‘Ibsen on the London Stage: Independent Theatre as Transnational Space’

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The history of the independent theatre movement in late-Victorian and Edwardian London is often told in terms of its role in laying the foundations for a form of artistically innovative, non-commercial theatre in Britain in the twentieth century.[1] In particular, the well-attested impact of the plays of Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) at this time has been singled out as the most important transformative factor in the transition from the supposedly parlous state of the nineteenth-century British stage to a creative renewal inspired directly by Scandinavian drama of what the Danish critic, Georg Brandes, called ‘the modern breakthrough’ (*det moderne gennembrud*).[2] This view accords with a model of an artistic renaissance on the domestic front that is motivated by an encounter with a foreign culture. Moreover, the foreign culture is one that is often perceived as backward, provincial, peripheral, exotic, or even barbaric; paradigmatic examples from the same period might include the European reception of Sergey Diaghilev’s *Ballets Russes*, or French and British responses to the realist novels of Fedor Dostoevsky, Lev Tolstoy, and Ivan Turgenev.[3]

In both their broad outlines and their specific details, existing accounts have shed crucial light on the mechanisms of translation and criticism that dictated the nature of Ibsen’s

[1] John Stokes, *Resistible Theatres: Enterprise and Experiment in the Late Nineteenth Century* (London: Paul Elek, 1972).

[2] Gretchen P. Ackerman, *Ibsen and the English Stage, 1889-1903* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1987), and James Woodfield, *English Theatre in Transition, 1881-1914* (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1984).

[3] Philip Ross Bullock and Rebecca Beasley (eds), *Russia in Britain, 1880-1940: From Melodrama to Modernism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

reception in turn-of-the-century Britain (there are parallel studies that trace his influence in France and Germany too).[4] Nonetheless, such accounts frequently see this phenomenon as a unidirectional flow from one culture to another (what Giuliano D'Amico has dubbed 'as a dialectic of import–export'),[5] thereby re-inscribing the very linguistic and national boundaries that comparative literary study is so well equipped to challenge. Even Pascale Casanova's attempt to produce 'a kind of relational or structural comparison' of Ibsen's reception in Britain and France tends to fall back on a series of linked case studies, rather than the analysis of an inherently transnational field as such.[6] Furthermore, where Casanova does attempt to reconstitute 'the "international club" of Ibsen's discoverers', she tends to see its individual members as representative of individual national traditions, rather than as emblematic of cosmopolitan literary space *per se*.[7] Thus, André Antoine, Lugné-Poe, George Bernard Shaw, and James Joyce (Casanova's four main case studies) stand for key moments in French,

[4] See, in particular, Kirsten Shepherd Barr, 'Ibsen in France from Breakthrough to Renewal', *Ibsen Studies*, 12/1 (2012), 56-80, and Erika Fischer-Lichte, 'Ibsen's Ghosts – A Play for All Theatre Concepts? Some Remarks on Its Performance History in Germany', *Ibsen Studies*, 7/1 (2007), 61-83.

[5] Giuliano D'Amico, 'Six Points for a Comparative Ibsen Reception History', *Ibsen Studies*, 14:1 (2014), 4-37 (p. 4).

[6] Pascale Casanova, 'The Ibsen Battle: A Comparative Analysis of the Introduction of Henrik Ibsen in France, England and Ireland', in Christophe Charle, Julien Vincent and Jay Winter (eds), *Anglo-French Attitudes: Comparisons and Transfers between English and French Intellectuals since the Eighteenth Century* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 214- 31 (p. 216). For an earlier and still indispensable comparative account of Ibsen's European reception, focussing primarily on Britain and France, see Kirsten Shepherd Barr, *Ibsen and Early Modernist Theatre, 1890-1900* (Westport, CT, and London: Greenwood Press, 1997).

[7] Casanova, 'The Ibsen Battle', p. 216.

English, and Irish theatre history, as well as illustrating the impact of Ibsen on the contrasting aesthetics of realism/naturalism and symbolism in those cultures.[8]

Casanova's paradigm of the interaction of dominant and dominating cultures in 'world literary space', as well as her emphasis on the highly personal ideologies of key players at the time, mean that she often oversimplifies the complex and interlocking networks of transmission that marked Ibsen's European reception more widely. The aim of the present article is, therefore, to consider Ibsen's British reception around the turn of the century from a rather different set of perspectives, replacing modernism's strongly teleological sense of its own temporality with a more spatially inflected account of artistic production at a distinct historical moment that draws some of its metaphorical impetus from tropes such as 'the Republic of Letters', '*Weltliteratur*', or even 'Global Ibsen'.[9] In particular, this article will treat the independent theatre movement as an exemplary instance of a transnational space operating outside of national canons and histories, and dependent on the involvement of a large number of individuals whose linguistic and cultural allegiances resist ready definition. Eschewing a teleological narrative, it views the contexts of British Ibsen reception around 1900 not from the point of view of their eventual outcome (either in the institutional history of British theatre, or in the story of Ibsen's eventual place in the literary canon), but as a way of

[8] For a study that deftly manages to show how Ibsen could be adopted both 'in the service of the nation' and simultaneously 'as an example of someone free of national pressures', see Tore Rem, 'Nationalism or Internationalism? The Early Irish Reception of Ibsen', *Ibsen Studies*, 7:2 (2007), 188-202 (here p. 188).

[9] See, for instance, Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 157-63, Martin Puchner, 'Goethe, Marx, Ibsen and the Creation of a World Literature', *Ibsen Studies*, 13/1 (2013), 28-46, and Erika Fischer-Lichte, Barbara Gronau and Christel Weiler (eds), *Global Ibsen: Performing Modern Identities* (London: Routledge, 2011).

rethinking the interaction between the local, national, and international in literary analysis and history.[10]

Even before the Ibsen cult of the turn of the century, British theatre was remarkably receptive to foreign influences, even if this receptivity has tended to be seen as fundamentally derivative, as opposed to self-consciously cosmopolitan. Accounts that stress the supposed backwardness of British nineteenth-century drama frequently emphasize the extent to which the standard theatrical repertoire at the time was made up of translations, adaptations, and imitations of foreign works – primarily French historical plays, melodramas, and vaudevilles – which held up the evolution of a native tradition. It is this notion of British theatre's indebtedness to foreign models that underpins Matthew Arnold's essay, 'The French Play in London', written in the wake of a visit to London by the Comédie Française in 1879. Although this event is generally remembered as the moment that Sarah Bernhardt's international career was launched, it was equally important for what Arnold described as 'the lessons to be learnt by us from the immense attraction which the French company has exercised, the consequences to be drawn from it.'[11] In his essay, Arnold calls for steps to be taken to revivify the moribund state of the British stage by copying the example of the visiting French theatre, particularly through the establishment of a national, state-funded theatre. In Arnold's reading, French drama offers an institutional model to be emulated, rather than a storehouse of works to be raided and copied (although he certainly writes admiringly of plays

[10] For a productive attempt to move beyond the binaries of 'original' and 'copy', 'source text' and 'target text', and to interpret theatre translation in terms of an inherent hybridity, see Katja Krebs, *Cultural Dissemination and Translational Communities: German Drama in English Translation, 1900-1914* (Manchester: St Jerome, 2007). Krebs' study also contains analysis of a number of individuals central to Ibsen's British reception, including William Archer and Jack Grein.

[11] Matthew Arnold, 'The French Play, in *Irish Essays and Others* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1882), pp. 208-43 (p. 213).

by Molière and Victor Hugo). If Arnold's essay represents one way in which foreign influence might be assimilated within British theatre of the Victorian period, then a comment made by the Lord Chamberlain's examiner of plays, Edward Smyth Piggott, reveals the extent to which licentious French vaudevilles could simultaneously function as an untranslated 'other' within the British body politic. 'When French players come to London with French plays', he reportedly said, 'I consider the theatre in which they act is for the time being French territory.'[12]

Classic accounts of the development of British theatre often stress the need to overthrow the perceived dominance of these assimilated French models and to establish a new form of drama by appealing directly or otherwise to different, often peripheral European traditions (Ibsen in the 1890s, Chekhov from the 1920s onwards).[13] The main driver in this process has often been viewed as the independent theatre movement – a series of often experimental enterprises undertaken by individuals working outside of the mainstream, West End theatre. In the eyes of the innovators, there were two major impediments to the proper development of modern British drama – the existence of censorship in the form of the Lord Chamberlain and the financial concerns of the actor-managers of the commercial theatres who were unlikely to risk their profits by putting on new and unusual repertoire. In order to get round both of these problems, the innovators established private theatrical societies that would not take money for tickets at the door, but would sell tickets to subscribers, thereby avoiding censorship laws and guaranteeing, at least in theory, a stable financial foundation for their work. Although, Ibsen was to be the great beneficiary of this process, the example in fact came from the revival of Percy Bysshe Shelley's *The Cenci* (written and published in 1819), performed for the first time in a private production sponsored by the Shelley Society at the

[12] Cited in Gunilla Anderman, *Europe on Stage: Translation and Theatre* (London: Oberon Books, 2005), p. 80.

[13] Patrick Miles (ed.), *Chekhov on the British Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

Grand Theatre in Islington in 1886. Nonetheless, as John Stokes observes, almost all of the movement's aims the 'were inspired by examples from the continent'.[14]

Although Ibsen's name was to become intricately linked with the independent theatre movement around the turn of the century (especially in the wake of the first British performance of *Ghosts* [*Gengangere*] at the Variety Theatre in March 1891), his works were discovered well before the 1890s. Edmund Gosse had written about him in a series of articles in *The Spectator* from as early as 1872, part of a broader series of intellectual encounters with modern Scandinavian culture that were shaped by his awareness of the 'modern breakthrough'. But it is *A Doll's House* (*Et dukkehjem*) that perhaps best illustrates the variety of approaches to translation that shaped Ibsen's early British reception. It first appeared in English in 1880, just one year after its Scandinavian premiere, in a version by T. Weber (and – rather strangely, given its provocative subject matter – dedicated to Alexandra, Princess of Wales).[15] It is an infamous version, as it was clearly translated by a competent, yet non-native speaker of English who would have relied on dictionaries to produce the finished text. Yet to highlight – once again – its many infelicities is also to overlook the fact that an early stage of an author's reception often depends on local informants and enthusiasts to raise his or her profile. Moreover, in its literal handling of syntax and idiom, it is a version that carries with it the strong influence of the original. By contrast, Henry Arthur Jones and Henry Herman's *Breaking a Butterfly* (1884) offered a bowderlized version of *A Doll's House* that was indicative of initial attempts to domesticate Ibsen (William Archer, Ibsen's main translator around the turn of the century, complained that 'the adapters […] have felt it needful to eliminate all that was satirical or unpleasant, and in making their work sympathetic they at

[14] Stokes, *Resistible Theatres*, p. 4.

[15] Henrik Ibsen, *Nora: A Play in Three Acts*, trans. T. Weber (Copenhagen: Weber's Academy, 1880).

once made it trivial').[16] Furthermore, *Breaking a Butterfly* was translated not from Ibsen's original Dano-Norwegian, but on the basis of a German version, further effacing any sense of its original context.[17] A third version from the early 1880s – by Henrietta Frances Lord – presents yet another approach to translation and adaptation.[18] In addition to her version of Ibsen's text, Lord included a substantial introduction supposedly about the 'Life of Henrik Ibsen', but actually analysing the play's contribution to the question of a woman's place in society from a passionate political perspective.[19] Here, translation is instrumentalized in the service of ideology, and shows how quickly Ibsen found himself read in Britain as a social commentator, as well as an artistic innovator.

The publication of a substantial number of translations of Ibsen's plays from the early 1880s meant that these play a particularly crucial role in shaping his reputation in Britain, especially in advance of subsequent theatrical productions. The main English translator of Ibsen at this time – and for many decades to come – was William Archer (he made his debut with a version of *The Pillars of Society* [*Samfundets støtter*] in 1880, the first of Ibsen's plays to be staged in Britain). It has been widely observed that as a child, Archer spent his summers in Norway, and that his bilingualism gave him 'that crucial insight and linguistic instinct that only a native speaker possesses'.[20] It should also be noted that Archer was Scottish. As a

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[16] William Archer, 'Breaking a Butterfly (A Doll's House)', in Michael Egan (ed.), *Ibsen: The Critical Heritage* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 65-72 (p. 72).

[17] Ackerman, p. 33.

[18] Henry [sic] Ibsen, *Nora*, trans. Henrietta Frances Lord (London: Griffith and Farran; New York: E. P. Dutton, 1882).

[19] 'Life of Henrik Ibsen', in ibid., pp. v-xxiv. For a discussion of Lord's views, see Ackerman, pp. 29-33.

[20] Shepherd Barr, *Ibsen and Early Modernist Theatre*, p. 42. On Archer more generally, see Thomas Postlewait, *Prophet of the New Drama: William Archer and the Ibsen Campaign* (Westport, CT, and London: Greenwood Press, 1986).

member of a broader network of non-metropolitan agents who facilitated the reception of foreign literatures in Britain, he is indicative of the literary landscape beyond London, and illustrates the importance of considering the other constituent nations of the United Kingdon, as well as the English regions, in accounts of the literary process at this time. The deliberate bypassing of metropolitan, national centres that is such a feature of cosmopolitan taste also makes room for the regional and the provincial.

In his review of *Breaking a Butterfly* (the bowdlerized adaptation of *A Doll's House*), Archer criticizes the process whereby the moral situation examined in the play was traduced by the banal, melodramatic rewriting of it in terms that would be acceptable to Victorian taste. At the same time, however, he asserts both Ibsen's local, Norwegian identity, as well as his transnational, pan-European reputation, primarily by praising recent German and Polish productions of *A Doll's House* which, he argued, were far more authentic than the recent British version, whether in terms of their linguistic accuracy and their handling of the play's controversial content.[21] Archer's own practice as a translator often went against apparent naturalness in English, as his own description of his aims makes clear: 'to reproduce the poet's intention with all possible accuracy, even at the cost of certain uncouthness or angularity of expression.'[22] His approach was deliberately literal, alienating even, and sought to promote a version of Ibsen that was closer to his Scandinavian roots than previous English versions. His translations preserve details of local colour and idiomatic expressions, often using footnotes to explain them in greater detail. Archer's versions show how Ibsen arrived first as 'literature' and only later as 'drama' in late nineteenth-century Britain, but they can

[21] Archer, 'Breaking a Butterfly (A Doll's House)', p. 67.

[22] William Archer, 'Biographical Introduction', *Ibsen's Prose Dramas*, vol. 1 (London: Walter Scott, 1904), p. x, cited in Postlewait, *Prophet of the New Drama*, p. 15.

also be seen as a deliberate provocation to read Ibsen in a more 'foreign', 'hybrid', and 'transnational' way.

Archer was not just active as a literary translator, but also as a reviewer and as a contributor to the lively debate about Ibsen that ran in the periodical press at the time.[23] There is, therefore, a close and mutually reinforcing association between his work as a literary translator and his support for the independent theatre movement. The most important of the various establishments which made up this movement (at least as far as Ibsen is concerned) was Jack Grein's Independent Theatre Society, which staged the British premiere of *Ghosts* at the Variety Theatre, Soho, in March 1891. Like the bilingual Archer, Grein also embodies the transnational spirit of British Ibsen reception. Born Jacob Thomas Grein in the Netherlands in 1862, he can be seen as something of both an outsider in British literary culture, and as an intermediary between cultures who promoted a more cosmopolitan vision of the theatre.[24] Moreover, his theatrical practice was itself modelled directly on a crucial European institution: André Antoine's Théâtre libre. Founded in Paris in 1887, this was just one of a number of independent theatrical spaces established around this time, including Otto Brahm's Freie Bühne in Berlin (1889), August Strindberg's Skandinavisk försöksteater (Scandinavian

[23] Thomas Postelwait (ed.), *William Archer on Ibsen: The Major Essays, 1889-1919* (Westpost, CT, and London: Greenwood Press, 1984).

[24] For the ambitious range of contemporary British and European plays performed by the Independent Theatre in London between 1891 and 1897 see N. H. G. Schoonderwoerd, *J. T. Grein: Ambassador of the Theatre, 1862–1935* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1963), pp. 114-6. As Schoonderwoerd notes, 'there were twenty-one productions in all of twenty-eight plays, only four of which […] had been seen in London before. Of the twenty-eight plays fifteen were English, five French, three Norwegian, three Dutch, one Danish, and one Flemish' (ibid., p. 116). See also Jan McDonald, 'Continental Plays Produced by the Independent Theatre Society, 1891-8', *Theatre Research International*, 1/1 (1975), 16-28. For an earlier account of Grein's life by his wife, see Michael Orme, *J. T. Grein: The Story of a Pioneer, 1862-1935* (London: John Murray, 1936).

Experimental Theatre, 1889), and Konstantin Stanislavsky and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko's Moscow Arts Theatre (1898).

The repertoire of Antoine's Théâtre libre was distinctly heterogeneous in terms of its nation origins. Inspired by the ideas of Émile Zola – principally the preface to the stage version of *Thérèse Raquin* and his manifesto, 'Naturalism in the Theatre' – it put on works such as Zola's *Jacques Damour*, Tolstoy's *Power of Darkness* (*Vlast' t'my*), Ibsen's *Ghosts* and *The Wild Duck* (*Vildanden*), Strindberg's *Miss Julie* (*Fröken Julie*) and *The Father* (*Fadren)*, and Hauptmann's *The Weavers* (*Die Weber*).[25] With its commitment to exploring and exposing the particular material and social circumstances that shape individuals and their behaviour, naturalism has, of course, a profoundly national, even local, component and will therefore look very different in different cultural contexts. Yet naturalism also travels readily across borders, as the repertoire of the Théâtre libre suggests. It is simultaneously a theatrical space, a dramatic repertoire, and a literary movement with a distinctly transnational character.[26] Antoine's theatre visited London in 1889, and the following year, George Moore and Arthur Symons saw the Paris premiere of *Ghosts*. Symons' reactions to the play were published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in June 1890 and constitute a crucial moment in the evolution of the British independent theatre movement:

> We have not yet a Théâtre Libre and it is possible that the Lord Chamberlain might have but little desire to license a play which is not even an adaptation from the French. But a Théâtre Libre could be improvised for the occasion, and *Ghosts* in this way at

[25] Anderman, p. 45.

[26] Kenneth Pickering and Jayne Thompson, *Naturalism in Theatre: Its Development and Legacy* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

least, performed – privately, if the guardians of our morality forbid the production of a play which contains so much that is 'properer for a sermon'.[27]

Thus, the establishment of Grein's Independent Theatre reveals not just Ibsen's crucial role in the reform of British drama (or, indeed, the direct import of a French model into London theatrical practice), but a whole series of transnational literary engagements and networks across the continent.

It is not just Archer and Grein who embody a spirit of cosmopolitanism, but many of the other representatives of the Ibsen culture in turn-of-the-century London. Henry James played a crucial role in negotiating the competing identities of Ibsen as a European dramatist who was simultaneously provincial and universal. In his review of *Hedda Gabler* in the *New Review* in June 1891, James famously described Ibsen as 'too far from Piccadilly',[28] but if Ibsen was far – in terms of aesthetics, morality, and nationality – from mainstream British theatre, then that was not necessarily a negative; it was, in fact, his resistance to ready domestication that served as a way of establishing a bridge between various modern European theatre repertoires in the 1890s. If James represents an interesting fusion of American and continental European influences (primarily French), then George Moore, George Bernard Shaw, James Joyce, and – to a lesser extent – Oscar Wilde all attest to a strong Irish strain in his English-language reception, whether in London or Dublin, as well as exposing the multipolar nature of the literary field in turn-of-the-century Britain.

Yet Shaw's Irishness has also functioned as an impediment to an understanding of his transnational engagements, just as his advocacy of Ibsen is too often read in the unidirectional terms of a Norwegian writer's reception in Britain and pre-independence Ireland. For Shaw,

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[27] Cited in Stokes, *Resistible Theatres*, p. 135.

[28] Cited in Anderman, p. 94.

Ibsen stands not so much for a particular iteration of Norwegian national identity, as a pan-European cultural commodity that readily crossed linguistic and institutional borders. Writing about *John Gabriel Borkman*, for instance, he offered this account of his attraction:

> Already Ibsen is a European power: this new play has been awaited for two years, and is now being discussed and assimilated into the consciousness of the age with an interest which no political or pontifical utterance can command. … Ibsen is translated promptly enough nowadays, yet no matter how rapidly the translation comes on the heels of the original, newspapers cannot wait for it: detailed accounts based on the Norwegian text, and even on stolen glimpses of the proof-sheets, fly through the world from column to column as if the play were an Anglo-American arbitration treaty.[29]

Much has been written about the supposed influence of Ibsen on Shaw's own dramas, but it is Shaw's critical writing that is most significant here.[30] The most famous of these is *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, first published in 1891, but in fact given as a public lecture the previous summer.[31] The contents of this lecture have been extensively studied, but what is most significant here is the context in which it was originally given. As Shaw recalls:

> In the spring of 1890, the Fabian Society, finding itself at a loss for a course of lectures to occupy its summer meetings, was compelled to make shift with a series of

[29] Cited in Brian Johnston, 'The Ibsen Phenomenon', *Ibsen Studies*, 6/1 (2006), 6-21 (p. 7).

[30] J. L. Wisenthal, *Shaw and Ibsen: Bernard Shaw's 'The Quintessence of Ibsenism' and Related Writings* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1979).

[31] G. Bernard Shaw, *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (London: Walter Scott, 1891). Subsequent editions of the book appeared in 1913 and 1922.

> papers put forward under the general heading 'Socialism in Contemporary Literature'. […] Sydney Olivier consented to 'take Zola'; I consented to 'take Ibsen'; and Hubert Bland undertook to read all the Socialist novels of the day […]. William Morris, asked to read a paper on himself, flatly declined, but gave one on Gothic Architecture. Stepniak also came to the rescue with a lecture on modern Russian fiction […].[32]

Shaw's emphasis is on the potential of Ibsen's drama to serve the cause of socialism, and a number of that summer's other lectures confirm this political reading. Yet the lecture hall also functions as a venue that brings together various disciplines and national traditions in the British capital and encourages its audience to engage in imaginative acts of linguistic and cultural border-crossing by comparing the diverse traditions on offer. Read outside of this context, Shaw's lecture becomes just one more document in the evolving history of British Ibsen reception; restored to its original venue, it regains a sense of the transnational space in which it was first delivered.

Shaw's promotion of a European Ibsen continued in his many reviews of British and foreign productions, including a visit of the Théâtre de l'Œuvre to London with productions of *Rosmersholm* and *The Master Builder* (*Bygmester Solness*) (as well as Maeterlinck's *L'Intruse* and *Pelléas et Mélisande*) in 1895, and an account of *Peer Gynt* in Paris in 1896. Although London saw a number of licensed, establishment productions of Ibsen during the 1890s (Herbert Beerbohm Tree's production of *An Enemy of the People* [*En folkefiende*] was given at the Haymarket in 1893, in the middle of a long run of Oscar Wilde's *A Woman of No Importance*, for instance), his plays were still a staple of the independent theatre scene. Indeed, the British premiere of *John Gabriel Borkman* was given by the newly established 'New Century Theatre' in 1897, evidence that Grein's original model was being adapted and

[32] Ibid., p. v.

developed elsewhere. Indeed, the establishment of the Stage Society in 1899 – which was so central to the incorporation of modern European drama and the development of British playwriting in the early twentieth century – seems like the logical endpoint of the movement, although that would be to reinscribe the kind of temporal, teleological metaphor that this article has been keen to avoid, or at the very least problematize.

One further element in this transnational portrait of Ibsen in London in the 1890s is that of gender. With their strong parts for female leads, and their recurrent theme of female self-realization, Ibsen's plays were tied up with late nineteenth-century debates about gender and sexuality.[33] Some of Ibsen's earliest translators were women – notably Henrietta Frances Lord and Eleanor Marx. The latter was crucial in promoting Ibsen within left-wing radical circles; amongst other plays, she translated *An Enemy of the People* (as *An Enemy of Society*) in 1888 for a volume edited by Havelock Ellis,[34] and was instrumental in organizing a private reading of *A Doll's House* in 1886 featuring Shaw as Krogstadt. Women were central in the independent theatre movement too, and played a central role in staging private performances of Ibsen's plays – most notably Elizabeth Robins and Marion Lea, who were responsible for London premieres of *Hedda Gabler* and *A Master Builder*. Women could use the space of independent theatre to establish a reputation and a voice for themselves (as in the case of Janet Achurch, who played Nora in the British premiere of *A Doll's House*), and thereby challenge the dominance of male actor-managers in the commercial theatre. It was the success of *Little Eyolf* (*Lille Eyolf*) in 1896, for instance, that allowed Robins to found the New Century Theatre (which opened with the British premiere of *John Gabriel Borkman*).[35] Indeed, so well-known had Ibsen's plays become in London by the end of the 1890s that, as

[33] Rebecca S. Cameron, 'Ibsen and British Women's Drama', *Ibsen Studies*, 4:1 (2004), 92-102.

[34] Henrik Ibsen, *The Pillars of Society and Other Plays*, ed. Havelock Ellis (London: Walter Scott, 1888).

[35] Anderman, p. 89.

Gretchen P. Ackerman observes, 'foreign actresses visiting London could offer a German, a French, or an Italian *Doll's House* with the knowledge that it would receive respectful attention from audiences and critics'.[36] Famously, Eleonora Duse performed the role of Nora in Italian in London in 1893, just one of the roles she brought to the capital.[37] Duse is just one of a number of European actresses whose careers attest not only to the extent of Ibsen's reputation across national and linguistic borders, but equally to the ability of women to seize on his fame as a vehicle for their own careers (compare, for instance, the career of Helena Modjeska, which took in not just her native Poland, but Russia and the United States too).[38]

Rethinking the British reception of the plays of Henrik Ibsen around the turn of the century from the point of view of transnational space, rather than models of 'import-export' influence, can challenge hierarchical models of the literary process that have often favoured authors, translators, and critics over other agents in the theatrical field, such as directors, managers, and actors. In this respect, a study of the independent theatre movement might have more in common with the field of performance studies, with its emphasis on the often evanescent moments of individual productions, than more traditional forms of literary criticism, where the written text continues to prevail. But perhaps the greatest consequence of concentrating on theatre as an instantiation of space is that it helps to posit a rather different view of London and its role in the literary process, whether of the United Kingdom or Europe

[36] Ackerman, p. 75. In this respect, the British reception of Ibsen evinces striking continuities with earlier theatrical practice. On this, see in particular John Stokes, *The French Actress and Her English Audience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). For a comparative study of the New York scene, focusing on American, English and Russian actresses there, see Thomas Arthur, 'Female interpreters of Ibsen on Broadway, 1896–1947: Minnie Maddern Fiske, Alla Nazimova & Eva Le Gallienne', *Ibsen Studies*, 1/1 (2000), 54-67.

[37] Anderman, p. 63.

[38] Beth Holmgren, *Starring Madame Modjeska: On Tour in Poland and America* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2012).

more broadly. As Raymond Williams argues, London's identity around the turn of the century was as far more than that of a capital city. Its importance as both a mercantile centre of world trade, and indeed the capital of an entire empire, meant that its ability to function as a national centre – whether of England or the United Kingdom – was significantly impaired: 'It was now much more than the very large city, or even the capital city of an important nation. It was the place where new social and economic and cultural relations, *beyond both city and nation in their older senses*, were beginning to be formed'.[39] Above all, it was the fusion of what Jed Esty has described as 'the urban-imperial base and rich cultural superstructure of modernism' that made turn-of-the-century London so receptive to the theatrical experiments traced in this article.[40] The performance spaces of independent theatre may have been small, but their relationship to the world beyond was truly global.

[39] Raymond Williams, 'Metropolitan Perceptions and the Emergence of Modernism', in *Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (London: Verso, 1989), pp. 37-48 (p. 44, emphasis added).

[40] Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 3.