

Joachim du Bellay on Beauty



Si nostre vie est moins qu'une journée
En l'éternel, si l'an qui fait le tour
Chasse nos jours sans espoir de retour,
Si périssable est toute chose née,

Que songes-tu, mon âme emprisonnée?
Pourquoy te plaist l'obscur de nostre jour,
Si pour voler en un plus cler sejour,
Tu as au dos l'aele bien empanée?

La, est le bien que tout esprit désire,
La, le repos où tout le monde aspire,
La, est l'amour, la, le plaisir encore.

La, ô mon âme au plus hault ciel guidée!
Tu y pouras reconnoistre l'Idée
De la beauté, qu'en ce monde j'adore.¹



¹ *L'Olive augmentée* (1549), xiii. Here are two translations side-by-side, a transparent one by A.S. Kline, and a looser one by J. Robin:

If our life is less than a single day
In eternity, and the year in its turn
Wastes our days, without hope of return,
If everything is born to decay,
Why my captive soul your dreams display?
Why for the shadow of our day so burn,
If for flight to a clearer one you yearn,
Graced with wings to help you on your way?
There, is the good, every soul's desire.
There, the rest to which all men aspire,
There, is the love, there the delight in store.
There, O my soul, in highest heaven clear,
There you may realise the Idea
Of the beauty, that in this world I adore.

If life is less than one day's passing sigh
Within eternity, and if the year
Too soon revolved, may never reappear,
If, helpless, all things here on earth soon die,
What do you dream about, caged soul?
And why this trouble take when darkness hovers near?
Although your dreams sing on to regions clear,
You seem a soul in pain whose wings can't fly.
Seek there the Good above, beyond the sky,
There the rest which to each man lends cheer,
There is Love, there pleasure, thither steer,
There, my soul, is heaven found, on high.
There you shall realize that rare rapport
with Beauty which in this world I adore.