

REVIEWS



Pavel Drábek |

Alice Dubská. *The Travels of the Puppeteers Brát and Pratte Through Europe in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*

Prague: NAMU, 2012. 120 pages.

After over a decade of archival research Alice Dubská, a leading Czech specialist in historical marionette and Puppet Theatre, publishes a monograph on the Brát/Pratte family. Several generations of the Bráts were active as marionettists, automata and panorama presenters, and occasionally as live actors' theatre impresarios between the 1770s and the late 1860s. Until Dubská's research, the Bráts were considered local or provincial performers of limited consequence. In the light of her new findings, a very different picture appears: one of a dynasty of internationally well-recognized theatre performers (with a possible link to relatives, musicians based in Sweden). Their activities are documented through most of the Germanic Europe, from Jan Jiří Brát's native town of Náchod in Eastern Bohemia through most of the towns and cities in Bohemia and Moravia, to central and northern Eu-

ropean metropolitan cities, Vienna, Hamburg, Hannover and Stockholm. The second and third generations of the Brát/Pratte family performed in Turku (Finland), in St Petersburg and Moscow, returning then via Wrocław (Breslau) to Vienna again, with a detour to Mannheim, eventually going for a tour of Hungary: Bratislava (Pressburg), Győr (Raab) and the royal cities of Pest and Buda. Another tour is documented in the Halycsh region (today's west Ukraine) and in the cities Lviv (Lemberg) and Cracow (Krakau) in the early 1840s. The revolutionary year 1848 found the Bráts/Prattes in Prague and an unconfirmed legend has it that their theatre equipment fell victim to the desperate search for material to raise barricades in the city streets. Although this is a mere legend the family's activities after 1848 were rather limited, fading for another two decades until all the traces were lost.

The Brát/Pratte saga narrated by Dubská is well referenced, documented and – very importantly – accompanied by tens of reproductions of the original archival documents and theatre posters. After the publication of the Czech monograph in 2011, the NAMU (publishing house of the Academy of Performing Arts, Prague) issued an English translation that corroborates the ample visual documentation. Dubská's research, although it benefits from findings done in Germany and Hungary, calls for an international contextualization.

An important dimension that might be opened up relatively easily are the links between the Bráts/Prattes–marionettists and the Prattes–musicians. What could be (re)constructed in this way is a vivid image of popular culture of early nineteenth-century central Europe. Dubská has laid a golden cornerstone for it.


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Barbora Příhodová |
 Donatella Barbieri
Encounters in the Archive

<http://www.encountersinthearchive.com/>

Lately, we have been hearing voices pointing out that the phenomenon of (theatre) costume lacks sufficient critical attention. No matter how substantial a role costume plays in the whole of theatre performance, considering it co-defines the performer's body and its movement in space, it has been somehow neglected within the discourse on theatre and scenography. The sense of deficiency has led to projects initiated by costume designers and/or researchers that focus on costume 'itself' and its performative qualities, taking it out of its

original context of the performance and examining its potential to create meanings. One of those was the section called Extreme Costume within the Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space 2011 curated by Simona Rybáková. *Encounters in the Archive*, a research project conceived by theatre designer and researcher Donatella Barbieri and presented via its web page with a documentary film, exhibition and an academic paper, represents one more contribution to this discussion.

Sponsored by the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and London College of Fashion, this research project is based on the holdings of V&A Theatre and Performance archive at Blythe House and so combines the topic of costume with questions on archive and (dis)embodied memory now intensely discussed within academia.

The core of the project is to establish an encounter between 6 selected artists/researchers and objects – costumes from the archive within its space and so provoke an interaction and reveal the above mentioned performativity of costume. The project seeks to apply an alternative methodological approach, drawing on phenomenology, performance studies and cognitive science, and so reflects contemporary interdisciplinary trends in the humanities. As Barbieri explains in her paper accompanying the project, "the methodology of *Encounters in the Archive* proposed the