

Classic Poetry Series

Mathurin Regnier
- poems -

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Mathurin Regnier(1573-1613)

Mathurin Régnier (December 21, 1573 – October 22, 1613) was a French satirist.

Régnier was born in Chartres, current region of Centre.

His father, Jacques Régnier, was a bourgeois of good means and position; his mother, Simone Desportes, was the sister of the poet Philippe Desportes. Desportes, who was richly beneficed and in great favor at court, seems to have been regarded as Mathurin Régnier's natural protector and patron; and the boy himself, with a view to his following in his uncle's steps, was tonsured at eight years old.

Little is known of his youth, and it is chiefly conjecture which fixes the date of his visit to Italy in a humble position in the suite of the cardinal, François de Joyeuse, in 1587. The cardinal was accredited to the papal court in that year as protector of the royal interests. Regnier found his duties irksome, and when, after many years of constant travel in the cardinals service, he returned definitely to France about 1605, he took advantage of the hospitality of Desportes.

He early began the practice of satirical writing, and the enmity which existed between his uncle and the poet François de Malherbe gave him occasion to attack the latter. In 1606 Desportes died, leaving nothing to Régnier, who, though disappointed of the succession to Desportes's abbacies, obtained a pension of 2000 livres, chargeable upon one of them. He was also made in 1609 canon of Chartres through his friendship with the lax bishop, Philippe Hurault, at whose abbey of Royaumont he spent much time in the later years of his life. But the death of Henri IV. deprived him of his last hope of great preferments. His later life had been one of dissipation, and he died at Rouen at his hotel, the Ecu d'Orlans, in October 1613.

About the time of his death numerous collections of licentious and satirical poems were published, while others remained in manuscript. Gathered from these there has been a floating mass of licentious epigrams, etc., attributed to Régnier, little of which is certainly authentic, so that it is very rare to find two editions of Régnier which exactly agree in contents. His undoubted work falls into three classes: regular satires in alexandrine couplets, serious poems in various metres, and satirical or jocular epigrams and light pieces, which often, if not always, exhibit considerable licence of language.

The real greatness of R gnier consists in the vigour and polish of his satires, contrasted and heightened as that vigour is with the exquisite feeling and melancholy music of some of his minor poems. In these R gnier is a disciple of Pierre Ronsard (whom he defended brilliantly against Malherbe), without the occasional pedantry, the affectation or the undue fluency of the La Pl iade; but in the satires he seems to have had no master except the ancients, for some of them were written before the publication of the satires of Vauquelin de la Fresnaye, and the Tragiques of Agrippa d'Aubign  did not appear until 1616. He has sometimes followed Horace closely, but always in an entirely original spirit. His vocabulary is varied and picturesque, and is not marred by the maladroit classicism of some of the Ronsardists.

His verse is extraordinarily forcible and virgorous, but his chief distinction as a satirist is the way in which he avoids the commonplaces of satire. His keen and accurate knowledge of human nature and even his purely literary qualities extorted the admiration of Boileau. R gnier displayed remarkable independence and acuteness in literary criticism, and the famous passage (Satire ix., A Monsieur Rapin) in which he satirizes Malherbe contains the best denunciation of the merely correct theory of poetry that has ever been written. Lastly, Regnier had a most unusual descriptive faculty, and the vividness of what he called his narrative satires was not approached in France for at least two centuries after his death. All his merits are displayed in the masterpiece entitled *Macette ou l'Hypocrisie dconcerte*, which does not suffer even on comparison with *Tartuffe*; but hardly any one of the sixteen satires which he has left falls below a very high standard.

Les Premieres d'Euvres ou satyres de Regnier (Paris, 1608) included the *Discours au rol* and ten satires. There was another in 1609, and others in 1612 and 1613. The author had also contributed to two collections : *Les Muses gaillardes* in 1609 and *Le Temple d'Apollon* in 1611. In 1616 appeared *Les Satyres et autres cvuvres folastres du sieur R gnier*, with many additions and some poems by other hands. Two famous editions by Elzevir (Leiden, 1642 and 1652) are highly prized. The chief editions of the 18th century are that of Claude Brossette (printed by Lyon & Woodman, London, 1729), which supplies the standard commentary on R gnier, and that of Lenglet Dufresnoy (printed by J. Tonson, London, 1733). The editions of Prosper Poitevin (Paris, 1860), of Ed. de Barthlemy (Paris, 1862), and of E. Courbet (Paris, 1875), may be specially mentioned. The last, printed after the originals in italic type, and well edited, is perhaps the best. See also Vianey's *Mathurin R gnier* (1896); M. H. Cherrier, *Bibliographie de Mathurin R gnier* (1884).

Epitaphe

Mathurin Regnier

Ô Dieu, Si Mes Péchés Irritent Ta Fureur

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Ode

Jamais ne pourray-je bannir
Hors de moy l'ingrat souvenir
De ma gloire si tost passee?
Toujours pour nourrir mon soucy.
Amour, cet enfant sans mercy,
L'offrira-t-il a ma pensee!

Tyran implacable des coeurs,
De combien d'amerres langueurs
As-tu touche ma fantaisie !
De quels maux m'as-tu tourmente!
Et dans mon esprit agite
Que n'a point fait la jalousie !

Mes yeux, aux pleurs accoutumez,
Du sommeil n'estoient plus fermez;
Mon coeur fremissoit sous la peine:
A veu d'oeil mon teint jaunissoit;
Et ma bouche qui gemissoit,
De soupirs estoit toujours pleine.

Aux caprices abandonne,
J'errois d'un esprit forcene,
La raison cedant a la rage:
Mes sens, des desirs emportez,
Flottoient, confus, de tous costez,
Comme un vaisseau parmy l'orage.

Blasphemant la terre et les cieux,
Mesmes je m'estois odieux,
Tant la fureur troubloit mon ame:
Et bien que mon sang amasse
Autour de mon coeur fust glace,
Mes propos n'estoient que de flame.

Pensif, frenetique et resvant,
L'esprit trouble, la teste au vent,
L'oeil hagard, le visage blesme,
Tu me fis tous maux esprouver;

Et sans jamais me retrouver,
Je m'allois cherchant en moy-mesme.

Cependant lors que je voulois,
Par raison enfraindre tes loix,
Rendant ma flame refroidie,
Pleurant, j'accusay ma raison
Et trouvay que la guerison
Est pire que la maladie.

Un regret pensif et confus
D'avoir este, et n'estre plus,
Rend mon ame aux douleurs ouverte;
A mes despens, las! je vois bien
Qu'un bonheur comme estoit le mien
Ne se cognoist que par la perte.

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Quand Sur Moi Je Jette Les Yeux

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Satire II

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Satire Iii

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Satyre X

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Satyre Xv

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