

SAMPLER

*Otherlands*

*Also by Harry Guest*

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# Otherlands

Translations of  
Jean Cassou,  
Rainer Maria Rilke  
& other poets

SAMPLER  
by

## Harry Guest

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Clément Marot  
(1495-1544)

**About My Self** [*De Soy Mesme*]

I'm not now what I used to be  
and can't bring lost time back to me.

Those lovely Aprils flew out through  
the window, those sweet summers too.

Neglecting other gods I know  
I served my master Eros though

if he could get me born once more  
I'd serve him better than before

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**Mellin de Saint-Gelais**  
(1487-1558)

**Sonnet**

Watching that range of distant mountains I  
compare it to the length of my distress;  
those peaks are lofty, my desire as high,  
they stand there firm, my faith's as serious.  
So many glittering brooks stream down their side.  
From my eyes tears flow just as readily.  
I cannot count how many times I've sighed.  
Those summits suffer gales as ceaselessly.  
A thousand flocks graze on those lower slopes.  
As many loves are nurtured and reborn  
inside my heart which fosters all my hopes  
which bear no fruit. My joys have been withdrawn.  
We're much alike. One feature's not the same –  
in them the snow lasts, in me it's the flame.

Maurice Scève  
(c.1510-c.1564)

*from Délie, dizain no. CCXVI*

At divers times, so many hours and days,  
you come, my lady, to my soul to share  
from hour to moment, moment to always,  
the mesh of contradictions lurking there.  
You live through calendars of mine which seem  
exempt at least from minor grievances  
while I, lost to reality in dread,  
feel I have no-one but my self to please.  
That's why I can't restrain the Furies by  
will-power however ardently I try

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## Délie *dizain* CCLVII

That mirror hanging always on its nail  
needs daybreak to receive her image where  
my heart in waiting daily must entail  
false hoping that she'd like me with her there.  
Your luck is such she often comes to see  
you look at her knowing you won't betray  
tears shed, complaints, what happens after. All  
is secrecy since any woman may  
get caught by you but if she's held in thrall  
no-one can join her as a referee.

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## To the Reader

*Scève's prologue to his long philosophical poem 'Microcosme'*

A vain desire to visit various lands  
brings kudos to the vagabond who strays  
forfeiting much by switching skies and grounds.  
More cautious use of years earns better days.

Time wasted gains approval from all those  
who gape at new amazement which can reap  
rewards won also by the ones who chose  
to work – a verb to make the idle weep.

Thus wandering in sunlight I shall deign  
to try both late and uselessly to please  
not cup in hand to ask a different favour.

Thus lilies withered can flaunt blooms again  
and autumn coaxing decorate fig-trees  
with second fruit though green and lacking flavour.

NOT HERE NOT THERE

Olivier de Magny  
(d. 1560)

***“Holà Charon...”***

**A Dialogue in Sonnet Form**

The Poet

Hey! Charon! Yes, you, boatman of the dead.

Charon

Some bumptious ass is yelling. Who are you?

The Poet

The weeping spirit of a lover who  
For faithfulness gained only tears to shed.

Charon

What do you want?

The Poet

To cross the Styx to Hell.

Charon

You've killed a man?

The Poet

That I have never done.  
Love made me die.

Charon

I can't take anyone  
Who's gripped by love as though beneath a spell.

The Poet

Oh be a sport for once. Take me across.

Charon

Get someone else to row you. Neither I  
Nor Fate would dare to disobey Eros.

The Poet

I'll go in spite of you. My soul has more  
Tears for my eyes and loving tricks to try.  
I'll be the river, be both boat and oar.

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Joachim du Bellay  
(1522-1560)

**Sonnet LXXVI from *L'Olive***

When fierce storms scrape high hills and level ground  
And rip her olive-tree from my poor heart  
The famished wolf will lie down with the hound  
Supposed to keep his flock safe and apart.

The pathway of that gale will sweep the skies  
To emptiness, quenching their blue with dark.  
Fires will give off no heat, no light. Those eyes  
Of hers, once beautiful, will have no spark.

All creatures will exchange the lair they'd made  
One with the other and the clearest noon  
Resemble midnight at its bleakest. Soon

The colours of each field will seem the same,  
The sea lack water, woods contain no shade  
And roses lose the scent which lent them fame.

Philippe Desportes  
(1546-1606)

**Sonnet LI from *Les Amours d'Hippolyte***

The water dripping from a stalactite  
Wears out the hardest marble and it's known  
That diamonds melt in lion's blood despite  
Resisting anvils and the flame. All stone –  
Boulders – the granite cliff blocking the way –  
Succumb when fire attacks the living rock.  
North winds have toppled oak-trees you would say  
Were old and tough enough to stand the shock.

But cursèd Eros sees how day and night  
I spend my breath in sighing, my bruised eyes  
Get drenched with tears, my soul's charred by my plight.  
I find no way to soften the hard heart  
Of one augmenting by her cruel art  
My love for her, my sores, my wounds, my sighs.

***“Amour en mesme instant m’aiguillonne et m’arreste...”***

Love can at the same moment goad and check,  
Console and terrify, blaze up and freeze,  
Pursue and flee, construct with care and wreck,  
Crown me as victor, force me to my knees.

The plaything of the storm, tossed high, brought low,  
I’m steered by Love erratically at will.  
I feel secure awaiting the death-blow,  
Believe I’ve won when I’m a loser still.

What pleased me once displeases me to-day.  
I fall in love with her I don’t desire.  
Finding my heart’s delight I’m led astray

And get entangled in protecting wire.  
Knowing what can assist me in my plight  
I move to act and fail to do what’s right.

Théophile Gautier  
(1811-1872)

**The Preface to *Emaux et Camées***

Goethe ignored the brutal times  
when empires made the cannons roar.  
His *East-West Divan* (book of rhymes)  
gave breathing-space for art to soar.

Shakespeare he spurned for Persian song,  
perfumed himself with sandalwood  
and borrowed metres which belong  
to Middle-Eastern brotherhood.

Calm on his divan hour by hour,  
aware those battles raged in vain,  
he plucked a petal from each flower.

I wrote, although the hurricane  
lashed windows which I always close,  
*Enamels* first, then *Cameos*.