

Part One

1.1 Methodological and theoretical framework

1.1.1 Methodological framing

The argument of this thesis builds upon a multifarious, interdisciplinary theoretical framework and methodology. Digital humanities, theatre studies and historical studies are equally relevant, hence interdependent in this approach. The inherent connection between these fields is influenced by the range of materials I have employed in this research, which entailed the use of both close and distant reading. In addition to previous research on the reception of Henrik Ibsen in Romania and across the world, this thesis is based on Romanian theatre history studies, biographies and memoirs, as well as a large amount of archival material including theatre reviews, revenues sheets and receipts from Ibsen performances. All the aforementioned materials have provided the background information for the IbsenStage Database, which I constantly refer to as a starting point and framework for this research. However, this thesis is not a pure digital inquiry of Ibsen's history on the Romanian stage. In fact, I have regularly returned to traditional theatre historiographical analyses in order to deepen the premises opened by the digital framework.

1.1.2 Digital humanities framework. IbsenStage Database

The dataset registered in IbsenStage Database (Hanssen 2019: 6) is the starting point for this research and its framework. In addition to map visualisations and lists provided by IbsenStage, I use graphs and statistics based on manually organised datasets of the archival materials. In the context of my research, IbsenStage helped me to delimit the temporal framework of the thesis, strengthened or confirmed my research premises, and offered me a wide range of criteria to organise, select and structure the data set analysed. The digital humanities tools thus made it possible not only to recreate the context, but also to select those aspects that required a zoom-in look.

Previous research using digital humanities tools to study Ibsen's worldwide reception constitutes the background of my approach. The book *A Global Doll's House. Ibsen and*

Distant Visions of Julie Holledge, Jonathan Bollen, Frode Helland and Joanne Tompkins and the volume on *Ibsen on the German Stage 1876–1918. A Quantitative Approach* of Jens-Morten Hanssen are the two main examples of quantitative analysis I refer to in the context of my research. Using Franco Moretti's studies (2007, 2013) as the main background, these inquiries choose specific datasets, which are investigated in light of the patterns revealed by the data. Networks, graphs, maps and trees are the main tools to identify them, while the research focuses further to explain their origin and relevance:

Looking from a distance at the 3787 records of *Et dukkehjem* productions in the IbsenStage database, we see patterns in the data that guide us towards new sites of enquiry. When we reach these sites, we zoom in to look at the work and lives of particular artists, commercial and government funding, specific performances, genres of adaptation, and multiple versions of a single scene to find the evidence that can help explain the global success of the play. No single performance is examined at great length, but full details of all the productions mentioned are held in IbsenStage. (Holledge et al. 2016: 6)

I employ the same approach in my thesis, where map visualisations, graphs, lists and statistics that accompany my analyses have the same function as in *A Global Doll's House*:

It is one thing to amass information in a database and visualise its content. It is another actually to interrogate what these data tell us: what new research possibilities emerge from the accumulation of information? No diagram can show us why an artist chose to produce this play, or how an audience received it; nor can it reveal the complexities and extraordinary richness of the adaptations and translations of the play. Yet visualisations of production data can indicate the transmission of Ibsen's play through time, across space, and between artists working in the theatre. They can reveal patterns that provoke further investigation. The methods used in the digital humanities provide the opportunity to ask questions that were not previously imaginable. (ibid: 8)

Nevertheless, while the dataset employed in *A Global Doll's House* or in *Ibsen on the German Stage 1879–1917* includes a generous number of events and contributors, the Romanian dataset is far smaller, leaving less room for digital investigations. At points, network analyses, graphs and statistics simply confirm information easily identifiable with traditional research tools. However, Digital Humanities tools still are appropriate in the context of this thesis, because they offer a stable framework to structure the premises and the historiographical material; they eliminate arbitrary selections; and, finally, they open up the possibility to compare various datasets and further identify similarities and differences in the reception to Ibsen across geographical, political or linguistic borders. The investigation of a small dataset such as the Romanian gains accuracy through a Digital Humanities approach and is easier to integrate into a wider picture of Ibsen's impact as a world dramatist.

1.1.3 Theatre historiography and practice of acting

A theatre studies framework is necessary when focusing on theatre history. While the digital humanities tools shape this approach, the close-up investigation of the patterns revealed in the maps, graphs and networks requires traditional theatre historiographical research methods. Thomas Postlewait's volume on theatre historiography guided my research in terms of what a theatre event is, how to pursue the analysis of historical documents, how to work with periodisation and how to understand a historical context. None of these concepts – event, document, period and context – are given or fixed realities. In Postlewait's words, "change the context, change the meaning. And if we change the historical questions, we may change both the event and the context" (2009: 79). Instead, these categories depend on a valid interpretation that could say what actually happened with an individual event or a series of events described in a document belonging to a certain period and in relationship to a specific context:

The descriptive mandate of historical study is the recording of actions and events. This is done in order to answer the basic question of who, what, where and when. By means of descriptive details, the historian provides a representation of human actions, placed within a shaping context. The explanations provide answers to how and why. In a cumulative manner, the events [...] provide a developmental order [...] that may achieve some kind of narrative significance. (ibid: 89)

Thus, Thomas Postlewait's approach is not only a handbook of how to pursue a theatre historiographical research, but also an incentive to critical thinking and a warning against pejorative assumptions and superficial analyses.

Beside the theatre historiographical framework, the thesis is shaped by Joseph Roach's volume on *The Player's Passion: studies in the science of acting*, as the Romanian practice of acting is mainly actor-based in the period I analyse. The memoirs, biographies and theatre histories I use all point to the way in which actors performed. Yet, these accounts seldom name the acting schools to which the actors belonged, nor refer to differences between acting genres. In this context, Roach's book is more than a history of acting exploring how "conceptions of the human body drawn from physiology and psychology have dominated the theory of acting from antiquity to the present" (Roach 1985: 11). By showing "how the inner workings of the actor's body have been variously understood by critics and theorists who knew something about the physiology of emotion" (ibid: 12), the study suggests how we should read the language of the actors who describe the preparations, creation and enacting of their roles. It is thus a helpful tool to "identify" the various acting genres employed by actors and to acknowledge how they integrated them in the interpretation of their roles. However, instead of being a manual of definitions of acting genres, Roach delves into the complex issue of the factors informing their evolution. Thus, the history of sciences, the history of the body and the theatre history are put together, revealing the contradictions, misunderstandings and unclear readings shaping the interpretation of the art of the actor in time, pointing at the changing, dynamic nature of the terms that inherently dwell in the actors' language. Thus, Roach warns the reader to think and read carefully and critically terms that might

seem simple to decipher, when, in fact, they acquired different meanings depending on the theatrical context and acting paradigm in which they were employed:

If each age prides itself on having attained the right answers about how the world works, it prides itself equally on being able to view theatrical exhibitions of human feeling that are more realistic and natural than those of the previous age. In fact, each acting style and the theories that explain and justify it are right and natural for the historical period in which they are developed and during which they are accepted. In order to understand historical styles of acting in the context of their contemporary settings, we must therefore restore the meaning of outmoded terminology and explanatory principles. Before we label an acting style as artificial, we should have at least made an effort to understand what its practitioners meant by natural. (ibid: 15)

Roach's volume is relevant to my approach because its detailed explanatory presentation of the science of acting's evolution is also an answer to how one should approach the terminology employed in actors' memoirs and biographies. Terms such as "natural", "real", "realism", "emotion" or "psychology" seem to need no longer further explanation today. However, they have had completely different meanings for actors throughout time. It is particularly relevant for the actor-based Romanian practice of acting to understand the changing nature of the acting science, the actors' use of terminology, and the way in which their accounts explain their actual interpretations on stage. Thus, Roach's book is an essential theoretical tool for this thesis.

1.1.4 From nation building to post-colonial theory and intercrossed histories

The Romanian theatre life was not separated from the political national ideal, neither in 1859, when the Union of the two Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia took place, nor in 1918, when the inclusion of Bessarabia, Transylvania, Bukovina, Banat and Crișana led to the foundation of Greater Romania. In fact, Romania is no different from other national states, which assumed the theatre as "the appropriate site for nation building" (Kruger 1992: 6) in the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century. In this respect, Loren Kruger's influential analysis of cultural legitimization of the national states through theatre in England, France and America offers a valid framework for Romania. The concept of "theatrical nationhood [which] manifests itself fully only in the course of the nineteenth century with the rise of mass national politics" (ibid: 3) applies to the emergence of the Romanian theatre as an institution supporting the emergence of the national state. Moreover, the relevance of Kruger's approach is revealed by Norway's example too, since the thesis discusses the cultural contact between two national theatre cultures newly emerged during the 19th century. Henrik Ibsen himself is symbolically associated with the process of national emancipation of Norway, a process enhanced by his international acknowledgment. Thus, the role ascribed to the theatre as nation-building tool implies, according to Kruger, "a natural affiliation between theatre and public politics on a national scale" (ibid: 6). Moreover, "the intersection of political, economic and aesthetic spheres in the institution of theatre as well as the ambiguity of those relationships makes theatre an exemplary site for investigating the complex and contradic-

tory relationships among the discourses and practices sustaining cultural hegemony” (ibid: 13).

The exploration of the “cultural hegemony” concept mentioned by Kruger addresses additionally the question of post-colonialism, which cannot be separated from the process of national building in the 19th century. Both Romania and Norway were seen as unofficial cultural colonies at the periphery of Europe, overshadowed by and under the influence of the major political and cultural powers of the time. However, while the foundation of a national state was pursued all over Europe, its implementation depended on the specificity of the local contexts.

Zoltán Imre draws even further on this argument using Kruger’s approach as a starting point when he focuses on the history of the Hungarian Theatre of Pest founded in 1837. The Hungarian example serves as a comparative tool for the Romanian example because of its similarity regarding the understanding of the concepts of national theatre and nation building. Imre distinguishes between two 19th-century perspectives upon the national theatre, illustrating the opposed Western and Eastern understanding of how this artistic institution should contribute to the development of a national culture. He differentiated between an “imperial” reading of the national theatre ideal focused on integrating the entire nation, and a resistance-oriented reading of the national theatre as a means to fight imperial tendencies:

The notion of a national theatre was not only used by certain social groups to represent themselves on stage, but also regarded as a means for the integration of an entire nation, as in France, Denmark, Sweden, and Germany; or even an empire, as in Russia, Austria, and Great Britain, either from ‘below’ or ‘above’. The debates on and later the realizations of national theatres, however, took also place within the context of and against oppressive imperiums such as those in Poland, Hungary, Romania, Croatia, Norway, Serbia, Ireland, and in some respects Scotland.¹⁹ In these countries, the establishment of a national theatre was regarded as an (idealistic) expression of political, cultural, and economic unity and independence. The national theatre was to represent the often unified image of the nation, and to maintain an (often single and fixed) national identity and an (often homogeneous and dominant) national culture. (Imre 2008: 77)

According to Imre, both Hungary and Romania were undoubtedly in the second category, in which the nation-building process through theatre was, more than anything else, a reaction to the imperialism of the major cultural and political models. However, the process of building a national theatre culture in these countries was, ironically, indebted to “imperial” cultures such as France, Germany or Austria, which served as institutional and administrative models for smaller communities. While the greater countries’ imperialism was rejected at the political level, their cultural models were much more likely to be adopted.

In any case, the overall framework of the cultural interactions shaping the development of the national theatre in smaller European communities during the 19th century seems to fulfil all the conditions of post-colonialism, regardless of whether the imperial influences were assumed by acceptance or rejection. This is no less applicable to theatre

and drama studies, as Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins demonstrate in their volume on *Post-colonial drama: Theory, practice, politics*. Although the authors focus on post-colonial drama in some of the previous colonies of the British Empire, they overtly state that “‘post-colonialism’ is not specific to a particular imperial regime, even though it often refers to the former colonies of the British Empire” (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 4). In fact, “theatre anthropologists and interculturalists have examined the theatre forms and styles of other cultures and often embraced the possibilities inherent in adopting them for use in a western context” (ibid: 9). The idea that “post-colonialism addresses reactions to colonialism” (ibid: 2) involves both acceptance and rejection of a major cultural model in minor cultures, regardless of geography and politics. In this sense, post-colonial theory can also be applied to the European context by framing the interactions between major and minor cultures.

The Romanian example of nation building through theatre and, in the context of this thesis, of Ibsen's reception seems very fit for a post-colonial framework. The situation of a minor culture situated at the periphery, under the influence of the major European models, reveals a post-colonial context that applies to the Romanian theatre life as well. The story of how these influences were accepted or rejected, of their transmission and inclusion in the peripheral Romanian culture, is clearly of post-colonial inspiration.

However, I argue that post-colonial theory is not enough to describe *all* kinds of dynamics of interaction between major and minor cultures in the context of the development of Romanian theatre culture and in the case of Henrik Ibsen's reception on the Romanian stage. While the beginnings of the Romanian theatre as a national theatre can be explained by using a post-colonial framework, its further evolution is more complex and exceeds the boundaries of the linear process of introduction-transmission-reception described in the post-colonial theory. Although the main keywords – introduction, transmission, reception – governing Henrik Ibsen's reception on the Romanian stage remain the same, the process of cultural transfer is anything but linear. In fact, the peripheral position of the Romanian space and its culturally complex structure question the validity of a linear post-colonial framework, by pointing to examples that escape clear categorisation. Instead, the dynamics of cultural transmission assumed a more fluid form in the Romanian theatre, to which terms such as entanglement, crossing or interweaving are much more suitable.

Concepts such as “interweaving performance” proposed by Erika Fischer-Lichte in *The Politics of Interweaving Theatre Cultures: Beyond Post-Colonialism* deal with fluid forms of interactions in theatre and performance. Hence, it might seem applicable in this case. Yet, it is rooted “in the context that brought them forth – that is, postcolonialism” (Jain, Jost and Fischer-Lichte 2014: 4). Moreover, one should bear in mind that “exchanges between the theatrical forms of neighbouring and later also of distant cultures occurred wherever we have some evidence of theatre. Theatre's interaction with elements from other cultures has been a perpetual instrument and vehicle for change and renewal” (ibid: 1). Therefore, the reason why Fischer-Lichte's concept is inappropriate for the Romanian analysis of Ibsen's reception lies in the methodological implications it entails. Firstly, interweaving performance aims to

provide an experimental framework for experiencing the utopian potential of culturally diverse and globalized societies by realizing an aesthetic which gives shape to unprecedented collaborative policies in society. By permanently probing the emergence, stabilization, and destabilization of cultural identities, these performances can transfer their participants into states of in-betweenness, which allow them to anticipate a future wherein the journey itself, the permanence of transition, and the state of liminality, is indeed constitutive of their experience. What is perceived as an aesthetic experience in these performances will be experienced as everyday life in the future. (ibid: 11–12)

Then, Fischer-Lichte states that

the processes of interweaving performance cultures are per se political processes. They relate to the politics of globalization, dealing with new paternalistic forms of exchange and the inequalities emerging from them. The contributions highlight different transformative aesthetics, which turn out to be political. (ibid: 17)

In other words, the concept of interweaving performance mainly relates to globalisation and politics as factors governing the aesthetic dimension of theatre in the contemporary world. The very content of the concept makes it thus inappropriate in the context of this thesis. These characteristics make the concept inappropriate for an inquiry not only of the phenomena in the history of theatre of the first half of the 20th century, but also of the exchange relationships characteristic in the Romanian theatre history of the time.

While the aforementioned concepts regarding post-colonial drama and interweaving performance intersect with the topic of this thesis, none can really help us grasp the essence of Henrik Ibsen's early reception on the Romanian stage. This is why I have turned to history and social sciences to find a theoretical tool that can consider the fluidity of the exchange relationships between cultures both diachronically and synchronically.

Histoire croisée is the concept that I have found most relevant not only for the constantly shifting framework of this research, but also for the stable elements within it. Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann proposed it in the volume *De la comparaison à l'histoire croisée* (2004), and later refined it in a concise version in the article *Beyond Comparisons: Histoire croisée and the challenge of reflexivity* (2006: 30–50). The concept belongs at the crossroads of social sciences and history, but the authors state its relevance for inquiries in other research areas. In this thesis, I use *histoire croisée* to investigate a theatre history topic.

What is *histoire croisée* and how is it different from other concepts used not only in history and social sciences, but also in theatre and performance studies? Werner and Zimmermann present it as a “relational” concept that offers an alternative approach to comparative and transfer studies concepts, and highlight how it changes our understanding of history. For instance, comparative studies employ a synchronic perspective, while transfer studies – to which post-colonial studies belong – appeal to a diachronic one. Consequently, comparative studies work with static, non-temporal frameworks, while transfer studies discuss transformation processes unfolding over time. However, comparative studies and transfer studies have not developed methodological tools for case-

studies that require a multiple perspective, diachronic and synchronic at the same time, such as Henrik Ibsen's reception in the Romanian theatre history up until the middle of the 20th century:

Quite often, however, a situation is more complex than this, bringing into play movements between various points in at least two and sometimes several directions. Such activities may follow each other in a temporal sequence [...] but may also overlap one another, partially or wholly. They may also crisscross and engender a number of specific dynamics through various kinds of interrelationships. All of these cases are resistant to any analysis that merely establishes a relationship between a point of departure and a point of arrival. (Werner and Zimmermann 2006: 37)

The main advantage of using *histoire croisée* in theatre and performance studies is its flexible framework, which is both diachronic and synchronic, both temporal and spatial. The notion of interweaving performance discussed by Erika Fischer-Lichte might seem similar to the elastic framework of *histoire croisée*, since “to cross is also to crisscross, to interweave, that is, to cross over several times at a tempo that may be staggered” (ibid: 38). However, the concept of “interweaving performance” addresses only specific temporal frameworks, whereas *histoire croisée* considers a multiple framework, which is not confined to a limited time-span. This flexibility is relevant when discussing the fluidity of the national context and the emergence of Ibsen on the Romanian stage through numerous foreign influences, across a very fluctuating temporal and spatial framework. In addition, it helps us follow the contribution of the Romanian Ibsenites and the temporal and spatial overlappings in their Ibsen activity in a very elastic diachronic and synchronic frame.

The flexibility of *histoire croisée* also allows the researcher to employ multiple viewpoints upon one research object. Thus, *histoire croisée* enables us to analyse “a variety of directions and multiple effects” (ibid: 37) by focusing “on a multiplicity of possible viewpoints and the divergences resulting from languages, terminologies, categorizations and conceptualizations, traditions, and disciplinary usages” (ibid: 32). This freedom to apply multiple viewpoints is particularly useful when the research object resists the isolation into a single framework. In this thesis, the multiplicity of foreign influences, of factors affecting the repertory, of theatre institutions and of interpretative approaches reveals a complex Romanian Ibsen world, which refuses the confinement to a single perspective.

The multiplicity of viewpoints most often entails intersection, which is central to the *histoire croisée* concept and to Ibsen's dissemination on the Romanian stage until 1947 at all levels, privileging “a multidimensional approach that acknowledges plurality and the complex configurations that result from it. Accordingly, entities and objects of research are not merely considered in relation to one another but also *through* one another, in terms of relationships, interactions, and circulation” (ibid: 38). Flexibility, multiplicity and intersection reveal that *histoire croisée* is oriented towards the analysis of the transformative dimension – processes – supported by intercrossings. This is helpful when an object changes to various degrees, yet its interaction with other elements does not necessarily lead to a new, hybrid product, suspending thus the merging process:

Such transformations [...] may also derive from asymmetry (the elements are not affected in the same manner). In this respect, intercrossing can be distinguished from intermixing. The latter emphasizes the specificity of the product of hybridization [...] and brings us beyond the original elements [...]. In contrast, *histoire croisée* is concerned as much with the novel and original elements produced by the intercrossing as with the way in which it affects each of the “intercrossed” parties, which are assumed to remain identifiable, even if in altered form. (ibid: 38)

In such a case, the suspension of hybridisation entails that the various elements in the mix preserve their individuality to a certain extent. This transformative dimension of the concept allows the researcher to acknowledge the subtle changes that do not affect the individuality of an element, as well as the tensions and contradictions emerging in any intersection: “This process-oriented dimension is a fundamental aspect of inquiry into any intercrossings. It points toward an analysis of resistances, inertias, modifications—in trajectory, form, and content—and new combinations that can both result from and develop themselves in the process of crossing.” (ibid: 38) The focus on processes is of utmost importance in assessing the uniqueness of the Romanian Ibsen tradition. This transformative aspect of the concept helps us identify whether this history is marked by hybridisation, coexistence or by other kind of intercrossing. Moreover, it highlights the fluctuations and the characteristics that mark the evolution of the Romanian Ibsen productions and its encounter with foreign theatre traditions as a continuous process, instead of displaying it as a static, unchanging landscape.

The constant fluidity, variation and transformation do not exclude patterns of stability, as we will see in the Romanian history of Ibsen productions. In fact, the intertwining and mapping of stability and change marking our story is at the heart of this concept. Hence, this research requires a constant readjustment of the spatial, temporal and methodological frames initially established. This “implies starting from the object of study and the situations in which it is embedded, according to one or more points of view—previously defined, it is true, but subject to continual readjustments in the course of empirical investigation” (ibid: 47). Thus, in contrast to the unique external point of view assumed in comparative studies, and to the fixed diachronic frames in transfer studies, *histoire croisée* questions constantly both the spatial and temporal frames encompassing the research object and does not take for granted their stability: “One of the contributions of *histoire croisée* is that it makes possible the articulation of both of these dimensions, [...] [it] enables the synchronic and diachronic registers to be constantly rearranged in relation to each other.” (ibid: 50) Thus, “*histoire croisée* engages in a to-and fro movement” (ibid: 50) and allows the readjustment of the reference frames if and when the research object requires it.

These characteristics indicate that *histoire croisée* encourages a thinking from within the research object, which entails reflexivity and awareness of change, variation and fluctuation. Historicization and pragmatic induction are the concept’s two mechanisms that “generate forms of reflexivity” (ibid: 49). On the one hand, historicisation asks the researcher to analyse the intersection of the temporal and spatial frameworks by constantly remembering that time and space are exposed to variation and fluctuation. On the other hand, pragmatic induction fosters awareness by driving the researcher away from the

rigid, essentialist explanation and use of contexts. Instead, it helps the researcher acknowledge the fluctuating nature of the context in relationship with the research object:

Such a lazy usage [of context] is replaced by an analysis of the manner in which individuals actually connect themselves to the world, the specific construction of the world and the elements of context produced by this activity in each particular case, and finally the uses arising from such construction. (ibid: 47)

The fluctuating geographical boundaries across time of the Romanian cultural space at the crossroads of Europe constantly signals how important “whereof and whence one is speaking” (ibid: 44) is. In this respect, the early history of Ibsen on the Romanian stage reveals that intercrossings are “intrinsically related to the object of research” (ibid: 39). The numerous foreign Ibsen productions, the territorial, political, linguistic and ethnic complexity of the Romanian cultural space, the intertwined factors affecting the national theatre life and the mixed interpretative approach of the Romanian Ibsenites all indicate that intercrossing is an intrinsic characteristic to this research. Awareness regarding the fluctuation of the contexts and the rejection of rigid, fixed, essentialist structures is therefore paramount in establishing what is specifically Romanian in the European Ibsen tradition.

Finally, this research uses *histoire croisée* to highlight and unwrap the “thick fabric of interweavings” (ibid: 49) in Romanian Ibsen productions until the middle of the 20th century, without falling into the trap of “relativist indecisiveness or infinite speculative relationships” (ibid: 49). Instead, it adopts the concept’s relational focus and aims to reconstruct Ibsen’s early history on the Romanian stage by showing the processes through which multiple, divergent, yet often interdependent perspectives emerged. To sum up, the concept of *histoire croisée* becomes a useful methodological tool, which enables us to acknowledge the fluidity of the numerous processes affecting the evolution of the Romanian national theatre and the early reception to Ibsen on the Romanian stage until the middle of the 20th century. The fluidity intrinsic to this concept matches the fluidity of the nation-building frames and aesthetic dimensions of Ibsen’s early reception on the Romanian stage, without ignoring the unchanged aspects of this history. Thus, instead of limiting my approach to a post-colonial, diachronic framework, the conceptual framework proposed by *histoire croisée* opens up for more nuanced answers to my research investigations.

1.2 What is Romania? Preliminary considerations

To begin with, a thorough discussion on the influence of Ibsen on the Romanian theatre practice requires that I explain the meaning of “Romania” and “Romanian” in the context of this research. Of course, this is not the first attempt to answer the apparently simple question: *What* is Romania? While the history of Romania has explicitly been the task of the Romanian researchers, foreign researchers such as Keith Hitchins and Kather-