

REVIEW

Rikard Hoogland (ed.):

I avantgardets skugga Brytpunkter och kontinuitet i svensk teater kring 1900.

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Mikko-Olavi Seppälä, *University of Helsinki*

It seems to be an obligation for humanities scholars in the Nordic and Baltic countries to publish at least in two languages, in the local language and in English. Only this way will the research properly find its audiences. At the same time each publication, regardless of its language, should aim to find fresh aspects and introduce new materials or considerations. From this perspective, one welcomes this new book as an exemplary accomplishment.

I avantgardets skugga ("In the shadow of the avantgarde") is a collection of articles related to a research project that has aimed to challenge the master narrative of Swedish theatre history. In Sweden, the shadow of the avantgarde has largely been the shadow of Gösta M. Bergman's influential study *Den moderna teaterns genombrott 1890-1925* (1966). The idea of the project has been to research areas outside of the highly valued institutions, playwrights (Strindberg) and directors. One could ask, however, if this master narrative holds anymore after several volumes of diverse theatre historical research in Sweden from the 1990s on. Despite these doubts, there is still a lot of theatre to be found in the margins. *I avantgardets skugga* brings to the fore commercial stages and genres, international connections, dancers, children, and female artists.

Founded in 2014, the research project has brought together theatre, dance, and drama scholars from Stockholm and Gothenburg universities. While the majority of the group members are experienced scholars, there are also some PhD students and postdocs involved in the project. Regardless of experience, some of the researchers cultivated themes that rest on their dissertations or long-lasting research interests, while others experimented with new topics.

The group and its members have already produced an impressive number of publications, both articles and monographs. Edited by Erik Mattsson, a special issue of *Nordic Theatre Studies* with the title *Turning Points and Continuity* was devoted to this project in 2017. Most of the authors of that volume have also taken part in the book at hand. It must be stressed, however, that each article offers fresh aspects and new insights on their topics. In his introduction to the new book, the editor, Rikard Hoogland, clarifies that while the NTS special issue was more focused on theoretical questions, *I avantgardets skugga* considers historiographical and archival issues.

The book is divided into two sections although the difference between overviews and case studies remains somewhat vague. In his essay, Willmar Sauter rereads recent Swedish theatre histories including his own work, without acknowledging his own agency. Karin Helander offers a deep insight into the Swedish children's drama of the time, even considering attitudes towards sugar and alcohol. Lovisa Näslund states that actors' contracts make an underused source for theatre history. In Finland, however, the contracts are well-known, well-preserved and have been widely used in research. Unfortunately, Näslund's comparison between the two theatres lacks sufficient material.

Perhaps the best piece in the compilation, Lena Hammergren's article presents a well contextualized and brilliantly analyzed case study of the forgotten dance family Kihlberg working in the shades of the royal ballet and the emerging modern dance. Delving into general operetta history, Mikael Strömberg's article almost seems like an introduction to a larger study. Overlooking musical qualities, his notions focus on the art of acting in the operettas.

Revisiting Leffler's play *Sanna kvinnor* ("True Women", 1883), Birgitta Johansson Lindh offers an intriguing analysis on how the feminist potential of the play was corrupted as a result of the male lead Emil Hillberg's interpretation of his role and the reception dominated by male critics. Concentrating on the actress Ellen Hartman's guest performances in Helsinki in 1889, Héléne Ohlsson writes convincingly about the emerging diva cult and the introduction of the spontaneous ingénue acting style. Astrid von Rosen describes her investigation into the career of the Russian-born dancer Anna Robenne. It should be added that since publishing this article, von Rosen has found answers to many of her open questions in another article published in the NTS issue *Transnational Influences* (2020).

In his concluding article, Rikard Hoogland concentrates on a crucial episode regarding the general research project, namely the moral condemnation of Albert Ranft's private theatre chain in the 1920s. While pointing out that there were no factual grounds for labelling Ranft's theatres as worthless or even dangerous entertainment, and that the morally doubtful features were more located in the

modernist drama itself, Hoogland stresses that the moral conflict was generated in order to pave the way for the emerging public theatre system.

All in all, the joint publication reveals that each researcher in the group has been working more or less independently under the wide umbrella of “Swedish theatre around 1900”. There is no common ground in theory. While each article provides an interesting peak at theatre history, it is Hammergren, Hoogland, Johansson Lindh, and Ohlsson who succeed best in contextualizing their topics and findings within the larger project: the reconsideration of the modernist breakthrough in Swedish theatre history.

National or local narratives have ignored the flourishing international and transnational connections that have been essential to scenic artists throughout centuries. Dancers and writers as well as several Swedish theatre groups and artists had audiences both in Finland and Norway. As some case studies in this book point out, it is inevitable for a Nordic theatre historian to have to work across national borders.

It could be added that equally important is the co-operation and networking of the researchers across borders. I remember when this research group first arrived in Helsinki in the winter of 2015 to learn about the local archives. Perhaps more importantly, that visit resulted in the establishment of many valuable individual contacts between specialists in the two countries. In that sense, the Swedish research project has managed to encourage Nordic co-operation in neighbouring countries, too. A co-operation which has been further strengthened by the annual ANTS conferences.