

FRANCO PERRELLI:

***On Ibsen and Strindberg: The Reversed Telescope.***

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Since the 1980s, Franco Perrelli has been tirelessly working as a scholar of Scandinavian theatre, as well as a translator of Scandinavian drama for the Italian readership and theatregoers. The present book contains nine chapters, eight of which are revised versions of previously

published articles. It gives a clear idea of Perrelli's interests and intercultural approach. Ibsen and Strindberg are seen in the context of their Scandinavian culture, and the scholar is well acquainted with the Scandinavian primary and secondary sources. At the same time, the focus is on the European dimension of the two playwrights' work, and on the dialogic quality of texts that have built bridges between languages and cultures for more than 150 years. It is no surprise, in this respect, that phenomena are often seen from an Italian angle.

'Ibsen and the Italian *Risorgimento*' shows how the writer's disapproval of Sweden and Norway's cautious foreign policy in 1864, when the Prussians attacked Denmark, was also inspired by the heroism and idealism of the Italian movement of national liberation. Perrelli underscores the combination of political, ethical and existential motives in Ibsen's urge for a renewal of consciousness. Thus, *Brand* reflects not only a stern Lutheran idealism, but also the spirit of self-sacrifice in the *Risorgimento*.

'On Nora's Tarantella' uses the perspective offered by Italian historical and anthropological research about tarantism. Dancing and miming the spider's movements was a way of performing the physical and spiritual disease caused by its bite, in order to get rid of it. This is a possible way to observe the turning point in Nora's revolt against the patriarchal order, and her transformation towards a new consciousness. Perrelli emphasizes Ibsen's reuse of 'scenic remains' in a more modern sense, as the topos of tarantella was known in Scandinavian nineteenth-century ballet and theatre.

'Theatrical Roles, Feminism, and Demonism in Ibsen's Plays' gives a portrait of the Danish actress Betty Hennings. The idea of 'remains' is used again, since Hennings proposed, as an interpreter of Ibsen's female roles, a more problematic version of the *ingénue* as it was known in previous theatrical practice. Ibsen's 'striking change of direction' did not mean 'a complete annulment of traditional signals and rules'.

'Eleonora Duse's Idealistic Ibsen' reminds us of the international stature of the Italian actress as an interpreter of Ibsen between 1891 and 1909. Laura Marholm and Georg Brandes wrote about Duse, and Herman Bang got in touch with her. The reviewers of her Scandinavian tour in 1905–06 underscored her strength and intensity. Through a

fruitful intercultural practice, Scandinavia was open to accepting a different temperament in the interpretation of Ibsen's women on stage.

'The Strange Case of Dr Ibsen and Mr Strindberg' sees the connections between the two foremost Scandinavian playwrights, in spite of their differences. Strindberg's need for an independent creative space caused his rebellion against the master, who after all remained a master. If Ibsen saw marriage as a human and social institution, not a sacred bond, such a move proved to be fundamental for Strindberg's oeuvre.

'Strindberg in the Italian Nineteenth-Century Theatrical Canon' describes a system dominated by the 'great actor', such as Ermete Zacconi (or Eleonora Duse). This tradition was different from the contemporary director's theatre in Scandinavia. While the overall staging was weaker, there was a stronger focus on the central, hypnotic interpreter. Zacconi became famous as the naturalistic interpreter of pathological states of mind. As such, he played Oswald Alving in Ibsen's *Ghosts* and the Captain in Strindberg's *The Father*. Perrelli's analysis of Zacconi's script of *Il padre* shows how he domesticated Strindberg, so that *The Father* was made less conceptual, more linear in the sense of a well-made plot for a 'dark domestic drama'.

The two following chapters underscore Strindberg's search for new solutions as a dramatist, a director and a theoretician of the theatre at the beginning of the twentieth century. He proposed a dematerialized stage in a post-naturalistic sense, with a 'simplified architecture of the set', and he could find support in the study of either classical drama ('Strindberg and Greek Tragedy') or contemporary proposals of theatre reform by Edward Gordon Craig and Georg Fuchs ('August Strindberg and Georg Fuchs').

The concluding chapter, 'Ibsen in Anti-Ibsenian Theatre', maps the legacy of Ibsen's drama in the avant-garde theatre of the second half of the twentieth century, which revolts against traditional bourgeois theatre 'ruled by family and existential drama'. In fact, experimental productions in the spirit of the Living Theatre, Jerzy Grotowski, Eugenio Barba and Odin Teatret recognize Ibsen's value through his strength as a dramatist and his pioneering fight for the rights of the individual in the bourgeois context.

In this book the reader will find a significant selection of material that summarizes Perrelli's work. All the case studies offer, in a concentrated form, interesting information and valuable perspectives.

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