

166 Louise Labé

## Élégie 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 Cieux  
 Se peut vanter de n'estre vicieux?  
 L'un n'est content de sa sorte de vie,  
 Et tousjours porte à ses voisins envie:  
 L'un forçant 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 loy 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 nec,  
 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,

Labé, Louise; Baker, Deborah Lesko (Editor); Finch, Annie (Translated by). Complete Poetry and Prose : A Bilingual Edition.  
 Chicago, IL, USA: University of Chicago Press, 2006. p 199.  
<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/swarthmore/Doc?id=10210011&ppg=199>

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## 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 —<sup>50</sup>  
 set her work against what Pallas had devised.<sup>51</sup>  
 And you should have seen me in armor, riding high,  
 gripping my lance, letting my arrows fly!

Labe, Louise; Baker, Deborah Lesko (Editor); Finch, Annie (Translated by). Complete Poetry and Prose : A Bilingual Edition.  
 Chicago, IL, USA: University of Chicago Press, 2006, p 200.

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168 *Louise Labé*

Le devoir faire en l'estour furieux,  
 Piquer, volter le cheval glorieux,  
 Pour Bradamante, ou la haute Marphise,  
 Sœur 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 ainsi:  
 "Tu penses donq, ô Lionnoise Dame,  
 Pouvoir fuir par ce moyen ma flame:  
 Mais non feras, j'ai subjugué les Dieux  
 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 eschaulé d'ire  
 Hors de sa trousse une sagette il tire,  
 Et décochant 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 vû encore seize Hivers,  
 Lors que j'entray en ces ennuis divers:  
 Et jà voici le treizième Esté  
 Que mon cœur fut par Amour arresté.  
 Le tems met fin aus hautes Pyramides,  
 Le temps met fin aus fontaines humides:

Labe, Louise; Baker, Deborah Lesko (Editor); Finch, Annie (Translated by). Complete Poetry and Prose : A Bilingual Edition.

Chicago, IL, USA: University of Chicago Press, 2006. p 201.

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## Poetry 169

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.<sup>32</sup>  
 But what of it? Love couldn't lend my heart  
 to Mars and study for long; soon he would start<sup>33</sup>  
 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.

Labe, Louise; Baker, Deborah Lesko (Editor); Finch, Annie (Translated by). Complete Poetry and Prose : A Bilingual Edition.  
 Chicago, IL, USA: University of Chicago Press, 2006. p 202.

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170 *Louise Labé*

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 quelqu'un le portera.

FIN

## Poetry 171

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,<sup>34</sup>  
but his love didn't last for very long;  
Medea was loved by Jason, so we hear<sup>35</sup>—  
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.<sup>36</sup>

END

196 Louise Labé

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 encercelé,  
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.

Labe, Louise; Baker, Deborah Lesko (Editor); Finch, Annie (Translated by). Complete Poetry and Prose : A Bilingual Edition.  
Chicago, IL, USA: University of Chicago Press, 2006. p 229.

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*Poetry* 197

## 13 [The Ivy and the Tree]

Oh, if I were taken to that handsome breast<sup>57</sup>  
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 sky<sup>58</sup>  
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.<sup>59</sup>

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206 *Louise Labé*

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 plains 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.  
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.

Labe, Louise; Baker, Deborah Lesko (Editor); Finch, Annie (Translated by). Complete Poetry and Prose : A Bilingual Edition.  
Chicago, IL, USA: University of Chicago Press, 2006. p 239.

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*Poetry* 207

## 18 [Kiss Me Again]

Kiss me again, rekiss me, and then kiss<sup>68</sup>  
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:<sup>69</sup>  
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.<sup>70</sup>

Labe, Louise; Baker, Deborah Lesko (Editor); Finch, Annie (Translated by). Complete Poetry and Prose : A Bilingual Edition.  
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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 LOUISE  
 LABÉ LIONNOIZE.

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## 24 [Sisters, Do Not Reproach Me]

Sisters, do not reproach me that I've felt  
such love it makes a thousand torches burn,<sup>79</sup>  
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.<sup>80</sup>  
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,<sup>81</sup>  
no beauty like Adonis's to accuse.<sup>82</sup>  
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

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