



# IBSEN News and Comment

The Journal of The Ibsen Society of America  
Vol. 29 (2009)

Deborah Strang  
and  
J. Todd Adams  
in the last scene  
of  
*Ghosts*



*Ghosts* from A Noise Within, Los Angeles, page 10

Craig Schwartz

<b>ELECTION OF ISA COUNCIL</b>	2
<b>IBSEN ON STAGE, 2009</b>	
<b>From the United States and Canada:</b>	
Marvin Carlson: <i>Henri Gabler</i> , <i>Peer Gynt</i> , and <i>Sounding Off</i> -Broadway	3
<i>The Master Builder</i> from the Yale Rep	8
Leonard Pronko: <i>Ghosts</i> from A Noise Within in Los Angeles	10
Joan Templeton: The Roundabout's <i>Hedda Gabler</i> on Broadway	11
Jon Wisenthal: <i>The Master Builder</i> at the Telus Studio in Vancouver	13
<b>From Germany and the UK:</b> Barbara Lide: The Thalia/Gorki <i>Peer Gynt</i>	14
Marvin Carlson: The Deutsches Theater's <i>Wild Duck</i> and the Schaubühne's <i>Borkman</i>	17
The British National's <i>Mrs. Affleck</i> ; the Scottish National's <i>Peer Gynt</i>	20
<b>From Argentina:</b> Don Levitt on Veronese's <i>Doll House</i> and <i>Hedda Gabler</i>	24
<b>NEWS/NOTICES:</b> 2009 Ibsen Essay Contest; 2009 International Ibsen Conference	28
ISA at SASS, Seattle, 2010; <i>The Pretenders</i> at the Red Bull Theater	29
<b>IBSEN IN PRINT: Annual Survey of Articles</b>	30

The Ibsen Society of America  
Department of English, Long Island University, Brooklyn, New York 11201  
[www.ibsensociety.liu.edu](http://www.ibsensociety.liu.edu)



is a production of The Ibsen Society of America and is sponsored by support from Long Island University, Brooklyn. Distributed free of charge to members of the Society. Information on membership and on library rates for *Ibsen News and Comment* is available on the ISA web site: [www.ibsensociety.liu.edu](http://www.ibsensociety.liu.edu)

©2009 by the Ibsen Society of America. ISSN 1089-6171. All rights reserved.

**Editor, Joan Templeton**

---

---

## ISA COUNCIL

2010 – 2014

### Officers:

**President: Mark Sandberg**, University of California, Berkeley

**Vice President: Tanya Thresher**, University of Wisconsin, Madison

**Secretary: Clarence Burton Sheffield, Jr.**, Rochester Institute of Technology

**Treasurer: Arne Lunde**, University of California, Los Angeles

### Council members at large :

**Melissa Gjellstad**, University of North Dakota

**Leonardo Lisi**, Johns Hopkins University

**Gergana May**, Indiana University

**Jan Sjaavik**, University of Washington

**Paul Walsh**, Yale School of Drama

As editor of *Ibsen News and Comment*, out-going President **Joan Templeton** continues to serve on the Council.



**Editor's Note:** We cover productions of Ibsen's plays in the United States as well as significant foreign productions. Members are encouraged to volunteer; please contact me at [joantmp@aol.com](mailto:joantmp@aol.com) if you are interested in reviewing a particular production.

## **Ibsen Productions Off-Broadway, 2009**

***Henri Gabler***  
**(Adaptation of *Hedda Gabler* by Alexander Burns)**  
**Exigent Theatre**  
**New York City, March 20 - April 5, 2009**

Perhaps it was inevitable that sooner or later there would be an adaptation of *Hedda Gabler* that would reimagine Ibsen's notoriously "unwomanly woman" as a gay man. And so we have Alexander Burns' *Henri Gabler*, which not only does this, but also brings Henri/Hedda forward in time to November of 2009. At first glance the project seems essentially a directorial conceit, somewhat along the lines of the widely traveled and extravagantly praised *Mabou Mines Dollhouse* of Lee Breuer, which presented all the men as diminutive figures dwarfed by extremely tall women. *Henri Gabler*, however, casts a far broader critical net than *Dollhouse*, which has both positive and negative aspects. The Breuer production did not confine itself to its single striking central metaphor of the disjunction between gender roles and physical size, although that of course dominated critical reaction to the production. Surrounding this was a wide range of typical Lee Breuer jokes and comments on other matters, almost all of them having to do with theatrical conventions—stage accents, melodramatic acting, musical accompaniment, operatic staging, indeed staging and costuming in general. *Henri Gabler* also ranges far beyond its basic conceit, not to amuse with jokes about the theatre but to take on, in a sometimes amusing but also often deadly serious manner, a very wide range of contemporary social and culture issues—homosexuality and gay marriage of course, but also celebrity culture, political corruption, the tensions between high, low, and mass culture, the influence of the internet, the culture's ambiguous attitude toward drugs, the struggles over intellectual property, and so on. While *Dollhouse* is ultimately in large part an ingenious in-joke for theatre people, *Henri Gabler* is, or attempts to be, a wide-ranging meditation on tensions in contemporary society. I would argue that in this respect it is in fact much closer to the spirit of Ibsen than the much better known and highly publicized *Dollhouse*.

This ambition comes, not surprisingly, at a price. The production tries to touch upon so many contemporary concerns that many elements are left inadequately explained or developed, and although the main line of the action is clear enough (basically still that of Ibsen's play), so much is going on that the specific drive of individual scenes or individual characters is not always totally clear or consistent. Ibsen's Hedda has been often accused of not having a clear motivation for her actions. Burns' Henri (engagingly and powerfully portrayed by Billy Whelan) on the contrary has too many motivations. The son of a revered president of the United States, Charles Gabler, he clearly feels the pressure of that heritage and those expectations. At a central point in the play, he takes down



Eliza Brown

(apparently for good) the grim portrait of his father that has so far dominated the stage. Apparently in control of the play's action, he gloats triumphantly over the picture: "And you said no one would ever love me." Clearly the desire to be loved is a powerful motive for many of Henri's actions, and unlike Hedda he seems truly to desperately desire the love of his spouse, George Truman (played by Vince Nappo), a celebrated anthropologist at Harvard.

---

### Mademoiselle Diana, only offstage in Ibsen, is here brought highly effectively into the action.

---

On the other hand, Henri, again unlike Hedda, is by no means devoid of power or influence. He is the CEO of the *Daily Gabler*, one of the nation's most widely read and influential political science blogs. Here, and in his personal life, Henri is devoted to working to advance a variety of liberal causes, headed of course by gay marriage. Thus he has political and social motives for his actions in addition to highly personal ones. One of the play's central conflicts is between the politically liberal Henri and his godfather, Judge Brack (played by William Otterson), a leading member of the Massachusetts Supreme Court and a long-time public opponent of same-sex marriage. Distasteful as Brack finds Henri's marriage, he is even more troubled by the spectre of a relationship between Henri and Elliott Lovell, the Løvborg of this play (John Keabler). Henri feels a long-standing sexual temptation to Elliot, and so homosexuality adds another dimension to this relationship, since the

abandoned life style Lovell has put behind him includes not only alcohol, but drugs, meat (he is a clean-living vegan now), and homosexuality. His inspiration is the straight, church-going Thea, played somewhat stiffly but effectively by the only woman in the cast, Elizabeth Ingram Maurer.

Aunt Julie never appears, but she is effectively evoked as a champion of middle-class taste in the opening scenes where her decoration of the newlyweds' elegant Cambridge flat overlooking the Charles River is contemptuously dismissed as "kitch" by the highly fashion-conscious Henri. On the other hand, Mademoiselle Diana, only offstage in Ibsen, is here brought highly effectively into the action as a flamboyant, worldly-wise, and highly articulate towering black transgendered night-club entertainer (dashingy portrayed by James Jackson Jr.). *Henri Gabler* moves out of the apartment to a wide variety of locations—nightclubs, cocktail lounges, restaurants, hotel rooms, a hospital—all simply indicated by minimal furnishings in a modest Off-Off-Broadway space with an audience only two rows deep on three sides of the action. The seventh member of the cast, Chris Yonan, is a kind of utility man, mostly playing waiters in the various bars and restaurants and making good comic capital out of his reactions to the often rather extreme emotional confrontations of the main characters.

At the intermission I was almost totally won over by the imagination, wit, inventiveness and use of contemporary cultural reference to open up themes that very likely would engage Ibsen today, although I felt the elevation of the leading characters to the highest levels of American political culture (presidents, supreme court judges, even Thea's husband is governor of New Hampshire) was not really necessary. By the end, my enthusiasm had somewhat diminished, despite the excellence of most of the actors, especially Whelan as Henri, and the inspired addition of Mlle Diana, because I felt the climactic scene did not quite work. Ironically, I think this was because it was overly concerned, as much of this ingenious production had not been, with a close following of the original. All of Ibsen's final blows to Hedda are kept, leading up to the shooting (after which there are no lines in this version), but they are not really organic to what has gone before, as they are in Ibsen. The manuscript has been destroyed by



Eliza Brown

Henri (in the form of a smashed computer, in the manner of German director Thomas Ostermeier), but this seemed almost accidental, a nod to the original, and had no stated relationship to an

unborn child. Thea's sudden decision to work creatively with Truman thus seemed unprepared for, and not the threat to Henri that it was in the original. Brack's sexual menace, here in the form of a demand that Henri perform oral sex on him in exchange for his silence, is shocking and powerful, but it is also largely unprepared for. Although we know all too well of conservative political figures who in private indulge in the very practices they condemn in public, there have not been, except for this cultural cliché, enough hints in the text to fully prepare us for this exposure of Brack's darker side.

Even with this somewhat forced and not fully effective return to the frame of the original, however, I found this evening on the whole a surprisingly successful carrying out of what struck me, when I first heard of it, as a trendy but probably rather self-indulgent and perhaps even silly project. On the contrary, thanks to the boldness and imagination of the adaptor and director and the talent and conviction of the company, it worked on the whole as it was clearly meant to do, as a trenchant, sometimes moving, and often highly entertaining commentary on and critique of a wide variety of contemporary mores. If the tonality was not always faithful to Ibsen, the concerns and conviction of the work indeed were.

***Peer Gynt***  
**Gorilla Repertory Theatre**  
**Central Park, New York City, August 7- 30, 2009**

For most New York theatergoers in the late summer of 2009 the phrase "free open-air theatre in Central Park" would have meant only one thing—the long-established offerings by the Public Theater, established in 1957 by Joe Papp and now produced at the open-air Delacorte Theatre. Although Papp's idea of free Shakespeare has been replaced by almost free performances (rather expensive seats can be reserved in advance for those who do not want to wait on line for the free tickets) and other dramatists have been added, the Public Theater offerings are a well-known New York institution. In August of 2009, Euripides' *The Bacchae* was offered, with a number of highly visible theatre artists headed by Joanne Akalaitis as director and Philip Glass as composer.

Not surprisingly, with such a significant tradition and such major names drawing audiences to the Delacorte, another open-air production running at the same time (August 7-30) just a few streets north and also in Central Park, Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, gained only modest attention. This is a pity, because the Gorilla Rep's *Peer Gynt* was superior, in almost every respect, to the highly publicized *Bacchae*, which was almost universally condemned by reviewers and public alike as confused, misconceived, and worst of all, deadly boring. This is not to say that the *Peer Gynt* was without flaws, but it was lively, imaginative, entertaining, and on the whole, a surprisingly successful rendition of an extremely ambitious project.

The location was well selected, a rather

secluded section of Central Park called Summit Rock. Although there are outcroppings of rock, as there are throughout the park, Summit Rock is

---

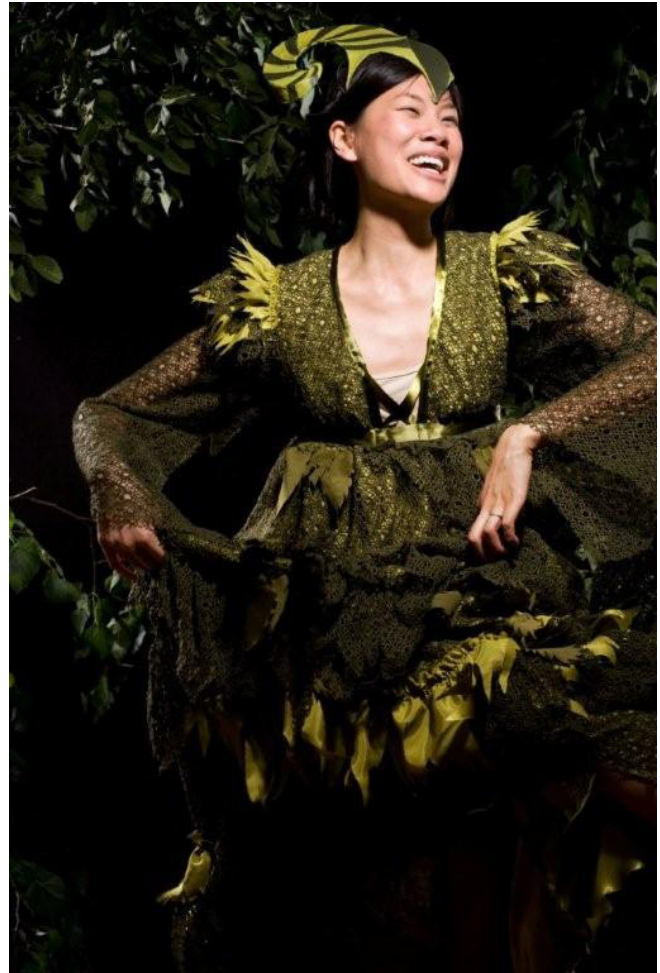
Gorilla Rep's *Peer Gynt* was superior, in almost every respect, to the highly publicized *Bacchae*.

---

actually a large, lightly forested grassy knoll, with paths on several sides leading up to a path that circles the knoll near the top. Director Christopher Carter Sanderson set individual scenes in *Peer Gynt* in some ten or twelve locations scattered around this upper area, each of them defined by a row of spotlights on the ground and almost all backed by trees or bushes which provided a natural background for the scenes. As most of the play takes place outdoors, this seemed quite appropriate, and even provided Peer with an actual tree to climb (though hardly a palm) in his encounter with the monkeys. The audience (around thirty in number) moved with the actors from location to location, and stood or sat on the ground as the scene unrolled. The production had no intermission and the action moved rapidly from scene to scene, the actors often starting the next scene while the audience was still moving from the previous location.

The text was translated and adapted by Laura Lynn MacDonald. In terms of cutting, MacDonald did an admirable job of presenting a comprehensive version of this sprawling play in about two and a half hours, including a number of striking scenes very frequently cut, such as those of the Song of Memnon, the Threadballs, and the appearance of Aase's ghost near the end. The language was clear and colloquial, the biggest problem being that repeated phrases, so important to the rhythm of the play (such as "The old one was bad but the young ones are worse," or "You can judge a man by the steed he rides") were translated in different ways in different parts of the play, so that the echo was lost. I was also not very happy with the Troll motto, translated as "To yourself be you," which rhymes with "To yourself be true," but is not very clear. Of course, this key phrase is notoriously difficult to translate.

Two actors performed Peer, Morgan Harris in the first part and Robert Berliner in



Gorilla Rep

the second. Both were quite good and captured well the exuberant imaginative quality of the character, although I would have preferred a bit more seeming difference in age, or else a third, distinctly older Peer for the final act. Nine other actors, of varying abilities, performed all the other roles. The best was Heather Lee Rogers as Aase (she was also called upon to perform the Stranger, the Great Boyg, the Button Molder and a couple of smaller roles). The wide variety of roles assumed by most of the actors led in some cases to more caricatured performance than was really necessary, but the enthusiasm and liveliness of the whole quite compensated for this. The use of the natural setting was varied and imaginative, and I will long remember the eerie effectiveness of the Great Boyg scene, the Boyg appearing simply as a dark silhouette, his voice mechanically amplified, with the only illumination of a Central Park lamp behind him and Peer standing among the audience gathered to face this apparition. Altogether a most ambitious undertaking, quite impressively carried out.

*Sounding*  
(Mixed-media performance based on *The Lady from the Sea*)  
HERE Arts Center  
New York City, January, 2009

Each year in January, New York's HERE Arts Center presents its CULTUREMART, during which the Center's resident artists offer experimental work crossing the boundaries between dance, theatre, music, new media, puppetry, and visual art. Among the seventeen offerings this year was a work-in-progress, *Sounding*, written by Jennifer Gibbs and directed by Kristin Marting, based on Ibsen's *Lady from the Sea*.

It is one of the peculiarities of Ibsen's contemporary reception in the United States that his works have almost disappeared from the major commercial theatres and the major regional non-profit theatres and is today primarily offered in radically altered versions by experimental theatre groups. New York recently saw the Freres Corbusier's robotized *Heddatron* [reviewed in *INC* 2006] and the highly publicized *Mabou Mines Dollhouse*, with its diminutive male actors [reviewed in *INC* 2005] is returning to the city this winter after a triumphant world tour.

Kristin Marting, the director of *Sounding* as well as the co-founder and Artistic Director of HERE, has been especially active in this wave of Ibsen experimentation. This is her third Ibsen-based work. First came a dance-theatre *When We Dead Awaken* in 1994, then in 2002 a mixed-media *Dead Tech*, based on *The Master Builder* [reviewed in *INC*, 2003] and now *Sounding*. The project involves seven characters, but the non-continuous excerpts presented on this occasion involved only three—Leda (Ibsen's Ellida), Walters (her

**John Gould Rubin as Walters  
projects only a kind of seedy,  
whining, down-at-heels failure.**

---

husband), and The Stranger. The announced goal of the artists is to "work toward deep integration of video with music and text," and video is especially central to the artists, who claim that its function "is more narrative than is typical in live performance."

There is indeed a continuous video (designed

by Maya Ciarrocchi) and sound accompaniment (designed by Kamala Sankaram) to the action, which is composed of a number of non-contiguous scenes lasting less than an hour, but with the exception of a single scene, Leda's encounter with the Stranger, there is virtually no narrative in the video. It appears on three screens: a tall vertical one to the left, a long horizontal one upstage center, and a smaller, more square one a bit higher up to the right. Waves and the occasional projection of the eyes of either the Stranger or the dead child are the almost invariable subject of the center screen, supplemented by waves and clouds on the square one. The vertical screen favors a tall, phallic lighthouse, which here appears not as Ellida's childhood home but as the spot where she meets the Stranger, who appears only as a projected image on this screen, while Leda and Walters appear as live characters onstage. This scene, effectively mixing live and video actors, is the most innovative and effective of the evening. Leda (Okwui Okpokwasili) has a powerful physical presence, but John Gould Rubin as Walters projects only a kind of seedy, whining, down-at-heels failure whose scenes with Leda consist primarily of largely unconvincing shouting.

Without the other four characters and the scenes they represent it is of course difficult to judge how the material presented will operate in the finished work, but what was presented seemed fragmented and unresolved. Clearly the key question in the play and apparently in this fragment is what the Lady's ultimate response to the challenge presented by the Stranger is going to be. In Ibsen, of course, Wangel gives her the motive to remain by paradoxically setting her free. This version ends with his desperate cry: "I can't lose you." She turns away, and, back to the audience, looks out at the video image of the rolling waves, just as she began the play. The Stranger does not reappear to enforce his claim nor does she choose. It would seem that a cutting focused upon these three characters would carry through to some conclusion, whether it agrees with Ibsen or not, unless the final point is to leave the whole matter unclear. If so, however,

it deprives the action not only of its point, but of much of its power.

Marvin Carlson  
CUNY Graduate Center

***The Master Builder***  
**Yale Repertory Theatre**  
**New Haven, September 18 - October 10, 2009**

The Yale Repertory *Master Builder* begins with a stunning image, which flashes out of the darkness and immediately disappears, so quickly as to be almost subliminal. It is a curled-up figure



C. Charles Erickson

suspended in space, brilliantly lit against a dark background. It flashes and is gone, and those familiar with the play recognize at once that we have either seen Solness falling to his death or have entered the dream of falling that he and Hilda share. Either might serve as an intriguing way into a production of the play that would provide a theatrical means of approaching the strange half-real, half-visionary world of this quasi-symbolist drama, as a feverish dream of Solness or as the

rapid rushing by of a subjective life-vision in the moment before death.

Neither of these turns out to be the case, however. Out of the darkness comes a series of magnified racking coughs. The lights come up to reveal the source of this bronchial introduction, the obviously desperately ill old Brovik. The oneiric has given way to the banal, and alas, that is where most of the evening remains.

The one moment that recaptures and indeed exceeds the power of that brief opening image is the appearance of Hilda, unquestionably the most memorable effect of the evening. The opening scenes are played on a basically neutral set with a few simple chairs and desks to suggest Solness's office. The one strange element is the stage floor, which in fact is the slightly tilted exterior wall of a house, with two windows. One, complete with frame and glass panes, lies beneath Kaja's desk to the left. The other, somewhat more upstage, opens to provide a stairway from below, the apparent entrance to the office. When Hilda's knocking resounds through the auditorium, an inner curtain rises to reveal for the first time the full depth of designer Timothy Brown's setting. Now the full façade of the floor/wall is revealed, distorted rather like a Magritte or Dali painting, and far upstage, in a bright spotlight, at the very tip of the distorted house façade, stands Hilda in her traveling costume. Behind her is a roiling mass of dark storm clouds and in the heavens above a ghostly mirror image of

---

The one moment that recaptures  
and indeed exceeds the power of that  
brief opening image is the  
appearance of Hilda.

---

the house on which she is standing. It is a stunning moment, and suggests what might have happened more consistently had the over-all performance style



been more integrated to the magic realism style of this memorable setting, but this was not to happen. When Hilda walked down into the major acting area she took up the rather flat and predictable realistic style performance approach already established by director Evan Yionoulis, and her entrance remained a brilliant memory, almost as if out of another, far more striking production. Occasionally, as when Hilda is recounting her memory of Solness's climb at her home, there is a touch of what that other production might have been.



C. Charles Erickson

As she speaks, Solness totters above one of the floor/windows, illuminated by a sickly light from below, and then collapses, but soon afterward the basic realism is resumed and this interval remains an odd, unintegrated moment.

The generally flat delivery unfortunately is most pronounced in the play's two leading roles, David Chandler as Solness and Susan Heyward as Hilda. Chandler's delivery strongly suggests that of a character out of Mamet, which gives him a strong contemporary feel, but little of the charisma or magnetism that are essential to Solness. He is simply not a very attractive or interesting person, and so the power he holds over Kaja and Hilda seems quite inexplicable (though Irene Sofia Lucio as Kaja manages in spite of this to project a powerful and convincing portrayal of passionate obsession). Susan Heyward as Hilda has an intensity lacking in Solness, but she also lacks the depth the role requires, never again attaining the power of her remarkable entrance. Her gestural range seemed limited and repetitive, favoring a stooped, head thrust forward stance for moments of passion, and a torso thrown back, arms extended stance for surprise or enthusiasm.

Within the basically conventional performance style of the production, the rest of the cast functioned generally well. Slate Homgren

was a rather characterless Ragnar, but Bill Guell brought a nice bluff goodwill and down-to-earth solidity to Herdal, while Felicity Jones was an elegant and chilling Aline, giving at least a touch of the imaginative extension of realism that the

production so clearly needed. Irene Lucio's warm and engaging Kaja has already been mentioned. The costuming, by Katherine Akiko Day, was a workable mixture of long, vaguely Victorian dresses and fairly neutral modern suits, jackets, and hats for the men. Paul

Walsh provided the smooth and generally quite faithful translation, which, like the costuming, serves the production well without calling attention to itself.

For the final sequence, Solness goes off with the wreath to the back of the auditorium from where we hear the shouts of the workers as he climbs and falls. The onstage characters also look out over the audience's heads to watch him climb. In a rather odd split focus, however, we actually see Solness climbing a ladder which extends out of an upstage window in the floor/wall façade and going into a parallel window in the ghostly reflected wall in the ceiling above. After Solness disappears in the upper window, the ladder is pulled up after him and his fall is announced, but the striking opening image of him in midair is not repeated. Hilda's frantic waving of the shawl downstage, facing in the opposite direction, remains curiously unconnected from either that opening image or the climb we have just seen, like so many aspects of this curiously fragmented production.

Marvin Carlson  
CUNY Graduate Center

## *Ghosts*

### A Noise Within

Glendale (Los Angeles), March 21 – May 9, 2009

This production of *Ghosts* at A Noise Within featured three Resident Artists of this treasured theatre, the only one in the Los Angeles area that is currently presenting the classics. For eighteen years these artists have played together in productions of Shakespeare, Webster, Molière, Goldoni, Marivaux, Calderon, Racine, Ibsen, Shaw,

---

This was Ibsen as Ibsen  
might have dreamed it.

---

Feydeau, Williams, and Miller, and now they have brought their rich understanding of great texts and their wealth of collaborative experience to create a production of *Ghosts* that is close to perfection. We knew we were in good hands from the start when Engstrand, played by Mark Bramhall, stamped into the room and enchanted us by his creation of a character rather than a caricature. Flawlessly, throughout the evening, Bramhall breathed reality, and his hypocrisy was authentic, never a false note, never pushing beyond apparent sincerity to “play” the role theatrically. It was a brilliant balance—and one that was achieved by all the actors in this rare production. The play was more real than I had ever seen it, but it never fell short of the stunning drama inherent in Ibsen’s great tragedy. The actors were riding all evening on the crest of a precipice; one false step and they might have fallen into melodrama. Instead they kept to the heights and we—despite the grim tragedy—were exhilarated from beginning to end—or almost the end.

A rich subtext contributed to the reality of the performance, but it was a subtext that remained subtext, never deconstructing a masterpiece in the belief that an “auteur” director had a better grasp on the drama than the “auteur” himself. This was Ibsen as Ibsen might have dreamed it. The scenes between Mrs. Alving (Deborah Strang) and Pastor Manders (Joel Swetow) were particularly impressive, richly complex, moving yet also charming, as the actors slowly and obliquely

revealed their past relationship while moving forward to new catastrophic discoveries. Swetow was masterful in his portrayal of Manders, a particularly difficult role which has comic moments but must never fall into clowning and stupidity. Swetow convinced us of the pastor’s failings—his naivete and narrow-mindedness—but never made him despicable. If Manders is hateful, the audience will lose respect for Helene Alving, wondering how she could ever have loved such a fool. Swetow possesses charm, suaveness, good looks, and his gullibility was more winsome than witless. Below the surface lay a whole unspoken world which only once barely sprang to the surface. When Mrs. Alving, after witnessing Engstrand’s manipulation of the pastor in act two, says to Manders, “I could kiss you,” she actually plants a kiss on his lips. For



Craig Schwartz

a moment we wonder what Manders will do, will his love for her revive? That we even contemplate such a possibility is a measure of this production’s credibility, for it is not a tale of fools and knaves, but of real people.

Strang is a match for Swetow, creating an intelligent, warm, imaginative Helene Alving, young in spirit, sure of herself, yet discreet, at the start, but slowly gaining strength along with insight, and God knows she is spared nothing in the way of enlightenment. Warmth, passion, love collide with humor, clear-sightedness and cool detachment as the distraught mother journeys from happy delusion to horrific understanding, learning along the way the double meaning of “ghosts” and the importance of the “joy of life.”

Director Michael Murray has deftly added a word or two here, deleted several elsewhere, to give the production easier comprehensibility. For example, in the scene where Mrs. Alving reveals to Regina her true birth, it is made perfectly clear that Oswald’s father was also hers. A Noise Within newcomer, lovely Jaimi Paige, played Regina with a hint of coolness that prepares us for her rapid, self-serving departure when she realizes she can no longer profit from her relationship with Oswald. J. Todd Adams projected the wan charm of the ill young artist and carried us sympathetically into the dark world that is his final day at home.

Although Oswald’s death was moving, it fell short of the devastating horror that one sometimes experiences, not because of the actors, who were unfailingly credible and deeply engaged, but because of a shift in the set design and a consequent change in the blocking of the final moments. The effective setting, by Angela Balogh Calin, enhanced the feeling of confinement by having no windows upstage, hence no view of

the “somber fjord landscape.” Instead, she placed the glass panes of the greenhouse at downstage left (perhaps a directorial choice), thus allowing Oswald to collapse dramatically downstage, right before our eyes. The director chose, however, to have Oswald fall onto the floor at center stage, and crawl to the window seat down left, calling for the sun. Finally, raising his upper body onto the bench, he asked for the sun once more. Unfortunately, the healthy energy suggested by the physical exertion and the sunlit upturned face read as hope rather than a descent into idiocy. The terrified mother’s horror was thus undercut and one wondered why she even considered searching for morphine. The play demands, and the author specifies, that Oswald’s muscles are relaxed, his face expressionless and his eyes blank. He is described as having “crumpled,” and he speaks without expression. One always changes Ibsen’s stage directions at great peril, for his concept of a play was total and his visual instructions every bit as essential as the dialogue. The director, with this one unwise decision, destroyed a great dramatic moment and deprived us of the poetry of the theatre that Ibsen created. He also took away our opportunity to see how two magnificent actors would have played this most devastating scene in modern theatre. One hopes that A Noise Within will revive the play with these actors in a year or so and give them a chance to complete what was so perfectly begun.

Leonard C. Pronko  
Pomono College

***Hedda Gabler***  
**The Roundabout Theatre Company**  
**New York City, January 25 – March 29, 2009**

I often disagree with the judgments of Ben Brantley, the *New York Times*’ chief drama critic—in my view, he is too kind to mediocrity—but this production was so bad that even Brantley felt obligated to say that it “was one of the worst revivals I have ever, ever seen.” I am as perplexed as Brantley to know to what extent this is the fault of director Ian Rickson, who had given us a fine *Seagull* on Broadway just months before. Rickson was surely responsible for the bare-bottomed Hedda lying on the sofa (mooning the audience?

masturbating?), the sight that greeted the audience, but I suspect that most of Rickson’s actors in this *Hedda Gabler* would have great difficulty playing Ibsen roles no matter who directed them. Heading the cast was the movie and television actress Mary Louise Parker, who was so awful that she seemed to be doing a parody of Mary Louise Parker playing Hedda Gabler. Her flat, nasal delivery in best Valley Girl style, with a lot of “yeahs,” was complemented by her narrow meanness as she sniped or screeched at Thea and Tesman and played

many of her lines for cheap laughs; “NOOO – who would do THAAAT?” When she discusses Løvborg with Thea, it’s as if she’s talking about the weather, and she manages to make “burning the child” seem silly. Parker’s performance would be perfect on a “Saturday Night Live” send-up of Ibsen’s women characters.

Matching Parker in her travesty performance were the usually fine Michael Cerveris as Tesman, a flat, one-note dunce to Hedda’s high-school termagant; Ann Reeder as an egregiously bad Thea who seemed to be reading her lines out of an actors’

learning manual; and Paul Sparks as Løvborg, who – I can’t do better than Brantley here – “plays the brilliant, decadent Eilert with the inflections of a ticked-off surfer dude.” The fine Swedish actor Peter Stormare as Brack does not descend to the bottom-feeding level of his co-actors, but even his performance is without nuance; his Brack is mere sleaze—exemplified by his long, greasy hair—without menace.

The terrible acting was made worse by the sagging rhythm of the production, a slow-motion tedium that made you want to wring your hands. The set of Tesman’s newly renovated Falk Villa, by Hildegard Bechtler, was tacky almost to seediness, with piles of tattered books on the floor and tasteless slip covers; the costume design, by the Oscar-winning Ann Roth, was uninteresting to the point of banality.

Something must be said of Christopher Shinn’s awful “adaptation.” Shinn adds the following to Løvborg’s description of his book: “I believe that the traditional materials of understanding culture don’t work. It’s the study of not only what we see, but how! – The revolution of the spirit of man!” Another unhelpful addition is to

Løvborg’s dialogue in the sofa scene with Hedda: “the women – what I did with them!” And poor Tesman is made to say to his aunt, “Doesn’t Hedda look voluptuous?!” The rooster Brack is now that familiar canine, “the only dog of the yard,” and his famous last line has become the weak, linguistically



*The New York Times*

stilted, “Who would do such a thing?” Shinn, who is a playwright and who declares Ibsen to be his favorite playwright, was interviewed by the *New York Times* a few weeks before the production opened. Among his choice remarks about Ibsen was the following: in *Hedda Gabler*,

Ibsen is dramatizing the “childlike part of us that’s angry, not getting what it wants, and decides then to destroy the world.” The interviewer records that Mr. Shinn, “who is in psychoanalysis five times a week, said that Freud learned Norwegian so he could read Ibsen, and that psychoanalytic writers have

had much to say about Hedda, diagnosing penis envy, neuroticism caused by a failure to mourn her father’s death and much else.” Much else, indeed. (It was, of course, Joyce who learned to read Norwegian so that he

could read Ibsen in the original; Freud happily read Ibsen in German.) Mr. Shinn also commented that there are “many more obscure [sic] Ibsen plays, and I would love an opportunity to bring those to New York audiences.” Gosh, one can hardly wait.

Joan Templeton, Editor

---

This production was so bad that even  
Brantley felt obligated to say that it  
“was one of the worst revivals I have  
ever, ever seen.”

---

***The Master Builder***  
**A new adaptation and translation by Errol Durbach**  
**Telus Studio Theatre, University of British Columbia, Vancouver**  
**October 29 - November 7, 2009**

Three years after the memorable Vancouver triumph of Errol Durbach's version of *Peer Gynt* (in a Blackbird Theatre production), there comes another of his intelligent translations and adaptations. This *Master Builder* is much closer to Ibsen's original play than the *Peer Gynt* was, but we again have a thoughtful, radically perceptive interpretation of Ibsen. Durbach's insights are skillfully conveyed by director Gerald Vanderwoude, his actors, and everyone else involved in the production.

*The Master Builder*, in any form, should be a disturbing experience, and this incarnation brings the most disturbing elements of the play right up to the surface. The Telus Studio theatre is a small space, and the audience, almost surrounding the performers, is compelled to confront the troll world of the play in a direct, visceral way. This is a pared-down version of Ibsen's play—



Telus Studio

not in the sense that the text has been shortened, or that anything has been left out, but in the sense that the late nineteenth-century Norwegian surface has been pretty much stripped away and the audience is faced directly and uncompromisingly with the characters' inner lives, especially in the case of Solness himself.

A fine program essay by Durbach argues that Ibsen's play "chafes against" its own realistic style, and this production enlarges the demonic depths at the expense of the solid bourgeois surface. It grippingly puts the subterranean life of the psyche right in front of us, for everyone to see, to marvel at, and to fear.

The stripped-down nature of this *Master*

*Builder* is evident in the almost bare stage, with the set consisting for the most part of a maquette, or model, of the new Solness house, which becomes mainly a projection of Solness's and Hilde's turbulent minds: a castle in the air which rises, falls, and burns at appropriate moments. So the visible world is largely blotted out, and replaced by what is imagined and felt.

As one might expect from this kind of production, the erotic elements in the play are very much in evidence. Durbach's idea is to free the play from its nineteenth-century reticences, and the sexual excitement in the scenes between Hilde and Solness is strongly expressed. Thus Solness, in Hilde's telling of the encounter in Lysanger ten years ago, did not just kiss her "many times," but he "kissed me and kissed me and kissed me and kissed me." The

fact that Hilde was only thirteen at the time of this (real, embellished, or possibly invented) encounter is always in our minds when Hilde is on the stage, in that Fiona Mongillo's marvellously portrayed Hilde is decidedly an embodiment of the younger—much younger—generation that is banging away at Solness's door. This Hilde, who looks a bit like a cross between Lewis Carroll's Alice and Irving Berlin's

Annie Oakley, is very much in command with her tremendous, always simmering, powerfully-focused mesmerizing energy. Sauntering around the stage with ecstatic assurance, she embodies a force that completely overwhelms the tormented, confused, embittered Solness, who is washed up

---

Durbach's idea is to free the play from  
its nineteenth-century reticences.

---

from the very beginning of the play.

This Solness (convincingly played here by Chris Humphries) does not have much in him of the powerful man at the top of his profession. The trappings of his office (desk, books, papers, etc.) have been taken away from him, and he



Telus Studio

stands exposed on the near-naked stage. And at the beginning of this *Master Builder*, before we are given any of the action of the original play, Solness has declared that his life has amounted to nothing – no love, no happiness, just a huge waste. In Ibsen’s play this is a declaration for which we have to wait until the final act, but here it comes to the surface right away, as part of a prologue that begins with the poem that Ibsen composed about

the Solnesses’ loveless marriage, declaimed by Hilde from on high. Then each of the other acts begins with a kind of prologue: Act 2 with Aline’s lament for her burnt dolls, a passage that has been transplanted from the Act 3 scene with Hilde in Ibsen’s text; and Act 3 with an agonizing soliloquy by a writhing Solness lying on the stage. These two anticipatory soliloquies, by Aline and Solness respectively, are more painful and wrenching (for the characters and for us) than the lines are in their original place, embedded in dialogue. And Trish Pattenden’s representation of Aline’s dignified, sensitive suffering is, throughout the play, one of the high points of this production.

One result of this *Master Builder*’s continuous intensity from the opening moment is to blunt the effect of Solness’s fall from the scaffolding at the end. That turns out to be merely an external manifestation of what has already been happening during all three acts, so that the ending is an emotional falling-off more than a climax—almost a relief after what we have already witnessed in this masterful translation, adaptation, and production.

Jonathan Wisenthal

The University of British Columbia

### *Peer Gynt*

#### **Joint Production of the Thalia Theatre, Hamburg and the Maxim Gorki Theatre, Berlin Winter Season, 2009-2010**

Originally intended as a *fauteuil* drama, *Peer Gynt* has enjoyed many an hour on the stage. Productions have ranged from minimal to monumental, and the most monumental in my experience was the Guthrie’s production in the early 1980s, with two actors playing Peer and with magnificent scenery, including an elaborate shipwreck. That production ran for about six hours, with a break for dinner. I also feel especially fortunate to have seen the great Peter Zadek’s 2004 production at the Berliner Ensemble.

With eager anticipation, I looked forward to this season’s joint production of the Thalia and the Gorki directed by Jan Bosse, the Gorki’s resident director. Bosse was the resident director at the

Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg from 2000 to 2005 before moving on to the Gorki, and he has a penchant for tackling complex plays—Goethe’s *Faust*, for example. One assumes that he embraced the challenge of *Peer Gynt*. Along with Andrea Koschwitz, chief dramaturg at the Gorki, Bosse wrote the script for the production, based on the translation by the poet Christian Morgenstern.

The Gorki Theater describes itself on its website as “the smallest theater in the middle of Berlin.” Indeed, if one compares it with the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm, which houses the Berliner Ensemble, one could consider it small; and if one is sitting in the first fifteen rows, one does have the feeling of being in an intimate theater. There

is, however, considerable space between the stage and the first row of seats, enough so that it could serve as an orchestra pit, and in this production, many of the actors congregated there and even changed costumes and disguises. No curtain was

used, so the set was visible at all times, allowing the audience to observe the actors as they pushed around stacks of what looked like large cardboard cartons. The cartons did not appear to be heavy, but they were strong enough to withstand being arranged into different formations, sometimes a structure that looked like a fortress wall,

sometimes opening to reveal a room. Occasionally, the action took place on top of the pile of cartons, as if on the roof of a building. The wall of cartons also served as a screen onto which various images were projected. Because the program notes include a description of a “dreamhouse,” by the British artist Tracey Emin, one could assume that it was Emin’s cardboard house that inspired the production’s set designer, Stéphane Laimé. In any case, while one might at first admire the versatility of the cartons as they take on different shapes and images, it doesn’t take long before the constant rearranging of them becomes tiresome, even irritating, making one wish that more time had been devoted to the action of the play.

The production begins with a prelude. As the audience enters, a woman who seems to be in her fifties or sixties, wearing an outfit with a bustier-style bejeweled bodice, a flouncy skirt, clunky shoes, an apron, and heavy eye shadow, stands on stage, watching and mugging the audience and smoking cigarettes. To the surprise of those accustomed to seeing Peer’s mother as frumpy and old-fashioned, the woman turns out to be Aasa, played by the prominent film and stage actor Karin Neuhäuser. As she sings, cries and

sniffs, Peer enters, wearing faded blue pants and a sweater with shirttails hanging out. He is portrayed by the award-winning actor Jens Harzer, who is a pleasure both to watch and to listen to. Harzer and the Solveig, Marina Galic, his colleague from both

the Bayerisches Staatstheater Kassel and from films, are the sole actors who play only one character. All the others play from three to five roles.

The scene with Aasa and Peer is delightfully comical, with the customary scolding and banter. Before

Peer enters, Aasa has a sad look on her face as she sings and sniffs as if shedding a tear or two, until she sees Peer, whom she scolds royally. The body movements, gestures, and speech of these two actors make one wonder if Bosse directed them to speak and act in a manner that stressed a generational difference. At the scene’s conclusion, heavy steel bars descend, Peer straps Aasa onto the bars, and she is hoisted up. He then exits, whereupon people appear for the wedding scene, with Aasa still hovering above, watching and smoking. When the uninvited Peer enters the wedding scene, takes off his sweater

and flings it at the guests, a huge flying eagle is projected onto a screen, along with the words “Aasa” and “Peer Gynt.”

The wedding party begins in what normally would be the orchestra pit, with the pretty blonde bride wearing a white dress, but with her bra strap showing—perhaps a contemporary touch. A seductive blonde in green (the “Green-clad One”) is present, as is Solveig, who wears a tight, short, white dress with a ruffle around the neck and high-heeled shoes. This seems a rather sexy outfit for the innocent Solveig, and yet the high, ruffled collar gives her a look of innocence, as do her large, beautiful eyes which radiate devotion and



Deutsche Presse Agentur

---

The Gorki Theater describes itself on its website as “the smallest theater in the middle of Berlin.”

---

love. Peer appears, with a projection of a deer (a reference to Peer's fictional reindeer ride) in the



Deutsche Presse Agentur

background, which then becomes wolves, followed by an eagle. Peer delivers a monologue, then, after several attempts, breaks down the wall of cartons, whereupon the Troll King (Aslak the smith, transformed) appears as a transvestite entertainer wearing thigh-high lace stockings, black bikini drawers, and mid-calf boots. Shouting "Man, be a troll!", the trolls perform a bit of striptease as Peer screams "Man, be yourself!" The trolls chomp on Peer, and their mouths turn red with blood.

In this scaled-down production, the famous scene of Peer and the Green-clad One riding off together on a pig's back (a delightful scene in Zadek's production, for example) is omitted, and in its place is a projection of a pig onto the carton wall. One would have to be familiar with the play to understand the significance of this projection, along with many others, e.g., the earlier deer. The stage then evolves into a new wall, which symbolizes Solveig's forest hut, with Solveig outside of it. The words "I'll die! No! I'll wait!" are projected onto the wall. Solveig then whistles a famous post-Anschluss song of 1939, "Komm' zuruck, ich warte auf Dich, denn Du bist fur mich all mein Gluck" (Come back, I'll wait for you, because for me, you are all my happiness) (also sung in World War II France as "J'attendrai"). This seemed to be a gesture toward irony, and also perhaps a bit of kitsch, but it is also a very serious moment in the play, and nobody in the audience laughed. Would that I could ask the director why he added what to me seemed a strikingly ironic comment on the relation between Peer and Solveig!

Aasa's death scene, in which Peer drives his mother off to heaven in his imaginary sleigh,

is known as one of the most moving in all of drama. This is not the case here. Aasa seems peppy and thoughtless as she mugs the audience. Has the director willfully misconceived the scene as comedy? Her "bed," constructed out of cartons, is elevated next to the building of piled-up cartons, onto which pictures of wolves are projected, followed by pictures of monkeys. Whether the monkeys are meant to signify Peer's journey after his mother's death to lands where monkeys abound is not clear.

Following an intermission is the relatively brief scene beginning act four, with Cotton, Ballon, von Eberkopf, and Trumpeterstraale. But if one did not know the play, one would wonder what the scene was about. A film is projected onto the cartons, showing Peer (who looks a bit like George Clooney in a serious discussion with doctors in "ER"), together with the other four, all dressed in business-like white shirts with dark ties. Solveig is perched on top of the cartons, watching over Peer, as always. Peer somehow crawls out of the carton structure, leaving the projected scene behind him, after which the boat explodes.

To introduce the "Anitra scene," Ingrid, the bride whom Peer carried off from her wedding at the beginning of the play, appears, disguised as an ape. Anitra, played by Anne Müller (who also plays a herd girl, the Green-clad One, and a passenger on the ship) executes her harem dance, while Solveig presses herself against the wall. After robbing Peer of all but his black drawers, Anitra leaves, while

---

**The Troll King (Aslak the smith, transformed) appears as a transvestite entertainer wearing thigh-high lace stockings.**

---

Solveig's beautiful face is projected onto the scene.

If there is a Sphinx in this production, it was projected so quickly onto the wall of cartons that I missed it. I also missed an initial encounter between Peer and Begriffenfeldt. Nor is there any indication that the further action between Peer and Begriffenfeldt takes place in an insane asylum. This leads to much confusion, which finally ends only with the entrance of the Button Molder,



played, surprisingly, by the Aase, Karin Neuhäuser. Is the message supposed to be something like “the mother giveth life and taketh it away?”

The director chose to omit the famous last scene. In this production, the still young Peer picks up the still young, lovely Solveig, sits her down, and fetches her shoe, which has been lying on stage since her first appearance. Although one can accept the idea that the fourth and fifth acts of the play relate Peer’s dream, one nevertheless can’t help but miss what Ibsen wrote in the last scene as the

aged Solveig welcomes her tired, wayward Peer home. At this point, I could almost imagine Peer saying, “Thank God, it was only a dream!” The “Solveig’s song” that ends this production sounds somewhat Brechtian, and if Bosse’s intention was to achieve an alienation-effect, he certainly succeeded. Altogether, this performance was energetic, unusual, and only occasionally moving.

Barbara Lide  
Michigan Technological University

***The Wild Duck, the Deutsches Theater***  
***John Gabriel Borkman, the Schaubühne***  
**Berlin, Spring Season, 2009**

Ibsen, along with Shakespeare and Chekhov, has been often featured in the productions honored in the annual May Theatertreffen festival held in Berlin. Of these three, only Chekhov was among the dramatists presented in 2009, but major Ibsen productions could nevertheless be seen by leading directors at two of the city’s major theatres during this time: the Deutsches Theater’s *Wild Duck*, directed by Michael Thalheimer, whose *Emilia Galotti* was recently presented in New York at BAM, and the Schaubühne’s *Borkman*, directed by Thomas Ostermeier.

Thalheimer is particularly associated with a minimalist style, and this *Wild Duck* was no exception, cut to just under two hours running time, with no intermission and shorn of all group scenes (the crowd of Werle dinner guests, the supper at the Ekdals). The stage was similarly bare—no scenery and only three props: the menu from the dinner, the letter of gift from old Werle, and of course the gun. The stark and powerful setting was by Thalheimer’s usual designer Olaf Altmann. Instead of the blank walls often utilized, Altmann here created a huge steeply raked revolving stage. Facing the audience, it ran from the footlights steeply up to the back of the very deep stage. When it was turned around, it offered a white curved wall that almost completely filled the proscenium arch.

The opening scenes were played in the latter configuration, with three figures—Gregers (Sven Lehmann), Hjalmar (Ingo Hülsmann) and oldr Werle (Horst Lebinsky)—lined up in the narrow downstage space, playing mostly facing

out toward the audience and with the usual Thalheimer delivery, a mix of staccato expression

---

Altmann here created a huge  
steeply raked revolving stage.

---

with deliberate silence. High above them, dimly lit, is Hedvig (Henrike Jörissen), her head and arms hanging unmoving over the edge of the stage wall. Old Werle’s blindness is emphasized. When he attempts to talk to either his son or Hjalmar, he must locate them by feel and then by the closest examination.

The stage turns to reveal the huge raked circle which for the most part represents the Ekdal home. Occasionally the actors will make rapid, and apparently physically risky moves from the top to bottom of this ramp or vice versa, but for the most part Thalheimer keeps them in essentially stationary positions for entire sequences, especially favoring the spot in the center of the circle at the very top, far to the rear, and downstage right and left, where proscenium openings provide the major entrances. Old Ekdal (Jürgen Huth) spends most of the evening standing in this area, facing outward, a beatific if somewhat simple-minded smile on his face, and providing a running subtext of small chirping noises. The attic is vaguely indicated out in the auditorium down right, and its presence is indicated aurally through much of the production. Ibsen’s final act is Thalheimer’s most powerful and innovative. For most of the act the raked stage



Deutsches Theater

is turned toward the audience, and as the various conversations among Gina (Almut Zilcher), Hjalmar, and Gregors take place in the forestage area, Hedvig moves frantically about a narrow space in the center of the raked circle, holding the gun and enacting in pantomime variations of shooting the duck and killing herself. Finally, at the moment of the actual shot, she holds the gun to her breast and falls. In Ibsen, it is shortly after this moment that her body is revealed, but Thalheimer reverses this. The turntable begins to move, as usual with ominous music (sound design by Bert Wrede), carrying Hedvig out of sight and leaving the Ekdals, Gregers and Relling (Peter Pagel) lined up across the forestage, with the curved white wall behind them, like the characters in the opening scene. The final exchanges are given mostly facing outward but ending with Hjalmar and then Gina moving to Old Ekdal's area stage left, leaving Gregers and Relling in the center. After their final exchange, Gregers slowly moves right, his gestures expressing his anguish at the suffering he has brought about. Relling moves the other way, to join the Ekdal group at the right. All during this

scene Old Ekdal, lost in his imaginary forest, has continued with his faint whistling and chirping. Relling stands just behind him and Hjalmar and joins in the chirping, gesturing to Gina to join in. She understands and complies, and finally Hjalmar allows his suffering to be overcome and also joins in the quiet chorus. The lights go down as the group chirps and whistles together and their chorus continues on in the darkened theatre. Clearly, for better or worse, Relling has re-established his palliative life lie among this tiny flock.

*John Gabriel Borkman* is the latest in the much discussed series of Ibsen revivals created by Thomas Ostermeier, artistic director of the Schaubühne. The earlier works in this series, *Nora (A Doll House)* and *Hedda Gabler* were invited both to the annual Theatertreffen and to the New Wave Festival of the Brooklyn Academy of Music and received praise acclaim in both venues. *John Gabriel Borkman* has achieved less acclaim and it seems to me a distinctly less interesting effort. The tragedy of a failed banker whose career was ruined when he was exposed in a kind of late nineteenth-century Ponzi scheme would seem a perfect choice



Arno Declair

for contemporary allusions, and Ostermeier does include a few current visual references (most notably a cell phone), but his interpretation seems curiously removed from any specific context.

Ostermeier's production was created for the National Theatre of Brittany in Rennes in 2008 and premiered in Berlin early in 2009. Ostermeier

---

*John Gabriel Borkman* has achieved less acclaim and it seems to me a distinctly less interesting effort.

---

assembled an outstanding cast, especially in the leading roles. Josef Bierbichler, who plays Borkman, Kirsten Dene, who plays Gunhild, and Angela Winkler, who plays Ella, have been for many years among the best known actors on the German-speaking stage. Perhaps Ostermeier, long a fan of the British theatre, wanted to follow the standard British mode of assembling well-known actors and not distracting them from their work by any directorial concept, but if so, the result was a

generally respectful but curiously flat revival.

Ostermeier's usual designer, Jan Pappelbaum, created a set in the now fashionable German minimalist style, far starker than the relatively cluttered design for *Nora* or even the elegantly stylized glass box of *Hedda Gabler*. Here we have only two blank white side walls, with a plain door at the back of each, a dimly reflecting back wall, and two very simple clusters of furniture: a sofa center stage with coffee table, lamp, and side chair for the Borkman living room and a table a chair for Borkman's upstairs retreat. These sets are mounted on a turntable, so that we move from one to the other when the back wall is temporarily raised and the other half of the turntable moves into position. There is nothing else except for a white fog which covers the entire stage floor at the beginning and end, and swirls continuously behind the backdrop throughout the production. The presentation time is also typical of much contemporary German production, just under two hours without an intermission.

This requires a certain amount of cutting of course, but mostly this is of individual lines here and there. The only entire scene I missed was the

one between Foldal (Felix Römer) and Borkman after Foldal has been run down by the sleigh, but the entire final act has undergone considerable adjustment. In both *Nora* and *Hedda Gabler* Ostermeier's endings were among his most radical departure from traditional interpretations, and the same thing is true of his *Borkman*, although with much less effective results. The cinematic move outdoors and up the mountain has always presented a challenge, but I have never seen a director resolve this problem as Ostermeier does, by never going outside at all and playing the scenes in the Borkman living room. The mountainside bench where Borkman sits with Ella becomes the center stage sofa where Gunhild sat in the opening act, and Borkman's great visions of his valley empire are meant as entirely internal. The fog which has been swirling behind the back wall flows out across the stage floor, but since we have already seen this effect in the opening scene, we cannot take it as an indication of a shift to the outside.

Apparently, Ostermeier considered that a collapse in front of the sofa might be too banal, or even unintentionally comic (there was a lot

of laughter, not all of it appropriate, during this production; the young man seated next to me enthusiastically embraced Borkman's suggestion to view the whole thing as a comedy). To avoid the danger, just before Gunhild's entrance, Borkman, somewhat inexplicably, pulled the armchair which had been sitting next to the sofa over to the right side of the stage and, as if exhausted by this effort, collapsed into it, not moving again. This left the sofa free for the two sisters, and in the final image of the play, as they sit side by side, Ella slowly and tentatively moved her hand to the side to take the hand of her sister. And thus, in contrast to Ibsen's original idea, Borkman is effectively excluded from the image of the sisters' reconciliation. Without that image, and indeed without the snowy mountainside, the vision of the factories, and the icy hand of the outside winter night, Ibsen's ending seems much diminished and domesticated, which no amount of artificial fog can hide.

Marvin Carlson  
CUNY Graduate Center

*Mrs. Affleck*  
(Adaptation of *Little Eyolf* by Samuel Adamson)  
National Theatre (the Cottesloe), London  
Winter Season, 2009

*Peer Gynt*  
National Theatre of Scotland and Dundee Repertory Ensemble  
London, the Barbican Center, April 30- May 16, 2009

Ibsen's late play *Little Eyolf* rarely receives a major revival, and so I was fascinated to hear that the National Theatre of Great Britain, although not precisely reviving the play, was going to present a modern reworking of it by Samuel Adamson. In the event, I found the production a great disappointment, as did, universally, the London press.

The action is reset in a cottage on the Kentish coast in 1955. Little, if anything, is gained by this temporal shift. On the contrary, much is lost and coarsened. The male characters fare the worst. Borgheim, here Jonathan (played by Paul Cheadle), is converted from a visionary

road building to an urban planner, involved in the noble project of creating what even the play refers to as "urban sprawl." Alfred "Affleck," played by Angus Wright, is a disturbed war veteran, probably suffering from post-traumatic stress, whose trip to the Scottish lochs resulted in not so much a dark night of the soul as a panic about nuclear destruction. The women fare somewhat better. Clair Skinner as Rita Affleck and Naomi Frederick as Audrey Affleck (Asta) have some scenes of real dramatic interest, although they, too, on the whole, fall into the flat, unnuanced rhythm of the script, which neither actors nor director (Marianne Elliott) seems able to alleviate.

The oddest and perhaps least successful change in the play is the conversion of Ibsen's haunting Rat Wife into a flesh-and-blood young man called Flea (played by Joseph Altin), a mélange of 1950's cliché youth culture, with black leather jacket, chewing gum, cigarette behind the ear, and Teddy Boy quaff haircut. For some reason, he first appears wearing a Second World War gas mask, and as he appears in this gear, "the kettle gives off its shrill whistle." Presumably this crude visual and aural melodrama is supposed to increase Flea's aura of mystery, as are the cheap magic tricks he does to entertain young Oliver (Eyolf, played in alternation by Alfie Field and Wesley Nelson). Whatever aura is built up, however, is totally dissipated by Flea's subsequent wandering into the cheap seaside outdoor tea stand of the second act, or the beach of the third, where Rita accurately characterizes him as "just a goddam boy on a fucking beach."

The play, like Flea, is full of 1950s detritus—Mrs. Miniver, space epics on the BBC, skiffle, Lonnie Donegan, "Rock Island Line,"

---

### Would even so insensitive a couple as the Afflecks dress their crippled son in a cowboy suit and refer to him as "Hopalong Cassidy?"

---

Anthony Eden, "Hancock's Half Hour," but little if any of this serves as anything other than casual seasoning. Sometimes it seems quite peculiar. Would even so insensitive a couple as the Afflecks dress their crippled son in a cowboy suit and refer to him as "Hopalong Cassidy?"

Perhaps the most effective moment in the play is its opening image. The figure of a small child, holding a gun, is dimly seen stage center, surrounded by darkness. This playing area takes up the entire center section of the Cottesloe theatre, with the audience arranged on three sides. A heavy mist falls on actor and audience alike, and this physical sensation, with its accompanying soft smell, creates a memorable effect. Even this effect had its price, however, some critics calling attention to the fact that it inspired a chorus of coughing in the audience that continued throughout the evening.

The production as a whole is not well served by either its director or its designer, Bunny Christie. The Affleck kitchen is a realistic box set at one end of the theatre, and even when the setting opens to the exteriors of the second and third acts, almost all of the action takes place in that area, to the considerable frustration of the audience members along the sides. The small figure we see standing in the rain at the opening is not the crippled son, as I first assumed, but his playmate George Constantine (played on alternating evenings by Omar Brown and René Gray). George introduces another 1950s theme that fits awkwardly into the play. This was a decade of considerable Jamaican immigration, with resulting racial tensions, and although this is not developed in the text, the opening scene suggests that young Oliver plays with children like George, unlike Ibsen's isolated Eyolf. These children witness Oliver's drowning, and George's mother Sophia (Sarah Niles) reveals that her family had been subjected to brutal police questioning. Her anger at Rita provides one of the most dramatic and intense sequences in the production, but has little or no relation to anything else in the play.

Many critics have been troubled by the seemingly optimistic (if guarded) ending of Ibsen's play, but that is certainly not a problem with Adamson's adaptation, which simply fades away. Flea comes in, bums a final cigarette, and leaves. Rita raises the possibility of social action, but in a half-hearted, desultory manner to which Alfred responds only in mockery. She then drifts away, up the beach, leaving him alone. The ending would be potentially much darker than Ibsen's if we had any sympathy for or interest in these characters, but in fact it seems only a quiet, unfocussed drifting into silence of a quiet, unfocussed undertaking.

Like much of the New York theatre-going community, I was deeply impressed by the recent visits of the National Theatre of Scotland and its powerful *Black Watch*, and so I was very excited by the opportunity to see the theatre's new, ambitious project, *Peer Gynt*, touring at the London Barbican. The Scottish setting seemed ideal—another rugged, far-North country whose lochs and highlands are a true echo of Norway's mountains and fjords. Director Dominic Hill had other ideas, however; wishing to "liberate" the production from its "often-seen rustic setting," he drew his primary inspiration, according to his program notes, from

a “raucous wedding reception” with country and western songs played by the local band that he overheard “in a run-down hotel in a run-down coastal town in north-east Scotland.” From this grew his interpretation of a *Peer Gynt* that would be “wild and raw and contemporary,” but also gritty and urban. Of Ibsen’s “rustic setting” there remains only a large free-standing painted screen with a crude picture of a fjord on it, with doors in the painting to allow entrances and with “gnothi seauton” painted at the bottom, i.e., “know thyself” in Greek, a language surely unknown to any of the figures in the production.

At the beginning, a striking single figure stands in front of this screen; tall, thin, in an elegant white suit and long white hair, this mysterious figure, hauntingly played by Cliff Burnett, will accompany Peer throughout the play, even in intimate scenes like the death of Aase, never speaking, but often providing accordion accompaniment. Essentially, the rest of the stage is empty except for a huge metal staircase rising from stage right to left at the rear (down which all the cast ascends near the end, evoking the final sequence of Fellini’s *8 1/2*), with rows of chairs on either side where off-stage actors occasionally sit. Most effective in this setting, designed by Naomi Wilkinson, are the occasional modern set-pieces, especially the modest, white trailer-home that shelters Solveig and the pig-driven SUV which carries Peer off to the palace of the troll king, “King Bastard.”

The free-wheeling structure and wide range of imagery in Ibsen’s play give great latitude to a director, and while Hill’s production offered an occasional striking image or ingenious re-reading, it seemed to me on the whole a flattened, coarsened

version of the play. Setting the first half of the play in a “run-down coastal town” with a gritty, urban feel and dialogue in the “in-yer-face” British style in which every third word is “fucking” and in which Peer is referred to by the town’s youths as “Peer Cunt” gets tiring very soon, and Aase would have to be feeble-minded, as she clearly is not, to

think that her son is going to leave this urban jungle to ride reindeer somewhere. Keith Fleming, the Young Peer, does not help by playing with such violence that little subtlety or variation is seen, and of course there is no poetry whatever. The Solveig of Ashley Smith also remains



Douglas McBride

unchanged throughout, although of course there is far less demand for variation in her role. Even so, I found her gawky, near-sighted adolescent schoolgirl engaging at first, but by the end it lacked the authority of Peer’s point of reference.

---

**Keith Fleming, the Young Peer, does not help by playing with such violence that little subtlety or variation is seen.**

---

Ann Louise Ross, as a feisty, down-at-heels Aase with short-cropped white hair and a costume apparently assembled from trash bins, is much more varied

and convincing. Also effective is Robert Paterson as King Bastard, a decaying *Blade Runner* style gang leader in a motorized wheel chair, although his band of identically clad followers are much less so. The visual high point of the troll scene is the Kafkaesque tattooing of the troll motto (here, “Look after yourself”) on Peer’s chest, although one wonders why Peer can accept this permanent troll mark when he is so adamant against such a commitment. The essential great Boyg scene is cut, the first time in my experience, although Hill does keep the often omitted scene of the conscript’s self-mutilation.

Much more radical are the changes in the



Douglas McBride

play's fourth and fifth acts, which of course make far greater directorial demands. A new actor, Gerry Mulgrew, happily much more nuanced than Fleming, now takes over the role of Peer. Hill's major adjustment here is to provide a new frame for the early act-four scenes. Instead of the drinking scene with the international financiers, Peer is here interviewed by a single figure (Irene McDougall), who is apparently making a documentary of this famous entrepreneur. A third figure is the accordion-player of the first part, now a photographer taking constant shots of Peer posing, and in embarrassing moments, as when he is raped by an ape. The sequence of act-four scenes generally follows Ibsen, but always with a contemporary edge. Peer's international trade is now providing arms for Islamic fundamentalists, and as prophet he becomes a celebrity revivalist, complete with southern American accent and buxom cheerleaders wearing Peeropolis T-shirts, attempting (without notable success) to stir up the audience to join in to sing the often-repeated theme song of the production, "Peer Gynt, the fucking Emperor," whose melody is recognized by British audiences as the tune of the football chant "You're shit and you know you are" (itself taken from the Pet Shop Boy/Village People classic, *Go West*.)

The transition to the madhouse is ingeniously handled, with the interviewer who has followed Peer through his international adventures suddenly revealed as the madhouse director (who has apparently conducted the previous scenes with Peer as some sort of elaborate therapy). This gets us nicely into the madhouse, with the other inmates seated in a circle, sharing their obsessions like members of an addiction working group. Hill follows Ibsen in showing no way out, and the plot,

as in the original, breaks off abruptly and takes us to the fifth-act homecoming, in which, not surprisingly, the ship is converted into an airliner. Even though the passenger cabin is recreated only suggestively, it still requires an awkward lowering of the main curtain. The predictable recorded safety message and the pastor's speech at the graveside of the mutilated boy cover the stage mechanisms, but the effect is not really worth the effort. One would think, given the terrorist set-up earlier, that the plane would be bombed, but in fact, like its water-borne original, it goes down in a storm. The most amusing moment is when the oxygen masks drop and Peer's is inexplicably missing. He fights to obtain another from a steward (the ship's cook), and then is forced to share it with the Strange Passenger, here a tangerine-wigged seductress in a short, tight-fitting dress and stilettos. There being no shipwreck or drifting wreckage, how Peer escapes from this crash remains as mysterious as his departure from the Cairo asylum, and I imagine audience members unfamiliar with the play must have been quite perplexed.

When the curtain rises again, the pastor joins Peer and others around the open grave. Then Peer, left alone, comments on the service and is surprised, as we all are, when an un-mutilated hand rises from the grave to point at him. It in fact belongs to the young Peer, who then jumps out and dashes off stage. It is a striking moment, but not a particularly illuminating one. Much better is the auction scene. As each of the humble artifacts is

---

The most amusing moment is when the oxygen masks drop and Peer's is inexplicably missing.

---

displayed, Peer experiences a flashback, and we see a series of brief, effective recreations of moments from the first part, played by the young Peer and others. The white-clad figure who has shadowed Peer throughout the evening now emerges as the Button Molder, whose matter-of-fact introduction of his trade is given grim underlining as he produces his tools, which include a hacksaw and a glowing propane torch. Peer's panic is easy to understand.

At the last crossroads, Solveig's tiny white

trailer home is rolled onto the stage with Solveig within, unchanged from the day she first met Peer years before. I suppose that if the director sees the entire story as a kind of dream vision of Peer's, as has often been proposed, there is no reason for Solveig to age, but the redeeming woman as gawky adolescent is not very convincing, even within the

much diminished world of this production. Solveig holds off the Button Molder, who stands thwarted by the trailer door as she sits inside with her arms around the reunited old and young Peer's.

Marvin Carlson  
CUNY, Graduate Center

***El Desarrollo de la civilización venidera***  
***(The Development of the Coming Civilization)***  
**A new version of *A Doll House* by Daniel Veronese**

***Todos los grandes gobiernos han evitado el teatro intimo***  
***(All the Great Governments Have Avoided the Intimate Theatre)***  
**A new version of *Hedda Gabler* by Daniel Veronese**

**El Camarin de las Musas (The Muses' Dressing-Room)**  
**Buenos Aires, August 2009**

Buenos Aires-based director, playwright, and adaptor Daniel Veronese, who has produced a myriad of diverse works throughout his extensive career, is a well-respected international artist. He has served three times as the curator for the International Festival of Buenos Aires in 1999, 2001, and 2003. In October, 2000, El Periférico de Objetos (The Peripheral Objects), a company he founded in 1989, presented a controversial production of Heiner Müller's *Hamletmachine* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. With the integration of puppetry and mannequins in the piece, Veronese and company used Müller's text to comment on former Argentinean state-sponsored violence, particularly (but not limited to) "The Dirty War" between 1976 and 1983. In July, 2007, Veronese's work was performed at the Lincoln Center Festival. Under the company name Proyecto Chekhov (Project Chekhov), Veronese presented a gender-bending version of *The Three Sisters* entitled *Un hombre que se ahoga (A Man Who Drowns)* which featured Olga, Masha, and Irina performed by male actors. Although Veronese initially cast women in the sisters' roles, he came to the conclusion that the gender of the actors did not synchronize with what he believed to be

play about men who wait and women who make decisions. Recently, his play *Women Dreamt Horses* was featured in *BAiT: Buenos Aires in Translation – Four Plays from Argentina*, translated and edited by Jean Graham-Jones.

Veronese's new versions of *A Doll House* and *Hedda Gabler* offer very different insights into Ibsen's work. Both plays are virtually stripped to the core (each performing at roughly seventy-five minutes), and Veronese has also made radical adjustments to some of Ibsen's thematic strands as well as crucial plot elements. Veronese's repositioning of Ibsen's work provides a new look (and I take the next description from the translation of Veronese's title of *A Doll House*) at these two "coming civilizations." In fact, in Veronese's two productions, the two "plays/civilizations" have arrived to wreak havoc on the core ideas of each play as Veronese pulls the most overtly sexual strands out of Ibsen's texts with frighteningly potent results. (Although I viewed Veronese's version of *A Doll House* first, the two plays function in such parallel form that they can be performed together and in fact there was a dual production of them in October, 2009.)

---

Veronese pulls the most overtly sexual strands out of Ibsen's texts with frighteningly potent results.

---

Veronese's theatre, in El Camarin de las



Musas (a venue that houses several theatres), has the feel of a work/rehearsal space. There is no lighting booth, but rather an exposed light board whose technician is visible to the audience. Consistent with the unadorned theatre space is a set whose production values seem deliberately makeshift. It is easy to make out the seams in the flats that form the walls of the acting space. The set painting lacks artisanal quality, and the scant tables, chairs, and sofa are mundane in their color and exhibit significant signs of wear and tear; altogether, the set is not “presentable.” Also startling is the fact that the set is almost identical in both productions.

In the performance of *A Doll House*, the audience is ushered into an eerily silent, empty stage pre-show environment that lasts until the seating is filled. When the production begins, the actors begin to speak a sharp, rapid-fire dialogue that rarely lets up until the end of the play. Although it should be noted that Argentine actors often attack dialogue with a fervor that is almost never found in U.S. theatre, this production’s script is particularly electric, demanding that the audience keep up with the breathless pace. María Figueras, as Nora, has a commanding voice, and Figueras is often deliberately brutal in her delivery. That Rank has been cast as a woman (Ana Garibaldi) who serves primarily as a sounding board for Nora indicates Veronese’s drastic selectivity in his changes. While Doctora Rank does provide her letter of death at the end, of course the romantic relation between Rank and Nora is absent. And Nora begins the play curiously unafraid of Torvald, providing a strength and friction unlike the Nora of Ibsen’s text.

Veronese also chooses to omit the Christmas tree, or for that matter, any decorative ornaments that may suggest the time of the year. While this

may initially seem a troublesome or “unfaithful” omission, it actually emphasizes the colorless world that the Helmers inhabit. Jorge Tesman, played by Carlos Portaluppi, is a virile sort, although his manliness is strikingly mixed with a brooding manner that creates an extremely textured character. Jorge seems to be a generation older than Nora, offering (from the outside) a supposed wisdom that challenges his younger, naïve wife. Throughout the production, a brutality builds in



El Camarin de las Musas

Jorge, yet this arc is subtle enough to keep the outcome of the play in question. One important element that Veronese adds to Ibsen’s Torvald is a prominent set of keys hanging from the right side of his pants. Those familiar with *A Doll House* certainly are aware of the significance of the keys, and how they will later open the mailbox to reveal Krogstad’s letter. The keys serve as a “weapon-to-be” throughout the production, taunting Nora as well as the audience.

---

As Nora studies Jorge in  
silence, it is as if she were  
saying, “What next?”

---

The ostensibly ham-fisted Krogstad (Roly Serrano) is ferociously confident and fearless as he enters the Helmer household. Staying close to the stage right doorway, he haunts the room, even as he keeps one

foot in the doorway. Serrano is a towering and threatening figure who never cowers at the thought of Torvald leaving him without a job at the bank. In stark contrast, Cristina Linde (Mara Bestelli) possesses a frailty that makes her seem powerless in relation to Krogstad. Krogstad is unmoved by her admission that she was forced to marry her husband to support her family. He is equally brutal in his scenes with Nora, although she possesses far more strength than the weakened Cristina.

The most striking moments of the performance, as usual, take place at its conclusion. This is where Veronese makes his most crucial changes in Ibsen’s text. While Ibsen’s text displays

a jubilant Torvald once the letters are burnt, here, Jorge does anything but forgive Nora. In a moment of relentless brutality, he seizes her by the neck and repeatedly pummels her. While Veronese conceals most of the beating inside the kitchen alcove, it is a still a shocking visual and aural moment.

Even more shocking is what follows. For the first time in the production, there is an eerie silence in the Helmer home. Torvald takes his seat at the kitchen table. Although Nora is prepared to leave, she changes her mind and takes a seat at the opposite side of the table. The keys lay in the center. As Nora studies Jorge in silence, it is as if she were saying, “What next?” The lights quickly black out, and the production ends. Rather than Nora’s leaving and Torvald’s staying, Veronese ends his production with a question about the future of the Helmer marriage. Although Nora’s choice to sit down at the table may seem a less dramatic choice than Ibsen’s original, her decision—like many others in this production—displays a Nora who is willing to put up a fight for her territory.

Veronese’s *Hedda Gabler* contains the same rapid-fire dialogue used in *A Doll House*. The set remains virtually the same, except that the dining room table unit has been altered to face the audience vertically as opposed to horizontally, and a piano is introduced

upstage left wall. The same work space/rehearsal space of *A Doll House* is also used. However, a striking new element in this production is the absence of the furnace that Hedda uses to burn the manuscript. While the plot follows Ibsen’s original work more closely than *A Doll House*, a few of Veronese’s

alterations cause confusion. Hedda Gabler (Silvina Sabater) stalks the stage with an irregular rhythm, at times giving the impression of a caged animal, and it is clear that she is plotting the next steps of her future rather than fretting about her husband’s academic career. Jorge, played by Claudio Da

Passano, is clearly no match for Hedda’s vitality. Whether this is Veronese’s choice, or the actor’s abilities, Da Passano’s appetite for competition in the high stakes’ situation of challenging Ejler Løvborg (Marcelo Subiotto) in a battle for a professorship initially feels somewhat muted. When Løvborg explains that he will not be competing for the academic position, Tesman’s demeanor shifts from a mild response to a rather open aggression. It is not clear why Veronese makes a choice to have Tesman not celebrate this moment. Perhaps his fiscal worries play a role in Tesman’s thirst for academic stardom, yet it would seem that there would be some hint of relief as Løvborg brings such significant news—a seemingly clear omission by Veronese.

The production features some sinisterly quiet moments that break the rapid-fire pace, a series of riveting pauses that freeze the audience’s eye so powerfully that they resonate for the remainder of the production. For example, in a scene in which time seems to be suspended, Hedda softly provides Løvborg with the pistol and the encouragement to commit suicide. And while Thea Elvsted (Elvira Onetto) speaks of her fierce determination to assist Løvborg with his soon-to-be-published work, Veronese remains deeply concentrated on the

almost trance-like effect that Hedda has on Løvborg.

On a lighter note, there is a feeble, strangely charming Asesor Brack (Fernando Llosa). While in Ibsen’s original, it is Hedda, of course, who plays the piano, in this production, Brack takes on the task, performing quite often, with at times a maniacal keyboard

that—rather than functioning in a melodramatic way—seems upbeat. This stage action yields a kind of comic relief to the high-stress moments being enacted. Brack becomes almost a choral witness to the action of the play, assuming his role with a ginger touch. Veronese creates a Brack that



El Camirin de las Musas

is blatantly less sinister and threatening to Hedda than Ibsen's character, and he does not play a role in Hedda's choice to kill herself.

Perhaps the most radical—and problematic—adjustment made by Veronese is his Hedda's treatment of Løvborg's manuscript. As mentioned earlier, Veronese forgoes the use of a furnace. When Hedda is left alone with the manuscript, instead of burning it, she chooses to hide it under the sofa. In Ibsen's original, Hedda hides the manuscript in the desk, as Tesman leaves hurriedly to go to Aunt Julie's, and burns it only after Løvborg's visit. Veronese's choice to leave the manuscript hidden and intact is not only less theatrical, but it opens up the very strong possibility that the manuscript could be discovered. While Veronese is to be highly respected for his trimming

---

Perhaps the most radical—and problematic—adjustment made by Veronese is his Hedda's treatment of Løvborg's manuscript.

---

and focusing of both plays, this is the one moment that seems incongruous with the rest of his lucid and unafraid choices.

One of the set elements left unused until Hedda's death is a central window (a design element

present but not used in *A Doll House*). After the offstage shot is heard, Tesman, Thea, and Brack create a potent visual image as they surround the window and look at Hedda's offstage body. They do not react to what they see as Veronese ends the play in silence, seeming to demand an examination of Hedda's fate.

Both *El desarrollo de la civilización venidera* and *Todos los grandes gobiernos han evitado el teatro intimo* are works that offer vital, immediate visions of Ibsen's original works. Veronese is powerfully selective in what he wants to examine, and each play exudes a confidence that both respects and challenges Ibsen's original works. Veronese highlights specific plot elements and character relations, squeezing a carnal tension out of Ibsen's texts. Viewers would be certainly well-served by having a familiarity with both plays before seeing these productions. However, Veronese's explosive versions, while refusing to dismiss the original works, are productions that can stand on their own.

Don Levit  
CUNY Graduate Center  
(The author would like to thank Jean Graham-Jones, Marvin Carlson, and Diego Hernan Curatella.)



**The Commonwealth Theatre Company**  
in historic Lanesboro, MN  
presents the 13<sup>th</sup> Annual  
**IBSEN**  
**FESTIVAL**  
APRIL 16-18, 2010

Featuring a world-premiere adaptation  
of Ibsen's rarely-produced  
*John Gabriel Borkman.*

John Gabriel Borkman  
plays through June 11.

(800) 657-7025  
www.ibsenfest.org  
www.commonwealththeatre.org



## The Ibsen Essay Prize and the 2009 Winners

As part of the 2006 Ibsen Centennial Year celebrations, the ad hoc National Ibsen Committee of Norway asked the ISA to judge and administer a prize, funded by Norway, for three years, for the best paper delivered at the annual SASS conference by a graduate student or independent scholar. The three years having come to an end, the ISA Council has voted to continue the prize with its own funding, beginning with the 2010 SASS conference. The winner will receive \$500.00.

The 2009 prize was shared by two graduate students, **Giuliano D'Amico**, of the University of Oslo, for "**Felix Bloch Erben and the Introduction of Ibsen in Europe**," and **Kyle Korynta**, of the University of Washington, for "**The Falk Villa**." These essays and the essays of the prior prize winners can be read on the **ISA web site**, [www.ibsensociety.liu.edu](http://www.ibsensociety.liu.edu).

---

### **"Ibsen Across Cultures" The 12<sup>th</sup> International Ibsen Conference Fudan University, Shanghai, June 14-20, 2009**

Over eighty participants, including eighteen ISA members, from seventeen countries, gathered in Shanghai last June for the first International Ibsen Conference to be held outside the West. The local hosts were Fudan University's Nordic Literature Research Institute and the College of Foreign Languages and Literature. Prof. Sun Jian chaired the host committee. Participants were welcomed by Gui Yonghao, Vice President, Fudan University; Svein Ole Saether, Norway's ambassador to China; Joan Templeton, Chair, International Ibsen Committee; Frode Helland, Director, Centre for Ibsen Studies, Oslo; Nie Zhenzhao, Vice President, China Foreign Literature Association; Sun Huizhu, Executive President, The Shanghai Theatre Academy; and Lu Gusun, Distinguished Professor, Fudan University.

The conference's sessions, held over four days, focused on the reception, translation, interpretation, and influence of Ibsen in different cultures worldwide. The participants were guests at two daylong excursions: a tour of downtown Shanghai's skyscrapers and museums and a trip to the thousand-year-old water town Zhouzhuang in the Yangtze Delta. The reknown Shanghai Theatre Academy presented *The Lady from the Sea* as a Chinese popular opera set in "old Shanghai" between the wars; the production was the premiere of Ibsen's play in China. Throughout the conference, the participants enjoyed delicious meals as the guests of the Chinese hosts, including beginning and ending traditional Chinese banquets.

**13th International Ibsen Conference:** The Conferences, organized by the International Ibsen Committee and the Ibsen Centre of the University of Oslo, are held every three years, with every other conference held in Norway. The next Conference will be held at the University of Tromsø, in the north of Norway, in the summer of 2012. The call for papers will be distributed on the ISA listserv. All teachers and scholars of Ibsen are welcome to participate.

## ISA at SASS 2010

University of Washington, Seattle, April 22-24

### Panel Discussion: “Stage Translations of Ibsen”

Moderator: **Mark Sandberg**, Prof. of Scandinavian and Film, Univ. of California, Berkeley

Panelists: **Anne-Charlotte Hanes Harvey**, Prof. Emerita of Theatre, San Diego State Univ.; **Barbara Oliver**, Director and Co-Founder, Aurora Theatre, Berkeley; **Paul Walsh**, Assoc. Prof. of Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism, Yale School of Drama

Each of these participants brings to this panel deep experience in working with Ibsen’s plays in performance, whether as actor, director, or translator, and each has thought in depth about what makes a translation work well on stage. We will take advantage of their experience, with initial 10- to-15-minute statements from each of the participants, followed by a moderated discussion. The panel will focus on theater practice, with an emphasis on translating Ibsen effectively for actors. Relevant issues may include: defining the characteristics of a good performance translation; translation and improvisation in the rehearsal process; the translating process as the imagination of vocalization; literary translations that do not work well on stage; collaboration between directors and translators; and the relation between performance translations and adaptations.

(For information about the conference, please see [www.sass2010.org](http://www.sass2010.org). Reminder: ISA members who attend only ISA meetings at SASS do not have to be members of SASS.)

---

### Reading of Ibsen’s *The Pretenders* at the Red Bull

On November 30, 2009, the Red Bull Theatre in Manhattan presented a staged reading of *The Pretenders* as part of its “Revelation Reading Series 2009-2010.” The series, which began in 2003 and won an Obie Award in 2006, features readings of important plays that are not often produced. Directed by Craig Baldwin, the reading of *The Pretenders*, using a cut version of Michael Meyer’s translation, featured the famous actor F. Murray Abraham as Bishop Nicholas. After the performance, Artistic Director Jesse Berger moderated a “talkback” with the audience featuring ISA members Marvin Carlson and Joan Templeton, both of whom wrote the program for the reading. The Red Bull, which takes its name from a London theatre built around 1600, focuses on the Jacobean plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Its well-received productions of such plays as *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, *Edvard II*, and *Women Beware Women* have made the Red Bull a “name” off-Broadway. The theatre’s spring 2010 season features the first Off-Broadway revival of Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi* in fifty years.



## Survey of Articles on Ibsen: 2007, 2008

**Editor's Note:** This survey systematically reviews articles in refereed publications whose language is English; articles in refereed journals in other languages may also be included. Proceedings of Ibsen conferences and invitational publications may also be noted or reviewed.

Abbreviations: *IS* (*Ibsen Studies*); *JDTTC* (*Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*); *MD* (*Modern Drama*); *Scan* (*Scandinavica*); *SS* (*Scandinavian Studies*). Full bibliographical citations are listed at the end of the survey.

### 2007

In 2007, Frode Helland, the new Director of the Center for Ibsen Studies in Oslo, took over from the retired Director Knut Brynhildsvoll as editor of *IS*. Atle Kittang remained as co-editor and two other Ibsen Center colleagues, Jon Nygaard and Astrid Sæther were also named co-editors. The two 2007 issues of *IS* mark an improvement in both the quality of the articles and the editing (which this survey's authors have criticized), but the presence of two extremely weak pieces, one in each issue, indicates a continuing lack of consistent selection criteria.

The first *IS* issue of 2007 contains six revised plenary talks delivered at the 11th International Ibsen Conference, "The Living Ibsen," held at the University of Oslo in 2006. Diverse in both subject and method, the articles, as Helland notes in his "Preface," "give a good impression of the wide range of issues and methodologies which is characteristic of contemporary Ibsen studies around the world."

Mark Sandberg's scintillating "The Architecture of Forgetting" (1) addresses what Sandberg calls the "architectonic phase" of Ibsen's oeuvre—

the use of architectural tropes as metaphors—and focuses on Mrs. Alving's building project in *Ghosts*. Sandberg uncovers by close textual reading of the original text that what is normally taken for granted to be a solitary building—"the orphanage"—was actually a complex of many buildings constructed over twenty-five years time. Mrs. Alving's "architecture of forgetting," her determination to bury the captain and his money forever in the sanctimonious orphanage, is thus

---

Sandberg has discovered  
another way to look at  
Ibsen's great subject, the  
power of the past.

---

shown to be a much more ambitious effort—indeed it is both mammoth and "compulsive"—than was previously realized. The devastating fire destroys a "sprawling architectural project" that was doubly "theatrical" because Mrs. Alving created not only an elaborate setting but

“a fictional character to inhabit it, namely the deceased philanthropist, renovator, and innovator Captain Alving.” Oswald’s revelation that he, too, is “burning up” extends Ibsen’s “architectural logic” to Oswald’s body, the worm-eaten interior underneath the façade. Sandberg’s revelatory reading allows us to feel the full weight both of Mrs. Alving’s “spectacular failure” and of Ibsen’s brilliantly ironic transformation of “Captain Alving’s Home” into the brothel of the same name. Sandberg considers more briefly Gunhild’s doomed project of memorialization in *John Gabriel Borkman*, the metaphorical “living fence”—the family’s restitution through Erhart—that Gunhild will erect to hide Borkman’s grave. While Mrs. Alving’s memorialization project has as its aim the falsifying of the dead, Gunhild’s architecture of forgetting would obliterate him. Sandberg has discovered another way to look at Ibsen’s great subject, the power of the past—“When Ibsen imagines forgetting, he conceives of it as an agonistic, ongoing, and ultimately futile project”—and illuminated the mastery of *Ghosts*.

The value of Jørgen Dines Johansen’s “Exchange in *A Doll’s House* and in *The Lady from the Sea*—Barter, Gift, and Sacrifice” (2), is that by discussing the necessary element of exchange in any relationship and in applying this discussion to both plays, Johansen de-romanticizes the relations between Nora and Helmer and between Ellida and Wangel and in so doing, allows us to look at them with clearer eyes. “Exchange, as barter, gift, or sacrifice, is ubiquitous, and it is also at the core of Ibsen’s contemporary plays.” Bartering is a form of bargaining, and Johansen’s thesis is that the transformation Ibsen traces in figures like Nora and Ellida is accomplished when bargaining is suspended. An agreement based on gender lines exists between Nora and Torvald, and when Torvald does not produce his half of the bargain—acting the knight in armor—Nora feels deceived. At the same time, it is only in being freed from the bargain that Nora can try to transform herself. Similarly, Ellida agrees to what she calls the “bargain” she made with Wangel, and it is only when he renounces it that she feels free to transform her life. Their relationship is still founded on exchange, but an exchange of gift-gifting rather than of bargain. I cannot agree with Johansen that in Ibsen, passion is the great enemy, husband and wife have to “govern

their inner nature,” and “female sexuality seems to be ominous.” Ibsen’s sexual worlds are both too complex and too varied to reduce to rules, and Ibsen’s sexual women are treated with empathy (Lady Inger, Hjørdis, Nora, Helene Alving, Rita

---

## Johansen de-romanticizes the relations between Nora and Helmer and between Ellida and Wangel.

---

Allmers, Rebecca West, Hedda Gabler). Johansen tries to defend the loveless marriage between Bolette and Arnholm, but surely this is a bargain in Johansen’s own terms; equally odd is the argument that in *Lady*, “the renunciation of passion seems a precondition of true humanity,” for in freely choosing Wangel, Ellida is choosing to love him fully. Johansen is a very intelligent reader of Ibsen, but in the end, curiously, he seems to read the plays as direct lessons in living.

Erika Fischer-Lichte’s “Ibsen’s *Ghosts* – *A Play for all Theatre Concepts?* Some Remarks on its Performance History in Germany” (3) treats the play’s earliest German performances and then a post-modern German *Ghosts*, Sebastian Hartmann’s 1999 adaptation. Fischer-Lichte’s précis of the early German performances—Anton Anno’s at the Residenz-Theater, Otto Brahm’s important naturalist productions at the Frei Bühne and the Deutsches Theater, and Max Reinhardt’s famous Kammerspiele production of 1906—would be useful to a reader new to the subject. It adds nothing, however, to what is already known about Ibsen’s early reception in Germany and seems an odd choice for a plenary lecture. Also, Fischer-Lichte claims that Reinhardt’s chamber-play *Ghosts* was an example of his conviction that theatre is “festive play,” but Reinhardt’s own writings on the production as well as a number of accounts of the production itself (some of which are cited by Fischer-Lichte) make it clear that the dark production’s anti-naturalism did not lie in its “festive play” but in its mood of brooding fear and its presentation of the play as a tragedy of fate. There are other inaccuracies: Reinhardt’s Oswald, Alexander Moissi, was not the first Oswald to imitate an actual victim of syphilis; August Lindberg

had done this in his own production of the play—the first—which toured Scandinavia in the 1880's; Edvard Munch did not design “the posters” for

---

Ibsen's play, a drama for all theatre styles, is the real “revenant,” continuing to haunt our stages.

---

Lugné-Poe's Oeuvre in 1896-97, “most notably” for *Peer Gynt* and *Borkman*. Munch designed the program lithographs for these two productions, the only work he did for Lugné. Fischer-Lichte's account of Hartmann's *Gespenster*, with Oswald and Regina gunning down Mrs. Alving—the mother from hell refuses to be killed, however, and rises to live again—wittily ends with her observation that Ibsen's play, a drama for all theatre styles, is the real “revenant,” continuing to haunt our stages, and the value of her essay is that it shows the varied lives that varied directors have given to *Ghosts*.

Maria Shevtsova's “Robert Wilson Directs *When We Dead Awaken*, *The Lady from the Sea* and *Peer Gynt*” (4) is an account of Wilson's three forays into Ibsen, explaining how Wilson applied his theories of performance to Ibsen and describing his working methods as he put his productions together. No one who has read Arthur Holmberg's *Robert Wilson* (Cambridge UP, 1996) will learn anything new here either about Wilson's theories and methods or about Wilson's version of *When We Dead Awaken*. And if Shevtsova's accounts of the two other Wilson works are useful, especially to readers who did not see the performances, this is only with significant reservations. Shevtsova is a Wilson disciple and offers her accounts uncritically, and as someone who has seen all three productions, I have to note that her accounts of them are highly selective. I have room for only one example: Shevtsova claims that “Wilson intensely dislikes histrionic acting and deviates ‘actorly’ emotion into highly formalized movements and gestures,” using the example of Maja in *When We Dead Awaken*, who “performs totally impassively.” Shevtsova ignores the screaming and screeching of both Maja and Rubek in that production, not to mention Wilson's directives to the actress playing Maja, one of which was to imagine that she was squashing Rubek with her shoe. One

person's histrionics are another person's drama. Shevtsova's account of Wilson's theory as revealed in his practice is also filled with contradictions (which can hardly be otherwise, given Wilson's own.) Citing Wilson's insistence that he does not interpret, Shevtsova goes on to read the house in the set of *Peer Gynt* as Wilson's “double satire” on the villagers and the trolls and offers interpretative clichés as Wilsonian readings: Solveig remains forever young in Wilson's production, “as Peer

---

Shevtsova realizes on some level that Wilson tries to have the proverbial cake.

---

remembers her, frozen in time,” and Wilson presents the trolls “mischievously.” Shevtsova realizes on some level that Wilson tries to have the proverbial cake; she writes that his “aesthetic,” i.e., rigidly non-interpretive, stance, “is a false impression, although Wilson cultivates it for the sake of showcasing his stylistic principles on the pretense that they have only to do with art.” She calls this a mere “paradox.”

My contribution, “Advocacy and Ambivalence in Ibsen's Drama” (5) challenges the stance that an overriding ambivalence defines Ibsen's work. I trace the trend to James McFarlane's 1965 essay “Meaning and Evidence in Ibsen's Drama,” which argued that Ibsen's placing of “sign against sign” makes it impossible to know where his allegiances lie, and I cite recent examples, including Atle Kittang's *Ibsen's heroism* (2002), which claims that Ibsen's heroism is not “moral” but “dramaturgical.” I argue that to regard Ibsen as a riddling purveyor of ambiguities “risks being as much a simplification as the notion of the committed Ibsen it seeks to deplace.” I show that this view ignores Ibsen's own view of his art as a mission, repeatedly documented over three decades in letters he wrote to Bjørnson and Brandes, and Ibsen's own insistence that his breakthrough as an artist occurred when he renounced aestheticism. I also point to the profound effect on Ibsen of Brandes' radical lectures on the necessity of a cultural revolution led by a literature of debate. Ibsen was even ahead of Brandes in his notion that “conventional ugliness may be beautiful by virtue



of its inherent truth.” I argue that making Ibsen into a wholly ambiguous writer ignores the large number of his plays that are battlegrounds in which the spokesman for conventional truth—Rørland, Helmer, Manders, Mayor Stockmann, Kroll—is challenged by another person who substitutes a superior notion; no one, after all, would argue that Lona Hessel, Nora Helmer, Mrs. Alving, Dr. Stockmann, and Rosmer are inferior to their antagonists. I argue that Ibsen’s imagination remained a moral one even in the plays that are regarded to be his most ambiguous. In *The Wild Duck*, there is a judgment of great severity underlying the tragic pathos: two self-obsessed, spoiled, childish men have caused the death of an innocent girl. In the riddling *Rosmersholm*, the tragedy lies not in Rosmer’s and Rebecca’s doubts about how one should live, but in the impossibility of their doing it; in *Little Eyolf*, whether or not the Allmers are capable of living out their altruistic plan, there is no doubt of its worth. Ibsen’s imagination remained essentially moral to the end; after he wrote his last play and became gravely ill, he fought to live on so that he could, as he said, “rejoin the old battlefields.”

In the last essay in this volume, according to the editor’s preface, “Kamaluddin Nilu tells the story of his own production of *Brand* in Bangladesh.” In fact, he does nothing of the kind. “[The] Contemporary Relevance of Ibsen’s *Brand* – the Case of Islamic Fundamentalism” (6) does not treat the production at all; its aim is to demonstrate the similarities between Islamic fundamentalism and the doctrines of Brand. Nilu gives a very slight, wholly inadequate précis of “the most common categories of interpretations” of the play, declares his allegiance to “universal individual human rights” and his dislike of religious fundamentalism, and offers an opinion that “*Brand* is basically a moral drama.” Continuing to treat what are givens as points that need to be made, Nilu discusses the drama as though nobody else had ever written about it, ignoring the large body of

---

I argue that Ibsen’s  
imagination remained a  
moral one even in the plays  
that are regarded to be his  
most ambiguous.

---



---

Nilu discusses the drama as  
though nobody else had ever  
written about it.

---

criticism on Ibsen’s complex drama and reducing *Brand* to “an attack on fanaticism of all sorts.” He offers two numbered lists, “Brand’s basic ideas” and “Brand’s attitudes and behavior,” which are, he claims very similar to “the views expressed by present fundamentalist leaders – whether Taliban leaders, Osama bin Laden, Hasan Nasrullah of Hizbullah [sic], Muqtada al-Sadr or others,” but he gives no examples of these figures’ ideas. We are told that “it is amazing to see how the basic ideas of Islamic fundamentalists resemble Brand’s ideas,” but in fact, it is wholly to be expected, for what Nilu writes about Islamic fundamentalism applies to all fundamentalist religions:

“Brand is of the view that God’s will is extreme. According to Islamic fundamentalists, Allah’s will is extreme. . . . For Brand no compromise is acceptable. This is exactly the same for Islamic fundamentalists.” One could of course substitute the 17<sup>th</sup>-century puritan theocracy of New England, for example, or certain contemporary American sects, for Islamic fundamentalism. What *is* amazing, however, is the appearance of this piece in a scholarly journal!

The first article in the second issue of *IS* 2007, philosophy professor Simon Critchley’s “Noises Off – On Ibsen” (7) is evidently meant as an offhanded, witty tour de force. But this unrevised talk that Critchley gave at an academic conference, a good example of what the British call “too clever by half,” reads like a parody of academic self-indulgence. It announces its subject as “noises off”

in Ibsen, but the crackling fire of *Hedda Gabler* is in fact a “noise on” and the “rising tidal wave of black, icy water” in *A Doll House* is not a noise at all. Critchley touches on an alarming number of unrelated matters as though he were reading from random notes. Heidegger looms large. We are treated to a discussion of the “*il y a* [shouldn’t it be the “*quoi*”?], the sheer thatness” of existence in Ibsen, then to the “sexed” nature of Ibsen’s noises when they are heard by his women, who are “wise” (Ibsen’s men are “foolish”) and whom Ibsen himself wants to emulate, i.e., he

“wants to lose his hugely impressive beard [Ibsen had no beard] and assume the position of female subjectivity.” Like his women, Ibsen “is a hysteric”

---

Critchley touches on an alarming  
number of unrelated matters  
as though he were reading  
from random notes.

---

(a wise hysteric, presumably). Critchley offers the hugely clichéd reading that Hedda’s “demonic malevolence” comes from “hysteria” and finds it “amusing” to note that Ibsen’s publisher was called “Hegel.” Ibsen, he claims, makes “an obvious allusion” to Heidegger, who was a boy of ten when Ibsen wrote his last play, and Nietzsche wrote very perceptively on Othello. “Only joking, I mean Hamlet,” Critchley writes, “although I sometimes dream of Moorish Othello as a Dane at the centre of a cartoon scandal.” Then there is more on Ibsen’s daemonic women, who renounce the search for authenticity and fall back “into a deep and lethargic facticity,” which is a “way of reading the final scene of *Brand*.” Is it? We then move to very slight accounts of the law in Ibsen, memory in Ibsen, “ghosts” in Ibsen—along with an unnecessary reminder that the Norwegian title is closer to “revenants” than to ghosts—guilt, conscience, and sin in Ibsen, whose characters demonstrate Heidegger’s “*ein geworfene Grund*, a thrown basic or ground that cannot throw off that thrownness in a movement of free will, ecstatic projection or the joy of life.” Oswald calls out for the “sun” but he is staring at “the son.” Amazing.

Critchley’s article was delivered at a conference called “The Sexed Ibsen,” sponsored by the Center for Women’s and Gender Research at the University of Bergen in 2006. The second article in this issue of *IS*, feminist scholar Margaret D. Stetz’ “Mrs. Linde, Feminism, and Women’s Work, Then and Now” (8) was also delivered at the conference; mercifully, it is an informed account. Stetz wants to problematize the feminism of *A Doll House* by going “beyond Nora” and examining Ibsen’s treatment of Anne-Marie and Mrs. Linde; she finds “a play that argues for women’s equality, but that does not apply this argument with an

even hand.” Ibsen’s brief treatment of Anne Marie reproduces “one strain of class-specific late 19<sup>th</sup>-century feminism,” found, for example, in British “new woman” fiction. I find it difficult to accept this judgment since Ibsen presents Anne-Marie sympathetically, and she is, after all, a minor character. One could also argue—and Stetz points out that Bernard Dukore has done so—that in Anne-Marie, Ibsen is mirroring the plight of many women of her class. Stetz’s much longer treatment of “Mrs. Linde’s subplot within the main plot”—her main subject—is far more interesting. She presents scholars’ different analyses of Mrs. Linde’s function as a parallel to Nora and points out—and in this lies the originality and the value

---

Stetz shows a side of Mrs. Linde  
as womanly moral guardian—a  
clichéd side indeed—that we  
have not seen before.

---

of her article—that while it is the independent Mrs. Linde who works outside the home and proposes marriage to Krogstad, the Mrs. Linde who accepts the role of Krogstad’s moral guardian embodies the 19<sup>th</sup>-century ideology of woman as the good angel necessary to man’s spiritual uplift. Stetz shows that “Ibsen presents unironically a relationship that harks back” to David Copperfield and Agnes, and even to the “notorious mid-Victorian pronouncements” of Ruskin. I have difficulty in accepting Stetz’s view that because Ibsen represents Mrs. Linde as unhappy in her work and longing for love and motherhood, his representation is anti-feminist. The fact that Mrs. Linde feels burned out and wants emotional commitment and a family should not be counted against either her or Ibsen. Even if Mrs. Linde’s feelings run counter to feminist historians’ evidence that middle-class women of the time believed in work as a redemptive power that gave them dignity, many working women, both then and now, want and need more than work. But Stetz shows a side of Mrs. Linde as womanly moral guardian—a clichéd side indeed—that we have not seen before.

The next essay in *IS*, by Ellen Mortensen, Director of the University of Bergen’s Center for Women’s and Gender Research, is the

thought-provoking “Ibsen and the Scandalous: *Ghosts* and *Hedda Gabler*” (9). One would have thought that this topic was exhausted, but this turns out not to be the case. The most valuable part of the

---

### Mortensen asks why, in *Ibsens heroisme* (2005), does Atle Kittang not include Hedda.

---

article is Mortensen’s discussion of the importance of scandalous subjects —incest, infanticide, patricide, matricide, sacrilege, betrayal—in Greek tragedy, which dramatized “what was forbidden, feared or shunned within the *polis*,” and her discussion of Ibsen’s use of scandal as “an acquired taste that he appropriated from the writers of tragedy in antiquity.” Mortensen argues that in *Ghosts*, in which Mrs. Alving, divided between the hypocritical past and a more modern future, condones incest and will perhaps kill her son, and in which Regine will do anything to attain her goals, including working in Engstrand’s brothel, scandal is primarily connected to the two female characters, and I wish that she had considered Mrs. Alving’s continued cover-up of Alving’s scandalous behavior. Mortensen then turns to *Hedda Gabler* to discuss the “degenerate femininity” of Hedda, suggesting that Hedda has an erotic attachment to Thea (a subject Mortensen discussed at length in a prior article, which she notes), thus adding to my own discussion of Hedda as “the deviant woman” in *Ibsen’s Women*. Noting the defense of Hedda by many critics who have noted her heroic qualities, Mortensen asks why, in *Ibsens heroisme* (2005), does Atle Kittang not include Hedda? “Kittang does not ask the question of why it is, in his readings, that no women characters attain the status of hero in Ibsen’s dramatic universe. A hero in the feminine would perhaps be a scandalous monstrosity?” Mortensen does not pursue this, but her observation is an extremely pertinent one, for after all, don’t the defiant Lona Hessel and Nora Helmer, the struggling Mrs. Alving, Rebecca West, and Rita Allmers, along with Hedda, display certain heroic qualities? Mortensen reads Hedda as a “heroic, tragic figure in the feminine” and notes that the “fact that Ibsen chose to dwell on such a scandalous female character makes him complicit

in the scandal.” Mortensen has a brief, final section called “the scandalous in the post-modern” in which she speculates in a very interesting way on whether technology, which has given us the internet and hundreds of TV channels, with a vast repertory of “information” and thousands of images of everything under the sun, has made us immune to scandal.

Tore Rem’s “Nationalism or Internationalism? The Early Irish Reception of Ibsen” (10) is another of Rem’s informative, beautifully clear studies on the reception of Ibsen in Great Britain. He analyzes the “appropriation” of Ibsen in Ireland for two opposing purposes—to serve the Irish nation and to serve as an example of a writer who had managed “to escape the category of the national.” Rem discusses the “mediation” of Ibsen in the Irish context, pointing to what got lost in English translation and in the broken chronology in which Ibsen’s works were introduced to the country. His account of Ibsen’s importance in the forming of the Abbey, the Irish National Theatre, is a full, fine, informative précis of how Ibsen and Ole Bull’s National Theatre served the Abbey’s founders. In the section “The artist abroad,” Rem turns to the opposite camp in the person of Joyce, who appreciated, indeed, worshipped Ibsen as the

---

### Rem is wonderful on Joyce.

---

artist who managed to escape the national. Joyce attacked the Abbey for failing to produce *Ghosts* and thus for surrendering “to the trolls.” Rem is wonderful on Joyce. He makes the fascinating observation that Joyce’s notion of Ibsen as the artist who “forgoes his very self and stands as mediator in awful truth before the veiled face of God” is the same notion as Stephen Dedalus’ famous definition of the distanced artist “paring his fingernails” at the end of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. In the end of his essay, Rem notes that the double reception of Ibsen in Ireland suggests a larger issue: “To what extent is Ibsen Norwegian literature, the pride of his nation? Or differently put, to what extent is he simply literature which began in Norway?” Rem’s work is always a joy to read.

The last essay in *IS* 2007, Leonardo Lisi's "Kierkegaard and the Problem of Ibsen's Form" (11) is far too complex for an article. Including six pages of notes in small type, the 23-page essay contains a difficult-to-follow paraphrase of some of Kierkegaard's theological theory and an ingenious but not altogether convincing application of this theory to Nora's choice to leave at the end of *A Doll House*. The author was a graduate student when he wrote the essay (he is now a post-doctoral fellow at Johns Hopkins), which reads like a far too-short précis of part of an ambitious dissertation. And why did the editors not demand translations of foreign languages? Other articles in the same issue of the journal include translations. This sort of inconsistency has plagued *IS* from the beginning, and one is sorry to see it continued. Lisi's essay uses Kierkegaard to absolve Ibsen from Peter Szondi's charge that his dramaturgy is inconsistent because while Ibsen's content is revolutionary, his form is old-fashioned. But Szondi was wrong in his claim that Ibsen's dramatic realism was a "novelistic" accounting of bourgeois life "told" in the form of a *pièce bien faite*. Scribe, in fact, is decidedly non-realistic, and whatever devices Ibsen took from his playmaking and refined to serve his plots, what is "antiquated" in Ibsen is not the structure of the hack Scribe but that of the great Sophocles, the dramatic—not "epic" or "novelistic"—plotting in which the exposition becomes itself the development leading to the crisis. Taking Szondi's notion that "Ibsen's endings do not match his beginnings and middles, Lisi applies it to the "problem" of Nora's change from "complacent butterfly to New Woman." First, one of the most widely recognized aspects of Ibsen's dramaturgy is its superbly tight construction in which the "beginnings, middles, and ends" dovetail

---

Lisi's ultimate aim is to show that what Szondi called "inconsistency" is part of Ibsen's aesthetics.

---

into a unity. Secondly, the argument that the brave, resourceful Nora of play's end does not accord with the silly doll of the beginning has now been discredited. The fault was not that of Ibsen, who

showed us the strong woman Nora hid from others and herself, but of inattentive or unsympathetic readers. Lisi is calling for a solution to a problem that does not exist. (He also strangely suggests that it was not the actual confrontation between wife and husband that created the original scandal, but its form, that of the debate, as though the arguing husbands and wives in Copenhagen were interested in dramatic form.) Lisi's ultimate aim is to show that what Szondi called "inconsistency" is part of Ibsen's aesthetics, an aesthetics which reflects basic principles of Kierkegaardian theology. Lisi's necessarily terse paraphrases of Kierkegaard's thought—the Socratic paradigm, the teleological suspension of the ethical, and much else—are meant to show that what Szondi finds contradictory are "necessarily related entities that also made possible the emergence of a third term that both encompasses the previous semiotic horizons and displaces them from a new perspective that exceeds them." Lisi wants to show that Nora's choice to leave is an example of Kierkegaardian "negative possibility" in which Nora emerges "as the positive third term in Kierkegaard's notion of the self" and in which "the vacillation between genres that Szondi points to is the necessary precondition for Nora to emerge as the positive third term." This confounding of a character's personal choice with the genre of literature in which she appears seems to me as deeply wrongheaded as it is currently fashionable. But the more important point is that to call Nora's decision "an action made possible by grace" is to argue that Nora herself is not responsible for her "incomprehensible and offensive act" and to take away both the dramatic power and the moral significance of Nora's leaving. Lisi insists that Nora "is sacrificing her honor by leaving Thorvald," but what she is sacrificing is her reputation. Her leaving is the first step not in losing but in gaining the honor that she, along with "hundreds of thousands" of other women, has given up. Lisi appreciates the depth and gravity of Nora's leaving (and of Ibsen's enormously radical—Kierkegaardian—impertinence), but not, I think, its meaning as a grand, human choice.

The 2007 *JDTA* contains three essays on Ibsen. Philosophy professor James Hamilton's ingenious "Theatrical Space" (12), attempts to sketch out a "new direction" in theorizing literary space. Phenomenological and semiotic approaches

to theatre have neglected “the basic facts that theatrical performances take place in ordinary physical space, and spectators always understand this fact.” After this common-sense observation, Hamilton offers arguments that sometimes use critical terms that obscure (unless one is a philosopher, perhaps) what he is trying to illuminate: “Physical and affective responses of audiences are non-discursive evidence of understanding” (spectators respond on an emotional level) and “the attention of spectators converges upon roughly the same features among the many performers present to them” (people pay attention to the same things). Ibsen becomes a part of Hamilton’s essay when he cleverly uses *Hedda Gabler*—he could have used any well-known realistic play—as his example to discuss audience response. He uses the title *Hedda Gabler* when he refers to “a traditional narrative performance using Ibsen’s script,” the title *Gabler at a Distance* to refer to “any Brechtian narrative performance using the same script,” *Burning Child* as the title for “a Grotowski-style performance,” and *Spontaneous Beauty* as the title of “an imagined narrative performance by Mabou Mines. . . using Bunraku puppet techniques and musicians.” Hamilton’s article is a clever and penetrating criticism of fanciful fashionable drama theory.

The second Ibsen article in *JDTC*, Attilio Favorini’s “Some Memory Plays before the ‘Memory Play’ “ (13), is a wide-ranging essay whose thesis is that modern drama is a “theatre of memory.” Ibsen is only one example of this sort of theatre, although not, as one would expect, as a dramatist of the past, but as a dramatist whose play *When We Dead Awaken* reflects Freud’s views on memory. Favorini challenges Oliver Gerland’s view that *When We Dead Awaken* reflects Janet’s view of memory (in a 1995 article in *MD*) by showing that Ibsen’s “analysis of the etiology of Irene’s hysteria and Rubek’s discontent bears at least as much resemblance to Freud’s views on remembering and forgetting” expressed in “The Aetiology of Hysteria” and “Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through.” Wading through Favorini’s comparative paraphrases of and quotations from Freud and Ibsen’s dialogue, I found it impossible to judge whether the representation of the characters in the play more resembles Freud than Janet and why it should matter to our reading of the play, but scholars of literature as expressions

of psychoanalytic theory will doubtless do better.

In the third *JDTC* article in which Ibsen figures, “Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* Reimagined in Guare’s *Marco Polo Sings a Solo* (14), Robert J. Andreach notes that Guare’s extensive use of Ibsen’s play in his drama has often been mentioned, but that the “reason for its presence” has not been explained. Andreach shows both how Guare’s characters conceive of themselves in terms of *A Doll House* and how Guare structures Stony’s leaving as a parallel to Nora’s. “The focus of Nora’s departure breaks with an older perception of a woman’s role as plaything. The spotlight on Stony confirms a newer perception of a man’s role as a single, caring parent in a world in which women work.” What Andreach writes about Guare’s use of Ibsen’s play is certainly right—*Marco Polo* is (among other things) a riff on and a new version of Ibsen’s play—but I am not convinced that the relatively lightweight Guare is “concerned” in the same deep way that Ibsen is “about the relationship between the past and the present in creating identity.”

Josephine Lee’s “Teaching *A Doll House*, *Rachel*, and *Marisol*: Domestic Ideals, Possessive Individuals, and Modern Drama” (15), which appeared in *MD* 2007, is an honest account of the difficulties of teaching modern drama in the multicultural classroom. Illustrating Lisa Lowe’s “simulacrum of inclusiveness” that political correctness now demands, Lee outlines her frustrations and problems as she set out to integrate contemporary plays about race and gender into a syllabus dominated by 19<sup>th</sup>-and 20<sup>th</sup>-century “classics.” She focuses on three plays: *A Doll House*, Angelina Grimké’s *Rachel* (1916), known historically as “the first successful drama written by a Negro” and now regarded as an “African-American womanist text,” and José Rivera’s

---

Lee outlines her frustrations and  
problems as she set out to  
integrate contemporary plays  
about race and gender.

---

*Marisol* (1992), which treats the contemporary “Nurorican migratory experience” in the U.S. Lee found that labeling the three plays dramas about the identity politics, respectively, of sexism, racism,

and immigrant poverty and homelessness resulted in less rather than more student comprehension. She found that when she put the plays together as examples of Lukács' theory of "modern drama as the drama of the individual," and organized the three plays under the rubric "the individual self versus the idealized home," the possibilities of each text expanded rather than shrank. Many would call Lee's approach an example of naive universalism, but it resulted, she witnesses, in a successful class of engaged students unhampered by labels and groupthink, and what teacher could ask for more than this?

In "Ibsen Our Contemporary: Contemporary Directors on the Playwright's Centenary" (16), which appeared in the 2007 *Theater* (published by the Yale School of Drama), Jacob Gallagher-Ross gathers accounts by directors, dramaturgs, actors, and others involved in twelve different productions of Ibsen during the centennial year. Gallagher-Ross explains that in contrast to the "staid psychological productions" of Ibsen that we are used to seeing in the English-speaking world, he is presenting "other Ibsens" by directors who are "honoring the spirit and not the letter" of Ibsen. The accounts vary greatly both in length and in interest (which of course is to be expected), and taken together they provide a very welcome record. 1) The informative account of the Berlin Schaubühne's widely successful *Hedda Gabler* (reviewed very favorably by Marvin Carlson in *INC* 2006 in his round-up of centennial productions) is by the production's director Thomas Ostermeier and dramaturg Marius Von Mayenburg. They give an interesting explanation of this exciting modernized *Hedda*, with its bored, yuppy characters and its gigantic revolving stage. It is fascinating to hear Ostermeier explain his rationale behind the much talked-about ending, in which the other characters do not bother to go inside to see the effects of Hedda's pistol shot, and Mayenburg has interesting things to say about Ostermeier's earlier, notorious *Nora* (the traditional German title of *A Doll House*), in which Nora shoots Torvald to death. 2) Next comes the controversial Dutch director Ivo Van Hove, General Director of the Toneelgroep, Amsterdam, and his account of that theatre's outrageous, sordid *Hedda Gabler* (later staged by the New York Theatre Workshop), in which a psychotic Hedda compulsively bangs on

the piano, a super-jerk Torvald cuts his toenails, and an eminently vulgar Brack pours V-8 juice down Hedda's back (reviewed unfavorably by me in *INC*, 2005). This is followed by accounts of two other Ibsen productions Off-Broadway: 3) Artistic Director Alex Timbers comments on his wild Les Freres Corbusier *Heddatron* (reviewed by Carlson in his *INC* 2006 round-up), in which Hedda is a 1950's American housewife kidnapped by robots (who Timbers explain represent mindless conformism); and 4) the Wakka Wakka Theatre Company's unfortunately very brief description of its delightful biographical puppet show "Little Ibsen" (also reviewed by Carlson). Then come two productions from Asia: 5) Mitsuya Mori, a Japanese Ibsen scholar and director and Kuniyoshi Munakata Ueda, a specialist on Noh drama, talk about their adaptation of *A Doll House* in the form of Noh theatre, "Double Nora," produced by Theatre Office Natori and featured in the National Theatre of Norway's 2006 Ibsen Festival. 6) Lin Zhaohu describes his aims in his production of what was the Chinese premiere of *The Master Builder* at the A.D., Lin Zhaohua Theatre Studio in Beijing. For the Chinese, Ibsen is the author of problem dramas, and *The Master Builder* showed them a "new Ibsen." 7) Director Paulo de Moraes speaks about his *Little Eyolf* at the Armazém Companhia de Teatro, Rio de Janeiro, a production which went on to tour Norway. 8) Eirik Stubø, who in the Centennial Year was the Artistic Director of Norway's National Theater, discusses his moving, highly-praised, minimalist *The Wild Duck* (reviewed by Carlson), which went on to play at BAM's "New Wave Festival." (10) Azza El-Hesseing, of El Hanager Theatre, who directed

---

Gallagher-Ross gathers accounts by directors, dramaturgs, actors, and others involved in twelve different productions of Ibsen during the centennial year.

---

the Egyptian premiere of *The Wild Duck* in both Al Minya and Cairo, has a very interesting account of the production's dual reception in Egypt, where a female director is unheard of. While her production

was praised in Al Minya, the Cairo audience, who thinks of theatre as “only comedy,” hated it. 11) Rejendra Ramoon Maharaj, the producing Artistic Director of the Rebel Theater (New York) discusses his intelligent, moving adaptation of *Ghosts* in a Jamaican setting (reviewed by Carlson). And, finally, (12), the distinguished Hungarian director Gabor Zsámbéki, of the Katona József Theatre, Budapest, discusses his 2006 Norwegian National Theater production of *Little Eyolf* (which was actually a revival of a production that premiered four years earlier, in 2002, at the National Theatre’s Ibsen Festival.) It is wonderful to have these accounts gathered together in one article.

Two articles on Ibsen appeared in the 2007 volume of *New Literary History*. The first, “Animal, [sic] Magnetism, Theatricality in Ibsen’s *The Wild Duck*” (17), by Rachel Price, considers the play a repository of Ibsen’s reflections on “mode and theatricality.” We are given a “brief excursus on the centrality of ‘the animal’ to questions of

---

Price gives us a fascinating account  
of animals “on stage” and of  
the notion of “the pet”  
—the wild animal domesticated—  
that sheds light on the duck.

---

theatricality, mimesis, absorption, and illusion in Western aesthetics.” We then get a brief discussion of mesmerism (animal magnetism) and its relation to photography (both were seen as “operating via unseen forces” [surely photographers themselves did not believe this]), which leads to an unconvincing declaration that Ibsen drew from both mesmerism and photography in order to “shed light on the degree to which the animal, the child, the woman, the otherworldly, and the actor test the limits of a certain ideology of ‘the human’ in the period.” We then have a summary of anti-theatricalism pace Diderot, Jonas Barish and Michael Fried, and the inability of the animal on stage to be theatrical. Price sees the wild duck as a kind of “tropical conceit through which Ibsen is able to address theories of representation and form—from realism to illusionism and theatricality.” I believe that Ibsen’s brilliant “tropical conceits” exist not

to advance theory but to advance the action of his plays and that he would have been flabbergasted at Price’s—and many others’—currently fashionable theories about himself as a theorizer of aesthetics. Nonetheless, Price’s article is very interesting for other reasons. Using John Berger’s brilliant work on zoos, Price gives us a fascinating account of animals “on stage” and of the notion of “the pet”—the wild animal domesticated—that sheds light on the duck as a foil for Hedvig. Price also gives us an equally interesting discussion of photography in *The Wild Duck* as an example of Rosalind Krauss’ notion of photography as “part of the theater that the family constructs to convince itself that it is together and whole.” Price is eloquent on Hedvig’s identification with the duck and her victimization as “pet,” and she draws a brilliant parallel between the animal-identifying victims Hedvig and Eyolf and the failure of “human responsibility” in the adults of *Little Eyolf* and *The Wild Duck*.

The second *NLH* article, “Ibsen and Fatherhood” (18), by Jørgen Lorentzen, is mainly about *The Wild Duck*. Somewhat unsure of its subject and repetitious, it badly needed editing. Lorentzen claims that “fatherhood and issues related to fatherhood occupy a central position” in Ibsen’s work and at the same time asks, “What is it that leads Ibsen to dramatize so consistently the relationship between father and child without fully developing it as a theme?” Lorentzen can’t decide what his position is. And while it is impossible to write dramas of the traditional nuclear family without the presence of fathers, I am not convinced that it is fatherhood that is the real subject of *Ghosts* and *The Wild Duck*. Mrs. Alving’s motherhood seems at least as pertinent as Captain Alving’s fatherhood, about which Lorentzen has nothing new to say. (And how is it possible to claim that the crude Engstrand’s arguments are the play’s “most

---

Lorentzen takes Gregers’ judgment  
of his father at face value and treats  
Werle as a villain.

---

elegant” defense of the Church!) The complexity of *The Wild Duck* makes it seem strange to isolate fatherhood as the play’s center, and Lorentzen’s

naïve judgments of the characters seem totally uninformed by the large critical literature on the play. In a section called “The Patriarchal Father,” for example, Lorentzen takes Gregers’ judgment of his father at face value and treats Werle as a villain. (Lorentzen’s discussion of the Norwegian debate on married women’s property rights has little to do with his subject, which is not husbandhood but fatherhood.) In “The Fallen Father,” Ibsen’s model is said to be his own father, which Lorentzen wrongly claims has received little attention from Ibsen’s biographers. That Knud Ibsen is the model for Jon Gynt is hardly new, but the notion that Solness is a “fallen father” seems just plain strange since his relation to the long dead babies is hardly paramount. And surely Borkman is less a “fallen father” than a fallen financier. But the most unconvincing—and amazing—part of Lorentzen’s essay is his uncritical stance on the well-meaning but thoroughly selfish Hjalmar, whom Lorentzen defends as a good son (has he not read act one?) and a good father who loves “Hedvig more than anything else in the world.” That Lorentzen can defend Hjalmar’s response to Hedvig’s death by writing that “Hjalmar accepts this fatal sacrifice and immediately forgives Hedvig”—and thus miss the overwhelming irony of Ibsen’s ending—is outrageous. Who were *New Literary History’s* readers here?

Giuliano D’Amico’s finely researched and well thought-out “Fighting for the Cause of Ibsen: William Archer and the Translation of *The Wild Duck*” (19) appearing in the Edinburgh journal *Northern Studies*, is a fine defense of the much maligned Archer. D’Amico considers Archer’s work in the light of his campaign to introduce English-speaking readers to a great dramatist and thus provide a model for modern English drama. Drawing on Thomas Postlewait’s definitive book on Archer, D’Amico explains that Archer’s literalness, for which he has been often attacked, was a result of Archer’s aim to produce faithful texts instead of the usual Victorian bowdlerizations. D’Amico goes on to show that what Archer wrote on the problems of translating Ibsen shows that he was aware of the complexities of rendering Ibsen in English and made choices accordingly: “How is one to escape still literalness on the one hand, lax paraphrase on the other? I cannot hope that I have always steered clear of the former danger; the latter

I have done my best to avoid.” D’Amico provides a full analysis of Archer’s choices in his and his wife Frances’ translation of *The Wild Duck*, pointing out both awkward phrasing and successful renderings. But while one can agree that “life’s mission” and “mission in life” are the right translations for *livsopgave* and *opgave at levefor*, one cannot accept D’Amico’s defense of “life’s illusion” for *livsløgn* as way of rendering the “awkward Norwegian compound into acceptable English.” “Life-lie” was too blunt for Archer, but it is no more awkward than the Norwegian compound, and “life’s illusion” is both awkward and an unpardonable softening of the original. D’Amico then gives a very interesting explanation of another of Archer’s main qualities as a translation—his literariness—as a necessary way of introducing Ibsen to a cultivated foreign readership. This explains much of what we now consider Archer’s “stuffiness” and also his choice to soften the bad Norwegian of Ibsen’s lower-

---

D’Amico goes on to show that what Archer wrote on the problems of translating Ibsen shows that he was aware of the complexities of rendering Ibsen in English.

---

class characters, most especially Gina Ekdal’s ungrammatical constructions, malapropisms, and vulgarities. Archer defended himself by saying that he could hardly make Ibsen’s characters speak Cockney. (I wonder if he was right; his literate English audience would have understood perfectly the class distinctions being established, and might they not have enjoyed themselves and perhaps even been flattered?) D’Amico makes one mistake; Archer’s choice of “No more he will” for Gina’s “Det også, ja” [“Yes, that, too”] is not “refined,” but is an example of dialect. But D’Amico has certainly made his point that Archer’s translations were “the product of a refined activist who saw in his translations a sharp weapon with which to fight his battle for Ibsen and for the rise of a new English drama.” D’Amico is a graduate student at the University of Oslo whose first language is Italian, and he is to be congratulated for producing such fine scholarship. He was one of the winners of



the ISA's Ibsen Prize for 2009 for his SASS talk on the early reception of Ibsen in Europe.

The last item in the 2007 survey is a strange invitational anthology, *One Hundred Year Commemoration to [sic] the Life of Henrik Ibsen, 1828-1906* (20), put together by "Dr. G.O. Mazur" and published by the "Semenenko Foundation" (which I am unable to identify). The volume contains twenty articles (and a poem, "Brand," which was "newly written in the Ibsen Centenary Year" and which the less said about, the better). Dr. Mazur's introduction makes flattering

---

Eric Bentley would be at least very surprised to learn that "at various times" he has been "against" Ibsen.

---

comments about the volume's contributors and gives us information whose quality can be deduced from the following two examples: both Ibsen and Mamet "have been observed to have strong realist orientations"; among Shakespeare, Molière, and Ibsen, "it is Ibsen who emerges among these three playwrights as historically the most recent of them." The critical judgments are on a par with the historical. Eric Bentley, one of Ibsen's greatest and most articulate champions, would be at least very surprised to learn that "at various times" he has been "against" Ibsen: "The pro-and-contra readings of Ibsen [unexplained by Mazur] have also been of much importance after the end of Ibsen's life as representing the sometimes harsh social reception of the controversial themes Ibsen explored many times throughout his career, Eric Bentley being one critic who has taken both sides of Ibsen critique at various times in his own life." Of the volume's twenty essays, the most important thing to be said is that apart from Austin Quigley's valuable "Ibsen's Ghosts and Pinter's Heirs," which reflects Quigley's knowledge both of Ibsen and of Pinter, there is precious little about Ibsen here. All but one of the articles are about other writers and Ibsen, and the authors are scholars of the other writers. Shakespeare scholar David Bevington, in "Shakespeare and Ibsen Revisiting the Ancient 'War of the Sexes,'" is knowledgeable about Shakespeare but not about Ibsen or Ibsen criticism, and everything he writes about *A Doll*

*House* is a given in Ibsen studies. Beckett scholar Enoch Brater's "Where Beckett Meets Ibsen" is so tentative about Ibsen that his title could have been "Where Beckett Doesn't Meet Ibsen." A fifth of the volume is devoted to the less than passionate, well-known subject of Ibsen's influence on Arthur Miller, and of the four articles, only David Otten's sensible précis "Arthur Miller's Enduring Debt to Ibsen" is valuable. The other three, mostly about Miller, are bone-thin. Of the three articles on Ibsen and Mamet, none establishes any real parallels between the two playwrights (which can hardly be surprising); one article, Dennis Carroll's "The Obligatory Scene in Ibsen and Mamet" is not a comparison but rather a discussion of one obligatory scene in Ibsen, about which nothing new is said, and an obligatory scene in Mamet. The same thing is true for Elizabeth Klaver's "The Body Politic and Modern Medicine in Ibsen and Ionesco": already well-known points are made about disease in *Enemy*, and then disease in *Rhinoceros* is taken up. Of the two articles on Ibsen and Pirandello, Luisetta Elia Chomel does not succeed in showing that we "re-encounter" *When We Dead Awaken* in Pirandello, and James Fisher's "Ambivalence and Moral Resilience in Ibsen and Pirandello" focuses strongly on Pirandello and has very little to say about this crucial subject in Ibsen. Michael Wreen's "Some Philosophical Aspects of *Peer Gynt* – And Let's Be Careful about Kierkegaard" seems unacquainted both with the vast literature on Ibsen and Kierkegaard (he mentions only Bruce Shapiro's widely criticized *Divine Madness and the Absurd Paradox*) and with the vast literature on *Peer Gynt*, about which Wreen writes nothing enlightening. In "Henrik Ibsen and the Chimera of the End of History," Matthew Wikander does little more than mention Ibsen several times in a discussion that is mainly about Hegel and Buckle. One wonders why a scholar like Christopher Innes would tackle "Ibsen in America," a huge subject far too large for an article, which Innes notes himself as he writes that he can give us only three different "snapshots" (early reception; Miller; an uncritical account of Robert Wilson). The last essay in the volume, the one essay on Ibsen "alone," as it were, Mazur's "Enduring Ambiguities in Ibsen's Late Prose Plays," is not about the late prose plays, which are hardly mentioned, or, in fact, anything else in particular. We are informed that *A Doll*

*House* catapulted Ibsen into the spotlight, given a potted summary of Empson's seven types of ambiguity, told that ambiguity was a major theme in the work of William James and Charles Pierce, and treated to puffery like the following: "the space of history traversed from Ibsen's characterization of Hedda Gabler at the juncture of early modernism,

back to Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth in medieval Scotland, to Shakespeare's Cleopatra who abandons Anthony at sea, when combined, covers over two full millennia in asserted [sic] historical sweep and span." As for Ibsen himself, "the domain of drama was something which he personally and vocationally identified with extensively." Indeed.

## 2008

One contributor to Dr. Mazur's anthology evidently did not consider his essay a publication, for he published it again, under a different title, the following year, in a refereed journal. Epiphanyo San Juan, Jr.'s "The Contrapuntal Relation of Ibsen and Joyce" in *Commemoration to the Life of Henrik Ibsen* in 2007 is now E. San Juan's "Joyce/Ibsen: Dialectics of Aesthetic Modernism" (21) in *Orbis Litterarum* in 2008. After several readings, I still do not understand what the author wants to demonstrate as he moves quickly from subject to subject—modernism, modernism in Joyce, Raymond Williams, naturalism, expressionism—without saying much about any of them. He also has a habit of making sweeping, erroneous declarations like the following: "Conceived outside the naturalist conventions of Victorian theatre, *Peer Gynt* mapped the world of departure and return, vision and blindness, the kaleidoscopic vicissitudes of temporal engagements." Victorian theatre had no "naturalist conventions" at all—that was part of what was wrong with it—and Ibsen himself knew nothing about Victorian theatre. (As for "kaleidoscopic vicissitudes of temporal engagements," I have no idea what it means.) Nor did Ibsen "depart" from "the classical realistic project of the bourgeois individualist

figure in *Catiline*, but the important point is that the theme is far too restrictive to describe Ibsen's work as a whole. San Juan devotes pages to Joyce's writings on Ibsen, paraphrasing Joyce's famous essay, not very clearly, and adding nothing new to the record. His effort to show how Joyce's play *Exiles* is indebted to *When We Dead Awaken* is cloudy, and the whole essay is filled with mentions of a great variety of subjects whose relation to the matter at hand is not clear; these include but are not limited to "otherness as desire," the aesthetics of modernity, the "loss of aura," Buci-Gluckman's discussion of Walter Benjamin's discussion of Baudelaire, Malcolm Bradbury, Richard Adams, Fredrick Engels, Georg Lukás, Plekhanov, Francis Fergusson, the Norwegian League for Women's Rights, Thomas Mann, William Archer, Shaw, Julia Kristeva, and Hugh Kenner. The effect of the essay as a whole is that of breathless name-dropping. It is odd to find such an essay in the refereed *Orbis Litterarum*.

Kathleen Kelly's exciting "Pandemic and Performance: Ibsen and the Outbreak of

---

### Kelly's essay is a superb précis of Ibsenism in England in the 1890s.

---

---

One contributor to Dr. Mazur's anthology evidently did not consider his essay a publication.

---

hero defying social law" in *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*, which preceded Ibsen's invention of theatrical realism by, respectively, twelve and ten years! Nor was Ibsen's "paramount theme (elaborated in *Catiline*)" the "loyalty to one's art." Art does not

Modernism" (22) in *South Central Review*, is the lead article in an issue devoted to "Staging Modernism," edited by Kelly and Penny Farfan, which includes essays on Eugene O'Neill and Zora Neale Hurston; Nijinsky; Ethel Waters, Leona Horne, and Katherine Dunham; Art Deco; and Modernism and Post-Colonialism. Kelly's essay is a superb précis of Ibsenism in England in the 1890s. Much of it must naturally go over familiar ground—Archer's Ibsen campaign, Janet Achurch

and Charles Carrington's *Doll House*, the early receptions of *A Doll House* and *Ghosts*, the trope of disease used by Ibsen's detractors—but Kelly knows so much about her subject and writes so clearly about it that what we thought we knew takes on new life. Her use of the disease metaphor as she shows that Ibsenism itself was “contagious” makes for fascinating reading, and the novelty of the essay is that it offers a superbly-informed account and analysis of what we might call “Ibsen as he was received not by the newspaper critics but in real life”: “Activist women not only pioneered early efforts to produce Ibsen through translations and critical essays about the playwright [e.g., Janet Achurch, Elizabeth Robins, Marion Lee], but also shaped the reception of his plays, filling up the theatres at afternoon matinees designed for unescorted female audiences.” Kelly shows that Ibsen was so crucial to the era that “to read Ibsen and attend his plays was to engage in a kind of public identity construction.” Finally, “Ibsenism” meant nothing less than “to live, write and think critically,” and Kelly ends her wonderful essay with a modernist of a different stripe, Ezra Pound, who, it is good to be reminded, wrote that “Ibsen was a true agonist – More than any one man, it is he who has made us ‘our world,’ that is to say, ‘our modernity’.”

Two articles on *An Enemy of the People* are very interesting investigations of real rather than metaphorical disease in Ibsen. Stephen Wallace's “Governing Humanity” (23) appeared in the *Journal of Medical Humanities*, an “international forum” devoted to “interdisciplinary inquiry in medicine and medical education.” It is always interesting to learn how Ibsen matters in the non-literary academic world, and Wallace, who teaches in the School of Health and Social Care at Bournemouth University,

---

*An Enemy of the People* is thus a cautionary tale for any health-care practitioner.

---

in Dorset, gives an account of how *Enemy* can be useful to professors of “clinical governance” in the UK. The term refers to the practice of controlling the quality of care in the National Health System. Wallace finds Ibsen's play an excellent tool for

“unpacking clinical governance for graduate students.” He writes that while one might think that the 1881 drama was a “quaint, routine history of balneotherapy” (a lesson for us literary Ibsen scholars), in fact, it is very valuable to the “front-line foot-soldiers of health care delivery.” How? Because the town-hall meeting, in Prof. Wallace's wryly understated terms-of-art, “augurs poorly for substantive trust in the modernist armoury of the democratization of science and patient panels.” In other words, in health panels, as in town-hall meetings, or in meetings of any group set up to address the amelioration of a system, “the primary and irresistible political imperative is for repression.” The play also “challenges, front and square, any trust in the self-correcting nature of science” itself, which is powerless on its own. Scientist Dr. Stockmann's fate “presages badly for the modernist role of innovation.” *An Enemy of the People* is thus a cautionary tale for any health-care practitioner who wants to “correct clinical practices” or “whistle-blow on the ostensibly harmful ones.”

Timothy Matos, in “Choleric Fictions: Epidemiology, Medical Authority, and *An Enemy of the People*” (24), in *MD*, focuses on the disease threatened by the baths. Examining the play in the context of the contemporaneous emerging sciences of sanitation and prophylaxis, Matos gives us a new and very interesting historical lens through which

---

Dr. Stockmann was the model of the emerging 19<sup>th</sup>-century scientific hero, exemplified by Pasteur.

---

to read the English reception of the play. One of the reasons that *Enemy* was well received two years after *Ghosts* was reviled was that Dr. Stockmann was the model of the emerging 19<sup>th</sup>-century scientific hero, exemplified by Pasteur, and it also helped that Stockmann was played by the hyper-respectable Hubert Beerbohm Tree. And cholera, which Matos shows fits the symptoms of the disease described by Dr. Stockmann, was not only not a forbidden subject, like the syphilis of *Ghosts*, but a subject very much on people's minds because of its “very recent and dramatic containment” made possible by the great pathologist Robert Koch.

Cholera, unlike syphilis, was both mentionable and medically preventable. It is not the science of Dr. Stockmann that the townspeople reject, but its disclosure. And it is Morten Kill's resistance to science, his refusal to believe in microbes because he cannot see them, that makes him a ridiculous figure. Stockman is defeated not by anti-scientific provincials, but by the commercial self-interest of the citizens. Unlike *Ghosts*, which couples disease and sex, *Enemy* couples disease and commerce. Matos also points out that the popularity of *Enemy* in England reflects a "serious misreading" because the audience, while seeing in Dr. Stockmann a hero, also identified with the townspeople who condemn him. Dr. Stockmann went too far in his rhetorical excesses for upstanding, bourgeois citizens. Matos provides only one review that reports audience dissatisfaction with Dr. Stockmann, and I would have liked more evidence for this, but in any case, there is no doubt that *Enemy* was far less outrageous—on the surface—than the "loathsome sore unbandaged" of two years earlier.

The second article on Ibsen in the 2008 *MD*, Tanya Thresher's "Vinløv i håret [Vine leaves in his hair]: the Relationship between Women, Language, and Power in Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*" (25) argues that Hedda shows "an acute awareness of the power of words, knowing that they carry with them an emancipatory potential." But while Hedda knows that "words hold the possibility of liberation," she fails "to negotiate the manipulative potential of words" and ultimately chooses silence "as a means of challenging her position within the patriarchal order." I find a confusion here between words and deeds; Hedda, who is no reader and who remarks of Løvborg's work that it is "only a book," shows no interest in words. What she wants is meaning. Nor can one accept the notion that Hedda is crushed by her inability to attain "the comradeship defined by Løvborg"; she had it before, with Løvborg himself, and rejected it. Thresher oddly considers the relation between Løvborg and Thea as a goal for Hedda that Hedda cannot attain, but how could—or should—Hedda find fulfillment in being Løvborg's secretary and muse? And to describe the play as a "series of linguistic attempts on the part of the heroine at controlling reality and a growing realization that the relation between language and reality is conditioned by the dominant ideology, in this case patriarchy" makes

of Ibsen's least intellectual protagonist a theorist of language and ideology. Hedda is not interested in such things. It is true that Hedda "uses words to

---

### Thresher oddly considers the relation between Løvborg and Thea as a goal for Hedda that Hedda cannot attain.

---

avoid becoming party to a social contract"—taking her place in the despised Tesman world—but what else could she use? And it is also true that she uses words to get information from Thea and, in the past, to elicit Løvborg's confessions. But she also uses her wits and her personal magnetism. Thresher writes that "Hedda's fear of what other people might say about her reveals her preoccupation with the spoken word," but what it reveals is Hedda's preoccupation with her reputation, and, thus, her essential cowardice. Hedda's ultimate rejection of the vine-leaves imagery may be "concomitant of the weakening power of her words," but what it indicates is something much more important: her realization that her life is bereft of meaning. Løvborg was her last, vicarious chance. And surely her "appropriation of silence" at the end goes far beyond "a deafening interrogation of the limits of linguistic medium." It is her last refusal to communicate with people whom she despises and who would never understand that people *do* do such things.

In his book *Modern Literature and the Tragic*, K.M. Newton sets out to refute George Steiner's theory of the "death of tragedy." His first chapter is devoted to "Ibsen's *Ghosts* and the Rejection of the Tragic" (26). While Newton disagrees with Steiner's notion that Ibsen's plays offer remedies, he agrees with Steiner that in Ibsen, there is no power beyond the human and thus the plays are bereft of "absolute values," the laws of the gods, for example, in Sophocles. In Ibsen's plays, it is "old, dead ideas," the metaphorical societal "ghosts," that cause pain and suffering. The role of determinism—of whatever sort—in Ibsen's work has been the subject of a good deal of inquiry, as has the related question of whether the naturalistic *Ghosts* qualifies as tragedy. Newton writes as if he is the first person to take up this question—except for Raymond Williams, whom

he dismisses for his discredited theory of “liberal tragedy,” which Newton does not bother to explain. Newton has simply not done his homework, and if he had, presumably he would have been able to discuss more deeply the issues which he raises. For example, he repeats the old, discredited notion that Mrs. Alving is responsible for the tragedy because her sexual coldness drove the poor captain to brothels (as I have argued, this reasoning is factually wrong—Captain Alving was “profligate” when Mrs. Alving married him—and illogical in the extreme: sexually accommodating wives are hardly a failsafe measure to keep husbands from brothels). But, Newton goes on, since Mrs. Alving was only following what she had been taught, “society” is the villain. But Newton ignores the fact that Ibsen gives Mrs. Alving a choice which is the determining event in the action and thus the main topic of the play’s development. Dominated and preached to by Pastor Manders, Mrs. Alving, as she tells the pastor to his face, made the “right” decision to return home and bow to her “marriage debt” and in so doing made the wrong decision that ruined her life (she will later learn that it also destroyed

---

Newton does not understand that Ibsen’s protagonists are not pawns obliterated by “dead ideas.”

---

her son.) Newton does not understand that Ibsen’s protagonists are not pawns obliterated by “dead ideas” but are thinking, feeling people faced with difficult, even “impossible” choices. This is part of what makes Ibsen Shakespeare’s brother. Newton suggests that Ibsen did achieve “an alternate tragic dimension” to replace classical tragedy, however, which he finds expressed in Derrida’s conception of “the human experience of having to decide in a context of undecidability.” In *Ghosts*, he locates the tragic choice in Mrs. Alving’s dilemma of whether to give Oswald the morphine. The notion that the core of a tragic action is to be found in the end of that action and even in what follows the end is dramaturgically impossible. It is akin to claiming that Othello’s suicide—or Borkman’s fatal heart attack—is the play’s center. Mrs. Alving’s decision, however undecidable and however horrible, is the result of a choice made many years ago.

Otto Reinert’s “Peer and Peer: The Gynian Self” (27), in *Scan*, offers a traditional reading of the play that also seeks to show how wrong Ibsen was when he called it “wild and formless.” Reinert goes over familiar ground—the dialectic of *Brand/Peer Gynt*, the elements that make up *Peer Gynt*’s hybrid form—fable, satire, folklore—the over-arching theme of departure and return, Peer’s shiftless, uncommitted self, the two mother figures of Aase and Solveig—before focusing on the recurrence of leitmotifs and images that link scene to scene and make *Peer Gynt* “a tissue of cross references” as Ibsen “networks.” Young Peer’s pastime, making buttons, becomes “old Peer’s doom.” Much of acts four and five are re-enactments, of different sorts, of acts one through three. The troll kingdom is connected to the “empire of lunacy” in the asylum, and in turn, Peer’s crowning here is connected to “what will happen if he ends up in the Buttonmoulder’s ladle.” *Peer Gynt* “is one tight whole,” wild, perhaps, “but ‘formless’ is exactly what it is not.” Reinert’s identification and probing of the connections throughout the play give the impression that he knows it by heart. His accounts of the familiar topics of “being oneself,” the connection between poetry and lies, the ambivalence of Peer as hero, *Peer Gynt* as a modern morality play in which the trolls are Peer’s clear antagonists but whose solution remains incomplete form as good a précis of the traditional view of the play as we are likely to get, and this article, accompanied by Reinert’s earlier, indispensable “Notes to *Peer Gynt*” (SS 67, 1995), constitute a fine critical apparatus for reading Ibsen’s play. I have one caveat: The last few decades of Ibsen performance and Ibsen criticism have made it impossible to accept the Solveig of the last

---

Reinert’s identification and probing of the connections throughout the play give the impression that he knows it by heart.

---

scene as a “real” character, a blind, tottering crone who welcomes Peer to their real forest hut after waiting for him for decades. Reinert acknowledges that the ending is problematic, but writes even so that “twentieth-century drama has taught us that

waiting is as good a dramatic action as any.” But Gogo and Didi are very present as they wait; in fact, what they do as they wait is the action of *Godot*. Solveig disappears. Reinert also takes Solveig as a feminine symbol: “as mother figure and virgin and wife Solveig is Everywoman, complementing Peer’s Everyman.” But Peer is not “Everyman” because he is a father figure, rake, and husband, but because he is a human being, which is an altogether different level of identity from the wholly gendered notion of “Everywoman.” It is partly because of this discrepancy that many modern readers and directors of Ibsen’s ending have found it puzzling, problematic, or unsatisfying.

Patrick Pollard’s “Gide and Ibsen: A Symbolist Crossroads,” in the 2008 *Modern Language Review* (28), is confusingly titled;

“symbolist” here does not mean a particular kind of 19<sup>th</sup>-century literature, but a literature that suggests rather than preaches. Since Pollard begins his essay by discussing Ibsen’s early reception in France, when Maeterlinckean symbolism vied with Zolaesque naturalism, Pollard’s use of “symbolist” is especially confusing. But the essay itself introduces us to a topic that heretofore has not been examined: the connection between Ibsen and Gide. How wonderful to learn that the great French iconoclast was an Ibsenite! Pollard covers a lot of ground in a few pages. After a fully researched two-page précis of Ibsen’s early reception in France, Pollard briefly describes Gide’s own writing for the stage, all of which was influenced by French symbolism, and then discusses Gide’s preferences among Ibsen’s plays: *Emperor and Galilean*, *The Wild Duck*, *Hedda Gabler*, and *Ghosts*, the only Ibsen drama on which Gide commented in detail. One learns that Gide read *Les Revenants* aloud to his devoutly Protestant mother and aunt (how one would have liked to have been a fly on the wall here!), and he wrote in his now famous *Journal* that the play had a “great effect” on him. Gide and his mother also corresponded about *Ghosts*, which Madame Gide admired, although she pointed out that while it was well and good to chastise society for its crimes, whoever did so owed his audience suggestions for remedy. Gide disagreed. Ibsen, for him, was the author who most embodied his

---

### How wonderful to learn that the great French iconoclast was an Ibsenite!

---

own treasured precept—“ne jamais conclure”—“Never conclude.” Pollard claims that Gide’s dislike of *Brand* is a reflection of this, but some reading in Ibsen scholarship would have informed him that *Brand* is widely recognized as one of the most questioning of Ibsen’s plays. But Pollard’s discussion of Gide’s appreciation of *Ghosts* is fascinating. Gide understood and appreciated both its Sophoclean tragic form and its Nietzschean horror of resignation and acceptance. Pollard finds an interesting parallel between Ibsen’s treatment of

disease in *Ghosts* and Gide’s in *L’Immoraliste* in the connection between illness, neurosis, and moral irregularity, and a parallel between blindness in *The Wild Duck* and *La Symphonie pastorale*, in which blindness becomes “the symbolic vehicle of innocence and the revelation

of hypocrisy within the world.” Pollard also argues persuasively that Gide’s essay “L’évolution du théâtre” shows the influence of Ibsen in its insistence that drama does not need heroic figures and that bourgeois contemporary subjects are necessarily inartistic. Above all, it is character that is of primary importance: “Qui dit drame, dit: caractère.” Gide’s notion that Christianity is in itself opposed to “character” because it proposes idealism instead, is, Pollard notes, the kind of Nietzscheanism that Gide shared with Ibsen. Gide, like Ibsen, raised issues rather than solved problems, a kind of “symbolist” credo that suggestion and allusion take the place of explained statement, but most of all, both authors took aim at “false gods and false values.” Gide took up Ibsen’s challenge “to disrupt society and undermine its common assumptions. . . . For both writers, untruth lies at the root of society’s evils.” Pollard has made a fine, original contribution to Ibsen studies.

The first volume of *IS* 2008 opens with Terry Eagleton’s “Ibsen and the Nightmare of History” (29), read at the University of Oslo in 2007, the “first of an annual series of lectures in the name of Ibsen.” Eagleton, of course, is a major literary and cultural critic, and what he has to say here about the bourgeois century and Ibsen’s place in it is, like his work as a whole, informed, thoughtful, and thought-provoking. He begins with the covering up of discreditable origins common

to all human regimes and the subsequent necessity to legitimize power by the passage of time during which revolutionary violence becomes sublimated into law. The middle-class revolution of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is different from prior ones, Eagleton argues, because its intensely revolutionary dynamic continues into its post-revolutionary history. “How can an inherently anarchic, individualist, *anti-social* formation be at the same time a tranquil, conformist, consensual one?” Ibsen lived through the middle-class romanticism of the 1840’s, to an individualist kind of capitalism, to the brink of the epoch known as monopoly capitalism, and what his dramas tend to do “is not so much to represent this as a *sequential* process as to grasp the middle-class conflict between lawlessness and convention, individualism and conformism, heroic ideal and prosaic actuality, in *synchronic* terms, as these two dimensions of bourgeois experience fight it out.” Eagleton takes Ibsen’s metaphor of being stuck in a tight place where “you can go neither forward or back” (the Boyg metaphor from *Peer Gynt*) as an “allegory of a class which in the very act of thrusting dynamically forward, fired by its mighty ideals of justice, equality and liberation, finds itself drawn inexorably back into the past, as the dead weight of its own guilt-ridden history closes oppressively around it.” For bourgeois individualism is “ruthlessly amoral . . . even thought it needs culture, morality, metaphysics, religions and idealism to legitimate its own godless, anarchic, anti-social activities.” Eagleton is not interested in the “rather simple-minded” model of breaking with an external enemy, as in *A Doll House*, or *Enemy*, but rather in the more complex notion that the middle-class has to break with itself. “Like a whole range of Ibsenite protagonists, all the way from Rosmer to John Gabriel Borkman, it is radically self-divided.” The dream in Ibsen, as in much of modernism, of making a clean break with the past, is the “definitive fantasy of the avant-garde,” for “how is one to bounce oneself out of history without the help of history?” Ibsen is himself conscious that there is something deeply flawed about this sort of optimism, a problem that

---

The dream in Ibsen, as in much  
of modernism, of making a clean  
break with the past, is the “definitive  
fantasy of the avant-garde.”

---

Eagleton, a Marxist, couches in these terms: “By what historical mechanisms does abstract equality twist into real inequality, freedom for some into oppression for others, and so on?” I think that Ibsen might smile at “historical mechanisms,” and, if pushed, might substitute “human frailty and error,” but certainly, like Marx, Ibsen “is conscious in his own way that there is something flawed as well as commendable about such idealism.”

A second Marxist approach in this first volume of *IS 2008* is Leonardo F. Lisi’s difficult and theoretical “Allegory, Capital, Modernity: *Peer Gynt* and Ibsen’s Modern Breakthrough” (30). Lisi offers his article as a corrective to what he calls the “canonical” view that the play “provides a stable hierarchical value scale in which Peer ranks on the lowest rung and the heroine, Solveig, on the highest.” Lisi provides a note in which he lists scholars who he claims have expressed this

monolithic view, but it is inaccurate to treat us all like eggs in the same moralistic basket (much of what I wrote about Solveig in *Ibsen’s Women*, for example, was an argument against prior readings of her as

Peer’s moral guardian.) And most scholars of *Peer Gynt* (with a notable exception in Asbjørn Aarseth, who reads the play as a criticism of the “animal” Peer) have insisted that whatever his faults, Peer is a likeable character, an “Everyman” with whom the reader identifies; many scholars find, too, that Solveig, whatever her virtues, is dramaturgically far too slender to provide a “high” solution to “low” Peer’s moral failings. According to Lisi, the play “stages a conflict between the system of morality *as such* and the new emergent capitalist world order, which no longer holds a place for it.” Lisi claims that no scholar has treated the relation between the play and capitalism, but many Ibsen scholars, in fact, have seen in the slaveholding and Bible trafficker Peer of act four a parody of the capitalist entrepreneur. Lisi’s claim is a different kind, however, and much more schematic; he argues that the great, sprawling drama reflects Marx’s theory of value in *Capital*. While noting that to his knowledge, Ibsen and Marx did not read each other, Lisi claims that a comparison between them

is “best grounded either on a shared awareness of a common socio-historical situation” or that both were “responding to Goethe’s *Faust*.” This is extremely problematic reasoning. There is no evidence that Ibsen was interested in economic theory—his objections to Mill and Bentham were not to their economic theories but to their philosophies of government. And while *Peer Gynt*, to quote from the title of Patricia Merivale’s influential article, was indeed “Ibsen’s *Faustiad*,” Goethe’s influence on Marx, as Lisi notes, is a much disputed subject. But even if Marx was influenced by Goethe, this hardly suggests that *Peer Gynt*, also influenced by Goethe, incarnates Marx’s theory. Lisi finds it amazing that the relation between “allegory, capital and reality,” which is “pivotal” for understanding Ibsen’s response to modernity, has not been treated, but why should Walter Benjamin’s work on

---

Lisi would have it that Peer, whose last name rhymes with “Mynt” (money), functions like Marx’s medium of exchange in capitalist economies.

---

allegory and Marx send Ibsen scholars scurrying to *Peer Gynt* and *Capital* even if Ibsen’s drama were an allegory (which it isn’t)? Lisi has a hard time of it comparing the “reality” in *Peer Gynt*—the actuality that Peer ignores or transforms—to Marx’s notion of the “real” in his economic theory, and the comparison of unlike things is exemplified in Lisi’s conflation of Ibsen’s playful satire in the mouth of a character—Begriffenfeldt’s “Peer Gynt! Allegorical!”—with Paul de Man’s and Franco Moretti’s theories of allegory. Lisi would have it that Peer, whose last name rhymes with “Mynt” (money), functions like Marx’s medium of exchange in capitalist economies: “Like money, Peer unifies and homogenizes the disparate entities of the play, being the only figure who can enter into relation with all others, the center through which all must pass, since it alone can bring them into relation with each other, by repetition, quotation, textuality.” This is an excellent observation, but it does not make Peer particularly economic; one could say the same thing of Homer’s Ulysses or

Joyce’s Bloom, or any *picaresque* protagonist—or, for that matter, Don Quixote. Lisi is excellent on the intertextuality of both *Peer Gynt* and *Peer Gynt*, but he cannot show that Ibsen’s great sprawling closet drama is an embodiment of anybody’s theory.

Michael Evans’ “Credit and Credibility: the Impact of Modern Banking Institutions on *A Doll’s House*” (31), a second essay in this issue of *IS* whose subject concerns money, is badly named. A better title would have been “Torvald Helmer, Norway’s Model Commercial Banker.” Evans’ essay is a genuinely informative account of an entirely new subject in Ibsen studies: Torvald’s job. Torvald was not just “a banker,” but the director of a commercial, joint stock bank, and Evans shows in detail how much this kind of institution was crucial—and Ibsen’s audience would have known this—in “dragging Norway into the industrial revolution” and thus into modern capitalist society. Torvald may seem like a prig in his refusal to hire Krogstad, but what good banker would hire a forger as an assistant? And Torvald is not a hypocrite

---

Evans’ essay is a genuinely informative account of an entirely new subject in Ibsen studies: Torvald’s job.

---

when he rails against borrowing money; as a commercial banker, he loans money to businesses, not to consumers, and what he chastises Nora about is borrowing money to spend. Also, if word of Nora’s forgery gets out, not only will Torvald’s own reputation be ruined, but the reputation of the bank he is responsible for; his “desire to hush up the whole matter seems to me to be the correct choice,” Evans writes. “Why should his investors be penalized because of something Nora did eight years ago?” And today’s audience is different from Ibsen’s; we no longer worry about a run on our banks, but Ibsen’s audience did. For us, Helmer “has it coming,” but for Ibsen’s audience, Helmer was precisely the sort of banker they would have liked to have themselves. And yet—and this is one of the most interesting things about this essay—Evans does not try to “rehabilitate” Torvald as Nora’s husband, for “while the new banks in



Norway sorely needed Helmers, wives didn't. The very qualities that will make him a valuable financier for the nation, serve to make him a poor husband." Unlike other defenders of Torvald, who claim that he is as much a victim as Nora, Evans sees Torvald clearly and wholly. Placing Torvald in the banking context of Ibsen's time is extremely valuable because it makes more understandable, and in so doing, softens, Torvald's stance. It adds another layer of richness to Ibsen's drama. This is the sort of historical scholarship that one delights in.

Julie Holledge's "Addressing the Global Phenomenon of *A Doll's House*: An Intercultural Intervention" (32) discusses Ibsen's play as an international phenomenon, a drama that has been performed hundreds of times "to an extraordinary diversity of audiences across historical time and geographical space." Her wide-ranging account is useful and thought-provoking. First, she provides and comments on the usual explanations for the play's popularity. As for its "aesthetics of realism," it is not surprising that Holledge can show easily that even within Europe, this was not the reason. However, I do believe, both from my own research and that of others, that "the iconic status of Nora as a symbol of women's struggle" was and still is one of the chief reasons for the play's popularity, and Holledge does not convince me otherwise. The fact that Olive Schreiner, Alexandra Kollantai, Emma Goldman, and Eleanor Marx did not wholly agree on a "common vision of women's self-realization" does not mean that they did not see Nora as an important symbol for women's selfhood. Holledge points out that with "so many interpretive variations on Nora in China . . . it is impossible to limit the discourse embodied within the character to the particularities of the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century

---

When Holledge analyzes reactions toward Nora's "abandoned children," she breaks new ground.

---

European movement for women's emancipation." But nobody who has studied Ibsen's reception in China would think otherwise, and the same goes for Japan, whose women, as Matsui Sumako, the first Japanese Nora, recounts, were not ready

for Ibsen's female hero. Holledge seems to be assuming both an ahistorical reader and a reader whose knowledge of Ibsen performance in the non-Western world is slight. When Holledge analyzes reactions toward Nora's "abandoned children," she breaks new ground, showing how Nora's act continues to be, even in Germany, so outrageous that it must be mitigated, less so than in Zambia and Iran, where Nora takes her children with her, but mitigated nevertheless; in Ostermeier's notorious production, the immigrant nanny assumes the role of surrogate mother and removes the children from the infected house. The same mitigation occurs in stagings of Nora's tarantella, which Holledge shows consistently soften Nora's wild dance. Holledge then touches on the importance of Judith Butler's discussions of performativity which are beginning to influence readings of Nora and Nora's dance. For Holledge, finally, Ibsen's play is less global than local, a text that allows "an infinite variety of cultures" to investigate Nora's radicalism in their own ways.

Bjørn Tysdahl's "Ibsen: the Significance of Swear-Words" (33), in the same issue of *IS*, is far too short; after nine pages of delightful explanations of who swears in Ibsen's plays and what sort of swearing it is—and how the swearing informs the characters who use it—one wants more. Rosmer is Tysdahl's gold standard, the former clergyman who, unlike the very mild-swearing Pastor Manders, for example, swears not at all; without Rosmer, "I could not have written this article," Tysdahl writes. One isn't surprised that Rosmer is the only character in Ibsen who does not swear, even a tiny bit, but this knowledge confirms in a wonderful way Rosmer's naive, straight-laced rigor. That Tysdahl discovers that Ibsen's precision in making his characters swear is both "social, psychological and thematic" is not surprising, either, but it gives us a new aspect of Ibsen's artistry of language. Lona Hessel swears like a man, Hilde speaks like a fairly dirty-mouthed teen-ager, Nora swears a strong oath only once, then retreats to her usual polite language; Engstrand's and Morten Kill's class origins are betrayed by their use of swear words—Tysdahl has an interesting discussion of the virtually untranslatable "fanden"—and Tesman's swearing is naturally "tediously repetitive." Dr. Stockmann turns out to be Ibsen's greatest swearer, again, not surprisingly, and Tysdahl takes us through the good

doctor's repertoire, which includes blasphemy as he compares himself to Christ. Tysdahl's last, very brief section is on swearing as a source of comedy, but the short two paragraphs don't even begin to treat the subject and it would have been better to leave

t h i s

---

### It's rare that an interesting scholarly article on Ibsen is actually fun to read.

---

subject for another day. One also wishes—once again—that the editors of *IS* would make sure that contributors provide English translations for their quotations in the original. In this case, since Tysdahl is a distinguished professor of English, this editorial laxness seems especially noticeable. In any case, it's rare that an interesting scholarly article on Ibsen is actually fun to read, and this one, by golly, is.

In the last item in this issue of *IS*, the two-and-a-half page "Beata Rosmer and Bertha Rochester" (34), Kristian Smidt wants to show that Ibsen based Beata on Charlotte Brontë's Bertha in *Jane Eyre*. His endeavor is similar to his four-page "Hedda Gabler's Boredom" (*Scan* 2006), in which Smidt argued that Ibsen based Hedda on Dickens' Lady Dedlock of *Bleak House*. In my review (*INC* 2008), I pointed out that the two women are much more different than they are alike, and I have cavils with Smidt's argument here, too. He at first claims that both *Rosmersholm* and *Jane Eyre* contain "deranged wives," but then admits that Beata's madness "is questioned," which is an understatement. He nevertheless maintains that the following plot is too similar to be coincidental: "a bright and nubile young woman of undistinguished origin orphaned (apparently) from early childhood and having experienced harsh treatment at the hands of her would-be protector, lives in close companionship with a proud, morose gentleman of distinguished descent who has had an unhappy marriage." I would counter that Rosmer and Rochester are so fundamentally different that this attempt to make them similar falls flat; that Rebecca is not, properly speaking, an orphan; and that Ibsen does not tell us enough about Rebecca's relation with Dr. West to assign responsibility. And of course *Jane Eyre* gets her man while Rebecca

and Rosmer commit dual suicide. It is true that memories of a dead wife in both cases haunt a manor house, but ghosts haunting manor houses are stock in Gothic novels. "Did Ibsen read *Jane Eyre* or did Suzannah read it for him?" Smidt asks. It is possible that the answer is "neither," for Suzannah read many books for her own pleasure. Smidt wonders whether the Ibsens also read *The Mill on the Floss*, and if so, whether Ibsen was influenced by the story of the sister and brother who drown in a loving embrace in an engulfed mill stream. I find such parallels curious, but not curious enough to convince me that Ibsen was directly influenced by English novelists.

The second issue of the 2008 *IS* is another example of the poor quality that authors of this survey have noted in prior reviews and that suggests, once again, that the journal would be much better served if it were restricted to an annual publication. Ellen Rees' sophisticated "Tropological Turns in *Peer Gynt*" (35) is the exception in the four articles in this issue. It is a commonplace that *Peer* follows the lesson of the Boyg in "going roundabout," and Rees' contribution to this literature is to view Ibsen's text as "rhizomatic" in the terms of Gilles Deleuze (and his collaborator Félix Guattari). "Rhizomatic structures" create "a matrix of connections rather than the hierarchical form common to more conventional literary genres." Rhizomatic structures are not "genres"—they are found in different genres—but Rees demonstrates nonetheless that Deleuze is a good lens through which to view Ibsen's thematic construction, and on this subject, Rees' article complements two articles reviewed above, Otto Reinert's (27) and Leonardo Lisi's (29). But Rees' Deleuzian approach goes beyond intertextuality as she uses "turn" in

---

### Rees' Deleuzian approach goes beyond intertextuality as she uses "turn" in a "physical, rhetorical, ethical and dramaturgical" sense.

---

a "physical, rhetorical, ethical and dramaturgical" sense: *Peer* turns, physically and ethically, *Peer*'s "verbal strategies" turn, Ibsen's narrative turns, and the text as a whole "problematizes subject

formation metapoetically.” Rees notes that she is arguing against the Cartesian reading of the text, specifically against reading it “primarily through the lens of Hegel.” In fact, most accounts of *Peer Gynt* note its sprawling, diffuse, ambiguous, decidedly non-Cartesian nature, and precious few Ibsen scholars would agree with the two scholars Rees cites as having established Hegel’s influence on *Peer Gynt*, Arne Liden and Asbjørn Aarseth; the latter’s arcane discussion of act four seriously proposes that Ibsen was deliberately “completing” Hegel’s *Aesthetics*! Nor does Rees need to spend three and a half pages arguing with Alvild Dvergsdal’s article “Satan’s Ruse” (reviewed in last year’s survey), which, as Rees points out, contains errors both in reasoning and in translation. When Rees gets to her subject, a reading of the turns in *Peer Gynt*, she shines; she shows how Ibsen’s stage directions function to maintain the tone of vacillation throughout, and she shows how in acts four and five, “the movements become so completely disconnected from each other and from the physical setting that no recognizable boundaries or meanings are identified or created. The text becomes entirely deterritorialized.” Multiple convolutions in *Peer*’s many “peripeteia,” along with Ibsen’s own metrical heterogeneity, the theme of the emergence of world capitalism, *Peer*’s “metapoetic comments on evasion and escape” all lift the text off the ground. Rees finds that the reader is “dizzied by a text that consists not of one fateful, tragic or melodramatic turn, but rather and overwhelming multitude of tangents leading in all directions.” The Boyg’s suggestion to “go round and about” is finally a “metacritical commentary on the fluidity of the self” and also a “metapoetic resistance to emplotment and dramatic structure.” Rees’ essay shows us *Peer Gynt* in all its radical, untrammelled glory.

Erika Fischer-Lichte’s “Interweaving Theatre Cultures in Ibsen Productions” (36), in the same issue of *IS*, comes close to being a semantic argument. Fischer-Lichte would change the popular term “intercultural” to describe productions which make use of different cultural norms and theatrical strategies; instead, she proposes “interweaving.” She traces the reception, including the problematics, of some landmark Ibsen productions in Japan, China, and Korea, showing how the introduction of Ibsen’s plays was linked to modernization in

general. She then asks the question, “Do these productions in their turn create a new aesthetic that erases the differences between theatre cultures and homogenizes them?” Since one’s first reaction is, naturally, “Of course not; how could they?” it seems something of a letdown to be told that her aim in the essay is to show that productions of plays from foreign cultures do not contribute to “the homogenization or standardization of theatre cultures,” but rather lead to “new, hybrid forms.” But we are then told that “hybrid theatre” assumes that “we are dealing with elements that

---

“Interweaving Theatre Cultures in Ibsen Productions” comes close to being a semantic argument.

---

do not belong together ‘originally’ . . . but have been linked arbitrarily.” “Interweaving” is better because it implies a “processual nature.” One could say that a “hybrid” production, like a “hybrid” plant, is in fact not an arbitrary combination, but rather the joining of two things whose components make possible the coupling. In any case, we are told several times that the “interweaving of theatre cultures” generates “new forms of diversity,” and Fischer-Lichte then briefly discusses three Ibsen productions which according to her “created a new theatre aesthetic”: Antunes Filho’s Brazilian *Peer Gynt* (1971), staged during a dictatorship that had lasted seven years; Wu Xiaojiang’s famous Beijing *Enemy* (1996), in which the characters’ costumes identify them as members of Chinese political groups; and Mitsuya Mori’s Japanese *Double Nora* (2005), which stages a Noh *Doll House*/modern *Doll House*. Because Fischer-Lichte’s account of the productions is much more descriptive than analytical, she does not demonstrate that the productions arrive at a “new aesthetic,” unless she means by this simply a combination of original features with new, culturally specific features, which is what one would expect in the first place, e.g., *Peer* is played as a type of Brazilian con-artist, and *Billing* as a member of the Red Guard. Fischer-Lichte claims that *Double Nora* created “a new aesthetic that reconciled Noh and modern Japanese theatre,” but the two acting styles resulted, to

my mind, in a juxtaposition of Noh theatre with contemporary theatre, not a merging. Nor was it my impression that Mori's production "seemed to propose the idea that Japanese women are both traditional and modern, although with a slight bias toward the modern." And of course, "the global and the local do not constitute binary opposites." The "global," after all, has no existence except what is found in different locales.

Nilu Kamaluddin's "*A Doll's House* in Asia: Juxtaposition of Tradition and Modernity" (37), in the same issue of *IS*, also takes intercultural performance as its subject. It concerns three productions of *A Doll House*: Sunil Pokharel's Nepalese production (2003), Mori's *Double Nora* (2005), and Kamaluddin's own production in Bangladesh (2001). Kamaluddin presents obvious givens as though they were matters of substance, e.g., "A critical prerequisite for success is a thorough understanding of the source culture and the target culture as well as of the meaning of the traditional theatrical form, elements or devices to be used so that the theatre production can emerge as an organic whole." Only two paragraphs characterize "Asian theatre." The account of the Nepalese production means to focus on the "revolt aspect" and "the modernity aspect," but it is an almost wholly descriptive account of obvious collateral substitutions, e.g., the jhrmara dance for the tarantella, the sari for the dress. We are also told that a woman lighting a man's cigarette "contrasts sharply with Nepalese custom," but we are not told if this action occurs in the production or not. The long, repetitive account of *Double Nora* is also almost wholly descriptive except for comments like the following: "Clearly, use of modern actors along with the Noh stock actors is something new and contrary to Noh conventions," and later on: "When it comes to acting, there is a completely new approach since traditional Noh acting and modern acting are used side by side." We are informed that "conventional Noh costumes are used for the two Noh actors. . . . The modern actors, on the contrary, use modern Western costumes." Why was this piece not edited? Director Mori keeps the Christmas tree, which "means that the cultural setting of the original play is placed within the Noh frame which derives from Zen Buddhism" and results in "an interesting encounter between the two cultures." Kamaluddin then offers a brief account of his own

production of *A Doll House*, in which the most interesting comment is how he approached the play "in a country where a woman leaving the home

---

### Kamaluddin presents obvious givens as though they were matters of substance.

---

would be strongly condemned." He took care of this by emphasizing the relationship between Krogstad and Mrs. Linde, which "gives a more positive and optimistic flavor with regard to the marriage institution than if only the Nora-Torvald relationship was focused on." He also notes that in all three Asian productions, the children are omitted because "the appearance of Nora's children on the stage would be likely to cause emotions among the Asian audience when Nora leaves without them." So much for interweaving.

I end this survey with the very weak fourth article in this issue of *IS*, Chengzhou He's "Ibsen's Men in Trouble: Masculinity and Norwegian Modernity" (38). Nothing is said about "Norwegian" modernity, and as for modernity *tout court*, it promoted a masculine ideal of success in work which, according to He, plagues Ibsen's male characters. There are a number of declarations in this essay that seem to arise from language problems, and the author deserved some help from editors. It is not true that "Ibsen's women are mostly housewives." If Gina Ekdal and Katherine Stockmann qualify here, it is impossible to imagine Helene Alving, Ellida Wangel, Hedda Gabler, Rita Allmers, or Ella Rentheim washing clothes or cooking dinner. Nor is it true that Ibsen "idealizes or romanticizes his male protagonists, endowing them with courage and knowledge, and on the other remains critical of them." To endow a man with courage or knowledge is not to "idealize" or "romanticize" him. Author He justifies his limiting his study to three male characters—Helmer, Solness, and Borkman—on the grounds that "it is impossible to include all Ibsen's men within this narrow area of research," but he must mean "within the space of an article." He covers very generally the extremely familiar territory of the "two spheres" of masculine and feminine before invoking R.W. Connell's notion of "hegemonic masculinity," which He rightly claims has been

very influential but which He does not define. Again, an editor would have been very helpful here. Mrs. Linde is not a “subversive image” for Nora because she abandons Krogstad to marry someone else to support her family; on the contrary, her act is utterly conventional. But what is most wrong with the essay is its treating Ibsen’s dramas as simplistic allegories of retribution in which the men are punished for their dastardly treatment of women; of Solness and Borkman, He writes that “their ambitions are jeopardized when they have made people around them, particularly their lovers and wives, endure great pain and sacrifices, for which there will be retaliation.” But Borkman’s ambitions are jeopardized when he foolishly embezzles securities, not when he coldheartedly abandons Ella; nor does Borkman “squander public money,” but rather steals from his shareholders. Solness owes his success to himself—he is the self-made man par excellence, an autodidact who is not, as He claims, an “architect,” but a mere builder. On the one hand, He talks of the “tragic fate” of Helmer, Solness, and Borkman, and on the other, he writes that the “deaths of Solness and Borkman” are “not tragedy [sic], because the two protagonists have aroused complex emotions among the audiences and readers.” This is, of course, a terrible argument for a protagonist’s non-tragic stature. Nora, Hilde, and Rebecca West are powerful while Helmer, Solness, and Borkman are “female constructs” because they lose in the end. Following this logic, of course, Hector and Achilles, along with all male protagonists of all tragedies are “female constructs.” He ends: “Ibsen’s men are really in trouble, they either fail to achieve their goal or even become complete losers.”

Joan Templeton

*The author thanks the periodicals staff of The New York Public Library, Humanities Research Division; the Princeton University Firestone Library; and the Columbia University Butler Library.*

- 1) Mark Sandberg, “The Architecture of Forgetting,” *IS 7* (1): 2007, 4-21.
- 2) Jørgen Dines Johansen, “Exchange in *A Doll’s House* and in *The Lady from the Sea*—Barter, Gift, and Sacrifice,” *IS 7* (1): 2007, 22-41.

- 3) Joan Templeton, “Advocacy and Ambivalence in Ibsen’s Drama,” *IS 7* (1): 2007, 43-60.
- 4) Erika Fischer-Lichte, “Ibsen’s *Ghosts* – A Play for all Theatre Concepts?” *IS 7* (1): 2007, 61-83.
- 5) Maria Shevtsova, “Robert Wilson Directs *When We Dead Awaken*, *The Lady from the Sea* and *Peer Gynt*,” *IS 7* (1): 2007, 84-104.
- 6) Kamaluddin Nilu, “Contemporary Political Relevance of Ibsen’s *Brand* – the Case of Islamic Fundamentalism,” *IS 7* (1): 2007, 105-21.
- 7) Simon Critchley, “Noises off – on Ibsen,” *IS 7* (2): 2007, 132-149.
- 8) Margaret D. Stetz, “Mrs. Linde, Feminism, and Women’s Work, Then and Now,” *IS 7* (2): 2007, 150-68.
- 9) Ellen Mortensen, “Ibsen and the Scandalous: *Ghosts* and *Hedda Gabler*,” *IS 7* (2): 2007, 169-87.
- 10) Tore Rem, “Nationalism or Internationalism? The Early Irish Reception of Ibsen,” *IS 7* (2): 2007, 188-202.
- 11) Leonardo F. Lisi, “Kierkegaard and the Problem of Ibsen’s Form,” *IS 7* (2): 2007, 203-26.
- 12) James Hamilton, “Theatrical Space,” *JDTC 21* (2): 2007, 21-47.
- 13) Attilio Favorini, “Some Memory Plays before the ‘Memory Play’,” *JDTC 22* (1): 2007, 29-50.
- 14) Robert J. Andreach, “Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* Reimagined in Guare’s *Marco Polo Sings a Solo*,” *JDTC 21* (2): 2007, 49-63.
- 15) Josephine Lee, “Teaching *A Doll House*, *Rachel*, and *Marisol*: Domestic Ideals, Possessive Individuals, and Modern Drama,” *MD 50* (4): 2007, 620-37.
- 16) Jacob Ross-Gallagher, “Ibsen our Contemporary: Contemporary Directors on the Playwright’s Centenary,” *Theater 37* (3): 2007, 87-115.
- 17) Rachel Price, “Animal, Magnetism, Theatricality in Ibsen’s *The Wild Duck*,” *New Literary History 37* (2007), 797-816.
- 18) Jørgen Lorentzen, “Ibsen and Fatherhood,” *New Literary History 37* (2007), 817-36.
- 19) Giuliano D’Amico, “Fighting for the Cause of Ibsen: William Archer and the Translation of *The Wild Duck*,” *Northern Studies 40* (2007), 82-101.
- 20) George O. Mazur, ed., *One Hundred Year Commemoration to [sic] the Life of Henrik Ibsen, 1828-1906* (Semenenko Foundation, 2007).

- 21) E. San Juan, "Joyce/Ibsen: Dialectics of Aesthetic Modernism," *Orbis Litterarum* 63 (4): 2008, 267-84.
- 22) Kathleen Kelly, "Pandemic and Performance: Ibsen and the Outbreak of Modernism," *South Central Review* 25 (1): 2008, 12-35.
- 23) Stephen Wallace, "Governing Humanity," *Journal of Medical Humanities*, 29 (1): 2008, 27-32.
- 24) Timothy Matos, "Choleric Fictions: Epidemiology, Medical Authority, and *An Enemy of the People*," *MD* 51 (3): 2008, 353-68.
- 25) Tanya Thesher, "Vinløv I håret [Vine leaves in his hair]: the Relationship between Women, Language, and Power in Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*," *MD* 51 (1): 2008, 73-83.
- 26) K.M. Newton, "Ibsen's *Ghosts* and the Reception of the Tragic," chapter one of *Modern Literature and the Tragic* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 9-20.
- 27) Otto Reinert, "Peer and Peer: the Gyntian Self," *Scan* 42 (2): 2008, 123-46.
- 28) Patrick Pollard, "Gide and Ibsen: A Symbolist Crossroads," *Modern Language Review* 103 (1): 2008, 46-56.
- 29) Terry Eagleton, "Ibsen and the Nightmare of History," *IS* 8 (1): 2008, 4-12.
- 30) Leonardo F. Lisi, "Allegory, Capital, Modernity: *Peer Gynt* and Ibsen's Modern Breakthrough," *IS* 8 (1): 2008, 43-68.
- 31) Michael Evans, "Credit and Credibility: The Impact of Modern Banking Institutions on *A Doll's House*," *IS* 8 (1): 2008, 29-42.
- 32) Julie Holledge, "Addressing the Global Phenomenon of *A Doll's House*: An Intercultural Intervention," *IS* 8 (1): 2008, 13-28.
- 33) Bjørn Tysdahl, "Ibsen: the Significance of Swear-Words," *IS* 8 (1): 2008, 69-78.
- 34) Kristian Smidt, "Beate Rosmer and Bertha Rochester," *IS* 8 (1): 2008, 79-81.
- 35) Ellen Rees, "Tropological Turns in *Peer Gynt*," *IS* 8 (2): 2008, 150-72.
- 36) Erika Fischer-Lichte, "Interweaving Theatre Cultures in Ibsen Productions," *IS* 8 (2): 2008, 93-111.
- 37) Nilu Kamaluddin, "*A Doll's House* in Asia: Juxtaposition of Tradition and Modernity," *IS* 8 (2): 2008, 112-33.
- 38) Chengzhou He, "Ibsen's Men in Trouble: Masculinity and Norwegian Modernity," *IS* 8 (2): 2008, 134-49.

# HONORARY MEMBERS OF THE IBSEN SOCIETY OF AMERICA

**G. Wilson Knight, 1983**

**Brian Johnston, 1984**

**James Walter McFarlane, 1984**

**Francis Fergusson, 1985**

**Maurice Valency, 1985**

**Stella Adler, 1986**

**Eric Bentley, 1986**

**Eva Le Gallienne, 1987**

**Carl Craycraft, 1987**

**Austin Pendleton, 1988**

**Lloyd Richards, 1988**

**Einar Haugen, 1989**

**Liu Haiping, 1992**

**John Northam, 1992**

**John Bjørnebye, 1993**

**Oliver Sacks, 1995**

**Inga-Stina Ewbank, 2003**

**The**  
**IBSEN**  
**Society of**  
**America**