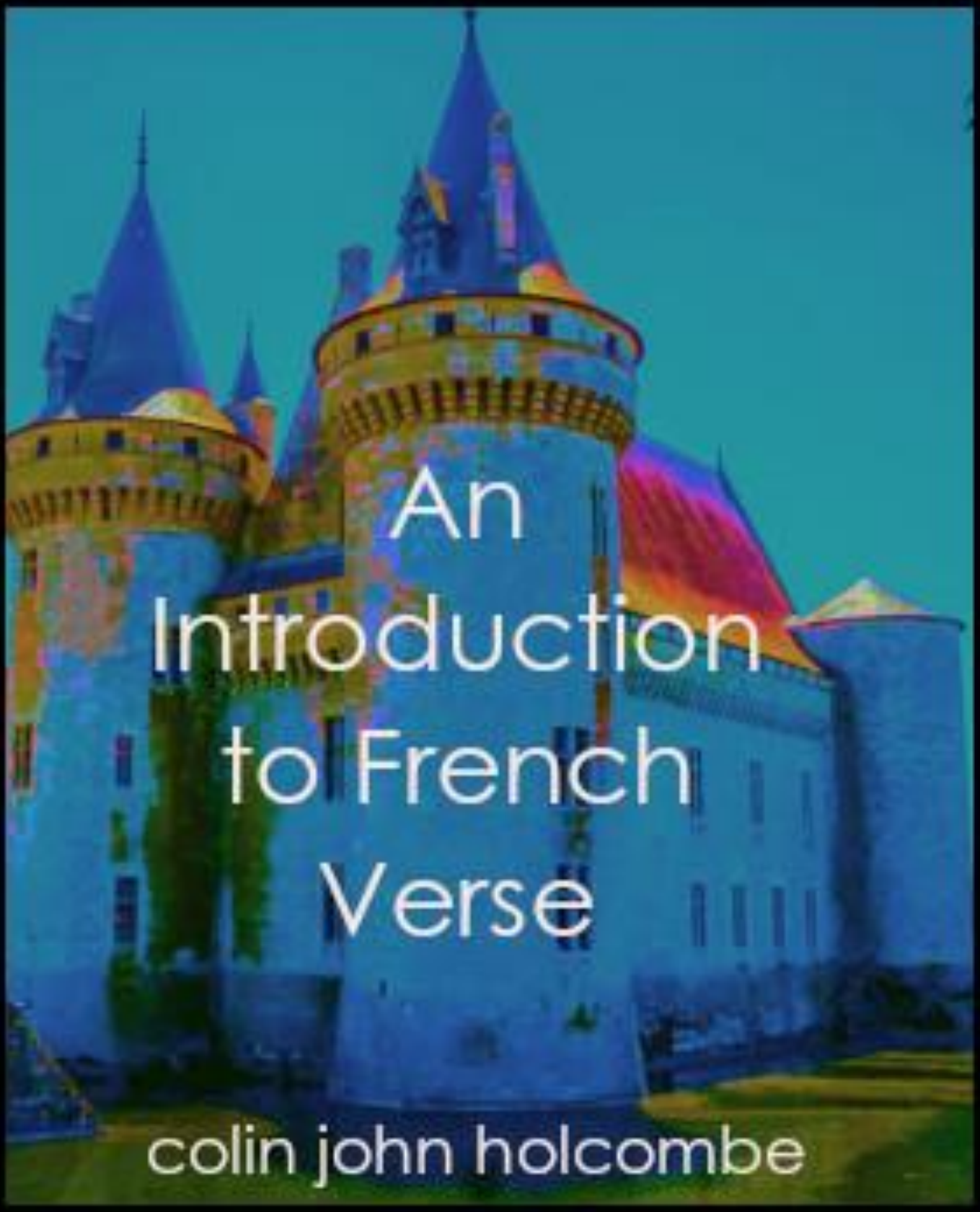

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An Introduction to French Verse

Volume One

Notes and translations by

Colin John Holcombe

Ocaso Press 2024

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PREFACE

I have tried to illustrate the range and variety of French verse with characteristic poems that translate into acceptable English poems. Most of these are well known, often in celebrated translations, but these volumes may be the broadest anthology in decent verse renderings. Translation issues are discussed after the anthology section, and the book concludes with resources and references.

The ebook will display as French text and facing English translation on laptops and larger computer screens.

Biographical notes and the like are kept to a minimum because this material is well covered in Internet sources.

The present volume is the first of three and covers the 9th to 18th century period. Volume 2 will cover 19th century French verse, and Volume 3 the twentieth century.

FRENCH VERSIFICATION

The rules governing French verse {3} are summarized in this introductory section, and repeated at greater length in the anthology sections that follow. Books and internet sites giving further details are listed in the Resources section.

The French Language

The lands now making France were once part of Gaul: a loose confederacy of Celtic tribes that was famously conquered by Julius Caesar and incorporated into the Roman Empire. The local people continued speaking their Celtic tongues in everyday matters, but the Roman administrators and landowners were naturally obliged to use Latin in their official duties. It was a Vulgar Latin, however, not far from classical tongue but adulterated by some grammatical irregularities. When Roman power waned and then wholly disappeared from French lands, that Vulgar Latin remained behind, serving for centuries as the lingua franca of the educated classes, the natural choice for legal documents and literature. It was from this Vulgar Latin that the Romance languages gradually evolved.

In the fourth and fifth centuries, when Gaul was progressively occupied by a Gothic people known as the Franks, the Vulgate Latin was greatly modified and extended. New words of Frankish origin were added. Latin

grammar was simplified, prefixes and word endings being changed or dropped. This Frankish language, or Old French as it is termed, became the everyday speech and then the literary language of all classes, though, as noted, Vulgar Latin was still retained for legal and literary documents.

The Franks were united by Clovis (481-513) into a powerful kingdom, the precursor of the feudal Carolingian Empire, which stretched from present-day Italy to Holland and incorporated much of France and Germany. The Empire was constantly at war — with the Saxons, the Avars, the Slavs, the Danes and the Moors of Spain — but fragmented after Charlemagne's death into the Kingdom of France and the Holy Roman Empire. From the 10th to the 14th centuries the French Kingdom was governed by the House of Capet, which fought off the Plantagenets and allied itself with the Pope in his dispute with the Cathars of Toulouse.

Old French (8th-14th centuries) was a tangle of dialects spoken in northern France, but another language altogether was spoken in the south: Occitan, which is closest to contemporary Catalan.

Pronunciation

French is a Romance language, unlike English in many respects. Its vowels, semivowels and nasal consonants, distinctive and beautiful, often have no exact equivalent in English, and the syllables themselves, unlike those in English or Latin, carry no *inherent* stress or weight. Thus,

while English verse is based on various patterns of inherently stressed and unstressed syllables, French verse is not, being simply arranged in semantic groupings where the last syllable in that group is given an *imposed* stress, being immediately followed by a caesura or slight pause where the reader half stops for breath. It's also important to note that, whereas contemporary French poetry is read as everyday speech — or largely so: see Volume Three for the details — traditional French verse most decidedly is not. Traditional verse is pronounced so as to maintain the appropriate number of syllables, where each syllable contains exactly one sounded vowel. Where the English poet may vary the number of syllables a little from line to line for naturalness, variety or special effects, the French poet may not: the alexandrine, for example, always contains exactly twelve syllables. Until recently, indeed, French verse lines had to maintain their stipulated number of syllables to be fully recognizable as verse.

Trouble comes with the so-called neutral e, the final *e, es* and *ent* that are silent in everyday speech but not necessarily so in verse. Here *cette semaine*, pronounced as sèt smèn in everyday conversation, become sè te se mèn in an alexandrine. The final *t* of the third person present tense ending of –*ent* is also sounded, and carried forward when immediately followed by a vowel. Conversely, at line ends, the neutral e (as a final e, es or ent) is *not* sounded but simply serves to lengthen the preceding vowel a little. These lengthened lines are termed feminine. Lines not so ending are termed masculine. Though they may sound much the same, feminine lines do not rhyme with masculine, only with other feminine lines. Similarly, masculine lines only rhyme

with other masculine lines.

Enjambment (i.e. the content running on, beyond the line ends, common in English blank verse) is generally avoided in French verse. In shape and semantic content, therefore, traditional French verse lines are securely end-stopped. French verse is generally more formal and constrained than ours, and these differences have to be appreciated if French verse is to be heard in its full power and beauty.

For this reason, audiences used to the burly rhetoric of Elizabethan plays will likely be disappointed at their first experience of French neoclassic drama, finding it too quiet, cerebral and restrained. So may also appear French poetry generally. It is usual in speaking English verse to aim for an easy and expressive naturalness, whereas the corresponding French delivery may well seem over-precise or even affected. English and French poetry have rather different traditions.

Metre

As noted, French verse syllables each contain one sounded vowel, but no *inherent* stress, which may explain why traditional French verse has to be governed by strict and somewhat artificial rules. The most formal verse line is the *alexandrine*, which has exactly 12 syllables, neither more nor less. Major imposed stresses come on the 6th and 12th syllables, and secondary accents on ends of subgroups comprising these half lines, be they groupings of 1 5, 2 4, 3

3, 4 2 or 5 1 syllables. That variety made for a fairly flexible verse line, though the lines also have to rhyme aa bb cc, etc. (there is no equivalent to unrhymed blank verse in French). In verse lines of ten syllables the caesura generally comes on the fourth or fifth syllable.

Rhyme

Rhyme is a match in sounds (phonemes) between words of different meaning, preferably different function as well (verb with noun, etc.) but has more complicated rules in French. We are happy with high/sky, etc., but the French dislike what they call *rime pauvre*. *Rime suffisante* requires two sounds or phonemes to match: vowel + consonant or consonant + vowel. *Rime riche* requires an additional phoneme match, generally consonant + vowel + consonant. but is sometimes taken to include assonance earlier in the line. And whereas the English detest rime riche, reserving it for comic effects, the French admire this extra correspondence. Or did so in the Romantic period, before the Symbolists judged the feature too cloying and ostentatious.

Technically, the various rhyme schemes are termed as follows:

Rimes croissées: ababcdcd.

Rimes plates : aabbccdd.

Rimes embrassées: abbacddc.

Rimes mêlées: no regular scheme.

Rimes redoublés: recurrence of the same rhyme in more than two lines.

In practice, rhyme schemes are tied to stanza forms, so that commonest arrangements are as follows, capital letters indicating lines that are repeated: *Ballade*: eight lines, *ababbcbC*, *ababbcbC*, *ababbcbC*, *bcbC*; ten lines, *ababbccdcD*, *ababbccdcD*, *ababbccdcD*, *ccdcD*. *Rondel: ABba*, *abAB*, *abbaA*. *Rondeau: aabba*, *aab refrain*, *aabba refrain*. *Triolet: ABaAabAB*. *Sonnet: abba abba ccdede*.

Phonetic Patterning

French verse may also be phonetically patterned, i.e. the very sounds of French words, vowels and consonants form patterns pleasing to the ear, both ornamental and adding semantic emphasis.

Much of this feature comes from the choice of words, how they are pronounced and what associated meanings are called up. We note in Ronsard's *Sur la Mort de Marie* below the *languissante*, for example, the obligatory associations with *jeunesse, grace, amour, nouveauté* and *beauté*, all, from the opening *Comme*, transforming individual reality by personification and metaphor into the sad universals of human existence.

The poem is written in lines of twelve syllables, which I have here retained for the translation, to give a restrained and slow-moving fulness to the thoughts. The metre is very regular; the hemistichs in the first stanza run :

Comme on voit sur la branche /

au mois de Mai la rose 3 3 | 4 2
En sa belle jeunesse, / en sa première fleur 4 2 | 4 2
Rendre le ciel jaloux / de sa vive couleur, 4 2 | 4 2
Quand l'Aube de ses pleurs / au point du jour l'arrose : 3 3 | 4 2

The arrangement of liquid, vibrant and sibilant syllables is also controlled by these groupings, e.g.:

Rendre le ciel jaloux / de sa vive couleur,

The measured nature of the thought is emphasized by *the repeated rose arrose, repose déclose, reposes roses*, and all but two lines end in the lengthening r or s. The phonetic patterning is subtle but quite rich. A few examples:

Comme on voit sur la branche au mois de Mai la rose
En sa belle jeunesse, en sa première fleur

Pour o**b**sèques reçois mes larmes et mes **p**leurs,
Ce vase **p**lein de lait, ce **p**anier **p**lein de fleurs,
Afin que vif, et mort, ton corps ne soit que roses.

And so on ; there are many beauties. Finally, in what is only the briefest introduction to the piece, we note the repetitions and long vowels in the closing line:

Afin que vif, et mort, ton corps ne soit que roses.

Patterning is often subtler in French than English, but exists all the same — or did until Modernism, and particularly Postmodernism, decreed the matter was of no interest, indeed unwanted in verse that should approximate to everyday speech patterns. It is one reason (see the

Appendix) why I have not employed ‘contemporary free verse’ in these translations.

Stanza Forms: Lyric

There is considerable overlap in the stanza forms used for lyric, narrative and dramatic purposes, but it may help to follow stanza developments under these broad headings.

The lyric began in short pieces where individual lines, words and rhymes were closely repeated. Thus the *rondeau* commonly consisted of 15 lines, each of 10 or 12 syllables, all constructed around two rhymes only. A refrain (R) was often added, so that a typical rondeau might be aabba aabR aabbaR. The *rondel* was shorter, generally 13 lines of 8 or 10 syllables, rhymed Abba abAB abbaA where the capitals denote refrains. The *rondine* was shorter still: 12 lines of eight or ten syllables rhymed abbaabR abbaR. In practice there were several such arrangements, but characteristically the refrain repeated elements of previous lines, and employed its restricted rhyme schemes. The form probably originated in dances or sung choruses.

The *sonnet*, introduced to French verse by Marot in the sixteenth century, was essentially a rondel with a second refrain added. The lines had 8, 10 or 12 syllables and were arranged as an octave consisting of two quatrains followed by a sestet. The first was rhymed abba abba, or ABba abAB, or abbaAB, where A and B were in fact refrains. The sestet was commonly rhymed cc dede, but as always, depending on the period, there were individual variations.

Equally popular was the *ballade*, which became the dominant verse form in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century France. It was generally longer than the rondeau and ended with an envoi, an address to the dedicatee, often termed 'prince'. A common form was a 28-line ballade rhyming ababbcbC ababbcbC ababbcbC bcbC, but again there were individual varieties. Lines had 8 or ten syllables, and rhymes did not exceed five.

In the *triolet*, which first appeared in 1486, the first line (A) was used three times and the second line (B) twice. A typical poem was rhymed AB aAa bAB. The *villanelle* was even more complicated, with five stanzas of three lines (with eight or ten syllables) followed by a quatrain of four lines. A typical villanelle was thus rhymed AbA abA abA abA abA abAA.

These forms generally fell out of favour in the classical period, but were revived in the nineteenth century by poets escaping the restrictions of the alexandrine.

What did survive was Ronsard's ode, a splendid creation that was taken further by many poets, including Boileau and Voltaire. Ronsard's ode had stanzas of 9 lines, unequal syllables to the line (10-4-10-4-10-10-4-4-8) and an ababccddc rhyme scheme. Later poets changed the form considerably, however, often away from the lyric to something more detached, measured and imposing.

France, even up to the seventeenth century, also had its dialects and spelling variants. In medieval times, southern France and surrounding areas even had a different

language. Occitan was a Romance language similar to Old French but derived from Latin by a different route. In its literature, the area is best known for its brilliant if short-lived period of troubadours or travelling minstrels singing of love, warfare and intrigue in verse forms described above, though often more ingeniously rhymed.

Stanza Forms: Narrative

The earliest narrative is the anonymous *Sequence of St. Eulia* (Buona Pulcella), fortuitously preserved in a book of sermons by Gregory of Nazianzus, dating to around 880, is clearly in French, though there are echoes of earlier Latin verse. Rhyme is present but approximate.

Fabliaux were short comic narratives, generally dealing with immorality in a blunt and coarse way. Long epic poems, called *chansons de geste*, were also popular in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Their stanzas are generally shaped by rhyme, but sometimes a little approximately. Assonant rhymes, i.e. — with the same vowel-sound but different consonants — features in the later anonymous *Song of Roland,* for example. *Aucassin et Nicolette*, also anonymous, is equally famous, but more human and complex. An early French was also spoken in England after the Norman Conquest, which is again illustrated by a short extract from work by Marie de France.

Poems could be much longer than the lyric forms noted above, but were often simply rhymed as aabb or abab. There were also specific forms, however. The *lai* was

a nine-line poem, often with aabaabaab rhyme pattern, where a-rhyme lines had 5 syllables and b-rhyme lines had 2 syllables.

Matters were more regimented from the middle of the seventeenth century, and narratives were commonly written in lines of ten (dizaine) or twelve syllables (douzaine). The ten syllable line was commonly segmented as 5:5, 6:4 or 4:6 but often tightly rhymed, e.g. ababbccdcd.

Stanza Forms: Drama

Dramatic poems arose from liturgical drama, and were closely connected with church ritual. *Le Jeu de Saint Nicolas* by Jean Bodel is a combination of farce, satire and miracle play. Many were complicated by sub-plots and took several days to perform. *La Farce de Maître Pathelin* dates from the mid fifteenth century and distantly anticipates Molière's comedies. It is written in short but effective rhyming couplets.

In the neoclassical plays of Corneille, Racine, Molière and others we come to the alexandrine in its most constrained, formal and exact shape. Varieties of the twelve syllable line, with various rhyme schemes, also appeared in the longer works of Voltaire and others, and some may have been written more for public declamation than silent reading.

POEMS AND TRANSLATIONS

Beginnings: Early and Middle Medieval Period

Old French, when we first catch sight of it in the anonymous *Sequence of St. Eulia* (Buona Pulcella), fortuitously preserved in a book of sermons by Gregory of Nazianzus, dating to around 880, is clearly in French, though there are echoes of earlier Latin verse. Rhyming is also evident, though the rhymes are approximate. More exactly, we could say that the text consists of 14 assonant couplets, each written on one line and separated by a punctus. The final lines are unpaired, and some lines have 11, 12, or 13 syllables. {19}

Assonant rhymes, i.e. — with the same vowel-sound but different consonants — also features in the later anonymous *Song of Roland*. The other chanson de geste featured, *Aucassin et Nicolette,* is equally famous, but more human and complex.

Assonant rhymes, i.e. — with the same vowel-sound but different consonants — also features in the later anonymous *Song of Roland*. {13} This chanson de geste of some 4,000 lines describes an episode in the wars of Charlemagne with the Moors of Spain, specifically, Roland's Battle of Roncevaux Pass in AD 778, where the hero was betrayed to the Moors and died fighting for the Christian cause. As to be expected, this celebrated *chanson de geste* portrayed the knightly ideals of mediaeval Europe, and

enjoyed enormous popularity. *Roland* was probably written somewhere between 1040 and 1115, possibly by a poet named *Turold*, and sung by travelling minstrels. Each line had 10 syllables (but sometimes 12 syllables later), and used assonance rather than true rhyme (until the later sections, when true rhyme also appears.) Each stanza used just the one rhyme, so that the overall rhyme scheme might be aaaa bbbbbbbb ccccccc, etc. The *chanson* was probably chanted rather than read or sung.

Also anonymous is the *Aucassin et Nicolette* chanson de geste, but more human and complex. {11} The poem incorporates several mediaeval genres in a *chantefable*, literally a sung story. Though written with great freshness, the poem derives the bourgeois region of Picardy rather than the aristocratic and courtly environs of Paris. Its setting is Provence and Tunisia, and the background is the activities of Charles of Anjou, an avaricious monarch who so antagonized his contemporaries that all Europe united against him. Many critics in fact see the poem as a parody of the popular mediaeval themes: i.e. the epic, the romance, and the saint's life. The lady dresses as a troubadour, for example, and pursues her love of an inaccessible man. Aucassin's speech turns the saint's life on its head by preferring hell to heaven because hell's inmates will be more entertaining. Wars are fought over food, but not with food as here with cheese and apple projectiles.

Le Roman de la Rose is a long poem written in the courtly language of Old French, purporting to be a 'mirror of love' taking the form of an allegorical dream vision. {17} As the

lover's quest, the rose is both the name of the noble lady and an abstract symbol of female sexuality. The short excerpt indicates that the poem does not hesitate to lay down the law, when the style approaches a fabliaux. The verse itself is quite simple: rhyming couplets. The names of the other characters function both as personal names and as metonyms illustrating the different factors that lead to and constitute a love affair. Its long-lasting influence is evident in the number of surviving manuscripts of the work, in the many translations and imitations it inspired, as in the praise and controversy the poem inspired

In contrast is the old French verse of someone calling herself Marie de France (1160-1215). {16} Her *Lai del Chievrefeuil* is written in a dialect of Norman French spoken by the English aristocracy of the time. There are many stories of Tristam and Iseult, but this is an exceptionally short example, where each stanza uses a single rhyme.

La Farce de Maître Pathelin is one of the more effective fabliaux, where the characters come alive in short but effective rhyming couplets. {12} It dates from the mid fifteenth century and thus distantly anticipates Molière's social comment. Interest in the country's medieval literature grew rapidly in nineteenth century France, and the text in this case was established by Anatole de Montaiglon and printed in 1872.

Most of these poems are far too long to be translated in entirety here, but are available in modernized French and English translation from commercial and academic

publishing houses.

Anon (c. 880) : Buona Pulcella

Buona pulcella fut eulalia.
Bel auret corps bellezour anima
Voldrent la veintre li deo Inimi.
Voldrent la faire diaule seruir
Elle no'nt eskoltet les mals conselliers.
Qu'elle deo raneiet chi maent sus en ciel.
Ne por or ned argent ne paramenz.
Por manatce regiel ne preiement.
Niule cose non la pouret omque pleier.
La polle sempre non amast lo deo menestier.
E por o fut presentede maximiien.
Chi rex eret a cels dis soure pagiens
Il li enortet dont lei nonque chielt.
Qued elle fuiet lo nom christiien.
Ell'ent adunet lo suon element.
Melz sostendreiet les empedementz
Qu'elle perdesse sa virginitet.
Por o's furet morte a grand honestet
Enz enl fou lo getterent com arde tost.
Elle colpes non auret, por o no's coist.
A czo no's voldret concreidre li rex pagiens.
Ad une spede li roveret tolir lo chieef.
La domnizelle celle kose non contredist.
Volt lo seule lazsier si ruovet Krist.
In figure de colomb volat a ciel.
Tuit oram que por nos degnet preier.
Qued avuisset de nos Christus mercit
Post la mort et a lui nos laist venir
Par souue clementia.

Anon : The Good Girl

Such goodness did the girl Eulalia know,
with body beautiful, her soul more so,
that enemies of God denied her praise
and strove to make her serve the devil's ways.
Yet she'll not listen to such councillors
nor turn from God and His most heavenly laws.
Not jewels, gold nor silver have her won,
and king's own pleas and wishes will she shun.
Nothing, it seems, persuades the girl to lose
her love for God and service. For such views
she was before the great Maximian brought
who was the king of pagans then. He sought
she give up Christian name and thereby all
the punishments that otherwise befall.
She gathers up her strength; she does not care;
and would that persecution gladly bear
than lose her soul's virginity. She died
a famous death for that, in faith and pride.
Into the fire they thrust her, but to learn
she had no sins to speak of, couldn't burn.
To her the pagan king stayed untoward,
and ordered head be struck off by the sword.
For this sad earth, she said, she would not grieve,
but more in Christ and only would believe.
With that, a dove, she rose into the sky
with prayers, for which will all men hope and sigh.
May Christ show mercy to us through our breath
and humbly let us come to Him at death.
Such be His grace.

Anon (1040-1115) : *de* Le Chanson de Roland

CCIX

– «Ami Rollant, prozdoem, juvente bele,
Cum jo serai a Eis, em ma chapele,
Vendrunt li hume, demanderunt noveles;
2920. Jes lur dirrai, merveilluses e pesmes:

«Morz est mis nies, ki tant me fist cunquere.»
Encuntre mei revelerunt li Seisne,
E Hungre e Bugre e tante gent averse,
Romain, Puillain e tuit icil de Palerne
E cil d'Affrike e cil de Califerne;

Puis entrerunt mes peines e mes suffraites.
Ki guierat mes oz a tel poeste,
Quant cil est [morz] ki tuz jurz nos cadelet?
E! France, cum remeines deserte!

2930. Si grant doel ai que jo ne vuldreie estre!»
Sa barbe blanche cumencet a detraire,
Ad ambes mains les chevels de sa teste.
Cent milie Francs s'en pasment cuntre tere.

c. 1090

Anon : *from* The Song of Roland

CCIX

‘My good friend Rolland, one esteemed so well:
when come to Aix, and in that chapel dwell,
and men approach for tidings, I must tell
how hardships, strange and heavy, would prevail.

My nephew’s dead who had supported realms,
and Saxon men deny my rule of then.
Hungarians, Bulgars: from that hostile den
will come the Romans, Pullain and Palerne,
the tribes of Afrik and of Califerne.

So back to pain and effort I am led,
for who’ll command our armies here, and shed
a luster on our warring days? No, he is dead.
By this, my France, how desolate you’re made!

How grief, I’d sooner meet my funeral bell’ —
he grasped his old white beard — ‘than hear it say
remove this thing and from the roots.’ So fell
the hundred thousand Franks that swooned away.

Anon (1180-1220) : *de* Aucassin et Nicolette
Canto XLI

Quant or entent Aucalfins
De s'amie o le cler vis ,
Qja'ele eft venue el pais,
Or fu liés, aine ne fut fi.
Aveuc la dame s'eft mis :
Dufqu'a Toftel ne prift fin ;
En la canbre fe font mis
La u Nicholete tift.

Quant ele voit fon ami ,
Or fu lie, aine ne fu fi;
Contre lui en pies fali.
Quant or le voit Aueaffins ,
Andeus fes bras li tendi ,
Doueement le reeuilli ,
Les eus li baiCTe & le vis.
La nuit le laifTent enfi ,
Tresqu'au demain par matin
Que l'efpoufa Aueaflins :
Dame de Biaueaire en fit;
Puis vefquirent il mains dis
Et menèrent lor delis.
Or a fa joie Aueaffins
Et Nieholete autrefi.

No eantefable prent fin :
N'en fai plus dire.

Anon (1180-1220) : *from* Aucassin et Nicolette
Canto XLI

And when that Aucassin did hear
his love, the bright of face, was near
and dwelt indeed upon this shore,
then never man knew gladness more.
At once, with lady, off he went,
full hasting on, not halting, bent
on reaching that far chamber door
where Nicholette was seen once more.

And she, on seeing lover there
10. at once abandoned every care.
Gladly to her feet she leapt
that Aucassin then likewise swept
her in his arms and sweetly found
her to his body tightly bound.
He kissed her eyes, he kissed her face
and on throughout the night-time's space,
until the morrow's morning tide
show Nicolette now made his bride.
The Lady of Beaucaire was she
and many years that company
they, close together, entertained,
a joy that Aucassin maintained,
nor need his Nicolette amend.

Our chantefable here has end:
no more of it to say.

Guillaume de Lorris (13th century) *de* Le Roman de la Rose
V: Couvoytise

Apres fut paincte Couvoytise
C'est celle qui les gens attise
De prendre et de riens ne donner
Et les grans trésors amener.
C'est celle qui fait a usure
Prester pour la tresgrant ardure
D'avoir, conquerre et assembler
C'est celle qui semont d'embler
Les larrons plains de meschant vueil
C'est grant péché, mais c'est grant dueil

A la fin quant il les fault pandre.
C'est celle qui fait l'autruy prendre
J'entens prendre sans achepter
Qui fait tricher et crocheter.
C'est celle qui les desvoyeurs
Fait tous et les faulx plaidoyeurs
Qui maintes fois par leurs cautelles
Ostent aux varletz et pucelles
Leurs droitz et leurs rentes escheuz
Courbes, courtes et moult crocheuz

Guillaume de Lorris *: from* Romance de la Rose
V: Covetousness

Covetousness was pictured next,
as truly makes good people vexed.
It grasps and gives not back a thing,
for all the treasures though it bring.
It's that which makes for usury,
hard presses men that constantly
they seek, assemble, from the first
are with a thieving nature cursed.
Plain robbers, harsh and cruel,
with this great sin must fight their duel.

It leads into the hangman's rope
that gives the others too much scope
to take from others till what's left
is but to cheat their way to theft.
It's she who stirs up litigation
with every kind of accusation.
At fraud, miscounting, doubtful trades
come varlets and the tripping maids
to court and have their rightful cause
be rendered mute before the laws.

Marie de France (1160-1215) Lai del Chievrefeuil

Par cortoisie despuel
Vilonie & tot orguel,
Car che k'ont chascié mi oel
Le me fait metre sur fuell,
.I. lai en acuel,
C'est del kievrefuel.

La note del kievrefuel
Par amors comencier vuel,
Com cil ki mais ne me duel
Des maus dont doloir me suel,
Mais chi en recuel
D'amors bel acuel.

Amie, je vos salu
Ens mon lai premierement.
Doce amie, mon salu
Prendés au comencement,
Car molt m'a vers vos valu
Ke si deboinairement
Vos a de m'amor chalu :
Je fuisse mors autrement.

Faite m'avés grant bonté,
Doce amie, deboinaire riens,
Dont j'ai vostre cuer donté,
Si ke vostres est li cuers & miens.
Or ne seront mais conté
Li mal dont j'ai tant esté empriens,

Marie de France : Lay of Chievrefeuil

Of a piece is courtesy
against all pride and villainy.
As eyes may look but cannot see
I write this lay as testimony
in gratitude. So be
this honeysuckle melody.

But in that flower's melody
I bid to start where love will be.
That no more sorrows shall it see,
or reap that evil's legacy,
but, receiving all, he
will feel love's charity.

First I greet you as a friend,
for so my lay has testified.
That from the first you apprehend
that you and I are near allied.
Recall the times that I would spend
in rapt contentment by your side,
accepting love we each would send,
when otherwise I should have died.

For that great favor shown to me,
sweet friend, it is joyful sign,
it is a heart most certainly
accounted as both yours and mine.
We need not count up now to see
how evils and their fell design

K’a grant bien me sont monté :
Je ne quier mais plus de tos les biens.

Je ne quier nule autre joie,
N’autre bien, n’autre deduit
Mais ke tos jors de vos j’oie,
K’a nule rien tant ne luit
K’a çou ke plaire vous doie,
Et ke ja ne vos anuit.
Je sui, ou ke j’onques soie,
Avoc vos & jor & nuit.

Ja mes cuers ne se partira
De vos mais ens ma vie,
Et s’il s’em part, quel part ira ?
Saichiés, ma doce amie,
Ke s’il s’em part, il partira :
De ce ne dotés mie.
Honis soit ki departira
Si doce compaignie !

Ne fait mie a departir ;
Diex nos en deffende !
Ains puisse li miens partir
Que li vostres tende,
Doce amie, au resortir.
A m’amor entende !
Faice l’on de moi martir
Ançois que ç’atende !

have turned to good: no remedy
but I to this would now incline.

I do not want some other joy
no ready goodness, or delight,
but what I hear that you employ.
For nothing throws its keenest light
than what you love and must enjoy:
nothing now that you must slight.
For pleasures new will never cloy
when I am with you day and night.

From you this heart would never know
life's painful parting at the end.
And if it left, where would it go?
In this you know, my dearest friend,
however life should overflow
in troubles that could never mend.
Shame on anyone who'd throw
away the sweetness time will lend!

So never mention leaving you,
for God forbid we ever should.
Before that notion even grew,
enough to think we one day could,
sweet friend, hold fast: the heart is true.
I'd rather seek a martyr hood
before that parting make me sue
for this, so be it understood.

Amie, entre vos & moi
N’ait ne guerre ne descort ;
Doce amie, par la foi
Ke jo, vostre amis, vos port,
Et port & porter vos doi,
Ja, par moi ne par mon tort
Ne por rien ke je foloi,
Ne ferai de vos resort.

Ja ens moi ne pechera
Ke j’aie vostre corous :
Tuit li bien ke mes cuers a
Puissent ançois estre rous !
Les biens ai je tos a ja
Et les delis ai je tous
Quanques Damediex cria,
La desus et cha desous.

Onques a home vivant
N’avint mais si bien d’amer,
Tant com ventent tuit li vent
De la & de ça la mer.
Dame, merci vos en rent,
De par cui se puet clamer
Cil ki mais nul mal ne sent,
Ne en qui n’a point d’amer.

A nului ne port envie
De rien ki soit en cest mont ;
Ja ne quier plus ens ma vie
De tos les biens ki i sont
Fors ke vostre amor, amie,

Let the two of us, my friend,
give up war's disharmony,
sweet friend, by common faith we lend
ourselves to each where both agree
to act as ever to amend
the actions done if wrongfully.
Whatever therefore rumours send
I will return as formerly.

In myself I'd never sin
that you reproach me angrily:
rather virtues locked within
the heart be killed immediately.
Such goodly things that I could win
were given here abundantly.
Our Lord's creations, these have been
both up and down repeatedly.

Not to anyone on earth today
has come the chance to love so well
but as the sea winds blow each way
and never in one place will dwell,
Madam, I give you thanks to stay
forever in this state to tell
that no such hurt or long delay
can be as bitterness might spell.

I do not envy anyone
in this wide world of nothing worth,
yet of my life I'd not be done
nor of the gifts of this good earth,
before your love, sweet friend, I'd won.

La dont viegnent & ou vont
Mi penser sans felonie,
Ki font par vos kank’il font.

Doce, plus doce ke mieaus,
Cil lais, ki est boins & beaus,
Est fais por vos tos noveaus,
Et s’il enviesist, seviaus
Tos jors plaira mais
As clers & as lais.

Ce saicent jouenes & viaus
Ke, por çou ke kievrefiaus
Est plus dons et flaire miaus
K’erbe ke l’en voie as gaus,
A non chis dous lais
Kievrefex li jais.

Yet here be plenty, never dearth:
such thoughts for you I would not shun
since in your all they found their birth.

Sweet, more sweet than honey dew
is this sweet lay that's fair and true
that's made anew and made for you,
that were I old at least I'd do
is please and please more thoroughly
the clerics and the laity.

Let it be known the young and old
are by the honeysuckle told,
for through the forest ways and wold
it blossoms sweetest, many-fold.
So as a lay is made this long
honeysuckle's joyful song.

Jean de Boves (13-14th century) : Explicit de Brunain la vache au Prestre.

D'un vilain conte et de sa fame,
C'un jor de feste Nostre Dame
Aloient ourer à l'yglise.
Li prestres, devant le servise,
Vint à son proisne sermoner,
Et dist qu'il fesoit bon doner
Por Dieu, qui reson entendoit ;
Que Diex au double li rendoit
Celui qui le fesoit de cuer.
« Os, fet li vilains, bele suer,
Que noz prestres a en couvent :
Qui por Dieu done à escient,
Que Diex li fet mouteploier ;
Miex ne poons-nous emploier
No vache, se bel te doit estre,
Que pour Dieu le douons le prestre ;
Ausi rent ele petit lait.
— Sire, je vueil bien que il l'ait,
Fet la dame, par tel reson. »
A tant s'en vienent en meson,
Que ne firent plus longue fable.
Li vilains s'en entre en l'estable,
Sa vache prent par le lien,
Présenter le vait au doien.
Li prestres ert sages et cointes.
« Biaus Sire, fet-il à mains jointes,
Por l'amor Dieu Blerain vous doing. »
Le lien li a mis el poing,

Jean de Boves. (13-14th century) Brunain the Cow to the Priest

A villain's tale I have to tell,
and on Our Lady's feast as well.
Devoutly, all to church had gone,
and with the service started on,
the priest began: our Lord attests
that there is goodness in bequests.
and He who hears our inmost hearts
will double all that gift imparts.
'You hear that, love? What priest has said?'
10. remarks the fool to her he wed.
'Willingly, we have to give,
when certainly, as true faiths live,
we'll be rewarded, handsomely,
for goodness and our piety.
Why not our cow? We can at least
give that creature to the priest.
She hardly gives us any milk.'
With arguments of such-like ilk
his wife is happy to agree
20. To house returning, soon we see
the villain at his stable make
a halter for his cow and take
it promptly off to priest, who got
a laugh from this, as like as not.
It stood there, fine and curly-haired.
'It's yours,' the villain said, prepared
to swear he had no other alms
to give, but knit his surly palms.

Si jure que plus n’a d’avoir.
« Amis, or as-tu fet savoir,
Fet li provoires dans Constans,
Qui à prendre bée toz tans.
Va-t’en, bien as fet ton message,
Quar fussent or tuit ausi sage
Mi paroiscien come vous estes,
S’averoie plenté de bestes. »
Li vilains se part du provoire.
Li prestres comanda en oirre
C’on face pour aprivoisier
Blerain avoec Brunain lier,
La seue grant vache demaine.
Li clers en lor jardin la maine,
Lor vache trueve, ce me samble.
Andeux les acoupla ensamble ;
Atant s’en torne, si les lesse.
La vache le prestre s’abesse,
Por ce que voloit pasturer,
Mes Blere nel vout endurer,
Ainz sache le liens si fors,
Du jardin la traïna fors :
Tant l’a menée par ostez,
Par chanevières et par prez,
Qu’elle est reperie à son estre
Avoecques la vache le prestre,
Qui moult à mener li grevoit.
Li vilains garde, si le voit ;
Moult en a grant joie en son cuer.
« Ha, fet li vilains, bêle suer,

’In God’s good name I give our cow:
Blérain is your possession now.’
‘My son,’ the priest responded, ‘would
that all were versed in suchlike good.
I will accept it, as in virtue shod,
as offerings should be, made to God.
Go back in peace, your duty shown,
in faith and wisdom, bravely grown.
If so did children of my flock
I’d always have good things in stock.’
His Blérain given to the priest,
the villain leaves, but to this beast
is dragged a Brunain, his own cow
the more to teach that Blérain how
it should obey another’s hand.
The morrow came ; on priests’s own land
the two were yoked, bound each to each,
though one had not the other’s reach.
One would bend down, Blérain not so,
to Brunain’s patch would never go.
Each tugged and pulled the rope so hard
that both were driven from the yard,
but in that tussle; Blérain won
and, dragging Brunain on, must run
back to its own pastures, on
past fields and house and village, gone,
the priest’s cow fighting all the same
but still arriving tired and tame.
The which the villain sees, amazed,
rejoicing. ‘May the Lord be praised.

Voirement est Diex bon doublère,
Quar li et autre revient Blère ;
Une grant vache amaine brune ;
Or en avons nous .II. por une :
— Petis sera nostre toitiaus. »
Par example dist cis fabliaus
Que fols est qui ne s’abandone ;
Cil a li bien cui Diex le done,
Non cil qui le muce et enfuet ;
Nus hom mouteplier ne puet
Sanz grant éur, c’est or del mains.
Par grant éur ot li vilains
vaches, et li prestres nule.
Tels cuide avancier qui recule.

My dear,’ he says.’ God’s word is true.
60. Blérain comes back, and now there’s two.
A deep brown beauty, by my oath,
I doubt our barn has room for both.’
So of this fiabliau take good note :
the upshot does not come by rote.
The one who gives has greater wealth
than he who hides and hoards in stealth.
And those who would aspire to gain
must first that simple trust attain.
By good fortune has the villain won
70. a second cow, the cleric none.
For what of one we too much yearn
will often to the other turn.

The Southern Tradition

Southern France, parts of Spain, Monaco and Italy spoke Occitan, a Romance language similar to Old French but deriving by a different route from Latin, being closest to present-day Catalan. The area was ruled in turn by the Romans, the Visigoths, and the Franks, but developed its distinct culture and a Cathar belief in two gods, one good and one evil. The Cathars also yielded more independence to women, denounced all killing, refused the sacrament of the Eucharist, and gave roles to Jews as bailiffs and other officials. For these and other heresies, the Cathars were condemned repeatedly by the Papacy, but matters came to a head in the 1208-9 Albigensian Crusade, which led to wholesale massacres of Cathars and then periodic repression for a century or so under the Inquisition. The Cathar heresy was finally extirpated around 1330, but with the destruction of their faith went much of the brilliant culture of the troubadours.

Scholars have many interpretations of this culture. That it derives from or is heavily influenced by Arab Iberia. That it espoused the theology of Bernard of Clairvaux, with its emphasis on religious and spiritual love, disinterested-ness, mysticism, and devotion to Mary. That it is a survival of the sexual mores and warrior codes of earlier Celtic or Germanic matriarchal societies. That it was influenced by what was understood of classical Roman world and its literature. That it was a reflection of Cathar religious doctrine, fading when that religion was suppressed. That it grew up simply as a response to the economic conditions, namely the wife's management of holdings when her husband was abroad on Crusades. That it originated in folklore and oral traditions.

That it grew up in the intertextual connection between vernacular and Medieval Latin. That it acquired Neoplatonic overtones in its ennobling effects of love. And so on: all most probably played some part in a brilliant if short-lived period of troubadours or travelling minstrels singing of love, warfare and intrigue in short pieces that employed exact rhymes in tightly-woven stanzas.

Thus the *sestina*, introduced by Anault Daniel, was a 39-line poem consisting of 6 rhymed stanzas of six lines each, followed by a 3-line envoi repeating the words/rhymes. The virtuoso rhyme/ repeated word scheme was:
First stanza: 1 2 3 4 5 6
Second stanza: 6 1 5 2 4 3
Third stanza: 3 6 4 1 2 5
Fourth stanza: 5 3 2 6 1 4
Fifth stanza: 4 5 1 3 6 2
Sixth stanza: 2 4 6 5 3 1
First line of envoi: rhymes 2-5
Second line of envoi: rhymes 4-3
Third line of envoi: rhymes 6-1

Biraut de Bornelh (c.1138 – 1215) was a troubadour associated with the castle of the viscount of Limoges. {15} He was born to a lower-class family in the Limousin, but his work was highly prized by literary contemporaries. He may have accompanied Aimar V of Limoges on the Third Crusade, and certainly made an individual pilgrimage to the Holy Land. His *Reis glorios* featured here is a simple ballade: 12 stanzas rhymed aabbx.

Bertran de Born (c.1140-1215) had a colourful life. {14} He was born a baron in Limousin, became involved in revolts

against Richard I and Phillip II, was married twice, produced five chidren, and ended his days as a monk. He was well known for his love songs (cansos) but more for his political pieces (sirventes). The poem translated is a virtuoso piece, not only tightly rhymed ababcddcee but employing those same rhymes for all five stanzas. The envoi is cee.

The *Sol sui qui sai lo sobrafan qu'em* sortz by Arnaut Daniel (1150-1210 is equally accomplished : the six 8-line stanzas employ the same rhymes throughout, repeating them from stanza to stanza. {10} The envoi is efg. Daniel may have been born to a noble family at the castle of Ribérac in Périgord, but the few contemporary sources also suggest he was a jester and unsuccesful gambler. Dante called him the great poet of love and verse craft, a claim championed by Ezra Pound.

Guirat de Bornelh (1138-1215) : Reis glorios

Reis glorios, verais lums e clartatz,
Deus poderos, Senher, si a vos platz,
al meu companh siats fizels ajuda;
qu'eu no lo vi, pos la nochs fo venguda,
   et ades sera l'alba!

Bel companho, si dormetz o velhatz,
no dormatz plus, suau vos ressidatz;
qu'en orien vei l'estela creguda
c'amena.l jorn, qu'eu l'ai ben conoguda,
   et ades sera l'alba!

Bel companho, en chantan vos apel;
no dormatz plus, qu'eu auch chantar l'auzel
que vai querren lo jorn per los boschatge,
et ai paor que.l gilos vos assatge,
   et ades sera l'alba!

Bel companho, issetz al fenestral
e regardatz las estelas del cel!
Conoisseretz si.us sui fizels messatge;
si non o faitz, vostres n'er lo damnatge,
   et ades sera l'alba!

Guirat de Bornelh : Glorious king

King in glory that is truth and light,
powerful lord, I beg you aid our plight,
and act as true companion to my friend:
I have not seen him from the daylight's end;
and dawn is nigh at hand.

My true companion: do you sleep or wake?
Bestir yourself and see the first light break
across the eastern sky, where star will tell
that daybreak comes apace, and shows it well;
and dawn is nigh at hand.

My true companion, whom our matins calls
to sleep no more but, as the bird song falls
across the daylight's tangle in the wood,
I fear suspicions here will bring no good;
and dawn is nigh at hand.

My true companion; gain the window, spy
the field of stars that sparkle in the sky;
you know the meaning of each hidden song
if cognizant or not of doing wrong,
and dawn is nigh at hand.

Bel companho, pos me parti de vos,
eu no.m dorm ni.m moc de genolhos,
ans preiei Deu, lo filh Santa Maria,
que.us me rendes per leial companhia,
   et ades sera l'alba!

Bel companho, la foras als peiros
me preiavatz qu'eu no fos dormilhos,
enans velhes tota noch tro al dia.
Era no.us platz mos chans ni ma paria,
   et ades sera l'alba!

Bel dous companh, tan sui en ric sojorn
qu'eu no volgra mais fos alba ni jorn,
car la gensor que anc nasques de maire
tenc et abras, per qu'e non prezi gaire
   lo fol gilos ni l'alba!

Know, my trued companion, leaving you,
I have not slept but knelt the whole night through.
I pray to God, who's hallowed Mary's son,
He give you back as true companion:
and dawn is nigh at hand.

You bid me, true companion, not to fear,
nor yet to sleep but hold the night watch here.
And this I've done; I've watched the whole night long
though you have called for neither me nor song
and dawn is nigh at hand.

My loyal watchman: know the place I stay
has riches far beyond the dawn or day.
The noblest lady that a woman bear
is held in my fond arms. Why then to care
for jealous fool or dawn at hand!

Bertran de Born (1140-1215) : Be·m platz lo gais temps de Pascor,

Be·m platz lo gais temps de Pascor,
Que fai fuolhas e flors venir,
E platz mi quan auch la baudora
Dels auzels, que fan retentir
Lor chan per lo boschatge,
E platz mi quan vei sobre·ls pratz
Tendas e pavilhos fermatz,
Et ai gran alegratge,
Quan vei per champanha rengatz
Chavaliers e chavals armatz.

E platz mi quan li corredor
Fan las gens e l'aver fugir,
E platz mi quan vei apres lor
Gran re d'armatz ensems venir,
E platz mi en mon coratge,
Quan vei fortz chastels assetjatz
E·ls barris rotz et esfondratz
E vei l'ost el ribatge,
Qu'es tot entorn claus de fossatz
Ab lissas de fortz pals serratz.

Et autressi·m platz de senhor,
Quant es primiers a l'envazir
En chaval armatz, ses temor,
Qu'aissi fai los sieus enardir
Ab valen vasselatge;
E puois que l'estorns es mesclatz

Bertran de Born : Easter time much pleases me

This Easter time much pleases me
that makes the leaves and flowers bloom;
I love to hear the gaiety
with which the singing birds assume
the thick, green safety of the woods.
I love to see on hill and lea
the splendid tents of chivalry,
I have much joy of neighbourhoods
when criss-crossed on the plain we see
the knights and armoured cavalry.

It pleases me when messengers
make men with their possessions flee,
and when a later glance concurs
with army's grand reality.
And then it pleases even more
to see the bare-walled forts displayed
with broken sanctuary betrayed,
to note the army on the shore
within its ditches stout arrayed
and thus its circling palisade.

I'm also pleased by that great lord
who is the first to sound attack,
who, fearless horseman, wields his sword
that all those following may not lack
the needful proof of valiant deed.
For so it is when horseman fight

Chascus deu esser acesmatz
E segre·l d'agradatge,
Que nuls hom non es re prezatz
Tro qu'a maints colps pres e donatz.

Massas e brans, elms de color,
Escutz tranchar e desguarnir
Veirem a l'entrar de l'estor
E maintz vassals ensems ferir,
Don anaran arratge
Chaval del mortz e dels nafratz;
E quant er en l'estorn entratz,
Chascus hom de paratge
No pens mas d'asclar chaps e bratz,
Que mais val mortz que vius sobratz.

Ie·us dic que tan no m'a sabor
Manjar ni beure ni dormir
Coma, quant auch cridar: " A lor! "
D'ambas las partz, et auch ennir
Chavals vochs per l'ombratge,
Et auch cridar: " Aidatz! Aidatz! "
E vei chazer per los fossatz
Paucs e grans per l'erbatge,
E vei los mortz que pe·ls costatz
An los tronzos ab los cendatz.

Baro, metetz en guatge
Chastels e vilas e ciutatz
Enans qu'usquecs no·us guerrejatz.

that truest valour learns to smite
and everyone in joy take heed.
No man is in his peers' good sight
except by trading blows aright.

Decked with plume and sword and mace
they cut and ride as nothing loth
to cut into the foe they face:
by this the vassals keep their oath.
And in the melee that ensues —
that flood of struggling horse and men
that turn to hack and hack again —
it's for a high-bred man to choose,
to risk his arm or severed head,
but not surrender till he's dead.

I cannot find much pleasure in
mere eating, drinking or in sleep.
I hear the voices shout: Begin!
And from all sides the voices sweep:
the horses neigh, but none will yield.
They hear me shout, To me! To me!
Throughout that reckless place they see
the old and young fall through the field,
and those not dead but soon to be
are speared with flame and enmity.

Barons, to whom I have appealed:
now pledge that house and castle be
but fought for in our company.

Arnaut Daniel (1150-1210) : Sol sui qui sai lo sobrafan qu'em sortz

Sol sui qui sai lo sobrafan qu'em sortz
al cor d'amor sofren per sobramar,
que mos volers es tant ferms et entiers
c'anc non s'esduis de celliei ni s'estors
cui encubic al prim vezer s'e puois:
c'ades ses lieis dic a lieis cochos motz;
puois quand la vei non sai, tant l'ai, que dire.

D'autras vezer sui secs e d'auzir sortz
q'en sola lieis vei e aug e esgar,
e jes d'aisso no'il sui fals plazentiers
que mais la vol non ditz la bocha'l cors,
qu'ieu non vau tant chams vauz ni plas ni puois
q'en un sol cors trob aissi bons aips totz,
q'en lieis los volc Dieus triar e assire.

Bon ai estat a maintas bonas cortz,
mas sai ab lieis trob pro ma is que lauzar:
mesur'e sen e autres bos mestiers,
beutat, joven, bos faitz e bels demors;
gen l'enseignet cortesia la duois
tant a de si totz faitz desplazens rotz
de lieis non cre res de ben si'a dire.

Arnaut Daniel : I only know the grief that comes to me

I know this overflowing grief in me
must come from love that's grown to great excess,
but since my will is ever strong and whole
it never once has left or drawn apart.
From first I felt for her and feel again.
away from her such ardent words I said,
when, be she close, I know not what to say.

I'm blind to other women, deaf to plea,
for only sight or hearing her can bless.
Nor is it slander that my tongue enroll
but silences that feed upon the heart.
I roam through hills and valley, field and plain
but find no others there imbued and bred
in graces God ordained and made them say.

In many splendid courts I've chanced to be
but all compared to her must shrink to less.
Her wit, her dancing measures, virtuous soul,
her youth, her looks, success in deed and art
display what only kindliness attain.
Nothing ill can thus remain: instead
there is a goodness she alone portray.

Nuills jauzimen no'm fora breus ni cortz
de lieis cui prec q'o vuoilla devinar,
o ja per mi non o sabra estiers
si'l cors ses dich no's presenta defors,
que jes Rozers, per aiga qe l'engrois,
non a tal briu c'al cor plus larga dotz
no'm fass', estanc d'amor, qan la remire.

Jois e solatz d'autra'm par fals e bortz,
c'una de pretz ab lieis no'is pot egar,
qe'l sieus solatz es dels autres sobriers.
Hai, si no l'ai, las, tan mal m'a comors!
Pero l'afans m'es deportz, ris e jois,
car en pensan sui de lieis lecs e glotz:
hai Dieus, si ja'n serai estiers gauzire!

Anc mais, so'us pliu, no'm plac tant treps ni bortz,
ni res al cor tant de joi no'm poc dar
cum fertz aquel, don anc feinz lausengiers
non s'esbruic, c'a mi sol so's tresors.
Dic trop? ieu non, sol lieis non si'enois:
bella, per Dieu, lo parlar e la votz
vuoill perdr'enans que diga ren qe'us tire.

E ma chanzos prec que no'us si'enois
car, si voletz grazir lo son e'ls motz,
pauc prez'Arnautz cui que plass'o que tire.

No joy from her could be too brief to see
if come in hope that even she may guess
from actions that I otherwise control.
It's true my feelings have no counterpart
in words, but, as the swollen Rhone will gain
its flood of power, the stirring heart is led
by sight of her to feel that stronger sway.

In joy and merriment they bend the knee,
all others, to her grace and worthiness.
So she above all others I'd extol
that, if denied me, I must sure depart
in real rejoicing that these hurts sustain:
with greed and gluttony I'm so fed
there's no enjoying her some other way.

No game of ball or skill, would I agree,
has ever brought me to such happiness.
It is the single thing no slander stole,
but stayed my treasure in the public mart.
Do I displease by making matters plain?
By God, my dear one, tongue and speech I'd shed
before I'd hurt you in hard things to say.

I pray my song will meet with no disdain,
for should you like where words and music led
this Arnaut care not whom he please or nay.

Late Middle Ages

Dante adopted the preciosity of courtly or chivalric love, which Italy had made her own, incorporating the songs of the troubadours and the poetry of northern France. The latter, illustrated here with three pieces from Charles d'Orléans, expressed more thoroughly the mediaeval mind, which often thought in symbols and allegories. Our everyday world was thus only a shadow of the divine world, and all beautiful things participate, not in some abstract universal, but in God's beauty. Christian allegorical interpretation sought to validate the Gospels, moreover, assigning symbolical meanings to ancient and Old Testament narratives.

That divine world is sensed through the mind, therefore, and more particularly the mind of God. Augustine had demonstrated the existence of God, and that of necessary, immutable Truth. The truth of ethics and mathematics does not rest on contingent, mutable and temporal things therefore, but on the necessary, the immutable and everlasting. Boethius adopted the Platonic notion of innate ideas, and also the more human concepts of providence, divine foreknowledge, chance, fate, and human happiness. John Scotus made a vast synthesis of Christian thought in which God is the primal unity, unknowable and unnameable in himself, but from which the multiplicity of creatures flows. The One descends into the manifold of creation and reveals himself in it. Remote as these notions must seem from today's everyday thought, we shall find contemporary poetry again wrestling with these imponderables, most notably in the creations of language, which poetry pre-eminently represents.

Poetry continued to be written in Latin, abundantly so in France, Italy and elsewhere, that poetry becoming more metrical and rhymed, the last feature perhaps deriving from Syria. Latin also remained the language of the Church and its clergy, and indeed of all educated people. It framed law, religion, education and serious knowledge, from which the vernacular languages continually drew. But in preaching to the laity, and increasingly in popular songs and their transcription to paper, the vernacular language gradually prevailed.

The French poet Christine de Pizan (1364-1431) was unusual in two respects: she was a woman and partly made her living through the pen. {18} Her featured *virelais* is in fact closer to the *rondeau,* having only the one line repeated: *Je chante par couverture*, in lines 1, 13 and 22. It means 'I sing to hide, feign, or maintain appearances, and is thus an early expression of a specifically feminine outlook. The virelais is a 'fixed form': 21 lines of 7 syllables in 5 stanzas. The rhyme scheme is abbaa cdcdc abbaa cdcd abbaa. The rhymes are exact but quite limited: couverture/endure, oeil/traveil, which appear in stanzas 1, 3 and 5, and douleur/plour, pitié/amitié which appear in the second and fourth stanzas. Also to be noted is the alternation of masculine (oeil) and feminine (couverture) rhymes, which becomes an important rule in French verse.

Virelais means to turn back on itself — vire (turn) lais (song) — and the form indeed echoes the act of dissimulation. The poet has turned a man's occupation into a woman's, and uses singing and dancing to hide her sorrows. This match of form and content is important, and applies throughout

French poetry, from these early forms, through the measured alexandrine of the 16th-19th centuries, to the fragmented, prose-like poems of the twentieth century. Note also that the verse texture is quite simple, with none of the verbal harmonies characteristic of long lines like the alexandrine.

Charles d'Orléans (1394-1465) was a nephew of Charles VI and father of Louis XII. Taken captive at Agincourt, he spent 25 years in England, becoming fluent in English verse. He wrote predominantly in the 123 ballade and 344 rondeau forms, and his French is particularly musical:

: Le te**m**p**s** a lai**ss**ié **s**on **m**anteau /
De **v**ent, de **f**roi**d**ure et **d**e pluye.
There is also the beautiful play of vowels (laissié/teau, froid/luye) which we shall meet again in Ronsard.

Note how simple is this rondeau, where *Le temps a laissié son manteau* appears in lines 1, 7 and 13, and *De vent, de froidure et de pluye* in lines 2 and 8. But the phrasing is particularly pleasing :

Le temps a laissié son manteau |
De vent,| de froidure | et de pluye, ||
Et s'est vestu de brouderie, |
De soleil luyant, | cler et beau.
Il n'y a beste, | ne oyseau, |
Qu'en son jargon ne chante ou crie ||
Le temps a laissié son manteau |
De vent,| de froidure | et de pluye, ||

Riviere, | fontaine | et ruisseau |

Portent, | en livree jolie, ||
Gouttes d'argent, | d'orfaverie ;|
Chascun s'abille | de nouveau |
Le temps a laissié son manteau. ||

His *J'ay fait l'obseque de ma dame* illustrates another feature of French mediaeval poetry: its love of allegory. Charles married three times, but *the lady at her shrine* may not be a real person, but an allegory of love personified in poetry, which the poet is hindered from fully pursuing by his incarceration in England. In this there are also echoes of the *Roman de la Rose*, and indeed several of Charles' poems keep up a correspondence with figures more imagined than real.

Though he did enter a ballade contest held by Charles d'Orléans at Blois, Francois Villon's persona is that of the pariah at the other end of the social scale. Villon preferred the low life of Paris, was imprisoned for various offences, receiving a sentence of death for manslaughter, which was commuted to banishment in 1463, after which he vanishes from the record. His poems shows the mediaeval love of detail, including the sordid, vulgar and grotesque, where the rendering is direct, common and uncompromising, laced with slang, private jokes and names of real people.

Their saving grace is the intense humanity, the deep pity at the human condition and the hope of eventual salvation. The Villon poems featured here are all ballades: some variation of three stanzas of 8 lines rhymed ababbcbc ending in a 4 line envoi rhymed bcbc. The language has no self-conscious beauty, but is vivid, evocative and exact.

Initially, the northern poets, the Grands Rhétoriqueurs like Jean Lemaire de Belges and Jean Molinet, continued the ballade and rondeau of the previous century, but these generally took on a different tone. The rondeau employed only two rhymes, and the poem featured is a deeply religious piece by Guillaume Crétin (1460–1525), one of the Grands Rhétoriqueurs, and in fact ordinary almoner to Francis I of France. The piece by Jean Molinet (1435–1507), is an extract from a much longer piece, *Discours de Vérité*, but shows much more argumentative nature and is in fact a forceful condemnation of talents prostituted by his literary countrymen.

Christine de Pizan (1364-1431) : Virelais I

Je chante par couverture,
Mais mieulx plourassent mi oeil,
Ne nul ne scet le traveil
Que mon pouvre cuer endure.

Pour ce muce ma doulour
Qu'en nul je ne voy pitié,
Plus a l'en cause de plour
Mains treuve l'en d'amistié.

Pour ce plainte ne murmure
Ne fais de mon piteux dueil;
Ainçois ris quant plourer vueil,
Et sanz rime et sanz mesure
Je chante par couverture.

Petit porte de valour
De soy monstrer dehaitié,
Ne le tiennent qu'a folour
Ceulz qui ont le cuer haitié.

Si n'ay de demonstrer cure
L'entencion de mon vueil,
Ains, tout ainsi com je sueil,
Pour celler ma peine obscure,
Je chante par couverture.

Christine de Pizan: Virelais I

My singing is to feign,
though eyes might better weep,
unknown the bitter grief
my heart must yet sustain.

For this I hide my pain
seeing none a pity show:
the more that we complain,
less friendship we will know.

Not murmur or complain,
nor make the mourning sigh.
I laugh when I would cry;
no rhyme or measure deign:
my singing seeks to feign.

It is of little worth
to take poor sorrow's part,
a folly on the earth
for those of easy heart.

So likewise in this vein,
no purpose in my will
but always venture still
to keep obscure my pain:
my singing seeks to feign.

Charles d'Orléans (1394-1465) Le temps a laissé son manteau

Le temps a laissié son manteau
De vent, de froidure et de pluye,
Et s'est vestu de brouderie,
De soleil luyant, cler et beau.

Il n'y a beste, ne oyseau,
Qu'en son jargon ne chante ou crie
Le temps a laissié son manteau
De vent, de froidure et de pluye.

Riviere, fontaine et ruisseau
Portent, en livree jolie,
Gouttes d'argent, d'orfaverie ;
Chascun s'abille de nouveau
Le temps a laissié son manteau.

Charles d'Orléans : The Month has thrown its cloak away

The month has thrown its cloak away
of wind and coldness and the rain.
Clad in rich embroidered train
the sun shines clear and bright today.

No animal or bird delay
to add their chant or clear refrain:
The month has thrown its cloak away
of wind and coldness and the rain.

River, stream and fountain play
and each in handsome livery;
the silver drops of goldsmiths be
the clothing of a newer day.
The month has thrown its cloak away.

Charles d'Orléans (1394-1465): Ballade LXIX

J'ay fait l'obseque de ma dame
Dedens le moustier amoureux,
Et le service pour son ame
A chanté Penser doloreux.
Mains cierges de soupirs piteux
Ont esté en son luminaire ;
Aussi j'ay fait la tombe faire
De regrez, tous de larmes pains,
Et tout entour moult richement
Est escript : Cy gist vrayement
Le tresor de tous biens mondains.

Dessus elle gist une lame
Faicte d'or et de saffirs bleux,
Car saffir est nommé la jame
De loyauté et l'or eureux.
Bien lui appartiennent ces deux,
Car eur et loyauté pourtraire
Voulu en la tresdebonnaire
Dieu qui la fist de ses deux mains
Et fourma merveilleusement.
C'estoit, a parler plainnement,
Le tresor de tous biens mondains.

N'en parlons plus ! Mon cueur se pasme,
Quant il oyt les fais vertueux
D'elle qui estoit sans nul blasme,
Comme jurent celles et ceulx
Qui congnoissoyent ses conseulx.

Charles d'Orléans: I’ve made obsequies to my lady

Obsequies I’ve paid in whole
to my lady at her shrine,
and in service to her soul
may song and pity there combine
with candles held in sad design.
I have made a lighted way
to her somber grave today.
Enough of tears and of regret,
or earthly riches heaped around:
virtue goes but to the ground:
On earthly, passing things reflect.

And on her too a tear was thrown
composed of gold and sapphire blue,
where sapphire is a precious stone,
as gold is loyalty, staying true:
so the two belong to her.
Care and loyalty are cast
as wanted in the very last.
God who gives with good effect,
abundantly, with more again.
Talk is easy, that is plain:
on earthly, passing things reflect.

Enough of talk. My love has gone
and hearing of each virtuous act,
no blasphemy came hereupon,
nor ever swearing this and that,
but only as His truths exact,

Si croy que Dieu l'a voulu traire
Vers lui pour parer son repaire
De paradis ou sont les saints,
Car c'est d'elle bel parement,
Que l'en nommoit communement

Envoi

De riens ne servent plours ne plains
Tous mourrons ou tart ou briefment.
Nul ne peut garder longuement
Le tresor de tous biens mondains.

I think that God himself would want
to have adorned our earthly haunt.
Let paradise the saints protect
so that the beauty of her face
will then her simple name reflect.

Envoi

No thing can plaint or tears affect:
though long or brief they be from birth.
No soul stays long upon this earth:
on earthly, passing things reflect.

Charles d'Orléans: (1394-1465) En regardant : Ballade

En regardant vers le pays de France,
Un jour m’advint, à Douvres sur la mer,
Qu’il me souvint de la douce plaisance,
Que je soulais au dit pays trouver;
Et commençai de coeur à soupirer,
Combien certes que grand bien me faisoit
De voir France que mon coeur aimer doit.

Je m’avisais que c’était non savance
De tels soupirs dedans mon coeur garder;
Vu que je vois que la voie commence
De bonne paix, qui tous biens peut donner;
Pour ce, tournai en confort mon penser,
Mais non pourtant mon coeur ne se lassoit
De voir France que mon coeur aimer doit.

Alors chargeai en la nef d’Espérance
Tous mes souhaits, en leur priant d’aller
Outre la mer, sans faire demeurance,
Et à France de me recommander,
Or nous doint Dieu bonne paix sans tarder!
Adonc aurai loisir, mais qu’ainsi soit,
De voir France que mon coeur aimer doit.

Paix est trésor qu’on ne peut trop louer
Je hais guerre, point ne la doit priser;
Destourbé m’a longtemps, sois tort ou droit,
De voir France que mon coeur aimer doit.

Charles d'Orléans: Gazing on : Ballad

Far looking to the lands of France
one day from Dover, by the sea,
I knew what joy informed my glance
from country as it used to be
that I must sigh dejectedly.
Although much good was in my gain,
my heart must see its France again.

I knew it was unwise to chance
the heart’s own sighs as come to be.
The path begins in happenstance
but gives the peace most necessary
in thoughts which time would comfort me.
But no, these sighs were more my bane:
and heart must see its France again.

My hopes I put aboard for France,
for wishes prayed most earnestly
they cross the sea and so advance
my case the more immediately.
But God alone gives peace and we
must learn what He affords to men:
my heart must see its France again.

Peace is prized assuredly,
and war I spurn and ever flee,
though be it right or wrong for men,
my heart must see its France again.

Francois Villon (1431- after 1463)

Dictes-moy où, n'en quel pays,
Est Flora, la belle Romaine;
Archipiada, ne Thais,
Qui fut sa cousine germaine;
Echo, parlant quand bruyt on maine
Dessus riviere ou sus estan,
Qui beauté eut trop plus qu'humaine?
Mais où sont les neiges d'antan!

Où est la très sage Héloise,
Pour qui chastré fut et puis moyne
Pierre Esbaillant à Sainct-Denis?
Pour son amour eut cest essoyne.
Semblablement, où est la royne
Qui commanda que Buridan
Fust gecté en ung sac en Seine?
Mais où sont les neiges d'antan!

La royne Blanche comme ung lys,
Qui chantoit à voix de sereine,
Berthe au grand pied, Bietris, Allys;
Harembourgis, qui tint le Mayne,
Et Jehanne, la bonne Lorraine,
Qu'Anglois bruslèrent à Rouen;
Ou sont-ils, Vierge souveraine?...
Mais où sont les neiges d'antan!

Villon : Ballad of Fair Ladies

Tell me in what country is
Flora the Roman courtesan,
or Archipiada, or Thais,
who was her nearest cousin? Can
the looks of Echo be for man,
forever laughing, babbling on?
The past years' snows: where are they gone!

And where is Heloise the wise,
for whose love was Abelarde
made a monk at St. Denis,
whose love for her they would confound?
Or the queen who had her bound
up in a sack, that Buridan,
then in the Seine be promptly drowned?
The past years' snows: where are they gone!

Or the queen as white as lily is,
she who sung a bird-like strain,
or big-foot Berthe, Allys, Beatrice,
who ruled throughout the lands of Maine,
Joan the martyr of Lorraine?
The English burned her at Rouen?
Where, our Lady sovereign,
the past years' snows, where are they gone!

Prince, n'enquerez de sepmaine
Ou elles ont, ne de cest an,
Que ce refrain ne vous remaine:
Mais où sont les neiges d'antan!

Prince: now do not ask again
where all things be a mere year on.
Be reconciled to this refrain:
the past years’ snows: where are they gone!

François Villon (1431- after 1463): Les Regrets de la belle Heaulmière

Jà parvenue à vieillesse.
Advis m'est que j'oy regretter
La belle qui fut heaulmière,
Soy jeune fille souhaitter
Et parler en ceste manière :
« Ha ! vieillesse felonne et fière,
Pourquoy m'as si tost abatue ?
Qui me tient que je ne me fière,

Et qu'à ce coup je ne me tue ?
« Tollu m'as ma haulte franchise
Que beauté m'avoit ordonné
Sur clercz, marchans et gens d'Eglise :
Car alors n'estoit homme né
Qui tout le sien ne m'eust donné,
Quoy qu'il en fust des repentailles,
Mais que luy eusse abandonné

Ce que reffusent truandailles.
« A maint homme l'ay reffusé,
Qui n'estoit à moy grand saigesse,
Pour l'amour d'ung garson rusé,
Auquel j'en feiz grande largesse.
A qui que je feisse finesse,
Par m'ame, je l'amoye bien !
Or ne me faisoit que rudesse,

Villon: Regrets of the beautiful Armouress

Since I have come to this great age,
to these complaints I will confess,
where lovely armouress can rage
at plight of young girl's comeliness.
And speaking in that manner more:
why fierce old age was not allowed
to send her earthward long before!
Who plaints me now I am not proud?

Why not end my life today
since that great power is so decreased?
Once my beauty held its sway
on every merchant, clerk and priest:
the man who spurned me was not born.
They gave their all and willingly
to one now even beggars scorn:
they loved who have abandoned me.

How many too I had refused
unwisely, under no duress,
but by a boy was badly used,
in whom I sunk my full largesse.
How freely I would give myself,
with fervour and with readiness:
my soul itself had gained in health
that now is only harsh distress.

Et ne m’amoyt que pour le mien.
« Jà ne me sceut tant detrayner,
Fouller au piedz, que ne l’aymasse,
Et m’eust-il faict les rains trayner,
S’il m’eust dit que je le baisasse
Et que tous mes maux oubliasse ;
Le glouton, de mal entaché,
M’embrassoit… J’en suis bien plus grasse !

Que m’en reste-il ? Honte et peché.
« Or il est mort, passé trente ans,
Et je remains vieille et chenue.
Quand je pense, lasse ! au bon temps,
Quelle fus, quelle devenue ;
Quand me regarde toute nue,
Et je me voy si très-changée,
Pauvre, seiche, maigre, menue,

Je suis presque toute enragée.
« Qu’est devenu ce front poly,
Ces cheveulx blonds, sourcilz voultyz,
Grand entr’œil, le regard joly,
Dont prenoye les plus subtilz ;
Ce beau nez droit, grand ne petiz ;
Ces petites joinctes oreilles,
Menton fourchu, cler vis traictis,

He loved me for myself alone,
although he'd barely waste an hour.
Beneath his feet I'd fall and moan,
and in my fullness take his power.
I sprawled for him, I gave my all:
at once was every hurt dispelled.
And so to gluttony we fall:
with every kiss my body swelled.

What am I left with? Shame and sin.
And he's been gone these thirty years,
when I am old and dead within
but still I look across the tears
from what I was, and then became,
I see this naked body here,
and very much it's not the same
but grown more wasted, thin and sear.

I'm maddened just to notice it.
What happened to that fair expanse,
the golden hair, how eyebrows sit
within that most delighting glance
where subtlety but disappears?
Where is the nose that sat just right,
or those enticing little ears,
the chin and teeth so small and white?

Et ces belles lèvres vermeilles ?
« Ces gentes espaules menues,
Ces bras longs et ces mains tretisses ;
Petitz tetins, hanches charnues,
Eslevées, propres, faictisses
A tenir amoureuses lysses ;
Ces larges reins, ce sadinet,
Assis sur grosses fermes cuysses,
Dedans son joly jardinet ?

« Le front ridé, les cheveulx gris,
Les sourcilz cheuz, les yeulx estainctz,
Qui faisoient regars et ris,
Dont maintz marchans furent attaincts ;
Nez courbé, de beaulté loingtains ;
Oreilles pendans et moussues ;
Le vis pally, mort et destaincts ;
Menton foncé, lèvres peaussues :

« C'est d'humaine beauté l'yssues !
Les bras courts et les mains contraictes,
Les espaulles toutes bossues ;
Mammelles, quoy ! toutes retraictes ;
Telles les hanches que les tettes.
Du sadinet, fy ! Quant des cuysses,
Cuysses ne sont plus, mais cuyssettes
Grivelées comme saulcisses.

Where are the fine and ruddy lips,
where are the gentle shoulder blades,
the slender arms, the generous hips,
the little breasts and fine cascades
of lifted contours light as air
that thrust on forward, firmly there,
and made for love's fine tournament?
Where is that sweet-dewed garden lair
high set with its small ornament?

The forehead's wrinkled, the hair is grey,
the eyebrow all ways, eyes are dim.
All, laughing, look at me and say,
no merchant hangs upon her whim.
The nose is hooked, and lacks appeal,
the ears are loose and sad as sin.
On the cheeks pale colours steal;
the chin is hairy, lips are thin.

Such is human beauty's fate:
the short arms end in knotted hands,
the shoulders hunched and nowhere straight
there's not a breast that firmly stands.
With haunch and nipple hardly found,
the twat's a joke, the thighs are thin,
the hams are withered, loosely bound
and foully blotched like sausage skin.

« Ainsi le bon temps regretons
Entre nous, pauvres vieilles sottes,
Assises bas, à croppetons,
Tout en ung tas comme pelottes,
A petit feu de chenevottes,
Tost allumées, tost estainctes ;
Et jadis fusmes si mignottes !…
Ainsi en prend à maintz et maintes. »

1461

So let's regret the former days
before we shrank to these old crones.
Let’s sit here, huddled by the blaze
that comes from kindling these dry cones.
By all refused, at every chance,
no beauty now to light the flame,
where time will have its bitter dance:
to each and all it is the same.

François Villon (1431- after 1463): L’épitaphe de Villon en forme de ballade

Frères humains, qui après nous vivez,
N’ayez les cœurs contre nous endurcis,
Car, se pitié de nous pauvres avez,
Dieu en aura plus tôt de vous mercis.
Vous nous voyez ci attachés cinq, six :
Quant de la chair, que trop avons nourrie,
Elle est piéça dévorée et pourrie,
Et nous, les os, devenons cendre et poudre.
De notre mal personne ne s’en rie;
Mais priez Dieu que tous nous veuille absoudre!

Se frères vous clamons, pas n’en devez
Avoir dédain, quoique fûmes occis
Par justice. Toutefois, vous savez
Que tous hommes n’ont pas bon sens rassis ;
Excusez-nous, puisque sommes transis,
Envers le fils de la Vierge Marie :
Que sa grâce ne soit pour nous tarie,
Nous préservant de l’infernale foudre.
Nous sommes morts, âme ne nous harie,
Mais priez Dieu que tous nous veuille absoudre !

Villon : Epitaph in the form of a ballad

My human brothers, who on earth remain,
let not your heart be hardened to us few.
For, if to pity us poor folk you deign,
more prompt the Lord will come to pity you.
So five or six of us are hung here who
too much indulged themselves in gluttony.
Thus came these shrunk and rotting things you see,
as do our bones to dust and ashes fall.
So make no fun of our poor frailty,
but pray to God that He forgive us all.

We clamour for you brothers: don’t disdain
or scorn the shadows we amounted to.
Earth’s justice killed us, as it’s ever fain
to do with those who lack good reason too.
Forgive the ones now shivering here, renew
our supplication to the Virgin’s son that He
will not be slothful in His clemency.
Preserve us from His wrath: we dead men call
you not assail us in our sanctuary,
but pray to God that He forgive us all.

La pluie nous a débués et lavés,
Et le soleil desséchés et noircis;
Pies, corbeaux, nous ont les yeux cavés
Et arraché la barbe et les sourcils.
Jamais nul temps nous ne sommes assis;
Puis çà, puis là, comme le vent varie,
À son plaisir sans cesser nous charrie,
Plus becquetés d'oiseaux que dés à coudre.
Ne soyez donc de notre confrérie;
Mais priez Dieu que tous nous veuille absoudre!

Prince-Jésus, qui sur tous a maîtrie,
Garde qu'Enfer n'ait de nous seigneurie :
À lui n'ayons que faire ne que soudre.
Hommes, ici n'a point de moquerie;
Mais priez Dieu que tous nous veuille absoudre!

We hang here rinsed and splattered by the rain,
and in the sun we've dried and blackened too.
The crows and magpies pecked out eyes and brain,
removed the eyebrows and the beard you knew.
Yet not a moment can we rest, but to
and fro the wind must turn us constantly.
It tosses us as though we're like to be
a thimble pecked by birds, a pitted ball.
Be therefore not of our fraternity,
but pray to God that He forgive us all.

We pray, Prince Jesus, in your sovereignty,
You keep us out of Hell's fell custody.
No other hope is ours when such befall.
And men: do not descend to mockery,
but pray to God that He forgive us all.

Anon (15th Century): *de* La Farce de Maître Pathelin

Act I Scène I

PATELIN
Par tous les saints, ma Guillemette,
Pour quelque peine que je mette
Tant à fourber qu'à rêvasser,
Nous ne pouvons rien amasser ;
Et si peux vivre, c'est grâce
A ma langue, dont j'avocasse.

GUILLEMETTE
Par Notre-Dame ! j'y pensais,
Et voyez donc le beau succès !
Il fait bruit, cet avocassage ;
10. Mais on ne vous tient pas si sage
De quatre parts comme autrefois ;
J'ai vu que chacun faisait choix
De vous pour gagner sa querelle ;
Maintenant, chacun vous appelle
L'avocat sous l'orme, et partout.

PATELIN
Je ne le dirai pas du tout
Pour me vanter : au territoire
Qui limite notre auditoire,
Hors le maire, je n'ai pas vent
20. Qu'on me passe comme savant.

Anon : *from* The Farce of Master Pathelin

Act I Scene I

PATHELIN
By all the saints, my Guillemette,
with all the trouble that I get
to daydream and to make up things
there's nothing that the action brings.
That we survive at all is through
the feats this practiced tongue will do.

GUILLEMETTE
By Our Lady, I confess
you come across a great success.
And such a noise this lawyer made
10. our wisdom in it is repaid,
and not from four parts as before.
Everyone will choose you more
as winner of the quarrel too.
Now all about are calling you
the elm-shade lawyer everywhere.

PATHELIN
Not fully so, for I would fare
still better in some fine place hence
that didn't limit audience.
Mayor apart, I haven't heard
20. they use on me the scholar word.

GUILLEMETTE
Aussi bien il lit le grimoire,
Monsieur le maire, et se fait gloire
De chicane apprise longtemps.

PATELIN
Me direz-vous, en peu d'instants,
Cause dont on ne fût le maître,
Pourvu que l'on voulût s'y mettre ?
Et pourtant, je n'appris jamais
Que bien peu sous les docteurs ; mais
Je m'oserai vanter qu'au livre
30. Avec le prêtre je peux suivre,
Et comme lui je peux chanter ;
On croirait que j'ai dû rester
Sous le maître autant qu'en Espagne
A la guerre fut Charlemagne.

GUILLEMETTE
Où cela mène-t-il, enfin,
Si ce n'est à mourir de faim ?
J'aime mieux un soulier solide.
Voyez comme d'un train rapide
Nos robes s'en vont nous quittant,
40. Non sans faire piteuse mine
Sur nos épaules, et passant
A l'état de simple étamine.
Et ma foi, je ne peux savoir
Comment nous en pourrions avoir
De neuves, par votre science

GUILLEMETTE
He only reads his book of spells,
our mayor, and there, self-glorying, tells
himself he knows chicanery.

PATHELIN
Could you even list for me
the skills in which I don’t excel?
I longed for it and started well,
and not from under doctor’s gaze
but learned from books the bragging ways.
With pious airs that priests can bring,
30. I also learned to prate and sing,
though under it I had to stay
as story was but told today
of those events in fabled Spain
that made the war of Charlemagne.

GUILLEMETTE
And that leads where? A waste of breath,
if not to starve oneself to death.
I’d much prefer a shoe that’s strong
to one that lightly trips along.
A dress that firmly fits with grace
40. than one that shows our sorry face,
that gives our shape an outward fling
than poor and paltry cheesecloth thing.
And, by my faith, we cannot know
what any of these fine things show,
or what deliberations give.

Guillaume Crétin (1460 – 1525) : Rondeau

De tout mon coeur humblement te salue,
Pour la grandeur de ta haulte value,
Royne du ciel, de la terre et la mer,
Pardonne moy se j'oze au reclamer,
Ton sainct nom mettre en ma bouche polue,

Delaissant vie estrange et dissolue,
Vueil par pensee honneste et resolue
Te bien servir, et loyaulment aymer
De tout mon cueur.

Tu fuz comme es de Dieu si bien voulue,
Que pour sa mere et fille preesleue
Dame te feit des vertus renommer ;
Telle te doy en la terre nommer,
Et telle aussi seras escripte et leue
De tout mon coeur.

Guillaume Crétin (1460 – 1525) : Rondeau

With all my heart, I humbly bow to you:
of your magnificence and goodness sue.
Throughout the width of heavens, the earth and sea,
forgive me if Your holy name must be
in truth polluted by each breath I drew.

From life that's shamed and dissolute I go,
with hope my staunch and honest thoughts will show
how well I served, with love and honestly,
as full heart be.

You've fled as thou art God would have it so
in daughter and your mother here below:
lady of all virtues, you will be
honoured in your name eternally.
And such as read and written words agree,
as full heart be.

Jean Molinet (1435–1507) : Le testament de la guerre

La guerre suis en train de mort,
Qui n'attent que à passer le pas ;
Mais conscience me remort
Tant fort que j'en pers mon repas ;
Et pour cause que je n'ay pas
Satisfaict aux miens plainement,
Il me fault, avant mon trespas,
Faire mon petit testament. ...

Je laisse aux abbaïes grandes
Cloistres rompus, dortoirs gastés,
Greniers sans bled, tronez sans offrandes,
Celiers sans vins, fours sans pastés,
Prélatz honteux, moisnes crottés,
Pertes de biens et de bestaille
Et, pour redressier leurs costés,
Sus leurs dos une grande taille. ...

Je laisse au povre plat pays
Chasteaux brisiés, hosteux brullés,
Terres a riés, gens esbahis,
Bregiers battus et affollés,
Marchans murdris et mutillés
De grans cousteaux et de courbés,
Et corbaux crians a tous lés
Famine dessus les gibetz. ...

Jean Molinet : Testament of the War

That war is dying: will not keep
the step by which all onward steal,
though conscience may return my sleep
so much that I may lose my meal.
I have no other cause to feel
satisfaction where I tread,
but lest there’s trespass in my zeal
I make my trifling will instead.

I leave it to great abbeys, where,
with abandoned dormitories,
emptied cupboards, tables bare,
cellars ransacked, repositories
of shameful prelates, inventories
of loss in land and great estate
and various other categories,
their backs are burdened by the weight.

I leave it to the poor flat lands here
with broken body, blackened breast,
the people laughing as appear
the burgers beaten and distressed,
the merchants murdered and oppressed:
where fearsome knives and hooks among
the crowd of feasting crows are blessed
with starvation‘s gibbet hung . . .

Je laisse aux jeunes estourdis
En vieillesse peine et tourment,
Qui Bourgs et Chasteaux plus de dix
Ont acquis cauteleusement,
Piteux cris et gemissements,
Gouttes aux mains, bras décroisez,
Et avant leur deffinement,
Le danger d'être racoursez. ...

Je laisse au pillart espillé
La pillade qui va pillant,
Tant qu'ung pilleur l'aura pillé,
Plus gorrier et plus espillant :
S'il est en pillart aggrapillant,
Il pillera sa pillerie,
Et l'autre qui fut espillant
Sera noyé en pillerie. ...

I leave it to young people when
there’s age in pain and punishment.
Where town and chateau, more than ten,
have been acquired without consent.
What piteous screams and moans are sent —
but drop your hands, uncross your arms,
with what refinement you are bent
upon the threat of dangerous harms. . .

I leave to those who lack the wit
in this great world to know the right,
inheriting the truth of it,
they know the enemy at sight.
Will choose to pillage or to fight,
regardless how the money sang:
whether in their drowning plight
they’d choose surrender or would hang. . .

Poetry of the Rennaissance

The Renaissance in France saw a rebirth in all the arts, particularly those of literature, painting and architecture. In this 1494-1559 period, which reached its greatest splendour in the reigns of Francis I and his son Henry II, there was the change from the rough warrior to the cultivated noble class, a new interest in humanism and Neoplatonism, in contemporary Spanish and Italian authors, in translations from the Greek and Roman authors, and the increasing spread of works now written in Middle French from many centres of learning through the new printing press. Literacy increased, and contributions were made not only from the royal court but the universities, the provincial noble and humanist individuals.

The atmosphere was initially mediaeval, but that slowly changed under the influence of Petrarch and Italian poets, the rediscovery of Greek poets like Pindar and Anacreon, and the teachings of humanism and Neoplatonism. The sonnet and ode replaced the mediaeval forms in the works of Scève and Marot, and more particularly in those of poets collecting about Ronsard and Du Bellay: the Pléiade. Their common themes were an idealized love of a woman, the brevity of life, a fresh depiction of the natural world, often with added mythological figures. Amorous paradoxes were popular, and some poets of the Pléiade saw poetry as divine inspiration.

Clément Marot (1496 – 1544) was the son of a court poet to Anne of Britany, became a page at the French court and in time a favourite of Francis I. Never a prudent man, Marot unfortunately showed a talent for heresy and political

entanglements, but was eventually pardoned and in 1539 given a house in the royal grounds by Francis.

The two poems featured are typical of Marot: charming conceits of love. The first is in the old ballade form, three stanzas of nine lines rhymed ababbcbc, followed by an envoi. The second is written in decasyllables, (ten syllables) with a caesura (pause) after the fourth syllable: it rhymes ababbcc. Note what a vast distance of tone, form and outlook separates these poems from the mediaeval world of Villon and the Grands Rhétoriqueurs.

Maurice Scève was the leader of the Lyonnais school of poets, though with strong connections to the Paris court. His most famous work is his *A sa Délie*, a 449 stanza-long collection of 10 line *epigrammes* modelled on Petrarch's *Canzoniere.* Délie 161 is straightforward, but some *epigrammes* can be difficult to follow, as is Délie 1. Many adopt a Neoplatonist belief of unity popular in the Renaissance world, where plants, animals, ourselves and even the earth itself are engaged in a contemplation that brings not intellectual understanding but a transformed sense of the world around, a sense of blessedness.

Louis Labé (*la belle Amazone*: c.524-65) was born into a prosperous artisan family in Lyon, the cultural centre of France at the time. She received a good education, won an early reputation as an excellent jouster and archer, and opened a salon frequented by the leading poets and humanists of the city. Labé was a cross-dressing beauty, her poetry not only reversing the social roles of women but demanding men’s traditional rights to choose honour, glory and pleasure.

Christopher Plantin (1514-89) was primarily a printer, who ran a prosperous and enterprising business in Antwerp, turning out editions of important works like the Polyglot Bible, the classics, theological and botanical works. All were beautifully produced in Greek, Latin, French and Flemish. There were many religious controversies to navigate, and Plantin had to move from Antwerp for some years after the city was sacked by the Spanish in 1576. His Le Bonheur de ce monde is an inconsequential little piece that has found its way into many anthologies.

Pernette du Guillet (1520-1545) was born into a noble family at Lyon and in 1537-8 married a M. du Guillet. In the spring of 1536 she met the rather older Maurice Scève, becoming the poetic muse of his celebrated *Délie* series. Much of her poetry was published posthumously.

Pontus de Thyard (1521-1605) was born a seigneur at Bissy-sur-Fley in Burgundy and became a friend of Maurice Scève, publishing his first work in 1549. Thyard was one of the first to write the sonnet form in French and may also have introduced the sestina into the language. He was an active member of La Pléiade, and contributed to its poetic and metaphysical program. His *Solitaire Premier, ou Prose des Muses, et de la fureur poétique* of 1552 developed from the Platonism of Marsilio Ficino, sought to distinguish divine madness from mental disturbances, categorizing the former as poetic fury, knowledge of religious mysteries through Bacchus, prophecy and divination through Apollo and the inspiration induced by Venus. Thyard became bishop of Chalon-sur-Saône in 1578, spending his last years in the study of mathematics and philosophy.

Ronsard (1524-85) and Du Bellay (1522-60) were leading members of La Pléiade, a literary group dedicated to making French second to none for nobility of expression. They studied the Greek and Roman authors, created neologisms based on these sources, and aimed to so thoroughly digest their outlook and expression that they would create an entirely new and rich poetic tongue. Joachim du Belay was a first cousin of the cardinal du Bellay, a contender for the papal throne, and accompanied his ambitious relative to Rome, where he published *Antiquités de Rome*, and then the 191 sonnets of the *Regrets.* Du Bellay fell deeply in love with a Roman lady called Faustine, but, being of a delicate disposition, did not enjoy or ultimate survive the political wrangles of the papacy. He became deaf, retired to France, and was buried in Paris.

Pierre Ronsard had a much longer and more successful life, though he too became deaf, which interfered with his duties at the French court. He retired to the Collège Coqueret and became a prolific writer: his poetry is noted for its magnificence of language and its extraordinary subtlety of metre. Ronsard's fame was immediate and long-lasting, quarrels with Marot and his followers notwithstanding, nor antipathy to the Huguenots. Ill health finally caused Ronsard to retire to Vendôme, though he remained productive to the end, producing little short of 100,000 lines. Ronsard's work was disliked by the classicists, and largely forgotten till the nineteenth century, but he had a mastery of the sonnet and wrote well in other forms: epistles, eclogues, elegies, etc. Looking at his *Sur la Mort de Marie*, we note the poem was written in 1578 at the command of Henri III to mark the early death of his mistress, Anne of Cleves. Ronsard may

well have been remembering too his own *Amours de Marie* of some twenty years previously, but this was a commissioned piece, which had to be appropriate and respectful.

The imagery is entirely so : a rose, the month of May, and dawn, i.e. beauty, its fragile and fleeting nature, how readily it is destroyed by rain or excessive heat. The milk and laid flowers In the penultimate line suggest kindness and finality. Note the *languissante*, and obligatory associations with *jeunesse, grace, amour, nouveauté* and *beauté*, all, from the opening *Comme*, transforming individual reality by personification and metaphor into the sad universals of human existence.

The poem is written in twelve syllable lines, and a hexameter is retained for the translation, to give a restrained and slow-moving fulness to the thoughts. The metre is very regular ; the hemistichs in the first stanza run :

Comme on voit sur la branche / au mois de Mai la rose 3 3 | 4 2
En sa belle jeunesse, / en sa première fleur 3 3 | 4 2
Rendre le ciel jaloux / de sa vive couleur, 4 2 | 3 3
Quand l'Aube de ses pleurs / au point du jour l'arrose : 2 4 | 4 2

The arrangement of liquid, vibrant and sibilant syllables is also controlled by these groupings, e.g.:

Rendre le ciel jaloux / de sa vive couleur,

The measured nature of the thought is emphasized by *the repeated rose arrose, repose déclose, reposes roses*, and all but two lines end in the lengthening r or s. The phonetic patterning is subtle but quite rich. A few examples:

Comme on voit sur la branche au mois de Mai la rose
En sa belle jeunesse, en sa première fleur
Pour o**b**sèques reçois mes larmes et mes **p**leurs,
Ce vase **p**lein de lait, ce **p**anier **p**lein de fleurs,
Afin que vif, et mort, ton corps ne soit que roses.

And so on ; there are many beauties. Finally, in what is only the briefest introduction to the piece, we note the repetitions and long vowels in the closing line :
Afin que vif, et mort, ton corps ne soit que roses.
Most French verse has some features like these, and we cannot appreciate it properly if we don't hear them — nor translate it adequately if, like our contemporary poetry, our English verse is deficient in their equivalents.

Called the prince of poets in his own lifetime, Ronsard's most celebrated works were his *Odes* (1550), *Les Amours de Marie* (1552); the unfinished *La Fanciade* (1572), *Sonnets pour Hélène* (1587). Publication was a little complicated. Ronsard fell in love with several women, commemorating them in sonnet sequences. The first was Cassandre Salvati whom he met in the court of Blois in 1545 and for whom he created *Les Amours de Cassandre* in 1552. The second was a simple peasant girl, Marie Dupin, for whom Ronsard wrote direct and moving poems that were first published in *Continuation des Amours* in 1555, but also continued as meditations in his *Sur la mort de Marie* (1578), a publication ostensibly commemorating the king's mistress

Marie de Clèves who died in 1574.

Confusingly, Ronsard also published his *Sonnets pour Hélène* in the same year, (love poems that may be addressed to someone living — possibly the Hélène of below — or meditations on past love) in 1578, though the title comes from Hélène de Sugères, daughter to Queen Catherine de Medici, whose lover had fallen in combat. In fact Ronsard wrote many odes, sonnets, villanelles, madrigals, hymns and discourses throughout his life, probably too many, as the poems tend to become formulaic, brilliantly varied in their imagery but on rather limited themes. They are also rather studied and remote, set in a Neoplatonic world that Classicism tried to escape.

Rémy Belleau (1528–1577) was born into a noble family at Nogent-le-Rotrou and through his early studies became acquainted with other poets of the region. Ronsard brought him into La Pléiade, to which he contributed a love of material objects like butterflies, oysters, cherries, coral, shadows, and turtles, being admired in our day by Francis Ponge and others. Belleau later experimented in mixed prose and verse in the manner of Jacopo Sannazaro's *Arcady*, entitled *La Bergerie* (1565-1572), in which a prose narration was interspersed with poems on love and the countryside. *Les Amours et nouveaux Eschanges des Pierres précieuses* :(1576), was his last work, a poetic description of gems and their properties inspired by medieval and renaissance lapidary catalogues.

Jean-Antoine Baïf (1532-1589) was another member of La Pléiade, an extraordinarily versatile and productive member. Baif was born was born in Venice, the natural son of the

French ambassador at Venice, and given the best education of the day. He duly produced volumes of amorous and congratulatory poems paraphrased from the classics, a four-volume treatise on prosody, a work on spelling and poems with lines of 15 syllables.

Baif's works were published in 4 volumes, entitled *Œuvres en rime* (1573), which consisted of *Amours, Jeux, Passetemps, et Poemes*; much not readable today but also including pieces of superb grace and delicacy. He was also the author of two comedies, a free translation of Terence's Eunuchus, and an imitation of the *Miles Gloriosus*, a collection of Latin verse and a popular collection of proverbs.

Jean Passerat (1534-1602) was born in Troyes, studied law in Paris, became a teacher at at the Collège de Plessis, and eventually a professor of Latin at the Collège de France. Passerat composed much agreeable poetry in the Pléiade style, the best-known pieces being his short ode *Du Premier jour de mai* and the villanelle whose first line is J'ay perdu ma tourterelle. The last was much imitated by nineteenth- and twentieth-century poets,

Robert Garnier (1535-1601) was a poet and the foremost exponent of the Renaissance tragic drama. He studied law in Toulouse, becoming conseiller du roi au siège présidial and sénéchaussée of Le Maine and later lieutenant-général criminel. Garnier wrote a long series of plays, first in the style of Seneca but later in his own manner. *Brandamente* of 1582 is a contest of the mind and foreshadows Corneille. *Les Juives* of 1583 concerns the barbarous vengeance of Nebuchadnezzar on the Jewish king Zedekiah and his children. With Racine's *Athalie*, it is often regarded as the

best constructed drama of the French 16th and 17th centuries. The plays indeed influenced English Renaissance drama, and in both plays and poems there are strong echoes of the French Wars of Religion.

Philippe Desportes (1545-1606) was born in Chartres and from the first enjoyed extensive church benefits, becoming abbot of the Benedictine monastery of Bonport in Normandy, Tiron, Josaphat, Vaux de Cernay and Aurillac, and eventually canon of the Cathedral of Chartres et de la Sainte Chappelle in Paris. His popular sonnets, elegies and songs brought in a good deal of money, and Henry III indeed made him an official poet, above Ronsard. Charles IX gave him eight hundred gold escudos for the poem of Rodomont, and Henry III ten thousand silver escudos for a few sonnets. Desportes stands out for his clarity of language and was, incidentally uncle to the poet Mathurin Régnier.

Jean Bertaut (1552-1611) was born in Caen and entered the church early, becoming councillor of the parliament of Grenoble, secretary to the king, almoner to Marie de' Medici, abbot of the Abbey of Aunay-sur-Odon and finally bishop of Sées. Bertaut wrote light verse on court life in the manner of Desportes, though the verse is more fantastic and fuller of conceits. This verse ceased on his elevation to the bishopric, to be replaced by more worthy celebrations of public events, which are unfortunately rather lifeless.

Théodore Agrippa d'Aubigné (1552-1630), poet, soldier, propagandist and chronicler, was born to strongly Protestant parents at the Château of Saint-Maury, near Pons. He was a precocious child, apparently knowing Latin, Greek and Hebrew at six years of age, and translating the Crito of Plato

before he was eleven. On leaving tutelage, d'Aubigné joined the Huguenot army under Louis of Bourbon, fighting in celebrated battles but also making enemies with his sarcastic and critical tongue. On Henry's accession to the throne and conversion to Catholicism, Aubergine left the army to manage his Poitou estates, remaining staunchly Huguenot, though welcoming Henry's religious toleration in the Edict of Nantes. Aubigné continued working on the first two volumes of his *Histoire universelle depuis 1550 jusqu'à l'an 1601*, but his third volume appeared after Henry's assassination, in 1619, and, being openly critical of the monarchy was ordered to be burned by the executioner. Aubigné was outlawed in 1620 and fled to Geneva, where he lived for the rest of his life. d'Aubigné's poetry were largely forgotten on his death but rediscovered by the Romantics and later poets like Ezra Pound.

Étienne Jodelle (1532 – 1573, poet and dramatist, was yet another member of La Pléiade. His first play, *Cléopâtre captive*, a tragedy in verse, was presented before the court at Paris in 1553 and was apparently successful. He wrote two other plays, *Eugène* (1552), a comedy, and *Didon se sacrifiant*, another verse tragedy, based on Virgil's account of Dido. Jodelle theorized that comedy must deal with people of the low or middle class that exhibit crudity and ignorance. Tragedy, on the other hand must deal with kings and the nobility, as only they would understand the classical allusions.

Jodelle's *Cleopatra Captive* was popular in its day but now seems rather static and unconvincing. Its importance lies in the future, what it suggested to the Neoclassical dramatists should be possible with the alexandrine rather than Jodelle's

ten-syllable line. Racine above all realised that soaring emotions had to be generated by characters in threatening circumstances, as they reacted to an intricate and fast-moving plot.

Clément Marot (1497 - 1544) : Chant de Mai et de Vertu

Volontiers en ce mois ici
La terre mue, et renouvelle.
Maints amoureux en font ainsi,
Sujets à faire amour nouvelle
Par légèreté de cervelle,
Ou pour être ailleurs plus contents.
Ma façon d'aimer n'est pas telle,
Mes amours durent en tout temps.

N'y a si belle
Dame aussi.
De qui la beauté ne chancelle ;
Par temps, maladie ou souci,
Laideur les tire en sa nacelle.
Mais rien ne peut enlaidir celle,
Que servir sans fin je prétends.
Et pour ce qu'elle est toujours belle
Mes amours durent en tout temps.

Celle dont je dis tout ceci, C'est
Vertu, la nymphe éternelle,
Qui au mont d'honneur éclairci1
Tous les vrais amoureux appelle : «
Venez, amants, venez, dit-elle,
Venez à moi, je vous attends.
Venez, ce dit la jouvencelle.
Mes amours durent en tout temps. »

Clement Marot : Song of May and Virtue

Gladly in the month to hand
the moulting earth renews itself
So would many lovers stand
attracted to some other's wealth.
With head awhirl, by lies and stealth,
they live on love that others lend.
Not so mine, that's true to self:
my love for you will never end.

There is no lovely lady here
from whom great beauty will not fade,
in time to grow but sad and sere,
and so to ugliness conveyed.
No one can halt the deepening shade,
but I to serve you will pretend
that loveliness in you is stayed:
my love for you will never end.

There's one alone I speak about,
where virtue is a deity:
at honour's mount there is no doubt.
In all true love she is to be:
'Come, I wait for you,' says she.
'Come to me; I am a friend.
Come as youth will ever be.
My love for you has never end.'

Envoi

Prince, fais amie immortelle,
Et à la bien aimer entends;
Lors pourras dire, sans cautelle : «
Mes amours durent en tout temps. »

Emvoi

If, Prince, you'd make a lifelong friend,
who love you ever constantly,
tell her in all honesty:
'My love for you will never end'.

Clément Marot (1497-1544) : D'où vient cela, belle, je vous supplie

D'où vient cela, belle, je vous supplie
Que plus à moi ne vous recommandez ?
Toujours serai de tristesse rempli
Jusques à tant qu'au vrai le me mandez.
Je crois que plus d'Ami ne demandez,
Ou mauvais bruit de moi on vous révèle,
Ou votre coeur a fait amour nouvelle.

Si vous laissez d'amour le train joli,
Votre beauté prisonnière rendez ;
Si pour autrui m'avez mis en oubli,
Dieu vous y doint le bien que y prétendez ;
Mais si de mal en rien m'appréhendez,
Je veux qu'autant que vous me semblez belle,
D'autant ou plus vous me soyez cruelle.

Clément Marot : My lovely one, I beg of you

My lovely one, I beg of you,
that you the more commending be.
If wrought of sadness, this I sue
that you address me honestly.
Perhaps you want but amity.
Or have you heard some ill report,
or novelty in other sought?

If you hold that pretty train
whereby I’m beauty’s prisoner:
or, I forgotten, others gain
the good that God himself confer:
or if no understanding were:
with all the beauty that I see
show me yet more cruelty.

Clément Marot (1497-1544) : Églogue au Roi *extrait*

Sur le printemps de ma jeunesse folle,
Je ressemblais l'hirondelle qui vole,
Puis ça, puis là ; l'âge me conduisait
Sans peur ni soin ou le coeur me disait.
En la forêt (sans la crainte des loups)
Je m'en allais souvent cueillir le houx,
(Pour faire glu à prendre oiseaux ramages
Tous différents de chants et de plumages ;

Ou me soulois pour les prendre entremettre
À faire bries ou cages pour les mettre ;
Ou transnouais les rivières profondes,
Ou renforçais, sur le genou les frondes.
Puis d'en tirer droit et loin j'apprenais
Pour chasser loups ou abattre des noix.)

Ô quantes fois aux arbres grimpé j'ai,
Pour dénicher ou la pie ou le geai,
Ou pour jeter des fruits jà mûrs et beaux
À mes compaings, qui tendaient leurs chapeaux.
Combien de fois aux montagnes allais,
Combien de fois aux fosses dévalais,
Pour trouver là les gîtes des fouines,
Des hérissons, ou des blanches hermines ;
Ou, pas à pas, le long des buissonnets,
Allais cherchant les nids des chardonnets ,
Ou des serins, des pinsons ou linottes.

Clément Marot - Églogue to the King: extract

In the spring of my mad youth
I chased the swallow’s flight in truth.
Then here, then there, as age has led,
with never care of heart or head.
Of forest wolves I had no fear,
but often made the holly bier
and in the branches set my traps
that different song or plumage maps.

Or, reaching up, I’d learn to pin
a snare or cage to put them in,
or cross deep rivers, wading through
as knee-breached men are apt to do,
By shooting straight, with various cuts,
I hunted wolf and hazelnuts.

In climbing branches found the way
to take the magpie or the jay.
For luscious fruit to fill the vats
my boon companions held out hats.
How many times on mountain steep
How many times we dug down deep
to find the nest that martens keep.
Or those of stoat and hedgehog, on
through bushes creeping we have gone
to find where finches make their nest,
the linnets, canaries and the rest.

Maurice Scève (1501-64) : L’Oeil trop ardent en mes jeunes erreurs

Délie 1

L’Oeil trop ardent en mes jeunes erreurs
Girouettoit, mal cault, a l’impourveue:
Voicy (ô paour d’agreables terreurs)
Mon Basilisque avec sa poingnant’ veue
Perçant Corps, Coeur, & Raison despourveue,
Vint penetrer en l’Ame de mon Ame.
Grand fut le coup, qui sans tranchante lame
Fait, que vivant le Corps, l’Esprit desvie,
Piteuse hostie au conspect de toy, Dame,
Constituée Idole de ma vie.

Maurice Scève : The eye too ardent in its young mistakes

Délie 1

The eye too ardent in its youth’s mistakes,
goes tilting on till troubled by events.
Herein the pleasure that our terror takes:
my Basilisk at poignant sights relents
for all that Heart is pierced. Then, lacking Sense,
it came to penetrate my Soul of Soul.
Great the blow, though blade not whole,
and stirred up Spirit and the Body’s strife:
How sadly must your company console
me, Lady made the idol of my life.

Maurice Scève 1501-64) : Comme Hécaté

Délie 22

Comme Hécaté tu me feras errer
Et vif, et mort cent ans parmi les Ombres :
Comme Diane au Ciel me resserrer,
D'où descendis en ces mortels encombres :
Comme régnante aux infernales ombres
Amoindriras, ou accroîtras mes peines.
Mais comme Lune infuse dans mes veines
Celle tu fus, es, et seras DÉLIE,
Qu'Amour a joint à mes pensées vaines
Si fort, que Mort jamais ne l'en délie.

Maurice Scève : Like Hecate

Délie 22

Like Hecate, you'd have me wandering
long depths alive and dead among the Shades:
and from Diana of the Heavens bring
adoption of these human escapades.
And like a queen of those infernal shades
in yet more suffering I'd brim and wane.
But like the Moon infused in every vein
DÉLIE you were, and are to my decease.
The Love within my thought was all in vain,
so strong that Death itself could not release.

Maurice Scève 1501-64) : Seul avec moy

Délie 161

Seul auec moy, elle auec sa partie:
Moy en ma peine, elle en sa molle couche.
Couuert d’ennuy ie me voultre en l’Ortie,
Et elle nue entre ses bras se couche.
Hà (luy indigne) il la tient, il la touche:
Elle le souffre: &, comme moins robuste,
Viole amour par ce lyen iniuste,
Que droict humain, & non diuin, à faict.
O saincte loy a tous, fors a moy, iuste,
Tu me punys pour elle auour meffaict.

Maurice Scève : Alone with myself

Délie 161

So with myself, alone, while she’s with him:
myself in pain and she in softer bed,
wrapped in grief and nettle-rashed each limb,
while she, full naked, in his arms is spread.
Unworthy he, in fondling her, is fed
complete submission: she but sparely fights
against that ravishment of lovers’ rites.
Bonds sealed by man no heaven heeds,
and holy law for all denies my rights:
thus am I punished here for her misdeeds.

Maurice Scève 1501-64) : La blanche Aurore à peine finissait

Délie 378

La blanche Aurore à peine finissait
D'orner son chef d'or luisant et de roses,
Quand mon Esprit, qui du tout périssait
Au fond confus de tant diverses choses,
Revint à moi sous les Custodes * closes,
Pour plus me rendre envers Mort invincible.
. . Mais toi qui as, toi seule, le possible
De donner heur ** à ma fatalité,
Tu me seras la Myrrhe incorruptible
Contre les vers de ma mortalité.

* Custodes : courtines
** heur : bonheur, chance, hazard

Maurice Scève : The dawn was white

Délie 378

The dawn was pale and thinning to its end,
its brow complexioned with the gold and rose,
when Spirit found it would not comprehend
the depths whence many jumbled things arose.
They came to me beneath where curtains close
that no more made me so invincible.
. . .To you alone, yes you, it’s possible
to know the hour that hazards final breath:
a Myrrh to me that’s not corruptible
for all that worms attend me after death.

Louise Labé (1525-66) : Baise m’encor, rebaise moy et baise

Sonnet XVIII

Baise m’encor, rebaise moy et baise :
Donne m’en un de tes plus sauoureus,
Donne m’en un de tes plus amoureus :
Ie t’en rendray quatre plus chaus que braise.

Las, te pleins tu ? ça que ce mal i’apaise,
En t’en donnant dix autres doucereus.
Ainsi meslans nos baisers tant heureus
Iouissons nous l’un de l’autre à notre aise.

Lors double vie à chacun en suiura.
Chacun en soy et son ami viura.
Permets m’Amour penser quelque folie :

Tousiours suis mal, viuant discrettement
Et ne me puis donner contentement.
Si hors de moy ne fay quelque saillie.

Louise Labé : Kiss me again

Sonnet XVIII

Again now kiss me, and re-kiss and kiss:
so give me one of your most savoured thus,
and give me one of your most amorous,
that four I'll give you back of franker bliss.

Enough? Let's take such evil wants as these,
and have them ten times made more generous.
Let all such happiness be mixed with us,
that each in other's joy may take their ease.

Then each will have a double life to tend
both in themselves and in their travelled friend,
wherein their madness take its loving shape.

For I am always hungry for you, living so
that full contenting me you'll never know,
nor could you out of me make your escape.

Louise Labé (1524-1566) : Tant que mes yeux

Sonnet XVI

Tant que mes yeux pourront larmes épandre
A l'heur passé avec toi regretter,
Et qu'aux sanglots et soupirs résister
Pourra ma voix, et un peu faire entendre ;

Tant que ma main pourra les cordes tendre
Du mignard luth, pour tes grâces chanter ;
Tant que l'esprit se voudra contenter
De ne vouloir rien fors que toi comprendre,

Je ne souhaite encore point mourir.
Mais, quand mes yeux je sentirai tarir,
Ma voix cassée, et ma main impuissante,

Et mon esprit en ce mortel séjour
Ne pouvant plus montrer signe d'amante,
Prierai la mort noircir mon plus clair jour.

Louise Labé : As soon as eyes

Sonnet XVI

So long as my sad eyes can shed their tears
at all the hours I've squandered, missing you,
so will they fight what weeping sighs would do:
be still the voice that whispers in your ears.

So long as hand incline to pluck a string
and lute to join your graces' melody,
so will my mind comport contentedly
and seek to know you well in everything.

I do not wish for death's expiring sigh,
but then it is I feel my eyes run dry,
my voice to break, my feeble hand to fall,

So is my mind on mortal things to stay,
know naught of love's eternity at all,
but pray that death itself close brightest day.

Christopher Plantin : Le Bonheur de ce monde

Avoir une maison commode, propre et belle,
Un jardin tapissé d'espaliers odorans,
Des fruits, d'excellent vin, peu de train, peu d'enfans,
Posséder seul sans bruit une femme fidèle;

N'avoir dettes, amour, ni procès, ni querelle,
Ni de partage à faire avecque ses parens,
Se contenter de peu, n'espérer rien des grands,
Régler tous ses desseins sur un juste modèle ;

Vivre avecque franchise et sans ambition,
S'adonner sans scrupules à la dévotion,
Domter ses passions, les rendre obéissantes,

Conserver l'esprit libre et le jugement fort,
Dire son chapelet en cultivant ses entes,
C'est attendre chez soi bien doucement la mort.

Christopher Plantin: Happiness in this World

A house well-ordered, comfortable and clean,
sweet-smelling espaliers in garden too,
fruits, good wine, no children, retainers few,
a wife that's faithful and is hardly seen.

Where debt and lovers' wiles have never been,
nor shared with families or what they do,
not wanting gifts that from the great accrue:
on all just models ably drawn between.

There far from artifice, ambition's cares,
where we in honesty within our prayers,
may bring base passions to obedience.

Conserve good judgement and strong freedom's breath,
repeat the rosary, assigning hence
the soft acceptance that must seal our death.

Pernette du Guillet (1520-1545) : Chanson VII

Qui dira ma robe fourrée
De la belle pluie dorée
Qui Daphnés enclose ébranla :
Je ne sais rien moins, que cela.

Qui dira qu'à plusieurs je tends
Pour en avoir mon passetemps,
Prenant mon plaisir çà, et là :
Je ne sais rien moins, que cela.

Qui dira que t'ai révélé
Le feu long temps en moi celé
Pour en toi voir si force il a :
Je ne sais rien moins, que cela.

Qui dira que, d'ardeur commune
Qui les jeunes gens importune,
De toi je veux... et puis holà !
Je ne sais rien moins, que cela.

Mais qui dira que la Vertu,
Dont tu es richement vêtu,
En ton amour m'étincela :
Je ne sais rien mieux, que cela.

Mais qui dira que d'amour sainte
Chastement au coeur suis atteinte,
Qui mon honneur onc ne foula :
Je ne sais rien mieux, que cela.

Pernette du Guillet : Song VII

Who will say my sated dress
with its golden rain will press
on Daphne caught and shaken so?
Less than that I do not know.

Who'll say I often waste too much
my time upon the many such?
I take my pleasure as I go.
Less than that I do not know.

Who'll say that I revealed to you
what my inward fire would do,
supposing love had strength to show?
Less than that I do not know.

Who will say from shared desire
there springs in youth a needy fire?
I want from you . . . and there we go!
Less than that I do not know.

Who will say what Virtue flows
from the richness of your clothes,
that in your love I inward glow?
Less than that I do not know.

Who will say when love is breached
it's chastely that the heart is reached,
never honour I forego.
Less than that I do not know.

Pontus de Thyard (1521-1605) : Père du doux repos

Père du doux repos, Sommeil, père du Songe,
Maintenant que la nuit, d'une grande ombre obscure,
Fait à cet air serein humide couverture,
Viens, Sommeil désiré et dans mes yeux te plonges.

Ton absence, Sommeil, languissamment allonge
Et me fait plus sentir la peine que j'endure.
Viens, Sommeil, l'assoupir et la rendre moins dure,
Viens abuser mon mal de quelque doux mensonge.

Ja le muet silence un escadron conduit
De fantômes ballants dessous l'aveugle nuit :
Tu me dédaignes seul qui te suis tant dévot.

Viens, Sommeil désiré, m'environner la tête,
Car, d'un voeu non menteur, un bouquet je t'apprête
De ta chère morelle et de ton cher pavot.

Pontus de Thyard : Father of sweet rest

Father of sweet dreams, come, give me rest,
that now the night assume its shadowed lair,
Come, make the soft air round me fare
as humid dreams are in the eyelids pressed.

Sleep: how languidly is lack expressed,
and makes me more to feel the pains I bear,
Come, therefore, sleep and more subdue my care,
abuse my ills and make them sweetly blest.

It is a still, mute squadron leads the fight
of phantoms, as it were, beneath the night.
And you alone disdain me, one who looms

devotedly about me: come now sleep,
and I will then a truthful banquet keep
of nightshade woven in with poppy fumes.

Joachim du Bellay (1522-60) *: L'Olive augmentée* III

Loyre fameux, qui ta petite Source
Enfles de maintz gros fleuves, et Ruysseaux,
Et qui de loing coules tes cleres Eaux
En l'Ocean d'une assez lente Course.

Ton chef Royal hardiment bien hault pousse
Et aparoy entre tous les plus beaux,
Comme un Thaureau sur les menuz Troupeaux,
Quoy que le Pau envieux s'en courrousse.

Commande doncq' aux gentilles Naiades
Sortir dehors leurs beaux Palaiz humides
Avecques toy, leur Fleuve Paternel,

Pour saluer de joyeuses Aubades
Celle qui t'a, et tes Filles liquides
Deifié de ce bruyt eternel.

Joachim du Bellay : *L'Olive augmentée* III

Say, illustrious Loire, where be the source
that swells, contributing with tributaries?
From far away your limpid water is
to ocean flowing on its placid course.

Your royal build that boldly wields its force,
the beautiful amongst its primaries,
so head of herd amongst its adversaries
that envious Po itself must know remorse.

Command the gentle naiads listening there,
within their beautiful damp palace ways,
be firmly to paternal river bound,

and greet the happy song of dawn's bright air
where you and all your babbling daughters gaze
on deities of that forever sound.

Joachim du Bellay (1522-60) : Heureux qui, comme Ulysse

Heureux qui, comme Ulysse, a fait un beau voyage,
Ou comme cestuy-là qui conquit la toison,
Et puis est retourné, plein d'usage et raison,
Vivre entre ses parents le reste de son âge !

Quand reverrai-je, hélas, de mon petit village
Fumer la cheminée, et en quelle saison
Reverrai-je le clos de ma pauvre maison,
Qui m'est une province, et beaucoup davantage ?

Plus me plaît le séjour qu'ont bâti mes aïeux,
Que des palais Romains le front audacieux,
Plus que le marbre dur me plaît l'ardoise fine :

Plus mon Loir gaulois, que le Tibre latin,
Plus mon petit Liré, que le mont Palatin,
Et plus que l'air marin la doulceur angevine.

Les Regrets XXXI 1558

Joachim du Bellay: Happy those like Ulysses

Happy those, like Ulysses, who travelled well,
or won the fleece, as would the other lord,
returning, with the world's wide reason stored,
and with his kinsfolk afterwards but dwell.

When shall I see, alas, my native shore,
my village, smoking chimneys, tell me when
I'll pass my own poor cottage door again
that is a kingdom to me, and much more?

The house my forebears built more pleases me
than Roman palaces' audacity:
I'd choose plain slates to marble's noble span,

my Gallic Loire to Tiber's Latin scene,
my little Liré to the Palatine,
and more the sea-girt air of Angevin.

Joachim du Bellay (1522-60: France, mère des arts

France, mère des arts, des armes et des lois,
Tu m'as nourri longtemps du lait de ta mamelle :
Ores, comme un agneau qui sa nourrice appelle,
Je remplis de ton nom les antres et les bois.

Si tu m'as pour enfant avoué quelquefois,
Que ne me réponds-tu maintenant, ô cruelle ?
France, France, réponds à ma triste querelle.
Mais nul, sinon Écho, ne répond à ma voix.

Entre les loups cruels j'erre parmi la plaine,
Je sens venir l'hiver, de qui la froide haleine
D'une tremblante horreur fait hérisser ma peau.

Las, tes autres agneaux n'ont faute de pâture,
Ils ne craignent le loup, le vent, ni la froidure :
Si ne suis-je pourtant le pire du troupeau.

Les Regrets 1558

Joachim du Bellay : France, mother of arts

France, of laws and letters, martial fame,
that long you nourished me I can’t deny:
and, like the infant for its nurse, my cry
fills out the dens and woodlands with your name.

And you have taken me as your child too
so many times, but now, my cruel one,
France, by these sad quarrels I'm undone,
no voice comes answering, or echoing through.

Across the plain are wolves that seek my death,
I feel the winter come, in whose cold breath
and trembling horror are my hackles cursed.

Your other lambs lack not for field or fold,
nor do they fear the wolf, the wind or cold,
must I of all the flock be counted worst?

Joachim du Bellay (1522-60: Qui choisira pour moi la racine d’Ulysse?

Sonnet LXXXVIII.

Qui choisira pour moi la racine d'Ulysse ?
Et qui me gardera de tomber au danger
Qu'une Circe en pourceau ne me puisse changer,
Pour être à tout jamais fait esclave du vice ?

Qui m'étreindra le doigt de l'anneau de Mélisse,
Pour me désenchanter comme un autre Roger ?
Et quel Mercure encore me fera déloger,
Pour ne perdre mon temps en l'amoureux service ?

Qui me fera passer sans écouter la voix
Et la feinte douceur des monstres d'Achelois ?
Qui chassera de moi ces Harpies friandes ?

Qui volera pour moi encore un coup aux cieux,
Pour rapporter mon sens et me rendre mes yeux ?
Et qui fera qu'en paix je mange mes viandes ?

Les Regrets 1558

Joachim du Bellay : Who’ll cut for me the root of Ulysses?

Sonnet LXXXVIII.

Who’ll cut for me the root of Ulysses,
and keep me safely out of foul design?
from Circe’s transformation into swine,
or vice’s slavery in traps like these?

Who’ll keep me huddled in Melissa’s ring,
another Roger to untangle me,
or some new Mercury to set me free
from time’s cruel waste that doting service bring?

Who’ll let me pass unscathed, not hear at all,
the honeyed sweetness of the Syrens’ call.
Who’ll drive off greedy Harpies, and release

in one more blow to over-threatening skies,
my own good sense, to give me back my eyes
that I may thenceforth eat my food in peace.

Joachim du Bellay (1522-60) : Les Antiquités de Rome VII

Sacrés coteaux, et vous saintes ruines,
Qui le seul nom de Rome retenez,
Vieux monuments, qui encor soutenez
L'honneur poudreux de tant d'âmes divines :

Arcs triomphaux, pointes du ciel voisines,
Qui de vous voir le ciel même étonnez,
Las, peu à peu cendre vous devenez,
Fable du peuple et publiques rapines!

Et bien qu'au temps pour un temps fassent guerre
Les bâtiments, si est-ce que le temps
Œuvres et noms finablement atterre.

Tristes désirs, vivez doncques contents :
Car si le temps finit chose si dure,
Il finira la peine que j'endure.

Les Antiquités de Rome 1558

Du Bellay : The Antiquities of Rome VII

You holy ruins and slopes of sacred knolls,
alone the name of Rome may now report,
the ancient monuments that still support
the powdery honour of those hallowed souls.

Triumphal arches, neighbouring ruined wholes
that still amaze the sky but only court
diminished ashes they become in thought:
a people’ s legend the tide of war controls.

So have the years on years warred down on them
and on these building that they represent,
that time itself their works and names condemn.

Of saddened hopes I’d bid you rest content;
since time reduces all things, proud and strong,
it too will end the pains I bear ere long.

Joachim du Bellay (1522-60 **:** Les Antiquités de *Rome* XXXI

De ce qu'on ne voit plus qu'une vague campaigne,
Où tout l'orgueil du monde on a veu quelquefois
Tu n'en es pas coupable, ô quiconque tu sois
Que le Tybre et le Nil, Gange et Euphrate baigne.

Coupables n'en sont pas l'Afrique ni l'Espaigne,
Ni ce peuple qui tient les rivages Anglois,
Ni ce brave soldat qui boit le Rhin gaulois,
Ni cest autre guerrier, nourrisson d'Alemaigne.

Tu en es seule cause, ô civile fureur,
Qui semant par les champs l'Emathienne horreur
Armas le propre gendre encontre son beau pere :

Afin qu'étant venuë à son degré plus haut,
La Romaine grandeur trop longuement prospere
Se vist ruer à bas d'un plus horrible saut.

Les Antiquités de Rome 1558

Du Bellay : The Antiquities of *Rome XXXI*

When all that's left us is an empty plain,
and none of pride that won the world's applause,
it's not fault of other lands, nor even shores
that Tiber, Nile, Ganges and Euphrates drain.

The culprits are not Africa or Spain
nor even those who hold the English cause
nor valiant soldier drinking of the Gallic laws,
nor any warrior born of Alemaign.

You are the cause of what blind fury yields
that sowed its horror through Emathian fields,
so arming all within the blood-knit throng.

So, having answered to that lofty call
from Rome that prospered on for all too long,
more terrible would come its headlong fall.

Joachim du Bellay (1522-60) Villanelle

En ce mois délicieux,
Qu'amour toute chose incite,
Un chacun à qui mieux mieux
La douceur' du temps imite,
Mais une rigueur dépite
Me fait pleurer mon malheur.

Belle et franche Marguerite
Pour vous j'ai cette douleur.
Dedans votre oeil gracieux
Toute douceur est écrite,
Mais la douceur de vos yeux
En amertume est confite,

Souvent la couleuvre habite
Dessous une belle fleur.
Belle et franche Marguerite,
Pour vous j'ai cette douleur.
Or, puis que je deviens vieux,
Et que rien ne me profite,

Désespéré d'avoir mieux,
Je m'en irai rendre ermite,
Pour mieux pleurer mon malheur.
Belle et franche Marguerite,
Pour vous j'ai cette douleur.

Joachim du Bellay: Villanelle

In this month so fresh and free,
where love will turn to tender heat,
and everyone advance their plea
and sweetness of the time repeat,
a stubborn rigor will defeat:
I weep my fortunes constantly.

Frank and fresh Marguerite,
of you I have no remedy,
In your gracious eyes I see
all that tenderness secrete
itself in kindly harmony,
where bitterness is candied sweet.

Oft hides the serpent, counterfeit,
in the flower's obscurity.
Frank and fresh Marguerite
of you I have no remedy.
Now I'm growing old you see
nothing good can come of it.

Desperate to better be,
I would take a hermits seat,
and mourn misfortune happily.
Frank and fair Marguerite,
of you I have no remedy.

Mais si la faveur des Dieux
Au bois vous avait conduite,
Ou, d’espérer d’avoir mieux,
Je m’en irai rendre ermite,
Peut être que ma poursuite
Vous ferait changer couleur.

Belle et franche Marguerite
Pour vous j’ai cette douleur.

But if the favoring gods would see
me led into a green retreat
where I would only better be:
I would take a hermit’s seat.
and in pursuing here entreat
you change that bright identity.

Frank and fair Marguerite,
of you I have no remedy.

Pierre Ronsard (1524-85): Comme un Chevreuil

Comme un Chevreuil, quand le printemps détruit
L'oiseux cristal de la morne gelée,
Pour mieux brouter l'herbette* emmiellée
Hors de son bois avec l'Aube s'enfuit,

Et seul, et sûr, loin de chien et de bruit,
Or sur un mont, or dans une vallée,
Or près d'une onde à l'écart recelée,
Libre folâtre où son pied le conduit :

De rets ni d'arc sa liberté n'a crainte,
Sinon alors que sa vie est atteinte,
D'un trait meurtrier empourpré de son sang :

Ainsi j'allais sans espoir de dommage,
Le jour qu'un oeil sur l'avril de mon âge
Tira d'un coup mille traits dans mon flanc.

Les amours de Cassandre, 1552

Pierre Ronsard : As will a Deer

As will a Deer, the liberating day,
when spring must free the bird from dreary frost,
the better seek the lustrous grass he'd lost,
but leave the wood at Dawn, and fleet away.

Alone and safe, now far from dog and horn
he'll seek the valley depths or mountain top,
or close by hidden waters will not stop
but follow on wherever foot is borne.

Of that fine freedom then is not afraid
though with his life he has so often paid,
when, murderously, is body gored.

So was I venturing on no hurtful stage
with eye that was the April of my age
when with a thousand strokes my flanks were scored.

Pierre Ronsard (1524-85): Cache pour ceste nuit ta corne

Cache pour ceste nuit ta corne, bonne Lune :
Ainsin Endymion soit tousjours ton amy,
Ainsi soit-il tousjours en ton sein endormy,
Ainsi nul enchanteur jamais ne t'importune.

Le jour m'est odieux, la nuit m'est opportune,
Je crains de jour l'aguet d'un voisin ennemy :
De nuit plus courageux je traverse parmy
Les espions, couvert de ta courtine brune.

Tu sçais, Lune, que peut l'amoureuse poison :
Le Dieu Pan pour le prix d'une blanche toison
Peut bien flechir ton cœur. Et vous Astres insignes,

Favorisez au feu qui me tient allumé :
Car s'il vous en souvient, la plus part de vous, Signes,
N'a place dans le ciel que pour avoir aimé.

Amours de Marie : Sonnet 25. 1552

Ronsard : So hide your horns

But hide your horns for this one night, good Moon
and leave your friend Endymion to his rest;
so nothing wake within your sleeping breast,
nor will enchanter come with maddened tune.

The day is hateful to me, night no boon.
By day I fear my neighbours will molest:
at night, courageously, I’m onward pressed
though camps of spies alert the dusky noon.
.
You know that lover is to poison lost,
that Pan has snatched white fleece at little cost,
and hurt the heart. So let the stars’ designs

but add their favour to the light-beloved,
and thus remembered, mostly: these are Signs
that hold their heavenly place by having loved.

Pierre Ronsard(1524-85): Ces longues nuicts d'hyver,

Ces longues nuicts d'hyver, où la Lune ocieuse
Tourne si lentement son char tout à l'entour,
Où le Coq si tardif nous annonce le jour,
Où la nuict est année à l'ame soucieuse :

Je fusse mort d'ennuy sans ta forme douteuse,
Qui vient, ô doux remède, alléger mon amour,
Et faisant toute nue entre mes bras séjour,
Rafraichist ma chaleur, bien qu'elle soit menteuse.

Vraye tu es farouche et fiere en cruauté :
On jouist de ta feinte en toute privauté.
Près d'elle je m'endors, près d'elle je repose.

Rien ne m'est refusé. Le bon sommeil ainsi
Abuse par le faux mon amoureux souci.
S'abuser en amour n'est pas mauvaise chose.

Sonnets Pour Helene II: XLI

Pierre Ronsard: Long winter nights

Long winter nights, the lazy moon in view,
which slowly turns her chariot through the sky:
how late the roosters say that dawn is nigh,
a year of darkness claims the soul in you.

A doubtful body and what boredom too
had love’s sweet remedy no reasons why.
How long and naked in my arms you lie,
renewing that close warmth, although not true.

How fierce you are, what hurtful pride we see
for all you act your feints in privacy.
Near her reposes that which lovers bring.

Nothing is denied me, sleep as well:
For all the falsities that lovers tell,
abuse in love is not so bad a thing.

Pierre Ronsard (1524-85): Quand vous serez bien vieille

Quand vous serez bien vieille, au soir, à la chandelle,
Assise auprès du feu, dévidant et filant,
Direz, chantant mes vers, en vous émerveillant :
Ronsard me célébrait du temps que j'étais belle.

Lors, vous n'aurez servante oyant telle nouvelle,
Déjà sous le labeur à demi sommeillant,
Qui au bruit de mon nom ne s'aille réveillant,
Bénissant votre nom de louange immortelle.

Je serai sous la terre et fantôme sans os :
Par les ombres myrteux je prendrai mon repos :
Vous serez au foyer une vieille accroupie,

Regrettant mon amour et votre fier dédain.
Vivez, si m'en croyez, n'attendez à demain :
Cueillez dès aujourd'hui les roses de la vie.

Sonnet 43 : Sonnets pour Hélène, 1578

Pierre Ronsard : Quand vous serez bien vieille

Cast truly aged, in evening’s candlelight,
sat carding wool before the fireside blaze,
you'll read my verses, marvel, speak of days
'when I was beautiful in Ronsard's sight.'

There’ll be no servant nodding through the night
but wakes at mention of my name, and stays
to hear the homage of my well-wrought praise
retrieve your loveliness from time's despite.

But I in earth, a disembodied guest,
shall in the shade of myrtles have my rest,
while huddled up in hearth, a crone you'll stay

regretting love and those past vows you scorned.
Believe me, live. By afterwards be warned
to gather in life's roses of today.

Pierre Ronsard (1524-85): Sonnets pour Hélène 22

Puis qu'elle est tout hyver, toute la mesme glace,
Toute neige, et son cœur tout armé de glaçons,
Qui ne m'aime sinon pour avoir mes chansons,
Pourquoy suis-je si fol que je ne m'en delace ?

Dequoy me sert son nom, sa grandeur et sa race,
Que d'honneste servage, et de belles prisons ?
Maistresse, je n'ay pas les cheveux si grisons,
Qu'une autre de bon cœur ne prenne vostre place.

Amour, qui est enfant, ne cele verité.
Vous n'estes si superbe, ou si riche en beauté,
Qu'il faille desdaigner un bon cœur qui vous aime.

R'entrer en mon Avril desormais je ne puis :
Aimez moy, s'il vous plaist, grison comme je suis,
Et je vous aimeray quand vous serez de mesme.

Le Premier Livre des Sonnets pour Hélène 1578

Pierre Ronsard: Sonnets for Helen: XXII

Since she is ever winter to me, ice and snow,
and is with icicles completely kirtled round
and loves not me but only how my verses sound,
why then indulge in foolishness, not let her go?

What good to me that name and state and lineage show
how honourably and sweetly I am in prison bound?
There's no such grey, beloved, on this old head found
that some fond heart, immediately, not take me so.

A child is love, no doubt, but cannot hide his eyes
and say in lofty state and looks your grandeur lies
that you with contumely may spurn this heart's true vow.

So love me, though the April of my years is fled,
I beg of you, with grey hairs scattered on my head,
and I will love the same this you that I am now.

Pierre Ronsard (1524-85): Sur la Mort de Marie

Comme on voit sur la branche au mois de Mai la rose
En sa belle jeunesse, en sa première fleur
Rendre le ciel jaloux de sa vive couleur,
Quand l'Aube de ses pleurs au point du jour l'arrose :

La grâce dans sa feuille, et l'amour se repose,
Embaumant les jardins et les arbres d'odeur :
Mais battue ou de pluie, ou d'excessive ardeur,
Languissante elle meurt feuille à feuille déclose :

Ainsi en ta première et jeune nouveauté,
Quand la terre et le ciel honoraient ta beauté,
La Parque t'a tuée, et cendre tu reposes.

Pour obsèques reçois mes larmes et mes pleurs,
Ce vase plein de lait, ce panier plein de fleurs,
Afin que vif, et mort, ton corps ne soit que roses.

Sur la Mort de Marie 1578

Pierre Ronsard : On the Death of Mary

Just as one sees, upon a branch, the rose in May,
to whose first flowered loveliness rich looks are lent,
with brighter organdies the very skies resent,
while dawn with tears will sprinkle it at break of day,

So will, in love and gracefulness, the petals stay
to haunt the trees and gardens round with sweetest scent,
but, in the undue heat and drumming rain’s descent,
they one by one unfurl, and fade and fall away.

So you, for all the expectations of your youth,
though earth and sky in homage speak but frankest truth,
respond to fate, and like them in the dust repose.

These are the obsequies that tears and grief assume:
a bowl of milk, a basket topped with fragrant bloom:
so shall in life and death your body be but rose.

Pierre Ronsard (1524-85): Mignonne, allons voir si la rose

Mignonne, allons voir si la rose
Qui ce matin avoit desclose
Sa robe de pourpre au Soleil,
A point perdu ceste vesprée
Les plis de sa robe pourprée,
Et son teint au vostre pareil.

Las ! voyez comme en peu d'espace,
Mignonne, elle a dessus la place
Las ! las ses beautez laissé cheoir !
Ô vrayment marastre Nature,
Puis qu'une telle fleur ne dure
Que du matin jusques au soir !

Donc, si vous me croyez, mignonne,
Tandis que vostre âge fleuronne
En sa plus verte nouveauté,
Cueillez, cueillez vostre jeunesse :
Comme à ceste fleur la vieillesse
Fera ternir vostre beauté.

A Cassandre June 1545

Pierre Ronsard : Mignonne

Mignonnet, let’s view the rose
that but this morning would disclose
her robe of crimson to the Sun,
but has, this evening of her days,
now lost the beauty of that blaze
and faded as your bloom has done.

Alas, that in a little space
the flower will falter from its place,
and so that beauty lose its power.
How cruelly Nature has forecast
that such a flower cannot last
full morning to the evening hour.

Believe me now, my sweetest thing,
that while your years are blossoming
throughout in verdant novelty,
grasp, grasp that youth today
for in that flowering age will stay
those blemished looks for all to see.

Pierre Ronsard (1524-85): Fontaine Bellerie : Ode IX

Fontaine Bellerie,
Belle fontaine chérie
De nos Nymphes, quand ton eau
Les cache au creux de ta source,
Fuyantes le Satyreau,
Qui les pourchasse à la course
Jusqu'au bord de ton ruisseau,

Tu es la Nymphe éternelle
De ma terre paternelle :
Pource en ce pré verdelet
Vois ton Poète qui t'orne
D'un petit chevreau de lait,
A qui l'une et l'autre corne
Sortent du front nouvelet.

L'Été je dors ou repose
Sur ton herbe, où je compose,
Caché sous tes saules verts,
Je ne sais quoi, qui ta gloire
Enverra par l'univers,
Commandant à la Mémoire
Que tu vives par mes vers.

Pierre Ronsard : Fountain Bellerie

Here has fountain Bellerie,
beautiful and dear to me,
retained its Nymphs that dimly peer
into its source of greater depths,
fleeing satyrs, which they fear
across the intervening lengths
that bind them to their watery sphere.

Eternally, throughout the land,
acknowledging my father’s hand,
throughout the meadows, rich and green,
see Poet bring his sacrifice:
a milk-white kid he’s yet to wean,
with stubs of horn not once but twice
upon its youthful forehead seen.

Throughout summer I repose
upon the grass or I compose
unknown beneath the willow screen.
Why I know not, but your fame
throughout the universe has been
such as memory will name
and in your verses ever green.

L’ardeur de la Canicule
Ton vert rivage ne brûle,
Tellement qu’en toutes parts
Ton ombre est épaisse et drue
Aux pasteurs venant des parcs,
Aux boeufs las de la charrue,
Et au bestial épars.

Iô ! tu seras sans cesse
Des fontaines la princesse,
Moi célébrant le conduit
Du rocher percé, qui darde
Avec un enroué bruit
L’eau de ta source jasarde
Qui trépillante se suit.

Les Odes 1550

Throughout the days of dog-star heat
your green banks are a cool retreat,
and shelter too; on every part
hang heavy shadows, thick and deep.
Come oxen wearied of the plough,
the shepherd from his fields of sheep,
all creatures scattered anyhow.

Here you are by all accounts
the princess of the water founts.
Me, I watch the waters spout
from their rock-bound crevices,
with a splintered, hissing shout
as that random issue is
following one another out.

Pierre Ronsard: Les Amours de Cassandre: CLII

Lune à l'oeil brun, la dame aus noirs chevaus,
Qui ça qui là, qui haut qui bas te tournent,
Et de retours, qui jamais ne sejournent,
Trainent ton char eternel en travaus.

A tes desseins les miens ne sont égaus,
Car les amours qui ton coeur epoinçonnent,
Et ceus aussi qui mon coeur eguillonnent,
Divers souhaits desirent à leurs maus.

Toi mignotant ton dormeur de Latmie,
Tu voudrois bien qu'une course endormie
Emblât le train de ton char qui s'enfuit:

Mais moi qu'Amour toute la nuit devore,
Las, des le soir je souhaitte l'Aurore,
Pour voir le jour, que me celoit ta nuit.

Les Amours 1553

Pierre Ronsard: The Loves of Cassandre: CLII

The dusk-eyed moon, whose darkest horse
the lady rising holds, must downward turn,
and not be stationary but still return,
as drawn forever on that chariot's course.

Your needs and mine are not of equal force,
yet still the very loves for which you yearn
are equally those for which my heart must burn,
for all they're various and bring remorse.

That sweet boy that once on Latmos slept,
and over whom your loving watch you kept
is as your chariot now and lost to sight.

Indeed the self-same night my love devours
must look through weariness to morning hours:
and thus see day again applaud your night.

Pierre Ronsard (1524-85): Ode V

La lune est coutumière
De naître tous les mois :
Mais quand notre lumière
Est éteinte une fois,
Sans nos yeux réveiller,
Faut longtemps sommeiller.

Tandis que vivons ores,
Un baiser donnez-moi,
Donnez-m'en mille encore,
Amour n'a point de loi :
A sa divinité
Convient l'infinité.

En vous baisant, Maîtresse,
Vous m'avez entamé
La langue chanteresse
De votre nom aimé.
Quoi ! est-ce là le prix
Du travail qu'elle a pris ?

Elle, par qui vous êtes
Déesse entre les Dieux,
Qui vos beautés parfaites
Célébrait jusqu'aux Cieux,
Ne faisant l'air, sinon
Bruire de votre nom ?

Pierre Ronsard: Ode V

It’s customary that moon
be month by month reborn,
to slowly dim and soon
can not the heavens adorn,
so under lids shut fast
we come to sleep at last.

While we must live below
give me a thousand more
of those sweet kisses: know
that love will keep no law.
In its divinity
unending things will be.

In kissing you, Mistress,
I wake to singing fame
the language that must bless
your most enchanted name.
Such is the price in fact
of pains she will exact.

She in whom you are
made equal with the gods,
a perfect beauty far
against the heavenly odds.
If not how could we claim
to celebrate your name?

De votre belle face,
Le beau logis d'Amour,
Où Vénus et la Grâce
Ont choisi leur séjour,
Et de votre œil qui fait
Le soleil moins parfait ;

De votre sein d'ivoire
Par deux ondes secous
Elle chantait la gloire,
Ne chantant rien que vous :
Maintenant en saignant,
De vous se va plaignant.

Las ! de petite chose
Je me plains sans raison,
Non de la plaie enclose
Au cœur sans guérison,
Que l'Archerocux
M'y tira de vos yeux.

Sonnets pour Helène 1587

Such is beauty’s face
that love itself must trace,
where Venus and her grace
have made their dwelling place.
The very sun your eyes
diminish in the skies.

From your ivory breast
descends a wave in two,
and though with glory blessed
it wholly sings of you.
Still in blood would paint
of you its long complaint.

Alas, a little thing,
a plaint that’s hardly real,
no reason thus to wring
the heart that cannot heal,
for all the Archer tries
to draw me from your eyes

Rémy Belleau (1528–1577) La Pierre Aqueuse

C'était une belle brune
Filant au clair de la lune,
Qui laissa choir son fuseau
Sur le bord d'une fontaine,
Mais courant après sa laine
Plongea la tête dans l'eau,

Et se noya la pauvrette
Car à sa voix trop faiblette
Nul son désastre sentit,
Puis assez loin ses compagnes
Parmi les vertes campagnes
Gardaient leur troupeau petit.

Ah ! trop cruelle aventure !
Ah ! mort trop fière et trop dure !
Et trop cruel le flambeau
Sacré pour son hyménée,
Qui l'attendant, l'a menée
Au lieu du lit, au tombeau.

Et vous, nymphes fontainières
Trop ingrates et trop fières,
Qui ne vîntes au secours
De cette jeune bergère,
Qui faisant la ménagère
Noya le fil de ses jours.

Rémy Belleau: The Weeping Stone

It was a beautiful brunette
that, spinning in the moonlight, let
her distaff drop. For which she steps
far out into the fountain pool.
Her thoughts, still running after wool,
were lost into the waters depths.

And so was drowned the pretty thing,
no aid her whisper summoning.
So the tragedy occurred
while far away her sisters bide
in their verdant countryside,
each tending to their tiny herd.

Too cruel it proved adventures were,
and death too proud and hard for her.
The marriage torch to that closed room
was not the sacred hymenaeum
but brought her to a sad te deum,
not marriage bed, it was the tomb.

So were you fountain nymphs allowed,
too much ungrateful and too proud,
to come but latterly, with long delays
upon your shepherdess’s cause,
attending to her household chores
who’s lost the thread that bound her days.

Mais en souvenance bonne
De la bergère mignonne,
Emus de pitié, les dieux
En ces pierres blanchissantes
De larmes toujours coulantes
Changent l'émail de ses yeux.

Non plus yeux, mais deux fontaines,
Dont la source et dont les veines
Sourdent du profond du coeur ;
Non plus coeur, mais une roche
Qui lamente le reproche
D'Amour et de sa rigueur.

Pierre toujours larmoyante,
A petit flots ondoyante,
Sûrs témoins de ses douleurs ;
Comme le marbre en Sipyle
Qui se fond et se distille
Goutte à goutte en chaudes pleurs.

Ô chose trop admirable,
Chose vraiment non croyable,
Voir rouler dessus les bords
Une eau vive qui ruisselle,
Et qui de course éternelle,
Va baignant ce petit corps !
Et pour le cours de cette onde

La pierre n'est moins féconde
Ni moins grosse, et vieillissant
Sa pesanteur ne s'altère :
Ains toujours demeure entière
Comme elle était en naissant.

For you whose thought would still possess
the shape of this pert shepherdess,
it’s with the gods true pity lies.
Thus in marble white appears
the flowing cascade of our tears
that change the enamel of her eyes.

No longer eyes but rivulets
which the saddened heart begets.
From her source, throughout her veins,
there pours not feeling but a rock
that’s adamant and taking stock:
such is the love that rigor gains.

Indeed the weeping stone would stay
as tiny waves that flow away
as witnesses of pain that show
how well the marble Sipylus,
declares itself at base to us
as drop by drop the hot tears flow.

How admirable it is, adept
at showing what we can’t accept.
that goes on rolling as to share
a living thing with us, a force
that bears these creatures on a course,
forever bathing their small bodies there.

And for the course of this one wave
the stone will fruitfully behave,
be no less weighty than the earth,
which does not lessen in its role
of staying constant, one full whole
as she was from her very birth.

Mais est-ce que de nature
Pour sa rare contexture
Elle attire l'air voisin,
Ou dans soi qu'elle recèle
Cette humeur qu'elle amoncelle
Pour en faire un magasin ?

Elle est de rondeur parfaite,
D'une couleur blanche et nette
Agréable et belle à voir,
Pleine d'humeur qui ballotte
Au dedans, ainsi que flotte
La glaire en l'oeuf au mouvoir.

Va, pleureuse, et te souvienne
Du sang de la plaie mienne
Qui coule et coule sans fin,
Et des plaintes épandues
Que je pousse dans les nues
Pour adoucir mon destin.

For that is how its nature stayed,
how it’s bound up, how its made.
How it holds surrounding air,
or in the self that it conceals,
indeed its very nature feels
in sundry goods it offers there.

For round it is, a perfect sphere
of whiteness that is always clear.
Agreeable, it need not beg
to be accounted rich in mood
as the inner parts are viewed,
the whiteness of the floating egg.

Go, weeping on, but yet recall
the blood that from the wound would fall
Flowing, flowing endlessly.
Whatever the complaints we see
that nakedness I push must be
a softening of my destiny.

Jean-Antoine Baïf (1532-1589) : A l’hirondelle, chansonnette

Babillarde, qui toujours viens
Le sommeil et songe troubler
Qui me fait heureux et content,
Babillarde aronde, tais-toi.

Babillarde aronde, veux-tu
Que de mes gluaux affutés
Je te fasse choir de ton nid ?
Babillarde aronde, tais-toi.

Babillarde aronde, veux-tu
Que coupant ton aile et ton bec
Je te fasse pis que Térée ?
Babillarde aronde, tais-toi.

Si ne veux te taire, crois-moi,
Je me vengerai de tes cris,
Punissant ou toi ou les tiens.
Babillarde aronde, tais-toi.

Crie contre tel qui heureux
En amour, veillant, à coeur soûl
De sa belle prend le plaisir.
Babillarde aronde, tais-toi.

Ne sois curieuse sur moi
Qui ne puis jouir que dormant
Et ne suis heureux qu'en songeant
Babillarde aronde, tais-toi

Jean-Antoine Baïf : To the songster swallow

Chatterer, you always come,
disturbing dreams, disturbing sleep,
It makes me happy and content
you chatter round, but that’s enough.

Chatterer, if round you go,
won’t that whetted sound not cease?
Should I toss you from your nest?
you chatter round, but that’s enough.

Chatterer, if round you go,
cutting with your wing and beak:
tell me what I’m doing here.
You chatter round, but that’s enough.

And if you will not stop that stuff
I’ll certainly retaliate,
and punish what is you and yours.
You chatter round, but that’s enough.

I deplore such happiness;
that love-inebriated heart
should in beauty take such pleasure.
You chatter round, but that’s enough.

Don’t be curious; don’t rebuff
the one ill fated in his sleep.
In happy thinking I repent.
You chatter round, but that’s enough.

Jean Passerat (1534-1602) : Villanelle

J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle:
Est-ce point celle que j'oy?
Je veus aller aprés elle.

Tu regretes ta femelle,
Helas! aussi fai-je moy,
J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle.

Si ton Amour est fidelle,
Aussi est ferme ma foy,
Je veus aller aprés elle.

Ta plainte se renouvelle;
Tousjours plaindre je me doy:
J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle.

En ne voyant plus la belle
Plus rien de beau je ne voy:
Je veus aller aprés elle.

Mort, que tant de fois j'appelle,
Pren ce qui se donne à toy:
J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle,
Je veus aller aprés elle.

Jean Passerat : Villanelle

I have lost my turtledove.
The one I see will never do.
I want to follow on my love.

The lady that I lost in love,
alas, is one I'll ever rue
I have lost my turtledove.

If you're faithful in your love,
firm and faithful I am too.
I want to follow on my love.

Repeated is the plaint thereof,
ever with this grief I sue.
I have lost my turtledove.

Gone the beauty I would love.
Another one I will not view.
I want to follow on my love.

Death I call on from above:
take whatever's given you.
I have lost my turtledove.
I want to follow on my love.

Robert Garnier (1535-1601) : *de* Elégie sur la mort de Ronsard

... Adieu, mon cher Ronsard ; l'abeille est votre tombe
Fasse toujours son miel ;
Que le baume arabic à tout jamais y tombe,
Et la manne du ciel.
Le laurier y verdisse avecque le lierre
Et le mirthe amoureux ;
Riche en mille boutons, de toutes parts l'enserre
Le rosier odoreux,
Le tin, le basilic, la franche marguerite,
Et notre lis François

Et cette rouge fleur, où la plainte est écrite
Du malcontent Grégeois.
Les Nymphes de Gâtine et les Nayades saintes
Qui habitent le Loir,
Le venant arroser de larmettes empreintes,
Ne cessent de douloir.

Las ! Cloton a tranché le fil de votre vie
D'une piteuse main,
La voyant de vieillesse et de goutte suivie,
Torturage inhumain ;
Voyant la pauvre France en son corps outragée
Par le sanglant effort
De ses enfants, qui l'ont tant de fois ravagée,
Soupirer à la mort ;

Le Suisse aguerri, qui au combat se loue,
L'Anglais fermé de flots,

Robert Garnier : *from* Elegy on the death of Ronsard

Farewell, my dear Ronsard, the bee will make
honey where you lie.
Arabia’s balm, I pray, will ever take
its manna from the sky.
The bay and ivy there are woven green
as love and laughter shows.
On every side a thousand buds are seen
to deck the fragrant rose.
Sweet rosemary, the forthright marguerite
and our French lily flower.

And that red bloom in which complaint is writ
is thus the Grecian lyre.
The sporting Nymphs and holy Naiads there,
inhabiting the Loire,
although they sprinkle dewdrops through the air
they’ll not put out the fire.

Though tired old Cloton cut the thread of life
with his pitiful old hand,
Old age and gout there followed on from strife
and torture by command.
And France, poor France, beset by wretched crimes,
her body with the breath
of all her children ravished many times,
and sighing at her death.

The seasoned Swiss so often battle-praised,
the English close attack,

Ceux qui boivent le Pau, le Tage et la Danoue
Fondre dessus son dos,
Ainsi que le vautour, qui de griffes bourelles
Va sans fin déchirant
De Prométhée le foie, en pâtures nouvelles
Coup sur coup renaissant.

Les meurtres inhumains se font entre les frères.
Spectacle plein d'horreur,
Et déjà les enfants courent contre leurs pères
D'une aveugle fureur ;
Le coeur des citoyens se remplit de furies ;
Les paysans écartés
Meurent comme une haie ; on ne voit que tueries
Par les champs désertés.

Et puis allez chanter l'honneur de notre France
En siècles si maudits !
Attendez-vous qu'aucun vos labeurs récompense
Comme on faisait jadis ?
La triste pauvreté nos chansons accompagne ;
La Muse, les yeux bas,
Se retire de nous, voyant que l'on dédaigne
Ses antiques ébats.
Vous êtes donque heureux, et votre mort heureuse,
O cygne des François ;

those Pau, Tagus and the Danube raised
to fall upon their back.
The vulture, too, but now with new-bred claws
that never are withdrawn
from liver of Prometheus, a cause
now suddenly reborn.

Fraternal murders that are foully done,
where horror pays its call,
already father learns to dread the son:
blind fury grips them all,
citizens with hearts now filled with shame;
there the peasants yield,
to die in hedgerows, scattered all the same
across an empty field.

Go sing of France, of how its honour stands
in these cursed centuries.
Expect no recompense as were the toiling hands
in former instances.
With poverty our songs accumulate,
the muse must look away,
withdraws from us who cannot now relate
how was that former day.
When you were happy in your life and death;
and Francis deemed a swan.

Philippe Desportes (1545-1606) : Sonnet XII

La vie est une fleur espineuse et poignante,
Belle au lever du jour, seiche en son occident ;
C'est moins que de la neige en l'esté plus ardent,
C'est une nef rompue au fort de la tourmente.

L'heur du monde n'est rien qu'une roue inconstante,
D'un labeur eternel montant et descendant ;
Honneur, plaisir, profict, les esprits desbordant,
Tout est vent, songe et nue et folie evidente.

Las ! c'est dont je me plains, moy qui voy commencer
Ma teste à se mesler, et mes jours se passer,
Dont j'ay mis les plus beaux en ces vaines fumées;

Et le fruict que je cueille, et que je voy sortir
Des heures de ma vie, helas! si mal semées,
C'est honte, ennuy, regret, dommage et repentir.

Philippe Desportes : Sonnet XII

The flower of life is poignancy and thorn,
beautiful at daybreak, shred at night;
like snow it’s fled away at summer’s height,
or ship whose keel is broken in the storm.

So fortune’s ever changing wheel is born
where up and down we go for what’s in sight.
Where honour, pleasure and great wealth excite
until those wind-puffed dreams are stripped and torn.

And so I see myself, where start the ways
of mind’s inebriation, dwindling days:
the best I worked for is but useless smoke.

Life’s fruits I gather in and know as yet
they came from scattered hours, alas, that spoke
of shame, repentance, pity and regret.

Philippe Desportes (1545-1606): Contre une nuit trop claire

Ô Nuit ! jalouse Nuit, contre moi conjurée,
Qui renflammes le ciel de nouvelle clarté,
T'ai-je donc aujourd'hui tant de fois désirée
Pour être si contraire à ma félicité ?

Pauvre moi ! je pensais qu'à ta brune rencontre
Les cieux d'un noir bandeau dussent être voiles
Mais, comme un jour d'été, claire tu fais ta montre,
Semant parmi le ciel mille feux étoilés.

Et toi, soeur d'Apollon, vagabonde courrière,
Qui pour me découvrir flambes si clairement,
Allumes-tu la nuit d'aussi grande lumière,
Quand sans bruit tu descends pour baiser ton amant ?

Hélas! s'il t'en souvient, amoureuse déesse,
Et si quelque douceur se cueille en le baisant,
Maintenant que je sors pour baiser ma maîtresse,
Que l'argent de ton front ne soit pas si luisant.

Ah ! la fable a menti, les amoureuses flammes
N'échauffèrent jamais ta froide humidité;
Mais Pan, qui te connut du naturel des femmes,
T'offrant une toison, vainquit ta chasteté.

Si tu avais aimé, comme on nous fait entendre,
Les beaux yeux d'un berger, de long sommeil touchés,
Durant tes chauds désirs tu aurais pu apprendre
Que les larcins d'amour veulent être cachés.

Philippe Desportes : *from* Night, O jealous night

Night, O jealous night, why would you cause
the sky to blaze up with new zeal for me?
So many times today I'd have you pause
and not endanger my felicity.

Alas, that I had thought the amber match
the deep dark veil that made our blackest nights.
But on a summer's day you fail your watch
and sow instead a thousand starry lights.

Dear wandering sister of Apollo, who
would show me clearly in your flame like this:
why brighten up the night, make such ado
when I'd from love would only steal a kiss.

Alas that you, the deity of love,
has in that kiss the very love betrayed.
In stealing out, and in the kiss thereof,
I want no luster to the lips conveyed.

But ah! the fable lied; the lovers' flames
have never overcome your cold humidity.
But Pan knew well the natural woman's claims
and with a fleece has conquered chastity.

You loved the shepherd, so the fable went,
the eyes so beautiful but fast asleep,
despite your hot desires you'd more consent
to have the thefts of love be hidden deep.

Mais flamboie à ton gré, que ta corne argentée
Fasse de plus en plus ses rais étinceler :
Tu as beau découvrir, ta lumière empruntée
Mes amoureux secrets ne pourra déceler.

Que de fâcheuses gens, mon Dieu ! quelle coutume
De demeurer si tard dans la rue à causer !
Otez-vous du serein, craignez-vous point le rhume ?
La nuit s'en va passée, allez vous reposer.

1611

Blaze as you will and let that silver horn
blast out its shining rays increasingly:
But you will find that borrowed light will warn
my secret loves of what they cannot see.

Unhappy men, what is this custom’s hold
you’d stay out late, to common talk addressed.
You’ll lose your balance or will catch a cold.
The night has passed. It’s time to pause and rest.

Jean Bertaut (1552-1611) : *de* Cantique à la Vierge Marie

Quand au dernier sommeil la Vierge eust clos les yeux,
Les Anges qui veilloyent autour de leur maistresse
Esleverent son corps en la gloire des Cieux,
Et les Cieux furent pleins de nouvelle allégresse.

Les plus hauts Séraphins à son advenement
Sortoient au devant d'elle et luy cedoient la place,
Se sentant tous ravis d'aise et d'estonnement
De pouvoir contempler la splendeur de sa face.

Dessus les Cieux des Cieux elle va paroissant,
Les flambeaux estoillez luy servent de couronne :
La Lune est sous ses pieds en forme de Croissant,
Et comme un vestement le Soleil l'environne.

Elle est là-haut assise auprès du Roy des Rois,
Pour rendre à nos clameurs ses oreilles propices,
Et sans cesse l'adjure au sainct nom de la Croix
De purger en son sang nos erreurs et nos vices...

Estoille de la mer, nostre seul reconfort,
Sauve-nous des rochers, du vent et du naufrage.
Ayde-nous de tes vœux pour nous conduire au port,
Et nous monstre ton Fils sur le bord du rivage.

Jean Bertaut : *from* Canticle to the Virgin Mary

When finally the Virgin closed her eyes,
the Angels watching over, in their last employ,
raised her body to the glorying skies,
and the heavens sounded with their new-found joy.

At which a Seraphim, the highest, went
to meet advancement and afford her place,
in the ease delighting, in astonishment
to contemplate the splendour of her face.

Above the Heavens of Heavens she goes,
up where the starry torches serve as crown.
The moon beneath her feet, a Crescent, shows
the sun an all-surrounding radiant gown.

There, elevated with the King of Kings,
and giving back the soft, sweet clamour in her ears,
she asks upon the Cross and heavenly things
to purge our blood of errors, sins and fears.

Star of the sea, and in the rescue sought
from rocks and shipwreck, from the wind’s wild roar:
we know your wishes lead us home to port,
and to your Son upon that furthest shore.

Théodore Agrippa d’Aubigné (1552-1630) : L'hiver du sieur d'Aubigné

Mes volages humeurs, plus sterilles que belles,
S’en vont ; et je leur dis : Vous sentez, irondelles,
S’esloigner la chaleur et le froid arriver.
Allez nicher ailleurs, pour ne tascher, impures,
Ma couche de babil et ma table d’ordures ;
Laissez dormir en paix la nuict de mon hyver.

D’un seul poinct le soleil n’esloigne l’hemisphere ;
Il jette moins d’ardeur, mais autant de lumiere.
Je change sans regrets, lorsque je me repens
Des frivoles amours et de leur artifice.
J’ayme l’hyver qui vient purger mon cœur de vice,
Comme de peste l’air, la terre de serpens.

Mon chef blanchit dessous les neiges entassées.
Le soleil, qui reluit, les eschauffe, glacées,
Mais ne les peut dissoudre, au plus court de ses mois.
Fondez, neiges ; venez dessus mon cœur descendre,
Qu’encores il ne puisse allumer de ma cendre
Du brazier, comme il fit des flammes autrefois.

Mais quoi ! serai-je esteint devant ma vie esteinte ?
Ne luira plus sur moi la flamme vive et sainte,
Le zèle flamboyant de la sainte maison ?
Je fais aux saints autels holocaustes des restes,
De glace aux feux impurs, et de naphte aux celestes :
Clair et sacré flambeau, non funebre tison !

Théodore Agrippa d’Aubigné **:** The Winter of Monsieur d'Aubigné

My sterile, changing moods that never shone:
you know that, swallows: so be off, be gone.
the hot days fade, we feel the chill increase:
nest somewhere else, and not this childhood’s bed,
stain nothing here, nor splatter desk instead:
it is my winter sleep: let that be peace.

Across the sky the sun’s a point of light
that sheds less heat perhaps but still is bright.
I change without regret, when I repent
of vain frivolity and artifice.
The winter comes to purge my heart of this,
like lands with air-borne plagues or serpents sent.

My Maker whitens snow that’s piled beneath.
The sun, which shines, can thaw the frozen wreath
but not dissolve away. For this is cast
as shortest month. Snows, clothe the heart:
you cannot make the brazier’s kindling start,
nor yet my ashes flame as in the past.

What, light gone before life! What shall I be
when holy flame no longer shines on me,
nor gaudy zeal of this most holy land?
At altars I have made burnt offerings
of ice to impure fire, celestial things:
a clear and sacred torch no funeral brand.

Voici moins de plaisirs, mais voici moins de peines.
Le rossignol se taist, se taisent les Sereines.
Nous ne voyons cueillir ni les fruits ni les fleurs ;
L’esperance n’est plus bien souvent tromperesse,
L’hyver jouit de tout. Bienheureuse vieillesse
La saison de l’usage, et non plus des labeurs !

Mais la mort n’est pas loin ; cette mort est suivie
D’un vivre sans mourir, fin d’une fausse vie :
Vie de nostre vie, et mort de nostre mort.
Qui hait la seureté, pour aimer le naufrage ?
Qui a jamais esté si friant de voyage
Que la longueur en soit plus douce que le port ?

Fewer pleasures come but fewer pains.
The nightingale is silent; with quieter strains,
we see no fruit or flower harvested.
Deceptive hope no longer holds the stage;
winter exerts its all, and blessed old age
need now not labour but can rest instead.

When death’s not far away, it comes to be
a life continuing, an end to falsity:
This life is ours, and so our death is naught.
Who would to safety or to shipwreck cling
who had been ever fond of travelling?
What way more sweet than to that quiet port?

Théodore Agrippa d’Aubigné (1552-1630): Prière Du Soir

Dans l’espais des ombres funebres,
Parmi l’obscure nuit, image de la mort,
Astre de nos esprits, sois l’estoile du Nort,
Flambeau de nos tenebres.

Delivre nous des vains mensonges,
Et des illusions des foibles en la foi;
Que le corps dorme en paix, que l’esprit veille à toi
Pour ne veiller à songes.

Le cœur repose en patience,
Dorme la froide crainte et le pressant ennui;
Si l’œil est clos en paix, soit clos ainsi que lui
L’œil de la conscience.

Ne souffre pas en nos poictrines
Les sursauts des meschants sommeillans en frayeur,
Qui sont couverts de plomb, et se courbent en peur
Sur un chevet d’espines.

A ceux qui chantent tes loüanges,
Ton visage est leur ciel, leur chevet ton giron,
Abriés de tes mains, les rideaux d’environ
Sont le camp de tes Anges.

Théodore d'Aubigne: Evening Prayer

In the gloom that funerals know,
where night and death’s own shadows are,
you star of thought, be that north star
that lights the way to go.

Deliver us from false regimes,
from faith and vain delusions of the weak.
May bodies sleep in peace, and spirit keep
them far from fearsome dreams.

A patient heart is blessedness.
In sleep no boredom comes, no fear can strike.
If eye is closed in peace, be it like
the eye of consciousness.

Pray our suffering breast suborns
the evil one in sleep, to start awake
and with a leaden coffin bend to make
our bedside one of thorns.

To those who sing your praise you far
exceed the sky’s own face, your bedside bound
by sheltering hands and, curtained round,
the camps of Angels are.

Étienne Jodelle (1532-1573) : *de* Cléopâtre captive
Acte III Cléopâtre â Octavien

Si la douleur en ce cœur prisonniere
Ne surmontoit ceste plainte derniere,
Tu n'aurois pas ta pauvre esclave ainsi :
Mais je ne peux égaler au souci,
Qui petillant m'écorche le dedans,
Mes pleurs, mes plaints et mes soupirs ardens.
T'esbahis tu, si ce mot separer
A fait mes forces se retirer ?
Separer (Dieux !), separer je l'ay veu,
Et si je n'ay point à ces debats pourveu
Mieux il te fust (ô captive ravie)
Te separer mesme durant sa vie !
J'eusse la guerre et sa mort empeschee
Et à mon heur quelque atteinte laschee,
Veu que j'eusse eu le moyen et l'espace
D'esperer voir secrettement sa face :
Mais, mais cent fois, cent, cent fois malheureuse,
J'ay ja souffert ceste guerre odieuse :
J'ay, j'ay perdu par ceste estrange guerre,
J'ay perdu tout, et mes biens et ma terre :
Et si ay veu ma vie et mon support,
Mon heur, mon tout, se donner à la mort,
Que tout sanglant, ja tout froid et tout blesme,
Je rechauffois des larmes de moymesme,
Me separant des moyme sme à demi
Voyant par mort separer mon ami.
Ha, Dieux ! grands Dieux ! Ha, grands Dieux !

Étienne Jodelle : *from* Cleopatra Captive
Act III Cleopatra to Octavian

‘But for the grief within this captive breast,
the pleas surmounting all of one distressed,
you never would have seen this poor slave so.
I cannot tell you how these terrors grow,
consume and scorch me so that silent lies
that inward lamentation, ardent sighs.
How odd the word of separation might
have power to put my inner strength to flight?
To separate; dear Gods, it would have been
far better had this battle been foreseen.
Better for this unhappy, captive queen,
if both from life had parted at the scene.
With war and death avoided, we of late
had not been heir to these great blows of fate.
For then I had the very means and space
to hide this hitherto unwelcome face.
Unhappily, a hundred times and more,
I’m made to suffer this abhorrent war,
and in the lawlessness that battles bring
lost livelihood, my lands and everything.
I have seen my larger life and its support,
my love, my everything, be cut off short,
his body bleeding there, so pale and cold,
I would with tears have warmed a hundred-fold.
But, separating from him at the end,
I saw that death withdrew me from a friend.
Ah, God! Great God above: it is enough.’

Poetry of the Classical Period

François de Malherbe (1555-1628) prepared the way for classicism. He criticized the freedom of La Pléiade, and through his theoretical writings and rather limited poetry, insisted on strict form, restraint, and purity of diction. In 1605 Malherbe went to Paris, and became court poet to Henry IV. He translated Livy and Seneca, and in his minute criticisms of the poetry of Phillipe Desportes, argued for verbal harmony, propriety, intelligibility, and, above all, for the conception of poet as craftsman rather than prophet. In the little poetry that Malherbe did write there was dignity and grandeur, and the harmony and strength of his best poems became principles in a France that was becoming organized under the strongly centralized government of Louis XIV and his successors.

Classicism is an aesthetic attitude deriving from the arts of ancient Greece and Rome, specifically an emphasis on simplicity, clarity, and restrained emotion. It is not to everyone's taste today, and its poetry can seem too ordered, dull and conventional. Among the many attitudes stemming from classical culture are nonetheless: Simplicity: less is more if carefully chosen and crafted. Clarity: depth is achieved through surface transparency. Perfection: achieved through extended, painstaking craftsmanship. Proportion: nothing to excess, aiming for beauty or pleasing aesthetic shape. Restraint: opposed to individuality of expression. Propriety: an elevated but not necessarily refined language that usually excludes the humdrum, misshapen and obscene. Also relevant are a respect for traditional forms and genres, a building on achievements of celebrated authors, and work based on experience rather than theory.

Our concepts of epic, tragedy, drama, lyric, etc. date from antiquity, but they have only gradually taken their current form. It was the Alexandrians of the second century BC that undertook much of the classifying and grading of writers, but even then lyric meant poetry

sung to the lyre rather than personal expression. In their enthusiasm for the ancient world, the Renaissance imposed much more rigorous formulations, tending to replace what had been convenient labels with strict rules. Codification continued in French classical drama, which (wrongly) attributed 'unities of time, place and action' to Aristotle, and insisted on the most elevated language.

However academic or remote Classicism may seem in the contemporary art scene, it is the dominant aesthetic attitude of western culture. Long centuries go past in which Classicism is lost or misunderstood, but the arts inexorably return to what human beings crave: significance, beauty and security, the return often being celebrated an outburst of creative energy. Predominantly, Classicism is the art of communities that live by accepted rules — rules which a long and often painful history has shown to be necessary. Classicism is not based on theory, therefore, but on experience: its rules generalize on past achievements. Tradition can be stifling, and artists worth the name usually innovate, test and break the rules. Nonetheless, when their work is successful, it is often by developing aspects of tradition that had been overlooked.

Those principles were variously respected in France. Mathurin Régnier (1573-1613) was much more satirical, vigorous and colloquial. He became secretary to Cardinal François de Joyeuse, but his advancement in Rome was delayed by his dissolute ways, though he returned to France and in 1609 became canon of Chartres, spending his last days at the Abbey of Royaumont, near Asnières-sur-Oise.

François Maynard (1582-1646) was a disciple of Malherbe, and, like his master, argued for a standard grammar, the reduction of personal sentiments and a more objective treatment of subject matter. He held office in the court of Aurillac from 1611 to 1628, but, failing to win the support of Cardinal de Richelieu, retired to the country.

Honorat de Bueil, seigneur de Racan (1589 – 1670) was a soldier, poet, dramatist and member of the original acceptance speech for the Académie française *Contre les Sciences* (1635), was an oration against "rules" and affectation, and in praise of "naturalness" française. He served in the Religious Wars and at court came under the influence and protection of Malherbe. It was his verse plays that made his name, and Racan, though he was an exceptionally fastidious verse writer, spoke in his acceptance speech for the Académie française against rules and affectation, praising a naturalness that anticipates Jean-Jacques Rousseau by a hundred years.

Théophile de Viau (1590-1626) was raised a Huguenot, but showed libertine and bisexual inclinations. He unwisely put together a collection of licentious poems, being denounced by the Jesuits and condemned to being burned alive. He went into hiding, but was caught, imprisoned in Paris for two years, and had his sentence commuted to permanent exile, when the unfortunate poet spent the last months of his life in Chantilly under the protection of the Duke of Montmorency. De Viau wrote satirical poems, sonnets, odes elegies and one play, *Les Amours tragiques de Pyrame et Thisbé* which ends in a double suicide. De Viau rejected the restraints of classicism, and his *Un corbeau devant moi croasse* ode featured here is closer to the hectic and theoretical Baroque images of the late Renaissance.

Marc Antoine Girard de Saint-Amant (1594-1661) was the son of a merchant and trader, but obtained a patent of nobility and, under various nobles, saw military service in Italy, England and Poland. His early poems set the fashion for burlesque, followed by Bacchanalian songs, but he also produced an epic, *Moyse sauvé.*

Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux (1636-1711), commonly known simply as Boileau, was both poet and the leading literary critic of his day, upholding standards that greatly influenced French and English literature. He was the son of a government official, tried various

employments before making his name with satires and a mock-heroic epic, *Le Lutrin*, an extended piece which began a famous battle between ancient and contemporary literature, but which also served as a model for Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*. In 1674 he published *L'Art poétique*, a didactic treatise in verse, setting out rules for the composition of poetry in the Classical tradition. It was largely a reworking of others' ideas, but the work was again very influential, on both sides of the Channel. Boileau also translated the Longinus treatise *On the Sublime*, which became a key source for Romanticism.

Malherbe's Consolation à M. Du Périer really only lives through the lines *Et rose elle a vécu ce que vivent les roses, / L'espace d'un matin*, as is rarely translated beyond a few stanzas. I have translated the whole piece, however, to illustrate the dangers of classicism. Du Périer would doubtless have preferred a few heart-felt stanzas, but is given instead a long and tedious piece of moralising, where cleverness has replaced sincerity. The French classical stage avoided the danger by injecting a good deal of emotion into the lines, setting up a fast-driving plot from the opening lines and breathing life into the characters as they declaim their hopes, follies and despairs

Pierre Corneille (1606-1684) practically created French classical tragedy. He was born to a middle-class Norman family, trained as a lawyer and, from 1628 to 1650, held the position of king's counselor in the local office of the department of waterways and forests. He wrote his first play before the age of 20, and many more followed before he caught the eye of Richelieu, who included the playwright amongst his favoured five authors. In 1637, Corneille wrote *Le Cid*, which was an artistic success although suppressed as it did not wholly observe the supposed classical unities: simple action, no subplots, all action to take place at the same place within twenty-four hours.

In 1641, Corneille married Marie de Lampérière, the daughter of a local magistrate, and when his brother married Marie's sister the two

couples lived in adjoining households in mutual assistance and harmony that is rare for writers. After *Le Cid* Corneille wrote *Horace* (1640), *Cinna* (1641), and *Polyeucte* (1643), all celebrated and possessed of an energy peculiar to Corneille. The characters present their arguments in the grand style, elegantly and rhetorically, but also sonorously and strongly. The alexandrine was not Corneille's invention, that he employed it with great flexibility to convey all shades of meaning and expression — irony, anger, soliloquy, repartee, epigram. It is not so much character that is revealed by the verse but the character's reaction to circumstances, what is thought, felt and suffered, emotions which are laid out clear and balanced as a lawyer's brief.

Corneille also turned out a great mass of other plays, including comedies, which were both successful and innovative, paving the way for Molière's work. In 1647 Corneille moved his family to Paris and was at last admitted to the Académie Française. His *Pertharite* was not well received, however, and the ageing playwright concentrated instead on a verse translation of St. Thomas à Kempis' *Imitatio Christi, and on critical discourses to his work.*

Jean-Baptiste Racine (1639-99) brought Corneille's work to perfection, and is renowned for his tightly interlocking plots written in moving and beautiful verse. His reputation rests on *Andromaque* (1668), *Britannicus* (1670), *Bérénice* (1671), *Bajazet* (1672), *Phèdre* (1677), and *Athalie* (1691). Orphaned at a young age, Racine was brought up by his grandparents and educated at the convent of Port-Royal des Champs near Paris, where he was introduced to the classics, given a first class education, but also exposed to the austere Roman Catholic reform movement of Jansenism, an heretical view that saw man entirely at the mercy of God's will.

Racine was an ambitious man who also valued his independence. Of the three ways a writer might succeed — obtain a royal patronage, an

ecclesiastical benefice, or compose for the theatre, Racine chose the last, assiduously working with all those who could assist him, even breaking with Molière in the process. Phèdre was not a commercial success, however, and Racine retired to marriage with the pious and unintellectual Catherine de Romanet, and to the coveted post of royal historiographer with his friend Nicolas Boileau. Racine returned to the theatre to write two religious plays — *Esther* (1689) and *Athalie (1691)*, the last being perhaps Racine's most influential contribution to the theatre, though the chorus was not performed in his lifetime.

Like most European writers of the time, Racine was a close student of rhetoric, the art of controlling an audience. Whole textbooks were written on the subject, and its rules governed the way Racine and others crafted their poetry, from initial creation (inventio), arrangement (dispositio) to the words adopted to write or speak in a correct, moving and pleasing manner (elocutio). Racine was familiar with a technical terminology now only of interest to scholars, and the organising power of those devices is present on every page he wrote.

French tragedy made much use of periphrases, for emphasis (a trois fois chassé la nuite obscure) or embellishment (la plaine liquide). Epithets came out of stock, ennobling in intent, but at times banal and immaterial (timide, cruel, fatal, etc.) The exclamations used to heighten speech sound unnatural or unconvincing today (Ah! Dieux! Ciel! Quoi! Hélas!). Racine's verse was in alexandrines, which are nothing like English blank verse or the rhyming couplet, and rather different from everyday spoken French.

As noted in the Introduction, the rules governing the French hexameter are precise. The alexandrine always consists of exactly twelve syllables. The only licence allowed the poet concerns the 'double vowels'. There are no diphthongs in French, and i/u/ü + vowel may be treated as two separate syllables (diaeresis) or as one by pronouncing the double vowel as y + vowel (synaeresis). Each syllable

of the alexandrine is a sounded vowel. The neutral e is not sounded when occurring at the line end, but simply lengthens the preceding vowel. A similar rule applies to the third person plural present tense ending of ent. Lines ending in e or ent are termed feminine. Other lines are masculine. Though they may end with much the same sound, feminine and masculine lines do not rhyme. A feminine line can only rhyme with another feminine line, and a masculine line rhyme with a masculine one. French dramatic verse is written in alternating pairs of masculine and feminine lines. If an act closes with a masculine line, the following act must open with a feminine line, and vice versa.

Hiatus is avoided in French, by running wherever possible the last consonant(s) of the preceding word or syllable into the vowel, by adding a letter (a-t-il), or by absorbing the neutral e before aient. The neutral e is not sounded in everyday speech (cette semaine is pronounced as sèt smèn) but is pronounced when occurring in the body of an alexandrine (cette semaine becomes sè te se mèn). Unlike English, however, where words have an inherent stress pattern (bódy, embódiment), French is a syllabic language where the stress falls on the last syllable of any meaningful group of words. In the alexandrine, this comes at the end of the line and, to a lesser extent, after the sixth syllable, which is marked by a caesura. Within this structure, the sense adds a further patterning or syllable grouping:

Je crois te voir, cher chant | un su ppli ce nou veau, 4 2 | 4 2
Toi-mê me de ton sang | de ve nir le bou rreau. 2 4 | 3 3
Par donne. Un Dieu cru el | a per du ta fa mille: 2 4 | 3 3
Re co nnais sa ven gean | ceaux fu reurs de ta fille. 3 3 | 3 3
Hé las ! du cri me_a ffreux | dont la hon te me suit 2 4 | 4 2
Ja mais mon tri ste coeur | n'a re cuei lli le fruit. 4 2 | 4 2
Jus qu'a der nier sou pir, | de mal heurs pour sui vie, 4 2 | 3 3
Je rends dans les tour ment | su ne pé ni ble vie. 2 4 | 4 2

English stage verse needs much more vigor and variety, however, and I have rendered this as:

What further punishments can you devise
than butchery in which your bloodline dies?
Forgive me that I let a god in wild
reprisal sow her fury through the child.
Never the once to what it sought for came
this heart, but sadness only, and to shame.
Phaedra in sighs, with which her path was rife,
in agonies gives back a painful life.

Most important is Racine's verse texture, with its ever-varying pace modulated by subtle assonance and consonant clusters.

In *Phaedra*, Racine has moved beyond the grand effects of his earlier verse and writes something closely apt, resonant and pleasing. The play opens with a line first compressed with the nasal dessein and en, is then driven on and opened with pris and pars, and then partially closed with the mène of Théramène.

Le dessein en est pris, je pars, cher Théramène,

The next line is brisker and more businesslike with its alliteration on t and assonance between séjour and Trézène:

Et quitte le séjour de l'aimable Trézène.

The next line sounds a key element in the play with doute mortel, and echoes the unease of Hippolytus with je suis agité.

Dans le doute mortel où je suis agité,

And so on, for hundreds of lines with a variety that will be apparent to

any reader of the original. Above all, *Phèdre succeeds* by its clear outlines, the emotional power of its language, and the profusion of its images and meanings.

Jean-Baptiste Molière (originally Poquelin: 1622-73), the greatest writer of comedy in the language, was a theatre man to his bones. He received a good education at the Collège de Clermont, but promptly joined with nine others to produce comedy as a company under the name of the Illustre-Théâtre. It proved an exceptionally hard but useful apprenticeship — indeed essential for dealing with authors, colleagues, audiences, and provincial authorities —, and Molière was twice imprisoned for debt. His fortunes changed in 1658, when the company presented Corneille's *Nicomède* before Louis XIV, and then *Le Docteur amoureux*, which secured the patronage of the king's brother.

Many successful, if sometimes scandalous, plays followed, the best known of which are *L'École des femmes, (1662), Tartuffe* (1664) *Le Misanthrope (1666),* and *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme (1670).* French comedy has a long history but Molière, an actor himself, succeeded in exaggerating the normal and abnormal, the natural and the specious in human nature. Molière's busy schedule left little time for a private life, but he married the aristocratic but not too faithful Armande Béjart in 1662.

Jean de La Fontaine (1621-1695) is best known for his fables, universally loved and admired. La Fontaine married an heiress, held the office as an inspector of forests and waterways, and seems always to have secured useful patronage. The fables he borrowed, but turned them into miniature comedies and drama, complete with gestures and characterizations. They are commonly set in the beneficent countryside, and though some are more elegies, idylls, epistles, or poetic meditations, everywhere is seen the moral experience of

mankind through the ages, expressed in their typical characters, emotions and everyday attitudes.

Francois Malherbe (1555-1628) : Consolation à M. Du Périer

Ta douleur, Du Perrier, sera donc éternelle ?
Et les tristes discours
Que te met en l'esprit l'amitié paternelle
L'augmenteront toujours ?

Le malheur de ta fille au tombeau descendue
Par un commun trépas,
Est-ce quelque dédale où ta raison perdue
Ne se retrouve pas ?

Je sais de quels appas son enfance était pleine,
Et n'ai pas entrepris,
Injurieux ami, de soulager ta peine
Avecque son mépris.

Mais elle était du monde, où les plus belles choses
Ont le pire destin ;
Et rose elle a vécu ce que vivent les roses,
L'espace d'un matin.

5. Puis quand ainsi serait que, selon ta prière,
Elle aurait obtenu
D'avoir en cheveux blancs terminé sa carrière,
Qu'en fût-il avenu ?

Penses-tu que plus vieille en la maison céleste
Elle eût eu plus d'accueil,
Ou qu'elle eût moins senti la poussière funeste
Et les vers du cercueil ?

Francois Malherbe : Consolation to M. Du Périer

Do griefs forever last, Du Perrier,
and every word impart
fresh sadness that a father’s spirits weigh
more heavy on the heart?

The tragedy that was your girl’s descent
into the common tomb:
is that a labyrinth where reason went
immediately to gloom?

I know the happy airs her girlhood had,
nor should I be content
to injure friendship, censuring what is sad
by vile disparagement.

Her world was all things beautiful that give
short promise of their power.
A rose, she lived as only roses live,
the briefest morning hour.

5. So had it been as was your prayer,
as would have been too clear
her ending life as one with whitened hair:
that changes her career?

You think if older in our heavenly home
they’d more have welcomed her
than she could feel in dust the small worms roam
and in the coffin stir.

Non, non, mon Du Perrier ; aussitôt que la Parque
Ôte l'âme du corps,
L'âge s'évanouit au-deçà de la barque,
Et ne suit point les morts.

Tithon n'a plus les ans qui le firent cigale ;
Et Pluton aujourd'hui,
Sans égard du passé, les mérites égale
D'Archemore et de lui.

Ne te lasse donc plus d'inutiles complaintes :
Mais, sage à l'avenir,
Aime une ombre comme ombre, et des cendres éteintes
Eteins le souvenir.

10. C'est bien, je le confesse, une juste coutume
Que le cœur affligé,
Par le canal des yeux vidant son amertume,
Cherche d'être allégé.

Même quand il advient que la tombe sépare
Ce que nature a joint,
Celui qui ne s'émeut a l'âme d'un barbare,
Ou n'en a du tout point.

Mais d'être inconsolable et dedans sa mémoire
Enfermer un ennui,
N'est-ce pas se haïr pour acquérir la gloire
De bien aimer autrui ?

No, no, Du Perrier, should Charon take
the soul from body sped,
age, vanishing beneath the boat, will make
up little for the dead.

Tithonus and cicada age as one,
for Pluto on a whim,
without regard for years or merit won,
makes D'Archemore as him.

Be done with all the useless plaints you've made,
and think of years to come.
Of love the shadows of a shadow fade
into an empty sum.

10. It is a custom only, I confess,
gives solace to the heart.
The eyes draw down their draughts of bitterness,
that happiness may start.

From heart the grave has separated whole
what nature held in thrall;
who doesn't feel has some barbarian's soul,
or maybe none at all.

To be inconsolable, where memories' reign
decays to ennui,
is it not to hate oneself and glory gain
that love of others be?

Priam, qui vit ses fils abattus par Achille,
Dénué de support
Et hors de tout espoir du salut de sa ville,
Reçut du réconfort.

François, quand la Castille, inégale à ses armes,
Lui vola son Dauphin,
Sembla d'un si grand coup devoir jeter des larmes
Qui n'eussent point de fin.

15. Il les sécha pourtant, et, comme un autre Alcide,
Contre fortune instruit,
Fit qu'à ses ennemis d'un acte si perfide
La honte fut le fruit.

Leur camp, qui la Durance avait presque tarie
De bataillons épais,
Entendant sa constance, eut peur de sa furie,
Et demanda la paix.

De moi déjà deux fois d'une pareille foudre
Je me suis vu perclus ;
Et deux fois la raison m'a si bien fait résoudre,
Qu'il ne m'en souvient plus.

Non qu'il ne me soit grief que la terre possède
Ce qui me fut si cher ;
Mais en un accident qui n'a point de remède
Il n'en faut point chercher.

Priam, seeing sons Achilles shot,
supported but a whim:
beyond all hope was then his city's lot:
it did not comfort him.

When to Castile the Dauphin fled from fears,
what force could not amend,
there seemed a sudden need to show the tears
that never would know end.

15. He dried them as another Hercules,
against what fortune said,
but wrought on foes an act so treacherous
that shame was his instead.

Their camp where Patience nearing truce,
has battalions increase,
foresaw what constant fury might produce
and wisely sued for peace.

Twice to me that kind of lightning fell
and struck me to the core.
Both times my reasoning served so well
I don't remember more.

Nor does it seem as though the earth possessed
such things beloved by me;
if hazard of a cure is that hard pressed
it is no remedy.

La Mort a des rigueurs à nulle autre pareilles :
On a beau la prier ;
La cruelle qu'elle est se bouche les oreilles,
Et nous laisse crier.

20. Le pauvre en sa cabane, où le chaume le couvre,
Est sujet à ses lois ;
Et la garde qui veille aux barrières du Louvre
N'en défend point nos rois.

21. De murmurer contre elle et perdre patience
Il est mal à propos ;
Vouloir ce que Dieu veut est la seule science
Qui nous met en repos.

1599

Death has unequalled rigors, in our tears
we also have to pray;
though cruel the mouth is, still the ears
will fill with what we say.

20. The poor in huts have thatch that barely shields,
yet to these laws must bend.
Nor Louvre’s guard for all the power it wields
can more our kings defend.

To lose all patience and to breathe defiance
is never for the best;
to want as God will want the only science
that brings to us our rest.

Malherbe Francois Malherbe (1555-1628): Dessein de quitter une dame qui ne le contentait que de promesse

Beauté, mon beau souci, de qui l'âme incertaine
A comme l'Océan son flux et son reflux :
Pensez de vous résoudre à soulager ma peine,
Ou je me vais résoudre à ne la souffrir plus.

Vos yeux ont des appas que j'aime et que je prise,
Et qui peuvent beaucoup dessus ma liberté :
Mais pour me retenir, s'ils font cas de ma prise,
Il leur faut de l'amour autant que de beauté.

Quand je pense être au point que cela s'accomplisse,
Quelque excuse toujours en empêche l'effet :
C'est la toile sans fin de la femme d'Ulysse,
Dont l'ouvrage du soir au matin se défait.

Madame, avisez-y, vous perdez votre gloire
De me l'avoir promis et vous rire de moi,
S'il ne vous en souvient vous manquez de mémoire,
Et s'il vous en souvient vous n'avez point de foi.

J'avais toujours fait compte, aimant chose si haute,
De ne m'en séparer qu'avecque le trépas,
S'il arrive autrement ce sera votre faute,
De faire des serments et ne les tenir pas.

Malherbe : Drawing to leave a lady who only contented him with a promise

Beauty is my first concern: the soul may deign
to mimic ocean in its constant ebb and flow
I'd ask you to resolve the matter, soften pain
for more of suffering now I'm not to know.

Your eyes have deep allures I love, and which I take
although they much reduce, or could, my liberty.
But if to hold me back, they do, I also make
it plain there must be love as well in what we see.

And when I think of what I've done, the industry
there's always some excuse that mars the victory won:
the wife of Ulysses, her ceaseless tapestry
whose workmanship from eve to dawn was thus undone.

So, Madam, be advised, it is your fame that's hurt
in promising your charms and then denying them.
For if you can't remember then your mind's inert,
and if you do, it is your faith we must condemn.

Of that high love I always keep a strict account
with separation only possible with death.
If things prove otherwise it is your faults that count
to swear an oath to me that meant but idle breath.

Francois Malherbe (1555-1628): Paraphrase du psaume CXLV

N'espérons plus, mon âme, aux promesses du monde ;
Sa lumière est un verre, et sa faveur une onde
Que toujours quelque vent empêche de calmer.
Quittons ces vanités, lassons-nous de les suivre ;
C'est Dieu qui nous fait vivre,
C'est Dieu qu'il faut aimer.

En vain, pour satisfaire à nos lâches envies,
Nous passons près des rois tout le temps de nos vies
A souffrir des mépris et ployer les genoux.
Ce qu'ils peuvent n'est rien; ils sont comme nous sommes,
Véritablement hommes,
Et meurent comme nous.

Ont-ils rendu l'esprit, ce n'est plus que poussière
Que cette majesté si pompeuse et si fière
Dont l'éclat orgueilleux étonne l'univers ;
Et dans ces grands tombeaux, où leurs âmes hautaines
Font encore les vaines,
Ils sont mangés des vers.

Là se perdent ces noms de maîtres de la terre,
D'arbitres de la paix, de foudres de la guerre ;
Comme ils n'ont plus de sceptre, ils n'ont plus de flatteurs ;
Et tombent avec eux d'une chute commune
Tous ceux que leur fortune
Faisait leurs serviteurs.

1616

Francois Malherbe : Psalm Paraphrase CXLV

Let’s no more put our faith, my soul, in worldly ways;
though clear as glass the light, it’s but a passing phase.
Always some odd breeze prevents its calming down;
so quit these vanities and leave what such may give;
It’s God who makes us live,
our love for God we crown.

How vain and craven is the one who singly strives,
we pass on close to kings throughout our temporal lives:
why suffer their contempt, why kneel in homage to?
As nothing is their power, they are as us again.
Truly they are men
who die as all men do.

They render up their spirits and are as dust
who in a pompous majesty still place their trust.
Their arrogance astonishes but yet confirms
that though their haughty soul the lofty tomb contain,
yet all is still in vain:
they are consumed by worms.

So lost are names of those great masters of the earth,
the arbiters, in whom both peace and war had birth.
They have no sceptre now, no crowds of flatterers.
All that they gained falls with them, to the common lot:
they whom fortune got
were made its servitors.

Jean de Spond (1557-1595) **:** Qui sont, qui sont ceux-là,

Qui sont, qui sont ceux-là, dont le coeur idolâtre
Se jette aux pieds du Monde, et flatte ses honneurs,
Et qui sont ces valets, et qui sont ces Seigneurs,
Et ces âmes d'Ebène, et ces faces d'Albâtre ?

Ces masques déguisés, dont la troupe folâtre
S'amuse à caresser je ne sais quels donneurs
De fumées de Cour, et ces entrepreneurs
De vaincre encor le Ciel qu'ils ne peuvent combattre ?

Qui sont ces louvoyeurs qui s'éloignent du Port ?
Hommagers à la Vie, et félons à la Mort,
Dont l'étoile est leur Bien, le Vent leur fantaisie ?

Je vogue en même mer, et craindrais de périr
Si ce n'est que je sais que cette même vie
N'est rien que le fanal qui me guide au mourir.

Jean de Spond **:** Say who are these

Who are these the heart should idolize,
flattering the honour that the world accords,
who are the valets here, and who the Lords,
which souls have black, and which the whitest guise?

What are these masks moving as do lies
amused and self-caressing, which the Court rewards
with fumes of self-importance, trade awards
that rise resistless to the very skies?

What are these wolfhounds speeding out from Port?
Felons of death and not of life they ought,
what star is Good where winds of phantoms fly?

I sail that sea, and dread a shipwrecked fate
except I know this life’s a passing state,
a beacon only, showing how to die.

Jean de Spond (1557-1595) **:** Tout s'enfle contre moy

Tout s'enfle contre moy, tout m'assaut, tout me tente,
Et le Monde et la Chair, et l'Ange revolté,
Dont l'onde, dont l'effort, dont le charme inventé
Et m'abisme, Seigneur, et m'esbranle, et m'enchante.

Quelle nef, quel appuy, quelle oreille dormante,
Sans peril, sans tomber, et sans estre enchanté,
Me donras tu? Ton Temple où vit ta Sainteté,
Ton invincible main, et ta voix si constante ?

Et quoy ? mon Dieu, je sens combattre maintes fois
Encor avec ton Temple, et ta main, et ta voix,
Cest Ange revolté, ceste Chair, et ce Monde.

Mais ton Temple pourtant, ta main, ta voix sera
La nef, l'appuy, l'oreille, où ce charme perdra,
Où mourra cest effort, où se rompra ceste onde.

John de Sponde : Everything swells against me

All swells against me, assaults and draws me near:
the World, the Flesh, the Fallen One as well
whose wave and effort weave an invented spell
that humbles, Lord, enchants and fills with fear

What nave, support, and what now sleeping ear,
without peril, falling, or enchantment there,
would grant your Temple, and your Holy care,
with hand so strong, your constant voice I hear?

How many times, my Lord, I'd fight your force,
at Temple still, against your hand and voice.
A fallen Angel is the Flesh and World we make.

Still at your Temple hand and voice will be
the nave, the ear, when charm itself will flee,
where effort dies and where the wave will break.

Mathurin Régnier (1573-1613) : Ode

Jamais ne pourray-je bannir
Hors de moy l'ingrat souvenir
De ma gloire si tost passee?
Toujours pour nourrir mon soucy.
Amour, cet enfant sans mercy,
L'offrira-t-il a ma pensee!

Tyran implacable des coeurs,
De combien d'ameres langueurs
As-tu touche ma fantaisie !
De quels maux m'as-tu tourmente!
Et dans mon esprit agite
Que n'a point fait la jalousie !

Mes yeux, aux pleurs accoutumez,
Du sommeil n'estoient plus fermez;
Mon coeur fremissoit sous la peine:
A veu d'oeil mon teint jaunissoit;
Et ma bouche qui gemissoit,
De soupirs estoit toujours pleine.

Aux caprices abandonne,
J'errois d'un esprit forcene,
La raison cedant a la rage:
Mes sens, des desirs emportez,
Flottoient, confus, de tous costez,
Comme un vaisseau parmy l'orage.

Mathurin Régnier : Ode

Never shall I put from me
that most ungrateful memory
of glory gone as soon as sought?
Inveterate always, I confess.
A child is love and merciless:
what can it offer to my thought?

That restless tyrant of our hearts
but languorous bitterness imparts.
Fantasies will touch and stun,
that evils stirred up there will find
much answering torment in the mind!
What has this jealousy not done!

As eye to tears accustomed grows,
on sleep my eyelids never close.
My heart is under so much pain
that looks are yellowed, soft and weak,
my mouth is moistened, does not speak,
and full of sighs I sigh again.

To every whim I’m given up,
on wandering confusions thought will sup.
It is on rage the mind will form
bereft of reason or desire
it floats consumed by inner fire,
as vessel lost into the storm.

Blasphemant la terre et les cieux,
Mesmes je m'estois odieux,
Tant la fureur troubloit mon ame:
Et bien que mon sang amasse
Autour de mon coeur fust glace,
Mes propos n'estoient que de flame.

Pensif, frenetique et resvant,
L'esprit trouble, la teste au vent,
L'oeil hagard, le visage blesme,
Tu me fis tous maux esprouver;
Et sans jamais me retrouver,
Je m'allois cherchant en moy-mesme.

Cependant lors que je voulois,
Par raison enfraindre tes loix,
Rendant ma flame refroidie,
Pleurant, j'accusay ma raison
Et trouvay que la guerison
Est pire que la maladie.

Un regret pensif et confus
D'avoir este, et n'estre plus,
Rend mon ame aux douleurs ouverte;
A mes despens, las! je vois bien
Qu'un bonheur comme estoit le mien
Ne se cognoist que par la perte.

I curse the earth and curse the sky,
myself offend and know not why.
So much this fury hurts my soul,
my blood I'd hold as in a vice:
around my heart is only ice,
and words to flames are given whole.

I'm thoughtful, frenetic, resolute,
my troubled mind would air dispute,
a haggard eye, and face the same,
wholly untoward and bad
the me I sought and barely had:
I'm looking for the least to blame.

However, when I'd want for cause
for such infringing of your laws,
my flame will cool and be at ease.
In tears Il find my reason stays
full distant from the healing ways
and far far worse than the disease.

When all confusion and regret
makes what I was but now forget:
an open heart is sorrow's pain.
And yet it deepens: I can see
how true that happiness in me
will only further loss maintain.

François Maynard (1582-1646) : Sonnet

Mon âme, il faut partir. Ma vigueur est passée,
Mon dernier jour est dessus l'horizon.
Tu crains ta liberté. Quoi ! n'es-tu pas lassée
D'avoir souffert soixante ans de prison?

Tes désordres sont grands; tes vertus sont petites;
Parmi tes maux on trouve peu de bien;
Mais si le bon Jésus te donne ses mérites,
Espère tout et n'appréhende rien.

Mon âme, repens-toi d'avoir aimé le monde,
Et de mes yeux fais la source d'une onde
Qui touche de pitié le monarque des rois.

Que tu serais courageuse et ravie
Si j'avais soupiré, durant toute ma vie,
Dans le désert, sous l'ombre de la Croix !

1582

François Maynard : Sonnet

My soul: we have to leave. My strength has passed,
beyond world's edge has sunk my final day.
You fear your freedom. Are you not downcast
at sixty years that formed your prison stay?

Grand confusions yours, but merits small.
Among such sins, how little good is done.
But if on you the Lord's good grace will fall,
you'll hope for everything, and will fear for none.

You too much loved the world, my soul: repent:
my eyes look on from where that wave was sent,
to touch the monarch of all kings with loss.

That you would be delighted and be brave
as all my life would seem a sighing, save
those wastes be overshadowed by the Cross.

Honorat de Racan (1589-1670) : Lucidas

Et moi seul resterai-je en proie à la tristesse ?
Passerai-je sans fruit la fleur de ma jeunesse ?
Que me servent ces biens dont en toute saison
Le voisin envieux voit combler ma maison ?
Que me sert que mes blés soient l'honneur des campagnes ?
Que les vins à ruisseaux me coulent des montagnes ?
Ni que me sert de voir les meilleurs ménagers
Admirer mes jardins, mes parcs et mes vergers,
Où les arbres plantés d'une égale distance
Ne périssent jamais que dessous l'abondance ?

Ce n'est point en cela qu'est le contentement,
Tout se change ici bas de moment en moment,
Qui le pense trouver aux richesses du monde
Bâtit dessus le sable, ou grave dessus l'onde,
Ce n'est qu'un peu de vent que l'heur du genre humain,
Ce qu'on est aujourd'hui l'on ne l'est pas demain,
Rien n'est stable qu'au Ciel, le temps et la fortune
Règnent absolument au-dessous de la lune.

Honorat de Racan : Lucidas

Must I remain here on my own and sad,
without the fruits of youth I onetime had?
What point to fill my house with season’s goods
that draw the eyes of envious neighbourhoods?
What use my wheat, the pride of countryside,
or wines like mountain rivers, far and wide.
Or that my men’s admiring glance adorns
my formal gardens, orchards and my lawns,
or trees so planted equally apart
that overfeeding makes their life depart.

This is not happiness, contentment’s flower
when all things alter here from hour to hour.
Who thinks the riches of the world are built
on passing wave or feeble banks of silt?
Our happiness is as the wind that sings:
today we are but as the morrow brings.
Nothing’s stable here but Heaven: soon
or late we owe our fortunes to the moon.

Théophile de Viau (1590-1626) : Sacrés murs du Soleil où j'adorai Philis

Sacrés murs du Soleil où j'adorai Philis,
Doux séjour où mon âme était jadis charmée,
Qui n'est plus aujourd'hui sous nos toits démolis,
Que le sanglant butin d'une orgueilleuse armée,

Ornements de l'autel qui n'êtes que fumée,
Grand temple ruiné, mystères abolis,
Effroyables objets d'une ville allumée,
Palais, homme, chevaux, ensemble ensevelis,

Fossés larges et creux tous comblés de murailles,
Spectacles de frayeur, de cris, de funérailles,
Fleuve par où le sang ne cesse de courir,

Charniers où les corbeaux et loups vont tous repaître,
Clairac pour une fois que vous m'avez fait naître,
Hélas ! combien de fois me faites-vous mourir.

Théophile de Viau : How blessed these sunny walls

How blessed these sunny walls where Phyllis was,
that interlude the soul of memory charms.
Now roofs are gone, and suchlike things because
they were the booty of proud men at arms.

The altar’s ornament is dark with smoke,
the temple’s ruined, and no mysteries found
when horrors of a burnt-out city spoke
of horse and palace jumbled underground.

Wide ditch and hollows filled with fallen stone
which witness funerals and heavy groan:
the rivers in which escaping blood will lie.

Mass graves where crows and wolves are rife:
Clairac, who often brought me into life,
how many times you also make me die.

Théophile de Viau (1590-1626) : Un Corbeau devant moi croasse,

Un Corbeau devant moi croasse,
Une ombre offusque mes regards,
Deux belettes et deux renards
Traversent l'endroit où je passe :
Les pieds faillent à mon cheval,
Mon laquais tombe du haut mal,
J'entends craqueter le tonnerre,
Un esprit se présente à moi,
J'ois Charon qui m'appelle à soi,
Je vois le centre de la terre.

Ce ruisseau remonte en sa source,
Un boeuf gravit sur un clocher,
Le sang coule de ce rocher,
Un aspic s'accouple d'une ourse,
Sur le haut d'une vieille tour
Un serpent déchire un vautour,
Le feu brûle dedans la glace,
Le Soleil est devenu noir,
Je vois la Lune qui va choir,
Cet arbre est sorti de sa place.

1621

Théophile de Viau： A Raven Crosses in Front of Me

From crow in front a croaking sound,
a shadow with a threat to throw.
Two weasels and two foxes show
the place that makes the passing ground.
My horse would seem to stumble there,
my servant into evil fare.
I hear the thunder’s heavy roar
and feel some spirit’s entity,
am pleased that Charon calls to me;
I look into the earth’s deep core.

From source the stream flows back in spate.
The ox has climbed to steeple clock
a red blood issues from the rock
and with the adder bear will mate.
On some old tower an asp will start
to tear a vulture’s flesh apart.
All fire assumes a chilling grace.
The sun turns black and I can see
the moon will sing in harmony:
this tree has shifted out of place.

Théophile de Viau (1590-1626) : *de* Pyrame et Thisbé

Thisbé
Du bruit et des fâcheux aujourd'hui séparée,
Ma seule fantaisie avec moi retirée,
Je puis ouvrir mon âme à la clarté des cieux,
Avec la liberté de la voix et des yeux ;
Il m'est ici permis de te nommer, Pyrame,
Il m'est ici permis de t'appeler mon âme ;
Mon âme, qu'ai-je dit ? c'est fort mal discourir,
Car l'âme nous fait vivre et tu me fais mourir.
Il est vrai que la mort que ton amour me livre
Est aussi seulement ce que j'appelle vivre :
Nos esprits sans l'amour assoupis et pesants,
Comme dans un sommeil passent nos jeunes ans ;
Auparavant qu'aimer on ne sait point l'usage
Du mouvement des sens ni des traits du visage ;
Sans cette passion les plus lourds animaux
Connaîtraient mieux que nous et les biens et les maux.
Notre destin serait comme celui des arbres,
Et les beautés en nous seraient comme des marbres
En qui l'ouvrier gravant l'image des humains
Ne saurait faire agir ni les yeux, ni les mains.
Un bel oeil dont l'éclat ne luit qu'à l'aventure,
C'est comme le soleil que cachait la nature
Auparavant qu'il fût entré dans ses maisons
Et qu'il pût discerner la beauté des saisons.
Moi, je crois seulement depuis l'heure première
Que l'amour me toucha d'avoir vu la lumière,
Et que mon coeur ne vint à respirer le jour
Que dès l'heure qu'il vint à soupirer d'amour ;

Théophile de Viaux: *from* Pyramus and Thisbe

Thisbe
At annoyances and noise today
I draw within what inner realms would say;
my soul is open to the light of skies
with freedom given to my voice and eyes.
Lawfully I name you, Pyramus,
as author of my soul. But speaking thus
about my soul may not be sensible.
The soul affords us life, but you more pull
me from the living world, my love spells death
10. although I see it as my living breath.
Without that love our minds are heavy dross,
and years of youth, so passed in sleep, are loss.
Before that love we have no vivid feel
of limbs in movement, or what face is real.
Without this passion untaught beasts would tell
far better than us men what's bad or well.
Our destinies would be as are the trees;
as stones our hearts to beauty's novelties,
image-makers truthful to the facts
20. but not what eye observes or hand enacts.
The eye of beauty but on venture bid
is like the sun that its own nature hid
before it entered on its house and found
the loveliness of seasons far around.
I have believed but only from the hour
that love first touched me with enlightening power,
whereby my heart no longer breathed the way
it so had once but now for love would pray,

Et combien que le Ciel fasse couler ma vie
Dans cette passion avec un peu d'envie,
Que mille empêchements combattent mes désirs
Et qu'un triste succès menace nos plaisirs,
Que les discords mutins d'une haine ancienne
Divisent la maison de Pyrame et la mienne,
Qu'hommes, Ciel, temps et lieux, nuisent à mon dessein,
Je ne saurais pourtant me l'arracher du sein,
Et quand je le pourrais je serais bien marrie
Que d'un si cher tourment mon âme fût guérie.
Une telle santé me donnerait la mort ;
Le penser seulement m'en fâche et me fait tort.

Bersiane
Comment vous être ainsi de nous tous éloignée !
Osez-vous bien aller sans être accompagnée ?
Tout le monde au logis est en peine de vous,
Et surtout votre mère en est en grand courroux.

Thisbé
Pourquoi cela ? ma vie est-elle si suspecte ?

Bersiane
Non ! mais toujours les vieux veulent qu'on les respecte ;
Vous deviez pour le moins un de nous avertir,
Faire quelque semblant que vous alliez sortir.

1623

and sigh for heaven to flow most seriously.
30. In all such passion we a little envy see,
a thousand obstacles will check desires,
those sad successes dampening pleasure's fires.
Some mutinous hatreds of an ancient line
divide the house of Pyramus from mine.
However men, heaven, time and place will thwart
my hopes, I will not give up what I've sought,
and if in blest forgetfulness my soul was sealed,
from all such torments then my heart be healed,
that health gave death instead, and angrily
40. I think of all the wrong it does to me.

Bersian
How can you be so distanced from us, prone
to go about unchaperoned, alone?
All at home are bothered and perplexed,
your mother, in particular, more than vexed.

Thisbe
Why? What in my life could they suspect?

Bersian
No! But people always need respect.
And one of us at least be less in doubt,
or some pretence be made for going out.

Marc Antoine Girard de Saint-Amant (1594-1661) : Le Paresseux

Accablé de paresse et de mélancolie,
Je resve dans un lict où je suis fagoté,
Comme un lièvre sans os qui dort dans un pasté,
Ou comme un Dom Quichot en sa morne folie.

Là, sans me soucier des guerres d'Italie,
Du comte Palatin, ny de sa royauté,
Je consacre un bel hymne à cette oisiveté
Où mon ame en langueur est comme ensevelie.

Je trouve ce plaisir si doux et si charmant,
Que je croy que les biens me viendront en dormant,
Puisque je voy des-jà s'en enfler ma bedaine,

Et hay tant le travail, que, les yeux entr'ouverts,
Une main hors des draps, cher Baudoin, à peine
Ay-je pu me résoudre à t'escrire ces vers.

Marc Antoine Girard de Saint-Amant : Lazybones

Sad and supine in this laziness,
I occupy a bed to which I’m bound,
like boneless hare that’s into paté ground,
or Don Quixote in his madnesses.

With no Italian wars am I concerned,
with Palatine or court I’m even less,
I dedicate this song to idleness,
my soul as though to buried languor turned.

Such sweet and charming pleasures I’m so keeping
I think good things will come to me while sleeping.
I’d have my stomach so extended too,

I hate all work so much that eyes now close,
which, barely handing out my scripts, but shows
the toil, dear Baudoin, I give to you.

Francis Tristan L'Hermite (1601 - 1655) : Le promenoir des deux amants

Auprès de cette grotte sombre
Où l'on respire un air si doux
L'onde lutte avec les cailloux
Et la lumière avecque l'ombre.

Ces flots lassés de l'exercice
Qu'ils ont fait dessus ce gravier
Se reposent dans ce vivier
Où mourut autrefois Narcisse.

C'est un des miroirs où le faune
Vient voir si son teint cramoisi
Depuis'que l'Amour l'a saisi
Ne serait point devenu jaune.

L'ombre de cette fleur vermeille
Et celle de ces joncs pendants
Paraissent être là-dedans
Les songes de l'eau qui sommeille.

Les plus aimables influences
Qui rajeunissent l'univers,
Ont relevé ces tapis verts
De fleurs de toutes les nuances.

Dans ce bois ni dans ces montagnes
Jamais chasseur ne vint encor ;
Si quelqu'un y sonne du cor,
C'est Diane avec ses compagnes.

Francis Tristan L'Hermite : The walk of the two lovers

Near this cavern dark and deep,
where air we breathe is sweet and lush;
the pebbles struggle with the water’s rush;
through light and shade the shadows creep.

To this exertion waves are tied
but make the same this gravel reach:
how wearily they come to beach:
and this is where Narcissus died.

It’s but one mirror where the Faun
can scrutinise its blushing face:
what Love has seized it can’t efface,
the yellow cast that speaks of dawn.

The crimson shade this flower keeps
and that of rushes hanging down
coalesces as it would but drown
the dream that in the water sleeps.

It is the kindest stimulus
rejuvenates the universe;
it is the green where lawns converse
with flowering colours spread for us.

Not in this wood or in the hills
can the hunter come again.
If horn is sounding in the glen
it’s as Diana’s party wills.

Ce vieux chêne a des marques saintes ;
Sans doute qui le couperait
Le sang chaud en découlerait
Et l'arbre pousserait des plaintes.

Ce rossignol mélancolique
Du souvenir de son malheur
Tâche de charmer sa douleur
Mettant son histoire en musique.

Il reprend sa note première
Pour chanter d'un art sans pareil
Sous ce rameau que le soleil
A doré d'un trait de lumière.

Sur ce frêne deux tourterelles
S'entretiennent de leurs tourments,
Et font les doux appointements
De leurs amoureuses querelles...

The oak tree scars are of a saint;
no doubt who made the felling blow:
immediately would warm blood flow.
and tree itself would make complaint.

The melancholy nightingale,
and from the long-remembered wrong,
will charm the pain and in a song
rekindle thus its tuneful tale.

It will resume its early note
that so by matchless art is won
beneath the branch, beneath the sun,
a golden line of anecdote

Two turtledoves upon the tree
so speak their torments each to each,
in sweet appointments so to reach
as all true lovers’ quarrels be.

Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux (1636-1711) : Amitié Fidèle

Parmi les doux transports d’une amitié fidèle,
Je voyais près d’Iris couler mes heureux jours:
Iris que j’aime encore, et que j’aimerai toujours,
Brûlait des mêmes feux dont je brûlais pour elle:

Quand, par l’ordre du ciel, une fièvre cruelle
M’enleva cet objet de mes tendres amours;
Et, de tous mes plaisirs interrompant le cours,
Me laissa de regrets une suite éternelle.

Ah! qu’un si rude coup étonna mes esprits!
Que je versais de pleurs! que je poussais de cris!
De combien de douleurs ma douleur fut suivie!

Iris, tu fus alors moins à plaindre que moi:
Et, bien qu’un triste sort t’ait fait perdre la vie,
Hélas! en te perdant j’ai perdu plus que toi.

Sur la mort d’Iris en 1654

Among the moving joys a faithful friend will stir
as I could see my flowing days for Iris were:
the love I held for her would doubtless long recur
with fires as fierce for me as those I held for her.

And when, by Heaven’s will, an evil fever took
away from me the object of my tender thought,
then stilled was all the course that my sweet pleasure sought,
and loosed to grief forever her continual look.

With what a brutal astonishment were spirits quelled,
what tears were shed, what shrieks and lamentations spelled!
How many pains was that fierce sorrow followed by,

Iris, you had less to think of, less to rue;
and true, in sadder fate you were the one to die,
alas! by losing you I lost much more than you.

Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux (1636-1711) : *de* Epistre VII à Monsieur Racine.

Que tu sais bien, Racine, à l'aide d'un acteur
Émouvoir, étonner, ravir un spectateur !
Jamais Iphigénie en Aulide immolée,
N'a coûté tant de pleurs à la Grèce assemblée,
Que dans l'heureux spectacle à nos yeux étalé,
En a fait sous son nom verser la Champmeslé.
Ne crois pas toutefois, par tes savants ouvrages
Entraînant tous les cœurs gagner tous les suffrages.
Si tôt que d'Apollon un génie inspiré
Trouve loin du vulgaire un chemin ignoré,
En cent lieux contre lui les cabales s'amassent,
Ses rivaux obscurcis autour de lui croassent,
Et son trop de lumière importunant les yeux,
De ses propres amis lui fait des envieux.
La mort seule ici bas, en terminant sa vie,
Peut calmer sur son nom l'injustice et l'envie,
Faire au poids du bon sens peser tous ses écrits,
et donner à ses vers leur légitime prix.

Avant qu'un peu de terre, obtenu par prière,
Pour jamais sous la tombe eut enfermé Molière,
Mille de ces beaux traits aujourd'hui si vantés,
Furent des sots esprits à nos yeux rebutés.
L'ignorance et l'erreur à ses naissantes pièces,
En habit de marquis, en robes de comtesses,
Venaient pour diffamer son chef-d'œuvre nouveau,
Et secouaient la teste à l'endroit le plus beau.

Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux: *from* Epistle VII To Monsieur Racine.

By actor aided, as you know full well, Racine,
your plays delight, transport and stun the gazer's scene!
And never Iphigenia on the Aulis shores
of Greece there immolated won such sad applause
as that great happy spectacle we saw today
performed for us by one named Champmeslé.
Do not believe, however, that your learned works
can win all votes in hearts that look for tricks and quirks.
Even Apollo, that great genius, knows it's best
10. to take a hidden path that leaves the uncouth rest.
In a hundred places cabals against him woke
as obfuscating rivals round him rose to croak,
as though his too much brilliance would distress the eyes
that even envy in his friends he'd recognise.
Death alone down here, which thereby ends his life,
can calm the ills his name stirs up, and settle strife,
to all his writings give their proper sense and face,
and thus assign his verses to their rightful place.

Before, a little earth sufficed, then graced by prayer,
20. to lock into the grave the likes of Molière,
a thousand features found so beautiful today
were said by foolish minds as wanting in the play.
Ignorance and error to their nascent core
were in the dress of marquis, or what countess wore.
Each came to denigrate the newest masterpiece
and from their box conduct a beautiful caprice.

- - -

Je sais sur leurs avis corriger mes erreurs,
Et je mets à profit leurs malignes fureurs.
Si tôt que sur un vice ils pensent me confondre,
C'est en me guérissant que je sais leur répondre :
Et plus en criminel ils pensent m'ériger,
70. Plus croissant en vertu je songe à me venger.
Imite mon exemple ; et lors qu'une cabale,
Un flot de vains auteurs follement te ravale ;
Profite de leur haine, et de leur mauvais sens :
Ris du bruit passager de leurs cris impuissants.

Que peut contre tes vers une ignorance vaine ?
Le Parnasse français anobli par ta veine,
Contre tous ces complots saura te maintenir,
Et soulever pour toi l'équitable avenir.
Et qui voyant un jour la douleur vertueuse
80 De Phèdre malgré soi perfide, incestueuse,
D'un si noble travail justement étonné,
Ne bénira d'abord le siècle fortuné,
Qui rendu plus fameux par tes illustres veilles,
Vit naître sous ta main ces pompeuses merveilles ?

1683

- - -

Continually, I know, they point out my mistakes,
but I can use what their malignant fury wakes.
It is a vice they have, much threatening to confuse,
but I, by mending matters, can that action use.
When more the criminal they want to make me out,
70. the more and more in virtue vengeance comes about.
Imitate my ways to have a faction claim
that streams of would-be authors capture all but name.
So take advantage of their hatred, lack of sense,
that you can laugh at noisy screams and like offence.

How can that pointless ignorance refute your verse,
when to our French Parnassus your noble veins disburse.
Against these vile conspiracies you have the force
to keep your brightest future on a steady course.
And who, on witnessing one day the virtuous pain
80. of Phaedra’s treacherous incest will complain
than rather at that noble work more stand amazed
and feel the fortune by which the century is praised?
Beneath your watch was born this most illustrious land,
with its portentous wonders made by your own hand.

Pierre Corneille (1606-84): *de* Le Cid
Acte première Scene première : Chimène, Elvire

CHIMÈNE
Elvire, m'as-tu fait un rapport bien sincère ?
Ne déguises-tu rien de ce qu'a dit mon père ?

ELVIRE
Tous mes sens à moi-même en sont encor charmés :
Il estime Rodrigue autant que vous l'aimez,
Et si je ne m'abuse à lire dans son âme,
Il vous commandera de répondre à sa flamme.

CHIMÈNE
Dis-moi donc, je te prie, une seconde fois
Ce qui te fait juger qu'il approuve mon choix ;
Apprends-moi de nouveau quel espoir j'en dois prendre ;
Un si charmant discours ne se peut trop entendre ;
Tu ne peux trop promettre aux feux de notre amour
La douce liberté de se montrer au jour.
Que t'a-t-il répondu sur la secrète brigue
Que font auprès de toi don Sanche et don Rodrigue ?
N'as-tu point trop fait voir quelle inégalité
Entre ces deux amants me penche d'un côté ?

Pierre Corneille: *from* The Cid
Act one Scene one: Chimène, Elvire

CHIMÈNE
Is your report, Elvira, faithfully read,
omitting nothing that my father said?

ELVIRA
I'm charmed to think of them. Your father sees
Rodrigo as your very heart decrees.
And, if I read his thoughts correctly, he'll
require you name the one for whom you feel.

CHIMÈNE
A second time, I beg you, give your voice
to why my father must approve my choice.
What hopes, you think, it well may touch?
A charming speech cannot be heard too much;
besides, where fires of love themselves burn bright
they give us freedom to reveal the light.
What's said about that secret courtship, too,
dons Sancho and Rodrigo make to you.
And, since unequal, won't he then infer
just which of these two lovers you prefer?

ELVIRE
Non, j'ai peint votre coeur dans une indifférence
Qui n'enfle d'aucun d'eux ni détruit l'espérance,
Et sans les voir d'un oeil trop sévère ou trop doux,
Attends l'ordre d'un père à choisir un époux.
Ce respect l'a ravi, sa bouche et son visage
M'en ont donné sur l'heure un digne témoignage,
Et puisqu'il vous en faut encor faire un récit,
Voici d'eux et de vous ce qu'en hâte il m'a dit :
« Elle est dans le devoir, tous deux sont dignes d'elle,
Tous deux formés d'un sang noble, vaillant, fidèle,
Jeunes, mais qui font lire aisément dans leurs yeux
L'éclatante vertu de leurs braves aïeux.
Don Rodrigue surtout n'a trait en son visage
Qui d'un homme de coeur ne soit la haure image,
Et sort d'une maison si féconde en guerriers,
Qu'ils y prennent naissance au milieu des lauriers.

La valeur de son père en son temps sans pareille,
Tant qu'a duré sa force, a passé pour merveille ;
Ses rides sur son front ont gravé ses exploits,
Et nous disent encor ce qu'il fut autrefois.
Je me promets du fils ce que j'ai vu du père ;
Et ma fille, en un mot, peut l'aimer et me plaire. »
Il allait au conseil, dont l'heure qui pressait
A tranché ce discours qu'à peine il commençait ;
Mais à ce peu de mots je crois que sa pensée
Entre vos deux amants n'est pas fort balancée.
Le roi doit à son fils élire un gouverneur,
Et c'est lui que regarde un tel degré d'honneur ;

ELVIRA
No. You felt for them the same, I said,
that neither of them would be checked or led.
Not over-stern or –gentle, you'd await
your father's orders to select a mate.
That attitude delighted him, to me
his lips and face at once gave testimony.
And since I must repeat the story, do
now listen: this he said of them and you.
'She's dutiful. With either she might shine
as with a noble, valiant, faithful line.
Both are young, in candid eyes, not hid,
shines what their brave and virtuous forebears did.
Rodrigo the most has nothing in his face
that does not speak of high and manly grace.
He comes from warriors of such renown
that he was born to wear the laurel crown.

His father, too, in his unequalled days
of strength was such to win sheer wonder's praise.
In the very wrinkles of his brow one reads
the proud possessor of once mighty deeds.
And in the son is promised what the father had:
my daughter can but love and make me glad.'
But he was off to council, for time was pressed,
so barely started on what thoughts addressed.
His words, though few, addressed his final view
between the men who make their suit to you.
The king must find a tutor to his son,
an honour which I think your father won.

Ce choix n'est pas douteux, et sa rare vaillance
Ne peut souffrir qu'on craigne aucune concurrence.
Comme ses hauts exploits le rendent sans égal,
Dans un espoir si juste il sera sans rival ;
Et puisque don Rodrigue a résolu son père
Au sortir du conseil à proposer l'affaire,
Je vous laisse à juger s'il prendra bien son temps,
Et si tous vos désirs seront bientôt contents.

CHIMÈNE
Il semble toutefois que mon âme troublée
Refuse cette joie, et s'en trouve accablée :
Un moment donne au sort des visages divers,
Et dans ce grand bonheur je crains un grand revers.

ELVIRE
Vous verrez cette crainte heureusement déçue.

CHIMÈNE
Allons, quoi qu'il en soit, en attendre l'issue.

1636

The choice is not in doubt, his bravery
is such that competition cannot be.
His high exploits are quite unparalleled,
that rival's prospects will at once be quelled.
Rodrigo's asked his father to advance his claim;
on going out of council he'll propose his name.
You'll know how well those gifts can be applied,
that all desires will soon be gratified.

CHIMÈNE
But, nonetheless, it seems my troubled mind
is overwhelmed and has that joy declined.
One moment fate will bless us, next will curse,
and in great happiness I fear reverse.

ELVIRA

Your happy fate will disappoint this fear.

CHIMÈNE
Well, let's go and have the outcome here.

Pierre Corneille (1606-84): *de* Le Cid
Acte première Scene deuxième : L'infante, Léonor, un page

L'INFANTE
Il m'en souvient si bien que j'épandrai mon sang
Avant que je m'abaisse à démentir mon rang.
Je te répondrais bien que dans les belles âmes
Le seul mérite a droit de produire des flammes ;
Et si ma passion cherchait à s'excuser,
Mille exemples fameux pourraient l'autoriser ;
Mais je n'en veux point suivre où ma gloire s'engage ;
La surprise des sens n'abat point mon courage ;
Et je me dis toujours qu'étant fille de roi,
Tout autre qu'un monarque est indigne de moi.
Quand je vis que mon cœur ne se pouvait défendre,
Moi-même je donnai ce que je n'osais prendre.
Je mis, au lieu de moi, Chimène en ses liens,
Et j'allumai leurs feux pour éteindre les miens.
Ne t'étonne donc plus si mon âme gênée
Avec impatience attend leur hyménée :
Tu vois que mon repos en dépend aujourd'hui.
Si l'amour vit d'espoir, il périt avec lui :
C'est un feu qui s'éteint, faute de nourriture ;
Et malgré la rigueur de ma triste aventure,
Si Chimène a jamais Rodrigue pour mari,
Mon espérance est morte, et mon esprit guéri.
Je souffre cependant un tourment incroyable :
Jusques à cet hymen Rodrigue m'est aimable ;
Je travaille à le perdre, et le perds à regret ;
Et de là prend son cours mon déplaisir secret.

Pierre Corneille : *from* Le Cid
Acy one Scene two : Infanta, Leonore, a page.

INFANTA
That I well remember, and would shed
my blood before I bent this royal head.
And I'd reply that our illustrious names
alone possess the right to kindle flames,
and if my passion sought out some excuse
a thousand well known cases prove its use.
All these I scorn where honour is concerned,
say courage holds when sense is overturned.
I tell myself, as daughter of a king,
that only monarchs could deserve my ring.
But when my heart could not defend itself,
nor would I take the offered chance itself,
I put Chimène in chains, and lit in her
such fires that those of mine would not occur.
What wonder, then, I wait with tortured heart,
and great impatience for that day to start.
You see my calm depends on it today,
for love but feeds on hope, and fails that way,
or as a fire falls short for want of fuel.
Though still these pains and sad adventures rule,
Chimène in wedding Rodrigo has sealed
my earlier hopes: they're dead, my spirit healed.
Meanwhile my torment deepens, for all I see
Rodrigo's marriage as but good for me.
I work to lose him, and regret it's so,
and from this source my hidden grief must flow.

Je vois avec chagrin que l’amour me contraigne
À pousser des soupirs pour ce que je dédaigne ;
Je sens en deux partis mon esprit divisé :
Si mon courage est haut, mon cœur est embrasé ;
Cet hymen m’est fatal, je le crains et souhaite :
Je n’ose en espérer qu’une joie imparfaite.
Ma gloire et mon amour ont pour moi tant d’appas,
Que je meurs s’il s’achève ou ne s’achève pas.

LEONOR

Madame, après cela je n’ai rien à vous dire,
Sinon que de vos maux avec vous je soupire :
Je vous blâmais tantôt, je vous plains à présent ;
Mais puisque dans un mal si doux et si cuisant
Votre vertu combat et son charme et sa force,
En repousse l’assaut, en rejette l’amorce,
Elle rendra le calme à vos esprits flottants.
Espérez donc tout d’elle, et du secours du temps ;
Espérez tout du ciel ; il a trop de justice
Pour laisser la vertu dans un si long supplice.

L’INFANTE

Ma plus douce espérance est de perdre l’espoir.

I see with sadness how my love constrain
those sighs for one my person must disdain.
I feel two parties in my mind contend
that, if high courage win, the fires descend.
That hymen’s fatal, yet I fear and hope
the joy it earns has only modest scope.
My love and glory have such benefits
I die if either course my case admits.

LÉONOR

Madam, I’ve nothing left to tell you now
beyond what common sympathies allow.
I used to blame you; now I pity you,
but since misfortune has its sweetness too,
your spirit fights, and by its charm and strength
repels that first assault, or will at length,
and calm will come to fill the troubled mind:
hope comes to all things, and in time you’ll find
that heaven helps, and justice will attain
its lengths though virtue is too long in pain.

INFANTA

I hope that very hope receives short shrift.

LE PAGE

Par vos commandements Chimène vous vient voir.

L'INFANTE, à Léonor

Allez l'entretenir en cette galerie.

LEONOR

Voulez-vous demeurer dedans la rêverie ?

L'INFANTE

Non, je veux seulement, malgré mon déplaisir,
Remettre mon visage un peu plus à loisir.
Je vous suis.

Juste ciel, d'où j'attends mon remède,
Mets enfin quelque borne au mal qui me possède :
Assure mon repos, assure mon honneur.
Dans le bonheur d'autrui je cherche mon bonheur :
Cet hyménée à trois également importe ;
Rends son effet plus prompt, ou mon âme plus forte.
D'un lien conjugal joindre ces deux amants,
C'est briser tous mes fers et finir mes tourments.
Mais je tarde un peu trop : allons trouver Chimène,
Et par son entretien soulager notre peine.

1636

PAGE

Chimène has come to see you, as you wished.

NFANTA, to Léonor

Go and talk with her: she’s over there.

LEONOR

The gallery? You’d keep this dreamlike air?

INFANTA

No, I only need, despite my grief,
to more compose myself in this belief.
I'll follow.
(*Leonor and Page leave*)
Dear God, I need some remedy
from that ill force that yet possesses me.
Some peace of mind, my honour not on loan:
in others’ happiness there lies my own.
This marriage means so much that each of three
will need me strong and purposed equally.
Join these two lovers so conjugally
that fetters end for me, and agony.
I wait too long. Chimène, let’s find again
that simple talk with her that soothes our pain.

Pierre Corneille (1606-84): Stances à Marquise

Marquise, si mon visage
A quelques traits un peu vieux,
Souvenez-vous qu'à mon âge
Vous ne vaudrez guère mieux.

Le temps aux plus belles choses
Se plaît à faire un affront :
Il saura faner vos roses
Comme il a ridé mon front.

Le même cours des planètes
Règle nos jours et nos nuits :
On m'a vu ce que vous êtes
Vous serez ce que je suis.

Cependant j'ai quelques charmes
Qui sont assez éclatants
Pour n'avoir pas trop d'alarmes
De ces ravages du temps.

Vous en avez qu'on adore ;
Mais ceux que vous méprisez
Pourraient bien durer encore
Quand ceux-là seront usés.

Ils pourront sauver la gloire
Des yeux qui me semblent doux,
Et dans mille ans faire croire
Ce qu'il me plaira de vous.

Pierre Corneille: Stanzas for the Marchioness

Marchioness, my face
has features roughly used:
but come my age you'll trace
a self not much improved.

Beauty in time's shade
will show its face to you.
So will your roses fade
and brow be wrinkled too.

The same planets rule
our days and nights, madam;
I was as you, and you'll
become as now I am.

But I retain some charms
still firmly in their prime,
and do not fear alarms
at ravages of time.

You are adored, you know;
my looks are more in doubt.
My gifts continue, though,
when yours are quite worn out.

For I preserve your fame,
whose eyes seem sweet to me.
A thousand years will name
the pleasing things I see.

Chez cette race nouvelle
Où j'aurai quelque crédit,
Vous ne passerez pour belle
Qu'autant que je l'aurai dit.

Pensez-y, belle Marquise,
Quoiqu'un grison fasse effroi,
Il vaut bien qu'on le courtise
Quand il est fait comme moi.

1658

Things pass, are mutable;
my credit lies ahead.
You pass for beautiful,
but only as I’ve said.

So, fair Marchioness,
affronted by this grey,
It’s not worth courting less
the me that’s made today.

Jean Racine (1639-99) : Phedre
Acte Premier : Scène première : Hippolyte, Théramène

HIPPOLYTE
Le dessein en est pris, je pars, cher Théramène,
Et quitte le séjour de l'aimable Trézène.
Dans le doute mortel où je suis agité,
Je commence à rougir de mon oisiveté.
Depuis plus de six mois éloigné de mon père,
J'ignore le destin d'une tête si chère ;
J'ignore jusqu'aux lieux qui le peuvent cacher.

THERAMENE
Et dans quels lieux, Seigneur, l'allez-vous donc chercher ?
Déjà, pour satisfaire à votre juste crainte,
10. J'ai couru les deux mers que sépare Corinthe ;
J'ai demandé Thésée aux peuples de ces bords
Où l'on voit l'Acheron se perdre chez les morts ;
J'ai visité l'Élide, et, laissant le Ténare,
Passé jusqu'à la mer qui vit tomber Icare.
Sur quel espoir nouveau, dans quels heureux climats
Croyez-vous découvrir la trace de ses pas ?
Qui sait même, qui sait si le Roi votre père
Veut que de son absence on sache le mystère ?
Et si, lorsqu'avec vous nous tremblons pour ses jours,
20. Tranquille, et nous cachant de nouvelles amours,
Ce héros n'attend point qu'une amante abusée...

Jean Racine : Phedre
Act One : Scene two : Hippolytus, Theramenes

HIPPOLYTUS
I leave, Theramenes: my course is set.
No more in pleasant Troezen will I let
myself be agitated by unease.
I start to blush at idleness that sees
my father’s six month’s leaving us has led
to unknown destinies for that dear head
in places distances themselves may hide.

THERAMENES
Then, Prince, where look for him? I've scoured each side
the oceans bounding Corinth for some word
10. of Theseus, what was rumoured, who had heard.
My search to calm your natural fears has led
to shores where Acheron fades into the dead.
I've called at Elis and from Cape Taenarus
surveyed the waters swallowing Icarus.
What makes you think that through some happy place
the steps of our dear hero left their trace?
Perhaps the king, your father, is not prone
to have the secrets of his absence known
and while we tremble for his life he stays
20. in blessed tranquillity, in hiding plays
with some new love who cannot yet suspect. . .

HIPPOLYTE
Cher Théramène, arrête, et respecte Thésée.
De ses jeunes erreurs désormais revenu,
Par un indigne obstacle il n'est point retenu ;
Et fixant de ses voeux l'inconstance fatale,
Phèdre depuis longtemps ne craint plus de rivale.
Enfin en le cherchant je suivrai mon devoir,
Et je fuirai ces lieux que je n'ose plus voir.

THERAMENE
Hé ! depuis quand, Seigneur, craignez-vous la présence
30. De ces paisibles lieux, si chers à votre enfance,
Et dont je vous ai vu préférer le séjour
Au tumulte pompeux d'Athènes et de la cour ?
Quel péril, ou plutôt quel chagrin vous en chasse ?

HIPPOLYTE
Cet heureux temps n'est plus. Tout a changé de face
Depuis que sur ces bords les Dieux ont envoyé
La fille de Minos et de Pasiphaé.

1677

HIPPOLYTUS
Now, good Theramenes, show more respect.
Our king renounced such errors with his youth,
and that once dangerous obstacle to truth,
his fateful, wandering heart, is as the throne,
bestowed on Phaedra, and on her alone.
As I too, fleeing what I cannot face,
return my duty to its rightful place.

THERAMENES
Since when, my lord, would you avert your gaze
30. from childhood's peaceful haunts of happy days?
Which you prefer, I've seen, indeed have sought
above the stir and pomp of Athens' court.
What danger — worse, affliction — could you fear?

HIPPOLYTUS
Those happy days are gone. All changes here
since gods have sent to us across the sea
the child of Minos and of Pasiphaë.

Jean Racine (1639-99) : de Phèdre
Acte IV Scène 6: Phedre

Ils s'aimeront toujours.
Au moment que je parle, ah ! mortelle pensée !
Ils bravent la fureur d'une amante insensée.
Malgré ce même exil qui va les écarter,
Ils font mille serments de ne se point quitter.
Non, je ne puis souffrir un bonheur qui m'outrage,
OEnone. Prends pitié de ma jalouse rage.
Il faut perdre Aricie. Il faut de mon époux
Contre un sang odieux réveiller les courroux.
Qu'il ne se borne pas à des peines légères :
Le crime de la soeur passe celui des frères.
Dans mes jaloux transports je le veux implorer.
Que fais-je ? Où ma raison va-t-elle s'égarer ?
Moi jalouse ! Et Thésée est celui que j'implore !
Mon époux est vivant, et moi je brûle encore !
Pour qui ? Quel est le coeur où prétendent mes voeux ?
Chaque mot sur mon front fait dresser mes cheveux.
Mes crimes désormais ont comblé la mesure.
Je respire à la fois l'inceste et l'imposture.
Mes homicides mains, promptes à me venger,
Dans le sang innocent brûlent de se plonger.
Misérable ! et je vis ? et je soutiens la vue
De ce sacré Soleil dont je suis descendue

Jean Racine (1639-99) : from Phèdre
Act IV Scene 6: Phedre

They will love forever.
And as I speak, ah, deadly thought,
it is the fury in my love they thwart.
What can exile do to wrench apart
a thousand vows that join them at the heart?
No, never can their happiness assuage:
Oenone, pity me my violent rage.
Aricia must die. I'll have my spouse
1260. be stirred to wrath against that odious house.
There'll be no trivial penalties for her
who is more flagrant than her brothers were.
Provoked, my jealousy will have her pay —
for what, and wherefore when my reasons stray
to ask of Theseus, my husband? — burn
for things unlawful, and the passions turn
from husband living to the son instead?
How hair in horror bristles on the head!
My measure of transgressions is complete,
1270. I reek with foulest incest and deceit.
My hands propel me and would not repent
if blood they bathed in cried out innocent!
How can I venture in the sun's bright rays
who is my ancestor, and blesses days?

J'ai pour aïeul le père et le maître des Dieux ;
Le ciel, tout l'univers est plein de mes aïeux.
Où me cacher ? Fuyons dans la nuit infernale.
Mais que dis-je ? Mon père y tient l'urne fatale ;
Le Sort, dit-on, l'a mise en ses sévères mains :
Minos juge aux enfers tous les pâles humains.

Ah ! combien frémira son ombre épouvantée,
Lorsqu'il verra sa fille à ses yeux présentée,
Contrainte d'avouer tant de forfaits divers,
Et des crimes peut-être inconnus aux enfers !
Que diras-tu, mon père, à ce spectacle horrible ?
Je crois voir de ta main tomber l'urne terrible,
Je crois te voir, cherchant un supplice nouveau,
Toi-même de ton sang devenir le bourreau.
Pardonne. Un Dieu cruel a perdu ta famille :
Reconnais sa vengeance aux fureurs de ta fille.
Hélas ! du crime affreux dont la honte me suit
Jamais mon triste coeur n'a recueilli le fruit.
Jusqu'au dernier soupir, de malheurs poursuivie,
Je rends dans les tourments une pénible vie.

1677

He is the foremost, gave my father birth
and all my family now on the earth.
What night of sanctuary can I now turn
to? Minos, my dread father, holds the urn,
that destiny in which their lots are cast,
1280. those poor, pale, trembling sinners, first to last?

How shuddering and fearful will his presence stare
at that dark shadow of his daughter there,
and know how heinously her crimes exceed
what hell will groan at and must heed!
For what, my father, do these horrors yearn
that now I see you drop that fateful urn?
What further punishments can you devise
than butchery by which your bloodline dies?
Forgive me that I let a god in wild
1290. reprisal sow her fury through the child.
Never the once to what it sought for came
this heart, but sadness only, and to shame.
Phaedra in sighs, with which her path was rife,
in agonies gives back a painful life.

Jean Racine: Athalie:
Acte Premier Scène première : Abner, Joad

ABNER
Oui, je viens dans son temple adorer l'Eternel ;
Je viens, selon l'usage antique et solennel,
Célébrer avec vous la fameuse journée
Où sur le mont Sina la loi nous fut donnée.
Que les temps sont changés ! Sitôt que de ce jour
La trompette sacrée annonçait le retour,
Du temple, orné partout de festons magnifiques,
Le peuple saint en foule inondait les portiques ;
Et tous, devant l'autel avec ordre introduits,
10. De leurs champs dans leurs mains portant les nouveaux fruits,
Au Dieu de l'univers consacraient ces prémices.
Les prêtres ne pouvaient suffire aux sacrifices.
L'audace d'une femme, arrêtant ce concours,
En des jours ténébreux a changé ces beaux jours.
D'adorateurs zélés à peine un petit nombre
Ose des premiers temps nous retracer quelque ombre.
Le reste pour son Dieu montre un oubli fatal ;
Ou même, s'empressant aux autels de Baal,
Se fait initier à ses honteux mystères,
20. Et blasphème le nom qu'ont invoqué leurs pères.
Je tremble qu'Athalie, à ne vous rien cacher,
Vous-même de l'autel vous faisant arracher,
N'achève enfin sur vous ses vengeances funestes,
Et d'un respect forcé ne dépouille les restes.

Jean Racine: Athaliah:
Act one Scene one: Abner, Jehoiada

ABNER
In Temple custom, yes, I come to praise
our God on this revered of solemn days,
and celebrate with you what would be still
were laws as handed down from Sinai's hill.
How times have changed! For when the dawn's first red
by sacred trumpet had been heralded,
the Temple with its festooned porticoes
was thronged by worshippers. In endless rows
they progressed to the altar, there to yield
10. the first of fruits they'd gathered from the field,
with blessings of the universal god to ask,
that priests were scarcely equal to the task.
But now that one audacious woman's cast
her shade on blest occasions of the past,
there are of fervent worshippers but few
who dare recall to us the ways we knew.
The rest are sunk in dire forgetfulness
and even to the shrine of Baal would press,
in shameful mysteries so far gone
20. as curse the name their fathers called upon.
Athaliah soon will leave small doubt
of aims in having even you dragged out,
and in her gloomy savagery reject
those last few vestiges of feigned respect.

JOAD
D'où vous vient aujourd'hui ce noir pressentiment ?

ABNER
Pensez-vous être saint et juste impunément ?
Dès longtemps elle hait cette fermeté rare
Qui rehausse en Joad l'éclat de la tiare :
Dès longtemps votre amour pour la religion
30. Est traité de révolte et de sédition.
Du mérite éclatant cette reine jalouse
Hait surtout Josabet, votre fidèle épouse.
Si du grand prêtre Aaron Joad est successeur,
De notre dernier roi Josabet est la soeur.
Mathan, d'ailleurs, Mathan, ce prêtre sacrilège,
Plus méchant qu'Athalie, à toute heure l'assiège ;
Mathan, de nos autels infâme déserteur,
Et de toute vertu zélé persécuteur.
C'est peu que, le front ceint d'une mitre étrangère,
40. Ce lévite à Baal prête son ministère ;
Ce temple l'importune, et son impiété
Voudrait anéantir le Dieu qu'il a quitté.
Pour vous perdre il n'est point de ressorts qu'il n'invente ;
Quelquefois il vous plaint, souvent même il vous vante ;
Il affecte pour vous une fausse douceur,
Et, par là de son fiel colorant la noirceur,
Tantôt à cette reine il vous peint redoutable,
Tantôt, voyant pour l'or sa soif insatiable,
Il lui feint qu'en un lieu que vous seul connaissez
50. Vous cachez des trésors par David amassés.
Enfin, depuis deux jours, la superbe Athalie
Dans un sombre chagrin paraît ensevelie.

JEHOIADA
What do these dark presentiments presage?

ABNER
Can you be holy and escape her rage?
The faith that ornaments your diadem
is such as Athaliah must condemn
when long devotions such as yours assault
her mind with feared sedition and revolt.
She envies merit in another's life,
and Josabeth she hates, your blameless wife;
as you are yet the high priest Aaron's heir,
your wife's the late king's sister. So beware
of Mathan also, for that turncoat priest,
in goading Athaliah is not least
of pressing dangers while he prowls around
in search of virtue to assault or hound.
For though he's Levite still, and mitre wears,
he ministers to Baal and vile affairs.
So much our Temple galls him, he'd have reft
the greatness from it of the God he left.
To injure you no wiles are too refined:
he seems to pity you, and has combined
a soft, persuasive and forgiving air
with depths that further darken fervour there.
He paints you as determined to withhold
what salves her sovereign appetite for gold.
You guard the Temple, and to you alone
is known the treasure of King David's throne
Athaliah, strikingly, these past
two days, has shown a shrouded, sombre cast

Je l'observais hier, et je voyais ses yeux
Lancer sur le lieu saint des regards furieux :
Comme si, dans le fond de ce vaste édifice,
Dieu cachait un vengeur armé pour son supplice.
Croyez-moi, plus j'y pense, et moins je puis douter
Que sur vous son courroux ne soit prêt d'éclater,
Et que de Jézabel la fille sanguinaire
Ne vienne attaquer Dieu jusqu'en son sanctuaire.

JOAD
Celui qui met un frein à la fureur des flots
Sait aussi des méchants arrêter les complots.
Soumis avec respect à sa volonté sainte,
Je crains Dieu, cher Abner, et n'ai point d'autre crainte.
Cependant je rends grâce au zèle officieux
Qui sur tous mes périls vous fait ouvrir les yeux.
Je vois que l'injustice en secret vous irrite,
Que vous avez encore le coeur israélite,
Le ciel en soit béni ! Mais ce secret courroux,
Cette oisive vertu, vous en contentez-vous ?
La foi qui n'agit point, est-ce une foi sincère ?
Huit ans déjà passés, une impie étrangère
Du sceptre de David usurpe tous les droits,
Se baigne impunément dans le sang de nos rois,
Des enfants de son fils détestable homicide,
Et même contre Dieu lève son bras perfide.

1691

I watched her yesterday, and saw advance
across her features such a furious glance,
as though the depths of our great Temple held
a God of vengeance that her force repelled.
Believe me, as I think, the less I doubt
that on your head her wrath must soon burst out,
when God's own inner sanctuary may feel
our Jezebel's bloodthirsty daughter's steel.

JEHOIADA
He who calms the wave and tempest can,
if need be, undo plots of wicked man.
I hearken, Abner, to His holy will,
fear God alone, although the threats instil
concern for me, I note, and gladly too.
You hate injustices and would pursue
the promptings that a Jewish heart is sent.
Heaven be praised, but how to stay content
with good withdrawn and wrath denied its power?
70. Is faith sincere when actions never flower?
Eight years ago a foreign irreligious
offshoot of great David's royal house,
unpunished, wallowed in our princes' blood,
usurping crown and rights of nationhood.
The offspring of her very son she killed
and raised her arm against what God has willed.

Jean Racine: Athalie:
Acte Premier Scène IV : Le chœur

TOUTE LE CHOEUR chante
Tout l'univers est plein de sa magnificence.
Qu'on adore ce Dieu, qu'on l'invoque à jamais !
Son empire a des temps précédé la naissance ;
Chantons, publions ses bienfaits.

UNE VOIX, SEULE
En vain l'injuste violence
Au peuple qui le loue imposerait silence :
Son nom ne périra jamais.
Le jour annonce au jour sa gloire et sa puissance,
Tout l'univers est plein de sa magnificence :
320. Chantons, publions ses bienfaits.

TOUTE LE CHOEUR répète.
Tout l'univers est plein de sa magnificence :
Chantons, publions ses bienfaits.

UNE VOIX, seule
Il donne aux fleurs leur aimable peinture :
Il fait naître et mourir les fruits ;
Il leur dispense avec mesure
Et la chaleur des jours et la fraîcheur des nuits ;
Le champ qui les reçut les rend avec usure.

Jean Racine: Athaliah:
Act One Scene IV: Chorus

FULL CHORUS sings
His world’s magnificence is all around,
that we continually invoke His name.
By no beginning was His empire bound.
Sing, His goodnesses proclaim!

SOLOIST
In vain is fury found
to quell a people or their praise confound.
Never surely fades His name
that’s daily more in power and glory crowned.
His world’s magnificence is all around.
320. Sing, His goodnesses proclaim!

FULL CHORUS repeats
His world’s magnificence is all around.
Sing, His goodnesses proclaim!

SOLOIST
He paints in flowers each petal fold.
He makes to fill and fall the fruits.
Not from us will He withhold
what heat of day and cooling nights produce:
His gifts in fields a hundredfold.

UNE AUTRE
Il commande au soleil d'animer la nature,
Et la lumière est un nom de ses mains ;
Mais sa loi sainte, sa loi pure
Est le plus riche don qu'il ait fait aux humains.

UNE AUTRE
O mont de Sinaï, conserve la mémoire
De ce jour à jamais auguste et renommé,
Quand, sur ton sommet enflammé,
Dans un nuage épais le Seigneur enfermé
Fit luire aux yeux mortels un rayon de sa gloire.
Dis-nous pourquoi ces feux et ces éclairs,
Ces torrents de fumée, et ce bruit dans les airs,
Ces trompettes et ce tonnerre ?
Venait-il renverser l'ordre des éléments ?
Sur ses antiques fondements
Venait-il ébranler la terre ?

UNE AUTRE
Il venait révéler aux enfants des Hébreux
De ses préceptes saints la lumière immortelle :
Il venait à ce peuple heureux
Ordonner de l'aimer d'une amour éternelle.

TOUTE LE CHOEUR
O divine, ô charmante loi !
O justice, ô bonté suprême !
Que de raisons, quelle douceur extrême
D'engager à ce Dieu son amour et sa foi !

SECOND SOLOIST
He makes the sun to animate our days,
His hand the action of that light.
But still His gift of holy ways
and pure administer to our delight.

THIRD SOLOIST
Keep, O Mount of Sinai,
this day of glorious and solemn name.
On your summit ringed with flame
the Lord in veiling cloud and darkness came,
His glory penetrating mortal eye.
Tell us why these lights and fires were found,
such noise and smoky torrents swirled around,
the blare of trumpets, thunder sound?
Were such elements to no more know
the order of the depths below
at the shaking of the ground?

FOURTH SOLOIST
He came to tell the children of the Jews
of His sacred precepts and the light.
He came to make the happy chose
to know eternally His loving might.

FULL CHORUS
Divine and joyful law above,
where good and justice know no bounds!
Such the reason and the sweetest grounds
to pledge ourselves to Him in faith and love.

UNE VOIX, seule
D'un joug cruel il sauva nos aïeux,
Les nourrit au désert d'un pain délicieux.
Il nous donne ses lois, il se donne lui-même.
Pour tant de biens, il commande qu'on l'aime.

LE CHOEUR
O justice, ô bonté suprême !

LA MÊME VOIX
Des mers pour eux il entr'ouvrit les eaux ;
D'un aride rocher fit sortir des ruisseaux.
Il nous donne ses lois, il se donne lui-même.
Pour tant de biens, il commande qu'on l'aime.

LE CHOEUR
360. O divine, ô charmante loi !
Que de raisons, quelle douceur extrême
D'engager à ce Dieu son amour et sa foi !

UNE VOIX, seule
Vous qui ne connaissez qu'une crainte servile,
Ingrats, un Dieu si bon ne peut-il vous charmer ?
Est-il donc à vos coeurs, est-il si difficile
Et si pénible de l'aimer ?
L'esclave craint le tyran qui l'outrage ;
Mais des enfants l'amour est le partage.

FIRST SOLOIST
Our fathers from their heavy yoke
he freed, and in the wastes with manna spoke.
He gives us laws and his own Self above
and with such benefits commands our love.

CHORUS
With justice and with goodness crowned!

FIRST SOLOIST
Between the parted waves they went,
and water to the hard, dry rocks He sent.
He gives us laws and His own Self above
and with such benefits commands our love.

CHORUS
360. Divine and joyful law above!
Such the reason and the sweetest ground
to pledge ourselves to Him in faith and love.

FIRST SOLOIST
Are you, the ingrate, such of servile dread
that no rich providence can He impart?
Why hear and take the awkward path instead
of bounty in the loving heart?
Before the tyrant bows the slave,
but love in children none can waive.

Vous voulez que ce Dieu vous comble de bienfaits,
370. Et ne l'aimer jamais ?

TOUTE LE CHOEUR
O divine, ô charmante loi !
O justice, ô bonté suprême !
Que de raisons, quelle douceur extrême
D'engager à ce Dieu son amour et sa foi !

1691

You’d have the benefits of Him above,
370. but still deny His love?

FULL CHORUS
Divine and joyful law above!
With justice and with goodness crowned!
Such the reason and the sweetest ground
to pledge ourselves to Him in faith and love.

Jean Racine: Sur le bonheur des Justes . . .

Heureux, qui de la Sagesse
Attendant tout son secours,
N'a point mis en la Richesse
L'espoir de ses derniers jours.
La mort n'a rien qui l'étonne ;
Et dès que son Dieu l'ordonne,
Son âme prenant l'essor
S'élève d'un vol rapide
Vers la demeure, où réside
Son véritable trésor.

De quelle douleur profonde
Seront un jour pénétrés
Ces insensés, qui du monde,
Seigneur, vivent enivrés ;
Quand par une fin soudaine
Détrompés d'une ombre vaine,
Qui passe, et ne revient plus,
Leurs yeux du fond de l'abîme
Près de ton trône sublime
Verront briller tes Elus !

Infortunés que nous sommes,
Où s'égaraient nos esprits ?
Voilà, diront-ils, ces hommes,
Vils objets de nos mépris,
Leur sainte et pénible vie
Nous parut une folie.
Mais aujourd'hui triomphants,
Le Ciel chante leur louange,
Et Dieu lui-même les range
Au nombre de ses Enfants.

Jean Racine: On the Happiness of the Just . . .

Happy are the wise
who on his help will gaze,
to whom no wealth is prize
nor hope of his last days.
Confusing death that's near
brings more their God to hear.
When soul is loosed from earth
it mounts in rapid flight
towards that house of light
that holds his truthful worth.

One day with deepest pain
he will be pierced and see
that fools around him gain
but drunk idolatry,
And at the sudden end
vain shadows only send
him unreturning on.
From throne's abyssal depths
the eyes of the adepts
in Chosen Ones have shone.

Unfortunate are we
whom thinking led astray:
most contemptuously
they are reviled, we say.
A holy, painful life
of crazed, unneeded strife.
How they triumph there
and glory in His praise,
where God directs the ways
his Children onward fare.

Pour trouver un bien fragile
Qui nous vient d'être arraché,
Par quel chemin difficile
Hélas ! nous avons marché !
Dans une route insensée
Notre âme en vain s'est lassée,
Sans se reposer jamais,
Fermant l'oeil à la lumière,
Qui nous montrait la carrière
De la bien-heureuse Paix.

De nos attentats injustes
Quel fruit nous est-il resté ?
Où sont les titres augustes,
Dont notre orgueil s'est flatté ?
Sans amis, et sans défense,
Au trône de la vengeance
Appelés en jugement,
Faibles et tristes victimes
Nous y venons de nos crimes
Accompagnés seulement.

Ainsi d'une voix plaintive
Exprimera ses remords
La Pénitence, tardive
Des inconsolables Morts.
Ce qui faisait leurs délices,
Seigneur, fera leurs supplices.
Et par une égale loi,
Tes Saints trouveront des charmes
Dans le souvenir des larmes
Qu'ils versent ici pour toi.
Cantiques spirituels

How fleeting all things good
are torn away from us,
how hard the path of should
we walk on nonetheless.
We walk on senselessly;
and soul, how wearily
you go, to never cease,
avoiding thus the light
though this alone brings sight
of His most blessed Peace.

Attacking us, what may
the fruits of victory be?
Grand the titles stay
where pride's but flattery.
No friends, with no defence,
revenge's throne will thence
long call him to atone.
Feeble and afraid,
a victim clearly made,
we come with these alone.

With plaintive voice we come
expressing our remorse,
belatedly and numb
death draws us on its course.
What joy would once endow
turns, Lord, to torment now,
and equally what's due
Saints welcome as arrears:
in memory of tears;
they pour them out for you.

Jean-Baptiste Molière (1622-73): Tartuffe
Acte Premier Scène VI : Orgon

ORGON

Ah ! si vous aviez vu comme j'en fis rencontre,
Vous auriez pris pour lui l'amitié que je montre.
Chaque jour à l'église il venait, d'un air doux,
Tout vis-à-vis de moi se mettre à deux genoux.
Il attirait les yeux de l'assemblée entière
Par l'ardeur dont au ciel il poussait sa prière ;
Il faisait des soupirs, de grands élancements,
Et baisait humblement la terre à tous moments :
Et, lorsque je sortais, il me devançait vite
290. Pour m'aller, à la porte, offrir de l'eau bénite.
Instruit par son garçon, qui dans tout l'imitait,
Et de son indigence, et de ce qu'il était,
Je lui faisais des dons ; mais, avec modestie,
Il me voulait toujours en rendre une partie.
C'est trop, me disait-il, c'est trop de la moitié.
Je ne mérite pas de vous faire pitié.
Et, quand je refusais de le vouloir reprendre,
Aux pauvres, à mes yeux, il allait le répandre.
Enfin le ciel chez moi me le fit retirer,
300. Et depuis ce temps-là tout semble y prospérer.
Je vois qu'il reprend tout, et qu'à ma femme même
Il prend, pour mon honneur, un intérêt extrême ;
Il m'avertit des gens qui lui font les yeux doux,
Et plus que moi six fois il s'en montre jaloux.

Jean-Baptiste Molière Tartuffe
Acte 1. Scene 6 : Orgon speaking of Tartuffe

ORGON

Ah! If you had seen the man I knew
you would have granted him your friendship too.
Each day to church and, with a gentle air,
had both his knees beside me sink in prayer.
Of course he drew the eyes of all those there,
what with those ardent pleas to heavenly care.
What sighs he'd make and, always, at a bound,
would fall to earth and humbly kiss the ground.
And, when I left, at once he'd run before
290. and offer holy water as I reached the door.
His man, as pious to the same degree,
informed me of his life of poverty.
I hastened to give alms, but always he
returned some part of it, in modesty
would say, No, no, that's far too much by half,
I want no pity on the Lord's behalf.
And when I would not take it back, he'd share
his proceeds with the poor folk thronging there.
So Heaven prompted me to take him in
300. since when at home we have most thriving been.
He takes the closest interest in our life,
and in my honour, which includes my wife.
he warns me of the folk who make soft eyes
at her, and, more than me, attacks such lies.

Mais vous ne croiriez point jusqu'où monte son zèle :
Il s'impute à péché la moindre bagatelle ;
Un rien presque suffit pour le scandaliser,
Jusque-là qu'il se vint l'autre jour accuser
D'avoir pris une puce en faisant sa prière,
310 Et de l'avoir tuée avec trop de colère.

1664

You wouldn’t know how far that fervour goes:
he blames himself if any trifle shows:
the smallest thing’s enough to scandalize.
Indeed he comes the other day and cries
that at his prayers he’d caught a flea
310. and promptly killed it much too angrily.

Jean-Baptiste Molière : Tartuffe
Acte 3 Scène III : Tartuffe

TARTUFFE

Ah ! pour être dévot, je n'en suis pas moins homme
Et, lorsqu'on vient à voir vos célestes appas,
Un cœur se laisse prendre, et ne raisonne pas.
Je sais qu'un tel discours de moi paraît étrange :
970. Mais, madame, après tout, je ne suis pas un ange ;
Et, si vous condamnez l'aveu que je vous fais,
Vous devez vous en prendre à vos charmants attraits.
Dès que j'en vis briller la splendeur plus qu'humaine,
De mon intérieur vous fûtes souveraine ;
De vos regards divins l'ineffable douceur
Força la résistance où s'obstinait mon cœur ;
Elle surmonta tout, jeûnes, prières, larmes,
Et tourna tous mes vœux du côté de vos charmes.
Mes yeux et mes soupirs vous l'ont dit mille fois ;
980. Et pour mieux m'expliquer j'emploie ici la voix.
Que si vous contemplez d'une âme un peu bénigne,
Les tribulations de votre esclave indigne ;
S'il faut que vos bontés veuillent me consoler,
Et jusqu'à mon néant daignent se ravaler,
J'aurai toujours pour vous, ô suave merveille,
Une dévotion à nulle autre pareille.
Votre honneur avec moi ne court point de hasard

Jean-Baptiste Molière: Tartuffe
Act 3. Scene III : Tartuffe

TARTUFFE

Devout I may be, but I'm human too,
and at those heavenly looks the heart will come
to lose at once its reason and succumb.
No doubt this speech from one like me seems quaint,
970. but I'm no angel, madam, nor a saint,
and should you censor me for what I claim,
it is your glowing charms that are to blame.
Your more-than-human splendours played their part
that you at once were sovereign of my heart.
Those looks, divine, ineffably so sweet
were such that no resistance could compete.
Tears, fasts, prayers: all were overruled,
and in your own resistless charms were schooled.
Though looks and sighs have said a thousand times
980. I'll use my voice to plainly speak my crimes.
The soul you knew as somewhat quiet and grave
has now the sufferings of unworthy slave.
In kindness you console me for the pain
until a nothingness I am again,
I will always see you something marvelous,
and like no other be devoted thus.
Your honour with me has no cause to fear

Et n’a nulle disgrâce à craindre de ma part.
Tous ces galants de cour, dont les femmes sont folles,
Sont bruyants dans leurs faits et vains dans leurs paroles ;
De leurs progrès sans cesse on les voit se targuer ;
Ils n’ont point de faveurs qu’ils n’aillent divulguer ;
Et leur langue indiscrète, en qui l’on se confie,
Déshonore l’autel où leur cœur sacrifie.
Mais les gens comme nous brûlent d’un feu discret,
Avec qui, pour toujours, on est sûr du secret.
Le soin que nous prenons de notre renommée
Répond de toute chose à la personne aimée ;
Et c’est en nous qu’on trouve, acceptant notre cœur,
De l’amour sans scandale, et du plaisir sans peur.

1664

some contretemps that we from others hear.
Unlike the gallants foolish women chase,
990. that vain-in-action, ever-chattering race,
that boast of conquests always, even those
whose favours given them they then disclose
in confidence, by using every word
the altar of their sacrifice has heard.
But souls like ours burn slow, our first desire
to keep forever safe that sacred fire.
Our worldly reputation is, above
all else, an answering to the one we love.
So this is what you'll find: love's sweet charm
1000. which fear will not diminish, nor scandal harm.

Jean-Baptiste Molière : Le Misanthrope
Acte Premier Scène I : Philinte, Alceste

PHILINTE
Qu’est-ce donc ? Qu’avez-vous ?

ALCESTE
Laissez-moi, je vous prie.

PHILINTE
Mais, encor, dites-moi, quelle bizarrerie…

ALCESTE
Laissez-moi là, vous dis-je, et courez vous cacher.

PHILINTE
Mais on entend les gens, au moins, sans se fâcher.

ALCESTE
Moi, je veux me fâcher, et ne veux point entendre.

PHILINTE
Dans vos brusques chagrins, je ne puis vous comprendre ;
Et quoique amis, enfin, je suis tous des premiers…

ALCESTE
Moi, votre ami ? Rayez cela de vos papiers.
J’ai fait jusques ici, profession de l’être ;
10. Mais après ce qu’en vous, je viens de voir paraître,
Je vous déclare net, que je ne le suis plus,
Et ne veux nulle place en des cœurs corrompus.

Jean-Baptiste Molière : Le Misanthrope
Acte one Scene I : Philinte, Alceste

PHILINTE
What’s that?

ALCESTE
I’d ask you please to go away,

PHILINTE
But that’s a trifle odd, now wouldn’t you say . . .

ALCESTE
Just leave me here, I tell you. Run and hide.

PHILINTE
You’d let those coming see your angry side?

ALCESTE
I will be cross, and do not want to hear.

PHILINTE
I don’t know why these sudden fits appear,
but as your first of friends I should insist . . .

ALCESTE
Me, your friend? Well, cross me off that list.
And if we had or might perhaps have been
10. before, it can’t be after what I’ve seen,
I want, I’ll tell you clearly, no connections,
nor any part in such perverse affections.

PHILINTE
Je suis, donc, bien coupable, Alceste, à votre compte ?

ALCESTE
Allez, vous devriez mourir de pure honte,
Une telle action ne saurait s'excuser,
Et tout homme d'honneur s'en doit scandaliser.
Je vous vois accabler un homme de caresses,
Et témoigner, pour lui, les dernières tendresses ;
De protestations, d'offres, et de serments,
Vous chargez la fureur de vos embrassements :
Et quand je vous demande après, quel est cet homme,
À peine pouvez-vous dire comme il se nomme,
Votre chaleur, pour lui, tombe en vous séparant,
Et vous me le traitez, à moi, d'indifférent.
Morbleu, c'est une chose indigne, lâche, infâme,
De s'abaisser ainsi, jusqu'à trahir son âme :
Et si, par un malheur, j'en avais fait autant,
Je m'irais, de regret, pendre tout à l'instant.

PHILINTE
Je ne vois pas, pour moi, que le cas soit pendable ;
Et je vous supplierai d'avoir pour agréable,
Que je me fasse un peu, grâce sur votre arrêt,
Et ne me pende pas, pour cela, s'il vous plaît.

ALCESTE
Que la plaisanterie est de mauvaise grâce !

PHILINTE
Mais, sérieusement, que voulez-vous qu'on fasse ?

PHILINTE
So say, Alceste, how I am to blame?

ALCESTE
Oh come now, you should die of very shame,
for things like that can’t be simply called amiss
when every man of honour is outraged at this,
You overwhelm a man with compliments,
caressing words, most tender sentiments,
protesting this and that, undying vows,
20. through which the fury of your words espouse,
but should I ask you then: who is this man?
You cannot tell me how his name began.
Your warmth falls off, it separates you two:
and now it’s not of consequence to you.
You act this worthless, shameless rigmarole
till he in stooping to you, bare his soul.
Had I, unwittingly, performed such stunts
I would have gone and hanged myself at once.

PHILENTE
I hadn’t seen, in being brought to court,
30. that I should ask your leave for such good sport.
Or do extenuating facts allow
me not to hang myself for you, right now?

ALCESTE
A joke in doubtful taste when come from you.

PHILINTE
Then tell me, seriously, what can we do?

ALCESTE
Je veux qu'on soit sincère, et qu'en homme d'honneur,
On ne lâche aucun mot qui ne parte du cœur.

PHILINTE
Lorsqu'un homme vous vient embrasser avec joie,
Il faut bien le payer de la même monnoie,
Répondre, comme on peut, à ses empressements,
Et rendre offre pour offre, et serments pour serments.

ALCESTE
Non, je ne puis souffrir cette lâche méthode
Qu'affectent la plupart de vos gens à la mode ;
Et je ne hais rien tant, que les contorsions
De tous ces grands faiseurs de protestations,
Ces affables donneurs d'embrassades frivoles,
Ces obligeants diseurs d'inutiles paroles,
Qui de civilités, avec tous, font combat,
Et traitent du même air, l'honnête homme, et le fat.
Quel avantage a-t-on qu'un homme vous caresse,
Vous jure amitié, foi, zèle, estime, tendresse,
Et vous fasse de vous, un éloge éclatant,
Lorsque au premier faquin, il court en faire autant ?
Non, non, il n'est point d'âme un peu bien située,
Qui veuille d'une estime, ainsi, prostituée ;
Et la plus glorieuse a des régals peu chers,
Dès qu'on voit qu'on nous mêle avec tout l'univers :
Sur quelque préférence, une estime se fonde,
Et c'est n'estimer rien, qu'estimer tout le monde.

ALCESTE
I want sincerity, true honour's part,
that nothing uttered is not from the heart.

PHILINTE
If a man embraces you with obvious pleasure
we need to pay him back with equal measure,
trading in that eagerness for both,
40. proposal for proposal, oath for oath.

ALCESTE
No, I cannot put up with this coward's way
with which the fashionable mince words and pray:
the worst I hate is making such contortions,
with protestations out of all proportions,
that affable and over-kissing folk
must render purposeless each word they spoke.
Who in civilities will come up close
and treat the honest man as someone gross.
How can it benefit to have a man caress
50. you with his friendship, faith and tenderness,
and so to make of you a glowing name
then run to anyone to do the same?
No, no. It's not a balanced soul who dreams
of puffed up, prostituted, false esteems.
Those most glorious here have little powers
if they can mix in with this world of ours.
On some such thing our preference is based:
if not, there's nothing there but shades of taste.

Puisque vous y donnez, dans ces vices du temps,
Morbleu, vous n'êtes pas pour être de mes gens ;
Je refuse d'un cœur la vaste complaisance,
Qui ne fait de mérite aucune différence :
Je veux qu'on me distingue, et pour le trancher net,
L'ami du genre humain n'est point du tout mon fait.

PHILINTE
Mais quand on est du monde, il faut bien que l'on rende
Quelques dehors civils, que l'usage demande.

1666

But, since you’re comfortable with current vice,
60. you’re not with people taking my advice.
I’d scorn complaisance and would stick to sense
but doubt it makes a scrap of difference.
I seek to be distinguished, of humbug free,
and not a friend of all humanity.

PHILINTE
But when we’re of this world, we must return
a few civilities of self-concern.

Jean-Baptiste Molière (1622-73) : L’Ecole des Femmes
Acte Premier Scene I : Chrysalde, Arnolph

CHRYSALDE.
Vous venez, dites-vous, pour lui donner la main?

ARNOLPHE.
Oui. Je veux terminer la chose dans demain.

CHRYSALDE.
Nous sommes ici seuls; et l'on peut, ce me semble,
Sans craindre d'être ouïs, y discourir ensemble.
Voulez-vous qu'en ami je vous ouvre mon cœur?
Votre dessein, pour vous, me fait trembler de peur;
Et, de quelque façon que vous tourniez l'affaire,
Prendre femme est à vous un coup bien téméraire.

ARNOLPHE.
Il est vrai, notre ami. Peut-être que chez vous
10. Vous trouvez des sujets de craindre pour chez nous;
Et votre front, je crois, veut que du mariage
Les cornes soient partout l'infaillible apanage.

CHRYSALDE.
Ce sont coups du hasard, dont on n'est point garant;
Et bien sot, ce me semble, est le soin qu'on en prend.
Mais, quand je crains pour vous, c'est cette raillerie
Dont cent pauvres maris ont souffert la furie:
Car enfin vous savez qu'il n'est grands, ni petits,
Que de votre critique on ait vu garantis;

Jean-Baptiste Molière : School for Wives
Act One Scene I Chrysalde, Arnolph

CHRYSALDE
You mean to marry her, I understand?

ARNOLPHE.
Yes, tomorrow, if we end as planned.

CHRYSALDE
We're here alone, and get to say each word
without much fear of being overheard.
Should I be frank, for all that friendship's harmed?
In your case I'm in fact a touch alarmed.
Whatever purposes or turn you take,
to add a wife's a risky move to make.

ARNOLPHE.
That's true, my friend. Perhaps too close to home
10. you find these troubling matters come to roam.
Your forehead has, I think, its horns to bear
that come with marriages most everywhere.

CHRYSALDE
Against such hazards nothing's guarantee,
which people fuss about unreasonably.
But when I fear for you, it is the threat
of raillery a hundred husbands get.
However great or small they be, you know
it is your criticism makes it so.

Que vos plus grands plaisirs sont, partout où vous êtes,
De faire cent éclats des intrigues secrètes...

ARNOLPHE.
Fort bien. Est-il au monde une autre ville aussi
Où l'on ait des maris si patiens qu'ici?
Est-ce qu'on n'en voit pas de toutes les espèces,
Qui sont accommodés chez eux de toutes pièces?
L'un amasse du bien, dont sa femme fait part
A ceux qui prennent soin de le faire cornard;
L'autre, un peu plus heureux, mais non pas moins infâme,
Voit faire tous les jours des présens à sa femme,
Et d'aucun soin jaloux n'a l'esprit combattu,
Parce qu'elle lui dit que c'est pour sa vertu.
L'un fait beaucoup de bruit qui ne lui sert de guères;
L'autre en toute douceur laisse aller les affaires;
Et, voyant arriver chez lui le damoiseau,
Prend fort honnêtement ses gants et son manteau.
L'une, de son galant, en adroite femelle,
Fait fausse confidence à son époux fidèle,
Qui dort en sûreté sur un pareil appât,
Et le plaint, ce galant, des soins qu'il ne perd pas;
L'autre, pour se purger de sa magnificence,
Dit qu'elle gagne au jeu l'argent qu'elle dépense;
Et le mari benêt, sans songer à quel jeu,
Sur les gains qu'elle fait rend des grâces à Dieu.
Enfin, ce sont partout des sujets de satire;
Et, comme spectateur, ne puis-je pas en rire?
Puis-je pas de nos sots...

One’s greatest pleasures in whatever leagues
20. is make an outcry of such shrewd intrigues . . .

ARNOLPHE
In all the world is there another city where
its patient husbands won’t profess to care?
Don’t we see them here in all degrees,
and well provided for, in damning ease?
One piles up goods, all which the wife will share
with those that leave the husband unaware.
The other, a little happier, but still decried,
sees wife with gifts, and daily even, chide
him for the jealousy that means to fight
30. for her sweet virtue, to be seen aright.
So comes a lot of noise but not much more.
Another sees his honour take the door,
for when the chosen one she would promote
arrives, he meekly takes his gloves and coat.
And one, more cunning of the female kind
will give her faithful husband peace of mind,
to sleep on soundly through her monstrous lies,
and pity the gallantry she’ll eulogise.
Another, to undermine munificence,
40. will spend the money gained at his expense,
when husband, hoodwinked, thinking nothing odd
at such rich takings gives his thanks to God.
They’re everywhere, these subjects of our scorn:
why can’t we laugh at those we cannot warn?
These fools . . .

CHRYSALDE.
Oui; mais qui rit d'autrui
Doit craindre qu'en revanche on rie aussi de lui.
J'entends parler le monde; et des gens se délassent
A venir débiter les choses qui se passent;
Mais, quoi que l'on divulgue aux endroits où je suis,
Jamais on ne m'a vu triompher de ses bruits.
J'y suis assez modeste; et, bien qu'aux occurrences
Je puisse condamner certaines tolérances,
Que mon dessein ne soit de souffrir nullement
Ce que quelques maris souffrent paisiblement,
Pourtant je n'ai jamais affecté de le dire;
Car enfin il faut craindre un revers de satire,
Et l'on ne doit jamais jurer sur de tels cas
De ce qu'on pourra faire, ou bien ne faire pas.
Ainsi, quand à mon front, par un sort qui tout mène,
Il seroit arrivé quelque disgrâce humaine,
Après mon procédé, je suis presque certain
Qu'on se contentera de s'en rire sous main:
Et peut-être qu'encor j'aurai cet avantage,
Que quelques bonnes gens diront: Que c'est dommage!
Mais de vous, cher compère, il en est autrement:
Je vous le dis encor, vous risquez diablement.
Comme sur les maris accusés de souffrance
De tout temps votre langue a daubé d'importance,
Qu'on vous a vu contre eux un diable déchaîné,
Vous devez marcher droit pour n'être point berné;
Et, s'il faut que sur vous on ait la moindre prise,
Gare qu'aux carrefours on ne vous tympanise,
Et...

CHRYSALDE
That laugh at others on a whim
should fear that others also laugh at him.
I hear the world around in talk and ease
will come to justify such faults like these.
And what's disclosed in places I have been
50. will find me untriumphant at the scene.
I am restrained about it, quietly say
how far our toleration errs today.
It's to these errors that I won't condemn
myself, though others are accepting them.
Most certainly I try to not take sides
for satire turns as quickly as the tides.
One shouldn't take a stand, swear something true,
say what we can and what we cannot do,
since all too fast, our foreheads, by a spell,
60. will indicate that things are not too well,
and then, immediately, by that disgrace,
we'll join the others laughing to our face,
but know in time we'll get the upper hand,
and sympathetic people understand.
But with you, dear friend, it's otherwise:
all's risked, I tell you, on this enterprise,
and as on husbands used to suffering
we put some care into the words we bring.
You're seen by most a devil as you rage
70. so must you then walk upright on the stage,
not fooled by anyone's alluring voice
but at the crossroads take the safest choice.
And . . .

ARNOLPHE.
Mon Dieu! notre ami, ne vous tourmentez point.
Bien huppé qui pourra m'attraper sur ce point.
Je sais les tours rusés et les subtiles trames
Dont pour nous en planter savent user les femmes,
Et comme on est dupé par leurs dextérités.
Contre cet accident j'ai pris mes sûretés;
Et celle que j'épouse a toute l'innocence
80. Qui peut sauver mon front de maligne influence.

1662

ARNOLPHE.
Friend: God forbid you feel anxiety.
It’d be the cleverest catching me.
I know the cunning tricks and artful nets,
the prize their planted use of women gets,
their ease in every smiling, sweet contortion.
Against such risks I’ve taken some precaution;
the one I’ll wed has kept an innocence
80. that saves me from such threatened influence.

Jean de La Fontaine (1621-95) : La Cigale et la Fourmi

La Cigale, ayant chanté
Tout l'été,
Se trouva fort dépourvue
Quand la bise fut venue :
Pas un seul petit morceau
De mouche ou de vermisseau.

Elle alla crier famine
Chez la Fourmi sa voisine,
La priant de lui prêter
Quelque grain pour subsister

Jusqu'à la saison nouvelle.
"Je vous paierai, lui dit-elle,
Avant l'Oût, foi d'animal,
Intérêt et principal. "

La Fourmi n'est pas prêteuse :
C'est là son moindre défaut.
Que faisiez-vous au temps chaud ?
Dit-elle à cette emprunteuse.

- Nuit et jour à tout venant
Je chantais, ne vous déplaise.
- Vous chantiez ? j'en suis fort aise.
Eh bien! dansez maintenant.

Jean de La Fontaine : The Cicada and the Ant

The Cicada, having sung
all summer long,
found itself that much deprived
when the winter days arrived.
In its larder not a scrap
of a worm or of a gnat.

Screeching famine, went to rant
at its neighbour, there the ant.
It begged it please to lend some grain
to at least survive again.

Just until the summer come.
I'll pay you back a decent sum,
and, as common faith be blessed,
both principal and interest.

The ant is not deceived by masks
but gives conditions debtors meet.
How did you act in days of heat?
So the ant of debtor asks.

Well, in all quarters, night and day,
I was singing, come what may.
Singing, were you? Don't delay,
but go on, dance the same today!

Jean de La Fontaine : L’ Amour et la Folie

Tout est mystère dans l’amour,
Ses flèches, son carquois, son flambeau, son enfance :
Ce n’est pas l’ouvrage d’un jour
Que d’épuiser cette science.

Je ne prétends donc point tout expliquer ici :
Mon but est seulement de dire, à ma manière,
Comment l’aveugle que voici
(C’est un dieu), comment, dis-je, il perdit la lumière,

Quelle suite eut ce mal, qui peut-être est un bien ;
J’en fais juge un amant, et ne décide rien.
La Folie et l’Amour jouaient un jour ensemble :
Celui-ci n’était pas encor privé des yeux.
Une dispute vint : l’Amour veut qu’on assemble
Là-dessus le conseil des dieux ;

L’autre n’eut pas la patience ;
Elle lui donne un coup si furieux,
Qu’il en perd la clarté des cieux.
Vénus en demande vengeance.

Femme et mère, il suffit pour juger de ses cris :
Les dieux en furent étourdis,
Et Jupiter, et Némésis,

Et les juges d’enfer, enfin toute la bande.
Elle représenta l’énormité du cas :
Son fils, sans un bâton, ne pouvait faire un pas :
Nulle peine n’était pour ce crime assez grande :
Jean de La Fontaine : Love and Madness

Jean de La Fontaine : Love and Folly

Love is one whole mystery:
his arrows, quiver, torch, his infancy:
No labour of a day to be
so knowledgeable, exhaustively.

I won't pretend I'm here explaining everything:
my goal is, in my way, to simply set aright
how the blind in this one thing
(he is a god) mislaid the light.

Whence came this mischief? Was it good?
I do not judge the lover: no one should.
One day when love and madness played together,
and love was yet to be deprived of eyes,
love holds us each to each in closest tether:
so said the gods, and they are wise.

The other lacked that patient force,
and gave a blow so furious, he
lost the heaven's bright clarity:
when Venus sought revenge, of course.

In cries the wife and mother aren't remiss;
the very gods were stunned by this,
and Jupiter, and Nemesis,

and gods of hell, and all through space and time,
agreed how very gross the case,
and the son, without his baton, stopped apace:
no sentence grave enough for such a crime.

Le dommage devait être aussi réparé.
Quand on eut bien considéré
L'intérêt du public, celui de la partie,
Le résultat enfin de la suprême cour
Fut de condamner la Folie
A servir de guide à l'Amour.

1694

Reparations were required, repairs
which, as the matter airs,
the public interest, how each party stood,
until at last the heavenly court above
decreed henceforth that madness would
become the guiding light of love.

Jean de la Fontaine: Hymne de la volupté

Ô douce volupté, sans qui, dès notre enfance,
Le vivre et le mourir nous deviendraient égaux ;
Aimant universel de tous les animaux,
Que tu sais attirer avecque violence !
Par toi tout se meut ici-bas.
C'est pour toi, c'est pour tes appâts,
Que nous courons après la peine ;
Il n'est soldat, ni capitaine,
Ni ministre d'Etat, ni prince, ni sujet,
Qui ne t'ait pour unique objet.
Nous autres nourrissons, si, pour fruit de nos veilles,
Un bruit délicieux ne charmait nos oreilles,
Si nous ne nous sentions chatouillés par ce son,
Ferions-nous un mot de chanson ?
Ce qu'on appelle gloire en termes magnifiques,
Ce qui servait de prix dans les Jeux Olympiques,
N'est que toi proprement, divine Volupté.
Et le plaisir des sens n'est-il de rien compté ?
Par quoi sont faits les dons de Flore,
Le soleil couchant et l'Aurore,
Pomone et ses mets délicats,
Bacchus, l'âme des bons repas,
Les forêts, les eaux, les prairies,
Mères des douces rêveries ?
Pourquoi tant de beaux arts, qui tous sont tes enfants ?
Mais pour quoi les Chloris aux appâts triomphants,
Que pour maintenir ton commerce ?
J'entends innocemment : sur son propre désir

Jean de la Fontaine: Hymn to Voluptuousness

O sweet voluptuousness: without you, childhood on,
our breathing here or dying would have been the same.
How loved you are by animals, how well you claim
to draw us violently, with all resistance gone.
It’s you who gives us force down here,
the bait that breathless draws us near,
without whom nothing matters, be
we captain or mere infantry.
No minister, subject or a prince
but as that purpose solely will evince.
The rest may well sustain us but a vigil steers
such rich and sweet commotion to our waiting ears.
And if for such rich pleasantness we did not long,
why would we ever break in song?
What’s called magnificence or what such glory frames,
will serve for prizes won in the Olympic games.
Divine you’re called, and properly, voluptuousness:
can pleasure of the senses well be counted less?
Flora’s offerings are not done
for dawn alone and setting sun,
nor then Pomona’s rich appeals
where Bacchus is the soul of meals
where forest, waters, meadow flowers,
are mothers of such dreaming hours.
Why see so many fine arts as your children too?
Chloris is triumphantly but bait for you
who carry on your enterprise?
I hear the innocence of pure desire,

Quelque rigueur que l'on exerce,
Encore y prend-on du plaisir.

Volupté, Volupté, qui fut jadis maîtresse
Du plus bel esprit de la Grèce,
Ne me dédaigne pas, viens-t-en loger chez moi ;
Tu n’y serais pas sans emploi
J'aime le jeu, l'amour, les livres, la musique,
La ville et la campagne, enfin tout ; il n'est rien
Qui ne me soit souverain bien,
Jusqu'au sombre plaisir d'un coeur mélancolique.

Viens donc ; et de ce bien,ô douce Volupté,
Veux-tu savoir au vrai la mesure certaine ?
Il m'en faut tout au moins un siècle bien compté ;
Car trente ans, ce n'est pas la peine.

Les Amours de Psyché et de Cupidon, 1669

as rigour that we exercise
and take a pleasure to acquire.

Voluptuousness, voluptuousness, the centrepiece
of the fairest soul of Greece,
Don't disdain me, come, stay, entertain:
you'll not be out of work again.
I like the game of love, and books and music's part,
the town and country, everything at last: and naught
is good that hasn't caught
the dark and melancholy pleasure of the heart

Come, on sweet Voluptuousness but feast.
Why want to know the bounds of what's enough?
I need a fully counted century at least
where thirty years is no such stuff

Poetry in the Age of Prose

The eighteenth century in France was a period of great social change, where debate on toleration, liberty and independence laid the foundations for a modern liberal Europe. The period is commonly seen as an age of prose, overshadowed by the satirical genius of Voltaire, but there were many minor poets who delighted in creating pointed social comment.

Jean-Baptiste Rousseau (1671-1741) was dramatist and poet but is best known for his witty, often cynical epigrams. He was born the son of a poor shoemaker but conquered Paris with satiric verse and plays. These successes upset many notables of the day, however, and Rousseau was eventually obliged to flee to Switzerland in 1712, thence wandering through several countries before dying destitute in Brussels. That sharp wit is shown by the piece selected for translation, *Ode to Fortune*, where the author has many sardonic observations on contemporary mores.

Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle (1703-71) had a happier life. Coming from an aristocratic Catholic family, he led a rather loose life as a young man, joined the army, eloped to Spain and spent 25 years in the court of Frederick the Great as chamberlain, producing 18 volumes of letters: *Correspondance philosophique. His comments* on philosophy, religion, and history for a popular readership helped spread the freethinker views of Voltaire and others. The verse is simple, expressed with reason, and well turned.

François-Marie Arouet (1694-1778**),** who called himself Voltaire, had a middle class background, lost his mother early and was brought up by his godfather, who encouraged his freethinker ways. He received a good education at the Jesuit college of Louis-le-Grand, was employed as a secretary at the French embassy in The Hague, returned to Paris under the Regency, and became the darling of Parisian society. But mocking the dissolute regent, the duc d'Orléans, proved a step too far: Voltaire was banished from Paris and imprisoned in the Bastille for a year. Released, he wrote for the stage and, following the success of *Oedipe* in 1718, took the name of Voltaire. His *Henriade* earned him a pension from the young queen Marie, and he became a popular court poet. But a quarrel with the chevalier de Rohan earned him another spell in the Bastille, exile to England, and then a life of opposition far too varied to be easily summarized here. He died in Paris in 1788, an international celebrity.

Voltaire wrote voluminously in verse — tragedies, comedies, burlesques, satires, odes, epitaphs, operas, poems didactic and serious — but was a thinker more than poet, a great propagandist for a better society. He was a constant crusader against tyranny, bigotry, and cruelty, and that smiling irony constantly bites through. Voltaire's verse is vigorous and enormously capable but quite without the power and beauty of Racine's, or the mischievous charm and polish of Molière.

Jean-Baptiste Rousseau (1671-1741) : Ode A La Fortune

Fortine dont la main couronne
Les forfaits les plus inouis,
Du faux eclat qui t'environne
Serons-nous toujours eblouis?
Jusques a quand, trompeuse idole,
D'un culte honteux et frivole
Honorerons-nous tes autels?
Verra-t-on toujours tes caprices
Consacres par les sacrifices
Et par l'hommage des mortels?

Apprends que la seule sagesse
Peut faire les heros parfaits;
Qu'elle voit toute la bassesse
De ceux que ta faveur a faits;
Qu'elle n'adopte point la gloire
Qui nait d'une injuste victoire
Que le sort remporte pour eux ;
Et que, devant ses yeux stoiques,
Leurs vertus les plus heroiques
Ne sont que des crimes heureux.

Jean-Baptiste Rousseau : Ode To Fortune

Fortune, she whose hand will crown
the most amazing instances:
will specious radiance surround
with always dazzling privileges?
How long will that vain thing exult,
a frivolous and shameful cult?
Will we honour all your shrines,
and ever see your every whim
praised by sacrificial hymn
that human homage so defines?

Learn that wisdom, it alone
has the hero well portrayed
and so the baseness of a throne
that favour of itself has made.
She that is from glory born
must injustices suborn.
Let fate award them all in time
that there before his stoic eyes
the most heroic virtues rise
and be his only happy crime.

Quoi! Rome et l'Italie en cendre
Me feront honorer Sylla?
J'admirerai dans Alexandre
Ce que j'abhorre en Attila?
J'appellerai vertu guerriere
Une vaillance meurtriere
Qui dans mon sang trempe ses mains;
Et je pourrai forcer ma bouche
A louer un heros farouche,
Ne pour le malheur des humains?

Quels traits me presentent vos fastes,
Impitoyables conquerants!
Des voeux outres, des projets vastes,
Des rois vaincus par des tyrans;
Des murs que la flamme ravage,
Des vainqueurs fumants de carnage,
Un peuple au fer abandonne;
Des meres pales et sanglantes,
Arrachant leurs filles tremblantes
Des bras d'un soldat effrene.

Can burnt-out Rome and Italy
make me honour Sylla’s shame,
or in that Alexander see
that vile, abhorred Attila’s name.
I’ll call the virtuous warrior
but the murder carrier
that in my blood he soak his hands;
I could force my mouth to be
a contract for this mercenary:
calamities for human lands.

What splendours rolled before my eyes
from ruthless conquerors!
Of other schemes or enterprise,
of kings struck down by tyrants’ laws,
of walls devoured by hungry fire,
of carnage equal to desire.
A people lost to iron ways,
where a frantic mother fights
to keep her daughter from the rights
of the lusting soldier’s gaze.

Juges insenses que nous sommes,
Nous admirons de tels exploits!
Est-ce donc le malheur des hommes
Qui fait la vertu des grands rois?
Leur gloire, feconde en ruines,
Sans le meurtre et sans les rapines
Ne saurait-elle subsister?
Images des Dieux sur la terre,
Est-ce par des coups de tonnerre
Que leur grandeur doit eclater?

Montrez-nous, guerriers magnanimes,
Votre vertu dans tout son jour,
Voyons comment vos coeurs sublimes
Du sort soutiendront le retour.
Tant que sa faveur vous seconde,
Vous etes les maitres du monde,
Votre gloire nous eblouit;
Mais au moindre revers funeste,
Le masque tombe, l'homme reste,
Et le heros s'evanouit.

Aren’t we foolish judges when
we venerate such venal things!
Does not the fortune of us men
create the virtue of our kings?
Can glory and the devastation,
the blood and plunder’s famed occasion,
go on without them and persist?
Do images of Gods perhaps,
and those of rattling thunderclaps
show true grandeur can’t exist?

Show, high-minded warriors,
how your virtue wins the day,
let your lofty hearts make cause
that fate turn back the other way.
When favour is your heart’s decree
you master all the world you see.
The dazzling glory does not stay;
the slightest setback undoes gains:
the mask falls off, the man remains
and the hero fades away.

Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle (1657–1757) : Sur ma vieillesse

Il fallait n'être vieux qu'à Sparte
Disent les anciens écrits.
Ô dieux ! combien je m'en écarte,
Moi qui suis si vieux dans Paris !

Ô Sparte ! Sparte, hélas, qu'êtes-vous devenue ?
Vous saviez tout le prix d'une tête chenue.

Plus dans la canicule on était bien fourré,
Plus l'oreille était dure, et l'oeil mal éclairé,
Plus on déraisonnait dans sa triste famille,
Plus on épiloguait sur la moindre vétille,
Plus contre tout son siècle on était déclaré,
Plus on était chagrin, et misanthrope outré,

Plus on avait de goutte, ou d'autre béquille,
Plus on avait perdu de dents de leur bon gré,
Plus on marchait courbé sur sa grosse béquille,
Plus on était enfin digne d'être enterré,
Et plus dans vos remparts on était honoré.

Ô Sparte ! Sparte, hélas ! qu'êtes-vous devenue ?
Vous saviez tout le prix d'une tête chenue.

Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle : On my Old Age

How blest the old in Sparta were,
or so the ancient writers said:
You see, dear Gods, how much I err,
to be in Paris aged instead.

O Sparta, Sparta, what's become of you,
when what a hoary head incurred you knew?

More than caught in heat-wave wearing fur,
more hard of hearing and half blind you were.
More cursed by misery, your next of kin
more see the merest trifle do you in.
More past the century and all hope,
more so the grieved and fuming misanthrope,

More by gout afflicted, or a crutch,
more than teeth were lost in their good will,
more than stumping on would helped too much.
More that finally you earn a tomb
your neighbourhood awarding star and plume.

O Sparta, Sparta, what's become of you,
when what a hoary head incurred you knew?

François-Marie Arouet (Voltaire 1694-1778) :
Epître à l'auteur du livre des Trois imposteurs

Insipide écrivain, qui crois à tes lecteurs
Crayonner les portraits de tes Trois Imposteurs,
D'où vient que, sans esprit, tu fais le quatrième?
Pourquoi, pauvre ennemi de l'essence suprême,
Confonds-tu Mahomet avec le Créateur,
Et les oeuvres de l'homme avec Dieu, son auteur?...
Corrige le valet, mais respecte le maître.
Dieu ne doit point pâtir des sottises du prêtre:
Reconnaissons ce Dieu, quoique très-mal servi.

10. De lézards et de rats mon logis est rempli;
Mais l' architecte existe, et quiconque le nie
Sous le manteau du sage est atteint de manie.
Consulte Zoroastre, et Minos, et Solon,
Et le martyr Socrate, et le grand Cicéron:
Ils ont adoré tous un maître, un juge, un père.
Ce système sublime à l'homme est nécessaire.

C'est le sacré lien de la société,
Le premier fondement de la sainte équité,
Le frein du scélérat, l'espérance du juste.
20. Si les cieux, dépouillés de son empreinte auguste,
Pouvaient cesser jamais de le manifester,
Si Dieu n'existait pas, il faudrait l'inventer.
Que le sage l'annonce, et que les rois le craignent.
Rois, si vous m'opprimez, si vos grandeurs dédaignent
Les pleurs de l'innocent que vous faites couler,
Mon vengeur est au ciel: apprenez à trembler.

François-Marie Arouet (Voltaire) : Epistle to the author of *The Trois imposteurs*

Why, dull author, for your readers draw
the three impostors' portraits of before
to then, unwittingly, become the next,
the fourth to have our high Creator vexed?
You've mixed Mohammed up with our true God,
and works of man with ways that He has trod.
Correct the valet most, but master least,
lest God be judged by actions of his priest:
let's hear the word of God, though unfulfilled.

10. My lodging is by rats and lizards filled;
but architect exists, by none denied
unless the wise and mad be close allied.
As Zoroaster, Minos, Solon show,
the martyr Socrates, great Cicero:
all loved the judge or father in their plan:
that soaring kinship is required by man.

It's that blessed tie which binds society,
foundation of its saintly equity,
which curbs the wicked and promotes the just.
20. Even the heavens, stripped of glory, must
forever manifest its truth. If He
did not exist we'd make up deity
the wise announce and which the rulers fear.
If kings oppress and will not councils hear,
make flow the countless tears of innocents,
the heavens avenge us: fear these incidents.

Tel est au moins le fruit d'une utile croyance.
Mais toi, raisonneur faux, dont la triste imprudence
Dans le chemin du crime ose les rassurer,
30. De tes beaux arguments quel fruit peux-tu tirer?

Tes enfants à ta voix seront-ils plus dociles?
Tes amis, au besoin, plus sûrs et plus utiles?
Ta femme plus honnête? et ton nouveau fermier,
Pour ne pas croire en Dieu, va-t-il mieux te payer?...
Ah! laissons aux humains la crainte et l'espérance.

Tu m'objectes en vain l'hypocrite insolence
De ces fiers charlatans aux honneurs élevés,
Nourris de nos travaux, de nos pleurs abreuvés;
Des Césars avilis la grandeur usurpée;
40. Un prêtre au Capitole où triompha Pompée;
Des faquins en sandale, excrément des humains,
Trempant dans notre sang leurs détestables mains;
Cent villes à leur voix couvertes de ruines,
Et de Paris sanglant les horribles matines:
Je connais mieux que toi ces affreux monuments;
Je les ai sous ma plume exposés cinquante ans.
Mais, de ce fanatisme ennemi formidable,
J'ai fait adorer Dieu quand j'ai vaincu le diable.
Je distinguai toujours de la religion
50. Les malheurs qu'apporta la superstition.

L'Europe m'en sut gré; vingt têtes couronnées
Daignèrent applaudir mes veilles fortunées,
Tandis que Patouillet m'injuriait en vain.
J'ai fait plus en mon temps que Luther et Calvin.

Such is the benefit of our belief
where you, false reasoning, will bring but grief:
is it a crime to think that way, a shoot
30. of brilliant arguments that bears no fruit.

Will children be more docile to your word,
your friends more true when needed, having heard?
Your wife be faithful, and your farmer pay
you more for not believing in a God today?
Let’s leave those fear and hopes in human hearts.

You think me hypocrite whose name imparts
more pride and honour to such charlatans
as trade on our poor tears and honest plans,
usurping Caesar, grander things undone
40. upon the Capitol where Pompey won.
Those sandaled wretches, excrement of men
who soak their hateful hands in blood again,
at whose word a hundred towns are sacked
that matins bell with bloodied Paris wracked.
I know these monuments, and more than you
for fifty years have plied my pen to do
down dogmatism, be its steadfast foe;
I’ve worshiped God in Satan’s overthrow.
True religion isn’t, on my submission,
50. the misery that’s bred of superstition.

Europe has thanked me: twenty kings have praised
my happy labours of unsleeping days,
Patouillet thus insulting me in vain.
I’ve gone past Luther’s work or Calvin’s reign.

On les vit opposer, par une erreur fatale,
Les abus aux abus, le scandale au scandale.
Parmi les factions ardents à se jeter,
Ils condamnaient le pape, et voulaient l'imiter.
L'Europe par eux tous fut longtemps désolée;
Ils ont troublé la terre, et je l'ai consolée.
J'ai dit aux disputants l'un sur l'autre acharnés:
"Cessez, impertinents; cessez, infortunés;
Très-sots enfants de Dieu, chérissez-vous en frères,
Et ne vous mordez plus pour d'absurdes chimères."
Les gens de bien m'ont cru: les fripons écrasés
En ont poussé des cris du sage méprisés;
Et dans l'Europe enfin l'heureux tolérantisme
De tout esprit bien fait devient le catéchisme.

Je vois venir de loin ces temps, ces jours sereins,
Où la philosophie, éclairant les humains,
Doit les conduire en paix aux pieds du commun maître;
Le fanatisme affreux tremblera d'y paraître:
On aura moins de dogme avec plus de vertu.

Si quelqu'un d'un emploi veut être revêtu,
Il n' amènera plus deux témoins sa suite
Jurer quelle est sa foi, mais quelle est sa conduite.
A l'attrayante soeur d'un gros bénéficier
Un amant huguenot pourra se marier;
Des trésors de Lorette, amassés pour Marie,
On verra l'indigence habillée et nourrie;
Les enfants de Sara, que nous traitons de chiens,
Mangeront du jambon fumé par des chrétiens.

Against each other they were so at war
that scandals piled up, and abuses more.
Among their factions being so irate
they both condemn the Pope they'd imitate.
Europe has been brought to desolation.
60. They troubled earth: I brought its consolation.
I've told the disputants, each hounding each
'Now stop, be less impertinent, try reach
an understanding based on brotherhood:
absurd chimeras breed no common good.'
The sensible believed me, the others prize
the insults denigrated by the wise.
At last on Europe toleration stole
as catechism for the well-made soul.

And from afar there come the happy days,
70. philosophy to light our human ways;
a common master has them find a peace
and trembling fanaticism there decease,
with less of dogma but more virtue boast.

If someone then should seek a public post.
he need not bring two witnesses to bear
on good religion but on conduct there.
The charming sister of an older cleric go
as marriage partner to a Huguenot,
Loreto's treasures are for Mary spread,
80. and poorest creatures will be dressed and fed.
Sara's offspring, seen as dogs that spoke,
may eat a ham that wretched Christians smoke.

Le Turc, sans s'informer si l'iman lui pardonne,
Chez l'abbé Tamponet ira boire en Sorbonne.
Mes neveux souperont sans rancune et gaîment
Avec les héritiers des frères Pompignan;
Ils pourront pardonner à ce dur La Blétrie
D' avoir coupé trop tôt la trame de ma vie.
Entre les beaux esprits on verra l'union:
90. Mais qui pourra jamais souper avec Fréron?

1770

A Turk may drink with Abbé Tamponet,
without the pardoning imam have his say,
my nephews gaily think up some such plan
to drink with heirs of brothers Pompignan.
They pardon harshest La Blétrie for strife
that cut well short the passage of my life.
The meeting of fine spirits is a thing divine,
90. but who with Fréron would seek to dine?

François-Marie Arouet (Voltaire) *de* La Pucelle

Mes parents morts, libre dans ma tristesse,
Cachée au monde, et fuyant tous les yeux,
Dans le secret le plus mystérieux
J'ensevelis mes pleurs et ma grossesse.

Mais par malheur, hélas ! je suis la nièce
De l'archevêque… " A ces funestes mots,
Elle sentit redoubler ses sanglots.

Puis vers le ciel tournant ses yeux en larmes :
" J'avais, dit-elle, en secret mis au jour
Le tendre fruit de mon furtif amour ;
Avec mon fils consolant mes alarmes,
De mon amant j'attendais le retour.

A l'archevêque il prit en fantaisie
De venir voir quelle espèce de vie
Menait sa nièce au fond de ses forêts
Pour ma campagne il quitta son palais.
Il fut touché de mes faibles attraits :
Cette beauté, présent cher et funeste,
Ce don fatal, qu'aujourd'hui je déteste,

Perça son cœur des plus dangereux traits.
Il s'expliqua : ciel ! que je fus surprise !
Je lui parlai des devoirs de son rang,
De son état, des nœuds sacrés du sang :
Je remontrai l'horreur de l'entreprise ;
Elle outrageait la nature et l'Église.

François-Marie Arouet (Voltaire) : *from* The Maid of Orleans

With parents dead, released to misery,
far hidden from the world, evading eyes,
in greatest secrecy my good name tries
to hide the tears and growing pregnancy.

But, most regrettably, I am the niece,
alas, of the archbishop. The words spell trouble:
she felt at once her sobs and tears redouble.

She turns her tear-filled looks towards the sky:
'I had produced in secrecy thereof,
10. the tender fruit of my most hidden love.'
and with my son consoling so must try
to think my paramour will soon return.

But then the archbishop took into his head
to come and see what kind of life had led
his niece to hide herself in forest depths:
on my campaign he quit his palace steps.
My meagre charms then touched him, woke the fates:
these looks, which ever present, give no rest,
this fatal beauty that I now detest,

20. pierced through his heart with its most dangerous traits.
Which he explained. Dear Lord! How much surprised
I was, and had to tell him what his duties were
when rank, conjugal state and blood confer.
I remonstrated with him, said this authorised
what outraged nature and the Church despised.

Hélas ! j’eus beau lui parler de devoir,
Il s’entêta d’un chimérique espoir.

Il se flattait que mon cœur indocile
D’aucun objet ne s’était prevenu,
Qu’enfin l’amour ne m’était point connu,
Que son triomphe en serait plus facile ;

Il m’accablait de ses soins fatigants,
De ses désirs rebutés et pressants.

" Hélas ! un jour, que toute à ma tristesse
Je relisais cette douce promesse,
Que de mes pleurs je mouillais cet écrit,
Mon cruel oncle en lisant me surprit.
Il se saisit, d’une main ennemie,
De ce papier qui contenait ma vie :
Il lut ; il vit dans cet écrit fatal
Tous mes secrets, ma flamme, et son rival.
Son âme alors, jalouse et forcenée,
A ses désirs fut plus abandonnée.
Toujours alerte, et toujours m’épiant,
Il sut bientôt que j’avais un enfant.
Sans doute un autre en eût perdu courage.
Mais l’archevêque en devint plus ardent ;
Et se sentant sur moi cet avantage :

" Ah ! me dit-il, n’est-ce donc qu’avec moi
" Que vous avez la fureur d’être sage ?
" Et vos faveurs seront le seul partage
" De l’étourdi qui ravit votre foi !

Alas, that I had need to talk to him,
that he persist though with a misplaced whim.

But still he told himself that my proud heart
was only insufficiently prewarned,
for otherwise his suit would not be scorned
and, triumphing, would better play its part.

And so he burdened me with pressing cares
of his unwanted and repelled affairs.

Alas, one day, in added misery
rereading promises once sweet to me,
that even now occasioned tears, he caught,
my dread uncle, what he doubtless sought.
He seized the letter so to arrogate
the messages that plainly sealed my fate.
He read those words so proud and vital
that spelt my secret flame that was his rival.
His soul, with jealousy so much offended,
was to fiercest passions then surrendered.
Alert, that spy on me was soon detecting
that all too well indeed I was expecting.
No doubt another would have lost all heart;
but not our prelate, though, who more affecting,
pressed how the merits of his rank would start.

'And that,' he said, is how you'll be to me,
an ardent nature but with wisdom crowned,
no more to have your favours spread around,
but from this dizzy height in constancy.'

" Osez-vous bien me faire résistance ?
" Y pensez-vous ? Vous ne méritez pas
" Le fol amour que j'ai pour vos appas :
" Cédez sur l'heure, ou craignez ma vengeance. "

Je me jetai tremblante à ses genoux ;
J'attestai Dieu, je répandis des larmes.
Lui, furieux d'amour et de courroux,
60. En cet état me trouva plus de charmes.

Il me renverse, et va me violer ;
A mon secours il fallut appeler :
Tout son amour soudain se tourne en rage.
D'un oncle, ô ciel, souffrir un tel outrage !
De coups affreux il meurtrit mon visage.

On vient au bruit ; mon oncle au même instant
Joint à son crime un crime encor plus grand :
" Chrétiens, dit-il, ma nièce est une impie ;
" Je l'abandonne, et je l'excommunie :
70. " Un hérétique, un damné suborneur,
" Publiquement a fait son déshonneur ;
" L'enfant qu'ils ont est un fruit d'adultère.
" Que Dieu confonde et le fils et la mère
" Et puisqu'ils ont ma malédiction,
" Qu'ils soient livrés à l'inquisition ! "

" Il ne fit point une menace vaine ;
Et dans Milan le traître arrive à peine,
Qu'il fait agir le grand inquisiteur.

“Do dare resist me, do you, on this path?”
“What are you thinking of, who don’t deserve
the senseless love for you I still preserve?”
“No, yield immediately or fear my wrath.”

I threw myself, much trembling, on my knees,
I testified to God and shed my tears,
but he, in undone love and rage, appears
60. the more incensed by added charms he sees.

He knocks me down, and goes to have his way,
I cry for help but then, without delay,
he changes; suddenly it’s rage instead
My uncle, Heavens! I would be sooner dead:
hard blows rain down upon my face and head.

Then worse: you might have thought that bad enough
but soon my uncle stoops to direr stuff.
“Christians,” he cries, “her faith is of a state
that I must leave and excommunicate.
70. A heretic, foul suborner of the faith
that all too publicly has soiled His grace.
The child she bears is by adultery won:
may God confound the mother and the son.
Let both of them on curses henceforth sup,
be to the Inquisition given up.”

In no way was this but an idle threat,
for in Milan the miscreant will get
short shrift till the inquisitor appear.

On me saisit, prisonnière on m’entraîne
80. Dans des cachots, où le pain de douleur
Était ma seule et triste nourriture :
Lieux souterrains, lieux d’une nuit obscure,

Séjour des morts, et tombeau des vivants !
Après trois jours on me rend la lumière,
Mais pour la perdre au milieu des tourments.
Vous les voyez, ces brasiers dévorants
C’est là qu’il faut expirer à vingt ans.
Voilà mon lit à mon heure dernière !

1758

They seize me, drag me off, till I must fret
80. away my life in dungeons, pain and fear.
Such was to be my sad and only food
far underground where only shadows brood

on death’s surroundings and the tomb of days.
Back three morns later came the taper’s power
in torment only, though. Around me blazed
devouring spectacles, where I, amazed,
must find my life of twenty years but gazed
upon the bed that held my final hour.

François-Marie Arouet (Voltaire) : Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne

Nul ne voudrait mourir, nul ne voudrait renaître.
Quelquefois, dans nos jours consacrés aux douleurs,
Par la main du plaisir nous essuyons nos pleurs ;
Mais le plaisir s'envole, et passe comme une ombre ;
Nos chagrins, nos regrets, nos pertes, sont sans nombre.
Le passé n'est pour nous qu'un triste souvenir ;
Le présent est affreux, s'il n'est point d'avenir,
Si la nuit du tombeau détruit l'être qui pense.
Un jour tout sera bien, voilà notre espérance ;
Tout est bien aujourd'hui, voilà l'illusion.

Les sages me trompaient, et Dieu seul a raison.
Humble dans mes soupirs, soumis dans ma souffrance,
Je ne m'élève point contre la Providence.
Sur un ton moins lugubre on me vit autrefois
Chanter des doux plaisirs les séduisantes lois :
D'autres temps, d'autres mœurs : instruit par la vieillesse,
Des humains égarés partageant la faiblesse,
Dans une épaisse nuit cherchant à m'éclairer,
Je ne sais que souffrir, et non pas murmurer.

Un calife autrefois, à son heure dernière,
Au Dieu qu'il adorait dit pour toute prière :
« Je t'apporte, ô seul roi, seul être illimité,
Tout ce que tu n'as pas dans ton immensité,
Les défauts, les regrets, les maux, et l'ignorance. »
Mais il pouvait encore ajouter *l'espérance*.

1756

François-Marie Arouet (Voltaire) : Poem on the disaster of Lisbon

No one would want to die, no one to be reborn.
Sometimes, in days we give to endless painful years
it is hand of pleasure wipes away our tears.
Our joys will pass as shadows only, exert no pull,
while grief, regret and loss will stay innumerable.
The past is lost to us in saddened memory;
frightful the present if what's to come we cannot see.
The tomb of night destroys wide thinking's larger scope
that better comes tomorrow, surely, and so we hope
that all around us now is not a specious sight.

Wise men were much deceiving, only God is right.
Humble in my sighs, submissive in suffering,
I do not rise to fight what Providence will bring.
Less gloomy was I once, and indeed had cause
to sing of pleasures, and of sweet seductive laws.
New times must bring new mores, or so the aged say.
Mankind misled shares errors, weakness and decay,
and in the thickness of the night can only echo doubt,
that I must learn to suffer and never whisper out.

There was a caliph once, at whose expiring power,
said to God he worshiped, and prayed to every hour,
'I bring to you, O only king, unlimited,
the sense you cannot have, in all your realms outspread:
among the flaws, regrets, the evils, and ignorance,
the hope of unknown fortune in one *lucky chance.'*

TRANSLATION ISSUES

Style

I have used strict forms to translate traditional French poetry, a practice that unfortunately needs defending when free verse is thought to better meet contemporary requirements.

A key element in poetry is verse, both formal and free verse styles. Like all art forms, verse is artificial, but nonetheless gives structure to compositions, liberating words from their everyday uses and connotations. Words for poets have special meanings, appropriate uses, associations, connotations, etymologies, histories of use and misuse, moreover. Out of these properties the poetry is built, even if the end cannot be entirely foreseen but grows out of the very process of deployment, that continual, two-way dialogue between writer and poem. Perhaps encouraged by the flexibility of today's cut-up prose, the great majority of academics and college students have only the most rudimentary ear for verse of any kind. Indeed they may positively reject it, finding verse an unnecessary and old-fashioned barrier to direct enjoyment of the content. And if that's an extraordinary situation, it is one repeated in many of the experimental arts where the critical theory is abstruse and taxing but often produces something prosaic in the extreme. The craft aspect is entirely overlooked, though it must be self evident that trying to write poetry without developing an ear for verse is akin to writing an opera while remaining ignorant of musical composition.

Rhyme and metre create and organise content, giving emphasis to words or elements that would otherwise escape attention. They please the reader by their display of skill, their variety within order, and their continuity with the admired literature of the past. They often help the actual writing of the poem, either by invoking words from the unconscious, or by pushing the poem in new directions to escape the limitations of the form. They also provide a sense of completeness impossible in free verse: the writer and reader know when the last word clicks into place. In short, traditional poems accentuate dignity, emotional power and density of meaning, and are generally more memorable, as Russian poetry lovers found during the repressive Stalin years, when committing anything to paper was a dangerous act.

The drawbacks also have to be acknowledged. Strict forms are taxing to write, requiring inordinate amounts of time, plus literary skills not given to everyone. They are much more likely to go wrong and expose the blundering incompetence of their author. Younger readers may find them inappropriate to the throwaway nature of contemporary life, or simply not hear the phonetic patterning in the syllables, on which the poetry depends. But if they are deaf to this patterning, they are deaf to the excellences of the great bulk of English poetry as well, and must repeat the views of others rather than analyse their own experiences.

More damaging is the influence on the writing of poetry itself. Since contemporary poets can no longer appreciate and learn from older work, their own productions have become technically inept, indeed rather shoddy. Even

literary criticism, which analyses what works in a poem, what doesn't, and where improvements lie, is no longer taught at university level, perhaps wisely given today's productions. {24}

I am not arguing against free verse as such, only the irredeemable plebeian prose that today calls itself free verse. Crafted properly, free verse is indeed a beautiful medium, and one employed extensively throughout Volume Three. At its best, free verse exhibits a convincing exactness of idiomatic expression, the line seeming exactly right in the circumstances: appropriate, authentic and sincere. It operates closely with syntax. In Modernist work it adopts a challenging layout on the page where line and syntax are rearranged to evade or exploit the usual expectations.

But it is these extra refinements that make free verse more than deft prose, and it is just these idiomatic touches that are so difficult to capture in translation work. Rather than lose ourselves in Modernist arguments, often more difficult than they need be, it may be simpler to compare styles, traditional and free verse, and see which works better in what circumstances. A good test is afforded by the challenging poems of Maurice Scève. His Délie 161 runs:

Seul auec moy, elle auec sa partie:
Moy en ma peine, elle en sa molle couche.
Couuert d'ennuy ie me voultre en l'Ortie,
Et elle nue entre ses bras se couche.
Hà (luy indigne) il la tient, il la touche:
Elle le souffre: &, comme moins robuste,
Viole amour par ce lyen iniuste,
Que droict humain, & non diuin, à faict.

O saincte loy a tous, fors a moy, iuste,
Tu me punys pour elle auour meffaict.

This has been rendered by Richard Sieburth in today's free verse as: {20}

Alone with myself, she with her husband:
I in my anguish, she in her cozy bed.
Wrapped in grief, I wallow in Nettles,
And she lies there naked in his arms
Ha! (unworthy him), he holds, he fondles her:
And she gives in: &, frailer of the two,
Violates love by this unjust bond,
Sealed by human, not divine, decree.
O holy law, just to all, except to me,
For I am punished for her misdeeds.

The rendering runs smoothly and conveys the sense well, though 'cozy' is not the right word, and the rhythm is rather uncertain. If we show the stressed syllables in bold type, we have a flat-footedness rather foreign to the theme:

Al**o**ne with my**self**, **she** with her **hus**band:
I in my **ang**uish, **she** in her **co**zy bed.
Wrapped in grief, I **wa**llow in **Net**tles,
And **she** lies **there naked** in his **arms**.

The earlier rendering {21} by the Scots poet Edwin Morgan attempts the odd rhyme, and does scan in some sections:

Here alone I lie, there she and he,
I on my bed of pain, on soft sheets she;
my weary flesh sprawled on rancorous nettles,

hers in its nakedness folded in his arms.
O but (unworthy he) he touches, holds,
she suffering him: forced love's not strong,
ravished by him under this unjust bond
which human law, and not divine, has formed.
O justice in fiat to all but me: you fall
in punishment on me for others' wrong.

The piece starts with an uneasy iambic but then breaks down into a loose rhythm.

Here a**lone** I **lie**, there **she** and **he**,
I **on** my **bed** of **pain**, on **soft** sheets **she**;
my **wea**ry **flesh sprawl**ed on **ran**corous **net**tles,
hers **in** its **nak**edness **fold**ed **in** his **arms**.

Tony Kline has not translated Délie CLXI, but his rendering of the nearest poem in the sequence — Délie CLXIII (De ce bien faict te doibs ie aumoins louer) — is: {22}

Of which I now note the time and place
Where, trembling, you heard me undo
That knot with which my heart was interlaced.
I saw you, as I, grown weary of my waste

Of labour, though more from compassion
Than any sense of this grand passion,
Alive, though less than at its beginning.
For, in so extinguishing my ashen
Heart, you welcome me, a burnt offering.

Kline's translations are easy to read if we are content to read verse as prose, when we shall not mind the

unattractive phrasing of *weary of my waste* and a *burnt offering,* or a metre that is all over the place:

Of **which** I **now note** the **time** and **place**
Where, **tremb**ling, you **heard** me un**do**
That **knot** with **which** my **heart** was **in**ter**lac**ed.
I **saw** you, as **I**, grown **wea**ry **of** my **waste**

It's worth noting is that all three renderings are by distinguished translators, either the winners of various awards and prizes, or, in Tony Kline's case, with top placements on the search engines. Free verse is easy to read, a boon to busy students, but succeeds largely by not being really verse, i.e. not requiring our ears slow down to hear some deeper music and/or crafted emotion.

Most academics do not write verse of any description, and they and their students have naturally lost the ear for its accomplishments, spending their days on more speculative matters. Outside a few MFA courses, the craft is not taught at university level, {23} any more than is the previously mentioned literary criticism, and both are indeed unneeded to produce the research papers that serve an increasingly specialist audience. {24}

But those brought up on older requirements will not find it difficult to write a smooth-running, properly rhymed version that conveys the semantic content adequately:

So with myself, alone, while she's with him:
myself in pain and she in softer bed,
wrapped in grief and nettle-rashed each limb,
while she, full naked, in his arms is spread.

Unworthy he, in fondling her, is fed
her frank submission: she but poorly fights
against that ravishment of lovers' rites.
Bonds sealed by man no heaven heeds,
and holy law for all denies my rights:
thus am I punished here for her misdeeds.

So **with** my**self**, a**lon**e, while **she's** with **him**:
my**self** in **pain** and **she** in **sof**ter **bed**,
wrapped in **grie**f and **ne**ttle-**rashed** each **limb**,
while **she**, glad **na**ked, **in** his **arms** is **spread.**

Some have blamed this decline in verse craft on Postmodernist movements, but the change comes a decade earlier, to judge from translations collected in George Steiner's anthology. {25}

Poetry as a fusion of skill and inspiration has been replaced by literary theory, which looks more for novelty than literary quality, if indeed such a concept still exists. The contributors to a recent and widely praised edition of Horace odes, {26} for example, were all seasoned translators, though few of their renderings would have been thought acceptable by earlier generations. One of the best pieces, Rosanna Warren's *Ode 1.2*, runs:

It's enough now, all this vicious snow and hail
Father Jupiter has sent to earth, enough
his striking sacred peaks with a smoldering hand
To terrify the town

To terrify the people: what if the dismal age
of Pyrrha should return, when she quailed at strange

new signs, when Proteus drove his ocean herd
to visit mountain tops,

And the race of fish clustered in the highest elms
where doves used to build their nests in the dry old days,
and deer swam, terrified, in floods ravening
over lost land?

The metre is largely iambic:

It's e**nough** now, **all** this **vic**ious **snow** and **hail**
Father **Ju**pi**ter** has **sent** to **earth**, e**nough**
his **stri**king **sa**cred **peaks** with a **smol**dering **hand**
To **ter**ri**fy** the **town**

This is not at all bad, but is markedly improved with rhyme
and a stricter metre:

Such snow and hail has Jove hurled down
on sacred temples, sanctified
by his right hand, that this vast town
lies terrified.

And people too, lest Pyrrha's time
should come again with monstrous sights
when Proteus had his sea herds climb
the mountain heights.

Then fish were hoisted high in elms
where naturally the pigeons roost,
and on those swirling liquid realms
were roe deer loosed.

We can extend the comparison to Russian. The famous Pushkin piece which I render immediate below as:

To . . .

Bound for far-off, native shores,
you left the alien land you knew.
What sad, remembered hour would cause
those endless tears I shed for you?
My hands felt colder as they tried
to more prevent your leaving me;
with moans I grew more terrified
that all was lost irreparably.

How bitter too was that last kiss
with which you tore yourself away.
But to our gloomy land comes this
long summoning, where you can say:
some promised day as fate may please,
below that sky's unchanging blue,
we'll kiss beneath the olive trees,
my friend, and kindle love anew.

But there, alas, where that far sky
is vaulted with such brilliant blue,
are shaded ways where there will lie
the other night that bid adieu.
You fell asleep, and so were gone
all pain and beauty. In that urn
were coffined kisses, kissing on . . .
and I still waiting their return.

These lines were rendered in the rather prosaic fashion that free verse encourages by Robert Chandler, the exceptionally well qualified editor of the prize-winning *The Penguin Book of Russian Poetry*: {27}

I cannot forget that hour:
you were leaving an alien country
for the shores of your distant home
and I stood there and wept.
my arms grew colder
as they tried to hold you back,
my tears implored you to prolong
the agony of parting.

But you, you tore your lips away
from that most bitter kiss,
calling me from the gloom of exile
to follow you home,
saying we will meet again
in the cool of an olive–grove,
beneath a sky of lasting blue —
in the kisses of love.

But in your homeland, where heaven's vault
Shines an eternal blue,
where olive trees shadow the waters,
you fell asleep for the last time.
Your sufferings, your beauty
are now just ash and dust;
but the sweet Kiss of our next tryst —
where is it now? You owe it to me.

This comes close to bald prose, and the ending makes Pushkin sound a little peevish. Lines 7 and 8 do not make sufficient sense, moreover, but tend to vex all translators not wishing to depict their hero wallowing in self-pity. *Томленье страшное разлуки / Мой стон молил не прерывать* is literally, or by the simplest interpretation: *The terrible longing of separation / My moan begged not to be interrupted*. It can indeed be rendered as *my tears implored/ you to prolong the agony of parting*, but they are more pointing, I think, to Pushkin's overwhelming sense of loss. The Russian case system allows for a rather free word order, of course, and we are entitled to look for a more sensible interpretation, as I have done above, and occasionally in my translations from the French.

Today's preference for free verse originated in Ezra Pound's translations from the Chinese, which remain the touchstone of the style. One of Pound's most celebrated renderings is 长干行 (Chang Gan Xing: River Merchant's Wife) by Li Bai:

While my hair was still cut straight across my forehead
I played about the front gate, pulling flowers.
You came by on bamboo stilts, playing horse,
You walked about my seat, playing with blue plums.
And we went on living in the village of Chokan:
Two small people, without dislike or suspicion.

At fourteen I married My Lord you.
I never laughed, being bashful.
Lowering my head, I looked at the wall.
10. Called to, a thousand times, I never looked back.

At fifteen I stopped scowling,

I desired my dust to be mingled with yours
Forever and forever and forever.
Why should I climb the look out?

At sixteen you departed,
You went into far Ku-to-yen, by the river of swirling eddies,
And you have been gone five months.
The monkeys make sorrowful noise overhead.

You dragged your feet when you went out.
20. By the gate now, the moss is grown, the different mosses,
Too deep to clear them away!
The leaves fall early this autumn, in wind.
The paired butterflies are already yellow with August
Over the grass in the West garden;
They hurt me. I grow older.
If you are coming down through the narrows of the river Kiang,
Please let me know beforehand,
And I will come out to meet you
As far as Cho-fu-Sa.

But the rendering is more effective in traditional verse: {30}

How simple it was, and my hair too,
picking at flowers as the spring comes;
and you riding about on a bamboo
horse; playing together, eating plums.

Two small people: nothing to contend
with, in quiet Chang Gan to day's end.

All this at fourteen made one with you.

Married to my lord: it was not the same.
Who was your concubine answering to
10. the thousand times you called her name?

I turned to the wall, and a whole year passed
before my being would be wholly yours —
dust of your dust while all things last,
hope of your happiness, with never cause

to seek for another. Then one short year:
at sixteen I sat in the marriage bed
alone as the water. I could hear
the sorrowing of gibbons overhead.

How long your prints on the path stayed bare!
20. I looked out forever from the lookout tower,
but could not imagine you travelling there,
past the Qutang reefs, in the torrent's power.

Now thick are the mosses; the gate stays shut.
I sit in the sunshine as the wind grieves.
In their dallying couples the butterflies cut
the deeper in me than yellowing leaves.

Send word of your coming and I will meet
you at Chang-feng Sha, past San Ba walls.
Endless the water and your looks entreat
30. and hurt me still as each evening falls.

These examples can be multiplied indefinitely, and I cannot be the only person thinking that the hand has now been called. The indifferent verse skills needed for contemporary poetry — which is scarcely read outside circles of poets and

associated English literature departments — has created equally indifferent translations. Contemporary styles are easy to write, convey the bald prose sense well, but are undemanding, indeed rather banal, employing a plain Jack and Jill language that inevitably trivialises the poetry.

Whatever style we decide on, translations still need to feel appropriate to period and author. Norman Cameron's rendering of *Villon's Les Regrets de la belle Heaulmière,* starts: {31}

Methinks I hear the harlot wail
Who was the helmet-maker's lass,
Wishing herself both young and hale
And crying in her woe: 'Alas!
Old Age, so cruel and so crass,
Why hast thou struck me down so soon?
What holds me back, that in this pass,
I do not seek death's final boon?

This is most attractive verse, but unfortunately far from the conversational style that Villon adopts:

Jà parvenue à vieillesse.
Advis m'est que j'oy regretter
La belle qui fut heaulmière,
Soy jeune fille souhaitter
Et parler en ceste manière :
« Ha ! vieillesse felonne et fière,
Pourquoy m'as si tost abatue ?
Qui me tient que je ne me fière,

It seems better to write something like:

Since I have come to this great age,
to these complaints I will confess,
where lovely armouress can rage
at plight of young girl’s comeliness.
And speaking in that manner more:
why fierce old age was not allowed
to send her earthward long before!
Who plaints me now I am not proud?

A celebrated translation of du Bellay’s *Les Regrets XXXI* is that by G.K. Chesterton: {25}

Heureux qui, comme Ulysse, a fait un beau voyage,
Ou comme cestuy-là qui conquit la toison,
Et puis est retourné, plein d'usage et raison,
Vivre entre ses parents le reste de son âge !
Quand reverrai-je, hélas, de mon petit village
Fumer la cheminée, et en quelle saison
Reverrai-je le clos de ma pauvre maison,
Qui m'est une province, et beaucoup davantage ?
Plus me plaît le séjour qu'ont bâti mes aïeux,
Que des palais Romains le front audacieux,
Plus que le marbre dur me plaît l'ardoise fine :
Plus mon Loir gaulois, que le Tibre latin,
Plus mon petit Liré, que le mont Palatin,
Et plus que l'air marin la doulceur angevine.

Happy, who like Ulysses or that lord
Who raped the fleece, returning full sage,
With usage and the world's wide reason stored,
With his own kin can wait the end of age.
When shall I see, when shall I see, God knows!
My little village smoke; or pass the door,

The old dear door of that unhappy house
That is to me a kingdom and much more?
Mightier to me the house my fathers made
Than your audacious heads, O Halls of Rome!
More than immortal marbles undecayed,
The thin sad slates that cover up my home;
More than your Tiber is my Loire to me,
Than Palatine my little Lyré there;
And more than all the winds of all the sea
The quiet kindness of the Angevin air.

The original is abbaabba ccdede where Chesterton's is ababcd*c*dcdefef; i.e. the concluding sonnet sextet has been replaced by two quatrains, which draw out the nostalgia and make it a much more compelling piece. There are also many extra touches —'the end of age', 'immortal marbles', 'thin, sad slates', 'quiet kindness' — that go beyond what the French strictly says, but create undeniable poetry. Personally, I'd be more than happy to make such additions if the results were as pleasing as this, but having decided in these volumes to respect the form and content, my version is much more earth-bound:

Happy those, like Ulysses, who travelled well,
or won the fleece, as would the other lord,
returning, with the world's wide reason stored,
and with their kinsfolk thence but chose to dwell.
When shall I see, alas, my native shore,
my village, smoking chimneys, tell me when
I'll pass my own poor cottage door again
that is a kingdom to me, and much more?
The house my forebears built more pleases me
than Roman palaces' audacity:
I'd choose plain slates to marble's noble span,

my Gallic Loire to Tiber’s Latin scene,
my little Liré to the Palatine,
and more the sea-girt air of Angevin.

The opening stanzas of Gautier’s *Art* in George Santayana’s rendering of: {32}

Oui, l'oeuvre sort plus belle
D'une forme au travail
Rebelle,
Vers, marbre, onyx, émail.

Point de contraintes fausses !
Mais que pour marcher droit
Tu chausses,
Muse, un cothurne étroit.

Fi du rythme commode,
Comme un soulier trop grand,
Du mode
Que tout pied quitte et prend !

Are:

All things are doubly fair
If patience fashion them
And care—
Verse, enamel, marble, gem.

No idle chains endure:
Yet, Muse, to walk aright,
Lace tight
Thy buskin proud and sure.

Fie on a facile measure,
A shoe where every lout
At pleasure
Slips his foot in and out!

The rendering was published in 1922, and we are not so happy today with ‘fair’, ‘thy’ and ‘fie on’. Which is a pity, because Santanaya’s rendering has a charm and polish that is difficult to capture with the more contemporary diction of:

Yes, things beautiful persist
if effort fashion them:
thus resist
enamel, verse and gem.

No needless fetters, Muse.
For steps correctly placed,
best chose
a buskin tightly laced.

In lumpen rhythm goes
the large shoe of a lout,
which throws
the loose foot in and out.

For academic translations, where semantic accuracy is of first importance, free verse is the obvious choice, as it is for later French poetry, which is largely written in free verse forms anyway. For traditional French verse, however, the Modernist free verse form is generally too plebeian to articulate the necessary refinements, limiting the aesthetic experience to the bald prose sense. Banning rhyme is a further misfortune when the device is everywhere present in the originals, being used to shape and interlock the stanzas

more securely together. In summary, extensive craft skills were needed to write this traditional French poetry in the first place, and some of these same skills are required to make the translations come alive. Style choices are not matters of fashion, or even of personal taste, but what those styles can bring over.

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