

Nicolas Bourbon. *Nugae (Bagatelles)*.

Ed. Sylvie Laigneau-Fontaine. *Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 446. Geneva: Librairie Droz S.A., 2008. 1064 pp. index. append. bibl. €130.55. ISBN: 978-2-600-01226-3.

V. L. Saulnier described Nicolas Bourbon (1503–ca. 1551) as the most complete French Neo-Latin poet of his day. Bourbon's major work was a collection of epigrams, published in three successively expanded and expurgated editions: the 1530 *Epigrammata* (272 poems), 1533 *Nugae* (584 poems), and 1538 *Nugarum libri octo* (some 1500 poems). Étienne Dolet, Andrea Alciato, and Desiderius Erasmus sang his praise; Hans Holbein the Younger sketched him in profile. Filling a major gap in Renaissance literary studies, Sylvie Laigneau-Fontaine has supplied both the first substantial modern study of Bourbon's life and writing in a 186-page introduction as well as the first critical edition of any of his poetry.

In the first part of the introduction, Laigneau-Fontaine summarizes the little we know about Bourbon's itinerant career established by Saulnier, Margaret Mann Philips, and Jean Dupèbe, and adds biographical details, especially concerning his relationship with several patrons, that she gleans from Bourbon's poems, including his 1530 *Epigrammata*, which was only discovered in 1991. The bulk of the introduction provides a detailed study of the epigram, a newly popular poetic form appreciated by Renaissance poets for its

concentrated and flexible power, and Bourbon's virtuosic and varied use of it. Her analysis of Bourbon's poems traces the main lines of his conservative ethical priorities, romantic and erotic inclinations, evangelical piety, Erasmus intellectual agenda, and poetic aspirations ca. 1533.

The next 776 pages contain, on facing pages, a critical edition of the 1533 *Nugae* and Laigneau-Fontaine's line-for-line French translation. An *apparatus criticus* of textual variants in other editions and an *apparatus fontium* of Bourbon's more or less direct allusions to classical, medieval, and Renaissance authors complete the edition. A further 2,122 footnotes to the translation elucidate the literary and historical dimensions of the poems, including all the figures mentioned in them. The end matter comprises: a full bibliography; indices of meters, of persons cited by Bourbon, and of classical, medieval, Renaissance, and modern authors cited by Laigneau-Fontaine in her notes to the edition (but, oddly and unhelpfully, not those in the introduction and its notes); as well as a concordance of the poems in the 1533 *Nugae* that appear in other editions of Bourbon's epigrams.

Only a gifted epigrammatist like Bourbon himself could give Laigneau-Fontaine's rich volume suitable praise here. In chief, she has opened Bourbon's poems to scholars with an accurate and fully annotated critical edition as well as with her perspicacious insight into Bourbon's literary subjects, sources, and artistry, which invite rather than foreclose further exploration and interpretation. As revealed by comparison with two original editions, her editorial interventions in accentuation, punctuation, and capitalization are light and consistent with her announced principles. These retouches along with her readable and often elegant French translations significantly aid comprehension.

Among the discoveries she relates in her notes, one set particularly impresses. If it is true that good artists borrow and great ones steal, then Laigneau-Fontaine has caught Bourbon in the act, revealing that he tried very hard to reach greatness. She demonstrates meticulously that though he rarely acknowledged them, Bourbon frequently imitated or copied not just themes but also phrases, whole lines, and even complete poems (with slight changes) from Erasmus, Thomas More, and Angelo Poliziano, as well as from Catullus, Horace, Ovid, Virgil, and the popular anonymous *Greek Anthology*. Charles Clay Doyle, Hoyt Hopewell Hudson, and James Hutton had done initial work on Bourbon's sources, particularly his use of More and the *Greek Anthology*, but Laigneau-Fontaine has surpassed them by uncovering the full extent of Bourbon's engagement with these and other poets, much as Doyle had hoped a scholar would do someday (*Moreana* 32 [1995]).

As Laigneau-Fontaine readily admits, the choice of the 1533 *Nugae* for an edition has its limitations: it only contains a third of Bourbon's total epigrams. Awaiting study are ninety-five highly charged religious poems in the 1530 *Epigrammata*, which Bourbon suppressed in the 1533 *Nugae*, as well as some 900 poems he added to the 1538 third edition, which were written during the tumultuous apex of his career when he was successively imprisoned in Paris for

heresy, subsequently succored in the evangelical circle of Anne Boleyn, and later taken into the employ of Marguerite of Navarre.

Thus, Laigneau-Fontaine has very ably provided us with a vital middle term and starting place for a comparison that will reveal the full arc of Bourbon's literary career. Because Bourbon, like his friends Clément Marot and François Rabelais, expurgated his printed works of controversial religious material, future editions and studies will have to take into account any manuscript evidence, as Gérard Defaux did in his edition of Marot's poetry. Paul Oskar Kristeller's *Iter Italicum* lists at least sixteen manuscripts with one or more of Bourbon's poems; there are likely more. An incipit index and glossary of key terms in the present edition would also have been of great help, particularly for those pursuing the research already begun on Bourbon's reception and use by later poets. Still, thanks to Laigneau-Fontaine, in this monumental volume we now have an important portion of Bourbon's elegant poems to enjoy and to mine — their great variety, literary quality, and historical interest cannot be adequately evoked here — and thereby with her guidance “plunge into the very heart of the early French Renaissance” (11).

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