

THE LIFE ON THE STAGE: SYMMETRIC ATTITUDE IN BAROQUE OPERA

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An analysis of the structures of the European Baroque Opera results in recognizing that this genre, which used to be an integral part of the public music life at the theatres in Europe as well in the overseas colonies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, reflects upon a multitude of political and philosophical ideas of that time. Apart from presenting a pure value of entertainment and education, it was an important medium of public opinion-building in the interests of the ruling classes. It was them who more or less financed the operas and also saw to it that also people from the lower classes attended the performances of operas. The ethic consensus of the ancient theatre as a state-supporting institution was revived in a reverberation of the Renaissance and interpreted in the sense of a claim to rule and a materialization of power of the absolutistically ruling aristocracy. But then this also provoked examples of contrasting political activities.

For the ambitious music spectacle the political implications were an indispensable part of the structures of the works and their presentation. With an astonishingly seemingly modern strategy of effect the libretti, the stage directions and the musical structure were able to transport very concrete, nearly person-related reflections as well as fundamental ideologically relevant attitudes and ideas.

The transformation of political orientations into the genre of the Baroque opera was by no means limited to purely proclamatory intentions. As a matter of fact the texts of the Arcadian poetry served for the entertainment of the aristocracy and were oriented by state authority and domination thinking. Of course the directions for the stage presentation embody or relate to particular court rituals. It is self-evident that the music is closely connected with the aristocratic ambiente of music entertainment.

Yet beyond this there is to be seen a much more differentiated form of reflection and manipulation in the Baroque operas, that thus probably mediated a clear-cut message also to the uneducated, yet even the more so to the aesthetically enlightened people of that time: with the help of and via symmetry.

An analysis of texts, stage directions (including the modes of presentation that have been handed down to us) and the music shows very clearly, how much the Baroque operas were shaped by the symmetrical impetus and how much they were carried by it dramaturgically. The symmetry is to be seen in the text and music structure in the horizontal and vertical arrangement as well as in the scenic presentation, which was obliged to the aristocratic ceremony.

The paper investigates selected examples of operas as to the variety of political manipulation on the Baroque opera stage in a dramaturgically oriented focus analysis of fundamental symmetrical structures, elucidating the philosophical, psychological and sociological issues and economic consequences, too.