

Sarah Alyn Stacey. *Marc-Claude de Buttet (1529/31–1586): L'honneur de la Savoie*.

Études et Essais sur la Renaissance 70. Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2006. 236 pp. + 16 b/w pls. index. append. illus. bibl. €53. ISBN: 2-7453-1317-7.

Elizabeth Vinestock. *Poétique et pratique dans les Poèmes de Jean-Antoine de Baïf*.

Études et Essais sur la Renaissance 71. Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2006. 272 pp. index. bibl. €45. ISBN: 2-7453-1316-9.

Monographs about long-forgotten poets are a strange exercise: an invaluable tool for scholars in the field, they can prove disappointing as critical works. Such attempts have to navigate around two common pitfalls: the desire to make up for centuries of oblivion can lead one to overstate the artistic gifts of these authors and to compile indiscriminately every single piece of information about them, while the corollary emphasis on such a subjective criterion as “poetic quality” threatens to take over critical interpretation. Two very fine publications illustrate — and partially remedy — these dangers: a biography of Marc-Claude de Buttet by Sarah Alyn Stacey on the one hand, and a study of Jean-Antoine de Baïf’s *Neuf livres des Poèmes*, the first volume of his copious *Euvres en rime* (1573), by Elizabeth Vinestock on the other. Both are laudable efforts to resuscitate unfairly neglected poets and to illuminate their works and historical import with new analyses and documents. Both pay scrupulous attention to details, provide a wealth of new information on the poetic landscape in France from 1550 to 1585, and guide us meticulously through hypotheses and conclusions.

The first book, *Marc-Claude de Buttet (1529/31–1586): L'honneur de la Savoie*, takes Buttet’s life where it was left more than a century ago, after the studies of Mugnier (*M.-C. de Buttet, Poète savoisien* [1876]), Ritter (*Recherches sur le poète Claude de Buttet* [1886]), and Balmain (*Un Oublié: M.-C. de Buttet* [1912]). Apart from a few articles by Demerson, Terreaux, and Stacey herself, the topic had been left dormant since then. Stacey, who offers here an extensive biography of Buttet, has already produced an excellent critical edition of his *Amalthée* (Champion, 2003), and promises a critical investigation of the author’s poetics in a forthcoming book. It is therefore not an exaggeration to say that she is in the process of renewing drastically our appreciation of Buttet’s poetry and our understanding of the social and literary networks of a not-so-minor author who was praised by Ronsard and protected by Marguerite de France, daughter of Francis I. The book under review, though, derived from a dissertation accomplished at the University of Hull in 1992, is slightly disappointing from an interpretative point of view, and should rather be approached as a database for future research. After having meticulously combed all the archives from Chambéry, Annecy, Turin, Paris, and Geneva, the author is clearly filing a definitive report on Buttet’s life, but she falls short of drawing a precise interpretative conclusion and does not explain the relevance of Buttet’s case for a more general understanding of the poetry and society of his time. The impressive amount of new documents, lost

poems, and testimonies she compiled will prove undoubtedly decisive for future studies, but it lacks the backbone of a leading argument or the romancing narrative which would transform it into the kind of riveting biography Simonin once wrote for Ronsard.

The biographical approach is certainly responsible for this sometimes dry linear juxtaposition of archival data. A first part details Buttet's biography, correcting previous accounts and shedding light on a number of former lacunae: his lineage, education, estate, profession, the circumstances of his introduction to Marguerite de France, and his establishment in the Duché de Savoie after 1560. The second part focuses on Buttet's friendships and relations in France and in Savoie. For someone familiar with French love lyrics of the years 1550–75, it is fascinating to notice the consistency of this constellation of authors who exchanged poems and imitated one another while setting forth a new poetic agenda (see our *Politique des Amours: poétique et genèse d'un genre français nouveau (1544–1560)*, Droz [2006]). Ronsard, Baïf, Des Autels, Du Bellay, Belleau, Jodelle, Peletier du Mans, Grévin, D'Espinaï, Bèze, all cross Buttet's path, and Stacey demonstrates forcefully that, in these years, there is no poetic activity without a strong sense of group identity.

The list of Buttet's connections with the local literary community in Savoie proves less exciting as it piles up names of obscure gentility, often remembered only because Buttet dedicated an anecdotal poem to them. An exception is Buttet's best friend, Jean de Piochet, whose *journal de raison* is a goldmine of information on books lent and borrowed, literary dinners, and lively anecdotes.

The annexes themselves, complete with transcriptions of unpublished poems, personal letters, inventory, bibliography, and sixteen plates of facsimile, account for more than a hundred pages, testifying to the real nature of Stacey's book as a tool for future research rather than a personal take on Buttet's poetry. The author has chosen to pace out her publications and divide them into archival description and critical survey: we are certainly looking forward to her forthcoming study of Buttet's poetics. In the meantime, this first book maps out a constellation of literary influences, courtly circles, and local friendships, which, we hope, lays the groundwork for a later explanation of the poetry itself.

With *Poétique et pratique dans les Poèmes de Jean-Antoine de Baïf*, Vinestock takes an almost opposite approach, leaving considerations of context and biography aside to provide a self-enclosed analysis of a single book of poetry, analyzed from every possible angle: she covers the structure, genre, and identity of the collection (chapter 1), Baïf's reflections on poetics (chapter 2), his practice of translation, adaptation, and imitation (chapter 3), his use of rhetoric in the domain of *inventio*, *dispositio* (chapter 4), and *elocutio* (chapter 5), and his versification (chapter 6). Her nuanced and detailed exploration offers many engaging readings of individual poems while underlining the scope and diversity of Baïf's talent. In particular, Vinestock shows how theory and practice are closely intertwined in the poetry of the Pléiade: confronting theoretical prescriptions of classical and Renaissance *ars poetica* with the actual inner workings of Baïf's texts, she develops

a convincing argument in favor of the double nature of poetry, which is at once image and theory. Almost every poem offers both a literal and a reflexive meaning, commenting upon its own art and reworking former texts while presenting a fluid evocation of human life and nature.

This was an argument worth pursuing and theorizing even further, as it would have offered a stronger critical thread to unify the book than the official motivation of a reassessment of Baïf's gifts. Vinestock's essay is no doubt a substantial contribution to the current reappraisal of this poet, but thanks to Jean Vignes's relentless efforts to publicize Baïf's achievements, he is now well-established as a leading figure of the poetic renewal of the 1550–70s. Vinestock's book will nonetheless be the ideal companion to the new critical edition of the *Neuf livres des Poèmes* recently published as the first volume of his *Complete Works* (ed. J. Vignes, [2004]). Her demonstration of the subtle unifying patterning of the book commands admiration, as does her discussion of the generic identity of the elusive "poème." The fear of leaving out any aspect of Baïf's poetic praxis sometimes takes over the need for a single strong interpretative stance, with the result of a somewhat schematic outline. But if the downside of this systematic approach is a lack of selection, the remarkable outcome is a comprehensive study which leaves no stone unturned and no poem untouched.

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