

The background is an abstract painting with a dark, textured palette of teal, blue, and purple. In the upper left, there is a golden, sculptural form that resembles a reclining animal or a stylized figure. In the center, there is a red, textured object that looks like a flower or a piece of fabric, with a circular, metallic-looking element below it. The overall style is expressive and painterly.

THE LABYRINTH OF LOVE

SELECTED SONNETS AND OTHER POEMS

PIERRE DE RONSARD

TRANSLATED AND INTRODUCED BY
HENRY WEINFELD

Renaissance and Medieval Studies

Edited by Charles Ross

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* * *

Three of the translations from *Les Amours de Cassandre*, Sonnet XXXVI (“In the same way, Phoebus, you used to bewail”), Sonnet XLIV (“I’d gladly be Ixion on his wheel”), and Sonnet CLII (“Brown-eyed Moon, goddess whose coal-black horses”), were in-

cluded in *Chicago Review*, 58:3/4 (2014), 294–96. Three of the translations from *Les Amours de Marie*, Sonnet IX (“Whoever wished to rearrange your name”), Sonnet XXVIII (“Are you so cruel as not to want to love”), and Sonnet XXIX (“I love the violet and the lovely rose”), were included in *The Poetry Porch* (2015). I am grateful to the editors of both of these journals.

Henry Weinfield
New York City
September 2020

Introduction

Pierre de Ronsard (1524–1585) has often been regarded as the greatest poet in French literature prior to the nineteenth century.¹ He was called “the prince of poets” in his own time and is one of the “big three” of French writers of the sixteenth century, the other two being Rabelais and Montaigne. He was the leader of the Pléiade Movement, which sought, by assimilating the classics and joining classical modes, genres, and procedures to the new Petrarchan and Neoplatonist spirit of the time, to renovate French poetry and, as Dante had earlier done for Italian, to make the vernacular capable of poetic greatness. Indeed, as Gilbert Highet asserts in *The Classical Tradition*, Ronsard was “the founder of elevated lyric poetry on classical models, not only for France but for all modern Europe.”² As a love poet and the author of sonnet sequences, Ronsard follows in the wake of Petrarch, of course, but Highet’s point is that Ronsard’s immersion in Greek poetry, especially Pindar, had a decisive impact on the subsequent tradition.³ Ronsard’s work is remarkable for its scope, energy, and amplitude: it ranges over all of the poetic genres (ode, hymn, sonnet, elegy, satire, epic, discourse), and in the two-volume *Bibliothèque de la Pléiade* edition encompasses more than 2,000 pages. Equally remarkable—especially for a poet of such copiousness and variety—is the consistently high level of Ronsard’s craftsmanship and the unvarying beauty of his phrasing. These characteristics are a reflection of Ronsard’s extraordinary intelligence, inventiveness, and sincerity: he says what he thinks and is rarely if ever dull. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, his work was sometimes disparaged (for example, by Boileau), but, all in all, his influence on subsequent French poetry has been enormous.

I approach Ronsard not primarily as a scholar but as a poet, one who, during the last ten years, has been immersed in Ronsard’s

1. See Terence Cave, “Preface,” *Ronsard the Poet*, ed. Terence Cave (London: Methuen and Co., 1973), 1.

2. Gilbert Highet, *The Classical Tradition: Greek and Roman Influences on Western Writing* (New York: Oxford UP, 1957), 233.

3. See *The Classical Tradition*, 230–35.

poetry and devoted to the project of rendering it into English verse. Verse translation, as I understand and practice it, is a paradoxical, not to say impossible, enterprise. In “bringing across” (the meaning of *translation*) another poet, my aim is simultaneously to get as close as possible to the original and to create a poem of my own. I want the original *en face*—placed side by side with the translation—for two antithetical reasons: first, because it is what the translation is trying to render, but, second, because it is what the translation must depart from in certain ways, and I want these departures to be transparent. At the same time, however, I want the translation to be a poem in its own right that has no need of the original and, in effect, is its own original. These two aims may strike the reader as logically incommensurate, but in practice the translation process involves a dialectical accommodation of one to the other. Whether or to what extent it succeeds in a given instance is of course another question.

There is a sonnet in Ronsard’s first book of love poems, *Les Amours de Cassandre* (1552), that speaks to a crucial aspect of what he was trying to accomplish, especially at this early stage of his career, and at the same time to what is involved in the translation process. In the Pléiade edition (which will be my text throughout), it is number XXXVI in the sequence. I quote it in both the French and in my translation:

Pour la douleur qu’Amour veut que je sente,
Ainsi que moy Phebus tu lamentois,
Quand amoureux et banny tu chantois
Pres d’Ilion sur les rives de Xante.

Pinçant en vain ta lyre blandissante,
Fleuves et fleurs et bois tu enchantois,
Non la beauté qu’en l’ame tu sentois,
Qui te navroit d’une playe aigrissante.

Là de ton teint tu pallissois les fleurs,
Là les ruisseaux s’augmontoyent de tes pleurs,
Là tu vivois d’une esperance vaine.

Pour mesme nom Amour me fait douloir
 Pres de Vandôme au rivage du Loir,
 Comme un Phenis renaissant de ma peine.⁴

In the same way, Phoebus, you used to bewail
 The sadness that Love now decrees that I feel,
 When lovesick and banished you sang on the shores
 Of the Xanthus, fair river near Ilion's towers.

Plucking your blandishing lyre in vain,
 Streams, flowers, and woods you enchanted again
 And again, but the beauty that made your soul wounded
 Was not moved at all by the music you sounded.

There, from your pallor, the flowers were made pale;
 There, from your tears would the rivulets swell;
 There, your vain hopes made you live in despair.

Now Love makes me grieve for the very same name—
 Near the town of Vendôme on the shores of the Loir,
 Like a Phoenix reborn from my sorrow's own flame.

The two vectors of Ronsard's inspiration as a lyric poet are his relationship to experience and his relationship to literary tradition; they are beautifully blended in his work, and this is one index of its greatness. Sara Sturm-Maddox has argued that in the sonnet quoted above Ronsard may have been influenced by Petrarch, who had drawn on the story from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in which Apollo laments the loss of the nymph Daphne;⁵ indeed, as we shall frequently see, the *Metamorphoses* is perhaps the single most important of all the classical influences that exerted themselves on Ronsard. But what the sonnet reveals, first and foremost, is how the circumstances of Ronsard's own experience opened up a rich vein of mythology

4. Pierre de Ronsard, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Jean Céard, Daniel Ménager, and Michel Simonin (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), 1. 42-43. I shall sometimes refer to this edition simply as the Pléiade edition.

5. See Sara Sturm-Maddox, *Ronsard, Petrarch, and the Amours* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1999), 16.

that released his creative abilities. The young woman who inspired the sonnet was in fact named Cassandra. She was Cassandra Salviati, the daughter of a banker, and she was fifteen when Ronsard first met her. That she happened to be named Cassandra was, of course, an accident (unless Ronsard chose her for her name), but it had the effect of thrusting the poet into the story of Apollo and Cassandra that Ronsard would have found in the version recounted by Ovid in the *Heroides*. In the story (ultimately derived from Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*), Apollo promises the Trojan princess Cassandra the gift of prophecy if she will accede to his desires; she agrees, but after receiving the gift, she refuses the god, who, to punish her, decrees that her prophecies will never be believed. As Ronsard's sonnet makes clear, what interests him is not the story per se but rather the parallel that he is able to draw between Apollo as an unrequited lover and his own situation. Thus, just as Apollo, the god of poetry, sings on the shores of the Xanthus in Troy, so Ronsard, the modern poet, sings on the shores of the River Loir (not to be confused with the much larger Loire), which runs alongside his native town of Vendôme in central France. Now, what is accomplished by this parallel? What psychic work does it perform? The answer, I think, is that by establishing the parallel Ronsard appropriates the glory associated with the ancients in such a way as to transform his own "prosaic" reality into a "poetic" one. This gesture of appropriation—or, as we might say, of *translation*—is central to Renaissance classicism.

At the same time that Ronsard appropriates to himself the glory associated with Apollo, he conjures the figure of Orpheus, the archetypal poet who charmed the woods and streams, singing so beautifully that Nature resounded to his song. In Ronsard's conception, there is a correspondence between Apollo's grief and the response of Nature ("There, from your pallor, the flowers were made pale"). The Orphic conception that Ronsard develops underscores the poet's ambition to *enchant*—a word that brings together the ideas of music and magic. The poet's incantatory verse possesses a magical power to lift language beyond the prosaic immediacies of ordinary discourse. Here again, by imitating the god and assuming the Orphic quest, Ronsard takes on the mantle of poetry and releases his own creative powers.⁶

6. Mallarmé, who was deeply influenced by Ronsard, asserts in a letter to

I have chosen to highlight this sonnet because of the symbolic significance it bears to the translation process. Just as in writing the sonnet Ronsard attempts to appropriate a mythical glory or resonance, so in translating it I attempt to bring over into my own language, epoch, and idiom possibilities that would otherwise be unavailable.. It was perfectly natural for a Renaissance poet steeped in the classics and in the Neoplatonist thought of his time to invoke Apollo; for us, however, gestures of this kind are virtually impossible: the disenchantment of the world has gone too far in divesting poetry of its traditional symbolism, and, in the process, has rendered such gestures practically meaningless. Not that there is a point in lamenting the loss of tropes and poetic possibilities that are no longer relevant, but it is worth pointing out that like Ronsard's phoenix in the sonnet ("Like a phoenix reborn from my sorrow's own flame"), translation allows for a process of retrieval that can lead to cultural renewal. For that reason, it is vital to the handing down that goes by the name of tradition.

Verse-translation poses challenges and difficulties of various kinds, and here, taking Sonnet XXXVI from the Cassandra sequence as an example, I should like to address a few of the technical problems involved in translating Ronsard before passing on to other matters. First, French prosody is quantitative and thus substantially different from the English accentual-syllabic system: it is defined metrically by the number of syllables per line, but, unlike English prosody, its accents do not occur in a regular pattern; as a result, the two systems do not map onto each other in a symmetrical way. If Ronsard is writing in decasyllabics, as he is in *Les Amours de Cassandre*, this does not mean that a given sonnet will necessarily lend itself to iambic pentameter; by the same token, if, as in his other collections of love sonnets, he is working in alexandrines, the twelve-syllable line that increasingly became the metrical norm for French poetry after and to some extent because of Ronsard, an English hexameter line will not necessarily be effective. (Hexameters usually don't work in English because the caesura tends to fall directly in the

Verlaine of 1895 that the poet's "sole duty" is "the Orphic understanding of the earth." See Stéphane Mallarmé, *Selected Prose Poems, Essays, and Letters*, trans. Bradford Cook (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1956), 15.

middle of the line, after the third foot, and as a result they become monotonous.) While most of my translations of Ronsard's sonnets are in iambic pentameter, in the case of Sonnet XXXVI the translation spontaneously took the form of a four-beat (tetrameter) line in which anapestic feet are interspersed with iambic ones ("In the SAME / way PHOE / bus you USED / to beWAIL // The SAD / ness that LOVE / now deCREES / that I FEEL"). I have used a variety of meters and measures in these translations, including "fourteeners" (iambic heptameter couplets) and even "Poulter's Measure" (couplets in which iambic hexameter and iambic heptameter alternate). Moreover, though I am working in rhyme and meter, I do not attempt to replicate the rhyme scheme of the Petrarchan octave (abba abba). French, being a Romance language, is much richer in rhymes than English, and the attempt to keep the Petrarchan rhyme scheme in all cases would invariably lead to awkward, stilted writing. I make considerable use of slant rhyme (rhyme in which the consonantal ending is the same but the vowel is slightly changed). In striving for musicality, as I am doing, I sometimes need to omit unnecessary details (thus, in line 8, I do not translate the fact that the "playe" or wound is "aigrissante" or "festering"), and at other times I slightly embellish what is given (thus, lines 3 and 4, "tu chantois / Pres d'Ilion sur les rives de Xantes"—literally, "you sang near Ilion on the shores of the Xanthus"—becomes, slightly echoing Marlowe's "topless towers of Ilium," "you sang on the shores / Of the Xanthus, fair river near Ilion's towers"). My hope is that I manage to convey something of the music, the feeling-tone, and—in its most crucial details—the meaning of Ronsard's verse in a way that is faithful to his poetry while simultaneously expressing something of my own sensibility.

In the pages that follow, I shall comment on some of the dominant stylistic and thematic features of Ronsard's verse, first in the early Cassandra poems, then in the sonnets devoted successively to Marie and Hélène, then in the "Discourse on the Miseries of These Times" and the two elegies I have translated, and finally in the "Derniers Vers," the sonnets written on his death-bed with which my selection concludes. Except for the "Discourse" and the elegies, I have arranged my selection chronologically. I don't think we can say as a general rule that Ronsard's poetry increases in complexity because (as we have already begun to see) some of the Cassandra sonnets are

themselves exceedingly complex. But as Ronsard's career develops, he continually takes on new engagements without jettisoning any of the old ones, and so his art both broadens and deepens over time.

The basic themes that charge the Cassandra sonnets are beauty, love, Nature, and the power of Eros—not as a set of separate concerns but as a continually changing constellation. These are the staples of love poetry, always and everywhere, but in addition to Ronsard's extraordinary mastery of the sonnet form, of metaphor, and of rhythm and cadence, his poetry is distinguished by its seriousness and sincerity. In Sonnet CXCI, for example, in which he describes his beloved's breasts, sensuality and eroticism are combined with an idealism that is not merely conventional (and thus cannot merely be reduced to a Petrarchan trope) but rather the product of real commitment. Ronsard is neither a sensualist nor the kind of Neoplatonist for whom physical beauty is a stepping-stone to a higher spiritual beauty.⁷ As Isidore Silver has demonstrated, the account of Eros in Ronsard has its underpinnings in Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, where Eros is conjoined with the Good, as well as in Hesiod's *Theogony*, where Eros is one of the most ancient of the gods.⁸ Ronsard is in continual dialogue with Plato throughout his career, and, in the radical hyperbole of this sonnet's concluding tercet, there is an insistence that the physical and spiritual are conjoined, that the spiritual is embodied in the physical and only has meaning because it can take a sensual form:

These two twin streams of clotted milk that flow
Over a valley white itself as snow—
They are like tides approaching near the shore,
Which slowly ebb and slowly flow back once more.

7. I would thus take issue with A. H. T. Levi, who writes: "From the beginning Ronsard's view of love is limited to its sensuous perspectives" ("The Role of Neoplatonism in Ronsard's Poetic Imagination," in *Ronsard the Poet*, 128).

8. Isidore Silver, *The Intellectual Evolution of Ronsard* (Saint Louis, MO: Washington UP, 1969), 1:165–214.

A space between them forms, as if between
 Hills, where a leveled pathway can be seen,
 White from the drifts of snow with which it's filled—
 In winter, when the wind drops and is stilled.

Two gleaming rubies there are raised on high:
 They lend their radiance to the ivory
 That smoothly curves around them on all sides.

All honor there, and there all grace abides;
 And beauty, if the world has any, flies
 To the abode of this fair paradise.

What I find most moving in this sonnet is the clause “if the world has any” (“si quelqu’une est au monde”). It conveys a certain ironic skepticism about the world and about the Platonic realm of idealization that is an index of Ronsard’s originality. From a certain perspective, the world is a place in which such ideals as honor, grace, and beauty are conspicuously absent; insofar as they exist, they float uselessly in some Platonic realm above and beyond human life and human interaction. But when desire is infused with love, these ideals can be materialized. There is nothing prurient or even particularly arousing in this sonnet: we are left with an impression of meditative stillness (hence the metaphorical stilling of the wind in the octave) and calm peacefulness.

I am pleased with the translation but fully aware of the fact that it does not capture the manner in which Ronsard’s idea emerges from his rhyme in the concluding tercet:

Là tout honneur, là toute grace abonde:
 Et la beauté, si quelqu’une est au monde,
 Vole au séjour de ce beau paradis.

Here, as always in Ronsard, thought in the abstract does not merely guide expression but also is guided and initiated by form and language.

Does Ronsard, in company with other love poets of the period, objectify women in his poetry? The issue is fraught in many ways, and of course the concept of objectification can be given various

meanings. If to describe a woman's breasts is to objectify her, then certainly Ronsard is guilty as charged. If desire always involves objectification, then, yes, Ronsard is guilty, but so is the entire lyric tradition. But if to objectify means to relate to a woman as an *object*, and hence as the mere object of cold lust, then Ronsard is surely innocent. It is true that the woman of the sonnet is not so much a person in her own right as an embodiment of the eternal feminine—and one can therefore sympathize with those readers who view Ronsard's very idealizations as merely the obverse of the subjugation of women in this era. But perhaps our current cultural milieu has moved so far in the direction of cynicism that cynicism has become a cliché of its own, and perhaps we need the assistance of a poet such as Ronsard, now more than ever, to restore us to the possibility of idealization and to align it with our changed sense of reality. Now as always, this is the task of lyric poetry.

Sonnet XXIII ("This lovely coral, marble breathing sighs") is a poem that in many respects is similar to CXCI in the concreteness of its physical description but is even more complex in the way it reaches for transcendence. Both begin with the figure of *deixis*, with the gesture of pointing, and with metaphorical elaborations on the woman's body: in Sonnet CXCI, a winter landscape that gives way to gleaming rubies; in XXIII, gems and precious substances, with their brilliant colors, that evoke and are evoked by her body, in its parts and as a whole. The latter poem is addressed to Ronsard's friend and fellow member of the Pléiade, Rémy Belleau, who is noted for his poems on gems. In the sestet, referring to the metaphorical gems, metals, and flowers he has just catalogued and enumerated, Ronsard writes:

They stir up in my soul such deep commotion
That nothing can elicit an emotion
Except their beauty, Belleau, which I adore;

This and the pleasure that can never wane
Of dreaming, thinking, thinking yet again,
Dreaming and thinking, thinking yet once more.

What is extraordinary here is the way Ronsard penetrates and articulates an experience of beauty—not through metaphor, although

after many metaphorical elaborations, but simply by repeating and giving rhythmic expression to the words “dreaming” and “thinking” (“songer, penser et repenser, / Songer, penser et repenser encore”). What he articulates, in other words, is both an experience of pure consciousness and that such an experience is impenetrable and transcends articulation.

I have been discussing poems in which the eroticism is somewhat idealized, but the Cassandra sequence contains many sonnets in which desire is expressed openly (one might almost say “nakedly”) and with complete candor, though without the slightest coarseness or hypocrisy. One wonders how a poet who had received the tonsure in 1543 and was thus eligible for Church benefices, though he was never expected to perform as a priest, managed to free himself from Christian scruples quite so completely. The answer, I think, is two-fold: first, in the case of Cassandra, who was, after all, a married woman (the situation is quite different with Marie and Hélène), because there is not the slightest possibility that he will ever actually manage to get her into bed—here it is strictly a case of what the French call *amour de loin*; and second, and perhaps more importantly, because Ronsard’s use of Greek mythology enables him to take on the lineaments of paganism.

Sonnet XX offers itself as a prime example:

I wish I could turn to a rich, golden shower
And rain drop by drop and hour by hour
Into the lap of Cassandra, while sleep’s
Vapors seep into her eyes and she sleeps.

Then I wish I could turn to a snowy-white bull
And bear on my back one so beautiful
That when she goes walking, a flower in spring,
The flowers themselves find her ravishing.

To ease my great burden of sorrow I dream
Of being turned to Narcissus and she to a stream
In which I can plunge and the whole night remain.

Moreover, I wish that this night were forever
 And that the goddess Aurora would never
 Illumine the morning to wake me again.

Laced with Ovidian myths, this sonnet is a poem of pure wish-fulfillment. It is certainly not profound, but to me it expresses a charming sense of naïveté and innocence. It has just a touch of sadness, which derives from the hard lesson that life for us mortals isn't what it is for the gods. For Ronsard, who in many respects is an Epicurean, just as for Lucretius, the gods inhabit an idealized plane of existence against which our own diminished and tragic one can be measured.

Part of the Ovidian flavor of the Cassandra sequence has to do with the way in which Nature is aligned with the realm of the gods. In Sonnet CLX, as in Sonnet XX, only the poet experiences sadness and solitude, but the irony here is that these feelings are exacerbated by his awareness of the beauty and plenitude surrounding him:

Now when great Jove in his virility
 Wants to engender his dear progeny,
 And from his burning loins spurts jets of spume,
 Inseminating Juno's hot, wet womb:

Now when the sea, now when the winds so wild
 And vehement, to great armadas yield,
 Now when the bird amidst the forest's boughs
 Against the Thracian her complaint renews:

Now when the meadows, when so many flowers,
 With thousands upon thousands upon thousands of colors,
 Are painting the bosom of the earth so gay,

Among secluded rocks, sad and apart,
 I count my sorrows with a muffled heart:
 Hiding my wounds, through woods I make my way.

Structured around anaphoric repetitions of the word "Now" ("Or" in the French), the sonnet conveys an extraordinary feeling of vitality and immediacy. Human beings are not excluded: the armadas ("grans

vaisseaux armez”) opening their sails to the wind are as fully enveloped in *life*—for that, finally, is what is being described and praised—as the gods, the birds, and the flowers. The feeling of exclusion and deprivation that the poet expresses in the final tercet is merely contingent, a function of his own sadness and unrequited desire. There is only a hint of the awareness that we as a species are not enfolded in being and that this deficiency separates us both from the gods and from the rest of Nature.⁹ Thus when Ronsard alludes in lines 7–8 to Ovid’s tale of Philomela, we see the extent to which his landscapes, absorbed from Ovid, are also idealized.

One might go so far as to say that in poems such as these the artistic achievement has to do with the way Christianity has been *excluded* from the poet’s frame of reference. Ronsard was not alone, of course, but how did he and his fellow artists and poets manage to find their way back not only to the classics but to a quasi-pagan vision of Nature? There are obvious answers (Neoplatonism, the recovery of an Epicurean outlook through the rediscovery of Lucretius), but to my mind there is still something deeply mysterious about this attempt on the part of Christian poets such as Ronsard to go beyond a Christian frame of reference.

That is certainly not how it would have been explained at the time, however. Consider the following passage from Ronsard’s own “*Abbrégé de l’art poétique*” (“Summary of the Art of Poetry”), which he wrote in 1565. “Above all things,” the poet insists,

you will hold the Muses in reverence . . . for the daughters of Jupiter, which is to say, of God, who from his holy grace first made known through them to ignorant peoples the excellences of his majesty. For Poetry in the first age was naught but an allegorical Theology with the purpose of allowing into the minds of savage

9. Ronsard’s sonnet might profitably be compared in this regard with a post-Enlightenment poem such as Wordsworth’s Petrarchan sonnet “The world is too much with us.” In the latter, the experience of a subject/object division motivates the poet to make artificial use of the personified gods of Greek mythology to return to what he frankly acknowledges is “a creed outworn.” As Wordsworth clearly understands—and this is what makes his poem so great—the attempt to do this is no longer possible. For Ronsard, by contrast, in the sixteenth century, there is no sense that in adopting the lineaments of paganism he is embracing a creed outworn.

men through pleasing and shadowy fables the secrets that they were not able to understand when their truth was revealed too openly to them. . . . For the Muses, Apollo, Mercury, Pallas and other such deities represent to us nothing else than the powers of God, to which the first men had given many names [to represent] the diverse effects of his incomprehensible majesty.¹⁰

By suggesting that poetry in “the first age” was an allegorical theology, Ronsard is anticipating the ideas of Giambattista Vico, who in *The New Science* (1744) argued that Homeric religion is a “poetic theology” that should be seen on a continuum with and as leading to monotheism. But when, turning to the present, Ronsard asserts that the Muses and the gods “represent to us nothing more than the powers of God,” he is also, I would suggest, defending himself against the possible charge that his own poetry is rife with paganism—a charge that was sometimes leveled specifically against Catholic writers by Protestant controversialists. Ronsard was a faithful and, indeed, at the time he wrote the “Abbrégé,” a militant Catholic, as we shall see,¹¹ but the passage strikes me as defensive and evasive. It is possible (though I think unlikely) that Ronsard thought that he was creating an allegorical theology, but it is obvious that what he was doing in much of his lyric poetry was something altogether different. The Jupiter of Sonnets XX and CLX (in the examples quoted above) can hardly be seen as a figure for God the Father in a monotheistic frame of reference. If one insists on holding onto the concept of allegorical theology in the case of Ronsard, one would have to say that in these poems it pertains to a religion quite different from Christianity.

Terence Cave suggests that for Ronsard, “the role of myth is the role of poetry itself: it evokes a magical world which is unreal and which nevertheless seems to comprehend truths fundamental to reality.”¹² This observation is certainly true, and if we apply the concept of an “allegorical theology” to Ronsard’s poetry in this sense, it would be an accurate description of his aims. Indeed, in Cave’s

10. Ronsard, *Œuvres complètes*, 2.996; translation mine.

11. See the discussion below of Ronsard’s “Discourse on the Misery of These Times.”

12. Terence Cave, “Ronsard’s Mythological Universe,” in *Ronsard the Poet*, 207.

view, “there is little doubt that [the concept of an allegorical theology] acted as a catalyst for [Ronsard’s] poetic imagination, and that without it his work would have been much less rich in significance.” He adds: “Once the supernatural framework begins to fall away, poetry is left with no guarantee other than its own intrinsic power to create, to maintain the dialogue between reality and the imagination, and thus to compensate in some measure for the deficiencies and intractabilities of ordinary experience” (207). The “supernatural framework” that would have fallen away for Ronsard, however, was certainly not the Homeric religion but rather Judeo-Christian monotheism. There are thus two senses in which the term “allegorical theology” can be used with reference to Ronsard’s poetry, one true and the other false. Insofar as the poet turns to the realm of mythology “to comprehend truths fundamental to reality,” as Cave suggests, the term is accurate; but insofar as it is a response to the charge of paganism, it is an obfuscation.

Indeed, only rarely in the Cassandra poems do we get the intrusion of Judeo-Christian or biblical elements, and, when they occur, they are often melded with classical or mythological ones—as in Sonnet CXLV:

My spirits were sunk in gloom and much I grieved
 When from my place of torment I received
 The golden fruit, grown yellow, as was I,
 From the same sickness that gives so much joy.

The Apples are the gift that Love accords:
 O warlike Atalanta, this you know;
 And you, Cydippe, still have cause to rue
 How piercing were the letter’s golden words.

The Apples are Love’s sign, and only he
 That’s worthy of the apple can be blessed!
 Venus has always held them to her breast.

Since Adam, our desire for it’s the same.
 Each Grace has one in hand habitually,
 And Love, in brief, is just an apple game.