

Great ma ghosts liv

WE ARE living through the centenary decade of some of Ibsen's greatest plays, and the old boy is in cracking form. In a week when London Transport survived suggestions of criminal negligence with a verdict of accidental death at the Kings Cross fire inquest, Arthur Miller's chilling version of his *Enemy of the People* (Young Vic) is the angriest play in town. In Dublin, Frank McGuinness's Irish translation of *Peer Gynt* (Gate) is a model of buoyancy and freshness despite a length of more than four hours. Hilton Edwards and Michel MacLiammoir opened the Gate 60 years ago with the Irish premiere of the same play. Ibsen is still opening gates and kicking down doors.

His *An Enemy of the People* (1882), the story of a provincial doctor who discovers that the town's thermal source of wealth is poisoned but that the citizens will destroy him rather than accept the truth, was his riposte to the vicious reception of *Ghosts* in Scandinavia and abroad. Miller's *Enemy* (1950), from a literal translation by Lars Nordenson, was conceived under the rise of McCarthyite America, and the protagonist prefigures John Proctor of *The Crucible*, Miller's next play.

Doctor Stockmann (Tom Wilkinson) is *bourgeois* man, eager to share his learning, a householder proud of his new tablecloth, a father delighted to see young people eat well, a man of joy. He has everything to lose by stepping out of line, but the lesson he learns from the perversion of democracy by his brother Peter, the mayor (David Healy), and Hovstad of the 'radical' press (Tom Manton) is that 'it takes 50 years for the majority to be right.'

He is thus accused of arrogance, ambition, elitism (in all but name) and revolution. A cover-up turns into a witch-hunt. In the face of three temptations to compromise and save face—from the mayor, the editor, and his mischievous father-in-law (Clive Swift)—he chooses to stay and fight. At the third temptation he weeps openly: 'I've had all the ambassadors of hell today, but there'll be no more!'

Stockmann is not perfect, and a deep river of aspidochelone runs beneath the play. Wilkinson plays him as an engaging *naif* for whom the facts of public life arrive, though

THEATRE
A. Miller's Ibsen,
J. Miller's 'Tempest'
MICHAEL RATCLIFFE

belatedly, with devastating force. He is magnificent, and matched in combat by Henry's mayor, a pale and venomous trimmer who makes all his enemies lie to him and then buys them over to his side. David Thacker's stirring production lacked only a measure of mob savagery on the opening night. It reveals all the infinite shades of accommodation and corruptibility accepted in the name of public opinion and a wealth of the domestic detail by which Ibsen ironically observes hairline cracks in society at large, by the way a man takes exercise or eats his food.

Joe Vaneck sets the Dublin 'Peer Gynt' under a curving, clapboard Norwegian sky which remains in place throughout Peer's adventures, though the floor and walls turn terracotta for North Africa and shining black for his ominous return up the fjord towards the end of the play. Patrick Mason directs a clear and bracing production which falters only in the comic scenes of Act Four, where Peter Stein at the Schaubühne used six



'Divine Gossip' at The Pit.

Ratcliffe on Enemy

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