

**HEATH'S MODERN LANGUAGE  
SERIES: FRENCH VERSE OF THE  
XVI CENTURY, SELECTED AND  
EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION  
AND NOTES**

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FRENCH VERSE  
OF THE XVI CENTURY

SELECTED AND EDITED  
WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

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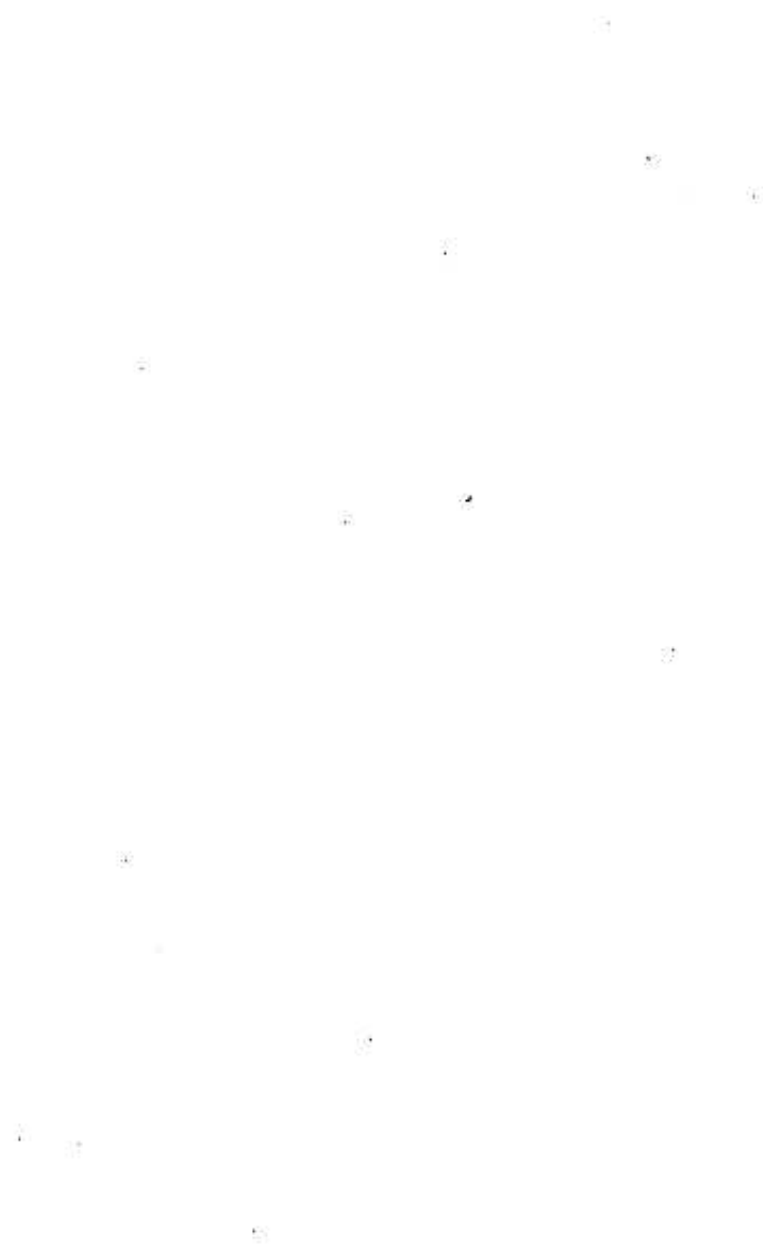


Figure 1. A 3D scatter plot showing the relationship between the number of species (S) and the number of individuals (N) for 10 different samples. The x-axis is labeled "Number of individuals" and ranges from 0 to 1000. The y-axis is labeled "Number of species" and ranges from 0 to 10. The z-axis is labeled "Sample" and ranges from 1 to 10. The data points are scattered, showing a general positive correlation between the number of individuals and the number of species. The points are labeled with sample numbers 1 through 10.



## INTRODUCTION

THE French sixteenth century is a period of great poetical richness, and the poets of the age are too numerous to mention. Many of them were meagrely endowed with the divine fire, for the composition of verse was considered almost the duty of every scholar and educated man. Therefore, the poetry of the period includes much which deserves the oblivion it has received. On the other hand, an anthology of sixteenth-century verse contains of necessity some of the most graceful lines in French literature.

Inasmuch as the sixteenth century includes very striking changes in thought and the flowering of the Renaissance, we must expect to find a great difference between the writings of the beginning and those of the end of the century.

At the dawn of the century poetry is still under the influence of the late Middle Ages. The Great Rhetoricians are high in favor, and the mediæval verse-forms are used as a vehicle for plentiful allegory and complicated metre. If we leave aside Lemaire de Belges, however far he may be above the other *rhetoriqueurs*, Clément Marot stands forth as the first great poet of an era of transition, such as we find the early Renaissance to be. In Marot's own writings we notice a marked development as he passes from youth to maturity. He still frequently uses the old verse-forms, but the content is apt to be different, more personal, more modern. Nevertheless, Marot and his little band of followers are replaced by the Pléiade. A certain number of poets are often grouped with Marot, though at times they give hints which prove valuable to the Pléiade. Thus, Melin de Saint-Gelais belongs to the

group of Marot, but he helps to make the sonnet popular. Charles Fontaine is a follower of Marot, but his Platonism foretells some of the poetical *motifs* of the new school.

The Pléiade was a group of ambitious, scholarly writers, humanists and lovers of antiquity, who desired to enrich the poetry of their own country by an ardent cult of Greek and Latin literature. Their conception of antiquity was, however, often modified by Italian literature which exerted a great influence upon them.

The leader of the Pléiade was Pierre de Ronsard, who tried with varying success to cultivate most of the poetical *genres*: lyric, epic, pastoral, etc. His chief friends and followers were Du Bellay, Baif, Belleau, Jodelle, Daurat and Pontus de Thyard. But the name Pléiade includes an indeterminate number of poets under the sway of antiquity and of Italy. Their favorite, but by no means only, form of expression was lyric poetry, particularly the sonnet. Ronsard was the great Hellenist or exponent of Greek influence. Success in this he did not always achieve, and it was above the power of most of his fellow-poets. The majority of these were content to be Italianists. Their idealism has often been called a form of Platonism, because it had its remote sources in Plato. But it was more likely to take the shape in poetry of Petrarchism, the cult of Petrarch's sensuous idealism, or even, more so of the sensual Italian imitators of Petrarch. Ronsard, the most ambitious lyric poet, was at times a Pindarist, in his soaring heroic odes based on those of Pindar, at times he followed in the wake of Horace or of the light Anacreontic verses.

Toward the end of the century, when Ronsard had grown old and had lost his enthusiasms, French poets, deprived of his leadership, fell somewhat away from their high aims. There had been in many of Ronsard's poems a strong moral strain, and this was still developed by certain poets like d'Aubigné and Du Bartas, who were not unfrequently Huguenots. But the conventional love-poets degenerated into Italianistic

Petrarchists, and flooded French court and society with innumerable soft and languishing verses. These were often graceful but frequently tedious by their conventional similarity. Of such poets the greatest and most popular was Desportes. But with him poetry seems to lose its vigor, and the tonic influence of a reformer like Malherbe was not out of place.

The beauty and melody of French sixteenth-century poetry have commended themselves to writers in English, and the notes to this edition testify to many translations and imitations. A necessarily incomplete list of those who have tried in modern times to make the French poets known to English and American readers includes: Louisa Costello, *Specimens of the Early Poetry of France*; Longfellow, *Poets and Poetry of Europe*; Andrew Lang, *Ballads and Lyrics of Old France*, and *Ballades and Rhymes*; George Wyndham, *Ronsard and la Pléiade*; C. H. Page, *Songs and Sonnets of Pierre de Ronsard*; John Payne, *Flowers of France*.

In the preparation of the present volume the editor acknowledges suggestions, and hints as to what to annotate, from some of the numerous French anthologies, for the use of students, either of poets in general, or of individual authors, including those of Becq de Fouquières, E. Voizard and A.-P. Lemercier. The study of the extracts in this volume should be accompanied by the literary comments in such works as Sainte-Beuve's *Tableau historique et critique de la poésie française et du théâtre français au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Faguet's *Seizième Siècle*, Petit de Julleville's *Histoire de la littérature française* Vol. III, and A. Tilley's *Literature of the French Renaissance*.