

## Review

# ***Disseminating Shakespeare in the Nordic Countries Shifting Centres and Peripheries in the Nineteenth Century***

Eds. Nely Keinänen and Per Sivefors

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The collection, *Disseminating Shakespeare in the Nordic Countries*, published in the series Global Shakespeare Inverted, brings together fascinating and very different Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, and Finnish case studies, all connected to the earliest Shakespearean appearances and influences in the aforementioned Nordic countries. The collection is an invaluable addition to the discussion on how global and adaptable Shakespeare's narratives actually are, and how, but also why, they have been travelling with extraordinary persistence in time and space. What is more, by making local studies available in the present *lingua franca* of research, English, the authors create a welcomed opportunity for further dialogues in the field of translation and comparative literary studies.

Featuring nine well-focussed case studies, of which four are on Swedish, two on Danish and Finnish and one concerning the Norwegian earliest Shakespearean influences and contacts, the collection aims to chart the spread of Shakespearean texts from early nineteenth century up until the 1890s. Although the editors wish to: "...avoid an alignment with narrowly defined national Shakespeares" (p. 3) and instead aim to: "...shed light on exchanges and parallels between the countries" (ibid.) the link and common denominator between the chapters seems to be the temporal framework, the nineteenth century, and the shared yet different socio-cultural background of the Nordic countries of the time.

Consequently, the nine chapters of the book rely on temporal chronology presenting a diverse array of studies on different texts, theatrical events, and encounters with and influenced by Shakespeare's plays. The core chapters start with Annelis Kuhlmann's account of the first

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Danish *Hamlet* translated in 1813 and the political implications of staging the texts associated with Danish history. Kiki Lindell and Kent Hägglund's study on the first direct English language translation of a full text *Macbeth* into Swedish describes the attempt to leave aside the prominent French and German translations and translate directly from the original tongue, a practice that generally signifies the start of the modern translation era. Cecilia Lindskog Whiteley's reading of the evolution of *Hamlet's* female character Ophelia in the Swedish translations of the play throughout the nineteenth century, the time of the cultural and political repositioning of Sweden, presents a refined gender-conscious description of the translational image of Ophelia in relation to the societal norms of the time of shifting cultural constructions of gender. In the fourth chapter Jyrki Nummi, Eeva-Liisa Bastman, and Erika Laamanen analyse the case of the localization of *Macbeth* into the Finnish language and socio-cultural system in Lagervall's dramatic adaptation of 1834. Next, James Newlin draws from Kierkegaard's fascination of Shakespeare and provides a thought-provoking account of the adapted narrative of *King Lear* buried within Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* and *Stages on Life's Way*. In chapter six, Per Sivefors sheds light on the racial debates in Swedish newspapers spurred by the visit of Ira Aldridge, an African-American actor, to Stockholm in the late 1850s. Sivefors documents the mixed feelings regarding Aldridge's performance as a lead character in *Othello* and as Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* alongside the Swedish cast. Through reviews and press debates in Swedish newspapers marking the infamous visit, the author concludes that the basic positions and stereotyping comments on race and performance aesthetics that are still under debate today were in place already in the discussions held in 1857. Riitta Pohjola-Skarp considers the enormous effect of Shakespeare's plays on Aleksis Kivi, the first professional Finnish writer who lived in the nineteenth century. The study effectively shows the presence of several Shakespearean references, especially *Romeo and Juliet* as an intertext in Kivi's *Karkurit* (1865, *The Fugitives*). Next, relying on the readings of Anne Charlotte Leffler's plays, *Skådespelerskan* (1873, *The Actress*) in particular, as well as the playwright's thoughts on stardom and reality, fate of actors and actresses, Lynn R. Wilkinson discusses the utilisation and impact Shakespearean characters have left on Leffer. The final chapter by Martin Humpál is dedicated to the Norwegian modernist writer Knut Hamsun's aesthetic beliefs, his dislike and criticism of Shakespeare.

The choice of the content articles of the collection is well balanced and versatile both from the point of view of topics as well as approaches. The selection gives an insightful overview on the Shakespearean influences on the prominent Nordic thinkers and writers, but contains also articles on specific yet far reaching racial as well as gender related issues forming a bridge between the nineteenth century Shakespeare-related events and present day societal attitudes.

What is more, the copious paratexts of the book deserve special attention. The assets of the book include the ample and functional introduction by the editors that gives an overview of previous work done on Nordic Shakespeares, both the translations and dramatizations of Shakespearean plays, but, for the ease of reading and relating, delves also into the general socio-political background of the Nordic countries. By the same token, the collection includes a very helpful afterword and an excellent tentative timeline of Shakespeare related events and appearances in the Nordic countries before 1900. Although Iceland and the early Icelandic contacts with Shakespeare are noticeably absent from the present collection, the authors promise to compensate for it in the next, more thorough collection dedicated to the "politicized appropriation of Shakespeare in the emerging national projects" (p. 25). The book (and its follow-up) has an excellent potential to become an invaluable source for scholars in different disciplines and fields of study as it brings together a broad and multifaceted body of research on early Shakespeare-related exchanges and spurs the reader to negotiate the "centres" and "peripheries" as well as "selves" and "others".

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