IBSEN News and Comment

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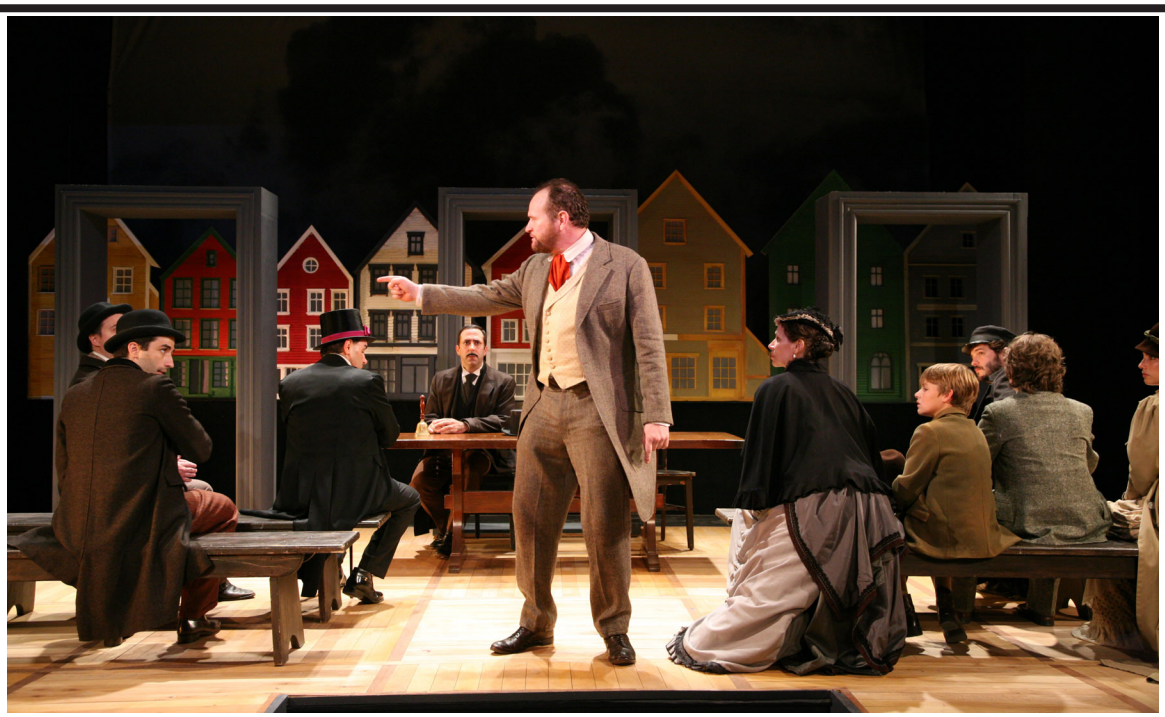

Phoenix Theatre, New York, *An Enemy of the People*, page 12 Gerry Goodstein

IBSEN ON STAGE, 2008

NEWS AND NOTICES

IBSEN IN PRINT

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Editor, Joan Templeton

Editor's Note: We try to cover important U.S. productions of Ibsen's plays as well as significant foreign productions. Members are encouraged to volunteer; please contact me at joantmp@aol.com if you are interested in reviewing a particular production.

Peer Gynt

The Guthrie Theater, Minneapolis
January 18 – March 2, 2008

The Commonweal Theatre, Lanesboro
April 26 – May 18, 2008

The state of Minnesota, which is probably the oldest and most venerable of Norwegian-American enclaves, was the site, in early 2008, of not one but two productions of *Peer Gynt*. Both were the culmination of a carefully nurtured project, both were presented in familiar Ibsen venues but in nearly-new theaters, and both were, in different ways, exceptional theatrical experiences.

The earlier of the two was at Minneapolis's Guthrie Theater, nationally and globally acclaimed, and a favorite destination for Midwestern theatergoers for nearly a half century. In 2007, the Guthrie moved to a breathtaking new downtown structure on the banks of the Mississippi, a recent triumph of famed French architect Jean Nouvel. Of its three performance spaces, the Wurtele thrust stage most closely resembles that of the original Guthrie, and was the venue for *Peer Gynt*.

The driving force behind the production was not a Guthrie regular, but the well-known American actor and director Mark Rylance, who played the title role and whose brief appearance in Minnesota fell between his successful if controversial tenure at London's famous Globe Theatre, where he was the founding artistic direc-

tor, and a starring role on Broadway in a revival of *Boeing-Boeing*, a 1960s West End farce. Rylance, incidentally, began his professional career not very far from the Guthrie, at the now defunct Wisconsin Shakespeare Festival at the University of Wisconsin at Platteville, an endeavor which was underappreciated in its time and is still missed today by at least a few of us. It was Rylance who solicited the famous poet Robert Bly, Minnesota's Poet Laureate and an elder statesman among Norwegian-Americans, to complete a translation of *Peer Gynt* on which Bly had worked intermittently over many years. Bly chose rhymed couplets to evoke Ibsen's verse, and the combination of 19th-century diction and breezy modern argot, which pleased some and displeased others, was evidently meant to shock. If the translation was cloying and too cute at times, it showed both facility and fluency.

Another important member of Rylance's team was director Tim Carroll, whose partnership with Rylance has included several productions at the Globe. Carroll's focus was on juxtaposition: Norway and Minnesota; youth and age; the troll kingdom and the world of men; destitution and wealth, and so on. And Rylance also brought on board his wife, Claire van Kampen, as composer, who, with no apologies to Grieg, drew from an assortment of traditional and contemporary sources in her partly cacophonous and somewhat unmemorable score.

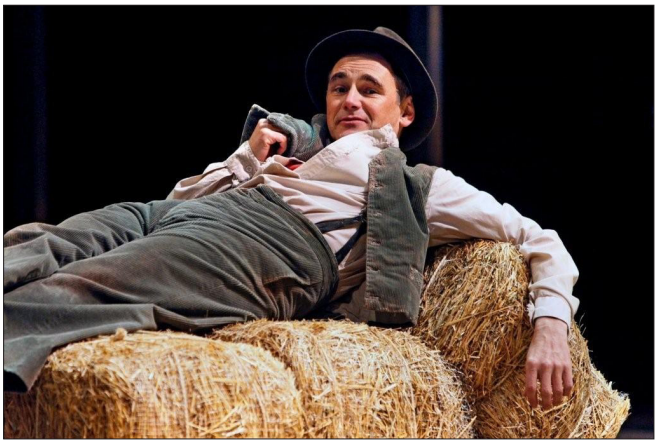
The performance begins with a party, something of an old-fashioned barn dance, to which the audience is invited. Set designer Laura Hopkins constructed a simple, imposing backdrop which suggests the interior of a barn, and in front of it, a puncheon floor of rough planks which entirely covers the thrust stage and which plays a significant role of its own as the action unfolds. With the house lights up, the actors—all but Rylance—assemble onstage, emerging individually or in small groups, greeting each other by their real names, frolicking about with the several children included in the cast, trying out new dance steps as a small band of rustic musicians plays what Midwesterners call "old time," and coaxing front-row spectators to join the fun. The mood is festive, the punch bowl in place, and clusters of balloons with "Peter" written on them hang suspended, waiting to be released. As the house lights dim, Peer/Rylance, in a snappy business suit, arrives with a confident strut, is properly surprised, and then, instantly, the stage darkens and the framing device of the party dissolves. When the lights come up, only Peer remains, stripped to faded red long johns and cowering under a scolding Aase in Ibsen's familiar opening scene. The director's clever surprise party has enabled him to juxtapose the successful fantasy Peer of Peer's dreams and the real Peer, the poverty-stricken failure who is the object of his mother's scorn—and love. The Aase, Isabel Monk, a Guthrie veteran who continues to lend grace to every role she plays, ably manages Ibsen's ranges of brashness and tenderness.

Michael Daniel

Other cast notables, most in multiple roles, include the two veteran Guthrie performers Richard Ooms, who plays the bridegroom's father and the Skinny Devil, and Richard Inglewski, the Troll King and "Monsieur Airhead" (the Frenchman); Tyson Forbes is a brawny Aslak; Jim Lichtschneidl is a properly menacing Button Moulder (but with a prop ladle better suited to vichyssoise than molten metal). Miriam Silverman, a Guthrie newcomer, plays Solveig with an enchanting softness, though perhaps without the undergirding passion behind the character's steadfastness and sacrifice.

It is, of course, Rylance who bears the responsibility of marshalling the production, and he largely succeeds, his trademark pixie-like mis-

chief ringing especially true in the act-one fantasy scenes; he then assumes the rueful wisdom of a man of the world as he experiences various successes but never fulfillment, and finally, a distinct gravitas as he nears the end of his journey and begins to recognize its futility.



Michael Daniel

The Guthrie brought its usual power pack of stunning aural and visual effects: explosions, tricky trapdoors, echoes, scrolled "gobo" lighting, impeccably crafted costumes and wigs. But the most enduring impression was left by the stage floor. In a company brochure called "Building the Production," set designer Hopkins termed her invention "simplistic" and also "a major challenge," and indeed, the floor's construction must have been anything but simple. It included forty 2 x 12 planks, very long, very heavy, rough cut and sandblasted, then fitted with thousands of auxiliary parts to achieve a remarkable, slow undulating movement, striking enough to elicit gasps. The floor was assembled first in miniature, then in full scale in the scene shop, in its operative entirety, before being painstakingly moved onto the stage. The effort was worth it. The swelling surface becomes the shifting desert sands of North Africa, the deadly whitecaps off the Norwegian coast, and, in general, the treacherous, unsteady ground upon which Peer—like all of us—treads.

The Guthrie *Peer Gynt* is the company's first Ibsen production in its dazzling new house and also its first Ibsen production since the watershed centenary year of 2006. It brought to Guthrie patrons all the dynamic polish and spectacle they have come to expect and was a landmark theatre experience.

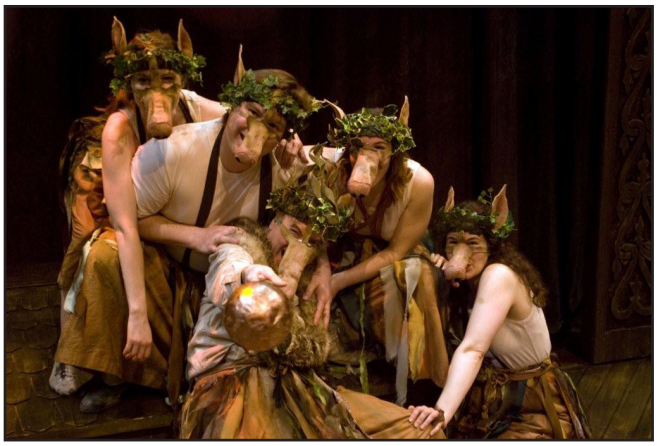
The Guthrie show closed on Sunday, March 8, just as rehearsals were getting underway for another, much less lavish, but no less successful *Peer Gynt*, in the town of Lanesboro. A pleasant two-hour drive south of the Twin Cities, Lanesboro, a small resort community tucked into Minnesota's Southeastern "Bluff Country," is home to the Commonweal Theatre Company, a year-round professional troupe which annually produces an Ibsen Festival (whose productions are regularly reviewed in this journal). The Festival, the only one of its kind in North America, was the brainchild of Eric Bunge, managing director of the Commonweal and a local maven whose efforts as businessman, hotelier, actor, singer, translator and self-styled diplomatic liaison have helped to bring Lanesboro to its present ascendancy. The Festival's

The swelling surface becomes the shifting desert sands of North Africa, the deadly whitecaps off the Norwegian coast, and, in general, the treacherous, unsteady ground upon which Peer—like all of us—treads.

coordinator is Adrienne Sweeney, who is also a frequent Commonweal performer. Sweeney has made "Ibsen weekend" a multi-faceted spectacle for the local community and for many non-local participants as well, with concerts, dances, storytelling, art exhibits and installations, a farmers' market, lectures and panel discussions, plenty of Norse foods and crafts, and many activities for children.

Since its inception in 1989 up until last year, the Commonweal had performed in the old St. Mane Theatre, a converted cracker-box movie house with a seating capacity of 126. Legend has it that the backstage toilets could not be flushed during a performance. Even in these circumstances, audiences were always impressed by the professional

quality of the productions under the leadership of artistic director Hal Kropp, and the Commonweal's reputation grew steadily. After a successful, years-long fundraising drive, the Commonweal was able



Commonweal Theatre

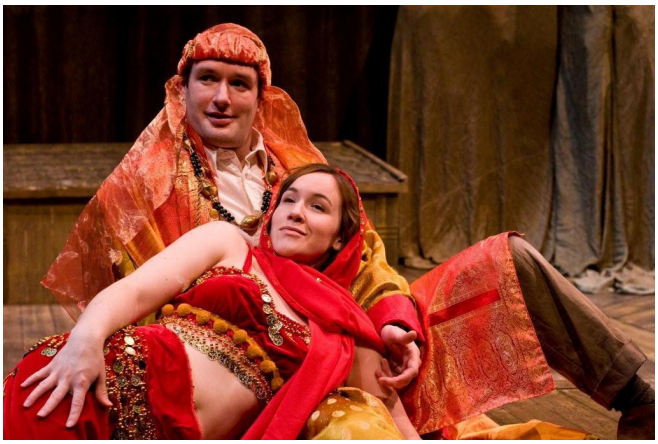
to open its new theatre in the summer of 2007, a compact but roomy thrust stage with state-of-the-art equipment and with nearly 200 seats—from the original Guthrie. This move, a milestone for both the company and the community, understandably brought new opportunities and challenges. For Kropp, one of these was very specific. For years, he had wanted to produce *Peer Gynt* at the Ibsen Festival, but he recognized that his small, creaky theatre would be an enormous obstacle. Now, he could go to work.

Kropp's vision encompassed every available foot of performance space, and more. Trolls emerged from beneath the stage, Peer's abduction of Ingrid took flight above vaulted archways, characters entered and exited through all the aisles, and silhouetted figures soared overhead, suggesting flying reindeer or ships at sea or the vast desert. This use of all the space available greatly facilitated the remarkable feat of staging *Peer Gynt* with a cast of only *six* actors. While Kropp modestly suggests that over its long production history, *Peer Gynt* has probably been performed with even fewer actors, one imagines that the text must have been heavily cut, and that the performances were more readings than productions. While the Commonweal production, like almost all productions of the play, was cut, it was done so judiciously that the spectator had the sense of experiencing Ibsen's play intact.

The Commonweal's Peer was Jerome Yorke, a Twin Cities-based actor and a relative newcomer to Lanesboro. Like Rylance, Yorke portrayed Peer throughout the production, from youth to old age. Very adept and versatile as the younger Peer, Yorke perfected all the leaps and climbs and rope tricks devised by Kropp and stage manager Troy Iverson, and as the midlife and elder Peer, he

This use of all the space available greatly facilitated the remarkable feat of staging *Peer Gynt* with a cast of only *six* actors.

adjusted his gait and stance appropriately, though his youth and strength often showed through. For the Solveig, Kropp recruited Chicago actress Irene Erkenbrack, a former Commonweal intern. Lithe and blonde, she played Solveig as the usual ingénue, and her appearance and demeanor formed an obvious contrast with Stef Dickens, a veteran of



Commonweal Theatre

several Commonweal seasons who offers a shrewish but tempting Ingrid and an appropriately sultry Anitra.

Three more veterans rounded out the cast: Scott Dixon as a Troll King who retains his distinct aura of danger even when he is an outcast; David Hennessey's brilliantly restrained, menacing Button Moulder; and Jill Underwood, a member of the Commonweal board of directors and a cerebral actress who has worked extensively in New York and

Los Angeles. Commonweal audiences always hope to see Underwood listed in the cast and consider themselves fortunate when she takes part in a post-performance "talk-back," where she invariably responds assertively and knowledgeably. In *Peer Gynt* she is at her best, moving effortlessly from a taunting Aslak to a slutty seter girl to an Aase whose death scene here must surely be one of the most moving ever staged.

Throughout the production, the innovative direction of Hal Kropp is apparent, along with Kropp's clear, engaging exuberance with his new facility and fine cast. One especially striking scene is the fourth-act banquet, in which the pompous and doomed voluptuaries, sporting vests bearing their national colors, quadrangulate about the shallow, pontificating (but ever-surviving) Peer. A glowing backdrop with a spectral profile, perhaps suggesting Ibsen's sphinx, perhaps an ancient Nordic figurehead, hovers eerily above the action.

Well-wrought productions often contain an extra star among their non-human actors. And if this was the complicated, expensive, wavy floor at the Guthrie, at the Commonweal it was a large simple panel of dun-colored Chinese silk. Kropp chose this fabric because of its suppleness, and, like its flesh-and-blood colleagues, the panel played many roles. It was the muddy stream snaking through the Gynt farmstead, a tent in the North African desert, a pitying shield for the Cairo inmates, and, in its most dramatic manifestation, nothing less than the Great Boyg himself, so much more frightening than a mere disembodied voice as it oozes out from a trapdoor, enfolding the characters and threatening a stunned Peer with lurching thrusts. This is minimalist staging of the most creative kind.

Kropp may be correct in his guess that *Peer Gynt* has been staged before with six actors or even fewer. But I doubt that there has been another minimalist *Peer Gynt* as complete and seamless as Kropp's production, with its high level of commitment and mastery. The Commonweal, with its gifted and experienced company, its magnificent new facility, and its impeccable artistic direction is emerging as a premier Ibsen venue.

Jim Briggs

Hedda Gabler
In a new version by Brian Friel
Gate Theatre, Dublin
September 30 – November 15, 2008

Editor's Note: Friel's *Hedda Gabler* (*after Ibsen*) (Loughcrew: 2008) is available from Gallery Press at www.gallerypress.com for 12.50 euros.

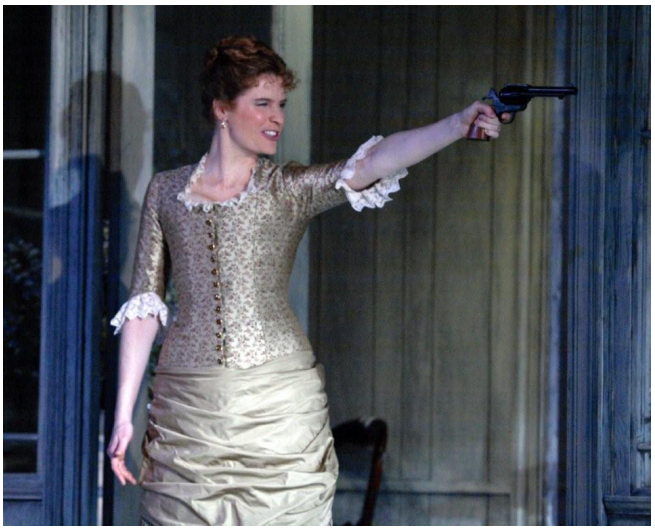
The production of *Hedda Gabler* adapted for the stage by one of Ireland's leading dramatists, Brian Friel, marks the 80th birthday of Dublin's Gate Theatre. Established in September, 1928, as a subscription company, the Gate's ambitious goal was to introduce Dublin audiences to the best offerings of the contemporary theatre. Its first production was the Irish premiere of *Peer Gynt*. Dispensing with the pictorial realism that had marked earlier productions of the play, the directors Hilton Edwards and Micheál MacLiammóir presented *Peer Gynt* in a radically innovative, impressionistic style. Mountains, valleys, and Aase's peasant hut were suggested by two steps placed in various positions on the stage. Fantastic landscapes created by the careful interplay of colored light and silhouette drew the rapt audience's attention to the illusory nature of Peer's fairy-tale world.

The Gate *Peer Gynt* was the first commercially successful Irish production of an Ibsen play. It was also the first production that articulated to the Irish audience the importance of Ibsen's influence on Irish literary tradition. Rarely seen in Dublin, Ibsen's plays had a profound impact on, among

others, W. B. Yeats, J. M. Synge, James Joyce, and Sean O'Casey. The lasting effects of this influence are evidenced in the work of Thomas Kilroy, who in 1989 put a contemporary Irish twist on *Ghosts*, and Frank McGuiness, who has recently completed a twenty-year project of translating Ibsen's major works. The current Gate production of Brian Friel's version of *Hedda Gabler* thus continues a long Ibsen tradition in Irish theatre and is itself a significant landmark in Ibsen's Irish reception. Like the Gate's inaugural production, it is a radical and innovative approach to Ibsen's text.

At first the number of Friel's textual alterations seems baffling. The illusion of 19th- century Norway conveyed by the set and costume design is shattered with the appearance of Bertha (Billie Traynor), whose speech and mannerisms make her look as though she has stepped out of one of Synge's peasant plays. Hedda (Justine Mitchell) calls Aunt Juliana (Susan Fitzgerald) an "interfering bitch" and Judge Brack a "smooth scoundrel." And the suave Judge, wonderfully portrayed by Andrew Woodall, continually enlightens his listeners by detailed explanations of the etymology of such Americanisms as "making whoopee" or "smackeroo on the kisser." It soon becomes clear that what we see on stage is neither Ibsen's play in a new translation nor a contemporary version of the play but a dramatization of Friel's encounter with the text. Anachronisms, literary allusions, and absurd cultural references abound in this play, just as, one imagines, they flickered through Friel's mind as he was reading *Hedda Gabler* (in a literal translation provided by Toril Solvang). Certain humorous moments, such as Tesman's confession of love for his slippers, are inflated into long passages of sustained comedy. Textual alterations mushroom when the text seems purposefully ambiguous. Friel also reads between Ibsen's lines as he replaces succinct dialogue with lengthy monologues and makes the characters confess to feelings barely hinted at in the original. Thea makes a soap-opera style declaration of her love for Loevborg. Aunt Juliana relates the last moments of Aunt Rena's death. Hedda admits to Loevborg that rejecting him sexually was a mistake: "A leap with you had to be made; it was time for it. . . . And I wanted it so much to make it—I can't tell you—so much, so much. But I just couldn't find the courage to take that leap with you."

Such alterations may seem, at first, to rob the play of its conciseness and to reduce its sophistication and ambiguity. Yet Friel's approach



Anthony Woods

is justified by the interpretive depth of his engagement with Ibsen's text. Even though he approaches the classic play as a kind of playground which he deconstructs, exaggerates, and parodies at will, his intention is not to adapt *Hedda* to his own purposes, or to "relate" it to the concerns of our culture, but to understand it.

Friel's Hedda is well aware of the criticisms that greeted her initial appearance on the English, and over ten years later, on the Irish stage. "I know

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it sounds abnormal but my honeymoon bored me. Am I unnatural?" she asks Brack, echoing the sentiments of the Irish journalist who wondered in 1907 whether "the sense of revulsion which

[Hedda] moves in the spectator" may not be "traceable to the circumstance that in just one respect she is absolutely abnormal." Friel's Hedda is also well aware of later, more sympathetic views that focus on the lack of a suitable vocation for this accomplished horsewoman and excellent shot. Friel's Hedda does not believe for a moment that she might get satisfaction out of supervising her husband's political career. Responding to Brack's mocking suggestion that she take up painting, Hedda erupts: "Oh, clever Judge Brack! No, painting doesn't interest me. But what about that old Turkish craft of macramé? Or bee keeping, perhaps? Or collecting miniature lead soldiers? Surely that would have a special interest for a general's daughter?"

In a crucial lengthening of Ibsen's text, Friel makes Hedda describe her anxiety in terms reminiscent of Solness of *The Master Builder.*

Anthony Woods

Indeed, Friel's Brack is far cleverer than Ibsen's. Sounding more like a modern literary critic than a 19th- century judge, he attempts to solve the mystery of Hedda by analyzing her unhappiness. "Marriage can be traumatic . . . for a woman of such fiercely independent spirit," he says, showing an anachronistic understanding of Hedda's situation. Yet he fails in his attempt to counsel Hedda out of her depression and thus explain the play: "We're all going to be bored if we keep brooding on our own restricted lives, look outside yourself and –" But Hedda interrupts: "He is so wise. We're liable to implode just because we don't see that perfect little petunia out there, or the chaste moon peeping out from behind that cloud, or the smile on baby's face when it hears his darling mummy."

Once regarded as a monster, Hedda is now frequently eulogized as a victim of her society. Yet, neither approach completely resolves the enigma of the play. Hedda's suicide is not merely the outcome of her conflict with her environment. It is an act that threatens the world views of both the play's other characters and its audience.

In a crucial lengthening of Ibsen's text, Friel makes Hedda describe her anxiety in terms reminiscent of Solness of *The Master Builder*. "Every so often a dark impulse takes hold of me," she tells Brack as she explains her insult to Aunt Juliana; "I feel I've actually become invaded and taken over – it's called possession in the Bible isn't it?" This "capricious force," this state of "joyless freedom", she feels, makes her "bitter and cruel": "When it controls me I find I even seek out my quarry. And the most vulnerable prey and the one I'm most fearful of hurting—you probably won't believe this—I'm most fearful of damaging George."

At first, this sentiment seems hard to accept. However, a Hedda who is fully aware and afraid of her destructive potential is not outside the bounds of Ibsen's text. Hedda inhabits a world of uncanny correspondences in which the burning of a book is also the killing of a child, and where mortality manifests itself in occasional verbal slips. "My day was done," she says, in the original (as translated by Edmund Gosse), and then adds, "*with a slight shudder*. Oh no – I won't say that; nor think it either." Friel's additions do not violate Ibsen's text

but rather pull out its subtext.

Director Anna Mackmin's production harmonizes with Friel's intentions. The set design by Lez Brotherton dispenses with the notion of Hedda as a victim of her environment. There is nothing to suggest claustrophobia in this ostensibly 19th-century set. The predominant colour is white. The inner room is a glass box in the middle of the stage. Its transparent walls and the large set of French doors at stage left allow for an interesting play of light. Hedda's house is a liminal space whose essence depends entirely on the lighting. When it is dimmed, it sometimes gives the space the appearance of a haunted hall. When bright sunlight seems to stream from the white-curtained windows, the space becomes a cosy drawing room. When the curtains are open, however, nothing is visible beyond the French windows, and instead of autumn leaves, Hedda faces a dark space outside the set and the black wall of the theatre. Hedda's habitual staring into this empty space and her obsession with keeping the French doors closed reinforce what Friel emphasizes as Hedda's main difficulty—her struggle against what she terms "possession," a dark force that seems to threaten her from without.

Justine Mitchell makes Hedda surprisingly honest. She instantly regrets offending Aunt Juliana. She admits her affection for Loevborg (whose emotional complexity is well conveyed by John Light). She genuinely believes, as she consoles Thea at the end of act three, in the "whiff of expectancy in the atmosphere" as a guarantee of Loevborg's triumph. She even sounds sincere when she declares that conjugal love prompted her burning of Loevborg's manuscript. Hedda's lying appears, in this production, to be an attempt to interpret rather than to control her reality. Each false confession, even her glorification of Loevborg's suicide, is an attempt to reinvent the world through words.

Thea Elvsted acquires, in Andrea Irvine's interpretation, the kind of cold blooded malice often associated with Hedda. As she confidentially strolls into the house in the first act, the brunette Thea makes the blond Hedda appear younger, more feminine, and more vulnerable. Irvine's Thea is obviously a deliberate rejection of the popular view that glorifies Thea as a selfless paragon of morality. This Thea possesses a dangerous combination of sentimentality and sound business sense. Her determination to beat Hedda at her own game is highlighted in the opening scene of act three. Sitting at the feet of the sleeping Hedda in an attitude of cold resolution, Thea stares into the audience. She then rises and solemnly walks around the house, staring out the window. Assuming Hedda's own gestures and poses, Thea has replaced the Hedda many readers despise: a cold, calculating observer of human destinies.

Of course, Irvine's deconstructive playing of Thea is an embodiment of Friel's alternative reading and his consequent alterations in Ibsen's dialogue. When the news of Loevborg's death reaches the house, Hedda rejoices at the courageous act carried out with beauty and style. Thea contradicts her: "Don't I know my Eilert? Some dark impulse took possession of him, just as he must have been possessed when he tore up our manuscript." This direct echo of Hedda's earlier confession of the fear of possession furthers Friel's investigation of the play's subtext. It also develops the Ibsenian idea that while words may fail to correctly describe reality, they may affect it nonetheless. Thea's remark is incorrect in so far as it concerns Loevborg, but it reflects on Hedda's burning of the manuscript and her later suicide. Through this remark Thea acquires power over Hedda; it is the beginning of her victory.

Hedda kills herself in the glass inner room. She is sitting down, so the actual act is not visible. The sudden gun shot and the splash of blood on the wall come as shocks as the horror of the dead body is conveyed powerfully to the audience. Crouching in absurd postures outside the glass box, neither Tesman, nor Brack, nor Bertha is able to approach what lies inside. Their farcical words emerge as credible responses to a disaster, the kind of verbal effluvia that often accompanies shock. Tesman mourns "the handsome Joachim and maybe exquisite young Rena," imagining two grown children

where there was only one half-formed, unborn baby. Brack refuses to believe what has happened—"reasonable people just don't do things like that"—and Bertha delivers a prayer for "the poor unhappy creature." Center stage, sitting on the floor, is Thea. Surrounded by the multiple pages of Loevborg's notes, oblivious to the shouts behind her, she stares coldly and resolutely into the audience.

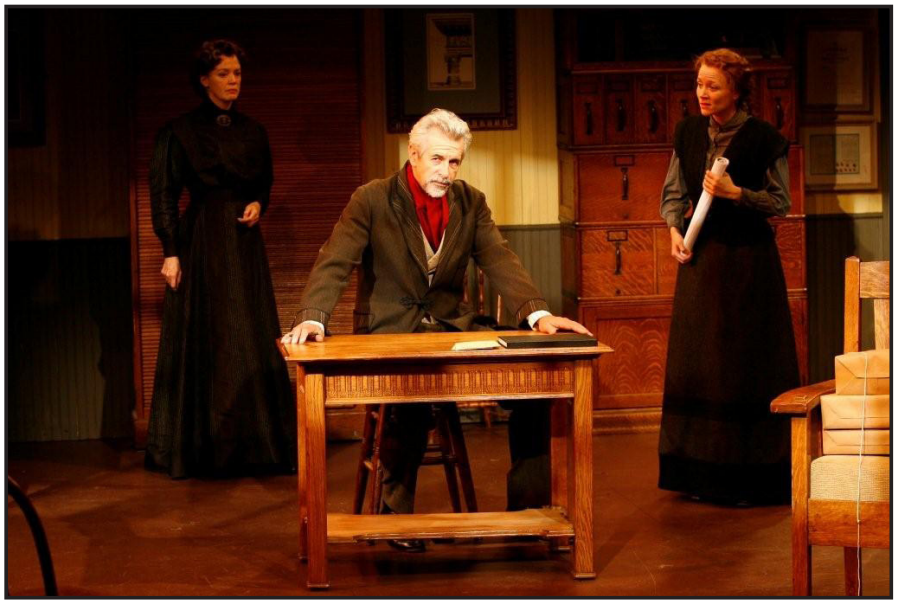
Moving away from the familiar reading of *Hedda Gabler* as a play about gender and social injustice, Brian Friel's adaptation is a profoundly interesting critical reading of Ibsen's play. The Gate's production does it justice through its finely balanced ensemble acting and the coordination between the director, the lighting designer (Oliver Fenwick), and the composer of the original score (Denis Clohessy). But Friel's version is by no means a regional adaptation, and I would be very interested to see it staged elsewhere by other companies. And Friel's daring encounter with Ibsen's text should be of interest to Ibsen scholars worldwide.

Irina Ruppo Malone
National University of Ireland, Galway

(The author acknowledges funding received from the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences.)

The Master Builder
The Irish Repertory Theatre, New York
October 10 – November 30, 2008

It came as something of a surprise to see that the Irish Repertory Theatre was opening its 2008-2009 season with a revival of *The Master Builder*, whose author can hardly be considered Irish, despite James Joyce's fascination with his work. The justification was that this production was an adaptation of Ibsen's play by one of Ireland's best known contemporary dramatists, Frank McGuinness, who is probably best known in American for his *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* which played on Broadway in 1992. In England, McGuinness is almost as well known as a translator/adaptor, especially of the Greeks, Chekhov, and Ibsen, from whom he has adapted *Peer Gynt, A Doll House, Hedda Gabler* and *Rosmersholm.*

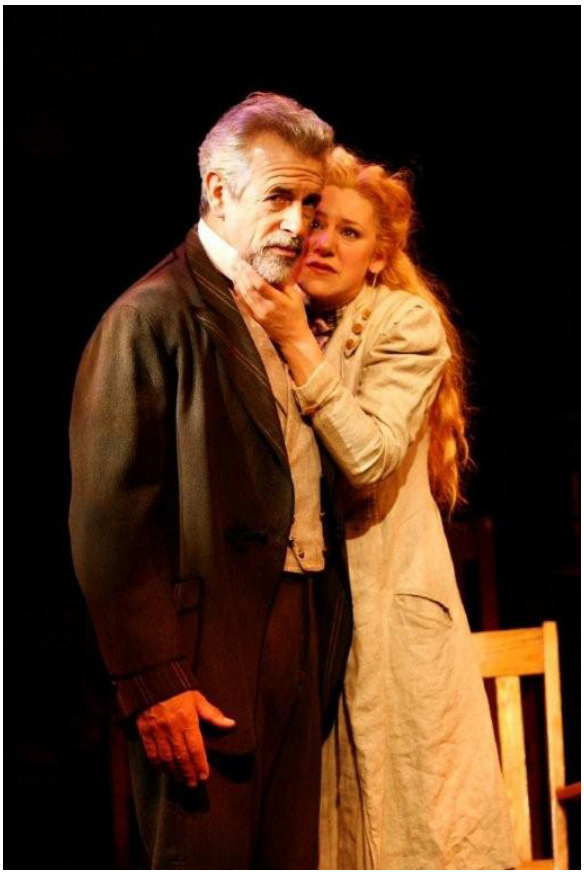


Carol Rosegg

The translation of *The Master Builder* seemed to me a good workman-like job despite an occasional somewhat odd phrase (such as the repeated "in a pig's eye" of which Ragnar seemed inordinately fond), and although the term "adaptation" often justifies bizarre alternations in the structure of a play's action, this version seemed quite faithful scene to scene.

The production is dominated, as is usually the case, by Solness (James Naughton) and Hilda (Charlotte Parry). Naughton's rather brooding and severe Solness seemed to me a bit too cold and

distant at first, but I was gradually won over by his dark quality, and although the arrival of Hilda did not really cause much softening of his forbidding



Carol Rosegg

exterior, her warmth and exuberance played very well against him and made the sexual undercurrent between them, which was clearly present from the moment of her arrival, quite fascinating.

Still, the power of the relationship between the two leads was strong and interesting enough to carry the play through most of the evening.

The rest of the company was competent but not distinguished, although most have long New York, national, and even international careers. The best was Herb Foster, the most seasoned member of the cast, as Knut Brovik. Foster is a long-time Broadway performer, whose single scene was powerfully and movingly presented. The next best (aside from the principles), was Kristin Griffith as Aline. There is a real problem with this role, a temptation to fall into abstraction and listlessness, and few actresses in my experience escape this trap, including Griffith. She has a nice stage presence, but she so convincingly portrays the figure from the grave that like Hilda we tend to be chilled by her ourselves, and her scenes go cold and rather flat.

The other roles are admittedly even more lightly developed than Aline's, but Doug Stender as Dr. Herdal provides only a competent rending of the part; Daniel Talbott as Ragnar seems little more than a petulant adolescent, well deserving of Solness' contempt; and Letitia Lange as Kaja plays only a single note of passionate, seemingly unmotivated physical attraction to Solness, which I soon found tiresome and felt that he did as well.

Still, the power of the relationship between the two leads was strong and interesting enough to carry the play through most of the evening. The first act I found quite powerful while the second seemed less effective and somewhat repetitive in mood, and the ending I thought quite misguided. Both the directing, by Ciarán O'Reilly, and the set design contributed to this frontloading, especially the design. The Irish Repertory has a difficult stage, with most of the audience facing one side and a smaller group facing another, with a large blocking pillar marking the corner of the stage between them. Designer Eugene Lee nevertheless created for the opening two acts a very attractive, if somewhat cluttered workroom in a kind of arts and crafts style with numerous filing cabinets, pictures and architectural models strewn about. For the third act, after the intermission, it is almost as though the designer had given up. The furniture of the earlier acts is inexplicably heaped up in the back corner of the stage and the patio is represented by two chairs center stage and a table down right for Hilda to climb onto at the end. A simple black drop behind the chairs or even a neutral canvas thrown over the heap of chairs and tables upstage would have at least created a less confused visual space, but nothing like this was done and so the whole gave rather the impression of a rehearsal. To be fair, since I

saw the play in previews, it may be that something was done about this problem later on, but normally in New York a preview is presented as a finished production.

The most effective moment of the evening was the entrance of Hilda, which was truly striking and memorable. She appeared upstage center in an opening in the rear wall, not a door but a door-like hole that mysteriously appeared only for her and was never seen again. As the stage lights dimmed, she appeared in a strong down light that made her blond hair glow like an aura. (I was reminded of a memorable moment in a German production of *Lady from the Sea* in which the Stranger similarly appeared in bright illumination through a door that opened in the sky.) At this moment we have to see Hilda as a kind of imaginary projection of Solness's imagination, but there is nothing else to confirm this. The door disappears and Hilde remains in an otherwise solidly realistic production, and we are left to wonder just what this striking moment was meant to suggest.

At the end of the production I thought we would again see that alternative world (as the German production of *Lady* notably made us do), but this was not to be. Hilda climbs onto the table, waves her scarf and speaks her final lines. The offstage crash is heard. Then a mysterious figure in black appears upstage, which made me anticipate some striking concluding symbolist vision. But the figure proved to be one of several who slowly pulled to center stage a large black bed in which lay the dead Solness, clearly with his head quite intact. What did this mean? Whose vision was this? Clearly not that of Hilda, who saw Solness aloft in triumph. Nor was it likely that of anyone else present, all of whom saw Solness fall headfirst onto the rocks. The ending provided an unconventional final visual effect, but one that left me simply puzzled.

Marvin Carlson
CUNY Graduate Center

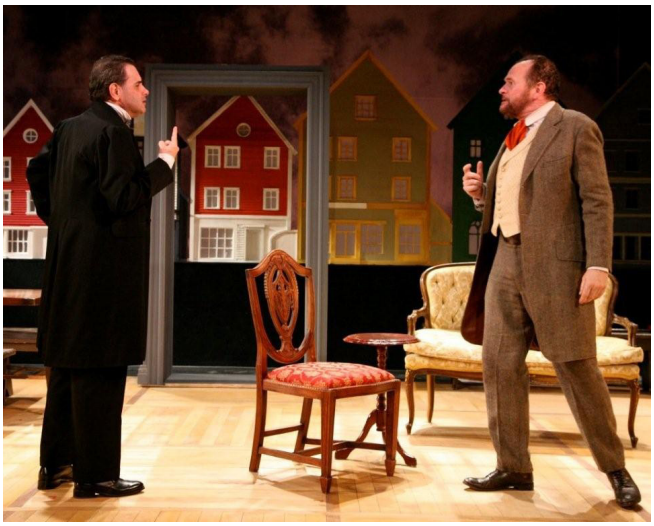
An Enemy of the People
New York, Phoenix Theatre Ensemble
September 3 – September 20, 2008

My first encounter with Ibsen, over forty years ago during my years as an undergraduate at the University of Kansas, was reading his *Enemy of the People.* Few plays I have read affected me as strongly as this one did.The boldness, the daring, the passion, and the challenge to my conventional Midwestern political world view left an indelible impression upon me and inspired in me a fascination with Ibsen that has continued now for almost half a century. I have studied Ibsen, collected Ibsen material, published on and taught Ibsen, and most importantly attended productions of Ibsen, in theatre experiences now numbering in the hundreds. Over the years, I have found it more and more difficult to bring a fresh eye and a fresh enthusiasm to some of the most frequently revived plays such as *A Doll House* and *Hedda Gabler,* especially to the all-too-common respectful but conventional productions now dulled by familiarity.

I was astonished to find how resonant, hard-hitting and disturbing Stockmann's great speech at the town meeting remains.

With this background, I approached the recent revival of *Enemy of the People* with some hesitation, it being one of those Ibsen works that I have seen so often that I can almost recite the lines along with the actors. To my surprise and satisfaction, I found the production, although conventional enough, powerful and challenging. Having just experienced the Democratic and Republican nominating conventions and now in the full press

of the pre-election season, I was astonished to find how resonant, hard-hitting and disturbing Stockmann's great speech at the town meeting remains. All my previous knowledge of Ibsen's irony and Stockmann's excess and folly disappeared as I was swept up in the power of his condemnation of a political culture (including a "liberal" press) that bases its concerns and its professed values upon a real or perceived mass culture, that of Stockmann's "mongrels." From comments I overheard before the production and during the intermission, it seems that most of the audience were also familiar with the play and that they also shared my experience of this production. Stockmann's speech was received with rapt attention, applause, and even gasps of astonishment, as if to say, "could Ibsen really have said that then?"



Gerry Goodstein

I think it will be clear by this time that this production does not, thank goodness, employ Arthur Miller's thin, watered-down adaptation, which the program notes rightfully characterize as embedded in its historical political correctness. Instead, the production uses Rolf Fjelde's strong, unashamed faithful translation of the original.

The physical presentation of the production is also quite effective, beginning with the space itself. The Connelly Theatre, where the Phoenix Theatre Ensemble presents this revival, is one of my favorite New York theatre spaces, although its remote location, in the outlying stretches of "Alphabet City" in the East Village removes it from the experience of many New York theatergoers. The theatre itself is a small, charming opera house located in a nineteenth-century school. Its elaborate proscenium and elegant columned balcony perfectly evoke a theatre of Ibsen's own time. The Phoenix costumes, by Suzanne Chesney, are historically accurate, effective, and, in the case of Mrs. Stockmann, even elegant. The setting, by Maruti Evans, is less conventional, but quite suitable to the production. The main visual element is a row of brightly colored building facades, surely modeled on the Bergen waterfront, which throughout the evening provide a colorful backdrop, changing by lighting according to the time of day. Small-town Norway is thus aptly evoked. In front of the backdrop, differing arrangements of tables, chairs, and benches simply but effectively suggest the various settings.

The emphasis of the production, however, is quite properly on the acting. The entire company provides solid performers, down to the minor roles of the sons Morten and Eilif (Jack Tartaglio and Dmitri Friedenberg, both already Equity members). Friedenberg is a particularly interesting member of the company. Also a professional cello player, he makes an effective addition to the depictions of home life at the Stockmanns by providing solos before each of the domestic scenes, and Friedenberg can make the unusual claim of having played both of the Stockmann sons in his brief but already impressive career. Of course, the burden of the evening falls upon John Lenartz as Dr. Stockmann, and Lenartz' bluff, outgoing, and impetuous portrayal effectively drives the evening. I found the dyspeptic portrayal of his brother by Joseph J. Menino a bit caricatural in the opening scene, but when the two brothers subsequently squared off, the play took on a life and energy that was totally convincing and that carried on throughout the performance. Kelli Holsopple as Petra did an excellent job of converting Stockmann's passion into a gentler key and Laura Piquado managed the besieged Mrs. Stockmann with grace, dignity, and sympathy. I would have preferred a bit more insinuation and cunning in Morten Kill than was

provided by the rather straightforward interpretation of Angus Hepburn, but he did convey very well the isolation and self-centeredness of the character. The other supporting actors—John Tyson as Billing, Tom Escovar as Hovstad, Brian A. Costello as Captain Horster, and Michael Surabian as Aslaksen—provided solid support for the major roles.

All in all, this was an effective and exciting production which reminded me anew of how close Ibsen remains to our social and political world.

Marvin Carlson
CUNY, Graduate Center

The Wild Duck
Stockholm, Stadsteater
2007-08 and 2008-09 Seasons

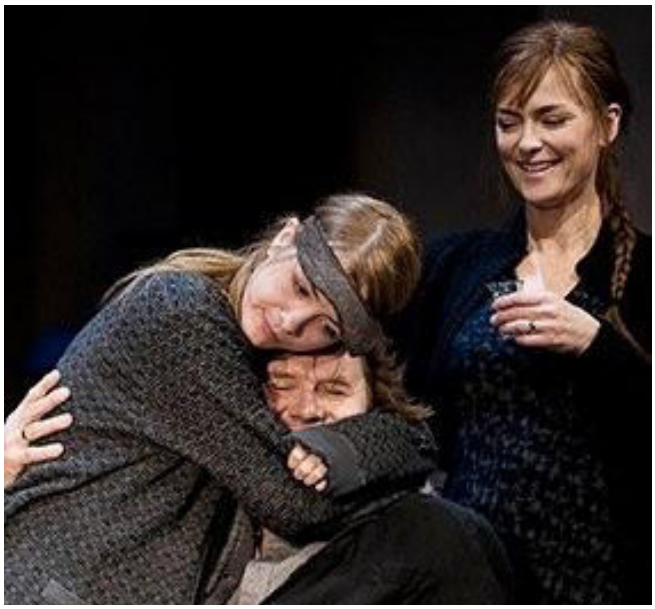
Never has a grey cardigan seemed so menacing, but then it is perhaps a sign of our times that we tense up whenever a conservatively dressed older man starts telling a young girl that it is time to keep secrets. And in fact, in this highly successful Swedish staging of Ibsen's *Vildanden*, the resonance of child abuse is never very far from mind; the other characters and audience alike seem instinctively to go on alert whenever Gregers Werle (Peter Andersson) enters the scene dressed in his drably conservative sweater, but most strongly each time he is left alone with Hedvig (Josefin Ljungman). The vulnerability of the child Hedvig stands front and center in this production, an emphasis underscored in the printed program as well. This thematic emphasis is aided considerably by the nuanced, prize-winning performance by Ljungman (in September 2008 she was awarded the Såstaholm Stipend for this breakthrough depiction of Hedvig). All in all, this is a strong and moving *Wild Duck*.

The main setting of the Ekdal's studio-home in this production is a sparely furnished room without strong historical stylistic markers. The first act's party scene is played out in a small corner of this set downstage left, with the background amusements from the banquet taking place behind those corner glass doors. The main conversations of Act One thus occur outside, with the characters standing or seated on a bench. (These foreground areas are lit up for the first act and darkened for the rest, so there is no set change.) The back wall of the set, which consists of an entire wall of window panes rising from a long alcove bench, the wall angled inward at the top to suggest the glass ceiling of an atelier, is the dominant staging presence throughout the remaining acts. This backdrop undergoes a variety of lighting shifts throughout the play, from Hedvig's moonlit prelude dance at the very start of the performance, to the cheerier light of day and natural backdrop of the luncheon scene, to the red sky of the confession scene, to the encroaching gloom of a murky twilight at the end of the play.

The attic space is positioned stage right instead of upstage center, as in the text, with an entrance to it through both a door that opens toward the audience (blocking the view) and through a wider roll-up door that reveals a glimpse of the leaves and netting of the attic's "forest" and "depths of the sea." The attic thus takes on a kind of diorama quality, as if it were a natural-history tableau at the Biologiska Museet out on Djurgården. This impression of simulated natural life is reinforced by the prelude's short dance number, in which Hedvig mimics the movements of a puppet-duck in silhouette against the blue moonlight of the back wall. The conceptual link between domestication and puppetry was promising, but the effect of showing this inanimate duck in performance was unfortunately rather awkward in practice. The usual dilemma of what to do on stage with this living-yet-domesticated wild duck was not solved any more successfully by the recorded quacking sounds from the attic later on.

A better use of recording as the conceptual equivalent of domestication came in the family

scene in Act Two, where instead of the usual family tableau with flute and beer, we are shown what appears to be a customary Ekdal family game of singing along to an opera recording, with Hjalmar (Johan Rabaeus) and Hedvig cast in cross-gender



Linn Sandholm

roles. The comic, exaggerated theatricality of this scene—along with the disparity between a high-cultural "authentic" source and its mimed, recorded equivalent played in these more modest circumstances—is quite effective at evoking the characteristic pleasures of being an Ekdal. It was easy as an audience member to get caught up in the game, so that when Gregers makes his dour entrance and abruptly interrupts this scene, the effect is all the more chilling—he robs both the Ekdals and the audience of their smiles. Whatever the ultimate value of Ekdalian theatricality, this production conveys a clear sense of its attractions, and in stark contrast to Gregers' "claim of the ideal." When the family nestles into the wicker-backed sofa on this set like a duck into its basket, it becomes clear that this scene's playfulness has created an argument that no matter what compromises might be involved in the idea of domestication, there is something worth protecting there as well, at least for a vulnerable child like Hedvig who clearly enjoys the game to its fullest.

In contrast, Hedvig's initiation into Gregers' metaphoric system in their first scene alone in Act Three is played with a halting, awkward pacing, as if the young girl who is entirely at home in the usual family game were groping to find the right register in this confusingly abstract, adult speech. This is Gregers's turf, and Ljungman plays the uncertainty of Hedvig's participation brilliantly. One picks up on the tone of an adult who is only pretending to treat a child as a conversation partner, and it is almost possible to mark the exact moment when ideology is forced upon the child—when Hedvig realizes that she and Gregers share the term "depths of the sea." One might say that the "child abuse" in this case is literally metaphorical. That is to say, Gregers commits metaphor with a defenseless minor; when he sits down alone with Hedvig the second time in Act Four and starts in again with "Let's chat a bit more about the wild duck" (even after the evidence of the Ekdal family's looming destruction is all around him) it sends chills down the spine. It is clear to the audience from the tone of this scene that Hedvig has turned to Gregers for comfort at the moment of crisis without realizing that she has put herself in the hands of the adult who will destroy her. All of today's cultural resonances of the apparently innocuous neighbor in the grey cardigan dovetail here with Ibsen's original brilliant commentary on the dangers of metaphor, combining to create a memorably powerful scene.

There are some substantial shifts in characterization in this adaptation. There is little sense here, for example, that Gina (Marie Richardson) is a limited, uneducated woman—she is practical, clearly capable, and possesses a radar-like sensitivity for the dangers Gregers represents for her family. Each time he enters the room, she seems visibly alarmed. Fru Sörby (Odile Nunes) is by contrast played as such a sophisticate that in one wordless interlude she is shown unzipping the back of the maid's dress as if offering her to Old Werle. This would seem to preclude the possibility that her relationship with Old Werle is to be understood as an ironic realization of the ideal that Gregers forces on the Ekdals, unless one understands "open relationship" in a slightly different way.

Given the true brilliance of several scenes

in the heart of the play, I wanted to like the ending more but reacted with some ambivalence. After the gunshot in the attic, the roll-up door to the attic stage right was opened to reveal Hedvig dead in the netting, from which she then tumbled forward toward the audience. Berggren opted not to stage the final rhetorical stalemate, the persistent cacophony of competing voices each asserting a

Linn Sandholm

different response to Hedvig's death. Gina did not touch the body, so there was no emphasis on her practical care. There were no rhetorical flourishes from Hjalmar, no stubborn debate between Gregers and Relling. There was not even a reference to the thirteenth man at table. Instead, all this was reduced to an extended scene with Hjalmar sobbing over the lifeless body. This staging choice certainly did manage to keep the focus on the child, as promised, but it also took the bite out of Ibsen's original ending by freezing the action at a moment

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of deep pathos instead of dramatizing the trivializing aftermath. Ibsen's text is more chilling, since it becomes apparent that even the sacrifice of an innocent child is incapable of effecting change in the adults who surround her, most of whom persist in their characteristic rhetorical positions until the end of the play. Berggren's changed ending suggests instead the possibility of a transformational pathos for Hjalmar. That prospect would make this a fundamentally different play, one that, to be sure, might be better suited to eliciting true solidarity with vulnerable children. That, however, is only one concern among many in *The Wild Duck*, and it is both the strength and weakness of this production that this one theme comes through so clearly.

Mark Sandberg
University of California, Berkeley

The RATS' *Peer Gynt*

The Rainham Amateur Theatrical Society, RATS, of Kent, UK, composed of 30 actors aged up to 18, put on *Peer Gynt* for six days in November. The young actors worked on the production for a year, rehearsing and discussing and making the sets and the costumes. Two cousins divided the role of Peer. The group's favorite scenes, youth director Heidi Hovind writes, were "of course the trolls and the Boyg, which we performed in the dark with one glowstick." Hovid reports that her charges "have attacked it with such relish!"

ISA at SASS 2009
University of Wisconsin, Madison, April 30 – May 2

"Ibsen and Aesthetics"

Chair: Mark Mussari, Independent Scholar

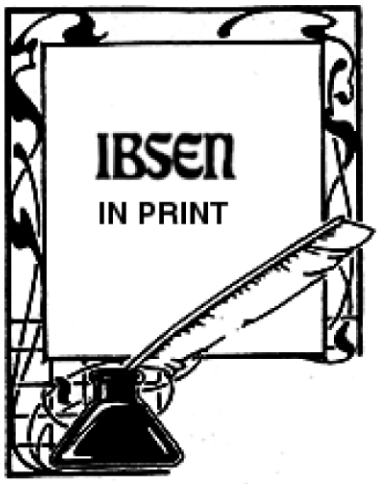
"Ibsen's Aesthetics": Clarence Burton Sheffield, Jr., Rochester Institute of Technology

"Churches for People: Ibsen's Architectural Aesthetic": Mark Sandberg, University of California, Berkeley

"Toward a Modernist Aesthetic with Munch and Ibsen": Joan Templeton, Long Island University

"Henrik Ibsen Collection" Available in DVD and Audio from Amazon.com

The series includes the following British productions in DVD: *Brand, A Doll's House, Ghosts, Enemy of the People, Wild Duck, Lady from the Sea, Hedda Gabler, Little Eyolf* and two *Master Builder's*. Audios of BBC radio productions are: *The Pretenders, Peer Gynt, Emperor and Galilean, Pillars of Society, Rosmersholm, Borkman, When We Dead Awaken*; and Michael Meyer's *A Meeting in Rome*, about an imagined encounter between Ibsen and Strindberg.



Survey of Articles on Ibsen: 2005, 2006

Editor's Note: In our last issue (27: 2007), in my first year as the survey's author, I began to reduce our backlog by covering articles from three years, 2002-04; in this issue, I treat 2005 and 2006, and next year, I will cover 2007 and 2008, thus eliminating the backlog.

Abbreviations: *IS* (*Ibsen Studies*); *MD* (*Modern Drama*); *Scan* (*Scandinavica*); *SS* (*Scandinavian Studies*); *INC* (*Ibsen News and Comment*). Articles are numbered consecutively in parentheses following the title. Full bibliographical information is given in a list at the end of the survey.

2005

Reviewing the inaugural issue of *IS* (2000) in these pages, Tom Van Laan wrote that it "does not suggest much of a future for the journal. Some of the items should not have been included, others could have profited from further attention, and only one of them . . . gets my enthusiastic recommendation" (*INC* 25:17). A year later, Van Laan reported that most of the articles in the journal's second issue made it "far superior to the disappointing inaugural issue" (*INC* 26:43). Last year, in reviewing the three subsequent issues, I also noted the striking unevenness in quality. Except for the second number of 2004, a volume of revised papers from the 2003 New York International Ibsen Conference, which Errol Durbach and I were invited to select and edit, scholarly criteria for inclusion seem to have been at work sporadically. It was hard not to conclude that *IS* was not receiving enough valuable submissions to justify its publication twice a year, and in 2002, in fact, it appeared only once, with only three articles. I also noted that editing and proofreading were lacking; in one issue, a book review was mistakenly placed in the Articles section. And contributors for whom English is a second or third language were extremely ill served by the lack of copy-editing; some articles were so riddled with language problems that they were only partly understandable.

IS 2005 continues to display a large unevenness in quality and lack of copy-editing. Of the eight articles in the two numbers, two are excellent and three fail to meet rudimentary qualifications of publishable scholarship. Of the remaining three, one offers ideas that are already staples of Ibsen criticism; one needs rethinking and copy-editing; and one is mostly impossible to understand.

The articles in the first 2005 number range from the unpublishable to the mediocre. In "The Longing Women of Mishima and Ibsen: A Reflection on *Hanjo* and *The Lady from the Sea*" (1),

the author begins with: "Henrik Ibsen wrote *The Lady from the Sea* in 1888 and Yukio Mishima wrote *Hanjo* in 1956"; "I would like to point to the similarities and differences in these two plays" (4). This level of discourse makes the astonished reader almost certain that its writer is a student, which the biographical note verifies. The article as a whole is as naïve as its beginning; unsurprisingly, Ibsen's and Mishima's plays turn out to be very dissimilar

But paraphrasing Collett—or any other writer—cannot constitute a refutation of a critical reading.

because their authors come from different cultures! And what the writer identifies as similar "themes" in the two plays—e.g., "dream versus reality" and "madness" (5)—are, of course, ubiquitous in literature. But the important point is that publishing such a piece in a scholarly journal is scandalous. I think also of the student, who, if she becomes a critical reader and writer, will have to face this piece. The inclusion of the article is a disservice to the writer as well as to the reader.

The second essay in the issue, Kristin Ørjasæter's "Mother, Wife and Role Model – A Contextual Perspective on Feminism in *A Doll's House"* (2), attempts to prove that Ibsen meant Nora to be an Everyman figure because she embodies the brand of feminism embraced by Camilla Collett. Gail Finney ("Ibsen and Feminism," in the *Cambridge Companion to Ibsen*) and I (*Ibsen's Women*) are wrong, Ørjasæter writes, in our claims that the argument that Nora represents both men and women ignores the play. I agree that Camilla Collett's feminism was crucial to Ibsen's thinking, and I discuss this subject at some length (I believe that I was the first writer to do so) in my book. Ørjasæter offers a good précis of Collett's feminism and rightly points out that Ibsen's remark that women should influence progressive education through their roles as mothers reflects one of Collett's positions. But paraphrasing Collett—or any other writer—cannot constitute a refutation of a critical reading. Ørjasæter's point is that Ibsen's radicalism lay in his choice of a woman as Everyman, but if she wants to show that Nora's conflict represents not only that of women but of Nora's husband and all the other men in the world, she must try to prove it. (The first Nora was not Betty Nansen, but Betty Hennings; Ibsen's protégée Laura Kieler was not married to a minister but to a schoolteacher).

Jørgen Veisland's "The Ethics of Aesthetics: Decadence in Henrik Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*" (3) views Ibsen as a philosopher whose *Wild Duck* is a meditation on aesthetics, ontology, and ethics. The placing of the bird in the attic "signifies aestheticizing," and as the duck becomes "an object of desire," it acquires multiple meanings; the "ultimate *ethics* of this incessant sliding of meaning, then, becomes Ibsen's ethical involvement with language" (49). Treating a play as a treatise on aesthetics is extremely questionable, and what Veisland would establish as Ibsen's aesthetics is equally so; it is not possible to agree that symbolic complexity is *ipso facto* a matter of ethics or that the "aesthetic process" is "ethical and ontological" (49). Since Veisland's language is declarative, it is also difficult to understand the logic of his thinking, which is obscured by Lacanian jargon: "Nothingness . . . generates an excess, in fact, an excessive desire which wants an unfathomable Thing" (50). And how can Hjalmar represent "aesthetic decadence" (52) and Gregers, "decadent ethics" (53)? Both men are naïve absolutists whose overwhelming provinciality is a main cause of the disaster. One is tempted to say that a little decadence might have helped. But the main difficulty of the essay is that its abstract, sometimes arcane language renders most of its points incomprehensible.

The last, very ambitious essay in the volume, Eric Østerud's "Viewing the Nude: Body and Existence in Space and Time: A Study of Henrik Ibsen's *When We Dead Awaken* (4)," is also difficult to understand, both because of its abstract language and its discursiveness. The forty-page essay is made up of sub-headed sections which do not always seem related and leave the reader won-

dering where this essay on "body and existence in space and time" is going. The essay badly needs editing, and there is much that could be cut; we do not need a long explanation of the word "episode" or a plot summary. The writer's dismissive account of the critical literature is inaccurate. It is not true that *When We Dead Awaken* has been mostly discussed as an allegory in which Rubek-Ibsen wrongly chooses art over life; a number of scholars, e.g., the writers in Lisbeth Wærp's anthology on the play, have offered much more substantial treatments. It is odd, too, that Østerud ignores the greatly admired essay, Jørgen Dines Johansen's "Art is (Not) a Woman's Body: Art and Sexuality in *When We Dead Awaken*," which would have been served Østerud well in the most interesting section of his own essay, "The Nude – academy art and the avant-garde." In the end, Østerud's account of Rubek's failure to live authentically does not seem very different from various other accounts. And it seems arbitrary to bring in Foucault's panopticon as a template for Rubek's treatment of Irene or to insist that Ibsen was influenced by Gnosticism. Ibsen did not need knowledge of this sect to depict an artist torn between the earthly and the heavenly, a central opposition in Christian theology. Østerud often gives the impression that he is mostly interested in the play as a repository of theory and myth. To my knowledge, Østerud is the only writer on the play who reads the ending as ironic: both couples are entirely self-deceived, and Rubek and Irene die "trapped in their own myths and optics" (97).

To my knowledge, Østerud is the only writer on the play who reads the ending as ironic.

Turning to the second number of *IS* 2005, one is blessedly met with two excellent articles that put theory to good use: Anne Marie Rekdal's "The Freedom of Perversion: A Lacanian Reading of Ibsen's *Ghosts*" (5) and Unni Langås "What did Nora do? Thinking Gender with *A Doll's House*" (6). Rekdal reworks part of her doctoral thesis, published as *Frihetens dilemma*: *Ibsen lest med Lacan* (*The Dilemma of Freedom*: *Ibsen Read through Lacan*), to produce a brilliant account of Ibsen's depiction in *Ghosts* of what Lacan called "le nom du père," the authority for the systems of patriarchy. Unni Langås draws on Judith Butler's theory of "gender performativity," the notion that we act what our perceived identity as male or female dictates to us, to produce an equally brilliant analysis of Nora. As someone who has written a good deal on these two plays, I learned in these two essays that Ibsen's radicalism—his ingenious analysis of patriarchy in *Ghosts* and his equally ingenious portrayal of a woman who refuses to be a "woman" in *A Doll House*—was even deeper than I had thought. And as a scholar who is suspicious of systematized applications of theory to literature, I was won over by both authors' methodologies. Rekdal uses Lacan, whose theories of sexuality can hardly be called progressive, to analyze Ibsen's dramatization of the perversion and the weakening of patriarchy: through the male characters (Rekdal's discussion of Engstrand is masterly); through Mrs. Alving's conflicted and confused response to her misery; and through the burning of the orphanage, which marks the final destruction of "the father" and allows the triumph of perversion in the brothel that replaces it. Langås opposes the nineteenth-century's notion of gender as "natural" to the contemporary notion of gender as "constructed," focusing on Butler's notion of gender performance, which she explains clearly in jargon-free terms; she then demonstrates that Ibsen's dramatization of how the divided Nora acts both "like a man" and "like a woman" refutes gender as natural and makes it cultural, thus refuting the received ideas of the age. My précis of these two finely argued articles cannot do them justice. Reading them was an exciting educational journey

My précis of these two finely argued articles cannot do them justice. Reading them was an exciting educational journey.

at the end of which I felt great appreciation for the two writers' work and new awe for Ibsen.

To move to the other two articles in this issue is to move from scholarship at its best to pseudo-scholarship. Kwok-Kan Tam's repetitive and uninformed "Spatial Poetics of the Self and the Moral-Dramatic Structure in *A Doll's House*" (7) reads Ibsen through two books by Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: the Making of Modern Identity* (1989) and *Human Agency and Language* (1985). Tam writes with a straight face that like Taylor, "Ibsen thinks that what constitutes a meaningful life is to live in accordance with the truth about life in society. That is to say, an individual has to live according to the truth he/she finds out about life and society" (181). Displaying a near perfect unfamiliarity with Ibsen criticism, Tam claims that "Ibsen's 'social problem plays' must be reread as plays that explore the redefinition of the modern self in a society, [sic] in which the traditional religious, philosophical and moral 'frameworks' have lost their bearings" (183); he can also seriously declare that the "awakening in the heroines" in Ibsen's plays has been discussed "mainly as a dramatic device" (187). In his thumbnail sketch of theatrical history, he informs us that Greek tragedy is based on "mythological causes" (191) and that Ibsen's "discussion drama" influenced the "post/) modernist" [sic] drama of Strindberg, Chekhov, and Beckett (192). One can hardly believe one's eyes.

When Simmel defended Nietzsche, arguing that majority opinion was likely to be wrong, he, like Dr. Stockmann, was attacked as a dangerous elitist.

If one is shocked by the inclusion of Tam's essay, one is incredulous at the inclusion of Xie Lanlan's four-and-a-half-page consideration of "Peer Gynt's Female World" (8), made up of three varieties: "1) The light character who elevates the mind and creates an atmosphere of sanctity – Solveig. 2) The gloomy characters with animal attributes who seduce Peer and entice him away from all that creates sanctity in the mind – the Woman in Green, the three summer-dairy girls, Anitra. 3) The daughter of the wealthy farmer (Ingrid) and the wealthy farmer's wife who has come down in the world (Mother Aase)." We are also offered insights and information whose level, respectively, is represented by the following two examples: Peer's mind "is populated with female figures who reflect the low and the high" (173); Peer misquotes Goethe's famous line on the eternal feminine. This presentation of very old news as new critical insight is shocking in a scholarly journal.

I now turn to articles on Ibsen in other journals.

Ralph Leck's very interesting "Enemy of the People: Simmel, Ibsen, and the Civic Legacy of Nietzschean Sociology" (9) appeared in the social-studies journal *The European Legacy*. Leck's aim is to defend Simmel against the charges that the great sociologist defected from his earlier liberalism to become a conservative, and he does so by comparing Simmel's thought to that of Dr. Stockmann. Leck shows that Ibsen's protagonist makes the same arguments against the self-interest of the European bourgeoisie that resonate through Simmel's work, i.e., the notions that economic self-interest is not synonymous with social ethics and that egotism can be group-based. Just as the pleas to Dr. Stockmann to protect his family and his community are examples of group interest masquerading as popular interest, Simmel argues that people who are indoctrinated to promote the self-interest of the group ignore more inclusive spheres of responsibility. (Whether *Enemy* can "best be understood" as a commentary on the irreconcilability of capitalism and democracy" [144] is another thing.) Especially interesting for Ibsen scholars is Leck's account of Simmel's belief in Nietzsche's notion that progress comes about through the iconoclasm of society's most intelligent individuals. When Simmel defended Nietzsche, arguing that majority opinion was likely to be wrong, he, like Dr. Stockmann,

was attacked as a dangerous elitist and a sympathizer with fascism. It is interesting to read *Enemy* through the mind of this social scientist, whose article, as far as I know, is the only study of Ibsen's play's affinities with Simmel's thought.

In spite of its title, Asbjorn Aarseth's "Ibsen and Darwin: A Reading of *The Wild Duck*" (10), in *MD*, does not offer a reading of the play but rather an argument that a passage in it proves that Ibsen read part of *The Origin of Species*. The passage is the one in which the Ekdals introduce Gregers to

And can the "degenerate" inhabitants of an indoor poultry farm really represent Werle's guests who are "smoking cigars, drinking wine, and avoiding sunshine" (7)?

the attic, and Darwin's text is the chapter "Variation and Domestication" and its sub-chapter "Breeds of the Domestic Pigeon." Aarseth's argument is that because the four species of animals who live in the loft—fowl, duck, rabbit, and pigeon—as well as the two varieties of the last—tumbler and pouter—are mentioned in chapter one of *Origins*, Ibsen must have read it. Aarseth's proof is that Ibsen uses the same words that Darwin's Danish translator used: "høns" (poultry); "vildand" (duck); "kanin" (rabbit); "due" (pigeon), "tumlere" (tumblers); and "kropduer" (pouters). One's response to this claim can only be skeptical; Darwin mentions many other species besides fowls, ducks, rabbits, and pigeons in his celebrated discussion of domestic variations, and he treats other varieties of pigeons besides tumblers and pouters. Besides, Ibsen hardly needed a naturalist to help him identify domestic animals. And since Ibsen's *Riksmaal* was virtually indistinguishable from Danish, what other words could Ibsen have used? Aarseth contrasts Darwin's keen interest in the variety of domesticated species with Ibsen's view of domestication as "degeneration," but even if Ibsen uses his animals as metaphors, according to Aarseth, for "the vulnerable and wretched human beings in the Ekdal family" (7), this hardly proves that Ibsen disapproves of domesticating animals. And aren't the Ekdals happy until Gregers Werle makes them wretched? And can the "degenerate" inhabitants of an indoor poultry farm really represent Werle's guests who are "smoking cigars, drinking wine, and avoiding sunshine" (7)? Aarseth reminds us: "That domestication means degeneration is not Darwin's view" (8). Well, of course not; Darwin was a scientist. But as far as we know, it was not Ibsen's, either, whose "ironic regard for the lifestyle and the aspirations of these characters" (8) was balanced by his self-declared fondness for them. *The Wild Duck* is not a castigating satire, but a tragi-comedy.

Otto Reinert's thought-provoking, important article in *Edda*, "The Drama in *Rosmersholm*" (11), takes the position that while Ibsen was "obsessed with the importance of questioning accepted truths," he also had a "hyper-alert sense of human existence as complex and inscrutable," and that *Rosmersholm* "cuts to the core of this" (20). It is "a play of conundrums, paradoxes, and ambiguities, ending in an infinitely suspended final meaning" (17). Reinert's disdain for attempting to discover what is "true" in fiction contains a salutary lesson.

Reinert's disdain for attempting to discover what is "true" in fiction contains a salutary lesson.

Nowhere, Reinert points out, does Ibsen's text establish whether Dr. West was or was not Rebecca's father, and if we decide one way or another, we are violating the poetics of fiction, for "such propositions, irrefutable in real life, don't apply to fiction [where] they have no ontological status" (17). Arriving at answers that the playwright does not divulge, we are, Reinert says, doing what Tom Van Laan has called "filling in." Ibsen's habit of leaving events "open" was "part of his sense of human reality" (18). Will Mrs. Alving give the morphine to Oswald? "We don't know, because Ibsen didn't

want us to know. If he had, he would have told us" (18). In *Rosmersholm*, numerous things are left in doubt: Who is Rebecca—the brave, attractive woman or the evil murderess? What is the truth of Beata's sexuality? Is the joint suicide an act of nobility? Reinert traces the themes of conversion and sacrifice in the play, pointing out the complications in making judgments; Rosmer is converted by Brendel, Rebecca is converted by Rosmer—they trade ideological positions—and Rosmer is re-converted by Brendel, but to a different ideology. Rebecca sacrifices for Dr. West, Beata sacrifices for Rebecca and Rosmer, Rebecca sacrifices for Rosmer, Rosmer sacrifices himself to a "law of conscience" (21). Both the outer and inner plots—the struggle between Kroll and Rebecca for control of Rosmer and the "conflicted consciousness of the two main characters"—are "rife with matter charged with ambivalences we are not obliged to resolve and with missing information we should not try to supply" (21). Reinert's discussion of the controversial ending makes his case air-tight; close textual reading reveals that Rosmer and Rebecca "resign themselves to the separate yet shared moral enigmas of their relationship and go out to die together, man and wife" (22). I have one caveat: Reinert adds: "The plague that kills happiness and joy kills them . . . . [The play] closes the prospect of anything like Julian's Third Empire, to be founded on both the tree of the cross (atonement through sacrifice) and the tree of knowledge (reason and hedonism" (22). Isn't this reading of the triumph of Rosmersholm's conservative values (shared by other writers on *Rosmersholm*, including Marvin Carlson and myself) at odds with Reinert's claim that the play ends "in an infinitely suspended final meaning"? (17) But Reinert's groundbreaking essay on *Rosmersholm*'s essential ambiguity is obligatory reading for anybody interested in the play.

I now turn to parts of books devoted to Ibsen. The first is chapter three of Elisabeth Oxfeldt's published Berkeley PhD dissertation, *Nordic Orientalism*: *Paris and the Cosmopolitan Imagination, 1800-1900* (12). Oxfeldt's book, which draws heavily but not slavishly on Edward Said and other post-colonialist critics, is both thoroughly researched and clearly written. In her chapter "Staged Cultural and Literary Encounters with the 'Real' Orient," she devotes three sections to *Peer Gynt*. While in acts one through three, Peer is "situated within an inward-focused, timeless, nation-building context," in act four, he confronts Europeans and Westerners "but also Orientals who challenge his self-identity" (135), and through his adventures, Ibsen "radically questions Romanticist notions of nationalism's intersection with Orientalism" (137). Oxfeldt deftly discusses Ibsen's fourth-act satire in the context of Ibsen's changing position toward Norwegian national identity, but she pushes her argument too far when she claims that Ibsen changed from being an "insider" in Norway to being an "outsider" in exile. Not only was Ibsen an outsider in Norway, but this ostracism was essential to his art. Oxfeldt's analysis of Anitra as the Oriental "other" is clever, but surely Ibsen did not mean this Eastern woman on the take to represent "Islam"! Oxfeldt's analyses of the desert scenes as a parody of Romanticist Orientalism and Peer's Egyptian experience, in which he turns Egyptian objects into European concepts, as a parody of the West's approach to the Orient are original and intelligent. Ibsen the post-colonialist is a new Ibsen, and Oxfeldt can be proud of her contribution to Ibsen studies as a graduate student. Reading it makes one look forward to her future work.

Ibsen the post-colonialist is a new Ibsen.

Gunilla Anderman's "Henrik Ibsen" is chapter three of Anderman's *Europe on Stage: Translation and Theatre* (13), whose subject is "major European playwrights and the linguistic and cultural aspects of their work in the original language at risk of being lost or misread in translation" (8). Not surprisingly, this huge comparative undertaking is thin. The heavily footnoted first half of the Ibsen chapter is a précis of Ibsen's initial reception in Europe; it would be useful to some-

one new to the subject, but no Ibsen scholar who has worked on this subject would learn anything. The account is worth reading, however, for some entertaining nuggets on Ibsen's plays: Mrs. Alving knows "only too well the origin of the fatal hereditary disease" (72); the plot of *Hedda Gabler* resembles that of a Victorian melodrama, with Hedda as "the bad, brown-haired heroine" and Thea "the 'good' blonde" (83); in *Enemy*, Ibsen, through "Tomas [sic] Stockmann," is pointing "to the danger of hereditary disease" (85). Anderman's discussion of the problems of translating Ibsen's language is a useful summary, e.g., Norwegian compound nouns, false friends, adjectives used as nouns, formal and informal personal pronouns; she confusingly considers Hedda's "vine-leaves" a problem of translation.

My last entry for 2005 is a collection, *Ibsen on the Cusp of the 21rst Century* (14), a festschrift for Professor Asbjørn Aarseth on the occasion of his retirement from the Department of Nordic Studies at the University of Bergen. Edited by Asbjørn's colleagues Pål Bjørby, Alvhild Dvergsdal, and Idar Stegane, and prefaced with an overview of Asbjørn's career by his colleague of forty years, Atle Kittang, the collection contains essays by eighteen invited scholars. The policy of *INC* is to review articles which appear in refereed journals, and what follows is an informational account of the volume. Of the eighteen essays, two were parts of works-in-progress and subsequently appeared in books: Toril Moi's essay on *St. John's Night* became part of *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism* (Oxford UP, 2006) and Astrid Sæther's general account of Suzannah Daae Thoresen was incorporated in Sæther's *Suzannah: Fru Ibsen*, the first biography of Ibsen's wife (Gyldendal, 2008). No less than four of the articles testify to Ibsen scholars' continuing fascination with *Ghosts*: 1) Jørgen Dines Johansen, "How Oswald Got Syphilis: Pathology and Metaphor in Ibsen's *Ghosts*"; 2) Eivand Tjønneland, "Repetition, Recollection and Heredity in Ibsen's *Ghosts*"; 3) Egil Törnqvist, "The Structure of *Ghosts*"; and 4) Erik Østerud, "The Living Dead. On the Phenomenology of Fear in Henrik Ibsen's *Ghosts*." Three of the essays concern *Peer Gynt*: 1) Errol Durbach, " 'Without Wings': The Existential Angels of *Peer Gynt*"; 2) Chengzhou He, "Peer Gynt, Ah Q, and the Loss of Self"; and 3) Jørgen Sejersted, "Reflections on Peer Gynt's Forefathers Niels Klim and Lemuel Gulliver." One essay is devoted to each of the following: *John Gabriel Borkman* (Fritz Paul, " 'As If He Were a King'—The Rise and Fall of John Gabriel Borkman"); *The Lady from the Sea* (Anne Marie Rekdal, "Art and Madness: *The Lady from the Sea* as a Text about Art and the Artist"); *Love's Comedy* (Knut Brynhildsvoll, "Decline and Fall of Bourgeois Marriage in Ibsen's Dramas—with constant regard to Martin Luther, Søren Kierkegaard and *Love's Comedy*"); *When We Dead Awaken* (Lisbeth P. Wærp, "Mise-en-abyme in Ibsen's *When We Dead Awaken*"); and *A Doll House* (Joan Templeton, "Updating *A Doll House*: Bergman, Ostermeier, Kimmig, and Breuer"). Three essays are devoted to comparative subjects: 1) Chengzhou He's article on *Peer Gynt*, noted above; 2) Jørgen Sejersted's "Reflections on Peer Gynt's Forefathers Niels Klim and Lemuel Gulliver," also noted above; and 3) Vigdis Ystad's "Ibsen, Solstad, and the Unspeakable Dimension: An Intertextual Relationship." Behzad Ghaderi, who is translating Ibsen's plays into Persian, contributes "Ibsen in Translation in Iran." Alvhild Dvergsdal's "Henrik Ibsen's *Digte* [Poems]" concerns a much neglected subject. My "Updating *A Doll House*" is the only article exclusively devoted to the performance of Ibsen on stage; Durbach's "Existential Angels of *Peer Gynt*" is partially about performance strategies for that play.

The Centennial Ibsen Year saw special Ibsen issues offered by three journals—*Modern Drama, Edda*, and *Scandinavica*—as well as a collection of articles edited by Michael Robinson, *Turning the Century: Centennial Essays on Ibsen* (15), which I will briefly treat first. The anthology is a sampling of fourteen articles published in *Scandinavica* from 1963 to 1998; the majority have appeared since our Survey of Articles began and thus have already been reviewed here. In what follows, I indicate the collection's contents with an occasional comment. The first five articles, grouped under "General Studies," include editor Robinson's excellent "England's Ibsen, or Performing Ibsen's Dramas of Contemporary Life Today" (2000); Jan McDonald's very informed "The Actors' Contribution to Early Ibsen Performances in London" (1976); Trygve Knudsen's "Phases of Style and Language in the Works of Henrik Ibsen" (1963); Robert Ola le Maire Amundsen's "Ibsen's Use of the Pronouns of Address in Some of his Prose Plays" (1981); and James McFarland's classic "Apostasy in Prose" (1984), about the meaning of Ibsen's turning from verse to prose; (the essay is also available in the 1989 Norvik Press collection of McFarlane's Ibsen work, *Ibsen and Meaning. Studies, Essays and Prefaces* 1953-87.) The second group, "Studies of Individual Plays," is clearly an effort to include a wide variety of works (although *Brand* and *Peer Gynt* are missing). The articles include John Northam's essential "*Love's Comedy*" (1964), which, along with Northam's other essay on the play, also called "*Love's Comedy*" (in his *Ibsen: A Critical Study*; Cambridge UP, 1973), is required reading for anybody interested in the play; Kristian Smidt's "Ideolectic Characterisation in *A Doll's House*" (2002), a fine study of how Ibsen characterizes his personages through their speech habits; Harold C. Knutson's "Forms of Address in Ibsen's *Ghosts*" (1994); Brian Johnston's "The Poetry of *An Enemy of the People*" (1979), a fascinating account of the play's echoes of classical works and themes; Marie Wells' "Ghosts and White Horses: Ibsen's *Gengangere* [*Ghosts*] and *Rosmersholm* Revisited" (1998); Sara Jan's subtle " 'Klistret fast med sort pa hvitt' ['Pasted down in black and white']: The Problems of Writing in Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* and *Hedda Gabler*" (2000); Anne-Marie Stanton-Ife's "A Woman's Place/Female Space in Ibsen's *Fruen fra Havet*" [*The Lady from the Sea*]" (1996); Egil Törnqvist's "The Illness Pattern in *The Master Builder*" (1974); and Erik Østerud's "Myth and Modernity: Henrik Ibsen's Double Drama" [*When We Dead Awaken*] (1994). The quality of the essays is varied, as is always true in anthologies, but the volume is filled with enough good to excellent essays and useful information—the bibliographies alone are very valuable—to make it deserving of a place in any Ibsen scholar's library.

The Fall 2006 *MD* "Special Issue: One-Hundred Years After Ibsen," organized by Errol Durbach and excellently edited by Durbach and Allan Ackerman (the editor of *Modern Drama*), also belongs on the shelf of any Ibsen scholar's library. It contains eight essays, two of which are excerpts from books that have already been reviewed by this journal: Atle Kittang's "Ibsen, Heroism, and the Uncanny" (16) is an abbreviated version of part of *Ibsens Heroisme* [*Ibsen's Heroism*; Gyldendal, 2002], which was received as a major contribution to Ibsen studies and reviewed very favorably here by Otto Reinert (*INC* 23/24, 2003-04). Kittang's book has not been translated into English, and *MD* has performed a service by making this précis available to scholars who read English but not Norwegian. Toril Moi's " 'First and Foremost a Human Being': Idealism, Theatre, and Gender in *A Doll's House*" (17) is a "slightly edited version of chapter seven" (256) of *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism* (Oxford UP, 2006), which received mixed reviews, including the review here by Tom Van Laan (*INC* 27, 2007). I take a point of personal privilege here to note that Moi's presentation of

gender in this chapter shares essential points with my own presentation in *Ibsen's Women*, which Moi does not acknowledge. Mary Kay Norseng points this out in her review of Moi's book in *Modern Language Review* as do I in my review in *Scandinavian Studies*. Both Norseng and I note that Moi frequently fails to acknowledge the work of other scholars, as do Brian Johnston (in *Comparative Drama*) and Ulla-Britta Lagerroth (in *Ibsen Studies*).

Kaplan's impeccable scholarship and lively writing make her article an example of reception studies at its finest.

I now consider the remaining articles in the *MD* Ibsen issue in the order in which they appear.

Merrill Kaplan's "*Ja, til Island*! The Icelandic Reception of *Hærmændene* paa *Helgeland* [*The Vikings at Helgeland*]" (18) is an original, superbly researched, and finely thought out account of the cultural complexities inherent in the first Icelandic production of Ibsen's play. While Norwegians considered the sagas Norwegian—the 13th-century Icelanders who wrote the sagas were merely "transcribing" Norwegian oral tradition—Icelanders considered the sagas their own beloved literary tradition, reading them in their own language "with as much ease as a modern English speaker reads Shakespeare" (236). In translating Ibsen's play, which was based on Icelandic saga but which took place in Norway, into Icelandic, and by directing its first production in Iceland (1892), Indriði Einarsson was "adding further layers of mediation to an already complicated cultural experience" (236). Kaplan painstakingly examines Indriði's "Icelandicization" of Ibsen's play, showing how his translation is closer to the sources of Ibsen's material than Ibsen's play and the translations he used to write it. She then offers a detailed account of the production's mixed reception in the Icelandic press. Ibsen was heavily criticized as insufficiently knowledgeable of Icelandic traditions, and his deviations from the sagas were considered to be mistakes. He was also defended by less nationalistic, more sophisticated voices. Lastly, Kaplan considers how the production of Ibsen's saga play was Indriði's contribution to a large Icelandic cultural nationalist project whose goal was to win Iceland's sovereignty from Denmark. Kaplan's impeccable scholarship and lively writing make her article an example of reception studies at its finest.

My *MD* essay, "Ibsen Lite: Robert Wilson's *When We Dead Awaken*" (19), is an account of the 1991 American Repertory Theater production in the light of Wilson's theory that his function as an artist is to "take things from one context [and] put them together in a different context" to "make a new language, a new order" (286). According to a Wilson aid, Wilson "hated" Ibsen's "lugubrious" play and wanted to "lighten it up" (287). I show that this approach is typical of Wilson's theory of serious theatre: "To be a great tragedy, *King Lear* must be light," Wilson instructed his actors in a German production; "Try a Mr. Magoo walk," he suggested to the Gloucester (293). To "lighten up" Ibsen's play, Wilson added what he calls a "knee play" to each act; tap dancer Honni Coles shuffles on stage to sing the blues in a send-up of the pangs of love gone wrong, a very large elbow in the side of Ibsen's serious drama. Another effort to "lighten up" the play was to cut its text in half, which ART's artistic director Robert Brustein explained was done in deference to Wilson's dislike of words, especially "the ping-pong of recitative dialogue" (288). However, the cuts resulted in more, not less, ping-pong (I give examples), and helped, along with the actors' scream-and-yell delivery, to turn the characters into stereotypes: Rubek is the bogus artist; Maja, the jealous, frustrated wife; Irene, who

I argue that Wilson's "new language" does not constitute a "new order" but rather results in confusion and trivialization.

exemplifies Wilson's love of mystery—"Nothing is as beautiful as a mystery" (153), he affirms repeatedly—is the avenging angel. To further mystify the action, Wilson adds long movement sequences, e.g., a chorus of women crossing the stage hissing incomprehensible dialogue. I argue that Wilson's "new language" does not constitute a "new order" but rather results in confusion and trivialization, and I contrast his production with those of other *auteur* directors of Ibsen's plays, who, whatever their "deconstructions" of them, take them seriously. I argue against Wilson's position that he does not "interpret" but rather "creates" drama, pointing to Umberto Eco's interview with Wilson in which Eco told Wilson that however he chooses to stage a text is *ipso facto* a reading of it. I claim that Wilson's insistence that no artist knows what he is doing constitutes an implicit argument that Wilson can treat any text with impunity, "the haphazard in the service of the whatever" (303).

The curious continuous action of *John Gabriel Borkman* has often been called "cinematic," but the next article in the *MD* issue, Mark Sandberg's "*John Gabriel Borkman*'s Avant-Garde Continuity" (20) is the first in-depth analysis of this subject. The essay is a critical tour-de-force. Sandberg establishes the "formal continuity techniques" in late 19th and early 20th-century stage melodrama and silent film that were used to achieve "convincing visual mobility" (331), e.g., the matching shot and the movable backdrop. He shows that for early theorists of film, Ibsen's dramas of psychological and emotional interiority were at the opposite pole from the natural subject of cinema, whose proper sphere was bold action and spectacle. It is in this context that *Borkman* seems such an anomaly. Sandberg minutely examines Ibsen's painstakingly worked out continuous continuity devices at the end of each act, showing how he makes use of the cinematic techniques later termed the "sound bridge" (Frida's piano playing); "cross-cutting" (Gunhild's exit downstairs, Ella's and Borkman's remaining in the room); and the "doorway" technique that allows movement from interior to exterior (Borkman's flight, the exits of Ella and Gunhild). Ibsen's drafts show that he worked hard to tighten the transitions between acts to achieve perfect continuous time. Sandberg then shows how it is virtually impossible to render this in the theatre and discusses the attempts of two modern productions. He then gives a fascinating account of how Ibsen forced Jens Wang, the Christiania Theatre's scenographer, to use a "vandreteppe," a rolling, scenic backdrop, for act four of the theatre's 1897 production, which, as Wang feared, only emphasized the "crashing of gears" between the naturalism of the fourth-wall acts one through three and the free, lyrical poetics of act four. Sandberg wonders interestingly whether Ibsen himself in his penultimate play might have wanted to signal a "crashing of gears" (he thinks, and I agree, that Ibsen probably believed that the rolling backdrop could succeed in seeming natural), but in any case, the insistent continuity of *John Gabriel Borkman* makes it, Sandberg shows, as avant-garde as early cinema. The article is required reading.

Sandberg minutely examines Ibsen's painstakingly worked out continuous continuity devices at the end of each act.

In her *MD* essay, Anne-Marie Stanton-Ife begins "Happiness as End: A Reading of *Rosmersholm*" (21) with the statement that "*Rosmersholm* is a play about happiness and how to achieve it" (348), as though the play were a self-help manual. This is both unfortunate and misleading because readers who continue will learn that the article focuses on a subject that has been "neglected" (I would add "or taken for granted") in consideration of *Rosmersholm*: that Rosmer's and Rebecca's notion of happiness is a reflection of the utilitarian ideal of acquiring happiness for the greatest number. Stanton-Ife summarizes Ibsen's well-known dislike of utilitarianism before illustrating convincingly how the protagonists' utilitarian notion of happiness is gradually swept under by the opposing tragic view of life that governs Ibsen's drama.

Stanton-Ife needlessly picks quarrels. She claims that her position refutes the notion that Ibsen's play espouses a positive "Benthamite message" (350), but I know of no Ibsen scholar who believes this; in fact, Ibsen commentators tend to consider *Rosmersholm* to be Ibsen's darkest play. (And contrary to Stanton-Ife's contention, I am aware that Brendel is a sybarite.) Curiously, Stanton-Ife takes Rosmer as a mature human being, claiming that unlike other Ibsen heroes, his "life-plan is not obviously flawed" (352); this stand makes her belabor, unnecessarily, and at length, Rosmer's development from certainty to uncertainy. Ibsen establishes the naive optimism of his armchair philosopher early on when Rosmer speaks of "liberating" and "ennobling" his countrymen. Taking Rosmer too seriously lessens the naivete of his utilitarian certainties and thus weakens Stanton-Ife's general argument. But her essay is nevertheless valuable because it shows how strikingly "Ibsen dramatizes the radical incompatibility of the utilitarian and the tragic view" (349).

Thomas Van Laan's important essay in the *MD* miscellany, "The Tragic Vision of Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*" (22) builds on two essays—Eivind Tjønneland's "Selvmordrene I [The Suicides in] Henrik Ibsens *Rosmersholm*" and Otto Reinert's "The Drama in *Rosmersholm*" (reviewed above)—to argue that the play's presentation of human existence as an "unresolvable mystery" (384) constitutes its tragic meaning. Rosmer cannot fulfill his hope of getting "to the bottom of things" in a play which has neither bottom nor clarity; adding to discrepancies in signifier and signified are the characters' equivocations and evasions and "the imperfect and often quite inexact relation between the characters' mental pictures of things and their actual states. There is much talk of indecipherable enigmas and of people's misinterpreting; being confused, deluded, or blind; being on the wrong track. . ." (372). Rebecca spies on Rosmer, and Kroll investigates Brendel and Rebecca and grills Rosmer, but nobody can get "to the bottom of things." Like Reinert, Van Laan discusses important issues that are not resolved: the truth about Beata's mental state; the nature of the relation between Rebecca and Dr. West; the inconsistencies in Rebecca's character (Van Laan identifies "Rebecca 1 – 4"); and the meaning of the last episode, which can be read in two conflicting ways: the suicide is a positive accomplishment of perfect love or it is a self-deluded act of negation. For the first position, Van Laan points to Rosmer's and Rebecca's own affirmations and to John Northam, who argues that the protagonists' biblical language gives authority to what they say. Readers who take the second position are prevented from taking the protagonists' words at face value because of the "equivocality" (376) of the play's language as a whole and point to what Tjønneland calls the "external influences" (377) that govern Rosmer's and Rebecca's decision: Brendel's influence on Rosmer, Rebecca's susceptibility to men's influence, the protagonists' own leanings toward suicide. "External influences" does not fully capture the negative position on *Rosmersholm*'s ending, whose adherents often claim that it marks the victory of the spirit of Rosmersholm, citadel of stasis and superstition, over its inhabitants, an influence that can hardly be called "external." I would have liked précis of major analyses of the ending, both positive (e.g., Errol Durbach's) and negative (e.g., Marvin Carlson's) in an article that means to present both sides. But Van Laan, like Reinert, succeeds in showing that *Rosmersholm* "is meant to be equivocal" (381). He wants to "to go further" than Reinert, however, in suggesting that "what Ibsen is trying to express through the play's many uncertainties may well be the representation

Van Laan then goes on to offer a brilliant analysis of *Rosmersholm* as tragedy.

of reality as it would look like without the seeming order given to it by the various formulae for living that we impose on it" (382). This seems to me to be a superb insight into what Reinert calls Ibsen's essential "skepticism." I am uneasy, however, with Van Laan's statement that "Rosmer and Rebecca

die because the world in which they exist is not fathomable, and since it is not fathomable, acting in it is dubious and very likely perilous" (382). I believe that the protagonists' motivations are both more complicated (Van Laan has helped me to understand just how complicated) and more personal, i.e., psychological, than some sort of philosophical despair. Van Laan then goes on to offer a brilliant analysis of *Rosmersholm* as tragedy, showing how Ibsen takes pains to dramatize how the characters' efforts to act freely and deliberately are thwarted by constraints of all sorts. What happens in life is both determined and inexplicable; in Rebecca's term, "that's how something like that goes" (383). Ultimately, the "most important component of the tragic view of *Rosmersholm* is the equivocality that makes acting dubious and perilous" (384). Van Laan's article is obligatory reading.

The last article in the *MD* Ibsen issue, Michael Goldman's "*When We Dead Awaken*: A Scene that Gets Out of Control" (23) examines the act-two scene in which Rubek explains to Irene how he transformed the original sculpture, "Resurrection Day." By a scene "that gets out of hand," Goldman means a kind of scene that he finds typical of Ibsen's dramas in which at least one of the characters realizes that "he or she has lost control" (387), e.g., Nora when she is confronted with Dr Rank's declaration of love. When Goldman gets to the actual scene, however, his subject changes; any inclination to accept seriously anything that either Rubek or Irene says, he argues, is stopped by the contradictions in their accounts of the past and of themselves; at the same time, each of them provides corrective insights of the other's self-absorbed position. Goldman's essay does not illustrate so much how the scene in question "gets out of control" as how it is difficult, if not impossible, to interpret. Goldman's somewhat rambling essay includes inaccurate paraphrases of the scene in question; "for some reason," he writes, Rubek never "made a pass at his gorgeous model" (392); Rubek, in fact, explains at some length and with anguish to Irene why he would not let himself make love to her. Goldman writes that Irene tells Rubek that she "never cared for him" (393), but in fact, she says that she hated him because he would not make love to her. Goldman curiously approaches the play on naturalistic terms; we can read the play "according to Irene and Rubek's grandest symbolic flights—indeed, to some extent we have to do so—but at the same time we can't exclude the possibility that, in order to do so, we have to be as crazy as they are" (394).

The 2006 "Ibsen Issue" of *Scandinavica* includes three *bona fide* articles and one four-page piece that reads like a draft. The lead article, Errol Durbach's " 'Fra det ubevidste Sjæleliv'[From the Unconscious Life of the Soul]: Ibsen's Existential Poetry" (24), is an extremely rich analysis of the poetics of Ibsen's spare language, both verbal and theatrical, in establishing his heroines' emotional "states of being" (145). By "existential poetry," Durbach means "Ibsen's fusion of its expression and its dramatization as a form of action, a conjunction of language and gesture in a technique that brings the dramas of the Greeks and Shakespeare into the age of Freud" (146). Hedda's firing her pistols is an example—"the God Dionysos will have taken possession" of her (147), but her gesture is also rife with the Apollonian principle of

"How can Freud not recognize in *Rosmersholm* the germ of his own great analysis of the dialectical impasse between the forces of Eros and Culture in the soul-life of Civilization?"

controlled action, the Gabler heritage of beauty and honor, and the Freudian Id. Durbach claims that we lack a critical vocabulary to discuss the soul-life of Ibsen's characters, and offers a fascinating account of Otto Rank's apercu that the obscurity of Ibsen's language mirrors the subconscious repressions of the speaker. Noting Freud's famous attempt to account for Rebecca West's guilt, Durbach asks an essential (and, as far as I know, original) question:

"How can Freud not recognize in *Rosmersholm* the germ of his own great analysis of the dialectical impasse between the forces of Eros and Culture in the soul-life of Civilization?" [in *Civilization and its Discontents*] (148). Durbach then demonstrates how Rebecca's soul-life is a precise embodiment of this conflict. Since Ibsen had no access to Freudian vocabulary ("not that he would have used it," I would add), he revealed his heroines' soul-lives by a "searing, lived-through recreation of the pain" (148). Durbach brilliantly accounts for Rebecca's response to Rosmer's marriage proposal by showing both the depth of Rebecca's slavish passion and her horror of that passion as her "divided consciousness momentarily hears its own appalling exultation" (150) and immediately brings judgment upon it. Freud, he shows us, stops short of Rebecca's "Freudian revelation that nobility of mind is the death-knell of human happiness" (152). This is exhilarating reading. Durbach then offers a brief comparative study of the rich vocabulary of Shakespeare and the poor vocabulary of Racine and Ibsen, arguing that Ibsen, like Racine, was forced to be "a minimalist" (154). He examines the language of *Ghosts* as a "perfect paradigm," with its "Racinian iterations," for Ibsen's aesthetics (154). Durbach ends with a discussion of Hedda as a woman who has no language for explaining her torments to a world who could not understand them and who therefore acts rather than says what she feels; and of Rebecca, who must recover her sense of self-worth not through words, which are suspect, but through self-immolation. No précis of this compelling essay can do it justice.

The second essay of the *Scan* Ibsen Issue, Marie Wells' "*Rosmersholm*—An Ibsenian Tragedy?" (25), presents itself as a chronological survey of the critical debate over *Rosmersholm* as tragedy from the earliest commentators to the present day. In fact, Wells' account is far from comprehensive, which considerably limits its usefulness. Either she is ignorant of the literature, or she considers that only one American commentator on *Rosmersholm* is worth treating here, Theoharis Theoharis. Secondly, the question of what is or what is not tragedy is one of the most debated in the history of literary criticism, and Wells' commentary does not begin to do justice to this subject. Her précis, comparisons, and commentary sometimes dilute the ideas she is analyzing, making neat distinctions that do not reflect the complexity of the material. The question that makes up the very title of the article suggests its naivete; one is not surprised at the foregone conclusion that some people have challenged the notion that *Rosmersholm* is a tragedy while other people continue to read it as one. Still, the article is useful as a bibliographical aid for someone who wants to compile a checklist of who has written what about *Rosmersholm* as tragedy, with the caveat that the reader realizes that the account is far from complete.

Amanda Doxtater's theory-soaked "Seduction and the Shadowy Body in Ibsen's *Bygmester Solness*" (26), the third article in the *Scan* Ibsen Issue, announces its subject as "the tangled scenario of watching and watched in the climactic final scene" (189). Doxtater finds it problematic both that Ibsen notes that "a human body" is falling and that he does not specify who sees it. In fact, Ibsen's dialogue makes clear who sees the body, and I find nothing innately odd in his use of a dummy. It turns out that Doxtater believes that "the somatic" is neglected in commentaries on Ibsen and that she wants to correct this: "A historical reading of the body's representational function in *The Master Builder*, i.e., in the light of discourses surrounding visual technologies that were in currency in the late 19th century, reveals how the play structures (and also genders) the practice of viewing in ways that both coincide with and fundamentally unsettle the expected practices of the time" (190). This examination will coexist with "a historical reading of the body's ambiguous ontological status in relation to Hilde's vision as an allegory for visual seduction" (191). These purposes lose credibility as Doxtater then zeroes in on my reading of the play in *Ib-*

> Doxtater is arguing against an argument that was not made.

sen's Women to give an utterly false account of it. She claims that I "discount" Hilda's claims as the "imaginative musings of a sexual, yet callow girl" (191), when in fact the contrary is true. Doxtater has not even bothered to get my chapter title right: "The Glories and Dangers of the Rejuvenating Feminine" is botched as "the glories and dangers of rejuvenating the feminine," which, if it means anything at all, reverses my meaning. Doxtater is arguing against an argument that was not made. This unfortunate combination of carelessness and chutzpah (Ms. Doxtater was a graduate student when she wrote the article) is followed by a confusing mélange of subjects, e.g., Ibsen's last scene as a representation of "visual seduction" that draws Solness into "an absorptive state" (195) (Is vertigo an absorptive state?); the subject of the scene as "the performance of various eye-witness accounts" (195) (how are the accounts "performed"?); the "*pornographic* economy of vision at work in the spectacle and display of Halvard's exposed human body in the compromising position of plummeting to its death" (196). The last eight words in the last sentence constitute the best understatement I've read in a long time. Doxtater then offers a précis of pornography scholar Linda Williams' theory of "hard core eroticism" and her discussion of a Japanese film which Doxtater claims has interesting affinities with Ibsen's play. In the film, the woman strangles her castrated male lover to death; in the play, Solness' body "might be considered a castration of sorts, the price of reliving a glory" (205). Others before Doxtater (including Ibsen) have spoken of Solness' willingness to risk his life to fulfill Hilda's vision of him, and I see no gain in playing the castration card. Doxtater does not explain how the film and the play suggest "the potential for radical diversity in historical or genre constraints" (205). She then brings in Plato, Foucault, and Nietzsche to confuse the issue—whatever it has now become—further.

The fourth and last piece in the *Scan* Ibsen issue, Kristian Smidt's "Hedda Gabler's Boredom" (27) is a four-page comparison of Hedda with Lady Dedlock of Dickens' *Bleak House*. Smidt asserts that Ibsen was "fascinated by Dickens," a statement for which we have no proof, and claims that it "seems reasonably certain that he read *Bleak House* before writing Hedda and took important suggestions from it" (214). I am not convinced by Smidt's evidence. That both women are bored and upper-class, live in stately homes, and have made marriages of convenience, hardly makes them unique in 19th-century literature. And it is not true that both have had a "love affair" in the past; the cowardly Hedda has *not* had the love affair she both wanted and feared so desperately while the passionate Lady Dedlock gave herself to a man whom she loved dearly. Lady Dedlock, whose erroneous belief that her lover and child had both died has rendered her emotionally dead, is awakened to unbearable loss and shame when she learns that her lover lived on for years and when she meets her own daughter; she runs away from her dishonored husband and dies of shock and grief. Hedda, distraught and seething, filled with loathing and hatred, trapped in a ludicrous marriage to a man she despises, chooses to kill herself.

I now turn to the third centennial collection of 2006, the "Ibsen Number" of *Edda*. Because English has become the lingua franca of Ibsen studies worldwide and because of the growing number of articles on Ibsen, we do not review articles in languages other than English, but I want to make an exception here for four of the five articles in this special Ibsen issue of the leading scholarly journal of literature and language in Ibsen's country.

The first article, Anna Westerståhl Stenport's "The Sexonomics of *Et Dukkehjem* [*A Doll House*]: Money, the Domestic Sphere and Prostitution" (28) is an original, fascinating study that shows how "gendered practices of consump-

Nora's relation with Torvald and her confidances to Mrs. Linde show that she knows that her marriage is built on sex for money.

tion and production inform the theme, structure and legacy of the play" (339). Stenport follows the currently fashionable habit of overstating her case when she claims that "the play is about money" (339), but her historicization of the play, her placing its conflict in the gendered capitalist world of late 19th-century Europe (and Norway in particular) yields many new insights. Discussing matrimonial laws that gave husbands control over wives' economic existence and cultural roles that reduced wives' lives to reproduction, Stenport shows just how radical Nora's earning money was. As for Torvald, as an underpaid civil servant, he has been an unproductive male; now, as a commercial banker, he will preside over "precisely the kind of lending practices that he privately condemns" (345). Mrs. Linde displays a remarkable reversal of gender roles, as she "is coded as productive both as a breadwinner and a social mother for [Krogstad's] orphaned children" (346). Nora's relation with Torvald and her confidances to Mrs. Linde show that she knows that her marriage is built on sex for money, and her loan to save her husband's life is "collateral against her diminishing looks" (348). Stenport offers a fine discussion of the lack of work outside the brothel that was available to unmarried women in Ibsen's time and demonstrates the play's insistence on Nora as an economic being. She concludes that when Nora leaves, "because she is no longer a wife/mother, she will become a prostitute, figuratively or literary—rather than a universalized human being" (350). Stenport insists that she is not "frivolously speculating" about the ever- recurrent question about what happens to Nora, but in fact, she is speculating, though not frivolously. It is, of course, true that Nora "is not in a position to express a new economic identity as an entrepreneur or self-supporting public intellectual" (352), but this does not mean that Nora will join a brothel. Perhaps, when she reaches her "hjemstad," she will earn her living sewing, copying, or, if need be, scrubbing floors. Who knows? Both the radicalism and the poetry of Nora's exit lie in the courage that allows her to take on the world alone. "We are thus back where we started" (352), Stenport writes, but since she does not claim that Ibsen meant his ending as cynical, or that Nora is self-deluded, or that the audience does not believe that Nora is capable of getting work, I take her comment, like her claim that the play is about money, as an overstatement.

Bjarne Markussen's "*Et Dukkehjem* og rettskulturen [*A Doll House* and Legal History]" (29) is a fine contribution to the reception history of Ibsen's play. The initial response to *A Doll House* has been treated in socio-cultural terms, and the play's shock effect on contemporary audiences is a well-known fact of modern theatrical history; Markussen's very interesting and original subject is *A Doll House's* repercussions in the Norwegian legal community. The first part of the essay shows how the theme of "the law" is essential to *A Doll House*. The plot is built around Nora's secret promissory note to Krogstad, and both Nora's conversations with Krogstad about the legality of her act and Torvald's fulminations against illegality and bad mothers implicitly raise questions about the legal powerlessness of married women. The play reflects contemporary 19th-century Norwegian family law, in which the husband, "the head of the household," had absolute control over his wife's

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legal existence. The second part of the article is an historical account of how Ibsen's play immediately became a reference point in the contemporary debate in family law. Ibsen's "doll house" was a new, fresh metaphor for bourgeois marriage, and Nora's accusations and contentions contained a new rhetoric of equality which liberal politicians could use in their battle against the sexist status-quo. The protracted fight over spousal property rights lasted six years, during which time, in 1884, Ibsen signed a letter to parliament, along with the president of the Women's Rights League, H.E. Berner, and Bjørnson, Lie, and Kielland, in which the writers urged

passage of a law protecting married women's separate property rights. In 1888, the new Marriage Act was finally passed, whose principle of shared legal rights Markussen reads as a direct political reponse to Ibsen's play. The essay is a wonderful reminder of how Ibsen participated in the legal and political life of his time.

Thorstein Norheim's " 'Versets små buketter': 'Mindets Poesie' og 'malte digterbilleder' i Henrik Ibsens lyrikk ['Verse's small bouquets': "The Poetry of Recollection' and 'painted images' in Henrik Ibsen's Lyrics]" (30), is an addition to the small bibliography of articles on Ibsen's poetry. Norheim wants to discover a governing aesthetic for Ibsen's poetics, based on some central poems in the collected *Digte* (*Poems*) of 1871, in which Ibsen makes references both to aesthetics and to the aesthetics of poetry in particular. Norheim focuses on the great sonnet sequence "I Billedgalleriet" [In the Picture Gallery], and, especially, on "Rimbrev til Fru Heiberg" [Rhyme Letter to Mrs. Heiberg]. Norheim is not interested in interpreting or explaining Ibsen's poems but in arriving at the aesthetic practices, or aims, that they embody. Using Ibsen's own term, "Mindets Poesie" (literally, the poetry of memory), Norheim sketches out a "poetics based on the constant reflections of time and space" (376). I do not always understand Norheim's language as he engages in a technical discussion of Ibsen's verse as "ekphrastic," and I suspect that only readers who are at home with the vocabulary of Greek poetic rhetoric can fully understand it. Ultimately, Norheim sees Ibsen's aesthetics as an architectural one which builds on images of materiality, surface, and depth to form a kind of "literary geography." The article is learned, somewhat abstract, and difficult.

In her very clever "Feminine floker I [Feminine Entanglements in] Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*" (31), Ellen Mortensen, reminding us that the devil is in the details, identifies her subject as the details of the hair of Thea, Hedda, and Diana. In this female triumvirate on a sliding scale, the blonde Thea represents all the conventionally good feminine traits and is thus the normal woman, the brunette Hedda, none of them, and is thus the abnormal woman, and the red-haired Diana, representing full deviancy, is the corrupt woman. Mortensen also wants to add a new context for Hedda's "degeneracy," a homosexual one. It is when Thea arrives, Mortensen argues, that Hedda begins to lose control, and it is Thea who continues to act as a catalyst until Hedda is pushed into suicide. Hedda's earlier schoolgirl fixation on burning Thea's hair; her grabbing Thea and shoving her; her provocative question to Løvborg whether Thea is lovely "only to look at"; and her burning Thea's "child" (which Mortensen also interestingly connects with her desire to burn Thea's hair) all reveal a hidden, erotic obsession. The relation of Hedda to Thea provides another drama besides that between Hedda and the men in the play; lesbianism is as impossible for Hedda as heterosexual sex outside marriage or adultery. Mortensen brings in Julia Kristeva's theory of psychological abjection and its connection to perversion as a notion that helps explain Hedda's ambivalent attraction to and repulsion toward Thea, but I don't see how Hedda's desperation and self-loathing express abjection. This does not take anything away, however, from Mortensen's suggestive thesis. She is not the first to propose that Hedda harbors lesbian feelings for Thea—several writers have mentioned this *en passant* and a Danish adaptation of *Hedda Gabler* at the last Ibsen Festival in Oslo dramatized a sexual relation between them—but she is the first, as far as I know, to propose a systematic reading of Hedda's lesbianism as part of her "degeneracy" and her refusal to live in the world she has inherited.

Mortensen also wants to add a new context for Hedda's "degeneracy," a homosexual one.

Eivind Tjønneland's brief essay, "Ibsens hysterisks kvinner [hysterical women]" (32), is misnamed; the subject of the four-page article is the meaning of the word "hysterical" as Ibsen used it in his working notes for *Hedda Gabler*. In 1890, there were two concepts of pre-Freudian hysteria,

Tjønneland instructs us: hysteria as a symptom of a kind of modern nervous condition, frequently referred to as "neurasthenia" ; and hysteria as a particular "traditional female complaint" (398). Character traits associated with the two notions of hysteria include hypersensitivity, strong feelings of jealousy, and "tendency to imitate and act impulsively"; behavior disorders include "sexually motivated criminal behavior" (398). It is useful to have the meanings of "hysteria" in Ibsen's day explained, but I wish that Tjønneland had at least mentioned that the unscientific terms "neurasthenia" and "hysteria" were used by (male) doctors to categorize and often stigmatize the behavior of women who could not or did not want to submit to society's demands (a situation that only worsened when Charcot and Freud added their own unscientific studies to the mix.)

I now turn to the 2006 *IS*. The editors note in the preface to the first number that its theme is "Ibsen and World Literature," but of the three articles whose titles would connect Ibsen with world literature, only one, the first, puts Ibsen in a global context. The subject of the fourth article is how Ibsen became rich. Both numbers of the 2006 issue are marked by the unevenness of quality that has plagued the journal since its inception.

The lead article of number 1, Brian Johnston's "The Ibsen Phenomenon –Ibsen and World Literature" (33) is an account of how Ibsen became what Johnston calls "the first world dramatist; that is . . . the first dramatist conscious of addressing a world audience rather than a national one" (7). Johnston follows this interesting insight with a summary of the well-known highlights of Ibsen's early receptions in Paris, London, and Germany, and discusses Ibsen's significance for his contemporary Irish disciples Joyce and Shaw. Johnston ends with a discussion of the regrettable dumbing-down of Ibsen in contemporary adaptations that both travesty the language and dilute the meaning of Ibsen's work, and he adds a few remarks on the post-modernist deconstructions of Ibsen's plays that prove how much Ibsen has now become "part of the cultural landscape" (20). The article is a knowledgeable and useful précis.

In the second article, "Arrival Scenes: Henrik Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkman* and the Tradition of Modern European Drama" (34) Annegret Heitmann illustrates the dramatization of "arrival" in "modern European drama" with a few paragraphs on Chekhov and Beckett, a sampling that can hardly constitute a "tradition." And that Chekhov and Beckett write dramas of "stasis" is a given. Heitmann seems interested in the subject of arrival itself; Ella's homecoming is an example of "thwarted arrival," Borkman's waiting, of "imagined arrival," Erhart and Mrs. Wilton illlustrate "departure as the inverse of arrival," and, lastly comes the "arrival of death." Heitmann argues that in his earlier plays, Ibsen used scenes of arrival to intimate "all manner of hopes regarding the future, for innovation and for growth" while in *Borkman*, the function of arrival "can be understood as a denial of those former values of renewal, progress, and competence" (39). But the arrivals of Krogstad, Pastor Manders, Mayor Stockmann, Gregers Werle, Kroll, Brendel, Løvborg, Hilde, and Allmers make it impossible to agree with Heitmann's distinction.

The next essay, Reiko Abe Auestad's "Ibsen's Individualism in Japan: *John Gabriel Borkman* and Ôgai Mori's *Seinen* (*Youth*, 1910)" (35) is a thoroughgoing, fascinating account of Ibsen's early reception in Japan. Ibsen scholars in the West are familiar with the importance of *Ghosts* to the Théâtre Libre, the Freie Bühne, and the Independent Theatre, but who knew that *John Gabriel Borkman* was the first public performance at

Who knew that *John Gabriel Borkman* was the first public performance at Tokyo's Free Theatre (1909)?

Tokyo's Free Theatre (1909)? This is only one of many interesting facts in Auestad's exacting essay in which she demonstrates Ibsen's importance in Japanese intellectual history at the turn of the 20th

century. Her focus is on "an intellectual giant of Meiji Japan" (44), the writer and military officer Ôgai Mori who translated *Borkman* into Japanese. Auestad recounts how Osani, the director of the Free Theatre production, and his actors took Erhart as the play's hero because they saw in his rebellion against his parents the same battle of youth versus age that was at the center of the culture war being fought in Japan. Auestad's main focus is Mori's novel *Youth*, whose protagonist Jun'ichi attends a progressive lecture on Ibsen at a young man's club and the historical Tokyo performance of *Borkman* in 1909. Auestad offers a sophisticated analysis of how Moi refigured Ibsen's individualism in his novel. "Poised precariously between two different worlds. . . Mori had to rescue Ibsen's individualism in terms that could easily be comprehended by the average educated Japanese man in 1910" (62). Auestad's essay is finely argued and enlightening.

The last article in the number, Jan W. Dietrichson's "Henrik Ibsen's Road from Want to Wealth" (36), inexplicably referred to as "Ibsen and Money" in the short-titles, is a useful corrective of Michael Meyer's account of Ibsen's fortune as that of a well-to-do bourgeois. Dietrichson's meticulous examination shows how Ibsen, in fact, became rich. There are occasional confusions, e.g., on Ibsen's financial situation just before he left Norway, Dietrichson writes that he was "desperate" (72) and also quotes without commentary a historian who curiously claims that Ibsen "got

Dietrichson's meticulous examination shows how Ibsen, in fact, became rich.

good jobs" and "had a cultural position when he left" (74). But the bulk of the article is clear and convincing, scrupulously researched, and extremely detailed. Drawing on financial documents, biographies, Ibsen's letters, the commentaries of the *Centenary Edition* of Ibsen's works, and monetary equivalents, Dietrichson explains the importance of money to a man who had known the miseries of poverty and who became almost obsessed with leaving his only child a rich legacy. We get a wonderful portrait of "Ibsen the financier," an active investor who shrewdly handled his money or made use of others who could handle it for him. And ultimately, we get a crucial understanding of an essential aspect of "Ibsen the artist": Ibsen wrote to Bjørnson (certainly with a glint in his eye): "to be able to work with a full and undivided power in the service of spiritual liberation, one must to a certain extent be financially independent" (78).

The second number of the 2006 issue of *IS* begins with Maria Shevtsova's "From Ibsen to the 'Visual Book': Robert Wilson's *Peer Gynt*" (37). The article is both a justification of Wilson's theatre by a disciple and a description of the production in question. Shevtsova begins by claiming that "there is little need to dwell here on the status of pre-existing texts [plays] in theatre productions" because Stanislavski and Meyerhold established the "stage as an art that is anything but secondary to literature" (110). Shevtsova's defensive logic is faulty; while nobody would deny the importance of the notion of "theatre as theatre," both reviewers and audiences continue to be interested on the director's "take" on the text, and even "deconstructive" directors like Thomas Ostermeier in Germany insist in interviews that their work is an attempt to tease out new meanings in the text. Wilson's well-known dislike of words is not as widespread as Shevtsova wants it to be. Shevtsova makes an equally problematic declaration in her claim that the term *auteur* theatre is an unfair description of Wilson and other post-modern directors because they work toward a synthesis in which "collaborators, not least actors, have a significant creative input" (130). In fact, anybody who has read actors' complaints or scholars' accounts of the way Wilson works (both can be found in Arthur Holmberg's thoroughgoing

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Robert Wilson) knows that Wilson controls every element of his productions. As Shevtsova herself notes, his actors "do not devise independently of him but learn and repeat the very precise movement patterns that he invents for them" (111). This is collaboration? Shevtsova makes obvious points about Wilson's thinking, e.g., "stylization for Wilson is the antithesis of 'naturalism' " (isn't it for everybody?), and her explanation of Wilson's emphasis on the visual is not helped by her claim that his "imagist" use of light and design is the same as that of the *haiku*, which, of course, is an image made of words. Her claim that Wilson has "rarely been so direct about his intentions" as he was in Paris on the "grand occasion" of his production of the *Ring* is inaccurate; the comments she quotes, beginning with "I paint with light," all repeat earlier declarations (which can be found in Holmberg's book.) Curiously, Shevtsova wants Wilson to have the proverbial cake; while his dramaturg for *Peer Gynt*, following Wilson's aesthetic, heavily cut Ibsen's text, flattening character and concentrating on narrative, "most of Ibsen's existential concerns appeared to have remained intact" (115). This was not the opinion of this spectator, who saw the production when it came to *BAM*, nor that of the New York reviewers, including those of the *New York Times* and Marvin Carlson in this journal (*INC* 2006).

The subject of the next essay, Erroll Durbach's very ambitious "Ibsen and the Dramaturgy of Uncertainy" (38) is the moral implication of Ibsen's ambiguity, which Durbach relates to the uncertainty principle in modern physics as dramatized by Michael Frayn in his 1998 play *Copenhagen*. Durbach argues that Niels Bohr's and Werner Heisenberg's discovery that "there is no precisely determinable objective universe" is the effect created by Ibsen's dramaturgy (125-26). He discusses directors' tendency to refuse the uncertainty in Ibsen's plays, and his example is Bergmann's staging of the ending of *Ghosts*, in which Mrs. Alving gives the morphine tablets to Oswald. Durbach's great insight here, though, is that "the dramaturgy of uncertainty. . . goes far beyond the 'does she/doesn't she' decision of Mrs. Alving," that "Ibsen's stagecraft amounts to an overarching 'tverimot' [on the contrary] that frustrates any attempt to define its tragic effect" (126); Durbach then analyzes the suggestive ambiguities of Ibsen's ending in two pages that are obligatory reading for anybody interested in Ibsen's great tragedy. Durbach shows how Ibsen's drama looks back to Sophocles and forward to Pinter and Beckett; drawing on George Steiner's discussion of "the undecideable" in Greek tragedy and on Martin Esslin's discussion of "uncertainty" in the theatre of the absurd, Durbach suggests a reassessment of Ibsen's modernity in which Ibsen's plays are viewed in the "world-altering Weltanschauung of 20th-century quantum physics" (131). Frayn's post-script to *Copenhagen*, with its thesis that "there is not one single thought of intention of any sort that can be precisely established" [and that] "this uncertainty in our thinking is also fundamental to the nature of the world," reads, Durbach notes, "almost like a commentary on Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*" (132). In an article full of *tours-de-force,* Durbach's last is to do what Frayn's Heisenberg does and turn the uncertainty principle into a (possible) saving grace: we cannot know the universe, except, Heisenberg says, "it works, it works. . . . [and] in the meanwhile, in this most precious meanwhile, there it is. The trees in Faelled Park. . . . Our children" (133). Ibsen's Hedvig, whose existence depends upon "the final core of uncertainty at the heart of things," is destroyed by one of those "monsters of certainty who stalk through Ibsen's plays" (134). Gregers leads Durbach back through Rosmer to Brand, and I hope he will find time to develop fully his novel notion of salvation achieved through uncertainy in Ibsen's *oeuvre*.

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The title of Mitsuya Mori's essay, the third in the volume is a question, "*Hedda Gabler*, A Parody of *A Doll's House*?" (39), to which the answer must be, at least on the basis of this article, "No." Ordinarily, Ibsen would have written *Hedda Gabler* first, Mori notes, because it would be "more appealing to the public if the cycle presented a transformation from a woman shooting herself in despair to a woman freeing herself from the old morals with a hope for the future," so Ibsen wrote the plays "in the reverse order" to call attention to the fact that "the social or family situation for women was in reality getting worse and worse" (139). Apart from Ibsen's departure from the norm of presenting progressively happy women, other evidence of *Hedda* as a parody of the earlier play are the "amazing correspondences" among the characters (141). Nora corresponds to Hedda, Helmer to Tesman, Krogstad to Løvborg, Mrs. Linde to Mrs. Elvsted, Dr. Rank to Judge Brack, Anne Marie to Aunt Juliana, and Helene, to Berte. How do these characters "correspond"? "On the surface, Helmer rules his wife, but in fact he lets Nora decide practically everything in the house. . . . Hedda, on the surface, dominates her husband, but in fact cannot decide anything in the house" (142). In fact, it is Torvald who is the family tastemaker as well as the breadwinner, and it is Hedda, who despises the house, who takes off the tacky slipcovers and demands a new piano (as well as a butler). But even if these "correspondences" rang true, they would not constitute "parody." On one page, we are told that the "plots of the plays are not the same, of course" (145), and on another that "the purpose of the present paper is just to point out the correspondences between the characters and plots of the two plays" (147). We are also told that another paper would be needed to analyze *Hedda Gabler* from the perspective of its "parody-like tie with *A Doll's House*" (147), and this is certainly true.

The next article in *IS*, Lars August Fodstad's "Refurbishing the Doll's House: the Theatre Programme as Paratextual Trace" (40) is an interesting and very amusing consideration of the little studied phenomenon of theatre programs. Using Gerard Genette's notion of the "paratext" (a "threshold" or "fringe" of the text), Fodstad wants to show how theatre programs "have worked as interpretive context for Ibsen spectators" (152), and his sampling consists of thirteen theatre programs of Norwegian productions of *A Doll House* from 1908 to 2003. Fodstad gives us a clever "Rough Guide to Norwegian Theatre Programs" and an account of the lean, though interesting scholarship on theatre programs (by Marvin Carlson and Mark Sandberg), before treating us to a romp through his

Why did nobody proofread this delightful article?

sampling, with illustrations. The earlier programs were shamelessly commercial; advertisements take up seventy-five percent of the space, and in one program, from 1936, Tore Segelcke, the most famous of all Norwegian Nora's (she played the role 299 times in eighteen years), is surrounded by images of "a photographer, a tailor, vitamin pills, a foundry, a dress store, sewing equipment, aluminum kitchenware, umbrellas and rainwear, skin care, suitcases and bags" (161-62). And what did a housewife reading a program of 1948 make of the dominance of advertisements for women's clothing? "Should I leave my husband, since he represents a fallogocentric [sic] discourse and treat me like a doll, or should I treat him better so that he buys me a completely new outfit?" (164). Fodstad shows us a very interesting phenomenon of the programs: the "ironic gap between the radicalism of Ibsen's play and the conformism of the bourgeois institution within which it is being performed" (167). The programs' written comments are often irrelevant to *A Doll House*, e.g., an account of Ibsen frequenting a bathing station in Amalfi while he was writing it. One exception, of sorts: the Trøndelag program in which the image of a woman Russian cosmonaut is juxtaposed with a Mel Ramos advertisement of a nude woman sitting on a giant cigarette box (Philip Morris). For the most part, though, Norwegian theatre programs

of *A Doll H*ouse contain "empty journalism" in which Ibsen and his play are sanitized and isolated from "history, politics, and society" (182). Why did nobody proofread this delightful article? There are startling errors in subject-verb agreement and spelling.

The last article in *IS* 2006 is Kirsten Shepherd-Barr's "Ibsen's Globalism" (41) a disturbing little essay which makes such sweeping, erroneous judgments that I feel obligated to discuss it at length. 1) In her desire to negate Ibsen's reputation, Shepherd-Barr reports that the Modern Language Association "has a Randall Jarrell, a D.H. Lawrence, and a David Mamet society, but none for Ibsen" (189). In fact, the MLA "has" no societies; the organizations mentioned —and many others—are self-organized, independent groups which have petitioned the MLA for the status of "allied organization" in order to hold meetings at MLA conventions. As for the Ibsen Society, its Council did not believe that the MLA was the best match for its membership and it chose to affiliate instead with SASS (the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study). Nor is it true that Ibsen "barely surfaces" (189) at the MLA conventions. In 2006, as chair of the MLA Discussion Group on Scandinavian Languages and Literature, I presided at "Ibsen in the Centennial Year," one of the handful of sessions, out of hundreds, which the MLA honored by naming "open to the public." So many people attended that there was no standing room in a space which held a hundred people. Over the past fifteen years, there have been eight MLA convention sessions in which Ibsen was either the sole subject or a main subject. 2) Shepherd-Barr also wants to establish Ibsen's unpopularity with the general public: "Usually, the only Ibsen play many people encounter is *A Doll's House*. Yes, *Hedda Gabler* is popular too; *Peer Gynt* is a favorite across cultures, and so is *An Enemy of the People*" (189). This situation, Shepherd-Barr claims, is the equivalent of Shakespeare's being widely known as the author of *Hamlet*. But in fact, it is the equivalent of Shakespeare's being widely known as the author of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello*, which is the case. And that Ibsen is the most frequently performed playwright after Shakespeare is a statistic that Shepherd-Barr ignores. 3) Shepherd-Barr wants to diminish Ibsen's reputation in order to increase the importance of her own recipe for "the only way Ibsen can really become a 'world' author" (192). First, she disparages Brian Johnston's "The Ibsen Phenomenon" [reviewed above]. Johnston, Shepherd-Barr claims, writes on Ibsen's impact in England, France, and Germany, which is "hardly what we understand as 'world' literature nowadays" (190-91). But Johnston is writing a precis of Ibsen's impact on the theatre of his day, and if Ibsen had no impact on non-Western drama, Johnston cannot be faulted. Shepherd-Barr also attacks the "reactionary" Johnston for disparaging "attempts to develop new and fresh stagings of Ibsen" (191), a complete distortion of Johnston's complains about the practice of theatres using cribbed "literal" translations as a basis for "tamed texts purporting to be by Ibsen but with their challenging original texture removed" (191). That Johnston sees himself as a "guardian of the text" who possesses "privileged access" to it is an untrue and unfair *ad hominem* argument. And for those who know something of Ibsen's reception in the non-Western world, Shepherd-Barr's recipe for making Ibsen global will be recognized as a description of what has in fact been happening since the second decade of the twentieth-century: "Ibsen is brought into a specific local culture, adapted to that culture, and not simply superimposed on it" (192). This process, which Shepherd-Barr calls "glocalisation" (after the policy of the Glocal Fo-

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rum, a political and economic group), could be used to characterize the "Nora plays" that dominated Chinese drama between the two world wars. Shepherd-Barr points to the productions of *A Doll House* and *Peer Gynt* by the Center for Asian Theatre in Dakah, Bangladesh, as models for a new "glocal" Ibsen, but the many adaptations of Ibsen by non-Western companies that the National Theatre in Oslo has been bringing to the Ibsen Festival for some years show that Ibsen is already "glocal." And, importantly, he is "glocal" for better or worse. "A play like *An Enemy of the People* can easily be adapted to local situations while retaining its universality," Shepherd-Barr writes, and she gives the example of "the Hindu [sic]" film *Ganashatru* by Satyajit Ray (193). In fact, it has been argued that the film was a bowdlerized version of Ibsen's play [see Rochelle Wright's article, below]; even a great director may not always "easily" adapt a text. The worst Ibsen production I have ever seen was an African "glocalized" *Enemy*, which the National Theatre's dramaturg greatly regretted having brought to the Festival. And Shepherd-Barr's formula of "harnessing" the "innate qualities of all of Ibsen's plays to the needs of local cultures" transforms art into a commodity, like food. Finally, Shepherd-Barr writes: "Ibsen was that curious mixture of the local and the global. He wrote about what he knew best—Norway—but made it relevant to the world" (195). The "curious" and the "but" are absolutely wrong, for all poets give to their imagined worlds "a local habitation and a name."

I now turn to articles in other journals.

Tijdschrift voor Skandinavistieck 27:2 (2006), a festschrift for Alan Swanson on his retirement as Professor of Scandinavian Studies at the University of Amsterdam, contains two articles on Ibsen, both of which I highly recommend. Janet Garton's "Are you really going to have this person in your living room? Ulrik Brendel's Difficult Entry into Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*" (42) is a fine essay on Ibsen as a working dramatist, crafting and recrafting his material. Garton painstakingly traces Ibsen's creation of the final Brendel from draft to draft, word for word, noting all the changes, additions, and eliminations and showing how Ibsen sharpened his original conception. Ibsen continued to make significant changes even in the final version of the text. Garton shows how Ibsen's revisions refined Brendel's psychological motivation and deftly integrated him into the play's dramatic structure. This essay, a meticulous examination of Ibsen as a revising writer, belongs in the company of James McFarlane's studies of Ibsen's drafts in *The Oxford Ibsen* as a sterling example of Ibsen the working artist. The second essay, Rochelle Wright's well researched "Ibsen Transcreations in Iran and India" (43), treats two films, the 1993 *Sara*, an adaptation of *A Doll House* by Dariush Mehrju'i, a prominent Iranian director, and the 1989 *Ganashatru*, an adaptation of *An Enemy of the People* by the famous Indian director Satyaigit Ray. Mehrju'i retains Ibsen's plot, adjusting its details to fit the sexual politics of Iranian society, making Sara a domestically accomplished hostess. When Goshtab, the Krogstad figure, presses her for money, she receives help from the local bazaar, whose businesswomen run an underground support system. Upon learning of her forgery, Sara's husband assumes instantly that she is giving Goshtab sexual favors and is so devastated that he takes to his bed. Sara telephones a taxi, seizes her young daughter, and leaves, and the film ends with the husband standing stricken and powerless in the street. The radicalism is total, for according to Iranian law, Sara has kidnapped her husband's child; and "by reducing the number of children from three to one and making the single child female, the film suggests that Sara's flight into the world beyond her home is paradigmatic" (125). The first of Mehrju'i's film trilogy of Iranian women, *Sara*, Wright notes, reflects the openly feminist subject matter in Iranian art cinema af-

Garton shows how Ibsen's revisions refined Brendel's psychological motivation and deftly integrated him into the play's dramatic structure.

ter the Islamic Revolution and succeeds both as a version of *A Doll House* and as a film on its own. Ray's version of *Enemy*, Wright argues convincingly, is another matter. In *Ganashatru*, which takes place in a West Bengali town, the ebullient

Wright notes that while Arthur Miller's adaptation merely flattens Ibsen's play, Ray's "obliterates Ibsen's spirit."

Dr. Stockmann has become the low-key, sensible Dr. Gupta, and the spa water, the holy water of a Hindu temple. Dr. Gupta's brother, the municipal leader, claims that holy water cannot be tainted while Dr. Gupta insists that laboratory reports do not lie. Ibsen's conflict between truth and self-serving herd mentality has been abandoned for a personal debate between two brothers over the claims of science and religion. Ray gives his play a happy ending: a reporter will publicize Dr. Gupta's case and the doctor's daughter's fiancé will publish his article. Students shout "Long live Dr. Gupta!" who then proclaims the opposite of Dr. Stockmann: that he is "*not* alone!" Wright notes that while Arthur Miller's adaptation merely flattens Ibsen's play, Ray's "obliterates Ibsen's spirit" (135).

The 2006 issue of *Scandinavian Studies* contains two articles on Ibsen. The first, Tanya Thresher's "The Performance of Sex and Gender in Oslo Nye Dukketeatrets [Oslo New Puppet Theatre's] *Hedda Gabler*" (44) seeks to show how this justly admired puppet *Hedda* "makes visible that which realism erases" (405). Thresher claims that realistic productions of *Hedda Gabler* run the risk of not sufficiently dramatizing Hedda as a gendered character. Thresher wants to affirm the Brechtian tenent of Elin Diamond and other feminist critics that realism, in reproducing reality, is complicit in the values of that reality and is thus dangerous for feminists. The logical fallacy of the argument that realism is inauthentic because it pretends to be real has been demonstrated fully by the philosopher John Searle—all fictional worlds present themselves as unreal—and, in drama criticism, by Raymond Williams and others, including Bert States, who, serving up Dr. Johnson, notes that spectators always know that the stage is only a stage. Thresher's other theoretical base is Judith's Butler's notion of gender as performative. Since realism encourages the audience to accept a "unified subject of the performance that inhabits the body" (411), it lessens the complexities of a character performing her gender; puppets, which are signs rather than physical human bodies, "may offer the opportunity of evading any performative confusion" (411). I wish that Thresher had not made her argument in terms of either/or—I have seen realistic Hedda's who have embodied her gender discontents very well—but there is no doubt that the puppets of the Dukketeater's wonderful *Hedda* achieved "pure intensity" (411); Brack as a bald-headed snake, Tesman as a little pig, Løvborg with a huge lion's mane, Aunt Julie made up of sofa cushions, were all delightful examples of this. For me, the large, expressionless Hedda puppet, whose mouth, alone of all the puppets, does not move, was a brilliant and moving embodiment of separateness, silence, superiority, and victimhood, but it did not "constantly remind" me of "the lack of body, or the lack of ontological truth (in this case the female sex) upon which to ground an interpretation of gender" (413).

It is a pleasure to end this survey with an account of a second Ibsen article in *SS*, Tom Van Laan's magisterial "Ibsen and Nietzsche" (45). This vexed subject has been discussed for many years, and uninformed claims and speculation must now give way to a superbly researched, carefully thought out précis of the true relation between the two 19th-century giants. First, Van Laan produces every word Nietzsche and Ibsen are known to have said or written about each other (very little) and establishes what Nietzsche read of Ibsen (very little) and Ibsen of Nietzsche (probably nothing). Van Laan then disproves a) Daniel Haakonsen's claim that Ibsen read *The Birth of Tragedy* and was influenced by it; and b) Michael Kaufman's claim that Ibsen read *Untimely Meditations* and was in-

fluenced by it. Importantly, Van Laan shows that these scholars' main mistake (which continues to be made by others) was to assume that Ibsen read Nietzsche's works "as soon as they were published" (259). But Nietzsche was virtually unknown throughout most of his working life. Ibsen became familiar with Nietzsche through Georg Brandes' lectures, summarized by Brandes in his essay "Aristocratic Radicalism," and Van Laan offers a full examination of the aspects of Nietzsche's writing that Brandes chose to emphasize. Drawing on the work of Atle Kittang, Keith May, and Jørgen Haave, Van Laan then gives a fascinating account of Ibsen's "Nietzscheanism" before Ibsen had heard of Nietzsche, e.g., what Kittang calls the "dream of power and self-excelling" (272) in Ibsen's protagonists. Van Laan then discusses the themes of "beyond good and evil" in *The Pretenders*, the debilitating effects of Christianity in *Emperor and Galilean*, and, in *Ghosts*, Pastor Manders' embodiment of slave morality and Mrs. Alving's questioning of the bases of Christianity. Dr. Stockmann is Ibsen's most Nietzschean pre-Nietzsche character "in the sense that he explicitly asserts Nietzschean ideas and implicitly manifests Nietzschean attitudes" (277). Van Laan's analysis of Dr. Stockmann's aristocratic radicalism makes it seem all the more extraordinary that Ibsen wrote *An Enemy of the People* before he was exposed to Nietzsche. Van Laan also identifies Nietzschean elements in *The Wild Duck* and *Rosmersholm*–e.g., Relling's life-lie, Rebecca West's ruthless drive to power—and gives an account of the Nietzscheanism in Ibsen's letters to Brandes and in Ibsen's Trondheim speech about "aristocracy, of mind, and of will" (282). The source of Nietzsche's and Ibsen's shared revolutionary views was "a passionate desire to render an exact account of human experience as it really is, once the myths and misconceptions have been swept away" (283). Van Laan then discusses the Nietzschean aspects of three plays Ibsen wrote after he became acquainted with Nietzsche: *Hedda Gabler*, *The Master Builder*, and *John Gabriel Borkman*. Van Laan's account of Hedda's Nietzschean characteristics offers a new reading of Hedda's longing for power and her disdain for the Tesman world. Van Laan shows how in *The Master Builder*, which is "saturated with the presence of Nietzsche" (287), Hilde "makes Nietzsche's presence in the play almost literal" (288). And the misogynist Borkman, a lover of music who views himself as a Napoleonic superman whose desires take precedence over the petty concerns of others, "can perhaps be said to be so Nietzschean as to have become Nietzsche" (289). Van Laan completes his study with a brilliant analysis of both writers' relation to Christian melodrama and tragedy. While Nietzsche abhorred the belief system of the former, Ibsen drew on it to develop "a dramatic form derived from it but made complex enough to provide a more textured portrayal of human experience" (292). Nieztsche's very limited account of tragedy in *The Birth of Tragedy* and his "ecstatic endorsement of the death of the protagonist" (297) do not accord with Ibsen's wider and bleaker vision, but both Nietzsche and Ibsen saw tragedy as a form of art which depicts life, in Nieztsche's phrase, in its "strangest and hardest problems" (299). Nietzsche saw all art, including tragedy, as an affirmation of life, while Ibsen, in his late tragedies, created catastrophes that "simultaneously evoke disaster and triumph" (300), but "without comment, except for the affirmation of his art" (300). This formidable article is an important landmark in Ibsen studies.

Van Laan then gives a fascinating account of Ibsen's "Nietzscheanism" before Ibsen had heard of Nietzsche.

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1. Ande Lande Peters, "The Longing Women of Mishima and Ibsen: A Reflection on *Hanjo* and *The Lady from the Sea*," *IS* 5:1 (2005), 4-18.
2. Kristin Ørjasæter, "Mother, Wife and Role Model—A contextual perspective on feminism in *A Doll's House*," see item 1, 19-47.
3. Jørgen Veisland, "The Ethics of Aesthetics: Decadence in Henrik Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*," see item 1, 48-63.
4. Erik Østerud, "Viewing the Nude: Body and Existence in Space and Time: A Study of Henrik Ibsen's *When We Dead Awaken*," see item 1, 64-104.
5. Anne Marie Rekdal, "The Freedom of Perversion: A Lacanian Reading of Ibsen's *Ghosts*," *IS* 5:2, 121-47.
6. Unni Langås, "What did Nora do? Thinking Gender with *A Doll's Hou*se," see item 5, 148-71.
7. Kwok-Kan Tam, "Spatial Poetics of the Self and the Moral-Dramatic structure in *A Doll's House*," see item 5, 180-97.
8. Xie Lanlan, "Peer Gynt's Female World," see item 5, 172-79.
9. Ralph Leck, "*Enemy of the People*: Simmel, Ibsen, and the Civic Legacy of Nietzschean Sociology," *The European Legacy* 103 (2005), 133-47.
10. Asbjørn Aarseth, "Ibsen and Darwin: A Reading of *The Wild Duck*," *MD* 48 (2005), 1-10.
11. Otto Reinert, "The Drama in *Rosmersholm*," *Edda* 2005, 16-23.
12. Elisabeth Oxfeldt, chapter 3 of *Nordic Orientalism: Paris and the Cosmopolitan Imagination*, *1800-1900* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2005).
13. Gunilla Anderman, chapter 3 of *Europe on Stage*: *Translation and Theatre* (London: Oberon, 2005).
14. *Ibsen on the Cusp of the 21rst Century*: *A Festschrift in Honor of Asbjørn Aarseth*, ed. Pål Bjørby, Alvhild Dvergsdal, and Idar Stegane (Laksevåg: Alvheim and Eide, 2005).
15. *Turning the Century*: *Centennial Essays on Ibsen*, ed. Michael Robinson (Norwich: Norvik Press, 2006).
16. Atle Kittang, "Ibsen, Heroism and the Uncanny," *MD* 49:3 (Fall 2006) Special Issue One-Hundred Years after Ibsen, 304-26.
17. Toril Moi, " 'First and Foremost a Human Being': Idealism, Theatre, and Gender in *A Doll's House*," see item 16, 256-84.
18. Merrill Kaplan, "*Ja, til Island*! The Icelandic Reception of *Hærmændene paa Helgeland*," see item 16, 235-55.
19. Joan Templeton, "Ibsen Lite: Robert Wilson's *When We Dead Awaken*," see item 16, 285-303.
20. Mark B. Sandberg, "*John Gabriel Borkman*'s Avant-Garde Continuity," see item 16, 327-47.
21. Anne-Marie Stanton-Ife, "Happiness as End: A Reading of *Rosmersholm*," see item 16, 348-69.
22. Thomas Van Laan, "The Tragic Vision of Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*," see item 16, 370-86.
23. Michael Goldman, "*When We Dead Awaken*: A Scene That Gets out of Control," see item 16, 387-95.
24. Errol Durbach, " 'Fra de ubevidste Sjæleliv [From the unconscious life of the soul]: Ibsen's Existential Poetry," *Scandinavica* 45:2 (2006) Ibsen Issue, 145-62.
25. Marie Wells, "*Rosmersholm*—An Ibsenian Tragedy?", see item 24, 163-88.
26. Amanda Doxtater, "Seduction and the Shadowy Body in Ibsen's *Bygmester Solness*," see item 24, 189-210.
27. Kristian Smidt, "Hedda Gabler's Boredom," see item 24, 211-14.
28. Anna Westerståhl Stenport, "The Sexonomics of *Et Dukkehjem* [*A Doll House*]: Money, the Domestic Sphere, and Prostitution," *Edda* (2006) Ibsen Issue, 339-53.
29. Bjarme Markussen, "*Et Dukkehjem* og rettskulturen [*A Doll House* and Legal History]," see item 28, 354-75.
30. Thorstein Norheim, " 'Versets små bukker': 'Mindets Poesie' og 'malte digterbilleder' i Henrik Ibsens lyrikk" ['Verse's small bouquets': the 'Poetry of Recollection' and 'painted images' in Henrik Ibsen's Lyrics]," see item 28, 376-87.
31. Ellen Mortensen, "Feminine floker i [Feminine entanglements in] Ibsens *Hedda Gabler*," see item 28, 388-99.
32. Eivind Tjønneland, "Ibsens hysteriske kvinner

[Ibsen's hysterical women]," see item 28, 399-103.
33. Brian Johnston, "The Ibsen Phenomenon—Ibsen and World Literature," *IS* 6:1 (2006), 6-21.
34. Annegret Heitmann, "Arrival Scenes. Henrik Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkman* and the Tradition of Modern European Drama," see item 33, 22-43.
35. Reiko Abe Auestad, "Ibsen's Individualism in Japan: *John Gabriel Borkman* and Ôgai Mori's *Seinen* (*Youth*)," see item 33, 44-67.
36. Jan W. Dietrichson, ". . . Since I Cannot Afford to Lose or even Risk Anything"—Henrik Ibsen's Road from Want to Wealth," see item 33, 68-89.
37. Maria Shevtsova, "From Ibsen to the 'Visual Book': Robert Wilson's *Peer Gynt*," IS 6:2 (2006), 110-23.
38. Errol Durbach, "Ibsen and the Dramaturgy of Uncertainty," see item 37, 124-38.
39. Mitsuya Mori, "*Hedda Gabler*, A Parody of *A Doll's House*?", see item 37, 139-48.
40. Lars August Fodstad, "Refurbishing the Doll's House? –The Theatre Programme as Paratextual Trace," see item 37, 149-87.
41. Kirsten Shepherd-Barr, "Ibsen's Globalism," see item 37, 188-98.
42. Janet Garton, " 'Are you really going to have this person in your living room?' Ulrik Brendel's Difficult Entry into Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*," *Tijdschrift voor Skandinavistiek* 27:2 (2006), 78-93.
43. Rochelle Wright, "Ibsen Transcreations in Iran and India," see item 42, 123-36.
44. Tanya Thresher, "The Performance of Sex and Gender in Oslo Nye Dukketeatrets [Oslo New Puppet Theatre's] *Hedda Gabler*," *SS* 78:4 (2006), 405-18.
45. Thomas Van Laan, "Ibsen and Nietzsche," *SS* 78:3 (2006), 255-302.

BOOK REVIEW

Helge Rønning, *Den Umulige Friheten: Henrik Ibsen og Moderniteten.*
[*The Impossible Freedom: Henrik Ibsen and Modernism.*]
Gyldendal: Oslo, 2006. 444 pages.

In the moments when drama reached its greatest heights—fifth century Athens, England from about 1590 to 1620, France in the second half of the seventeenth century, Germany late in the eighteenth century, Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century, and Europe and America in the mid-twentieth century—the best plays were always about the era in which they were written, even though their ostensible subject matter was derived from myth, legend, folk tales, history, or the dramatists' own cunning. With Ibsen, the dramatist's engagement with the social, political, economic, and cultural forces of his own era became more immediate and more obvious, and the distinction between ostensible and real subject matter does not apply because Ibsen's plays "imitate" (to borrow Aristotle's term) the experience of living in Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century. As a result, they are very much *about* this experience. Most Ibsen commentators ignore or only glance at this aspect of his work, but it is given extensive coverage in Helge Rønning's *Den Umulige Friheten*. Rønning argues that Ibsen's representation of his era, produced not just by his imitating it but also by his often viewing it critically, is still valid today and in fact constitutes a central key for understanding the nature of European experience in the second half of the nineteenth century. Rønning calls this era the "first Modernism" in order to distinguish it from and also link it to our own era, which he calls the "second Modernism"—in other words, Postmodernism. Ibsen is also of great

importance for the second Modernism, Rønning observes, because his explorations of his characters' psychic experiences still have validity for understanding such experiences today. Rønning notes that his perspective in demonstrating Ibsen's engagement with his era is sociological, and this is amply confirmed by his main sources: Eric J. Hobsbawm, Carl E. Schorske, Peter Gay, Jürgen, Habermas, Walter Benjamin, Theodore Adorno, and Richard Sennett. For the most part these sources also indicate a Marxist-socialist perspective.

Rønning's demonstration roughly consists of two parts. The function of the first ninety pages, which keep Ibsen's plays in the distant background, is to construct basic statements about the era in general and various individual aspects of it. The topics discussed are many and wide-ranging: e.g., Modernism's contradictions, the six main features of the first Modernism, the age of capitalism, freedom and anxiety, the problematic individual, the liberal utopia, the Paris commune, identity and individuality, liberal tragedy (a term from Raymond Williams that is far more political than literary). One other topic, whose importance is made clear by its providing the book with its title—the "impossible freedom"—has to do with the impossibility of attaining the total freedom for the individual that the dream of the liberal utopia promised. In addition, Rønning also includes accounts of the nature of theater and drama in Ibsen's era, the similarity of Ibsen's plays to the works of the era's novelists, and Ibsen's known non-literary responses to contemporary issues (as in his letters to Georg Brandes in the early 1870s). The richness of the material in this section of the book makes it well worth reading. The problem is that it is by no means an easy read. The section sometimes lacks coherence; in his discussion of the six main features of the first Modernism, for example, Rønning lists the first five features clearly and directly but then leaves the reader to figure out what the sixth feature is. The jumping about among the various topics leaves the impression that the section is not well organized, and there is also some repetition, as in the two accounts of liberal tragedy, and some tedium, as in the lengthy and unnecessary précis of scenes from a Danish novel that are used to set up an account of the function of the theater in Ibsen's era. I am also left with the impression that Rønning has not fully characterized the era he is describing. The word "religion" has only three entries in the index, and none of them refers to an actual discussion of religion. I also wonder why the philosopher Hegel is only mentioned, Kierkegaard is ignored, and Nietzsche rates only a very brief consideration.

The rest of the book's text—328 pages—continues Rønning's basic argument, but it is organized in terms of detailed studies of all of Ibsen's plays except for *The Burial Mound*, *Saint John's Night*, *The Feast at Solhaug*, *Olaf Liljekrans*, and *The Vikings at Helgeland*. Rønning basically discusses the plays in chronological order up to *Emperor and Galilean*, but from there on he either pairs or groups them in various categories, e.g., political plays (*Norma*, *The League of Youth*, *An Enemy of the People*, and *Rosmersholm*) and plays exemplifying the "suffocating" family (*Love's Comedy*, *Ghosts*, and *Little Eyolf*). The individual discussions usually focus on the circumstances in which the play was written and the most significant aspects of the era that it reflects before turning to a detailed analysis of the text. Linking the plays to their background in actual late nineteenth-century European experience usually leads to the introduction of such topics as the development of political parties and the impact of the emerging press, but it can also lead to repetition of what has already been discussed in the first section of the book, and it can also sometimes seem rather strained, as when Rønning calls *Peer Gynt* both a *Bildungsro-*

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man, so that he can discuss that phenomenon, and a dream so that he can work in a mini-essay on Freud. Nonetheless, the linkings can also contain some very good things, such as Rønning's pointing out that Ibsen's representation of Europe in the dramas of contemporary life is more German than Norwegian, and, more important, his noticing that when Ibsen was working on *Brand* and thinking about *Emperor and Galilean* in Italy, Garibaldi and his cohorts were trying to unify Italy. Rønning believes that news of this effort must have had an impact on Ibsen's writing of these plays, and he is probably right, although he eventually goes too far by trying to link the main participants in this effort to particular characters in Ibsen; Ibsen did not need the Italian models in order to create character types that he already knew very well.

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The detailed analyses of the plays are for me the heart of the book, and although they are uneven I would say that on the whole they are well worth reading. When Rønning sets his mind on describing what is going on in a play and on making its action lucid, the results are usually excellent. He is also good in perceiving the links that connect the plays in various ways. One indication of this is his account of Ibsen's original jottings for *The Wild Duck*, which he sees as a rendering of Ibsen's themes not only for this particular play but also for his work as a whole. An even more important indication is his working out from *Catiline*, *Brand*, *Emperor and Galilean*, and other early plays a characteristic pattern in which the actions initiated by an individual—in other words, the Ibsenian protagonist—turn out to have consequences other than those intended. One cause of this is that the protagonists try to accomplish the impossible—to bring into being an unrealizable utopian dream, for example, or to persuade all others affected by their actions to accede to their wishes. Another cause is that the protagonists, sensing the difficulties of what they want to do or doubting their capacity to get it done, act too late. The usual outcome of this pattern is that the frustrated protagonists direct their focus inward to brood on their own doubts and guilt. On the whole, Rønning's sociological perspective works best with the plays that are most suited to it, plays like *The League of Youth* and the first four dramas of contemporary life. For me, the best discussion of an individual play is the one on *An Enemy of the People,* which is almost perfect. I am not fond of the linking of *Rosmersholm* with the other political plays or the pairing of *The Master Builder* with *Pillars of Society* because in each case the later play is much more sophisticated and complex than its predecessor(s) and thus contains much that Rønning's perspective cannot detect. In general, the discussions of the later plays are far looser, less well-controlled than those of *The League of Youth-An Enemy of the People* sequence. Two examples should suffice: the commentary on *The Lady from the Sea*—with the exception of a cogent paragraph linking the play to the book's main title—reads like a series of explanatory footnotes, while for the most part the discussion of *The Master Builder* seems to serve as the occasion for introducing all kinds of topics pertaining to the era that had not previously found an appropriate niche. One last comment on the chapters discussing the plays: the reader (especially a reader trying to write a review) would have been much better served if the chapter headings in the table of contents had listed the plays being discussed in the chapters.

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The Impossible Freedom also has other problematic features: (1) Rønning can sometimes appropriate an idea from his sources without considering its validity. The main example is his stance

that Ibsen was trying to solve the same problems as the novel but within the framework of a different genre. This idea comes from Peter Szondi, who claimed that while classical drama gives us only the moment, the scene going on before us, and eschews any indication of an extended action going on outside the scene, modern drama always begins in a history and always assumes an epic time-span (81-82). Rønning tries to back up his assertion by pointing to contemporary Norwegian novels and by asserting that Ibsen was more interested in rendering the psychological depths of his characters than in working out the action (88). Szondi's idea, in fact, should never have been formulated. Of the thirty extant Greek tragedies, for example, I find only four or five whose narrative spans could be said to begin essentially with the beginning of the play. Most Greek tragedies resemble the plays of Ibsen by giving the audience, during the unfolding of the action, extensive information about the past of the characters and the past in general. In fact, one of these tragedies, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, very likely provided Ibsen with the model for his dramatic structure. I do not agree that Ibsen is more interested in probing his characters' psyches than in working out an action. Ibsen's characters have a richer psychological profile than the characters of classical drama, but so do those of Shakespeare and many other dramatists. Ibsen's plays resemble contemporary novels because he draws on similar themes and subjects and not because he is working like a novelist when he informs us about the past. The early chapters of a novel—those that would correspond in time with Ibsen's past action—are likely to resemble the later chapters in providing a faithful representation of people and events and their settings, while in Ibsen the revealed past is sketchy, sometimes quite uncertain, and for the most part defined in terms of the particular points of view of the characters who provide the revelations. The focus of an Ibsen play is an action that begins with the beginning of the play and proceeds to its outcome at the finish. When Rønning discerns the characteristic pattern of action in Ibsen's plays or describes what is going on in a particular play, he knows this.

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(2) In his version of Raymond Williams' liberal tragedy Rønning shows no awareness of the important fact that for Williams liberal tragedy began with Marlowe and Shakespeare and thus had (has had?) a lifespan approximately as long as the postclassical age. This omission, which helps create the impression that liberal tragedy and the second half of nineteenth-century Europe are in effect synonymous, puts the emphasis on Ibsen's era as the ultimate cause of his tragic representation of it. But Ibsen began as a writer of tragedy and it continued to be his preferred dramatic genre throughout his career, although he often mixed it with other genres. Rønning's book would have been stronger if he had included a consideration of Ibsen's penchant for tragedy and the impact that this may have had on his representation of his era. Rønning also makes an odd statement concerning tragedy: after calling *Brand* a tragedy, in his opinion the only tragedy that Ibsen wrote, he adds, "But it is not a classical tragedy, for Brand's fate is not *meningsløs* [meaningless or absurd]. It is, in its ambiguity, the logical consequence of the play's action" (163). I do not understand the implied judgment on the outcome of classical tragedy, especially since the next sentence, putting aside "ambiguity," is a pretty good fit for the structure of Greek tragedy.

Rønning's book would have been stronger if he had included a consideration of Ibsen's penchant for tragedy.

It is also difficult to know how seriously Rønning means "in my opinion the only tragedy that Ibsen wrote," for he subsequently twice uses the phrase "Hedda Gabler's tragedy" (345, 352), calls *John Gabriel Borkman* a "cynical tragedy" (391), and uses the term "tragic" in connection with *When We Dead Awaken* (417).

(3) I wrote above that the discussion of *An Enemy of the People* is almost perfect. Where it goes wrong is at its end, when Rønning surveys possible ways of trying to bring about social and political change and concludes that Dr. Stockmann's decision to start a school for street urchins in order to create "a Trojan Horse that will conquer and destroy society from within" puts Stockmann clearly in the fascist or authoritarian way of creating change by forcing it. Rønning then points out that *An Enemy of the People* was the Ibsen play that aroused the most enthusiasm during the Third Reich (208-09). There is something terribly wrong with this argument. For one thing, Stockmann might be more appropriately regarded as a Nordic Ralph Nader exposing the evils of capitalism. More important, the drift of Rønning's argument sharply differs from our experience of the play. Stockmann becomes quite illiberal in his verbal attacks on his enemies in Act Four, but I doubt that many spectators completely lose their affection for him, and while Ibsen often makes fun of him, it is always in a way that increases our affection. Basically we see Stockmann as a good man who is harassed and hampered by various good-for-nothings who act out of their own self-interests. If Rønning is correct in his conclusion—which I doubt, obviously—he at least has an obligation to explain why Ibsen, who makes us admire and root for Stockmann and to love what he says and does in Act Five, would expend so much effort to conceal the essential meaning of his play. Was he trying to make his spectators admire fascist behavior? Or did he perhaps not really understand the drift of his own play? Rønning's final view of Stockmann associates Rønning with an interpretive position assumed by some Ibsen specialists that Ibsen's purpose in writing his plays was to expose his characters to our contempt and condemnation. That interpretive position, which Atle Kittang attacked in *Ibsens herorisme*—an attack I endorsed in my article "Ibsen and Nietzsche"—also surfaces in Rønning's discussions of Solness and, especially, John Gabriel Borkman. Rønning states that in Borkman's play the idea of the Nietzschean Übermensch "is placed in an ironic, but at the same time heroic, light." However, the term "heroic" in no way pertains to his view of Borkman, whom he sums up as a fool and "a comic figure who has lost contact with the world around him and lives only in his own self-conceived world" (381-82). The same thing might be said about King Lear—and was in fact said by Lear's fool. But not many readers or spectators have been able to accept this as the last word on Lear. Borkman is Ibsen's King Lear.

(4) *The Impossible Freedom* is a parochial book. It prefers sources with a sociological perspective to those with a literary one, and when it does draw on literary sources they are almost always Scandinavian. The extensive valuable work done elsewhere, especially in England and North America, is almost entirely ignored. The book would probably have been considerably more effective had Rønning drawn on some of these ignored sources. Theoharis C. Theoharis' *Right Action and Tragic Joy*, for example, might well have helped him discover some of the richer dimensions of Ibsen's later plays and to appreciate the heroic dimensions of Ibsen's protagonists. The book is also parochial in another sense. The study of Ibsen has become an international, not a local, activity, as the Norwegian journal *Ibsen Studies* acknowledges by publishing all its articles in English. It is unfortunate that valuable books like this one and Atle Kittang's indispensable *Ibsens heroisme* are not made more available to the wider world of Ibsen scholarship and criticism by being translated into English.

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