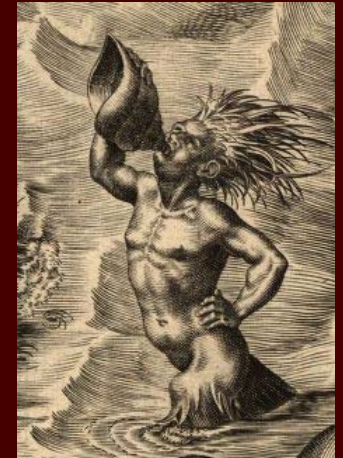


— Pierre de Ronsard —  
“Les Îsles Fortunées”  
 (“The Fortunate Islands”)

ca. 1560, Excerpts

In ancient mythology the "Fortunate Islands" were the paradise of the gods, located somewhere in the west beyond the ocean. Later the name was given to the Canary and Madeira Islands as they were discovered by European explorers—and then to points farther west as the discoveries enchanted the European imagination.

In tumultuous sixteenth-century Europe, the image of an Edenic land far across the ocean that offered an escape from war and hardship appeared as a literary leitmotif, as in Ronsard's poem "Les Îsles Fortunées."



...  
Or sus, amis, puisque le vent commande  
De démarrer, sus, d'un bras vigoureux  
Poussons la nef vers les champs bien-heureux,  
Au port heureux des îles bien-heurées,  
Que l'Océan de ses eaux azurées,  
Loin de l'Europe et loin de ses combats,  
Pour nous, amis, emmure de ses bras.  
Là, nous vivrons sans travail et sans peine.  
Là, là toujours, toujours la terre est pleine  
De tout bonheur et là toujours les cieux  
Se feront voir fidèles à nos yeux.

Là, sans navrer comme ici notre aïeule  
Du soc aigu, prodigue, toute seule  
Fait hérissier en joyeuses forêts  
Parmi les champs les présents de Cérès;  
Là, sans tailler, la nourricière plante  
Du bon Denys, d'une grimpure lente  
S'entortillant, fait noircir ses raisins  
De son bon gré sur les ormes voisins.

Là, sans mentir, les arbres se jaunissent  
D'autant de fruits que leurs boutons fleurissent;  
Et sans faillir, par la bonté du ciel,  
Des chênes creux se distille le miel.  
Par ses ruisseaux toujours le lait ondoie,  
Et sur les bords toujours l'herbe verdoie  
Sans qu'on la fauche, et toujours diaprés  
De mille fleurs s'y peignent les prés  
Francs de la bise, et des roches hautaines  
Toujours de lait gazouillent les fontaines.

Là, comme ici, l'avarice n'a pas

...  
Let us sail away, friends, since the wind commands  
That we unmoor; let us go with vigorous arms,  
Let us push the ship towards the blessed fields,  
Towards the happy port of the Fortunate Isles,  
Which the Ocean surrounds with its arms of blue waters,  
Far away from Europe and far from its wars,  
For our benefit, my friends.  
*There*, we will live without toil and without suffering.  
*There*, *there* always, always the land is full  
Of happiness and *there* the skies  
Will faithfully appear to our eyes.

*There*, without hurting our ancestress, as happens here,  
With the sharp ploughshare, the lavish earth, among the fields,  
Gives rise on its own to happy forests,  
Full of the gifts of Ceres [wheat];  
*There*, without pruning, the suckling plant  
Of good Denys,<sup>1</sup> through its slowly entangled vine  
Willingly ripens its grapes  
On the neighboring elms.

*There*, truthfully, the trees carry  
As much fruit as buds had bloomed;  
And without fail, thanks to the goodness of the heavens,  
Hollow oaks produce honey.  
Milk always flows in its rivers,  
And grass is always green along its borders  
Without ever needing to be mowed, and the fields  
Are always speckled with thousand of flowers.  
Exempt of winds and of high rocks,  
The fountains always flow with milk.

*There*, like here, greed has put no limits

Excerpted and images added by the National Humanities Center, 2006: [www.nhc.rtp.nc.us/pds/pds.htm](http://www.nhc.rtp.nc.us/pds/pds.htm). In Pierre de Ronsard (French, 1524-1585), *Le Second Livre des Poèmes*, ca. 1560. Translation by Dr. Sahar Amer, University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill; Fellow, National Humanities Center, 2005-2006. Italization of *There* (Là) in English translation added by NHC. Map details from *Americae sive quartae orbis partis nova et exactissima descriptio*, map of the western hemisphere by Diego Gutiérrez, 1562 (courtesy Library of Congress). Portrait of Ronsard courtesy of Bibliothèque Publique et Universitaire, Neuchâtel, Switzerland. Complete image credits at [www.nhc.rtp.nc.us/pds/amerbegin/imagecredits.htm](http://www.nhc.rtp.nc.us/pds/amerbegin/imagecredits.htm).

<sup>1</sup> St. Denys (third century, also known as Dionysus) is a patron saint of France. In Greek mythology, Dionysus produced the first wine from grapes.



Borné les champs, ni d'un effort de bras  
 Avec grand bruit les pins on ne renverse  
 Pour aller voir d'une longue traverse  
 Quelque autre monde; ains jamais découverts  
 On ne les voit de leurs ombrages verts.  
 Par trop de chaud, ou par trop de froidure;  
 Jamais le loup, pour quêter sa pâture  
 Hurlant au soir, ne vient effaroucher  
 Le sûr bétail à l'heure de coucher . . .

Le vent poussé dedans les conques tortes  
 Ne bruit point là, ni les fières cohortes  
 De gens armés horriblement ne font  
 Leurs morions craquer dessus le front.  
 Là, les enfants n'enterrent point leurs pères,  
 Et là les soeurs ne lamentent leurs frères,  
 Et l'épousé ne s'adolore pas  
 De voir mourir sa femme entre ses bras . . .  
 Car leurs beaux ans entrecassés n'arrivent  
 A la vieillesse, ains d'âge en âge vivent  
 Par la bonté de la terre et des cieux  
 Jeunes et sains comme vivent les Dieux.

On the fields, and the pine trees  
 Have not been cut with great noise and effort  
 To allow one to sail far away and see some other world;  
 Rather they have never been discovered,  
 And they are known only through their green shade.  
 Through extreme heat, or through extreme cold:  
 Never does the wolf, when seeking its food,  
 Howling in the evening,  
 Scare the secure livestock at night . . .

Nor does the wind, pushed inside the marine shells  
 Make noise *there*, nor do the haughty cohorts  
 Of armed men horribly make  
 Their helmets crack over their foreheads.<sup>2</sup>  
*There*, children do not bury their fathers,  
 And *there*, sisters do not mourn their brothers,  
 And husbands are not saddened  
 By seeing their wives dying in their arms . . .  
 For, their beautiful lives do not reach  
 Old age; they live from one generation to the next  
 Thanks to the goodness of the earth and of the skies  
 Young and healthy as live the Gods.



<sup>2</sup> *Morions* (Fr.): helmets worn by the Spanish army during the Franco-Spanish War of this period (1635-1659).