

Thrane, Marcus. 2007. *Selected Plays of Marcus Thrane*. Trans. with an introduction by Terje I. Leiren. New Directions in Scandinavian Studies. Northfield, M.N.: Norwegian-American Historical Association. 245 pages. Published in association with University of Washington Press. ISBN: 978-0295987989.

Selected Plays of Marcus Thrane, a part of the University of Washington Press's "New Directions in Scandinavian Studies" series, is not Terje Leiren's first scholarly foray into the life and work of the nineteenth-century Norwegian radical Marcus Thrane (1817-1890). Nearly 25 years ago Leiren published *Marcus Thrane: A Norwegian Radical in America*, focusing on Thrane's frequently overlooked American years, which started with his move to New York in 1864 and ended with his death in Wisconsin in 1890. While a chapter of this earlier work discusses Thrane's role in Norwegian-American theatre as a playwright and director and provides plot summaries and critiques of several of the over 20 plays Thrane wrote for Norwegian language audiences, these plays were fairly inaccessible since the surviving plays were only found in Norwegian language transcripts and manuscripts in Norway. Leiren's recent publication remedies this by providing translations of six plays which are particularly representative of Thrane's authorship. These comedies, national musicals, and operas, reveal not only Thrane's political and social views and agenda, but also dominant interests of and tensions within late nineteenth-century Norwegian-American society.

Leiren's introduction provides a helpful context for reading the plays in this collection. The emergence of Thrane's interest in popular theatre during his time as a teacher and labour movement pioneer in Norway is discussed, as well as the way in which Thrane used this background to help develop The Norwegian Theater in Chicago. Leiren provides an overview of the plays written, directed, and produced by Thrane in America, while highlighting the social criticism found in Thrane's plays. This criticism spares neither Norwegian nor Norwegian-American society, and paints a negative picture of the Norwegian-American clergy, particularly those in the conservative Norwegian Synod. While the free-thinking Thrane recognized that popular theatre and humour could be used not only to entertain but also to enlighten the masses, Leiren argues that Thrane also used the theatre to produce art for the sake of art; not merely for didactic means. Information regarding contemporary events linked to play content, performance history, and popular and critical reception round out Leiren's commentary.

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The six plays in this collection—*An American Servant Girl*, *The Posting Station in Hallingdal*, *Who Grinds the Coffee?*, *The Hypocrites OR Love During the Fire*, *Holden (OR: Be Patient!)*, and *The Power of the Black Book*—appear in chronological order. Three are set in Norway, while three take place in the American Midwest. Thrane uses humour to highlight differences in attitudes towards gender and class in Norway and the United States, and some of his characters heatedly debate these issues. Religious hypocrites play an integral role in several of Thrane’s plays, and their words and actions highlight how the desire for money and power, rather than religious conviction, were—in Thrane’s opinion—prevalent among Norwegian-American clergy and lay people. The most extreme example is Pastor Bernt in *Holden*—a minister who neglects and abuses his wife while presenting himself as a pious church leader to the public. Thrane loosely based this character on Bernt Julius Muus, a Norwegian Synod minister who was sued in civil court in 1879 by his wife Oline for neglect and cruelty and for the inheritance she had received from her father. The translations of these mostly light-hearted plays flow well and are supplemented with linguistic and cultural commentary in notes. Dramaturges, folklorists, and immigration historians may find material of interest in this volume, and the general public will also find it accessible. Leiren does not include the musical scores for *The Posting Station in Hallingdal: A National Musical in Two Acts* or for *Holden (OR: Be Patient!) - A Synod Opera in Three Acts*, though they are briefly mentioned. Those who are interested in pursuing the musical elements of Thrane’s work may need to consult the Thrane manuscripts and papers at the National Library in Oslo.

Selected Plays of Marcus Thrane is a welcome addition to the field of Norwegian-American studies. Not only does it raise awareness of Marcus Thrane as a literary figure, but also of dramatic ventures among the Norwegian Americans, an area which has often been marginalized. Though the literary quality of Thrane’s plays may be modest, they are valuable in what they reveal about Norwegian-American society and one of its high profile members. Finally, as Leiren points out in his preface, though Thrane’s plays were written for a late nineteenth-century Norwegian immigrant audience, contemporary readers will find they raise issues such as gender equality and religious hypocrisy that are still of concern and relevance today.

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