NOTES ON HENRIK IBSEN SCHOLARSHIP TODAY: POTENTIALS AND CHALLENGES IN COMBINING HISTORIOGRAPHICAL METHODS, DIGITAL HUMANITIES, AND THEATRE/LITERARY STUDIES

GIANINA DRUȚĂ[1]

ABSTRACT. *Notes on Henrik Ibsen Scholarship Today: Potentials and Challenges in Combining Historiographical Methods, Digital Humanities and Theatre/Literary Studies[2].* This paper explores the potentials and challenges encountered in the recent Henrik Ibsen scholarship emerging from the methodological combination of historiographical methods, digital humanities, and theatre/literary studies. In the first part, the article discusses the methodological intercrossings through examples from the Ibsen field. For this purpose, it takes theatre historiography, theatre/literary studies and digital humanities as different yet interconnected methodological portals to access the Ibsen world. In the second part, the article takes the methodological discussion further, by bringing into light the main four steps generally taken by researchers when working with this methodological combination. In this account, the IbsenStage Database[3] is the most powerful example of a research tool at crossroads between historiography, digital humanities, theatre and literature in the Ibsen field. Finally, the article concludes that the potentials and challenges in combining historiographical methods, digital humanities and theatre/literary studies revealed in the examples demonstrate the inescapable interconnectedness of quantitative and qualitative approaches not only in the Ibsen research, but also in the humanities in general.

Keywords: *Henrik Ibsen, IbsenStage, theatre historiography, digital humanities, theatre studies, literary studies, potentials, challenges, methodology*

REZUMAT. *Note asupra cercetării ibseniene recente: Oportunități și provocări în combinarea metodelor istoriografice, umanioarelor digitale și a studiilor literare/teatrale.* Acest articol explorează oportunitățile și provocările din cercetarea ibseniană recentă care a valorificat combinația metodologică dintre

---

[1] PhD Candidate at the Centre for Ibsen Studies, Faculty of Humanities, University of Oslo. E-mail address: gianina.druta@ibsen.uio.no .
[3] https://ibsenstage.hf.uio.no/

metodele istoriografice, umanioarele digitale şi studiile teatrale/literare. În prima parte, articolul discută aceste intersecții metodologice prin exemple din studii care abordează opera şi receptarea lui Henrik Ibsen. Din această perspectivă, articolul consideră istoriografia teatrală, studiile teatrale şi literare, precum şi umanioarele digitale ca portale metodologice diferite, dar interconectate prin care putem accesa universul ibsenian. În a doua parte, articolul duce discuția metodologică şi mai departe, punând în lumină cei mai importanți patru paşi urmați de cercetători atunci când aleg această combinație metodologică. În acest context, baza de date IbsenStage este exemplul cel mai puternic de instrument de cercetare la intersecția dintre istoriografie, umanioare digitale, teatru şi literatură în domeniul studiilor ibseniene. În cele din urmă, articolul demonstrează prin exemplele prezentate privind oportunitățile şi provocările care apar atunci când combinăm metode istoriografice şi umanioarele digitale cu studiile literare/ teatrale că studiile cantitative şi calitate sunt interconectate nu doar în cercetarea ibseniană, ci şi în domeniul umanioarelor în general.

Cuvinte cheie: *Henrik Ibsen, IbsenStage, istoriografie teatrală, umanioare digitale, studii teatrale, studii literare, oportunități, provocări, metodologie*

1. Introduction

With the rich spectre of research material revolving around the literary texts, theatre performances, film adaptations, translations circulating across the world from 1850 until today, it is no wonder that Ibsen studies has become a research field *per se* opened to a variety of methodologies. This paper focuses on how the combination of historiographical methods, digital humanities and theatre/literary studies was approached in the recent Ibsen scholarship. In studying the complex impact of Henrik Ibsen as world dramatist, we inevitably draw these methodologies together. The examples I will give demonstrate the development up to date of a new research tradition in Ibsen studies based on methodological intercrossings. This awareness around the mechanisms at work when combining different methodologies is particularly relevant in today's interdisciplinary research in the humanities. In this sense, Ibsen field is a playground for methodological experiments. Therefore, the examples of how methodological combinations are tested here, and the discussion of the potentials and challenges these experiments imply, can also serve other researchers conducting investigations in the theatre and literary studies.

But first, it must be clear that historiography, digital humanities, and theatre respectively literary studies are different methodologies. That is, they propose different ways of looking at a research object. Besides, I also must acknowledge that researchers encounter numerous challenges when working

with Digital Humanities. The main reason is the unconventional way of analysing data, rooted in the natural sciences and based on distant reading, which contrasts with the traditional close reading used in the humanities. While we can still identify some common issues, these challenges are usually unique in the backstage journey of each researcher. In the following, this paper demonstrates how the Ibsen stories of the past can be developed, shifted or amplified by bringing together historiography, digital tools, literature and theatre. Then it will move further to a more detailed discussion of the methodological steps and the general challenges entailed by this combination of research approaches.

2. Theatre historiography

First of all, the study of Henrik Ibsen's impact as world dramatist entails awareness of how history in general, and theatre history in particular is approached and written. In this respect, the field of theatre historiography makes no exception from the general rules of studying history.

Yet we have to demonstrate a special awareness when a theatrical event is at the core of our research. Why? Because a theatrical event has unique characteristics compared to other historical events. As Thomas Postlewait notices, "in the process of examining performance events, we can study them for their aesthetic or formal qualities, apart from the historical factors that may contribute to their significance"[4]. In other words, "a theatre event is to be understood simultaneously as an aesthetic and a historical event"[5].

For example, when Postlewait discusses the performance and reception of *A Doll's House* in London in 1889 starring Janet Achurch[6], he makes us aware that the approach of the historical records of the performance and its reception requires both historical and aesthetic thinking. Postlewait questions the historiographical perspective on Ibsen's breakthrough on the British problems emerging in the reconstruction of the production. His inquiry is based on a comparison of the contrasting meanings regarding the impact of the production extracted from reviews written by Robert Buchanan or G.B.Shaw. Also, Postlewait dedicates a considerable part of his analysis to William Archer and his equally central and controversial role in the staging as translator and active participant in the rehearsals.

With such a sharp theatre historiographical meta-commentary of this renowned Ibsen production, Postlewait highlights the historian's challenges and potentials when interpreting historical documents on theatre performances.

---

[4] T. Postlewait *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Historiography*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 117

[5] Postlewait, *Theatre Historiography,* p. 119

[6] Postlewait, *Theatre Historiography,* p. 131-143

He also demonstrates us that the historiographical analysis of the theatrical events cannot be separated from the analysis of the meanings extracted from the dramatic text and the performance by all agents involved: actors, directors, audiences and, finally, scholars. It is when these meanings and the audience's reception on their enacting on stage are contradictory that the historian is challenged the most. Nevertheless, the plurality of perspectives turns into an advantage as the richness of theatre history emerges from the hybrid nature of the theatrical event.

3. Ibsen in-between literature and theatre

Hybridity is also the keyword for a scholarly approach to Ibsen because of his belonging both to the literary and theatrical realm.

Because of the hybrid nature of a playwright's activity, the greatest temptation is to follow the path of either literary or theatre studies as opposite solutions. The main reason for this situation, which is also the greatest methodological challenge, is that the dramatic text is a common research object that theatre and literary studies share.

Yet, the centrality of the performance in theatre studies and the centrality of text in literary studies indicate clear boundaries. To put it simply, theatre and literary studies look at the dramatic text, and, implicitly, at the activity of playwrights such as Ibsen from different perspectives. On the one hand, in theatre studies, the dramatic text is a tool used for a larger purpose, that is, the performance: "the term 'theatrical text' has been coined, which is used increasingly in theatre studies to refer to the textual basis of a performance. (...) The term 'drama' we can restrict to a historical and generically definable form, which certainly continues to be produced but is by no means synonymous with theatre (...). A theatrical text encompasses any kind of textual blueprint that is intended for or attains performance."[7] On the other hand, in literary studies, the dramatic text and its meanings constitute the main research object, whereas the performance is a by-product. In Postlewait's words, "literary critics typically focus on these aesthetic features of characterization and themes, but theatre historians want to understand how such matters were turned into the theatrical event."[8] In spite of these differences, the intercrossing of theatre and literary studies and their mutual influence is inevitable when discussing Ibsen's dissemination on the international book and theatre markets. As it follows, I will look closer at examples of how translations, adaptations and the mechanisms of cultural transmission affected Ibsen's impact as world dramatist.

---

[7] C. B. Balme, *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Studies,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008, p. 125
[8] Postlewait, *Theatre Historiograhy,* p. 132

3.1. Ibsen translations

Let us take the example of the translations of Ibsen's plays. We usually consider them from a literary perspective. Their circulation on the book market, copyright issues or the loyalty of the translation to the original text are the most common aspects we look at. However, in the case of playwrights, translations can also be analysed from a theatrical perspective, as they belong to the theatre market too. In this respect, the process of translation helps us understand the asymmetrical cultural relationships affecting the book and the theatre market alike. Ultimately, translation is not only a matter of transmitting texts, but also of moving across historical, social, political and aesthetic contexts, as researchers such as Lawrence Venuti[9] or Pascale Casanova[10] prove it.

To understand this double literary and theatre perspective upon the Ibsen translations, it can be enough just to remember that dramatic texts usually constitute the background for if not the very script of the theatre performances. The case of Ibsen reveals that the emergence and dissemination of translations in the literary field is usually a consequence of the recognition they acquired in the theatre field. In addition, that a playwright manages not only to publish, but also to disseminate at such as a large scale his plays as literary works is a sign of canonization and establishment of his position in the literary field for the future.

For example, the translations of Enrico and Icilio Polese affected Ibsen's impact on the Italian stage and book market alike between 1891 and 1894, as Giuliano D'Amico demonstrates by looking at how Ibsen's plays were "domesticated" for the local audience[11]. Another example is Petre Sturdza, the most representative Romanian Ibsen actor. He published his own stage translations of *An Enemy of the People* (1907)[12] and *Ghosts*[13] as books. The Spanish example of Gregorio and Maria Martinez Sierra's stage rewriting of *A Doll's House* at the turn of the 20th century[14] also proves the entanglement of the literary and theatre fields. The analysis of Ibsen's dissemination on the German stage also reveals the tight relationship between the literary and theatre market. The publishing of the *Complete Works* edition in German

---

[9] See L. Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation. Second Edition,* Routledge, London, 2008; L. Venuti, *Translation Changes Everything: Theory and Practice*, Routledge, London, 2013.

[10] See "The Tragedy of Translated Men" in P. Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters,* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2004, p. 254-302

[11] G. D'Amico, *Domesticating Ibsen for Italy: Enrico and Icilio Polese's Ibsen Campaign*, Torino, Università Degli Studi Di Torino, 2013

[12] P. Sturdza, *Un duşman al poporului: piesă în 5 acte,* Bucharest, Editura Librăriei Leon Alcalay, 1907

[13] P. Sturdza, *Strigoii,* Bucharest, Editura Librăriei Leon Alcalay

[14] Iris Muñiz, *A Doll's House of Their Own: Gregorio and María Martínez Sierra's Feminist Rewritings of Ibsen in Silver Age Spain*, Oslo, Universitetet i Oslo, Institutt for Litteratur, Områdestudier Og Europeiske Språk, 2018

translation between 1894 and 1904 was directly influenced by Ibsen's previous success on the German stage. This event also prepared the advent of the symbolist plays between 1899 and 1918 when Ibsen was performed most on the German stage.[15]

3.2. Adaptation

The analysis of translation invites us to a larger discussion of adaptation as an equally ambivalent and challenging tool in literary and theatre studies. From a literary perspective, adaptation usually entails the rewriting of a story, but the term has always been difficult to define as it entered other fields such as theatre or film. Linda Hutcheon coined it eventually as "1.An acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works; 2.A creative and an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging; 3.An extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work"[16] One proof is that, for theatre scholars, adaptation goes far beyond the plot level into the acting and staging practices. That is, the meanings extracted from the plot and the perspectives on the role of the dramatic text in the theatre production can indicate to what extent a play is adapted.

A famous example is the German alteration of the ending of *A Doll's House* for the 1880 premiere with Hedwig Nieman-Raabe. It even created a tradition on the German stage followed even by directors of recent stagings of the play, such as Thomas Ostermeier, according to the latest Ibsen research[17]. Italian star-actors such as Ermete Zacconi or Ermete Novelli also used to heavily cut, add or replace pieces of a text to please their audience in plays such as *Ghosts*[18], *An Enemy of the People*[19] or *The Wild Duck*[20] at the end of the 19th century. The fame of the Italian literary and theatre practitioners for domesticating the plays went so far that Ibsen himself is said to have expressed his discontent with Ermete Zacconi's approach of *Ghosts*: "Zacconi recita sotto il mio nome un dramma, Spettri, che non è il dramma mio."[21] Petre Sturdza also followed the Italian example when he deliberately and freely chose to either preserve or delete the gathering scene when staging the Fourth Act of *An Enemy of the People.* For example, in his touring performances with the play in 1907-1908,

[15] J.-M. Hanssen, *Ibsen on the German Stage 1876-1918. A Quantitative Approach,* Tübingen, Narr Francke Attempto Verlag, 2019, pp. 154-158

[16] L. Hutcheon, and S. O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*. Second edition, London, Routledge, 2013, p. 8

[17] See C. Räthel, "Redecorating A Doll's House in Contemporary German Theater-Multiple Authorship in Ibsen's Nora." *Ibsen Studies,* Vol.20, Issue 1, 2020, pp.67-87

[18] D'Amico, *Domesticating,* pp. 131-166

[19] D'Amico, *Domesticating,* pp. 240-254

[20] D'Amico, *Domesticating,* pp. 108-130

[21] U. Ojetti, *Cose viste. Con una prosa di Gabriele D'Annunzio. Tomo secondo,* Florence, Sansoni, 1951, p.21

he excluded the scene. However, in the production of 1912 at the National Theatre of Bucharest, he decided to keep the scene and confessed the troubles he had to ensure a homogeneous ensemble throughout the staging: "Soon after, we staged An Enemy of the People by H. Ibsen. But this time, we performed it entirely, including Act IV – that of the meeting – which I had omitted in Craiova because of the lack of personnel. (Yet I had noticed this omission in the [performances of the] Italian ensembles, without demeaning either the meaning or the effectiveness of the work.)"[22] By contrast, French Ibsenites such as Andre Antoine acknowledged the primacy of the dramatic text, judging by his interest in the quality of the translations: "Je voudrais surtout trouver le moyen de confronter le texte original, norvégien, original, des *Revenants,* avec la traduction que j'ai entre les mains"[23]. However, the naturalist approach of Antoine contrasted, for instance, with the extremely symbolist approach of Despres and Lugne-Poe[24]. This reveals how the extremely diverse Ibsen adaptations are rooted in the encounter of the literary meanings extracted from the plays with specific sets of theatre practices, whose analysis requires both literary and theatre expertise.

3.3. Cultural transmission

Both translation and adaptation have been considered by literary and theatre scholars as mechanisms of cultural transmission.

However, when it comes to a playwright of global impact such as Ibsen, the very understanding of the notion of cultural transmission becomes a challenge, because it has been articulated differently at crossroads between theatre and literature. Why?

Different laws rule the theatre and the literary fields, and this often makes scholars in theatre and literary studies develop irreconcilable perspectives. This controversy is further rooted in the fact that, in contrast to authors of novels, playwrights do not depend on the book market alone, they have their other foot in the theatre market. In the Ibsen field, these controversies most clearly emerge in the debate on the playwright's international breakthrough in light of cultural transmission. Whereas the tendency in the literary studies is to attribute Ibsen's breakthrough to the circulation of his plays on the book market, theatre scholars highlight the role of the global theatre market in ensuring Ibsen's worldwide consecration.

---

[22] "Curând după aceasta s-a montat *Un dușman al poporului* de H. Ibsen, de astă dată jucată în completul ei și cu actul al IV-lea, al întrunirii, pe care îl omisesem la Craiova din lipsă de personal, (omisiune pe care de altfel o văzusem și la trupele italiene și care nu știrbește câtuși de puțin nici înțelesul, nici eficacitatea lucrării)." (P. Sturdza, *Amintiri.40 de ani de teatru*, Bucharest, Meridiane,1966, p. 244)

[23] A. Antoine, *Mes souvenirs sur le Théâtre-Libre,* Paris, 1921, p. 170

[24] K. E. Shepherd-Barr, "Ibsen in France from Breakthrough to Renewal", *Ibsen Studies*, Vol. 12, Issue 1, 2012, p. 61

This debate deepened once the concept of world literature and the focus on the relationship between centres and peripheries won the scholars' attention. One classical example is Pascale Casanova's Ibsen approach. She wrongly attributes his successful career as world dramatist to his consecration in Paris and London by means of William Archer's translations[25] and appropriation by the avant-garde theatre environments represented by Antoine and Lugne-Poe[26]. In this sense, Narve Fulsås and Tore Rem's research on "Ibsen, Scandinavia and the Making of a World Drama" contradicts Casanova's demonstration through a nuanced investigation of the complex network marking Ibsen's book dissemination in Scandinavia, Britain, Germany and France. They highlight that: "A threefold pattern can be discerned. In northern Europe, Ibsen was already firmly appropriated both as book and theatre. In Britain, his existence was conditioned on the still-existing divide between literature and theatre, with Ibsen soon being established as literature, while belonging to the 'independent', minority theatre sector; in France, he remained a minority interest both as book and performance."[27]

Theatre scholars also dismantled Casanova's approach: "Pascale Casanova has argued that it was the collective foreign adoption of Ibsen in Britain, Ireland, and France that made him 'universally recognised as universal' (2007, 229). (…) It is easier to defend Ibsen's value by highlighting his connections with the men of the European avant-garde than by his association with the actress-managers of the nineteenth- century commercial touring circuits; after all, the European avant-garde was to have a profound influence on the development of twentieth-century theatre."[28] Thus, quantitative analysis proved that Ibsen's consecration as world dramatist is highly indebted to the theatre practitioners who performed Ibsen all over the world.

Eventually, the conclusions of both literary and theatre scholars provide a rather decentralized view on the theatre and literary markets. In other words, the relationship between "centre" and "periphery" tends to be dissolved into a much more diverse landscape marked by mutual influences and constantly changing conflicting points and competing agents. While the stories told by literary and theatre scholars about Ibsen's international success are different and sometimes even contradictory, we must acknowledge that they point at two different contexts that do not necessarily exclude one discourse in favour of the other.

---

[25] Casanova, *World Republic,* pp. 159-161

[26] Casanova, *World Republic,* pp. 162-163

[27] N. Fulsås, and T. Rem. *Ibsen, Scandinavia and the Making of a World Drama*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017, p. 5

[28] J. Holledge, J. Bollen, F. Helland, and J. Tompkins, *A Global Doll's House*, London, Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 2016, p. 31

4. Digital Humanities

Digital humanities has challenged our way of looking at the stories about Henrik Ibsen's literary and theatre past even further. Why? Because applying quantitative analysis to qualitative interpretations has allowed us to see previous biases in the interpretation of historical facts. Franco Moretti' distant reading model taught us to read literature through maps, graphs and trees[29]. This model encouraged scholars to set up corpuses of texts and build infrastructure to facilitate Digital Humanities-based research. Transferred to the theatre field, distant reading highlighted the unique dynamics of performances moving across the global theatre market. According to Debra Caplan, the current digital archives, theatrical environment, visualisations and and databases[30] in the theatre and performance field "demonstrate the medium's potential to tackle some of our discipline's most formidable challenges"[31].

The Ibsen studies field also adopted Digital Humanities as historiographical tool for both literary and theatre analyses, because it "offers possibilities for extending the bounds of Ibsen scholarship"[32]. While this combination is a common feature to all the examples I will mention, the models they generate are different. The main reason is that while a typical literary approach can benefit from the exploration of a research object through a pre-established theoretical framework, theatre historiography and Digital Humanities entail a phenomenological approach of the resources. On the one hand, the technical steps are roughly the same: archival investigations, the use of a database such as IbsenStage, the extraction and processing of data in order to generate networks and maps. On the other hand, the results of these similarly executed steps reject pre-established frameworks. The archive materials and the possibility to access them differ based on geographical and temporal criteria. Consequently, the theoretical models emerging from the combination of quantitative and qualitative tools can hardly be duplicated. In the following, I will focus on some examples of Ibsen research combining historiographical methods, digital humanities and theatre/literary studies.

In the literary Ibsen field, there are currently two major models based on digital tools. Firstly, the project "Mapping Ibsen's Productivity" casts light on Ibsen's self-imposed exile, on the influences around him, and traces of these

---

[29] F. Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History*, London, Verso, 2007; F. Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature", *New Left Review*, Issue 1, 2000, pp. 54-68

[30] See Caplan's overview of such digital resources in D. Caplan, "Notes from the Frontier: Digital Scholarship and the Future of Theatre Studies", *Theatre Journal,* Vol.67, Issue 2, May 2015, p. 351

[31] Caplan, "Notes from the Frontier", p. 348

[32] Holledge, *A Global Doll,* p. 8

places in his works through maps.[33] Secondly, the National Library of Norway has also developed a platform with statistical graphs and network visualisations where it is possible to see the connections between Henrik Ibsen and other influential intellectuals of the epoch based on his correspondence.[34]

Nevertheless, the IbsenStage Database is by far the most complex Digital Humanities historiographical research tool in Ibsen studies. Jens-Morten Hanssen described it as "an event-based, relational performance database currently holding more than 23,000 records with data from Ibsen performance from 1850 until the present day"[35]. More precisely, this database currently consists of 24335 records[36]. But IbsenStage is not just a "collection" or "a way to organize data".[37] It is also "a set of procedures to facilitate interaction between data and users, and a set of research methodologies to enable scholars to use the database for research purposes"[38].

The major way in which IbsenStage has been used is to map theatre production history. The stories emerging from the mapping challenged the traditional narrative on Ibsen's international breakthrough. From a history about key translators and avant-garde artists, the "cartographic revelations"[39] changed it to a history about commercial theatre networks controlled by star-actor and actor-managers. More concretely, Ibsen's international success has been attributed to translators such as Wilhelm Lange, William Archer or Moritz Prozor, critics such as Georg Brandes, George Bernard Shaw or Edmund Gosse, or avant-garde producers such as Otto Brahm, André Antoine or Aurelien-Marie Lugne-Poe.

By contrast, the early success between 1890 and 1914 of the Noras discussed in *A Global Doll's House* appears ephemeral compared to the long-term impact of translators, critics and avant-garde theatre practitioners. The "*Et Dukkehjem* maps suggest that it was the early Noras from Germany, Denmark, Norway, France, Italy, Portugal, Russia, Japan, the UK, and Greece who secured Ibsen's first international successes."[40] It was the commercial success of the play ensured by actresses who established Ibsen in the theatrical and even

---

[33] "Although places in Ibsen's life have been particularly well documented by previous biographers, often down to the level of address and date of residence, the visualization of that information on a map allows us to see new relationships in the material. For example, we can compare the places that were productive for him, we can visualize the stages of composition for each play in terms of place, and we can get a better sense of the pace and range of the mobility of both Ibsen's person and his writing." (http://tango.bol.ucla.edu/orientnorth/ibsen.html)

[34] https://www.nb.no/hanske/brev/aarsliste.php?id=64 ; https://www.nb.no/hanske/brev/knute.php?id=64&aar=1879 .

[35] Hanssen, *Ibsen on the German Stage,* p. 16

[36] Last SQL interrogation of IbsenStage was on 10th July 2020.

[37] Hanssen, *Ibsen on the German Stage*, p. 16

[38] Hanssen, *Ibsen on the German Stage*, p. 16

[39] J. Bollen and J. Holledge, "Hidden Dramas: Cartographic Revelations in the World of Theatre Studies", *The Cartographic Journal,* Vol.48, Issue 4, 2011, pp.226-236

[40] Holledge, *A Global Doll,* p. 32

literary field. The mapping[41] of the global trajectories of the actresses performing Nora at the turn of the 20th century was also backed by their personal histories. This demonstrates how the meeting between quantitative and qualitative methods changed the discourse around Ibsen's first international breakthrough revolving around translators and avant-garde theatre practitioners, pointing at the major role of the commercial theatre circuits. Starting in Europe, travelling to the East and West alike, the global outreach of the early Noras can only be compared with the geographical expansion of the Ibsen performances after 1990.

The maps[42] further show that a second global expansion of *Et dukkehjem* emerged at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. These tours travelled farther than the performances in the first global wave. They also entailed a much greater linguistic diversity, as German and English no longer dominated the performance landscape. Another pattern in the mapping of these productions reflect that they originated outside Europe, usually in the Americas, and East and South Asia. A qualitative inquiry reveals that soft power policies are behind this global expansion after 1991. Since *Et dukkehjem* has been part of the UNESCO documentary heritage since 2001[43], Norway has constantly nourished the Ibsen industry through initiatives such as the International *Ibsen festival, Ibsen Awards*[44] or *Nora's Sisters*[45].

Jens-Morten Hanssen's research based on maps and graph visualisations also highlights a unique feature of the German Ibsen tradition, namely the Ibsen cycles performed by Ibsen Ensembles between roughly 1899 and 1910: "the tradition dates back to the end of the 1880s and continues into the 1920s, but I would argue that the first decade of the twentieth century constituted the golden days of the Ibsen cycles and that the very fact that they proliferated during these years testifies to Ibsen's strong command of the German stage."[46] Beside the combination of historiographical close reading and digital visualisation, the discussion of this trend required a mix of literary and theatre perspectives. The notion of Ibsen cycle is rooted in the literary view of Ibsen's work as a system organised chronologically and aesthetically in a clear order. The concept was imported by the theatre practitioners in the Ibsen ensembles and re-invested with meaning. For these ensembles, an Ibsen cycle was "a non-fixed set of Ibsen plays"[47],

---

[41] See the map "The First Global Expansion" at https://ibsenstage.hf.uio.no/pages/project/130.
[42] See the map "The Second Global Expansion" at https://ibsenstage.hf.uio.no/pages/project/130 .
[43] Holledge, *A Global Doll,* p. 28
[44] One relevant example is the Romanian project "Hedda's sisters. Empowering Women Theatre Artists in Romania and Eastern Europe" which was granted the *Ibsen Awards* in 2014. See more at: http://ibsenawards.com/scholarship/winner/hedddas-sisters/
[45] See the map "Norwegian Funding between 2006 and 2011" at https://ibsenstage.hf.uio.no/pages/project/131 .
[46] Hansen, *Ibsen on the German Stage,* p.176
[47] Hansen, *Ibsen on the German Stage,* p. 181

usually staged as a series of performances during tours. Ibsen cycles also create density and frequency in the graphical visualisations of performances across a short time span. More specifically, the graphs[48] and maps[49] tell us the story of the high degree of consecration, canonization, and naturalisation, as well as of the commercial impact of Ibsen on the German stage at the turn of the 20th century.

Network analysis has also revealed invisible connections between theatre practitioners and links between productions that earlier were hidden from the scholars' eyes. In Jens-Morten Hanssen's work on *Ibsen on the German Stage,* the networks reveal the power of the star-system when promoting *A Doll's House*[50]. The contributor-contributor networks reveal the impact of Agnes Sorma's interpretation of Nora on the German stage. They also highlight the power of the touring performances organised by the star-actress and the impact of the solo-guest performances on the geographical distribution and on the commercial success of *A Doll's House.* In this respect, the network of Sorma displays weak ties due to her numerous performances as solo-guest artist together with different ensembles across the German-speaking world. By contrast, the networks of resident artists such as Emil Lessing point at ensemble-based productions with stronger cohesion, but less geographical expansion, and, most probably, less commercial impact too.

Networks are also crucial in the building and transmission of an aesthetic tradition. The Nordic Noras participated in and supported a "process of aesthetic blending"[51] by travelling across Scandinavia. Actresses such as Betty Hennings, Adelaide Johannesen, Ida Aalberg, Johanne Dybwad and Tore Segelcke fuelled a common Ibsen experience in this geographical area[52]. Not only the ensembles that these guest-actresses performed with assumed their influence, but also the other way round. Mutual influence and collaboration were the keywords for the Nordic Ibsen network.

This digital travel in the past invites us not only to look at maps and networks to understand the challenging methodological combinations when analysing Ibsen. For example, the virtual reconstruction of Komediehuset in Bergen invites us to step in on the 19th century theatre stage, and follow Ibsen's steps at this place where he "learnt his craft"[53] by staging one of his first historical plays, *Olaf Liljekrans* in January 1857[54].

---

[48] Hanssen, *Ibsen on the German Stage,* p. 184. See also the graph in section 5 "The German Naturalisation of Ibsen" at https://ibsenstage.hf.uio.no/pages/project/152 .

[49] See the maps in section 6 "The German Ibsen cycles" and section 7 "Touring in the name of Ibsen" at https://ibsenstage.hf.uio.no/pages/project/152 .

[50] See the network in section 4 "*A Doll's House* and the Star System" at https://ibsenstage.hf.uio.no/pages/project/152.

[51] Holledge, *A Global Doll*, p. 75

[52] See the map "Touring Trajectories of Major Nordic Noras 1879 to 1937" at https://ibsenstage.hf.uio.no/pages/project/131 .

[53] https://ortelia.com/project/the-virtual-reconstruction-of-komediehuset-bergen/

[54] https://ibsenstage.hf.uio.no/pages/event/77883

5. A methodological journey

As mentioned earlier in this paper, researches based on methodological combination of historiographical methods, digital humanities and theatre/ literary studies involve several technical steps. To make this methodological process clearer, I will explore here the main fours steps that we take when combining quantitative and qualitative research tools. For this purpose, I use the IbsenStage database as the main example of digital tool used for such investigations in the current Ibsen scholarship.

The first step is to gather enough information in order to build and work with a reliable dataset. Archival investigations are most typical in this phase. The second step is to interrogate the raw dataset of events in IbsenStage based on various criteria such as language or country. The third step is to extract the main patterns of analysis through a further processing of the initial results in graphs, maps or networks. The fourth step is to decipher the story told within these patterns by going back to a qualitative analysis of the historical resources.

5.1. Common challenges

Before explaining how these interconnected methodological steps are combined into a back and forth movement, I also have to make it clear that each of these four steps entail many challenges that apply when we investigate not only the Ibsen field, but the humanities in general. Matthew Wilkens[55] identifies some of them, and highlights that these challenges are common to any researcher combining historiographical methods and digital humanities tools across fields such as literature and theatre.

The first challenge entails legal and technical issues regarding the corpus of archival material on which the dataset is based. Copyright regulations are most problematic for researchers who gather documents but are prevented from their further publishing and processing in research: "it can be difficult to assemble suitable corpora for computational analysis, especially in the era after 1923 when many texts remain in copyright"[56].

Training challenges constitute an issue too, as humanities researchers often lack "skills and methods necessary for computational work"[57] at the beginning of their projects. For example, I also had to learn a new language – SQL or Structured Query Language – in order to be able to extract the information I needed from the IbsenStage database. Information such as the number and list of the 110 Romanian

---

[55] M. Wilkens, "Digital Humanities and Its Application in the Study of Literature and Culture", *Comparative Literature,* Vol.67, Issue 1, 2015, pp.11-20

[56] Wilkens, *Digital Humanities,* p. 18

[57] Wilkens, *Digital Humanities,* p. 18

events performed between 1894 and 1945, or the number and list of the 277 Romanian actors who performed in Ibsen plays in the same period were extracted by writing SQL queries applied to IbsenStage. Moreover, it is not only a matter of technical skills. We also have to learn how to understand and interpret the findings that this new informatics language communicate to us as researchers.

A final challenge Wilkens mentions concerns the ability of "working across multiple languages"[58]. This entails both the software's capacity to process data in several languages and that of the researchers to cross the linguistic boundaries. However, a collaborative research approach, involving a team as opposed to individual scholars, opens the possibility of working across disciplines and cultures.

### 5.2. Four steps in a process

The first step in the methodological journey I propose here is based on previous research and archival investigations that enable researchers to build the IbsenStage datasets. The main challenge here is that the dataset constantly changes as more information is registered in the database. This mobile nature of the dataset highly can affect the next two steps, often leading to a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis already from the start of the research. We can still perform data interrogation while we register information in the database, when the dataset is not complete. This usually helps to identify the main research directions and guides us to choose which historical resources to focus on. But, we must be aware that the results of the initial data interrogation can change if historical investigations indicate that we must expand our dataset. The main research paths might be same, but significant details might emerge and lead us to new historical investigations.

What happens when we proceed to the second step, which is the data interrogation? In this respect, the Romanian Ibsen tradition prior to 1947 offers, for example, particular challenges for researchers because it is marked by a unique pluralism and fluidity. Historical facts such as constantly changing national boundaries and the mix of languages make it hard to apply only one criteria such as language or country when interrogating the IbsenStage dataset. The data interrogation and, later on, the pattern extraction, can also affect the theoretical choices of the researcher, whose initial assumptions might simply be wrong. For example, the combination of Digital Humanities and theatre historiography made me abandon the initial post-colonial framework in my research on Ibsen in Romania. Thus, I adopted the concept *histoire croisee* to address the diversity, openness and playfulness in the cosmopolitan early Romanian Ibsen suggested already by the initial results of the data interrogation on plays, actors and organisations.

---

[58] Wilkens, *Digital Humanities,* p. 19

On this background, we can take the third step, which entails the pattern extraction based on graphs, maps or network visualisation. These tools draws the path for the application of historiography, and theatre/literary theories even further. Moreover, the extraction and selection of graphs, network patterns and tables needed for the elaboration of map layers entail several steps themselves. In the case of IbsenStage, the initial quantitative part of the research is performed by using SQL queries. Then, the network software Visone or mapping software such as ArcGIS/QGIS are needed in order to process the initial data extracted from IbsenStage and to obtain networks and maps of Ibsen contributors and events[59]. But, we must remember that graphs, maps and network do not tell us the whole story. The analysis of the patterns requires the return to qualitative analysis of historical resources to rebuild the Ibsen past.
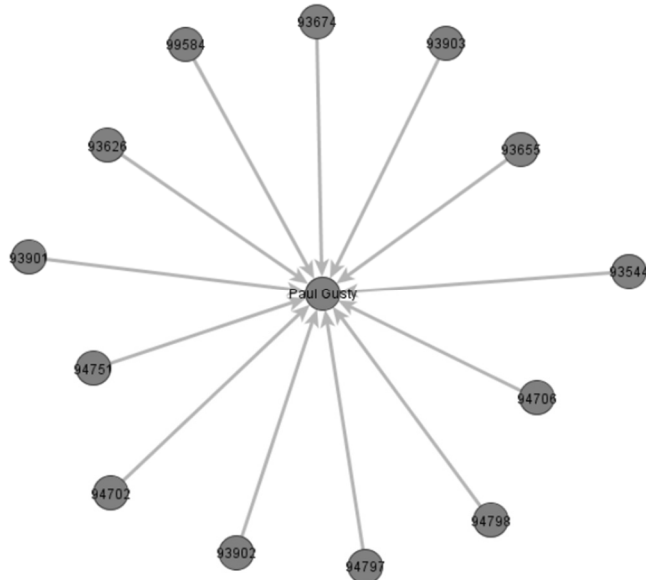
Fig. 1. Contributor event network capture

The challenge here is to know how to "read" the various elements of a network, so that the combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis really helps us to tell the hidden Ibsen stories. On the one hand, the dots are the elements that we want to find more about: events, contributors such as actors or directors, theatre institutions and venues. The lines with arrows at one end are vectors that tie these elements together. The arrow connects the central

---

[59] See more at https://ibsenstage.hf.uio.no/pages/browse/projects.

elements we inquired about in the SQL query. For example, if I am interested to find the plays in which the Romanian actors performed most, the arrows connect the plays with the contributors. The same applies to institutions and venues that bring the actors together in the same way as the plays or the productions.

The understanding of graphs, maps and network patterns depends on a final fourth step: the qualitative analysis of historical resources. Archival documents, biographies, memories and theatre reviews complete the stories hidden in the main visualisation patterns. Nevertheless, there are many challenges hidden behind working with historical resources at crossroads between digital humanities, theatre and literature.

For instance, the theatre reviews are among the most important and the most sensitive resources we work with. Historically, they document the performances, their reception and the changes in the theatre field, as Postlewait demonstrated in his analysis of *A Doll's House*. In the Ibsen field, both older and newer research has demonstrated the major role of theatre reviews when conducting theatre historiographical research and performance analysis[60]. Yet, from a quantitative perspective, if these reviews are not "stored" in a digital version, but kept in analogue archives, they are sensitive to the passing of time and can be easily corrupted. Thus, resources that previous researchers could consult 50 years ago might simply not be available anymore for researchers today. In addition, the absence of a digitized version of such reviews makes it almost impossible to investigate them using a more complex quantitative method such as text mining.

Another challenge is that theatre reviews are a written "site" in-between literature and theatre, as both theatrical and literary documents. However, this challenge is also one of the greatest research potential of these resources. Due their versatility and ambivalence, we can use them to analyse both the theatrical and the literary reception of Ibsen based on two different, yet interconnected standpoints. In other words, the in-between nature of the theatre reviews is rooted in the double literary and theatrical meaning that the researcher can draw from their interpretation.

6. Concluding remarks

The exploration of these four steps demonstrates that the potentials and challenges I focused on stem from the continuous back and forth movement entailed by the methodological combination of quantitative and qualitative research tools. I therefore want to stress that the introduction of digital humanities in the field of Ibsen studies does not make the crossing of discipline boundaries

---

[60] Postlewait, *Theatre historiography,* pp. 132-140

between history, literary studies and theatre studies any less complex. There will always be challenges as we move from historiography as the writing of experiences of the past, literature as the creation of fictional worlds, and theatre as the spatial, visual and bodily representation of this fiction on stage. Digital Humanities only brings a quantitative analysis methodological approach from the sciences into the world of qualitative interpretation. The patterns in the data visualisations that I have shown you have all stimulated new research questions. But the answers entail the return to traditional close reading methodologies of historiography, literary and theatre theory, as Joanne Tompkins also highlights: "Taking advantage of digital humanities tools does not dilute or compromise intellectual inquiry; rather, it has the potential to extend the parameters of research in theatre and performance."[61] Jonathan Bollen strengthens this view, reminding us that "rich descriptions and interpretations, not the abstractions of data models, are what preserve the artistic, linguistic, and cultural authenticity of performance and archival resources."[62]

To conclude, the methodological models of combining historiographical methods, digital humanities and theatre/literary studies I have presented revealed a great research potential, where challenges encourage creative theoretical and practical solutions. The examples I presented teach us how recent Ibsen research explores the combination of historiographical close-reading and digital humanities distant reading tools to re-discuss Ibsen's global and local impact by tracing unknown histories and challenging consecrated discourses. Eventually, only by choosing the best combination of quantitative and qualitative methods and tools can we reveal the story behind the nodes, lines, arrows and polygon layers in the fascinating maps, graphs and trees that have changed our way of seeing the Ibsen world and the humanities in general.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Antoine, A., *Mes souvenirs sur le Théâtre-Libre,* Paris, 1921

Balme B., C. *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Studies,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008

Bollen, J. and J. Holledge, "Hidden Dramas: Cartographic Revelations in the World of Theatre Studies", *The Cartographic Journal,* Vol.48, Issue 4, 2011, pp.226-236

Caplan, D., "Notes from the Frontier: Digital Scholarship and the Future of Theatre Studies", *Theatre Journal,* Vol.67, Issue 2, May 2015, pp.347-359

---

[61] J. Tompkins, "Editorial Comment: Theatre, the Digital, and the Analysis and Documentation of Performance", *Theatre Journal,* Vol. 68, Issue 4, 2016, p. xi

[62] J. Bollen, "Data Models for Theatre Research: People, Places, and Performance", *Theatre Journal,* Vol. 68, Issue 4, 2016, pp. 621

Casanova, P., *The World Republic of Letters,* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2004

D'Amico, G., *Domesticating Ibsen for Italy: Enrico and Icilio Polese's Ibsen Campaign*, Torino, Università Degli Studi Di Torino, 2013

Fulsås, N., and T.Rem. *Ibsen, Scandinavia and the Making of a World Drama*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017

Hanssen, J.-M., *Ibsen on the German Stage 1876-1918. A Quantitative Approach,* Tübingen*,* Narr Francke Attempto Verlag, 2019

Holledge, J., J.Bollen, F.Helland, and J.Tompkins, *A Global Doll's House*, London, Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 2016

Hutcheon, L., and S. O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*. Second edition, London, Routledge, 2013

Moretti, F., "Conjectures on World Literature", *New Left Review*, Issue 1, 2000, pp. 54-68

Moretti, F., *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History*, London, Verso, 2007

Muñiz, Iris, *A Doll's House of Their Own: Gregorio and María Martínez Sierra's Feminist Rewritings of Ibsen in Silver Age Spain*, Oslo, Universitetet i Oslo, Institutt for Litteratur, Områdestudier Og Europeiske Språk, 2018

Ojetti, U., *Cose viste. Con una prosa di Gabriele D'Annunzio. Tomo secondo,* Florence, Sansoni, 1951

Postlewait, T., *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Historiography*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009

Räthel, C., "Redecorating A Doll's House in Contemporary German Theater-Multiple Authorship in Ibsen's Nora", *Ibsen Studies,* Vol.20, Issue 1, 2020, pp.67-87

Shepherd-Barr E., K., "Ibsen in France from Breakthrough to Renewal", *Ibsen Studies*, Vol. 12, Issue 1, 2012, pp. 56-80

Sturdza, P., *Amintiri.40 de ani de teatru*, Bucharest, Meridiane, 1966

Sturdza, P., *Strigoii,* Bucharest, Editura Librăriei Leon Alcalay

Sturdza, P., *Un duşman al poporului: piesă în 5 acte,* Bucharest, Editura Librăriei Leon Alcalay, 1907

Venuti, L., *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. *Second Edition,* Routledge, London, 2008

Venuti, L., *Translation Changes Everything: Theory and Practice*, Routledge, London, 2013

Wilkens, M., "Digital Humanities and Its Application in the Study of Literature and Culture", *Comparative Literature,* Vol.67, Issue 1, 2015, pp.11-20

*** https://ibsenstage.hf.uio.no/

*** http://tango.bol.ucla.edu/orientnorth/ibsen.html

*** https://www.nb.no/hanske/brev/

*** http://ibsenawards.com/scholarship/winner/hedddas-sisters/

*** https://ortelia.com/project/the-virtual-reconstruction-of-komediehuset-bergen/