PART II

POETRY
After living in Rome for four years (June 1553—August 1557) the poet Joachim du Bellay returned to France tired and ill. His stay in Rome, which he talks about with some repugnance in his poetry, certainly did not harm his creative spirit: in 1558 he published no less than five collections of poems, one in Latin and four in French. Two of these collections, the *Antiquitez de Rome* and the *Regrets*, are famous: some of the poems in them are among the most well-read and most frequently quoted poetry in French literature. The three remaining collections are less well-known: the *Divers Jeux Rustiques* and the Latin *Poemata* are only read nowadays by a handful of specialists, and the poems from *Songes* are too hermetic to appeal to a wide readership.

The French-language collections are innovative in a number of respects. First of all Du Bellay deliberately chose the sonnet form which had until then, at least in French literature, only been used in Petrarchan love discourse, as in his own *Olive* (1549). This *canzoniere*, consisting of 50 love sonnets, is one of the first in this genre in French poetry. In the second edition of this collection (1550), which was extended to include 115 sonnets, the quest for love was transformed into a spiritual search, with a strong neoplatonic bias, and concluded with an invocation to God. After Du Bellay had repudiated Petrarchism in a scathingly satirical poem titled ‘Contre les Pétrarquistes’, he started to use the sonnet form for a broader range of subjects. The 191 sonnets in *Regrets* form three sets of 56, 70 and 65 sonnets respectively, each written in a different register. The first 56 sonnets are elegiac in character. They express the personal disappointment of the lyrical I-person when confronted with the old and the new Rome. The tone is that of exile, as expressed in Ovid’s *Tristia*, with one great difference: Ovid’s chosen subject was his home-sickness for Rome, writing from far-off Tomi on the Black Sea, whereas Du Bellay was airing his feelings of longing for France while staying in Rome. The following series consists of 70 satirical sonnets which include his denouncement of modern Rome’s moral