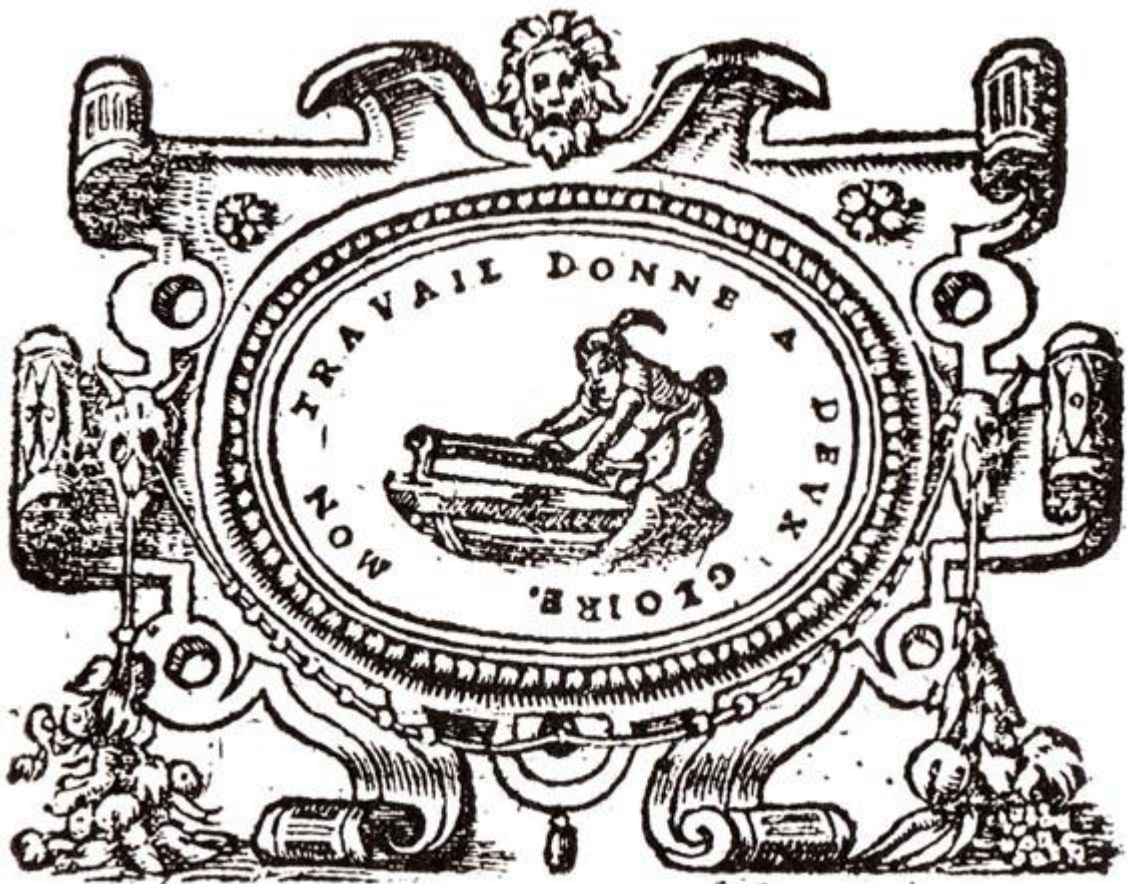
Mirror, you hang forever in the air,
Receiving her image in your bright glass,
While here a Heart waits, to attend on her,
She never deigns to see, as she goes past.
With you (O happy one) she often has
Shared all her secrets, and nobility,
While, disdaining It, she yet can dare
To hear the Heart that weeps patiently.
Yet any lady you may welcome there,
While in Its depths none exists but she.



Emblem XXVII: The Viper that Destroys Itself
'To give you life, I give myself to death'

‘De toute Mer tout long & large espace’ (Délie: CCLIX)

Every long and wide expanse of sea,
Every winding tract of solid land,
Every slope, whatever its degree,
Every single place, on every hand,
Each day or night, you who trouble me,
See filled, with your sweet severity.
Thus, far outlasting the centuries,
You will transcend the stars on high,
Your sacred name alive in my misery,
Sailing beyond all things as you fly.



Emblem XXVIII: The Armourer
'My efforts bring glory to two'

‘Sur fraile boys d’oultrecuydé plaisir’ (Délie: CCLX)

In a frail skiff, at my proud leisure,
Expecting bliss, I sailed the seas,
Many a year, assured of pleasure,
Close to the haven of desired peace.
Then fate, conspiring against me,
Roused this unjust storm, whose gales still
Deprive me of hope, of her goodwill,
And of the sight of harbour, evermore
Adrift beneath these skies the shadows fill,
In an abyss beyond sounding, far from shore.



Emblem XXIX: The Saw
'Effort little by little blunts me'

‘Tout temps ie tumbe entre espoir, & desir’ (Délie: CCLXV)

I fall, always, between hope and desire:
Torn, forever, between doubt and fear:
Every place to me is pain and ire,
Every free act enslaves me here,
So is my life attached to her dear
Presence, who shows me no mercy.
Come, Lady, come: you have lit, I see,
Those happy fields enough, where resides
Your Orient, while, in this city,
Dawn, without you, never meets my eyes.



Emblem XXX: Cleopatra and her Asps
'They live long enough who die when they will'

‘Bien eut voulu Apelles estre en vie’ (Délie: CCLXXVII)

Burning to see himself in portraiture,
Cupid might have wished Apelles here,
Though he had in view a certain painter,
Whose services he deemed not too dear.
Benedetto da Bene made arrows appear,
Persuaded he'd painted something fine:
Till seizing him, with this hand of mine,
‘Stop’, I cried, ‘you must do otherwise;
To capture Love well, sketch, with pen and line,
Not arrows but Délie’s living eyes.’



Emblem XXXI: The Moth and the Candle
'In my delight, sorrow'

‘Qui vault scauoir par commune evidence’ (Délie: CCLXXVIII)

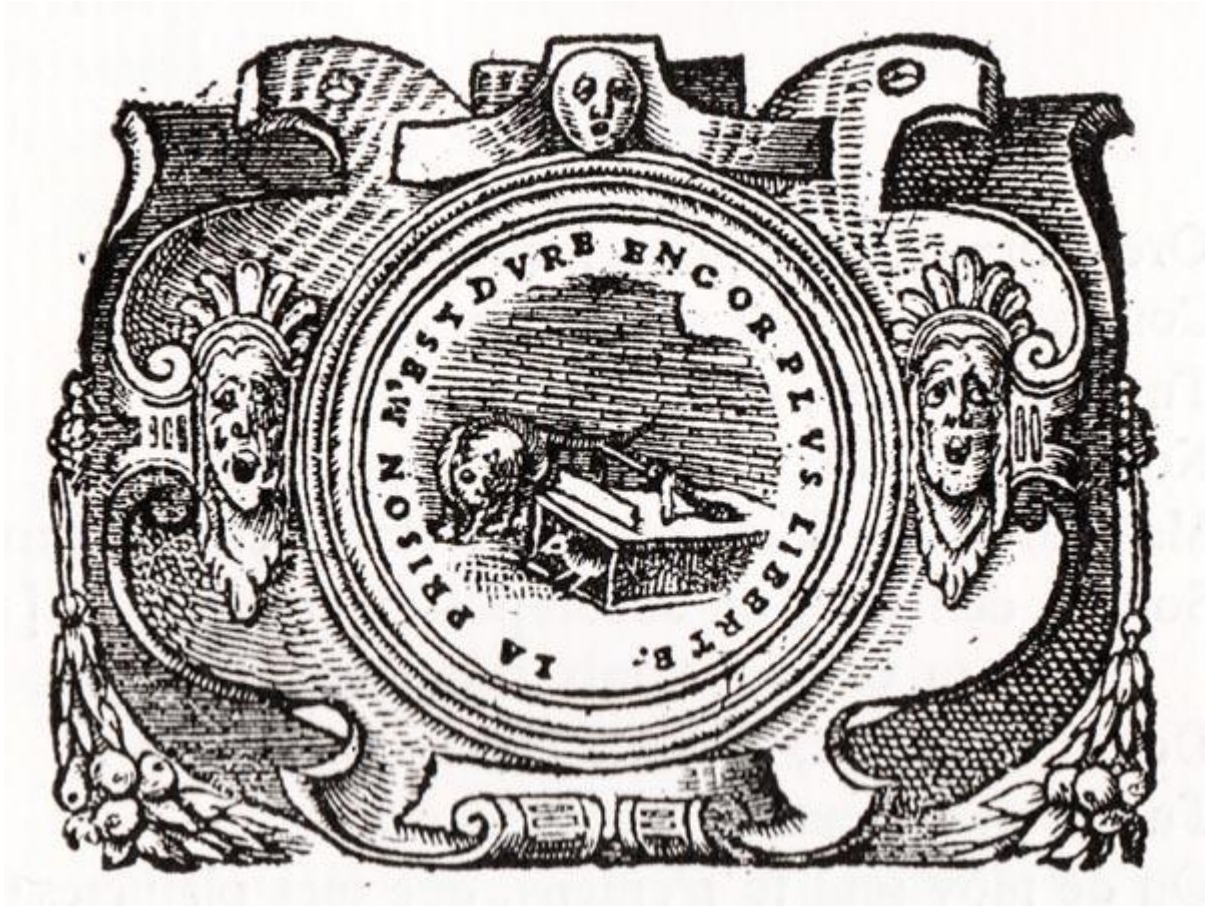
Whoever seeks to find clear evidence
Of how his inner self man may forget,
And, without dying, death experience
Where the soul is separated from the flesh,
Let him hear her now, her words assess,
Where holy speech achieves full measure,
She in whom Nature, for her pleasure,
Realised perfection, divine and true,
So that, with the birth of this treasure,
The Phoenix of our age might renew.



Emblem XXXII: The Muleteer
'Double the pain toiling for another'

‘Plus ie poursuis par le discours des yeulx’ (CCLXXXVIII)

The more that, by the power of sight,
I sense the art and skill of portraiture,
The more I admire and adore the Light
That has realised this lovely creature,
The very perfection of whose nature
Stirs my thought, and imagination:
And whose colour’s living imitation,
So burns me that my mind surrenders.
What would I become then, on occasion,
Seeing her alive? – Mere ash and cinders.



Emblem XXXIII: The Cat and the Rat-trap
'My prison is harsh, but more so freedom'

‘Le Paintre peult de la neige depaindre’ (Délie: CCXCI)

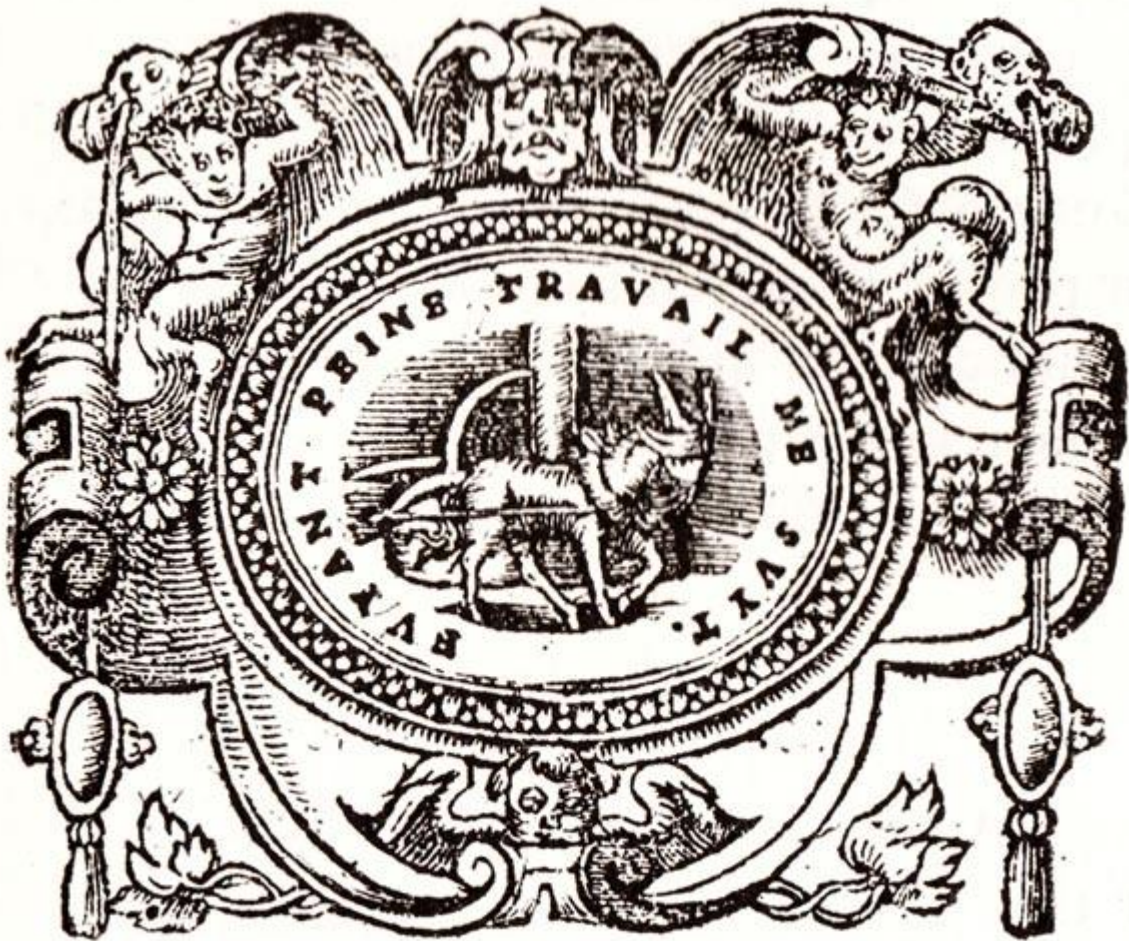
The painter paints the whiteness of snow
The pallor, more or less, that we see,
But cannot equally attain its cold,
And even less convey that visibly.
So I would deceive myself indeed,
And readily receive a reprimand,
If I tried to make you understand
This oppressive pain that seizes hold,
Grips the soul as plague grips the land,
The more acute, the less it can be told.



Emblem XXXIV: The Peacock
'He who truly sees himself, quells his pride'

‘Cest Oeil du Monde, vniuersel spectacle’ (Délie: CCCIII)

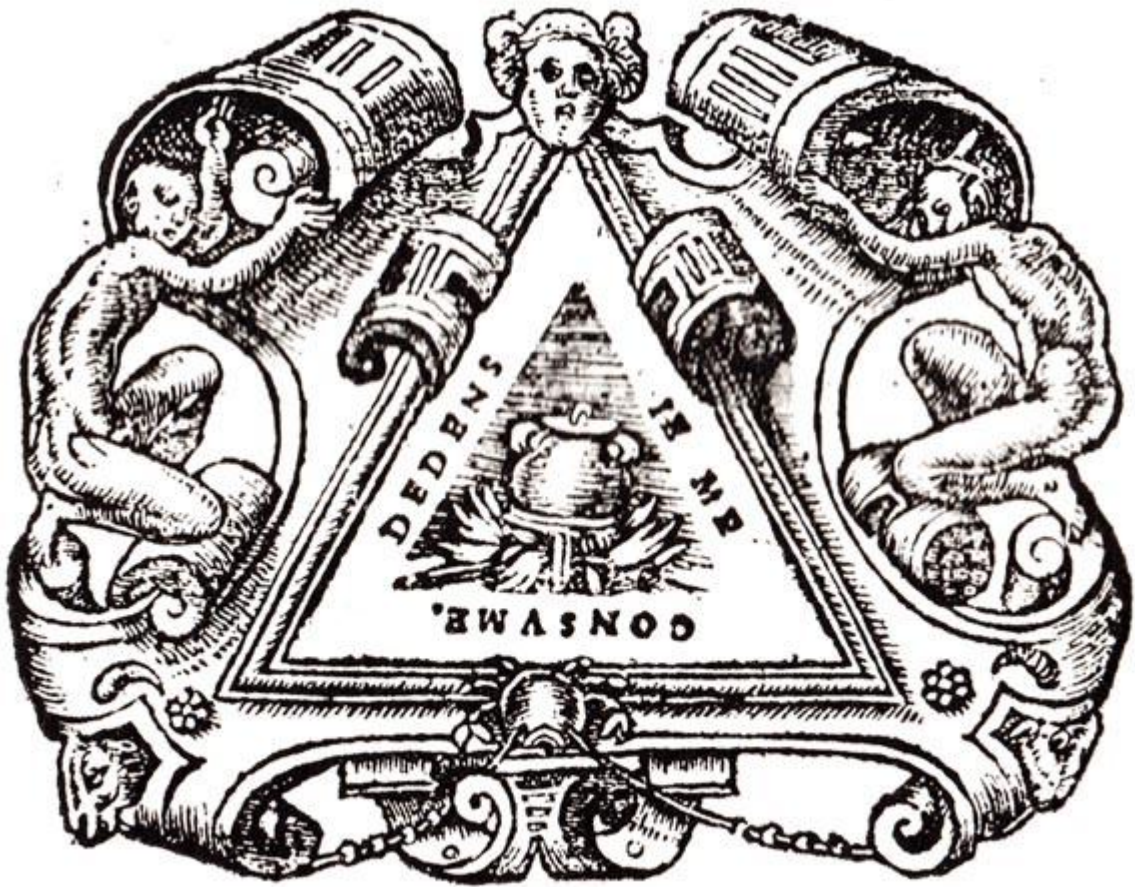
This World’s Eye, and universal spectacle,
So revered by earth, and sea, and sky,
In your mirror, miracle of miracles,
Perceives itself demoted by the eye,
Seeing the Graces better recognised
In you than, in the mirror, all we see.
Thus, unable to bear such effrontery,
It flees, to leave this Pole to cold allied,
Presenting this motto to you, silently:
Who truly sees himself, quells his pride.



Emblem XXXV: The Donkey at the Mill
'Fleeing toil, my task pursues me'

‘Chantant Orphée au doux son de sa lyre’ (Délie: CCCXVI)

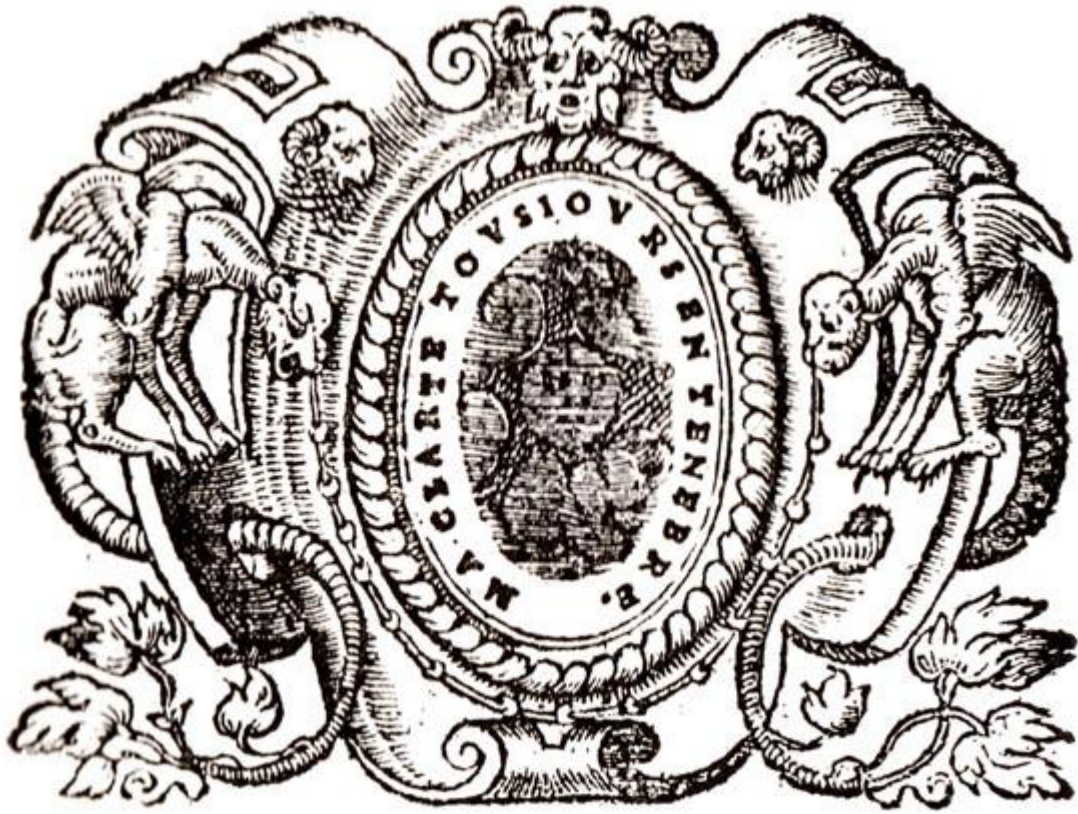
So sweetly Orpheus sang upon his lyre
He drew pity from the pitiless kingdom,
Charmed from the tormented all their ire,
Risking pain himself in the dark region.
Wearied by my task, in my sad prison,
Wretched, I find not the slightest grace,
Never a sign of mercy in her face,
Nor extract one sole tear from her eye,
That might my fiery state embrace,
Quenching the flame, or raising it on high.



Emblem XXXVI: The Cooking Pot
'Within this, I consume myself'

‘Lors que le Linx de tes yeulx me penetre’ (Délie: CCCXXI)

When your Lynx-eyed gaze penetrates
To the heart of my piteous burning,
I feel Love, whom nothing sates,
To his barb-filled quiver turning.
Then, the art of that magician fearing,
The soul flees, unequal to his power,
And he, proud conqueror of the hour,
Sets everything on fire, gleefully
Delighting in ruin, mocking as I cower
So as to hide what he consumes in me.



Emblem XXXVII: The Moon in Darkness
'My light forever in shadow'

‘Auoir le iour nostre Occident passé’ (Délie: CCCXL)

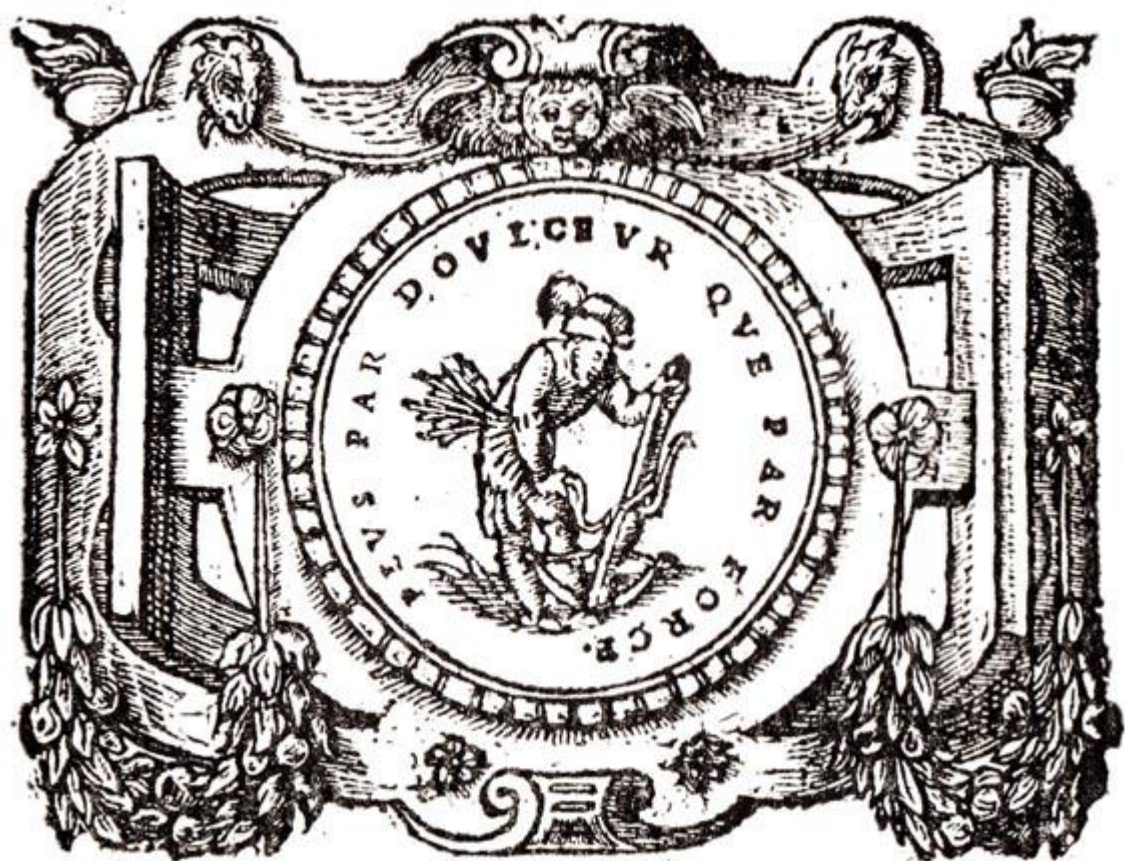
Our sun having sunk into the west,
Yielding to the shadowy night air,
Less weary of body than by thought oppressed,
I seemed to see my merciless Lady there,
Showing me her face, for love prepared,
Her every grace beyond my private dream.
But morning (too abruptly) robbed my sight
Of such delights, which like a hidden stream
Reached me through you, my traitorous eyes,
That, closed, my joy and, open, saw my grief.



Emblem XXXVIII: Europa and the Bull
'He rests secure who hides his tracks'

‘Leuth resonant, & le doux son des cordes’ (Délie: CCCXLIV)

Resonant lute, sweet sounding string,
And the concert of my affection,
How you blend to one single thing
All your harmony and my passion!
Yet, when I lack occupation,
You exercise my mind so vividly
That you incite now joy, now pain, in me
With chords so different from my own.
Speaking to her of all my misery
Better than I, who tremble, sigh and moan.



Emblem XXXIX: The Crossbow-man
'More by gentleness than force'

‘Quand (ô bien peu) ie voy aupres de moy’ (Délie: CCCLIV)

When (how seldom) I see her by me,
She who is all virtue, all grace:
I, who was so fiery, formerly,
Now feel myself reduced to ice.
Then I raise my eyes to view the face
That has altered me, so suddenly,
But, clouded my previous clarity,
I burn the more, the more from her I run:
As mountains are always said to be
Colder, the closer they are to the sun.



Emblem XL: The Rooster in flames
'The more I smother them the more I fan the flames'

‘L’Aulbe venant pour nous rendre apparent’ (Délie: CCCLV)

With the Dawn that renders apparent
What is hidden from us in the dark,
The fire of night within my flesh, transparent,
Retreats within, quenching every spark.
But when Evening, following its arc,
Casts a black veil over all the earth,
My flame, risen from its grave, has birth,
Out of that abyss harmful to my light;
As again the glow-worm shows its worth,
Beside my flame, rekindling the night.

‘Estant ainsi vefue de sa presence’ (Délie: CCCLXIII)

Being thus deprived of her presence
I now so capture her in mind,
That I still see her in her absence,
Though she’s far from me confined.
And, by diverse imaginations, find
Her in the silence of my thought:
Here she sat and there she walked,
Trembling here, I uttered my reproach:
And there, one word, as we talked,
Revived in me my dying hope.



Emblem XLI: Leda and the Swan
'Hidden in others what I reveal in myself'

‘Asses plus long, qu’un Siecle Platonique’ (Délie: CCCLXVII)

Far longer than that Platonic Year
Was the month I lived without you:
But, seeing your face, peaceful, clear,
The noble seat of every grace, anew,
Where power itself has reason in view,
I believe my dreams were prophecies.
For, my Soul, you re-entered me,
Sensing her hands, celestially white,
And those arms, O mortal divinity,
On my neck, my waist, resting light.

‘Tu m’es le Cedre encontre le venin’ (Délie: CCCLXXII)

My Cedar, proof against the venomous slime
Of this serpent ever coiled in me,
Your eyes, so cruelly benign,
Sustain me by their fire, perpetually.
And when Love, reciprocally,
Opens your mouth, voices, no less,
That heavenly human sweetness
So often leaving me distressed,
It breathes (O Gods) a balm more fresh
Than the Zephyrs of Araby the Blest.



Emblem XLII: The Bat
'When all's at rest I do not cease'

‘Tu es le Corps, Dame, & ie suis ton ombre’ (CCCLXXVI)

You are the body, Lady, I your shadow;
You govern, in this my endless silence,
All motion, not as Hecate, there below,
Ruling the shades by force, by violence,
But by the sole power of your excellence,
Thus moving me, in my sweet round
Of all you do or say, more tightly bound
Than a shadow following its body,
Were it not for one thing, ultra-human:
That our pure wills are bound in enmity.

‘La blanche Aurore a peine finyssoit’ (Délie: CCCLXXVIII)

White Dawn had scarcely finished crowning
Her head with gleaming gold and roses,
When my Spirit, among all things drowning,
Confused at source by what life poses,
Behind the curtain, that sleep encloses,
Returned, to render me far less mortal.
Yet you alone, for whom it proves possible
To grant me grace, despite all fatality,
Will be to me the Myrrh, incorruptible,
Against the blind worm of mortality.



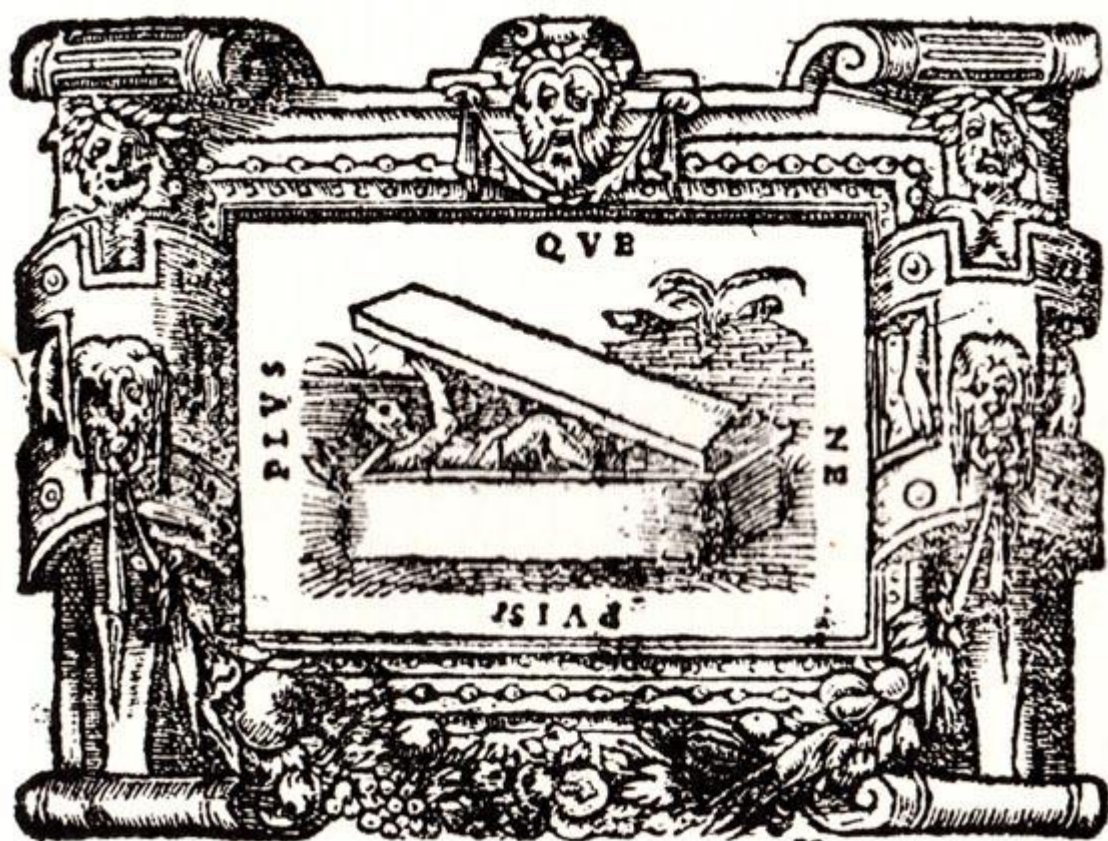
Emblem XLIII: The Clock
'I watch over my labours day and night'

‘Plus croit la Lune, & ses cornes r’enforce’ (CCCLXXXIII)

The more Moon waxes in her course,
The more she soothes the sick man’s fever:
The more she wanes, with ebbing force,
The more his illness grips him ever.
But you appear, exciting in me, rather,
A violent temperature, quite premature,
And when your presence fades, the more
The fires rage in me, in a thousand forms.
Until, but half-exposed, your face shines pure
And from life to death my state transforms.

‘Ce doux venin, qui de tes yeulx distille’ (CCCLXXXVIII)

The sweet venom that your eyes distil
Unmans me more in my maturity
Than in the wasted springtime of my will
Did that young Cupid’s pure agility.
No matter that Petrarch could still
Find his laurel bitter to the taste:
He learnt to love in his early days,
While Cupid, so against all reason,
Strikes me in Autumn, fickle in his ways,
And prevails, against all sense and season.



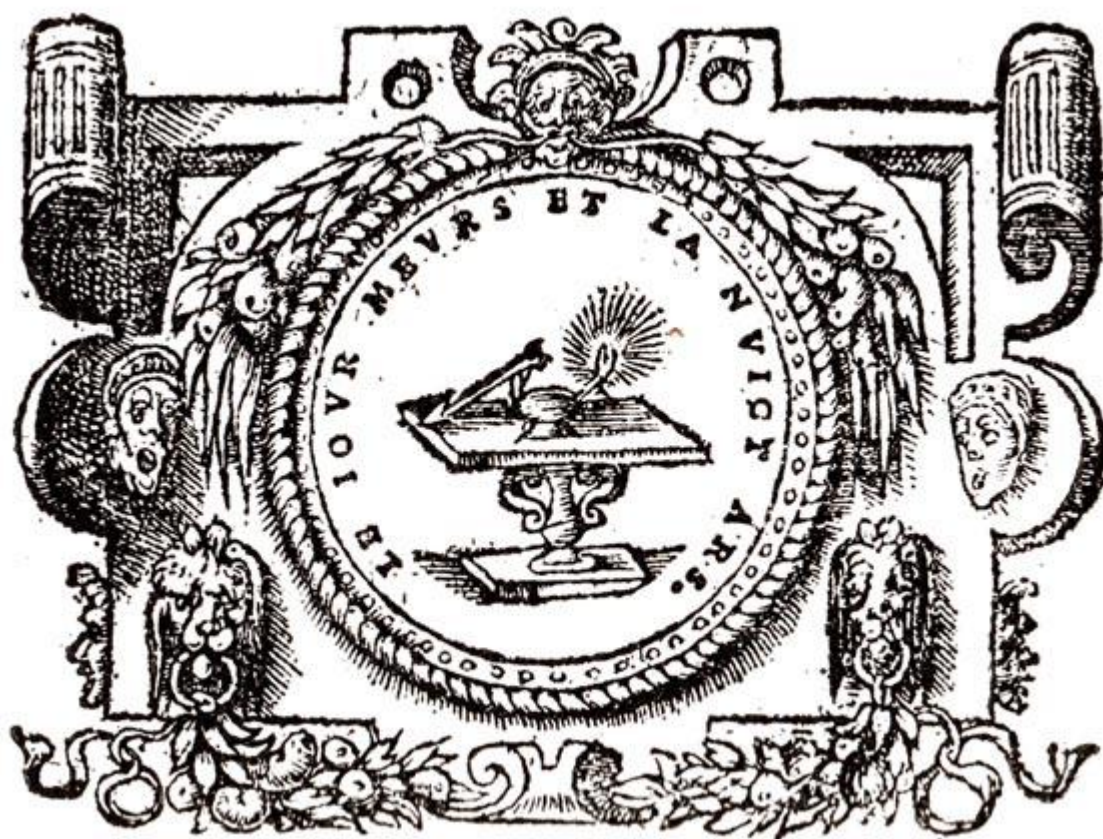
Emblem XLIV: The Dead Man Emerging from His Coffin
'More than I can do'

‘Le Laboureur de suer tout remply’ (Délie: CCCXCVI)

The ploughman, all drenched with sweat,
Come evening, to his rest retires:
The pilgrim, in peace, his object met,
To reach his home once more aspires.
And you who, in fury and with ire,
Rage fiercely from the Alps, O Rhône,
Towards the cool waters of the Saône,
Find she waits to clasp you to her breast.
Yet I, who work on, to my end, alone,
Must expect no peace from her, no rest.

‘En moy saisons, & aages finissantz’ (Délie: CCCCVII)

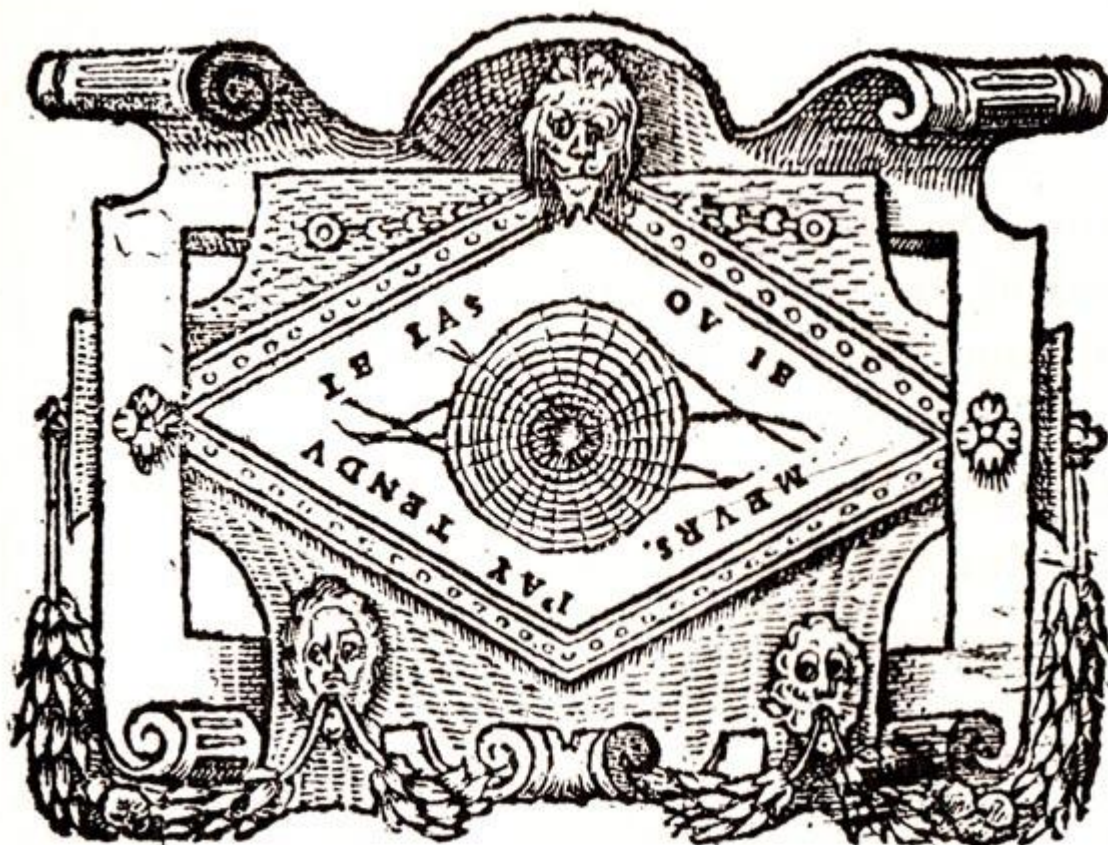
Seasons and ages in me dwindling,
Day by day, disclosing their deceit,
The turn of days, months, the years passing,
Their work in ageing you will complete.
Yet your virtue, time cannot cheat,
But like a northerly it gathers force,
Driving onwards, as it takes its course,
To light your eyes dimmed by mortality.
So you, below green bark, from the sap’s source,
Live on to match the centuries’ infinity.



Emblem XLV: The Lamp on the Table
'By day I die, by night I burn'

‘Fleuve rongeur pour t’attitrer le nom’ (Délia: CCCCXVII)

Greedy river, worthy of the name
Of Rhône the Gnawer, in your wild course
Many a stream still augments your fame,
Sends you racing, between amorous shores,
To bathe that happy region, with full force,
Where Tuscan Petrarch spent his youthful hours,
With such skill that, in old age, his powers
Stay green, grow greener, in eternity,
Yet where Love spoiled my first flowers,
In denying them their immortality.



Emblem XLVI: The Spider
'I weave the web in which I die'

‘Bien que ie sache amour, & ialousie’ (Délie: CCCCXXV)

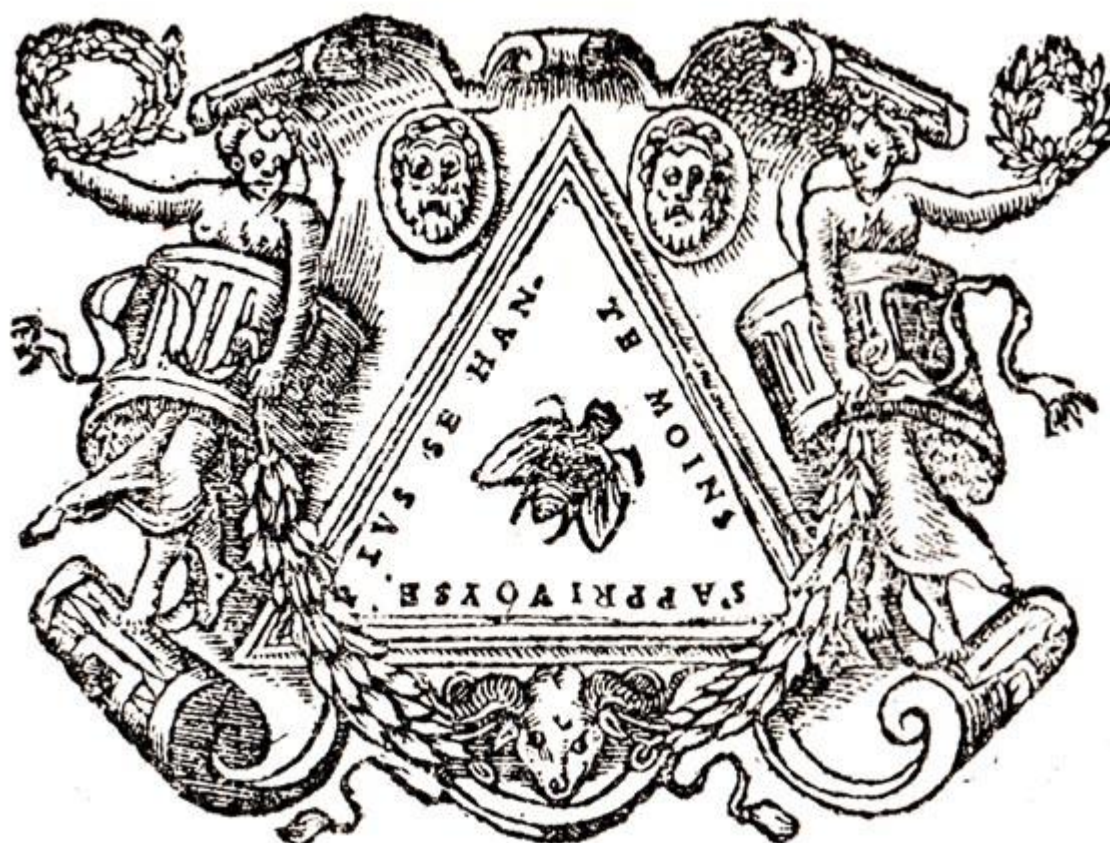
Well I know that love, and jealousy,
Like smoke and fire, lightning and thunder,
Arousing in me every fantasy,
Without resolution, roil and fester:
I cannot though be absolved of error,
Searching, ever, this loathsome monster,
To discover some abominable flaw there,
Worse than those reigning in my rival:
While one might say, that I, moreover,
In accusing him, condemn myself in total.



Emblem XLVII: The Woman Churning Butter
'The more I soften it, the more it hardens'

‘Bien que raison soit nourrice de l’ame’ (Délie: CCCCXXXIX)

Though reason truly nourishes the soul,
Sweet dreams of idle pleasure feed the senses,
Dreams that bind my body whole,
Penetrating, sponge-like, my defences,
Drowning me in depths, my absences,
And stifling all my inmost vigour.
To find excuse, and proper cause, here,
The depth of search need not be great,
When my, so saintly wise, Diotima
Forever teaches me to love and hate.



Emblem XLVIII: The Fly
'The more habitual the less tame'

‘Doncques apres mille trauaulx, & mille’ (Délie: CCCCXLI)

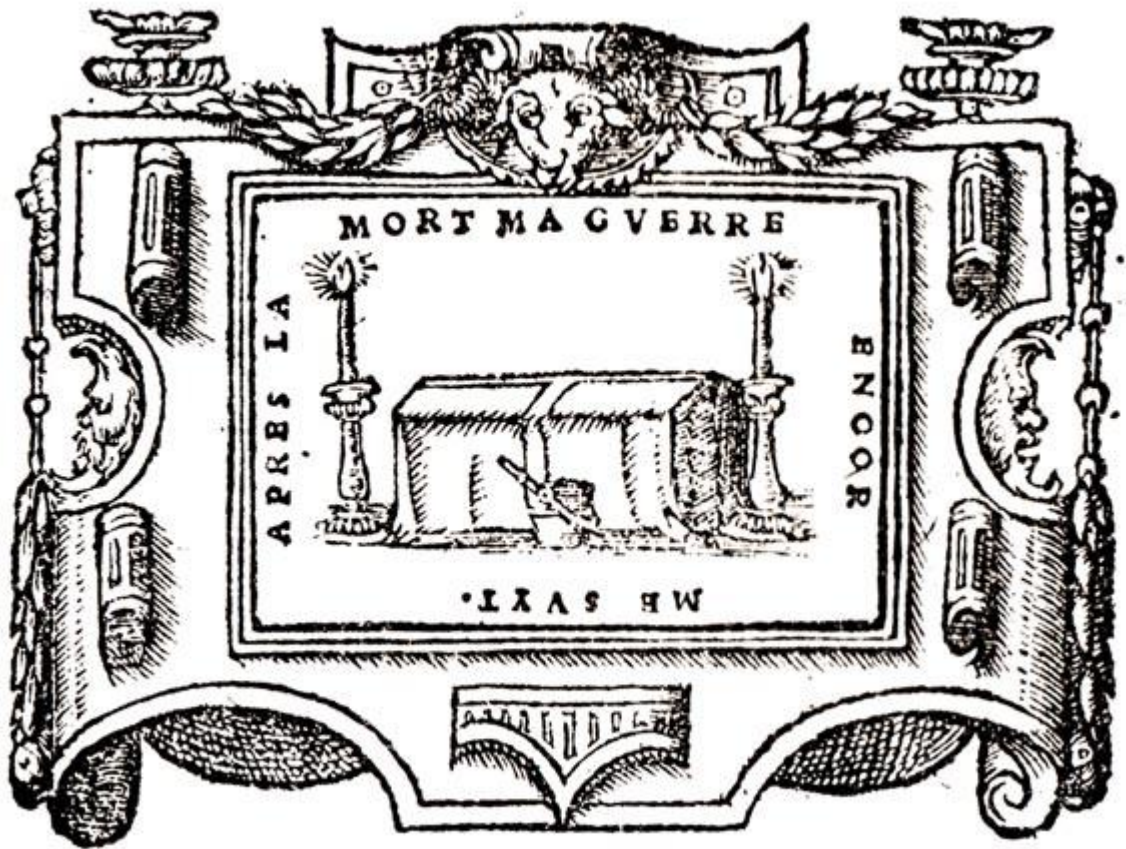
After a thousand torments, a thousand more,
To laugh and cry, to burn and freeze:
After desire and futile hope, the door
Of bliss, and then the loss of ease,
The tears and sighs, the sobs and pleas,
I win only death and disdain, still!
He who sired Love by his own will,
To noble end and nothing sinister,
Reserved this bitter fate for me, until
All saw that of his wish I was the minister.



Emblem XLIX: The Chamois and the Hounds
'One leap and I am lost'

‘Combien qu’a nous soit cause le Soleil’ (Délie: CCCCXLIII)

As much as the Sun indeed ensures,
That everything is clear and bright,
The eye that for too long endures
Its fire is swiftly robbed of sight.
My soul, whose object is her light,
Leaves me bereft of every sense,
As if Semele, rapt by the presence
Of that lover veiled in stormy air,
Here, within me, in all innocence,
Should lose her life to his lightning flare.



Emblem L: The Coffin and Candles
'After death conflict still follows me'

‘Si tu t’enquiers pourquoi sur mon tombeau’ (CCCCXLVII)

If you enquire why two opposing
Elements should decorate my tomb,
You will see that fire and water, being
Perfect adversaries, are granted room:
Both necessary to illustrate my doom,
And, by their manifest signs, to show
How tears and flames in me did flow
And did in fierce and bitter conflict feud;
That, even after death, you might know
I weep and burn, for your ingratitude.

‘Flamme si sainte en son cler durera’ (Délie: CCCCXLIX)

A flame so blessed will endure, its light
Forever shining out, in evidence
As long as this World shall escape the night,
And men still hold Love in reverence.
Again, I find there’s little difference
Between the fire pursuing hearts, unseen,
And the living virtue leading us, it seems,
Into the heavens, and their far infinity.
So our Juniper shall live on, evergreen,
Unmarred by death’s mortal lethargy.

FIN

Suffer – not – to suffer