

Classic Poetry Series

Philippe Desportes

- poems -

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Philippe Desportes(1546-1606)

Philippe Desportes (1546 – 5 October 1606) was a French poet.

Philippe Desportes was born in Chartres. While serving as secretary to the bishop of Le Puy he visited Italy, where he learned Italian poetry. This experience became a good account. On his return to France he attached himself to the duke of Anjou, and followed him to Cracow on his election as king of Poland. Nine months in Poland satisfied the civilized Desportes, but in 1574 his patron became king of France as Henry III. He showered favours on the poet, who received, in reward for the skill with which he wrote occasional poems at the royal request, the abbey of Tiron and four other valuable benefices.

A good example of the light and dainty verse in which Desportes excelled is furnished by the well-known villanelle with the refrain "Qui premier s'en repentira," which was on the lips of Henry, duke of Guise, just before his death. Desportes was above all an imitator. He imitated Petrarch, Ariosto, Sannazaro, and still more closely the minor Italian poets, and in 1604 a number of his plagiarisms were exposed in the *Rencontres des Muses de France et d'Italie*. As a sonneteer he showed much grace and sweetness, and English poets borrowed freely from him.

In his old age Desportes acknowledged his ecclesiastical preferment by a translation of the Psalms remembered chiefly for the brutal mot of Malherbe: "Votre potage vaut mieux que vos psaumes." He published in 1573 an edition of his works including *Diane*, *Les Amours d'Hippolyte*, *Elegies*, *Bergeries*, *Œuvres chrétiennes*, etc.

An edition of his *Œuvres*, by Alfred Michiels, appeared in 1858.

Conquest

Those eyes that set my fancy on a fire,
Those crispéd hairs that hold my heart in chains,
Those dainty hands which conquered my desire,
That wit which of my thoughts doth hold the reins:
Those eyes for clearness do the stars surpass,
Those hairs obscure the brightness of the sun,
Those hands more white than ever ivory was,
That wit even to the skies hath glory won.
O eyes that pierce our hearts without remorse!
O hands that conquer more than Caesar's force!
O wit that turns huge kingdoms upside down!
Then, Love, be judge, what heart may there withstand
Such eyes, such hair, such wit, and such a hand?

Philippe Desportes