

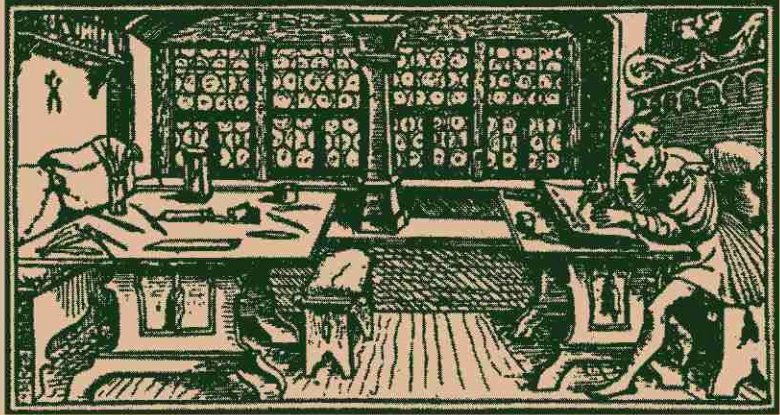
# STUDIA

UNIVERSITATIS  
BABEŞ-BOLYAI

P h i l o l o g i a

C L U J - N A P O C A 2 0 0 6

Cluj University Press



**S T U D I A**  
**UNIVERSITATIS BABEȘ – BOLYAI**  
**PHILOLOGIA**

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Det er en stor glede for meg som Norges ambassadør til Romania å henvende meg til leserne av dette spesialnummeret av STUDIA som er viet Henrik Ibsen. Jeg hilser velkommen dette betimelige bidraget til markeringen i Romania av en ruvende person i verdenslitteraturen i anledning hundreårsmarkeringen i 2006 av Henrik Ibsens død.

Ibsens dramaer har røtter i norsk kultur og historie, men temaene har en global og varig relevans: individets frihet, personlig og offentlig moral, likhet, politisk makt og korrupsjon, og ikke minst forholdet mellom det lokale og det globale.

Det er en fornyet interesse for Ibsen både i Romania og i verden for øvrig. Ibsen er i stor grad vår samtidige også i Romania. En rumensk avis hadde følgende tittel tidligere i år: "Deres Ibsen og vår Ibsen". Samtidig har Ibsen blitt lest og spilt i Romania i mer enn hundre år, selv om hans popularitet har gått opp og ned som for de fleste store forfattere og dramatikere.

I det siste har flere av hans dramaer blitt fremført på rumenske teatre, deriblant *Peer Gynt*, *Brand*, *Hedda Gabler (Play Hedda)*, *A Doll's House (Nora)*, *Rosmersholm*. Videre gleder det meg at Romania vil være representert under den prestisjefylte Ibsen teaterfestivalen i Norge senere i år, med Ilinca Stihis og Radioteatrets produksjon av *Brand*.

Vi trenger en aktiv og informert debatt om Ibsen, hans temaer, personer og kunst i det akademiske miljøet. Dette spesialnummeret av STUDIA er et viktig bidrag til denne akademiske debatten, med et imponerende antall bidragsytere fra en rekke land.

Jeg vil spesielt få takke Sanda Tomescu Baciu for idéen og innsatsen for å samle så mange ledende Ibsen-kjennere i denne utgaven av STUDIA. Jeg ønsker dere god lesning!

**LEIF ARNE ULLAND**  
Norges ambassadør til Romania

It is a great pleasure for me as ambassador of Norway in Romania to address the readers of this special issue of STUDIA devoted to Henrik Ibsen. I welcome this timely contribution to the celebration in Romania of a towering figure in world literature in the centennial year of Ibsen's death in 2006.

Ibsen's dramas are rooted in Norwegian culture and history, but the themes they deal with are of a global and enduring relevance: individual freedom, personal and public morality, equality, political power and corruption, and not least the interface between the local and the global.

We see a revival of interest in Ibsen these days both in Romania and the world. Ibsen is very much our contemporary also in Romania. A Romanian newspaper had the following headline earlier this year: "Their Ibsen and Our Ibsen". At the same time Ibsen has been read and his dramas performed in Romania for more than hundred years, even if there has been ups and downs in his popularity as for most great writers and dramatists.

Recently several of his plays have been staged by Romanian theaters, including "Peer Gynt", "Brand", "Hedda Gabler" ("Play Hedda"), "A Doll's House" ("Nora", "Rosmersholm" and others. I am also very pleased that Romania will be represented at the prestigious centenary Ibsen theatre festival in Norway later this year with Ilinca Stihî's and the Radio Theatre's production of Ibsen's "Brand".

We also need an informed and active debate on Ibsen, his themes, characters and art in the academic world. The Ibsen special issue of STUDIA will be an important contribution to this academic debate with an impressive number of contributors from several countries.

I would like to thank in particular Mrs. Sanda Tomescu for the idea and efforts to bring together so many leading Ibsen scholars and academics in this issue of STUDIA and wish you happy reading!

**LEIF A. ULLAND**

Ambassador of Norway to Romania

Vi vil gjerne gi uttrykk for vår takknemlighet til alle de som aksepterte Sanda Tomescu Bacias invitasjon til å markere, akkurat i vår publikasjon, Henrik Ibsens betydning for Norges- og verdenslitteraturen, i anledning 100-årsmarkeringen av den store dramatikerens bortgang.

Artikkelforfatterne, som er prestisjefylte forskere med stor betydning for Ibsen-studiene verden over og for en utbredt Ibsen-bibliografi, formidler en dypere forståelse av Henrik Ibsens verk i Romania og samtidig en nær norsk-rumensk kulturkontakt.

Med deres og våre kollegers bidrag blir filologiforskningen i Cluj, ved *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai. Philologia*, tilgjengelig for mottakerne i Norden.

Vi er beæret over hilsenen fra Norges ambassadør til Romania, Leif Arne Ulland. Ambassadør Ulland har alltid støttet norskfaget ved vårt fakultet, og han har aktivt deltatt i markeringen av det internasjonale Ibsenåret i Romania.

*Vi vil uttrykke vår store takknemlighet til førsteamanuensis Sanda Tomescu Baci, som har redigert dette nummeret av Studia. Hun fortjener en stor honnør for dette arbeidet, og for sin meget betydningsfulle innsats med å formidle slike kulturkontakter som hun tilbyr i Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai. Philologia.*

**STUDIA**

We would like to express our gratitude to all those who have answered to the initiative of Associate Professor Sanda Tomescu Baciu, who, on the occasion the great playwright Henrik Ibsen's centennial of the death dramatist, marked in our journal Henrik Ibsen's importance for the Norwegian and world literature.

Well – known names, very important for the international Ibsen studies, for a bibliography of Ibsen's reception in general, the authors of the articles included in this issue of the journal favor the acquaintance with Ibsen's work in Romania and at the same time the Romanian – Norwegian cultural contact.

Thus, by their contribution, as well as by the contribution of our Romanian colleagues, the philology research in Cluj, respectively *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai. Philologia*, opens for its receivers in the Nordic countries.

The words of His Excellency, Leif Arne Ulland, the Ambassador of Norway in Romania, who has always supported the activity of the Norwegian program of our university, highly honor us. His Excellency involved himself actively in supporting the celebration of the International Ibsen Year in our country.

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**STUDIA**

## Redaktørens forord

I anledning 100-årsmarkeringen av Henrik Ibsens død utgir *Studia Univeristatis Babeș-Bolyai. Philologia* et nummer som samler en rekke bidrag skrevet av viktige Ibsen-forskere og teatereksperter fra hele verden. Jeg vil uttrykke en varm takk til alle bidragsyterne som deltok i dette prosjektet og støttet det med sine betydningsfulle artikler. Jeg overbringer også en hilsen og min dype takknemlighet til velkjente internasjonale Ibsenforskere, hvis akademiske og vitenskapelige prestisje bærer både tidsskriftet *Studia* og „Babeș-Bolyai” Universitetet.

Utgivelsen av *Studias* Ibsen-nummer kommer i tillegg til flere kultur- og teaterarrangementer organisert i Romania i løpet av Ibsenåret med støtte av Ambassadør Leif Arne Ulland og den norske ambassaden i Bukarest.

Takk til alle bidragsyterne, til Ambassadør Leif Arne Ulland, til „Babeș-Bolyai” Universitetet og sist men ikke minst til *Studia*-redaksjonen for støtte og utmerket samarbeid.

Med takknemlighet,

**Sanda Tomescu Baciu**

## Editor's Note

On the centennial of Henrik Ibsen's death, the present issue of *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai. Philologia* gathers studies of important Ibsen researchers and theater experts from all over the world. The editor warmly thanks all the contributors to this issue of the journal, who could answer to the project initiative, supporting it through their valuable articles. I gratefully greet the researchers worldwide devoted to Ibsen studies whose scientific and academic research honor the Journal *Studia* and „Babeş-Bolyai” University.

The issue of this number of the Journal *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai. Philologia* dedicated to Henrik Ibsen is one more event in a series of theatrical and cultural events organized in Romania with the direct support of The Royal Norwegian Embassy in Bucharest, and His Excellency Leif Arne Ulland, the Ambassador of Norway.

I hereby thank the authors of the articles, His Excellency Leif Arne Ulland, the Ambassador of Norway, „Babeş-Bolyai” University and last but not least the editorial staff of *Studia* Journal for their support and excellent cooperation.

With gratitude,  
*Sanda Tomescu Baciu*

## PEER'S LAST TAPE: IBSEN AND BECKETT IN 2006

ERROL DURBACH<sup>\*\*</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** *Peer's Last Tape: Ibsen and Beckett in 2006.* This paper examines the relationship between the plays of Ibsen and Beckett in the centenary year of their respective death and birth. It investigates the familiar claim that Ibsen is the "father of modern drama" and therefore an influence on even such unlikely forms as Theatre of the Absurd. However, Intertextual Theory and Performance Theory both persuade modern comparative scholarship to consider the possibility of bi-directional influence: in other words, to acknowledge that our reading of Beckett may influence the ways in which we read Ibsen one hundred years later. The test-case for this proposition was my adaptation of *Peer Gynt* for performance in 2000, where I explored the idea of "Selfhood" in Ibsen's play by using the split-self device borrowed from Beckett in *Krapp's Last Tape*. In my version, two Peers appear simultaneously onstage, old and young versions of the same persona (rather like old Krapp and his youthful self who is heard on the tape). Beckett's stagecraft, incorporated into Ibsen's structure, has the advantage of dramatizing such abstract concepts of "self", "self-consciousness", the process of "becoming". In the final analysis, however, we also have to acknowledge that there are differences in the dramatic presentation of selfhood in *Peer Gynt* and *Krapp's Last Tape*. In the early plays of Ibsen, the old self is still subject to (possible) change and redemption from the failure of youthful choices. But in the last plays, the bleak vision of *Krapp's Last Tape* is confirmed in the irreparably damaged selfhood of men like Borkman and Rubek.

2006 links Ibsen and Beckett by accidents of death and birth — a coincidence that challenges scholars of comparative drama to confirm the claim that Ibsen is the "father of modern drama" and therefore one of Beckett's theatrical ancestors. Is it possible to discover the post-modern world of the absurd in Nineteenth Century realism? Can we find the nothingness at the core of Ibsen's many onions in the despairing cry of *Waiting for Godot* — "Nothing to be done" (7) — that defines the experience of post-modern sensibility? Martin Esslin has argued that Ibsen remains "one of the principal creators and well-springs of the whole modern movement in drama" (Esslin, 71) organically linked even to dramatists like Beckett, whose anti-illusionist techniques seem to deny any indebtedness to Ibsen's

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influence. The link, Esslin suggested, is not technical but thematic, an existential vision basic to the subject matter of modernity: "the problem of *Being*, the nature of the self, with the question of what an individual means when he uses the pronoun *I*. How can the self be defined? Can one even speak of a consistent entity corresponding to an individual's self?" (76) Esslin's argument suggests that a play like *Krapp's Last Tape* may be a modernist variation on the central preoccupation of *Peer Gynt* and that the image of the onion, with its core of nothingness, expands outwards from Ibsen to incorporate the existential quandary of Beckett's entire *oeuvre*.

It was this assumption that I set out to test in a version of *Peer Gynt* that I adapted for performance in 2000; and I would like to indicate the way in which a knowledge of Beckett's theatre can be used to transform Ibsen's theatre, so that the idea of "influence" moves backwards and forwards at the same time. Two theories gave me courage in developing this comparative approach to such very different bodies of drama. The first was the idea of "Intertextuality" that eliminates boundaries of time and period, and encourages readers to see the co-existence of all texts in one "universal library" — art speaking to art in a living and timeless context. The other branch of theatre criticism is "Performance theory" — especially the work of the director, Jonathan Miller, whose book *Subsequent Performances* develops a biological model for drama that paradoxically makes Beckett Ibsen's father in the Twenty-First Century. "[T]he afterlife of a play," writes Miller, "is a process of emergent evolution, during which meanings and emphases develop that might not have been apparent at the time of writing, even to the author" (Miller, 35). The "afterlife" of *Peer Gynt*, I would argue, has been shaped as much by Beckett's absurd vision as Beckett's modernism has been shaped by Ibsen's radical questioning of the "real"; and a *Peer Gynt* for the Millennium, it seemed to me, needed to recreate the old in the context of the new — even if, as Miller puts it, Ibsen could have had no possible foresight of the development of his ideas in the age of Beckett.

The central dramaturgical problem of *Peer Gynt*, as I see it, is how to dramatize something as abstract as "selfhood" and how to define ideas as difficult as "being" or "self-consciousness" in theatrical terms. Beckett's solution to these difficulties is brilliant. What he does, in several of his plays, is to split the Self into its component parts and create tension and conflict out of this division. In *Ohio Impromptu*, for example, the Narrator and the Listener — identical "mirror" images of each other — interact in a curious dual monologue that turns each into aspects of the other's existence. In *Rockaby*, the Woman's physical presence is defined by her recorded voice that concentrates the story of her life into a 15-minute "doomsession" (as Ibsen would call it). But by far the most extensive and complex use of this device occurs in Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* where Krapp "now" and Krapp "then" coexist in the same eternal present. Old Krapp listens to the voice of Young Krapp, and raises the crucial questions that Old Peer contemplates in the onion field as he strips away layer after layer of his life. Is there a process that

unifies identity? Is life itself an experience of becoming? Is “me now” a by-product of “me then”? Is there continuity or coherence in life? Do the multiple “selves” even resemble the phases of an integrated life? Krapp at 69 interacts with Krapp at 39 who interacts with Krapp at 29 — the voices all interpenetrating in ironic commentary on a Self that is nothing more than a litany of unrealized possibility, and a cynical reflection on nothingness. The drama is all contained in the soundscape, in the collision of the multiple Selves in a desperate attempt at self-evaluation.

“The unexamined life,” says Socrates, is not worth living.” And what both Peer and Krapp have in common, at the end of their lives, is this compulsion to exhume their lives. In another of Beckett’s plays, *Not I*, the protagonist is desperate to *deny* the identity that her own narrative voice cannot bear to contemplate — on the assumption, I imagine, that the un-lived life is not worth examining. This, of course, is the predicament that both Krapp and Peer must contemplate, and that Beckett and Ibsen force them to acknowledge. The voice on Krapp’s tape — the younger Self — comments on a process that is obsessively repeated year after year with horribly diminishing reassurances: “These old P.M.s are gruesome, but I often find them — [KRAPP *switches off, broods, switches on.*] — a help before embarking on a new ... [*hesitates*] ... retrospect. Hard to believe I was ever that young whelp. The voice! Jesus! And the aspirations! [*Brief laugh in which KRAPP joins.*] And the resolutions! [*Brief laugh in which KRAPP joins.*]” (58) Old Krapp listens to Young Krapp commenting on an even younger version of Krapp, sharing the cynical laughter of his former Self who mocks his former-former Self. He calls the procedure a “P.M.” — a post-mortem — as if he were exhuming the corpse of his identity; and he speaks, with conscious irony, of a “new...retrospect” (like moving backwards into the future). Aspirations and resolutions are nothing but a mocking joke in a life of failure and futility. This is as close as Beckett comes to the anxiety of Peer Gynt in the onion field; and his articulation of that despair is made all the more poignant by the simultaneous presence onstage of the many aspects of Krapp, preserved like the layers of an onion in recorded time.

The dynamic interaction of the split personality was central to my idea of a Beckettian Ibsen; and it was the stagecraft of the simultaneous co-existence of multiple Selfhoods that I “stole” from Beckett in my version of *Peer Gynt*. At the same time, this device enabled me to address one of the questions that directors and adapters must face when staging the play: how many Peers? Sometimes one actor plays Peer — either a young man who must play a much older Peer in the last acts of the play, or an older actor who must play a much younger Peer for the first half. This is such an unsatisfactory solution that some directors choose to have several Peers transforming from a youth, to a middle-aged merchant, to an old vagabond. Peter Stein, for example, had five actors playing the seven phases of Peer’s career. I am not convinced that this solution is any better. My own Beckettian choice was to have two actors play one Peer — an Old Peer and a Young Peer — who

appeared onstage, like the two Krapps, simultaneously and not sequentially. The advantage of this “split” character was that it shaped the play’s point of view. The adaptation begins with old Peer looking back in time, reviewing his life, and trying to understand the origins of his Gyntish nature — selfish, Romantic, irresponsible, incapable of separating poetic ideas from lying fantasies — in the person of his young alter-ego. In the second half of the play, the point of view is reversed. The young Peer Gynt looks forward into the future career of his counterpart, and he is made to recognize the consequences of his selfishness in the multiple failures of his old self. Together, the two Peers dramatize the process of self-consciousness, which is what I wished to emphasize as the main theme of Ibsen’s play — just as, 150 years later, it appears as the central feature of Beckett’s existential drama.

The Button Moulder, in my version of the play, acts as a sort of Stage-manager who mediates between the two Peers, reveals one to the other, and creates the dynamic interaction between them. At the beginning of the second part, for instance, he introduces the young Peer to his old (and future) Self — just turned fifty years of age, and obviously very rich. (The verse, and the rhyming couplets, unfortunately will be lost in translation).

YOUNG PEER:                                    So how did I amass my wealth?  
BUTTON MOULDER:                            You’d better ask your older Self —  
  This bourgeois merchant’s now Peer Gynt:  
  Filthy rich, and hard as flint.

YOUNG PEER:                                    How did I get from *here* — to *there*?  
  Which one of us is the *real* Peer?  
  .... Are you the “me” who rode the buck?

OLD PEER:                                        I’m the Peer you’re going to be. It takes good luck,  
  Some capital, some business sense,  
  Some self-instruction, some pretence  
  Of moral dealing —

YOUNG PEER:                                    A little stealing?  
OLD PEER:                                        When required. Add a touch of pious feeling  
  And behold! — a great philanthropist!

YOUNG PEER:                                    Or a self-serving Capitalist?



As in *Krapp's Last Tape*, the scene acquires the outline of a “new retrospect”, a journey back to the future, where Romantic resolution looks forward to its failure in Capitalist aspiration. Young Peer does not admire what he will become, and yet he cannot halt a process already completed. All he can do, finally, is acknowledge the “becoming” of Selfhood with its origins in his own fantastic dreams of self-aggrandizement. And like the multiple Krapps, each Peer functions as the other’s destiny — an image which I tried to restructure in the mad-house of Cairo scene, where King Apis appears as a sort of Siamese twin: two men linked together, each one a corpse on the other’s back:

One of them’s the symptom, and the other the disease,  
But which is which, and who is who, nobody agrees!  
One of them’s the consequence, and one of them’s the cause  
A perfect demonstration of our schizophrenic laws!

Another variation on this split-self schizophrenia, in my adaptation, is found in the scene where Peer tries desperately to persuade the Button Moulder that his life has integrity, and that he has resisted the trollish temptation to be merely “enough”. He summons up the Troll King to testify on his behalf, and he reminds him that he never allowed the trolls to scratch his eyes and alter his moral vision. But the Troll King is not easily persuaded:

TROLL KING: You wore my tail... You drank my mead...  
You reveled in our Trollish greed...

YOUNG PEER: I resisted all the way!  
I triumphed at the end of play...

TROLL KING: The play’s not over. Your defense  
Ignores *this* living consequence! [*He points at OLD PEER*]  
“Enough” is branded on his soul,  
He’s a superior kind of Troll  
Whose secret guile is evident!  
Hail to the Chief, our President!  
If the casting-ladle scares you shitless,  
For twenty crowns, I’ll bear false witness.

[*OLD PEER searches for some money to bribe the BUTTON MOULDER, but his younger Self stops him.*]

YOUNG PEER: Forget it! I want no part of this...  
Must Old Peer be my Nemesis?

Consequences are un pitying, and the Young Self is disastrously defined — like Krapp — by the extension of his failures into his Old Self. We are our own Nemesis. And the terrible question posed by both Ibsen and Beckett is whether there can ever be redemption from a career of selfishness and moral and existential inauthenticity.

Beckett and Ibsen answer this question in ways that are both similar and different. Each play is open-ended — that is to say, the two dramatists leave the issues unresolved and uncertain. The form of Beckett's theatre is frequently repetitive and ritualistic; and although this is Krapp's *last* tape, there is an ambiguity in the English sense of "last": it may mean either the *final* tape, or it may mean the *most recent* of Krapp's tapes. The tape itself runs on in silence at the end of the play and the curtain descends while the process continues. Similarly, at the end of *Peer Gynt* there is only a temporary resolution in Solveig's arms, and Ibsen leaves Peer with an arrangement to meet the Button Moulder once again "på sidste korsvejen" (315) — at the *last* cross-roads. Everything remains provisional and undecided. But does Krapp learn anything from his life's review? Has the examined life left him with a clearer sense of Selfhood? Or do the multiple selves remain, like the layers of an onion, discarded fragments of a Self without continuity and without an essence at its core? The last words of the play are spoken by the Young Krapp while the Old Krapp listens, sometimes silently mouthing the words, but finally staring motionlessly before him as the ironies of the past overwhelm the present:

Perhaps my best years are gone. When there was a chance of happiness. But I wouldn't want them back. Not with the fire in me now. No I wouldn't want them back. (63)

Does he understand what he has done to himself? Is he aware of the pathetic self-deception of the 39-year-old who gives up happiness for the "fire" of a second rate and mediocre creativity? Is the burned-out Old Krapp sufficiently self-conscious to recognize the futility of sacrificing his best years? And does he now agree that he wouldn't want them back? Beckett leaves the actor — motionless, silent, and empty — to register the tragedy or the indifference or the cynicism of the play's final moments. This is life experienced as the nothingness at the core of Ibsen's onion.

Ibsen's *Peer*, as I read the character, offers the audience a more hopeful alternative. If the two (or more) Krapps are self-destructive, the split-character Peers have at least the opportunity to reconcile their antipathies in a desperate attempt to avoid the Button Moulder's ladle. Some linkages in Beckett are totally negative, like the Pozzo-Lucky pairing in *Waiting for Godot*, where the two "halves" of humanity are roped together in a nexus of mutual annihilation. But Didi and

Gogo, in the same play, are tied together in a relationship where incompatibilities are reconciled from time to time, and where the other “halves” of humanity have a slightly better chance of survival. This pairing, it seemed to me, was a more viable model for the two Peers in my version of the play; and although I retained much of the uncertainty of *Krapp's Last Tape*, I also tried to honour Ibsen's less bleak and unrelenting vision of human wholeness. At a certain point, united in their hope of overcoming the Button Moulder and escaping the fate of being melted down into a selfless substance, Young Peer and Old Peer join forces, agree to participate in a creative reconciliation of difference, and support each other in their mutual distress. United at last, they try to out-wit the Button Moulder, bargain with the Thin Man (the Devil) to be admitted to Hell where they will be damned but will nevertheless retain their identity, and finally both “halves” of the Self resist the temptation to despair by acknowledging the nothingness of their existence. No longer taking the Boyg's roundabout route, they choose a straight path that leads them back to their beginning: Old Peer rediscovers the ever hopeful Solveig, and Young Peer returns to the loving care of his mother Åse. Women, as the Boyg well knows, had always been Peer Gynt's salvation, and in the play's finale I offered two images of womanhood — lover and mother — in the place of Ibsen's original single redemptive figure.

In *Krapp's Last Tape*, of course, the redemptive woman is abandoned (as she is in *Peer Gynt*) but without any hope of recovery or reconciliation. She is nothing but a memory, a sad recollection of lost hope and a futile reminder of irrecoverable possibility. In Beckett there is no redemption from the failures of Selfhood, and the consequences of self-betrayal are without consolation. In *Peer Gynt* there is still a small possibility of saving the defective Self through self-transformation, self-consciousness, and choice. But in Ibsen's last plays, like *John Gabriel Borkman* and *When We Dead Awaken* — where Borkman and Rubek are variations on Peer Gynt's defective Selfhood — Ibsen seems in many ways much closer to Beckett. Peer is given a second chance, and in his reunion with Solveig he finds a constructive solution to his dilemma. But when Borkman is given a second chance as Ella Rentheim re-enters his life, he only compounds the terrible error of his earlier choice by betraying her love again. Like Krapp, Borkman is unregenerate. And Rubek discovers, like the spiritually dead Krapp reviewing his life, that waking from the dead merely reveals that he has never really lived. All that is left to the protagonists of Ibsen late plays is a Beckettian emptiness — a combination of the dreaded nothingness at the core of the onion, and a terrible silence at the end of the tape.

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## IBSEN AND POLITICS

ASBJØRN AARSETH\*\*

**ABSTRACT.** **Ibsen and politics.** In Norway the nineteenth century has sometimes been referred to as the age of *poetocracy*. Representing this way of thinking was Ibsen's friend and rival Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson (1832–1910), poet, playwright, and public speaker. In the aftermath of the February revolution of 1848 the young Ibsen had supported an early labour union movement, but after this movement was shattered by the police in 1851, Ibsen decided to stay away from political activity. Reacting to liberal agitation he was wrongly accused of being a conservative, which he denied in a 1869 poem, exposing an extreme misanthropic stance. In letters to Georg Brandes Ibsen advocated a position in favour of anarchism. In plays such as *An Enemy of the People* (1882) and *Rosmersholm* (1886) political parties are shown to be destructive to human dignity and spiritual values.

In most European countries the nineteenth century was an age of democratic reform, tending towards a more liberal distribution of political power. At the same time it was an age of utopian thought as well as social experimentation in some quarters. The public role of the most outstanding creative writers was to a great extent influenced by the tradition which has been known as poetocracy. This meant that men who had demonstrated extraordinary literary talents in general came to be regarded as potential leaders in political matters. Many writers were well read in political theory and entertained idealist notions as to how a modern society ought to be organized and administered. This was reflected in the founding and development of political constitutions, which took place mostly in the first half of the century in several parts of Europe, among them the Scandinavian countries. This happened partly as the result of a democratic process, and partly as a compromise between conflicting group interests, which later grew into political parties, either in support of established government or rallying to strengthen the forces of opposition.

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In the early years of this political process conditions might seem to favour the strong individual who possessed the talent of leadership, the Napoleonic hero, but with the growth of liberal reform, in particular the gradual widening of the right to vote, the political parties became the main legitimate basis for influence in matters of state and government. Thus individuals with a political talent and political ambitions had to join a party and be loyal to its principles and slogans. A culture of political craftsmanship developed, favouring such talents as the ability to calculate the effect of an initiative, recognition of the spirit of compromise as an honorable attitude, even including a certain amount of opportunism; these were some of the virtues required by the politician who wanted the support of the majority. And since talents and attitudes along these lines hardly appealed to individuals with high ideals of personal integrity and unconditional belief in the philosophical values of Romanticism, there was a problem for any idealist who wanted to enter into politics.

In Denmark, Sweden and Norway the formation of political party organizations took place mainly during the 1870s and 1880s. To some extent this was an effect of the development of modern news media, with the introduction of telegraphic communication over long distances both nationally and internationally in the 1850s and the 1860s, culminating in the completion of the transatlantic telegraph cable in 1869. News agencies in the form of telegram bureaus were established, in 1866 Ritzaus Bureau in Copenhagen and Svenska Telegrambyrå in Stockholm, and in 1867 Norsk Telegrambureau in Kristiania. This was the decade when daily papers became newspapers more than anything else, providing political comments and analyses along with the news bulletins. The 1860s were experiencing a boom in the newspaper industry as a consequence of the regular and speedy supply of national and international news and comments.

These radically new conditions in the field of public information also meant a significant change in literary history. Playwrights and poets who had mainly been exploiting historical sources were quick to sense a distinct change in popular taste with a growing interest in contemporary events far and near. In 1873 Ibsen published his last historical drama, *Emperor and Galilean*. The same year Bjørnson put aside his last historical drama, *Kong Eystein*, of which he never made a fair copy, suddenly realizing that public interest in that kind of plays had evaporated. The play was published posthumously in 1932, on the occasion of the Bjørnson centennial.

Both Ibsen and Bjørnson turned to the writing of modern prose drama. Following the example of Bjørnson, whose play *En fallit* (*A Bankruptcy*, 1875) had been an immediate success, Ibsen also managed to establish his fame outside of the Scandinavian countries, starting with *Pillars of Society* in Germany in 1878. Within that year this play was produced by 31 German theatres (Friese 1976, xi). Strindberg, who in 1872 had published *Master Olof*, dealing with events from the age of Reformation in Sweden, turned to the writing of prose fiction about contemporary life.

This turn to contemporary characters and themes in an age of intense political awareness and unprecedented public debate might seem to imply the introduction of a political aspect of fundamental importance. How could one avoid taking a stand in matters of social importance, and how could a playwright or a poet write a text dealing with contemporary issues and not invest it with a politically relevant message? To Bjørnson this kind of relevance was obvious. He had been promoting national values in his poems as well as in his saga plays in the 1850s and 60s. In the 1870s and 80s he continued to do so, joining the Liberal party, *Venstre*. This party organized the political as well as the national opposition against the Conservative party, *Høire*, and its sympathies for the union with Sweden and the Swedish king. Bjørnson took vigorously part in election campaigns, touring the country with his remarkable eloquence in favour of the liberal position. When the historian Ernest Sars in 1902 introduced the concept of poetocracy in modern Norwegian history, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson was his main example, the national poet with the political visions and the eloquence to make people listen.

Ibsen was an entirely different kind of writer. His political thinking was far more complicated, and in order to understand the development of his attitude to political matters we have to take a look at his activities and experience as a young man. In 1848 strong liberal and even revolutionary winds blew over the European continent. When these winds reached the small province town of Grimstad on the south coast of Norway, Ibsen was 20 years old. He was easily inspired by radical and revolutionary slogans against all kinds of tyrants. One of his earliest recorded poems is a tribute "To Hungary" on the occasion of the Hungarian defeat in the 1848 war for national independence; the rhetoric is youthfully passionate, with the prophecy of one day the hurricane of autumn overturning the tyranny which temporarily is hovering above the ruins of freedom.

Arriving in Kristiania and preparing for his University entrance exam in the spring of 1850 Ibsen once again was struck by the freedom-loving sentiments of his fellow students. A Danish revolutionary writer and editor, Poul Harro Harring, who had been expelled from several countries as an aftermath of the February revolution, had settled in Kristiania in 1849 and founded a radical paper, *Folkets Røst* (the Voice of the People). In late May of 1850 Harring was charged with an offense against the press regulations, and he was expelled from Norway. 140 mostly young sympathizers signed a petition in his favour, and marched to present it to the senior member of the government, after which they hurried to the harbour to cheer the unfortunate writer. The 22 years old Ibsen was among the signatories and demonstrators, and so was the 18 years old Bjørnson and the 32 years old Aasmund Vinje.

A foreigner like Harring could easily be expelled if he did not please the authorities. Norwegian citizens were better protected by the liberal constitution of 1814. Marcus Thrane was a pioneer among Norwegian union leaders. In the years 1848–51 he managed to establish a labour movement which grew at an impressive speed, by 1851 numbering 273 local unions around the country including more

than 20.000 members. They demanded the right to vote for all grown men, less working hours, and a new law regulating the conditions of agricultural workers. One of Ibsen's neighbours was a law student, Theodor Abildgaard, an adherent of Thrane's, who served as editor of the Labour union paper. He was the one who had talked Ibsen into taking part in the demonstration in support of Haring, and he encouraged him to contribute to the paper, which he did. The contributions were anonymous, and it is impossible today to identify Ibsen's texts printed in that paper.

On July 7, 1851 the police arrested Thrane, Abildgaard, and some other union leaders, charging them with conspiring to overthrow the government. Thrane and Abildgaard had to serve several years of prison. The police also searched the printer's workshop, where letters and contributions by Ibsen and others were kept, but the factor had managed to throw most of the critical material on the floor, giving the police the impression that it was waste paper. Ibsen was shocked, waiting in his quarters for the police to arrest him, but he was not implicated.

This experience must have shaken the young student. He became very careful regarding political issues; in fact it is not easy in any of the works he himself published to find ideas and viewpoints of a clear political nature. In his letters to people whose sympathy he counted on we may find political statements, but not often. And yet many of his readers would assume that he in most questions sided with His Majesty's opposition, which was the case with most of the intellectuals who were not employed by the government. Ibsen several times applied to the Storting for financial support, travel grants etc., and writing to the King or to one of the ministers he was of course careful to express complete loyalty.

In 1869 Ibsen visited Stockholm, and as the author of *Brand* and *Peer Gynt* he received much attention in the higher circles of that city, including the royal court. The fact that he seemed to enjoy moving in circles like that must have provoked a young Swedish liberal politician, Adolf Hedin, into suggesting in public that Ibsen had apparently turned conservative. Ibsen's response came in the form of a short poem which was later included in *Digte* (1871).

#### TO MY FRIEND THE REVOLUTIONARY ORATOR

You say I've become a 'conservative'.  
I remain as I was, every day I live.

I do not have time for smart moves and bidding.  
Just knock the board over – I'm yours, and no kidding.

Just one revolution is worth repeating  
that wasn't a matter of half-baked cheating.

It robs all the later attempts of their glory.



Of course I refer to the Deluge's story.

Though he was caught, even then, was our Lucifer;  
for Noah, you know, got the ship and the use of her.

Let's try it again, but be more categorical;  
we'll need real men though, not just rhetorical.

You fix up a flood to earth's farthest mark.  
I'll gladly, myself, torpedo the Ark.

(English version by John Northam 1986. 94 f.)

Lines such as these can hardly be said to amount to a political statement. And yet they express a view on the political organization of society. The speaker of the poem is not satisfied with what has been achieved by revolutions so far in the history of mankind. The Flood reported in the Old Testament could have been successful had it not been for Noah who established the new social organization and deprived men of their freedom. A second try, including a new flood, would be necessary, but this time the Ark would have to be sunk. What this means is that a successful social organization on this earth can only be imagined if no human being survives. In such circumstances of course conservative or liberal positions are completely irrelevant. Ibsen revealed himself in this poem as a full-fledged misanthropist and anarchist.

Around 1870 Ibsen and the Danish critic Georg Brandes started their correspondence, of which only Ibsen's letters are available. These texts are a valuable source to our knowledge of Ibsen's thinking about political matters. Brandes' position as a staunch partisan of liberal reform in politics as well as in social and cultural relations is well known. From Ibsen's letters to him we can see that he is in favour of a more extreme approach. In February of 1871 Ibsen comments on Brandes' view on political freedom:

I shall never accept that the concept of freedom is equivalent to political freedom. What you call freedom I would call freedoms, and what I call the fight for freedom is nothing but the steady, living acquisition of the idea of freedom. He who possesses freedom in any other way than as that which is sought-after, he possesses it dead and uninspired, because the concept of freedom is characterized by its constant expansion during the acquisition, and if therefore somebody in the process of fighting rests and says: I have it now, he shows that he has just lost it (HU 16, 349).

He goes on to denounce the state as the curse of the free individual. The state is founded on the idea of freedom as a permanent achievement, not as a dynamic spirit. Therefore the state must be undermined. That would be a revolution in which Ibsen would take part.

Ibsen's biographer Halvdan Koht has listed a number of quotations by Ibsen on the idea of the state, on the necessity of revolution, on religion, on the free union of individuals, on the demand for strong government, etc. He comments: "It would not be useful to try to systematize these casually spoken paradoxes into a political theory. He had no system at all" (Koht 1971, 269).

In the 1882 elections for the *Storting*, the Norwegian national assembly, the political conflict between the two parties, *Venstre* and *Høire*, approached its point of culmination. The main issue was the question whether members of the government could have access to the negotiations of the *Storting*. The conservative side insisted on the constitutional principle of division of power, with the legislative, the executive and the judicial powers operating independently of each other. The liberal side insisted that the government ministers had to take part in the debate and defend their political actions, thus being in fact responsible to the national assembly. If the majority vote of the people's representatives turned against the government or any of its members, those affected would have to resign.

Bjørnson was actively taking part in the electoral campaign, and at the same time he was celebrating his 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary as an author. Ibsen wrote a letter of congratulation to him, praising his great gifts for politics and admitting his own complete lack of such talents; this was the reason why he had decided not to take part in any debate. "You must by no means think that I am blind regarding the great importance of your agitation. To me, however, the greatest and most important part of it is the fact that you devote your whole, strong, and truthful personality to it. This is poetry in practice" (HU 17, 475). To Ibsen political engagement in itself is clearly not praiseworthy. What he is emphasizing is the moral quality of the political agent – the ability to remain true to oneself in one's political and other actions.

Ibsen's scepticism regarding political engagement should be seen as a natural consequence of his individualism. On one occasion at the end of 1883 he comments in a letter to his publisher Frederik Hegel on what he refers to as a literary civil war in Copenhagen. Holger Drachmann had protested strongly against some utterance by Georg Brandes, and Ibsen is concerned that this might lead to a break between two old friends. But he adds that in case the literary left as a result of the controversy should be scattered, this would not necessarily be a literary disaster: "I think that many of these highly talented writers are better off working on their own without constantly having to glance at some common programme" (HU 17, 534).

A couple of the modern prose plays contain a view of politics which seems to correspond well with the attitude expressed in some of Ibsen's letters. In *An*

*enemy of the people* (1882) Ibsen clearly wants to expose the ignoble nature of political conflict. The main character, Dr. Stockmann, an idealist who has discovered serious pollution of the water supplying the municipal bath, insists that it should be made known, so that the appropriate action can be taken as soon as possible. This leads to a confrontation with his brother, Mayor Stockmann, who represents a completely different policy, since he has the financial aspect of the problem to consider. The bath is widely known as a health institution, every summer attracting a considerable number of visitors from the region.

The Doctor is confident that the editorial staff of the local newspaper, the *People's Courier*, will take his side, which they have indicated, but as soon as the Mayor brings up the question about the cost of the purification process, and the house owners realize the temporary loss of income they are going to suffer, the editor and his assistant feel that they must be careful and not provoke the citizens and the municipal authorities by supporting the Doctor. Encountering so much short-sighted resistance and even denied access to the columns of the newspaper, Dr. Stockmann summons a public meeting where he not only denounces the decision to cover up the truth about the unhealthy conditions at the bath, but attacks in rude language the generally accepted idea that any political issue should be decided by the majority vote. Insisting that the minority always is right, the Doctor provokes his audience into a strong support of the claim that he is an enemy of the people. The stone throwing mob smashes the windows of his office, he loses his commission at the bath, the family is given notice by the landlord, his daughter is fired from her job as a school teacher. But the stubborn Doctor does not surrender. The play ends with his announcement in the family circle of yet another discovery: He has come to realize that "the strongest man in the world is the one who stands most alone" (Ibsen 1965, 386).

The paradoxical proposition concluding the play has created considerable confusion among readers and interpreters. Can such a statement coming from a man who has lost practically all esteem among his fellow citizens be taken seriously? In the final scene he is surrounded by his family, and their response seems to be somewhat divided, although not at all unsympathetic:

MRS. STOCKMANN (*smiling and shaking her head*). Oh, Thomas, Thomas –!  
 PETRA (*buoyantly, gripping his hands*). Father! (*loc.cit.*)

One is of course free to utter any personal opinion regarding Dr. Stockmann's final discovery. How can someone completely lacking public support be the strongest man in the world? It has also been argued that he is not without support; his family is on his side. And yet, for all practical purposes he is rather isolated. Only one single man outside his family, Captain Horster, a man of civil courage, does not turn away; he is a house owner and he offers the family a place to stay.

The important question concerning the end of this play is whether we can determine the position of the playwright. Does Ibsen state his point in this case? The Doctor is brave, but he is also naïve, particularly in the early acts, expecting that the townspeople may want to honour him because of his important discovery about the health risk. He is easily overpowered by his brother in winning the support of the press as well as that of the house owners' association and the common people. In terms of political influence Dr. Stockmann has lost everything.

It is important to understand that political strength is not the main asset to the hero of an Ibsen play. *An enemy of the people* is not a political drama, and Ibsen is not advocating a democratic development or a democratic solution in this or in any other one of his plays. The question under scrutiny is a moral one. Dr. Stockmann's final discovery has to do with moral strength. He knows that he has the support of science; – the water has been analysed by experts. He also knows that the opinion of what he calls "the compact majority" is easily reversed if the people can be led to believe that their interest is better served by an alternative solution. The strongest man in the world is not he who has to rely on political affiliation, on compromise, on the result of elections. The paradoxical triumph of the Doctor originates in his complete independence and his moral integrity; he is free to pronounce what he recognizes as the true state of things. He is unfettered by considerations of loyalty to any group or group interest. His strength is purely spiritual and purely moral.

During the fierce political debates in the early 1880s, a turning point in Norwegian political history, Ibsen had been watching things from abroad. He must have felt the urge to raise the moral issue as an alternative to the political one. He had been stating a similar point ten years earlier, in a letter to Georg Brandes. After Brandes had begun his well-known series of lectures at the University of Copenhagen in the fall of 1871 he had experienced strong reactions against some of his ideas. He had hoped to be considered as a candidate for the vacant chair of aesthetics at the University, but the faculty had turned against him, and the chair was left unfilled. In his letter Ibsen tries to encourage his friend. Brandes had complained that the liberal press in Denmark had refused to support him and would not print his articles. To Ibsen this is a confirmation of his view on the limits of political freedom. And Brandes had written that all the votes of the Faculty of Philosophy were against him. Ibsen comments:

Dear Brandes, would you really wish it otherwise? Is it not precisely the philosophy of the faculty which you are against? [...] I hear that you have founded a society. Do not trust unconditionally any one who joins you; the main thing is whether the support is based on the crucial premises. Whether your position is strengthened by it, I do not know either; to my mind it seems that the lonely one is the strongest (HU 17, 31–33).

Ibsen has himself experienced attacks in the papers, and he presents his advice to Brandes: "Be dignified! Dignity is the only weapon against things like that. Look straight ahead; don't ever answer with one single word in the papers. Act as if you had no idea that there was any resistance against you" (*loc.cit.*). What Ibsen is recommending here is clearly a kind of aristocratic stance, an attitude of aloofness. In politics it would probably be an inefficient response, but to Ibsen there seems to be an aesthetic dimension to this situation of the one against the many. It should probably be regarded as a romantic concept of the hero.

The second play to be considered briefly in this perspective is *Rosmersholm* (1886). Early in this play it becomes clear that a political polarization is taking place in the local community, and that both the conservative side, represented by Mr. Kroll, the headmaster, and the radical side, with Peder Mortensgaard, editor of *The Beacon*, as its spokesman, are eager to convince the former pastor Johannes Rosmer to declare his allegiance to their respective political sides. None of them are successful in their efforts. Rosmer is more and more disgusted with the meanness with which the political contest is being fought in the papers and elsewhere. He has turned away from his Christian faith and left the church. His plan is to launch a campaign on a morally elevated level; the idea has to do with ennobling the minds of men and make them become spiritually refined individuals. He has been discussing his idealistic project with Rebecca West, a young woman who is a resident in the manor and who is sympathetic to his ideas.

While the political rivalry is being fought on a trivial level, it is increasingly clear that Rosmer is the object of a tug-of-war on a more existential and tragic level. His late wife, Beate, the sister of Kroll, has ended her life by going into the waterfall in the vicinity of the manor. Rebecca West and Rosmer have been clinging to the idea that Beate ended her life because of a mental disturbance, but from various sides it is hinted that her mental state may have been less troubled than one might assume; that she in fact has committed suicide because she was made to feel that she was one too many at Rosmersholm. As this understanding is invading the dismal quarters of the old manor, Rebecca is gradually feeling the need to atone for her secret wish to supersede the late Mrs Rosmer. Johannes is at the same time beginning to realize that his project of ennobling the minds of men is something quite beyond his capacity. This has to do with their common sense of guilt. The only way of recovering the positive experience of guiltlessness is to walk together the fatal road that Beate went. This will be an act of atonement, and at the same time it will be sufficient evidence that Rebecca has been ennobled through the influence of Rosmer, while she has helped him to recognize his share in the guilt and the need to become guiltless.

The effect of *Rosmersholm* seems to be as close to that of the ancient Greek tragedies as Ibsen managed to get. It is a play which is well suited to illustrate the triviality and utter irrelevance of conventional political activity in Ibsen's mature drama. The playwright is trying to demonstrate that the source of

tragedy in a play like this is not so much in the acts or minds of the characters. Rather it resides in the spirit of the place, some moral mood hovering around the living room of the Rosmer family mansion. It is as if this spirit is emanating from the walls of the old-fashioned room, from which portraits of old and more recent members of the family, clergymen, military officers and public officials in uniform are observing the acts and movements of the present inhabitants of the house. The effect is somewhat similar to that of the curse which is said to haunt some of the royal families whose stories are presented in Greek tragedies.

Politics is to direct the attention towards administering the future, to decide what to do to improve conditions and help people to fulfill their ambitions and realize their potentials. As a dramatist Ibsen does not believe in this kind of optimistic future arrangement. The present is a stage from which human beings cannot escape their individual or common past. They must accept their fate and bring it to its conclusion.

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## THEATRICAL ROLES, FEMINISM AND DEMONISM IN IBSEN'S PLAYS

FRANCO PERRELLI\*\*

**ABSTRACT.** *Theatrical Roles, Feminism and Demonism in Ibsen's Plays.* The role of the *ingénue* was a deep-rooted tradition for actresses of Ibsen's time, especially on the romantic stage in Denmark, where this role was also marked by intense sensuality and a demonic quality. Although he revolutionised the concept of drama, Henrik Ibsen maintained this theatrical remnant, but he adapted it in various ways, such as the case of Nora in *A Doll's House*, a feminine exaltation of the spirit of freedom; or Hedvig in *The Wild Duck* and Hilde in *The Master Builder*, where there is a progressive transfiguration of in-depth psychology, in order to create driven characters. Thus we come to understand that – as in the case of the great musician Igor Stravinsky – Ibsen's approach was to create something new out of “the readjustment of old ships”.

In a letter addressed to Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson dated May 1893, the philosopher Harald Høffding reports fresh impressions about the recent staging of *The Master Builder* produced by the Royal Theatre of Copenhagen, directed by William Bloch. Høffding seemed attracted, above all, by the explosive force of Hilde's character, the female protagonist, “whose self-confidence and enthusiasm” had been precisely revealed and “skilfully emphasized” by the famous actress Betty Hennings<sup>1</sup>, who, however, in the various and reserved reviews that welcomed the drama in the Danish capital, also elicited from a demanding critic such as Edvard Brandes the admission she “was praiseworthy” and that, at least for most of the third act, she played in her role “with great passion” and “secure intelligence”<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> B. Bjørnson, *Brevveksling med Danske 1875-1910*, II, København-Oslo, Gyldendal, 1953, p. 152 et seq.

<sup>2</sup> E. Brandes, *Om Teater*, edited by H. Engberg, København, Politikens Forlag, 1947, pp. 58-59.

“Passion”, “self-confidence and enthusiasm”: Betty Hennings had evidently bestowed upon Hilde sharply effusive feelings and traits of sentimental and youthful kind. In fact, it is Edvard Brandes’ article which really tells exactly that Hilde, in Mrs Henning’s interpretation, turned out to be “too young and in particular too maiden like”, with “burst of laughter of an *ingénue*, sometimes of a doubtful taste. Mrs Hennings was certainly “awkward” and “pressed to strain the youthful features” by a character that – as the text says – is about twenty, twenty-three years of age, while she (class of 1850) was over forty and paired off with an “inferior” Solness (according to Brandes) played by Emil Poulsen (class of 1842, perhaps too young in a role likely for a man of sixty). Mrs Hennings and Mr Poulsen were inadequate to their roles not being in the right age, but both of them were nevertheless famous leading actors with a long playing experience in Ibsenian production (they acted as Nora and Helmer in the first performance of *A Doll’s House* in 1879), and it is clear that the assertion of Naturalism had not yet quite affected the nineteenth-century’s routine of the stage roles and hierarchies.

When, in 1885, *The Wild Duck* was first performed at the Royal Theatre of Copenhagen (directed by William Bloch with Emil Poulsen acting the part of Hjalmar Ekdal), Hedvig’s role, it goes without saying, was played by Betty Hennings who, at that time, was thirty-five years old. The studio photographs show us a miraculous adaptation of the performer in the make-up, in the costume and in the attitudes towards the adolescent age of the character (a fourteen-year-old girl), but, on everything evidently prevailed prestige, the role conditioning and an old habit, because Betty Hennings had been notoriously a great *ingénue*, or better the *ingénue* of the Royal Theatre since 1870, when she made her début, and not for incidental circumstances, in the role of Agnés in Molière’s *École des femmes*.

In fact, Edvard Brandes, in portraying Mrs Hennings, tells that she acquired a reputation on the stage “as the young woman who is still almost a baby-girl, being in the dark about life and immaculate as to its grief and filthiness”. What is more, Mrs Hennings was trained in the school of ballet and “the sudden change from a dancer to Nora”, that had the opportunity to carry out in her career, “was not easy”, even if it was dominated by the actress by means of a prudent adaptation to the theatrical categories of the time. In fact, in *A Doll’s House*, Betty Hennings pointed to “the light-hearted and childish” features of the protagonist and succeeded in accomplishing a shrewd variation of the theatrical type of the *ingénue*<sup>3</sup>, that, after all, as we will see, Ibsen himself had implied in the conception of the character.

We know that the author had sent her “the most respectful and hearty thanks” for her interpretation<sup>4</sup>, and, in 1888, he hoped she could assume the part of

<sup>3</sup> E. Brandes, *Dansk Skuespilkunst*, København, Philipsens, 1880, p. 221 et seq.

<sup>4</sup> H. Ibsen, *Brev 1845-1905. Ny Samling*, I, edited by Ø. Anker, Oslo-Bergen-Tromsø, Universitetsforlaget, 1979, p. 250.



Ellida in *The Lady from the Sea*<sup>5</sup>. When she played in *The Wild Duck*, the dramatist's judgement, rather critical on the whole staging, was instead positively explicit, at least towards her: "Mrs Hennings is Hedvig"<sup>6</sup>. In that way Ibsen bestowed his homage not only on an actress with exceptional mimetic capacities, but on a convention as well – if one agrees, on a ruin – of the nineteenth century's theatre: the *ingénue* with eternal vitality, that the director and writer Herman Bang, in 1892, defines "the idol of our audience, pure, tender and candid as an anemone. Innocent and more than that, because her sex has not quite aroused. In her body she is half a child, but in her mind she is entirely a baby-girl"<sup>7</sup>.

But, technically, what was an *ingénue*? In the specific meaning of the Scandinavian scene, it is above all a firm "heritage of the vaudeville" – as Herman Bang still explains –, actually "its essential presupposition, so that the vaudeville itself would never perish on the stages" of northern Europe<sup>8</sup>. Moreover, for the great actresses it was a challenge to play the *ingénue* role, even individually faced, of the eternal youth, the recalling of the charm of innocence and everlasting freshness, of the unalterable spontaneity in a mature body. In this, there was something inevitably seducing and, at times, even diabolic, which bestowed on the *ingénues* other nuances indeed, as regards those winged childish hints which were mentioned, for instance, in the memoirs of one of the most famous actress of that time, Johanne Luise Heiberg<sup>9</sup>.

It is just one of Kierkegaard's Scribean essay contained in *Enten-Eller* (1843) that enables us to grasp immediately the ambiguity of the *ingénue*: the "amiability" the actress (in this case it is exactly Mrs Heiberg) represents on the stage "could possibly become dangerous for you", warns the philosopher<sup>10</sup>, and, after all, it was reported that, even for the celebrated *ingénue* M.lle Mars of the Comédie Française, "*rien n'égale sa décence; tout en elle ravit, séduit, enchante*"<sup>11</sup>. What an uncommon matching: decency and seduction! The *ingénue* was an ambiguous and perturbing type, from whom the audience of that time was morbidly doubly fascinated, because at a spiritual level she "was entirely a child", but physically she was only "half" a child, and Herman Bang swiftly adds that all her "purity" was dealt with "an ideal [of the scene], half the son of the [northern] character and of hypocrisy"<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> H. Ibsen, *Samlede verker*, Oslo, Gyldendal, 1928-58; from now on: HISV XVIII, p. 194.

<sup>6</sup> HISV XIX, p. 219.

<sup>7</sup> H. Bang, *Teatret*, København, Schubothes Boghandel, 1892, p. 88 et seq.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> J. L. Heiberg, *Et Liv genoplevet i Erindringen*, I, København, Gyldendal, 1973<sup>5</sup>, p. 245.

<sup>10</sup> S. Kierkegaard, *Enten-Eller. Un frammento di vita*, II, edited by A. Cortese, Milano Adelphi, 1990<sup>3</sup>, p. 190.

<sup>11</sup> *Enciclopedia dello Spettacolo* (1954-1968), VII, Roma, Unedi, 1975, p. 175.

<sup>12</sup> H. Bang, op. cit., p. 88.

Elin Andersen, in an essay on the woman-child of the nineteenth-century's theatre<sup>13</sup>, allows us to understand how, on the stage, the audience could find what in the social life was strongly censured. In Denmark (in particular between 1820 and 1840), all the prevailing repertoire of such authors as Johan Ludvig Heiberg and Henrik Hertz is focused, and not by chance, on what Janne Risum defines as “a new, typical characterization of the pubertal maiden”<sup>14</sup>. Johanne Luise Heiberg – firstly a child-woman and then a woman-child – dominated this sensual and romantic dramaturgy, having followed its evolution since the first vaudeville up to the bewitched enchantment of works such as *Svend Dyring's House* by Hertz (1837) and, meanwhile, she “charmed and fascinated by means of the duplicity of her scenic radiation. If she struck, above all, for her fascinating innocence, after she lured with the demonism of her characters' sentiments. Such demonism was placed at the centre of the dramatic renewal in about the middle of the century”, which, in opposition, drew up a melancholy male partner, “an antithesis of Don Juan”<sup>15</sup>. As Edvard Brandes also testifies, in the great actor Michael Wiehe, Mrs Heiberg found for a long time a partner with whom she expressed “a sublime reality, which was a bewitching dance of elves and a supernatural erotic exultation”<sup>16</sup>. What has been defined, as well, the golden age [*Guldalderen*] of the Danish Royal Theatre was the mixture of strongly sublimated sensuality in the winged neoclassical stylization, this symbiosis of ingenuousness and perturbation, which was embodied in the couple of woman-child and of the melancholy hero, often seized in a relation of enchantment.

Ibsen knew this theatre very well; he was trained under the banner of its authors, and, with the passing of years, he became intimate with Johanne Luise Heiberg, to whom he devoted a long and important *Letter in Rhyme*. Vaudeville traces are not only found in the first Ibsen's dramas, but they are still noticed in *The League of Youth* (1869) and actually in *The Pillars of Society* (1877)<sup>17</sup> and it is well known that the stern Sarcey, in *A Doll's House*, could recognize “*les procédés de Scribe*” along with an intrigue of a traditional mould<sup>18</sup>.

With *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts*, Ibsen, anyhow, set him up more and more consciously as the interpreter of “*en skønheds-fattig tid*”, of “an age poor in beauty” (in an apparent antithesis with the dimension of aestheticism of the classical-romantic scene); he presented himself as the dramatist of disillusion, who now struck the *biedermeier* sensibility and was engaged in suggesting the theatre a new realistic horizon, revealing social hypocrisies, the two-faced morality and

<sup>13</sup> E. Andersen, *Den ristende Uskyld*, København, Hans Reitzels, 1986.

<sup>14</sup> J. Risum et al., “Den store Teatergalskab”, in *Dansk Teaterhistorie*, I, København, Gyldendal, 1922, p. 213.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

<sup>16</sup> E. Brandes, *Om Teater* cit., p. 103 et seq.

<sup>17</sup> M. Gravier, *Vaudeville français et vaudeville scandinave*, in « *Revue d'Histoire du Théâtre* », oct.-déc., IV-1959, pp. 313-4.

<sup>18</sup> A. D. Reque, *Trois auteurs dramatiques scandinaves, Ibsen, Bjørnson, Strindberg, devant la critique française 1889-1901*, Paris, Champion, 1930, p. 134.

authoritarianism. The scene, once a gratifying place where unspeakable instincts were screened and sublimated, has become, by now, to Ibsen's mind, a tribune where the contradictions explode; it is focalized the season of "nihilism which works under the surface", as the dramatist writes in a letter about *Ghosts*<sup>19</sup>.

This was a bright changing mark, but not a complete annulment of signals and rules, so to speak, traditional, to which Ibsen did not know how to renounce, or could not give up thoroughly, both for his personal training and sensibility, and in order not to lose the contacts with the reality of the theatrical world of his time. For instance, Edvard Brandes, just in his portrait of Mrs Hennings, incidentally makes a very interesting objection on Nora: with this character, he says, "Ibsen has intended to show the *ingénue* destiny in marriage, as soon as it ceases to be 'a doll's house' and the traditional masks of comedians fall from those who play a love role of husband and wife"<sup>20</sup>. The critic casually mistakes the role (and the actress who embodied it) for the character: he suggests that in *A Doll's House* structurally survives the *ingénue* image, with her childish charm and her pranks (the macaroons she secretly bought and munched), her latent demonism (which is explicit in Lou Andreas-Salomé's words in the "unnatural and almost wild performance" of the tarantella)<sup>21</sup> and her eroticism (the scene of the silk stockings with Rank, in the second act). "Nora is a child. And it is actually her ingenuousness which creates her charm, her danger and her destiny", has still written Lou Andreas-Salomé<sup>22</sup>. As a fact, the *ingénue* re-appears in Ibsen's drama, but in a new variation, that of a child who, in the end, wants to grow up: "it is actually that indisputable, frank and magnificent ingenuousness to enabling her to go straight off to the bottom of things". The audience, however, in that way, will enjoy no more her childish show and her subtle indecency of pretended purity: "once everything was peaceful confidence and thoughtlessness; now, all of a sudden, everything is looked with distrust. Once wonder was taken for natural; now even acquired certainties and securities seem confused and unintelligible"<sup>23</sup>.

Indeed, *Little Women Grow Up*, we could say recalling the old novel by Alcott, and their growing – as every growth – is painful; it is revolt and trauma. It is really the subversion of acknowledged social harmonies, and it is known that Ibsen, at this point, almost entrusts what is the essence of an *ingénue* – art, femininity and inexperience – with his revolutionary utopia. In a speech delivered at the "Circolo Scandinavo" of Rome on the 27<sup>th</sup> February 1879 (before the final writing of *A Doll's House*), in fact he states that the "so-called unpractical women [...] have something in common with the true artist" and what must rather frighten is "the worldly wisdom of the old", and such "men with little ambitions and little thoughts, little scruples and little

<sup>19</sup> HISV XVIII, pp. 450-1.

<sup>20</sup> E. Brandes, *Dansk Skuespilkunst*, cit., p. 234.

<sup>21</sup> L. Andreas-Salomé, *Figure di donne*, Milano, Iperborea, 1997, p. 45.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 47; 49.

fears, those men who direct all their thoughts and actions towards achieving certain little advantages for their own little and subservient selves”<sup>24</sup>.

According to Elin Andersen, it is just with Ibsenian characters of last decades of the century, that the woman-child – who, generally, had inevitably begun to evolve since the middle of the nineteenth century – assumes a specific individuality, particularly concerning the background of a past which, in childhood, often presents a disquieting and fatal season. From this point of view *The Wild Duck* (1884) would be the most shocking example of the new style, in which “Ibsen draws from what will later become the endless source of the tragedy of modern man: the psychic infantile traumas. It is the tragic perspective on existence which the author shares with psychoanalysis...”<sup>25</sup>. In fact, *The Wild Duck*, above all would be a drama of puberty and sexuality, to which little Hedvig must succumb because entrapped in the symbolic relationship with the ambiguous Hjalmar Ekdal who inhibits her personal maturing<sup>26</sup>.

And here, at this point, we have reached a stage that, availing ourselves of some expressions contained in *The Master Builder*, we could define of the “very high towers”, of “the castles in the air” or of the depth psychology, as Ibsen himself explicitly declared, even if with the sharpness which was peculiar to him: “I don’t write symbolically. Just about people’s inner life as I know it – psychology, if you like... I draw real living people”<sup>27</sup>. According to the modern academic research (Elisabeth Davidsen)<sup>28</sup>, more than ever, at this stage, the charm and the subtle demonism of the repertoire and of the romantic characters appear as a sort of a hidden trace that, from Ibsenian juvenile dramas tendentiously being superimposed over the logic psychology, comes to light again in *Rosmersholm*, in *The Lady from the Sea* and, above all, in *The Master Builder*. The “real, living human beings” of these works seem incongruous and fabulous, that is to say they open to the interferences both of a fantastic dimension and of the unconscious life which proliferates with symbols and archetypes. Even here, those we named the ruins of the old dramaturgy are “renovated” – such as, in some way, in *The Thoughts of an Octogenarian*, Stravinskij maintained to do with “the old ships” of the musical wealth –, re-created in an original style (one may merely think of the metamorphosis of the woman-child into the child-old woman in Aline Solness’ character) and in that instinctual revivification of the *ingénue* in Hilde, now resolutely bent to restore the most perturbing “life of the soul”.

<sup>24</sup> HISV XV, p. 403. Cit. in M. Meyer, *Ibsen. A Biography*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1974<sup>3</sup>, pp. 460-70.

<sup>25</sup> E. Andersen, op. cit., p. 180.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178 et seq.

<sup>27</sup> A statement collected by Ernst Motzfeldt, after the publication of *The Master Builder*, cit. in M. Meyer, *Ibsen* cit., p. 727.

<sup>28</sup> E. Davidsen, *Henrik Ibsen og Det Kongelige Teater*, København, Akademisk Forlag, 1980, p. 6.

## IBSENS FRAUEN

ASTRID SÆTHER\*\*\*

**ABSTRACT. Ibsens Frauen.** In my article on “Ibsen’s Women” (“Ibsens Frauen”) I have dwelt broadly on the relations between Ibsen’s female friends and his writings. This theme is, of course, a general and often discussed matter. However, my article will focus on his wife, Suzannah, her lifelong devotedness and clever contribution to her husband’s artistic work. Her family background, her talents and literary knowledge were greatly appreciated by the author. She was an ardent reader, had exquisite taste and participated in the creation of his dramatic characters as they daily had their discussions and exchange of views on his writing. It was in accordance with her character and wish that she posed in the background. On the other hand; her contribution to his dramatic production has rarely been dealt with, and my intention here, is to give her a more central position.

Viele Frauen haben in Ibsens Leben eingegriffen und seine Dichtung beeinflusst, sowohl vor als auch während seiner Ehe mit Suzannah Daae Thoresen. Die größte Bedeutung kommt – selbstredend – seiner Frau Suzannah zu. Alle Frauen waren von temperamentvoller Natur, mit jeweils ausgeprägtem, persönlichen Charakter, mehr oder weniger „problematische Frauen“, die ihm alle Freude und Inspiration brachten; einige von ihnen gaben ihm einen „Anreiz“ zum Schreiben. Alle fügten ihm auch geringes oder großes Leid zu, waren Grund für Ambivalenz und trugen zu seinem spannungsvollen Dasein bei. Alle stimulierten sie sein schöpferisches Genie in außerordentlichem Maße und sie leben, auf die eine oder andere Weise, in seinen Dramen und Gedichten fort. Ich werde das Hauptgewicht auf Ibsens Frau, Suzannah, legen, die Frau, mit der er 50 Jahre zusammen war. Ich möchte versuchen, die Beziehung der realen Frauengestalten zu den dramatischen Figuren zu verdeutlichen, mit anderen Worten, einen geschlechterspezifischen Blick zuzulassen und eine neue Perspektive auf diese Beziehungen und damit indirekt auf die Dichtung aufzuzeigen.

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Es gibt nur ein Bild, auf dem sich Henrik, Suzannah und ihrem Sohn, Sigurd, gemeinsam finden. Es wurde während eines festlichen Zusammenseins bei der Familie Heftye in Kristiania aufgenommen. Es ist das Jahr 1874. Das Bild ist interessant, es ist Ausdruck für die Position, die die verschiedenen Akteure einnahmen: Vater und Sohn in der Mitte platziert, dem Fotografen direkt zugewandt, die Mutter daneben, den Blick auf Mann und Sohn gerichtet. Das Portrait der Frau ist von doppelter Bedeutung: Einerseits im Abseits, in der Kulisse, doch andererseits befindet sie sich auf dem obersten Niveau, hat die Übersicht und den Blick eines Regisseurs. Ihr Profil ist deutlich und stark, das dunkle Haar, üppig gewellt, gibt dem Gesicht eine sensuelle Weiche: distanziert und gleichzeitig nah, mündig und weich. Dies ist keine dekorative Gestalt, die hinter dem Geländer der Veranda sitzt, sondern eine Frau, die Vertrauen und Ruhe einflößt. Während sich der Mann und der Sohn sichtbar in der öffentlichen Sphäre befinden, in frontale Positur geworfen, nimmt die Frau einen untergeordneten Platz ein, an der Seite, neben dem hinteren Vorhang. Dieses Arrangement reflektiert selbstverständlich das sozial-familiäre Muster der damaligen Zeit, doch spiegelt es die Konstellation des Ibsen-Trios?

Wer war Suzannah Ibsen?

Dass ihr Leben als Frau eines der größten Dramatiker der Welt, Henrik Johan Ibsen, so ganz im Dunklen liegt, hat mich verwundert und provoziert. Ich möchte versuchen, die Frau, die „hinter“ dem Mann stand, zu beleuchten. Sie war „die andere“, die Zweite, und sie wollte es so. Ihr Lebensweg ist in einem solchen Maße mit dem seinen verwoben, dass es schwer fällt, die beiden zu trennen: „Die Gatten folgten auf der strahlenden Dichterbahn, und sie folgen ihnen noch immer. Doch im Laufe der Zeit erscheinen verschiedene Spuren – einmal deutlicher und einmal undeutlicher.“ (Thoresen: 1901) Suzannah Thoresen wurde in Herøy, in Nordwestnorwegen geboren. Herøy mit seinen 300 Inseln ist einer der Landstriche Norwegens mit dem rauhesten Klima. Die Familie zog 1844 nach Bergen und hier wuchs Suzannah mit 8 Geschwistern auf. Ihr Vater starb 1858, wenige Tage vor ihrer Heirat mit Henrik Ibsen.

Die Divergenzen zwischen den Eheleuten waren offensichtlich, doch auch ihr Zusammenspiel, wie es Suzannahs Stiefmutter, Magdalene Thoresen, ausdrückte. Sie war eine der wenigen, die früh erkannten, welche Bedeutung Suzannah Thoresen für den Dichter haben sollte: „Ja, für dich, Ibsen, war es nichts. Während wir anderen (mit dem, was wir aus den Sagas hervorholen wollten) jahrelang arbeiten und studieren mussten, so hattest du die lebendige Quelle bei dir: Suzannah, von der du alles haben konntest.“ Und Ibsen wusste sich einverstanden: „Ja, du hast Recht.“ (Koht:150-151) Wir wollen auf Suzannahs Bedeutung für Ibsen zurückkommen.

Schon im Heim seiner Kindheit, in Skien, finden wir zwei Frauen, die später als Modell für mehrere seiner Dramenfiguren auszumachen sind. Seine Mutter, Mariken Altenburg Ibsen, war eine Künstlernatur, aus wohlhabendem

Hause und sehr schön. Ihre Ehe mit Knut Ibsen wurde nicht glücklich. Er meldete seinen Konkurs an und brachte Schande über die Familie. Ihre Gräber liegen in verschiedenen Ecken des Friedhofs. Marikens komplexer Charakter hat Ibsen in die bekannte Gestalt der Mutter Åse – der fantasievollen, doch armen Witwe des Bankrotteurs Jon Gynt - in *Peer Gynt* einfließen lassen. Mutter Åse liebt ihren schimpfenden und fluchenden Sohn, doch lässt sie sich auch – bis in den Tod hinein - die lebhaftesten Dinge einbilden. Ibsens Schwester Hedvig ist die einzige in der Familie, mit der er den Kontakt aufrecht erhält, nachdem er als 15-Jähriger das Elternhaus verlassen hatte. Er liebte seine jüngere Schwester und wir finden ein Echo von ihr in der Figur der Hedvig in der *Wildente*: Hier ist es die hingebungsvolle, kluge, junge 14-Jährige, die sich in tragischer Verwirrung das Leben nimmt, um ihrem Vater zu „beweisen“, dass sie ihn liebt.

Die nächste Frau, die auf entscheidende Weise Ibsens Leben zeichnen sollte, war ein Dienstmädchen, dem er während seiner Apothekerlehre als 17-Jähriger in Grimstad begegnete. Diese 28-Jährige, Else Sophie Jensdatter, war das Mädchen aus dem Apothekerhaushalt, das einen Sohn zur Welt bringen sollte, für den er die Vaterschaft übernahm. Er sah die Mesalliance in seinem Verhältnis zu dem um vieles älteren Dienstmädchen, aber auch seinen eigenen Fall. Genauso wenig wie ein Peer Gynt, als er mit seinen Eskapaden mit der „Grüngekleideten“ konfrontiert wird - konnte er vor dem Ganzen – vor dem Skandal in der Kleinstadt, vor seiner eigenen Beschämung – davonlaufen. Die Episode lud ihm eine lebenslange Bürde der Schuld auf. Eine fröhlichere und glücklichere Episode, die er ebenfalls in Grimstad erlebte, war seine Verliebtheit für die junge Clara Ebbell, eines der attraktivsten und intelligentesten jungen Mädchen der Stadt, die einer der gebildetsten Familien der Stadt entstammte. Über sie, Clara, schrieb der junge Dichterspross viele Gedichte, z.B. „Klarer Stern“ („Klare stjerne“) und „Resignation“ („Resignasjon“); dies waren Gedichte des romantischen Genres, mit deutlichen Referenzen zu Heine und Goethe. Später distanzierte er sich von den Gedichten und sagte, dass, die kleinen Teufel nie hätten gedruckt werden sollen.

Ibsen zog 1850 nach Christiania und nach einem Jahr von dort nach Bergen, wo er, gerade mal 23 Jahre alt, an dem neu gegründeten Norwegischen Theater als Regisseur arbeiten sollte. Hier traf er erst die blutjunge Rikke Holst, in die er sich heftig verliebte. Für sie war er der kleine Kerl mit den großen Gefühlen und als er um sie freite, war sie bereit. Sie verlobten sich und warfen die Ringe ins Meer. Da erschien Rikkens Vater, wurde rasend und Ibsen nahm die Beine in die Hand. Später, als er sie wieder traf, war sie verheiratet und hatte sechs Kinder. Sie inspirierte ihn zu einigen seiner liebsten Gedichte und ging in die Reihe seiner jungen Musen ein. Sie trennten sich. Dann traf er die ebenfalls junge Suzannah Thoresen, 19 Jahre alt und Tochter des Superintendenten Thoresen. Ihr Vater war sehr literatur- und kunstinteressiert, ihre Stiefmutter liebte und schrieb für das

Theater – anonym. Die beiden trafen sich im Januar 1856, als er zum literarischen Salon der Familie eingeladen wurde, sie trafen sich wieder auf einem Ball und in jener Nacht schreibt er das Gedicht "An die Einzige" ("Til den eneste")

Sie war – wie er – zurückhaltend, schüchtern, temperamentvoll, dramatisch veranlagt, unversöhnlich und eminent intelligent, ja bereits außerordentlich belesen und sie hatte den Mut andere mitzureitzen. Sie verlobten sich nach kurzer Zeit, und nach einem Jahr reiste Ibsen zurück in die Hauptstadt, um dort eine Stellung als Theaterintendant und Regisseur anzutreten. Ein Jahr später, im Juni 1858, heirateten sie und ließen sich danach in Christiania nieder. Hier beginnt ihr gemeinsames Leben. Nach einem Jahr gebärt sie ihren gemeinsamen Sohn und sie wohnen im elegantesten Haus der Stadt. Doch danach geht ihr Leben auf gemeinsamer Bahn den Bach hinunter. Er bekommt große Probleme am Theater, lebt über die Verhältnisse und sie müssen mehrmals umziehen, in ständig schlechtere Wohnungen. 1863 hat sie es satt, verlässt ihren Mann und zieht mit dem Sohn zu ihrer Stiefmutter nach Kopenhagen.

Es gibt wenige Ibsen-Biographen, die gesehen und verstanden haben, welche Bedeutung Suzannah Ibsen in dem Verhältnis zu ihrem Mann, Henrik Ibsen, spielte. Eigentlich hat sie nur Halvdan Koht ernst genommen und ihre Rolle beschrieben als eine vor allem moderne, unkonventionelle und belesene Frau. "Sie war die erste Frau, die er getroffen hatte, die das Leben ernst nahm; in ihren Augen fand er, träumende Gedanken". (Koht 1928: 149). In seinem Kapitel zu Ibsen und Bergen zieht er – als erster – eine Verbindungslinie zwischen Hjørdis aus *Nordische Heerfahrt* und Suzannah, „der Mensch gewordenen Sagafräulein, warm und stark zugleich“. (Koht 1928: 153). Koht weist darauf hin, dass sie Ibsens Visionen teilte und mit Wesensart und Charakter seine Persönlichkeit ergänzte. Ibsens eigene Charakteristik ist bekannt: "Sie ist ein Charakter, den gerade ich benötige, - unlogisch, doch mit einem starken, poetischen Instinkt, von großmütiger Gesinnung und mit einem nahezu ungestümen Hass auf alle kleinlichen Rücksichtnahmen". (Ibsen 1870: Brief an Peter Hansen, 28 Oktober) Wie war diese junge Frau, an die er sich band? Was hatte sie geprägt?

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Suzannah Thoresen kam als 8-Jährige nach Bergen, das dritte Kind in einer Geschwisterschar von fünf. Die Mutter war gestorben, als sie gerade mal fünf Jahre alt war. Hans Conrad Thoresen, der Gemeindepfarrer der Kreuzkirche in Bergen, gehörte nach damaligen Maßstäben zur oberen Gesellschaftsschicht der Stadt. Die Familie erstand das Pfarrhaus, in der besten Straße der Stadt; der Vater und die neue Frau, Magdalene Kragh, gehörten bald zu den tonangebenden Paaren innerhalb der kulturellen Elite der Stadt.

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Im Garten des Gemeindepfarrers wurde für die jungen Leute Theater gegeben. Hier versammelten sie sich im Sommer und inszenierten ihre eigenen Stücke. Suzannah spielte oft Männerrollen, denn Männer weinten nicht, sondern



handelten. Sie war eine dynamische und energische junge Dame, mit starkem Willen und Humor. Sie und Ibsen trafen sich in ihrem Interesse für das Theater. In Suzannah fand Ibsen den nahezu idealen Partner, das brachte er selbst mehrere Male in Briefen an Freunde zum Ausdruck. Sie las. Sie kannte die nordischen Sagas und englische Romandichtung, sie lernte Deutsch und Französisch. Später brachte sie sich auch Italienisch bei. Wir haben von ihr nur wenige Bilder. Diese zeigen ein Gesicht mit strahlenden Augen, mit vollem, schwerem, dunklem Haar, so schön, dass man viel davon sprach. Ihr Gesicht erhielt seine Schönheit durch die starke Lebendigkeit, die es erstrahlen ließ. Er war das Genie, sie der Charakter - auch war sie *sein* Charakter. Bisweilen knirschte die Ehe in ihrer Verankerung. Ein Jahr lang (1863-64) lebten sie getrennt. Dessen war er sich bewusst, doch wollte er es bis zum Schluss nicht einräumen. Doch sie war sich dessen die ganze Zeit bewusst und deshalb ließ sie sich vom Urteil der Leute kaum erschüttern. Vom ersten Augenblick an war sie sich darüber im Klaren, welches Talent sie zu verwalten hatte und dies begriff sie als ihre Lebensaufgabe. Sollten sie sie doch einen Spielverderber schimpfen, diese Freunde von ihm, die ihn oft in die Stadt schlepten! Sie war starrsinnig und anstrengend und hielt an ihm fest, wenn er außer Gefecht gesetzt worden war. Ihr Wille war letztendlich auch sein Wille.

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Es kann kaum Zweifel herrschen, dass Ibsen seiner Frau vieles verdankt. Sie zwang ihn an den Schreibtisch, berichtet er. Ihr einziges Kind, der Sohn Sigurd, erzählt: "Man muss selbst gehört haben, wie sie ihren fanatischen Glauben (an ihn) ausbreitete, um zu verstehen, was sie ihm während all der Jahre an Stärke gegeben hat. Wenn ihn die schonungslose Kritik niederschlug, war sie nicht verdrießlich. Ihre Augen funkelten und sie sagte: du mit deinem Talent! Warum scherst du dich darum, was das Mittelmaß schreibt! Und das endete immer damit, dass er befreit zu seiner Arbeit zurückkehrte." (Ibsen 1948: 30) Ohne die Unterstützung und Inspiration seiner Frau, hätte Ibsen wie der talentierte und kreative Schriftsteller Løvborg in *Hedda Gabler* werden können, der sich sowohl leicht locken als auch in hoffnungslose Situationen bringen lässt.

Suzannah findet man dann auch in vielen seiner Frauengestalten wieder, zuerst, 1857, in der streitbaren Sagafrau Hjørdis in der *Nordischen Heerfahrt*. 1862 erschien sein erstes Gegenwartsstück, die *Komödie über die Liebe*, die von den Kritikern wegen der darin enthaltenen Kritik an der Ehe regelrecht geschlachtet wurde. Ein frisch verheirateter Autor, Ibsen, mit einem kleinen Sohn, schreibt, dass Liebe und Ehe unvereinbar seien? Was hatte die Ehefrau dazu zu sagen? „Meine Frau ist die einzige, die mich verteidigt“, behauptete Ibsen, als die Kritik am stärksten wütete. (Ibsen 1870: Brief an Peter Hansen 28 Oktober ). So war Suzannah, sie verstand seine Gedanken, sie stütze ihn, doch nicht unkritisch. Und mehr als das: oft brachte sie ihn auf die Spur des brandaktuellen Stoffes, der zur Dichtung wurde. Denn sie war es, die las. Als Stuart Mills Werk über *Die Hörigkeit der Frau* (1869)

erschien, machte sie sich mit ihm vertraut und diesbezüglich war wohl auch ihre Stiefmutter, die Schriftstellerin Magdalene Kragh Thoresen, eine wichtige Wegbereiterin. Sie hatte radikale Haltungen und keine Angst, diese zum Ausdruck zu bringen. Als Witwe war sie mit der großen Kinderschar in ihre Heimat, Dänemark, zurückgekehrt. Von dort aus war sie imstande, sich als Autorin durchzuschlagen. Ohne Zweifel war sie jemand, der Positionen außerhalb des bürgerlich Akzeptierten einnahm und sie wurde zum Rollenmodell für ihre im Ganzen fünf Töchter, von denen Suzannah die Älteste war.

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Wir wissen, dass Henrik Ibsen 1864 nach Italien reiste, um "Kunst und Literatur zu studieren" – so hatte er sich jedenfalls in seinem Stipendiengesuch ausgedrückt. Ein halbes Jahr später kam seine Frau nach, sie fanden sich in Rom wieder und blieben danach bis 1891 im Ausland. Dort, im Exil, schuf er seine großen Dramen, die ihm Weltruhm verschafften. Er verließ Norwegen – einige meinen er flüchtete aus dem Land – nach einigen missglückten Jahren als Theaterintendant in Kristiania. Hier hatte er einige Male die Wohnung wechseln müssen, war in immer dürftigere Wohnungen gezogen, er musste den persönlichen Konkurs anmelden und stand am Rande des Abgrunds. Suzannah war ihrer Wege gegangen, zur "Mutter" nach Kopenhagen. Ihre Habseligkeiten wurden auf einem Dachboden gelagert und später, ohne ihr Wissen, auf einer Auktion verkauft, um die Schulden zu decken, die er hinterlassen hatte. In Rom fanden sie eine kleine Wohnung, nur anderthalb Zimmer, und in ihren 27 Jahren im Ausland kamen sie nie dazu, viel zu besitzen. Georg Brandes, der bekannte dänische Kritiker sagte von Ibsen, dieser Mann, der nicht einmal das Bett besitzt, in dem er schläft. Sie wollten ganz und gar unabhängige Menschen sein, in ihrem selbst gewählten Exil in Europa, anfänglich nur mit einem Existenzminimum. Hier entstand 1866 Ibsens *Brand*, dieses ergreifende Drama vom Pfarrer Brand, dem starrsinnigen, absoluten Idealisten, der weder nachgibt noch seine Positionen verrät. Das Stück verschaffte Ibsen internationalen Ruhm und bereits im Jahr darauf, 1867, erscheint *Peer Gynt*. Zuerst wurde das Stück von den damaligen ästhetisierenden Kritikern als „wild und roh“, als form-los bezeichnet. (Ibsen: 1867 Brief an Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, 9 Dezember). Später wird dieses dramatische Gedicht – das nicht für die Aufführung auf einer Bühne bestimmt war – wie bekannt zu einem der wichtigsten der Welt dramatik gezählt. Hier gibt es mehrere Frauentypen, am bekanntesten ist selbstverständlich Mutter Åse, die schon Züge mit Suzannah gemein hat, insofern als dass sie ebenfalls ihr Auge auf ihre ausschweifenden Männern haben und schwere Zeiten und finanziellen Bankrott erdulden muss. Gemeinsamkeiten gibt es auch in Bezug auf den Sinn für das Fabelhafte, für Märchen und Dichtung – die Lügen – als welche sie hier bezeichnet werden. Die Szene zwischen Mutter Åse und Peer, in der sie sich über den Ritt auf dem Rentier streiten, ist wie geradewegs den lauten Disputen zwischen Mutter und Vater entnommen, sagt Sigurd Ibsen, ihr Sohn. Das Temperament konnte im Hause Ibsen hohe Wellen schlagen. Suzannah war wohl

weit davon entfernt, eine Solveig-Figur abzugeben, die zu Hause saß und jahrzehntelang wartete, ohne Vorwürfe zu machen. Weit gefehlt! Sie war daran gewöhnt, die Dinge selbst zu ordnen, in den vielen Jahren in räumlicher Enge, mussten sie und der Sohn sich draußen herum bewegen, während der Mann schrieb. Sie liefen kreuz und quer durch Rom, wenn sie sich in Amalfi und auf Ischia befanden, nutzten sie die Tage für lange Wanderungen. Sie liebte es, zu laufen und machte während der Ferientaufenthalte in Berchtesgaden und Gossensass lange Wanderungen in den Alpen. Sie besaß eine starke Selbstdisziplin und impfte Mann und Sohn dasselbe ein. Doch sie war auch von lebhafter und künstlerischer Natur. Sie liebte Besuche in den Kunstgalerien der großen europäischen Städte.

Nachdem sie vier Jahre in Rom gewohnt hatten, zogen sie 1868 nach Dresden. Hier gab es die besten Museen Europas, diese kannten sie und der Sohn, der nun Schulkind war, in- und auswendig. Das, was sie sahen, wurde dem Dichter zugetragen. In vielen Dingen war sie sein erster Informant, dies galt sowohl für die neue Dichtung als auch für die Malerei. Sie gingen nicht oft ins Theater, auch in München nicht, das damals wie heute erstklassiges Theater bot. Sie ließen sich nämlich dort nieder, wegen der Schulausbildung des Sohnes. Ist es nicht eigentlich merkwürdig, dass diese zwei genuin interessierten Theatermenschen es nicht ins Theater schafften? Vielleicht hatte es damit zu tun, dass sie ihre eigene Theaterwerkstatt zu Hause hatten? Jeden Abend, nach dem Tagewerk des Schreibens, las Ibsen den beiden vor. Er nahm auch Vorschläge für Repliken entgegen. Die Alltagssprache Ibsens, wie wir sie aus den Dialogen seiner Gegenwartsdramen kennen, ist zweifelsohne in diesem engen Kreis „getestet“ worden, bevor sie in den Druck ging. Es ist die scheinbar einfache Rede der Texte, die stets tiefere Schichten und Zwischentexte in sich birgt, ein Meisterwerk, das auf einzigartige Weise Raum lässt für Neuinterpretationen und sogar Genrewechsel (hin zur Oper, Ballett, Film usw.). Doch wollen wir zurückkehren zu Ibsens Frauen, sowohl den fiktiven als auch den realen.

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Viele große Schauspielerinnen träumen davon, eines Tages Nora Helmer, Helene Alving, Rebekka West, Hedda Gabler oder Hilde Wangel, die eine oder andere Frauengestalt aus Ibsens Galerie zu spielen. Diese Gestalten sind fesselnd, sie sind Trägerinnen großer dramatischer Visionen und ohne den Zusammenhang, in den sie in dem jeweiligen Stück gesetzt sind, undenkbar. Man sollte sich fragen: Was ist charakteristisch für eben die *Auffassung von Frauen*, die in Ibsens Bühnenfiguren zum Ausdruck kommt? In seinen 24 umfangreicheren Schauspielen hat Ibsen im Ganzen genommen 300 mit Namen versehene Bühnengestalten geschaffen. Wenn wir das Werk chronologisch einteilen in eine vor-realistische und eine realistische Periode – mit 12 Werken für jede Periode – dann beanspruchen Frauen nur ein Viertel der Rollenliste der ersten Gruppierung und ca. die Hälfte der zweiten. Wir können etwas vereinfacht sagen, dass sich Ibsen im

Verlaufe seines dramatischen Wirkens in eine feministische Richtung bewegt hat. (Haakonsen 1978: 472-480). Wir haben die Tatsache, dass Suzannah las - und zwar die feministische Literatur der damaligen Zeit – und Ibsens Verbindung zu Georg Brandes als motivierende Faktoren genannt. Die Kampfsache der Frauen war für Ibsen nicht notwendigerweise die Emanzipation der Frauen. Er nannte es "Emanzipation des Menschen". Es ist nicht einfach zu sagen, was er in diese Unterscheidung hineinlegte. Er verwendete jedenfalls Frauenfiguren als Wegbereiter und Träger der Werte, die er befördern wollte. Die Frauen seiner Dramatik haben als Rollenmodelle gedient und tun dies noch immer.

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In den ersten historischen Werken (von 1850), die der „romantisierenden“ Periode angehören, galt die Konvention der Darstellung unkonventioneller Frauentypen, solcher, die man damals die *Dämonischen* nannte. Der erste, der über diese Ibsen-Frauen schrieb, war Georg Brandes, der bereits 1868 (Brandes: 1868) einen Unterschied machte zwischen den dunklen und hellen Frauen: die dunklen waren aktiv, handlungsfähig, aggressiv und für den Mann gefährlich. Die hellen waren passiv, zögerlich, versöhnlich, weich und mild. Diese Typeneinteilung ist leider für die Nachwelt so geblieben, ist jedoch eine solche Vereinfachung, dass sie für seine spätere Dichtung nicht verwendet werden sollte. Die Typeneinteilung gilt demnach vor allem für seine historischen Schauspiele. In der romantischen Dichtung ist die Frau, die sich für den Mann opfert und ihn zu einem höheren geistigen Leben inspiriert, ein anderer bekannter Typus. So erscheint Agnes in *Brand* (1866), Solveig in *Peer Gynt* (1867) und weniger bekannt, doch wichtig Svanhild in *Die Komödie der Liebe* (1862). Diese wird wieder auftauchen, in anderer Gestalt. Zu Ibsen und seinem Werk gehört diese literarische Konvention der 60er Jahre des 19. Jahrhunderts, geprägt wie er war durch seine Zeit. Doch selbstverständlich gibt es klare Verbindungslinien zwischen seinen frühen Frauengestalten und den späteren, die in seiner realistischen Phase entstanden. Diese rechnet man ab ca. 1878 und sie setzt ein mit *Stützen der Gesellschaft*. Das Dämonische beispielsweise leuchtet aus Hedda Gabler, ebenso die Fähigkeit, zu inspirieren oder "anzuregen", etwas, was sehr viele der realistisch gezeichneten Frauengestalten kennzeichnet. Laut Ibsen gibt es einen grundlegenden Unterschied zwischen dem Weiblichen und dem Männlichen, seine Auffassung kommt faktisch der Kierkegaards nahe: „Eine weibliche Seele hat und soll nicht die Reflexionsfähigkeit haben, die dem Mann eigen ist...Die Frau ist in ihrer Unmittelbarkeit im Wesentlichen ästhetisch, doch eben weil sie das wesentlich ist, liegt auch der Übergang zum Religiösen nahe.“ (Haakonsen 1978: 474). Das ist eine Betrachtungsweise, die sich einem romantischen Gedankengang nähert, denken wir heute. In den Aufzeichnungen zu *Nora. Ein Puppenheim* schreibt Ibsen: „Es gibt zweierlei Gesetze des Geistes, zweierlei Arten von Gewissen, eins, das der Manne innehat und ein ganz anderes der Frau. Sie verstehen einander nicht; doch die Frau wird in der Praxis nach dem Gesetz des Mannes gerichtet, so als ob sie keine Frau sei, sondern ein Mann.“ (Ibsen 1879: Band VIII, 368). Wenn Nora sich für ihr Leben gegen Mann und Kinder entscheidet,

ist das selbstverständlich eine äußerst provozierende Handlung – selbst heute. Sie sehnt sich nach „dem Wunderbaren“ (Ibsen 1879: Band VIII, 361). Nach dem, dass die Menschen, die einander lieben, in der Lage sind, in der Stunde der Not alle Rücksichten beiseite zu schieben, um dem Geliebten bzw. der Geliebten zu Hilfe zu eilen. Doch für den Mann, Helmer, gibt es einen solchen Begriff des „Wunderbaren“ nicht, genauso wenig wie er in der Lage ist, Rücksichten auf Karriere und soziales Ansehen beiseite zu lassen. Noras Traum, ihre Normen und ihr Gerechtigkeitsgefühl sind weit entfernt von dem des Mannes. Er ist nicht der Mann, den sie zu kennen glaubte. „Aber es opfert keiner seine Ehre denen, die er liebt“, sagt Helmer. Noras Entgegnung ist bekannt: „Das haben hunderttausend Frauen getan!“ (Ibsen 1879: 362).

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Das Ehepaar Ibsen diskutierte den Schluss von *Nora. Ein Puppenheim* eingehend und ganz sicher hatte Suzannah ihren Anteil an der Ausformung von Ibsens vielen radikal ausgerichteten Frauenfiguren. Ibsen wollte Nora zurückkommen lassen, doch da – so eine Familienanekdote – erhebt sich die Frau des Hauses und sagt: „Wenn du Nora zurückkehren lässt, dann gehe ich!“ Nun ist das Wesentliche an den Frauenfiguren Ibsens nicht, ob sie gehen oder nicht. In seinem autobiographischen Roman *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* zeichnet Rilke einen Ibsen, der in ein Mikroskop hinein schaut, um die geringsten Verlagerungen und Bewegungen im menschlichen Bewusstsein zu untersuchen. Was Ibsen interessiert, ist nicht die äußere Handlung, nicht, dass eine Frau geht. Er hält bei der inneren Bewegung inne und bei der scheinbar widersinnigen Verbindung des *Schönen* und des *Furchtbaren*. Diesen äußerst provozierenden Fokus findet man sowohl in *Gespenster* als auch in *Hedda Gabler*, um nur zwei Beispiele zu nennen. Und das kann man zur Frage nach dem Utopischen (dem Schönen) und dem Tragischen (dem Furchtbaren) in Beziehung setzen.

Die großen Frauengestalten, also die Hauptfiguren der letzten 12 Dramen, sind Träger von Visionen von einem „besseren“ Leben, einem Leben in einer neuen, befreiten Wirklichkeit. (Ystad 1996). Doch in ihre Träume und Sehnsüchte – die Illusionen – dringen Gedanken ein, die diese zurückschlagen, Gedanken, die einer „alten“ Welt, Konventionen und Falschheit angehören. Das geht deutlich aus Frau Alving's heroischem, doch gleichzeitig festgefahrener Kampf in *Gespenster* (1881) hervor. Sie liest die neue Literatur und durch das Lesen kommt sie, die an einem öden Ort am Fjord wohnt, zu denselben radikalen Gedanken wie der in Paris lebende Sohn Oswald, der Maler ist. Doch zwischen Gedanken und Handlung ist auch hier ein großer Unterschied. Die Vergangenheit knebelt sie, genau so wie die Vergangenheit das Leben des Sohnes vorherbestimmt hat. Das weist, kann man sagen, auf eine düstere Perspektive in Bezug auf die Möglichkeit einer „Befreiung“ hin und steht in Übereinstimmung mit Freuds Auffassung, dass man sich als handelnde Person bestenfalls durch einen lang andauernden Bewusstseins- und Bearbeitungsprozess frei machen kann von der Vergangenheit.

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Die vielen Ähnlichkeiten zwischen Ibsens Dichtung und Freuds Gedankengang und Therapie sind Gegenstand vieler Fachartikel. Nichts zuletzt hat Freud selbst Bahn brechende Analysen mehrerer Dramen Ibsens geschrieben. Seine Interpretationen sind aktuell und bilden einen ständigen Ausgangspunkt für neue, psychoanalytische Lesarten der Dramen. Wie bekannt räumte Freud ein, dass er die weibliche Psyche nicht bis auf den Grund hin verstehe und empfahl die *Dichtung* als Quelle für ein solch angestrebtes Verstehen. Ibsens Schauspiele der 80er und 90er Jahre des 19. Jahrhunderts nahmen Freuds Verständnis vom Männlichen und Weiblichen in auffallendem Maße vorweg. In *Gespenster* wird ein Freudscher Begriff thematisiert – der der Wiederholung – was bedeutet, dass man so von dem Vergangenen gebunden ist, dass sich altes Verhalten wiederholt. Die Wiederholung ist eins der psychischen Muster, mit denen beide arbeiteten. Das Unbewusste und die Macht, die es über die Sinne hat, stellt ein anderes gemeinsames Interessengebiet dar. Der Wunsch, das Wahre des Individuums aufzudecken, ist grundlegend, ebenso die Befreiung von Schuldgefühlen. Ibsen – wie Freud – betrachteten dies als Voraussetzung für eine bessere Gesellschaft. Die Verwendung und Interpretation von Symbolen und Träumen ist ein weiterer gemeinsamer Interessenaspekt. Die Interpretationen bieten den Menschen neue Möglichkeiten der Annäherung an die Wirklichkeit. Die Thematik *Ibsen-Freud* ist wichtig, doch zu weitreichend, als dass wir an dieser Stelle weiter darauf eingehen können.

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Viele haben Ibsens Affären mit jungen Frauen große Bedeutung beigemessen. Eine solche war die mit der jungen Wienerin Emilie Bardach, der er 1889 während der Sommeraufenthalt in Gossensass begegnete. Sie war erst 18 und wurde zu seiner Vertrauten, sowohl während seines Urlaubs dort als auch in dem späteren Briefwechsel. Nach Ibsens Tod 1906 publizierte Brandes ihre Briefe, ein Sensationalität seither an Ibsens Biographie haften blieb. Und mehr als das: Fräulein Bardach wurde als Modell für Hedda Gabler gesehen, diese junge Verführerin, diese unberechenbare, schöne und poetisch veranlagte Frau, die Ibsen "die Maisonnie eines Septemberlebens" nannte. (Ibsen 1889: Brief an Emilie Bardach, 20 September). Faszination spürte Ibsen auch bei seiner Begegnung mit Helene Raff, der er in München begegnete. Sie war Malerin und während Suzannah und Henrik Ibsens Aufenthaltes dort oft in deren Haus. Sie diskutierten voller Eifer Malerei und Literatur, sie war schön und elegant. Frau Ibsen hielt große Stücke auf sie und über die kursierenden Gerüchte, dass ihr Mann von jüngeren Frauen angezogen sei, lachte sie. Doch als das Paar 1891 von München heim nach Kristiania, dem heutigen Oslo, zog, entstand eine neue Verbindung, die Suzannah ganz und gar nicht gefiel.

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Ibsen, der nun 63 Jahre alt war, begeisterte sich sehr für die junge, norwegische Pianistin Hildur Andersen. Er verehrte ihr seine späteren Manuskripte, er begleitete sie zu Konzerten - er, der er sein Leben lang kaum Musik gehört hatte. Da sich Suzannah wegen ihrer rheumatischen Erkrankung oft in wärmeren Ländern

aufhalten musste, lebte Ibsen oft allein. Die Pianistin wurde bei ihm gesehen und nach Rückkehr der Ehefrau, wurde dem Ganzen ein Riegel vorgeschoben: Fräulein Andersen war im Hause unerwünscht, hieß es. Wahrscheinlich war dies Ibsens einziges, wirklich ernsthaftes Verhältnis zu einer anderen als seiner Frau. Er nahm viele Frauen für sich ein, doch für ihn gab es niemand anderen als Suzannah. Das konstatiert er selbst in vielen Briefen, von der ersten bis zur letzten Stunde. Er studierte Menschen, er war von jungen Leuten angezogen, besonders Frauen, denn sie besaßen Vitalität, Neugier und Fantasie. Eine solche junge Frau betritt in einem von Ibsens Dramen der späten Jahre, in *Baumeister Solness* (1892), die Bühne. Der Architekt Ragnar Solness ist verheiratet und reich, er ist gut in seiner Arbeit, doch führt er eine traurige Ehe mit Aline – die viele für ein Portrait von Ibsens Frau halten. Die junge Frau, die die Bühne betritt, heisst Hilde. Sie fordert den Baumeister heraus, der ihr Offenheit und Vertrauen entgegenbringt. Es zeigt sich, dass Hilde ein großes Talent zur Verführung besitzt; sie bringt ihn dazu, gefährliche Sachen zu machen, die sich im Grenzbereich zwischen Realität und Symbolik befinden, wie beispielsweise einen Turm zu besteigen, den er selbst für sein neues Haus gebaut hat. Er fällt hinunter, schlägt sich zu Tode, und dies vor einer großen Menschenmenge, die sich versammelt hat, um das neu errichtete Bauwerk zu besehen.

Der Baumeister stürzt und auch die anderen Männer (Borkman, Rubek), die in Ibsens Dichtung aus den 90ern das Schicksal herausfordern, indem sie den Rahmen des von ihnen erwarteten verlassen, erwartet der Tod. Das Gewöhnliche setzt Ibsen mit dem Konventionellen und Trivialen gleich und stempelt es in seinem dramatischen Kontext als unwesentlich. Seitdem er sich als Künstler etabliert hatte, lebte er in äußerster Sparsamkeit, ein Leben, geprägt von Routine und erstarrten Formen. Dafür wurde er verhöhnt, u.a. von Strindberg. Doch vielleicht kann man mit Dürrenmatt sprechen, wenn man sagt, dass er, indem er ein Leben ohne große Erschütterungen wählte, weitaus mehr Lebensschicksale in seinem Kopf, in seiner Kunst „ausleben“ konnte. Wie sollte seine eigene Kreativität Wirkung erzielen, wenn er gleichzeitig herumexperimentierte und ein ausschweifendes Leben führte? Ibsens Experimente waren an seinen Blick auf die Dinge gebunden, daran zu sehen – und an die Möglichkeiten, zu denen hin sich die Gedanken öffneten.

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Zusammenfassend bleibt zu sagen: Wir haben uns rasch durch einige Stationen von Ibsens Leben bewegt. In diesem Abriss haben wir die Bedeutung einiger Frauen, die es tatsächlich in Ibsens Leben gab, für ihn und seine Dichtung, in Augenschein genommen. An dieser Stelle möchte ich gern die Gelegenheit wahrnehmen, all den Geschichten, die der „Sensation“ zuliebe, um sein Leben herum konstruiert wurden, das Dramatische zu nehmen. Er führte ein Leben ständiger Anspannung, um Kunst zu schaffen und die Frau, in deren Schuld er vor allen anderen stand, war seine Frau Suzannah. Er dankt ihr in dem wunderbaren Gedicht „Dank“ („Tak“).

(Übersetzung aus dem Norwegischen: Sabine Richter)

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## ET KORT NOTAT OM IBSENS BRUG AF TITLER OG NAVNE

JØRGEN STENDER CLAUSEN\*\*\*

**RESUMÉ.** Et kort notat om Ibsens brug af titler og navne. Forfatterens valg af titel og personnavn i sine værker giver os sædvanligvis nogle vigtige oplysninger om tid, sted og miljø. Men derudover kan der ligge en række signaler om stil og genre og om forfatterens holdning til sine personer. Endvidere har de forskellige tidsaldre deres foretrukne titler og navne, ligesom de enkelte perioder i et forfatterskab er karakteriseret ved en bestemt navnepraksis. Ibsens digtning er i så henseende typisk, og i øvrigt giver hans samlede produktion forfattet over et halvt århundrede et rigt materiale til en onomastisk undersøgelse. Det omfatter 22 titler, 257 navngivne personer og et meget stort antal unavngivne. Men mens gennemsnittet af såvel navngivne som unavngivne personer er relativt højt i de tidlige ”romantisk-historiske” stykker (15 navngivne og tit endnu flere unavngivne), så falder antallet til under det halve i såvel de ”realistiske” samfundsdrammer, som i de ”symbolske” stykker. Men samtidig er det interessant at bemærke, hvorledes Ibsen i begge disse grupper ofte benytter symbolske titler og navne. *Et dukkehjem* er i denne forbindelse symptomatisk.

Ibsens benyttelsen af symbolske navne og titler, der ofte henviser til andre litterære værker og tidsaldre, ikke mindst af gammelnordisk oprindelse, gør det ofte vanskeligt at ”få fat i” det intertekstuelle element og måske umuligt at oversætte.

Artiklen er et forsøg på gennem fremdragelsen af nogle få eksempler at belyse dette forhold.

Enhver forfatter vælger omhyggeligt titel og personnavne. Det sker ikke mere eller mindre tilfældigt. Og de signalerer dermed til læser (eller tilskuer) en række oplysninger, som ikke alene kan have at gøre med genre og stil men også med tekstens atmosfære, samfundsmiljø, relationer, forfatterholdning etc. Holbergs valg af titler og personnavne i sine komedier er i så henseende emblematiske. Han er uden tvivl en af de største mestre på dette felt i nordisk litteratur, og en række af

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disse titler og navne er bevaret i dagligsproget og i den folkelige forestillingsverden den dag i dag. Ofte var de, ligesom dialogen, lidet polerede, og til tider anakronistiske, paradoksale, ambivalente eller obskøne. Men det gjorde ikke noget, for forfatteren var jo Hans Mikkelsen, der var brygger i Kalundborg, og ikke Ludvig Holberg, professor ved universitetet i København. Pseudonymet Hans Mikkelsen stiller Holberg mere frit, giver ham større distance til stoffet, og giver ofte anledning til metapoetiske indslag enten i dialogen, fx. ved ”forklaringer” rettet til publikum, eller i forord og noter.

Forfatteres (og forældres) valg af navn er blandt andet bestemt af det forhold, at navnet ikke blot betragtes som en betegnelse og identifikation af mennesket men også som en beskrivelse af det. Navnet har en historie og en skæbne, der knyttes til den person, der bærer det. Troens navne: nordiske gudenavne og Biblens navne, især kristne helgen- og apostelnavne, florerer stadigvæk i nordisk navngivningstradition – og i Ibsens stykker. Men der var også tabu-navne på ting eller personer, som fremkaldte rædsel og ulykke, hvis de blev udtalt. Ofte var det udtryk for overtro, der som bekendt også er en slags tro. Det hænger sammen med ”at mennesket i dets fysiske eksistens ikke er noget absolut selvstændigt, isoleret væsen, men derimod står i en vedvarende og reel forbindelse med mange ting, der findes omkring det i naturen” (K.Nyrop, VI, pp. 115-116).

I denne forbindelse kan det endvidere nævnes, at Ibsen ofte benytter efternavne, der ud fra det toponomatiske aspekt siger noget om personernes oprindelse og sociale status: Sol-ness, Fjeld-bo, Guld-stad, Stens-gård, Lyng-strand, Elv-sted, Løv-borg, Bro-vik, Borg-heim, eller som kan orientere og påvirke vores sympati eller antipati for personen: Ulf-heim, Stock-mann, Strå-mand etc., altså med en symbolsk og komisk betydning. Fx. kan stort set alle ti personnavne i *Kjærlighedens Komædie* (1862) henføres til denne kategori.

Navne- og titelvalg angiver imidlertid ikke blot forskelle mellem forfattere fra samme tidsperiode, for eksempel Ibsen versus Strindberg, men også udviklingen inden for et enkelt forfatterskab, såsom Ibsens, hvor de enkelte perioder i hans digtning i høj grad kan aflæses i valget af titler og personnavne. Perioder som mere eller mindre præcist kan defineres som den romantiske, den realistiske og den symbolistiske periode.

I Ibsens tilfælde omfatter hele dette stof 22 titler og 257 navngivne personer samt, specielt i de tidlige ”romantisk-historiske” skuespil til og med *Peer Gynt*, et omfattende antal unavngivne medvirkende, der som regel angives ved det arbejde, de udfører: tjener, eller ved en massebetegnelse: studenter. I disse første skuespil er der gennemsnitlig omkring femten navngivne personer pr. stykke, og som regel med ”historiske” navne. Fx. har *Kongsemnerne* (1864) 20 navngivne personer. Mens gennemsnittet falder til omkring syv navngivne personer i de følgende stykker samt få eller slet ingen unavngivne. *Gengangere* har således kun fem navngivne personer og ingen uden navn, mens *Når vi døde vågner* kun har henholdsvis fire og to samt et antal ”tjenere, badegæster og børn”.

Hvis hele dette stof blev behandlet i lyset af den moderne onomastik og herunder statistisk og sociolingvistisk, ville det kunne give en række vigtige indikationer om udviklingen i Ibsens værk, i hans læsning og i hans kulturelle baggrund, foruden at det ville lette arbejdet for oversættere og gøre det af med en stor mængde fejl og uklarheder.

At en person er uden navn betyder ikke nødvendigvis, at han også er "stum", altså uden dialog. Tværtimod kan der være tillagt ham en vigtig rolle som fx. "budbringer", "tjener", "inspektør ved badet" etc., og personbetegnelsen er tilstrækkelig for at forstå handlingsgangen, da det ikke er denne persons navn og karakter/psykologi, der har interesse, men hans funktion som (direkte eller indirekte) kommunikator. Ja selv en hovedperson kan være uden navn, således som det er tilfældet i Hamsuns roman *Sult* (1890), eller han kan hedde *Ingen* (1920) som i Borbergs ekspressionistiske teaterstykke af samme navn, eller *Den ukendte* som i Strindbergs *Till Damaskus* (1898). Det afgørende er, at hvadenten en person er navngiven eller ej og uden nogen betydning for handlingen, kan han fremkomme med (eller modtage) nogle fundamentale oplysninger for forståelsen af stykkets intrige eller "atmosfære". Man kunne fx. nævne fx. et par replikker, husholdersken *Madam Helseth* i *Rosmersholm* fremsætter i stykkets første linier, hvorved den stemning af gru og anger, der karakteriserer hele stemningen, straks angives: "Våger han sig over kloppen?", siger hun, da hun ser Rosmer gå hen ad møllevejen, det vil sige "går han over gangbroen?" [jeg har oversat det, da jeg selv måtte bruge ordbog i forbindelse med "kloppen"]. Og da Rebekka svarer "Det er det jeg vil se. . . Nei. Han vender om. . .", tilføjer: "Herregud, ja. Det må vel falle tungt for pastoren å tre over *den* kloppen. Der hvor slikt noe er skjedd, der –". Gangbroen (et par simple planker over fossen) er det sted, hvor Rosmers kone Beate er druknet, og det er åbenbart denne hændelse, Rosmer gruer over.

Man kunne på sin vis sammenligne en sådan "andenrangsrolle" med den person man før i tiden kaldte en "konfident", altså en ven eller en bekendt eller en tjener, som en af stykkets vigtige personer henvender sig til, samtidig med han at derved indirekte får kommunikeret nogle oplysninger til publikum og måske fortæller noget, som de andre personer i stykket ikke ved eller ikke skal vide. Denne konfident er i reglen navngiven, men også i disse tilfælde er navnet ligegyldigt.

Personbetegnelsen kan imidlertid være mere eller lige så karakteriserende som et navn, idet den kan "farve" og tydeliggøre atmosfæren og betydningsbaggrunden. At Irenes "selskabsdame" i *Når vi døde vågner* er diakonisse og ikke en hvilken som helst Fru hvemsomhelst er af betydning for vores opfattelse og vurdering af Irene. Og selv om denne diakonisse kun har en enkelt replik i stykket, så er hendes blotte tilstedeværelse på scenen af stor vigtighed for at forstå Irenes fremtræden. I denne forbindelse kan det anføres, at der ofte er stor forskel på de oplysninger henholdsvis læseren og tilskueren får. Fx. kan tilskueren se, at Irenes rejseledsagerske er diakonisse, men for læseren er det nødvendigt, at det står specificeret i personlisten, i

modsat fald bliver det uklart, hvilken indflydelse denne person udøver, og hvorfor hendes eneste – og samtidig stykkets sidste replik er ”Pax vobiscum”.

Navn og titel kan være neutrale: *Henrik den IV*, *Niels Lyhne*; eller de kan være symbolske eller allegoriske: *Sorgagre*, *Pelle erobreren*, *Lykke Per*, *Vildanden*. Titlen kan være en konkret situation: *Jul i købmandsgaarden*, eller en lokalitet: *Langelandsrejse* etc. Og den kan indeholde forskellige referencer og hentydninger: *Kærlighedens komedie*.

Det er formålet med denne artikel at nævne nogle (få) eksempler på navne og titler fra Ibsens dramaer, og herunder hans brug af titler i en intertekstuel sammenhæng – allerede ordet drama, som han ofte, men ikke altid, skriver under titlen, evt. sammen med et tillægsord, sætter en serie betragtninger igang, fx. at et drama, således som det ofte er tilfældet hos Ibsen, kan indeholde såvel tragiske som komiske elementer: det moderne menneskeliv er både en komedie og en tragedie. Og lignende betragtninger af dramaturgisk art opstår i forbindelse med en hel række andre oplysninger: forord, efterskrift, navneliste og genrebetegnelse, oplysninger som kun læseren nyder godt af, og som ofte betegnes paratekst. I en dramatekst findes der endvidere en bitekst som ”omfatter allt i ett drama som inte verbaliseres på scenen, allt som inte är <det talade ordet>. Till bitexten kan man räkna också pjästiteln och replikrubrikerna”. (Egil Törnqvist, p. 149).

I lighed med alle de øvrige nordiske forfattere fra 1800-tallets første halvdel med Oehlenschläger i spidsen, var Ibsen stærkt påvirket af det gammelnordiske sagnstof: legender, fabler, mytologien og ikke mindst folkeviser. *Gesta danorum* og de kort tid forinden ”genopdagede” islandske sagaer blev plyndret og efterlignet, og det nordiske navnestof fandt vej til forfatternes værker.

Det fremgår tydeligt af den store nordmands brug af titler og navne i de første ”historiske” stykker til og med *Kongsemnerne* (1864). Men også i *Brand* (1866) og *Peer Gynt* (1867) er der fuldt op af trolde og elverpiger. Selve navnet Peer Gynt er som bekendt en person fra de norske folkeeventyr.

I de ”realistiske” og samfundskritiske dramaer begynder den udbredte brug af symbolske titler og navne: *Samfundets støtter*, *Et dukkehjem*, *Gengangere*, *En folkefjende*. Og navnene på de tre vigtigste personer i *Et dukkehjem* er *Thorvald* altså den nordiske krigsgud i fuld udrustning, *Nora*, et diminutiv til Eleonora, den tragiske heltinde fra den europæiske teatertradition, eller det forelskede pigebarn hos Holberg. Og endelig *Rank*, der som en krumrygget gentleman er på vej ud af tilværelsen.

Ibsen ”genoptog i sin alderdom en elementsymbolik, som han havde anvendt i nogle af sine romantiske ungdomsdrammer, *Hærmændene* og *Gildet på Solhaug*. Dengang skete det under indtryk af folkeviser og sagaer og altså på grundlag af allerede omformede, menneskeliggjorte naturindtryk”. Men nu, fra og med *Rosmersholm*, forsøgte han ”at aftvinge elementerne en psykisk ’mening’

under påvirkning af moderne evolutionslære” (Aage Henriksen, p.16). Luften, jorden og havet besidder hver for sig nogle kræfter der både tiltrækker og frastøder og har dermed afgørende betydning for menneskets liv og lykke. Det er ikke længere noget blot og bart symbolsk men arketypisk og forankret i det ubevidste. Havet bliver for Ibsen menneskets oprindelige element: vi drages mod havet og længes efter det, og vi er bundne og afhængige af havet og ønsker at komme tilbage til det, det repræsenterer det evigt tabte. Men det er især kvinderne; mændene er godt tilfredse med jorden, hvor de sublimerer kærligheden ved at udkæmpe blodige kampe om prestige og magt, og når de søger op mod lyset, op i luften, så falder de ned og tilintetgøres, som det fx. er tilfældet i *Bygmester Solness* og *Når vi døde vågner*.

Denne dragning mod havet er forbundet med seksualiteten, og det dokumenteres allerede i folkeviserne, hvor billedet blev konkretiseret og legemliggjort af en havmand, der kunne drage kvinderne og få dem med ned i havet, fx. i *Agnete og havmanden*, hvis historie blev gendigtet af H.C.Andersen. I det hele taget myldrede det med havfruer og havmænd i folkeviserne og i Romantikken, og en af dem hedder Rosmer havmand.

Det er nu kun uhyrets navn, der udgør titlen: *Rosmer havmand*, og det er med dette navn, folkevisen er gengivet hos Svend Grundtvig (II, p. 72 ff.), som samtidig analyserer og aftrykker de forskellige opskrifter, som foruden dem af dansk oprindelse omfatter skotske, svenske, islandske, færøske og specielt norske. Historien er stort set den samme i alle opskrifter, og gendigtes af Oehlenschläger i *Digte 1803*: Elina, kong Ullers elskede, er forsvunden, men kongen samler sine mænd og sejler afsted for at finde hende, hvilket også lykkes efter en mængde genvordigheder, herunder en storm som medføre at ”Roret brak! . . . og Skibet sprak.” Og Eline fortæller nu sin historie, nemlig hvordan hun ”En Sommeraften, klar og huld”, da hun sad på stranden, blev overfaldet og bortført af den enøjede Rosmer havmand, der ”stak ned i Dybet paa en Hval”, og at hun nu har siddet på ”Havsens Bund” et år. Eline bliver altså reddet, og kan leve lykkeligt med sin Uller. Men hun har jo heller ikke ladet sig drage af havmanden, således som det sædvanligvis er tilfældet med folkevisens kvinder, der er i samme situation. Men det kan jo også være at det er løgn, og at hendes og Oehlenschlägers version er tilpasset tid, sted og omstændigheder: den seksuelle tiltrækning er væk, den er en saga blot. Men da Ibsens skrev *Rosmersholm* (1886) var Biedermeier død som en sild, og man turde nævne tingene ved deres rette navn.

Navnet Rosmer var et tabuord og er derfor tilsyneladende ukendt i de forskellige opslagsværker og navneencyklopædier. Det eneste sted, hvor det har været muligt at finde noget er i *Ordbog over det danske Sprog*. Her står under opslagsordet *Rosmer* – men med et kors foran, altså ”nu ubrugeligt”, at det i oldnordisk skrives ”rossmall” eller ”rosmhvalr”, og i ældre nydansk, altså de ældste folkevisers sprog, betød ”hvalros”, ”havmand”.

Det er ikke alene muligt men nok sandsynligt, at Ibsen foruden den oehenschlägerske version kendte folkevisen, om ikke andet så fra *Danmarks gamle Folkeviser* (1856 ff.). Og det samme gjorde alle belæste og dannede mennesker i samtiden, og det fortsatte de med at gøre mindst til og med midten af forrige århundrede – men selvfølgelig kun i Norden.

Ved at sætte navnet Rosmer op i titlen, understreger Ibsen forbindelsen mellem folkevisens og dramaets hovedperson, ligesom han alluderer til havmandens foretrukne element, havet, ved at tilføje ordet ”holm”, og med *Rosmersholm* har vi således en allusion om stykkets miljø og situation. Ibsen forsyner os med andre ord lige fra stykkets start med oplysninger af stor betydning for vores gestaltning af Rosmers og af stykkets to kvindeskikkelsers karakter og historie. Og vi er således på forhånd orienteret om den seksuelle tiltrækning, han udøver over de kvinder, som – i modsætning til folkevisens heltinde – takket været deres erotiske besættelse går deres undergang i møde: de drukner (sig) begge to i fossen.

De to kilder, Ibsen henviser til: folkevisen og *Digte 1803*, var som nævnt velkendte i samtiden, og alene af den grund er stykkets titel i langt højere grad associationsdannende end den titel, han først havde tænkt sig at benytte: *De hvide heste*. Det drejer sig om havjættens Ægirs heste, således som de nævnes i den nordiske mytologi, dvs. bølgerne, der er Ægirs sønner. Ægir var tillige guden for de forskellige havvæsener, der overfaldt kvinder og søfarende. Ibsen havde altså tænkt sig at benytte denne *kenning* som titel for derved at alludere til druknedøden, men ville derved ikke have opnået at forme den karakteristiske hverken af hovedpersonen eller af de to kvindeskikkelser, som den endelige titel til gengæld udtrykker så prægnant.

Hvad gør en oversætter med en sådan titel? Hvis han skriver ”Rosmers ø”, bliver folk forvirrede, da det ikke svarer til stykkets geografi. Hvis han skriver ”Rosmers hjem”, som de gør i Frankrig og Italien, så går det også galt, idet titlen i begge tilfælde blot får betydning af en mere eller mindre neutral stedsangivelse. Oversætteren vælger derfor fornuftigvis ofte titlen *Rosmersholm*, som eventuelt kan forstås i sin fulde betydning på engelsk og nordtysk. I sin ellers meget præcise og interessante bog, *Ibsen (1916)*, løb den kendte italienske Ibsen-ekspert Scipio Slataper sur i problematikken, da han selvsagt ikke kendte noget til Rosmer havmand eller til holme, og da stykket som nævnt på italiensk hedder *La casa di Rosmer*. Han tolkede nemlig ”casa” (hus/hjem) som ”gård”, og gør derpå meget ud af at beskrive det norske miljø og traditioner, idet ”Gården er den norske families hjem og dens verden” (Slataper, p. 265).

Og for at det ikke skal være løgn, gav Ibsen samtidig Rosmer fornavnet Johannes. Altså et rigtig godt kristent navn, der svarer til den forhenværende pastor Rosmers kald, som går ud på at skabe ”glade adelsmennesker”. Men der er den hage ved det, at der synes at have været en vis aversion mod dette navn. Det havde en ringeagtende betydning, og Nyrop nævner en række sammensatte betegnelserne såsom *Klodshans* (altså egentlig Klods-Johannes) og anfører desuden et citat fra Holbergs *Ulysses von Ithacia*, der illustrerer denne negative holdning til navnet (Nyrop, pp. 112-113).

I *Fruen fra havet* ser vi havmanden lyslevende på scenen, skønt det hævdes, at han er druknet. Det er altså en levende død, hvoraf der efterhånden begynder at være adskillige i Ibsens seneste stykker. Han hedder Friman, og han lever sit liv frit og uden skupler men er samtidig trofast, og i modsætning til Rosmer havmand er han feminist og respekterer kvinderne, således at stykkets hovedperson "havfruen" Ellida har tiltro til ham og er ham huld. Og hun siger om ham: "den mand er som havet".

Men de mest levende døde er hovedpersonerne i *Når vi døde vågner*, hvor titlen samtidig er en af Rubeks replikker, der får Irene til at svare: " - så opdager vi, at vi aldrig har levet".

Ibsen har her, ligesom det var tilfældet med *Rosmersholm* og lige så bombastisk placeret en intertekstualitet i titlen. I dette tilfælde drejer det sig om et citat fra Kierkegaards *Skyldig – Ikke Skyldig*, hvor frater Taciturnus foretager et "Psykologisk eksperiment" med hovedpersonens (og forfatterens) lidelseshistorie, altså ligesom Ibsen gør med Rubek. Og det unge menneske Quidam skriver dagbog om sin historie og om den tidligere elskede. Om morgenen skriver han om kærligheden og om natten om lidelsen. Og ved midnatstide den 12. januar, skriver han:

"Alt sover; kun de Døre stige nu frem af Graven og leve om igen. Og end ikke det gør jeg,

Thi da jeg ikke er død, kan jeg jo ikke leve om, og dersom jeg var død, kunde jeg jo heller

Ikke leve om, thi jeg har jo aldrig levet." (Kierkegaard, VI, p. 224).

Det var i det hele taget ikke levende døde det skortede på i Kierkegaards forfatterskab og i den efterfølgende tid. Kierkegaard angiver som bekendt, at bogen om Andersen stammer fra "en endnu levendes papirer", mens han i afhandlingen *Det antike Tragiskes reflex i det moderne Tragiske* hævder at være død.

Ibsen var moralist og bar på en anseelig skyldfølelse, og det blev ikke bedre ved at læse Kierkegaards værker. Men på det punkt kunne han ikke styre sig: Kierkegaard er et fixpunkt på den ibsenske stjernehimmel.

Men derfor kunne han godt, lige som Holberg, more sig over menneskets særheder, og det er kendt, at han for at tegne en karakter i stor udstrækning benyttede træk fra samtidige personer. Også for at karikere dem. En meget samtidig skikkelse var Knut Hamsun, som banede sig vej i det litterære vildnis ved at hugge ned til højre og venstre på udpræget norsk facon. Og også, og især Ibsen stod for skud. Men i stedet for at tage til genmæle mod det unge menneske, kunne man jo lave en karikatur af ham i et stykke. For det første kunne man give ham et navn, som angav, at han kom et eller sted fra oppe i vildmarken, hvor ulv og bjørn er daglig kost. Dernæst kunne man udnævne ham til storvildtsjæger, der samtidig jagter og drager kvinderne næsten lige så meget som en havmand, og i stedet for hvalrosser forsyne ham med et koppel glubske jagthunde, der ind imellem får tilkastet en luns råt kød, men hvis de er sårede fêr et skud hagl i kroppen. Næsten lige som den

vældige jæger løjtnant Glahn i romanen *Pan* (1894), der skyder sin hund og sender liget som gave til den pige, der har været ham utro. Endvidere kunne man tilføje, at når storvildtet er anskudt, så var han der hurtigt med sin kniv og går det af med byttet. Og så kunne man lade den naive Maja føle sig draget af sådan et mandfolk. Som tænkt så gjort. Karikaturen af Hamsun fik navnet Ulfheim og glimrer nu til tidernes ende ved sin larmende tilstedeværelse i *Når vi døde vågner*.

## BENYTTET LITTERATUR

Kristoffer Nyrop, *Ordenes Liv* I-VI, Gyldendal, København 1934.

Egil Törnqvist, *Det talade ordet*. Om Strindbergs dramadialog, Carlssons, Stockholm 2001.

Aage Henriksen, *De ubændige*. Om Ibsen – Blixen – hverdagens virkelighed – det ubevidste. Gyldendal, København 1984.

Scipio Slataper, *Ibsen*, Fratelli Bocca, Torino 1916.

Søren Kierkegaard, *Samlede Værker* I-XV, Gyldendal, København 1920-36, udg. af Drachmann, Heiberg og Lange.



## DOLL HOUSING

MARK B. SANDBERG\*\*

**ABSTRACT.** *Doll Housing.* This article examines the ways in which Ibsen undermines the easy embrace of the notion of "home" in his 1879 play, *A Doll House*. A close reading of the word pair "house" and "home" reveals how the play's contest of architectural metaphors opens up space for thinking about new positions beyond simple endorsement or rejection of the bourgeois home. Nora is an early example in Ibsen's prose plays of the "modern unhomely," a character whose rejection of the home resonates with the much broader cultural stakes of architectural thought among progressive authors of the late nineteenth century.

One of the most persistent features of Ibsen's prose plays taken as a group is their special, ongoing interest in architectural metaphor. This interest exceeds what one might otherwise expect of the bourgeois interior drama, which by definition is in some sense already exhibits an architectural sensibility due to its special interest in the substantive representation of domestic space and in the interface between publicity and privacy. An assumption of this essay, however, is that Ibsen's interest in architecture goes beyond the general late nineteenth-century trend toward "great reckonings in little rooms," to use Bert States's phrase.<sup>1</sup> Ibsen's plays, with their glass walls, doll houses, orphanage memorials, attic lofts, widow's villas, and master builders, deploy a more conspicuous architectural thematic than that one might expect from the simple formal development of realistic interior drama. That is, it is not surprising given Ibsen's realist aesthetic that his plays take place largely *in* the house; more interesting is that these dramas are *about* the house at the same time.

Another way of saying this is that Ibsen's notion of the free individual is quite inextricably entangled with the architectural imagination. The most reductive version of that claim would be that Ibsen's individualism is resolutely anti-

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<sup>1</sup> Bert States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theatre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

architectural—to be free is to leave the home. This is the way Ibsen's 1879 play, *A Doll House*, is most often understood, with its dramatic slamming of the door and turning of the back on domestic life. But this kind of freedom—the absence of architectural constraint—is still profoundly architectural in its point of reference (there are many other ways of conceptualizing freedom without invoking the rejection of a built structure). Nora's freedom outside the home will remain informed by the idea of home, even if in negation. The task of this essay will be to explore this complex dynamic in detail.

I begin by emphasizing the strange title of the play, strange in the sense that in Norwegian we are dealing with a neologism—the word *dukkehjem* seems to have been invented by Ibsen for the occasion of this play. The word is not now listed in the *Bokmålsordbok* at all, and the *Riksmålsordbok* lists it only in reference to Ibsen, marking it as literary usage and defining it thus: “et tilsynelatende idyllisk hjem hvor mannen forkjæler konen, men ikke behandler henne som en selvstendig personlighet”<sup>2</sup> (“an apparently idyllic home where the husband spoils his wife, but doesn't treat her as an independent personality”). In other words, the dictionary definition of the word *dukkehjem*, when it is listed at all, coincides exactly with the plot of Ibsen's play. The word *dukkehjem*, for all its current fame, is still Ibsen's word.

For his title, Ibsen could have used the common word for a miniature toy house, *dukkestue*, and in fact he does have Nora use that word at a crucial point in the first full draft of the play, where Nora says to Torvald, “Vort hjem har været en dukkestue.”<sup>3</sup> (“Our home has been a doll house.”) In the final published version the key word in this line gets changed to *legestue* (SV 358), probably for stylistic reasons (Rolf Fjelde translates this *legestue* into English as “playpen,” but more literally means “playroom”).<sup>4</sup> In both the draft and the final version, that same speech reinforces the “doll house” metaphor with Nora's realization that as Torvald's wife she has really only been a *dukkehustru* (a doll wife) and a *dukkebarn* (doll child). In the final draft, however, the only remaining invocation of the doll house phrase as an architectural structure is in the title.

It is interesting, then, that no English translation that I am aware of has ever tried to translate the title literally as *A Doll Home*. Instead the translation attention in English has centered on the question of whether to call the play “*A Doll House*” or “*A Doll's House*.” Neither of those translated titles, however, captures the slightly jarring combination of the words *dukke* and *hjem*, jarring because of the contrasting resonances of those two terms: they pit doll's association with an empty mimesis against the presumed authenticity and rooted emotional depth of the home. By not choosing *dukkestue*, then, Ibsen forces a clash of perspectives that challenges widely held assumptions about “home”; we are left to muse on which half of the term—the “doll” or the “home”—will trump the other in rhetorical terms.

<sup>2</sup> *Norsk Riksmålsordbok*, vol. 1 A-L (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1937), 750.

<sup>3</sup> Henrik Ibsen, *Samlede Verker*, Hundreårsutgave, vol. 8 (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1933), 442.

All citations from the original Norwegian text of *A Doll's House* and its drafts are taken from Volume 8 of this edition.

<sup>4</sup> Rolf Fjelde, trans., *Ibsen: The Complete Major Prose Plays* (New York: Plume, 1965), 191.

The difference between *hus* and *hjem*, between “house” and “home,” is worth considering as well. The contrast is both a commonsensical and a theoretical one. These or similar terms form a binary lexical pair in most Germanic languages with quite similar effects. The word *hus* (or house) is the more neutral term, connoting little more than a physical structure, while *hjem* (or home) is commonly laden with emotional resonance and notions of origin, grounding, authenticity, security, and comfort. But the inescapably binary nature of the pairing makes it ripe for deconstruction; it is easy to see how the fuller concept of “home” depends in fact on a contrast with the evacuated notion of “house” for its persuasiveness.<sup>5</sup> “Home” cannot work rhetorically without “house” as the lesser, contrastive term. What is a home? Hard to say, but it is clearly more than a house. What is a house? Less than a home.

The German version of this binary is found in the pair *Haus* and *Heim*, which has received an extra theoretical richness due to Freud’s interest in the idea of “das Unheimliche” in his famous essay of 1919.<sup>6</sup> Freud’s main point is that the etymological connection between the two apparently separate meanings of the German adjective *heimlich*—it can mean both “secret” and “familiar”—allows us to see the ways in which the experience of the *Unheimlich* (or the uncanny, as it is usually translated into English) is the return of something strange or secret that used to be familiar, but now repressed. In German, the root of the word “unheimlich” (“heim”) makes an etymological connection between the unfamiliar and the idea of home, and links the house/home dichotomy to a much broader philosophical discussion. (The usual translation of this German term with the word “uncanny” does not have that effect in English, but the fact that we need the word “familiar” and “unfamiliar” to get at many of these same concepts does maintain that connection to the idea of the family and the intimate private sphere.)

The architectural theorist Anthony Vidler has exploited this opening in recent work and extended the notion of *das Unheimliche* to include a more general “not being at home” in modern and post-modern thought. In his book *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely*, Vidler argues for a specifically *modern* uncanny within the longer history of that idea. This argument emphasizes that the real displacements and social shifts of late nineteenth-century modernity and urbanization, intensified especially with the cataclysmic events of WWI, entailed a profound philosophical shift in notions of home. To be sure, post-war philosophers disagreed about the fundamental priority or essentialism of “home”—was it after all an authentic point of origin that had been lost, or had that idea of shared origin always been an illusion in human thought, now unveiled by recent widespread traumatic experience? But there was nevertheless general agreement that in the

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<sup>5</sup> This is the type of argument pursued at length in Mark Wigley’s examination of architectural metaphor in the philosophical thought of Derrida, in *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida’s Haunt* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> Sigmund Freud, “The ‘Uncanny’” (1919), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 17:217-252.

aftermath of the war, home could no longer be taken for granted as a concept, even by those like Heidegger who were interested in retaining a philosophical use for this and related terms like “dwelling.” To be modern, philosophically speaking, was to be homeless. As Vidler puts it, “Estrangement and unhomeliness have emerged as the intellectual watchwords of our century.”<sup>7</sup>

Vidler deliberately uses the word “unhomeliness” instead of “homelessness.” To use the word “homeless” is to retain the logic of the home and in a sense to continue speaking from within its walls while claiming to be outside them. To be unhomely, or *Unheimlich*, is by contrast to begin to wonder about that very logic, to become unmoored from the familiar and to find existence suddenly and productively strange. It creates a space outside the usual dichotomy of thinking about the home, a dichotomy that goes something like this: either one accepts the logic of the home and remains within it (in which case its main quality is security) or one rejects its logic and leaves (in which case that same quality is seen as entrapment and the departure therefrom as liberation). With the term “unhomely,” Vidler encourages ways of thinking outside this simple embrace or rejection of the home.

When Ibsen wrote his play at the height of the bourgeois nineteenth century, the emotional preference of “home” to “house,” of *hjem* to *hus*, would have been more or less automatic. For the middle classes at least, the ideology of home was like the air one breathed: unnoticed, invisible, and absolutely essential. But as Ibsen and other similar writers increasingly began to realize, the security of home could be its most confining aspect as well, and its power to call up the emotional values of childhood a hindrance to the development of independent, forward-thinking adults. Ibsen can thus be placed in a series of avant-garde thinkers, artists, and writers who detached themselves intellectually from the idea of “home” at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Using a good Norwegian term, we might group them under this rubric: “*Hygge* and its Discontents” (Coziness and its Discontents).

One of the crucial strategies for a social critic like Ibsen, then, was to empty out the concept of home. Errol Durbach has made this point about Ibsen’s notion of “home” in his book-length study of *A Doll’s House*. He writes: “If we pride ourselves that we no longer live in dolls’ houses, it is because plays like Ibsen’s have undermined so thoroughly the Victorian foundations of ‘home’ and ‘family,’ exposing them as empty and oppressive shams in a world where such ideals are maintained only at the expense of self-negation and deceit.”<sup>8</sup> Another way of putting this is that Ibsen was writing at a pivotal moment in the history of thinking about the home, a moment when it became possible to subvert the existing automatic hierarchy of “home” over “house.” We might even say that this issue was a crucial marker of progressive thinking in Ibsen’s time.

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<sup>7</sup> Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essay in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 9.

<sup>8</sup> Errol Durbach, *A Doll’s House: Ibsen’s Myth of Transformation* (Boston: Twayne, 1991), 28.

Nora enacts this trajectory both in her initially desperate clinging to notions of home and in her eventual rejection thereof. At the beginning of the play, Nora piles up the adjectives around the word “home,” almost as if to protect the term from scrutiny by calling up its habitual connotations. She confides to Fru Linde in Act 1 that Torvald mustn’t find out her secret, saying: “Det vilde ganske forrykke forholdet imellem os; vort skønne lykkelige hjem vilde ikke længer blive, hvad det nu er.” (SV 287) (“That would just ruin our relationship. Our beautiful, happy home would never be the same,” Fjelde 136) Later, when trying to win Krogstad’s job back for him, she piles on no less than five qualifiers in the Norwegian original when she begs Torvald, “Nu kunde vi få det så godt, så roligt og lykkeligt her i vort fredelige og sorgløse hjem . . .” (SV 316) (“We could be so snug and happy now in our quiet, carefree home . . .”, Fjelde 160).

When the façade of home drops away in Act 3 with the shocking revelation of Krogstad’s first letter, the word *hus* tends to substitute for talk of home in the long conversation between Nora and Torvald. Within Ibsen’s schematic, a true glimpse behind the curtain, reveals a house, not a home. The remarkable thing is that by setting it up in this way and using reality criteria as the measure, Ibsen has inverted the house-and-home dichotomy so that now “house” emerges as the more authentic of the two terms. Authenticity has become a question of accuracy, not true feeling. “Home” has been exposed as the theatrical effect; “house” is the reality left behind when the illusion of home is dispelled under pressure.

Take for example Torvald’s feverish attempt to talk his way through the new blackmail situation that presents itself: “Og hvad dig og mig angår, så må det se ud, som om alt var imellem os ligesom før. Men naturligvis kun for verdens øjne. Du blir altså fremdeles her i huset; det er en selvfølge.” (SV 353) (“And as for you and me, it’s got to seem like everything between us is just as it was—to the outside world, that is. You’ll go right on living in this house, of course.” Fjelde 188) “Home” in this passage is clearly associated with the show to the outside world; what remains for the future is the reality of going on living in the house, which for Torvald is a much reduced form of existence. “Going on living in a house” is the equivalent of “at redde resterne, stumperne, skinnet—” (SV 353) (“saving the bits and pieces, the appearance—”) as he says immediately afterwards (Fjelde, 188). From Torvald’s perspective, the house can only be conceived of as a ruined home.

How remarkable, then, that the term “home” returns with the same cozy adjectives after the second letter saves Torvald. He says, as if nothing has happened, “Å, hvor vort hjem er lunt og smukt, Nora. Her er ly for dig; her skal jeg holde dig som en jaget due, jeg har fået reddet uskadt ud af høgens klør . . .” (SV 355) (“How snug and nice our home is, Nora. You’re safe here; I’ll keep you like a hunted dove I’ve rescued out of a hawk’s claws,” Fjelde 189). For both readers and audience members, the rhetorical reappearance of the snug and cozy home comes as a bit of a shock at this point, given what has just transpired. We might wonder how the original idea can really emerge from such an onslaught unscathed, and if we

analyze that reaction carefully, it becomes clear that we have been set up—Ibsen employs the double reversal in order to estrange us from a widespread, accepted rhetoric of the home. By having Torvald reintroduce the earlier rhetoric as if nothing has happened, Ibsen is able to return familiar phrases to us in uncanny form at the end of the play.

It is left to Nora to complete the destabilization of the terms, however. Torvald's quick return to the rhetoric of snug and cozy homes shows that for him the idea of house without home was indeed an intolerable prospect, and the return to familiar rhetoric is a willful turning of his eyes away from what for him is the abyss of unhomeliness. Nora's reaction is somewhat different. Once she has seen the house behind the home, she embraces it for its sober reality and refuses the return home, both literally and rhetorically. This comes to mark a profound discursive difference between the two of them. Indeed, it almost prevents them from understanding each other in the final scene. One of the many failures of conversation occurs when Nora mentions off-handedly in her famous doll-house speech, "Så kom jeg i huset til dig—". Torvald interrupts by calling attention to the term itself: "Hvad er det for udtryk du bruger om vort ægteskab?" (SV 357). (Nora: "Then I came into your house—" / Torvald: "How can you speak of our marriage like that?" Fjelde 191). A more literal translation of his reaction would be—"What kind of expression is *that* to use about our marriage?" Torvald's reaction foregrounds her use of a word—"house"—as a deliberate marker of difference and distance from his world-view.

The word "home," that is, no longer has any rhetorical power over her, even when Torvald tries to call up its former magic—that is to say, its unseen ideological power of social assent. He cries out at different points in the final conversation, "Forlade dit hjem, din mand, og dine barn!" (SV 359) and "Du skulle ikke have rede på din stilling i dit eget hjem?" (SV 360) ("Abandon your home, your husband, your children!" and "Why can't you understand your place in your own home?" Fjelde 192, 193). Nora fends off these attempts, not only by pointedly translating Torvald's term *hjem* (home) into *legestue* (playroom), as mentioned earlier in this essay, but by becoming very cautious about her own use of the former word. When she tells Torvald she is leaving, she catches herself in the old habit and quickly corrects herself: "Imorgen rejser jeg hjem,—jeg mener, til mit gamle hjemsted" (SV 359). This is rendered not quite so exactly by Fjelde as "Tomorrow I'm going home—I mean, home where I came from" (192). In Norwegian, though, the specific words are different. The substitution of *hjemsted* for *hjem*—"home-place" for "home"—is quite brilliant in the way it dilutes any emotional affect the latter term might have. As a parting shot, when Torvald asks if she will think of him after she leaves, she responds by choosing her words carefully, "Jeg kommer visst ofte til at tænke på dig og på børnene og på huset her (SV 364)." ("I'm sure I'll think of you often, and about the children and the house here" Fjelde 196.) After so recently losing her illusions about one home, Nora is clearly not about to call up those of another. Homes are for idealists.

We might say that what Nora embodies is a hint of what I will call “contingent housing,” a germ of an idea in this early prose play that will develop in more complex directions by the end of the twelve-play cycle. That is, Nora advances the idea that housing is no longer best conceived of as existing prior to the individual, but should instead be shaped by him or her. A house might be the product of an individual's action in the world; as she says, her future living situation is for her to find out. Just as she no longer has any pre-existing guidelines of morality or religion that she accepts as valid, there is also no obvious architectural given. When one chooses the word home, by contrast, one cannot help but call up an entity that, like tradition, language, and ideology, pre-exists the individual—people are born into and *find their places* in homes. Houses, by contrast, are built to fit needs. Conceptually speaking, the word can make room for considerably more individual agency.

Unsurprisingly, Torvald remains firmly entrenched in the philosophical priority of the home—that is to say, he strongly endorses the idea that homes shape individuals and not the other way around. His stern warning to Nora about dishonesty at the end of Act 1 expresses this attitude in powerful imagery: “Fordi en sådan dunstkreds af løgn bringer smitte og sygdomsstof ind i et helt hjemms liv. Hvert åndedrag, som børnene tager i et sådant hus, er fyldt med spirer til noget stygt” (SV 307). (“Because that kind of atmosphere of lies infects the whole life of a home. Every breath the children take in is filled with the germs of something degenerate”, Fjelde 152). This is a strikingly material architectural image—this house filled with the germs of dishonesty—and the contagion metaphor underscores in a powerful way the idea that the home *acts on* and exists prior to its inhabitants.

In the first draft of the play, Dr. Rank expresses a similar idea, though to different ends. In that draft Ibsen has him comment twice on a new carpet in the Helmer apartment (Ibsen apparently thought better of this comment while editing and removed both instances from the final version.) But the line is interesting for the way it aligns with Torvald's notion of the effect of home on inhabitant. He says, “Et sådant gulvtæppe forreter sig, mine damer; med et sådant gulvtæppe under fødderne tænker man højere og finere, man føler noblere, end hvor man går i en uhyggelig stue med de kolde knirkende planker under sig. Og især hvor det er børn i huset.” As a later addition to the draft, Ibsen has him finish by saying, “Racen forædler sig under smukke omgivelser”(SV 387). (My translation: “A carpet like that is worth it, ladies. With a carpet like that under one's feet, one thinks higher and more refined thoughts, one feels things more nobly than when one walks around in an uncomfortable room with cold, creaking planks underfoot. And especially when there are children in the house. . . . The human race refines itself in beautiful surroundings.”) In his writing process overall, then, Ibsen was clearly interested in this idea that homes shape people when he gave attitudes like this to both Torvald and Rank.

Nora's main critique goes right to this point—after all, she has gone from one "given" house to another, from her father's to Torvald's. This idea helps explain a possible strategy behind one of the more curious details of characterization in the play, namely Torvald's keen aesthetic sense. (Nora says late in the play that everything has been arranged according to *his* taste, *SV* 357) Ibsen's point in giving Torvald strong opinions about interior decoration is to emphasize that what Nora finds so confining about the home environment is that she has not created it. Because Torvald, like her father, has designed her home (and by extension, has determined the opinions and thoughts one might have within its walls), Nora finds herself in structure not of her own making.

The common protests elicited by the play's ending ("Where will she go? Where will she live? Will she come back home?") are all questions with architectural implications, and all lose sight of the point of a more contingent idea of housing; all of three of them remain firmly within the logic of the home. Ibsen's play practically taunts us to imagine an architectural solution to the ending, to reconcile Nora's departure with some kind of future dwelling structure. But the whole point seems to be *not* to find another place that is readymade for her authentic inhabitation—that would be the same as finding another *home*. Instead, Ibsen seems to argue that if her independent existence can be established first, the building will follow—if at all. The terms of any future housing for Nora are of course open for debate since Ibsen leaves it famously undepicted offstage, or to put it another way, leaves it unbuilt. Although he has Nora slam the door on the home, Ibsen leaves us wondering about housing, about what used to be familiar, and about what structures, if any, might house a free individual in the future. To that extent, we, like Nora, have become "unhomely."

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## **NORA AND HOPA OR HAPPINESS AS A SOCIAL STRUCTURE**

**VERA GANCHEVA\*\***

**ABSTRACT. Nora and Hopa or Happiness as a Social Structure.** The Latin and Cyrillic transcription of Ibsen's heroine's name in the title of this paper, devoted to a peculiar moment in the reception of *A Doll's House* in Bulgaria, means to highlight a difference not only in terms of geography, but also a difference between two ages and between two societies set apart by the particular stages of their development, and last but not least a difference between two national frames of reference. While the publication of *A Doll's House* in Bulgarian at the very end of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. (1897) may not be so remote from the work's original release (1879), it is this difference that determines the interpretations of Ibsen's drama as well as its respective functions in the two socio-historical contexts.

As a matter of fact, Ibsen's plays put Bulgarian culture in touch with the complex correlation between the ancient and the modern; between past and present; between the assets of tradition and the shortcomings inherent to novelty. These shortcomings stemmed from the exigencies of progress after the recent liberation from a 5-century Ottoman rule, as well as from the hopes for a government, social organization and civil attitudes in the young independent state shaped in the spirit of liberalism. The leading figures of Bulgaria's art and culture were impressed by the Norwegian writer's warnings and revelations that resulted from his intent probing into the human soul and his profound insights into social reality, which, to him, was moulded by the spiritual aspects of humanity, and social reforms, both positive and negative, were determined by these aspects.

In 1907, Ivan Vazov (1850-1921), Bulgaria's greatest writer and pioneer of the country's new literary culture, published a novella, significantly entitled *Nora*. The work was prompted by the Bulgarian writer's ambition to critically oppose Ibsen's views on women's freedom. This novella is a moralizing tract rather than a psychologically motivated work of art. The didactic bias was undoubtedly determined by Vazov's serious concern for the moral stability of the Bulgarian society. He was deeply troubled by the growing number of young Bulgarians influenced by *Ibsenism*. To him, this "epidemic" posed a great danger to marriage, the family, and the nation at large. Vazov's heroine Lubitsa deserts her husband and her infant. Her fleeing the family home in Rousse is prompted by the performance of *A Doll's House* in the same town.... A great writer and humanist, Vazov had

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certainly no hidden agenda in his attempt to prevent the penetration of the decay, which he considered peculiar to Western civilization, into the more vulnerable and intimate spheres of the Bulgarian social world. He must have been aware of the inefficiency of his efforts to oppose man's free will to create for the sake of others and serve elevated ideals, to the will of Ibsen's heroine, which, to him, typified an individualism alien to the Bulgarian emotional frame and to the Bulgarian perception of duty to kin and society.

But for Nora and Lubitsa alike, material well-being is less valuable than true love or its ideal image. Both heroines do not actually rise against marriage itself. They rebel against the hypocrisy of marital life, against the essence of marriage as a repressive mechanism used to manipulate the individual, as a social structure that excludes human intimacy, equality and mutual respect – a structure that fails to make itself equivalent to happiness. The fact that *A Doll's House* has withstood the test of time and has stepped into the future along with most of Ibsen's plays, as well as the fact that Vazov's work has not lost its significance, if only within the confines of a single country, shows that great literature survives when it sparks off debate, when it lends itself to pluralistic readings and perceptions, saving it from loss of appeal and from oblivion. In fact, although Vazov's novella does not share the felicitous destiny of most of his works, and has been overlooked by many readers today, it still remains part of Bulgarian literature's history as an interesting and revealing fact, which alerts us to the fact that *Nora* and *Hopa* is actually the same name, the name of two women. They are as remote as they are close, despite the different environments and the different circumstances that have built up their personalities. Their kinship is not based on origin or destiny, but, rather, on the high price they both have had to pay for the dream of their lives.

The Latin and Cyrillic transcription of Ibsen's heroine's name in the title of this paper, devoted to a peculiar moment in the reception of *A Doll's House* in Bulgaria, means to highlight a difference not only in terms of geography, but also a difference between two ages and between two societies set apart by the particular stages of their development, and last but not least a difference between two national frames of reference. While the publication of *A Doll's House* in Bulgarian at the very end of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. (1897) may not be so remote from the work's original release (1879), it is this difference that determines the interpretations of Ibsen's drama as well as its respective functions in the two socio-historical contexts.

It is a widely known fact that *Doll's House* enjoyed a wide and warm reception as soon as it came out in Copenhagen at the end of the above-mentioned year. At that time, 8,000 copies was quite an impressive number for a play. In the same period Bulgaria was a country recently liberated from a 5-century Ottoman rule; a country that had just taken the course of independence, which would involve an inevitable and painful transformation in all spheres of life. The foundations of Bulgarian society were being laid – a process intimately bound up with the elevated spiritual aspirations of the National Revival. At the same time, Bulgaria's young

society was in the grip of the political and social realities of the day, which were fraught with tension and conflict. Consequently, Ibsen's bourgeois heroine's anxiety, generated by her quest for self-identification, looks rather remote from the concerns of Bulgarian women at the time. In fact, it seems irrelevant to the overall context of a country faced with a pivotal moment in its historical development.

Still, however rapid the rate of development might be, the legacy of ideals and values bequeathed by the Revival (circa 1760-1878) proved to obstruct rather than stimulate progress, which ran counter to original expectations. The main objective was still the construction of a European-like society, but its realization was accompanied by considerable friction in Bulgaria's post-liberation reality. There was a sorely felt clash between the pronounced tendencies of Bulgaria's progress toward Europe, and the equally strong desire in certain quarters for a conservation of the patriarchal order, with its century-long hierarchy, its peculiar atmosphere, and its limited set of values. If quite a few among the intellectual elite at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century turned quite rightly to European literature as a source of aesthetic ideas that would prove beneficial to Bulgarian culture, some intellectuals, most notable among whom is Ivan Vazov (1850-1921), Bulgaria's greatest writer and pioneer of the country's new literary culture, perceived this mechanical transfer of West European ideologies as a danger to the fragile foundations of our toddling independent society. Quite significantly, it is through the work of Ibsen (1828-1906) that our political and social life was penetrated by Europe's mental attitudes, which were also informed by a process of arduous and far-reaching reforms.

As a matter of fact, Ibsen's plays put Bulgarian culture in touch with the complex correlation between the ancient and the modern; between past and present; between the assets of tradition and the shortcomings inherent to novelty. These shortcomings stemmed from the exigencies of progress as well as from the hopes for a government, social organization and civil attitudes shaped in the spirit of liberalism. The leading figures of Bulgaria's art and culture were impressed by the Norwegian writer's warnings and revelations that resulted from his intent probing into the human soul and his profound insights into social reality, which, to him, was moulded by the spiritual aspects of humanity, and social reforms, both positive and negative, were determined by these aspects. Bulgarian intellectuals were affected by Ibsen's command of psychological detail and his social critique as well. They used the Norwegian playwright's work as a mouthpiece of their own views on the organization of the new Bulgarian state. However, Ibsen's plays made an impact in Bulgaria not only through their ideological depth, but also through their artistic merit. Their appeal lay in the strictly observed principles of *la pièce bien faite* (the well made play), which were considered obligatory a hundred years ago, and which we find in the work of, say, Scribes, Augier, or Dumas-fils. Equally impressive was his approach to the issues raised in the plays; an approach akin to that of the Russian playwrights, traditionally well known in Bulgaria, such as Tolstoy, Ostrovsky, Gorky, but also akin to Sophocles, Aeschilus, Shakespeare,

Lessing, Schiller. In other words, Henrik Ibsen could be regarded as one of the first to have initiated Bulgarian writers into the intricacies of the playwright's art. Interestingly, however, Ibsen's image of a critical realist in his own right and of a philosophically minded writer with a subtle knowledge of the individual and of the dialectical nature of the cause-and-effect correlation between the subjective and the objective, would push into the background, for decades, the merits of the exquisite literary craftsman, the sophisticated and sensitive poet, who has achieved unquestionable perfection in the design of remarkable dramatic constructs, and who has effected a true revolution in world theatre, which was to be taken up and developed further by Maeterlinck, Strindberg, Hauptmann, Chekhov (to mention just a few among those who have traveled the road to this *Rome of modern drama*, as Martin Lamm, the Swedish literary historian, dubs Ibsen's work, only to strike out in a direction of their own towards experimentation beyond the confines of Ibsen's drama, but not without absorbing part of the great master's spiritual legacy).

That the aesthetic accomplishments of Ibsen's drama were underestimated was not due to negligence, but was, rather, determined by the imperatives of the age, which motivated Bulgarian intellectuals to participate actively in the social agenda of the day. In this sense, the appearance of Ibsen's plays on the Bulgarian stage and their becoming part of Bulgarian socio-cultural discourse was important in terms of adding energy to the intellectual and artistic debate. To some extent, what might account for this reception is the poor art of the plays' translations at the time<sup>1</sup>. Yet it is an unchallenged and well known fact that Ibsen's dramas have added vitality to the research and criticism of Bulgarian theatre experts. In their work we discover not only the critic's ability to stir anxiety by posing questions that have the significance of answers, but we also find valid suggestions concerning interpretation. The latter increase in number and become more surprising, especially when it comes to the playwright's later works (roughly, the last ten plays<sup>2</sup>). We hardly need to resort to a profound analysis to arrive at the conclusion that in this respect Bulgarian theatre and literary critics owe a lot to the general and the theatre-going public, to the directors, actors, and all those involved in the field of theatre. What we lack is a leap, in terms of both quantity and quality, to a multi-faceted and original interpretation of Ibsen's work not only in its entirety, as the playwright himself wanted it to be read and viewed, but also as an entity composed of discrete works; works that are closely bound up with one another through the power of the conflicts and the dramatic intensity; works that affect us with their characters –

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, most translations were then made from German, Russian or from other languages. They are accomplished with talent and consideration for the adequate Bulgarian equivalent. However, Ibsen's dramas came to be translated from Norwegian only in the 1980's, the Bulgarian publishers' and translators' ambition being to present now all his work translated from the original.

<sup>2</sup> *Ghosts, An Enemy of the People, The Wild Duck, Rosmersholm, The Lady from the Sea, Hedda Gabler, The Master Builder, Little Eyolf, John Gabriel Borkman, When We Dead Awaken.*

virkelighedsmennesker, according to Ibsen's own definition<sup>3</sup>, i.e. individuals belonging to the real world, overcome by a peculiar anxiety of the *angst* type. In Søren Kierkegaard's philosophy, *angst* is a key notion characterized by an inherent ambivalence: 1. it involves man's awareness of his liberty as an opportunity, and 2. it has to do with man's inability to seize this liberty and to make of it a synonym of his most important choice, and consequently a synonym of his existence.

Nora is no exception to the majority of central characters in Ibsen's plays. She experiences that dizziness stemming from her being focused on the seemingly fathomless abyss of her happy family life. Actually, this is the feeling that Kierkegaard associates with the experience of *angst*: a mixture of anxiety, fright and panic, generated by the sense of doom, the sense of being confined in a vicious circle that threatens to strangle you like a loop. In fact, Bulgarian critics have not yet achieved a well-rounded explication of the semiotic complexity of the heroine of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. This is strange, given the fact that there have been so many successful, some even memorable, stagings of this drama in Bulgaria over the last century. Actually, in the latest versions, staged over the last few years, the traditionally dominant realistically quotidian aspect of the play has been slightly subdued by directors, sets designers and actors alike. This tendency, however, has not occurred at the expense of that socially significant content of the play which Ivan Vazov made use of in his attempt to respond to some phenomena in Bulgarian social life.

In 1907, Vazov published a novella, significantly entitled *Nora*. The work was prompted by the Bulgarian writer's ambition to critically oppose Ibsen's views on women's freedom. The piece was included as a separate edition in a series called *Spiritual Awakening*, designed with an edifying agenda and cherishing the norms of the then conventional morality. This fact concerning the book's publication history is indicative of its author's objectives. The novella itself is a moralizing tract rather than a psychologically motivated work of art. The didactic bias was undoubtedly determined by Vazov's serious concern for the moral stability of Bulgarian society. He was deeply troubled by the growing number of young Bulgarians influenced by *Ibsenism*.<sup>4</sup> To him, this "epidemic" posed a great danger to marriage, the family, and the nation at large. Vazov's heroine Lubitsa deserts her husband and her infant. Her fleeing the family home in Rouse is prompted by the performance of *A Doll's House* in the same town<sup>5</sup>. She heads off to Sofia in quest of liberty and stimulating emotional experiences. But after the dramatic collapse of her illusions, her disappointment with the calculatingly selfish and parasitic

<sup>3</sup> In a letter to Edvard Brandes of 27<sup>th</sup> December, 1892.

<sup>4</sup> In his essay "Ibsen and Ibsenism" (1924), the Bulgarian writer and philosopher Emanuil Popdimitrov introduces this notion to the Bulgarian cultural scene. In fact the notion, somewhat controversial, gained currency after the publication of George Bernard Shaw's book *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*. Popdimitrov contends that Bulgaria's contemporary youth could be described as "ibsenized".

<sup>5</sup> In fact, this was the first staging of Ibsen's play in Bulgaria. It came with the title *Nora* in the *Roza Popova Dramatic Theatre*. The première was in 1897.

Tikhov, with whom she believes she has fallen in love, makes her reconsider her act and return to Rouse after a period of painful hesitation. She is welcomed by her forgiving husband Goychev, a humble and unassuming personality. According to the author, however, Goychev impersonates the temperance, modesty and industry that could protect people from moral degradation, or help them shake it off, if the process of decay has already been initiated. The ending of *Nora*, if didactic, is still clearer than the ending of *A Doll's House*, which is open to all kinds of interpretations. In fact, Ibsen was compelled to modify the original ending for the sake of the German audience, but the new version did not appeal to the viewers and he had to return to the old ending.

The crisis that Lubitsa goes through will most probably transform her into a good wife and mother; it will make her put up with the role, which, according to Vazov, is an essential part of any woman's identity: the role of the keeper of hearth and home, called upon to preserve the set of traditional spiritual and moral values, which are fundamental to the building up of personality, as well as to progress, both individual and collective, in the new social conditions.

It is actually paradoxical that with his categorical response to the opportunity that Ibsen gives his heroine (convinced as *a priori* that she will take advantage of it), Vazov ends up "behind the barricade" in this battle of ideas and views on the so called "women's question", which was actually gaining ground in Bulgaria at the time. Vazov shares this position with August Strindberg, Ibsen's temperamental opponent in the war of the sexes in the Scandinavian North. This war was fuelled further and assumed the dimensions of a sacred cause for the fair sex especially after the publication of Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson's (1832-1910) play *The Gauntlet* (1883), whose heroine Svava stands up for "purity and chastity before marriage", which should apply to women and men alike. Still, the staging of Strindberg's *The Dance of Death* (1900) at the National Theatre in Sofia in 1919-1920, aroused Vazov's anger. In an open letter, published in the *Razvigor* newspaper, of 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1921, Vazov gives vent to his indignation at such "fuzzy charades", produced by a "sick imagination yearning to stock the blasé audience in the West with something new, strange and scary".

Actually, to this day, Strindberg's oeuvre generates interest accompanied by contradictory responses to his plays and fluctuations about their reception, which makes the modern reader and viewer's profound understanding of his ideas a slow, if inevitable, process. In contrast, Ibsen's plays have literally had a triumphant presence on the Bulgarian stage for many decades, thus refuting, of course, Vazov's apprehensions that they could do harm to the spirit of the nation or trigger passions and inclinations that would prove deadly to Bulgarian society. A great writer and humanist, Vazov had certainly no hidden agenda in his attempt to prevent the penetration of the decay, which he considered peculiar to Western civilization, into the more vulnerable and intimate spheres of the Bulgarian social world. He must have been aware of the inefficiency of his efforts to oppose man's

free will to create for the sake of others and serve elevated ideals, to the will of Ibsen's heroine, which, to him, typified an individualism alien to the Bulgarian emotional frame and to the Bulgarian perception of duty to kin and society.

But for Nora and Lubitsa alike, material well-being is less valuable than true love or its ideal image. Both heroines do not actually rise against marriage itself. They rebel against the hypocrisy of marital life, against the essence of marriage as a repressive mechanism used to manipulate the individual, as a social structure that excludes human intimacy, equality and mutual respect – a structure that fails to make itself equivalent to happiness. What brings together the Norwegian and the Bulgarian classic is their critical realist approach to life's phenomena and to human nature. Both writers build up their fictional characters on the basis of real-life relationships and multi-faceted aspects of reality. They probe deep into the minds of their heroes in order to explicate and justify the motives behind their acts and decisions.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was the heyday of critical realism, and the new conditions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century required a different ideological prism and a new set of aesthetic values and corresponding artistic methods. This, however, by no means plays down the importance of the legacy of the greatest representatives of critical realism, one of whom is Henrik Ibsen. By the same token, Ivan Vazov's work has preserved its significance for us. Actually, time has put it into perspective and has attached to it the quality of intransience.

It is true that in some quarters both Ibsen and Vazov are hastily pronounced *vieux jeux*, i.e. writers belonging to a bygone era. This claim could be based on the assumption that they pay too much attention to social and moral issues, while remaining reserved towards experimentation in literature and art, especially when it is superfluous or self-willed. Some would even say that their talent, powerful enough to go beyond the order of time and place, lacks glamour.<sup>6</sup>

The fact that *A Doll's House* has withstood the test of time and has stepped into the future along with most of Ibsen's plays, as well as the fact that Vazov's work has not lost its significance, if only within the confines of a single country, shows that great literature survives when it sparks off debate, when it lends itself to pluralistic readings and perceptions, saving it from loss of appeal and from oblivion. In fact, although Vazov's novella does not share the felicitous destiny of most of his works, and has been overlooked by many readers today, it still remains part of Bulgarian literature's history as an interesting and revealing fact, which alerts us to the fact that Nora and Hopa is actually the same name, the name of two women. They are as remote as they are close, despite the different environments and the different circumstances that have built up their personalities. Their kinship is not based on origin or destiny, but, rather, on the high price they both have had to pay for the dream of their lives.

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<sup>6</sup> American writer Henry James, for example, is known to have said the following about Henrik Ibsen: "a talent with no glamour." Similar opinions about Ivan Vazov have been expressed in Bulgaria.

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## QUESTIONING THE ENDING OF *LITTLE EYOLF*

LAURA CARETTI\*\*

**ABSTRACT.** *Questioning the ending of Little Eyolf.* Is there at the end of *Little Eyolf* a change for the better between the characters, a possible, affectionate, reconciliation? Or is there simply an illusory hope for the future, all the more dramatic for being self-deceptive? Since the first performances of the play, the complex ambiguity of the finale has challenged actors, directors and spectators giving rise to contrasting interpretations. Travelling back in time to the London of 1894, the divergent voices of Henry James and of G.B. Shaw embody the beginning of this theatrical debate. Questioning the ending of *Little Eyolf*, the article intends to focus on the innovative structure of the play and on the experimental nature of its 'implosive' dramatic vision.

### 1 *All passion spent*

*Little Eyolf* is not the kind of play that ends with a crescendo culminating in death or suicide. In this respect it differs from other plays by Ibsen where in the epilogue death prevails over life. Think of *Hedda Gabler*, *Rosmersholm*, *The Wild Duck*, to mention the most famous. Here, in *Little Eyolf*, at the end Rita and Allmers are alone on stage, all exits barred, imprisoned. They disappear slowly in a gradual fade-out. As darkness descends, even their voices become fainter. The energy of their confrontation is extinguished. Neither has the strength left to argue, to hit

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- *La tarantella di Nora e Ibsen e la regia in Italia* in Aa.Vv., *La didascalica nella letteratura teatrale scandinava*, a cura di M. Kjoller Ritzu, Roma, Bulzoni, 1987.
- *Capuana, Ibsen e la Duse*, in Aa.Vv., *L'illusione della realtà. Studi su Luigi Capuana*, a cura di M. Picone e E. Rossetti, Roma, Ed. Salerno, 1990.
- *Rosmer's House of Shadows: Craig's Designs for Eleonora Duse*, in *Ibsen im europäischen Spannungsfeld zwischen Naturalismus und Symbolismus*, a cura di Maria Deppermann, Beate Burtscher-Bechter, Christiane Mühlegger, Martin Sexl, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 1998.
- *Close-ups on Women Directing Hedda Gabler*, in *Proceedings IX International Ibsen Conference*, ed. by Pål Bjørby and Asbjørn Aarseth, Bergen, Alvheim & Eide, 2001.
- Ibsen and Raphael, in *Ibsen and the Arts*, Oslo, Unipub, 2002.

back, to take revenge. The I/you opposition gives way to a most fragile “we”. Silence surrounds them and permeates their barely whispered words. When the curtain comes down we don’t hear Alfred’s reply to Rita nor do we see him take the hand she holds out to him. “Thanks”<sup>1</sup>, she says and that word, as you know, is the last line of the play.

This is how Ibsen staged his finale. Skilful as ever in his stage directions, he orchestrates the voices, sounds and lights in such a way as to annul them, leaving it to his interpreters to find sense in this enigmatic conclusion. In many cases the critical debate has generated divergent questions. Is there at the end a change for the better between the characters, a possible, affectionate, reconciliation? Or is there simply an illusory hope for the future, all the more dramatic for being self-deceptive? Alfred, hoisting the flag over the wreckage of their existence, and inviting Rita to look up at the stars from the bottom of the well into which they have fallen, certainly doesn’t seem to be opening up horizons of happiness. Ibsen wanted to give an implicit double value to this epilogue, by refusing to end on a drastic note, with a tragic gesture. Where there seems to be nothing left, no emotion, no passion, the characters are stirred by an agonising desire for calm after the storm.

Leafing through the manuscript of *Little Eyolf*, we find that Ibsen corrected the earlier draft of the scene<sup>2</sup>. In his first version a poem, written and recited by Allmers, anticipated the characters’ hapless condition - a poem about a couple who from the “ruins” and “ashes” of their marriage can no longer find “the jewel” they had lost, concluding with these lines:

But even if this fire-scarred pair ever do find  
That precious fire-proof jewel-  
She will never find her burnt peace-  
He never his burnt happiness.

(transl. by J.W.McFarlane)<sup>3</sup>

In the final, rewritten version, there is no lost happiness, no regret for time past, but rather a longing to be rid of a nightmare. The past is annihilated, no longer afflicting them with desire, fear or even remorse. The whole scene could very well be staged as if belonged to a Beckett play; yet in Ibsen, as in Chehov, when the dramatic situation seems to have reached a dead end, time resumes its course and life painfully goes on:

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<sup>1</sup> *Little Eyolf*, translated by Una Ellis-Fermor, in H. IBSEN, *The Master Builder and other Plays*, London, Penguin Books, 1958, p.283.

<sup>2</sup> *First Complete Draft of Little Eyolf*, in *The Oxford Ibsen*, vol.VIII, edited and translated by J.W. McFARLANE, Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 107-149.

<sup>3</sup> *The Oxford Ibsen*, p.147.

RITA (*hesitating*): But then you'd have to stay here.

ALLMERS (*softly*): Let's see if it wouldn't work.

RITA (*almost inaudibly*): Let us, Alfred.

(transl. by Una Ellis-Fermor)<sup>4</sup>

2. *Henry James reads the first two acts*

I don't intend to dwell on the critical debate the third act of *Little Eyolf* has given rise to. I am more interested in the ways it has been staged. I do, however, want to say a few words about an exceptionally perceptive reader, Henry James. His critical response is emblematic of the bewilderment many people felt on seeing the play and throws light on how innovative the dramaturgy of *Little Eyolf* was for the theatre of that time.

London, 1894: *Little Eyolf* has been translated into English and is about to be published. The publisher William Heinemann send the proofs of the first two acts to Henry James who immediately hails the play as "immense": "It is indeed immense – indeed and indeed. It is of a rare perfection – [...] It is a masterpiece and a marvel; and it *must* leap upon the stage."<sup>5</sup> That's what he says in a letter to the actress Elizabeth Robins, who's trying to get the play staged in London, reassuring her of its predictable success and advising her to play the part of Asta.

James, however, hasn't yet read the third act and is awaiting it anxiously, convinced as he is that: "If the 3<sup>rd</sup> keeps up the tremendous pitch of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> it [*Little Eyolf*] will distinctly stand at the tip top of his [Ibsen's] achievement"<sup>6</sup>.

That very same day (22nd November, 1894), James writes to Ibsen's publisher, William Heinemann, expressing his judgement on the first two acts. The second act, he says, is a magnificent "crescendo" after the first and he considers formidable the coup de théâtre at the end of the act, which reveals that Asta isn't Allmers' sister. However, something doesn't convince James: he feels that Ibsen should have said more about Allmers' emotions at this revelation:

It seems to me that he [Ibsen] doesn't make quite enough – (in the form, in the pause to take it in, and the indication of the amazement and emotion of Allmers) – of the revelation of the non-relationship.<sup>7</sup>

James's observation reflects a fundamental difference between the two writers. It is significant that James criticises the way Ibsen condenses Allmers' reaction into only a few words.

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<sup>4</sup> *Little Eyolf*, p. 282

<sup>5</sup> H. JAMES, *Letter to Elizabeth Robins*, 22nd November 1894, quoted in Michael Meyer's *Introduction to H. IBSEN, Little Eyolf*, London, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1961, p.12.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> H. JAMES, *Letter to Heinemann*, 22nd November 1894, in "A most unholy Trade", *being letters on the drama by H. James*, London, The Scarab Press, Privately Printed, 1923, p.10.

ASTA: Read the letters. Then you'll see. And understand – And perhaps forgive – my mother too.

ALLMERS: (*clasping his head*) I can't take this in. Can't get hold of the idea. You, Asta, - then you're not –

ASTA: You're not my brother, Alfred.

ALLMERS: (*looking at her quickly, half defiant*): Well, but what's really changed in our relation? Nothing, really.<sup>8</sup>

Just a few lines, but they tell us everything: Allmer's surprise, and above all his wish not to know, his determination not to read her mother's letters so that he can save his past and preserve his relationship with Asta from any kind of change.

In other words, James, the omniscient narrator of his characters' psychological turmoils, couldn't understand the modernity of Ibsen who gives expression to repressed emotions, suspensions and silences.

### 3. *An unexpected third act*

But it was above all after reading the third act that James showed his total incomprehension of Ibsen's dramaturgy. The construction of the final part of *Little Eyolf* is so unexpected as to upset all his predictions. Not only is he convinced that Asta will end up choosing to follow the same path as little Eyolf, but he even predicts that Allmers will accompany her, as happens at the end of *Rosmersholm*: "Yes, Eyolf n.2 does by design what Eyolf n.1 did by accident – and does it conjointly with Alfred (at the risk of repeating *Rosmersholm* and *Hedda* and the *Wild Duck*)".<sup>9</sup>

As we know, Ibsen always brilliantly avoids this risk of repeating himself. *Little Eyolf* seems to be a reweaving of some earlier plots, but they are actually transposed onto a new stage and re-embodied in a different pattern. By placing the traumatic event of Eyolf's drowning at the end of the first act, Ibsen leaves himself free in the other two acts to experiment a form of drama that we could call 'implosive', that is one entirely contained within the characters. At this point he no longer relies on tragic events. It's as if in *The Wild Duck* we were given two other acts to follow Gina and Hjalmar after Hedvig's death and we saw them suffer, accuse each other, feel and admit guilt, seeking at the same time, however, to free themselves from their anguish.

But let's get back to James who after making his predictions finally receives the third act, reads it and is unable to conceal his disappointment. In his eyes, that finale destroyed everything that had come before, irreparably damaging the whole work. This is what he immediately wrote to Elizabeth Robins:

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<sup>8</sup> *Little Eyolf*, p.264.

<sup>9</sup> *Letter to Heinemann*, p.11.

I fear in truth, no harm can be done equal to the harm done to the play by its most disappointing third act. [...] It seems to me a singular and almost inexplicable drop – dramatically, *representably* speaking; in short strangely and painfully meagre.<sup>10</sup>

His idea of Asta as a heroine is completely belied. In his ‘melodramatic imagination’ James envisaged her emerging as the protagonist of a final redress through self-sacrifice: “My idea that Asta was to become an active, *the* active agent is of course blighted.” He just can’t understand her precipitous exit, as she decides to follow the only character who offers her a chance of escape. And above all James refuses to accept the idea that an insignificant figure - as he considers Borghejm to be - should be given a role in the final outcome. (“I don’t see the meaning or effect of Borghejm – I don’t see the value or final *function* of Asta.”)

James admits his inability to understand, but all the same feels sure about his judgement that the conclusion is really too weak: “I find the solution too simple, too immediate, too much a harking back, and too productive of the sense that there might have been a stronger one”. Here, he’s obviously thinking of that “stronger” ending that he himself had imagined: a double suicide off-stage.

The only thing in the third act that he spares is the “solemn beauty” of the final image that this paper began with, in which Ibsen freezes the scene and gives the task of the final curtain to the gradual withdrawal of light.

Really uttered, *done*, in the gathered northern twilight, with the flag flown and the lights coming out across the fjord, the scene might have a real solemnity of beauty – and perhaps that’s all that’s required!<sup>11</sup>

In contrast to his previous enthusiasm, James is no longer confident that *Little Eyolf* will be a theatrical success. On the contrary, he’s convinced that no actor-manager will want to interpret the ineffective role of Allmars.

As for Rita, the puritan James undermines her, enamoured as he is of the ‘innocent’ Asta. All he can see in her is her explicit sexuality to the point at which he imagines her in the last scene ending up seducing Borghejm: “Perhaps Rita “has” the roadmaster publicly on the stage, while Asta throws herself into the fjord”<sup>12</sup>.

His eyes failed to see Ibsen’s Rita, even when he saw her on stage played by her first English interpreter, the extraordinarily expressive Janet Achurch. And James’s myopia is all the more surprising if we consider that from the earliest performances it is Rita who is the dynamic centre of the drama. All the lights are turned on her. And also the eyes of the critics and of the audience.

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<sup>10</sup> H.JAMES, *Letter to Elizabeth Robins* (25th November 1894), in H.JAMES, *Theatre and Friendship*, London, Cape, 1932, p.159.

<sup>11</sup> *Letter to Elizabeth Robins*, p.160.

<sup>12</sup> JAMES, *Letter to Heinemann*, p.11.

#### 4. *First performances*

Bernard Shaw was the first to focus attention on Rita's complexity as a character and on the fact that if the actress playing her fails to render the dark variety of her moods the entire play collapses as if robbed of its sustaining energy. This happens, in Shaw's view, when the strong contrasts in Rita's personality and the violence of her passions are toned down, as they were in Mrs Patrick Campbell's interpretation:

Mrs.Campbell succeeded wonderfully in eliminating all unpleasantness from the play...Her performance was infinitely reassuring and pretty...There was not a taste of nasty jealousy...And how nicely Mrs. Campbell took the drowning of the child! Just a pretty waving of the fingers, a moderate scream as if she had very nearly walked on a tintack and it was all over, without tears, without pain...<sup>13</sup>

Staging *Little Eyolf* in this way means, for Shaw, draining all the blood out of it and leaving it a dead, sentimental thing.

By contrast, Shaw applauded Janet Achurch's interpretation precisely because the actress didn't hesitate to give expression to the full horror of the drama. He was struck by the power of her voice which ran the full tonal scale, from the terrible piercing cry at the end of the first act to the polyphony of the lower notes. And above all Shaw appreciated Achurch's ability to show Rita's many faces, her despair but also her relentless force:

She looked at one moment like a young, well-dressed, very pretty woman: another she was

like a desperate creature just fished dripping out of the river by the Thames police. Yet

another moment, and she was the incarnation of impetuous, ungovernable strength...<sup>14</sup>

How distant it seems today – that 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1896<sup>15</sup>, when *Little Eyolf* was staged in London for the first time, triggering radically conflicting reactions. Critics and spectators were divided between those who condemned it as “dull, wordy, unpleasant and prodigiously tiresome” and those like Shaw who considered it “An extraordinarily powerful play”. The debate of those years takes us back to a time when Ibsen ignited flaming discussions that spread well beyond the four walls of the theatre to the life of society at large. Opinions, discussions relevant, I think, to us who are reading *Little Eyolf* in a different context.

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<sup>13</sup> G. B. SHAW, review of *Little Eyolf*, 12 December 1896, quoted by M. Meyers, *English Stage History*, in IBSEN, *Little Eyolf*, p. 83.

<sup>14</sup> SHAW, *Review*, p.82:

<sup>15</sup> Translated by William Archer, *Little Eyolf* was performed at the Admiralty Theatre with the following cast: Courtenay Thorpe (Allmers), Janet Achurch (Rita), Elizabeth Robins (Asta), Patrick Campbell (The Rat-Wife), Stewart Dawson (Eyolf), C.M. Lowne (Borgheim).

It's well known that *A Doll's House* had provoked passionate reactions throughout Europe. Nora Helmer had immediately become not just a character in a play but the living example of a woman who leaves her husband and children in order to become most fully herself. For the majority, an absolutely scandalous example, but also an illuminating one for many women who were fighting for a change in their condition. In any case, whatever the judgement on Nora's decision to leave her doll's house, that slammed door, as Shaw said, had shaken the middle class household more violently than a cannon shot.

*Little Eyolf* didn't have the same impact as *A Doll's House*, even if the anatomy of the Allmers family laid bare tensions and conflicts that were no less dramatic. Indeed, here Ibsen doesn't give the audience time to delude themselves that some kind of happiness is possible: from the very first scene he unmask the characters, letting their most secret impulses emerge. And this unmasking doesn't stop even when the alchemy of the passions produces deadly poison. The power of the play as we appreciate it still today - above all today - lies in this.

In the past, this intensely realistic representation was criticised as "unnatural". The characters themselves seemed to be the creatures of Ibsen's perverse vision of things, alien to the humanity of readers and spectators alike. And the most unnatural of all the characters was Rita. Her longing to be a seductive wife-cum-lover and not only a mother was enough to shock a society where the maternal role was seen as a woman's destiny and duty, and love for her children a 'natural' all-pervading biological instinct. Add the fact that this character doesn't disguise her frustrated eroticism and the destructive impulses it generates, and it's hardly surprising that she met with so much condemnation.

##### 5. *Rita and Nora*

Nevertheless, why is it that Rita seemed less scandalous than Nora? Nora who leaves her children with their father in a comfortable middle-class home where there's a nanny who's looked after them since they were born? In *Little Eyolf* instead we have a woman who wants to be rid of her child, whom she feels a rival to her husband's love, to the point of subconsciously wishing him dead. Despite this, the 'monstrous' Rita was saved by her torment after the dramatic climax of the first act. In her child's death one could see both guilt and punishment. So her entire drama *could* and *can* be interpreted as a modern morality play in which the guilty person acknowledges her faults, loses her potential for evil and in the end is somewhat redeemed. In this perspective, the change she undergoes could (and I emphasise *could*) be seen as the metamorphosis of the murderer mother into the loving mother ready to take under her wing all the children of the village.

Let me say at once that I don't agree with this interpretation. I don't believe that *Little Eyolf* is a morality play where after the hell of the passions the characters go through a purgatory of expiation and finally achieve a peace that

turns their spiritual gaze upwards towards the stars. And if we listen carefully to Ibsen's words, Rita's final project to receive the children into her home reveals an unaltered desire for possession.

RITA (*slowly, with decision*) As soon as you've left me, I shall go down to the shore and bring all those poor, outcast children up here with me to our place. All the wretched little boys-

ALLMERS What will you do with them here?

RITA I will make them my own.

ALLMERS *You* will?

RITA Yes, I will. From the day you go, they shall be here, all of them – as if they were my own.<sup>16</sup>

It's a last, desperate attempt to rid herself of a nightmare, but at the same time those children are part of the nightmare. In them Rita sees reflected, as in a mirror, their lovelessness and Allmers' as well for little Eyolf.

I remember seeing in a performance of *Little Eyolf* in Oslo how these lines of Rita's were translated on stage into a mechanical, hysterical gesture. While Allmers spoke, the actress laid kiddies' clothes in a circle around the flag-pole. She arranged them carefully locked in a frenzy, which made her imagine the multiplication of numberless little Eyolfs in her house.

RITA: They shall live in Eyolf's room – look at his books – play with his toys. They shall take it in turns to sit in his chair at table.<sup>17</sup>

It was a most powerful expression of that delirium of motherhood by which Rita tries to placate her obsession with her dead son.

### 5. Plot and subplot

Any production of *Little Eyolf* has to take account of the complexity of the difficult role of Rita. The part requires a talented actress capable, like Janet Achurch, of representing Rita's multiple faces without reducing them to the mask of the *femme fatale* in the first part and of the *mater dolorosa* in the last.

Today, as we know, staging practice has changed greatly. Compared with the past, the main character is no longer isolated on stage by a spotlight. The *mise-en-scène* in our time aims to give space to all the characters. In this overall vision, the subplot which centres on the ambiguous tie between Asta and Allmers takes on

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<sup>16</sup> *Little Eyolf*, p.280.

<sup>17</sup> *Little Eyolf*, p. 280.



a sharper relief. Contemporary productions give full expression to this subplot, and don't play down the implicit incestuous element of their relationship.

In many productions there is, however, too stereotyped a contrast between Rita and Asta: sensual versus sensitive, violent versus meek, guilty versus innocent. This opposition reduces Asta to being simply the antithesis of Rita. It is undoubtedly a difficult task for an actress to render the vibrant dramatic impact of this young woman imprisoned by her past.

There's a scene in the play, at the end of the second act, which is emblematic of her attempt to take leave of that past, in which dressed up as a boy she used to play the part of Allmers' fictitious brother, under the name of Eyolf. Having revealed that she isn't his sister, Asta offers Allmers a bunch of water-lilies. They are, she says, "a last greeting to you from – from little Eyolf". In that gesture it's as if Asta is finally showing herself to him as a woman. For a moment she is neither a sister nor a disguised boy, but a woman who has flowered up from the depths of the lake where her male double has symbolically drowned. She no longer wants to be reinvested with her former role, as Allmers wishes. Unlike her, Allmers has never really grown up. Indeed, to avoid acknowledging his present guilt he feels the need to regress into a childhood of mythic innocence. But their love is no longer innocent, and indeed it has never been so.

The interaction between plot and subplot is Ibsen's main challenge to actors and directors in their staging of *Little Eyolf*. They are tightly woven together throughout the play, only to be separated at the very end, in the last, most difficult act.

### *Epilogue*

I'd like to conclude by mentioning an idea for staging *Little Eyolf* that completely upturns Ibsen's play. The Italian director Massimo Castri had this idea, but has never carried it through on stage. It is only to be found among his notes jotted down while he was working on his outstanding production in 1984.

Reflecting on the role of Eyolf and the haunting presence of his "open eyes", he imagines that the child is not actually dead. He was saved by the rat-wife, who is thereby transformed into a "beneficent mother". Little Eyolf simply threw his crutch into the fjord and pretended to die in order to remove himself from the conflict and lovelessness of his home. He no longer wants to be used as an alibi in the relations between his parents. He wants to see how they will fare without him. Throughout the play he observes the action, unseen, and at the end accompanies the last lines spoken by his parents on the piano.

## TIL FORSVAR FOR BOLETTE. EKTESKAPSDEBATTEN I IBSENS *FRUEN FRA HAVET*

BERET WICKLUND<sup>\*\*</sup>

**ABSTRAKT.** Til forsvar for Bolette. Ekteskapsdebatten i Ibsens *Fruen fra havet*. In Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea* Wangel's eldest daughter Bolette accepts to marry her former teacher to be free and be able to leave home. This proposal has often been seen as a parallel to Ellida's marriage to Wangel, who "bought" her from her father, and Bolette's acceptance is thus an unhappy solution as it is based not on love, but lack of other options, thus being a critic of society and women's lack of equality. By exploring the different stages in Arnholm's proposal, Bolette's alternative choices and her response, I argue in my article that this scene presents the idea that equality means mutual respect to each part's needs and wishes, as opposed to an egocentric, child-like attitude represented by the romantic artist-to-be Lyngstrand. Thus this proposal gives us the ideological foundation for Ellida's final choice of "acclimatication" and civilization in the main plot of this drama.

*Fruen fra havet* er et drama som kombinerer psykologi og samfunnskritikk på en for Ibsenpublikumet, uvant og særegen måte, og mange av de som kjente Ibsen best som idealist og samfunnsrefser var heller negative til stykket. Balansen mellom de to sidene ved dramaet har bydd på utfordringer både for dramatikere og kritikere, slik at oppsetninger og tolkninger helst fokuserer på det ene perspektivet på bekostningen av det andre. Dette gjelder også kvinnelige forskere og kritikere.

Lest som realistisk og samfunnskritisk drama, er *Fruen fra havet* kjent for å uttrykke kritikk av hvordan ekteskapet er bygd på kjøp og salg. Hovedpersonen Ellida Wangels innser i at hun i si tid solgte seg til ektemannen og tar et oppgjør med ham om dette. At stedatteren Bolette sier ja til sin tidligere huslærer Arnholms frieri for å komme ut i verden, har blitt tolket som en parallell til måten Ellidas ekteskap kom i stand. Alfred Sinding-Larsen syn på Bolettes valg har dermed blitt stående fra 1888: "Denne scenen... vil til alle tider staa som et Paradigma til Indledningen til et Fornuftgiftermaal" (Sinding Larsen 1888). Feministiske Ibsenforskere i vår tid, som Joan Templeton og Sandra Saari, deler dette noe

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negative synet på Bolettes valg. Saari hevder for eksempel at Bolette går inn i en konvensjonell kvinnerolle, mens derimot søsteren Hilde "creates her own active design" og dermed peker framover mot en alternativ og mer selvstendig kvinnerolle. Det er dette noe snevre synet på Bolette jeg vil utfordre i denne artikkelen ved å se nærmere på Bolettes valg. Jeg vil hevde at står for et radikalt syn på kjønnsroller og ekteskap, men å forstå disse sidene forutsetter at en fokuserer på hva som sies underveis i frieriet mer enn på det faktiske utfallet.

I den psykologiske og psykoanalytiske tradisjonen er en mer positiv til Bolettes valg. Slike lesninger legger først og fremst vekt på Ellida Wangels terapeutiske samtaleprosess som setter hennes fri fra bindingen til mannen fra fortiden og skaper forsoning med nåtiden. Forsoningen innebærer at Ellida forsaker den absolutte friheten som sjømannen og havet representerer, og hun velger den siviliserte friheten, frihet under ansvar, i samliv med ektemannen. Anne Marie Rekdal er i sin Lacan-inspirerte lesning av dramaet, inne på hvordan både Bolette og Ellidas valg mellom disse to typene frihet illustrerer hvordan individets psykologiske utvikling innebærer en sublimering. "Å sublimerer er å frigjøre seg fra det regressive som karussdammen representerer og gå inn i det symbolske med de begrensinger i friheten som *det* innebærer." (Rekdal 1998, s.221) Rekdal ser dermed Bolettes valg som noe mer enn et fornuftsekteskap:

Hennes motiver for å velge Arnholm er ikke bare styrt av materielle behov. Ut fra den metaforiske konteksten i dramaet er de også styrt av hva karussdammen som *det reelle* representerer, og som Bolette takler gjennom sin form for sublimering. Gjennom å velge den sosiale og begrensede friheten og muligheten til kunnskap, avstår hun fra den absolutte friheten *le pire* som er knyttet til karussdammen og *det reelle*. (Rekdal 1998, s.222)

Det vil føre for langt å gå nærmere inn på psykoanalytiske lesninger her, men jeg vil trekke fram at flere kvinnelige kritikere i Ibsens samtid står for et positivt syn på hvordan konflikten løses i dramaet, og dermed den sublimering som finner sted. Den kjente kvinnesaksforkjemper og forfatter Camilla Collett roser for eksempel stykket fordi det avslører de romantiske kjærlighetsdrømmer hun selv og så mange andre kvinner har latt seg rive med av, her knyttet til den fremmede som representerer den absolutte friheten. Collett omtaler den slik: "Ungdomstrangens blinde, rodløse – kritikløse – Forelskelse – Fantasiens Foster. Denne Dæmon som har knust saa utallige hjerter, ødelagt så utallige eksistenser" (Collett 1889). En tilsvarende positiv holdning kommer fram i omtaler av ledende kvinnesakskvinner som Wilhelmine Ullmann, Gina Krogh og Hanna Andersen Butenschön. Butenschön ser mennene i verket som representanter for ulike stadier i menns syn på kvinners likeverd. Her har Wangel nådd det høyeste nivå, mens Arnholm er en god nummer to. (Butenschön 1889)

Når det gjelder Bolette-skikkelsen, hører med å nevne at mange kritikere har sett på bipersonene som overflødige i dette dramaet, eller de ser på dem kun som speiling av hovedpersonen. Det innebærer å se Bolettes ja til Arnholm som

uttrykk for at hun, som Ellida, resignert og uten motstand inngå et fornuftekteskap basert på kjøp og salg på samme måte som Ellida i sin tid gjorde det da Wangel fridde til henne. Jeg vil hevde at scenen uttrykker langt mer enn dette. Den viser oss riktignok Ellidas *dilemma* ved å gjenta det med andre personer og i en ny situasjon, men den er forskjellig fra Ellidas historie på en rekke viktige punkter. Den viser hva som manglet av likeverd mellom mann og kvinne da Ellida ga sitt ja. Denne mangelen er det Ellida senere i dramaet tar et oppgjør med Wangel om, og dette oppgjøret fører til at hun til slutt kan velge ham på et annet grunnlag enn tidligere. Frieriscenen mellom Bolette og Arnholm fungerer dermed til å klargjøre og illustrere viktige prinsipper for likeverdighet, og dette foregriper Ellidas endelige valg. La oss se på hvordan dette kommer til uttrykk i dramateksten.

Frieriscenens plassering i 5. akt i dramaet legger visse føringer for hvordan den kan tolkes. Den følger etter innledningsscenen i 4.akt som viser Lyngstrands flørt med begge Wangeldøtrene, der han ber først den ene og så den andre om å være inspirerende muse for ham mens han er ute i verden og utvikler seg som kunstner. Bolette avslører egoismen i hans prosjekt ved å spørre om kvinnens plass i et slikt forhold, men romantikeren Lyngstrand vil nyte gleden ved at en kvinne tenker på ham uten å yte noe til gjengjeld. Tvert imot vil han "belønne" Bolette for innsatsen ved å vrake henne når hun vil ha blitt for gammel og bytte henne ut med Hilde. Ironiseringen over Lyngstrand i denne scenen levner ingen tvil om at denne mannlige egoismen ikke kan være grunnlag for et forhold mellom mann og kvinne, slik Bolette ser det.

Frieriscenen mellom Arnholm og Bolette har flere faser, og disse tematiserer ulike aspekter ved forholdet mellom mann og kvinne. Utgangspunktet er at Bolette tidligere har delt sine lengsler og sine bekymringer for sin framtid med Arnholm. Etter at han har forsikret seg om at hun ikke er bundet til noen (som Ellida var da han fridde til henne), sier så Arnholm: "...så skal De også få reise med meg" (Ibsen 1934, s.142). Bolette klapper i hendene av begeistring og lykke, men når Arnholm deretter spør om hun vil "knytte seg til ham for livet" viker hun tilbake i skrekk.

Bolettes reaksjon får Arnholm til å fortelle at han ut fra Wangels brev til ham har trodd det var Bolette, og ikke Ellida, som har gått og tenkt på ham. Etter at denne misforståelsen er oppklart, går Arnholm tilbake til sitt første tilbud om å sørge for at Bolette likevel får reise ut i verden og lære noe, slik hun ønsker, men dette føler Bolette at hun ikke kan ta imot etter det som er sagt. Arnholm bønnfaller henne om å ikke avslå og minner om alternativene, å bli alene når faren dør eller måtte ta en annen hun "heller ikke kunne føle noen godhet for". Stilt overfor disse utsiktene, sier Bolette nølende ja, og nå byttes rollene om. Det er Arnholm som gleder seg over utsiktene til et forhold basert på vennskap, mens det er Bolette som deretter forsiktig røper at hun likevel kan tenke seg å gifte seg med ham.

Det er tydelig at Bolettes gir sitt ja med veloverveid beslutsomhet, men under sterk tvil. Lesere og tilskuere settes i samme uro som hun synes å føle, når det gjelder å avgjøre om hun har blitt manipulert inn i ekteskapet en mann som har

utnyttet hennes situasjon som ugift og ubemidlet kvinne med svært begrensede muligheter. Men la oss se nærmere på hva det er slags overveielser som kan ha ligget til grunn for hvordan Bolette handler. Den sosiale og økonomiske siden av saken er svært viktig for henne og hun selv oppfatter seg ikke som ufri ved denne forlovelsen, snarere tvert om. Hun gleder seg ved tanken på å komme ut av sin nåværende rolle som voksen datter med en ubemidlet far: "Tænk, - at vide sig fri - og få komme du i det fremmede. Og så ikke behøve at gå og ængste sig for fremtiden. Ikke gå og grue for dette tossede udkomme-" (Ibid.s146). Ufriheten ved den innstengte posisjonen som hjemmевærende datter er altså den største byrden i hennes liv. I denne sammenhengen er det riktig å si at hennes ja til Arnholm et ja til et fornuftsekteskap. Men det er likevel et faktum at hun ikke hadde behøvd å gifte seg med Arnholm for å få lov til å reise ut, for han er villig til å hjelpe henne også på vennskapelig basis. Hvorfor velger hun ikke *denne* løsningen? Valget må ses i lys av den forutgående scenen med Lyngstrand.

Den personlige siden ved Bolettes valg gjelder hennes drøm om å komme ut i verden. Dette er en drøm hun deler Lyngstrand. Der ute vil han berike sin sjel på en hengiven kvinnes varme tanker, uten tanke for henne. Denne posisjonen har Bolette grundig avslørt som egoistisk. Hun står for en ide om et likeverdig forhold der begge parter yter noe for den andre. Aksepterer hun å motta Arnholms støtte uten å gi noe igjen, er hun altså i samme posisjon som den selvsentrerte Lyngstrand. Et slikt valg vil bety å bytte ut mannlig egoisme med kvinnelig, og dette bringer oss ikke nærmere et likeverdig forhold mellom mann og kvinne. For Bolette er dette tydeligvis et moralsk spørsmål. Det gjelder gjensidig respekt for hverandres ønsker.

Men forholdet har også en følelsesmessig side. Bolette er taus om hva hun føler for Arnholm, og kritikere synes å ta for gitt at Bolette ikke nærer noen varme følelser for ham, eller at hun til og med føler motvilje mot ham. Dette er det ikke belegg for å hevde ut fra Ibsens tekst. Tvert imot får vi vite at Bolette svermet for Arnholm den gang han var hennes lærer. Situasjonen er dermed ikke den samme for Bolette som den var for Ellida overfor Wangel og Arnholm. Ellida hadde mannen fra fortiden i sine tanker da hun ble fridd til, men mannen fra fortiden i Bolettes liv, det er nettopp Arnholm. At Bolette nå overraskes over at han ser tynnhåret og halvgammel ut og tar avstand fra sin skolepikeforelskelse, er ikke det samme som at hun misliker ham. Det hun har problemer med, er å se ham i en *annen rolle* enn som sin lærer. Jeg tolker Bolettes handling her som uttrykk for at hun styres av det samme idealet om likeverd som hun forfekter overfor Lyngstrand. Et lærer-elev forhold har sterke likheter med et far-datter forhold. Dette er en relasjon der læreren/faren er autoritet og rådgiver med ansvar for eleven/barnet, mens eleven er det umodne barnet som trenger råd og ikke kan foreta selvstendige valg på egne vegne. Nettopp denne relasjonen ligner den far-barn relasjonen som Ellida gjør opprør mot overfor Wangel. Bolettes valg foregriper altså dette opprøret.

Når det gjelder den seksuelle siden ved ekteskapet, som også er en side ved et frieri, så er det fristende å trekke en parallell til det berømte frieriet i Ibsen foregående drama, *Rosmersholm*. Også dette har flere faser. Rebekka West er først henrykt over tilbudet om å bli Beates etterfølger, dernest avslår hun kontant når tilbudet endres til et samliv ”i frihet, i fryd, lidenskap”. Slik jeg tolker det, ønsker Rebekka et platonisk forhold til Rosmer, for på grunn av skyldfølelsen overfor sitt incestuøse forhold til faren er hun ikke følelsesmessig i stand til å leve i et seksuelt forhold til ham. Det er et lignende omslag i Bolettes reaksjon. Først er hun lykkelig over tilbudet om et aseksuelt forhold. Hun reagerer som et barn som får en etterlenget gave. Når den seksuelle realiteten bringers inn ved at tilbudet gjelder ekteskap, blir dette derimot en umulig posisjon. Forskjellen mellom Bolette og Rebekka er imidlertid at Bolette ombestemmer seg når hun får tenkt seg om. Det er tydeligvis altså ikke den seksuelle siden ved den voksne kvinnerollen som sådan som skremmer henne, det er nærmest det motsatte, det å bli værende i barnerollens uskyld synes umulig. Det er den rollen hun vil ut av.

Likeverd mellom partene betyr også at begge ønsker tas hensyn til, og det skjer i dette frieriet. Her er det en viktig forskjell mellom bipersoner og hovedpersoner, en forskjell som antyder at frieriet er noe mer enn en påminnelse om Ellidas fornufteekteskap. Bolettes ja til Arnholm er annerledes enn Ellidas ja til Wangel i fortiden, for Bolette stiller betingelser, og disse loves innfridd. Ellida stilte i sin tid ingen krav, men synes å ha latt seg overlevere passivt fra farens varetekt til ektemannens. Bolette har derimot klare ønsker, hun setter ord på sine dem og hun får dem anerkjent som legitime. På bakgrunn av de rådende forhold på Ibsens tid, tør jeg påstå at Bolette på dette punktet framstår som både radikal og selvstendig snarere enn underdanig og konvensjonell.

Den viktigste hindringen for Bolette i forhold til Arnholm, er hennes eget mentale bilde av ham som hennes lærer. ”De, som har været min lærer! Jeg kan ikke tenke mig at skulle stå i noget slags andet forhold til Dem” (Ibid. S.144) forklarer hun. Hun har tidligere erklært at man ikke gifter seg med sin lærer. Siden dette ikke var uvanlig for kvinner i borgerlige familier, der markedet var begrenset, må vi anta at Bolette anser et slikt giftermål som svært konvensjonelt. Livssituasjonen har dessuten gjort henne nøktern overfor romantiske ideer om kjærlighet uten tanke for den praktiske virkeligheten. Arnholm er på tilsvarende måte styrt av sitt mentale bilde av Bolette, formet av Wangels brev som ledet ham til å tro at det var Bolette, og ikke Ellida, som har gått og tenkt på ham. At denne feiltakelsen nå er oppklart er ikke nok til å endre situasjonen for Arnholm uten videre. Det mentale bilde farger det relle: ”Deres Billede, – således som jeg bærer det i meg, - vil alltid stå farvet og præget av den stemning som fejltagelsen satte meg i (Ibid.s.144)” Både Bolettes og Arnholms fantasibilder av hverandre er klare paralleller til stykkets hovedkonflikt og en sentral tematikk i dramaet. Ellida Wangel må overvinne sitt bilde av den fremmede som demonisk havmann for å frigjøre seg fra angsten for ham, og Wangel må overvinne sitt bilde av Ellida som havfrue, naturvesen og hjelpetrengende barn for å gi henne friheten hun trenger.

De mentale bildene personene bærer i seg av hverandre er ikke uten videre enkle å overvinne. Psykologisk kan de forstås som projeksjoner av indre bilder, og så sådan forsvinner de ikke bare ved at de blir identifisert og påpekt, men dette er en nødvendig begynnelse. Arnholms bilde av Bolette som kvinnen som går og drømmer om ham, ligner dessuten sterkt om Lyngstrand drømmekvinne, en rolle Bolette tar avstand fra. Bolette må erkjenne at mannen hun knytter seg til har et romantisert bilde av henne som ikke uten videre lar seg endre. Imidlertid er dette en situasjon parallell til hennes egen, for også hennes bilde av ham er farget av fortiden. Hun ser ham som sin lærer og kommer ikke uten videre ut av denne forblindelsen. På denne måten er de i samme båt. Det viktige her, og det skiller Arnholm fra Lyngstrand, er at han, som Bolette, er klar over sin forblindelse. Disse to har bevissthet om hvordan fantasibildene styrer dem og de kan sette ord på denne innsikten. Jeg vil hevde at Bolette og Arnholm på dette området viser avansert innsikt i hva som styrer forholdet mellom menn og kvinner. Med denne innsikten representerer de et skritt i riktig retning mot et mer likeverdig forhold mellom kjønnene. Hundre års kvinnekamp etter Ibsens tid har vist at likeverd mellom kjønnene ikke følger automatisk av økonomisk og juridiske frihet. Det er de mentale bildene menn og kvinner har av hverandre som er det problematiske og som vi stadig sliter med å avsløre. Det er interessant at Ibsen også på dette området viser innsikt langt forut for sin tid.

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## ASPECTS OF THE MASTER BUILDER MYTH IN IBSEN'S *THE MASTER BUILDER*

SANDA TOMESCU BACIU\*\*

**ABSTRACT.** *Aspects of the Master Builder Myth in Ibsen's "The Master Builder"*. The paper proposes an archetypal perspective on some motives of Henrik Ibsen's *The Master Builder*. The analysis aims to trace the mythical core of the archetypal idea/representation (C. G. Jung) of the drama, with a focus on the daemonic dimension and the idea of sacrifice contained in this myth (Mircea Eliade). As background, an outline of the displaced or camouflaged myth of creation – in a broader cultural context – will be drawn, with reference to the Eddic myth of the master builder, the legend of St Olaf, and the East European ballad of Manole, the master builder. *The Master Builder (Bygmester Solness)* could also be viewed as an archetypal image of the primordial creation myth, which, according to Eliade, expresses the myth of the eternal return.

### *Outline*

The paper views the text of the master builder as image (Kittang: 277), namely as an archetypal image of the myth of creation, reading the play from one perspective, that of a camouflaged myth. According to G. Vico the myth in itself is a metaphor and the metaphor is the linguistic equivalent of the myth (Vico: 245). The revealing metaphor of creation contains in a nutshell the myth of creation and expresses the human being's attempt to reach an ultimate challenge on what Gaston Bachelard calls the vertical axis of the air, a challenge of the absolute, which also implies the daemonic side of creation and the "self sacrifice".

### **Displaced myth in folklore traditions**

In the displaced or camouflaged myths of creation the human being imitates the primordial gesture of the divinity. The mere imitation of a divine primordial gesture, which is real because it is sacred, implies the sacrifice which coincides with the originally Space and Time of the primordial divine manifestation. The concrete time or the actual time thus coincides with the mythic time of creation

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through this ritual, as a co-occurrence between the whole and the part, between the transient and the absolute (Eliade: 1992: 95). Thus, the sacrifice of the re-enacted creation coincides with the primeval time - "illo tempore", and space - the centre of the world. Every act of creation copies the cosmic archetypal representation of the cosmogony myth and this act has to take place in the centre of the world, because creation started in the centre, which is sacred. The sacrifice of the constructor, be it daemonic or not, is contained in the myth of Creation, either because the master builder, as a humble human being, is not allowed to create an outstanding edifice, which can only stand in God's power, or because the fear of perfection may express the fear of death. Only God can create anything without diminishing His being. The human being, who is also a result of creation, is sterile as long as he does not give soul to the product of his own hands. He can give it life by sacrificing himself or his fellow human beings (Eliade: 1992: 79).

Thus, in the secularized myths of creation, from Greece to Transylvania, the sacrifice of a child, a woman, a stranger or even the master builder himself gives soul to the construction, it gives the edifice both "duration" and "perenniality". The meaning of the sacrifice is to remake the original act of creation, because it is only in this way that a thing/edifice gains reality and duration according to Eliade (Eliade: 1992: 89).

As suggested by Eliade, this repetition of the creation act implies the archaic human being's thirst to live again the 'wholeness', it is the nostalgic need to go back to the primordial crucial time of the creation. It is the metaphysical vocation to recover the lost paradise (Eliade: 1992: 86), or it is the revealing metaphor of the great myth of humanity, the fall and redemption of the divine soul.

The legends and rituals connected to the cosmogony myth, the superstitions and legends about constructions (churches, cities, houses, bridges, walls, etc) ask for almost similar sacrifices from the human being, thus reiterating the primordial act of a mythical amorphous creature which through sacrifice, a violent death, gives birth to the worlds, transforming Chaos into Cosmos.

According to Joseph Harris "the existence of an Old Norse myth was attested at least four centuries before the earliest folktale versions" and "the only certain attestation of the myth is in the late sophisticated handbook of Snorri Sturluson and shows strong traces of his creative hand." (Harris: 66). The actors of the narrative are the master builder (who proves in the end to be a daemonic character) and the contractor (represented by the Gods), while the outstanding work is embodied by the walls of Aasgaard to be built in due time so that the master builder gets his reward, namely Freya and the sun and the moon in the sky. The contract is faked by the contractor with the help of Loke, while the identity of the master builder - alias the mountain giant - is revealed and hence the constructor is punished and destroyed by Tor. The productivity of the "displaced" or "camouflaged" myth in folk literature is very rich, especially in South Eastern Europe where the construction theme is profoundly related to the idea of the daemonic and that of

human sacrifice. The image of sacrifice evolved in the South Eastern tradition from the sacrifice of a person indifferent to the master builder to the sacrifice of a person closely attached to the constructor (the wife of the master builder to be built in the walls of the construction work). This leads to a change of human aspect within this archetypal image, namely an incipient phase of the idea of self-sacrifice in achieving a creation work. This qualitative mutation (Ciompec: 278) constitutes the foundation of the aesthetical accomplishment of the myth in the Eastern European cultural tradition. From Greece to Transylvania, this qualitative change is self-contained in the folk legend, as quoted by Ciompec:

“Et gardez vous bien de sacrifier un orphelin, un étranger ou un voyageur/ Mais seulement la belle épouse du maître oeuvre” • (Ciompec: 278).

The daemonic touch of the master builder who sacrifices his own wife in order to achieve the outstanding work of art is somehow related to the fact that the master builder in the Scandinavian tradition is of daemonic offspring, a troll or a vette. The historical legends about St Olaf and the Seljord Church and the Trondheim Cathedral can be subsumed under a formal pattern, according to Sehmsdorf: “both involve the task of building a tower and the need of the builder to enlist the help of a demon troll to achieve a degree of perfection (the superhuman height) ordinarily denied to a man” (Sehmsdorf: 265).

The master builder's imperative desire to create the masterpiece within a given time metaphorically transforms itself within the folklore tradition. As such, the archetypal representation focuses upon the challenge of perfection, of the divine creation. It is this very aspect which is contained in the narrative of creation in the Eddas. The daemonic sides of the constructor and the construction are linked to the captivating imperative to challenge perfection, through the outstanding work of art which is, in the Norwegian folklore variants, as in the South-Eastern European variants, - as for example *Manole the master builder* - a cathedral rising on the axis of the air.

Literary criticism has constantly come with proofs that Ibsen's *The Master Builder -Bygmester Solness* - makes use of the Norwegian folklore belief according to which a troll assists a human being to achieve personal success at a certain price. It is the case of the two Norwegian legends about King Olav, the master builder, who associates to a daemonic force / a troll / to achieve the outstanding edifices of Seljord church and of Trondheim cathedral. The explanatory functions of the legends reveal the daemonic aspect which gave birth to outstanding achievements, in this case “the tower, the structure so high that it stood for something superhuman and unachievable by a man unless he had the help of a supernatural power” (Sehmsdorf: 265).

The representation of the tower is connected to a centre representing a revealing metaphor of the ascension myth. The tower reminds us of the Babel

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• “But pay attention and don't sacrifice an orphan, a stranger or a voyager/ But only the beautiful wife of the master builder”.

tower which is the Gate to the sky and whose purpose was to recreate the broken axis in order to reach God. And Babel means the Gate to God. Still, as Chevalier points out (Chevalier: III: 393), this connection between the Earth and the divinity was perverted over time and became its contrary. The Babel tower has come to symbolize the opposite, namely the human arrogance in an attempt to reach the heights of divinity, and from a collective point of view the desire of a community to revolt against God. In Christian tradition, the tower is the symbol of ascension to heaven. (Chevalier: vol.3: 394) On this axis of the air, the ascent to heaven is apparently opposed to the fall, or to the descent to Hades, which are both characteristic for the master builder myth. Still, both the ascending and the descending movements on the axis of the air account for the same thing, the “initiatory scenario” which leads to “selfrealization”.

### **Ibsen’s Master Builder**

Ibsen used creatively this archetypal representation of the master builder myth which was present as a displaced myth in the Norwegian folklore. In support of this idea also comes the well known reference made by Ibsen about the legend of the builder of St Michals’ church in Munich who was killed when he fell down from the church he had built. Commenting for Helene Raff on the explanatory “Baumeistersage”, Ibsen touched the very core of this primordial image: “Die Leute empfinden sehr richtig, dass niemand ungestraft so hoch baut” (Sehmsdorf: 268). The reading of the play *The Master Builder - Bygmester Solness* - as image may reveal the archetypal image of the myth of construction, as a camouflaged myth or “secularized” myth, which re-enacts the “initiatory scenario” of the creation myth, through the challenge of an impossible task to be accomplished, **the fulfilment of absolute mastery**.

“Solness (alvorlig): Har De aldri merket det, Hilde, at det umulige – det liksom lokker og roper på en?” (462)

“Solness: Have you never noticed, Hilda, how the impossible, how it beckons and calls to you?” (BJ 394)

According to Eliade and the folklore tradition, the re-enacting of the myth of creation involves two important aspects: the daemonic aspect and the sacrifice, which are present on different levels in the play. The first level regards Solness’ success as a master builder within the society or the profane environment.

The second level points towards the master builder’s fulfilment on the ascension axis of the air in the sphere of the sacred. One can remark the use of the word “vær” in Norwegian, for both dimensions, on the one hand in the profane world:

“Solness: ...ja, ser De, - som sagt, - den brannen, den brakte meg i **været**, den. Som bygmester da.” (461).

“Solness: So you see, as I said, that fire, set me up – as master builder, that is.” (BJ:393) and, on the other hand, in the sacred world:

“Jeg hadde aldri før kunnet stige så høyt og fritt **til værs**”

Both levels are marked by Solness' encounters with Hilde, the source<sup>1</sup>, the anima, or his double. Solness, the master builder, whom Hilde symptomatically calls only by his generic name, embodies the exemplary hero who, in his initiatory scenario, is the daemonic vitality aiming to fulfil the absolute mastery. The initiatory scenario re-enacts the creation myth leading the master builder to the centre, to his own centre, the selfrealization (*selverkjennelse*) which only Hilde can perceive as such at the end of the play. It is symptomatic that Ibsen did not call Solness an architect, but archaically a master builder, denominating, as Sehmsdorf points out, both the designer or planner and the craftsman who supervises the actual construction... making in this way the legendary tradition relevant to his drama.

The daemonic aspect of the drama is present both in Solness and in his double, Hilde. The master builder's Shadow embodied by the troll, the devils, even the vampire bear the blame for having sacrificed Aline in the sphere of the profane, transforming her into one of the living dead.

"Solness: Ja dævlene! Og trollet inneni meg også. De har tappet alt livsblodet av henne. For min lykkens skyld gjorde de det" (474)

"Solness: Yes, devils! And the trolls inside me also. They've drained all the life blood from her. They did it for the sake of my happiness and success" (BJ: 410)

Still, Solness' fulfilment on the profane level, of building churches and then houses, turns out to be illusionary and ephemeral when the master builder encounters Hilde for the second time in his life:

"Solness: Er det ikke underlig -? Jo mer jeg tenker over det nu. – så står det for meg som om jeg i hele lange år har gått her og pint meg med – hm- måtte ha glemte igjen. Men aldri så fikk jeg tak i hva det kunne være." (453)

"Solness: Isn't it strange? The more I think about it now, it's as if for many long years I've gone around tormenting myself with, hm..

Hilda: With what?

Solness: Trying to track down something, some experience I thought I'd forgotten. But I could never discover a clue as to what it could be." (BJ: 382)

"The forgotten" defines the hero's initiatory road towards the centre, towards the very self of the hero, through a centripetal movement triggered by the second appearance of Hilde in Solness' life, and culminating with the *aircastle*, and the ascension and fall on the vertical axis of the air. It is on his second meeting with Hilde that Solness perceives the illusionary success of his artistry in the profane world. The *source* of this revelation, *Hilde*, makes him aware of the supreme mastery – **the aircastle (luftslottet)**.

Hilde, regarded as image, is the double of Solness in Otto Rank's words, the master builder's anima, the eternal feminine, the daemonic which in C. G. Jung's view is both good and bad: "because the Anima wants life, she wants both good and bad". (Jung: 223). Both as daemon and princess, she liberates the prince and

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<sup>1</sup> *Hilde* pronounced as *kilde* which means "source" in Norwegian.

gives him back his soul, as in the myth of Cupid and Psyche referred to by Otto Rank. She can be perceived as the anima that can be reached in relation to the opposite sex, and which would be the image of the soul, its vital force in a positive sense or in a negative one, according to Jung. Hilde is den “hivtkledde dævelunge” suddenly emerging from nowhere, from Solness’ subconscious:

“Solness: ... Hvorfor er De kommet?

Hilde: Fordi jeg vil ha fatt i mitt kongerike. Nu er fristen ute”...(452)

“Solness: Why have you come?

Hilda: Because I want my kingdom. The time’s up”. (BJ: 381)

Hilde speaks through archetypal images which suit her role as anima, as for example: *troll*, *luftstott* (*aircastle*), *kongerike* (*kingdom*), which trigger a process of giving shape to Solness’ thoughts which eventually turn into the supreme act of creation, achieving the mastery of the aircastle, Luftsloppet, on the ascensional axis of the air represented by the tower.

The initiatory scenario of the hero leads him to the centre, and through a centripetal movement the master builder approaches the sacred on the ascensional axis of the air with the belief and ultimate challenge to build “det deiligste i verden”(480) since the princess “skal ha sitt slott” (480). The master builder dares climb as high as he has built, “stige så høyt som han selv bygger” but falls immediately after, as if defeated by the Ikarus syndrome.

But the ascensional movement on the axis of the air, described by Bachelard, as well as the fall, the violent sacrifice, mentioned by Eliade, are both an expression of the same dimension, the initiatory itinerary of the hero, the way to the centre, the re-enacting of the creation myth. The violent death of the master builder suggests the self sacrifice of the master builder which re-enacts the creation myth, concluding the initiatory scenario of the hero through its triadic form, ascension – fall – rediscovery of the self by returning to the centre in the sphere of the sacred. The aircastle (Luftsloppet) is at the same time the *axis mundi*, the centre of the universe which creates the world. It is an *imago mundi*, which gains the soul of the master builder who continues his existence by giving his soul to it. It is only Hilde who seems to see that Solness became part of and gave soul to the aircastle which unites them both. The sacrifice and the re-enacted creation coincide with the original time - “illo tempore” -, and space – the centre of the world. According to Eliade, this centre means ESSE, the absolute reality, being the opposite of the profane, of the becoming, of life, in one word, the opposite of NON ESSE. (Eliade: 1991: 29)

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## THE RECEPTION OF IBSEN IN THE UNITED STATES: A MIRROR OF CULTURAL AND POLITICAL CONCERNS, 1889–1910

ORM ØVERLAND\*\*

**ABSTRACT.** *The Reception of Ibsen in the United States: A Mirror of Cultural and Political Concerns, 1889–1910.* Ibsen was introduced in New York in the 1889-1890 season with *A Doll's House*. Reactions to his plays in the first two decades were largely negative: Ibsen's plays were incomprehensible, they had a message and were therefore not suitable for the theater, and they were obscene. A fourth issue, the question of their relevancy for the United States, had markedly different responses before and after 1900. In the 1890s Ibsen was found to be irrelevant for a healthy society. In the next decade, however, he was seen to address social ills in the United States. The reviews of American Ibsen productions in this period may not throw much new light on his plays, but they have much to say about prevalent social and cultural views. The critical debate that his plays engendered focused on those very issues that characterized American theater of the period and that precluded a warm American welcome of the Norwegian dramatist.

By the time Henrik Ibsen had become recognized as the foremost contemporary dramatist in many European countries, he was still largely unknown in the United States. When one of his plays eventually was produced and reviewed, the event presents us with a paradox. *Ghosts*, published in Copenhagen in 1881, had its first performance some months later in Chicago. This production may be called provincial; it was done by an immigrant amateur company, in the original language, and far from New York. Nevertheless, the review in the Chicago Norwegian-

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language newspaper, *Skandinaven* May 30, 1882, was well-informed and demonstrated critical sophistication. The critic concluded that the play was not entirely successful. He was evidently familiar with Georg Brandes and believed that literature should hold up a mirror to society so that readers and audiences could more clearly see its faults. Consequently, *Ghosts* was a failure because it did not give “an image of society as a whole but presented an example of a situation that, happily, is an exception.”<sup>1</sup> But the reviewer did not complain that the play was difficult or repulsive. A decade later, the drama critics of New York would declare Ibsen both intellectually incomprehensible and morally unacceptable. Most New York critics in the 1890s appear provincial in comparison with the immigrant critic in Chicago in 1882.

Ibsen posed a challenge to a theater regarded as a place of light entertainment. He was launched in the 1889–1890 theater season with *A Doll's House* and the circumstances were propitious. The leading role was played by Minnie Maddern Fiske, a star of the New York stage, and the producer was the equally prominent Richard Mansfield. Before opening on New York's Broadway, theater productions were tried out in cities such as New Haven, Boston and Philadelphia. Fully aware of the importance of this theatrical event, *The New York Tribune* had sent a critic to the opening night in Boston. He noted that, to-day's representation was the first that any of Ibsen's plays had had in this country before an audience which fairly represented the best class of American play-goers. Although the Globe was not filled many of the best known literary people were present and before the play began there was on the faces of the majority an expression which said clearly “This is an important occasion and our responsibility in judging of the work of a dramatist who is the founder of a new school of playwriting is great.”<sup>2</sup>

The event created considerable interest in Ibsen in Boston. The *New York Tribune*, December 22, 1889, noted that there were more requests for Ibsen than for any other author in the city's libraries. The audiences in other cities where the play was tried out before coming to New York may not have been equally well prepared. A critic claimed, somewhat facetiously, “that in spite of the many columns of Ibsen matter, published in advance of the performance, the Philadelphia matrons thought that a ‘Doll's House’ was a play for children, and took their own to see what they thought might be another ‘Little Lord Fauntleroy.’”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A microfilm copy of the weekly edition of *Skandinaven* is in Riksbiblioteket, Oslo. A second Chicago production of the play, in English translation as *Phantoms*, was in the spring of 1886.

<sup>2</sup>*New York Tribune*, October 31, 1889. The reviewer wrote that a few earlier performances of another version of “Henry” Ibsen's play “were not in cities where much critical comment or attention could be expected....” His reference is probably to a production by the Polish actress Helena Modjeska in Louisville, Kentucky, December 7, 1883. The play was called *Thora* and had a happy ending, as in most early German productions. Another version of *A Doll's House*, *The Child Wife*, had been played in Milwaukee in 1882.

<sup>3</sup>Trophonius, “Entre Nous,” *Theatre Magazine* 6 (November 16, 1889): 45.



In spite of all advance publicity the production was a flop. Looking back on her career in 1906, Mrs. Fiske observed that "Ibsen plays required an entirely new treatment"; there was "no precedent to guide productions of those psychologic dramas" in the United States, "where the old-fashioned obvious or romantic play had been long in vogue." Two years later, a critic in *The Independent* also noted that Ibsen had presented a challenge to the American theater: "audiences and actors had to be taught to forget all that the term 'theatrical' connotes."<sup>4</sup>

The turn of the century was a time of radical change. Industrialization, capitalization and urbanization were developing at an unprecedented pace and the engine driving much of this change was immigration. Immigrants and their children made up as much as 80 per cent of the population of major cities in the Northeast and Midwest. Consequently, there was a growing anxiety in the English-speaking middle class for the foreignization of the United States. To them immigrants were a foreign element in the streets of New York; Ibsen represented a foreign element in the theater to audiences and critics alike. One way to understand the resistance to Ibsen's "foreign" plays may be to see it in the context of the Anglo-American resentment of the expanding "foreign element" in the streets outside the theaters where he was performed.

Ibsen's supporters were a select group. When *Ghosts* was performed in 1894, the *New York Times* published the names of the better known "patrons and subscribers" of the production, in effect a list of the city's prominent liberal intellectuals. The next day the journalist further underlined the special nature of the occasion, noting that there was "nobody present who is not, presumably, of the cult."<sup>5</sup> By 1902 a magazine pronounced *A Doll's House* "almost popular," having "attracted an unusual amount of interest" in Philadelphia and Boston. Again the star was Mrs. Fiske but even she was not able to draw an audience for more than two performances in New York.<sup>6</sup> The following year a Baltimore company had moderate success with *Ghosts* in New York, giving four matinées in January and returning in March for a run of two and a half weeks before a national tour.<sup>7</sup> In the season after Ibsen's death in 1906 there were three productions of his plays with a total of 171 performances. This is hardly impressive; Ibsen remained an obscure figure in the American theater. In advance of a 1907–08 production of *Rosmersholm*

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<sup>4</sup>"An Actress Manager and her Ideas of Play Producing," *New York Times*, November 25, 1906; "Ibsen," *The Independent* 64 (April 23, 1908), 921.

<sup>5</sup>*New York Times*, January 5 and 6, 1894. The list included H. H. Boyesen, W. D. Howells, R. G. Ingersoll, Brander Matthews, Charles Dudley Warner, and Stanford White.

<sup>6</sup>Ralph Bergengren, "An Ibsen Play that is Almost Popular," *National Magazine* 16 (August 1902), 568.

<sup>7</sup>Joseph Dannenberg, "Playing Ibsen in the Badlands," *The Theatre* 6 (August 1906), 219. The tour had about 225 performances and went as far west as Colorado. The play's title seems to have had some appeal; a lumberjack in Wisconsin threatened to shoot if he didn't get his money back when he discovered that there was no ghost in the play. New York theatergoers were not much more sophisticated. Some years earlier several had walked out on a performance of *Ghosts* for the same reason. *New York Times* June 4, 1899.

the *New York Times* informed readers about Mrs. Fiske's "dramatization of Ibsen's vigorous novel *Rosmersholm*.... The book is translated and cleverly dramatized by Charles Archer."<sup>8</sup>

In this period criticism ranged from skeptical to negative. Three main points—partly related and partly contradictory—were repeated by reviewers: Ibsen's plays were incomprehensible, they had a message and were therefore not suitable for the theater, and they were obscene. A fourth issue, the question of their relevancy for the United States, had markedly different responses before and after 1900. In the 1890s Ibsen was found to be irrelevant for a healthy society. In the next decade he was often seen to address social ills in the United States.

For some critics the contrast between Ibsen's international status and the lack of interest demonstrated by the American public posed a problem. E. A. Dithmar, the drama critic for the *New York Times*, found fault with the audience rather than the dramatist. Dithmar consistently tried to present a balanced view in his reviews. In 1894 he characterized *Ghosts* as "awful," "unclean," and "unwholesome," yet he conceded that, "in a technical sense, *Ghosts* is a perfect play." Reviewing *The Pillars of Society* in 1891, he admitted that Ibsen's "philosophy is morbid" but added that audiences did not really mind that plays were "nasty" but shunned anything that required serious thought. In explaining what the audience missed in Ibsen's plays he makes fun of the dramatic fare then dominant in American theaters:

The sentiment of them eludes the Anglo-Saxon theatregoer, there is no fun in them, the women do not wear pretty clothes, the heroine does not pull the portieres down when she gets excited, the band does not play nice tunes pianissimo while the love scenes are going on, and something does not happen in just the nick of time to restore calm and peace and happiness. The underlying theory of these plays is not that a bad man never can swim. There is a whole library of popular dramatic literature founded on this theory. If a man jumps into a river to save a woman from drowning, he thereby proves his right to her love, and always wins her and her fortune.

Seven years later, Dithmar was still sarcastic about the audience, observing that Ibsen was "not entertainment for ladies who 'so dearly love to go to the matinee' and afterward take tea at the Waldorf-Astoria."<sup>9</sup>

William Winter of the *New York Tribune* found Ibsen incomprehensible or, as he claimed of *A Doll's House* in 1889, "vacuously obscure." Dithmar was never as dismissive as Winter but felt that it was difficult for the average audience to see "what Ibsen is driving at." In 1900, *The Master Builder* baffled Dithmar, who found the symbolism "particularly occult and mystifying." Norman Hapgood claimed

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<sup>8</sup>*New York Times*, December 26, 1907. As late as 1905 *The Master Builder* was set up as an experimental matinee by the Progressive Stage Society in New York.

<sup>9</sup>These reviews by Dithmar are in the *New York Times* for January 6, 1894, March 7 and 15, 1891, and April 3, 1898.

that very few in the audience “had even the most primitive comprehension of the meaning, or, in any adequate sense, of the story.” As he put it a few years later, “...it is writ in Greek or some equally incomprehensible language. It is Norwegian and will stay Norwegian.... It is pure pedantry to know what it all means.”<sup>10</sup>

Ibsen was also criticized for having a message, contradicting, it would seem, those who declared him incomprehensible. A reviewer of *A Doll's House* in 1889 claimed that Ibsen's didactic tendency was a more serious “source of weakness” than the play's “illogical and unnatural story”; Ibsen's plays were “not well-suited to theatrical representation” because they were “psychological studies rather than dramas.” Andrew Wheeler found the play “one of the most exasperatingly tedious narratives that ever called itself drama,” echoing Winter, who called it “an essay put into the shape of a dialogue, in three parts and illustrated with a stage setting and tableaux.” As late as 1910 Winter insisted that ideas did not belong in the theater: “There are halls to be hired. There is an audience for the lecture—if lecturing would serve any good purpose.... Why inflict the stage with inquiry as to ‘original sin,’ or the consequences of ancestral wickedness...? Since when did the theatre become a proper place for a clinic of horrors and the vivisection of revolting physical and moral ailments?”<sup>11</sup>

Clearly, the issue was not only a controversial message but a controversial content. It is a commonplace to observe that there have been differences between the continental European and the American sense of propriety. Aspects of life regarded as natural in one culture were considered improper for public discourse or display in the other. In 1903, the *New York Times* noted about a performance of *Hedda Gabler* that, “some of the lines relating to Hedda's pregnancy were omitted in a deference—mistaken perhaps—to the dictates of delicate feeling; but enough was left to denote the case properly.” In 1906, the actress Charlotta Nilsson said in an interview that “Hedda Gabler is spoken of as morbid and unnatural simply because no American actress has ventured to drive home the import of her physical condition.” And she added, “Some of the truths of life we are not accustomed to discuss in public.”<sup>12</sup>

Ibsen's texts were often edited. In 1889, the *New York Times* objected to the presence of Dr. Rank in *A Doll's House*: “The scene between Nora and the dying friend of the family is unnecessarily coarse, Dr. Rank himself being really a supernumerary in the plot and nothing being gained by the note of vulgarity in

<sup>10</sup>William Winter, *New York Tribune*, December 22, 1889; E. A. Dithmar, *New York Times*, December 22, 1889 and January 18, 1900; Norman Hapgood, *The Stage In America 1897–1900* (New York, 1901), 206 and “Peer Gynt and other Ibsen Plays,” *The Theatre* 6 (November 1906): 294.

<sup>11</sup>“Ibsen's *Doll's House* at Palmers,” *The Critic* N. S. 12 (December 28, 1889): 329; “Nym Crinkle,” “The Foolishness of the Ibsenites,” *Theatre Magazine* 6 (December 28, 1889): 165–166; William Winter, *New York Tribune*, December 22, 1889 and “Ibsenites and Ibsenism,” *Harper's Weekly* 54 (May 21, 1910): 30.

<sup>12</sup>*New York Times*, October 18, 1903 and November 11, 1906.

Nora's dubious remarks to him and his advances to her." This scene, that may strike many as a particularly moving one, was a borderline case of what could and what could not be presented on the stage. "The 'stocking episode' in the play where *Nora* sits on the sofa and *Rank* makes sudden love to her," wrote the critic for the *Theatre Magazine*, "while it might be left out of the play altogether to suit some tastes, is very neatly handled and need carry no offence." The *New York Times* was pleased to note that the 1894 production of the play had "properly, removed from the role of Rank some of its hideousness. Nora's stockings were not on view and nothing was said about them. But this must have been a sad blow to members of the Scandinavian cult."<sup>13</sup> Some critics found the concessions made to taste more ridiculous than proper, as when a reviewer *Peer Gynt* in 1907 "could not help wondering whose sense of 'propriety' resulted in the change of Solveig's 'garter' into a 'shoestring'."<sup>14</sup>

It was not easy to negotiate between a conservative, middle-class sense of propriety and a genuine interest in Ibsen's plays. Upper-class women were arbiters of taste, but while they could be serious about their duty to promote art, they were no less serious about their obligations to decency. In the 1889/90 season the prominent Mrs. Erving Winslow had a series of Ibsen readings for select audiences in cities on the eastern seaboard. In Boston, "the audience, composed almost wholly of ladies, was," according to the *New York Tribune*, "almost painful in its select character, millions of money being represented in a crush of beauty and intellect...."<sup>15</sup> In New York Mrs. Winslow read at a theater but there were complications when she performed in a private home in Washington: "Mrs Wanamaker ... refused the use of her parlors, being unable to 'give patronage to an author whose works required such thorough deodorizing.' Mrs. Morton and Mrs. Hearst also 'gracefully excused' themselves. Mrs. Fuller, wife of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, was ... hoodwinked into letting Mrs. Winslow read in her drawing-room from the writings of 'that foulmouthed Ibsen, who recognizes no law human or divine.'" *The Critic* made light of this, observing that, "This is a view of the matter that had not occurred to the corrupt society of Boston and New York." Nevertheless, according to another correspondent, it appears that the Boston reading, too, was considered daring, even though Ibsen's text had been bowdlerized for the occasion: "... the omissions and alterations, perhaps unavoidable before a mixed audience, perceptibly altered the tone and tendency of the play.... The audience were charmed *with the reader*, but most of them expressed afterward a decided dislike and disapprobation of the author. There were very few young people present, and indeed I think they were better away, although there is no

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<sup>13</sup>*New York Times*, December 23, 1889 and February 16, 1894. *Theatre Magazine* 6 (December 28, 1889): 165.

<sup>14</sup>*New York Times*, March 3, 1907.

<sup>15</sup>*New York Tribune*, December 22, 1889.

reason that I know of why their elders should not hear and read Ibsen.” Fearing that his wife’s reputation was at stake, Erving Winslow wrote to the *New York Tribune*, deploring that some may have been attracted to the readings “by prurient criticism in certain quarters of minor details in Ibsen’s plays, which it is needless to say, Mrs. Winslow has entirely eliminated.... Ibsen’s disciples are too earnest, too sincere and single-hearted,” he wrote, “not to deplore such a method of approach to the new master.”<sup>16</sup>

It is not surprising that *Ghosts* was shocking to audiences in the United States; it had, after all, shocked audiences in Europe as well. A Boston critic spoke for many when he declared *Ghosts* “an insult to decency and an outrage on taste.”<sup>17</sup> In 1890, an article in the *New England Magazine* found “Mrs. Alving’s too circumstantial relation of her husband’s character and habits ... one of the many lapses from good taste.”<sup>18</sup> In 1894, a reviewer of *Ghosts* observed that Ibsen “is unnecessarily—‘realistic,’ I suppose it is called,” and agreed with “a witty lady who remarked ... that, while she did not object to *A Doll’s House*, *Ghosts* was a little too ‘Ibscene’ for her taste.” The text for the 1894 production had, as usual, been revised. Dithmar in the *New York Times* noted that, “The language used in reference to a possible union between Oswald and his half-sister had been modified. At least, one of fru Alving’s awful speeches had been cut out, but the horror was all there.”<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Dithmar interpreted *Ghosts* in a way that may seem both naïve and perverse: “In this unwholesome *Ghosts*,” he wrote, “which shows us a respectable man who has fought down his passions, preached wise doctrine, bestowed alms, and lived a clean life, and then holds him up to scorn, with a paretic, a courtesan, a procurer, and a woman, who having been the wife of a horribly-diseased debauchee, is prepared to believe that all that is wrong, as his only visible associates—his morals are at their worst.”

In the 1890s, the perceived indecencies of Ibsen’s plays were regarded as evidence that American society was more advanced than that of Norway. To a reviewer of *A Wild Duck* in 1890, some things that could be expressed in Norwegian could not “bear a literal translation” into English: “There are passages that would exemplify this but, unfortunately, must not be translated,” he explained and after a crude outline of the plot he concluded: “There is not an unsullied person in the composition.” “Augh! I hear the outraged Anglo-Saxon’s ejaculation. Yes, I agree with it; the structure is decidedly unpalatable. It makes a Zola stare. But stop a bit, my dear puritan.... Ibsen is a Scandinavian. He is depicting Scandinavian life in

<sup>16</sup>*The Critic* NS 13 (April 5, 1890): 170 and (April 12, 1890): 187-188; *New York Tribune*, March 29, 1890. Erving Winslow (1838-1922), a successful Boston business man, was a prominent intellectual of his day as a contributor to many journals and newspapers. His main literary contribution may be his translation of Maurice Maeterlinck’s *Pelleas et Melisande*.

<sup>17</sup>Benjamin Woolff of the *Boston Gazette* was quoted with approval in the *New York Tribune*, May 13, 1894.

<sup>18</sup>Edward Fuller, “Ibsen’s Social Dramas,” *New England Magazine* 8 (New Series 2) (July 1890): 589.

<sup>19</sup>*The Critic* NS 21 (January 20, 1894): 42; *New York Times*, January 6, 1894.

Norway for the Scandinavians....” This critic is actually recommending *The Wild Duck* as a play “startling in all its absolute originality.”<sup>20</sup> Americans had to accept that a work of art from Scandinavia would be tainted by the general corruption of that distant society. Other critics insisted that Ibsen’s plays were irrelevant because his criticism of a backward Norway could not apply to the more advanced United States.

In his introduction to the first American edition of Ibsen’s plays in 1890, Edmund Gosse thought that, “To an American audience it would seem as though Ibsen should speak with greater certainty of a sympathetic hearing than to any other.” A reviewer observed that the Englishman “is evidently not fully acquainted with the habits and temper of the American people.... The ordinary American is a sincere respecter of the law, moral and political.... Radical methods, even when obviously in the direction of improvement, in his eyes wear the grim aspect of anarchy....” A year earlier, George Carpenter had made the point that “Americans are perhaps not apt to be much interested in a man who has written in praise of Julian the Apostate, and who has been trebly condemned as a realist, a pessimist, a socialist.” And in 1890 a reviewer of Henrik Jæger’s Ibsen biography remarked that “Ibsen is too revolutionary, too much of an extremist, to permit of any large following here.”<sup>21</sup> When Dithmar expressed his abhorrence of *Ghosts* in 1894, he insisted that, “The merit in Ibsen that concerns us in this young and healthful society is purely technical.” The next day he declared, “Ibsen has no message for America.” Winter agreed: “The man is many years behind the progress of independent thought in this country.”<sup>22</sup>

*The Critic’s* reviewer of the 1889-90 *A Doll’s House* found Ibsen a “much overrated man” and explained, “What he says ... has been said a thousand times before, and better said.... Norwegian society must be exceedingly naive if works like these can shake it to its foundations.” The play was “simply a satire aimed at men who treat their wives like dolls.... a story hinting at the emancipation of women, who in Norway must be at least a thousand years behind the times.” The *New York Times* was confident that “the fault ... lies with the method of educating women in Europe and the position women hold in society.”<sup>23</sup> After 1900, however, changes in middle-class attitudes to politics had had an effect on the response of many critics to Ibsen.

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<sup>20</sup>Emil Friend, “Ibsen’s *Vildanden*,” *The Theatre Magazine* 6 (January 10, 1890): 188-189.

<sup>21</sup>Edmund Gosse, “Introduction,” *Prose Dramas of Henrik Ibsen* (New York, 1890), quoted from a paper edition of *A Doll’s House* (Boston, n.d.), 18; Charles L. Hildreth in *Belford’s Magazine* 4 (April 1890): 770; Charles Rice Carpenter, “Henrik Ibsen,” *Scribner’s Magazine* 5 (April, 1889): 412; W. E. Simons in *The Dial* 9 (1890): 146.

<sup>22</sup>*New York Times*, January 6 and January 7, 1894; *New York Tribune*, January 26, 1894. Five years and another production of *Ghosts* later, Dithmar still admired Ibsen’s “matchless” skill but also then found his “teachings ... quite unimportant.” *New York Times*, June 4, 1899.

<sup>23</sup>*The Critic* NS 13 (February 22, 1890): 89; *New York Times* 22 December 22, 1889.

A brief survey of the shifts in reform politics at the turn of the century may be necessary. In the 1890s, the main supporters of political reform were farmers and workers, many of them immigrants, organized in the Populist Party. Progressivism, the reform politics of the early years of the twentieth century, was supported by the Anglo-American middle class. Richard Hofstadter explains “that the middle classes of the cities not only joined the trend toward protest but took over its leadership.... As the demand for reform spread from the farmers to the middle class and from the Populist Party into the major parties, it became more powerful and more highly regarded.” Louis Filler observes that the change in political climate “came suddenly, unexpectedly.”<sup>24</sup> The change in critical reactions to Ibsen was no less sudden. After the turn of the century it was common to note that his plays gave accurate descriptions and criticisms of wrongs that were as prevalent in the United States as in Europe.

A few feminists had been alone in hailing the social and political views of Ibsen. In 1890, Annie Meyer knew “no more important lessons for women than those contained in the *Doll’s House* and *Ghosts*.... They sound a clarion call to women to throw off the yoke of the past, to arise, to put aside their worn out ideals and to boldly assume the duties of the present age.” In 1894, when most critics were worried about the morbidity of Hedda Gabler, Meyer saw her as a natural product of “the unhealthy half-ignorance in which we bring up our girls.” That year a paper presented at the New England Women’s Club declared that Ibsen “dares to raise the curtain on true situations not uncommonly met with in life.”<sup>25</sup> After 1900, this way of relating Ibsen to American life was the rule rather than the exception. One critic recognized the connection between Progressivism and the response to Ibsen: “It took a [Charles Evans] Hughes and a [Theodore] Roosevelt to prepare us for Ibsen.”<sup>26</sup>

When it was revealed in 1903 that doctors in Ithaca, New York, had tried to play down a serious typhoid epidemic, calling it “Ithaca fever,” the *New York Times* saw a parallel between this situation and *An Enemy of the People* and suggested that a “carload of Ibsen’s plays” should be sent to Ithaca. In 1906, Edwin Slosson, literary editor of *The Independent*, wrote an article on “Ibsen as an Interpreter of American Life” and explained that although John Gabriel Borkman “has never appeared in America on the stage ... he is well known on the street. He is the typical financier of the kind who are now being pilloried in the market place by

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<sup>24</sup>Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform from Bryan to F. D. R.* (New York, 1955), 131; Louis Filler, *Crusaders for American Liberalism* (New York, 1961), 31.

<sup>25</sup>Annie N. Meyer, “Ibsen’s Attitude toward Woman,” *The Critic* NS 13 (march 22, 1890): 147; Meyer, “A Prophet of the New Womanhood,” *Lippincott’s Monthly Magazine* 53 (March 1894): 377–378; Helen A. Michael, “The Drama in Relation to Truth,” *Poet-Lore* 7 (No. 3, 1895): 154.

<sup>26</sup>Walter P. Eaton, a review of *The Pillars of Society* in *At the New Theatre and Others. The American Stage: Its Problems and Performances 1908–1910* (Boston, 1910), 165.

official and unofficial investigators.” “The present time would be a good opportunity” to produce *An Enemy of the People*.<sup>27</sup>

In 1910 *The Pillars of Society* was revived in New York and Clayton Hamilton in *The Bookman*, noted that,

The majority of the newspaper reviewers, having looked up the period of the *Pillars*, dismissed it as old-fashioned and out of date. As a matter of fact, it is, for the average American audience, the most effective of all of Ibsen’s social dramas.... In form it is the sort of play that we are used to, and it discusses a subject peculiarly pertinent to Americans to-day. The reputations of many of our Pillars of Society are built upon sand, and of late we have grown amazedly aware of many of our social masks and lies.

To Eaton, “there is something almost pitifully personal to us in America just now about” it: “They are not the exclusive possession of Norway, these men.... have our pillars of society proved any more secure when their foundations were investigated? ... The play has its message for the New York of to-day.”<sup>28</sup>

As the relatively few productions and short runs in the first decade of the twentieth century indicate, Progressivism hardly made Ibsen popular. But at least he was no longer quite the sensation he had been 20 years earlier. In 1910 the *New York Times* found that *The Pillars of Society* primarily had historical interest “as a link in the chain of Ibsen’s dramatic writings. And as an earlier exposition of an effective means of stimulating the public conscience through a theatrical representation of social misdoings it is an interesting document.”<sup>29</sup> But the earlier reactions lingered on, as in an article in *The Theatre* in 1907: “his plays lead us to feel and believe that Denmark [sic] or Scandinavia is one of the Purlieus of Hell. The political corruption which he has pictured in *The Pillars of Society* is beyond what may be conceived by the fondest enemy of the United States.”<sup>30</sup>

American theater critics at the turn of the nineteenth century may be of little interest to the scholar looking for critical enlightenment and insight into the dramas of Henrik Ibsen. For the student of American cultural and intellectual life, however, the critical reactions to Ibsen in these early years are revealing. Because he was a towering international figure at odds with the dominant aesthetic of the American theater, the critical debate that his plays engendered focused on those very issues that characterized American drama and theater of the period and that precluded a warm American welcome of the Norwegian dramatist.

The two decades from 1890 to 1910 were a period of radical change in the United States. An American historian, Henry May, has used a metaphor of war to

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<sup>27</sup>James Corbin in the *New York Times*, March 15, 1903; Edwin E. Slosson, “Ibsen as an Interpreter of American Life,” *The Independent* 60 (May 31, 1906): 163–165. It may be noted, however, that a production of *John Gabriel Borkman* had five performances in 1897.

<sup>28</sup>Clayton Hamilton, in *The Bookman* 31 (June, 1910): 416; Eaton, *The New Theatre*, 163–165.

<sup>29</sup>*New York Times*, March 29, 1910.

<sup>30</sup>“Henrik Ibsen—His Plays and His Philosophy,” *The Theatre* 6 (July 1906): 177.



characterize the period as one of continuing waves of insurgents and invaders assaulting the crumbling fortresses of conservatism.<sup>31</sup> Compared to the impact of immigration, urbanization, industrialization, and capitalization the influence of Ibsen on American society may have been minor. Yet, in introducing a new concept of theater to American critics and audiences and, perhaps more importantly, in expanding the range of topics that could be openly and critically addressed in public, Ibsen certainly had an influence. One way of understanding that influence may be to realize that without the experience of learning to appreciate Ibsen, neither American audiences nor American critics would have been ready for the dramas of Eugene O'Neill or, later, for those of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams.

When Walter Eaton summed up his impression of two theater seasons in 1910, he claimed that Ibsen had had a significant impact on the American theater by creating “dissatisfaction with sentimentalized or false morality in the drama, to teach the need when a moral issue is raised of facing it squarely and honestly, and holding the whole play true to its underlying principles.” Another critic concluded, “The drama will never be the same it was before Ibsen appeared.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Henry F. May, *The End of American Innocence: A Study of the First Years of Our Own Time 1912-1917* (New York, 1959), passim.

<sup>32</sup>Eaton, *At the New Theatre*, 200; *The Theatre* 11 (May 1910): 131.

## LIVIU REBREANU ON HENRIK IBSEN

MIRCEA MUTHU\*\*

**ABSTRACT. Liviu Rebreanu on Henrik Ibsen.** The paper analyses the constant interest of Romanian writer Liviu Rebreanu (1885-1944) for Ibsen's work. This is materialized in the numerous references existing in his earlier reading notes, in his articles between 1912-1938, as well as in his correspondence and in the collection of interviews published in Norwegian newspapers on the occasion of Ibsen's Centennial (March 1928). This moment also represented a major step towards a deeper understanding of Ibsen's work in Romania.

Liviu Rebreanu (1885–1944) –the most representative Romanian writer between the two World Wars' period<sup>1</sup> –in his position of founder and President of the Romanian Writers Association, and in that of Director of the National Theatre from Bucharest (between 1928-1929 and 1941–1944) took part at the festivities occasioned by Ibsen centenarian, in March 1928 in Oslo. That year signified the major moment of perceiving Ibsen's literary work in Romania. The review "Rampa", for instance, published the result of Ibsen's theatrical representations. Thus, there were eight plays performed at the National Theatre from Bucharest in 1895–1927: *Rosmersholm*, *Ghosts*, *An Enemy of the People*, *Pillars' Society*, *John Gabriel Borkmann*, *The Untamed Duck*, *Nora* and *Hedda Gabler*. On 21st April 1928, the same review published a homage issue dedicated to Ibsen and prefaced by the writer Corneliu Moldoveanu; further on, a paragraph from *Peer Gynt* was reproduced, the version belonging to the poet Adrian Maniu. The Romanian cultural press commemorated again the centenarian issuing articles and studies under the signature of the most important literary critics and historians of the moment: George Călinescu, Tudor Vianu, Mihai Ralea etc.

For the writer and dramatic chronicler, the latter being so prolific between 1911–1928, Ibsen was a constant point of reference that explains his active

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presence at the centenarian's days, besides the obligations connected to the official dignities. This is a chapter from Rebreanu's intellectual biography that can be reorganized today owing to the complete edition of *Opere* (vol. 1–23) supervised by the literary historian Niculae Gheran<sup>2</sup>. The analysis of the conventional interviews and discourses published in Oslo<sup>3</sup>, their reference to the *Travelling Log*<sup>4</sup> mixed with excerpts from family correspondence<sup>5</sup> –all these settled on the background of the constant interest for Ibsen's literary work, materialized in dramatic chronicles<sup>6</sup> mostly written before the writer's recognition as an unquestionably literary value, offers a conclusive image of Rebreanu's analytical pertinency. Beside Bjornson's name, Ibsen's name is also met in a few reading "Notebooks" (going back to 1908) and in a dramatic chronicle from 1912 –and reduplicated, not at all at random, in the single theoretical volume published after three decades (*Amalgam*, 1943)- he would write enthusiastically that "there isn't a great honor for a serious theatre only if it is allowed to translate the huge Norwegian. It is a delight to perform Ibsen on the stage." Praising in his dramaturgy "a brilliant technician and an unsurpassed psychologist" the observer of the Romanian scene would develop the youth enunciations in dramatic chronicles published in reviews as "Junimea", "Sburătorul", "Viața Românească", "România", "Calendarul Minervei" etc., beside, naturally, the incisive considerations regarding the actors' performance, some of them specialized in interpreting Ibsen's characters (e.g. as Aristide Demetriad who accompanied Rebreanu at centenarian's days). In 1917, during the performance of the play *Hedda Gabler*, Rebreanu surprised "the atmosphere in which Ibsen's symbolism floats heavily, reveals souls, arouses issues, agitates and ascends." A famous character, Nora, is the "woman's prototype"; after more than one decade, in 1921, the same chronicler gave more details: "If in *Romeo and Juliet* the ingenuity and tragedy are successive, in *Nora* they must be simultaneous. That's why in the theatre there are more frequent excellent Juliets than acceptable Noras." A *Doll's House* is "the tragicomic model towards which the modern drama is said to evolve." He recognizes that "Ibsen is not popular, especially in his major literary works and perhaps he will never be. Ibsen has eliminated from the theatre all the artifices that stimulate the people's relishes" (1923). In a survey entitled *Romanian theatrical movement in 1923-1924*, Rebreanu expressed his hope that "gradually we will have Ibsen in his entirety, but we don't have to lose our patience and the resistances don't have to discourage us", as in the first theatrical seasons *Rosmersholm* and *Hedda Gabler* proved to be failures. With the first play "we have penetrated the real Ibsen, the one that is hard and obscure"; that's why the atmosphere imposes more severe exertions to the actors, another example being *Little Eyolf* performed in 1924. In the interview published in "Aftenposten" (13<sup>th</sup> March 1928), Rebreanu asserted that "*An Enemy of the People* aroused an outstanding interest because you had the sensation that the play made hints to the political relationships from Romania". But *Peer Gynt*, translated and performed on the stage, "seems to be a little bit far of our people". The last literary work written by Ibsen "doesn't gain an

outstanding success”, stated Rebreanu in the last interview published in “Nationen” (13<sup>th</sup> March 1928). The fact that “Ibsen was translated into Romanian language and now we are about to have an important critical literature concerning his literary work” (in “Bergens Attenblad”, Bergen, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1928) certified, one more time, the praise found in the conventional discourse *Romanian writers greet the Norwegian colleagues*, also published in “Aftenposten” (19<sup>th</sup> March 1928). The peak moment at ceremonial festivities is retained in the notes from diaries, also in the letter addressed to the wife, Fanny L. Rebreanu: “In the morning, Norway’s cannons pull out salvos in Ibsen’s memoir. At the graveyard the solemnity is simple and impressive –the students’ chorus is singing a hymn. Then, we are putting down the wreaths: firstly, the Norwegian writers, then the chairman of the Storting (of the Parliament), then the government’s representatives and finally the foreigners’ delegation.” Those days spent in Norway revived Liviu Rebreanu’s admiration and gratitude for Ibsen: “a remarkable example of intellectual and moral value of his country” and the artistic expression of truth that “even the existence of small nations is necessary for the idea of civilization” (*The Romanian writers greet their Norwegian colleagues*).

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<sup>1</sup> Liviu Rebreanu (1885-1944), writer and playwright. He was the founder of the Romanian modern novel, member of the Romanian Academy (1939) and Director of the National Theatre from Bucharest (1928-1929; 1941-1944). The novels *Ion* (1920), *Pădurea spânzuraților* (1922), *Adam și Eva* (1925), *Ciuleandra* (1927), *Crăișorul* (1929), *Răscoala* (1931), *Jar* (1934), *Gorila* (1938), *Amândoi* (1940) illustrates the epic force and the capacity of innovation in the Romanian modern prose.

<sup>2</sup> Liviu Rebreanu, *Opere*, vol. 1-23, 1968-2005, Editura Pentru Literatură, București –Editura Prisma, București

<sup>3</sup> *The first guests of Ibsen’s centenarian –Romanian representatives L. Rebreanu and A. Demetriad arrived yesterday*, interview in “Aftenposten”, 13<sup>th</sup> March 1928, Oslo; *What the Romanians know about us –and what we don’t know about them*, interview in “Nationen”, 13<sup>th</sup> March 1928, Oslo; *The Romanian writers greet their Norwegian colleagues*, in “Aftenposten”, 19<sup>th</sup> March 1928, Oslo; *The President of the Romanian Writers Association Liviu Rebreanu*, interview in “Bergens Attenblad”, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1928, Bergen; *The representative of the Romanian Writers Association speaks about his impressions from Norway*, in “Bergens Tidende”, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1928, Bergen. The Romanian versions belong to Sanda Tomescu, all being published in Liviu Rebreanu, *Jurnal*, vol. I, Editura Minerva, București, 1984, p. 389-395 and then reduplicated in Liviu Rebreanu, *Opere*, vol. 19, Editura Minerva, București, 2000, p. 59-65.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Liviu Rebreanu, *Opere*, vol. 18, Editura Minerva, București, 1988, p. 3-31.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Liviu Rebreanu, *La lumina rămpii*, Editura Minerva, București, 1981, p. 127-148 and Liviu Rebreanu, *Opere*, vol. 21, Academia Română, Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă, București, 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Liviu Rebreanu, *Opere*, vol. 12-13-14, Editura Minerva, București, 1987, the edition from which I excerpted the quotations inserted in the article.

## **BRAND – A PERFORMANCE**

**ILINCA STIHI\***

**ABSTRACT. BRAND – A performance.** The paper presents the Director's view on her performance of *Brand*, which was selected by the National Theatre in Oslo to participate in the *Henrik Ibsen International Festival* in Oslo at Henrik Ibsen's Centennial, 2006.

### **BRAND- the play**

A hand has five fingers. On each finger, you can read a letter and when you clench your fist, you gather one single word: Brand. Brand is not a character. Brand is energy. The burning books that do not turn into ashes join the universe of human imagination. They burn under a cold flame and create fire. After the Superman created by Nietzsche, belonging to the family of Dostoyevsky heroes, the main character of the poem written by Henrik Ibsen, is the only one who slipped his universal career because he was meant to belong to theatre. Can be BRAND performed on stage? How can you embody the absolute of the human will, this returning Christ that has no face or age that chops his own cross and crucifies slowly and painfully on its arms? Often, the actors use their own life as an inspiration for the *adventure* on stage. For BRAND, the performer has to find the humiliation. Facing the eyes of his character, the actor has only one chance: not to create a role, but let himself *performed by the role*.

BRAND has a biography, a mundane biography: he was born and led to be a priest. Does he decide? He comes back to his birth village to profess the word of God. He has a wife and a child. An obscure destiny? Yes, but the most darkness dark. Because BRAND was brought to life by a mother willing to grow wealthy and led to become a priest in order to enrich his family, because BRAND looked for GOD and from the depth of the sins inherited he tried to wash away the burning

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\* Ms Ilinca Stihî, director. Professional achievements as director: In audio drama: "Nina Berberova-Moments from the Exile". "Brand" by Henrik Ibsen. "August Strindberg-The Journal" "Dyagnosis" "Chasing Mussolini" by Jim Euclid. In theatre: "Brand" by Henrik Ibsen. Experience in journalism: Film critic at the Writer's Association Review "Luceafarul" for three years with a weekly column. Participation at Festivals: 2006 – participation at The International Stage Festival „Henrik Ibsen” in Oslo with the performance „Brand” by Henrik Ibsen. Nominee at the Theatre's Union Gala for Best Radio Drama in 2005 with "Dyagnosis". Participation at The International Festival of Hvar, Croatia, with the radio drama "Dyagnosis". Participation at The International Audio Drama Festival Prix Italia, with the radio drama "Dyagnosis". 2005- Participation at the International Theatre Festival in Sibiu with "Brand" by Henrik Ibsen. 2003- Participation at Cannes Film Festival with the short length fiction "Adam".

fire of the ABSOLUTE. The mirror of skies trembled when BRAND set his eyes on it. Ibsen's hero dragged the celestial vault to his abyss, and there, it confounded it with spark heavenly water, washed his body until bleeding and went out with a more dirty and bent body than before. Because he loved GOD, as he says, he condemned his mother to death without confession and sacrificed his child and wife. Then, alone along graves, laid down and learned to weep. "You weep? You deeply weep. Steam comes out from your cheeks/ how come you never wept before?"

GERD, this mysterious character, a wandering little girl at the beginning, then, progressively, more unsubstantial, on her step to become the protection of Brand's unrest, tells him those words at the end of the poem. This is the moment when GOD of the NEW WILL veils the world of Brand with love and light. It is the world before Jesus, as HE appeared in front of people waiting for Messiah, a world of law and sword led by a merciless GOD, the world of the performance BRAND set up to the Lutheran Church in Bucharest.

### **BRAND - the project**

It is almost impossible to transform the poem BRAND into a perfect dramatic demarche. On one hand, its length- the declaim of the poem could last more than 6 hours- is over the space generally specified for a drama production. On the other hand, certain moments from the poem would ask production efforts made, now days, only for those performances considered "successfully". Therefore, the first step for the objectification of "the project BRAND" was to bring of a script that would concentrate on the complex hero imagined by Ibsen. The script was based on the life of the character, apart from the sequences where BRAND was the voice of Ibsen himself talking about the history of the Norwegian people and its road of liberty. Therefore, the Romanian performance loses the patriotic dimension of the poem, but it may gain universality.

The almost two hours performance is made under the sign of searching the truth. All of us, at a certain moment, are facing this problem. BRAND is looking for his own audience, capable of reading the sign of its own disquiet through the metaphoric and philosophical lines. Nowadays, when the 21<sup>th</sup> century recognizes only two possible attitudes toward religion- extremism and atheism - BRAND can offer the example of his own mistakes. Nowadays, when searching for a young audience, the theatre tries to speak the street words, BRAND faces the struggle with the largest problems of the humanity. From my point of view, BRAND won. The young audience joggled hearing his words. The undemanding performance, focused on acting found the human beings that needs it as it is.

### **Performance into a church**

At the opening, the Lutheran Church in Bucharest was bursting with people. There were, of course, professionals- critics, stage directors, actors, but also many young people crowded at the balcony, among the projectors. I skeptically observed their enthusiasm. I was convinced that at the middle of the performance I would

feel impatience and hear, by and by, the steps toward the exit. This did not happen. Their profiles lightened by the projectors populated the space until the end of the performance. They were there. They were true. Through the shadows accidentally projected, they were right there, in front of the altar. When the performance ended, the bells rang. A deathful silence laid over the audience as a thick mantle. Then, applause burst out. This is the way “BRAND” by Henrik Ibsen started its career, its first set up on a Romanian stage- under the roof of a protestant church.

Thank to the gentleness of the Parochial Council of The Lutheran Church and of the celebrant Emil Olteanu, the project BRAND took place into the place where a long time ago theatre was born: into a church. The unbending space of the protestant church- the spiritual trousseau dowry of Henrik Ibsen inspired the monasticism of the performance. Another perspective has been imposed then, a perspective differently received by the professionals: will our performance be theatre into a church or just BRAND into a church? We decided for the second option, reducing the theatrical signs, in order to induce to the audience the feeling of a monochrome space, black and white, a space with white triangles looking like the ice knives which, only at the end, become transparent and reveal the warm, golden image of the icon on the altar. The art director Imelda Manu set up the space. Into this space, the hero struggles with loneliness, lunging against his own limits and falling down on the steps of the altar. This way the energy of the entire performance is concentrated on Ibsen’s word. Its message has to fly free, without any tricks towards the human being, telling its word tenderly or under the sign of a clear blasphemy and courage through the actor, which brings it to life with talent.

### **Those who believed in *BRAND***

The chance of this large text, a little known in Romania, was to gain the trust and dedication of the most loved and talented actors in our country. Irina Petrescu accepted to be the image of Brand’s mother: a strong, proud and stubborn commoner, which learned BRAND to hate of the earthly heritage. “my father died. You, lied in bed. I sneaked into the shadow of the secret room. Steps hear. Into the pale shadow of the candle. A woman comes. Becomes to tear the cloths apart. First moves his breathless head. She searches then. Then takes out a heap. Then more and more. She cried and screamed and cursed. So less? So less?”

Those are the words that BRAND tells her mother when she appears on sight as a cruel and ardent boggy. The son tries to chase her away from a life dominated by the obsession of earnings. The hero’s arguments are fragile in front of his mother; the faith cannot enter her iced heart. Therefore, AGNES- Ana-Ioana Macaria- offers to BRAND the warm comfort and the unlimited support, things that are crucial for him. “Agnes, if she were alive. She could always see. Within the less important things. The greatness. She could face my hesitation. With one word she could bring together the earth an sky.”

That's how BRAND describes AGNES- the beloved one, the one taken away from her youth and beauty, the one banished into the shadow of a law that she could not be convinced of, a utopia forced into reality: all or nothing.

BRAND speaks forward, introduces the characters on stage, and offers the audience his own images on them. The interestedly, phony, sneaky and charming thought enters the stage played by ADRIAN TITIENI. The politician, always ready for any compromise, has the earth at his feet and he takes humanness as an excuse for his pragmatic attitude. This amusing character, although sad, offers the audience the model of an electoral screen. Time stops as if nothing has happened before.

"Thousands of words are no more than a deed, be aware. The people of the village made me come to you. We wanted to find a man, and that's what we found." The MAN, played by Constantin Cojocaru, brings to life the face and voice of a common destiny marked by the burden of life within the rocky space and ruthless climate of the village surrounded by fiords. Facing the difficult every day problems, the peasants have the strange feeling of losing the means of their soul, of losing their humanity. They become the chained animals, having no sky above, but eyes turned to the rocks of the field. Despite THE DOCTOR, who represents the elite of the village, the peasants confess their lack. The bourgeois and blind DOCTOR, brought to life by Ion Siminie offers the hero his advice:

"Brand, every moment has its own belief/ Ours... is not the fire on a whip,/ with boiled hearts,/ from ours grandmothers tails,/ today, our belief is: be human"

"Idol? Just wait. Can't you see it?/ under her attire/ can't you see the hands and feet of a child?/ can't you see her fear?/ the way she wants to cover up her child/ with a painted blanket?/ she terrified covers him/ idol? See it. Take it. " GERD, played by Adina Stan, reveals to BRAND the fact that for his destiny being human means heresy. His calling, as he did read it without really confessing is the eristic calling. GERD, the only character that reflects BRAND'S desires, could have straightened himself. He took her warning words for encouragement.

EINER, played by Adrian Văncică and THE WOMAN- Simina Siminie-, complete the image of the Norwegian village. EINER has a special destiny. He is the painter, Agnes's lover left for BRAND. Over the years, the two of them meet again. EINER condemns the hero's cruelty, curses him and predicts a tragic ending for the pastor BRAND. This part has not been included in the final script of the performance, on one hand because of the very difficult understanding of the translation, on the other hand because of the necessity of developing a character gifted with a special destiny, independent of the evolution of the main character of this performance.

BRAND- *sword*, corresponding to the old Norwegian, or *fire*, corresponding to the modern Norwegian language. This character is played by Gheorghe Visu. He is always present on stage, on the lights of the projectors, haunted by the other characters as the phantoms of a life that he only remembers. Still alive, standing and sharp from the beginning, then fanatic, then torn apart and warped. BRAND's



destiny is faced in loneliness. The contact with the others is not real. Only the echo left behind by their words respond inside him and get sense, the sense of himself. He wants to take people up, to GOD. Therefore, he builds up a church. He sacrifices everything in the name of the final purpose. In the end, in front of the built church, the priest has to face his failure. He built up a monument dedicated to dogma. No spiritual feeling can force the cold walls of the edifice. He feels like an abandoned child of the skies, like the undesired child of GOD. “Your name, o, Jesus,/ I always whispered it/ you never hugged me/ you passed near my lips/ only like an old word/ give me the bread of salvation/ just a drop/ from the sweet wine of life.”

### **The return to *BRAND***

I read the poem years ago. I had this courageous but hopeless dream of bringing this poem within the sacred space of a church. I presented the poem at the radio. The casting was almost the same as the one it is now. Shortly after, within the National Romanian Broadcast, a project for unconventional spaces has been planned. The initiator was CATALINA BUZOIANU, well known stage manager, those days the honorific director of the Theatre Department, together with the chef editor of the same department, ATILA VIZAUER. The project BRAND has its first steps. The space chosen for the project was the Lutheran Church in Bucharest. The project was approved and partly financed by the National Romanian Broadcast. Willing to find more finance, I went to the Royal Norwegian Embassy. I had no hope of receiving a very prompt answer. I was thrilled to receive this prompt answer from His Excellency Leif Arne Ulland, the ambassador of Norway. He decided to take the project under the aegis of the Embassy, and also to make it the starter *avant la lettre* of the International Ibsen Year 2006. The opening on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February 2005 anticipated the great commemoration of Ibsen, 100 years since his death. The production has been presented within the International Festival in Sibiu, hosted by the Asylum Church, an edifice built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The performance was taped and transmitted by the National Romanian Television. It seemed like the end of the performance came. The discussions around this subject, drama within the sacred space of a church, ended the destiny of the project inside The Lutheran Church of Bucharest. But the help of His Excellency Leif Arne Ulland, the ambassador of Norway, was once again essential. His Excellency pointed out the existence of several important Romanian productions based on Henrik Ibsen’s works. After the selection made by the manager of the National Theatre in Oslo, Mrs. Ba Clemetson, we were invited to participate to the Henrik Ibsen International Festival in Oslo, autumn 2006, for three performances inside a church where cultural events usually take place.

We came back to our performance after almost an year. The first reunions were hesitant. The actors were no longer sure on the lines, less on the structure of every character established before. Still... at our first general rehearsal the strength of the words came out of nothing. The tip of Brand’s sword raised and hit again with the blade of its judgment. The performance was not only alive, but set,

balanced, loaded with the humanity of each one involved. I had a strange feeling at that moment. I felt like I was taking from the pages of a book a character which wanted to live and die over and over again, together with its world of lies and truth, human beings and phantoms, a character which waited to raise from the dead and never leave its body again. I had the feeling of being unable to leave Brand without a fight, without taking him down to the ground, until one of us would crash without breath. You cannot kill a great hero of the universal culture. That is true. You cannot erase the hero from the imaginary history, but also you cannot take him with you into your crime. But my duty is to kill him inside me, to strangle him with love, because he carries the hunch of rightness and wrongness. Because he is the hero conceived by spiritual heresy. As white as black, as charming as rejecting... because his ruthless judgement helps the human beings to take away the every day commodity, between the air conditioned and the heat behind the windows, between the monthly income and his rational aimed life. This particular human being looks in the eyes of Death and brings BRAND to life: "You pray? However, what is praying? A word. So easily taken by wind. And wasted. Their pray is just a scream for forgiveness. Or they just missed the way, on knees. Begging for a place near Jesus".

This is Brand's justice. Moreover, for its clearness we welcome you all to come to see the performance!

## MOTTAKELSEN AV HENRIK IBSENS *ET DUKKEHJEM* I RUMENSK KULTUR (SLUTTEN AV DET 19.ÅRHUNDRE OG BEGYNNELSEN AV DET 20.ÅRHUNDRE)

SANDA TOMESCU BACIU<sup>\*:\*\*</sup>

**ABSTRAKT.** Mottakelsen av Henrik Ibsens *Et dukkehjem* i rumensk kultur (slutten av det 19.århundre og begynnelsen av det 20.århundre). Artikkelen presenterer aspekter vedrørende mottakelsen av Henrik Ibsens *Et dukkehjem* i rumensk kultur ved århundreskiftet (19./20.årh.), med vekt på kvinnefrigjøringsspørsmålet som utfordret rumenske oversettere, skuespillere, kulturpersonligheter og ikke minst det rumenske publikum. (Tidligere utgitt i *Literature as Resistance and Counter-culture*, Budapest, 1993)

### Oversettelser til rumensk

Kvinnefrigjøringen, en ny og omstridt problemstilling slik den ble fremstilt i *Et dukkehjem* vakte stor oppsikt i hele Europa i de to siste tiår av det 19.århundre og ikke minst i et land som, selv langt borte fra Norden, ble kjent med Nordens litteratur gjennom tysk eller fransk kultur. De to retningslinjer for Ibsens inntog i verdenslitteraturen var den germanske og den romanske. Ulike og, noen ganger, helt motsatte oppfatninger av tyske eller franske kritikere ble omtalt i rumenske litterære tidsskrifter. Samtidig ble Ibsens drama formidlet direkte både i bokform og på scenen.

Omtrent femten år etter stykkets gjennombrudd i Vesten ble *Et dukkehjem* oversatt til rumensk. I det siste tiår av det 19.århundre og det første tiår av det 20. århundre ble Ibsens *Nora* og hennes frigjøring vist stor oppmerksomhet i rumensk åndsliv. Emnet var nytt, og omstridt i begynnelsen. Oversettere, litteraturkritikere, skuespillere og ikke minst publikum ble betatt, forvirret og tiltrukket av dette emnet.

Interessen som *Et dukkehjem* vakte ble konkretisert i oversettelser til rumensk, laget av flere forskjellige oversettere bare i løpet av noen få år. Vi kjenner til fire forskjellige oversettere som hver gav sin egen variant på rumensk, og i alle tilfeller ble stykkets opprinnelige slutt bevart.

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I 1895 utkom den første oversettelse av *Et dukkehjem* laget av B. Marian i kulturtidsskriftet *Vatra* fra Bucuresti.<sup>1</sup> Kontaktspråket som han brukte var tysk, noe som ble lovprist av samtidige rumenske litteraturkritikere som betraktet de tyske oversettelser nærmere originalen i motsetning til franske oversettelser fra den tiden.<sup>2</sup> Samtidig vakte stykket stor interesse for leserne. Som en følge av dette ble *Nora* utgitt i bokform, og i løpet av noen få år utkom stykket i tre opplag (til 1907).

At en avspeiling av *Et dukkehjem* - i en kontaktkultur – skulle gjenspeiles på nytt - i rumensk kultur – var helt naturlig fordi rumensk kultur mottok norsk litteratur gjennom en tredje kultur. Men dramaet ble også gjendiktet direkte fra norsk til rumensk.

Overraskende nok var norsk kjent også i dette kulturelle område rundt århundreskiftet. Det gjaldt helt isolerte tilfeller: en av dem var N.D. Ciotori, en diplomat som studerte i Sverige og var en beundrer og oversetter av nordisk litteratur, en kulturpersonlighet som bidro til å gjøre det nordiske åndsliv kjent i dette romanske land. I 1907 sendte han fra utlandet sin egen oversettelse til rumensk av *Et dukkehjem* samt et helt begeistret brev over dramaet til den store rumenske kulturpersonlighet Nicolae Iorga. Oversettelsen utkom i bokform og gjendiktningen lå nærmest originalspråket i motsetning til andre oversettelser via andre språk, fordi oversetteren hadde det fantastiske privilegium å forstå Noras språk, kontret og figurativt, ved den direkte kontakt han hadde med det nordiske åndsliv.

Andre vellykkede oversettelser hører til Oscar Feld i 1909 og siden til dikteren Adrian Maniu. Disse fire forskjellige oversettelser av *Et dukkehjem* har tittelen *Nora sau o casă de păpuși – Nora eller et dukkehjem* –, etter tysk innflytelse.

### Litteraturkritikk

Nokså omstridt ble spørsmålet om hvordan man skulle tolke dramaet, enten som et kvinnesaksspørsmål eller et rent moralsk prinsipp. ”For en stor rikdom av detaljer i Ibsens individualisering av det kvinnelige åndsliv ... Det ble sagt, og kanskje med god grunn, at *Nora* er et talerør for kvinnefrigjøringen, men selv synes jeg at *dramaet Et dukkehjem* er legemliggjørelsen av et moralsk prinsipp”, skrives det om *Nora* etter århundreskiftet.<sup>3</sup>

Allerede i 1897 – to år etter den første oversettelse til rumensk – utgav litteraturkritikeren og forfatteren Sextil Pușcariu det første omfattende på rumensk over Ibsens forfatterskap i flere nummer av kulturtidsskriftet *Familia*.<sup>4</sup> Det var ikke bare den tyske kultur og de tyske oversettelser av Ibsen som formidlet ham alle informasjon om Ibsens drama, men det var også den direkte kontakt han hadde med norsk språk og kultur. Sextil Pușcariu reiste til Danmark og lærte dansk i sin ungdom, og dette åpnet veien til en ekte forståelse av Ibsens drama, som han selv forteller i sine memoarer:

<sup>1</sup> *Vatra*, tidsskrift, 1895, nr.9-17, *Nora* av Henrik Ibsen, oversettelse til rumensk av B.Marian

<sup>2</sup> *Viața românească*, tidsskrift, nr 3, 1907, s.559

<sup>3</sup> *Viața românească* – tidsskrift – nr. 5/1921, s. 184+197

<sup>4</sup> *Familia*, tidsskrift, nr. 41-42/1897 *Henrik Ibsen – kritisk studie* av Sextil Pușcariu

”Siden dansk er også nordmennesenes litterære språk, ble jeg kjent også med en del av norsk litteratur ... Men av de moderne forfattere Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson og Henrik Ibsen var jeg mest begeistret for, Særlig den sistnevnte ... Når jeg ble begeistret for en bestemt forfatter måtte jeg lese hele forfatterskapet... Men i Ibsens tilfeller måtte jeg studere også hans liv fordi denne – tilsynelatende - kalde analytiker av de sosiale onder, egentlig var en stor lyriker blant dramatikere.”<sup>5</sup>

I sin studie viser Sextil Pușcariu at ”Noras opprør i slutten av stykket var fra personenes synspunkt den eneste konsekvente løsning, mens fra publikumets synspunkt var dette bruddet den rene tragedie”. Han la merke til at datidens publikum som var skapt av og som selv skapte familiemyten, oppfattet *Et dukkehjem* som motstandslitteratur mot sine egne fordommer.<sup>6</sup>

Kritikere som Sextil Pușcariu eller som Mihail Negru forberedte veien til en god mottakelse og forståelse av *Et dukkehjem* i det rumenske åndsliv. I en bok om Ibsens individualisme fremstilte Mihail Negru kvinnens stilling i det norske samfunn som bakgrunn for en tolkning av Ibsens helt progressive syn på kvinnens individualisme: ”Den som skal lese *Et dukkehjem* og forstå denne individualisme skal først skjønne den spesielle stilling som den norske kvinne lenge har hatt i det norske samfunn”. Litteraturkritikeren tok utgangspunkt i ”en progressiv lovbestemmelse fra 29. juni 1888 angående eiendelene til ektefellene som regnes for å være en virkelig revolusjon sammenlignet med i andre land”.<sup>7</sup>

Litteraturkritikere og viktige rumenske forfattere som Garabet Ibrăileanu eller Liviu Rebreanu førte videre denne interessen for kvinnefrigjøringen og *Nora* i 1920-årene: ”Og om vi tar hensyn til at de viktigste sidene ved Ibsens individualisme er akkurat kvinnens rettigheter og kvinnens rett til sine egne rettigheter, er Ibsen enda mer aktuell en noensinne”.<sup>8</sup>

### Teaterforestillinger

I 1897, ti år etter Ibsens store gjennombrudd i Europa omkr. 1887, ”da *Nora* ble tatt opp på ny”,<sup>9</sup> ble *Et dukkehjem* spilt for første gang i Romania av den store franske skuespillerinne Réjane sammen med Vaudeville teatret fra Paris.

Allerede i 1893 var spørsmålet om *Noras* oppsetning på *Teatrul National* i Bucuresti under heftig debatt i tidens aviser: direksjonen på nasjonalteatret ble beskyldt for mangel på kompetanse fordi, til tross for en eksisterende oversettelse på nasjonalteatret, laget av Gr. Ventura, ble stykket ikke iscenesatt til fordel for andre verdiløse skuespill.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Sextil Pușcariu: *Călare pe două veacuri*, Edit. pentru literatură, 1968, s. 66.

<sup>6</sup> Sextil Pușcariu: *Henrik Ibsen – kritisk studie* i *Familia*, tidsskrift, nr 41-42/1897.

<sup>7</sup> Mihail Negru: *Henrik Ibsen – Viața și opera – Filosofia lui socială*, București, Editura Librăriei Al. A. Stănculescu, 1920, s. 117-118.

<sup>8</sup> Garabet Ibrăileanu: *Opere*, 4, București, Editura Minerva, 1977, s. 521.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Haakonsen: *Henrik Ibsen – mennesket og kunstneren*, Oslo, Aschehoug and Co, 1981, s.228.

<sup>10</sup> *Săptămîna ilustrată*, tidsskrift, 1893, 28. februar, s. 62.

Denne urettferdighet ble kompensert av det store privilegiet som det rumenske publikum fikk i 1897. Nora ble spilt av den berømte franske skuespillerinne Gabrielle Réjane som hadde kreert Nora i Paris, Réjane som Ibsen selv beundret: ”Min skjønneste Drøm er bleven til Virkelighed. Réjane har kreeret Nora i Paris”.<sup>11</sup> Réjane kom flere ganger på turné til Romania (1897, 1901, 1910, 1914), men hun spilte *Et dukkehjem* bare på den første turné i 1897, noe som var symptomatisk for publikumets mottakelse av stykket. Et dukkehjem på scenen rokket sterkest ved publikumets opplærte fordommer om familie og kvinnens stilling. Stykket fungerte å scenen i større grad som motstandslitteratur.

*Et dukkehjem* ble også oppfattet som motstandslitteratur av noen av datidens rumenske skuespillere. Tiltrukket av hovedrollen i *Et dukkehjem* ble Aristita Romanescu, den største skuespillerinne på den nasjonale scenen i Bucuresti. Hun hadde studert teater i Paris og hun beundret den berømte Eleonora Duse som også kom på turné til Romania i 1899. Den rumenske Artistița Romanescu hadde spilt i *Rosmersholm* og i *Gengangere*, og forberedte seg for Nora i flere år. Men hun spilte aldri Nora og uttrykte sin sterke tvil om rollen fordi hun ville bevare sin publikumsuksess. Hun torde ikke risikere sin suksess. Da hun skrev sine memoarer, kunne hun nesten ikke innrømme dette og forklarte at hun ikke hadde spilt Nora fordi hun ikke mestret rollen godt nok.<sup>12</sup>

Et helt annet forhold til Nora hadde en annen skuespillerinne, Aglae Pruteanu, den første som spilte Nora på en rumensk scene. Ifølge Massoff ble *Et dukkehjem* spilt for første gang med et rumenske ensemble i 1901.<sup>13</sup> *Et dukkehjem* ble iscenesatt på den nasjonale scene i det viktige kultursentret Iasi, og ble spilt i 1903-1904. ”Nora ble godt likt og ble spilt flere ganger. Vi dro på turné med Nora, og i tillegg til vår personlige suksess, fikk vi gleden av å være de første som spilte Ibsen her i landet”, forteller Aglae Pruteanu i sine memoarer”.<sup>14</sup>

Entusiasmen over å oversette *Et dukkehjem* til rumensk var utbredt allerede før århundreskiftet og litteraturkritikernes interesse for og forståelse av problemstillingen som Ibsen satte under debatt var stor, men selve forsinkelsen i oppsetningen av dramaet var helt symptomatisk for motstanden som Noras verdier representerte for datidens sosiale fordommer.

*Et dukkehjem* ble iscenesatt med rumenske skuespillere bare etter århundreskiftet: først på den nasjonale scene i Iași (1903-1904) og senere på den nasjonale scenen i București (1906-1907), mens andre drama av Ibsen, som *Gengangere* og *Rosmersholm*, allerede hadde blitt spilt før århundreskiftet.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Haakonsen: *Henrik Ibsen – mennesket og kunstneren*, s. 183.

<sup>12</sup> Aristita Romanescu : *30 de ani – Amintiri*, Editura de stat pentru literatură, 1960, s 112.

<sup>13</sup> Ioan Massoff : *Teatrul românesc*, București, Minerva, 1978, b. 7, s. 595.

<sup>14</sup> Aglae Pruteanu: *Amintiri din teatru*, Iași, Viața românească, s. 171.

<sup>15</sup> *Istoria teatrului în România*, b. 2, București, Editura Academiei, s. 518.

*Nora* ble bedre forstått og elsket av publikum etter århundreskiftet. I 1928 reiste formannen i forfatterunionen, Liviu Rebreanu, som utsending på Ibsenjubileet ”au nom des écrivains et des acteurs roumains”.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Liviu Rebreanu: *Jurnal*, București, Editura Minerva, 1984, s.38.