

# History Repeating Itself

## The function of turning points and continuity in three historical narratives on operetta

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### **ABSTRACT**

The article's primary aim is to discuss the function of turning points and continuity within historiography. That a historical narrative, produced at a certain time and place, influences the way the historian shapes and develops the argument is problematized by an emphasis on the complex relationship between turning points and continuity as colligatory concepts within an argumentative framework. Aided by a number of examples from three historical narratives on operetta, the article stresses the importance of creating new narratives about the past. Two specific examples from the history of operetta, the birth of the genre and the role of music, are used to illustrate the need to revise not only the use of source material and the narrative strategy used, but also how the argument proposed by the historian gathers strength. The interpretation of turning points and continuity as colligatory concepts illustrate the need to revise earlier historical narratives when trying to counteract the repetitiveness of history.

### **KEYWORDS**

Operetta, historiography, postnarrativity, turning points, continuity.

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A phrase used again and again is that history repeats itself. It can be events that share similarities, but it can also be certain patterns in the way history is told that return again and again. The repetitiveness of history is caused by historians creating patterns and describing similarities between different ages, events, and so on. Thomas Postlewait adds another layer to this by emphasizing how historians tend to return to certain events in history: “Once a specific event attains historical significance, through documentation and commentary, subsequent historians are drawn to it.”<sup>1</sup> A consequence of these narratives being re-told over and over is a sedimentation where each repetitive turn strengthens the importance of the selected events or facts, together with how they have been interpreted and presented. This is an important reason as to why historiography never ends and why there is always a need for new narratives, questioning earlier narratives and expanding our knowledge and interpretation of the past. This article is part of a research project with the overall aim to connect “extensive archival work with historiographical, intersectional and socio-economic analyses in order to provide new interpretations of a period traditionally marked as the breakthrough of early avant-garde performances in Sweden.”<sup>2</sup> Gösta M. Bergman’s description of the modern breakthrough in Sweden is an example of an interpretation that has become somewhat of a role model for explaining the developments in theatre around the turn of the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> According to Bergman, theatre, as a modern art form, was closely associated with spoken drama and the avant-garde. Bergman’s description of the period emphasizes both how to look and what to look for, creating a loop-like structure where examples from spoken drama and the avant-garde emphasize the importance of spoken drama and the avant-garde. A notable feature in Bergman’s narrative is the exclusion of popular genres, which is justified by the strong emphasis on modernism. It is as if the aesthetic avant-garde had nothing to do with anything but spoken drama and/or more progressive ideas associated with small

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1. Postlewait 1991, 172.
  2. For further details see the introduction to this issue of *Nordic Theatre Studies*.
  3. Bergman 1966, 9-10.

experimental theatres. As an alternative to Bergman's deliberate emphasis on spoken drama, I have chosen narratives on operetta as examples for the article to illustrate that there were many things going on onstage towards the end of the nineteenth century, not just new developments within spoken drama driven by the avant-garde. New inventions and a rapid development all over Europe, were, for example, significant features of the operetta. The overall aim of the article is to critically discuss the selected narratives on the operetta to show that a new interpretation of the past requires not only new narrative strategies, and new source material, but also new theoretical understandings of how to interpret, and interact with earlier narratives. The article is primarily a discussion of theatre historiography, but points toward the necessity for a discussion on the need to re-write the history of the breakthrough of the early avant-garde in Sweden, and how a study of the operetta can enable this.<sup>4</sup>

The past is everything that has happened, always and forever in the past.<sup>5</sup> It is not, however, completely lost or inaccessible, but can be discussed through different source materials. The historian's task is to select and organize traces from the past found in different archives and so on, into comprehensive narratives.<sup>6</sup> The narrative functions as a synthesizing unit, a structural component that organizes textual material into an intelligible form, similar to a story, with a beginning, middle, and an end.<sup>7</sup> It enables the historian to gather and combine a large amount of information into an integrated whole – a panoramic interpretation of the past.<sup>8</sup> History as an argumentative process, based on a unifying narrative about the past created by the historian, is as much connected to the historian's own time as it is to the past itself. The relevance of the argument proposed by the historian, therefore, changes over time, creating a need for new interpretations, not only of the past and earlier historical accounts, but also how historical narratives are interpreted. In *Postnarrativist Philosophy of Historiography*, Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen argues for, what he calls, a postnarrativist standpoint that will enrich the way historiography is understood and interpreted.<sup>9</sup> Frank Ankersmit summarizes: "Kuukkanen's main claim is that historical texts must be regarded as offering arguments rather than representations

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4. This follows from the aim of the overall research project where theoretical discussions on historiography are combined with studies of the past.
  5. Thomas Postlewait describes the gap between the past and the traces of the past found in different sources as "footprints in the sand". Postlewait 1991, 160.
  6. "Of all the means we use for ordering history, the most prevalent is narrative. [...] We organize historical events into a sequence or story line that posits contiguous and causal lines of development." Postlewait 1991, 176.
  7. I am not rejecting causality completely, but want to stress the difficulty in finding out what caused what. For a good discussion of narrative strategies versus causality see: Canning & Postlewait 2010, Introduction, and especially 16-19.
  8. Kuukkanen 2015, 22-23.
  9. Kuukkanen defines historiography as "the writing of history or simply history writing." It does not mean the history of history writing.

of the past.”<sup>10</sup> The shift from a narrativist to a postnarrativist theory of historiography hinges on the importance of the “the argumentative support provided for the central thesis.”<sup>11</sup> Kuukkanen does not reject narrativity but tries to look beyond the emphasis on the narrative and its structure. I find the argumentative aspects, where a historian tries to convince the reader of his/her interpretation, important and relevant in understanding the function of a historical narrative. To be able to develop this further I use Kuukkanen’s ideas on the argumentative aspects of a historical narrative as inspiration for this article.

### **THE FUNCTION AND MEANING OF TURNING POINTS AND CONTINUITY**

To further delimit my study I will look at two words from the headline of the research project that this article is part of – turning points and continuity. I will be examining a selection of historical narratives while looking at how these narratives use and relate to ideas connected to turning points and continuity. An emphasis on their function as colligatory concepts within an argumentative framework will develop the meaning of each individual word. I want to underline, as a point of clarification, that I see turning points and continuity as collective terms for a large number of words or ideas, such as; key moments, developmental turns, defining instances, continuing processes, traditions, conventions, and so on. Colligatory concepts organize empirical data and material into larger synthesized wholes. They help categorize without sharing any resemblance with the empirical objects.<sup>12</sup> A colligatory concept is a specific understanding constructed by a historian. Ryan Benjamin Shaw argues that a “historian never develops this understanding ‘from scratch’ or ‘discovers’ it in the archives. Instead he produces it by transforming inherited ideas, which may be concepts taken for granted in his culture or concepts developed by his peers and predecessors.”<sup>13</sup> Since they do not correspond to, or resemble, anything in the past they cannot be said to be truth-bearers. Kuukkanen argues that instead of using truth, we need to look at how these colligatory concepts affect us and convince us to believe in a historical narrative.<sup>14</sup> By treating turning points and

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10. The quote is from page 6 of a short and illuminating text summarizing Kuukkanen’s book. Ankersmit, 2017.

11. Kuukkanen 2015, 95-96.

12. Kuukkanen 2015, 97-99. Examples of colligatory concepts are the ‘Fall of the Roman Empire’, the ‘Industrial Revolution’, the ‘Renaissance’, and the ‘Cold War’. The term colligation was coined by William Whewell and was introduced to the philosophy of history by William H. Walsh.

13. Shaw 2010, 16.

14. According to Kuukkanen, historians use colligation when they need to explain a specific phenomenon. Different events are connected and treated as part of the same process. Kuukkanen uses the ‘Thaw’ – “the period in [...] Soviet History from the mid-1950s to the early years of the 1960s, when [...] Khrushchev initiated the process of de-Stalinization” (Kuukkanen 2015, 101) – as one of many examples. Kuukkanen lists several features associated with the period from different historical narratives; “the easing of repression and censorship in publishing, the

continuity as colligatory concepts, their function, rather than their true meaning, is emphasized. I interpret this as important for the shift of focus from how a historical narrative is constructed and represents the past, to how it, as an argument, affects the reader.

To further develop the combined strategy to use and reflect on turning points and describe the mechanisms behind turning points and continuity as colligatory concepts within an argumentative framework the article relies on three different levels; (1) the historical events referred to by the historian, (2) the written historical narrative produced by the historian, and finally (3) the interpretation of the written narrative and its relationship to the source material used. The first level – the facts used from the past – can create the impression that there were turning points in the past. The sources from the past, within the archives, can contribute to an interpretation of certain events as unique, and as turning points. The way the historian selects and uses information from the past, based on certain narrative strategies, can also participate in highlighting turning points and continuities. If several historians point to the same event as the cause for the development described, it creates an impression that this in fact was the cause or the turning point altering the events that followed. The process of finding and selecting source material from the past is interwoven with the second level mentioned above, where the historian produces a narrative about the past. I argue that turning points and continuity as colligatory concepts gather argumentative strength from a complex interplay between these two levels, which in turn emphasize the importance of the third level of interpretation. This connects to Kuukkanen's aim with a postnarrative historiography is to not only look at how different texts are organized as narratives, but also at the effects of these texts. "Historiography is about argumentation in a looser sense than that of a clear set of premises and conclusions. It is about proving or giving reasons for accepting certain general points or theses."<sup>15</sup> Historiographic texts argue for one interpretation over another and offer facts in support of this. These arguments should not be considered as true or false, but as more or less appropriate, fitting, or warranted, according to Kuukkanen, who is specifically interested "in what might be called *disciplinary illocution-*

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release of prisoners from the Gulag labor camps, the politics of peaceful co-existence with the West, the improvement of relationships with China and Yugoslavia, the creation of cultural contacts with previously hostile countries and economic reforms." Kuukkanen concludes; "What is remarkable in the historiographical use of colligatory notions is that they manage to colligate seemingly very diverse phenomena under one label." This leads to a question of whether a colligatory "concept can be an accurate representation of historical reality." Kuukkanen 2015, 105. Instead, Kuukkanen proposes that colligatory concepts should be evaluated based on their argumentative force. Historical narratives "purified of colligatory expressions would be much poorer, and much less expressive." Kuukkanen 2015, 115.

15. Kuukkanen 2015, 95.

ary intention and force, which is to persuade peers and the wider audience to accept historians' historiographical theses."<sup>16</sup> A historical presentation is, therefore, first and foremost an argumentative intervention, according to Kuukkanen.<sup>17</sup>

### THREE HISTORICAL NARRATIVES ON THE OPERETTA

As empirical material I use three different historical narratives on operetta that discuss the creation and development of operetta. All of the books describe the operetta as a continuing art form filled with events that changed and developed the genre. One has a more narrow geographical scope, operetta in Sweden (Haslum 1971) while the two others (Traubner 1990, Lamb 2000) look at the genre from a global perspective, describing differences from country to country. The reason behind the selection is that the three books represent differences while sharing interesting similarities.<sup>18</sup> The timespan between the first book, published in 1971, and the last, published in 2000, opens up the possibility of tracing recurring features as to how the operetta has been described.

Bengt Haslum's book is a standard history on operetta and the musical in Sweden, published, with some revision, in two editions.<sup>19</sup> Haslum's aim with the book is to describe how the most famous operettas, and later on musicals, were conceived and by whom. The book uses a chronological framework focusing on the most popular operettas in Sweden. The book describes a long period of time, from 1860 to 1970. It is not an academic text but rather a publication meant for a broader audience. The reason for including Haslum's book is because it is one of the few books in Swedish on operetta and musicals. Richard Traubner's book is an extensive history of the operetta from a theatrical perspective. Traubner argues for the importance of a theatrical perspective, rather than an additional study focusing on music. Traubner also uses a chronological structure as the foundation for the narrative.<sup>20</sup> His theatrical history acknowledges the actors/singers (stars), the intrigue, the chorus, the scenic splendor, and so on, while emphasizing the music as the most important part.<sup>21</sup> A similar book to Traubner's detailed examination of operetta is *150*

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16. Kuukkanen 2015, *History and Theory*, 229.

17. Kuukkanen 2015, 67.

18. There are of course other interesting books that could have been used, but hopefully these four will contribute to the argument of the article in a productive way.

19. With standard piece I mean a book offering information about its history together with presentations of several well-known pieces and a supporting number of images.

20. "From Offenbach's operas-bouffes in the 1850s and '60s to Gilbert and Sullivan's comic operas in the 1870s and '80s, from the Golden Age of Suppé and Strauss II to the Silver Era of Lehár and Kálmán, through the Broadway operettas of the 1920s up to the romantic American musicals of the '40s and '50s, operettas have kept audiences enthralled for more than a century." Traubner 1990, x.

21. "But the songs were always the most important element in this popular genre."

*Years of Popular Musical Theatre* by Andrew Lamb. It too is a chronologically structured book with a larger scope than the other two. As opposed to Traubner, Lamb has an explicit emphasis on composers and their work as the “main narrative thread”.<sup>22</sup>

That the operetta genre is important and worth historical investigation is a common denominator for all authors, however emphasized in different ways. They all develop a long continuing line from the early operettas all the way to contemporary musicals, based on similar empirical material. Andrew Lamb’s work shares several similarities with Haslum’s. They both treat music as an important feature and study musical theatre from the operetta to the musical. A difference is the international scope found in Lamb as opposed to the predominantly Swedish material presented by Haslum. Lamb also emphasizes how the operetta commented on contemporary social and political issues. By tying the operetta to society, Lamb argues for the importance of studying both the social milieu and the aesthetic aspects.<sup>23</sup> According to Lamb, the operetta is first and foremost a form of popular entertainment, closely related to other similar genres and not to opera and classical music.<sup>24</sup> The need to study operetta as a complex art form, where, for example, singing, dancing, music, and literature is combined is part of how Traubner emphasizes the importance of operetta. He is more interested in how different impulses and performance innovations, from surrounding genres, led to a continuing development from country to country. All three authors, albeit in different ways, address the question of what the operetta is. The operetta, for Haslum, is linked to popularity. His examples are all pieces that were not only popular around the time of their conception, but continued to attract audiences for a long time. For Traubner, the operetta is more closely connected to the way it was performed and how different venues, such as the boulevard theatres in Paris, influenced the development of the genre. Yet another take on what the operetta is can be found in Lamb, who emphasizes the function of operettas within a cultural and political context. In the following analysis, I will focus on two examples, the birth of the operetta and whether the operetta is primarily a musical phenomenon or not in order to further develop the discussion of the function of turning points and continuity within historiography.

### **THE BIRTH OF OPERETTA – TURNING POINT OR PART OF A CONTINUITY?**

A common feature among all the three writers is to pinpoint some kind of origin for the operetta. They all agree that it was in France, Paris to be more

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Ibid.

22. Lamb 2000, x.

23. Europe during the mid-nineteenth century was highly influenced by the ongoing industrial revolution. Larger cities lead to new living conditions for a large part of the population.

24. Lamb 2000, 4-5.

exact, during the latter half of the nineteenth century. There is a strong will to associate the birth with a person (and specifically a composer), but, whether the inventor was Jacques Offenbach (1819-1880) or Louis Auguste Florimond Ronger (1825-1892), better known as Hervé, seems to differ.<sup>25</sup> Traubner argues that Hervé did the groundwork that Offenbach refined and developed into the operetta.<sup>26</sup> This leads to Traubner's conclusion that "Offenbach is considered the father of French operetta – but so is Hervé."<sup>27</sup> Lamb argues that the period around 1850, when Hervé and Offenbach, "generally recognised as the founding fathers of the operetta", did their first "light-opera pieces", is the origin of the operetta.<sup>28</sup> Haslum, on the other hand, is more specific, using the opening night, 5 July 1855, of the Bouffes Parisiens as the starting point for the history of operetta.<sup>29</sup> Haslum does not offer any information as to why the opening night at the Bouffes Parisiens is a relevant start for the history of operetta. His emphasis on Offenbach as a starting point is, in fact, a premise for his narrative, rather than a result of the investigation. Haslum does not start by investigating what happened around 1855 to determine whether it is the best and most relevant starting point for his study. The organizing principle behind his narrative, based on the success and popularity of Offenbach's operettas throughout the twentieth century, determines the starting point and singles out the opening night of Bouffes Parisiens, Offenbach's first own theatre, as a landmark for the development of operetta. This becomes an example of how the narrative structure, together with a specific narrative strategy, determines the source material and not the other way round.

It is, perhaps, not possible to determine whether it was Offenbach or Hervé that created the first operetta. What is worth examining, however, is how the choice of origin affects the argumentation that follows or, rather, how the narrative strategy of emphasizing a forefather delimits the source material used. To claim a kind of 'forefather' responsible for the creation is a common narrative strategy. All three books start with the premise that the founding father must be a prominent figure whose work profoundly affected the development of the operetta for a long time, therefore, Offenbach is the natural choice, with many more successful works in his repertoire than Hervé.<sup>30</sup>

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25. Almost all books on operetta, not just the ones I refer to, use either Offenbach or Hervé as creator.

26. Even though Traubner sees Offenbach as the creative genius responsible for operetta, he is the only one among the three who, in a detailed way, describes early influences leading up to the birth of operetta.

27. Traubner 1990, 19. Traubner's emphasis on a theatrical history and a composer as creator deserves a comment. The choice to organize the book by composer is "for the sake of convenience". Traubner 1990, iix.

28. Lamb 2000, ix-x. Lamb has a more relaxed attitude regarding the exact starting point – "one has to start somewhere."

29. Haslum also calls Offenbach "the real creator" of the operetta. Haslum 1971, 14.

30. Successful is a combination of several aspects such as; number of performances, reviews, popularity outside of Paris, and that the pieces outlived its maker.



Another example of how the narrative strategy of selecting and emphasizing an individual creator stimulates (or forces?) the historian to return again and again to examples connected to this person can be found in the first part of Lamb's book, which deals with the early years of the operetta. Lamb begins by emphasizing how important Offenbach was for the operetta, a claim he returns to again and again by using several examples from Offenbach's production. Towards the end of the discussion of Offenbach, Lamb writes that "although [...] other composers prospered, they remained very much in the shadow of Offenbach's perpetual inventiveness."<sup>31</sup> The explanation for this does not come from the source material referred to but from the narrative strategy used by Lamb throughout the text. The notion of a perpetual inventiveness is re-enacted by Lamb himself, by exemplifying every novelty that happened with examples from Offenbach.

There are other strategies for emphasizing the creator's sovereign position that also connect to the dynamic relationship between the events referred to and the narrative created by the historian. One such example is connected to certain words or expressions used to elevate and assign a sense of grandeur to the origin and the creator. Haslum's choice of words such as; genius, masterpiece, triumph, inspiring, all contribute to elevate Offenbach's work. From a source material perspective, Haslum does not offer any support of his claim regarding the greatness of Offenbach, instead it is the language used that is supposed to convince the reader of Offenbach's supreme qualities as operetta composer.<sup>32</sup> Why *La Vie Parisienne*, for example, is a masterpiece is not developed further.<sup>33</sup> I assume it is because of its popularity.<sup>34</sup> Offenbach is treated as a genius, a fact that needs no further discussion. The similarities between the books are striking when it comes to describing Offenbach's works, especially the triumphant aspects. Traubner, for example, writes about Offenbach's "triumphant career".<sup>35</sup> The use of this form of appraisal, read as a narrative strategy, results in a continuity between the different books. A consequence of the strong emphasis on Offenbach leads to an interpretation of him and his contributions to the operetta as a turning point for the genre. I argue that the similarities between the three books illustrate the power behind the repetitive structure of certain historical narratives, which in turn connects to Postlewait's comment on how historians seem to be drawn to events as soon as they attain historical significance. That all three books, published over a period of almost thirty years, emphasize the same creator by using a similar language is cause for reflection.

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31. Lamb 2000, 21.

32. I am not suggesting that Haslum needs to provide such source material. What I see as interesting is how the language used takes on this function.

33. Haslum 1971, 21.

34. Haslum's narrative is driven by an implicit emphasis on popularity, where many performances = popularity = quality.

35. Traubner 1990, 21.

An interesting question, based on the discussion above, is what the differences are between treating the birth of the operetta as a turning point or a continuity. What argumentative force comes from arguing for one interpretation over another? To use a narrative strategy centering on a creative genius, whose work and ideas thoroughly changed the operetta into something new, uses a continuity as its underlying premise, while the result is an emphasis on the creator as some kind of turning point. Seen from the level of the source material, the repetitive use of Offenbach and his works creates an emphasis on his importance, which relates to both a turning point and a continuity. On the one hand, the strong emphasis on something new suggests a turning point, while on the other hand, the process of going back to Offenbach as the beginning, again and again, becomes a continuity. By using source material connected to one individual, this individual becomes a returning point of reference both *in* and *between* different historical narratives. This emphasis could be read as a continuity that also strengthens the creator's position as creative genius or turning point in the development of the operetta. By returning to the three levels used in the article, the dynamic interplay between turning points and continuity can be further developed as a difference between a turning point found in the source material from the past and a continuity on the level of the historical narrative. The interplay is also built on the continuity between different historical narratives that highlight the selected events in the source material as turning points. The different levels illustrate the function of an argumentative force for historiography and how this force is the result of a combination of the different levels.

The narratives produced by the historians referred to use a specific narrative strategy to locate and determine the origin of operetta. It is not the historical events referred to that provide the answer for who created the operetta. This is decided on the level of the written historical narrative produced by the historian. The argumentative force connected to these narratives can be further developed by using turning points and continuity. By adhering to either features connected to a turning point or a continuity the narrative gains argumentative force. Turning points and continuity, furthermore, share a complex relationship. Offenbach as origin, or a form of turning point, in the history of the operetta is only valid because of his long and continuing work. The origin as a turning point is, therefore, based on a continuity.

Does the consensus between the three examples mean that Offenbach truly is the creator of the operetta? My answer is no. This is, rather, a telling example of the sedimentation of process caused by re-using specific details in different historical narratives. A repetition of certain facts from the past, together with a number of narrative strategies, create the impression that this is what really happened. I interpret this as an example of the need to re-examine and re-interpret earlier historical narratives – both the source material and the narrative strategies used. As historians we need to seek alternative narrative strategies and return to the archives to be able to develop new interpretations of the past. The continual use of the same interpretation of the origin for the

operetta becomes, in my view, a limitation. Even though the three authors emphasize different interpretations of the operetta, they all come back to the same beginning, creating a continuity within the history of operetta. The continual emphasis of certain events as turning points and the continual use of certain ways of narrating the past create an argumentative force, as indicated above. I argue that this force gathers strength from both the level of the source material and of the narrative created by the historian. An understanding of the interplay between the source material and the created narrative is, therefore, needed to be able to develop new alternative strategies for interpreting the past.

### **MUSIC AS TURNING POINT OR CONTINUITY AS THE OPERETTA DEVELOPED?**

Emphasizing a composer as the creator of the operetta introduces another interesting question, which leads to my second example, whether the operetta is primarily about music or based on other aspects? The three books offer mixed messages regarding the function of music for the operetta.<sup>36</sup> All of them use a composer as the creator, and by using a composer, the operetta, inevitably, becomes connected to music. I argue that the deliberate choice of a composer affects not only the source material used but also affects the narrative used by the historian. It is important to remember that the operetta was a staged work with a written script and actors on stage. The librettists and actors/singers all participated in the creation of the new genre together with the composers. It was also part of a larger repertoire of popular entertainments offered throughout the city. In Paris, the small boulevard theatres were important for the genre and became popular venues for the early operetta, as emphasized by Traubner. The operettas “were intended as entertainments not for the opera houses [...] but for boulevard theatres.”<sup>37</sup> Traubner emphasizes the importance of operetta as popular entertainment just like Lamb and Haslum, and how the early performances were closely associated with vaudeville, music hall, and similar popular entertainments. From these surrounding genres the operetta borrowed some of its trademarks – the humour and parody, the catchy tunes, and the comic *couplets*. Lamb connects this to the ongoing urbanization where larger cities lead to new living conditions for a large part of the population. The working class grew steadily and developed other cultural interests than the upper classes. Light entertainment such as amusement parks, music halls, dance halls, vaudeville, cabaret, and variety theatres are some examples. The repertoire at these places was dominated by well-known songs and melodies performed by professional artist specialized in each specific genre.

The operetta, whether it was created by Hervé or by Offenbach, was not, according to all three authors used, invented overnight. It was part of a pro-

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36. Neither of them see operetta as only about music. All of them mention artists, librettists, and so on as important for the operetta.

37. Traubner 1990, iix.

cess, and depending on how you read this process, it can be longer or shorter. While some argue that the operetta can be traced back to the ballad and minstrel tradition of the sixteenth century, others argue that it was a result of the *opéra comique* and other forms of popular entertainments from the eighteenth century. Uniting all the examples leading up to the creation of operetta is the connection to music. A narrative strategy based on the composer as creator affects the role of music within the history of the operetta. Both Traubner and Haslum mention the vaudeville and the small boulevard theatres as important for the development of the operetta. Despite this, Traubner emphasizes music as the most important feature of these theaters, rather than, for example, performance conventions. “Operetta attracted its audiences principally by means of its contagious melodies”.<sup>38</sup> The same line of argument is found in Lamb’s book where the operetta is seen as a form of popular entertainment dominated by a repertoire of well-known songs and popular melodies.

All historians describe, in one way or another, how the operetta spread throughout Europe, back and forth, making the form into a dynamic flux established between different countries and cities.<sup>39</sup> While this is seen as a continuing phenomenon that strengthens operetta as an art form, linking it to all the major cities in Europe, it also emphasizes the connection between differences and turning points. French operetta is one thing, Viennese operetta is something else, British operetta yet another thing. Even though there is a link between the French and Viennese operetta, the operetta from the Austrian-Hungarian empire added a novel touch to the genre (for example the waltz or the *czardas*), thereby transforming it. “The waltz was the Austrian ingredient that transformed Viennese operetta.”<sup>40</sup> Traubner’s emphasis on the waltz could be read as an indirect emphasis on music as a dominating factor for the operetta, despite his own emphasis on the operetta as a theatrical enterprise. The importance of the waltz could be read as an emphasis on dancing and that popular dance forms were used on stage. This is not the case. Traubner writes that “popular dance *music* had a huge impetus in the creation of operetta everywhere, nowhere more obviously than in Vienna, where the waltz [...] [was] among the principal means of *musical* expression in operetta.”<sup>41</sup>

Music returns, again and again, in the historical narratives examined, as an important turning point. The birth of operetta, seen from a musical perspective, can be described as both a turning point and part of a continuity. It is part of a continuing development of popular entertainment and light opera, while at the

38. Traubner 1990, iix.

39. It was created in Paris and then travelled to Vienna, Berlin, London, Stockholm, and so on. This road trip all over Europe had many causes – composers travelling between cities, the leading stars going on tour, theatre managers visiting, looking for new pieces to buy, social and political developments, and so on.

40. Traubner 1990, 14.

41. Traubner 1990, 10. My emphasis.

same time representing a new form of musical theatre.<sup>42</sup> Haslum offers an example of this. He sees operetta as predominantly about music. The origin, for him, hinges on popular music as well as classical music. This means that the influence of Viennese waltz or Hungarian czardas functions as turning points in the development of operetta. These turning points, consequently, consolidate music as a continuing aspect. To be able to emphasize the development of the operetta as an important turning point it has to be part of a continuing development, either connected to different genres or connected to a specific theme or feature such as music. It is by associating it to a long tradition that the turning point becomes valid and distinct/visible. It is as if turning points gather strength from the continuities they relate to. Historians, therefore, create continuities that relate to selected turning points, where these turning points, in turn, emphasize the created continuity.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of the article has been to contribute to a new understanding of the meaning and the function of turning points and continuity within history by using them and reflecting on them at the same time. I especially want to emphasize one aspect of this which relates to the argumentative support that these words or ideas can offer. By looking at earlier historical narratives – the source material used in combination with narrative strategies – while interpreting their argumentative force, I find an embryo for a strategy for how archival work, together with new narrative strategies based on critical interpretations of existing historical narratives, can open up for new interpretations of the past. To question a dominant narrative is important and can be done in several ways. A completely new source material can shed light on previously unknown aspects. A different narrative strategy can also create an alternative interpretation of the past. To use either one of these approaches may not be enough to fundamentally challenge existing narratives. By emphasizing the argumentative aspects I can better understand the complex and intertwined relationship between narrative strategy and the sources from the past. The use of colligatory concepts help illustrate the need to revise earlier historical narratives to be able to counteract the repetitiveness of history. If history repeats itself, there will always be a need for new narratives questioning earlier ones and expanding our knowledge and interpretation of the past. This also leads to an emphasis on colligatory concepts as important for understanding historical narratives. A colligatory concept is something that develops over time and gathers strength by being used again and again. It is not something that is discovered through intense archive work, nor is it something that is invent-

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42. A comparison to other forms of popular entertainment, such as variety, outdoor concerts at amusement parks, and music hall, will not render the operetta the same novelty aspects regarding music. In comparison to these forms it was rather the way it was performed that was more of a turning point towards something new.

ed by the historian without using source material. It is rather built on existing ideas and well established concepts. I see a connection to Postlewait's description of how historians tend to return to certain events making them seem more significant. This leads to my conclusion that it is not enough to challenge Gösta M. Bergman's powerful narrative regarding the breakthrough of the early avant-garde in Sweden by only including new source material. Bergman's emphasis on spoken drama lead him towards a narrow source material based on examples from the avant-garde and spoken drama. To use examples from other genres such as operetta, revue, or popular entertainment more generally, would definitely challenge Bergman's description. This, however, runs the risk of erecting another breakthrough or turning point, similar to Bergman's. I have deliberately selected narratives on operetta as examples for two reasons. First, to illustrate that there were lots of things going on onstage towards the end of the nineteenth century, not just new developments within spoken drama driven by the avant-garde. The second reason as to why these narratives are interesting is because they uphold very similar interpretations of how the operetta was created and developed. The similarity between the three books suggests that a recurring narrative on the birth of the operetta is well established. Perhaps Offenbach is the equivalent of a breakthrough for operetta? If so, how to avoid emphasizing the same interpretation again and again? By re-interpreting earlier narratives based on what narrative strategies and which source material has been used, and finally how the author has tried to convince the reader. The argumentative aspects are especially important because they add another layer to the understanding of earlier historical narratives. They point to the importance of looking at dominant ideas among historians and how certain ways of understanding specific periods of the past return over and over again, thereby strengthening these interpretations of past events. In all of the examples above, I find ways of organizing history and traces from the past based on constructed turning points (a creator or new musical innovations) or continuities (a chronological framework), where these are supposed to convince the reader. To avoid creating new narratives based on established turning points and/or continuities, historians need to develop new ways of arguing about the past. Besides finding new source material or using available material from the past in new ways, new narrative strategies are a solution. Perhaps simultaneity could be a thought-provoking way of organizing a study and a narrative as it is not primarily based on causality. What would a study of a large number of performances of one single operetta, as opposed to just studying premieres and other special events, result in? Rather than development, is adaptation a better way of describing a continual movement made up of events that in some way relate to change? To adapt is not just to change but also to adjust and interact with surrounding genres, traditions, novelties, and so on. This could enable the historian to produce new interpretations that would not only enrich previous understandings of the past, but also stimulate new argumentative strategies. In summary, I argue that a new, alternative, interpretation of the past hinges on a combination of a re-interpretation of earlier historical narratives (to detect

dominant recurring themes), together with archival studies (finding new source material) and the development of new narrative strategies. I specifically want to emphasize the argumentative force for understanding the interplay between source material and narrative strategy, and how an understanding of the persuasive aspects of this interplay can introduce new ways of researching the past.

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