

CRITICISM

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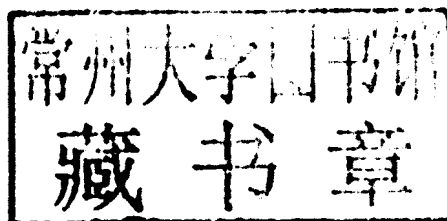
154

Poetry Criticism

*Excerpts from Criticism of the Works
of the Most Significant and Widely
Studied Poets of World Literature*

Volume 154

Lawrence J. Trudeau
Editor



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Poetry Criticism

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Preface

Poetry Criticism (PC) presents significant criticism of the world's greatest poets and provides supplementary biographical and bibliographical material to guide the interested reader to a greater understanding of the genre and its creators. This series was developed in response to suggestions from librarians serving high school, college, and public library patrons, who had noted a considerable number of requests for critical material on poems and poets. Although major poets and literary movements are covered in such Gale Literary Criticism series as *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (CLC), *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC), *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism* (NCLC), *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800* (LC), and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism* (CMLC), librarians perceived the need for a series devoted solely to poets and poetry.

Scope of the Series

PC is designed to serve as an introduction to major poets of all eras and nationalities. Since these authors have inspired a great deal of relevant critical material, PC is necessarily selective, and the editors have chosen the most important published criticism to aid readers and students in their research.

Approximately three to six authors, works, or topics are included in each volume. An author's first entry in the series generally presents a historical survey of the critical response to the author's work; subsequent entries will focus upon contemporary criticism about the author or criticism of an important poem, group of poems, or book. The length of an entry is intended to reflect the amount of critical attention the author has received from critics writing in English and from critics who do not write in English whose criticism has been translated. Every attempt has been made to identify and include the most significant essays on each author's work. In order to provide these important critical pieces, the editors sometimes reprint essays that have appeared elsewhere in Gale's Literary Criticism Series. Such duplication, however, never exceeds twenty percent of a PC volume.

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Each PC entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author's actual name given in parentheses on the first line of the biographical and critical introduction. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the author's name (if applicable).
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author and the critical debates surrounding his or her work.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The first section comprises poetry collections and book-length poems. The second section gives information on other major works by the author. In the case of authors who do not write in English, an English translation of the title is provided as an aid to the reader; the translation is either a published translated title or a free translation provided by the compiler of the entry. In the case of such authors whose works have been translated into English, the **Principal English Translations** focuses primarily on twentieth-century translations, selecting those works most commonly considered the best by critics.
- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. All individual titles of poems and poetry collections by the author featured in the entry are

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- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Citations conform to recommendations set forth in the Modern Language Association of America's *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th ed. (2009).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** describing each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

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Glen, Heather. "Blake's Criticism of Moral Thinking in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*." *Interpreting Blake*. Ed. Michael Phillips. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1978. 32-69. Rpt. in *Poetry Criticism*. Ed. Michelle Lee. Vol. 63. Detroit: Gale, 2005. 34-51. Print.

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Louise Labé

1520?-1566

(Born Loïze Charly) French poet and prose writer.

The following entry provides criticism of Labé's life and works.

INTRODUCTION

Louise Labé was the most prominent female poet of the French Renaissance and the first to write lyric elegies and sonnets in the Petrarchan style. She broke new ground not only as a woman openly publishing her writing but also through her bold and direct expressions of desire and her call for other women to join her as writers and colleagues in a learned community. Though Labé was branded a prostitute by some—a common reaction at that time to women who published—she was also admired by her male peers, and her *Euvres de Louïze Labé Lionnoïze* (1555; may be translated as *Works of Louise Labé of Lyon*) appeared in three editions during her lifetime.

The title of Labé's works advertises her as a poet of the city of Lyon, which was, during Labé's life, one of the leading publishing centers in all Europe, rivaling Paris as the center of culture in France. It became a destination for humanist scholars and writers, and from the salons of Lyon arose the École lyonnaise, or the Lyon school of poetry, of which Labé was a part. As a woman and a poet, Labé was invariably compared to the ancient Greek poet Sappho, who had been rediscovered by European humanists only a few years before the publication of *Works of Louise Labé of Lyon*. To be the Sappho of Lyon lent credibility to Labé's poetry as well as the Lyon school, creating a place for a modern female poet in the masculine realm of literature.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Labé was the daughter of Lyon ropemaker Pierre Charly and his second wife, Etiennette Roybet. There are no records of her birth, but she was likely born between 1520 and 1522. She took the appellation "Labé" from a property, a name her father had inherited from his first wife, Guillemette Humbert. Labé's mother died when Labé was an infant, and she was raised by Antoinette Taillard, Pierre's third wife. Though Pierre was illiterate himself, he was wealthy, and he provided a humanist education for all of his children, including Labé. Such instruction was not typical for girls; biographers have suggested that either she joined in lessons intended for her brothers or she benefited from the particular admiration of her father. She

studied ancient and modern languages, and learned fencing and horsemanship with the boys in addition to the music and needlework typical of girls' education at the time. Some biographers maintained that Labé fought at the siege of Perpignan in 1542 as "Captain Louis," but Charles Boy, editor of *Oeuvres de Louise Labé* (1887; may be translated as *Works of Louise Labé*), wrote that she simply participated in a tournament held in Lyon as the French army passed through.

Labé's family connections to ropemaking led to her nickname, "La Belle Cordière" ("The Beautiful Ropemaker"). As a ropemaker's daughter, Labé could expect to marry a ropemaker herself, as was typical in tradesmen's families. In 1543, her father arranged her marriage to Ennemond Perrin, a much older man who could offer financial stability. After her marriage, Labé took an active part in humanist circles, attending and possibly hosting salon gatherings with the literary elite of Lyon. Most important among these was Maurice Scève, the preeminent poet of the École lyonnaise, as well as Pernette du Guillet, another female poet who was thought to be Scève's muse. The Lyon school also included the poets Pierre de Ronsard and Joachim du Bellay, major figures among the poets known as La Pléiade, who promoted the nascent practice of using French, rather than Latin, for serious literature. Labé herself was a part of this trend, using French for her poetry at a time when Latin was considered a more elevated language. Some biographers have speculated that du Bellay's friend Olivier de Magny, a lesser poet among the group, was Labé's lover. Because she freely and openly associated with men in her home, Labé was accused by some of being a courtesan, or prostitute, but there is no evidence of this claim apart from scurrilous contemporary poems.

As a member of this circle of writers, Labé likely began writing her own poetry shortly after her marriage. By 1554, she was ready to publish a collection of elegies and sonnets, along with the prose dialog *Débat de folie et d'amour* (1555; published as *Debate of Folly and Love* in 2000). She received the "Privilège du Roy," permission from the king to publish, on 13 March 1554 and sent her work to be printed by the humanist publisher and bookseller Jean de Tournes. Despite her success, she did not publish any new works again. In 1557, Labé bought a country house in Parcieux-en-Dombs, about twelve miles north of Lyon, and moved there shortly afterwards. Her husband died sometime before the early 1560s. In the last few years of her life, Labé was very ill. In 1565, she wrote her will while staying at the home of the Italian banker Thomas Fortini, a longtime friend to whom she left much of her estate. She

died on 15 February 1566 at the age of forty-five and was buried at her country estate in Parcieux-en-Dombs.

MAJOR WORKS OF POETRY

Works of Louise Labé of Lyon begins with a dedicatory epistle addressed to Clémence de Bourge, a female poet from a noble family of Lyon. In it, she defends her writing and calls upon other women to leave their distaff, a spinning tool often invoked as a metonym for “women’s work,” and join the community of educated writers. Labé maintained that study and writing could offer women both pleasure and the possibility of intellectual equality with men. These themes—creating a community of women readers and writers, more equal relationships with men, and feminine pleasure—were also prominent in her poetry. The 1555 edition of *Works of Louise Labé of Lyon* also included the prose *Debate of Folly and Love* and twenty-four poems written by her male contemporaries, praising her talent.

The first of Labé’s poems in the volume are three elegies. The elegy form, which had originated in ancient Rome, was still relatively new in France, having been introduced in 1532 by Clément Marot in *La suite de l’adolescence Clémentine* (1533–34). Labé’s elegies, like Marot’s, were deeply influenced by the increasing importance of humanist/Renaissance Italian poet Francesco Petrarch in French poetry, especially in their focus on lost or unrequited love. In the first elegy, the poet tells her female readers that if they will read her poem with compassion, she will likewise support them in giving voice to their own miseries. She compares herself with Sappho, in doing so not only establishing a feminine precedent for her passionate longing but also authorizing her status as a female love poet. In the second elegy, the poet addresses her absent lover, who has abandoned her, before consigning herself to death if her lover will not return; some have interpreted de Magny as the intended recipient of the poem. In the third elegy, the poem’s speaker compares herself to female warriors like Bradamante from Ludovico Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso* (1516–32), but love proves to be too powerful to conquer. As in the first elegy, the poet calls out not to her beloved but to her female readers, asking “les dames Lyonnaises” (“the women of Lyon”) not to condemn her but rather to show compassion for her pain.

The most celebrated of Labé’s poems are her sonnets. She published twenty-four of them in the 1555 *Works of Louise Labé of Lyon*, including just one in Latin, each addressing either the misery or the bliss caused by love. Even more than the elegies, the sonnets demonstrate the influence of Petrarch, particularly his sonnet sequence and his *Canzoniere* (1336–38?). The Petrarchan style had been popularized by Scève and his sequence of Petrarchan love poems titled *Délie* (1544), which was circulating in manuscript by the 1530s and was a likely influence for Labé as well. However, Labé differed from both Petrarch and Scève in her treatment of love and desire. Her emphasis on a reciprocal

relationship between the poet and her beloved revises the Petrarchan conceit of a man burning with love for an unattainable mistress. Where the women in Petrarchan poetry might be cold and aloof, Labé—unique among poets of her time—portrayed women as capable of both longing and desire. While the consummation of love in Petrarchan verse was often spiritual, for Labé’s poet it was decidedly physical. Labé’s sonnets make clear that the female poet suffers terribly from the absence of her beloved, but they speak openly of the joy and ecstasy she has experienced and are sometimes even erotic.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Poems written by Labé’s male contemporaries indicate that she earned the admiration of her peers. Not long after her death, however, her reputation declined along with interest in her work. Jerry C. Nash (1980; see Further Reading) quoted the influential religious reformer John Calvin, who called Labé a “plebeia meretrix” (“common whore”), noting that the belief that Labé was an adulteress or even a prostitute persisted among later readers, even those who praised her work. Nash observed that, apart from the moral condemnation, readers prone to emphasizing the autobiographical aspects of Labé’s poetry were also likely to attribute the beauty and emotional power of her verse to spontaneous inspiration rather than to skill, learning, or art. Nash and other critics, including Jeanne Prine (1987), have instead emphasized the poetic and rhetorical strategies Labé used, downplaying the significance of Labé’s personal experience with love. Arguing that biographical detail has become “irrelevant” to the study of Labé’s poetry, Gertrude S. Hanisch (1979; see Further Reading) instead emphasized the poems’ origins in the works of Latin love elegists, from whom Labé borrowed technique, structure, imagery, and theme.

Scholars of Labé’s poetry have also insisted that, although Labé’s work clearly arose from both Latin and French traditions, she was inventive and original, finding several ways to differentiate herself from her literary forebears and express her own voice. In particular, Labé’s debt to, and difference from, Petrarchan love sonnets has been a dominant theme in Labé scholarship. Critics such as Deborah Lesko Baker (1996) and Zeina Hakim (2011) have explored the ways in which Labé reappropriated a decidedly masculine tradition to speak about feminine intelligence, community, and desire. Specific differences from the Petrarchan tradition have been described by critics, including Karen F. Wiley (1981) and Mary B. Moore (2000). Wiley, for instance, noted that Labé altered the relationship between the lover and the beloved. Where Petrarch’s Laura is a perfect woman who is forever unattainable, Wiley asserted, Labé’s lover has flaws, suffering for love found and then lost. According to Moore, such changes made it possible for Labé to speak frankly of pleasure, describing love as both longing and release. Kenneth Varty (1956) and Andrea Chan (1977) have also emphasized the influence of Neoplatonism on

Labé's poetry, particularly in her understanding of love. Chan suggested that while Petrarch provided for Labé a vocabulary to describe suffering, Plato (through the Neoplatonists of the Renaissance) provided one for happiness in love. Both Chan and Varty asserted the influence of Italian philosopher Marsilio Ficino, one of Plato's most important Renaissance translators, for Labé's Neoplatonic views.

Critics including Carla Freccero (2000) and Cathy Yandell (2000) have found that in her poetry, Labé began to construct the community of female scholars and writers she called for in her dedicatory epistle. However, this view of Labé as a proto-feminist has been challenged by French scholar Mireille Huchon (2006; see Further Reading), whose controversial study hypothesizes that Labé was "une créature de papier" ("a creature of paper"/"a paper invention"), or a hoax created by the male poets who wrote *Works of Louise Labé of Lyon*.

Shaun Strohmmer

PRINCIPAL WORKS

**Euvres de Louïze Labé Lionnoize* [may be translated as *Works of Louise Labé of Lyon*]. Lyon: De Tournes, 1555. (Dialog, letter, poetry, and prose)

Oeuvres de Louise Labé [may be translated as *Works of Louise Labé*]. Ed. Charles Boy. 2 vols. Paris: Lemerre, 1887. (Dialog, letter, poetry, and prose)

Oeuvres complètes [may be translated as *Complete Works*]. Ed. François Rigolot. Paris: Flammarion, 1986. (Dialog, letter, poetry, and prose)

Principal English Translations

Sonnets. Ed. Peter Sharratt. Trans. Graham Dunstan Martin. Austin: U of Texas P, 1972. Print.

Debate of Folly and Love: A New English Translation with the Original French Text. Trans. Anne-Marie Bourbon. New York: Lang, 2000. Print. Trans. of *Débat de folie et d'amour*.

Complete Poetry and Prose: A Bilingual Edition. Ed. Deborah Lesko Baker. Trans. Annie Finch. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2006. Print.

*This volume includes the first publication of Labé's poetry and *Débat de folie et d'amour* [published as *Debate of Folly and Love*].

CRITICISM

Ernst Rose (essay date 1944)

SOURCE: Rose, Ernst. "Two German Translations of Louïze Labé's Second Sonnet." *Modern Language Quarterly* 5.2 (1944): 183-91. Print.

[In the following essay, Rose compares translations of Labé's second sonnet by Rudolf G. Binding and Rainer Maria Rilke. Rose contends that Rilke's translation mischaracterizes the register in which Labé wrote, neglecting the significance of Petrarchan echoes in the poem and giving it a more romantic feel than Binding's translation. Binding, by contrast, maintains the formal elements of the original, preserving its simplicity.]

After centuries of comparative oblivion, modern times have witnessed quite a reawakening of interest in the French Renaissance poet Louïze Labé (1526-66). Of all the romantic and scholarly descriptions of her life, of the various renderings and studies of her poetry, the German translation by Rainer Maria Rilke has evoked the widest comment. *Die Vierundzwanzig Sonette der Louïze Labé Lyoneserin. 1555. Übertragen von Rainer Maria Rilke* appeared first in 1918¹ and since then have found the most divergent critical judgment. In a very clear article, Lotte Cleve² has apparently succeeded in demonstrating the outspokenly Rilkean character of this translation which, according to her, can scarcely be classified as faithful to the original. Yet Paul Zech³ has thought more highly of the sympathetic reflection which this "extraordinary" woman has found in the mirror of Rilke's temperament, and Norbert Fuerst⁴ more recently has called the translation "the ideal version, in which nothing has been lost and nothing has been falsified, in which everything has a new freshness, a new youth. One could say, they are an apparition of the original with nothing added but the glory of resurrection."

In view of these inconclusive results of previous scholarship, a new discussion of Rilke's translation has become necessary and shall here be attempted from an at least partly new angle. We shall concentrate our attention on Louïze Labé's second sonnet which happens to have been translated not only by Rilke, but also by the scarcely less gifted German poet, Rudolf G. Binding.⁵ This affords us an unusual opportunity for minute observation and objective comparison.

I

Louïze Labé's own position in French literature is not always readily understood. She is generally characterized as an important representative of the Lyonnaise group of poets whose achievement has been the introduction of forms and thoughts of the Italian Renaissance into French literature. But it is not always realized to what extent these forms and thoughts had crystallized into the two systems of Petrarchism and Platonism, and Louïze Labé is frequently described as much more original and independent than she was.

Petrarchism⁶ can be described as the lyrical fashion of Western Europe introduced by the first Italian followers of Petrarch and which became the standard of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Like the previous lyrical system of the troubadours, it comprised a definite pattern of attitudes

and stylistic devices. In Petrarchist poetry, the beloved is always cruel and inexorable, the lover always wooing, pining, and complaining. The lover's psychological situation is broadly exposed and described by antithetical rhetorics as a situation of incurable sickness from which no escape is possible. The circle of poetic motives is comparatively narrow and is represented by definite formulas, which are rigidly fixed, down to the individual metaphors. This combination of prescribed psychological attitudes and prescribed stylistic devices produces a distinct literary pose in which the individual poetic experience no longer plays an important or decisive rôle.

The same holds true of the other international literary fashion of the Renaissance and Baroque periods, Platonism.⁷ The Platonists tended to make of love a purely spiritual affair. They maintained that true beauty could exist only in the world of the soul. And this idea was also expressed by a number of conventional metaphors culled from the dialogues of Plato.

Like most of the other poets of the French South, Louïze Labé was only superficially influenced by Platonism. To be sure, the ideal of purely spiritual love is glorified in at least some of her poems. But usually the Petrarchist motives of passionate longing and of outspoken sensual love break through, and at times she is even led to involuntarily strong expressions. But these definite traces of passion and warm feeling should not tempt an intelligent critic to make Louïze Labé into a modern independent individual and to ascribe to her a singularity of experience. Deductions about her private life are founded entirely on gossip and on literary homages paid to her by other poets, and the learned theses⁸ which have ventured into them, all appear to have stretched a point. A conservative scholar will beware of their highly hypothetical conjectures and confine himself to the printed words of the poetess herself.⁹

II

Louïze Labé's second sonnet¹⁰ is one of those that most clearly demonstrate her poetry to have been of Petrarchist character:

O beaus yeus bruns, ô regars destournez.
O chaus soupîrs, ô larmes espandues.
O noires nuits vainement atendues
O iours luisans vainement retournez:

O tristes pleins, ô desirs obstinez,
O tems perdu, ô peînes spendues,
O mile morts en mile rets tendues,
O pîres maus contre moy destinez.

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'endroits d'iceus mon coeur tatant,
N'en est sur toy volé quelque estincelle.

Here predominate not the lofty sentiments, as with the true Platonists, but the elements of sensuous passion, and these are presented in a rigid intellectual form. In regard to this sonnet one could almost speak of an intellectual passion. The whole structure of the poem is centered around the antithetic contrast between the cruel, unfeeling beloved and the vainly longing lover who spends her days and nights in sighing and weeping. Of course, the beloved here is a man, and the lover a woman. But this reversal of the situation described in Petrarch's sonnets was nothing new and had already been introduced by Veronica Gambara (1485-1550), one of the originators of the new literary style. As with most Petrarchist poems, the accent in this sonnet also is on the lover. Her condition is described in every detail, and the details are worked out with rhetorical exactness. Each of the two quartets is divided into two halves. Each of the first halves is subdivided into four parts by identical strong caesuras. And each of the divisions and subdivisions is introduced by an *ô*. The subdivisions of the first halves run parallel, as, for instance, in verse one, where *yeus* and *regars* stand for almost the same thing, though the second half of the verse is stronger and more to the point. Similarly, there is a higher degree of expression in the second halves of the second, fifth, and sixth verses. The second halves of the quartets themselves contain a similar contrast only expressed by longer units. Here the *noires nuits* of the third verse are contrasted with the *iours luisans* of the fourth, and the *mile morts* of the present situation described in the seventh verse are taken up in a stronger key by the imminent *pîres maus* of the eighth.

In the tercets the contrast is even stronger. The first of them sketches the attractiveness of the beloved whose cruelty has already transpired in the quartets. He is described by a rather detailed enumeration of his physical parts (in verse nine) and of his social charms (in verse ten), and these elements of attractiveness are then summarized in the last verse of the first tercet (verse eleven). The theme of this first tercet, of course, is the opposite of the theme of the quartets. But the contrast is partly softened by formal means in order to avoid a disruption of the structure of the whole poem. The twelve *ô*'s of the quartets are followed by three more *ô*'s in the first tercet, and the method of enumeration too is continued, though in a more abrupt manner.

The second tercet then contrasts with the beloved's attractions (expressed in the first tercet) his haughty indifference to the feelings of the lover. This indifference, which is also the cause of the hopeless situation described in the quartets, is finally summarized by an impressive Petrarchist metaphor of the strongest possible persuasion. This metaphor is taken from the same realm of fire as the corresponding imagery in verses eleven, twelve, and thirteen. So the unity of the tercets, in spite of their contrast, is also well preserved. The metaphor itself is not hyperbolic and thus fits into the character of the whole passion finding expression in this sonnet, a passion that in spite of its violence is guided by strong reason and is capable of intellectual refinement.¹¹

III

Regardless of any other liberties it might have taken, an acceptable German translation ought to have done justice to the intellectual character of the passion expressed in Louïze Labé's second sonnet, and ought to have preserved its main structural elements. But has Rainer Maria Rilke's translation¹² met these primary requirements? Let us compare it with the original:

O braune Augen, Blicke weggekehrt,
Verseufzte Luft, o Tränen hingegossen,
Nächte, ersehnt und dann umsonst verflossen,
und Tage, strahlend, aber ohne Wert.

O Klagen, Sehnsucht, die nicht nachgibt, Zeit,
mit Qual vertan und nie mehr zu ersetzen,
und tausend Tode rings in tausend Netzen
und alle Übel wider mich bereit.

Stirn, Haar und Lächeln, Arme, Hände, Finger,
Geige, die aufklagt, Bogen, Stimme,—ach:
ein brennlich Weib und lauter Flammen-Schwinger.

Der diese Feuer hat, dir trag ichs nach,
daß du mir so ans Herz gewollt mit allen,
und ist kein Funken auf dich selbst gefallen.

Here, instead of the fifteen *ô*'s of the original, we have only three, and even these are not distributed in anything like an equal arrangement. Still worse is the disruption of the contrasts as far as they are expressed by metrical means. Nothing in Louïze Labé's sonnet corresponds to the enjambement connecting Rilke's fifth and sixth verses. And Rilke's caesuras in the second, third, fifth, and sixth verses are also much weaker than those of Louïze Labé. Even the rhyme scheme of the French poet has not escaped major alterations. Rilke's quartets show four rhymes for Louïze Labé's two and thus frankly give up the traditional character of the sonnet form. The change of the rhyme scheme *ccdeed* of the original tercets into Rilke's *efefgg* is perhaps less significant, although it weakens the formal contrast between the two tercets.¹³

As a result of these changes, the structure of the whole sonnet is destroyed, and its intellectual character has disappeared. In its stead we have the irregular oscillations of a nervous emotion, which occasionally disrupt the smooth flow of the form. Not even the expression of Louïze Labé's feeling in the form of an exclamation has been preserved.

Rilke's interpretations of individual phrases often point in the same direction. Where Louïze Labé has a definite relation between nouns and adjectives, Rilke upsets the balance by leaving out adjectives and substituting for them nominal or verbal terms.¹⁴ Thus the contrast between the black nights and the shining days has been weakened by the omission of *noires*. The contrast between *attendues* (line 3) and *retournez* (line 4) has been rendered by one participle and one noun which, moreover, is not an adequate translation. In the second quartet, *tristes* and *tendues* have not been translated, while *obstinez* and *despandues*

have changed into verbs. In the tercets, *pleintif* and *plein* have likewise become verbal expressions; *lut* has been omitted, to avoid a rhetorical enumeration.

In other ways formal contrasts have been weakened by the rendering of the two *vainements* in the first quartet by only one *umsonst*. In the eighth verse of Louïze Labé *pires maus* not only takes up *mile morts*, but also increases it in degree; Rilke has *alle Übel* instead of a more correct *schlimmre Übel*. Thus, the regular rhetorical contrasts of the French sonnet are superseded by a more spasmodic flow of feeling. Rilke's verses acquire an emotional character totally different from Louïze Labé's. Reason with him no longer governs this emotion.

In the unexpected *ach* in Rilke's first tercet this emotional character clearly comes out. It is checked only by a certain preciousness which again has no counterpart in the original. Where Louïze Labé employs simple, strong adjectives and participles, Rilke has choice words like *verseufzt*, *hingegossen*, *brennlich*. These words translate a Renaissance poem into a Baroque key and make Louïze Labé's simple, strong reason appear forced and strained. In the same direction points the questionable translation of the simple *flambeaus* by the complicated image *Flammen-Schwinger*.¹⁵

All these changes, however, flow quite logically from Rilke's basic misconception of the French Renaissance poet. At the end of *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* (1904-10),¹⁶ he ranked her among the loving women who forget the real object of their love and are satisfied by the attitude of unfulfilled love itself. But he overlooked that, with Louïze Labé, this satisfaction expressed itself primarily by formal means. For him she was a timeless type, and he considered it unimportant that she belonged to the Renaissance; so he simply bridged the distance by making her his own.¹⁷ In this translation also, Rilke can hardly be called a born translator who forgets himself in favor of the foreign poet he translates.¹⁸ His translation is definitely "rilkisch."¹⁹ It cannot even be called an "Übertragung."

IV

Is Rudolf G. Binding's translation²⁰ to be preferred to Rilke's? His version reads:

O braune Augen, Blicke abgewendet,
O heiße Seufzer, o vergossene Tränen.
O dunkle Nächte hingebracht in Schenken,
O lichte Tage nutzlos hinverschwendet;

O Traurigkeit, o endloses Begehren,
O Stunden die vertan, wehes Entsetzen,
O tausend Tode rings in tausend Netzen,
O schlimmere Qualen noch mich zu verzehren.

O Lächeln, Stirn, Haar, Hände—mich verzückend;
O Stimme, Laute, Geige—mich berückend:
So viele Flammen für ein schmelzend Weib!