

Yiddish tours are minor models. The term “minor” here refers to the minority groups of Romania, of which the Transylvanian Hungarians were the strongest quantitatively, whereas the Jews were a smaller group mostly tied to Bucharest and Iași.

My analysis of the foreign performances addresses the fluidity of intersection by looking at major contributors and tracing the network of events. The purpose is not only to illustrate the theatre traditions that came into the country, but also to analyse how they spread internationally through the key-artists who included Romania in their touring circuits. Finally, I consider how the influences of these theatre traditions expanded beyond the touring circuits both spatially and temporally.

The staging of foreign productions also suggests that the audiences in Bucharest and Iași knew several foreign languages and, thus, could attend theatre performances in French, Italian and German.² Nevertheless, if the stagings in French and Italian were not always connected to the presence of the respective minority groups, the stagings in Hungarian and Yiddish were predominantly associated with the respective ethnic groups that have been part of the Romanian society. Finally, the German stagings reveals a combination of both aspects. In Sibiu and Timișoara, Germans were a powerful minority group, so ethnicity clearly influenced attendance at performances, yet in cities such as Bucharest or Iași, it was mainly the local audience who participated at the German performances.

In the following, I analyse separately each foreign model and its contribution to Ibsen's emergence on the Romanian stage, always keeping in mind their temporal and spatial intersections.

2.2 The French model

The French model influenced Romanian culture at the political, educational, legislative, artistic, linguistic, architectural and social level to such an extent that it became a topic both positively and negatively assessed by Romanian historians. For example, Pompiliu Eliade (1982: 1–8) and Eugen Lovinescu (1992) supported the French model and its contribution to Romania's modernisation. On the other hand, Titu Maiorescu criticised the superficial appropriation of the foreign models (1868: 301–307), while he supported the German model instead (1882a; 1882b; Alterescu 1971: 447–451;). Moreover, the fascination for Paris as *centrum mundi* in politics, arts and social life was enhanced by the Latin kinship between the French and the Romanians.

The French model represented one of the most powerful influences upon the Romanian theatre. A relevant example is the first Romanian theatre law issued on April 6, 1877 (*Lege pentru organizarea și administrarea teatrelor din România 1877: 2313–2315*). The law took inspiration from the French system of the Comédie-Française in order to establish how the Romanian “Dramatic Society” would be organised (Massoff 1969: 12–14). The

Empire must have also encouraged foreign companies to visit the country. Therefore, the German influence exceeded the mere national boundaries pointing at this model as a major one.

2 The overviews of the foreign language tours that visited Romania before communism given by Massoff (1969; 1972; 1974; 1976; 1978) in each chapter of his books on the Romanian theatre history support this statement.

repertory is further evidence, as the numerous French plays competed successfully with both Romanian and other foreign plays. The most performed French dramatists included Victorien Sardou, Henry Bataille, Henry Bernstein, Henry Kistemaekers, Georges de Porto-Riche, Alexandre-Dumas-père, Alexandre Dumas-fils, Victor Hugo and Georges Feydeau³. This list also indicates that most performed genres were comedies, melodramas and vaudevilles.

The impact of the model is also visible in the contact between Romanian and French practitioners. On the one hand, the Romanian theatre life was marked by the contribution of French practitioners since the second half of the 19th century.⁴ On the other hand, Paris was a pole of attraction for the Romanian theatre practitioners, including Romanian Ibsenites such as Aristizza Romanescu, Aglae Pruteanu, or Mărioara Voiculescu who wanted to develop their acting skills either by observing the performances of the French actors or by taking classes with them.⁵ Moreover, Eduard (Édouard) de Max, Maria Ventura⁶ and Elvira Popescu are examples of Romanian actors who successfully embarked upon a parallel stage career on the Parisian and Romanian stages. To add more, Alexandru Davila is one example of Romanian director who was inspired by the French actor, director and manager André Antoine in his initiatives to develop the state and private theatre institutions in Romania (Alterescu 1980: 160–172; Vasiliu 1965: 93–94, 97).

Since the French model was powerful in the local theatre life both before and after Ibsen emerged on the national stage, the key-question here is which French traditions shaped his early reception in Romania?

2.2.1 French Ibsen tours in Romania

IbsenStage holds records of 12 French events in Romania between 1894 and 1911, highlighting André Antoine, Gabrielle Réjane, Suzanne Després and Aurélien-Marie Lugné-Poë as the main contributors (Figure 9). If Després and Lugné-Poë visited Romania together and performed Ibsen here several times between 1906 and 1911 (10 events), both André Antoine and Gabrielle Réjane performed Ibsen here just once, in *Ghosts* (*Les Revenants*) in 1894, respectively *A Doll's House* (*Une maison de poupée*) in 1897.

Of the four plays the French actors performed for the Romanian audience – *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts*, *Hedda Gabler* and *The Master Builder* – *A Doll's House* was most staged, as Després and Lugné-Poë performed it during each of their Romanian visits. The other three plays – *Ghosts*, *Hedda Gabler* and *The Master Builder* – were only staged once by the French actors.

These tours overlapped spatially in Bucharest, the Romanian capital city, which dictated the main tendencies in the local theatre life in terms of not only Romanian, but

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- 3 The overviews on the theatres' repertoires in Massoff (1969; 1972; 1974; 1976) support this statement.
 - 4 Relevant examples are Nini Valéry (actress and soprano), Victor Boireaux Delmary (actor and director), or Alexandre Gatinéau (stage manager).
 - 5 One such example is Aristizza Romanescu who took classes with the French actor Louis-Arsène Delaunay.
 - 6 She performed the role of Nora in a Romanian production of *A Doll's House* from 1918.

also foreign languages productions. Després and Lugné-Poë performed in Craiova (1906, 1907) and Iași (1911) too. Nevertheless, the French tours did not cross temporally, as they performed in the country in the following order: André Antoine in 1894, Gabrielle Réjane in 1897, and Suzanne Després and Aurélien-Marie Lugné-Poë between 1906 and 1911.

An overview of Ibsen's French reception at the end of the 19th century is necessary so that we understand the impact of the traditions brought by the French Ibsen performances on the early Romanian theatre practice. Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr (2012: 56–80) has addressed the most important aspects of Ibsen's French reception; she preserves Joan Templeton's idea of a "battle for Ibsen" (1998: 71–82) between the naturalist approach of Antoine and the symbolist approach of Lugné-Poë, but highlights that the French reception did not entail these approaches alone. Shepherd-Barr insists that the approach of Gabrielle Réjane was an alternative (2012: 61) to the avant-gardist and experimental theatre practice of Antoine and Lugné-Poë. The French artists presented all these three divergent interpretations of Ibsen to the Romanian spectators.

The impact of these key practitioners on French and non-French theatre was considerable. The French companies touring Ibsen to Romania also performed across Europe, and in the case of Réjane, even North America. Réjane was already a symbol of the French theatre itself during her lifetime, named as "the toast of the French capital" (Marker and Marker 1989: 60) even before her successful rendition of *Nora*. The English audience considered that "Madame Réjane is the Parisienne, is all Parisiennes, incarnated" (Meunier 1894: 197). However, she was not alone in being acknowledged as a pillar of French theatre. André Antoine and Aurélien-Marie Lugné-Poë were experimentalists responsible for the development of new directions in the practice of acting: Antoine represented the naturalist-realist path, Lugné-Poë represented the symbolist path.

As Romania was a commercial market for these tours, the companies' aesthetic aims were subordinated to commercial ones. The presence of the French Ibsen on the Romanian stage was determined by financial considerations: the repeated presence of the same production performed by the same company indicates success, whereas an isolated production suggests reduced impact.

2.2.1.1 André Antoine, 1894

Ibsen was performed for the very first time in French on the Romanian stage in April 1894 when André Antoine chose *Ghosts* as touring production and interpreted the role of Osvald. The performance was staged at Teatrul Liric [The Lyrical Theatre]⁷ in Bucharest (Alterescu 1971: 82) approximately one month after the first Romanian Ibsen performance of *An Enemy of the People* in Iași, as well as three years before *Ghosts* would be performed for the first time in Romanian in 1897, marking the emergence of Ibsen on the local stage. His touring repertoire consisted of seven French⁸ and two Norwegian plays (Massoff 1969: 337–338): Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson's *The Bankrupt* and Ibsen's *Ghosts*. In terms of reception, Antoine "și-a exprimat mulțumirea pentru felul cum au fost primite spectacolele lui,

7 Most foreign performances that visited Bucharest took place here.

8 *La dupe* (Georges Ancy), *Marriage d'argents* (Eugène Bourgeois), *Blanchette* (Eugène Brieux), *Bourbouruche* (Georges Courteline), *La Fille Elisa* (Edmond de Goncourt), *Jacques Damour* (Émile Zola/Léon Hennique), and *Un beau soir* (Maurice Vaucaire).

promițând că va reveni” (expressed his gratitude for the way in which his performances were received and promised to return; my translation.) (Massoff 1969: 338). Yet, when he returned to Romania, he decided not to perform the Norwegian plays. In 1897, he chose an exclusively French repertoire.

At an international level, IbsenStage reveals Antoine’s presence as contributor in 12 events. *Ghosts* is associated with 11 of these events, whereas *The Wild Duck* was only performed once. The database also indicates Antoine’s lasting interest in touring with Ibsen for 13 years between 1890 and 1903. French, Italian, German, Dutch and Romanian audiences could all witness Antoine in *Ghosts*. Moreover, the staging of *Ghosts* was not only the artist’s first Ibsen production on May 30, 1890, but also the very first French Ibsen production, hence its significance.

The Romanian audience met Antoine’s naturalist version of Ibsen, “featuring all the things that irritated critics like François Sarcy, such as turning his back to the audience and whispering” (Shepherd-Barr 2012: 61). This approach shaped the acting, the stage design and the repertoire, in order to deliver the audience a piece of real life, that is, a “slice of life”:

Antoine offered spectators a new brand of realism/naturalism: a *slice of life* [...] that brought audiences face to face with themselves and with their environment. Decors followed the patterns of reality. A revolutionary acting technique was also instituted [...]: actors and actresses no longer declaimed in stiff and studied ways, as was the style in state-subsidized and boulevard theaters. They walked and talked, comported themselves on stage as they did in shops, on the streets, and in their homes. [...] Nor did the performers upstage each other. Antoine had abolished the star system. His company worked as a unit – a cohesive whole. (Knapp 1988: 866)

Such an acting perspective proved to be demanding for the spectators who were surprised by

felul de interpretare cu totul degajat al actorilor, ce nu se sfiau să joace [...] cu spatele la public, să țină mâinile în buzunare, să coboare tonul [...], aparent fără să țină seama dacă puteau fi auziți de cei din sală. (actors being completely relaxed, and unafraid to perform [...] by turning their back to the audience, keeping their hands in the pockets, lowering their voice [...] apparently without taking into consideration that they cannot be heard; my translation.) (Massoff 1969: 338)

The Romanian historians also highlighted “excesul de studiu al rolurilor – atitudini, gesturi, tăceri chiar, calculate până la amănunt” (excessive study of the roles – attitudes, gestures, silences even, that were all calculated in detail; my translation) (ibid: 338) and pointed at exaggerations hidden in a too-precise representation of life on stage. In other words, the excessive preparation of the roles in the naturalist approach led to exaggerated portrayals of real-life interactions in which the pathological dimension appeared to be artificial instead of real.

On the one hand, Ion Vartic appreciated that the Romanian audience reacted “moderately”⁹ enthusiastic to Antoine’s *Ghosts*. On the other hand, Ioan Massoff claims that “succesul turneului lui Antoine a fost de necontestat” (the success of Antoine’s tour was indisputable; my translation) (ibid: 338) and that “interpretarea lui Oswald din aşteptata piesă *Strigoii* de Ibsen este întâmpinată cu admiraţie” (the interpretation of Oswald in the long-awaited play *Ghosts* was received with admiration; my translation.) (Alterescu 1971: 82). The “moderate” reception applied to the overall content of the repertoire; this illustrates that “a slice of life” theatre was less appealing to the “high audience”¹⁰ than the world of comedies, farces, melodramas or vaudevilles. The historians point to the contrast between the repertoire of Antoine which portrayed a “lume mărunţă, cenuşie” (petty, grey world; my translation) (ibid: 82), and the repertoire of other foreign theatre companies that were privileging entertainment in their stagings. Even if most of the spectators were not enthusiastic about “supleţea jocului lui Antoine” (the suppleness of Antoine’s acting; my translation) (ibid: 82), the overall reception to his tour was positive. A theatre review written by Laura Vampa contains positive remarks about the audience’s response to Antoine’s *Oswald*, but also comments on the lack of Ibsen performances in Romania previously. She suggests this was a reason for the low number of attendees and for the moderate impact:

Când am văzut, cu prilejul reprezentaţiunilor date de Antoine, teatrul mai gol la piesa lui Ibsen *Les Revenants*, mi-am zis că publicul nostru e prea tânăr pentru piesele artistului Norvegian. (When I saw the theatre mostly empty at the staging of Ibsen’s *Ghosts* on the occasion of Antoine’s performances, I told myself that our audience is too young for the Norwegian artist’s plays; my translation.) (Vampa 1894: 1)

An empty theatre hall at Ibsen performances was a recurrent image in the epoch’s reviews, indicating that Ibsen’s plays were seldom a commercial success. This perception is reflected in the reviews of the early staging of Ibsen in Romania, for both foreign and national performances. Antoine toured to Bucharest in 1894, only a month after the first Romanian Ibsen performance in Iaşi; his production of *Ghosts* was the first Ibsen play to be staged in Bucharest. Thus, the context indicates that this “young” audience was simply unaware of Ibsen’s international reputation:

Puţini, cred, chiar dintre acei cari se aflau în sală, aveau idee de Ibsen, cu toate acestea de la început piesa s-a impus, a coprins toate spiritele şi-a câştigat toate simpatiile. [...] erau momente în care se simţea că entuziasmul era la culme, şi, dacă nu isbucneau aplauzele şi pentru autor şi pentru interpret – era numai fiindcă nu voia nimeni întreruperi, îşi dedeau seama toţi că asemenea banalităţi nu-şi aveau locul în faţa analizei, a studiului adâncit, şi a geniului neîntrecut al artistului, care apucă înaintea tuturor să ne arate nu numai relele şi viţile omenirii, dar chiar isoarele lor [...]. (I believe very few of the audience had any idea of who Ibsen was. Yet the

9 “primirea moderată ce i s-a făcut la Bucureşti în 1894 celebrului Antoine” (the moderate reception of the famous Antoine in Bucharest in 1894; my translation) (Vartic 1995: 168).

10 “publicul ‘înalt’ nu se simte atras” (the “high” audience does not feel attracted; my translation) (Alterescu 1971: 82).

play gained authority from the very beginning, surrounded all the spirits and won everyone's sympathy. [...] [T]here were moments when one could feel an absolute enthusiasm, and, if the audience did not enthusiastically applaud both the author and the performer, it was only because no one desired interruptions; they acknowledged the inappropriateness of such banalities when faced with a profoundly analytical performance of an unsurpassable genius, who showed us not only the evil and the vices of humankind, but also their very origin; my translation.) (ibid: 1)

The reference to Ibsen's "Northerness" completed the description, using the sobriety of Ibsen's plays as a reason for the audience's difficulty in assimilating the story of the play:

Ibsen cu pătrunderea, cu filozofia pe care i-a dat-o viața lui cam încercată, într-un mijloc unde nu era înțeles și unde clina neguroasă te apleacă fără voie la melancolie și la reflexiuni, ne dă nu niște bucăți de petrecere, dar niște studii adânci, fiziologice și psihologice ale pornirilor omenești. [...] Ne "distrează" mai puțin, e adevărat, dar ne face să ne gândim mai mult la nimicurile vieții, să ne dăm seama de multe fenomene sociale și de cauzele lor. (It is because the depth of his mind and philosophy resulting from his challenging life in an environment where he was not understood and where dire predicaments inclined him towards melancholy and reflection, that Ibsen does not provide us with entertaining plays, but deep, physiological and psychological studies of human behaviour. [...] It is true that his plays do not amuse us, but trigger us to think more of the emptiness of the existence, to become aware of the social phenomena and their causes; my translation.) (ibid: 1)

This does not make Antoine's performances less valuable. On the contrary, if the commercial impact was weak, the aesthetic impact was definitely strong, as revealed by its influence over the development of the Romanian practice of acting.

2.2.1.2 Gabrielle Réjane, 1897

The actress Gabrielle Réjane is registered in 15 IbsenStage events, with 14 events pointing at *A Doll's House* and Nora as her most powerful contribution between 1894 and 1903. As 11 of the 14 IbsenStage events demonstrate it, she performed this role mainly between 1894 and 1897 during her European and American tours. However, in Romania she appeared in this role only in 1897 at Teatrul Liric [The Lyrical Theatre] in Bucharest, when she was touring with Théâtre de Vaudeville's troupe. With the exception of *A Doll's House*, she only included French plays in her repertoire (Massoff 1969: 415). But, similarly to Antoine, when she came back to Romania in 1901, 1905, 1910 and 1914 (Alterescu 1971: 83), she refrained from performing Ibsen and chose an entirely French repertory instead.

When it comes to the Ibsen tradition that Réjane presented to the Romanian audience, Kirsten E. Shephard-Barr states that she "steered away from these two dominant modes of presenting Ibsen" (Shepherd-Barr 2012: 62), that is from the naturalist and symbolist interpretations. Réjane represented the tradition of the "boulevard" theatre and provided "the first [...] mainstream theatrical success for Ibsen" (ibid: 61). She employed a declamatory acting style and her performances were representative for the star-system tradition in which the roles were selected so that they gave the actress the opportunity to display her skills. Réjane belonged to the same tradition as other great

actresses of her time such as Sarah Bernhardt or Mademoiselle Rachel. “Réjane, like her rivals, inherited a Romantic tradition of acting, only rarely was she sublime, and only very rarely indeed, only despite herself almost, was she ‘tragic’. Mostly was she witty, ironical and wonderfully physical.” (Stokes 2005: 122) Stokes also points at Réjane’s inclination towards naturalism and realism in her acting, in contrast to her Romantic predecessors: “The terms of Réjane’s success show a like adhesion to the newer naturalism of established mechanics, and critical appreciation of her career rested upon the way in which she transformed, deepened and complicated the predictable workings of her popular repertoire [...]” (ibid: 122) The audience in London noticed that her acting had “one firm claim upon realism” (ibid: 136), while taking a distance from the Romantic acting conventions. Thus, “the French ‘impersonal’ manner, surviving even Rachel’s Romantic approach to tragedy, still present in Bernhardt, remained a preserve of the alien, from which Réjane’s mixture of observation and provocation offered a plausible escape” (ibid: 136).

There is little information about the production of *A Doll’s House* staged in Romania in 1897. The historians insist she impressed the audience “prin simplitatea jocului, printr-o sensibilitate emoționantă, prin naturalețe” (through the simplicity of her acting, the moving sensibility and the naturalness; my translation) (Massoff 1969: 415), suggesting a realist interpretation of Nora. However, they give no clear definition of “simplicity”, “naturalness” or “sensibility”. Thus, while we could incline towards an interpretation of her approach as naturalist or realist, Kirsten E. Shephard-Barr presents the actress as belonging to a different theatre trend, privileging a combination of Romanticism with realism. Her reviews may just be signalling a contrast between her acting and the predominantly declamatory Romanian acting of the time. A simple, sensitive and natural acting could just have been the description of an acting paradigm that did not employ declamation. In Réjane’s interpretation of Nora, Fredrick J. Marker and Lise-Lone Marker detect a combination of acting styles she most likely proposed too in her performance for the Romanian audiences:

Réjane transferred [...] the robust spirit of Sardou’s pert, saucy washerwoman to Ibsen’s heroine – a spirit of personal rebelliousness that became one of the twin pillars of her distinctive attack. The end result was neither Sorma’s bitter hostility toward Helmer nor Duse’s elegiac tone of loss and regret. ‘For Réjane’, Bang writes, ‘the play became a work about revolt’. [...] This revolt was prepared and counterbalanced by the acute, sustained sense of fear that Réjane made the other supporting pillar of her interpretation, and which she fuelled with all of her own enormous nervous energy. (Marker and Marker 1989: 61)

Since this was the first time that a Romanian audience had seen a performance of *A Doll’s House*, the critics referred to the controversy that surrounded the play: “s-a stârnit o animată discuție chiar în sala teatrului, publicul fiind împărțit în ceea ce privește comportarea eroinei lui Ibsen.” (a lively discussion unleashed in the theatre hall, as the audience was divided regarding the behaviour of Ibsen’s heroine.) (Massoff 1969: 415) Réjane chose not to perform Nora in her Romanian tours after 1900. (Alterescu 1971: 82)

2.2.1.3 Suzanne Després and Aurélien-Marie Lugué-Poë, 1906–1912

Suzanne Després and Aurélien-Marie Lugué-Poë's presence on the Romanian stage is recorded between 1906 and 1912 with 10 events in IbsenStage. They toured Romania with Ibsen performances five times (1906, 1907, 1908, 1909, and 1911) and performed not only in Bucharest, but also in Craiova (1906, 1907) and Iași (1911). The Ibsen play they staged most in Romania was *A Doll's House*, but they also performed *The Master Builder* (1901) and *Hedda Gabler* (1911). Their performance of *The Master Builder* was also the premiere of the play on the Romanian stage. Apart from their Ibsen productions, they performed mostly French playwrights, as well as Italian, German, Russian, and even a Romanian play.¹¹

Suzanne Després and Aurélien-Marie Lugué-Poë were the most prominent French contributors who travelled with Ibsen productions in Europe. IbsenStage points at 43 events with Suzanne Després performing in leading roles between 1895 and 1937, as well as 111 events in which Aurélien-Marie Lugué-Poë is registered as actor and/or director between 1892 and 1934. These events are testament to their powerful contribution to the dissemination of Ibsen's works.

There are few archival traces left of the Suzanne Després and Aurélien-Marie Lugué-Poë's Ibsen performances in Romania. We know that their Romanian tour was part of a larger initiative of the state that involved cultural exchanges in order to encourage cooperation between France and Romania. Ioan Massoff indicates that the most influential national theatre ensembles were granted a state subsidy to travel across Europe and advocate for France as a powerful and trustworthy diplomatic partner (1972: 269). This subsidy made it easier to cope with the touring costs in Romania, particularly since foreign companies had to pay taxes on each performance. Després and Lugué-Poë's return to Romania suggest that their tours were successful financially in spite of the costs (ibid: 269), and Lugué-Poë remembers "les beaux soirs de nos représentations de Bucarest" (the beautiful evenings of our performances in Bucharest; my translation.) (Lugué-Poë 1933: 248).

Suzanne Després and Aurélien-Marie Lugué-Poë are mostly known for their activity at *Théâtre de l'Œuvre*, but historical data points at the fact that the theatre was not open to the theatregoers in Paris for about 13 years in the first decade of the 20th century (1899–1912).¹² During those years, *Théâtre de l'Œuvre* was acknowledged as an international enterprise mainly outside of France, which is reflected in the IbsenStage dataset.

11 For instance, the repertoire performed in 1906 included, apart from Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, *Le détour*, *La Fille Elise*, *Poil de Carotte*, *La robe rouge*, *La Massière*, *Le jaloux* and *Fedra*, which were all French plays. Instead, the repertoire performed in 1907 included both French plays, such as *Denise*, *L'Ainé*, *Rosine* and the Italian play *Gioconda*. In 1908, the actors added a French adaptation of the Russian *The Kreutzer Sonata* to a repertoire including the same Italian play *Gioconda* and still dominated by French plays such as *La Parisienne*, *Poil de Carotte*, *La Rafale*, *Sapho* and *Denise*. The tour of 1909 was even more diverse, as it included not one, but two Ibsen plays, *A Doll's House* and *The Master Builder*, together with the same Italian play *Gioconda*, the German play *Electra*, and the French plays *Amoureuse*, *Poil de Carotte*, *Le détour*, *Le jeu de la morale et du hasard* and *Le fardeau de la liberté*. Finally, apart from Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and *Hedda Gabler*, the repertoire performed in 1911 was exclusively French, including *Andromaca*, *Fedra*, *La Fille Elise*, *Poil de Carotte*, *Les Marionnettes* and *La Sacrifiée* (Massoff 1972: 163, 164, 189, 226, 270, 388).

12 *Théâtre de l'Œuvre* was closed in 1899 and reopened only in 1912, as several resources signal: "Lugué-Poë closed the Théâtre de l'Œuvre in 1899 but revived it in 1912, and again for a time after World

One of Lugné-Poë's early aims was to establish *Théâtre de l'Œuvre* as an international organisation named *L'Œuvre internationale* with activity in Brussels, London and The Hague. His first attempts with this initiative date from 1895, but ended in 1896 as a result of poor management:

L'Œuvre, internationale par son répertoire, le serait aussi parce que chacun de ses spectacles serait donné successivement à Paris, à Bruxelles, à la Haye et à Londres. [...] Au bout de quelques mois l'échec fut évident. Pièces mal choisies, qui n'avaient rien à voir avec les grandes reconstitutions promises, interprétations médiocres et hâtives. [...] En juin 1896, *L'Œuvre internationale* semblait bel et bien enterrée. (L'Œuvre is international not only because of its repertory, but also because of each one of its performances would be successively organised in Paris, Brussels, Hague and London. [...] After several months, the failure was obvious. The plays were poorly chosen and had nothing to do with the great performances promised, and the interpretations were mediocre and rash. [...] By June 1896, *L'Œuvre internationale* seemed completely buried; my translation.) (Robichez 1955: 134–135)

In 1906, when Lugné-Poë took over as the impresario for *L'Œuvre internationale*, the project revived and in the first decade of the 20th century Suzanne Després and Aurélien-Marie Lugné-Poë toured extensively together, often without any other partners, presenting a unique repertory unlike that of other Parisian theatres.¹³ It was during their international tours, which brought them – especially Suzanne Després – global recognition, that they performed in Romania.¹⁴ According to Jacques Robichez, this period marked “l’expansion triomphale de L'Œuvre sur les routes du monde entier” (the

War I.” (Britannica ACADEMIC, n.d.); “Relevons une dernière fois le rideau qui vient de se baisser, le soir du 21 juin 1899, sur la scène de L'Œuvre” (Robichez 1957: 471).

- 13 “Et, vers 1900, se dessine une des grandes maximes de L'Œuvre : indépendance complète du répertoire des tournées et du répertoire parisien. Quand Lugné-Poë va en Norvège en 1897, en 1898, en 1899, en 1902, un autre principe l'inspire : l'économie. Il y va seul avec Suzanne Després. [...] Voyages sans prétentions, non sans efficacité. [...] En 1906, une nouvelle carrière, une fulgurante carrière, commence pour lui, celle d'impresario. Un impresario revenu de ses illusions” (Robichez 1955: 135–136).
- 14 “L'‘étoile’ maintenant c'est Suzanne Després. En peu d'années elle s'est fait une réputation mondiale. Dès 1906 elle a joué en Europe Centrale, en Turquie, en Amérique de Sud, en Allemagne, en Alsace, en Belgique, en Hollande. En 1907, elle retourne en Allemagne et parcourt Danemark, Suède, Norvège. 1908 et 1909 sont pour elle et Lugné-Poë des années de voyages incessants. C'est la grande époque de *L'Œuvre internationale*. Janvier 1908 : Anvers, Liège. – Février, mars : Verdun, Strasbourg, Colmar, Luxembourg, Mulhouse, Bâle, Francfort, Dresde, Prague, Vienne, Budapest, Bucarest, Constantinople, où les représentations de *Maison de poupée* furent prétextes à des manifestations dans les harems des vieilles familles bourgeoises, Le Caire, Alexandrie. – Mai : Londres. – Juin : Strasbourg, Marseille. – Octobre : Bruges, Bruxelles, Verviers, Metz, Strasbourg, Colmar, Moulhouse, Cologne, Munich. L'année 1909 n'est pas moins chargée. Avril et mai : Stuttgart, Munich, Vienne, Budapest, Craïova, Bucarest, Jassy. – Juillet et août : plus de quarante représentations à Buenos-Ayres, une à Dakar, à l'escale du retour. – Novembre et décembre : Berlin, Hanovre, Brême, Dusseldorf, Barmen, Luxembourg, Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines” (Robichez 1955: 138–139).

triumphant expansion of *L'Œuvre* on the circuits of the entire world; my translation.) (Robichez 1955: 144).

Suzanne Després and Aurélien-Marie Lugné-Poë presented a symbolist version of Ibsen to the Romanian audience, which contrasted to the naturalist Ibsen of Antoine. Their performances revealed “antinaturalistic settings, the actors’ lines being pronounced in a monotonous, oneiric tone and with slow, emphatic movements” (D’amico 2014: 15) and “hieratic, plainchant intonation and performances taking place behind a scrim” (Shepherd-Barr 2012: 61). These extreme symbolist performances reflected Lugné-Poë’s “vision of the theatre [that] went beyond the visible world, directly into the occult, sometimes nightmarish, transcendental domains” (Knapp 1988: 872) and secured “Ibsen’s full and final breakthrough in France” (Shepherd-Barr 2012: 61). However, they were highly controversial, not just for Ibsen, who hardly approved of them, but also with Scandinavian audiences. Georg Brandes objected to their symbolist stagings, claiming that Ibsen wrote realist plays:

Et George Brandès à la même époque partait en guerre contre les ‘interprétations fantastiques’ de *L'Œuvre* et proclamait très haut qu’Ibsen était un dramaturge réaliste que des hurluberlus, en France, avaient systématiquement déguisé en Symboliste. Lugné se trouvait en somme dans une fâcheuse situation : on s’apercevait qu’il était plus ibsénien qu’Ibsen! (At the same time, George Brandès was going to war too against the ‘fantastic interpretations’ of the *L'Œuvre* and claimed loudly that Ibsen was a realist playwright who was systematically disguised into a Symbolist by eccentrics in France. In sum, Lugné was in a disagreeable situation: we could see that he was more Ibsenian than Ibsen!; my translation.) (Robichez 1955: 15)

Eventually, the symbolist interpretation of Ibsen was accepted as a compromise to ensure the playwright’s international dissemination, but it was not considered a plausible aesthetic option:

Mais les Norvégiens au début le pardonnaient à Lugné-Poë comme ils lui pardonnaient son jeu somnambulique qui faussait les intentions d’Ibsen et de Bjørnson, ôtait la vie des personnages, mais les enrichissait en même temps d’une profondeur et d’une gravité nouvelles. (But the Norwegians initially forgave Lugné-Poë and his somnambulistic plays that falsified Ibsen and Bjørnson’s intentions, deprived the characters of life, at the same time enriching them with a new profundity and solemnity; my translation) (ibid : 14)

Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr claims that the symbolist approach to Ibsen “ultimately did more harm than good to the French understanding of Ibsen [...] playing him in a mode that we might not see (as he himself did later) as not just incompatible but risible” (Shepherd-Barr 2012: 62).

What kind of symbolist Ibsen arrived in Romania together with Suzanne Després and Lugné-Poë? Firstly, none of the Romanian historians has actually named the tradition they presented on the local stage as “symbolist” to the extent Shepherd-Barr, D’Amico and Knapp indicate. In fact, no one ever mentioned “symbolism” at all. Instead, the descriptions of Després and Lugné-Poë’s performances indicate that symbolist and re-

alist means were combined so that “predomină tonul simplu și grav al limbajului scenic despuiat de convenții, dar nu de poezie” (the stage language that dominates employs a simple and low tonality, and is cleared of conventions, without being devoid of *poetry*; my translation.) (Alterescu 1971: 84). Giuliana Altamura clarifies this conundrum, pointing at the fact that when *Théâtre de l'Œuvre* closed its doors in 1899, Lugné-Poë moved away from the extremely symbolist and experimental approach of Ibsen¹⁵. French theatre history also indicates that Lugné-Poë proposed a milder version of symbolist theatre, including realist elements. This historical division implies that by the time Suzanne Després and Aurélien-Marie Lugné-Poë visited Romania between 1906 and 1911, they most likely did not present an experimental symbolist approach of Ibsen to the local audience. Instead, they probably played an interpretation of Ibsen infused with both symbolist and realist elements. Robichez also highlights that their approach changed at the turn of the century:

Il est désormais engagé dans une nouvelle direction. Il a rompu avec les Symbolistes français en juin. Il répudie définitivement leurs paradoxes de mise en scène. De 1897 à 1899 il présente les drames du Nord dans une interprétation plus simple, mais qui ne va pas toutefois jusqu'au réalisme intégral. (Henceforth, he assumed a new direction. He broke with the French symbolists in June. He repudiated definitively their paradoxes concerning the mise-en-scène. From 1897 to 1899 he presented a simpler interpretation of the dramas of the North, which, however, did not aim at an integral realism; my translation.) (Robichez 1955: 27)

Robichez indicates that the keyword describing Després and Lugné-Poë's theatre activity around 1900 was no longer symbolism, but realism. It is also clear that the artists did not make a radical transition from extreme symbolism back to Antoine's naturalism/realism. Robichez describes their approach as “un réalisme poétique qui se nuance souvent d'un comique âpre, parfois ricanneur, toujours profondément original” (a poetical realism which is often nuanced by means of a rough humour, sometimes sneering, always profoundly original; my translation) (ibid: 27) or “*réalisme mitigé*”:

Un réalisme mitigé, c'était la formule à laquelle Lugné s'arrêtait pour son propre jeu et pour sa mise en scène. Suzanne Després reprenait les rôles qu'avait créés Berthe Bady. Elle n'usait pas des mêmes moyens. Elle était plus humaine et plus simple. Son influence fut certainement considérable dans l'orientation nouvelle de l'Œuvre. (A nuanced realism [*réalisme mitigé*], this was the formula that Lugné chose for his own acting and mise-en-scène. Suzanne Després got the roles previously interpreted by Berthe Bady. She did not use the same means. She was more human, simpler. Her influence was certainly considerable in the new direction assumed by the L'Œuvre.) (ibid: 16)

15 “La chiusura dell'Œuvre annunciata nel 1899, sebbene non definitiva, segnò effettivamente la conclusione della fase che – più che altro per semplificazione, come s'è visto – è stata detta *simbolista*, ma che forse sarebbe più opportuno definire *sperimentale*” (Altamura 2014: 407).

While “poetical” indicates that some symbolist traces remained in Lugné-Poë’s “realist” approach, what did *mitigé* entail? Since the word *mitiger* means “édulcorer quelque chose, l’adoucir en y mêlant quelque chose d’autre” (making something sweeter or milder by combining it with another element; my translation) (*mitiger*, n.d.), *mitigé* indicates that the extreme symbolist phase of Lugné-Poë and Després’s activity was followed by a tempered realism, clearly “sweetened” by a symbolist touch.

Accordingly, Lugné-Poë and Després brought this “sweet” and “mild” symbolist-realist version of Ibsen to Romania. The Romanian critics did not find extreme symbolist elements in Suzanne Després’ interpretation, but balanced renditions:

A emoționat cu jocul ei simplu, izbutind să scoată efecte dintr-o mișcare bruscă, dintr-un cuvânt șoptit parcă din adâncuri misterioase. (She moved [the audience] with her simple acting and managed to create effects through sudden movements, through words whispered as if from mysterious depths; my translation.) (Massoff 1972: 388).

Ioan Massoff points precisely to the realist brush in her symbolist interpretation:

Marea actriță a emoționat și de data aceasta publicul, prin jocul său sincer, lipsit de orice emfază, printr-o economie dusă la extrem a mijloacelor exterioare. [...] spectacolele cu Suzanne Després au avut o certă valoare artistică, în ciuda faptului că această simplitate a mijloacelor scenice a surprins pe unii, obișnuiți să se vorbească pe scenă “altfel decât în viață”. (The great actress moved the audience with her sincere acting that lacked any emphasis, and with an extreme economy of her external means. [...] Although this simplicity of the acting surprised some of those used to people on stage speaking ‘differently than in [real] life’, the performances of Suzanne Després had an unquestionable artistic value; my translation) (*ibid.*: 189–190)

This comment on the actress’ speech indicates how she turned from a symbolist “monotonous”, “hieratic” and “oneiric” approach to a realist one, reminding us of Antoine’s principle of actors talking on stage as in real life. Robichez ties Després to the theatre innovations of both Lugné-Poë and Antoine, stressing the realism of her acting:

Ce n’est pas une grande tragédienne, c’est une femme simple qui n’a pas dépouillé tout à fait les aspects familiers et un peu populaire de son personnage. [...] On retrouve dans son jeu les leçons de Lugné-Poë, de Worms et d’Antoine. (This is not a great tragedienne, but a simple woman who has not deprived her character of its familiar and popular aspects. [...] We encounter the lessons of Lugné-Poë, Worms and Antoine in her acting; my translation.) (Robichez 1955: 141)

In fact, according to Robichez, her acting dictated the realist turn in the theatre managed by her husband by taming its symbolist approach. The local description of Després and Lugné-Poë’s Ibsen performances in Romania as a combination of “mysterious depths” and “simplicity” of the acting language supports the analyses of Robichez, Altamura and Shepherd-Barr. It is also clear that Suzanne Després did not employ the declamatory

acting style that was typical, not only for the French, but also for Romanian actresses at the time:

Suzanne Després, socotită în epocă, cea mai de seamă interpretă a dramei moderne. Neavând ca înfățișare nimic ispititor, cu o “față palidă, un cap plin de griji, în ochi licăririi stranii”, departe de “linia marilor comediene franceze”, Suzanne Després a încântat totuși prin jocul său simplu, însoțit de gesturi puține, dar cu atât mai convingător. (Suzanne Després was considered the greatest interpreter of modern drama. She had nothing tempting in her appearance, and her ‘pale face, a head burdened with sorrows and strange glimmers in her eyes’ had nothing in common with the ‘appearance of the great French comediennes’. Yet, Suzanne Després delighted through her simple and therefore more convincing acting, accompanied by few gestures; my translation.) (Massoff 1972: 163)

The Romanian actor George Ciprian also noted that Suzanne Després’s realist acting marked by simplicity tempered her symbolist interpretation in the interpretation of Nora in *A Doll’s House*:

O Noră poate nu destul de potrivită ca înfățișare dar de un clocot interior mistuitor și de o putere de pătrundere rar întâlnite – ridicând marea scenă finală, cu mijloacele cele mai simple, la înălțimi nebănuite.” (She may probably not be the best Nora in terms of physical appearance, but [she performed] with such an inner, consuming fire, and with such a seldom encountered penetrating power, that she elevated to an unexpected standard the great final scene by the simplest means; my translation.) (Ciprian 1965: 172)

The actress emphasised this balance in her view of Nora: “În Nora nu e o singură femeie care trăiește, sunt toate femeile.” (Nora is not just an individual woman, she is a symbol of all women everywhere; my translation.) (Cocca 1911: 2)

2.2.1.3.1 Lugué-Poë and the Romanian-French theatrical “chemistry”

The international activity of *Théâtre de l’Œuvre* was not confined to touring productions or the aim of creating a platform for cooperation between theatre enterprises. The international mark that Lugué-Poë put on *Théâtre de l’Œuvre* also was reflected in the contributions of the numerous foreign actors and directors who participated in the ensemble. Robichez highlights the transnational dimension of *Théâtre de l’Œuvre* as one of its specificities:

On parlera roumain sur la scène de l’Œuvre, russe, hollandais, danois, italien et Lugué-Poë apparaîtra quelquefois comme le portier d’une sorte de Babel du théâtre. (People would speak Romanian on the stage of l’Œuvre, then also Russian, Dutch, Danish, Italian. Therefore, Lugué-Poë sometimes had the appearance of a doorkeeper of a theatrical Babel; my translation.) (Robichez 1955: 140)

Such renowned actors as Eleonora Duse and Ermete Zacconi collaborated with Lugué-Poë too.

Some of the foreign contributors participating in the activity of the ensemble were Romanian. Two of them took part in the Ibsen productions staged by Lugné-Poë's *Théâtre de l'Œuvre*, both during and after the company's extremely symbolist phase. They were Édouard de Max and Alexandre Mihalesco.¹⁶ The IbsenStage records confirm their status as Ibsen contributors. Édouard de Max is registered in seven events associated with the *Rosmersholm* production of 1893–1894; Alexandre Mihalesco also appears in seven events, but in association with several plays between 1924 and 1934: *Ghosts*, *The Wild Duck*, *A Doll's House* and *Rosmersholm*.

Édouard de Max worked as actor in Lugné-Poë's ensemble and is most remembered for his performance as Ulrik Brendel in *Rosmersholm*. Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr reminds us that Ibsen “famously complained about the way Brendel was electrically lit on his entrance in *Rosmersholm*” (2012: 61). The Brendel that Ibsen was referring to was performed by the Romanian actor Édouard de Max. He acted in Lugné-Poë's experimental symbolist productions and in 1893–1894 participated in *Théâtre de l'Œuvre*'s tour to Brussels, Liège, Amsterdam, The Hague and Oslo, where he performed in front of Ibsen. Regardless of the criticisms of the production's extreme symbolism, the performance by Édouard de Max was treasured by Lugné-Poë, who mentions him in his Ibsen memoirs:

Si le tragédien Édouard de Max, interprète de Ulrich Brendel, s'égara quelque peu dans sa dernière scène—où il apparut fantomatique—de Max était difficile à retenir—il faut néanmoins se souvenir que sa création fut acclamée et que Bang put [...] télégraphier le triomphe de la soirée...et Ibsen se rapprocha de nous. (Although the tragedian Édouard de Max, interpreter of Ulrich Brendel, was going somewhat astray in his last scene—the one where he had a ghostly appearance—because de Max was difficult to restrain—we must nevertheless remember that his creation was acclaimed and that Bang could [...] send by telegraph the message about the triumph of that evening...Then Ibsen approached us; my translation) (Lugné-Poë 1936: 40)

Neither Lugné-Poë nor French theatre historians such as Jacques Robichez acknowledged that Édouard de Max was Romanian. However, the Romanian historian Ioan Masoff mentions him among with a number of other Romanian actors who were successfully performing in French on the French stage, in spite of their foreign origin (1969: 225). This omission is understandable with regard to Édouard de Max as he studied at the National Conservatoire of Dramatic Arts of Paris. He was a student of Gustav Worms and was educated according to the norms of the Romantic declamatory style and was to become one of the epoch's greatest tragedians in Paris. His symbolist interpretation of Brendel in *Rosmersholm* was influential even when *Théâtre de l'Œuvre* moved to a milder, “poetical” approach combining symbolism and realism:

Il fallait qu'il subsistât une faible brume autour de ces pièces. Pour Ulric Brendel, dans *Rosmersholm*, on ne pouvait, sous peine de rompre le charme, le montrer tel qu'il apparaissait aux Norvégiens: un simple pochard verbeux et truculent. Il fallait

16 The names of these contributors were slightly adapted once they moved to France, in order to fit the French pronunciation. It is the case of both Eduard de Max, who became Édouard de Max, and of Alexandru Mihalescu who became Alexandre Mihalesco.

garder au personnage un peu de la poésie dont de Max, à la création, l'avait trop généreusement revêtu. (There had to be a shallow fog around these plays. As for Ulric Brendel in *Rosmersholm*, we could not present him just how he appeared to the Norwegians, like a simple, verbose and picturesque drunkard, because it would have been painful to destroy the charm. We had to preserve a bit of the posity with which de Max had too generously endowed the character; my translation.) (Robichez 1955: 16)

Alexandre Mihalesco not only acted with *Théâtre de l'Œuvre* like Édouard de Max, he was also the director of a production of *Ghosts*. Mihalesco also performed in a Romanian Ibsen production of *An Enemy of the People* staged in 1912 at the National Theatre of Bucharest. When Mihalesco moved to France, he participated in Ibsen productions at Lugné-Poë's *Théâtre de l'Œuvre* and with Georges Pitoëff's company. Jacques Robichez mentions both Mihalesco and de Max, but he only acknowledges Alexandre Mihalesco as Romanian:

Quant à Mihalesco il reviendra jouer à l'Œuvre, mettra en scène certaines pièces d'Ibsen. Faire monter, pour des Français, une pièce norvégienne par un comédien de Bucharest, voilà l'une de ces expériences de chimie théâtrale à quoi Lugné se complaît. (As far as Mihalesco is concerned, he would come back to perform at the L'Œuvre and he would stage some of Ibsen's plays. To let an actor from Bucharest stage a Norwegian play for a French audience – this is one of the experiences of theatrical chemistry in which Lugné would indulge; my translation.) (ibid: 139–140)

The careers in Paris of these two actors proves that the “theatrical chemistry” between the French and Romanian theatre practitioners exceeded the boundary of the French tours performing Ibsen on the local stage. These interactions reveal the fluidity of constant exchanges not only in the local, but also in the transnational theatre history to which the Romanian theatre belongs.

2.2.2 Final remarks

To sum up, the influence of the French model upon the Romanian early reception of Ibsen reveals itself as a spatial intercrossing of various theatre traditions. Despite their simultaneous presence on the French stage, these traditions did not cross temporally on the Romanian stage: André Antoine's *Ghosts* was shortly followed by Gabrielle Réjane's *A Doll's House* at the end of 19th century, whereas the first decade of the 20th century belonged to Suzanne Després and Aurélien-Marie Lugné-Poë. The three traditions they brought to Romania – naturalist theatre, boulevard theatre and symbolist theatre – were inherently conflicting, yet they were all well received. However, the tours of Després and Lugné-Poë must be considered the most influential with audiences as they staged Ibsen almost every time they returned to Romania. In contrast, the performances by Gabrielle Réjane and André Antoine reached fewer people and had less influence despite the critics' appraisal.

The long-term impact of the French interpretative approaches to producing Ibsen worked differently than the short-term impact of the individual performances. The influence upon the national theatre life was strongest in the case of Antoine. His model of

an independent theatre promoting a naturalist/realist repertory, acting and staging, and a homogeneous ensemble was implemented in Romania by Alexandru Davila. This initiative shaped the evolution of both the national and private theatres. Some of the most important Romanian Ibsen contributors were actors and actresses who had collaborated with Davila and were inspired by Antoine. The long-term impact of Després and Lugné-Poë was less significant; it followed a different path of cultural exchange.

The French approaches to performing Ibsen presented on the early Romanian stage offered conflicting alternatives to producing his plays. Their positive reception proves both the fluidity of the Romanian theatre environment and its capacity to absorb and employ conflicting traditions in various ways, for shorter or longer periods. In this respect, the French example reveals that the Romanian history of Ibsen was marked by constant cultural exchanges, escaping the national boundaries, yet simultaneously preserving them. I will return to this discussion on the influences of the French interpretative models later in this thesis in an in-depth analysis of the Romanian Ibsen tradition.

2.3 The Italian model

The Italian tours intensified the entanglement of traditions revealed in the performances of the French theatre companies that brought Ibsen on the Romanian stage. Although the Italian model seems less prominent than the French, given that IbsenStage only records 5 events on the Romanian map between 1907 and 1940 (Figure 10), they are surprisingly similar.

The connection between the Italian and the Romanian culture can be traced back to Ancient Rome. This common legacy is first and foremost evident in the linguistic similarity which fostered continuous interaction between Italians and Romanians throughout time. The chronicler Grigore Ureche's famous statement from the 17th century that "de la Râm ne tragem" ([Romanians] come from Rome; my translation) (Ureche 1967: 37), points at the Roman Empire's rule and domination in Dacia between A.D. 106 and 271 as proof. The national history further indicates that Italians have had the status of middlemen on Romanian lands, as experts in fields such as architecture, medicine, religion, politics or arts, since the Roman rule in the province of Dacia, in the Middle Ages and in the modern times:

Secole de-a rândul s-a manifestat o prezență ocazională a unor indivizi sosiți aici pentru a-și exercita diversele profesii sau meserii, ca de exemplu medici, negustori, profesori, în special de limba italiană sau latină, arte plastice sau muzică, muzicieni, cântăreți de operă și actori voiajori, arhitecți, ingineri și mulți alții. (For centuries, there was an evident occasional presence of individuals who came here to practise their diverse professions or crafts. They were, for example, doctors, merchants, teachers, especially of Italian or Latin language, fine arts or music, musicians, opera singers and touring actors, architects, engineers and many others; my translation.) (Dorojan 2017: 14)