

## Review

### ***Mästerregissören. När Ludvig Josephson tog Europa till Sverige*** **(The Master Director. When Ludvig Josephson brought Europe to Sweden)**

**Tiina Rosenberg**

Atlantis: Stockholm, 2017, 303 p.

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Professor Tiina Rosenberg, Stockholm University, has published a biography about the Swedish theatre and opera director, Ludvig Josephson (1832–1899). The title of Rosenberg's book is twofold. The first part of the title sets the notion of *Mästerregissören* (the master director) as a main focus of the biography. The second part of the title, *När Ludvig Josephson tog Europa till Sverige*, enhances the notion of the master director by crediting Josephson for bringing the European modernist theatre to Sweden.

Rosenberg's biography deals with one of the pioneering directors of theatre and opera in Sweden. The book cover is adorned by a portrait of Ludvig Josephson, painted by his nephew, Ernst Josephson, in a typical position during rehearsals, where he often wore a red fez, pointing one finger at the manuscript, while holding a little bell in the other hand in order to gain the attention of the actors.

With this biography, Rosenberg has several different agendas, which resonate in a contemporary context. One is definitely to say that the history of Swedish theatre is a history about the influence of European theatre and culture in a broader perspective. Rosenberg reminds the reader of this influence as seen through the portrait of Swedish theatre practices and Josephson the director.

The other important agenda has to do with Josephson's sexuality.

In the preface, Rosenberg emphasizes Josephson as non-heterosexual with a Jewish background, and, as we shall see later in the book, these characteristics are seen as guidelines for Josephson's capacity on the international horizon. This point of departure aims at opening the perception of Josephson's artistic perspective and reputation towards not only the surrounding world but also at presenting the more homely situation and mood of Swedish culture at that time.

Josephson introduced the, at that time, new *Gesamtregie* in Sweden. He had, as Rosenberg states, an interest in romantic-revolutionary masculinity in a number of noticeable opera productions like, for example, Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (1866) and Meyerbeer's opera *L'Africaine* with libretto by Eugène Scribe (1867). Furthermore, Josephson played a significant role in establishing August Strindberg in Swedish theatre as well as Henrik Ibsen on the Norwegian stage. Josephson was also interested in Jewish emancipation and participated in liberal homosexual circles in Europe. Continental Europe would, in Josephson's perspective, have an impact on contemporary provincial Swedish culture. It is as if Rosenberg has an ambition of seeking to highlight Josephson's Jewish cultural background as well as his non-heterosexual nature as a particular quality in Josephson's artistic sensibility.

Rosenberg has organized the biography of Josephson in four chapters: 1) The Jewish, 2) Europe I, 3) Europe II and 4) The master director. The progression of chapters builds up a culturally broad perspective to the final focus on the master director. Beginning with panoramic descriptions of cultural life in general, Rosenberg's focus slowly shifts towards a description of Josephson's visiting theatre and opera in Paris and Berlin. In particular during the time of the two revolutions of political and industrial achievements. Josephson experienced from the early 1850s the professionalization of the *metteur en scène* as it emerged in Paris with, for example, Adolphe Montigny who was director 1844–1880 of the Théâtre de Gymnase. The *mise en scène* had Josephson's particular interest, and he sometimes also worked as a theatre critic. Late in his lifetime, he published several books in Swedish on the art of directing.

Rosenberg's narrative seems to begin with Josephson's travelling in continental Europe, encountering not only unstable cultural understandings of sexuality, but the emerging craftsmanship of the profession of the theatre director. For this purpose, Rosenberg uses Goethe's notion of *Wanderjahre* and turns it into *Wanderlust*. Rosenberg has great compassion for Josephson's life story, and to such a degree that she lends him the epitome of the master director. It can be said that the notion of master director in the case of Rosenberg's book, probably, is a double. Either, it is Josephson's qualities which remind us of the image and the strength of the master director, or it is Rosenberg lending Josephson's reputation this metaphor so that it creates him as such.

The notion of *mästerregissör* originally emerged from the English theatre director and stage designer, Edward Gordon Craig, who thought that the total theatre should be created by a master-artist, combining the roles of director and designer. In Swedish literature, the notion of the *mästerregissör* is connected to Ingmar Bergman's name, but by establishing a connection between the

mästerregissör and Ludvig Josephson, Rosenberg takes the notion of the master director further back in history. The notion of mästerregissören, as used in this book, remains somewhat unclear.

Very few theatre directors can actually be identified as a *mästerregissör*. Today, one mainly encounters this notion in relationship to film directors, such as Ingmar Bergman. However, in theatre and performance, names like Robert Lepage, Christoph Marthaler, Eimuntas Nekrošius, Carlus Padrissa, Michael Thalheimer, Patrice Chéreau, Eugenio Barba, to name a few, have been described as master directors. What exactly this notion covers is harder to say. To me, the notion of a master director involves a certain understanding of what a master in the theatre is. The notion of a master is very rare in today's theatre, because it implies a relationship to pupils or collaborators, who are *not* masters. Unfortunately, Tiina Rosenberg's book does not explicitly tell the reader what is actually understood by the notion of *mästerregissör*.

Rosenberg's book is well researched and combines its academic style with a well written narrative style. The book encompasses a generous number of footnotes and an enormous amount of archival knowledge (the footnotes and the bibliography by themselves occupy one third of the entire book). This generosity of sharing sources and knowledge meets another strength of the book, namely, in its narrative style, with which Rosenberg communicates Josephson's biography to the general, culturally educated reader.

Tiina Rosenberg has previously occupied herself with Ludvig Josephson's merits as a theatre director. Her PhD thesis, *En regissörs estetik: Ludvig Josephson och den tidiga teaterregin* (*The Aesthetic Program of a Director*, 1993 also in Swedish) covers the same topic as *Mästerregissören*, except that the latter is more elaborate. It can be refreshing to return to previous research projects. However, I would have recommended that the book had come out in English in order for it to reach a broader international audience, also because Franco Perrelli's monograph, *Ludvig Josephson e l'Europa Teatrale* (2012) is only accessible for an Italian-reading audience.