

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

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

2.3 The Italian model

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

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

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

The historian Ion Cârja highlights the importance of the “Italian model” for the Romanian cultural space, especially in the religious and political fields:

Roma a devenit o referință spirituală și eclesiastică importantă, odată cu Unirea românilor din Transilvania cu Biserica Romei și înființarea Bisericii Greco-Catolice [...]. În procesul de formare a celor două națiuni și state naționale moderne, român și italian, a existat un paralelism al momentelor definitorii [...]. Pentru statul român modern, în a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea, s-a vorbit de un ‘model italian’, atât la nivelul acțiunii și al construcției politice interne, cât și în ceea ce privește politica externă și alegerea sistemului de alianțe (Rome became an important spiritual and ecclesiastic reference, once the Union of the Transylvanian Romanians with the Church of Rome took place and the Romanian Greek Catholic Church was born. [...] A parallelism of the essential moments marked the building process of the two Romanian and Italian nations and national modern states [...]. In the case of the Romanian modern state of the second half of the 19th century, the ‘Italian model’ was often invoked, with regard to political action and internal structure, as well as external politics and choice of systems of alliance.) (Cârja: 8)

The presence and influence of a still under-investigated Italian minority in Romania adds to this cultural kinship, as Giulio Vignoli's research on the spread of the Italian minority group across Europe “Gli Italiani dimenticati” [*The forgotten Italians*] (2000) proves. The volume *În căutarea tărâmului promis. Italianii din România* [*In search of the promised land. The Italians of Romania*] does justice to the topic, painting the Romanian cultural space as an attractive destination for Italian immigrants in the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century:

Este mai puțin cunoscut, pentru unii chiar suprinzător, faptul că în trecut spațiul românesc a putut constitui o țintă pentru emigrația italiană. Tânărul stat român, unificat la 1859 și independent din 1878 era, alături de Imperiul Habsburgic (devenit din 1867 Monarhie Austro-Ungară), la începuturile unui proces de modernizare care a necesitat, între altele, aducerea de mâna de lucru specializată pe care italienii o puteau oferi. (It is less well known, and even surprising for some people, that the Romanian cultural space could constitute a target for the Italian emigrants in the past. The young Romanian state, unified in 1859 and independent since 1878, together with the Habsburg Empire (which became the Austro-Hungarian monarchy in 1867), was at the beginning of a process of modernisation. This implied, among other things, the need to bring the specialised workforce the Italians could offer here; my translation) (ibid: 8–9)

Eventually, their presence influenced Romanian culture's modernisation at all levels:

Chiar dacă italienii au fost mereu prezenți în spațiul românesc ca medici, secretari ori ambasadori ai domnilor români din Principate, sau ca zugravi și constructori de biserici și catedrale în Transilvania, ei ajung la noi în număr suficient de mare pentru a putea constitui o comunitate odată cu demararea procesului de modernizare, care a necesitat mâna de lucru specializată, inexistentă pe plan intern. (Although Italians were always present in the Romanian cultural space as doctors, secretaries,

ambassadors of the Romanian princes in the Principalities, or as painters, and church and cathedrals builders in Transylvania, they arrived here in a sufficiently great number to create a community once the process of modernisation required a specialised workforce that did not exist locally; my translation.) (ibid: 11)

This long history of interactions created a strong background for the visit to Romania of Italian theatre practitioners who participated in Ibsen performances both in Italy and Romania, and who eventually enhanced the Italian influence upon the Romanian theatre culture. However, not all renowned Italian contributors performed Ibsen on the Romanian stage. Whereas Ernesto Rossi, Tommaso Salvini, Adelaide Ristori, Eleonora Duse and Ermelio Novelli did not include Ibsen in their repertoire when they toured Romania, actors such as Ermelio Zucconi, Alfredo de Sanctis and Emma Gramatica did. The Italian tradition of performing Ibsen became a model for the Romanian actors and influenced their approach as powerfully as the French tradition.

The analysis of the Italian Ibsen performances on the Romanian stage must start by looking at the impact of the Italian acting system upon the local performance history and Ibsen tradition at the turn of the 20th century. Italian theatre at that time was dominated by the actor. Armando Petrini considers the actor “*il dominus* assoluto della scena” (the absolute *dominus* of the stage; my translation) (Petrini 2018: 272). *Il capocomico*, *il grande attore* and *il mattatore* are more than simple designations of function, they are institutionalised terms defining the evolution of Italian theatre and point to the organisation of theatre life around the theatre company structure led by a *capocomico*. *Il capocomico* chose the repertory and distributed the roles according to a scheme of *ruoli*¹⁷ that remained stable long into the 20th century.¹⁸ The most important actor – *grande attore* or *mattatore* – in the ensemble, was also its manager, and the director/metteur-en-scène.

The structure of the Italian companies was also influenced by the absence of institutions such as a National Theatre and conservatoires. With few exceptions, most of their members “inherited” the “trade” from parents or other relatives, so theatre was a family affair driven by the *figli dell’arte*. This ensured the efficient functioning of the enterprise, compensated for the lack of a state theatre, and mitigated the difficult financial situation of the actors. Since the Italian actors performed more on tour than in a fixed location, they achieved a certain celebrity particularly if their careers stretched beyond Italy.

This institutional structure characterised by the practice of extensive touring and by *il capocomico* is visible in the repertory. The commercial value of the foreign plays gave them a strong position in the repertory and they outnumbered the Italian plays. The repertory was controlled by *il capocomico* not only in terms of selection, but also of interpretation. They decided on the play, the acting style and the mise-en-scène, and the performance highlighted their skills. The dramatic text was a pre-text, a fluid framework arranged according to the commercial interests of the company and the aesthetic aims

¹⁷ *Emploi* in the French system.

¹⁸ “Sappiamo che le compagnie itineranti o di giro avevano i caratteri d’una piccola impresa economica gerarchicamente organizzata e assunta da un capocomico, da cui dipendevano la scelta del repertorio e i modi della sua esecuzione, sulla base di ruoli maggiori (*primo attore/attrice, brillante, caratterista, padre/mare nobile*), minori (*amorosi giovani, seconda donna, generico primario, promiscuo, ingenua, secondo brillante ecc.*) e generici” (Bottino 1999: 13).

of the *grande attore* or *mattatore*. The freedom assumed by *il capocomico* in relationship to the text is mainly visible in its domestication, as it entailed “tagliando, spostando, aggiungendo” (cutting, moving, adding; my translation) (Alonge 1988: 14) without remorse. This relationship developed constantly in the timespan analysed, moving from the actor’s outright control of the dramatic text towards a more balanced approach. The changes in the actor’s status were simultaneous with the rather slow, smooth transition from a romantic to a *verismo* acting in the Italian theatre practice. As a consequence, the actor would dominate the Italian theatre until as late as the 1930s, when the playwright and the director slowly started to gain more power.

In Roberto Alonge’s words, the tensions that characterise the perspective of the “great actors” on the dramatic text reveal a “dualismo dei poteri” (dualism of powers; my translation) (ibid: 210):

Un comportamento sostanzialmente schizofrenico dell’attore italiano, che avverte l’esigenza del mutamento ma lo teme, che aspira al cambiamento ma lo respinge. Oppure arriva – con geniale e forse inconscia lucidità – a *mimare la trasformazione per mostrarne l’impossibilità*. (A substantially schizophrenic behaviour of the Italian actor, who understands that a switch is required, but fears it; who aspires for a change, but rejects it. Or, with a genial and probably unconscious lucidity, he even *mimes the transformation to show its impossibility*; my translation) (ibid: 210)

The historical overview on the status of the actors in the Italian theatre history developed by Armando Petrini is based on the changes that marked their approaches to acting and to the dramatic texts. *Il grande attore*, the actor of *verismo*, *il mattatore* and the “interpreters” are Petrini’s (2018: 286–289) categories and they demonstrate that even though the director and the ensemble practice gained more power in theatre cultures such as the French, the German or the Russian, the star-actor continued to dominate the Italian theatre tradition until late in the first half of the 20th century. The Romanian audience witnessed these changes in the Italian theatre culture through the Ibsen performances that toured from Italy to Europe and the world during this period of transitions, tensions and intersections.

According to the IbsenStage dataset, the Italian Ibsen performance that toured Romania between 1907 and 1940 overlapped spatially in Bucharest. Nevertheless, in contrast to the French model that also highlights the dominant position of the Romanian capital city in the country’s cultural life, the temporal pattern is different. While all French Ibsen performances took place at the turn of the 20th century, the Italian performances cover a larger timespan, revealing three different contexts in Ibsen’s early Romanian reception. For instance, the two stagings of *Ghosts* taking place in 1907, with Alfredo de Sanctis, respectively Ermete Zacconi, highlight a temporal overlapping enhanced also by the French stagings of *A Doll’s House* starring Lugné-Poë and Després that were performed the same year in Bucharest and Craiova. Shortly after, in 1910, Alfredo de Sanctis came back to Bucharest with the touring production of *Ghosts*. The two other Italian performances that appear on the IbsenStage map point at larger temporal gaps. Emma Gramatica performed as Nora in *A Doll’s House* in 1927, whereas Corrado Pavolini directed the only production of *Love’s Comedy* witnessed by the Romanian audience and performed

as late as 1940 by the troupe of *Compagnia dell'Academia di Roma*. What characterises these Italian Ibsen moments? Which traditions did they represent, how were they interrelated, and what was their impact?

2.3.1 A realist overlapping: Ermète Zacconi and Alfredo de Sanctis as Osvald

In 1907, the theatregoers in Bucharest could see both the performance of *Ghosts* starring Ermète Zacconi and the performance of *Ghosts* staged by Alfredo de Sanctis's touring company. Although I discuss them separately, both actors chose a *verismo* acting approach. Roberto Alonge and Armando Petrini categorise them both as *mattatori*. The IbsenStage database indicates that the international impact of Zacconi's performances of *Ghosts* was stronger than that of the local Ibsen performances of Alfredo de Sanctis, in spite of their both sharing a *verismo* aesthetics. Thus, these two performances of *Ghosts* reveal more than a mere spatial and temporal overlapping on the Romanian stage, as they indicate both changes in the Italian practice of acting and their effect upon both Italian and foreign audiences.

2.3.1.1 The Italian intertwining of acting practices

The history of the Italian practice of acting did not have a clear trajectory of definitive changes and fixed borders. The path from Gustavo Modena, to the generation of the *grande attore* represented by Ernesto Rossi, Adelaide Ristori and Tommaso Salvini, followed by Giovanni Emanuel, and culminating with the generation of *il mattatore* embodied by Ermète Zacconi, Ermète Novelli and Eleonora Duse, was marked by a constant to-and-fro movement. The anticipations and re-appropriations of the acting practices of the Italian actors in the second half of the 19th century impacted on the interpretations of Ibsen not just on the Italian stage, but across Europe. For this reason, we need to contextualise the very understanding of *verismo* in relationship with the Romantic practice of acting and with the privileged position of *il grande attore* and *il mattatore* on the Italian stage.¹⁹

We know that both Alfredo de Sanctis and Zacconi focused on Osvald when staging *Ghosts*, displaying a *verismo* interpretation. What is the story behind the *verismo* ingredients they put into their Ibsen interpretations? The classification of Armando Petrini places Alfredo de Sanctis and Ermète Zacconi as both *mattatori* and *verismo* actors because they were disciples of Giovanni Emanuel,²⁰ who initiated the transition from Romanti-

19 Although the phenomenon of the “great actor” (*grande attore*) was not encountered in Italy alone, Italian theatre scholarship highlights the peculiarity of this concept in the Italian domain, which was longer and more strongly dominated by actors than in neighbouring theatre cultures such as the French or the German. For instance, in France and Germany, the end of the 19th century marked the advent of the art of directing, whereas in Italy the real establishment of the director as a prepotent theatre agent happens only towards 1930 (Petrini 2018: 272, 282–284, 290).

20 “d) *L'attore del Verismo*. La quarta generazione comprende gli attori che partecipano del clima artistico e culturale del Verismo, da ciascuno interpretato a proprio modo, e a volte in modi del tutto originali. Sono questi soprattutto i casi di Giovanni Emanuel (1847–1902) e Giacinta Pezzana (1841–1919), artisti che non solo realizzano alcune interpretazioni memorabili [...] ma

cism to *verismo* on the Italian stage.²¹ Emanuel was concerned with a detachment from Romantic acting, which involved tailoring the script to highlight the abilities of the actors instead of adapting to the text's intentions. He sought to return primacy to the dramatic text:

Cerca ovviamente di rinovare rispetto ai moduli recitativi del *grande attore*. Lavora di lima, attenua la dimensione *passionale* del personaggio shakespeariano; si preoccupa di evitare ogni tentazione declamatoria. Ma soprattutto fonda un diverso rapporto con il testo. [...] Emanuel si muove propriamente in un'ottica di piena accettazione della legge dello scrittore. (He is obviously trying to renew the recitative form of the *grande attore*. He is working at polishing, diminishing the *passionate* dimension of the Shakespearian character; he is preoccupied with avoiding any declamatory temptation. But, above everything, he establishes a different relationship with the text. [...] Emanuel is specifically moving towards a view in which the laws of the writer are fully accepted; my translation.) (Alonge 1988: 213)

Despite an apparent openness to the text, Alfredo de Sanctis and Ermete Zacconi still performed according to the logic of *il mattatore* and dominated their productions. In this respect, *il mattatore* was a re-appropriation of the Romantic *grande attore*. The thread of the Romantic acting is thus recognisable in the behaviour of the spectators who

[n]on si aspettano di vedere *Spettri* di Henrik Ibsen [...] ma l'Osvaldo concepito da Ermete Zacconi [...]. Il teatro del grande attore è, in questo senso, un *teatro del personaggio* (were not expecting to see *Ghosts* by Henrik Ibsen [...], but the Osvald created by Ermete Zacconi [...]. In this respect, the theatre of the grande attore is a *theatre of the character*; my translation) (Petrini 2018: 273–274).

Alonge points to the similarities and differences between *il grande attore* and *il mattatore*. These differences concern the attitude towards play, characters and playwright. If the Romantic interpretation of *il grande attore* focused on the character, Alonge warns us that the *verismo* interpretation of *il mattatore* focused on the author's intentions: "Il mattatore interpreta l'autore, e non il personaggio." (The mattatore interprets the author, not the character; my translation.) (1988: 206) Yet Alonge rightly suggests that this apparent change in the Italian actors' respect for the play did not actually mean its acceptance:

Ma quando si dice che l'imporsi della drammaturgia costringe il mattatore a un maggior rispetto dei testi, si indica soltanto l'emergere di una nuova linea di tendenza; non siamo certo alla fedeltà filologica o al modo di rapportarsi tipico del teatro di regia. (But when they say that the empowerment of the dramaturgy is a constraint for the *mattatore* to a greater respect towards the texts, this indicates

riprendono anche un'istanza riformatrice, in specie Giacinta Pezzana [...]. Non a caso si tratta della prima vera guida artistica di Eleonora Duse" (Petrini 2018: 287).

21 "Ma soprattutto ci sono in Emanuel grandi capacità pedagogiche, che fanno di lui un fortunato maestro di attori – da Zacconi a Virgina Reiter, da Alfredo de Sanctis a Ferruccio Garavaglia – che segue nei loro primi passi con generosità, assicurando loro parti di crescente importanza e riservando a se stesso ruoli minori" (Alonge 1988: 216).

only the emergence of a new tendency; we are not exactly at the moment of the philological loyalty or of that relationship typical for the theatre of the directors; my translation) (ibid: 216)

If *il grande attore* focused on his/her acting qualities by performing the character of the play, *il mattatore* did the same, but performed the author, and whereas the actors abandoned the custom of isolating the character from the context the play, they still adapted the roles and plays to their skills, even if this risked distancing themselves from the author's perspective.

The kinship between the *verismo* and the Romantic Italian actors is actually very close, and the shift from one genre to the other entailed more of a polemical debate on subtle differences in acting than a real break in theatrical practice. This is illustrated by Alessandro D'Amico in his example of various death scenes as performed by the Romantic and the *verismo* Italian actors:

Si veda il tema della morte in scena, uno dei do di petto dell'attore verista. Se ne può tracciare un albero genealogico, che dalla morte della Ristori nell' *Elisabeta d'Inghilterra* [...] si dirama verso la lenta agonia di Ernesto Rossi nel *Luigi XI* e verso l'infarto di Salvini nella *Morte civile* [...]. Da Salvini derivò la morte per delirium tremens nell'*Assommoir*, cavallo di battaglia di Emanuel: che a su volta ispirò il finale epilettico di Zacconi negli *Spettri*, poi adattato anche all'*Otello*. (Look at the subject of the death on stage, one of the moments of climax [in the performances] of the *verismo* actor. We can trace a family tree, which ever since the death of Ristori in *Elisabeta d'Inghilterra* [...] branches out towards the slow agony of Ernesto Rossi in *Luigi XI* and towards the heart-attack of Salvini in *Morte civile* [...]. The death by *delirium tremens*, which was the warhorse of Emanuel, derived from Salvini; in turn, Emanuel inspired the epileptic final of Zacconi in *Ghosts*, which was also adapted for *Othello*; my translation.) (D'Amico 1990: 37–38)

In other words, Ibsen's *verismo* interpretation of Ermete Zacconi and Alfredo de Sanctis had more Romantic inflections than imagined, both because of and in spite of the pathological, organic renditions it entailed. The break between Romantic and *verismo* acting was based on the different use of the codes of beauty and passion. On the one hand, the crude renditions of the bodily reactions on stage in the *verismo* acting broke the code of beauty that was essential to Classicism and Romanticism. However, the Italian actors preserved the code of passion in the *verismo* acting, ensuring an essential tie with Romanticism. The passage through these various acting traditions is also revealed in how the Italian actors alternated, re-designed, broke with or re-appropriated these two codes. The issue was essentially connected with the perspective upon the body and its representation on stage. In this respect, the scientific evolution in biology, medicine and psychology influenced the actors' view upon the body as a tool to express passion and beauty. Particularly in a theatre that was so focused on the actor, these scientific discoveries shifted the actors' views on the body as aesthetic tool. Whereas the passionate body remained a common element, for the Italian actor it was the absence or presence of the beautiful body that defined the border between the Romantic and *verismo* acting.

The *verismo* versions of *Ghosts* presented by Alfredo de Sanctis and Ermete Zacconi on the Romanian stage was subtly rooted in the Romantic acting style and supported the actor as the *dominus* of the stage. Roberto Alonge has argued that the realist tradition followed a different path in Italy to its French, German and Russian counterparts, mainly because of the lack of an established tradition supported by a stable theatre institution. He argues that whereas the realist theatre movement across Europe is rooted in the evolution of the directing art as a way of breaking with the actor based tradition, the story of Italian realism – *verismo* – was different. The lack of an Italian national theatre tradition made the Italian *verismo* an experimental phase implemented by actors rather than a change attributable to the emergence of the director.²² The Italian *verismo* served as a connection between older and newer generations of actors, revealing both similarities and distinctions in their acting:

Non è dunque incauto ipotizzare che l'attore italiano, nella sua secolare ricerca intorno alla naturalezza, abbia svolto da Modena fino a Zacconi un discorso ininterrotto, il cui legame con le poetiche classiche, romantica, verista, è assai meno rigido di quanto si possa credere. (It is not incautious to presume that the Italian actor, whose research revolved around the naturalness for centuries, from Modena to Zacconi, developed an uninterrupted discourse. Its connection with the classic, poetic, romantic, *verismo* poetics is even less rigid than one could possibly think; my translation.) (D'Amico 1984: 29)

Finally, the Ibsen interpretations of Alfredo de Sanctis and Ermete Zacconi mirror this evolution of the Italian theatre on the Romanian stage in the temporally overlapping productions of 1907.

2.3.1.2 Ermete Zacconi and the Ibsen “terror”

Ermete Zacconi was an essential agent for Ibsen's worldwide reception. Roberto Alonge depicts both Zacconi and Eleonora Duse as “i vettori della diffusione in Italia dell'ibsenismo” (the vectors of Ibsenism's dissemination in Italy; my translation) (Alonge 1988: XI) and IbsenStage supports this statement. Zacconi is associated with the success of *Ghosts* on the Italian stage, and with the breakthrough of *verismo* in the Italian theatre. IbsenStage data highlights Zacconi's preference for Osvald, a role he started to perform in 1892, and 74 of 96 events register his contribution in this role in local and foreign performances. Undoubtedly, *il mattatore* Zacconi not only introduced Ibsen to Italians, but contributed to the Norwegian playwright's international dissemination.

²² “Non dobbiamo cioè enfatizzare il legame fra il mattatore e la drammaturgia di fine secolo, fra il mattatore e il verismo. Fuori d'Italia il naturalismo è strettamente connesso con le forze teatrali più vive (che sono però i registi, non gli attori): si pensi al Théâtre Libre [...]. Laboratori nei quali si approfondisce un'indagine destinata a gettare le basi del teatro novecentesco, a fondare una moderna estetica del teatro. Ma fuori d'Italia esiste una precisa tradizione attoria da rispettare. I registi si legano al naturalismo perché da quello traggono stimoli teorici che rinforzano la battaglia per la rottura e il cambiamento. In Italia invece l'attore è più libero, non ha il peso di una tradizione, gode quindi in definitiva di una apertura alla sperimentazione linguistica più ampia che sfrutta pienamente. Gli attori, da autentici cavalli di razza, hanno la capacità di presagire sensibilità nuove anziché limitarsi a riflettere quelle dominanti” (Alonge 1988: 207).

Giuliano D'Amico's analysis of Zaconni's *Ghosts* performances in 1892 highlights the actor's interpretative approach as the most astonishing aspect of the play: "Through this 'pathological' rendering he managed to create a theatrical effect that 'mesmerised' the audience and granted him long-lasting success. Nevertheless, Zaconni also had to face criticism for his naturalistic²³ and pathological interpretation of the character" (D'Amico 2013: 132). In addition, Roberto Alonge's remarks on "il contestatissimo Osvaldo di Ermelio Zaconni" (the most contested Osvaldo of Ermelio Zaconni; my translation) (Alonge 1990: 84) indicates the controversies arised in the Italian and European theatre communities alike because of this pathological approach of the role. Ibsen expressed a dislike of Zaconni's interpretation too: "Zaconni recita sotto il mio nome un dramma, Spettri, che non è il dramma mio." (Zaconni uses my name to recite a drama, *Ghosts*, that it is not my drama; my translation.) (Ojetti 1951: 21) Zaconni's Osvald is the most telling example of the use of *verismo* acting in the history of Ibsen at the turn of the 20th century. Alessandro Tinterri portrayed Zaconni as "il cosiddetto mattatore, capace di favorire al massimo grado l'immedesimazione, enfatizzando le sue attitudini istrioniche" (the so-called *mattatore*, able to privilege the identification [with the role] to the largest extent, emphasising his histrionic attitudes; my translation) (1990: 20). In addition, Lucia Re writes that Zaconni:

Esteriorizzava completamente i suoi personaggi [...] e ne faceva degli esseri patologicamente sovraeccitati e esageratamente contorti nei movimenti e nelle espressioni facciali, seguendo la teoria lombrosiana delle passioni delittuose eccessive e deformanti. (He was completely externalising his characters [...] and was making of them human beings that were pathologically overexcited, exaggeratedly twisted in their movements and facial expressions, in accordance with the Lombrosian theory of the criminal, excessive and distorted passions; my translation.) (Re 2002: 133)

Zaconni presented an Osvald to the Romanian audiences that was shaped by this "sintomatologia clinica" (clinical symptomatology; my translation) (Alonge 1990: 88).

According to Alonge, Zaconni further domesticated an already domesticated translation of *Ghosts* by Enrico Polese Santarnechi.²⁴ His re-domesticated version of Polese travelled across Europe, burnishing Ibsen's fame. This "refurnished", "naturalised" Ibsen arrived in Romania. How did the audience react?

23 We notice the confusion of naturalism and *verismo* acting which is rooted, most probably, in the inaccurate overlapping of the literary definition of naturalism with the definition used in the science of acting. This overlapping is relevant indeed to literature, where Italian *verismo* has the same characteristics as French naturalism, but this does not apply to the theatre field. The risk of overlapping these two concepts becomes even greater as *verismo* and naturalist actors performed in both Italian *verismo* and French naturalist dramas. Nevertheless, their views on acting and staging were different. On the one hand, *verismo* was a variant of realism that privileged a pathological interpretation, and hence focused on the representation of the illusion of life in the acting. On the other hand, naturalism focused on presenting a copy of life itself and rejected the representation of the illusion of life in the acting.

24 Giuliano D'Amico provides an extensive analysis of the role played by Icilio and Enrico Polese in the dissemination of Ibsen's plays in Italy and the changes they made within Ibsen's texts so that they fitted the local audience's taste (2013: 95–275).

The Romanian spectators disapproved of Zacconi's interpretation of Ibsen, despite the actor's international reputation. According to M.-Faust Mohr, his performance as Osvald caused confusion among the spectators who left the performance "cu nervii complectamente zdruncinăți" (with completely shaken nerves; my translation) (1937: 119). This applied not only to Ibsen's *Ghosts*, but also to the rest of the plays in his repertoire.²⁵ "Terror" was the keyword summarising the reaction of those who rejected not only Zacconi, but also his pathological *verismo* interpretation:

Zacconi, mare 'tehnician', a zguduit mai mult decât a emoționat, spre deosebire de Novelli, [...] și care, aşa cum s-a spus, 'se străduia să îmbrace cruda realitate în haina frumosului'. Într-un fel, Zacconi a însemnat o decepție: pe când la reprezentările cu Novelli s-a plâns sau s-a râs, la cele cu Zacconi spectatorul mai mult s-a cutremurat. (Zacconi, a great 'technician', managed to shake more than to emotionally move, in contrast to Novelli. [...] It was said that that the latter 'was striving to dress the cruel reality with the garment of beauty.' In a certain sense, Zacconi constituted a disappointment: while Novelli's performances made the spectator either laugh or cry, Zacconi's performances left the same spectator rather shaken; my translation.) (Massoff 1972: 226)

The actor did not come back to Romania, but his influence and that of his *verismo* interpretation did impact on the Romanian practice of acting. His Osvald was a reference point, and it was considered both positively and negatively in the Romanian theatre environment. Petre Sturdza was mainly influenced by the Italian *verismo* and referred not only to Ermete Zacconi, but also to Ermete Novelli and Eleonora Duse as models for his interpretation of Ibsen, as will be further discussed in Part Four of this thesis.

2.3.1.3 Alfredo de Sanctis and his Ibsenian family

Zacconi's *Ghosts* performance overlapped spatially and temporally the performance of Alfredo de Sanctis. Alda de Sanctis Borelli and Napoleone Borelli were also part of the latter's touring ensemble, thus making the tour a family affair, in accordance with the Italian tradition of *figli del arte*. The tours with *Ghosts* taking place in 1907 and 1910 in Bucharest represent their only Romanian tours, and the historians give no information about these productions, merely depicting the troupe as "una dintre cele mai bune trupe de turneu din câte s-au perindat în ultimul timp prin București" (one of the best touring groups that visited Bucharest lately; my translation.) (Alterescu 1971: 85). IbsenStage registers Alfredo de Sanctis's company in 50 Ibsen events over a period of approximately 30 years (1893–1924). *Ghosts* was Alfredo de Sanctis's favourite play, as demonstrated by 21 of the 50 IbsenStage events. He also performed in *Love's Comedy*, *Pillars of Society*, *An Enemy of the People*, *Rosmersholm*, *The Lady from the Sea*, *John Gabriel Borkman* and *When We Dead Awaken*. Yet *Ghosts*, as both the first and the last Ibsen play he performed, survived the longest in the repertoire. The concentration of events is greatest between 1893 and 1910, with the Romanian performances taking place at the end of this touring period in

²⁵ The repertory of Zacconi included plays by Roberto Bracco, Paolo Giacometti, Girolamo Rovetta, and Ivan Turgenev, that is, mainly an Italian repertory.

1907 and 1910. The Romanian tour to Bucharest in 1907 also represented the ensemble's first travel outside Italy (Popescu 2000: 80–82).

Alfredo de Sanctis toured mainly in Italy, therefore the Ibsen performances presented to the Romanian audience had a special status in the company's typical route. This also applies to the performances by Alda Borelli de Sanctis and Napoleone Borelli. The company performed a repertory of mainly Italian and French plays, and sporadically included German and Norwegian (Ibsen) plays.²⁶

Ioan Massoff highlights the *verismo* approach of Alfredo De Sanctis when he acknowledges that the Italian actor provided an extreme interpretation in 1907: "Cu o mască mai puțin mobilă decât a lui Novelli, de Sanctis a impresionat câteodată până la teroare" (With a mask that was less mobile than Novelli's, de Sanctis managed to impress to such an extent that he created an atmosphere of terror; my translation) (Massoff 1972: 190). However, in 1910, barely three years after, the same historian highlights the actor's turn towards a more balanced *verismo* interpretation:

A fost o surpriză: de Sanctis își schimbase stilul de joc, renunțând la exagerări, atât în dramă, cât și în comedie; a jucat nuanțat, cu gesturi puține, redând cu finețe stările sufletești, fără să 'terorizeze' pe spectatori. Verismul actorilor italieni trecea printr-o perioadă de evoluție spre un stil mai uman. (It was a surprise: de Sanctis had changed his acting style, renounced exaggerations in both drama and comedy; he performed nuancedly, with few gestures, and finely embodied states of mind, without 'terrorising' the spectators. The *verismo* of the Italian actors was going through a period of evolution towards a more human style; my translation.) (ibid: 308)

Eventually, Alfredo de Sanctis moved away from the pathological approach of Zaconi marked by an extreme interpretation, and his performance of Ibsen's characters adopted a more balanced aesthetics inspired by realism and its acting techniques.

2.3.2 Emma Gramatica. A *verismo* Nora

The Italian Ibsen story in the Romanian lands experienced a gap from 1910 until 1927 when Emma Gramatica came to Bucharest with a touring performance of *A Doll's House*. Gramatica is registered in 57 IbsenStage events between 1894 and 1930. She performed mostly in *Ghosts* (34 events), while *A Doll's House* is the next most performed Ibsen play in her repertoire (17 events). A look at the IbsenStage map of these events indicates that Emma Gramatica played mainly for the Italian audience, but travelled to perform in the greatest European capitals of the day too.

Armando Petrini labels Emma Gramatica as a *figlia d'arte*, like some of the other Italian actors performing Ibsen in Romania. According to the historian's categorisation, she

26 The repertoire performed in 1907 consisted of plays by Emile Fabre, Paolo Giacometti, Giuseppe Giacosa, André de Lorde and A. Foley, Mélesville, Hermann Sudermann, and Henrik Ibsen, whereas the repertoire of 1910 consisted of plays by Emile Fabre, Giuseppe Giacosa, Carlo Goldoni, André de Lorde and A. Foley, Girolamo Rovetta, Victorien Sardou, Silvio Zambaldi, and Henrik Ibsen (Massoff 1972: 190, 308).

belongs to the actor-interpreters' generation, which came after the epoch of *il mattatore* whose main spokesmen were Zucconi, Novelli and Duse. In Petrini's words, the actor-interpreters

mantengono alcune caratteristiche del grande attore, soprattutto per ciò che riguarda lo stile e il modo di formare e gestire la compagnia, ma che sul piano della recitazione, complice un maggior protagonismo degli scrittori [...], si pongono in modo più stringente il problema dell'interpretazione e della resa scenica del testo che scelgono di recitare. (preserve some characteristics of the *grande attore*, especially those regarding the style and the manner to establish and manage the company. However, at the level of the recitation, the playwrights achieve a major [recognition] as protagonists. [The actors] question in a much more stringent manner the interpretation and the staging of the text they choose to recite; my translation.) (Petrini 2018: 289)

In contrast to *il grande attore*, who interpreted the character, and to *il mattatore*, who interpreted the author through their star performance, the actor-interpreter no longer monopolised the text. Emma Gramatica belongs to this generation of Italian actors who acknowledged the primacy of the text and marked a transition from the generation of Zucconi and Duse. Yet, this is not to say that the actor-interpreters did not experience the tensions between the star-based system and the ensemble-based system, as the production of *A Doll's House* with Gramatica as Nora demonstrates it. This shift is apparent in Gramatica's acting approach marked by a transition from Romanticism towards *verismo* as the actress approached the end of her career. For instance, when she performed in Romania, her acting was characterised by *verismo*. Petrini makes a clear generational distinction between Giovanni Emanuelli, Ermelio Novelli, Ermelio Zucconi and Emma Gramatica, especially because her approach was moderate and imbued with discrete poetic notes compared to the *verismo* approach of the previous generation of Italian actors:

Ha tuttavia lasciato sempre, in ogni genere, il segno di una vivida intelligenza. Notata, agli inizi, per le sue note romantiche, nella maturità si affermò piuttosto nei tratti d'un verismo talvolta crudo, e anche ingrato, ma da cui, almeno nei momenti migliori (*Casa di bambola...*), seppe trarre accenti d'una accurata poesia di caratteri delicatamente intimisti e crepuscolari. (She has a vivid intelligence. She was known, at the beginning, for her Romantic nuances, while at maturity she expressed herself through a sometimes cruel, even wretched *verismo*. From the latter she knew how to extract the accents of an accurate poetry, which was delicately intimate and crepuscular, at least in her best moments (*A Doll's House...*); my translation.) (Encyclopédia dello spettacolo: 5: Fan-Guard 1958: 1555)

IbsenStage places her performance of *A Doll's House* in Romania at the Theatre "Carol cel Mare" ("Eforie") in Bucharest in a tour that the actress organised in 1927, and which had its premiere on March 31 the same year in Budapest. Apart from Ibsen's play, Gramatica

included plays from the Italian, French, German and British repertory²⁷ in her 16 performances in Bucharest (Alterescu 1973: 115). The reception to her tour was generally positive (ibid: 115), and her performances in the Italian and British plays generated the greatest enthusiasm:

Spectacolele ei constituie izbânci, provoacă ovații tumultoase. Se vorbește despre polivalența talentului, despre glasul, despre limbajul ochilor, al mâinilor ei care „flutură neîncetat, la înăltîmea capului, care subliniază cuvântul, puntează fraza, schițează într-un gest de nesfârșită sensibilitate urmarea, acolo unde textul e mut”. (Her performances constitute triumphs and provoke tumultuous ovations. People talk about her polyvalent talent, voice, language of the eyes, hands that “fly ceaselessly at the height of her head, highlighting the word, stressing the phrase, sketching what follows in a speechless text by using a gesture of endless sensitivity”; my translation). (ibid: 115)

From this review, we can surmise the spectators' positive reception of her balanced *verismo* acting. However, her approach of Ibsen was criticised. For instance, Scarlat Froda's evaluation was largely negative. Her age was his strongest reason for criticism and he contrasted Gramatica's performance as Nora with her previous attempt at the role 15–20 years earlier:

A fost o categorică desmințire a tuturor iluziilor noastre. Nu se poate spune că Emma Gramatica nu e bine în rol. Ce e grav e că rolul n'o mai cuprinde. Vedeți cât e de mare tragedia actorului. [...] Desigur că dacă tu spectator, posezi atâtă putere de autosugestie încât să vrei să-ți închipui cum trebuie să fi fost Emma Gramatia acum douăzeci de ani în acest rol, o vei găsi extraordinară. Pentru ceea ce e însă azi, nu poți rămâne decât decepționat. (It thoroughly shattered all our illusions. One cannot say that Emma Gramatica was not optimal in the role. But what is grave indeed is that the role does not fit her anymore. You can see how terrible the actor's tragedy is. [...] Of course, if you, as a spectator, possessed such a power of visualisation to imagine how Emma Gramatica must have been in this role twenty years ago, you would find her extraordinary. As for her current expression, you cannot be but disappointed; my translation.) (Froda 1927: 4)

Gramatica performed Nora for almost 30 years, by the time she came to Romania in 1927 she was already 53 years old. Froda claimed that although Gramatica's depiction of Nora was correct from a psychological point of view, she was, however, not physically fit for a plausible interpretation of the role anymore:

E foarte just acest punct de vedere artistic pe care Emma Gramatica îl îmbrățișează, și noi îl aplaudăm. Numai că pentru redarea lui, artista nu mai are mijloace, sau chiar dacă le are n'o mai prind. Toate acele ‘minauderii’, cochetării, expansiuni și răsfățuri, n'o prind cum nu mai pot prinde nici un om de la o anumită vîrstă în sus. Sânt stridente și enervează. [...] Oricât de mare bunăvoiță am avea, nu mai putem

27 The most renowned of them were *Magda* (Hermann Sudermann), as well as *La dame aux Camélias* (Alexandre Dumas-fils) (Massoff 1976: 170).

aplauda scena tarentelli și nici un fel de moment de calinerie după cum tot în jurul Emmei Gramatica ne-a impresionat, în schimb, în scenele de dramă, în care vârsta nu contează [...]. (The point of view embraced by Emma Gramatica is very just, and we applaud it. But the actress does not have the means to convey it anymore or, if she has them, they no longer fit her. All those “minauderies” [demureness], coquetties, expansive gestures and fondling are just as unsuitable for her as for any other person that has reached a certain age. They are ostentatious and annoying. No matter how much indulgence we might have, we cannot applaud either the Tarrantella scene or any other endearment anymore. At the same time, Emma Gramatica’s acting skills in the scenes in which age does not matter are impressive; my translation.) (ibid: 4)

Froda also criticised her superficial acting in the final act and the ensemble’s lack of balance:

Acolo unde însă și concepția rolului ne-a apărut deformată e ultimul act în scena explicației. E problema însăși a piesei și tocmai aici, Nora n-a apărut nici convinsă de marea decizie pe care o ia părăsindu-și soțul și copiii, nici halucinată de un ideal social, nici condusă de o convingere a drepturilor pe care le apără prin gestul ei. A jucat complet indecis și a plecat ca și cum s-ar fi supărat pe bărbatul ei. Sa redus astfel întreaga piesă la un caz personal, deplasându-se opera din rangul de ideea pe care-l ocupă. A contribuit la această impresie și ansamblul submediocru [...]. (But the moment when even the conceptual approach to the role seemed distorted was the scene of the debate in the final act. [The scene] encompasses the very essence of the play and it is precisely here that Nora seems neither convinced of the great decision she had taken to leave her husband and children, hallucinated by a social ideal, nor by the conviction of the rights she was protecting through Emma’s gesture. She acted in a completely irresolute manner and left as if she was annoyed because of her husband. Thus, the whole play was reduced to an individual case, displacing the play from the conceptual level it represented. The sub-mediocre ensemble contributed to this impression; my translation.) (ibid: 4)

The end of the review presents a critical judgement of the relationship between Romanian theatre and the foreign models filtered through Gramatica’s performance:

Nu trebuie ca dintr-un spirit de imitație sau copleșită de o sugestie colectivă să aplaudăm pe un artist oricât de mare ar fi – și d-na Emma Gramatica e desigur una dintre cele mai mari – în toate rolurile pe care le joacă. (One is not supposed to applaud an artist, no matter how great – and Mrs Emma Gramatica is certainly one of the greatest –, while succumbing to the spirit of imitation or collective suggestion; my translation.) (ibid: 4)

Froda suggests that the audience shared his negative reaction to Gramatica’s performance in *A Doll’s House*, despite approving of her mild *verismo* interpretation, and he criticises the uncritical appropriation of major foreign theatre traditions by Romanian theatre.

2.3.3 A 1940's *Love's Comedy*. Corrado Pavolini

The staging of *Love's Comedy* in 1940 was not only the last performance in Italian in Romania, but also the only performance of *Love's Comedy* on the local stage. Despite the scarce information about this production, its presence in Romania suggests that it was a consequence of the political context of World War Two. *Love's Comedy* was a touring production that arrived on Romanian territory in December 1940 (Enciclopedia dello spettacolo: 6: Guarini-Mak 1959: TAV.LXIV), approximately two months after Romania joined World War Two on the side of the Axis Powers. As Italy was part of the Axis, the two countries strengthened their cultural contacts. This cultural policy had started before the war and was managed by the Italian Cultural Institutes in Romania.²⁸ The performances of 1940, including *Love's Comedy*, were part of the cultural exchanges between Romania and Italy that were imposed by the war. In addition, the production was organised by *Compagnia dell'Accademia di Roma* and directed by Corrado Pavolini. He was the brother of Alessandro Pavolini, renowned for his activity in the fascist government, especially as Secretary of the Republican Fascist Party (Pavolini, Alessandro, n.d.; Pavolini, Corrado, n.d.). In fact, both brothers were proponents of fascism. Their cultural interests revolved around journalism, literature and literary criticism, and, in the case of Corrado, also around theatre. This explains his presence in Romania and the staging of Ibsen's *Love's Comedy*.²⁹

Apart from its political significance, the production also demonstrated the movement of Italian theatre culture towards an ensemble system led by a director. Gramatica had anticipated this tendency, but in *Love's Comedy* its fulfilment was visible with the entire ensemble performing in the production. The play has never been performed again on the Romanian stage.

2.3.4 Final remarks

The Italian Ibsen tours between 1907 and 1940 demonstrate the dominance of star actors and *verismo* acting. Ermete Zacconi, Alfredo de Sanctis and Emma Gramatica reflect the nuanced evolution from a star system to an ensemble-based system through their Ibsen performances. They also illustrate a history of the Italian practice of acting marked by fluid transitions from one generation of actors to the other. Instead of revealing contradictions, the debates regarding the evolution of the Italian practice of acting, from classic to romantic and then to *verismo*, highlight numerous meeting points, with subtle differences allowing for smooth transitions. Eventually, the passage from one acting genre to another was intertwined with the passage from a theatre dominated by actors – *il grande attore, il mattatore* – to a theatre that acknowledges the primacy of the dramatic text.

28 For example, the renowned theatre historian Silvio D'Amico held a lecture about the contemporary Italian theatre in Bucharest in 1934. Later on, between March 21–23, 1939, the Studio of the National Theatre of Bucharest hosted three performances of *Compagnia del teatro di Venezia*, managed by Alberto Colantuani (Massoff 1978:202–203, 389–391).

29 Their repertory also included other four Italian and one American play. Ioan Massoff indicates that the other playwrights performed by the Italian ensemble were Carlo Goldoni, Carlo Gozzi, Luigi Pirandello and Thornton Wilder, beside an adaptation done by Silvio D'Amico (Massoff 1981: 48).

Although the Italian actor's Ibsen of *verismo* inspiration was rejected by the local audience, the *verismo* interpretation techniques became a reference point for Petre Sturdza, who was to become the most important Romanian Ibsen contributor. Thus, although the short-term impact of the Italian tours reveals a low power of influence, the long-term influence was undoubtedly strong. From this perspective, the Italian tours changed the Romanian actors' way of performing Ibsen at the beginning of the 20th century.

2.4 The German model

A considerable number of German actors and ensembles from Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire performed Ibsen between 1884 and 1924 during their tours within what is today's Romania's border (Figure 11). These external influences affecting Ibsen's early staging in Romania make the foreign intercrossings of theatrical influence even more complex as the number of German-speaking Ibsen productions was higher than that of both the French and Italian performances. As these tours displayed the activity of numerous theatre agents, they entailed a high degree of heterogeneity.

How does the German landscape of 35 Ibsen events look like on the Romanian map? The first observation is that there is no visible pattern. However, the German tours organised by Das Ibsen-Theater aus Berlin, performing in Bucharest, Iași and Sibiu, are the most numerous. Sporadic productions from Deutsches Theater starring Agnes Sorma, Deutsches Theater der Modernen, and Alexander Moissi's ensemble add heterogeneity, whereas productions from the German ensemble that performed in tandem with the Romanian ensemble at the National Theatre of Bucharest during the German occupation of the capital city in World War One (Massoff 1974: 137–141, 152–166)³⁰ complete this uneven landscape.

To understand the impact that the German tradition of staging Ibsen had on the Romanian theatre, it is paramount to look at the Romanian-German cultural interaction. According to Keith Hitchins, the Romanian culture was strongly marked by the German "model of development". Factors such as the power exerted by the Habsburg/Austro-Hungarian Empire at all societal levels in Transylvania, the existence of a Saxon minority group in Sibiu, and the presence of the occupying German army in Bucharest during World War One opened for ceaseless cultural contact.

However, in contrast to the French or Italian models, the Romanian theatre experienced the German model in a much more discrete manner, with Paul Gusty, stage manager and then director at the National Theatre of Bucharest, as its subtle promoter. Romanian actors were also influenced by their German counterparts. One example is Aris-tizza Romanescu, who took inspiration from Adèle Sandrock's interpretation of Rebekka West for her approach of the same role in the Romanian premiere of *Rosmersholm* in 1895 (Romanescu 1960: 124). In the 1920s, the German elements gained even more power in the

³⁰ The performance in German of *Peer Gynt* provided by a local ensemble in Timișoara in 1940 complicates the German story even more by bringing the German ethnic group into the already complex landscape. However, after 1940, no Ibsen play was presented in German on a Romanian stage until 1960.