



PROJECT MUSE®

Le Mémoire de Mahelot (review)

Michael Hawcroft

French Studies: A Quarterly Review, Volume 60, Number 3, July 2006, pp.
390-391 (Review)

Published by Oxford University Press



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/208200>

temps' (p. 105). Mersenne lays especial stress on the musical applications of mathematics and also celebrates its technological benefits. It enables us to imitate the divine handiwork, but Mersenne sees this not as encroaching on the Creator's sphere, but rather as affording us further reason to admire him. And the applications of mathematics are not only technological; Mersenne uses the concepts of arithmetical and geometrical progression to analyse the effects of grace, and to distinguish democratic from aristocratic states (monarchy, the best of all forms, being based on harmonic proportion). This excellent edition, fully annotated, offers us access to a text that not only offers important insights into Descartes and Pascal, but constructs an intellectual world fascinating in its own right.

doi:10.1093/fs/knl047

MICHAEL MORIARTY
QUEEN MARY, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Le Mémoire de Mabelot. Édition critique établie et commentée par PIERRE PASQUIER. Paris, Champion, 2005. 377 pp. Hb €70.00.

The so-called *Mémoire de Mabelot* is a crucial document for the study of seventeenth-century theatre, the notebook of scenic designers at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, the miraculous survival of which offers unique insights into on-stage performance conditions. This is the first edition since that of Lancaster of 1920, and its 200 pages of introduction now offer the best available account of seventeenth-century French scenography pertaining to the performance of spoken drama. The manuscript, really several different manuscripts, in different hands, privileges the early 1630s and the 1670s. For most of the plays listed in the earlier period there is both a verbal description of the set requirements and a drawing; for the later plays, there is only a summary verbal description. Accordingly, Pasquier devotes most of his attention to the earlier material, although a strength of his presentation is to conjure up both as clear as possible a vision of the two different scenographic practices in force in the earlier and later parts of the century and an evolution between them. In the 1630s, the dominant scenography used five concurrent sets disposed around the stage, some of them flat, some practicable with doors and windows, some containing visible interiors in which actors could perform; Pasquier refines the traditionally sanctioned concept of simultaneity of decor into one of *relative* simultaneity, as the occasional use of small curtains (painted to represent yet another set) to hide and then reveal the sets rests on the opposite principle of successivity. By the 1670s, the dominant scenography used one single set, representing either outside or inside, but not allowing the on-stage transition from one to the other that the earlier scenography allowed. Pasquier suggests how the different components of the multiple sets became gradually unified in the late 1630s and early 1640s (for instance, the five components increasingly representing parts of the same town or palace). His discussion is informed not only by his knowledge of a vast number of plays, but also by his sensitivity to the traditions of medieval performance, Italian sets for comic and tragic performance in the sixteenth century, evolving practices in the staging of *ballets de cour*, and the elaborately spectacular staging of Italian opera in mid-century Paris. He shines the cold light of evidence and patient analysis

on a number of *idées reçues*. One will suffice by way of illustration. It is now dogma that actors came to the front of the stage to perform. Pasquier shows that there is no evidence to support this view, but a considerable amount of evidence to show that they performed just about everywhere else. This work constitutes a major revision of many time-honoured claims in Scherer's *La Dramaturgie classique*.

doi:10.1093/fs/ksn1049

MICHAEL HAWCROFT
KEBLE COLLEGE, OXFORD

JEAN MAIRET: *Théâtre complet*. Tome I. *La Sophonisbe* — *Le Marc-Antoine ou la Cléopâtre* — *Le Grand et Dernier Soliman; ou, la mort de Mustapha*. Textes établis et commentés par BÉNÉDICTE LOUVAT, ALAIN RIFFAUD et MARC VUILLERMOZ. Paris, Champion, 2004. 611 pp. Hb €80.00.

Here is scholarship of truly outstanding quality, and a telling reminder of everything that separates a scholarly critical edition from what we too readily call critical editions, but that are in fact reprints of a pre-established text with the addition of a literary critical introduction and some explanatory notes. Little known today outside seventeenth-century circles, Jean Mairet is the author of twelve plays, first performed between 1630 and 1640. He is important because he is one of a handful of dramatists, including Pierre Corneille, who together, in that decisive decade, by a mixture of theory and practice, inflected the course of French drama for the next two hundred years. This is the first of four volumes that will constitute the first ever collected edition of Mairet's theatre, because he himself only published his plays separately. For most of the plays, this will be their first ever critical edition. This volume contains his three tragedies, including *La Sophonisbe*, with its claim to being the first regular modern French tragedy. Each of the three editors is responsible for a single play, but the volume as a whole is a team effort, as there is much cross-referencing, and Alain Riffaud's exceptional skills as a material bibliographer have explicitly shaped and contributed to the editorial work of his two colleagues. It is no exaggeration to say that, if the remaining volumes of the edition are completed to the same standards as this one, Mairet will be the seventeenth-century dramatist whose *œuvre* has been best served by modern critical editions. The reason is that Riffaud is tireless in his pursuit and scrutiny of copies of what appear to be the same edition. It is a duty that all critical editors are aware of, but that most shy away from, partly because of time constraints, partly because the rewards are not always commensurate with the effort expended. However, such work is crucial unless we want to close our eyes to complex historical truths, as it reveals the aleatory nature of the text, always subject to the competing and contradictory forces of authors, publishers, printers, composers and markets. Establishing a text for a modern readership that might want to read works like these for a whole range of reasons is a perilous activity, as it can make them look definitive, when historically they never were. But when the work of material bibliography has been done and its findings presented, as here, with thoroughness and scrupulous care and with the help of photographs of title pages and examples of *mise en page*, readers have all the evidence with which to assess the provisional nature of the texts presented by the editors and the complex evolutionary processes to which the early editions