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**Schneider, Federico. Unexpected Competitive Contexts in Early Opera: Monteverdi's Milanese Challenge to Florence's Euridice (1600)**

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**Schneider, Federico.**

***Unexpected Competitive Contexts in Early Opera: Monteverdi's Milanese Challenge to Florence's Euridice (1600).***

Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2016. Pp. xix, 155. ISBN 978-88-6372-876-7 (paperback) €28.

This important study has an ambitious, difficult, but also fascinating goal: to demonstrate the influence of post-Tridentine culture on early melodrama and the “competitive contexts” between Jacopo Peri and Ottavio Rinuccini’s *Euridice* (1600, Florence) and Claudio Monteverdi and Alessandro Striggio’s *Orfeo* (1607, Mantua). Federico Schneider analyzes the *meraviglia*—the concept of “marvel” in post-Tridentine Catholicism—that became central in theoretical discussions of the baroque, and that was already present in the first operas and in theoretical writings by contemporary academicians. Schneider also highlights the presence of both Dante and Petrarch in the libretti of these two early melodramas. The result, as this interesting study highlights in the title, is a sort of long-distance quarrel between Florence and Mantua (and Milan) that involved the use of Dante (for *Orfeo*) and Petrarch (for *Euridice*).

Schneider focuses on the literary texts rather than on the totality of the spectacle (music, stage machineries, dynastic goals, etc.). To focus solely on the dramaturgy of the libretti, and their theoretical and intellectual frames, is a difficult but important task, as the author explains in his introduction. Somewhat surprisingly, Schneider begins his analysis with Monteverdi’s *Orfeo*, a decision he explains in the preface. He links Monteverdi’s masterpiece to an academy in Milan and to a theoretical work on *meraviglia* by the Milanese academician Giovanni Talentoni. In so doing, he demonstrates how the *Orfeo* relies on Dante’s *Comedia* and can thus be defined as a *pièce sub specie Dantis*. He then turns to Rinuccini’s *Euridice* and points out its debts to Petrarch’s *Canzoniere*, following the *Lezioni* by Leonardo Salviati (1575). According to Schneider, both operas, but *Euridice* in particular, are deeply influenced by a post-Tridentine culture and include several Mannerist *peripetiae* in their plots. He stresses the importance of dramaturgical considerations and of this long-distance dispute or rivalry that, in the case of Monteverdi’s *Orfeo*, points, surprisingly, to Milan and to the academy of the Inquieti. Schneider also puts the problems of the tragic-comic style in a wider and interesting cultural context.

One of the great merits of this study is that it reveals the sources of both libretti, and how these sources (with poetic and thematic elements taken from Dante on the one hand, and from Petrarch on the other) are crucially important for an understanding of the dramaturgy of both melodramas.

One of the demerits of this volume is that the dynastic context of the two operas is almost completely overlooked, in spite of various studies on the topic (some of which are not present in the bibliography). The author also does not mention that the “flop” of *Euridice* is attributable to a technical malfunction with some of the theatrical machinery used in the show—a malfunction that, for the Florentines and the Medici court, accustomed to refined theatrical machinery since the time of the Council of Florence (1439), was almost shocking, especially since the “director” of the show was Don Giovanni de’ Medici, the illegitimate offspring of Grand Duke Cosimo I. In my opinion, if we consider only the dramaturgy of the libretti without putting it in a wider cultural and theatrical context, some important elements can be lost or misunderstood. Nevertheless, I understand that a discussion of such a context was not the goal of the current study.

Sticking, therefore, to the stated goals, it could have been of some benefit to explain why Dante was so important for Monteverdi’s *Orfeo* and for the Milanese academy, and not for Florence. If we consider the great relevance that Dante had for the Florentine Academy during the sixteenth century, a consideration of this question could have enriched the themes discussed by the author. But these are quibbles; the fact that Schneider unveils unexpected sources and themes within the dramaturgic texture of the two operas constitutes an essential addition to our knowledge of these *melodrammi*, one that should not be ignored by future studies. Too often dramaturgy is not analyzed deeply enough or in relation to historical, religious, and philosophical questions. Schneider fills this gap wisely and thoroughly, and thus opens the door to further considerations.

This volume contributes greatly to scholarship on early melodramas and stimulates academic discussion. Schneider’s profound and thorough analysis of the two texts is extremely well done and raises a number of interesting and relevant points for the history of melodrama. Schneider’s great merit, therefore, is to have shown new, articulated, refined, and complex dramaturgic scenarios behind the opera’s plots. The connections Schneider reveals between

Monteverdi/Striggio (composer/librettist) and the Milanese academician Talentoni help to rectify previous references/studies on them.

That being said, the book is not an easy read. It sometimes seems that the author is writing for a very restricted group of specialists who are already aware of the many polemics and studies on the two operas. Perhaps more judicious editing and a less confusing structure would have made it easier to read. Aside from these editing issues, the book offers an important and fundamental analysis of the post-Tridentine concept of marvel that is essential to a better understanding of both *Orfeo* and *Euridice*, and of how these two pagan figures were rendered suitable for a contemporary Catholic audience. The two appendices (Talentoni's discourses on *Meraviglia*, and Leonardo Salviati's *Cinque Lezzioni*) are a gem and offer the unique possibility of reading primary sources on this important topic.

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**Selderhuis, Herman J., ed.**

***Psalms 1–72.***

Reformation Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament 7. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015. Pp. lvii, 561 + 1 map. ISBN 978-0-83-8-2957-6 (hardcover) US\$45.

Reformation historian Herman Selderhuis of Apeldoorn, the Netherlands, has produced the first of two volumes on psalms in the Reformation Commentary on Scripture (RCS). Considering the liturgical and devotional significance of the psalms, one is impressed that this volume is among the first to appear in the series.

The volume begins with a “Guide to Using this Commentary,” a “General Introduction” by series editor Timothy George, and an “Introduction to the Psalms” by Selderhuis. Then follows the body of the work: a psalm-by-psalm anthology of excerpts from Reformation-era authors and sources, presented in a format familiar to users of its prequel, the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, one difference being that pericopes are quoted from the ESV rather than the RSV. The volume closes with a map of Reformation Europe, a detailed