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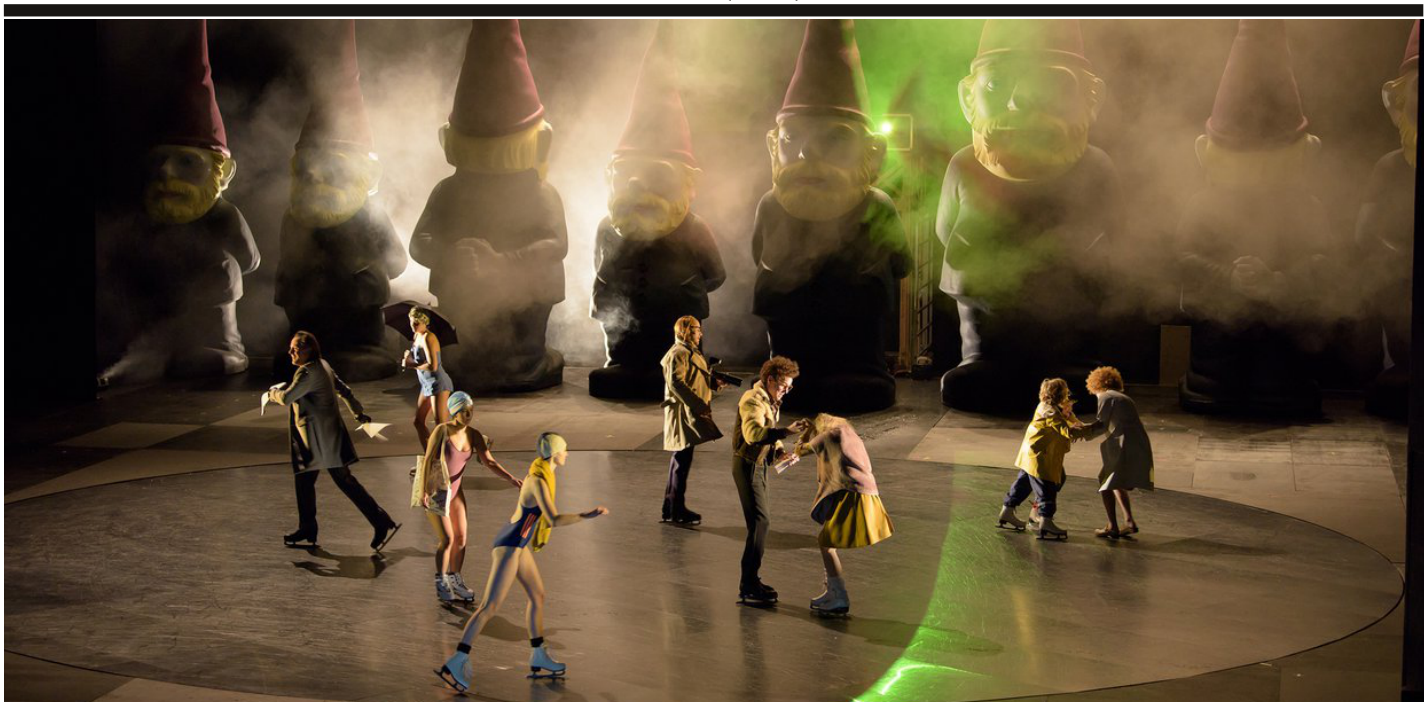

An Enemy of the People, Burgtheatre, Vienna, page 3 Georg Soulek

Established in 1978 Rolf Fjelde, Founder

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Editor's Column

INC in JSTOR; *Enemy*, play du jour; "Other Eyes" at the Ibsen Festival

***Editor's Note*:** If there is a professional Ibsen production that you would like to review, please let me know.

I am very happy to report that JSTOR has invited *INC* to join its extensive archive of journals. President Olivia Gunn, Vice-President Dean Krouk, and I have signed the agreement contract, and I am working with the JSTOR staff to digitize all issues of *INC*, including back issues that have been available only in print, going back to the first issue, in 1980. Work will be completed within the year 2019. I would like to thank Peter Frost, JSTOR's Associate Licensing Editor, and the JSTOR staff in New York and Ann Arbor for their help.

An Enemy of the People continues to make news as the "go to" play of our political era. Last year, I reported on this phenomenon, writing of the joint adaptation by eight theatres performed in a gym in Flint, Michigan, inspired by Flint's infamous poisoned water. The Flint scandal inspired other theatres to stage *Enemy*, including the Guthrie in Minneapolis, and in this issue, Ben Bigelow analyzes what happened to Ibsen's play when it was transformed into an anti-Trump screed to flatter the liberal audience. Similarly, Marvin Carlson reviews the recent *Enemy* of Vienna's Burgtheatre in the context of current European politics; the Austrian audience, far from being flattered, is treated as "a roomful of apathetic ass-lickers" not dissimilar to Ibsen's townspeople, represented as giant garden trolls. And the contrast between the realism of the U.S. production and the post-realism of the European one, including an ice rink and a tsunami—the fruit, of course, of lavish state subsidies—is startling.

The falling price of crude oil caused substantial cuts in the National Theatre's budget and reduced the Ibsen Festival, held biennially in Oslo, from three weeks to twelve days. Runi Sveen, the National Theatre's Artistic Director, said that given this constraint, the Board decided to concentrate on non-Norwegian directors—to have "the other eye" on Ibsen. Olivia Gunn gives us an account of the three most important of these "other" visions. The brilliant Frenchman Stéfan Braunschweig has done fine Ibsen before, and Olivia found his National Theatre production of *The Master Builder* the best she had seen. The up-and-coming Swedish director Sofie Jupither also directed the NT actors in what Olivia reports was a fairly straightforward *Hedda Gabler* with an ending bereft of Brack's famous curtain line. And Dramaten was invited to bring its new production of *Peer Gynt* from Stockholm, adapted and directed by Michael Thalheimer, the famous German re-inventor of the classics. In the 2012 *INC*, Poul Houe reviewed Thalheimer's *Ghosts* at the Royal in Copenhagen, played on a rain-drenched stage, with masked characters, with Oswald raping Regina. Thalheimer's *Peer Gynt*, Olivia reports, also revels in sex and violence, along with copious noise, and contains a marathon performance by Erik Ehn, perched on a pillar throughout most of the performance. Ibsen's plays, as Marvin's and Olivia's reports confirm, continue to inspire the great directors of the world.

Joan Templeton

An Enemy of the People
Burgtheater, Vienna
November 18, 2017—in repertory, 2018

Toward the end of the last century, with a rising public consciousness of ecological threats, Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* was often presented as a cautionary tale about pollution. While this concern has certainly not lessened either in society or in interpretations of the play, more recent productions have often paid more attention to Stockmann's own discovery that he announces in the famous fourth act: that the polluted springs are symbolic of an even deeper problem, that society itself is polluted by the myth of democracy as an ideal form of government. Stockmann's famous pronouncement—the majority, misled by demagogues, opportunists and a corrupt media, is always wrong—has been answered by suggestions that Stockmann's experiences have turned him into a proto-fascist. As the twenty-first century continues, however, and examples of misled majorities multiply, Stockmann's dark conclusions seem to contain an uncomfortable element of truth.

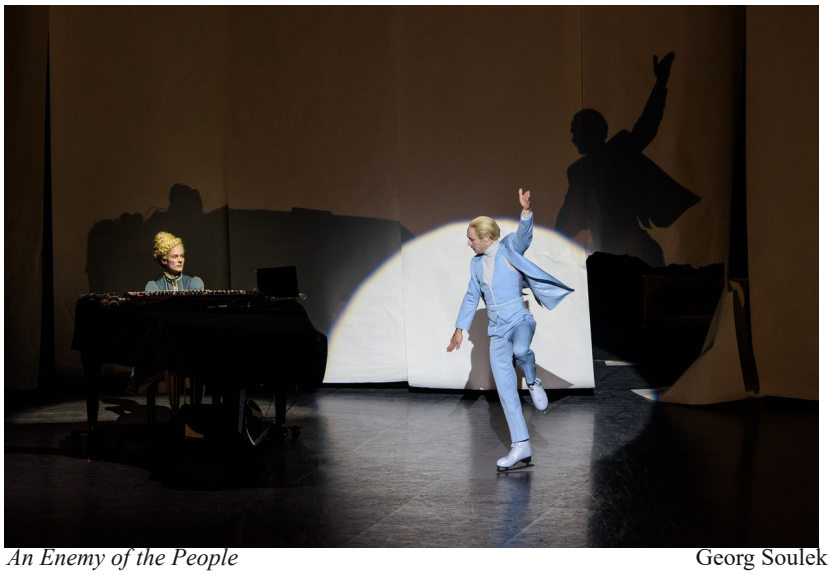
The current production, directed by Jette Steckel at the Vienna Burgtheater, Austria's leading theatre, is perhaps the first that places equal emphasis upon both these concerns, showing how closely they are interwoven in contemporary society. I found the production, in both concept and execution, one of the most original and memorable interpretations of this often-produced work I have ever seen, but my views did not accord with those of the majority of the Austrian critics, few of whom greeted the production with great enthusiasm. There were, I think, two clear reasons for this reaction. The first, obvious from the opening scenes, was that Steckel's approach directly challenged traditional, realistic production approaches to Ibsen, in visual imagery, acting style, and faithfulness to the text. Significantly, Steckel's production was characterized as "deconstructive" in several reviews, a popular term for the work of directors who take radical liberties with the texts and staging conventions of familiar works, especially the classics. Taking such liberties is widely accepted in Germany, even to some extent expected by the arbitrators of public taste, like the leading journal Theater heute, but it is much less popular in more conservative Austria. In the north of Germany, Steckel is considered one of the rising stars of the German theatre, graduating from the Hamburg Theater Academy in 2007 and named "young director of the year" by *Theater heute* for her direction of *Nightblind* by Darja Stocker. Since then she has directed a wide range of European classics at the Berlin Deutsches Theater and the Hamburg Thalia, where she has been resident director since 2013/14. Hers is a theatre family, her mother being the stage designer Susanne Raschig and her father Frank-Patrick Steckel, one of the leading German directors of the late twentieth century, who created the script of Enemy used by his daughter. It follows the general outlines of Ibsen's plot, but with much cutting (including the character of Captain Horster) and updating of many lines. Jette Steckel carries this process further, incorporating many specific references to recent political events in Austria and elsewhere, and radically changing the

beginning and ending of the play. The second and perhaps even more important stimulus for negative reactions appeared in Stekel's interpretation of the final two acts, which I will discuss presently.

When the curtain rises, we are already far from the conventional world of Ibsen production. The stage is a huge black void, containing only a drifting cloud of smoke or steam—not a hint of walls or furnishings. Suddenly, downstage, in the traditional location of the prompter's box, a handsome, nude male body erupts from an unseen pool of water. This is Joachim Meyerhoff, a leading and much-honored member of the Burgtheater ensemble, who plays Thomas Stockmann. He goes far upstage center, where a thin column of water begins pouring from a showerhead far up in the theatre flies. After a few moments in the shower, Meyerhoff goes to a small red metal suitcase, suddenly spotlighted, and takes from it towels and his costume, the main element of which is a large and bulky orange anorak, which he will wear for most of the production. The red suitcase will regularly appear in the rest of the production, one of the few physical properties of the minimalist staging. The scenic designer is Steckel's usual partner, Florian Lösche, perhaps best known for the enormous suspended net which was the sole setting for Steckel's production of *Woyzeck* in Hamburg in 2010. When the clothed Meyerhoff carries the suitcase offstage we are left with the opening stage picture of black void and cloud, but now an image is projected onto the cloud and filtered through it to appear, in shimmering form, on the dark back wall. It is the title of the play—*EIN VOLKSFEIND* —with a modern barcode above it. The technique of a "cold open," a "pre-credit," or "teaser" that gives the audience a powerful opening image before the title appears, is common in contemporary film and television, but quite rare in the theatre. This and the accompanying bar code immediately plunge us into the world of contemporary capitalist society, which clearly forms the ground for all that follows.

The action begins with Stockman's dinner guests standing in the same black void —no table, no furniture, no walls or props. Only when Stockmann's brother, the mayor, arrives does a kind of scenic background appear, but it is far from a conventional frame. His entrance is a remarkable one. Usually the dyspeptic Peter is a not an attractive physical specimen, but Mircro Kreibich, in a slim, form-fitting, elegant powder-blue suit, cuts a dashing figure next to his brother, whose attractive frame is lost in his enveloping amorak. Moreover, Peter does not walk in, but glides in, and we realize for the first time that the stage floor is covered with ice and that he is on skates. As the evening progresses, those who support the mayor perform more gracefully on this tricky surface, while Thomas, lacking skates, moves ploddingly and sometimes unsurely. When we lift our eyes from the gliding Peter, we become aware of some huge dark shapes that have entered behind the mayor. These form the most striking physical image of the production, eight identical troll-like traditional garden gnomes, each perhaps fifteen feet high, with pointed red hats, blue suits, flowing yellow beards, healthy round white faces, blue eyes, blank expressions and hands behind their backs. From this point on they are a continuing part of the stage picture, gliding singly or in groups around the stage (apparently moved by technicians inside each figure), or gathering like an ominous chorus upstage. In the one scene where they are not present, there is for the first time a hint of a box set, with vertical strips of white material forming a kind of back wall, perhaps ten feet wide, between two black wings. All during the scene the distinctive shadows of three of the figures can be seen projected against this wall, psychically present throughout. The printer Aslasken

(Peter Knaack), the "man of the people," whom these figures apparently represent, can also be seen in silhouette, assiduously polishing the noses or smoothing their hair. Only those who are familiar with the play will remember that this scene takes place in the editorial office. In this production, there is a single item of furnishing, an elegant grand piano at which an elegantly dressed musician (Martin Mader) sits, accompanying the entire scene with soft harmonies. The high point of the scene (and arguably of the play) occurs when the Mayor glides in as usual, between the rear white hangings, and as he delivers his own version of the current situation to the dazzled Billing (Ole Lagerpusch) and Hovstad (Matthias Mosbach), he presents an increasingly elaborate skating performance. His astonishing turns and pirouettes are faithfully followed by the musician. This bravura performance draws extended and well-deserved applause from the audience.



An Enemy of the People Georg Soulek

The Town Hall meeting, the turning point of the play, is here reduced to its simplest elements, i.e., Stockmann and his audience, who are here the trolls. Ibsen's preliminary negotiations are gone, and the scene begins when Stockmann climbs on his faithful red suitcase downstage left and begins to address the group of trolls, who face him upstage. As his oration continues and he receives no response from them, he become increasingly agitated, moving across the stage to confront them more directly, shouting and even employing a bullhorn. He even checks the chest of one with the stethoscope he wears around his neck throughout the evening, but all is in vain. The figures continue to stand impassively or even to turn casually away from him.

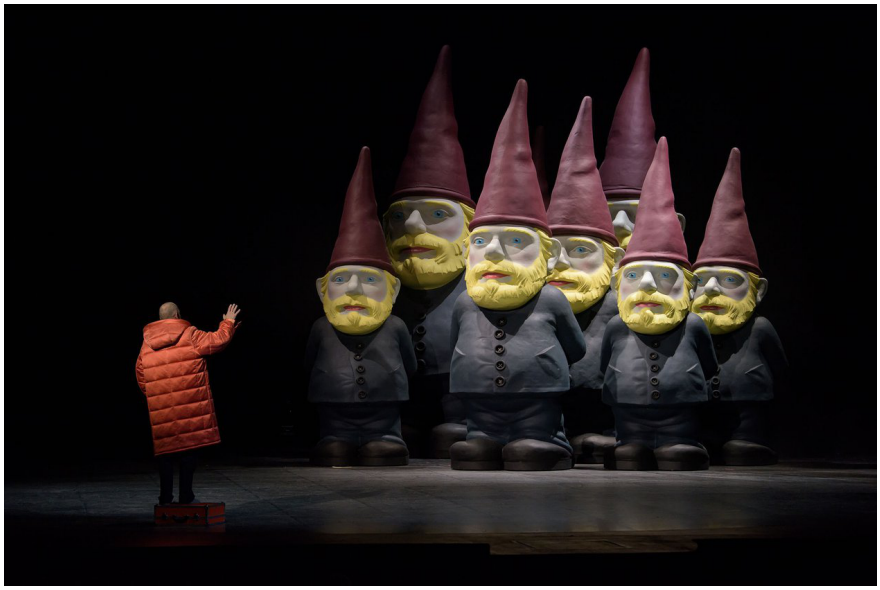
At last, as he moves directly up to them, they begin a gradual pushing back. Stockman finds himself surrounded and slowly forced backward downstage until at last an inexorable wall of expressionless figures literally force him to jump from the stage into the orchestra, in front of the first row of seats. He moves along the front row until he comes to an empty seat, which he apparently rips up from the floor and turns with its back to the stage. Here he sits, and as his family gathers around him and the trolls gaze out impassively from the stage, he delivers a lengthy and scathing address to the audience.

The opening up of the fourth act to the actual theatre audience has been seen several times lately in both German and U.S. productions of Ibsen's play, most famously in Thomas Ostermeier's 2012 production at the Berlin Schaubühne, which toured

> Austria's growing support of former neo-fascist Christian Strache, just named Vice-Chancellor, and of similar far right politicians, was cited.

internationally. The dynamic here is totally different, however. Ostermeier's Stockmann stopped the show and challenged the audience to discuss tensions in their current society. Although this experiment was accepted by some audience and rejected by others, its primary aim was to stimulate

engaged dialogue. Steckel's apparent aim seemed quite different, a direct attack on the audience as representatives of the "liberal majority" who allow themselves to be manipulated by corrupt leaders and the media. Although some of Ibsen's condemnation of this majority remained, it became much more specific and confrontational. Austria's growing support of former neo-fascist Christian Strache, just named Vice-Chancellor, and of similar far right politicians, was cited, and the audience was characterized as "a roomful of apathetic ass-lickers." Indeed the Burgtheater audience has traditionally been characterized as comfortably conservative, if not outright reactionary, which has resulted in a long tradition of major Burtheater directors and authors portraying their audience as covert fascists. This in turn has led to an almost equally long tradition of bitter theatre protests at the Burg over such depictions, most famously during the preparations and performances of Thomas Bernhard's *Heldenplatz* in 1988, to which Steckel's Stockmann specifically refers.



An Enemy of the People Georg Soulek

Somewhat disappointingly, no riots have greeted the Stekel production. There were a respectable number of boos and audience members loudly departing the night I attended, but I had the feeling that this sort of confrontation had almost become part of the Burgtheater experience. Official displeasure was much more evident in the many negative reviews of the production, almost all of which claimed that what Steckel had done to Ibsen's play was essentially crude agitprop. A few expressed surprise that talented actors would allow themselves to be so used. Not being a part of the Austrian political dynamic and not being too disturbed by radical reworkings of classic texts, as long as they seem artistically or intellectually interesting, I found the production on the whole quite fascinating.

I also felt that this production, after breaking out of the world of the play in the fourth act, moved on to a more satisfactory and consistent conclusion than did that of Ostermeier, whose final act, though closer to Ibsen, I found distinctly anticlimactic. When Stockmann has finished his denunciation, a figure pushes through the trolls. It is Stockmann's father-in-law, the cunning capitalist Morton Kiil, beautifully played by Ignaz Kirchner, a pillar of the Burgtheater. As in Ibsen's play, Kiil has used Mrs. Stockmann's inheritance to buy up shares in the baths, which are now virtually worthless due to Stockmann's revelations, and he showers these on the appalled family. Kiil thus appears as a kind of ironic *deus ex machina*, announcing that he will use his own money to refurbish the baths and convince the media and the public that they are an attractive operation. We do not see the results of this, at least not the direct results, but we see something far more powerful. The scene abruptly ends after Kiil's announcement and suddenly a film appears on the backdrop showing a surfer riding within a giant wave which slowly engulfs him. Several minutes of much more

disturbing visual images follow—the Japanese tsunami, devastating hurricanes, floods, and oceans awash in oil spills, and huge blocks of glaciers falling into roiling seas. Accompanying this devastating visual montage is the song "No Surprises," by the English alternative rock band Radiohead. The lyrics of the song, describing the pursuit of happiness by a public unable or unwilling to see how they are being manipulated by external powers, are chillingly appropriate, but much more so is the accompanying music video showing only the head of lead singer, Thom Yorke, in a kind of diver's helmet, singing the lyrics as the helmet gradually fills with water, eventually covering his face. From Stockmann's opening burst from the hidden pool, through its surprising ice-skating images, to this concluding image of death by drowning, the production achieved an unusually powerful and coherent marshalling of how one of the world's most basic materials, water, has been turned from ally to enemy.

Marvin Carlson
CUNY Graduate Center

The Wild Duck
Zurich Schauspielhaus
March 9—June 10, 2017; in repertory, 2018

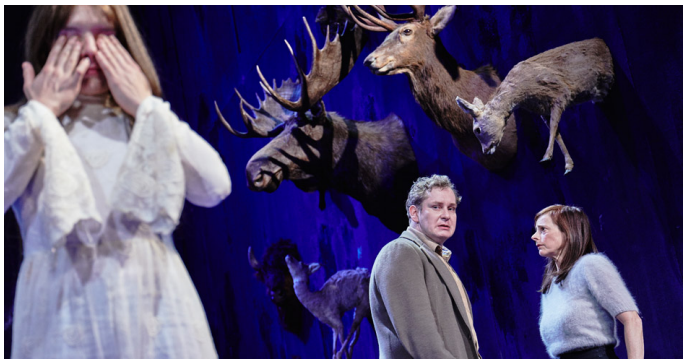
The Zurich Schauspielhaus is one of the leading German-speaking theatres in Europe with a long and distinguished history of Ibsen production of which the most recent contribution is a *Wild Duck*. The director, Alize Zandwijk, has a major European reputation although this is the first time she has directed in Zurich. Born in the Netherlands, she worked during the 1990s with the Ro Theatre in Rottendam and became director of that institution in 2006. At the Ro, in 1996, she mounted Ibsen's rarely produced *The Vikings at Helgeland,* which toured successfully in Germany that year. Since 2003 she has regularly directed in Germany and was appointed the Principal Director of Theater Bremen in 2016. She has been particularly committed to plays dealing with the life of the lower classes, beginning, significantly, with her first major success, Gorki's *The Lower Depths,* in 1991, which was invited both to the Edinburgh Festival and the Vienna Festwochen.

The designer Thomas Rupert, who has worked regularly with Zandwijk since 1998, produced a striking and original design for her Zurich *Wild Duck.* Among its most striking features was one of the most ingenious solutions I have ever encountered to the major design challenge of the play, which is that while most of it takes place in the Ekdal apartment, a humble although presumably spacious one, the opening act takes place in the totally contrasting world of the Werle mansion, challenging the designer to create a rich, elaborate interior that is utilized only for what is essentially a prologue. Rupert's innovative solution to this challenge was to place the opening act in a kind of visual void. When the play begins, the stage is totally filled with stage smoke. In the rear wall, two bright lights facing the audience send their beams through the fog, but at first reveal nothing. A strange disembodied music, perhaps from a bass viol, reverberates through the mists. Slowly we become dimly aware of movement, and then of running or dancing

Rupert's innovative solution to this challenge was to place the opening act in a kind of visual void.

figures passing in silhouette before the illuminated doors. The music becomes more suggestive of a rather grotesque dance, and as a group of silhouettes passes the door in a kind of conga line we are startled to see that one of them appears to be a bear! Eventually, the doors close and different characters emerge downstage out of the still thick fog that covers the rest of the stage opening. Those who know the play realize that we have seen dancing at Old Werle's costume party, with himself in a bear suit, the head of which he has now removed. Only when Werle began to rub his eyes did it occur to me that this striking visual effect was probably inspired by the foggy vision of the relation between Werle and Hedvig that is a central component of the play.

When the mists dissipate after the opening sequence, we see revealed a huge space, the Ekdal attic, a largely empty room done by Rupert in a style somewhat reminiscent of a setting by the leading



The Wild Duck Matthias Horn

German designer Ann Viebrock. A large boxy structure resembling an internal chimney wanders up the left wall, reinforced by large wooden supporting beams, while the right wall bears a large assortment of stuffed animal trophies. Some are the standard heads, but others are the whole front parts of the bodies of deer and other creatures, looking almost as if they are in the process of leaping through the wall. Strangely enough, there is no door into the garret domain of the wild duck, so that this has to be superimposed mentally upon the room, with the result that it is not at all clear whether this space even exists. Occasionally, Hjalmar will apparently scatter grain across the floor for imaginary chickens, and Hedvig shoots the pistol downstage, apparently within the room itself. There is, however, a box with a duck in it that Hedwig fiercely protects.

At the rear of the stage is a small platform reached by a ladder, which serves as the room of Old Ekdal (Siggi Schweintek). In the middle of the wall a box on the floor contains the musical instruments, mostly strings with a few wind pieces, which have provided a rather sinister, non-lyric background since the opening scene and continue to do so throughout the evening. They are all played by a single musician, MaartjeTeussink, who created the score. Like the designer and the dramaturg, Karoline Trachte, Teussick came with the director from the Ro Theatre, while the actors are all from the regular Zurich ensemble.

The ethereal Hedwig of Marie Rosa Tietjen, a pre-Raphaelite figure with long dark hair and a flowing white dress, makes the most powerful impression of the evening, although she seems to be drifting in a world apart from that of the other characters. She appears as visually challenged as I have ever seen the role played, wandering almost obsessively around the walls of the large space and running her hands along their surfaces for guidance. The key roles of Hjalmar and Gregers are performed by Christian Baumbach and Milian Zerzawy. Hjalmar is not so comic as he is often played, nor Gregors so neurotic, but both present convincing images of confused and troubled figures attempting to make sense of a world slipping away from their control. Ludwig Boettger, a long-time veteran of the company, presents a similarly insecure Relling. Molvik is surprisingly missing. Isabelle Menke brought a down-to-earth

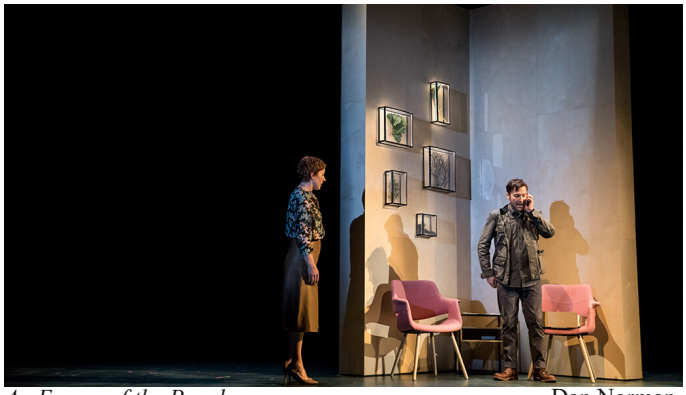
solidity to Gina, and Ann Eigner a cool business-like directness to Mrs. Sørby, but I felt that each of the characters was living in a kind of self-contained bubble that allowed for very little real dramatic interaction. This suited Hedvig and old Ekdal very well but gave a king of flatness to other relationships in the play, especially the tension between Gregers and Relling. Ibsen's text was generally faithfully followed except for cutting the servants and party guests from the first act and Molvik from the rest. The first choice I could support, but I sorely missed poor Molvick, who adds an important and distinctive note to the play as a whole.

Marvin Carlson
CUNY Graduate Center

An Enemy of the People
The Guthrie Theatre
Minneapolis, Minnesota, April 28—June 3, 2018

The Guthrie's production of *Enemy* was staged with full awareness that the play was "having a moment," in the words of Guthrie dramaturg Carla Steen. Her introduction to the play in the program references the ongoing water crisis in Flint, Michigan, which resulted in an adaptation of *Enemy* there; other recent adaptations and productions of the play; and the revival of the phrase "enemy of the people" by Donald Trump in his attacks on the American press. The version produced at the Guthrie was based on an adaptation by Welsh playwright Brad Birch which condenses Ibsen's text to a play that can be staged in just over ninety minutes, with no intermission. Despite some obvious strengths, e.g., the visually striking stage design, and a powerful performance of Stockman's famous fourth-act oration by the Irish actor Billy Carter, the radical abridgement of the play and the self-congratulatory, heavy-handed anti-Trumpism resulted in a production that fell flat.

Directed by Lyndsey Turner, the Guthrie production opens with Petra (Christian Bardin) drunkenly serenading a party at her father's house with a microphone in one hand and a blue balloon on a string in the other. From the first scene, Petra's outsized role in Birch's adaptation is glaring. She bears much more narrative and symbolic weight than in Ibsen's original, and her status as an innocent is clumsily and constantly reinforced by the way she drifts



An Enemy of the People Dan Norman

like a pixie through the scenes, balloon in tow. Bardin's scenery-chewing performance vacillates oddly between melodramatic self-pity and ironic detachment. This makes some logical sense, since her detachment acts as an external defense against her inner sense of failure and self-doubt, but these two sides of her character are so starkly drawn that she rings false. The larger issue with her character, however, is that her stage time makes her seem more central to the play than she actually is, and in this highly condensed version, this magnification occupies time that the production can ill afford.

Birch's adaptation sets the play in

But in an updated version like this one, surely the information would not be impeded by a robust editorial apparatus, but would rather be leaked to the public via social media.

contemporary Norway. The characters use kroner when discussing money and make reference to the Brage Prize (a Norwegian literary award), and it is clear that the water contamination poses a threat to the population and environment in and around a small Norwegian town. The costuming is recognizably contemporary, and the interior spaces are furnished with sleek modern pieces. A sensitivity to environmental issues and the looming threat of climate change underscore the play's continued relevance in our time. But the media landscape of the play remains stubbornly old-fashioned, causing unexpected anachronisms. For an adaptation that makes specific reference to Donald Trump, there is an odd aversion to bringing in social media—Twitter, for example—or a twenty-four-hour news cycle. The journalist Hovstad, a female newspaper reporter played by Minneapolis-based actress Mo Perry, is cut from the cloth of a muckraking journalist of late-nineteenth-century social realism. Her back-and-forth with her editor Aslaksen (J.C. Cutler) sets up an actual impediment to news about the water contamination leaking out to the public, a delay that allows for the tension in the plot. But in an updated version like this one, surely the information would not be impeded by a robust editorial apparatus, but would rather be leaked to the public via social media and other digital information platforms. The unevenness in the updating makes one wonder why adapter Birch chose to bring the play into the present day in the first place.

At the center of the play is, of course, the character of Stockman, and Irish actor Billy Carter succeeds in giving him both subtlety and substance. As in the original text, Stockmann's mission initially seems righteous, but his monomaniacal fixation on combatting the tyranny of the majority gradually makes him into a tyrant himself. In the Guthrie's staging, this trajectory is aligned with Stockmann's gradual move away from the comforts of interior domestic space. By the end, he has become a rambling, sanctimonious pariah who withdraws to the wilderness, keeping himself warm with a meager oil-drum fire in lieu of the domestic comforts of home and community. The metaphorical meanings that map onto domestic architectural space (associated with conformity and conservatism) and the wilderness (associated with radical individualism and freedom) is true to Ibsen's architectural imaginary, as described by Mark B. Sandberg in his book *Ibsen's Houses* (Cambridge University Press, 2015). But because of Birch's condensation of the play, Stockmann's moral complexity is flattened out. Rather than being both a righteous crusader for the public good as well as the spokesman for troubling anti-democratic ideas, Birch's Stockmann is mostly the former.

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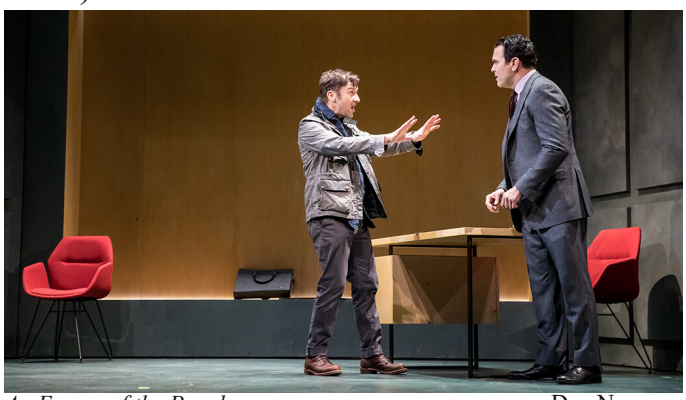


An Enemy of the People Dan Norman

One element that does actually work well in the confines of such a condensed production is Merle Hensel's stage design. In front of a backdrop of a looming Norwegian mountain peak, Hensel has placed two roughly ninety-degree interior sets on top of a rotating stage. As one set faces out toward the audience, the other faces toward the backdrop, allowing for seamless back-and-forth scene changes. The turntable is even used to achieve a kind of cinematic cross-cutting effect, e.g., taking the action from the Stockmann living room to the newspaper office and back again, letting the plot proceed essentially unencumbered by breaks for scene changes. Not all will appreciate the cinematic pacing that such a stage design allows, however, and ultimately it is in the service of a misguided condensation of Ibsen's text, which is not allowed to breathe in such a format.

Although the Guthrie's version of *Enemy* no doubt appealed to many in its audience, its self-conscious attempts to underscore its own political relevance as well as the radical abridgment of Ibsen's text make it an unsatisfying production, particularly for theatergoers who have read Ibsen's play or seen other productions of it. One emblematic moment for me was an exchange between Tom Stockmann and his brother, Peter (Ricardo Chavira) in the third act. When Tom confronts Peter with his findings, Peter tells him: "Yours aren't the only facts, Tom!" Tom's response is almost a word-perfect renunciation of not only his brother's willful ignorance, but the arrogance of Trump adviser Kellyanne Conway's well-known turn-of-phrase. "People don't get to choose the facts," Tom says. "There's no third option; there's no alternate facts." The line elicited enthusiastic applause and laughter in the performance I attended, which I took as an indicator that any pleasure to be had from this production derives from its commentary on the toxic politics of our own time and place. But as a political statement, this adaptation breaks no new ground, and in condensing and simplifying Ibsen's moral universe, it serves up a light, unsatisfying reimagining of its original.

Benjamin Bigelow
University of Minnesota

The Ibsen Festival, 2018
National Theatre, Oslo
September 8 – 19, 2018; in repertory, 2018-19 season

The Master Builder, the National Theatre

The National Theatre's production of *The Master Builder*, directed by Stéphane Braunschweig, was updated in terms of costuming and furnishings but remained relatively true to Ibsen's original text. Braunschweig, an important French director now at the Odéon in Paris, first made a name for himself at the Théâtre National de Strasbourg and then at the Théâtre de la Colline, outside Paris, where his *Peer Gynt* of 2009 was a revelation. He has also staged *Rosmersholm* and *A Doll House* in France, and was invited by the National Theatre to stage *Ghosts* (2004) and *The Wild Duck* (2014) for the Ibsen Festival. The online promotional materials for the production of *The Master Builder* emphasized that while "the ideas" for it came "from France" (presumably from Braunschweig), the staging was created in "collaborative mode" with the Norwegian actors. In a short promotional video, Gisken Armand, who played Aline Solness in the production, called it "almost exotic" to play in a version

of *The Master Builder* that is not postmodern and deconstructed.

On occasion, the 1890s gender and workplace politics of the original drama

The Master Builder Øyvind Eide

sounded out of place—or more precisely, out of time—in the contemporary setting, with its furnishings from the renewed popularity of midcentury modern. The sleek, low profile couch, chairs, tables, and drafting desk were dwarfed by the backdrop: an expansive brick wall, painted white. In the center of this white wall was a large, square cutout, not really a window (too big, the wrong height, no glass panes) yet seemingly full of blue sky. Hilde Wangel (Mariann Hole) arrived through this square hole, looking out at the horizon in a very determined and intense fashion, but with no door on which to knock.

The most striking and satisfying aspect of this production was Hole's Hilde. Rather tomboyish, wearing yellow overalls that downplayed any curves and standing in a pelvis-first attitude, Hole managed to be unsexy in a traditional feminine sense —without a hint of femme fatale and hardly any Lolita—yet highly seductive. She addressed her Solness, Mads Ousdal (of the famous Norwegian family of actors), in a slightly gravelly voice, with an intonation both inquisitive and suggestive, making demands for information and for castles in the air in a rushed tempo. Ousdal was type-cast, being very handsome and masculine,

The most striking and satisfying aspect of this production was Hole's Hilde.

The Master Builder Øyvind Eide

domineering but sufficiently boyish—or perhaps Peer-Gyntish, as he suggests in a promotional video. Taken together, this Hilde and Solness were a very convincing pair, clearly isolating themselves from the other characters as they turned their attention toward one another and inward. (Interestingly, Ousdal's father once played Solness to Gisken Armand's Hilde).

In act three, the white brick wall turned around so that the square cutout revealed itself to be the end of a square tunnel, with a broader entrance slanting and tapering up to the opening, which was neither a window nor a door, but became more clearly an access point to the sky, filled with passing clouds. This dominant and dominating feature of the scenography added a slightly surreal quality to the otherwise straightforward and realistic, although not period, staging, opening a (symbolic) pathway to the locale of Hilde and Solness's castles and to their immateriality. Solness made his way up through this tunnel, dazed and on unsteady feet, while music soared, and eventually fell out the other end. At this point, the wall turned around again, and the audience was treated to proof of the fall in the form of Solness's body, lying motionless on its side

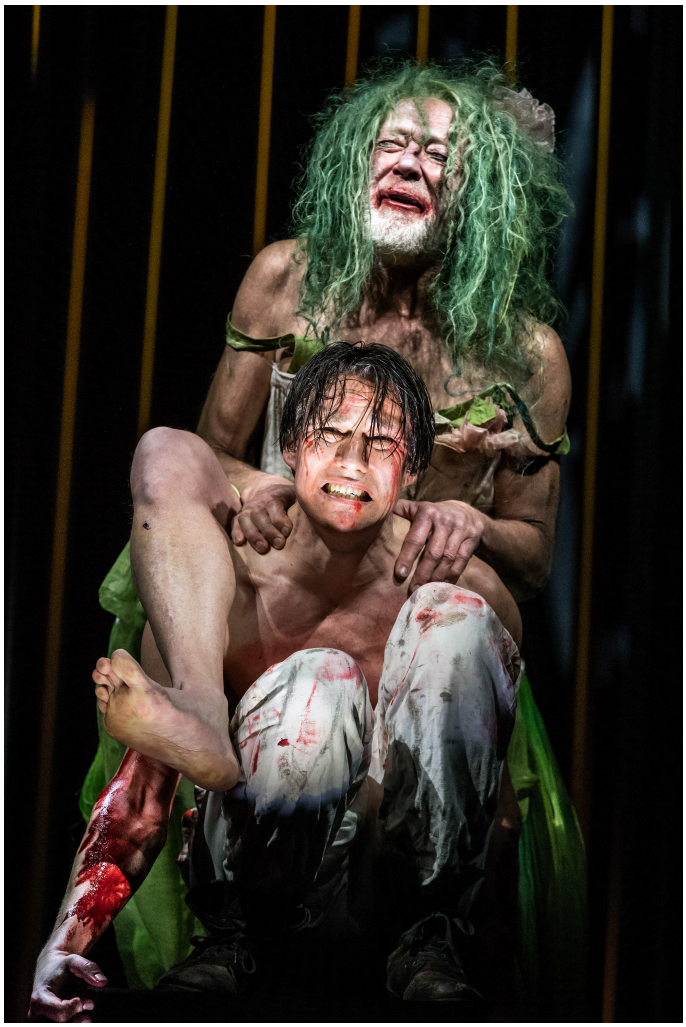
and facing away. This dramatic yet pitiful sight brought our focus down from the sky and made Hilde's final pronouncements regarding the triumph of "her" master builder appear particularly delusional. All in all, this was a strong and compelling production with the best Hilde I have ever seen.

Peer Gynt, Dramaten, at the National Theatre

Adaptation by Michael Thalmeier and Maja Zade

Michael Thalheimer's innovative staging of *Peer Gynt* took more liberties than Braunschweig's *Master Builder*, as was only to be expected from this iconic German director, famous for his modernist updates of the classics from Greek tragedy on, whose productions have earned him seven invitations to the Theatretreffen and numerous awards worldwide. Here, Thalheimer places Peer Gynt on a square pillar downstage front from which he proclaims his existential isolation, yet still manages to carry the whole world of the play on his shoulders. On the night that I attended, the audience clearly adored Thalheimer's take on Norway's national drama, whose production at Dramaten had already received excellent reviews in Stockholm. The Swedish daily *Dagens Nyheter* referred to the production as "A completely stand-alone [helt enestående] *Peer Gynt*. Erik Ehn performs the role of his life . . . theater at its best." The description "enestående" can almost be taken literally in this case because of Peer's pillar. Occasionally joined by Åse (Stina Ekblad), Ingrid and Solveig (Rebecka Hemse), the trolls, and other characters, Ehn managed to fascinate, despite his relative immobilization.

Although Ehn's Peer hardly moved and was forced to shout his lines over the music and out into the void above the audience—where his gazed remained fixed for the majority of the performance—my impression of this production was that it was highly dynamic. Behind Peer, a major section of the stage was constantly turning. Other actors had to make their way forward through a field of tightly spaced metal poles that turned with the stage, sometimes suggesting a forest, other times an abstract confinement. The tension between this constant movement, the coming and going of other actors, and Peer's immobility—a mix of dizziness and inertia—was undoubtedly also responsible for some of the production's intensity.



Peer Gynt Sören Vilks

A general feeling of brutality and vulgarity reigned, especially from the costuming and the antics of minor characters, most of whom were played by three actors (Carl Magnus Dellow, Andreas

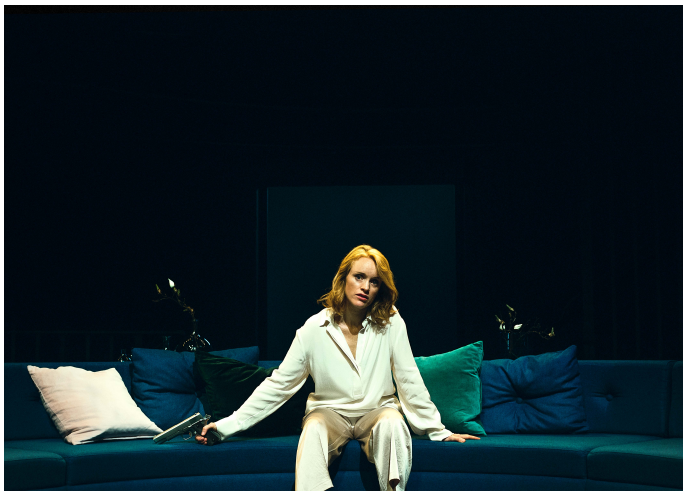
Rothlin Svensson, and Thomas Hanzon). Peer's bare chest and wrinkled white suit pants and jacket became increasingly bloody as the trolls, who wore ashen makeup and green matted wigs, continued to attack Peer on his pillar. The troll king (Hanzon) perched behind him in a corset, while the others gave him an unwanted blowjob. The European business men from act four wore fat-suits, smoked cigars, and looked blasé, one of them repeatedly rubbing his crotch. The distasteful and jarring aspects of this production were certainly purposeful, including the invariable, intense tempo. I was impressed by Ehn's performance, yet longed for the production to end: the repetitive, loud background music—over which the actors had constantly to yell—was particularly tiresome, distracting me from the performance as a whole. I was a bit startled by the lengthy, enthusiastic standing ovation, but willingly joined in, certain that Ehn's performance of Peer was an impressive feat of endurance.

> A general feeling of brutality and vulgarity reigned, especially from the costuming and the antics of minor characters.

Hedda Gabler, National Theatre, at the Torshov

The National's new production of *Hedda Gabler* was staged at the intimate Torshov theatre, an alternate venue for National Theatre productions since 1977. Swedish director Sofia Jupither, increasingly a presence in Sweden, got her breakthrough in 2010 with a production of *Ghosts* at the Stadsteatre in Stockholm. She has also directed several productions in Norway, including Strindberg's *A Dream Play* at the Torshov in 2008 and *Little Eyolf* for the 2014 Ibsen Festival.

The Torshov is a black-walled theatre-in-the-round with spectators seated on one side of the stage and one side of a gallery, which is wide enough only for a single row of chairs. On the night that I attended, these chairs were filled with what appeared to be bored high school students. The other side of the gallery doubled as the back parlor in which Hedda kills herself, right up against the gallery railing. The main acting area, the stage, was mostly filled with a sectional sofa in a semi-circle, littered with throw pillows and backed all around by low shelving covered in knickknacks and flowers. The actors, dressed in contemporary clothing, could only move around this large piece of furniture, entering and exiting the small stage through the theater's actual doors.



Hedda Gabler Sören Vilks

The actor who played Hedda (Kjersti Botn Sandal) is very thin and small, looking almost like a child, especially in comparison with Aunt Julie (Marika Enstad) and Judge Brack (Trond Espen Seim). I was struck by Hedda's thinly veiled desperation and by the fact that she constantly touched the other actors, showing obvious desire for Løvborg (Benjamin Helstad). This Hedda was explicitly anxious and fragile rather than controlled and disdainful, as well as more interested in faking the part of the happy wife in moments—even giving Tesman a quick peck on the lips! She was poised

between the desire to make contact with others and the desire to withdraw from their contact.

The webpage for this production calls Jupither's *Hedda Gabler* "uretusjert"

Hedda suddenly changes her mind and rapidly moves the gun down to shoot herself low in the gut, perhaps in the womb.

[unaltered]. It came to an end, however, with two striking deviations from the usual manner of Hedda's suicide and the cutting of Brack's final, infamous line: "But good god, people don't do such things!" After pointing the gun at her temple, Hedda suddenly changes her mind and rapidly moves the gun down to shoot herself low in the gut, perhaps in the womb. She then falls to her knees against the gallery railing, blood seeping out of her mouth and falling down to the main floor. On the way out of the theater, I heard another theatergoer wonder about Brack's cut line. While Hedda's decision to shoot herself in the belly clearly evokes her horror of pregnancy, there was no overt element of the performance that explained the removal of Brack's final line. Of the seven Ibsen productions that I saw in 2017 and 2018, three involved a director's choice to show a death or a corpse that Ibsen chose to hide from spectators and readers. My sample size is insufficient to claim a trend, of course, but one can nonetheless wonder about the desire to make Ibsen's fatality *more* visible and Hedda's suffering more realistic—which also meant, in this case, making her death *less* beautiful.

All in all, this was a well-played version of *Hedda Gabler* with no noticeable additions, meta-theatrical or otherwise. With the exceptions of the reinterpretation of Hedda's character, the mode of Hedda's death, and the cutting of Brack's line, it seemed like a straightforward following of the text, almost a dramatic reading. I will admit to sympathizing, on occasion, with the bored students seated in the gallery.

Olivia Gunn
The University of Washington

Gnit by Will Eno
Staged Reading, Theatre for a New Audience
Brooklyn, New York, June 18, 2018

Since the success of his *Thom Pain (Based on nothing)* in 2005, Will Eno's sophisticated plays, quirky American comedies with a touch of Beckett, have been regular contenders for major awards. Until the present Eno's works have been original stories, but in 2013 he presented his first adaptation of a familiar classic, *Gnit,* based on *Peer Gynt,* at the Humana Festival in Louisville. The play has not yet seen a full production in New York, but it was given as a staged reading at the Theatre for a New Audience in Brooklyn, on June 18, 2018.

The peculiar spelling of the title is explained by Peter Gnit himself early in the play as a "typographical error." This somewhat offhanded meta-theatrical joke is fairly typical of much of the humor in Eno's play, which takes a rather smug and even dismissive attitude toward the original. Eno has done away with the button molder and his casting ladle and Peter's final search for a witness; a "stranger," apparently based on the strange passenger on the ship (the whole sea sequence also disappears), serves to interact with Peer near the end. A particularly telling example is what happens to the famous "onion scene." Here, Peter

picks up an onion and starts to examine it, but his ruminations are immediately cut off by the stranger, who tells him not to burden us with tired poetic metaphors about life as an onion with many layers and so on. It is a quick and easy joke at the expense of the original, but aside from that, it contributes little to whatever point the scene is trying to make.

Eno has a sharp ironic style which keeps the conversations lively, but any more poetic and emotional coloring seems to make him uncomfortable.

Like many modern directors of the play (especially Americans), Eno is much more comfortable with the more conventional and contained first part than with the sprawling second part (which more visionary directors, like the Eastern Europeans, tend to emphasize). The result is that about two-thirds of the two-hour play is devoted to the first part and great sections of the second part disappear (almost all that is left is a much reduced, depoliticized Moroccan scene, an equally reduced and decentered Cairo asylum scene, and Peter's homecoming, the most lengthy part of which is the sermon over the body of the young man who cut off his finger.) Solvay has died before Peter's return, removing even an ironic note of reconciliation or redemption.

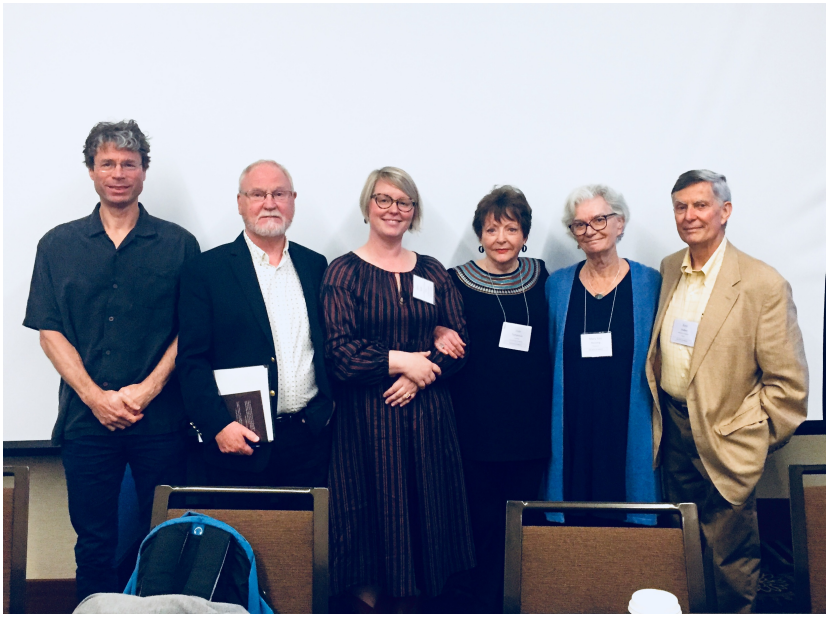
The much more extensive first part follows the original more closely, covering Peter's first scene with his mother, the carrying off of the bride, the meeting with Solvay, the Boyg (here called "Middle") and the final scene with Peter's mother. The presentation is generally faithful to the original, and Eno has a sharp ironic style which keeps the conversations lively, but any more poetic and emotional coloring seems to make him uncomfortable, and I was especially disappointed in the final scene with Peter's mother. Devoid of the imaginative elaboration of the sleigh ride, it seemed rather flat, even banal.

Michael C. Hall, a popular TV, film and stage actor who has worked with Eno before, is a good fit for Eno's Peter, which, although it does not require a great emotional range, does demand enough presentational variety to make a somewhat one-dimensional character interesting to watch thoughout a production in which he is rarely offstage. Tyne Daly, the most familiar actor in the production, is an engaging and very American mother. The play begins with her direct address to the audience complaining about raising children which established an instant and warm rapport. The less well-known Eboni Booth was an adequate Solvay and she also presented most of the other female roles, though with very little variety.

The male roles were divided between Stranger 1 and 2, played by Peter Francis James and Ari Graynor and a character known as Town, performed by Matthew Maher. The stage directions were read by Maryn Shaw. The most original element in the production, which most delighted the audience, was the "Town" of Maher. In each of the play's group scenes—most notably the reactions of the community to Peter's carrying off of the Bride and to Peter among the Trolls—Maher played five or six characters at once, arguing among himself in a variety of voices and registers. At first I thought this highly effective device was an invention of director Oliver Butler to avoid using a large number of actors in what was essentially a minimalist production, but in consulting the text I found that the device was called for by Ibsen in the original. In the hands of a skilled actor like Maher it was extremely effective, indeed one of the most original and effective elements in a production which despite many amusing exchanges, lacked most of the power and depth of Ibsen's original.

Marvin Carlson
CUNY Graduate Center

ISA Session at SASS, May 5, 2018
Luskin Conference Center, UCLA



Left to right: Frode Helland, Paal Bjørby, Olivia Gunn, Joan Templeton, Mary Kay Norseng, Ross Shideler.

This session, organized by ISA President Olivia Gunn and ISA Vice-President Dean Krouk, celebrated the 20th anniversary of Joan Templeton's book *Ibsen's Women* (Cambridge UP, 1997; paperback 2001; ebook *plunkettlakepress.com*). Paal Bjørby (University of Bergen), Olivia Gunn (University of Washington), Frode Helland (Ibsen Center, University of Oslo), Mary Kay Norseng (UCLA), and Ross Shideler (UCLA) gave appreciative tributes. Here is Joan's response:

"Then and Now: Mrs. Alving, Nora, Lionel Trilling, the Pope, and Me"

Thank you, Olivia and Dean, for organizing this session, and thank you, friends on the panel, for your kind contributions.

When I published *Ibsen's Women* a little more than twenty years ago, in 1997, one of my main goals was to expose the ubiquitous critical effort to rescue Ibsen's plays from feminism. Today, I want to talk about the beginning of this effort, about ten years earlier, when I published two articles on Ibsen and feminism in *PMLA* which would appear as chapters in the book. I think that my story, in the light of today's celebration, says a good deal about how things have changed in our profession in the last few decades.

On February 19, 1986, in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, a headline announced: "Scholar disputes Interpretation of Henrik Ibsen's *Ghosts*." In the column, the reporter wrote: "In the latest issue of *PMLA* Joan Templeton disputed the standard view of the Norwegian playwright's work, which holds that the tragedy of *Ghosts* is Mrs. Alving's gradual understanding that she failed her husband, that her devotion to duty and lack of joy drove him to a dissolute life of alcohol and prostitutes. . . . Most critics, Ms. Templeton said, argue that the 'summation of the play' rests in Mrs. Alving's line to her son: 'I am afraid I made your poor father's home unbearable to him, Oswald.' But Ms. Templeton disagreed. She argued, based on evidence both from Ibsen's notes on the play and from his construction of the tragedy, that the key line or 'summation' occurs much later in the action, just before Oswald collapses into mindlessness. 'I never asked you for life,' he says to his mother. 'And what kind

of life did you give me? I don't want it. Take it back again!' Helene Alving bears a share in the tragedy's catastrophe, Ms. Templeton wrote, 'but not because of her inadequacy as a wife. She never should have been Alving's wife at all.' "

In refuting the conventional wisdom on *Ghosts*, I was arguing against a reading that had been cast in critical stone by the famous critic Lionel Trilling in his well-known short story, "Of This Time, Of That Place," originally published in *Partisan Review* in 1943. Trilling poses the question to his fictional all-male class: "At whose door must the tragedy be laid?" The class star answers by coming "brilliantly to the point: 'Your father never found any outlet for the overmastering joy of life that was in him. . . . I am afraid I made your poor father's home unbearable to him, Oswald.' Spoken by Mrs. Alving." In my article, Trilling's title "Of This Time, Of That Place" becomes my title "Of This Time, Of *This* Place: Mrs. Alving's Ghosts and the Shape of the Tragedy," in which I wrote about what took place in my real class, forty years after Trilling's. The comparative literature course, in 1981, at the University of Tours, in the Loire Valley, was on modern tragedy from Ibsen to Beckett. We had read Trilling and other critics in several languages who made the same case against Mrs. Alving. I argued that the stance that Mrs. Alving should have enjoyed making love to a man she despised was psychologically and humanly absurd. It is not Mrs. Alving's sexual refusal but her sexual compliance that is the heart of the tragedy, whose *fatum* was put in motion long ago when she ran away from her vile marriage. That paragon of rectitude, Pastor Manders, persuades her, against his own desire, to return home and "do your duty" as a wife, and it was in performing this duty that she conceived the syphilitic son. In the play's present, Helene Alving confronts the pastor with his cowardice, which she terms "a sin against us both," and, in her great speech, condemns the "ghosts" of the past —"old, dead ideas, dead beliefs"—who return to haunt the present. "Why, then," I

Well, take that, Lionel Trilling.

asked my students, "has Mrs. Alving been blamed for the tragedy?" *My* class star responded: "Eh bien, madame," she said, "on sait bien que dans ce genre de chose, c'est toujours la femme qui est responsable. Vous savez, 'Chercher la femme,' et tout ça." [Well, everybody knows that in this sort of thing, it's always the woman who's responsible. You know, 'Look for the woman,' and all that"]. Well, take that, Lionel Trilling.

Writers who respond to a *PMLA* article in the journal's "Forum" frequently do so because they disagree with it. In one letter, the author claimed that I had not understood that Mrs. Alving, in taking the blame for her husband's dereliction, gains "heroic moral and intellectual stature"; Ibsen's point, she wrote, was that Mrs. Alving now sees how "society" victimized her husband "through her as a duty-ridden, joyless, bought wife." In other words, as I noted in my rebuttal in *PMLA*, the author had simply repeated Trilling's stance: Mrs. Alving owed it to her husband to welcome him sexually, and when she didn't, he was driven to brothels.

On the other side of the coin, I received a handful of personal letters congratulating me. One was from Trilling's colleague at Columbia, Carolyn Heilbrun. "I took great pleasure in your article," she wrote. "You said what I have believed and taught for a long time now so it was a great treat to have it in print in *PMLA* . . . Trilling really is, in retrospect, an amazing phenomenon, and it still rather startles me to be reminded of how very phallic a critic he was, even though I thought I knew that on my pulses." She added: "I learned a while

ago how important it is for each of us to let the other know we are there."

Three years later, in 1989, *PMLA* published my essay "The *Doll House* Backlash: Criticism, Feminism, and Ibsen." My target here was an even more ubiquitous argument about a famous—in fact, much more famous—Ibsen play, *A Doll House*, which, according to many well-known drama scholars, had nothing to do with women. One authority, Robert Brustein, Dean of the Yale School of Drama, had instructed his readers, in his book *The Theatre of Revolt*, that Ibsen "was completely indifferent to the woman question, except as a metaphor for individual freedom." Richard Gilman, Brustein's chair-holding colleague at Yale, had similarly insisted, in *The Making of Modern Drama*, that *A Doll House* was "pitched beyond sexual difference." As for R. M. Adams, in the *Hudson Review*, *A Doll House* as a feminist play? "Fiddle-faddle," he pronounced. For these authors, and for many others whom I cited, Nora had no sex. Ibsen meant her as Everyman.

The dismissal of gender in *A Doll House* was a kind of "gentlemanly backlash," a refusal to acknowledge, in Ibsen's biographer Michael Meyer's phrase, the "hoary problem of women's rights." But there was another kind of backlash, I showed, in which Nora was attacked for exhibiting the most perfidious characteristics of her sex: she was irrational, frivolous, irresponsible, and deceitful. In the Freudian version, Nora was an "abnormal woman" and a "hysteric." The purpose both of the de-gendering of *A Doll House* and attacking Nora on personal grounds was to remove Ibsen from the taint of feminism. The logic of the first argument, while never laid out, was that women's status is insufficiently universal to be a subject of art; *A Doll House* is art; ergo, *A Doll House* is not about women's status. This reasoning, I pointed out, is startlingly tautological: if women's rights is a subject insufficiently universal to be the concern of literature, that can only be because the other half of human beings, i.e., men, already enjoy the rights that women lack; women's inequality cannot be a subject of literature *because* women are unequal. Secondly, if one removes the "woman question" from *A Doll House* and gives Nora the same rights and status as her husband,

But there was another kind of backlash, I showed, in which Nora was attacked for exhibiting the most perfidious characteristics of her sex.

there is no play; or rather, there is, precisely, the *crisis* of the play, the confrontation between husband and wife. And to read the confrontation is to encounter, in housewife Nora's simple version, the argument already made by Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill, Harriet Martineau, and Camilla Collett: "I believe that before all else," she says to her husband, "I'm a human being."

I received about a dozen personal letters from *PMLA* readers, divided halfway between praise and blame. One of the latter was from one of the critics I had cited, Einar Haugen, a professor at Harvard and the doyen of Scandinavian Studies in the United States. You have "grossly misrepresented me," Prof. Haugen chided. "I did not say Nora did not represent women; I said that she is "not only that. . . I feel that her case is part of Ibsen's wider view of *human* liberation." He added "And there are after all women like Hedda Gabler in his repertoire." The implication, of course, was that an author who could create *this* specimen could not possibly be interested in the species as a whole.

PMLA published letters pro and con about the article. One of the latter was from the professor who was then teaching modern drama in the English Department at

Berkeley, Marvin Rosenberg; he offered a paraphrase of his *own* article, published fifteen years earlier in *Modern Drama*, on what he called the "two Nora's—the frivolous one and the feminist one—which I had cited and refuted in my article: was Rosenberg not acquainted with literary characters—or people—who grew out of inauthentic role playing? Rosenberg ignored my arguments altogether; he clearly thought that merely repeating *himself* fifteen years later would be sufficient to demolish my argument.

Another anti-Nora letter was from an angry professor of English at the City University of New York. He argued that Ibsen wanted to demonstrate that Nora was a cold egotist, and that he did so through her foil, the kind Mrs. Linde, she of the "wise and loving heart." The writer said that there *is* a sense in which Ibsen was a feminist, "and it is in the sense that Saint Augustine, Dante, and [Pope] John Paul are feminists: all four celebrate the moral dignity of womankind." This would surely have elicited a wry smile from the creator of Nora, who was Ibsen's favorite character. "My Nora," Ibsen said proudly, "went alone."

All that was *then*—and *this*—this session celebrating the publication of *Ibsen's Women*, is now. Things have changed mightily since my *PMLA* quarrels of the 1980s. A few weeks ago, I received an email from a man who introduced himself as a sociologist who was teaching an adult-education course on feminism at NYU. His sole literary text was *A Doll House*, and when he googled the play, he discovered my article on the backlash against Nora. He wrote that he was flabbergasted by what he read; the non-feminist argument, he said, is both "patently ridiculous and offensive to boot." He added that the men and women in his class were as incredulous as he was. They wanted to know how "all these Ibsen professors" could have been so wrong. He also asked me: "Do you think that this sort of thing is still being taught about Ibsen in college literature classes?"

"Do you think that this sort of thing is still being taught about Ibsen in college literature classes?"

I wrote back, explaining the anti-Nora argument as an example of the anti-feminism implicit in the "humanist" tradition that had dominated Western culture since its inception. I also tried to answer his question: there are undoubtedly *some* holdouts in various unenlightened holes who still insist that Nora represents Everyman, I wrote, but they are far less numerous than just a few short decades ago. More and more people had learned to say, along with Nora, "I don't believe that any more."

Thank you all very much for coming.

Joan Templeton

14th International Ibsen Conference, Skien, Norway, September 5-8, 2018

The fourteenth International Ibsen Conference was held at the Ibsenhuset Concert Hall in Skien, Norway, Ibsen's birthplace. Other venues were the Henrik Ibsen Museum, in Venstøp, outside Skien, which was Ibsen's boyhood home, where Mayor Hedda Foss Five of Skien welcomed the participants in an opening reception; the Parkbiografen, site of an evening showing of early Ibsen films; and the Telemark Museum, where a group of sessions was held. One hundred ten speakers presented papers over three days.

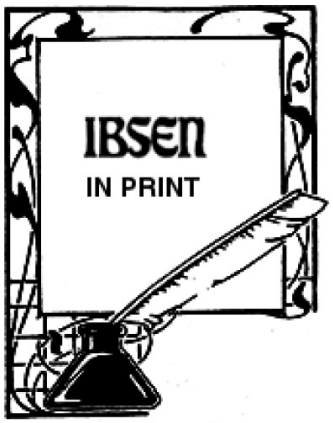
The Conference Co-ordinators were Jens-Marten Hanssen, National Library, Oslo; Anette Storli Andersen, of the Skien municipality; and Ragnhild Scheea, University of Oslo. The local organizing committee was made up of Frode Helland, Director of the Center for Ibsen Studies, University of Oslo; Professors Ellen Rees and Giuliano d'Amico of the Center; Liyang Xia, also of the Center; Jens-Morten Hanssen, and Anette Storli Andersen.

At the closing banquet, Frode Helland presented Joan Templeton with one of Norway's highest honors for "the dissemination of Norwegian culture," the Maltese cross of The Royal Norwegian Order of Merit, whose honorees are chosen by King Harald.

The next International Ibsen Conference will take place in the summer of 2022 in China, at the University of Nanjing, with Chengzhou He as the chief organizer.

Liyang Xia

Frode Helland and Joan Templeton



Survey of Articles on Ibsen: 2017

Editor's Note: This annual survey systematically reviews articles in English on Ibsen in refereed journals and collections. Edited conference proceedings may also be reviewed or noted. In the reviews below, the abbreviation *IS* refers to *Ibsen Studies*.

Outstanding among the 2017 crop of articles is Giuliano D'Amico's contribution to Ibsen's English reception, "Henrietta Frances Lord: Translating Ibsen for the Theosophical Movement" (1), in *Scandinavica*. Usually, Lord has been mentioned only in passing, and in the rare cases where her translations have been studied, they been dismissed as inaccurate or bizarre. D'Amico, an authority on Ibsen's reception, rescues Lord from the dustbin of Ibsen criticism. His argument is that Lord's "peripheral" position as a woman, a feminist, and a theosophist was an asset that allowed her to view Ibsen through a more comprehensive lens than most of her contemporaries. D'Amico's scholarship is formidable. Unearthing Lord's Cambridge background and her translating and feminist bona fides, he discusses her place in the contemporaneous intersection of feminism, theosophy, and socialism, showing how she was trained to resist "Victorian mainstream literary and social narratives." His primary subject is Lord's "Preface" to *Nora*, her translation of *A Doll House* (the text used in Eleanor Marx's famous reading in which Marx played Nora and Bernard Shaw played Krogstad.) Lord's essay indeed reveals her surprising modernity. What Ibsen wanted to expose, she wrote, was "Helmer's false view of half humanity," and he did this through Nora, the "new woman" who prefigured the future for all men and women. D'Amico also demonstrates that Lord's gender-bending discussion of Nora's notion of a "true marriage" reflects the views of her fellow theosophist Anna Kingsford's *The Perfect Way*. And he successfully argues that Lord's source for *Nora* was a German translation,

D'Amico, an authority on Ibsen's reception, rescues Lord from the dustbin of Ibsen criticism.

and that this explains both her errors and her infelicities. D'Amico does not try to rescue Lord's "Preface" to *Ghosts*, in which she identifies characters as failed reincarnations of former selves, but he points out that this oddity is the result both of Lord's theosophy and her conversion to Christian Science. In general, D'Amico proves that the neglected Lord deserves far better than her reputation warrants; her position as an outsider allowed her to see that Ibsen was ultimately not a social but a spiritual writer, a beacon for a new age. The article is a fine contribution to Ibsen studies and a model of reception scholarship.

A second excellent contribution among the 2017 essays, in *IS* 2, is Torbjørn Andersen's "The Contemporary Reception of *Little Eyolf* and its Presentation in *Henrik Ibsens Skrifter* [*Henrik Ibsen's Writings*, ed Vigdis Ystad (Oslo: Universitet i Oslo/ Aschehoug, 2005-10)] (2). Andersen's title is misleading; he not only studies the *Skrifter*'s treatment of the reception of *Little Eyolf*, but offers a highly critical account of the Skrifter's handling of Ibsen's reception in general. While no critical edition can offer a full account of the reception of Ibsen's plays, Anderson recognizes, it should indicate the size of "the whole body of reviews," which is missing here, and, much more importantly, it should follow clear and consistent practices, which is not the case, e.g., Ystad refers to one French, four German, and four English reviews of *When We Dead Awaken*, but Asbjørn Aarseth, in his account of *Borkman*, writes nothing about the play's reception outside Scandinavia. In some cases, private letters by important writers are cited, along with anonymous reviews, and in others, not. The opinions of the Brandes brothers and of the Swedish critic Carl David af Wirsén are privileged over those of other reviewers, with no rationale. And Ystad's approach is analytical while Aarseth lets "the reviews speak for themselves." These discrepancies amount to an extraordinary lack of consistency in a scholarly edition. In Andersen's account of the *Skrifter's* treatment of *Little Eyolf*, he uses his own findings (in his M.A. thesis) to identify Aarseth's bad choices among the early reviews, arguing that it would have been better to omit the sole, unrepresentative British review, and that it is illogical to ignore Herman Bang's three reviews while including one by af Wirsén. He offers a thorough analysis of the ten reviews cited by Aarseth, contextualizing them in the general response to the play "in order to clarify their representedness [*sic*]." And Andersen is fair: "The two most common interpretations of *LE* in the contemporary Scandinavian reception are represented in *HIS*'s sample of reviews." No Ibsen scholar who has consulted the inconsistent, disappointing *Skrifter* will be surprised by Andersen's criticisms. Reviewing the edition for *Ibsen News and Comment*, Evert Sprinchorn noted that apart from its glossaries, some updated commentary, and Narve Fulsås's scrupulous work on the letters, the edition was cumbersome and badly edited, and could serve only "as a kind of heavy appendage to the Centennial Edition" (*INC* 30 [2010], 4). Kudos to *Ibsen Studies* for publishing Andersen's rigorous criticism of the *Skrifter*.

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In the same issue of *IS*, Shouhua Qi's round-up, "Reimagining Ibsen: Recent Adaptations of Ibsen [sic] Plays for the Chinese Stage" (3), is extensively researched and entertaining to boot. Occasionally, language problems keep it from being clear (which editing could have corrected), and it is often more descriptive than analytical. The author's stated aim is to discuss how Ibsen's

plays have been adapted in China "to deliver poignant commentary (inconvenient truths) on sociopolitical, economic and cultural realities." The most important play here, of course, is *An Enemy of the People* (whose production last year in Beijing by the Schaubühne was censored and ultimately curtailed). The author seems to be hedging her bets as she writes confusingly that in Chinese performances of *Enemy*, "(mis)reading some subversive, political messages, intended or otherwise, into the story of someone not afraid to stand alone for what he believed to be the truth, would seem inevitable." Of Wu Xianjiang's famous 1996 production, she writes that the great director offered "a production that interjected some anti-corruption elements into the story." But anti-corruption hardly needed to be "interjected" into a text already full of it. And in an account of two productions of *Enemy* by the veteran director Lin Zhaohua, she notes that Lin sought to dramatize the connections between Stockmann's predicament and Chinese censorship, but that he "has not become an enemy of the people by any stretch of the term." What is meant by this? The account of Lin's *The Master Builder* is strictly descriptive, as is, mostly, the exceedingly entertaining section on the wild, video-saturated *Ghosts 2.0* (2014), directed by Wang Chong of "*la* [*sic*] *nouveau vogue*" [*la nouvelle vague*?]. At the end, Oswald shouts: "A father's sin will be visited upon his children" as he throws about "hundreds of pieces" of women's underwear. Regina also has her moment, cursing "men, life, religion, her foster father, her biological mother, and prostitutes." Tantalizingly, the author notes that Manders is not a pastor but a "Party Secretary Man" who "offers an unflattering, barbed commentary on the party, its ideology, and its power in China." *Ghosts 2.0* was invited, but later disinvited, to the Tenth Shanghai International Contemporary Theater Festival on the grounds that there was a hole in the stage! One longs for more on the discontents of this production. As for the Hangzhou Yue Opera Company's operas based on *Hedda Gabler* and *The Lady from the Sea*, the author devotes six pages to these "extreme adaptations" which she cleverly analyzes as "Sinicized love triangles." It would have been nice to have less discussion of these safe offerings and more on the "inconvenient truths" of other productions, but the author made me long to see Haida and Wembo (Hedda and Løvborg) dying together in the sword dance. I hope that Shouhau Qi will continue her work on Chinese productions of Ibsen's plays; there's a very interesting book here.

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Also in this issue of *IS*, Klaus Müller-Wille's "*Spidsborgere I Blæst*—Henrik Ibsen's *De Unges Forbund* [*The League of Youth*] and the Crisis of the Radical Political Imaginary" (4) is less successful than the other two articles. While it begins as one of those articles that laboriously explain what they will discuss before going on to do it —"I will read *De Unges Forbund* in the light of current discussions in German literary studies that have been inspired by Cornelius Castoriadis' theory of the political imaginary"—the discussion itself, which argues that Ibsen's play is a neglected text that embodies the 19th-century European zeitgeist, is unfortunately difficult to understand, couched in a theoretical language that is often so vague and unidiomatic—it reads like a translation from German—that the aim of the essay gets lost. It may be that Ibsen's play is more significant than its critical reputation warrants —an amusing, occasionally creaky satire on contemporary politics that is, importantly, Ibsen's first experiment in prose Realism

—and the author is certainly right to dispute Ståle Dingstad's weird claim that Ibsen's comedy is too trivial to count as a problem drama; Ibsen himself wrote to his publisher that his play dramatized "frictions and forces in modern life." But the play's anti-populist, anti-press sentiments seem both so obvious and so simple that analogies to Kierkegaard's study of Aristophanes's *The Clouds*, followed by a discussion of a Norwegian critic's analysis of Heinrich Rötscher's influence on Kierkegaard, followed by Kierkegaard's analysis of the 19th-century zeitgeist in *A Literary Review*, followed by Heiberg's influence on this analysis, seem *de trop*.

In the first number of the 2017 *IS*, Christian Janss's "When Nora Stayed: More Light on the German Ending [of *A Doll House*"] (5) corrects one of the most famous notions about Ibsen's early European reception: that the ending of the first German *Doll House*, in which Nora announces that she cannot bear to leave her children and stays home, was the result of the refusal of actress Hedwig Neimann-Raabe to play Ibsen's text. Her objection—"I would never leave *my* children"—is famous in the critical literature. Janss, who has done excellent yeoman work in the German primary sources, shows that Neimann-Raabe was not responsible for the alternative ending; the production's director quoted her to bolster his *own* argument that the play needed an "audience-friendly" finale, and it was William Lange, Ibsen's German agent and translator, who agreed with him, who wrote to Ibsen to propose an alternate ending. The essay then turns from the subject of its title to offer an account of Ibsen's early German reception in which the focus becomes Lange's career; this is followed by a discussion of a production of *Nora* at Vienna's Stadttheater, after which comes an account of the famous Italian imbroglio over *A Doll House* that involved Duse, Luigi Capuana, Moritz Prozor, and

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Ibsen. The reader has to wonder where the essay is going; it calls out for reorganization and editing for coherence and emphasis. Another problem is that the essay is frequently impossible to understand because of language problems. One example: Janss has discovered a fascinating story—hitherto unknown in the literature—of a Lugné-Poe production in which Nora stayed home, but the account is so confusing, including a garbled footnote about sources, that the reader is lost. Given Janss's extensive research, this is a pity. The editors of *IS* owe it to speakers of other languages to make sure that their MSS are understandable in English.

Also in the first issue of the 2017 *IS*, Gunvor Mejdell's "*Et Dukkehjem* [*A Doll House*] in Arabic Translation," (6) is a fine example of a prominent interest of the Ibsen Center at the University of Oslo for the past two decades: to encourage the study of Ibsen throughout the world, or, to draw on the phrase of the famous medical organization, to promote "Ibsen Without Borders." Readers without Arabic will find it hard to follow Mejdell's comparative inspections of five Arabic translations of *A Doll House* as she focuses on words and phrases to identify their English relay translations, but her analysis will certainly be useful to Arab translators of Ibsen. And Mejdell's substantial introductory material, based on extensive research, will be of interest to Ibsen scholars generally. She first provides an account of the very brief history of drama in Arab literature and then explains the importance of the two opposing Arabic language traditions—the literary "high Arabic" and the vernacular. In her very

interesting account of Ibsen's early Arab reception, she discusses how intellectuals "found their way to Ibsen" through French translations—both Levantine and Egyptian

Particularly interesting is the account of the Nasser regime's campaign to promote knowledge of Ibsen.

scholars were enthusiastic Francophiles —and through Bernard Shaw, whose *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* was especially appreciated in Egypt. The stories of Ibsen's first Egyptian translators and scholars contain gems; we learn, for example, about Salāma Mūsā, devoté of Voltaire, Marx, Shaw, and Darwin, who was important in introducing Ibsen to Egypt and who linked *A Doll House* with Egyptian women's issues. It is also fascinating to learn that the earliest Arabic translations in Egypt, made in the 1950s and long out of print, still circulate widely among drama students in photocopies. Particularly interesting is the account of the Nasser regime's campaign to promote knowledge of Ibsen, along with Shakespeare, Molière, Sophocles, and Chekhov, through translations. Mejdell has thoroughly mined the available sources and provided a fine introduction to the Arab reception of Ibsen.

Also in issue one of *IS* 2017 is "Reading Ibsen with Irigaray: Gendering Tragedy in *Hedda Gabler*" (7), by Lior Levy, who wants to show that Hedda is a victim/heroine who embodies Irigaray's anti-patriarchal argument in *Speculum de l'autre femme*. Since Levy devotes only a few paragraphs to *Speculum* before applying it to Ibsen's play, her argument is thin. But Irigary does not, in any case, help Levy prove her thesis that Hedda knows the truth of what Ibsen wrote in his working notes on *A Doll House*: "A woman cannot be herself in modern society. It is an exclusively male society with laws made by men and with prosecutors and judges who asses feminine conduct from a masculine standpoint." The problem here is that there is no indication that Hedda has ever thought about, much less theorized about, the position of woman in society. Hedda herself tells Brack that she has no idea why she is so miserable. Levy claims that "Ibsen deals with Hedda's tragic fate rather than Thea's or Aunt Julle's [neither of whom has a "tragic fate"] because she is the only one cognizant of the fact that the existing cultural, social, and political frameworks prevent each of these roles from being her own. Hedda's tragedy is rooted in her awareness of her impossible position." This declaration, which makes the uneducated, desperate Hedda into a clear-eyed analyst of her own situation who is also aware of "cultural, social, and political" norms is contrary to Ibsen's portrait. The argument that Hedda's interest in "public life" is indicated by her idea to push Tesman into politics is grasping at straws, and the belle of the ball who has married Tesman because nobody else asked would be puzzled to learn that she "persistently resists the phallocentric order." Levy claims that Hedda is unable to do this "in the language available to her" and cites a bad example: it

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isn't because Hedda does not have "the language" to tell Tesman that she's pregnant but because she is so appalled by the reality of it that she can't bear to name it. Hedda is not held back from revolt against her life because she lacks a language to do so, but because, as she herself says, she is a coward: "Courage, yes; if only one had that." Certainly, Hedda's suicide is a sign of her

revolt—I was, I think, the first critic to argue that her act is a refusal to serve—but nothing in Ibsen's text suggests that Hedda conceived of her suicide as a feminist act. Nor can I hear in Hedda's "wild music" a "promise" that, à la Irigaray, "new women will be born," but only terrible frustration and bitter, determined defiance.

In 2017, Norderstedt (Hanse), brought out a re-edition of the 1893 *The Pocket Ibsen*, a collection of the popular parodies of Ibsen's plays by the British journalist Thomas Antsey Guthrie ("F. Antsey") that had originally appeared in *Punch*. Coincidentally, Rebecca Flynn's "Parody as Translation: Ibsen's New Woman in the pages of *Punch*," also appeared in 2017, in *Nordic Theatre Studies* (8). Flynn's subject is what she calls Antsey's "translation" of Ibsen's women from tragic to comic characters and the resulting implications for the early reception of Ibsen in England. She

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argues that Anstey's portraits reflect Linda Hutcheon's notion of parody as "doubly coded in political terms: it both legitimizes and subverts that which it parodies." This is hard to grant for Antsey's *Nora; or, The Bird Cage*, in which, after her famous door slam, Nora returns home, explaining to Helmer that her lack of money prevented her from going to the theatre to educate herself; she will leave tomorrow, after breakfast. Flynn artfully analyzes that Antsey turns the play into a kind of "makeshift romantic comedy," but his parody also trivializes Nora. The argument works better with Antsey's *Hedda Gabler*, in which Hedda accidentally and fatally shoots Tesman, Thea, and Brack. "The accounts of those everlasting bores settled!" Hedda exclaims. "Then my suicide becomes unnecessary." Flynn writes that Antsey's ending gives Hedda "the ability to achieve personal autonomy." Indeed! In Antsey's most ambitious parody, *Pill-Doctor Herdal*, a sequel to *The Master Builder*, the play-hopping Hilda, after having sent Ragnar into bankruptcy, has made Thea mad with jealousy, which causes Tesman's suicide, and has also persuaded Kroll to ride on the white horse, from which he falls off and drowns. Hilda now cajoles Dr. Herdal, now married to Solness's widow, to turn his pills into poison and swallow them, but his assistant, Helmer, has replaced the poison with chalk. Helmer and Hilda, who becomes Nora, agree that her education is now complete and that she can return home. Flynn's analysis is that Antsey's Hilda-Nora is the emancipated woman as monster, but one could argue that it is precisely this notion that Antsey's outrageous serial killer is parodying. And it is questionable that Nora's returning home with Helmer marks her "rehabilitation," for she says: "I have quite made up my mind that Society and the Law are all wrong, and that I am right." Antsey's parodies, as Flynn argues, both challenge and reinscribe the New Woman, but I would add that they are also digs at the provinciality of Ibsen's detractors.

"Enemy of Society, Hero of the Nation: Henrik Ibsen" (9), in the collection of essays, *Idealizing Authorship*," by Suze van der poll, is superficial and contains inaccuracies. The information offered on Ibsen's last years is a potted summary of information available in the biographies, e.g., the medals Ibsen received, his daily walk to the Grand Hotel, the idolization by the public, the caricatures in *Vikingen*, and so on. The essay omits the criticism Ibsen's plays continued to receive in his old age and in his own country and in so doing gives a skewered account of the end of his life. Also, Ibsen is oddly presented as a bland barometer of the intellectual weather: "the general public loved *Brand*." Where is the

cultural warrior who received inspiration for *Brand*, as he explained, from watching his pet scorpion attack rotten fruit? *Brand* shocked the pants off a large part of the "general public," as did *Love's Comedy*, which is said to have attacked "the amatory institutions of society" when in fact the play was a jeremiad in which Ibsen, as he said, "cracked the whip as best I could over love and marriage," causing such a scandal that he was ostracized by the good citizens of Christiania. Van der poll's account of the reception of *A Doll House* and *Ghosts* gives no sense of the perturbation they caused —the extraordinary vitriol that the London press poured on *Ghosts*—or the great devotion and excitement of the Ibsenites. And there is a wrongheaded account of "Ibsen's attempt to influence his media image" when he wrote to the Norwegian Consul in London to ask him to correct a misleading interview that had appeared in a newspaper; Ibsen was not interested in his "media image" but in correcting errors. Finally, the "self-image" that Ibsen

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presented in his plays—"a liar and a story teller in *Peer Gynt*, an enemy of the people, an old master-builder afraid of the new generation, an artist who has forsaken his muse"—is too reductive to warrant comment.

Philip Ross Bullock's "Ibsen on the London Stage: Independent Theatre as Transnational Space" (10), in *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, is without merit, an extremely selective, greatly distorted account that deserves ample criticism. One extraordinary contention is the claim that the 19th-century English theatre was "remarkably receptive to foreign influences"—a statement that would inspire guffaws from the ghost of Bernard Shaw. The "foreign influences" were mostly trivial French plays, including the inane trifles of Scribe's disciple Victorien Sardou and his imitators, which Shaw famously termed "Sardoodledom." Equally astonishing is Bullock's claim that London saw "a number of licensed establishment productions of Ibsen during the 1890s"; the example Bullock gives is the single one! One of the most important facts of Ibsen's British reception is that the establishment theatres ignored Ibsen, which was one of Shaw's major complaints against the Victorian stage. Bullock claims that Shaw's "critical writing" is "the most significant" source for his own argument for the "transnational" nature of the late Victorian stage, but the central point of Shaw's three years of *Saturday Review* columns is that the British theatre was both deeply provincial and deeply awful. The one Shaw work that Bullock mentions is *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, and his account is erroneous: the book was not "given as a public lecture" nor have "the contents of this lecture been extensively studied." As Jonathan Wisenthal demonstrated in *Shaw and Ibsen*, Shaw discarded a good deal of his lecture when he revised it for the *Quintessence*, including everything on the subject which Bullock identifies as "Shaw's emphasis": how Ibsen's plays could serve socialism! One can hardly believe her eyes when she reads that Bullock cites Wisenthal as a source. Some other important corrections: the Independent Theatre's first performance of *Ghosts* in 1891 did not take place at the Variety Theatre, but at the Royal. It was not Elizabeth Robins who founded the New Century Theatre, but Robins and William Archer. The great actress Janet Achurch did not make use of the independent theatres to "challenge the domination of male actor-managers"; she worked with her husband, the actor-manager Charles Charrington, until her death. The

blackmailer in *A Doll House* is not "Krogstadt" but "Krogstad."

Apart from the shocking quality of the scholarship, Bullock's thesis is unfair and intellectually confused. He charges that scholars of the independent theatre movement have failed to examine it as *Weltliteratur,* a "transnational space operating outside of national canons and history," but Pacale Casanova, the one scholar whom Bullock bothers to mention, does in fact present it as "transnational"; and it is a given in the critical literature that Antoine's Théâtre Libre, as well as Otto Brahm's Frei Bühne, Jacob Grein's Independent Theatre, and Konstantin Stanislavski and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danshenko's Moscow Art Theatre (the last is unmentioned by Bullock), were international ventures that staged the avant-garde playwrights of Scandinavia, France, Germany, and Russia. Bullock complains that scholarship has emphasized "individual national traditions" rather than "cosmopolitan literary space per se" (without offering examples), but why should scholars impose a theory on theatre history, which, like all history, cannot be reduced to a "per se" of any kind? And like all theatre in all ages, the independent houses had a local habitation as well as a transnational one. It would be absurd to offer a study of Ibsen in France that omitted the complaints of Francisque Sarcey, who ceaselessly carped about "la brume [fog] scandinave" that was the opposite of French "clarté." Or to give an account of Ibsen's English reception that did not include Clement Scott's fury against what he considered Ibsen's abominations. One last comment: Bullock has the habit of offering conventional wisdom as though it were new. What reader does not know that gender was an important element in Ibsen's plays? A more important, and unrhetorical, question: Who recommended this piece for publication?

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Joan Templeton, Editor

1. Giuliano D'Amico, "Henrietta Frances Lord: Translating Ibsen for the Theosophical Movement," *Scandinavica* 56 (2017), 96-122.
2. Torbjørn Andersen, "The Contemporary Reception of *Little Eyolf* and its Presentation in *Henrik Ibsen's Skrifter*," *IS* 17:2 (2017), 114-40.
3. Shouhua Qi, "Reimagining Ibsen: Recent Adaptations of Ibsen [*sic*] Plays for the Chinese Stage," *IS* 17:2 (2017), 141-64.
4. Klaus Müller-Wille, "'Spidsborgere i Blæst'—Henrik Ibsen's *De unges Forbund* and the Crisis of the Radical Political Imaginary," *IS* 17:2 (2017), 87-113.
5. Christian Janss, "When Nora Stayed: More Light on the German Ending [of *A Doll House*]," *IS* 17:1 (2017), 3-27.
6. Gunvor Mejdell, "*Et Dukkehjem* [*A Doll House*] in Arabic Translation," *IS* 17:1 (2017), 28-53.
7. Lior Levy, "Reading Ibsen with Irigaray: Gendering Tragedy in *Hedda Gabler*," *IS* 17:1 (2017), 54-84.
8. Rebecca Flynn, "Parody as Translation: Ibsen's new woman in the pages of *Punch*," *Nordic Theatre Studies* 28:2 (2017), 56-70.
9. Suze van der poll, "Enemy of Society, Hero of the Nation: Henrik Ibsen, 1828-1906," in *Idolizing Authorship. Literary Celebrity and the Construction of Identity, 1800 to the Present*, ed. Gaston Franssen and Rick Honings (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2017), 81-104.
10. Philip Ross Bullock, "Ibsen on the London Stage: Independent Theatre as Transnational Space," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 53:3 (2017), 360-70, *https://doi.org/10.1093*.

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