

Socrates, Fénelon and Kauffman: Negotiating Identity through Common Experience

In 1693-94 François Fénelon, the Archbishop of Cambrai composed *The Adventures of Telemachus, the Son of Ulysses* for the young Dauphin of France, the Duke of Burgundy to “guard him, in an allegorical way, against forming his conduct after the bad example of his grandfather Louis XIV.” (Melmoth, 1785) Fénelon’s epic resumes the story of Telemachus, begun in the first four books Homer’s *Odyssey* (the *Telemachy*) after he has departed home in search of news of his father, and recounts the set-backs and victories that he faces during these adventures. It ends with the reuniting of father and son on Ithaka.

In 1785 the London publisher Alexander Hogg printed the English translation by the classicist William Henry Melmoth. To illustrate the poem, twenty-five copper-plate engravings were included after designs by artists Angelica Kauffman, Charles Monnet, Charles Eisen and Jean Michel Moreau. The one plate included after Kauffman’s design, engraved by Francesco Bartolozzi, is titled “The celebrated Moral Philosopher Socrates while under sentence of Death at Athens, composing an Hymn to Apollo.” Located in Book XXIV, the image does not illustrate the narrative, but rather a translator’s footnote. With the exception of the frontispiece that depicts a posthumous portrait of Fénelon, all other plates illustrate the narrative.

My paper suggests two reasons for Hogg’s inclusion of Kauffman’s image. First, Socrates, the ultimate statesman who sacrificed his life out of loyalty to his morals, his god, and his polis provides the visual archetype of Fénelon’s moral, political and religious lessons presented throughout the epic. Secondly, this final image of the ancient philosopher functions as a pendant to the frontispiece of Fénelon himself. The reader

relates the figure of Socrates as the teacher and moral guide of Plato with Fénelon as the teacher and moral guide of the Dauphin.

Finally, I would also like to suggest that Kauffman used her representation of Socrates to convey aspects of her own personality, particularly her unblemished virtue, strong sense of morals, and religious devotion, which were frequently called into question because of her insistence to pursue a career within the masculine genre of history painting. Both Socrates and Kauffman were forced to defend themselves against critics who attempted to slander their reputations. Fortunately for Kauffman, her character was never put on trial.

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