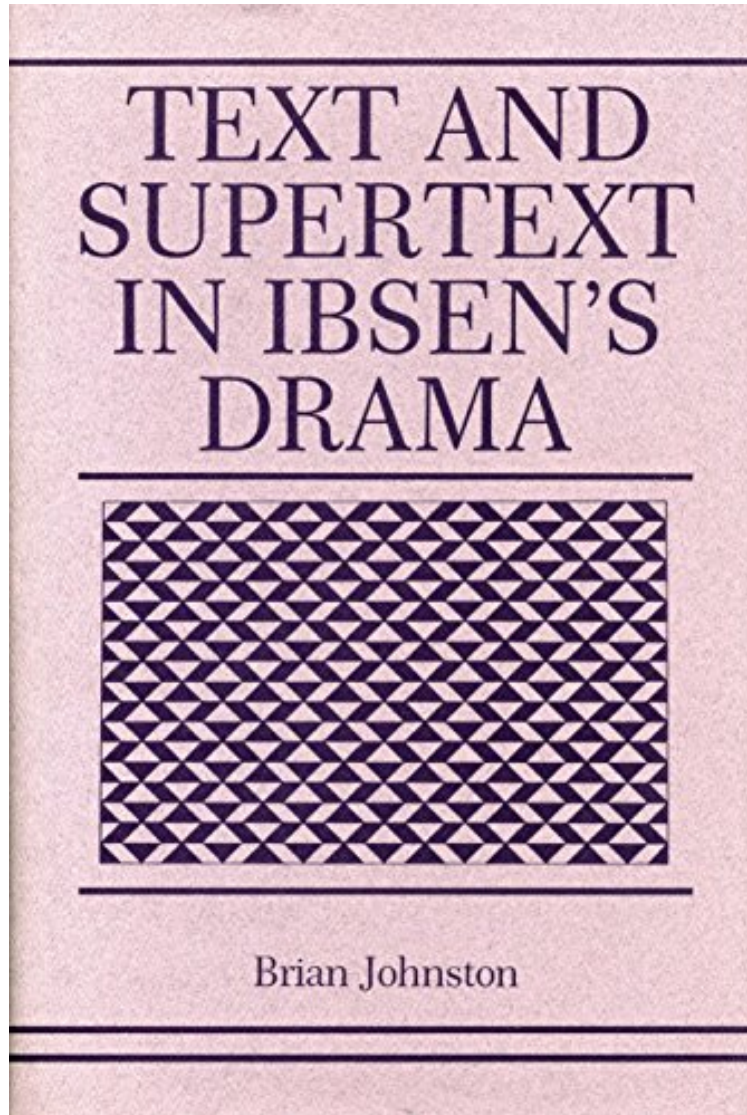


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## Text and Supertext in Ibsen's Drama

Brian Johnston

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**Brian Johnston : Text and Supertext in Ibsen's Drama** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Text and Supertext in Ibsen's Drama:

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Melba toast dryBy kchrisfoxNeedlessly wordy, the writing style is so over-the-top academic one constantly has to drift five lines back -to the beginning of the sentence-to remind oneself of how he began some gem of a clause.The book's main thesis boils down to what is simply good acting. It's in responses to academics, Freud himself, and perhaps some poor performances he's seen who apply linear narrative psychology to Rebecca's and Rosmer's actions. His point:whatever subconscious speculation you have, the character knows what they know when they discover and say it -not before. They haven't known it and hidden it all along.

Brian Johnston's approach to Ibsen, now well known, is unlike any other. Johnston sees Ibsen's twelve realist plays as a single cyclical work, the "realist" method of which hides a much larger poetic intention than has previously been suspected. He believes that the cycle constitutes one of the major works of the European imagination, comparable in scale to Goethe or Dante. And he has shown Ibsen to be the heir to Romantic and Hegelian art and thought, adapting this heritage to the circumstances of his own day. This work demonstrates how the language and scene, characters and "props," of the Ibsen dramas establish a bold and far-reaching theatrical goal: nothing less than an account of our biological and cultural identity in its multilayered totality. Johnston argues that Ibsen's realist text, while stimulating the appearance of nineteenth-century life, also objectively and precisely builds up an alternative image in which archetypal figures and situations from our cultural past repossess the realist stage. Thus he sees the Ibsen "strategy" in his realist plays as twofold: (1) the dialectical subversion of the nineteenth-century reality presented in the plays, and (2) the forced recovery of the archetypal from the past, in a procedure similar to James Joyce's in *Ulysses*. By "supertext" Johnston means a reservoir of cultural reference upon which Ibsen continuously drew in his realist work just as in his earlier poetic and historical dramas.

About the Author Brian Johnston is Chief Editor of *Theater Three*. He is the author of *The Ibsen Cycle* (Penn State, 1992) and *To the Third Empire* (1980), and is Visiting Professor, Department of Drama, Carnegie Mellon University.