

# Tragedy And The Grotesque In Modernist Opera: An Examination of Berg, Britten and Shostakovich

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## Abstract

This paper examines how the human being is constructed as a subject influenced by social, political, and ideological structures in the modernist and post-war opera repertoire of the 20th century. The study employs document analysis, a qualitative research method. The research is limited to the operas *Wozzeck* and *Lulu* by Alban Berg, *Peter Grimes* and *Billy Budd* by Benjamin Britten, and *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* and *The Nose* by Dmitri Shostakovich. Through these selected operas, the tragic and grotesque forms of narrative in modern opera are discussed; the focus is on how the fate of the characters and the relationship between the individual and the system are dramaturgically constructed. In this context, the final scenes are particularly evaluated in the context of the physical annihilation and dissolution of identity of the individual. In Alban Berg's operas, the individual suffers both spiritual and physical destruction. In Benjamin Britten, the conflict develops more between the individual and society, on a moral and conscientious level. In Dmitri Shostakovich's work, tragic and grotesque elements are used together. *Wozzeck's* drowning in the lake, *Lulu's* violent death, *Peter Grimes's* disappearance, *Billy Budd's* execution and *Katherine's* suicide demonstrate the weight of tragic endings in modernist opera. In contrast, *The Nose*, with its ironic and absurd structure, presents a grotesque ending based on the shattering of identity, without physical death. Consequently, it has been observed that in the operas examined, the modernist narrative is often constructed with dramatic endings that lead the viewer mostly to tragic annihilation or a grotesque disintegration of identity.

**Keywords:** Modernist opera; *Wozzeck*; *Lulu*; *Peter Grimes*; *Billy Budd*; *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*; *The Nose*.

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