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And Tide Laps Against Tide (Et l'onde pousse l'onde)

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The author of this sonnet, Jean-Baptiste Chassignet, published a collection of one hundred devotional sonnets, *Le Mespris de la vie et consolation contre la mort*, in 1594. All of the poems treat in some manner the ephemeral quality of human life and the paradox that is death, being both horror and blessing. We see elements of these characteristics in this translation, which is sonnet number 53 in the collection. Of Chassignet little is known save that he studied law in his native Besançon and wrote paraphrases of the Psalms.

Et l'onde pousse l'onde

L'enface n'est sinon qu'une sterile fleur,
 La jeunesse, qu'ardeur d'une fumiere vaine,
 Virilité qu'ennuy, que labeur, et que peine,
 Viellesse que chagrin, repentance, et douleur,

Nos jeux que desplaisirs, nos bon-heurs que mal-heur,
 Nos thresors et nos biens, que tourment, et que geine,
 Nos libertez que laqs, que prisons, et que chaine,
 Nostre aise, que mal-aise et nostre ris que pleur;

Passer d'un âge à l'autre, est s'en aller au change
 D'un bien plus petit mal, en un mal plus estrange
 Qui nous pousse en un lieu d'où personne ne sort.

Nostre vie est semblable à la mer vagabonde,
 Où le flot suit le flot, et l'onde pousse l'onde,
 Surgissant à la fin au havre de la mort.

Jean-Baptiste Chassignet

And Tide Laps Against Tide

Our childhood is a fruitless floweret;
Youth for the dung of flesh does lust in vain;
Our manhood is but worry, work, and pain;
Old age repentance, sadness, and regret.
Our play is but displeasure, our joy woe;
Our treasure and our goods cause toil and care;
Our liberty, a prison we must bear;
Our ease and laughter, torment and sorrow.
From age to age we pass, in passing change
One evil for one worse; the last exchange
Brings nothing but the loss of thought and breath;
Our life is like the wandering ocean wide;
Wave follows wave, and tide laps against tide,
All surging onward to the port of death.

Sharon King

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