

Brooks, William. *Bibliographie critique du théâtre de Quinault* (Paris, Seattle and Tuebingen: Biblio 17, 1988). 135 pp.

The best description of this book is that of Brooks himself: "Nous avons cherché à donner toutes les références à Quinault et à son théâtre, même les notices les plus courtes et les ouvrages qui n'en parlent qu'en passant, chaque fois qu'il nous semblait que ces notices et ces ouvrages présentaient, sinon des jugements et des informations originales sur le poète, du moins un intérêt d'histoire de la critique de Quinault." Brooks includes bibliographies, Quinault's works, biography, criticism of the corpus of Quinault's plays and of individual plays, sources, influences, and judgements by his contemporaries, and there is still room for a chapter on "Aspects divers." Each entry is described (very carefully in the case of editions of Quinault's plays), and annotations vary from one lone to a long paragraph. It is a model of painstaking scholarship, including an index and numerous cross-references.

Brooks' aim at completeness is no mere boast. My own interest in Quinault the librettist has taken me to many obscure works, and they are almost all included in Brooks' bibliography; to find one he seems to have missed, I had to dig as deep as a "feuilleton" in the 1846 *Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris* by D.G.E. Monnais (a.k.a. "Paul Smith!"). A more serious omission is the article on Quinault by Jacques Morel in the 1987 issue of *L'Avant-Scène Opéra* (devoted to *Alys*), but this may have appeared too late for inclusion. And of course, given Brooks' goal of completeness, one could question the omission of certain reference works (the entry on Quinault by James Anthony in the new Grove, for example) and histories of literature (for example, Voltaire's *Siècle de Louis XIV* and the Zuber/Cuénin volume "Le Classicisme" in the Arthaud series both contain interesting comments on Quinault's theater.

The main omission, of course, is voluntary--this bibliography does not include Quinault's lyric poetry

nor his libretti, the works for which he was so admired in the 17th and 18th centuries. Voltaire called him the second greatest lyric poet in France, and his libretti were read and praised by almost everyone except a small group of writers who, unfortunately for Quinault, have been mainly responsible for our view of the period--Boileau, Racine, La Fontaine, Saint-Evremond, Furetière. However, as those who have participated in the recent revival of interest in Lully's operas have immediately noticed, it only takes a bit of open-minded reading, preferably aloud, to reveal Quinault's true talents as a lyric poet.

Quinault did not make it easy for modern scholars by beginning a second career as librettist. People interested in his non-lyric theater are understandably less interested in his libretti, and those with a more operatic bent tend to disregard the earlier plays (which almost everyone thinks are inferior anyway). It is easy to concentrate on the lyric works and make a case for their special merit, while still admitting that Boileau was right about the plays, and it is equally easy to concentrate on the plays while treating them as obviously inferior to those of Quinault's more famous contemporaries. Brooks is to be commended for insisting, with a hint from Truchet (8, 88), on studying Quinault rather than judging him, for looking at what he has to offer rather than just defending him against Boileau. It is a welcome change to find someone who treats *Bellerophon*, for example, as an important work in its own right rather than an inferior predecessor of *Phèdre*.

Brooks' work thus constitutes an obvious and important point of departure for a better understanding of the man who had the misfortune to have a name that rhymed with "sot." His annotations are accurate and concise, evaluation the work in question both in itself and in the larger context of Quinault scholarship. He often emphasized his own interests--the dating of the plays and the evolution of Quinault's theater--but these are such important issues, and so often misunderstood, that one can hardly complain. With

Brooks' densely packed little book in hand, scholars can perhaps begin to give Quinault the attention he deserves and at the same time reach a better understanding of the relations among tragedy, tragic-comedy, comedy, lyric and opera.

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