

Clément Marot

Selected Poems

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Translator's Introduction

Clément Marot (1496-1544), born in Cahors, and an older contemporary of Maurice Scève and Louise Labé probably studied law in Paris and later created a career for himself at the French court. In 1520 he attended Francis I at the Field of the Cloth of Gold, and accompanied Francis on his ill-fated Italian campaign ending in defeat at Pavia in 1524. Supporting both the humanist and religious reform movements, Marot was subsequently imprisoned for heresy, and was forced to flee Paris in 1534. After time spent in Navarre and Ferrara, he finally abjured his heresy at Lyon, and in 1539 Francois granted him a house there. His translation of the Psalms into French gained him wide fame and helped to promote the Protestant Reformation. The earliest editions of his works appeared at Lyon in 1538 and 1544, and he is rightly claimed as a key writer of the Lyon school of poetry, which employed themes of spiritual love, based on the works of Plato and Petrarch, and the Renaissance conventions of courtly love.

On Anne's Departure (*Du partement d'Anne*)

Where are you going, Anne? Let me know,
and teach me now, before your departure,
what I should do, so my eyes might hide
the raw regret of a sad heart in torment.
Yet I know how, no need to inform me.
You'll take it with you; I give it to you.
Take it, to render you free from sorrow,
that should be far from you, in that place;
and since lacking a heart one cannot live,
leave yours with me, and so say farewell.

Love and Death (*'Amour et Mort m'ont fait outrage'*)

Love and Death have injured me.
Love keeps me still in slavery,
but Death (to increase my sorrow)
has borne him far from my eyes,
who, near, would rob me of courage.

Alas, Love, such a one as he,
served you in the flower of youth,
yet you're ungrateful, it seems to me,
to suffer War, in all its pride,
to murder those who do you homage.

Is it not so to my heart's advantage,
that what contains his noble corpse,
interred, is far from where I dwell,
for should I set eyes on his sepulchre,
My great sorrow would drive me mad.

Ballad of the Beautiful Friend (*'Ballade de s'amie bien belle'*)

Love, seeing me free of sadness,
and wearied with serving him,
told me I might create a lover,
for, indeed, he'd assist me then.
After hearing what he had to say,
I created a mistress at my leisure,
and don't mistake a word I say,
she's the loveliest girl in France.

She's a smiling glance that wounds
my heart, that's so full of loyalty,
and, mixed with her high nobility,
she's filled with sweet discretion.
It would prove great evil, if cruelty
were within her to find a dwelling,
for, if it's beauty you choose to speak of,
she's the loveliest girl in France.

To flee from her love, that distresses,
I've neither power nor am I willing,
stuck here in this close duress,
like a tree, in the earth I'm planted.
What wonder then if I complain
of sorrow, suffering and torment?
We are tormented, true, by less;
she's the loveliest girl in France.

Envoi:

Prince of Love, by your goodness,
if of her I might take my pleasure,
no man could see better treatment,
she's the loveliest girl in France.

The Tormenter (*'Celle qui m'a tant pourmené'*)

She who has so tormented me,
has taken pity on my distress:
for into her garden she had led me,
where all the trees grow lustily.
And so employs no harshness:
if I kiss her, she embraces me;
she gave her noble heart to me,
from which I am advised to flee.

When I see her heart is mine,
I put all fear behind me, saying
'Lovely one, it's no great thing
for me to slumber in your arms.'
But the lady then replies: 'No,
no more of such demands. He's
master enough of all the body,
who has its heart at his command.'

The Song of May and Virtue (*'Chant de Mai et de Vertu'*)

Gladly, in this month of May,
earth transforms, and renews,
and many a lover does so too,
made to forge their love anew,
by the fickleness of their hearts,
and be more content elsewhere.
That way of loving is not for me,
my love will endure eternally.

There is no lovely lady, here,
whose beauty will not fade,
through time, illness, anxiety
imperfection seeks them out;
but no shade can touch the one
whom I claim to love endlessly;
and since she is forever lovely;
my love will endure eternally.

She of whom I say these things
is Virtue the unfading Nymph,
who to Honour's shining peak,
calls all true lovers perpetually:
'Come, lovers, come,' she cries,
'come to me, for I wait for you.
Come' she cries, the lovely girl,
'my love will endure eternally'.

Love or Friendship (*'D'où vient cela, belle, je vous supplie'*)

What is it, lovely one, I beg you,
that stops you loving me more?
I'll always be filled with sadness,
until you tell me the truth, I'm sure.
Perhaps you only want Friendship,
or something ill's been said of me,
or your heart's found a newer love.

If you forsake love's sweet path,
you render your beauty prisoner;
if you've forgot me for another,
Heaven grant the good you seek;
but if you've heard aught ill of me,
then, I trust, as fair you seem to me,
so much or more you'll punish me.

Alone (*'De celui, qui est demeuré, et s'amie s'en est allée'*)

All on his own, he's melancholy
your servant, far from every place
where they sing and smile, dance too:
alone in his room he pens his sorrow,
there's nothing better for him to do.

For when it rains, and the sun in heaven
fails to shine, all men are anxious,
every creature retreats to its den,
all on its own.

As now the tears fall from my eyes,
and you, who are my sun in grace,
abandon me to torment's shadow:
and so I conceal myself from all,
lest my pain prove pain to them,
all on its own.

The Rose (*'De la rose'*)

The lovely rose, to Venus consecrated,
would give greater pleasure to eye and mind,
if I tell you, lady, who pleases me,
why we see it dressed all in red.

One day Venus with her Adonis
through a garden, full of briars,
trod sleeveless and bare-footed;
a rose-thorn pricked here, there;
and all the roses, white before,
were reddened with her blood.

And I have profited from that rose,
in enjoying you, for, above all else,
your face, in embracing sweetness,
seems a fresh and reddened rose.

Of His Great Love (*'De sa grande amie'*)

In Paris, that fine city,
walking one day, melancholy,
I forged a new friendship
with the loveliest lady
who hails from Italy.

With honesty she's overflowing
and I think, beyond all knowing,
there's none more beautiful
in Paris.

I'll not say her name to you,
though she's my love and true,
such being our agreement,
for a kiss, I had of her,
without thinking any ill,
in Paris.

Regarding Himself (*'De soi-même'*)

I'm no longer what I once was,
might think none of it had existed.
My fine spring, my summer,
have vanished out the window.
Love, you've been my master,
I've served you above all others.
Ah, could I only begin again,
see how I'd serve you better!

Discontented with Love (*'Du mal content d'amour'*)

I no longer intend to be in love,
a state for which I've least affection,
for she, of whom I thought to be
the well-beloved, makes me seem
to the fact of love, a mere fiction.

I'd have thought her free of imperfection,
but of a new love she's in possession;
as for that, I no longer wish to try
to be in love.

In this age, throughout our nation,
the ladies are like the tip of a twig,
that always bends to left or right.
In short, the best men know naught of it;
from which I conclude it's self-deception,
to be in love.

Awaiting Help (*J'attends secours de ma seule pensée:*)

I'm awaiting help from my sole thought.
I'm awaiting the day I'll be sent away,
or the loveliest of all will say to me:
'Friend, your love will be rewarded.'

Our agreement has begun full well,
but what will transpire, I've no idea:
for, if she wishes, my life is lost,
though love expects advancement.

If I'm refused, come, insensate Death:
she toys with my heart at her pleasure.
If I receive mercy, she'll be glad
of one who has never harmed his Lady.

Cupid and Venus (*'Je suis aimé de la plus belle'*)

I'm loved by the loveliest girl
who exists beneath the sky:
I'll proclaim that she is such,
against all envious falsehoods.

If Cupid, sweet and rebellious,
had unmasked both his eyes,
to see her graceful bearing,
I think with her he'd be in love.

Venus, immortal goddess,
you filled my heart with joy,
by making it fall in love
with such a noble lady.

Languishing (*'Languir me fais sans t'avoir offensée:'*)

You make me languish who never offended,
you no longer write, nor enquire about me,
yet though I seek no other Lady,
I'd rather die than change allegiance.

I don't say my love for you should fade,
but I complain of the pains I incur,
and far from you, humbly request you,
far from me, to restrain your anger.

Thoughts Of You (*'Quand j'ai pensé en vous, ma bien-aimée,'*)

Thinking of you, my best-beloved,
I could find none of greater beauty,
and I'd rank you more virtuous than
others, if it were not for your cruelty.
And yet, by loving you so loyally,
I am now rewarded for my torment,
although, whenever it pleases you,
my ills might end through your mercy.

As soon as my eyes viewed your face,
my freedom vanished so completely,
my sad heart, hoping for your grace,
abandoning me, gave itself to you.
Now it wishes to withdraw to a place
from which it never could be prised,
having found you lacking in assent,
more, you're a Lady without mercy.

Your harshness wills that so I die,
since pity never touches your heart.
Yet you'll win (I assure you) neither
honour nor praise from such a death:
since one should never bring distress
to one who loves with all their heart:
she is too severe, even on her enemy,
who proves cruel to her loving friend.

Happiness (*'Qui veut avoir liesse'*)

Who longs for happiness
if on some girl they gaze,
come, view my mistress,
whom God keep always!
She has such sweet grace,
that all who come to see,
their thousand ills efface,
or more, if such there be.

The lovely girl's virtues,
make me wonder too,
the very memory of her
stirs all my heart anew.
Her beauty, so exquisite,
to dying brings me near,
but her grace, requested,
means certain death, I fear.

Assist Me (*'Secourez-moi, ma Dame par amours,'*)

Assist me then with love, my Lady,
or else indeed my death will find me.
None but you can bring assistance
to my heart, which now is dying.
Alas, please bring your aid to one
who lives for you, in great distress,
for of his heart you are the mistress.

If by loving, suffering night and day,
a lover deserves what he most needs,
tell me why then such a long delay,
in yielding what so many would cherish?
O noble flower, must you now destroy
your servant, for the lack of that joy?
I think you've not such cruelty in you.

Your harshness sent me here and there,
when I first approached to ask it of you:
Sweet Welcome played me many a time,
in letting me win there many a kiss.
Alas, your kisses will never heal me,
for the fierce fire grows that stirs me,
and enjoyment's the only medicine.

Loyalty ('*Tant que vivrai en âge florissant,*')

As long as I live, and I still flourish,
I'll serve Love, the powerful god,
in word and deed, in song, in tune.
For many a day she made me languish,
yet after sadness she made me happy,
for I've the love of the loveliest woman.
In her friendship
lies my trust:
my heart is hers,
her heart is mine:
away with sadness,
long live gladness,
for in Love there's much that's fine.

If her I wish to serve and honour,
by my poetry wish to adore her,
if I see and visit her often,
the envious only murmur.
Yet our Love could never be less,
as much or more the wind carries.
Despite all envy
for all my life
I will love her,
and I will sing:
she is the first,
and is the last,
whom I serve and will forever.

Her Death (*'Plaisir n'ai plus, mais vis en déconfort.'*)

I've no pleasure, I live in discomfort.
Fortune has brought me great sorrow.
My time has turned to misfortune,
unhappy is he who lacks all comfort.

Deeply I grieve, regret consumes me,
Death has stolen my precious lady.
My time has turned to misfortune,
unhappy is he, who lacks all comfort.

I have no worth; I'm dead to this world.
Dead is my love and great my languor.
Weary, I'm filled with all that's bitter,
my heart breaks at her grievous death.

The May-Tree (*Pour le May planté par les Imprimeurs de Lyon*)

*For the May-Tree planted by the printers of Lyon
in front of Seigneur Trivulse's House.*

There's no planet or constellation
ever governed the year so well,
as this city, Lyon, is governed by
you, Trivulse, the true and worthy.

We proclaim it, for your noble virtue,
and for joy of your being our leader,
by which you've given us Freedom,
Freedom, the worthiest of treasures.

Happy man: the great drums beating,
this tree we plant, the fifes sounding,
are in praise of you and your noble kin.

And behold therefore, it's now our wish,
that nothing here, to this very last tree,
should fail to praise, or fail to thank you.

End of the Selected Poems of Clément Marot