

## REVIEWS



## BOOKS

*Eighteenth-Century Music* 5/1 © 2008 Cambridge University Press  
doi:10.1017/S147857060800122X Printed in the United Kingdom

### TILI BOON CUILLÉ

*NARRATIVE INTERLUDES: MUSICAL TABLEAUX IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FRENCH TEXTS*

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006

pp. xxiv + 284, ISBN 0 8020 3842 5

*Narrative Interludes* is a contribution to the burgeoning field of tableau theory. However, unlike previous scholarship, which has focused upon a particular figure or genre, Cuillé's book focuses exclusively upon a particular *type* of tableau – the musical tableau. Whilst scenes incorporating musical elements were nothing new to eighteenth-century literature, from around the time of Rousseau onwards, Cuillé notes a change in the way these scenes were employed.

Musical scenes were, more often than not, used to represent a sexual tension between two, or even three, of the story's main characters. In short, the music lesson functions as a metaphor for a lesson in sexual education. What Cuillé notes, however, is not a change in the content of these scenes, but a change in their function. The scenes become increasingly woven into the plot, forming an ever more important part of the drama and heightening the effect of the music in particular. For this reason Cuillé perceives them to be tableaux.

A tableau, at least in theory, was a moment where the action was suspended, so as to bring the emotional side of the drama to the forefront of the narrative. Indeed, in his *Entretiens sur le Fils naturel* (1757), Diderot suggests that modern drama should consist solely of emotional tableaux, the emotional reaction of characters being of considerably more interest than the actual actions that occur. The one major criticism I would have of Cuillé's book, then, is that the title fails to do justice to its contents. A narrative interlude would suggest a break in the telling of the story, yet all of Cuillé's examples (and indeed her own definition of a musical tableau) suggest that these musical scenes form an essential part of the narrative structure. It seems strange then for the book title to undermine its own argument.

Cuillé's aim is to 'demonstrate how eighteenth-century authors enhanced the expressive power of the narrative tableau by drawing not only on contemporary theories of visual arts but on contemporary theories of music' (xvi). After an introductory chapter that provides a thorough and useful assessment of scholarly developments in tableau theory, two large sections follow that each consist of three case-study style chapters. The first three chapters focus on the interrelations of music and language in the works of Diderot, Cazotte and Beaumarchais. Cuillé looks at the impact of Rousseau's *Lettre sur la musique française* (1753) noting that the ensuing debate surrounding it was as much concerned with the French language as with music. Cuillé goes on to assess how these authors use musical tableaux to challenge Rousseau's statements on music and language. Part II – 'Music and Morality: *La Querelle Des Femmes*' – focuses upon four female authors:



Charrière, Cottin, Krüdener and Staël. It examines the use of musical tableaux from a gendered perspective, showing how these authors used supposed ‘stock scenes’ to confront the contemporary perception that music could lead to a woman’s undoing – statements fuelled by Rousseau in works such as *Emile* and *Julie*.

In Chapter 2 our attention is drawn to the operatic allusions made in Cazotte’s *Le Diable amoureux* (1772). Cuillé’s argument is that Cazotte, inspired by the use of the marvellous in opera, uses musical scenes in an attempt to add a marvellous dimension to his literary work. She argues that ‘contemporary theories of *tragédie en musique* . . . furnished a vital conceptual foundation for Cazotte’s literary creation, contributing to his ability to reconcile the *merveilleux* with the *vraisemblable*’ (72). It is not Cuillé’s statements about Cazotte with which I disagree; it is her statements about French opera in general. Cuillé argues that ‘the opera, which evolved in counter distinction to the spoken theatre, was the designated realm of the *merveilleux*’ (74), and later asserts that ‘eighteenth-century French audiences were inclined to accept the presence of marvellous agents and events because they were seated in the sung rather than spoken theatre’ (80). The argument here is too prescriptive for French opera of the late eighteenth century. Cuillé’s comments fail to do opera and the French public justice – it was not simply the case that in the opera house ‘anything goes’. Indeed, from the middle of the century onwards there was a determined effort, by theorists and composers alike, to make opera more rational. This was achieved by focusing the plot more on the emotional, more human, aspects of the drama; the fact that supernatural elements were involved no longer mattered as much as it had previously. Whilst opera may have lagged behind spoken drama, it *was* undergoing some sort of reform.

The subject of opera and its irrational, marvellous elements was a hot topic for philosophers and music theorists alike. It was Gluck, however, alongside Calzabigi, who took it upon himself to incorporate some of these changes, and one such change was the use of Diderot’s dramatic, emotional tableaux. Indeed, it could be said that Gluck’s opera *Alceste* is based entirely upon a series of musical tableaux. Gluck’s effective use of contrast allows each scene to have its own mood and its own character. We only have to compare the static, mournful opening scene of *Alceste* that bemoans Admeto’s dreadful fate with the terrifying temple scene that follows to see how Gluck differentiates each scene. Whilst these large-scale blocks of music could be said to hinder the drama’s dramatic trajectory, what they actually do is to highlight and intensify the emotional situation. Gluck’s *Alceste* focuses almost exclusively on the emotional side of the drama. In fact, with regards to the opera’s action, very little actually happens. In short, the human side of the drama becomes far more important than the marvellous elements that generate the action. In one sense, the emotional tableaux of *Alceste* could be considered somewhat similar to those that Cuillé puts forward in her book. Indeed, Gluck’s tableaux function similarly as an integral part of the narrative structure.

Cuillé’s literary tableaux are essentially different, though, from Gluck’s operatic tableaux. In six out of the seven examples in her book music is seen, but not heard. Indeed, one of the important features of Cuillé’s musical tableaux is that they are musical performances without music, ‘staged for a beholder inscribed within a text’ (5–6). Cazotte’s *Le Diable amoureux* brings us close to a kind of audible performance by printing the musical score within the literary work, inviting ‘the reader to share more fully in Alvare’s experience, not by vicariously participating in his sensory upheaval but by recreating the performance and sustaining the effect of the music’ (85). In Beaumarchais’ stage play actual songs are included and, as it is a play and not a novel, performed. The songs, however, were not newly composed but were popular French songs, although new texts were added to suit the new context. The context in which these songs are now situated is an important aspect of the tableau, but this seems to go unnoticed by Cuillé. In all the examples she cites, the musical performance is located within the private, domestic sphere. Even in Krüdener’s *Valerie* where Gustave and Valerie attend the opera – a public event – the narrative remains in the private sphere focused exclusively upon their box and their emotional situation. Indeed, the musical tableau here is not a result of the music per se, but the *private*, sensual effect it has upon Gustave, who is far more concerned with Valerie than with the opera.

Herein lies the crucial distinction between music and the literary depiction of it. In opera music is for the listener alone – the characters onstage do not hear their music and there is no mediating beholder. In



literature, however, music occurs within the private sphere with someone often *performing* for another character – a beholder. As a result music becomes objectified and loses its sense of temporality and space. What we are presented with is not music, but the emotional resonances of the beholder. In effect, Cuillé's narrative does not tell a story about music, but about beholders of music. The type or genre of music does not matter at all; what matters instead is that there is music, and that the music has an emotional affect upon its beholder.

For Gluck, and indeed everyone who engaged in the eighteenth-century opera-related quarrels, the ultimate aim was for music to become more closely aligned with its text, so as to create a far more powerful and intense dramatic presentation. In these literary examples music is in a sense separated from its (con)text, and ascribed a new meaning by its beholder. Indeed, in all the examples the songs actually require no text at all. These literary musical tableaux use music to heighten the emotions of the beholder (and the reader) and if understood in this sense could be said to foreshadow the writings of Ludwig Tieck, Friedrich Schlegel and E. T. A. Hoffmann who praised music for its mysterious qualities that could most powerfully affect the listener. This is, of course, the story of Hoffmann's *Don Giovanni*.

Cuillé's investigation into literary perceptions of music provides a springboard for new areas of musical study, inviting us to reassess audience perceptions in the eighteenth century and to re-evaluate the way that music is perceived to affect its beholder. *Narrative Interludes* is a stimulating and impressive study covering a vast array of literature that spans almost fifty years. It is a thoroughly interdisciplinary venture that combines literary, philosophical, political and musical modes of thought. As a result Cuillé raises a variety of issues for scholars to consider across a broad disciplinary spectrum, and, in particular, draws attention to important texts yet to receive musicological attention.

KIERAN PHILIP HULSE



*Eighteenth-Century Music* 5/1 © 2008 Cambridge University Press  
doi:10.1017/S1478570608001231 Printed in the United Kingdom

ANDREA FABIANO

*HISTOIRE DE L'OPÉRA ITALIEN EN FRANCE (1752–1815): HÉROS ET HÉROÏNES D'UN ROMAN THÉÂTRAL*  
Paris: CNRS Editions, 2006

pp. 295, ISBN 2 271 06396 5

Italian opera in eighteenth-century France is an important topic, but one about which eighteenth-century musicologists know little. Our ignorance stems from a lack of basic understanding of the repertory, the composers and the institutional history. In addition, we know little about the contexts in which Italian operas were produced and disseminated. Andrea Fabiano's *Histoire de l'opéra italien en France (1752–1815)* provides – for the first time – a solid documentary history for anyone interested in French operatic history.

Fabiano begins his enquiry with a question: why was Goldoni hired at the Comédie-Française in 1762? While this question is aptly posed, the answer Fabiano provides is not as satisfying as the question itself. In keeping with Catherine Kintzler's schematic analysis of the 'poetics' of French opera (17), Fabiano explains Italian opera in France from the perspective of a 'cultural need' (9). This schematic view makes Fabiano's claim unnecessarily dichotomous. Rameau's *Platée* (1745), for example, was 'the first symptom of the need to design a national comic reaction to Italian opera buffa' (41). This claim is problematic not only because it overlooks the burlesque tradition in French theatre, but also because it is uncontested. How do we know that the French 'needed' anything? Even though the majority of eighteenth-century audiences did in fact 'need' something, what forms did 'needs' take? These questions invite cultural, intellectual and political analyses that explain the ways in which 'Italian opera' formed an 'Other' in French culture (9). Unfortunately, the formation of this cultural 'desire' – if any – remains hypothetical.