

MVSE

ANNUAL of the
MUSEUM of ART and ARCHAEOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI-COLUMBIA



NUMBER NINE: 1975

Fiery Shield and Waxen Darts:

A Mannerist Psychomachy

When Etienne Delaune hastily quit Paris after the massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day, 24 August 1572, France forfeited perhaps her most versatile and brilliant *petit-maître*.¹ A goldsmith, medalist, designer and engraver, he had in the course of his Parisian career (to mention but a few of its salient aspects) worked in the Paris Mint, furnished designs for the parade armor of Henry II,² engraved miniature copies of Fontainebleau School masterpieces and produced hundreds of ornamental and pictorial engravings of his own invention, remarkable for their formal elegance and technical refinement.³ He was, in a word, a highly talented craftsman and artist practising in Paris the gracious French Mannerist style evolved a little earlier in the century (beginning about 1530), principally at the royal chateau of Fontainebleau, that medieval hunting lodge for whose decoration François I had imported the Italians Il Rosso and Primaticcio to direct a cosmopolitan body of artists and workmen.⁴ But Delaune was also a Calvinist in an aggressively Catholic France. His situation as such, probably none too easy even in the earliest days of the turbulent period of religious and social struggle in which the country was caught up after 1560, was, after St. Bartholomew's Day, insupportable. He fled to Protestant Germany where, thanks to inscribed and dated prints, it is known that he was in Strasbourg in 1573, in Augsburg in 1576 and back in Strasbourg by 1580.

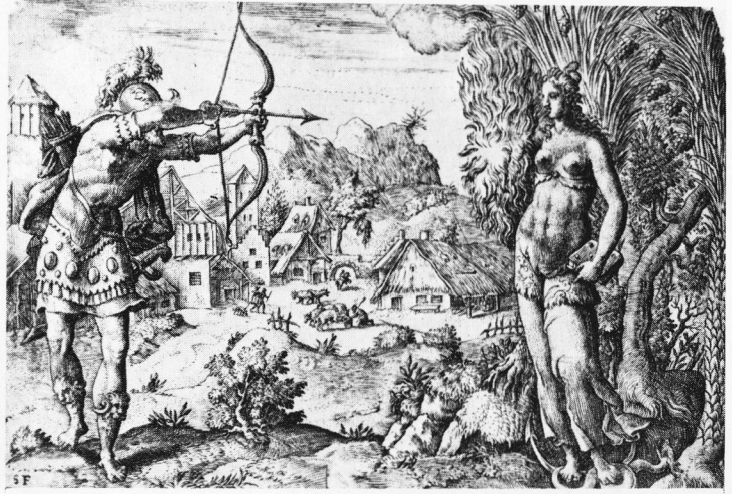
As a result of his forced exile Delaune assumes an historical importance that would not have been his had he remained in France. Because of his flight he is among the artists of the sixteenth century who exercised the

greatest influence upon their contemporaries for, as Colin Eisler attests, "It is thanks only to the great number of engravings, nearly all of small dimensions, produced at first by Delaune from about 1550, that the style evolved by Primaticcio and his Fontainebleau disciples was, for the first time, largely diffused in Northern Europe."⁵

Attention is drawn here to one exemplar of this extremely accomplished and idiosyncratic graphic production. The Museum of Art and Archaeology possesses an impression of one of Delaune's most fascinating masterpieces,⁶ a print engraved in 1580 after the design of his son Jean.⁷ Bearing a small letter **R** which nestles among palm fronds at the top, the print is one of a series of twenty moral emblems, each designated by a letter of the alphabet,⁸ which exposes the vanity, inconstancy and transience of things mundane.

The fabrication of such emblems and allegories preoccupied the erudite Renaissance mind.⁹ The ideal of the emblematic device seems, for the most part, to have been "a middle goal between sibylline obscurity and obvious transparency. . .";¹⁰ but sometimes these emblems, as well as more intricate and elaborate allegorical compositions, are so recondite that they can be understood now only with great difficulty, and sometimes not at all. Speaking of the very series of which Delaune's allegory for the letter **R** is a part, Jacques Bousquet recognizes this impediment. He is not much disturbed about it. Indeed, he finds a positive virtue in the fact that such Mannerist conceits are so often undecipherable. He observes of Delaune's images that when they are divorced from the allegory which united them, "they

Allegory for the Letter R, engraving by Etienne Delaune (actual size), Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri-Columbia.



are extraordinarily incongruous and our dominant impression is one of strangeness and mystery. We see them as a beautiful and curious collection of pure images. . . Our ignorance, however," Bousquet continues, "enables us to appreciate how great was the margin of aesthetic existence which the artist has bestowed upon his images independent of the ideas they represent."¹¹

Though doubtless most attractive in this context, as Bousquet makes clear, Ignorance need not be courted too long. In fact, man's lamentable tendency to consort with Error and Falsehood is among those moral weaknesses which Delaune's series of emblems is meant to counter and subdue. For the **R** print is connected with a known allegorical program, whose portion directly relevant to the imagery of the engraving is set forth in this engaging *huitain*:

*Un jour le monde combatant
Contre vertu sa plus grande ennemie,
Il la menasse, et elle le deffie;
Il entre au camp et elle l'y attend,
Il marche, il vient, il s'approche, il luy tire
Mais tous ses coups ne peuvent avoir lieu
Car tous les traits du monde sont de cire
Et le bouclier de vertu est de feu.¹²*

With the verse as a guide the print becomes

intelligible. The principal personifications—the World and Virtue—are easily discerned. The World, represented at the left as a bearded warrior clad in tight-fitting cuirass, mantle and richly decorated tunic, wears a plumed helmet and greaves terminating in lions' heads, and is armed with sword, quiver and bow. He raises his bow and draws back the waxen arrow in preparation for its discharge toward Virtue, who stands at the right. Virtue is personified as a woman wearing a diaphanous gown which fastens below her breasts and falls in soft folds to her ankles. The simplicity of her dress is relieved by a band of embroidered fabric, to which she points with a finger of her left hand. Standing upon an anchor, as well as a dragon or serpent, she holds in her left hand a closed book and in her right the buckler of fire. Immediately behind her rise date palms and a laurel tree.

While the identification of the warrior as a personification of the World is attested by both the *huitain* and the couplet which accompany a few of the proofs examined by Robert-Dumesnil,¹³ certain attributes and symbols are present in the print which help to reinforce Delaune's moral meaning; like most others found in the series, these are consistent with Renaissance iconographical usage.¹⁴ Arms, for example,



Moral Allegory for the Letter B

*L'eau va viste et le traict, comme aussi fait le vent,
Mais la joye mondaine fuyt plus legierement.*

*Like the wind and the arrow, water moves swiftly,
But mundane joy is even more fleeting.*

(Photo courtesy Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris)

often represent the vanity of human endeavor.¹⁵ The richness of the warrior's tunic, in marked contrast to Virtue's simple gown, may also represent worldly vanity or even the influence of that pernicious vice, *Luxuria*.¹⁶ It seems, too, that the configuration of the bones in the figure's right knee forms a death's-head,¹⁷ emblematic of mortality, hence the evanescence of all human things.

THE WORLD IS INCARNATED in two other prints of the series: in **B** (R-D 206) as the Whore of Babylon, and in **D** (R-D 208) as a duelist. In

the engraving for the letter **B**, Delaune represents the irresistibly seductive powers of the World, capitulation to whose awful charms by frail mortals, as symbols indicate, is more rapid than the flight of an arrow, the blowing of a tempestuous wind or the cascading of a river over a waterfall. The infernal abyss is the sure destination of these hapless creatures. In the **D** print the fickle World is shown trampling the body of a young man after first dispatching him with a sword, although this youth was one of his most ardent servitors and devotees!¹⁸ The Philosopher, who appears in a number of the



Moral Allegory for the Letter D

*S'il [le Monde] est amy, pourquoy a il cest coustume
De tuer l'homme vain, sous ses pieds abatu?*

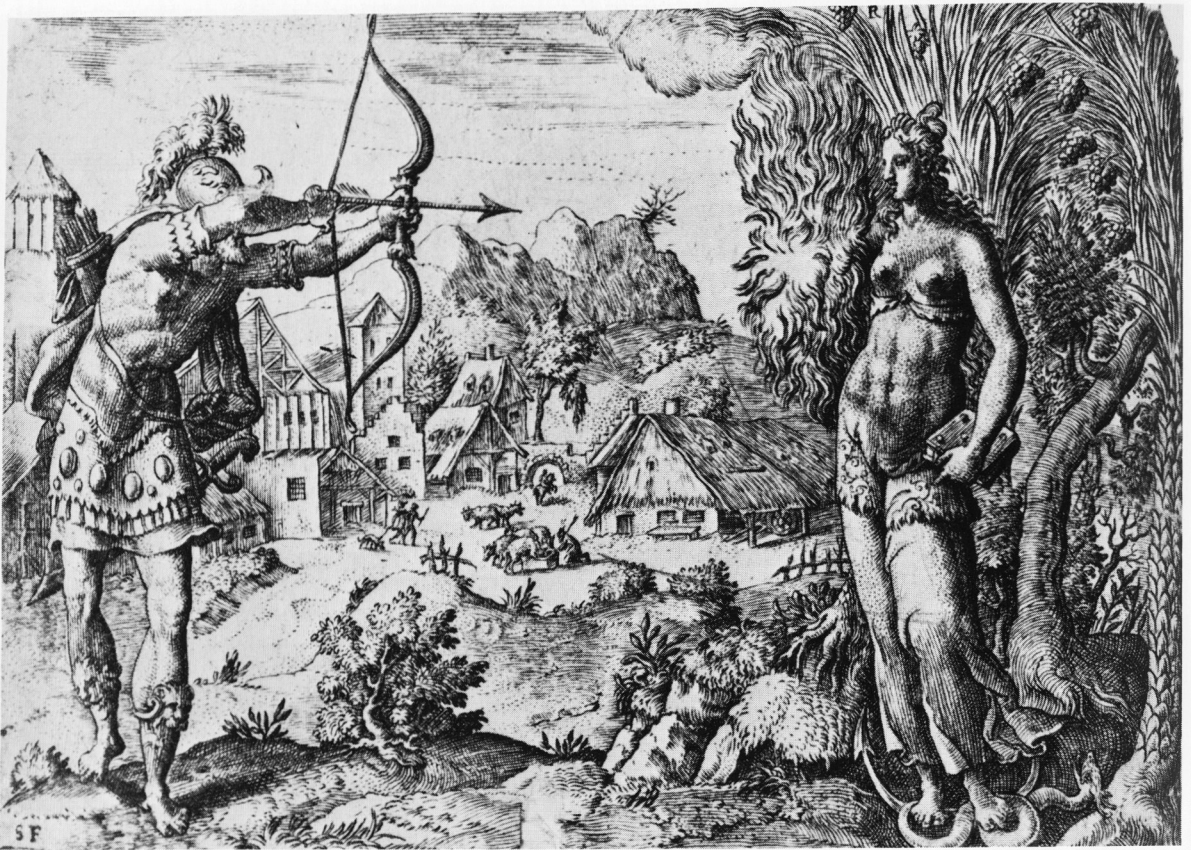
*If the World is a friend, why has he this custom
Of murdering the vain man, trampling him under foot?*

(Photo courtesy Bibliothèque Nationale)

engravings in a contemplative or hortatory role, waves an admonitory finger at the villain. It is not until the confrontation pictured in the **R** print, however, that the vicious World meets a truly formidable foe.

Delaune's Virtue is indeed a redoubtable opponent, for her attributes, which appear to be taken from the iconographical tradition of the four Cardinal (Classical) and three Theological Virtues, along with those of other abstractions, combine to form a composite personification of *virtus generalis*.¹⁹ The book in her left hand is an attribute of Theology, Religion and Verity²⁰ as

well as of Prudence, who finds wise and virtuous (*sage*) precepts therein.²¹ The anchor is the quintessential attribute of Hope²² and may be seen beneath the feet of that personified virtue in print A (R-D 205) of the series. The dragon or serpent upon which Virtue also stands can be interpreted in several ways. If it is a serpent, it may be understood as an attribute of Prudence, Vigilance or *Sagesse*.²³ Or it may be an image of eternity or perfection,²⁴ two concepts which can readily be associated with ever-vigilant Virtue. If, however, the creature is a dragon—its head compares with those of the hydra-headed



Moral Allegory for the Letter R

*Le monde armé de cire a fait guerre a vertu,
Qui ha l'escu de feu, et ses traits sa fondu.*

*The World, armed with wax, made war on Virtue,
Who had a shield of fire which melted his darts.*

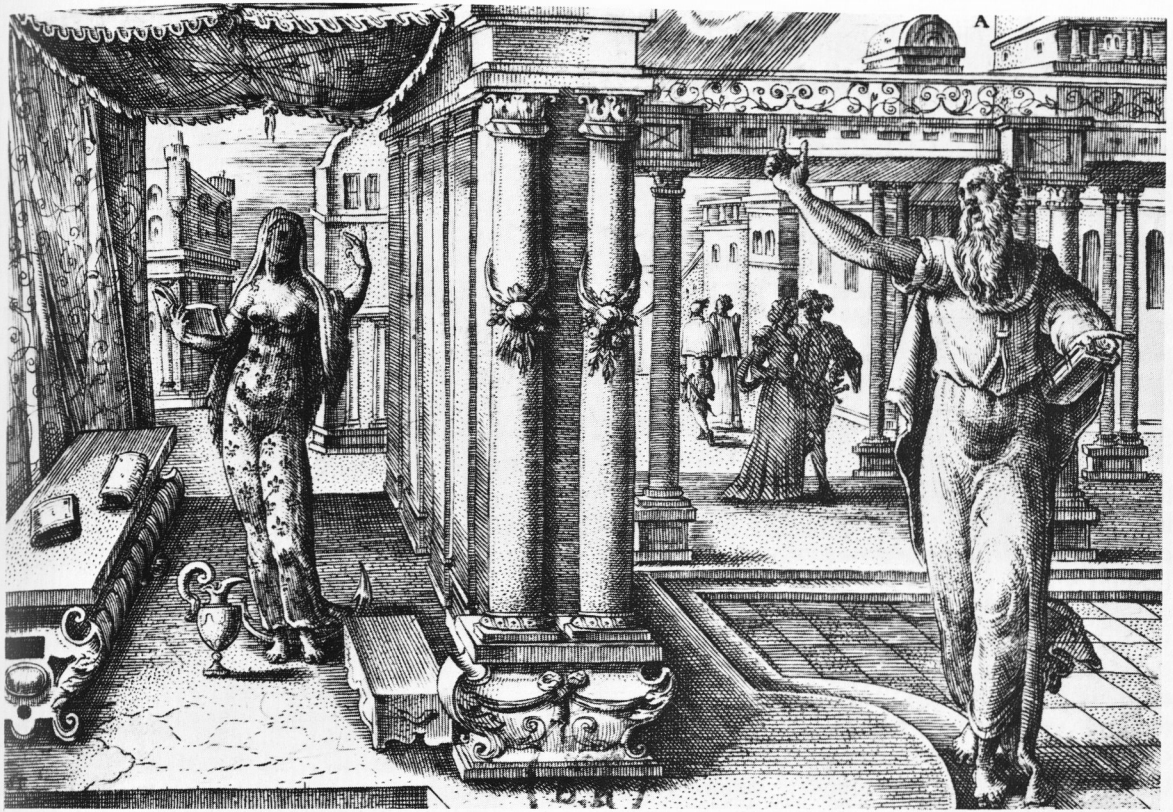
Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri-Columbia.

monster upon which the Royal Harlot rides in print B—the animal belongs to Virtue in her guises of Prudence, Vigilance and Moral Force (*Fortitudo*),²⁵ symbolizing—as serpents often do—an evil upon which she treads.²⁶ Verneuil lists Vanity, Envy, Pride or even Hell itself as minor avatars of evil sometimes found disguised as a dragon.²⁷

The shield of fire is not quite so problematical. Guy de Tervarent notes that shields are attributes of Chastity, Fortitude, Victory and Minerva in her role of “la Sagesse victorieuse des vices.”²⁸ Verneuil assigns a shield to Prudence and, more specifically, to Virtue her-

self, the shield to preserve her from the blows of evil.²⁹ The fact that the buckler takes the form of flame is dictated by the iconography set forth in the accompanying distich and *huitain*.³⁰

Virtue's attire is appropriate. With the spread of Neo-platonic thought, nude and simply draped figures came to represent lofty principles, nudity signifying, in Panofsky's words, “the ideal and intelligible as opposed to the physical and sensible, the simple and ‘true’ essence as opposed to its varied and changeable ‘images’.”³¹ It is remarkable that Virtue's gown is very like the dress of Hope in print A, a transparent drapery strewn with fleurs-de-lis,



Moral Allegory for the Letter A

*Appren bening lecteur à mepriser le monde,
Et suy la Marguerite ou la vertu abonde.*

*Learn, good reader, to despise the World,
And know that Marguerite or Virtue flourishes.*

(Photo courtesy Bibliothèque Nationale)

“symbole de toute vertu.”³² Virtue’s gown, moreover, drapes a suavely curving body almost identical with that of Hope; only the arms and head are different. Clearly, Virtue’s assumption of both the symbolic and physical attributes of Hope signals her appreciation of the value of this discrete element to her hybrid nature.

Lastly, the arbor under which Virtue stands has iconographical value. Placed between two palms and before a laurel tree, she complacently faces the arrows of the World. And well she might, for not only is the laurel a symbol of Unconquerable Virtue³³ but the palm is emblematic of moral victory.³⁴ The palm, like the

laurel mentioned by Ripa, grows thicker and taller in the face of adversity and even puts forth fruit more bountifully.³⁵ Together, the laurel and palms assure Virtue’s triumph.

STYLISTICALLY THE PRINT REVEALS, above all, Delaune’s acceptance of the Fontainebleau School vocabulary, especially that of Primaticcio.³⁶ This is most evident in his typically Mannerist figures, elongated and graceful, clad in the insubstantial, form-revealing garments favored by these artists.

But while Delaune was obviously inspired by Fontainebleau, his prints reflect the

"northern" tradition as well, notably the work of the Danube school, because of "the penetrating and attentive vision of the microcosm which they offer."³⁷ The synthesis of these influences is demonstrated most fully in his landscapes; they combine observation of natural detail with Classical and Mannerist elements and have a rhythmic, decorative quality. Delaune was one of the first artists of the Fontainebleau School to use naturalistically observed landscapes as settings for his urbane Mannerist figures. He was, in fact, the leader of the new trend in Paris, with Fantuzzi, Jean Mignon and the "Master L. D." in Fontainebleau, and Bernard Salomon in Lyons, as his counterparts.³⁸

A marvelous combination of Delaune's synthetic figural and landscape styles is to be seen in the **R** print. The two personifications, placed on a hill in the foreground, display their French Mannerist lineage. In the middle ground appears gently rolling terrain on which stands a village or large rural estate. Two cows or goats, two men with a leashed dog and a man feeding animals are found in the central area of this enclave. A man on a rearing horse is about to depart through an arched gateway. Birds fly over the background of hills and low mountains.³⁹

The whole effect is one of great descriptive and formal beauty. Delicately engraved, the print breathes that air of complexity and mystery with which Delaune endows his wonderfully detailed, wonderfully tiny works. His depiction of a near cosmic confrontation between two sophisticated and elegant Mannerist figures standing before a closely observed rustic setting may indeed be somewhat incongruous and strange—it is certainly extremely charming.

DAVID MARCH
University of Missouri-Columbia

¹ Etienne Delaune, born at Paris or Orléans 1518/19; died at Paris 1583. Perhaps the son of Christoph Delaune, Paris Mint-master of 1540. Biographical information is to be found in Thieme-Becker, *Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Kuenstler* 9 (Leipzig 1913) 2-3; also A. P. F. Robert-Dumesnil, *Le peintre-graveur français* 9 (Paris 1865; reprinted 1967) 16-24.

² For this armor see Stephen V. Grancsay, "Royal Armorers: Antwerp or Paris?," *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 18 (1959) 1-7; *Idem.*, "The Armor of Henry II of

France from the Louvre Museum," *op. cit.*, 11 (1952) 68-80; Helmut Nickel, "The Battle of the Crescent," *op. cit.*, 24 (1965) 110-127; Bruno Thomas, "Die muenchener Harnischvorzeichnungen des Etienne Delaune fuer die Emblem- und die Schlangen-garnitur Heinrichs II von Frankreich," *Jahrbuch der kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien* 56 (1960) 7-62; *Idem.*, "Die muenchener Waffenvorzeichnungen des Etienne Delaune und die Prunkschilde Heinrichs II von Frankreich," *op. cit.*, 58 (1962) 101-168. An article of especial interest about Henry II and Delaune's connection with him is W. McAllister Johnson's "Numismatic Propaganda in Renaissance France," *The Art Quarterly* 31 (Summer 1968) 123-153. Other articles dealing with Delaune include: Yvonne Hackenbrock, "Commissi," *Bull. Met. Museum* 24 (1966) 213-224; *Idem.*, "New Knowledge on Jewels and Designs after Etienne Delaune," *The Connoisseur* 162 (June 1966) 82-89; J. F. Hayward, "A German Design for a Pair of Wheel-lock Pistols," *Connoisseur* 123 (March 1949) 16-18; *Idem.*, "The Mannerist Goldsmiths, 2; France and the School of Fontainebleau Part 2," *Connoisseur* 153 (May 1963) 11-15; and Ilaria Toesca, "Quelques dessins attribueés à Etienne Delaune," *Revue des arts* 10 (1960) 255-259.

³ In addition to over one hundred ornamental prints, he engraved biblical and mythological subjects, allegories of the Elements, Seasons, Months, Planets, Sciences, etc.

⁴ See Sylvie Béguin, *L'Ecole de Fontainebleau: le maniérisme à la cour de France* (Paris 1960).

⁵ Colin Eisler, "Etienne Delaune et les graveurs de son entourage," *L'Oeil* No. 132 (December 1965) 11. See also John D. Farmer, *The Virtuoso Craftsman: Northern European Design in the Sixteenth Century*, catalogue of exhibition at Worcester Art Museum, 27 March—25 May 1969 (Worcester, Mass. 1969) 11, 76; and *L'Ecole de Fontainebleau*, catalogue of exhibition at the Grand Palais, Paris, 17 October 1972—15 January 1973 (Paris 1972) 73, among others, for similar observations.

⁶ Acc. No. X-114. Engraving, 7 x 9.6 cm. Signed SF in lower left corner = Stephanus Fecit. **R-D** 221, second state. Top right and left corners torn; slight tears at center right and center bottom. Two states are catalogued by Robert-Dumesnil, *op. cit.*, 72: the first unfinished, with only the letter **S** at the bottom left; the second finished, with the letter **R** at the top and **SF** at bottom left. The **R** print is reproduced by Jacques Bousquet, *La peinture maniériste* (Neuchâtel 1964) 235, English translation by Simon W. Taylor, *Mannerism: The Painting and Style of the Late Renaissance* (New York 1964) 235; and by Roger Caillois, *Au coeur du fantastique* (Paris 1965) 85. Robert-Dumesnil, *op. cit.*, 71, notes that print **O** of the series (**R-D** 218) bears an inscription at the top right which reads: STEPHANUS PATER AET. 61 FOELICITE SCULPSIT IHOANO. FILIO INVE. 1580. At the center top: IN. ARGENTINA [Strasbourg].

⁷ Jean Delaune, born Paris 1555. Worked in the atelier of his father; known chiefly from prints of 1578 and 1580 (**R-D** 126-132 and 205-224) which Etienne engraved from his designs. See Thieme-Becker, *op. cit.*, 2-3, s.v. Etienne Delaune. The catalogue of the exhibition, *L'Ecole de Fon-*

- fontainebleau, 76 no. 80, shows a drawing attributed to him.
- ⁸ R-D 205-224. There are no prints for the letters J, U, W, X, Y, Z. Each print measures 7 x 9.6 cm.
- ⁹ See Mario Praz, *Studies in Seventeenth-century Imagery*, 2nd revised ed. (Rome 1964); Robert J. Clements, *Picta Poesis* (Rome 1960), among other works.
- ¹⁰ Clements, *op. cit.*, 20.
- ¹¹ Bousquet, English trans., *op. cit.*, (note 6 above) 236.
- ¹² Robert-Dumesnil, *op. cit.*, 67-68. Translation: One day the World battling / Against Virtue, his greatest enemy, / Her he menaces and him she defies; / He enters the camp and there she awaits him, / He steps forward, he proceeds, he advances, he fires / But none of his shots can reach their goal / Because all the World's arrows are of wax / And the shield of Virtue is of fire.
- ¹³ Robert-Dumesnil, *op. cit.*, 65, 67f., 73.
- ¹⁴ Guy de Tervarent, *Attributs et symboles dans l'art profane 1450-1600: Dictionnaire d'un langage perdu* (Geneva 1958-59) 2 vols; and M. P. Verneuil, *Dictionnaire des symboles, emblèmes et attributs* (Paris n.d.).
- ¹⁵ De Tervarent, *op. cit.*, I, 34.
- ¹⁶ See Adolf Katzenellenbogen, *Allegories of the Virtues and Vices in Mediaeval Art* (New York 1964) 13, note 1, for "richly dressed" *Luxuria*.
- ¹⁷ De Tervarent, *op. cit.*, II, 373. The same seems to be true of the right knee of the warrior in print D; however, all this may be fortuitous.
- ¹⁸ Robert-Dumesnil, *op. cit.*, 64-65, 72-73.
- ¹⁹ The Classical Virtues are Justice, Prudence, Fortitude and Temperance; the Theological are Faith, Hope and Charity. Note that Hope appears in print A (R-D 205) with much the same attire as Virtue in R. See Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology* (New York 1972) 157, note 97, for a discussion of *virtus generalis*. He notes that this concept was a "modern" one and was still considered a "new problem" in the third quarter of the fifteenth century. The first representation appeared, however, in the figure of Hercules in Giovanni Pisano's Pisa Cathedral pulpit, 1302/1310. For treatment of the virtues in the medieval period see Katzenellenbogen, *op. cit.*, and Rosemund Tuve, "Notes on the Virtues and Vices," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 26 (1963) 264-303; as well as Emile Mâle, *L'Art religieux de la fin du moyen âge en France*, 3rd ed. (Paris 1925) 309-328.
- ²⁰ De Tervarent, *op. cit.*, II, 248-251.
- ²¹ Verneuil, *op. cit.*, (note 14, above), 108, 150.
- ²² De Tervarent, *op. cit.*, I, 28. The Christian source of this symbolism is found in St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews, VI.19: "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil." (King James Version)
- ²³ Verneuil, 151, 155, 161, 167. *Sagesse* may be rendered as Wisdom, Sobriety, Chastity, etc. See also De Tervarent, *op. cit.*, II, 340-342.
- ²⁴ See especially Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, rev. ed. (New York 1968) 266. He notes that these concepts are "commonly illustrated by a serpent biting its own tail, but known also in the form of a circular loop on the serpent's back. . .," or with its tail coiled in a circle.
- ²⁵ De Tervarent, *op. cit.*, I, 150; Mâle, *op. cit.*, 324 especially. A representation of Prudence by Delaune (R-D 160) includes "Un serpent, frappé mortellement, se debat à terre." The creature at Virtue's feet is, of course, identical with the serpent encircling the waist of the infernal genius in print B; sure identification is, therefore, forestalled.
- ²⁶ See Katzenellenbogen, *op. cit.*, 15-17 for dragons as embodiments of evil or vice.
- ²⁷ Verneuil, *op. cit.*, 58, 167. It may be remarked here that the personal device of Pope Gregory XIII (1572-85) was a winged dragon. That Delaune's series perhaps has something more than a didactic and pietistic *raison d'être* is hinted at in a distich for print C of the series (R-D 207) quoted by Robert-Dumesnil, *op. cit.*, 73: "France fragile et pleine de grand' variété / N'a rien de plus constant que sa legiereté." According to Robert-Dumesnil, the imagery of the C print includes a personification of Inconstancy, a moral philosopher remonstrating with her, burning buildings, a corps of soldiers, etc.
- ²⁸ De Tervarent, *op. cit.*, I, 50-51.
- ²⁹ Verneuil, *op. cit.*, 28-29, 186.
- ³⁰ See above and note 12. I have found no other instance of a shield in the form of fire.
- ³¹ Panofsky, *op. cit.*, 159. See pp. 150-160 for an exposition of the problem of nudity in relation to personifications of virtues and moral concepts. It should be noted that the dress of Delaune's Virtue is a rather conventional Mannerist one and appears frequently on Fontainebleau School female figures: a similar one even covers the Whore of Babylon!
- ³² Robert-Dumesnil, *op. cit.*, 64.
- ³³ Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia* (Rome 1593) 291. *Virtù Insuperabile* is armed with a spear in her right hand and a shield in her left. On the shield's surface is painted the Holm oak. She stands before a laurel which, having been struck by lightning, grows even more vigorously. With a porcupine at her side she fights against vice.
- ³⁴ De Tervarent, *op. cit.*, II, 296; see also 295-297.
- ³⁵ Ripa, *op. cit.*, 291, *Virtù Insuperabile*.
- ³⁶ Béguin, *op. cit.*, 84; Eisler, *op. cit.*, 11; catalogue for the Paris exhibition *L'Ecole de Fontainebleau*, 73.
- ³⁷ Eisler, *op. cit.*, 12; also J. D. Passavant, *Le peintre-graveur* 1 (Leipzig 1860, reprinted New York n.d.) 257, among others. Delaune would have come under direct Germanic influence after his move from Paris, of course, but his style had already been formed by that time. Germanic influences were pervasive in France, however, and Delaune was not alone in being affected. In this regard see Lucile M. Golson, "Landscape Prints and Landscapists of the School of Fontainebleau, c. 1543—c. 1570," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, series VI, 73 (February 1969) 95-110.
- ³⁸ See Golson, *op. cit.*; also Henri Zerner, *The School of Fontainebleau: Etchings and Engravings* (New York 1969).
- ³⁹ The question of the background elements as bearers of symbolical meaning in the print under consideration still remains. It will in this study, however, be left unexplored. The background may be (probably is) replete with added meanings.