

*Ibsen and the Irish Revival*. By Irina Rupp Malone. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010; pp. 223. \$80.00 cloth.

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In her book *Ibsen and the Irish Revival*, Malone tackles the fascinating ambivalence with which the Irish literati and the Dublin public greeted Ibsen. Equal parts production history, comparative literature, dramatic criticism, and historiography, the book shines as an addition to the plethora of studies on the Irish Revival. It also acts as a welcome supplement to Ibsen studies, further illuminating Ibsen's international legacy.

Malone's study follows such well-known works as Jan Setterquist's two-volume *Ibsen and the Beginnings of Anglo-Irish Drama* (1974), in which Ibsen's influence on J. M. Synge and Edward Martyn is explored, and Bjørn Tysdahl's *Joyce and Ibsen: A Study in Literary Influence* (1968). These books are duly referenced, but Malone's scope is wider and more intensive. An adept historian, her list of primary sources is long; she delves into the various journals and newspapers of the day and scrutinizes promptbooks and photographs. Her goal is to use "Ibsen and Ireland to examine the pattern of interrelation between literary influence and dramatic reception" (177). In the process, she also uncovers the extent to which Ibsen's work enthused political and social movements in Ireland.

Divided into six chapters, the book is organized by chronology and theme. English influences on the Irish reception of Ibsen frame the book and provide appropriate context for the playwright's entanglement in the fight for political, ideological, and artistic nationalism in Ireland. Chapter 1 addresses the exposure of Irish intellectuals to the 1889 English controversy over the staging of *A Doll's House* and recounts the first productions of Ibsen's plays in Ireland. After years of reading in their papers about the scandal and immorality of the playwright's work, audiences flocked to see Beerbohm Tree's 1894 production of *An Enemy of the People*. However, "Instead of being shocked," Malone reveals, "they were bored" (15).

Chapter 2 attends to Ibsen's further entrenchment into the influences of Irish ideology by addressing the well-known inspiration Ibsen provided the founders of the Irish Literary Theatre (which later became the Abbey). Despite Lennox Robinson's famous assertion that "Yeats hated Ibsen," Yeats's relationship with the playwright's work was complex. Malone clarifies this "critical confusion" (6) by contextualizing purported statements and analyzing creative influence. Unlike most of Dublin that best new Ibsen's realism, Yeats admired his earlier romantic, national, and poetic work and called for Irish dramatists to create a national literary movement similar to what he perceived had occurred in Norway. It was not long before critics were noting "'Ibsen with an Irish accent'" (28) on the Dublin stage. The most well-known and blatant nod to Ibsen's influence is Synge's *In the Shadow of the Glen*, where another famous Nora leaves her house. Malone provides a superb analysis of this play and its

Ibsenite influences and consequences, arguing that prior judgments of Ibsen's work fed into the play's controversy.

In Chapter 3, Malone emphasizes the extent to which Irish dramatists found nationalist messages in Ibsen's work. The Theatre of Ireland, for example, staged act 4 of *Brand* in 1906 in a manner which "subverted the meaning of the play" (61) by imposing an artificial embodiment of "that ideal of Irish nationalism—a female figure beatified by her suffering for the sake of a grand cause" (61). Readings such as this encouraged Irish dramatists to address their politics in their art and to model it after what they took to be Ibsen's style. Malone points out that this inspired dramatic output resulted in a dearth of work by Ibsen (and other foreign playwrights) on Irish soil, temporarily stalling dramatic evolution.

It was not until 1908 that Dublin was exposed to Ibsen's later, more symbolic drama (*The Master Builder*, imported from London), and in Chapter 4 Malone illustrates the great confusion with which it was greeted. Neither Dublin audiences nor Irish playwrights understood the extent to which folklore and realism were intertwined in Ibsen's play or the associations between myth and psychology therein. Despite the frustration theatre patrons expressed at this work, Irish playwrights were quick to attempt Ibsen's methods. The result was an unremarkable collection of plays characterized by a belabored use of symbolism.

Ibsen's realism was adopted anew in the 1910s to assist in the fight for social and political change, and Chapter 5 addresses this continued attraction to Ibsen's work. The Suffragists sponsored productions of *A Doll's House*, and Nationalists continued to relate such plays as *An Enemy of the People* and *John Gabriel Borkman* to their cause. Most noteworthy was the debut of a controversial playwright who penned a new Nora. Sean O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* pays homage to Ibsen in both form and literary allusion. Still, Malone stresses, this play and the others like it were written and staged with an incomplete understanding of Ibsen's dramaturgy. She asserts that it was not until English-turned-Irishmen Micheál MacLiammóir and Hilton Edwards staged *Peer Gynt* at the Gate Theatre in 1928 that there was an Irish production of an Ibsen play that "mattered" (164). Malone effectively analyzes this production in her final chapter, stressing that it was "the first production of an Ibsen play in Ireland to reflect the concerns of the public and also to show them new facets of Ibsen's art" (164).

This contention is difficult, perhaps, for the reader of Malone's book to buy into after journeying with her through the history of the Irish Revival and discovering the extent to which Irish playwrights and theatre artists engaged with Ibsen's work. However, Malone leaves room for argument. Her book is one that will fuel the ongoing discussion of Ibsen's Irish legacy. In fact, if there is one glaring shortcoming to be found here, it is that Malone glosses over the most recent Irish creative responses to Ibsen in the form of Thomas Kilroy's adaptation of *Ghosts* and the five transadaptations of Ibsen's plays by Frank McGuinness, worthy subjects both in light of the political, social, and artistic changes in Ireland since 1934. Perhaps Malone will tackle these in a second volume.

