

Der Seelenbräu

Erzählung

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It is a pastiche written by a writer who made his name and reputation as a dramatist, and as such maybe not really representative of his oeuvre in general. It is a trifle, yet nicely produced and not without definite charm. One is surprised at the late date of production, it was first published in Stockholm in 1945, it is more in the style of a 19th century rural story, but as noted this may have been the point, after all it is set in a mountainous villa in which time has been standing still, the wet dream of any nostalgically inclined individual.

'DerSeelenbräu' is the name of one of the protagonists the Dechant (the dean) of the little timeless village of Köstendorf, but he is not really the main one. There is also the rich business man of the village, der Herr Bräu, or Matthias Hochleithner, the other pole of the social force field of the small community. Hochleithner is presupposing and huge in volume, not denying himself the pleasures life may provide. He is also the proprietor of the inn (Wirtshaus) the social center of the small community. They do not like each other, do not warm up, yet there is mutual respect and a workable *modus vivendi*. The dean suffers from an unreciprocated love for music, which means that he puts all his soul into his choir with endless repetitions combined with desperate cajoling of his somewhat indifferent and inept charges. Then there enters upon the scene the orphaned niece - Clementine - of the Herr Bräu. She comes already as a young girl to her uncle and village, where she has spent many a happy summer vacation, as a refuge from the nunnery, where she has been an unhappy student. As she grows up she turns out to have a wonderful voice (in fact she has the rare gift of perfect pitch), and the dean realizes that her aptitude for music is very much beyond where he can teach her, in fact he may only hamper her development. Yet his love of music, and his (unconscious) attraction to the blossoming woman, means that he claims her attention and his teaching, as well as having her sent to Salzburg. Then a fourth character, a young man with ears nipped by the frost, is brought to the scene one cold winter night, in fact on Fasching. He looks for an abode, and finds by chance the inn where a big party is in full swing, and into whose whirl he is sucked, whether he likes it or not. Clementine, who is pursued by the wealthy Ammetsberger, finds herself immediately attracted to the young man by name of Franz Haindl, much to the chagrin of her persistent suitor. Haindl is offered to spend the night in the ghost haunted room, to which he has no objections, not being frightened by mere ghosts. Der Herr Bräu plans a skit in which a ghost would be impersonated and scare the daylights out of the poor guest as he is being waken up. This comes to naught, the young man is not to be messed with, he spends the night busy walking up and down engaged in composing music, which deeply affects Clementine.

A few months later at Easter the whole affair is brought to a conclusion. Meanwhile, the young teacher Haindl, because that was his mission coming to the village, has composed

some music and dedicated it to Clementine. This causes a scandal, one of the teachers - Fischlhammer - of the Mozarteum in Salzburg, feels obliged to visit the village in the company of his wife, and condemn it. The uncle takes it badly, as does of course the suitor Ammetsberger, while Clementine herself feels incumbent upon her to defend her young friend and declare that she feels proud. As a result the uncle has what looks like a stroke.

By Easter, however, he has recovered, in the meantime the dean has seen the young couple in the woods, disappearing into a ruin of a former castle. They can be up to no good, he reflects, riddled with envy and jealousy. Later on they are followed by a long train of children, which puzzles him further. It is one thing to seduce a young woman, but to lead a whole train of children, following him as he being a piper, must be far worse. It all has a happy resolution in the church on Easter Sunday. As a present to the Dean, his choir, properly trained and coached by the young man and Clementine, sings Bach. Never before has the dean heard such beautiful music, in fact it is even suggested that although he must have known of Bach, being a church musician after all, he does not recognize it as a work of Bach. Everything is forgiven. And the wealthy suitor Ammetsberger? He is gone having left the waitress of the inn pregnant.

So is there a moral to this delightful story? One moral is of course the universal one that nothing can prevent true love to have its fated course, so attractive indeed, that writers and story-tellers never tire of telling it. More specifically it is a proclamation that likewise true talent always tops mere application. No matter how much you try you will never succeed if you do not possess what it really takes, this mysterious intrinsic gift, so much in opposition to contemporary modes. That it is music is of course symptomatic, because of all the arts, music may be the most unforgiving in separating true talent from the fake one. The poor dean is forever, in spite of his dedication, doomed to remain a pitiful mediocrity, for ever barred to understand the secrets of the craft, but of course like the population at large, he is able to reap the emotional awards of music, without being privy to its creative process, just as it is much easier to verify a solution than to come up with it. In the case of music, if this had not been the case, music as an art form would have been impossible, and instead reduced to be an incomprehensible idiosyncrasy of a few queer and disturbed individuals (maybe not unlike mathematics). One may even argue that the ignorant public's emotional appreciation of music may be greater, if not necessarily deeper, than that of composers and performers. I doubt that this is the case with the visual arts, where the qualities of a painting are more apparent to the artists than the public who may only be attuned to very superficial aspects. As arts, music and paintings, are very different. In the story we are made privy to the process of composing, both by been given a glimpse at the artist at work (he may not be Haydn but the principle is the same) as well as being allowed to eavesdrop on his conversation with Clementine on a bus. He scoffs at her idea that he as a composer needs a piano, or for that matter any kind of instrument. It is all in his head, in fact musicians can listen by their sights, just reading the Partitur (the sheet music) it all comes alive to him. It may come alive to him, the reader muses, but does that really mean that an actual performance is unnecessary to the likes of him? Would that not add somethings after all? We can all for our inner eyes fashion pictures that may be rather vivid, but does that mean that seeing the pictures themselves is superfluous? It seems to be a real difference between an auditory memory

and a visual, the latter can never be as literal as the former. Thus we do not need to look at a picture to remind ourselves how Mona Lisa looks like, but this is not the only reason we would lie to look at her, there are reasons that can only be satisfied by actually looking at her.

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