

Sonnets : Louise Labé

Edward Byrne

Nomados

Vancouver

Sonnets : Louise Labé

Sonnets : Louise Labé copyright © 2011 Edward Byrne

ISBN 978-0-9810952-6-4

Nomados Literary Publishers
PO Box 4031
349 West Georgia Street
Vancouver BC Canada V6B 3Z4
info@nomados.org
<http://www.nomados.org/nomados.htm>

Non havria Ulysse o qualunqu'altro mai
 Piu accorto fù, da quel divino aspetto
 Pien di gratie, d'honor & di rispetto
 Sperato qual i' sento affanni e guai.
 Pur, Amour, co i begli ochi tu fatt'hai
 Tal piaga dentro al mio innocente petto,
 Di cibo & di calor gia tuo ricetta,
 Che rimedio non v'e 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.
 Chieggo li sol' ancida questa noia,
 Non estingua el desir à me si caro,
 Che mancar non potra ch'i' non mi muoia.

Nobody no other so clever
 given my looks so divine so good
 could ever discover breathless love

 Mad love sharp eyed wound innocent heart
 suck and sucking cauterize harsh fate
 makes the fix both cut and remedy

 I beg assailant scorpion prick
 kill only pain and not desire
 without which *caro* I cannot be

O beaux yeus bruns, ô regards destournez,
 O chaus soupirs, ô larmes expandues,
 O noires nuits vainement atendues,
 O jours luisans vainement retournez:
 O tristes pleins, ô desirs obstinez,
 O tems perdu, ô peines despendues,
 O mile morts en mile rets tendues,
 O pires maus contre moy destinez.
 O ris, ô front, cheveux, bras, mains & doigts:
 O lut pleintif, viole, archet & 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.

Dark brown eyes untrained glance averted
 heated sighs and tears night attended
 bright day turning obstinate lust sad

complaint lost time spent pain 1,000
 deaths caught in 1,000 snares and worse
 laughter brow hair arms hands and fingers

pleading instruments and ardent voice
 Enflamed inside and out I bitch
 that no spark leaps back to you my punk

Alternate Translation

You're beautiful brown eyes turned away
 your heat black night needless tears dropped
 obstinate want bright day returning
 and lost moments death caught in your trap
 and worse still you your laughter your hands
 on strings your bow on my arched expanse

So many flames raise a girl's ardour
 I ask myself match after match why
 you never catch fire never get burned

O longs desirs, o esperances vaines,
 Tristes soupirs & larmes coutumieres
 A engendrer de moy maintes rivieres,
 Dont mes deus yeus sont sources & fontaines:
 O cruautéz, o durtez inhumaines,
 Piteus regards des celestes lumieres:
 Du cœur transi o passions premieres,
 Estimez vous croitre encore mes peines?
 Qu'encor Amour sur moy son arc essaie,
 Que nouveaux feus me gette & nouveaux dars:
 Qu'il se despise, & pis qu'il pourra face:
 Car je suis tant navree en toutes pars,
 Que plus en moy une nouvelle plaie,
 Pour m'empirer ne pourroit trouver place.

Untamed desire breeds vain hope
 damp sighs springs rivulets and fountains
 the thoughtless gaze of celestial lights

a heart crossed uncrossed tried with fever
 meaning yes to increase my sorrows
 yes to incite love to mount attacks

beyond reason finally beyond harm
 once wrecked and beaten thoroughly
 no place left untouched by your empire

Depuis qu'Amour cruel empoisonna
 Premièrement de son feu ma poitrine,
 Toujours brulay de sa fureur divine,
 Qui un seul jour mon cœur n'abandonna.
 Quelque travail, dont assez me donna,
 Quelque menasse & procheine ruïne:
 Quelque penser de mort qui tout termine,
 De rien mon cœur ardent ne s'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 & les hommes mesprise:
 Mais pour plus fort contre les fors paroître.

Amour vrayement est une maladie (Ronsard)

Since love first burnt my breast with fire
 this fury heaven sent never gives

whatever trouble whatever threat
 of ruin whatever thoughts of death
 no abduction no astonishment

The more swift and brutal love's assault
 the stronger we grow – a strength not ours
 but the very force we rise to meet

Alternate translation from Rilke's German version

Only a god this awful presence
 this boy a gift that corrodes the soul
 burning from within our pain this core
 decaying numbered but never trapped

For the deeper he seeds his poison
 the sharper the teeth of his harrow
 the stronger and harder we grow

Each day both we and the gods are tried

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 & 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 & de sommeil esprits.
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.

6

Deus ou trois fois bienheureus le retour
De ce cler Astre, & plus heureux encore
Ce que son œil de regarder honore.
Que celle là recevroit un bon 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 ses levres sejour!
C'est à moy seule à qui ce bien est du,
Pour tant de pleurs & tant de tems perdu:
Mais le voyant, tant lui feray de feste,
Tant emploiray de mes yeus le pouvoir,
Pour dessus lui plus de credit avoir,
Qu'en peu de tems feray grande conquete.

12

5

Bright evening star wandering star
called Lucifer called *Φωσφορος*
attend my voice my complaint my song

until morning comes and dulls my pain
In your presence unsleeping eyes fill
bathe my damp bed with tears fair witness

We are lax drawn to sleep fleeing day
Broken hardly enduring I fall
repeatedly into bed to weep

6

Happy or more than happy past joy
at sun's return to my employ
I welcome the day and flaunt my luck

I taste (kiss) the floral lips of Spring
as soft and wet as ever met dawn
and would rest forever on that mouth

But when I see him my head is turned
my eyes widen celebrate invest
lost time and tears in conquest

13

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 si long tems pámee,
Pour me sauver apres viendrois trop tard.
Las, ne mets point ton corps en ce hazart:
Rens lui sa part & moitié estimee.
Mais fais, Ami, que ne soit dangereuse
Cette rencontre & revuë amoureuse,
L'accompnant, non de severité,
Non de rigueur : mais de grace amiable,
Qui doucement me rende ta beauté,
Jadis cruelle, à present favorable.

8

Je vis, je meurs : je me brule & me noye.
J'ay chaut estreme en endurent froidure:
La vie m'est & trop molle & trop dure.
J'ay grans ennus entremeslez de joye:
Tout à un coup je ris & je larmoye,
Et en plaisir maint grief tourment j'endure:
Mon bien s'en va, & à jamais il dure:
Tout en un coup je seiche & 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 certeine,
Et estre au haut de mon desiré heur,
Il me remet en mon premier malheur.

14

7

Evidence shows that the body dies
when the quick and subtle spirits part
If I'm flesh then you're that other part

abandoned parted rejoined too late
Lust is corporeal and risky
for its part a danger Set aside

this joining this panting revision
exchange harsh words for comelier signs
rendering your looks once cruel now kind

8

Living dying burning up submerged
I'm hot as hell the ice fields of Dis
Life's too easy and too goddamn hard

I'm bored comatose and pumped with joy
laughing and weeping with happiness
gone to endurance dried out and lush

Thus love inconstant leads zig-zagging
through deep pain suddenly outside pain
through joy back to that first sharp sadness

15

Tout aussi tot que je commence à prendre
 Dens le mol lit le repos desiré,
 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, ou 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.

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 & 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?

Soon as sleep takes me in its soft bed
 dulled thought flees incontinent to you
 and I dream a sweetness enters me

my own sweet sighs sweet tears expended
 Sleep tender night pleasant rest and calm
 continuance all nights my dreaming

And if my poor enamoured being
 can never have such sweetness in truth
 let it have these truths these nightly lies

When I find you blonde head green leaf crown
 animate inanimate with song
 and all your powers praised and envied

my colour rises much distempered
 wondering why these words that make you loved
 don't rebound and make you mad as well

adding my name to your lexicon
 an echo like flame plaintive encore
 burnt animate me then take my heat

11

O dous regards, o yeus pleins de beauté,
Petis 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 recevez:
Mais toy, mon cœur, plus les vois s'y complaire,
Plus tu languiz, plus en as de souci,
Or devinez si je suis aise aussi,
Sentant mon œil estre à mon cœur contraire.

12

Lut, compagnon de ma calamité,
De mes soupirs témoin irréprochable,
De mes ennuis contrôleur 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 te veus efforcer au contraire,
Tu te destens & si me contreins taire:
Mais me voyant tendrement soupirer,
Donnant faveur à ma tant triste plainte:
En mes ennuis me plaire suis contreinte,
Et d'un dous mal douce fin esperer.

18

11

Your gaze your regard these garden paths
amoral florid and perilous
please my eyes incorporate pleasure

Cruel heart and fell crude hold hard bite
taunt joy runs its course of languid tears
ardent heart tormented mine now felt

And so my eyes pleased turn bought by yours
but my heart lost lapses in seeing
Wonder now caught between eyes and heart

12

Instrument of my calamity
friend and faithful witness of my sighs
of my boredom agent weep with me

and undone turn delectable notes
sad the change from major to minor
And if you try to force back sorrow

silence and breath pulsion and complaint
you leave me here alone rapt in grief
grasping in lux in pain for exit

(for Chet Baker)

19

Oh si j'étois 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.

If ravished if crushed against his breast
 if rage did not forbid nesting there
 if coupling he said let's not return

 fast from tempest from rush or current
 from disjuncture this Oedipal life
 if grasping like ivy round the trunk

 death came envious of my pleasure
 soft tongue lift ghostly breath from my lips
 well then I'd die more lively and glad

Alternate Translation

Only if if enfolded wrapped
 not dying but turning in your grasp
 desire allowed me all my short days
 if only against me dear friend you
 hold fast promise neither storm nor tide
 could tear us from Europe from this shore
 our embrace this pole our happy death
 if only your lips my spirit steal
 away from here in bliss only if

14

Tant que mes yeus pourront larmes esandre,
A l'heur passé avec toy regretter:
Et qu'aus sanglots & soupirs resister
Pourra ma voix, & un peu faire entendre:
Tant que ma main pourra les cordes tendre
Du mignart Lut, pour tes graces chanter :
Tant que l'esprit se voudra contenter
De ne vouloir rien fors que toy comprendre:
Je ne souhaite encore point mourir.
Mais quand mes yeus je sentiray tarir,
Ma voix cassee, & 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.

15

Pour le retour du Soleil honorer,
Le Zephir, l'air serein lui apareille:
Et du sommeil l'eau & 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 jeus s'esbatent
Au cler de Lune, & 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.

22

14

Tears are evidence expenditure
drops of regret resistance of joy
impediments to thought being heard

My eyes my voice my hands my mind
your enjoyment much to comprehend
nothing more than force to hold back death

But when these parts dry break falter lapse
and can no longer signify thus
I pray death darken my clearest day

15

Wind disturbs serene air sun's return
water and ground break sleep's hold wake now
to murmur flower flow unblocked stain

As already morning's chorus breaks
boredom of branch and twig and leaf
As already nymphs contest and dance

in freakish light bruise clover and grass
Wind won't you please please refurbish me
bring back my sun and make me pretty

23

16

Après qu'un tems la gresle & le tonnerre
Ont le haut mont de Caucase batu,
Le beau jour vient, de leur revêtu.
Quand Phebus ha son cerne fait en terre,
Et l'Océan il regaigne à grand erre:
Sa seur se montre avec son chef pointu.
Quand quelque tems le Parthe ha combatu,
Il prend la fuite & son arc il desserre.
Un tems t'ay vù & 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.

17

Je fuis la vile, & temples, & tous lieux,
Esquels prenant plaisir à t'ouir pleindre,
Tu peus, & non sans force, me contreindre
De te donner ce qu'estimois le mieus.
Masques, tournois, jeux me sont ennuieus,
Et rien sans toy de beau ne me puis peindre:
Tant que tachant à ce desir 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.

24

16

After a storm beats the mountainside
beautiful day returns damp and bright

After the sun goes round the world
the moon lifts its prow above the wave

After a brief struggle the soldier
discharges his weapon and flees

Cold I gave you warmth when you were hot
But now you've brought me to the edge enflamed
you lose your heat grow cold and withdraw

17

Your precious beggary pursues me
taking what you want given away

No imaginary without you
I seek a new object in the real

Torn by thought's desire in solitude
after much wandering this bleak suburb

I can see myself absent from you
only if I live outside myself
or at least take a long vacation

25

18

Baise m'encor, rebaise moy & 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 & son ami vivra.
Permits m'Amour penser quelque folie:
Tousjours suis mal, vivant discrettement,
Et ne me puis donner contentement,
Si hors de moy ne fay quelque saillie.

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 & sans carquois,
Qu'as tu trouvé, o compagne, en ta voye,
Qui de ton arc & flesches ait fait proye?
Je m'animay, respons je, à un passant,
Et lui getay en vain toutes mes flesches
Et l'arc après : mais lui les ramassant
Et les tirant me fit cent & cent bresches.

26

18

Take me again retake me and take
Give me rude love a taste of honey
I'll double your gifts and take you home

I'll forestall your lassitude your plaint
mixing give and take with arrival
with our double dwelling in each other

Unhappy in singularity
I'm only content in such excess
this mad love this leaping over self

19

Diana my ideal hunts and kills
then laughs and goes swimming with her nymphs

Wandering aimlessly in the suburbs
I was hailed by a voice calling Nymph
you're heading in the wrong direction
and What did you do with your weapons

I threw them at the first man I saw
He gathered them up took careful aim
and left me numb with a thousand cuts

27

Predit me fut, que devoit fermement
 Un jour aymer celui dont la figure
 Me fut descrite : & 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'autant que lui aymay ardemment.
 Qui n'ust pensé qu'en faveur devoit croitre
 Ce que le Ciel & destins firent naitre?
 Mais quand je voy si nubileus aprets,
 Vents si cruels & tant horrible orage:
 Je croy qu'estoient les infernaus arrets,
 Qui de si loin m'ourdissoient ce naufrage.

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 & de tant je m'assure,
 Que tout le beau que l'on pourroit choisir,
 Et que tout l'art qui ayde la Nature,
 Ne me sauroient acroitre mon desir.

(Pretty my foot the void firmament)

Predicted love and its description
 Who'd a thunk it but I knew him when
 he was hungry and it was my world

It took a push really on my part
 but I got there where he was say love

Predicted love you'd think it would grow
 but when I see this storm of love break
 I think then of love contradicted

“Morality for Beautiful Girls”

Well-shaved men and tough-minded perhaps
 honey-eyed their incurable play

a song a sadness that penetrates
 sweet struggle sweet voice by nature grave

Though I couldn't say with certainty
 affection having nicked my judgement

these qualities more than any art
 make pleasure the true measure of worth

22

Luisant Soleil, que tu es bien heureux,
De voir tousjours 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 & chaleureus.
Voilà du Ciel la puissante harmonie,
Qui les esprits divins ensemble lie:
Mais s'ils avoient ce qu'ils aiment lointein,
Leur harmonie & ordre irrevocable
Se tourneroit en erreur variable,
Et comme moy travailleroient en vain.

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 & 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 & de despit & d'ire:
Mais je m'assure, quelque part que tu sois,
Qu'autant que moy tu souffres de martire.

30

22

Happy shining Sun to always see
your lover's face shine back on you
Mars keeps Venus in view while Mercury
slips from one heaven to the next
and Jupiter finds pretext to retake
the places from which he's been exiled
Such the harmony that binds them fast
within the law they cannot break
But just remove the object from their grasp
and they would err unhinged like me

23

Christ what good your sweet talk now you're gone
torment of my splendor left behind
what good your tears and imprecations
What the hell did you want anyway
To make me slave to your servitude
Pardon me mister if just this once
fucked up with despite mixed up with ire
I wish that wherever you might be
you're just as buggered as you left me

31

Ne reprenez, Dames, si j'ay 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 & forte passion.
 Et gardez vous d'estre plus malheureuses.

Don't blame me I was beside myself
 burnt worked bitten timed out and weepy

And don't say that I was weak or bad
 Or maybe I was but it still hurts
 So don't salt my wounds Think about it

Love prosecutor always on point
 could condemn you just as easily
 even if your man's no Adonis
 could stoke a heat more vulgar than mine

Postface

Not much is known about Louise Labé's life. Some of what has been said of her is based on slim or fabulous evidence. She was born in Lyon around 1520 and died there in 1566. Her father, Pierre Charly, was a prosperous rope maker (*cordelier*) – the name Labé, or L'Abbé, was taken from the name of a property owned by his first wife. Louise's education probably included matters usually reserved for men, such as Latin, Italian, fencing and riding. She may have participated in the battle of Perpignon with the future Henri II of France. Her arranged marriage to a contemporary of her father, Ennemond Perrin, also a rope maker, took place around 1542. The lover referred to in the elegies and sonnets has been identified as Henri II and Olivier de Magny, among others.

In terms of secular writing and printing, Lyon was the cultural capital of France. Louise was part of a circle of well-known poets associated with the publisher Jean de Tournes – most notably Maurice Scève, Pernette du Guillet and Olivier de Magny. Her "Works" were published in 1555, with a second edition in 1556. They included : an introductory letter to a younger woman, Clémence de Bourges, defending the education of women and women's writing; a dialogue between Folly and Love, which displays the influence of Erasmus, but also of Ficino's *De Amore* and other contemporary and classical sources; three elegies that owe as much directly to Propertius, Tibullus and Ovid as to contemporaries such as Clément Marot; and the twenty-four Petrarchan or, one might argue, anti-Petrarchan sonnets here

translated. The original edition of her works also included a couple of dozen poems by ‘divers Poètes, à la louenge de [in praise of] Louïze Labé Lionnoize.’ In the first of these, an ode in Greek, she is identified as the Lionnaise Sappho. She was publically characterized in her time as both a “courtesane” and a prostitute – terms which in some minds amounted to the same thing. John Calvin called her “plebeia meretrix”, variously translated as “common prostitute” and “vulgaire courtisane” – that is, if “La Belle Cordière,” the cross-dressing beauty to whom he referred, was in fact Louise. Two historians writing within ten years of her death referred to her as, on the one hand, extremely virtuous and a prodigy of knowledge (Guillaume Paradin) and, on the other, as a lewd, public courtesan (Claude de Rubys). Her fame has persisted. La Fontane adapted the debate between Folly and Love; Voltaire referred to it as the most “jolie” modern fable; Sainte-Beuve praised it. In the nineteenth century Marceline Desbordes-Valmore praised her in verse, as did Louis Aragon in the twentieth. Rilke translated the sonnets into German.

It has long been suggested that she was assisted in her work by some of the male writers that she frequented, in particular Maurice Scève and Olivier de Magny. Some degree of collaboration is probable. A recent book by Mireille Huchon proposes that Louise Labé’s works were, in fact, wholly written by her male friends, as a kind of well-intentioned hoax, not untypical of its times. The evidence she relies on is detailed, fascinating, but circumstantial.

Ann Rosalind Jones: “Speaking out of silence, entering the terrain of male discourse from the margins, Pernette [du Guillet] and Labé take over its central position as speakers and appropriate its rituals for their own ends. Their women’s situations and women’s voices do more than modify poetic style. They rewrite the rules of the game.” (“Assimilation with a Difference : Renaissance Women Poets and Literary Influence,” *Yale French Studies*, vol. LXII, 1981)

Sonnets : Louise Labé (Set One) is the first part of a longer work and consists of translations from Italian and French of the twenty-four sonnets of Louise Labé. The following editions have been consulted: *Poètes du XVIe Siècle*, edited by Albert-Marie Schmidt (1953); *Sonnets*, edited by Peter Sharratt (with verse translations by Graham Dunstan Martin, 1972); *Œuvres Complète*, edited by Enzo Giudici (1981); *Œuvres Poétique*, edited by Françoise Charpentier (1983), and *Louise Labé : Œuvres Complète*, edited by François Rigolot (1986). At the time I began these translations, *Complete Poetry and Prose*, edited by Deborah Lesko Baker (with verse translations of the sonnets by Annie Finch, 2006), had not yet been published. I am not aware of a literal translation that I could recommend.

Among other works consulted, my best companions were François Rigolot (*Louise Labé Lyonnaise ou la Renaissance au féminin*), Daniel Martin (*Signe(s) d’Amante : L’agencement des Œuvres de Louïze Labé Lionnoïze*), Deborah Lesko Baker (*The Subject of Desire : Petrarchan Poetics and the Female Voice in Louise Labé*), Tom Conley (“Engendering Letters : Louise Labé Polygraph”),

Nicolas Ruwet (“Un Sonnet de Louise Labé”), and Natalie Zemon Davis (*Society and Culture in Early Modern France*). I have only recently read Mireille Huchon’s *Louise Labé : Une creature du papier*, and I thank Nancy Frelick for alerting me to this omission.

The Italian and French text is taken directly from the 1555 edition of the *Œuvres de Louise Labé Lionnoise*, published by Jean de Tournes. The 1556 edition announces that it is “revues et corrigees par ladite Dame,” but in fact there are no significant revisions. A complete facsimile of the 1555 edition is included in Mireille Huchon’s *Louise Labé : une creature de papier*. I don’t pretend to have edited the text. I’ve merely copied it from the 1555 edition. However, as is common practice, I’ve adjusted the orthography of the original, distinguishing v and u, i and j, f and s, as they are distinguished in contemporary typography. I have also carefully checked the text against the various editions listed above. I have not corrected errors except where I felt such corrections were necessary to an understanding of the text. In particular, I have not corrected errors where they appear to have some significance or charm, such as, in sonnet I, the evidence that Italian is not the author’s (or printer’s) first language, or inconsistencies which would not have been considered errors.

Some of these translations were published in *W, West Coast Line*, *The Capilano Review*, and *Onsets* (published by *The Gig*). Sonnet 20 was written for a “Pestschrift” dedicated to Dorothy Trujillo Lusk.

