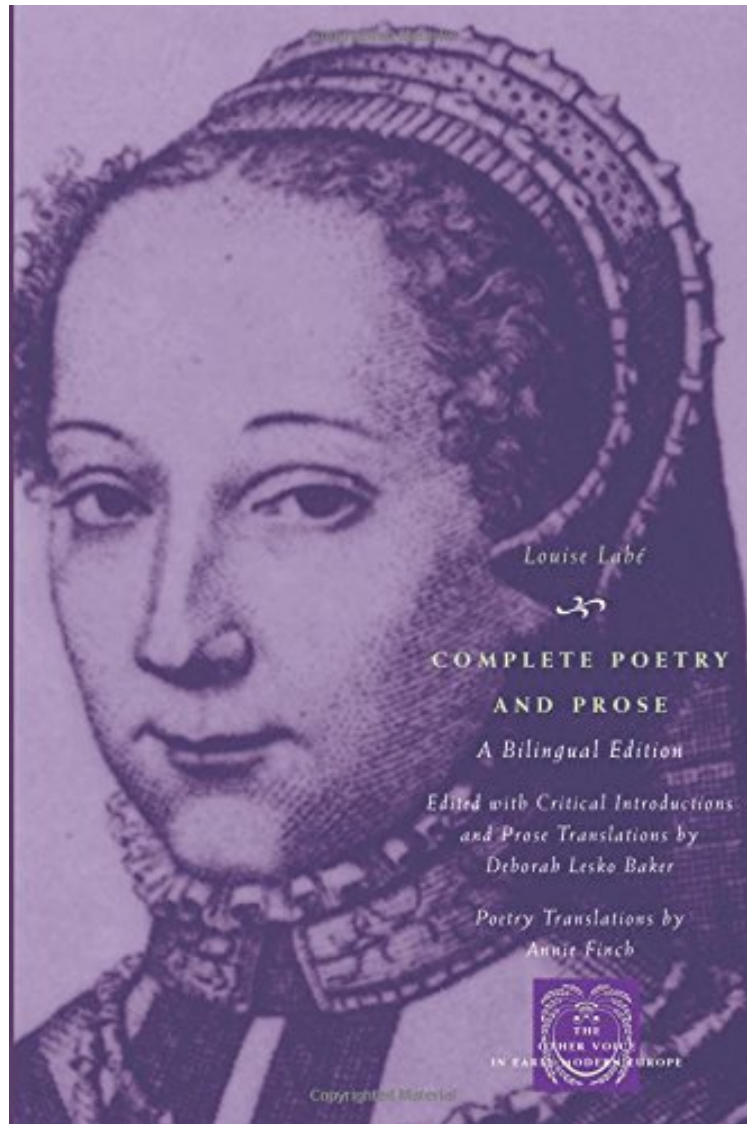


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*Louise Labé*

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before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Complete Poetry and Prose: A Bilingual Edition (The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. a beautifully mastered formality livened by vernacular wit and speedBy Glenn J. Shea: LA BELLE CORDIERE. Louise Labé wrote her moving and intimate verses in Lyon in the

sixteenth century, at a time when French poetry had glamors and glories very neatly parallel to those of English: the model and influence of Petrarch, a pure lyric impulse matched by adventurous intellect, a beautifully mastered formality livened by vernacular wit and speed. I love Labeshes one of my favorite Renaissance poetsbut Im uncertain as to how far shes likely to make it into English. The sheer accomplishment of the verse, its mix of artistry and directness, its ease and achieved style, as with her masters, Ronsard and du Bellay, even lesser and lovely poets like Philippe Desportes, are likely to leave all but the most inspired translators with little but pale simulacra. In the only current complete English-language edition of Labes work (COMPLETE POETRY AND PROSE, edited with prose translations by Deborah Lesko Baker and poetry translations by Annie Finch, Chicago, 2006) Bakers versions of the prosethe famous Dedicatory Epistle and Debate of Folly and Loveare readable enough; Finchs rhymed-couplet versions of the Elegies work better, because simpler, than with the more tangled challenges of the sonnets, which are, finally, the real core of Labes work. Better to take these renderings as usable cribs or, if your French is up to it, stick to Francois Rigolots wonderful (and inexpensive) edition, published by Garnier Flammarion in 1986. The critical introduction by Baker in the Chicago edition is intelligent but, sweet Jesus hung on the cross with nails, the prose is awful: a style so abstract and Latinate as to make Samuel Johnson look like blunt Saxon muttering. And nowhere in this mess of jargon is there any urgent sense that Labe meant any of it, that she is remarkable, even among the riches of Renaissance verse, for a style marked by utter conviction. Of course, I could be mistaken. In the most recent academic attention to Labe she has received the Homeric, indeed Shakespearean level of flattery: dismemberment. In LOUISE LABE, CREATURE DE PAPIER (Droz), Mireille Huchon has denied Labe the authorship of the book published under her name and parceled her work out to Maurice Sceve and other poets of his Lyonnais circle. Oh, the horror. Online there is not only much discussion of The Huchon Hypothesis but a variety of texts and translations: infionline.net offers a good selection of both. Theres a charming brief chapter on Rilkes translation of Labes sonnets in Alberto Manguels HISTORY OF READING (Viking, 1996). From there its only a hop, skip and a jump to Clement Marot, Joachim du Bellay and Pierre de Ronsard, the acknowledged masters of French Renaissance poetryand hence to some of the most beautiful and human poetry in the French language. Norman R. Shapiro, the prolific and ingenious translator, has done an anthology of these three poets, LYRICS OF THE FRENCH RENAISSANCE (Yale, 2002); Shapiros versions, which maintain the meters and rhyme schemes of the originals, succeed both as helpful cribs for those of us whose sixteenth- century French is imperfect and as reimaginings of the originals as poetry in English. Its a joy to read.Glenn Shea, from Glenn's Book Notes, at [www.bookbarnniantic.com](http://www.bookbarnniantic.com)2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Labe, a woman after my own heartBy Marie SharonI became aware of Louise Labe in grad school where I did a paper on her work. I found her rollickingly lusty and forthright and loved that about her, especially as she was writing at a time (16th century Europe) when women were decidedly meant to be kept quiet. Her work is littered with classical allusions and deep references so that it is rich and requires rereading if one is to garner as much as one can from it. Fortunately, this is not a chore, but very enjoyable. It is not difficult to read. It is sometimes uproariously erotic and sometimes trenchantly serious and melancholy. Her eroticism is gloriously raw and immediate. Some critics and researchers tend to deny its pungency but, as ever, I am in the opposite court. Women have always known what is erotic, intriguing. It is only those who would buy into the man's world of female subservience who strive to deny her earthiness. One of her most interesting and enjoyable techniques is to use double entendre and this requires a bilingual edition (which this is) to fully appreciate the ambiguities of her work. She uses words that are perfectly acceptable but which also might have a more erotic connotation, a thinly veiled or a heavily emphasized "other" meaning. This provides a great deal of fun reading her poetry, figuring out where she is coming from or heading. She is also not backward in giving as good a women got back then and does not let her lovers off easy when they try to put her in her place. I heartily recommend Labe.I also cannot strongly enough recommend the Other Voices series from the University of Chicago Press, of which this is one.5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Indispensable for the French Lit enthusiastBy Sherringford ClarkThis is an excellent edition of the complete works of Louise Labe, who is one of the most important women writers of the French Renaissance and whose poetry is especially wonderful, providing a much-needed female perspective on the love lyric. One mustn't ignore Labe's prose however, for her "Debate of Folly and Love" is an excellent addition to the literary tradition of the debate and showcases Labe's proto-feminism.Deborah Lesko Baker provides excellent introductions to Labe's poetry and prose, describing her life and times and her relation to other Renaissance writers (esp. Christine de Pisan). Baker illuminates Labe's role as a distinctively female writer and how her sonnets respond to those of Petrarch. Essentially, then, Baker provides all the background necessary for a full understanding of Labe, and she also supplies copious and helpful footnotes to Labe's works.In addition, Annie Finch's translations of Labe's poetry are superb, capturing the spirit of the originals (of course, the french is on the facing page). All in all, this is an essential purchase for anyone interested in Labe or French Renaissance literature, being the only complete bilingual edition of Labe's works available and a model for all scholarly editions of its kind.

Thanks to her acclaimed volume of poetry and prose published in France in 1555, Louise Lab (1522-66) remains one of the most important and influential women writers of the Continental Renaissance. Best known for her exquisite

collection of love sonnets, Lab played off the Petrarchan male tradition with wit and irony, and her elegies respond with lyric skill to predecessors such as Sappho and Ovid. The first complete bilingual edition of this singular and broad-ranging female author, *Complete Poetry and Prose* also features the only translations of Lab's sonnets to follow the exacting rhyme patterns of the originals and the first rhymed translation of Lab's elegies in their entirety.

About the Author Deborah Lesko Baker is associate professor and chair of French at Georgetown University. Annie Finch is the director of the Stonecoast Low-Residency Masters of Fine Arts in Creative Writing Program at the University of Southern Maine.