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Voice and Vision in Ronsard's Les Sonnets pour Hélène

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Voice and Vision
in Ronsard's
Les Sonnets pour Helene

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Eckhard Bernstein
General Editor

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To Michael, and to Aaron and Jordan

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Introduction

Songs of desire have haunted us throughout the ages and across the pages of all the literatures of the world. Ronsard's *Sonnets pour Helene* is filled with yearning, where desire rivals desire and narrative vies with narrative. Like the lyre of Orpheus ringing over the sea to drown the seductive song of the Sirens, these sonnets relate the impassioned will of the sonneteer to sing not of love but of poetry.

Most scholars tend to acknowledge Ronsard's prominent place in sixteenth century circles, and many critics have expressed quite convincingly the symbiosis between Ronsard's poetic theories and his poems. Those studies, however, have tended to emphasize certain individual poems as representative of Ronsard's poetic notions or have based their analysis on a general examination of Ronsard's poetry. To my knowledge, no work of any great length or detail has focused on one of the *love cycles* as a vehicle for a Ronsardian poetic treatise. To the abundance of Ronsard studies, then, this work proposes to add an analysis of a single cycle of love poetry, the *Sonnets pour Helene*, by valorizing its content as a primary purveyor not of love's truth, but poetry's.

In order to read these one-hundred forty-six poems as an overall work about poetry, it is necessary to establish a general guiding structure that takes into account the inconsistencies in tone, theme and style. The uneven tone has baffled those who have attempted to read the poems as expressions of the historical Ronsard, or as one, single narrative voice. Scholars have debated the identities of the women to whom Ronsard addressed his love sequences, the occasions, times and dates for certain of the sonnets in the cycles, or Ronsard's variance in style from one sequence to another. Moreover, critics have continued to wonder whether the poems constitute an embrace of or rejection of (Neo)Platonic philosophy. This study, therefore, takes as its premise a dual-voiced, fictional narrator who presides as the main character or protagonist over a "narrative" which also functions on a system of dual or double adventures. This narrator combines aspects of a fictional lover and a fictional poet. Many of his words resonate on two different registers, speaking of love, of poetry, or of a combination of love and poetry. Their message is most often a blend of poetic and physical desire, progressing steadily to an ultimate triumph of the poetic discourse. In my examination of the *Sonnets pour Helene* I seek to elucidate this triumph of poetry and of the poet's voice, by focusing on the struggle for narrative control that the two personas of lover and poet undergo during the course of the work.

Medieval and Renaissance literature carried a tradition of debates and dialogues as frequent compositional structuring devices. The characters of lover and poet in this work are not designated or defined in the text as two, separate protagonists. It is the reader's task to identify these two, distinct personas in order to appreciate the rich, harmonic resonance that the voices bring to the text. Much of Renaissance literature invites active reader participation, and this text proves no exception. A careful reading of these sonnets will delineate two interdependent narrative adventures, one about the dissolution of love, and the other about the transcendence and triumph of poetry, both of course, completely orchestrated by Ronsard.

In Chapter One of this study, I establish this basic dual structure, by focusing on the two voices of lover and poet. I show how contrasting treatments of similar thematic material reflect the control by the two different voices. The specific thematic material of this chapter is water. The lover and the poet voice in strikingly different manners their perspectives in poems where water images figure prominently. Because water itself is a significant component for many texts about voyages, and the epic in particular, I introduce in this chapter the notion that Ronsard's failed epic, the *Franciade*, provides a background motivation for the resounding success of the *Sonnets pour Helene*. In rechanneling some of the basic elements of the epic into this last sonnet cycle, Ronsard managed to achieve a compelling, profound, literary creation which reaches far beyond the limits of a simple cycle of love poems.

The second and third chapters correspond to the two books which comprise the *Sonnets pour Helene*. Both chapters concentrate on a series of poems which stand out from the other sonnets because of a body of characteristics which they share. These sonnets all exemplify the particular presence of the narrator as a character in a set or scene (which I call a *tableau*) depicted in these poems. The *tableaux* accentuate the visual quality of these sonnets and introduce the corresponding dichotomy of vision that belongs to the lover and poet. We can then examine in greater detail the narrator's dual personas of lover and poet because of the self-referential matter which these sonnets emphasize. Recurring patterns of vocabulary, theme and style mark the poems in this group, and certain circular and/or cyclical images and movements emerge in these *tableaux*, images and movements which are fundamental to an understanding of the entire work. This group of sonnets, moreover, traces the developmental structure of the whole sonnet sequence. We are thus able to follow the overall patterns of the entire work through this group of poems.

Chapter Four examines the central concept of nature as one overlying area which influences the contrasting perspectives of lover and poet. The two voices exhibit their most dramatic separation of personas in the closing poems of the *Sonnets pour Helene*. There, two different sets of poems allow each persona his turn at a closing argument in defense of his perspective. In the final comparison of these two endings, poetry's triumph is sealed.

The single largest forerunner for my study came from Donald Stone's *Ronsard's Sonnet Cycles*. Stone's examination traces the influence of Petrarch and others on Ronsard's work while simultaneously pointing out the personal aspects of Ronsard's perspectives which give his poems their unique tone and style. Stone's insights into the *Helene* cycle differ fundamentally from mine in two respects. Stone takes the ambivalent symbol of the fictive subject, Helene, as a key toward resolving some of the conflicts in the cycle's tone and style, whereas my search for unity in the tone and style of the sonnets led me not to the narrator's subject but to the narrator himself. The double-voiced narrator functions in my work as the means for reading the two themes of joy and despair, for it is the poet's joy of writing and the lover's despair over the end of his love which surface as the overall "narratives" of this sonnet sequence. Stone bases his study, moreover, on the 1578 edition of the *Sonnets pour Helene*, while I have chosen the 1584 edition.

To those who question my choice to study the 1584 edition, I respond that the 1584 text reveals an intricate, harmonious and unified cycle of poems. Moreover, the 1584 edition is the last to have appeared in print during Ronsard's lifetime. In the later work Ronsard made significant changes from the earlier version, supplementing it with poems from the *Amours Diverses*. These changes allow us to view the 1584 work, in fact, as a different text from the 1578 publication, as it demonstrates some very prominent patterns, refrains, and unifying structures.

The *Sonnets pour Helene* differs from the earlier love sequences by offering Ronsard's most mature tone and vision. Moreover, appearing in the corpus of his published works after the appearance of the unfinished and ill-received *La Franciade*, the *Sonnets pour Helene* appears to address Ronsard's rivalry with the great Greek writer whose epic poems *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* incorporate accounts about love's peregrinations, and about narrative itself. Homer's Helen provides Ronsard a very pertinent point of departure for the poetic voyage undertaken in the *Sonnets pour Helene*.

Many critics contributed to my appreciation and interpretation of these sonnets, but because no detailed study had treated singly the significance of the *Helene* cycle as exemplary of Ronsard's poetic theories, much of my work covers

unexplored ground. My approach developed as a thorough, intense, and comprehensive reading of the sonnets in an effort to foreground as a unifying device an intertextuality which operates among the poems themselves. My initial reading of the *Sonnets pour Helene* culminated in an appreciation of their beauty and splendor as a whole, but it was not until I had reread the entire cycle several times that many of the patterns and dualities became apparent. I owe much to the notes and commentaries of Ronsard's poems that Paul Laumonier, Isidore Silver and Malcolm Smith have presented. François Rigolot's and Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani's writings strengthened my understanding of self-referential matter by Renaissance authors, and Doranne Fenoaltea's and Edwin Duval's notions about "textual architecture" contributed to my appreciation of the structural patterns apparent in the *Sonnets pour Helene*. From Robert Garapon I borrow the categorizing title of "tableau" for certain of the poems. I also benefit from his delineations of various descriptive techniques that Ronsard employed. Finally, two sources outside the body of Ronsard scholarship strengthened my overall conception of images and description. Helen Vendler's *The Odes of John Keats* provided a means of viewing the growth and transformation of central images through the collective achievements of a series of poems. Svetlana Alpers's *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* treats a later period and another culture's art, but her work offered me glimpses into the role that physical description plays in Ronsard's sonnets.

In my study, I clarify, enumerate and point out recurring structures, rhythms, patterns, themes and images which add to the overall unified, controlled poetic creation. It is my hope that other readers of these sonnets will discover the rich layers of resonance produced by the harmony of voices of a lover and a poet, a harmony of voices that points toward a complicity between desire and poetry: the song of desire for the *woman* constitutes, in fact, a song of desire for the *song*. The *Sonnets pour Helene* addresses the outcome of the union between desire and poetry, and bequeaths to its readers a monumental tribute to poetry's eternal glory.

Chapter One

“Conserve en tes eaux mes amours et ma foi”

Les Sonnets pour Helene recounts a story about growth—growth that involves action and stasis, expansion and reduction, choice and chance, progress and reversal.¹ The details of a lover's loss and a poet's progress emerge in the course of the two books of sonnets as the narrator struggles to record the quests of two personas in their search to realize their ultimate goals. The lover and the poet must each grapple with his complex role of imitator and creator of something unique. The lover's complaint bears traces of the traditional at times, for these pages repeat a familiar lament; yet the unique and inventive variations on an old theme impose a creative stamp on his words. The poet, too, calls up the familiar and weaves it with the new. He often sees himself as a creator, equating himself with Jupiter and other generative powers; yet he is also a product of the natural world, subject like the lover, to mortality. Much of the growth in these sonnets stems from the limits imposed by the threat of death, as well as from the nourishment provided by the hope of the eternal. What helps the poet may destroy the lover. Still, the voices of poet and lover are not necessarily always in conflict. In fact, they often merge and become indistinguishable, only to diverge again as they register the emotions and attitudes of two very different personalities.²

These voices are figured by the Dioscuri, the twins Castor and Pollux, mythological brothers of Helen of Troy, traditional guides to navigators and voyagers, and, as Gemini, zodiac sign of the month of May. Legend recounts that the brothers remained devoted and spiritually joined to one another, even when physically separated. They are associated with a partial immortality, as both brothers knew the underworld as well as the heavens.³ Although explicit references to Castor and Pollux are rare in the text, their image is often invoked through allusions to twins of any kind, to stars, to events in Helene's life, to spring and to May, and to voyages at sea.⁴ Notions of unity and opposition are inherent in the pair of Castor and Pollux as well as that of the poet and lover. Indeed, Castor and Pollux become symbols for the narrator's dual vocation. The figures of poet and lover are direct links to the tension between the immortal and the mortal. The poet allies himself with the immortals—the gods of Greek mythology, the Christian God, and above all to previous poets, who, though dead, enjoy an immortal existence through the posterity of their works. The figure of the poet is superior to that of the lover, for his work is the source of his immortality; this creation will not end with the dissolution of love but will spring

forth from it. He is immortal because he fashions a creation that will outlast him. The love story, however, provides a sacrificial victim. The lover's growth is doomed from the outset by the choice of Helene as his subject. The lover chooses Helene because she is the most beautiful woman in history, a woman whose affections are worth a passionate, violent struggle. The poet selects Helene because he wishes to follow Homer, to glorify the poet's profession, to equate himself with the epic writer, even to create a form of epic within his sonnet cycle. A suggestion of epic appears in the first sonnet when the figures of the sea-guides Castor and Pollux are introduced:

Ce premier iour de May, Helene ie vous iure
 Par Castor, par Pollux, vos deus freres iumeaux,
 Par la vigne enlassée à l'entour des ormeaux,
 Par les prez par les bois herissez de verdure,
 Par le nouveau Printemps, fils aîné de Nature,
 Par le cristal qui roule au giron des ruisseaux,
 Par tous les rossignols, miracle des oiseaux,
 Que seule vous serez ma derniere auenture. (I, I, ll. 1-8)⁵

The citing of the twins at the very opening of the work evokes the concept of a voyage, and the lines speak of an adventure about to begin. The notion of a voyage is a key element in many epics. In the *Sonnets pour Helene* in turn it metaphorically portrays the poet's growth as well as the lover's doomed courtship. This epic connotation is not gratuitous, for it points toward a preoccupation with a specific literary achievement, or rather, a literary failure. In the wake of the unfinished and unappreciated *Franciade* (1572-1578), Ronsard here manages to rechannel his frustrated urge to write the great French national epic into the composition of the *Sonnets pour Helene* (1584), the personal epic of his own poetic vocation. The poetic epic recounts the development of the poet, his belief in his creation, and the eternal glory which his poetry assures him.

Striking, too, in these opening lines is the system of coupling that we see in the images of Castor and Pollux, the vine entwined with the elms, the crystal rolling in the fold of the stream, the field stretching into the forest, and spring portrayed as Nature's offspring. Helene is *seule* both by placement of her name in the first line as a singular unit, not joined with another to form a pair, and in line eight where she is described as "seule vous." Helene's singular character already spells trouble for the unwitting lover who seeks to bind himself to her yet who throughout the pages of this book will succeed only in distancing himself from

her. The first day of May suggests the promise of growth and fertility. The name "Helene" immediately casts doubt on the prognosis of the lover's growth because as such a fatal name, it connotes the destruction and death associated with the Trojan epic.⁶ Thus, the failure of the one, essential pairing—the lover's union with Helene—looms menacingly at the outset of the *Sonnets pour Helene*. The early model of the Dioscuri serves as a reminder that pairing in this work requires further consideration. Like the Castor and Pollux myth with its emphasis on union that is at times physical and at times spiritual, the issue of Helene's union with another may prove more complex. The narrator's initial failure to pair Helene with the lover permits a later union between Helene and the poet. Indeed, the remainder of this first sonnet affirms that the poet's adventure will dominate and eventually subjugate the lover's quest:

Vous seule me plaisez, i'ay par election
Et non à la volée aimé vostre ieunesse:
Aussi ie prens en gré toute ma passion,
Ie suis de ma fortune auteur, ie le confesse:
La vertu m'a conduit en telle affection.
Si la vertu me trompe adieu belle Maistresse. (I, I, ll. 9–14)

The narrator confidently emphasizes his own power by the strong choice of verbs pertaining to control. Although he calls on Castor and Pollux, he is also relying heavily on himself and on his own guidance and control, conscious of his actions and motivations. His authorial voice speaks clearly in the last tercet, underlined by the word "auteur."⁷ The repetition of "seule vous" and "vous seule" in lines eight and nine not only calls attention to Helene's singular nature but also underlines the speaker's assertion of his choice. We find here a juxtaposition of the narrator's two voices. One seeks direction for his voyage, while the other believes in his own power to steer his course. The more dominant, confident voice is that of the poet ready to embark on an adventure. The ensuing sonnets will sing of that epic and in so doing will tell the story of the sonnets' own creation. The lover's account will relate the sacrifice of love which permits the poet's voyage to begin.

In order to appreciate fully this idea of the sonnets' creation, we must examine closely the concept of voyage, for it shapes the overall textual framework of the *Sonnets pour Helene*. This framework consists of two, very different treatments of water as an image, one appearing in the sixth sonnet from the beginning of the work (I, VI) and the other beginning in the sixth sonnet from the end (II, LXII).

Within the bounds created by this water framework, the lover's power weakens while the poet's gradually assumes full reign. The water image encourages the notion of voyage, the symbolic transformation from lover to poet via the textual adventure. We will analyze this demise of the lover's world and the evolution of the poet's and come to understand them first by defining the water framework and then by examining what transpires between the first and second frames.

The first water reference occurs in Book I, Sonnet VI:

Dedans les flots d'Amour ie n'ay point de support,
 Ie ne voy point de Phare, & si ie ne desire
 (O desir trop hardy!) sinon que ma Nauire
 Apres tant de perils puisse gaigner le port.
 Las! deuant que payer mes voeux dessus le bort,
 Naufrage ie mourray: car ie ne voy reluire
 Qu'une flame sur moy, qu'une Helene qui tire
 Entre mille rochers ma Nauire à la mort.
 Ie suis seul me noyant de ma vie homicide,
 Choissant un enfant, un aueugle pour guide,
 Dont il me faut de honte & pleurer & rougir.
 Ie ne sçay si mes sens, ou si ma raison tasche
 De conduire ma nef: mais ie sçay qu'il me fasche
 De voir un si beau port & n'y pouuoir surgir. (I, VI) 8

The narrator's attitude offers the image of a man limited in ability, the water being more powerful than he. By repeated use of negative expressions, he stresses his incapacity to help himself. His lack of control reduces him to passivity. The sonnet ends with the narrator neither safe on shore nor submerged in the seas. There is a strong downward movement in this sonnet, yet it is as if the downward pull—the drowning—is temporarily stalled. Castor and Pollux are notable for their absence because the narrator lacks navigational guides. A ploughing of the waters recalls the start of an epic adventure, but the narrator here has begun his trip without the benefit of the twins. Having called upon them in the opening sonnet, the narrator now either forgets or forsakes his sea-guides in this poem, only five sonnets further into the work, leaving open a greater possibility for a doomed adventure at sea.⁹

The verbs of verses six and nine—"ie mourray" and "ie suis seul"—have a pointedly negative content. The narrator's recognition of his isolation recalls the independent character attributed to Helene in the opening sonnet of the work: she

appears so incapable of union with another. The narrator's negative knowledge influences his perception: in lines thirteen and fourteen the verb *savoir* is linked with the verb *voir*. In lines six and seven the narrator focuses his vision on Helene who pulls his ship toward the rocks. The mention of a vessel, "Nauire" in line seven and "nef" in line thirteen, reinforces the narrator's distance from the water. The downward motion, the movement to the interior of the medium is at work here. This removal from and control by the water contributes heavily to a perception that this first part of the water framework portrays and emphasizes the narrator as powerless. It is curious that a voyager in a sinking ship does not call upon Castor and Pollux to guide him, but chooses instead Love, personified by Cupid, "un enfant, un aueugle."¹⁰ Both the issues of growth and development and of vision (or the lack of vision) are incorporated in the figure of Love. The narrator's dominant voice here is that of the lover whose growth has just begun in this sonnet when he realizes that he is *seul* and that Helene is distant and dangerous.¹¹ His choice of guide—a blind child who cannot in turn enhance the lover's sight—determines his vision.

Although we respond quickly to the lover's voice in this sonnet, both voices are present. The quatrains blame the Siren-like Helene for directing the boat to the rocks.¹² In the tercets, however, the thinking changes slightly. The narrator assumes more of the responsibility for his distress, using the first person, "me noyant, de ma vie homicide," and by accepting responsibility for having chosen his guide. In neglecting to call on the Dioscuri, he chooses to follow another guide and thereby substantially weakens the direction or control of his voyage. The narrator indicates that he feels not only sadness but also shame and embarrassment over his choice (l. 11). Embarrassment and shame imply an awareness of a mistake. The narrator recognizes his role in adding to the panic and anguish he feels, rather than viewing himself solely as a victim of Helene's actions. This cognizance of his own acts in tandem with the description of his emotions indicates that the narrator considers his feelings and reasoning powers as contributing factors to his problems, although he appears to be unsure of the precise cause. It is no accident that the sonnet ends on the verge of sight. To see, to know, and to be unable to act present the dilemma with which the narrator's two voices will struggle throughout the work. It angers him here to imagine the existence of "such a lovely port"—a safe haven and an end to a voyage, be it amorous or poetic. The final word, the verb "surgir" (to spring up) offsets the downward motion of the sonnet, in suggesting a springing upward. The very sound of the word "surgir" suggests "Surgères," the family name of Hélène (de Surgères), the woman to whom Ronsard addressed this cycle.¹³ We will

encounter in the latter half of the water framework another instance of a near-pun on a given name—that of Pierre—which we will contrast with this play on words.¹⁴ Both instances imply the insertion of details from Ronsard's own life, a use of subjective matter which brings our attention to the poets's voice, to creation, as well as to self-glorification and self-preservation through these poems.

In spite of these positive signs, the sonnet ends on a note of hesitancy and irresolution. Indeed, the use of the present tense throughout, along with the final uncertainty about the narrator's safety or harm, leave the epic stalled. We have the beginning of a voyage but no further progress and no destination reached. The voyager is engulfed in waters which threaten to overwhelm him. While the narrator is far from reaching his port of call, he is beginning to see, although he does not yet incorporate the power of sight into his body of governing knowledge. He knows that he has wrongly chosen his guide and that there must be a new charting of direction. This recharting of the voyage will generate the changes encompassed within the water framework. It is important to understand and define this framework itself before analyzing what transpires to change the focus and tone so sharply from the opening use of water as an image to that in the final poems about water.

Rather than a single sonnet, the closing half of the water framework is a three-poem sequence. In the second part of the framework, water appears as a fountain which is purely the poet's creation, the product of his power.¹⁵ The fountain is the subject of (1) Sonnet II, LXXII, (2) the "Stances de la Fontaine d'Helene" and finally (3) Sonnet II, LXXIII. This framing device—the water image—leaves five sonnets at the beginning of the *Sonnets pour Helene* which precede its appearance and five poems remaining after it. The change from *flots* in the first water sonnet to *fontaine* in the final sequence parallels the changes that the narrator experiences as he grows in his ability to control his environment.¹⁶ The reduction in the body of water (from *flots* to *fontaine*) enables the narrator to increase his control over it. The transfer from the initial state of helplessness to the later one of power reflects the change in narrative voice from lover to poet. Moreover, the increase in the number of poems (from a single sonnet to a series of three poems) from the first frame to the second further underscores the emergence and development of the poet's dominance. While the lover need not perish in order for the poet to assume control, a process of transformation does occur, with the poet's voice incorporating the lover's into his own. The process is similar to the painting over of one canvas with another picture, where the first painting leaves traces which furnish some detail for the second, lasting image. In

fact, the narrator in these sonnets records his own verbal self-portrait during the course of the work. Perfectly at ease in the art of creating and recreating images, the poet begins the culmination of his creative powers of representation—the fountain—which appears for the first time in Sonnet II, LXII:

A fin que ton honneur coule parmy la plaine
 Autant qu'il monte au ciel engraué dans un Pin,
 Inuoquant tous les Dieux, & respendant du vin,
 Le consacre à ton nom ceste belle Fontaine.
 Pasteurs, que vos tropeaux frisez de blanche laine
 Ne paissent à ces bords: y fleurisse le Thin,
 Et tant de belles fleurs qui s'ouurent au matin,
 Et soit dite à iamais la Fontaine d'Helene.
 Le passant en Esté s'y puisse reposer,
 Et assis dessus l'herbe à l'ombre composer
 Mille chansons d'Helene, & de moy luy souuienne.
 Quiconques en boira, qu'amoureux il deuienne:
 Et puisse en la humant, une flame puiser
 Aussi chaude qu'au cœur ie sens chaude la mienne. (II, LXXII)

The consecration of the fountain to Helene parallels the composition of *Les Sonnets pour Helene*. The completed poetic achievement—the cycle of sonnets—becomes the literal representation of the fountain, a *mise en abyme* (interior reduplication).¹⁷ The artist erects both in the text and by the text his monument to Helene. The prohibiting of the shepherds and their flocks from drinking from the fountain preserves its purity and sets it apart from any other.¹⁸ The poet will later add to his conception of this fountain in the "Stances de la Fontaine d'Helene," continuing to exert his control over what the fountain is and what it represents, just as he does in the second quatrain and in the tercets of this sonnet. The verb "composer" (l. 10) is significant, too, for it emphasizes the increasing authorial control. In line eleven the narrator inserts a reference to himself ("and may he remember me"), thus associating himself directly with the fountain. This remembrance thus assures the narrator a lingering evocation with the fountain—the beginnings of his search for immortality. The last word of this sonnet, "mienne," like a signature further emphasizes the creator's role in achieving his creation. Helene is less important than either the fountain or the narrator, as the value shifts from the object or recipient of the narrator's words

to the words themselves. The fountain is the source of the poets's vision, the flow of his mental images, and replaces the image of Helene.

The long "Stances de la Fontaine d'Helene" follows Sonnet II, LXXII and is marked in the subtitle for singing or recitation by three persons. It is, as Laumonier's note informs us, full of allusions to Theocritus, Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Petrarch, Ariosto, the neo-Latins Navagero and Flaminio and perhaps also to Propertius and Sannazar.¹⁹ There are also allusions to Ronsard's own works—to sonnets in this cycle, and to two other works, *Les Amours* and "L'Hylas." The idea of so many references to so many other sources in a poem about a fountain evokes a reflection, a mirroring of one image into another. The evocation of reflection, in turn, recalls Narcissus. He appears, of course, frequently in other works by Ronsard, and although there is no single, dominant mythological personage in these "Stances," the figure of Narcissus is central to the ideas of the fountain and of the representation of an image (or imitation): Narcissus fell in love with his reflection, an imitation. The concept of reflection and imitation reinforces this same notion in the "Stances." At one point one of the speakers entreats the moon to shine on the fountain: "Te mire dedans" (l. 76). Ronsard might well have addressed these same words to himself, for he uses portions of his own previously-published verses here in a poem about a fountain. In so doing, he parallels Narcissus's action at the edge of that legend's fountain, being both the "original" and the "imitation," creator and creation. The poet's double role recalls the issue of mortality and immortality, for he seeks to establish in the world something of lasting value, something that will outlive him. The monument to Helene, a fountain, becomes a metaphor of his poetic accomplishment and his claim to immortality. The closing words of the "Stances" are spoken by the character "Le Poete," one of the three speakers indicated by Ronsard in the subtitle of this work. "Le Poete" closes the piece:

Fontaine, ce—pendant de ceste tasse pleine
 Reçoy ce vin sacré que ie renuerse en toy:
 Sois ditte pour iamais la Fontaine d'Helene,
 Et conserue en tes eaux mes amours & ma foy. (ll. 85–88)

The phrase "pour iamais" appears three times in this series of fountain poems, and its repetition underlines the poet's beseeching the fountain to preserve forever his love and his faith. *Les Sonnets pour Helene* records the lover's love and the poet's faith in his vision, with the sonnets remaining "pour iamais" the creation of the poet. After creating the fountain, the poet then pours into it the

sacred wine which is swallowed up in the waters just as the lover's story is enveloped by the longer, more dominant "epic" of poetic glory. The lover's story is sacrificed to that of the poet's creation, with Love being forsaken so that a *text* about love might survive.

The poet further emphasizes his poetic creation in the "Stances," most dramatically near the middle of the poem where the character "Le Premier" requests:

Cesse tes pleurs, Hercule, et laisse ta Mysie,
Tes pieds de trop courir sont jà foibles et las.
Icy les Nymphes ont leur demeure choisie,
Icy sont tes Amours, icy est ton Hylas. (ll. 33–36)

The words "Amours" and "L'Hylas" stand out since each is the title of a well-known work by Ronsard. "L'Hylas" (1569) in particular is noteworthy because the protagonist dies in a fountain. The poem, furthermore, concludes with one of Ronsard's most straightforward and often-quoted passages where he expounds upon his theory of poetry. In that passage, lines 417–430 of "L'Hylas," Ronsard compares himself to a bee gathering his forces, stocking up for the winter:

Mon Passerat, je ressemble à l'Abeille
Qui va cueillant tantost la fleur vermeille,
Tantost la jaune: errant de pré en pré
Volle en la part qui plus luy vient à gré,
Contre l'Hyver amassant force vivres:
Ainsy courant & fueilletant mes lires,
J'amasse, trie & choisis le plus beau,
Qu'en cent couleurs je peints en un tableau,
Tantost en l'autre: & maistre en ma peinture,
Sans me forcer j'imite la Nature,
Comme j'ay fait en ce portrait d'Hylas
Que je te donne, & si à gré tu l'as
J'en aimeray mon present d'avantage
D'avoir sceu plaie à si grand personnage.
(*"L'Hylas,"* ll. 417–430) 20

Les Sonnets pour Helene portrays a movement of diurnal cycles, echoed often in the narrator's preoccupation with immortality, his fear of leaving no legacy as

the winter of death approaches. The process of careful choice, advocated in the famous "bee passage" from "L'Hylas" is also central to the "Stances," since the verses are modeled on so many other works. The concepts of imitation and creation converge in the figure of Narcissus who is, as is Ronsard, "Maistre en [sa] peinture (l. 425)," in that he creates his own image or self-portrait. However, Narcissus is initially unable to recognize his image as his own, thus he does not appreciate his ability to produce images. This flaw, moreover, proved fatal, leading directly to his death. This oversight or defect on the part of Narcissus may account for the lines in the "Stances" where the narrator refuses to identify with Narcissus: "Et non comme Narcisse. . ." (l. 24). In dividing the "Stances" into three parts spoken by "Le Premier," "Le Second," and "Le Poete," Ronsard seems intent on foregrounding the poetic identity and of merging the voices of all three to represent various aspects of the poet's character and his vision. Unlike Narcissus, Ronsard understands the nature of the image that he sees, recognizing its value for what it is—the product of his own artifice.

"L'Hylas" (1569, *Septieme Livre des Poèmes*) is a curious poem because the general narrative recounts the story of Hercules, to whom Ronsard addresses the beginning of the poem. The portion of the Hercules legend that Ronsard recounts is the loss of the young Hylas, Hercules's water-bearer. The young servant's death in a fountain so grieved the older hero that he did not return to Jason and the voyage of the *Argo*.²¹ Once again we encounter, although rather indirectly, the notion of a disrupted voyage. Hylas's death, according to Ronsard's poem, is a sacrifice, so that the Argonauts' ship might be saved from evil: "Que la nauire est sauué de tout mal" (l. 308). The linking of a sacrifice in a fountain with a ship's preservation from harm recalls the water framework that opens and closes *Les Sonnets pour Helene* where the sacrifice of the lover's story permits the poetic voyage to reach its full sail.

If Hylas's death devastates Hercules, the encounter represents a passionate exchange for the young Hylas and his captor, the nymph Printine.²² In "L'Hylas" we read:

. . . en cependant Printine,
Ardante au coeur d'une telle rapine,
Sa gauche main finement approcha
Et du garçon le col elle accrocha:
Coup dessus coup le baise & le rebaise, . . . (ll. 293–297)

It is significant that the text contains two versions of Hylas's death—the narrator's and Hylas's own. The two versions exemplify the concept of mirror images that a fountain might suggest, and the further reflection of the poem "L'Hylas" within the "Stances" presents yet another mirror—the vision of a mirror reflected. Here then is the beginning of a chain of reflected images, a chain that implies an infinite reflection of an image. The double versions of the same story also suggest an echo and thus certainly the figure of Echo in the Narcissus myth. Furthermore, the telling of one story within another parallels Ronsard's use of Homer's Helen to tell his own story. In both the legends of Hylas and Narcissus, death in the fountain is a falling in, a giving way, a complete submergence of the self, culminating in the loss of contact with the rest of the world. Both, moreover, appear to lead to a happy afterlife for the victim—Hylas describes his life as happy: ". . . heureux ie vis ici" ("L'Hylas," l. 396). In both stories, the loss is difficult for the survivors, Echo and Hercules.

Although the legends of Narcissus and Hylas present certain similarities, Ronsard establishes some fundamental differences between the two. First, Narcissus falls into and is enveloped by his own image whereas Hylas interacts with another, a separate and different individual who pulls him to his death. Hylas, furthermore, lives on through his voice, for he is able to speak to the grieving Hercules after his disappearance in the waters. He is then able to do what the poet in the *Sonnets pour Helene* hopes to do—to live eternally through the preservation of his voice. In the Narcissus myth, the lamenting voice and sighs belong to Echo, and the notion of immortality associated with Narcissus derives from the flower into which the latter is transformed. In the "Stances," Ronsard makes reference to the Narcissus myth when "Le Second" expresses the wish: ". . . qu' Amour me transforme en un rocher sans ame/ Et non comme Narcisse en une belle fleur" ("Stances," ll. 23–24). The desire to be transformed, not into a flower as Narcissus was, but into a rock with no soul would enable the narrator to be a more enduring being. The word "rock" catches our attention, for Ronsard is making another of his quasi-onomastic games just as the verb "surgir" suggested "Surgères" in Sonnet I, VI. Another word for "rocher" is "pierre." It is probable that Ronsard has once again made reference to himself (to his first name, Pierre), inserting himself into his poem, mirroring his own identity in his verse. Each end of the water framework, then, contains hints of one character's name, and these two names counterbalance one another from opposite ends of the sonnet cycle, like the two halves of the water framework. The verb "surgir" suggests a leaping forward, appropriate for the beginning of a work, while the noun "rocher" adds a note of stasis, of grounding, as an anchor to the second half

12 *Voice and Vision in Ronsard's 'Sonnets pour Helene'*

of this water framework. The narrator's early instability finds stability in the later allusion.

The lines which terminate "L'Hylas" constitute the afore-mentioned "bee passage" (ll. 417–430) wherein Ronsard explains his poetic theories concerning the role of the artist's conscious choice in his creations. Clearly the reference to Hylas in the "Stances de la Fontaine d'Helene" manifests the poet's belief in his role, in his art, in his actions, in his visions—something which the framework of the two water poem sequences has already implied. The fountain suggests a control that the poet achieves, and it presents a deliberate contrast to the overwhelming seas of the early sonnet.

Time and again in the "Stances" allusions to Ronsard's poems seize the reader's attention.²³ This long poem, then, functions repeatedly as a mirror, reflecting sonnets and poems from Ronsard's own repertoire, a function that places direct emphasis on the work of the poet, on the preservation and posterity of his works.²⁴ Among the more striking allusions in the "Stances" is the last speech offered by "Le Second":

Aduienne apres mille ans qu'un Pastoureau desgoise
Mes amours, & qu'il conte aux Nymphes d'icypres
Qu'un Vandomois mourut pour une Saintongeoise,
Et qu'encore son ame erre entre ces forests. (ll. 77–80)

This passage resembles the ending of the "Chanson," a poem which appears in the first book of the *Helene* sonnets, immediately following Sonnet VI, the first poem of the water framework. The tone of the "Chanson" is lighter, much less serious than Sonnet VI, but in the concluding lines the narrator foresees an inscription on his tombstone:

Dessus ma tombe engrauez mon soucy
En memorable escrit:
D'un Vandomois le corps respouse icy,
Sous les Myrtes l'esprit.
Comme Pâris là bas faut que ie voise,
Non pour l'amour d'une Helene Gregeoise,
Mais d'une Saintongeoise. ("Chanson," ll. 43–49)

The tombstone initiates once again the issue of immortality, and the words engraved on a tombstone would, like a written text, remain "en memorable

escrit" long after the death of the person in whose honor they were conceived. The choice of the words "memorable escrit" accentuates the eternal nature of the written creation. The identification of the narrator as "un Vandomois" in both the quotation from the "Stances" and the passage from the "Chanson" again positions Ronsard in his text. The notion of immortality is evoked in both passages, in the "Chanson" by the mention of the "memorable escrit" and by the continued voicing of love for Helene. In the "Stances" we are told that one thousand years hence the story of the love of Ronsard the Vendomois for Helene the Saintongeaise will still be told, spouted forth ("degoisé"), as a fountain projects water, and that ". . . encore son ame erre entre ces forests" (l. 80). This idea of an eternally-wandering spirit precedes the mention by the narrator in the text of his wish to be transformed into "un rocher sans ame." The rock—the tomb—will be without "ame" because the narrator's soul will continue to wander in the forest. The spirit then is the eternal voice, the voice associated with Echo, and the immortal record of the poet's glory.

This separation of a grounded earthly body and a free-moving spirit occurs at various points in the *Sonnets pour Helene*. It relates to the earlier discussion of the separate but symbiotic twins, Castor and Pollux. Ronsard plays with Neo-Platonic concepts throughout this sonnet cycle, alternately promoting the superiority of the spiritual over the physical. Castor and Pollux furnish a convenient symbol for Ronsard since they represent separation, with one brother in the heavens and the other on earth, much like the linked but distinct soul and body of the narrator. Ronsard clearly prefers that the mind and body work in harmony, just as the corresponding voices of the poet and lover together produce the unity of this text.

The division of body and soul, however, parallels other dualities in the sonnet cycle. In the "Stances" we have noticed a tripartite composition, divided as it is into parts spoken by "Le Premier," "Le Second," and "Le Poete." Readers expecting a correspondence between "Le Premier" and "Le Second" with the personas of lover and poet will be unconvinced. It is "Le Poete" who clearly represents the voice and the perspective of the poet—perhaps even of the historical Ronsard—while "Le Premier" and "Le Second" reflect aspects of both lover and poet with no clear distinction to separate them. While "Le Second" speaks of a spirit still wandering in the forest, "Le Premier," too, allies himself to a creator of an eternally-lasting creation when he hypothesizes:

Si i'estois un grand Prince, un superbe edifice
 Je voudrois te bastir, où ie ferois fumer

Tous les ans à ta feste autels & sacrifice,
Te nommant pour iamais la Fontaine d'aimer. ("Stances, ll. 65–68)

We know that Ronsard was regarded for many years as the most important poet of his day, the Prince of Poets. "Le Premier" here speaks in the persona of the poet, for the "superbe edifice" is, in fact, the *Sonnets pour Helene*. Again we note the expression "pour iamais" (l. 68) in a fountain poem, suggesting the immortality attained by the poet throughout his creation. Although no clear dichotomy exists between "Le Premier" and "Le Second" with respect to the personas of lover and poet, the lover's voice does, however, grow ever fainter throughout the "Stances," as references first to authorial functions, and then to Ronsard's and other poets' verses appear. The gradual merging of the two voices into one occurs much like the engulfing of the sacred wine by the waters of the fountain.

The whole construction of the "Stances," functioning as a fountain, serves as real, tangible evidence of the poet's "source."²⁵ The poem emphasizes the poet's creative powers, his dominant control, leading ultimately to his supremacy: the final words of the "Stances" are spoken for the *first and only* time by the character "Le Poete." He gains total control at the end of the "Stances" just as the poet's voice assumes the command in the creation of the fountain poems. His closing words stress the role of the poet's voice and point toward some sort of fusion and resolution for the entire sonnet cycle. The "Stances," in fact, make it clear that some kind of ending or closure to the *Sonnets pour Helene* is imminent, but it is a closure that includes the idea of an eternal resonance that contrasts directly with the dissolution of the love story. This blending of finality and eternity is a recurring motif in the body of Ronsard works, as the concluding sonnet of the earlier sonnet cycle *Les Amours* demonstrates. As we noticed, *Les Amours* is the second of Ronsard's prominent works ("L'Hylas" being the first) which is alluded to by name in the "Stances." The very last sonnet in the *Amours* collection salutes the dead Marie as follows: "Maintenant tu es viue & ie suis mort d'ennuy" ("Epitaphe de Marie," l. 12, Sonnet XIII of "Sur la mort de Marie" in *Le Second Liure des Amours*). The work closes then with a death, with the finite limits of mortality imposed upon Marie the Angevine. The poet, however, reverses the order and views Marie as continuing to live while he pronounces himself emotionally dead.

In the "Stances" the eight lines of "Le Poete" which conclude the piece hint of both closure and eternity:

Garçons ne chantez plus, jà Vesper nous commande
 De serrer nos troupeaux, les Loups sont ja dehors.
 Demain à la frescheur avec une autre bande
 Nous reuiendrons danser à l'entour de ces bords. (ll. 81-84)

The remaining lines constitute the previously-cited passage of the pouring of the wine into the waters of the fountain:

Fontaine, ce-pendant de ceste tasse plaine
 Reçoy ce vin sacré que ie renuerse en toy:
 Sois ditte pour iamais la Fontaine d'Helene,
 Et conserue en tes eaux mes amours & ma foy. (ll. 85-88)

The termination of the lover's belief in his ability to love Helene parallels the notion of endings presented here. The poet's claim to lasting glory through the virtues of his creations underlines the notion of eternity. The fountain, the poet's source, will preserve and encourage the love and the faith or belief that the poet wants to recount. The "memorable escrit" which is the text itself, furnishes the tangible evidence of preservation. The lover's story, the *vin sacré*, is sacrificed in order to assure the continuance of the fountain. The insistence on the words "pour iamais" assure, in turn, the fountain's eternity. This structure makes it evident that the lover's story has ended, but that the poet's will necessarily continue into eternity *avec une autre bande*.

Sonnet II, LXXIII follows the "Stances," concluding the group of fountain poems which comprise the second water framework:

Il ne suffit de boire en l'eau que i'ay sacrée
 A ceste belle Helene, afin d'estre amoureux:
 Il faut aussi dormir dedans un antre ombreux,
 Qui a ioignant sa rive en un mont son entrée.
 Il faut d'un pied dispos danser dessus la pré.
 Et tourner par neuf fois autour d'un saule creux;
 Il faut passer la planche, il faut faire des voeux
 Au Pere Saint Germain qui garde la contrée.
 Cela fait, quand un coeur seroit un froid glaçon,
 Il sentiroit le feu d'une estrange façon
 Enflamer sa froideur. Croyez ceste esriture.
 Amour du rouge sang des Geans tout souillé,

Essuyant en ceste eau son beau corps despouillé.
Y laissa pour iamais ses feux & sa teinture. (II, LXXIII)

The closing lines reaffirm the notion that love must be sacrificed in this work in order for the poetic adventure to succeed. Once again we read the words "pour iamais" which stress the poet's immortality. We now also encounter a curious series of actions that are supposed to point to becoming *amoureux*, according to the narrator. The actions—sleeping in a shadowy cave, dancing over the meadow, turning nine times around a hollow willow, passing the plank, making vows—all appear to belong to the realm of magic or nonsense. The narrator beseeches us, however, to believe these words: "Croyez ceste escriture" (l. 11). Readers may refuse to believe that these strange actions would leave one "amoureux" and thus not believe the "escriture." Or, they may believe in the written word and therefore accept the actions as leading to love. Since the lover's story began with the powerless tossing in the tumultuous waves of the first water poem, Sonnet I, VI, only to be overpowered by the overwhelming creative source represented here in these final water poems, we can assume that these words are spoken by an almost voice-less lover (and thus easily dismissed) or by a poet who cares about writing but knows little about love. The lover's voice simply does not reach his audience any longer, and it is therefore quite easy to dismiss this sonnet's four long, qualifying sentences which impart the curious and nonsensical actions leading to love. It takes little effort, finally, to sacrifice love and all that it entails to the shorter but more compelling sentence of the poem: "Croyez ceste escriture."

Sonnet II, LXXII closes the water framework, leaving five poems to terminate *Les Sonnets pour Helene*. In similar fashion, we recall, five poems precede the first half of the water framework near the opening of the work. These two frames where water is featured present dramatically the transfer of control from lover to poet. The poems portray in theme and in tone the change in narrative voice from lover to poet. The sacrifice of the love story for the survival of the poet's story—his text—demonstrates vividly that Ronsard's main aim in writing this sonnet sequence was to narrate the growth of the writing process itself. The pretext of a lover's struggle disguises the more intriguing concern of the poetic adventure. This parallel and paradoxical pattern of growth that shapes the water framework serves as a blueprint for the overall development of the entire sonnet cycle. When the two books of sonnets which comprise the *Sonnets pour Helene* are read according to this initial framework, readers find that the development is manifest: love is sacrificed for poetry. We place our faith in the poetic

narrative. The poet's voice is responsible for the growth of the poetic epic, for the symbolic voyage that he—and we—embark upon as we take up Ronsard's final sonnet sequence. He bids his followers believe now—and we do—in the power of the "memorable escrit."

Notes

¹ Portions of this study were previously published in the *MIFLC Review*, 2 (October, 1992): 9–17. See Jean Fallon, “Following the Artist’s Blueprint in *Les Sonnets pour Helene*.”

² In her book, Kathleen Anne Perry has already written about Ronsard’s use of a “flexible persona” in his poetry. She points to Ronsard’s use of different narrators within a single poem, such as the “Voyage de Tours,” and astutely remarks: “The mutability of the Petrarchan persona becomes, in Ronsard’s work, a sort of shift in perspectives of a poet (or narrator) conscious of the context in which he is speaking.” Kathleen Anne Perry, *Another Reality* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1990) 134.

³ Pirre Grimal, *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology*, trans. A. R. Maxwell-Hyslop (New York: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1986) 140–141.

⁴ Ronsard recounts the legend of Castor and Pollux in his “L’Hynne III De Pollux et Castor, à Gaspar de Colligny.” Verses 41–42 call our attention to the association with navigators: “Et qui sauuent encor les nauires forcées/ Des homicides flots quand elles sont poussées. . . .”

⁵ All quotations from Ronsard’s *Sonnets pour Helene* are taken from Pierre de Ronsard, as recorded in Paul Laumonier, ed. *Oeuvres Complètes de P. de Ronsard* (Paris: Librairie Alphonse Lemerre, 1914–1919). Laumonier uses word forms and spellings that Ronsard employed, keeping “Helene” unaccented, as Ronsard did, representing “u” for a modern “v” when it does not begin a word, “i” for “j,” and preserving inconsistent spellings for the same word used within the body of the poems, as well as spellings of words which have changed since Ronsard used them. Laumonier also uses roman numerals to identify the sonnets, using a I or II to identify the book, followed by the sonnet number in roman numerals. For example, I, VI is the sixth sonnet in Book One. I have followed Laumonier’s example in this study. Laumonier uses “IIII” instead of “IV.” I have abbreviated the *Derniers Vers* by “D.V.” in the one instance where I have quoted from that work. As a general practice, I quote the sonnets in full, but from the “Stances,” the “Elegie,” and the “Chanson,” and from the long poem, “L’Hylas,” I quote pertinent passages.

6 François Rigolot's exhaustive and riveting section of his 1977 book on onomastic notions in Renaissance poetry deals in great detail with the significance of the name "Hélène." He writes: "Le Nom est *fatal* en vérité (II, 9 & 3); et le sort tragique du *poète-amant* (emphasis mine) est marqué par cet emploi inconscient (mais sans doute conscient de la part de l'écrivain) du mot-clé de la thématique héliénique. . . . "Le jeu de la paronomase est donc justifié par le contexte; il est une *felix culpa* qui, critiquable sous la forme que lui donne le sonnet-définition, se rachète ensuite par les opérations métaphoriques qu'il permet pour le grand profit du texte poétique." François Rigolot, *Poétique et Onomastique: L'Exemple de la Renaissance* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1977), 222.

7 Rigolot 226. He comments: "S'il y a élection de l'amour chez le personnage, il y a élection d'une technique scripturale chez l'auteur. Le déchiffrement d' "Hélène" est un long cheminement de la pensée qui correspond, en sens inverse, au lent encodage de l'âme par le sentiment amoureux."

8 The use of the words "nauire," "homicide," and "flots" in Sonnet I, VI recall Ronsard's "L'Hynne III De Pollux et Castor."

9 Philip Ford comments on the significance of the storm: "Set-piece storm descriptions are not uncommon in classical literature, with *Odyssey* 5. 291 sqq. serving as a model for such later scenes as Virgil's *Aeneid* I. 181 sqq. It is well known that Ronsard, like his teacher, Dorat, considered that the *Odyssey* represented an allegory of the human soul passing through the vicissitudes of life on to its homecoming in the afterlife. So, any depiction of a storm-tossed hero might be interpreted in this light." Philip Ford "Ronsard the Painter: A Reading of 'Des Peintures Contenues Dedans un Tableau,'" *French Studies: A Quarterly Review*, 40 (1) (January, 1986): 32-44. We can interpret this set-piece as illustrating in part the narrator's early situation before his progression to powerful poet.

10 For a discussion of the origins and development of Blind Cupid in Renaissance art and literature, see Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1962) 95-128.

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⁴ Ronsard recounts the legend of Castor and Pollux in his “L’Hynne III De Pollux et Castor, à Gaspar de Colligny.” Verses 41–42 call our attention to the association with navigators: “Et qui sauuent encor les nauires forcées/ Des homicides flots quand elles sont poussées. . . .”

⁵ All quotations from Ronsard’s *Sonnets pour Helene* are taken from Pierre de Ronsard, as recorded in Paul Laumonier, ed. *Oeuvres Complètes de P. de Ronsard* (Paris: Librairie Alphonse Lemerre, 1914–1919). Laumonier uses word forms and spellings that Ronsard employed, keeping “Helene” unaccented, as Ronsard did, representing “u” for a modern “v” when it does not begin a word, “i” for “j,” and preserving inconsistent spellings for the same word used within the body of the poems, as well as spellings of words which have changed since Ronsard used them. Laumonier also uses roman numerals to identify the sonnets, using a I or II to identify the book, followed by the sonnet number in roman numerals. For example, I, VI is the sixth sonnet in Book One. I have followed Laumonier’s example in this study. Laumonier uses “IIII” instead of “IV.” I have abbreviated the *Derniers Vers* by “D.V.” in the one instance where I have quoted from that work. As a general practice, I quote the sonnets in full, but from the “Stances,” the “Elegie,” and the “Chanson,” and from the long poem, “L’Hylas,” I quote pertinent passages.

⁶ François Rigolot's exhaustive and riveting section of his 1977 book on onomastic notions in Renaissance poetry deals in great detail with the significance of the name "Hélène." He writes: "Le Nom est *fatal* en vérité (II, 9 & 3); et le sort tragique du *poète-amant* (emphasis mine) est marqué par cet emploi inconscient (mais sans doute conscient de la part de l'écrivain) du mot-clé de la thématique hélénique. . . . "Le jeu de la paronomase est donc justifié par le contexte; il est une *felix culpa* qui, critiquable sous la forme que lui donne le sonnet-définition, se rachète ensuite par les opérations métaphoriques qu'il permet pour le grand profit du texte poétique." François Rigolot, *Poétique et Onomastique: L'Exemple de la Renaissance* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1977), 222.

⁷ Rigolot 226. He comments: "S'il y a élection de l'amour chez le personnage, il y a élection d'une technique scripturale chez l'auteur. Le déchiffrement d' "Hélène" est un long cheminement de la pensée qui correspond, en sens inverse, au lent encodage de l'âme par le sentiment amoureux."

⁸ The use of the words "nauire," "homicide," and "flots" in Sonnet I, VI recall Ronsard's "L'Hynne III De Pollux et Castor."

⁹ Philip Ford comments on the significance of the storm: "Set-piece storm descriptions are not uncommon in classical literature, with *Odyssey* 5. 291 sqq. serving as a model for such later scenes as Virgil's *Aeneid* I. 181 sqq. It is well known that Ronsard, like his teacher, Dorat, considered that the *Odyssey* represented an allegory of the human soul passing through the vicissitudes of life on to its homecoming in the afterlife. So, any depiction of a storm-tossed hero might be interpreted in this light." Philip Ford "Ronsard the Painter: A Reading of 'Des Peintures Contenues Dedans un Tableau,' *French Studies: A Quarterly Review*, 40 (1) (January, 1986): 32-44. We can interpret this set-piece as illustrating in part the narrator's early situation before his progression to powerful poet.

¹⁰ For a discussion of the origins and development of Blind Cupid in Renaissance art and literature, see Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1962) 95-128.

20 *Voice and Vision in Ronsard's 'Sonnets pour Helene'*

11 Malcolm Quainton, "The Love Poetry of Pierre de Ronsard: Convention and Beyond," *Durham University Journal*, 80 (2) (June, 1988): 193–199. He submits: "The star of Helen [is] by tradition harmful to mariners." Thus, whether the narrator refers to the star or to Helene's eyes as the light source that pulls him to the rocks, it is a negative light.

12 For another perspective on Ronsard's treatment of flames and shipwrecks, see Perry 195.

13 Quainton 197. He corroborates this view of Ronsard's use of this verb: "In particular, the verb *surgir* (line 14) [is] itself a play on the name of his lady, Hélène de Surgères."

14 Laurence Mall also reminds us of sixteenth century writers' fondness of incorporating their own names into their texts and of a fairly widespread use of onomastic games in Renaissance texts. Laurence Mall, "Nom et renom dans les *Sonnets pour Helene* de Ronsard," *Australian Journal of French Studies*: 25 (2), (May–August, 1988): 115–131.

15 See Rigolot 221 where he notes the rhyming of "Helene" and "fontaine."

16 Perry 160. She sums up this image as follows: "Water contains within it the potential for destruction and creation, death and fertility. . . ."

17 John O'Brien mentions the *mise-en-abyme* as part of Ronsard's *Amours de Cassandre*. See John O'Brien, "Theatrum Catopticum: Ronsard's *Amours de Cassandre*," *The Modern Language Review*, 86 (2) (April, 1991): 298–309.

18 The fountain was, of course, an early inspiration for Ronsard in his Ode II, ix, "A la Fontaine Bellerie" which he had previously imitated from Horace's Ode III, xiii, "O Fons Bandusiae." As Ahmed notes in his article, Ronsard deifies the fountain by "depicting himself as the poetic source not of the Latin Bandusiae but the French Bellerie." E. Ahmed, "Ronsard's 1550 Odes: Defining a Poetic Self," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 49 (3) (1987): 591–596.

19 Laumonier 207.

²⁰ See Ronsard's poem "L'Hylas" with explanatory notes in Graham Castor and Terence Cave, eds. *Ronsard, Odes, Hymns and Other Poems* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973) 229–238, and 285–286.

²¹ See Castor's and Cave's comments on Ronsard's interest in the *Argonautica* legends in his poetry in their *Ronsard, Odes, Hymns and Other Poems* 285–286.

²² In "L'Hylas" Ronsard uses two spellings: Printine and Printinne.

²³ Barbara Welch has pointed out an element of Du Bellay's poetry which she calls his process of "s'entre-écrire". See Barbara L. Welch, "Subtextual Voice in Ronsard's 1552 *Amours* and Du Bellay's *Regrets*," *Romance Quarterly* 37 (4) (November, 1990): 397–407. It is easy to imagine Ronsard using his own words and images from his own previously written poems as a kind of subtext for his writing about writing. While Welch's article is instrumental in directing readers to a form of dialogue employed between Du Bellay and Ronsard in their works, we can understand Ronsard using something of the same sort in his reworkings of his own texts. Thus, the 1578 edition of the *Sonnets pour Helene* could have stimulated further comment in his 1584 version.

²⁴ Terence Cave and Thomas Greene's numerous and cogent observations about Renaissance imitations of classical models have contributed to my understanding of Ronsard's self-referential material in his works. It is apparent that Ronsard uses some aspects of *imitatio* but it is to allude to his own previously-published poetry. See Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), and Thomas Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

²⁵ David Quint, *Origin and Originality in Renaissance Literature: Versions of the Source* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983). He explores the theme of the source as a locus of divinity and truth in Renaissance literature. See pages 21–30 in particular for a discussion of Ronsard's versions of the source in his "Ode a Michel de L'Hospital" and in his "Response aux injures et calomnies." Quint underlines these two poems as presenting "the divided aspirations of a poet who desires both to ground his verse in an authorized source and to establish his own identity as a literary creator: to be a source for other poets." Quint 30.

Chapter Two

The "Memorable Escrit":

Book One of *Les Sonnets Pour Helene*

In erecting the fountain to Helene near the end of the *Sonnets pour Helene*, Ronsard proclaims the mastery of his artistic powers. His poet succeeds in calming the turbulent waters of the shipwreck (I, VI) so that the water element itself undergoes a fundamental transformation. The natural body of water (ocean or river—the *flots*)—under the control of the poet, becomes a fountain, a symbol of the poetic source. The essentially natural aspect of the body of water takes on an artificial or manmade quality, the construct of the artist. The poet transforms nature into art. Just as the concluding lines of "L'Hylas" announced, Ronsard conceived of his work as a blending of art and nature. In a very basic sense, this union provides one solid, overall structure for the entire work. Predictably, this blend of nature and art proves complex, becoming at times a struggle between opposite forces and at other points behaving as a harmonic fusion.

The artist's desire to equate his skill with nature's, to create his own world, a "recreated nature" of his design, constitutes, in fact, Ronsard's major goal in composing the *Sonnets pour Helene*. The epic expectations that we form in reading these sonnets concern a poetic epic, an artist's adventure. This poetic quest aims at promoting the superiority of poetry, the divine nature of a beautiful work and the poet's triumph or *vertu*.¹ It is a personal epic as well, in that it seeks to proclaim Ronsard's own indisputable claim to the title of poetic prince of his day, and to establish as a legacy his virtuosity as a composer of sonnets. If he failed in writing the ambitious epic, *La Franciade*, he completes in *Les Sonnets pour Helene* a personal poetic voyage.

The overall body of the sonnet cycle demonstrates Ronsard's conscious application of nature's diurnal and seasonal rhythms. Moreover, as the refinement of the rough waters into the artist's font exemplifies, nature's elements are vulnerable to the poet's dominance in this cycle of poems. Ronsard's establishment of himself as center of his own universe depends on the mastery of his craft, on the brilliance of his art, on his adept ability to build, transform, portray and manipulate. Within the *Sonnets pour Helene* lie a body of sixteen sonnets which accentuate the poet's function as master craftsman of his universe. These sonnets as a group constitute a sub-sequence of the cycle. We can refer to these sonnets as "tableau sonnets," borrowing from Garapon's description in his *Ronsard*,

chanter de Marie et d'Helene.² These sonnets share aspects from the following set of characteristics:

1. The narrator represents Helene as a contemporary, a woman of the French court, not as a mythological character, although he may allude to the Greek Helen.
2. He describes an encounter or an interaction, usually brief, between them ("Le Soleil l'autre iour se mit entre nous deux," for example, or "Nous promenant tous seuls. . .").
3. He generally sets the scene in the past, often using the *passé simple*, and indications of past time, as in "l'autre iour," or in "harsoir."
4. He includes a detail of decor or a prop, thereby emphasizing the *tableau* quality of these sonnets ("le haut d'un degré," or "un filet de soie cramoisie").

The narrator of the tableau sonnets is a character named Ronsard. He makes reference to his "vers" or his "sonnets," to the act of "chanter" and "écrire." This character Ronsard includes aspects of both the poet's and the lover's voices that we heard in the sonnet analyzed in the first chapter. He undergoes a process of development in these sonnets that mirrors the growing emphasis on poetry which occurs during the course of the entire sonnet cycle. His character grows through interaction with the character Helene. Her character, however, is without dimension or "flesh." She grows more and more distant from the narrator, and this process places the focus on his character rather than on her own. In studying the character interaction and the narrative patterns of the tableau sonnets, we witness the poetic process as it develops before our eyes and ears. The tableau sonnets present a working model for much of the movement and many of the themes of the *Sonnets pour Helene* as a whole.

The search for narrative control is an important aspect of the development of the poetic voice in the sonnets. In the early sonnets of the tableau series, Helene's is the controlling character, even though it is the character Ronsard who presents the narrative as part of his past. The scenes arise from his memory, but since memory is selective, the memories reveal more to us about him than about Helene. Despite the title of this work, Helene is conspicuously absent from many

of the sonnets of the cycle, just as the fictional Helen of Troy was absent from her countrymen while they waged war for her return. The war waged here is for control of the narrative—of imagination, of voice.

The tableau sonnets invite attention for a variety of reasons. Certainly their vivid imagery and attention to detail make them appear lifelike.³ They represent scenes that could well have occurred or which might yet occur. It is not difficult to imagine the settings which are mentioned in the tableau sonnets. But this quality of seemingly realistic representation does not imply that they are unveiled representations of life. We must not be tempted to accept as truth the events recounted in these sonnets simply because the realistic scenes are easier for us to identify with than, for example, a mythological forest or Jupiter's palace. The tableau sonnets seem particularly lifelike because of their inclusion of the character Ronsard, a writer of sonnets. When we witness in these tableau scenes some interaction between the characters Ronsard and Helene, we are watching what appears to be Ronsard the author entering into the set of his own work, becoming part of his created world. What we witness, in fact, is Ronsard the author creating Ronsard the character, blending reality and fantasy, nature and art, the created world and a recreation of it. The tableau sonnets, with their theatre and/or painting-like presentation provide an interesting junction at which the notions of *imitatio* and *mimesis* meet, for these poems accentuate structures, forms, set-pieces, and props—the crafted, supported by images and metaphors taken from nature.⁴ The *tableaux* display the artist's sense of construction, where architectonic details and a general sense of color and movement underline the artist's role in erecting or crafting his domain. These details call attention to form, to style, to the manner in which the poet represents his superiority.

Although Ronsard's love poetry is less overtly marked by his theories of poetry than certain of his other works—"L'Hylas," for example—this last sonnet cycle imparts significant concepts about the process of poetry writing.⁵ The 1584 edition of the *Sonnets pour Helene*, the last published during Ronsard's lifetime, reveals Ronsard's belief in his vocation, and his firm confidence in the immortal nature of poetry, especially when poetry is contrasted with mortal life and love. The tableau sonnets furnish keyholes through which the reader may glimpse visions of a poetic process at work, a series of studies that blend vision and voice, the concrete and the ethereal, the mortal and the immortal. Above all, these sonnets focus on the ascendance of poetry. Ronsard displays in these tableau poems his artistry in constructing an environment where the glorification of poetry is his constant aim. The architectonic features of the tableau sonnets, not coincidentally, include the fountain, the staircase, the fireplace, the doorway

and the garden, which were prominent "set pieces" in the Mannerist period.⁶ Indeed, the first tableau sonnet, I, IX, is set against the backdrop of a staircase:

L'autre iour que i'estois sur le haut d'un degré,
 Passant tu m'aduisas, & me tournant la veuë
 Tu m'esblouis les yeux, tant i'auois l'ame esmeuë
 De me voir en sursaut de tes yeux rencontré.
 Ton regard dans le coeur, dans le sang m'est entré
 Comme un esclat de foudre alors qu'il fend la nue:
 L'euz de froid & de chaud la fièvre continue,
 D'un si poignant regard mortellement outré.
 Lors si ta belle main passant ne m'eust fait signe,
 Main blanche, qui se vante estre fille d'un Cygne.
 Le fusse mort, Helene, aux rayons de tes yeux:
 Mais ton signe retint l'ame presque rauie,
 Ton oeil se contenta d'estre victorieux,
 Ta main se resiouyt de me donner la vie. (I, IX)

The poem accentuates Helene's superiority—the power that she holds over the narrator. Her eye wields a glance that strikes the narrator as "un si poignant regard" (l. 8). The narrator further admits its power over him when he deems it "victorieux" (l. 13). While the action verbs are few, a basic stirring to motion conveys a sensual awakening, for the text of the poem itself moves toward life: the last words read "donner la vie" (l. 14). This gesture that Helene makes emphasizes her power, for it is her hand that initiates the narrator's life. Her gesture, despite its gift of life, is not without negative connotations. The narrator, in esteeming Helene's hand, describes it as "belle" and "blanche" (ll. 9–10). These two adjectives foresee the assimilation with the mythical Helen, an assimilation which is called into focus by the mention of the swan, the disguise worn by Jupiter while seducing Leda, Helen's mother. The allusion to that forceful seduction by that potent creator corroborates the textual movement towards life and reinforces the story of birth or beginning which launches the movement in this sonnet and in the tableau series. This evocation of the mythical Helen, however, summons, too, the eventual doom and destruction associated with the Trojan War. The narrator refers to the gesture made by Helene's hand as "ton signe." The repetition of the word *signe* (ll. 9 and 12) and the homonym *cygne* (l. 10) present that set of phonemes three times within the space of four lines. The "Cygne" functions as an early sign or symbol to the readers that the legend

of Helen, with all of its connotations of infidelity, is a negative and essentially doomed choice for a love story—a lover's "swan song." However, the word *cygne* and the allusion to the coupling of Jupiter and Leda also alerts the reader to the issue of mortality/immortality, as the offspring of this union between Leda and the ruler of the gods were known to be immortal. The name "Helene" thus offers two possibilities for the lover and the poet seeking to find in her his story. For the lover her name portends infidelity, independence, incapacity to join with another. The choice of this name for a love story, then, would appear to be either ironic or pathetic. For the poet, however, the name indicates immortality because of its alliance with the revered Homer. The recreation of Homer's subject emphasizes life, renewal and specifically a textual rebirth.⁷ The *cygne* also functions as a symbol of the poet, for the swan was Apollo's bird. The allusion to Helen—and thus to Homer—reiterates Ronsard's focus on imitating Homer's accomplishment, the epic, although the epic contained within the *Sonnets pour Helene* is decidedly more abstract than Homer's narratives.

In this sonnet, any interaction between the narrator and Helene which might result in a union like that of Helen's parents is denied. Helene's character retains its singular nature, an independence which recalls the "vous seule" and the "seule vous" of the cycle's opening sonnet. Helene offers a glance and gestures, to which the narrator responds with opposing reactions: he perceives the first as negative and the second as positive. The effects of her actions, then, cancel each other and do not lead to any significant character interaction. In fact, this lack of interaction is due in part to the narrator's stasis. In setting the scene for the readers, the narrator describes his position during the encounter as "sur le haut d'un degré." The initial connotation accents the narrator's high or superior position and would suggest a corresponding mental or emotional state. The narrator's position, however, is static throughout this first tableau sonnet. His emotions receive the focus in the sonnet, while all the verbs (*passer, tourner, éblouir, entrer, fendre, faire signe*, and so on) are all associated with Helene. Twice the narrator describes her as "passant," a verb which stresses her movement. Her action and the speaker's stasis undermine the narrator's ostensibly superior position "sur le haut d'un degré," as does the ensuing description of the narrator's emotions. Helene's hand, her gesture, her movement give him life, and thus initiate the progression that we may observe in the entire series of tableau sonnets—the "birth" of the narrator and his struggle for narrative control. The narrator in recollecting the event, might well have viewed himself as the bestower of life in this instance—in bringing it to life for the readers. However, he chooses to recount the scene with Helene's gesture as the initiator of

life. Because of Helene's association with immortality, her gesture and her touch can indeed constitute a life-giving act. The narrator receives life for his narrative from this first encounter with Helene on the stairs. She is the lively one who casts the glance that enters "dans le coeur, dans le sang." The repetition of the word "dans" underlines both the strength of the glance and the probing, interior nature that these tableau sonnets as a group portray. The structural associations implied by the stairs ("sur le haut d'un degré," l. 1) invite us to enter the artist's inner world. Within this world—which the tableau sonnets symbolize—the emphasis is on the art, the crafting, the constructing. This focus on the manufactured stresses the poet's effort, his diligence, in fabricating his own imitation of Homer's epic poem. The success of Ronsard's poetry, however, depends on the manner in which he employs both art and nature in his unique version, a blending of *imitatio* and *mimesis*. Numerous references to nature's order occur, too, in these tableau poems. The two theories, *imitatio* and *mimesis* meet one another in the concepts of the artificial—the art—and the natural in the *tableaux* and throughout the *Sonnets pour Helene*. By observing the various images which exemplify the manufactured and the natural, we gain insight into Ronsard's understanding and use of the theories of imitation and inspiration as he composed his last sonnet cycle.

The man-made in this sonnet—the stair—provides the place of encounter. The eye's glance and the hand's touch are Helene's, a human's, but the narrator compares them with a flash of lightning and a swan, two products of nature. The image of the swan, moreover, suggests both a natural creature and a created disguise fashioned by the creator Jupiter to seduce Leda. Ronsard's repeated emphasis on Helene's hand ("ta belle main" in l. 9, "main blanche" in l. 10, "ton signe" in l. 13, and "ta main" again in l. 14) prompts us to look at his own hand, his handiwork in the drafting of this sonnet, and by extension, the entire tableau sequence.

Furthermore, by casting the narrator as a participant in this group of sonnets, Ronsard asks the readers to consider the whole concept of the narrator's role in the work. The narrator is a very prominent protagonist, calling attention to his birth, his coming to life. The life of the narrator generates, in turn, the life of the narrative. Life begins but the narrator's position in this sonnet is precarious, "sur le haut d'un degré," on the verge of movement, alive, but devoid of dynamic motion and far from controlling Helene or the movement of the text.

In the second tableau sonnet which appears in I, XI, we note immediately an increased interaction between Helene and the narrator:

Le Soleil l'autre iour se mit entre nous deux,
Ardent de regarder tes yeux par la verriere:
Mais luy, comme esblouy de ta viue lumiere,
Ne pouuant le souffrir, s'en-alla tout honteux.
Ie te regarday ferme, & deuins glorieux
D'auoir veincu ce Dieu qui se tournoit arriere,
Quand regardant vers moy tu me dis, ma guerriere,
Ce Soleil est fascheux, ie t'aime beaucoup mieux.
Une ioye en mon coeur incroyable s'en-volle
Pour ma victoire acquise, & pour telle parolle:
Mais longuement cest aise en moy ne trouua lieu.
Arriuant un mortel de plus fresche ieunesse
(Sans esgard que i'auois triomphé d'un grand Dieu)
Tu me laissas tout seul pour luy faire caresse. (I, XI)

The increased interaction between Helene and the narrator is evident. The narrator recounts a short-lived "victoire" here, as he has outlasted the sun in an attempt to draw close to Helene. The personified sun, looking in through the window, attempts to come between the two characters. Again we note an emphasis on the inward search represented in this case by both the window and the sunlight itself. The window functions as another construct which opens the tableau sequence up, beckoning inward our attention, our presence, our gaze. Like the stair in the previous tableau, the window serves as a place of encounter in the sonnet. It also calls attention to the artist's construction, for the window is a man-made object. It reflects, however, the natural light of the sun. The light shining in through the window also accentuates the inward search, exemplifying illumination, clarity, a search for truth. But this sunlight soon "s'en alla tout honteux" (l. 4), leaving the readers to search for further illumination. Ronsard's use of the sun in this sonnet underlines again his fascination for the coming together of both nature's elements and man's creations. Because the sun's light in this poem is transient, it can be considered "undependable" from a human standpoint. The sun here is merely functioning within the realm of nature's order. It belongs to the cosmic scheme of things, rather than to the control of human logic, order or design. Ronsard's narrator, however, consistently seeks to compare the sun with humans (the narrator himself and Helene) in this sonnet.

Because the narrator has "triumphed" over the sun, he seems to regard his feat as worthy of Helene's affection. Twice he refers to the sun as a god: ". . . ce Dieu" (l. 6) and ". . . un grand Dieu" (l. 13). After their interaction with this

"grand Dieu," the narrator considers himself equal to Helene in one sense, since they both triumph over the sun, although for different reasons. Her beauty outshines the sun's, thus allowing her to triumph. And when she prefers the narrator to the sun, she assures him a victory over his rival. This sense of equality with Helene does not last, for the end of the sonnet announces the arrival of "un mortel de plus fresche ieunesse." The *mortel* stands in opposition to the god-like sun and to the implied divinity accorded those who have gained victory over it. More significant, though, the word *mortel* highlights the ongoing concern with mortality and immortality, a concern that manifests itself again and again throughout the entire sonnet cycle. It is unclear whether the narrator stresses "un mortel" or "un mortel de plus fresche ieunesse" (emphasis mine), but clearly the juxtaposition of "mortel" with "un grand Dieu" in lines twelve and thirteen accentuates this central concern of the cycle and the tableau sonnets. Furthermore, a rivalry between the gods and the mortals reflects the struggle between poet and lover for narrative control, as well as the opposition between the orders of nature and man.

This notion of struggle is included in the narrator's relationship with Helene, for the narrator refers to her as "ma guerriere," a curious term of endearment for a lover to use, although not unusual in light of the Trojan War connotations. Once more we note a striking juxtaposition of words: "guerriere" (l. 7) with "ie t'aime" (l. 8). As Rigolot notes, "Le thème de la guerre de Troie est exploité pour amplifier, par une mimesis appropriée, les ravages de la passion amoureuse."⁸ The figure of Helene presents a host of negative and positive associations in the sonnets of this cycle. Our understanding of the relationship between Helene and the narrator substantiates the complexity of the issue. She gives him life yet maintains a textual and emotional distance from him. The narrator informs us that following Helene's words there arose in his heart "une ioye . . . incroyable" (l. 9), but concludes the first tercet with the sad realization that "longuement cest aise en moy ne trouua lieu" (l. 11). The inconstancy of Helene's love mirrors the inconstant nature of the sun's light. The narrator personifies the sun and then attempts to explain its actions in a rational or logical manner. He takes as the point of his account a natural phenomenon, the sunlight's appearance and disappearance. In spinning a story about the sun, the narrator paints a whimsical picture, using material that the metaphysical poet John Donne, for one, would later use.⁹ It is an amusing story, an attempt to explain a natural occurrence in anthropomorphic terms, just as a myth might seek to do. In trying to explain a natural happening in human terms, the narrator also draws attention to another non-rational yet human phenomenon—love. Helene's love is just as

transient as the sun's light, yet no whimsical story emerges to explain her preference for another. The narrator can find no reason for Helene's ultimate choice other than to mention that his human rival is younger than he: "de plus fresche ieunesse." Youth alone does not constitute within the text we are given here a solid enough reason for the fickle change of heart. The readers appreciate this vanquishing of the sun as merely an embellished account of the sun's disappearance which corresponds to the bewilderment caused by the loss of love. Ronsard uses the natural event to illustrate an emotional experience. It appears more plausible for Helene to reason, to have emotions, than for the sun. Indeed, the quoted words attributed to Helene ("Ce soleil est fascheux, ie t'aime beaucoup mieux") initially portray her as caring, specifically because of the narrator's triumph over the sun whom Helene describes as "fascheux" in line eight. Thus, she appears to act logically in response to the events. However, when she fails to continue to follow the narrator's proscribed "logic," in failing to value him after his "triumph," Helene then invites us to equate her inconstancy with the sun's arbitrary appearance and disappearance. The narrator can do relatively little to control either one.

In this sonnet, the love story does not develop and grow as the lover expects, but the poet shows signs of growth, a development toward more control of the *récit* (which is ultimately controlled and directed by Ronsard through the guise of his characters in the tableau sonnets). The love story is stalled and not moving toward any lasting or permanent coupling, but the narrative demonstrates complexity, reason, and movement on the part of the poet. Although the narrator is left alone at the end of the sonnet, he has experienced a close encounter with Helene and with the sun. The brush with the sun, however, does not yield an ally. Instead of providing aid or symbolic illumination for the narrator in this sonnet, the sun disappears. This retreating sun casts a glimpse into the lover's future, for like the sun, he, too, will be overpowered by Helene. She will continue to present an unworthy match who will not permit him the joy of her company. The sun's movements, moreover, mirror the cycle that love must undergo in order for the poet to triumph at the end of this work. It further establishes very significantly the natural order of the cycle. Ronsard's use of the natural order to illustrate his human dilemma suggests that he views the two domains—the cosmic order and man's—as working in harmony, following similar patterns, although with distinctly different outcomes appropriate to the laws of each. This sonnet fuses the natural and the man-made, nature and art. Ronsard prepares us for an emphasis on nature's cycles which accompany the poetic cycles of growth (the narrative) throughout the *Sonnets pour Helene*.

In Sonnet I, XVI, the narrative process makes further gains. This time, instead of focusing on Helene's gaze, the narrator recounts the effects of the glance withheld:

Te regardant assise aupres de ta cousine,
 Belle comme une Aurore & toy comme un Soleil,
 Je pensay voir deux fleurs d'un mesme teint pareil,
 Croissantes en beauté l'une à l'autre voisine.
 La chaste sainte belle & unique Angeuine,
 Viste comme un esclair sur moy ietta son oeil:
 Toy comme paresseuse & pleine de sommeil,
 D'un seul petit regard tu ne m'estimas digne.
 Tu t'entretenois seule au visage abaissé.
 Pensive toute à toy, n'aimant rien que toymesme,
 Desdaignant un chacun d'un sourcil ramassé.
 Comme une qui ne veut qu'on la cherche ou qu'on l'aime.
 J'eü peur de ton silence, & m'en allay tout blesme,
 Craignant que mon salut n'eust ton oeil offensé. (I, XVI)

The sonnet retains many of the same narrative techniques as the previous two tableau sonnets. The recalled event is recorded in detail from beginning to end. Present participles (*regardant*, *dedaignant*, *craignant*) mark this sonnet, much like the others. This use of the present participle so common to the tableau sonnets, stresses the "immediacy" of the narrative. Ronsard calls attention again to light, to the eye, and to the act of seeing. The most striking distinction, though, concerning the vision is that Helene's eye does not interact with the narrator's. In the previous sonnets, Ronsard allows Helene's eye to meet the narrator's—abundantly, we recall, in the first tableau, I, IX:

Passant tu m'aduisas, & me tournant la veuë
 Tu m'esblouis les yeux, tant i'aurois l'ame esmeuë
 De me voir en sursaut de tes yeux rencontré
 Ton regard dans le coeur, dans le sang m'est entré. . . (II. 2-5)

—and in a more limited fashion in the second tableau, I, XI:

Quand regardant vers moy tu me dis, ma guerriere. . . (I. 7)

In this sonnet, the narrator recreates the scene that first met his eye— Helene and her cousin. He describes the two young women in terms of degrees of light. The Angevine cousin represents the dawn and Helene again represents the sun. This amplification of light again reflects Ronsard's awareness of diurnal and seasonal influences, and his use of their illustration to support his text. Once again the sun proves no ally to the narrator. Helene is "un Soleil" in this scene, both because her love is transient (as in the last) and because of the brilliance of her glance. She refuses, however, to grace the narrator with this gaze, thus continuing to exemplify the sun's retreat that we witnessed at the close of the last sonnet. Ronsard uses nature convincingly to portray in graphic terms the emotional experiences of his narrator.

We notice that Ronsard's simple technique of restating events has undergone alterations in the *tableaux* which follow the first. In the second tableau, the account recorded more details of the narrator's thoughts, and the corresponding natural phenomena illustrated more fully the emotional episodes. Now in this sonnet, we encounter a narration even more fully colored by the narrator's thoughts, illustrating another example of Ronsard's use of self-imitation. This poem shows a more artfully-developed narrative technique, for it is stylistically richer, chiefly from the repetition of the comparison. The description of the women contains the first two of the five uses of the word "comme" (twice in l. 2, once each in ll. 6, 7 and 12). Ronsard is careful to include the narrator's thought processes at work. He writes, "Je pensay voir deux fleurs"—not "Je voyay deux fleurs." Each time the comparison appears, we see evidence of the poet's thoughts. He recounts the cousin's glance in two lines. By contrast, his description of the lack of Helene's glance occupies six of the poem's fourteen lines. Helene does not favor the narrator with any interaction, yet he describes in detail his perception of a beautiful but sullen young woman with lowered head. This sonnet offers a more developed "reading" of Helene's thoughts (although it is, of course, the narrator's projection upon her of his assumptions of her thoughts), thereby alerting us even more directly to the power of the poet's voice.

The references to the two woman, first as the dawn and the sun, and then as two flowers underscore the process of growth and renewal at work in the entire cycle. *L'Aube* expands to *Le Soleil*, and the sun in turn stimulates the blossoming of the *deux fleurs*. The images taken from nature lend supporting visions of growth to the text. Even as the love story moves in a negative direction, the text exhibits signs of growth, as the various natural images suggest. Although the sun does not offer a continually-growing light in these sonnets—on the contrary, showing a decrease from the first to the most recent—the use of the sun as part of

nature and our understanding of nature's laws project a positive image of growth. We know, for example, that the sun does not shine in one spot all the time, but that the periods without its light are necessary and regular components of nature's cycle. Night and wintertime yield light and vision of a different type, as later sonnets in this cycle will demonstrate.

In considering the group of *tableaux* that we have studied thus far, we note that after each negative love encounter, a new vision springs from the narrator's thoughts, thus reflecting *his* growth, renewing and sustaining the evolution of the text. Furthermore, the dynamics of this sonnet fall in line with the previous ones. The end of the sonnet brings the narrator's estrangement from the other characters. He is alone at the conclusion of each of the sonnets we have studied, and his alienation brings our focus squarely to him.¹⁰

In this sonnet, the narrator describes himself physically as "tout blesme," for the lack of any light from Helene's eye leaves him colorless, wan. With no shared glance between Helene and himself, the narrator not only ceases to recount any further action of seeing, but also depicts himself as having no color. With no glance received, the narrator ceases to mention any further the action of seeing. He mentions his fear of Helene's silence, but not of her failure to return his glance. At that point the narrator takes his leave, and his words express much the same notion as the sun's disappearance in the second tableau. In that earlier poem, the sun's parting is described: "[il] s'en-alla tout honteux" (I, IX, l. 4). Here the narrator describes himself: "ie m'en allay tout blesme" (I, XI, l. 13). The lack of sunlight in both sonnets contributes significantly to the final outcome of the poem. The sun cannot withstand Helene's glance in the earlier poem, and the lover cannot withstand her lack of glance in this one. Light and sight are specifically linked in this sonnet: the lack of the glance—light, because Helene is the "Soleil"—ends any further mention of sight. The presence and the degree of light greatly influence the narrator's sight in each of these *tableaux*. The narrator's insistence on describing his involvement with Helene in terms of natural phenomena again binds the growth of his love/poetry to the cycles of nature. In these early tableau sonnets, the loss of light parallels the end of the *récit*. The narrator, then, responds like a character on nature's stage, moving within pools of light when they are present. However, he uses the loss of light in these sonnets to guide his text, too, for when the light is extinguished, his sonnets end.

The architectural detail is more subtle in this sonnet, but we know from the word "assise" in the first line that Helene appears in a seat of some kind, and the narrator's taking leave reinforces a movement away from the set. We are still inside the narrator's created world—his stage, his theatre—thus, the prominent

set-pieces of entry/exit, like the stairs and window, are not at present required. In fact, the following tableau, I, XXIII, contains no architectural detail. Rather, the use of a prop or single article reinforces the tableau quality of the poem. It further differs from the previous tableau sonnets in making no reference to sight nor to light. The narrative techniques, moreover, distinguish it from the others we have examined:

Je liay d'un filet de soye cramoisie
 Vostre bras l'autre iour, parlant auecques vous;
 Mais le bras seulement fut captif de mes nouds,
 Sans vous pouuoir lier ny coeur ny fantaisie.
 Beauté, que pour maistresse unique i'ay choisie,
 Le sort est inegal: Vous triomphez de nous.
 Vous me tenez esclau, esprit, bras & genous,
 Et Amour ne vous tient ny prinse ny saisie.
 Je veux parler, Maistresse à quelque vieil sorcier,
 Afin qu'il puisse au mien vostre vouloir lier,
 Et qu'une mesme playe à nos coeurs soit semblable.
 Je faux: l'amour qu'on charme est de peu de sejour.
 Estre beau, ieune, riche, eloquent, agreable,
 Non les vers enchantez, sont les sorciers d'Amour.
 (I, XXIII)

The narrative technique that Ronsard uses in this sonnet demonstrates still another phase of development. The lack of the verb "to see" and of any reference to light/sight combine to shape a new narrative point of departure. Here the base or starting point of action on which Ronsard constructs the anecdote concerns the narrator's physical gesture of wrapping Helene's arm in a scarf. He restricts the episode to tying the swathe of crimson around Helene's arm while engaged in conversation with her. This action from start to finish occupies only the first two lines of the sonnet. In the previous *tableaux*, the event(s) recalled comprised the entire sonnet, although not without artistic embellishment or affective statements by the narrator. In this sonnet, the tableau material, confined to two lines, is brief, but vivid, lifelike and natural.¹¹ The small detail of color, the "filet cramoisie," greatly enhances the visualization of the narrated account and is largely responsible for the tableau quality of this sonnet.

The remaining lines in the quatrain offer a new treatment of tableau material not seen thus far. Here, for the first time, the readers encounter a narrative of an event, followed by an interpretation of that event:

Mais le bras seulement fut captif de mes nouds,
Sans vous pouvoir lier ny coeur ny fantaisie. (ll. 3-4)

Moreover, the remainder of the sonnet affords the narrator the opportunity to expand his interpretation. We see that he takes his analysis one step further, reversing the positions of captor and captive: "Vous me tenez esclave, esprit, bras & genous. . ." (l. 7). In the previous tableau sonnets, the narrator drew no general conclusions to interpret his own anecdotes. The readers must intuit any significance couched within the events recalled. The narration in those first sonnets is more naïve—a restating or recalling of events with no deducing from the event any moral lessons or general truths. The readers are invited to interpret these events, but the narrator's own interpretation does not accompany his account. This sonnet, then, breaks a narrative pattern established in the tableau series. The lack of any action involving the eye and seeing is significant, for, in their absence, the narrator's voice has assumed a larger, more comprehensive role. He does the "seeing"—the interpreting—for the reader.

If the eye is absent in this sonnet, the voice is not. The narrator makes several key statements that indicate to the reader his desire and power to communicate. From the word "Je" which marks prominently the beginning of the first quatrain and each of the two tercets, to the curious "nous" which occupies a near central place in the poem, the narrator makes his presence known.

In the second quatrain, the address to "Beauté" causes some confusion. It would logically appear that "Beauté" is another term for Helene, similar to the frequently-used "Maistresse." In fact, "Maistresse" serves conveniently to address both Helene and the poetic adventure in many of the sonnets of this cycle. "Beauté" might theoretically serve the same double function, addressing both Helene and poetry. But why does the narrator state, "Vous triomphez de nous" (emphasis mine)? To whom does the "nous" refer? If the epithet "Beauté" identifies the abstract quality of beauty, then the "nous" could refer both to Helene and the narrator. However, the notion of a triumph by Beauty would not coincide with the concept of Helene as captor and Ronsard her captive, as the first quatrain expresses. If "Beauté" refers to Helene/poetry, then the "nous" might more conveniently delineate the double voices of lover and poet, since both seek beauty. Certainly "nous" rhymes with "genous," but "genous" itself is a peculiar

word to choose for its own merit in such a description: "Vous me tenez esclave, esprit, bras & genous. . . ." Although *genous* implies the servile gesture of kneeling, it appears more likely that Ronsard chose the word to rhyme with "nous" than the reverse, and that the word "nous" is the more important word in the rhyme. Moreover, when we add the rhyme words of line two and three to this one, we find the words "vous," "nouds," "genous" and "nous." The *sounds* of these words give the following: "vous" (as stated), "nous" (for "nouds"), "je" plus "nous" (for "genous") and "nous" again (as stated). The rhymes all point toward a *complicity* in the narrative voice, and a general opposition between the "nous" of the narrator and the "vous" of Helene. The plural narrative voice accentuates, of course, the dual personas of lover and poet.

The notion that we hear the double voices of lover/poet in this sonnet is not without reason. In the first tercet the narrator tells us explicitly that he longs to speak: "Je veux parler, Maistresse," he begins. The action of speaking and communicating certainly falls within the poet's domain, but the remainder of the tercet appears to evoke the lover's voice, not the poet's:

Je veux parler, Maistresse à quelque vieil sorcier,
Afin qu'il puisse au mien vostre vouloir lier,
Et qu'une mesme playe à nos coeurs soit semblable. (ll. 9-11)

The possessive adjective "nos" clearly appears to refer to Helene and the narrator, but it does not necessarily correspond to the earlier use of "nous" in the first quatrain. The words "Je veux parler" can easily translate the poet's desire as well as the lover's, thereby offering a blend of their two voices with a strong accent on the act of communicating.

The final tercet begins with a retraction: "Je faux." Ronsard employs this technique sparingly but effectively in the sonnet cycle. These two words themselves slow the rhythm of the line, while alerting the readers to the possibility of confusion, of a mistake. The lines apparently mean that the lover's desire to place a spell over Helene is but a silly whim. The reader would therefore expect that a retraction would announce a more serious goal. The narrator continues to aim at finding a sorcerer to link the two in love, but his retraction tells us that he considers the magic combination of being "beau, ieune, riche, eloquent, agreable" to be the real source of love's charm. The most significant aspect of this retraction concerns the enchantment of verse: "*Non* les vers. . ." (emphasis mine). Why mention the power of poetry at this point? There is no inherent, explicit connection between the "vers enchantez" and the "vieil sorcier." In bringing up

the "vers enchantez" in the last line where the phrase achieves added prominence, the narrator is, in fact, focusing on the very power of his "vers enchantez." In order to introduce these "vers enchantez" in such a seeming non-sequitur, the narrator must indeed be very aware of them, and more precisely, building a sonnet around them.¹² With this thought in mind, readers can then refer back to the "Ie faux" of line twelve. Perhaps a second interpretation is possible, even where the "Ie faux" is not a retraction of the first tercet but the introduction to the entire second tercet. The meaning of the ensuing three lines would then be read as the mistake or error—a deliberate one. The narrator, in announcing his presence with a repetitive use of "ie," in imparting his desire to communicate ("Ie veux parler"), by the insertion of himself in the tableau scene and finally as an interpreter of his own verse, is, in effect, pointing directly to the power and charm of verse as the source of and aim of his desire. Thus, the readers would be obliged to translate the two concluding sentences of the sonnet (beginning with the word "l'amour" in l. 12 and continuing to the end of the poem) as signifying the opposite of what an initial reading offers. That is, that the "vers enchantez" are indeed "sorciers d'Amour" and that Ronsard is the Sorcerer, by his poetry. The narrator convincingly accentuates the poet's voice in this sonnet by drawing attention to the process that the narrative undergoes during the course of these sonnets. All of these techniques which enhance our appreciation of the narrative development point directly to the power and charm of verse as the poet's aim and will. The "vers" have a legitimate place in the logic of this sonnet, then, because the lover's voice is not alone in expressing his aims and desires. The poet as "Sorcier" creates enchanted verses and these verses do decidedly link Helene and the narrator for all time in an abstract relationship that these poems preserve. The poet is responsible for this poetic charm, and therefore we are able to hear in no uncertain tones his voice as he readies himself to speak to us more and more directly.

The narrator's desire to speak, in fact, erupts more forcefully in I, XXXIII after an exchange where Helene discusses his verses with him:

Nous promenant tous seuls, vous me distes, Maistresse
 Qu'un chant vous desplaisoit, s'il estoit douxereux;
 Que vous aimiez les plaints des tristes amoureux,
 Toute voix lamentable & pleine de tristesse.
 Et pource (disiez-vous) quand ie suis loin de presse,
 Ie choisis vos Sonnets qui sont plus douloureux,
 Puis d'un chant qui est propre au suiet langoureux

Ma nature & Amour veulent que ie me paise.
 Vos propos sont trompeurs. Si vous auiez souci
 De ceux qui ont un coeur larmoyant & transi,
 Je vous ferois pitié par une sympathie;
 Mais vostre oeil cauteleux, trop finement subtil,
 Pleure en chantant mes vers, comme le Crocodil,
 Pour mieux me desrober par feintise la vie. (I, XXXIII)

The vivid detail in this tableau sonnet is more limited than in others we have seen. In fact, the most vivid image conjured up by this sonnet is actually the product of the narrator's imagination and not his "recollection." In line twelve he scorns Helene's romantic desire for wistful and sad sonnets, dismissing her emotions as crocodile tears, a hypocritical show of sorrow.¹³ Again Ronsard compares Helene with some product or action belonging to nature. The crocodile's tears, thought to be a natural, biological function, cannot normally be compared to a human show of tears which stem from great emotion. What is natural to the crocodile is also natural to Helene, who can exhibit a show of tears, according to the narrator, but with no passion behind them.

The majority of the tableau-like details are derived from the dialogue, rather than from a set of images. The narrator records Helene's thoughts and words in the quatrains, while reserving the tercets for his own. Yet another distinction between the quatrains and the tercets concerns a temporal difference. The quatrains recall a past conversation produced during a walk which the characters took together ("Vous me distes," in l. 1 and the parenthetical "disiez-vous" in l. 5). The tercets, however, express the narrator's thoughts in the present tense. Helene may or may not hear his words. Although the narrator addresses Helene, the two portions of the poem do not necessarily share the same narrative time. Only the tercets present the narrator's part of the dialogue, as if, excluded earlier in the quatrains, he only now finds occasion to speak. We recall the words of the previous tableau sonnet: "Je veux parler. . . ." At the outset of this sonnet, the readers are still waiting for the narrator to speak. The narrator is, of course, the vehicle through which Helene's words reach the readers, but the readers are waiting for the narrator's own recorded dialogue. Helene makes reference to the narrator's profession as poet: "Je choisis vos Sonnets. . ." (l. 6). "Sonnets" is a more direct reference to Ronsard's work than the "vers enchantez" of the previous tableau. The narrator reveals more and more of his own craft, but these references are still couched in Helene's words. Ronsard's self-referential

material is evident, although at this point in the series, it finds its representation through another character and not yet through the character Ronsard.

In the tercets the narrator speaks forcefully, opening with the direct accusation: "Vos propos sont trompeurs" (l. 9). This emphasis on false words recalls, too, the "Ie faux" of the preceding tableau sonnet. The narrator believes that he cannot trust Helene's words, for if she truly cared for sadness, his lover's lament would have moved her long ago to a union with him. She is the very source of his sadness, and despite her preference for sad sonnets, she does not express any sympathy for the one who writes them. The narrator attacks Helene's falseness on two accounts—for her false words and her wily eye. The return to an account of the eye is a key issue in this sonnet. In the previous tableau, we found no mention of the eye or of the verb "to see," and we noticed a corresponding lack of much vivid detail. The absence of the eye greatly limited the visions recorded. In this sonnet, while the eye is mentioned, it is an "oeil cauteleux." Again, we notice relatively little vivid detail. Once more the mention of the eye and the verb "to see" are directly related to the quality and quantity of the images evoked. The readers should be wary of trusting any vision associated with the "oeil cauteleux" or any voice associated with the "propos trompeurs." The tercets, which represent the narrator's discourse, contain, however, four references to falseness or dishonesty: "trompeurs" (l. 9), "oeil cauteleux" (l. 12), "derober" and "feintise" (l. 14). While all of these expressions are leveled at Helene, they appear in the narrator's portion of the dialogue, thus "belonging" to him and to his representation. Although as readers we can experience some "sympathie" toward this narrator, we find it easy to reject the notion that the narrator has been robbed of his life, for the poetic structuring of the narrative itself presents an opposing scenario. The poet's development and construction of the sonnet show us that the poet is very much in control of his story, his poetic life.

Indeed, the narrator has assumed much control in this sonnet, gradually shifting the narrative time to the present tense and presenting himself as a character who writes "sonnets" and "vers." Moreover, the narrator's careful separation of the two characters' discourse in the poem belies the expressed desire for union, all the while exhibiting a masterful power over the sonnet. The only detail which might support any interaction between the two characters appears in the opening line, as the very first word of the sonnet: *Nous*. It is a union that is subsequently lost by the direct and deliberate temporal and textual separation of Helene and the narrator. Helene's words refer several times to sustenance/nourishment: "pleine" (line 4), and "ie me paise" (l. 8). It is the narrator who records her words through indirect discourse, so we may interpret this desire for

nourishment as representing his own aim. He nourishes the narrative now, feeding it by fueling the tension that moves the plot. Desire for Helene parallels the desire to narrate. Each time that Helene and the narrator separate or grow at odds with each other, the narration grows. The readers now contemplate a pattern where a union with Helene will be tantamount to the fulfillment of the narrative and the end of the work. Since all sign and all hope of union are adamantly denied in this sonnet, the narrative is still very much alive. The poetic voice registers dynamically here because the narrator depicts Helene as his reader, reading these very sonnets, as they generally constitute "les plaintes" described in lines three and four. Thus, the narrator now exhibits a power that he has as poet over Helene, his reader—a power that he does not, as lover, have over her. Despite the many references to "propos trompeurs," this sonnet gives evidence of a narrative integrity which has continued to grow with each sonnet in the tableau series. Because of the forcefulness of the poet's *voice* in this poem, the architectural details and/or props associated with the vivid *vision* are not stressed. In fact, the sonnet focuses so much on the "vers" that it is the use of the actual text itself that spurs us to appreciate the poet's craft.

Ronsard continues to stress the recorded word in Sonnet I, XXXVI:

Vous me distes, Maistresse, estant à la fenestre
 Regardant vers Mont-martre & les champs d'alentour:
 La solitaire vie, & le desert seiour
 Valent mieux que la Cour, ie voudrois bien y estre.
 A l'heure mon esprit de mes sens seroit maistre,
 En ieusne & oraison ie passerois le iour,
 Ie desfirois les traicts & les flames d'Amour:
 Ce cruel de mon sang ne pourroit se repaistre.
 Quand ie vous respondy, Vous trompez de penser
 Qu'un feu ne soit pas feu pour se couvrir de cendre:
 Sur les cloistres sacrez la flame on voit passer,
 Amour dans les deserts comme aux villes s'engendre.
 Contre un Dieu si puissant, qui les Dieux peut forcer
 Ieunes ny oraisons ne se peuvent defendre. (I, XXXVI)

The tableau technique is expanded to its fullest in this sonnet where the narrator furnishes details of architecture/decor ("estant à la fenestre," l. 1) and of the view from the window: ("vers Mont-martre & les champs d'alentour," l. 2). The window returns in this sonnet to afford a means through which the gaze is

directed. However, unlike the sun looking in through the window in the second tableau, the characters here look outward, toward the convent of Montmartre, beyond the urban, Parisian view. The window thus offers a double service, for it may direct the gaze inward as well as outward. As a construct, it provides a flexible vehicle for the direction of the characters' gaze. On each occasion where sight becomes an issue in the tableau sonnets, the readers must look carefully at what the sight reveals, at which symbolic functions are implied. When interiors or exteriors are evoked, the readers must probe deeper into the layers of the narrative, searching for information which would substantiate the process of visualizing inward or outward. These "sets" or surroundings furnish the narrator's realm—the stage where he operates, revealing himself to the readers. They suggest a work space where he hones and refines his craft. The eye and the process of vision are not the sole means whereby the narrator expresses his role. Voice and dialogue, as we have noticed, are also significant. Many of the tableau sonnets represent character interaction through dialogue or conversation reported by the narrator. Often when love is the apparent subject, we may discern in the dialogue a sub-text about narration itself, about the poet's creative vocation. Desire for physical love represents the desire to narrate, to develop, to consume and possess. The love story supports and sustains the poetic adventure in an inverse developmental fashion. As the love union becomes more endangered and finally thwarted, the poetic mission grows. The poetic adventure depends for its own fulfillment on the tension, the repercussions, the peripatetic nature of the love story, and ultimately on the demise and death of the love.

In this sonnet, Helene yearns for the solitary life of the convent where she imagines that love's flames and passions would be quelled. Her comments arise from the sight which meets her gaze as she looks from the window outward. The view itself is worth mentioning, for it stimulates very different thoughts from the two characters. The narrator's description stresses the literal view—"vers Montmartre & les champs d'alentour" (l. 2)—that he sees before his eyes. Helene's words stress the abstract qualities, the "imagined vision" that she expects to find in the convent. She describes this fantasy scene as "la solitaire vie & le desert sejour. . . ." (l. 3). Her singular nature continues to dominate her person and her thoughts. She craves isolation, moreover, as well as emptiness, for she would have herself spend her days "en ieusne & oraison" in order to deny the "flames" of Love any access to her body. Her reference to fasting not only contradicts the narrator's concept of "Amour. . . [qui] s'engendre" (l. 12), but it also opposes her expressed desire in the previous tableau for nourishment. We now believe more

than ever that the desire for sustenance represented the narrator's words, and that Helene's words in that sonnet were indeed "propos trompeurs."

The narrator's perception of the view from the window differs from Helene's as do his concepts about love, expressed in this sonnet. While Helene's gaze stops at the convent, the narrator's appears to be a more panoramic view, as his words in line two suggest. Furthermore, in line twelve, when he depicts love as not only nourishing but replenishing, he speaks of "amour dans les deserts comme aux villes . . ." (emphasis mine). His vision from the window supports his concepts about love, which he sees as unsolitary, steeped in plurality from its very essence. He focuses on the smoldering and ever-present nature of the "flame" believing love to be constant and omnipresent, affecting all people. Love, in his eyes, represents the true *maistre*, as opposed to Helene's concept of her "esprit" as "maistre" (l. 5), for he cannot imagine a more powerful force: "Contre un Dieu si puissant, qui les Dieux peut forcer, / Ieusnes ny oraisons ne se peuuent defendre" (ll. 13-14).

In short, this sonnet reflects basic fundamental differences between the narrator and Helene, and these differences point up again how far apart emotionally they are. While the setting implies that the two are looking from the same window, the sonnet illustrates that even this imposed "closeness" does not lead to any significant spiritual or emotional harmony between the two. The set brings them together, but the text itself insists on separation. The quatrains, with the exception of the first lines, represent Helene's words, while the tercets are reserved for the narrator. When Helene refers to love as "Ce Cruel de mon sang" (l. 8), it appears to be a reversal of basic character, for she has heretofore not shown any evidence of being affected by love. Actually, her discourse here only reiterates her basic lack of passion, and her emptiness as a character, for she would through fasting deny love any nourishment from within her body.

This solitary and empty character has become so apparent in these sonnets that Helene no longer represents a character at all. She appears to function more as a "figurehead"—the guise of a character rather than a character with dimension. The narrator, on the other hand, reveals more of his character and personality with each sonnet. His self-referential material has consistently refocused the perspective on his role in and control of the accounts. After receiving "la vie" from Helene in the opening tableau, the narrator has continued to mature and to make his presence and his actions felt in these sonnets. In recognizing the narrator's increasing power, we see more and more of the poetic voice and vision infusing this narrator, and less of the lover, for the lover has not consistently influenced the narration, and the love story has been repeatedly without

success in uniting Helene and the narrator. Although there has been movement and action, the story of physical desire and love's fulfillment has not moved beyond the point of the first gesture recounted in the opening tableau. The lover has often appeared alone, intimidated or abused by Helene, with his voice diminishing. The poet's voice, however, has assumed greater power, referring to his "vers" and "sonnets."

Sonnet XXXVI looks toward the second book of sonnets. It exhibits evidence of change that has occurred gradually in the first book, through the interactions and thoughts of the characters. It employs the device of the window, which, in this sonnet, symbolically points outward, toward the horizon and toward the second book of *Les Sonnets pour Helene*. However, while the view points outward, the voice points inward. Helene and the lover have moved further and further apart. Simultaneously, Helene and the poet have nearly merged or fused. Helene reflects more of the narrator's concerns, as she assumes more aspects of his character. The composition of the *Sonnets pour Helene*, divided into two books, parallels much of the dualistic structure of the work. The guides, Castor and Pollux, the voices of lover and poet, the concepts of love and poetry, life and death, are all concerns of the work as a whole. In the second book of sonnets, we will notice ways in which the sonnets, the concerns, the voices and the visions differ from those of the first book, although these changes transpire gradually. These changes indicate a transformation which marks the entire sonnet cycle—the growth of the narrator's role and the triumph of his art.

Sonnet LX reflects many of the *tableaux* changes forthcoming in Book Two:

I'attachay des bouquets de cent mille couleurs,
 De mes pleurs arrosez harsoir dessus ta porte:
 Les larmes sont les fruits que l'Amour nous apporte,
 Les soupirs en la bouche, & au coeur les douleurs.
 Les pendant ie leur dy, ne perdés point vos fleurs
 Que iusques à demain que la cruelle sorte:
 Quand elle passera, tombez de telle sorte
 Que son chef soit mouillé de l'humeur de mes pleurs.
 Ie reuiendray demain. Mais si la nuit, qui ronge
 Mon coeur me la donnoit par songe entre mes bras,
 Embrassant pour le vray l'idole du mensonge,
 Soulé d'un faux plaisir ie ne reuiendrois pas.
 Voyez combien ma vie es pleine de trespas,
 Quand tout mon reconfort ne depend que du songe! (I, LX)

In this final tableau sonnet of Book One, we discover the tableau in the first line of the poem, in the vision of multi-colored bouquets of flowers which the narrator attaches over Helene's door. He refers to the door as "ta porte," the only occasion in the poem where he addresses Helene. The door functions much like the window in the earlier *tableaux*, as a symbol for entry/exit into the poet's world. In this last tableau of Book One, the door opens symbolically into yet another recess of the poet's imagination—the dream. Oneiric visions offer another means of seeing and of interpreting.

The sonnet is curiously composed in terms of tense and address. The confusion results in part from the narrator's own emotional distress. The only actions which the text reconstructs are the attaching of the flowers above the door and the narrator's subsequent instructions to them. The text does not recount the flowers' release. They are textually suspended throughout the course of the poem, so that the image of the flowers falling on Helene's head, dampening her hair with the narrator's tears is but an imagined sight. This "private" vision of the narrator is accompanied by another—that of Helene coming to the narrator in the form of a dream. The readers, however, do not glean any details pertaining to these visions. The narration is incomplete, for a temporal break in line five separates the sonnet into a quasi-present tense in the first four and one-half lines, and a future tense in the remainder of the poem. Between the "harsoir" of line two, and the narrator's present, what events have occurred?

In the first lines of the poem, the narrator speaks to us from his present, the day after the hanging of the flowers. He recreates that past scenario for us in lines one through four. In line five, as he begins to recount his instructions to the flowers, the narrator suddenly accelerates in time, giving us a future tense vision that he imagined while hanging the flowers. His future tense vision includes himself, an actor for his own imagined script. This script, in turn will not take place at all, if during the night following the hanging, before the morrow's events, Helene comes to the narrator in a dream. The concluding tercet brings us back once again to the moment of the hanging, still part of the recreated past that the narrator is recounting at the beginning of the sonnet. We are given a portion of the past, recounted in a portion of the present, with visions of the future which either did or did not occur between the past and the present. The narrator states that his comfort "ne dépend que du songe" (l. 14). The life of the text also depends on a dream, but the poem does not confirm whether or not the narrator's wish to dream about Helene actually took place. Helene's door represents a closed door to the narrator's dream world. Its very presence suggests that the hidden

dream chambers exist, but the narrator does not explore that area for the reader's benefit within the confines of this sonnet.

The narrator's dependence on the "songe" inhibits his facing reality. He keeps the thoughts of the dream before us, nourishing the dream in order to satisfy himself with "un faux plaisir." The flowers symbolize, too, his hopes, suspended above Helene's door, as he waits for her to pass. The narrator waters these flowers with his own tears, exhibiting a belief in his power to nourish or sustain life, however fanciful it may be. His fantasy extends to Helene, for he wishes that her head would be "motuillé de l'humeur de [ses] pleurs" (l. 8). Had this dream become reality, the narrator would have "watered" Helene with his tears in an effort to make her grow amorous, the "fruits que l'Amour nous apporte" (l. 3).

We hear the lover's voice here, and we witness a yearning on his part to nourish his love for Helene as he would a flower. He believes in the power of his tears, and he expects to return on the following day to witness Helene's arrival. However, in line nine, a note of hesitancy creeps in, beginning with the words "Mais si. . . ." The tercets reflect quite a change in the narrator's attitude, notably in the choice of verbs. The contrasting verbs "ronge" in line nine, and "soulé" in line twelve show us the extent of the narrator's beliefs and desires: consume and replenish. Night has the power both to devour his heart and to fill him with false pleasures. Line thirteen reflects this paradox with its juxtaposition of the words *vie* and *trespas*: "Voyez combien ma vie est pleine de trespass." Death, depletion, loss are so much a part of the lover's life that the only growth and fulfillment he can hope for will come in the form of a dream—visions that he cannot trust but which would seem to satisfy, at least temporarily, the desire. The coming of night itself points toward a change, as well, for night stands between the narrator's return. If he can renounce a physical fulfillment of his desire and accept a dream in their stead, then night will offer a kind of "reconfort." The "mensonge" might well occur within the environs of the dream, if we read "trespas" in line thirteen to signify sexual "jouissance" as well as physical death.

Death, whether physical or spiritual, is very much a part of this sonnet. The references to nourishment ("arrosez" in l. 2, "fruits" in l. 3, "motuillé" in l. 8, and "soulé" in l. 12) are necessary to counterbalance the lover's desperate sense of losing Helene. His loss becomes even more complex when he acknowledges here that his own desire is diminishing as well. He is ready to accept a false pleasure for a true one, and to renounce his earlier intention to return to Helene's door. The lover's disappearance from the sonnet cycle prefigures the poet's domination of the work. We know that love must die in order for the poet to take over, and

for the true narrative about the poetic adventure to replace the love story. Thus, even while this sonnet is marked with a loss, it stresses a growth in a new direction, symbolized by the dream and by the door. The flowers hanging above the door suggest that life is waiting there, suspended for the moment.¹⁴ The dream, while announcing the death of certain realistic desires, nonetheless offers the medium for further creative development: more visions, but inner, private ones which reflect the poet's craft and the poetic mission as he shapes and molds the sonnets of the second book of this work. The door to the poet's dreams, while closed to the readers in this sonnet, nevertheless offers access to this world via the second book of sonnets. Night is close at hand in this sonnet, an indication that the work has evolved since the early *tableaux* where sunlight and the eye were so much a part of the poems. Now the night offers darker, different visions that the human eye alone is incapable of perceiving. In Book Two, the sonnets move further away from Helene and the lover and closer to the realm of the creative artist.

The narrator's depiction of himself affects the development of the tableau sonnets. His vision shapes the reader's comprehension, for his inclusion of himself in the *tableaux* offers an initial introduction to the narrator through glimpses of the character Ronsard interacting with Helene. However, as the character interaction fades, the narrative control changes, and in Book Two, the character Ronsard undergoes prominent transformations. After the *tableaux* of Book One, the very last sonnet of the book features the poet's voice alerting the readers to the possibility of change to come in the next book:

Si j'ay bien ou mal dit en ces Sonnets, Madame,
 Et du bien & du mal vous estes cause aussi:
 Comme ie le sentoie i'ay chanté mon souci,
 Taschant à soulager les peines de mon ame.
 Hà qu'il est mal-aisé, quand le fer nous entame,
 S'engarder de se plaindre & de crier merci!
 Tousiours l'esprit ioyeux porte haut le sourci,
 Et le melancholique en soy-mesme se pâme.
 I'ay suiuant vostre amour le plaisir poursuiuy,
 Non le soin, non le dueil, non l'espoir d'une attente.
 S'il vous plaist, ostez-moy tout argument d'ennuy:
 Et lors i'auray la voix plus gaillarde & plaisante.
 Il ressemble au mirouër, qui tousiours represente
 Tout cela qu'on luy monstre & qu'on fait deuant luy. (I, LXIII)

The narrator's voice accentuates the role that the self-referential matter plays in these sonnets. In professing to follow pleasure, he alludes to the initial vow of Sonnet I, I: "Aussi ie prens en gré toute ma passion / Ie suis de ma fortune auteur, ie le confesse. . . ." These confident words have been overshadowed time and again in the sixty-four poems which follow. We discern now in the last sonnet of this first book that the quatrains repeatedly stress negative notions: "mal" (ll. 1-2), "souci" (l. 3), "soulager" (l. 4), "peines" (l. 4), "mal-aisé" (l. 5), "le fer nous entame" (l. 5), "se plaindre & de crier merci" (l. 6), "le melancholique en soy-mesme se pâme" (l. 8). After this negative overture, the tercets attempt to convince us that the pursuit of pleasure—not the effects of torment or pain, nor the hope of fulfilling expectations—is the focus of the narrator's attention. The pursuit of pleasure in the strict sense of a physical fulfillment has been repeatedly denied. As the tableau sonnets in Book One have shown, interaction between the characters has been minimal and desultory at best. The only pleasure that the reader consistently notes is the pleasure of the *récit*. The only positive growth that we witness is that of the narrative technique and the narrator's influential presence. The concluding lines of the sonnet make reference to a mirror, and to the narrator's reflection:

Ie ressemble au mirouër, qui tousiours represente
Tout cela qu'on luy monstre & qu'on fait deuant luy. (ll. 13-14)

The mirror implies vision and reflection. It symbolizes the process of representation and thus exemplifies the aim of the entire tableau series.¹⁵ The tableau scenes which offer "realistic" detail of the narrator's world suggest a creative reconstruction of that world. A mirror reveals an image of an original object or person, but that mirrored image, "true," though it appears, is not the original. The tableau sonnets offer a narrator's images of a "real world" but they present verbal pictures only. This dichotomy of the real and the re-created image appears in Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy. Robert Cottrell reminds us that "the mirror in the Platonic tradition expressed the notion 'that the physical or material world is a reflected image of eternal Forms.'"¹⁶

The poet's crafted world which the tableau sonnets manifest constitutes the "reflected image" of an ideal, higher plane. Love poetry portrays a physical desire which corresponds to a yearning for the divine, the eternal, the immortal. The mirror, then, at the end of Book One prepares our vision for a higher, more abstract and permanent perspective which Book Two will achieve. In this instance, Ronsard's mirror presents a distortion of Platonic and Neo-Platonic

thought. This image of the mirror, moreover, suggests a doubling of an image which parallels the doubling of voice that the narrator's dual personas of lover and poet present. A merging of the lover and poet occurs at the site of reflection—in the mirror at the end of Book Two. The mirror further implies the pairing of an original with a copy or second image which is merely superficial, possessing no depth or dimension. It opens to our examination the notions of reality and illusion which frequently become problematic in Ronsard's works, and thus invites our analysis. In the *Sonnets pour Helene*, we can interpret the poetic mission as the real or original narrative of the work, while the love story provides the "copy," a shallow reflection of poetry's greater desire.

Additionally, a mirror appearing at the close of Book One invites us to consider the two books as opposites, since a mirror image portrays the opposite aspects of the original object. As we have noted, even the sonnet's construction reflects that mirror image of opposites. The quatrains profess one belief while the tercets belie it. The tercets strive to produce a concept of pleasure which the quatrains have already negated by their outlook and comments.

And then, perhaps, the mirror simply implies that the narrator has much more to show us of himself—he is like the mirror, but his mirroring ability depends on what is performed in front of him. The text depends on what the readers do with it. When we turn to the final lines of Sonnet I, LXIV, we notice that the narrator compares himself not with the object/person that appears in the mirror, but with the mirror itself—the *means* through which the copy image is presented: "Je resemble au mirouër. . . ." The narrator's voice constitutes his text. This text functions as the mirror, providing the double images, the double voice between which the reader must distinguish the personas of lover and poet. The narrator's concept of himself, and thus his text, as a mirror functions in relation to "tout cela qu'on luy monstre & qu'on fait deuant luy." The text, then, represents the narrative and this narrative can be the lover's story of his quest for Helene's love, or the poet's epic. It is the reader's task to differentiate between the images presented, focusing on the image which endures outside of and independent of the mirror.

In defining Ronsard's concept of *mimesis* and *imitatio*, Rigolot explains that "true . . . representation of Nature (*mimesis*) can only be achieved through the conscious and conscientious imitation of previous art (*imitatio*)."¹⁷ The final sonnets of Book Two will increasingly encourage fidelity to nature, all the while emphasizing poetry's own powers of production. In wishing to create a poetic epic, the poet has opened our eyes to his world, his surroundings, his props, his sets. His emphasis on demonstrating the development of the poetic process finds

supporting natural detail and architectonic features that accentuate the poet's creative aspect, stressing his diligent efforts at reproducing in his own strongest medium Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as well as correcting in a new form the failure of his own *Franciade*. The choice of the name "Helene" with its associations to the former text greatly influences the narrator/poet of this work. His presence is tangible in Book One, largely due to the *tableaux* that he paints with words. These tableau glimpses into his world continue in Book Two, following the patterns already established thus far, but delving deeper into the interior landscapes of the poet's mind, plumbing the depths of his imagination for the voice and the vision that he projects on his quest to establish indubitably the superior status of poetry in our universe.

Notes

¹ François Rigolot, "Homer's Virgilian Authority: Ronsard's Counterfeit Epic Theory," *Discourses of Authority in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, eds. Kevin Brownlee and Walter Stephens (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1989) 63–75. Rigolot writes of Ronsard's sense of *vertu*, the overcoming of difficulty as it pertained to his attempts at writing the epic.

² Robert Garapon, *Ronsard chancre de Marie et d'Helene* (Paris: Société d'Édition d'Enseignement 1981) 115. Garapon specifies: ". . . Le mot peut signifier, dans un sens très métaphorique, une représentation vive et naturelle d'une chose, soit en action, soit de vive voix, soit par écrit. . . . Nous entendons ici par tableau une représentation vive et naturelle, dans un décor approprié, d'objets ou de personnages qui incite l'imagination à se figurer quelque chose d'analogue à une peinture ou à une scène de théâtre."

³ For more discussion on Ronsard's interest in the visual arts, see Roberto Campo, "A Poem to a Painter: The 'Elegie a Janet' and Ronsard's Dilemma of Ambivalence," *French Forum* 12 (3) (September, 1987) : 273–287.

⁴ See Rigolot 72–74 for Ronsard's use of these terms as employed in his three prefaces to *La Franciade*.

⁵ Isidore Silver, *The Intellectual Evolution of Ronsard, Vol. I* (St. Louis: Washington University Press, 1969) vii. Writing about the interdependence of Ronsard's poetic theory and the poems themselves, he maintains: "It would have been unwise to separate the discussion of his poetic theory from the poetry itself, since Ronsard tended so irresistibly to mingle the two. It is no exaggeration to say that major elements of his theory are to be found almost as frequently in certain of his poems as in his professedly theoretical prose compositions."

⁶ John Shearman, *Mannerism* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1967) 18. Reminding us that the Mannerist period is defined by its absolute attention to style, Shearman writes: "It was understood that *maniera*, whether in people or works of art, entailed a refinement of and abstraction from nature. . . . In the sixteenth century, the word *artifizioso* was wholly complimentary, and to a great extent concomitant with *maniera*; books ought to be written and pictures painted, with artifice."

7 See François Rigolot, *Poétique et Onomastique: L'Exemple de la Renaissance* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1977) 219. In his chapter on Ronsard, Rigolot devotes attention to the name Helene: "Ronsard récupère la publicité donnée par Homère à l'illustre nom d'Hélène; il reprend la tâche là où l' 'excellent sonneur' (II, 49, v. 9) l'a laissée."

8 Rigolot, *Poétique et Onomastique* 218.

9 One thinks, for example of Donne's "The Sun Rising" or "A Lecture Upon the Shadow."

10 This alienation is less explicitly stated in the first tableau sonnet, I, IX, but the double mention that we saw there of Helene as "passant" reinforced the point that she had moved past the narrator on the stair, leaving him behind.

11 Garapon 115. He refers to the tableau representation as "vive and naturelle" in his description. Philip Ford also refers to the visualizing of tableaux in Ronsard's poetry. See Ford: 32-43.

12 In fact, although there is no explicit connection between the "vieil sorcier" and the "vers enchantez," this sonnet does allude to several elements associated with magic and witchcraft. Ronsard, the creator of the "vers," is actually the 'sorcier' behind their production, as the remainder of my analysis will show. In light of the aspects of witchcraft and sorcery contained in this sonnet, the red scarf bears closer examination. In *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, Ioan Couliano mentions a "red sash" as part of the ancient images of the personified entities of the Zodiac (Aires). Descriptions of such entities, he concludes, "were probably meant to be incorporated into the magician's phantasy when he prayed to the planets," 142-143. In Sonnets I, XII and I, XXXVII Ronsard represents Helene's date of birth as occurring in April, thus associating her with Aires. Couliano moreover emphasizes that the *armpit* was thought to be one of the two most sensitive areas of a woman's body, according to sixteenth century ledgers on witchcraft. Thus, the action of placing the red scarf around Helene's arm finds some bases in Renaissance theories of magic. See Ioan Couliano, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance* (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 1987) 153.

In a separate account in the same book, Couliano refers to the act of binding as associated with Circe, the sorceress, whom he identifies as representing "the

terrible aspect of the Great Goddess of Nature, Diana. Whereas Diana represents the universe in its unity, Circe is the mistress of magical processes, whose purpose is, precisely, to reunite the parts of the world, to place them in relationship to each other. Without Circe, there would be no Diana: the remedy would not exist without the poison," Couliano 84.

Nature and sorcery are complementary agents in the couple Diana/Circe. While Ronsard makes other references to Helene as Circe in these sonnets (II, LXI, for example), he does not do so here. Indeed, it is the narrator and not Helene who is engaged in the process of uniting/binding that Couliano attributes to Circe and which he points out as negative activity. The lover's attempt to bind himself with Helene does not succeed on an emotional, spiritual and lasting level. This binding is limited and does not change Helene's nature. As we have seen before in the previous tableau sonnets where an illustration from nature (the sun) was used to support Helene's actions, her character operates as the sun, outside the lover's control. The lover cannot change Helene's emotions which are apparently *natural* and appropriate to her.

13 The crocodile also connotes some inconstancy, infidelity that further adds to the representation of the distance between the lover and Helene in these sonnets. I.D. McFarlane notes that "... the crocodile, sometimes confused with the cockatrice in sixteenth-century legend, was believed to run after those who fled from it, and to flee from its pursuers." *The 'Délie' of Maurice Scève*, ed. I.D. McFarlane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966) 455.

14 The flowers are a multi-faceted symbol here, for they refer us both to the lover as well as the poet. Within the context of this sonnet cycle, flowers—part of the larger code word "May" of this sequence—can connote beginnings as well as endings, birth as well as death. In this instance, the hanging of the flowers on a door reminds us of the old custom in the Loire Valley-Tours region of France (where Ronsard spent most of his adult life):

Une des coutumes en usage depuis le début du XIII^{ème} siècle consistait à "esmayer" les filles au premier jour de mai. C'est à dire à déposer nuitamment un bouquet de fleurs sur leur demeure. La pose de ces bouquets appelés "mais" s'insérait dans le système des préliminaires du mariage, et permettait aux galents d'exprimer publiquement leurs sentiments aux élues de leurs coeurs. Cela donnait parfois lieu à quelques rixes nocturnes si la jeune fille avait plusieurs soupirants. Les amoureux devaient monter la garde devant leur "mai" afin

d'éviter que le rival ne le dérobe et ne lui substitue le sien! *Reflets du Loiret* No. 24, Conseil Général du Loiret (Orléans, France: Conseil Général du Loiret, juin, 1992) 11.

In this sonnet the lover stands guard before the door, perhaps anticipating the poet as his rival, reluctant to abandon his post, yet aware of giving way to the poet's power.

¹⁵ McFarlane 425. The mirror appears often in Renaissance literature, including references in Scève's writings. The latter's section in *La Délie* entitled "Le Basilisque, & le Miroir" is accompanied by the motto: "Mon regard par toy me tue." The basilisk, according to Ian McFarlane's note, was reputed to kill itself by its reflection in the mirror. In Ronsard's sonnet I, LXVIII we appreciate the convergence in this concept of the mirror the legend of Narcissus, the reflection that proves fatal, the confusion of reality and imitation, the double visage of the dual-voiced narrator. Moreover, the mirror reminds us of the notion of two recounted versions of one account, like those told in "L'Hylas" and like the double narration told in these sonnets by the lover and the poet.

¹⁶ Robert Cottrell, "The Gaze as the Agency of Presence in Marguerite de Navarre's *Miroir de Jhesus Christ Crucifié*," *French Forum* 13, 2, eds. Raymond C. and Virginia A. La Charité (1988): 133-141.

¹⁷ Rigolot, "Homer's Virgilian Authority" 74.

Chapter Three:
“Plus l’argument est grand, plus Cygne vous mourrez”
Book Two of *Les Sonnets pour Helene*

Le Second Livre des Sonnets pour Helene opens with an address not to Helene, but to the reader. In fact, Helene’s name and her presence do not figure at all in this poem. Although we note several refrains from the first sonnet of Book One, this sonnet differs in tone. The vitality and vibrant optimism of the earlier poem have given way to a quiet, more mature self-confidence:

Soit qu’un sage amoureux ou soit qu’un sot me lise,
Il ne doit s’esbahir voyant mon chef grison,
Si ie chante d’amour: tousiours un vieil tison
Cache un germe de feu sous une cendre grise.
Le bois verd à grand’ peine en le soufflant s’attise,
Le sec sans le souffler brusle en toute saison.
La Lune se gaigna d’une blanche toison,
Et son vieillard Tithon l’Aurore ne mesprise.
Lecteur, ie ne veux estre escolier de Platon,
Qui la vertu nous presche, & ne fait pas de mesme:
Ny volontaire Icare ou lourdaud Phaëthon,
Perdus pour attenter une sotise extrême:
Mais sans me contrefaire ou Voleur ou Charton,
De mon gré ie me noye & me brusle moy-mesme. (II, I)

The dominant voice, we recognize immediately, is the poet’s. Although the narrator speaks of love in verse three (“Si ie chante d’amour”), the references to reading in verse one (“Soit qu’un sage amoureux ou soit qu’un sot me lise”) and the address to the “Lecteur” as well as the mention of Plato in verse nine (“. . . ie ne veux estre escolier de Platon”) all outweigh the material pertaining to love. Furthermore, the initial hypothesis of verse one ascribes no more advantages to the “sage amoureux” than to the “sot” who might chance to read these lines of poetry. The “sage amoureux” therefore, connotes some sense of mockery or irony, just as the name “Helene” initially strikes the readers of *Sonnets I, I* as a poor choice for a love story.

One of the more subtly perplexing portions of this sonnet occurs in the opening lines:

Soit qu'un sage amoureux ou soit qu'un sot me *lise*
Il ne doit s'esbahir *voyant* mon chef grison. . . (emphasis mine).

I have emphasized the words "lise" and "voyant" because these verbs are at the root of the puzzle. The narrator anticipates that a reader—either "un sage amoureux" or "un sot"—should not be surprised to *see* that his head is gray, thus associating the actions of reading and seeing. He assumes that the self-portrait he portrays through his words is equivalent to the "sight" of him, or replaces significantly that sight. This association of seeing and reading in a prefatory sonnet where the narrator so openly addresses his readers reinforces the significance of the tableau sonnets, where visual imagery is strongly communicated through words. The words themselves and the tercets in particular recall the cycle's opening sonnet where we witnessed the narrator's statement of his goals:

Vous seule me plaisez, i'ay par election
Et non à la volée aimé vostre ieunesse:
Aussi ie prens en gré toute ma passion,
Ie suis de ma fortune autheur, ie le confesse:
La vertu m'a conduit en telle affection.
Si la vertu me trompe, adieu belle Maistresse. (I, I, ll. 9–14)

Here the narrator once again stresses his aims, although the tone differs markedly. Whereas in Sonnet I, I, the address was to Helene, here the salutation is aimed at the "Lecteur":

Lecteur, ie ne veux estre escolier de Platon
Qui la vertu nous presche, & ne fait pas de mesme,
Ny volontaire Icare ou lourdaud Phaëthon,
Perdus pour attenter une sotise extrême:
Mais sans me contrefaire ou Voleur ou Charton,
De mon gré ie me noye & me brusle moy-mesme. (II, I, ll. 9–14)

The use of three reflexive verbs in the last two lines of the Book Two poem demonstrates that the narrator's actions are quite different from those of the

narrator in the Book One sonnet. These reflexive verbs (*me contrefaire, me noye, me brusle*), moreover, strengthen this sonnet's link with the mirror imagery that closes the first book. The contrast between the conclusions of the two sonnets which open respectively these first and second books of *Les Sonnets pour Helene* reflects, too, that movement toward closure, endings, death and consumption that we have noticed earlier. The first sonnet foresees the possibility of a farewell to Helene, yet it reveals the narrator's tone as optimistic. Bidding adieu in that poem suggests none of the somber overtones that the more suicidal "ie me noye & me brusle moy-mesme" of the second one does. The legends of Icarus and Phaëthon, of course, include the actions of burning and drowning, since both characters followed a trajectory first toward the sun, then plunging downwards to the sea. The readers recall, too, the near drowning in the "shipwreck" sonnet (I, VI) of Book One, where the narrator despairingly reproached himself for having chosen "un enfant, un aveugle pour guide." Here, at the beginning of the second book of sonnets, the triumphant fountain-monument to Helene has not yet been erected. The possibility of drowning and burning still looms on the horizon for the narrator. He considers Icarus and Phaëthon as lost individuals who attempted "une sotise extrême," and he fears joining their ranks. His own anxiety over committing such an act pertains to Plato and to his version of "vertu." The rather strong denunciation of Plato "qui la vertu nous presche, & ne fait pas de mesme" leads the readers back once again to the opening sonnet of Book One. There, in the closing lines, the narrator refers twice to *vertu*: "La vertu m'a conduit en telle affection./ Si la vertu me trompe, adieu belle Maistresse." Since the narrator does not wish to be and act as he perceives Plato—or a student of Plato—to do (preaching *vertu* without following it), he now renounces his original pursuit of *vertu*, as if unable to live up to his earlier words.¹ The narrator's concept of *vertu* has grown since the opening sonnet of Book One. In that first poem, the mention of *vertu* pertains to Helene. It constitutes one of the qualities that initially attract the narrator to her. In the second book, the revised notion of *vertu* suggests that the narrator realizes his own need for personal *vertu* and not merely an admiration of it in others. This apparent palinode does not represent the only contradiction in these two sonnets. In the earlier composition, the narrator makes many references to nature's verdant, fresh images. These images, in turn, mark an appropriate opening for a single poem, for a cycle of poems, and for a love adventure. In this second sonnet, the references to love are all colored by maturity. Borrowing from Petrarch, the narrator praises the quality of dry wood over young, green wood which ignites only with great difficulty: "Le bois verd à grand' peine en le

souflant s'attise, / Le sec sans le souffler brusle en toute saison" (ll. 5–6).² In this connotation, burning indicates desire, an easy, natural desire that needs no coaxing. The earlier mention in the first quatrain of the "vieil tison" which hides "un germe de feu sous une cendre grise" reinforces this notion that fire/desire is everpresent and natural. We recall the tableau of Book One (XXXVII) where the two characters looked out over the rooftops of Paris to the convent of Montmartre: "Vous trompez de penser / Qu'un feu ne soit pas feu pour la couvrir de cendre. . ." (ll. 9–10). The narrator continues to view love as a growing flame. The fire image in this poem does not consume itself until the closing lines with the appearance of Icarus and Phaëthon. The changing nature of this image within the bounds of a single sonnet parallels much of the contradictory matter of the opening sonnets of the two books and foreshadows some of the developments to come in Book Two. As the narrator reveals more of the ascendance of poetry in the second book, images are amplified, transformed, or enhanced by some detail. The narrator's vision expands, yielding the images that a more seasoned imagination produces.

Further allusions to mature images of love occur in the second quatrain where the narrator describes the moon's "blanche toison," apparently associating the moon's white countenance with his own gray head. He continues to focus on his age when he refers to the elderly Tithonus: "Et son vieillard Tithon l'Aurore ne mesprise" (l. 8). The legend of Aurora and Tithonus appeared earlier in the cycle, in I, XIII, where the narrator argued a similar point: "Tu deurois d'un regard soulager mon dommage: / L'Aurore ne met point son Tithon à mespris" (ll. 7–8). This story of Aurora and Tithonus is pertinent to the poet's concern in the *Sonnets pour Helene* because of its emphasis on immortality and old age.³ Tithonus functions as a symbol of immortal existence, but not without certain drawbacks. We have already encountered in the *tableaux* numerous references to Helene as the narrator's sun-symbol, much like Aurora is to Tithonus. However, where Aurora represents the early sun, the dawn, Helene stands for a more amplified sun, as the third tableau of Book One (I, XVI) earlier testified: "Te regardant assise aupres de ta cousine / Belle comme une Aurore, & toy comme un Soleil. . ." (ll. 1–2). Thus, if Helene corresponds to Aurora, only in a more amplified version, then the narrator is likened to Tithonus, but in a more exaggerated manner. The narrator would then fear growing old, like Tithonus, reduced to babbling senselessly and incoherently, due to Aurora's error. The verb "mespriser" in both of Ronsard's allusions to Aurora and Tithonus (I, XIII, and II, I), suggests primarily "to scorn," all the while reminding us of the concept of "making a mistake." In this introductory sonnet of Book Two, it appears that

the narrator stresses Aurora's kindness toward Tithonus: she does not scorn her elderly husband. But she has also not erred in asking Jupiter for her husband's immortal life. Even in Tithonus's advanced years, Aurora accepted him. She transformed him into an insect, where his once incoherent sounds found a voice in a natural chant. The narrator's identification with Tithonus stresses his belief in the poet's immortality and emphasizes the poet's voice in these sonnets. The babbling voice of the lover is transformed into the natural chant of the poet. The poet's song changes with his advancing years, his words speaking less of love and more of poetry. The poet knows, too, that his profession grants him shades of immortality, as his verses live on through each successive reading of his work. However, as a mortal, the poet knows that he will age, and that his age will likely alter the nature of his physical desire. The lover may die, but the poet, through his verse, endures.

The references to the poet are compounded, moreover, in the closing lines of the sonnet: "Mais sans me contrefaire ou Voleur ou Charton, / De mon gré ie me noye & me brusle moy-mesme" (ll. 13–14). Huguet gives as definition for *contrefaire*: "imitation, painting, drawing."⁴ It thus accentuates the self-portrait that the narrator is designing here in the sonnets. Without portraying himself as Icarus or as Phaëthon, he nevertheless assures us that he is capable of drowning or of burning himself—"de [s]on gré." The manner in which the narrator can achieve this seeming self-destruction may, in fact, not prove as negative as an initial reading of the words might suggest. If the fire and burning images of the opening lines project essentially positive images, and if the narrator refuses to follow Icarus and Phaëthon, then there is every possibility that he will resist attempting "une sotise extrême." The drowning and burning will be of the lover and the love story, for the consuming of the love story will necessarily involve the success of the poetic adventure.

The *Sonnets pour Helene* never stray far from certain Platonic concepts. Our guides are the separated but spiritually linked brothers Castor and Pollux. The harmony of narrative voices alternates between the physical reality of the lover and the immortal, near mystical existence of the poet. Castor represents the mortal twin, the physical, earthly concerns, while Pollux symbolizes the immortal, the spiritual, the celestial. Together they exemplify a joining of the physical and the spiritual, the earthly and the heavenly.

The first tableau sonnet of Book Two, Sonnet II, XXV explores further the notion of interaction between mind and body although not without certain surprises:

Le mois d'Aoust botuillonnoit d'une chaleur esprise,
 Quand i'allay voir ma Dame assise aupres de feu:
 Son habit estoit gris, duquel ie me despleu,
 La voyant toute palle en une robbe grise.
 Que plaignez-vous, disoy-ie, en une chaire assise?
 Je tremble & la chaleur reschauffer ne m'a peu,
 Tout le corps me fait mal, & viure ie n'ay peu
 Saine depuis six ans, tant l'ennuy me tient prise.
 Si l'Esté, la ieunesse, & le chaud n'ont pouuoir
 D'eschauffer vostre sang, comment pourroy-ie voir
 Sortir un feu d'une ame en glace conuertie?
 Mais, Corps, ayant souci de me voir en esmoy,
 Serois-tu point malade en langueur comme moy,
 Tirant à toy mon mal par une sympathie? (II, XXV)

We recognize many of the now-familiar tableau characteristics: the details of color, of decor, of placement, and the discourse of the two characters, the precision of time and place, the event recounted from start to finish by the narrator who also plays a part in the scene. The fireplace represents a symbolic opening where the fire is found. The fire is another ambiguous symbol in these sonnets, for it connotes both warmth (passion/desire) as well as the ultimate consumption—the burning—that such desire may provoke. The fireplace itself is the manmade locus that contains the natural element, thus evoking further the union between the natural and the manmade.

The second quatrain furnishes the beginning of the dialogue between the characters Ronsard and Helene, a dialogue which the tercets complete. In this sonnet, the narrator hopes to discover within Helene's body a sympathetic illness responding to the spiritual suffering that he experiences. The color gray here describes not the narrator's head as in the opening sonnet of the book, but Helene's clothing. Ronsard describes her dress: "Son habit estoit gris" (l. 3) and ". . . en une robbe grise" (l. 4). This emphatic association of the color gray with Helene points toward the expected "sympathie." The narrator searches further for parallels between himself and Helene when he seeks the "feu d'une ame en glace." This line reminds us of the narrator's earlier words in Sonnet II, I where we read ". . . tousiours un vieil tison / Cache un germe de feu sous une cendre grise" (ll. 3-4). In this case, the narrator's belief cannot extend to Helene. He does not ultimately believe it possible to find in Helene's frigid character any "germe de feu." His lone hope would lie in the sympathetic alignment of Helene's

body with his emotions. Such an alliance would represent symbolically a union of *his* mind and *her* body and would reduce the distance between the two characters. Any harmony resulting from a union of body and soul would signal fulfillment, completion. We would expect such a completion to signify the end of the text. This sonnet does not resolve the matter, but concludes with a question. Is Helene's body reacting "par une sympathie?" The text remains far from conclusion, and the response to this question will be postponed until Sonnet II, XXXII. Here, we find a reverse of the previous sonnet. This time it is Helene who comes to see the narrator who has been bled, presumably because of some malady:

I'auois esté saigné, ma Dame me vint voir
Lors que ie languissois d'une humeur froide & lente:
Se tournant vers mon sang, comme toute riante
Me dist en se iouant, Que vostre sang est noir!
Le trop penser en vous a peu si bien mouvoir
L'imagination, que l'ame obeissante
A laissé la chaleur naturelle impuissante
De cuire de nourrir de faire son deuoir.
Ne soyez plus si belle, & deuenez Medée:
Colorez d'un beau sang ma face ja ridée,
Et d'un nouveau printemps faites moy r'animer.
Aeson vit raieunir son escorce ancienne.
Nul charme ne sçauroit renoueller la mienne.
Si ie veux raieunir il ne faut plus aimer. (II, XXXII)

The color gray from the last sonnet darkens to black. This reference to black blood identifies the narrator as suffering from melancholy. An excess of black bile, one of the four humors believed to affect personality, would result in a melancholy character. Melancholy, in turn, was directly associated with the genius, and the artist.⁵ The narrator's self-depiction in this sonnet places him squarely within the domain of the creative artist. This darkened image further invites our recalling the instance in the first tableau sonnet where the narrator described Helene's penetrating glance: "Ton regard dans le coeur, dans le sang m'est entré. . . ." He compared her glance then to "un esclat de foudre." This description of light penetrating the narrator's body finds its counterpart in the vision of the black blood. The progression from white (la foudre) to black demonstrates a loss of light as the direction of the movement goes downward, to

the inside. Furthermore, the narrator is now ailing. It is hard not to read the evolution of colors in this cycle as one of disintegration, of approaching death: white turns to gray and darkens to black. The narrator appeals to Helene to recreate Medea's magic, to rejuvenate him as Medea did Jason's father. But even as he writes the words, the narrator cannot believe them. The last tercet begins with the success of Aeson but quickly moves to the more realistic understanding that no magic can transform the narrator's "escorce ancienne."

There exists, however, a certain sense of union in this sonnet. Helene herself notes that the narrator's "trop penser" has been able to alter the color of his blood—that is, that his mental state has affected his physical state. This union between the narrator's mind and body addresses the search for union which closed the previous sonnet. The unity of body and mind, however, does not occur according to the narrator's earlier anticipation. He now becomes sick, "en sympathie" with the once-ailing Helene who by now appears well. In this sonnet, she is associated with youth and with Medea, the magician. She remains continually out of reach, always a step away from the narrator. The narrator grows closer to harmony within himself, to uniting his contrary "selves" so that the poet's voice dominates the lover's. Any physical or emotional harmony or union of the narrator with Helene, however, proves elusive. In the closing lines of this poem, the narrator, in realizing that Medea's resolution will not work for him, chooses another impossible remedy to his problem: "Si ie veux reieunir, il ne faut plus aimer." At first glance, the readers believe that the narrator has moved from one form of magic to another. If he ceases to love, will the narrator grow younger? Does love age him? While this formula may well apply to the emotional lover, it cannot be of much service to the poet. Loving—to a point—serves as his means of life. As long as the narration about love progresses, his life and the life of the text are prolonged.

The references to Medea's magic and to spring emphasize the narrator's age: he is no longer young. A "nouveau printemps" would symbolize a revitalization, new life that love might offer. However, when the narrator asks Helene to color his wrinkled face with "un beau sang" he is renouncing his black blood with its link to melancholy and the poet. A lack of black blood would then also deplete the poet's creative forces, so this scenario would help the lover alone and not the poet. When the narrator finally concludes that he must stop loving if he wants to grow young again, he knows, too, that when he ceases to write about love the text will be completed. Through the process of immortalization via the text the poet will not perish. He may, like Tithonus, grow old, but he will undergo a continual process of renewal and death each time that the text is read and reread.

by future readers. In this text Ronsard underscores the cycle of renewal and death through the images of spring, the allusions to Aurora and Tithonus, the use of colors and the notions of illness and old age.

The closing line of this sonnet anticipates death—either love's death or the poet's. The union between body and mind in these two sonnets, XXV and XXXII, stresses progress and continuity, even while disavowing any *rapprochement* between Helene and the narrator. The end of the love story does not parallel the end of the poetic mission. The poetic adventure continues indefinitely because of the participation by the readers who keep the poet and his work alive.

Once the union of body and soul takes place, as we see in Sonnet II, XXXIII, the narrator's voice begins to achieve a harmony and balance between that of the lover and the poet, showcasing now the poet's craft, his writing, his name. All of these notions are evident in the most famous of the *Sonnets pour Helene*, Sonnet II, XLIII:

Quand vous serez bien vieille au soir à la chandelle,
 Assise auprès du feu, deuidant & filant,
 Direz chantant mes vers, en vous esmerueillant,
 Ronsard me celebroit du temps que i'estois belle.
 Lors vous n'aurez seruante oyant telle nouuelle,
 Desia sous le labeur à demy sommeillant,
 Qui au bruit de mon nom ne s'aïlle resueillant,
 Benissant vostre nom de louange immortelle.
 Je seray sous la terre & fantôme sans os
 Par les ombres myrteux ie prendray mon repos:
 Vous serez au fouyer une vieille accroupie,
 Regrettant mon amour & vostre fier desdain.
 Viuez, si m'en croyez, n'attendez à demain:
 Cueillez dés aujourd'hui les roses de la vie. (II, XLIII)

Many of the concerns that Ronsard voices throughout the *Helene* cycle are distilled in this sonnet. It is not the first portrait of Helene seated by the fire, for we have already encountered the gray, ailing Helene "assise auprès du feu" in Sonnet II, XXV. The fireplace again stresses the natural element, fire, as well as its control by man. In this poem, the narrator's total control of the *récit* is evident from the outset. The character "interaction" is imaginary, as the scene concerns Ronsard's projection into the future when Helene will be an old lady and

the narrator "sous la terre, un fantôme sans os" (l. 9). Although Ronsard does not include his character as physically partaking in that future, he assures his place and his power over Helene through his poetry. The dominant issue concerns death and immortality. The narrator twice describes Helene as old, first as "bien vieille" (l. 1) and later as a "vieille accroupie" (l. 11). Heretofore the narrator had depicted the portrait of his *own* aging body, mentioning on several occasions his gray head, as well as alluding to the myths of Aurora and Tithonus and of Medea and Aeson. In this poem, he has moved beyond his fears of old age, now bestowing this state upon Helene and according himself an unusual "protection"—death! He views his death here, however, in positive terms, so that, in comparison to old age, death fares better. In the first tercet, he paints his future: "Je seray sous la terre & fantôme sans os / Par les ombres myrteux ie prendray mon repos" (ll. 9–10). The key contrast between his state of "repos" and of Helene's—she is "une vieille accroupie"—gains further reinforcement by the type of and amount of light which each will enjoy. Helene will have firelight and the candle's flicker to light her evening, while the narrator will rest beneath the natural "ombres myrteux." The myrtle forest, according to Tervarent's iconographical study, "était consacrée à Vénus. . . parce qu'on lui attribuait le pouvoir de faire partager et d'entretenir l'amour."⁶ Equally important, as Tervarent notes in his listing for myrtle, ". . . le fruit du myrte est noir, pour montrer que l'amour donne un fruit mélancolique et engendre l'inquiétude."⁷ A link between love and melancholy supports the basic harmony between the lover and the poet in this work. In this poem, Helene's light sources, the candle and the fire, no longer represent symbols of sensual passion and desire, but highlight the cold and aging state of Helene's body, a stranger to love. Ronsard's darkness is preferable to Helene's feeble light, although with the image of the myrtle's "melancholy fruit," this darkness is not without negative connotation. The positive connotations associated with darkness and death, however, outweigh the negative in this sonnet. This generally positive idea of death continues the trend of the darkening, inward and downward probes that characterize the movement in this second book of sonnets.

We remember early associations of Helene with the light (especially the sun) in the earlier *tableaux* of Book One. In Book Two, Helene has twice been depicted as seated beside a fireplace, devoid now of light and warmth. She can no longer compare to the sun. Indeed, the sun is ceding to a darker landscape, but it does not necessarily indicate a corresponding lack of truth or intellectual illumination for the poet, as we see in this sonnet, for he projects his vision upward from darkness.

Ronsard opposes his immortality to Helene's aged state, yet offers a union of their names as a means of preserving their love. Her name will be pronounced "de louange immortelle" but only because of Ronsard's name.⁸ The mention of his name precedes hers in the text ("mon nom" appears in line 7, and "vostre nom" follows in line 8). The 1578 version of this sonnet read "au bruit de Ronsard," and the change in 1584 to "au bruit de mon nom" reinforces the union, the common link between the two which the repetition of "nom" achieves. By his name will hers be known.⁹ The proximity of their names in the text is the only contact, the sole "interaction" which Ronsard accords the two in this sonnet. The physical distance between the two characters far outmeasures that of any of the other tableau sonnets, yet paradoxically, it is the only sonnet which offers any type of permanent bond or union for the two. And this bond will occur by means of the "louange immortelle" that the poet Ronsard will merit. This achievement, furthermore, will be so unequivocal that even Helene's servants will recognize his name, long after his burial. This sonnet continues the anticipation of closure that we have already noted in previous tableau sonnets, muting the sting of death by a positive and triumphant confidence in the poetic achievement. Because of great poetry's immortal nature, death's finality can be circumvented.

Although the portrait in this sonnet is of Helene "deuidant & filant" beside the fire, her portrait does not suggest a purely Parcae-like figure, a death-like representative controlling the strands of the narrator's life.¹⁰ Rather, it is the unseen narrator who controls the portrait by weaving the poetic fibers into an affirmation of the poet's eternal and enduring existence. The narrator is unseen as a character, but the picture that he "paints" here accentuates his poet's voice. Unlike many of the tableau sonnets where the act of seeing receives prominent treatment, this poem features both seeing and hearing, vision and voice. The images are precisely detailed, the visions vivid. But we note an accent on the voice, as well, for the poet emphasizes the act of hearing: "Direz, chantant mes vers" (l. 3) and then ". . . vous n'aurez seruant oyant telle nouvelle" (l. 5), followed by "Qui au bruit de mon nom ne s'aïlle resueillant, / Benissant vostre nom de louange immortelle" (ll. 7-8). The accent on the ear emphasizes the voice—the narrator's voice which strongly represents the poet's voice. Certainly we can appreciate this sonnet as an example of Ronsard's *carpe diem* philosophy, but we find the accent here less on the lover and the love story than on the poet and his poetic mission (indeed, this lover is hardly tender toward his lady!). This vision showcases Helene, but the voice emanates from Ronsard. Indeed, even the words that Helene will speak comply with the narrator's direction: "Quand vous serez bien vieille. . . / (vous) Direz, chantant *mes vers*. . ." (ll. 2-3,

emphasis mine). His portrait of her becomes his means of singing *his* verse. In fact, all the portraits of the tableau sonnets offer Ronsard a means of using vision to transmit his voice, and voice to bring us his vision.

In the final lines of this sonnet, we read a present tense command from the lover to Helene and from the poet, borrowed from Horace, to his readers:

Viuez, si m'en croyez, n'attendez à demain:
Cueillez dès aujourd'hui les roses de la vie (ll. 13-14).

Readers of Ronsard's poetry have encountered images of flowers and particularly of roses before. The memorable "Ode à Cassandre" (1553) and the sonnet in the Marie sequence, "Comme on voit sur la branche au mois de mai la rose" (1578) are but two of many poems which recount the fleeting beauty of the flower. The "Ode à Cassandre" ends with an admonition similar to this one:

Cueilles, cueilles vostre ieunesse:
Comme à ceste fleur, la vieillesse
Fera ternir vostre beauté (ll. 16-18).

In this tableau, the narrator manipulates the *carpe diem* topos. He counsels us not to "cueillir ieunesse," but "les roses de la vie." The composition of this sonnet may strike some readers as odd, with this "moral" tacked on the end of a poem which to that point never evokes roses and which serves more to praise its narrator than to chastise its subject for her lack of vitality.¹² There is only one other nature reference in this poem—the aforementioned myrtle tree. Both evoke the lover, the roses because of the traditional associations with the notion of "seizing the day" and the myrtle because of its association with Venus. Moreover, in the context of this sonnet, both the rose and the myrtle share a connotation of death. The roses, because of the manner in which the narrator urges their appreciation, remind us that their existence is brief and should be savored. The myrtle provides the shadows beneath which the dead narrator will repose. We have noted that death is less morbidly portrayed in this sonnet and in fact offers the narrator some peace and glory of which Helene in her aged state is deprived. This death is palatable because it offers at once the death of the lover (who is beneath the myrtle shadows) and, through Helene's recitation of his verses, the continuing voice of the poet. It is his words that strike us at the end of the sonnet, echoing his earlier Ode and thus preserving his voice. Like the dead Hylas in the poem of that name, and reminiscent of Echo in the Narcissus

myth, the narrator's voice underscores death with a positive connotation—the enduring and perpetual voice of the artist-creator. The references to nature—the roses and myrtle—while supporting the notion of death, also connote vegetative growth. These images of growth further substantiate the pattern of cycles that winds its way through the *Helene* sonnet sequence. The poetic mission grows, but at the expense of the love story. The "louange immortelle" will sing of the poet's glory and the poetic mission which preserves it in a continuous vision of life even as it springs from death.

Enhancing his concept of the cyclical movements, the narrator turns to one of the most hauntingly beautiful of all the tableau sonnets, II, XLIX:

Le soir qu'Amour vous fist en la salle descendre
 Pour danser d'artifice un beau ballet d'Amour,
 Vos yeux, bien qu'il fust nuit, ramenerent le iour,
 Tant ils sceurent d'esclairs par la place respandre.
 Le ballet fut diuin, qui se souloit reprendre
 Se rompre se refaire, & tour dessus retour
 Se mesler s'escarter se tourner à l'entour,
 Contre-imitant le cours du fleuve de Meandre:
 Ores il estoit rond ores long or' estroit,
 Or' en point en triangle en la façon qu'on voit
 L'escadron de la Gruë euitant la froidure.
 Le faux, tu ne dansois, mais ton pied voletoit
 Sur le haut de la terre: aussi ton corps s'estoit
 Transformé pour ce soir en diuine nature. (II, XLIX)

Evening confines the sonnet, the word "soir" appearing in the opening and closing lines of the composition. However, the narrator's perception of the evening's events are colored by the light which emanates from Helene's eyes, for her eyes, as he tells us, "bien qu'il fust nuit ramenerent le iour" (l. 3). Thus, within the space of the sonnet, we encounter first "soir," (l. 1) then "nuit" (l. 3), followed by "iour" (l. 3) and finally "soir" (l. 14) again. We do witness Helene's eyes bringing light to the darkness, as her eyes were known to do in previous tableau sonnets, but night still dominates this sonnet. Helene's light pierces the gloaming here but cannot dispel the darkness which gathers during the course of the poem. Although the action of the sonnet is limited to one evening's events, they are recounted through the eyes of a narrator who conveys a sense of movement and flow, of cyclical endings and beginnings. Ronsard likens the slow,

sinewy movement of the dance to the "cours du fleuve de Meandre," and the second quatrain and the first tercet do imitate the repetitious rhythms of the river and of the dance itself. A second generating movement at work in the sonnet concerns Helene's descent to the ballroom, and that later symbolic ascent which the narrator perceives, due to her "diuine nature" (l. 14). The narrator does not place himself in the sonnet. He describes the scene as if he were present, but hidden, apart from the group, a silent spectre observing the ball—imbued, perhaps, with some divinity of his own. In the previous tableau, the narrator had projected himself into the future, "sous la terre, un fantôme sans os," and in this sonnet, he is once again physically absent. The disappearance or "death" of this character, however, has not meant an end to the visions, the vivid and detailed *tableaux*, nor to this character's voice—as the last two *tableaux* attest. Despite the lack of interaction, this sonnet describes a sensual, physical sense of movement and offers the image of light penetrating a darkened room, visions which lend the poem a warm, glowing, human presence. The narrator compares the dance first to the river, then in the first tercet to "l'escadron de la Gruë euitant la froidure" (l. 11). This second comparison introduces winter to the sonnet. The image of the flock of cranes flying in "V-formation" is drawn from nature, and echoes Homer and Virgil.¹³ The birds' instinct instructs them to flee the cold and guides their flight. Although the narrator compares the birds to the dance in which Helene takes part, the image finds an appropriate symbol in the narrator himself. The composition of this sonnet sequence offered Ronsard the opportunity to redirect the failed *Franciade* epic attempt into a coherent, triumphant tribute to poetry. Finding his political favor and his popularity threatened, Ronsard must have felt, too, that he and his former *Pléiade* compatriots, like the birds in this image, faced a transforming political climate that they could little protest. This literary accomplishment represents the instinctive "flight" as he opposes an impending end to his career by assuring himself an everlasting poetic existence. The images in this sonnet of night and winter emphasize the narrator's growing concern in the sonnets with aging and death. These cyclical components enable the sonnet to flow in a rhythmic response to nature's movements.

Despite the simple and natural harmony, we discern elements of trickery or confusion in this sonnet. In the second line, the narrator recalls Helene's entrance into the room: "Pour danser d'artifice un beau ballet d'Amour." Does he mean to imply that the intricacy of Helene's dance conveys subtleties of love, or that, because she is incapable of love, her dance is necessarily "d'artifice"? Furthermore, the narrator's perception of Helene's presence as light-inducing is

not strong enough to quell the images of night and of darkness, nor of the "froidure" that is to be avoided. Certainly the narrator is responsible for coloring his own perceptions. He envisions day when he knows that it is night, as the opening and closing references to the "soir" attest. He hints at love when he knows that he can expect none. He mentions the cold of winter herding birds into flight just before describing Helene's transformation "pour ce soir en diuine nature." Thus, Helene is linked, by her nature, to the birds and to the cold and to a movement away from the narrator. If we read and reread this sonnet, it is possible to discern that the glow of love diminishes in the face of a more complex scene. First, we note the use of "ie faux" again in a tableau sonnet. This expression calls attention to the poet's narrative power. The words punctuated by the comma command a pause in the line and in the thought. The rhythm of the dance changes with line twelve.¹⁴ We question Helene's ability to fly, like the birds of the earlier description, and we may doubt that such a transformation can occur. But it is a transformation, we learn, "pour ce soir." The limits placed on Helene's divinity actually intensify the narrator's power. This is not the voice of one lost in love but of one who can see, who describes and controls.

Helene, physically present in this sonnet, is nevertheless quite distant from the narrator. We find no recorded dialogue between the two characters to "corroborate" or support the event. The narrator's physical character has disappeared from the tableau, so we are left to contemplate a vision of Helene. Her character has also changed. She is less a physical presence and more of an image—a controlled image. Because she refrains from dialogue, and because she descends and then ascends, according to the narrator's words, she loses a physical or earthly dimension. She appears to be much more spiritual, more abstract, because of her "flight" which is entirely controlled by the narrator. Ronsard transforms her into "diuine nature" within the space of the sonnet—"ce soir." The many wintry and darkening images of the second book of *Les Sonnets pour Helene* point to a "death" or to closure, and the tableau sonnets of this book illustrate and parallel this movement. The narration is drawing to a close, but slowly, easing the tension between subject and narrator, stretching the pleasure of the *récit* which moves, like Helene's dance, to the rhythm of the word.

A surprise awaits in the following sonnet, for we now encounter the physical presence of the narrator. This time, however, he is alone, and Helene is absent. This absence and presence of the narrator's character presents some confusion, but not without a possible resolution. As we examine the loss of Helene, we will turn, too, to the loss of and regaining of the narrator.

Winter is the backdrop once again for the tableau of Sonnet II, LVI:

l'errois en mon iardin, quand au bout d'une allee
 Le vy contre l'Hyuer boutonner un Soucy.
 Ceste herbe & mon Amour fleurissent tout ainsi:
 La neige est sur ma teste, & la sienne est gelee.
 O bien-heureuse amour en mon ame escoulee
 Par celle qui n'a point de parangon icy,
 Qui m'a de ses rayons tout l'esprit esclarcy
 Qui deuroit des François Minerue estre appelee:
 En prudence Minerue, une Grace en beauté,
 Iunon en grauité, Diane en chasteté,
 Qui sert aux mesmes Dieux, comme aux hommes d'exemple.
 Si tu fusses venue au temps que la Vertu
 S'honoroit des humains, tes vertus eussent eu
 Voeuz encens & autels sacrifices & temple. (II, LVI)

The narrator's stroll about his garden provides the physical decor that we have come to expect in the tableau sonnets. This first example of an outdoor tableau, a garden, would normally constitute a significant symbol of nature's growth. We would expect a tableau set in a garden to offer a variety of lush, blossoming images, somewhat like the opening sonnet's description of the fields, trees, birds and stream. But this is a wintry ground, barren, save one flower, *un Soucy*. The garden setting itself depicts another vision of nature's growth pattern—the winter cycle. These images of winter that the last two *tableaux* have shown—first the flock of cranes in II, XLIX, and now the frozen garden—portray the season as a further development of the cyclical rotation and not simply as an end to growth. In the earlier sonnet, the flock of birds obeys a common instinct to flee the cold. Migration is a response to the seasonal changes, occurring as part of a natural preparation to adapt and endure. In this sonnet, the discovery of a lone flower in the garden prompts hope, belief, praise—positive emotions in the narrator—and demonstrates a continuity of growth. Although flowers do not normally flourish in the colder months, this marigold (the *Soucy*) appears bravely, “contre l'Hyuer,” a crown of ice on its petals. This image is at once one of life and of death. The flower is out of season, most probably lingering into the colder months by a combination of chance and circumstance. The very notion of a bright orange or yellow flower appearing amid a wintry landscape suggests persistent growth. The marigold, moreover, is a hardy, common flower, with a strong, pungent odor. No delicate rose, but a survivor of late autumn, the marigold suggests a willful power of life. It thus presents an appropriate symbol for the

narrator's identification with it: "Ceste herbe & mon Amour fleurissent tout ainsi: / La neige est sur ma teste & la sienne est gelee" (ll. 3-4). Moreover, because the flower provides an unexpected blossom, it represents the rare, the prevailing, the unique, and as such functions equally well as a symbol for Helene. The second quatrain expands the narrator's interpretation of the flower to include Helene, and he enumerates Helene's virtues with tender affection. The flower, then, represents the narrator, his love, and Helene. The multifaceted representation appropriately supports the complexity in the growth process itself. Within nature's domain, we understand that all does not operate in utter splendor. Migration, transformation, adaptation, decay and growth are components of the cyclical rhythms. Ronsard's nature images reflect the complexities of his double-voiced narrator. The rhythms of lover and poet move in opposite directions. The lover's failure will be the poet's triumph, the one depending on the other for its pattern. The initial vision of the narrator in his garden stresses at once the indecision as well as the guidance that both lover and poet bring to the scene. The choice of the verb "error" emphasizes the lack of clear direction. It stands in sharp contrast to the well-defined (albeit twisting) movement of the dance in the previous sonnet. The gradual narrative control that we have observed does not occur in one swift, decisive act. Rather, it develops as a slow unfolding of strength as the poetic mission gains in scope and breadth. The word "error" also connotes a moral overtone as it signifies a straying from the truth.¹⁵ The appearance of the flower coincides with the reappearance of the narrator, with the disappearance of Helene, and with a praising of Helene by the narrator who no longer laments her cruelty. The truth of the narrative in this sonnet sequence—the ascendance of poetry—is restored or regained in the discovery of the *soucy*.

The "*soucy*" functions as a key word, for it refers to a garden flower as well as to a central concern or worry. As a flower, the *soucy* symbolizes growth. This enrichment associated with a botanical flourishing is also relevant to the *soucy* as the narrator's increasingly dominant concern for his subject, poetry's ascendance. An earlier use of the word occurs in I, III. There Ronsard vocalizes his choice of Helene as a recreation of Homer's subject: "Nom, malheur des Troyens, suiet de mon souci. . . ." (l. 9).¹⁶ As the "suiet. . . de souci" in the earlier sonnet, Helene is the narrator's subject and the lover's concern. As the subject, Helene comes more and more to furnish the means for the text, the superficial love interest and the substantial symbol for the poetic mission, as Ronsard directs his urge to create into the central message of this sonnet sequence. The lover's frustration, in turn, will be washed away in the fountain

that the narrator erects at the end of the sonnet cycle in the "Stances": "Ainsi puisse couler en ceste eau le souci / Que ma belle Maistresse à mon mal trop superbe, / Engraue dans mon coeur sans en auoir mercy" (ll. 2-4).

We see signs here that the poet believes in his powers, but we know by the opening lines that the poetic gifts necessarily isolate and exile the poet, distancing him from others, including Helene, reducing him to exploring alone the fruits of his garden. The narrator's preoccupation with death and old age in this work finds a symbol in the discovery of the blossom, for it indicates a continuity in creative development, even as cooler political climates, aging and impending death are at hand. The poet's source will not dry up in old age but can continue to provide him with material for his tribute to Helene, which is, of course, the tribute to poetry. The poet's textual isolation in this sonnet parallels Helene's textual isolation in the work's opening sonnet. The character Ronsard grows more and more removed from Helene, becoming in a sense more like the idealized and idolized Helene who functions as the subject of the work. The writer, too, now approaches glorification through the praise of his subject, through the resurrection of Homer's Helen, through his own creation. He now praises Helene who "de ses rayons tout l'esprit esclarcy. . ." (l. 7). How far removed is this tribute from the weary and wretched voice who spoke in the "shipwreck sonnet" (I, VI), the lover who accused Helene of pulling his vessel to the rocks with her "flame"!

The poet's tribute to Helene includes the repetition of the name "Minerue" in lines eight and nine. This identification of Helene with Minerva figures among the several comparisons with which the narrator seeks to glorify her. She is like "une Grace," like "Iunon," and, like "Diane," she serves "aux mesmes Dieux comme aux hommes d'exemple" (ll. 9-10). Minerva as patroness of the arts and trades reminds us of the artisan-creator of these tableau structures and scenes, the narrator who twice mentions her name. He succeeds in calling attention to the poems' crafted quality. Minerva also furnishes an apt symbol to the poet, for the goddess of wisdom and daughter of Jupiter was also esteemed for her talents at weaving, as Ovid recounts in his tale of Minerva and Arachne.¹⁷ The addition of Minerva to these other references thus signals the incorporation of wisdom and weaving to the body of qualities which Helene stands for, while corroborating the earlier portrayals of Helene as "deuidant & filant." Both women moreover were daughters of Jupiter, and Minerva was furthermore associated with war, thereby strengthening the links between Minerva and previous descriptions of Helene in these pages. Wisdom and weaving suggest the poet's guidance and control as he directs the expansion of his tribute to poetry.

This tribute is further enhanced by the construction of a temple at the end of the sonnet. The vision of the garden is hypothetically developed in the final lines:

Si tu fusses venue au temps que la vertu
S'honoroit des humains, tes vertus eussent eu
Voeuz encens & autels sacrifices & temple (ll. 12–14).

Ronsard's sonnet appears to rectify the conditional nature of Helene's (poetry's) reward by offering in effect a temple. The plural nouns "vœux," "autels," and "sacrifices" precede the singular "temple" which closes the sonnet. This tableau "erects" yet another architectural structure: the sonnet becomes a temple to Helene, citing her "beauté, gravité et chasteté." Because the sonnet opens with a garden and closes with a temple, it calls attention to the peculiar qualities of the sixteenth-century garden, as Shearman outlines: "[It] was a well-established art-form long before the Mannerist period" and was "more obviously a product of man than of nature."¹⁸ Ronsard's consistent evocation of both natural and man-made images in these *tableaux* underscores his working practice of employing both *mimesis* and *imitatio* as part of his artistic genius. The natural images represent a trust and a belief in that which is beyond the human, those qualities or talents which are inherent rather than developed, and to whose direction the natural poetic inspiration obeys. The man-made suggests a conscious, studied modeling, a dependence on diligent effort and individual will, a crafting of the elements by imposing on them a human concept of order—in short, the power of art. The structures of the fountain, the temple and the settings of the tableau sonnets accentuate a conscious desire to preserve the poet's world, to prolong his life through the life of his text. The images of growth and of cosmic order which stem from nature substantiate the poet's accomplishments by suggesting that his work is in part guided by a harmony with the universe around him. The poet responds to nature for it is in part responsible for endowing him with his poetic gifts which set him apart from others. His use of his gifts are reflected in his constructions, his compositions.

The next tableau, Sonnet II, LVII, explicitly explores the poet's task:

De Myrte & de Laurier feuille à feuille enserrez
Helene entrelassant une belle Couronne,
M'appella par mon nom: Voyla que ie vous donne,
De moy seule, Ronsard, l'escruiain vous serez.
Amour qui l'escoutoit, de ses traicts acerez

Me pousse Helene au cœur, & son chantre m'ordonne:
 Qu'un suiet si fertile vostre plume n'estonne:
 Plus l'argument est grand, plus Cygne vous mourrez.
 Ainsi me dist Amour, me frappant de ses ailes:
 Son arc fist un grand bruit, les feuilles éternelles
 Du Myrte ie senty sur mon chef tressaillir.
 Adieu Muses adieu, vostre faueur me laisse:
 Helene est mon Parnasse: ayant telle Maitresse,
 Le Laurier est à moy ie ne scauroit faillir. (II, LVII)

The detail employed here reveals more of a dialogue than of a setting. We have before our eyes two *tableaux*, one literal and one a blend of the literal and the allegorical. The literal scene depicts Helene speaking to the narrator while weaving a crown. This crown represents love (myrtle) and poetry (laurel). The other blended scene portrays a personification of Love who also speaks to the narrator. The fusion of the two *tableaux* corresponds to the image of the crown that Helene weaves, and also calls our attention to the combination of illusion and reality, so prevalent in Ronsard's works. Here, Ronsard abandons the air of complete reality with which he has constructed the majority of the other tableau sonnets, for his personification of Love hints at allegory. However, this use of the character Love, much like that of the Sun in the second tableau sonnet, requires no complex interpretation or analysis. Love, like the Sun in the earlier poem, conveys a negative image. We notice that his features are "acerez," that his actions are aggressive: Ronsard uses the verbs "pousse" (l. 6) and "frappant" (l. 9). Love's bow, moreover, "fist un grand bruit" (l. 10). His words, on the other hand, reveal nuances of more complexity and point strongly toward the poet's voice as the dominant narrator in this sonnet: "Qu'un suiet si fertile vostre plume n'estonne: / Plus l'argument est grand, plus Cygne vous mourrez." The word "plume" appears almost at the center of the poem, and this position is appropriate, for the figures of the poet, the swan and Love share its attribute. The context of the poem denotes the poet's pen, but both winged creatures (the swan and Love) are mentioned directly beneath the word "plume" in lines eight and nine. The physical proximity of the words in the text suggest that the three—the poet, the swan and Love—are tightly linked, as indeed they are. The symbol of the swan, in addition to accompanying Apollo in early frescos, was represented in musical terms as well. Tervarent confirms that "les cygnes passaient, dès l'antiquité, pour aimer la musique et faire entendre, avant de

mourir, leur chant le plus mélodieux." He cites Plato and Aristotle, among others, as sources for this widely-held notion.¹⁹

The "suiet fertile" of line seven recalls a line from Sonnet II, LV: "Si pour suiet fertile Homere t'a choisie" (l. 5), as well as the much earlier reference that we have already examined in I, III: "... suiet de mon souci" (l. 9). These three mentions of the poet's subject reinforce our understanding that its growth and triumph constitute the major theme of the *Sonnets pour Helene*.²⁰ The very repetition of the words themselves stresses Ronsard's conscious inclusion of himself, by way of citing his own words, in this sonnet cycle, and strengthens the structure of the sequence.

The adjective "fertile" encourages the growth-oriented imagery, particularly the flowers which we encounter in this cycle. It also highlights the process of creation, a process which the references to the swan also underscore. The reference to the "cygne" in this sonnet presents a counterpart to the first tableau sonnet where we read of Helene's hand: "Main blanche qui se vante estre fille d'un Cygne" (I, XI, l. 10). In that earlier sonnet, the emphasis on Helene as Jupiter's daughter drew our attention to the union which produced that daughter, to origins, birth, beginnings. In this sonnet, death punctuates the reference: "Plus l'argument est grand, plus Cygne vous mourrez." Certainly the two allusions to the swan in Sonnets I, IX and II, LVII suggest a birth and a death, a beginning and an end, with the latter pointing to some notion of closure. In the last of the six poems which comprise the mini-collection of sonnets, the *Derniers Vers*, Ronsard returned to the image of the swan singing its death song. That final sonnet embraces many of Ronsard's cherished beliefs, several of which are pertinent to our examination of Sonnet II, LVII, and which therefore merit our attention:

Il faut laisser maisons & vergers & iardins,
 Vaisselles & vaisseaux que l'artisan burine,
 Et chanter son obseques en la façon du Cygne,
 Qui chante son trepas sur les bord Maendrins.
 C'est fait, i'ay deuillé le cours de mes destins,
 I'ay vescu, i'ay rendu mon nom assez insigne:
 Ma plume vole au Ciel pour estre quelque signe
 Loin des appas mondains qui trompent les plus fins.
 Heureux qui ne fut onc, plus heureux qui retourne
 En rien comme il estoit, plus heureux qui sejourne
 D'homme fait nouuel Ange aupres Iesus Christ,

Laissant pourrir ça bas sa despoüille de boüe.
 Dont le sort, la fortune, & le destin se ioue,
 Franc des liens du corps pour n'estre qu'un esprit. (D.V., VI)

Written on Ronsard's deathbed, this sonnet demonstrates the poet's ultimate belief in a continuity of life after the terrestrial existence he had depicted so well in his poetry. The *Sonnets pour Helene* reflect a preparation toward that final resolution, and it is not surprising that we recognize in the *Helene* sequence germs of thoughts which find their final development in this, Ronsard's last sonnet. The swan singing its death song by the Maeander River is preceded in the *Helene* poems by the image of the dance in Sonnet, II, XLIX, which we have already examined (" . . . Contre-imitant le cours de fleuve de Meandre: . . ."), and by the swan reference in this last tableau, II, LVII ("Plus l'argument est grand, plus Cygne vous mourrez"). Sonnet VI of the *Derniers Vers* moreover speaks of leaving the earthly existence—"maisons & vergers & jardins, / Vaisselles & vaisseaux"—which the artisan fabricates. These words, "l'artisan burine," emphasize the crafting of the earthly life and are so marked by architectonic structures that they seem to comprise to a great extent the life which Ronsard is ready to leave in the *Derniers Vers*. Furthermore, the reference to leaving these earthly haunts and objects is phrased in such a way as to denote the narrator's *leaving such artifacts behind as proof of his existence*, as well as to indicate the narrator's belief that it is time to *take his leave from* these items. The tableau sonnets provide a means by which Ronsard can leave behind "maisons & vergers & iardins" in a lasting monument to his earthly existence. When he writes that he has accomplished his goal, the verb "dévider" reminds us of the weaving images in the tableau sonnets—particularly of Helene "deuidant & filant" beside the fireplace in II, XLIII. The repetition of "Minerue" in tableau II, LVI trained our focus on the weaving process which symbolizes the production, the spinning of the fabric of the text.²¹ This spinning may suggest Penelope's incessant weaving while rejecting the advances of would-be lovers in her husband's absence. Indeed, in the early I, III where we have already noted the line, "Nom, malheur des Troyens, suiet de mon souci," the narrator refers to Helene in the succeeding line as his "sage Pénélope" (I, III, l. 10).²² The spinning of cloth parallels the spinning of the narrative. Just as Homer's character prolongs the unsatisfaction of the suitor, Ronsard's spinning Helene holds the life of the lover at bay. Her actions are like Penelope's and those of the Fates. Thus, this activity signifies both endless repetition, unceasing beginnings, and yet a closure as well, since we are aware that the cycle is spinning out before us in these poems. The author of

the *Derniers Vers* is justly proud of the text that he has spun, as master of his own fate in the *Helene* cycle. The seasonal references to winter in these last *tableaux* reinforce the concept that a cycle of life is nearing an end, before beginning anew. Renewal of the life preserved in these poems will occur through future rereadings of them.

In returning our attention to tableau sonnet II, LVII, we notice that Helene is once again depicted as a weaver, "fueille à fueille. . . entrelassant une belle Couronne" (ll. 1–2). Fashioning here a poet's crown of laurel and myrtle, she suggests a creative force. The fusion of the elements laurel and myrtle which represent respectively Apollo/poetry, and Venus/love, joins the poet with the lover. Helene is the common link to both lover and poet, and now she binds them in a manner that clearly elevates the poet over the lover: "Voyla que ie vous donne: / De moy seule, Ronsard, l'escruiain vous serez" (ll. 3–4). The word *écriuain* is significant, for it specifically identifies the narrator's profession. Helene is instrumental in making him a writer because she functions as his "suiet fertil." She explains their relationship by her words in lines three and four. Clearly Helene deems herself responsible for Ronsard's fame. Her perspective calls for a reexamination of the narrator's words in the work's opening sonnet: "Je suis de ma fortune auteur. . ." (I, I, l. 12). He is the author, but his subject, Helene, brings him acknowledgment. She is his "dernier auture." He depends on her for his ultimate "fortune" just as she depends on him to write about her and her alone: "De moy seule. . ." These last words remind us of the narrator's statement in that same opening poem, "Que seule vous serez ma derniere auture." Earlier in this examination, we perceived these thoughts as reflecting Helene's singular, solitary nature, as they reinforced her textual isolation. Of all the pairs and couples cited in that first sonnet, Helene remains solitary. While these words can be read as reflecting Helene's independence, we can also read in this poem Helene's voicing words expressed earlier by the narrator. That is, in the former sonnet, the narrator, addressing Helene, calls her "seule vous/ vous seule" and in the later poem Helene, while addressing the narrator, refers to herself as "moy seule." Her words repeat the narrator's words in the first sonnet. She imitates him, falls under his domain, becomes his "suiet."

This transformation is further evident in the concluding lines of II, LVII, where Ronsard refers to Helene as his "Parnasse" and his "Maistresse": "Helene est mon Parnasse: ayant telle Maistresse, / Le Laurier est à moy ie ne sçauois faillir" (ll. 13–14). She is both muse and power over him for the subject commands that the narrative be produced. Helene calls the narrator by name, she braids and offers the crown, and he rightly responds, calling her "Maistresse."

In these later tableau sonnets, Helene's words serve almost exclusively to advance Ronsard's own words. Her discourse functions as a complement to the poet's thoughts, rather than expressing an opposing viewpoint, as in I, XXXVI, for example, where the two characters viewed the Montmartre convent in a distinctly opposing manner. The two references to Ronsard in this text, "mon nom" (l. 3) and "Ronsard" (l. 4), support this claim that the focus of the text is on the creator rather than on the subject. We remember Sonnet II, XLIII where Ronsard had earlier referred to both his name and Helene's: "Qui au bruit de mon nom ne s'aïlle resueillant, / Benissant vostre nom de louange immortelle" (ll. 7-8). Their names, linked in that famous sonnet, reflected the dominance of Ronsard's name, his conceiving hers. Now, in this sonnet, Ronsard has Helene stress his name. This emphasis on his name stresses the point that his fame will stem from him *and*, because she is his subject, from her. This union between narrator and subject will not be physical but textual.

The poet's voice asserts direction over the lover's voice in this sonnet, but the blend of laurel and myrtle in the crown enables us to comprehend that they depend on each other for their positions. The references in the text to "Ronsard" and "escruiain" as well as the supporting allusions to "laurier" and "Cygne," to "plume" and "fueilles" and to "Muses" and "Parnasse" firmly acknowledge the poet's presence. His power is becoming so manifest that the poet can dismiss his muses now: "Adieu muses adieu" (l. 12). In bidding farewell to his muses, the poet appears to believe that he no longer needs their aid. Since many epics traditionally begin with an invocation to the Muses, we can read this dismissal as a sign that the suggested poetic epic is now reaching a close. The poet has offered such significant proof of his direction in the tableau sonnets, especially those in Book Two, that he now prepares to assume full control and responsibility. The narrator's identification with Apollo (whose bird was the swan and whose tree was the laurel) emphasizes the poetic achievement. Moreover, the "fueilles eternelles" which quiver upon his head underline the immortal existence and continuing glory that the poet expects to achieve. These "fueilles" suggest both the leaves of the laurel and the myrtle crown, and the pages of this work. In the first line of the poem, the crown is described as "De Myrte & de Laurier" but in lines ten and eleven the narrator states: "Son arc fist un grand bruit, les fueilles eternelles / Du Myrte ie senty sur mon chef tressaillir." The myrtle plant, associated with love and thus with the Lover, seems to preside over the laurel. The crown is clearly composed of both myrtle and laurel, "feuille à feuille enserrez" but it is the leaves of the myrtle that the narrator feels trembling on his head. The verb "tressaillir" connotes both excitement and fear. The love story

constitutes the superficial pretext from which the deeper text of the *Sonnets pour Helene* will emerge. The deeper text is about poetry, and it is woven firmly but subtly into the fabric of the love story.²³ A careful reading of these sonnets reveals the poet's voice and even exposes it as the more dominant voice. If the narrator describes the crown in the second instance by emphasizing the myrtle, we can interpret this phrasing in several ways. First, the voice which we hear is the poet's, and he is fully aware of the importance of the love story as the vehicle through which the poetic mission will be achieved. Or, the lover fears the trembling leaves, indicating that the love story, too, will face a drastic and intimidating challenge. The image of the woven crown exemplifies the interdependence of love and poetry.

Like the crown, the movement in this sonnet is circular. The initial image of Helene "entrelassant une belle Couronne" sets this pattern in motion. Helene has come to represent various intermingled and interdependent entities and concepts, such as the flower, the poem, the subject, honor, destiny, and death. She conveys the movements, the dynamics, the qualities of the life-to-death cycle. In this sonnet, the crown that Helene weaves symbolizes the narrator's poetic achievement, and as such indicates the fulfillment or completion of the poetic mission. The text of this sonnet supports this notion of fulfillment or endings. The words "Cygne" and "mourrez" in line eight speak openly of death. The word "adieu" appears twice in line twelve, accompanied by the word "laisse." This emphasis on closure concurs with the union between subject and author which appears closer in this sonnet than in any we have examined. The two characters interact in a positive exchange which exhibits the poet's serious intent to witness himself crowned by his own poetic glory. The final lines of the poem indicate the poet's belief in himself, for as his independent spirit asserts, he no longer needs the muses to aid him in his task. He has chosen Helene as his subject, recreating her "à [son] gré" and he now envisions his future: ". . . ayant telle Maistresse, / Le Laurier est à moy ie ne sçaurois faillir" (ll. 13-14). The interaction between author and subject in this text has led to belief, self-confidence, union, fulfillment, creation. The accent on endings here denotes not a tragic and lugubrious notion of death, but of triumphant accomplishment, ultimate reward, creation. This creation is colored by the laurel and myrtle which suggest enduring poetic growth, as future generations of readers will approach the "feuilles éternelles."

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The expectations of fulfillment raised by Sonnet II, LVII are postponed. After that powerful interaction between Ronsard and Helene, the narrator in the following tableau, II, LVIII, reverts to his "hiding place," absent once again from the tableau's cast of characters. The absence of the narrator assures us that union is not yet possible, that completion is yet to come. The tableau's effect is strengthened by the imagery—a very vivid image here of a very isolated Helene, alone in a grandiose setting:

Seule sans compagnie en une grande salle
 Tu logeois l'autre iour pleine de maïesteté,
 Coeur vrayment genereux, dont la braue beauté
 Sans pareille ne treuve une autre qui l'egalle.
 Ainsi seul en son ciel le Soleil se deualle,
 Sans autre compaignon en son char emporté:
 Ainsi loin de ses Dieux en son Palais vouté
 Iupiter a choisi sa demeure royale.
 Une ame vertueuse a tousiours un bon coeur:
 Le Liéure fuyt tousiours, la Biche a tousiours peur.
 Le Lyon de soy mesme asseuré se hazarde.
 La peur qui sert au peuple & de frein & de Loy,
 Ne sçauroit estonner ny ta vertu ny toy:
 La Loy ne sert de rien, quand la vertu nous garde. (II, LVIII)

This portrait of Helene counterbalances the vision of the narrator alone in his garden. In both sonnets one single character appears, but the attitude that each projects differs enormously from the other. The narrator's wandering indicates hesitancy, a search, which initiates discovery. Helene's character, while generous, reflects a god-like stature, a fixed, unmoving attitude, as well as a formidable distance. The descriptions "seule" and "sans compagnie," "sans autre compaignon," and "loin" stress that singular nature which we have come to know in Helene. The two characters Ronsard and Helene have changed considerably since the opening tableau. In that first tableau sonnet, I, IX, the narrator was static, poised on the stair, overwhelmed and reacting to Helene's movements. In later tableau sonnets the narrator's movement has been reinforced by his disappearance and reappearance in the scenes. In this tableau, Helene appears considerably less mobile than the narrator.

The image of Helene, majestic and omnipotent in the "grande salle" perpetuates the image of Helene's ascent that we began to witness in the "beau

ballet d'amour" sonnet (II, XLIX), her transformation into "diuine nature." This movement towards the celestial is substantiated by much of the vocabulary of the quatrains: the comparisons of Helene to the sun and to Jupiter, the image of the "Palais vouté." The verb "logeois" in line two suggests "loge"—a balcony seat—which in turn supports the spatial image of the "salle." The extended comparisons of Helene with the sun and with Jupiter, in addition to supporting the upward motion which shapes this sonnet, also emphasize Helene's distance from the narrator. Even though Helene is distant and depicted as superior, the verb *dévaler* reminds us that a descent is still an appropriate movement for the sun and perhaps also for Helene. Her distance, however, does not provoke a negative description. On the contrary, the narrator's tone is quite complimentary, continuing the trend of the last two tableau sonnets. In all three, praise for Helene's nature has dominated any expression of desire. This praise for Helene extends, in turn, to praise for the author, for Helene represents the unique, singular and perfect text, the achievement that merits the crown. Ronsard shares Helene's ascent, therefore, and if both are ascending, then the distance between them may well be lessening. We shall entertain this question in more detail as we examine the end of the sonnet cycle.

The movement in the "beau ballet d'amour" sonnet (II, XLIX), began with Helene's descent into the room where the observant but hidden narrator followed her dance before recording her ascension toward the sky. That ascension is protracted in this sonnet, where no temporal clause defines any limits. Indeed, the clause "pour ce soir" failed to restrict Helene's ascent. She is now acting outside of the narrator's proscriptions, her divinity having removed her from his control. Her independence has always assured her a certain autonomy, even while the narrator seeks to link himself with her in some manner. As the symbolic representation of the narrator's subject, Helene is identified with the narrator, yet she possesses a power of her own. The subject is an entity apart from the creator. The tone of this sonnet and of the last three sonnets supports the impression that Helene, this "divine subject," is praised, not cursed. Gone are the sensual allusions, the lover's complaints. The narrator's acceptance of Helene accompanies his perception of her as god-like. And, conversely, her divine status may be responsible for lessening the distance between the two. The subject spurs the artist to produce. As she acquires the label "diuine," the creator also stands to merit that adjective. Ronsard desired poetic immortality, to be recognized as the supreme poet of his day, his country's equivalent to Homer and Petrarch. But what of the lover? Closure in this work depends on an ascent of the poet, and it would seem logical to expect a descent or

disappearance of the lover. Like the Dioscuri, our guides to this work, the lover and the poet can never be fully and completely separated from each other. A link, a rapport will always exist between them. However, like Castor and Pollux, one character will remain earthbound while the other moves into the celestial spheres. The lover's descent will not spell complete eradication. The narrator whose presence as a character comes and goes, appears and disappears in these tableau sonnets, emphasizing the very nature of the Dioscuri: while one partner is concealed or simply not immediately apparent, he remains very much an integral member of the pair. Similarly, parallel but opposing movements shape and mark the overall structure as well as many of the individual sonnets in the *Sonnets pour Helene*. As we focus on one set or series of actions, another set may be shifting away from our focus. Because of this appearance of "instability," many readers of this sonnet cycle have noticed only the inconsistencies, the contradictions. In fact, each pattern of movement is stable and consistent. The narrator's movements greatly affect the growth and dynamics of the other motions in the cycle. As we focus on the stories told, we focus on the storyteller. His is the "hidden" story preserved in the structured enclosure of the tableau sonnets. Many of the prominent architectural structures of the *tableaux*—the staircase, the window, the door—allow for some of the parallel but opposing movements to occur. The staircase permits ascent and descent, and the door and window provide for entry as well as exit. In other *tableaux*, it is the natural imagery—the *soucy*, for example—that furnishes flexible perceptions of both growth and decay, or of change that occurs within a stable environment. These structures and images, allusions and references, patterns and movements occur in the sonnet sequence under the watchful eye of the creator, the poet.

The poet's story relates his struggle to possess his subject, to complete his narration. This desire to make himself heard influences the composition of tableau LVIII. The comparison with the lion is a double one. Although the tableau suggests that Helene is leonine in her majestic rule, a second connotation suggests that the poet himself is like the lion: "*Le lyon de soy mesme assure se hazarde*" (l. 11). The identification of both Helene and the narrator with the lion supports again the notion that there exists some link, some harmony between those two characters, just as between artist and subject. This harmony is, of course, manifest in the symbol of Castor and Pollux. Just as Castor and Pollux constitute a unified pair, so the narrator and Helene as author and subject remain inextricably joined. The lover and Helene, however, fail to achieve any such bond.

The two other creatures in the animal kingdom who figure in the narrator's comparisons are "le Liéure" and "la Biche." Both are employed in order to contrast the lion's courage: "Le Liéure fuyt tousiours, la Biche a tousiours peur" (l. 10). The final tercet extends the discussion of fear, making reference to the "peuple" and the "Loy" (l. 12). While the hare and the hind may refer to both the "peuple" and the "Loy" of Ronsard's day, they also draw our attention to the lover who, in the poet's (or the lion's) presence, has fled the *tableaux*, pressing into the background and leaving the story of prominence to the poet.

The references to the fleeing animals supports the idea of the sun which "se deualle," and both point to the natural changes which occur in the realm of the cosmos. The references to the "peuple" and the "Loy" introduce some political overtones to this tableau. Political references occur at other points in *Les Sonnets pour Helene*, most notably near the end of both books.²⁴ They remind us of the struggle that Ronsard underwent during the composition of this work, as he rallied to compete with Desportes, his Protestant rival for the court's and the public's favor.²⁵ The "liéure" and the "biche" could well represent Ronsard's rivals, too, in opposition to his self-drawn lion comparison. He compares himself to the sun and to Jupiter as well as to the lion, and he uses these same comparisons with regard to Helené. Thus, in various textual or stylistic manners, Ronsard seeks to strengthen the rapport between Helene and the poet, all the while denying this alliance to the lover. With that thought in mind, we are now ready to turn our attention to the remaining thematic developments of the tableau series, searching for that long-sought union between the narrator and Helene.

To our immense surprise, the tone of praise and the diminishing distance between the two characters vanish in the following tableau, Sonnet II, LX:

Passant dessus la tombe où Lucrece repose,
 Tu versas dessus elle une moisson de fleurs,
 L'eschaufant de souspirs, & l'arrosant de pleurs,
 Tu monstras qu'une mort tenoit ta vie enclose.
 Si tu aimes le corps dont la terre dispose,
 Imagine ta force & conçois tes rigueurs:
 Tu me verras cruelle entre mille langueurs
 Mourir puis que la mort te plaist sur toute chose.
 C'est acte de pitié d'honorer un cercueil,
 Mespriſer les viuans est un signe d'orgueil.
 Puis que ton naturel les fantômes embrasse,
 Et que rien n'est de toy, s'il n'est mort, estimé,

Sans languir tant de fois, esconduit de ta grace,
 Je veux du tout mourir pour estre mieux aimé. (II, LX)

The tableau depicts Helene's actions as she visits the grave (during or after the funeral) of Lucrece, one of her former acquaintances at the court.²⁶ The narrator does not state whether he takes part in the visit, or whether he simply records it, employing his "silent observer" technique. He addresses his words to Helene, but we cannot distinguish whether or not he delivers this monologue to Helene in her presence or absence. The lack of physical contact between Helene and the narrator invites us to question once more the matter of distance between the two characters. A non-physical relationship dooms the union of the lover and Helene yet may still encourage a potential union between the poet and his subject. As the poet's subject, Helene's function is associated with the poet's thoughts and not with his physical body. As the tableau series progresses, physical contact between the two characters becomes less and less evident, yet, as we have observed, some kind of union or link grows more and more possible. As Helene ascends, the narrator's thoughts have centered on glory, *vertu*, and honor. He desires possession of the "ideal Helene," the textual representative, and his focus and ours have moved upward, toward his crowning as creator of this divine subject.

This sonnet, however, presents concepts of both growth and decay which parallel the two motions of ascent and descent. In addition, we hear both the lover and the poet in a harmony of voices that we have not heard since Sonnet II, XXXII. The verb "aimer" appears in lines five and fourteen, and the lover's bitter tone registers throughout the sonnet, thereby emphasizing his voice. The subtle rivalry of death imagery with images of nourishment, however, provides an occasion where we may observe the poet's craft, and take in his words.

In Sonnet II, XXXII, the narrator hinted at an ailment ("T'auois esté saigné, ma Dame me vint voir / Lors que ie languissois d'une humeur froide & lente) and he concluded the sonnet with a word about rejuvenation: "Si ie veux raieunir il ne faut plus aimer"). In this sonnet, he openly asks for death, believing that Helene would then treat him to the same overflow of emotions that she lavishes on her dead friend. As the occasion involves a death, the words "tombe" (l. 1), "souspirs" (l. 3), "pleurs" (l. 3), "mort" (l. 4), and "enclose" (l. 4) in the first quatrain steep the picture of death in a rather traditional, mournful light. The second quatrain continues the vision with its references to "cruelle," "langueurs," "mourir," and "la mort." A quick glance at the tercets reveals more of the same type of vocabulary: "cercueil" (l. 9), "mespriser les viuans" (line 10),

"fantômes" (l. 11), "mort" (l. 12), "languir" (l. 13), and finally "Je veux du tout mourir. . ." (l. 14). We notice, however, that the narrator's counterbalancing vocabulary emphasizes life, nourishment, sustenance. He describes the tomb as the site where Lucrece will "respose" (l. 1). Helene pours down upon the coffin "une moisson de fleurs" (l. 2). The use of the word "dessus" twice in lines one and two initiates a downward movement supported by the verb "verser" in line two. However, this same verb, in conjunction with the mention of the flowers introduces the entire image of growth that continues throughout the poem. In pouring the harvest of flowers onto the coffin, Helene ignites a chain of actions which the narrator describes in terms of growth: "L'eschaufant" and "arrosant" (l. 3) connote actions of nourishment, yet they are used in reference to a dead woman. Even the notion of loving a corpse ("Si tu aimes le corps dont la terre dispose," in line 5) presents a blend of intense emotion with a lifeless body. The narrator calls upon Helene to imagine its force and its rigors. Both the verbs "imaginer" and "concevoir" signify creation and production. Furthermore, the "moisson de fleurs" constitutes an interesting image. By their very essence they suggest growth, and flourishing hope, just as the "soucy" in the wintry garden. These flowers, however, once plucked will soon be but thin, limp shadows of their former beauty. They are preserved, however, by this poem, for the temporal enclosure of the sonnet guards their life, even while they are offered to the dead.

The narrator's vocabulary contradicts his deathwish. His words sustain an image of growth, supporting our belief in the development of the poetic adventure. Death receives a double treatment in this sonnet. It provides the background for the visit to the tomb, and it represents the narrator's stated intention in the concluding lines. The verses in between the opening and closing references to death, however, blend the concepts of life and death. The combination of the two vocabularies—one for death and one for life—contained within two death references contributes to an overall cyclical structure that substantiates the order of this sonnet and of many of the poems in this work. The visions portray death, but the words infuse death with life. The nourishing actions in this sonnet contribute to the upward movement which opposes the descent. The two opposing movements, the ascent suggested by the growth-oriented vocabulary, and the descent suggested by the repetition of "dessus" along with the death-oriented vocabulary, accentuate again the cyclical nature with its perpetual shifts. The death imagery is readily apparent in a reading of this sonnet, and that notion of death prepares us for the closure which is at hand. In lines eleven and twelve, the narrator accuses Helene of a fondness for ghosts:

"Puis que ton naturel les fantômes embrasse,/ Et que rien n'est de toy, s'il n'est mort, estimé. . . ." He concludes his argument by wishing for death in order to receive Helene's love. We have already witnessed the narrator's depiction of himself as a "fantôme sans os" in Sonnet II, XXXLIII. In that sonnet, it was not Helene's love that the narrator solicited as much as her respect for his name, gained through celebrating her love. The narrator observes that Helene esteems ghosts, and that the only way he can become a phantom is through his own design, as in II, XLIII, or by actually disappearing from the scene. In the poetic adventure, the narrator will not disappear, but will be elevated to a glorious position as creator, a recipient of a specific type of eternal life made possible through the reading and rereading of the poems. With the ending of II, LX, we understand the narrator's desire to approach that point which he had outlined so clearly in II, XLIII—to be "sous la terre & fantôme sans os." The expression "sous terre" would again point to a descent, but by now we view a descent from a larger perspective, waiting and watching for the ascent.

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In the tableau sonnets, Helene appears consistently closed off from the narrator, and the many attempts to portray the two within the confines of the tableau decors gradually give way to larger, less intimate settings, and finally to settings where contact between the two no longer exists. As Helene distances herself from the lover, the poet, in contrast, draws closer to capturing Helene in the form of his text. Death, however, is a necessary factor for both of these strands of narrative. The lover's story, thwarted from the outset, must be recounted, spun out and completed in order for the poet to accomplish his poetic mission, and then to guard it, preserving it through the poems. The many life-like details of the tableau sonnets, and the poet's choice of vocabulary which repeatedly emphasizes life cycles, indicate that the poet is both a creator and a preserver of life. It is in blending the images of life and death that Ronsard conveys to the readers his belief in nature's cycles, in the repeated power of resurgence and renewal. Just as the final line of the previous tableau combines love with death, the entire cycle of sonnets will close with a similar fusion.

This series of tableau sonnets, moreover, presents in graphic detail the "death" and separation of the lover and Helene, the disappearance of any notion of union, while emphasizing architectural structures—the stair, the window, the door, the garden, the fountain, the temple, the room. These structures accentuate

construction, textual enclosures and surroundings erected as part of the means of preserving the movements of this entire work. In the final tableau sonnet of the cycle, the flight of stairs reappears as the architectural feature. Sonnet II, LXV presents an opposing scenario to the opening tableau sonnet where the narrator once posed "sur le haut d'un degré:"

Je ne serois marry si tu contoïs ma peine,
 De conter tes degrez recontez tant de fois:
 Tu loges au sommet du palais de nos Rois:
 Olympe n'auoit pas la cyme si hautaine.
 Je pers à chaque marche & le poulx & l'haleine,
 I'ay la sueur au front, i'ay i'estomac penthois,
 Pour ouyr un nenny, un refus, une vois
 De desdain, de froideur, & d'orgueil toute pleine.
 Tu es comme Deesse assise en tres-haut lieu.
 Pour monter en ton ciel ie ne suis pas un Dieu.
 Je feray de la court ma plainte coustumiere
 T'enuoyant iusqu'en haut mon coeur deuotieux.
 Ainsi les hommes font à Iupiter priere
 Les hommes sont en terre, & Iupiter aux cieux. (II, LXV)

The narrator depicts his slow and breathless climb up the stairs to Helene's room high in the Louvre palace. In his labored ascent, he recalls by contrast the stationary narrator "sur le haut d'un degré" in the opening tableau. The threefold use of the verb "compter" in the first three lines of the sonnet emphasizes the progress or advancement that the narrator makes. The realm of the poet's mind, moreover, becomes evident when we examine the play on the words "compter" and "(ra)conter" which accentuates the act of literary creation. The direction is upward, toward Helene who lives so high, "au sommet du Palais de nos Rois" (l. 3), that the narrator compares the height to that of Mount Olympus. The ascent highlights the basic evolution that we observed in the last tableau sonnet, a contrasting technique where the narrator reinforces the vision of the tableau with an opposing vocabulary. He describes the climb in terms that emphasize the pain and drudgery, accenting his body rather than an exulted emotional response.²⁷ We are then easily reminded of the opposing centers of concern: for the lover, the corporeal; for the poet, the spiritual.

The two stairway sonnets in the opening and closing *tableaux* function much the way the water image does in opening and closing the entire sonnet cycle. The

staircase as a construct assumes an important architectural role in structuring the tableau series. As a means of passage, a staircase permits both ascent and descent. The up and down movements associated with the passage on the stairs also underlines the pattern of risings and fallings inherent in an infinite cycle of growth. Much of this sonnet cycle revolves around the notion of cyclical and seasonal development and change, the natural rhythms of a continuous life system. The narrator's self-portrait here supports that basic reliance on the progression and evolution of life. His verbal painting depicts an old man climbing upward. Age leads the poet not toward the earth but toward the sky. We recognize signs that the body is slowing, but we know that the eventual physical demise of the body will be accompanied by the ascendance of the soul, the thoughts, the poetry. The narrator's self-portrait paints the very unflattering image of a man, sweating, panting, experiencing difficulty in climbing the stairs. However, the direction of the climb points to Ronsard's belief in his own "diune nature." Helene may reside in a "cyme. . . hautaine," but the narrator is approaching her realm. Although the words are addressed to Helene, she is again absent from the tableau. In the opening tableau sonnet, I, IX, the scene portrayed both characters on the stairs. Helene's glance and the touch of her hand, in short, her physical contact, provided much of the descriptive matter of the poems. Helene's gesture furnished the life-touch, the beginning of the narrator's subsequent movements throughout the remainder of the tableau series. The allusions to Jupiter's union with Leda in the first tableau focused on the offspring of that coupling, on birth. This last tableau makes allusion to Jupiter alone, to his power, his height, his magnificence. The portrait of the aged narrator counterbalances the stirrings of life and birth that the earlier tableau presented. One major evolution in these sonnets points from birth toward death. The narrator's remark that he loses "à chaque marche & le pouls & l'haleine" focuses on his age. The word "haleine" is close to "Helene" and prompts us to remember the words of Sonnet I, III: "Ma douce Helene, non, mais bien ma douce haleine. . ." (l. 1). Helene is the narrator's breath of life, for she provides the subject and the means of advancing his narration. Without her subject, he has no story to tell. But now, near the end of his story, the narrator grows breathless. The loss of breath comes slowly with each step, the "degrez" marking the progress of his narration. Concurrently the lover feels that he is losing his "Helene," too, for, despite his approach, she remains "comme Deesse" far from his reach.²⁸

We have watched Helene's transformation into "diune nature" from the evening of the dance, to finding her seated alone in a large room, reigning as a

god. The poet's constant insistence that she be hailed as divine has evolved during the course of these tableaux. Her divinity is the result of his creation. Because she represents his accomplishment, his text, an immortal and enduring preservation of his words, she is god-like. The *tableaux* show a symbolic "physical" representation of Ronsard's thoughts as they have evolved during the course of the work. Once the narrator stood "sur le haut d'un degré," but that position proved only the point of departure for his downward movement. From that initial pinnacle, his movements swept into a descent, through illness and death, disappearance and reappearance, culminating here in the picture of an ascent. The curve of his movements parallels a fall, much like a Biblical or mythical fall from grace and eventual ascent toward life. In order for the poet to live through the text, the lover's mortality must be exploited. The poet's divinity will stem from the preservation of his text and not of his life. Through the text he becomes a creator and keeper of life. The words of the first sonnet of Book Two indicate the extent to which the narrator understands his direction: "Mais sans me contrefaire ou voleur ou charton, / De mon gré ie me noye & me brusle moymesme" (ll. 13-14). The flights of Icarus and Phaëthon took first an upward, then a downward path. The narrator spoke vehemently against a comparison to "volontaire Icare ou lourdaud Phaëthon / Perdus pour attenter une sotise extrême" (ll. 11-12). He flies, in fact, in an opposite trajectory, falling so that he may climb toward the heavens, where, via the text, he will continue to live. However, the poet knows that it is ultimately the text which survives and not the poet himself. The poet is mortal. The picture of the old narrator depicts both the dying lover who has long ago lost Helene and the dying poet who will gain after his demise immortal existence and glory. Again the words of Sonnet II, I remind us of the poet's symbolic ascension: "La Lune se gaigna d'une blanche toison" (l. 7). The poet compares himself to a rising moon, his white head mirroring the translucent glow of moonlight. In the *Sonnets pour Helene* Ronsard often uses sunlight to symbolize Helene's brilliant presence. His own symbol, the moon, is Helene's opposite. Because he cannot unite with Helene, even their symbols connote opposite components of nature's cycles. Moonlight symbolizes a natural and temporary end in the cycle, as it marks the expiration of one day before the renewal of daylight. Moreover, the moon and the sun function within the cosmos in the same manner as the Dioscuri of legend, the one being visible while the other is not, yet both playing a vital role in the unit. The symbol of the moon also parallels the vision of the aging mortal whose death is not too distant. Stressing his mortality in this poem, the poet reminds us: "Je ne suis pas un Dieu" (l. 10); "Les hommes sont en terre & Iupiter aux cieux" (l. 14). His

His existence on earth, however, includes the action of building, constructing a monumental edifice which commemorates Helene and himself. The symbolic erection of the fountain, and the individual sets and decors of the *tableaux* represent the poet's achievement, the body of sonnets. The staircase framework of the tableau series invites the reader into the enclosure. Because the tableau series opens and closes with a staircase, we can easily read each of the tableau poems as a step on the flight of stairs, as the "degrez" which mark the dual-voiced narrator's ascent and descent as poet and lover on the stairs. When we enter the structure of the narrator's world, we may then understand the poet's accomplishments and appreciate his creations. Like an ancient temple, this "edifice" stands, a tribute to the divinity for which it was built, as well as a memorial to the human efforts which conceived it.

Notes

¹ For *vertu* Huguet gives as definition: “force, courage, vaillance, talent, qualité.” Ronsard’s use in this sonnet cycle often implies *courage/force*, as well as *talent*. Edmond Huguet, *Dictionnaire de la Langue Française du Seizième Siècle, Tome VII* (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1929) 452.

² Laumonier 203. His note explains that “Les vers 5–6 viennent de Pétrarque, sonnet ‘L’ardente nodo,’ premier tercet.”

³ The myth of Aurora and Tithonus is recounted in Homer, the *Iliad*, II, 1 and in the *Odyssey* V, 1 as well as in Virgil, *Georgics* I, 447. Aurora married Tithonus and asked Jupiter to give him eternal life. She neglected to ask that he not age, and thus Tithonus aged but could never die. Aurora pitied him and laid him in a room where he babbled incoherently. He was later transformed into a cicada.

⁴ Huguet defines *contrefaire*: “imiter, prendre pour modèle, imiter par l’art, faire semblable.” Huguet *Tome II* 487–488.

⁵ Couliano 49.

⁶ Guy de Tervarent, *Attributs et Symbols de l’Art Profane à la Renaissance* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1958) 282.

⁷ Tervarent 282.

⁸ Laurence Mall poses the question: “Ne serait-ce pas d’abord de l’amour. . . du nom?” See Mall 115.

⁹ Mall notes Ronsard’s purposeful confusion of Helene’s identity with Helen of Troy, which we observe throughout the sonnet cycle. I believe that there is also an equally purposeful confusion of the “je” because of the narrator’s two identities. This poem accents the poet’s narration and therefore his identity and his name.

¹⁰ Ruth Murphy associates this image of Helene spinning by the fire with a passage in *The Odyssey* (IV, 120–37) which describes Helen of Troy with her spindle. By highlighting the ties to Homer's creation, Murphy thus confirms further this idea of the *Sonnets pour Helene* as a kind of "epic" about creation. Ruth Murphy, "Devidant et filant': A New Reading of Ronsard's 'Quand vous serez bien vieille. . .,'" *French Studies Bulletin: A Quarterly Supplement* 25 (Winter, 1987–1988): 5–7.

¹¹ Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani, commenting on the self-referential quality found in many of the works by a variety of *Pléiade* writers submits: "L'un des traits caractéristiques de la poésie de la Pléiade est sans doute son activité autoréflexive. Non seulement en effet elle s'accompagne depuis *La Defense*, d'un discours sur la poésie qui se construit en marge des oeuvres, dans les arts poétiques, comme ceux de Ronsard et de Peletier, les manifestes, les préfaces, ou en bordure, dans les avis au lecteur ou les pièces liminaires, mais encore le poème lui-même, chez Pontus de Tyard, Du Bellay, Ronsard, Jodelle, est souvent le lieu où se déposent des fragments de poétique, où la poésie réfléchit (sur) son écriture . . . la poésie parle de la poésie. . . ." Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani, "Poésie et Spécularité: La Représentation de l'Écriture dans les *Amours* de Ronsard," *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France* 4 (juillet-août, 1986): 659–666.

¹² Because Murphy establishes a "pre-existent" life for Helene (as Helen of Troy in Homer's work), she is able to read the "Vieuez si m'en croyez. . ." (lines 13–14) as a summons to Helene to resume her past (immortal) life and become the poet's companion.

¹³ Malcolm Smith, ed., *Les Sonnets pour Helene* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1970) 156. "L'Escadron de la Gruë remonte à Homère (*Iliade* II, 459, seg. III, 2). Elle est fréquente chez Virgile (v. *L'Enéide*, X, 264; VII, 310)."

¹⁴ The Maeander River, according to legend, dried up when Phaëthon drove the chariot of the sun. In this sonnet, Helene as a light source has eyes that "ramenerent le iour." Her dance, as we have seen, is compared to the Maeander. This reference to the river alludes to the destructive burning of the world by an erratic and misguided course of the sun in Phaëthon's hands. Helene's movements in this sonnet, a descent and an ascent, exemplify a direct opposite of the sun's daily movement, further suggesting that Helene's sun source is erratic, unstable and undependable. The allusion to Phaëthon's direction reminds us of the

narrator's stated wish in the opening sonnet of Book Two not to emulate Phaëthon. These allusions substantiate the subtle negative tone which slowly overtakes the initial glow of this sonnet.

Furthermore, Richelet's commentary, as cited by Malcolm Smith, offered that the Maeander was the "fleuve de Phrygie si tortueux & limacé que son flot escrevisse & retourne vers sa source." See Smith 156. The notion of returning to the source can assume a negative connotation in the context of the poem, for there is no progress. Helene's dance does not bring her closer to anyone but herself. She thus retains her solitary status. The poet, however, returns again to the source, as the allusion to a source of water reminds us of the poet's ability to tame the waters of this sonnet sequence, culminating in the *fontaine* at the end. The line of the river can imply this positive concept as well as the previously-mentioned negative connotation.

15 Huguet defines *error* as "se tromper, cheminer, administrer," Huguet *Tome III* 574–575. For more information on the use of "error" in sixteenth century texts, see Mary B. McKinley, "Montaigne dans le Labyrinthe," *Europe: Revue Littéraire Mensuelle*, 68^e année, 729–730 (janvier-février, 1990): 65–71.

16 Mall 115: ". . . le nom est productif, il engendre l'oeuvre; c'est une matière, un thème en soi. De même lorsque le nom d'Hélène est fréquemment qualifié de "fatal," il faut comprendre qu'il accapare inévitablement et l'écriture et la lecture. La fatalité poétique du nom d'Hélène, c'est en terminologie stylistique moderne, sa capacité de motivation, ses possibilités de "contamination."

17 Grimal cites the locus for this story of the rivalry between Arachne and Minerva in Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VI, 1–145. Grimal 225–227.

18 Shearman 123.

19 Tervarent 138.

20 Mathieu-Castellani 662. She refers directly to a concept of two different narrative figures: "Voilà donc reconnue l'ambivalence de tout *canzoniere*: censé dire la peine, il l'écrit; la transformant en trace; et subordonnant la visée émotive à la visée poétique. Sous le compliment galant adressé par un *je* figure de l'amant, à sa Dame. . . se déchiffre le message adressé par un *je* figure du poète à son inspiratrice: vous m'êtes argument."

21 Smith 16. He comments on the name "Minerve": "Pour sa part, Hélène aurait été l'un des plus brillantes membres de cette société d'élite. Brantôme la nomme 'la docte de la court' et il ajoute, 'aussy l'appelloyt-on la Mynerve.'"

22 See Mall 117 for a discussion of Ronsard's reasons for addressing Helene as "Penelope."

23 Mathieu-Castellani 662–663. The reader, argues Mathieu-Castellani, is asked to undertake a double reading of the sonnets. "Le Voeu fixe donc un protocole de lecture double: le lecteur est appelé à déchiffrer, sous les arguments d'un discours séducteur, un autre discours qui s'adresse à lui, et qui requiert son jugement (esthétique)."

24 Mall supports this suspicion: "Les *Sonets* ne seraient-ils qu'une oeuvre de compétition, de rivalité, de défi, en particulier, à l'égard des jeunes poètes contemporains de Ronsard vieillissant?" See Mall 129.

25 Smith 8: "Entrepris dans un esprit de rivalité avec les poètes contemporains, le recueil l'emporte avec honneur sur les oeuvres de Jamyn, Baif, Belleau et surtout Desportes."

26 Smith 167. He cites Richelet's identification of this acquaintance: "Ceste Lucrece estoit Melle de Bacqueville, jeune, belle, sçavante, des plus parfaites de la Cour, & qui estoit des meilleures amies d'Hélène, comme j'ay sçeu du sieur Binet."

27 Ronsard's portrayal reminds us of the aging Montaigne's in the *Essais*. Robert Garapon states that Montaigne, like Ronsard here, "se sent menacé par la vieillesse et la maladie, mais il n'en tient que plus à se peindre dans toute sa particularité." Robert Garapon, "Ronsard par lui-même dans les *Sonnets pour Helene*," *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France* 4 (juillet-août, 1984): 643–649.

28 Rigolot, *Poétique et Onomastique* 222: "Qui perd haleine, perd Hélène."

Chapter Four: "Croyez ceste esriture"

The architectonic features of the tableau sonnets draw our attention to the man-made, the crafted, the "sets" which the poet recreates throughout the sonnet sequence. The composition of *Les Sonnets pour Helene* reminds us constantly of a dual or double focus that shapes the work—from the twin guides Castor and Pollux who open the sonnets, to the dual voices of lover and poet who struggle to direct the narrative, to the mythical Helen of Troy who finds a renewal in the figure of Hélène de Surgères. We have already examined the water poems which frame the sonnet sequence and the staircase which introduces and concludes the tableau series. In both of these structures, we can perceive an urge to order, an arranged use of parallel features which complement each other. In light of these dual components, it should come as no surprise that the "artificial" or architectonic aspects of the tableau sonnets find their complement in a focus on nature and on the natural order of the universe which exerts a profound influence on the overall composition of the *Sonnets pour Helene*.

The natural order presents both an ally and a formidable opponent for the narrator's two combined personas of lover and poet. Ronsard's poet exalts nature in the *Sonnets pour Helene*. His concept of nature includes a deep respect for the rich variety of images and movements offered by nature in a repeating and eternal pattern. The poet often uses images and details of nature as a backdrop to his sonnets, suggesting that poetry, too, moves in a rhythmic and organized manner toward the accomplishment of the poetic mission. The poet's eschatological aim, the final erection of the fountain, seals the poetic triumph and brings the poetic mission to a close. With each new reading of the text, the poetic mission repeats itself, like nature's continuous cycling of the seasons. Winter may be considered the "end" of the cycle, but spring renews the pattern in an annual rebirth. The *Sonnets pour Helene* begins and ends in the month of May. Readers are thus able to appreciate another example of cyclical completion and reconstruction at work in the text.¹ This cyclical/repeating pattern bestows on the poems nature's eternal endurance. The references in the opening and closing poems to the month of May, however, treat the month and present the narrator's corresponding emotional attitudes in two very different fashions. In this manner, the two Mays achieve the effect of suggesting the stability of continuity and repetition, all the while indicating a significant change in the pattern. The final May poems produce a closure which the opening May sonnet ignores. The changes in the May poems ultimately indicate that the cycle changes through our reading and understanding of the events which shape and influence the poet's and the lover's views.

While the poet extols and respects nature, the lover becomes increasingly frustrated by his perceptions of nature which are led astray by his blind devotion to Helene. As we shall see, the ending of the work will reflect the poet's influence over the lover, with regard to nature. The poet's belief in the orderly pattern of nature finally leads the lover to an uneasy acceptance of nature's order. For the lover, however, following nature's order means ultimately rejecting his own construction of a universe where Helene functions as the center. When he comes to follow nature at the close of the work, he necessarily accepts the loss of Helene from his world and the end of their love story. The poet's ability to direct the lover to an acceptance of the universal order is rooted in part in a Renaissance notion of order which was reflected in the movements of dance. In Balthazar de Beaujoyeux's *Ballet Cosmique* (1581), the "geometric patterns traced on the floor by the *Ballet's* dancers, repeating (as was then thought) similar patterns shaped by the planets in the heavens, had the power to produce order out of disorder and to imprint beneficent influences in the minds of those who danced and those who watched."² Ronsard's poet in the *Helene* sonnets creates an overall unifying pattern through his artful construction of the tableau series, and through his ability to transform the raging waters of the lover's near shipwreck into a memorial, the idyllic fountain. We have even noted one specific sonnet, II, LXIX, where Helene danced a "beau ballet d'amour" and was transformed by the silently-watching poet to a divine status.³ Helene's dance, too, indicated then the poet's concern for order as well as his reliance on nature: the dance was compared to the "fleuve de Meandre" and to the "Escadron de la Gruë."⁴

The poet's adherence to and rapport with nature is best manifested in the construction of the fountain, a symbol which reaches back to early troubadour traditions. In his article, "The Old Provençal Lyric," Stephen G. Nichols examines medieval etymological links formed between "music and nature, especially music and water. The root, *mus-* was thought to join the Greek concept of the muses—viewed as nymphs or aquatic deities—with the Hebrew prophet Moses, so-called because he was found by the water."⁵ The link with the muses and with Moses helps to clarify the inclusion of a biblical reference in Sonnet II, LXI ("Laisse de Pharaon la terre Egyptienne"), which we will analyze later as part of the discussion on the poet's concept and perceptions of nature. Nichols's article is furthermore relevant to this study when we understand that music "represented the sound of nature, since medieval theory held that humans first learned to make music by imitating the sound of water they had heard in streams and fountains."⁶ Finally, Nichols points out a rapport between love and nature:

The troubadours established a close link between love, singing and nature. Often cansos begin with an evocation of a natural setting, and generally in spring . . . Not infrequently a fountain, the sign of the muses as well as of music and lyric figures in such natural settings, signifying the concord between the natural music of birds and water and the artificial music of the poetic text and music.⁷

The fountain appears at the end of the "Stances series", the group of poems composed of Sonnets II, LXXII, the "Stances de la Fontaine d'Helene," and II, LXXIII. The erection of the fountain presents a most persuasive image which blends nature and artifice and which is rooted within the love tradition. The poet's voice speaks forcefully in the "Stances series," dramatically and successfully closing the poetic mission. The text of the *Sonnets pour Helene*, however, does not end with Sonnet II, LXXIII which marks the end of the "Stances series." The five remaining poems in the text offer a sharp contrast in tone and theme and constitute a "second ending" for the work. This second ending is composed of Sonnets II, LXXIV, the "Elegie," Sonnets II, LXXV, LXXVI and LXXVII. We can refer to these five poems as the "Elegie series." This series allows the lover's voice his chance to dominate, his turn at closing the sonnet sequence. This double ending of the *Sonnets pour Helene* is shaped in part by the two different perspectives toward nature's order held by the poet and the lover throughout the work. The poet's fountain and the direction that the poet's voice brings to the cycle as a whole finally influence the lover's last words as he expresses in the "Elegie series." Before we examine the final poems of the *Sonnets pour Helene*, we should examine the narrator's early focus on nature with regard to the lover's and the poet's understanding of the power and order of the natural realm.

The narrator identifies Helene with a light source, and specifically with the sun early in the first book of sonnets. Time and again Helene's eyes are described in terms of the light which they emit: "l'amoureuse etincelle / Qui sort de tes beaux yeux" (I, II), ". . . Des yeux; non pas des yeux, mais l'astre d'Helene" (I, III); "Un oeil qui fait les Dieux & les hommes contens" (I, IV); ". . . ton visage m'affole / Me perçant de ses raiz" (I, XVII); "Qu'est-ce parler d'amour sans point faire l'amour / Sinon voir le Soleil sans aimer sa lumiere?" (I, XVIII); "Vos yeux, mes deux Soleils. . ." (I, XXXV); or as "Le mirouër de vertu, le Soleil de mes yeux. . ." (I, XXIX); "D'autre torche mon coeur ne pouuoit s'allumer / Sinon de tes beaux yeux. . ." (I, XXXVIII). Such references abound in the first book of the sonnet cycle, but there is an overall reduction of the sun imagery in the second book, and when sun images are associated with Helene in the latter book,

the focus of the description generally changes. In the first book, the images predominantly describe a source of light and/or warmth which directly affects the narrator. In the second book, when Helene is identified with the sun, the narrator emphasizes qualities other than light/warmth. We have already seen one such example in the tableau presented in II, LVIII where, in equating Helene with the sun, the narrator accentuates Helene's solitary, aloof and distant manner: "Ainsi seul en son ciel le Soleil se deualle, / Sans autre compaignon en son char emporté" (II, LVIII, ll. 5-6). Moreover, Book Two presents more frequent use of winter and night images which contribute to the overall diminishing of the sun imagery and to the lessening of the qualities of warmth and light symbolically associated with Helene. The various movements associated with nature's seasons and days which support the narrator's changing perspectives in the *Sonnets pour Helene* point toward a gradual focus away from the full light of day. The shift to the less intense but equally significant light of night achieves two results. The balance of the eye is maintained by the examination of both spring and winter images, and by both day and night imagery. Each portion of the seasonal and diurnal cycles contributes a part, playing a role in the whole organizing concept of nature which structures the sonnet sequence. Furthermore, the movement away from the sun and towards less light causes a reexamination of the sight process where sight is linked with light and light is linked with knowledge. The changing perspective of the tableau sonnets from pure physical representation to more interpretive representation paves the way for an adjustment on the reader's part to the manner in which the sight process is foregrounded during the course of the sonnet cycle. As the narrator's sight changes, depending less on sunlight and more on a somber setting of less intense light, his corresponding power of knowledge shifts from what he can *perceive* alone to what he is capable of *conceiving* through the creative process of imagination. Less light, then, does not mean less knowledge: it signifies a different kind of knowing which is instrumental in outlining the immense power of the narrator's creative process. The diminishing of one element corresponds to an accumulation of another, in keeping with the general dual movements at work in the *Sonnets pour Helene*. The poet appears more capable than the lover of employing the whole gamut of nature's images—that is, elements other than the sun, to support his ideas, with flowers, moonlight and trees foremost among them. In general, all of his images add to the overall production and generative power of his words. When the lover uses symbols other than the sun or when he uses an absent sun, his words often include negative growth images, as though the lack of Helene as sun in his life produces a negative tropism. The stunt in growth occurs because he cannot "grow" toward the absent

Helene/sun. Furthermore, his words frequently speak of a lack of vision. The lover's inability to perceive or create "healthy" visions or substitute visions when he can no longer see without Helene's light contributes to the failure of the love story.⁸ The lover's positing of Helene as the sun or center of his universe, of course, decides the fate of his existence. The lover's vision will be affected in this darkened universe, along with his sense of survival in an unfamiliar environment.

There is, finally, a textual correspondent to the change in the power of the sunlight which the narrator describes in the sonnet cycle. In the second tableau sonnet where the sun functioned as a personified character vying for Helene's attention, the narrator experienced a direct brush with the sun. We recall from that sonnet that the narrator considered himself triumphant in having vanquished "ce Dieu qui se tournoit arriere" (I, XI, l. 6). Later, in the opening sonnet of Book Two, the narrator cautioned the readers that he did not wish to follow ". . . volontaire Icare ou lourdaud Phaëthon, / Perdus pour attenter une sotise extrême" (II, I, ll. 10-11). The initial upward flight of both Icarus and Phaëthon, as previously noted, resulted in a disastrous plunge downward, to death. Their encounters with the sun prove fatal. The narrator's acquaintance with the sun in the *Sonnets pour Helene* recounts a similar fatal liaison for the lover. Depending on Helene to function as his sun, to provide his warmth and light, the lover is ultimately disappointed when his Helene/sun disappears: "Menteuse contre Amour, qui vengeur te poursuit, / Tu es leué ton camp pour t'enfuyr de nuit" (II, LXX, ll. 9-10). Thus, the early association of Helene with the sun in the first book of sonnets points toward the later distance described in the second book. This distance is consistent with the path of flight like that of Icarus and Phaëthon, toward the sun and then away from it, downward toward darkness. This darkness, however, does not necessarily always imply total destruction and death. In the *Sonnets pour Helene*, there are two, separate images of darkness presented at the end of the second book of sonnets in the "Elegie series." One concerns the darkness of the night sky and the second deals with the burial of Charles IX. These two different treatments of a loss of light correspond with the various dual perspectives which structure the entire work and which face resolution in the final sonnets.

Much of the movement away from the sun and toward the night is foreshadowed in Sonnet I, XXXV:

Tousiours pour mon suiet il faut que ie vous aye:
 Le meurs sans regarder vos deus Astres iumeaux,

Vos yeus, mes deux Soleils, qui m'esclairent si beaux,
 Qu'à trouuer autre iour autre part ie n'essaye
 Le chant du Rossignol m'est le chant d'une Orfraye,
 Roses me sont Chardons, torrens me sont ruisseaux,
 La Vigne mariee à l'entour des Ormeaux,
 Et le Printemps au coeur me rengrege la playe.
 Mon plaisir en ce mois c'est de voir les Coloms
 S'emboucher bec à bec de baisers doux & longs,
 Dés l'aube iusqu'au soir que le Soleil se plonge.
 O bienheureux Pigeons, vray germe Cyprien,
 Vous avez par nature & par effect le bien
 Que ie n'ose esperer tant seulement en songe! (I, XXXV) ⁹

It is impossible to read this sonnet without recalling the opening sonnet of the work, Sonnet I, I, which we have already examined on several occasions. A body of vocabulary common to both sonnets convinces us that the resemblance is significant and a key constituent to major changes which occur during the course of the sonnet cycle. Sonnet I, I reads "vos deux freres iumeaux" (l. 2) while this one mentions "vos deus Astres iumeaux" (l. 2). The earlier sonnet praises "la vigne enlasee à l'entour des ormeaux" (l. 3), while the later one describes "la vigne mariee à l'entour des ormeaux" (l. 3). Line six of both sonnets includes a river: ". . . au giron des ruisseaux" in the first, and ". . . torrens me sont ruisseaux" in the second. The nightingale is featured in both: "Par tous les rossignols" (l. 7 of the former), and "Le chant du rossignol. . ." (l. 5 of the latter). Both sonnets mention pleasure: "Vous seul me plaisez" (I, I, l. 9), and "Mon plaisir. . . c'est de voir les colons" (I, XXXV, l. 9). The nature images used in both poems present a striking contrast in the manner in which the narrator is affected by the season. In the opening sonnet, the images, as we have earlier concluded, emphasize birth, growth, renewal, with the narrator's tone one of confidence, as he contributes to this natural scheme of creation. In the later sonnet, the narrator perceives nature's pleasures as negative symbols: "Le chant du rossignol m'est le chant d'une Orfraye" (l. 5); "Roses me sont chardons, torrens me sont ruisseaux" (l. 6). He concludes that the intertwining vine among the elms and springtime in general "rengrege la playe" in his heart (ll. 7-8). The use of a common vocabulary in these two sonnets underscores the change in perception that occurs in the *Sonnets pour Helene*, a change in the narrator's perception as well as our own that will occur gradually as we examine the effects and the influences that the natural world references play in this entire work.

The sun, although not specifically mentioned in the earlier sonnet, is certainly implied in the verdant and glistening depiction of the spring that emerges in that poem. In Sonnet I, XXV, the narrator's vision follows the movements of the sun. After the opening line, it is the lover's voice which registers more strongly here, especially at the end. The early mention of Helene's eyes as the lover's "deux Soleils" prefigures the corresponding rapport between the sun's eventual setting. The sun's disappearance will thus signify Helene's disappearance. Line three's mention of "les deux Soleils" culminates in line eleven's "le Soleil se plonge." The effect of seeing the word first in line three and then again in line eleven tends to imitate the setting of the sun, since the word itself appears to fall from the beginning to the end of the sonnet. This setting of the sun is reinforced by the words "Dés l'aube iusqu'au soir" which precede the mention of the sinking sun in line eleven. The sonnet ends in the realm of the dream, a field removed from the reality of the harsh spring day depicted earlier in the poem. The introduction of the dream leads us into nightfall, and with the onset of night, the setting sun realizes its journey. The poem occurs within the space of a day, defined by the sun's natural cycle. This cycle represents symbolically the same transformation that the lover's expectations will assume during the evolution of the work. The natural habit of the pigeons, their fidelity one to the other, is not mirrored by the lover and Helene. This enduring love that the birds possess "par nature" is but a vague hope, a shadowy and insubstantial dream that the lover wishes to achieve. His goal, however, will not become reality for he demonstrates a headstrong reluctance to seek a light source other than Helene. He does not heed the model that nature's sun provides. The lover seeks a permanent sunlight from Helene which will never set and which will never lead to the counter-effects of night.

The narrator deliberately poses limits in this sonnet, demonstrating his desire to control. In line one, he states that his subject is Helene and that he believes this to be for "tousiours." The poet's voice can express those words confidently, while the lover will be mocked by his adamant refusal to forsake Helene. Without the light of Helene's eyes, the lover perceives himself to be dying, as he states in line two, yet with the light of her eyes as his only light, he approaches the same fate. In lines three and four he states that he equates Helene's eyes with two suns, and that because they "esclairent si beaux" he does not look to find "autre iour autre part." Limiting his light to Helene's eyes necessarily confines his source and amount of light. We notice that the sonnet passes from day to night; we know, then, that Helene's "two suns" also diminish, leading the way to darkness for the lover. The deliberate action on the lover's part of looking to

Helene for his sun leads to his deception and anguish as daylight turns to night. When night falls, the narrator can only look to himself, to his dreams for any possible union with Helene. The sonnet ends with the word "dream" as if even the dream is a dream, incapable of coming to pass. Because the sonnet stops before the representation of the dream, and because the sonnet which follows supplies no dream vision, we can infer that the lover cannot dream. It is the silence, the non-representation of the dream, that marks its failure.

The lover's initial positing of Helene as the center of his universe is the key that sets his unnatural cycle in motion. His desire to find in her the qualities of warmth, growth, and light have not enabled the love story to grow and develop. Rather, the love story has become less and less prominent as the poetic adventure has grown. The lover's world will disintegrate until he learns to follow nature's order instead of his own control. It will be the poet who leads him to follow nature in the closing poems of the work. Before that point, the lover's attempts to order his world will achieve mixed results. The poem does feature nature's cycle as a conflicting/contrasting background to the lover's invented picture of nature. The movement of the sun from morning to night, and the doves' natural fidelity function within the patterns that nature provides. The problem for the lover—like that of Icarus and Phaëthon—lies in trying to control nature. He attempts to turn nature's cycles to his advantage, to love Helene in a mimetic and eternal similitude of nature's way. A reciprocal love relationship with Helene does not exist in these pages. The one-sided love story, like the Helene-centered universe, will simply stop (r)evolving and lead to eventual destruction.

We have examined a sonnet where the lover's vision of darkness and a downward motion inform his negative emotions, leading to the ultimate failure of his goal. We turn now to Sonnet II, XLI which showcases the poet's powerful reconstructive vision, his ability to transform a darkened state to one of light. The placement of this sonnet, immediately followed by Sonnet II, LXII where the lover relates his dreams of "longues nuicts d'hyuer," serves to showcase the forthcoming pathetic attempt by the lover to convince himself that his dream world vision is successful. The poet's example precedes the lover's, a pattern which will be repeated at the end of the work where the "Stances series" will be followed by the "Elegie series." The construction of the poet's exemplary sonnet paving the way for the lover and providing him the opportunity to assimilate a change of perspective into his thoughts will allow for the ultimate resolution that closes the *Sonnets pour Helene*. The poet presents a transformed vision as follows:

Laisse de Pharoan la terre Egyptienne,
Terre de seruitude, & vien sur le Iourdain:
Laisse moy ceste Court & tout ce fard mondain,
Ta Circe, ta Sirene, & ta magicienne
Demeure en ta maison pour viure toute tienne,
Contente toy de peu: l'âge s'enfuit soudain
Pour trouuer ton repos, n'atten point à demain:
N'atten point que l'hyuer sur les cheueux te vienne.
Tu ne vois à ta Cour que feintes & soupçons:
Tu vois tourner une heure en cent mille façons:
Tu vois la vertu fausse, & vraye la malice
Laisse ces honneurs pleins d'un soing ambitieux,
Tu ne verras aux champs que Nymphes & que Dieux,
Je seray ton Orphee, & toy mon Eurydice. (II, XLI)

The poet's beautiful sonnet resonates with its rich images from biblical and classical sources, as well as the repetitive phrases, its "refrains." The visionary poet sings of the future, urging a separation from a servile present. Three times the word "Laisse" appears as an assured proclamation by one who sees a better world than the one that awaits those held captive by manipulative, fraudulent surroundings. The image of the court as a "Circe" had appeared in Ronsard's earlier composition, the 1560 "Elegie à Loïs des Masures Tournisien" along with a corpus of similar phrasings ("Contente toy du tien," "Quand aux champs où ie suis"). In that 1560 elegy, Ronsard had presented the discourse of a dead Du Bellay who appears to him in a dream. In that dream, Du Bellay urges Ronsard the narrator to pursue a simple life, a life devoted to Christ and to the leaders of the country, as well as to bid farewell to "toute nostre bande" (l. 133). The words "Entre Homere & Virgile" figure among the words recounted, and although they refer to Du Bellay in that poem, we understand the significance of these words as they express Ronsard's struggle to rival the epic poems of the ancient past and to carve out his place among them and the poets of his day.

In Sonnet II, XLI, echoes of several epics appear, concurrent with a firm command which issues from the poet's voice. The musicality of the poem itself as shown in the repeated phrases confirms the poet's closing claim: "Je seray ton Orphee." The comparison of the narrator with Orpheus is but one of several self-identifications which appear in this sonnet. The references to "Circe" and to the "Sirene" in line four point toward a corresponding conception of the narrator as Ulysses (or Odysseus), a figure which reminds us of the 1560 Elegie's mention

of Homer and Virgil. Still another alliance between the narrator and a known figure occurs in the opening lines. Although the name "Moses" does not appear, the reference to "Pharaon" and to the "terre Egyptienne" and the call to come "sur le Jourdain" suggest his presence among the cast of characters with which the narrator identifies. Biblical allusions are rare in the *Sonnets pour Helene*, and even this initial suggestion of a Biblical character fades into the background of the mythical company which fills the remaining lines. Moses's leadership was responsible for the Israelites' crossing of the Red Sea where the waters parted, allowing their flight from Egypt. Viewed in faith by the Israelites, the parting of the waters demonstrated God's divine presence, his control and his power. The poet's taming of the water in the *Sonnets pour Helene* into a fountain and tribute to Helene illustrates much the same control. The allusion to Moses reminds us of the poet's ultimate guidance in the sonnet cycle. Although Moses died before reaching the promised land known then as Jordan, his leadership initiated the long journey, an epic recounted in the early books of the Bible, toward that destination. The poet's repeated use of the word "Laisse" in this sonnet shows an authoritative presence, not unlike that of the Lord's voice in the Biblical account where He urges Moses to proclaim to Pharaoh, "Let the people go. . ." (Exodus 6:11). This authority strongly announces the poet's invocation to the lover for it invites him to follow his direction. The lover's response follows in the dreams of the "longues nuits d'hyuer," but he will only boast feebly of success while his visions will reflect darkness, unfulfilled hope and despair.

With Stephen Nichols's research of medieval etymologies in mind, we return to his account of the linking of music, water and Moses. The three characters with whom the narrator identifies in this sonnet correspond to such a grouping. The evocation of Moses is clear. The allusion to Ulysses/Odysseus (through the reference to "Circe" and "Sirene") recalls a voyage on water, as well as a haunting song, and Orpheus is linked with music as well as with the seafarer Ulysses. The poet's role in the *Sonnets pour Helene* undertakes the task of elevating poetry by constantly reminding us of poetry's creative, generative power which is linked with and likened to nature's own forces. The poet guides the poetic mission as though it were an epic journey to a promised, privileged destination. The allusions to Orpheus and to Moses underscore the incomplete nature of the quest, for in their own journeys, those two figures were unable to successfully complete their missions. The reference to Moses, however, is especially powerful, for we recognize that the poet plays the role of a great leader who takes poetry to a higher realm, a trip in which, potentially, he will be denied the possibility of witnessing the end result.

The narrator's visionary powers in this sonnet are demonstrated not only in his three-fold self-identification. In the tercets the narrator literally describes what the other does and does not see: "Tu ne vois à ta Cour. . ." (l. 9); "Tu vois tourner une heure. . ." (l. 10); "Tu vois la vertu fausse. . ." (l. 11); "Tu ne verras aux champs que Nymphes & que Dieux" (l. 13). Certainly one possible reason for the narrator's direction of Helene's sight has its roots in Sonnet II, XVIII, the famous "Quand vous serez bien vieille." In that scenario, the narrator prescribed Helene's *words*, directing her voice. Here, he dictates her *perceptions*. When read together, these two sonnets solidify the link between vision and voice in the *Helene* sonnets. Still another explanation for the prescription of the other's views may be revealed in the closing lines where the referral of Helene as "Eurydice" to his "Orphee" may account for the narrator's action of seeing for Helene. If she represents his Eurydice, then her vision may well be hampered by the darkness of her underground position. However, the poet's version of the Orpheus legend presumably allows the two characters to glimpse the fields above ground together, for the focal point of his account is the final vision of the fields full of nymphs and gods. He circumvents the tragic and dark ending of the Orpheus story by placing his Eurydice above ground. Both Orpheus and Eurydice are drawn out of bondage, like the Israelites, into a land of freedom.

In accordance with his concept of the legend, the poet's Orpheus here never looks backward, but always forward. This progressive vision lends him the authority he needs to address these words to the lover (for this "tu" can refer to the lover as well as to Helene), to follow his example, to look toward the freedom that he would find away from Helene, his *Circe*, his *Sirene*, his *magicienne*, who so transforms and distorts the lover's world. Poetry's power provides the poet his freedom, allows him to change the rules, to reconstruct the story, to take his place "entre Homere & Virgile, ainsi qu'un demy dieu. . ." The movement of the poet's vision is outward and upward in this sonnet as the poet's version of the legend looks out of the darkness toward light.

The poet's model combines elements of nature—the river, the fields—and of the seasons—with references to aging and to winter. It also provides his portrayal of a stylized courtly life fraught with fraud. The poet is able to base his inner visions of the fields of "Nymphes & . . . Dieux" at once on a reliance on nature's bountiful beauty as well as on a transcendent and transformed version of an established legend (of an Orpheus and Eurydice who live happily ever after). When the lover responds by offering his dream in the following sonnet, we will find his dream a negative one. His lame conclusion that "s'abuser en amour n'est pas mauvaie chose" will confirm that the love story is but an insubstantial excuse

for the real mission of the *Sonnets pour Helene*. The abusive love generates a narrative, but it is a narrative filled with "feintes & soupçons." The poetic mission continually offsets its example of a unified, coherent, artful and elegant creation, with the poet offering his advice and direction to a lover who can never fully comply. The poet will try again in the "Stances series" to influence the lover in establishing a crowning and glorious model of poetry's sublime, immortal and eternal status. His final triumph will necessarily point to the lover's demise.

The lover's attempts to find a satisfying relationship with Helene continue to frustrate him. In Sonnet II, XLII, he returns again to the realm of the dream, employing again an aspect of nature's cycle as the setting against which he speaks:

Ces longues nuicts d'hyuer où la Lune ocieuse
 Tourne si lentement son char tout à l'entour,
 Où le Coq si tardif nous annonce le iour,
 Où la nuict semble un an à l'ame soucieuse;
 Je fusse mort d'ennuy sans ta forme douteuse,
 Qui vient par une feinte alleguer mon amour,
 Et faisant toute nue entre mes bras seiour,
 Me pipe doucement d'une ioye menteuse.
 Vraye tu es farouche, & fiere en cruauté:
 De toy fausse on iouyst en toute priuauté.
 Pres ton mort ie m'endors, pres de luy ie repose:
 Rien ne m'est refusé. Le bon sommeil ainsi
 Abuse par le faux mon amoureux souci.
 S'abuser en amour n'est pas mauuaise chose. (II, XLII)

Although the lover's vision involves a physical encounter with Helene, his dream version does not compare to the pigeons' display which he had earlier witnessed in Book One. In that earlier sonnet (I, XXXV), the lover recounted his great delight at seeing the pigeons: "Mon plaisir en ce mois c'est de voir les coloms / S'emboucher bec à bec de baisers doux & longs / Dés l'aube iusqu'au soir que le Soleil se plonge" (ll. 9-11). This pleasure, moreover, took place within a spring month. The common vocabulary used in describing the setting of that sonnet and the opening sonnet (where the month of May had been explicitly mentioned) led us to place those two sonnets within the same general seasonal time. The lover also described in I, XXXV the setting as a springtime one when he declared in line eight, "Et le Printemps au coeur me rengrege la playe." The Book One

sonnet recounted a scene which the lover professed to observe, and which occurred during the spring (May), and even more specifically, "Dés l'aube iusqu'au soir."

In Sonnet II, XLII, "Ces longues nuicts d'hyuer. . ." where the lover enters the realm of the dream, relating this time the essence of his dream, the verb "to see" does not appear. The images imply a darkened landscape where an absence of light results in a corresponding "negative" or nebulous vocabulary. The personified moon is labeled "ocieuse," a slowly-moving entity that provokes, much to the narrator's frustration, a delayed response in the cock's crowing. Night seems to endure a year rather than several hours. Now we can read the poet's admonition in the previous sonnet as pointedly addressing the lover, for the poet in that preceeding sonnet had mentioned in lines eight through ten the issues of winter, of the deception of sight, of the turning of the hours: "N'atten point que l'hyuer sur les cheveux te vienne. / Tu ne vois à ta Cour que feintes & soupçons: / Tu vois tourner une heure en cent mille façons." In line ten, he had pointed out the inversion of the lover's values, an inference which corresponds now to the lover's vision of Helene as "Vraye tu es farouche, & fiere en cruauté: / De toy fausse on iouyst en toute priuauté."

In this sonnet, the lover's one-sided perception of nature continues to color his description. Because he cannot endure absence of sunlight, he finds no beauty, no comfort and no vision in the night itself. Just as the negative images in Sonnet I, XXXV ("Le chant du Rossignol m'est le chant d'une Orfraye," "Roses me sont Chardons," and so on) provided a contrast to the opening nature images of the first sonnet, these images, too, reflect a counter-image of nature. In both sonnets I, XXXV and II, XLII, the negative view of nature described in the quatrains leads to the dream description of the tercets. The dream world is employed as a substitute for the world which the lover perceives around him. Nature, then, or the "real" surrounding, represents a negative or unappealing environment for the lover. When the lover's landscape is darkened by winter's solstice, spring does not promise to reawaken Helene's emotions. Unfortunately for him, the dream provides no better atmosphere. The vocabulary of Sonnet II, XLII is strikingly negative: "Je fusse mort d'ennuy sans ta forme douteuse" (l. 5); "Qui vient par une feinte. . ." (l. 6); "Me. . . pipe d'une ioye menteuse" (l. 8); "De toy fausse" (l. 10); "ton mort" (l. 11); "Abuse par le faux" (l. 13); "S'abuser" (l. 14). Even the phrasing of the closing line accentuates a negative manner of speech, for in describing what he proclaims a positive state, the lover can only call it "pas mauaise." The lover's admission that love is self-abusive appears a rather pathetic statement, far from a successful transcendence of his frustrated position.

The conclusion also demonstrates dramatically that the lover is in complete understanding and accordance with the dream world into which he willingly submerges himself. The lover, then, is caught between the unpromising environment that he perceives nature as offering and the ultimately false and destructive vision which his dreams yield. Despite the final words, the lover is unconvincing in his efforts to portray the dream world as a positive one.

The two types of vision, of the natural world and the realm of the dream, emphasize again to what extent the lover's quest is doomed in the *Sonnets pour Helene*. His vision, "imagined" or "recalled," repeatedly offers unfulfillment or bitter disappointment. We recall as an example the unfinished dream of Sonnet I, LX where the lover suspended flowers over Helene's door, and the unrepresented dream of I, XXXV, where the doves provided a model which the lover could not replicate. The poet, on the contrary, succeeds. His poetic adventure succeeds in part because of his ability to construct positive visions through his poetry. The final monumental fountain to Helene in the "Stances series" is the dominant representative of such positive visions. Even his most night-oriented vision, the evening account of the "beau ballet d'amour" (II, XLIX) contains the word *divine* twice within its description. His focus moreover in that sonnet was upwards, from the "Escadron de la Gruë euidant la froidure" to Helene's seeming flight "sur le haut de la terre." The lover's perceptions more often move downward, as we have seen in the early "shipwreck sonnet" (I, VI), in the account of the pigeons in I, XXXV where the sun, according to the narration, "se plonge," and again in II, XLII where the focus moved from the moon to the sublunary domain where the lover's arms yearn to embrace Helene.

Certainly the lover knows that he cannot exist on the empty substance of his dreams and hopes. In the poems which precede the "Stances series" the lover's despair and loss of hope are more and more evident, leaving the way clear for the poet's triumph in the "Stances series." One pointed example which prefigures the poet's liquidation of the love story occurs in Sonnet II, LXII:

Ma Dame ie me meurs abandonné d'espoir:
 La playe est iusqu'à l'oz: ie ne suis celuy mesme
 Que i'estois l'autre iour, tant la douleur extrême
 Forçant la patience, a dessus moy pouuoir.
 Ie ne puis ny toucher gouster n'ouïr ny voir:
 I'ay perdu tous mes Sens, ie suis une ombre blesme:
 Mon corps n'est qu'un tombeau. Malheureux est qui aime,

Malheureux qui se laisse à l'Amour decevoir!
 Devenez un Achille aux playes qu'avez faites,
 Vn Telefe ie suis, lequel s'en va perir:
 Monstrez moy par pitié vos puissances parfaites,
 Et d'un remede prompt daignez moy secourir.
 Si vostre seruitude cruelle vous desfaites,
 Vous n'aurez le Laurier pour l'auoir fait mourir. (II, LXII)

The lack of Helene's love corresponds to the loss of the sun. They produce an "ombre blesme" who can no longer touch, taste, hear nor see—"un tombeau" (II. 5-7). The opening lines are particularly forceful, for they recall Helene's glance in the first tableau (I, IX), where light from her eye entered the narrator's body, "dans le coeur, dans le sang." Now he feels its effects "iusqu' à l'oz," causing his statement, ". . . ie ne suis celuy mesme / Que i'estois l'autre iour. . ." (II. 2-3). Even the phrase "l'autre iour" recalls that first penetrating glance when the narrator stood, as he recounted in the first tableau, "L'autre iour que i'estois sur le haut d'un degré. . ." (I, IX, l. 1). That first tableau described the narrator's stirrings to life which Helene's glance and touch initiated. Here the narrator speaks of his death, for the terrible power of Helene's sun-like eye has burned and dried his vital forces, wounding him to the bone and arresting his growth. The concept of the sun as center of the universe has gone astray, for it has at first burned brightly and then disappeared as the lover sought to seize that eternal force. Helene as the lover's life-giving force has led to the end of his life. In the final line, the narrator compares himself to a plant deprived of light: "Vous n'aurez le Laurier pour l'auoir fait mourir." The laurel represents the poet's creation, and the threat here is that this creation will not be successful if the lover must ultimately die. The lover has been a faithful servant to Helene, if a blinded and misguided one, and to the poet who has used the love story for the advancement of his narrative. At the end of the *Sonnets pour Helene* the lover's vulnerability reaches us more and more, until the poet's response in the "Stances series" is to end this pain decisively by ending the life not of the lover, but of personified Love, of the love story.

Because we have come to distinguish two voices and two narratives in the *Sonnets pour Helene*, we will delineate two endings to the cycle. In chapter one of this study, as we examined the poet's framework, the water poems, we focused much of our thought on the poet's ending, the "Stances series." That series concludes with Sonnet II, LXXIII, the remaining lines of which bear repeating

again, for they demonstrate the poet's last effort at guiding the lover to an acceptance of the end of love:

Amour du rouge sang des Geans tout souillé,
 Essuyant en ceste eau son beau corps despouillé
 Y laissa pour iamais ses feux & sa teinture (ll. 12-14) .

The allusion to the struggle between the giants and the gods lends a violent air to Love itself. In attempting to cleanse his "beau corps" in the water of the fountain, Love sheds his body, leaving "pour iamais ses feux & sa teinture." This description amounts to a demise of love, a final encounter in the water where the fountain envelops and inundates love. The poet and poetry emerge supreme, but traces of love remain behind, incorporated forever in the notion of poetry.¹⁰ Like Hylas, Love retains immortality through this spring which renders all who bathe in it or drink from it amorous. Love exists within poetry as part of the desire to ascend to a higher realm and as part of the discourse to touch and change the listener. This immersion of love within the fountain's waters merges the concepts of love and poetry, the two voices of lover and poet, with the sphere of nature. The end of the "Stances series" represents the poet's conclusion to the entire *Sonnets pour Helene*, but we have yet to read the lover's conclusion. The poet's precedes the lover's, as he seeks to offer again his successful model in hopes that the lover's narrative will follow his example.

After this sonnet, the lover's voice speaks up harshly in the "Elegie series," beginning with Sonnet II, LXXIII. In this series, the lover appropriates and employs some of the poet's philosophy so that his turn now at resolving the *Sonnets pour Helene* reflects a change in attitude, influenced by the poet's model. The change is not dramatic, but gradual. The lover's acceptance is of a higher knowledge which directs him; his final acceptance is of its power, even when he can find little personal fulfillment. The "Elegie series" makes evident the lover's progression toward that point which serves as the closure to the entire work.

Sonnet II, LXXIII returns the lover's thoughts once again to the dream world which he constructs during the course of the cycle:

Adieu cruelle adieu ie te suis ennuyeux:
 C'est trop chanté d'Amour sans nulle recompense.
 Te serue qui voudra, ie m'en vais, & ie pense
 Qu'un autre seruiteur ne te servira mieux.
 Amour en quinze iours m'a fait ingenieux,

Me iettant au cerueau de ces vers la semence:
 La Raison maintenant me r'appelle, & me tanse:
 Ie ne veux si long temps deuenir furieux.
 Il ne faut plus nourrir ceste Enfant qui me ronge,
 Qui les credules prend comme un poisson à l'hain,
 Une plaisante farce, une belle mensonge,
 Vn plaisir pour cent maux qui s'envole soudain:
 Mais il se faut resoudre, & tenir pour certain
 Que l'homme est malheureux qui se repaist d'un songe.
 (II, LXXIII)

The images of nourishment provide a point of departure for an understanding of this sonnet. In line six, the lover speaks of "la semence," and in line eight he follows with the notion that "Il ne faut plus nourrir ceste Enfant qui me ronge." He concludes the sonnet, employing the verb *se repaître*: "Que l'homme est malheureux qui se repaist d'un songe." The planting of the seed in line six involves a penetration, a downward movement which will ideally initiate a growth upward, toward light. The "enfant" which appears in line nine is the textual result of the "semence" of line six. But the lover qualifies this child's actions with the verb "ronger," thereby indicating that this child's appetite is extreme and destructive. The lover cannot continue to tolerate such a sapping of resources, a nibbling away of his strength. He describes the ensuing effect as like that of "un poisson à l'hain," of "une plaisante farce," and finally as "une belle mensonge." The rhyme of *mensonge* and *songe* occurred earlier in the final tableau of Book One where the hanging flowers awaited Helene's passing. There the lover tentatively accepted the unexplored area of the dream world as a substitute for the unsatisfying reality which confronted him:

... Mais si la nuit qui ronge
 Mon coeur me la donnoit par songe entre mes bras,
 Embrassant pour le vray l'idole du mensonge,
 Soulé d'un faux plaisir ie ne reuiendrois pas.
 Voyez combien ma vie est pleine de trespas,
 Quand tout mon reconfort ne depend que du songe!
 (I, LX, ll. 9-14)

The dream offered the potential for some fulfillment in the earlier sonnet, and Helene's closed door symbolically suggested the untapped resources of the

narrator's creativity. It was, however, an unexplored realm, a closed door, another dark, blank or silent image in the lover's field of inner visions. Here in this sonnet the lover renounces the dream world entirely, knowing that he cannot feed himself on the emptiness of the dreams. He refers to the dream as a farce, a lie. The love story, subordinated to the poetic adventure, constitutes a lie because it provides a false path for the reader who must read the love story initially in order to delve into the poetic mission.¹¹

In the earlier sonnet (I, LX), it was the night that gnawed at the narrator's heart, but in this sonnet, it is "ceste Enfant" who eats away at the lover. This "child" conceived by Love's seeds represents the outcome of the relationship between the lover and Love. However this engendering is most unnatural, for the lover portrays himself and Love as male figures, thus biologically incapable of producing a child. Again the lover's attempt at redirecting nature's laws into an order which would support his own needs leaves him unable to survive. The "enfant" grows from the seeds "au cerueau de ces vers." It is a textual fertilization which must be aborted in order for the lover to return to the poet's control. This unnatural product, this child, develops as an embryo, drawing on the nourishing body of the lover for its own nutriment. However this sustenance develops into an intolerable situation; the lover cannot encourage further growth of this child, this dream produced by Love. In feeding himself on the dream, the lover has become overwhelmed by it, ultimately allowing himself to be consumed by it. This is roughly the same process which he followed in first coming too close to the sun/Helene's light, being burned by it, and subsequently unable to feel any positive effects from it. Sonnet II, LXXVIII points undeniably toward the weaning of the lover from his dream world. The lover will still need some salvation or resolution to replace his now spurned dream world. The poet's faculties offer a possible restitutive domain. The "vers" and "Raison" of lines six and seven indicate that the poet hovers nearby, like an unseen Castor to the lover's Pollux, capable of aiding the lover and ready to let poetry incorporate the love story, keeping its "feux & teintures" as the desiring force that guides.

Following this sonnet is the lengthy "Elegie." Slightly shorter than the "Stances," the poem contains many relevant thematic threads that help in establishing a basic unity and coherence to this work. The most relevant aspect of this "Elegie series" concerns the onset of night and the insistence on bowing to the ways of nature. The genre of the elegy, associated frequently with meditations about death or other solemn themes, proves appropriate in preparing for the closing of the *Sonnets pour Helene*. It also marks the lover's mourning for the

end of the love story, a tribute to his love which counters the poet's tribute to his poetry.

The "Elegie" begins with the narrator's description of the earlier, initial state of "pure liberté" from all constraint of affection, desire or love. During that period of his life he lived, as he states, "Seul maistre de moy. . . / Ayant tousiours és mains pour me servir de guide / Aristote ou Platon ou le docte Euripide" (ll. 7-10). These guides he calls his "bons hotes muets, qui ne faschent iamais," for he is allowed to leave and return to them, according to his fancy. He praises these authors and books as "douce compagnie, & utile & honneste" (l. 13), but relates that "un autre en caquetant m'estourdiroit la teste" (l. 14). This "autre" is nature, and the ensuing lines describe the wandering narrator and the marvels that awaited his eye:

Puis du liure ennuyé, ie regardois les fleurs,
Fueilles tiges rameaux especes & couleurs,
Et l'entrecouplement de leurs formes diuerses,
Peintes de cent façons, iaunes rouges & perles,
Ne me pouuant saouler, ainsi qu'en un tableau,
D'admirer la Nature, & ce qu'elle a de beau:
Et de dire en parlant aux fleurettes escluses,
"Celuy est presque Dieu qui cognoist toutes choses,
Esloigné du vulgaire, & loin des courtizans,
De fraude & de malice impudens artizans. (ll. 15-24) 12

The words recall Ronsard's verses in "L' Hylas" of the artist who, in imitating nature becomes "maistre en [sa] peinture." The homage to nature offers a crucial contrast to the courtesans who are denounced as "De fraude & de malice impudens artizans." The emphasis on the fraudulent harks back to the "belle mensonge" that the love story incorporates as part of its lying message. Life among the "courtizans" is linked with lies, and lies with love. Nature offers a paradise of discovery, creation and knowledge. The love story poses the threat of "fraude" and "malice" while nature offers knowledge which can be trusted.

The natural spectrum leads the narrator further into the realm of creation for it draws his attention to the forest, the rocks and the river. There he finds a new pleasure in "une chasse muette" which he describes:

Tirer auecq' la ligne en tremblant emporté
Le credule poisson prins a l'haim apasté,

Qu'un grand Prince n'est aise ayant prins à la chasse
 Vn cerf qu'en haletant tout un iour il pourchasse.
 Heureux, si vous eussiez d'un mutuel esmoy
 Prins l'apast amoureux aussi bien comme moy,
 Que tout seul i'auallay, quand par trop desireuse
 Mon ame en vos yeux beut la poison amoureuse. (ll. 35-42)

We recognize the *topos* of the hunter hunted, as the description changes from the pleasures of nature to those of desire. The lover takes as his model the gullible fish who too willingly swallows the bait. This model image transforms the lover's earlier description by changing him from observer to participant. He takes on the characteristics of the captured fish after having first observed it. He demonstrates again that he is unable to use nature's signs and symbols to his advantage. His short-sighted vision is his constant downfall. As participant, he becomes part of nature, but not a creator of nature. The safe haven that water represents for the poet in this work has always stood as a negative force for the lover who is controlled by it. Here, his self-identity lies with a fish out of water, an unnatural image which portends death.

The "Elegie" then turns to the oncoming night, as though night's darkness is the appropriate background for the doomed lover:

Puis alors que Vesper vient embrunir nos yeux,
 Attaché dans le ciel ie contemple les cieux,
 En qui Dieu nous escrit en notes non obscures
 Les sorts & les destins de toutes creatures.
 Car luy, en desdignant (comme font les humains)
 D'auoir encre & papier & plume entre les mains,
 Par les astres du ciel qui sont ses caracteres,
 Les choses nous predit & bonnes & contraires:
 Mais les hommes chargez de terre & du trespas
 Mesprisent tel escrit, & ne le lisent pas. (ll. 43-52)

The loss of daylight leads to a close observation of the stars and to the knowledge which their presence brings. As the sun disappears and the stars appear, the loss of light does not prohibit an increase in knowledge. God, the director of nature, writes "en notes non obscures" not with paper and pen but with "astres du ciel." We are reminded once again of Castor and Pollux, the poet's chosen guides. This set of natural characters imparts information which, according to the narrator,

earthly men "mesprisent & ne. . . lisent pas," preoccupied inordinately as they are with "de terre & trespas." The lover's own example has demonstrated that earthly man can control neither earth nor death, that his ability to follow nature's sign is deficient. The inept qualities of the human domain oppose the mystic realm of the natural. True knowledge is not to be found in the writings of man but in those of God/nature. The implications of this theory strike us as odd at this point in a work so dedicated to the efforts of the poet and to the writing process. But this is the discourse of the lover who is far removed from the poet's status as Creator. It is the poet's ability to "read" the stars and to "write" in them that guides the lover's words here in the "Elegie series." The poet has shown by his actions that he is a creator and a controller, and he exerts his control over the lover here at the end of the *Sonnets pour Helene*.

The link between the poet and God figures among the ideas in the "Elegie" for the words then proceed to discuss the subject of the lover's "peine," alluding anew to the poetic work in progress:

Or le plus de mon bien pour decevoir ma peine,
C'est de boire à longs traits les eaux de la fontaine
Qui de vostre beau nom se braue, & en courant
Par les prez vos honneurs va tousiours murmurant,
Et la Royne se dit des eaux de la contree:
Tant vault le gentil soin d'une Muse sacree,
Qui peult vaincre la mort, & les sorts inconstans,
Sinon pour tout iamais, au moins pour un long temps. (ll. 53-60)

There is much here that draws our attention to the poet's discourse. The first two lines of the passage cited above mock the distressed lover's words that we read in Sonnet I, XXXV: "Mon plaisir en ce mois c'est de voir les coloms." The rhyme of the words voir/boire contrasts the touching but unrealized vision that the lover mentions as the only pleasure in a rather dreary and torturous situation, with the water that the poet actually takes into his own body. His consumption of the water of the fountain points our focus back to the fountain as the poet's source in this work. This reference to the fountain's waters, then, returns our attention to the "Stances." There, the magnificent monument to Helene honors the poet, as the lover states above. The "eaux de la contree" are cared for by a "Muse sacree" who is able to "vaincre la mort & les sorts inconstans" in an eternal or quasi-eternal fashion, according to the narrator. In returning to the subject of the water, the poem merges the natural world with the poet, linking him anew to

nature, and specifically to water once again. The poet's ability to interpret, understand and be incorporated with nature establishes his talents as outside the realm of the earthly man who is associated with the fraudulent, the corrupt and the inobservant. The poet participates in an ongoing creative exploration which duplicates nature's processes.

The last lines of the "Elegie" reflect the poet's guidance now over the lover, so that we continue to hear in them a blend of their voices:

Là couché dessus l'herbe en mes discours ie pense
Que pour aimer beaucoup i'ay peu de recompense,
Et que mettre son coeur aux Dames si auant,
C'est vouloir peindre en l'onde, & arrester le vent. . . (ll. 61-64).

We recognize the lover's incapacity to establish lasting visions in the images which he gives, as he can neither "peindre en l'onde" nor "arrester le vent." Laumonier reminds us that this image stems from Catullus and Petrarch's "peindre en l'eau."¹³ This reference, then, because it alludes to two great poets, blends both the voices of the lover and poet. The poet's presence is furthermore reflected in the ensuing lines which reprise a theme from the famous Sonnet II, XLIII, "Quand vous serez bien vieille":

M'asseurant toutefois qu'alors le vieil âge
Aura comme un sorcier changé vostre visage,
Et lors que vos cheueux deuiendront argentez,
Et que vos yeux, d'amour ne seront plus hantez
Que tousiours vous aurez, si quelque soin vous touche,
En l'esprit mes escrits, mon nom en vostre bouche. (ll. 65-70)

These words stress the power of poetry, the lasting quality of the poet's words and name, more powerful and enduring than even a long earthly existence. This depiction of an aging Helene who no longer possesses youth and beauty, attributes traditionally associated with an ideal love interest, but who will always have the poet's name and words on her lips, repeats and solidifies the poet's portrait in the earlier sonnet. In both poems, when the narrator projects Helene into the future, she ages while poetry remains ageless.

The final words of the "Elegie" sound the first chorus of the return to nature, the most prevalent refrain of the lover's ending and the most significant example

of the lover's change of direction, as influenced by the poet. "Le Poete" in the "Stances" declared that "Vesper nous commande." In the "Elegie," we read:

Maintenant que voicy l'an septième venir,
Ne pensez plus Helene en vos laqs me tenir
La raison m'en deliure, & vostre rigueur dure,
Puis il fault que mon age obeysse à nature. (II. 71-74)

Obedience to nature will evoke that confidence, trust and delight in discovery that nature's creations offer to mankind, and which serve as eternal inspirations for poetry. Poetry's higher plane preserves the stability of nature's healing, progressive and patient forces. The lover's disappointing "real" world can be replaced with poetry's world of a timeless and regenerative nature.

Sonnet LXXV picks up the last line of the "Elegie," continuing the closing refrain:

Ie m'en-fuy du combat, mon armee est desfaite:
I'ay perdu contre Amour la force & la raison:
Ia dix lustres passez, & ja mon poil grison
M'appellent au logis, & sonnent la retraite.
Si comme ie voulois ta gloire n'est parfaite,
N'en blasme point l'esprit, mais blasme la saison:
Ie ne suis ny Pâris ny desloyal Iason:
I'obeis à la loy que la Nature a faite.
Entre l'aigre & le doux, l'esperance & la peur,
Amour dedans ma forge a poly cest ouvrage
Ie ne me plains du mal, du temps ny du labeur,
Ie me plains de moymesme & de ton faux courage.
Tu t'en repentiras, si tu as un bon coeur,
Mais le tard repentir n'amande le dommage. (II, LXXV)

The lover's final acceptance of nature's rule means that his universe will henceforth function according to natural laws. This bowing to nature is also a bow to the poet, for as we have seen in the "Elegie," the poet works within nature, creates like nature, controls like nature. Because the lover's "Elegie series" follows the poet's "Stances series" it establishes at once a respect for the poet and an acceptance of the lover's inferior status, as he bows to his superior. While the lover's voice in Sonnet II, LXXV is influenced by the poet's, his vocabulary

nevertheless offers much that we consider negative: "desfaite" (l. 1); "perdu" (l. 2); "retraite" (l. 4); "blasme" (l. 6), "mal" (l. 11); "faux courage" (l. 12); "repentiras" (l. 13); and all of the final line: "Mais le tard repentir n'amande le dommage." The damage to which he refers consists not only of the problem that Helene has caused but also to the lover's own misjudgment in his attempt to control his world. Like Icarus and Phaëthon, he has erred in trying to direct his course rather than follow the guides established by nature, and by extension of that relationship, by the poet. The poet's discourse is reflected in the reference to "ceste ouvrage" (l. 10) and by the verb "sonner" (l. 4). These echoes of the poet's voice remind us of his presence and of his example which he has set in the "Stances series." The "Elegie series" offers us the gradual progress of the lover's adaptation to and acceptance of the poet's example.

The lover's adaptation of the poet's model involves his acceptance of nature, and the subsequent exploration of the darkness represented by the night sky. The writing of the stars on the sky symbolizes knowledge and direction that are associated with the ascent to the sky, and with the darkness. The night's light source is less intense than Helene's sunlight, but it offers potential for a new, fuller, more complete perspective, as the lover turns to nature's realm for his direction.

There is, however, a second motion associated with a change of light in the "Elegie series," and this descending direction appears in the image of the burial of Charles IX in the closing sonnets of the *Sonnets pour Helene*. A burial has already been the subject of one of the last tableau sonnets, II, LX. The overall tone and imagery of that sonnet, however, reflected a certain optimism, viewed in the vocabulary which implied growth and development. When the narrator discusses the death of Charles IX in sonnets II, LXXVI and LXXVII, the last two sonnets of the entire cycle, the vocabulary does not reflect similar positive images of growth:

Helas! voicy le iour que mon maistre on enterre,
 Muses, accompagnez son funeste conuoy:
 Je voy son effigie, & au dessus ie voy
 La Mort qui de ses yeux la lumiere luy serre.
 Voila comme Atropos les Maiestez atterre
 Sans respect de ieunesse ou d'empire ou de foy
 CHARLES qui fleurissoit nagueres un grand Roy,
 Est maintenant vestu d'une robbe de terre.
 Hé! tu me fais languir par cruauté d'amour:

Je suis ton Promethée, & tu es mon Vautour.
 La vengeance du Ciel n'oublira tes malices.
 Vn mal au mien pareil puisse un iour t'auenir,
 Quand tu voudras mourir, & que mourir tu ne puisses,
 Si iustes sont les Dieux, ie t'en verray punir. (II, LXXVI)

The opening "Helas!" leaves little doubt as to the tone of the poem. The lover's adherence to nature's way furnishes a bitter lesson: earthly man cannot control nature—even kings are subject to death's finality. The lover's account of Charles's death centers on what he sees, as the repetition of the words "ie voy" in line three emphasizes. The sights which meet his eyes are of death: the "effigie," and "La Mort" who blocks off light from the king's eyes. The lover's visions have posed a constant problem throughout the Helene sequence. His inability to conceive inner landscapes which soothe the harshness of the exterior world has been a continual downfall in his attempts to order and control his fate. No longer blinded by Helene's light, he turns to the realm of nature and to the poet for his inspiration. The tone of this sonnet is in fact doubly depressing, for the lover finds help neither from the poet nor from nature. He invites the Muses to accompany Charles's funeral procession, sending their guidance (thus, the poet's) to the silent, barren realm of Death. No ray of light, no symbolic vision intervenes to bolster the lover's confidence in this newly-accepted order of nature.

History establishes May 30, 1574 as the date of Charles IX's death, while sources give the date of the funeral services as occurring in July.¹⁴ The above sonnet refers to the day of the interment, but it is followed by a sonnet which refers to the month of Charles's death, Sonnet II, LXXVII: "En ce funeste mois que mon Prince mourut. . ." (l. 2). The placement of these two poems together, with the final poem referring directly to the month of May allows us to read the two as a general reference to Charles's death. The sonnet cycle thus opens on the "premier iour de mai" and closes with a reference to this "funeste mois" which we know to be the month of May. Laumonier's note informs us that Sonnet II, LXXVI appeared in the 1578 edition of the *Helene* sonnets as the forty-eighth sonnet of Book One.¹⁵ The change in order from that 1578 version to the 1584 edition where the sonnet appears second to last further reinforces the notion of unity and closure at work in the entire 1584 collection. The ending sonnets in the 1584 work are grouped around a common theme, the death of Charles IX. This theme terminates definitively the entire sonnet cycle. The opening May is appropriate for the beginning of the cycle, the freshness of the adventure about to start, while the ending vision of May functions as a thematic and textual closure.

The two concluding sonnets portray Charles IX's death in a more somber and less optimistic light than the tableau sonnet on the burial of Helene's friend, Lucrece. Specifically lacking is any image of flowering, for the "moisson de fleurs" of the Lucrece sonnet is only echoed feebly in line seven of II, LXXVI: "CHARLES qui fleuroissoit, nagueres un grand Roy. . . ." The use of the imperfect reflects a past flourishing and accentuates a present which makes no reference to any growth. The sonnet, in fact, repeatedly grounds Charles's death in a downward, earthly direction with no saving concept of nourishment to encourage a belief in the generative quality of life. The tercets express a clearly negative image of regeneration in the figures of Prometheus and the vulture. The relationship between the lover as Prometheus and Helene as the vulture follows that tragic model where Prometheus was repeatedly stripped of his vital organs by the bird's tearing appetite.

All of the negative references in the sonnet can be associated with the loss of light. The gradual disappearance of Helene as a sun source for the lover culminates in the reference to Atropos. The lover's growth toward Helene has followed the direction of a negative tropism. As Helene (the sun) has become more and more distant, the lover's growth has responded to a downward gravitational force, much like Icarus and Phaëthon's final plunge. The lover's atrophy is represented in the Prometheus/vulture figures of line ten. The thread of his life has not been cut, and it is the agony of prolonged, wasted and malnourished life that he bemoans. Atropos has ended Charles IX's life, but the lover continues to "languir par cruauté d'amour." Unlike the poet who envisions a peaceful death as recounted in the "Quand vous serez bien vieille" sonnet (II, XLIII), the lover is unable to depict or conceive of a death or end to his suffering. He compares himself to Prometheus, living eternally in punishment, his body devoured repeatedly. In lines 12-13, he threatens Helene with his wish that a similar scenario would befall her: "Un iour au mien pareil puisse un iour t'auenir, / Quand tu voudras mourir, que mourir tu ne puisses!" Of course, this "punishment" for the lover would be the poet's cherished aim. Should Ronsard take his place between the "demi-gods" Homer and Virgil, this exact scenario would, indeed, come to pass: Ronsard's heroine would live eternally.

It is significant that neither the poet nor the lover depicts Helene's death. In II, XLIII, it is specifically Helene's old age ("bien vieille") that the poet imagines, in contrast to his own state of "repos." In II, LXXVI, the lover's failure to imagine his death results in the prolonging of his wretched existence. Death alone would remove his pain. His ardent desire for death expressed in the closing lines of this sonnet renews our search for the love story's closure. His death

would serve the double purpose of alleviating his agony and ensuring the poet his eternal life. The lover's sacrifice—indeed, the sacrifice of the entire love story—functioned as the "vin sacré" that was poured into the waters of Helene's fountain in the "Stances series." However, as we have noted, the lover and the poet are inextricably joined, like Castor and Pollux, reflecting two personas in one central narrator. The poet's voice dominates but the lover's voice contributes to the poet's dominance by the sheer weight of the comparison and contrast that it offers. The death will not be of the lover, but of his love. The closure is of the love story.

The central aim of this love story has always been to join Helene with another, specifically with the lover. Helene's increasing distance thwarted such a union and enabled the completion of the narrative to remain always tantalizingly before us. In the final sonnet of the cycle, we find a parallel structure that posits Charles on one side against Helene on the other. The long-sought union occurs, but Helene's final link is with Charles IX, a dead man. Helene is then finally joined with death. This ultimate union secured by death presents the lover more bitterness and pain, yet it offers the poet the closure that he needs to complete the poetic narrative expressed in the *Sonnets pour Helene*. The lover's voice continues to narrate the last sonnet, although not without hints of the poet's background presence:

Je chantois ces Sonnets amoureux d'une Helene,
 En ce funeste mois que mon Prince mourut:
 Son Sceptre, tant fust grand, Charles ne secourut,
 Qu'il ne payast la debte à la Nature humaine.
 La Mort fut d'un costé, & l'Amour qui me meine,
 Estoit de l'autre part, dont le traict me ferut,
 Et si bien la poison par les veines courut,
 Que i'oublaiy mon maistre, attaint d'une autre peine.
 Je senty dans le coeur deux diuerses douleurs,
 La rigueur de ma Dame, & la tristesse enclose
 Du Roy, que i'adorois pour ses rares valeurs.
 La viuante & le mort tout malheur me propose:
 L'une aime les regrets, & l'autre aime les pleurs:
 Car l'Amour & la Mort n'est qu'une mesme chose. (II, LXXVII)

The repetition of the title "maistre" for Charles in these last two sonnets contrasts with the use of "Maistresse" in the opening sonnet. The poet's

"maistresse" is his poetry, while the lover's allegiance in this poem is with Charles IX. The "maistre" can refer to Charles, to Death, and to the poet, as well, for the poet is, by the example that he sets, the lover's "maistre." Alan Nagel views the final line of the poem as particularly bleak. In his article, "Literary and Historical Context in Ronsard's *Sonnets pour Helene*" he writes: "... Helene, representing Love, and Charles, Death, are a Scylla and Charybdis the poet cannot escape. What counts here is that no help is to be found; the poet is shipwrecked, regardless of his choice."¹⁶ While I agree with Nagel that the final poem is oriented toward closure, I do not see this closure as an ending for the poet and his poetic mission, but as an ending—a necessary and long-awaited one—for the love story. The *Sonnets pour Helene* is not a simple collection of love poems. The emptiness of this lover's ending achieves two very important goals. It contrasts sharply with the glowing and hopeful ending created by the poet in the "Stances series." In so doing, it sends the careful reader back into the text, back into the labyrinth of the narrative construction for that first enduring ending. Going back to the "Stances series" returns the reader to the poet's domain, back in the eternal, enduring, magical realm of poetry which has no end. The return to the text ensures its lasting nature, its end without end.

This double ending technique which closes the *Sonnets pour Helene* reinforces the tight structuring of the work which I have attempted to clarify during the course of this study. The poet's final monument to Helene ascertains his creative powers, all the while crowning the other "architectonic" constructions recounted in the tableau poems. Furthermore, the "Stances series" paves the way for the lover's final acceptance of the end of his love which he links with an obedience to nature's rule. Throughout the *Sonnets pour Helene*, the lover's reluctance or incapacity to accept nature's laws has led to his perpetual disillusionment and torment with Helene. Doranne Fenoaltea's observations about architecture in Maurice Scève's *La Délie* hold relevant and germane notions for Ronsard's *Sonnets pour Helene*:

On the one hand the architecture exerts a stabilizing influence on the textual expression of the lover's disorder by suggesting Renaissance notions of the harmonic proportions of the universe, the capacity of art to reflect intellectual design, and the value of an architectural form that corresponds to a divine cosmic order.¹⁷

More important is Fenoaltea's conclusion which can speak directly to our understanding of the closing poems of the *Sonnets pour Helene*. She concludes her observations about Scève's architectural patterns:

On the other hand, the apparent impossibility of defining that order and ascertaining its meaning has a destabilizing effect, which helps to reinforce the impression of opacity, even of obscurity. The architecture that at first appears to provide signposts eventually leads into a labyrinth. 18

While the two endings contribute toward a certain amount of confusion for many readers of the *Sonnets pour Helene*, we can discern in this pattern a significant message. The poet's ending, the "Stances series," directs the lover to his conclusion in the "Elegie series." Even the word "stance" catches our attention, for it comes from the Latin *stare*, "to stand." It offers the poet's position, his standing place, his dwelling room for his triumphant message about the eternal continuity of poetry. The poet as guide suggests that poetry does have the power to organize the disorder of the universe. The lover in this text eventually conforms, bowing to nature's order as the dominant, organizing power, and his recognition of nature's rules indicates a belief in a cosmic order even if earthly man cannot fully understand or find personal satisfaction in it. The poet's ending furthermore prefigures the lover's acceptance of the natural occurrence of Charles IX's death and the simultaneous end of the love story. The work maintains that poetry does direct just as a higher order directs and guides. Thus, Poetry mimics the cosmic power of the universe, and both are brought together in this sonnet cycle.

After the "Stances series" ends, the magic and enduring world created by the poet opposes the bleak domain which the lover perceives around him. The lover does not possess and has never shown the talent to *create*, like the poet. His descriptions of the world around him, particularly of Helene's eyes as his sun, of dark winter nights that drag on to infinity, have always betrayed his inability to rise above the downward pull and the descent, as his line of vision plummets and images disappear. The poet's upward gaze and ever-ascending movements allow him his freedom, his transcendence from the constraints, the frustrations, the disappointments of the earthly world, assuring him a belief in an eternal existence through poetry.

When the poet recites Love's last rites at the end of the "Stances series," his voice and his authority determine the lover's subsequent thoughts and words.

The lover ultimately accepts or resigns himself to the loss of his love. Moreover, he appears to posit "blasme" or cause for his loss to the all-powerful laws of nature, when he finally comes to obey. In the "Elegie series," obedience to nature is a recurring notion, a refrain which explains the lover's final acquiescence to his loss and serves as a textual conclusion. The lover's final vision of a funereal May, of the darkness and finality of death, and of the end of his love all portray symbolically the finite aspect of the lover's ending. The lover's use of the present tense in the final tercet of the last sonnet leaves the impression that his mourning is "projected in a continuing presence."¹⁹ The lover's pain, therefore, endures in the same fashion as the poet's fountain for Helene. The closing words of the "Stances" also employ the present tense: "Fontaine. . . reçois ce vin sacré que ie renuerse. . . Sois ditte pour iamais la Fontaine d'Heleine, / . . . conserue en tes eaux. . ." (ll. 85–88). The lover's final resolution parallels the poet's final resolution, although with opposite affective results.

The lover's end, however, contains a note of hope, a glimmer of the poet's message of eternal existence. Although the lover writes of the end of Helene's love and of the death of Charles IX, his text of closure is not without signs of immortality. The first sign is designated by the figure of Prometheus, creator of the first man and woman in Greek myth. Prometheus did indeed receive a cruel punishment which was repeated again and again, but the reason for such repetition was necessitated by Prometheus's *immortality*. Prometheus represents, moreover, wisdom, a rebel against authority, a survivor. The lover's linking of himself with Prometheus at a time of great suffering in his life offers us hope that the lover believes, too, in some endurance, some eternal existence, some power of creation. In his acceptance of his failure, the lover expresses his pain, his "tout malheur." He allies himself with a tragic figure; however it is one with decidedly positive attributes—immortality, endurance, conviction, creation. Prometheus, too, as Sonnet I, LIII acknowledged, "maria la Terre à la Diuinité" (l. 12). He symbolizes the union of body and soul, of earth and sky, and as such represents both the descent to the ground and the ascent to the heavens.

Another positive sign that the lover leaves in his final discourse is the mention of the "funeste mois." The contradictions and contrasts are apparent between the lover's month of May in the last sonnet of the work and the poet's month of May, "Ce premier iour de May" that we meet in the first poem of the work. However, because May appears in both, we can discern a cycle, a return to the beginning point, a renewal, even in this very finite and closure-oriented ending to the sonnet sequence. The lover's end, in short, contains his predictable failure, loss, disappointment, deception and mourning. However, it also contains a hopeful,

corroboratory message to the poet's. The lover's final equation of love with death establishes the fragile aspect of love. Love can end, like Charles IX's life, with no apparent "logic." Just as the lover tried to explain the Sun's disappearance in the second tableau sonnet and could reach no logical explanation, here he finds no logic to explain Charles's death, nor the end of his love. His conclusion is simply that nature controls these domains. The refrain of obeying nature in the final poems makes this point clear.

The poet's closing in the "Stances" speaks of an immortality, establishes a lasting life for his poems within the preservation of the fountain. Because of the poet's superiority as a creator and sustainer of images over the lover's weaker attempts, he becomes like nature, a creator, a ruler, a guide. Nature's superiority is the poet's superiority. The lover's final bow to nature, then, is a bow to the poet. The acceptance of death and of love's end is an admission of poetry's endurance. The contrast of the "double ending" and of the double personas, their conflicting perspectives and their contrasting talents to create images are the keys to reading the *Sonnets pour Helene* as a positive affirmation of creation. Read out of context, the final five poems, this "Elegie series," constitutes a negative, finite and dismal ending. Read, however, as the logical result of the poet's triumph in the "Stances series," the "Elegie series" reads as the normal fictive result where the stronger protagonist wins while his lesser rival mourns. The lover's weak point, in comparison to poetry's is that he is *mortal*. Poetry's immortality, its creativity, its ability to sustain enduring images are qualities which enable the poetic epic to conquer the rival story. The hero and the rival in this case portray not so much separate entities as aspects of a blended, single persona, an unseparable pair like Castor and Pollux. The lover's end, then, leaves a small glimmer of hope that his end is not totalizing. This "epic" will be able to continue and since this "epic" is about poetry, "s'abuser en amour n'est pas mauvaïse chose."

Notes

¹ Various references to the seasons occur throughout the *Sonnets pour Helene*. M. Pelan and C. Chadwick in two separate articles distinguish the number of years identified in the 1578 edition. Their articles entertain questions about biographical bases for the composition of the sonnets, searching to establish a chronological order which might account for some of the anachronisms. Both attempt to trace the duration of the lover's service to Helene, dating sonnets according to information given in the text. Such information includes specific mentions of seasons and/or festivals—in Sonnet II, IIII, "Le Carnaval vous plaist," for example—or references to a year/moment: "Trois ans sont ja passez" in I, XIII. That same line, "Trois ans sont ja passez" is also the opening line of II, XI, so it can also be read as part of a poetic pattern, and not necessarily as proof of chronological details. Pelan's and Chadwick's articles examine the many details of date or of diurnal and seasonal references which figure among many of the sonnets. See M. Pelan, "Ronsard's Amour d'Automne," *French Studies*, 7, 3 (1953): 214–222. Refer also to C. Chadwick, "The Composition of the *Sonnets pour Helene*," *French Studies* 8 (4) (1954): 325–332.

² Margaret McGowan, "The Spectacle of Power," *A New History of French Literature*, ed. Denis Hollier (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1989) 243–248.

³ McGowan 247. She cites this sonnet in her article, noting, "Helen performs similar complicated steps until, through the act of dancing, she is made divine. . . ." She thus places the emphasis on the act of dancing as the impetus for Helene's divine activity.

⁴ Virgil, the *Aeneid*, trans. William Morris (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900) 162. From Book VI, lines 309–311 Morris offers this version: "As many of the gathered fowl press on to field and fold,/ From off the weltering ocean-flood, when the late year and chill/ Hath driven them across the sea the sunny lands to fill."

⁵ Stephen G. Nichols, "The Old Provençal Lyric," *A New History of French Literature*, ed. Denis Hollier (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1989) 30–36.

⁶ Nichols 35.

⁷ Nichols 36.

⁸ Perry 152. She comments on the failure of the narrator-lover's quest: "It is perhaps the over-ardent pursuit itself that makes the goal unattainable, bringing in its train those destructive states of mind that are supposed to help the lover, but in fact destroy him."

⁹ I would like to point out that many of the *Sonnets et madrigals pour Astree* contain in a compressed form images and vocabulary that appear in the *Sonnets pour Helene*. Consider this sonnet, I, XXXV, from the *Helene* cycle, and sonnet XIII, lines 9–11 from the *Astree* cycle where we read these lines: "Hà, tu devrais imiter les pigeons, / Qui bec en bec de baisers doux et longs / Se font l'amour sur le haut d'une souche." I have found references in nineteen of the twenty poems of the *Astree* sequence which appear in a more detailed version in the *Helene* poems. These similarities between poems in the two cycles can further reinforce my argument that the *Sonnets pour Helene* delivers a message about the writing process, for it is as if the *Astree* cycle functions as an abbreviated version—an outline— of the *Helene* cycle.

¹⁰ Doranne Fenoaltea, "The Architecture of Poetic Sequences," *A New History of French Literature*, ed. Denis Hollier (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1989) 189–193. She explains the desire in Scève's *Délie*: "[Ficino's] Neoplatonism. . . viewed love as a means of access to higher wisdom, even to a union with the divine. . . . It furnished a means of exploring the movements of the soul between body and mind and of viewing the human condition in the context of a superior ideal or knowledge attained only in the desire for it or at best in rare and fleeting moments. In this context, poetry—and love poetry in particular—could become a vehicle for expressing the full range of desire."

¹¹ For more discussion about the dream, refer to Malcolm Quainton's *Ronsard's Ordered Chaos: Visions of Flux and Stability in the Poetry of Pierre de Ronsard* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980) 173–218.

12 Laumonier's edition shows only one quotation mark preceding the word *Celuy*, with no closing quotation punctuation.

13 "Sources: Catulle LXX, 4; Pétrarque, sextine VII, fin, et sonnet *Beato in sogno*, 4." Laumonier 207.

14 Smith 194.

15 Laumonier 208.

16 Alan F. Nagel, "Literary and Historical Context in Ronsard's *Sonnets pour Helene*," *PMLA* (May, 1979): 406-416.

17 Fenoaltea, "The Architecture" 192.

18 Fenoaltea, "The Architecture" 192.

19 Nagel 415.

Conclusion

The theme of unity or wholeness has played a consistent role in the argument of this study. I have sought to indicate that this unity most often results from a gradual and natural merging of the parts into a whole. The two voices of lover and poet provide the most evident example of this dual structure, but we can discern in it the figures of Castor and Pollux as well, and in the seasonal and diurnal rhythms that they suggest. Although the lover's goal of joining himself with Helene is not achieved, a textual union of Helene as poetic subject with the poet's desire to write does indeed take place. The poetic yearning succeeds via the exploitation and dissolution of the lover's desire. The textual wholeness occurs, then, through the eventual disappearance of the love adventure. The *Sonnets pour Helene* recounts the ascendancy of the poet and the completion of his work through the demise of the lover and his quest. Although the love narrative recounts the failure to attain physical fulfillment, it plays a vital role in the achievement of textual closure. The poet and the lover are as intricately related as Castor and Pollux. The alternating pattern of mortality and immortality told in the classical versions of their myth results from the descent and ascent of Helene's brothers as they share life and death. The pair is known as a unit, intact, despite the absence which death brings to the pair, now to Castor, then to Pollux.

The search for unity is a *topos* which appears again and again in Renaissance literature. The period found one haunting expression of this search in Plato's *Symposium*. There Aristophanes recounts the myth of the Androgyne as a deep-rooted and fundamental quest for the other half, the missing part which will complete and make one. In that story, after the splitting of man, Apollo was appointed the healer of those wounds, the composer of their form. In the *Sonnets pour Helene*, the healer, the force which executes the work's unity, overcoming the sting of death, is poetry's power. Apollo, the god of poetry, aptly figures in Sonnet II, LVII, as Helene weaves the laurel and myrtle crown for the poet's head. The combining of the two forces of poetry/laurel and love/myrtle foreshadows the closure of the work. In the final poems, the alliance of love with death necessarily turns our focus to the *undying*, to the immortal, eternal glory of the poetic text.

As part of the emphasis on poetry's power, architectural allusions and descriptive elements underline the entire thematic structure of the *Sonnets pour Helene*. These ekphrastic aspects of this poetic sequence express qualities and concerns seen in the works of other prominent Renaissance writers whose works reflect the link between the literary and the visual. Many of the emblems used by Scève, for example, in *La Délie* appear in the descriptions, the imagery and the *tableaux*

of the *Sonnets pour Helene*. Scève's emblems include the representations of Narcissus, the spinning woman, various birds, Orpheus, the *bateau a rames froissées*, Leda and the Swan, the moon and other light sources, the coffin and the pail of water, various uses of fire and flame, and the reflection in the mirror. All of these images occur prominently in the *Helene* poems analysed in this study. The *Sonnets pour Helene* with its emphasis on architecture and description, presents a Ronsardian version of poetry and ekphrasis. The architectural patterns and descriptions in the *Sonnets pour Helene* convey significant details which support the author's attitudes and concerns toward his text. The accent on the visual safeguards and supplements the power of the word. Vision adds power to voice, and indeed, in Ronsard's *Helene* sonnets, the struggle for narrative voice leads to changing visions.

The complicity between voice and vision is not the only union in the *Sonnets pour Helene*. The bond between poetry and desire results in a harmonic conclusion that does not at first glance manifest itself. Renaissance texts present unity in ways that often seem to circumvent or subvert it. Although writers of the period widely professed a love of unity, the closure of their texts often seems to undermine it. At first, the endings of the *Sonnets pour Helene* appear to depart in two, different directions. The closing poems of the work, however, manifest an overall sense of completion and unity primarily through the two endings which the "Stance series" and the "Elegie series" recount. The final setting of May recalls the opening sonnet where the names of Castor and Pollux were first evoked. As zodiac markers of the constellation Gemini which appears in late May, Castor and Pollux were also commonly known as guides and as protectors of sailors. Both the "Stances" and the "Elegie" point the reader's attention to the coming of night. The narrator in the "Elegie" acknowledges the message of truth that the writing in the stars represents. Our gaze then returns at the end of the sonnet sequence to the stars which in turn evoke the notion of the voyage and of a unified pair. Castor and Pollux symbolize the union of the love story and the poetic narrative, the blending into one whole text preserved in the *Sonnets pour Helene*.

The matter of the stars and particularly of the writing in the stars deserves some thought, especially when we consider that included in Ronsard's 1578 volume of poetic works appeared the *Sonnets et Madrigals pour Astree*, and that this shorter sonnet cycle resembles the *Helene* sonnets in a significant manner. The *Astree* sonnets use many puns and plays on the word "astres" much like the *Sonnets pour Helene* uses the words *Helene/haleine*. Moreover, as note nine in Chapter Four of this study indicates, the *Astree* sonnets are fundamentally linked

to the *Helene* sonnets by their thematic and descriptive elements. In nineteen of the twenty *Astree* poems appear lines, phrases, tone of voice, images and descriptions that are more fully developed in the *Sonnets pour Helene*. This calls into question the links not only between poems within one sonnet sequence, but of one sonnet cycle with another. The *Astree* sonnets appear to represent a condensed version or outline study for the 1578 *Sonnets pour Helene*, which was in turn reworked into the 1584 *Helene* sonnets. Most importantly, because of these textual links between seemingly independent sonnet sequences, it is all the more possible to believe that the 1584 *Helene* cycle recounts a narrative not about a unique love between Ronsard and Helene, but about the evolution of the writing process and the glory of poetry. This area of Ronsard's poetry provides a potentially rich and potent study for further poetic adventure. The *Sonnets pour Helene* invites repeated and persistent examination by its readers.

The reader's journey into the text, moreover, is as unending as the alternating of Castor and Pollux's death with life, and as regular as the passage of the seasons from one May to another. In the final union of love with death which closes the text, the superiority of poetry becomes evident, completing the text, making it whole. The search for union stimulates the movement and the growth of the text and marks the 1584 edition of the *Sonnets pour Helene* as a precise, artful and unified work. The sonnet cycle demonstrates unquestionably that it represents a manifesto of Ronsard's poetic thought and theory, where desire and poetry come together in the production of the glorified, unified text.

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