

a crisis of faith

towards a rethinking of the concept of *Werktreue*
in staging repertoire operas

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Abstract

This thesis proposes a rethinking of the concept of *Werktreue* in the context of staging repertoire operas, departing from the observation that the discourse on *Werktreue* and the closely related concept of *Regietheater* is unproductive and emotionally charged. The main problem within the discourse is argued to be that it is based on the presumption of a linear opposition between the two concepts, which can be demonstrated to be artificial. Through the hermeneutical model of the three worlds of a text, *Werktreue* and *Regietheater* are understood as dealing primarily with either the world *behind* the text or *in front of* the text. A case study is then examined, Graham Vick's 2018 staging of Mozart's opera *Die Zauberflöte* at the Macerata Opera Festival, through which is demonstrated that the supposed opposition between *Werktreue* and *Regietheater* is indeed artificial. Then, counterarguments are provided to *Werktreue*'s most recurring claims, and a new direction of thinking is proposed. Based on the previously introduced hermeneutical model, which is argued to be a triad conform Chiel Kattenbelt's definition, a new triad is devised of *Werktreue*, *Regietheater*, and *Aufführungspraxis* (the latter as a substitute for the world of the text in the original triad). The proposition resulting from this is to understand these concepts (and specifically *Werktreue*) as closely interrelated ideal types that don't exist separately identifiable in reality, countering their oppositional presupposition and resulting in a more productive basis for discourse. The practice of staging repertoire operas, it is argued, takes place in the interplay of these three concepts.

The image depicted on the front page of this thesis is a photograph by Alfredo Tabocchini of Graham Vick's 2018 staging of *Die Zauberflöte* at the Macerata Opera Festival, featuring Guido Loconsolo as Papageno and Valentina Mastrangelo as Pamina.

Foreword

What a year it has been.

When I first started thinking about my thesis, COVID-19 was as unknown to me as any fringe viral disease. Months and months later, how the world has changed. It has been a struggle for me to find out how working from home could work for me, and how I could manage my concentration and energy levels. This was not at all an easy feat; I had to rely on those skills that have always been challenging to me. Over this last period, I have time and again tried to grapple with these skills, employing new tactics and strategies and learning many, many things about myself along the road. Even more than an intellectual process, this was a personal one. I want to dedicate this space to the many people who were there for me in any capacity over the course of this process, and who have helped me come out better, stronger, and more self-aware.

First of all, I want to thank those most close to me: Arianne, Liza, Job, and Justin. Their constant support and warmth gave me a safe environment to grow in, and they encouraged me to share also my moments of doubt and dejection. (There were quite a few of those.) If it wasn't for them, I don't know where I would be now as a human being. I also want to thank my parents for being so supportive and encouraging, and my father for engaging in quite some in-depth conversations about hermeneutics and biblical studies. Many thanks also go to Karin, who has been instrumental in helping me figure out how this process could work for me, and how I could tackle my issues from a position of growth. To Nicolas, who in addition to a genuine friend is also unapologetically outspoken about opera and sat down with me to talk about what opera needs today – and to his wonderful husband Hanz. And, of course, to our lovely, fuzzy, sleepy cat Sjonnie.

I want to thank Chiel Kattenbelt for guiding me on this journey, for his patience and endurance, and for the personal moments we shared together. As frustrating as my process often was, I enjoyed having Chiel on the sidelines, rooting for me. There were always interesting conversations to be had about art and life. Both in a professional and a personal way, these brought me something. Also many thanks to Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink, who offered me support on several occasions and reminded me that inspiration comes from interaction and not from 'just thinking'. Furthermore, I want to thank my wonderful fellow MA students, who are each and all amazing specimens of human beings, for sharing with me moments of both inspiration and desperation, of accomplishment and crisis. I hope to see all of you again very soon.

Special thanks go to Zoe Renaud at De Munt / La Monnaie in Brussels, Isabel Kopf at Komische Oper Berlin, and Saskia de Jong Brons at Holland Opera for making video registrations of several performances available to me. To Wout van Tongeren at the National Opera & Ballet in

Amsterdam for setting up several connections. And to Florina Ionescu and Ulrich Schmidt at Birkhäuser Verlag for kindly providing me with a very relevant and helpful article by Ulrich Müller I couldn't find online.

Lastly, a word of appreciation for Slavoj Žižek, who stated in a documentary that he despises writing, and that he therefore never begins to 'write'; instead, he tells himself he's just jotting down rough ideas in the form of a note to elaborate on later, stringing on page after page until there suddenly *is* a book. At moments where I struggled to get anything on paper at all, I used his mindset to get things done. (I do hope however that my thesis is a bit more readable than his works.)

Well, what a year it has been. Now, 1.621 sticky notes, 62 Word documents, and 37 new beginnings later, it is time to reflect on the growth this year has brought me. Now is also the moment to finally peel myself off of my laptop screen, step outside again, and soak up the lovely summer sun.

Table of contents

1. Introduction.....	1
1.1 Research question and methodology	4
2. Regietheater and Werktreue	7
2.1 Regietheater.....	7
2.2 Werktreue.....	13
2.3 Hermeneutics and opera: three worlds of the operatic text.....	15
2.4 Conclusion	20
3. The dichotomy in practice.....	21
3.1 Mozart's <i>Zauberflöte</i>	21
3.2 Vick's <i>Flauto Magico</i>	25
3.3 Into the case study.....	27
3.4 Conclusion	35
4. A step forward.....	37
4.1 A critique on Werktreue	37
4.2 The third world: a new triadic model.....	44
4.3 Conclusion: towards a rethinking of Werktreue.....	47
5. Conclusion.....	49
5.1 Conclusion	49
5.2 Discussion.....	51
5.3 Suggestions for further research.....	52
5.4 Closing remarks.....	53
Bibliography.....	54
Appendix.....	56
Synopsis	56
Cast & crew	58

1. Introduction

Opera is a singular art form. There are few forms of (especially performative) art that are still as caught up in history and tradition as opera, and in which progress seems to go so slowly. Historicity permeates this art form: from its original conception in 17th Century Italy, it has always been cloaked in the foggy mystery of antiquity. Since the Camerata Fiorentina was established in late sixteenth Century Florence and the first operas were getting composed, its business was always the enactment of imagined history. The contents of the first operas were mythological and in that sense historical (drawing on the myths of Daphne, Orpheus and others), but the art form in itself was also the resurrection of an art form gone extinct. This leads Slavoj Žižek and Mladen Dolar to an astute and exciting observation:

...from its very beginning, opera was dead, a stillborn child of musical art. One of the standard complaints about opera today is that it is obsolete, no longer really alive (...). Instead of denying the charge, one should undermine it by radicalizing it: opera *never* was in accord with its time (...). To put it in Hegelese, opera is outdated in its very concept. How, then, can one not love it?¹

When compared to recent developments in (Western) theater and dance, opera seems to lag behind. Theater has seen a significant development in the approach to staging repertoire plays in the last seventy years or so, during which conventions and norms have shifted immensely. Nowadays it might be more exception than rule to see Hamlet performed by a man who in all aspects looks as if he could be a Danish prince pondering his existence. *Hamlets* have been staged in which the central character is performed by a woman, multiple performers, or even a robot.² In opera however, conductor Erin Helyard notes, similar experimental stagings of repertoire works are usually quite controversial.³ It is almost a sport to express dismay about new stagings of repertoire operas and subject them to harsh judgment. There always seems to be a strict and very clear idea of the ‘correct’ way to stage an opera – and all other ways are deemed simply wrong.

Particularly caught in the crosshairs of criticism is the notion of Regietheater, a practice of staging opera in a way that affords the director many liberties to alter the opera as they seem fit, in order to find new meanings in its staging. Critics of Regietheater cast their judgment often

¹ Slavoj Žižek and Mladen Dolar, *Opera's Second Death* (New York and Oxon: Routledge, 2002), viii-ix.

² The project referred to is the short film *Machine-Hamlet: To be, or not to be* by director Louise LePage. More information: <https://www.robottheatre.co.uk/machine-hamlet-film>.

³ Erin Helyard, “Opera Column: In defence of Regietheater,” published May 28, 2012, <https://www.limelightmagazine.com.au/features/opera-column-in-defence-of-regietheater/>.

quite crudely, ascribing very negative qualities to particularly its 'extremes.' In an inflammatory and influential 2007 article called "The Abduction of Opera," critic Heather Mac Donald goes head-on with it:

The reign of Regietheater in Europe is one of the most depressing artistic developments of our time; it suggests a culture that cannot tolerate its own legacy of beauty and nobility.⁴

Mac Donald is somewhat of an icon in the effort against Regietheater. Opera critic and fervent blogger Olivier Keegel regularly publishes articles on opera development and reviews of performances, in which he laments a contemporary practice of staging opera in which not the music, but the personal beliefs (and traumas) of the director take center stage. Keegel, echoing Mac Donald, charges that the 'cartel of Regietheater directors' lack imagination or meaningful talent of their own and are therefore dependent on the existing repertoire.⁵ Mac Donald states it even more crudely:

The dirty little secret of Regietheater is this: its practitioners know that no one will bother to show up for their drearily conventional political cant unless they ride parasitically on the backs of geniuses.⁶

Critics of Regietheater commonly (implicitly or explicitly) defend principles corresponding to those associated with the concept of *Werktreue*. *Werktreue*, briefly put, is the idea of being 'loyal' to an opera 'as it is' and respecting the composer and librettist's intentions when staging it. Writing about the discussion on *Werktreue* and Regietheater, *Werktreue* critic and Theater Studies Professor Christopher Balme states that this should not be seen as merely an aesthetic discussion, but also

...als Glaubenskrieg (...), bei dem über Fragen der Auslegung der heiligen Texte so intensiv gerungen wurde wie zu Luthers Zeiten.⁷

⁴ Heather Mac Donald, "The Abduction of Opera: Can the Met stand firm against the trashy productions of trendy nihilists?", *City Journal* 17, no. 3 (Summer 2007), <https://www.city-journal.org/html/abduction-opera-13034.html>.

⁵ Olivier Keegel, "The Non-Idiot's Guide to Opera (English version)," *Opera Gazet*, published May 1, 2020, <https://operagazet.com/operanieuws/the-non-idiots-guide-to-opera-english-version/>.

⁶ Mac Donald, "The Abduction of Opera," 9.

⁷ Christopher Balme, "Werktreue: Aufstieg und Niedergang eines fundamentalistischen Begriffs," in *Regietheater! Wie sich über Inszenierungen streiten lässt*, ed. Ortrud Gutjahr (Würzburg: Verlag Königshausen & Neumann GmbH, 2008), 47. My translation underneath.

...as a crisis of faith, in which the battle about questions surrounding the interpretation of holy texts is fought as intensely as in Luther's times.

Balme's article serves as another example of how the discourse surrounding Werktreue and Regietheater is inflammatory, entrenched and heated. Werktreue is described as 'fundamentalist,' Regietheater as 'trendy nihilism' that is 'abducting opera'. The middle ground seems miles away.

Precisely this heated and destructive discourse is what my research is all about. The way Regietheater and Werktreue are understood in this discourse seems to me problematic: both are seen in black-and-white vision and oversimplified, just to make a point. The resulting premise on which this whole discourse is based is that Regietheater and Werktreue are linear opposites. I will argue that this premise is nothing more than prejudice, and that these concepts are not miles apart, but actually very closely interrelated. In this thesis, I will examine these concepts both in a theoretical and a practical context. I will substantiate my claim that they are interrelated and propose new ways of thinking about Werktreue specifically.

That some kind of change is needed in this discourse is also described by Medieval German Literature Professor Ulrich Müller, who argues that we desperately need emotions to de-escalate and that the discussion needs to become more objective.⁸ Seeing the linear opposition between Werktreue and Regietheater as imagined might be helpful for this. This is not necessarily a new idea: Theater Studies Professor Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe for instance offers a useful introduction on this way of thinking. In a chapter of the book *Music on Stage* he examines Werktreue and Regietheater, drawing the conclusion that upon closer inspection these concepts

appear to be less of binary opposites than much discussion seems to imply. Both have at their heart the desire to bring the opera in question as close as possible to the spectator, to engage the spectators, to make them relate to the opera, be that by feeling uplifted by the beauty and sublime nature of the work (...), or by thinking critically about the opera and the contemporary relevance of its contents (...).⁹

Meyer-Dinkgräfe goes on to state the following, which puts into words concretely the relevance of my research:

⁸ Ulrich Müller, "Werktreue, Originalklang, Regietheater," *Österreichische Musikzeitschrift* 59, no. 7 (2004): 18.

⁹ Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe, "Werktreue and Regieoper," in *Music on Stage*, ed. Fiona Schopf (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 18. EBSCOhost.

The terms and related concepts of *Regieoper* and *Werktreue* do not serve much purpose any more for discussion and critical analysis of opera productions as long as they are used in their conventional connotations as binary opposites.¹⁰

1.1 Research question and methodology

In this thesis I argue that the linear opposition between *Werktreue* and *Regietheater* as established in the surrounding discourse is at least to some extent imagined and made to seem larger than necessary or logical. To arrive at this conclusion my research questions are set up as follows:

How can a critical approach to the presupposed linear opposition between *Werktreue* and *Regietheater* lead to a more productive rethinking of *Werktreue* in the context of the staging practice of repertoire operas?

1. What are the core principles of *Werktreue* and *Regietheater* as they are understood in their current discourse?
2. How can Graham Vick's 2018 staging of Mozart's opera *Die Zauberflöte* help to demonstrate the problematic artificiality of the *Werktreue*-*Regietheater* opposition?
3. How can thinking in terms of triads help to move towards a more productive rethinking of *Werktreue*?

These questions structure the coming chapters. To answer them, I firstly examine in Chapter 2 how the notions of *Werktreue* and *Regietheater* emerged and evolved over the years. For this I employ literature research, making use of the extensive discourse that is available both online and in print. Secondly, I compare how the concepts approach opera stagings. I draw upon a hermeneutical conception of the interpretation of text in three worlds, which I will elaborate on later. The conception of these three worlds allows me to examine *Werktreue* and *Regietheater* as different approaches to the operatic 'text' with distinct underlying assumptions and a different placement of the locus of meaning. In other words, it functions as a lens to better understand the concepts. To me, there is a clear analogy between the world *behind* the text (very closely related to author-centered hermeneutics) and *Werktreue* on the one hand, and the world *in front of* the text (closely related to reader-centered hermeneutics) and *Regietheater* on the other. Through this comparison I arrive at the extraction of a set of principles for both concepts.

¹⁰ Meyer-Dinkgräfe, "*Werktreue* and *Regieoper*," 26. Italics by the original author.

In Chapter 3 I apply the insights and extracted principles to a case study, Graham Vick's 2018 staging of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* at the Macerata Opera Festival in Italy.¹¹ With concrete examples from that performance I demonstrate my argument that *Werktreue* and *Regietheater* are closely interrelated, and that they converge in practice. The result is somewhat of a dramaturgical analysis, by which I mean that I analyze Vick's staging choices in comparison to Mozart and Schikaneder's original score.¹² Through this, I examine to what extent they comply with *Werktreue* and *Regietheater* principles, demonstrating how the hermetic distinction between these two concepts is impossible in practice.

In Chapter 4 I revisit how practical examples destabilize the *Werktreue*-*Regietheater* opposition. That forms the starting point for my proposal for a rethinking of *Werktreue*. I counter some of the most recurring *Werktreue* claims, with validation from citations from relevant literature. I then revisit the model of the three worlds of a text, based upon which I devise a triadic model in which *Werktreue* and *Regietheater* take place alongside the idea of *Aufführungspraxis* (staging practice and conventions). With this new model *Werktreue* can be untethered from its affiliation with tradition and convention, which invites a more constructive rethinking of the concept. Furthermore, I propose to see *Werktreue* as an ideal type instead of as a practical and attainable goal in staging opera.

The core argument I make in my conclusion is that the linear opposition between *Werktreue* and *Regietheater* is indeed artificial. I summarize my findings and stress once more the importance of rethinking *Werktreue*. I conclude how the triad of *Werktreue*-*Regietheater*-*Aufführungspraxis* helps to move towards this rethinking, while also acknowledging the long road ahead. I then provide suggestions for further research.

Before we start

A minor remark is to be made regarding the use of the terms *Regietheater* and *Regieoper*, which are both present in this thesis. In practice they are interchangeable and (almost exclusively) specific to the field of opera. For clarity I have chosen to consistently use the term *Regietheater*, with the exception of direct citations in which *Regieoper* is used.

It is furthermore important to note here that the discourse surrounding *Werktreue* and *Regietheater* focuses on the staging of well-established and relatively well-known repertoire operas. Statements I make on opera and operatic practice throughout this thesis are, unless

¹¹ Please note that due to licensing limitations, the video registration for this performance is scheduled to be removed from YouTube as soon as July 8, 2021.

¹² The score I employ is the Bärenreiter Urtext, which contains the full music, words, and stage directions as used at *Die Zauberflöte*'s first performance.

otherwise contextualized, also focused on this particular (if ubiquitous) part of the realm of staging opera.

One final note. This thesis is about finding ways to cool down a heated discourse and finding a more constructive understanding of a commonly used term. The observation I make is that the discourse is unconstructive as it is right now, and that a more in-depth (and perhaps intelligent) discourse might be achieved by rethinking *Werktreue*. I do not however want to move towards a frictionless, consensus-based discourse. Friction and disagreement are key to progress, I feel, and certainly in opera there should be a place for these. What I propose is to find more clarity in the disagreement, without wanting to smooth out all wrinkles. After all, as Garrett Harris puts it:

Will opera lovers agree on the merits of the future? No. Of course not. It's opera.¹³

¹³ Garrett Harris, "Pavarotti hurt opera more than he helped it," *San Diego Reader*, December 18, 2020, <https://www.sandiegoreader.com/news/2020/dec/18/classical-pavarotti-hurt-opera-more-he-helped-it/>.

2. Regietheater and Werktreue

In this chapter, I first examine how the concepts of Werktreue and Regietheater emerged in the operatic discourse in Germany from the beginning of the twentieth century, but particularly from the 1950s onward. I demonstrate how Regietheater was a critical reaction to ruling staging conventions in a time that called for opera (and specifically Richard Wagner's oeuvre) to be reclaimed from fascist and Nazi appropriation. Counterpart to that, I describe how the already existing concept of Werktreue became the guiding principle for critics of Regietheater and thus gained new meaning and importance.

Secondly, in this chapter I distill as much as possible a set of guiding principles for both Werktreue and Regietheater. I concretize these principles by employing the hermeneutical model of the three worlds of a text and using it as a lens to discern how they engage with the operatic text. I use the resulting principles in the next chapter to demonstrate my claim that Werktreue and Regietheater are not at all the linear opposites they are made out to be, but that they are intricately linked to each other.

2.1 Regietheater

Regietheater is an approach to staging repertoire opera that acknowledges the director as the 'primary creator' of a staged opera, foregrounding their agency. Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe describes that it "places emphasis on the ideas that the director develops inspired by, and in relation to the combination of libretto and score."¹⁴ It centralizes around the notion that the director has the liberty of reimagining well-known operas to find new meaning within them. A recurring theme is the rejection of convention and tradition in lieu of experiment and innovation. Meyer-Dinkgräfe, following amongst others Ortrud Gutjahr, states that Regietheater

should be understood as the director's attempt to enable the audience, through their work, to think about the issues presented in the opera for themselves in a contemporary context. [It] implies a new role for the director, close to that of an author; rather than reconstructing and interpreting an opera that claims sacrosanct status, directors develop a new conceptualization of the stage experience, in which the opera hypertext is exposed to multiple exchanges with discourses, arts and media.¹⁵

¹⁴ Meyer-Dinkgräfe, "Werktreue and Regieoper," 8.

¹⁵ Meyer-Dinkgräfe, "Werktreue and Regieoper," 15-16.

Professor of Medieval German Literature Ulrich Müller describes how in Regietheater (in a broad sense) the director at least ranks equal to the original authors (composer and librettist) in creating a performance, most often together with the set designer.¹⁶ Specific to opera, Müller writes, this means

...dass der Regisseur und sein Team aus dem durch Librettist und Komponist Vorgegebenen ein ihrer Interpretation nach aktualisiertes, neues und im Extrem anderes Werk schaffen, und zwar aufgrund unterschiedlicher Ansätze und Methoden.¹⁷

...that the director and his team, through their interpretation of what is given by librettist and composer, create an actualized, new and extremely different work, based on varying approaches and methods.

This notion of a ‘new work’ being created through the staging of an existing opera resounds in the writings of theater scholar Clemens Risi. Risi places emphasis on Regietheater’s ‘intellectual engagement with new readings and interpretations’ in which the meaning of repertoire operas is continuously questioned and reimagined:

...these are in general well-known ‘works’—the works of the classical operatic canon—that regulate the question of authorship through the two poles of composer and director, while producing a horizon of expectation located between recognition and surprise through divergence.¹⁸

The term Regietheater is also often used with a negative connotation. Conductor Erin Helyard writes in a 2012 column that

...*Regietheater* is generally used in a negative sense to describe theatrical productions in which the director radically alters the original setting of the libretto or play and in doing so essentially restages the work, ignoring or suppressing elements of the original stage directions.¹⁹

¹⁶ Müller, “Werktreue, Originalklang, Regietheater,” 13.

¹⁷ Ibidem. My translation underneath.

¹⁸ Clemens Risi, “Opera in Performance,” *The Opera Quarterly* 35, no. 1-2 (Winter-Spring 2019), 8. Oxford Academic.

¹⁹ Helyard, “Opera Column.”

Müller also refers to the usage of Regietheater as a provocative term, and argues that writing about Regietheater is particularly complicated because there are varying understandings of the term itself:

On the one hand, *Regietheater* generally implies that *Regie* is as important as the text and the music; on the other, there is an understanding of the term reserved primarily for provocative or disparaging purposes: a type of *Regie* that seeks to dominate the drama, to deconstruct it, to question it, even to transform the story and/or interpret it in a new way.²⁰

The discourse, it becomes more apparent, is unclear in its definitions. To understand why Regietheater is seen as the rebel child of opera we need to trace it back to the place of its birth: post World War II Germany.

Historical development

In *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*, Ulrich Müller describes how the first forms of what would eventually become Regietheater emerged in German-speaking countries in the beginning of the twentieth century.²¹ Renouncing the established bourgeois theater with its Romantic acting and singing style, several directors took on staging operas in a more experimental manner. Instead of realistic scenery and lighting, a more abstract imagery was used and symbolism came to replace literal mimesis. Müller describes a wide and increasingly international emergence of Regietheater and mentions several notable directors and festivals organized in the spirit of this development; for opera, Adolphe Appia (see figure 1) and Edward Gordon Craig are amongst the most noteworthy of early Regietheater directors. Compared to what would become Regietheater after the Second World War, these developments were rather unintrusive. Although they gained quite some traction, this ended abruptly when the national socialist dictatorship of Adolf Hitler became established in 1933.

²⁰ Ulrich Müller, "Regietheater/Director's Theater," in *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*, ed. Helen M. Greenwald (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 582. Italics by the original author.

²¹ Müller, "Regietheater/Director's Theater," 584-585.



Figure 1: A photograph of Adolphe Appia's stage design for Gluck's opera *Orfeo ed Euridice* at the Festspielhaus Hellerau in 1913: clearly a non-romantic design, and a precursor of what would become Regietheater. Obtained from Rachel Hann, "Dwelling in light and sound: An intermedial site for digital opera," *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media* 8, no 1 (January 2014): 61-78.

After 1945, war-torn Europe was set on redefining its cultural frameworks and reimagining the future. Müller describes how from about 1951 onwards a new development of Regietheater takes flight, starting from one of opera's epicenters: Richard Wagner's Bayreuther Festspiele.²² Since its first edition in 1876, this annual festival takes place at the illustrious Bayreuther Festspielhaus, commissioned by composer Richard Wagner and built specifically to his needs and visions. In that year, Wagner's impressive feat of composition named *Der Ring des Nibelungen* – a cycle of four operas stretching more or less fifteen hours of performance – premiered in its entirety after a composition process of twenty-six years.²³ Seventy-five years later, the composer's grandson Wieland Wagner, together with his brother Wolfgang, oversaw the now world-famous festival that to this day continues to present Wagner's operas after his death.²⁴

²² Müller, "Werktreue, Originalklang, Regietheater," 10.

²³ It is noteworthy that while the complete cycle premiered in 1876, some of the operas of which it consists had already been finished and performed earlier as standalone productions.

²⁴ The Bayreuther Festspiele is as fascinating as it is famous with opera enthusiasts. The festival is dedicated only to the work of Richard Wagner, and the Festspielhaus is constructed to the specific vision of Wagner himself, with room for orchestras of extraordinary sizes and large sets and machinery.

When Wieland Wagner in 1951 took the reins of the festival, his grandfather's oeuvre had been undeniably tainted by the claim that the Nazi elite put on it. When he took to staging those operas himself, he made a clear shift away from the ruling staging conventions and aesthetic of the time. Müller describes his work as 'revolutionary, reductionist stagings,' spurring heated debates and ideological confrontations.²⁵ Dismissing the conventional ornate sets and costumes, Wagner opted instead for an (almost) empty stage dressed with lights and a large cyclorama, in the middle of which often a central disc was placed.²⁶ Shunning a romantic and illustrative conception of opera, Wagner proposed a new form for staging opera and reclaiming his grandfather's work "by clearing the stage – and also trying to clear out the former dreadful affiliation with the ideology of National Socialism."²⁷



Figure 2: A photograph of Wieland Wagner's 1952 staging of Siegfried, the third opera of the Ring des Nibelungen. The minimal use of scenery, costumes, and props is characteristic of Wagner's 'Neu-Bayreuth style.' Obtained from Pinterest, <https://nl.pinterest.com/pin/361976888777315430/>.

²⁵ Müller, "Werktreue, Originalklang, Regietheater," 10.

²⁶ Müller, "Regietheater/Director's Theater," 585.

²⁷ Ibidem.

Since 1951 a lot has changed. According to Müller, Regietheater as it is used in contemporary discourse has developed into new meaning:

Modern use of the term *Regietheater* (...) means something quite different: productions in which the director and his team present the drama or musical theater in what is often a surprisingly new and often provocative manner, specifically the director's personal interpretation of the drama to a modern audience.²⁸

At the shared fundament of the varying types of Regietheater that Müller differentiates lies the notion of subtext: "one or more parallel texts or messages that lie below the surface of the manifest text (...)." ²⁹ Müller further describes subtext as a bundle of associations that is evoked by perceiving and recognizing a world on stage. This is a highly individual and subjective interplay between spectator and performance, and so it is impossible to define 'the' subtext of an opera. Müller argues that directors can choose to appeal to different subtexts and leave others open, choosing a particular focal point that allows them to reimagine the opera. This is especially the case for Regietheater directors.

Müller separates the ambiguous subtext from the 'surface of the plot' (*Handlungsoberfläche*), demonstrating how directors in Germany after the Second World War have aimed to reimagine operas and change their original course of action through their conceptual interpretation.³⁰ He describes how directors such as Ulrich Melchinger and Joachim Herz have been of great influence on the reconstruction of the German opera field after the war, when they staged operas in a way to (literally) display the circumstances of their creation and reception – thus exposing how these operas were expressions of ideologies and political convictions in themselves. Other efforts, following a similar direction, aimed to actualize opera stagings by directly referencing contemporary situations, for instance shifting the place of action in Beethoven's *Fidelio* to the Berlin wall. Other efforts again created more tension between the plot and its subtext by reimagining the narrative of the opera as being a dream, vision or memory of (one of) the characters. Müller gives the example of Jean-Pierre Ponnelles' staging of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, in which *Isolde's Liebestod* – the highly meaningful and extremely moving final aria of the opera, during which one of its main characters dies of sorrow – was reimagined as 'merely' a vision of Tristan, her lover.³¹ Again other efforts would, through a

²⁸ Müller, "Regietheater/Director's Theater," 586. Italics by the original author.

²⁹ Müller, "Regietheater/Director's Theater," 591.

³⁰ Müller, "Werktreue, Originalklang, Regietheater," 15-17.

³¹ For those unfamiliar with this aria, I would recommend listening to Waltraud Meier's rendition: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gbbEBt5mP6w>.

deliberate choice of subtext and interpretation, aim to deconstruct and even denounce (parts of) an opera. The shared characteristic of these efforts is that they reflect on the opera itself *through* staging.

Müller argues that the great difference in appreciation of Regietheater stagings derives mostly from the fact that the matter of subtext is fundamentally personal and subjective: “there is no right or wrong, only agreement or disagreement.”³² Overall, the term Regietheater in a modern context refers to “re-interpretations, deconstructions, and stagings of subtext by directors of the last few decades.”³³

2.2 Werktreue

Werktreue is widely regarded as the antithesis to Regietheater. This approach to staging opera, Meyer-Dinkgräfe states, “can be understood as the director’s commitment to do as much justice as possible to the perceived intentions of the composer and librettist (...).”³⁴ It centers around the appreciation of convention and tradition and the honoring of great composers long gone. Underlying this approach is the conception of a ‘true essence’ residing within an opera that should be made perceivable to the spectator by staging it ‘as it is.’

The artistic process that Werktreue envisions bears a clear power dynamic: the composer and librettist are the primary creators of the opera and their ideas should therefore not be subverted. Meyer-Dinkgräfe argues that in this approach, “the director’s role is to express for the audience the author’s perceived intentions without any conceptual superimposition of their own.”³⁵ This viewpoint was expressed by E. T. A. Hoffman long before the emergence of Regietheater, who stated that the genuine artist

...lives only for the work, which he understands as the composer understood it and which he now performs. He does not make his personality count in any way. All his thoughts and actions are directed towards bringing into being all the wonderful, enchanting pictures and impressions the composer sealed in his work with magical power.³⁶

³² Müller, “*Regietheater/Director’s Theater*,” 591.

³³ Müller, “*Regietheater/Director’s Theater*,” 592.

³⁴ Meyer-Dinkgräfe, “*Werktreue and Regieoper*,” 8.

³⁵ Meyer-Dinkgräfe, “*Werktreue and Regieoper*,” 9.

³⁶ E.T.A. Hoffmann, as cited in Lydia Goehr, *Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 1. Oxford Scholarship Online.

One of the most vocal contemporary advocates of *Werktreue* is American attorney and political commentator Heather Mac Donald. In an influential and often-cited 2007 article in *City Journal* she ponders the fate of the New York Metropolitan Opera under its new management. More than a case study, the article is a strong condemnation of Regietheater and an appeal to new general manager Peter Gelb to stand his ground “against the trashy productions of trendy nihilists.”³⁷ Right away in the opening paragraph, Mac Donald states that a new generation of European opera directors ‘know better than Mozart what an opera should contain,’ referring to the many liberties taken in certain stagings of well-known operas.

While the article by Heather Mac Donald is mostly a dismissal of Regietheater, it also contains an insight into how opera *should* be staged according to the author. One important quality of opera that is impaired in Regietheater, Mac Donald argues, is that of being a ‘precious window into the past’. She describes the primary obligation of opera directors as ‘lovingly preserving and transmitting the works of the past,’ in a role that is more curating than creating. After all, opera stagings should “allow the beauty of some of the most powerful music ever written to shine forth.”

According to Meyer-Dinkgräfe, one of the first proponents of *Werktreue* was German actor and theater director Gustaf Gründgens. In 1948, he argued in favor of *Werktreue* productions, stating that they should “interpret the play as it was intended by the author.”³⁸ The creativity of the director, Meyer-Dinkgräfe summarizes, should lie in the endeavor to display on stage the intentions and vision of the original creator. Gründgens then states that

...it is not important whether productions are good or bad, but whether they are right or wrong – whether it is possible to recognise, unambiguously, a specific play even if the production is only of moderate quality, or whether all that is recognisable as the director’s vanity and ignorance.³⁹

The notion first emerged in Germany in the middle of the twentieth century and was initially only used in a musicological discourse.⁴⁰ Its application to the staging practice of opera came later, and as a response to the emergence of Regietheater. When Wieland Wagner introduced his radically new style of staging opera in the 1950s, *Werktreue* became the clear guiding principle

³⁷ Mac Donald, “The Abduction of Opera.”

³⁸ Meyer-Dinkgräfe, “*Werktreue* and *Regieoper*,” 17.

³⁹ Meyer-Dinkgräfe, “*Werktreue* and *Regieoper*,” 18.

⁴⁰ Balme, “*Werktreue*,” 45.

of those who opposed Regietheater.⁴¹ Gundula Kreuzer and Clemens Risi describe how Werktreue became called for by critics of Regietheater

...on *all* levels of production, including direction; thus they suggest that each work carries at least a minimum sense of how it should generate meaning and what it should look like in production, and that this sense should be adhered to.⁴²

Gründgen's claim that a production should not be judged on whether it's good or not, but on whether it's right or wrong could well be seen to characterize the general Werktreue attitude. This is where the discourse runs aground: it seems to be guided by the search who's right in the discussion. The truly relevant and helpful questions of course are much different.

2.3 Hermeneutics and opera: three worlds of the operatic text

In order to examine the notions of Werktreue and Regietheater as separate but closely interrelated approaches to staging opera, I employ a way of thinking that is rooted in hermeneutics. In this subchapter I offer a concise introduction to the model of the three worlds of a text. I draw parallels between the world *behind* the text (based in author-centered hermeneutics) and Werktreue, and between the world *in front of* the text (based in reader-centered hermeneutics) and Regietheater. I then translate how these two worlds might take form when applied to opera. In order to make this more practical and concrete, I illustrate each point with an application to Mozart's opera *Die Zauberflöte*, since this also constitutes the case study I examine in Chapter 3. I conclude each part with an extraction of set of principles I believe to be guiding either Werktreue or Regietheater.

Three worlds

Professor W. Randolph Tate summarizes hermeneutics as "the study of the locus of meaning and the principles of interpretation."⁴³ In his 2011 book *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach*, Tate describes how hermeneutics scholars have strongly differing views on how

⁴¹ Müller, "Regietheater/Director's Theater," 590.

⁴² Gundula Kreuzer and Clemens Risi, "Regietheater in Transition: An Introduction to Barbara Beyer's "Interviews with Contemporary Opera Directors," *The Opera Quarterly* 27, no. 2-3 (Spring-Summer 2011): 304. Oxford Academic. Italics by the original authors.

⁴³ W. Randolph Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 1.

literary meaning is extracted from a text through interpretation.⁴⁴ The different views on how this meaning is to be found can be divided into three distinct points of view, Tate argues:

...author-centered (with attention directed to the world behind the text), *text-centered* (with the focus on the world within the text, or the textual world), and *reader-centered* (where the spotlight is trained upon the world in front of the text, or the reader's world).⁴⁵

The conception of these three worlds of a text can in itself be seen as a model and is mostly used in biblical studies. In that context, biblical scholar D. Andrew Kille summarizes the three worlds as follows:

The world *behind* the text includes the context in which a text arose— historical situations, the world of the authors and their communities. The world *of* the text includes the structures of narrative, characterization and use of language. The world *in front of* the text is that imaginative dialogue in which the reader interacts with the text in the effort to understand it.⁴⁶

The hermeneutical endeavor to 'find meaning' is particularly congruent with the discourse on *Werktreue* and *Regietheater*, which is certainly centered around this same notion. By drawing a parallel between two of the three worlds and these concepts, I can better understand and concretize the guiding principles underlying them. The parallels I propose are between the world *behind* the text and *Werktreue*, and between the world *in front of* the text and *Regietheater*. For now, I omit the world *of* the text since there is not immediately a clear parallel to be drawn. This brings to the fore relevant (and as of yet unanswered) questions on how we could understand this third world in the context of opera. These and more questions will take center stage in Chapter 4, in which this hermeneutical model will prove even more helpful.

The world behind the text (author-centered hermeneutics) & *Werktreue*

The first parallel I draw is between the world *behind* the text and the concept of *Werktreue*. W. Randolph Tate describes how the author-centered approach in hermeneutics places the locus of meaning in the original intentions of the author, as "formulated in terms of [their] social, political, cultural, and ideological matrix (...)." ⁴⁷ This historical-critical method is based on the

⁴⁴ Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 1-2.

⁴⁵ Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 2. Italics by the original author.

⁴⁶ D. Andrew Kille, "Psychology and the Bible: Three Worlds of the Text," *Pastoral Psychology* 51, no. 2 (November 2002): 129. SpringerLink. Italics by the original author.

⁴⁷ Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 2-3.

assumption that the text contains a core meaning that can only be ascertained through immersion into the author's world and the context in which the text was created. This context contains, among other influences, the author's contemporary social conventions and taboos. Another key element in consideration is the author's 'psychological makeup' and how this informs our understanding of his work. These elements all constitute the world *behind* the text. Werktreue can be seen as placing primacy on this world as well. The world behind the text, when I apply it to opera, refers to the historical, societal, and personal context in which the opera was created. Through understanding this world, the original intentions of composer and librettist can be discerned.

For example: to understand the circumstances in which *Die Zauberflöte* was created, it is important to understand the cultural and religious context of the time. Both composer Mozart and librettist Schikaneder were members of the Freemasonry and believed strongly in its ideals of enlightenment, freedom, truth and development.⁴⁸ These themes are evidently expressed in the opera's allegorical narrative in which wisdom, truth, and personal growth are attained through the withstanding of ordeals and temptation, at the end of which the force of light of Sarastro prevails over the force of darkness of the Queen of the Night.⁴⁹ In order to understand the significance of the chosen narrative and themes, some insight into Freemason symbolism and ideology is helpful.

The parallel between the world behind the text and Werktreue checks out. Werktreue places emphasis on the original conception of an opera and the composer and librettist's original intentions; primacy lies with how the opera was originally envisioned. This sense of originality resonates in the Werktreue advocate's argument that the director shouldn't think they are 'more than Mozart', but that they should follow his intentions.

This results in the following practical principles:

- Staging choices are made in a way as to follow and constitute the composer and librettist's original intentions and visions of the opera as much as possible;

⁴⁸ Burton D. Fisher, ed., *Mozart's The Magic Flute*, Opera Classics Library Series (Boca Raton: Opera Journeys Publishing, 2001), 9. ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁴⁹ For a concise introduction on how Masonic symbolism is expressed in *Die Zauberflöte*, see Tjeu van den Berk, "Muziek voor een alchemische bruiloft," in *Mozart's Zauberflöte: Het alchemisch proces in de tempel van inwijding* (Haarlem: Rozekruis Pers, 2017), 9-18. Furthermore, see the appendix of this thesis for a plot summary of *Die Zauberflöte*.

- The opera is staged in its entirety and according to its own internal logic, meaning that parts of the opera that might be perceived as antithetical to contemporary frames of reference or values are presented 'as they are' nevertheless;
- The staged opera steers clear from overt political motives and messages and instead focuses on its own contents;
- All staging choices are congruent with the source material; the staging is never a critical reflection on the opera itself;
- The composer and librettist are the primary creators of the staged opera.

The world in front of the text (reader-centered hermeneutics) and Regietheater

The second parallel I draw is between the world *in front of* the text and Regietheater. According to Tate, reader-centered hermeneutics put the locus of meaning in the interaction between reader and text.⁵⁰ Through this interaction, the reader 'actualizes the meaning that is only potential in the text.' Within the constraints and limitations of the text as imposed by the author, the reader makes sense of it shaped by their own frame of reference, interests and presuppositions. While this approach puts the reader in a central position, it does not exclude the author fully from the process of meaning-making. What it does imply is that the author's original intentions aren't as crucial as is understood in author-centered hermeneutics. In this approach, Tate states, meaning "is an invention by the reader in collaboration with the text rather than the intention of the author."⁵¹

In the context of opera, this entails the way we make sense of an opera from a contemporary point of view. Contemporary frames of reference and conceptions on how meaning is constructed in our day and age inform how the director interprets and stages the opera. One key aspect of the world in front of the text as I apply it to opera stagings lies in those areas where the contents of the opera conflict with our contemporary values and world views. There are quite some examples of repertoire operas that contain themes and expressions that could be considered problematic and controversial from a contemporary point of view. Since these are most often in a sense artefacts from a different world in a different time, it is only logical that there comes a time where they no longer align with our ever shifting and evolving

⁵⁰ Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 4-5.

⁵¹ Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 5.

understanding of the world around us. While this process likely takes place in different ways and paces depending on where you examine it, it is certain that it leads to conflicts – and perhaps some cognitive dissonance – in a Western-European context. The following serves as an illustration of my point.

Die Zauberflöte is a textbook example of a beloved opera that is nevertheless often considered problematic in its content matter. Many authors suggest that the opera carries distinct notes of misogyny and racism that might be historically explainable, but are seen as hurtful and undesirable on the twenty-first century stage. Burton D. Fisher describes how Mozart presents women in several of his operas as fickle, untrustworthy and fundamentally unfaithful.⁵² In *Die Zauberflöte* for instance, the priest Sarastro, when he admits Tamino and Pamina into his order, states that Pamina needs the leadership of her man to substitute her mother's.⁵³ There are more suchlike statements that clearly envision women to be dependent of men for guidance and strength. The character of the Moorish slave Monostatos furthermore is evidently influenced by racist imagery: he is presented as a villainous person who is led by lust and cruelty, and the color of his skin is explicitly associated with negative qualities on several occasions.

From a contemporary point of view, opera directors nowadays generally feel that they have to 'deal with' these (perceived) expressions of misogyny and racism, as did Dutch director Lotte de Beer. When she was contracted to stage *Die Zauberflöte* at a prominent Viennese opera house, she decided to stage it in a way to expose those expressions, casting a direct spotlight on them and addressing issues of (in)equality and inclusion. The established conductor didn't appreciate this effort and made sure De Beer was fired from the production. This led De Beer to organize a week of working sessions with small groups of artists, in which the objective was to take *Die Zauberflöte* and find radical new ways of working with it. This new project, aptly titled *Rewriting Zauberflöte*, invited critical artists to engage with the opera and get started on the question how we should deal with operas that are beloved, but carry within them exclusion, racism, misogyny etcetera. What is most relevant to conclude from this is that De Beer's is an approach that points towards the significance of the world in front of the text, in which the relationship between the operatic text and our contemporary understanding of it takes center stage.

⁵² Fisher, *Mozart's The Magic Flute*, 16.

⁵³ Anthony Arblaster, *Viva la Libertà! Politics in Opera* (London and New York: Verso, 2000), 41.

The focus on the interaction between the operatic text and the world of the director (and spectator) in Regietheater is a fitting parallel to the world in front of the text. At the center of it all lies the engagement between the source text of the opera and a contemporary perspective, frame of reference, and world view.

The following set of principles results:

- Staging choices are made stemming from observations by and inspiration of the director in engagement with the operatic text;
- The structure of the opera can be altered by omitting or adding musical, textual, or other sequences;
- The staged opera carries in itself a political critique on (the director's) contemporary society and/or on itself;
- The staged opera can (directly) reference the spectator's current societal and cultural situation and context;
- The director is the primary creator of the staged opera.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined the backgrounds of Werktreue and Regietheater to understand how they emerged. By using the hermeneutical model of the three worlds of a text as a lens, I extracted a set of principles for both these concepts. These principles help to make concrete what the concepts represent; since the lack of clarity is one of the main issues in the discourse, this is certainly helpful. With these principles in sight, an examination of my case study will help to see how Werktreue and Regietheater converge in practice, and how their linear opposition is artificial.

3. The dichotomy in practice

In this chapter, I examine director Graham Vick's 2018 staging of Mozart's opera *Die Zauberflöte* at the Macerata Opera Festival as a case study. I demonstrate how the concepts of *Werktreue* and *Regietheater*, when applied to practice, are clearly more intricately linked than the current discourse suggests. This practical approach helps to see that the presumed linear opposition between the two is imagined, more than based in reality.

Firstly, I examine the content and background of Mozart's opera *Die Zauberflöte*. I make clear what Mozart and librettist Emanuel Schikaneder set out to do with their creation, and thus what the 'original' intentions of the opera's creation were. I discern two main intentions: to create an opera for the people, and to deliver a political critique. With these I can assess, per *Werktreue*-principles, to what extent those original intentions can be recognized in this staging.

Secondly, I describe Vick's 2018 staging of the opera at the Macerata Opera Festival. I introduce how the staging is set up and what Vick's overall intentions are or seem to be.

Thirdly, I examine particular moments and staging choices in the opera that can be seen to match both a *Werktreue* and a *Regietheater* approach. I discuss how these moments demonstrate the complexity of these concepts when applied to practice, and which issues and questions arise. This is structured in two parts, based on Mozart and Schikaneder's two main intentions in creating the opera.

3.1 Mozart's *Zauberflöte*

On September 30, 1791, *Die Zauberflöte* premiered in the Viennese Theater auf der Wieden. Its realization was a result of a collaboration between composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and librettist Emanuel Schikaneder, two longtime friends. Schikaneder was the director of the theater, which – unlike the more sophisticated Viennese Burgtheater – attracted what Musicology Professor David Schroeder empathetically calls 'a more rustic audience.'⁵⁴ For this theater Schikaneder proposed to Mozart to create a so called *Zauberoper* together, 'magic operas' that were popular with Schikaneder's audiences and relied heavily on machinery and special effects. Schroeder describes how the two found each other in their shared sense (and love) of humor.

⁵⁴ David Schroeder, *Experiencing Mozart: A Listener's Companion*, Listener's Companion, ed. Greg Akkerman (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2013), 165-166. EBSCOHost.

The first of Mozart and Schikaneder's main intentions I discern is formed by the following. *Die Zauberflöte* is not strictly an opera, but a Singspiel.⁵⁵ In Mozart's time, the Singspiel was a very popular genre that was directed not at the entertainment of the ruling class, but of the lower classes: political science Professor Anthony Arblaster describes that it was not written in Italian, as was favored by the court and the upper classes, but in German.⁵⁶ Another characteristic of the Singspiel is that the narrative on stage does not only advance through music, but also through spoken dialogue. Musicology Professor Julian Rushton furthermore describes the Singspiel as a tradition in which "adventure, comedy, and moral posturing rub shoulders, and magic can be worked by musical instruments."⁵⁷

Mozart and Schikaneder chose to create their new work in the style of the popular Singspiel primarily for commercial reasons. One of these reasons was that Schikaneder wanted to add another success to his already substantial record as director of the Theater auf der Wieden. For both of them however – although more so for Mozart – a different goal was more important: making money. When emperor Joseph II died in 1790, Mozart lost an idealistic and supportive patron.⁵⁸ The emperor's successor, Leopold II, did not share his admiration and appreciation for music. As a result, Mozart lost his royal engagements and quickly found himself in a financial pickle. The new Singspiel, Schikaneder argued to him, would surely attract many spectators: the mythical and magical themes of the story (derived from an older popular tale named *Lulu*) were very popular in that time, and Schikaneder's experience with theatrical machineries and stunning visual effects would enable them to set up an impressive and exhilarating performance.

The plot of *Die Zauberflöte* seems quite fitting indeed for the 'magic opera' Schikaneder proposed to Mozart: a young prince named Tamino meets a host of mysterious beings in a dark forest, one of whom is the illustrious Queen of the Night. She asks him to rescue her daughter Pamina, who is held hostage by the evil lord Sarastro. Papageno, Tamino's newly made friend, will guide him on his journey, and armed with a magic flute and magical bells they go on their way. As Tamino's search progresses, it turns out that it is not Sarastro but the Queen of the Night who is evil. Sarastro is revealed to be the leader of an order of reason and enlightenment, who chooses mercy over vengeance. Tamino and Pamina together need to withstand several trials and ordeals, and in the end – with a lot of help from the magic flute – they are admitted into

⁵⁵ The aforementioned Zauberoper can be seen as a subcategory of the Singspiel. Because Singspiel titles are usually presented and staged as operas, with an eye to textual clarity and consistency I allow myself the liberty to use the word 'opera' throughout this thesis to characterize *Die Zauberflöte*. The difference between 'true' opera and the Singspiel seems to me too lexical to be of much relevance to my research.

⁵⁶ Arblaster, *Viva la Libertà!*, 34-35.

⁵⁷ Julian Rushton, *The Master Musicians: Mozart*, The Master Musicians (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 223. Oxford Scholarship Online.

⁵⁸ Fisher, *Mozart's The Magic Flute*, 13-14.

Sarastro's order. When the slave Monostatos then decides to turn against his master Sarastro and help the Queen of the Night attack him, they are eventually both defeated – and forgiven – by Sarastro.⁵⁹

Arblaster describes how Mozart and Schikaneder, in addition to popular and commercial motivations, had a political agenda as well. On the success of the opera and its layer of political critique he writes the following:

[*Die Zauberflöte* became] a work that certainly contains popular elements, and can appeal at the level of a touching and picturesque fable, but which is also profound, enigmatic, moving and sublime. It has charm and comedy, yet it is also a work of ethical grandeur and vision. (...) The opera's popularity is not hard to understand. But it seems likely that this popularity owed something to that other dimension of the work: the ethical and political idealism, which is rather too readily assumed to be of concern only to the more educated minority.⁶⁰

The political dimension Arblaster mentions forms the second main intention with which *Die Zauberflöte* was written. Mozart and Schikaneder, Arblaster states, believed strongly in the Enlightenment ideals and the idea that a new or better world could be possible. Both were furthermore members of the Freemasonry, which certainly strongly influenced their work on *Die Zauberflöte*⁶¹:

Mozart and Schikaneder clearly intended the work as a celebration and assertion of Masonic ideas, and they filled it with Masonic emblems and details, some of them easily recognized, others not.⁶²

Mozart was actively involved in the Viennese Freemason lodge Zur Wohltätigkeit.⁶³ At that time it was far more common to be a part of the Freemasonry than it is nowadays, and Arblaster argues that it was in fact one of the more 'important organizational forces of the Enlightenment.' Authorities regarded it as subversive and potentially revolutionary, and considering the political ideals of the Masons they were to some extent right. The most important Masonic ideals included that of egalitarianism, which not necessarily dismissed hierarchy but did pronounce all

⁵⁹ A full synopsis of the plot is included in the appendix of this thesis.

⁶⁰ Arblaster, *Viva la Libertà!*, 35-36.

⁶¹ Arblaster describes how other operas by Mozart also carried more or less obvious references to Masonic symbols and ideals, most notably *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, *Così fan tutte* and *La clemenza di Tito*.

⁶² Arblaster, *Viva la Libertà!*, 36-37.

⁶³ Arblaster, *Viva la Libertà!*, 37-38.

people to be of equal value. Ingrained in this was criticism of authoritarian and unjust leadership, and the ideal of humane and rational rule.⁶⁴

The narrative of *Die Zauberflöte* expresses what Arblaster calls the 'utopian hopes of Masonic Enlightenment'. The themes of transformation and enlightenment are very visible present in this 'quest opera', he argues,

...and the quest is not only for love and personal happiness, but also for virtue and enlightenment. And these are not merely personal qualities or assets, but the key to a better and happier world: indeed, to the transformation of human life.⁶⁵

The opera thus serves as a metaphor, or perhaps even a symbolic blueprint for the realization of (Masonic) Enlightenment ideals. Victory of the sun (and its forces of good) over darkness (and its forces of evil, superstition and prejudice) is often either concretely addressed in the libretto or symbolized – very much a stock image of the Enlightenment. The distinction between good and evil is very clear: good is personified by Sarastro and evil by the Queen of the Night. Probably the most famous aria from the opera (and most certainly one of the most recognizable pieces of operatic music in general) is *Der Hölle Rache* in which the Queen of the Night orders her daughter Pamina to assassinate Sarastro. The aria is marked by a distinct sense of hatred and bloodlust:

Der Hölle Rache kocht in meinem Herzen
Tod und Verzweiflung flammet um mich her
Fühlt nicht durch dich Sarastro Todesschmerzen,
So bist du meine Tochter nimmermehr⁶⁶

Hell's vengeance boils in my heart
Death and despair flame up all around me
If Sarastro shall not feel death's agony because of you
You will be my daughter no more

⁶⁴ Arblaster, *Viva la Libertà!*, 39.

⁶⁵ Arblaster, *Viva la Libertà!*, 40.

⁶⁶ Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte: Eine deutsche Oper in zwei Aufzügen*, ed. Martin Schelhaas (Kassel: Bärenreiter-Verlag Karl Vötterle GmbH & Co. KG, 2016), 145-146. My translation underneath.

A stark contrast is provided by the aria *In diesen heil'gen Hallen* by Sarastro shortly afterwards, which he sings after he has discovered Pamina contemplated killing him:

In diesen heil'gen Hallen kennt man die Rache nicht!⁶⁷

In these sacred halls we do not know revenge!

Most authors agree that *Die Zauberflöte* should be seen as a political statement.⁶⁸ Opera scholar Burton D. Fisher demonstrates that

[a]s a political and social allegory, the story therefore represents a veiled assault on the autocratic rule of Empress Maria Theresa, who was known for her intense passion in suppressing Freemasonry: in that sense, Maria Theresa appears allegorically as the Queen of the Night; Prince Tamino as the Emperor Josef II, a defender of the secret order; and Pamina as the Austrian people who were caught in the conflicting political struggle.⁶⁹

To conclude this examination of *Die Zauberflöte*, it seems clear that Mozart and Schikaneder had two main intentions in creating it: to provide a pleasing, charming, and comical theatrical experience geared towards common, non-elite citizens, and to critically address political issues of power structures and equality. These will be the main focal points in subchapter 3.3.

3.2 Vick's *Flauto Magico*

My case study is Sir Graham Vick's 2018 staging of *Die Zauberflöte* at the Macerata Opera Festival in Macerata, Italy.⁷⁰ Vick has a long and successful record and is currently artistic director of the Birmingham Opera Company. This company is well-known for its innovative and progressive view on opera, and Vick for his experimental stagings. This particular production (conductor: Daniel Cohen) is the result of a coproduction between Vick's Birmingham Opera Company, the Associazione Arena Sferisterio, and the Palau de les Arts Reina Sofía in Valencia. Vick has taken considerable liberties in staging the opera, changing the place and time of the narrative, constructing a clear contemporary political critique, and altering even the language of

⁶⁷ Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte*, 152. My translation underneath.

⁶⁸ Next to the more textual markers described in this thesis, Masonic symbolism can also be recognized in the music of *Die Zauberflöte*, for instance in the three opening chords of the overture. Further elaboration on this can be found in Schroeder's book *Experiencing Mozart*.

⁶⁹ Fisher, *Mozart's The Magic Flute*, 13.

⁷⁰ Recorded on July 29, 2018. Available until July 8, 2021 on YouTube through OperaVision, an international platform that aims to make opera available and accessible online. See bibliography and appendix for further details, including a full list of the cast and crew.

the libretto. One of the main characteristics of this staging is that it is in many ways set up to include and appeal to the citizens of Macerata specifically. This takes shape in different ways.



Figure 3: a photograph of the stage at Macerata's Sferisterio, providing an overview of Vick's stage setting. Obtained from OperaVision (photographer: Alfredo Tabocchini).

Firstly, the venue of the performance is not a conventional one. It takes place in Macerata's Sferisterio, a sports arena specifically constructed for the antiquated but once immensely popular sport *pallone col bracciale* (see figure 3). No closed-off venue, no pretentious theater hall for this staging, but a venue with a strong historical connection to the town's people.

Secondly, exactly these people are involved in the performance themselves. Vick employs a hundred of Macerata's citizens as actors on stage.⁷¹ This 'theatrical community' – credited in the video registration as 'cittadini del mondo', 'citizens of the world' – reflects the community of the city and is diverse in gender, age, and skin color. More than this, Vick describes how he wants to involve these people in the creative process and the elementary questions ingrained in the opera: "It speaks deeply about who we are and how we could go on to have a future."⁷² Additionally and significantly, several immigrants who live in Macerata are part of the troupe on

⁷¹ OperaVision, "Behind the scenes of THE MAGIC FLUTE – Macerata Opera Festival," January 7, 2021, YouTube video, 0:35, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MczFiS0TLVE>.

⁷² OperaVision, "Behind the scenes of THE MAGIC FLUTE," 1:15.

stage, taking place in makeshift tent camps and in and around old cars.⁷³ Throughout the performance, this group of actors functions as a chorus and reacts vocally to what is happening on stage. Additionally, the actors sometimes play minor roles without speech or song.

Thirdly, Vick has translated the libretto from German to contemporary Italian –the first language of his audience. While this is quite an intervention on the ‘original’ opera, it does function to bring the opera closer and more immediately understandable to the spectator – quite fitting with Mozart and Schikaneder’s own choice for the popular German instead of elitist Italian.⁷⁴

3.3 Into the case study

The structure within which I discuss this case study is based on Mozart and Schikaneder’s two main intentions in creating *Die Zauberflöte*: they aimed to create a popular, crowd-pleasing opera, and they wanted to address political issues concerning (un)just leadership and equality. Multiple staging choices can be seen as significant in this context; I have selected the most notable.

An opera of the people, by the people, for the people

The first of Mozart and Schikaneder’s main intentions is that they aimed to create an opera for the people. *Die Zauberflöte* was created to be charming, comical, and accessible. While many of Vick’s staging choices differ quite drastically from the libretto and its directions, they are still very much congruent with this main intention. They bring the opera closer to the contemporary reality of Macerata in different ways.

First off, let’s take a look at the issue of language. Mozart and Schikaneder deliberately chose for the popular form of the Singspiel when they created *Die Zauberflöte*. As stated before, one of the markings of the Singspiel is that it is sung in German. The first audience to *Die Zauberflöte* could easily and directly understand what was sung because their own language was used. Vick’s choice to translate the libretto to Italian is exactly the same strategy. This direct connection between spectator and performance takes away the barrier that a different language can put up even if there is sufficient subtitling present. It makes it possible for the spectator to

⁷³ James Imam, “Graham Vick’s new *Magic Flute* opens the Macerata Opera Festival,” *Bachtrack*, published July 23, 2018, <https://bachtrack.com/review-magic-flute-vick-cohen-sferisterio-macerata-july-2018>.

⁷⁴ This double reversal in language certainly is interesting.

be even more invested in what is happening on stage, and furthermore to feel more directly represented on stage.⁷⁵ Vick states about the importance of language:

Mozart always dreamed of writing his operas in the language of his audience. And above all, Mozart create[d] a popular work in which he finally got the opportunity to write in the language of the audience and [translate] through the actors and through popular songs a deeply important theme to him.⁷⁶

Then, there are many ways in which Vick has staged *Die Zauberflöte* using images that are instantly recognizable to his audience. The broad stage resembles a construction site, with tall, expensive, and prestigious buildings in the middle, made inaccessible by high fences: models of the Euro Tower in Frankfurt (flagship of the European Central Bank), an Apple Store, and Rome's Saint Peter's Basilica. Separated from these buildings is a makeshift tent camp on either side of the stage, populated by a diverse group of people – the troupe of Macerata citizens. These 'common' people are excluded from the world of the rich and successful, left to fend for themselves in their world of tents and foldout chairs. Their existence is threatened by excavators and other heavy machinery. Themes of gentrification, the division between wealth and poverty, urban growth at the cost of those living at the fringes, and an oppressive and inhumane system, are alluded to from the beginning onwards. With this, Vick ignores Mozart and Schikaneder's directions to depict 'a rocky area that is sparsely overgrown with trees' – and all other scene descriptions that are included in the score.

Another moment that illustrates the liberties Vick takes regarding the libretto and its stage directions is seen in Act II's twenty-eighth scene (or Auftritt). The following is included in the score:

Das Theater verwandelt sich in zwei große Berge; in dem einen ist ein Wasserfall, worin man Sausen und Brausen hört; der andre speit Feuer aus; jeder Berg hat ein durchbrochenes Gegitter, worin man Feuer und Wasser sieht; da, wo das Feuer brennt, muss der Horizont hellrot sein, und wo das Wasser ist, liegt schwarzer Nebel.

(...)

Zwei schwarz GEHARNISCHE MÄNNER führen TAMINO herein. Auf ihren Helmen brennt Feuer. Sie lesen ihm die transparente Schrift vor, welche auf einer Pyramide

⁷⁵ When characters sing in a foreign language, this doubtlessly 'others' them to the spectator to some extent.

⁷⁶ OperaVision, "Behind the scenes of THE MAGIC FLUTE," 1:48.

geschrieben steht. Diese Pyramide steht in der Mitte ganz in der Höhe, nahe am Gegitter.⁷⁷

The scene transforms into two large mountains; in one there is a waterfall from which churning and roaring water can be heard; the other spits fire; every mountain contains an openwork grid through which fire and water can be seen; where the fire burns the horizon must be bright red, and where the water is there is black mist.

(...)

TAMINO is brought in by two MEN IN BLACK ARMOR. Fire burns on their helmets. They read him the transparent script, which is written on a pyramid. This pyramid stands high in the middle, close to the grid.

Compare this to Vick's setting:



Figure 4: still from OperaVision, "THE MAGIC FLUTE Mozart - Macerata Opera Festival," YouTube video, 2:18:35, January 8, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qJBh1ZKe8IU>.

No fire and water on Vick's stage, no bright red horizon, no black mist, and no fiery helmets. Instead: missiles, extremely oversized construction tape, people wearing either orange hoods or hazmat suits, and the silhouette of St. Peter's Basilica carrying a message of both warning and

⁷⁷ Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte*, 197. My translation underneath.

promise.⁷⁸ While Vick disregards Mozart and Schikaneder's directions, he does create an image on stage that represents the gloomy atmosphere of danger and despair they envisioned. Perhaps the image of nuclear danger carries the same weight in our secular age as hellfire did in Mozart's Christianity-dominated era. Moreover, Vick brings well-known images to the stage that provoke immediate reactions and associations. This contributes to a sense of accessibility: the performance alludes to contemporary issues and themes using broad-stroke imagery that most, if not all, spectators will be able to understand.

Another dimension of the performance that adds to its accessible nature is that of comedy and lightness. Many moments in it are embellished with comical effects and acting. This is especially the case for the character Papageno. This bird-catcher wears a full-body chicken suit with yellow feathers. When he makes his first entrance, he carries a food delivery backpack and hands out flyers for his fried chicken. Through this and singer Guido Loconsolo's over-the-top physical acting, Papageno certainly is a comical character. A specific moment helps to further illustrate the comical character of the performance: when Papageno ignores the silence imposed on him as a trial and goes to throw away the orange hood given to him by Sarastro's men, he opens up a large garbage can. Out comes an arm, holding a bottle of rum. Staggered, Papageno helps the old woman in the garbage can to stand up, while she says in a shrieking voice: "Buonasera!"⁷⁹ A conversation ensues in which the woman swigs from the bottle, puts a cigarette in her mouth only to throw it away when Papageno says he doesn't have a lighter. (The woman, as it turns out, is actually his promised love Papagena, disguised by Sarastro's men as an old drunk. This is Papageno's actual trial: will he still want her in this state?)

Papageno in particular was originally meant to be a comical figure, modeled after the archetypal fool Hanswurst.⁸⁰ Importantly, he was meant to represent the common people, who would be able to recognize his struggles and often laugh at his inability to overcome them.

A political critique

The second of Mozart and Schikaneder's main intentions is that they aimed to address political issues critically within the opera. These issues had to do mainly with power, equality, and

⁷⁸ The text sung by the guards during this scene is painted on the backside of the basilica in graffiti letters: "whoever crosses this path that holds so many dangers / is purged by fire and water and air and earth / and if he conquers the fear of death / he may ascend from earth to heaven." My translation.

⁷⁹ OperaVision, "THE MAGIC FLUTE Mozart - Macerata Opera Festival," YouTube video, January 8, 2021, 1:46:45, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qJBh1ZKe8IU>.

⁸⁰ Schroeder, *Experiencing Mozart*, 165-166.

societal structure. Vick's staging certainly matches this intention, even if (or maybe exactly because) the specific political circumstances addressed are different.

First off, Vick makes it clear that the opera is in some way *about* the Macerata community by placing it on stage itself. The troupe of a hundred (amateur) actors is present on and around the stage during the opera's overture. They socialize together and are caught up in all kinds of pastimes: one of them is working on his car, some are making pasta, others are drawing or painting each other's nails. Their activities are very mundane, prosaic even. The result is that they have a sense of natural belonging, that it is 'their space' the audience is entering. It amplifies the notion that the actual Macerata community is represented on stage, and it suggests that the political themes touched upon are part of their lived reality.

Often this 'chorus' reacts to what happens in the scene in a mix of support and judgment, mostly siding with Tamino, Pamina, and Papageno.⁸¹ They are also part of the scene sometimes in a different way; as Tamino undergoes his trials, they wear orange hoods over their heads as if they're going through it together. They shout statements or warnings when something bad is about to happen, and in some cases they also react in a more politically loaded way. In the second act, Sarastro catches Monostatos as he tries to force himself onto Pamina. Sarastro condemns him, stating that "...I also know that your heart is as black as your face."⁸² The actors in the auditorium respond to him, shouting "What about his color? He is right!" and "He is a victim!" and "He is a racist!". When Sarastro threatens to punish him, the actors shout "He can't change!" and "He needs help!" and "It's the fault of society!" They side with Monostatos, echoing statements related to Macerata's recently inflamed political immigration debate.

This last element is crucial for understanding Vick's staging. Macerata had been shocked by unsettling events in 2018, the year that the opera was staged. An 18-year-old girl by the name of Pamela Mastropietro was brutally murdered by a Nigerian immigrant and drug dealer called Innocent Oseghale.⁸³ This fed already growing anti-immigrant sentiments and led a man named Luca Traini to drive his car through Macerata's narrow streets and randomly shoot any black pedestrians he saw.⁸⁴ The bloodshed marked a jarring shift away from sea-adjacent Macerata's previous tolerant and welcoming attitude towards immigrants, who made up about ten percent of its population. In a broader context, this shift in attitude is visible throughout all of Italy, where political issues around migration have become more and more polarizing and pressing in

⁸¹ Going forward, I will refer to the group of amateur actors either as 'the actors' or 'the chorus'.

⁸² OperaVision, "THE MAGIC FLUTE Mozart," 1:40:20.

⁸³ Grif Witte and Stefano Pitrelli, "A gruesome murder. A hate-filled shooting rampage. And a reckoning with immigration before Italy votes," *The Washington Post*, February 6, 2018.

⁸⁴ Traini had previously attempted to become an elected representative for the Lega Nord, a right-wing party with anti-immigrant and nationalist ideals.

the last decades.⁸⁵ This context of turmoil and political tension forms the backdrop for Vick's staging of *Die Zauberflöte*. Vick has chosen to also make it its subject.

Employing the actual Macerata community on stage this way mirrors the chorus found in ancient Greek tragedies. This speaks to the notion of community even more, since the Greek chorus mostly fulfilled a commentarial role and expressed the polis' fears, hopes and judgment.⁸⁶ In opera, Anthony Arblaster describes, the chorus came to represent the people in general after 1789: "The collective voice of the chorus takes us at once into the public realm, and very often it represents that new actor on the political scene: the people – or 'the masses', as some would have it."⁸⁷ Vick follows this long tradition by representing the people of Macerata, and perhaps goes a step further even by directly placing them on stage. He gives the community a place in the opera's narrative – especially when current political discussions are represented on stage this concretely.

From the beginning onwards the theme of immigration is concretely addressed: on the left and right side of the stage are what seem to be refugee tent camps, with people living together peacefully if in poor conditions. They are sequestered off from the three prestigious buildings in the middle (the Euro Tower, Apple Store, and St. Peter's). As the overture progresses, they lay down their activities and move towards the fences, on which posters are placed with a missing persons announcement. (The missing person in question is Pamina.) Gradually the group takes up protest signs with politically loaded statements: 'Siamo tutti stranieri del mondo' and 'La libertà non si compro' and 'Nessun uomo è illegale.'⁸⁸ Very directly, Macerata's political discourse is placed on stage, and it is made clear that the performance is in some way about the issue of immigration.

Another highly political theme that is addressed in the performance is that of inequality and exclusion, specifically in the areas of class, gender, and color. Firstly, a segregation is depicted between common people and elite throughout the opera. The former are represented by the chorus of Macerata citizens, presented as living on the fringe of society. They are contrasted by a different chorus of the 'elite', representing Sarastro's order: white men wearing costumes of authority and power, such as business suits, high-ranking military uniforms, police

⁸⁵ Michael Birnbaum, "In once-welcoming Italy, the tide turns against migrants," *The Washington Post*, August 25, 2017.

⁸⁶ "Chorus," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed June 8, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/art/chorus-theatre>

⁸⁷ Arblaster, *Viva la Libertà!*, 4.

⁸⁸ 'We are all strangers in this world,' 'Freedom can't be bought,' and 'No human is illegal.' My translation.

uniforms, robes of cardinals and other religious figures, and even some in academic formal dress. Again: all white men. This leads to the second area of exclusion.

Next to this group of white men, there is a group of white women that is part of Sarastro's order. They are however clearly presented to be disempowered in comparison to the men. None of them wear any official clothing of authority like the men do, instead they are all dressed in white with gold accents. Their subordinate and powerless position is expressed most clearly in the choral *O Isis und Osiris*. In this, the Chorus of Priests (Chor der Priester) call on the gods Isis and Osiris to assist Tamino during his trials, praising how the shining sun will drive out the dark night. When the men sing these words in which Enlightenment ideals clearly ring through, the women are also on stage, but placed on the other side, voiceless. They move their mouths as if they try to sing, but no sound comes out; they clutch their throats, frozen in place (see figures 5 and 6).⁸⁹ Eventually they slowly retreat, looking defeated and disappointed. It is telling that the voice (that most important instrument of empowerment) is available only to the privileged men, while the women are literally voiceless. (That they are dressed in white with gold accents, meaningful suffragette tokens, makes their depiction even more of a political statement.)⁹⁰ The third area of exclusion has to do with skin color. Black and dark-skinned people are only represented in the chorus of 'common' people. While Sarastro's order supposedly stands for enlightenment, equality and justness, it also seems that these are conditionally reserved for the privileged few.⁹¹



Figure 5: still, 1:58:46. Powerful men versus...



Figure 6: still, 1:58:53. ...voiceless women.

⁸⁹ OperaVision, "THE MAGIC FLUTE Mozart," 1:58:45.

⁹⁰ For a straightforward introduction on the meaning of white clothing within the suffragette's movement, see: Sophie Shaw, "The history of women wearing suffragette white," CR Fashion Book, published February 5, 2020, <https://www.crfashionbook.com/fashion/a26261899/the-history-of-women-wearing-suffragette-white/>.

⁹¹ I only devote a limited amount of attention to this area of exclusion because the notion of skin color and racism in *Die Zauberflöte* is quite a complicated subject to address. If I would examine this more, I would want to do its complexity justice – which I can't do within the limitations of this thesis. That is also why I scarcely write about the character of Monostatos, who is presented in the libretto as an evil black man, confirming many harmful racial stereotypes, but who in this staging is played by a white man wearing a ski mask.



Figure 8: still, 2:39:37. Harmony is achieved when Tamino, after succeeding at the trials, plays the magic flute.

While the inequality within Sarastro's order is poignant, it is also overcome. At the end of the opera – all is well, everyone is forgiven – Tamino and Pamina are officially welcomed into Sarastro's order by the elite chorus. With help of the magic flute, Tamino resurrects the bodies of the common people that are scattered all over the stage, after which both choruses finally mingle and interact for the first time (see figure 8). They all start to hug each other and dance together, depicting an image of overcoming social inequality and finding sincere human connection after discrimination and oppression.⁹² How's that for the Masonic ideal of Enlightenment and the search for a better humanity?

While Vick with his staging choices strays quite a lot from Mozart and Schikaneder's original directions, their intentions and political convictions are still very much recognizable in this staging. They aimed to address the political issue of unjust leadership through presenting an imagined universe in which their audience could recognize real and concrete elements from their own experience – unjust leadership by the Queen of the Night that mirrored Habsburg Empress Maria Theresa's, primarily. Much like Mozart and Schikaneder, Vick also presents images and characters that represent existing figures or organizations quite concretely – for instance when he lets Sarastro enter on the yellow bulldozer, dispersing the crowd. Alessandro Cammarano suggests a connection to right-wing politician Matteo Salvini of the populist and

⁹² It is telling that Sarastro in this scene literally disappears into the background.

xenophobic party Lega Nord, who used the image of a yellow bulldozer as a recurring element in his rousing speeches.⁹³ Laura Cervi and Santiago Tejedor describe how Salvini in 2015 “proposed his ‘final solution’ for the ‘Gypsy problem’: ‘using bulldozers to destroy all the slums’.”⁹⁴ (It is even more telling that Mozart’s serpent, chasing Tamino, is substituted by this bulldozer as well.)⁹⁵ It is not at all a far cry to argue that Salvini, Apple, the European Central Bank and others are the Habsburg emperors of our time. With this in mind, Vick’s staging can certainly be seen as a political critique on power, injustice, and inequality, while also remaining a charming, accessible opera of the people, for the people, by the people.

3.4 Conclusion

As demonstrated throughout this chapter, even though Vick has taken considerable liberties with regard to Mozart and Schikaneder’s original libretto and directions, he still follows their main original intentions in his staging choices. He actively involves the Macerata community and places it on stage itself, amplifying the current political discourse he addresses through his staging and making the stage a place ‘of the people’. He uses the opera as a lens to think about contemporary issues, in this case particularly immigration, which matches a Regietheater approach.

It becomes increasingly unclear what it is exactly that ‘loyalty’ should mean. The examined moments demonstrate how staging choices that could well be marked as Regietheater could also be justified from a Werktreue point of view, in that they correspond with Mozart and Schikaneder’s intentions and vision. The different core principles of both Werktreue and Regietheater as discerned in the previous chapter are interconnectedly identifiable in this staging, obscuring the clear-cut difference between them.

Examining an opera staging such as this in practice makes clear to what extent the current conceptions of Werktreue and Regietheater are restrictive and unproductive. It affirms my claim that the linear opposition between these concepts is artificial, and that the opposition in the discourse is therefore also artificial and problematic. It is also clear now that in order to be able to meaningfully gauge how ‘loyal’ a particular staging is – leaving aside for now the question to what extent that should be considered relevant – an ambiguous understanding of Werktreue

⁹³ Alessandro Cammarano, “Macerata: né preti né massoni nel Flauto magico di Vick,” *Le Salon Musical*, published July 20, 2018, <https://www.lesalonmusical.it/macerata-ne-preti-ne-massoni-nel-flauto-magico-di-vick/>.

⁹⁴ Laura Cervi and Santiago Tejedor, “Framing ‘The Gypsy Problem’: Populist Electoral Use of Romaphobia in Italy (2014–2019),” *Social Sciences* 9, no. 6 (June 2020): article no. 105, 4. MDPI.

⁹⁵ What this means for how we should interpret Sarastro’s character would certainly merit further analysis: how good and just is he after all?

will not do. The notion of loyalty, when applied to practice as done here, is too flexible to be adequately employed for Werktreue arguments. In other words: 'Regietheater choices' are proven to be possibly very 'loyal' to the opera's original creator's intentions, but on the level of meaning instead of the level of concrete directions, and staging conventions. This will be the main focus of Chapter 4: how can we move towards a clear understanding of this idea of loyalty and of what the 'work' is, or at least to a common agreement that these are not self-evident notions?

4. A step forward

In this chapter, I firstly take a critical look at *Werktreue* as it is commonly used in today's discourse. I counter some of the recurring claims made by *Werktreue* advocates in order to make clear how the idea of loyalty to the work can be problematic and is at least unclear: what is it that we understand those words 'loyalty' and 'work' to mean? In order to do this, I examine concrete examples from the discourse surrounding *Werktreue* and Regietheater, containing often recurring arguments. The claims I aim to counter are therefore based in practice. This endeavor also makes clear once more how heated, emotional and entrenched the discourse on these concepts is at this moment. The necessity of finding a new way of talking about *Werktreue* specifically becomes all the more apparent.

Secondly, I revisit the model of the three worlds of a text as discussed in Chapter 2 and employed in Chapter 3. I argue that it can be seen as a triad, following Chiel Kattenbelt's description, and offer a proposal for devising a new triad of *Werktreue*-Regietheater-Aufführungspraxis. Through this, I propose to understand *Werktreue* not as a fixed position in linear opposition of Regietheater, but as an ideal-typical way of thinking about the staging of repertoire operas. Visual models help to concretize this.

Thirdly then, I discuss what a further rethinking of *Werktreue* should be focused on. I mention some relevant but as of yet unanswered questions that might help to open up a new way of thinking about the concept.

4.1 A critique on *Werktreue*

Within the heated discourse surrounding *Werktreue* and Regietheater, the most outspoken and destructive force seems to come from *Werktreue* advocates. Their writings are often directed at particular opera stagings deemed Regietheater and at a perceived growing influence of Regietheater all over. Often they contain strong dismissals and a judgment of value, where a more neutral and value-free approach might be more productive. In this part of my research, I examine some of the recurring arguments used in favor of *Werktreue* and offer counterarguments or critical questions.

The intentional fallacy

First off, a short examination of *Werktreue*'s main claim: when staging an opera, the director should respect and follow the original creators' intentions. When writing about author-centered

hermeneutics (which I paralleled with *Werktreue* and the world behind the text in Chapter 2), W. Randolph Tate offers a relevant rebuttal to this notion. He mentions the “inevitable gap between the originating moment in the author’s mind and the cultural specificity of the author’s language.”⁹⁶ What is also referred to as the ‘intentional fallacy’ argues that there is no guarantee that the specific product of the author (e.g. the text) accurately reflects the original intention and vision with which they set out to create it. In other words, as Tate asks, “[is] the text a foolproof and undistorted mirror of the author’s mind?”⁹⁷ The question seems rhetorical. Even though Tate writes about literature specifically, there is no reason to presume this would be less true for the creators of an opera.

The historical argument

One of the other recurring claims of *Werktreue* advocates is that opera can show us the world as it looked hundreds of years ago. Per Heather Mac Donald:

[W]hen directors yank operas out of their historical contexts, they close a precious window into the past. Most operas’ assumptions about nobility, virtue, and the duties of rulers and subjects, as well as of parents and children, could not be more alien to our modern experience. If we refuse to take such values seriously, not only do we render the plots incomprehensible; we also cut ourselves off from a greater understanding of what human life has been and, by contrast, is now.⁹⁸

In a way, Mac Donald’s argument makes sense. It is true that many operas contain world views and ideas about society that are not prevalent anymore in contemporary society. Two main counterarguments can be brought up, however. Firstly, even if we fully agree with Mac Donald, does this mean that directors should always depict the world on stage as it happened at the opera’s first premiere? This foregoes the obvious fact that the worldview of many composers was flawed and non-inclusive from a contemporary perspective, for instance in the many expressions of exoticism and racism.⁹⁹ It also doesn’t justify the complete dismissal of any kind of staging that does try to find new settings for existing operas.

Secondly, there is the – again – obvious problem that we can’t perceive the world exactly as it existed before in any way. Ulrich Müller draws a parallel to the discourse on *Originalklang*, a

⁹⁶ Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 3.

⁹⁷ Ibidem.

⁹⁸ Mac Donald, “The Abduction of Opera.”

⁹⁹ See for instance Giacomo Puccini’s stunningly beautiful but inherently troublesome operas *Madama Butterfly* and *Turandot*. Colonialism never sounded so sweet.

notion related to *Werktreue* that centers around the aim to perform classical music as it sounded for its composer and initial audience.¹⁰⁰ As much as music is performed according to its original conception however, Müller argues, there is no way to truly hear it as its contemporary audience did. Between the time that Bach wrote his music and today, for instance, lie about 280 years of music history during which conventions and collective hearing habits have changed considerably. Likewise, the practice of theater and its aesthetics evolve and develop continually, and so does the frame of reference of its audience. This means, Müller writes, that even if it were possible to stage an opera exactly as it had been originally performed, the spectators would perceive it vastly different as the original spectators:

Weder Ohr noch Auge können gezwungen werden, die Entwicklung zu ignorieren und sich in die Vergangenheit zurückprogrammieren zu lassen.¹⁰¹

Neither eye nor ear can be forced to ignore its development, and to let itself be programmed back into the past.

With this argument, Müller decisively destabilizes the claim of *Werktreue* (and *Originalklang*) that opera allows us to travel back in time and see societies of centuries ago through the eyes and ears of composers and librettists. What it can do, he argues, is gain us insight into how people once perceived the world auditorily, to some degree.¹⁰² Through this we can also become more aware of what Müller calls the 'historical distance' between then and now, even though that distance becomes neither larger nor smaller. When framed as a response to Mac Donald, Müller's claim serves to take off the edge of judgment: yes, opera can to some extent give us a 'window to the past,' but that window is filled with smudges, and it is certainly not the only viewpoint to stage opera from – let alone the 'right' one.

Müller takes his argument even further. Writing about the (sometimes implicit) *Werktreue* notion that operas should be staged according to the original directions, he states that *Werktreue* is in its essence impossible:

[T]o stage an opera as the author(s) wanted it or, much more strictly, as they staged it (...) is no longer possible: theater is constantly being influenced by developments, modes, and fashions, and, surprisingly, more so than other visual media such as painting or film. We can never look upon a stage as Mozart or Wagner did, because there is a span of one or two intervening centuries, filled with experiences and

¹⁰⁰ Müller, "Werktreue, Originalklang, Regietheater," 11-12.

¹⁰¹ Müller, "Werktreue, Originalklang, Regietheater," 14. My translation underneath.

¹⁰² Müller, "Werktreue, Originalklang, Regietheater," 12.

transformations of the stage environment, which provide other references and associations that cannot be expunged from memory.¹⁰³

Problems with the work-concept

One different problematic aspect of *Werktreue* has to do with the first half of the term, the conception of an opera as a hermetic 'work' that is deemed to contain some kind of objectively discernable core. Or in the words of Kreuzer and Risi I quoted in Chapter 2, the suggestion that "each work carries at least a minimum sense of how it should generate meaning and what it should look like in production (...)." ¹⁰⁴ In her 1992 book *Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music*, Professor of Philosophy Lydia Goehr offers a critical examination of the so-called work-concept. Writing about musical 'works' such as symphonies or operas, Goehr states that we tend

...to see works as objectified expressions of composers that prior to compositional activity did not exist. We do not treat works as objects just made or put together, like tables and chairs, but as original, unique products of a special, creative activity. (...) Once created, we treat works as existing after their creators have died, and whether or not they are performed or listened to at any given time. We treat them as artefacts in the public realm, accessible in principle to anyone who cares to listen to them.¹⁰⁵

As much as it makes sense in our minds to speak of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony (with those most famous of opening notes) as a thing in itself, this is in fact a misguided idea. Borrowing a phrase from philosophy scholar Alan Tormey, Goehr calls musical works 'ontological mutants.' They are not concrete physical objects, nor mere ephemeral ideals. They are not identical to their performances, nor to their scores: "[I]f all copies of the score of a Beethoven Symphony are destroyed, the symphony itself does not thereby cease to exist, or so it has been argued."¹⁰⁶

Overall, Goehr's argument is a testament for the complication and problematization of the work-concept. The understanding of musical works as 'objectified expressions of composers' and 'artefacts' becomes complicated and problematic at further inspection. She gives the example of Bach's compositions, which we nowadays regard as finished works in themselves.

¹⁰³ Müller, "Regietheater/Director's Theater," 591.

¹⁰⁴ Kreuzer and Risi, "Regietheater in Transition," 304.

¹⁰⁵ Goehr, *Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, 2.

¹⁰⁶ Goehr, *Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, 3.

Goehr states however that “Bach did not intend to compose musical works.”¹⁰⁷ In his capacity as Court Composer to the King of Poland, Kapellmeister to the Prince of Anhalt-Cöthen and Cantor to St Thomas's School, there were very clear requirements to his commissions.¹⁰⁸ Composers in his time often did not have much influence on the mood and duration of their compositions, nor on choices regarding instrumentation and text. Since composers were generally employed by aristocratic or religious dignitaries, their task was “to produce music on request as time and occasion demanded – for the here and now.”¹⁰⁹ Connected to this, Goehr describes, there was no conception of copyright, and often there wasn't even clarity over which composer had written what music exactly. Composers could freely reuse music written by others (or by themselves) without permission or obligation to notify. Rossini for instance is well-known for having reused parts of his previously written operas in his new works. Often pressed for time – he was a notorious procrastinator – Rossini would recycle his own compositions in writing new music. The now famous overture to *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* was originally written for his opera *Aureliano in Palmira* and replaced an original, less successful overture.¹¹⁰ In the light of all this, Goehr argues, the Romantic notion of the original ‘work’ as a result of incomprehensible, almost divine, creative genius does not hold. While much more could be said about this (and there is), this demonstrates how the idea of an opera as a ‘thing in itself’ is misleading.

Can an opera speak for itself?

In connection to the previous argument, there is the claim that the opera should ‘speak for itself’. Heather Mac Donald reacts to a statement by director Nicholas Payne, who said the following:

I'm not saying that the only way to do [Monteverdi's] *Poppea* is to make Nero the son of the chief guy in North Korea. Nevertheless, if you're bothering to reproduce *Poppea*, it has to have some way of speaking to people now.¹¹¹

Labeling this statement as insulting, Mac Donald writes:

¹⁰⁷ Goehr, *Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, 8.

¹⁰⁸ Goehr, *Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, 177-181.

¹⁰⁹ Goehr, *Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, 179.

¹¹⁰ Philip Gossett, “Rossini, Gioachino,” Grove Music Online, accessed October 26, 2020, <https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.23901>.

¹¹¹ Nicholas Payne, quoted in Mac Donald, “The Abduction of Opera.”

Payne assumes that Monteverdi's works are so musically and dramatically limited that they cannot speak to us today on their own terms, and that audiences so lack imagination that they cannot find meaning in something not literally about them.¹¹²

Erin Helyard in response to Mac Donald asks himself how it would be possible to let an opera speak for itself, considering that it needs to be called into being and given shape only through a medium of interpretation such as direction.¹¹³ He then quotes musicologist Richard Taruskin, who stated that "the idea of letting the music speak for itself implies hostility, contempt or at least mistrust of performers."¹¹⁴ The idea that an opera should speak for itself does not withstand scrutiny; how could it? An opera is not a thing in itself like a marble statue is, it is material that needs to be brought to life through staging. In other words, it exists *only* through mediation. Mac Donald's suggestion is that there is a way for the director to be completely neutral and invisible, which is of course not within human limitations. The consequence of this idea is then that only conventions are followed: a performed opera can only be perceived to speak for itself if it answers to the spectator's expectations of what that looks like.¹¹⁵

A tendency towards depoliticization

Performance studies scholar Christopher Balme, one of Werktreue's most vehement opponents, argues how the principles of Werktreue center not around aesthetic ideas, but about political convictions. In a quite inflammatory dissection of the concept, Balme refers to it as a 'fundamentalistic' notion.¹¹⁶ The desire for unrestricted obedience to the work, he argues, suggests an inclination to the absolute, and to fundamentalism. Balme states that Werktreue is rooted in the Romantic perception of the 'genius artist' and an almost religious deference to the autonomous art work. The central point Balme makes is that the discussion surrounding Werktreue is symptomatic for a more generally fundamentalistic mindset. Noting how one of the first mentions of the word occurs in the national-socialist newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter*, Balme draws a stark connection:

¹¹² Mac Donald, "The Abduction of Opera."

¹¹³ Helyard, "Opera column."

¹¹⁴ Richard Taruskin, quoted in Helyard, "Opera column."

¹¹⁵ In this context the notions of absorption and theatricality are relevant. Professor Maaïke Bleeker argues how nothing on stage is 'simply there to be seen', and that the notion of an unmediated experience of theater (and in this case opera) is impossible. See: Maaïke Bleeker, *Visuality in the Theatre: The Locus of Looking* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

¹¹⁶ Balme, "Werktreue," 43-45.

Der werkgetreue Dirigent und der parteigetreue Volksgenosse haben sich den gleichen Prinzipien des absoluten Gehorsams zu unterwerfen.¹¹⁷

The conductor loyal to the work and the comrade loyal to the party need to subject themselves to the same principle of absolute obedience.

Issues regarding the apparent idolization of the repertoire are not purely aesthetic, but also very political in nature, Balme argues. Heather Mac Donald argues that no new operas will ever be written that have the quality and brilliance of a Mozart or Verdi masterpiece.¹¹⁸ This statement suggests the perception of an operatic culture in decline, and reveals the author's stylistic conditions of what constitutes 'good' opera. Surely, the days in which opera was widely popular are over, and so the production conditions have changed drastically. However, new operas are still being written, and the twentieth century has provided us with an astonishing new repertoire. This is where, again, Mac Donald's appreciation of the historic quality of opera comes into play, which also hints towards the idolization of the eighteenth and nineteenth century and its cultural accomplishments. It also lies very close to (neo)colonialism and a non-inclusive world view.

Werktreue, especially in its most radical elaborations, seems to move towards a depoliticization of opera. Its advocates claim that opera is a unique insight into the past, which we should not alter too much lest we lose our grasp of history. Imbuing opera with a 'superimposed' contemporary political view would weaken its message and dilute, if not erase, its original meaning. Anthony Arblaster however argues that it very much matters within this discussion how the word 'political' is understood: instead of conflating politics with *party politics*, he states that the political involves questions on how to live, how to balance power in society, what values and virtues should be maintained, etcetera – both on the individual and the collective level.¹¹⁹ In this sense, the political is

woven into the texture of opera simply because the large questions of politics are not separate from the other large questions that have always preoccupied dramatic composers.¹²⁰

The argument that Regietheater directors politicize opera has therefore no leg to stand on; opera is in a sense almost always political already. Depoliticization only affirms the dominant frames of meaning, while dismissing other viewpoints – in itself a highly political strategy. The

¹¹⁷ Balme, "Werktreue," 45. My translation underneath.

¹¹⁸ Mac Donald, "The Abduction of Opera."

¹¹⁹ Arblaster, *Viva la Libertà!*, 2-3.

¹²⁰ Arblaster, *Viva la Libertà!*, 3.

suggestion is that only 'status quo' political frameworks should be upheld. A different consequence is that opera is reduced to its entertainment value. Arblaster writes how music (and opera) is often turned to "as an escape from the stresses and contradictions of everyday life," and that operagoers often seek mostly entertainment and enchantment.¹²¹ Arblaster states that ignoring its political dimension simply doesn't take opera seriously enough – And I could not agree more. Arblaster concludes his introduction on politics and opera with a statement that is as obvious as it is meaningful:

[C]omposers must make their music out of something: a something that in some sense lies outside or beyond the music itself.¹²²

4.2 The third world: a new triadic model

In this subchapter, I firstly revisit the hermeneutical model of the three worlds of a text as discussed in Chapter 2. I argue how this model can be seen as congruent with Chiel Kattenbelt's conception of the triad. I then examine how the notion of the world *of* the text could make sense when applied to the practice of staging repertoire operas, especially in relation to the parallels I suggested before: between the world behind the text and *Werktreue*, and between the world in front of the text and *Regietheater*. I do this by proposing to substitute the world of the text for the notion of *Aufführungspraxis*, as a third node to *Werktreue* and *Regietheater*. Through this, I arrive at a proposal for a new triadic model, which might help to rethink *Werktreue* and set a clearer stage for the discourse.

Three worlds: a triad

W. Randolph Tate, in discussing the three different approaches to hermeneutics (author-centered, text-centered, and reader-centered),¹²³ states that each of them fails to acknowledge either one or both of the other 'worlds' of the text.¹²⁴ He therefore suggests what he calls an 'integrated approach to meaning.' Tate's key point is that "meaning results from a conversation between the world of the text and the world of the reader, a conversation informed by the world of the author."¹²⁵ The locus of meaning then is not placed in one of the worlds, nor in the interaction between two of them, but in the interplay of all three.

¹²¹ Arblaster, *Viva la Libertà!*, 6.

¹²² Arblaster, *Viva la Libertà!*, 5.

¹²³ As stated previously, these can be seen as parallels to the worlds behind, of, and in front of the text, respectively.

¹²⁴ Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 5.

¹²⁵ *Ibidem*.

The notion of the triad as I employ it in this thesis is derived from Media and Performance Studies scholar Chiel Kattenbelt, editor of and contributor to an issue of the journal *Maske und Kothurn* in 2021. Kattenbelt's conception of the triad is that its three nodes represent ideal types (Idealtypen), absolute and 'pure' ideas that don't exist separately in reality.¹²⁶ Importantly, a 'true' triad constitutes a unity that can't be reduced to two of its nodes: any observable event in real life can be understood as taking place somewhere in between those nodes. When applied to hermeneutics (and specifically Biblical Studies), the three worlds of the text certainly match this description of the triad. Tate's idea of meaning resulting from the interplay of these three worlds also implies that they are not singularly identifiable in practice, but that they function as ideal types.

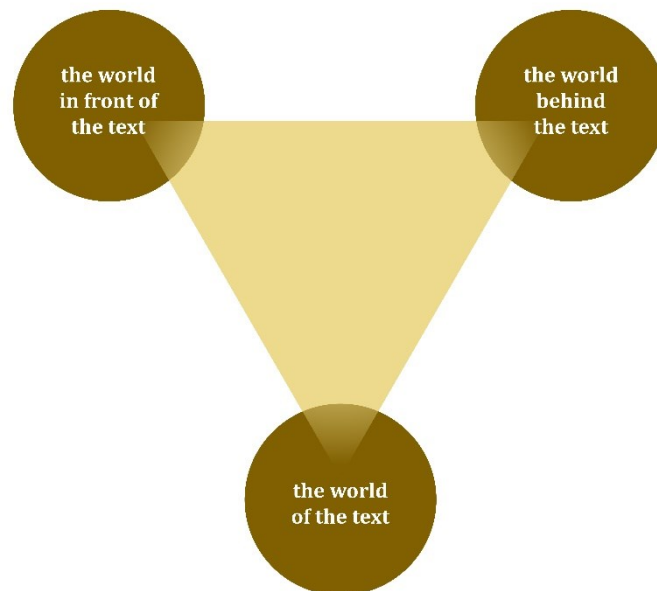


Figure 9: the hermeneutical model of three worlds of a text: a triad conform Kattenbelt's definition.

Earlier, I drew parallels between the world behind the text and *Werktreue*, and between the world in front of the text and *Regietheater*. Since the model of the three worlds of a text can be seen as a triad, it makes sense to investigate whether a new triad could be devised by following through on these parallels. With them, two nodes of the three-worlds-triad have been substituted, while the third node (that of the world of the text) remains open. I propose a substitution that could be an equal counterweight to *Werktreue* and *Regietheater*: *Aufführungspraxis*. One of many German words that are challenging to translate properly, the notion of *Aufführungspraxis* (staging practice) refers to the collection of (implicit) stagings

¹²⁶ Chiel Kattenbelt, "Denken in Triaden," *Maske und Kothurn* 64, no. 4 (2021): 17-18.

norms and conventions as constituted in practice.¹²⁷ Every (dramaturgical) choice the opera director makes is in some way or form a reaction to previous stagings they have seen of *Die Zauberflöte*, other operas, and even other forms of art. This results in a new triad:

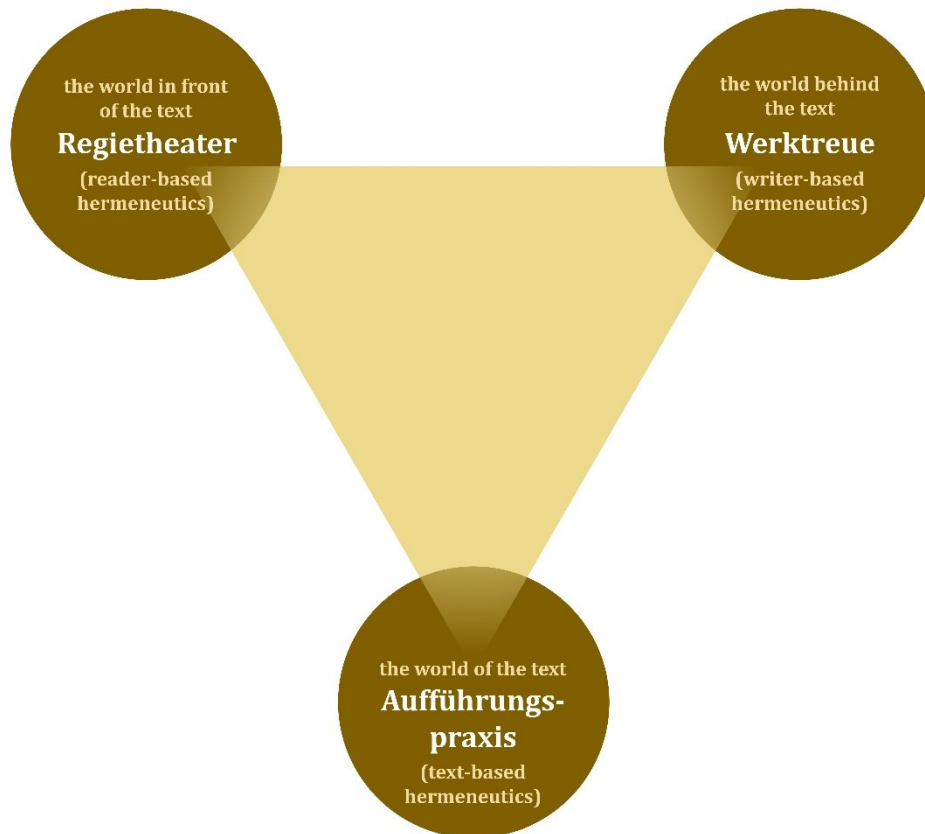


Figure 10: a new triad, visualizing the conception of the three notions as ideal types while still referring to the 'original' hermeneutical triad.

Substituting the third node for Aufführungspraxis makes sense, considering the following. One of the influences under which opera is staged is that of the genre's ruling conventions and standing traditions. Especially in opera tradition plays an important part. This entails memorable stagings and 'big names' (Zeffirelli, Schenk, etc.), and constitutes what is seen as conventional practice. Regietheater often takes shape as a reaction to this conventional practice, as can be traced back to Wieland Wagner's stagings at Neu-Bayreuth from 1951 onwards. Meanwhile, Werktreue advocates in theory don't necessarily claim to protect tradition and convention. Instead, even Heather Mac Donald states that opera stagings don't have to be traditional or 'realistic', but that

¹²⁷ What makes this term particularly interesting is that it's closely tied to the movement of originality and Originalklang in classical music, an idea quite comparable to Werktreue. I'm not sure at this moment how to integrate that in my reasoning, but this would certainly merit further thinking.

what is embedded in the music should be the primary guide for the director.¹²⁸ Interestingly enough however, *Werktreue* in contemporary discourse is to a significant extent characterized by an adherence to convention and tradition, since its advocates criticize those stagings that depart from conventional ones. The concept then, while claimed to be focused on opera's authors' original conceptions and intentions, seems tightly tethered to the conventional practice of staging opera. In addition to being an equal counterweight to *Werktreue* and *Regietheater* in the triad, the notion of *Aufführungspraxis* also helps to detach *Werktreue* from its associations of tradition and convention. It opens up a way of thinking about *Werktreue* that allows it to become a more clear and crystallized principle (as dealing with the world behind the operatic text), while also having the potential to dismantle some of its more negative and restrictive traits. This seems to me a productive way forward.

Following Kattenbelt's conception of the triad, the three nodes represent ideal types of equal weight, the interplay of which produce any observable event in real life. The consequence of this is that I propose to see *Werktreue*, *Regietheater*, and *Aufführungspraxis* not as concrete notions (or staging styles) that can exist separately in practice, but as core principles that are always in interplay in the practice of staging repertoire operas. I concluded before that the discourse on *Werktreue* and *Regietheater* is heated, emotional, and entrenched. Understanding these concepts as ideal types perhaps invites a more open (and less hostile) way of thinking about them as being neither objectively true or right, nor as isolated entities.

4.3 Conclusion: towards a rethinking of *Werktreue*

The main effort of this thesis is to move towards a rethinking of the concept of *Werktreue*. I have identified it as the most problematic of the two concepts within the *Werktreue* – *Regietheater* discourse, and offered counterarguments to its most recurring claims. I do not state – and this feels important to keep mentioning – that it has no validity in the practice of staging repertoire operas, but I do signal that it is being used in an unclear way. This unclarity produces a hostile and unproductive discourse. I have observed that *Werktreue* advocates often defend tradition and convention, dismissing new and 'radical' stagings.

One way of moving towards a rethinking of the concept, I argued, is to devise a new triad. In this triad, *Werktreue*, *Regietheater*, and *Aufführungspraxis* are the nodes, conceived as ideal types. The practice of staging repertoire operas then takes place within the interplay of these ideal types; neither of them can be identified in a pure form in practice without also evoking the other two. This triadic thinking opens up a way of thinking about *Werktreue* as being separable

¹²⁸ Mac Donald, "The Abduction of Opera."

from notions of convention and tradition. It allows for it to move towards a more crystallized and clear principle, while also making it more elusive in practice.

Since clarity is one of the main issues in this discourse, it should take center stage. What do we mean when we claim that 'Mozart would turn in his grave' at a specific staging of one of his operas? What is the perceived infidelity to his original creation? What do we understand this creation to be exactly, and what would it mean to respect and follow it? To what extent is it at all possible to follow the composer and librettist's directions while still addressing a contemporary audience? Some of these questions I have aimed to address in this thesis, others I haven't, but to none I can provide a truly definitive answer. In order to arrive at a proper rethinking of *Werktreue*, the discussion needs to be continued in a broad context, between opera directors and scholars, between dramaturgs and bloggers, between opera enthusiasts and journalists. One thing is sure however: the current discourse undeniably calls for a new arena.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Conclusion

This thesis departed from the observation that the discourse surrounding the concepts of *Werktreue* and *Regietheater* in opera is heated, emotional, and entrenched. The presupposition underlying this discourse is that these are two antithetical concepts, linear opposites from each other. This opposition occurred to me likely to be artificial, meaning that the difficulty and unproductivity of the discourse are in a sense unnecessary. It also means that they could possibly be circumvented. In the hermeneutical model of the three worlds of a text I found a lens to understand *Werktreue* and *Regietheater* as different in their approach to staging opera, thus concretizing their separate core principles. I argued that *Werktreue* could be seen as a parallel to the world *behind* the text, and *Regietheater* to the world *in front of* the text. This left open the third world, the world *of* the text. In order to arrive at a meaningful interpretation of that world in the context of *Werktreue* and *Regietheater*, I first aimed to demonstrate the artificiality of the opposition between the two through my case study.

My case study, Graham Vick's 2018 staging of Mozart's opera *Die Zauberflöte* at the Macerata Opera Festival, provided me with many concrete examples of staging choices that are congruent with both the *Werktreue* and the *Regietheater* approach. I examined several of these to demonstrate how both were identifiable in this staging. Vick made many staging choices that are very much congruent with Mozart and Schikaneder's intentions – even if they made this production fundamentally different from the opera as originally created. Time and place were radically altered to address and represent a current, tense political situation, and liberties were taken with regard to the libretto. Spoken texts and a speaking chorus were added, and all text has been changed to contemporary Italian. Still, what Mozart and Schikaneder set out to do was still accomplished: the opera was comical and light, still represented Masonic values of enlightenment and the search for a better world, and embodied a political critique on an unequal, oppressing system of power. Through this examination, I substantiated my claim that *Werktreue* and *Regietheater* are not antithetical to one another, but closely interrelated. The borders between the concepts blurred, effectively destabilizing the entire premise of linear opposition on which the current discourse is grounded.

In the next chapter, I aimed to take a step forward and propose a rethinking of *Werktreue*. To do this, it seemed logical to me to first take a closer look at *Werktreue*'s recurring claims. I offered counterarguments from relevant literature to do this. The main relevance of this was to make even more clear the problematic usage of *Werktreue* in its current discourse, and therefore the necessity of a new understanding of this concept.

The main research question I set out to answer was how we can arrive at a more productive rethinking of the concept of *Werktreue* in the context of staging repertoire operas. I have aimed to answer this question by revisiting the hermeneutical model of the three worlds, interpreting it as a triad conform Chiel Kattenbelt's definition, and devising a new triad by substituting its nodes. Thinking through the triad, I found, helps to give words to the way in which *Werktreue* and *Regietheater* converge in practice.

As stated before, I had substituted the world behind the text with *Werktreue*, and the world in front of the text with *Regietheater*. A useful third node to substitute the world of the text was found in the notion of *Aufführungspraxis*, the collection of ruling norms and conventions in (repertoire) opera's staging practice. As a result of this interpretation of the world of the text in application to opera, *Werktreue* could be detached from its affiliation with convention and tradition, thus opening up a way of thinking about *Werktreue* that is less conservative and reactionary. Furthermore, the consequence of following Kattenbelt's definition of the triad is that its nodes are understood to be unattainable ideal types, that are not separately identifiable in practice. Instead, reality – in this case specific stagings of repertoire operas – always takes place somewhere within the triad, in the interplay between the three nodes of *Werktreue*, *Regietheater*, and *Aufführungspraxis*. This then is my proposition: to rethink *Werktreue* as an ideal, a dot on the horizon, instead of as a practical and attainable goal – and consequently, to understand *Werktreue* and *Regietheater* as closely interrelated concepts, instead of as antithetical positions. The fundamentally relational model of the triad helps to see them as such. This is the direction of thought I believe can be helpful in achieving a rethinking of *Werktreue*. A change is necessary in its discourse, that much is clear.

While I have not found a definitive answer to my main research question, through my research I have found a way in which we might be able to move towards a rethinking of *Werktreue*. My addition to its discourse is to suggest a new way of understanding the concept. Moving forward, there certainly are more areas in opera in which the clarification and rethinking of concepts and ideas might be necessary.¹²⁹ I hope that this research contributes to that development, however modest that contribution may be. Opera certainly deserves a more constructive arena and less unnecessary conflict.

¹²⁹ Notably the discourses on racism and misogyny in opera, which are also marked by tension and conflict.

5.2 Discussion

Regietheater

In my research I have chosen to focus critically on Werktreue, and not nearly as much on Regietheater. As I have explained before, I have made this choice because in Werktreue I see the most obstructive force in the discourse, while Regietheater argues in favor of the director's liberty and agency. These principles are harder to disagree with, while those of Werktreue elicit a more immediate critical response. This does not mean that there are no valid points of criticism on Regietheater as it takes form in practice; my choice not to focus on this also stems from the necessary limitations this thesis is bound by.¹³⁰

Aufführungspraxis

I have proposed in this thesis to think about Werktreue and Regietheater through a new triadic model, together with the notion of Aufführungspraxis. While I feel that this choice is justified (as argued in Chapter 4.2), I do think there might also be other ways to interpret and substitute this third node. There are probably also other terms and concepts that would be helpful for devising a triad that helps to understand the practice of staging repertoire operas as taking place in the interplay of Werktreue, Regietheater, and a third notion, and that would also be helpful for rethinking the Werktreue.

Freemasonry & Mozart

In this thesis I have argued that Mozart and Schikaneder wrote *Die Zauberflöte* to express Freemason ideals. While the consulted literature generally suggests this is indeed the case, there are also authors who nuance or counter this claim. David Schroeder for instance argues that Mozart and Schikaneder saw the flaws of Freemasonry as well, and that they had their own criticisms of it.¹³¹ My decision to take the expression of Freemason ideals as one of the main intentions of Mozart and Schikaneder in creating *Die Zauberflöte*, while justified by literature research, might have been further explored, were there more time. For more insights into this, I recommend to read Schroeder's text from page 166 onwards.¹³²

¹³⁰ For a critical response to contemporary stagings of early operas, in which the director takes (too?) many liberties, see for instance: Julie and Frans Müller, "Early Opera: Production and Counter-production," *Early Music World*, accessed May 11, 2021, <https://www.earlymusicworld.com/operaproduction>.

¹³¹ Schroeder, *Experiencing Mozart*, 166.

¹³² An interesting exploration of the paradoxical inequality within the presumable 'universal' Freemasonry can furthermore be found in Cécile Révauger's chapter "Freemasonry and Blacks" in the following publication: Henrik Bogdan and Jan A.M. Snoek, eds, *Handbook of Freemasonry* (Leiden and Boston: Brill,

Practical limitations of a registration

Due to the pandemic, it was not possible to visit a physical opera performance. Therefore I have only seen my case study as a video registration, which obviously has its limitations. Even though I think I could 'see enough' of the performance, my perception was still mediated through the camera work. It is possible that this has caused me to miss some elements of Vick's staging.

5.3 Suggestions for further research

Aufführungspraxis applied

In Chapter 4 I add Aufführungspraxis as the third node in a triadic model containing Werktreue and Regietheater as the other nodes. It would be interesting to apply this node to the case study again. For this, a more thorough examination would be required of standing practices, norms and conventions regarding staging *Die Zauberflöte*. How does Vick respond to the existing conventions in this particular staging? Through this examination, a better understanding of this third node could be achieved, thereby either substantiating further its usefulness for the Werktreue-Regietheater discourse or exposing its weaknesses as a third node.

A different understanding of the triad

As an addition to my research in Chapter 4, it seems relevant to further examine the possibilities of the triad as a model for thinking about Werktreue and Regietheater. In this thesis I used the triad of the three worlds of a text as a basis to arrive at a new triad. I am certain that departing from other triads could lead to new insights.

Werktreue and agonistic art

In this thesis I have devoted considerable attention to the element of the political in Werktreue. My argument that Werktreue bears (at least potentially) in itself a movement towards depoliticization can be further developed. One possible direction for this is based on Chantal Mouffe's interpretation of the public sphere and her notion of agonistic art. In short, Mouffe's argument is that art should not function as a way of smoothing out differences in society and relieving social tensions, but instead as a medium for exposing those tensions and displaying

2014), ProQuest Ebook Central,
<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uunl/reader.action?docID=1730293&ppg=1>.

political friction.¹³³ Examining *Werktreue* through this lens might help to further understand its political implications.

5.4 Closing remarks

The world of opera, I wrote before, is a singular one, with peculiar forces of conservatism and innovation pulling in different directions. It is however also a world that I love, and that has much to offer. In order to further develop into the twenty-first century, I believe that opera practitioners should become more aware of their privileged position in society, the developments within that society, and the ways in which they (often implicitly) reproduce non-inclusive world views. This does not mean that Mozart operas can never again be staged in eighteenth century gowns and frocks, but it does mean that we should open our eyes more for new voices, new ideas, and new ways of staging opera. This is an endeavor that will be grappled with for decades to come, and it is already underway. In the meantime, I think it serves us to take a step back when emotions rise, and to continually realize why we want to keep sharing this art form with more and more people. To revisit the statement by Slavoj Žižek and Mladen Dolar I cited before:

...from its very beginning, opera was dead, a stillborn child of musical art. One of the standard complaints about opera today is that it is obsolete, no longer really alive (...). Instead of denying the charge, one should undermine it by radicalizing it: opera *never* was in accord with its time (...). To put it in Hegelese, opera is outdated in its very concept. How, then, can one not love it?¹³⁴

¹³³ Chantal Mouffe, "Art and Democracy: Art as an Antagonistic Intervention in Public Space," Open! Platform for Art, Culture & the Public Domain, accessed May 10, 2021, <https://www.onlineopen.org/art-and-democracy>.

¹³⁴ Žižek and Dolar, *Opera's Second Death*, viii-ix.

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Appendix

Synopsis

The plot of *Die Zauberflöte* advances as follows.¹³⁵

ACT I (Erster Aufzug)

A mythical land between the sun and the moon. Prince Tamino flees a terrible serpent before three ladies in the service of the Queen of the Night save him. After they have left, the bird catcher Papageno appears. He explains that the Queen's ladies give him food and drink in return for his birds. Then, he claims that it was he who killed the serpent. Hearing Papageno take credit for their work, the ladies return and padlock Papageno's mouth shut for lying. Turning to Tamino, they give the prince a portrait of the Queen's daughter, Pamina, who they say is being held prisoner by the evil Sarastro. Tamino falls in love with Pamina's portrait at first sight. The Queen appears. She grieves over the loss of her daughter and asks Tamino to rescue Pamina. The ladies offer Tamino a magic flute to ensure his safety on the journey, and to Papageno, who will accompany him, they give magic silver bells. Finally, the ladies summon three spirits to guide the men on their journey.

In Sarastro's palace, the slave Monostatos pursues Pamina, but he is frightened away when Papageno arrives. The bird catcher tells Pamina that Tamino loves her and is on his way to save her. Led to Sarastro's temple, Tamino learns from a priest that it is the Queen who is evil, not Sarastro, and that Pamina is safe. He plays on his flute, charming the animals with the music and hoping that it will lead Pamina to him. When he hears the sound of Papageno's pipes, he rushes off to follow it. Monostatos and his men chase Papageno and Pamina, but the sound of Papageno's magic bells renders them helpless. Sarastro, entering in ceremony, promises Pamina eventual freedom and punishes Monostatos. Pamina and Tamino are enchanted with each other, but soon the priests separate them to maintain their purity.

ACT II (Zweiter Aufzug)

Within the temple's inner sanctum, Sarastro tells the priests that Tamino will undergo initiation rites. Papageno and Tamino are sworn to silence. The three ladies appear and have no trouble derailing Papageno from his course of virtue, but Tamino remains firm.

¹³⁵ The text cited here is retrieved from the website of the Metropolitan Opera. "Synopsis: Die Zauberflöte," The Metropolitan Opera, accessed October 30, 2020, <https://www.metopera.org/discover/synopses/die-zauberflote/>.

In a garden courtyard, Monostatos tries to kiss the sleeping Pamina but hides when the Queen of the Night arrives. She gives her daughter a dagger and orders her to murder Sarastro. When Monostatos finds Pamina alone in tears, he forces himself upon her. Sarastro intervenes, consoling Pamina and explaining that he does not seek vengeance against her mother.

Inside the temple, Papageno is quick to break a new oath of fasting and jokes with a flirtatious old lady, who vanishes when he asks for her name. Tamino remains steadfast, even to the point of breaking Pamina's heart—she cannot understand his silence.

The priests inform Tamino that he has only two more trials to complete his initiation. Papageno, who has broken his oath, is eliminated from the trials. Pleading for a wife, he eventually settles for the old lady. When he promises to be faithful to her, she turns into a young maiden named Papagena but immediately disappears.¹³⁶

In one of the temple's gardens, Pamina despairs over Tamino's apparent indifference and contemplates suicide. Before she can take her life, the three spirits intervene to save her.

As Tamino prepares for the final trials, Pamina runs in. Together, they face the ordeals of fire and water, protected by the magic flute.

On a hillside, Papageno dejectedly resolves to hang himself. The spirits arrive just in time and remind him that if he uses his magic bells, he will find true happiness. When he plays the bells, Papagena appears, and the two are united.

At the entrance to the Temple of the Sun, the Queen of the Night, her three ladies, and Monostatos prepare to attack but are defeated and banished. Sarastro joins Pamina and Tamino as the brotherhood praises the gods and the triumph of courage, virtue, and wisdom.

¹³⁶ Note that in Graham Vick's staging Papagena's true identity isn't revealed until later in the opera, when Papageno plays the magical bells.

Cast & crew

For a complete image of my case study, I attach a list of cast and crew names. Since the characters can be regarded in three languages, I include both their English and German names (as mentioned in the Bärenreiter Urtext) and their Italian names (as mentioned in the video registration's credits).

Tamino

Giovanni Sala

Papageno

Guido Loconsolo

Three Ladies / Drei Damen / Tre Dame

Lucrezia Drei, Eleonora Cilli, Adriana Di Paola

Queen of the Night / Königin der Nacht / Astrifiammante

Tetiana Zhuravel

Monostatos / Monostato

Manuel Pierattelli

Pamina

Valentina Mastrangelo

Chorus

Coro Lirico Marchigiano "Vincenzo Bellini"

Orchestra

Orchestra Regionale delle Marche

Music

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Text

Emanuel Schikaneder (original), Fedele d'Amico (translation), Graham Vick, Stefano Simone Pintor (dialogues)

Conductor

Daniel Cohen

Three Boys / Drei Knaben / Tre Geni¹³⁷

Ilenia Silvestrelli, Caterina Piergiacomi, Emanuele Saltari

Speaker / Sprecher / Oratore

Marcell Bakonyi

Sarastro

Antonio Di Matteo

Papagena

Paola Leoci

First Priest & First Man in Armour / Erster Priester & Erster geharnischter Mann / Sacerdote & Armigero

Marco Miglietta

Second Man in Armour / Zweiter geharnischter Mann / Armigero

Seung Pil Choi

Director

Graham Vick

Set Designer

Stuart Nunn

Costume Designer

Stuart Nunn

Lighting Designer

Giuseppe di Iorio

Movement Director

Ron Howell

Chorus Master

Martino Faggiani, Massimo Fiocchi Malaspina

¹³⁷ The Three Boys are credited as Three Geniuses in the registration's credits.