

Jean Doublet. *Élégies*.

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Almost nothing is known about the obscure Norman poet Jean Doublet, except what the poet himself tells us in this small collection of twenty-seven elegies and twenty-two epigrams published only once in the sixteenth century (Paris, 1559). Claiming the twin titles of “Dieppoyo” and “Ovide François,” Doublet set out to do for the elegy and the epigram what the Pléiade had done for the ode and the sonnet, adopting and adapting the Ovidian elegiac mode to glorify his native city and relate the vicissitudes of his love for a Dieppoise, poetically named Sibille. The influence of the Pléiade is palpable throughout the collection, and Ronsard and Du Bellay are frequently invoked by name. At the same time Doublet pays homage to an earlier generation of poets whom the Pléiade had rejected outright. He refers often and admiringly to Marot, placing him in the same company as Ronsard and other moderns (elegies 18 and 21). More piquantly, Doublet promotes with obvious pride the *puy de Dieppe*, one of those old spice factories dismissed with such disdain by Du Bellay in the *Deffense et illustration de la langue françoise*. He even invites Du Bellay and Ronsard to participate in the next *puy*, hinting that new prizes are now awarded for “Dircean odes” and “Tuscan sonnets,” alongside the traditional prizes for chants royaux, ballades, and rondeaux (elegy 21). Doublet’s mediating stance between the old and the new is evident even in his choice of poetic forms. Since 1549 virtually every new poet had followed the lead of Du Bellay and Ronsard in launching his career with twin collections of odes and sonnets. By publishing elegies and epigrams instead, Doublet was deliberately going against the grain, indicating a lingering attachment to the previous generation and to Marot in

particular, author of the first elegies and epigrams in French, even as he undertook to transform these into more prestigious, more authentically classical forms.

Doublet's elegies are indeed new. They show no sign of the Marot-Sébillot hesitation between elegy and epistle, though many are addressed to specific *destinataires* (a brother, a doctor, a former teacher, and of course Sibille). The first three are in fact direct imitations of the first three elegies of Ovid's *Amores*. Several others are similarly adapted from obvious Ovidian models. But as Hélène Hôte observes in her commentary and notes, many are closer in subject and tone to epideictic and Epicurean odes. Some are direct imitations of well-known odes by Horace. Others tend more toward the epigram, the epitaph, or the epithalamium. Doublet was clearly experimenting with the very idea of an elegy, pushing its boundaries as far as he could to demonstrate the versatility of the genre while showcasing his own virtuosity, exactly as Du Bellay was doing during these same years with the sonnet in the *Regrets* and the *Antiquitez de Rome*. Similar generic experimentation is evident in Doublet's epigrams as well, though to a lesser degree and with less striking results.

One of the most obvious of Doublet's innovations is formal. Observing that Marot's decasyllabic rhymed couplets are not at all equivalent to Greek and Latin elegiac couplets, and that French requires more syllables than Greek or Latin to express a complete thought, Doublet adopts the novel solution of doubling the alternating hexameters and pentameters of Greek and Latin elegiac couplets. The result is a series of heterometric quatrains — "limping quatrains," as he tellingly calls them (elegy 4) — rhymed *abab*, in which the first two lines are decasyllabic, the second two octosyllabic. Hôte's commentary on this innovation is helpful. I can't help wondering, though, if Doublet's primary purpose in devising this new form was not to allude punningly to his own name. His idiosyncratically doubled couplets seem, in fact, to bear the stamp of a formal trademark, conspicuously advertising themselves as Doublet's doublets. Doublet seems perfectly capable of such onomastic wit, judging by the liminary elegy "De J. D. à Jan Doublet," in which Doublet's double, a *Doublet doublé*, seems to be talking to himself.

We can be grateful to Hélène Hôte for a readable, well-annotated edition that makes these fascinating, unstudied Renaissance poems once again available.

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