



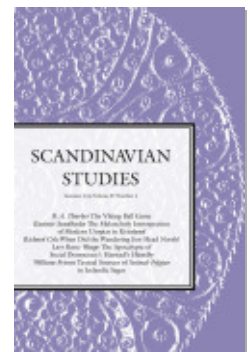
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Domesticating Ibsen for Italy: Enrico and Icilio Polese's Ibsen Campaign by Giuliano D'Amico (review)

Olivia Gunn

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Thorkild Hansen, who, of course, has previously been treated by Stecher at length.

Stecher's book has received quite a lot of attention in Danish newspapers, most of it positive. The primary focus of interest seems to be the racism issue, which raises the question of why sexism and Nazism no longer seem as provocative as they once were. When Danish television asked me whether Blixen was a racist, I answered, "Yes and no." Curiously, the "no" ended up on the cutting room floor. There still seems to be a popular urge in Denmark to cut Blixen down to size, something she had to cope with even during her lifetime. Stecher's outsider perspective, as an American scholar, is no doubt very helpful as a counterweight and has kept the fire ants from biting too hard. Stecher's book raises issues that still need to be discussed, and she should be applauded for keeping the conversation going.

Susan Brantly
University of Wisconsin, Madison

■ Giuliano D'Amico. *Domesticating Ibsen for Italy: Enrico and Icilio Polese's Ibsen Campaign*. Bari: Edizioni di Pagina, 2013. Pp. v + 358.

Giuliano D'Amico's *Domesticating Ibsen for Italy: Enrico and Icilio Polese's Ibsen Campaign* is a detailed study of Henrik Ibsen's reception during the late nineteenth century (primarily 1891–1894), centered on the Milan-based theater agency L'arte drammatica. It is an important addition to a collection of studies focusing on Ibsen's reception and staging outside of Scandinavia. In the specific case of Italian scholarship, D'Amico's book builds upon and exceeds Roberto Alonge's *Ibsen—L'opera e la fortuna scenica* (Ibsen—His Oeuvre and Reception) by considering a broader "theatrical, cultural and institutional context" (p. 6). It is also the kind of book—involving both an impressive feat of archival research and (thereby) some corrections to or confirmations of assumptions made in prior scholarship—that can serve as foundational reading for anyone wanting to work in a comparative mode on early Ibsen and theater studies in the European context. To say that D'Amico's book is not for dilettantes is an understatement, given that it demands from the reader (in very correct prose) a strong interest in the politics of reception, translation, and adaptation, as well as patience for the meticulous findings of archival excavation. Its particular strengths lie in its neutral attitude toward textuality—it does not hierarchize or moralize—in its thorough consideration of the translations in a broader context of promotion and performance, and in its comparative awareness and erudition.

D'Amico's approach to narrating this Italian reception history involves insisting, following Jerome McGann, that "all variants of text are of interest": "a successful, historically informed study of Ibsen's works (and of literature in general) must take into account, first, the different individuals that participate in the *social* process of creation of the literary work . . . and, second, the various shapes and forms a text acquires after it has been produced, marketed and read" (p. 7; emphasis in original). The result of this approach is "a partial rejection of the idea of a 'principal' version or form of a text" and that "categories of 'right' and 'wrong' or 'good' and 'bad' regarding the critical approach to it are often dismissed" (p. 7). Happily, D'Amico largely succeeds in eschewing evaluative speculation, or in avoiding application of the rejected terms. Although this resistance to rigid textual hierarchies is familiar and has been established in theory, such an approach is nonetheless refreshing in the context of Ibsen studies. In other words, D'Amico's approach, while not radical, thwarts certain persistent expectations for work on Ibsen-the-canonical-dramatist. Of course, and as he amply illustrates, canonization itself is a complex process, involving promotional campaigns and the "violence" of translation (à la Lawrence Venuti), or domestication and/as exoticization—not really a contradiction, as D'Amico shows by gesturing to the creation of a particularly Italian or southern European notion of Nordicness (p. 13). Most importantly for D'Amico, the canonization of Ibsen in Italy, as elsewhere, involved middlemen. He writes:

Domesticating Ibsen for Italy focuses on the "Ibsen campaign" that the Polese lead between 1891, when Enrico [*figli*] translated and Icilio [*père*] marketed *The Wild Duck*, and 1894, when they did the same with *An Enemy of the People*. I have chosen the word "campaign" to highlight that the introduction of the works of Ibsen in Italy did not happen peacefully or by mere chance, but often resulted in struggles, polemics and battles between Ibsen's supporters and detractors. . . . In one important sense, this book is also a study of a "marketing operation." In part, domestication took place because the Polese had a personal interest in making the plays more suitable for the market. (pp. 3–4)

As this focus on middlemen and their "marketing operation" suggests, the key players in D'Amico's book are the Polese rather than Ibsen, and the key texts are not only Ibsen "*tradotti and adattati per la scena italiana*" (p. 38) [translated and adapted for the Italian stage], but also "the articles, announcements and letters that circulated, privately or publicly, around the translations" (p. 7).

It is, of course, the Polese who organized much of the domestication named in D'Amico's title, largely by means of a promotional campaign and translation practices involving expurgation, explication, augmentation,

and so forth (pp. 107–8). The cover art of *Domesticating Ibsen for Italy* also makes the significance of the middleman apparent: an image of the article “Ibsen in Italia,” which was printed in the agency’s publication (also called *Larte drammatica*), includes a portrait of Ibsen by Allcardo Villa (p. 262). This Ibsen looks away from the reader, while a foregrounded Icilio Polese looks her right in the eye. Following the refreshing character of his rejection of the alignment of interest with what is “principal,” “right,” and “good,” D’Amico pivots his study on “a theatrical agent [Icilio Polese] in search of new plays rather than an enthusiastic admirer,” whose “interpretation of Ibsen” could not match “his efforts in the dissemination of Ibsen’s plays throughout Italy” (pp. 92, 227). One of the central corrections of the book is to assert Icilio Polese’s significance to the Ibsen campaign, a matter that has been overlooked by other scholars assuming the greater significance of the translator, Enrico Polese: “a more balanced account . . . will have to consider the efforts of both father and son as equally important. Up to a certain point, it was Icilio who was the *brains* of the campaign and Enrico, helped by [fellow translator Paolo (p. 40)] Rindler, the *brawn*” (pp. 273–4; emphasis in original).

Importantly, *Domesticating Ibsen for Italy* remains a reception history rather than any kind of biography, and the heart of the book is D’Amico’s careful and comparative study of reception, translation, and performance texts, all of which help the reader to understand how Ibsen’s canonization in Italy—“for better or worse”—took place by means of Enrico’s domesticating, pathetic, and delicate (rather than brawny) Italian translations (p. 274). Some examples: In *Ghosts*, Pastor Manders is described as “pastore evangelico” in order to mark him as “explicitly different from a Catholic priest,” while the Vestland, fjord-adjacent setting becomes “in campagna, vicino a una città Norvegese” (p. 147) [a more general countryside, close to a Norwegian city]; Judge Brack no longer refers to Hedda’s unwillingness to get off the train (*Hedda Gabler’s ménage à trois* metaphor) as motivated by distaste for men on the platform who “ser på ens ben” [look at one’s leg] because “in Italian, the legs are turned into *il suo bel piedino*” (p. 184) [your nice little foot]; Hilde of *The Master Builder*, now Hilda, has underwear that needs washing, but they aren’t “svært skiddent” (p. 220) [extremely dirty] as in the original; Beate of *La fattoria Rosmer* (*The Rosmer Farm* or *Rosmersholm*) is no longer just “stakkers” [poor] but a “martire” [martyr] in Italian, and when Rosmer feels that his torment has made her “in some uncanny way . . . back among the living again” (“ligesom så uhyggelig levende igen”), in Italian, Rosmer feels that she has “come back from the grave” (p. 231) [tornata dalla tomba]. Of particular interest is D’Amico’s attention to the play scripts that followed Polese’s translations and were themselves, in many

cases, re-translations with reference to French and German translations, or adaptations based on a given actor's interpretation of a given role. In the case of *Spettri* (Ghosts), which also happened to constitute the Poleses' greatest success with an Ibsen play, D'Amico illustrates why Polese's printed translation might be considered as a "mere pretext for the interpretation and recreation by the *mattatore*," star performer Ermete Zacconi, who rendered Osvaldo as the obvious protagonist in a pathologized portrait of syphilitic breakdown (p. 158).

D'Amico's knowledge of other national and international traditions of reception adds to the richness of the study. Although quite focused on the Italian situation, the book contains the right amount of comparative references to German, French, and Scandinavian contexts to bolster any understanding of what might be Italian about the Italian reception of Ibsen—as well as what might be misidentified as Italian, for example:

Negative reactions to Ibsen's plays were hardly rooted in something specifically Italian, but were the expression of the general values of the European bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century. For example, as Maurice Descotes has shown in his book on the history of French theatre audiences, "the theatregoers conceived the unity of the family as one of the crucial moral values of the bourgeois world." (p. 81)

Thus this book would be vital reading for anyone doing a reception study on Ibsen in Europe, in order that prospective projects might also benefit from and be grounded in such comparative conscientiousness.

In his epilogue, D'Amico brings his non-hierarchizing approach to textuality and his interest in the politics of translation together in a brief comparative commentary on Paolo Rindler's translation of *The Father* and on Strindberg-as-translator from Swedish to French:

Rindler's translation, entitled *Padre*, is strongly domesticated along the same lines that he and Enrico Polese had used for translating Ibsen. Although this might seem a mere confirmation of Polese and Rindler's working practice, it is perhaps more usefully seen as a surprising and significant exception to it. In fact, this text is a rather faithful transposition of Strindberg's French self-translation, entitled *Père* . . . and all modifications were made by Strindberg himself. (p. 319)

Warning against the oversimplified dismissal of "Rindler and Polese as 'destroyers of texts,'" D'Amico uses this brief account to reject any strict distinctions between professional translators and "the author himself" (p. 320). Both Strindberg-the-author and these middlemen were participants in the dissemination of Nordic drama. Thus one can and should, according to D'Amico, understand the Poleses and Rindler as significant players in the "paradigm shift" (Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European*

Novel, Verso, 1998, p. 196) that “Ibsen . . . originated in the history of European drama,” regardless of their potentially non-literary interest in his plays (D’Amico, p. 320). This rejection might not save the Poleses from the moralizing (and legitimate?) accusations of individuals such as Zacconi, who “labelled [Icilio Polese] a scoundrel who speculated at the expense of ‘naïve’ Italian actors” (p. 322). However, without resistance to moralistic hierarchizing in criticism, we would not have D’Amico’s significant work of scholarship.

Olivia Gunn
Pacific Lutheran University