

Classic Poetry Series

Pierre de Ronsard

- poems -

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Pierre de Ronsard()

Pierre de Ronsard (11 September 1524 – 28 December 1585) was a French poet and "prince of poets" (as his own generation in France called him).

Pierre de Ronsard was born at the Manoir de la Possonnière, in the village of Couture-sur-Loir, Vendômois (in present-day Loir-et-Cher). Baudouin de Ronsard or Rossart was the founder of the French branch of the house, and made his mark in the early stages of the Hundred Years' War. The poet's father was Louis de Ronsard, and his mother was Jeanne de Chaudrier, of a family both noble and well connected. Pierre was the youngest son. Loys de Ronsard was maître d'hôtel du roi to Francis I, whose captivity after Pavia had just been softened by treaty, and he had to quit his home shortly after Pierre's birth.

The future poet was educated at home in his earliest years and sent to the Collège de Navarre in Paris at the age of nine. When Madeleine of France was married to James V of Scotland, Ronsard was attached as a page in the Scottish court, where he was encouraged in the idea of making French vernacular translations of classical authors. A year after the death of the queen, he returned to France, travelling back through England.

Further travel took him to Flanders, Holland, and again, for a short time, Scotland, on diplomatic missions under Claude d'Humieres, seigneur de Lassigny, until he was attached as secretary to the suite of Lazare de Baïf, the father of his future colleague in the Pléiade and his companion on this occasion, Antoine de Baïf, at the diet of Speyer. Afterwards he was attached in the same way to the suite of the cardinal du Bellay-Langey, and his mythical quarrel with François Rabelais dates from this period.

Deadly Kisses

All take these lips away; no more,
No more such kisses give to me.
My spirit faints for joy; I see
Through mists of death the dreamy shore,
And meadows by the water-side,
Where all about the Hollow Land
Fare the sweet singers that have died,
With their lost ladies, hand in hand;
Ah, Love, how fireless are their eyes,
How pale their lips that kiss and smile!
So mine must be in little while
If thou wilt kiss me in such wise.

Pierre de Ronsard

His Ladys Death

Twain that were foes, while Mary lived, are fled;
One laurel-crowned abides in heaven, and one
Beneath the earth has fared, a fallen sun,
A light of love among the loveless dead.
The first is Chastity, that vanquished
The archer Love, that held joint empery
With the sweet beauty that made war on me,
When laughter of lips with laughing eyes was wed.

Their strife the Fates have closed, with stern control,
The earth holds her fair body, and her soul
An angel with glad angels triumpheth;
Love has no more that he can do; desire
Is buried, and my heart a faded fire,
And for Death's sake, I am in love with Death.

Pierre de Ronsard

Ladys Tomb

As in the gardens, all through May, the rose,
Lovely, and young, and fair apparelled,
Makes sunrise jealous of her rosy red,
When dawn upon the dew of dawning glows;
Graces and Loves within her breast repose,
The woods are faint with the sweet odour shed,
Till rains and heavy suns have smitten dead
The languid flower, and the loose leaves uncloze, -

So this, the perfect beauty of our days,
When earth and heaven were vocal of her praise,
The fates have slain, and her sweet soul reposes;
And tears I bring, and sighs, and on her tomb
Pour milk, and scatter buds of many a bloom,
That dead, as living, she may be with roses.

Pierre de Ronsard

On His Ladies Waking

My lady woke upon a morning fair,
What time Apollo's chariot takes the skies,
And, fain to fill with arrows from her eyes
His empty quiver, Love was standing there:
I saw two apples that her breast doth bear
None such the close of the Hesperides
Yields; nor hath Venus any such as these,
Nor she that had of nursling Mars the care.

Even such a bosom, and so fair it was,
Pure as the perfect work of Phidias,
That sad Andromeda's discomfiture
Left bare, when Perseus passed her on a day,
And pale as Death for fear of Death she lay,
With breast as marble cold, as marble pure.

Pierre de Ronsard

Roses

I send you here a wreath of blossoms blown,
And woven flowers at sunset gathered,
Another dawn had seen them ruined, and shed
Loose leaves upon the grass at random strown.
By this, their sure example, be it known,
That all your beauties, now in perfect flower,
Shall fade as these, and wither in an hour,
Flowerlike, and brief of days, as the flower sown.

Ah, time is flying, lady - time is flying;
Nay, 'tis not time that flies but we that go,
Who in short space shall be in churchyard lying,
And of our loving parley none shall know,
Nor any man consider what we were;
Be therefore kind, my love, whiles thou art fair.

Pierre de Ronsard

The Rose

See, Mignonne, hath not the Rose,
That this morning did unclothe
Her purple mantle to the light,
Lost, before the day be dead,
The glory of her raiment red,
Her colour, bright as yours is bright?

Ah, Mignonne, in how few hours,
The petals of her purple flowers
All have faded, fallen, died;
Sad Nature, mother ruinous,
That seest thy fair child perish thus
'Twixt matin song and even tide.

Hear me, my darling, speaking sooth,
Gather the fleet flower of your youth,
Take ye your pleasure at the best;
Be merry ere your beauty flit,
For length of days will tarnish it
Like roses that were loveliest.

Pierre de Ronsard

To His Young Mistress

Fair flower of fifteen springs, that still
Art scarcely blossomed from the bud,
Yet hast such store of evil will,
A heart so full of hardihood,
Seeking to hide in friendly wise
The mischief of your mocking eyes.

If you have pity, child, give o'er;
Give back the heart you stole from me,
Pirate, setting so little store
On this your captive from Love's sea,
Holding his misery for gain,
And making pleasure of his pain.

Another, not so fair of face,
But far more pitiful than you,
Would take my heart, if of his grace,
My heart would give her of Love's due;
And she shall have it, since I find
That you are cruel and unkind.

Nay, I would rather that it died,
Within your white hands prisoning,
Would rather that it still abide
In your ungentle comforting.
Than change its faith, and seek to her
That is more kind, but not so fair.

Pierre de Ronsard

To The Moon

Hide this one night thy crescent, kindly Moon;
So shall Endymion faithful prove, and rest
Loving and unawakened on thy breast;
So shall no foul enchanter importune
Thy quiet course; for now the night is boon,
And through the friendly night unseen I fare,
Who dread the face of foemen unaware,
And watch of hostile spies in the bright noon.
Thou knowest, Moon, the bitter power of Love;
'Tis told how shepherd Pan found ways to move,
For little price, thy heart; and of your grace,
Sweet stars, be kind to this not alien fire,
Because on earth ye did not scorn desire,
Bethink ye, now ye hold your heavenly place.

Pierre de Ronsard