



LAW AND CRIME IN THE OPERA

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RCSL WG „Law and Popular Culture“, 22 09 2021

Abstract

- Law and Crime in the Opera
- It is very typical of operas that the drama unfolds with transgression against the law and that character flaws and those of the society are revealed. Opera forms a very rich combination of theatre and music, drawing on orchestral music, song, acting, stage architecture, and a plethora of other dramaturgical devices. The resulting overwhelming effect on the audience may well balance out the pronounced artificiality of this form of art and leave a lasting message.

Studying crime/law and popular culture

- Interest in people's views on crime and the law
- As part of various indirect experiences with things legal, or crime, people are influenced by media products
- A good deal of media consumption is entertainment
- Some of which is „high-brow“ and comes with considerable prestige
- For example: opera

Opera

- Opera is one of the most prestigious and most complex forms of art
- It combines music and literature, acting and singing, stage and costume design, elaborate lighting and (for recorded opera) editing
- Due to its complexity, opera can offer a very immersive audience experience
- Opera is very much geared to portraying emotions and evoking emotional audience reactions
- Law and crime similarly evoke strong feelings
- As much as opera depends on the portrayal of law and crime for dramaturgical reason...
- ... it is also uniquely placed to convey an „understanding“ of law-related behaviour.





Book cover, Annunziata 2017

Private law in opera

- Some literature (e.g. Annunziata 2017, Annunziata and Colombo 2018)
- Often with legal history focus
 - How do operatic portrayals compare to the law, mainly of the time? (e.g. Annunziata 2017)
- Not much reference to socio-legal thought

Criminological analysis

- Only one more systematic criminological article so far: Lodewijk **Brunt** (English 2021)
 - Taking a clue from Conrad (1987) book "A Song of Love and Death. The Meaning of Opera".
- Opera heroes always in danger for dramaturgical reason (Brunt 2021, 72)
- "... an endless source of inspiration for a criminologist" (ibid., p. 76).
- Crime is related to **emotions and obsessions** (ibid., p. 82).
- "Crime clings to certain characters", it is "**personalized**" (ibid., 82, 85).
- Opera audience encounters "people who are part of violent situations" and are shaped by them.
- "... opera ... approaches the true emotional connotations of death, terror, and debauchery. ... opera reveals something about crime that cannot be found anywhere else in such a concentrated form" (ibid., 86).

Abuse of political power



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Scene from the opera „Khovanshchina“.

- Political scientist Bermbach's 1997 book title „Wo Macht ganz auf Verbrechen beruht. Politik und Gesellschaft in der Oper“
- Translated „**Where Power is Completely Based on Crime**. Politics and Society in the Opera“.

Our methods apply

- While there are special methods for the study of opera...
- ... methods of film and tv analysis developed by law in popular culture scholars can be usefully applied.
- Especially as the future of opera is increasingly recorded opera.
- Streamed opera and opera on DVD are edited versions, like a film!
- And modern opera has turned to more acting and action on stage.
- Leaving behind the static acting of the past.
- Become „music **theatre**“ again, with consequences for the audience.

Conclusion

- Yes, there is as much law in opera as in life and that is a lot (Tritter 2004, 12).
 - But opera seems especially geared to show enormous transgressions.
- The appeal to emotions is very strong.
- More than other media, thanks to the addition of music and singing, opera is able to make complex motivations and emotions very clear.
- **The immersion of the audience into the opera may leave a lasting effect on the audience.**
- Socio-legal scholars can learn from opera about behaviour in situations of extreme stress and emotional upheaval.

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THANK YOU VERY MUCH!