

wider audience; however, the emphasis in her musical discussions on local surface detail, often at the expense of the whole, makes it necessary to read the book with recordings and/or scores at hand (unless one is already intimately familiar with the works). Her broad range of source material and larger cultural discussions would seem to make the book attractive to social and cultural historians of the seventeenth century, but because Gordon's readings of her sources are drawn almost entirely from secondary sources, the book will most likely not provide any new information for scholars already familiar with the works in her extensive bibliography. For readers familiar only with the standard musicological literature, however, Gordon's book will definitely shed new light on the music of the seicento. Even if it does not cause a seismic shift in the way one hears and interprets Monteverdi's music, it nonetheless gives the reader much to ponder and will make anybody think twice before interpreting a piece of early seventeenth-century vocal music according to our modern understandings of the body, the voice, and musical meaning.

Jean-Noël Laurenti. *Valeurs morales et religieuses sur la scène de l'Académie royale de musique (1663-1737)*. Geneva: Droz, 2002. 440 pp. CHF 148. Review by DOWNING A. THOMAS, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA.

Opera is a serious matter, Jean-Noël Laurenti tells us in his introduction, which is why he has decided to focus not on the aesthetic qualities of the *tragédie en musique* or its political or social functions during the Ancien Regime, but rather on the moral, philosophical, even theological meanings explored on the lyric stage. Moving against the grain of accepted notions of opera as mere fluff, Laurenti bases his arguments on tendencies in the repertory over the first seventy-four years of its history, primarily through comparisons of individual works and references to contemporary writings on the theater, philosophy, and moral or religious matters. Taking into account the shifting philosophical orientations over the years, he reminds his readers that spoken theater was also a form of "spectacle" in order to bring home the point that opera was not *only* spectacle, even though it was manifestly spectacular. Recognizing the limitations of an approach to opera that leaves out any consideration of the music and dance that were essential to it, Laurenti nonetheless

defends his decision to restrict his study to the libretti by noting that the texts allow us to get a snapshot of opera's thematic concerns, albeit without full resolution on the genre. His corpus has also been limited to the selection of libretti published as the *Recueil général des opéras*. This selection allows him to focus on works seen by a relatively large public in Paris, but necessarily excludes court productions or works seen only in smaller venues (such as the parodies of *tragédies en musique* given at the fair theaters). The endpoint of his study—1737—is, he suggests, the point at which music begins to dominate the libretto, previously considered the central element of the *tragédie en musique*. Finally, Laurenti chooses not to take into account variations or changes to works made during or after the publication of the libretto. His approach to this repertory as a body of works fixed on paper has, of course, the advantage of providing the critic with a clearly defined object of study; but, as he recognizes, it also disregards in many cases what audiences actually witnessed, particularly during revivals of the operas.

Laurenti's study is divided into two large sections: the first delves into the Epicurean foundations of French opera, while the second examines the relationship posed in these works between the human and the divine. An introduction situates opera in the context of seventeenth-century Epicureanism, showing how it drew from this intellectual current its celebration of love and pleasure. The first chapter continues this reflection through analysis of operas such as Quinault's *Alceste* and *Roland*, in particular the accommodation of love and glory one finds in these works. The next chapter focuses on the pleasures and virtues of tranquility (*le repos*) and peace, examining the operatic device of the *sommeil* (taking among others Quinault's *Armide* as example) and the prologue that characterized early French operas where the monarch is represented as above (and as resolving) all conflict. The pastoral ideal, in which love is represented as carefree, figures prominently here. Chapter three delves into the worldly qualities of operatic Epicureanism, examining opera's allegories of the arts (and of Louis XIV's promotion of the arts) in the prologue. Laurenti argues that the traditional Epicurean discourse glorifying the simple pleasures of pastoral tranquility is supplanted, beginning already in Quinault, by "un discours à la gloire de la civilisation citadine," offering praise of commerce, luxury, and the arts and sciences (174). Chapter four is devoted to the moral cautions of these early French operas, so many of which urge us to love, "mais sans alarmes" (180). Overall, he sees in these operas an affirma-

tion of “la confiance dans la possibilité d’un bonheur terrestre” (211).

Laurenti explains that opera allowed for a *mondaine* version of moral truths. Through the vehicle of the *merveilleux*, opera also affirmed “l’intelligibilité du monde,” in part because the spectator knew that the actions of the gods on the stage were in reality made possible by that of theatrical machines in the flies (221). The first chapter of the second section reviews the representation of each of the primary divinities from antiquity. Examining the critical representation of the gods (who are enslaved, like humans, by their passions), Laurenti debunks the received opinion that operas must always end happily. Though Quinault often avoids resolutely tragic endings, his successors take a different tack: “de 1687 à 1699, période où produisent notamment Campistron, Jean-Baptiste Rousseau et du Boulay, le nombre des dénouements malheureux est de huit contre sept” (269). The second chapter shifts to the representation of humanity (the fatal nature of love, the ravages of jealousy, ambition, and human weakness) and opera’s “casuistique” with respect to human frailty (273). After 1712, however, Laurenti sees a shift away from Quinault’s ambiguous treatment of the hero, citing works such as Danchet’s *Téléphe* (1714) and his *Achille et Déidamie* (1735): “Les héros [des opéras] du XVIIIe siècle, eux, sont des militants de la vertu, courent à l’action, voire au sacrifice; ils sont peu portés à l’hésitation et à la nostalgie, lesquelles sont réservées comme ornements passagers pour les monologues; les criminels, eux, persécuteurs opiniâtres de l’innocence, peu partagés, ne suscitent guère la terreur admirative ou la compassion que méritaient leurs prédécesseurs” (383). Laurenti sees the 1670s as a period of gallant Epicureanism, the 1680s as a period of growing pessimism and at the same time of heedless Bacchic pleasures, and finally a reorientation of opera in the new century toward responsibility, action, and free will. Laurenti’s periodization goes against the traditional view of the Regency as a time for “[la] course effrénée aux plaisirs,” since that notion characterizes more accurately the operatic repertory from end of the reign of Louis XIV (397). In the end, Laurenti argues, “l’image d’une divinité providentielle, intervenant activement dans le cours des choses, resurgit et vient coexister avec la thématique des Lumières” (399). Despite its limitations noted above, Laurenti’s study has the advantage of exploring some of the complexities and contradictions of a corpus of dramatic literature that does not fit tidily into the accepted frameworks of social or literary history. The

volume includes appendices listing the works included in the *Recueil général des opéras*, a bibliography, and an index nominum.

Bret L. Rothstein. *Sight and Spirituality in Early Netherlandish Painting*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. xii + 262 pp. \$90.00. Review by MIYA TOKUMITSU, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA.

Much like the artists he discusses, Bret L. Rothstein has created a dense work, requiring of its audience close reading and careful interpretation. His book, *Sight and Spirituality in Early Netherlandish Painting*, examines four seminal paintings of the fifteenth-century Low Countries and discusses the consequences of representing aspects of Christian spirituality for both artist and viewer. Painterly reflexivity, or the artist's signaling of his own means of representation, is the overarching theme of the book, and this theme provides the terms on which the other issues, including naturalism and patronage, are discussed. The topic requires some patience on the reader's part, but allowing Rothstein the time to elucidate his observations is worth the effort.

Each chapter of the book is dedicated to a single work: Rogier van der Weyden's Bladelin Triptych (c. 1445), Jan van Eyck's *Virgin and Child with Canon Joris van der Paele* (c. 1434-36), and *Virgin and Child with Chancellor Nicolas Rolin* (c. 1435) and Petrus Christus's *Goldsmith in His Shop* (c. 1449). In the first chapter on the Bladelin triptych, Rothstein argues that Van der Weyden's reflexive painting undermines or at least disturbs the "nature and function of optical experience" (184). While the viewer looks at a visually stunning painting, the subjects of that painting, Octavius Augustus, Bladelin, the shepherds behind the Nativity, and the Virgin Annunciate, are all having their own, purely spiritual visions. Clearly the "spiritual seeing" of these subjects is more exalted than the viewer's physical seeing of the painting. Yet the painting serves a specific devotional purpose. Exactly what this purpose is and how one should employ the painting are at issue. That such paintings simultaneously enhance and complicate the spiritual aims of their viewers is one of the key paradoxes of fifteenth-century devotional art. Rothstein's discussion of it is illuminating in that he shows the artist beginning to position himself within these paradoxes to determine how these paintings should be used and interpreted.

The second chapter, on Van Eyck's Van der Paele *Virgin and Child*, claims