

the spoken theatre. Branger is able to show that Massenet and his librettists, Philippe Gille and Henri Meilhac, were aware of some of these, but the accent is more on careful and systematic documentation of intertextuality than on critical issues such as changing modes of discourse and/or representation (of, say, sexuality, unheroic tenors, social order, the eighteenth century, or national character). Branger then considers the characters briefly as types, perhaps too briefly, especially in the light of the delicate manoeuvring of Massenet and his librettists to bring a figure such as Manon Lescaut to the stage. The last part of the book (entitled 'Éléments d'analyse musicale') is given over to the music itself and comprises rigorous consideration of how recurring material is deployed, numbers organized, and textures of the melodramas developed. The bulk of interpretation and criticism occurs in previous sections, and it is regrettable—but only slightly—that when the musical text is actually engaged the primary goal is to parse. Here Branger is systematic almost to a fault, inasmuch as he feels bound to perform the same set of operations on each of his topics (for example, covering tempo, form, melodic style, and tonal plan for all types of set piece); such consistency is not always repaid by the interest of the observations that are generated. Italianate models for French musical forms are too eagerly applied; in my view a good case can be made only for the Manon–Des Grieux duet in the first act (and even here I believe there is a more convincing way to analyse the number along Italianate lines than Branger suggests, by taking into account the French—and especially Massenet's—tendency to create local-level ternary forms). Much more might have been made of Massenet's striking text-setting in *Manon*. The vocal shaping of an aria such as the heroine's 'Je suis encore toute étourdie' was as much of a breath of fresh air in its day as the melodramas. Its impact was widely felt, to judge by the resonances of Manon's melody in Mimi's 'Si, mi chiamano Mimi' in Puccini's *La Bohème* (a point made years ago by Mosco Carner in *Puccini: A Critical Biography* (2nd edn., London, 1974), 339).

Branger's last section will rub against the professional habits of many opera historians and critics today. But there is much to be said for it. Typologies provide an important way of understanding style, and style remains not only a fundamental tool of hermeneutics but also a vital bridge between aesthetic contemplation and the creation of historical narrative. Thank goodness some scholars are still producing them: *vive le positivisme!* More generally, this

study exhibits something of a cross between sourcebook and critical endeavour. The history is thick, and Branger eschews facile generalizations. Hence over 500 pages on a single opera—and hence the value.

STEVEN HUEBNER

Jules Massenet: Thais. Dossier de presse parisienne (1894). Ed. by Clair Rowden. pp. xli + 194. Critiques de l'opéra français du XIX^{ème} siècle, 10. (Galland, Heilbronn, 2000, 29. ISBN 3–925934–46–4.)

The series Critiques de l'opéra français du XIX^{ème} siècle reproduces reviews of opera premieres in the original French. Except for Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* (1881), the first nine volumes concern operas produced in Paris between 1835 and 1867. The choice of *Thais* (1894) for Vol. 10—not only the series' first opera by Massenet, but also the first from the 1890s—raises many questions. Why not *Manon* or another of his better-known operas? Why this opera as opposed to others from the 1890s, such as Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila* or d'Indy's *Fervaal*, which arguably had more impact? Why an opera that was poorly received rather than one that succeeded?

The answer lies with an enterprising young scholar, Clair Rowden, whose fascinating and provocative dissertation on *Thais* (in progress, City University, London), situating the work in a feminist perspective, is currently drawing attention to the work. Her thirty-five-page introduction to this collection of reviews begins by acknowledging the opera's poor initial reception. This in itself creates an interesting challenge: how to discuss failure in a way that brings the work alive for today's listeners? Rowden succeeds, in part because her focus is not so much on the reviews as on the context they help set. Critics' references to Halévy's *La Tentation* and Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable* lead her to explore precedents that may have informed public perception of the work. She also discusses what gave rise to the prose libretto concocted by Louis Gallet, praised by many as the work's primary innovation. Yet she avoids the critical reception of Anatole France's novel on which the opera was based; even though many of *Thais*'s reviewers claimed to have read it, it was published only a few years earlier, and it may have predisposed them to the opera in certain ways. More discussion of reviewers' rejection of the work as a 'comédie lyrique' would also have been useful.

What interests Rowden, above all, is the

character of *Thaïs* as an erotic courtesan, Sanderson (Massenet's preferred interpreter) as a woman admired for her body as well as her voice, and scenes that foreground temptation, eroticism, and ecstasy. Certainly all reviewers agreed that Sanderson was 'superb', her physical appearance reason enough to ensure her success. To explore *Thaïs* in some depth, Rowden felt that she had to go beyond the reviews and delve into subjects upon which reviewers did not touch, but which, she suggests, may have affected public reception of the opera. These include Loie Fuller's dances at the Folies-Bergère, Jean-Martin Charcot's experiments with hypnotism as a cure for hysteria, and the staging-book for the opera, which refers to the need for *Thaïs* to give the illusion of having an 'attack of the nerves'. Rowden uses these to set the stage for her own attempt to link *Thaïs*'s sexual promiscuity with 'an implied insanity' (p. xliii) and her vocal excesses with the experience of orgasm. This language, of course, could never have appeared in print, but, Rowden argues, the ideas are among the 'densely-woven canvas of social metaphors' suggested by the work (p. xlvi) and perhaps a reason to revisit it in the early twenty-first century.

Given the subject of *Thaïs*, it would also have been relevant not only to point to long-standing links between 'religious transport' and 'hysterical ecstasy' (p. xl) but also to discuss the mystical Catholic revival of the time. As a bridge to her concerns about decadence, Rowden might have examined a comment made by a reviewer in the political journal *La Revue bleue*. Refusing to take anything about the story seriously, René de Récy suggested that *Thaïs* could be understood as 'the opposite of *Parsifal*, a satire of wagnerism, tolstoism, neo-catholicism, and other contemporary degenerations methodically classified by M. Max Nordau' (p. 158). The introduction, then, should be read as more than a study of the work's first reviews, indeed an orientation of the work from the perspective of feminist concerns with body and voice.

This volume contains thirty-seven reviews published in Paris between 14 March and 9 April 1894. The alphabetical order by print source allows ease of consultation, especially while reading the introduction. Possibly Rowden or her editors chose not to arrange them in chronological order because the majority appeared on 17 or 18 March. Still, there are reasons for separating out those published before the premiere on 16 March and those appearing in the monthlies on 1 April. Initial

reviews sometimes influence later ones or are commented upon in them. Anatole France's letter to the editor of *Le Figaro* that appeared on 15 March is a case in point. In it, he referred to the concept of 'philosophical doubt' underlying the story (p. 31). Several reviewers subsequently addressed this in their essays—according to the formula of the day, each had to begin with a commentary on the libretto. Darcours's review is particularly interesting because, in the same newspaper as France's letter two days earlier, he suggests how different the opera is from the novel, noting that 'philosophical doubt' disappeared in the creation of the drama (p. 32).

It would also have been illuminating to discuss which reviews and which comments led to the numerous cuts and changes in both the libretto and the music that took place between the dress rehearsal and the first performances. On 1 April, Widor notes that most of the initial reviews were written subsequent to the dress rehearsal (p. 162). Reviews published weeks after the premiere inevitably addressed the opera's initial problems, but were based on later performances. It would be interesting to trace the evolution of critical judgement after the cuts. From this perspective, Rowden might have included reviews of the 1898 revision in which much that shocked the initial audiences was removed, including the entire 'Ballet de la Tentation' and the 'Symphonie des amours'.

The range of reviews included in this collection, chosen from over a hundred that Rowden collected, is impressive and offers a good overview of the work's critical reception. Still, an explanation of her choice and more context for what appears would have been welcome. Why, for example, is Gallet's essay explaining his 'poésie mélodique' not included, especially as many reviewers refer to it? *Ménestrel* published this essay only five days before the premiere. Why, among the musical press, is only *Ménestrel* represented, its review written by Massenet's own publisher, and not *Art musical*, *Monde musical*, or other such periodicals with less self-interest at stake? Besides the short essay in *La Croix* written in an attempt to influence public reception on the day of the dress rehearsal, additional examples from the religious press would have fleshed out an important aspect of the work's reception. All readers would probably appreciate knowing which of those print sources were perceived as powerful, and which were of secondary importance, and especially which reviews appeared in daily newspapers, and which in bi-weekly music magazines and literary or political journals. To help the reader

understand not only the tone but also the arguments raised in support of, or in opposition to, the opera, Rowden occasionally refers to a source's political orientation. We also, however, need to know about the critics. The essay by Charles-Marie Widor, Massenet's colleague at the Conservatoire, is full of excuses for the work. He explains what went wrong in the dress rehearsal and why the story and its characters are hard to define musically; his praise goes to general issues such as the work's unity and orchestration. Was he hoping to secure Massenet's support for his promotion to composition professor, a position he won two years later? Could Bruneau, Massenet's pupil in the 1880s, be objective about the work? Who, among the critics, were Wagnerians, and how did their perspective affect their judgement?

For the most part, the pleasure of reading and comparing the texts, of discovering what reviewers liked and did not like, as well as pondering what they shared and where they differed, is largely left to the reader. Rowden does a good job of ferreting out some shared references but does not discuss all the recurring themes, even the common comparison that most critics made to *Manon* and the recurring attacks on Massenet's preoccupation with 'exterior' aspects of the drama (p. 41). What especially interested me was the shared ways in which certain critics dismissed the work. O'Divv and Léon Kerst, for example, both called *Thaïs* an 'error' (pp. 112, 135–6). Are we to understand that the work risked tarnishing Massenet's reputation, or merely that it was inappropriate for Sanderson to have taken a work to the Opéra when it had been conceived for the Opéra-Comique? Or was it too philosophical, too risqué, too irreverent, or not sentimental enough for the general public to whom they addressed their reviews? Two other highly respected, conservative professional critics, Louis de Fourcaud and Camille Bellaigue—the former an admirer of Wagner, the latter of Mozart—used other words to reject the work. In spite of their different aesthetic preferences, in reviewing *Thaïs* both of them admitted seeking grandeur and finding none. Even if Fourcaud can point to Wagner's influence on Massenet's use of leitmotifs and thinks that an opera based on such a story 'pourrait être grand', he notes that the scenes are 'petitement construites . . . sans haute vue musicale' (pp. 40–1). Two weeks later, in his review Bellaigue notes that the music is 'peu de chose pour un si grand sujet', its subject treated 'petitement' (pp. 173, 175). André Corneau seems to be addressing these criticisms when

he writes that, for him, the work's value lies in its charm as opposed to its grandeur. He even defends its presence at the Opéra, arguing that 'in varying its spectacles, in making charm succeed grandeur, in proceeding by oppositions, the Opéra is not departing from its traditions' (p. 62).

A close reading of these reviews offers a fascinating window on to French culture of the time, especially when read in conjunction with Clair Rowden's wonderfully contextual introduction. Such publications are thus more than mere reference tools. They enable us not only to place Massenet more accurately in his times but also to encounter the complexities associated with musical taste in the late nineteenth century.

JANN PASLER

Arnold Schönberg und sein Wiener Kreis: Erinnerungen seines Enkels. By Arnold Greissle-Schönberg. pp. 260. (Böhlau, Vienna, Cologne, and Weimar, 1998, DM63,80/£29.90. ISBN 3–205–98849–3.)

'The Barely Even Present Bystander' would probably be a better title for this book than *Arnold Schoenberg and his Vienna Circle: Memoirs of his Grandson*. Unlike Eduard Steuermann's modestly titled *The Not Quite Innocent Bystander*, Arnold Greissle-Schönberg's immodestly titled memoirs provide us with few, if any, new insights into the workings of the group that gathered around Schoenberg in Vienna.

The son of Schoenberg's daughter Trudi and student Felix Greissle, Arnold Greissle-Schönberg was born in September 1923 and lived in Vienna until 1938. Shortly after the *Anschluss* the Greissle family fled Vienna for New York. Schoenberg senior left Berlin for the United States in 1933, taught in Boston and New York initially, but settled in Los Angeles with his new wife and family in 1934, and lived there until his death in 1951.

A glance at these dates reveals that Arnold junior's memoirs refer to a period when the author was less than 10 years of age and Arnold senior was for at least some of the time living in Berlin. There is no reference in this book to their having spent any time together in the United States. The memoirs end around 1942 with an account of Arnold junior being drafted into the American army to serve on a mission to reinstate Otto von Habsburg as Kaiser after the end of the war. The mission was aborted.

Despite the fact that he is logically unable to