



“Law and War in the Opera”

Stefan Machura & John Cunningham

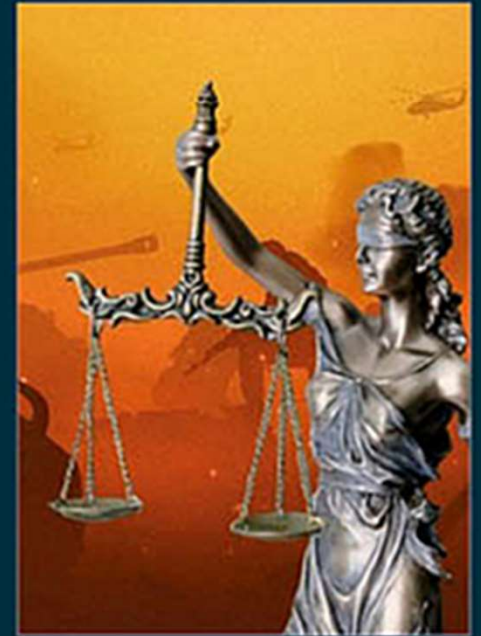
Bangor University


We are drawing on article in book:

Stefan Machura [Hrsg.]

Law and War
in Popular Culture

STAATSVERSTÄNDNISSE



 Nomos

Law and Crime in War

- Law does not stop in times of war.
- New conflicts to be regulated and decided, and special provisions brought in.
- In war, the military, other organisations, and individuals, may deviate from the normal paths of law.
- Transgressions can take particularly gruesome forms.
- Wars come with war crimes (Ann Ching).
- The horrors of war may wash away legal scruples, compassion with strangers and basic humanity.

Opera

- War as common theme - conflict means drama
- Opera 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 war for dramaturgical reason...
- ... it is also uniquely placed to convey an „understanding“ of human behaviour.

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).

Reading opera like a (law) film

- 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. [E.g. analysis scheme in Machura 2007]
- Especially as the future of opera is increasingly recorded opera.
- Streamed opera and opera on DVD are edited versions, like a film!
- Acting and action on stage.
- Become „music **theatre**“ again.
- Revealing patterns by comparing different stagings of an opera.

Abuse of political power



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Scene from the opera „Prince Igor“.

- Bermbach's 1997 book „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“.
- „Prince Igor“ (premiered 1890) depicts:
- The unpredictability of war for actors
- Emphasises a situation of chaos when an unworthy person usurps power - worse than the enemy!
- Also the need for Russians to be united under one leader.

Conclusion

- Yes, there is as much law and war in opera.
 - But opera seems especially geared to show egregious 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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Picture: <https://www.wipo.info/de/musik/baden-baden/badskilvesterkonzerte-39890/>, accessed 11 September 2021.