

JON STEWART (ed.):

The Heibergs and the Theater. Between Vaudeville, Romantic Comedy and National Drama.

Museum Tusculanum Press, Copenhagen 2012. Pp. 269.

ISBN: 978-87-635-3897-8.

Although Johan Ludvig Heiberg dominated theatre life in the Danish Golden Age, the theater critic, theorist, essayist and dramatist was seen merely as a footnote to giants like Kierkegaard and H.C. Andersen from the start of the twentieth century. Recently the situation altered; ironical as it may seem, it was Kierkegaard research that triggered the Heiberg renaissance. Initially Heiberg was acknowledged as an important object for both Kierkegaard's criticism and his admiration. But it was not long before Heiberg became an object for international and interdisciplinary research in his own right, something the present monograph illustrates. *The Heibergs and the Theater. Between Vaudeville, Romantic Comedy and National Drama*, the seventh volume in Jon Stewart's series on Golden Age Denmark, sheds light on Johan Ludvig Heiberg's dramatic oeuvre from three different though closely related perspectives: politics, philosophy and, although less prominent, gender. Most of the contributions centre around Heiberg. For Sohl Jessen ("Kierkegaard's Hidden Satire on Heiberg's Poetics of the Vaudeville in *Either/Or* and *Repetition*"), Schiedermaier ("Theater and Modernity: Thomasine Gyllembourg's Novella *Near and Far*"), and Sanders ("The Ethics of Performance in Johanne Luise Heiberg's Autobiographical Reflections"), however, Heiberg is of secondary importance and functions as a referential 'footnote' to the works of (intimate) contemporaries.

Although the table of contents might give the impression that philosophical issues are mainly touched upon in the second part of the volume, philosophy and especially Heiberg's relation to Hegel functions as one of the leitmotifs in both the first and second section of *The Heibergs and the Theater*. Finn Hauberg Mortensen shows that Heiberg's Hegelian breakthrough in 1824 not only has been as important for Danish nineteenth-century intellectual history as Oehlenschläger's romantic breakthrough and Brandes' modern breakthrough, he also underlines the fact that the marginalization of Heiberg's breakthrough

was caused rather by strategic-political preferences (his breakthrough didn't fit the national-historic line in the tradition of Danish literary history), hereby providing an implicit commentary on Danish literary history.

That philosophy and politics are closely intertwined is shown by Lasse Horne Kjældgaard in "An Artist Among Rebels? Johan Ludvig Heiberg and the Political Turn of the Public Sphere". Kjældgaard convincingly connects Heiberg's Hegelianism to his reflections on state reformation. By looking closely at three mutually related tendencies in the 1830s, the critique of aesthetization, the pitting of politics against aesthetics, and the fast politization of the press, Kjældgaard shows that Danish literature was quite strongly influenced by the political movement during this period, which has traditionally been characterized as an apolitical and quiet age. Heiberg, whose writings became politically orientated during the 1830s, does not just serve as a random illustration of this development. Kjældgaard underlines that Heiberg, earlier than most of his contemporaries, grasped the scale and importance of the irreversible politization of the public sphere that took place in Denmark after the 1830 July revolution, something which is clearly reflected in the closet drama *A Soul after Death* which Heiberg published in 1840 and in the journal *Intelligensblade* he launched in 1842, an example of the fast politization of the press that took place from the 1830s onward.

Wolfgang Behschnitt in a way connects Kjældgaard and Müller-Wille. Like Kjældgaard Behschnitt studies Heiberg's reflections upon the close relation between art and society in times of change. Behschnitt's reading of Heiberg's essay on Hertz' *Svend Dyring's House* examines Heiberg's thoughts on the way art in times of social change could represent and mould the people. The solution according to Heiberg was found in popular art. Only popular art, when rooted in national heritage and when addressing all social strata, could truly influence the people. Popular art thereby functioned as a kind of national art. The question of the aesthetic and political representation of the national body is also at the core of one of the most interesting contributions to the volume: Klaus Müller-Wille's "Ghostly Monarchies – Paradoxical Constitutions of the Political in Johan Ludvig Heiberg's Royal Dramas".

By analyzing the structural differences between three of Heiberg's royal plays Müller-Wille exposes the political implications of these plays in the light of the programme of creating a national culture. As Müller-Wille shows Heiberg used the plays to reflect upon the representation and function of the king in the early nineteenth century, and is initially clearly influenced by Hegel's political-aesthetic reflections. Müller-Wille provides a solid analysis of both Hegel's thoughts on the function of the monarch in relation to the state and Heiberg's changing view on this matter. Whereas in *Elves' Hill* (1828), a vaudeville functioning as a national drama, he presents the king both as a real person and as an image of the Danish spirit, *Day of the Seven Sleepers* (1840) no longer aesthetically legitimizes the monarchy. At least as interesting is Müller-Wille's conclusion that a reading of *Day of the Seven Sleepers* shows that national theatre will take over the symbolic function of ensuring the unity of the state.

The second and third sections of the volume concentrate on different aspects of Heiberg's dramatic and drama-theoretical works. Joachim Grage ("Heiberg and the Musical Theatre") comments upon Heiberg's systematic theory of dramatic art (heavily depending on Hegel), and especially the place of the vaudeville, a genre much loved by Heiberg, within this system. One could argue that the division between the second section and the first is slightly arbitrary, bearing in mind that the aesthetic reflections are partly political as well. Commenting on the educational qualities of theatre, he once again seems to underline – as Kjældgaard and Müller-Wille did too – that the line between politics and aesthetics is a thin one, as is the one between philosophy and theatre, something which is shown in Jon Stewart's "Heiberg's Conception of Speculative Drama and the Crisis of the Age: Martensen's Analysis of *Fata Morgana*." In 1838 Heiberg had written a drama which according to his wife was not poetry at all. In *Fata Morgana* he had tried to put into practice 'speculative drama', a genre he had reflected upon five years earlier in *On the Significance of Philosophy for the Present Age*. The experiment failed, but was defended by Heiberg's friend Martensen who demonstrated that Heiberg in this play diagnosed the crisis of art in the late 1830s and indeed provided something new. Stewart's re-reading of Martensen's review does not lead to a revaluation of the

aesthetic qualities of *Fata Morgana*, but Heiberg's experimental play does illustrate that he was aware of the fact that something had to be done to give a new impulse to the theatrical life of the Golden Age.

Gunilla Hermansson's analysis of Heiberg's 'forgotten' play *Nina* signalizes that Heiberg experimented with other genres as well. With *Nina*, Heiberg was probably attempting to write a sentimental play, concludes Hermansson, because Heiberg, who had seen successful *Nina*-versions in Paris, dreamt of an aesthetic (and financial) success himself.

In all the present volume, by supplementing traditional aspects of Heiberg research like biography, drama, critical works and aesthetics with studies on his philosophical and socio-political views, Stewart and others have succeeded in providing new insights not only into the many-sided character of Heiberg's life and writings, but into the cultural life of Golden Age Denmark as well. The first half of the volume is the most consistent one, as all contributors in this part reflect upon the link between the aesthetic, the political and the philosophical. In some cases this unfortunately leads to unnecessary repetitions. Grage's remarks on Heiberg's discussion of Holbergian comedy were already and more thoroughly discussed by Müller-Wille. The same can be said about Behschnitt's reflections on the 'notions of the national'. But these are only small editorial imperfections in a stimulating collection of essays.