

important point that no one knew how far reaching or long lasting the reforms would be, and this uncertainty shaped women's responses to the closure of their houses. Spear also provides four appendices: a list of nunneries and their income, a list of the superiors in each house, the election license of Cecily Willoughby as Abbess of Wilton Abbey, and Euphemia's eulogy.

Overall this book contains a great deal of meticulous research. If I have one criticism, it is that Spear might have filled in some of her gaps with parallel examples from outside convents. Women managed households, and towns, parishes, and guilds all held elections. Some consideration of the dynamics of these analogous situations might have fleshed out her argument. Spear has covered a vast territory and has successfully argued for the competency of nunnery leadership in the late Middle Ages, yet she continually hedges her assessments because the fragmentary nature of her sources makes it difficult for her to make generalizations. Her argument that leadership looks very different when viewed from within the nunnery as opposed to the idealized ecclesiastical hierarchy is very compelling and adds a valuable dimension to the scholarship on female monastics.

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**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. (The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe.) University of Chicago Press, 2006. pp. xxxi + 274.**

**T**he 1555 *Oeuvres* of Louise Labé are remarkable in many ways. Written by a ropemaker's daughter, they combine erudition with feminist polemic and frank eroticism and comprise a startlingly wide range of genres: an introductory manifesto addressed to a woman, a prose allegorical debate, three elegies in the tradition of Ovid's *Heroides*, and the first female-authored Petrarchan sonnet cycle in French. Nevertheless, as Deborah Lesko Baker observes in the introduction to her new edition of the *Oeuvres*, the complete corpus of Labé's work has not hitherto been readily available to English speakers. In a trend that began within Labé's own lifetime, analysis of her texts often came second to speculation about her colorful personal history (was she or was she not a courtesan?); and from the nineteenth century onward, critics preferred to read her sonnets as erotic autobiography, privileging them over the rest of her work. Accordingly, the sonnets have been translated into English five

times, but Lesko Baker and Finch's translation is only the second English edition of the complete works to appear, and the first to be issued in bilingual format by a major press.

Lesko Baker provides a short general introduction to Labé and her work (accompanied by an excellent critical bibliography) and essays on Labé's prose and poetry. She emphasizes the interconnectedness of Labé's texts, arguing that her multiple "speaking postures," varied as they are, nonetheless constitute "the unified voice of an authentic female subject" (2). This underscoring of the common themes and vocabulary that run throughout Labé's work is particularly timely in the context of Sorbonne professor Mireill Huchon's claim, in *Louise Labé: Une creature de papier* (2006) that Labé wrote none of the texts attributed to her: the feminist preface, the *Débat*, and the poems were all ghost-written by different male contemporaries. Lesko Baker's demonstration of Labé's consistent poetic voice and unique revision of the Petrarchan tradition offers a powerful counter-argument to Huchon's.

Lesko Baker traces "the values of equality, reciprocity, and interdependency that motivate Labé's entire literary oeuvre" (38). Her discussion of Labé's preface focuses on the different addressees whom Labé explicitly and implicitly calls into dialogue: her young dedicatee Clémence de Bourges; women in general, who are urged to support one another as they trade their distaffs and spindles for the pen; men, who are

to accept women as partners in both domestic and public affairs; and last but not least, "the process of writing itself" (26), which brings the author not only fame but also personal pleasure. Turning to the *Débat de Folie et d'Amour*, Lesko Baker shows how the goddess Folly's quarrel with the male figure of Cupid constitutes a further exploration of the issues introduced in the preface while it also looks ahead to the major themes of the love poems (the satirization of solipsistic male suffering, the desire for mutuality in love). Finally, Lesko Baker highlights Labé's radical reworking of Petrarchan conventions: Petrarch's self-absorbed lyric speaker is replaced by a new voice that seeks "to preserve intact a sense of both selfhood and otherness" (143). This reading of Labé is clearly informed by contemporary theories of gender and ethics, but not obtrusively so. In this sense Lesko Baker is well-matched with the poet herself, whose writing is distinctive for its combination of philosophical depth with lucidity and concreteness.

Packed with mythological references, rhetorical flourishes, and witty colloquialisms, the *Débat de Folie et d'Amour* is a difficult text to translate. Lesko Baker's translations of the *Débat* and the *Epistre dédicatoire* are meticulously accurate and very readable. She adds her own paragraph divisions to the translation, but leaves the French text in its original format on the facing page, with paragraph symbols helpfully indicated in brackets. The translation faithfully conveys unusual features of Labé's

prose, such as unexpected shifts from past to present tense, giving the reader a clear flavor of the original text. Idiomatic English phrases reveal the lively humor of the French, as when Folly tells Amour that his bow and arrows are “softer than wet noodles” (*plus molz que paste*, 51), or “yanks his eyes right out of his head” (*tout d’un coup lui lève les yeux*, 71). Where Lesko Baker’s interpretation of the French differs substantially from that of the *Débat*’s previous English translators, she indicates the variation and explains her decisions in the notes. In short, the translation makes the dense text of the *Débat* more accessible than ever before, and is sure to be the standard scholarly translation of Labé’s prose for years to come.

Annie Finch’s translations of Labé’s elegies and sonnets are, unfortunately, less felicitous. The problem is due not to lack of talent on Finch’s part (she is an esteemed poet in her own right), but to the difficulties of maintaining a rigid rhyme scheme when translating poetry into English. Unlike earlier translators, Finch undertakes the challenge of preserving Labé’s original rhyme patterns and meter. Some of Finch’s verses convey the sense of the original remarkably well; she concludes Sonnet 1 with the beautiful line, “the desire whose broken life would break my own” (173), and captures Labé’s dry wit in Sonnet 2: “so many flames to engulf one single woman! / [. . .] but not one spark flies back, to make you human” (175). More often, however, the meaning of the original, and even poetic

beauty, lose out to the exigencies of the rhyme. For example, a famous and ambiguous line from Sonnet 18, “Permetts m’Amour penser quelque folie” (“Permit my love to imagine some folly,” or “Permit me, Love, to imagine some folly”) is rendered by Finch as, “I’ll tell you something honest now, my love” (207). The tentative yet daring tone of the French line is lost, as is the reference to folly and its obvious resonance with the *Débat de Folie et d’Amour*.

It is disappointing that the book omits twenty-five poems that appeared at the end of Labé’s 1555 *Oeuvres*: the “Escriz de divers Poètes, à la louenge de Louïze Labé Lionnoïze” (“Writings of Various Poets, in praise of Louise Labé Lyonnaise”). While not written by Labé herself, these poems constitute an integral part of her book as it was published in the sixteenth century, and provide an intriguing glimpse into the canny strategy used by Labé to market her works. It is a pity that these texts will remain unavailable to non-Francophone readers. It is also worth noting that the portrait of Labé in Lesko Baker and Finch’s edition is not the 1555 engraving by Pierre Woériot, as the caption says; it is the nineteenth-century version of the portrait, retouched by Henri-Joseph Dubouchet in order to appeal to his contemporaries’ notions of female beauty.

This new bilingual edition of Labé’s complete works represents a valuable and welcome scholarly resource that will appeal to students and specialists

alike. Edited by a scholar who treats questions of gender with sensitivity and insight and appearing at a moment when renewed interest and controversy has begun to surround the figure of Louise Labé, the volume will enable her texts to reach a wider audience, as she extends her invitation across the centuries: "Oh, Women who read these words, / Come sigh with me, for the sorrows you have heard!" (155).

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**Susanne Hafner.**  
*Maskulinität in der höfischen Erzählliteratur.* Peter Lang, Europäischer Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2004.  
pp. 209.

**M**askulinität in der höfischen Erzählliteratur [Masculinity in Courtly Narrative] is a study of the complex web of relationships that shape constructions of masculinity in medieval culture. Hafner studies four medieval German texts diachronically and synchronically. Instead of focusing on the "canonical" protagonists, such as Tristan, Siegfried, Parzival, and Erec, Hafner selected the title characters of Heinrich von Veldeke's *Eneasroman*, Hartmann von Aue's *Gregorius* and *Iwein*, the Gahmuret story in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* and *Titurel*, and marginally

in the introduction, Gottfried von Straßburg's *Tristan*. Hafner chose her texts because of their "fehlgeleitete libido: die Liebe zum falschen Objekt [misdirected libido: the love for the wrong object]" (21, original emphasis). In her view, the protagonists' choice of a love object defines their sexuality; it is whom he loves that makes a man a man (21). Hafner traces different constructions of masculinity through the lens of gender: Eneas supposedly desires men and is accused of sodomy; Gregorius desires close relatives and, like his parents, practices incest; Iwein desires the widow of the man he just murdered and goes insane when she rejects him as her husband; Gahmuret does not desire Herzloyde, a woman who is perfect for him while she displays fetishistic behavior in their marriage. In each case, Hafner argues, the woman is the perfect choice for the protagonist based on the criteria of courtly society for ideal marriage partners. Much scholarship ends with determining this political and social compatibility of the couple. Not so Hafner, who undercuts the perfect compatibility topos with her detailed analyses of why these characters' libido is displaced onto the wrong object. Her interdisciplinary and comparative approach allows her to demonstrate powerfully how constructions of masculinity changed throughout a story's transmission and that authors did not simply translate an original but adapted it to reflect their own cultural contexts.

Hafner's analysis of the character of Aeneas places particular emphasis on