

*Ordered Text: The Sonnet Sequences of Du Bellay*, University Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature (New York, Berne, Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1985).

14. The edition of Petrarch quoted in these pages is *Petrarch's Lyric Poems: The Rime sparse and Other Lyrics*, ed. and trans. Robert M. Durling (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976). English translations are Durling's.

15. *Amours*, "Vœu," line 8 (*Œuvres* 4.4) and *Amours* 182, line 14 (*Œuvres* 4.172).

16. For a compelling discussion of these characteristics, viewed as common to all collections of mid-sixteenth-century French poetry, see Cécile Alduy, *Politique des "Amours": Poétique et genèse d'un genre français nouveau (1544–1560)*, *Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 422 (Geneva: Droz, 2007).

## Chapter 10

# Du Bellay's "Source de Meduse"

Margaret Ferguson

Writing is precisely working (in) the in between, inspecting the process of the same and of the other without which nothing can live, undoing the work of death.

Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" ["Le Rire de la Méduse"]

It is here, in this Latin elegy [the "Patriae desiderium," "Longing for His Fatherland"], that [Du Bellay] first defines his stay in Rome as exile, first takes alienation as his great subject.

Richard Helgerson, "Introduction," *Joachim du Bellay*

This chapter aims to illuminate and estrange some of Joachim Du Bellay's poetic representations of a feminized source of linguistic creativity in relation to his bilingual practices of writing, reading, and disseminating allusions. In the four books of poems that he published in 1558—three in French, one in Latin—Du Bellay explores his great subject of alienation, as Helgerson justly calls it, by reflecting on his four years in Rome (1553–57) under the rubric of exile.<sup>1</sup> He repeatedly depicts his exile as an absence from a source of poetic inspiration. The source, whether located in modern France or in ancient Rome, is typically depicted in terms of a kind of wealth that the poet lacks, whether it is erotic, economic, political, and/or linguistic. The source is also depicted as the home of the Muse, sometimes as a singular entity, sometimes as the group of nine sisters created (according to Pindar) in order to "hymn the praises of Zeus's newly ordered world, whose beauty was incomplete" without their singing.<sup>2</sup> Du Bellay represents his absence from the desired source as structural, not accidental: it continues even when he returns to his birthplace, as he figures himself doing in *Regrets* 130. This sonnet is an ironic

reprise of the more famous poem in which he longs for his French homeland by contrasting himself with Ulysses (“Heureux qui, comme Ulysse,” *Regrets* 31). In the later sonnet, he presents himself as a disillusioned anti-Ulysses, a voyager who returns home but fails to reclaim his property from the greedy suitors who had threatened his patriarchal security in his absence. Returning “to the bosom of the land that nursed him” [“au sein de sa terre nourrice”], the French poet finds himself dispossessed by “mille souciz mordants” [“a thousand biting cares,” Helgerson 180–81].

These “cares,” which “gnaw his heart” [“rongent le coeur”], are an intriguingly abstract version of Homer’s suitors: imitating but also changing the Homeric story by a detour through an Ovidan poem about Penelope. Du Bellay’s sonnet ends with a *fantasy* of taking vengeance on these unspecified enemies if his friend Dorat will lend him a phallic “bow” [“arc”]. That weapon has been passed from the nine Muses to the “hand” of the absent male friend: Du Bellay’s typically epistolary sonnet begs for the Muses’ gift to be handed over—as a loan, not an outright gift—to the man now writing, the man who threatens portentously to remain “still Roman” if the Muses’ bow is denied to him:<sup>3</sup> “Adieu donques (Dorat) je suis encor Romain/Si l’arc que les neuf Sœurs te misrent en la main/Tu ne me preste icy, pour faire ma vengeance” [“So adieu, Dorat, I am a Roman still, unless you lend me here the bow the nine sisters put into your hand, so I can take my revenge; Helgerson 180–81].

Ulysses’s wife is not named in this poem; nor is she named in the Latin elegy “Patriae desiderium,” in which Du Bellay contrasts himself to the “Ithacan” who returned to his “fatherland” though the land itself was “sterile” [“sterilis,” l. 42; Helgerson 312–13]. She is mentioned, however, in a Latin poem addressed to the same friend addressed in Sonnet 130, Jean Dorat. In the Latin version of the French poem, Du Bellay laments his lack of a “virtuous Penelope” and of a good son such as Telemachus.<sup>4</sup> As a weaver and unweaver of textiles, as an ostensibly chaste wife, and as a mother, Penelope is a significant influence on Du Bellay’s figuration of his composite and labile Muse. She arguably encompasses both the wife and the mistress figures that Du Bellay in one Latin poem neatly separates by associating the wife with the French language, the mistress with the allure and danger of Latin.<sup>5</sup> The boundaries between these muses, like those between French, Latin, and their shadowy sister Italian, are unstable in Du Bellay’s oeuvre, however, as is the distinction between male and female. I suggest, indeed, that *Regrets* 131 shows us a male poet posing as Ulysses blending his voice with that of Penelope as she is refigured, from her Greek prototype, by Ovid in the first poem of his *Heroides*. This is a series of somewhat accusatory epistolary elegies written as if by women to the lovers who have abandoned them.

Critics and editors have not cited the *Heroides* as a subtext for the *Regrets*, perhaps because they simply do not expect a male poet to echo the voice of a female writer, even a male-authored one. Ovid’s Penelope, however, suffers from fearful “cares” [“curas,” l. 73], a Latin version of Du Bellay’s “souciz”; moreover, like Du Bellay’s persona, Penelope describes herself as failing to repel those who are “pillaging” her household goods—or, more precisely, the goods that Ulysses, with his “scepter,” should protect.<sup>6</sup> Ovid’s Penelope, like Du Bellay, lacks a weapon to protect her home: significantly, Ovid does not mention the weaving stratagem of delay that Penelope deploys in Homer’s epic. Ovid transmutes her weaving—with complex ideological effects—into her passive-aggressive writing of a love letter. One could read the transmutation as a masculinist appropriation of a figure who elsewhere more overtly signifies women’s artistic powers; but given the striking similarities between the *Heroides* and Ovid’s laments for his own exile in the *Tristia*, it might be interesting to think of his Penelope as a figure for a writer who self-consciously lacks a scepter, that symbol of masculine rule, but who is nonetheless fruitful in strategies of deferral and of difference.

In his printed drama of homelessness, impoverishment, and threatened masculine identity, Du Bellay and his Muse(s) go back and forth between France and Italy, with the latter observed both in its ancient and modern guises. Du Bellay’s Muse resembles, at different moments, a Petrarchan mistress, a potentially “pillaged” or possibly unfaithful wife like Penelope, a witch, Ovid’s figure of “Echo,” a cruel mother who starves her “lamb” (though he is “not the worst of the flock,” *Regrets* 9), and a royal goddess (“diva”) named Marguerite of France—the sister of King Henri II. Marguerite is the powerful patron-reader to whom Du Bellay addresses both an early poem enjoining the French poet to write in his native language [“D’Ecrire en sa Langué”] and a later poem breaking that rule at the threshold of his book of Latin poems produced in Rome: the poem is entitled “Cur intermissis Gallicis Latine scribat” [“Why he [the poet] has abandoned French to write in Latin”].<sup>7</sup> Some of the poems to Marguerite echo or even translate each other, as the queen, who is obliquely but repeatedly reproached for abandoning her poet, becomes a Muse intricately tied to the *problem* of the poet’s loyalty to his country and to his native tongue.<sup>8</sup> That word in French as in English denotes a body part critical for eating, drinking and speaking; it also signifies a complex psycho-social construction, the phenomenon variously known as the mother or vulgar tongue or the native—or national—language.

Addressed obliquely as “France mere des arts” and, more overtly, as “Gallica”—the Latin name for France that inevitably recalls a time when the territory of France was a colony of Rome<sup>9</sup>—Queen Marguerite is a fulcrum for

Du Bellay's meditations on his experience of being, like Homer's Ulysses, exiled in a "sea" of language: the Latin word for "sea," "mare" provides Du Bellay with rich opportunities for word play on the French word "mère" [mother], a homophone for the French word for sea, "la mer."<sup>11</sup>

Du Bellay's figurations of and addresses to Queen Marguerite as Muse. I argue, exist in a complex network of verbal practices and theories that also yokes the Muse—and by implication, the Queen of France and her various surrogates in Du Bellay's poetry—to a famously monstrous mother whom the hero Perseus, aided by Athena, decapitates. The scene of decapitation is often represented in literature and the visual arts;<sup>11</sup> the parts of Medusa's story that seem most to concern Du Bellay, however, have to do with the *products* of the decapitation: the hybrid creature, the "winged" son Pegasus, who springs into life from Medusa's neck-blood at the moment when Perseus kills her; and the "gushing fountain" that Pegasus later creates, with his hard hoof, as a kind of weird reprise of the moment of his mother's death. That fountain is the Hippocrene, legendary home of the Muses.

Mirroring and doubling greatly interest Du Bellay and are indeed crucial to the ways in which he links the Muse(s) with Medusa. Perseus accomplishes his ostensibly heroic act of murder with the aid of winged shoes given him by Hermes—shoes mirrored in Pegasus's wings—and with a mirroring shield given him by Athena: this is the shield that allows Perseus to "see" Medusa without succumbing to her petrifying powers, and it is itself mirrored in the image of Medusa's head that Athena carries on her dress or shield. Athena, virgin goddess, becomes a mirror of Medusa because Athena too can petrify men (with her shield); and Athena is also yoked to Pegasus by virtue of her own "unnatural" birth from a parent's head—though in Athena's case, the head is a father's and is not cut off from the body. According to Ovid, Perseus recounts to an audience a second-hand story ("tis said") that Neptune raped the beautiful Medusa in Athena's temple.<sup>12</sup> Is Athena then scapegoating Medusa—who according to some classical sources was Medusa's rival in beauty before her lovely hair was changed into snakes—or justly punishing her for an act of sacrilegious lust that resulted in the birth of the "swift-winged" Pegasus and his twin brother (l. 786)? Ovid doesn't answer the question, but by having Medusa's killer tell her story—and mention the birth that came from her bloody death—Ovid creates a narratively rich back story, implicating the teller as well as the dead mother and the unpunished father. The latter is a figure whom Freud never mentions in his own famous reading of the Medusa's decapitation as a symbol of (the boy's fears of) castration.<sup>13</sup> Medusa's story is important for Du Bellay because he is concerned, as is Ovid in his exile poetry, with apportioning blame for obscure crimes and with placating reader-patrons both male and female. Among these, as I've suggested,

is Queen Marguerite of France; among these also is her husband the king, whom Du Bellay figures as a sea god in *Regrets* 128 in a phrase—"Neptune Francois"—that reminds us of the king's father (François I) as well as his nationality. The poem begins by emphasizing the writer's lack of choice in steering his ship into "la mer Tyrrène," the part of the Mediterranean off the west coast of Italy; the poem ends with the poet promising to dedicate his "remains" (his books of poetry, also his "spoils" from imperial or piratical ventures) to "Neptune Francois" if (and only if) the poet can "one day save myself from the dangers I flee wandering in these foreign seas" ["si je puis un jour me sauver des dangers/Que je fuy vagabond par ces flots étrangers." Helgerson 178–79].

Du Bellay's revisionary reading of the Medusa myth is arguably a key part of his extended and often misogynistic meditation on the male poet's dependence on a feminized "source" which is (to paraphrase Baudelaire) the poet's "semblable" as well as his beloved. Medusa's story—featuring her extended family, as it were—allows Du Bellay to reflect on the art of poetic reflection itself as well as a set of illicit passions including incestuous ones that are tightly tied to desires for food, drink, and unmediated, uncensored speech. Such desires are at once frustrated and analytically re-presented in the medium of writing destined for print as Du Bellay uses it in the service of the ambitious bilingual project he began during his sojourn in Rome and that bore creative fruit, in Paris, in 1558.

In the quartet of books he published that year, as distinct but nonetheless thematically and verbally linked objects, Du Bellay represents himself as banished to a territory between languages as well as between places, times, and Muses. This territory anticipates the "in between" of writing-as-work posited by Hélène Cixous in the passage quoted in my epigraph.<sup>14</sup> In Du Bellay's case, the writing is often explicitly described as "useless" and the words are often borrowed—or echoed or stolen—from others, illustrating the phenomenon that Du Bellay and his contemporaries defined (in multiple and contradictory metaphors) as "imitation."<sup>15</sup> Through writings that blur not only the common distinction between linguistic theory and practice but also that between a native language and a foreign one, Du Bellay inspects poetic writing as a "process of the same and of the other," as Cixous calls it, in ways that invite further analysis from a feminist perspective.<sup>16</sup> My approach is indebted to studies of the so-called "pre-Oedipal" mother and, more broadly, to new theoretical work on paths taking us, in Greselda Pollock's phrase, "beyond Oedipus" as his "complex" is formulated by Freud and Lacan. Such paths—which do not forget Freud or Lacan—do focus on the differently gendered perspectives from which such a complex may be seen; moreover, critics such as Cixous and Pollock interrogate the linear temporalities often presumed to

obtain for male or female subjects represented in language. Those feminists who seek to think beyond Oedipus take seriously Cixous's statement that "the mother, too, is a metaphor."<sup>17</sup>

Du Bellay's Roman poetry amply supports this proposition: at the same time, it illustrates habits of misogynistic thought that run like an oily river through centuries of male-authored writing about the Muse.<sup>18</sup> I provisionally pair Du Bellay with Cixous not to turn him into a (proto) feminist writer of any kind but rather to focus analytic attention on an intellectually provocative notion of bisexuality that emerges intermittently in his Roman poetry. This notion subtends his theory and practice of imitation and inheres, particularly, in his readings of Ovidian metamorphoses of mythical beings across many different category-lines including those between male and female, animal and human, human and plant, immortal and mortal. Du Bellay's notion of bisexuality anticipates Cixous's because it does not "conjure away castration" (Cixous 2048) but instead loosens that construction up by insisting on its status as a construction, that is, as a phenomenon that we can *know* only as it exists in language. That does not of course mean that the construction has no existence or mode of effectivity beyond language; but the argument does open a breach between ontology and epistemology, a breach that invites interrogation. This, I take it, is what Cixous offers when she critiques the Lacanian idea of the Symbolic as a "sanctuary of the phallos" even as she also writes that "their symbolic exists" and "holds power"; she further insists that we "are in no way obliged to deposit our lives in their banks of lack" (Cixous 2048). We could read this witty statement as supporting the case against Cixous made by some of her feminist readers who worry about "the potential impotence" of her "utopianism."<sup>19</sup> Utopian thinking is "potentially" impotent much of the time, however, as is most non-Utopian thought. Cixous does offer a bracing destabilization of Oedipal paradigms including that of the "castration complex." Her destabilizing enterprise, which attempts to make "the old single-grooved mother tongue reverberate with more than one language" (2049), can help us layer questions of gender and sexuality into the dynamic identified by George Hugo Tucker in his important studies of Du Bellay's bilingualism and his self-representations as an "Ovidian exile cut off not just from France but implicitly also, like Ovid himself, from Rome."<sup>20</sup>

Cut off, yes—but by whom? The answers Du Bellay offers are multiple and shifting, and to trace them, I have suggested, we need to entertain the idea that he is ringing changes on Ovid's female personae in the *Heroides* as well as his male persona in the (autobiographical) *Tristia*. In the *Regrets* and the *Poemata*, Du Bellay represents himself both as being abandoned and as *choosing* separation as part of a strategy of revenge. Sometimes, the two postures occur in a single poem: striking images of weakness often

exist in—and through—poetic practices signaling authorial agency and even aristocratic masculine bravado. Du Bellay indeed offers the reader glimpses of a complex mode of authorial agency through minute linguistic deviations from the *texts* he has chosen as his sources—texts that he both follows and abandons. He thus creates a certain ironic distance from his sources that is analogous to the distance from the ancient poets that he recommends to the ambitious French poet in *La Deffence et Illustration de la Langué Francoyse* (1549). Although by 1558 he has clearly modified his early somewhat paradoxical view (articulated both in the *Deffence* and the poem mentioned above, "D'Escrire en sa Langué") that the French poet should not write in a "strange" language but should rather "convert" to his native tongue—which phrasing of course implies that the tongue is not simply something naturally given—Du Bellay insists throughout his short and intense career that the mother or "vulgar" tongue should be "ennobled" through masculine labor and art.<sup>21</sup> As the "defender" of the French language, Du Bellay had indeed urged the ambitious French poet (always rhetorically presumed to be male) to "cut out" the "corrupted flesh" of his native literary tradition and to pursue a literary language "e loigné du vulgaire": distanced from the vernacular and the vulgar people including women and nurses who speak but don't write it.<sup>22</sup>

Being cut off from a desired source, whether it is symbolized as France or Rome, is arguably what the Du Bellayan poetic persona shows himself needing in order to achieve a certain kind of poetic fecundity. This is one of the stories he dramatizes in the longest poem of *Les Regrets*. On the threshold of that sequence of sonnets is a poem in quatrains addressed to a paternal figure of authority, the "Conseiller du Roy en son Privé Conseil": Jean de Saint-Marcel, lord of Avanson, appointed French ambassador to the Pope in 1555, and hence in Rome during the latter part of Du Bellay's time in that place. Du Bellay also addresses Elegy 3 of the *Poemata* to this man, under the title "Ad Ianum Auansonium." D'Avanson is additionally addressed in several sonnets of the *Regrets*, including 165, where he is described as the "dearest nursling of the nine sisters" ("des neuf Soeurs le plus cher nourisson," Helgerson 216–17).

The poem to D'Avanson begins with a quatrain by and about a poet who is distinctly *not* nourished by the Muse: "Si je n'ay plus la faveur de la Muse/Et si mes vers se trouvent imparfaits/Le lieu, le temps, l'aage où je les ay faits/Et mes ennuis leur serviront d'excuse" ["If I no longer am favored by the Muse, and if my lines are found to be imperfect, the place, the time, the age at which I wrote them, and my troubles will serve as their excuse," Helgerson 40–41]. This seems a conventionally self-deprecating opening; but the poet's rhetorical tactics invite a second look, for he is at once displacing blame onto the abstract entities of "le lieu, le temps, et l'aage" and also enlisting these

entities as his servants, as, literally, those who will “serve” as an “excuse” in a complex scene of gift giving—or commodity proffering—that includes the poet himself, occupying a servant’s role; the man he solicits here as a potential patron; and the Muse. The opening scene with three characters is open-ended, marked by the conditional mood Du Bellay employs in many of his poems (“Si . . . /si”) and by the poet’s deft shifting of any responsibility for the quality of his verse onto the Muse, its inspirational source: onto its conditions of production, including an “age” that is soon specified as a condition of the poet’s being “beyond” his most “active” years; and onto its powerful male reader-patron, who stands as the chief of those who could judge the poetry imperfect. I read this opening scene as the first of many in *Les Regrets* in which Du Bellay borrows others’ words (in this case, Ovid’s, from the *Tristia*) to limn a small but powerful drama in which an aging son—one mysteriously beyond his prime—presents the fruits of his labors to parental figures, a mother and a father, who may already have abandoned him, deeming him unproductive.<sup>23</sup> The poet nonetheless continues to court their favor, albeit in a way that reminds them, obliquely, that they are to blame for any insufficiency they may find in the poetic gift or commodity being offered to them. What is arguably at stake here is the quality of a *work* that stands in for the poet-son’s already failing body: “J’estois à Rome au milieu de la guerre,” he explains at the beginning of the second stanza [“I was in Rome in the midst of war”], and during that time, he was “already beyond [his] most active [or willing or ready] age, seeking some rest from his labors, not to acquire praise or favor” (Helgerson 41–42).

The second quatrain’s concluding line exemplifies what François Rigolot has called Du Bellay’s “poetics of refusal” [“poésie du refus”]: “Non pour louange ou pour faveur acquerre.”<sup>24</sup> Syntactically, the fourth line takes us back to the first, which is retroactively revealed as harboring a question that the poet refuses to answer: Why was he in Rome? Not for the reasons you might suppose—*not* to acquire favor or praise—terms causally linked, in Du Bellay’s milieu, to financial gain. The shadowy parent figures from the first quatrain, the Muse and potential patron whose favor and praise the poet seemed to be seeking, are thus obliquely set aside by the poet who declares that he was and is not seeking anyone’s favor. In the next quatrain, he metamorphoses from a son-like figure courting favor for his “line-making” work into a deracinated figure of paradoxical, fantasmatic self-sufficiency: he becomes (like) a laborer who works not for money or praise (for the acquisition of which he would be dependent on others’ judgment of his work), but rather for himself. He states that he resembles a cowherd or a rampart-builder, humble types of workers in his world: in sixteenth-century Paris vagrants were often put to work as rampart builders.<sup>25</sup> From these comparisons, he creates a simplified version of his

own work: he presents himself as someone who produces poetry on the side, as it were: the poetry is without “art” (or artifice), a leisure activity (*avocation*) undertaken simply for the “worker’s” pleasure—or, more accurately, for relief from the pain of his labor: “Ainsi voit-on celuy qui sur la plaine/Pique le boeuf, ou travaille au rampart/Se resjouir, et d’un vers sans art/S’esvertuer au travail de sa peine” [“So the man who on the plain herds cattle or toils on the ramparts rejoices and with an artless poem he has made relieves the burden of his labor.” ll. 9–12, Helgerson 40–41].

The opening of the poem to d’Avanson offers a subtle inquiry into the nature of poetic production: is it a kind of adult work at all, or is it an alternative to or indeed an escape from what others see as valuable work? After the vague comparisons of the poet to the cowherd and the rampart builder—types of rural and city laborers respectively—Du Bellay gives three other analogies for his poetic activity: the first is a quatrain-long comparison of himself to one who rows a galley—an apt image for a laborer who reaps no profit from his work and who has to adjust his every stroke to the rhythms set by the galley master: “Celuy aussi qui dessus la galere/Fait escumer les flots à l’environ/Ses tristes chantes accorde à l’aviron/Pour esprouver la rame plus legere” [“Likewise he, who on the galley makes the sea around him foam, accords his sad songs to his rowing, so that his oar will seem lighter.” ll. 13–16]. These lines acquire ironic depth from the fact that Du Bellay compares himself to a Roman slave who produces “tristes chantes” [“sad songs”] while at the same time closely imitating a single poem (IV.1) from Ovid’s own book of sad songs, the *Tristia*. Ovid’s comparison of his exiled self to a galley slave occurs in elegant lines that mimic the repetitive motion of oar strokes that he is describing: he compares the poet to one “who pulls to his breast in unison the pliant oars, timing his arms with measured strokes upon the water” [“quique refert pariter lentos ad pectora remos, in numerum pulsa brachia pulsat aqua”].<sup>26</sup> Du Bellay’s indefinite “celuy,” so often invoked in these poems contrasting the exile to someone happier than he is, applies here quite specifically to Ovid, Du Bellay’s precursor. There is a *mise en abyme* quality to the lines since Ovid too compares himself to another rower.

Ovid’s song exists in ironic counterpoint to Du Bellay’s because Ovid, as I noted above, was banished from Rome whereas Du Bellay sees himself as banished to that place. Pierre Maréchaux astutely invokes the metaphor of the “chassé-croisé”—a complex criss-cross dance movement—to describe the intertextual relation between Ovid and Du Bellay. Maréchaux sees that relation as rhythmic because it moves repeatedly across poetic lines and across geo-temporal spaces: the movement is also *triangular*, because it is an unstable liaison between Ovid, Du Bellay as “latiniste,” and Du Bellay as “poète français” (Maréchaux, “Le Masque d’Ovide,” 272). Building on

Maréchaux's insights. I would describe the relation as triangular in another way: it exists between the poet's present feelings, his work, and the material conditions imposed by the galley-master, who figures the distant power of the Emperor, in Ovid's case, or the French monarchs, in Du Bellay's. Ovid describes his oars as "lentos," which Wheeler translates as "pliant" but which can also mean "slow"—a connotation that carries an ironic hint of resistance into the scene of the poet's compliance to the Emperor's will. Du Bellay hints more strongly at the poet's agency and powers of resisting what is given: his galley slave, as we've seen, "makes the sea around him foam" ["fait escumer les flots à l'environ." l. 14, Helgerson 40–41)—an image not in Ovid's text—even as the French poet also makes his Ovidian "tristes chants" "accord" with the rhythm of his own (French) oars. In the act of "according," which is an act of cultural and linguistic translation, Du Bellay claims, as Ovid also does, to make a new, more bearable reality: he sings "so that his oar will seem lighter" ["Pour esprouter la rame plus legere." l. 16].<sup>27</sup> The comparison of the poet's labor to that of the galley slave clearly has a mystificatory dimension: the poet has considerably more freedom to vary his rhythm than a galley slave would have had. Nonetheless, the comparison serves, in both Ovid's and Du Bellay's texts, to signal and invite reflection on the element of repetitive compulsion in the labor of poetic line-making, a labor governed, at least in part, by the will of distant, ungenerous patrons and by the constraining "matter" of the mother tongue.

Du Bellay continues to follow the flow of Ovid's verse in the two quatrains that compare the poet to the Greek figures of Achilles and Orpheus; both comparisons serve further to complicate the meditation on the nature of the poet's labor and both—by introducing the traditional idea of poetry as a consolation for a specifically erotic loss—bring problems of masculinity into the meditation on poetic labor. Achilles sings to console himself for the loss of his mistress Briseis while he is notoriously not performing his warrior's work on the battlefield; Orpheus sings powerfully to the stones and trees, but only to lament his absent wife—lost, as Du Bellay remarks, "for the second time" (l. 22). Both comparisons stress the poet's inability to possess a beloved erotic partner in the face of opposition from a more powerful, and older, male figure. Agamemnon in Achilles' case, Hades in that of Orpheus. The comparisons lead both Ovid's and Du Bellay's poetic personae to consider (again) the figure of the Muse.

With the naming of the Muse, who is invoked as a consolation and figurative substitute for the erotic losses just mentioned, the Roman and French poet part ways. Although both initially praise the Muse for helping them "to endure the trouble of this sad time" ["Passer l'ennuy de la triste saison"], as Du Bellay puts it (l. 27), Ovid looks back at a Muse who was his "partner"

in error because she inspired him to write the love poem that contributed to Augustus's decision to banish the poet to the "barbarous" shores of the Danube: Ovid carefully distinguishes between the "fault" ("culpa") he and the Muse jointly committed and a "crime" ["acta rea"], which he avers that he/they did not commit. He briefly regrets having dedicated himself to the "service" of the Muses (shifting suddenly to a plural epithet: the Pierian ones), and he likens his Muse-inspired songs to the "strange lotus" tasted by Ulysses and his companions during their long voyage.

Du Bellay follows Ovid in moving from thanking the Muse to seeing her as a cause of his present dilemma, but Du Bellay does much more than Ovid does to associate the Muse with a mother, and Du Bellay also turns on the Muse much more bitterly than Ovid does—in a way that anticipates the turn from invocation to reproach one finds in Du Bellay's famous sonnet apostrophizing "France mere des arts."<sup>28</sup> Anticipating that poem, Du Bellay here conceives the Muse as having once given the poet "rest and life"; now, however, in that repetitive present Du Bellay is so adroit at rendering, the Muse becomes a cause of his poverty and an occasion for a desire to undo his life-path: "Je voudrais bien (car pour suivre la Muse/J'ay sur mon doz chargé la pauvreté)/Ne m'estre au trac des neuf soeurs arresté/Pour aller veoir la source de Meduse." Helgerson translates this tortuous quatrain as follows: "I wish—for in following the Muse I have assumed the burden of poverty—that I had not set myself in the path of the nine sisters to visit the Medusean spring" ll. 41–44, pp. 42–43). But the term "arresté" could also be translated as "stopped." This past participle, stronger than "set," seems paradoxical only until one realizes that the poet is wishing that he had never actually begun a doomed journey on the "track" of the nine Muses (notice that he has here shifted from one Muse to a band of female figures) because he sees the journey as leading—possibly—to a "death by sight," a death by gazing at the Medusa. Unlike Freud, however, du Bellay does not focus on the Medusa's *head*. Instead, Du Bellay uses an ambiguous phrase—"source de Meduse"—that, like Erasmus's famous title *Encomium Moriae (Praise of Folly)*, can be read both as a subjective and as an objective genitive. The phrase has no exact Ovidian equivalent though it clearly alludes to a passage in Ovid's long poem about the Roman calendar, the *Fasti*. Book 5 of that text begins with the poet describing his uncertainty about the origin of the name "May." The hesitation is politically significant, since Ovid will eventually find the word's origin in the awe-inspiring concept of "majesty": a mistaken choice might be dangerous. To dramatize his uncertainty, Ovid constructs an elaborate comparison: "As a wayfarer stands in doubt, and knows not which way to go, when he sees roads in all directions, so, because because it is possible to assign different reasons, I know not where to turn: the very abundance



of choice is an embarrassment. Declare to me, ye who haunt the springs of Aganippian Hippocrene, those dear traces of the Medusaeon steed" ["ut stat et incertus qua sit sibi nescit eundum/cum videt ex omni parte, viator, iter:/sic, quia posse datur diversas reddere causas/qua ferar, ignoro, copiaque ipsa nocet./dicite, quae fontes Aganippidos Hippocrenes/grata Medusaei signa, tenetis equi"].<sup>29</sup>

It seems significant that Du Bellay exercises his poetic will in choosing *this* Ovidian source to imitate here, a passage about abundant but possibly risky choice among different reasons—or “causes”—for proper names. In a way that an attentive reader with competence in both French and Latin can observe, Du Bellay abandons one textual source-path—*Tristia*, 4.1, which he has been following closely—for another Ovidian text from an entirely different poem. The passage from the *Fasti* emphasizes a “confusing” abundance of choice whereas the *Tristia* poem laments the poet’s poverty of choice, his inability to follow his will to return to Rome. The Ovidian poetic persona—the source for Du Bellay’s poem—is split and doubled by the later poet’s imitative move, and this seems thematically appropriate since the *Fasti* text presents an emotional conflict in the poet’s mind that is itself doubled by a conflict among the Muses. Instead of behaving as a unified source of inspiration, they are represented as doubtful, divided, squabbling in an almost comic fashion. When Ovid asks them to “declare” or “explain” the “traces” of the “Medusean steed,”<sup>30</sup> that is, the gushing fountains made by Pegasus’s hoof striking the hard rock, the goddess-Muses “disagree” [“dissensere deae,” *Fasti* 5, 10]. Ovid invokes the Muses to help him in his dilemma of discovering a name’s origin, but before the Muse of “sacred song,” Polyhymnia, derives “Maia” from “Maiestas,” majesty, Ovid shows the Muses disagreeing about the meaning of an etymological source while he also creates ambiguity about whether the Muses haunt one or two sources of water on Mt. Helicon—Aganippe and/or Hippocrene. Ovid conflates these fountains into one proper name modified by another.<sup>31</sup> He then conflates two mythical moments, as he does also, though in slightly less compressed form, in *Metamorphoses* 5: one is the moment when Perseus, advised by Athena, with whom Medusa had foolishly competed for a prize for beauty, struck off the latter’s head; her blood gave birth to the winged horse Pegasus.<sup>32</sup> The other is the moment when Pegasus struck the ground of Mt. Helicon with his hoof, creating the Hippocrene spring. Perseus becomes something like a male artist figure by virtue of his ability to kill Medusa through watching her reflection in a mirror and thus avoiding her power to turn to stone those who looked upon her face and snaky hair. Perseus also in effect becomes a second father to Pegasus, who was initially engendered, as I have remarked, when Neptune—the master god of Horace’s *Ode* 5:1 and *Regrets* 128—allegedly ravished

Medusa in Athena’s temple. Perseus’s act of striking Medusa’s body, which both saves his own life and creates that of Pegasus, is symbolically yoked to Pegasus’s act of striking the earth, creating the inspirational spring beloved of the Muses.

Both Ovid and Du Bellay give a matricidal aura to their evocation of the Muses at the site of a spring or fountain that both poets describe in a way that stresses its relation to the dead mother of the creature that made it, although Du Bellay stresses that relation more strikingly (as it were) than Ovid does. “Hippocrene” means well of the horse, and Ovid uses that name when he directly addresses the Muses in *Fasti* 5, 7–8 (quoted above). Du Bellay, in contrast, omits the fountain’s association with its horse-maker and goes, as it were, directly to the source of the source in the chilling and enigmatic phrase, “source de Meduse.” For Ovid’s clever internal rhyme on the son’s name—“hippo”/“Agenippodo”—Du Bellay substitutes an internal slant rhyme on the name of the dead mother: “source”/“Meduse.” Both Ovid and Du Bellay take on aspects of the mirror-using Greek hero and the magical flying horse, who both create liquidity—an apt symbol for the flow of a poetic line—in place of a hard stoniness that would have been Perseus’s fate had he not struck off Medusa’s head. Perseus indeed gives life to Medusa’s son in the moment of creating a gushing spring from what was the mother’s neck: several ancient writers including Strabo and Ovid himself stress this grotesque detail of Pegasus’ birth scene.<sup>33</sup> In the *Metamorphoses*’ account of the origins of the Hippocrene, the connection between the mother’s death and the fountain’s birth is again made by the tactic of referring to Pegasus as a creature belonging to the Medusa, Athena, whose shield carries the “sign” of the Medusa’s head, comes to visit the Muses on Mt. Helicon in order to learn more about the inspirational fountain. “The fame of a new spring has reached my ears,” says Athena, a spring “which broke out under the hard hoof of the winged horse of Medusa” [“fama novi fontis nostras pervenit ad auras/dura Medusaei quem praepetis ungula rupit.” 256–57]. Both in the *Metamorphoses* and in the *Fasti*, Ovid’s phrasing implies that the fountain is co-created by the monstrous mother with her fecund blood and by the magical horse-son, a hybrid creature who is also monstrous. The mother’s creative power, however, exists only as it is channeled through her son Pegasus. Neptune the progenitor is nowhere to be seen, though the name of one of his sons, Triton, is graphically related to an epithet that Ovid’s Muses use to address Athena (“Tritonia,” l. 270) when she comes calling, eager to learn about the “new spring.”

The Ovidian intertexts about Medusa, Perseus, Athena, Neptune, and Pegasus are rich ones for Du Bellay, who takes on aspects of both Perseus and Pegasus in his account of going to “see” the “source of Medusa.” The

quest to see something dangerous leads the French poet to a densely layered set of Ovidian sources that serve—or so the evidence of the printed poem suggests—as a test of his masculine competitive mettle. Far from being petrified or terrified by an image of castration, the modern poet—as if armed with a gorgonian mirror—makes something new from the “matter” he finds in Ovid’s text(s); he signals his safe passage through and beyond the singular “source de Meduse.” I suggest, by depicting himself, in the next stanza, as a winged creature (l. 48). As such, he resembles both Pegasus and Perseus; the latter received winged shoes on his quest to kill Medusa. Du Bellay immediately ironizes the achievement of freedom symbolized by “mes aelles” [“my wings”], however, even as he obliquely recalls the French pun on feathers and pens [“plumes”] through the image of his wings. This image, absent from the Ovidian source text, is part of a larger metaphor of the poet as a bird that the Muses, now more and more like the Sirens, have entrapped with glue.<sup>34</sup> “Mais que feray-je à fin d’eschapper d’elles?/Leur chant flatteur a trompé mes esprits/ Et les appaz aux quels elles m’ont pris/ D’un doux lien ont englué mes aelles.” [“But what can I do to escape them? Their flattering song has misled my wit, and the charms with which they have captured me have limed my wings with a sweet bond.” ll. 45–48, Helgerson 42–43]. With the brilliant homophonic rhyme of “elles” and “aelles”—at once conceptually rich and phonically, indeed graphically, poor—Du Bellay finds a complex equivalent for the notion of a poet’s wings “glued” to a linguistic source. But in this case, the source is imaged as plural (the Muses not the Muse) and is, moreover, conceptually plural as well: it blends an idea of the French mother tongue with the textual fact that Du Bellay is imitating a Latin text in French. By fragmenting and multiplying the figure of the source, Du Bellay makes room for a display of a certain linguistic freedom.

In the following stanzas, Du Bellay returns to following Ovid’s words closely and introduces a general (and, as we have seen, oft-repeated) analogy between the voyage of the exiled poet and the voyage of Homer’s Ulysses. Du Bellay, however, develops the analogy freely, exhibiting as Ulysses himself does a clever power to free himself from forms of bondage even as the poem focuses, thematically, on a condition of being entrapped and emasculated. Ovid compares the power of song to that of “the strange lotus” tasted by Ulysses’s companions (*Odyssey* IX); Ovid is like those companions insofar as he finds pleasure in that which harms him, his own books of poetry, his “song” (*Tristia* 4.1, ll. 38–39). Du Bellay also mentions the “fruit” that exerted a “sweet power” over Ulysses’s companions (“d’Avanson,” ll. 52, 51); but the French poem elaborates Ovid’s analogy by interpolating another episode of the *Odyssey* into the picture: that of the Sirens, already foreshadowed, as I’ve suggested, in the images of the Muses entrapping the poets’

wings through the “sweet bond” of their “charms” [“appaz,” which also means “bait” or “lure”]. Du Bellay turns now to a slightly different image of bondage, one conceptually half way between the image of honey as a kind of glue (l. 48) affecting the poet’s wings and the image of the lotus as a dangerous “fruit” enervating Ulysses’s companions. The “in between” image is that of a “douce force” that is said to have “bound” [“liez”] Ulysses’s companions. The “force” can be read proleptically as the power of the lotus fruit; but the phrasing, the delicate hesitation on the Petrarchan phrase “douce force,” invites the reader to think not only of the Lotus episode but of a later one in Homer’s poem, though in Du Bellay’s it comes earlier. This is the episode in which Ulysses caused himself to be “bound” to the phallic mast so as not to succumb to the Sirens’ powerful song. Through echoes of Ovid that blend into echoes of Petrarch, Du Bellay’s poetic persona defines himself as irremediably split, divided between being like Ulysses’s companions, who are trapped by the Lotus eaters until their captain rescues them, and Ulysses himself, who is capable of exercising his reason at least to the extent that he binds himself against temptation even as he opens his ears to experience the Sirens’ song. That song is associated, as we have seen, with the power of the Muses. They shift, as the male poetic persona does, from a singular to a plural mode of being—and back again.

With the specter of matricide hovering over this scene of journeying, Du Bellay presents himself as a poet wounded since birth by some action of a Muse. Fittingly, the Muse who “Dès le berceau . . . m’a laissé/Cest aiguillon dedans la fantaisie” [“from the cradle, left this thorn in my fancy,” ll. 59–60], becomes, in the penultimate quatrain, like “la vineuse prestresse,” the priestess of Dionysus. One such priestess famously killed her son, Pentheus; and Dionysius’s own mother, Semele, a mistress of Zeus, was killed when pregnant for looking on the face of Zeus in his divine form. This is not a scene where mothers and sons live in happy harmony, but they do share (incestuously? competitively?) in the work of giving birth to the book that Du Bellay ends by offering to the male patron father, hoping that he will find the gift agreeable (ll. 105–06, Helgerson 46–47). The book will contain “fruits” born of “la douleur” and consisting of “les souspirs et les larmes non feintes” [“sighs and tears that are not feigned,” ll. 75–76, Helgerson 44–45]. The poems are thus figured as oddly immaterial phenomena that are allegedly “non feintes.” That phrase can mean both “not fictional” (i.e., true, real) and “not shaped”: the Latin root is *fungere*, to shape or mold. This claim to truth is of course wholly unverifiable and, at the level of the poem’s ontology, manifestly false. So the reader moves from the prefatory poem of *Les Regrets* into the sonnet sequence “proper” without quite knowing what “fruits” of poetic labor she or he is about to taste, or whether the labor is a masculine



voyaging such as that of Aeneas (“hoc opus, hic labor est”), a female child-birth, or a mixture of the two. The poet himself describes the fruits’ likely taste, however, as “doulx-amer”—sweet-bitter, a variant on the type of “beau mot composé” he had recommended in the *Deffence* as a way to “enrich” the vernacular. In that text, his example was “aigredoulx” (*Deffence* 193). Here, he both follows his earlier advice and changes the example. The compound, now lacking a hyphen between its parts, turns the sound of the French substantives for “sea” and for “mother” into part of a new substantive derived from a Latin adjective, “amarus.” In the fecund domain of language, hybrids are welcome: the monstrous mother and her monstrous son-horse are yoked to the act and art of representation, reminding us that “monstrer” in French means “to show.” In Du Bellay’s Roman poems, the Medusa laughs, and so, at times, and often while lamenting, does the poet-son as he weaves words carrying the memory of Medusa’s blood to the Muses’ fountain.

## NOTES

1. See Richard Helgerson, *Joachim Du Bellay, “The Regrets,” with “The Antiquities of Rome,” Three Latin Elegies, and “The Defense and Enrichment of the French Language”: A Bilingual Edition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006): 311–15, for the text and translation of the “Patriae desiderium,” which was first printed in Du Bellay’s *Poemata* of 1558. This book in four parts was granted a “privilegium” from the King on 3 March 1558, the same date as the “privilege” granted to the *Antiquitez de Rome*. The other two books in Du Bellay’s carefully shaped quartet are *Les Regrets* and *Les Divers Jeux Rustiques*, both granted identically worded privileges dated 17 January; for publication details see George Hugo Tucker, *The Poet’s Odyssey: Joachim du Bellay and the “Antiquitez de Rome”* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990): 51, n. 158. Tucker and Helgerson have both contributed substantially to the task of analyzing Du Bellay’s four-part poetic structures. My citations and translations of Du Bellay’s French and Latin poems, unless otherwise indicated, are from Helgerson’s book. For an assessment of its achievement, see Paul White’s review in *Translation and Literature* 17.1 (2008): 305–11. I have also consulted the edition of *Les Regrets et Autres Oeuvres Poétiques* by J. Joliffe and M.A. Screech (Geneva: Droz, 1966). For citations from Du Bellay’s sonnets, I give Helgerson’s page numbers only; for longer poems, I give line numbers as well. For French poems not in Helgerson’s book, I cite the edition of Du Bellay’s *Oeuvres poétiques* [françaises], 6 vols., ed. H. Chamard (Paris: Société des Textes Français Modernes, 1908–31). My citations from the Latin poems, except for the three elegies translated by Helgerson, are from Joachim Du Bellay, *Oeuvres Poétiques* 7, *Oeuvres Latines: Poemata*, ed. and trans. Geneviève Demerson (Paris: Société des Textes Français Modernes, Librairie Nizet, 1984); this volume is a supplement to the edition by Chamard mentioned above.

2. Penny Murray, “Reclaiming the Muse,” *Laughing With Medusa: Classical Myth and Feminist Thought*, ed. Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 337.

3. On the epistolary features of the *Regrets*, and, specifically, on the multiple addresses to male friends (and rivals for royal favor) such as Dorat and Ronsard, see Mark Bizer, *Les lettres romaines de Du Bellay: “Les Regrets” et la tradition épistolaire* (Montréal: Les Presses de Université de Montréal, 2001). See also Timothy Hampton’s discussion of Du Bellay’s and Ronsard’s exchanging texts as if they were instances of the historically new financial instrument, the “lettre de change,” in *Literature and Nation in the Sixteenth Century: Inventing Renaissance France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 168.

4. *Oeuvres Latines*, ed. Demerson, “Ad Ianum Auratum,” 128–29, l. 25. For a discussion of this Latin poem in relation to Du Bellay’s French sonnets on the Ulysses theme, see Y. Hoggan, “Aspects du Bilinguisme Littéraire chez Du Bellay: Le Traitement Poétique des Thèmes de l’Exil dans *Les Poemata* et *Les Regrets*,” *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance* 14.1 (1982): 64–79, here 69.

5. In the poem “Ad Lectorem” which stands between two parts of the *Poemata* volume, Du Bellay creates a striking, four-part analogy likening his French Muse to a wife and his Latin Muse to a mistress. According to the logic of this comparison, writing in Latin is a form of adultery on the part of the French poet: “Gallica Musa mihi est, fateor, quod nupta marito: Pro domina colitur Musa Latina mihi / Sic igitur (dices) praefertur adultera nuptae? Illa quidem bella est, sed magis ista placet.” [“The French Muse is to me, I confess, what a wife is to a husband; as my mistress I cherish the Latin Muse. The former is pretty, indeed, but the latter is more pleasing.” *Oeuvres Latines*, ed. Demerson, 78–79, ll. 5–8]. For a valuable discussion of this passage, and a translation which I have relied on here, see William Kennedy, *The Site of Petrarchism: Early Modern National Sentiment in Italy, France, and England* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 140. For a reading that accepts the idea that Du Bellay’s French muse is “chaste,” his Latin muse “erotic,” see Dorothy Gabe Coleman, *The Chaste Muse: A Study of Joachim Du Bellay’s Poetry* (Leiden: Brill, 1980).

6. See ll. 87–94 of *Heroides* I, Penelope’s letter to Ulysses, from the Loeb bilingual edition with a translation by Grant Showerman, 2nd ed., revised by G. P. Gould (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 16–17. Penelope is threatened not only by the suitors and her own fears but also by her father Icarus, who chides her for her “measureless delay” in remarrying [“immensas . . . moras”]. That phrase (l. 85) could apply as well to Ulysses. Ovid suggests indeed that each spouse could be seen by the other as potentially unfaithful.

7. “D’Ecrire en sa Langue” is in *Oeuvres Poétiques*, ed. Chamard 3.97–100; see also the poem to Marguerite that opens the *Poematum Libri Quattor* 1, in *Oeuvres Latines*, 35–36, ll. 23–24.

8. Du Bellay’s Roman poems include a tissue of coded complaints about a Queen who is extravagantly praised (see e.g. *Regrets* 181), but who is also obliquely reminded, again and again, that she has favored others including several of

Du Bellay's male friends more than she is favoring Du Bellay. In *Regrets* Sonnet 7, for instance, Du Bellay explicitly laments his loss of the Queen's favor as a reader; once, "the court read his works" and "la soeur du Roy, l'unique Marguerite," favored him with "son bel oeil divin." In this past golden age, the Queen gave Du Bellay his inspiration, figured as a Platonic "fueur d'esprit." She fanned his poetic powers, his "ardeur," "de son feu plus divin" ["with her more divine ardor," Helgerson, 58–59].

9. "Gallica," the first word of Du Bellay's book of Latin poems, cited above, resembles the poet's description of himself on that book's title page as "Joachim Belaii Andini"—"Joachim du Bellay of Andes," the Roman name for his native region of Anjou. "Gallica" not only translates a French proper name (back?) into a Latin one but, in doing so, dramatizes the poet's and the addressee's existence as temporally extended entities.

10. See for example the description of the queen as a version of the Virgin Mary in her guise as "stella maris," star of the sea and guide to sailors, in the opening poem of the *Poemata, Oeuvres Latines*: 35–36, ll.23–24. See also "D'Escrire en sa Langue," in *Oeuvres Poétiques*, ed. Chamard 3, 97, ll. 7–8.

11. On Medusa's rich history as a cultural icon, see Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard, editors' Introduction, *Laughing with Medusa*, 1–17; and Marjorie Garber and Nancy J. Vickers, editors' Introduction, *The Medusa Reader (Culture Work)* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 1–8.

12. *Metamorphoses* 4, l. 799, cited from the Loeb bilingual translation by Frank Justus Miller (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977) 1.235. Ovid's stress on the doubly-mediated report of this rape story raises questions about Medusa's culpability—and Athena's.

13. Freud, "Medusa's Head" ["Das Medusenhaupt"], written 1922, first published 1940, cited from *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955) 18.273–74. Freud famously equates decapitation with castration in this essay; he interprets Medusa's story as supporting his theory of the boy child's "terror of castration that is linked to the sight of something," specifically, he surmises, the sight of "the female genitals, probably those of an adult, surrounded by hair, and essentially those of his mother." For Freud, Medusa's snaky hair and her head's power to turn men to see it into stone are both part of the defensive "transformation of affect" that accompanies the boy's initial sight of the mother's terrifying lack: the snaky hairs "replace the penis," and the image of a man turned to stone "offers consolation" to the spectator (now apparently a grown man reading literature or viewing art?) because "he is still in possession of a penis, and the stiffening reassures him of the fact" (273).

14. Cixous, *Le Rire de la Méduse*, 1975; I cite from the translation by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen first published in 1976 as "The Laugh of the Medusa," reprinted in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. V. B. Leitch (New York: Norton, 2001), 2039–52; the passage cited is on p. 2045. On the appropriation of this essay by English-writing critics, see Lynn K. Pernod, "Translating Hélène Cixous: French Feminism(s) and Anglo-American Theory," *TTR: traduction, terminologie, rédaction*, 6, 2 (1993): 39–54.

15. For a discussion of this concept in Du Bellay's treatise of 1549, see my chapter on Du Bellay in *Trials of Desire: Renaissance Defenses of Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983). See also Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), chapters 3 and 11; and, for an incisive overview, G. W. Pigman, "Versions of Imitation in the Renaissance," *Renaissance Quarterly* 33.1 (1980): 1–32.

16. My understanding of the impossibility of the distinction between native and foreign is indebted to Jacques Derrida's many texts on translation—and to the texts of those who have translated his texts into English. See *inter alia* Jacques Derrida and Christie McDonald, *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, published in part in French in 1982, English edition by Claude Lévesque and Christie McDonald, trans. Peggy Kamuf and Avital Ronell (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1988); see also Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other: or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, published in French in 1996, published in English, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); and Derrida, "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?" trans. Lawrence Venuti, *Critical Inquiry* 27.2 (2001): 174–200. My approach to an analogously impossible distinction between theory and practice in Du Bellay's writing is indebted to Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), xix; and Francois Rigolot, "Esprit Critique et Identité Poétique: Joachim Du Bellay Préfacier," in *Du Bellay: Actes du Colloque International d'Angers du 26 au 29 Mai 1989*, ed. Georges Cestron (Angers: Presses Universitaires d'Angers, 1990): 285–300.

17. Cixous, "Laugh of the Medusa," 2045. Cixous radicalizes Lacan's argument that psychoanalytic "objects"—for example, "mother"—are "retrospective constructions." The phrase is from Andrew Strycharskii, "Literacy, Education, and Affect in *Astrophil and Stella*," *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900*, 48.1 (2008): 45–63; the passage cited is on p. 59, n. 7. See also Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, "Hamlet" to the "Tempest"* (New York: Routledge, 1992). She provides a bibliographic map of the terrain by Anglo-American early modernists on p. 244, n. 30. See also Domna Stanton, "Difference on Trial: A Critique of the Maternal Metaphor in Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva," in *The Poetics of Gender*, ed. N.K. Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 156–180. But see also Morag Shiach, who argues against the view that Cixous "reduces women to an essence . . . and thus negates the possibility of the very change which she seeks to promote," in *Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing* (London: Routledge, 1991), 17.

18. On this multilingual misogynistic tradition of writing see Penny Murray, "Reclaiming the Muse," in *Laughing with Medusa*, 327–54.

19. Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard, "Introduction," *Laughing with Medusa*, 4.

20. Tucker, "Writing in Exile: Joachim du Bellay, Rome and Renaissance France," in Zweder von Martels, ed., *Travel Fact and Travel Fiction: Studies on Fiction, Literary Tradition, Scholarly Discovery and Observation in Travel Writing* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 125. See also Tucker's *The Poet's Odyssey*, cited above, n. 1, and his *Homo Viator: Itineraries of Exile, Displacement and Writing in Renaissance Europe*

(Geneva: Droz, 2003): this includes a chapter on Du Bellay's Roman sojourn. Tucker takes Ovid's *Tristia* as a key subtext for Du Bellay's *Regrets*, as do other critics: see especially J.-P. Néraudau, "Imitation des Anciens et Création dans *Les Regrets*," *Du Bellay et ses sonnets romains*, ed. Yvonne Bellenger (Paris: Honoré Champion Editeur, 1994), 247–70; and P. Maréchaux, "Le Masque d'Ovide: Figures de l'imaginaire élégiaque dans les *Regrets* et dans les *Poemata* de Du Bellay," *Du Bellay et ses sonnets romains*, 271–96.

21. See *La Deffence et Illustration de la Langue Françoyse*, ed. Henri Chamard (Paris: Librairie Marcel Didier, 1948). Book 1, chap. vii. While quoting from this edition, I have consulted Helgerson's translation of the passages from the *Deffence* he includes in *Joachim du Bellay*. On Du Bellay's career as short and intense, running from 1549 to 1560, when he was thirty five or thirty seven, see Tucker, *The Poet's Odyssey*, 8.

22. See *La Deffence*, ed. Chamard, Book 2, chapter iv, 114; my translation. Du Bellay's recommendation of a literary language "distanced from the vulgar" obviously exists in some tension with his chapter urging the poet not to resort to "foreign tongues" (see p. 186): that chapter holds up as models Italian poets like Petrarch and Bembo who had "converted" to their vernaculars from a prior attachment to Latin. Du Bellay doesn't mention Dante in the *Deffence* but does in the poem "D'Escrire en sa Langue": Dante's treatise *De vulgari eloquentia*, unfinished at the time of his death and widely circulated in manuscript before it was first published in Paris in 1577, offers a striking parallel for the paradoxical praise of "the vulgar" in Du Bellay's treatise: Dante's vernacular is not the language of speech learned by children from mothers and nurses: it is rather a grammaticized vernacular selected from the "best" of the regional vernaculars and modeled on Latin: it is, moreover, learned through reading not listening and its site is not the home but the male-only institution of the school. For a discussion of such "improved" vernaculars, and for bibliography on Dante's treatise, see M. Ferguson, *Dido's Daughters: Literacy, Gender, and Empire in Early Modern England and France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 125–29. Du Bellay's image of the native literary tradition as an "ulcer" and "corrupted flesh" that needs excising from the "body" of French letters occurs on p. 179 and is discussed in my *Trials of Desire*, 34.

23. For Du Bellay's obsession with the theme of apparently useless, effeminizing work—work uncannily like Penelope's weaving and unweaving—see for instance his preface to the second edition of the *Olive* (1550), where he remarks that he has passed his childhood and the best part of his adolescence quite uselessly ["[j'ai] passé l'age de mon enfance et la meilleure part de mon adolescence assez inutilement"]. Cited from the edition of this preface in Yvonne Bellenger, ed., *Du Bellay: ses 'Regrets' qu'il fit dans Rome: Etude et documentation* (Paris: A.-G. Nizet, 1975), 371.

24. Rigolot, "Du Bellay et la poésie du refus," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 35 (1974): 489–502, cited in Helgerson, "Introduction," 10. For other useful discussions of Du Bellay's "characteristic negative gesture[s]," see John C. Lapp, "Mythological Imagery in Du Bellay," *Studies in Philology* 61.2 (1964): 109 and Michel Deguy, "Pour le 450<sup>e</sup> Anniversaire de J.D. B. A.," *Critique* 29.310 (1973), esp. 216–18.

25. See Christian Paultre, *De la répression de la mendicité et du vagabondage en France sous l'ancien régime* (Paris: L. Larose & L. Tenin, 1906), 55 on the increase in numbers of vagabonds in sixteenth-century France and on the efforts made by the emergent state to distinguish between the "valid poor," who were employed in "ateliers publics" and in the ongoing business of fortifying the city, and "vagabonds étrangers," poor people who lacked official recognition and who were sometimes chained together as unpaid workers on the city's fortifications. In the 1540s and '50s, there was insufficient money for "regulating" the growing Parisian population of vagrants, as Paultre shows (see esp. 85–89).

26. See Ovid, *Tristia and Ex Ponto*, Loeb bilingual ed., trans. A. L. Wheeler (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 158–59, ll. 9–10.

27. Compare this line with Ovid's parallel though not identical claim in *Tristia* 4.1.6: "indocili numero cum grave mollit opus" ["lightening with untutored rhythm his heavy work," Wheeler 158–59].

28. Thomas M. Greene argues that the poet's comparison of himself to a "shivering lamb" in this sonnet "leads to a reductive sentimentalization of the nourishing source which inevitably dries up her breasts." Greene thus blames the poet-son's lack of verbal "art" for the phenomenon the poet (mis)represents as the mother country's failure to nourish her child. Greene is brilliant on the poem's melodrama, but by reading the poem as the representation of a psychic and stylistic failure, he overlooks what seems to me the most unusual aspect of the otherwise all too familiar story of a poet reproaching a mother-figure for failing in her gifts to him while giving generously to others. See Greene, "Regrets Only: Three Poetic Paradigms in Du Bellay," *Romanic Review* 84.1 (1993): 1–18, here, 10.

29. Quoted from the Loeb bilingual edition of *Fasti*, trans. Sir James George Frazer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), 260–6. Bk. 5, ll. 3–8.

30. The phrase "Medusacan steed" suggests that the mother still somehow possesses or marks the son: compare the similar passage in *Fasti* III, 450, where the reader is enjoined to look in the sky to see "the neck of the Gorgonian steed" ["Gorgonei colla videbis equi," Loeb 152–53]. A strong memory of the mother's neck blood lurks in the horse-son's neck as refigured in the constellation Ovid enjoins the reader to view.

31. According to *A dictionary of Greek and Roman biography and mythology* [www.ancientlibrary.com/smith-bio/2499.html, accessed Dec. 20, 2009], when Ovid uses "aganippis" as an epithet of Hippocrene, its meaning "is not quite clear." Although it is the name of a separate fountain, it is also designates the Muses in the form "Aganippides," so "Aganippis Hippocrene" may mean "Hippocrene, sacred to the Muses."

32. See *Met* 5, 255–56. Loeb 256–57, where Athena comes to the Muses to see the "new fountain" and remarks that she saw with her own eyes the horse "born from his mother's blood."

33. See for instance Strabo, *Geography* 8.6, describing the Peirene stream: "And here, they say, Pegasus, a winged horse [that] sprang from the neck of the Gorgon Medusa when her head was cut off, was caught while drinking by Bellerophon. And the same horse, it is said, caused Hippu-crene ["horses' spring," also spelled

“hippo-crene”) to spring up on Helicon when he struck with his hoof the rock that lay below that mountain. (Accessed Dec. 20 2009 from [www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0198:book=8:chapter=6&highlight=hippocrene%20pegasus#note-link98](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0198:book=8:chapter=6&highlight=hippocrene%20pegasus#note-link98).)

34. As Tucker notes, Du Bellay had described himself (following Horace) metamorphosing into a swan in his early ode “Contre les envieux poetes à Pierre Ronsard,” which includes the striking line “Mes ailes sont mes ecriz” [“my wings are my writings”] in the context of praising Queen Marguerite (*The Poet's Odyssey*, 34–35).

## Chapter 11

# The Jacobean Prodigals

Michael O'Connell

In his first play, written for the Lord Chamberlain's company, Ben Jonson creates a character who might have stepped from the milieu that Richard Helgerson describes in his first book, *The Elizabethan Prodigals*.<sup>1</sup> Lorenzo Senior in the 1598 version of *Everyman in his Humor*, who will become Knowell when the play is given its London setting in 1605, worries that his son is a prodigal: “How happy would I estimate myself / Could I by any means retire my son / From one vain course of study he affects.”<sup>2</sup> But as far as the audience can tell, the father is worrying in vain: his son does not appear to be spending his time in “idle poetry” nor to be in any sense a prodigal. Rather, he has, as the father acknowledges, won a good report as a scholar “in all our academies” (“in both our [English] universities” in 1605). Rather it's Lorenzo/Knowell himself who acknowledges that he was a prodigal in his youth, a fictional part of that earlier literary generation, the generation of George Gascoigne, John Lyly, Robert Greene, Thomas Lodge, and Philip Sidney, whose sense of a literary career was bound up with the idea of prodigality. For that generation poetry and the writing of prose fiction were the activities of a prodigal youth. Knowell recollects his younger years as a member of that generation:

Myself was once a student, and indeed,  
 Fed with that self-same humour he is now,  
 Dreaming on nought but idle poetry,  
 That fruitless and unprofitable art,  
 Good unto none, but least to the professors:  
 Which I thought the mistress of all knowledge:  
 But since, time and truth have waked my judgment,  
 And reason taught me better to distinguish  
 The vain from useful learnings. (1.1.15–23; 1605 text)<sup>3</sup>