

***Pierre Boaistuau ou le génie des formes*. Sous la direction de Nathalie Grande et Bruno Méniel. (Série Ethique et poétique des genres, 5). Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2021. 470 pp.**

The work of the sixteenth-century *polygraphe*, Pierre Boaistuau, has long been studied by a modest number of experts. In recent years, their numbers have grown considerably. In the present volume, Nathalie Grande and Bruno Méniel have put together a collection of twenty studies that builds upon Jean-Claude Arnould's edited volume, *Les Histoires tragiques du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle. Pierre Boaistuau et ses émules* (2017; also published by Classiques Garnier). If Boaistuau has hitherto been studied as a translator-compiler of *histoires tragiques* and *histoires prodigieuses*, the present volume asks us to consider these in the context of a broader oeuvre: one that includes a treatise on princes, a history of the persecuted Catholic church, and reflections on the dignity and misery of humankind. To this end, Grande in her introduction presents the volume according to three thematic continuities. Firstly, a pessimism oriented at the political situation of mid-sixteenth-century France: for Boaistuau, the prince is but a leading example of a declining humanity. Secondly, a pessimistic outlook on the whole of human history, suggesting an Augustinian approach to the notion of *theatrum mundi* (Boaistuau had unfulfilled ambitions to translate Augustine's *City of God*). Thirdly, an innovative approach to storytelling, especially in short forms: Boaistuau would produce the first version of Marguerite de Navarre's novellas under the title of *Histoires des amans fortunez* (1558) – and more broadly, he would establish the development of both the *histoire tragique* and the *histoire prodigieuse* in France. Grande and Méniel are to be credited with an editorial strategy that allows for depth and breadth. Most of the contributions focus on a single aspect of Boaistuau's oeuvre – for instance, his skills as a compiler and translator; his technique of *declamatio*; his portrayal of Islam. The more ambitious pieces consider several of Boaistuau's works in a broader literary-historical context (notably the contributions of Jean-Claude Arnould, Hervé Campagne, and Nora Viet), taking into consideration, where appropriate, the extent of Boaistuau's reworking of Italian sources. Méniel's postface offers insight on the progression of the volume as a whole, whereby Boaistuau moves from a socially-inflected model of *écrivain* ('artisan majeur du renouveau du genre narrative au milieu du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle', p. 16) to a rather more mystical one ('Le collectionneur est, d'une manière ou d'une autre, un dévot: il sait déceler la présence et la puissance du divin dans les éléments qu'il réunit', p. 410). Méniel leaves us with a tentative suggestion: Boaistuau's work might be said to be 'maniériste' insofar as it privileges strangeness and especially as it draws attention to its own presumptuous excesses of citation. In sum, this volume significantly advances our understanding of Boaistuau. While it largely references French scholarship, it does not neglect important Anglophone contributions. However, works by Lyndan Warner (on the dignity and misery of

humankind) and by Wes Williams (on monstrosity) are conspicuous by their absence from the bibliography.

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