

Kela Kvam, Janne Risum, Jytte Wiingard, eds. *Dansk teaterhistorie*. 2 vols. Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1992. Illus. Pp. 279 + 362. ISBN 87-00-39494-7. DKR 598,00

A history of Danish theatre has been much needed for some time. There has been little of a comprehensive nature since the work earlier in the century of Robert Neiiendam. To some extent, this new study fills that need, especially for the post-War period.

These two volumes are unevenly divided, and their separate titles say something about the approach taken. Volume I, the shorter by almost one hundred pages, is subtitled *Kirkens og kongens teater* and takes us to 1849. Volume II, *Folkets teater*, moves us quickly from there into the twentieth century. The authors are alert to every independent move in the Danish theatre, especially one that appears to respond to that mysterious entity, "the people." On the whole, the national stage, Det kongelige Teater in Copenhagen, takes a beating at the hands of these critics. It is no accident that the great watershed in Danish theatrical history is set at 1849, with the ending of absolutism and the establishment of a democratic constitution. The first picture in Volume II is of Viggo Lindstrøm as Jens Daglykke, Landsoldaten in the *folkekomedie* of that name from 1886.

The authors would like to see their history used as "a reservoir of possibilities" (I:7), and they have written it in a most accessible style, given it a large type-face, and furnished it with many pictures.

These books have many virtues, among which are the first two chapters of Volume I. These deal with the mediæval period and with the eighteenth century through Holberg, and are a good reminder that theatre in Denmark did not begin with that justly eminent writer: Bent Holm on Holberg and his predecessors gives us a model of how to integrate a view of the play with a study of the playhouse. It is also useful that this new history includes developments in radio and television theatre, as well as having a few words to say about theatre outside Copenhagen. As is to be expected, the period 1945-1990 is particularly well-covered—a third of Volume II—and the authors seem, as well, to have found every post-War alternative theatre group in Denmark. This study does try to provide an expansive view of the Danish theatre and certainly suggests the breadth of that theatre's interests. These are good signs.

There are, however, a few disturbing elements that limit the use of

these volumes as a "reservoir of possibilities." Most problematical is the complete lack of documentation. Though the bibliographies are impressive, arranged topically to conform (mostly) to the chapters and titled sections of chapters, citations, paraphrases, and summaries in the text are not documented. This makes it functionally impossible to check and assess their use and their relevance. For instance, during a discussion of some disagreements at Det Kongelige in 1858-59 (II:20), Edvard Brandes is suddenly called upon to attack the Heibergs by means of a criticism of them he levelled in 1875. This seems playing surprisingly fast and loose with proper historical method until, with some work, one can discover that Brandes made his remarks in the context of an historical survey of just that period in Danish theatre history. On the whole, dates have a way of jumping around in this history. Equally tiresome is the endless need of the authors to approve what "the people" do and disapprove what Det Kongelige does.

There is, however, an important, structural, issue which this study raises. It deliberately separates the history of the "theatre" from the history of the "drama" (described in the Foreword as "*noget andet*" [I:7]). While the theatre can certainly be considered in institutional terms--these books are a good example--and while the theatre as institution is, the authors' claim to the contrary, almost always the subject of theatre histories, it does, somehow, seem that the object of the theatre's *raison d'être*, the play, ought to be somewhere near the center of the discussion. It is not clear to me why the theatre and the drama ought not to be discussed together. Excepting Holm on Holberg, this is not the case here. Yet, on the other hand, certain non-"dramatic" elements of theatre history, sets and costumes, for instance, which one might imagine ought to be a part of the kind of history the authors claim to want to write, are essentially ignored. This is particularly unfortunate as the generous supply of pictures offers ample opportunity to add this important dimension. As it is, the choice of illustrations and their captions, as with the text itself, take no advantage of this. In the end, the pictures are merely decoration. Further, not much is said about the recruitment and training of actors, surely a central concern of the theatre as institution.

What do we have, then? Well, the books seem aimed at a general audience, one the publishers mistrust enough for them to eliminate the terror apparently inspired by a footnote. The history offers opinions but

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not much analysis. The bibliographies in each volume are excellent, though disconnected from the text, and there is a complete list of all plays mentioned in each volume (and one must say that a lot of plays are mentioned). Though adequate within the terms they set out, these volumes are still not the comprehensive history of the Danish theatre we need.

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