

Per Schelde Jacobsen and Barbara Fass Leavy. **Ibsen's Forsaken Merman: Folklore in the Late Plays.** New York: New York University Press, 1990. Pp. xiv + 350, appendices, bibliography, index. \$15.00 paper.

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In *Ibsen's Forsaken Merman* Jacobsen and Leavy present an extended analysis of Ibsen's use of folklore in his later plays. The materials used in their analysis are primarily the ballad collection of Svend Grundtvig and the large corpus of Norwegian prose narrative published in Ibsen's time and since.

The ballad material is analyzed, for the most part, by Jacobsen. His description and interpretation of the ballads form the first two substantial chapters in the book. His semiotic interpretations of the magical ballads (*trylleviser*) seem at times somewhat naive and idiosyncratic. While he does present some intriguing suggestions in these chapters, I think the English speaking audience, for whom the book is aimed, would have been better served by a more descriptive account of both the ballads and Scandinavian scholarship on the ballads. Jacobsen's third chapter is his analysis of Ibsen's use of the ballads. Here he seems to rely more on his interpretations of the ballads than Ibsen's possible interpretations of the ballads or the ballads themselves. This section also has the problem of referring to Ibsen's plays by their Norwegian titles (as does the table of contents). For the Scandinavianist this presents no problem, but the English speaking student is not likely to find this useful. The English names for the plays are, however, in the index.

Leavy's main section in the book consists of seven chapters that each focus on a specific play and theme: for instance, "Little Eyolf as Changeling" (chapter 9). Her discussion of the influence of folklore in the plays relies heavily on prose narrative for evidence. On the whole Leavy's section seems to me better done than Jacobsen's, though here too the connection between the folklore and Ibsen's plays is sometimes vague.

The book concludes with two appendices of translations by Jacobsen of Ibsen's essays on ballads and diary entries from his collecting trip.

The handling of the folklore topics in this book will strike many folklorists as somewhat clumsy. Perhaps this is to be expected as neither Jacobsen nor Leavy are folklorists by profession. Even so, the book is still a welcome addition to the English language scholarship on Ibsen and the interaction of folklore and literature.