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**SPREAD AND RECEPTION OF IBSEN'S WORK
IN ITALY: CAPUANA, SLATAPER AND
PIRANDELLO.
WITH AN APPENDIX ABOUT IBSEN IN THE
UNITED STATES.**

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Index:

Introduction

1. Spread of Ibsen's works in Italy

- 1.1 Three reasons of the introduction of Ibsen in Italy
- 1.2 The domestication of Ibsen
- 1.3 Chronological overview of the introduction of Ibsen's works in Italy
 - 1.3.1 The early presence of Ibsen in Italian texts and the first representation of *A Doll's House*
 - 1.3.2 The second Italian representation of *A Doll's House*
 - 1.3.3 Focus on Eleonora Duse
- 1.4 Ibsen in Trieste

2. Luigi Capuana and Scipio Slataper

- 2.1 Luigi Capuana
 - 2.1.1 History of Capuana's approach to Ibsen
 - 2.1.2 Consideration around Capuana's translation
 - 2.1.3 Critical writings concerning Ibsen
- 2.2 Scipio Slataper
 - 2.2.1 Slataper's *Ibsen* through his articles and his correspondence
 - 2.2.2 *Ibsen*

3. Luigi Pirandello

- 3.1 Ibsen and Pirandello
- 3.2 *Suo marito and A Doll's House*
- 3.3 *When We Dead Awaken* and *Diana e la Tuda*: two similar dramas
- 3.4 A Comparison Between two *Femme Fatale*

Appendix. Ibsen in the United States

1. Eugene O'Neill

1.1 Ibsen or Strindberg?

1.2 A comparison between *Anna Christie* and *The Lady From the Sea*

1.3 *Ah, Wilderness!*

2. Thornton Wilder

2.1 *A Doll's House*, an Adaptation by Thornton Wilder

2.1.1 An Overview on *A Doll's House* By Wilder: the Reasons of The New Version

2.1.2 A Comparison Between the Original Script and Wilder's Version

2.1.4 Analysis of the Stage Directions

2.1.3 Some Considerations About the Language

2.2 *Our Town*

2.2.1 Substantial Differences Between Ibsen and Wilder's Poetic

2.2.2 The Institution of Marriage in *Our Town* and *A Doll's House*

Bibliography

Introduction

The first chapter of the thesis focuses on the reception of Ibsen's works, in particular *A Doll's House*, in Italy. The play went through the process, called "domestication," in Italy, Ibsen's characters were reshaped to line up with traditional theatrical roles, and his works were shortened and altered to be more relatable and understandable. Concerning the critics that followed the performances of *A Doll's House*, they were half critical and half admiring. Some article criticised the play's unrealistic ending and its disconnect from Mediterranean cultural norms, where a mother would never leave her children. The second performance on February 9, 1891, featuring the renowned actress Eleonora Duse, attracted significant attention due to Ibsen's rising fame and Duse's celebrated career. Reviews were mixed, with praise for Duse's performance but continued scepticism about the play's ending. Despite initial resistance, Ibsen's work gradually gained recognition in Italy, highlighted by a significant essay in *Nuova Antologia* and further performances of his other plays later in the year.

Paolo Quazzolo's monograph *Trieste e il caso Ibsen* examines the unique reception of Ibsen's plays in Trieste, highlighting the audience's initial confusion and mixed reactions. Reviews indicate the public's nervous curiosity and divided opinions, especially regarding the lack of a happy ending. Intellectuals recognized Ibsen's innovative departure from traditional theatre, while common audiences struggled with his themes.

Luigi Capuana was one of the first Italian supporters of Ibsen and he produced the first translation of *A Doll's House*. Despite his reservations, Capuana adhered to Ibsen's insistence on maintaining the original ending, fearing that changing it would lead to a financial and critical failure. His translation closely followed Maurice Prozor's French version, reflecting a relatively faithful rendition of the original play. Capuana's engagement with Ibsen extended beyond

translation to literary criticism. In his essays, he analyzed Ibsen's works within the broader context of European literature.

Scipio Slataper realized the value of Ibsen's work as well. The core of his study on Ibsen materialized in his thesis for the Literature degree at the University of Florence which was later extended and published after his death. In *Ibsen*, Slataper sought to present a comprehensive portrait of Ibsen's intellectual and artistic evolution, intertwining biography, play analysis, and historical context. This approach was pioneering in collocating Ibsen within his socio-political milieu, highlighting the tension between the individual and society, a central theme in both Ibsen's and Slataper's works.

Luigi Pirandello's relationship with Henrik Ibsen stands out because, unlike many the other intellectuals mentioned in this thesis, he was not explicitly influenced by Ibsen's works. Despite this, both authors explored similar themes, such as the psychology of women and societal roles. Scholars have noted parallels between their works, including the portrayal of complex female characters and the critique of societal norms. Key examples include the thematic connections between Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and Pirandello's *Suo marito*. In particular, the two works focus on female characters who take distance from family and what is generally associated to femininity. Silva and Nora are women who perform professions or activities that were generally associated to males and, both the women end up abandoning their husbands and children.

In *When We Dead Awaken* by Henrik Ibsen and *Diana e la Tuda* by Luigi Pirandello, the protagonists are sculptors who are extraneous to life: Rubek regrets spending his time trying to portray life, instead of living it; Sirio, coherently with Pirandello's view of art, is extremely detached. Both authors suggest that the act of creating art can distance artists from truly living. In their turn, Irene and Tuda, drained of vitality by posing, illustrate how art's pursuit can metaphorically 'kill' life. Ultimately, both plays subvert the Pygmalion myth, portraying the models as co-creators yet victims, becoming 'stone' under the sculptors' gaze.

Furthermore, Ibsen and Pirandello both depict women as tragic heroines, often embodying the *femme fatale* archetype. These women, like Irene and Varia Nestoroff in Pirandello's *Quaderni di Serafino Gubbio operatore*, use their beauty and achieve their aims and cause destruction in men's lives. Irene is cold and enigmatic, linked, symbolically and literally, to death, driving her first husband to suicide and killing her second. In contrast, Varia is more complex and multifaceted. She manipulates Giorgio Mirelli, leading to his suicide, but her actions stem from self-hatred and a desire for revenge against a world that exploited her. Both women have ties to prostitution and eroticism, further connecting them to the *femme fatale* role. Despite their different motivations, Irene and Varia embody the destructive power and moral ambiguity typical of the *femme fatale*, challenging societal boundaries and reshaping their fates through controversial actions.

The appendix of this thesis focuses on two American playwrights, Eugene O'Neill and Thornton Wilder whose works were deeply connected to Ibsen's production.

Thornton Wilder in 1937, adapted *A Doll's House*, modernizing its language to resonate with contemporary American audiences while preserving the original's structure and themes. Nevertheless there are some differences between the two versions, for example Wilder portrays Nora as less deceitful and he omits some spousal nicknames to make Torvald less grotesque to modern audiences. Additionally, Wilder alters significant scenes, for instance Nora no longer disobeys her husband explicitly.

Wilder's adaptation of *A Doll's House* features extensive stage directions that add psychological depth and detailed set designs, creating a vivid atmosphere. He portrays Nora as more cunning and anxious, introduces new character dynamics, and extends emotional connections, especially during the Tarantella scene. Wilder emphasizes the metaphorical significance of actions, such as Nora firmly closing the nursery door, symbolizing her decisive break from her motherhood.

The plot of *Our Town*, the play Wilder composed while adapting *A Doll's House*, delves into the theme of marriage too. Both plays address the economic power dynamics within marriage, with women hiding their financial independence and men asserting control over family finances. Such perspective can be noticed in the relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Gibbs

Eugene O'Neill was a pioneering American playwright born into a tumultuous theatrical family; some important elements contained in his works are attributable to Ibsen's influence or to the use of the same literary archetype.

Eugene O'Neill's *Anna Christie* and Henrik Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea* both deal with female protagonists whose lives are deeply influenced by the sea. In *Anna Christie*, the sea symbolizes redemption and transformation for Anna, a woman with a troubled past who reconnects with her seafaring father and finds love. Similarly, in *The Lady from the Sea*, the sea represents freedom for Ellida, who struggle with her unhappy marriage and her past relationship with a mysterious man. Both plays explore themes of control and liberation, with male characters initially attempting to dominate the female protagonists but ultimately surrendering to their autonomy. The sea serves as a powerful metaphor for both change and a deeper connection to one's true self.

Unlike many of O'Neill's darker works, *Ah, Wilderness!* is a cheerful and nostalgic comedy set during the Fourth of July weekend in 1906. The play follows the Miller family, particularly Richard Miller's coming-of-age journey, as he navigates young love and rebellion. His heartbreak over Muriel and a drunken encounter with Belle highlight the generational gap and societal norms of early 20th-century America. Richard's story is contrasted with his uncle Sid's struggle with alcoholism, adding complexity to the otherwise light-hearted tone. O'Neill infuses the play with literary references, notably Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, reflecting Richard's obsession the play. He fixates on the vine leaves worn by Lovborg in the play, symbolizing Dionysian freedom and chaos, echoing Nietzsche's ideas on embracing irrationality for transcendence. Richard's alcoholism mirrors O'Neill's own struggles, suggesting escapism into Dionysian realms. The motif of

guns from *Hedda Gabler* links to masculinity and suicide, reflecting Richard's melodramatic response to heartbreak, similar to O'Neill's personal experiences.

1. Spread of Ibsen's works in Italy

1.4 Three reasons of the introduction of Ibsen in Italy

In the first place, the reason why Ibsen's works were imported to Italy has to be researched in the cultural relationship between the European countries in connection with the literary market. Such complex web of relations has been studied by Franco Moretti in his *Atlante del romanzo europeo 1800-1900*, where the author theorizes a cultural division of Europe. According to such division it is possible to understand the spreading of novels through the European space. He refers to "three Europes":

Il *core*, il «centro» del sistema: un gruppo precoce, versatile e molto ristretto. All'estremo opposto la «periferia»: che è invece un gruppo assai ampio, ma dotato di poca libertà e pochissima creatività. E a metà strada tra i due, un insieme ibrido, sfuggente, che mescola tratti di entrambi: la «semi-periferia»¹

Due to Moretti's theory, such division implied a different tendency in translating, importing and exporting novels:

a un estremo, un gruppo ristretto (Francia, Inghilterra e Germania; Francia, Inghilterra e Russia) – un gruppo ristretto che esporta intensamente un po' dappertutto; all'estremo opposto un gruppo assai largo, il quale viceversa *importa* moltissimo, e non esporta quasi nulla.²

In short, the peripheral countries translate and import novels from the core countries.

¹FRANCO MORETTI, *Atlante del romanzo europeo*. Torino, Giulio Einaudi editore, 1997, P 178.

² Ibid.

Giuliano D'Amico extends Moretti's theory³ to the theatrical market in order to understand how and why Ibsen's production arrived in Italy. He points out that the history of Ibsen production is an exception: a peripheral country as Norway produced literary objects that became a new model for the core countries. Nevertheless, the spreading of the works through Europe followed the norm as Ibsen's plays arrived in first place in France, England and Germany, where they became well known and appreciated. After this process Italy, as a semi-peripheral country, received Ibsen's works from the core countries:

Italians staged Ibsen plays only when they had worked well in Germany and France, the Spanish waited for Ibsen's success in France and Italy, the Irish depended on Ibsen's outcome in England. In this circuit, the dynamics of autonomy and heteronomy are strictly intertwined and somewhat necessary to each other.

[...]

Theatrical agents and company directors from outside the core usually did not "dare" put Ibsen on stage until his plays had proved successful inside the core.⁴

In second place, another element fostered the importation of Ibsen's works in Italy: the lack of Italian plays. Even though the late 18th century and the early 19th century were characterised by a florid production of Italian plays, written in particular by Romantic authors, the second part of the 19th century records a short number of noteworthy text to be staged on the theatre scene. On the other hand this period witnessed a huge demand for plays due to the increasing number of theatrical companies.

Because of this situation, the needy Italian theatrical market was forced to look for plays abroad, above all in France and Germany, where several quality

³ D'Amico refers to *Atlante del romanzo europeo* in two occasions: in his monograph *Domesticating Ibsen for Italy* (2013) and in his article *Six Points for a Comparative Ibsen Reception History* (2014).

⁴ GIULIANO D'AMICO, *Six Points for a Comparative Ibsen Reception History*, «Ibsen Studies», Vol 14 No. 1, 2014, p 4-37.

plays were produced, easily translated and released on the Italian market. Therefore Ibsen's works didn't arrive in Italy just because of their high literary value, but also because of a proper venture set by the theatrical companies. The economic return has indeed been a fundamental propeller for persuading translators, theatrical agents and companies to invest resources on Ibsen's works.

The trend of importing scripts from abroad has been object of several controversies. The most of the detractors (and above all Marco Praga⁵) argued against the prevailing French plays because, in their opinion, their presence in Italy weakened the development of the national drama.

In relation with the Ibsen case, the Italian promoters of his plays were accused of encouraging a "Nordic invasion". For instance the article published the 1st February 1891 on «L'illustrazione italiana» reports details that can be integrate in the frame of the polemic. A journalist known with the name of "Doctor Veritas" refers to the Russian and the Norwegian production as «le nerbate che devono cacciare dal teatro e dal mondo i flaccidi brandelli della nostra civiltà incancrenita»⁶. As Marco Praga, he believes that the Nordic theatre stifles the Italian one.

In addition, Doctor Veritas points out that the reason why Italian critics are interested in Ibsen lies in the fact that the author is "fashionable" in France. In other words, if the French audience wouldn't have appreciated Ibsen, the Norwegian author would have been still unknown in Italy.

Furthermore, the Italian intellectuals wouldn't genuinely understand and admire Ibsen: they forced themselves to do so because of the trend; this statement is corroborated, in the author's point of view, by the fact that some young Italian intellectuals hailed Ibsen even before seeing or reading his plays. He claimed that the only way to intimately know the style and the themes of a playwright is attending the performance of his scripts, but until that moment an Ibsen's play had been staged only once in Italy.

⁵ Marco Praga (1862-1929) was a popular playwright, and in 1896 become the president of the SIA, the Società Italiana degli Autori.

⁶ LEONE FORTIS, *Conversazione*, «Illustrazione Italiana», 1st February 1891, pp 67-69.

A further article was published the 7th March 1895 on «Gazzetta dei Teatri», it is a matter of a review of *Little Eyolf*; the complier claimed that the play was nonsense and Ibsen was appreciated only because of a «Nordic mania» was taking place in Italy, a consequence of the «Nordic invasion». Even though Ibsen is considered the leader of the «invasion», the article reports a list of German, Scandinavian and Russian plays staged in Teatro Manzoni whose plays were, in his opinion, mediocre. The call to stop the «Nordic invasion» was useless, and Ibsen's plays, as the other Nordic authors', continued to attract Italian audience.

The third reason of the spread of Ibsen's plays is the change in Italian taste: since the first half of 19th century the bourgeois drama was widely appreciated, above all in the North, where the rural areas left room to industrialised centres. The recurring themes were indeed domestic and social relationships and issues of economic nature, set in the living rooms of the middle class.

Aside the bourgeois dramas, in the 1870s the Verismo movement took hold in Italy influenced by the French Naturalism, in particular by the novelists Emile Zola, Gustave Flaubert, Honoré de Balzac and the theorist Hippolite Taine. The most important names within the Italian movement are Federico De Roberto, Luigi Capuana and, above all, Giovanni Verga; even though Verismo took distance from the French reading, the interest in some underlying themes remained the same. The works of the new movement implied a detached and disenchanted description of the human being, far away from the sentimentalism of the last romantic epigones. Some topics were common to both *veristi* works and Ibsen's plays: the tendency to analyze *tranche de vie*, and some issues such as hereditariness,⁷ and the struggle for social and economic improvement⁸ within the middle class. It's not a coincidence that Luigi Capuana, one of the most important authors of the movement, has been one of the first promoter of Ibsen in Italy.

⁷ Among the others, *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts*.

⁸ i.e. *Rorsmersholm*, *A Doll's House*, *Hedda Gabler* ecc.

It is particularly interesting the way Ibsen is described in an article of the 24th October 1891 on the daily newspaper «L'indipendente»: «È l'anatomo spietato di tipi patologici, a cui egli sfibra e scarna l'anima tutta, e poi la porge nella sua cruda, triste e ributtante realtà»⁹. The metaphor of the anatomist or physiologist is frequently used by naturalist writers: for example Emile Zola describes the chapters of his novel *Teresa Raquin* (1867) as «the study of a curious case of physiology [...]. I have simply undertaken on two living bodies the analytical work which surgeons perform on corpses».¹⁰

Furthermore, in many occasions the adjective *verista* is addressed to Ibsen by the critic. On the «Corriere della Sera», for instance, it was published an article by an author under the pseudonym of “Verme” who defined Ibsen’s plays as

Drammi a cui rappresentare il concetto vivono personaggi che hanno anima e sangue umano, che parlano il linguaggio della vita, che escono da una osservazione raffinatamente verista [...].¹¹

1.5 The domestication of Ibsen

Giuliano D’Amico chooses to call his monograph regarding the history of Ibsen’s plays in Italy *Domesticating Ibsen for Italy*. Missing the explanation of such a fundamental element like “domestication” would be a lack in the attempt of contextualize the introduction of Ibsen in Italy.

Many studies have been carried out about the attitude of domestication in translation; Fade Wang (scholar in Foreign Language College, Jiangsu, China) brightly sums up the concept:

⁹ *L’Enrico Ibsen dell’ultima maniera (Nel giorno della prima rappresentazione d’un suo lavoro a Trieste)*, «L’Indipendente», 24th October 1891, p. 3.

¹⁰ EMILE ZOLA, *Thérèse Raquin*, London, Vizetelly&Co, 1886, p. VII.

¹¹ *Le colonne della società, dramma in quattro atti di H. Ibsen*, «Corriere della Sera», 25th November 1892.

The essence of translation is to transfer the information represented in one language into another one. However, literary translation is not only a kind of transfer of language symbols, but also a kind of communication between cultures (Zhang, Jin, 1987) [*Fundamentals on Literary Translation*. Kaifeng, He'nan University Press] . Generally speaking, literature translation is to pass on the artistic mood of a literary work with another language so as to make the readers enlightened, moved, and make them get the same feelings of beauty as if he is reading the original work. [...] domestication refers to the translation which is oriented to the target culture and in which unusual expressions to the target culture are transmuted and changed into some familiar ones so as to make the translated text easy to be understood by the target readers.¹²

The process of the domestication brought Ibsen's plays to be more likely understood and appreciated by non-Scandinavian people. Norwegian sensibility was far from Italian's, and the culture of the former was almost unknown by the latter. Due to this situation, Ibsen's book needed to be adapted for the Italian audience.

In first place, some of the characters were "reshaped" in order to make them fit in the categories of the traditional theatrical roles. The division of roles was an heritage of the *Commedia dell'arte*, which was still popular during the 19th century, even though it presented different features from the past. D'Amico reports several manipulation of this nature; for example, in *Ghosts*, the minor role of Jacob Engstrand was turned into a *caratterista*¹³ through the exaggeration of his pathetic features. In the domesticated play, during the last scene of his character, Engstrand heartily begs Mrs. Alving and pastor Manders to take care of Regine, the girl he grew as his daughter who is about to leave the town. In the original play there is no trace of paternal love: on the contrary Engstrand

¹² FADE WANG, *An Approach to Domestication and Foreignization from the Angle of Cultural Factors Translation*. «Theory and Practice in Language Studies», IV, 11, pp. 2423-2427, November 2014.

¹³ The role of *caratterista* is a secondary, one dimension role, and it is characterised by some feature of the caricature. Usually these roles are humorous, but sometimes they can also be pathetic, as in the case above.

promotes to the step-daughter the hostel he is about to build, in case she will need an accommodation in town, whether she chose to come back.

Moreover, even though it is clear that Ibsen's works already aimed to represent the facts in the most realistic way, in Italy such attitude was accentuated, probably in order to fit the current taste of the audience. Ermete Zacconi, the most representative actor who worked to introduce naturalist theatre in Italy, often played the role of the main male character in Ibsen plays. His performances tended to emphasize the details of realistic taste contained in the plays. His performance of Oswald, one of the main characters of *Ghosts*, became really famous for the meticulous representation of the symptoms of syphilis. The presence of such details is not present in the original play, whose main point was not certainly a medical report of illnesses. The performance was so exaggerated that a critic ironically wrote on «Corriere della sera» «La patologia drammatizzata di *Oswaldo Alving* fece loro ribrezzo. Siamo in teatro o all'ospedale?». ¹⁴

On the practical side, every script was subjected to a work of shortening, in order to make some lines more bright and quick. D'Amico estimates that the Italian version of the last part of the third act of *The Wild Duck* is 1/3 shorter than the original; such simplification had the purpose to make the play more understandable for the audience: the translators were well aware of the fact that difficult expressions and too long lines would have driven the audience away from the work that was difficult in itself.

To support this attitude, on the other side, some explicative words, lines and stage directions were added to make sure that the audience would properly understand the plot and the plot twist. D'Amico provides this example:

HEDVIG. [...] Vildanden!

EDVIGE. [...] L'anitra, il sacrificio!

¹⁴ *Gli spettri, dramma in tre atti di H. Ibsen*, «Corriere della sera», 23th-24th February 1893.

There is no evidence of a ‘sacrifice’ in Hedvig’s exclamation in Dano-Norwegian. The addition of the phrase is a clear explicitation aimed to helping the audience understand Hedvig’s intention.¹⁵

The alteration is set at the acme of the fifth act, when Hedwig is finally persuaded to kill the wild duck she saved and she took care of for years. The gesture is meant indeed as a sacrifice aimed to to impress her father and prove him her love. The line is the last pronounced by Hedwig who, after killing the duck, kills herself as she is overwhelmed by the words of her father who confessed his friend he believes that Hedwig feigned her affection for him.

An extremely outstanding domestication was made on the script of *Rosmersholm*. The changing starts from the title, translated in “La fattoria Rosmer”; but the location of the play has nothing to do with a “farm”, and the translation completely loses the meaning of “Family Rosmer” in favour of a familiar and countryside vibe. Furthermore, some references of the “inappropriate” cohabitation of Rebekka and Rosmer are deleted, even though not all of them. The two characters, even though not involved in a marriage, lived in the same house after Rosmer’s wife death. The two are not involved in a romantic relationship, but some details could be considered too explicit, for example the fact that Rebekka enters Rosmer’s private rooms in night-gown.

It was very frequent to cut parts that could be considered scandalous, too explicit or controversial. Such tendency was noticed also by the contemporaries. Silvio Benco, writer and literary critic, wrote an article concerning the representation of *Hedda Gabler* in Trieste, in which he complains about the translation:

Alla fine del terzo atto, alle parole di Hedda: Brucio vostro figlio! vostro figlio! noi vorremmo sostituite quelle dell’originale: Brucio il bambino! il

¹⁵ GIULIANO D’AMICO, *Domesticating Ibsen for Italy*, Bari, Edizioni di Pagina, 2013, p. 123.

Bambino!... Ci sembra che ch'esse rappresentino con più terribile evidenza il mostruoso pensiero di Hedda.¹⁶

Despite the effort to make the Norwegian plays more “domestic” for Italian audience, as mentioned in 1.1, Ibsen’s works were nevertheless perceived in many occasions as distant from the Italian taste. Several critics blamed the otherness of the plays as the cause of their failure. The following examples are taken only from «Corriere della sera».

Referring to Hedda Gabler’s character:

Non c’è da fare meraviglie se questa creazione ibseniana riesce quasi incomprensibile al pubblico dei nostri teatri. Ella non appartiene né alla nostra razza, né al nostro ambiente. Hedda Gabler non è e non può essere una donna di sangue latino. Nei nostri paesi, sotto il nostro sole, assorbiti come siamo dalla vita voluttuosa dei sensi, per noi donna ed amore sono quasi sinonimi. La nostra donna non è che amante o madre, come la nostra arte non è che realismo o sentimentalismo erotico.¹⁷

About *The Wild Duck* and its scenic design:

È cioè un dramma della vita norvegese contemporanea. Ma in essa assai più che nella *Casa di Bambola* domina l’ambiente nordico, il colore locale.

Perciò questo nuovo lavoro dell’Ibsen [...] sembrerà certamente al nostro pubblico assai più strano delle commedia recitata dalla Duse. La casa del fotografo Ekdal, nella quale il dramma si svolge, con quella vasta soffitta piena di piccioni e conigli, dove il vecchio Ekdal va a caccia e la giovinetta Edvige tiene prigioniera un’anitra selvatica, non ha riscontro fra noi.¹⁸

A further phenomenon represents the will of domestication the Italians accomplished in order to make Ibsen’s works fit their standards: *Nora seconda*. It

¹⁶ *Teatro filodrammatico*, «L’indipendente», 7, fasc. 5364, 16th April 1892.

¹⁷ *La Duse al Manzoni, Hedda Gabler*, «Corriere della sera», 7th-8th June 1898.

¹⁸ *Manzoni*, «Corriere della sera», 25th November 1892.

is a three acts play written in 1954 by Cesare Giulio Viola (1886-1958); he was an influential playwright, screenwriter, and novelist, known for his significant contributions to early 20th-century Italian literature and cinema. The play consists of a sort of "sequel" to the Ibsenian drama; it is the author himself who, in the preface, specifies his intention to give a clear conclusion to the open-ended play. He also declares the "moral" aim of the play: «E' la mia risposta, che potrebbe anche essere errata, ma nasce da un'amara contemplazione della crisi, onde le eredi di Nora, le donne del nostro secolo, sono tra vagliate, E alle quali io guardo con estrema pietà».¹⁹

Due to Viola's interpretation of the Ibsen's finale, Nora moved in Capri and she made a living by renting rooms. Twenty years after the facts narrated by Ibsen, Emmy, her now married daughter, escaped from her home country with her lover and met her mother. Nora, at the end of the play explains her daughter the reasons why she left her husband and children and she confesses she regrets her choice:

E' più eroica una donna che sentendosi estranea, delusa, nella sua casa, resta al suo posto, o chi in nome d'una conquista di se stessa, molla tutto in bando, e se ne va?

[...]E ti dico; ho il coraggio di dirti: «Ho sbagliato!». Sbagliamo tutte. Anche quando in apparenza la vita ci va bene. Ma dentro, non va mai bene.²⁰

In the play Viola destroys the icon of literary feminism, showing a victim of her own choices, repented of her intransigence. Nora is not the symbol of the emancipated woman anymore, she wants to represent the female desire to be a wife and mother.

Furthermore, a particular element bounds *Nora seconda* to the general concerns the critics exposed as soon as *A Doll's House* become popular in Italy: the cultural differences between Scandinavian countries and Italy. The issue will

¹⁹ CESARE GIULIO VIOLA, *Nora seconda*, «Il dramma», N. 202, 1st April 1954, P. 8.

²⁰ Ibid, P. 26.

be explained better in the following subchapter, but Viola's work lets understand how, even fifty years after the debut of *A Doll's House*, the audience kept on perceiving it as culturally alien.

1.3 Chronological overview of the introduction of Ibsen's works in Italy

1.3.1 The early presence of Ibsen in Italian texts and the first representation of *A Doll's House*

Henrik Ibsen's name appeared for the first time in an Italian publication between 1883 and 1885, in the first of twenty volumes of *Storia universale della letteratura* by Angelo De Gubernatis; the volume entitled *Storia del teatro drammatico* refers to Ibsen as a successful Norwegian playwright.

During the 1880s Enrico Polese, a fundamental figure that fostered the diffusion of Ibsen plays in Italy, wrote articles in «L'arte Drammatica» about Ibsen's representation in foreign countries. For instance the 14th of May 1887 he wrote some lines about *A Doll's House* representation in Monaco, underlining both the value of Ibsen as a playwright and the popularity of his drama²¹.

On December 1884 the Milanese lawyer Alfredo Mazza, passionate of Norwegian culture, first attempted to translate and publish *A Doll's House*. Even though he had an epistolary exchange with Ibsen who in first place approved his work, he started the translation of the play in Italian but he never finished it; on the same year he published an article on «Gazzetta d'Italia» meant to be the preface of the Italian translation; in 1888, in a review for «L'arte Drammatica», the translation was mentioned once again. In the same year Ibsen claimed in a letter that he had stipulated a contract with two famous men of letters in Florence, who were translating his plays from the German edition. The mentioned «men of letters» were Piero Galletti and Ulisse Saccenti, who worked

²¹ *Notiziario*, «L'arte drammatica», Milano, N.28, 14th May 1887.

on the first stage representation of *A Doll's House* (entitled in Italian *Nora o la casa della bambola*).

On the 15th February 1889 the first representation of *A Doll's House* was given at the Turin Teatro Gerbino; the role of Nora was played by the actress Emilia Aripriandi, and her performance was appreciated by the few critics who noticed the representation. The play had not been properly advertised: the main newspapers that dealt with theatrical issues did not mention the play; not even «Il Sistro», the newspaper owned by Galletti himself, advertised the event.

Concerning the critics, «the response was mixed», states Giuliano D'Amico²². The reviewer of the local newspaper «Gazzetta piemontese» claims that the audience was enthusiastic because of the masterful performance of, but didn't appreciate the play as well. In particular he underlines the negative reaction to the conclusion of the play: «a questa finale un po' astrusa ed inaspettata il pubblico ha fatto viso arcigno»²³. “Astrusa”, meaning “enigmatic” and “not realistic”, is the key word to understand what the Italian audience and critic really thought of the ending: they didn't believe it was likely to happen that a mother could leave her three children.

Another noteworthy article, even though of a few lines, came out on «L'arte Drammatica»: the author (with the pseudonym of Liborio) praises once again the *prima attrice*'s acting skills, and then states that «il lavoro si presterebbe alla più lunga ed intricata discussione, tanto che non credo la sua rappresentazione vorrà essere tentata da altre attrici»²⁴.

So the critic was aware of the potential value of the play as well as of the probable moral critics that it could draw. Three years had to pass before Ibsen's plays become popular and generated an intense debate.

1.3.2 The second Italian representation of *A Doll's House*

²² GIULIANO D'AMICO, *Domesticating Ibsen for Italy...* p. 69.

²³ Quoted by PAOLO QUAZZOLO in *Trieste e il caso Ibsen*, Venezia, Marsilio Editori, 2020, p. 18.

²⁴ *Torino, 21 febbraio* in «L'arte drammatica», 21st February 1889.

A week before the second representation of *A Doll's House*, the newspaper column «Conversazione» of the well known weekly newspaper «L'arte Drammatica» dedicated a significant article to the upcoming play, some parts of which will also be analysed in the following subchapters. With a half polemic half admired attitude, the author (the already mentioned Doctor Veritas) introduces to his readers the figure of Henrik Ibsen. He underlines the fact that *A Doll's House* has been published ten years before and that it has been introduced in Italy because of its popularity in France.

Once again the issue of the lack of realism in the finale comes out: the author makes his readers understand that he has already read the play in the French translation, and anticipates to the people that are going to see the play that they won't find credible the *finale*. The fact that the author comes from the Northern Europe, and therefore the characters embody cultural features far away from the Mediterranean culture, can not mitigate the sense of unlikelihood: a woman would never ever leave her children. The following sentence properly summarises the mixed opinion of the compiler:

Si prepari anche lei, gentile lettrice, a credere che nella moglie e nella madre scandinava vi sieno questi doppie triplici fondi che la rendano diversa, molto diversa, dalla madre e dalla moglie del nostro *clima* — perché adesso hanno scoperto anche la influenza del clima sull'arte, per cui giova sperare che si finirà coll'applicare anche ai nostri autori la cura climatica per rinvigorirne la fibra.

[...] per cui se Ibsen mi costringerà a veder fare da una moglie, e da una madre scandinava, ciò che non farebbe a nessun patto una moglie e una madre dei nostri paesi, potrò forse dire che il suo lavoro è bello, ma non mai ch'è vero, o solo verosimile.²⁵

The second representation of *A Doll's House* took place the 9th February 1891 in the Teatro dei Filodrammatici in Milan, staged by Eleonora Duse's

²⁵ LEONE FORTIS, *Conversazione* in «L'illustrazione italiana», 1st February 1891.

theatrical company. Differently from the representation held three years before, it was noticed by a great number of critics and spectators for two main causes. Firstly, the name of Ibsen became more and more popular and it was common to find it in theatrical and cultural newspapers: several articles reported the success of his plays in France, Germany and Austria.

Secondly, the role of Nora was played by the famous *prima attrice* Eleonora Duse who got famous because of many successful plays such as *Teresa Raquin* by Emile Zola (1879), *Cavalleria rusticana* by Giovanni Verga (1884), *Antonio e Cleopatra* by William Shakespeare (1888) etc. This two combined elements created so many expectations for the public that the tickets were sold out even though the price was very high²⁶.

Concerning the reception of the first Duse's performance, various newspapers reviewed it expressing different opinions; on the whole they are similar to the few articles published about the very first performance in Turin. The value of the *prima attrice* acting is never questioned, but there are uncertainties about the finale. Once again the audience reaction is mixed: some are enthusiastic, some are not.

The most enthusiastic review is by Vittore Grubicy, published on «Cronaca d'Arte». The author was an intellectual and a well-known painter: his profession affected the review as a huge part of the article is occupied by the description of the Scandinavian artistic panorama, related to Ibsen's work. Grubicy claims that the play has been passionately applauded by the Milanese audience:

Il lavoro del poderoso drammaturgo e pensatore norvegese «La casa di bambola» ha avuto la forza di scuotere, di galvanizzare, per una decina di giorni – e non è poco in questi tempi! – la fibra del pubblico milanese inflaccidita o sonnolenta, refrattaria alle emozioni dell'arte.²⁷

²⁶ *Casa di bambola, commedia in tre atti di H. Ibsen* in «Corriere della sera», 10-11th February 1891.

²⁷ VITTORE GRUBICY, *Henrik Ibsen e l'arte scandinava* in «Cronaca d'arte», 22nd February 1891.

But the author reveals in the following lines that some *beckmessers* (in English in the article) didn't appreciate the play as they are stuck to the «Codice o Galateo che regola impretebrabilmente quanto si può e si deve permettere di fare all'arte».

On the contrary, in «*L'illustrazione italiana*», appeared an article once again written by Doctor Veritas, and once again extremely critical about the play. The author reports, alongside the detailed plot of the play, some information about the audience reaction; he states that the first act

fu, alla prima rappresentazione, il più cordialmente, più sinceramente applaudito, perché il solo che non sconfini dal vero per gettarsi ad occhi chiusi nelle astruserie filosofiche.²⁸

The main problem of the play was, in his opinion, the excess of philosophical material transposed in the play: in the following lines the author points out that Nora's final speech is pedantic and too theoretical, in other words unreal.

Nevertheless the second and the third act appeared to the spectators exaggerated and absurd, for example at the end of the second act the audience was perplexed because, in Doctor Veritas' opinion, they considered too excessive the fact that Nora was counting the hours separating her from Torwald reading Krogstad's letter:

Nora fa i suoi conti. — “Sono le 5 — da adesso a mezzanotte, sette ore — poi 24 ore sino alla mezzanotte di domani. — Ventiquattro e sette... — Ho trentuna ore da vivere... », E così termina il secondo atto.

— Dio buono! Dottore. — Ma siamo proprio nel mondo delle esagerazioni. Non le pare che in tutto ciò vi sia qualche cosa di eccessivo, di falso, che deve

²⁸ LEONE FORTIS, *Conversazione* in «*L'illustrazione italiana*», Milano, 15th February 1891.

viziare radicalmente il lavoro — che questi personaggi si esaltino tutti oltre misura — che il fatto sia sproporzionato alle sue conseguenze ?²⁹

An interesting fact is that the Milanese audience appreciated and applauded especially the scene of Nora playing with her children. The author reports that the scene was the

più graziosa della commedia, la sola che strappò al pubblico affollato della prima recita uno scoppio spontaneo, irrefrenabile di applausi, appunto perché lo trasportava in un'atmosfera di serena intimità domestica, in cui si sentiva allargare i polmoni — una scena nella quale la Duse fu la più fresca, la più gentile delle mammine.³⁰

Another interesting element appears in the article: exactly like three years before, the finale of the play is considered implausible. The author is extremely critical about it and he also complains because he knew³¹ that Ibsen gave his permission to adopt the finale version where Nora decides to remain at home for his children sake. «Ebbene... tutto ciò può essere simbolico finché si vuole — ma è assurdo. — Può essere scandinavo, ma è falso»³², stated Doctor Veritas. He wishes this kind of plays not to gain a foothold in Italy, and he is sure it won't happen, because the play was not successful enough to bring “Scandinavian fashion” in the country.

When *A Doll's House* was performed in Rome, «L'arte drammatica» published a short article about it. The journalist stated that the staging wasn't successful as the audience couldn't empathise with Nora: «La vertià vera sta in ciò: una donna è sempre odiosa quando abbandona i propri figli. Non v'è

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ The statement is not completely correct, as Ibsen himself wrote in a letter to Luigi Capuana, in which he claimed that he wished the Italian staging to maintain the original finale as the audience, in his opinion, was enough open minded to understand and accept Nora's choice.

³² Ibid.

attenuante che possa renderla meno antipatica agli occhi del pubblico»³³. In this occasion there is no mention to the unlikelihood of the play, but once again the verdict of the critique is negative.

The Italian “consecration” of Ibsen as relevant and prestigious author occurred the 16th February 1891. In that date, ten days after Duse’s performance, a long essay about Ibsen was published in «Nuova Antologia» by Giuseppe Chiarini³⁴. The article became reference point for every intellectual interested in Ibsen.

The author of the article, reports that an Ibsen’s play has been recently represented in Milan, and that his name and his works are very popular in Germany, France, United Kingdom and Denmark, while it’s substantially unknown in Italy; for this reason he decided to write in order to let Italian people know about such a remarkable playwright. The article accounts a biography of the author (the writer informs the reader that his source is the German translation of Ibsen’s biography written by Jaeger and a Grosse’s essay); and an overview of Ibsen’s works published so far. Underlining the fact that it took twelve years to *A Doll’s House* to arrive in Italy, he states that

Nessun altro dramma dell’Ibsen ha dato luogo a discussioni e polemiche come questo, forse perché in questo l’autore trattava per la prima volta la questione della donna. Le donne, per l’Ibsen, non sono soltanto le mogli dei loro mariti e le madri dei loro figliuoli; sono esseri umani indipendenti al pari degli uomini, che han diritto, com’essi, al libero svolgimento delle loro facoltà individuali. Questa tesi vien fuori alla fine del dramma, nell’ultimo dialogo fra l’avvocato Helmer e sua moglie; ma nel corso del dramma è tanto abilmente dissimulata, che non si sospetta nemmeno.

³³ DON MARZIO, *Cronache romane dal 2 al 12 marzo, 1891*, in «L’arte drammatica», 20, 14th March 1891.

³⁴ Born in 1833 and dead in 1908, Giuseppe Chiarini was one of the most important Italian men of letters and critiques, author of relevant studies about the most important Italian authors of the 19th century.

Chiarini touches upon the scandal that a *Doll's House* provoked, and appears on the whole enthusiastic about the play, but the article aims to present the figure of Ibsen to the Italian public more than review the performance.

Regardless the positive or negative response of *A Doll's House*, other plays written by Ibsen were staged in Italy: on September 26th of the same year *The Wild Duck* was performed in Milan, and it reached the theatres of Trieste a month later.

1.3.3 Focus on Eleonora Duse

Born in 1858 in Italy, Duse rose to prominence during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, becoming renowned for her naturalistic acting style and emotional depth on stage. With a career spanning decades, she portrayed a wide array of complex characters with grace and authenticity, earning acclaim both in her native Italy and on stages across Europe and the United States.

Duse's acting was particularly appreciated for its renewed and personal technique which would have perfectly fit the intimacy of *A Doll's House's* scenes. In particular, Duse brought to the Italian theatre a new way of acting that emphasized the strong stage presence of the actresses, for example she focused on the way of walking on the stage and surprising the spectators with sudden and dissonant movements. She also introduced in her characters a strong sense of passion, redeeming a form of acting until then considered inferior.

Duse deeply admired Ibsen's works and she had on her repertory many of his plays: *A Doll's House* (1981), *Hedda Gabler* (1989), *Rosmersholm* (1905), *John Gabriel Borkman* (1908), *The Lady of the Sea* (1909), *Ghosts* (1922). According to Francesco Perrelli, Ibsen represented for Duse a radical rupture with the old French and Italian standard.

Regarding Duse's performance in the role of Nora, some precious testimony have been reported by Laura Marholm in *Six Modern Women: Psychological Sketches* (Oslo, 1894). Marholm appreciated the personal

interpretation Duse took on the stage and she observed in her acting the stateliness of a real and «complete» woman. She claims that:

Ibsen's Nora is hysterical, and only half a woman; and that is what Ibsen, with his poetic intuition, intended her to be. Eleonora Duse's Nora is a complete woman. Crushed by want and living in narrow surroundings, there is a certain obtuseness about her which renders her willing to subject to new misfortunes. There is also something of a child in her, as there is in every true woman; but even in her child-like moments she is a sad child. [...] I never heard any one say "no" like her; it contains a whole world of human feeling.³⁵

Duse's performance of Ibsen's characters was appreciated in Italy and abroad as well. In 1906 she undertook a tour in Scandinavia and *A Doll's House*, *Hedda Gabler* and *Rosmersholm* were part of her repertory. All her performances were successful and allowed her to earn the respect of the Norwegian critics who judged her character of Hedda Gabler as perfect. Perrelli reported some review of those performance in his essay *Echi nordici di grandi attori italiani*. The reviewer Kristofer Randers wrote on the newspaper «Afterposten» that «Latrice italiana ha evidentemente posto l'accento sulla condizione morbosa in cui Hedda Tesman si trova. L'ha mostrata come la donna vogliosa di bellezza, lacerate dal più demoniaco sentimento di annientamento».³⁶

Hedda's morbidity can be compared to Nora's hysteria. Duse was particularly expert in staging female characters commonly considered hysteric. Luigi Rasi's words perfectly explained her skills in the monograph he wrote about the actress in 1901:

L'occhio agitato da tremanti impercettibili, si recava rapidamente in direzioni opposte; le guance passavano con incredibile rapidità dal rossore al pallore; le

³⁵ LAURA MARHOLM HANSSON, *Six Modern Women: Psychological Sketches*, Boston, Roberts Brothers, 1896, P. 108.

³⁶ Translated and quoted in FRANCO PERRELLI, *Echi nordici di grandi attori italiani*, Firenze, Le lettere, 2004, Pp 159-160.

narici e le labbra fremevano; i denti si serravano con violenza, e ogni più piccola parte del volto era in movimento... la persona poi, a significar ben compiuta la espressione del tipo, avesse guizzi serpentini, o abbandoni profondi rispondeva perfettamente coll'azione e contrazione delle braccia, delle mani, delle dita, del busto, all'azione e contrazione del volto. E perciò, forse, la grande artista riusciva insuperabile nella presentazione dei personaggi *a temperamento isterico*.³⁷

1.4 Ibsen in Trieste

Paolo Quazzolo analyses the peculiar reception of Ibsen's plays in Trieste³⁸ in his monograph *Trieste e il caso Ibsen*³⁹.

The press of Trieste reports many interesting information about the first reaction of its audience; some words of the anonymous reviewer of «Il piccolo della sera» sum up the reaction of the spectators:

Il teatro era tutto occupato in modo eccezionale; singolare la curiosità, grande l'aspettazione. Durante tutta la sera, il pubblico inquieto, nervoso, ma l'attenzione costante ed intensa. Dopo l'atto primo, attenzione; dopo il secondo, chiamata, contrastata da una parte del pubblico; dopo il terzo, zitti; dopo il quarto, parecchie chiamate (crediamo tre o quattro) di fronte ad una debole opposizione; dopo il quinto, zitti; qualche fischio e finalmente un applauso, da supporre diretto agli esecutori.⁴⁰

³⁷ LUIGI RASI, afterword by MIRELLA SCHINO, *La Duse*, Roma, Bulzoni Editore, 1986, P. 14.

³⁸ Quazzolo contextualizes in first place the cultural panorama of the city of Trieste. Three elements determined its cultural peculiarity: the past Habsburg domination, the presence of a vivaciously dynamic harbour, and the geographic collocation of the city. From the cultural point of view, between the late 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, Trieste went from being a peripheral zone of scarce relevance to becoming a multicultural city thanks to the development of new literary models. In many occasions Trieste's cultural elite, which was fluent both in Italian and German, came in touch with cultural news ahead of the time, compared with the rest of the Italian cities. To mention few names that made Trieste a prominent place: Umberto Saba, Italo Svevo and Scipio Slataper. Not by chance, as we'll see, Slataper was the most important Italian critic of Ibsen.

³⁹ Venezia, Marsilio editori, 2020.

⁴⁰ *Notizie del giorno, Teatro comunale* in «Il piccolo della sera», 3577, 25th October 1891.

In addition, some review report information about the fact that the audience didn't understand properly the play and its seriousness: at least two⁴¹ articles reveal that the public laughed out of place during the representation, in particular at the end of the second act, and again when Hedvig Ekdal reveals to Gregers Werle her doubts about not being the legitimate daughter of Hjalmar Ekdal.

Furthermore, both the critic and the audience complained because of the lack of happy ending: people were used to bourgeois dramas that always involved, after entwined events, a finale with a comforting return to order. Nothing to do with Ibsen's plays. Despite this, the intellectuals were aware of the fact that *The Wild Duck* (aside with the the entire production by Ibsen) was a breaking element with the old manner of making theatre, and that it would have taken time to properly understand the play. An article signed by "R" on «L'indipendente» the 25th October 1891 contains some neat and lucid observation about the play and its value:

L'Anitra selvatica, che si diede ierisera, lascia l'impressione d'una nuova forma d'arte che si presenta imperiosamente, rompendo con vigorosa audacia tradizioni e convenzioni, che cerca d'imporsi senza passaggi, saltando bruscamente dall'oggi al domani della drammatica. [...] L'Ibsen invece non intende d'aver fatto un primo passo, ma vuol sbalzare addirittura al fondo della nuova via. [...] Il lavoro dell'Ibsen è una cambiale a lunga scadenza, di cui noi riconosciamo il valore, ma che soltanto i nostri figli forse vorranno pagare; è un bolide luminoso che noi vediamo attraversare l'orizzonte artistico, ma la cui traiettoria potrà essere esattamente determinata soltanto dall'avvenire.⁴²

This comment is particularly relevant as it puts us in front of two different interpretations. In first place, it is fundamental to highlight the fact that *The Wild Duck* was published for the first time in 1884 (seven years before its first

⁴¹ The first without signature on «Il piccolo della sera», 25th October 1891; the second by Giulio Ventura, on «L'indipendente» with the title *Il quinto atto dell'"Anitra selvatica"*, 26th October 1891.

⁴² *In città, Teatro Comunale* in «L'Indipendente», 25th October 1891.

representation in Italy). Ibsen was considered in Italy an author to be understood in the future still in 1891. This fact could make Ibsen a drastically innovative author, a man who came to enlighten the minds of his contemporaries. On the other hand it is possible to read the article under a different light: it appears clearly that Italian audience was lagging behind.

There is not an univocal answer to resolve the issue. Henrik Ibsen was and still is a complex author, whose works put the reader in front of questions without a certain answer, and that create a sense of bewilderment. At the same time Quazzolo, in the above mentioned monograph, referring to the Trieste's community, comes to the conclusion that Italian people was not prepared for Ibsen's plays, but he puts a disclaimer between the middle class and the intellectuals. Distinguishing between the common people and the intellectuals, Quazzolo states:

Da un lato lo sforzo di interpretare la novità, dall'altro l'imbarazzo e talora l'irritazione per un autore che non appagava le attese e che non rientrava nei canoni della drammaturgia di fine Ottocento. Le opposte reazioni possono essere spiegate non solo da una differente preparazione culturale, ma anche perché l'incontro con Ibsen avvenne, per intellettuali e pubblico, lungo percorsi e tempistiche diverse. Gli uomini di cultura ebbero modo, prima di assistere alle rappresentazioni, di leggere i testi ibseniani nelle traduzioni tedesche.⁴³

One fact that supports Quazzolo's point of view stands behind the complaining the critics wrote about the translation of *The Wild Duck*: Enrico Polese's translation was more a "domestication", as the script was made shorter and some lines were omitted because they were considered too irreverent for the Italian public. The controversies and the complaining of the critics about the bad quality of the translation make us understand that, despite Ibsen's name was quite new among Italian newspapers and stages, the intellectuals of Trieste did know him. It becomes evident, analysing articles about *The Wild Duck*, that a good

⁴³ PAOLO QUAZZOLO, *Trieste e il caso Ibsen...*, p. 55.

number of journalists and intellectuals read Ibsen's works while he was becoming popular in the theatrical scene.

Moreover, some days before the representation of *The Wild Duck* in Trieste, the already mentioned daily newspaper «L'indipendente»⁴⁴ published on 24th October 1891 an article that doesn't only report informations about the upcoming play, but also makes an interesting comparison with *Rosmersholm*, sign that he/she knew the author's works very well.

The 7th March 1892 Eleonora Duse and her company performed *A Doll's House* at the Teatro comunale of Trieste. The debate generated by the play on the Trieste's newspaper lasted a long time and involved both critics and common people. Differently from the Milanese critique, that disapproved of the finale's unlikelihood, the leitmotiv of the complaining here was the sudden change of Nora's attitude between the second and the third act. For instance:

Benché ammiratori dei pregi di osservazione e di realismo che si riscontrano nei primi atti, dobbiamo esprimere la nostra impressione che la conclusione del lavoro non ci pare né logica né, soprattutto, coerente con le scene presentate in precedenza. Come spiegare al terz'atto una Nora tragica, filosofica, che sfodera tutto un arsenale di sociologia non solo moderna, ma che è satura di idee tanto ardite, come non potranno averle forse che gli economisti e i sociologi di là da venire? Dov'è andata la bambina che succhiava le pastiglie di soppiatto al marito?⁴⁵

A really interesting initiative taken by «Il Piccolo» put in touch the intellectuals with the common people: the 9th March 1892 the newspaper addressed to the female readers who had attended the representation a call to write their opinions about the finale and what they would have done in Nora's situation. The newspaper received great number⁴⁶ of letters, but decided to

⁴⁵ *Teatro comunale*, «Il piccolo», N. 3712, Trieste, 8th March 1892.

⁴⁶ «Abbiamo ricevuto un numero sterminato di lettere», reports the article of the 10th March 1892.

publish about a thirty of them, dedicating two entire pages to the issue. Some answers are short and concise, some are comical, and other are very serious and elaborated; in four cases the writers wrote short poems about the figure of Nora⁴⁷.

In one of the most noteworthy letters, the author points out that the topic is so complex that few lines are not enough to settle the matter; she doesn't approve Nora's choices and compares her character to the protagonist of *Crime d'amour* (1886) by Paul Bourget:

Non agisce così una delle “virtuose adultere” di Bourget (*Crime d'amour*) la quale allo spegnersi dell'amore colpevole che tanto intensamente accarezzava, trova nelle assidue cure dei suoi figli, sul santo altare della famiglia la possibilità di obliare un grave fatto, la più dolce, l'unica espiazione.

E in Ibsen il delitto è ben minore!

Alla sfuriata di Helmer, e al successivo suo perdono (quanto è mai meschino qui il carattere di costui) io non dimenticherei di essere madre e moglie e, ammessa nella mia educazione la possibilità di un mutamento tanto dottrinario, tanto filosofico, alle gelose cure dei miei figli toglierei un po' di tempo per educare me stesse e un po' anche... mio marito.⁴⁸

The last letter published is signed by «Nora Helmer» and the author identifies herself in the character writing in first person narrative and imagining what happened after the finale of the play. She “confesses” that the decision of leaving her house was caused by a sudden and furious frenzy, and that she came back to her husband after meeting a doctor called by her friend Cristina.

After experiencing the representation of *The Wild Duck* and *A Doll's House*, which got, in the whole, a mixed reaction in line with the other Italian cities, the audience of Trieste surprisingly acclaimed the representation of *Hedda Gabler*. The first staging took place the 5th April 1892 and again the day after, held by the company of Italia Vitalini and Antonio Salsilli at the Teatro Filodrammatico.

⁴⁸ *Quello che dicono le signore sulla chiusa di “Casa di Bambola”, «Supplemento al piccolo della sera», 9th March 1892.*

Silvio Benco wrote two articles about the play for «L'indipendente»: the first one consisted of an analysis of the work, while the second was a report of the audience's reaction. The author of the article claims that both the representation have been so successful that there were thunderous applause at the end of every act.

Benco came back on the theme of the reception of *Hedda Gabler* once again the following September, after reading about the failure of the play in other Italian cities, like Turin and Florence. Moreover Rome responded to *Hedda Gabler* in a such a tremendous way that the theatrical company decided not to perform for a second time the play, as it was planned.

The two following staging of Ibsen's plays, *The Pillars of the Society*, *Ghosts* and *The Master Builder*, were both welcomed by the audience and the critics of Trieste. *Rosmersholm* was, on the contrary, not appreciated as much as the previous ones; Quazzolo hypotizes that the reason could be the poor interpretation by the actors and the bad translation. It appears that the audience, after a first period of dismay had learned to appreciate Ibsen's works; the theatre-goer got used to the complex and deep ibsenian plots. A proof of this fact is that the audience rejected the staging of *The League of Youth*: the play was written in 1869, and the themes it focuses on are far from the ones the audience was familiar with.

The appreciation of Ibsen in Trieste caused also the early publication of valuable works about the Norwegian author: Carlo Boccardi, Federico Sternberg and Scipio Slataper wrote remarkable essays during or some years after the period of the premieres of Ibsen's plays.

In 1893 Boccardi hold two conferences at the Minerva society in Gorizia and at Gabinetto di lettura in Trieste. The speach were subsequently transcribed and published with the name *La donna nell'opera di Henrik Ibsen*. It is the first critic publication about Ibsen's works in Italy. The content of the work focuses on the chronology of Ibsen's works and the respective reception from the public, than the author analyses the most significant female characters. The last play

considered in the essay is *The Master Builder*, at the time the most recent work Ibsen published in that year.

Sternberg's monograph, named *Ibsen*, consists of a transcript of conferences as well. The author held a course at the Regio Istituto Superiore Di Studi Commerciali in 1922. In that year the name of Ibsen was known all over Europe and America and writing an essay about his work was not considered innovative anymore. The reason why the Sternberg's analysis is particularly remarkable is the fact that it interprets Ibsen's play in an innovative way. It is clear that the social change that hit Europe influenced Sternberg reading; he considered Ibsen as a "depicter" of the human rebellion against evil.

He also theorises the category of the *dissidio senza catarsi*⁴⁹: the characters of Ibsen's dramas don't find a socially acceptable solution to their dilemmas, and this is the reason why they become outsiders of the society or they die; but they do that without pathos, while the most dramatic moments are accompanied by humour. The last mentioned element is one of the reasons why the name of Ibsen is frequently associated in Italy to Luigi Pirandello. This topic will be faced in the following chapters as well as the analysis of Slataper's *Ibsen*, considered the most important essay about Ibsen as it is still relevant today.

⁴⁹ A concept that can be translated with the words "tension without catharsis".

2. Luigi Capuana and Scipio Slataper

2.1 Luigi Capuana

Luigi Capuana, born on May 28, 1839, in Mineo, Sicily, emerged as a pivotal figure in the late 19th-century Italian literary landscape. A prolific writer, journalist, literary critic, and university professor, Capuana played a key role in the development of *Verismo*, contributing to the evolution of literature and literary theory during a period of profound cultural transformation.

Raised in Sicily, Capuana's early exposure to the rich panorama of local traditions and folklore profoundly influenced his literary sensibilities. After studying philosophy at the University of Catania, he embarked on a multifaceted career that spanned journalism, teaching, and creative writing.

In 1864 he moved to Florence where he got in touch with the lively intellectuals who lived and worked there. This period marked the beginning of Capuana's engagement with *Verismo*.

One of his main work is the novel *Giacinta*, published in 1879; it is often regarded as one of the earliest examples of *Verismo*. In this novel, Capuana explored the impact of social and environmental factors on the psyche of his characters, laying the groundwork for a broader Naturalist literary tradition in Italy.

He also wrote several novels and, above all, short stories for children and teenagers, for example *Il regno delle fate* (1883), *Il pecoro nero, fiabe e novelle illustrate* (1894) and *La paura è fatta di nulla ed altre novella* (1901).

Capuana has also been a literary critic and theorist. His critical essays, reflected a rigorous analytical approach that aimed to define the parameters of Italian literature in the context of European literary movements.

Stylistically, Capuana's prose is characterized by vivid description of psychology and the attempt to portraying the complexities of human experience, he particularly focused on the female psyche. His writing, whether

in fiction or criticism, reflects a meticulous attention to detail and a desire to capture the shades of everyday life.

This chapter aims to study Luigi Capuana in quality of one of the first promoter of Ibsen in Italy; his translation of *A Doll's House* will be analysed aside with the critical essays about Ibsen.

2.1.1 History of Capuana's approach to Ibsen

It is unknown how Capuana got in touch with Ibsen's production, it is most likely that he heard about of him by reading on the theatrical newspaper about the Norwegian author's success in Europe.

It is plausible that subject matter of *A Doll's House* attracted the attention of the Sicilian author. Capuana's main works focus on the psychology of their characters, mostly women. He was particularly good in digging deep and describing the motivations and the passions of women. For instance, one of his main works is a short story collection entitled *Profili di donne* (1877); inspired by Dumas *filis'* attention to female psychology, it focuses on the theme of seduction, imagination and sensibility of the six female protagonists. The stories are all narrated from a male point of view, they contain some *cliché* and the pathetic-sentimental tone prevails, also due to the contemporary taste. Nevertheless the focus on women issues was almost a novelty.

Furthermore, almost ten years before the publication of *Profili di donne*, Capuana expressed his interest in the "modern woman" in a review of Goldoni's *Casa Nova* published the 29th March 1866 on «La nazione»:

Nella nuova commedia la donna è libera e padrona di se stessa, mescolata in guisa molto attiva a tutto il movimento della società. Quindi sulla donna di un secolo fa ha il vantaggio di una più squisita pulitezza di maniere, d'una maggiore larghezza d'istruzione... così non più sdegnuzzi, non più pettegolezzi, ma qualcosa di più serio, se non di più onesto. Forse al presente siamo andati un po' là; e molte donne han scambiato la loro parte cogli uomini... ma osiamo

confessare la nostra debolezza: la donna moderna ci sembra più donna
quantunque meno ingenua⁵⁰

Nora, as a modern woman, must have ignited Capuana's interest.

Giuliano D'Amico reflected on the reasons that pushed Capuana to promote Ibsen in Italy, and came to the conclusion that there was an economic motivation in Capuana's choice. In that period, he was facing financial hardships, and the need of money encouraged him to translate and sell the script of *A Doll's House*. The proof of this reason, in D'Amico's view, is to be found in the fact that Capuana waited to introduce *A Doll's House* in Italy after he was sure that it had been a success in other European countries. Furthermore, Capuana wanted to change the final scene and make the play end with Nora returning home. He feared that with the original *finale* the play would have been a *fiasco* and that would have implied a money loss.

The first document that relates Capuana to *A Doll's House* is a letter sent in September 1890 to Cesare Rossi (the actor who staged *Giacinta*, the main drama written by Capuana). In the letter he claims that he had the permission from both Ibsen and Maurice Prozor⁵¹ to translate *A Doll's House* from French to Italian. Capuana informed the friend that, due to the lack of valuable plays in Italy, *A Doll's House* will be successful. From this letter it is clear that the translation he was about to start was originally supposed to be staged by Rossi's company and not by Duse's.

The theme of the lack of Italian plays, also mentioned in the previous chapter, has deeper roots and was particularly important for Capuana who

⁵⁰ Quoted in CARLO A. MADRIGNANI, *Capuana e il naturalismo*, Bari, Editori Laterza, 1970, p. 87.

⁵¹ Maurice Prozor (1849-1928) was a diplomat, man of letter and translator of Lithuanian origins. Prozor (aside with his wife Marthe-Elsa Bonde) translated from Dano-Norwegian to French several works by Ibsen: besides *A Doll's House* he also translated *Ghosts*, *Hedda Gabler*, *The Lady of the Sea*, *Rosmersholm* etc. He had the occasion to meet Ibsen in person in 1890, for the rest the two maintained an epistolary relationship.

reflected about it since his youth⁵². In 1860s he hoped for the development of a national theatre of the united Italy, but his expectations were disappointed. He tried to find the cause of the misfortune of Italian Theatre and he came to the conclusion that the Italian plays had problems of form: the content, in his opinion, was a secondary aspect.

Returning to the main theme of the chapter, some other letters reveal information about the making of the translation: as mentioned before, Capuana had an epistolary exchange with Ibsen himself and he asked him the permission to change the finale modifying the last scene in which Nora leaves her husband's home as he feared that the Italian audience would have been scandalised. Ibsen was unmovable and he didn't accept Capuana's proposal:

München, den 22. Januar 1891.

Hochverehrter Herr!

Ich muss darauf bestehen, dass der ursprüngliche Schluss meines Schauspieles bei der Aufführung nicht geändert wird. Gerade des Schlusses wegen ist das ganze Stück geschrieben. Das italienische Publicum ist hochintelligent und feinfühlig. Die Italiener werden schon meine Intentionen verstehen!

Ihr ganz ergebener

Henrik Ibsen^{53, 54}.

In a letter addressed to Prozor Ibsen complained about Capuana's intent: the missive is particularly important as it summarises the reasons why he was forced to allow the change of the finale in occasion of the first representation in

⁵² For example in an article published the 25th August 1867 he judges the history of Italian Theatre a failure, with the exception of Vittorio Alfieri.

⁵³ Translation by Giuliano d'Amico: «Dear Sir! I hereby insist that the original ending of my play must not be changed during the performance. The entire play is written to lead towards the ending. The Italian audience is highly intelligent and sensitive. The Italians will soon understand my intentions! Yours completely devoted Henrik Ibsen».

⁵⁴ Source of the original text: Henrik Ibsen Skrifter – Universitetet i Oslo. https://www.ibsen.uio.no/BREV_1890-1905ht%7CB18910122LCa.xhtml. Last consultation January 2024.

Berlin, and it contains the famous sentence «Jeg kan næsten sige at netop for slutningsscenens skyld er det hele stykke skrevet».⁵⁵⁵⁶

Capuana published his translation as a serial in the journal «Carro di Tespi» on 24 January 1891, only two days after Ibsen sent him the abovementioned letter. The publication was divided in eight illustrated parts and it took the name *Bambola*.

The text was published as a book three years later, in 1894, this time entitled *Casa di bambola*. Concerning the title of the play, it's Capuana himself who declared in the preface to the script that it was the will of Duse to maintain a title as close as possible to the original.

The content of the preface to the translation sums up the sequence of the above mentioned events: the doubts Capuana had about the ending of the play and Ibsen's will to maintain it faithful to the original. With a short sentence Capuana declares, in an almost pleased way «Infatti non fu praticato nessun mutamento: alle rappresentazioni però si è visto quanto il mio dubbio fosse fondato»⁵⁷. Afterwards Capuana explains the reason why the Italian audience found it difficult to empathise with Nora: once again the reason would be the distance between Scandinavian and Italian or Mediterranean world. Nevertheless, compared to the Italian critics who advanced the same motivations, he was more aware of the fact that *A Doll's House* caused lively debates also in Norway. Conscious of this, he says that Nora is “an exception” also in the Scandinavian world.

He concludes the preface with some fine words concerning the value of the play:

In ogni modo, Nora è una delle più fresche e più belle creazioni dell'arte drammatica moderna.

⁵⁵ Translation by Giuliano D'Amico: «I might honestly say that it was for the sake of the last scene that the whole play was written».

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ HENRIK IBSEN translated by LUIGI CAPUANA, *Una casa di bambola*, Milano, M. Kantorowicz, 1894, P. 8. From now on it will be quoted as *DHC*

Tutta la commedia è anche tra le più teatrali, come oggi si dice, dell'illustre scrittore norvegiano: e questo può insegnarci che, scrivendo pel teatro, bisogna, innanzi tutto, non dimenticare che la cosa della teatralità non è una qualità affatto secondaria in un lavoro drammatico. (*DHC* 9)

2.1.2 Consideration around Capuana's translation

As mentioned in the previous subchapter, Luigi Capuana's work is not a direct translation from the Norwegian original text, but it refers to the translation of Maurice Prozor.

On the whole, compared to the most recent and reliable Italian translation made by Roberto Alonge in 2007, Capuana's translation appear to be faithful to the original: no lines have been added or omitted, the stage directions are the same as the original and also the rare metaphor are maintained. The domestication that generally affected Ibsen's plays is, in the case of this translation, very faint, almost unperceivable. It is possible that, after Ibsen refused to permit him to change the finale of the play, Capuana was persuaded that Italian readers and theatregoer would have understood and appreciated a play as close as possible to the original.

Nevertheless, it is fundamental to state that it is likely that the actual performance staged by Duse's company moved away from the script. It is impossible to estimate the entity of the change, even though it is sure that some changes occurred. It is known that Duse didn't perform the Tarantella and she didn't dress up like a Neapolitan fishwife, but she wore an Harlequin costume.

Some differences between the original script and Capuana's are anyway present. In first place, the fact that Capuana translated a text that was in its turn a translation caused some inaccuracies concerning, for example, the lexicon. Some nuances of meaning got lost in the passages from the two languages. An example can be noticed in the third act, during the last speech between Nora and Thorwald. Nora's purpose is to leave the marital home in order to spend

some time alone and *educate* herself. Such principal can also be noticed considering her will of questioning everything she knows (for example religion and morality), in order to obliterate the knowledge her father and her husband instilled in her and start again like a *tabula rasa*.

Such concept is lost in Capuana's translation as he reports such line: «[...] C'è un altro compito a cui devo consacrarmi: l'elevazione di me stessa» (DHC 110). The word *elevazione*, in the meaning of "elevation", presuppose an improvement of intellectual and spiritual nature. The reason of such translation is to be found in Prozor version which recites «Je veux songer avant tout à m'élever moi-même»⁵⁸. The French word *élever*, near in sound to the Italian *elevare*, means in Italian both *elevare* and *educare*: to elevate and to educate⁵⁹. The plain meaning of the Norwegian word *opdrage*⁶⁰ is "upbringing"⁶¹, education.

In his Italian translations of Ibsen's plays contained in *Henrik Ibsen - Drammi moderni*, Alonge dedicated a special attention to the lexicon that characterises each character of the plays. In the case of *A Doll's House*, he identified some words typical of Nora's lines, for example *deilig* and *fin* (respectively "adorable"⁶² and "refined"⁶³) used six and eleven times in the play and only by Nora. The word that defines *par excellence* Nora is *vidunderligt*. Such word has been counted in nineteen occasions in the script, fifteen of which in the lines of Nora. In Alonge's version the word is always translated in Italian in the same way: with the word *meraviglioso*, "wonderful". In the note to the text the author states that:

⁵⁸ HENRIK IBSEN translated by PROZOR MAURICE, *Théâtre : les revenants, la maison de poupée / Henrik Ibsen*, Paris, A. Savine, 1889, P. 271.

⁵⁹ Source: Pons Online dictionary. Last consultation November 20th 2023

⁶⁰ Source: Henrik Ibsen Skrifter, Universitet i Oslo website. Last consultation 22nd November 2023

⁶¹ W.A. KIRKEBY, *Norsk English ordbok*, Oslo, Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1986, p. 831.

⁶² Ibid. p. 226.

⁶³ Ibid. p. 330.

Si tratta dunque della parola chiave del personaggio, che ne rivela l'ansia affabulatrice. Il bisogno di meraviglioso.

[...] Naturalmente è essenziale tradurre ogni volta l'aggettivo nello stesso modo, evitando sinonimi che distruggono la caratteristica della lingua ibseniana, martellante e maniacale⁶⁴

It is clear that Prozor, followed by Capuana, didn't notice⁶⁵ this lexical peculiarity as the word that are supposed to be translated with *meraviglioso* display multiple translations. Capuana used only once the translation «meraviglioso» (DHC, 22), Prozor twice. In general he uses different words, for example «bellezza» (DHC, 17), «prodigio» (DHC, 79), «catastrofe» (DHC, 85,)⁶⁶.

Concerning the elements of domestication, it is possible to observe some stylistic elements meant to move the language closer to the colloquial Italian of everyday life. It is possible that Capuana inserted such elements in order to partially solve the problem of the “nordicity” of the play which caused a sense of confusion and detachment in the Italian audience.

The neutral French line pronounced by Thorwald in the second act «C'est égal»⁶⁷ has been translated by Capuana with the common saying «Se non è zuppa è pan molle» (DHC, 63), Tuscan variation⁶⁸ of the most common *se non è zuppa è pan bagnato*, expression that indicates the equivalence between two options or parts.

⁶⁴ HENRIK IBSEN edited by ROBERTO ALONGE, *Henrik Ibsen – Drammi moderni*, Milano, Mondadori libri (BUR grandi classici), 2009, P. 140.

⁶⁵ On the contrary, Slataper noticed the importance of this key word. In *Ibsen* he remarks this concept in three different passages of his analysis of *A Doll's House*; for example he wrote, referring to the word: «E lo ripete tre volte in poche parole; e Io ripeterà in tutto il dramma. È la sua verità e la sua parola. Nora, abbiam visto, è nata con il “meraviglioso”» (page 191)

⁶⁶ In French respectively *merveilleux* (p. 158), *prodige* (p. 233) and *épouvante* (p. 239).

⁶⁷ HENRIK IBSEN translated by PROZOR MAURICE, *Théâtre : les revenants, la maison de poupée / Henrik Ibsen...* P. 213.

⁶⁸ Source: Treccani vocabolario online. Last consultation November 21st 2023.

In the same way, in the further pages the line «Nora: Non, au jourd'hui vous êtes par trop extravagant»⁶⁹, is translated by Capuana once again with an Italian expression which is more “colored” than the French one: «Oggi ha le lune».

Concerning the action of domestication on the play, in Capuana's translations are present some attempt to make the content less explicit and heavy. It is necessary to say that such actions on the text are minimal and they don't undermine the meaning or the graveness of the scenes. One of the most iconic moment that reveals the dual aspect of Nora's personality is the “seduction” of Dr. Rank that culminates with the showing of her stockings. Two secondary elements have been removed from Nora's lines; both of this element are present in Prozor's French translation so it is likely that Capuana voluntarily deleted them.

Let's compare Alonge's translation with Capuana's:

NORA [...] sia gentile ora, dottor Rank; domani potrà vedere come sarò bella a danzare; e allora immaginerà che lo faccio unicamente per lei, - sì e naturalmente per Torvald – s'intende.

NORA. [...] Vedrà domani con che grazia ballerò e potrà dire che lo faccio per lei, sì e per Torvaldo, questo va da sé. (*DHC*, 69)

Alonge's version (together with Prozor's) emphasize the fact that Nora will dance only for Dr. Rank and, thanks to the punctuation, they underline her excitation in correcting herself to include the husband in her “exclusive audience”.

The second element can be found in the same page, and consists in the elimination of a line which would imply the fact that Nora offered Dr. Rank to see the upper part of her stockings:

⁶⁹ HENRIK IBSEN translated by PROZOR MAURICE, *Théâtre : les revenants, la maison de poupée / Henrik Ibsen...* P. 217.

No, no, no; lei deve vedere soltanto la pianta del piede. Oh, sì, se vuole, lei può certo vedere anche la parte superiore.

No no lei deve vedere soltanto le piante dei piedi. Se vedesse altro... (DHC, 69)

The two cuts don't significantly change the content of the scene, they only reduce the provocative appeal of Nora's character.

Furthermore, similar small changes concern the topic of Nora and Dr. Rank's suicidal intention, once again in two passages of the third act. Both the characters crave for death for different reasons: Nora doesn't want to face the shame of her crime and Rank wants to put an end to his illnesses before his health degenerates. In the first case a reference to her upcoming suicide transpire in Nora's words while she is talking to Thorwald after the Tarantella scene. This scene is meant to show Nora's apprehension and fear and it is coherent the fact that, after the acme of her concern, she is pervaded by suicidal thoughts. In Alonge's translation:

NORA Non so; credo si sî; ma tu non devi leggere niente di niente, ora; niente di brutto deve intervenire fra di noi prima che tutto sia finito.

[...]

HELMER (*passa le braccia intorno a lei*) La bambina vedrà soddisfatta la sua volontà. Ma domani notte, quando avrai danzato –

NORA Allora sarai libero.

In Capuana's translation

NORA. Non lo so; può darsi: tu però non leggerai nulla. Fra te e me non ci deve essere neppure un'ombra fino a ballo finito.

[...]

HELMER. Sia, bambina. Si farà come tu vuoi. Però domani, terminato il ballo...

NORA. Sarai libero. (*DHC*, 83)

The presence of the last quoted line implies the fact that Thorwald will be free in an absolute way. It strengthens the interpretation of this lines as a forewarning of Nora's possible suicide. Capuana changes the first line removing the hidden allusion to the fact that "everything will end"; at this condition also Nora's line about the fact that Thorwald will be free must be read as a simple statement of the fact that her husband, after the dance, will be allowed to read his letters.

The second fading of a suicide reference is present in the last scene of Dr. Rank. Nora is aware of the fact that, if the doctor had the confirm of his health to be hopeless, he would kill himself. In this scene Rank says it in a way that only Nora could understand that the last medical exams he made had a negative outcome. Aware of this fact Nora, in Alonge's and Prozor's translation, wishes Rank «Dorma bene, dottor Rank» (pag 211), «Dormez bien, docteur Rank»⁷⁰. Capuana chose instead to change the meaning of the line, breaking the pathos; Nora, in his version says a partially out of place «Buon giorno, dottore!» (*DHC*, 99).

In conclusion, Capuana's translation is, as he himself declared in the preface, very faithful to the source. Persuaded by Ibsen's will, he maintained the content of the plot as well as the final scene; aside with some mistake in the translation from French, he tried to make some matters less rough by cutting some parts of lines. Although this small interventions, the domestication is minimized.

2.1.3 Critical writings concerning Ibsen

⁷⁰ HENRIK IBSEN translated by PROZOR MAURICE, *Théâtre : les revenants, la maison de poupée / Henrik Ibsen...* P. 257.

Luigi Capuana's critic production is wide; since his debut as a writer he accompanied his novels and stories with critical essays. His critic was mostly focused on authors contemporary to him, above all Giovanni Verga, Gabriele d'Annunzio, Carlo Dossi, the French naturalists, etc. Among the writings, Ibsen's works are analysed in three short essays .

The first essay that mentions Ibsen is contained in *Gli ismi contemporanei: verismo, simbolismo, idealismo, cosmopolitismo*. The book, published for the first time in 1898 by Giannotta (Catania), consist of a collection of essays and articles on various topic: the crisis of the novel, some considerations about short stories and scripts of different authors, above all the most quoted are Giovanni Verga and Gabriele d'Annunzio. The topics Capuana deals with are numerous, but the underlying theme is always the relationship between form and concept.

The first chapter called *Idealismo e Cosmopolitismo* isn't specifically dedicated to Ibsen, but it contains several references to the Norwegian playwright; the first part of the chapter consist on three articles in which Capuana polemicises with some ideas expressed by Ugo Ojetti during a speech he gave in 1896: *L'avvenire della letteratura italiana*. In this speech, Ojetti spoke about the necessity of cosmopolitism in literature, in other words purposes to overcome the politic patriotism and to give up on national literature in favour of a cosmopolitan literature. In Capuana's opinion, such attitude risks to make literature flat ad dull, nothing but an "exposition" of symbols and abstractness. The second part of the chapter contains the answer of Ojetti.

In the first part, Capuana quotes Ibsen (together with Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky) as opposite example of Ojetti's cosmopolitism. In few pages he makes an interesting reading of Ibsen's creation process: the playwright tried to recreate characters that are at the same time «creature della sua Norvegia» who embodied Norwegian features, and also "generic" suffering, disturbed and neurotic people. He masterfully managed to make live together in the same character universality and real Norwegian manners. As an artist, points out Capuana, Ibsen wasn't interested in recreating pre-existing dramatic forms, he

on the contrary created unique characters and situations, in many occasions shaped in his own image.

As a reaction to the novelty of Ibsen's theatre the European playwright tried to passively replicate, in the name of cosmopolitanism, the Norwegian feature of the characters:

Intanto, invece di contentarsi d'intendere e d'ammirare l'opera dell'Ibsen, invece di limitarsi all'assimilazione dei perfezionamenti di *forma* ch'egli ha recato nella drammatica, si è voluto *norvegizzare* tutte le creature del teatro europeo, anzi *cosmopolita*.⁷¹

Ojetti's answers to the three articles is contained in the chapter. He points out that Capuana misunderstood the way he means cosmopolitanism as he wanted to promote the universalization of art without denying the identity of the form which can maintain national peculiarity.

The name of Henrik Ibsen is quoted once again in the chapter *Varietà* in which Capuana reflects on various playwrights, authors and works. In the first subchapter, he answers to a negative review published on the newspaper «Marzocco» concerning Verga's plays. Firstly, Capuana compares Verga to Shakespeare in his attitude of avoiding to judge his characters; on the contrary both the authors love and pity their protagonists. In the further pages, Verga is compared to Ibsen:

Ma *l'Ibsen* fa precisamente come Shakespeare, come il Verga, come tutti coloro che sanno che vogliono dire teatro; quando non si rammenta che *deve* pensare, e far *pensare* i suoi personaggi, è scrittore drammatico di prima forza. Il male è che l'ultimo se ne rammenta e guasta ogni cosa. E per questo il pubblico si stizzisce con lui⁷²

⁷¹ LUIGI CAPUANA, *Gli ismi contemporanei : verismo, simbolismo, idealismo, cosmopolitismo ed altri saggi di critica letteraria ed artistica*, Milano, Fabbri, 1973, p. 23.

⁷² *Ibid.* p.118.

Further essays regarding Ibsen can be found in *Cronache letterarie*: the following year, in 1899, Capuana published another collection of essays. The majority of the essays is entitled with the name of an author: *Enrico Ibsen* chapter contains a review of the play *John Gabriel Borkman*. The play had debuted for the first time in Italy in 1898 in Bologna, played by the company of Ermete Zacconi.

Firstly, he briefly recapitulate the plot of the play and profiling the complex character of John Gabriele Borkman: it revolves around the tragic consequences of the protagonist character's financial and moral downfall. Borkman, a former bank manager, is released from prison and faces the consequences of his past decisions, including his obsession with wealth and power. His wife, Gunhild, bears the emotional scars of his neglect and pursues revenge, while Ella Rentheim, Gunhild's sister, represents a past love and holds Borkman accountable for the tragedy in her life. The play explores themes of guilt, ambition, and the impact of individual choices on personal and familial relationships.

Capuana underlines how ephemeral love, friendship and power are. The reasons would be, in the author's point of view, «necessità naturale»⁷³. The core of the essay is the effort of corroborating his idea: the play pursues realistic aims. He asserts that the process that brought Ibsen to the writing of the play is for sure the observation of life and the faithful representation of it: «Enrico Ibsen ha osservato questo terribile drama della vita e lo ha magistralmente rappresentato in questo suo ultimo lavoro».⁷⁴ Indeed, he particularly appreciated, due to his taste and artistic credo, the realism of the play and he insists on the verisimilitude and the vitality of the characters. He also contradicts the critics who noticed in the play a symbolic attitude, a sort of return to the romantic poetic Ibsen adopted in his youth. Capuana replays them

⁷³ LUIGI CAPUNANA, edited by ERMANNINO SCUDIERI, *Scritti critici*, Catania, Niccolò Giannotta editore, 1972, p. 290.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

that the play can be considered symbolic as much as every living people can be considered a symbol of something.

It is a fact that, at the end of his career, Ibsen wrote plays which implied symbolic content; such attitude can be probably noticed in a more clear way by reading in order all his late plays, including the last one: *When we Dead Awaken* (1899) which is the most allegoric work of Ibsen. When Capuana wrote the chapter *Enrico Ibsen*, the play hadn't been published yet, so appreciating Ibsen's poetic change was difficult, even though the most of the critics were aware of that.

It is likely that Capuana choose to ignore the style change in order to "preserve" the image of Ibsen as a realism paladin. At a first sight John Gabriel Borkmain contains all the themes of the ibsenian realistic drama: corruption in public life, betrayal, collision between the generations, imposition of duty upon the spontaneous joy of life, the renunciation of love for power, and so on. Nevertheless, it is impossible to ignore the dreamlike tension that pervades the the play as a whole, in a particular the last scene, which seems to be the proof copy of the last scene of *When we Dead Awaken*.

Furthermore, the character of John Gabriel Borkman fits the canon of the ibsenian self-made man, but while he is possibly affected of a delirium of omnipotence, Ibsen doesn't describe him as a pathologic case, as for example Capuana would have done. On the contrary, the character is presented with the features of the titan, a tormented character who, alone, struggles against the society who has limited his power. His character can be related with the nietzschean idea of the *Übermensch*, and he is more than once compared to Napoleon; a Napoleon, as he describes himself, «reso invalido alla prima battaglia».⁷⁵

Another short essay contained in *Cronache letterarie* consist of some considerations regarding the critics the actor Ermete Zacconi received because

⁷⁵ HENRIK IBSEN edited by ROBERTO ALONGE, *Henrik Ibsen – Drammi moderni*, Milano, Mondadori libri (BUR grandi classici), 2009, P. 998.

of his performance in *Ghosts*. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Zacconi's staging of the catcher of Oswald was considered excessively marked by the intent of stressing the realistic features concerning the syphilis the character is affected of.

Capuana, even though he was in favour of Zacconi's performance choices, disagrees with the answer the actor gave to the critics. He reports Zacconi's words:

Nella interpretazione dei capolavori dei sommi non bisogna arrestarsi sempre davanti alla semplice opera d' arte. C'è il pensiero che va più in là dell'arte. Così nell'Ibsen bisogna distinguere prima il filosofo, poi il simbolista, e soltanto in ultimo l'artista. Egli è grande per la forza del pensiero, non per la forza artistica.⁷⁶

Capuana read in Zacconi's words a misinterpretation of Ibsen's works:

Tradotto in parole più semplici e più chiare, questo significa: Vi sono opere d'arte sbagliate, dove il concetto non è riuscito ad assumere la forma che gli spettava. Le opere drammatiche dell'Ibsen sono di questa categoria. Nella rappresentazione di esse si deve quindi badare più al pensiero che alla forma...

In che modo, io sarei curiosissimo di apprenderlo dalla stesso Zacconi.⁷⁷

Once again Capuana deals with a topic that is fundamental in his critic reflection: the relationship between concept and form. In his opinion Ibsen had masterfully gathered both the concept and the form. The concept of the hereditariness became alive on the stage by means of the form of the character of Oswald.

He continues:

L'Ibsen, al contrario, chiede di essere considerato principalmente come artista. Per lui tutta l'opera drammatica consiste nell'azione, nei caratteri. Se sotto

⁷⁶LUIGI CAPUNANA, edited by ERMANNIO SCUDIERI, *Scritti critici...* p. 295

⁷⁷Ibid. pp 295-6.

quell'azione, sotto quei caratteri formicolano idee, è naturale che sia così. Un' opera d'arte è un concetto astratto materializzato nella forma.

Il dovere dell' attore è quindi soltanto quello di cooperare con essa per mezzo di efficace interpretazione.⁷⁸

This topic gives Capuana the opportunity to reflect about a theoretical issue. Capuana moves a critic to the actors who dare to impose their interpretations of the characters at the expense of the will of the author. He points out that there is a hierarchy between author and actor: the first is the creator of the character, and the character is an alive entity, a pure representation of life. For this reason the actor's duty is to play his or her role preserving all the details the author imagined, otherwise the integrity of the work of art would be put in danger.

After this last article, there is no trace of Ibsen's name in Capuana's production: the silence regarding the Norwegian author could be related to his last play, *When we Dead Awaken*, whose symbolic content might have not satisfied the taste of Capuana.

2.2 Scipio Slataper

Scipio Slataper was born on July 28, 1888 in Trieste; his life, tragically cut short at the age of 27, was marked by a profound engagement with the intellectual currents of his time and a passionate commitment to the exploration of identity, language, and the human condition.

Slataper's early years were shaped by the cultural and political ferment of Trieste, a city that mirrored the complex tapestry of the Habsburg Empire. Raised in a bilingual environment, he developed a sympathy to the diverse linguistic and cultural influences, a theme that would permeate his later writings. After completing his studies in philosophy at the University of

⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 297.

Firenze, Slataper returned to Trieste, where he began his career as a cultural critic and essayist.

He worked with *La Voce* a literary magazine published in Florence which became a receptacle for avant-garde thought, attracting contributions from prominent figures such as Luigi Pirandello and Giovanni Papini.

His best-known work is the novel *Il mio Carso*, a work that deals with the complexities of his multicultural upbringing, navigating the crossroads of his Italian and Slovenian identities.

Slataper died on December 3rd 1915, while serving as a volunteer in the Italian army during World War I. Nevertheless, his influence endured, and his ideas continued to resonate in the intellectual circles of the time. Slataper's legacy lies not only in the richness of his literary contributions but also in his role as a bridge between cultures, a figure who sought to transcend the linguistic and ethnic divides of his era. This chapter aims to analyse his figure as one of the first and, for sure, one of the most important critic of Ibsen in Italy and in the all Europe.

2.2.1 Slataper's *Ibsen* through his articles and his correspondence

Slataper's first approach to the Norwegian playwright is documented when he was nineteen years old, in 1907, year in which he attempted to write a study concerning *When we Dead Awaken*. The work consists of an essay-letter sent to his friends Guido Devescovi e Marcello Loewy, published in 1964 in the newspaper «La Città», in Venice.

The core of *Ibsen* consists of the thesis Slataper wrote for his graduation in Literature at the University of Florence; it was originally entitled *Ibsen, suo sviluppo intellettuale e artistico sino ai Fantasmi*. Slataper finished to compose his dissertation in November 1912 and he defended it the 19th December of the same year. As soon as he completed it, he decided to re-elaborate the work which he believed defective due to the hurry to graduate. Referring to the text,

he claimed: «io voglio che ogni mio scritto sia sempre il massimo ch'io posso dare in quel momento»⁷⁹

The text was indeed extended in 1913⁸⁰ and published by Bocca publishing house in Turin one year after Slataper's death, in 1916; the first publication included an introduction by Arturo Farinelli who curated the edition⁸¹. It was printed once again in 1944 in Florence, this time edited by Ruggiero Jacobbi, who included in the edition also the transcription of some preparatory material and passages of the book Slataper couldn't modify before his death. The last time *Ibsen* has been published was in 1977 by Vallecchi (Florence).

Slataper decided to write his dissertation about Ibsen, even though his first choice was the German poet and dramatist Hebbel.⁸² Slataper considered Hebbel, nevertheless, a precursor of Ibsen because of his tendency to deeply explore the psychology of the heroes of his dramas who, at the end of the plays, never found redemption or peace. What is common between the two dramatists is also the relationship between the person and the society: the protagonists of their plays always try, unsuccessfully, to change the society. Such concepts were also the starting point of the drama Slataper was writing himself. Never ultimate, the drama was called in a first moment *La tragedia di una vita*, than *Caino e Abele* and, in the end, *La disfatta*.

In order to create a chronological overview of the developing of Slataper's interest for Ibsen it is important to consider the articles written for «La Voce» and, especially, his letters.

Two long articles (28th December 1911, 18th January 1912) were published in «La voce»; they inaugurate the definitive abandonment of Hebbel as a

⁷⁹ SCIPIO SLATAPER, edited by ILVANO CALIARO, MARCO FAVERO and ROBERTO NORBEDO, *Lettere alle "tre amiche"*, Berlin/Boston, De Gruyter, 2022, P. 356.

⁸⁰ In his letters written in that year there are several references to *Ibsen* as a work in progress, see for example 25-26 January 1913, 21st May 1913, July 1913 (letter 220).

⁸¹ Farinelli eliminated some parts of the text as they hadn't been edited by Slataper due to his death.

⁸² Chronologically, some letters testify that it is sure that Slataper decided to write the thesis about Ibsen starting from the 5th July 1912.

reference point in favour of Ibsen. The articles contain a lot of consideration regarding the cultural value of the theatre and its need of reformation. Ibsen is here hailed as the most important playwright of the past decades.

Concerning the letters, during his university years, Slataper maintained a dense and deep correspondence with three girls in Trieste, Luisa Carniel (Gigetta, who became his wife), Elody Oblath and Anna Pulitzer (Gioietta); the letters have been collected and published in 2022 under the name *Lettere alle "tre amiche"*. Slataper frequently refers to his thesis regarding Ibsen in the letters addressed to Elody Oblath⁸³, but he seldom mention it while writing to the other two. By the examination of their correspondence, it appears that between Oblath and Slataper there was a teacher-pupil-like relationship: Slataper traced for her education a literary path that included the reading of some biographies and works of German and Scandinavian writers. At the same time she was tasked with copying final draft Slataper's writings. In their letters they regularly discussed and noted their opinions regarding the books he recommended her.

It is possible to gain several information from the correspondence between Slataper and Oblath, among the others some concern the source he used to write *Ibsen*.

On the 20th June 1913 Slataper asked Oblath to send him «le indicazioni delle pagine dove il *Reich* parla degli scritti femm[inisti] prima di Nora e dove dà la statist[ica] delle rappresent[azioni] di Nora (Cap[itolo] "Nora")»⁸⁴. With the name Reich Slataper meant the Austrian author Emil Reich, who wrote several texts concerning Ibsen and, above all, studied the female characters in his plays. His name is quoted twice in *Ibsen* as biographer of the Norwegian author, but, thanks to this letter, it is possible to understand that Slataper was referring to *Henrik Ibsens dramen - sechzehn vorlesungen* (1894), because it is

⁸³ 1889-1871, Elody Oblath has been a poetess and a playwright. She translated from Italian to German *Il mio Carso*, the main work of Slataper.

⁸⁴ Ibid. p. 369.

the only work containing a chapter named «Ein Puppenheim (“Nora”)». Furthermore, it is also possible to understand that it isn't only the source of the biographical part of *Ibsen*, but also for the paragraphs about *A Doll's House*.

A successive letter reveals information concerning a source that is often mentioned in *Ibsen: Henrik Ibsen. 1828–1888. Ein litterarisches Lebensbild* by Henrik Jaeger. He claims that it will be the main source of the biographical aspects of the essay. The interesting fact is that Slataper claims that he is reading for the first time Jaeger's book in summer 1913; it means that the largest part of the biographical information wasn't part of the original graduation thesis, it has been inserted only during the 1913 review.

According to the correspondence, the first testimony of his academic approach to the Norwegian author dates back to the 31st March 1911, date in which Slataper communicates Oblath that he is going to have a meeting with professor Emilio Paolo Pavolini, expert in Nordic languages, because he found out that Ibsen wrote some of his plays in Danish and not in Norwegian.

The nucleus of the reflection regarding *Brand*, widely developed in the final edition of *Ibsen*, is contained in the letter of the 8th June 1911 and in the following. Some days before Slataper had sent the text of *Brand* to Oblath and he asked her to read it carefully and send him her considerations; he answered the friend's following letter with his thought about the play and, among the other things, the parallelism with Goethe's *Faust*. The short lines are a summary of the content of the article entitled *Brand* published the 6th July in «La voce»⁸⁵. The strong presence of thoughts regarding Brand are a prelude of the fact that the character will be constantly mentioned also in *Ibsen*. It is another proof of the fact that Slataper was really impressed by the character.

Many critics contested *Ibsen* because of its lack of inner coherence. It appears that also his contemporaries perceived its fragmentary nature, among

⁸⁵ Concerning the account of the works Slataper wrote about Ibsen, he mentions in the letter to Elody Oblath of June 1913 (letter 219) and in the letter to Gigetta of the 18th June 1913 (letter 189) that he wrote an article about the character of Nora and that he sent it to «Nuova Antologia». Nevertheless, there is no trace of the article on the newspaper.

the others Oblath. He answered to one of her letters with the following words which also reveal the method Slataper used to enrich the pre-existing text of his dissertation:

Ibsen progredisce assai, benché non ancora definitivamente. Mi meraviglio che a te non paia un libro organico. È tanto organico, una sola cosa, che ogni nuovo dramma che studio m'obbliga a rifare il processo di tutto il libro. Perciò finché non sarò giunto in fine, dove m'aspetta la pietra di paragone di *Quando noi morti ci destiamo*, la cui interpretazione deve suggellare tutto, come essa suggella tutta l'opera e la vita d'Ibs[en], non potrò stendere per l'ultima e definitiva volta tutto lo studio. Ora sto passando ore inquiete per Rosmersholm, che capisco tanto bene da accorgermi che qualche cosa non è stata valutata abbastanza da me nei drammi precedenti; e mi tocca tornar indietro, nientemeno che a Giuliano l'Apostata. Il mio metodo, che credo sia l'unico, è di rispettare profondamente ogni opera presa in sé, come se quella fosse l'unica opera e l'unico documento che avessi della vita e dello spirito di Ibsen. In ogni opera ci deve esser tutto Ibsen, cioè anche le premesse ad essa e le conseguenze. E finché tutto il resto del libro non s'accorda perfettamente ad essa, o è sbagliata la mia valutazione dell'opera o è sbagliato il corso del libro. Naturalm.[ente] la più parte di questo lavoro l'ho fatto già nell'estate d'anno (e anche prima), sicché ora l'edifizio è già tutto chiarissimo in mente, e non si tratta che di simmetrie particolari.⁸⁶

The correspondence with Oblath also shed some lights on the difficulties Slataper faced while working on such an ambitious work. In July 1913 he wrote:

Ibsen è argomento più serio. Però è un affaraccio. Ho sempre una voglia matta di scappar via. Da una parte so ormai troppo. Dall'altra è assai faticoso creare il significato dell'opera d'un uomo. È lavoro magnifico e travagliante: da storico. C'è una massa di fatti: tutti importanti, ma senza significato, così. Eppure, se costruito l'edifizio, uno solo non ha il suo posto, l'edifizio è falso. È un lavoro da poeti con il controllo da scienziati. C'è le schedine che t'accoppiano. Le ordini

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 368-9.

tutte, tutta la traccia stupenda è pronta: non puoi scrivere una parola. Manca la vita, manca il colpo del cuore.⁸⁷

In August 1913 he was indeed experiencing a situation of perplexity regarding *Ibsen*. Even though a letter of the 15th April 1913 testifies that he was already in touch with a Milanese publishing house, the 5th August he writes to Oblath that he spent some time reflecting about the work. He pondered the idea of learning Danish in order to be able to study the plays in their original language, but he gave up on the venture as he was aware that to master the language he would have taken more at least two years. Moreover, he is sure that he will take several months to conclude the work because his purpose was analysing the whole *corpus* of Ibsen's works.

The references to *Ibsen* that followed the above mentioned letter don't contain relevant information about the work; the correspondence with Oblath becomes more rare and in his last letters Slataper only describes his life as soldier.

2.2.2 *Ibsen*

The whole work consists of an extended biography, starting with the birth of Ibsen and ending with his death. Slataper endeavoured to compose an essay able to present the entire frame of Ibsen's introverted and occasionally gruff personality; the biographical facts are accompanied, or rather interrupted, by the analysis of his works. Furthermore, Slataper wrote many paragraphs concerning Norwegian and European history; he aimed to provide the writer a detailed portray of Ibsen as a poet, but also as a man involved in the historical and political context.

The contraposition between the three elements (biography, plays analysis and, in a minor quantity, historical context) that Slataper tried to combine

⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 431.

gained him the negative critique for fragmentation. *Ibsen* is an extremely not homogeneous work, it is difficult to read it in a fluent way. Nevertheless, once its shortcomings are overcome, the work is remarkably meticulous. One of its peculiarities is that it doesn't only focus on the most popular plays, but Slataper analysed in an accurate way also the first works written by Ibsen and, above all, he enriched the biographical information by constantly quoting the poems Ibsen wrote in his youth.

On the other hand, the elements of historical and social context are the innovation that characterise the work. According to Quazzolo:

Con l'*Ibsen* assistiamo al primo tentativo di storicizzare l'autore e la sua opera drammatica, collocandoli all'interno della loro epoca e dei fatti storici che sconvolsero l'Europa del secondo Ottocento, sottolineando la lotta tra lo Stato e l'individuo, tra il singolo e la società.⁸⁸

The fact that Slataper decided to concentrate on Ibsen's biography is not a coincidence. Slataper believed that art and life are strongly connected and that the artistic production of an artist (included his own one) had to be interpreted taking his or her biography in account⁸⁹. Slataper himself probably tried to suggest this concept to the reader starting from the very first lines of the work: the epigraph in the opening of the book:

«Tutto ciò che ho scritto è in stretta relazione con ciò che ho vissuto intimamente — anche se non esteriormente. Ogni nuova opera, per me, ha avuto lo scopo di liberarmi e purificarmi lo spirito. Giacché non si è mai del tutto superiori alla società cui s'appartiene: vi si è sempre in qualche modo corresponsabili e correi. Perciò una volta ho preposto come dedica a un esemplare "d'un mio libro questi versi:

⁸⁸ PAOLO QUAZZOLO, *Trieste e il caso Ibsen*, Venezia, Marsilio Editori, 2020, p. 169.

⁸⁹ Another element that support this idea is to be found in *Lettere alle "tre amiche"*. Most of the books he suggested to his friends were indeed biographies. For instance on the 8th June 1911 he wrote to Oblath «Dopo la vita di Tolstoj potrai leggere quella di Beethoven e di Michelangelo (tutt'e due del Rolland). Una vita buona e bella di Nietzsche in tedesco non la conosco»

Vivere: è pugnare con gli spiriti
mali del cuore e del pensiero.
Scrivere : è tenere severo
giudizio contro sé stessi.»
(Ibsen, lettera del 16 giugno 1880).⁹⁰

The first chapter, called *Preparazione*, aims to describe the family background of Ibsen, his youth until he moved in Italy. As the title of the chapter suggests, Slataper conceived this period and the works Ibsen composed as a “practice” that got the writer to the successive glory and poetic fulfilment.

It is remarkable the fact that Slataper tries to connect some aspects of Ibsen’s childhood to elements contained in his plays. It is easy to perceive a subjective tone in the work: Slataper creates emotionally participates in the description of Ibsen’s early life. Some examples:

Henrik ha ott’anni. Il babbo, un «rovinato» abbastanza allegro, pare, senza più nessuna resistenza o capacità seria di lavoro, beone: è il tipo, impressionantemente solito, del «fallito» ibseniano; la madre, rassegnata e debole nel suo cuore capace di continui sacrifici, cerca chissà di dimenticare quello squallore improvviso sognando e pregando, intrattenendo i figlioli in quell’immaginare misto di fate e di leggende bibliche così caratteristico dei popoli nordici protestanti. (*Ibs*, 5-6)

E anche il nostro adolescente scandinavo si ritrova meglio nei mari in burrasca con chiaro di luna, nei boschi invernali stecchiti, nei morti che specchiano il loro strano sguardo astrale nell’onde. (*Ibs*, 12)

È già teoria prima del dramma. Difatti: se l’uomo avesse autocritica sufficiente! Ma non l’ha; o per lo meno: se non l’ha? Deve darsi tutto alla propria passione, alla “volontà” del suo desiderio, e le forze non corrispondendo, egli cade. Ecco l’eroe, *Catilina*, il primo dramma, la prima confessione piena dell’animo d’Ibsen. (*Ibs*, 18)

⁹⁰ SCIPIO SLATAPER, *Ibsen*, Firenze, Sansoni, 1944, From now on it will be quoted as *Ibs*.

Such emotive manner decreases in the following chapters which contain less biographical information.

Slataper describes the first two phases of Ibsen's artistic development: in first place, during his adolescence he adhered to the Romantic movement. During the following years his production focused on the Norwegian folklore as his works were inspired by the traditional fairy tales and, in particular, by Edda.

Several paragraphs are dedicated to the political situation of Norway: Ibsen declared in many articles and poems how strongly he believed in the independence of his country from the Danish and the Swedish political and cultural dominion. At the same time he wished for the unification (or at least the close cooperation) of the Scandinavian countries. As a result of the Slesvig-Holstein war (meticulously described by Slataper in its two phases), Ibsen decided to leave the country and move to Italy. The breaking point between Ibsen and his Country was the refusal of Norway and Sweden to help Denmark, symptom of the fact that the cooperation between Scandinavian people in which Ibsen had believed was an utopia. Such disillusion determined the ambivalent relationship Ibsen had with Norway during his all life.

The second chapter, *Affermazione*, opens with a fragment of a famous speech pronounced in Copenhagen by Ibsen in 1898; it describes his first arrival in Italy. In a footnote Slataper explains to the reader that the landscape described by Ibsen in that speech is the Karst, the zone of the middle eastern Alps where Slataper spent his youth. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the main work written by Ibsen is named *Il mio Carso*⁹¹. Even though Ibsen was probably not aware of the name of the zone he briefly went through, Slataper wanted to specify it: he took occasion to underline an element that bounds him to Ibsen.

⁹¹ *Il mio Carso* is defined as a lyric novel in which Slataper deals with some painful experiences such as the suicide of the loved woman and his mother's death. The symbolic landscape where the novel is set is indeed the Karst which is portrayed as the opposite of the city, receptacle of pain and corruption.

Aside the considerations regarding Ibsen's experience in Italy, the chapter contains the analysis of the works that precede the season of the realistic theatre inaugurated by *The Pillars of the Society*. The most noteworthy paragraphs are the ones about *Brand*.

Brand seems to have deeply fascinated Slataper, even though his response about the play is not completely positive, it is clear that Slataper is involved and passionate in the analysis. From this moment on, the figure of Brand will be omnipresent in the essay and he, together with the other characters will be terms of comparison for every successive play.

Brand was in a first time (1864-65) conceived as a poem, but the work, left unfinished, resulted in a verse drama published in 1866. The plot revolves around the character Brand, a highly principled and uncompromising clergyman. The play explores themes of individualism, morality, and the conflict between personal ideals and society expectations. As Brand faces various challenges and moral dilemmas, he remains resolute in his commitment to his principles, even at great personal cost such as the loss of his infant son.

Slataper compares the play to Goethe's *Faust*: in particular the structure of the two plays are similar; he points out the difference between the characters of Brand and Faust, especially the way they mean the moral law (connoted by the Kantian acceptance): the first is aimed to be master of his soul while Faust's purpose was to master the universe, and to do it he embraces life in its fullness. On the contrary Brand's attitude is renounce, giving up on everything.

The concept of the will is the keystone of *Brand*: the drama is interpreted through the concepts expressed in Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* and *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, even though, Slataper admits, he is not sure it can be considered one of Ibsen's philosophical sources.

Kant ammette che magari la volontà buona non possa mai attuarsi; che noi sempre e da per tutto ci urtiamo nel nostro «caro Io», ma «quel che importa sapere non è se uno o l'altro atto è accaduto, ma bensì questo: che la ragione comanda per

sé stessa, e indipendentemente da ogni fatto dato, ciò che deve accadere, e che di conseguenza alcune azioni, di cui non s'è visto nel mondo forse ancor mai il minimo esempio e della cui possibilità perciò dubita fortemente chi fonda tutto sull'esperienza, sono in realtà imposte senza remissione alcuna dalla ragione» Cosicché la massima cui l'uomo deve ubbidire è: «Fa dipendere la tua volontà da una legge che sarebbe propria di una volontà perfetta, quale non è la tua». In questa terribile constatazione; «quale non è la tua» è il centro del dramma di *Brand*, il nostro dramma. (*Ibs*, 93)

The third part of the monograph was originally called *Maturità* but in the last redaction the title is replaced by *Prosa*. It contains the analysis of the first three dramas of the new realistic literary season: *The Pillars of Society*, *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts*.

Preceded by a historical framework, *The Pillars of the Society* represents a radical change of direction towards «Rovnekrog» (*Ibs*, 155), a Norwegian word that Slataper reports in the essay and that could be compared to the concept of *milieu*. The *rovnekrog* in several plays is the element that defeats the man or the woman who is always somehow weak and inept. The reason of the downfall of Bernick is the lies he told to his wife, his friend and above all to himself; Slataper individuates this pattern as the propeller of the following plays: also in *A Doll's House* the lie Nora told her husband many years before represent the reason of her downfall.

The result of the finale of *The Pillars of Society* is, in Slatpaer's view, artificial and forced. At this point of his career:

In realtà Ibsen crede ancora. La donna non ha ancora nessun astio contro chi sacrificò tutta la sua vita. E arrivava ancora in tempo per salvare il suo eroe. Il riconoscimento, il giudizio dell'eroe è ancora, qui, catarsi. Poi sarà esso stesso il dramma; l'inutile e terribile agnizione del peccato commesso succederà proprio nel momento in cui esso agirà nelle sue irrimediabili conseguenze. (*Ibs*, 157)

Together with Brand, *A Doll's House* is the central topic of the monograph, the author dedicated it a forty pages analysis, the longest of the book. It is presented in first place through the description of the making of the play and the changes that the text has undergone in the different editorial passages. There are several differences between the first drafts, the first redaction and the definitive one, among the others the fact that the play was supposed to end with Nora's suicide. Slataper summarised the ideological change with this words:

il dramma non è più tra l'uomo e la donna, ma tra un uomo gretto, idealizzato da una donna che deve, per educazione, idealizzare, e talmente, che quand'essa s'accorge della verità, ogni amore e ogni certezza le rovinano. (*Ibs*, 185)

One of the main theme of the analysis is the social context and the reasons that pushed Ibsen to write the play: the reason why Ibsen created the character of Nora is to be found in the debates that, in that period, focused on the right to individuality which inevitably opened the discussion about the women issue.

Together with the social reasons, the story of Nora was also inspired by a true story that happened in Munich. The fact made Ibsen reflect on the contraposition between men and women and the way the latter is oppressed by the rules made by the former.

Slataper's analysis is extremely meticulous, in particular regarding the very first scene that is studied line by line; in his opinion, it perfectly captures the essence of Nora and Thorwald. Concerning the finale and the change Ibsen made to the first redaction he wrote:

Nora non è né debole né forte: è una povera bambola che sentendo battere in lei per la prima volta l'anima umana, si rifugia in solitudine per comprendere che cosa essa sia. Il non cedere alla sua carne, il non continuare a essere incosciente moglie e madre è un atto di forza : ma solo relativamente alla sua infinita

debolezza. Ella perché è debole non può rinascere nuova nella casa dove è stata bambola, non può compiere nessun altro dovere che verso sé stessa, deve andar via perché qui non riuscirebbe mai a verità. (*Ibs*, 194)

The next chapter is named *La caduta dell'eroe*, title that is supposed to express the pattern of the protagonists of the plays here examined. They are considered as megalomaniacs by Ibsen himself and they can do nothing but be defeated. The figure of Brand is mentioned several times as it appears that he has been the prototype of both Dr. Tomas Stockmann, protagonist of *An Enemy of the People*, and Greger Werle, the irreproachable moralist of *The Wild Duck*. Particularly in the latter the theme of the inadequacy of the man, despite all of his renouncement, echoes the character of Brand.

Slataper expressed dissimilar opinions about the two plays as the first one is considered badly conceived and lazy while *The Wild Duck* is evaluated as the best work of Ibsen. Slataper welcomed transition from the naive Dr. Stockmann to the morality-obsessed Greger Werle and the portrayal of a society in which human race is at the peak of its failure.

Slataper interpreted the drama as a denial of all the value Ibsen expressed in his previous works:

La sua persona, e la sua opera, è intaccata alle radici. Gregorio ha bisogno patologico di verità; perché ha malata la coscienza non può sopportare il peccato: e Brand? «La febbre di probità è una malattia nazionale, che però si manifesta sporadicamente»: non è questa, più che di Relling, una sghignazzata d'Ibsen? Non è l'anatra una cruda satira contro il «matrimonio puro», «l'amicizia pura», la «vocazione pura», che è stato il fondamento e l'esistenza di tutto Ibsen? (*Ibs*, 245)

Slataper also notices the presence of symbolism in the play.

Ma il simbolo è la vera unione, è la comunione, l'unificarsi della forza con l'aspetto. È il fatto d'ogni uomo e d'ogni ora in cui sboccano i fini dell'universale. È l'individuo e la sua coscienza rinati in alcunché di sovrumano, intangibile,

immutabile. È la verità espressa nell'atto; l'intelletto e la fantasia riassorbiti nel morale centro umano, ricreati concretamente. Il simbolo è reale perché lo crediamo. (*Ibs*, 247)

The further chapter is called *Tentativo di rinascita*. It opens with the long and detailed description of the vacation Ibsen did in Norway in 1885. After the indisputable acknowledgment of Ibsen value in Norway and all over Europe, the author composed *Rosmersholm*, one of his most complex works together with *The Lady of the Sea*. They represent a moving beyond the pessimism of the past two plays. In this new phase the characters are free and the nature and the society don't inveigh on them because of their imperfections.

The two plays are not deeply examined. A huge part of the paragraphs dedicated to *Rosmersholm* concentrate on the analysis of the first redaction of the play; once again the male protagonist is compared to Brand and in general Slataper claims that the play "reconciled" with the epic tendency of the youth play.

The part concerning *The Lady of the Sea* contains an harsh criticism on various aspects of the play. Slataper noticed the attempt of Ibsen of describing a new conception of life, more free and more positive, but, in his opinion, the attempt resulted in a failure. In Slataper's words:

Ma il dramma stesso è preponderatamente uno schema. È un desiderio, non un'azione. Non che tutto succeda perché il poeta intervenga deus ex machina nelle opere degli umani; tutt'altro; ma la convinzione del poeta non è persuasa; non è vissuta, ma astratta. (*Ibs*, 276)

The penultimate chapter of the monograph could appear out of place in the eyes of the reader. Instead of being named with a title that indicates a phase of Ibsen's life or his artistic process, it is named *Edda Gabler*. It indeed contains only an analysis of the drama that is relatively short (ten pages). The reason of lack of coherence in structure of the book is probably to be found, in this case,

in the premature death of the writer who couldn't refine the last details of the work.

Slataper's opinion about the play is not completely positive, he considers it like «un punto di quiete» (*Ibs*, 281). The weak point of the drama is, in Slataper's opinion, the main character. As usual he connects the protagonist to Ibsen's youth works, in particular to Hjordis, character of play *The Vikings at Helgeland*, written in 1857. The author will even claim that the character of Hjordis is the more perfect version of Hedda; they are both characterised by living in the name of love and hate at the same time, their attitude is violent and passionate. The great difference between the two is the fact that Hedda fears to be judged by society: «Edda è vigliacca perchè ha paura di esser ridicola» (*Ibs*, 284).

The final chapter is called *Epilogo*. The first part is portrait of Ibsen during his old age, starting from his definitive return in Norway in 1891. In some paragraphs the style becomes lyric; Slataper, like in the first chapter, describes in an emotional and touching way the last years of the playwright. The poetic tone is also accompanied by some lines of Dante's XXVII canto of *Purgatorio*.⁹² The quotation aims to give the reader the idea of the slow movement from the tireless trial of reason to the peace, metaphorically, a transition from Virgil to Matelda and the Garden of Eden.

The last three dramas are interpreted in connection to the old age and the imminent death of Ibsen. With few concise words Slataper defines this way the last four plays:

Costruttore Solness: caduta dell'ultimo sogno; *Piccolo Eyolf* ('94): il pentimento sperato ancora come una redenzione; *John Gabriel Borkman* ('96): insufficiente anche il pentimento se non è l'atto mortale; *Quando noi morti ci destiamo* (98): epilogo eroico della tragedia e della vita. (*Ibs*, 303)

⁹² Giovane e bella, in sogno, mi pareo
Donna veder andar per una landa
Cogliendo fiori, e cantando dicea. (Vv 97-99)

The very last analysis of *When we Dead Awaken* closes in a circular way the works Slataper dedicated to Ibsen because, as mentioned in 2.2.1, the very first article Slataper wrote about Ibsen concerned the same play. *When we Dead Awaken* represents the end of faith in art and of love, it is connected with the end of Ibsen's life as, according to Slataper, he was somehow aware that he would have never written anymore. The play portrays the regret of an artist who neglected life, symbolised by Irene, in favour of his art.

Solo volontà, solo lavoro, solo sforzo; non spontaneità, vita, immediatezza. Anche nell'artista: e Ibsen lo sa. L'angoscioso spasimo suo verso la vita è nello stesso tempo desiderio supremo di vera, istintiva arte. Non venne. Mancò l'amore a questo grande poeta della vita morale. (*Ibs*, 327)

Slataper choose to close the book by reporting a famous anecdote: the old Ibsen, after two apoplexies that had compromised his mobility, during the last years of his life tried to learn again how to write. The great playwright was practicing writing the alphabet.

Considering the work in the frame of Slataper's production, it is important to underline how the value *Ibsen* doesn't only concern the analysis of Ibsen's works, but it is also an important element that can be used to understand Slataper's interpretation of literature, art and history. Even though Slataper's conception of art changed through the years, his basic idea was that art couldn't exist for its own sake, on the contrary it had to pursue an ethic and a constructive value⁹³. In other words, Slataper and Ibsen meant their works as an attempt to share their ideals and change the society. They invited the audience to question the prevailing moral and societal norms, encouraging them to consider the ethical implications of individual and community choices.

⁹³ Such ideal explains the fact that, in the last years of his life, Slataper devoted his life not to artistic speculation, but to political action. This is also the basis of his choice to join as a volunteer the Italian army during World War I.

Quazzolo and Mutterle agree on the fact that through the ideological elements contained in *Ibsen* it is possible to better understand Slataper main work: *Il mio Carso*. Beside the ideas, style is one of the elements that connect the two books. In Mutterle's words (also quoted by Quazzolo in *Trieste e il caso Ibsen*):

[*Ibsen*] si connette direttamente alla tematica critica e stilistica impostata nel *Mio Carso*, fornendone, nella sua non breve elaborazione, gli antecedenti e soprattutto la più diretta prosecuzione e svolgimento sul piano della consapevolezza critica, se non su quello della realizzazione poetica.⁹⁴

In conclusion, *Ibsen* gains a further value because of Slataper's premature death. *Il mio Carso* and *Ibsen* are the only organic and complex works of the author and they have to be considered as an ideological and artistic testament. It is one of the few works written by a writer that could have become great in his artistic and critic production, if his life was not cut short during World War I.

⁹⁴ ANCO MARZIO MUTTERLE, *Scipio Slataper*, Milano, Mursia, 1981, p. 100.

3. Luigi Pirandello

Luigi Pirandello was born on June 28th 1867, in Agrigento, Sicily. His life was marked by a profound exploration of the complexities of human existence, a theme that permeates his diverse body of work.

Pirandello's upbringing in a family of wealthy landowners provided him with a privileged yet turbulent environment, fuelling his keen observations of social dynamics and psychological intricacies. He graduated from his studies in Philology 1891 at the university of Bonn. In 1894, he married Antonietta Portulano: their marriage was, since its beginnings, clouded by the financial struggles the family had to face, and the tension was intensified by the fact that Antonietta, suffered from mental health issues. The couple had three children.

Throughout his literary career he produced a large number of novels, short stories and plays. The first novel, *L'esclusa*, was published in 1901 and it was followed by a plethora of novels including *Il fu Mattia Pascal* (Rome, 1904), *Suo Marito* (Florence, 1911), *I vecchi e i giovani* (Milan, 1913), *Quaderni di Serafino Gubbio operatore* (Florence, 1925), *Uno, nessuno e centomila* (Florence, 1926). The novels dig into the depths of the human psyche and showcase Pirandello's inclination to explore the themes of identity, illusion, and the clash between societal norms and individual desires.

Concerning the short stories, Pirandello wrote about 250 tales collected in *Novelle per un anno* (Florence, 1922-1928). The stories are populated by a diverse and appealing assortment of characters, each grappling with their own existential dilemmas and psychological turmoil.

However, it is theatre that truly made Pirandello a pioneer. Central to Pirandello's dramatic work is the concept of "theater within theater" or "metatheater," a technique that challenged traditional notions of reality and illusion. His masterpiece, *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* (1921), outlined this approach, as it obfuscated the boundaries between fiction and reality, inviting audiences to question the nature of truth and representation. In works like *Enrico*

IV (Florence, 1922) and *Ciascuno a suo modo* (Firenze, 1924) Pirandello continued to explore the fluidity of identity and the inherent absurdity of the human condition.

Within the context of Pirandello's production, an important role is played by the essay *L'umorismo* (Lanciano, 1909) in which the author

As a winner of the Nobel prize in Literature in 1934, Pirandello's influence reverberates across generations of writers, playwrights, and intellectuals, shaping the trajectory of modern literature and theatre. Through his questioning exploration of the human psyche and his relentless interrogation of the nature of reality, Luigi Pirandello remains an immense figure in the pantheon of world literature, his work serving as a timeless testament to the complexities of the human experience.

3.1 Ibsen and Pirandello

It is necessary to state that Pirandello, in the context of this stands out as an exception. The writers analysed in the past and the following chapters were explicitly correlated with Ibsen's works: they deeply studied the author's works, quoted him in their essays and articles and, sometimes, claimed that Ibsen influenced their production. In some cases, the Norwegian playwright was directly quoted in their works or his influence was extremely clear, especially as regards the construction of the characters and the structure of the plays.

It is a fact that Pirandello knew Ibsen as the Norwegian writer was well known in Europe and in Italy while Pirandello was at the peak of his production. Furthermore, in the library of Pirandello's house in Rome (now a museum) it is possible to find some Ibsen's plays translated in German and an essay written by Alberto Foschini named *Il teatro di Ibsen* (Naples, 1936)⁹⁵.

⁹⁵ Source: Studio di Luigi Pirandello – Istituto di studi pirandelliani e sul teatro contemporaneo; <https://www.studiodiluigipirandello.it/archivi-e-biblioteca/> (last consultation 11th April 2024)

Despite Pirandello knew Ibsen, he rarely referred to him: in his essays he quoted Ibsen's name few times and briefly. For instance the volume *Saggi* (Milan, 1939) edited by Manilio Lo Vecchio Musti and published by Mondadori, which collects a lot of essays about literature and theatre, Ibsen was mentioned twice, the first time in the essay *Teatro nuovo e teatro vecchio* (published for the first time in «Comoedia», 1st January 1923) in which Pirandello dedicated few lines to the Norwegian author praising him because of his ability in investigating society. The second quotation is to be found in *Un critico fantastico* (in «Nuova Antologia» 16th March 1905), in which Ibsen's figure is briefly put in pair with Nietzsche's. Those two quotation are enough to confirm the fact that Pirandello knew the author, but are not enough to determine his thoughts about him.

That being said, the current chapter aims to study some of the huge topics that both the two writers dealt with. Some of their works feature common points; this tendency is to be ascribed to the fact that such issues sparked interest in many intellectuals who wrote between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th.

Some of the themes that will be analysed in this chapter have been suggested by Roberto Alonge who curated *Drammi moderni* (Milan, 2009), the collection of the twelve latest plays written by Ibsen. Alonge repeatedly associated Pirandello's name to Ibsen's, in particular in the footnotes of the last drama *When we dead awaken*: he noticed how the themes and the dynamics portrayed in *When we dead awaken* correspond for the most part to the ones Pirandello described in the play *Diana e la Tuda*.

Nevertheless, the name of Pirandello was associated to Ibsen in other occasion: Cosmo Crifò in the essay *Sentimento della femminilità e dell'infanzia in Pirandello* underlined how the two writers deeply investigated female psychology:

È appunto il motivo della donna rimasta sola, avulsa dalla normale destinazione alla famiglia e alla casa per le avversità della sorte – incarnate spesso

in una irriducibile alterità maschile. [...] la quale avrà elementi comuni – specie nell’approfondimento delle diversità fra psicologia maschile e femminile – con quella ibseniana di *Casa di bambola*, *La donna del mare*, *Quando noi morti ci destiamo*, proseguendo in Pirandello fino a *Diana e la Tuda* e *Quando si è qualcuno*.⁹⁶

Crifò does not quote the novel *Suo marito*, but the character of Silvia Roncella can be easily associated to the reference to the isolation of women who take distance from family and what is generally associated to femininity. The next subchapter will focus indeed on a parallelism between the novel *Suo marito* and *A Doll's House*, two works which show a lot of tangencies.

Moreover, both Pirandello and Ibsen, alongside with numerous writers of their age, showed interest in the figure of the *femme fatale*; as a regard of Ibsen’s production, the most iconic character which embodies such model is Hedda Gabler, the protagonist of the homonymous play, but the protagonist of *When we dead awaken*, Irene, can be considered in all respects a *femme fatale* as well. Pirandello dealt with such the figure too, and the complex character of Varia Nestoroff has several points in common with Irene.

3.2 *Suo marito* and *A Doll's House*

Suo marito is the story of Silvia Roncella, a young author who, after publishing a successful novel, moved from Taranto to Rome with her husband: Giustino Boggiolo. In the time period that concerns the first part of the novel, Silvia becomes pregnant and gives birth to a child; at the same time she writes a theatrical piece of great success entitled “La nuova colonia”.

Getting in touch with the worldly Roman society, Giustino appears to be particularly well-versed in business and he takes several contract initiatives with

⁹⁶ COSMO CRIFÒ, *Sentimento della femminilità e dell’infanzia in Pirandello* in *Atti del Congresso internazionale di studi pirandelliani: Venezia, Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Isola di San Giorgio Maggiore, 2-5 ottobre 196*, Firenze, Le monier, 1967, P. 751.

publishers, critics and journalists in order to advertise and make use of his wife's literary production. He is able to ignore the society's disrespect and ridicule in order to ensure the success of his wife's work, of which he assumes, in a certain sense, a symbolic paternity. Silvia, in turn, begins to distance herself from her spouse, eventually separating from him after the attempt to start an extramarital affair with an elderly writer.

During the period of separation with his wife, Giustino, together with his mother, takes care of the little son who, however, due to a sudden illness, dies. The last scene of the novel stages a definitive separation between Silvia and her husband.

Luigi Pirandello's *Suo Marito* and Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and are both influential works that delve into the roles and perceptions of women in society, though through distinct cultural and narrative paradigms.

Nora Helmer, the protagonist of *A Doll's House*, at a first glance, is portrayed as a seemingly frivolous and naive housewife. Living in a comfortable, bourgeois household, she is indulged by her husband, who treats her more like a child than an equal partner. She seems to embody perfectly the characteristics of the female standard, but a fact makes her deviate from this apparent paradigm of gender. Nora secretly took out a loan to save her husband's life, a financial responsibility that would traditionally fall to the male head of the household. She manages this debt independently and takes on various strategies to repay it, such as saving money from her household allowance and working secretly. The exceptionality of such behaviour is underlined by Mrs. Linde who, expresses her perplexity about money:

LA SIGNORA LINDE perché prenderlo in prestito, certo, tu non potevi.

NORA Ah si? Perché no?

LA SIGNORA LINDE No, una moglie, certo, non può prendere in prestito senza l'autorizzazione del marito.⁹⁷

Silvia's struggle is more directly tied to her professional aspirations: she does a typically male job, the one of the writer. As a writer, she steps into a field that, at the time, was predominantly male-dominated. The literary world, including publishing, authorship, and literary criticism, was mostly controlled by men. It is through the thoughts of Ippolito, Silvia's uncle, that it is highlighted how the role of a writer is considered unconventional for a woman. On the contrary, Ippolito thinks that she would be better suited to activities different from writing, activities clearly more bounded to the female role:

Avrebbe voluto che Giustino impedisse alla moglie di scrivere. [...] Invece di domandarle se avesse rassettato la casa, sorvegliato la serva nella pulizia o in cucina, o se magari si fosse fatta una bella passeggiata a Villa Borghese; le domandava se e che cosa avesse scritto.⁹⁸

The theme of the gender roles is extremely important in *Suo marito*; the preface to the edition of the novel published by Mondadori focuses on the topic underlining how Pirandello dealt with such issue in more than one work (among the others his first novel, *L'esclusa*). The author of the preface, Michael Roessner, claims that:

Nella relazione col marito, Silvia vorrebbe inizialmente assumere il tradizionale ruolo di moglie, ma la realtà non glielo permette: la fama e i cospicui introiti dovuti alla sua opera letteraria La rendono colei che porta il pane a casa e che mantiene la famiglia, riducendo il marito, Giustino Boggiolo, al ruolo

⁹⁷ HENRIK IBSEN edited by ROBERTO ALONGE, *Henrik Ibsen – Drammi moderni*, Milano, Mondadori libri (BUR grandi classici), 2009, P. 147.

⁹⁸ LUIGI PIRANDELLO edited by GIOVANNI MACCHIA, *Suo marito* in *Opere di Luigi Pirandello – Tutti i romanzi*, Milano, Mondadori editore (I Meridiani), 1984, P. 629

marginale e dipendente previsto tradizionalmente per la donna: egli perde infatti l'identità propria, diventando meramente «suo marito».⁹⁹

Giustino appears to accept his subordinate role, but, upon closer examination, he tries to control Silvia. Initially, he appears supportive and proud of Silvia's literary success. However, as her fame grows, so does his insecurity and need to assert control. Giustino's attempts to manage Silvia's career and personal life become stifling, ultimately revealing his deep-seated need to subordinate her achievements to his own efforts.

Giustino is convinced that the Silvia's popularity and the esteem she received should be attributed to him. He indeed exaggeratedly encourages his wife to write as much as possible in order to have the possibility to make economical arrangements for the staging of her theatrical writings or for interviews. Silvia herself recognises his role in giving economic stability to the family, but her husband's attitude makes her extremely uncomfortable:

Ma ecco, ora egli s'era messo a far bottega di quel segreto su cui era edificata la stima, la gratitudine di lei; s'era messo a vendere e a gridare con tanto baccano la merce, perché tutti entrassero nel vivo segreto di lei e vedessero e toccassero. Qual rispetto potevano aver gli altri d'un tal uomo? Ne ridevano tutti, ed egli non se ne curava! Quale stima più poteva averne lei e qual gratitudine, se egli ora, invertendo le parti, la costringeva anche al lavoro e voleva viver di esso?¹⁰⁰

Giustino's attitude to show and almost exploit his wife is compared by Roessner to the attempt to force his wife to prostitute herself. A similar behaviour can be seen in Thorwald as well. A foretaste of the effects of this stance can be clearly seen in the second act, during the famous scene of the

⁹⁹ LUIGI PIRANDELLO, edited by MICHAEL ROESSNER, *Suo marito*, Milano, Mondadori, 2017, P. VIII.

¹⁰⁰ LUIGI PIRANDELLO edited by GIOVANNI MACCHIA, *Opere di Luigi Pirandello – Tutti i romanzi...* P. 765.

tarantella. The scene is a crucial moment of the story where Nora, dressed up like a Neapolitan fisherwoman, trains to dance ahead of a party that will be held the next day. It's a tense and dramatic moment that highlights Nora's desperation, but, similarly, important features of the figure of Thorwald are shown. He physically manoeuvres his wife's body to make her dance perfectly the tarantella to impress those who attend the ball.

Nevertheless, the strongest act that perfectly shows Thorwald's behaviour towards Nora is to be found in the last act, when he and Nora come back from the ball and meet Mrs. Linde. After Mrs. Linde expresses the desire to see Nora's Neapolitan costume, Thorwald reacts this way:

HELMER (*toglie lo scialle di Nora*) Sì, la guardi bene. Credo che sia degna senza dubbio di essere guardata. Non è deliziosa signora Linde?

[...]

Non è sorprendentemente deliziosa? Era anche l'opinione generale durante la serata. Ma lei è spaventosamente ostinata – la dolce piccola cosina. Cosa possiamo farci? Si figuri, ho dovuto quasi usare la forza per portarla via.¹⁰¹

The act of taking off Nora's shawl to show his wife's body together with the pride he demonstrated for her success during the ball reveal an underlying and implicit desire to take advantage of his wife.

Another central theme that unites *A Doll's House* and *Suo marito* is the issue of the abandonment of children by mothers and women's refusal of motherhood. Nora and Silvia are indeed mothers who give up on their parental role.

As mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, the main reason why *A Doll's House* was perceived as scandalous is to be found in the fact that Nora, without any hesitation leaves her three children. During her last confrontation with Thorwald the matter of the children is mentioned twice: firstly Nora realises

¹⁰¹ HENRIK IBSEN edited by ROBERTO ALONGE, *Henrik Ibsen – Drammi moderni...* P. 205.

that, in her turn, she perceives her kids as nothing but dolls, as her father did with her. Secondly, she denies she has any duty towards them as her only obligation is owed to herself.

Concerning *Suo marito*, Fabio Danelon focused on the novel in his essay collection *Il giogo delle parti* (Venezia, 2010), in which he analyses the theme of the institution of marriage in modern literature. According to Danelon, the lack of interest in parenthood showed mainly by Silvia (and also by Giustino) is reflected in the description of the house the couple moves in:

Dalla presentazione che se ne fa, per mezzo della voce di Giustino in indiretto libero, ci si accorge che nel villino non c'è una stanza per il piccolo Vittorio. Il figlio della coppia, attraverso tale atto mancato, è già pensato/percepito come intruso, estraneo alla costruzione del successo della moglie, attività in cui si esaurisce il senso della vita di Giustino.¹⁰²

After the separation with his wife following her betrayal, it is Giustino who takes care of the young son. Silvia, on the other hand, separates from her son and even after the death of the child she will not be as desperate as Giustino is. After the child's funeral, the only information given about Silvia is the fact that she got into the car of a journalist in order to leave.

Silvia leaves behind her dead son and her former husband in a dramatic and meaningful gesture which inevitably reminds of the iconic conclusion of *A Doll's House*: Nora's slamming of the door.

3.3 *When We Dead Awaken* and *Diana e la Tuda*: two similar dramas

¹⁰² FABIO DANELON, «Cose orride, talvolta». *A proposito di Suo marito di Luigi Pirandello in Il giogo delle parti – narrazioni letterarie matrimoniali nel primo novecento italiano*, Venezia, Marsilio editori, 2010, P. 23.

When We Dead Awaken - A Dramatic Epilogue in Three Acts is the last work written by Henrik Ibsen; it was published in December 1899 and staged for the first time in Stuttgart the following year.

The play investigates the complex psyche of Arnold Rubek, an acclaimed sculptor who, after finishing his masterpiece, a sculptural group named «Resurrection», faces a period of low interest for art and life itself. The play is completely set outdoor, in a Norwegian mountain resort where Rubek encounters Irene, the former muse from his youth, whose presence “resurrects” unresolved conflicts. The woman posed as a model when Rubek was carving «Resurrection» and a complex relationship established between the two. Irene appears, due to her behaviour and appearance, a character surrounded by mystery: Ibsen provided fragmented information about her, in some occasion only allusions regarding the life she lived after leaving Rubek. She declares she drove crazy and killed the men she married and, covertly, she hints that she spent a period in a psychiatric hospital. Her most outstanding feature is “to be dead”.

As Irene and Rubek recall their shared history, the artist struggles with the realization that he lived a lifeless existence and that his marriage with his wife Maja is nothing but a farce. Maja, in turn, starts what seems to be an extramarital affair with Ulfhejm, a boorish bear hunter. The end of the play is set on top of a mountain, during a night storm; Maja saves her life by deciding to follow Ulfhejm and leave Rubek and the monotonous life he could offer her; Rubek and Irene decide to awake from their numbness of death and live the rest of their life as a couple, but, as they declare their will, an avalanche hits them and causes their death.

Twenty-five years after the first theatrical representation of *When We Dead Awaken*, in 1925, Luigi Pirandello began writing *Diana e la Tuda*, a tragedy in three acts staged for the first time in Zurich on November 1926.

The plot of the play focuses on Tuda, a young and beautiful woman who makes a living modelling for several sculptors and painters. The first scene opens with her posing for the young artist Sirio Dossi who is struggling to accomplish a

statue representing the goddess Diana. The sculptor, after noticing that Tuda spends part of her time posing for other artists, proposes her marriage in order to force her to pose only for him and therefore finish quickly his masterpiece. Among the non protagonist characters, Nono Giuncano particularly stands out. He is a sculptor who gave up on his career as he realised that he had wasted his life trying to shape lifeless and unmoving statues.

After Tuda accepted the loveless marriage with Sirio, she undergoes to long posing sessions which cause her a physical decay. At the same time she experiences frustration and loneliness because Sirio sees her only as a means of achieving artistic perfection. Tuda, mortified by her husband's apathy decided to betray him by modelling for another painter, Caravani, who was painting Diana's figure as well.

In the last scene of the play Tuda, lost her beauty and liveliness, throws herself desperate and crazy towards the statue which seems to have gained the vitality she misplaced. Sirio, who believes that Tuda wants to destroy the statue, tries to stop her and attempts to kill her, but Giuncano jumps on Sirio and strangles him.

To place the two works within a historical-literary framework, on the one hand, themes concerning the relationship between artists and their works of art have been widespread since classical times. A good example of an analysis of the theme can be found in the essay *Il ritratto dell'amante* (Torino, 1992) by Maurizio Bettini. On the other hand, the two works present several dissimilarities compared to the ones analysed by Bettini, since, in the dramas of Ibsen and Pirandello, the artists show no romantic love through the model or the statue. Nevertheless, Bettini coined a particularly fitting expression: cruel painter. «Il racconto del pittore crudele» is indeed the name of the chapter dedicated to a short story written by Edgar Allan Poe which can be considered the earlier story which shares more points in common with *When we Dead Awaken* and *Diana e la Tuda*.

The short story is *The Oval Portrait*, published for the first time by «Graham's Magazine» in 1842. The story concerns a wounded man who becomes captivated by a portrait of a young woman while admiring it in a mansion. The narrative then focuses on the story of the man who painted the painting: he artist was so obsessed with capturing her likeness that he didn't notice she was losing her liveliness as he painted. By the time he finished the portrait, she had died and the painting had gained liveliness.

As regard to Poe's story, Bettini wrote some words that perfectly fit *When we Dead Awaken* and *Diana e la Tuda*:

Il ritratto *uccide* il referente, ne usurpa il posto e l'identità. Nella mente perversa del pittore che ha una «sposa nella sua arte», la persona *vera* dell'essere amato non risiede nella vita 'viva' di questo, ma solo nell'immagine che le sue mani riescono a trarne [...] Ve ne sono alcuni che dipingono perché amano, certo: ma ve ne sono altri che amano solo per poter dipingere.¹⁰³

Turning to the specific plot of *When we Dead Awaken* and *Diana e la Tuda*, the two plays share similar dynamics and they delve into common themes, among the others the struggle between art and life. Furthermore, they deal with the relationship between artists and women who pose as models, which, together with the theme of the connection between the sculptor and the statue, have always been a point of interest for intellectual reflection and literature.

Firstly, the system of the characters is similar as the couple of protagonists is made by a sculptor and his model and they are flanked by a third character who has a different point of view about life and art.

In order to define how the two artists act, it is useful to describe their opposite: Giuncano and Ulfhejm. Starting from Giuncano, in the first lines of the first scene he is presented while trying to dissuade Sirio from carving his statue and even preventing all the sculptors to do so. As mentioned before, he gave up

¹⁰³ MAURIZIO BETTINI, *Il ritratto dell'amante*, Torino, Einaudi, 2008, P. 94.

on his career and destroyed all his creations because they were nothing but a death quantity of plaster. The renounce to be stuck in the sterile process of creation of frozen figures gave him the possibility to enjoy life:

GIUNCANO (subito, con forza, alzandosi): Ah sì – e ne ringrazio Dio, se vuoi saperlo! – Questa mattina – ah, li ho qua ancora, come una vampa negli occhi – su ai Parioli – tutti quei papaveri – la gioja –

[...]

GIUNCANO: – non la volevano dare a nessuno – (chi li vedeva lassù?) – l’ave-vano, l’avevano per sé, la gioja d’avvampare al sole, così in tanti insieme – e il silenzio, su quel loro rosso scarlatto, pareva stupore – stupore.

SIRIO (stordito): I papaveri?

GIUNCANO: Perché ora vedo! Da che sono impazzito come tu dici. Sapessi quante cose che prima non vedevo.¹⁰⁴

The words «gioja» and «stupore», both repeated twice, represent what the old ex sculptor gained in exchange of his role of artist: life itself. Giuncano implicitly outlines the paradigm art is equivalent to death. This concept was boded twenty-five years before by Ibsen through the character of Ulfhejm.

Ulfhejm is very far from being an artist: he is portrayed as a hunter and a wanderer whose only friends are his hunting dogs. He is explicitly described as the opposite of Rubek; the audience is aware of this fact because of a clever line pronounced by the character: he proudly claims that in his castle there is not even one painting or sculpture.

Furthermore, Ulfhejm appears to be a dynamic and vital spirit: even though his job is to kill animals, so he has a lot to do with death, he describes himself as closed to the most active aspects of hunting. For example, when he is asked

¹⁰⁴ LUIGI PIRANDELLO edited by ALESSANDRO D’AMICO, *Diana e la Tuda* in *Opere di Luigi Pirandello – Maschere nude*, Milano, Mondadori editore (I Meridiani), 2004, PP 592-3. From now on it will be quoted as *DET*.

which animals he prefers to hunt, he answers « [...] Basta che la carne sia fresca, polposa e sanguigna e – (*Beve da una fiaschetta*)¹⁰⁵».

In two occasions Ibsen made Ulfhejm make references to art; the most relevant one is to be found in the first scene of the first act, when the Rubeks meet the hunter for the first time. Ulfhejm, in reference to the sculptor's job, claims: «Sì perché anche la pietra ha ragione di lottare, lo so. È morta e lotterà fino all'ultimo sangue per non farsi donare la vita a suon di martellate» (*WDA*, 1061). The focus is to be put on the association between the stone, so by metonymy the statue, and death. Even though the artist tries to instil life to his statues, there is no way he can succeed.

All the characteristics which define Giuncano and Ulfhejm do not belong to Sirio and Rubek. On the whole, the two carver are obsessed by their work and, as artists, don't live their life, but they only watch it and portray it.

Both the sculptors claim that they are extraneous to life. Rubek appears to be detached to life, but, compared to Sirio, his attitude is different, probably by virtue of the fact that he is older than him. Rubek regrets spending his time trying to portray life, instead of living it:

PROFESSOR RUBEK (*di nuovo serio*) Era *questo*: che tutta la storia della vocazione artistica e dell'opera artistica – e cose del genere – incominciò a sembrarmi qualcosa di vuoto e deserto e profondamente privo di significato.

SIGNORA MAJA E cosa avresti voluto, invece?

PROFESSOR RUBEK La vita, Maja.

SIGNORA MAJA La vita?

PROFESSOR RUBEK Sì, vivere esposti al sole e alla bellezza, non è forse molto più prezioso che passare i propri giorni in un buco malsano e stancarsi a morte sopra zolle d'argilla e blocchi di pietra? (*WDA*, 1078-1079)

On the other hand, Sirio is even contemptuous of life, as his dialogue with Giuncano shows:

¹⁰⁵ HENRIK IBSEN edited by ROBERTO ALONGE, *Henrik Ibsen – Drammi moderni*, Milano, Mondadori libri (BUR grandi classici), 2009, P. 1061. From now on it will be quoted as *WDA*.

SIRIO – ma dico anche quella degli altri, di tutte le cose – ciò che lui chiama «vivere» (*a Giuncano, con foga:*) che cosa? viaggiare, come fa adesso mio fratello? giocare, amar donne, una bella casa, amici, vestir bene, sentire i so-liti discorsi, far le solite cose? vivere per vivere? –

GIUNCANO – sì, sì – e senza nemmeno saper di vivere –

SIRIO – già – come le bestie –

[...]

SIRIO – grazie l’ho fatto: me ne sono seccato: non ne ho più neanche sdegno; ma tanta uggia, tanta afa (*DET, 597-598*)

The concept expressed by Ibsen and Pirandello seems to match perfectly: producing art excludes the possibility of living life. Pirandello in particular reflected on this idea in several occasions. *Diana e la Tuda* is one of the works in which the dichotomy between life and art is expressed in the most clear way, but in his novels, short stories and essays it is possible to find a lot of references to this particular concept.

Artists, painters, carver and writers have been more than once the protagonists of Pirandello’s works and, coherently, they are often portrayed as people who neglect their life in favour of their art. An example can be found in *Candelora*, a short story composed probably in 1913 and published for the first time by Treves in 1917. The male protagonist, Nane Papa, is an artist whose wife commits suicide after providing his pauper husband the esteem and support of a rich patron.

Nane is characterised by a passive and defeatist attitude, but, in quality of artist, he is described with words that indicate a detachment from life:

E ha provato un gran dispetto per lui rimasto tal quale, né triste né lieto, sciamannato come prima, senz’altra gioia fuori di quella de’ suoi colori, senz’altra voglia che di scavare, di scavare nella sua arte per il bisogno sempre insoddisfatto

di andare in fondo ad essa, quanto più in fondo fosse possibile, tanto da non veder più nulla della buffa fantasmagoria della vita che gli s'agita attorno.¹⁰⁶

Some further similarities can be found in Giorgio Mirelli, a side character in the novel *Quaderni di Serafino Gubbio operatore* (Milano, 1916). Mirelli is a young painter who has some peculiarity in common with Sirio and Rubek. Firstly, some words used by Pirandello to describe him point out, in a less explicit way, that he is not involved in everyday life, but he is completely immersed in his art: «in preda a un'ansia continua, che non gli faceva né scorgere né toccare quella che per gli altri era la realtà della vita»¹⁰⁷

Secondly like Rubek and, partially Sirio, Mirelli is not interested in love or sex. The narrator of the novel states that, even though Mirelli was quite appreciated by women, he was «castissimo, non perché non sapesse farsi valere su le donne, ché timido non era affatto, ma perché istintivamente rifuggiva da ogni distrazione volgare». His first attitude towards Varia Nestoroff (the fascinating *femme fatale* whose figure will be analysed later) is pure and detached contemplation; he takes advantage of the body of the woman, but his only purpose is to consecrate it to art.

Mirelli has a similar position as Rubek: Irene mentions the presence of a table which always prevented the artist and the model to touch each other. During their first conversation she claims:

IRENE Sì, *tu!* Mi sono prostrata del tutto davanti a te, in contemplazione –
(*più sottovoce.*) E mai, nemmeno una volta mi hai toccato.

[...]

RUBEK (*la guarda con trasporto*) Ero un artista, Irene!

[...]

¹⁰⁶ LUIGI PIRANDELLO edited by ALESSANDRO D'AMICO, *Opere di Luigi Pirandello – Novelle per un anno*, Milano, Mondadori editore (I Meridiani), 2004, P 414.

¹⁰⁷ LUIGI PIRANDELLO edited by GIOVANNI MACCHIA, *Opere di Luigi Pirandello – Tutti i romanzi*, Milano, Mondadori editore (I Meridiani), 1973, P 550. From now on it will be quoted as *QSG*.

Diventasti per me una creatura sacra, da toccare solo in adorazione. Ero ancora giovane a quel tempo, Irene. E mi vinse la credenza che, se ti avessi toccato, ti avrei desiderato coi sensi, la mia mente si sarebbe sconvolta, e non sarei riuscito a terminare ciò per cui lottavo. – E credo ancora che in questo ci fosse del vero. (WDA, 1068)

Concerning Sirio, he appears reluctant only towards Tuda, who, more than once offered herself to him. Nevertheless, the plot of the play implicitly suggests that Sirio has a relationship with Sara Mendel, another model; so, from this point of view, Sirio and Rubek can not be put on the same level.

The general relationship between art and life and the attempt the former does to portray the latter aroused Pirandello's interest for long time. In turn, the evolution of Pirandello's thought on the topic has been studied in a chronological perspective by Giovanni Sincropi who, in 1916 published an essay entitled *Arte e vita nelle opere di Luigi Pirandello* («Italice», 1961). The scholar dated back the first analysis of the matter to the period between 1904 and 1908, years in which Pirandello wrote one of his masterpiece, the essay *L'Umoreismo*. The essay, on the whole, delves into the complex nature of humour, exploring its depths beyond mere amusement. The last chapters of the second part of the essay deal with the contraposition between life and art. In particular, he describes life as an incessant and changeable flux that human being try to arrest in different ways¹⁰⁸. One of the possible ways is the artistic representation:

Anch'essa l'Arte, come tutte le costruzioni ideali o illusorie, tende a fissar la vita: la fissa in un momento o in vari momenti determinati: la statua in un gesto, il

¹⁰⁸ The theme of the attempt to give shape to the mutability of life is faced by Pirandello in his novels as well. See for instance *Uno, nessuno e centomila*. In the novel are reported the thoughts of Vitangelo Moscarda, the protagonist who is gripped by an identity crisis: «Possiamo conoscere soltanto quello a cui riusciamo a dar forma. Ma che conoscenza può essere? È forse questa forma la cosa stessa? Sì, tanto per me, quanto per voi; ma non così per me come per voi: tanto vero che io non mi riconosco nella forma che mi date voi, né voi in quella che vi do io; e la stessa cosa non è uguale per tutti e anche per ciascuno di noi può di continuo cangiare, e difatti cangia di continuo.» (*Opere di Luigi Pirandello – Tutti i romanzi*, 778).

paesaggio in un aspetto temporaneo, immutabile. Ma, e la perpetua mobilità degli aspetti successivi? e la fusione continua in cui le anime si trovano?

L'arte in genere astrae e concentra, coglie cioè e rappresenta così degli individui come delle cose, l'idealità essenziale e caratteristica [...] tutto ciò semplifichi troppo la natura e tenda a rendere troppo ragionevole o almeno troppo coerente la vita.¹⁰⁹

Therefore, art is not capable of representing efficaciously existence. Between the two there is a gap caused by the different nature of the two elements: art is static, while life is constantly evolving.

Pirandello's philosophic system extends the concept expressed above. The act of making art is not the only thing that seems to stop life itself, but also the general will of analysing or observing it. Several novels written by Pirandello reflect on this topic, putting on the scene characters who are observers and analysers of life¹¹⁰. The already mentioned novel *Quaderni di Serafino Gubbio Operatore* provides a clear illustration of the topic:

Porsi davanti la vita come un oggetto da studiare, è assurdo, perché la vita, posta davanti così, perde per forza ogni consistenza reale e diventa un'astrazione vuota di senso e di valore. E com'è possibile spiegarsela? L'avete uccisa, potete tutt'al più, farne l'anatomia.

La vita non si spiega; si vive. (*QSG*, 662)

As opposite to Pirandello, Ibsen dealt with the issue of the distance between life and art only once. In his plays he staged characters whose profession in the artist only twice: *Ghosts* and *When we Dead Awaken*. Concerning *Ghosts*, the artist is Oswald Alving, the son of the protagonist who works in Paris as a painter. The young man does not show any of the characteristics outlined so far,

¹⁰⁹ LUIGI PIRANDELLO, *L'umorismo*, Milano, Baldini&Castoldi, 1993, P. 162.

¹¹⁰ See for example the character of Mattia Pascal, protagonist of *Il fu Mattia pascal*, who, mistakenly declared dead, starts a new life under a new identity. At the end of the ninth chapter the character thinks «Ma la vita, a considerarla così, da spettatore estraneo, mi pareva senza costruito e senza scopo» (*Opere di Luigi Pirandello – Tutti i romanzi*, 429).

on the contrary he tells of living a bohemian and almost wild life in Paris. The roots of young Alving's behaviour are to be found in trying to prove that his late father's vicious attitude was inherited by the son. Therefore, Rubek alone exhibits such attitude.

Leaving aside the characters of the two artists, also the analysis of female figures leads to discover similarities between *When we Dead Awaken* and *Diana e la Tuda*. Firstly, the two models show a consequence, a sort of physical complication of the paradigm life-death. Art attempts to portray life, but while trying to do that, it does nothing but kill vitality. In a symmetrical way, Irene and Tuda physically lost their vitality. Ibsen described Irene with subtle allusions to the feature of a statue: whiteness and stativity:

(Avanza una signora d'aspetto slanciato, in un fine vestito di kashmir color bianco crema [...] Il viso è pallido e i tratti sono come rattappiti; le orbite sono slavate e gli occhi sembrano come privi della facoltà di vedere. Il vestito è lungo fino ai piedi e le cade in pieghe uguali lungo il corpo. [...] Tiene le braccia incrociate sul petto. La sua figura è ferma. Il passo rigido e cadenzato. (WDA, 1057-1058)

She also claims more than once that she is death, indeed her character appears more like a ghost conjured during a séance. The cause of her (symbolic) death is not clear: it is clear that the indifference of Rubek towards her naked body caused her frustration and despair, but a brief line pronounced by Irene alludes to the fact that her life has been sacrificed in favour of the clay statue the artist was modelling:

IRENE (*di nuovo con violenza*). Sì, verso di te... verso l'artista, che privo di sensibilità e scrupoli prese un corpo pieno di sangue caldo, una giovane vita, e le strappò via l'anima – perché ne avevi bisogno per creare un'opera d'arte. (WDA, 1084)

In the case of *Diana e la Tuda*, the fact that the life of the woman has been “transferred” to the statue is explicit. The theme is anticipated by Giuncano at the end of the second act: «[...] bambina, tu ti movevi di più – guizzavi – ora un po’ meno – e sempre meno, sempre meno – finché – hai creduto di vivere? – hai finito di morire!» (DET, 638). The old man is aware of the fact that Tuda is slowly losing her life energy. The drama of the young woman whose life was consumed by the statue reaches its acme at the end of the third act. Tuda, horrified, realises that her body is decaying while the statue lives through her vitality:

TUDA Guarda! Guardala bene! Guardale gli occhi! Gli occhi! – e ora guarda qui i miei – vedi? Vedi? Sono i miei là – questi – come me li stai vedendo ora – da pazza – e così, perché me li hanno fatti diventare loro così – da pazza – tutti e due!

[...] erano altro i suoi occhi – lui me li ha presi e glieli ha dati: guardale. (DET, 654)

The epilogue of the play shows how life is not simply destroyed by art, but the model, the source of inspiration, becomes fused with the statue.

At a first sight, the readers or the audience of the play could relate the two plays to the literary archetype of the sculptor: Pygmalion, a legendary figure from Greek mythology, known for his exceptional skill in sculpting. He crafted a statue of a woman so perfect and lifelike that he fell deeply in love with it. His devotion was so intense that Aphrodite, brought the statue to life.

The figure of Pygmalion fascinated a huge number of writers who re-elaborated the myth; among the others Ovid, Petrarch, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Honoré de Balzac, Herman Melville, George Bernard Shaw etc. It is clear that the story of Pygmalion is implied in the plots of *When we Dead Awaken* and *Diana e la Tuda*, but Ibsen and Pirandello, didn’t only repeat the story of Pygmalion with some variance, they completely overturned the story.

Paolo D’Angelo, in his essay *Amare una statua* (Palermo, 1998) analysed the overturning of the myth present in *When we dead awaken*, *Diana e la Tuda* (and a third play, *La Gioconda*, written by Gabriele d’Annunzio). Regarding the

relationship between the plays and the myth of Pygmalion, D'Angelo distinguishes two distinctive traits:

La prima è il fatto che in tutti questi testi non viene più messo in scena un rapporto a due, tra artista e immagine, o innamorato e immagine, ma un rapporto complicato dall'ingresso di un terzo personaggio, la modella che viene rappresentata nella statua.¹¹¹

È questo il secondo tratto discriminante. In tutti questi testi il rapporto dell'artista con l'opera d'arte è avvertito come estraneo ed opposto al desiderio, in un accoglimento perfino troppo letterale dell'idea moderna di disinteresse come atteggiamento fondamentale della fruizione estetica. È una sorta di rovesciamento del mito originario di Pigmalione: se lo scultore di Ovidio era spinto ad implorare che la sua creatura di marmo si animasse e diventasse corpo, qui son piuttosto delle donne in carne ed ossa a diventare agli occhi dell'artista della statue di marmo.¹¹²

There is not a metamorphosis that donates life to the death stone, on the contrary life is taken away from the alive women who pose for the artists.

Remaining within mythological terms, the figure of Pygmalion seems to fuse together with that of another mythical character: Medusa. Originally a beautiful maiden, Medusa was transformed into a monstrous Gorgon as punishment by the goddess Athena. Her hair became a writhing mass of serpents, and her gaze turned everyone who looked at her to stone. As Medusa did, the gaze of Rubek and Sirio, «pittori crudeli», as Maurizio Bettini would call them, does nothing but erase life from the two models to leave only two perfect statues.

Under the sight of Sirio and Rubek, Tuda and Irene turn into stone and lose their liveliness. As it was exposed in the previous paragraph, both the models, after posing for the artists, have the feature of the stone, as if they were under a spell.

¹¹¹ PAOLO D'ANGELO, *Amare una statua*, Palermo, Medina, 1998, P. 9.

¹¹² Ibid. P. 10.

Ibsen and Pirandello make a further overturn to the myth of Pygmalion. In the classical myth the artist, through his creative act, creates a work of so much value that seems to be alive. In the case of the two plays, the models as well perform a creative act from which flows the artistic creation: Irene, from the beginning of the play, refers to the sculptural group as her baby¹¹³. The model underlines how the parenthood of the work of art is to be ascribed not only to the artist, but also to the model.

IRENE (*evitando la risposta*). E il bambino? Il bambino sta bene. Il nostro bambino mi è sopravvissuto. In gloria e onore. (WDA, 1064)

IRENE Sono entrata nelle tenebre – mentre il bambino era alla luce della trasfigurazione. (WDA, 1065)

IRENE [...] Ma questa statua, fatta di argilla umida e viva, *lei* l'amavo – solo perché era nato un bambino, un'anima da quella materia rozza e informe – perché *quella* era la *nostra* creatura, il *nostro* bambino. Mio e tuo. (WDA, 1085)

On the other hand, Tuda explains Giuncano how she secretly participates to the process of creation of the paintings and statues she models to.

TUDA: Eh, posso anche far finta d'essere senza pensieri – per malizia. Combatto con gli artisti! Fingo di parlare come a caso; volto il capo un pochino, senza che me ne faccia accorgere; lo piego; lo alzo; sporgo appena appena una mano; guai a far vedere che sia io, la modella, a suggerire: no: io ho detto anzi una sciocchezza; ho fatto un atto, così: il pensiero è nato in loro. E ne sono così sicuri che me lo dicono: «Oh, sai? sto pensando che... codesta mossa...» oppure: «Zitta!

¹¹³ The tendency to refer to a work of art as a child or a baby is widespread in literature. Also Pirandello in his novels described literary works as children, a peculiar example can be found in the novel *Suo marito* (Milano, 1911) where the protagonist, Silvia Roncella, is depicted as an author whose writing process mirrors the physical and emotional labour of childbirth. Pirandello delves into the intense dedication, the nurturing of ideas, and the ultimate vulnerability involved in presenting a finished work to the public, much like a mother presenting her newborn to the world. Both acts produce something new, often seen as an extension of the creator's identity, embodying their hopes, fears, and aspirations.

mi nasce l'idea di...». E io, seria: «Che mossa?» oppure: «Che ho detto?» – Bisogna pur fare così, con certuni. Ma con certi altri, no. Con questo, no, per esempio (*allude a Sirio*). (*DET*, 609)

Other than participating to the creative act, the two models have indeed another interesting element in common: being described as armed. There is a underlying violent attitude that the two women share, a sort of attempt to take revenge against the men who tried to use their bodies causing them the loss of their vitality and, in Irene's case, the symbolic death.

The gesture of Tuda is ironic, but it still demonstrates the tenacious and pugnacious nature of the model. At the end of the first act two old women enter Sirio's study in order to warm up with the fire. Here's how Tuda's reaction is described:

TUDA (*rivenendo fuori con Giuditta e Rosa nell'atto di minacciarle con lo spil-lone del cappello, ridendo*): No, via! via! via!

GIUDITTA: Non pungere oh! Sei cattiva!

ROSA: Ma guarda: ci caccia lei! (*DET*, 617)

Irene is the one which shows in a more clear way the will of hurting and even killing Rubek and the (unknown) men who tried to take advantage on her. Thanks to the complexity of her character, the readers perceive her as, at the same time, the victim and the perpetrator. In the case of Irene, this peculiarity allowed the critic to consider her as a *femme fatale*. The issue will be analysed in the following subchapter and Irene's figure will be compared with the most iconic *femme fatale* narrated by Pirandello: Varia Nestoroff.

3.4 A Comparison Between two *Femme Fatale*

In more than one occasion Ibsen's works portray women who are tragic heroines mistreated and tyrannised by men, but they are not inert victims, they

rebel and, sometimes, become author of controversial actions themselves. The most of the time the captivation within the bourgeois home shaped them in a fatalistic manner: the attempt to change their position brings them to act against men and, more generally, against the typical feminine standard. Some of those characters can be framed in the literary type of the *femme fatale*.

In general, the *femmes fatales* are captivating and enigmatic literary characters (and subsequently film characters), often depicted as a beautiful, seductive women who use their appeal to manipulate and ensnare those around them. Rooted in ancient mythology¹¹⁴ and evolving through various literary movements, they embody a complex blend of danger and desire, often leading their lovers and admirers to ruin or tragedy. This archetype is characterized by intelligence, independence, and a willingness to flout societal norms to achieve their own ends. Furthermore, death, both literal and symbolic, is a constant companion to the *femme fatale*: the desire she ignites is inextricably linked to peril.

Considering globally the figure of Irene in relation to the features of the *femme fatale*, they stand out her cold and enigmatic character surrounded by mystery and, above all, the fact that she is doubly tied to the concept of death. Firstly, she is, as she claims, death: she has, at the same time, the features of the corpse and of the death stone. Secondly, she is also the one who gives death: she pushed her first husband to commit suicide and she killed her second husband herself. Irene narrates that, after the experience as a model for Rubek, she got married twice, and the few details she tells about her married life give a very precise image of her.

IRENE Era un sudamericano. Un alto diplomatico. (*Guarda nel vuoto con un sorriso di pietra*) Lui l'ho proprio fatto impazzire; matto – matto inguaribile;

¹¹⁴ Mario Praz in *La carne, la morte e il diavolo nella letteratura romantica* cites for example the mythological figures of Scylla and the sphinx, biblical characters such as Salome and Judith, Cleopatra and Semiarid or Lucretia Borgia and the countess of Challant for the Renaissance period. One of the most representative figure would be the Belle dame sans merci, protagonist of the homonymous ballad by John Keats.

inesorabilmente – davvero singolare, puoi crederci, - almeno all'inizio. Potevo ridere all'infinito dentro di me.

PROFESSOR RUBEK E dove vive ora?

IRENE Sottoterra, in un cimitero, da qualche parte. Con un alto, imponente monumento sopra di sé. E con una palla di piombo fumante nel cranio.

PROFESSOR RUBEK Si è ucciso?

IRENE Sì. Ha preferito precedermi. (WDA, 1065)

Again, referring to her second husband: «L'ho ucciso con un bel pugnale affilato, che ho sempre con me nel letto – » (WDA, 1066).

A sadistic streak comes to light through this brief exchange of words: she is a woman who drives men crazy and who kills them without any remorse. Furthermore, she claims that she is always armed with a dagger and this information will be confirmed during the second, when she turns it on Rubek himself.

The first quotation suggests that Irene deliberately drove her first husband crazy leading him to suicide, a behaviour that paves the way for a comparison with the Pirandello's *femme fatale*, Varia Nestoroff, a character of the already quoted novel *Quaderni di Serafino Gubbio operatore*. Both the women bring death and destruction in the life of the men around them. Some hint lead to believe that the two characters are pushed by similar motivations, even though Varia's action result in a different way. Furthermore, the character of Varia is more deep and multifaceted, due to the fact that Pirandello made her the focal point of many pages of the novel.

Concerning the plot of *Quaderni di Serafino Gubbio operatore*, the events of the novel are seen through the eyes of Serafino Gubbio, a disenchanted cameraman working in the silent film industry. Gubbio describes the events and the fact that happen around him and he particularly focuses on the vicissitudes that involve Varia Nestoroff and two men who fell in love with her: Giorgio Mirelli and Aldo Nuti. Mirelli moved to Capri to devote himself entirely to painting, and there he met Varia, a Russian actress with a mysterious past.

Charmed by the beauty of the woman, Mirelli uses her as a model for six of his paintings. He fell in love with her and wanted to marry her, but Aldo Nuti, Mirelli's sister fiancé, opposed the plan. On the eve of her wedding to Mirelli, Varia betrayed him with Nuti. Mirelli, in the end, killed himself after learning of the betrayal from Nuti himself who, convinced of being responsible for Mirelli's death, faces a nervous breakdown. At the end of the novel Nuti and Varia are involved as actors in the production of a film. One of the scenes of the film is set in the forest and it represents Aldo Nuti in the role of a man who kills a real tiger. When he is supposed to shoot the tiger that is lunging towards him, Nuti turns the gun towards Varia and kills her, then lets himself be mauled by the beast. Serafino films the entire scene, impassively, but the shock renders him mute forever.

Concerning the role of Varia as model, just like Rubek and Sirio did, the attitude of the artist towards her implies nothing but the will of using her body to produce art. Such behaviour upsets the woman who feels hatred towards men who reduce her to nothing more than a body. Through the narration it is made clear that Varia had been exploited for her body before, but the fact that Mirelli takes advantage of her even without any sexual desire brings her to take her revenge. Here's how the thoughts and the behaviour of Varia are described:

[...] il dispetto per uno, che voleva anch'esso il corpo e nient'altro; il corpo, ma solo per trarne una gioja ideale e assolutamente per sé, doveva esser tanto più forte, in quanto mancava appunto ogni motivo di nausea, e più difficile, anzi vana addirittura rendeva quella vendetta, ch'ella almeno soleva prendersi contro gli altri.

[...] dobbiamo supporre ch'ella, non curata, non ajutata e irritatissima, per potersi vendicare, dovette con le arti più fini e più accorte far sì che il suo corpo a mano a mano davanti a lui cominciasse a vivere, non per la delizia degli occhi soltanto; e che, quando lo vide come tant'altri vinto e schiavo, gli vietò, per meglio assaporare la vendetta, che da lei prendesse altra gioja, che non fosse quella di cui finora s'era contentato, come unica ambita, perché unica degna di lui. (*QSG*, 562)

Varia acts according to the scheme of the *femme fatale*: she uses her beauty and charm to make Mirelli fall in love with her. After doing so she pushes him to commit suicide in order to take her revenge.

The difference between Irene and Varia stands in the fact that the former seems to take delight and amusement from the suicide of a man who fell in love with her. In the contrary Varia is more complex under this point of view: the woman doesn't enjoy hurting other people. On the contrary, by pushing Mirelli to suicide and therefore thwarting her marriage with him, she aims to hurt and punish herself. In her character are enclosed all the complexities of the psyche of a woman who has been wronged by men. She does not only consider men as enemies, but she also treats herself so as to mortify herself.

Another element that links Varia and Irene to the role of the *femme fatale* is the fact that their profession is closely related to prostitution. The strong correlation between *femme fatale* and eroticism has often brought to overlap the figure to that of the prostitute. The *femme fatale* and the prostitute both represented deviations from the expected norms of female behaviour, challenging societal boundaries. The reference to the world of prostitution is an important element that links Irene to Varia Nestoroff and in turn leads the two to be considered *femmes fatales*.

Models and actresses work by showing their body. Historically, especially in the 17th to 19th centuries, actresses were often stigmatized and not considered respectable. The theatre world was seen as morally dubious, and women who chose acting as a profession were frequently suspected of having loose morals. Furthermore, both actresses and prostitutes were public and private personas. Actresses performed on stage, using their looks and talent to captivate paying audiences, while prostitutes engaged in a more private but similarly transactional relationship with their clients. The emphasis on their physical appearance and sexual allure created a cultural link between the two roles.

A similar argument can be made for the role of the model, even more closely associated with nudity. Moreover, it was very common for models to

come from humble social backgrounds and they prostituted themselves to make a living.

Turning to Irene's story, especially one line lets the audience understand that her past was marked by the attendance of promiscuous environments and the exploitation of his naked body: «Sono stata nel teatro di varietà, su una piattaforma girevole. Come statua nuda in mezzo a figure vive» (WDA, 1065).

Variety show theatres are connected to the life that Serafino supposes that Varia lived before becoming an actress for an important production company. In the narrator's view, Varia was forced by her former Russian husband to sing in café concerts of the lowest order to earn money to support his vices.

Furthermore, even as an accomplished actress Varia exposes her naked body, but she does it with a peculiar attitude:

Ma la nudità meravigliosa del saldo corpo esile e pieno era quasi coperta dalla sdegnosa noncuranza di esso, con cui elle si è presentata in mezzo a tutti quegli uomini, a testa alta, giù le braccia coi due pugnali affilatissimi, uno per pugno.

Firstly, it should be noted that she is depicted armed with sharp daggers, typical of the figure of the *femme fatale*. Secondly, Varia appears to be a woman who despises her body and therefore herself. As mentioned before, Varia punishes herself. Serafino supposes that Varia's youth was marked by traumas and behaviours that led her to despise herself and place no value on her body and her person.

The lack of self-esteem was considered one of the major characteristics of the figure of the prostitute as outlined by Otto Weininger in *Geschlecht und Charakter*, a philosophical essay first published in Austria in May 1903. The book, divided into several sections, explores different aspects of human character and gender; the tenth chapter of the second part of the book deals with two opposite stereotyped archetypes of the feminine: the mother and the prostitute.

The figure of the prostitute, which in the description can easily be superimposed onto that of the *femme fatale*, is described with these words:

Si può offendere o irritare facilmente una madre, ma nessuno può oltraggiare né ledere la prostituta; chè la madre quale custode della specie o della famiglia ha un certo onore, mentre la prostituta ha rinunciato a ogni forma di stima e ciò forma il suo vanto che le fa scrollare le spalle con noncuranza.¹¹⁵

Pirandello was well acquainted with Weininger, to the extent that he cited him on several occasions, as Angelo R. Pupino recalls in an essay regarding Pirandello's novels: *Pirandello o l'Arte della Dissonanza* (Roma, 2008).

In his turn, Weininger knew Ibsen as he quoted him several times in his essay, taking as examples the female characters of his plays. Irene (aside with Anitra, female protagonist of *Peer Gynt*, and Rita, protagonist of *Rosmersholm*) is taken as a proof of the fact that, due the author's opinion, women do not possess a soul and therefore genius and judgment.

Weininger does not explain in detail what led him to use the figure of Irene as an example, but a passage of the chapter could probably explain such connection. One of the arguments by which the author tries to prove that a woman does not possess a soul would be the lack of modesty. The author speaks of carelessness in undressing and in showing their private parts. In this chapter, he refers to an alleged habit of women to remain naked when they are in female company and in general, the apparent tendency of women to show their naked bodies much more willingly than men. Such attitude can indeed be compared to the tendency of the models and the actresses as conceived by Ibsen and Pirandello.

¹¹⁵ OTTO WEININGER, *Sesso e carattere*, Torino, Fratelli Bocca, 1922, P. 208.

Appendix. Ibsen in the United States

1. Eugene O'Neill

Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953) was born in New York City to a prominent theatrical family. His early life was marked by both privilege and tragedy: he studied at the most prestigious schools in the United States but his childhood was marred by his father's alcoholism and his mother's drug addiction. These experiences deeply influenced his writing, leading him to deal with themes of addiction, dysfunction, and the search for identity in his plays.

He enrolled in Princeton University, but he left before completing his degree, choosing instead to pursue a life at sea. His adventures in various countries and his adventures provided material for his early plays, such as *Bound East for Cardiff* (1916) and *The Long Voyage Home* (1917).

The turning point in his career came with the success of his groundbreaking play, *Beyond the Horizon* (1920), which earned him the first of his four Pulitzer Prizes. His subsequent works, including *Anna Christie* (1921) and *The Emperor Jones* (1920), established O'Neill as a leading figure in American theatre. He delved into experimental and expressionist forms with plays like *The Hairy Ape* (1922) and *Desire Under the Elms* (1924), pushing the boundaries of traditional dramatic conventions. In both plays, O'Neill challenged the traditional theatrical techniques. The experimental nature lies, for example, in the use of regional dialects, symbolism, and the exploration of themes considered controversial and unconventional during the early 20th century. These plays played a significant role in shaping O'Neill's reputation as a pioneering playwright who was unafraid to challenge established theatrical norms.

In the 1930s, O'Neill entered a more introspective phase, exploring psychological and philosophical themes in works like *Strange Interlude* (1928) and *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931). His masterpiece, *Long Day's Journey Into Night* (written in 1941 and produced in 1956, after his death), remains a

touching portrayal of his tumultuous family life. He won a posthumous Pulitzer Prize.

O'Neill's impact on American theatre extended beyond his creative output; he played a crucial role in transforming the theatrical landscape, inspiring subsequent generations of playwrights. Because of this reason he received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1936, acknowledging his powerful contribution to the world of drama.

The latter part of O'Neill's life was marked by personal challenges, including battles with depression and a debilitating illness. Despite his struggles, he continued to write, producing significant works such as *The Iceman Cometh* (1939) and *A Moon for the Misbegotten* (1947).

He died in Boston, on November 27th, 1953, at age 65.

1.1 Ibsen or Strindberg?

This thought of original inspiration brings me to what is, for me, the greatest happiness this occasion affords, and that is the opportunity it gives me to acknowledge, with gratitude and pride, to you and to the people of Sweden, the debt my work owes to that greatest genius of all modern dramatists, your August Strindberg.

It was reading his plays when I first started to write back in the winter of 1913-14 that, above all else, first gave me the vision of what modern drama could be, and first inspired me with the urge to write for the theatre myself. If there is anything of lasting worth in my work, it is due to that original impulse from him, which has continued as my inspiration down all the years since then – to the ambition I received then to follow in the footsteps of his genius as worthily as my talent might permit, and with the same integrity of purpose.

Of course, it will be no news to you in Sweden that my work owes much to the influence of Strindberg. That influence runs clearly through more than a few of my plays and is plain for everyone to see. Neither will it be news for anyone who has ever known me, for I have always stressed it myself. I have never been one of those who are so timidly uncertain of their own contribution that they feel they

cannot afford to admit ever having been influenced, lest they be discovered as lacking all originality.

No, I am only too proud of my debt to Strindberg, only too happy to have this opportunity of proclaiming it to his people. For me, he remains, as Nietzsche remains in his sphere, the Master, still to this day more modern than any of us, still our leader. And it is my pride to imagine that perhaps his spirit, musing over this year's Nobel award for literature, may smile with a little satisfaction, and find the follower not too unworthy of his Master.¹¹⁶

This text is part the speech delivered by James E. Brown at the Banquet at the City Hall in Stockholm on the 10th December 1936, the day in which Eugene O'Neill accepted the Nobel prize for literature. O'Neill was forced to ask Brown to read his speech as a consequence of his illness: in that period he could not move from the United States.

The fact that a huge part of the speech consist of a praise at Strindberg should not be only meant as a tribute to the Swedish Nation which honoured him with the Nobel Prize. It is a proper poetic self-reflection concerning the corpus of O'Neill works.

As a consequence of the Nobel Prize speech, together with further declaration of the playwright, the majority of studies regarding the elements that influenced the O'Neill concentrated on the figure of Strindberg, neglecting important elements that could encourage to create a more comprehensive framework regarding intertextuality and influences in O'Neill's works. The bibliography concerning studies in influence between the two playwright is immense. Nevertheless, the relationship between O'Neill and other authors, such as Ibsen should not be ignored. Some scholars who studied the American author touched upon the matter, even though not in a systematic or exhaustive way.

Firstly, it is important to compile a chronological frame of the approach of O'Neill to Ibsen. As a result of the study of his interviews, writings and other sources, it has been established that the first contact of the playwright to Ibsen

¹¹⁶ Source: www.nobelprize.org; last consultation 10th January 2024.

happened when he was a teenager attending the prep school in Stamford, between 1905 and 1906. This statement is attested by the playwright and producer Lawrence Langner, who personally knew O'Neill. Langner wrote an autobiography entitled *The Magic Curtain - The Story of a Life in Two Fields, Theatre and Invention by The Founder of the Theatre Guild* (1951); many chapters of the book are dedicated to the relationship between him and O'Neill as they deeply knew each other.

Langner reports that O'Neill's was first introduced to Ibsen through the essay *Quintessence of Ibsenism*, written in 1891 by George Bernard Shaw. In the essay, Shaw explores the works of Norwegian playwright, particularly focusing on the underlying philosophical and social themes of the play comparing them with the philosophy of Nietzsche. Langner states:

When he went to prep school in Stamford, Connecticut, he was wildly excited about Shaw's *Quintessence of Ibsenism*. It was his favourite reading during his last year at school and he kept underlining the points with which he agreed with Shaw in red ink to such an extent that the book was almost entirely underlined.¹¹⁷

Also Doris Alexander describes O'Neill's first approach to Ibsen in the biography she wrote about the playwright. She underlines that in that period Ibsen was an absolute novelty in the US American theatre. Referring to the last year of high school, Alexander states:

So he began to read Ibsen, learning how a moralistic middle-class society can turn any expression of joy in living into evil dissipation — how the mask of Pan is gradually compressed into the mask of Mephistopheles, as he would later express it in his own play *The Great God Brown*.

[...]

His greatest excitement came when he discovered Shaw's *Quintessence of Ibsenism*. [...] He now understood exactly what was wrong with the romantic plays

¹¹⁷ LAWRENCE LANGNER, *The Magic Curtain*, New York (New York), American Book – Knickerbocker Press, 1951, P 288.

he had grown up on. Vistas of social and intellectual revolt opened before him. He saw how a corrupt drama stemmed from a corrupt society; he saw how false standards and hypocrisy create a false, artificial art.¹¹⁸

The early reading led O'Neill to a reflection about Ibsen and society, art and realism. Even though the importance of Ibsen in O'Neill's art changed with time, it is undeniable that reading Ibsen particularly touched him.

O'Neill not only read the works of Ibsen, but also began to attend their performances in New York. Alexander reported a statement made by O'Neill himself regarding the first time he saw *Hedda Gabler* performed by the actress Alla Nazimova:

“I do remember well the impact upon me when I saw an Ibsen play for the first time, a production of ‘Hedda Gabler’ at the old Bijou Theatre in New York—and then went again and again for ten successive nights,” he recalled years later. “That experience discovered an entire new world of the drama for me. It gave me my first conception of a modern theatre where truth might live”¹¹⁹

Some testimonies suggest that O'Neill continued to be interested in Ibsen even during his university years at Harvard.

O'Neill declared in the above mentioned speech he gave in acceptance of the Nobel Prize that he had discovered for the first time Strindberg between 1913 and 1914. The enthusiasm for the Swedish writer supplanted and weakened the admiration towards Ibsen. The reason of such attitude can be found, among the others, in the substantial changes that World War I caused. Strindberg's works could appear better-suited to the new society, while Ibsen's realism could be perceived as dated.

His opinion regarding Ibsen grew more and more negative through the years. Langner reported in his autobiography a statement O'Neill made:

¹¹⁸ DORIS ALEXANDER, *The Tempering of Eugene O'Neill*, New York (New York), Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962, pp 95-96.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 104-105.

Notwithstanding O'Neill's interest in Ibsen, he is no disciple of the gloomy Norwegian dramatist. On one occasion he stated to me, "Ibsen has set back the theatre for many years by his very success in developing a so-called 'naturalistic' method which in reality is not naturalistic at all. Ibsen's realism in the theatre is just as much manufactured as the theatre of Sardou which preceded it"¹²⁰

In 1965 Egil Törnqvist, who has been for a long time professor of Scandinavian Studies at Uppsala University in Sweden, studied O'Neill's works from a different point of view, trying to underline how his works are connected to other authors, among them, Ibsen. He published an article in which he dealt with the matter of the influence of Ibsen on O'Neill's production.

Firstly he described the developing of the approach to Ibsen, but most of the article is composed by a list of O'Neill plays in which it is possible to find traces of the influence of the Norwegian writer. The analysis of such elements is quite quick and sometimes superficial, mostly limited to the description of similarities between plays. However, Törnqvist proposed a schema aimed to portray the developing of the influence of Ibsen on O'Neill. It being understood that during his early life O'Neill read and appreciated Ibsen's plays which inspired him, his interest decreased during his maturity, so Törnqvist did not find traces (with few exceptions) of Ibsen's influence on the plays written between 1914 and 1920; after 1925, the presence of Ibsen is systematic. In Törnqvist's words:

It would, however, not be at all surprising if he did [revaluate Ibsen's plays], considering the return to a realistic technique that O'Neill's later oeuvre bears witness of, and which undoubtedly owes much to Ibsen. It takes no penetrating eye to see that the author of *The Ice-Man Cometh* and *A Touch of the Poet* had more in

¹²⁰ LAWRENCE LANGNER, *The Magic Curtain*, New York (New York), American Book – Knickerbocker Press, 1951, PP: 288-289.

common with the nineteenth-century master playwright than had the young barricade stormer [sic] who composed *The Hairy Ape*.¹²¹

In the following subchapters I will attempt to analyse two plays by Eugene O'Neill, focusing on the elements attributable to Ibsen's influence or the use of the same literary archetype. I will also attempt to find elements to prove the veracity of the scheme drawn up by Törnqvist.

1.2 A Comparison Between *Anna Christie* and *The Lady From the Sea*

Eugene O'Neill's *Anna Christie* stands as an emotional exploration of human redemption, the complexities of family relationships, and the inexorable pull of the sea.

It was first staged on Broadway in 1921 and earned O'Neill his second Pulitzer Prize. The play is a powerful testimony of the playwright's ability to delve into the depths of the human psyche. *Anna Christie* unfolds the story of a young woman of Swedish origins, who, after a long and arduous separation from her seafaring father, Chris Christopherson, is reunited with him. Together with her father she finds the sea, an element that is a fundamental symbol, omnipresent in the play. Anna's past is shrouded in darkness, marked by a life of hardship, the traumatic experience of rape, and the time she lived as a prostitute. When Mat Burke, a charismatic Irish stoker, enters the scene, he and Anna fall in love but their relationship is threatened by his inability to accept Anna's past. The plot is resolved with a happy ending as Mat decides to forget Anna's past and he reconciles with her father.

The play has some elements in common with *The Lady From the Sea* by Ibsen. In particular, some of the most outstanding topics O'Neill deals with are in

¹²¹ EGIL TÖRNQVIST, *Ibsen and O'Neill: a Study in Influence*, «Scandinavian Studies», Vol. 37, No. 3, August 1965, PP. 211-235.

dialogue with the elements Ibsen displays in *The Lady from the Sea*: the element of the sea, and man trying to control women.

First of all, the sea is an element that played an important role in the biography and, as a consequence, in the literary production of both Ibsen and O'Neill. The ancestors of Ibsen were sailors and he grew up in the coastal town of Skien, in southern Norway, and spent much of his youth near the sea. Michael Meyer, in *Ibsen*, wrote that:

Apart from his father, his paternal ancestors had for over two hundred years been sea-captains; and towards the end of his life Henrik Ibsen is said to have looked, and walked, more and more like a sea-captain himself.¹²²

After those words Meyer describes Ibsen's genealogical tree proving that his ancestors were indeed captains and mariners.

It is likely that Ibsen's childhood experiences in a maritime environment contributed to his familiarity with seafaring life and with the symbolism associated with the sea. This background might have influenced his choice to incorporate sea elements into some of his works.

On the other hand, O'Neill spent an important part of his youth at sea: he left Princeton University in order to work on various ships, experiencing the hardships and camaraderie of a sailor's life. This nautical background deeply influenced his understanding of the sea. He navigated for a long time and ashore for example in Buenos Aires, Liverpool, and New York City. The element of the sea is often present in his plays, to cite some examples: *Bound East for Cardiff* (1916), *The Long Voyage Home* (1917), *In the Zone* (1917), *The Hairy Ape* (1922).

As a consequence, the sea is to be considered the common thread that unites the two plays. In both the plots of *Anna Christie* and *The Lady from the Sea* it plays such an important role that it can be considered as a character itself. The

¹²² MICHAEL MEYER, *Ibsen - a Biography*, Garden City (New York), Doubleday & Company, 1971, P. 3.

female protagonists are almost obsessed with the sea. Even though the stories of the two women are different, the symbolic meaning of the sea is almost the same.

Firstly, it is important to underline the tacit dichotomy between land¹²³ and sea. The mainland is the place where Anna was “exiled” by her father, where she spent her childhood exploited by her family, sexually abused by her cousin and, at last, forced by poverty to become a prostitute. In a different way, Elida feels trapped in the fiord, away from the open sea. The land represents an unsatisfactory marriage she had to consent to in order to make up for her poverty deriving from her humble origins. It is especially significant that the words Ellida uses to describe her marriage with Wangel can be attributed to the sphere of prostitution. In the fourth act, she refers to her marriage as follows:

Ellida. Yes, lying. Or at any rate — concealing the truth. The truth — the sheer unvarnished truth is this: you came out there and — bought me.

Wangel. Bought did you say — bought ?

Ellida. Oh, I was not a bit better than you. I joined in the bargain. I went and sold myself to you.¹²⁴

Furthermore, the similar contrast between land and sea has been noticed by Törnqvist, who compared two passages of the two plays in order to prove that the conception of the sea is similar:

The contrast between land and sea and the mysterious attraction the latter has for Anna go back to *The Lady from the Sea*, where Ellida comes to the conclusion that man once had to choose whether he would be a land animal or a creature of the sea; and that having chosen the land, he has carried about him ever since a secret sorrow for the element he has forsaken. This is exactly Anna's feelings when, returned to the sea, she tells her father: "It's like I'd come home

¹²³ In the case of Ellida the concept of land can be extended to the fiord.

¹²⁴ HENRIK IBSEN trad. WILLIAM ARCHER, *Rosmersholm and The Lady from the Sea in The Collected Works of Henrik Ibsen*, vol. IX, New York (New York), Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908, P. 299.

after a long visit away some place. It all seems like I'd been here before lots of times" (28).¹²⁵

Secondly, for both Anna and Ellida the sea is connected to a sense of freedom and belonging: it symbolizes liberty from the cruelty that happens on land, both cases connected with the two women lack of means and wealth. Furthermore, the metaphorical belonging of Anna and Ellida to a maritime dimension can be supported by the parallelism made between the two women and the mythological figure of the mermaid. When Ellida makes her first appearance during the first act, her husband addresses her in this way: «Wangel. [Smiling and stretching out his hands towards her.] Ah, here comes the mermaid! »¹²⁶. in a parallel way, when Mat Burke meets Anna for the first time, pronounces the following words: «[...]I thought you was some mermaid out of the sea come to torment me»¹²⁷.

In third place, the sea is also a symbol of change and transformation. It represents the constant ebb and flow of life, mirroring the changes that the characters undergo throughout the play. Ellida's internal struggles and the choices she faces are reflected in the ever-changing nature of the sea. When Anna in turn, reunites with her father Chris, the sea becomes a tangible link to her past and a catalyst for transformation in her present. The vast expanse of the ocean mirrors Anna's desire for a fresh start and a new direction in life. It is Anna herself who claims that she feels clean and changed as soon as she has got in touch with the waters: «It makes me feel clean – out here – 's if I'd taken a bath»¹²⁸

In conclusion, the sea attracts the two women in a similar way, through a sense of mystery and pull to the unknown. Traditionally, the sea is associated with mystery and unconscious forces. Indeed, it also represents the deeper,

¹²⁵ EGIL TÖRNQVIST, *Ibsen and O'Neill: a Study in Influence*, «Scandinavian Studies», Vol. 37, No. 3, August 1965, PP. 211-235.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* P. 186.

¹²⁷ EUGENE O'NEILL, *Anna Christie* in *Complete Plays*, vol. I, New York (New York), The Library of America, 1988, P. 984.

¹²⁸ *Ibid* p 980.

inconscious aspects of human nature that in both plays materialize in a male character that the two women fall in love with; in Ellida's words, something at the same time frightening and fascinating.

It is also easy to notice that the figure of The Stranger and Mat Burke are extremely similar, even though their relationship with the respective protagonists conclude with different results: whereas Ellida abstains from her sea-man, Anna decides to marry him. The two men are bound to the sea in such a deep way that, for example, The Stranger is compared to marine creatures:

About storm and calm. About dark nights at sea. About the sea in the glittering sunshine too. But we talked most about the whales and the porpoises and the seals that lie out upon the reefs and bask in the midday sun. And then we spoke of the gulls and the eagles and all the other sea-birds, you know. And — is it not strange ? — when we talked of such things it seemed to me as though both the sea-animals and the sea-birds were akin to him.¹²⁹

On the other hand, Mat literary comes from the sea since his ship has sunk and he and his companions were saved by a lifeboat on which they remained for five days. During the fight with Chris, Anna's father, he pronounces beautiful words about the sea and the sailor's life:

[...] The sea's the only life for a man with guts in him isn't afraid of his own shadow! 'Tis only on the sea he's free, and him roving the face of the world, seeing all things, and not giving a damn for saving money, or stealing from his friends, or any of the black tricks that a landlubber'd waste his life on.¹³⁰

Both men try, at first, to exert power over their female counterparts. Mat and The Stranger show the possessive aspects of their personality and their tendency to consider the women they love as their property. O'Neill made this

¹²⁹ HENRIK IBSEN trad. WILLIAM ARCHER, *Rosmersholm and The Lady from the Sea in The Collected Works of Henrik Ibsen...* P. 230.

¹³⁰ EUGENE O'NEILL, *Anna Christie in Complete Plays...* P. 999.

facet of Mat's character very clear through his words and through a sharp line pronounced by Anna: while Chris and Mat fight.

CHRIS. [Commandingly.] You don't do one tang he say, Anna! [ANNA laughs mockingly.]

BURKE. She will,so!

CHRIS. Ay tal you she don't! Ay'm her fa'der

BURKE. She will in spite of you. She's taking my orders from this out, not yours.

[...]

ANNA. [...] You can go to hell, both of you! - you're just like all the rest of them - you two! Gawd, you'd think I was a piece of furniture! I'll show you! Sit down now! [As they hesitate--furiously.] Sit down and let me talk for a minute.¹³¹

Wangel and The Stranger use similar words on two occasions:

Wangel. I observe that you call my wife by her first name. That sort of familiarity is not usual here.

The Stranger. I know that very well. But as she belongs first of all to me¹³²

Wangel.[Advances towards him.] My wife has no choice in the matter. I am here to choose for her and — to protect her. Yes, protect her! If you do not get away from here — out of the country — and never come back — do you know what you expose yourself to?¹³³

Despite the above passages, the four men mitigate their oppressive behaviour at the conclusion of the plays. On the one hand, after they get to know the events that marked the previous life of Anna, Chris and Mat accept it and process it: Chris stops protesting about the marriage between Anna and Mat and

¹³¹ Ibid P. 1006-1007.

¹³² HENRIK IBSEN trad. WILLIAM ARCHER, *Rosmersholm and The Lady from the Sea in The Collected Works of Henrik Ibsen...* P. 264.

¹³³ Ibid P. 341.

the latter decides to forget the jealousy provoked by the knowledge that Anna, as a prostitute, was forced to sleep with many men.

On the other hand, Wangel, after a reflection, understands the reason that brought Ellida to marry him and decides to set her free and to give her the choice to decide whether to stay with him or to leave with The Stranger. Once she regains her freedom, Ellida prefers staying with her husband and she starts appreciating her family life by becoming a real mother to her two stepdaughters. It is made almost too clear and explicit that Ellida chooses to stay only because of the fact that her husband recognised her the freedom to choose to stay or to leave. The dynamic is opposite to *A Doll's House*, where Helmer, despite his good will of changing and becoming a better husband, does not consider Nora a person independent from his influence as he even wants to educate her as if she was one of her children.

1.3 *Ah, Wilderness!*

Unlike many of O'Neill's works, which often dig into dark and intense themes, *Ah, Wilderness!* stands out as a heart-warming and nostalgic comedy. Premiering on 2nd October 1933, the play is set in a small town in Connecticut during the Fourth of July weekend, in the year 1906.

The story revolves around the Miller family, particularly the coming-of-age journey of one of their son, Richard Miller. As the Millers prepare for their holiday celebrations, Richard finds out that the girl he loves, Muriel, wishes to break their relationship because of his «being dissolute and blasphemous»¹³⁴. Even though it will be revealed that she is forced by her father to leave him and that she loves him, the tragic news sinks him in a vortex of desperation. His pain leads him to accept to meet another girl, Belle, who turns out to be a young college student who prostitutes herself to pay the rent of her room. He refuses to

¹³⁴ EUGENE O'NEILL, *Ah Wilderness!* in *Complete Plays*, vol. III, New York (New York), The Library of America, 1988, P. 19.

have an intercourse with her but, in return he gets a serious alcohol intoxication that causes great concern in his parents.

This situation leads to the exploration of the generational gap between parents and children: through a series of comedic and emotional moments, O'Neill paints glimpses of the life of the of bourgeois society at the beginning of the twentieth century, yet the challenges of growing up and finding one's identity remain universal.

Richard's story is counterpoised and at the same time bounded to his uncle's one, Sid. O'Neill portrays the destructive impact of Sid's alcoholism on his own life and the dynamics of the Miller family, adding a bitter layer of complexity to the otherwise humorous tone of the play. Sid's journey becomes a sad subplot, highlighting the challenges and consequences associated with alcohol addiction in a time when such issue was, in some occasion, not taken seriously and not properly cured.

Compared to *Anna Christie*, where the presence of Ibsen is related to themes and plot and remains implicit, in *Ah, Wilderness!*, the Norwegian dramatist is directly quoted in of the beginning to the end of the play.

Generally speaking, the whole play is permeated with several extracts from different authors; the title itself is a quotation from Quatrain XII of Edward Fitzgerald's translation of the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*. In particular, the lines of Richard are the ones that contain the quotations; O'Neill used what can be compared to a "linguistic tic" to lend Richard the manner of the young pseudo-intellectual. Indeed, he is shown to be a bit rebellious, challenging the societal norms of the time, and expressing socialist and progressive views. Despite his self confidence owed to his youthful idealism, he is naive and inexperienced. Richard's quoting reflects his intellectual aspirations and his desire to engage with the world through the ideas he has encountered in literature. The quotes also provide a contrast between Richard's youthful idealism and the realities of the world around him, creating both humour and pathos in the play.

Concerning Ibsen, Richard quotes multiple times some lines from *Hedda Gabler*. In particular, Richard seems to be obsessed with two symbolic elements of the play: the vine leaves and the guns.

Concerning the first element, the vine leaves, the first direct quotation present in the play is to be found in the first scene of act three, when Richard is in a bar in with Belle, the Bartender, and the Salesman. «“And then – at ten o’clock – Ellert Lovberg will come – with vine leaves in his hair!”»¹³⁵. The quote refers to a line by Hedda in the second act; the woman imagines her former sweetheart, Løvborg, as wearing vine leaves in his hair as he used to do when the two had a relationship.

A similar line is repeated shortly after, in the second scene of the third act: «“And then – I will come – with vine leaves in my hair”», followed by ““Fancy that, Hedda”»¹³⁶. Regarding the first line, there is not a corresponding part in the original Ibsen’s play, it is probably a re-elaboration made by Richard in the midst of intoxication. Conversely, the line «Fancy that, Hedda»¹³⁷ is pronounced multiple times by Tesman, Hedda’s husband; the expression «Fancy that» is indeed a sort of linguistic tic that typifies the character of Tesman and it is likely that remains imprinted in Richard’s mind.

The element of the vine leaves, which seems to be a recurrent element in Richard’s mind, is traditionally connected to the mythological figure of Dionysus, the ancient Greek god of wine and festivities who, in his turn, plays a crucial role in Nietzsche's philosophical concept of the Dionysian. As emerged in the speech delivered on the occasion of the Nobel Prize award, Nietzsche played a fundamental role in shaping the philosophy underlying O’Neill’s works.

In Nietzsche's work, particularly in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), Dionysus represents the primitive and chaotic forces of nature, as well as the liberating power of ecstatic experiences. The philosopher contrasts the Dionysian with the

¹³⁵ Ibid P. 60.

¹³⁶ Ibid P. 73.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

concept of the Apollonian, which represents order, reason, and form. The connection between Dionysus and vine leaves is to be found in the traditional description and representation of the god who is always portrayed as walking with the help of a thyrsus (a staff topped with a pinecone finial and wrapped in ivy and vine leaves) and with a crown of vine leaves. Nietzsche views the Dionysian as a force that transcends individuality and connects individuals to a collective, ecstatic experience, breaking down the rigid structures imposed by the Apollonian. In this way, the symbolism of vine leaves in connection with Dionysus becomes a visual representation of Nietzsche's profound philosophical ideas about the transformative and liberating aspects of embracing chaos and irrationality in the pursuit of a deeper, more profound existence.

There is no proof that Ibsen meant the symbolic element of the leaves in a Nietzschean perspective, but for sure he connected it to the Greek mythology which refer to the god as the protector of wine and inebriation. It is not a coincidence that Richard evokes this element during his drunk.

This drunkenness appears, at first glance, to be an attempt to forget the pain stemming from the rejection of the beloved Muriel. However, upon closer analysis, the young intellectual could be trying to escape from the Apollonian dimension of family to reach the mystification of the Dionysian. In many of his plays O'Neill stages the use of alcohol as an attempt to soothe pain, but there are also plays in which the alcohol is used as a means to reach a transcendent experience. The most outstanding is *The Great God Brown* (1925), which is indeed inspired to *The Birth of Tragedy*.

The complex figure of Løvborg must have fascinated O'Neill, because of some biographical implication. In the play, Løvborg is a talented and charismatic writer who, at the beginning of the play, is recovering from a period of alcoholism. He is initially on the path to redemption, having recently completed an innovative book, but he experiences a relapse into alcoholism when he attends a party with Hedda's husband. Alcoholism leads him to the peak of self-destruction, as, in the midst of the fumes of intoxication, he loses the precious

manuscript of his book. Alcoholism and, in general, addiction is a recurring theme in O'Neill's works, bounded to the author's experience as also his father was an alcoholic and his mother was drug addicted. O'Neill himself struggled with alcohol addiction during his youth. Many plays deal with the issue, among the others *Long Day's Journey Into Night* (1956), *The Iceman Cometh* (1936), *Anna Christie* etc.

Concerning O'Neill's alcoholism:

Gelb and Gelb (2000) confessed that they found O'Neill's continued drinking "bizarre" (p.314). Linney (2002) interpreted his drinking as an adolescent response to suffering. Miliora (2000) viewed it as a minor expression of "self-fragmentation" (p. 252) that resulted from his never having a sense of home. Addiction in these views is hardly more than a developmental behaviour that O'Neill would outgrow, an act of escapism, or a minor symptom of some deeper psychological disturbance.¹³⁸

Furthermore, it is possible to find a fundamental connection between the character of Sid and Løvborg: both have spent a period being sober and they have a relapse during the course of the play. Their illness leads them to the loss of something, in Sid's case the occasion of being loved by Lily; for Løvborg loses his occasion of becoming an important and recognised scholar.

Concerning the second element, the guns, they are quoted in the following lines:

RICHARD. [...] It's lucky there aren't any of General Gabler's pistols around – or you'd see if I'd stand it much longer!¹³⁹

¹³⁸ GEOFF THOMPSON, *A Touch of the Poet: A Psychobiography of Eugene O'Neill's Recovery from Alcoholism*, Master thesis at the Thrinity western University, Langley (Canada), 2004, P 11.

¹³⁹ EUGENE O'NEILL, *Ah Wilderness!* in *Complete Plays...* P. 2.

RICHARD. I did, too! If there'd been one of Hedda Gabler's pistol around, you'd Have seen if I wouldn't have done it beautifully! I thought, when I'm dead, she'll be sorry she ruined my life!¹⁴⁰

In the first place it is the main element that connects Hedda to masculinity, not only because they were object that, in the Victorian age, were mostly used by man, but also because of their phallic symbolism. It is possible that Richard's obsession with Hedda's guns is to be connected also to the attempt to affirm his identity as a man.

Secondly, leaving aside the symbolic content of the play, Richard made clear that he wants to kill himself as the alcohol intoxication has not completely erased his pain. The audience would easily understand that those lines have to be interpreted as an exaggeration. Richard is a teenager who is struggling with his first love failure, the perception of the pain is exasperated by his young age and by his precociously tragic and melodramatic sense of life. Having said that, this element hides the shadow of O'Neill personal experience. The wreck of his first marriage with Kathleen Jenkins together with the traumas and the loneliness of his past pushed him to attempt suicide by swallowing a big quantity of pills.

A further element connects the character of Richard with the young O'Neill: the above mentioned book, *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*. The essay is quoted many times at the beginning of the play, when Mr. and Mrs. Miller comment upon the "forbidden" books they found in Richard's room:

MRS MILLER: One was a book of his [Show's] plays and the other had a long title I couldn't make head or tail of, only it wasn't a play.

RICHARD [*proudly*]: *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*.

MILDRED: Phew! God gracious, what a name! What does it mean, Dick? I'll bet he doesn't know.

RICHARD [*outraged*]: I do, too, know! It's about Ibsen, the greatest playwright since Shakespeare!

¹⁴⁰ Ibid P. 92.

MRS MILLER: Yes, there was a book of plays by that Ibsen there, too! And Poems by Swin something -¹⁴¹

The exchange of words is intentionally comical and at the same time it aims to show the proud intellectualism of Richard.

The element of *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* captures particularly the attention because, as mentioned in the previous subchapters, the book was well known to the young O'Neill and it represented his first approach to Ibsen.

Such a combination of elements seems to confirm the interpretation according to which Richard represents the young Eugene O'Neill. Many scholars noticed the biographical implications present in *Ah, Wilderness!*, Virginia Floyd in her long essay *The Plays of Eugene O'Neill: a New Assessment* (1985), confronted the biographical elements present in the play with other similar elements. She comes to the conclusion that O'Neill used *Ah, Wilderness!* to build an ideal representation of his family. She finds several parallelisms, such as the ones concerning the physical features of the characters of the play and the real O'Neill family; she also notices the similarities between the description of the house where most of the scenes are set and the real house where the O'Neill family used to spend the summer.

Regarding the general plot, Floyd claims:

In many of his autobiographical dramas, the author had presented bleak portraits of the four O'Neills and tragic view of their relationships and lives.

In *Ah, Wilderness!* he uses the Millers to depict the O'Neills; later in *Long Day's Journey into Night* he did so through the Tyrones. Together the Miller-Tyrone families represent the ideal and the real, the light and the dark aspects of the O'Neills. These two plays and *Days Without End* are interconnected.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Ibid P. 16.

¹⁴² VIRGINIA FLOYD, *The plays of Eugene O'Neill: a New Assessment*, Frederik Ungar Publishing Co., New York (New York), 1985, p 422.

In conclusion, the presence of Ibsen in such play would probably mean that in the period in which he wrote the play, almost at the end of his maturity as a playwright, he actually reworked on Ibsen's plays. Such re-reading might have caused the massive presence of references to Ibsen in the plays of that period, exactly like Törnqvist theorised in his article.

2. Thornton Wilder

Thornton Wilder was one of the most important American playwright and novelist of the first part of the 20th century, mostly famous for plays like *Our Town* (1938), *The Merchant of Yonkers* (1939), *The Skin of Our Teeth* (1942). One year before one of his first success, *Our Town*, he adapted and renewed the script of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*.

This chapter aims to study both the peculiarities of Wilder's *A Doll's House* and the influence that Ibsen had on some of his works, especially on *Our Town*, proceeding from the fact that it was written while the author was working on *A Doll's House*.

2.1 *A Doll's House*, an Adaptation by Thornton Wilder

2.1.1 An Overview on *A Doll's House* By Wilder: the Reasons of The New Version

It had been fifty-eight years since the 21st December 1879, when *A Doll's House* was performed for the first time in Copenhagen; the first performance caused discontent and disapproval. During the following years the general public had slowly accepted a play whose finale implied a woman leaving her house, her husband and over all her children to become something else (or something more) than a wife and a mother.

Even though the post World War I United States was a pretty different place compared to the late 19th century Europe, the themes of *A Doll's House* were still relevant. Nevertheless, the script needed to be adapted both form the linguistic and content-related point of view.

Some sources state that Wilder wrote the adaptation of *A Doll's House* as a present for the popular actress Ruth Gordon; the actress worked several times with Wilder's scripts and she also won a Tony in 1956 for of her performance as main character in *The Matchmaker*. In a letter to Joe Eta Clarke emerges that it was Jed Harris¹⁴³ who asked Wilder to adapt the play for Gordon. Regardless of the reason why he accepted the work, it is clear that Wilder thought that more than an half century later, Ibsen still had something to teach to the world, even though his scripts needed a renovation.

Written in 1937, *A Doll's House* maintains the general structure and the plot of the original script, the characters preserve their core personality and the ending of the play is not subject to change. Wilder himself claimed in an interview:

No alterations at all. Some cuts, but no alterations. I merely took three translations, including that of Ibsen's friend, Brandes, and turned out a version in colloquial English so that you get the feeling.

[...]

I think that the cuts and the translation give the play a twentieth century feeling. The problems raised by the play are our problems—that is to the play's credit—but much that was necessarily explicit then can be glanced at now.¹⁴⁴

Therefore, the work he made on the script is mainly a linguistic renovation aimed to make it more accessible to the American 30's audience. The starting point was the translation: the most popular edition in English was William Archer's, for sure one of the three above mentioned editions. Archer, as he shows in his preface to *A Doll's House*, deeply knew not only the play, but all the texts related to it such as the letter that Ibsen wrote about it and his notes¹⁴⁵. His translation is extremely faithful to the original one, for this reason it was

¹⁴³ 1900-1979, he was a famous theatrical producer and director who also led the staging of *Our Town*.

¹⁴⁴ JACKSON BRYER, *Conversations with Thornton Wilder*, Jackson (Mississippi), University Press of Mississippi, 1992. P. 16.

¹⁴⁵ Archer reports some interesting facts about the changing Ibsen made between a first version and the published one.

considered old-fashioned in the 30's. This fact pushed Wilder to produce his own translation, starting from a German version of the play.

The letter to Joe Eta Clarke he stated that:

Rehearsals were to have begun yesterday and I sat down and from German and English versions began a completely new 'translation' of the play.¹⁴⁶

In the same letter Wilder claims that he started the work in a big hurry as he was urged by Jed Harris, but some days after he started the renewal of the play he had been told that the staging was postponed.

Finally, the play was staged for the first time at Henry Miller's Theatre on 4 February 1938. The script was not staged until 2016, year in which also the script was published again by the publishing house of Samuel French.

2.1.2 A Comparison Between the Original Script and Wilder's Version

On the whole, the structure and the plot of Wilder's version of *A Doll's House* are the same of Ibsen's original script and the characters' physical and psychical features are preserved. Analysing it more and more deeply, it emerges that there is actually a huge quantity of differences, but they are all small shades that contribute to create more complex facets on characters and situations. Not many scholars analysed such topics; the most relevant and noteworthy article was written by Thierry Dubost, professor at the University of Caen. In his article named *Wilder as a Playwright-in-the-Making - Adapting A Doll's House*¹⁴⁷, Dubost analyses the differences between the original and Wilder's script.

For instance, Dubost noticed some differences regarding the developing of the character of Nora: in the first act Wilder did not emphasise the fact that Nora has eaten the macaroons in secret. Ibsen's version has the effect of highlighting

¹⁴⁶ BURNS, EDWARD AND ULLA E. DYDO, *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Thornton Wilder*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1996, P.371.

¹⁴⁷ Thornton Wilder journal, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2020.

the fact that Nora is used to lying to her husband and therefore she can not be trusted. Wilder's version implies a less deceitful Nora and it encourages the audience to empathise with her.

There is a further element that points in the same direction, but that is not quoted in Dubost's work: in the original version of the second act Thorwald asks Nora to send Rank to his office as soon as he arrives home; Nora disobeys her husband and keeps the doctor busy with a conversation that leads to the famous seductive scene of the stockings. In Wilder's version Thorwald says Nora «That must be Rank. Keep him for a bit, will you dear? I've got to go over some of these letters»¹⁴⁸. At this condition Nora does not disobey her husband.

In the new version there are less animal "nicknames" addressed by Thorwald to Nora. In Dubost's words:

Spousal relationships had changed, and while Helmer's address supposedly expresses love, the subtlety and refinement of his compliments leave much to be desired. In other words, after fifty years (*A Doll's House* premiered in 1879 and Wilder adapted it in 1937), because of his obsolete terms of endearment, Ibsen's serious and loving husband had become a grotesque character with whom the audience was unlikely to sympathize, hence Wilder's drastic editing.¹⁴⁹

Dubost also detected the fact that on two occasions Nora tries to reveal her secret: the first time to Thorwald and the second time to Rank. The second occurrence is particularly important:

NORA: [...] I want to tell you something . . .

(But she can't quite bring herself to do it yet, so she goes to the box, on the table between the sofas, which contained her costume.)

Oh, yes, and I want to show you something, too.

DOCTOR RANK: What is it?

¹⁴⁸ THORNTON WILDER, *A Doll's House - An Acting Version by Thornton Wilder*, Samuel French Acting Edition, 2016, P. 56.

¹⁴⁹ THIERRY DUBOST, *Wilder as a Playwright-in-the-Making, adapting A Doll's House*, Thornton Wilder Journal (2020) Vol. 1, P. 90.

NORA (*Taking a pair of shell-pink stockings, carefully ironed and folded, which she is to wear with the costume*): Look!¹⁵⁰

The provocative showing of the stockings is here a pretext to avoid the revealing of her troubles, not a mere show of sensuality.

The last point analysed by Dubost concerns the final scene. In the original version, before the iconic slamming of the door, Thorwald invokes for «The miracle of miracles—?!»¹⁵¹ ; his words are probably heard by Nora who is not out of the house yet and this implies, in Dubost's opinion, that the audience will hope for Nora's return as she might be moved by the declared will of the husband to make the «miracle» happen.

Wilder arranged the scene differently:

NORA: (*Out of sight now, only a voice, leaving*) Thorwald, good-bye!
(*She shuts the door. In a moment the street door is heard to slam and she is gone. His last hopeless cry; he is quite out of sight of the audience, and the room, his house, his whole life, is emptied:*)

HELMER: Nora! (*The curtain slowly falls.*) (*DHW*, 106)

There is no longer a reference to the «miracle», there is no possibility of Nora returning.

The theme of the lack of possibility in Nora's returning is noticeable in other elements that Wilder adds to the play. This topic will be dealt with at the end of the next subchapter.

2.1.4 Analysis of the Stage Directions

¹⁵⁰ THORNTON WILDER, *A Doll's House - An Acting Version by Thornton Wilder*, Samuel French Acting Edition, 2016, P. 59. From now on it will be quoted as *DHW*.

¹⁵¹ HENRIK IBSEN, translated by WILLIAM ARCHER, *The collected works of Henrik Ibsen*, Vol. VII, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913, P. 156. From now on it will be quoted as *DHA*.

One of the outstanding differences that can be noticed, not even reading the script, but only looking at one page, is the large presence of stage directions. If we compare the original¹⁵² with Wilder's version, the number of stage directions is similar: three hundred eighty-eight against Wilder's three hundred ninety-five. The relevant matter about the stage directions is that in Wilder's version they provide more psychological details and they clearly aim to let the actor (or the reader) know how the character's psyche faces the given situations.

Starting from the very first direction concerning the set design, Wilder adds several details: he has an extremely clear vision of the way the stage has to look. An interesting boost is the presence of some bric-a-brac and some «*pictures, collected variously during eight years of marriage and not too closely regarded now*». (DHW, 7)

Nevertheless he adds some interpretative statements aimed to provide information about the atmosphere that the setting was supposed to suggest the public. Some examples:

The home of Thorwald HELMER, an honest member of the middle class, late in the nineteenth century

[...]

it is a pleasant warm, conventional, comfortable, room, an adequate shelter for a wife, a growing reputation and a pair of children.

[...]

Between them stands the great stove, symbol of the secure comfort of the house (DHW, 7)

In some cases Wilder adds elements that are not present in the original version, for instance during the first act, while Krogstad is in Torvald's office

¹⁵²I am referring to the edition that was most popular in the USA during the first half of the 20th century, William Archer's translation. William Archer was a Scottish critic, translator, and writer. His version is well known for being very faithful to the original.

learning about his layoff, the scene directions inform the reader about Nora's behaviour while talking to Mrs. Linde and Dr. Rank:

(DOCTOR RANK *has sat down comfortably opposite CHRISTINA, on the other sofa. NORA, unnoticed is listening at HELMER's door*) (DHW, 24)

The eavesdropping of Nora is absent in the original script. Wilder's "extension" is nevertheless well-fitting for two reasons: firstly it donates dynamism to Nora's character as she appears more like a cunning person able to invade the privacy of his husband office in order to know the reason of Krogstad visit.

Secondly it reveals in advance the state of anxiety she will be in the next two acts, but this state comes together with her natural jolly behaviour as, while trying to listen to her husband conversation, she brightly speaks with her friend. Wilder specifies that she «[...] *has kept one ear on their conversation*» (DHW, 25), cleverly expressing the two natures of Nora: the joyful friend and the anguished wife.

Furthermore, Wilder, adding this particular, shows an accurate knowledge of Ibsen's works as many of his subjects eavesdrop, so it is likely that also Nora does it.

In the Second Act, during the popular scene of the Tarantella, Wilder puts a particular effort to dig deeper in the characterization of the characters, in particular he says a lot of words about the correlation between Nora's dance and what is going on in her mind. The scene originally written by Ibsen is intense as the feelings of Nora shine through her action, but Wilder makes them more explicit and somehow more complex.

First of all, Nora is not the only character involved in such tendency: by some tagline is possible to understand some information about the way Wilder interprets the character of Thorwald and his personality. In the original play Thorwald only «*sits at piano*» and «*plays*» (DHA, 104); the reader only

comprehends that he is able to play the piano. Wilder communicates that «*he plays vigorously*» (DHW, 71) and some lines forward, after Nora fails the dance, «*his artistic soul outrages, HELMER leaves the piano*» (DHW, 72); some other lines forward: «*HELMER, in the splendid conceit of an amateur of the dance, beats time with his hands and hums the tune*» (DHW, 72). Such words widen the information about the personality of Thorwald who is a great connoisseur and an enthusiast of music and dance. According to this version he is more than a simple bank official, he also has an artistic spirit. The emphasis on his knowledge somehow justifies the peremptory way he corrects his wife when she dances.

The stage directions also add some details about the character of Dr. Rank; Ibsen does not describe his actions and reactions in a detailed way, he only says that he «*looks on*» (DHA, 104) the dance and plays the piano while Thorwald directs Nora. Wilder adds only two but meaningful lines about him.

The first one describes how Rank's manner of playing changes after Nora's "violent" dance: «*DOCTOR RANK strangely infected by her is increasing the tempo*» (DHW, 73). The word *infected* has a deeper meaning in relation with Ibsen's plays, especially in *A Doll's House* where such a notion echoes in the all play. Wilder must have not chosen such a word by chance even though the concept does not fit the frame of the "Ibsen's infection" because in his works it is strongly connected with the family heritage¹⁵³. In other words, Rank has been infected by his father dissolute life and Nora's crime could pollute the morality of her children. Nora's hysteria is not supposed to infect Rank in the same way, so the attitude behind the fact must be different. It is more likely that Rank actively chooses to follow Nora's rhythm and it appears that his will is not only supporting her dance, but probably also increasing its speed and taking it to the limit. There is a circular movement between Nora and Rank and for a while it looks like the two are connected by the music and the dance; this fact excludes Thorwald for a while, as long as he «*finds the whole thing wrong again, and rises to stop it*» (DHW, 73). It is said in the second stage direction referred to Rank

¹⁵³ For the same concept: Ghosts.

that he attends and so somehow participates to Nora's hysteria. Once again it appears that the two are intimately connected.

At the end of the dance Rank «*has risen from the piano, closely attending every desperate shift in NORA's hysteria*» (DHW, 73). Dr. Rank, aware of his imminent death and overtly in love with Nora, can not miss any action of the woman. He also appears to be sadistically pleased not only with her manifest desperation and hysteria, but also because of the small argument between husband and wife about the dance.

At a deeper reading, it is possible to find out that Wilder points out twice the fact that Rank carefully watches Nora dancing and Thorwald correcting her: before the above mentioned direction there is another line that reports: «DOCTOR RANK. (*Missing nothing of any of this, he goes to the piano himself*)» (DHW, 72).

The attitude of watching Nora is typical of his character, for instance at the end of the third act, when he gets to Helmer's house to say his last goodbye to his friends, Wilder puts a particular emphasis on the eyes of Rank:

He half turns his head toward them, taking in the domestic scene

[...]

His eyes closing

[...]

Opening his eyes

[...]

Slowly, he turns and looks at Nora. (DHW, 90,91)

Such attention is not present in the original script.

Regarding the stage directions addressed to the character of Nora, firstly they describe in a very precise way Nora's actions and, on the other hand, they clarify the metaphorical value of the dance.

Chronologically, Nora «*takes the opening position of her dance, to the right of the piano*», «*whirls in the first movements [...] out of time with the music*»,

«once again striking her opening pose for the dance», «NORA dances three figures of the dance»(DHW, 72, 73) and in the end Thorwald stops her.

Wilder makes clear that the dance is nothing but a way «to keep HELMER involved in this charade as long as possible» (DHW, 72): it was Nora's plan, in agreement with Christine, to deviate Thorwald's attention from Krogstad's matter. In the stage direction there is a noteworthy word: *charade*. In the meaning of «a situation in which people pretend that something is true when it clearly is not»¹⁵⁴, the word highlights the metaphorical aspect of the dance: it is nothing more than another game that Nora enacts with Thorwald. Something made up to act the role of the happy wife that pleases her husband, but it is a false game: once again Wilder presents the double registry according to which the reader has to interpret Nora's character. Nora puts all her efforts to dance properly making her husband happy and trying to make the charade last, but Wilder points out that she dances «at an intensity far beyond her strength» (DHW, 73).

The tarantella is the above mentioned *charade* and the breach in the inner world of Nora as it reveals all her «nervousness» (DHW, 73), a single word used by Wilder to mean anguish, anxiety, fear and suicidal thoughts. So Nora shows her true self, but in a “covert” way, in a “performance”, because a woman is not allowed to express her feelings directly in the society.

Another clarification about the already mentioned stage direction referred to Rank: «DOCTOR RANK. (Who has risen from the piano, closely attending every desperate shift in NORA's hysteria)» (DHW, 73). The fact that Wilder connects *hysteria* with the dance of tarantella is particularly significant. Tarantella indicates a group different traditional dances spread in the south of Italy that aimed to heal people, mostly women, affected by *Tarantism*, a

¹⁵⁴ Source: Oxford Learner's Dictionary. Last consultation October 18th 2023.

consequence of the bite of spiders, in particular of tarantulas (from which the name of the dance probably comes from¹⁵⁵).

During the past centuries many scholars analysed and described the Tarantella, one of them was Jørgen Vilhelm Bergsøe, a Danish novelist and poet who lived in Italy between 1861 and 1869; he published in 1865 an essay about Tarantism and Tarantella. It is known that Bergsøe and Ibsen were friends as they were both living at the same time in Italy¹⁵⁶ so it is likely that Ibsen was influenced by Bergsøe's ideas about the issue.

The above essay, *Jagttagelser om den italienske tarantel og bidrag til tarantismens historie i middelalderen og nyere tid*, contains a scientific report of the attesting to the phenomenon from the Middle Ages to his time. Sandra Colella, who analysed the essay and drafted an accurate study of the issue:

On the base of the collected and analyzed data, he exposes in the last part of the treatise his rationalistic and positivistic conclusions: the bite of the Tarantula spider was not dangerous and the illness of Tarantism was due to other causes, in connection with the geographical environment on one side and with the strong social influences which oppressed the sufferers on the other side.

[...]

The phenomenon concerned especially the women because of their repression in the daily life.

The unhappy loves, the difficult existential condition pushed them to simulate the illness, in order to participate in the dances, in a sort of "small Carnival of the women", together with women that suffered of hysteria or chlorosis. (Bergsøe 1865: 89-90)¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Some sources identify the etymology in the name of Taranto, the most important city of Apulia.

¹⁵⁶ Many epistles prove this fact, for instance the 28th October 1867 Ibsen wrote to Jonas Collin that «We and the Bergsøe family have followed each other about all summer. Of course he and I often meet ; but we are not the least likely ever to become close, intimate friends».

¹⁵⁷ SANDRA COLELLA, *Tarantism And Tarantella In A Doll's House*, master thesis for Ibsen Studies Master at University of Oslo, 2007, P. 32.

Ibsen during his journey in Italy had probably witnessed to performances of tarantella and he probably discussed the issue with Bergsøe; such an exchange must have pushed the playwright to insert the dance in *A Doll's House* as he was writing the script right about that time.

There is no proof of the fact that Wilder studied so deeply Ibsen that he was aware of his source. It is possible anyway to conclude that he examined *A Doll's House* in considerable depth, so much that he understood the connection between Tarantella and hysteria.

Carrying on with the analysis of the stage directions, the last and most iconic scene of the third act continues Wilder's trend of describing meticulously the movement and the gestures of the characters. Starting from the moment in which Thorwald reads the letter, coherently with Ibsen's original script directions Nora is for the most of the time static and motionless,: «NORA says nothing, and continues to look fixedly at him» (*DHA*, 136) and «NORA stands motionless» (*DHA*, 138). On the contrary, Thorwald is more dynamic in the original version, an attitude that Wilder decisively amplifies. As usual, he not only adds some actions that are not present in the original, but he includes sentences that describe the character's frame of mind.

We can divide Thorwald's action in three parts: before/after the promissory note is returned and during Nora's speech. The following directions refer to the moments after he read the letter containing Krogstad's threat, so before the promissory note is returned:

He flings her past him, the impetus carries her to the centre of the room.

[...]

Having flung all this at her, he turns to the vestibule doors and closes them.

Harshly turning back to her to continue his arraignment.

[...]

He turns and pulls the shawl from her shoulders, flinging it onto the sofa. He is past the first shock now, and is busily looking for a loophole for himself.
(*DHW*, 95,96,97)

The angry and sharp words Thorwald addresses to his wife are accompanied by an almost violent behaviour. From the lexical point of view, it is interesting the use of the word *arraignment*, a noun that implies a strongly juridical meaning; it is perfectly coherent both with the character of Thorwald who works in close contact with legal affairs and with the situation that implies legal loopholes.

Wilder insists with a short but significant stage direction on the fact that Thorwald is trying to find a solution only for himself: this note underlines his selfish personalities and makes more convincing Nora's choice to leave. It is also a prelude to the iconic line: «Oh God! Nora, I'm saved! I'm Saved!» «And I?» «You too, yes of course!» (DHW, 98). Wilder indeed specifies that «*He is past the first shock now, and is busily looking for a loophole for himself*» (DHW, 97).

After he learns that Krogstad had returned the promissory note:

Like a man suddenly weak in the knees – and he is – he raises himself up slowly, leaning on the little side table. He takes quite a time to turn toward NORA.

[...]

Proceeding methodically to set his physical house in order, while he tries to right himself in NORA's eyes. He picks up the torn envelope and throws it in the fire.

[...]

He takes NORA's shawl from the sofa, and neatly folds it, leaving it on the piano

[...]

He returns to the bookcase the book MRS. LINDEN had been reading (DHW, 98,99).

Another personality trait emerges: he tries to calm himself down and «*right himself in NORA's eyes*» (DHW, 98) by putting the house in order. Apparently Thorwald tries to “fix” the aggressive gesture of taking off Nora's shawl and throwing that away by taking it and putting it in place.

It is likely that Wilder wanted to empathise Thorwald's will to put everything back as it was before everything happened. In particular, the fact that «*He returns to the bookcase the book MRS. LINDEN had been reading*» (DHW, 98), could be a metaphor of the fact that everything has to go back as it was: not only before he got to know about Nora's forging, but even before the play started, as Christine's arrival is the first event of the play.

Concerning the third part of the scene, when Nora reveals to her husband that she wants to leave the house, the number of stage directions decreases. Once again the most dynamic character is Thorwald, Nora is still characterised by immobility and her actions are all concentrated in the last lines.

Wilder adds two significant actions; on the one hand, Thorwald's pleas are emphasised by the kneeling and the attempt to stop her by holding her: «*He comes to her, kneeling beside her, holding her*» (DHW, 104). Such a gesture can not move Nora who is «*Heedless of his arms around her. She rises*» (DHW, 104).

The second supplement is extremely interesting. Wilder points out that Nora «*rises, then walks to the nursery door. She firmly closes it*» (DHW, 105). Such an action could be Wilder's answer to one of the most popular questions raised in the debate that *A Doll's House* provoked since its first performance: what did Nora do after the ending of the play? The idea that Nora would come back to her husband's home after a short time has always been very popular¹⁵⁸. People have speculated about it because it is likely that she came back pushed by the love for her children. Frequently the audience and the critic disagreed with the finale, which was considered not realistic as people could not accept that a woman could leave her children. On many occasions the finale was also changed, for instance during the first performances in Germany the *prima attrice* Hedwig Niemann-Raabe did not accept to perform the regular finale and changed it. She made the audience understand that the protagonist changed her mind by kneeling in front of the room of the children.

¹⁵⁸ See for example the debate on the Italian newspapers analysed in the first chapter of this thesis.

Wilder is openly rising up against such speculation and interpretations. As Nora closes the door of the nursery she is also closing the metaphorical door of her experience as a mother. Wilder's Nora is sure of her choice: the author also strengthens the concept by using the adverb *firmly* which results as an end to her motherhood.

Such a gesture is a parallel to the following stage direction which, on the contrary, is present also in the original script. In both versions Nora gives back her wedding ring to Thorwald and he does the same with his ring. In this second moment the audience witness the end of Nora's wedded life, she is no longer a wife.

The explanation of such a confident stance by Wilde should also be explained by the different social status women played in 1937. As mentioned before, fifty-eight years separate the two works, years during which, for example, World War I brought women to work at their husband's place and, in the United States, the Nineteenth Amendment granted women the right to vote (1920).

It is likely that also the staging of Wilder's *A Doll's House* on Broadway caused some controversies about the finale, but his strong choice of making clear that Nora is not going to reverse her decision is a symptom of the changing of the times.

2.1.3 Some Considerations About the Language

Generally speaking, Wilder's language is characterised by a sober, simple and direct language to convey profound ideas. This simplicity is evident in the dialogue of his characters and the overall structure of his plays. Plays like *Our Town*, together with its experimental elements, is characterised by an accessible style which, at the same time, digs deep in the fundamental aspects of the human condition.

Regarding *A Doll's House*, its language is probably the most outstanding element that has been changed in Wilder's version.

The comments of Wilder on *A Doll's House* adaptation contained in *Conversations with Thornton Wilder* («I merely took three translations, including that of Ibsen's friend, Brandes, and turned out a version in colloquial English») express the clear effort of renewal made not only on the content but also on the language.

Wilder connected the language with the concepts of identity and experience. In his essay *Toward American Language* (1952) he also marked a difference between the English and the American identity and experience as, since the beginning of the 20th century, «European modes, however fruitful for Europeans, could no longer serve the American people»¹⁵⁹. He continues:

The American space-sense, the American time sense, the American sense of personal identity are not those of Europeans — and in particular, not those of the English. The English language was moulded to express the English experience of life. The literature written in that language is one of the greatest glories of the entire human adventure. That achievement went hand in hand with the comparable achievement of forging the language which conveyed so accurately their senses of space, time, and identity. Those senses are not ours and the American people and American writers have long been engaged in reshaping the inherited language to express our modes of apprehension.¹⁶⁰

Considering the fact that William Archer was Scottish, his language was for sure affected by the English-European language Wilder mentions in the essay, a language that was no longer valuable for the Americans. Furthermore, Archer's translation was only ten years “younger” than the original one as it was published in 1889. It means that forty-eight years divided the two versions, years in which the both varieties of English drastically changed.

¹⁵⁹ THORNTON WILDER, *Toward American Language*, in «The Atlantic Online Archive», July 1952. Last access date: November 7th 2023.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

In conclusion, the old age of the translation together with the distance between the American and the English language were the reasons of the changes Wilder made on his version of *A Doll's House*.

Donald Haberman stated, regarding the changes Wilder made on *A Doll's House* that:

In the Ibsen adaptation, he did little more than eliminate from the standard translations the Victorian mannerisms that he thought would be offensive to a modern audience, either because they dated the play or because they seemed to make Ibsen's ideas too awkwardly obvious.¹⁶¹

Dubost, in his article, cites a passage that serves as an example of the changes Wilder frequently did:

A portion of a scene, in which Helmer asks Nora about Krogstad's visit, is an example of Wilder's updating:

Archer's version:

Helmer. And then to tell me an untruth about it!

Nora. An untruth! (63)

Wilder's version:

HELMER: No, Nora! And you could stoop to that! To speak to such a man, to make him a promise! And then to tell a lie about it . . . to me!

NORA: A lie?

HELMER: Didn't you say nobody had been here? That's lying. (41)

"An untruth" versus "a lie" is very revealing. If one focuses on the connection between language and time, one notes that The Oxford English Dictionary writes that "untruth" can either be deemed "archaic," used in Late Middle English, or in the "Mid-Nineteenth Century."¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ DONALD HABERMAN, *The Plays of Thornton Wilder – A Critical Study*, Middletown (Connecticut), Wesleyan University Press, 1967, P. 102.

¹⁶² THIERRY DUBOST, *Wilder as a Playwright-in-the-Making, adapting A Doll's House*, «Thornton Wilder Journal» (2020) Vol. 1, P. 89.

Some further examples can be easily found in the lexicon that appears more formal in Archer's English version; the following examples are both taken from the second act. When Nora begs Thorwald to give the workplace back to Krogstad, she claims that she is doing that for her husband sake. She express that in the following way:

Nora: This man writes for the most scurrilous newspapers; you said so yourself. He can do you no end of harm. I'm so terribly afraid of him (*DHA*, 36).

Wilder version:

Nora: It's for your own sake, Thorwald! He can do so much harm...by talking and everything. I'm so terribly afraid of him (*DHW*, 53)

Wilder simplifies the line and he completely cancels the fact that Krogstad writes articles for newspapers. It is significant that he cuts the adjective «scurrilous» that is defined as formal in the Oxford Learner's Dictionary¹⁶³

The same attitude is shown when Christina accuses Nora of getting the money from Dr. Rank, Nora states, in Archer's translation, that « [...] he came into his property afterwards» (*DHA*, 70). The word «afterwards» is replaced with the more colloquial «later» (*DHW*, 51).

2.2 Our Town

2.2.1 Substantial Differences Between Ibsen and Wilder's Poetic

¹⁶³ Last consultation November 3rd 2023.

The starting point to draw a comparison between *A Doll's House* and *Our Town* is the fact that Wilder worked on the plays during the same period, indeed only about two weeks separated the premieres the two plays¹⁶⁴.

There is no doubt about the fact that the two works are extremely different under many point of view, to mention the most outstanding of them. The idea behind *A Doll's House* is realism, while Wilder in *Our Town* does not pursue the same aims. In the preface to *Our Town* Wilder distances himself from Ibsen realism:

The theatre longs to represent the symbols of things, not the things themselves.

[...]

When the theatre pretends to give the real thing in canvas and wood and metal it loses something of the realer thing which is its true business. Ibsen and Chekov carried realism as far as it could go, and it took all their genius to do it. Now the camera is carrying it on and is in great "theoretical peril" of falling short of literature.¹⁶⁵

The aim of Wilder's theatre was catching the infinite standing under the words and the gestures of his characters. The concept of eternity is well represented in *Our Town* because, regardless the meticulous information about the time and the place in which the action takes place, it is clear that behind the specific characters there are everyman and everywoman that lived and passed away without leaving a mark of their life.

Furthermore, concerning the timing, the crowd of the death people in the third act is a clear representation of how past stands aside to the living present and how the past affects the present in a never-ending circle.

¹⁶⁴ *Our Town* was first staged the 22nd of January 1938 at McCarter Theatre Princeton, in New Jersey.

¹⁶⁵ THORNTON WILDER, edited by J. D. MCCLATCHY, *Collected plays & writings on theatre*, New York (New York), Penguin Putnam, 2007, P. 658.

A fundamental passage representing the concept of eternity appears in the speech of the Stage Manager about the never-ending flux of people inhabiting the Earth and the opposition between the vivid life people lived and the dull trace that remains of it after death:

Y'know Babylon once had two million people in it, and all we know about'em is the names of the kings and some copies of wheat contracts . . . and contracts for the sale of slaves. Yet every night all those families sat down to supper, and the father came home from his work, and the smoke went up the chimney, same as here. And even in Greece and Rome, all we know about the real life of the people is what we can piece together out of the joking poems and die comedies they wrote for the theatre back then. So I'm going to have a copy of this play put in the cornerstone and the people a thousand years from now'll know a few simple facts about us more than the Treaty of Versailles and the Lindbergh flight. See what I mean? So people a thousand years from now this is the way we were in the provinces north of New York at the beginning of the twentieth century. This is the way we were: in our growing up and in our marrying and in our living and in our dying.¹⁶⁶

The concept is remarked in the preface to *Three Plays by Thornton Wilder*, published for the first time in 1958. The book collects the three most successful plays: *Our Town*, *The Skin of our Teeth* and *The Matchmaker*. Wilder wrote a sort of a manifesto of his theatre; after a short analysis of the way the theatre had changed since the time when the middle class undermined aristocracy's predominance, the author expressed his ideas. According to Wilder, every action, feeling or situation people live in their life is unique and unrepeatable, but awareness brings the individual to reflect on the «repetitive patterns»¹⁶⁷ that underlies such experiences. The playwright's role is to represent the general truth, not the particular one which can be found, for instance, in novels.

¹⁶⁶ THORNTON WILDER, *Our Town – A Play in Three Act*, New York (New York), Harper & Row, Publishers, 1938, P. 38. From now on it will be quoted as *OT*.

¹⁶⁷ THORNTON WILDER, *Three Plays By Thornton Wilder: Our Town, The Skin of Our Teeth, & The Matchmaker*, New York (New York), Bantam Pathfinder Editions, 1958, p. 12.

Such purpose affects the structure of the play which is choral and it aims to represent, together with the individual stories of the characters, the life of an entire city.

On the other hand, Ibsen, after writing historical verse plays following the Romantic taste, moved his attention to the realistic aesthetic which was getting a foothold during the last decades of the 19th century. His attempt to depict in his plays a real situation occurring between real people set in a certain social context in a precise moment is quite clear and effective¹⁶⁸.

To quote only one declaration of his poetic intent, it is quite explicative a passage of a letter sent to Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson¹⁶⁹ (1832-1910). Written in Rome on 9th December 1867, the letter contains an outburst by Ibsen who complains about the bad review Clemens Petersen wrote about *Peer Gynt* itself.

Ibsen claims:

If I am no poet, then I have nothing to lose. I shall try my luck as a photographer. My contemporaries in the North I shall take in hand, one after the other, as I have already taken the nationalist language reformers. I will not spare the child in the mother's womb, nor the thought or feeling that lies under the word of any living soul that deserves the honour of my notice.¹⁷⁰

2.2.2 The Institution of Marriage in *Our Town* and *A Doll's House*

¹⁶⁸ It is necessary to specify that some symbolic features deriving from the previous romantic experience remain in his mature works. For example Albert Morey Sturtevant in his article *Some Phases of Ibsen Symbolism* (Publications of the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study, Vol. 2, No. 1, October, 1914, pp. 25-49) states that some elements of the Scandinavian folklore and the symbolic element of the eye pervade plays like *The Lady from the Sea* (1888), *Little Eyolf* (1894) and especially *When We Dead Awake* (1899).

¹⁶⁹ Norwegian writer who won the Nobel prize in 1903. During his life he pursue a friendship whit Ibsen. The two met during the period of their studies in Oslo.

¹⁷⁰ HENRIK IBSEN, edited and translated by [JOHN NILSEN LAURVIK](#), *Letters of Henrik Ibsen*, University Press of the Pacific, 2002, P. 147.

After such a necessary disclaimer regarding the huge difference between the two authors, it is possible to focus on the fact that *Our Town* shares some thematic elements with Ibsen's work. Both playwrights were interested in examining the human condition, the social institutions, the struggles of individuals within society, and the concept of self-awareness and self-discovery. Wilder admired Ibsen's work and was inspired by his use of complex characters, intricate plots, and exploration of social and moral issues. It is likely that his works were influenced by Ibsen's. A proof of this statement can be found in the principal common theme of the two plays.

One of the main themes *A Doll's House* has in common with *Our Town* is marriage. In *Our Town* this topic is dealt with multiple points of view, in particular during the second act which is indeed called *Love and Marriage*. The audience and the readers witness a vivid analysis of such institution both from Emily's and George's standpoint (a marriage at its beginning) and from their parents' mature point of view.

As mentioned before, it is necessary to interpret Emily's and George's wedding (as much as every relationship in the play) in an absolute way: it is meant to represent the general institution of marriage in its eternal sense. Wilder shows the two opposite poles of the marriage; one side is represented by the words of the Stage Director, who underlines the necessity of weddings as a constitutive need of human beings. He claims that «People were made to live two-by-two»(*OT*, 71), and the nature of this status has always existed as he invokes «All the other witnesses at this wedding, the ancestors. Millions of them. Most of them set out to live two-by-two, also. Millions of them. » (*OT*, 71) On the other hand, the Stage Director himself mentions that

This is a good wedding, but people are so put together that even at a good wedding there's a lot of confusion way down deep in people's minds and we thought that that ought to be in our play, too. (*OT*, 71)

Starting from the end of the play, the marriage of Emily and George appears to be happy and serene (prior to Emily's death), but before the celebration a lot of confusion affects indeed their mind.

George regrets his choice of getting married because he realises that this step implies the ending of his light-headed and carefree youth. He wants to remain a "fella". Alternatively, Emily's confusion does not have, at the beginning, a clear explanation: through her mother's words the reader gets to know that she put her head on the breakfast table and started crying. In the following lines she pronounces this words: «I never felt so alone in my whole life. And George over there, looking so . . . ! I hate him. I wish I were dead. Papa! Papa!» (*OT*, 72) such a climax of negative feelings appears to contradict the Stage Director's words: people may be made to live two-by-two, but that is not enough to extinguish the sense of loneliness. The reason for such sense of solitude could be found in Mrs. Gibbs words: «Frank, weddings are perfectly awful things. Farces, that's what they are!» (*OT*, 52).

If we consider the play in its entirety, the above mentioned lines appear somewhat out of place as the marriage seems to be successful, indeed after her own death, Emily declares that after her wedding every day of her life was happy. The fact that Mrs. Gibbs describes the institution of marriage the attributes of «awful» and «farce» makes the issue complex and unclear and puts the focus of this analysis on the marital relationship between Mrs. and Mr. Gibbs.

Maybe the origin of such a complex interpretation of the institution has to be found in the influence *A Doll's House* had on the process of writing *Our Town*. Nora and Thorwald's marriage looks happy and passionate during the very first interactions of the two, but going further into the reading, the marriage is indeed a farce as Nora lies to her husband who, in his turn, treats her like an actual doll without intelligence and willpower. At the end of the play, the superficiality of their relationship is made clear:

NORA. [After a short silence.] Does not one thing strike you as we sit here?
HELMER. What should strike me?

NORA. We have been married eight years. Does it not strike you that this is the first time we two, you and I, man and wife, have talked together seriously?

HELMER Seriously! What do you call seriously?

NORA During eight whole years, and more - ever since the day we first met - we have never exchanged one serious word about serious things.

HELMER Was I always to trouble you with the cares you could not help me to bear?

NORA I am not talking of cares. I say that we have never yet set ourselves seriously to get to the bottom of anything.

HELMER Why, my dearest Nora, what have you to do with serious things?

NORA There we have it! You have never understood me. I have had great injustice done me, Thorwald; first by father, and then by you. (*DHA*, 142)

The theme of the lack of effective and serious communication is clearly present in *Our Town*, with equivalent features. Once again Mrs. Gibbs is the protagonist of the scene: while talking to Mrs. Webb about the money she will earn by selling some furniture and about her desire to travel, she says to her friend: «You know how he is. I haven't heard a serious word out of him since I've known him». ¹⁷¹ (*OT*, 20)

The feature of the lack of relevant communication is connected to the word *charade* analysed in 5.1.4. The relationship between men and women in the institution of marriage does not imply a closed and emotive connection because it is, in Mrs. Gibbs' words, a farce.

The reason for the lack of this element seems to be, in *A Doll's House*, the failure to achieve the personal realisation of the self, especially for the female part of the couple. Nora has the duty of educating herself in order to leave behind the doll and finally become a woman. Nora then affirms that only the

¹⁷¹ Furthermore, other elements connect the figure of Nora and Mrs. Gibbs. For example they are portrayed as wives who try to convince their husbands doing something: Nora struggles to persuade Thorwald to annul the dismissal of Krogstad and Mrs. Gibbs tries to influence Dr. Gibbs in order to convince him to leave for a journey in Europe.

«miracle of miracles» could transform the marriage-charade in a real marriage. She refers to a «change so that [...] communion between us shall be a marriage». In other words, the two parts of the couple need to develop their personality and their faculties as individuals out of the scheme of the married couple in order to be able to communicate and finally «talk seriously».

Another topic that transpires in the relationship between Mrs. and Dr. Gibbs and which is, conversely, deeply explored in *A Doll's House* is the subjection of women in the institution of marriage. This topic has many facets, one of them being the “economic power”. The common denominator between the two plays is the fact that women hide the fact that they have something to do with money: at the beginning of the first act, Nora asks for money in a playful and helpless way, she keeps secret the fact that she strictly saved money and above all that she worked to pay back the loan.

Mrs. Gibbs's attitude is similar to Nora's as she lies to her husband when she has the possibility of earning a large amount of money by selling her furniture: instead of telling the truth, she prefers to communicate to her husband that she will inherit a legacy. In both cases the wives hide their credit and their active role in the management of money.

On the opposite side, both Wilder and Ibsen underline the will of the male part of the couple to control the economic assets of the family. Thorwald categorically refuses to ask for a money loan even when it would have been fundamental for his health and he does not even listen to Nora's reasons. Dr. Gibbs refuses to leave for a trip in Europe for a mere fact of egoism:

No, he said, it might make him discontented with Grover's Corners to go traipsin' about Europe; better let well enough alone, he says. Every two years he makes a trip to the battlefields of the Civil War and that's enough treat for anybody, he says. (*OT*, 20)

Owning money apparently implies having power over other people, the social context forces the two women to hide and cancel such power in favour of the men. Mrs. Gibbs leaves the decision of how to use her money to her husband and this way she will never use the money as she wants: in the third act, Emily lets the audience understand that she and George inherited three hundred and fifty dollars, the exact amount of money that Mrs. Gibbs earned by selling the parlour.

The audience of *A Doll's House* can understand that Nora will be able to dispose openly of her own money only after she has left the marital home.

To conclude the speech about marriage, a noteworthy essay written in 1892 by Lou Von Salomé (collected in *Readings on A Doll's House*) provides a peculiar point of view about marriage in *A Doll's House*, some of her conclusions complete this analysis of the conception of marriage in *A Doll's House* and *Our Town*. Firstly, Von Salomé provides her point of view about the character of Nora and she mainly describes her as a child who loves her husband as she loved her father, bestowing on him all the characteristics of an almighty and perfect god. Conversely, Thorwald is described as a self-satisfied and assured man who kindly let a subordinate being like Nora stay with him on the condition that she would cheer up his life.

A paragraph of the essay is instead dedicated to the relationship between Mrs. Linde and Krogstad, a matter that is frequently neglected due to the complexity and the fascination of Nora and Thorwald. Von Salomé claims that the reason Ibsen explored their relationship is the fact that they are meant to represent a true and healthy marriage. The reason of such conclusion is the fact that the two parts of the couple know each other and cooperate side by side for their purpose. In Von Salomé's words:

Mrs. Linde hardship, her loveless marriage to assume help for her mother and two brothers, lends her the fortitude to enter her future relationship with Krogstad on a basis of mutual compassion and understanding. They are equal in

their experience of life trials. [...] They know themselves in all their missteps and in their situation in society. That is why their relationship eventuates in a “happy ending”.¹⁷²

Von Salomé’s interpretation underlines that the lack of *mutual compassion and understanding* prevent a marriage to be successful and cause the loneliness portrayed in Nora and Thorwald’s marriage as much as in the married couples of *Our Town*.

¹⁷² HAYLEY R. MITCHELL, (book editor), *Readings on A Doll's House*, San Diego (California), The Greenhaven Press, 1999, P. 74.

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