

Baroque Drama

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The Baroque style in art and music has a few defining characteristics, among which are a sense of movement, contrast between light and dark, sensuality, and detailed, realistic naturalism. When blended together by a skilled artist the goal was to evoke emotion and draw the viewer or listener into the piece. This paper presents a few of the works of the period that are representative of those stylistic elements and describes how those elements are achieved in the works.

The first work is the sculpture *David* by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, which was produced in 1623. In this work, the artist encapsulates a frozen glimpse of the hero just as he is about to engage the giant Goliath only a moment before releasing the stone that would bring down his enemy. His gaze is intent on his target and “so real is his intensity that viewers tend to avoid standing directly in front” perhaps afraid that they are in the line of fire (Sayre 682). It is not difficult to imagine the drama of the battle from the tension of the muscles. The position of the arms and the body imparts a sense of movement as the attack begins.

The next work is the painting *Bacchus* (ca. 1597) by Michelangelo Merisi, also known as Caravaggio. Standing out in stark contrast to the darker background, the title subject exhibits another common characteristic of the Baroque style – sensuality or the pursuit of physical pleasure. The subject holds a glass of wine and the presence of the bowl of fruit demonstrates “the pleasures of indulging the sensual appetites” not only to satisfy physical hunger but also “carnal pleasure” (Sayre 691).

The final example is the opera *Orfeo* by Claudio Monteverdi produced in 1607. This work in particular is significant because of how successfully all the elements of the Baroque style are achieved. An opera tells a dramatic story “using music, dances, choruses, and instrumental interludes” (Sayre 696). The stage was in constant motion as actors engaged with one another.

The *recitativo* – the dialog of the actors on the stage – is set to music and sung with a cadence and rhythm that mimics natural speech – the clear telling of the story. The *aria* was an intricate part of the production where the complexities of the musical composition as well as the skill of the singer could be showcased. Point and counterpoint exchanges in the musical score and variation of the volume from one act to another or even within the same act – the light-and-dark contrast seen in paintings or sculpture. Orpheus’ skill as a musician allows him to win the release of his love from the underworld – the sensuality.

The combination of all of the elements that makeup the Baroque style could be crafted to ensnare the viewer or listener and inspire profound emotion with its scale, detail, action, and sensuality which are all hallmarks of the period.

Works Cited (Bibliography)

Sayre, Henry M. *The Humanities. Culture, Continuity and Change*. Book 4. Saddle Rock, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2012. Print.