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Michel-Jean Sedaine, *Théâtre de la Révolution* (ed. Mark Darlow). MHRA Critical Texts, Vol. 63. London, MHRA, 2017. Viii + 181 pp. \$17.50 U.S. (pb). ISBN : 978-1-781886-05-02

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*Théâtre de la Révolution* is an impeccably researched edition of Michel-Jean Sedaine's last operatic works. Known more for his comedies of the 1760s (especially, *Le Philosophe sans le savoir*, 1765 and *La Gageure imprévue*, 1768) or for his partisanship on the side of the *philosophes* during their war against the Counter-Enlightenment, Sedaine, and the genre in which he had perhaps the most success, the *opéra-comique*, are relatively unknown to students and scholars of eighteenth-century French culture. Mark Darlow's introduction provides a brief biographical sketch of Sedaine's final years and a close reading of his librettos from 1789 until the author's death in 1797. Darlow is an internationally-recognized authority on French opera and the author of arguably the most important work on eighteenth-century music of the past decade. [1] He details the complex and ever-changing cultural climate of revolutionary Paris, a polemical, and even dangerous environment that Sedaine navigated in order to publish and stage his musicals.

Darlow's book is divided into three parts: the introduction and two critical editions of Sedaine's collaborative works with the famous composer, André Grétry: *Raoul, Barbe-bleue* (1789) and *Guillaume Tell* (1791). Each musical is prefaced by a justification of the core text used for the edition and a list of every version of the play in existence during Sedaine's lifetime. In addition, Darlow provides brief vignettes of Sedaine's unpublished, yet performed works of the revolutionary years: *Pagamin de Monège* (1792); *Bazile, ou à trompeur, trompeur et demi* (1792), *La Blanche haquenée* (1793), and *Albert, ou le service récompensé* (1794). Overall, Darlow paints a complicated and contested picture of Sedaine's operatic output at the twilight of his career, demonstrating that, "comme Beaumarchais," Sedaine was a successful artist, despite his "ambiguous" reputation (p. 5).

Darlow is correct to underline a lack of scholarship on the Revolution's musical theatre. Criticism of the period's tragedies and comedies has enjoyed a modest Renaissance, notably over the past fifteen years. Historical revisionism of the Revolution and a turn towards discerning revolutionary "theatricality" have produced a diversity of recent studies including, but certainly not limited to works by Paul Friedland, Susan Maslan, Mechele Leon, Suzanne Bérard, Cecilia Feilla, Annela Curulla, Yann Robert, and more. [2] These studies—and countless others [3]—have been bolstered by a wave of recent critical editions of tragedies and comedies from the period, such as Jean-Louis Laya's *L'Ami des Lois* (1793; 2011), Marie-Joseph Chénier's tragedies of the 1790s (2002), Monvel's *Les Victimes cloîtrées* (1791; 2011), and a collection of the

Revolution's plays depicting the comte de Mirabeau (2017).<sup>[4]</sup> Aside from David Charlton, Darlow, Raphaëlle Legrand, and a few others, however, there has been too little scholarly interest in tackling the Revolution's array of operas and *opéra-comiques*, a critical mistake, since it constitutes a refusal to address one of the most popular forms of entertainment during the period.<sup>[5]</sup>

Darlow's archival research on both *Raoul, Barbe-bleue*, and *Guillaume Tell* reveal striking differences between the various editions of both texts circulating in Europe during the 1790s. For instance, Darlow shows that Sedaine added a "scène patriotique, chantée par des Sans-culottes, sur l'air de la *Marseillaise*," to the version of *Guillaume Tell* that was performed in late 1793, during the height of the Terror (7). Moreover, Darlow's comprehensive knowledge of eighteenth-century European literature and, especially, of drama, allows him to identify difficult-to-discern intertexts and source materials undergirding Sedaine's works. This reveals the mastery of Darlow's scholarship and the complexity of the genre, proving that many *opéra-comiques* were serious intellectual achievements of the French Enlightenment. Sedaine's *Raoul*, for example, was "une véritable toile intertextuelle" and indicative of an aesthetic that borrowed just as much from eighteenth-century narrative fiction across European traditions as from any theatrical predecessors in France (20).

In his introduction, Darlow provides evidence that revolutionary policies affected the arts during the early 1790s. After authorities struck down theatre monopolies with the Le Chapelier law in 1791, the number of theatres in Paris skyrocketed <sup>[6]</sup>: In 1789, Paris had just 12 theatres, but several months after the new law had passed, there were at least 35.<sup>[7]</sup> Darlow details the effects of the law on Sedaine's career: For example, after having failed to stage *Pagamin de Monègue* at the Paris Opera in 1785, the aging *philosophe* was able to secure a place for it on the boards of the private Théâtre Louvois in 1792. More theatres meant more opportunities, especially for respected librettists like Sedaine. Yet a reputation was no golden parachute. The late life successes (*Guillaume Tell*) came just as easily as the failures (*Bazile*; *La Blanche haquenée*). With so many theatres, genres, artists, and performances to choose from, spectators during the revolutionary years were a tough crowd to please.

To establish his scholarly edition of each play, Darlow presents only "les sources datant du vivant de Sedaine" (47) in an attempt to capture a version that would have been performed at the time. With extensive footnotes, Darlow integrates seven variant librettos into his edition of *Raoul, Barbe-bleu*, a strange play based on a medieval tale of jealousy and murder (and later made famous by Charles Perrault in his 1697 *Histoires ou contes du temps passé*) and a narrative that Darlow argues was reinvigorated during the second half of the eighteenth century during a wave of medieval revivalism. For *Guillaume Tell*, Darlow uses the first published version (Maradan, 1791) as his core text and argues that the musical was based less on the historical accuracy of the famous Swiss foundational story and more on the multiple theatrical and narrative representations of that tale published and performed during the pre-revolutionary period (especially Antoine-Marin Lemierre's 1766 play). He then incorporates several important variants into his edition, including the patriotic scene with the singing *sans-culotte*. Darlow's presentation of both plays is free of jargon, and his notes reveal the instability and energy of musical theatre during the Revolution. Refusing to reduce each production to a single, static libretto, Darlow presents his readers with evidence of the holistic musical and dramatic experiences that changed from theatre to theatre and month to month during the revolutionary years.

Sedaine's *Théâtre de la Révolution* will be required reading for scholars of eighteenth-century theatre and music. Thanks to Darlow's introduction, the work is also an essential contribution to scholarship on cultural production and policy during the Revolution. New students to Sedaine and to eighteenth-century French musical theatre would have benefitted from a longer biography of the librettist and more analysis of Sedaine's earlier drama, and those in search of more information on Sedaine and the *opéra-comique* should turn to Darlow's other works, David Charlton's scholarship on opera, and to a forthcoming collection of essays dedicated to Sedaine's theatre.[8] This extra analysis in *Théâtre de la Révolution*, however, would have made for a heftier (and more expensive) volume. Darlow should be commended for his succinct presentation of *le dernier Sedaine*, and we should thank his publishers for offering this book at a modest price. Overall, eighteenth-century French musical theatre, ignored by *dix-huitièmistes* for generations, has a champion in Mark Darlow and a welcome new title in his edition of Sedaine's last librettos.

## NOTES

[1] Mark Darlow, *Staging the French Revolution: Cultural Politics and the Opéra de Paris, 1789-1794* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[2] Paul Friedland, *Political Actors: Representative Bodies and Theatricality in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2002); Susan Maslan, *Revolutionary Acts: Theater, Democracy, and the French Revolution* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); Mechele Leon, *Molière, the French Revolution, and the Theatrical Afterlife* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2009); Suzanne J. Bérard, *Le théâtre révolutionnaire de 1789 à 1794. La déchristianisation sur les planches* (Paris: Presses universitaires de Paris-Ouest, 2009); Cecilia Feilla, *The Sentimental Theatre of the French Revolution* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013); Annela Curulla, *Religious Life in French Revolutionary Theatre* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, forthcoming 2018); and Yann Robert, *Dramatic Justice: Trial by Theater in the Age of the French Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming, 2019).

[3] These monographs are complemented by several multi-authored works on theatre of the Revolution, including Philippe Bourdin and Gérard Loubinoux, eds. *La Révolution française et les arts de la scène* (Clermont-Ferrand: Presses universitaires Blaise-Pascal, 2004); Barry Daniels and Jacqueline Razgonnikoff, eds. *Patriotes en scène: le Théâtre de la République (1790-1799)* (Paris: Atlas, 2007); and Martial Poirson, ed. *Le théâtre sous la Révolution. Politique du répertoire (1789-1799)* (Paris: Desjonquères, 2008).

[4] Jean-Louis Laya, *L'Ami des lois* (1793). A critical edition by Mark Darlow and Yann Robert (London: MHRA, 2011); Marie-Joseph Chénier, *Théâtre. Charles IX, Henri VIII, Fénelon, Timoléon*. A critical edition by Gauthier Ambrus and François Jacob (Paris: GF Flammarion, 2002); Monvel, *Les Victimes cloîtrées* (1791). A critical edition by Sophie Marchand (London: MHRA, 2011); *Commemorating Mirabeau: Mirabeau aux Champs-Élysées and other texts*. A critical edition by Jessica Goodman (London: MHRA, 2017).

[5] Two works by David Charlton: *Grétry and the Growth of the Opéra-Comique* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) and *Opera in the Age of Rousseau* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). See also Raphaëlle Legrand and Nicole Wild, *Regards sur l'opéra-comique: trois siècles de vie théâtrale* (Paris: CNRS éditions, 2002); Marie-Cécile Schang, *Dramaturgie d'un*

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*genre au service du lyrisme: la comédie mêlée d'ariettes* (Ph.D. dissertation, Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2017) and Martin Wålberg, *La Scène de musique dans le roman du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Garnier classiques, 2015). For more information on the *opéra-comique* during the years shortly before the Revolution, see Philippe Vendrix, *L'Opéra-comique en France au XVIIIe siècle* (Liège: Mardaga, 1992).

[6] The *loi Le Chapelier* (14 June 1791) banned guilds and other privileged syndical bodies, thus striking down the monopoly on performed theatre enjoyed by the Comédie-Française and the Opéra.

[7] André Tissier, *Les Spectacles à Paris pendant la Révolution: repertoire analytique, chronologie et bibliographie* (Geneva: Droz, 1991), appendix 1.

[8] Raphaëlle Legrand and Marie-Cécile Schang, eds. *Le Théâtre de Sedaine: une oeuvre en dialogue. Sources, diffusion, rayonnement. Actes du colloque du 13 et 14 mai, 2016*. In progress.

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