

Abstract

Henrik Ibsen, the father of and leading representative of modern drama, died in 1906. Samuel Beckett, the father of and leading representative of late modernist drama, was born in 1906. Does Ibsen in more than the chronological sense come before Beckett? Is Ibsen a father of modernism and Beckett just his predecessor? Are there any similarities between Ibsen's time or experience of early modernity and Beckett's experience of late modernity?

I will try to give some answers to these questions by discussing Ibsen's relation to modernism, the modern drama and modernity.

I will make my discussion in three steps.

I will start with a presentation of a recent book claiming that Ibsen was the father of modernism, but that we on the contrary not can understand him from the point of view of late modernism - or in our context that Ibsen was before Beckett but he is not to be interpreted as an early Beckett.

I will then present the well established and almost "classic" Theory of modern drama by Peter Szondi where Ibsen is the first and Beckett among the last to contribute to the crisis of modern drama.

And finally I will then discuss modernity and draw the consequences of respectively early and late modernity on the dramas of Ibsen - and Beckett.

Özet

Modern dram sanatının babası ve önde gelen temsilcisi Ibsen 1906'da öldü. Geç dönem modern dram sanatının babası ve önde gelen temsilcisi Samuel Beckett 1906'da doğdu. Ibsen acaba kronolojik anlamın ötesinde düşünüldüğünde de Beckett'den önce geliyor mu? Ibsen modernizmin babası ve Beckett de onun takipçisi midir?

Ibsen'in dönemi ve erken dönem modernite deneyimi ile Beckett'in geç dönem modernite deneyimi arasında benzerlikler var mıdır?

Ibsen'in modernizmi ile modern oyunlar ve modernite arasındaki ilişkiyi tartışarak bu soruları yanıtlamaya çalışıyorum.

Bildiriyi üç aşama ile kuruyorum. Ibsen'i modernizmin babası olarak kabul eden ama buna rağmen geç modernizmin bakış açısı ile anlayamayacağımız biri olarak ele alan yakın dönemli bir çalışmadan söz ederek başlıyorum.

Bu konferansın terimlerine çevrildiğinde "Ibsen Beckett'den önce gelmektedir ama bir erken dönem Beckett'i olarak yorumlanamaz" demektir bu.

Bundan sonra çok iyi kurulmuş ve artık neredeyse klasikleşmiş bir yapıt olan Peter Szondi'nin Modern Dramın Teorisi'nden söz ediyorum. Bu kitapta modern dramın içinde bulunduğu krizin ilk ismi olarak Ibsen son ismi olarak da Beckett ele alınmaktadır.

Son olarak da moderniteyi tartışarak, Ibsen'in ve Beckett'in oyunları üzerinden sırasıyla erken ve geç dönem modernitelere ilişkin sonuçlar çıkarıyorum.

IBSEN BEFORE BECKETT

BECKETT'TEN ÖNCE İBSEN

JOHN NYGAARD*

* Prof., Oslo Üniversitesi / İbsen Çalışmaları Merkezi

Prof., University of Oslo / Centre for Ibsen Studies

Henrik Ibsen, the father of and leading representative of modern drama, died in 1906. Samuel Beckett, the father of and leading representative of late modernist drama, was born in 1906. Does Ibsen in more than the chronological sense come before Beckett? Is Ibsen a father of modernism and Beckett just his predecessor? Are there any similarities between Ibsen's time or experience of early modernity and Beckett's experience of late modernity?

I will try to give some answers to these questions by discussing Ibsen's relation to modernism, the modern drama and modernity.

I will make my discussion in three steps.

I will start with a presentation of a recent book claiming that Ibsen was the father of modernism, but that we on the contrary not can understand him from the point of view of late modernism - or in our context that Ibsen was before Beckett but he is not to be interpreted as an early Beckett.

I will then present the well established and almost "classic" Theory of modern drama by Peter Szondi where Ibsen is the first and Beckett among the last to contribute to the crisis of modern drama.

And finally I will then discuss modernity and draw the consequences of respectively early and late modernity on the dramas of Ibsen - and Beckett.

FIRST STEP:

IS IBSEN THE FATHER OF MODERNISM?

The Norwegian professor of literature at Duke University, USA, Toril Moi, has earlier this year published Henrik Ibsen and the

IBSEN BEFORE BECKETT

Birth of Modernism (Moi 2006). The aim of her study has been to establish Ibsen as a father of modernism. Her basic question is that Baudelaire, Flaubert and Manet are recognised as the fathers of modernism, but why not Ibsen?

In her introduction Toril Moi underlines the ambiguous status of Ibsen: On one side is he representing the unquestioned beginning of modernism in theatre and drama; on the other many claim that notwithstanding his importance for the development of modernism, Ibsen himself was not a modernist (Moi 2006:16).

The main points in her arguments are:

Ibsen established modernism by liberating drama and theatre from the straitjacket of idealism.

In Toril Moi's opinion the antagonism in the 19th Century was between idealism and modernism. Against the dominant idealism of the 19th Century Ibsen's modernism represented a new contribution to the literary history of the 19th Century.

Modernism was according to Toril Moi not opposed to realism. The conflict of the 19th Century was not between modernism and realism, but between idealism and realism.

In her opinion Henrik Ibsen's works represents an almost perfect genealogy of the development of modernism. But by re-introducing idealism as a concept, Toril Moi will on the other hand demonstrate that what we normally call modernism is a result of a historical development since 1914. It is therefore anachronistic and a-historical to project this relatively limited definition of modernity back to the 1870s (Moi 2006:18).

Moi's contribution is therefore to describe the elements of

Ibsen's modernism in opposition to the elements emphasised by the ones, she with a term introduced by Fredric Jameson, calls the representatives of "Modernism as Ideology".

In his book *A Singular Modernity* Fredric Jameson (2002) defines 'Modernism as Ideology' as a set of aesthetic norms based on three doctrines:

- The autonomy of aesthetics
- De-personalisation
- Autonomisation of language

'Modernism as Ideology' means first of all the autonomy of art or the autonomy of aesthetics. Art has to be liberated from social, political or religious suppression – and art should basically be concerned with art. Autonomous art is therefore, according to 'Modernism as Ideology' art that not "mirrors", "reflects" or "describes" reality, as in realism, – but is art in itself. Art is anti-cultural and self-reflexive.

De-personalisation has many forms, as the un-personal, objectivity and the "death of the author". Autonomization of language has as a consequence that every presentation of reality is taboo, supporting both the hate of realism and the love of a language turning on the unspeakable, the un-represent-able, impossibility of meaning, absolute negativity and so forth.

"Modernism as Ideology" is a specific aesthetic theory of art and literature developed after the Second World War. "Modernism as Ideology" is based on art and literature from this period. The late modernists after 1945 worshipped the negative, absence and nothingness. This manic interest in the failure of language resulted in a strong contempt for realism understood as the result of the authors naïve belief in the language's ability to present reality (Moi 2006:40).

IBSEN BEFORE BECKETT

“Modernism as Ideology” as aesthetic theory can, therefore, be relevant for interpreting Beckett and other representatives of late modernism. The problem is, however, according to Moi, when the representatives of “Modernism as Ideology” project these specific aesthetic norms backward in time. “Modernism as Ideology” is established when the values of late modernism are turned to be the norms of all other forms of art, including the earlier forms of modernism (Moi 2006:42).

In the modernist critique since the 1950s Ibsen’s realism has been presented as so strongly associated with his time and society that his works will faint and be forgotten because they no longer has contemporary relevance. The reaction to this position was to claim that Ibsen’s dramas had eternal values hidden under or behind the realistic surface. Ibsen’s heroes are all fighting for a higher idealism based on sacrifice. This view was first presented by the British scholar John Northam in Ibsen’s Dramatic Method in 1952 and repeated by the leading Norwegian Ibsen Scholar of that time, Daniel Haakonsen, in Henrik Ibsens realisme (Henrik Ibsen’s Realism) in 1957. In his arguments Haakonsen actually reintroduced idealism as the aesthetic norm – and opened for an idealistic or “spiritual” turn in Ibsen scholarship in Norway in the 1960s and 70s. Toril Moi describes this as a movement defending Ibsen by underlining the eternal, the timeless and the tragic in a desperate attempt to protect him against the wolves both of realism and modernism (Moi 2006:57).

Toril Moi, on the contrary, is underlining that Ibsen was both a realist and a modernist and based on this position she will defend him against the representatives of the “Ideology of Modernism”. In her opinion it is only two possibilities for the representatives of the “Ideology of Modernism”– either to reject Ibsen as non-modernist, a dull old realist who tried to “present” reality and at the same time produce melodramatic intrigues – or to adopt him for their own aesthetic ideology. The first is in her opinion common in the Anglo-American world – and the last has in recent years been dominating in Norway according to Moi (2006:58).

In the very first lines of the introduction to her book she expresses her surprise over the rather low interest for Ibsen among American scholars. Her critical review of Ibsen scholars who she interprets to be representatives of “Ideology of Modernism” is therefore concentrated to Norwegian scholars, Atle Kittang and first of all Frode Helland.

In 2000 Frode Helland published *Melankoliens spill* (The Play of Melancholy) a study of the four last dramas of Ibsen. In Helland’s interpretation the main characters are turning away from their contemporary society and the idea of development. Reality is experienced as an empty game. He underlines that Ibsen’s texts are insisting that this is not a pathological misunderstanding but an adequate reaction to stiffening life. Ibsen’s last four dramas are revolting against the realistic drama, the dramatic form Ibsen had established earlier.

Helland’s interpretation of Ibsen is based on Adorno’s aphorisms Excavations. The chock of negativity in Ibsen’s last dramas is not immediately accessible as a contemporary experience.

The intention of the playwright is hidden for us. We can only read and interpret his texts.

The author is not in his texts. Intention and work of art are to separate entities. To understand them, they have to be excavated through meticulous work. In Moi’s opinion is Helland’s interpretation based on one of the fundamental doctrines of “Modernism as Ideology”, de-personalisation as the “death of the author”. His interpretation expresses also the doctrines of the autonomy of aesthetics, as art is self-reflexive, and of autonomization of language, as the unspeakable, the impossibility of meaning and absolute negativity.

Helland describes the meta-dramatic as the common element in Ibsen’s last dramas. They are texts about literature and art,

IBSEN BEFORE BECKETT

meta-texts reflecting on the position and function of art and the artist. An important concept in Helland's study is theatricality. In different ways the texts are exhibiting their status as art as staging and theatre and as play within the play. The work of art should define its own rules and its own status as art (Helland 2000:26). The last plays are expressing a radical negativity and a far-reaching irony – reducing all efforts to reduce the plays to a “message” (Helland 2000:28).

In Moi's opinion Helland understand Ibsen's last plays as a kind of sorrow over the alienation in modernity where authenticity is impossible. The plays are balancing on the edge of silence and just overcome negativity. But even in Helland's far-reaching worship of negativity – art is the only in life with positive value. The radical negative works of art are created, they are written, and expresses through this the defiance of the creative productivity. In this way, according to Moi, the worship of art in high modernism and the worship of the negative in late modernism are united (Moi 2006:59).

Such “late modernist” reading of Ibsen is in Moi's opinion blurring his actual intentions.

Helland and Kittang are wrong when they project over to Ibsen a totally negative view of the language's possibilities of expression and when they take for granted that Ibsen was of the opinion that art was the only transcendent value in a meaningless world. Moi underlines that some of his best plays, as *Wild Duck*, *Rosmersholm* and *Hedda Gabler*, are concerned with the destructions rising from the missing sensitivity between people. These plays are masterly investigations of the isolation, loneliness and loss of meaning in modernism, but they are also expressing a longing for expressive freedom and human co-understanding. Ibsen's understanding of language is therefore closer to Freud and Wittgenstein than to Lacan and Derrida (Moi 2006:60).

To understand Ibsen as a representative of the “Ideology of Modernism” is therefore to misunderstand him Moi concludes. But on the other hand, if we not understand Ibsen as a representative of modernism we can not explain why leading modernists as Rainer Maria Rilke and James Joyce admired Ibsen so intense. Moi therefore draw the consequence that we have to start anew and try to understand Ibsen’s revolutionary theatre in the light of concepts with meaning for him and not in the light of the anachronistic categories of the “Ideology of Modernism” (Moi 2006:63).

Concepts with meaning for understanding Ibsen and modernism are according to Moi, theatre and theatricality.

SECOND STEP:

FROM THEATRE AND THEATRICALITY TO THE THEORY OF MODERN DRAMA

Moi states that most books on modernism are not mentioning theatre, and the few doing it, are not referring to Ibsen. The reason for the silence she finds in Michael Fried’s (1980) statement that a certain type of modernism is an enemy of theatre. For them theatre is the negation of art. In Moi’s opinion theatre and theatricality is now at war, not only with modernist painting and sculpture, but with art as such – and even with the modernist experience of life as such (Moi 2006: 50)

Theatre and theatricality is according to Fried created consciously to have an effect on the audience. Theatre is eager to present itself, to stage itself. But because theatre has an audience theatre exists in quite another way than other forms of art. It is exactly this other way of existence in the theatre that more than anything else is so unbearable for the modernist sensibility. With reference to Christopher Innes (1999) Moi claims that almost nothing presented on a stage can have any hope to be “modernist” (Moi 2006:51). The basic connection between theatre and the physical reality and social existence makes it impossible to use most of the key concepts of modernism.

On stage art could neither be presented as an autonomous activity, independent of external praxis nor try to be pure form. In contrast to modernist poetry or painting, imitation has always been present in the theatre and it is the necessary basis for acting. Just to present a sequence of actions in a frame of space and time was to establish a “narrative” method. Theatre as a public form of art can not pretend to be autonomous in relation to the “culture”. On the contrary theatre is always in relation to the culture and society.

Moi underlines the double position in the modernist’s relation to theatre and theatricality. On one side the “Ideology of Modernism” is basically an enemy of theatre. It is against theatre both as an art and as an institution. But at the other side the modernists are using “theatricality” as a word of honour based on the understanding that the purpose of theatre is to develop the possibilities of theatre. “Theatricality” is “self-reflexive theatre” or a theatre always conscious of its existence as theatre (Moi 2006:53). For Brecht and Artaud and others Ibsen was bourgeois, full of words, narratives, bound in tradition and traditional intrigues and outdated problems. Ibsen’s theatre was a theatre of the text and not the body, a theatre without the ability to express the possibilities of theatre as such (Moi 2006:54). The theatre enemies among the modernists claim that Ibsen is too theatrical, and the friends of theatricality claim that he is not theatrical enough (Moi 2006:55).

Just in a footnote Moi mentions Peter Szondi’s criticism of Ibsen’s realism in *Theory of Modern Drama* (1987) as an example of the avantgarde wing of the “Ideology of Modernism” (Moi 2006:55, note 49). In Moi’s opinion Szondi’s criticism is based on theatricality and that Ibsen’s dramas are not theatrical enough. This is, however, not right. Parallel to Fried’s distinction between absorption and theatricality in his book *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*, Szondi distinguish drama in the same way as Diderot as basically anti-theatrical. In Szondi’s definition “Drama is absolute. To be purely relational – that is, to be dramatic, it must break loose from everything external. It can be conscious of nothing outside itself” (Szondi 1987:8).

If we apply Fried's concepts drama in Szondi's definition is absorption. Szondi bases this on a modernist understanding of the dramatist as absent from the Drama. In Szondi's words the dramatist "does not speak; he institutes discussion." And "Drama is not written, it is set:"

All the lines spoken in the Drama are dis-closures. They are spoken in contexts and remain there. They should in no way be perceived as coming from the author (Szondi 1987:8).

Szondi develops this principle further by claiming that the same absolute quality exists with regard to the spectator. The lines in a play are as little an address to the spectator as they are a declaration by the author. And he explicitly points out that the "theatre-goer is an observer – silent, with hands tied, lamed by the impact of this other world" (Szondi 1987:8). This understanding of the total passivity in the audience is unmistakably an expression of absorption and anti-theatricality. In the same way as Szondi Richard Sennett (1977) has described the 19th Century as the fall of public man or in other words as the fall of theatricality and the rise of absorption. Szondi's understanding that the "actor-role relationship should not be visible" and that "the actor and the character should unite to create a single personage", (Szondi 1987:9) is just the same opinion as expressed by Stanislavskij and the opposite of the modernist claim of theatricality of Brecht or Artaud.

In the same way Szondi defines the Drama as absolute or primary, we can claim the theatre is absolute and primary. "It is not a (secondary) representation of something else (primary); it presents itself, is itself. Its action, like each of its lines, is "original"; it is accomplished as it occurs" (Szondi 1987:9).

This is of course a modernist definition of drama and theatre as autonomous works of art. This is not a definition of theatricality as a relation between the actors and the spectators. Theatricality is a play within the work of art, the drama or theatre. The play is

always primary, here and now. Everything prior to or after the action or the play has to remain foreign to the drama or theatre.

Szondi underlines that because the Drama always is primary its internal time is always the present. "In the Drama, time unfolds as an absolute, linear sequence in the present". And because the Drama is autonomous or absolute, it is itself responsible for the temporal sequence. In Szondi's own words: "It generates its own time" (Szondi 1987:9). To generate its own time, every moment in the Drama must contain what Szondi calls "the seeds of the future" or it must be "pregnant with futurity" (Szondi 1987:9). The dynamic of the Drama, the principle that makes it possible to generate its own time, is according to Szondi the Drama's dialectical structure, which, in turn, is rooted in interpersonal relationships.

The Drama for Szondi is self-contained dialectic and the sphere of the "between" is an essential part of the Dramas being. All dramatic themes have to be formulated in the sphere of the "between" and the verbal medium for the interpersonal relation is the dialogue. Szondi therefore states that the absolute dominance of dialogue or interpersonal communication in the Drama "reflects the fact that the Drama consists only of the reproduction of interpersonal relations, is only cognizant of what shines forth within this sphere" (Szondi 1987:8).

Consequently Szondi claims that "the whole world of the Drama is dialectic in origin". It exists because of "the interpersonal dialectic, which manifests itself as speech in the dialogue." The dialogue carries the Drama, according to Szondi. "The Drama is possible only when dialogue is possible" (Szondi 1987:10).

From this theoretical position, based on the interpersonal dialectic manifested as speech in the dialogue in the drama, Szondi is criticising Ibsen. Ibsen, in Szondi's opinion, "did not take a critical stance vis-à-vis traditional dramatic form. He

achieved fame in great part because of his mastery of earlier dramatic conventions. But this external perfection masked an internal crisis in the Drama” (Szondi 1987:12). Szondi explains that the reason for this internal crisis was that however much the thematic in Ibsen’s dramas was tied to the presence of an action, it remains exiled in the past and the depths of the individual. The thematic does not arise out of interpersonal relationships, but, according to Szondi, “it is at home only in the innermost being of these estranged and solitary figures”. That means it is impossible to give it direct dramatic presentation (Szondi 1987:16).

If we follow Szondi Beckett is just one of the last examples of the long line of dramatists presenting the crisis and death of modern drama and theatre, expressing the pessimism and negative feeling of endgame and no hope. The crisis started with Ibsen and was followed by Chekhov and Maeterlinck. The Three Sisters, according to Szondi, “perhaps the most fully realized of Chekhov’s plays, is exclusively a presentation of lonely individuals intoxicated by memories and dreaming of the future” (Szondi 1987:18).

Maeterlinck’s early works are in the same way described by Szondi as “an attempt to dramatize existential powerlessness – mankind’s dependence on a fate that is forever obscure” (Szondi 1987:32). For Maeterlinck human destiny is represented by death itself, and death alone dominates the stage in his works.

And at the end of this line of crisis is Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*. According to Szondi this is a play where

/.../nothing but empty conversation remains to confirm the existence of those beings who wait for Godot – this deus not only absconditus but also dubitabilis. Constantly pressing toward the abyss of silence, retrieved from it over and over again but only with great effort, this hollow conversation still manages to reveal the “anguish of man without God” in this empty metaphysical space – a space that gives importance to whatever fills it. At this level,

of course, dramatic form no longer contains any critical contradictions, and conversation is no longer a means of overcoming such contradictions. Everything lies in ruins – dialogue, form as a whole, human existence. Negativity – meaningless automatic speech and unfulfilled dramatic form – is now the only source of statement. What emerges is an expression of the negative condition of a waiting being – one in need of transcendence but unable to achieve it (Szondi 1987:54).

AND THEN, FINALLY, THE LAST STEP

MODERNITY AND THE DEATH OF MODERN THEATRE

Szondi's argument seems rather formalistic. Because Ibsen's starting point was epic in nature, Ibsen was forced to develop an incomparable mastery of dramatic construction. To conceal the epic origin of his plays the analytical technique therefore became Ibsen's mode of construction in his modern plays (Szondi 1987:17). But this formalistic criticism is based on his more fundamental point of the Drama as interpersonal dialectic manifested as dialogue. Szondi interprets the crisis in the Drama of Ibsen as an expression of a general historical crisis. In his introduction to the English translation of Szondi's Theory of the Modern Drama

Jochen Schulte-Sasse underlines that "Szondi is fascinated with moments of transition and crisis because they create tensions, discrepancies, epistemologically productive ruptures" and that:

"Adequate forms emerge only after periods of crisis" (Schulte-Sasse 1987: xiv). This understanding of the crisis as a creative moment is highly modern and the same is Szondi's understanding of the work as evidence of human existence or as "documents" of human history (Schulte-Sasse 1987: xvii). Szondi's hermeneutic method is basically modern, constituted by his search for the moment of tension between form and content that will reveal

the historical ground on which a text is built. In other words the modern drama is expressing the drama of modernity or the dramatic historical changes in modernity.

Szondi's description of the end of dialogue and the crisis of drama is as a parallel by Sennett described as the fall of public man and of Habermas as the re-structuring of the public sphere from critical dialogue to cultural consummation. They are all contributing to a general interpretation of the 19th Century, Ibsen's times or a period we more generally can describe as modernity. Szondi's interpretation of Ibsen's dramas is therefore not an anachronistic misinterpretation of a representative of the "Ideology of Modernism", as Moi claims, but it is just one of many contributions to the discussion of the consequences of modernity.

In the same way Helland in his book is not giving an interpretation of Ibsen based on the "Ideology of Modernism", as Moi argues, but a contribution to the understanding of modernity as the changes in the 19th Century. The question of his book, Helland underlines, is the consequences of modernity for Ibsen and Ibsen's dramas (Helland 2000:25). Helland distinguishes between two modes of interpretation of modernity – one optimistic and one pessimistic. He mentions Kant and Hegel among the optimistic and I will add Marx and Durkheim – and he mentions Nietzsche and Kierkegaard among the pessimistic and I will add Weber. This distinction is in many ways the same as Moi's distinction between idealism and modernism. Moi's concept of modernism is in other words an expression of Ibsen's pessimistic or anti-idealistic interpretation of modernity with obvious parallels both to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.

Helland argues that since the definition of modernity is the autonomy of the individuals – modernity means the independence or autonomy of art. The consequences of the autonomy of art, is on one hand that art is liberated. On the other hand that art is turned to be a commodity to be sold on a market (Helland 2000:25-26). This construction of arguments and consequences

IBSEN BEFORE BECKETT

is interesting and has as an important consequence a distinction between drama as texts and theatre as performance. Dramas as texts can be published as books and books are commodities to be sold on a market. Theatre, however, is not and can not be a commodity to be sold on a market.

What Szondi describes is therefore not just the crisis of modern drama, but also the crisis of theatre in modernity. The decline of dialogue in modern drama is a result of the decline of interpersonal relations in general. The interpersonal relations were according to Habermas the basis for the establishing of a critical public sphere and the theatre as a public institution. With the fall of public man and the re-structuring of the public sphere the theatres were deprived of their audience and the books and the book marked took over.

Both for Ibsen personally and the theatre system in Norway in general the years 1863-1864 marked the change or the re-structuring of the public sphere from a critical dialogue and theatre - to the consumption and the birth of the modern book market. 3 of the 4 public theatres in Norway went bankrupt in 1863-1864. One of them was run by Ibsen and after more than 13 years of practical work as theatre director and theatre manager Ibsen left the practical theatre in 1864 and never returned. From 1864 he was just writing books to be published for a rapidly growing market in Scandinavia and Europe.

Szondi's critic of Ibsen is therefore on one hand just formalistic and unimportant for understanding Ibsen. He produced books for a market – and not dramas for the theatre and at the book market it had no importance if his dramatic structure was epic or not. But on the other hand, his dramas were staged at the theatres all over Europe and the crisis of his modern dramas was also to be a crisis for the theatres in modernity and in the relation between the theatres and their slowly decreasing audience. The end of 19th Century was also the end or the death of the modern theatre and the call for a re-theatricalisation of the theatre. In 1906, the year of Ibsen's death, three of his plays were staged by

three of the most important representatives of new theatre: Max Reinhardt's Ghosts in Kammerspiele in Berlin with scenography by Edvard Munch; Craig's Rosmersholm in Florence with Eleonora Duse as Rebekka West, and Meyerhold's Hedda Gabler in St.Petersburg. The death of modern theatre was marked by a new way of staging Ibsen, the father of modern drama.

Ibsen is therefore definitely not the father of modernist theatre, as Toril Moi argues.

To CONCLUDE

If there are parallels between Ibsen and Beckett they are based on parallels in their experiences of modernity.

When the father of modern drama, Ibsen, according to representatives of markedly different perspectives as Moi, Szondi and Helland – is turning more and more anti-idealistic and pessimistic in his dramas – it is, in my opinion, because Ibsen earlier and stronger than most other Europeans experienced the dramatic changes of early modernity after the Napoleonic wars.

When Beckett is claimed to present a parallel negativity in his dramas, it is in the same way based on his dramatic experience of the decline of late modernity after the Second World War – just as earlier representatives of modernism expressed the negativity in their dramas in the years after the First World War.

Modernism as a pessimistic and negative expression is a reaction on a crisis in modernity.

It is therefore no line of development between Ibsen and Beckett. But it is a similarity or parallel in their experiences of modernity.

IBSEN BEFORE BECKETT

And both Ibsen and Beckett, coming from Norway and Ireland, are clearly demonstrating that in periods of radical change, the change is experienced stronger and more dramatic in the periphery than in the centre.

References

Fried, Michael 1980 Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot, Berkeley

Helland, Frode 2000 Melankoliens spill: En studie I Henrik Ibsens siste dramaer. Oslo

Haakonsen, Daniel 1957 Henrik Ibsens realisme, Oslo

Innes, Christopher 1999 "Modernism in Drama" in Michael H. Levinson (ed.) The Cambridge Companion to Modernism, Cambridge

Jameson, Fredric 2002 A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present. London and New York

Moi, Toril 2006 Ibsens modernisme, Oslo

Northam, John 1953 Ibsen's Dramatic Method: A Study of the Prose Dramas, London

Schulte-Sasse, Jochen 1987 "Foreword" to Theory of the Modern Drama, Minneapolis

Sennett, Richard 1977 The Fall of Public Man. On the Social Psychology of Capitalism. New York

Szondi, Peter 1987 Theory of the Modern Drama, Minneapolis

