

VIGDIS YSTAD *et al.* (eds.):

Henrik Ibsens skrifter.

Aschehoug, Oslo 2005-2010. 17 vols.

Finally it is published: the whole of Henrik Ibsen's collected writings, together with exhaustive introductions, commentaries and indexes. It was to have been completed by 2008; the last volume actually saw the light of day just before the end of 2010. It was to have been in fifteen double volumes with a comprehensive index volume; in the event we have sixteen double volumes, and the ambition to produce a comprehensive index volume has been dropped – the last slim volume 17 is an account of the philological principles behind the edition. Of the sixteen double volumes, the first halves are the texts: ten volumes of plays, four of letters, one of poems, one of other prose writings. The reason for the extra volume is the discovery of far more letters than had been previously collected which were written by Ibsen, and which made the anticipated three volumes of letters swell to a very large four (the last one just shy of 1000 pages). The second halves of the double volumes contain the introductions and commentaries – and these volumes in most cases fill more pages than those containing the texts.

A bookcase full of books, then, extending to just a little short of six feet in width by my tape-measure. It may have been late, it may have been over budget – when are such editions not? – but it is an achievement to be celebrated. At last we have the definitive text of

what one of the world's greatest dramatists actually wrote. Vigdis Ystad and her team are to be congratulated on a fine piece of work. Any criticisms of the criteria used for selection or methodology must first acknowledge that, just as any future translations or adaptations will need to refer to this text as the touchstone.

In my review of the first three volumes to be published (see *Scandinavica* 2, 2006) I expressed some disappointment at the decision not to include Ibsen's drafts for the plays in this edition. I understand that the drafts will be made available in the online version of the edition when that is ready; however, I do still feel that it is a pity that they were not included here. They provide invaluable insight into Ibsen's working methods. Room could have been made for them by cutting down on the repetition of information, for example about Ibsen's correspondents or the people and events he mentions in his letters. An index including a little more information could have supplied some facts once and for all which as it is take up space time and again.

On the other hand, having now worked with one of the volumes more intensively – in the preparation of a new translation of *Peer Gynt* – I must admit that I have found the extensive textual commentaries very useful indeed. The explanations of words which have become archaic or changed their meaning, the analysis of the different verse forms used, the information about the frequent references to folk tale or local legend – all these have greatly facilitated the translator's task. And the introduction – literary-historical background, process of composition, publication, performance, reception (85 pages in the case of *Peer Gynt*) – is a distillation of contemporary scholarship.

The edition is not cheap any more than it is pocket-sized. Advertized originally with a prepublication price of Nkr 9990 (£1100), it will now cost the purchaser Nkr 14,685 (£1600). But in terms of kroner per page, it still represents very good value – and it is a work which all libraries with any pretensions to serious scholarship in the humanities ought to acquire.

JANET GARTON

UNIVERSITY OF EAST ANGLIA