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H-France Review Vol. 21 (March 2021), No. 29

R. J. Arnold, *Musical Debate and Political Culture in France, 1700-1830*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2017. vi + 232 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, bibliography, and index. \$99.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9781783272013.

Review by Julia Simon, University of California, Davis.

R. J. Arnold's ambitious study documents the phenomenon of musical *querelles* in France from the early eighteenth century through the Revolution and into the early nineteenth century. The long historical period under study serves to answer the question of whether to conceive of these *querelles* as one continuous debate or as separate episodes with unique stakes and forms of articulation. In addition to this question, Arnold proposes to address the significance of opera as subject of debate and the issue of whether or not there is anything specifically French in the phenomenon of the *querelle*. In each debate, Arnold analyzes the "intellectual, political and social context of disputes over music and, in particular, opera" (p. 2). In the end, Arnold argues that the *querelles* around opera are a uniquely eighteenth-century phenomenon, although they have links to earlier disputes in the seventeenth century. Moreover, he argues against their "political significance" in the traditional sense, asserting instead a broader conception of the political insofar as the *querelles* "illustrat[e] the rapid expansion of the public sphere, the thirst for antagonistic discourse and the impotence of any group to achieve a lasting ascendancy over public opinion" (p. 212).

Working within a Habermasian framework, Arnold argues that the historical long view enables an understanding of the ways in which the French began to think critically about the "process of antagonistic debate itself" (p. 3). In each close examination of the four *querelles* that occurred prior to the Revolution, attention to the modes of debate reveals different strategies for articulating conflicting opinions, as well as different stakes. Of particular analytical interest to the author in these historical moments of contested discussion are their discursive modes of presentation and dissemination. For example, the early Raguene-Lecerf controversy (1702-32) deploys a "notably ill-tempered" style in books written by two men largely disconnected from "sectarianism among opera audiences" (p. 44). This contrasts with the use of "satirical verse, caricature, theatrical skits, pamphlets and...a more intense involvement of the periodical press" (p. 53) in the Ramiste-Lulliste *querelle* (1733-51), a proliferation of pamphlet essays in the *Querelle des Bouffons* (1752-54), and the prominence of the periodical press and open letters in the Gluckiste-Piccinniste debate (1774-88). In addition, these three later *querelles* all engage more than two authors.

Within the *querelles*, Arnold attends to rhetorical strategies, verbal tactics, as well as the musical and aesthetic substance of the arguments, although to a lesser degree. In the end, his emphasis

remains on the modes of argumentation in each historical episode of conflict over opera, seeking to represent the *querelles* as “free-wheeling, even ramshackle negotiations with an organic quality that led them to spiral out of the control of any particular interest group” (p. 211).

Attention to the particularity of each *querelle* leads Arnold to argue for their specificity against the claim that they represent a continuous conversation. He is careful not to generalize or rely on the identification of patterns, but does acknowledge echoes between and among the *querelles*. For example, he highlights the recurrence of arguments invoking national traits and taste (Italian versus French, German versus French), elite versus popular reception, and “conservative” versus “progressive” or “innovative” tendencies in musical composition, to name a few, but also takes pains to maintain the distinctiveness of the arguments in each debate.

The analytical project of the book represents, to some degree, competing tasks. It requires looking at each *querelle* in its specificity, while also providing historical coverage over a period of 130 years. Analyzing each individual *querelle* with respect to both content and form requires providing sufficient detail to maintain the distinctiveness of each one. This demand can be daunting and requires a delicate balancing act between specifics of positions and how they are articulated against a sense of the overall flavor of the dispute in terms of style. For example, the *Querelle des Bouffons*, a voluminous pamphlet literature with detailed back-and-forth engaging both major and minor Enlightenment figures, sometimes turned around highly technical musical questions. Providing a sense of the debate requires summarizing those positions with a particular attention to questions of style and form without too much attention to musical technicalities. The robust footnotes (helpfully, actually at the foot of the pages!) provide ample secondary sources for readers interested in pursuing musicological and historical details.

The presentation of the content and form of the *querelles*, given the questions and stakes of the project, also requires accounting for the socio-political context in which the debates occurred. With respect to the *querelles* prior to the Revolution, not a great deal of attention is paid to their political contexts other than brief descriptions of regime change, religious and/or ideological disputes, and wrangling with the *parlements*. Indeed, in this respect, the title of the book is misleading in that the study addresses “political culture” as it is manifested in cultural institutions that enable debate about music. In other words, the book attends to the politics of opera production, literary production, and publishing as they relate to the *querelles* as part of the public sphere. Only in the section on the Revolution and, significantly, the absence of *querelles* from 1789 to 1800, does the author attend to political events and their cultural repercussions.

A sense of progression or development emerges from the examination of each *querelle*, from the Raguenet-Lecerf controversy at the beginning of the eighteenth century to the Gluckiste-Piccinniste *querelle* prior to the Revolution. While there are some continuities, that mostly take the form of resonances of earlier positions in terms of content and form, there are also significant discontinuities as the cultural phenomenon of the *querelle* is repeated over time. Arnold’s analysis reveals significant cultural shifts not only in terms of mode of argumentation and presentation, but also those related to other changes, in particular, changes in the cultural institutions responsible for modes of performance (the Académie Royale de Musique, commonly known as the Opéra, and Comédie-Italienne, which merged with the Opéra-Comique in 1762) and of publication and dissemination (books, pamphlets, and periodical press). For example, the development of the periodical press enabled shorter polemical pieces and quicker response times as the century progressed.

Ultimately, Arnold concludes that “participants [in the *querelles*] were forced to be resourceful in their literary tactics, helping to extend the expressive possibilities of critical language in the process” (p. 213). In this respect, the *querelles* were served by the expansion of the public sphere and its modes of transmission of ideas throughout the eighteenth century. Arnold interprets the cessation of *querelles* during the Revolution as reflective of a kind of rupture analogous to other abrupt social and cultural changes ushered in by political changes. Consistent with this analysis, he reads the debates of the nineteenth century as distinctly different from the *querelles* of the ancien regime, characterizing them as “bickering about opera [that] was almost continuous from the late 1790s on,” without “a recognised trigger, a discernible duration and, most importantly, a self-generating quality that would draw in disputants and make issues of allegiance into a public question” (p. 179).

As for the questions about the significance of opera specifically and whether or not *querelles* are a French phenomenon, the author provides only partial responses. For Arnold, the opera seems to have provided an occasion for the French, under conditions enabled by a weak Bourbon monarchy, to indulge a tendency toward “messy outbursts of dissension,” enabling an ever-widening public to engage in “disputes about dispute itself” (p. 212).

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ISSN 1553-9172