

Chemistry in Theatre The SciArtist

It requires a great degree of courage to carry out what Carl Djerassi has aimed to do. We have all had a clear image of the two cultures that cannot meet, in which “Science” and “Literature” belong two to different realms. In this aloof view, it is taken that the range of competence of each is distributed asymmetrically. A scientist cannot bring about works of literature, and vice versa. This may apply for a good number of the participants of these disciplines, but it cannot be a coincidence that brilliant researchers are not only able to appreciate the quality of another culture of knowledge but also be capable of producing remarkable contributions of their own. This is shown not only by the two plays by Carl Djerassi but also the reflections on his work.

Carl Djerassi has, in his own words, created the plays so that they do not necessarily have to be performed, but can also be read. This is indeed the case; they are stimulating and draw the reader into a world of science, in the world of thoughts and relationships, in which scientific communities hold as a kind of fascinating collegiality and at the same time as an abyss. In the play *Insufficiency*, an assistant professor, who is the central character, hopes to gain kudos for his work on carbonized drink in the field of “bubbleology”, thereby hoping to achieve tenure. It all goes wrong and it ends up with the public prosecutor: there is an underlying tone but it is at the same time amusing. The other play, *Phallacy*, deals with the idea of an antique work of art that is suddenly made 1500 years younger during chemical analysis. What does this mean for our perception and understanding of art? At first, many sequences in the play appear normal and almost banal. The everyday activities that appear from the outside to be the strange and crazy acts of scientific researchers move into focus. The really surprising point is that the world that is

presented here is so familiar but at the same time strange or even exaggerated because it is brought to the point by being the subject of a piece of theater; however, it offers a chance to look at certainties in another way. The fine line between triviality and profoundness is what makes these two works.

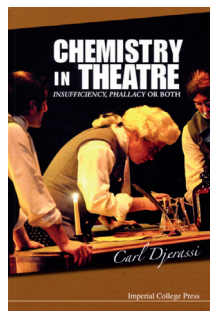
The book *The SciArtist* deals with the literary works of Carl Djerassi. This is a noble task, as the various references that inspired Djerassi can be seen. The art of Paul Klee is a particularly important point of reference for Djerassi. At the same time, the relationship between the two cultures that meet in one person can be illuminated. Through the change in format from e-mail correspondence to text that illustrates pictures, a very lively, non-academic (in a positive sense) style arises.

The relationship between science and aesthetics, which has been undervalued for a long time, because the theory of cognition and ethics have played a central role in the analysis of scientific understanding, is given heed with these works. This creates an avenue to think about basic questions of scientific lifestyle, but in a way that the amusing, annoying moments can be experienced and thus creates exactly the openness that this contemplation needs. The bridging to self-reference is in itself is not easy, but here someone writes about the inner machinery of scientific culture from their own experience, and they are at the same time able to bring this to the “outside” and from there, as a scientist, be able to look over their own shoulder. The alienating view brings a new perspective to that that is familiar. At the very time that there is increasing ignorance of premises and unusual and amazing things about our own scientific activities, such a view is existentially important.

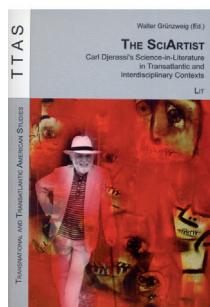
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