



Ibsen's Foreign Contagion: Henrik Ibsen, Arthur Wing Pinero and Modernism on The London Stage, 1890 - 1900

T. Carlo Matos

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The Independent Theatre's production of *Ghosts* at the Royalty Theatre, London in 1891 precipitated one of the most famous theatrical quarrels in European theater history. Although many have commented on the extremity of the response from the conservative reviewers, few have remarked on the fact that the majority of these reviews were laden with disease metaphors. Ibsen, in the age of the classic epidemic, comes to be perceived by his English hosts as a contagious entity. The importance of *Ghosts*, then, lies in its ability, to "introduce into the cultural matrix a germ, a foreign body, that cannot be accounted for by its existing codes and practices" (Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, 55-6). In this scholarly monograph, Dr. Matos treats the theatrical reviews as serious cultural artifacts in order to avoid reducing them to mere entertaining invective in order, ultimately, to trace the transmission of modern dramatic innovation from Ibsen to Arthur Wing Pinero and George Bernard Shaw. Arthur Wing Pinero wrote a series of plays in the 1890s distinctive both for their seriousness and their seeming similarity to Ibsen. *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* and *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* establish Pinero as both a popular and a serious writer, something Ibsen could never quite accomplish. Although it is unfair to lay the "improvements" in Pinero's method solely at the feet of Ibsen, it is fair the author believes to demonstrate that without Ibsen's boundary-breaking work, Pinero could never have produced these important plays, which helped bring the London stage into the modern period and ushered in a new era of dramatic modernism that included Shaw and Wilde.

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