



Touched by the Graces: The Libretti of Philippe Quinault in the Context of French Classicism

Buford Norman

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The operas of Jean-Baptiste Lully and Philippe Quinault, created between 1673 and 1686, were so successful that special ordinances were passed to control the crowds that flocked to the performances. Quinault's libretti were widely published and eagerly discussed; in the history of French classicism there is no other author whose plays were performed so frequently or who was so generously remunerated. For this reason the standard account of French culture during the reign of Louis XIV is seriously incomplete. This book--the first in English on Quinault and the first comprehensive study in any language of these libretti--begins with an introduction that situates them in the context of French classicism. After a chapter devoted to the prologues that begin each opera, the eleven chapters which follow--one on each libretto--include a discussion of traditional literary elements such as performance history, plot, characterization, and style supplemented by a second section devoted to an issue that is more specific to musical theater. The concluding chapter summarizes what opera can tell us about French classicism and explores in more depth some of the key theoretical issues, namely representation, imitation, and recognition. This volume will appeal to a broad spectrum of readers, specialists in seventeenth-century French theater, musicologists, music lovers who are interested in early opera, and those whose research focuses on the interrelationship of music and literature.

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