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A Study of the Conversion of Operas into Popular Plays, 1675-1722, with  
Special Reference to the Play *Atis*

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AND THE VENETIAN OPERA

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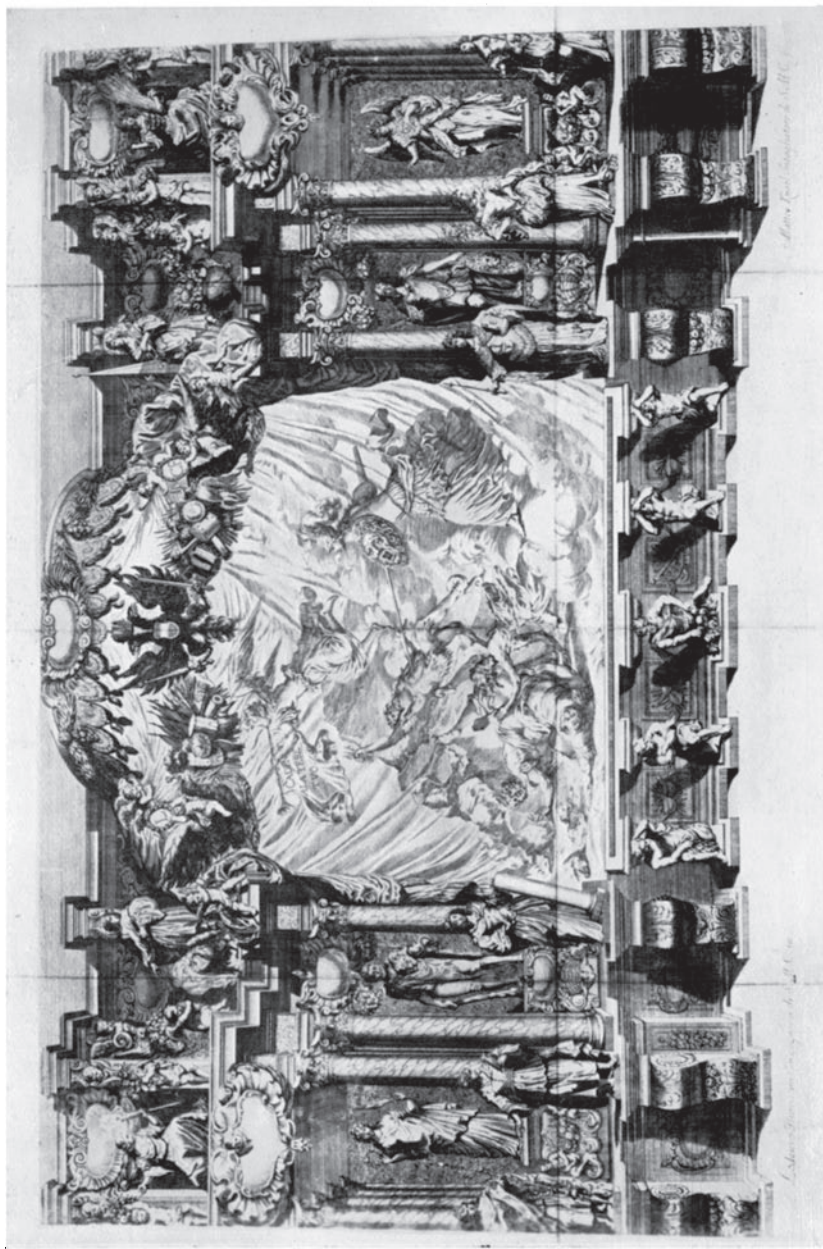
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## PLATE I



*‘Il Fuoco Eterno Custodito dalle Vestali.’ Proscenium and Curtain*

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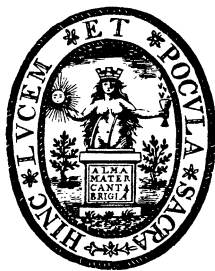
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BY

MARY BEARE

*Fellow of Newnham College, Cambridge*



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## PREFACE

If the pages that follow seem, as the sub-title indicates, to insist on the conversion of Italian operas into popular plays in the German language during the period under review, rather than on the play in question, it is for the simple reason that 'Atis' has a considerable historical and sociological interest, if little intrinsic literary value. My aim, then, is not to write an appreciation of the play or to prepare an edition of it, but to inquire into its sources and to determine the form and the stage setting of the foreign operas which it resembles. This investigation will lead up to a study of the form of 'Atis', considered from the point of view of its origin in a musical genre that tended to subordinate dramatic conflict to pageantry and symbolism. In relating the class of plays, usually known as "Haupt- und Staatsaktionen", of which 'Atis' is but a typical example, to their social background, an attempt will be made to study the efforts of seventeenth-century actors to make good the lack of dramatic interest by means of acting, and to offer a more satisfactory explanation of the divorce of the theatre from the drama than would be possible starting from an historical survey of the player-companies. It is hoped at the same time that these investigations will throw new light on the nature and extent of Italian influence on the "Wanderbühne" in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—a subject which for obvious reasons has never received the same attention as the English influence on dramatic production in the earlier part of the seventeenth century.

My sincere thanks are due, and are here gratefully tendered, to the trustees of the Tiarks Fund for the generosity which made the publication of this work possible. To Professor Willoughby I am especially indebted for his valuable criticism of the first draft of my essay, originally planned as

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the introduction to an edition of the play, and for his remarkable patience with my habits of procrastination; to Geheimrat Professor Oskar Walzel of Bonn for drawing my attention to several omissions and inaccuracies in the final typescript copy; to my friend and former colleague at Newcastle-on-Tyne, Mr F. Austin Child, for indispensable help with the description of the stage designs reproduced in this volume. I should also like to thank the Research Fund Committee of the Queen's University of Belfast for the aid of a grant, without which it would have been difficult to obtain the material necessary for carrying out the researches, also the Authorities of the National Library at Vienna and the Library of the University of Bonn for their assistance and courtesy. Dr Richard Samuel kindly undertook the task of preparing the index, and to him and Mrs Cynthia Crews I am grateful for revising the proofs.

Lastly, I would express my deep sense of gratitude to Professor R. A. Williams, without whose inspiring guidance and unfailing encouragement throughout my work this book would probably never have seen the light.

M. B.

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## INTRODUCTION

The National Library at Vienna, formerly known as the Hofbibliothek, contains preserved in manuscript a number of secular plays which resemble, both in content and form, the operas performed at Venice between the years 1637 and 1700. The titles of some fifteen of these plays were mentioned in the year 1889, and detailed synopses of the content of six were given by Carl Heine in a book dealing with the repertoire of the "Wanderbühne"<sup>1</sup> in the latter half of the seventeenth century and during the first three decades of the eighteenth, that is, prior to the reforms of Gottsched in Leipzig.

Heine attempted to prove on very slight evidence that these plays were of Italian or Spanish rather than of English origin, and for one of them 'Der Stumme Prinz *Atis*' (MS. 13107) he was able to name a probable Italian model. His main argument for the Italian origin of 'Atis' was based upon the assumption of the existence of burlesque scenes that served as a foil to the main plot, in imitation of Italian popular drama. It seemed to me worth while to find out whether the Italian opera 'Creso' of the year 1678 was the original of 'Atis', whether the burlesque scenes described by Heine really existed, and if so, to investigate the exact relation of the German play to its Italian original. An examination of this kind promised to explain not only the type of play chosen by the popular actor-authors in Germany, when English influence had altogether vanished, but also to account for certain modifications made in the original so as to adapt it to the taste of a popular audience.

<sup>1</sup> Carl Heine, *Das Schauspiel der deutschen Wanderbühne*, Halle, 1889. Heine was successively manager of a theatre in Hamburg and of the Deutsches Theater in Berlin.

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The existence not only of a German translation of ‘Creso’<sup>1</sup> (published as was the Italian libretto at Vienna in 1678), but also of a Hamburg libretto of the year 1684 on the same theme, proved at first somewhat bewildering and seemed likely to complicate considerably the investigations into the origins of ‘*Atis*’. The possibility, however, of rejecting at once the German translation of 1678 as part of the basis of inquiry soon became evident, since it was found to be a word for word and rather uninteresting rendering of the Italian text, displaying no originality whatever. The Hamburg ‘*Croesus*’ on the other hand promised to solve certain difficulties; what was of interest here, as compared with the Italian ‘*Creso*’, was the existence of comic scenes in each act similar to those contained in the popular play ‘*Atis*’ but differing altogether from the comic episodes of the Italian opera, from which both the ‘*Croesus*’ and the ‘*Atis*’ evidently derived. The similarities between the operas and the ‘*Atis*’ in the main spectacular scenes, and the differences between the Italian opera on the one hand and the German opera and German play on the other, in respect of their comic scenes, thus form the points on which all the lines of the present inquiry focus. Before proceeding with the investigations, the general scope of which has been already indicated in the preface, it will be necessary to describe the MS., to discuss the authorship of the play and its provenance and to offer some explanation of the cultivation of Italian opera at Vienna.

<sup>1</sup> This German translation, mentioned by Alexander von Weilen in *Zur Wiener Theatergeschichte*, Schriften des österr. Vereins für Bibliothekswesen, Wien, 1901, p. 23, may be found in the Musikalien-Sammlung of the National-Bibliothek, Vienna. The Hamburg libretto is contained in the *Hamburger Opersammlung*, vol. 1, No. 26, Staatsbibliothek, Hamburg.