

Affective Economies in the Tug of War between Idealism and Anti-idealisms

Reviewers' reactions to Anne Charlotte Leffler's *Sanna kvinnor* (True Women)

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to demonstrate and discuss a method for analyzing reviews, emphasizing the emotional reactions and personal attempts by reviewers to position themselves. Paying attention to such structures is especially important during periods of intense aesthetic and ideological struggles in the field of theatre. The documents used in the study are three reviews of the opening night (15 October 1883) of *Sanna kvinnor* (True Women), by the Swedish playwright Anne Charlotte Leffler. The reviews constitute an interesting case, as both the play and the performance broke with dramaturgical conventions and strongly criticized the gender-ideology of the era, at a time when the advocates of idealism exercised hegemony and were challenged by various anti-idealist opponents.

KEYWORDS

The Scandinavian modern breakthrough, nineteenth century theatre, reception, reviews, theory of affect, Sarah Ahmed, gender, Anne Charlotte Leffler.

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In the 1880's Scandinavian theatre underwent radical change. They were part of a process, that took much longer than a decade. Toril Moi for example describes the Scandinavian modern breakthrough as a slow and piecemeal process over fifty years, in which several different literary and theatrical strategies circulated. She finds that during the period, various anti-idealistic expressions competed with the artistic norms and conventions of idealism and questioned its view of art and morals, striving to undo the knot that tied these components closely together.¹ The morals of idealism were basically the exponent of conservative bourgeois values; in particular, they defended matters of "sedlighet", a concept similar to decency, connected to sexual behaviour, but also referring to a wider range of conservative bourgeois norms and values. Realism without idealistic elevation was considered a threat to decency and thus to the core of society, by the advocates of idealism.² Performances that criticized or clashed with the theatrical norms and conventions that supported decency, which included the prevailing gender norms and ideology of family and marriage provoked strong emotional reactions among both reviewers and ordinary theatregoers.

Anne Charlotte Leffler's plays of the 1880s question the patriarchal ideal of the subservient woman and conservative concepts of decency. The performance of the three-act-play *Sanna kvinnor* (True Women) is a good example of Leffler's gender criticism which caused intense emotional responses when it premiered at the Royal Dramatic Theatre on 15 October 1883. Therefore, I have chosen to use a few reviews of this performance to suggest a methodological approach for highlighting how emotions at times of ideological tensions construct the reviewer's conceptions of the performance.

Thomas Postlewait warns us against reductive uses of reviews, in which reviewers are quoted as if they were "the arbitrators" of the significance of

1. Moi 2006, 67-68, 105-06.

2. Gedin 2004, 387-91.

a theatrical event.³ Instead he recommends that we conceive of reviews as sources in which a partial “contextual meaning” of the theatrical event can be traced. He also reminds us of the importance of taking into consideration the aims, motivations and purposes of the agents of an event.⁴ The latter is certainly something every theatre historian should take to heart when using the descriptions and evaluations of reviewers. However, instead of looking for the significance of theatrical events in reviews, they can be regarded as sites, at which performances are discursively constructed. The Swedish theatre scholar Karin Helander stresses that theatrical reviews are complicated sources when researching the history of theatre. The evaluations of reviewers are coloured by the way theatre and society were understood at the time, however they remain individual and subjective.⁵ In this article, I will expound on Postlewait’s exhortation to pay attention to the aims and motivations of agents, as well as Helander’s remark about the individual subjective side of descriptions and evaluations in reviews. Instead of looking for the significance of a theatrical event, though, I will deal with reviews as sites for constructions of a performance and stress the importance of the reviewer’s emotions and aspirations for positions in that construction.

My analysis will start with the emotional responses of the reviewers. I will show *how* emotions construct the performance and the reviewers’ positions as well as the playwright’s position in the reviews. I will use three reviews from the opening night of the production of Anne Charlotte Leffler’s gender critical play *Sanna kvinnor* (True Women) For the theoretical framework and the method, I depart from Sarah Ahmed’s idea of affective economies in *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (2004) in which Ahmed studies how emotional reactions inform speech acts that construct objects and persons in texts. The purpose of the analysis is to apply Ahmed’s phenomenological and constructionist approach and concepts to analysis of reviews in historiographical research, in order to highlight how emotions and positioning strategies work in the reviewers’ constructions of the performance. Hence, I make no claims of presenting an extensive analysis of the reception of the performance, thoroughly contextualized in its historical period. Although such a study would certainly have been worthwhile, the scope of the article is limited to showing how an analysis of the reviewer’s construction of a performance that starts by examining emotional reactions can be performed, and to a discussion of the usefulness of that analysis.

“AFFECTIVE ECONOMIES” AND “OBJECTS OF CIRCULATION”

The study of “affective economies” is concerned with the way emotions operate as forms of action, which involves orientations with regard to others or to objects in given situations or in artefacts. It investigates how emotions are pro-

3. Postlewait 2009, 13.

4. Ibid., 225.

5. Helander 2003, 12.

duced by contact with objects and how they circulate. The central question for an analysis is: “What do emotions do?” In her analyses, Sarah Ahmed tracks how objects become invested with emotions. Emotions “stick” to objects and attach or connect different objects in specific contexts.⁶ Such objects can be material or immaterial like memories or other individuals. Feelings “stick to some objects” and “slide over” others.⁷ Ahmed calls objects that attract and/or produce feelings “objects of circulation”.⁸ The process of attributing qualities to objects involves reading the contacts we have with them in a certain way. Emotions both shape and are shaped by such contacts.⁹ Contact with objects imply direction and is furthermore shaped by the perceiver’s history of contact. Thus, emotions involve such (re)actions and relations as attraction or repulsion.¹⁰

Ahmed studies affective economies by reading texts concerned with terrorism, asylum and immigration that circulate in the public domain.¹¹ Her arguments suggest that figures of speech are crucial to the emotionality of texts and she examines how different ‘figures’ adhere and how sticking is dependent on past histories of association. She also considers the emotionality of texts in terms of the way in which they name or perform different emotions. Relying on speech act theory, she states that emotions simply exist before utterances but become real as effects, shaping different kinds of actions or orientations. Therefore, texts can be the site of analyses of how emotions do their work by ‘reading’ objects.¹²

In the analysis of the reviews, I will pay attention to the reviewers’ readings of objects through emotions. What objects in the performance of *Sanna kvinnor* have attracted their feelings and what have not? I will consider how emotions involve different orientations towards the objects and how they affect the construction of the performance in the reviews. Consequently, I will attend to how emotional speech acts in the reviews contribute to producing the performance and the position of the playwright, as well as the reviewers’ ideological and aesthetical positions.

THE PLAY AND THE REVIEWS

On the opening night, *Sanna kvinnor* was performed along with the one-act play *En räddande engel* (A Redeeming Angel). While the first play is a drama in three acts, the latter is a comedy in one act about a young girl’s first experience of a ball. I have chosen to analyze reviews of *Sanna kvinnor*, as it is the most

6. Ahmed 2004, 4.

7. Ibid., 8.

8. Ibid., 7-8.

9. Ibid., 6-7.

10. Ibid., 8.

11. Ibid., 1. Three cases inform Ahmed’s choice of texts: Reconciliation in Australia, responses to international terrorism and asylum and immigration in the UK (14).

12. Ibid., 12-13.

controversial of the two plays on the evening-programme. The protagonist Berta is in her late teens and the youngest daughter of Mr and Mrs Bark. Berta's father is a gambler and has dissipated most of the family's fortune. Berta supports the family with her hard work at a bank. Mr Bark wants to lay his hands on some bonds that his wife has inherited, but Berta has protected the family from her father's ravages by persuading her mother to sign a deed of gift, giving Berta control over the bonds. Her weak mother cannot resist her husband's persuasiveness though and gives him the deed. After having settled his debts, he comes home with Berta's colleague from the bank, Mr Lundberg, to arrange a celebration of wedding anniversaries in the family. The gathering turns into an arrangement in which Mr Bark reproaches Berta, acting as her judge in regard to her arrangement of the deed of gift. Berta is overwrought by her mother's treachery. She blames Mr Lundberg for participating in the demeaning party, but it turns out that he has come to propose to her, to save her from her troublesome situation. Berta declines his proposal on the grounds that her mother needs her more than ever.¹³

In *Sanna kvinnor* melodramatic elements interplay with the gender critical discourse. They underscore women's subordination in the family and the unlimited power of husbands and fathers. Furthermore, they contribute to generating an inner plot, which dramatizes an emotional conflict in Berta concerning her relationship to her mother. Depending on how the play is staged the melodramatic elements can either highlight or subdue the emotional conflict in Berta and the consequent inner plot, as well as the gender-critical discourse.¹⁴ A play with a rather subdued external plot, focused on the situation and the agony of an individualized female character in the position of the protagonist, was hardly anything that the reviewer or the ordinary theatregoer would have expected. In most theatrical performances, the stories had enthralling external plots.

The reviewers concentrate a lot on the story and the characters in *Sanna kvinnor*. It is often difficult to know whether the reviewer is referring to the written words in the play or the creation of the story by the actors on the stage. The play *Sanna kvinnor* was published after the première, a fact that indicates that at least the accounts of the story in the reviews in the two daily papers refer to the staging, as those reviews were published the day after the opening night.¹⁵ For the third review, published in the periodical *Tidskrift för hemmet* I cannot find a date of publication, but it is evident that the reviewer compares his/her own interpretation of the text to the performance, so it is reasonable to assume that the review was written after the publication of the play. The reviewers also comment on actors' presence on the stage and their acting. These kinds of comments are quite sparse, compared to the descriptions and comments on the story.

I have chosen three reviews that represent different kinds of emotional

13. Edgren Leffler 1883.

14. Johansson 2010.

15. Sylvan 1984, 61.

readings and in which various positions of the reviewers can be discerned. The review in the daily paper *Aftonbladet*, was published on 16 October 1883 and signed A. F (scholar and conservative Anders Flodman).¹⁶ He belonged to an aesthetic school called ‘The Signatures’, which supported and theoretically elaborated on the aesthetics of idealism.¹⁷ The review in *Göteborgs Handels och Sjöfartstidning* (GHT) was also published on 16 October 1883 and is signed with the abbreviation E-dt (Frans Eugène Fahlstedt, a good friend of August Strindberg’s, who was a litterateur and also reviewed music).¹⁸ The third review was published in *Tidskrift för hemmet* in issue six of 1883.¹⁹ The periodical addressed female readers. It is considered an important organ for the women’s movement of the time, although a rather conservative wing of it. The review is much longer than the other two, but most of it describes the story and plot of *Sanna kvinnor*. The reviewer uses the pen name ‘Teatervän’ which literally means ‘friend of theatre’. I do not know for sure who is behind the pen name, therefore I will use ‘Teatervän’ and s/he when referring to the author of the article.

READING THE PERFORMANCE THROUGH INDIGNATION

The latter piece, on the other hand, was complete news, as it was in the current modern style, aimed at a pessimistic representation of all of the male sex, at least those who have succeeded in starting a family. Two specimens of this despicable species appear: Mr Pontus Bark [...] and his son-in-law Wilhelm, [...].²⁰

In *Aftonbladet*, Anders Flodman finds that *Sanna kvinnor* aims at “a pessimistic representation of the male sex”, at least of husbands. He ironically calls the father of the main character, Mr Bark, and his son-in-law, Wilhelm, two examples of this “despicable species”. Using Ahmed’s terminology, the object of circulation is clearly the representation of men, and it produces a strong feeling of indignation in the reviewer that shapes his perception and description of the representation. The emotional reading through indignation is performed with speech acts that are marked by exaggeration and irony, as for example “pessimistic representations of *the male sex*” and “*despicable species*” [my

16. A.F. *Aftonbladet*, 16 October 1883; *Svenskt pressregister* 1967.

17. Lagerström 1999, 33-35.

18. E-dt. *Göteborgs Handels och Sjöfartstidning* (GHT) 16 October 1883; *Svenskt pressregister* 1967; Hildebrant 1956.

19. Teatervän. *Tidskrift för hemmet*, tillagnad Nordens qvinnor, 1886:6, 321-28.

20. A.F. *Aftonbladet*, 16 October 1883. The Swedish original of the quote is: “Det senare stycket deremot var en fullkomlig nyhet, ehuru i den nuvarande moderna stilen, åsyftande en pessimistisk framställning af alt, hvad mankön heter, åtminstone de deraf, som lyckats att bilda familj.” Här förekomma tvänne exemplar af detta föraktliga species: hr Pontus Bark [...] samt dennes måg Wilhelm, [...].” All quotes from hereon out are from the review in this issue of *Aftonbladet*. Only longer quotes will be cited in the Swedish original.

italics]. “The male sex” and “species” delineates the husbands in *True Women* as representations of all men.

The representation of men as the object of circulation and the reviewer’s direction in relation to it delineates the reviewer as a perceiving subject affected by a hurting imprint. The feeling of being hurt is redirected towards the playwright in an offensive speech act, which shapes her as a person with doubtful morals. “Only God knows”, the reviewer writes, where educated women like Anne Charlotte Leffler and another female playwright, Alfild Agrell, could have met such “base and common men”. Leffler and her popular colleague are portrayed as indecent women. The doubtful men, whom they are accused of associating with are connected to “pessimistic” representations, which refers to anti-idealism and particularly to the school of naturalism whose practitioners, from an idealistic point of view, were guilty of immoral representations, as they advocated realism without uplifting qualities and the didactic aim of improving human beings. Thus, by attacking the two female writers, the whole “Ibsenite” school is attributed bad morals. The reviewer constructs himself as a victim of the offense that he finds in the representation of men, as well as a judge who is in a position to make moral determinations about the author who has created them and her likes.

Flodman’s indignation presupposes an idea of male characters as the dominant ones in theatrical performances. The female characters do not attract his attention to the same extent. It is stated that the title of the play alludes to the opposition between “the so called true femininity” marked by indulgent compliancy, represented by the character Mrs Bark on the one side, and “the true sense of justice and mental firmness”, represented by her youngest daughter Berta on the other.²¹ The comments on the female characters stop there, though. The protagonist Berta receives no more attention and is thus constructed as insignificant. In Ahmed’s terms, she can be considered an object, which the reviewer’s attention and feelings have just “slid over”.²² Consequently, the males are not delineated as minor characters in relation to her, and Mr Bark is not cut out for the antagonistic position, which it is quite obvious that he occupies when analysing the dramaturgy of the play. Who inhabits the position of the protagonist becomes vague, but in the review the male characters get most of the attention and are clearly constructed as its protagonists.

Anders Flodman’s indignation produces and, according to Ahmed’s theory, is simultaneously produced by *Sanna kvinnor* as a universe in which men are generally irresponsible and insensitive to women’s needs. As these men are represented as husbands, marriage is constructed as an ugly and immoral institution, and as Anders Flodman positions himself as a man with high moral standards he cannot approve of the representation of husbands, nor of marriage: They are not represented according to the truth. Although Flodman cannot deny that there are marriages in the world based on the husbands’

21. ”den s.k. sanna qvinlighet” and ”verklig rättskänsla och karaktärsfasthet”.

22. Ahmed 2004, 8.

egoism and wives' spinelessness, the positive counterparts to disproportionate marriages are missing in the story. The relationship between the protagonist Berta and her friend, Mr Lundberg the accountant, does not qualify as a good example, due to the paucity of interest the male character attracts. While the playwright has put real effort into constructing the irresponsible and bad men, she has not bothered to do so with the good one, the reviewer claims. The lack of benevolent, good-natured male characters, equally represented and in the same proportion as the bad men, is offensive and presents a distorted representation of life. By hinting that Leffler has intended to misrepresent life, untruthful mimesis becomes a matter of morals. The tendentious narration that Flodman perceives can be considered another object of circulation production generated by his indignation over the unfavourable construction of male characters.

Although Flodman's indignation over the male characters primarily addresses Leffler's playwriting, it also shapes his orientation towards the acting. One of the actors in particular is blamed for the unbalanced representation of men. Hans Erik Fahlbeck, who plays the role of Lundberg the accountant, does not understand how to make the spectators interested in his character, and the reviewer finds that his acting is not up to the standards for creating the balance that would have given the piece harmony, beauty and truth. Hans Erik Fahlbeck's acting skills are delineated as inadequate. His creation of Lundberg, the accountant, is constructed as a role figure without individuality, complexity or credibility, thus without the illusion of being an embodied person with the qualities that might touch the audience. On the whole, the critic finds that the acting in the performance of *Sanna kvinnor* fails in making up for the immoralities of the story and dramatic universe in Leffler's play.

The reviewer connects his observations and critique of the false mimesis to the aesthetics and practices of idealism by alluding to Hans Christian Andersen's fairy-tale *Snödrottningen* (The Snow Queen). He states that the playwright seemingly has got "a splinter from the troll's wonderful mirror" in her eye, which makes her gaze turn things askew and ugly. The balance between good and bad is contrasted to this splintered gaze that twists things out of proportion. The allusion to the morals of the fairy-tale contributes to making *Sanna kvinnor* into a representation whose aesthetics are not only immoral and untrue, but lacking beauty. The offensive representation of men is thus ultimately linked to bad artistic quality.

The speech acts clearly address the emotional and moral faculties of the readers of the review via a chain of speech acts adhering to each other. The irony and exaggeration in the phrases "a pessimistic representation of the male sex" and "despicable species" are linked to the "base and common men" whom Leffler and Agrell are supposed to associate with, which is attached to a one-sided representation of irresponsibility and insensitivity, "egoism" and "spinelessness" and the hint that Leffler has intended to create a false representation. The story, the playwright and anti-idealists on the whole are thus constructed as immoral. The phrase "splinter from the troll's wonderful mirror"

connects the words about morals and the false mimesis to ugliness, and the chain of emotional argumentation thus concludes by attaching the label of bad artistic quality to Leffler's play.

THROUGH THE LENS OF SOBRIETY AND DETACHMENT

In *Sanna kvinnor*, a drama in three acts, the old-fashioned approved notion of true femininity is sharply contrasted with the demands of new times. The representatives of the former are Mrs Bark [...] and one of her daughters Lissi [...], while the other daughter Bertha [...] is the exponent of the idea of independence.²³

Frans Eugène Fahlstedt in *Göteborgs Handels och Sjöfartstidning* does not show the same strong feelings as his colleague in *Aftonbladet*. On the contrary, he voices his opinions in a tone of sober and detached objectivity. Ahmed calls attention to the fact that emotions are often connected to softness and the absence of emotion to hardness, but that hardness is nevertheless a different orientation to objects and to others.²⁴ Following Ahmed's line of reasoning, sobriety and detachment are the reviewer's direction towards the performance of *Sanna kvinnor* and thereby stay within the bounds of the definition of emotional reaction. Women's subordination is outlined as the vital topic of the performance in his review: It is women's independence that is at stake. The gender ideology of the performance is obviously the main object of circulation and has made a positive imprint on the reviewer as he thinks that "[t]he play deserves all credit as a powerful call of deliverance and as an undaunted interjection in important matters of our time".²⁵

Unlike Anders Flodman in *Aftonbladet*, Fahlstedt thinks that there are plenty of husbands like Mr Bark and Wilhelm "in any layer of society". If you look just a "little bit" around, you will notice this. He connects his appreciation of the gender ideology to his experience of life and society and thus constructs the performance as one of mimetic truth. "Our white men" Fahlstedt writes, cannot see this truth because they all are decent men and their own experience causes them to swear that Mr Bark and Wilhelm are so bad that their counterparts in real marriages cannot be found. The expression "[o]ur white men" clearly refers to the advocates of purity, that is, the idealists, and the reviewer suggests that it would be too upsetting for their view of themselves and of the world to

23. E-dt. *Göteborgs Handels och Sjöfartstidning* (GHT) 16 October 1883. The Swedish original of the quotation is: "Sanna kvinnor, skådespel i tre akter, ställer den gammaldags godkända uppfattningen af sanna qvinlighet och en ny tids sig framarbetande kraf på denna i skarp motsättning mot hvarandra. Representanter för den förra äro fru Bark [...] och hennes ena dotter Lissi [...], medan den andra dottern Bertha [...] är uppbarinna af själfständighetstanken." All quotes from hereon out are from the review in this issue of *Göteborgs Handels och Sjöfartstidning*.

24. Ahmed 2004, 4.

25. "Som ett kraftfullt väckelserop, ett oförskräckt inlägg i betydelsefulla tidsfrågor förtjenar emellertid pjesen all heder".

approve of the mimesis of the performance.²⁶ By talking of “[o]ur white men”, although in an understanding and non-accusatory tone, who cannot see what he clearly sees, he distances himself from them. This reviewer clearly positions himself as an anti-idealist, affirming the theatre delivering social criticism of marriage and society. Still he remains loyal to the advocates of idealism by hinting that these men are so good and moral themselves that they refrain from seeing that ugly marriages and base and common men exist in the world. Like Anders Flodman he constructs a position of superiority for himself, but not as a man with high moral standards but, through his detachment and sobriety, as a man who has the ability to analyse and see through things. He is able to see the truths that the idealists will not admit to.

Sobriety and detachment are furthermore shaped by and shape the reviewer’s willingness to differentiate between ideological concerns and aesthetic judgement. In spite of his ideological approval, he is not content with the artistic or dramaturgical qualities: Leffler has painted “dark-grey in dark-grey”, and no dramatic work benefits from that kind of composition. He outlines a slightly monotonous story and predicts that the play will not be staged for a very long time. Fahlstedt draws his conclusion from the performance and the reactions of the audience. A majority is applauding but there are also a number of people who try to shout them down. By referring to the dissatisfied reactions in the audience, he underscores his construction of *Sanna kvinnor* as a theatrical performance, lacking dramatic excitement and velocity.

The roles of *Sanna kvinnor* are not very rewarding for the actors and actresses to perform, according to the reviewer. He believes that the author has invented the characters from abstract ideas, but she has not been able to mould them into properly consistent living persons. Thus, they appear a bit rough; “the hand of the artist has not given them their final completed form”.²⁷ As an example, he describes a scene in which Wilhelm tells the protagonist Berta that Lissi, his wife and Berta’s sister, was delighted at listening to his confessions about his libertine life before marriage, and that he then realized that he would not receive the moral support he had hoped for from his innocent bride. Fahlstedt considers Lissi’s and Wilhelm’s reactions incredible. This scene, just as the performance as a whole, shows an exaggerated image of life. Fahlstedt’s detached objectivity, manifested in his ability to differentiate between ideology and art, seems to falter. It is clear that he thinks that the mimetic connection to the world, which he has earlier referred to in order to support the ideology of *Sanna kvinnor*, fails in this scene. Still he does not object to moulding characters from abstract ideas as long as they *appear* to be consistent living beings to the viewer. Ideology supported by true representations of human lives is in the end connected to artistic creation: Rather than being true the playwright

26. Although just a short quotation “[o]ur white men” is such a special expression that giving it in Swedish is motivated: “Våra ’hvite” and the sentence continues “må gerna, därför att de är hyggliga karlar [...]”.

27. “konstnärens hand har ej bestått dem en sista fullbordande utmäjsling”.

must make them seem true and the reviewer ends up entangling ideology and art, which he earlier has kept apart. *Sanna kvinnor* is ultimately constructed as a performance marked by false mimesis and as poor material for the actors, due to the playwright's failure of artistic fulfilment.

By the critique of the dull dramaturgy and inconsistent rough characters, Anne-Charlotte Leffler is positioned as an unskilled artist, while she fills the role of the ideologist. By supporting the ideas of the play and finding flaws in its artistic composition, the reviewer constructs a position for himself as supportive of radical ideas on gender and morals, and, on top of that just as much a sensitive aesthetic and connoisseur of art as his adversaries among the supporters of idealism. It is worth noting that both Flodman and Fahlstedt, in spite of their different perceptions of the central object of circulation and their differences in emotional orientations to it, construct the story and the characters as incredible due to the failing illusion of being real. They both depict *Sanna kvinnor* as a performance that is guilty of producing a false mimesis, but on different grounds.

In conclusion, in Frans Eugène Fahlstedt's review *Sanna kvinnor* is constructed through speech acts marked by distant sobriety. This orientation shapes and is reciprocally shaped by the ability to differ between ideology and artistic qualities. Through this, the reviewer can position himself in a superior position, as a clear-eyed judge, in relation both to the advocates of idealism, that is his ideological and artistic adversaries, and to the playwright. He approves the gender ideology, which, in his construction of the performance, is the main object of circulation, and can thus claim that his adversaries do not have his ability to see that it is based on a true mimesis. Simultaneously he can demonstrate the same aesthetic sophistication as his adversaries, by critiquing Leffler for her inadequate artistic ability. He distances himself from idealist morals and ideas of art, but at the same time bonds with its defenders by admitting to their high morals and by criticising the artistic fulfilment of the mimesis of the story.

The procedure is performed by a semantic chain in which the approval of *Sanna kvinnor* as a "powerful call of deliverance and as an undaunted contribution to important matters of our time" is associated with the appearance of men like Wilhelm and Mr Bark in "any layer of society", which makes mimetic truth the basis of the reviewer's ideological approval. "Dark-grey in dark-grey" sticks to a failing ability to entertain the audience and to "dramaturgical lack of velocity". So far, the ideology is connected to mimetic truth and artistic qualities to the ability to entertain and they are held strictly apart, but then a conflation takes place. The critique of the failing artistic fulfilment is also based on mimesis, but the latter is no longer connected to the ability to observe life and society but to "the hand of the artist". *Sanna kvinnor* is thus constructed as a play that has an important ideological function but fails both as truthful mimesis, art and entertainment. Anne Charlotte Leffler is positioned as a powerful distributor of rightful ideas on gender but as an unskilled playwright unable to truthfully depict life.

MORAL TRUTH VIEWED WITH AFFIRMATIVE SYMPATHY

It is an instant photography, and like most such pictures, it is true but not beautiful. When the curtain falls, there is a strange atmosphere in the auditorium. One feels unconditionally touched by the deep moral seriousness, the sincere conviction and the warm zeal, by which the author tackles the prejudice, customs and laws, which still in our days enable moral notions to go astray, right and wrong to be confused. In "Sanna kvinnor" the characters are affected by the consequences of guilt, which they do not themselves clearly see and, strangely enough, all of them believe to a certain extent that they are right and have done the right thing.²⁸

Teatervän senses a strange feeling in the auditorium and makes herself/himself the spokesperson for the audience's reception. S/he ends the review with cordial gratitude to the author for "her courage to show falsehood, and, for men and women alike, the fatal view of true femininity as *just* sacrifice and self-denial, but also how mild forgiving love must rest on the seriousness of truth and be carried by its force".²⁹ The courage to tell the truth combined with sincerity, moral seriousness and warm zeal is the object of circulation for this reviewer, who is touched by it and finds that the audience feels the same way.

The reviewer's warmth and affection produce a view that attributes redeeming features to all the characters. They are all "affected by the consequences of a guilt, which they are not fully aware of, and strangely enough, all of them believe to a certain degree that they are doing the right thing".³⁰ The ability to see through gender inequality is presented as a matter of having a sense of justice and a good personality: "[O]nly Berta can see matters clearly through all the entanglements, because of her firmness and unprejudiced sense of moral justice, in spite of the wreckage of all her happiness, all hope and all her belief

28. *Tidskrift för hemmet, tillegnad Nordens kvinnor*, 1886:6, 321-328. The Swedish original of the quote is: "Det hela är ett ögonblicksfotografi, och lik de flesta sådana bilder, sann men icke skön. Då förhänget faller, råder en egendomlig stämning i salongen. Man känner sig ovilkorligen gripen af det djupa sedliga allvar, den innerliga öfvertygelse och det varma nit, hvarmed förf. drager i härnad mot de fördomar, seder och lagar, hvilka ännu i våra dagar möjliggöra sådana moraliska begrepps förirringar, en sådan förblandning af rätt och orätt. I "Sanna kvinnor" drabbas de handlande personerna af följderna af en skuld, hvilken de icke sjelfva klart inse och, egendomligt nog, trodde sig alla i viss mån hafva eller göra rätt: [...]" All quotes from hereon out are from the review in this issue of *Tidskrift för hemmet*.

29. "hennes mod att här visa oss huru falsk, och, för mannen som för kvinnan sjelf, huru olycksbringande den är, denna uppfattning af den sanna kvinligheten såsom blott försakande och uppoffrande, huru äfven den förlåtande kärleken i all sin milda form, dock måste hvila på sanningens allvar, bäras af dess krafter".

30. "af följderna af en skuld, hvillken de icke sjelfa klart inse, och, egendomligt nog, trodde sig alla i viss mån hafva eller göra rätt".

in life.”³¹ The hardships that the protagonist endures, do not shake her belief in what is right. Thus, they prove her qualities. The comment about all characters being burdened with guilt shows the reviewer’s attitude that unequal gender conditions are due to social structures but which is above their ability to be fully aware of. Only Berta and her likes with superior personalities can see through them. The reviewer takes sides with the playwright and Berta and shows that s/he is one of the superior people who are able to discern between right and wrong. Just like A. Flodman, Teatervän claims a position on moral grounds, and just like F. E. Fahlstedt, s/he claims to be a clear-sighted person.

Teatervän writes that s/he had predicted that the performance would be scorned by the advocates of “aesthetics” and by those who go to the theatre for the “pure artistic pleasure”. S/he clearly claims a distance from both the advocates of idealism and spectators who want sheer entertainment, hinting that the performance, based on Leffler’s play, is something other than an ordinary one. Thus s/he goes into a position as someone who can understand what is new. S/he makes idealism and artistic pleasure into positions whose inhabitants cannot see or appreciate the distinction between true and false femininity or truth as the base for forgiving love. S/he furthermore seems to use the word truth in two different ways. As the breeding ground for forgiving love, truth is referred to as the individual’s moral belief and emotions, but the performance is also described as an instant photograph, and just like that kind of picture, it is true but not beautiful. In that sense, an exterior truth is hinted at, according to the ideals of an anti-idealistic realism. The story presents both a truthful correspondence between the external conditions of family and marriage, and of the emotional state and moral struggle of a woman.

The reviewer’s warmth and affection is also decisive for her/his orientation towards those who do not share her/his views on *Sanna kvinnor*, but the speech act is also used as the introduction of a critique of the acting. Teatervän admits that people have the right to feel disappointed, because the characters appear in a hard and unsympathetic light, which makes them more into types than into vivid personalities. Furthermore, the representation suffers from the weight of a prosaic heaviness. Not even Berta and her accountant are able to attract any warm sympathy. The remark refers to the actors’ performance. It becomes evident in the description of the character Mrs Bark. In contrast to the harshness of the other characters, she can bring out feelings of sympathy but this is due to a great extent to the splendid way in which the actress creates the role. “Mrs Kinmanson” is an artist, whom you always watch “with pleasure and who lets her natural finesse and *absolutely* true femininity guide her judgement”.³² She has managed to avoid the “unhealthy maudlin exaggeration” that would have made Berta’s blind devotion for her mother totally

31. ”Berta, den enda hvars starka karakter och oförevillade rättskänsla låter henne se klart genom alla dessa förvecklingar, äfven hon gör dock skeppsbrott på all lycka, allt hopp, all tro på lifvet”.

32. ”med nöje och hvars naturliga fina takt och verkligt sanna qvinlighet leda hennes omdöme”.

inexplicable. As much as the reviewer likes Helfrid Kinmanson's performance she dislikes Lotten Dorsch Bosin's depiction of Berta. It suffers from a certain dryness and frigidity. Ferdinand Thegerström's portrayal of Mr Bark lacks the natural amiability that his wife sees in him. He is just disgusting and so is "Miss Zettertröm's" Lissi.³³ *Sanna kvinnor* is constructed as a performance in which the actors, with a few exceptions, fail to give their roles the quality of complex individualized people. The reviewer seems to suggest that roles in *Sanna kvinnor* require another kind of interpretation and acting than what the actors are used to. This is underscored by his/her observation of Victor Hartman's portrayal of Wilhelm: The actor seems a bit uncertain about the many forces that motivate the actions of his role. For female actors, the ability to create complex characters seems to be a matter of giving them the right kind of femininity, just like Helfrid Kinmanson does. Teatervän clearly constructs the acting from ideas of femininity but also seems to compare the role figures to an understanding of the characters from her/his reading of the play.

To sum up, Teatervän's affectionate and affirmative reactions to the gender ideology of the performance produce an appreciative understanding of the artistic features of the story in *Sanna kvinnor*. S/he takes sides with the playwright not only ideologically but artistically, and the faults in the performance are blamed on the acting. Thus, the position of loyalty to the playwright is maintained. S/he defends the evaluation of the performance by hinting that ordinary standards of evaluation do not apply to the performance and thus finds a superior position both with the advocates of idealism and with pure artistic pleasure-seekers. S/he furthermore constructs *Sanna kvinnor* as a story that conveys both external truth about marriage and the subjective emotional truth of a subordinated woman. The reviewer, the playwright and the main character Berta appear as highly moral and thus constructed as clear-sighted portents of truth. A speech act chain starts with the comparison of the performance to an instant photograph, which is connected to the courage to tell the truth. Truth in turn adheres to high morals, sincerity and seriousness, which sticks to both the author of the play, the main character and the reviewer. Warmth is a central word in the review. It is attributed to the author but is also connected to the acting which lacks "warm sympathy", except for the performance by one of the actresses, in which case it is connected with true femininity. An understanding warmth is also what the reviewer constructs as his/her attitude towards the performance and even towards those who do not share his/her views.

DIVERSE POSITIONS AND CONSTRUCTIONS IN TENSION

In Swedish literature and theatrical histories, the label of indignation has been attributed to women's plays of the 1880's, referring to the emotion they express, but it is evident that this emotional reaction shapes Flodman's reading

33. Teatervän writes "Zetterström's" but it should be Zetterberg's. Miss Zetterberg is what the actress playing Lissi is called in the other reviews. The actress in question is Anna Zetterberg.

of the play. It causes indignation, which lends the expression 'plays of indignation' quite a different ring. For Teatervän strong emotional involvement also marks the orientation towards *Sanna kvinnor*. Both the reviewers' reactions rest on moral stances, but on different ethical grounds, while E. Fahlstedt distant attitude places him above such concerns. By adopting Ahmed's focus on what emotions do in terms of shaping and being shaped in contact with objects, I have aimed to bring out the importance of such emotions and how they work in the construction of the performance in the reviews. In the case of these three reviewers, situated in the tug of war between idealism and anti-idealisms of the 1880's, the emotional orientations towards what is taking place on the stage seem greatly decisive. They show three different attitudes towards *Sanna kvinnor*, which result in three different objects of circulation in the reviewers' constructions of the performance. Flodman is focused mainly on representation of men. It produces and is produced by his indignation at what he considers unfair treatment. Fahlstedt sees the gender ideology as the object of circulation from a perspective of sober detachment, and strives to separate his positive view from his evaluation of the artistic qualities. "Teatervän" is directed towards the playwright's courage to tell the truth with sincerity, moral seriousness and warm zeal by her emotions of warmth and affection. The emotional orientations towards the performance and the objects of circulation have produced three totally different constructions and thus different evaluations. While Flodman constructs *Sanna kvinnor* as a performance with male characters at the centre, Fahlstedt perceives it as a just and audacious contribution to an important social question. "Teatervän" constructs the performance as a brave and true confession of the conditions of marriage.

It is furthermore evident that Flodman and Fahlstedt do not pay any attention to the inner plot, while Teatervän does. As an object in the dramaturgical construct of Leffler's story, it seems to have escaped their perception, but has stuck to the third reviewer's perception to the degree that is a vital part of the object that provokes the affirmative emotional response. Reflective of this is the fact that Flodman complains that nothing has really happened when the story ends and that Fahlstedt is dissatisfied with *Sanna kvinnor's* dullness and inability to entertain. They do not see the main character Berta's emotional and moral struggle, and seem to expect a plot built on the development through external actions. There is a crux to this observation and interpretation though. Teatervän's delineation of *Sanna kvinnor* as a play that communicates emotional and moral truth seems to be based on a reading of the play. The evasive object of *Sanna kvinnor's* dramatization of an inner truth in the two other reviewers' constructions can then be due to the interpretation and performance of the roles by the actors.

By taking the point of departure in emotive responses to disclose the "affective economy" governing the construction and evaluation of performances, other factors than the reviewer's cognitive analysis as generated from his/her knowledge of theatre and ideological standpoints can be brought to the fore. A scenario unfolds in which such cognitive analysis seems to support feelings

and emotions connected to the reviewer's image of himself/herself and the social position from which s/he experiences the world. The affective economy of the reviews furthermore points to the importance of the reviewer's creation of a position in the cultural or theatrical field for the construction and evaluation of the performance. In my analysis of the three reviews, power relationships and gendered perspectives on truth seem to be just as important as the concepts of idealism and anti-idealisms for the orientation towards the performance.

Starting from emotions is thus useful as an alternative or complement to analyses of reviews, which proceed from the ideas of a period of time and the individual reviewer's ideological and aesthetic standpoints. These structures are highlighted in Postlewait's discussion of the aims and motivations of agents in connection with theatrical events, as well as in Helander's use of reviews in her study of the Swedish theatrical landscape of the 1950s, to which I have referred in the introduction of this article.³⁴ In such analyses, a model of interpretation is adopted that gives priority to the rational logical faculties of cognition in the reviewer. Reactions springing from the reviewer's private and personal experiences and conditions, which involve emotions, are omitted or are given a marginalized role in the interpretations. Still embodied and personal experiences of life that involve emotions play an important part in the ideological and political standpoints of an individual. They are not just results of a rational cognitive decision. In particular, Flodman's emotional reaction of being repelled by the mimesis of the story produces a standpoint that seems to connect not only to aesthetic preferences and ideological standpoints but also to a gendered experience of life.

According to Ahmed, emotional operations involve orientations with regards not only to objects but also to other individuals. They can be incorporated in narratives that work through establishing "us" and the "others".³⁵ In the three reviewers' texts, emotional orientations towards others shape their ideological and aesthetic positions. All of them put themselves in superior positions as people with better judgement of art than others but on different grounds, depending on the emotion or attitude through which the performance is read. Interestingly, Fahlstedt distances himself from the men among the idealists and at the same time bonds with them by claiming that it is their goodness that prevents them from seeing the world as it really is. Flodman and Fahlstedt furthermore put themselves above the playwright, Flodman morally and Fahlstedt as the judge of artistic quality, while Teatervän takes sides with her. By adopting Ahmed's phenomenological point of departure in orientations towards objects, including other people, social power relationships and positioning rather than objective expertise-perceptions and ditto evaluations of intrinsic artistic qualities are stressed as vital elements in the construction of performances in the reviews.

As Ahmed states, the emotions that are formed by and form the contact with objects may be of the same quality for several individuals but may also

34. Postlewait 2009; Helander 2003.

35. Ahmed 2004, 1, 4.

differ. In any case, they create density in personal and social sites, caused by heightened tension or by different emotions in tension.³⁶ According to the three reviews, *Sanna kvinnor* stands out as a performance that provoked tensions in between different viewer's orientations towards various objects of circulation. *Sanna kvinnor* is clearly constructed as a radical representation of the power relationship between men and women, transgressing the morals and aesthetics of idealism that supported the prevailing view on gender. When comparing the three constructions the line between idealism and anti-idealisms gets blurred. Both Flodman and Teatervän emphasize ethics and thus construct positions that are consistent with an idealistic view of art. While Anders Flodman's ethics support a conservative view of gender Teatervän's ethics construct a defence of *Sanna kvinnor's* criticism of the prevailing gender order. Franz Eugène Fahlstedt, who supports the gender criticism of the performance just as Teatervän, remarks on the incredibility of the representation of a woman's interest in her husband's sexual affairs and her spouse's disappointment, while the latter comments on the ugliness of the representation, hinting at indecency. The construction of *Sanna kvinnor* in the three reviews delineates the gender ideology of the performance as transgressing both idealism and a sceptic materialistic view of realism and truth, thus provoking emotions such as condoning or being insulted from both the advocates of idealism and anti-idealism. Hence the tidy opposition between idealism and heterogeneous anti-idealisms, which Toril Moi constructs as the hub of the transitions and changes in the period of the Scandinavian modern breakthrough, falls apart when the point of departure is taken in the reviews of *Sanna kvinnor*. The ideological and aesthetic conflicts seem even more complicated when gender-criticism by a female writer comes into the picture.

Such a complexity also generally appears when you look closely at documentation in archives. The neatly generalizing, often dualistic models, that are constructed in histories of literature and theatre normally break down. The problem is that the structures, often presented as polarized dualisms, that we have learned are characteristic of a certain period in theatre history are often used as the point of departure for analyses. They become the filter through which the material is interpreted. Academic analyses and interpretation demand structure and reliable instruments. Therefore, it is important to try other methods than those confirming the established way of understanding theatre in a certain period of time, and which also can make visible the specific structures in particular empirical materials.

Gender-critical performances and other artistic artefacts explore the borders between private individual bodies and lives on the one hand and social structures on the other. Thus, they interfere with the private and social lives of the members of the audience. They question their thinking and acting and ask for change of habits and traditions. These are deeply rooted in emotions and evoke emotional, irrational reactions. A model of analysis and interpretation for

36. Ibid., 10-11.

reviews of plays and performances like *Sanna kvinnor*, which just like Ahmed's "economics of affect" brings emotions to the fore is therefore important for gender-critical artefacts, not the least in the ideological and aesthetic tug of war of the Scandinavian modern breakthrough.

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