

Rahvusliku ajaloo tõlgendusi eesti draamas ja teatris 1970.–1980. aastatel

Interpretations of National History in Estonian Drama and Theatre in the 1970s–1980s

Piret Kruuspere

Abstract

According to theatre scholar Freddie Rokem, theatre portraying or performing historical events is seeking to overcome both the separation and the exclusion from the past, as well as 'striving to create a community where the events from this past will matter again'. This article covers the topic of interpretations of national history in Estonian theatre and in original dramaturgy during the Soviet era, with the focus on aspects like national self-reflection and the relationship to the common past. The main focus is on the 1970s, with examples from Rein Saluri's, Mati Unt's and Jaan Kaplinski's drama productions. During the period in question, re-tellings of national history on Estonian theatre stages were clothed in metaphors, allusions and secret codes – Aesopian language. Within the Soviet cultural context, I analyse if and to what extent theatre of the time displayed resistance, political theatre or social allegory. Theatre was also connected with the principle of playing or playfulness, which on one hand indicates national resistance, national endurance, and a certain survival strategy, but on the other hand indicates the Estonian as being an involuntary homo ludens – the Playing Man, who through various enforced roles is trying to adjust to the whirlwinds of history. Saluri's first play, the intellectual drama *Külalised* (The Guests), opens with an allusion to a drama classic the world over, William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, adding a powerful national-symbolic background to the play. The role-play which permeates and structures the play (The Host–The Guest) however, displays allegorical references to changes in the status and self-image of Estonians. In Unt's play *Peaproov* (Dress Rehearsal), the principle of playing/acting sheds ironic light on the makers of an historical film and their readiness to create superficially flashy interpretations at any cost: this take acts as an estranging and generalising reflection in a context of general humanism on the one hand and artistic ethics on the other. Kaplinski's *Neljakuningapäev* (The Day of Four Kings) is based on a historically familiar tale about four Estonian kings. Here, the take with the play within the play helps amplify the play in both a mythical and a historically-philosophical manner as well as within the polemical stance of the author.