

**Three Poems by Pierre Ronsard**

**Translation and Commentary: William Calin**

**Ode 17  
To Cassandra**

Sweetness, Let's go see whether the Rose  
who this morning had opened  
her dress of crimson to the Sun,  
this evening has at all lost  
the pleats of her crimson dress  
and her complexion the same as yours.

Alas! Behold how, in a little space,  
Sweetness, she has, on the spot, alas, alas  
let all her beauties fall!  
O Nature is truly a cruel mother  
since such a flower lasts  
only from morning to evening.

So, if you will believe me, Sweetness,  
while your age is in flower  
in its green newness,  
gather, gather your youth:  
for, the same as this flower, old age  
will tarnish your beauty.

**Ode 17\*  
À Cassandre**

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 choir!  
O 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.

### **On the Death of Marie**

We see in the month of May on a stem the rose  
 In her lovely youth, in her first bloom  
 Making Heaven jealous of her vibrant color,  
 when Dawn the day begins and waters her with tears:

Grace in her leaves and Eros resting there,  
 she blesses gardens and trees with her perfume:  
 yet battered by rain or extreme heat,  
 languishing, she dies leaf by leaf.

Thus, in your first and youthful newness,  
 while earth and Heaven honor your beauty,  
 Fate kills you, and turns you into ashes.

For a funeral gift receive my weeping and my tears,  
 this vase of milk and this basket of flowers,  
 So, dead or alive, your body may ever be roses.

### **Sur la mort de Marie 4\***

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

La grace dans sa feuille, et l'Amour se repose,  
 Embasment les jardins et les arbres d'odeur;  
 Mais battue ou de pluye, ou d'excessive ardeur,  
 Languissante elle meurt, feuille à feuille declose.

Ainsi en ta première et jeune nouveauté,  
 Quand la terre et le Ciel honoroient 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.

**Editor's Note:** Ronsard's famous Ode No. 17, „Mignonne allons voir si la rose“ has been set to music many times, perhaps most recently, performed by Dominique Montaulard-Ziani on YouTube:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fLjAFvBwlyK>

### **Last poetry: Sonnets 1**

I am no more than bones, I seem a skeleton,  
 fleshless, nerveless, muscleless, pulpless,  
 for death's dart has struck me without appeal,  
 I dare not look at my arms lest I tremble from fear.

Apollo and his son, two great masters, together  
 cannot cure me, their calling deceived me.  
 Farewell pleasurable sun, my eyes are blocked,  
 my body goes away down to where all falls apart.

What friend, seeing me to this extent stripped bare,  
 does not return home with sad and tearful eyes,  
 consoling me lying in bed and kissing my face,  
 in wiping my eyes put to sleep by death?

Farewell dear comrades, farewell dear friends,  
 I set out first to prepare a place for you.

### **Derniers vers: Sonnets 1\***

Je n'ay plus que les os, un Squelette je semble,  
 Decharné, denervé, demusclé, depoulpé,  
 Que le trait dela mort sans pardon a frappé,  
 Je n'ose voir mes bras que de peur je ne tremble.

Apollon et son fils, deux grans maistres ensemble,  
 Ne me sçauroient guerir, leur mestier m'a trompé:  
 Adieu plaisant Soleil, mon oeil est estoupé,  
 Mon corpse s'en va descendre ou tout se desassemble.

Quel amy me voyant en ce poinct despouillé  
 Ne remporte au logis un oeil triste et mouillé,  
 Me consolant au lict et me baisant la face,  
 En essuiant mes yeux par la mort endormis?

Adieu chers compagnons, adieu mes chers amis,  
 Je m'en vay le premier vous preparer la place.

\**Les Oeuvres de Pierre de Ronsard*, texte de 1587. Ed. Isidore Silver, 8 Volumes. Chicago: University of Chicago and Paris: Didier, 1966-70. [III, 104-05; II, 179; VIII, 104]

**Commentary;**

Pierre de Ronsard is generally recognized as the greatest poet of the Renaissance in France. He brought together a group of young poets known as the Pleiade. He and his fellow poet Joachim du Bellay authored *The Defense and Illustration of the French Language*, the first in a series of French manifestos which continue up today. Ronsard's own opus is enormous: twenty volumes in the Laumonier edition. It contains sonnets, odes (Pindaric and Horatian), elegies (epistles) eclogues, hymns (telling of mythical deeds), satirical discourses, moral and philosophical poèmes, and an epic. His work is of major quality in all registers (sermo gravis, sermo mediocris, and sermo humilis). I consider Ronsard to be the greatest French poet, and I place him with Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Pushkin, Victor Hugo, and Rilke.