

A detailed black and white engraving of Louise Labé, a French Renaissance poet. She is depicted from the chest up, wearing a dark, high-collared dress with intricate lace or ruffled details. Her hair is styled in an elaborate, braided updo. She has a serene expression, looking slightly to the left of the viewer.

Louise Labé

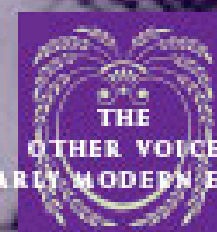


**COMPLETE POETRY
AND PROSE**

A Bilingual Edition

*Edited with Critical Introductions
and Prose Translations by
Deborah Lesko Baker*

*Poetry Translations by
Annie Finch*



IN EARLY-MODERN EUROPE

Louise Labé

COMPLETE POETRY
AND PROSE
A Bilingual Edition



*Edited with Critical Introductions and
Prose Translations by Deborah Lesko Baker and
Poetry Translations by Annie Finch*

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Louise Labé, 1522–1566

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Figure 1. Engraved portrait of Louise Labé by Pierre Woeriot in Lyon in 1555, the only known portrait drawn during her lifetime. Courtesy Printing Museum of Lyon.



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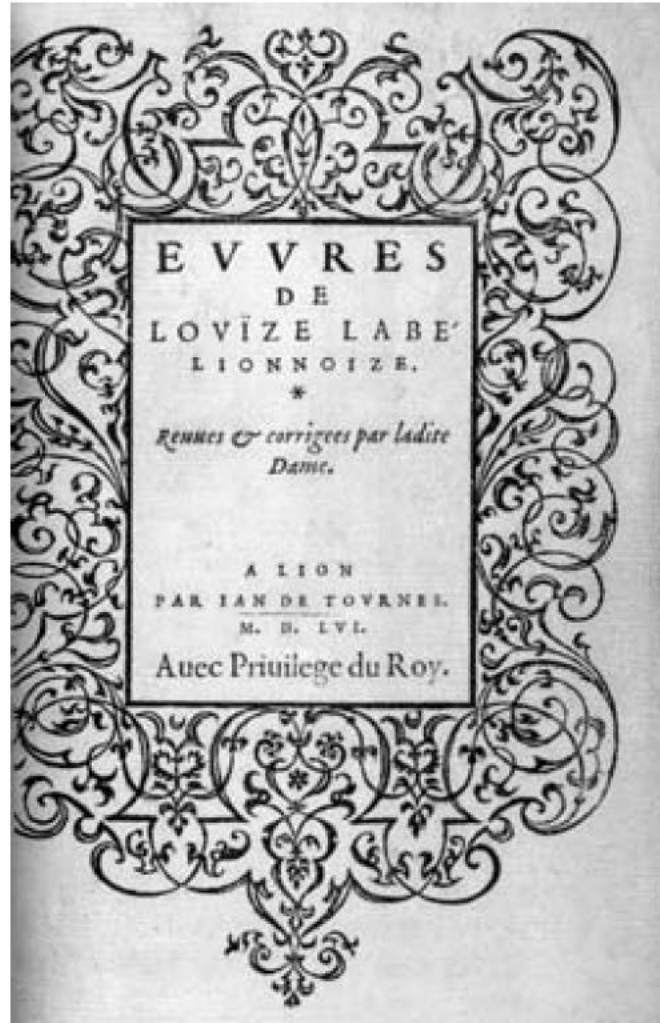


Figure 2. Title page from the second edition of Labé's works, "Euvres de Louïze Labé Lionnoize. Reuues & corrigees par ladite Dame" (Gordon 1556.L25). Gordon Collections, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library.

EPISTRE DEDICATOIRE

A M. C. D. B. L.

Estant le tems venu, Mademoiselle, que les severes loix des hommes n'empeschent plus les femmes de s'apliquer aus sciences et disciplines: il me semble que celles qui ont la commodité, doivent employer cette honneste liberté, que notre sexe ha autre fois tant desirée, à icelles apprendre: et montrer aus hommes le tort qu'ils nous faisoient en nous privant du bien et de l'honneur qui nous en pouvoit venir: Et si quelcune parvient en tel degré, que de pouvoir mettre ses concepcions par escrit, le faire songneusement et non dédaigner la gloire, et s'en parer plustot que de chaines, anneaus, et somptueus habits: lesquels ne pouvons vrayement estimer notres, que par usage. Mais l'honneur que la science nous procurera, sera entierement notre: et ne nous pourra estre oté, ne par finesse de larron, ne force d'ennemis, ne longueur du tems. [¶] Si j'eusse esté tant favorisée des Cieus, que d'avoir l'esprit grand assez pour comprendre ce dont il ha à envie, je servirois en cet endroit plus d'exemple que d'amonicion. Mais ayant passé partie de ma jeunesse à l'exercice de la Musique, et ce qui m'a resté de tems l'ayant trouvé court pour la rudesse de mon entendement, et ne pouvant de moymesme satisfaire au bon vouloir que je porte à notre sexe, de le voir non en beauté seulement, mais en science et vertu passer ou egaler les hommes: je ne puis faire autre chose que prier les vertueuses Dames d'eslever un peu leurs esprits par-dessus leurs quenoilles et fuseaus, et s'employer à faire entendre au monde que si nous ne sommes faites pour commander, si ne devons nous estre desdaignées pour compagnes tant es affaires domestiques que publiques, de ceus qui gouvernent et se font obeïr. Et outre la reputacion que notre sexe en recevra, nous aurons valù au publiq, que les hommes mettront plus de peine et d'estude aus sciences vertueuses, de peur qu'ils n'ayent honte de voir preceder celles, desquelles ils ont pretendu estre tousjours superieurs quasi en tout. Pource, nous faut il animer l'une l'autre à si louable entreprise: De laquelle ne devez eslongner ny espargner votre esprit, jà de plusieurs et diverses graces acompagné: ny votre jeunesse, et autres faveurs de fortune, pour aquerir cet honneur que les lettres et sciences ont acoutumé porter aus personnes qui les suyvent. [¶] S'il y ha quelque chose recommandable apres la gloire et l'honneur, le plaisir que l'estude des lettres ha acoutumé donner nous y doit chacune inciter: qui est autre que les autres recreations: desquelles quand on en ha pris tant que lon veut, on ne se peut vanter d'autre chose, que d'avoir passé le tems. Mais celle de l'estude laisse un contentement de soy, qui nous demeure plus longuement. Car le passé nous resjouit, et sert plus que le pre-

DEDICATORY LETTER

TO M.C.D.B.L.²⁸

Since the time has now come, Mademoiselle, when men's harsh laws no longer prevent women from applying themselves to study and learning, it seems to me that those who have the means should take advantage of this well-deserved freedom — so fervently desired by our sex in the past — to pursue them, and to show men how wrong they were to deprive us of the benefit and recognition these things might have given us.²⁹ And if any of us succeeds to the point where she can put her ideas down in writing, she should do it seriously and not disdain fame, but adorn herself with it, rather than with chains, rings, and lavish clothing, all of which we cannot truly consider our own except by social custom.³⁰ But the honor that education brings us will be entirely our own, and cannot be taken away from us — neither by a thief's trickery, nor by an enemy's force, nor by the passage of time.

If the heavens had blessed me with a mind intelligent enough to understand whatever it wanted to, I would hold myself up here as an example, instead of simply giving advice. But because I spent part of my youth being trained in music, and found the time left over to be too brief to apply my limited understanding, I cannot carry out on my own the sincere wish I have for our sex, to see it surpass or equal men not only in physical beauty, but in knowledge and virtue.³¹ I can do no more than urge virtuous ladies to raise their minds a bit above their distaffs and spindles, and to dedicate themselves to making the world understand that if we are not made to be in command, we nevertheless should not be scorned as partners, in domestic as in public affairs, by those who rule and demand obedience.³² Beyond the acclaim our sex will receive, we will benefit the public good, since men will put more effort and study into valuable domains of knowledge in order to avoid the shame of seeing themselves surpassed by women, over whom they have always claimed to be superior in almost everything. For this reason, we have to spur one another on to such a worthy undertaking. You must not abandon or be deterred from this goal, and you should thus devote your mind, already endowed with so many qualities, your youth, and whatever other gifts fortune has given you to obtaining the honor that letters and learning generally bring to people who pursue them.

Yet if there is something else beyond fame and honor to recommend in the study of letters, the pleasure it typically provides ought to be an incentive to every one of us. This pleasure is different from other diversions, for when people have gotten as much enjoyment from them as they want, they

sent: mais les plaisirs des sentimens se perdent incontinent, et ne reviennent jamais, et en est quelquefois la memoire autant facheuse, comme les actes ont esté delectables. Davantage les autres voluptez sont telles, que quelque souvenir qui en vienne, si ne nous peut il remettre en telle disposicion que nous estions: Et quelque imaginacion forte que nous imprimions en la teste, si connoissons nous bien que ce n'est qu'une ombre du passé qui nous abuse et trompe. [¶] Mais quand il avient que mettons par escrit nos concepcions, combien que puis apres notre cerveau coure par une infinité d'affaires et incessamment remue, si est ce que long tems apres, reprenans nos escrits, nous revenons au mesme point, et à la mesme disposicion ou nous estions. Lors nous redouble notre aise: car nous retrouvons le plaisir passé qu'avons ù ou en la matiere dont escrivions, ou en l'intelligence des sciences ou lors estions adonnez. Et outre ce, le jugement que font nos secondes concepcions des premieres, nous rend un singulier contentement. Ces deus biens qui proviennent d'escire vous y doivent inciter, estant aseuree que le premier ne faudra d'accompagner vos escrits, comme il fait tous vos autres actes et façons de vivre. Le second sera en vous de le prendre, ou ne l'avoir point: ainsi que ce dont vous escrirez vous contentera. [¶] Quant à moy tant en escrivant premierement ces jeunesses que en les revoyant depuis, je n'y cherchois autre chose qu'un honneste passetems et moyen de fuir oisiveté: et n'avois point intencion que personne que moy les dust jamais voir. Mais depuis que quelques de mes amis ont trouvé moyen de les lire sans que j'en susse rien, et que (ainsi comme aisément nous croyons ceus qui nous louent) ils m'ont fait à croire que les devois mettre en lumiere: je ne les ay osé esconduire, les menassant ce pendant de leur faire boire la moitié de la honte qui en proviendrait. [¶] Et pource que les femmes ne se montrent volontiers en public seules, je vous ay choisie pour me servir de guide, vous dediant ce petit euvre, que ne vous envoye à autre fin que pour vous acertener du bon vouloir lequel de long tems je vous porte, et vous inciter et faire venir envie en voyant ce mien euvre rude et mal bati, d'en mettre en lumiere un autre qui soit mieus limé et de meilleure grace.

Dieu vous maintienne en santé. De Lion ce 24. Juillet 1555.

Votre humble amie Louïze Labé.

can boast of nothing except having passed the time. Study, on the contrary, brings with it a unique inner satisfaction that stays with us far longer.³³ We take joy in the past, and it serves us better than the present, but the pleasures of the senses immediately slip away and never return, and the memory of them is sometimes as painful as the acts were sweet. Besides this, other sensual pleasures are such that whatever memory we have of them cannot put us back in our previous state of mind; and no matter how powerful the image imprinted in our minds, we still know perfectly well it is merely a shadow of the past that misleads and deceives us.

But when we happen to put our thoughts down in writing — even though afterward our mind races through endless distractions and never stops moving — by going back much later to what we wrote, we can still recapture the moment and state of mind we were in before. Then we experience twice the enjoyment, for we rediscover the pleasure we had in the past, either in the subject we were writing about, or in our understanding of the fields of knowledge we were studying at the time. And beyond this, the judgment that our second impressions allow us to make of our earlier ones repays us with an unparalleled satisfaction. These two benefits attainable through writing should inspire you, for you can rest assured that the first one will not fail to go hand in hand with what you write, just as it does with all your other actions and your entire way of life. As for the second one, it will be up to you whether to take or leave it, depending on how happy you are with what you write.

As for me, both when I first wrote these youthful works, and when I had occasion to look over them again more recently, I was seeking nothing more than a worthwhile pastime and a way to keep from being idle. I never meant for anyone else to see them. But since some of my friends managed to read them without my knowledge and since (how easily we believe those who praise us!) they persuaded me that I ought to make them public, I didn't dare say no to them — although I did threaten to make them drink down half the shame that might come out of it.

And because women are reluctant to appear in public alone, I have chosen you as my guide and dedicate this little book to you. I send it with no other goal than to assure you of the good will that I have long had toward you, and to instill in you, after seeing this crude and badly constructed work of mine, the desire to produce another that may be more polished and more elegant.

*May God keep you in good health. From Lyon, on this 24th day of July, 1555.
Your humble friend, Louise Labé*

SONNETS.

1.

Non hauria Vlyffe o qua' unqu' altro mai
 Più accorto fu, da quel diuino affetto
 Pien di gratie, d'honor & di rispetto
 Sperato qual i sento assanni e gnai.
 Pur, Amour, co i begli ochi tu fatt' hai
 Tal piaga dentro al mio innocente petto,
 Di cibo & di calor gia tuo ricetto,
 Che rimedio non ve si tu n'el dai.
 O sorte dura, che mi fa esser quale
 Punta d'un scorpio, & domandar riparo
 Contr' el velen' dall' istesso animale.
 Chieggiò li sol' ancida questa noia,
 Non estingna el desir a me sì caro,
 Che mancar non potra ch' i non mi muoia.

1 1.

O beaux yeux bruns, ô regards deslournez,
 O chaus soursirs, ô larmes esbandues,
 O noires unites vainement atendues,
 O iours luisans vainement retournez:
 O tristes pleins, ô desirs oblinez,
 O tems perdu, ô peines despendues,
 O mille morts en mille rets tendues,
 O pire maus contre moy deslinez.
 O ris, ô front, cheueus, bras, mains & doits:
 O lut pleintif, viole, archet & vois:
 Tant de flambeaus pour ardre une femelle!
 De toy me plein, que tant de feus portant,
 En tant d'endrois d'iceus mon cœur tatant,
 N'en est sur toy volé quelque estincelle.

O long

Figure 3. First two sonnets from the second edition of Labé's works, "Evres de Louïze Labé Lionnoize. Reuues & corrigees par ladite Dame" (Gordon 1556.L25). Gordon Collections, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library.



ELEGIES

ELEGY 1 [All-Conquering Love]

At first when Love — whose power can make gods grow tame¹⁹—
brought down inside my heart a burning flame,
embracing with his cruel and furious rage
my blood, my bones, my spirit, and my courage,
I was tender and did not yet have the strength
to sing out my pain and suffering at length;
Phoebus, the friend of laureled poetry,²⁰
had not yet allowed my verse to come to me.
But now that his divine furor has filled
my valiant breast, I feel my ardor build
and it makes me sing — though not of the bruising thunder
of Zeus, nor of the wars we suffer under²¹
at the will of Mars, when he moves the universe.²²
The lyre he gave me once chanted the verse
of love on Lesbos, in the olden times;²³
now, in the same way, it will sing of mine.
So sweeten my voice for me, sweet arching bow.
I know it cracks or sours sometimes with woe,
reciting so many troubles, so little gladness,
so many hard turns of fortune, such deep sadness.
Soften my passion. Once it made my tender heart
burn half to cinders; and now whenever I start
to relive the piteous memories of those years,
they force my sobs and constrain my eyes to tears.
Already it seems I hear the same alarms
that I heard first from Love; now I see the arms

Dont il s'arma en venant m'assaillir.
C'estoit mes yeus, dont tant faisois saillir
De traits, à ceus qui trop me regardoient
Et de mon arc assez ne se gardoient.
Mais ces miens traits ces miens yeus me defirent,
Et de vengeance estre exemple me firent.
Et me moquant, et voyant l'un aymer,
L'autre bruler et d'Amour consommer:
En voyant tant de larmes expandues,
Tant de soupirs et prieres perdues,
Je n'aperçu que soudein me vint prendre
Le mesme mal que je soulois reprendre:
Qui me persa d'une telle furie,
Qu'encor n'en suis apres long tems guerrie:
Et maintenant me suis encor containte
De rafreschir d'une nouvelle plainte
Mes maus passez. Dames, qui les lirez,
De mes regrets avec moy soupirez.
Possible, un jour, je feray le semblable,
Et ayderay votre voix pitoyable
A vos travaux et peines raconter,
Au tems perdu vainement lamenter.
Quelque rigueur qui loge en votre cœur,
Amour s'en peut un jour rendre vainqueur.
Et plus aurez lui esté ennemies,
Pis vous fera, vous sentant asservies.
N'estimez point que lon doive blamer
Celles qu'a fait Cupidon inflamer.
Autres que nous, nonobstant leur hautesse,
Ont enduré l'amoureuse rudesse:
Leur cœur hautein, leur beauté, leur lignage,
Ne les ont su preserver du servage
De dur Amour: les plus nobles esprits
En sont plus fort et plus soudain espris.
Semiramis, Royne tant renommee,
Qui mit en route avecques son armee
Les noirs squadrons des Ethiopiens,
Et en montrant louable exemple aus siens
Faisoit couler de son furieus branc
Des ennemies les plus braves le sang,

with which he girded himself to take me on.
My eyes were the ones that shot the arrows, then;
others would stop and gaze at me too long,
not able to guard themselves against my strong
bow. But my arrows wound my own eyes now,
in a model of revenge. While mocking how
one loved, another was consumed and burned —
how so many tears were poured, so many turned
to prayers and sighs in vain — I didn't see
how the same fate was overtaking me.
And it got such a furious grip into my soul
that after so long a time, I'm *still* not whole.
Once more I feel it, now: the old constraint
opening freshly again, with a fresh complaint,
wounds from the past. Oh, Women who read these words,
Come sigh with me, for the sorrows you have heard!
And maybe one day I'll do the same for you,
helping your pitiful voices to sound more true
as you tell about your pain and your sad trial,
lamenting in vain for times gone this long while.
Whatever hardness lodges in your heart,
Love will always conquer it through his special art,
and the more you have made him your enemy,
the worse he'll act when you are at his mercy.
So never think that anyone should blame
the women whom hot Cupid has enflamed!
Even those whose power and rank have seemed most great
still had to bear the rudeness of Love's weight.
Their haughty hearts, their beauty, their high breed
could not protect them from the awful need
to serve hard Love. He traps the noblest souls
most suddenly, and in the strongest coils!
Even mighty Semiramis, a queen so proud²⁴
she led her powerful army to put to rout
the dark squadrons of the Ethiopians
(and as an example to her troops, made run
along her furious sword's clean shining blade
her bravest enemies' congealing blood),
and then desired to go conquer still more,
bringing all of her neighbors out to war —

Ayant encor envie de conquerre
Tous ses voisins, ou leur mener la guerre,
Trouva Amour, qui si fort la pressa,
Qu'armes et loix veincue elle laissa.
Ne meritoit sa Royalle grandeur
Au moins avoir un moins facheus malheur
Qu'aymer son fils? Royne de Babylonne,
Ou est ton cœur qui es combaz resonne?
Qu'est devenu ce fer et cet escu,
Dont tu rendois le plus brave veincu?
Ou as tu mis la Marciale creste,
Qui obombroit le blond or de ta teste?
Ou est l'espee, ou est cette cuirasse,
Dont tu rompois des ennemis l'audace?
Ou sont fuiz tes coursiers furieus,
Lesquels trainoient ton char victorieus?
T'a pù si tot un foible ennemi rompre?
Ha pù si tot ton cœur viril corrompre,
Que le plaisir d'armes plus ne te touche:
Mais seulement languis en une couche?
Tu as laissé les aigreurs Marciales,
Pour recouvrer les douceurs geniales.
Ainsi Amour de toy t'a estrangee,
Qu'on te diroit en une autre changee.
Donques celui lequel d'amour esprise
Pleindre me voit, que point il ne mesprise
Mon triste deuil: Amour, peut estre, en brief
En son endroit n'aparoitra moins grief.
Telle j'ay vù qui avoit en jeunesse
Blamé Amour: apres en sa vieillesse
Bruler d'ardeur, et pleindre tendrement
L'âpre rigueur de son tardif tourment.
Alors de fard et eau continuelle
Elle essayoit se faire venir belle,
Voulant chasser le ridé labourage,
Que l'aage avoit gravé sur son visage.
Sur son chef gris elle avoit empruntee
Quelque perruque, et assez mal antee:
Et plus estoit à son gré bien fardee,
De son Ami moins estoit regardée:
Lequel ailleurs fuiant n'en tenoit conte,

even her Love pressed too hard, until she saw
that she was vanquished, and gave up war and law.
Didn't her royal grandeur at least deserve
a love less maddened than to make her serve
her son in love? Oh Babylon's Queen, in state,
where is *your* heart, which war made resonate?
What has become of the great spear and shield
with which you made even the bravest yield?
Where have you laid your helmet, with its bold
and martial crest shadowing your head's blonde gold?
Where is your cuirass; where is the slim blade
that struck your boldest enemies afraid?
Where are the furious coursers who drew you on
in your chariot of victory? So soon
have you been broken, and by so feeble a foe!
Is your high, virile heart so soon laid low
that now the pleasures of arms no longer touch
you? Do you simply languish on your couch?
Far behind you've left Mars's hard and bitter ways,
learning again how sweet Love's nature stays.
Your own love has, finally, estranged you from you,
yourself; and now it seems you're someone new.
And so, when someone sees that I'm in love
and lamenting, I hope my sadness will not move
their mind to scorn. In such a very brief
time, Love could cause them not one bit less grief!
I saw a woman once, who blamed and scorned
Love in her youth; but in old age, she turned
to burning passion, and tenderly lamented
the late, bitter hardship with which she was tormented.
Then, with continual washing and with rouge,
she tried to bring back beauty, camouflage
the wrinkles and the furrows, and to chase
the marks age had engraved deep in her face.
On her gray head she wore a wig, a puff
of borrowed hair, and badly curled enough.
The more she was, to her eyes, nicely painted,
the less her love looked at her; he nearly fainted,
then paid no attention, ran far away so fast—
he thought her ugly, and was quite embarrassed
to be loved by her. And so the poor old dear

Tant lui sembloit laide, et avoit grand'honte
D'estre aymé d'elle. Ainsi la povre vieille
Recevoit bien pareille pour pareille.
De maints en vain un tems fut reclamee,
Ores qu'elle ayme, elle n'est point aymee.
Ainsi Amour prend son plaisir, à faire
Que le veuil d'un soit à l'autre contraire.
Tel n'ayme point, qu'une Dame aymera:
Tel ayme aussi, qui aymé ne sera:
Et entretient, neanmoins, sa puissance
Et sa rigueur d'une vaine esperance.

got just exactly what seemed to be fair;
in times long past, men had clamored for her in vain;
now *she* loved, and it only earned her pain.
And so Love takes his pleasure, always setting
the will of one against another, letting
this one not love, though a woman loves him well,
and that one love, who's not loved, truth to tell —
but yet who encourages Love's awful strength
by holding hard to a vain hope — and at such length!

Elégie 2

D'un tel pouvoir le serf point ne desire
 La liberté, ou son port le navire,
 Comme j'atens, hélas, de jour en jour,
 De toy, Ami, le gracieus retour.
 Là j'avais mis le but de ma douleur,
 Qui fineroit, quand j'aurois ce bon heur
 De te revoir: mais de la longue atente,
 Hélas, en vain mon desir se lamente.
 Cruel, Cruel, qui te faisoit promettre
 Ton brief retour en ta premiere lettre?
 As tu si peu de memoire de moy,
 Que de m'avoir si tot rompu la foy?
 Comme oses tu ainsi abuser celle
 Qui de tout tems t'a esté si fidelle?
 Or' que tu es aupres de ce rivage
 Du Pau cornu, peut estre ton courage
 S'est embrasé d'une nouvelle flame,
 En me changeant pour prendre une autre Dame:
 J'à en oubli inconstamment est mise
 La loyauté que tu m'avois promise.
 S'il est ainsi, et que desja la foy
 Et la bonté se retirent de toy:
 Il ne me faut esmerveiller si ores
 Toute pitié tu as perdu encores.
 O combien ha de pensee et de creinte,
 Tout aparsoy, l'ame d'Amour ateinte!
 Ores je croy, vu notre amour passee,
 Qu'impossible est, que tu m'aies l'aissee:
 Et de nouvel ta foy je me fiance,
 Et plus qu'humeine estime ta constance.
 Tu es, peut estre, en chemin inconnu
 Outre ton gré malade retenu.
 Je croy que non: car tant suis coutumiere
 De faire aus Dieus pour ta santé priere,
 Que plus cruels que tigres ils seroient,
 Quand maladie ils te prochasseroient:
 Bien que ta fole et volage inconstance
 Meriteroit avoir quelque soufrance.

ELEGY 2 [Such Endless Waiting]

With a yearning such as slaves could hardly know
 for liberty — or ships aching to go
 to harbor — alas! I wait from day to day
 for you, dear gracious love, to bring my way,
 at last, the long-awaited end of sorrow,
 the long-postponed eternal glad tomorrow
 of seeing you! But ah, such endless waiting;
 that's the cause of this vain, passionate berating.
 So cruel, so cruel . . . didn't you pledge a solemn vow,
 when you first wrote, that you'd be back by now?
 Do you have so little memory of me
 that your promises are broken so easily?
 How do you dare abuse me? How could you wrong
 one who has stayed so loyal, for so long?
 If you're still lingering near the crescent shore
 of the river Po,²⁵ it could just be that your
 sweet heart has been consumed by other fire,
 changing my own for some other's desire,
 and forgetting, in that hard inconstancy,
 your solemn vow of faithfulness to me.
 If this is really so — if it *is* true
 that faith and goodness have abandoned you —
 I shouldn't be the slightest bit surprised
 that you don't feel compassion for my cries!
 Yes, so many hard thoughts, and so many hard fears, come
 on the poor souls where Love has made a home;
 But I *will* keep faith, because of our former love,
 that you'll find it impossible to rove.
 I'll vow, again, my faith in your own faith;
 I'll esteem your constancy more than my breath!
 But what if you're lost alone on an unknown road —
 or a terrible illness is dwelling in your blood —
 though I doubt that, because I have such skill
 at praying to the Gods to keep you well;
 they would be crueler than tigers in a spat
 to send you any sickness after that
 (though silly, faithless, cruel inconstancy
 does deserve some suffering!). Well, as for me,

Telle est ma foy, qu'elle pourra sufire
 A te garder d'avoir mal et martire.
 Celui qui tient au haut Ciel son Empire
 Ne me sauroit, ce me semble, desdire:
 Mais quand mes pleurs et larmes entendroit
 Pour toy prians, son ire il retiendroit.
 J'ay de tout tems vescu en son service,
 Sans me sentir coupable d'autre vice
 Que te d'avoir bien souvent en son lieu,
 Damour forcé, adoré comme Dieu.
 Desja deus fois, depuis le promis terme,
 De ton retour, Phebe ses cornes ferme,
 Sans que de bonne ou mauvaise fortune
 De toy, Ami, j'aye nouvelle aucune.
 Si toutefois pour estre enamouré
 En autre lieu, tu as tant demeuré,
 Si say je bien que t'amie nouvelle
 A peine aura le renom d'estre telle,
 Soit en beauté, vertu, grace et faconde,
 Comme plusieurs gens savans par le monde
 M'ont fait à tort, ce croy je, estre estimee.
 Mais qui pourra garder la renommee?
 Non seulement en France suis flatee,
 Et beaucoup plus, que ne veus, exaltee.
 La terre aussi que Calpe et Pyrenee
 Avec la mer tiennent environnee,
 Du large Rhin les roulantes areines,
 Le beau païs auquel or' te promeines,
 Ont entendu (tu me l'as fait à croire)
 Que gens d'esprit me donnent quelque gloire.
 Goute le bien que tant d'hommes desirent:
 Demeure au but ou tant d'autres aspirent:
 Et croy qu'ailleurs n'en auras une telle.
 Je ne dy pas qu'elle ne soit plus belle:
 Mais que jamais femme ne t'aymera,
 Ne plus que moy d'honneur te portera.
 Maints grans Signeurs à mon amour pretendent,
 Et à me plaire et servir prets se rendent,
 Joutes et jeux, maintes belles devises
 En ma faveur sont par eus entreprises:

my faith is strong. And it will guard you well
 from all the evils that might do you ill.
 Even He whose empire is the highest sky
 cannot think worse of me because I pray
 for you. As my tears and cries come pouring down
 for your sake, He'll undo His angry frown;
 I've lived to serve Him my entire life long,
 and I don't think I've done anything wrong
 (except to make you a god: Love forces me
 to place you where only a god should be!).
 Now, the silver moon has closed her silver horns²⁶
 twice, since the day you promised to return,
 and no news of you at all. I haven't heard
 anything good or bad — not a single word.
 If you've made up your mind to stay away
 because you've fallen in love, well, I'll just say
 that if you ever did find another love,
 she couldn't earn the fame of the one you have —
 whether in virtue, beauty, skill, or graces.
 Quite well-known people, and in many places,
 have (wrongly, I think!) chosen to praise my name
 (though who can count on everlasting fame?).
 I'm lucky to be flattered here in France
 (far more than I'm happy with) — by fame enhanced,
 and not only here. Where the Carps and Pyrenees²⁷
 cup that rich land between surrounding seas,
 and by the Rhine, between the shores that roll,
 and the lovely green country where you stroll,
 they've heard of me. You've told me it is so —
 that I hold some glory, in the eyes of those who know.
 So come, taste well what others now desire;
 rest at the goal to which so many aspire.
 You know that elsewhere there's no one like me!
 I don't say others might not have more beauty —
 but no woman will ever love you more
 than I do now, or bring you higher honor.
 Many great lords have tried to win my love,
 offering themselves to please me, and to prove
 their worth. They've jostled, gamed, worn fine devices²⁸
 to try to win my favor by their enterprises —

Et neanmoins, tant peu je m'en soucie,
Que seulement ne les en remercie:
Tu es tout seul, tout mon mal et mon bien:
Avec toy tout, et sans toy je n'ay rien:
Et n'ayant rien qui plaise à ma pensee,
De tout plaisir me treuve delaissee,
Et pour plaisir ennui saisir me vient.
Le regretter et plorer me convient,
Et sur ce point entre en tel desconfort,
Que mile fois je souhaite la mort.
Ainsi, Ami, ton absence lointaine
Depuis deus mois me tient en cette peine,
Ne vivant pas, mais mourant d'une Amour
Lequel m'occit dix mile fois le jour.
Revien donq tot, si tu as quelque envie
De me revoir encor' un coup en vie.
Et si la mort avant ton arrivee
Ha de mon corps l'aymante ame privee,
Au moins un jour vien, habillé de dueil,
Environner le tour de mon cercueil.
Que plust à Dieu que lors fussent trouvez
Ces quatre vers en blanc marbre engravez.

PAR TOY, AMI, TANT VESQUI ENFLAMMEE,
QU'EN LANGUISSANT PAR FEU SUIS CONSUMEE,
QUI COUVE ENCOR SOUS MA CENDRE EMBRAZEE
SI NE LE RENS DE TES PLEURS APAIZEE.

but in spite of all that, I care so very little,
 I've hardly even thanked them for their trouble.
 Only you are all my bad and all my good;
 you are my all. Except you, it's understood
 that nothing satisfies me. There's nothing left;
 I'm abandoned by any pleasure, lost, bereft —
 no more delight. Grief and care alone seize me —
 only regret and complaint will keep me company.
 And in this state, among such miseries,
 I have wished a thousand times for Death to ease
 my mood. My love, your absence is terribly wrong;
 it has kept me in this state two whole months long,
 not living, but dying of desire; and it makes me pay
 every time it kills me — ten thousand times a day!²⁹
 Come back right now, if you ever want to see
 me alive again. But if it has to be
 that death finds its way to me before you do,
 and takes away this soul, which so loves you —
 find me once, at least. Dress yourself all in black.
 Come circle around my tomb: forward, then back.
 And if it pleases God, your eyes will find
 on the white carved marble headstone these four lines:

MY LOVE, I BURNED FOR YOU UNTIL DESIRE
 CONSUMED MY BODY. THEN THE FLAMES GREW HIGHER.
 I'M STILL BURNING UNDER THE ASHES OF THIS PYRE.
 ONLY YOUR TEARS CAN EVER QUENCH THE FIRE.

Elégie 3

Quand vous lirez, ô Dames Lionnoises,
 Ces miens escrits pleins d'amoureuses noises,
 Quand mes regrets, ennuis, despits et larmes
 M'orrez chanter en pitoyables carmes,
 Ne veuillez pas condamner ma simplesse,
 Et jeune erreur de ma fole jeunesse,
 Si c'est erreur: mais qui dessous les Cieus
 Se peut vanter de n'estre vicieus?
 L'un n'est content de sa sorte de vie,
 Et tousjours porte à ses voisins envie:
 L'un forcenant de voir la paix en terre,
 Par tous moyens tache y mettre la guerre:
 L'autre croyant povreté estre vice,
 A autre Dieu qu'or, ne fait sacrifice:
 L'autre sa foy parjure il emploira
 A decevoir quelcun qui le croira:
 L'un en mentant de sa langue lezarde,
 Mile brocars sur l'un et l'autre darde:
 Je ne suis point sous ces planettes nee,
 Qui m'ussent pù tant faire infortunee.
 Onques ne fut mon œil marri, de voir
 Chez mon voisin mieus que chez moy pleuvoir.
 Onq ne mis noise ou discord entre amis:
 A faire gain jamais ne me soumis.
 Mentir, tromper, et abuser autrui,
 Tant m'a desplu, que mesdire de lui.
 Mais si en moy rien y ha d'imparfait,
 Qu'on blame Amour: c'est lui seul qui l'a fait.
 Sur mon verd aage en ses laqs il me prit,
 Lors qu'exerçoi mon corps et mon esprit
 En mile et mile euvres ingenieuses,
 Qu'en peu de tems me rendit ennuieuses.
 Pour bien savoir avec l'esguille peindre
 J'eusse entrepris la renommee estreindre
 De celle là, qui plus docte que sage,
 Avec Pallas comparoit son ouvrage.
 Qui m'ust vù lors en armes fiere aller,
 Porter la lance et bois faire voler,

ELEGY 3 [Oh, Women of Lyon]

Oh, women of Lyon, whenever you read
 these writings of mine, so full of love and need —
 all the worries, grudges, tears, sobs, and regret
 that the piteous music of these songs has set —
 please don't condemn me for simplicity
 because of my youthful weakness. If it be
 that I'm in error, who, under the skies,
 can praise herself for having not one vice?
 One is unhappy with her lot in life,
 and watches her neighbors with envy like a knife;
 another, striving to see peace come on earth,
 tries so hard that he starts wars for all he's worth;
 another, making a sin of poverty,
 sacrifices only to the god of money;
 another, perjuring her own Faith, will deceive
 whoever trusts her enough to want to believe;
 another, with a lizard-like poisoned tongue,
 throws a thousand lying darts, and many are stung.
 I wasn't born under those planets at all —
 the ones that could have forced my luck to fall.
 It never pained my eyes to have to see
 better rain fall on my neighbor than on me.
 I have not set discord among my friends,
 or debased myself to further my own ends.
 To lie, to trick, or to abuse another —
 or to speak badly of anyone — makes me shudder.
 So, if there's anything imperfect in my life,
 blame Love. He is the cause of all my strife.
 In my green youth he got a hold of me,
 while I was exercising both my soul and body
 in a hundred thousand ingenious feats of skill
 which, in no time at all, he rendered dull.
 Wanting to paint fine scenes in my sewing frame,
 I had challenged myself to extinguish the great fame
 of her who — surely more studious than wise —³⁰
 set her work against what Pallas had devised.³¹
 And you should have seen me in armor, riding high,
 gripping my lance, letting my arrows fly!

Le devoir faire en l'estour furieux,
 Piquer, volter le cheval glorieus,
 Pour Bradamante, ou la haute Marphise,
 Seur de Roger, il m'ust, possible, prise.
 Mais quoy? Amour ne peut longuement voir,
 Mon cœur n'aymant que Mars et le savoir:
 Et me voulant donner autre souci,
 En souriant, il me disoit ansi:
 "Tu penses donq, ô Lionnoise Dame,
 Pouvoir fuir par ce moyen ma flame:
 Mais non feras, j'ai subjugué les Dieus
 Es bas Enfers, en le Mer et es Cieus.
 Et penses tu que n'aye tel pouvoir
 Sur les humeins, de leur faire savoir
 Qu'il n'y ha rien qui de ma main eschape?
 Plus fort se pense et plus tot je frape.
 De me blamer quelquefois tu n'as honte,
 En te fiant en Mars, dont tu fais conte:
 Mais maintenant, voy si pour persister
 En le suivant me pourras resister."
 Ainsi parloit, et tout eschaufé d'ire
 Hors de sa trousse une sagette il tire,
 Et decochant de son extreme force,
 Droit il tira contre ma tendre escorce,
 Foible harnois, pour bien couvrir le cœur,
 Contre l'Archer qui tousjours est vainqueur.
 La bresche faite, entre Amour en la place,
 Dont le repos premierement il chasse:
 Et de travail qui me donne sans cesse,
 Boire, manger, et dormir ne me laisse.
 Il ne me chaut de soleil ne d'ombrage:
 Je n'ay qu'Amour et feu en mon courage,
 Qui me desguise, et fait autre paroître,
 Tant que ne peu moymesme me connoître.
 Je n'avois vù encore seize Hivers,
 Lors que j'entray en ces ennuis divers:
 Et jà voici le treizième Esté
 Que mon cœur fut par Amour arrêté.
 Le tems met fin aus hautes Pyramides,
 Le temps met fin aus fontaines humides:

I kept my head in the fury of the fight,
 spurring my glorious wheeling horse. You might
 have compared me to great Bradamante with ease,
 or to Roger's sister, the renowned Marphise.³²
 But what of it? Love couldn't lend my heart
 to Mars and study for long; soon he would start³³
 to lead me to other concerns. At first, for a while,
 he only watched me. But then he called, with his smile,
 "Oh woman of Lyon, do you believe
 that my quick flames will grant you a reprieve?
 No, they will not! I have subdued the gods
 in hell below, in the sea, and in the clouds!
 Now, don't you think I also can command
 you humans, making sure you understand
 my hand is so strong that no one can escape?
 Those who think they're strongest are the first I take!
 And you have dared to defy me without shame,
 putting your faith in Mars, spreading his name!
 Now, see if you are strong enough to persist
 in following him — see if you can resist!"
 So saying, now all red and hot with anger,
 he pulled out an arrow with a fearsome clangor.
 He loosed it with a strength that will never yield,
 aiming it straight against my tender shield —
 too feeble a harness to defend my heart
 against that all-vanquishing Archer's solemn dart.
 Now the wound is cut. When Love entered in my breast,
 the first thing that he drove away was rest.
 He brings me cares that will never be complete;
 He will not let me drink, or sleep, or eat.
 I can't feel sun, and I can't feel the shade.
 Only fire and love fill me. And they don't fade;
 they hide me. Now I have become so strange
 I hardly remember, myself, how I have changed.
 I was not even sixteen winters old
 when all these cares took me into their hold,
 and now it has been thirteen summers more
 since Love first froze my heart to its young core.
 The Pyramids were defeated, at last, by Time;
 moist fountains will be dried, at last, by Time.

Il ne pardonne aus braves Colisees,
Il met à fin les viles plus prisees:
Finir aussi il ha acoutumé
Le feu d'Amour tant soit il allumé:
Mais, las! en moy il semble qu'il augmente
Avec le tems, et que plus me tourmente.
Paris ayma OEnone ardamment,
Mais son amour ne dura longuement:
Medee fut aymee de Jason,
Qui tot apres la mit hors sa maison.
Si meritoient elles estre estimees,
Et pour aymer leurs Amis, estre aymees.
S'estant aymé on peut Amour laisser
N'est il raison, ne l'estant, se lasser?
N'est il raison te prier de permettre,
Amour, que puisse à mes tourmens fin mettre?
Ne permets point que de Mort face espreuve,
Et plus que toy pitoyable la treuve:
Mais si tu veux que j'ayme jusqu'au bout,
Fay que celui que j'estime mon tout,
Qui seul me peut faire plorer et rire,
Et pour lequel si souvent je soupire,
Sente en ses os, en son sang, en son ame,
Ou plus ardente, ou bien egale flame.
Alors ton faix plus aisé me sera,
Quand avec moy quelcun le portera.

FIN

Time will not pardon the brave Coliseum,
it will topple each city that holds our esteem;
and Time is accustomed even to quenching the fire
of Love, no matter how hot the desire.
But, alas, in me the flame grows still more fervent
with Time, and brings on worse and worse torment!
Paris's desire for Oenone was strong,³⁴
but his love didn't last for very long;
Medea was loved by Jason, so we hear³⁵—
but soon enough he threw her out the door.
Those women deserved the love that they had earned,
and, loving, to have been loved in return.
If those who are loved can leave love in the past,
shouldn't we who aren't loved let it go, at last?
So shouldn't I pray to you now, Love, to cease
this torture, and to let me rest in peace?
Don't make me look Death in the face to prove
that Death is more compassionate than Love!
If you really want me to love to the very end,
make him whom I love most, my all, my friend,
the only one who can bring me tears or laughter,
for whom I have sighed so often, follow after:
let him feel, in his blood, his bones, and in his soul,
an equal — or a hotter — desire boil.
Then your burdens won't weigh as heavily on me,
since someone who shares them will keep me company.³⁶

END



SONNETS

1

Non havria Ulysse o qualunqu'atro mai
Più accorto fu, da quel divino aspetto
Pien di gratie, d'honor et di rispetto
Sperato qual i' sento affanni e guai.

Pur, *Amour*, co i begli occhi tu fatt'hai
Tal piaga dentro al mio innocente petto,
Di cibo et di calor già tuo ricetta,
Che rimedio non v'è si tu n'el dai.

O sorte dura, che mi fa esser quale
Punta d'un Scorpio, et domandar riparo
Contr'el velen' dall'istesso animale.

Chieggo li sol' ancida questa noia,
Non estingua el desir a me si caro,
Che mancar non potrà ch'i' non mi muoia.



SONNETS

1 [The Sting]

Not even Ulysses, or someone as wise as he,³⁷
would guess that a face like yours — so full of grace
and honor and respect — such a divine face —
could bring suffering like the pain you're causing me.
Yes, Love, your eyes in all their piercing beauty³⁸
have stabbed my innocent breast in the same place
once nourished and kept warm in your embrace;
and still, you are my only remedy.
Hard destiny makes me act like one who's been
stung by a scorpion but still hopes to heal,³⁹
taking an antidote of the same poison.
I am wounded. I ask you only to kill the pain,
but not to extinguish the burning I crave to feel,
this desire whose broken life would break my own.⁴⁰

2

O beaux yeus bruns, ô regards destournez,
O chaus soupirs, ô larmes espendues,
O noires nuits vainement atendues,
O jours luisans vainement vainement retournez:

O tristes pleins, ô desirs obstinez,
O tems perdu, ô peines despendues,
O mile morts mile rets tendues,
O pires maus contre moy destinez.

O ris, ô front, cheveus, bras, mains et doigts:
O lut pleintif, viole, archet et vois:
Tant de flambeaus pour ardre une femmelle!

De toy me plein, que tant de feus portant,
En tant d'endroits d'iceus mon cœur tatant,
N'en est sur toy volé quelque estincelle.

2 [Handsome Brown Eyes]

Ah handsome brown eyes — ah eyes that turn away —
ah burning sighs; ah tears that stretch so far;
ah night I wait in vain for, without a star;
ah luminous and vainly returning day —
oh sad complaints; oh love's stubborn play;
oh lost hours; oh wasted pain and war;
oh thousand deaths, each in a tightened snare;
oh sullen evils that design against my way.
Ah laugh, ah forehead, hair, arm, hand, and finger,⁴¹
ah plaintive lute, viola, bow, and singer —⁴²
so many flames to engulf one single woman!
I despair of you; you carry so many fires
to touch my secret places and desires,
but not one spark flies back, to make you human.

3

O longs desirs, ô esperances vaines,
Tristes soupirs et larmes coutumieres
A engendrer de moy maintes rivieres,
Dont mes deus yeus sont sources et fontaines:

O cruautéz, ô durtez inhumaines,
Piteus regards des celestes lumieres:
Du coeur transi ô passions premieres,
Estimez vous croitre encore mes peines?

Qu'encor Amour su moy son arc essaie,
Que nouveaux feus me gette et nouveaux dars:
Qu'il se despise, et pis qu'il pourra face:

Car je suis tant navree en toutes pars,
Que plus en moy une nouvelle plaie,
Pour m'empirer, ne pourrait trouver place.

3 [Long-Felt Desires]

Long-felt desires, hopes as long as vain —
sad sighs — slow tears accustomed to run sad
into as many rivers as two eyes can add,
pouring like fountains, endless as the rain —
cruelty beyond humanity, a pain
so hard it makes compassionate stars go mad
with pity: these are the first passions I've had.
Do you think Love could root in my soul again?
If he arched the great bow back again at me,⁴³
licked me again with fire, and stabbed me deep
with the violent worst, as awful as before,
the wounds that cut me everywhere would keep
me shielded, so there would be no place free
for love. It covers me. It will pierce no more.⁴⁴

4

Depuis qu'Amour cruel empoisonna
Premierement de son feu ma poitrine,
Tousjours brulay de sa fureur divine,
Qui un seul jour mon cœur n'abandonna.

Quelque travail, dont assez me donna,
Quelque menasse et procheine ruïne:
Quelque penser de mort qui tout termine,
De rien mon cœur ardent et n'estonna.

Tant plus qu'Amour nous vient fort assaillir,
Plus il nous fait nos forces recueillir,
Et toujours frais en ses combats fait estre:

Mais ce n'est pas qu'en rien nous favorise,
Cil qui les Dieus et les hommes mesprise:
Mais pour plus fort contre les fors paroître.

4 [Stronger among the Strong]

Ever since I felt cruel Love first poison me⁴⁵
with the first of many fires in my chest,
with a sacred flame that never lets me rest,
for one single day He has not let me be.
Whatever troubles He's brought me to see,
whatever approaching ruin or distress,
whatever thoughts of death's final conquest —
none of it could shake my heart's desire free.
The more that Love assails us with His powers,
the more He makes us recollect what is ours
and reenter the fight, refreshed, before too long.
It's not because He favors us in any way,
He who scorns gods and men and makes them pay —
it's just so He'll look stronger, among the strong.

5

Clere Venus, qui erres par les Cieus,
Entens ma voix qui en pleins chantera,
Tant que ta face au haut du Ciel luira,
Son long travail et souci ennuieus.

Mon œil veillant s'atendrira bien mieus,
Et plus de pleurs te voyant gettera.
Mieus mon lit mol de larmes baignera,
De ses travaux voyant témoins tes yeus.

Donq des humains sont les lassez esprits
De dous repos et de sommeil espris.
J'endure mal tant que le Soleil luit:

Et quand je suis quasi toute cassee,
Et que me suis mise en mon lit lassee,
Crier me faut mon mal toute la nuit.

5 [Bright Venus]

Listen, bright Venus — errant in the air!⁴⁶
Listen to my clear voice move, as I sing
for your face, shining so high above everything,
about my long labor and my exhausting care.
My eyes grow softer with the night's long stare,
and as you look you'll see much, much more weeping.
More tears will dampen this bed, with your eyes watching,
though they trouble the sight of witnesses so rare.
Humans are weary now. Their spirits sleep
in a gentle hold of rest that pulls them deep.
But my pain will last as long as the sky is bright,
and when, almost completely broken, I
am pulled to my tear-wet bed, I'll plead and cry
with hurt that will hold me through the whole long night.

6

Deus ou trois fois bienheureus le retour
De ce cler Astre, et plus heureux encore
Ce que son œil de regarder honore.
Que celle là recevroit un beau jour,

Qu'elle pourroit se vanter d'un bon tour
Qui baiseroit le plus beau don de Flore,
Le mieus sentant que jamais vid Aurore,
Et y feroit sur mes levres sejour!

C'est à moy seule à qui ce bien est dû,
Pour tant de pleurs et tant de tems perdu:
Mais le voyant, tant lui feray de feste,

Tant emploiray de mes yeux le pouvoir,
Pour dessus lui plus de credit avoir,
Qu'en peu de temps feray grande conqueste.

6 [Aurora's Lessons]

It's twice happy, three times happy, the return
of his clear Star. And happier in turn⁴⁷
is she his gaze will honor: I discern
how she will spend a happy day's sojourn,
so very proud of the rare luck she will earn
when Flora's gifts, of handsomest kisses, burn —
the most fragrant lessons Aurora could ever learn,
she on whose lips that sweet bliss will adjourn!⁴⁸
And I am the one to whom this gift should go,
for all my tears, and my time lost in woe.
So, when I see him, I will show my best,
using my eyes so well in all their power
that I'll have the advantage; in that short hour,
I'll make myself a very grand conquest.

7

On voit mourir toute chose animee,
Lors que du corps l'ame sutile part:
Je suis le corps, toy la meilleure part:
Ou es tu donq, o ame bien aymee?

Ne me laissez par long temps pámee,
Pour me sauver apres viendrois trop tard.
Las, ne mets point ton corps en ce hazard:
Rens lui sa part et moitié estimee.

Mais fais, Ami, que ne soit dangereuse
Cette rencontre et revüe amoureuse,
L'accompagnant, non de severité,

Non de rigueur: mais de grace amiable,
Qui doucement me rende ta beauté,
Jadis cruelle, à present favorable.

7 [Soul and Body]

We know this: everything that feels life move
dies, if the soul and body separate.
Now, I'm the body, and you are my own soul mate.
So where have you gone to now, my life, my love?
Don't make me stay here soulless while you rove!
You'd come back too late to save my life! Don't wait!
This body of yours has reached a terrible state!
I need you now; I need how you move above
me. Come easily, so it's not dangerous
for us to meet again, all amorous;
don't be too hard on me, and I know you'll move
me to appreciate your grace. Restore
your beauty to me gently — so it will prove
gentle, although it was so cruel before.⁴⁹

8

Je vis, je meurs: je me brule et me noye.
J'ay chaut estreme en endurent froidure:
La vie m'est et trop molle et trop dure.
J'ay grans ennuis entremeslez de joye:

Tout à coup je ris et je larmoye,
Et en plaisir maint grief tourment j'endure:
Mon bien s'en va, et à jamais il dure:
Tout en un coup je seiche et je verdoye.

Ainsi Amour inconstamment me meine:
Et quand je pense avoir plus de douleur,
Sans y penser je me treuve hors de peine.

Puis, quand je croy ma joye estre certaine,
Et estre au haut de mon désiré heur,
Il me remet en mon premier malheur.

8 [I Live, I Die]

I live, I die: I burn and I also drown.⁵⁰
I'm utterly hot and all I feel is cold.
Life is too soft and too hard for me to hold;
my joy and my heavy burden are mixed in one.
I laugh at the same time that I weep and frown;
the tarnish of grief has marred my pleasure's gold;
my good flies away, but stays until it's old;
I wither just as I find out that I've grown.
This is how love guides me, so changeably
that when I think the pain has me controlled,
with my very next thought I find that I am free.
Then, just as I trust in joy so certainly
that the peak of a yearned-for hour makes me bold,
he shows me my familiar grief unfold.

9

Tout aussi tot que je commence à prendre
Dens le mol lit le repos désiré,
Mon triste esprit, hors de moy retiré,
S'en va vers toy incontinent se rendre.

Lors m'est avis que dedens mon sein tendre
Je tiens le bien, où j'ay tant aspiré,
Et pour lequel j'ay si haut souspiré,
Que de sanglots ay souvent cuidé fendre.

O dous sommeil, o nuit à moy heureuse!
Plaisant repos, plein de tranquillité,
Continuez toutes les nuiz mon songe:

Et si jamais ma povre ame amoureuse
Ne doit avoir de bien en verité,
Faites au moins qu'elle en ait en mensonge

9 [A Dream]

As soon as I, at last, begin to take
the rest I have been needing in my soft bed,
my soul grows sad and, shivering, is led
to fly to you and surrender.⁵¹ I mistake
myself, imagining my tender breast will make
a pillow for the longed-for, darling head
for which I've sighed so hard, for which I've shed
tears and sobbed sobs until I thought I'd break.
Sweet sleep! Night so full of happiness!
Tender rest, all tranquil and unvisited
by pain — keep sending this dream every night!
And if my poor soul ever can't possess
its actual good, then send to me, instead,
at least the lie — the wrong, deceptive sight.

10

Quand j'aperçoy ton blond chef couronné
D'un laurier verd, faire un Lut si bien pleindre,
Que tu pourrois à te suivre contreindre
Arbres et rocs: quand je te vois orné,

Et de vertus dix mile environné,
Au chef d'honneur plus haut que nul ateindre,
Et des plus hauts les louenges esteindre:
Lors dit mon cœur en soy passionné:

Tant de vertus qui te font estre aymé,
Qui de chacun te font estre estimé,
Ne te pourroient aussi bien faire aymer?

Et ajoutant à ta vertu louable
Ce nom encor de m'estre pitoyable,
De mon amour doucement t'enflamer?

10 [Ten Thousand Ornaments]

When I see your blond head in its laurel crown
and hear your melancholy lute strings sing⁵²
with a sound that would seduce almost anything,
even rocks or trees;⁵³ when I hear of your renown,
all the ten thousand ornaments that surround
your virtue, endowing you more than a king
so the highest praise grows dim with your sparkling —
then my heart cries, in a secret passion of her own:
since all your graces are well-loved and known —
since everyone's esteem for you has grown
so strong — shouldn't these graces help you start
to love? To all the virtues that make you great
adding knowledge of my own pitiable state,
so that my love can softly inflame your heart?

11

O dous regars, o yeus pleins de beauté,
Petits jardins, pleins de fleurs amoureuses
Ou sont d'Amour les flesches dangereuses,
Tant à vous voir mon œil s'est arrêté!

O cœur felon, o rude cruauté,
Tant tu me tiens de façons rigoureuses,
Tant j'ay coulé de larmes langoureuses,
Sentant l'ardeur de mon cœur tourmenté!

Donques, mes yeus, tant de plaisir avez,
Tant de bons tours par ses yeus recevrez:
Mais toy, mon cœur, plus les vois s'y complaire,

Plus tu languiz, plus en as de soucis,
Or devinez si je suis aise aussi,
Sentant mon œil estre à mon cœur contraire

11 [Opposition]

Ah! The soft looks of your so beautiful eyes
are tiny gardens growing amorous flowers;
Love's dangerous arrows nestle in their bowers,⁵⁴
and my eye has been arrested by the prize.
Ah! Your violent heart is so rude and cruel: it lies,
and binds me with such unrelenting powers
that my tears pour down in oh, such languorous showers,
at the torture of my ripe heart's ardent cries!
My eyes, you have discovered such great pleasure,
so much good fortune in his two eyes' treasure —
but my heart, the more you see the eyes' condition,
the more you languish, the more you feel the pain.
Do you think that I feel easy, that I gain,
when I feel my eyes and my heart in opposition?

12

Lut, compagnon de ma calamité,
De mes soupirs témoin irréprochable,
De mes ennuis controlleur véritable,
Tu as souvent avec moy lamenté:

Et tant le pleur piteus t'a molesté,
Que commençant quelque son delectable,
Tu le rendois tout soudein lamentable,
Feignant le ton que plein avoit chanté.

Et si tu veus efforcer au contraire,
Tu te destens et si me contreins taire:
Mais me voyant tendrement soupirer,

Donnant faveur à ma tant triste plainte:
En mes ennuis me plaire suis contrainte,
Et d'un dous mal douce fin esperer.

12 [To My Lute]

Lute, my companion in calamity,⁵⁵
irreproachable witness of my sighs,⁵⁶
faithful secretary of all my cries,
you have lamented so often with me
that my tears have driven you deep into pity.
Now, if a delicious sound starts to arise,
you turn it back to a sad lament, disguise
it with tones you've sung so much more frequently.
No matter how I try to force you the other way,
you struggle, and loosen your strings, and steal away
my song. Still, when you watch my tender sighing,
indulging me, listening again while I complain,
I know pleasure, I find an opposite in my pain,
and hope sweet suffering will lead me to sweet dying.

13

Oh si j'estois en ce beau sein ravie
De celui là pour lequel vois mourant:
Si avec lui vivre le demeurant
De mes cours jours ne m'empeschoit envie:

Si m'acollant me disoit, chere Amie,
Contentons nous l'un l'autre, s'asseurant
Que ja tempeste, Euripe, ne Courant
Ne nous pourra desjoindre en notre vie:

Si de mes bras le tenant acollé,
Comme du Lierre est l'arbre encerclé,
La mort venoit, de mon aise envieuse:

Lors que souef plus il me baiseroit,
Et mon esprit sur ses levres fueroit,
Bien je mourrois, plus que vivante, heureuse.

13 [The Ivy and the Tree]

Oh, if I were taken to that handsome breast⁵⁷
and ravished by him for whom I seem to die,
if I could live with him through all of my
short days, free of the envy of the rest;
if, clinging to me, he'd say, "We're so blessed,
dear love, let's be contented just to lie
together, proving to flood and stormy sky⁵⁸
how life can never break our close caress" —
if I could tighten my arms around him, cling
as ivy surrounds a tree with its circling,
then death would be welcome to envy and destroy.
And if then he'd give me another thirsty kiss
till my spirit flew away through his sweet lips,
I would die instead of live, and with more joy.⁵⁹

14

Tant que mes yeux pourront larmes espandre,
A l'heur passé avec toy regretter:
Et qu'aus sanglots et soupirs resister
Pourra ma voix, et un peu faire entendre:

Tant que ma main pourra les cordes tendre
Du mignard Lut, pour tes graces chanter:
Tant que l'esprit se voudra contenter
De ne vouloir rien fors que toy comprendre:

Je ne souhaite encor point mourir.
Mais quand mes yeus je sentiray tarir,
Ma voix cassee, et ma main impuissante,

Et mon esprit en ce mortel sejour
Ne pouvant plus montrer signe d'amante:
Prirey la Mort noircir mon plus cler jour.

14 [The Point of Death]

While my eyes can still pour out fountains of tears,
mourning our shared hours, gone now, so long gone;
while my slow sighs and sobs can still bemoan
the loss of you in a voice someone might hear;
while my hands can still caress this lute to clear
praises for any grace you might have shown,
and while my spirit remembers to bend alone
on you, on nothing that's outside your sphere —
I'll never want to reach the point of death!
Though when my eyes grow dry and this voicing breath
is broken and my hand is powerless,
and when my spirit takes its mortal flight,
beating with no more signs of love — yes, then, I'll press
death to come and cover my clearest day with night.

15

Pour le retour du Soleil honorer,
Le Zephir, l'air serein lui apareille:
Et du sommeil l'eau et la terre esveille,
Qui les gardoit l'une de murmurer,

En dous coulant, l'autre de se parer
De mainte fleur de couleur nompareille.
Ja les oiseaus es arbres font merveille,
Et aus passans font l'ennui moderer:

Les Nynfes ja en mile jeux s'esbatent
Au cler de Lune, et dansans l'herbe abatent:
Veus tu Zephir de ton heur me donner,

Et que par toy toute me renouvelle?
Fay mon Soleil devers moy retourner,
Et tu verras s'il ne me rend plus belle.

15 [The Returning of the Sun]

In honor of the returning of the Sun,⁶⁰
the Zephyr begins to move the peaceful air.⁶¹
Both water and earth have awakened out of their
deep sleep (which kept the first from its sweet run-
ning murmur, the second from dressing in the spun
rainbows that myriads of flowers wear).
The marvel of birds in trees has just begun,
cheering anyone who was passing in despair.
But nymphs still play at their thousand games and prance
in the clear Moon's light, beating the grass as they dance.
Oh Zephyr, will you give me some time with you,
so I can renew myself in your company?
Come help my Sun return into my view,
and see if he doesn't render me more lovely.

16

Après qu'un tems la gresle et le tonnerre
Ont le haut mont de Caucase batu,
Le beau jour vient, de leur revéu.
Quand Phebus ha son cerne fait en terre,

Et l'Océan il regaigne à grand erre:
Sa sœur se montre avec son chef pointu.
Quand quelque tems le Parthe ha combatu,
Il prent la fuite et son arc il desserre.

Un tems t'ay vù et consolé pleintif,
Et defiant de mon feu peu hatif:
Mais maintenant que tu m'as embrasee,

Et suis au point auquel tu me voulois:
Tu as ta flame en quelque eau arrosee,
Et es plus froit qu'estre je ne soulois.

16 [Impotence]⁶²

After a time in which thunder and hail
have beaten the mountains — the Caucasian height —⁶³
a fine day comes, and they're clothed again in light.
When Phoebus⁶⁴ has covered the land with his circling trail,
he dives to the ocean again, and his sister, pale
with her pointed crown, moves back into our sight.
When the Parthian warrior has spent some time in the fight,⁶⁵
he loosens his bow and turns from his travail.
When I saw you plaintive once, I consoled you, though
that provoked my fire, which was burning slow.
But now that you have given me your embrace
and I am just at the point where you wanted me,
you have quenched your own flame in some watery place;
now it's colder than my own could ever be.

17

Je fuis la vile, et temples, et tous lieux,
Esquels prenant plaisir à t'ouïr pleindre,
Tu peus, et non sans force, me contreindre
De te donner ce qu'estimois le mieus.

Masques, tournois, jeus me sont ennuieus,
Et rien sans toy de beau ne me peindre:
Tant que tachant à ce désir esteindre,
Et un nouvel obget faire à mes yeus,

Et des pensers amoureux me distraire,
Des bois espais sui le plus solitaire:
Mais j'aperçoy, ayant erré maint tour,

Que si je veus de toy estre delivre,
Il me convient hors de moymesme vivre,
Ou fais encor que loin sois en sejour.

17 [I Run from Town and Temple]

I run from town and temple, everywhere⁶⁶
that I felt pleased to hear of your desire
(you could, with just a little force, inspire
me to surrender — ah, surrender what they call rare . . .).
Masques, tournaments, and games are a dull affair;
without you, there is nothing to admire.
I'm struggling once again to quench my fire,
To find another object to hold my stare,
to distract me from these constant thoughts of love —
I'm the loneliest soul in this deserted grove!
Wandering further then, I realize:
if I really want to deliver myself from you,
I'll need to live outside myself. It's true.⁶⁷
Or else you will have to move further from my eyes.

18

Baise m'encor, rebaise moy et baise:
Donne m'en un de tes plus savoureux,
Donne m'en un de tes plus amoureux:
Je t'en rendray quatre plus chaus que braise.

Las, te pleins tu? ça que ce mal j'apaise,
En t'en donnant dix autres doucereus.
Ainsi meslans nos baisers tant heureux
Jouissons nous l'un de l'autre à notre aise.

Lors double vie à chacun en suivra.
Chacun en soy et son ami vivra.
Permets m'Amour penser quelque folie:

Tousjours suis mal, vivant discrettement,
Et ne me puis donner contentement,
Si hors de moy ne fay quelque saillie.

18 [Kiss Me Again]

Kiss me again, rekiss me, and then kiss⁶⁸
me again, with your richest, most succulent
kiss; then adore me with another kiss, meant
to steam out fourfold the very hottest hiss
from my love-hot coals. Do I hear you moaning? This
is my plan to soothe you: ten more kisses, sent
just for your pleasure. Then, both sweetly bent
on love, we'll enter joy through doubleness,
and we'll each have two loving lives to tend:
one in our single self, one in our friend.
I'll tell you something honest now, my love:⁶⁹
it's very bad for me to live apart.
There's no way I can have a happy heart
without some place outside myself to move.⁷⁰

19

Diane estant en l'espaisseur d'un bois,
Après avoir mainte beste assenee,
Prenoit le frais, de Nynfes couronnee.
J'allois resvant comme fay maintefois,

Sans y penser: quand j'ouy une vois,
Qui m'apela, disant, Nynfe estonnee,
Que ne t'es tu vers Diane tournee?
Et me voyant sans arc et sans carquois,

Qu'as-tu trouvé, o compagne, en ta voye,
Qui de ton arc et flesches ait fait proye?
Je m'animay, respons je, à un passant,

Et lui getay en vain toutes mes flesches
Et l'arc apres: mais lui les ramassant
Et les tirant me fit cent et cent bresches.

19 [A Meeting with Diana]

Diana, standing in the clearing of a wood⁷¹
after she had hunted her prey and shot it down,
breathed deep. Her nymphs had woven her a green crown.
I walked, as I often do, in a distracted mood,
not thinking — when I heard a voice, subdued
and quiet, call, "Astonished nymph, don't frown;
have you lost your way to Diana's sacred ground?"
Since I had no quiver, no arrows, it pursued,
"Dear friend, who were you meeting with today?
Who has taken your bow and arrows away?"
I said, "I found an enemy on the path,
and hurled my arrows at him, but in vain —
and then my bow — but he picked them up in wrath,
and with my arrows shot back hundreds of kinds of pain."

20

Predit me fut, que devoit fermement
Un jour aymer celui dont la figure
Me fut descrite: et sans autre peinture
Le reconnu quand vy premierement:

Puis le voyant aymer fatalement,
Pitié je pris de sa triste aventure:
Et tellement je forçay ma nature,
Qu'antant que lui aymay ardentement.

Qui n'ust pensé qu'en faveur devoit croitre
Ce que le Ciel et destins firent naitre?
Mais quand je voy si nubileus aprets,

Vents si cruels et tant horrible orage:
Je croy qu'estoient les infernaus arrets,
Qui de si loin m'ourdissoient ce naufrage.

20 [The Seer]

A seer told me of a man who stood
firm in his love, and described this steadfast lover.
I needed no other picture; I knew I would
know him—and I did, when I first looked him over.
And when I realized that his love was good,
I was shaken to pity by his sad endeavor,
forced myself to love him, and found I could
love him right back, with just as hot a fever.
Who wouldn't think that this love, birthed alive
by the union of Fate and Heaven, was bound to thrive?
Ah! When I see how thick the storm clouds form,
how cruel the winds blow, how angry the sea foam,
I think Hell is the place that birthed this storm,
bearing its long-foretold disaster home.⁷²

21

Quelle grandeur rend l'homme venerable?
Quelle grosseur? quel poil? quelle couleur?
Qui est des yeus le plus emmieleur?
Qui fait plus tot une playe incurable?

Quel chant est plus à l'homme convenable?
Qui plus penetre en chantant sa douleur?
Qui un dous lut fait encore meilleur?
Quel naturel est le plus amiable?

Je ne voudrois le dire assurément,
Ayant Amour forcé mon jugement:
Mais je say bien et de tant je m'assure,

Que tout le beau que lon pourroit choisir,
Et que tout l'art qui ayde la Nature,
Ne me sauroient acroitre mon desir.

21 [Love Forces My Judgment]

Which height makes a man earn the most admiration?⁷³
Which weight? Which hair? What color of skin and face?
Which eyes brim fullest with the honeyed grace
that spurs the most incurable sensation?
What song brings a man's voice the highest glorification,
its sadness penetrating the deepest place?
On whose voice does a lute leave the sweetest trace?
Which nature best feels love's warm palpitation?
I wouldn't want to claim that I know best,
since Love forces my judgment; nevertheless,⁷⁴
I do know one thing well — yes, I'm quite sure
that all the beauty I could choose to explore,
and all the art that might improve on Nature,
would never increase my desire one bit more.

22

Luisant Soleil, que tu es bien heureux,
De voir toujours de t'Amie la face:
Et toy, sa seur, qu'Endimion embrasse,
Tant te repais de miel amoureux.

Mars voit Venus: Mercure aventureus
De Ciel en Ciel, de lieu en lieu se glasse:
Et Jupiter remarque en mainte place
Ses premiers ans plus gays et chaleureus.

Voilà du Ciel la puissante harmonie,
Qui les esprits divins ensemble lie:
Mais s'ils avoient ce qu'ils ayment lointein,

Leur harmonie et ordre irrevocable
Se tourneroit en erreur variable,
Et comme moy travailleroient en vain.

22 [Celestial Loves]

How you shine, oh Sun, with happiness, to see
your love's own silver, gazing, steady face.⁷⁵
Your sister Moon, whom Endymion embraced,⁷⁶
is filled now with the feast of Love's fine honey.
And Mars sees Venus, and Mercury still ventures⁷⁷
from Sky to Sky, from place to glistening place,
and Jupiter notices everywhere the trace
of his many youthful hot and gay adventures.
See how, with the strength of the Sky's harmonies,
these heavenly bodies link their different ways.
If those celestial loves were to separate,
their harmony and irrevocable order
would change and vary in a turning error —
and they'd strive as I do, vainly, against fate.

23

Las! que me sert, que si parfaitement
Louas jadis ma tresse doree,
Et de mes yeus la beauté comparee
A deus Soleils, dont Amour finement

Tira les trets causez de ton tourment?
Ou estes vous, pleurs de peu de duree?
Et Mort par qui devoit estre honoree
Ta ferme amour et iteré serment?

Donques c'estoit le but de ta malice
De m'asservir sous ombre de service?
Pardonne moy, Ami, à cette fois,

Estant outree et de despit et d'ire:
Mais je m'assur', quelque part que tu sois,
Qu'autant que moy tu souffres de martire.

23 [This Tangle]

What good is it how well, alas, you sang
those long-ago praises to my rich gold hair,
or told me that my gorgeous eyes compared
to suns from which Love's brightest arrows sprang,⁷⁸
tormenting you again with each sharp new pang?
Oh tears, that dry so quickly in the air;
oh Death, on which you promised you would swear
your love — and where your solemn vows still hang
(or was the aim of your deceitful malice
to enslave me, while seeming to be in my service?).
This time, oh love, I know you'll pardon me
this tangle of all my anger and grief entwined;
since I know for sure, wherever you may be,
you endure your martyrdom, as I do mine.

24

Ne reprenez, Dames, si j'ai aymé:
Si j'ay senti mille torches ardentes,
Mille travaux, mille douleurs mordentes:
Si en pleurant, j'ay mon tems consumé,

Las que mon nom n'en soit par vous blamé.
Si j'ay failli, les peines sont presentes,
N'aigrissez point leurs pointes violentes:
Mais estimez qu'Amour, à point nommé,

Sans votre ardeur d'un Vulcan excuser,
Sans la beauté d'Adonis acuser,
Pourra, s'il veut, plus vous rendre amoureuses:

En ayant moins que moy d'ocasion,
Et plus d'estrange et forte passion.
Et gardez vous d'estre plus malheureuses.

FIN DES EUVRES DE LOVISE
LABÉ LIONNOIZE.

24 [Sisters, Do Not Reproach Me]

Sisters, do not reproach me that I've felt
such love it makes a thousand torches burn,⁷⁹
had a thousand cares, a thousand sorrows turn
my days to days that tears consume and melt.
Rough words like yours shouldn't burden my name with guilt;
if I've failed, you'll know I feel all the pain I earn.⁸⁰
So stop sharpening those needles. Someday you'll learn
how high Love flames every time it burns heartfelt,
even if there's no Vulcan as an excuse,⁸¹
no beauty like Adonis's to accuse.⁸²
On a whim, Love can force you to burn until —
even with less occasion than I have —
you'll suffer a stronger, and a stranger, love.
So watch out — you could be far more unhappy still.

END OF THE WORKS OF LOUISE
LABÉ, LYONNAISE



NOTES

CHAPTER ONE

1. The present edition reproduces the definitive text of François Rigolot in his 2004 edition of the *Complete Works*.

2. From its opening invocation of the "harsh laws of men," the *Letter* takes its place among what Colette Winn has called the "transgressive" female-authored texts challenging the social restrictions placed on early modern women ("La femme écrivain au XVI^e siècle: Ecriture et transgression," *Poétique* 84 [1990]: 442–43).

3. The text of Labé's letter is preceded by an explicit dedication in abbreviated form: A.M.C.D.B.L. ("A Mademoiselle Clémence de Bourges, Lyonnaise"). Jones (*Currency of Eros*, 159) and Berriot (*La Belle Rebelle*, 183) have read in Labé's insertion of the epithet "Lyonnaise" the author's highlighting of the common urban citizenship she shared with Clémence, over and above their class differences.

4. Two male-authored French documents published in the years prior to Labé's works demonstrate important resonances with her dedicatory letter. Antoine de Moulin's preface to the 1545 edition of Pernette du Guillet's *Rymes*, addressed to the women of Lyon, urges the female collective to follow in Pernette's literary footsteps and strive toward her acclaim. As Madeleine Lazard underlines, Labé's own preface "responds" to Moulin's exhortations — not through a male intermediary, but in the poetess's own voice (*Louise Labé*, 121). In a different vein, Claude de Taillemont's *Discours des champs faits à l'honneur et l'exaltation de l'Amour et des Dames* (Discourses on the Spheres Related to the Honor and Praise of Love and of Women [Lyon, 1553]), deplore the past barriers to female learning and argue for equal access for women and men to educational opportunity. In his recent critical book on Labé, François Rigolot posits the polemic links and temporal proximity between Taillemont's defense and her letter as an important example of the solidarity and exchange in the Lyonnais intellectual community that nurtured Labé's literary and cultural formation (*Louise Labé Lyonnaise*, 22–27). Moving farther back in time, prose defenses of women founded on exempla had long been the typical mode, as shown in Boccaccio's *De claris mulieribus* (Of Famous Women, c. 1380) and Christine de Pizan's 1405 *Livre de la Cité des Dames* (Book of the City of Ladies). Other sixteenth-century male defenses of women still frequently adopted the model of exemplarity, sometimes alternating with conventional Petrarchan stereotypes that placed women on pedestals and thus elided the

issue of active social change. Examples of such works include Castiglione's 1537 courtly polemic *Il Cortegiano* (The Book of the Courtier), Cornelius Agrippa's *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* (Declamation on the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sexe, 1529), and François de Billon's *Le Fort inexpugnable de l'honneur du sexe féminin* (The Inextinguishable Strength of the Honor of the Female Sex), published the same year as Labé's own volume, 1555.

5. Ann Rosalind Jones (*Currency of Eros*, chap. 1) and Constance Jordan (*Renaissance Feminism*, 175) explore the background and socioeconomic implications of the distaff and spindle emblem in early modern Europe, a period of mercantile expansion during which it lost much of its urgent domestic necessity, but maintained its power as an image of women's confinement to the home.

6. Cotgrave's 1611 *Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues* offers the following range of definitions for the term *vertu*: Virtue, goodnesse, honestie, sinceritie, integritie; worth, perfection, desert, merit; also valour, prowess, manhood; also energie, efficacie, force, power, might. Huguet's seven-volume 1950 dictionary of sixteenth-century French language presents similar threads of meaning: *force, courage, vaillance* (valor), *talent, propriété* (propriety); *pouvoir* (power), *qualité* (upstanding character).

7. Cathy Yandell, *Carpe Corpus: Time and Gender in Early Modern France* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2000), beautifully analyzes against the backdrop of the male Lyonnais establishment what she calls the "temporality of virtue" in Labé's works, from the *Letter's* challenge to the distaff and spindle to the poetry's vigilant consciousness of both the gift and the burden of investing time in self-expression (111–27).

8. François Rigolot's updated 2004 edition of Labé's works introduces the term "*secondes conceptions*" ("*second impressions*"), and I have followed this change in my translation. This replaces the 1986 edition's other plausible orthographic transcription of the term as "*fecondes impressions*" ("*fertile impressions*"), given that Labé is clearly drawing a distinction between earlier and later impressions, as Daniel Martin's exhaustive 1999 study of Labé's works has also argued (*Signe[s] d'Amante*, 43). The earlier transcription nevertheless retains a certain appeal, since more "fertile" or developed ideas are clearly the product of the later perspective of which Labé speaks. For an important discussion of Labé's notion of literary composition and recomposition, see Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism*, 176–77.

9. In an earlier study I have observed that "the rapidly accumulating diction of pleasure in the second half of the *Epistre* divides into two different networks, such that the more abstract and global terms of enjoyment ('contentement,' 'resjouit,' and later, 'aise') are related to intellectual activity, as against the more narrowly suggestive vocabulary evoking purely sensual satisfaction ('voluptez,' 'delectables')" (*Subject of Desire*, 36).

10. Rigolot, Préface to *Œuvres complètes*, 21–22 (my translation).

11. For a discussion of the projection of responsibility onto others as a frequent rhetorical tactic in the prefaces of women writers, see Anne Larsen, "'Un honneste passetems': Strategies of Legitimation in French Renaissance Women's Prefaces," *L'Esprit Créateur* 30, no. 4 (1990): 17–19. One effect of adducing advance outside support for potentially controversial or even censurable writing, of course, is to attract

the interest and curiosity of other readers (see Jones, *Currency of Eros*, 173, and Lesko Baker, *Subject of Desire*, 19).

12. One likely imperative for the author's strong attribution of both external support and responsibility for the publication of her works is the important fact, stressed by Lazard, that Labé stands alone among sixteenth-century French women writers in having received the so-called "privilege du Roy" (the king's authorization to publish) without the expressed intervention or facilitation of a specific male intermediary (*Louise Labé*, 122).

13. For discussions of the hybrid generic sources of the *Debate*, see Edith Benkov, "The Re-making of Love: Louise Labé's *Débat de Folie et d'Amour*," *Symposium* 46, no. 2 (1992): 95–98; Berriot, *La Belle Rebelle*, 170–72; Christiane Lauvergnat-Gagnière, "La rhétorique dans le *Débat de Folie et d'Amour*," in Demerson, *Louise Labé*, 53–56; Lazard, *Louise Labé*, 131; and Rigolot, Préface to *Œuvres complètes*, 10–11.

14. As Lazard notes (*Louise Labé*, 134), the idea of making Folly responsible for Cupid's blindness is original to Labé.

15. Anne R. Larsen, "Louise Labé's *Débat de Folie et d'Amour*: Feminism and the Defense of Learning," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 2 (1983): 46.

16. Given the centrality of the confrontation between the two sexes in this scene, I have chosen to specify the female gendering of the repeated nominal adjective "fole."

17. For an extended analysis of the rest of discourse 1 in the context of the protagonists' opening exchange, see Lesko Baker, *Subject of Desire*, 47–58.

18. Martin reveals other important "thematic echoes" between the letter and the *Debate's* first discourse, namely, varying presentations of the motifs of *glory* (the misplaced, self-attributed glory of Cupid versus the authentic glory obtainable by women through writing); *guidance* (Folly's self-portrayal as the guide for Love's arrows and ultimately for the blinded god himself versus Labé's own request for a guide in the person of Clémence de Bourges); and *public enlightenment* (Folly's self-purported modesty in not announcing her role in the praise attributed to Love, versus Labé's imperative to her female counterparts to illuminate the world on the rightful status of women as "companions" alongside men, the common vocabulary in this theme's presentation being the expression "faire entendre au monde" [to make the world understand]). *Signe(s) d'Amante*, 117–20.

19. As stated by François Rigolot and Julianne Jones Wright, Folly's culminating act (the blinding of Love) serves literally to obliterate the "objectifying look" with which the love god has viewed her. She can therefore no longer be simply a misunderstood reflection of his male suppositions. "Les irruptions de Folie: Fonction idéologique du porte-parole dans les *Œuvres* de Louise Labé," *L'Esprit Créateur* 30 no. 4 (1990): 74.

20. See *ibid.*, 76.

21. Labé's critique here alludes to the Petrarchan speaker's tendency — hyperbolized in the genre of the Renaissance *blason* — to laud the female object fragmentally in terms of her specific body parts, a phenomenon discussed in depth by Nancy Vickers in "Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme," *Critical Inquiry* 8 (1981): 265–79. As Jones has argued, in the listing of male attributes in sonnet 2 and in the longer interrogation of male attributes in sonnet 21, Labé turns the

gender tables on this descriptive mode, amusingly deriding its objectifying consequences (*Currency of Eros*, 168–70).

22. On the medieval rooting of the tradition of highborn love, see Berriot, *La Belle Rebelle*, 163.

23. Labé will in fact use a similar image of joint labor at the end of the final elegy, when she evokes Love's "burden" ("faix," l. 103) as easier to bear when shared with another person.

24. It is these instances of otherwise inexplicable pronoun slippage that Rigolot and Wright refer to as the "irruptions" of Folly's own voice into Mercury's oral argument ("Les irruptions de Folie," 78–81). In addition to the attempt to claim her verbal autonomy on the social and judicial stage, Folly's intrusions subtly anticipate Labé's rejection of the lady's mute posture in Petrarchan male lyric and her own poetic restoration of that silenced voice (Lesko Baker, *Subject of Desire*, 73–74).

25. See Robert D. Cottrell, "The Problematics of Opposition in Louise Labé's *Débat de Folie et d'Amour*," *French Forum* 12, no. 1 (1987): 39.

26. Mercury's amusing enumeration of these contradictions is as follows:

To have a heart divided against itself; to be at peace one minute, at war the next, and then at truce the next; to cover up and hide one's pain; to change expressions a thousand times a day; to feel the blood rush up and redden one's face, then suddenly drain away, leaving it pale, according to whether shame, hope, or fear besiege us; to go in search of what torments us, while pretending to run away from it, and yet to dread finding it; for every laugh, to breathe a thousand sighs; to deceive oneself, to burn from afar, but to freeze up close; to stumble on our words and fall abruptly silent — aren't these all signs of *someone no longer in control of his senses?*

(Avoir le cœur séparé de soyemesme, estre maintenant en paix, ores en guerre, ores en treves: couvrir et cacher sa douleur: changer visage mile fois le jour: sentir le sang qui lui rougit la face, y montant: puis soudein s'enfuit, la laissant palle, ainsi que honte, esperance, ou peur, nous gouvernent: chercher ce qui nous tourmente, feignant le fuir, et neanmoins avoir creinte de le trouver: n'avoir qu'un petit ris entre mile soupirs: se tromper soyemesme: bruler de loin, geler de pres: un parler interrompu: un silence venant tout à coup: ne sont ce tous signes d'un *homme aliéné de son bon entendement?* [Pp. 122–123 below; emphasis added.]

27. Rigolot observes and analyzes this key pronoun ambiguity in "Gender vs. Sex Difference in Louise Labé's Grammar of Love," in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 295, and in "Quel genre d'amour pour Louise Labé," *Poétique* 55 (1983), 313. I state my own reasons for attributing the final pronoun to Love in the final note for my translation of discourse 5.

28. Labé uses initials only to identify her dedicatee: Mademoiselle Clémence de Bourges, Lionnoize (see, 00 and n. 9 above). As mentioned earlier, Labé's insistence on referring to this young noblewoman with a formal invocation of her Lyonnais heritage attests to her pride in a shared female citizenship that blurs and supersedes their class differences (see p. 6, n. 9, and n. 3 above).

29. As confirmed by Cotgrave and Huguet, the sixteenth-century meanings of the French term *science* go back to its Latin etymologies (*scio, scire*: "to know"), and it is therefore best translated as "learning" (or, by extension, "education") or "knowledge," depending upon the context. The word *discipline(s)* pertains especially to the work of gaining knowledge, i.e. *study*, and, by extension in the plural, the materials to be mastered, i.e., *studies*.

30. The French term "usage" can refer to the actual use or using of something, or else to social custom or convention. Although translators Anne-Marie Bourbon (*Debate of Folly and Love* [New York: Peter Lang, 2000], 15) and Edith Farrell (*Louise Labé's Complete Works* [Troy, NY: Whitson, 1986], 27) have both adopted the first sense, I have preferred the second, as has Jeanne Prine ("Louise Labé," 149), because I feel it suggests more clearly the sense that material goods come to women principally through their societal bonds and commitments to men.

31. For a discussion of the multiple resonances of the word "virtue" (*vertu*) in the sixteenth century and its exploitation along gendered lines in this paragraph, see p. 22 and nn. 6–7 above.

32. Concerning the emblem of the distaff and spindle, see p. 22 and n. 5 above.

33. Labé's French phrase "contentement de soy," describing the particular nature of intellectual pleasure, could have the sense of either the satisfaction or contentment experienced within the self (the sense followed by Bourbon and Farrell) or the satisfaction or contentment uniquely produced by study (the sense followed by Prine). Although I tend to favor the first option, I have tried to capture both resonances in my translation.

34. Jupiter, Olympian king of gods and men.

35. Love, god of love, popularly known as Cupid, and the son of Venus.

36. Folly, daughter of Youth, first popularly allegorized as a goddess in the Renaissance by Erasmus, as pointed out by translators Anne-Marie Bourbon (*Debate of Folly and Love*, 24) and Edith Farrell (*Louise Labé's Complete Works*, 6).

37. Bourbon raises the issue of Labé's frequent shifts in verb tense in the *Debate*, as illustrated in the very first two sentences of the preliminary Argument. Although there is indeed an element of stylistic dissonance here in the rapid change from the past to the present tense, I have maintained this transition, because it immediately draws the reader into the "presentness" and dramatic vibrancy of the protagonists' upcoming encounter in the opening discourse.

38. Venus, goddess of love and beauty, and mother of Cupid.

39. Apollo, god of poetry, music, and prophecy and Love's representative at Jupiter's hearing.

40. Mercury, god of eloquence and cleverness, known as the messenger of the gods, and Folly's representative at Jupiter's hearing.

41. Given the centrality of the confrontation between the two sexes in this scene, I have chosen to specify the female gendering of the repeated nominalized adjective "fole."

42. The French phrase, "vendre tes coquilles," is certainly one of the most colorful expressions in the *Debate* and one of the most difficult to translate. A more literal

version of Labé's sentence ("Ce n'est pas a moy a qui tu dois vendre *tes coquilles*.")) is followed in Farrell's translation: "Don't try to sell your *pilgrim's shells* to me" (32). As Bourbon has noted in her own translation (38), these "*coquilles*" refer to the shells brought back by religious pilgrims from Santiago de Compostela and then sold for profit. Folly means here to equate Love's inflated rhetoric with worthless, misrepresented merchandise offered to the gullible buyer. However, Max Engammare, the editor of Droz Press, has recently pointed out that the *q* in "*coquilles*" was most likely inserted by Labé's printer to deflect attention away from the otherwise socially inappropriate term "*couilles*" (referring to the male testicles), this while leaving its resonance to the reader's imagination. In that context, I wish to thank François Rigolot for suggesting the translation "strut your stuff," which exploits the ambiguous connotation of "stuff" (boasting, nonsense, merchandise, virility).

43. Saturn, former ruler of the universe, overthrown by his son Jupiter. Mars, god of war. Satyrs, fauns, and sylvans, minor rural and woodland deities.
44. Pallas, another name for Athena, goddess of war and wisdom and a masterful weaver of tapestries. In elegy 3, Labé's speaker will reinvoké and measure herself against Pallas's artisanal talents.
45. Neptune, god of the sea, accompanied by his attendants, the Tritons.
46. Pluto, god of the underworld, stole Proserpina away as she screamed for her mother and whisked her off to Hades.
47. Vulcan, god of fire and forger of arms for the gods.
48. The Furies, three snaked-haired female spirits who avenged unpunished crimes. Harpies, monsters of prey with the head and upper body of a woman and the legs, tail, and claws of a bird.
49. In this sentence, I have translated the polyvalent term "*vertu*" as "power," applying to Love the typical male-gendered connotations of this word discussed in the introduction to this chapter (see p. 22).
50. The serpent of Epidaurus, known for its keen sight, became a medical emblem symbolizing the watchful eye of doctors over the health of their patients.
51. Circe, an enchantress who changed men to swine in Homer's *Odyssey*. Medea, the volatile sorceress who assisted Jason in his quest for the Golden Fleece.
52. In the series of famous transformation myths included in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Jupiter turns himself into a bull to carry off the Phoenician princess Europa; into a golden rain to father Perseus by the nymph Danaë; and into an eagle to snatch up the nymph Asteria.
53. Vulcan, Venus's husband, caught his wife and Mars in bed together by setting up chains in which they were entrapped.
54. The smitten Paris's abduction of Helen from King Menelaus of Sparta was the famous catalyst of the Trojan War.
55. As movingly recounted in book 4 of the *Aeneid*, Queen Dido of Carthage welcomed Aeneas and his entourage to her shores after the fall of Troy, only to fall so deeply in love with him that when his fortune finally beckoned him to embark for Italy, she committed suicide on a funeral pyre.

56. After the death of her husband, King Mausolus of Caria, Queen Artemisia memorialized him with the construction of the fourth-century BCE Mausoleum, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. But still wild with grief, she is said to have met her own death after drinking a mixture containing her husband's ashes.
57. In Greek and Roman mythology, the Fates were the three goddesses who controlled human life and destiny through their work at the spinning wheel. Accordingly, the first goddess, Clotho, was responsible for spinning the thread of life; the second, Lachesis, for deciding upon its length; and the third, Atropos, for cutting it off.
58. I have chosen to translate literally Venus's characterization of Folly as "the most wretched *thing* of all" ("la plus miserable chose du monde") in order to emphasize how Labé attributes to both Love and his mother the misogynist rhetorical tactic of dehumanizing the female protagonist as part of their attempt to claim power and superiority over her. This linguistic strategy is repeated later in the scene, when Venus likens Folly to a "mad beast" ("beste si furieuse").
59. Diomedes, a Greek warrior at the siege of Troy, injured Venus's wrist as she struggled to save Aeneas, the Trojan hero and her son with Anchises.
60. Adonis, a young man esteemed for his exceptional beauty and loved by Venus. According to some sources, Apollo grew so jealous of Adonis's affections for Venus that he sent a wild boar to kill the boy, thereby provoking Venus's wrath. It is this history that Venus alludes to further on when she requests Apollo to be Love's defender.
61. In his role as god of the sun, Apollo nurtured and cultivated lands, among them Venus's gardens on the island of Cyprus and on Mount Ida in Crete.
62. In this discourse, "love" as an abstract concept begins to be interwoven more frequently with "Love" as the name for the male protagonist, Cupid. (Prior to this discourse, the noun as concept is used only once (in the plural: "Amours"), designating the "love story" of Dido toward the end of discourse 1.) Here in discourse 4, as well as in discourse 5, Labé most frequently (although not in every single instance), retains the capitalization of the term regardless of its referent. In my translation, beyond the references to the love god himself, I will choose the uppercase or lowercase spelling according to the context, capitalizing the word only when it refers simultaneously to the character and the concept (as in this sentence), or when the concept is used in an overarching proverbial or aphoristic formulation.
63. A reinvocation of Jupiter's metamorphoses first mentioned in the *Debate's* opening scene, and glossed above, n. 52.
64. Jupiter sustained challenges to his rule by a race of ancient giant deities, also known as the Titans, who tried to reach the heavens from earth by piling mountains one on top of the other, but who were buried under the rubble of their own structures when the Olympian king hurled his thunderbolt. Briareus, a monstrous giant with a hundred hands, was supposedly allied with the Olympians against the Titans but himself joined a rebellion against Jupiter. So numerous were the attacks to Jupiter's power that his retaliatory thunderbolts at one point threatened to burn up the entire universe.
65. Anne-Marie Bourbon (*Debate of Folly and Love*, 134 n. 3) rightly points out the syntactical ambiguity opening this sentence, where the word "dernier" could be taken to modify "festin" ("the last banquet") or Love himself ("il," i.e., the last one to arrive at the

banquet). Although, as she indicates, the previous action in discourse 1 invites the second interpretation, I have followed Edith Farrell in selecting the other option, since it seems to me unlikely that Apollo — Love's defender — would wish to draw attention to the tardiness of his own client. Beginning here, when Apollo describes the opening encounter between Love and Folly, Labé shifts once again to the present tense, as she did in the Argument. I continue to uphold this tense shift for the same reasons of dramatic vibrancy that I adduced in my translation of the Argument.

66. Bourbon's note (*Debate of Folly and Love*, 134 n. 6) describing Folly's attack as a violation of the protected sacred site of Jupiter's palace helps to clarify the accurate sense of this difficult sentence.

67. Apollo refers to the story of Ixion, who was fastened eternally to a burning wheel in Hades as punishment for his attempt to seduce Jupiter's wife, Juno.

68. Sicily's Aetna was one of the mountains under which Jupiter buried the Giants who rebelled against his reign.

69. Apollo here invokes the famous punishment inflicted by Jupiter on Prometheus, who for having stolen fire from the gods was imprisoned on Mount Caucasus, where every day an eagle came and devoured his liver.

70. This sentence and the following one pose problems, owing to the ambiguity of the referent in the phrase "A leur profit," as noted by Bourbon (*Debate of Folly and Love*, 135) and shown by the wide divergence between her translation and that of Farrell. I have basically followed Bourbon's interpretation, which makes more sense in context, although my reading of the difficult phrase "n'est procedee de gloire" in the second sentence differs from hers.

71. Orpheus, the mythological Thracian musician and poet whose magical skill on the lyre could delight and appease even the most brutal men and animals, as well as trees, rocks, and other elements of the natural world.

72. In Greek legend, Orestes, the son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, would likely have been murdered along with his father by his mother and her lover Aegisthus, had he not been sent in secret by his sister, Electra, to the home of his uncle, King Strophios. There Orestes was raised alongside his cousin Pylades, and the two became inseparable lifelong friends.

73. As Rigolot notes in his edition (*Œuvres complètes*, 70 n.1), the reference to different theories concerning Love's origins suggests Labé's familiarity with Plato's *Symposium*. Among the ancient forces deified here, Zephyrus is the personification of the west wind, considered among the gentlest of the wood-land gods.

74. Philios, the name sometimes attributed to Jupiter, comes from the Greek *philos* (friend) and *philein* (to love).

75. Plato's androgyne combined both male and female characteristics in one unified being.

76. Castor and Pollux were the twin sons of Leda. Castor was fathered by Leda's husband, Tyndarus, whereas Pollux was fathered by Jupiter, who had seduced the faithful Leda by assuming the form of a swan. Their fraternal love was so great that when Jupiter decided to grant immortality to the wounded Pollux following a battle that claimed Castor's life, Pollux asked that he be able to share this immortality with

his dead brother. According to legend, Jupiter granted this request and conferred immortality to each of them on alternate days.

77. These three allusions span Old Testament, classical, and medieval contexts. As recounted in the first book of Samuel, when King Saul revealed to his son Jonathan his intention to kill David, Jonathan pleaded with his father to recall David's defense of the kingdom of Israel against the Philistines and finally convinced the king to spare David's life. In Roman legend, Damon and Pythias were such devoted friends that when Pythias had been condemned to death for challenging King Dionysius of Syracuse but wished a stay of his execution to finalize his affairs, Damon offered himself up as a pledge of Pythias's return — an act that moved the king to pardon them both. Alexis, the peripatetic saint of medieval lore, was said to have left his marriage bed and entrusted his bride to his friend in order to flee and answer God's calling. Bourbon's note (*Debate of Folly and Love*, 136) also relates this allusion to an episode in book 10 of the *Decameron*, where Gisippo gives his bride, Sofronia, to his lovesick friend Tito Quinzio Fulvo on his wedding night.

78. King Darius tried for many months to conquer Babylon, succeeding finally when his devoted companion Zopyrus feigned betrayal and gained command of the Babylonian army, only to stage their defeat.

79. As the story goes, the king of Bosphorus scorned the request by the young Scythian Arsacomas to marry his daughter, but Arsacomas, aided by his two cherished friends, eventually prevailed and won the princess's hand.

80. In one of the most renowned stories in classical mythology, King Minos's daughter, Ariadne, out of love for the great slayer of monsters Theseus, provided the hero with the thread that allowed him to find his way out of the labyrinth after he destroyed the Minotaur. Hypermnestra was the only one of the Danaides, the fifty daughters of King Danaus forced into marriage to the fifty sons of the king's twin brother, who disobeyed her father's order to kill her husband, Lynceus.

81. This sentence and the previous one are excellent examples of instances in which the word "Love" can be taken to refer simultaneously to Cupid and to the abstract concept (see n. 62 above). In my translation I have retained the capitalization prioritizing the male protagonist as the primary referent in both sentences, given the context of Apollo's defense.

82. Rigolot remarks that the word "misanthropes" was a recent addition to the French lexicon, and that it was used and defined by Rabelais in the *Brief Declaration* appearing with his *Fourth Book (Quart Livre)* (*Œuvres complètes*, 72 n. 1). Rabelais's inspiration seems likely both in the scatological humor and the hyperbolic enumerations in the following comic passage.

83. Like his fellow poet and musician Orpheus (see n. 71 above), Amphion exercised magical power with his song. When he played his lyre, the stones being used to build the walls of Thebes fell into place all by themselves.

84. I retain the uppercase spelling for the conceptual notion of "Love" in this aphoristic sentence (see n. 62 above). Rigolot notes Labé's allusion to Plato's notion of love in the *Symposium* (*Œuvres complètes*, 74 n. 1).

85. Virginals or spinets (*espinettes*) were small varieties of single-keyboard harpsichords in use during the sixteenth century.

86. Pavaues (*pavaues*) were slow, elegant early modern court dances of Spanish and Italian origin that gained popularity in France; passamezzos (*passemeses*) were faster Italian dances; and *gaillardes* (which I have translated as “lively waltzes”) were very fast French dances set in three-quarter tempo.

87. Aubades were musical pieces played or sung at dawn or during the morning, in contrast to serenades performed in the evening.

88. Morris dances were old folk dances common especially in England during special celebrations such as May Day.

89. As Bourbon notes, the referent in the final part of this sentence is grammatically obscure in the French text (*Debate of Folly and Love*, 137 n. 40); given the nature and context of the vignette being recounted, I translate this segment as applying to the wife.

90. A Roman philosopher and satirist from the second century CE, Apuleius was the author of *The Golden Ass*, a romance widely read in early modern Europe recounting the experiences of a young man magically transformed into an ass.

91. Musaeus and Linus were two mythological poets and musicians linked with Orpheus, the second of whom incurred Apollo’s jealousy and was purportedly killed by him. Alcaeus and Sappho were seventh-century BCE Greek poets, male and female respectively, from the island of Lesbos. The original text of Sappho’s most famous love poem had just been recovered and published in Venice in the mid-1550s, and this ancient woman writer famed for her passionate lyrics inspires the opening section of Labé’s first elegy. The “Sage” refers to Socrates, so named and prized above all others for his wisdom.

92. In addition to the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid (43 BCE–17 CE) was the author of the *Amores*, a volume of short love poems; the *Heroides*, a volume of verse letters written in the voices of women abandoned by their lovers; *Ars amatoria* (The Art of Love), a handbook on love; and *Remedia amoris* (The Remedies of Love), an advice book for the lovelorn.

93. See n. 55 above.

94. The women enumerated here were notorious for their deviant passions. As narrated in Labé’s first elegy, Semiramis, the widowed queen and fierce leader of Babylon, abandoned her armies to indulge her incestuous passion for her own son. The unhappy loves of the nymph Byblis for her twin brother, Caunus, and of Myrrha for her father, King Cyniras, to whom she bore a child, Adonis, are recounted at length in books 9 and 10, respectively, of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Canace was ordered by her father to kill herself after giving birth to her brother Macareus’s child. Finally, Phaedra, daughter of King Minos, whom Theseus married after killing the Minotaur, fell in love with her stepson, Hippolytus, and in a jealous rage ordered his death at the hands of Neptune before committing suicide herself.

95. In the final two sentences of this paragraph I have changed the verb tenses in Labé’s original text from the future perfect to the simple future, in order to make the passage more colloquial and less ponderous. The use of the conditional in these entreaties to Jupiter might sound more natural still, but it is clearly advantageous for Apollo to keep his discourse in the future in order convey his expectation that Jupiter will indeed take the course of action being recommended. Likewise, I have had to be

creative in my translation of “Folie amoureuse” (normally, “Folly in love”) to give idiomatic sense to the expression.

96. See n. 57 above.

97. The last part of this sentence in the French text is very difficult to decipher, and has been glossed both by Rigolot (*Œuvres complètes*, 80 n. 1) and Bourbon (*Debate of Folly and Love*, 138 n. 54). I have taken the license to reformulate these enigmatic phrases in such a way that contextually they make sense.

98. In one of his famous transformations, Jupiter disguised himself as Amphitryon, the husband of Alcmena, and impregnated her with the future Hercules. During this seduction Jupiter did not allow the sun to rise for three days in order to extend his “night” of love with Alcmena.

99. By intimating his knowledge of the future, Apollo is referring to his role as god of prophecy. In this final pronouncement, the word “revoluciones” in the French text, as defined in the sixteenth-century lexicon, suggests the passage of time, as calculated by the length of the orbits of planets and stars.

100. One of Pallas Athena’s notable features was her virginity, and thus her refusal to submit to Cupid’s temptations. Likewise, her role as goddess of wisdom places her in antagonistic opposition to Folly.

101. As Bourbon (*Debate of Folly and Love*, 138 n. 61) notes, Apollo’s statue embodying truth was the site of trials held in the Roman Forum.

102. I agree with Bourbon that this sentence is somewhat obscure in French and that the person who loves and champions the victim (Love) here is his mother Venus. However, the expression “avoir affaire à” (to be involved, entangled, or implicated in) does not to my knowledge include the specific sense of having sexual affairs, as is reflected in her translation and explanation (*Debate of Folly and Love*, 97 and 138 n. 63).

103. The indirect references to Venus continue here, as Love’s attack on Mars catalyzed his adulterous liaison with Vulcan’s wife. See n. 53 above.

104. This is the first of the four instances in discourse 5 where the slippage from third-person to first-person pronouns indicates Folly’s own interruption of Mercury’s argument. See p. 34 and n. 24 above.

105. See n. 66 above.

106. As in the case of the substantive “love” (*amour*), the noun “folly” (*folie*) begins to be used more frequently to evoke an abstract concept, in addition to the name of the female protagonist. Here again Labé is not completely consistent in her choice of uppercase or lowercase spelling. In my translation, therefore, beyond the unambiguous uppercase references to the protagonist, I will once again select the uppercase or lowercase spelling according to the context, capitalizing the word only when it refers simultaneously to the character and the concept (see n. 62 above).

107. Alexander the Great (356–323 BCE), king of Macedon, was notorious not only for his military conquests but for his drunken excesses.

108. A Greek philosopher from Zeno’s third-century BCE school of stoicism and one of the founders of the Athenian Academy, Chrysippus was renowned for his voluminous writings.

109. Euripus was the strait between the island of Euboea and Boetia in ancient Greece, well-known for its violent and unpredictable currents in both directions. As Bourbon (*Debate of Folly and Love*, 139 n. 71) notes, the great Aristotle is said to have drowned there, unable to overcome his grief at being unable to solve the puzzle of its currents. Euripus becomes a central image in Labé's sonnet 13, where it subverts the classic Petrarchan topos of the stormy seas as a metaphor of the lyric speaker's disorientation and serves rather as a purely external phenomenon against which the unified lovers protect themselves. (Lesko Baker, *Subject of Desire*, 141–42).

110. Crates, a fourth-century BCE cynic philosopher and follower of Diogenes, got rid of his worldly possessions so that he could live and teach the ascetic life. One story recounts that Diogenes convinced him to throw his entire fortune into the sea.

111. Empedocles was a fifth-century BCE Greek philosopher who attempted to show that he was a god by seeking a death in which he would leave no mortal trace and diving into the crater of Mount Etna. His misrepresentation of himself became apparent when one of his brass sandals was coughed back up by the volcano.

112. Diogenes was the eminent cynic philosopher from the fourth century BCE who touted his austere lifestyle by living in a tub. Socrates' follower Aristippus believed he shared his mentor's greatness because he enjoyed the undivided attention of Denys the Tyrant.

113. Both Farrell and Bourbon have chosen to translate this sentence in the form of a rhetorical question, following the model of the previous sentence. However, Labé's original text does not present this sentence as a question, and I have preferred to retain its declarative form, which entails a slightly different but, I believe, legitimate grammatical interpretation of the opening verbal structure.

114. As Bourbon (*Debate of Folly and Love*, 139 n. 76) points out, the expression "to go plant one's cabbages" popularly carries the connotation of retiring to country life. I combine the literal and figural renderings in my translation.

115. For the second time, the unexpected switch to the first-person pronoun signals Folly's brief appropriation of Mercury's voice (see n. 104 above). The translation of Folly's resolve to "dire mon fait" is not without ambiguity. Farrell and Bourbon have translated this phrase as referring to Folly's legal "case." However, I prefer to assume that "mon fait" refers to a person's character or way of being (as documented in the *Dictionnaire Robert*), especially since the following segment of Mercury's oration deals with Folly's role in the world rather than with her "legal" dispute with Cupid.

116. Lucullus was a first-century BCE Roman consul and general who was renowned for his wealth and luxury, which he gained the reputation for displaying in magnificent feasts. Claudius was emperor of Rome from 41 to 54 CE. As Rigolot (*Œuvres complètes* 90 n. 3) notes, the inspiration for Labé's parenthetical reference may come from the fact that Claudius was born in her home city of Lyon.

117. In respect to Labé's phrase "la dissolution des habits," although in modern French the term *habits* refers exclusively to fashion or dress, in sixteenth-century French it may apply to customs or manners. In my translation I have taken the license to color this second connotation more strongly by proposing the word "morals," which I believe works well with the sense of "decline" communicated by the word

"dissolucion." I nevertheless see no lexical inaccuracy in Farrell's choice to translate the phrase as "excesses in customs" (74) (since *dissolucion* carries this sense as well), or in Bourbon's preference to translate it as "indecentcy of clothes" (113).

118. Mercury here refers back to the opening section of Apollo's oration, which evoked the burying of the Titans under Mount Etna (Mount Gibil) as well as the chaining of Prometheus to Mount Caucasus. See nn. 64, 69 above.

119. Folly's Olympian mother was Jeunesse, the goddess of youth. In my translation of the final clause of this sentence, I have adapted in English the paraphrase provided by Rigolot in modern French (*Œuvres complètes* 92 n. 1).

120. In the first of these two allusions to the sudden onset of love, the Greek noblewoman Cydippe was said to have received an apple from her suitor of humble means, Acontius, on which he had cleverly inscribed a message in his beloved's own name, vowing on the goddess Artemis-Diana that she would marry and remain true to him. The second reference is to the renowned passage in Dante's *Inferno* recounting how Paolo and Francesca, a married woman, fell in love as they read the adulterous tale of Lancelot and Guinevere.

121. Here Mercury begins a critique of the Neoplatonic theorist Marsilio Ficino's commentary on the visual origins of Petrarchan love, what is known as the Petrarchan *innamoramento*.

122. The young man in question was from Cnidus, a city in ancient Asia Minor that housed a well-known statue of Venus-Aphrodite in the temple named in her honor.

123. Bourbon and Farrell have both translated "et s'ils s'en trouvent mal" with the hypothetical "if," suggesting the uncertain nature of the lover's suffering. I prefer the emphatic sense of "si," since there seems little doubt that Mercury views concealed passion as heightening internal anguish and as a mark, as he states, of another brand of folly.

124. Apelles was a Greek painter from the fourth century BCE famed in particular for his self-portrait and his portraits of Alexander the Great and others.

125. As noted by Bourbon (*Debate of Folly and Love*, 141 n. 95) and Rigolot (*Œuvres complètes*, 93 n. 3), the symbolism in the colors of the servants' uniforms demonstrates character traits popularized in the *Blason des couleurs*: red for long-suffering devotion, blue for determination, and green for hope.

126. Both Bourbon and Farrell have introduced the suitor's lovesick gestures by the adverb "meanwhile." But Labé's term "ce pendant," in sixteenth-century usage, can have the sense of "during" or "in the midst of." It makes sense if the lady has slammed the door on the suitor and refused to see him privately that he would need to pledge his passion once he had succeeded in meeting her publicly, rather than while he is banished from her company.

127. Bourbon (121) conveys in her translation the sense that another man will definitely supplant the suitor as the lady's talking companion, whereas Farrell (79) sees the "rival" as having as much chance as the suitor in engaging her in conversation. I believe that both translations can be justified grammatically (depending on differing adverbial interpretations of the expression "aussi tot . . . que"); however, I incline more to an adaptation of Farrell's, especially given that in the following

sentence the suitor, in my reading, is still said to consider himself “happy.” (In that subsequent sentence, where there are ambiguous pronoun structures, Bourbon also attributes to the woman, rather than to the suitor himself, the opinion that he should still be happy (see *Debate of Folly and Love*, 141 n. 99), which fits well with her reading of the previous sentence).

128. In one of the most famous myths recounted in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (book 10), the magical musician Orpheus pleads for the return of his wife Eurydice after her premature death and moves the gods to secure her release from the underworld on the condition that as he leads her back he will not turn around and look at her until they have reached the upper world. But just before they arrive on earth, in his eagerness to see her Orpheus glances behind him, and Eurydice falls back into the depths and is lost to her husband forever.

129. Greek legend tells that the gods had the great hero Hercules sold as a slave to Omphale, queen of Lydia, to make amends for his murder of one of Mercury’s friends. Hercules fell passionately in love with the queen, submitting himself to her whims to the extent that he dressed as a woman and did her spinning while she wore his lion skin. The wise King Solomon of Israel (tenth century BCE) kept a large number of wives. Hannibal, the second-century BCE Carthaginian general famed for crossing the Alps to invade Italy in the Punic Wars, was said to have debauched himself in a sordid love affair.

130. Folly’s third interruption of Mercury’s speech extends this time for three sentences, which feature multiple incursions of first-person subject and object pronouns (see nn. 104, 115 above).

131. It is interesting that Mercury resumes his argument by reasserting his own “I,” which he has used only in rare instances since the early part of his exposition. It suggests, perhaps, that he feels too much intervention on the part of his client will not work in their favor.

132. Amphion and Zethus were twin sons born to Antiope, daughter of King Nyc-teus of Thebes, after Zeus disguised himself as a satyr and impregnated her in her sleep. After fleeing her father’s wrath and marrying the king of Scyion, Antiope was captured and forced to return to Thebes by her uncle when he laid siege to her husband’s city. Amphion and Zethus were born on her journey back to Thebes and were abandoned to be raised by shepherds. Zethus himself became a shepherd and came to hate his brother on account of Amphion’s magical skill on the lyre. However, Amphion regained Zethus’s regard when, through his music, he made the stones fall into place for the wall around Thebes, their mother’s birthplace (see n. 83 above).

133. Mercury indirectly refers to one of Jupiter’s most famous erotic escapades (already evoked in the opening discourse by Folly herself): his seduction of Danaë in the disguise of a golden rain (see n. 52 above).

134. Atalanta was a beautiful, swift-footed young maiden who had been abandoned at birth and raised in the woods by hunters under the protection of the goddess Artemis-Diana. Like her protectress, Atalanta excelled at hunting and spurned the advances of all those who fell in love with her. Since she could run faster than anyone else, she would challenge each of her suitors to a footrace, promising to marry whichever one could defeat her. Hippomenes finally accomplished that feat,

but only with the help of Venus, who gave him three golden apples to throw into Atalanta's path, thereby making her slow down enough to lose the race.

135. The god of gardens refers to Priapus, the son of Venus and Bacchus, who was said to be endowed with a huge phallus in a constant state of erection, and who thereby became associated with procreative power. He enjoyed a great following among the Romans, who often placed his statue in gardens to promote the growth of flowers and fruits.

136. A huge monster with three bodies and three heads, Geryon possessed a herd of red cattle coveted by King Eurysthios, who sent Hercules to slay the creature and seize the animals in what became the hero's tenth great labor.

137. For the fourth and last time, Folly breaks into the argument and interrupts Mercury's defense in order to have her final, unapologetic say (see nn. 104, 115, and 130 above).

138. In his closing argument, Mercury associates Folly with a group of pleasure-loving deities: Genius, god of nature; Youth, Folly's mother; Bacchus, god of wine and revelry; and Priapus, already evoked in his virile role as god of gardens (see n. 135 above).

139. In Roman mythology, Saturn was assimilated to the Greek god Cronos, one of the Titans who challenged Jupiter's reign. Here Mercury recalls the adulatory recounting of Jupiter's retaliation by which Apollo began his speech.

140. In a style similar to that of the opening Argument, the tense shifts rapidly from past to present in Labé's "stage direction." I have once again chosen to maintain this transition, since the switch to the present in the final sentence lends a certain immediacy to Jupiter's decree.

141. Clearly the idea being presented here is that the final verdict will not be handed down for centuries to come, implying that the relationship between Love and Folly is an eternal issue. It seems appropriate to retain the curious numerical wording, however, according to the letter of the text.

142. Rigolot (*Œuvres complètes*, 15 and 103 n. 2) has drawn prominent attention to the ambiguous nature of the French pronoun "lui" (him or her) in this sentence, for it leaves open the possibility that although Folly is leading the way, either protagonist could be giving directions. From the point of view of critical analysis, this grammatical slippage provides a rich focal point of Labé's clever assertion of the notion of interdependency she espouses so vehemently (see Lesko Baker, *Subject of Desire*, 80–81). Farrell's translation accentuates the ambiguity by avoiding attribution of the pronoun, in an impersonal phrase where she has Folly guiding Love "wherever it seems best" (*Louise Labé's Complete Works*, 87). Bourbon (*Debate of Folly and Love*, 133 and 142–43 n. 123), on the other hand, chooses to attribute the prerogative of selecting the path to Love, arguing that this is more consistent with Jupiter's deferential temporary verdict. Since for the purposes of translation (versus analysis), it seems to me undesirable to elide the reference of a pronoun that is clearly center stage in the sentence, I have adopted Bourbon's stance. Not only is her conceptual argument convincing but there is a grammatical argument to be made that normally a pronoun should refer to the immediate antecedent, which in this case is indeed Love.

CHAPTER TWO

Note—all notes below are by Deborah Lesko Baker.

1. For helpful overviews concerning the thematic structuring of the elegies and sonnets and/or the various strands of dialogue between them, see especially Keith Cameron, *Louise Labé*, 42–25 and 61–85; and François Lecercle, "L'erreux d'Ulysse: Quelques hypothèses sur l'organisation du *Canzoniere* de Louise Labé," in Demerson, *Louise Labé*, 207–21, reprinted in Alonso and Viennot, *Louise Labé 2005*, 169–80. For a much more extensive discussion of these structural and intertextual issues, see Daniel Martin, *Signe(s) d'Amante*, 157–67, 185–96, and 197–375.
2. In order to sustain and prioritize the rhyme scheme of the original, Finch occasionally makes small modifications to Labé's decasyllabic lines by adding or suppressing a syllable.
3. In her book *Fictions of Sappho: 1546–1937* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), Joan DeJean underlines Labé's central role in the French literary appropriation of Sappho as a figure representing the claim to female writing: "She is the first of a number of French women writers, notably Scudéry and Stael, elaborately to stage her accession to authorship through an identification with the original woman writer, as the process by which she becomes a Sappho in her own right" (38–39). For an overview of the rebirth of Sappho in the literary circles of early modern Europe, see Lazard, *Louise Labé* (111–16); for more extended discussion, see Rigolot, *Louise Labé Lyonnaise*, 31–67, and "Louise Labé et la redécouverte de Sappho," *Nouvelle Revue du seizième siècle* 1 (1983): 19–31.
4. The present edition reproduces the definitive text of François Rigolot in his 2004 edition of the *Complete Works*.
5. Mary B. Moore elaborates on this connection in her recent study, *Desiring Voices: Women Sonneteers and Petrarchism* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), observing that Labé extends her Sapphic filiation well beyond the dynamics of unrequited heterosexual desire, via a "move [that] fuses intellectual and erotic aspects of female subjectivity, simultaneously displaying learning and wit and a spectacular role as desirable woman" (94).
6. For an excellent discussion of the cultural privileging of male grief and the typical devaluation of female grief, see Schiesari, *Gendering of Melancholia*, 160–66. For a fuller elaboration of this phenomenon in the context of Labé's first elegy, see Lesko Baker, *Subject of Desire*, 98–101.
7. For a discussion of the intertextual debt to Ovid's *Heroides* in the second elegy, see Martin, *Signe(s) d'Amante*, 176–78, and Rigolot, *Louise Labé Lyonnaise*, 83–85.
8. Cathy Yandell (*Carpe Corpus*, 123–25) shrewdly analyzes the subversion of Petrarchan "error" in the elegies, as well as in the final sonnet, through Labé's accumulated use of the ambiguous conjunction "si" (if), which highlights how the speaker questions her transgression, rather than admitting it.
9. For a discussion of the speaker's multiple but problematic challenges to female gender stereotypes in this section of elegy 3, see Moore, *Desiring Voices*, 106–7.

10. Although not addressed directly to the beloved in epistolary form, the bitter reminiscences of abandonment in these allusions once again recall the powerful intertext of Ovid's *Heroides* (see n. 7 above).

11. This purposeful lack of linearity is perhaps most strikingly demonstrated by Labé's return in the final sonnet to the imperative to forestall blame on the part of her female co-citizens by yet another warning addressing their equal susceptibility to the snares of unhappy passion. Thus, the quest for legitimation and the anxiety of potential judgment against the backdrop of cultural and literary norms remain part of the poet's psychic struggle. Nonetheless, as Martin (*Signe[s] d'Amante*, 374–76) points out, if Labé frames the end of her sequence with an intertextual play on the obsessive theme of error in Petrarch's inaugural sonnet, her stance is nevertheless different: ostensibly humble, yet unashamed and unapologetic with respect to her own loves; didactic and admonitory, although sympathetic, toward those who have not yet traveled the path of her amatory experience.

12. For key discussions devoted to Petrarch's opening poem and/or the new lyric speaking voice and subjectivity it inaugurated throughout early modern Europe, see especially DellaNeva, *Song and Counter-song*, 86–88; Freccero, "Fig Tree and the Laurel"; Mazzota, "Canzoniere and the Language of the Self"; and Sturm-Maddox, *Petrarch's Metamorphoses* (4–5). For a more extended analysis of the dialogue between the opening sonnets of Labé and Petrarch, see Lesko Baker, *Subject of Desire*, 125–36.

13. The brief excerpts from the *Canzoniere*, along with their English translations, are from Robert Durling's bilingual edition, *Petrarch's Lyric Poems*.

14. For additional commentary on the key role of the figure of Ulysses in Labé's opening sonnet, see Kennedy, *Authorizing Petrarch*, 165–66; Lecercle, "L'erreur d'Ulysse, 216–20; and Rigolot, *Louise Labé Lyonnaise*, 80–86. For an excellent analysis of the sonnet as a whole, with an emphasis on the epistemological issues suggested by the Ulysses figure and the complex implication of the scorpion's wound, see Moore, *Desiring Voices*, 107–11.

15. For a discussion of the relationship of Labé's sonnet addressing Venus to Petrarch's sonnet 216, see Kennedy, *Authorizing Petrarch*, 171–73.

16. In his sensitive analysis of this sonnet, Tom Conley evokes how the poetess's voice "labors to speak ambiguously and with affective complexity that the figure of Venus cannot represent." He goes on to posit that "the goddess is invoked only in order to be castigated through the counter image of a female who strives toward an intersubjective union that does not deny her a space of autonomy." Foreword to Lesko Baker, *Subject of Desire*, xi–xiii.

17. "Ne me laissez par long temps pámee" (l. 5); "Las, ne mets point ton corps en ce hazart" (l. 7); "Rens lui sa part et moitié estimee" (l. 8); "Mais fais, Ami, que ne soit dangereuse / Cette rencontre . . ." (ll. 9–10); "L'accompagnant, non de severité" (l. 11). For an etymological analysis of the adjective "dangerous" ("dangereuse") used at the end of line 9 by both Labé and Finch and its relationship to the power dynamics between the speaker and her lover, see Kennedy, *Authorizing Petrarch*, 175.

18. Recent in-depth discussions of this anthology favorite, as well as its Latin and neo-Latin backgrounds, have been undertaken by Jones, *Currency of Eros*, 171–72;

Peggy Kamuf, "A Double Life (Femmeninism II)," in *Men in Feminism*, ed. Alice Jardine and Paul Smith (New York: Methuen, 1987), 93–97; Kennedy, *Authorizing Petrarch*, 190–93; Lesko Baker, *Subject of Desire*, 153–61, and "Re-reading the 'folie': Louise Labé's Sonnet XVIII and the Renaissance Love Heritage," *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme* 17.1 (1993), 5–14; Moore, *Desiring Voices*, 119–23; and Rigolot, *Louise Labé Lyonnaise*, 216–25, and "Signature et signification: Les Baisers de Louise Labé," *Romanic Review* 75.1 (1984), 10–24.

19. Labé's lyric works open with an immediate invocation of the god of Love (Cupid), who remains a dramatic personified force throughout her poetry, particularly in the narratives of elegies 1 and 3.

20. Phoebus, another name for Apollo, god of the sun, poetry, music, and prophecy. As recounted in book 1 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, he was in love with the nymph Daphne, who, in order to stave off his unwanted advances, entreated her father to transform her into a laurel tree. The heartbroken Apollo nevertheless cut off one of the laurel branches and used it ever thereafter to adorn his lyre.

21. Zeus, the Greek name for the celestial king Jupiter, wielder of the thunderbolt.

22. Mars, the brutal god of war. Jupiter's only legitimate son by his wife, Juno, Mars was notorious for his adulterous love affair with Venus. See chapter 1, n. 53.

23. Lesbos, the ancient name of Mytilene, an island in the Aegean Sea sacred to the poet Sappho, Labé's female model of lyric inspiration. See nn. 3 and 5 above.

24. Semiramis, the warlike Babylonian queen, following her husband's death deserted her nation's troops after surrendering to an incestuous love for her own son, Ninus. Already mentioned by Apollo in discourse 5 of the *Debate* (see ch. 1 n. 94) as an example of disordered passion, Semiramis returns in Labé's elegy as an example of the extremes to which victimization by Love may lead. See the introduction above.

25. The Po River, located in northern Italy and flowing into the Adriatic Sea. This river was known for its serpentine meanderings and was therefore sometimes represented as a god with horns, which explains Labé's French expression "Pau cornu" (literally, "horned Po").

26. Phoebe, one of the Greek names for Diana, goddess of the moon. That her "silver horns" (Diana was associated with silver moonlight, in contrast to the golden sunlight prized by her brother Apollo) have closed twice indicates that the full moon has come and gone two times since the lover's expected return.

27. The Pyrenees are the mountain range between France and Spain. The name "Calpe" poses more of a problem. According to Rigolot, it refers to Gibraltar (*Oeuvres complètes*, 112), and Edith Farrell follows the same direction by translating it as the "Pillars named for Hercules" (*Louise Labé's Complete Works*, 92)—that is, the two points of land on either side of the Strait of Gibraltar. However, it may refer rather to the town of Calpe on the Spanish Mediterranean coast, which is dominated by an impressively high rock at the edge of the sea.

28. As explained by Rigolot (*Oeuvres complètes*, 113), "devices" ("devises") were ornamental colors worn by knights in honor of their cherished ladies.

29. Although the problem is elided in Finch's English translation, the original French lines 91–92 ("Ne vivant pas, mais mourant d'une Amour / Lequel m'occit dix mille fois le jour, emphasis added") present another grammatical slippage pertaining to gender, as we have seen in the provisional verdict issued at the end of the *Debate*. Rigolot addresses this instance in the same articles mentioned in chapter 1, nn. 27 and 142.
30. The referent here is Arachne, in Greek mythology a young woman who excelled at weaving and who challenged the goddess Pallas Athena, celebrated for her own stitching skills, to a tapestry-weaving contest. Arachne's artistry was so extraordinary that the goddess destroyed the work and transformed her into a spider, destined forever to spin her web. The story is recounted in depth at the beginning of book 6 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.
31. See chapter 1, n. 44.
32. Bradamant and Marfisa, were two female warriors in Ariosto's epic *Orlando Furioso*, a recasting of a legend from the ancient Carolingian dynasty. As noted by Edith Farrell (*Complete Works of Louise Labé*, 136), Bradamant, known as the Virgin Knight and wielder of a magic spear that caused the downfall of any knight it touched, fell in love with Marfisa's brother, the Moor Ruggiero, and following his conversion became his wife.
33. See n. 22 above.
34. Paris, one of the sons of Priam, king of Troy, was married to the nymph Oenone, but abandoned her for Helen, the wife of the Greek king Menelaus. Helen's kidnaping by Paris was the celebrated catalyst of the Trojan War.
35. Medea was the sorceress who enabled Jason and his Argonauts to obtain the Golden Fleece. When he later reneged on his promise to marry her and instead wed Creusa, daughter of King Creon of Thebes, the enraged Medea murdered her rival, as well as the two sons she had borne Jason.
36. As she concludes her final elegy, Labé returns to the image of love as equal, shared burden, thereby recalling Cupid's advice to Jupiter in discourse 4: "love thrives best when things are equal. It's no more than a yoke that needs to be carried by two well-paired oxen; otherwise the harness will not stay on straight."
37. Ulysses, one of the greatest of Greek heroes, known especially for the intelligence, cunning, and trickery he displayed during the Trojan War. After the war, he embarked on his famous ten-year odyssey, filled with multiple adventures and fraught with numerous dangers, finally arriving home in Ithaca where he was reunited with his faithful wife, Penelope.
38. Just as in elegy 1, personified Love appears almost immediately in Labé's opening sonnet and remains the speaker's formidable opponent but indispensable companion throughout the sonnet cycle, invoked explicitly in sonnets 3, 4, 8, 11, 18, 21, 23, and 24.
39. Labé highlights the image of the scorpion, with its toxic stinging tail, to metaphorize her own *innamoramento* in the traditional mode of violent attack (see Paolo Budini, "Le sonnet italien de Louise Labé," in Alonso and Viennot, *Louise Labé* 2005, 152; reprinted from *Francophonica* 20 [1991], 48; and Berriot, *La Belle Rebelle*, 82–83). Images

of real or mythological poisonous creatures are common in Petrarchan poetry to dramatize the beginnings of love, as is attributing to them the paradoxical ability both to wound and cure their victim.

40. For a discussion of this inaugural poem in dialogue with the opening of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, see the introduction above, esp. n. 12.

41. As mentioned in the introduction to chapter 1, Venus's need to validate herself exclusively through Cupid's visual appreciation of her own beauty inaugurates a critique of Petrarchan adaptations of the *blason*, verse involving the male praise of specific female body parts. This sonnet—and particularly this line cataloguing the beguiling physical attributes of the male lover—provides an example of Labé's "table-turning" satirization of this convention that Ann Rosalind Jones has highlighted (see ch. 1, n. 21). Sonnet 2's play with the rich *blason* tradition is also discussed by Kennedy, *Authorizing Petrarch*, 166–69, and Moore, *Desiring Voices*, 111–14.

42. The power of music—and of verse—not only to reveal but to provoke passion is central in Labé's poetry, beginning with her invocation of the Apollonian and Sapphic lyre in elegy 1. The lute is a classic instrument representing this power, and recalls, of course, the author's revelation in the dedicatory letter that she had been substantially trained in music. Across the sonnets both the female speaker and the male lover take turns as its players (the lover here and in sonnet 10, the female speaker in sonnets 12 and 14), and this alternation provides a motor that enhances her capacity to both feel and voice love. For discussion of the importance of the lute as a representation of the link between music and poetry, and its role in Labé's work, see Yandell, *Carpe Corpus*, 117–19.

43. See n. 38 above.

44. For a commentary on sonnet 3 in the context of Finch's translation, see the introduction above.

45. See n. 38 above.

46. Sonnet 5 marks the first direct appearance of Venus in Labé's works since discourses 2 and 3 of the *Debate*, where she represented the voice of female censure and opposition to Folly, and the embodied glorification of the male gaze (see the introduction to chapter 1, pp. 30–31). Here the speaker seeks instead an empathetic bonding with her celestial counterpart in passion. For a commentary on the ambivalence of that bonding in the context of Finch's translation, see introduction above, p. 145 including n. 16; for the backgrounds grounding the divided depictions of Venus in the mid-sixteenth century, see Rigolot, *Louise Labé Lyonnaise*, 167–70.

47. The "clear Star" evokes the sun (Apollo), which in its cyclic daily dawnings also figures the hoped-for return of the male beloved.

48. The syntax and referents here are somewhat ambiguous. Rigolot identifies the "she" (lines 4, 5, and 9) as the moon (Luna, sister of Apollo), figuring the female lover who would attract the gaze of her solar partner (*Œuvres complètes*, 124 n. 2). Another plausible variation on this popular lyric coupling would be to identify the "she" with Aurora herself, goddess of the dawn (and a sister of both Apollo and Luna), who is specifically named in line 7 and is kissed by the daytime blooming of Flora's (the divinity of spring and flowers) most fragrant gift—most likely, as Rigolot notes, the rose.

49. For a discussion of how Finch's translation of sonnet 7 brings a vibrant intensity to the frequent Neoplatonic theme involving the transmigration of lovers' souls, see the introduction above, pp. 146–147.
50. Composed of endless antitheses in varied grammatical formulations, sonnet 8 is Labé's version of Petrarch's famous sonnet 134 "Pace non trovo et non ò da far guerra" (Peace I do not find, and I have no wish to make war). Although Petrarch's poem is far from one of his most subtle, moving, or ingenious, it became the hallmark of the tortured and conflicted male lyric speaker and was widely imitated across the stage of European Petrarchism. As is the case with Labé here, such imitations of *Canzoniere* 134 are not typically strong sites of revision or subversion, but rather artful rhetorical gestures to the tradition.
51. This oneiric flight of the speaker's soul toward the male beloved is described in line 3 of the French as a flight "hors de moy" (literally, "outside myself"). This expression, repeated by Labé in sonnet 17 and most famously in sonnet 18, has physical, spiritual, and psychological dimensions, but in all cases subverts the sense of the phrase in male Petrarchan poetry, where it reflects the divided and alienated self of the anguished lover (see Lesko Baker, *Subject of Desire*, 160).
52. See n. 42 above.
53. Here the speaker implicitly compares the speaker to the great musician Orpheus in his ability to move even inanimate objects (see ch. 1, n. 71).
54. See n. 38 above.
55. See n. 42 above. In taking up the lute herself for the first time here in the sonnet sequence, she dramatically positions it as the first word of the poem, personifying and addressing it directly as her constant emotional partner. As Yandell puts it, "the lute serves here as the embodiment of the poet's contradictory sentiments and the pretext for a dialogic exchange" and holds the status of "companion, witness and implied interlocutor" (*Carpe Corpus*, 119).
56. In the intimate communion the speaker has evoked, the lute has become an "irreproachable witness" ("témoin irréprochable"), thus implicitly more reliable than the revered but "errant" Venus to whom she appeals as her witness in sonnet 5 (see n. 46 above).
57. This provocative scene of union and reciprocal passion imagined by the speaker constitutes one of Labé's most compelling and well-known sonnets, and also one where the Petrarchan paradigms of separation and inaccessibility are most pointedly challenged. For a discussion of this challenge through the poetess's rereading of Ovidian narratives, see Jones, *Currency of Eros*, 165–67; for the full range of the poem's erotic resonances, see Kennedy, *Authorizing Petrarch*, 191–92; for the multiple subversions of Petrarchan images and rhetorical structures, see Lesko Baker, *Subject of Desire*, 137–45, and "Louise Labé's Conditional Imperatives: Subversion and Transcendence of the Petrarchan Tradition" in Alonso and Viennot, *Louise Labé 2005*, 133–50, reprinted from *Sixteenth Century Journal* 21, no. 4 (1990): 523–41.
58. Euripus, the violent strait between the ancient Greek islands of Euboea and Boetia, was alluded to in discourse 5 of the *Debate* as the dramatic site of Aristotle's drowning (see ch. 1, n. 109). As already mentioned in that note, Euripus ("Euripe")

recurs in line 7 of the French sonnet (translated by Finch as “flood”), where, along with the image of the “tempeste” (“stormy sky”), it strikingly overturns the Petrarchan use of the sea storm as a representation of the lyric speaker’s disordered state—thus remaining a fierce manifestation of nature that further unites the lovers in an embrace of mutual protection.

59. The escape of the speaker’s spirit (i.e., her life breath, from the Latin *spiritus*) caused by the ecstasy of her lover’s kisses figures an erotic love-death based on the conventional motif of the *mors osculi* (death from the kiss). For background on this motif and its use in both sonnets 13 and 18, see Rigolot, *Louise Labé Lyonnaise*, 220–21, 233–34.

60. See n. 47 above for a similar solar configuring of the male beloved.

61. Zephyr, the god of the west wind, known for its soft, gentle breezes, and therefore pointing, both literally and metaphorically, to favorable and auspicious conditions. As seen later in the poem, the speaker will playfully try to coax Zephyr to stay in her presence and to ease the return of her fair weather “sun.”

62. The welcome return of fair weather after the storm at the beginning of sonnet 16 belies the speaker’s frustration to come, powerfully captured by Finch’s title.

63. Mount Caucasus, where Prometheus was chained by the gods for having stolen their fire. See ch. 1, n. 69.

64. Phoebus, another name for the sun god, Apollo, is first used by Labé in her inaugural elegy (see n. 47 above).

65. The Parthian soldiers, from the ancient kingdom of Parthia southeast of the Caspian Sea, were known for firing parting shots with their arrows as they retreated or pretended to retreat from the enemy.

66. Labé takes as her intertext here Petrarch’s famous sonnet 35, “Solo e pensoso i più deserti campi / vo mesurando a passi tardi et lenti” (“Alone and filled with care, I go measuring the most deserted fields”). For an in-depth analysis of Labé’s rewriting of this sonnet, see Kennedy, *Authorizing Petrarch*, 184–89, and also Moore, *Desiring Voices*, 116–19.

67. See n. 51 above. Labé’s recasting of the “hors de moymesme” (“outside myself”) phenomenon in this second instance is suggested in the discussions of both Kennedy, *Authorizing Petrarch*, 188, and Moore, *Desiring Voices*, 118.

68. Sonnet 18 is Labé’s most famous and widely published single text, and also one in which the subversion of conventional Petrarchan and Neoplatonic motifs and diction is most acute—as well as more subtle than meets the eye. The poem is discussed in the context of the translation in the introduction to this chapter (p. 148–149, and important recent critical studies of the poem are also listed there in n. 18.

69. See n. 38 above. This line is both richly intriguing and pivotal, particularly in terms of how to read the key terms “Amour” (“Love”) and “quelque folie” (literally, “some kind of folly” and translated provocatively, as the introduction above explains, as “something honest”). Finch has conveyed “Love” as “my love,” referring directly to her lover; for other interpretive possibilities of this apostrophe and/or of the “folly” that Labé proposes in the final tercet of the sonnet, see especially Jones,

Currency of Eros, 72; Kamuf, "Double Life," 93–94; Kennedy, *Authorizing Petrarch*, 192–93; Lesko Baker, *Subject of Desire*, 158–61, and "Re-reading the 'folie,'" 9–12; Moore (122–23); and Rigolot, *Louise Labé Lyonnaise*, 222–25, and "Signature et signification," 18–21.

70. See nn. 51 and 67 above. This is Labé's final reiteration of the expression "hors de moy" ("outside myself") in her sonnets.

71. Diana, sister of Apollo, Roman goddess of hunting, virginity, and the moon (hence, among her other names is Luna; see n. 48 above). As the virgin huntress, she is known to wreak vengeance with her arrows whenever she is offended. In this sonnet the goddess, having just slain her latest prey, stands in stark contrast to the unsuspecting female speaker, who has unsuccessfully attacked her own victim and remains weaponless and wounded after his counterattack.

72. The Petrarchan images of "orage" (storm) and "naufrage" (literally "shipwreck," translated by Finch with apt dramatic effect as "disaster") here do not serve as backdrops to protective union of the lovers against the tempest as they did earlier (see n. 58 above). They prefigure instead a catastrophic aftermath to a mutual love that destiny seemed to fulfill.

73. In contrast to the (purposefully) melodramatic enumerations of sonnet 2, this poem—with its opening list of mock-serious questions—is a more playful example of Labé's gently satirical gesture to the Renaissance *blason* tradition. See n. 41 above, and chapter 1, n. 21.

74. See n. 38 above.

75. Sonnet 22 begins with another reference to the loving reciprocity between Apollo (the sun) and his sister Diana (Luna, the moon). See n. 48 above.

76. After Luna fell in love with the beautiful young shepherd Endymion, Jupiter put him into a deep, everlasting sleep so that the goddess could gaze upon and caress him forever.

77. Another allusion to Mars's adulterous passion for Venus (see n. 4 above, and ch. 1, n. 53). Having served as Folly's defender in his role as god of eloquence (see ch. 1, n. 40), Mercury appears here in his role as messenger of the gods in the heavens and on earth.

78. See n. 38 above.

79. As observed in n. 19 above, in her twenty-fourth sonnet, the concluding text in her volume, the poetess puts forth one final time the emotional address to her sister citizens undertaken in her first and third elegies—an address complexly invested with pleas for compassion rather than blame, with touches of anxiety yet void of contrition, and above all with an urgent quest from the voice of experience to unite her peers by convincing them to understand their common and inevitable vulnerability to love. On this combination of impulses, see Jones, *Currency of Eros*, 176–77; Lesko Baker, *Subject of Desire*, 219–20; and Rigolot, *Louise Labé Lyonnaise*, 194–95.

80. As in elegy 3, Labé employs the conditional "si" (if), refusing any definitive admission of error.

81. Implicitly comparing her female audience to Venus, married to the repulsive-looking Vulcan (see ch. 1, n. 53), the speaker warns that unattractive physical appearance in a partner is no excuse for amorous wandering.

82. Angered by the refusal of the princess Myrrha to marry, Venus forced her to fall in love and copulate with her own father. The fruit of this incestuous union was a son, Adonis, whose beauty was so remarkable that Venus fell in love with him and persuaded Jupiter to let her live with the boy for a portion of each year—an infidelity vis-à-vis not only her husband, Vulcan, but her own lover, Mars. Labé's admonition here is that since it is unlikely her peers will come across a partner as stunning as Adonis, they will likewise not be able to blame their passion on their lover's irresistible physical charms.

Thanks to her acclaimed volume of poetry and prose published in France in 1555, Louise Labé (1522–66) remains one of the most important and influential women writers of the Continental Renaissance, and her temperament and values continue to resonate with modern issues of female identity, writing, and gender relations. Best known for her exquisite collection of love sonnets, Labé's original use of conventional metaphor, her alternating focus on playfulness and pain, and her frank reflection on the positive force of desire and the full dimensions of physical love reveal her to be an accomplished sonneteer who played off the Petrarchan male tradition with wit and irony. Likewise, her elegies, alternately funny and heart-wrenching, show the depth and range of her lyric skill in response to classical predecessors such as Sappho and Ovid. Labé's more recently recovered prose works include a stunning letter advocating women's education and accession to the social and literary stage. The strongly feminist *Debate of Folly and Love* is a fascinating combination of medieval and Renaissance philosophical and theatrical genres that anticipates the ethos of female independence and selfhood in Labé's poetry.

The very first complete bilingual edition of this singular and broad-ranging female author, *Complete Poetry and Prose* also features the first translations of Labé's sonnets to follow the rhyme patterns of the originals and the only rhymed translation of Labé's elegies in their entirety.

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