

a play” received official approval (154). Gaborik notes that most liberal democracies at the time had some sort of censorship office—the difference here was “not in the matter but in the means” (156). Zurlo had to navigate not only the needs of the state but also Mussolini’s taste, which meant that censorship under Fascism was never as straightforward as it might seem from the outside. In a relatively liberal theatre-making environment, in which ideologically diverse plays were staged by myriad companies with divergent politics, only 9.4 percent of theatrical texts submitted to Zurlo were ultimately rejected. The picture that emerges is one of a censorship office engaged in a “relations-management task that went far beyond . . . ensuring orthodoxy in production” (162).

While I would be curious about Mussolini’s attitude toward the historical avant-gardes of futurism, dada, or surrealism—which all produced significant theatrical works during this period—I have nothing but praise for Gaborik’s work. It is carefully argued, engagingly written, exceptionally well documented, and full of surprising reversals of accepted wisdom. In letting the facts breathe and the history unfold before our eyes, Gaborik has produced an important work that will interest theatre scholars, art historians, and anyone curious about understanding not only how the interface between Fascism and art works, but also, perhaps, how to meet Fascism on this terrain in order to combat it.

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## Performing Power: The Political Secrets of Gustav III (1771–1792)

By Maria Berlova. Edited by Michael Kroetch. Abingdon: Routledge, 2021; pp. viii + 242. \$136 cloth, \$48.95 e-book.

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King Gustav III of Sweden’s interest in the theatre is well known in Swedish cultural historical research, where he has often been referred to as the “King of the Theatre.” His great commitment to the theatre has sometimes led scholars to perceive his entire political and cultural work as part of a spectacle, be it onstage, in court life, or in politics. Because Gustav’s efforts are known only to a lesser extent outside of his national context, one of the great merits of Maria Berlova’s *Performing Power: The Political Secrets of Gustav III (1771–1792)* is that Gustav III and his efforts are highlighted for an international readership and can thereby be placed in a wider context.

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A starting point for the study is the idea that monarchs have always needed to convey a certain image of themselves. For Gustav III, the theatre was the most important medium to do this, and Berlova claims that Gustav III constantly acted: firstly onstage in internal court performances, secondly in public contexts with public *divertissements*, and thirdly in politics. These three areas are comprehensively addressed in Chapters 3–5. Surrounding those are an Introduction; Chapters 1–2 on theories of performing and the king as performer, respectively; Chapter 6, which compares Gustav III to contemporary monarchs regarding their use of the theatre; and a Conclusion that analyzes his death as a form of tragedy. The author emphasizes that the book is based on empirical material that has already been studied by previous researchers; what her study adds is perspective. For the analysis, a model by the theatre historian Willmar Sauter is central. It argues that theatrical elements also exist outside the theatre, with the action of the actor and the reaction of the spectator as central elements of theatrical communication. The latter can be studied on sensory, artistic, and symbolic levels, which relate to the experience, the artistry, and the meaning of the action, respectively. Sauter's model is used in several chapters, for example in Chapter 3, regarding analysis of interaction between actors and beholders, and in Chapter 5, which discusses Gustav III's communication with subjects during the 1772 coup d'état.

In my opinion, the chapters dealing with amateur performances within the court (Chapter 3, "Court Playing Culture: Brokering Power and the Nobility") and performances in public contexts (Chapter 4, "Public Pageant: Displaying to the People") work the best. These depict how theatre was included as a natural component of Gustav III's upbringing from a very young age. The art of performing was useful not only onstage, but also in various social contexts. Both as crown prince and king, Gustav participated in many amateur performances within the court. In Chapter 3, Berlova stages an interesting discussion about whether the real role of crown prince or king could combine with fictional roles in a play onstage; she notes that "Gustav III stepped outside his social role, playing fictional characters at times so contrary to the sublime role of king that he was double playing or contrast playing. Such playing was not in power of the monarch, whose rights were restricted by parliament" (89). This conflict between real and fictional roles subsequently forced Gustav to stop acting onstage.

In addition to pure theatre and opera performances, both at court and for larger parties, Gustav also hosted light entertainments, such as *divertissements*, carousels (spectacles of knightly skill and pageantry), and tournaments. These were performed outdoors by many actors and a wider crowd of spectators than at pure theatre performances. Throughout, the public maintained interest in portraying historical figures and events, expressed not only in light entertainment but also in newly written full-length operas. Berlova analyzes this material based on Sauter's model, where the division of communication into three levels proves rewarding and relevant. However, few of the other many theories presented in the first chapter are ultimately utilized in the study. In addition, despite Gustav III's significant interest in opera, the study lacks musicological perspectives. This is a shortcoming above all when it comes to the analysis of the opera performances. In particular, musicological research could contribute to the discussion of how Gustav III wanted to present an image of himself as a historical king,

belonging to a dynastic chain of kings, and how this became manifest in opera performances.

Taking the view that political events exist solely as theatrical action, Chapter 5, “Royal Encounter: Communicating Power for Consensus,” is less convincing. Gustav III’s actions in political events, such as the coup d’état the king carried out in 1772 and the war against Russia in 1788, are treated in detail, with focus on the king’s self-presentation; Berlova writes that “Thanks to his mastery in performing, Gustav III united his persona with the symbolic figure of the monarch. His personality became characteristic of the hero he was enacting” (150). Though this is an interesting perspective, some remarks on activities in parliament relevant to the situations would have enriched the discussion. Chapter 6, on Gustav III and contemporary monarchs’ interest in theatre, is compelling but is above all descriptive, rather than analytical, and the comparison itself is relatively short.

The research referenced is extensive and spans more than a hundred years. A source-critical discussion about the literature used would have increased the reliability of the study, though. The author shows some understanding of the difficulties in interpreting older sources, specifically regarding the problems of reliability that can occur when evaluating statements from the eighteenth century, but rarely does the discussion critically question the source material used. All in all, however, Berlova’s book is a good contribution to the international knowledge of Gustav III and his contemporaries’ perception of the importance of the theatre in society.

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## Feeling the Future at Christian End-Time Performances

By Jill Stevenson. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2022; pp. xii + 230, 7 illustrations. \$75 cloth, \$59.95 e-book.

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When the coronavirus disrupted the world in 2020, some Evangelical circles deemed the pandemic a biblical apocalyptic prophecy coming to pass. Several radical groups even declared the COVID-19 vaccinations the mark of the beast, an imprint representing one’s allegiance to the empire of the Antichrist. Discussions of the end times certainly predate the pandemic, however, as Jill Stevenson demonstrates in her insightful new book, *Feeling the Future at Christian End-Time*

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