

Part Three

3.1 How much Ibsen? Ibsen's "acclimatisation" in the Romanian theatres' repertory

The repertory was one of the most discussed aspects in the emergent Romanian theatre, as the National Theatres staged national historical dramas, classic Romanian and foreign plays, comedies, melodramas, vaudevilles, and modern dramas. What was Henrik Ibsen's position in the repertoires of these institutions between 1894 and 1947? To answer this question, I start with statistics (Figure 27, Figure 28, Table 1, Table 2, Table 3) of all the plays included in the repertoires of the four national and two private theatre companies that staged the majority of the Ibsen productions during these 54 years in Romania.¹ I have paid particular attention to the statistics for the years when Ibsen was actually performed. The producing institution, the national origin, and number of plays are the main criteria for the data analysis. The chronological division follows the structure of the theatre seasons, roughly starting between September and November and ending between March and April, and it also includes touring performances. What does the data indicate with respect to the content and to Ibsen's position in the repertory between 1894 and 1947?

¹ The primary source of this statistic is Ioan Massoff's account of Romanian theatre history (1969, 1972, 1974, 1976, 1978), and the material available on the topic in the Collection "The National Theatre" at the State Archives of Bucharest, Iași, Craiova and Cluj-Napoca. In this respect, it is possible that the statistics do not offer a complete overview of all plays ever performed on the stages of the National Theatres, except for the National Theatre of Cluj, in which case Massoff's statistics were revised and completed. Given the material on plays available in the collection on "The National Theatre" at the State Archives, the statistics are more accurate for the National Theatres than for the other theatres and private companies. Moreover, the information offered by Massoff includes the names of the annual premieres and, to a certain extent, the names of the plays that had been played previously and were being included in the current season again. However, it is almost never clear whether the overview of the plays performed during a certain theatre season is complete or not. Hence, this uncertainty is inherent to these statistics due to the uncertainty regarding the amount of data available so far.

3.1.1 General repertory statistics

Few differences emerge between the repertoires of the National Theatres and those of the private theatre companies, *Bulandra* and *Mărioara Voiculescu*. The institutions staged both Romanian and foreign plays, revealing that “toate repertoriile sunt eclectice” (all repertoires are eclectic; my translation) (Firan 1978: 153). Most foreign plays were European, and only seldom non-European, such as American. However, this diversity does not imply a balance in the national origins. In fact, the statistics show that the repertoires were largely indebted to the French, German, Italian and English theatre cultures.

The Francophile tendency was the most dominant. The number of French compared to that of Romanian plays indicates a competition between them in the repertory of the National Theatres. By contrast, Czech, Hungarian, Russian, Yiddish, Greek, Spanish, Swedish, Austrian, American and, finally, Norwegian plays appear in smaller numbers. At certain times, German or English plays dominate. However, for plays such as those from Norway or Russia, the lower numbers are stable, and their influence is best gauged by their permanency in the repertory. The private theatre companies clearly preferred foreign – especially French – plays to Romanian ones.² Finally, the Norwegian plays are almost exclusively by Ibsen.

3.1.2 Ibsen in the repertory

What do these statistics tell us about Ibsen’s position in the Romanian theatre’s repertoires? To begin with, they indicate that the National Theatre of Bucharest presented the greatest number of Ibsen productions in Romania: 18 out of 54 theatre seasons. The National Theatre of Iași comes second, with 11 out of 54 seasons. The National Theatre of Cluj started its activity in 1919 and staged 8 Ibsen productions in its 29 seasons. The National Theatre of Craiova has the least Ibsen productions, with 4 out of 47 seasons, but the theatre was closed between 1935 and 1942. Finally, the private theatre companies *Bulandra* and *Mărioara Voiculescu* staged Ibsen in 7 theatre seasons. Overall, Ibsen was staged in 41 of 54 theatre seasons. The largest number of Romanian events in a single year between 1894 and 1947 occurred in 1928, when 8 productions were staged as part of the worldwide celebration of Ibsen’s Centennial. In the remaining years when Ibsen was performed, the overall number is between 1 and 4 events.³ In the years when Ibsen was not performed the gaps between productions are not overly long, but tend to be of short duration. At no point did a theatre stage more than two Ibsen plays in a single season, not even in 1928.

These numbers suggest that Ibsen was not the most performed foreign playwright in Romania during these years, but despite the low numbers of productions there is a consistent presence of his work in the country, largely because the theatres tended not

² For example, *Bulandra Company* covered a wide variety of European plays and some Romanian contemporary plays, while *Mărioara Voiculescu Company* staged exclusively foreign plays.

³ Of the 54 years of the analysed time span (1894–1947), 13 years do not register any Ibsen events, 35 years register between 1–3 events a year, 6 years are associated with 3 events yearly, 4 years with 4 yearly events, 5 years with 5 yearly events and only 1 year each with 6, respectively 8 events.

to stage his plays during the same theatrical season. In addition, they seldom staged the same Ibsen play in the same or consecutive seasons. These statistical findings indicate that the Romanian National Theatre was decentralised and there was a diversity in the programming, which resulted in the continuing presence of Ibsen on the Romanian stage.

The IbsenStage Romanian events list records which plays were staged and how often between 1894 and 1947. The 110 events on the map (Figure 25) revolve around 14 plays, with a visible focus on the following three: *Ghosts* (35 events), *A Doll's House* (30 events) and *An Enemy of the People* (19 events). The remaining 11 plays were staged far less often and none of them exceeded 6 events before 1947 (Figure 26). In addition, the National Theatres of Bucharest and Iași staged almost the same number of Ibsen Romanian premieres. Of the 14 premieres, 4 were staged by the National Theatre of Iași: *An Enemy of the People* in 1894, *A Doll's House* in 1901, *Hedda Gabler* in 1902 and *The Master Builder* in 1919. Another 7 premieres were staged at the National Theatre of Bucharest: *Rosmersholm* in 1895, *Pillars of Society* in 1896, *Ghosts* in 1897, *John Gabriel Borkman* in 1919, *The Wild Duck* in 1920, *When We Dead Awaken* in 1924, and *The Lady from the Sea* in 1928. The remaining 3 premieres were staged by Mărioara Voiculescu Company (*Peer Gynt*, 1924), by the National Theatre of Cernăuți (*The League of Youth*, 1928) and by Aristizza Romanescu in a guest-performance in Iași (*Little Eyolf*, 1895). Finally, the most performed Ibsen plays – *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts* and *An Enemy of the People* – were staged most frequently by the National Theatres of Bucharest, Iași and Cluj-Napoca, which highlights their dominance in contrast to the private companies (Figure 35).

3.1.3 Final remarks

Studying production numbers can tell us nothing about the factors responsible for the constant fluctuation in the numbers of foreign as opposed to Romanian plays:

Faptul însă că într-o stagiuine (1924–1925), din șaisprezece premiere, douăsprezece sunt cu piese românești nu este, în sine, semnificativ, decât sub raport statistic, pentru că în fond ceea ce dă pondere și valoare unui repertoriu este calitatea și nu cantitatea. (the fact that during a theatre season (1924–1925) 12 of 16 premieres are Romanian plays is not significant *per se* but statistically, because it is the quality and not the quantity that gives weight and value to a repertory; my translation.) (Alterescu 1973: 35)

One cannot judge the aesthetic value and the reception of the various foreign and national plays based entirely on statistics, although they indicate tendencies that require further historical research. For instance, the statistics on number of plays grouped by national origin say nothing about how many times the same play was performed, its quality, its reception and the revenues. The number of plays might also be misleading. Whereas we might interpret the large number of French or Romanian plays as an indicator of their success, it can also indicate the opposite. The real indicators of a play's financial or aesthetic success are in revenues sheets, receipts and theatre reviews.

The statistics indicate a paradox in the Romanian Ibsen productions, as the low number of productions is counterbalanced by their stable position in the repertory. What caused this paradox?

I argue that the low yet even number of Ibsen productions describes the regularity of the institutional fractures in Romanian theatre history. Thus, it indicates the fractures and weak power of absorption in the Romanian Ibsen tradition, without dismissing the influence of the playwright on the local theatre culture. The administrative and financial frames of the theatre institutions directly influenced the emergence of a fragmented Ibsen Romanian tradition, providing the main proofs of fluidity and mobility of this institutional environment. Further on, I analyse these frameworks as the main factors influencing the institutional structure of the national theatres, their repertory, and Ibsen's paradoxical position in the Romanian theatre.

3.2 What is the Romanian national theatre?

The National Theatres caught between laws, politics and money

In order to understand Henrik Ibsen's place in the Romanian theatre, we must look at the Romanian theatre context. The foundation of the national state, local wars and two world wars affected not only the Romanian society, but also its theatre history, because of its constant remodelling until 1947. In this sense, the fluidity of Romania as a national and territorial entity marked the development of its *national* theatre culture.

The Romanian theatre as national institution began in the middle of the 19th century, and is closely connected with the foundation of the Romanian national state in 1859. The Romanian theatre was still young when Ibsen first appeared on the national stage in 1894. In fact, the history of the Romanian *national* theatre almost entirely overlaps the Romanian history of Ibsen's reception, if we consider the dates of the first performances in Romanian, the discovery of the first Romanian dramatic text, and the establishment of the first Romanian national theatres.

Until the middle of the 19th century, the performances marking the beginning of the Romanian national theatre highlight the territorial fragmentation of Romania into Moldavia, Wallachia and Transylvania. The only commonality between these productions is that they were mounted by students and were thus amateur rather than professional initiatives. The very first theatre performance in Romanian took place in 1754 and was initiated by a group of students in Blaj, a small Transylvanian town. The pupils performed *Mirtil și Hloe* [Myrtile and Chloe] and even went on a tour entitled "*comoedia ambulatoria alumnorum*" (Alterescu 1980: 23) in 1755.⁴ The cities of Iași and Bucharest witnessed their first Romanian performances in the same conditions as in Blaj, but later. The beginning of

4 This initiative is symptomatic for Transylvania in the context of the region being part of the Habsburg/Austro-Hungarian Empire until 1918. More precisely, Romanian artists from either Transylvania or the two other Romanian-speaking regions would tour as much as the Hungarian authorities allowed them to in the absence of a National Theatre in Romania. This situation would last as late as 1919, when a National Theatre would eventually come into being in Cluj (Ceuca et al. 1994: 8–28).