

In Section Two, the perspective shifts from producing companies to particular Ibsen plays and characters. That is, we move from production hubs to an approach that considers characters created by Ibsen as sites that can be examined to identify intercrossing theatrical influences. For this purpose, Section Two will analyse the same key contributors in light of the Ibsen characters they performed most frequently, and account for the diversity of the Romanian Ibsen production through their unique acting interpretative recipes.

## 4.2 Section One. Production Hubs

### 4.2.1 National Theatre of Iași Hub: State Dragomir, Aglae Pruteanu and Napoleone Borelli

#### 4.2.1.1 Introduction

The first pattern characterising the early Romanian Ibsen production is related to the emergence of a psychological realism hub at the National Theatre of Iași at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The two key contributors who represent it are State Dragomir and Aglae Pruteanu. In the following, I investigate their contribution separately because of their different ways of participating to the emergence of a Romanian Ibsen tradition. Yet, we must keep in mind that they are linked by a long-lasting stage companionship not just in Ibsen productions, but in most stagings at the National Theatre of Iași. The most important connection between them is given by the renewal of the acting approach of the time, paving the way towards psychological realism, although their acting style never became a purist version of this genre. Instead, the mix of acting techniques they employed attests to a gradual displacement of Romanticism with realism. Finally, this change was supported by a strong scientific background in which the epoch's newest research in experimental psychology played a major role.

#### 4.2.1.2 State Dragomir: an Ibsen teacher

The following section investigates the contribution of State Dragomir to the dissemination of Ibsen's plays on the stage of National Theatre of Iași at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I argue that his effort to promote Ibsen influenced the modernisation of the theatre life in Iași in terms of repertory and acting technique.<sup>21</sup> Quantitatively, he was one of the 12

---

21 Few resources trace the activity of State Dragomir, and Romanian theatre historians hardly mention him in their accounts. Nevertheless, he was an influential actor and stage director at the National Theatre of Iași. Small pieces of archive material, memoirs and press releases recognise his contributions at the National Theatre of Iași at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His name appears constantly in the archival material of the National Theatre of Iași and of the "George Enescu" Music and Dramatic Art Academy dating from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These materials document that he participated in the most important stagings of the time in Iași, while he also taught the "Dramatic Art" class. The archive material also suggests a constant interest in promoting Ibsen plays both on stage and among his students.

actors who participated in leading roles in more than four events, according to Ibsen-Stage.

My analysis considers State Dragomir from the perspective of the dominant role played by star actors in the Romanian Ibsen tradition until 1947 at the level of both staging and acting. Firstly, his contribution as star actor and teacher marked the emergence of Ibsen on the Romanian stage between 1895 and 1915. Secondly, his interest in Ibsen's dissemination was part of the effort to modernise the practice of acting at the National Theatre of Iași. Thirdly, his complex perspective upon the science of acting reveals an entanglement of Romantic, naturalist and realist elements, ultimately developing into and leading to psychological realism. What proves that State Dragomir's endeavours were essential for Ibsen's dissemination? How did Ibsen and State Dragomir's constant interest in Ibsen help him change the acting practices of the time? Finally, what did these changes entail and reveal?

To begin with, State Dragomir was among the earliest most enthusiast promoters of Ibsen on the Romanian stage. Dragomir's first Ibsen staging, *An Enemy of the People*, took place on April 7, 1895, soon after the first Romanian Ibsen in 1894 in Iași of the same play initiated by C. I. Ionescu, a colleague of Dragomir at the National Theatre. Dragomir's staging also took place a few months before Aristizza Romanescu and Constantin I. Notara's first Ibsen performance in Bucharest, *Rosmersholm*, on December 9, 1895. Moreover, State Dragomir included Ibsen in the theatre's repertory and staged his plays until at least 1910. By contrast, his counterparts Aristizza Romanescu and Constantin Notara performed Ibsen to the audience in Bucharest later, less extensively, and exclusively for their "benefit stagings" before 1900. In addition, by the time Ibsen really emerged in Bucharest due to the work of Petre Sturdza and Aristide Demetriade around 1910, State Dragomir and Aglae Pruteanu had already established Ibsen at the National Theatre of Iași. Finally, State Dragomir taught Ibsen regularly at the Conservatoire of Iași until at least 1915.

State Dragomir's lasting contribution to the dissemination of Ibsen in Romania was part of his attempt to modernise the repertory at the National Theatre of Iași. To achieve this renewal, he focused on four Ibsen plays as an actor and teacher: *An Enemy of the People*, *Ghosts*, *Pillars of Society* and *A Doll's House*. Aglae Pruteanu considered that his initiative was pioneering not just for Iași, but for the entire country:

*Dragomir*, veșnic neobosit cercetător, în curent cu tot ce era mai bun în literatura dramatică de pretutindeni, nu se oprea numai la repertoriul nostru [...] și s-a gândit să îmbogățească repertoriul nostru și cu piesele acestui mare renovator al literaturii dramatice, care este Ibsen. După câte știu, mi se pare că cel dintâi, care a adus pe Ibsen pe scena teatrului, a fost *Dragomir*. Ibsen s'a jucat pentru prima oară în țară, – pe scena teatrului Național din Iași, cu "Dușmanul Poporului" prin anii 1893. (*Dragomir*, who was an eternally tireless researcher, knew what was best in the dramatic literature from all over. He did not confine himself to our repertory [...] and also thought of enriching our repertory with the plays of Ibsen, this great renovator of dramatic literature. As far as I know, *Dragomir* was the first one to bring Ibsen onto the theatre stage. *An Enemy of the People* was the first of Ibsen's plays ever to be performed in the country on the stage of the National Theatre of Iași around 1893; my translation.) (Pruteanu 1922: 168)

State Dragomir's knowledge of Ibsen and modern drama is also revealed in the fact that the plays he chose to promote on the stage of Iași, *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts* and *An Enemy of the People*, were not arbitrarily selected. The actor must have been aware of their European success and of their potential to ignite the modernisation of the Romanian theatre. He also insisted on promoting Ibsen on stage continuously, from the performance of *An Enemy of the People* in 1895 until his last registered performance of *Ghosts* in 1910.<sup>22</sup> This change was subject to conflicts, as the older actors attempted to get Ibsen and other modern playwrights out of the repertory. According to Ioan Massoff, he stood against members of the Dramatic Society who attempted to exclude plays such as *Ghosts* and *Pillars of Society* from the repertory:

Un conflict pe față a izbucnit când, continuându-se deplorabila tradiție de a alcătui repertoriul după propunerile câtorva societari [...], aceștia au 'respins' *Strigoii* și *Stâlpii societății* de Ibsen, *Un faliment* de B.Bjørnson, *Evreul polonez* de Erckmann-Chatrian, *Lăpușneanu* de Iuliu Roșca, piese propuse pentru reprezentare de grupul stagiilor nemulțumiți de configurația repertoriului. State Dragomir, adresându-se Comitetului teatral, a protestat vehement împotriva 'excluderii' autorilor citați. (In the context of the deplorable tradition that permitted a part of members of the Dramatic Society to decide the repertory according to their own proposals, an open conflict arose when they 'rejected' *Ghosts* and *Pillars of Society* by Ibsen, *The Bankrupt* by B. Bjørnson, *The Polish Jew* by Erckmann-Chatrian, *Lăpușneanu* by Iuliu Roșca. These plays were proposed by the group of junior actors, who were dissatisfied with the configuration of the repertory. State Dragomir addressed the issue in front of the Theatre Committee and vehemently protested against the exclusion of the aforementioned playwrights; my translation.) (Massoff 1978: 548)

The introduction of Ibsen's plays in the repertory of the National Theatre of Iași activated the younger generation's aim to modernise the local theatre life. In this sense, Aglae Pruteanu insisted on the role of State Dragomir in the development of the theatre tradition in Iași:

Datorită acestui curent sănătos de regenerare intelectuală, care își făcea apariția în teatrul nostru din Iași—ași putea zice pentru întâia oară,— ne-am consolidat ca teatru modern, cu aspirații artistice, pentru o literatură dramatică, demnă de un teatru național, ca instituție culturală, pentru și în slujba acestui scop. Și dacă teatrul din Iași și-a continuat stagiunile sale, fără întrerupere, cu succes și progresând mereu, până în timpul de față, se datorește colaborării pricepute și entuziaste a lui *Dragomir*. Scena teatrului din Iași, datorită lui se ilustra prin alegerea

22 The traces left by these performances are few, though they seem to have reached a large number, not only in the case of *A Doll's House*, but also in the case of *An Enemy of the People* and *Ghosts*. Yet, no further information is mentioned by either the actors involved in these productions, or in other archival resources. However, there are reasons enough to consider that State Dragomir's contribution as a promoter of Ibsen exceeds the information gathered so far. All the resources available suggest that State Dragomir can be considered the strongest agent of modernisation in the theatre life of Iași at the turn of the century.

repertoriului, în care figurau cele mai bune piese din marele repertor clasic și modern. Noi eram cei dintâi, cari jucam tot ce apărea nou, înaintea celor din București chiar. (Thanks to this healthy stream of intellectual regeneration that began to appear in our theatre of Iași – for the first time, I dare say – we managed to strengthen our status as a modern theatre. We had artistic aspirations with respect to the dramatic literature suitable for a National Theatre as a cultural institution. And if the theatre of Iași has continued to develop its activity ceaselessly and successfully each season until now, this is due to *Dragomir's* enthusiastic and skilled contribution. Thanks to him, the stage in Iași was influential because of its repertory, which included the best plays of the classic and modern repertory. We were the first to perform everything that was new, even before our colleagues from Bucharest; my translation.) (Pruteanu 1922: 77–78)

Aglae Pruteanu also indicated that at the time his attempts were considered too demanding. From this perspective, she criticised the theatre environment and insisted on the efforts of State Dragomir to renew the theatrical standards in a context highly resistant to improvement:

Fără el – ‘nebunul’ – așa îi ziceau actorii, – și așa sunt considerați de multe ori cei ce iau cu mult înaintea mediului înconjurător, – nu am fi reușit să ne menținem și nici să atragem atențiunea continuă a unui public restrâns și veșnic același, asupra unui grup de artiști cari, cu tot talentul lor, aveau toată greutatea să lupte cu efectul indifferenței și a lipsei de gust pentru teatru.” (Without him, the ‘madman’ – this is what the actors would call him, and this is what many of those who are far ahead of their environments are called –, we would not have managed to keep ourselves afloat and continuously attract a small audience, which was permanently the same. [We were] a group of artists who felt the burden of fighting the consequences of the indifference and lack of taste for the theatre, no matter how talented [we were]; my translation.) (ibid: 78–79)

He was not the only actor to fight the taste of the audience and adopt an elitist approach in the selection of the plays he staged. Actors such as Aristizza Romanescu, Petre Sturdza or Mărioara Voiculescu, belonging to different generations, also mentioned the challenges of proposing and staging demanding plays unlikely to provide substantial financial gains. From this perspective, Ibsen was not among the most profitable playwrights. Therefore, State Dragomir's initiatives to stage Ibsen were met with scepticism. The lack of a strong Romanian theatre tradition and the lack of knowledge of Ibsen did not favour his promotion on the Romanian stage at this time. Yet State Dragomir took the risk, performing in three Ibsen plays throughout his career, a period when Ibsen was yet unknown, and easily rejected.

Dragomir's Ibsen initiatives were strongly supported by one of the most renowned actresses of the time at National Theatre of Iași and his stage companion: Aglae Pruteanu. His collaboration with Aglae Pruteanu enriched the local theatre life, and all his Ibsen productions included her as the leading actress. Aglae Pruteanu gives the most comprehensive portrait of State Dragomir as actor and director in her memoirs. Her approach combines the emotional recollections of a friend with remarks on his contribution to the

modernisation of the National Theatre of Iași. According to the actress, he was not only an admirable actor and stage partner, but also an excellent teacher, a strict director and a beloved friend:

Numele lui *Dragomir*, care e în strânsă legătură cu toată colaborarea mea și a altora pentru progresul teatrului. Pe el îl voiu întâlni neconținut în cursul carierei mele ca pe cel mai desăvârșit și cel mai prețios partener și coleg. (*Dragomir's* name is closely tied to the way others and I collaborated for the progress of the theatre alike. I have always considered him an exquisite and the most precious partner and colleague of my entire career; my translation) (ibid: 75).

Nicolae Barbu emphasises the special relationship between the two actors, which might have involved not only a professional, but also a sentimental sympathy:

Este vorba de vechea prietenie, bazată pe o profundă unitate de vederi artistice dintre Aglae Pruteanu și State Dragomir. Fără îndoială, perfectă înțelegere profesională, stima și stimulentele artistice reciproc între cei doi parteneri, nu erau lipsite de un adânc ecou afectiv. Elementul hotărâtor în această legătură era însă prețuirea față de calitățile omului și ale intelectualului Dragomir. Artista nu-și putea imagina viața ei creatoare fără înțelegerea și fără suportul moral pe care-l constituia unica și marea ei prietenie. (It is all about the old friendship between Aglae Pruteanu and State Dragomir, which was based on a profound unity of artistic perspectives. Undoubtedly, their perfect professional compatibility, the mutual esteem and artistic incentive between the two partners were not devoid of a deep emotional echo. The decisive element of their bond was the appreciation for the qualities of Dragomir as a man and as an intellectual, too. The artist could not imagine her creative life without the sympathy and moral support of this one man, whose friendship she considered unique and great; my translation.) (Barbu 1965: 109)

The two actors' destinies were so entangled that they remained inseparable stage partners until the very end of their careers. Their mutual attachment was also believed to be so strong that it prevented Aglae Pruteanu from leaving the National Theatre of Iași in the pursuit of a career in Bucharest and greater recognition:

Mai toți cei care i-au cunoscut de-aproape pe Aglae Pruteanu și pe State Dragomir [...] ne-au vorbit de legătura dintre ei ca de un impediment în evoluția lor și, în ceea ce o privește pe Aglae Pruteanu, un impediment în ocuparea locului pe care-l merita în mișcarea teatrală bucureșteană. (Almost all those who knew Aglae Pruteanu and State Dragomir [...] told us about their relationship as a hindrance to their evolution. This concerned Aglae Pruteanu especially, as she could not attain to the place of honour she deserved in the theatre movement of Bucharest; my translation.) (ibid: 109)

No matter the reason, their choice to stay in Iași was surprising at a time when Bucharest attracted the most talented artists and exerted a strong influence upon Romanian theatre. Together with Agatha Bărsescu, who accepted the proposal of the National Theatre

to perform and teach in Iași in the interwar period, State Dragomir and Aglae Pruteanu were the local theatre's most influential names.

The most important aspect connecting Aglae Pruteanu and State Dragomir is their participation in the Romanian premiere of *A Doll's House* in 1901. State Dragomir was the most enthusiastic promoter of the first Romanian production of *A Doll's House* in 1901, whereas Aglae Pruteanu was the first Romanian Nora. In this context, Dragomir was not only Aglae Pruteanu's partner in the role of Torvald, but also the one who proposed the play to be staged. More specifically, he encouraged the translator, Barbu Marian, to send the manuscript of the 1895 translation to the theatre's Reading Committee. Dragomir advocated the approval of the manuscript and the staging of the play:

În 1901 d-nul Marian, traducătorul piesei "Nora", după îndemnul lui *Dragomir*, fiindcă a urmat o corespondență între ei, a prezentat piesa comitetului teatrului nostru [...]. (In 1901, Mr. Marian, the translator of *A Doll's House*, proposed the play to our theatre's committee. He was encouraged to do so by *Dragomir*, according to their subsequent correspondence; my translation.) (Pruteanu 1922: 168)

Moreover, the production of *A Doll's House* was also part of an apparently successful tour, according to the actress (Figure 39).

State Dragomir was an influential Ibsen promoter not only on stage as actor at the National Theatre of Iași, but also off-stage, as teacher at the Conservatory of Music and Dramatic Arts in Iași. In this context, he had a remarkable pedagogical contribution:

Cum însă teatrul prepondera mai presus de orice, nu a trecut mult și a rămas cu ce i-a fost drag: Teatrul și Conservatorul, unde era un eminent profesor. (But since theatre was above everything, it was not long until he was left with what was dearest to him: the Theatre and the Conservatory, where he was an eminent teacher; my translation.) (Pruteanu 1922: 186–187)

The archives of the institution reveal that as a teacher, State Dragomir set Ibsen's plays and the students chose Ibsen-related topics for their final examinations. Ibsen was on the curriculum of State Dragomir's declamation class at the Conservatoire in Iași between 1909 and 1915; he also appears as a recurrent exam topic for the students of all years since 1909. For example, during the 1909–1910 academic year, Miss Procopovici, a second-year student, included Ibsen's biography and Nora's role among the topics she prepared for examination (Collection Academia de Muzică și Artă Dramatică "George Enescu", Folder 5/1909: 148). Gh. Dimitriu and Gh. Slavnicul, two other graduating students, both made a similar choice regarding Ibsen's biography, while Gh. Dimitriu's preferences for the examination were Ibsen's *Ghosts*, *An Enemy of the People* and *Pillars of Society* (ibid: 148). In the next academic year, 1910–1911, the situation was the same. Miss Procopovici, already a third-year student, kept Ibsen's biography and *A Doll's House* (Collection Academia de Muzică și Artă Dramatică "George Enescu", Folder 3/1910: 108) in her exam repertoire, while Popescu L., another third-year student, chose *An Enemy of the People* alongside the playwright's biography (ibid: 108). The same happened in the academic year 1912–1913, when the fourth-year students Ștefan Constantinescu and Elena Dorotei both chose Ib-

sen's biography as exam topic, whereas the latter also chose Nora as the role to perform at her exam (Collection Academia de Muzică și Artă Dramatică "George Enescu", Folder 4/1912: 133). The Ibsen tradition in the curriculum was preserved in the academic year 1913–1914, when the fourth-year student Constantin Dimitriu chose Ibsen's biography as exam topic (Collection Academia de Muzică și Artă Dramatică "George Enescu", Folder 6/1913: 91). Finally, the third-year student Bruno Braeschi, a future interpreter of Osvald, also showed his interest in Ibsen's biography as exam topic in the academic year 1914–1915, as student of State Dragomir (Collection Academia de Muzică și Artă Dramatică "George Enescu", Folder 5/1914: 128). But State Dragomir did not only propose Ibsen roles to the most experienced students, but also included them in the curriculum from as early as their first years. In the 1910–1911 academic year, Manoliu D. and Pavlov I., both first year students, chose *An Enemy of the People* and *A Doll's House* respectively among their exam topics (Collection Academia de Muzică și Artă Dramatică "George Enescu", Folder 3/1910: 105).

*A Doll's House*, *Ghosts*, *Pillars of Society* and *An Enemy of the People* were all part of the curriculum and the students chose roles from these plays to prepare for their exams. State Dragomir was not only interested in teaching his students acting skills, but also in enriching their theatre knowledge. His lessons on how to perform Ibsen in 1909–1910 were accompanied by lectures on universal theatre history and on the biographies of the most important playwrights.<sup>23</sup> State Dragomir aimed at the advancement of a realist theatre tradition. Besides Ibsen, he included classic and contemporary Romanian and foreign plays, seeking to provide the students with a complex acting profile instead of focusing on the role typology supported by the *emploi* system. At a time when *Ghosts*, *A Doll's House*, *An Enemy of the People* and *Pillars of Society* had only occasionally been performed on the Romanian stage in Iași and Bucharest, they were all part of the university curriculum. Eventually, State Dragomir demonstrates through his stage and pedagogic achievements a strong commitment to these plays at a very early stage in the Romanian Ibsen production. Additionally, his literary, philosophical and historical background contributed to this realist approach to theatre and performance, and made him an excellent theatre theoretician and practitioner.

Ibsen's privileged place in Dragomir's repertoire as actor and teacher indicates that the playwright influenced the actor. How? By implicitly forcing a transition from Romanticism as the dominant style of acting of the time to psychological realism. This transition is also signalled by Ibsen's unique, modern presence in a repertory that included Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles, the romantic dramas of Schiller and Hugo, the classic comedies of Molière, or the Romanian classic and romantic repertory including Alecsandri, Eminescu or Coșbuc.<sup>24</sup>

23 "Odată cu expunerea orală a subiectului, elevul va fi îndatorat a ști biografia autorului respectiv." (Once the subject [of the play] was presented orally, the student would be obliged to know the respective playwright's biography; my translation) (Dragomir 1902: 5).

24 For an overview of the repertory, see Collection Academia de Muzică și Artă Dramatică "George Enescu", Folder 5/1909: 148; Collection Academia de Muzică și Artă Dramatică "George Enescu", Folder 3/1910: 105; Collection Academia de Muzică și Artă Dramatică "George Enescu", Folder 4/1912: 133; Collection Academia de Muzică și Artă Dramatică "George Enescu", Folder 6/1913: 91; Collection Academia de Muzică și Artă Dramatică "George Enescu", Folder 5/1914: 128.



But what would the transition from Romanticism to psychological realism of Dragomir entail, and what was so new about it? Briefly, State Dragomir not only combined romantic, naturalist and realist elements in his acting, but also insisted on an active use of psychology and philosophy. This is visible both in the industrial aspect of the theatre productions and in the acting. His teaching plan at the Conservatoire of Iași, published in 1902, is one of the most valuable resources revealing this mix of acting techniques:

Până în anul al II-lea și până la această parte a psihologiei să se evite învățarea pe dinafară, fiind-că trebuie să se dea elevilor un mijloc sigur de a putea reține aceia ce învață. Ne vine greu s-o mărturisim, însă lucrul e așa, sînt foarte mulți actori și încă în teatrele noastre subvenționate, cari au jucat și joacă în multe piese fără să știe *subiectul piesei* din care pricină nici odată nu pot intra în *ansamblu*. (One should avoid the memorisation [of the text] until the second year and until this part of [the] Psychology [discipline is taught], because one should teach the students a reliable strategy to be able to remember what they learn. It is difficult for us to make such a confession, but the truth is that there are very many actors even in our subsidised theatre who have been performing in many plays without knowing the *subject of the play*, hence they could never participate in the *ensemble*; my translation.) (Dragomir 1902: 8)

In addition, he insisted upon text-based productions in which each actor should know the entire play. In this context, the transition to realism entailed a focus on understanding the action of the play, its social context and its influence on characterisation. He also considered that the director should supervise both the technical aspects and the actors' work, instead of being a stage manager alone. In this respect, he criticised the negative consequences of the epoch's practices:

Aceasta e pricina pentru care nu știu rolurile și nici nu vor putea să le știe vreodată cît timp vor fi străini de lumea în care se învârtesc. Acest obicei e contractat sau de pe băncile Conservatorului sau dacă n-a făcut conservatorul, în teatru, unde regizorul, adeseori se ocupă de *tot* iar nici de cum de fiecare actor în parte. (This is the reason why they do not know the roles and they will never know them as long as they are estranged from the world they live in. They develop this habit already in the Conservatoire or, if they did not pursue their training in the Conservatoire, then they develop it in the theatre, where the director often supervises *the whole*, but under no circumstance each actor separately; my translation.) (ibid: 9)

As a director, he also insisted on the attention that one should pay to the specific message or interpretative direction required by every text:

În fiecare piesă pe care va pune-o în scenă, neapărat va trebui să i se înfățișeze o nouă problemă: de ordin istoric, filozofic, psihologic, social, politic și ș.a.m.d. Nu-mai cu un asemenea director de scenă, actorii unui teatru național sunt siguri că nu se vor abate din drumul adevărului și că nu vor comite greșeli, dând o falsă interpretare a lucrurilor, pe cari poate nu le cunosc în tot întregul lor. Cu *Dragomir* nu se puteau întâmpla asemenea neajunsuri și aici era calitatea lui cea mare, care nicio-



dată nu s'a știut a i se recunoaște în deajuns. (Every play he would stage should embody a new problem, either historically, philosophically, psychologically, socially, politically etc. Only with such a stage director could the actors of a national theatre be sure that they would not leave the path of truth and would not make mistakes by giving a misleading interpretation of those things they might not understand completely. There was no chance of such shortcomings with *Dragomir*. And this greatest quality he had was never acknowledged enough; my translation.) (Pruteanu 1922: 185)

Finally, the fact that he relied upon a translation done by a specialist for the staging of *A Doll's House* instead of translating the play himself, as was the practice of most star actors, suggests his tendency towards a realist rather than romantic approach.

However, there were still traces of the romantic actor-based system in his view. In the absence of a director, he considered that the star actor performing the leading role should supervise the ensemble and the technical aspects of the staging. As a teacher, he let graduating students act as the stage director:

În anul al IV-lea elevul va analiza și va compune sub privegherea profesorului un rol dintr-o piesă ce și-o va alege singur. Va distribui rolurile secundare camarazilor săi precum și celor din anul al III-lea. El va face toate explicațiunile necesare precum și punerea în scenă. (In the fourth year, the student will analyse and compose a role from a play he will choose himself, under the teacher's supervision. Then he will cast his friends and colleagues from the third year in secondary roles. He will give the necessary explanations and be in charge of the stage direction; my translation.) (Dragomir 1902: 15)

Dragomir himself was both actor and stage director at the theatre of Iași. From this perspective, he did the same as his forerunners and fellow colleagues such as Grigore Manolescu, Constantin I. Nottara and Petre Sturdza, who had also assumed a double, and even a triple role as actors, directors and translators of the plays they were staging.

In terms of acting, the contradictions emerging in the entanglement of Romanticism, realism and Italian *verismo*, based on philosophy, natural sciences and psychology, also attest to a period of transition. From this perspective, by introducing Ibsen to the Romanian audience State Dragomir also promoted an aesthetic turn not only in the repertory, but also in the acting technique. Together with Aglae Pruteanu and Petre Sturdza, he represents that branch of Romanian theatre characterised by an emphasis on the psychological and philosophical approach.<sup>25</sup> Petre Sturdza, the most influential Ibsen con-

25 "Alături de reprezentanții școlii de comedie, o altă categorie de actori care debutează pe scena românească în ultimul deceniu al veacului trecut și imediat după această dată, își va înscrie creația pe linia aceleiași realism psihologic [...]. [...] Petre Liciu și Petre Sturdza, State Dragomir și Aglae Pruteanu, fără a deveni imitatorii unor modele, se vor mărturisii adepții unei metode de creație, fideli unui climat de preocupări artistice și intelectuale, ai unui climat de idei care va influența decisiv evoluția artei interpretative în perspectiva noului veac. [...] Acum, la sfârșitul secolului orientarea veristă și programul școlii naturaliste reclamă în sprijinul teatrului, și în primul rând al artei actorului, toate progresele înregistrate la această dată în științele sociale și în cercetările de psihologie." (Beside the representatives of the comedy school, another category

tributor in Romania, also started his career in Iași and only later moved to the National Theatre of Bucharest. This highlights the contribution of the theatre of Iași in the early Romanian Ibsen production.

By taking one step further from the Romantic, actor-based tradition consecrated by Grigore Manolescu,<sup>26</sup> State Dragomir aimed to renew a local theatre culture that was dominated by declamation, easy and clichéd plays, and an audience insufficiently educated in the theatre. Yet romantic elements were still present in Dragomir's acting perspective, as he saw an actor's talent as a "gift" tied to an innate capacity to identify with the role:

Cine are darul de a trăi viața altuia și a o manifesta prin propria lui personalitate încât acesta din urmă să pară că nu mai există, acela se zice că are talent dramatic. Darul acesta de a imita oameni nu-i de ajuns pentru ca cineva să poată fi artist dramatic; această dispozițiune naturală însă trebuie ajutată [...]. (Whoever has the gift of living and enacting another's life through one's own personality so that the latter seems no longer to exist, that person is said to have dramatic talent. This gift to imitate people is not enough, though, to be a dramatic artist; this natural inclination must be helped [to develop further]; my translation) (ibid: 2)

He also considered the use of the philosophical romantic concept of "free will" (ibid: 14) in the practice of acting. Finally, the historians describing his renditions confirm his romantic background, focused on elegance and beauty of posture and voice:

Dispunea de eleganță în rostire, atitudini de impresionantă noblețe, în piesele romantice avea caracteristicul tumult, dând revărsărilor de energie dramatică valoare artistică, înălțându-și ca pe niște monumente tiradele. (He had an elegant speech, impressively noble attitudes, and in the Romantic plays he displayed the specific tumult, and he was giving artistic value to the outbursts of dramatic energy through his monumentally recited tirades; my translation.) (Brădățeanu 1979: 169)

Nevertheless, his reference to Shakespeare's advice for actors from *Hamlet* indicates the rejection of declamation in favour of everyday speech, as well as the rejection of the Romantic excessive gestures and movements in favour of "natural" – that is, realist – ones:

Și niciodată nu va uita a aminti elevilor săi cea mai bună lecție ce s-a dat vreodată actorilor de către Shakespeare [...]: "Te rog să zici cuvintele aceste așa cum ți le-am

---

of actors, who debuted on the Romanian stage in the last decade of the last century and immediately after, would evolve towards the same psychological realism [...]. [...] Without ever becoming the imitators of certain models, Petre Liciu and Petre Sturdza, State Dragomir and Aglae Pruteanu would confess their aim to develop a creation method. They would also be loyal to a climate supporting artistic and intellectual pursuits, as well as ideas that would decisively influence the evolution of the interpretative art at the turn of the new century. Now, at the end of the century, the *verismo* tendency and the programme of the naturalist school requires that the theatre life and especially the art of the actor is supported by all progress happening in the recent social sciences and psychology research; my translation) (Alterescu 1971: 373).

26 Grigore Manolescu was Aristizza Romanescu's partner on stage until 1892.

spus eu, cu-n ton natural și ușor de înțeles. Dar dacă ai de gând să le declami cu emfază, cum fac mulți actori, atunci o să-mi pară rău că n-am scris cuvintele acestea pentru gura vre-unui strigător public.” Aceasta pentru dicțiune. Întrucât privește mișcarea și gestul, ascultați-l: “Nu da astfel cu mânele în toate părțile fără niciun motiv. Toate mișcările să fie cumpătate [...]. Inteligența să-ți servească de conducător. Proportionează acțiunea cu cuvântarea și cuvântarea cu acțiunea, fiind atent să nu ieși din natural, pentru că cine se-ndepărtează de la această regulă se îndepărtează de la scopul unei reprezentațiuni dramatice, scop care de la sorgintea lui și până azi a fost de-a înfățișa naturei o oglindă deschisă, a arăta virtuței adevăratele ei foloase, ridicolului o imagine exactă, și fie-cărui secol forma, culoarea și urmele ce lasă.” (And one should never forget to remind the students of the best lesson ever given to the actors by Shakespeare: “Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue; but if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I had as lief the town-crier spoke my lines” (Shakespeare and Edwards 2003: 3.2.1-3). This concerns the diction. As far as the movement and gestures are concerned, listen to him: “Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand [...]. [...] you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness [...]. [...] Let your own discretion be your tutor. Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance, that you o’erstep not the modesty of nature. For anything so o’erdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end both at the first and now, was and is, to hold as ’twere the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure (ibid: 3.2.3-20)” (my translation). (Dragomir 1902: 14)

To understand the changes that the actor made upon the acting system of the time more clearly, we must first consider State Dragomir’s artistic profile, marked by a multi-layered perspective relying on an inter-crossing of romantic-realist-naturalist elements, supported by a strong philosophical, psychological and natural sciences background, including physics, chemistry and biology. Critics, fellow actors and historians alike also remembered the actor’s philosophical, psychological and scientific acting, in Ibsen plays such as *Ghosts* included:

Rolul a fost bine studiat de d-l Dragomir și în actul al II-lea, scena desperărei de a nu mai putea gândi nici munci, a fost emoționantă. (The role was well analysed by Mr. Dragomir and the second act’s scene of the desperation of being unable either to think or to work was touching; my translation) (Viorela 1910: 37); Rolul lui Oswald, l-a interpretat cu competența lui din punct de vedere artistic și științific. (He interpreted Oswald’s role, making use of all his artistic and scientific skills; my translation.) (Pruteanu 1922: 171)

What did this mean for Dragomir’s activity?

Firstly, the actor was renowned for his interest in philosophy, since he was not only “un eminent student în litere și filozofie” (an eminent student of [the Faculty of] Letters and Philosophy; my translation) (ibid: 74), but also a teacher of philosophy, history and dramatic art:

A fost un timp când l-am văzut pe *Dragomir* desfășurând o mare activitate în mai multe direcțiuni. Era profesor de istorie și filozofie la Liceul Național, profesor la Institutele Unite, profesor la Conservator și artist la teatrul național. (There was a time when I saw *Dragomir* greatly involved in several different things. He was a teacher of History and Philosophy at the National High School, teacher at the United Institutes, teacher at the Conservatory and artist at the National Theatre; my translation.) (ibid: 186)

Nicolae Barbu even defines Dragomir as “actorul-profesor de filozofie” (the actor teaching philosophy; my translation) (Barbu 1965: 65), which explains the interest in abstract, analytical plays such as Ibsen’s. Eventually, the philosophical approach favoured a change in his work as actor, director and teacher; he stated that psychology was essential for the acting career:

Cu greu se va încerca în a interpreta un rol din repertoriul Shakespearian sau Ibsenian dacă nu va avea cunoștințe de psihologie. De altfel această din urmă știință este cea arma cea mai puternică a artistului dramatic. De ea trebuie să se servească în analiza caracterelor și stărilor sufletești, iar de istorie în evocarea unui personaj istoric. (One would hardly try to interpret a role from Shakespeare or Ibsen’s repertory without psychological knowledge. Besides, this latter science is the most powerful weapon of the dramatic artists. It therefore must serve the analysis of the characters and of the states of mind, whereas history [must serve] to represent a historic character; my translation.) (Dragomir 1902: 3)

But what kind of psychology? Ion Găvănescul’s handbook (1890),<sup>27</sup> which Dragomir recommended to his students, was an example of rational, speculative psychology. This psychology genre was inspired by the romantic German idealism of Immanuel Kant and by the English empiricism of John Locke. By the time Dragomir had begun to perform Ibsen between 1893 and 1895, Eduard Gruber had founded the first laboratory of experimental psychology in Iași (Bejat 1972: 153–182). Gruber’s initiative made Romania one of the first 10 countries in the world to have such a laboratory (ibid: 153). Wilhelm Wundt, who

27 The book was one of the most popular manuals of psychology at the time, enjoying “un succes didactic foarte mare” (a great pedagogical success; my translation) (Herseni 1980: 187). It was re-edited approximately 20 times and its content changed constantly. However, the most radical change to its content seems to be that of 1901, as Găvănescul himself mentioned. I also chose to refer to this manual because it is closest temporally to the moment when State Dragomir wrote the Programme for the Declamation class in 1902. Yet we must keep in mind that Găvănescul does not display an experimental psychology perspective. He is rather tied to the British empiricism of John Locke, George Berkely and David Hume, which also preserved, in turn, elements taken from German idealism. Hence, apriorism and deism represent important philosophical concepts in Găvănescul’s perspective upon psychology. He even wrote a doctoral thesis about John Locke. Finally, he was interested in the concept of natural theology, which did not deny the existence of God, yet considered the material experience as a fundamental background. The manual of psychology mirrors this dualist perspective, marked by apriorism and agnosticism. Nevertheless, once the findings of experimental psychology are more vividly employed in the scientific life, the author himself changes his manual accordingly to the new research in the field (Bejat 1972: 48–49).

founded the first laboratory of experimental psychology in the world in Leipzig in 1879, had inspired Gruber (ibid: 21). The relationship between the two researchers was close, as Wundt, the father of experimental psychology,<sup>28</sup> had supervised Gruber's doctoral thesis about the luminosity of colours.<sup>29</sup>

Gruber's view was different to that of Găvănescul, but they both taught psychology at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy (ibid: 45) despite their contradictory perspectives. Dragomir was probably aware of the differences between speculative and experimental psychology,<sup>30</sup> which entailed the transition from a transcendental thinking, relying on theological/deist principles to a thinking based on experience. This implied the passage from a dualist perspective upon the human being divided between body and soul, to a monist perspective of the human being a unitary organism constantly evolving.

The knowledge of physics, biology, chemistry and physiognomy that Dragomir introduced to the science of acting reflected the tensions between rationalism and empiricism and highlighted his view that "interpretarea poate și trebuie să aibă caracter științific" (interpretation can and must have a scientific nature; my translation) (Brădățeanu 1979: 170). How did these sciences fit into his mixed romantic-realist-naturalist perspective? In his teaching programme, Dragomir relied on German, Italian, French and English scientists alike: "Cu această ocaziune profesorul va arăta teoriile lui Ioh. Muller, Ch. Bell, Darwin; Oken, Harles, Baumgaertner, Gratiolet, Mantegazza, Piderit<sup>31</sup>, Lange, Engel<sup>32</sup> (mimica pentru actori)." (On this occasion, the teacher will present the theories

28 "Adevăratul creator al psihologiei experimentale, care militase pentru desprinderea psihologiei de filosofie, ajunge de multe ori (mai ales în lucrările sale cu caracter filozofic), la formularea unor concluzii idealiste, care contrazic în mare măsură faptele acumulate și chiar unele dintre ideile promovate în lucrările de psihologie." (The real founder of experimental psychology, who fought for the separation of psychology from philosophy, often draws idealist conclusions (especially in his philosophical works), contradicting to a great extent the facts and even some of the ideas promoted in psychology studies; my translation) (Bejat 1972: 23).

29 Its German title was *Experimentelle Untersuchungen über die Helligkeit der Farben* (Bejat 1972: 162).

30 "Psihologia empirică, propunându-și să studieze faptele suferitești observabile, să le descrie și să le clasifice, constituie un pas înainte în cunoașterea vieții psihice, față de psihologia "rațională", speculativă, care se ocupă de ceea ce este inaccesibil observației, de problemele metafizice ale originii și naturii sufletului, ale raportului dintre suflet și corp." (By aiming to study, describe and classify the observable states of mind, empirical psychology constitutes a step forward with respect to the knowledge of the psychic life, in contrast to the 'rational', speculative, psychology, which drew on what was inaccessible by means of observation, on metaphysics issues related to the origin of the nature and of the soul, and of the relationship between body and soul; my translation) (Bejat 1972: 50).

31 Karl Wilhelm Piderit (1815–1875) was a German classical philologist and educator. His interest in editing in Cicero's works indicates his connection with the Latin rhetoric art, which implied the use of the antic declamation principles such as eloquence and beauty of speech, voice, face and body posture (See Cicero 1867).

32 Johann Jakob Engel (1774–1802) is mostly renowned for his book *Ideen zu einer Mimik* (1785). He was part of the German Enlightenment movement and was interested in the relationship between gestures, perception and dialogue, and hinted at the future use of physiognomy and evolutionary theory in the practice of acting. However, he must have applied his knowledge to the classical and romantic acting genres. Sara Fortuna (2003: 95–12) highlights some of Engel's most important ideas and findings. He established perception as the fundamental perspective to study the bodily expression by analysing how perception conveys meaning. He investigated

of Ioh. Muller, Ch. Bell, Darwin; Oken, Harles, Baumgaertner, Gratiolet, Mantegazza, Piderit, Lange, Engel<sup>33</sup> (mimicry for actors); my translation.) (Dragomir 1902: 13) The central debate that all these scientists engaged with concerned the transition from an idealist, agnostic to an empiricist, experimental way of approaching the world and the human being, including references to physiognomy and evolutionism. On the one hand, Johann Heinrich Jakob Müller<sup>34</sup> or Charles Bell<sup>35</sup> and Lorenz Oken's<sup>36</sup> visions were rooted in Kant's idealist, dualist perspective. On the other, Charles Darwin,<sup>37</sup> Louis-Pierre Gra-

the issue of expressive gesture and made a classification of gestures and passions. He also anticipates some ideas of Darwin, as he considered that we could find all the actions fundamental to evolution within the axes of approach and distancing. More specifically, each action connected as a propulsive element to an emotion (flight-fear, aggression-rage, sexual impulse, hunger). He also considered that gestures are independent of perception. However, they are dependent on thoughts and therefore connected to imagination. In this sense, gestures refer to the thoughts that accompany the perception, not to the perception itself. Finally, Engel differentiates between the spontaneous actor and the reflective actor. He considered that reflective acting should be preferred over spontaneous acting in which the actor fully identifies himself with the character he is performing. Therefore, he encouraged the actor to reflect upon what happens when certain gestures express certain emotions and separate gesture from meaning. See also Coulombeau (2006).

- 33 The complete names of some of these scientists and philosophers are Johann Heinrich Jakob Müller, Charles Bell, Charles Darwin, Lorenz Oken, Louis-Pierre Gratiolet, Paolo Mantegazza, Karl Wilhelm Piderit, Carl Georg Lange, Johann Jakob Engel.
- 34 A German physicist (1809–1875) whose main research interests were optics, galvanism, magnetism (See Müller 1849; Müller and Von Liebig 1836). He also supported the dualist perspective of “natural philosophy”.
- 35 Charles Bell (1774–1842) was a Scottish surgeon, anatomist, physiologist, neurologist, artist, and philosophical theologian. He supported natural theology and rejected the *a priori* reasoning of the German idealism, and tried to prove the existence of God through empiricist facts such as the physiology of the human body. From this perspective, his work focused on experience, experiments, and empiricist arguments in the research of the muscles of the face and of the nerves. Bell also studied emotional expression and was influenced by the perspective of Darwin upon emotions. In this sense, although Darwin rejected the theological argument, he agreed with Bell that the muscles of respiration played a role in the expression of emotion (Aminoff 2017; Hughes and Gardner-Thorpe 2022).
- 36 Lorenz Oken (1779–1851) was a German naturalist, botanist, biologist and ornithologist who conducted research in the fields of natural history and medicine. He was one leading figure of the natural philosophy movement in Germany and applied the philosophical principles of Kant to physical science. His work and philosophical view was preceded by that of Gottlieb Fichte and Friedrich Schelling. He was also in contact with Goethe, who invited him to hold lectures at University of Jena in 1807 on his natural history findings. One of the specific aspects of his work was that he employed deductive illustrations of the main concepts, an approach which was typical to the transcendental school (Gamberotto 2017: 329–340).
- 37 Darwin (1809–1882) represented a turning point already anticipated by other researchers in the transition from the *a priori*, Kantian reasoning to the empiricist perspective upon the human body. On the one hand, the philosophy inspired by Kant considered the human body from a dualist body-soul perspective, which implied that the human body possessed all the categories it needed *a priori*. On the other hand, Darwin highlighted a new kind of thinking upon the human body, based on experience instead of inborn qualities. He considered the human body from a monist, unitary perspective, which implied that the body is a whole evolving in time and adapting itself to the changes of its environment. Consequently, there is no conflict between

tiolet,<sup>38</sup> Paolo Mantegazza<sup>39</sup> and Carl Georg Lange<sup>40</sup> moved forward to a radical empiricist, monist perspective highlighting determinism, heredity and the physiological basis of human existence.

This entanglement of perspectives in Dragomir's acting reveals his unique approach born of the meeting of these conflicting traditions. No other Romanian Ibsen contributor employed such a complex science-based combination of acting techniques in performing Ibsen on the Romanian stage. Dragomir was an actor teaching not only philosophy, in Nicolae Barbu's words, but also psychology and natural sciences in his acting lessons, from which Ibsen was not exempted. The purpose must have been to achieve an accurate rendition of any role: "Elevul nu va neglija nimic din cele ce sunt necesare explicației pentru a se putea interpreta just textul și personagiile autorului." (The student will not neglect any explanation needed to interpret the text and the author's characters justly; my translation.) (Dragomir 1902: 16) Therefore, I assume that this paradoxical entanglement of traditions was not supposed to be used as such in the interpretation of every role, but adapted to the requirements of every play.

To sum up, Dragomir's acting perspective suggests a move from the romantic tradition, based on the talent of the inspired actor, to psychological realism. Ibsen's plays supported this change because of their multi-faceted characters and because of the retrospective dramaturgical technique in his plays. In the 20 years of staging and teaching Ibsen, Dragomir must have experienced and solved many acting challenges by appealing to new concepts and scientific findings in philosophy, psychology and the natural sciences:

---

body and soul, as the two represent interdependent dimensions of the same organism. Finally, Darwin's perspective points at heredity, determinism, agnosticism and the reflex arc concept. See Darwin (1872); Shepherd-Barr (2015).

- 38 Louis-Pierre Gratiolet (1815–1865) was a French anatomist and zoologist conducting research in the fields of neuranatomy, physiognomy and physical anthropology. His book *De la physiologie et des mouvements d'expression* (1865) belongs to the same research area as Johann Kaspar Lavater and Cesare Lombroso's. The particularity of physiognomy is that it discusses the psychological profile of the human being based on its physical traits, especially those of the face.
- 39 Paolo Mantegazza (1831–1910) was an Italian neurologist, physiologist and anthropologist. He rejected the Darwinist theory of sexual selection. His was a philosophical view upon nature based on metaphysics, which indicates him as an idealist philosopher supporting the dualist instead of the monist perspective. Nevertheless, he accepted the idea of transmission, heredity, natural selection and competition for life. He was part of the Italian positivism movement, marked by an optimist evolutionism and biologic pessimism. His greatest concern was with the essential difference between the human being and animals (Mantegazza, Paolo, n.d.; Landucci 1977).
- 40 Carl Georg Lange (1834–1900) was a Danish physician working mainly in the neurology, psychiatry and psychology fields. His main book contribution is *On Emotions: A Psycho-Physiological Study* in which he highlights the empiricist idea that all emotions are developed as or can be reduced to physiological reactions to stimuli. He is known especially for the James-Lange theory, which considers that the physiological reaction generates the emotion. That is, the first thing that happens is the physiological stimulus, then the emotion is experienced as a consequence of the respective physiological stimulus that generated that specific emotion. The chain follows as such: 1. Emotion stimulus – 2. Physiological response pattern – 3. Affective experience (Oxford Reference, n.d.; Lange and James 1922).



Interpretarea preconizată, practică și propagată de State Dragomir, tindea să aibă caracter științific, actorul, totodată profesor de istorie și filozofie, om cu o bogată cultură, cu serioase cunoștințe și pătrundere psihologică, folosea toate aceste calități în descrierea, înțelegerea și adâncirea textelor, în conceperea și redarea personajelor. Creațiile sale erau rodul gândirii, al stabilirii trăsăturilor specifice și integrării în ființa personajului, interesându-l cu deosebire psihologiile bogate și profunde, fiind atras de investigație, tentat de revelarea către spectator, prin integralitate, a ceea ce îndeobște scapă lecturii obișnuite. (The interpretation that State Dragomir expected [to deliver], practised and promoted tended to have a scientific nature. The actor, who was also history and philosophy teacher, was richly cultivated, had a serious psychological knowledge and depth, using all these qualities to decipher, to understand and to analyse the texts in-depth in order to create and to enact the characters. His creations were the fruit of his mind, of his establishing the specific traits of the character and of his identification with it. He was mostly interested in [the characters with] rich and profound psychologies, was attracted to investigate, and was tempted by the aim to reveal in its entirety to the spectator everything that escapes a common reading; my translation.) (Brădățeanu 1979: 168)

Finally, the evolution towards psychological realism stemming from the mix of Romanticism, naturalism and realism in the acting of State Dragomir was a consequence of the contact with and influence of Ibsen plays. In addition, the interdisciplinary profile of State Dragomir evokes the image of the actor as intellectual. In Ion Vartic's words, he was

actor cerebral, intelectualist, animator al avangardei teatrale ieșene și, în consecință, unul dintre popularizatorii ce mai fervenți ai dramaturgiei ibseniene la noi (a cerebral actor, an intellectual, the leader of the theatre avant-garde of Iași, and one of the most fervent promoters of Ibsen's dramaturgy in our country; my translation) (Vartic 1995: 148)

Ultimately, the assimilation of Ibsen into the repertoire of State Dragomir ensured a significant step in the modernisation of Romanian acting and the dissemination of Ibsen across Romania at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

#### 4.2.1.3 Aglae Pruteanu: Nora who never left

The psychological training hub developed at the National Theatre of Iași is not confined to the example of State Dragomir. His stage partner, the star actress Aglae Pruteanu, accompanied and enriched his perspectives: "Ea este actrița care a făcut trecerea de la spiritul științific, documentar, la adevărul interior, psihologic și poetic." (She is the actress who marked the transition from the scientific, documentary spirit to the interior, psychological and poetic truth; my translation.) (Alterescu 1971: 387) In the next section, I investigate her contribution to Ibsen's emergence on the Romanian stage, in light of the five events in which she performed between 1901 and 1909. Of these events, three are associated with *A Doll's House* and although the time span in which she performed Ibsen is shorter than Dragomir's, her contribution is likewise significant because of the quality of her acting.

Pruteanu was the first Romanian Nora. She was not only the most memorable actress of her generation, but also a successful Nora among the actresses who interpreted this role during the early reception period of Ibsen in the Romanian theatre. For instance, while Aristizza Romanescu stated her hesitation to act the role of Nora in *A Doll's House*, Aglae Pruteanu welcomed the opportunity to play Ibsen's protagonist and remembered the performance as a success that was received well by the audience. As it was the first Romanian interpretation of Nora,<sup>41</sup> her rendition was a milestone in Romanian Ibsen production. Her success as an Ibsen protagonist was not confined to *A Doll's House*, as her renditions in *Hedda Gabler* and *An Enemy of the People* were also successful.<sup>42</sup> Ibsen's characters were unique within her mostly romantic roles; she successfully interpreted in plays by Al. Dumas, V. Sardou, A. D'Ennery, Molière. G. Ohnet and V. Alecsandri:

Principalele mari succese: "Hamlet", "Crimă și pedeapsă", "Romeo și Julieta", "Narcis", "Hoții", "Othello", "Luiza Müller", "Ruy-Blas", "Nora", "Tosca" – în care am avut un eclatant succes [...]. (*Hamlet, Crime and Punishment, Romeo and Juliet, Narcis, The Thieves, Othello, Luiza Müller, Ruy-Blas, Nora, Tosca* [were] my main achievements; my translation.) (Pruteanu 1922: 140)

- 
- 41 Gabrielle Rejane performed Nora in 1897 in Bucharest and was perceived as controversial. Yet Aglae Pruteanu did not attend these performances, as she was living in Iași. Agnes Sorma also performed in Bucharest, in 1901, the same year as Aglae Pruteanu performed Nora. But Sorma's performance took place after Aglae Pruteanu's performance, and, given the location, Aglae Pruteanu had definitely not attended this one either. So, no direct influence of the German or of the French actresses can be acknowledged in the Romanian actress's style.
- 42 The private life of Aglae Pruteanu also reveals her common traits with Ibsen's feminine protagonists, which must have contributed to a special empathy in understanding the psychology of the characters. Although the actress gave little information about her private life, Nicolae Barbu indicates that she had a failed marriage with Dimitrie Pruteanu, an actor at the National Theatre of Iași. The account of Nicolae Barbu reveals a story akin to Nora or even to Hedda Gabler: "Ruptura cu soțul ei, Dimitrie Pruteanu, îi agravează zbuciumul sufletească. [...] Idealurile artistice ale soțului erau, în orice caz, subordonate existenței liniștite pe care căuta s-o asigura căminului. [...] Aglae însă simțea că se sufocă în această atmosferă căldică – marile ei avânturi, arderea lăuntrică, elanul dăruirii în creație fiind incompatibile cu separarea netă (și desigur mai comodă) a vieții personale de viața artistică. Mai târziu a deschis și acțiune de divorț și și-a reluat chiar numele de Theodoru, timp de câteva stagii. Însă Dimitrie Pruteanu nu a consimțit la despărțirea legală, fie din orgoliu, fie din speranța nemărturisită a unei eventuale concilierii." (The break-up with her husband, Dimitrie Pruteanu, aggravated her inner torment. [...] Her husband's artistic ideals were subordinate to the peaceful existence he sought at home. [...] Yet Aglae felt that the lukewarm atmosphere suffocated her. The great ideals, her inner fire and her enthusiasm to give everything in her [artistic] creation were incompatible with the separation between the private and the artistic life. Later on, she filed for divorce and even resumed using her surname Theodoru for a few seasons. But Dimitrie Pruteanu did not give his consent to the legal separation, due either to his vanity or unconfessed hope of a conciliation; my translation.) (Barbu 1965: 64) The rejection of a mediocre life certainly stemmed from her strong need for a meaningful intellectual and artistic life. Both the self-worth and inner fulfilment she was searching for made her resemble Nora, while in Hedda Gabler the actress must have found a similar aesthetic ideal of beauty. Thus, the actress' approach to the two roles was successful in light of the special connection she managed to bridge between the characters and her own private life.

According to the actress, the staging of *A Doll's House* generated controversy that was revealed in both the resistance to, and enthusiasm for, the play amongst the Romanian audience. The initiative of the translator Barbu Marian, who submitted the play to the "Reading Committee", and the active support of State Dragomir attest to the interest in promoting the play. Aglae Pruteanu refers to the correspondence between Dragomir and Barbu Marian that led to the proposal for the staging. The enthusiasm for Ibsen is further acknowledged due to the "valoarea piesei și a traducerii" (value of the play and of the translation; my translation) (ibid: 168) and to "profunda deosebire de concepție a teatrului lui Ibsen" (the profound difference of perspective provided by Ibsen's theatre; my translation) (ibid: 169). Ibsen was an innovator associated with "nou gen de piese care se deosebea fundamental de toate celelalte" (a new category of plays, completely different from all the other; my translation) (ibid: 169), which made him worthy of being included in the repertory. Aglae Pruteanu considered herself proud to participate in this pioneering activity:

Pentru noi satisfacția era îndoită și pentru succesul nostru personal și pentru mândria care ne revenea că noi am fost primii interpreți ai lui Ibsen în țară. Succesul acesta m'a încurajat și am mai jucat în a doua stagiune "Hedda Gabler" cu acelaș succes și am reluat "Dușmanul poporului". (Our satisfaction was double both because of our success and because of the pride to be the first interpreters of Ibsen in the country. The success was encouraging and I performed *Hedda Gabler* successfully in the second season. We also re-staged *An Enemy of the People*; my translation.) (ibid: 171)

The success was, however, short-lived, highlighting the contradictions related to Ibsen's presence on the Romanian stage at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The actress noticed this scepticism, alongside the hesitation, opposition and mistrust expressed in the context of *A Doll's House* staging:

Dar până să fie jucată, au urmat oarecare ezitări; nimeni nu credea că Ibsen va prinde la noi; mai ales dintre artiști erau mulți cari se opuneau și priveau cu neîncredere încercarea lui Dragomir. (But before the play was even staged, a lot of hesitation arose; no one believed Ibsen capable of captivating our audience. There were many, especially among the actors, who resisted and regarded with scepticism *Dragomir's* attempt; my translation.) (ibid: 168)

The resistance to Ibsen was first evident among the actors themselves, who claimed Ibsen would have no impact on the audience. Moreover, she noticed that although the spectators enjoyed the performance of *A Doll's House*, they still manifested superficiality towards theatre performances:

Păcat numai că toată munca aceasta uriașă, a unei pleiade de buni artiști, nu a fost sortită [...] pentru timpul prezent, pentru publicul acesta bun de acum, setos de spectacole, dornic să vadă și să învețe. – Publicul de atunci era tocmai dimpotrivă, pretențios și indiferent. (It is a shame that the tremendous efforts made by an entire group of illustrious actors were not meant [...] for the present day, for the brave

audience of these times, who thirst for performances, wanting to learn. – But, on the contrary, the audience of our time was pretentious and indifferent; my translation.) (ibid: 171)

Thus, Aglae Pruteanu confirms that the staging of Ibsen was an elitist choice rather than supported by the mass audience or by fellow actors. It is even questionable how much of the following reaction she described reveals a meditation upon Nora's leaving or the spectators expecting Nora's return:

Și pașii Norei care se pierd în depărtare, răspândind în urma ei o tristețe nemărginită. Am simțit impresia aceasta și printre spectatori, prin negrăbirea de a se ridica din staluri." (And Nora's steps, fading afar, spread around her a boundless sadness. I felt this impression among spectators too, as they did not rush to leave their seats; my translation.) (ibid: 170)

Nevertheless, the actress insists on the success of *Nora*, referring to both the performances in Iași and the touring ones:

Nora a plăcut și s'a jucat de multe ori. Apoi am făcut și un turneu cu ea, de asemenea reușit [...]. Am fost prin multe orașe și a plăcut mult pretutindeni, făcând și afaceri bune materiale. (The audience enjoyed *Nora* and we performed it many times. Then we organised a tour with it, which was also successful. [...] We toured many cities and the audience enjoyed it everywhere, and we also obtained financial benefits because of it; my translation.) (ibid: 170–171)

Aglae Pruteanu's memoirs support the image of a sensitive actress with huge intellectual abilities. The attraction towards Ibsen and towards the role of Nora is a reflection of her star actress profile, as well as of her interest in roles demanding psychological depth. In this sense, the actress highlights that the role required sharp intelligence, a deep psychological understanding, and a sensitive psyche. But what did this psychological depth and understanding mean more precisely in the case of Aglae Pruteanu?

The actress's acting perspective answers our question, given that her Ibsen contribution was most relevant at this level. Together with State Dragomir, Aglae Pruteanu marked the transition from Romanticism to psychological realism associated with Ibsen's emergence on the Romanian stage, indicated by the mix of elements in her acting approach.

What did this transition involve in the case of Aglae Pruteanu? Primarily, it entailed the shift from a Romantic perspective of the actor as an "inspired" artist to a more scientific approach to the role:

Total depinde de puterea de creație a artistei, de imaginație, de simțire, de expresivitate, pentru a reda armonia într-un tot ideal de frumusețe și de duioșie, dar și de adevăr științific care să corespundă cu tipul real. (Everything depends on the actress's creative power, on her imagination, feeling and expressiveness in rendering the harmony as an ideal unity not only of beauty and sweetness, but also of scientific truth corresponding to the reality of the character type; my translation.) (ibid: 106)

From this perspective, the actress mixed realist and romantic concepts in her acting.

A brief look at her general profile accounts for this combination. Introspection, identification, soul, nerves, sincerity, hypersensitivity, emotion, self-control, balance and intellect, and a delicate physical appearance and voice are the main keywords used to describe Aglae Pruteanu:

Superioritatea Aglaei Pruteanu provine și din farmecul pe care îl exercita asupra contemporanilor, și din atracțiozitatea feminină, și din combustii dramatice, și din suavitatea vocii, dar în primul rând din faptul că jocul său de scenă este rezultatul unui proces conștient de creație care urmărește realizarea unor simboluri de participare adresate conștiinței publicului. (Aglae Pruteanu's superiority stems from her charm and from the feminine attraction she exerted upon the audience of her epoch, as well as from the dramatic combustions, and the suavity of her voice. But above all was the fact that her acting style was a conscious creative process pursuing the fulfilment of several collective symbols intended for the consciousness of the audience; my translation.) (Alterescu 1971: 384)

Mihai Vasiliu confirms this view of the actress as one who possessed a

mare sensibilitate, capacitatea de aprofundare psihologică a rolurilor, simțul măsurii, grația și plasticitatea atitudinilor, dicția clară și timbrul glasului [...], convingerile sale despre valoarea artei realiste, făurită cu intensă participare intelectuală (great sensitivity and the capacity for a deep psychological approach to the roles, a sense for balance, grace and plasticity in her attitude, a clear diction and timbre of the voice, [...]) [and] her own perspective of the realist art, built through an intense intellectual engagement; my translation) (Vasiliu 1995: 169).

Above all else, the actress was renowned for her hypersensitivity:

Ea a fost mai mult decât o sensibilă. A fost o hipersensibilă, o hiperestezică chiar, care-și substituia sensibilitatea propriei 'duioșiei sufletelor poetice' pe care le-a jucat. (She was more than a sensitive [actress]. She was a hypersensitive, even hyperaesthetic [actress], who substituted her own sensitivity to the 'sweetness of the poetic souls' she interpreted; my translation.) (Alterescu 1971: 385)

All these qualities and depictions of her acting point to a blend of romantic and realist techniques in which psychology was a background element: "Aglae Pruteanu optează pentru o interpretare psihologică. Citește filosofie, studii de psihologie și psihopatologie [...]." (Aglae Pruteanu chooses a psychological interpretation. She reads philosophy, psychological studies and psychopathology [...]; my translation.) (Alterescu 1971: 385) She did not clearly differentiate between the romantic and the realist acting techniques, but mixed them both when she explained her approach. In this respect, she considered realist truthfulness and sincerity, as well as the romantic inspiration of the gifted actor, in a more or less conscious attempt to reconcile two paradoxical techniques:

Rolurile pe care le interpretam [...] erau produsul propriei mele gândiri; veșnic în căutarea adevărului și a cunoașterii sufletului meu și al altora. Posedam acest dar de observație, de care mintea mea era veșnic preocupată [...]. Să cercetez cu nesațiu adâncul sufletului omenesc, oricum și oricând, era îndeletnicirea mea principală, era studiul meu involuntar de fiecare moment. – utilizat însă cu voință, armonizând totul, creând caracterele atunci când aveam nevoie, în arta mea. (The roles I was interpreting [...] were the product of my own reflection; I was always in search of the truth and knowledge of my soul and of others' souls too. I possessed this gift of observation, which constantly preoccupied my mind [...]. To insatiably investigate the depths of the human soul everywhere and at all times was my main concern, my involuntary study activity of each moment – and I willingly used it, in trying to harmonise everything, and creating the characters when I needed it in my art; my translation.) (Pruteanu 1922: 90–91)

Regardless of the lack of conceptual clarity, Simion Alterescu highlights that “cel mai plinar se recunosc calitățile actriței în drama cu teză, în drama psihologică” (the qualities of the actress are plentifully recognisable in the thesis drama, namely in the psychological drama; my translation) (Alterescu 1971: 386). Thus, whereas her profile indicates an actress inspired by the Romantic tradition, her affinity with the “thesis drama” – Ibsen included – indicate an actress equally inspired by realism. To understand her perspective, we must separate the details of this mix, and analyse how they activate the transition towards psychological realism.

On the one hand, many aspects of her profile indicate her as a romantic actress. Firstly, the notions of “soul” – “voiu substitui toată duioșia sufletelor poetice pe care le-am jucat” (I will re-enact all the tenderness of the poetic souls I have interpreted; my translation) (Pruteanu 1922: 4); “inspiration” – “stăpânită de-o inspirație lăuntrică căreia nu mă puteam sustrage” (I was dominated by an interior inspiration that I could not escape; my translation) (ibid. 125); and “intuition” – “prin puterea intuiției, – și fără ea nici o înțelegere nu e cu putință, – intram dela prima dată în *coaja rolului*” (through the power of intuition – and no real understanding [of the role] is possible without it – I could assume the role from *scratch*; my translation) (ibid.: 125) – seem central to her approach. Then, the *emploi* system provided the framework for her career, at least at the beginning. She was a drama actress, performing especially *ingénuités* and *coquettes*. Moreover, the beauty of the interpretation was also a romantic preoccupation and informed her conviction about the importance of the beauty and posture of the body, as well as the quality of the voice and diction:

Trebuie să ai ceva din inocența și simplitatea sufletelor sincere pentru a putea reda ideia despre o asemenea ființă ideală. Pe lângă aceasta mai trebuie un fizic plăcut și corespunzător în totul cerințelor scenei [...]. Și apoi, vocea...prin care trebuie să exteriorizezi toate... (You must possess something of the innocence and the simplicity of honest souls in order to illustrate the idea behind such an ideal being. In addition, one needs a pleasant physical appearance, entirely adequate to the requirements of the stage. [...] And then, [one needs] the voice to enact all these...; my translation) (ibid: 105); Nu mi-e rușine să mă laud cu vocea mea excepțional de bine înzestrată cu toată gama simțirii omenеști.” (I am not ashamed to praise my own

voice, which is exceptionally well endowed with the entire scale of human feelings; my translation.) (ibid: 140)

Pruteanu uses various concepts to point towards realist acting techniques that contradict the romantic approach. Firstly, the rational control of her interpretation goes beyond the typical romantic control of the posture and of the voice. She focused on a conscious understanding of the action, which left less room for intuitive inspiration. “Understanding” each role became the crux of her acting approach, which made the actress distance herself from the interpretation templates of the *emploi* system:

Firul gândirii urmărea ideea corect și ordonat, fără efortare și în chip natural și mai ales fără imitațiuni sau influențe străine. (The thread of my thought was following the idea correctly and orderly, effortlessly and naturally, and especially without any imitation or foreign influences; my translation) (ibid: 126); exprimând astfel, în interpretare, gândirea autorului; după ce a trecut-o prin propria sa gândire și apoi executând acțiunea: prin gest, mișcare, sentiment și vorbire (Thus, I was expressing the author’s thought in the interpretation, filtered through my own thinking and then executing the action through gesture, movement, feeling and speech; my translation) (ibid: 91); personajul era înțeles foarte bine de public, fiindcă era înțeles perfect de interpret (the audience understood the character very well because the interpreted had understood it perfectly; my translation.) (ibid: 95)

This aspect of her process reveals the idea that understanding the play involves understanding the motivation of the actions within the play. Why and how? The main proof is that the actress did not use any notes written beside her lines to mark how she would perform the role. Instead, she states that she focused on the way in which the action developed in the play and followed this line of thought, instead of memorising gestures, tones or facial expressions:

Niciodată nu mi-am însemnat în rol vre-o trecere, mișcare sau indicație a jocului meu, care întotdeauna era unitar, exact, în aceleași puncte neschimbate, bine înțipărite și pentru totdeauna neuitate, pentru că toate erau gândite, bine cumpănite și înregistrate în minte. (I have never written any passage, movement or other note concerning my acting beside the [lines of the role]. My acting was always unitary, precise, with the same unchanging nuances, well imprinted on the role and ever unforgettable, because they had all been [filtered through my] thought, well balanced and registered in my mind; my translation.) (ibid: 126)

This contrasts with the classic approach of the majority of her fellow colleagues, educated in the Romantic tradition. They prepared the roles by noting beside their lines the gestures, facial expressions or vocal tones they intended to employ. All the star actors of her generation mentioned this practice of preparing roles with the help of these written notes.

Secondly, the influence of the comedy tradition facilitated by Costache (Costantin) Bălănescu and even by her teacher Mihail Galino – educated by Matei Millo, the founder of the Romanian comedy school, who privileged “vorbirea naturală și gestul măsurat” (the



natural speech and the balanced gesture; my translation) (ibid: 154) – brought Pruteanu closer to the realist and naturalist techniques, and to the use of everyday speech on stage instead of declamation. The presence of Napoleone Borelli, marked by the Italian *verismo* evolving towards realism, must have separated her even more from the romantic acting:

Contopirea atâtor însușiri o apropiau pe interpretă de trăirea autentică, reală, făcându-i pe spectatori să remarce diferența de stil față de jocul exterior, 'teatral' al multora dintre artiștii vremii. (The merging of so many characteristics drew her closer to the real, authentic experience [of the role], which made the spectators notice the difference of style in contrast to the exterior, 'theatrical' acting of many of the epoch's artists; my translation.) (Barbu 1965: 172)

In this sense, the influence of the Romanian comedy school and the tempered Italian *verismo* of Borelli guided her towards the use of everyday speech on stage. Yet, she neither adopted the pathological, exaggerated gestures of *verismo*, nor fell into the naturalist trap of imitating real life on stage. Her collaboration with Borelli shows that Aglae Pruteanu was much more inclined towards a realist view. In this respect, the critic Nicolae Barbu states that this difference makes it impossible for the Romanian actress to be a facsimile of the Italian actresses:

Adâncind mecanismul psihologic al diverselor caractere înfățișate, artista ieșeană depășește acel verism psihologic care în teatru a fost ilustrat și justificat numai datorită forței artistice de transfigurare a unor mari personalități ca Adelaida Ristori și mai ales Eleonora Duse – aceasta din urmă contemporană cu Aglae Pruteanu. Tradiția realistă a școlii lui Millo s-a dovedit, în teatrul românesc, puternică, între altele și prin această împrejurare. În adevăr, nici Aristizza Romanescu și nici urmașa ei de care ne ocupăm, nu au fost atrase de naturalețea în sine, lipsită de semnificație umană de un ordin mai general. (Through the deepening of the psychological mechanism of the numerous characters she interpreted, the actress from Iași goes beyond a psychological *verismo*. However, the success of *verismo* is basically justified because of the artistic transfigurative force of great personalities such as Adelaida Ristori and especially Eleonora Duse – the latter was a contemporary of Aglae Pruteanu. In the Romanian theatre, the realist tradition of Millo's school proved its influence even in a context like this. Fair enough, neither Aristizza Romanescu, nor her successor whom we analyse, were attracted by a natural interpretation as such, lacking human meaning in a much more general sense; my translation.) (ibid: 154)

Thus, her acting approach marked a clear transitional movement from Romanticism to realism. It was also reflective of her training, which was a product of the different approaches used at the Conservatoires in Iași and Bucharest. In Bucharest, the teacher would *show* the students *how* to perform the role. In this respect, the female students were taught by the most prestigious actress of the time – Aristizza Romanescu – while the male students by the similarly prestigious actor Constantin Nottara. In Iași, instead of *showing*, the teachers let the student discover the best interpretation based on their artistic personality. Mihail Galino, the teacher of Aglae Pruteanu, was one such example:

Dela bunul și marele meu profesor, am învățat multe lucruri bune, fără să-mi fi impus vreodată felul lui de-a zice sau de-a fi ca artist, deși era un admirabil artist, un mare tragedian. Mă lăsa să spun și să joc rolul, în voia mea, dela început până la sfârșit, cu rare excepții numai, făcând din când în când câte o observație, dar fără să-mi corecteze intonațiile, impunându-mi-le pe ale lui. Atunci, nu știam de ce mă lăsa astfel și eram foarte îngrijată. Mai târziu, însă, am înțeles că înadins mă lăsa, să caut eu singură nota justă, fiind sigur că am s'o găesc. (I learned a lot of good things from my good and great teacher, who never imposed on me his way of reciting [the role] or his way of being as an artist, although he was a remarkable artist and a tremendous tragedian. He let me recite and perform the role at will, from the beginning to the end, only exceptionally making observations, but without correcting my intonations by imposing his [intonations] on me. At the time, I did not know why he was doing so and I was very worried. Later on, I understood that he was doing it on purpose, in order to let me find the right note on my own, as he was sure that I was going to find it; my translation.) (ibid: 17)

Although Galino taught Romantic techniques, he was also inspired by the Romanian comedy school of Matei Millo, and by the German tradition in Vienna (Barbu 1965: 16, 17).

Aglae Pruteanu “este actrița care a făcut trecerea de la spiritul științific documentar, la adevărul interior, psihologic și poetic” ([she] is the actress who marked the transition from the scientific, documentary spirit to the inner, psychological and poetical truth; my translation) (Alterescu 1971: 387). Although she performed together with and was influenced by actors trained into the Romantic tradition such as Aristizza Romanescu and Grigore Manolescu, her acting surpassed the boundaries of the romantic techniques. Her acting approach is situated between Romanticism and realism, a transition phase leading to psychological realism, and reinforced by numerous psychological and philosophical references. In Nicolae Barbu's words, in the case of Aglae Pruteanu “se poate vorbi de profesarea unei concepții și a unei arte profund realiste, un realism înțeles într-un chip evoluat, plin de subtilitate” (one can talk about the enactment of a profoundly realist art and perspective; it is a realism at a high-level conception, full of subtlety; my translation.) (Barbu 1965: 151)

Ibsen played an important role in her transition from Romanticism to realism. She was clearly aware of *A Doll's House's* novelty: “nou gen de piese care se deosebea fundamental de toate celelalte” (a new genre of plays which was fundamentally different from all the others; my translation) (Pruteanu 1922: 169). The director of Napoleone Borelli contributed to her interpretation, since “el demult studia piesa cu toată grija și strădania cuvenită acestui nou gen de piese care se deosebea fundamental de toate celelalte.” (he had studied the play long before with all the required care and the effort; my translation) (ibid: 168–169). He was the director of *A Doll's House* and worked closely with Aglae Pruteanu on her performance. It is probably that his approach to acting, situated between Romanticism and a tempered version of Italian *verismo*, influenced her approach to Nora. Moreover, his rehearsal room practice resembled the approach to Aglae Pruteanu's teacher, Galino.

Thirdly, as in the case of State Dragomir, philosophy and psychology were important tools for the actress. Memory, imagination, will and attention are the most important psychology concepts she mentioned. Memory and attention gave a rational and con-

trolled focus on the interpretation: “În concepția rolului, mai trebuia și memorizarea lui, pentru a fi stăpână pe cuvinte, cum eram stăpână pe acțiune” (In order to create the role, I also had to memorise it, in order to master the words in the same way I was mastering the action; my translation) (ibid: 127). More specifically, she did not use the romantic technique, which involved to “assemble” or “compose” a role only by putting together gestures, postures, facial expressions, vocal tonalities to express the different stages of the character’s evolution. She did not ignore the value of the individual gestures, yet they were surpassed by her use of a larger view. That is, she appealed to imagination to create a unique, unitary image of the character – an ideal model of its own – yet integrated in the landscape provided by the other characters of the play:

Fiecare cuvânt, fiecare situație, avea un ecou îndepărtat rășfrânt în mintea mea, având totodată imaginea ființei pe care trebuia să o interpretez și a celorlalte personaje, pe cari le vedeam în închipuirea mea, ca într-o oglindă. [...] Nu le venea a crede camarazilor, că nu cunoșteam nici rolul, nici piesa, ci eram la prima repetiție, citindu-mi numai rolul cu foarte multă atenție și urmărind piesa cu aceeași atenție. (Each word, each situation had a distant, faint echo in my mind, but I simultaneously had [in mind] the images of both the being that I had to interpret and that of the other characters, which I was in my imagination as in a mirror. [...] My companions could not believe their eyes that I knew neither the role nor the play, but I was only at the first rehearsal, just reading the role very attentively and following the play with the same attention; my translation.) (ibid: 126)

This contrasts with the Romantic actors’ manner of preparing their interpretation of the roles, usually studying and composing them with gestures to signify different experiences. This sense of separation of the experiences gained through the observation method appears subsidiary in the case of Aglae Pruteanu. She did use this technique, but subordinate it to the wider purpose of creating an ideal model of the character instead of breaking the role into separate and distinct pieces. Finally, the emergence of a new acting technique in the direction of psychological realism is visible in Aglae Pruteanu’s focus on understanding the action, and allowing this to precede the memorising of the text.

Similar to State Dragomir, she was also in touch with the new findings of experimental psychology. She integrated into the practice of acting the very subtly Darwin-inspired approach proposed by Théodule Ribot. It is true that she also believed in the importance of inspiration and talent, but considered this inborn ability beyond a simple “gift” and as part of a generational transmission enacted and fulfilled through a selection mechanism:

Și dacă artistul este înzestrat cu un adevărat talent, apoi presupunem că el este o selecțiune a câtorva generații, până a ajunge în stadiul acesta. Și atunci nu e de mirare că spiritul lui s-a rafinat în experiențe și pătrundere. (And if the artist is truly gifted, then we suppose that he is the result of a selection [unfolding over] several generations, until arriving to this point. Then, it is no wonder that the spirit was refined by experience and depth; my translation.) (ibid: 125)

Thus, Aglae Pruteanu considered that the abilities of the individual were more a matter of personal and cultural heredity than of mysteriously acquired talent.

If State Dragomir was associated with Ion Găvănescul and Eduard Gruber, Aglae Pruteanu was clearly influenced by Théodule Ribot's findings. She must also have discussed the psychological research topics of Nicolae Vaschide during her visit to the psychologist's family in Paris in 1900, as she mentions in her memoirs. Who was Nicolae (Nicolas) Vaschide? Briefly put, he was a Romanian experimental psychologist who conducted research in Paris together with Alfred Binet,<sup>43</sup> Armand Théodule Ribot,<sup>44</sup> Édouard Toulouse<sup>45</sup> and H. Pieron<sup>46</sup> until 1907, based on the same experimental psychology framework of Wilhelm Wundt. Vaschide also contributed to the elaboration of a technique of experimental psychology, published in 1911, four years after his death in 1907. Overall, his main research focused on sleep, dreams, hypnosis, delirium, psychopathology, psychophysiology etc. In this context, Aglae Pruteanu must have been exposed to Ribot's perspective upon the talent of the artists in her memoirs:

Căutând să-și explice această capacitate de intuire, care li se părea surprinzătoare chiar unor interpreți încercați în tainele meșteșugului, cum erau colegii ei, artista recurge la opiniile unor oameni de știință, și-l citează, între alții, pe Th. Ribot. Pornind de la numeroase cazuri concrete, psihologul francez ajungea la concluzia că intuiția artistică, elementul cel mai de seamă în definirea talentului, se formează [...] printr-o selecțiune a însușirilor specifice, de-a lungul câtorva generații. [...] străduința artistei de a se situa pe terenul solid al cauzalității științifice în definirea acelor însușiri pe care mulți preferau să le socotească misterioase, învăluite într-un nimb transcendent. Ea refuza deci interpretarea artei în spirit idealist, ceea ce aruncă o lumină și mai puternică asupra ponderei pe care o avea în structura sa artistică latura rațională, sprijinită ferm pe reflectarea obiectivă a realității. (When trying to explain this intuitive ability, which seemed surprising even to experienced interpreters such as her colleagues, the artist refers to the opinions of scientists such as Th. Ribot. Through the examination of numerous concrete cases, the French psychologist concludes that the artistic intuition, which is the most important element defining the talent, is developed through a selection of specific traits along several generations. [...] the artist made the effort to place herself on the solid ground of scientific causality when defining these characteristics, which most preferred to consider them mysterious and veiled by the transcendence nimbus. So she refused to interpret the art in an idealist manner, which highlights even more how important for her artistic personality was the rational side, firmly rooted in the objective reflection of reality; my translation) (Barbu 1965: 168)

- 
- 43 French researcher, the founder of the experimental psychology research in France. He was specialised in psychopathology. He visited Romania in 1895 and held 12 lectures on experimental psychology at the University of Bucharest (Bejat 1972: 182–197; Ralea and Botez 1958: 491–504).
- 44 French theoretician in the field of experimental psychology, interested in mental heredity, psychopathology (Bejat 1972: 63, 183, 202; Ralea and Botez 1958: 504–505).
- 45 French theoretician in the field of experimental psychology, interested in pathological psychology, who together with N. Vaschide developed a technical approach to experimental psychology, published in the book *Technique de psychologie expérimentale*, published in 1904 (Bejat 1972: 22, 200–201).
- 46 French psychologist and doctor who also collaborated with N. Vaschide and Ed. Toulouse on the elaboration of the book *Technique de psychologie expérimentale*, published in 1904. He also studied the psychology of sensations (physiological psychology) (Ralea and Botez 1958: 505–506).

Besides, Nicolae Barbu indicates that the actress borrowed books from the National Theatre's library written precisely by Th. Ribot, Ch. Darwin,<sup>47</sup> P. Mantegazza,<sup>48</sup> J. J. Weiss,<sup>49</sup> Schopenhauer, A. Mézières<sup>50</sup> or Coquelin-aîné.<sup>51</sup> This list of authors<sup>52</sup> also indicates the mix of romantic and realist techniques, pointing at the transition towards psychological realism in her acting. Eventually, we notice State Dragomir and Aglae Pruteanu's shared interest in Darwin and Mantegazza, highlighting their focus on a science-based acting, yet without completely abandoning the romantic norms, as the presence of Schopenhauer and Coquelin-aîné indicate.

Finally, the mix of all these influences tells us about the "ingredients" Aglae Pruteanu used in her Ibsen performances: Her combination of romantic techniques and realist techniques rooted in the use of experimental psychology suited Ibsen roles, particularly Nora. The understanding of the action in the play and interest in the truthfulness of rendition indicate a psychological realism approach, whereas the identification with the role and the hypersensitivity remain the romantic characteristics:

Cu mare admirație am ajuns să pătrund înțelesul subiectului și să urmez firul cugetării autorului. Atunci am văzut că pot urma desfășurarea acțiunii numai prin puterea gândirii și a sentimentelor lăuntrice, singurele conducătoare în forma de exteriorizare a personajului, care numai astfel poate capata o precizie a stărilor sufletești în interpretarea dificilului rol al Norei, precum și al tuturor pieselor lui Ibsen. Trecherile prin diferite faze le simțeam bine în sufletul meu [...]. (With great admiration, I managed to grasp the meaning of the play, to follow the thread of the author's thinking. Then I realised that I could follow the action only through the power of the inner thoughts and feelings, which dominate the character's way to express herself. This is the only way to gain a certain precision of the state of mind when interpreting the difficult role of Nora, as well as of other Ibsen protagonist. I could feel so well the passages through different phases in my soul [...]; my translation). (Pruteanu 1922: 170)

At the level of the theatre production, Aglae Pruteanu considered the importance of the entire ensemble and, implicitly, of the other colleagues' interpretation: "De la această înțelegere între interpreți depinde succesul. În privința aceasta, Dragomir era un neprețuit partener." (The success depends on the collaboration between actors. From this perspective, Dragomir was a priceless partner; my translation.) (ibid: 170) Thus, "cu asemenea interpreți piesa se juca destul de bine" (with such actors, the play was performed quite well; my translation) (ibid: 170). However, given the focus on the actors

47 She read Darwin's book *The expression of emotions in man and animals* (Barbu 1965: 211).

48 She read Paolo Mantegazza's book *La physionomie des sentiments* [*The physiognomy of the feelings*] (Barbu 1965: 211).

49 She read Jean-Jacques Weiss's book *Le théâtre et les mœurs* (Barbu 1965: 211). Weiss also wrote a book on the Parisian theatres, *Les théâtres parisiens*, published in 1896.

50 She read Alfred Mézières's book *Shakespeare, ses Œuvres et ses critiques* (Barbu 1965: 211).

51 She read *L'art du comédien* by Coquelin-aîné, who was an influential French actor associated with the classical acting genre and renowned for his comedy performances (Barbu 1965: 211).

52 According to Nicolae Barbu, these books had been bought by and included in the library of the National Theatre of Iași in September 1898 (Barbu 1965: 211).

in leading roles, even in *A Doll's House*, the approach remained romantic, that is, actor-based rather than ensemble-based. Finally, even her acting approach suggests that, despite her being a star actress, she considered the integration of her interpretation into the ensemble and did not refuse smaller roles, not even when they did not suit her:

Nu am neglijat niciodată un rol, ori în ce condițiuni l-aș fi jucat. Am avut aceeași grijă și atenție pentru un rol mic sau care nu-mi plăcea, ca și pentru unul mare și frumos. (I have never neglected a role, regardless of the context in which I was performing it. I was as careful with a smaller role or one that I did not like as with a great and beautiful role; my translation.) (ibid: 127)

The direct legacy of Aglae Pruteanu is, however, weaker than in the case of other Ibsen key contributors. She did not teach, in contrast to State Dragomir, and she did not have a degree because she started performing on the National Theatre's stage before finishing her studies. Therefore, her impact upon other generations of actors and the influence of her interpretation of Ibsen was low, in contrast to that of Dragomir. In this respect, her contribution to Ibsen's dissemination is relevant as an isolated, unique case study in the local dissemination of Ibsen.

#### 4.2.1.4 Napoleone Borelli: Ibsen in-between Romanticism and naturalism in Iași

Napoleone Borelli modelled Aglae Pruteanu and State Dragomir's approaches to Ibsen at the turn of the century. The plays of the Norwegian playwright were part of the new repertory policy applied by Borelli through his introduction to the Romanian audience of

o paletă mult mai bogată a stărilor, impulsurilor și îngrădirilor sufletești aduse pe scenă, atât de autorii nordici, cât și de francezi, italieni și chiar de români (a richer spectrum of the states of mind, impulses and spiritual coercions that both Nordic, French, Italian and even Romanian playwrights had previously brought to the stage; my translation.) (ibid: 114)

Borelli was the first manager of the National Theatre in Iași (1896–1903) (*Enciclopedia dello spettacolo*: 2: Bas-Cap 1954: 828) after the reconstruction and re-opening of the theatre and the director of the first Romanian production of *A Doll's House* in 1901. His background in the Italian theatre tradition and the more general connections between the Romanian and the Italian culture, with their common Latin heritage, made Borelli a suitable candidate for the position of manager of the theatre and the more unusual role of its stage director. Borelli enhanced the skills of the Romanian actors by adapting his acting and staging perspectives to the local practice of acting. As Nicolae Barbu states, Borelli focused on “perfecționarea artiștilor ieșeni” (perfecting the artists of Iași; my translation) (Barbu 1965: 112) and influenced a generation of actors<sup>53</sup> responsible for the early promotion of Ibsen on the Romanian stage. Aglae Pruteanu mentioned that he

53 Aglae Pruteanu, Petre Sturdza, State Dragomir, Ion Morțun, Natalia Profir, Verona Cuzinski (Almăjanu) were the most important Romanian actors and Ibsen contributors who collaborated with Borelli.

shaped her approach to Nora when she performed the role for the first time on the Romanian stage in 1901 under his supervision.

Borelli used Ibsen's plays to renew the repertory and to model the Romanian actors' acting, but how did he do this? We know that he performed in *Ghosts* with Alfredo de Sanctis, who brought a *verismo* interpretation of Ibsen to Romania. It is likely that when Borelli came to Romania in 1907, he adopted the same approach. But how inspired by *verismo* was Borelli's Ibsen before 1903, when he entered de Sanctis's ensemble? This question is provoked by the fact that Napoleone Borelli's first and decisive contact with the theatre in Iași was as part of Ernesto Rossi's ensemble in 1895, which suggests his connection with the romantic acting genre. Borelli's experience before his encounter with Alfredo de Sanctis, gained through his participation in Ernesto Rossi's and Giacinta Pezzana's ensembles until 1895, and, finally his contribution as director at the National Theatre of Iași between 1896 and 1903, reveals a complex entanglement of Romanticism and *verismo*.

The tight timeframe of Borelli's activity indicates that his Ibsen perspective was only vaguely inspired by *verismo* before he worked with Alfredo de Sanctis. Instead, his Ibsen recipe was inspired by his participation in Ernesto Rossi's and Giacinta Pezzana's ensembles. This indicates that although he was aware of the *verismo* rendition of Ibsen, his proposal for the actors of Iași differed from Zacconi's extreme acting. Nicolae Barbu confirms Borelli's distant attitude towards *verismo*, and suggests that he promoted another acting perspective:

Ceea ce s-a numit verismul fiziologic, detaliind până la ultimile reacții suferința, exacerbarea violenței, chinurile morții – nu intra în vederile lui Borelli, care nu a încercat niciodată această coardă. (The so-called physiological *verismo*, which showed the details of the suffering, the exacerbated violence and the torments of death, were not part of Borelli's perspective. He had, in fact, never emphasised this style; my translation.) (Barbu 1977: 115–116)

Ioan Massoff confirms this, indicating that Borelli “fără să fie prea robit stilului de interpretare veristă (naturalistă) a marilor actori italieni” (was not enslaved by the *verismo* (naturalist) acting of the great Italian actors too much; my translation) (1978: 562).

With Rossi as the leader of the ensemble with which Borelli arrived in Romania, I argue that the latter was more inclined to romantic rather than *verismo* acting. At the same time, I agree that his experience as part of Pezzana's ensemble ensured him a smooth transition and integration in the *verismo*-based ensemble of Alfredo de Sanctis in 1907. Furthermore, Borelli is more often connected to the romantic Rossi than to the *verismo*-inspired Pezzana. In addition, neither Giacinta Pezzana nor Giovanni Emanuel, who both introduced the *verismo* acting in Italy, were performing in the pathologic, extreme manner of Zacconi. But in order to understand Borelli's view between Romanticism and *verismo*, as well as its consequences upon the staging of Ibsen in Romania at the National Theatre of Iași, we must briefly look at Ernesto Rossi's position in the Italian theatre and at the specificity of his Romantic acting.

Firstly, Ernesto Rossi belonged to the “canonical generation of the *grande attore*, represented by the classic trio Ristori-Rossi-Salvini, all born in the 1820s” (Puppa 2006:



232) and was considered a Romantic actor (Enciclopedia dello spettacolo: 8: Peri-Sio 1961: 1227). Roberto Alonge supports Paolo Puppa's view by adding that "il *grande attore* italiano è in realtà una *santissima trinità*" (the Italian *grande attore* is, in fact, a *Holy Trinity*; my translation) (Alonge 1988: 23). For instance, Rossi, as a Romantic actor, "non conobbe confine, abbandonandosi completamente a ogni parte" (knew no boundaries and abandoned himself to any role; my translation) (Enciclopedia dello spettacolo: 8: Peri-Sio 1961: 1227). Through a complete identification with the role, the Romantic actors aimed at an absolute transfiguration of their artistic personality in an ideal representation of the character on stage, rather than the particular, individual realities of the *verismo* actors:

Il linguaggio del 'grande attore' da almeno mezzo secolo era stato utilizzato per dare una immagine unitaria di sentimenti e passioni, in personaggi aristocratici o popolari, mitici o storici (quasi mai borghesi), incarnazioni tutte di un 'vero' ideale o moltiplicato: le 'donne mondiali' della Ristori, i giganti buoni di Salvini, gl'innamorati passionali di Ernesto Rossi. Alla successiva generazione la drammaturgia verista chiese di passare da un 'vero' ideale a tanti 'veri' particolari. (The language of the '*grande attore*' had been used for almost half a century to create a unitary image of feelings and passions in both aristocratic or popular, mythical or historical (almost never bourgeois) characters which were all embodiments of an ideal or multiplied 'truth': the 'global ladies' of Ristori, the kind giants of Salvini, the passionate lovers of Ernesto Rossi. The *verismo* dramaturgy required the next generation to switch from an ideal 'truth' to so many individual 'truths'; my translation.) (D'Amico 1990: 36)

In this respect, Rossi belonged to that generation of Italian actors who privileged the character, rejecting the primacy of the text. Moreover, the acting followed strict rules, in which the beauty and the balance of the performance were essential:

Sia nella Ristori che in Rossi e Salvini il rapporto con il personaggio, la sua costruzione calibratissima, sono assolutamente centrali. [...] Ma rapporto con il personaggio e non con il testo: con Amleto e non con *Amleto*. (Either for Ristori or for Rossi and Salvini, the relationship with the character and its most calibrated construction are absolutely central. [...] But this applies to the relationship with the character, and not with the text: with Hamlet, and not with *Hamlet*; my translation.) (Alonge 1988: 25)

Based on his experience as an actor in Rossi's ensemble, it seems logical that Borelli brought the Italians' romantic acting to Iași, while focusing on "eliberare din declamatorism și de concentrare a mijloacelor de expresie" (the liberation from declamation and the compression of the acting means; my translation) (Alterescu 1971: 313). Consequently, the first Romanian production of *A Doll's House* in 1901 must have been dominated by a romantic approach, while also making use of *verismo* principles due to Borelli's influence. On the one hand, the romantic perspective is revealed in the prominence of the character, the beauty and the passion tied together in a balanced corporeal rendition in which the musicality of the voice played an essential role, which Borelli applied while working with the ensemble. On the other hand, the use of *verismo* elements emerges, according

to Nicolae Barbu, in the director's focus on "grija armoniei, prin înlăturarea retoricii și a incantației în sine, prin adâncirea psihologică a personajelor" (harmony, the removal of rhetoric and incantation in itself, and in the deeply psychological analysis of the characters; my translation.) (1977: 117) Whereas Barbu does not clarify either the notion of "psychological analysis" or the function of a "director" in Borelli's practice, it is nevertheless clear that no pathological exacerbations revealing the anomalies of the body and of the psyche and pointing at a *verismo* interpretation seem part of the artistic credo he conveyed to the Romanian actors. Borelli's initiative to change the repertory by bringing *verismo* plays in the repertory also required the actors to abandon declamation. In this respect, if he adopted elements from the Italian *verismo* acting, they must have been tempered and subtly included in his acting perspective. Borelli's position in-between Romanticism and *verismo* suggests that the staging of *A Doll's House* of 1901 was also situated somewhere between these traditions.

Given Borelli's influence, we can assume that Aglae Pruteanu adopted a Romantic-to-*verismo* acting in her interpretation of Nora. Nevertheless, she seems to have been more a Romantic heroine than a Romanian, *verismo*-inspired version of Duse. The romantic influence starts already at the training level, as Borelli was working on the individual creativity of the artist to highlight their emotional impulses. This could have been a version of the romantic tradition that removed the universal code of passion present in the declamation technique by replacing it with the individual expression of passion. This contrast between universality and individuality ensured the subtle transition from Romanticism to *verismo* without removing the illusion of reality on stage. Thus, whereas Romanticism was concerned with the representation of an ideal, universal Truth, *verismo* as a species of realism revealed the multiple individual "truths", yet in a synthetic, essentialised form, cleared out of unnecessary details. Finally, Aglae Pruteanu confirms Borelli's romantic perspective inspired by Rossi who regarded the actor's talent as innate. This idea is elaborated in the differentiation that Rossi, Borelli and Pruteanu herself made between "actor" and "artist":

Rossi [...] arriva a distinguere fra *attore* e *artista*: il primo rappresenta la medietà dei lavoratori del palcoscenico; il secondo ne è il prodotto più raffinato e sublimato, una sorta di attore-genio [...]. Ma la pietra di paragone, il terreno su cui si decide lo scarso gerarchico fra l'uno e l'altro, è proprio questa capacità di scomparire perfettamente nel personaggio [...]. C'è anzi in Rossi la malcelata convinzione che si tratti di una qualità innata, quasi il segno di una elezione divina, che non si può 'acquistare mediante lo studio'. (Rossi [...] makes the distinction between *actor* and *artist*: the first one represents the mediocrity among the ones working on stage; the second one represents the most refined and sublimed product, a kind of actor-genius [...]. But the point of comparison, the area in which the hierarchical difference between the one and the other is decided, is precisely this capacity to perfectly disappear in the character [...]. Rossi also has the unconcealed conviction that this is an innate quality, even the sign of being a chosen of the divine. And that this was impossible to achieve through studying; my translation.) (Alonge 1988: 27)

This perspective confirms their powerful sense of belonging to the romantic tradition, illustrating the actor as the incarnation of an ideal image of the absolute artist, simultane-

ously possessed by and possessing beauty and passion in the rendition of the characters embodied on stage.

In this regard, it is not a coincidence that precisely the actors Borelli worked with most – Petre Sturdza, State Dragomir and Aglae Pruteanu – played an essential role in the early reception of Ibsen in Romania. They both promoted his plays on several tours in the country and contributed to the establishment of Ibsen in the Romanian theatres' repertory, asserting the dominant role of the actor in the Romanian reception of Ibsen, remembering up to a certain point the Italian *grande attore/mattatore* tradition. Borelli must be acknowledged as one of those Ibsen contributors who ensured not only his dissemination on the Italian stage, but also his emergence on the Romanian stage.

## 4.2.2 Private Companies Hub. Ion Manolescu and Mărioara Voiculescu

### 4.2.2.1 Introduction

Another pattern in the early Romanian Ibsen productions is related to the activity of actors in the private theatre environment. Ion Manolescu and Mărioara Voiculescu are the two most influential Ibsen contributors active in this context. Institutionally, these two actors ensured the Bulandra Company's dominance among the 10 private theatre companies that staged Ibsen. Their activities reveal how the private theatre companies in Bucharest enriched the Romanian Ibsen production until 1947, despite the dominance of the national theatres.

But what is the story of the Romanian private theatre environment, and what was the actors' status within them? In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Romanian private theatre market was associated with the cheap entertainment provided in cafés, restaurants, hotels, circuses or peasant fairs before the establishment of the national theatres. Even after this shift in theatre culture, the private theatre environment provided a living for actors in the off-season when they were not performing at the national theatres. In addition, the actors participated in private initiatives during the regular theatre season, given that the National Theatre was only scheduling performances for half of the week until 1910.<sup>54</sup> The actors divided their remaining time between rehearsals and tours to neighbouring towns, either as guest actors or as managers of a small troupe. These private initiatives provided them with additional revenue as well as disseminated theatre productions according to their preference across the country.

No real institutionalisation of the private theatre market took place before the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The actors continued to work at the National Theatre institutions during the season and participate in the private theatre environment in the off-season. Once the audience grew, the private theatre market needed a clearer institutional framework, which was eventually acknowledged legally in 1910.

If the model of a National Theatre as the ruling theatre institution of the country suggested stability and confinement, the private theatre company suggested instability

54 "Această societate va dispune pentru reprezentațiunile de trei serî cel puțin pe fie-care săptămână în tot cursul anului." (This society is granted the right to organise evening performances at least three evenings per week for the entire year; my translation) (Lege pentru organizarea și administrarea teatrelor din România 1877: 2314).

and freedom. Yet, Miruna Runcan suggests that the contradiction between private and state theatres was illusory:

Modelului [...] marelui teatru de repertoriu, companiile particulare ale vremii nu-i opun, propriu-zis, un alt model. În spectrul destul de larg al teatrelor particulare (mai toate fiindând în capitală, pe perioade mai lungi sau mai scurte), modelul Naționalului se reflectă ca-ntr-o oglindă concavă, care lățește sau subțiază contururile inițiale. [...] compania privată s-a născut schismatic, ca variantă '*pe cont propriu*' de a face '*teatru mare*', teatru de rang...național. [...]Tradiția aceasta depune involuntar mărturie asupra tipului de schismă care stă la baza aparentei opoziții între Teatrul Național și companiile particulare, între instituția de stat și cea privată. (In fact, the private companies of the period do not propose a model contrary to the one of the 'theatre with a repertory'. The very broad spectrum of the private theatres—which existed mostly in the capital city for longer or shorter periods of time—reflected the model of the National Theatre as a concave mirror does, only growing thicker or thinner with respect to the initial shape. The private company was schismatically born as a version to make 'great theatre' or theatre at a...national level 'on their own'. [...] This tradition involuntarily testifies to the schism that the apparent opposition between the National Theatre and the private companies is based on; my translation.) (Runcan 2003: 29)

The governing characteristics of the private companies enhanced their resemblance to the National Theatre (ibid: 21–35). One of them was the dominant position of the star actors, who assumed the role of both directors and mentors, such as Mărioara Voiculescu, Ion Manolescu, Lucia Sturdza-Bulandra<sup>55</sup> or Tony Bulandra.<sup>56</sup> These actors worked both in the state and private theatres as their Ibsen productions demonstrate. The private companies attempted to stabilise their repertory by staging both aesthetically qualitative and commercial plays, but they faced the same struggles as the National Theatres, despite

55 Lucia Sturdza-Bulandra started her acting career at the National Theatre of Bucharest in 1898, but she had not previously taken acting classes. It was only after she started to perform that she participated in Aristizza Romanescu's courses and assumed Agatha Bârescu and Constantin Nottara as her models, which indicates a Romantic background. Later in her career, she was also influenced by Italian actors such as Eleonora Duse and Ermete Novelli, who employed the *verismo* genre in their acting. The encounter with Alexandru Davila marked not only her transition towards naturalism, but also the beginning of her career in the private theatre environment, first at the Davila Company, then at the Bulandra Company, whose manager, as well as being her husband, was Tony Bulandra. See Sturdza-Bulandra (1956); Alterescu (1973: 412–414).

56 Tony Bulandra followed the same institutional career path as Lucia Sturdza-Bulandra, working first at the National Theatre of Bucharest, then at the Davila Company and, finally, at the Bulandra Company. However, in contrast to his wife, he had solid acting training based on the Romantic acting principles, as student of Constantin Nottara. He was also influenced by the Italian actors using the *verismo* genre and by André Antoine, and his encounter with Alexandru Davila and Paul Gusti eventually led to his definitive turn towards a realist acting style, marked by sobriety, sincerity, elegance and subtlety. Together with Lucia Sturdza-Bulandra, he strengthened the private theatre environment and transformed the Bulandra Company into a pillar of the Romanian theatre history. See Sturdza-Bulandra (1961); Alterescu (1973: 414–415).

their apparent independence from legal constraints. They desired the same prestige as the state theatres as a repository of the National Theatre tradition:

Modelul repertorial al Naționalului, un model încă relativ performativ, din inerție la noi [...], are în interbelic o anumită forță lăuntrică profund conservatoare; termenul conservator trebuie înțeles aici în dubla sa accepțiune: de păstrător de valori general admise și recunoscute de către societate, și de limitativ, obstrucționând noul, diferitul. (The model of the National Theatre's repertory, which was still relatively functional, had a profoundly conservative effect on us in the interwar period, for inertial reasons; the significance of conservative must be understood as having a double meaning here: both in the sense of preserving generally accepted and acknowledged values, and as obstructing the new, the different directions in a limitative manner; my translation.) (ibid: 25)

Alexandru Davila ensured the unofficial breakthrough and institutionalisation of the private theatre environment before its legal recognition 1926 (*Lege pentru organizarea și administrarea teatrelor Naționale și controlul spectacolelor din România* 1926: 3918–3919). In 1909, when his period of management at the National Theatre of Bucharest ended, he founded the Davila Company, which changed the Romanian theatre landscape for good (Vasiliu 1965: 125–157; Massoff 1972: 273–276, 279–289; Alterescu 1971: 69–72). How? Briefly, the company took further the reforms that had been initiated by Davila at the National Theatre of Bucharest with the same group of actors. In other words, younger actors such as Mărioara Voiculescu, Ion Manolescu, Lucia Sturdza-Bulandra, Tony Bulandra decided to leave the National Theatre and develop their acting by organising productions under Davila's supervision. Two of them, Ion Manolescu and Mărioara Voiculescu, became Ibsen key contributors.

Yet the Davila Company did not contribute directly to the emergence of a private theatre company hub in the Romanian Ibsen production. He did not stage Ibsen, neither as manager of the National Theatre of Bucharest, nor as director of his own theatre company. Instead, he still paid tribute to the French boulevard repertory including Scribe, Sardou, Bataille or Bernstein. This might contradict his acting and industrial reforms that had been inspired by André Antoine: the substitution of the romantic declamatory speech with everyday speech, the focus on the ensemble instead of star actors, and finally, a stage design copying the epoch's environment. Davila sought to gradually shift his audience's behaviour and expectations. Instead of radically changing the repertory, he radically changed the actors' renditions of the same plays to which the audiences were accustomed. By changing the shape of the performance and promoting young actors performing in a different way to the previous generation, he sought to prepare the audience for a real change of repertory. When he mixed the French boulevard repertory with more demanding modern plays, he held on to his loyal audience that provided the financial means for his theatre, thus securing the staging of more demanding, even experimental plays.

Since the Davila Company lasted only one year, the mission of preserving its achievements was passed on to its most important actors. In this sense, Davila participated indirectly in the Romanian Ibsen production, through his disciples Mărioara Voiculescu,

Ion Manolescu, Lucia Sturdza-Bulandra, Tony Bulandra, Gheorghe Storin and Maria Giurgea. They established the most powerful private company of the time: it was an association of actors created in 1914, under the abbreviated name “Bulandra” (Sturdza-Bulandra 1956: 59–62; Massoff 1974: 88–93).<sup>57</sup> The two actors in the company who performed Ibsen the most were Ion Manolescu and Mărioara Voiculescu, but they did not work exclusively for Bulandra. Manolescu performed at the state theatre in the brief periods, whereas Mărioara Voiculescu founded her own company. In the latter part of their careers, they both left Bulandra and returned to the National Theatre of Bucharest. However, these two actors created a powerful private theatre environment, and their initiatives encouraged other actors to create companies, particularly in the context of the changing audiences of the interwar period.

Although Davila’s institutional model ignited the Romanian private theatre market at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, his reforms were slow to be absorbed at the production level. Even though romantic declamation was used less often, the star actor approach still dominated on the stage during this epoch, as did the model of the star actor running his or her own company.<sup>58</sup> The Bulandra Company was no exception, despite its aim to provide ensemble-based productions. The status of Ion Manolescu at the Bulandra Company, and of Mărioara Voiculescu within her own company, supported the star’s dominance. The repertory also experienced slow, gradual changes, as the Bulandra Company preserved the same strategy as Davila. For instance, the repertory evolved from being dominated by modern, French boulevard plays to including more diverse plays from the Italian, German, English or Scandinavian repertory.

In this context, we must consider not only the impact of Ibsen upon the acting and staging in the Romanian private theatres, but also their impact upon Ibsen’s presence on the Romanian stage through the interpretative perspectives they applied to his plays. To assess this mutual impact, I will focus on Ion Manolescu and Mărioara Voiculescu, whose contribution within the private theatre environment is also statistically relevant. They collaborated together at the beginning of their career both at the National Theatre of Bucharest, and then at the Davila and Bulandra Company. However, their individual performances reflect different approaches. On the one hand, Ion Manolescu performed Ibsen most at the Bulandra Company as star actor in *Ghosts*, whereas Mărioara Voiculescu performed leading Ibsen roles at her own theatre company in *A Doll’s House* and *Peer Gynt*. Eventually, both actors were also involved in ensemble-based productions at the National

57 The company took the name of Tony Bulandra and his wife, Lucia Sturdza-Bulandra, but constantly amended its name, depending on the actors associated to the enterprise. These various names were: Bulanda Company, Mărioara Voiculescu-Bulandra Company, Bulandra-Manolescu-Storin Company, Bulandra-Maximilian-Storin Company, Bulandra-Maximilian-Storin-Iancovescu Company, Bulandra-Manolescu-Maximilian-Storin Company and Bulandra-Manolescu-Maximilian-Storin-Iancovescu Company (Massoff 1974: 88, 110, 190, 207, 257, 303, 349, 392, 439; Massoff 1976: 25, 93, 154, 211, 289; Massoff 1978: 29; Alterescu 1973: 412).

58 Such examples were the companies and private theatres founded by Maria Ventura (Teatrul Ventura), Maria Filotti (Teatrul din Sărindar), Mărioara Voiculescu (Compania Mărioara Voiculescu), Ion Manolescu (Asociația dramatică “Excelsior”), Elvira Popescu and Ion Iancovescu (Teatrul Mic). See Massoff (1974: 211–221, 439–450); Alterescu (1973: 407–453).

Theatre of Bucharest, with Ion Manolescu as Dr. Rank in *A Doll's House* and Mărioara Voiculescu as Mrs Alving in *Ghosts*.

#### 4.2.2.2 Ion Manolescu and the Bulandra Company

In the following, I discuss the impact of Ion Manolescu's performances in *Ghosts* in the context of his activity at the Bulandra Company. IbsenStage indicates that he was the second most influential Ibsen contributor on the Romanian stage after Petre Sturdza: he was cast in 12 events, 11 of which took place in the period analysed (1914–1932), and one in 1954.<sup>59</sup> He performed in two Ibsen plays, namely *Ghosts* between 1914 and 1927, and *A Doll's House* between 1918 and 1932. In *Ghosts* he performed his most renowned role of Oswald, while in *A Doll's House* he played the secondary role of Dr. Rank. His contribution as both a star actor and as a secondary role actor reveals the tensions between the actor-based and the ensemble-based productions. In his case, the number of ensemble productions (4 events) and actor-based productions (7 events) is almost balanced compared to other Ibsen key actors. This tension between stars and ensembles also points to the tensions between the private and national theatres. Whereas Manolescu performed in *Ghosts* at the private theatre companies Bulandra and Excelsior, he performed in *A Doll's House* at the National Theatre of Bucharest. This indicates that the private theatre companies were grouped around the stars, while the National Theatre was more oriented towards ensemble productions during the interwar period. However, I analyse Manolescu here in light of his impact as an actor at a private theatre on Ibsen's dissemination.

His contribution is tightly connected with the role of the Bulandra Company in promoting a new repertory in which Ibsen was one of the most performed playwrights beside Strindberg, Tolstoy, Oscar Wilde, Pirandello, Shaw, and Maeterlinck. However, plays of the French repertory and of the Italian *verismo* repertory were often staged.<sup>60</sup>

Given that the Bulandra company was born out of the Davila Company, one would expect that it predominantly staged ensemble-based productions displaying naturalist-realist acting and a modern repertory, but it preserved a strong connection with the old French *emploi* system, regularly starring its associates in roles that rarely changed their profiles and challenged their skills. The influence of the star actors of the National Theatre of Bucharest was still strong upon the young actors educated by Davila: Aristizza Romanescu and Constantin Nottara had been both the teachers and the stage partners of Davila's pupils. Mărioara Voiculescu, Tony Bulandra, Lucia Sturdza-Bulandra and Gheorghe Storin all made their debut by appearing with Agatha Bârsescu in her guest performance planned by Alexandru Davila (Berloga 1972: 153–155). For Manolescu, Nottara was his teacher, and although he rejected the master's romantic technique, Manolescu preserved a tight connection with his star actor approach, which is visible in his production of *Ghosts*.

The critics insist that Manolescu was at the core of the *Ghosts* production, surrounded by the rest of the ensemble. Thus, even if Bulandra Company sought to enact Davila's en-

59 The production of 1954 is a Radio-theatre staging of *A Doll's House* at the National Radiophonic Theatre in Bucharest.

60 Lucia Sturdza-Bulandra gives a comprehensive overview of all the plays performed by the Bulandra Company between 1914 and 1937 (1956: 271–280).



semble reforms, the production of *Ghosts* with Manolescu as star actor in the role of Oswald suggests that it only partially succeeded. This is also proved by the performances of Manolescu with *Ghosts* in Iași and Cluj-Napoca, which demonstrate the actor's ownership of the role (Figure 40):

Autorul a încercat din *boală* să facă motiv de artă și încă de artă dramatică. Și se pare că a izbutit. În orice caz el a dat prilej multor actori virtuosi să-și vădească măestria lor și faptul iarăși e sigur că 'Strigoii' nu plac decât în funcție de virtuozii. D-nul *Manolescu* poate fi foarte sigur că e printre aceștia de oarece 'strigoii' d-sale place și-l face deci accesibil spectatorului. (The author tried to transform the *illness* into reason for art and, even more, dramatic art. And it seems that he succeeded. In any case, he offered the opportunity to prove their mastery to many virtuoso artists. Besides, it is a certain thing that *Ghosts* are not received well but depending on these virtuosos. Mr. Manolescu can be very sure that he is among them, because his 'ghost' is pleasant and accessible to the spectator; my translation.) (Sorbul 1922: 1)

The statistics indicate that the Bulandra Company and its associates were the most active promoters of Ibsen, other than the actors at the national theatres. As there is a lack of information concerning all their Ibsen performances, their role may have been even greater than is currently reflected in IbsenStage. The 1916 production of *Ghosts* starring Ion Manolescu as Oswald is said to have been staged for 11 years with the same cast. Further research is needed to confirm the dates and the contributors of the actual performances, but if this is the case, then Bulandra Company may have played a similar, if not a greater role in promoting Ibsen in Romania than the actors of the national theatres. Also, an enrichment of the dataset would strengthen the tensions between the state theatres and the private theatres as Ibsen promoters, by putting them on an equal footing. It could result in a considerable increase in the number of events for at least three other contributors – Tony Bulandra, George Ciprian and Lucia Sturdza-Bulandra, and potentially reveal how the Bulandra Company combined the star actor approach with the ensemble approach. This statistical increase would also generate a stronger network between the actors at the Bulandra Company. Nevertheless, the role of Manolescu would still be of higher importance than that of his colleagues at the Bulandra Company, and any increase in the number of events in IbsenStage would also statistically strengthen Manolescu's position in the landscape as compared to the other key contributors. In the context of a potential statistical increase in the number of events based on new findings, the only contributor withstanding the comparison with the achievements of the Bulandra Company would be Petre Sturdza, who was a temporary member of Bulandra and also performed Ibsen with the company.

When Manolescu performed Oswald, Ibsen's plays were no longer considered a pillar in the process of modernisation of the Romanian stage, but were perceived as classics ready for new interpretations. Ion Manolescu's major contribution to the dissemination of Ibsen in the private theatre environment was to establish Ibsen's *Ghosts* as a major play on the Romanian stage. It also brought to an end the development process regarding the acting of Oswald started by Constantin Nottara in 1896, when the first Romanian performance of *Ghosts* took place. Thus, the coexistence of various, divergent theatre traditions

in interpreting Ibsen, which I analyse later, is confirmed by the playwright's position in an eclectic repertory.

#### 4.2.2.3 Mărioara Voiculescu: *Peer Gynt en travesti*

Mărioara Voiculescu reinforced the private theatres' role in Ibsen's dissemination. She established and managed her own private theatre company, which competed with the Ibsen productions of Bulandra Company and the National Theatre of Bucharest. Her experience with the Davila Company was the background to her initiatives as an actress-manager, and her diary presents an image of an energetic, tenacious and engaging actress-manager, showing generosity, integrity and loyalty.

According to IbsenStage, she participated in five events associated with three plays – *A Doll's House*, *Peer Gynt* and *Ghosts* – between 1922 and 1944<sup>61</sup>. Although less prominent statistically than her colleague and stage partner Ion Manolescu, Mărioara Voiculescu's career has similarities. They both worked at the National Theatre of Bucharest, the Davila Company and at the Bulandra Company in the interwar period. In contrast to Manolescu, Voiculescu preserved her status as a star, with only a subtle concession to the ensemble system at the end of her career.

She began performing at a very young age at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in a period dominated by star actors both on and off-stage:

Este o perioadă de răsfăț a unor vedete, al unor "idoli": marii actori, cu extravagantele și capriciile lor, sînt în centrul vieții publice, sînt încă personajele care dictează în teatru, pe punctul de a ceda pasul regiei și încă nedispuțați de cinematograf. (It is a period when stars, "idols" are spoiled: the great actors, their extravagances and caprices are at the core of the public life. They are still the ones dictating the theatre life, bound to give up in the face of the [newly emergent] directing art, yet still undisputed by the cinematograph; my translation.) (Alterescu 1973: 407)

Mărioara Voiculescu fits perfectly into this context. Her diary and memoirs support the image of a temperamental personality in her private, social and professional life. The roles in her repertoire support this profile regardless of their theatrical genre. Throughout her career she performed Adrienne Lecouvreur, Marguerite Gauthier, Judith, and Messalina:

Judith [...] reprezenta pentru Mărioara Voiculescu un tip preferențial de eroină, în interpretarea cărei intra prioritatea acordată instinctelor, o voluptate a confesiunii, o trecere neașteptată de la ură la patimă, de la înverșunare la înfrângere. (Judith [...] was a heroine very much preferred by Mărioara Voiculescu, as the interpretation prioritised the instincts, the voluptuousness of confession, the unpredictable switch from hate to ardour, from fierceness to defeat; my translation.) (Alterescu 1973: 410)

The *Peer Gynt* staging also framed Mărioara Voiculescu as a "monstre sacré", since "interpretarea d-nei Mărioara Voiculescu a susținut spectacolul" (the interpretation of Mrs

61 Four events register her as actress and one event as director.

Mărioara Voiculescu supported the performance; my translation) (P.Ș. 1924: 1)<sup>62</sup> and “numai în d-sa se rezumă întreaga piesă” (the entire play can be reduced to her presence; my translation) (Froda 1924: 2). In this sense, the industrial organisation within her company remained star-based.

In terms of acting, Mărioara Voiculescu was as influenced by Davila's reforms as Ion Manolescu, moving from Romanticism to naturalism. The fact that Aristizza Romanescu was her teacher at the Conservatoire and that her success on stage was partly due to her remarkable physical posture – “înalță, expresivă în mișcări, cu mușchii feței foarte mobili, elegantă, personal până la exces” (tall, with expressive movements, with very mobile muscles of the face, elegant and with an almost excessively personal style; my translation) (Alterescu 1973: 408) – and to her voice – “caldă, emoționantă, care n-ar avea nevoie de ‘tremolurile declamației’” (warm, emotional, in no need of “declamation tremolos”; my translation) (ibid: 408), betray her romantic background. Yet her acting style changed from declamation to everyday speech under the influence of Davila and Paul Gusti. Finally, romantic, naturalist and realist aspects were recycled and enhanced when she embraced expressionist techniques in her productions. Voiculescu introduced Expressionism to the Romanian stage with plays such as *Salome* by Oscar Wilde, or *Lulu* by Frank Wedekind (Alterescu 1973: 409–410).

Her interest in Ibsen began with *A Doll's House* and *Peer Gynt* in the 1920s. She toured with *A Doll's House* in Iași in 1922 (Figure 41). A gap of nearly 20 years separates these productions from her successful performances in *Ghosts* at the National Theatre of Bucharest during World War Two. Voiculescu refers to her Ibsen performances in the volume *Jurnal. Memorii [Diary. Memoirs]*; her account is frustratingly devoid of details, but the theatre reviews tell us that her Ibsen roles were “dintre marile sale creații” (among her great creations; my translation) (Vasiliu 1995: 185).

Her Ibsen contribution to the private theatre environment was significant as she staged the first Romanian *Peer Gynt* and performed the leading role *en travesti* in 1924–1925. She used her own theatre company as an experimental environment to stage the play on Christmas Eve of 1924: “Unanim s'a recunoscut impresionantul curaj al teatrului 'Mărioara Voiculescu' de a reprezenta *Peer Gynt*.” (The impressive courage of 'Mărioara Voiculescu' Theatre in staging *Peer Gynt* was unanimously acknowledged; my translation) (P.Ș. 1924: 1). She chose to perform a half prose-half versed translation by Emanuel Cerbu (Fagure 1924: 3). The *Peer Gynt* production was designed to promote Voiculescu as a theatre manager, reinforce her position as a leading actress, and define her repertoire policy of producing new approaches to staging and aesthetically significant plays. The critics affirmed that the *Peer Gynt* performance satisfied all three objectives:

62 “Întreaga gamă a temperamentului său a fost utilizată. Nu era o simplă suprapunere de suflète, era o îngemănare. *Peer Gynt* a luat contur de viață, a trăit în înțelegere, în sensibilitatea noastră. Moartea mamei Aas – de o pildă – s'a strecurat în gândurile noastre ca o înduioșare cu rouă de lacrimi. Cuvintele picurau în liniștea atentă a sălii care părea un pocal ce primește o licoare rară. Imaginația interpretării d-nei Mărioara Voiculescu a ținut cumpăna dreaptă eroului plâsmuit de Henrik Ibsen” (P.Ș. 1924: 1).

Dacă *Peer Gynt* e totuși posibil să fie reprezentat pe scena de cinematograf dela Cercul Militar, aceasta se datorește numai și numai d-nei Voiculescu. În adevăr, această extraordinară artistă a concentrat asupra ei, privirile și atențiile încordate ale tuturor. Cadrul era de prisos, putea fi oricum. *Peer* al d-nei Voiculescu, domina realmente totul. (If it was possible for *Peer Gynt* to be performed on the cinema stage at the Military Circle, we owe this only and only to Mrs Voiculescu. Indeed, this extraordinary actress attracted everyone's intense attention. The framework was unnecessary, it could have been in any way. Mrs Voiculescu's *Peer* really dominated everything; my translation.) (Munte 1924: 1)

Even reviewers who were critical of the performance agreed that Mărioara Voiculescu's initiative would be remembered as an important reference point in Romanian theatre history: "Cu toate aceste lipsuri și scăderi reprezentarea lui *Peer Gynt* rămâne o dată în istoria teatrului românesc." (Despite all these shortcoming and drawbacks, the staging of *Peer Gynt* will remain a date [of major importance] in Romanian theatre history; my translation.) (P.Ș. 1924: 1)

Mărioara Voiculescu's expressionist approach to Ibsen was unique among that of her younger and older colleagues at the level of both acting and staging.

In terms of acting, her interpretation of *Peer Gynt* was marked by temperamental outbursts, emotional displays, passionate interpretations, richness of vocal and bodily expression, and sensuality, all of which revealed her romantic background:

De mult n'am mai văzut o atât de formidabilă explozie de energie, ca la d-na Voiculescu în seara premierei. 5 acte lungi, interminabile, jucate cu vervă drăcească, interpretate cu inteligență stilizare, biruite cu napoleonice virtuți. Sglobiu, trist, visător, îngândurat, avântat, desamăgit, orgolios și îndoindu-se de sine, *Peer* al d-nei Voiculescu a trecut prin sbuciumul unei vieți întregi de erou. (It is a long time since I have seen such a formidable explosion of energy as the one Mrs Voiculescu showed in the evening of the premiere. She performed in five long, interminable acts with a devilish verve and intelligent stylisation, and, thus, she overcame them with Napoleonic virtues. Mrs Voiculescu's *Peer* was lively, sad, daydreaming, thoughtful, enthusiast, disappointed, vainglorious and doubtful, thus passing through the torment of an entire life of a hero; my translation.) (Munte 1924: 1)

Nevertheless, the actress employed a naturalist/realist everyday speech instead of declamation, seeking the synthetic representation of human archetypes and essences in her performances. Her interpretation of *Peer Gynt* followed expressionist interpretation principles by highlighting archetypes and symbols, while building a bridge between romantic and expressionist acting, as the critics suggest:

Temperamentul dramatic al interpretei lui Bataille și Bernstein a făcut pe Mărioara Voiculescu să străbată victorioasă fazele tragicei povești a omului căutător de himere, și rolului studiat cu adâncă pricepere psihologică, i-a dat prilejul să se înalțe până la o mare creație. Ceea ce am admirat mai mult în jocul d-nei Voiculescu, pe lângă discreta nuanțare a momentelor, care puteau aluneca spre melodramă, este silința ce și-a dat să joace pe *Gynt* cât mai omenește posibil,

apropiindu-l cât mult de mentalitatea comună a spectatorilor. (The dramatic temperament of Bataille and Bernstein's interpreter made Mărioara Voiculescu go victoriously through the stages of the tragic story of the human being in search of chimeras. And this role, which was analysed with a deep psychological understanding, gave her the opportunity to raise herself to a great creation. But there is one thing I admired even more in the performance of Mrs Voiculescu, beside the discreet and nuanced moments that could slip into melodrama. This thing is the endeavour of performing Gynt as humanly as possible, bringing him as closely as possible to the spectators' common mentality; my translation.) (De Herz 1925: 1)

It is also evident that her approach was tempered by the naturalist-realist influences in her career, which distilled and essentialised the romantic background in the use of everyday speech, simple gestures and flexible movements instead of declamation, broad gestures and rigid poses. Essentially, the actress tailored her romantic, naturalist and realist skills to the expressionist fashion. Her interpretation of Peer Gynt was reminiscent of both the old French boulevard repertory and the newer influences from Wilde and Wedekind. This mixture of acting styles generated not only positive, but also negative remarks for her *Peer Gynt*. Scarlat Froda criticised the interpretation for its romantic acting elements, such as expansive gestures, excessive temperament, pathetic voice and passionate approach. He criticised the actress's lack of identification with Peer Gynt and the lack of depth in revealing the human essence of the character, deeming her incapacity to understand it:

S'a căznit să-și biruie insuficiențele de înțelegere ale textului și lipsa mijloacelor de expresie, cu răcnete, tăvăleli pe dușumele, fandări cu mâinile și cu picioarele. Dar nu mergea. Oricât de omenesc ar fi Peer Gynt, nici o clipă nu am simțit în privirea d-nei Voiculescu ecoul unui suflet chinuit de idealul absolut, nici un moment, modulația vocii d-sale nu s'a insinuat ca o flăcără inspirată printre noi, niciodată nu ne-a transmis fiorul acela al artei adevărate, al talentului mare și biruitor. (She endeavoured to overcome her insufficient understanding of the text and her lack of expressive means by yelling, rolling on the floor, lunging with the hands and with the legs. But it did not work. No matter how human Peer Gynt would have been, I did not once feel the echo of a soul tormented by an absolute ideal in the eyes of Mrs Voiculescu. The modulations of her voice did not infuse us as a flame. She has never conveyed either the thrill of real art or of the great and victorious talent to us; my translation.) (Froda 1924: 2)

The interpretation *en travesti* was also a controversial side of her expressionist approach, pointing at the "festive play" approach to the production. Her disguise as Peer Gynt nourished the expressionist idea of theatre as both illusion and celebration of life. Both praised and criticised, her option was yet most special element of the staging, and highlighted her star actress skills and her versatility, according to Eman. Cerbu:

D-na Mărioara Voiculescu a trecut biruitoare peste ficțiunea travestiului și a isbutit să încarneze plastic și convingător pe Peer Gynt în cele trei faze ale vieții sale: cu o comunicativă sburdălnicie de băiat, în pubertate; cu o masculinitate dură și viguroasă,

în epoca maturității; și cu o oboseală prețioasă în vârsta bătrâneții. (Mrs Mărioara Voiculescu surpassed the fiction of *travesti* victoriously. She managed to embody Peer Gynt suggestively and convincingly during all the three stages of his life: with a boyish, communicative playfulness during the puberty; with a rough and vigorous masculinity during maturity; and with an affected weariness during old age; my translation.) (Cerbu 1925: 36)

Emil D. Fagure supports Cerbu's opinion:

D-na Voiculescu, care în travestitul său are lucruri minunate pentru caracterizarea și înțelegerea figurei lui Peer Gynt – amestec admirabil de naivitate, ambiție, revoltă, farsă și idealism – a făcut totul spre a risipi oboseala acestei retorici și a izbutit în bună parte, cu toată lungimea covârșitoare a rolului. (Mrs Voiculescu possesses wonderful abilities to characterise and understand the image of Peer Gynt in her interpretation *en travesti* – namely, an admirable mix of naivety, ambition, revolt, farce and idealism. Thus, she did everything to make the tiredness of this rhetoric vanish. And she succeeded despite the overwhelming length of the role; my translation.) (Fagure 1924: 3)

The criticism was likewise powerful, dismissing the *travesti* interpretation as an artificial, colourful caricature, failing to give a realist representation of the illusion of life. Eventually, the *travesti* was seen as an obvious reason for the production's failure:

O înscenare interesantă, dar care s'a redus mai mult la o apariție costumată, plină de pitoresc. Fiindcă nu putem lua în serios încercările d-sale. [...] Am avut în schimb impresia unei cazne repetate, a unei munci contrafăcute [...]. Rolurile în *travesti* sunt încercări periculoase. Mai ales când e vorba de Peer Gynt. Lipsea iluzia. (It was an interesting *mise-en-scène*, yet rather reduced to a costumed, picturesque appearance, as we cannot seriously take into consideration her attempts. [...] Instead, we had the impression of a repeated endeavour, of a counterfeited work [...]. The roles *en travesti* are dangerous attempts, especially when Peer Gynt is concerned. The illusion was missing; my translation.) (Froda 1924: 2)

At the staging level, the expressionist approach to *Peer Gynt* closely followed the German model of Reinhardt and the later consecration of the play on the German stage discussed in detail by Jens-Morten Hanssen (2019: 197–227). This is most evident in the painter and scenographer Traian Cornescu's stage design, which created the impression of a mega-production, enhanced by its length of almost six hours. Together with the director Mime Mizu, he staged *Peer Gynt* on the small stage of the newly launched theatre of Mărioara Voiculescu located at Cercul Militar in Bucharest, which was considered inappropriate given the ample spatial requirements for the play: "o scenă cu desăvârșire inadaptabilă pieselor cari cer o desfășurare a numeroaselor tablouri" (a stage completely inadaptable to those plays that require an ample unfolding of numerous scenes; my translation) (De Herz 1925: 1). Yet Traian Cornescu's rich expressionist stage design reduced some of the spatial inconvenience and emphasised the role of the props in creating the atmosphere of the play:

D. Traian Cornescu a dat decorurilor acea îngânarea dintre real și fantast; maniera expresionistă întrebuințată i-a înlesnit cu prisosință să dea cadrul necesar poemului. [...] Pictura de teatru a d-lui Traian Cornescu poate înlesni printr-o strălucită tovarășie cele mai îndrăznețe înfăptuiri. Scena prea mică a fost cu dibăcie iluzoriu amplificată. (Mr. Traian Cornescu depicted the entanglement between reality and fantasy in the stage design; the expressionist manner he used helped him considerably to render the framework that the poem needed. Traian Cornescu's theatre painting can facilitate the most daring initiatives if brilliantly accompanied. The too small stage was skilfully amplified by means of illusion; my translation.) (P.Ș. 1924: 1),<sup>63</sup>

In this respect, the staging had all the characteristics of a “festive play”, with a rich, colourful, opulent stage design, and the orchestra performing Edvard Grieg's *Peer Gynt* added to this atmosphere. The director Mime-Mizu also contributed to the expressionist perspective of the staging, as he “a făcut cele mai fantastice scamatorii, pentru a realiza pe mica scenă a teatrului, mișcările de ansamblu necesare desfășurării feericului poem” (did the most fantastic tricks in order to provide the little stage of the theatre with the necessary dynamic the poem needed; my translation.) (Munte 1924: 1). Overall, the production highlighted the increasing importance of the director and of the stage designer in the interwar period.

The focus on the symbols in the play, the “îngânarea dintre real și fantast” (intertwining of reality and fantasy; my translation) (P.Ș. 1924: 1), the “maniera expresionistă” (expressionist manner; my translation) (ibid: 1), and the “inteligentă stilizare” (intelligent stylisation; my translation) (Munte 1924: 1) of the acting of the staging indicate that the *Peer Gynt* production presented a different Ibsen to the Romanian audience, one inspired by Expressionism. It also strengthened Mărioara Voiculescu's privileged position on the Romanian stage. Yet the mixed critical response resulted in the production's short lifespan in Mărioara Voiculescu's repertoire and rendered it no more than an experimental Ibsen initiative on the Romanian stage. The press releases also indicate a small number of performances at the end of December 1924 and the beginning of January 1925. In the end, *Peer Gynt* was not performed again on the Romanian stage until 1957.

Through *Peer Gynt*, Voiculescu introduced expressionist staging and acting to Romanian theatre, but unlike Wilde and Wedekind, whose plays had not been performed on the Romanian stage, Ibsen was not new. In this respect, Mărioara Voiculescu's initiative confirmed Ibsen's status as a modern classic, just as Manolescu's performances had

63 Further examples: “D. Cornescu ne-a încântat uneori cu decoruri care întrec tot ce s'a făcut până acum la noi” (Mr. Cornescu provided us with an enchanting stage design that surpasses everything ever done here; my translation) (De Herz 1925: 1); “D. Cornescu a făcut picturi minunate, a căutat să ne amăgiască, furându-ne ochiul în unghiuri de suprafață, dar Moara de pânză și carton tremura la respirația noastră, podețul din parcul dela Haegstadt se înfunda în nasul suflerului, iar vaporul ne ispitia să-l pipăim, pentru a ne convinge că e o jucărie din pânză, carton și 2–3 scândurele” (Mr. Cornescu made beautiful paintings, sought to delude us and capture our imagination by means of new surface angles. But the mill made of cloth and cardboard was swinging as we were breathing, the little bridge from the Haegstadt park was sinking so near to the prompter's nose, the boat was too tempting not to be touched to check if it was a toy made of cloth, cardboard and 2–3 small planks; my translation.) (Munte 1924: 1).



done. This is echoed by the actress's touring performance as Nora in Iași in 1922. Staging *Peer Gynt* introduced a new theatrical approach using a canonical playwright. The key question here is whether Ibsen influenced Mărioara Voiculescu's acting in *Peer Gynt*. I do not consider that it did. The roots of her expressionist acting lay more in her contact with Wilde and Wedekind than in her contact with Ibsen. Instead, we witness an expressionist appropriation of Ibsen enhanced by the display of the star actress as the main character. Finally, a further discussion of her interpretative style will be developed within the site of the Mrs Alving character.

### 4.2.3 National Theatre of Bucharest Hub

Although the Romanian Ibsen theatre tradition was dominated by star actors during this early reception period, the ensemble-based productions were not absent. The stagings at the National Theatre of Bucharest prove that the Romanian theatre witnessed the coexistence of actor-based and ensemble-based Ibsen productions. In fact, this institution emerges as one of the hubs in the early Romanian Ibsen tradition, its most important aspect being the collaboration of a group of contributors: Paul Gusty, Agepsina Macri-Eftimiu, George Ciprian, Nicolae Soreanu and Aurel Athansescu. They do not merely perform Ibsen at the same institution; they also participate in the same productions. All these contributors belonged to the National Theatre of Bucharest's network, generating a powerful institutional core with a considerable impact in the Romanian Ibsen production. Statistically, Agepsina Macri as a star actress had the greatest impact, while Paul Gusty was the most influential director in the Romanian Ibsen production. On both a network and a statistical level, the coexistence of the actor-based and the ensemble-based approach at the National Theatre of Bucharest, consecrates the institution as a most important core in the Romanian Ibsen production.

This coexistence was marked by tensions that arose in the transition process from an actor-based to an ensemble-based theatre. Ibsen informed this process, as the ensemble-based approach to his plays shaped the acting and the actor training. In a theatre environment marked by the *emploi system*, an ensemble-based Ibsen production brought together actors cast in both drama and comedy, making them cross the borders of their own genres. In addition, it challenged the actors to switch between drama and comedy in the same role. The key contributors cast in Ibsen productions at the National Theatre of Bucharest experienced all these challenges. Therefore, their encounter with Ibsen resulted in productions marked by interweavings at all levels, eventually leading to his establishment on the national stage.

#### 4.2.3.1 Paul Gusty

The role of the director Paul Gusty is central to any discussion of the emergence of an ensemble-based Ibsen tradition on the Romanian stage. His contribution immediately appears as the most important in the statistics. He directed almost all Ibsen plays staged at the National Theatre of Bucharest. He is registered as director for 13 IbsenStage events, representing eight plays: *Pillars of Society* (1911), *An Enemy of the People* (1912, 1937), *John Gabriel Borkman* (1919), *The Wild Duck* (1920), *A Doll's House* (1921), *Rosmersholm* (1923), *Hedda Gabler* (1923), and *League of Youth* (1932). This is also the greatest number of Ibsen events

associated with any Romanian director to date. In this context, I argue that Gusty was responsible for the successful ensemble-based Ibsen productions in the interwar period. But what characterised his activity and impact upon the Romanian Ibsen production?

On the one hand, Paul Gusty's activity must be considered from the perspective of both the vertical and generational as well as horizontal and prestige mechanisms of cultural transmission. His realist perspective upon the directing art was the result of his equally direct and indirect contact with both Romanian and foreign theatre practitioners. In the Romanian theatre field, this contact was shaped according to a generational axis. This axis indicates Gusty as the witness of almost the entire Romanian national theatre history in the period from the establishment of the National Theatre of Bucharest until communism. The horizontal and prestige axis concerns the foreign – especially French and German – influences that marked Gusty's activity as director. Gusty's contribution in the Romanian Ibsen field must also be addressed from the perspective of the actors' dominant position. Gusty's discrete position as both stage manager and stage director, his contribution to the establishment of the Romanian comedy school and of the ensemble tradition, and his participation in the actors' training were dependent on the primacy of the actor in the Romanian theatre prior to 1947. The overall analysis of Gusty's impact reveals a new facet of the interweaving movements that characterised the early Romanian Ibsen production, casting light upon the National Theatre of Bucharest as an essential hub.

#### 4.2.3.1.1 Gusty, a realist director

The main characteristic of Gusty's profile as director at the National Theatre of Bucharest is that he cultivated realist stagings and promoted realist acting. In the interwar period, this realist perspective became such a tradition trademark that it ended up being considered not just conservative, but also a sign of "academism":

Teatrul Național a fost acuzat nu de puține ori că s-a păstrat vreme îndelungată în academism, în confortul unui convenționalism temperat, în spiritul tradiționalismului care nu depășea exactitatea, copierea fidelă a naturii și nu numai în interpretare, dar și în regie și scenografie. Ceea ce la începutul veacului însemnase ieșire din empiric și patetism, din retoric și din grandilocvență (vezi arta actorilor dicționişti Grigore Manolescu, Aristizza Romanescu, Aristide Demetriade ș.a.) sau arta interpreților psihologi (Aglae Pruteanu, Petre Sturza), intră acum sub optica școlii moderne de interpretare. (The National Theatre was often accused of preserving an academic perspective for a long time, remaining in the comfort zone of a tempered conventionalism that did not go beyond precision, the loyal imitation of nature not only in terms of acting, but also of staging and scenography. If the interpretative art of actors such as Grigore Manolescu, Aristizza Romanescu or Aristide Demetriade, who focused on diction, or the interpretative art of the actors-psychologists, such as Aglae Pruteanu and Petre Studza, reflected the wish to abandon empiricism, pathos and grandiloquence at the beginning of the century, the new interpretation followed the path of the modern interpretative school; my translation.) (Alterescu 1973: 328–329)

Gusty rejected new staging formulas, such as the expressionist approach that younger directors tried to introduce onto the stage of the National Theatre. But what were the roots of his realist, so-called conservative, but influential perspective?

The great impact of Paul Gusty undoubtedly stemmed from his literally life-long experience at the National Theatre of Bucharest, where he worked between 1882 and 1944, from the age of 23 until he was 85 years old. He started by writing the actors' roles by hand in 1882, worked as a prompter, and became stage manager in 1885. His position as a stage manager eventually changed into that of stage director, a position he held until the end of his career in 1944 (Bumbești 1964: 59–61, 74–77, 90–91). Yet he received this title officially only in 1907, at the initiative of Alexandru Davila. This short biography indicates that Paul Gusty experienced the entire process concerning the gradual change of the director's role in the theatre. In fact, at the time Gusty started working at the National Theatre of Bucharest, the stage manager was not even mentioned on the playbill. The stage director was either the actor performing the leading role or the most experienced actor in the theatre, as in the case of Constantin Nottara. However, at the end of Gusty's career, the director was already acknowledged as a key element not just in Romanian theatre, but also in Romanian Ibsen productions. He was considered "neîntrecut în stabilirea atmosferei necesare dramei ibseniane" (unsurpassable in creating the atmosphere necessary in Ibsen's drama; my translation) (De Herz 1928: 3).

Gusty witnessed the entire passage from one generation of actors to another, from the institutional foundation of the National Theatre until the establishment of the Communist regime. He handwrote roles and was prompter in Mihail Pascaly's troupe, (Bumbești 1964: 56–58) and as stage manager supervised productions with actors such as Matei Millo in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (ibid: 63–64). On the other hand, he exerted his influence upon young actors such as Ion Manolescu and Mărioara Voiculescu (ibid: 89), as well as young directors such as Victor Bumbești (ibid: 105–113) and even Soare Z. Soare (ibid: 144), who achieved artistic maturity in the interwar period.

Paul Gusty was a disciple of Alexandre Gatinéau, the very first stage manager of the National Theatre of Bucharest (ibid: 60). He benefitted from collaborating with the romantic star actors Mihail Pascaly and Grigore Manolescu, who were also stage directors (ibid: 123–128). From these two actors, he learned how to work with the cast. He collaborated with I. L. Caragiale (ibid: 66–69) in the theatre season 1888–1889, after staging the very premiere of his most famous play, *The Lost Letter*, in 1884 (ibid: 65, 192–198). The main consequence of his collaboration with Caragiale was the establishment of the Romanian comedy school: "Gusty crescuse o mare școală de comici – 'cea mai bună trupă de comedie europeană, nota Camil Petrescu.'" (Gusty had educated a great school of comic [actors] – "the best European ensemble of comedy" (Petrescu 1962: 309), as Camil Petrescu remarked; my translation) (Bumbești 1964: 13–14). In the long run, Gusty became the director of the comedy productions at the National Theatre of Bucharest. By contrast, the position of stage director for the drama productions at the National Theatre of Bucharest belonged to Constantin Nottara, who also collaborated closely with Gusty, but in this case the latter was just the stage manager. Gusty had no influence upon the dramatic actors until Nottara temporarily left the institution due to his conflict with Alexandru Davila. However, he was renowned for his influence upon the comedy school actors, who abandoned romantic acting and adopted realist acting much earlier than the drama school

actors guided by Nottara. Once Davila empowered Gusty to work with the drama ensemble too, actors such as Ion Manolescu and Mărioara Voiculescu experienced a more radical switch to realist acting. In this respect, the collaboration between Davila and Gusty between 1905 and 1908 fulfilled the long transition to realism in the Romanian theatre, which had started with Caragiale in 1888.

The axis of generational transmission was visible in Gusty's influence upon the generation of directors of the interwar period. In this context, he was considered a conservative director. He supervised the other directors working at the National Theatre of Bucharest, who also staged Ibsen occasionally. Directors such as Soare Z. Soare, Victor Bumbăști, Victor Enescu, and Victor Ion Popa either started their career as disciples of Gusty or benefitted from his guidance at the National Theatre of Bucharest. All the directors experimented with theatrical innovations early in their careers, but eventually (re)turned to Gusty's realist staging manner:

Există în general o tendință de unificare a stilurilor, de integrare în matca largă și încăpătoare a realismului a tuturor formulelor înnoitoare. (There is a general tendency towards the merging of the styles, towards the integration of all the renewing formulas in the larger, comprehensive shape of realism; my translation.) (Alterescu 1973: 274).

Even Soare Z. Soare, whose expressionist approach was his clear trademark, adopted a more tempered approach over time. In this respect, all directors who staged Ibsen either followed Gusty's realist model or shaped their new perspectives based on the realist traditional approach of their older master:

Naționalul beneficiază, așadar, în acești ani de bogata experiență și energia lui Paul Gusty, model activ, învățător al celor vârstnici sau tineri, element ponderator, 'bătrânul'. (Thus, the National Theatre benefits from Paul Gusty's rich experience and energy during these years. 'The old man' was an active model, a master for both the older and the younger, as well as a balancing force; my translation.) (Brădățeanu 1982: 10)

The horizontal axis of cultural transmission reveals Gusty's connections with the foreign theatre environment both before and after 1900, which made him aware of the directing art's evolution internationally. Gusty was a promoter of the German model inspired by Otto Brahm (Bumbăști 1964: 102, 137–140). His background was of German inspiration due to his German family and attendance at German-speaking school. Later on, his knowledge enabled him to translate German plays and localise them for the Romanian audience, thus introducing the German repertory to the national stage. He travelled frequently to Munich and Berlin and was in contact with the new approaches in the German theatre, ranging from Brahm to Reinhardt and Karlheinz Martin (ibid: 141–144). His contact with the German theatre gave him a preference for realist, ensemble-based productions, particularly the realist productions of Brahm, rather than the stylised realist/expressionist productions of Reinhardt (ibid: 10, 141–144), or the purely expressionist/avant-gardist ones of Karlheinz Martin (Manolescu 1962: 200). In terms of acting, he rejected the romantic, declamatory acting despite its being common among actors:

Eu vedeam bine încotro merg lucrurile [...]. Din momentul în care autorii au început să scrie drame din viața de toate zilele, declamația, gestul larg și atitudinea statuară nu mai aveau ce căuta pe scenă. La noi însă toate acestea vin mai încet și ajung mai târziu. Pe scenele noastre se juca încă drama realistă în stilul tragediei. [...] Romanticismul era școala agreată de oficialitate. (I saw clearly where everything was heading. [...] Ever since the moment when playwrights started to write dramas inspired by everyday life, there was no longer space for declamation, broad gesture and grandiose postures on stage. But all of these things come slower and arrive to us later. Realist drama was performed in the tragedy style on our stages. [...] Romanticism was the officially agreed [acting] school; my translation.) (ibid: 202)

Instead, he supported realist acting based on the use of everyday speech:

Mă mai răzbunam când aveam de pus în scenă câte o comedie...Acolo nu mai era loc de declamații și atitudini 'mărețe'. Și apoi Caragiale deschisese drumul încât puteam invoca oricând marea lui autoritate. Când a venit Davila cu metodele lui, am fost cel mai bucuros. Cu prestigiul lui, el putea realiza ceea ce eu nu izbutisem decât într-o măsură redusă. (I could sometimes take revenge when staging comedy...There was no longer place for declamation and 'sumptuous' attitudes. And then Caragiale had opened up this way and I could invoke his great authority at any time. When Davila applied his methods, I was happiest. Because of his prestige, he could manage to do everything I only had managed to a reduced extent; my translation.) (ibid: 203)

Finally, he was one of the few theatre practitioners of the time who knew German (Burnbești 1964: 54–55, 96), in contrast to the majority who mastered French. Finally, Davila<sup>64</sup> strengthened the realist approach of Gusti by adding the influence of the German naturalist-realist model inspired by Otto Brahm to the influence of the French naturalist-realist model of André Antoine (ibid: 131–141).

At the level of Ibsen production, Gusti's success as a director is tied to the period when he staged Ibsen at the National Theatre of Bucharest, starting with *Pillars of Society* in 1911 (ibid: 81). All the Ibsen productions directed by Gusti took place in the period when he was already officially employed as the stage director and he played a major role in the establishment of Ibsen in the repertory of the National Theatre of Bucharest in the interwar period. Over a period of more than 60 years, Gusti witnessed all the transitions in the Romanian interpretation of Ibsen, from Romanticism to *verismo*, naturalism, realism and Expressionism. However, the Ibsen version that Gusti established on the country's preeminent stage mixed realism and Romanticism at the industrial and acting levels alike. But why did not he manage to present an entirely realist Ibsen at the National Theatre of Bucharest?

64 Moreover, Davila and Gusti had both attended the same German-speaking school as children. However, whereas Gusti preserved his inclination towards the German model, Davila became more attached to the French one.

#### 4.2.3.1.2 The primacy of the actor in Gusty's approach

The answer lies in Gusty's focus on the actor. Regardless of the rising status of the director at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Gusty preferred to concentrate on the actor's work, instead of focusing on how the director's contribution might mark the production:

Deși era foarte conștient de însemnătatea misiunii sale de regizor, Paul Gusty a susținut întotdeauna *primatul actorului* față de regizor, punând valoarea spectacolului în jocul acestuia, și tocmai de aceea îi cerea să fie *convins* de ceea ce face, să-și trăiască rolul după propria lui înțelegere, simțind și gândind el însuși viața pe care o exprimă. (Although he was conscious of the significance of his job as director, Paul Gusty has always supported the *actor's primacy* in contrast to that of the director. He sought to promote the idea that the quality of the performance stemmed from the actor's interpretation. Therefore, he asked the actor to be convinced of what he was doing, to live his role based on his own understanding, to feel and think himself the life he enacted [on stage]; my translation.) (ibid: 101)

His perspective was rooted in his experience as a stage manager and prompter; these experiences backstage, where he witnessed the domination of the romantic star actors, taught him that the central element of a production was the actor, not the director. The newer theatrical approaches, with which he was familiar, tended to ignore the actor and privilege the stage design and the technical innovations. His failure to impose a radical change on the Romanian theatre tradition from an actor-based to an ensemble-based system was also due to the minor and largely technical role of the director at the time Gusty started his activity at the National Theatre; but not even his official recognition as director led to a radical change.

His belief in the primacy of actors rather than directors partly explains the slow change in the dominant position of actors in the Romanian theatre. It also points to the growing tensions between actor-based and the ensemble-based production techniques. Gusty supported the latter, as he declared himself:

Problema regizorului constă în însumarea tuturor forțelor izolate, atât ale actorilor cât și ale întregului aparat scenic, într-un organism viu. (The director's concern consists of the gathering of all the isolated forces, of both the actors and the entire technical apparatus, into a living body; my translation.) (ibid: 151)

To add more, he also privileged text-based approaches:

Un regizor cu adevărat conștiincios va respecta întotdeauna textul unui autor consacrat și nu-și va permite fără motive binecuvântate să-l ciunească cu foarfeca sau cu creionul albastru. (A director who is really scrupulous will always respect the text of a consecrated playwright and will not let himself cut it with the scissors or with the blue pencil without blessed reasons; my translation) (ibid: 153)

Yet he did not have the same influence upon drama as comedy actors. The ensemble-based drama productions evolved slowly, and Ibsen stagings preserved a focus on the star actor and were reminiscent of romantic acting. Yet, contact with Gusty in the early

careers of the most important Romanian star actors shaped future Ibsen interpretations and ensured a realist tendency. Gusty's working method was built upon Brahm's technique of working with the actors:

Ce socotim noi că a învățat Paul Gusty de la Otto Brahm? (Sau poate că n-a găsit în metoda acestuia decât o răsfrângere a propriilor sale înclinări.) Mai întâi felul de a lucra cu actorii. [...] Oferind actorilor, de la începutul repetițiilor, o analiză pătrunzătoare a înțelesului piesei și o caracterizare lămurită a personajelor, lăsându-i apoi să se descurce singuri o bucată de vreme, notându-și observațiile și intervenind ulterior cu îndrumările cuvenite, Paul Gusty proceda, *nu întocmai* ca Otto Brahm care lăsa interpreților o libertate cvasi-totală de a-i urma sfaturile – dar după o concepție foarte asemănătoare, întemeiată pe ideea că actorul, nefiind o marionetă cu sfori, ci un om în carne și oase, trebuie să fie el însuși *convins* de justetea jocului său. A doua trăsătură comună ni se pare a fi fost respectul pentru cuvântul rostit în teatru. Nici Paul Gusty n-a dat decorului mai mult decât merită cadrul scenic, menit să creeze ambianța potrivită acțiunii. [...] Paul Gusty s-a bizuit în teatru mai întâi pe jocul actorilor. (What do we consider that Paul Gusty learned from Otto Brahm? (Or he probably just found in his method a mirroring of his own inclinations.) Firstly, it concerns his manner of working with the actors. [...] Already at the beginning of the rehearsals, he offered them a deep analysis of the play's meaning and a clear description of the characters. Then he left them on their own for a while, writing down his observations, and only afterwards stepping in with his proper guidance. Thus, Paul Gusty did not proceed exactly as Otto Brahm, who let the interpreters almost completely free with respect to his advice, but followed a similar approach, based on the idea that the actor is not a marionette with strings, but a human being made of flesh and bones, who must be convinced in himself of the accuracy of his acting. The second common trait seems to us the respect towards the spoken word in theatre. Paul Gusty did not give more [importance] to the stage design either, as its role was only to create an adequate atmosphere for the play. [...] First and foremost, Paul Gusty counted on the actors' way of performing; my translation.) (ibid: 140)

He used realist technique in the training of the actor, dismissing the romantic declamation and employing everyday speech on stage, while cultivating a thorough relationship with the text and a deep understanding of the content of the script:

Paul Gusty se înfățișa *de la cea dintâi repetiție* cu textul îndelung studiat și cu mișcarea scenică bine precizată, ca o imagine fotografică pusă la punct, limpede și fixată definitiv. [...] Paul Gusty dădea toate deslușirile privitoare la personalitatea autorului, la ideile lui, la tema și tendințele piesei, la mediul social și epoca în care se petrece acțiunea, oferind interpreților, ca punct de plecare [...] o analiză completă și adâncă a operei dramatice [...]. (Paul Gusty used to come already at the first rehearsal with the text analysed for a long time and with a very precise perspective upon the stage movements, like a polished, clear and definitively established photography. [...] Paul Gusty was giving all the explanations concerning the playwright's personality, his ideas and the main directions of the play, its social environment and the epoch of the action, offering a complete and deep analysis of the dramatic work as a starting point for the interpreters; my translation.) (ibid: 99–100)



In this respect, Gusty focused on the interaction between the members of the ensemble as he honed their previously acquired skills and their potential for new techniques:

6. În ce privește metoda mea personală, las pe actor la primele repetiții să-și dea drumul, adică îngădui să joace rolul așa cum îl interpretează el, fără intervenția mea. Urmând astfel, caut să descopăr posibilități pe care să le pot folosi pentru punerea mea în scenă. 7. Aceste posibilități sunt uneori așa de puternice, încât pot influența însăși ideea fundamentală a înscenării mele. (6.As far as my personal method is concerned, at the first rehearsals I let the actor express himself, that is I allow him to perform the role as he pleases, without my intervention. Then, I seek to discover those potential [directions] that I can use in my staging. 7.These potential [directions] are so strong at times that they can even influence the fundamental idea of my staging; my translation.) (ibid: 151)

Although this approach led to a slower assimilation of the ensemble system, it provided a solid training for the actors, who acknowledged that they owed their acting development not only to their Conservatoire teachers, but also to Gusty.

His contribution to a Romanian interpretation of Ibsen is subtle, yet extremely powerful: by seeking to evolve an ensemble-based system out of an actor-based system, he altered the actors' way of thinking and working. His productions of *A Doll's House*, *Hedda Gabler*, *John Gabriel Borkman* and *The Lady from the Sea* are somewhere in-between actor-based and ensemble-based performance. They were marked by the strong presence of a star actor, yet surrounded by an ensemble that was gradually gaining more power. Whereas the actor-based approach is rooted in the wish/initiative of a specific actor to stage a play in order to display his/her qualities, the ensemble-based approach – which is Gusty's contribution – lies in the director's choice to cast the best actors in secondary roles. These characteristics are confirmed by many Ibsen stagings at the National Theatre of Bucharest such as *Pillars of Society* (1911), *An Enemy of the People* (1912, 1937), *The Wild Duck* (1920), and *League of Youth* (1932). Some of the participants in these productions were also comic actors, despite the fact that Ibsen's Romanian productions were dominated by drama actors. Gusty understood the importance of the comic element in Ibsen and its potential impact on his audience.

Gusty remained a backstage and largely unacknowledged figure, yet his discrete influence was decisive in the introduction and establishment of Ibsen. It contributed to the emergence and establishment of ensemble-based Ibsen productions on the Romanian stage, without entirely stealing the power away from the star actor in leading roles; and it provided the Romanian audience with realist Ibsen stagings, marked by the German influence of Otto Brahm and the French influence of Antoine, while still reminiscent of the romantic acting tradition.

#### 4.2.3.1.3 Which productions?

Of the productions directed by Gusty, two were particularly successful – the 1920 premiere of *The Wild Duck* and the 1921 premiere of *A Doll's House*. The latter even generated

public debate.<sup>65</sup> The productions were staged many times, across multiple seasons, with roughly the same actors; this led to the establishment of Ibsen as part of the permanent repertory of the National Theatre of Bucharest. I will analyse the impact of Ibsen upon the Romanian theatre until 1947 through these two ensemble-based productions.

The key questions here concern the specificity of these performances and the mix of divergent elements of these productions that ensured their long presence in the repertory, even though the critical reception was not always positive:

Pluralitatea generațiilor, amestecul de moduri de interpretare, tipologia mai variată ca oricând a actorilor, componența eteroclită a trupelor fac ca distribuțiile să nu fie omogene, ca în același spectacol să întâlnim stiluri și concepții de joc felurite, actori care nu se pot adapta repertoriului modern. (The plurality of the generations, the interpretative mix, the actor typology more varied than ever, and the multifarious structure of the ensembles led to heterogeneous casts. [These factors] also caused the encounter with manifold styles and acting perspectives, as well as with actors unable to adapt to the modern repertory in the same performance; my translation.) (Alterescu 1973: 332)

This intercrossing is evident at three levels: at the industrial level, at the training level and at the acting level.

#### 4.2.3.2 Mix of star approach and ensemble approach

At the industrial level, the ensembles were no longer relying on minor actors to play secondary roles, but were casting major actors. This ensured the quality of the performances and minimised the display of the star actor's skills. This is not to say that the star actor was unimportant. Agepsina Macri-Eftimiu's presence in the role of Nora in eight *A Doll's House* IbsenStage events between 1921 and 1932 at the National Theatre of Bucharest provides evidence for this:

*Nora (Casa de păpuși)* [...] ispitește, de câteva decenii, marile tragediane, fiind unul din rolurile de căpetenie feminine [...] căci prezintă o serie de fețe, una mai interesantă decât cealaltă și dă prilej actriței să-și desfășoare, în toată amploarea, sensibilitatea și virtuozitatea dramatică. (For decades, *Nora (A Doll's House)* has been a temptation for the great tragedians, as one of the major feminine roles [...], because it presents a series of facets, one more interesting than the other, and offers the opportunity to the actress to unfold all her sensitivity and dramatic virtuosity to the greatest extent; my translation.) (INT. 1929: 3)

65 The production of *A Doll's House* staged in 1921 stimulated great interest among the Romanian spectators as it applied to their own lives. The debate launched by the newspaper *Rampa*, was entitled "Ce ați face în situația Norei Helmer" (What would you do if you were in the situation of Nora Helmer?; my translation), and it unfolded over a period of almost three weeks between October 21 – November 9, 1921. See "Pentru cititoarele noastre. Ce ați face în situația Norei Helmer" 1921: 4; "Ce ați face în situația Norei. Primele răspunsuri" 1921: 4; "Ce ați face în situația Norei. Nouile răspunsuri primite" 1921a: 4; "Ce ați face în situația Norei. Nouile răspunsuri primite" 1921b: 4; "Ce ați face în situația Norei. Ultimele răspunsuri primite" 1921: 2.

She is the Romanian actress most associated with the role, in spite of the great number of actresses who performed Nora. She also performed the roles of Hedvig in a successful production of *The Wild Duck* in 1920, and Rebecca West in *Rosmersholm* in 1923. From this perspective, the 12 IbsenStage events starring Agepsina Macri-Eftimiu show that her contribution was characterised by stability and continuity. The contrast is especially evident when we compare her contribution as Nora with that of the many actresses who only occasionally performed this role on the Romanian stage.

Macri-Eftimiu's contribution cannot be separated from the ensemble, which included similarly renowned actors. She performed together with George Ciprian, Aristide Demetriade, Ion Manolescu and Nicolae Soreanu both in *A Doll's House* and in *The Wild Duck*. This makes her into a node in the visualisation of the central network of artists, particularly as her colleagues performed both leading and secondary roles in Ibsen plays. They performed both as stars and ensemble players. Aristide Demetriade and Ion Manolescu were renowned for their Ibsen contributions as star actors in the role of Osvald, but these two actors are also known for their renditions in the secondary role of Dr. Rank in *A Doll's House*. Aristide Demetriade also performed Judge Brack in *Hedda Gabler* (1923), and Johan Tønnesen in *Pillars of Society*. The profile of actors such as George Ciprian, Nicolae Soreanu and Aurel Athanasescu is similar to that of Demetriade and Manolescu. In fact, George Ciprian and Nicolae Soreanu were both at the core of the production of *The Wild Duck*, in the roles of Gregers Werle and Hjalmar Ekdal. This explains the equal number of four events in which they appear in leading roles. As for their participation in secondary roles, George Ciprian participated in seven events, as Krogstad in *A Doll's House* (1921, 1929, 1941), as the Troll King in *Peer Gynt* (1924), as Kroll in *Rosmersholm* (1923) and as Jacob Engstrand in *Ghosts* (1916). By contrast, Nicolae Soreanu appears in only three events as secondary character, namely as Jørgen Tesman in *Hedda Gabler* (1923), as Rørhund in *Pillars of Society* (1911) and as Daniel Hejre in *The League of Youth* (1932). Finally, Aurel Athanasescu performed mostly as Torvald in *A Doll's House*. However, he is also registered in secondary roles, as the stranger in *The Lady from the Sea* (1928), as Hilmar Tønnesen in *Pillars of Society* (1911) and as Captain Horster in *An Enemy of the People* (1937). The contributions of all these actors reveal a statistical balance in both leading and secondary roles; they had star status, but equally were part of the emergence of an ensemble-based system.

The ensemble-based productions also involved star actors who only performed secondary roles, but made a statistically consistent contribution to Ibsen productions. Within the list of 238 actors performing in secondary roles, Victor Antonescu, Ana Luca, Ion Crețu, Ion Morțun and Ion Livescu performed in at least five Ibsen events each. The presence of these actors indicates the slow coagulation of ensemble-based Ibsen Romanian production at the National Theatre of Bucharest. The only exception in the list is Ion Crețu, whose presence is tied to Petre Sturdza's tour with *An Enemy of the People* organised in 1907–1908. Otherwise, the contributions of Victor Antonescu, Ana Luca, Ion Morțun and Ion Livescu are tied to those of Agepsina Macri-Eftimiu, George Ciprian, Nicolae Soreanu and Aurel Athanasescu. Together, these actors highlight the role of the National Theatre in the emergence of an ensemble-based Ibsen tradition.

#### 4.2.3.3 Mix of drama and comedy training

The eight actors mentioned above were experienced in performing drama or comedy according to their designated role type within the *emploi* system. The collaboration between actors with different training and profiles is a significant aspect of these Romanian Ibsen ensemble-based productions. This intertwining is important because Ibsen's plays were traditionally associated with the drama schools to which most of the Ibsen actors belonged. Even in the list of eight actors performing either leading or secondary roles, the drama actors have a stronger position than the comedy actors. They assume the leading roles more frequently and are more statistically present, as is the case with Agepsina Macri-Eftimiu and George Ciprian. Surprisingly, the drama actors performing Ibsen leading roles were more often criticised for inappropriate performances, regardless of the acting genres they employed. For instance, Aurel Athanasescu was strongly criticised for his performance as Torvald:

D.A. Athanasescu în Torvald și D-sa afară de rol, pentru motivul că a fost deasupra rolului. D-sa n'a fost suficient de imbecil în această interpretare: ne-a redat un Torvald inteligent și viguros, către care merge toată simpatia noastră, în timp ce eroul lui Ibsen este o mediocritate egoistă și respingătoare. (Mr. Athanasescu as Torvald was outside the role because he was beyond it. He was not imbecile enough in this interpretation: he rendered an intelligent and vigorous Torvald, who gains all our sympathy, whereas Ibsen's hero displays a selfish and abhorrent mediocrity; my translation.) (N.P. 1921: 15)

Interpretarea pe care d.Athanasescu a dat-o lui Helmar a fost anti-artistică și a distonat complet cu întreg ansamblul. D-sa a fost rău distribuit în acest rol. (Mr. Athanasescu's interpretation was non-artistic and was completely out of tune with respect to the entire ensemble. He was badly cast in this role; my translation.) (Bobeș 1929: 2)

D. Athanasescu joacă pe soțul mărginit și măsurat cu expansiuni dâmbovițene, ritmul general al interpretării e cam meridional: ghețurile fiordurilor sufletești se topesc și mai lent, ca cele naturale de pe culmile nordice. (Mr. Athanasescu performs the narrow-minded and reserved husband by providing an expansive interpretation, typical for the people living on Dâmbovița's<sup>66</sup> river bank, and generally impressing a rather southern rhythm to the performance: the ice of the soul's fjords melts even slower, just as the natural fjords on the northern peaks; my translation.) (Fagure 1929: 3)

There are only two actors belonging to the comedy school in the list of the eight key contributors, namely Nicolae Soreanu and Ion Morțun. However, the presence of these comedy school actors in the Romanian Ibsen stagings heightened the comedic elements in the plays. Morțun performed in *The Wild Duck* and in *John Gabriel Borkman*, while Soreanu performed in *The Wild Duck*, *Pillars of Society*, *Hedda Gabler* and *The League of Youth*. Other influential Romanian actors belonging to the comedy school, although less relevant in

66 A geographical reference indicating the southern, that is passionate and intense temperament of the people living in Bucharest, where Dâmbovița is the river dividing the city in two.

the field of Ibsen production, such as Ion Iancu Petrescu<sup>67</sup> and Cazimir Belcot,<sup>68</sup> performed comedy roles in *Ghosts*, *Rosmersholm*, *An Enemy of the People* and *Pillars of Society*. All these actors managed to reveal the subsidiary comedy element in Ibsen's plays, despite the dominant drama approach.

The comedy element appealed to audiences, although the critical reception indicates flaws in the approach of the comic actors. The case of *The Wild Duck*'s reception is especially relevant here. The Romanian premiere of the play in 1920 is one of the Ibsen productions with the greatest impact in the Romanian theatre prior to 1947; it enjoyed tremendous critical reception and financial success. The mix of the drama and comedy acting schools, and the different generations of actors in the cast, makes the *The Wild Duck* production of utmost relevance. Nicolae Soreanu and George Ciprian, the actors playing Hjalmar and Gregers, brought together drama and comedy within the performance. This meeting of two renowned actors with different profiles highlighted the comedy in Ibsen's play through their complementary renditions. The critics noticed it too, even when the comedy approach in Soreanu's rendition was criticised:

D. N.Soreanu ne-a surprins neplăcut. A denaturat personagiul ce i s-a încredințat, Hialmar Ekdal e un suficient, un încrezut în sine, o licheluță care se complăce în viața comodă, așa cum este ea, fără să-și puie vreo întrebare. Un asemenea tip, când apele i se turbură, și minciuna vieții sale e ruptă, așa încât adevărul crud îi apare în față, devine amar, acru, rău. D.Soreanu a făcut din Hialmar o paiață, un manechin pe arcuri: Sare în dreapta, în stânga, întinde mâinile sus, își trage mustățile în jos, dă din umeri. Iar când i se arată adevărul, când i se spune că trăește în mocirlă, atunci devine nervos, epileptic. Nu acesta e veritabilul Hialmar. (Mr. Soreanu surprised us unpleasantly. He deformed the character he was cast in. Hialmar Ekdal is self-sufficient, arrogant, a toady who is complacent with the comfortable life just the way it is, without ever asking himself one single question. When such a man experiences turbid situations, when the lie of his life is unveiled in front of him, he becomes bitter, sour and mean. Mr. Soreanu transformed Hialmar into a harlequin, a mannequin: He jumps to the right and to the left, he stretches his arms up, he pulls his moustache down, he shrugs. And when you show him the truth, when you tell him that he is living in the mud, he becomes angry, epileptic. This is not the real Hialmar; my translation.) (Munte 1928: 1)

Barbu Fundoianu praise for the contribution of Ion Morțun as Old Ekdal in *The Wild Duck* production of 1920 reveals the strong impact of the comedy actors, even when cast in secondary roles: "Și ași mai vrea să spun, dragostea pe care o am pentru arta modestului interpret al lui Ibsen care e Morțun." (And I would also like to express my love for the art of the modest Ibsen interpreter Morțun; my translation.) (Fundoianu 1920: 1)

67 A Romanian comedy actor belonging to the generation of Constantin Nottara, Aristizza Romanescu and Grigore Manolescu. He was renowned for his innate acting talent; he lacked any formal actor training, in contrast to most of his colleagues. See Alterescu (1971: 347–349).

68 A Romanian comedy actor whose technique moved between *verismo* and Expressionism; he admired Ermete Novelli and Max Reinhardt. He was also inspired by the performing techniques of the actors in silent movies. The collaboration with Petre Sturdza in *An Enemy of the People* resulted in Sturdza's analysis of Belcot's performance as Aslaksen. See Alterescu (1971: 380–384).

The contribution of Paul Gusty in this mixed assemblage of the ensemble-based Ibsen production is highly relevant and was also acknowledged by the critics:

O unanimitate desăvârșită a existat însă asupra faptului că marele om de teatru Paul Gusty a reușit să realizeze o armonie minunată a totalității, a atmosferei de ansamblu a acestei piese, care mai presus de orice, este una în care Ibsen pune în conflict caractere și personalități diferite. (We unanimously agreed that the great theatre practitioner Paul Gusty managed to convey the wonderful harmony of the whole, the ensemble atmosphere of this play, which is, after all, a play in which Ibsen insists on the conflict between characters and personalities completely different [from each other]; my translation). (S.L. 1923: 3)

Gusty, as the director of these plays starting in 1911, was responsible for casting the most influential comedy actors in Ibsen's plays. After all, he was not only the promoter of an ensemble-based approach, but also the acknowledged stage director of the comedy productions at the National Theatre of Bucharest. The comedy actors he chose for productions such as *Pillars of Society*, *An Enemy of the People* and *The Wild Duck* were instrumental in establishing Ibsen's place in the at the National Theatre of Bucharest.

#### 4.2.3.4 Mix of acting genres

The ensemble-based Ibsen productions at the National Theatre of Bucharest created a context for encounters between actors from different generations and with different acting backgrounds ranging from Romanticism to realism.

The star actress and the drama actors were more tied to the romantic than the realist acting norms. In this respect, Agepsina Macri-Eftimiu, the interpreter of Nora, Hedvig and Rebecca, provided a rendition of the three characters marked by a mix of romantic and realist techniques. She was renowned for her traditional acting style honed on the Romanticism-inspired repertory. However, drama actors such as George Ciprian, Aurel Athanasescu, Ana Luca, Victor Antonescu and Ion Livescu had at least partially adopted realist acting, mostly under the influence of Alexandru Davila. Yet the romantic background of their actor training was still powerful in their realist acting. Agepsina Macri-Eftimiu did not benefit from Davila's influence as her background in acting was rooted in the romantic tradition since her training took place in Paris (Carandino 1973: 28–30). This led to a mix of romantic and realist acting in the staging of *A Doll's House*: her focus on theatrical affect, the beauty of her appearance, conveying emotion through noble, controlled gestures and by the musicality of the voice, point at a romantic background. Yet, the sobriety, subtlety and simplicity of her appearance at the end of the play indicates a subtle turn to a realist technique.

The comedy actors embraced realist acting due to the influence of Paul Gusty and his constant supervision of the acting. Nicolae Soreanu and Ion Morțun participated not only in *The Wild Duck*, but also in *A Doll's House*, *Pillars of Society*, *An Enemy of the People* or *Hedda Gabler*, and thus reinforced the realist interpretation. Even the comic actors belonging to older generations, such as Ion Iancu Petrescu and Cazimir Belcot, switched more easily from a classic/romantic approach to the realist approach indicated by Gusty.

Their adoption of the Ibsen roles and the overall positive critical reception highlighted the successful combination of comedy and realism in the Romanian Ibsen production.

#### 4.2.4 Conclusions Production Hubs

The three production hubs I analysed reveal different stages in the development of the Romanian Ibsen production across both time and space, revealing numerous intercrossings at both the acting and staging levels.

Firstly, the legacy of Ibsen on the psychological realism school at the National Theatre of Iași is attributable to State Dragomir, Aglae Pruteanu and Napoleone Borelli. Henrik Ibsen's plays were part of these contributors' initiative to modernise the local stage, revealing the National Theatre of Iași as strong an institution as the National Theatre of Bucharest at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Their greatest achievement is visible in the displacement of romantic acting towards an acting modelled on psychological realism and based on sciences such as psychology and physiology, with the production of Ibsen's plays being instrumental in this change. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century this was probably the most significant reform in the Romanian practice of acting after the one imposed by I. L. Caragiale, and ahead of the one enacted by Alexandru Davila. However, because of the reduced geographical spread of their Ibsen performances in Moldavia alone, the influence of these contributors was high at a local level, yet low at a national level. In addition, all of these contributors only worked at the National Theatre of the Iași of all Romanian theatre institutions. Besides, the gradual changes introduced by State Dragomir and Aglae Pruteanu were not echoed in the activity of the next generation of Ibsen key contributors led by Agatha Bârsescu. Consequently, their acting reforms had no further impact, although Ibsen remained a unique presence in the romantic and national repertory performed in Iași until late in the 1930s. Finally, this production "hub" disintegrated once Napoleone Borelli, State Dragomir and Aglae Pruteanu ceased their activity at the National Theatre of Iași. This proves that while the National Theatre of Bucharest and the Bulandra Theatre Company enjoyed the greatest renown in Romanian theatre history, the National Theatre of Iași was arguably a much more significant institution than previously acknowledged.

Secondly, the private companies' initiatives highlight the classicisation of Henrik Ibsen in the Romanian theatre and the impact of the expressionist movement on the Romanian stage. Moreover, the Ibsen activity associated with the Bulandra Company, as the most powerful private theatre institution until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, deserves further investigation. Ibsen's position in the repertoire of both Bulandra and Mărioara Voiculescu, together with a variety of plays ranging from the French boulevard to Expressionism, proves that his plays were no longer seen as an innovation. However, they could be re-interpreted through the newest acting perspectives and stage devices. In other words, the classicisation of Henrik Ibsen offered the private companies the opportunity to explore new acting and staging perspectives in the interwar period.

Thirdly, the Ibsen productions of the National Theatre of Bucharest hub reveal three aspects. It highlighted the increasing power of the director Paul Gusti to ignite an ensemble-based approach and diminish the power of the actor-based approach. Then, it pointed to the stage impact of the comedy element in drama productions. Finally, it re-



vealed the mix of acting styles across the drama and comedy genres, bringing together actors with different backgrounds and from different generations in the same productions. The two most popular productions reveal the development of these aspects in time, as *The Wild Duck* was performed in 1922 and 1928, whereas *A Doll's House* was performed in 1923, 1929, 1930 and 1932 with few changes to the interpreters of the secondary roles. Their presence on the stage of the National Theatre of Bucharest reaffirmed Ibsen's establishment on the Romanian stage. However, the transition towards the Ibsen ensemble-based productions was slow and they only represent a small part of the overall number of events on the Romanian stage. Finally, the ensemble productions still preserved elements specific to star actor productions, highlighting once again the actor's dominant power in early Romanian Ibsen.

## 4.3 Section Two. Character sites

### 4.3.1 Introduction

If the arrangement of research findings in the previous section focused on producing organisations as places where the mixing of theatre aesthetics occurred, in this section I investigate in detail the transmission of interpretative approaches as located within particular plays – in other words, in fictional places. The focus of this section is character as a theatrical site, and my analysis concerns the key contributors whose activity within Romanian Ibsen production revolved around specific roles. This will involve returning to some familiar names as the initial IbsenStage selection of key contributors applies not only to Section One, but also to Section Two.

The first step in identifying the characters that attracted most the Romanian key contributors was to select the most performed Ibsen plays on the national stage, namely *Ghosts*, *A Doll's House* and *An Enemy of the People*. The next step looked at the contributors associated with the leading roles in these works. Finally, the statistical results pointed to three roles – Dr. Stockmann, Oswald, Mrs Alving – and at five actors who interpreted them: Petre Sturdza, Aristide Demetriade, Ion Manolescu, Agatha Bârsescu, and Mărioara Voiculescu. Their contributions in productions of *Ghosts* and *An Enemy of the People* either signify generational transmission or marks the actors' ownership of particular Ibsen roles. The contribution of Agepsina Macri-Eftimiu, the actress who was quantitatively the most influential Nora, cannot be discussed without considering the role of the National Theatre of Bucharest in the emergence of an ensemble tradition. In her case, the play/character hub is interweaved with the National Theatre of Bucharest, and she belongs to the network of actors tied to the Romanian ensemble tradition. For this reason, I considered it appropriate to analyse her contribution within the earlier discussion of the role of the National Theatre of Bucharest in the Romanian Ibsen production.

This section is divided into three parts, analysing: 1. The generational, vertical transmission thread enacted by Aristide Demetriade and Ion Manolescu as Oswald; 2. The prestige, horizontal transmission thread enacted by Agatha Bârsescu and Mărioara Voiculescu as Mrs Alving in *Ghosts*, and 3. The contribution of Petre Sturdza as Dr.