

strates how the French language manuals of the period were aimed primarily at English merchants obliged to travel abroad to trade. Through their presentation of language in situations, the manuals provide an admirable guide to contemporary commercial customs.

The bulk of the book, though, is taken up with a detailed examination of the bargain scenes from *Pathelin* and *Le Nouveau Pathelin*, designed to show how these can be more fully understood by a knowledge of the economic conditions, rituals, and practices outlined thus far. The work concludes with a study of the gender bargain. Here, Collingwood explores similarities between the negotiation of commercial contracts and popular customs of marriage and betrothal, going on to demonstrate how this can add to our understanding of the farce. This section was fascinating but all too brief.

Indeed, I found the book somewhat unbalanced overall, and would have preferred rather less on the *Pathelin* plays and more on the lesser-known farces. Also, the author's application of the old lecturing technique of telling us what she is going to tell us, telling us, and then telling us what she has told us was a little irritating. These, though, are minor quibbles, and generally I found this an enormously interesting book which left me eager to find out more, both about the plays themselves and the period of which they were a product.

JAN CLARKE

*Joan Templeton*  
**Ibsen's Women**

Cambridge University Press, 1997. £45.00.  
ISBN 0-521-59039-6.

Templeton prefaces her study with the claims that *A Doll's House* is 'the quintessential feminist work because it does nothing less than destroy the notion of Woman, the female Other of history', and that Ibsen's 'refusal of Woman allowed him to discover the socialization of sexual identity we now call "gender".'

Ibsen as feminist precursor to all our current 'trouble' with gender is likely both to intrigue and to anger feminist readers of this volume. Despite the 'marks' of feminist critical theory circulating in her opening comments, the author's approach to this biographical and literary study is conventionally textual, and undergraduate students of European and Scandinavian drama are likely to find Templeton's close textual readings useful in their study of the Ibsen 'canon'. The material is presented chronologically and the author has researched the lesser known plays, as well as the 'masterpieces'.

There are substantial sections on *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts*, and *Hedda Gabler*, where Templeton

usefully takes issue with the (masculinist) ideology surrounding much of the commentary on these plays in general and their female protagonists in particular. That said, her progressive discussion of gender-related issues is often curiously at odds with a more conservative approach, signalled in section headings such as 'What Ibsen Intended' or 'Critical Reasoning and Her Master's Voice', which bear no traces of critical or feminist irony.

The intended focus of the volume, 'Ibsen's women', is treated principally through two key areas: the women who are characters in the plays and the women in Ibsen's life. The latter may well fuel lively debate between Ibsen scholars, or those overly concerned with Ibsen's married life, or his relations with the 'princesses' of his later years. Despite the welcome inclusion of several production photographs of actresses in major Ibsen roles, the feminist theatre scholar, however, is likely to be disappointed by the relatively scant treatment of the women who played them.

ELAINE ASTON

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## Twentieth-Century Theatre

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*Kathleen M. Cioffi*

**Alternative Theatre in Poland 1954-1989**

Netherlands: Harwood Academic Publishers,  
1996 (Polish Theatre Archive, Vol. 2). £26.00.  
ISBN 3-7186-5853-4.

This book fills a gap in documentation from the informed perspective of an objective insider – a vital role for deciphering the self-referential codes of Polish avant-garde performance. As witness to the turmoil of 1980s political life in Poland, Cioffi expertly describes the functions of theatrical culture in relation to broader public events. To forge this overview she has collated primary sources in both English and Polish and drawn much from detailed observation of performances and her own interviews. It adds up to a useful, accessible, and clear source book, reiterating sometimes, but more often developing and updating, Daniel Gerould's twenty-year-old *Twentieth-Century Polish Avant-Garde Theatre*.

Descriptions of numerous performances paint full pictures, but these tend to dominate as the primary means for the reader to identify the groups' diverse practices. The equally important environmental explorations, training workshops, and rehearsal processes that were so central to groups like Theatre of the Eighth Day, Akademia Ruchu, and Gardzienice are touched upon all too briefly.

Cioffi argues the importance of Polish experimentation forcibly, but the connections she makes between Polish and American theatre of the same period, drawing on Theodore Shank's definitions