

Classic Poetry Series

Jean Lemaire de Belges
- poems -

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Jean Lemaire de Belges(1473-1525)

Jean Lemaire de Belges was a Walloon poet and historian who lived primarily in France.

He was born in Hainaut (Hainault), the godson and possibly a nephew of Jean Molinet, and spent some time with him at Valenciennes, where the elder writer held a kind of academy of poetry. Lemaire in his first poems calls himself a disciple of Molinet. In certain aspects he does belong to the school of the grands rhétoriciens ("rhetoricians"), but his great merit as a poet is that he emancipated himself from the affectations of his masters. This independence of the Flemish school he owed in part perhaps to his studies at the University of Paris and to the study of the Italian poets at Lyon, a centre of the French Renaissance. In 1504 he was attached to the court of Margaret of Austria, duchess of Savoy, afterwards Regent of the Netherlands. For this princess he undertook more than one mission to Rome where he came into contact with the culture of the Italian Renaissance; he became her librarian and a canon of Valenciennes.

To her were addressed his most original poems, the burlesque *Épîtres de l'amant vert*, of 1505 (see 1505 in poetry). The *amant vert* (green lover) of the title being a green parrot belonging to his patroness. This latter piece was subsequently utilised in the sublimely melancholic *Soubz ce tumbel* (Within this tomb) by Pierre de la Rue. It is an intense elegiac farewell to Margaret's 'green lover'.

Within this tomb, which is a harsh, locked cell,
Lies the green lover, the very worthy slave
Whose noble heart, drunk with true, pure love,
Losing its lady, cannot bear to live.

Lemaire gradually became more French in his sympathies, eventually entering the service of Anne of Brittany, wife of Louis XII, and supporting Louis's ambitions to create a church relatively independent of the Pope. His prose *Illustrations de Gaule et singularitez de Troye* (1510-1514), largely adapted from Benoit de Sainte More, is a novel-like history that connects the Burgundian royal house with Hector using fictional characters.

Lemaire probably died before 1525. Étienne Pasquier, Pierre de Ronsard and Joachim du

Bellay all acknowledged their indebtedness to him. In his love for antiquity, his sense of rhythm, and even the peculiarities of his vocabulary he anticipated the humanist movement led by Du Bellay and Ronsard, the Pléiade.

Chanson De Galathée, Bergère

Arbres feuillus, revêtus de verdure,
Quand l'hiver dure on vous voit désolés,
Mais maintenant aucun de vous n'endure
Nulle laidure, ains vous donne nature
Riche peinture et fleurons à tous lez,
Ne vous branlez, ne tremblez, ne croulez,
Soyez mêlés de joie et flourishing :
Zéphire est sus donnant aux fleurs issance.

Gentes bergerettes,
Parlant d'amourettes
Dessous les coudrettes
Jeunes et tendrettes,
Cueillent fleurs jolies :
Framboises, mûrettes,
Pommes et poirettes
Rondes et durettes,
Fleurons et fleurettes
Sans mélancolie.

Sur les préaux de sinople vêtus
Et d'or battu autour des entellettes
De sept couleurs selon les sept vertus
Seront vêtus. Et de joncs non tordus,
Droits et pointus, feront sept corbeillettes ;
Violettes, au nombre des planètes,
Fort honnêtes mettront en rondelet,
Pour faire à Pan un joli chapelet.

Là viendront dryades
Et hamadryades,
Faisant sous feuillades
Ris et réveillades
Avec autres féés.
Là feront naïades
Et les Oréades,
Dessus les herbades,
Aubades, gambades,
De joie échauffées.

Quand Aurora, la princesse des fleurs,
Rend la couleur aux boutonceaux barbus,
La nuit s'enfuit avecques ses douleurs ;
Ainsi font pleurs, tristesses et malheurs,
Et sont valeurs en vigueur sans abus,
Des prés herbus et des nobles vergiers
Qui sont à Pan et à ses bergiers.

Chouettes s'enfuient,
Couleuvres s'étuient,
Cruels loups s'enfuient,
Pastoureaux les huent
Et Pan les poursuit.
Les oiselets bruyent,
Les cerfs aux bois ruyent
Les champs s'enjolient,
Tous éléments rient
Quand Aurora luit.

Jean Lemaire de Belges