



IBSEN News and Comment

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Jason Underferth

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Editor's Column

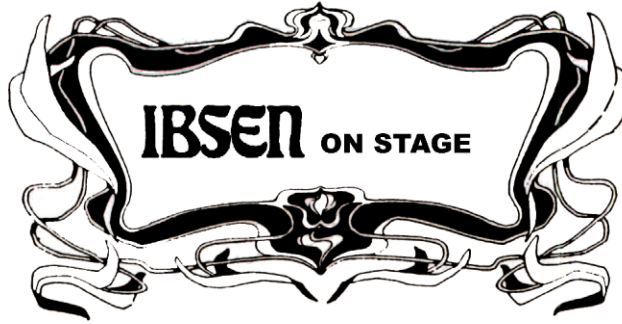
Editor's Note: Please contact me if there is a professional Ibsen production that you would like to review (joan.templeton8@gmail.com).

Ibsen in America: Lanesboro, MN, and Flint, MI

This issue of *Ibsen News and Comment* celebrates the Commonwealth Theatre's Ibsen Festival, the fullest homage to Ibsen in United States theatrical history. *INC* has reviewed many of the Commonwealth's Ibsen productions, and a number of ISA members have delivered lectures at the Ibsen Fest; all of us who have had the experience of visiting Lanesboro and seeing the work of the Commonwealth cherish our visits there. Happily, as I report in my essay in this issue, the Commonwealth has ended its Ibsen Fest, but not its Ibsen productions, and we look forward very much to the next one.

That the Festival took place in a tiny town in America's heartland; that it took on some of Ibsen's most difficult, rarely staged works, like *Brand*, *Rosmersholm*, and *When We Dead Awaken*; and that its enthusiastic audiences came, for the most part, from the surrounding rural area, are proofs both of the Commonwealth's professionalism and of Ibsen's popular success when a theatre knows what it's doing. The ISA congratulates and honors Hal Cropp and his company for their exceptional "American Ibsen."

Another, much briefer American Ibsen story took place last year in Flint, Michigan, when the notorious drinking-water scandal again proved the status of *An Enemy of the People* as the go-to literary work when government officials put monetary interests ahead of the public welfare. In this case, the resemblance was so striking—both in Ibsen's play and in Flint, the offense was covering up a poisoned water supply—that when British directors Purni Morell and Christian Roe, working in the U.S., were inspired to produce a play about the Flint scandal, Morell said: "So why don't we just do *Enemy*?" Morell and Roe partnered with eight U.S. theatre companies on their adaptation, *Public Enemy*, including Flint's McCree Theatre, Detroit's Public Theatre, Baltimore's Center Stage, Berkeley's Repertory Theatre, and Chicago's Goodman, along with the drama department of the University of Michigan/Flint. The free performance, which ran for three nights, June 8-10, 2017, was played in a school gym. Morell cut the play to eighty minutes, turned Ibsen's male Norwegian whistle blower into the African-American Dr. Heather Stockmann, and substituted an actual talkback with the Flint audience for Ibsen's act-four town meeting. The performances attracted wide press attention and spurred productions of the play by the Yale Repertory Theatre, the Goodman, and the Guthrie in their current seasons. With populism on the rise, and with our government officials gutting the EPA and our National Parks and opening our coastal waters to oil drilling, Ibsen's corrupt politicians, ignorant citizens, and infected water supply seem more timely than ever in "the land of the free."



**The Ibsen Festival
Commonweal Theatre, Lanesboro, Minnesota
1998-2017**

**Done. And Quite Well
When We Dead Awaken
Commonweal Theatre, April 14 – June 17, 2017**

This year marks the last of the Commonweal’s twenty consecutive Ibsen Festivals. It has been a remarkable journey through the author’s dramatic canon by this small but stalwart company in rural Minnesota—a series of performances that predictably has had its ups and downs, but rarely has left any doubt about the passionate teamwork behind the enterprise. A total of fourteen plays have been staged, eight of which were original adaptations by Jeffrey Hatcher, and with the impact, according to the most recent issue of the theatre’s newsletter, that “we have logged more than 500 performances, toured throughout the Midwest and seen attendance of more than 40,000.” No small feat by any reasonable measure.

The fact that the cast “closed the book on twenty years of exploring the work of this revolutionary playwright” by staging his final play does not mean that the chronology of Ibsen’s plays set the schedule for Lanesboro’s performances. That the 2016 play was *The League of Youth*, an early specimen, is but one indication of the company’s daring to reach across timelines in its take on Ibsen’s art; and as someone who has only attended the most recent third of the twenty shows—and reviewed half of them for this publication—I, for one, certainly appreciate having witnessed the breadth of Ibsen’s output over such a short time period. This is not to say that it was coincidence that made Commonweal say its “Final Farewell to Henrik Ibsen” by staging *When We Dead Awaken*. The program notes alone suggest otherwise. Craig Johnson, the play’s director, highlights three salient aspects, all enhanced for today’s audiences by Hatcher’s adaptation, as it “remains faithful to Ibsen’s characters, but sharpens the wit and clarifies the underlying themes”: 1) this play takes us, in the wake of Moses and Jesus, to extreme heights and depths of human existence in the world; 2) it shows a protagonist grappling with his identity as an artist for good and ill; and 3) it interlaces these themes with the desire and despair of the human heart. Appealing directly to Commonweal’s audience, the program goes on to translate these dimensions into topics of conversation: How do we experience activities that consume us the way Ibsen’s protagonist is consumed by his craft? How do we personally experience “mountain climbing,” which seems to be the one obsession all of this play’s characters share? And finally, have we been inspired by other

people the way Ibsen's artist was inspired by his muse, and if so, has this inspiration stayed with us? Clearly, this is meant to be an Ibsen for "the present age," as Kierkegaard might have put it, that Craig Johnson and his cast wish to extract from this final play, "one of his shortest . . . rarely produced . . . often regarded as slight and opaque, perhaps evidence of the playwright's failing powers," as the author "suffered a series of debilitating strokes" shortly after finishing it, as Johnson mentions in his notes. These are legitimate concerns for someone directing a modern drama to pursue, not simple sales pitches, and one might boil them down to one simple, if wide-ranging question: is our present age truly foregrounded by Ibsen's? That is, does the age of Ibsen remain present to us, and can any staging of his final work be a window onto the way our work (of life) is staged?

The answer may well depend on the eye of the beholder, and to its credit the *Commonweal* admits as much and seeks to comply with potentially divergent responses. As the cited program notes make clear, genuine efforts are made to reach an audience with broad existential concerns. But the show also has another impetus, aimed more exclusively at Ibsen's artistic dilemmas, to which the cast seems especially attuned; in the director's words about Ibsen's protagonist Rubek, his "aria on the obsessive nature of the artist's life hits uncomfortably close to home for many of us working on the show."

The question then becomes how well the Lanesboro performance achieves its different objectives. As with earlier *Commonweal* productions, a fair verdict is hard to reach. As much as the bridge-building ambition deserves credit, the outcome is undeniably shaky. The common denominator for the existential and artistic agendas is a kind of 'existential logic' that compromises both the existential and

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logical dimensions. That Hatcher's adaptation may have mitigated some deficiencies but aggravated others comes as small surprise, as the incoherence issues from Ibsen's play itself; at least some of the critics who deemed it "slight and opaque" had this fault line in mind. On the other hand, the merciless probing of the art-life conflict in *When We Dead Awaken* has long put the play above ill repute in critical opinion overall, for example, in Hans Heiberg's *Henrik Ibsen*, which saw publication fifty years ago. Here we find Ibsen's early production of narrowly rebellious idealism, masked as principle, coming out later in broad daylight as proud individualism, before his final plays reveal how this social outing undermines its own idealism. As relativism usurps its place, the critical judgment that had been integral to the previous phases of Ibsen's art turns inward and deems art detrimental to life. Far from offering visions of a better life, fantasy and imagination end up as delusions, and the artist guilty of heartless seduction. Self-destruction becomes art's only redeeming quality, better late than never, enabling the artist and his muse to awaken from their living death so they can at least die for real!

As hard as it is to connect such a mortally charged ground zero of art and existence to down-to-earth experiences of ordinary humans, its lure to modernism's vanguard is obvious. One who at an early age proved eager to push Ibsen's late 19th-century envelope into

the new century was the eighteen-year-old James Joyce in his lengthy, eulogizing review of Ibsen's last play for *Fortnightly Review*, April 1, 1900, followed by a letter in which he—in Norwegian—humbly thanks Ibsen for appreciating the review, which includes this telling passage: "Ibsen's plays do not depend for their interest on the action, or on the incidents. Even the characters, faultlessly drawn though they be, are not the first things in his plays. But the naked drama—either the perception of a great truth, or the opening up of a great question, or a great conflict which is almost independent of the conflicting actors, and has been and is of far-reaching importance—that is what primarily rivets our attention." What with dramatic action and incidents so downgraded—and depersonalized to the extent they even occur—how much stronger could modernist doctrine emphasize art itself as the true protagonist? This is the tipping point where Ibsen's craft is seen reaching for the mountain top and inviting an avalanche, all in one gesture—to the delight of some and the dismay of others in 20th and 21st-century audiences.

In Hatcher's adaptation, intricacies that may have muddled but also enriched the artistic scheme in Ibsen's text have been simplified for clarity. Instead of the original three acts unfolding over two days in locations specific to each act, Hatcher fasts-forwards in one "act" and one explicit setting, "A mountain spa resort in Norway, 1914," which by subdivision is limited to three scenes and two natural settings, "On the Mountain, The Next Day," and "A Precipice, Near Dawn." The cast of characters has been scaled down as well; for instance, neither bear-killer Ulfheim's servant Lars, nor the spa's inspector appears, leaving us with five actors to enact the tightened storyline: Sculptor Arnold Rubek is in limbo. He has his masterpiece, "The Resurrection" behind him,

and his entire life and four-year marriage to the much younger Maia are vanishing as well. She had come from nowhere to the famous older

In Hatcher's adaptation, intricacies that may have muddled but also enriched the artistic scheme in Ibsen's text have been simplified for clarity.

artist, not driven by any interest in art, but by the hope that he might show her life at its peak; instead, he proved all-consumed by his art, especially his masterpiece, which he had crafted by hacking his model Irene's soul into his marble. Both sacrificed themselves on his artistic altar, yet both were deprived of their "planned parenthood" by the way the sculptor transformed the initial statue, displacing Irene from its center and incorporating himself, as the artist rather than the human being. Human art, one way or another, comes about at the cost of its creators' humanity. All that Irene and Rubek have in common is their loss of life—certified by the dire shadows that follow them, each in its own way—and the desire to reclaim what they lost, which they manage to do only to lose it definitively. Meanwhile Maia escapes her lifeless husband and his prison-house of art to briefly ascend with rough-riding Ulfheim to the glorious heights from which she was barred by Rubek and his possessions. Yet for all the ascendancy, her new union is not made in heaven, either, and soon descent, literally and figuratively, follows the brief climax, and Maia and Ulfheim fade away, so that the play's long-awaited calamity can take center stage and end Ibsen's vision of art's trajectory in a spectacular way. The ultimate creator and

his muse are as deadly united as they are separated. With her shadow, The Sister of Mercy, screaming Irene's name in vain, Irene and Rubek disappear for good in the avalanche, and Maia's song of freedom adds perfect harm to this final injury. Her numbing repetition of the beautiful lyrics epitomizes the play's notion of a vacuous idealism going down for good.

What this plot summary suggests is indeed the play's rather plotless modernistic fabric, a claim backed by various cognate tropes. Unearthly silence signifies an empty life. When Rubek (ignoring Maia) says, "Talking about nothing, low, meaningless. It was that quiet that told me we'd crossed the border, that we were home," her response only corroborates his claim: "you're restless, you despise people, you despise life, you're splendid." And when he responds to her dream that he would take her "to the top of the highest mountain" and show her "all the glories of the world" by saying, "I told you that too? Figure of speech, Maia," he delivers a prototype of empty transcendence, as late symbolist critics would use the term.

Irene's nickname, "The Stranger," fits the bill, and so does her self-image of "a still life," one of several signs of vitalism's living death, another being Rubek's spiritual incarceration in a coffin to which she alone has the key. Yet the meaning of her own words is beyond her reach; they merely transmit inspiration for Rubek the

artist to decode. He, in turn, refrains from personally touching the transmitter, as he believes true life is conspicuous by its absence, like the life he and his model have sacrificed in splendid isolation to secure its resurrection in art.

In a modernistic sense, Irene's and Rubek's ambition to bring this absence back into presence does come true, but only momentarily, and to make the absence tangible; life is gained as a loss. As Rubek's muse, Irene inspired him at the expense of her life; and as the artist, he saved her soul by detaching it from her body to endow it with a subtler form of its own. It is the irreversible nature of this depersonalization that Rubek and Irene come to appreciate in the very

moment they realize that their attempt at reversing it is costing them their lives. Modernist art is the creation of an objective correlative, as when Maia "scornfully laugh[s] ... Always the artist" and Rubek replies "*Objective*, at least." Burning life's bridges—

including the bridge to memory—is art's way of forming this correlative. Bracketing the body for the sake of the spirit's new life, or sacrificing one's self for one's artistic creation, is merely a corollary to the same tenet and leaves a figure like Rubek as an artist and nothing else, and Irene as merely a means to his artistic end, with the two of them sharing the self-sacrificial plight. Liberating the human through art imprisons the artist in the process as images of life override life itself and wrap it in cosmic



Jason Underferth

whiteness.

This staple of modernistic creeds is extracted from Hatcher's adaptation of Ibsen's more full-fledged agenda. Still, many twenty-first century theatergoers likely have deemed even the curtailed form cumbersome, or alternatively, old hat. Such reactions are slightly unfair, for both Hal Cropp as Rubek and Adrienne Sweeney as Irene are seasoned performers who did not degrade their playbook's more highfalutin moments. Yet both they and their younger counterparts—Elisabeth Dunn as Maia, Eric Lee as Ulfheim, and Megan Hanks as The Sister of Mercy—privileged the play's more direct appeal to sensory perceptions, which began with the art nouveau mountain prop background for the opening scene and its resonance with Irene's living death, and ended with the cacophony of thunder and lightning ominously fueling the horrendous atmosphere of the avalanche that will engulf the protagonists. Like an ironic/iconic vignette, a distant photo of Rubek and Irene as a couple neatly framed the harmony that was to be, yet not to be. This final little prop encapsulated how these living dead were awakened for just a moment before disappearing for good.

In the opening of the second scene, the blandness of Maia and Rubek's interaction owes much of its significance and entertainment value to the characters' positions and clothing. Whether sexually stretched out on the ground or just sporting her informal attire and straw hat, Maia displays a light-headed mood, whereas Rubek in his upper-bourgeois, reddish-brown suit stands completely decoupled from her sentiments. When later he embarks on his painfully self-revealing aria about the plight of the artist, the incongruence between the spouses is most visible in Maia's listening expression of distress, especially when he elaborates his

dependence on Irene, whose imminent entrance is now manifestly awaited. When Irene does enter, through the auditorium, moving toward the stage, she talks, then falls silent. She then begins swinging a knife at Rubek, while he, somewhat guilt-ridden and reluctant, reveals his revisions of their initial sculpture child.

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Approaching him from behind, she claims he is a coward for displacing her from "their" creation's center. His word "episode" for the whole shared enterprise makes her especially distraught—until she returns the favor with sarcastic effect, making him the vulnerable one: they both unwittingly have spoken the inconvenient truth that artistic creation turns all involved into episodes, or displaceable means to a higher end.

This second scene turns both visually and laudably dramatic as contrasts justifiably proliferate. Rubek and Irene are peacefully, even idyllically, conversing on the shoreline of their bluish lake, a long and narrowly winding carpet. In the background of the auditorium, on a balcony level, Maia is heard singing her freedom song, and sarcasm is once again in the air as Rubek cries out to her and Ulfheim, "Bad luck to you! May your hunting end in disaster!" After which The Sister of Mercy enters and winds the water carpet or river cloth around her arm.

A whiter cloth, symbolic of snow on the mountain, marks the opening of the final

scene, and musical echoes are also heard while Ulfheim and Maia, in hunting outfits, teasingly wrestle near the abyss: a hint of a visual sledgehammer before Rubek and Irene follow them “up there” into the dangerously windy wasteland. Life and art’s coexistence is coming to its dramatic end. While the slightly horned Ulfheim and horny Maia are on the downturn, Rubek and Irene, the dreamless man and the female figure that turned white after he had finished modeling her, are on the updraft, toward the ultimate whiteness, by which all distinctions, the ones between ups and downs included, will be definitively erased. Indeed, as Maia ends her freedom

song, the same white avalanche that ends the life of her husband and Irene makes *When We Dead Awaken* slowly fade into black.

Such a moment of ultimate curtain is a high bar for any small provincial theater to clear. Did the Commonweal in Lanesboro manage it in 2017? Hard to tell, as I said earlier, and reasonable people may disagree about the answer. But setting the bar so high—and by no means failing to clear it—to my mind does honor to both the institution and its twenty years of service to Ibsen’s legacy.

Poul Houe
University of Minnesota

Twenty Years of Ibsen: The Commonweal’s Ibsen Festival, 1998-2017

Editor’s Note: Another form of this essay appeared in the Fall, 2017 issue of *Scandinavian Review*, the magazine of the American-Scandinavian Foundation.

The greatest homage to Ibsen in United States theatrical history came to an end when, after twenty years, the Commonweal announced that its 2017 Ibsen Festival would be its last. Over the years, the Festival has presented fourteen of Ibsen’s dramas: *Brand*, *Peer Gynt*, *The League of Youth*, *Pillars of Society*, *A Doll’s House*, *Ghosts*, *An Enemy of the People*, *The Wild Duck*, *Rosmersholm*, *The Lady from the Sea*, *Hedda Gabler*, *The Master Builder*, *John Gabriel Borkman*, and *When We Dead Awaken*. Six of the plays—*A Doll’s House*, *Ghosts*, *An Enemy of the People*, *Hedda Gabler*, *The Master Builder*, and *When We Dead Awaken*—were given two different productions.

The Commonweal’s Ibsen Festival has been striking not only in the depth of its commitment—twenty straight years of Ibsen—but in its professional rigor. While *A Doll’s House*, *An Enemy of the People*, *Hedda*

The Commonweal’s Ibsen Festival has been striking not only in the depth of its commitment—twenty straight years of Ibsen—but in its professional rigor.

Gabler, *Peer Gynt*, and, to a lesser extent, *The Wild Duck* and *Ghosts*, have become staples of the Western theatrical repertory, this is not the case with the rarely staged plays *The League of Youth*, Ibsen’s early experiment in prose, the massive verse play *Brand*, and the complex *Rosmersholm*, *The Lady from the Sea*, *The Master Builder*, and *When We Dead Awaken*. That a theatre in the rural American Midwest has staged Ibsen for twenty years is an interesting phenomenon; that it has

succeeded in its productions of the more difficult Ibsen as well as the popular Ibsen is a lesson for regional theatres everywhere. The Commonwealth's staging of Ibsen is proof of what Bernard Shaw told the London producers of the 1890s who refused to stage Ibsen on the grounds that the public wanted only entertainment; "nonsense," Shaw told them; there are plenty of "ordinary cultivated people" who would go to see Ibsen if they could, even a play "as grimly serious as *Brand*."

The Ibsen Festival was born in 1998, when the civic-minded Arts Council of Lanesboro (population 755), wanting to encourage winter visitors, asked the Commonwealth to add a winter season to its summer one. Lying one hundred twenty miles south of Minneapolis-St. Paul, Lanesboro is the gateway to the scenic Root River biking trail; by 1998, it had become a popular summer tourist destination, offering bread and breakfasts, an inn, cafes and diners, a fine restaurant, two art galleries, and, of course, the Commonwealth's summer theatre. Founded in 1989, the Commonwealth had caught on—in its first season it offered two plays, and by 1998, it was offering five—and the company was interested in expanding. It was also interested in performing Ibsen. Hal Cropp, the Commonwealth's Executive Director, later explained to an interviewer for *American Theatre* that the Arts Council's suggestion of adding a winter season seemed to provide a good "frame of reference" for adding an emphasis on Ibsen, and the

company decided to create an Ibsen Festival that would serve as a week-end opening to

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the new season. The company made an initial five-year commitment to the Festival, with the goal of selling twenty-five seats for each performance.

C r o p p chose *Ghosts* for the first Festival, which took place in February, 1998. The production aroused media interest, the box office was encouraging, and the goal of twenty-five seats proved too



Hedda Gabler, 1999

Commonwealth Theatre

modest. Cropp followed *Ghosts* with equally successful performances of *Hedda Gabler* in 1999 and *The Lady from the Sea* in 2000. By 2001, when the company performed *An Enemy of the People*, the Festival's success had encouraged the company to take its Ibsen productions on tour, and a biennial schedule was begun for communities in the upper Midwest. The next year, 2002, the Commonwealth produced *A Doll House*, and in 2004, Cropp was able to tell the interviewer for *American Theatre*, six years into the Festival, that the Ibsen experiment "has been reaffirming." Indeed, in the prior year, 2003, two thousand people, two and a half times the population of Lanesboro, had come to

see one of Ibsen's most complex plays, *The Master Builder*. The new winter season and its Ibsen Festival were bringing new visitors to Lanesboro, not only to the Commonweal, but to Lanesboro's merchants, art gallery owners, cafes, and bed and breakfasts.

In 2007, the Commonweal celebrated the Festival's ten-year existence with a second production of *Ghosts*, which the company afterwards took on tour. Cropp explained his choice of play to an interviewer for Minneapolis' Guthrie Theater, one of the tour venues: "*Ghosts* was the first Ibsen we mounted in 1998. Having worked on his plays for a decade, the time seemed right to go back and explore what we'd learned with



Peer Gynt, 2008

Commonweal Theatre

this piece, which resonates with historical import. It was the play that cemented Ibsen's reputation as the father of modern drama. . . . And it's one of his most accessible plays for a modern audience trying to come to grips with the central question that runs through his work: 'Where does the individual's responsibility to being truth to one's self stop and the individual's responsibility to the society, people around them, start?'"

At the beginning of the Festival, the Ibsen production was the sole event, but gradually, the Commonweal added other offerings, and local shops and organizations also held events, mostly related to Norwegian

culture. By 2004, the seventh "Ibsen Fest," as it was now popularly known, included, from the Commonweal, slide shows on Ibsen and on Norway and a lecture on Ibsen, and, from the town of Lanesboro, a concert of Norwegian folk music and a Norwegian crafts workshop. In 2007, Cropp explained to the Guthrie Theater interviewer: "We use the opening of our Ibsen production annually as the focal point for a weekend-long celebration of Scandinavian culture. The weekend allows us to bring to Lanesboro experts on Ibsen to speak of Ibsen's contribution to world culture, as well as Norwegian art exhibits and craftspeople, lectures, and classes—in short, a weekend immersion in Scandinavian culture."

In 2008, Norway honored the Commonweal by making it part of the first group of recipients of the Ibsen International Scholarship, established by the Norwegian parliament the preceding year and administered by the Ibsen Theatre in Skien, Norway, Ibsen's birthplace. The scholarship is awarded to institutions and individuals who are deemed to be important champions of Ibsen; the Commonweal was given the prize for bringing Ibsen to the rural Midwest of the United States. Hal Cropp, the Commonweal's Executive Director, and Adrienne Sweeney,

In 2008, Norway honored the Commonweal by making it part of the first group of recipients of the Ibsen International Scholarship, established by the Norwegian parliament the preceding year.

the Ibsen Festival Co-Ordinator, travelled to Norway to receive the award, where they were the guests of the Norwegian government during a ten-day stay.

Cropp calls the Commonweal production style “representative realism,” which makes no attempt at fourth-wall verisimilitude, but aims for an imaginative staging that, at the same time, respects Ibsen’s texts. From 2010 onward, the Commonweal’s Ibsen productions have been performed in playwright and screen-writer Jeffrey Hatcher’s deft, highly speakable adaptations. After the initial Festival opening, the annual Ibsen performances have run for three weeks before rotating with the second production of the season, becoming part of a markedly electric repertory that includes other classics, e.g., works by Shakespeare, Shaw, and Chekhov, along with staples of American theatre—Williams’s *Streetcar* has been produced twice—and theatrical adaptations of beloved fiction, e.g., *A Christmas Carol*, *Little Women*, and *To Kill A Mockingbird*.

The Commonweal began its life in Lanesboro’s historic theatre, “The Elite,” built in the early 1900s for showing silent films and later remodeled as a theatre. Shut down in the 1960s, it was reopened by the Arts Council in 1984 as the St. Mane, after a beloved Lanesboro Postmaster, Charles St. Mane. The 130-seat house, while charming, was inadequate for a professional theatre company, and, by 1998, the year of the first Ibsen Festival, the theatre had become too small for the Commonweal’s audiences. The company decided not only to launch the new Festival but, at the same time, to begin an ambitious campaign drive for a new theatre. Nine years later, thanks to donations by foundations, corporate donors, local businesses, and seven hundred individuals, the new \$3.5 million Commonweal Theatre

opened on Lanesboro’s main street, on July 7, 2007, with a production of Frederick Knott’s thriller *Wait Until Dark*.

The state-of-the-art Commonweal



Enemy of the People, 2011

Jason Underferth

Theatre has an auditorium of two hundred raked seats, none of which is more than thirty-five feet from the stage. The seats were made for the original mainstage of the Guthrie, which, when it underwent a rebuilding, donated them to the Commonweal. The theatre also contains rehearsal space and a bright lobby. The interior design is the work of Minnesota artist Karl Unnash, who produced a regional theatre out of regional materials: the stone walls evoke the region’s bluffs, the concrete floors recall the building’s former function as a cheese factory, and the toilet stalls have barn doors. The theater features the “Commonweal Stash,” a locally iconic installation that encompasses the foyer and the lobby and includes Unnash’s “found” ceiling sculpture of local objects and detritus of all sorts, his “Donor Pantry” of two hundred fifty Mason jars bearing the names of contributors to the theatre, and his “Diorama Wall,” in which twelve small, recuperated objects embedded in the stone—e.g., a rural mailbox, a bird-house, a watering can—open to reveal tiny dioramas representing sets from Commonweal productions.

The well-named Commonweal

possesses an unusual organizational structure that calls for its members to perform multiple tasks; many work both as actors and as staff, either administrative or theatrical, and sometimes both. Besides his duties as Executive Director of the Commonwealth, Hal Cropp has adapted, directed, and acted in numerous productions in his twenty-six years with the company; his Ibsen parts have included the leading roles of Solness in *The Master Builder*, John Gabriel Borkman, and Rubek in *When We Dead Awaken*. Adrienne Sweeney, a resident company member for seventeen years, has served as the Ibsen Festival Co-ordinator, the Commonwealth's Associate

Artistic Director, and the Director of External Relations; she has also played leading roles in many productions, including Hedda Gabler, Ellen Rentheim (in *John Gabriel Borkman*), and Irene (in *When We Dead Awaken*). Another resident member for

seventeen years, Scott Dixon, serves as the company's Director of Development and has also directed productions, including *An Enemy of the People*, and acted. David Hennessey, in over nineteen seasons with the Commonwealth, has acted in forty-five productions, including *Ghosts*, *Rosmersholm*, and *The League of Youth*, and has also designed costumes for other productions and worked in development.

The Commonwealth serves and is nourished by the community in which it lives, both Lanesboro and the region of southeastern Minnesota and neighboring Iowa. It encourages community volunteers,

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and receives financial support from the state of Minnesota's Arts Board and from private foundations that support Scandinavian culture. It also receives significant aid from the local chapter of "The Sons of Norway" and from dozens of regional businesses. Two-thirds of



The League of Youth, 2016

Jason Underferth

the Commonwealth's annual budget is self-generated, coming from ticket sales—currently, \$115 will buy a season ticket for five performances—and revenues from the Commonwealth's educational programs and courses for high schools, colleges, and "lifelong learning" organizations. The Commonwealth's Board of Directors includes local citizens—a bank president, a building contractor, a restaurant owner, the head of a tour business—as well as several lawyers from the region, a professor of theatre, a freelance director, and, ex-officio, the Executive Director of the Commonwealth.

In 2006, the Ibsen Centennial Year, which marked Ibsen's death in 1906, celebratory events were held around the world, including more than two hundred performances of Ibsen's plays. For its Ibsen Festival that year, the Commonwealth fittingly

chose the last play Ibsen wrote before his final illness and death, *When We Dead Awaken*. This year, 2017, the company selected the same play for its own Ibsen swan song. I recently asked Hal Cropp why the Commonwealth had ended the Festival. Was it because the company felt that it had “done it all,” and there was thus no point in continuing? He replied that after twenty years, it seemed time to think of creating something new, but that Jeffrey Hatcher is eager to do new adaptations of *Hedda Gabler* and *The Wild*

Duck, and that he himself feels “personally committed to trying *Little Eyolf* on stage, as the only late master work we haven’t done.” He also said that the Commonwealth is deeply committed to stage plays that reflect Ibsen’s influence on the drama, both recent works and older ones. Ending the Ibsen Fest, he told me, “doesn’t mean ending our relationship with Ibsen; we’re just giving him a rest.”

Joan Templeton, Editor

A Doll’s House Part 2

By Lucas Hnath

John Golden Theatre, Broadway, April 27—September 24, 2017

Editor’s Note: This review is based on the original cast; on July 23, 2017, three of the four roles were recast: Julie White replaced Laurie Metcalfe as Nora, Stephen McKinley Henderson replaced Chris Cooper as Torvald, and Erin Wilhemi replaced Condola Rashad as Emmy. Jane Houdyshell remained as Anne Marie. The production, with good reviews for both casts, was scheduled to run through January 7, but falling ticket sales forced it to close on September 24.

Surely no play in the modern repertoire has inspired so many sequels as Ibsen’s *A Doll House*. The international attention which the play gained and the open-endedness of the conclusion (striking even among the works of a dramatist who often employed open endings) virtually guaranteed that spectators would try to imagine what would happen to Nora and Torvald and that other writers would attempt to respond to this interest.

Indeed, within a decade a number of such responses appeared. One of the first was a short story by a British author, Walter Besant, who published in 1890 “*The Doll’s House— and After*,” set twenty years after the events in Ibsen’s play and treating Nora, Torvald, and their now adult children. Nora has become a successful, somewhat notorious figure in the literary world by writing novels advocating free love and the abolition of marriage, while

Torvald has sunk into despair and drunkenness. In the climactic scene, Nora happens to pass a crowd, including Torvald and one of their sons, both drunk, gathered around the body of her impoverished daughter, who has drowned herself; at last, Nora realizes the human cost of her emancipation. Within a few weeks, Bernard Shaw responded to this melodramatic fantasy with a short story, “*Still After the Doll’s House: A Sequel to Mr. Walter Besant’s Sequel to Ibsen’s Play*,” which is essentially a dialogue between Nora and Krogstad in which Nora defends and elaborates on her action. Later that same year, the American social reformer Edna D. Cheney published *Nora’s Return: A Sequel to “The Doll’s House” of Henry [sic] Ibsen*, in which the departed Nora devotes herself to work among the sick and impoverished. During a cholera epidemic, she meets Torvald

again, and matured by their experiences since they parted, they decide to reunite on a more solid basis.

The renewed interest in Ibsen's drama during the second wave of feminism beginning in the late 1960s brought with it a renewed interest in sequels to *A Doll House*. Probably the best known of these was the first play by a dramatist who became one of the leading theatre voices in Europe, Elfriede Jelinek. Her *What Happened after Nora Had Left her Husband or Pillars of Societies* (1977) dramatizes Nora's search for freedom crushed by a capitalist society as she moves from factory worker to trophy wife of a rich businessman. A Danish Nora, in Ernst Bruun Olsen's 1969 *Where Did Nora Go? Folk Comedy in Three Acts*, also joins the working class but unites with them to fight against the capitalist masters. Back in Norway, Tomod Skagestad's *Nora Helmer* (1982) has Nora returning home after a single day, realizing that she has no resources to survive alone. She stays apart from Torvald, however, although he, with Krogstad's knowledge, embezzles money from the bank to win her back. She gains revenge by publishing a novel revealing their manipulations and sending Tovald to prison. That same year, Betty Comden and Adolph Green presented *A Doll's Life* on Broadway, the only attempt to create a musical comedy out of Ibsen's work and a notorious failure. In it, Nora, rather like Jelinek's protagonist, falls prey to the capitalist system, first working in a café, and then coming under the control of a lawyer and a shipping magnate.

It is striking that all these sequels fall clearly into two groups; in one, Nora becomes an exploited member of the working class and is driven to revolt or accommodation, and in the other, she achieves fame and recognition, always as a writer of feminist novels. The new Broadway sequel to Ibsen's work, *A Doll's*

House Part 2, which opened on April 27, 2017, as the last Broadway show of the 2016-2017 season, falls so clearly into the latter category that it is difficult to believe that author Lucas Hnath was not inspired at least in part by these sequels, especially by Walter Besant's. In Hnath's version, we jump forward fifteen rather than twenty years, but Nora's situation is much the same; during these years, she has become a well-known and wealthy author of books that reveal what women really want and how men misunderstand and mistreat them. Hnath's Torvald has not become a fallen alcoholic like Besant's, but his life is hollow and unfocussed. He has never come to terms with Nora's departure and has never filed divorce papers. Nora, who has only recently discovered that she is still legally

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married and thus cannot execute contracts on her own, and that she even faces prison for the contracts she has already signed, returns to persuade Torvald to file for divorce. Partly out of a lingering love for her, and partly out of a desire to punish her, Torvald refuses, and it is this conflict that is developed in Hnath's play.

When we enter the theatre, we see two walls of a large empty room, with high white paneled walls and minimal furniture—four chairs and a small table against the wall. There is a single large door in the long wall running across the upstate at a slight angle and another in the shorter wall to the left. By far the most prominent feature is a very large,

suspended sign in block yellow letters, rather suggesting a Brechtian notice, that declares “A DOLL’S HOUSE – PART 2.” Thus, from the outset, we are alerted not only to the derived origin of this production, which of course we already knew, but also to the fact that a certain consciousness of that derivation will haunt the production. The striking minimalist set is the work of Miriam Buether, while David Zinn provides elegant period costumes with just a hint of parody, the perfect note for the production.

The play basically consists of Nora’s confrontation with the other three characters in turn, and this rather formal but by no means contrived arrangement is emphasized by



Brigitte Lacombe

the stage design. Each time we move to a new section of the play, the name of a single character—TORVALD, ANNE MARIE, EMMA, NORA—is projected in large letters on the room walls. The two walls of the room that we do not see are suggested by a triangular extension of the floor out into the audience, and this projected platform serves for each of the characters to use to deliver quasi-monologues that wittily and persuasively outline their position on the various domestic and social issues of the play.

The play begins with an empty stage and after few moments, a knock at the door, a clever opening rewarded by a knowing chuckle from an audience. The old nurse Anne Marie, played by Jane Houdyshell,

who has remained to care for Torvald and raise his and Nora’s children, opens the door to discover an elegantly dressed Nora, played by Laurie Metcalf. Both actresses are among the most beloved on Broadway and are here at the peak of their powers. While they await the arrival of Torvald, they play out an extended and witty scene in which Nora tries in vain to convert the faithful, conservative, sharp-tongued Anne Marie, to her feminist cause and enlist her aid in getting Torvald to approve the divorce.

When Torvald finally arrives, the central section of the play begins, and although Anne Marie is brought in from time to time, this section recapitulates, from a more contemporary

perspective, and with distinct tragicomic undertones, the conflicts brought to light in Ibsen’s final act. Chris Cooper as Torvald did not seem to me to quite be up to the high level set by Metcalf and Houdyshell—there was a bit too much of the suffering victim in him for my taste—but thanks in part to

The play basically consists of Nora’s confrontation with the other three characters in turn, and this rather formal but by no means contrived arrangement is emphasized by the stage design.

its close connection to Ibsen's original, this section did not lose the momentum built by the first. Although Hnath manages to show that there remains a real attraction between Nora and Torvald, he also shows that any sort of reconciliation is impossible, since it would require one or the other to sacrifice an essential part of their self-image. One is from time to time reminded of the playing out of a similar tension in Strindberg.

The next part of the play takes the action in a new and unexpected direction, with the arrival of the Helmers' grown-up daughter Emmy, played by a rising young star in New York, Condola Rashad. Once again there are echoes of Walter Besant's sequel, whose emotional climax is the devastating impact of Nora's absence upon her daughter, but instead of giving way to hopelessness and despair as does Besant's abandoned daughter, Hnath's Emmy, much more in the spirit of Nora herself, draws strength from her position and uses it to build a newer and stronger personality. Ironically, but not surprisingly, her plight has turned her into an articulate champion of precisely those values and norms that Nora has devoted herself to tearing down. Emmy, like Nora, unflinchingly analyses her predicament with devastating clarity. She is thus drawn into the play's central two-person duel and makes of it a cruel triangle, with each member seeking to gain advantage by manipulation of the others, and none willing to compromise their own position.

The last part—NORA—brings us to a conclusion which is surprising, satisfying, and, at the same time, as it should be, unresolved, leaving the central conflict developed by Ibsen even more complex. Torvald makes a highly theatrical return to the scene, his head bleeding from an accident. Indeed, this is almost a parody of a theatrical entrance, and not really necessary, since his injury, from a pushing

match with another man, is not significant, while his other offstage actions are critical. He has bought and read Nora's first published book, which is a thinly disguised account of their marriage from her point of view (Ibsen scholars will be amused by the deft touch of

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making the book one of those small, gilded publications in which the major plays of Ibsen first appeared). Torvald realizes that this book will show him to future ages as a person that he is not, or any rate does not want to be, and he proposes to Nora that they make a new start and create the true marriage which she suggests in the original play. Metcalf beautifully plays Nora's conflicting responses to this change, and in the end she feels she must pursue her own course. Two surprising but perfectly understandable dramatic turns follow. First, Torvald reveals that he has, in fact, as a result of his new insight, filed the divorce papers, which he gives to Nora. Second, Nora, after a moment of relief, tears them apart. She announces that she has realized that she cannot accept being rescued by a man in the terms of a man's world. Once again she leaves, to face perhaps even more serious dangers, but this time with the conviction that she is doing this not only for herself, but for future women who will look to her experience as an inspiration in their ongoing cause.

The sequel most faithful to the original *A Doll House* is surely one like this, which develops the results of Nora's leaving before

an audience that is more theatrically and politically self-conscious than Ibsen's and yet continues to struggle with the issues he brought to light in 1879.

Marvin Carlson
Graduate Center, CUNY

Bluebeard's Dollhouse
Combustible Company

James J. Hill House, Saint Paul, Minnesota, October, 2016

Editor's Note: The author of this account, William Banks, served as dramaturg for the production.

Among the more encouraging developments of our troubled new century has been the emergence of what is arguably a new form of staged theater. In some respects this is entirely natural, as playwrights and directors attempt to find a way forward in a dramatically changed media landscape, increasingly dominated by technologists. That ours is in its essence an Age of Distraction largely goes without saying; one need only look to the particular lexicon of the technologists themselves: “augmented reality,” “environmental storytelling,” “attention tracking.” That such a bewildering media environment constitutes a new kind of threat to the viability of the stage play is obvious not only within the theater itself, but also in our classrooms. Who among us, after all, has not struggled to divert the attention of our students from their screens? To paraphrase Marx in one of his rare lyrical moments, what chance has Ibsen against Rockstar Games?

In the effort to adapt to changing conditions, many directors have found new possibilities in established theatrical concepts, breathing new life into *site-specific*, *immersive* (or *promenade*) theater. Their generous employment of all the ancillary forms made available by our age— film and video, music both recorded and performed, sophisticated lighting and sound effects—

recalls the Wagnerian concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. In crafting this approach, which might be termed the “new immersive theater,” these directors have in effect begun to reclaim for the stage many of those very same technological innovations which, the more bullish of technophiles insist, ought to be sounding the death knell of the stage play itself.

Since the breakthrough 2011 success of Punchdrunk's *Sleep no More*, an immersive reimagining of *Macbeth* staged in a Manhattan warehouse, directors have continued to push the boundaries between the traditional stage play and the video game— see here in particular Rift's interactive adaptation of Kafka's *The Trial* as well as Punchdrunk's own *The Drowned Man*, both staged in London in 2013. Given this international groundswell, it was only a matter of time before Ibsen would receive a similar treatment. To the delight of the theatergoing public of the Twin Cities, such a production was mounted in October of 2016 in the shadowy expanses of Saint Paul's James J. Hill House, an original work entitled *Bluebeard's Dollhouse*, written and directed by Kym Longhi, founder and co-artistic director of the Combustible Company and a senior teaching specialist at the University of Minnesota Department of Theater Arts and Dance.

As its title suggests, *Bluebeard's Dollhouse* is properly understood as an example of “mashup art.”

Bluebeard and A Doll House

In addition to the growing impact of interactive storytelling upon the contemporary theater, directors have also begun to explore the possibilities of another aspect of digital culture. Much of the appeal of *Sleep no More* must be attributed to its gestures toward postmodernist intertextuality (or, as the millennials like to say, the “meta”); critics and attendees were particularly intrigued by its cinematic references. *Bluebeard's Dollhouse* is in this sense qualitatively distinct from its predecessor, for Longhi's production takes its cues from a wholly different corner of contemporary popular culture. As its title suggests, *Bluebeard's Dollhouse* is properly understood as an example of “mashup art,” a form with considerable roots in twentieth-century art history that, as Paul Miller has argued, has only reached its full aesthetic potential in the digital era. In wedding Perrault's tale “Bluebeard” and Ibsen's play *A Doll House*, Longhi has remounted these iconic narratives in the form of the new immersive theater and in so doing, has crafted for the stage the very kind of totalizing experience the Virtual Reality visionaries have long prophesied.

The marriage of *Bluebeard* and *A Doll House* constitutes, at first glance, a rather odd coupling. The former is a late seventeenth-century version of an ancient folk tale, recorded in the idiom of court French and reflective of the social values of the Baroque, while the latter is perhaps the signal example of

the psychological realist drama and reflective of the mores and manners of late nineteenth-century bourgeois Europe. But both stories, from the perspective of the folklorist, are narratives of captivity. They present the tale of a young woman who is imprisoned in a home that is really no home at all and who gradually exhibits a desire, and, ultimately, an existential need, for escape. Both stories hinge upon the threat of discovery, by the male captor, of incriminating evidence that would mean peril for the female captive, in Perrault the bloody key, in Ibsen the fateful letter, both of which figure prominently in *Bluebeard's Dollhouse*. And in both stories, there is the sense of impending doom; in *Bluebeard*, of course, the question is whether the new wife will suffer the fate of her predecessors, and in *A Doll House*, more subtly, Dr. Rank's impending death from syphilis broods over the third act.

There is, of course, an obstacle to the “mashing up” of the two stories: the difference between the two villains. Bluebeard is the material of childhood nightmares and the most menacing of fictional serial killers. A man of immense wealth, his happiness is prevented by his physical disfigurement, namely his blue beard, which “made him so frightfully ugly that all the women and girls ran away from him.” In one of the seemingly insoluble textual questions so often present in recorded oral tales, however, we are also informed that Bluebeard had in fact married several times in the past, each of his wives disappearing without a trace. In spite of this disquieting fact, Bluebeard wins a local lady, and the newly wedded couple settle in his vast, mysterious castle. When he is called away, he leaves his wife a master key so that she may explore the castle's treasure-laden chambers, but there is an interdiction: a small closet is not to be entered under any circumstances, and doing

so will invoke Bluebeard's wrath. Naturally, the young woman is unable to resist, and upon entering the chamber she discovers the corpses of Bluebeard's previous wives. In panic she attempts to cover her tracks, only to discover that the master key is now stained in blood that cannot be washed clean. Upon her husband's return, she reluctantly hands over the incriminating key, the receipt of which provokes Bluebeard's murderous rage, and he informs her that she must die. In desperation, she begs a brief reprieve to say her final prayers, in the hope that her brothers, who had planned to visit that day, might arrive in time to rescue her. Brandishing his cutlass, Bluebeard repeatedly roars his demand that she return to face her execution; on the third occasion she concedes, but her brothers arrive and she is saved.

Of course, the "villain" in *A Doll House* is not the husband Torvald, but the blackmailer Krogstad (who, not coincidentally, does not appear in Longhi's production). Even more importantly, Torvald himself, the model of sober and seemingly harmless bourgeois mediocrity, belies everything the nineteenth-century century spectator and we ourselves would associate with "villainy." Yes, he demeans and patronizes his wife, and yes, even more disturbingly, he fails her at the moment of truth. But while he is a coward and a bit of an oaf, serial killer he certainly is not. And yet there is indeed in Torvald a certain *degree* of the menace of Bluebeard when he reacts to Krogstad's letter. Much like the heroine of "Bluebeard," Nora, who knows that the fatal letter, Ibsen's bloody key, is in the mailbox, engages in a desperate delaying ploy, asking Dr. Rank to play the piano so that she can rehearse her tarantella, giving a performance so desperate that Torvald remarks that it is almost as though she were dancing "as if her life were at stake." Like Clod Hans, a

beloved figure of Nordic folklore, Torvald has revealed his ability to hint at the truth without at all understanding it, although his inadvertent truth telling only begins to hint at the degree of Nora's spiritual torment. For of

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course, for Nora, her life—her marriage to a beloved husband whose life she herself has saved—is at stake. And Nora's worst fears are confirmed. When he reads the letter, Torvald breaks out into a self-serving, threatening tirade in which he berates and denounces his wife and announces the end of their marriage; of course, she will remain in the household to quell possible rumors, but she will have no further contact with her children. In other words, Nora will be a powerless prisoner in Torvald's home. In Longhi's staging of the tarantella scene, which portrays the unfolding action from the perspective of Nora's frantic, disordered mind, the merged figures of Torvald/Bluebeard (the male figure in many of the scenes is often portrayed as a composite of the two) and of a desperate Nora circle one another in a parody of a bourgeois dance lesson that becomes ever more violent. Gradually the murderousness of Bluebeard's character takes over, and the scene concludes in a frantic and harrowing chase of beast after prey.

In some sense, then, *Bluebeard's Dollhouse* considers the possibility that there may very well be a measure of the ruthlessness of Bluebeard within Torvald, and yet the production also seems to pose the inverse question: could there not as well be

in Bluebeard at least some small degree of Torvald's weak, somewhat pathetic nature? Perrault's rendering of 1697 is of course only one of many variants circulating at the time, in France and elsewhere, in which the Bluebeard figure emerges as a figure more pathetic than cruel. And even in Perrault, Bluebeard's physical grotesqueness and his lonely state, locked away, as he is, amidst his gold and silver plates, his embroidered furnishings, his gilded carriages, inspire some pity.

The Production

Longhi's production took place in a Gilded Age mansion, the James J. Hill House, completed in 1891, on the eastern end of Saint Paul's magnificent Summit Avenue, overlooking the Mississippi (just a stone's throw from the rather more modest childhood home of another neighborhood luminary, Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald.) Since

1978, the imposing five-story red stone mansion has been a property of the Minnesota Historical Society; Longhi was granted access to the first three floors for the production. The ground floor is largely devoted to spaces of display; *Bluebeard's Dollhouse* makes use of the grand staircase located just beyond the main entrance, the impressive two-story gallery to the east, and the attached drawing room. The more intimate "tableau" scenes are set in the smaller rooms of the second and third floors, which housed the family and servants.

The performance can loosely be divided into three distinct segments. The opening

action, which involves most of the cast of eleven as well as the full audience of up to forty spectators, begins on the ground-floor grand stair case, after which the audience is led through the hallway for additional scenes in the gallery and the drawing room. While the opening (as well as concluding) action more closely resemble the traditional stage play, it is in the middle segment that *Bluebeard's Dollhouse* reveals its novelty. Twice the audience is divided into six small groups, each of which views a series of brief set pieces that are perhaps best described as *tableaux vivants avec mouvement*. In the first series, cast members distribute an antique key

to each spectator, attached to which is a card containing a randomized viewing sequence, e.g., 3-2-6-4-1-5. The groups are then formed and each is led to the first room in the sequence. The transitions between the simultaneously performed tableaux are marked by the

sounding of a gong, after which a cast member then leads the group to the next room. Upon conclusion of the first "key sequence," the full audience reconvenes for a larger scale scene, at the end of which letters containing the viewing sequence for the second series are distributed. The process then repeats itself, after which the entire audience reconvenes atop the grand staircase and is then led back through the gallery toward the ground-floor grand staircase, where the concluding action takes place.

Understandably, attendees were most impressed by the complexity of the



Hill House

Mike Neuharth

choreography. In mapping the placement of the scenes as well as the intricate movements of cast and audience, Longhi in fact imparted a degree of the literal to the central metaphor of Ibsen’s masterwork, making extensive use of architectural blueprints and representative figurines. Given the considerable physical limitations imposed by the staging, in which six (and in the second sequence, five) scenes are performed simultaneously in separate rooms, Longhi produced a novel solution, effectively stripping the source texts down to their essentials; only the figures of Bluebeard, Nora and Torvald are listed as characters. But Longhi diffuses the characters into multiple aspects; Bluebeard and Torvald appear as both themselves and, as has been noted, in merged iterations, while Nora is portrayed in four distinct variants, as child, lover, mother, and crone.



Opening Action

Mike Neuharth

Longhi has described her production as “something akin to a haunted house, but the haunting is inside the characters” themselves; the house itself, recalling the thinking of Bachelard, functions as a kind of map of Nora’s embattled psyche. Longhi has also described the production as a kind of murder mystery, albeit the nature of the crime is perhaps better qualified by a Strindbergian term, *sjælemord* [soul murder]: “Multiple Noras haunt rooms and hallways enacting Nora’s choices, each one embodying critical moments throughout the play . . . Bluebeard’s forbidden chamber filled with murdered wives will transform into a chamber of living dolls—a room of Noras—

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each one masked in a doll’s fixed visage, each one striving to either reconcile themselves to their mask, to escape their situation (unmask) or to imprison or rescue the others. This fairytale murder mystery asks the question, “Who killed all those Noras?” The role of the spectator in the performance inevitably resembles that of the detective, as we are witnesses to a series of incidents in the life of Nora, some

of them deceptively quotidian and others momentarily liminal, in no defined order. The four distinct iterations of Nora interact freely with one another as well as with the male characters. This “non-linear murder mystery” should at times overwhelm the spectator, yet slowly, gradually, a concrete sense of the play’s fragmentary plot and its central themes begins to emerge.

As has been indicated, one of the constituent elements of the new immersive theater is the generous deployment of the auxiliary art forms available to the twenty-first century director; in the eleven tableaux presented here, Longhi is deeply occupied



Drowning

Mike Neuharth

with the possibilities in merging projected moving images with the actual human body. Two of the tableaux are particularly effective in achieving this. In the first or “key sequence” of tableaux, Georges Méliès’ haunting silent film *Barbe-bleue* is projected against the walls, its luminous imagery spilling across the body of a haggard and increasingly paranoid Torvald fumbling with his briefcase, the same that later spills open, revealing the letters containing the viewing sequence of the second series. A second tableau, entitled “Drowning,” also in the key sequence, is equally effective. An original video recording (by James Peitzman) is cast upon the back wall of a servant’s quarters, in front of which a deeply distressed Nora Lover is found sprawled across a mattress, encased within a bed sheet and attended to by an increasingly concerned Nora Crone. The video begins with an aerial view of lake water, from the depths of which emerges a female figure, initially serene but gradually more and more anguished as she confronts the possibility of death by drowning. The equally harrowing spasms of Nora Lover closely mimic those of the woman on video as she struggles to come to terms with her own impending reckoning; the effect of psychic drowning is simulated by Nora Crone, who encloses Nora Lover within the bed sheet that captures the virtual image of a drowned Nora.

Many if not most of the tableaux serve to invoke in the spectator a sense of discomfort and ill ease; in Scandinavian terms, *Bluebeard’s Dollhouse* is a decidedly *uhyggelig* experience. And this is doubly so, for the performance invokes not only a vague unsettling feeling but also the more specific concept of the Freudian uncanny, in that the informed spectator recognizes lines from both the tale and the play, often in disturbing new contexts. It is a testament to Longhi’s sense of restraint that the production does not resort to the tactics of shock theater, the ultra-violence of, say, the Grand Guignol. The physical violence depicted in the play is, by contemporary standards and even those of a more innocent age, relatively muted. Instead it is the often painfully awkward proximity of the cast members to the audience that produces the dramatic effect, for we are privy to the most private moments between Nora and Torvald, inducing a profound sense of *intrusiveness* and *eavesdropping*. This unsettling effect is further reinforced by the synchrony of the tableaux, since often the



Training

Mike Neuharth

spectator can hear the events taking place in other rooms. A particularly powerful example occurs in the first series of tableaux. Seated in Mrs. Hill’s private quarters, the audience witnesses a wordless gestural dance of manners— Longhi is an accomplished mime,

a former student of the great Marceau— of an aged Nora and Torvald “training” one another in proper gendered bourgeois comportment, all the while overhearing the dialogue of the scene being simultaneously performed in the adjoining master bedroom, the crisis between wife and husband. In the “Tea Party” tableau, similarly, we are “served” pretend beverages by a precocious Nora Child, and in the transitional movements between tableaux, individual spectators are addressed directly by the cast members guiding us along: “Do you believe in magic?” “Did I ever love him?”

Longhi has indicated that she did not set out to craft a new kind of theater appropriate for an age of technologically driven interactivity. Her roots in immersive, physical theater stretch back decades, as a longtime member (1993-2006) of the seminal MB Adaptors Company under the hand of Kari Margolis, herself a disciple of Étienne Decroux. Yet at the same time it is difficult not to view the play through the prism of recent techno-cultural

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developments, for if anything, the play serves to remind us of the still considerable inbuilt limitations of the new technology. As the advocates of the new academic sub-discipline of ludology have ably documented, video

game designers have for some time looked to age old forms of storytelling in the effort to impart at least a measure of the age-old pleasures of the stage play, the novel and the film to their often staggeringly compelling visual displays. In some respects the new immersive theater constitutes precisely the inverse development, as artists of the new immersive theater attempt to mobilize the new insights gathered from the VR visionaries in the attempt to reinvigorate the stage play. And if the experience of *Bluebeard’s Dollhouse* leaves us with any firm sentiment, it is that the technologists continue to lag behind the humanists in this ever increasingly complex game of mutual appropriation. No measure of pixelated holographic projection, no matter how sophisticated and no matter how rooted in narrative, can begin to provide the spectator with even an approximation of the immediacy and the intimacy of the new immersive theater. *Bluebeard’s Dollhouse* demands our undivided attention, from the frantic opening exposition all the way to the resounding slam of the Hill House’s oaken front door. Perhaps the technologists will gradually close this gap and one day provide us with a reasonably satisfying version of the Starship Enterprise’s Holodeck. Until then we can hope that we are in the capable hands of visionaries like Longhi and her admirable Combustible Company, who will continue to innovate as they probe the relationship between literature and performance.

William Banks
University of Minnesota

Une Maison de Poupée

Paris, Lucernaire, December 7, 2016—March 12, 2017
Avignon, Off Festival, Théâtre de l'Oulle, July 7—30, 2017

This very popular revival was the brainchild of director and actor Philippe Person, the Lucernaire's artistic director from 2009 to 2015 and the founder and head of its drama school. The Lucernaire, a cultural center in Montparnasse, was born in the tumult of 1968 and then forced to find another home because of the construction of the Tour Montparnasse in 1975. It relocated in a former factory located between the Boulevard Montparnasse and the Boulevard Raspail, at 53, Notre Dame des Champs, an important residential and commercial street in Paris' 6th arrondissement. Since then, the Lucernaire has been a thriving part of left-bank cultural life, with three small auditoriums for contemporary films and three for theatre, both contemporary and classic, including the Red and Black theatres, each with one hundred eighteen seats, and the Paradise, which seats fifty. The center also runs a popular series of events for children, a photography gallery, a shop, and a small bar and cafe-restaurant.

Person's aim in his minimalist production, staged in the intimate Paradise space, was to distill Ibsen's play to its essence. He pared Régis Boyer's standard French translation to ninety minutes of playing time, with no intermission. There are no children,

no maid, no Anne Marie, and no Dr. Rank, leaving the play's four essential characters: wife Nora, husband Torvald, confidante Mrs. Linde, and blackmailer Krogstad. Vincent Blot's stark single set, which is meant, as several reviewers noted, to suggest a *huis clos* (as in Sartre's famous *No Exit*), is theatrically clever and psychologically suggestive; it consists of a large table and two chairs, where the conversations between Nora and the other characters mostly take place, Ibsen's famous Christmas tree, and, at back center stage, a bay window with frosted glass through which we see, at the beginning, falling snow, and, then, later on, the shadows of people who approach the letter box or the adjoining front door. From the beginning,



www.projectionniste.net
Lucernaire Theatre, Paris

Alexander Dujardin's brilliant (in both senses) lighting ranges from bright, even cruel, to less bright, and suggests both illumination and menace. The time is vaguely contemporary. Nora's tarentella is a frenzied charleston and her spangled party dress suggests the 1920s, but she leaves the doll house in a tailored black pantsuit that could be worn today. At the beginning of the action, Torvald wears a twentieth-century banker's pin-striped suit and tie, but after the masquerade party until play's end, he is in jeans and tee-shirt. In

the blackouts between the scenes, we hear contemporary American popular music, with obvious ties to the action, like Lou Reed's *Perfect Day*, the Doors' *The End*, and Jimi Hendrix's *Foxy Lady*.

All four actors gave very fine performances. Nathalie Lucas played Christine Linde both simply and fully as a genuinely concerned friend, and Philippe



Pierre Francois

Calvario seemed wholly natural as Torvald, a well-meaning, somewhat obtuse man of his time who is both befuddled and terribly hurt by his wife's decision. Florence Le Corre, who received well-deserved accolades in the French press, had no difficulty playing Nora's transformation from a role-playing child wife to a woman who decides that she must leave the doll house behind. But the revelation was Philippe Person's Krogstad, one of Ibsen's most interesting secondary characters. The tall, elegant Person emphasized the character's intelligence and cunning, and instead of a weak loser, Krogstad emerged as a calm, intensely determined blackmailer (in French, the term for blackmailer is *maître chanteur*, and the notion of mastery clearly underlay

The more important omission, to be sure, is Dr. Rank, but even his absence did no real damage to the play.

Person's interpretation). But while Person's Krogstad is perfectly adept at manipulating his targets, he is also a man who loves and needs Christine.

The main critical question regarding the production was, of course, the absence of the two main supporting characters. While the Helmer children and the maid are often omitted in productions of *A Doll House*, Anne Marie and Dr. Rank are not. I was surprised to find that I didn't miss them. Anne Marie's function as the woman who, in the place of child-wife Nora, is raising Nora's children, turns out to be peripheral; Nora's own explanation to Torvald of her incompetence as a mother—how she was brought up as a doll in her father's house and then transferred to his, where she continued to live as a doll—is enough. The more important omission, to be sure, is Dr. Rank, but even his absence did no real damage to the play. A couple of critics insisted on Dr. Rank's importance both as Nora's confidante and as the representative of death-in-life, which, as one reviewer argued, is crucial to Nora's decision to attempt to live a life rather than remain a doll object. In fact, in the famous silk-stocking scene, Nora receives not an existential but a simple,

Person's minimalist production was both powerful in its own right and a fascinating exhibition of the force of Ibsen's dramaturgy.

although important insight: in manipulating Dr. Rank, she perceives that she has used her sexuality as a tool to get what she wanted from her husband. But even without this self-revelation, the long quarrel between husband and wife that constitutes the famous crisis scene is explanation enough to account for Nora's leaving. This does not mean that Dr. Rank is superfluous; his relation with Nora and the pathos both of his love for her and of his illness deepen Ibsen's play. But it does

mean that the spine of *A Doll House*—Nora's transformation—is sufficiently developed in the dialogue of the principle characters, with the honesty of the Christine Linde/Krogstad relation emphasizing the inauthenticity of the Nora/Torvald one. Person's minimalist production was both powerful in its own right and a fascinating exhibition of the force of Ibsen's dramaturgy. For an Ibsen scholar, it was a revelation.

***A Doll's House*, adapted by Thornton Wilder**
Performed in tandem with *The Father*, adapted by David Greig
Theatre for a New Audience
Brooklyn, Polansky Shakespeare Center, May 22—June 12, 2016

Over the years, the Theatre for a New Audience, founded by Artistic Director Jeffrey Horowitz in 1979, has established itself as New York City's primary Off-Broadway company for classic theatre. The company's productions have won Drama Desk, Lucille Lortel, Obie, and Tony awards. Known especially for its excellent productions of Shakespeare—perhaps the finest was the 2007 production of *The Merchant of Venice*, with F. Murray Abraham as Shylock—the TFANA was the



David Sundberg, Esto

first American company invited to bring a Shakespeare production to the Royal Shakespeare Company in England. Horowitz and his staff have also worked tirelessly with the New York Public School System to introduce Shakespeare to the city's schools. In 1913, after

thirty-four years of performing in leased spaces in Off Broadway and Off-Off Broadway, including school gymnasiums, and, once, a YMCA, Horowitz obtained a permanent home for his company at 262 Ashland Place, Brooklyn. The handsome building, located in the borough's downtown arts district, very near BAM and the Mark Morris Dance Group, is called the Polansky Shakespeare Center, after a gift from the Polansky Foundation. It includes an attractive foyer, with a box office and bar serving drinks and snacks, offices for the directors and staff, rehearsal space, and a

**For those of us who have been
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state-of-the art 299-seat theatre, where every seat in a surround section on two sides of the playing space is a good one. For those of us who have been avid followers of TFANA in its various venues over the years, the Polansky Center seems like theatrical heaven.

The TFANA's revival of *A Doll House* was directed by the company's Assistant Artistic Director, Arin Arbus. One of the most interesting aspects of the production was Arbus' choice of the English translation: Thornton Wilder's virtually unknown version for a successful 1937 Broadway production at the Morosco starring the well-known actress Ruth Gordon. (Martha Graham choreographed Gordon's tarentella; Dennis King was the Torvald; Sam Jaffe played Krogstad). Wilder wrote the script as a favor both for Gordon, whom he adored, and for another close friend, the Broadway wunderkind producer-director Jeb Harris, who refused to use William Archer's dated 1889 version, which remained the standard translation, and who asked Wilder to give him a more contemporary, actor-friendly text. Not knowing Norwegian, Wilder worked with translations in German (which is far closer to Norwegian than English), with the goal of producing a script that would be faithful to Ibsen's original but would have, he hoped, "a twentieth-century feeling." Wilder was reluctant to publish his translation on the grounds that since Harris made changes in it, it was no longer fully his own, and the TFANA's production of *A*

Arbus said she chose Wilder's version among other available twentieth-century versions because she found it actable and fresh.

Doll's House is only the second production of the play to use the script. (As a result of the TFANA production, the first printed edition of the script was issued last year by the Theatre Communications Group.)

Arbus said she chose Wilder's version among other available twentieth-century versions because she found it actable and fresh, and while it must have seemed fresher in 1937 than now, Wilder's indication on the title page that his work is "an acting version" remains viable. The phrasing seemed occasionally a bit archaic, but this actually worked well since Arbus' production was decidedly period, with lovely costumes and set by, respectively, Susan Hilferty and Riccardo Hernandez. Arbus explained in an interview that she believed that Ibsen's plays need period productions because ideas of sexual relationships and marriage have changed so drastically since the late nineteenth century that staging the plays in the present would be false. This is an interesting critical position which is antithetical to the "director's theatre" now in vogue in Europe, most especially in Germany, in which the historical milieu of the play (not to mention the original text) is considered irrelevant to whatever purposes the director may have.

Arbus' excellent cast was a joy to watch. Maggie Lacey gave a finely nuanced performance of Ibsen's iconic, fascinating Nora, proud of her secret work to save her oblivious husband's life, and, at the same time, both acquiescing to and making use of his view of her as a nitwit. Lacey's desperation when she is cornered verges on hysteria, and then, as she realizes, when her husband repudiates her, the nature of their relation, the scales fall from her eyes and the thinking woman she hid in the doll begins to emerge. The riveting actor John Douglas Thompson, whose roles as Othello (2009)

Arbus, Lacey, and Thompson make us understand and care about the couple's story and bring Ibsen's groundbreaking play alive.

and *Macbeth* (2011), in productions directed by Arbus, made him New York's star actor of classic theatre, seemed perhaps an odd choice for Torvald, but Thompson inhabited wholly the role of the naive, patronizing husband-who-knows-best. The dramatic effect of a production of Ibsen's play largely depends on the actors' ability to establish the strong bond between husband and wife and then to show it shattering as Nora comes to grasp the shameful nature of her lie with Torvald. Arbus, Lacey, and Thompson make us understand and care about the couple's story and bring Ibsen's groundbreaking play alive. In the supporting cast, the British actor Nigel



Gerry Goodstein

Gore's steady, witty, vulnerable Dr. Rank was deeply moving, the best Rank I have ever seen, Jesse Perez was very fine as the angry yet needy Krogstad, and Linda Powell was warm and convincing as Nora's friend Mrs. Linde, horrified by the dishonesty of the Helmer marriage. Marcus Doshi's sensitive

lighting ran the gamut from candlelight to the harsh light of day at play's end, which Arbus restages in a tour de force. In place of the lone abandoned husband at center stage, the Helmers' three young children, awakened by their parents' argument, have come into the living room, where their father—confused, shocked, and, above all, bereft—must face them alone in a cold dawn.

In the other half of Arbus' twin bill, Strindberg's *The Father* (the plays were performed on alternate nights), Lacey plays Strindberg's housewife and Thompson is the father-husband. Arbus' decision to perform *A Doll's House* and *The Father* in tandem is a wonderful example of the notion of something that seems so obvious that we wonder why it took so long to appear. Strindberg's play was partly inspired by his hatred of Ibsen's, which he fumed against obsessively in the press and parodied in *Married*, a collection of short stories. In opposition to Nora's vision of marriage as partnership and mutual respect, here, Strindberg shows us, what marriage is really like: a vicious power struggle between the sexes. In his house, the Captain says, there is a war going on, and he himself will turn out to be the loser as he is gradually driven mad by what he believes to be the connivance of women: his wife, his old nurse, and his young daughter. In the Captain, the magnetic Thompson has a Shakespearean "great role" that he can sink his teeth into: the audience watches transfixed as he gradually breaks down, little by little, losing his lucidity and common sense, ranting against Eve and all her sex in what is perhaps Strindberg's greatest tirade, and finally rolling on the floor as his old nurse soothingly wraps him in a straight-jacket. Careful not to fall into the role of a femme fatale, Lacey holds her own, playing Laura as a woman who wrongly but honestly believes that she and her daughter are threatened by

a madman and determined to subdue him. The acting of Lacey and Thompson in the great scene in which they speak movingly of their lost love and how marriage destroyed it was remarkable. Remarkable, too, was the acting of Laurie Kennedy (the Anne Marie of Arbus' *Doll's House*) as the Nurse, the epitome of Strindberg's notion of the power of the feminine, the softness and sweetness that overpower the masculine will. Scene designer Hernandez's animal trophies were wonderful details of a handsome and workable set, Hilferty's period costumes were again perfect, and Doshi's lighting, as in *A Doll's House*, brilliantly ran the gamut from candlelight to flame.

Arbus' twin productions, which retain the original time period and use modern but faithful adaptations—the version of *The Father* is a deft script by the Scottish playwright and director David Greig—reflect the director's

Arbus' great talent as a director of classic texts is her ability to make them come alive in the present in inventive recreations of the originals.

respectful love for classic theatre. At the same time, Arbus' keenly intelligent direction puts to rest any fears that her straightforward approach might result in a stale revival. Arbus' great talent as a director of classic texts is her ability to make them come alive in the present in inventive recreations of the originals. We truly hope that she will return to Ibsen (and Strindberg, too) in further performances.

Joan Templeton, Editor



Survey of Articles on Ibsen: 2015, 2016

Editor's Note: This survey reviews articles in English on Ibsen in refereed journals; edited conference proceedings may also be reviewed or noted. The following abbreviations are used: *EJSS* (*European Journal of Scandinavian Studies*); *IS* (*Ibsen Studies*), *MD* (*Modern Drama*), *Nordlit* (*Nordlit: Tidsskrift i litteratur og kultur*), *SS* (*Scandinavian Studies*).

Anders Skare Malvik's "The Advent of Noo-Politics in Ibsen's Problem Plays" (1), in *IS*, volume 1, is a fine addition to the growing list of studies exemplifying what Malvik calls "the media historical approach to Ibsen." His particular aim is to show how Ibsen's plays "respond to the rise of the newspaper industry in late 19th-century bourgeois culture." Historically, he argues, Ibsen's texts dramatize the power of what French sociologist Gabriel Tarde (1843-1904) called "the publics"—printing, the railroad, and the telegraph—and theoretically, they anticipate what Maurizio Lazzarato would later call (unfortunately, in English) "noo-politics" (the word *nous*, Malvik explains, is Greek for *intellect*), which, in Lazzarato's rather hazy and repetitive definition, "involves above all attention, and is aimed at the control of memory and its virtual power. The modulation of memory would thus be the most important function of noo-politics." More simply put, media influence and even determine the ideas of their consumers. Malvik offers a fascinating discussion of the importance of the press in Ibsen's own "mediation" of the bourgeois parlor and the world outside it: the influence of Mrs. Alving's books in *Ghosts*, the menace of the press in *Rosmersholm*, and, most importantly, the importance of the *People's Courier* in *An Enemy of the People*. Malvik reads the conflict in *Enemy* not as a battle of truth against lies, but a power struggle over "access to the public." Stockmann loses because he has no platform; no media, no power. While most analyses of *Enemy* emphasize the famous act-four town meeting, Malvik's focuses on the third-act newspaper office, in which "Ibsen's text highlights the workings of the press as a noo-political power apparatus." Malvik sees in the

"books, periodicals, and newspapers" strewn on the table an "intra-textual reference" to Mrs. Alving's publications; both insist on "the communication between newsrooms and living rooms," an "infrastructure capable of

Malvik offers a fascinating discussion of the importance of the press in Ibsen's own "mediation" of the bourgeois parlor and the world outside it.

modulating social memory." Malvik's goal of demonstrating the power of the press as it helps to doom Dr. Stockmann's mission makes him claim that since Dr. Stockmann's "only audience is a crowd of four, it matters little what [moral authority] it holds." But it does matter, and not only because Dr. Stockmann is right, but because he plans to found a radical school, for which he needs twelve disciples, and who knows what might come of that enterprise? But Malvik has written an original, very penetrating essay on Ibsen as an analyst of "the psychology of the public" as it is formed by the media, which is, he reminds us, a very timely subject indeed.

Oliva Noble Gunn's "The Master Builder's Tragic Quotidian" (2), the second essay in *IS*, volume 1, considers the subject of Ibsen's possible affinities with Maeterlinck. In order to boost his symbolist "static drama," Maeterlinck claimed that Ibsen had already written this kind of play himself in *The Master Builder*. Maeterlinck's contention was bolstered by Lugné-Poe, who, during his early symbolist period at the Oeuvre, produced *Rosmersholm* and *The Master Builder* as Maeterlinckean mood studies (which so alarmed Ibsen that he sent Herman Bang to Paris to show Lugné the error of his ways).

Some scholars, such as Kirsten Shepherd-Barr, have taken Maeterlinck's claim seriously, while others, like myself, have argued that it is spurious. Gunn undertakes a close reading of *The Master Builder* in order to settle the question of what she calls the "odd couple" of early modern drama. Citing the Belgian scholar Paul Gorceix, she distinguishes between Maeterlinck's notion of fatality as the fruit of powerful, unknown "forces," and Ibsen's notion that fatality is "in us," and is thus psychological rather than metaphysical. She also refutes Maeterlinck's claim that Ibsen uses "second-degree dialogue," Maeterlinck's vague, "mysterious" speech that has no real-world referents; the exalted dialogue between Solness and Hilde leads to the very real crisis of the play, Solness' death, as Hilda "grooms"

Gunn undertakes a close reading of *The Master Builder* in order to settle the question of what she calls the "odd couple" of early modern drama.

him for his fatal climb. Maeterlinck's "tragic quotidian" is "located in a hyper-real and hyper-banal existence accessible only by a contemplative, half-conscious experience," but if there is a tragic quotidian for Ibsen, it lies in "the desire to perpetuate an identity, vision, or master plan at all costs." Gunn's thoughtful essay, full of insights about the work of both writers, demonstrates that Maeterlinck's self-serving claim that Ibsen was his symbolist brother is simply wrong.

The final essay in volume one of *IS* (2015), Thor Holt's "Ibsen's Firebrand: The Dead Child and Theodicy in *Brand*" (3), seems muddled. It takes the familiar tactic that its

subject is an essential one that has somehow escaped the notice of Ibsen scholars. But while theodicy—the notion that God cannot be held responsible for evil—is of course present in *Brand*, first as part of the protagonist's general dogmatism, and later in his interpretation of his son's death as just punishment for Brand's mother's sins, it is not important in the play's action. Another oddity of the essay is that the author treats *Brand* as an example of "disaster literature," like Kleist's "The Earthquake in Chile" or Camus's *The Plague*, but *Brand*, although it includes disaster, is no more about it than the similarly apocalyptic *When We Dead Awaken*. It is also puzzling to read that Ibsen "desacralizes theodicy" by showing "the social order behind disasters." Rousseau's declaration to Voltaire in their famous quarrel about the Lisbon earthquake—that it was bad housing construction, not "nature," that was responsible for the damage—is, after all, problematic. Moreover, the author views Ibsen as an active participant "in the theodicy debate" and seems surprised that he does not seem to take sides; "strikingly," he writes, *Brand* does not offer "the radically negative answer to theodicy, in the Voltaireian sense." But why should one expect it to? *Brand* is not a treatise. And surely any essay on the representation of God in *Brand* should not ignore, as this one does, the play's last line: "He is *Deus Caritatis!*"

Problems in applying systematic theory to literature also surface in the first essay in the second volume of the 2015 *IS*, "Little Eyolf—A Sartrean Reading" (4). The author, Lior Levy, presents Sartre's work as a "rich conceptual framework" and a "new context" for reading *Little Eyolf*. She also wants to show, following the currently fashionable theory, that *Little Eyolf* is "meta-theatrical," claiming that the roles are played by actors "who play at being other than themselves." Following this logic,

of course, all plays are meta-theatrical, and thus Levy's point is meaningless. But Levy's reading of *Little Eyolf* through a Sartrean lens is interesting and valuable, providing a fine guide to Rita Allmers' transformation from a selfish, irresponsible sybarite to a caring, responsible woman. Levy is also excellent on the complicated inauthenticity of the relation between Allmers and Asta. But she does not escape the danger of applying theory to complex literature; Rita's demand that Alfred love her madly seems much more than "masochistic objectification," and the Allmers "cannot handle Eyolf's presence" not only because, in Sartrean terms, they "are attempting to escape their subjectivity," but because they feel guilty for his lameness. This is an example of Levy's repeated claims that the characters do and think things because they are illustrating

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some Sartrean theory, e.g., the change that Rita undergoes is not the fruit of her epiphany that the poor boys "are little Eyolfs, too," but "the realization that subjectivity calls for constant negotiation between transcendence and facticity." In passages like this, Levy is no longer using Sartre to read Ibsen, but Ibsen to read Sartre. But Levy is right to correct Toril Moi's sentimental reading of the play's ending—"if we have the courage to face reality. . . the only viable response is love"—on the grounds that commitment to others is very different from love, and she writes very well on the complexity and the difficulty of Ibsen's famously problematic ending.

So much has been written on Ibsen's plays that we rarely encounter a reading

of them that is wholly original, and this is what we have in the second essay of volume two of *IS*. Mitsuya Mori's unappetizingly entitled but fascinating "The Structure of the Interpersonal Relationships in Ibsen's *Little Eyolf*: A Japanese Perspective" (5). The essay argues that the psychological concept of *amae*, peculiar to Japanese culture, underlies the relation between Alfred, Rita, and Eyolf. *Amae* is the Japanese word, in the child-parent relation, for a young child's taking his parents' love for granted, a kind of self-satisfied dependency. The Japanese conception of *tannin*—which means a person unrelated to oneself, or a "stranger"—is the other notion central to Mori's reading. Eyolf's father Alfred both resents and feels guilty for Eyolf's lameness, which is part of what causes him to sexually reject his wife Rita; the other reason is his unacknowledged sexual love for his half-sister Asta. Eyolf's mother, the obsessive Rita, lives only for her sexual relation with Alfred and neglects her son. Of course, the rejected Eyolf could not feel *amae* toward his parents, and it was natural that he was strongly attracted to another *fremmed* person, the mysterious Rat Wife. After Eyolf's death, both parents realize that for them, he was only "*en liten fremmed gut*," a little stranger boy, a *tannin*. At the end of the play, Rita and Alfred complete the symbolic pattern when they "resolve to take care of the *fremmed* (*tannin*) boys in the place of Eyolf." In doing

Mori's essay is a wonderful, moving reading of *Little Eyolf*.

so, they both honor Eyolf and transcend the notion of *tannin* itself. Throughout, Mori does not impose the Japanese conceptions on Ibsen's text but rather shows how Ibsen's text

embodies the conceptions. Mori's essay is a wonderful, moving reading of *Little Eyolf*.

If Hub Zwart's title "The Call from Afar: A Heideggerian-Lacanian Rereading of Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea*" (6) seems to indicate yet another doctrinaire application of theory to an Ibsen play, this impression quickly changes as the reader is led through what turns out to be a brilliant, occasionally difficult, critical romp. Zwart, a professor of philosophy, does not read Ibsen's plays as theory disguised as literature. His straightforward *modus vivendi* is: here is Ellida Wangel's problem; here is a Freudian reading of it, here is a Heideggerian reading, and here is a Lacanian reading. Zwart's exercise is as fun to read as it is erudite because he knows that he is indulging in a kind of game and relishes doing it and because his writing is highly knowledgeable, deft, and witty. The play is first read as staged therapy: Ellida, a Freudian neurotic, an amphibian dwelling in two worlds, is ultimately cured of her attraction to the sea by her husband's love, and *ego* replaces *id*. But while this reading of the play makes for a satisfactory parable, Zwart notes, it seems too pat. Enter Heidegger. Here, Ellida is divided subject, and Heidegger's existential "voice of conscience," which goes against the grain of traditional morality, calls Ellida to what she

Zwart's exercise is as fun to read as it is erudite because he knows that he is indulging in a kind of game and relishes doing it.

might become if she left her carp pond to heed the call of primordial nature and join the Norway of the authentic and the sublime, the country of the Wagnerian Stranger. But Ellida

chooses traditional morality, and thus the play is best read, Zwart claims, from a Lacanian perspective, midway between those of Freud and Heidegger. Here, Ellida has a task—to come to terms with the cause of her unhappy desire—and when she has accomplished this, she is able to make a decision. That she opts for her "predetermined, standardized role" instead of the call of her "inner fish" is an active choice. My forcibly short paraphrase does an injustice to Zwart's learned, complex, and valuable *tour de force*.

I now turn to articles on Ibsen in other journals. In *MD*, Matthew Yde, who proved his totalitarian *bona fides* in his fine, well-reviewed book *Bernard Shaw and Totalitarianism* (Palgrave, 2013), turns his attention to Ibsen in "Messianism and the Third Kingdom: Intimations of the 20th Century in Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*" (7). Yde begins with *Emperor and Galilean*, which he finds "positively uncanny, almost prophetic in its intimation of the imminent millenarian century," and then considers *Enemy* as "a recapitulation of the main idea [of the earlier play] in contemporary dress," with a messianic figure resuming the battle lost by Julian. Yde considers Dr. Stockmann in the light of what Francis Galton would call, in 1883, a year after *Enemy* was published, "eugenics," and, drawing on Steven Sage's book *Ibsen and Hitler* (Carroll and Graf, 2006), he notes that Stockmann's notorious analogy between people and animals and his claim that the stupid and brutish should be exterminated anticipates both Hitler's and Stalin's Utopian theories of cleansing the world of Jews, parasitic land owners, and other "undesirables." Yde is very good on the ambivalence of Dr. Stockmann's character, who, although he is right to fight the corrupt majority, is also a "latter-day Julian" who resembles the "messianic leaders of history

What is new and valuable in Yde's essay in his reading of *An Enemy of the People* in the context of 20th-century millenarianism.

rushing into a fiery apocalypse.” Many other commentators have, of course, discussed the ambivalence of Dr. Stockmann's character; what is new and valuable in Yde's essay in his reading of *An Enemy of the People* in the context of 20th-century millenarianism.

The other essay on Ibsen in the 2015 *MD* is Olivia Gunn's incisive “Adaptation, Fidelity, and the ‘Reek’ of Aesthetic Ideology: Susan Sontag's *Lady from the Sea*” (8). Sontag explained that she rewrote Ibsen's play, which “reeks with the playwright's ambivalence toward his subject,” because it was “profoundly flawed;” Ibsen contradicted the “strongest part” of his original conception because his mermaid Ellida would have left her marriage to return to the sea with her sea husband. Sontag's claim is wrongheaded; an essential component of the tradition of the “havfru,” the “mermaid,” is her longing to belong to the land. Sontag, who calls her play both “a hypothetical Ur-text” [which ignores the Ur materials] and an “excavation and reconstruction of Ibsen's play,” has her own Ellida stay with her land husband, too, as Ibsen's does, but this decision makes her so miserable that she longs to “smash his head with a flat rock.” Gunn shows convincingly that Sontag deeply misread *The Lady from the Sea*, which is not a romantic version of “the folkloric truth portraying the sea creature's radical alienation from the conventionally human,” but an exploration of a human woman's dilemma in a “counter-romantic and realist drama.” Sontag, Gunn points out,

criticizes Ibsen for doing precisely what he intended to: depict the nature of, including the limits of, the bourgeois world. Gunn is sympathetic to Sontag's dislike of Ibsen's conventional ending, but to object to it on the grounds that it contradicts the nature of what it dramatizes is, she rightfully insists, to mistake Ibsen's purposes. This does not mean, she notes, that Sontag's own play is bad, and although this is true, the play, in fact, *is* bad. Sontag has a tin ear for speech, and her fragmented, abrupt dialogue is cliché-ridden. Gunn notes that Sontag was “fixing” Ibsen's play for a production by Robert Wilson (who dislikes words), and that her goal was, in

Sontag, Gunn points out, criticizes Ibsen for doing precisely what he intended to: depict the nature of, including the limits of, the bourgeois world.

Sontag's words, to provide “ideal material” for Wilson's “poetic, anti-realistic sensitivity and visionary talents.” This is unintentionally ironic, Gunn comments, because it embodies the false notion that “realism” cannot be poetic (and, I would add, because Sontag's own text is decidedly unpoetic.)

Pavel Knápek's “Love, Guilt, Death and Art in *When We Dead Awaken*” (9) appeared in the 2015 *European Journal of Scandinavian Studies* (which succeeded *Skandinavistik* in 2010), edited by Klaus Bödl, Lutz Rühling, and Henk van der Liet. The essay does not meet even the minimum of scholarly standards. Composed of plot summary, paraphrase, and naïve textual readings, the essay claims to offer a new reading of *When We Dead Awaken* as a play about “atonement,” but in fact it

transforms the normative reading of the play into a sentimental cliché: “*When We Dead Awaken* ends in a sacrifice to prove love.” The simplistic analysis runs from unintended understatement—Rubek’s abandonment of Irene results “in her no longer being able to dedicate herself romantically to another man”—to gross misreadings—Allmers’ decision to devote himself to his son in *Little Eyolf* is regarded as morally exemplary. Allmers’ action is compared to the decision of Rubek and Irene to die together after they realize that “Irene’s life project was motherhood,” which “had a better chance at success than Rubek’s intended influence on people with the help of his idealizing art.” *When We Dead Awaken* reveals Ibsen’s “belief in the future of humanity.” *EJSS* claims to be peer reviewed; if this is so, the journal needs to find other readers for its Ibsen submissions.

The proceedings of the 13th International Ibsen Conference, devoted to “Ibsen and World Drama(s)” (10), held at the University of Tromsø, Norway’s “University of the Arctic,” in 2012, are available in the 2015 *Nordlit*, the university’s “open access” journal (available free on the internet), which publishes articles on “a wide spectrum of literary, cultural and historical subjects.” Forty-six papers, some of which have been published in print elsewhere, make up the proceedings of 530 pages.

2016

It is very troubling to find in a journal of record—*SS*—Jenny Björklund’s “Playing with Pistols: Female Masculinity in Henrik Ibsen’s *Hedda Gable*” (11). Björklund claims that she is offering an original analysis of Hedda: “no one has focused specifically on her masculinity and how it relates to the masculinities and femininities by [*sic*] the

other characters in the play.” In fact, one of the main points of Hedda’s many detractors has been that the masculine Hedda is an *exemplum* of that horrid creature, the “unwomanly woman,” in contrast to the feminine, motherly Thea and Aunt Julie. In *Ibsen’s Women*, I defend Hedda’s masculinity, arguing that it her wish to live what Ibsen called “the whole life of a man” that renders Hedda a “deviant

This lapsus is so blatant that one has to suppose that it results from an ignorance of the first tenet of scholarly writing: credit the work of others.

woman” and, ultimately, a hero. Björklund writes that her aim is to add to my reading, and to other readings of Hedda, like Ellen Mortensen’s essay on Hedda’s lesbianism, by establishing Hedda as an example of “female masculinity,” a term coined by critic Judith Halberstam to designate a “kind of masculinity in its own right.” But Björklund neither defines nor explains Halberstam’s queering of masculinity, and in fact her account of the play presents very familiar themes that are offered as new: Hedda (masculine) and Thea (feminine) as contrasting women; Thea’s abundant hair as marker of her femininity; Thea and Aunt Julie as self-sacrificing women in opposition to Hedda as egoist; Hedda’s sexual desire for Thea; Tesman’s femininity and love of domesticity; Hedda’s hatred of her pregnancy; Hedda’s love of her phallic pistols; Hedda’s strong connection to her father; Ibsen’s use of Hedda’s maiden name; Løvborg as a Dionysian figure; Løvborg’s book as his and Thea’s child; Hedda’s sexual

relation with Løvborg; and so forth and so on. Sometimes, the author uses the formula, “Drawing on Norseng,” or “Drawing on Templeton” when in fact she is not “drawing on” but merely repeating. And in paragraph after paragraph, the already established ideas are presented as the author’s. This lapsus is so blatant that one has to suppose that it results from an ignorance of the first tenet of scholarly writing: credit the work of others. Quite apart from what appears to be the author’s misunderstanding of the critical apparatus she has chosen yet abandons, any referee reading the piece who was familiar with the major criticism on *Hedda Gabler* would have recognized its unacknowledged presence here and opposed publication on these grounds alone.

I now turn to the most interesting article of the 2016 vintage, Ellen Rees’ timely, thought-provoking “Dramatizing Biographers: Michael Meyer’s *A Meeting in Rome* and Robert Ferguson’s *Dr. Ibsen’s Ghosts*,” in *MD* (12). Rees analyzes the plays as examples of the relatively new critical field of “biographical theatre,” and what interests her are the ethical implications in fictionalizing the lives of real people. Rees prepares her discussion by questioning Meyer’s reliability as Ibsen’s biographer, pointing to the work of Jon Nygaard, who has shown that Meyer presented distortions of Ibsen’s family’s status in Norway and his father’s financial fall that have now, alas, become standard in the literature. She also cites Astrid Sæther’s complaint that in his account of the relation between Ibsen and Emilie Bardach, Meyer invented an “unhappy love story” to titillate his readers. I have meticulously examined the primary and secondary sources on this subject (in “New Light on the Bardach Diary: Eight Unpublished Letters from Ibsen’s Gossensass Princess” [*SS* 69, 1997]), and I do not find that

Meyer misrepresented the sad, even pathetic episode that scarred Emily Bardach for life. It is Fergusson, actually, who blundered on this subject, claiming in his biography of Ibsen that he had new knowledge of the affair because he had been able to consult Bardach’s diary, which had “turned up in a Paris library.” The document turns out to be Hans Lampl’s *Nova über Henrik Ibsen und sein Alterswerk. Das “Tagebuch” der Emilie Bardach*, an edition of a photocopy, in the National Library, Oslo, of a photocopy in the Royal Library, Copenhagen, of a typescript that Bardach dictated thirty-five years after the Gossensass summer and sent to the *Mercure de France* for publication (the original of this typescript has disappeared from the Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet, in Paris). The diary remains lost.

When Rees gets to her subject, she shines. Both Meyer’s and Fergusson’s plays are very particular examples of “biographical theatre,” she points out, because their authors are also Ibsen’s biographers. Rees argues that this alone lends authority to the plays, endowing them with what the scholar Ursula Canton has called “authenticity,” i.e., the sense, but not necessarily the truth, of authenticity. In a fascinating analysis, Rees shows how Meyer builds on his authority as biographer by inventing a narrator (a rare presence in modern theatre, she notes), who expresses Meyer’s own views and is thus his stand-in; on top of this, Meyer added a third reification of himself by playing the role of the narrator both in the 1991 BBC-Radio 3 version and in the production by the Bristol Express Theatre Company staged in London and at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Rees then shows how, having established his total “discursive control,” Meyer offers doubtful, improbable, or invented “biographical” information about Ibsen, merging it with historical letters. Rees’

analysis exposes Meyer's innocuous little play as self-serving propaganda (my word) for his own views. In contrast, Fergusson's *Dr. Ibsen's Ghosts* is a much simpler animal. Here, the "biographer-character" is not the biographer—Fergusson—but rather Ibsen's first Norwegian biographer, Henrik Jæger, and the play's plot, Rees shows, is composed of deliberately far-fetched or historically impossible embroideries on various accounts of Ibsen and his relation with his illegitimate son, the son's mother—Else Sophie Jensdatter—and Ibsen's wife Suzannah. Fergusson creates a deliberately ahistorical fantasy and makes a butt of the biographer Jæger, who misses the truth under his nose. The countless intertextual references to Ibsen's plays—*A Doll's House*, *Catiline*, *The Master Builder*, *The Wild Duck*—result, to my mind, in a self-serving mashup that is meant to flatter the play's audience—Ibsen scholars, or other people

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familiar enough with Ibsen's work to "get" the references—and give the playwright his (rather cheap) laughs. At the same time, and in contrast to Meyer, who, as Rees shows, attempts to cement his own views of Ibsen's life through "authenticity," Fergusson plays fast and loose with his sources to make, Rees, suggests, "a metacritical commentary on the impossibility of historical accuracy in life writing." This is an original and compelling essay.

I now turn to the 2016 *IS*. In volume

one, Oystein Brekke's "Bonfire of the Vanities: Moral Dynamics in Ibsen's *Brand*" (13) seems initially to address beginning students of literature. It offers a definition of "syllogism," which it follows with the admonition that

Brekke problematizes *Brand* in ways that suggest that he is deeply uncomfortable with the play.

in reading *Brand*, we should not concern ourselves with "what Ibsen is really trying to say" or in identifying *Brand* "as someone we like or dislike." When the author begins his analysis of "the moral dynamics explored by the play," however, his target audience changes to readers who are comfortable with sentences like the following: "If modernity represents, as Rebecca Comay holds, a time in which the world becomes explicit and human beings are made responsible for the constant production of this world, then it is tempting to see *Brand* as a constitutively modern drama." The article is full of such language. And some of its main points seem off the mark; the argument that *Brand*'s choice of his humble pastorate over his grand mission reflects Savonarola's famous bonfire of worldly goods ignores the fact that *Brand*'s mission, however tainted with vanity, was a religious, not a worldly one. Brekke problematizes *Brand* in ways that suggest that he is deeply uncomfortable with the play. *Brand*'s decision to lead his flock in a "desperate exodus" is said to "make no sense"; the march to the "demonic ice church" leads to nothing but "deliberate and dangerous ideality." But this is Ibsen's demonstration, precisely, of what *Brand*'s fanaticism has led to. That *Brand*

displays both “courageous determination” and “gruesome inhumanity” is not puzzling, but is rather central to Ibsen’s fearless, deeply ambiguous examination of perfectionism. What is interesting and new in the article is Brekke’s suggestion that German idealism is a useful lens through which to read Ibsen’s play, and his analysis of Brand as Kant’s revolutionary “new man” is convincing and valuable. But if Hegel’s notion of “abstract interiority” is helpful to understanding Brand’s psychology, we need an explanation of what the phrase means in order to follow Brekke’s argument. The article would have greatly benefitted by helpful criticism and copy editing.

Billy Smart’s very interesting critical study, “‘Nats Go Home’: Modernism, Television and Three BBC Productions of Ibsen (1971-1974)” (14), the second essay in *IS* 2016, tests Troy Kennedy Martin’s claims in his article “Nats [Naturalist plays] Go Home” (published in *Encore*, 1964). Kennedy Martin’s then novel argument, which became trendy, was that realistic television dramas, like the very successful *Marty* (NBC, 1953), which were heavily indebted to Ibsen and Shaw, were inappropriate for television because they were not visual but verbal, relying on narrative and “untelevisual” dialogue, which limited the role of the camera to following the actors around. Kennedy Martin called for “a one hundred percent director’s medium” that rejected plot and made free use of montage, juxtapositions, and heavy editing to produce “modernist” television drama. In fact, as Smart points out, this view of realism is enormously reductive (and it’s no surprise to learn that Kennedy Martin’s own experimental *Diary of a Young Man* [BBC, 1964] was both a popular and critical failure). Smart then painstakingly shows how three BBC-television Ibsen productions—Basil

Coleman’s *The Lady from the Sea*, Waris Hussein’s *Hedda Gabler*, and Allan Bridges’ *The Wild Duck*—problematize and ultimately disprove Kennedy Martin’s claims about the failure of televised realistic theatre; *Hedda Gabler* and *The Wild Duck*, in fact, actually made use of many of the techniques Kennedy Martin himself called for. Smart’s perceptive essay corrects the notion that realism is antithetical to modernism and that its very nature doomed televised versions of Ibsen’s plays.

The last essay in *IS* 2016, volume 1, Daan Vandenhoute’s scrupulous “Dead Awaken? An Empirical Study of Ibsen’s Presence in Contemporary Flemish Theatre” (15) offers a meticulous quantitative record of Ibsen’s reception in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, from 1985 through 2014. The author’s goals are to establish what plays were put on in how many performances, what kind of theatres produced them, and “Ibsen’s status for the contemporary Flemish theater audience.” The numerical data come from the IbsenStage [*sic*] and Flemish Theatre Institute’s data bases, various archives, and theatre websites, and the information on Ibsen’s status comes from surveys of theatre-goers, members of theatre companies and cultural organizations, drama critics, journalists, and teachers and students of drama. Tables from one to six meticulously present the numbers. It’s not surprising to learn that *Hedda Gabler* and *An Enemy of the People* both enjoyed seven performances, followed by *A Doll House*, with six, but I would love to know why *Peer Gynt* received 13, including *Peer!!!*, Compagnie Carlotta’s travelling show for children. This question is, alas, outside of the article’s purview. But what it seeks to do, it does excellently.

The second number of the 2016 *IS* opens with Ståle Dingstad’s bizarre “Ibsen

and the Modern Breakthrough—The Earliest Productions of *The Pillars of Society*, *A Doll's House*, and *Ghosts*” (16). The essay is carelessly written and contains errors, e.g., in Charles Charrington’s English premiere of *A Doll's House*, Charrington played Dr. Rank, not Torvald, and the great French actress was called “Réjane,” not “Réjanes.” But the essential difficulty here is Dingstad’s renegade insistence that Ibsen’s plays were unimportant in the modern breakthrough and that the breakthrough itself might not have taken place, “at least in the way that later traditions dictate.”

According to Dingstad, scholars have grossly misrepresented Ibsen’s early reception; newly available digitized records of newspapers reveal productions that have been ignored, and many early productions were gross misrepresentations of Ibsen’s texts and often received little attention. In Germany, *Pillars of Society*, however popular, was vastly cut, and since there were no other Ibsen productions for the next few years, Dingstad argues, both “during and after the success” of five simultaneous 1978 Berlin productions of *Pillars*, Ibsen was “unknown” in Germany. Just as oddly, Dingstad claims that “many” people believe that *Ghosts* was rejected by theatres in Norway when, in fact, it was widely produced; why Dingstad believes that Ibsen scholars are unaware of the early production history of *Ghosts*, including August Lindberg’s famous successes, is a mystery. Nor does the stage success of *Ghosts* cancel the enormous scandal that occurred earlier when the play was published. And it is well known that early productions of Ibsen’s plays often used pirated versions or versions that were gross misrepresentations, e.g., the notorious German premiere of *A Doll's House* and English playwright Henry Arthur Jones’ famous travesty *Breaking A Butterfly*. But

the fact that producers changed or travestied Ibsen’s plays to make them acceptable to contemporary audiences demonstrates, after all, how radical the plays were. And more accurate translations followed. In London, Mrs. Lord’s *Nora* was followed by *A Doll's House* in William Archer’s translation that was a *succès de scandale*, and the Independent Theatre’s *Ghosts*, also in Archer’s translation, caused the greatest scandal in English theatrical history. These

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productions launched the “new drama” on the English stage. Another important point is that printed editions of Ibsen’s plays were far more responsible for Ibsen’s growing reputation than early stage productions. And the fact that Ibsen was flattered by the attention of monarchs does not mean that his plays did not break with “bourgeois art”; radicals can be as vain as conservatives.

Dingstad’s claim that Ibsen had no importance for the breakthrough ignores Ibsen’s own single-minded devotion to it. Of course it is true that Brandes was not important for Ibsen’s plays—Ibsen needed only himself—but it is also true that Ibsen tirelessly supported Brandes in his battles against the Danish establishment. In fact, Ibsen and Brandes became anti-idealist brothers-in-arms in the war that Ibsen considered “this mortal battle between two epochs.” Brandes should come to Dresden, Ibsen told him, so

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that “we can make our war plans together”—which Brandes did—and Ibsen persuaded his own publisher to take on the Brandes brothers’ periodical *The Nineteenth Century*. Over and over again, both his letters and in his speeches during the Norwegian culture war, Ibsen insisted on his allegiance to modernity—“my book belongs to the future,” he said of *Ghosts*; “I couldn’t stop with *A Doll’s House*; after Nora, I had to create Mrs. Alving.” Dingstad also thoroughly misrepresents Brandes’ view of Ibsen, maintaining that he thought him a “provincial” writer, an opinion in direct opposition to Brandes’ great praise for Ibsen as the voice of modernism. In his “Inaugural Lecture,” Brandes chose Ibsen’s *Brand* as his example of literature that breaks with tradition and puts the present “to shame.” More fully, in *Men of the Modern Breakthrough* Brandes praised Ibsen’s works as the essence of modernism; Ibsen began “waist-deep in the Romantic period,” and as he worked himself out of it, he became more and more modern until “finally he grew to be the most modern of the modern. This is his imperishable glory.”

Dingstad’s new information about early Ibsen productions is welcome, but to deny the essential role of Ibsen’s plays in the modern breakthrough and to suggest that the vastly documented breakthrough itself may not have taken place seems a capricious stance that denies facts and ignores history. Why is it in *Ibsen Studies*?

One must ask the same question about Kyle Koryanta’s “Altering Henrik Ibsen’s

Aura; Jon Fosse’s *Suzannah*” (17), the second article in the *IS* volume, which is repetitive, awkwardly written, and ridden with sentence errors—run-ons and fragments—and grammar mistakes. Its argument about Fosse’s old-fashioned play, which consists of three monologues spoken by an Old, a Middle-Aged, and a Young Suzannah Ibsen, is that it constitutes a “postmodernist ‘anti-crime’ drama” as opposed to a “modernist, crime-fiction novel”; in Fosse’s play, we know who committed the “crime”—burning the “Ibsens’ correspondence”—but we do not know why. In fact, *Suzannah* burned her letters to Ibsen but kept many of his to her, some of which are treasures, and we do know why: she did not want to share them with posterity. More importantly, the subject of Fosse’s play is the whole of the Ibsen marriage, in which the letter burning, hardly a “crime,” is only one incident

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among many that are far more important, i.e., Fosse’s presentation of *Suzannah* as claiming responsibility for Ibsen’s plays, a grotesquely wrongheaded notion that has been duly denounced by Astrid Sæther and other scholars. Koryanta also claims that Fosse meant *Suzannah* as a “critique” both of the retrospective form of Ibsen’s dramaturgy and of the Ibsen marriage, with the purpose of changing Ibsen’s “aura,” which is defined as “a supposed subtle emanation from and enveloping living persons and things. . . the

essence of the individual.” But *Suzannah* is in fact Fosse’s own “retrospective” portrait of the Ibsen marriage, and Ibsen’s “aura” turns out to mean not Ibsen’s “essence” but his reputation; Fosse’s aim, the author writes, was to “challenge and alter” Ibsen’s “high cultural status.” Should we, he asks seriously, “honor a husband who flirted with younger women?” Koryanta defends Fosse’s portrait of Suzannah Ibsen by claiming that Fosse is free to write what he chooses because we know little about her—we know, in fact, a lot—and that Fosse’s play includes “fragmentations” of and “gaps” in the record to signal that it is post-modern, an argument that is highly questionable both on moral and critical grounds.

Like the first two articles in this volume, the final one, Elizabeth Svarstad and Jon Nygaard’s “*A Caprice*—The Summit of Ibsen’s Theatrical Career” (18)—makes an extravagant claim. But with it, the authors offer an important context for looking at Ibsen’s early career that has been neglected: Norwegian theatrical history. By “Ibsen’s theatrical career,” the authors mean his career as manager and director. In 1859-60, Ibsen’s production of *A Caprice*, a vaudeville by Eric Bøgh, at the Norwegian Theatre in Oslo, was a great success. Contemporary critics, however, rebuked Ibsen for offering fodder for the lower classes, an opinion that has stuck, and Svarstad and Nygaard want to show the wrongheadedness of this judgment. First, they point out that making the theatre financially viable was an important part of Ibsen’s job. Secondly, they take pains to show that dance was not, in fact, a form of entertainment for the Norwegian “lower classes,” but rather an integral part of Danish and Norwegian upper-class

culture that Ibsen himself took seriously as a medium of theatre, offering instruction in dance to his actors at the Norwegian Theatre of Bergen and the Norwegian Theatre of Oslo. The authors claim, very oddly, that in *A Caprice*, Ibsen “introduced a revolution in the theatre”; vaudeville, however, and other musical entertainments that included dance were already popular on the 19th-century stage. And Ibsen’s production of his own *The Vikings at Helgeland*, which was a success both financially and critically, seems a far better choice for the “summit” of Ibsen’s theatrical career than *A Caprice*. On the other hand, it is a breath of fresh air to read that Ibsen deserves credit and not criticism for mounting a successful, well-danced entertainment that made money for his hard-pressed theatre. And the authors also show that Ibsen’s staging of *A Caprice* helps us understand his development as a dramatist; the play’s farcical parody of Norwegian nationalism challenged Ibsen’s

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own allegiances, and that he chose to stage such a work signals the disenchantment that would lead to his break with National Romanticism. It is too much to claim that the criticism Ibsen received for *A Caprice* accounts for his depression after the theatre’s bankruptcy, or that no one has offered another explanation. Ibsen’s biographers point to his harsh treatment by the theatre board and the

press, his continual box-office failures, his heavy debts as a new husband and father, and his writer's block. But Svarstad and Nygaard have resurrected a neglected production in Ibsen's theatrical career and given it deserved attention, and they have also insisted on an Ibsen who has been too often neglected: a working man of the theatre in 19th-century Norway.

(1) Anders Skare Malvik, "The Advent of Neo-politics in Ibsen's Problem Plays," *SS* 15 (2015), 1: 3-39.

(2) Olivia Noble Gunn, "The Master Builder's Tragic Quotidian," *SS* 15 (2015), 1: 40-65.

(3) Thor Holt, "Ibsen's Firebrand: the Dead Child and Theodicy in *Brand*," *SS* 15 (2015): 1, 66-98.

(4) Leor Levy, "Little Eyolf—A Sartrean Reading," *SS* 15 (2015): 2, 113-41.

(5) Mitsuya Mori, "The Structure of the Interpersonal Relationships in Ibsen's *Little Eyolf*: A Japanese Perspective," *SS* 15 (2015): 2, 142-71.

(6) Hub Zwart, "The Call from Afar: A Heideggerian-Lacanian Rereading of Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea*," *SS* 15 (2015): 2, 172-202.

(7) Matthew Yde, "Messianism and the Third Kingdom: Intimations of the 20th Century in Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*," *MD* 58 (2015): 2, 155-70.

(8) Olivia Noble Gunn, "Adaptation, Fidelity, and the 'Reek' of Aesthetic Ideology: Susan Sontag's *Lady from the Sea*," *MD* 58 (2015): 1, 46-65.

(9) Pavel Knápek, "Love, Guilt, Death and Art in *When We Dead Awaken*," *EJSS* 45 (2015): 1-15.

(10) Proceedings of the 13th International Ibsen Conference, "Ibsen and World Drama," *Nordlit* [online journal, University of Tromsø], 2015: 1-530.

(11) Jenny Björklund, "Playing with Pistols: Female Masculinity in Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*," *SS* 88 (2016): 1, 1-16.

(12) Ellen Rees, "Dramatizing Biographers: Michael Meyer's *A Meeting in Rome* and Robert Fergusson's *Dr. Ibsen's Ghosts*," *MD* 59 (2016): 1, 75-94.

(13) Oystein Brekke, "Bonfire of the Vanities: Moral Dynamics in Ibsen's *Brand*," *IS* 16 (2016): 1, 1-36.

(14) Billy Smart, "'Nats Go Home': Modernism, Television and Three BBC Productions of Ibsen, (1971-1974)," *IS* 16 (2016): 1, 37-70.

(15) Daan Vanderhaute, "Dead Awaken? An Empirical Study of Ibsen's Presence in Contemporary Flemish Theatre," *IS* 16 (2016): 1, 71-99.

(16) Ståle Dingstad, "Ibsen and the Modern Breakthrough—The Earliest Productions of *The Pillars of Society*, *A Doll's House*, and *Ghosts*," *IS* 16 (2016): 2, 103-40.

(17) Kyle Koryanta, "Altering Henrik Ibsen's Aura: Jon Fosse's *Suzannah*," *IS* 16 (2016): 2, 141-67.

(18) Elizabeth Svarstad and Jon Nygaard, "A *Caprice*: the Summit of Ibsen's Theatrical Career," *IS* 16 (2016): 2, 168-85

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