

## BOOKS

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**Sanda Tomescu Baciu and Ștefan Gencărașu. *Sextil Pușcariu și exegeza operei lui Henrik Ibsen în revista „Familia”: 4/16 maiu 1897 – 28 decembrie 1897: (9 ian. 1898)* [Sextil Pușcariu and his analysis of Henrik Ibsen’s work in the *Familia* magazine: 4<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> May 1897 – 28<sup>th</sup> December 1897: (9<sup>th</sup> Jan 1898)] Cluj: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2018, 183p.**

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Compiling the 30 articles written by Romanian linguist and philologist Sextil Pușcariu and published in the literary magazine *Familia* between 1897-1898, the volume *Sextil Pușcariu și exegeza operei lui Henrik Ibsen în revista „Familia”: 4/16 maiu 1897 – 28 decembrie 1897: (9 ian. 1898)*, put together by a group of eleven students attending the Norwegian language, literature and culture optional module at the Faculty of Letters, Cluj-Napoca, and coordinated by Professor Sanda Tomescu Baciu and Professor Ștefan Gencărașu, seeks to anthologize Pușcariu’s critical study, which spanned 52 issues during its initial publication. Preserving the writing style of the time, the volume gives the modern Romanian reader an integral and authentic account of the academic and literary techniques used to



discuss, analyze, reinterpret and reexamine the plays of one of the most important figures in modern dramaturgy.

Pușcariu’s interest in the topic seems to stem from a desire to correct what is referred to in the introductory paragraph to the study as an unfamiliarity of Romanian literature with “the great Norwegian playwright, Henrik Ibsen” (p. 17). It is a task he resolves to accomplish by embarking on a rigorous analysis of

the themes and motifs which regularly resurface in the playwright’s works, of the manner in which characters are constructed as well as on speculation as to what extent the writer’s strenuous life and underwhelming critical reception had influenced the writing process. Approaching the plays in chronological order, Pușcariu attempts to explore each

work's themes and subjects separately by providing the inexperienced reader with a summary of the plot and analysis of the character archetypes one is bound to encounter, frequently including his own translations of several works which had not yet been made available in the Romanian language. Nevertheless, he does not recoil from referencing aspects of other plays should he consider it necessary. As a result, though his study lacks a rigid structure that is often associated with critical studies, Pușcariu's work manages to provide an insightful critique of the dramatist's opus, due in large part to his desire to focus more on the exploration of Ibsen's artistic perspective and portrayals of humanity and society.

Nevertheless, despite the rather unstructured approach that he employs, Pușcariu insists on identifying three stages in Ibsen's dramaturgy: that of historical dramas, which include most of his early works; dramatic poetry, which Pușcariu notes is mostly ignored in favour of his later creations; and his mature dramas, which are considered the most well-known and celebrated of his plays. In the first category Pușcariu includes plays such as *Catiline* (1850), *Lady Inger of Oestraat* (1854), *The Feast at Solhaug* (1855), *The Vikings at Helgeland* (1858) and *The Pretenders* (1863), whose historical subjects have captured Ibsen's interest due in part to their relevance given the context of the time, but also, and perhaps more importantly, due to the fact that these subjects lend themselves to affirming Ibsen's belief that there is in fact little difference between previous generations and our own. In the playwright's view, the characters of these dramas are merely dressed in the clothes worn by his contemporaries and they

"can feel just the same with the same organs." (p. 29) As a result, Pușcariu notes, the historic dramas tend to pay little attention to the reality of the past, as Ibsen prefers to reinterpret it according to his interests.

The second category, that of dramatic poetry, could be considered rather sparse with only three titles being discussed: *Brand* (1866), *Peer Gynt* (1867), and *Emperor and Galilean* (1873). In spite of the fact that it would be these three works that would bring Ibsen acclaim among his contemporaries, Pușcariu dedicates considerably less attention to their analyses when compared to other plays discussed in the volume, remarking they would eventually be overshadowed by his later works, as mentioned above. Furthermore, he claims that the playwright's interest in producing these plays can be attributed to his appetite for recognition and the epiphany regarding the contrast between the impressions of his motherland gained while living there and those acquired while travelling abroad.

The third and final stage in Ibsen's artistic career is marked by his most well-known works, with titles such as *Love's Comedy* (1862), *The League of Youth* (1869), *A Doll's House* (1879), *Ghosts* (1881), *The Enemy of the People* (1882), *The Wild Duck* (1884), *Rosmersholm* (1886), *The Lady from the Sea* (1888), *Hedda Gabler* (1890) and, according to Pușcariu, Ibsen's masterwork, *The Master Builder* (1892). He also adds that since the publication of *The Master Builder* Ibsen produced two more plays *Little Eyolf* (1894) and *John Gabriel Borkmann* (1896), which are briefly discussed as well. It is these plays that Pușcariu considers to be representative of Ibsen's vision as a dramatist, as they tend to

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focus or comment on one of the most encountered themes of his work: the need for individualism. Entirely aware of the public's views of him as a rebel due to his vehement opposition towards the state, a sentiment not shared by his fellow men, Pușcariu notes that Ibsen uses several of his plays (such as *Brand*, *League of the Youth* and *The Enemy of the People*) to satirize such attitudes, exploring society's reaction towards having its true face exposed. This idea would later carry on in some of his tragedies (such as *The Wild Duck*, *Ghosts* and *Hedda Gabler*) alongside themes such as deceit, fatalism and legacy, with the idea of love being touched upon as well (*Rosmersholm*, *The Master Builder*, *A Doll's House* and *Little Eylof*) as Pușcariu observes that Ibsen makes a clear difference between what he considered a 'legal marriage' and a 'natural one', as well as the effect they might have on the off-springs of such unions, who always seem to be cursed by their own biology.

Lastly, amongst the interesting notions that Pușcariu discusses is the comparison he makes in the closing section of his study, in which he equates Ibsen with one of his own creations, the Master Builder Solness. Much as Solness' construction of the high church and its tower signifies his reaching the height of his architectural vocation, so does the play itself symbolize the height of Ibsen's literary career in Pușcariu's perspective. For the Romanian philologist this ought to be considered the last play, his own high church tower, the succeeding works being 'mere houses' which, he notes, will ultimately form a wall that can attest to his talent. I consider that a somewhat similar effect is achieved by Pușcariu's own articles, as despite decades have passed since their publication they remain nevertheless a valuable building block affirming Pușcariu's own role in the introduction of the Romanian literary public to the 'Master Writer' Henrik Ibsen.

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