

## *From Stage to Page*

The overwhelmingly negative assessment of Ibsen's years in Norway, and his years in the theatre in particular, originated in the author's own time. In the English-reading world it has been cemented not least by Michael Meyer's major Ibsen biography.<sup>1</sup> Here, Ibsen's departure from Norway in 1864 is the great turning point, introduced under the heading 'Out of the tunnel', followed by sections entitled 'Italian spring' and 'German seed-time'. In addressing this narrative, we ought not to conceal the very real obstacles Ibsen faced in Norway and the limitations of the institutions within which he worked. However, this needs to be balanced against the extraordinary opportunities for employment and training he was offered, and the continuous rise in his literary status. Furthermore, we will highlight the entangled Scandinavian and European character of Ibsen's early dramatic and literary efforts.

### **Norwegian State, Danish Culture**

In order to understand the preconditions for Ibsen's rise to world status, it is vital that we establish a few key cultural and political contexts. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Napoleonic wars had redrawn the political geography of Scandinavia. In 1808 Sweden lost Finland to Russia and in 1814, the Danish King was forced to give up the centuries-old union between Denmark and Norway. Norway entered into a new but much looser royal union with Sweden, with a separate constitution, parliament and government. In the post-Napoleonic 'restoration' period, the Swedish King repeatedly tried to revise the constitution in order to strengthen royal power and the Norwegian parliament fought as

<sup>1</sup> Michael Meyer, *Ibsen* (London: Penguin, 1974), originally published in three volumes: *The Making of a Dramatist, 1828–1864* (1967), *The Farewell to Poetry, 1864–1882* (1971) and *The Top of a Cold Mountain, 1883–1906* (1971) (London: Rupert Hart-Davis).

consistently, and successfully, to defend the constitution and its power in relation to the King. In some respects, this situation served to prolong and strengthen the age-old cultural ties to Denmark. Danish continued to be the written, vernacular language in the new Norwegian state and Norway continued to be part of and dominated by Danish literature and theatre.

Two basic cultural characteristics were common to the Nordic countries. First, they all had high levels of literacy, not least due to the concerted efforts by the Protestant states to promote popular religious reading.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, the Nordic countries were open literary economies and, strikingly so, cultures of translation. Comparing translation activity in a number of European countries in the first half of the nineteenth century, Franco Moretti has shown that Denmark regularly comes out on top.<sup>3</sup> In one perspective, this dominance of translation over domestic production and export attests to the peripheral status of the Scandinavian countries in the international circulation of literature. In another perspective, Scandinavian readers were enjoying the advantages of what Goethe in the late 1820s called 'world literature': the intensified circulation of books, journals and ideas facilitated by increased economic exchange.<sup>4</sup>

The European novel came to Norway via Denmark, on a wave of translations in the 1830s: Cooper, Marryat, Bulwer-Lytton and soon Dickens, Scott, H.B. Stowe, A. Dumas *père*, E. Sue, George Sand and others.<sup>5</sup> Denmark experienced its own literary 'golden age' in this period, with authors like Hans Christian Andersen, Søren Kierkegaard and a series of popular novelists who were also read in Norway throughout the century.<sup>6</sup> In Norway, the native novel arrived slightly later, however. Camilla Collett's *The District Governor's Daughters*, published 1854–55, is considered the first Norwegian bourgeois novel, while the firm establishment of the novel as a serious, modern genre only took place in the 1870s.<sup>7</sup>

The late arrival of the novel had its counterpart in the persistent popularity of the drama. There were dramatic societies all over the country, reflected in the fact that both private libraries and the libraries of

<sup>2</sup> Loftur Guttormsson, 'The Development of Popular Religious Literacy in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, vol. 15 (1990), 7–35.

<sup>3</sup> Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel 1800–1900* (London: Verso, 1998), 151–58, 174–84.

<sup>4</sup> Johann Wolfgang (von) Goethe, 'On World Literature (1827)', in Theo D'haen, Cesar Domínguez & Mads Rosendahl Thomsen (eds.), *World Literature* (London: Routledge, 2013), 9–15; David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 6–15.

<sup>5</sup> Harald L. Tvetterås, *Bokens kulturhistorie* (Oslo: Cappelen, 1986), 118–25.

<sup>6</sup> Among them, B.S. Ingemann, Steen Steensen Blicher, Thomasine Gyllembourg, Carl Bernhard, and Carit Etlar (J.C.C. Brosbøll).

<sup>7</sup> Per Thomas Andersen, *Norsk litteraturhistorie*, 2nd edn (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2012), 246.

reading societies had substantial selections of play texts.<sup>8</sup> In the leading public library in Kristiania, the Danish-Norwegian playwright Ludvig Holberg (1684–1754), Shakespeare and Schiller were among the most popular authors in the 1820s.<sup>9</sup>

As a young reader Ibsen was exposed to this influx of translated novels and Danish golden age literature, alongside the continued presence of the drama. He does not seem to have inherited particular literary or theatrical interests or dispositions, but evidence clearly suggests that he read widely from his childhood and youth.<sup>10</sup> His friend in Grimstad, Christopher Due, says that Ibsen ‘had certainly read remarkably much, incredibly much considering the limited accessibility of literature in the circumstances in which he lived’.<sup>11</sup> Due does not go into detail but claims that among the works being eagerly studied in these years were *Either-Or* and other books by Kierkegaard and the tragedies of the Danish playwright Adam Oehlenschläger. He also notes that Ibsen had a preference for Voltaire.

Ibsen himself admitted to having read Oehlenschläger and Holberg in Grimstad, ‘besides novels’, but no other dramatists.<sup>12</sup> However, the first extant Ibsen letter, from 1844, seems to be referring to Schiller’s play *Wilhelm Tell*.<sup>13</sup> At least there is no doubt about the importance of Oehlenschläger and Holberg. Oehlenschläger, also a Danish ‘golden age’ author and generally considered the initiator of national romanticism in Danish and Nordic literature, was widely read and played in Norway. He used material from Nordic mythology, saga and ballads for poetry and stories, and laid the foundation for the new history drama. Ibsen’s second printed poem, ‘The Skald of Valhalla’, was written on the occasion of Oehlenschläger’s death in 1850, and the influence of this dramatist is evident in the first Ibsen play to reach the stage later that year, *The Burial Mound*.

There was, then, nothing peculiar in Ibsen choosing poetry and drama as his main genres. But even though drama enjoyed a high prestige and was

<sup>8</sup> Elisabeth S. Eide, *Bøker i Norge* (Oslo: Pax, 2013), 89, 106, 116, 132, 165–66, 169, 173, 238.

<sup>9</sup> Nils Johan Ringdal, *By, bok og borger* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1985), 47.

<sup>10</sup> Jon Nygaard, ‘... af stort est du kommen’ (Oslo: Akademika, 2013), 120–28.

<sup>11</sup> Chr. Due, *Erindringer fra Henrik Ibsens Ungdomsaaar* (Copenhagen: Græbes bogtrykkeri, 1909), 39, quoted in Kristian Smidt, *Silent Creditors* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 2004), 8. For a survey of Ibsen’s possible reading, see Vigdis Ystad, *Innledning til Catilina: Bakgrunn*, www.ibsen.uio.no/skuespill.

<sup>12</sup> Henrik Jæger, ‘Henrik Jægers optegnelser fra samtaler med Ibsen’, in Hans Midtbøe, *Streiffys over Ibsen og andre studier* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1960), 162; see also Henrik Jæger, *Henrik Ibsen* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1888), 45.

<sup>13</sup> Ibsen, Letter to P. Lieung, 20 May 1844, *Letters and Speeches*, 7.

still common reading, it was not at all a blooming genre in terms of published titles. The last 'serious' Norwegian drama published before *Catiline* was Henrik Wergeland's *Venetianerne* in 1843, and alongside *Catiline* just one other Norwegian play was published in 1850.<sup>14</sup> But the slim production of drama was basically a reflection of the overall weakness of Norwegian literary production. In the first national bibliography, covering the period up to 1847, it was estimated that just 147 books were published in Norway that year, of them 23 in the category 'Fine Sciences and Arts'.<sup>15</sup> Norwegian literature was, in other words, in its infancy.

### Breaking the Danish Hegemony: The Norwegian Theatre Project

Ibsen's first period as dramatist is framed by two major political events, the 1848 revolution and its Norwegian aftermath and the 1864 war between Denmark and Prussia-Austria over Schleswig-Holstein. The first event, 1848, had a double impact on Ibsen. Like most students, he sympathised with the revolution and in Kristiania he befriended one of the leaders of its Norwegian offspring, the so-called Thrane movement, and also became involved in its activities.<sup>16</sup> There were some contacts between the liberal, parliamentary opposition against the government and the Thrane movement, but under the impression of the reinstalment of order in the rest of Europe, the movement was brought down by the police in the summer of 1851 and its leaders arrested and later convicted. The leaders of the parliamentary opposition were driven to rather humiliating retreats and Ibsen scorned them, for example, in his early and largely unknown three-act parody of parliamentary debates, *Norma; or the Love of a Politician* (*Norma; eller en Politikers Kjærlighed*) (1851).<sup>17</sup>

The revolution was also, however, the source of inspiration for the Norwegian theatre project. One visible aspect of the continued Danish cultural dominance in Norway was the fact that up until the middle of the century, the Norwegian stage was dominated not just by Danish plays but also by Danish actors and consequently by Danish spoken language. A couple of initiatives to train and use Norwegian actors had been taken, but none had survived for long. The first significant move to alter the

<sup>14</sup> Ystad, *Innledning til Catilina: Bakgrunn*, www.ibsen.uio.no/skuespill.

<sup>15</sup> Martinus Nissen, 'Statistisk Udsigt over den Norske Litteratur fra 1814 til 1847', *Norsk Tidsskrift for Videnskab og Litteratur* (1849), 181, quoted in Eide, *Bøker*, 22.

<sup>16</sup> Ibsen later commented on his relation to the movement in a letter to J.B. Halvorsen, 18 June 1889, *Letters and Speeches*, 14.

<sup>17</sup> Published in *Andhrimmer* 1851, nos. 9 and 10; www.ibsen.uio.no/skuespill/Norma.

situation was made in Bergen in 1850, followed by the capital Kristiania in 1852. Bergen's famous violin virtuoso Ole Bull, invigorated by experiencing the 1848 revolution in Paris to fight for Norwegian 'independence' by promoting Norwegian culture at home and abroad, came to Bergen to support the theatre cause.<sup>18</sup> On 15 October 1851 the Students' Society in Kristiania organised a concert in support of the Bergen theatre project, after Bull's effort to gain financial support from the parliament, *Stortinget*, had failed. Ibsen had written the prologue and also the text to a song, 'Kunstens Magt' ('The Power of Art'), for which Bull had composed the music. Bull was impressed and immediately offered Ibsen a position at the theatre.<sup>19</sup>

On his arrival in Bergen Ibsen's responsibility was specified as pertaining to 'assisting the theatre as dramatic writer', and a bit later he was appointed 'stage director'. In April 1852 Ibsen signed a contract which allowed him to travel to Copenhagen and Dresden to study theatre, while obliging him to stay in Bergen for five years. He carried out the study trip from the middle of April until the end of July 1852. In 1853, his duties were once more expanded and he was appointed 'stage manager'. During these years, Ibsen became practically acquainted with almost every aspect of theatre management, from directing to accountancy.

In 1857, after first having prolonged his Bergen contract for one year, Ibsen was allowed to leave in order to take over a position as artistic director at the Norwegian Theatre in Kristiania. Ibsen stayed in his new position in Kristiania until the theatre had to close for financial reasons in June 1862. From the beginning of January 1863 Ibsen had a part-time post as 'aesthetic consultant' at Christiania Theater, which was now once again the only theatre in the capital, but with a growing number of Norwegian actors. In September 1863 Ibsen was awarded a state travel grant to go to Paris and Rome. In June the following year he left for Rome and began what would turn out to be a twenty-seven-year period of residence in Italy and Germany.

<sup>18</sup> Bull's involvement in and importance for the project has probably been overestimated. In a recently discovered letter from November 1857, just after Ibsen had left Bergen and an antagonistic conflict between Bull and the theatre board had broken out, Ibsen wrote that 'the false impression of Ole Bull's importance as founder, must be corrected'. Ibsen wholeheartedly supported the board against Bull and offered to write the history of the Bergen theatre. Unfortunately, he never did; Ibsen, Letter to D.C. Danielsen, 18 November 1857 (original in Bergen Museum). See also Knut Nygaard, *Holbergs teaterarv* (Bergen: Eide, 1984), 121–22; and Ellen Karoline Gjervan, 'Ibsen Staging Ibsen', *Ibsen Studies*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2011), 125.

<sup>19</sup> Ståle Dingstad, *Den smilende Ibsen* (Oslo: Akademika, 2013), 65–66.

### National Theatre in a Transnational Context

The ‘Norwegianness’ of the new theatres in Bergen and Kristiania had a number of distinctive features. The most salient was the use of Norwegian actors and the introduction of Norwegian spoken language on the stage. While still a student in 1851, Ibsen said this about the student theatre: ‘It is us who will make the people used to hearing the Norwegian tongue from the stage.’<sup>20</sup> Pascale Casanova notes that drama, by occupying ‘an intermediate position between the spoken and written language’, has generally played an important part in standardising the language, settling the boundaries of an oral language, and transforming ‘a popular audience into a national audience’: ‘In many newly formed literary spaces, the accumulation of popular heritage, the demand for (and reinvention of) a national language distinct from the language of colonisation, and the founding of a national theater go hand in hand.’<sup>21</sup>

By the nineteenth century philology too had become more concerned with spoken language, and the Danish scholar Rasmus Rask argued that orthography should follow contemporary pronunciation rather than etymology and tradition. In Norway this ‘orthophony principle’ was picked up by Knud Knudsen and, applying that principle, he had started using the term ‘the Norwegian language’ (1845).<sup>22</sup> Knudsen was appointed as a member of the board of the Norwegian Theatre in Kristiania and functioned as its language consultant.

No clear-cut reform strategy followed from this orthophony principle, however, since pronunciation was varied in different parts of the country. Knudsen’s own suggestion was to base a reform of the written language on a form of ‘received pronunciation’ [‘den landsgyldige norske uttale’], a pronunciation he thought was generally acceptable or understandable throughout the country, soon referred to as ‘educated everyday speech’ [‘dannet dagligtale’]. This in effect meant the spoken language of the upper class as it had emerged in the eighteenth century, with vocabulary and grammar similar to Danish but with a different pronunciation. Ivar Aasen went for another strategy, grounding a new language in rural dialects with echoes of Old Norse. This meant a vocabulary more different from Danish and in some respects closer to Swedish, and also with a slightly different

<sup>20</sup> ‘Om Samfundstheatret’ (1851), [www.ibsen.uio.no/sakprosa](http://www.ibsen.uio.no/sakprosa).

<sup>21</sup> Casanova, *World Republic*, 228.

<sup>22</sup> For short introductions to these questions, see Eric Papazian, ‘Språkreformatoren Knud Knudsen’, *Språknytt*, vol. 40, no. 2 (2012), 19–22; Arne Torp, ‘Skandinavisten Knud Knudsen’, *ibid.* 23–25; Erlend Lønnum, ‘Knudsen og Ibsen’, *ibid.* 29–31.

grammar. Knudsen himself thought that Aasen and he were working towards the same goal, only along different routes. Knudsen was controversial in his own time, but the great orthographical reforms of 1907 and 1917, laying the foundation for today's majority language 'bokmål' ['book language'], meant that his strategy finally won out, while Aasen's 'lands-mål' ['country language'], later called 'nynorsk' ['New Norwegian'], has remained a minority language.

It ought to have been easy to apply some clear-cut basic differences to a new Norwegian stage language, like replacing 'soft' Danish consonants 'd', 'g' and 'b' with the 'hard' Norwegian 't', 'k' and 'p' in words like 'gade' [gæ:ðə]/'gate' [ga:tə] (street), 'bog' [boʊ]/'bok' [bu:k] (book) and 'åbne' [o:bnə]/'åpne' [o:pnə] (to open).<sup>23</sup> But applying the principle consistently was far from easy, and many other seemingly trivial changes in pronunciation, for example from 'sø' [sø:] to 'sjø' [ʃø:] (sea) or from 'skov' [sgou] to 'skog' [sku:g] (forest), or taking up distinctly Norwegian words, could take on revolutionary significance and be felt like a descent into barbarism. Danish continued to set the norm for what should be considered 'poetic', 'serious' and 'high'.<sup>24</sup> Ibsen soon learnt that 'the people' were not at all that happy to hear 'the Norwegian tongue from the stage'. It seems that the reforms introduced were not very radical<sup>25</sup>; even so, in 1861 Ibsen was disappointed at a common complaint 'that the language of the Norwegian theatre is raw and offensive'. He noted that it had been associated with a Kristiania working-class dialect ('Piperviksdialekt') and was therefore seen as 'unsuitable in all true artistic representation'.<sup>26</sup>

The actual development of a Norwegian stage language came to be influenced by the regional recruitment of actors. As it turned out, the Bergen project became of vital importance for the gradual replacement of Danish actors by Norwegian ones. Laura Svendsen (later Gundersen), born in Bergen, became the first Norwegian actress at Christiania Theater in 1850. Several of the actors that came from Bergen and gained their schooling at the Norwegian theatre in Bergen eventually came to join her. This resulted in the notion that Norwegian spoken with a polished Bergen accent, with uvular 'rs' and softer consonants than in the east, was particularly well suited for the stage. Olaf Hansson, who made his second

<sup>23</sup> Kirsten Shepherd-Barr, 'The Development of Norway's National Theatres', in S.E. Wilmer (ed.), *National Theatres in a Changing Europe* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 87–9.

<sup>24</sup> Andersen, *Norsk*, 92.

<sup>25</sup> Thoralf Berg, 'Debatten om et norsk scenespråk i Christiania 1848–1853', unpublished thesis (Trondheim: Universitetet i Trondheim, NLHT, 1977).

<sup>26</sup> 'De to Theatre i Christiania III' (1861), [www.ibsen.uio.no/sakprosa](http://www.ibsen.uio.no/sakprosa).

debut as Stensgaard in *The League of Youth* in 1877, was the first to gain acceptance for quotidian, urban, southeastern dialect, while actors with other linguistic backgrounds, like the Trøndelag dialects, had to erase their regional roots to be accepted.

The other basic aspect of the programme for a Norwegian theatre was to perform Norwegian plays written by Norwegian authors. Ibsen wrote 40 theatre articles and reviews before leaving Norway, in addition to commenting on the theatre in many letters, and they show that he fully identified with the Norwegian theatre project and that, at the time, he also embraced the accompanying expressivist-essentialist vocabulary associated with Herderian nationalism. The national author, he wrote in 1851, 'is the one who understands how to endow his work with the keynote that chimes towards us from mountains and valleys, from hillsides and seashores, but most of all from our own inner beings'.<sup>27</sup> In 1857 he maintained that 'the people', as opposed to the usual theatre audience, did not care about poetic subjectivity and did not seek to be entertained by new situations and plots. The 'new' would only be attractive to the people if it was at the same time 'old': 'it must not be invented, but reinvented'. The mission of the national author was to wake up 'memories which sort of lay in our inner being, fermenting in obscure and indefinite ways until the poet came and put them into words'.<sup>28</sup> His colleague and rival Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson's style in his peasant tales, Ibsen explained a year later, did not belong to the author in any other sense than that Bjørnson was the first who had used it. The sense of relief with which Bjørnson's peasant tales had been met showed that his style 'already in advance had been a dormant demand in the people and a completely adequate expression of the notion of nationhood in our times'.<sup>29</sup>

Ibsen, furthermore, advocated the idea of a Norwegian language totally distinct from Danish: 'The spirit of these brother languages is just as different as the nature, history and other linguistic conditions of the two countries'.<sup>30</sup> He also engaged wholeheartedly in the polemics against the 'foreign tendencies' and 'unpopular activity' at the 'Danish' Christiania Theater.<sup>31</sup> Even so, he acknowledged the great contribution that Danish

<sup>27</sup> "Huldrens Hjem," originalt skuespil i tre akter med sange og chor' (1851), *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> 'Om Kjæmpevisen og dens Betydning for Kunstpoesien' (1857), *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> ["See Tiden an"] (1862), *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> 'De to Theatre i Christiania III' (1861), [www.ibsen.uio.no/sakprosa](http://www.ibsen.uio.no/sakprosa).

<sup>31</sup> In 1857 Christiania Theater first accepted *The Vikings at Helgeland*, but then found that they could not afford to produce it after all. Ibsen wrote a series of polemical articles, the first of which were entitled 'Et Træk af Christiania Danske Theaters Bestyrelse' (1858), *ibid.*



actors had made to Norwegian theatre. He wrote tributes to a couple of them upon their return to Copenhagen, partly under the impression of the growing demand for Norwegian actors.<sup>32</sup> Ibsen also acknowledged Oehlenschläger as the one who first had realised the need to give national art a national foundation by using sagas and ballads.<sup>33</sup>

In Ibsen's most extended discussion of these matters, 'On the Heroic Ballad and Its Significance for Poetry' ('Om Kjæmpevisen og dens Betydning for Kunstpoesien', 1857), he argued that the ballads were better suited as raw material for drama than the sagas, because the saga 'is a large, cold, completed and self-contained epic'.<sup>34</sup> The ballads had the advantage of allowing for 'Mystery, the enigmatic, the inexplicable'. The ballads, he continued, suggested a spiritual kinship between the different branches of the 'great Germanic tribe' – the Scandinavian, the German, the English, the Scottish. The heroes and themes of Scandinavian poems were clearly recognisable in, for example, the 'Niebelungenlied' and 'The Song of Roland'. Ibsen claimed that their origin went all the way back to 'a time which lies *before* the Germanic tribe's immigration to Europe, a time, in other words, when this great tribe made up a unified whole'. Everything suggests that Ibsen was a follower of the Norwegian historians' 'immigration theory', according to which the originally 'Germanic' and 'Nordic' had been best preserved in Norway and Iceland and was primarily a Norse-Norwegian inheritance. In this perspective, the struggle for a 'Norwegian' theatre was an attempt to reconquer a precious source of cultural prestige that had so far been appropriated and exploited primarily by Danes and Swedes.<sup>35</sup>

Ibsen contributed to this programme during his whole time in Norway, before his departure for Italy in 1864. After his first play in Bergen, *St John's Night* (1853), with a contemporary setting,<sup>36</sup> his second contribution was a revised version of *The Burial Mound* (1854). The next were: *Lady Inger of Ostrat* (premiere 1855, printed 1857), subtitled 'historical drama'; *The Feast at Solhaug* (1855, 1856), with a certain basis in historical events in the early fourteenth century, but according to Ibsen just as much inspired by medieval ballads<sup>37</sup>; and finally *Olaf Liljekrans* (premiere 1857,

<sup>32</sup> 'Anton Wilhelm Wiehe' (1857), *ibid.* and 'Til en Bortdragende Kunstner' (1863/1871), [www.ibsen.uio.no/dikt](http://www.ibsen.uio.no/dikt).

<sup>33</sup> 'Om Kjæmpevisen', [www.ibsen.uio.no/sakprosa](http://www.ibsen.uio.no/sakprosa). <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> This is the general thrust of the conclusion, *ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Ibsen later repudiated the authorship of this play, see Ibsen, Letter to J. Elias, 19 September 1897, *Letters and Speeches*, 329.

<sup>37</sup> 'Fortale til anden udgave', [www.ibsen.uio.no/skuespill/Gildet](http://www.ibsen.uio.no/skuespill/Gildet).

unpublished until 1902), based on legends and ballads of the Black Death. In Kristiania he wrote *The Vikings at Helgeland* (printed and performed 1858), relying on Icelandic ‘family’ sagas, but with invented characters and intended to ‘give a picture of life in the age of the sagas more generally’.<sup>38</sup> After the contemporary verse drama *Love’s Comedy* (published 1862), Ibsen concluded the national-historical cycle with *The Pretenders* (published October 1863, performed January 1864), subtitled ‘historical play’ and with characters and events taken from early thirteenth-century Norwegian history, generally considered to be the climax of the Norwegian medieval state.

Even though both Bjørnson and Ibsen made a substantial contribution to ‘national’ drama, the Norwegian theatres were not even close to nationalising their repertoires. Norwegian theatre continued to be dominated by Danish and French plays. During Ibsen’s five full seasons in Bergen, 122 new plays were performed: 62 French, 28 Danish, 16 Norwegian, 11 German, and 5 others. In terms of genre the repertoire for the whole period in which the theatre operated, 1850–1863, was dominated by light comedy (‘lystspill’) (35 per cent), vaudeville (20 per cent), comedy (14 per cent), farce (3 per cent), and ‘musicals’ (4 per cent). Ten per cent were classified as ‘plays’ and 8 per cent as ‘drama’. The most frequently played author was, by far, Eugène Scribe (40 plays), but Nordic plays achieved the highest number of performances.<sup>39</sup>

The composition of the repertoire is the most obvious evidence that the struggle for a national theatre took place in a thoroughly transnational context. From the very start the ambitions of the project were also self-consciously formulated in transnational terms. Reviewing a vaudeville at Christiania Theater in the spring of 1851, Ibsen called for something new: ‘We ourselves produce nothing, nor do the Danes. Scribe has become stale.’<sup>40</sup> Six years later it was much the same. There was a general complaint, he wrote, that the time of the great scenic artists were over. The Théâtre Français had its period of excellence, the Danish theatre adored its own past and Germany no longer had the likes of Eckhoff, Iffland or Schröder. Those to blame, Ibsen thought, were the dramatic authors,

<sup>38</sup> Ibsen, Letter to C. Hauch, 8 February 1858.

<sup>39</sup> Jan Olav Gatland, *Repertoaret ved Det Norske Theater 1850–1863* (Bergen: Universitetsbiblioteket i Bergen, 2000), iv–vi.

<sup>40</sup> [“En blaseret Herre”] (1851), [www.ibsen.uio.no/sakprosa](http://www.ibsen.uio.no/sakprosa), quoted and trans. in McFarlane, *Ibsen and Meaning*, 109.

and particularly those of the new dramatic trend in France; these in technical terms perfect pieces of art that annually emanate from the Parisian authors' workshops and that to such a sad degree contribute to promoting virtuosity at the expense of art, – these laceworks that are calculated only to create effect through the 'delivery of lines' cannot but degrade art to a lower region – that of sensation.<sup>41</sup>

It is not quite clear which new trends Ibsen referred to. But the European theatre market was highly synchronised at this time. Émile Augier, for example, was first performed at Christiania Theatre in 1855 with *Le Gendre de Monsieur Poirier* (*Hr. Poiriers Svigersøn*, trans. Glückstad) – written with Jules Sandeau – appearing only a year after its Paris production. *Un beau Marriage* (*Et godt Parti*, trans. H. Arentz) was staged in 1860, that too only a year after Paris, and *Les Effrontés* (*Den offentlige Mening*, trans. unknown) in 1863, two years after its French premiere. Ibsen himself produced Victorien Sardou for the first time in Norway, with *Pattes de Mouche* (*Et farligt Brev*, trans. A. Recke) at Kristiania Norwegian Theatre in the autumn of 1860. It was one of Sardou's first successes in Paris that same year.<sup>42</sup> Where the translators have been identified, at least some of them seem to be Norwegian. But whether the translations were made directly from French or were adaptations from Danish or other languages is not known, nor how the plays were acquired.

The national theatre project clearly aimed at raising the theatre to an art institution, and this ambition was conceived in a European context, more particularly in the context of a French theatre hegemony that needed to be challenged. Bjørnson explicitly perceived the Norwegian historical drama as a transitional stage towards a renewal of bourgeois drama. He had, he wrote in 1861, 'an ill-fated passion for the bourgeois drama, which at this very moment all over the world is in need of radical development, even though it seems that no one wants to start'. In Norway, he thought, 'it would in many respects be harmful if this drama came before the historical one; without it [the historical drama] the bourgeois drama would tend towards a sentimentality and pettiness that would be more suffocating than refreshing'.<sup>43</sup> In 1865 Bjørnson wrote what is considered to be the first bourgeois play in Norway, *The Newly Married*, but it was only with his two plays of 1875,

<sup>41</sup> 'Anton Wilhelm Wiehe' (1857), *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Anker, Øyvind, *Christiania Theater's Repertoire 1827–99* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1956); Øyvind Anker, *Kristiania Norske Theaters Repertoire 1852–1863* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1956).

<sup>43</sup> Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Letter to Ditmar Meidell, [Summer 1861], *Gro-tid*, ed. Halvdan Koht (Kristiania: Gyldendal, 1912), 255–56; we would like to thank Ann Schmiesing for identifying this reference.

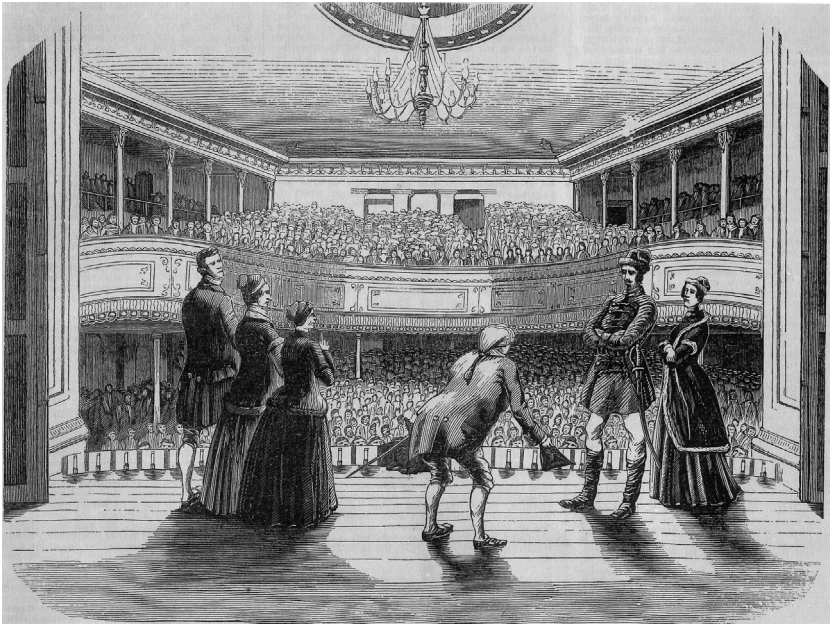


Figure 1.1 The Norwegian Theatre in Kristiania, where Ibsen served as artistic director 1857–62.

The contemporary xylograph shows a scene from A. Duval's *Snedkeren i Lifland, eller: Peter den Stores Reise (Le Menuisier de Livonie, ou: Les Illustres Voyageurs, 1805)*, performed five times in the 1852/53 season (Øyvind Anker: *Kristiania Norske Theaters Repertoire*, Oslo: Gyldendal 1956, 38).

*A Bankruptcy* and *The Editor*, that he definitively initiated the turn of Scandinavian drama towards contemporary middle-class society.

There are good reasons to argue that the way Ibsen empowered modern drama owes much to his craftsmanship learnt in the service of the national theatre. Many have pointed to the continuity in his constellations of characters and the affinities between his female heroines, for example. Exploiting the techniques of 'the well-made play', he fused them with the tragic, the heroic, the passionate, the 'demonic' that he found in his 'native' literary heritage. But 'bourgeois' transcended a national frame of reference. By moving from the heroic national past to the un-heroic middle-class present, Ibsen was able to contribute to national and European culture at the same time. His contemporary prose plays no longer

appealed to nationally specific 'memories' or 'a peculiarity of outlook belonging to us and nobody else',<sup>44</sup> but to experiences that could be transnationally recognised and appreciated.

### How Bad Were Ibsen's Theatre Years?

The master narrative informing Ibsen biography imposes a double-entry bookkeeping on the account of his theatre years, resulting in a highly negative balance. In James W. McFarlane's introductions to *The Oxford Ibsen* – arguably, due to its appearance in English, the most influential scholarly Ibsen edition of the twentieth century<sup>45</sup> – we read this about the start of Ibsen's theatre career: 'For a young and ambitious author to be invited at the age of twenty-three to join this exciting new enterprise was on the face of it a stroke of amazing good fortune; even today it is difficult to believe that the effect on his career was other than wholly beneficial'.<sup>46</sup> Only 'on the face of it', since at this point we have already learnt that Ibsen's early plays 'help to define the nature of a kind of intellectual bondage from which it took him long years to break free. Summarily expressed, the two things that mainly held him fettered were the Norwegian Myth and the *pièce bien faite*'.<sup>47</sup>

If Bergen had been bad, Kristiania turned out worse, 'far more chilling to his spirit than anything he had experienced in Bergen, or Grimstad, or Skien', according to Michael Meyer.<sup>48</sup> McFarlane acknowledges *The Pretenders* as 'Ibsen's first and incontrovertible masterpiece', and credits the warm sympathy Ibsen met with in Bergen during the choral festival in June 1863 for the creative mood that enabled him to write it. But this turns out to be the exception to the general experience of 'frustration, hostility, misunderstanding, and growing artistic isolation'.<sup>49</sup> Arriving at the crisis of 1864, the narrative voice merges completely with Ibsen's own fierce condemnation of Norwegian 'betrayal' and 'cowardice' and no further explanation of the nature of the Danish-German conflict or Norwegian and Swedish politics are given. The transfer to Rome can, accordingly, take on the character of a romance; a transition from darkness to light, from nationalism to culture, from bondage to freedom, from heteronomy to authentic self-expression.

<sup>44</sup> Ibsen et al., Letter to the Storting, 25 October 1859, quoted and translated in McFarlane, *Ibsen and Meaning*, 144.

<sup>45</sup> The introductions are collected in McFarlane, *ibid.*      <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* 108.      <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* 104.

<sup>48</sup> Meyer, *Ibsen*, 157.      <sup>49</sup> McFarlane, *Ibsen and Meaning*, 164–66.

Again, there is no denying that this narrative can find ample evidence from Ibsen himself and his supporters.<sup>50</sup> When leaving Bergen in 1857 to take up his new position in Kristiania, Ibsen wrote that ‘the conditions at the Bergen theater have for a long time now oppressed and inhibited me. Every path in which I might have accomplished something has been closed to me.’<sup>51</sup> In 1867, after three years in Rome, Ibsen wrote to Bjørnson: ‘For a poet, working in a theater is equivalent to repeated, daily abortions.’<sup>52</sup> Throughout the years he turned down every offer he was given to return to Kristiania and take up a position at the theatre. Based on Ibsen’s own statements and actions, the view of McFarlane and numerous other authors certainly seems reasonable and well founded.

Even so, the overall negative assessment needs to be reconsidered and, above all, Ibsen’s theatre experiences deserve some comparative perspectives. Starting with the response to his own plays, Ibsen might seem to have met with little understanding. In Bergen, most of his plays were only on for two nights. But this was, after all, the fate of the majority of plays.<sup>53</sup> *The Feast at Solhoug*, which Ibsen later called ‘a study which I have disowned’,<sup>54</sup> was his only clear success, performed five times in its premiere season. This should not, however, be taken to indicate that the taste of the Norwegian audience was particularly unsophisticated; *The Feast at Solhoug* was actually also the first Ibsen play to be performed outside Norway, at the Royal Theatre in Stockholm in 1857 and at the Casino theatre in Copenhagen in 1861.

When *The Vikings at Helgeland*, generally thought of as Ibsen’s best play from the 1850s, was not put on by Christiania Theater, Ibsen ventured on an extended newspaper campaign against the theatre. But this time as well the Norwegian reception seems quite sympathetic within a Scandinavian context. When Ibsen sent *The Vikings* to the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen it was turned down by the censor and leading dramatic authority in Scandinavia, Johan Ludvig Heiberg. The conclusion of Heiberg’s report has entered the repertoire of spectacularly failed predictions: ‘A Norwegian theatre will probably not appear from the laboratory of these experiments;

<sup>50</sup> See Ståle Dingstad, ‘Mytene etableres’, in Astrid Sæther et al. (eds.), *Den biografiske Ibsen* (Oslo: Unipub, 2010), 79–101.

<sup>51</sup> Ibsen, Letter to the Director of the National Theater in Bergen, 23 July 1857, *Letters and Speeches*, 25.

<sup>52</sup> Ibsen, Letter to Bjørnson, 28 December 1867, *ibid.* 71. <sup>53</sup> Gatland, *Repertoaret*, iv–v.

<sup>54</sup> Ibsen, footnote to Letter to P. Hansen, 28 October 1870, *Letters and Speeches*, 101. Even so, in 1883 Ibsen made a new version of the play.

the Danish does happily not need them.<sup>55</sup> When Ibsen himself produced the play at the Norwegian theatre in Kristiania during the season of 1858–59, it achieved a respectable eight performances.

In terms of his practical schooling in drama, Ibsen's theatre years were invaluable. He was involved in staging 122 new plays in Bergen, and around 200 in all before he left the country. He became acquainted with everything relating to the creation and use of the stage, technically and artistically.<sup>56</sup> In Bergen, he had the unique privilege of having every piece he wrote rehearsed and tried out on the stage. Furthermore, he worked with many highly talented actors. In 1862 Ibsen claimed that 'our theatre history will be able to show up an amount of talent and many-sided giftedness that few others can equal'.<sup>57</sup> He later found support for his opinions. After visiting Christiania Theater in 1876, Georg Brandes wrote: 'There were evenings where, in this small, inconspicuous and ugly theatre, they were not behind Théâtre Français in their comedy.'<sup>58</sup>

The *literary* value of Ibsen's theatre experience has generally been downplayed with reference to the inferior repertoire. Ibsen was largely forced to reproduce what he in 1851 termed 'Scribe and Co.'s sugarcandy dramas'.<sup>59</sup> The total reliance on box office receipts meant an extremely high turnover in the repertoire and subjection to the popular demand for entertainment. But when Ibsen himself, in the early 1860s, was met with the charge of running a 'vaudeville theatre' nurtured on 'the so-called lower dramatic arts',<sup>60</sup> he turned on his critics. The French, he said, produced half of what any theatre in Europe, big or small, put on.<sup>61</sup> A 'good repertoire' was a repertoire that suited the resources available and a good execution of bad drama was preferable to destroying a masterpiece. A 'good repertoire' also had to be diverse: 'it has to vary between Mallefille, Oehlenschläger, Birch-Pfeifer, Shakespeare, Iffland, Molière, Barriere, and partly, Holberg.'<sup>62</sup>

On a couple of occasions at the beginning of the 1860s, Ibsen also noted the relative merits of French plays. In 1862 he contrasted plays with stereotypical characters with plays where the actors could supply the

<sup>55</sup> Quoted in J.B. Halvorsen, *Norsk Forfatter-Lexikon 1814–1880* (Kristiania: Den norske Forlagsforening, 1892), vol. 3, 39.

<sup>56</sup> Gjervan, 'Ibsen Staging', 130. <sup>57</sup> '[Theaterkrisen]' (1862), [www.ibsen.uio.no/sakprosa](http://www.ibsen.uio.no/sakprosa).

<sup>58</sup> *Levned* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1907), vol. 2, 214.

<sup>59</sup> "Haarpidsk og Kaarde", *Skuespil i 5 Akter af K. Gutzkow* (1851), [www.ibsen.uio.no/sakprosa](http://www.ibsen.uio.no/sakprosa).

<sup>60</sup> 'De to Theatre i Christiania' (1861), *ibid*.

<sup>61</sup> 'Lidt, men nok om Theaterafhandlingen i *Christianiaposten*' (1861), *ibid*.

<sup>62</sup> 'De to Theatre i Christiania IV' (1861), *ibid*.

characters with 'a thousand individual shades'. Plays of the first kind were overwhelmingly represented in German and Swedish literature and in the majority of the Parisian repertoire 20–25 years ago. He even suggested that 'the entire genre of tragedy, according to its definitions, belongs to the same category; it is at least certain that one cannot exempt most of Oehlenschläger's tragedies.' Another kind of play, he argued, was found in the light comedy of recent French and Danish literature. Their quality was totally dependent on performance and they required that each actor knew the whole dialogue, not just the individual part.<sup>63</sup> Later the same year he reviewed Augier's *Diane* (*Diana*, tr. unknown, 1852) at Christiania Theater. The play was originally written for Rachel and is considered a failed effort in the genre of the historical drama,<sup>64</sup> but Ibsen compared it favourably with 'German art'. And he praised Louise Brun as Diane and Chr. Jørgensen as Richelieu in a minor but, according to Ibsen, important scene: 'The interaction between him and Diane makes the scene into the most excellent thing dramatic art has achieved in this country. Why does one not produce *Macbeth*?'<sup>65</sup>

It is generally acknowledged that Ibsen's technique owes a lot to Scribe and 'the well-made play'. Here, he learnt how to construct a clear, logical and conceivable chain of events, with the uncovering of a hidden truth as a major device. There are reasons to claim, then, that the most valuable experience from these years might have been exactly what in one sense was a failure, namely that they exposed Ibsen to and made him learn the whole range of the 'low', 'illegitimate drama'.<sup>66</sup>

Even so, Ibsen clearly felt that the theatre was more and more of a restriction. The poem *On the Heights* (1860) was, as Ibsen later expressed it, pervaded by a desire for freedom.<sup>67</sup> In this poem he developed a poetics of distance, organised around the opposition between 'high mountain life' ('høyfjellsliv') and 'low country life' ('lavlandsliv'), making distance and cold the necessary preconditions for reaching a higher perspective and giving aesthetic form to subjective pain. We will return to how Ibsen on several occasions rephrased this poetics in response to changing conditions

<sup>63</sup> '[Der gives en hel stor Klasse af Theaterstykker]' (1862), *ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> 'Augier, Guillaume Victor Émile', *Salmonsens Konversationsleksikon*, 2nd ed. (Copenhagen: J.H. Schultz, 1925), vol. 2; see also comment to Ibsen, '[Christiania Theater]' (1862), [www.ibsen.uio.no/sakprosa](http://www.ibsen.uio.no/sakprosa).

<sup>65</sup> '[Christiania Theater]' (1862), *ibid.* In 1855 Bjørnson too had praised what he called the 'naturalist' plays of Musset, Augier and Dumas *faits* at the expense of Scribe, see Meyer, *Ibsen*, 139.

<sup>66</sup> Gjervan, 'Ibsen staging', 131–32.

<sup>67</sup> Ibsen, Letter to P. Hansen, 28 October 1870, *Letters and Speeches*, 101.



of production and reception. It clearly marks a departure from the expressivism and collectivism of his writings of the 1850s.

There is no doubt that economic factors presented a major challenge for the Norwegian theatre project, and that economic concerns and box office considerations took on an overwhelming importance. Repeated applications for state support were turned down and after 1860 theatre attendance fell.<sup>68</sup> Ibsen was quite pleased to report in 1861, after having received some criticism, that under his leadership the incomes of the Norwegian theatre in Kristiania had increased year by year.<sup>69</sup> But the next year he commented bitterly that the public had been indifferent to the closure of the theatre<sup>70</sup> and that the audience preferred amusement to art and national endeavour.<sup>71</sup> The hardships of the theatre, furthermore, directly affected his private economy. The last part of his salary from the Norwegian Theatre was never paid, and when he was engaged as consultant for Christiania Theater from 1863, his payment was made dependent on the overall income. Again he had to write much occasional poetry as well as articles and reviews for newspapers and periodicals, like other Norwegian writers of this time. He was forced to change residence frequently, and his last address was in a 'slum-like' neighbourhood.<sup>72</sup>

Ibsen's financial problems cannot, however, be attributed purely to bad theatre economy, nor even to low incomes generally. During his time at the Norwegian Theatre in Kristiania, Ibsen was paid 635 specie dollars the first season (1857–58) and 664 the last one (1861–62). In between these two his salary varied from 711 to 767. In addition to this, he might have had something like 100 specie dollars from literary work.<sup>73</sup> This should have provided him with a solid economy; his contractual minimum income alone, 600 specie dollars, put him on the same level as a master craftsman and above a Principal Officer (*byråsjef*).<sup>74</sup> Ibsen's annual income in Kristiania was above what he had received in Bergen and should have been sufficient even after he got married in 1858 and his son Sigurd was born in 1859. But Ibsen had started to accumulate debt already in Bergen, and in Kristiania he began to neglect the maintenance obligation for his illegitimate son in Grimstad, even though less than 30 specie dollars were left to pay.<sup>75</sup> From 1857 to 1864, thirteen lawsuits were raised against him,

<sup>68</sup> Anette Storli Andersen, 'In the Right Place, at the Right Time', *Ibsen Studies*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2011), 105.

<sup>69</sup> '[I det forløbne Spilleaar]' (1861), [www.ibsen.uio.no/sakprosa](http://www.ibsen.uio.no/sakprosa).

<sup>70</sup> '[Den forestaaende Theatersaeson]' (1862), *ibid.* <sup>71</sup> '[Christiania Theater]' (1862), *ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Per Kristian Heggelund Dahl, *Streifyls* (Oslo: Ibsen-museet, 2001), 40. <sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* 36–7.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* 104. <sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* 104–5.

ten of them by 1861.<sup>76</sup> By the time the Norwegian Theatre had to give up in 1862, Ibsen's debt amounted to 400 specie dollars. A year later, it had grown to over 500.<sup>77</sup> The politician Ludvig Daae, a relative of Ibsen's wife Susanna, wrote in his diary 3 February 1863: 'On the way home . . . I met Ibsen. He looks fairly dissipated; patchy overcoat, patchy hat and an almost copper-red face. It may be accidental that he looked like this today, but it made a disturbing ['uhygge] impression on me.'<sup>78</sup> Other sources confirm that Ibsen had built up a reputation for drunkenness.<sup>79</sup>

Ibsen's application for an annual stipend in line with Bjørnson's was rejected in March 1863, but in the course of the year his fortune turned in many respects. In May he was awarded a domestic travel grant (100 specie dollars), and in September a grant to go abroad (400 specie dollars), something which had been indicated already when his application for the regular annual stipend was denied. In September he received 150 specie dollars for the publication of *The Pretenders*. In 1864 the performance of this play earned him almost 190 specie dollars from Christiania Theater, and in addition to this Bjørnson and Bernhard Dunker managed to collect 700 specie dollars which were paid him in monthly rates from April 1864 until January 1865.

Overall, Ibsen was in a privileged position during his years in Norway, even during the last period in Kristiania. The causes of his economic troubles are mixed and not altogether clear. Furthermore, they seem not to have severely affected the quality of his literary work. If *The Vikings at Helgeland* is Ibsen's best work of the 1850s, this was improved upon in the 1860s, with the long poems *On the Heights* (1860) and *Terje Vigen* (1862), the verse drama *Love's Comedy* (1862) and the historical drama *The Pretenders* (1863) as high points. And his works were appreciated. Ibsen himself put great emphasis on the hostility against *Love's Comedy* in the preface to the new edition issued in 1867: 'I made the mistake of publishing the book in Norway.' It took ten years before the play was finally performed at Christiania Theater (1873), but from then on it became one of his most popular plays. It has often been assumed that he was refused an annual grant because of *Love's Comedy*,<sup>80</sup> but this was flatly denied by Ibsen himself.<sup>81</sup> The next play after *Love's Comedy*, *The Pretenders*, was an

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. 11.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 33–5. See also Ibsen, Letter to the King, 10 March 1863, *Letters and Speeches*, 32.

<sup>78</sup> Ludvig Daae, *Politiske dagbøger og minner* (Oslo: Grøndahl, 1934), vol. 1, 216.

<sup>79</sup> See Meyer, *Ibsen*, 197. <sup>80</sup> For example, McFarlane, *Ibsen and Meaning*, 166–67.

<sup>81</sup> Ibsen, Letter to F.V. Hegel, 8 March 1867, *Letters and Speeches*, 62.

immediate and considerable success. The publisher produced a relatively large edition of 1250 copies, and at the theatre, under Ibsen's own instruction, it was played for seven nights in the spring of 1864.

Ibsen had clearly acquired a solid position by 1863, as witness for instance the celebration he received during the above-mentioned choral festival in Bergen in 1863. Here he was a leading cultural personality alongside other authors and composers like Bjørnson, Andreas Munch and Ole Bull. His fame also reached outside the two largest cities. On his return from Bergen Ibsen was greeted with a speech by the mayor of Kristiansand when the Kristiania delegation made a stop there.<sup>82</sup> When he left Norway Ibsen was on his way up, both financially, socially and artistically.

We could, finally, adopt a broader comparative perspective and ask what chances a character like Ibsen would have stood in a more advanced theatre culture. What would his prospects have been, for example, in the theatre capital of the world, Paris? Of ten playwrights elected to the Académie Française over the period 1855–88, all except two were born in Paris. Their fathers had all pursued professional careers and they themselves had attended prestigious educational establishments in Paris and mostly gone on to study for degrees. Nearly all had connections in theatrical or literary circles. Even so, it was extremely hard to be let in because everything suggested that it was wiser to go for an established name than to gamble on a new one. The younger Dumas had to wait four years until he had one of the greatest theatre successes of the century, *La Dame aux Camélias*, accepted by the Vaudeville, in spite of the name and connections of his father. Victorien Sardou, another of the most highly esteemed playwrights and one of the richest, 'led a life of dire poverty between 1854 and 1859, a period during which he was starving and shabby and never knew how he was to pay the rent for his room'.<sup>83</sup> Émile Zola was highly disfavoured by these circumstances; Ibsen would simply have lacked every quality required to enter into this world. In Norway, on the contrary, all available dramatic talent was mobilised to build a Norwegian theatre, just when Ibsen stood poised at the start of his career. The timing was 'a stroke of amazing good fortune', indeed, not just 'on the face of it'.

<sup>82</sup> *Beretning om den femte store Sangerfest afholdt i Bergen 14–18 Juni 1863* (Kristiania: Joh. D. Behrens, 1963), 1–2, 61, 89, 121–22, 172.

<sup>83</sup> F.W.J. Hemmings, *The Theatre Industry in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 242–43; the sociological data are from a study by Christophe Charle.

### 1864 and the Crisis of the Pan-Scandinavian Movement

Ibsen left Norway under the impression of another major event which coloured Scandinavian political and intellectual life for years, and Danish politics for decades. In 1864, Denmark was defeated by the allied military forces of Prussia and Austria and lost the two duchies of Schleswig and Holstein (in Danish Slesvig and Holsten). Ibsen would later describe his transfer to Rome as a voluntary exile caused by growing isolation, as well as anger at Norway and Sweden for not supporting Denmark with military forces. Ibsen had been a supporter of the Pan-Scandinavian movement (*Skandinavismen*) and had seen Scandinavian solidarity in this conflict as a true test. When Denmark was left alone, the crisis became a major blow to Scandinavianism and to Ibsen a disillusionment even darker than 1848.

The Norwegian policy on the war issue, however, was dictated by rather straightforward reasons. The King had instilled hopes for military support to Denmark, but he had never had the backing of either the Swedish or the Norwegian government. The leader of the Norwegian government, Frederik Stang, would not involve Norway in continental politics to defend Danish interests in Schleswig, and made Norwegian support of Denmark conditional on British support. Stang thought Schleswig should be divided along nationality lines, while the Danish policy was to include the whole of the duchy under the Danish constitution and introduce Danish in administration, church and school. It was only in the northern parts of Schleswig that Danish-speakers were in a majority; the conflict was very much an internal civil war between the Danish-speaking and the German-speaking parts of the duchy. The overall majority in Schleswig was German and it was not obvious to all Norwegians that Danish nationalism was more ideal and principled than German nationalism. The remarkable thing about Ibsen's rhetoric is indeed how one-sided it was.

If we take the emotional temperature in Ibsen's rhetoric seriously, the question remains: Why did Scandinavianism matter that much to him? At first glance it seems contradictory, since the Norwegian theatre project with which he had identified had such a clear anti-Danish tendency. Furthermore, by the 1860s Scandinavianism had ceased to be primarily a liberal movement and had turned into an instrument for the dynastic ambitions of the Bernadottes, the Swedish royal family, as a military programme against Russia and Prussia.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Bo Stråth, *Union og demokrati* (Oslo: Pax, 2005), 189–95.

Even so, there was a consistency to the attitude of Ibsen and many other Norwegian intellectuals. First, Ibsen, like other Norwegian supporters of the pan-Scandinavian movement, always insisted that working for closer Nordic unity and solidarity, had to go hand in hand with the struggle for national 'liberation'. The Scandinavian idea, Ibsen claimed, made it a 'duty' for Norwegians to act as a free nation, politically and culturally.<sup>85</sup> Nordic unity presupposed independence and coequality.<sup>86</sup> Expressing Norwegian individuality and working for closer Nordic unity were two sides of the same coin.

The second motive was that Scandinavianism promoted a northern cultural orientation, as opposed to the traditional German-Continental orientation that was predominant in Denmark. In his speech in Rome in 1865 on the occasion of the unveiling of a monument of the Norwegian historian P.A. Munch, Ibsen encouraged the Danes to stop looking south, to erase from their art and literature 'that party in your country which with such strangely sympathetic ties feel pulled towards the South, that party in your country which do all its exercise ['Idræt'] with their eyes directed there, as if it *there* had its allied country ['Frændeland'], the country of its own tribe ['Stammeland']'.<sup>87</sup> A northern orientation had a lot to offer Norwegian academics, artists, and authors since it implied the cultivation of a glorious past of myth, religion, Vikings and medieval kings where Norway could claim not just coequality with its neighbours, but even a certain priority and superiority.

A similar motive can, thirdly, explain why the struggle for a Norwegian language could coexist with efforts to promote Scandinavian language cooperation. The kind of Danish-Norwegian hybrid language that was advocated by Knud Knudsen could be conceived of as an ideal Scandinavian 'middle language'. The orthophonic reforms he suggested would all contribute to narrowing the gap between Danish and Swedish.<sup>88</sup>

All these reasons were conjoined in a fourth strong motive for Ibsen's Scandinavianism: it was a perfect ideological underpinning for entering the Scandinavian book market.

### The Transition to Danish Gyldendal

Bjørnson was instrumental not only in making it possible for Ibsen to go to Rome, but also for his transition to Gyldendal. In 1860, Gyldendal

<sup>85</sup> 'De to Theatre i Christiania' (1861), [www.ibsen.uio.no/sakprosa](http://www.ibsen.uio.no/sakprosa).

<sup>86</sup> Ibsen, 'Endnu et Indlæg i Theatersagen' (1858), *ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> 'Korrespondence fra Rom til Nyhedsbladet' (1865), *ibid.*      <sup>88</sup> Torp, 'Skandinavisten', 23.

published a new edition of Camilla Collett's *The District Governor's Daughters*. At that time Bjørnson too had decided to go to the Copenhagen publisher Frederik V. Hegel, head of the Gyldendal company since 1850. This was a turning point with far-reaching consequences for literature and publishing in the whole of Scandinavia. Bjørnson was strongly encouraged to take this step by the Danish critic Clemens Petersen after the success of his peasant tale *Synnøve Solbakken* in Denmark. It was not at all an easy step since it was in obvious conflict with the whole national rhetoric of building a Norwegian theatre and a Norwegian literature – in opposition to the age-old Danish hegemony. But the advantages were many. Publishing in Copenhagen had a cultural prestige that added value to a Norwegian book in the home market, while at the same time facilitating access to the Danish market. Within the still existing cultural hierarchy, Norwegian publishers had a disadvantage in the Danish market that Danish publishers did not have in the Norwegian. Neither were there any Norwegian publishers at the time with visions and financial muscle to provide for a considerable expansion of Norwegian literature. Hegel, on his side, had the means to be generous with advance payments. Bjørnson's offer to introduce Ibsen to Hegel and ask for an advance on his behalf fell on fertile ground since Ibsen's financial sources had all dried up by the spring of 1865.

So it was that, starting with Collett, Bjørnson and Ibsen, the writers of the 'golden age' of Norwegian literature became Copenhagen publishing commodities while Frederik V. Hegel became the main publisher of the literature of the Modern Breakthrough and the foremost literary publisher in Scandinavia. From 1860 to 1890, around 90 Norwegian authors chose Gyldendal and other Danish publishers.<sup>89</sup> The result was that the great majority of 'native language' books circulating in Norway in the nineteenth century continued to be books printed in Denmark.<sup>90</sup>

The move to Gyldendal had several important consequences. One was that it stabilised the relationship between author and publisher. Until Ibsen went to Gyldendal, his publishing pattern had been new book, new publisher. But after some initial misunderstandings concerning *Brand*, the loyalty and mutual understanding between Ibsen and Gyldendal were cemented and unbroken for the rest of his career.

The transition to a Danish publisher also had major consequences in linguistic terms. In a wider perspective, the fact that the most prestigious part

<sup>89</sup> Harald L. Tveterås, *Norske forfattere på danske forlag, 1850–1890* (Oslo: Cappelen, 1964), 409.

<sup>90</sup> Eide, *Bøker*, 23, 110, 184.

of Norwegian literature in the late nineteenth century was published in Denmark, might have contributed to prolonging the Danish hegemony over Norwegian written language. The major spelling reforms, adjusting the written language to Norwegian pronunciation, came, as already noted, only in 1907 and 1917. When a Norwegian author opted for a Danish publisher, it clearly meant a rejection of Aasen's radical linguistic strategy, but it also made Knudsen's strategy difficult to apply. Ibsen participated in the Nordic spelling reform meeting in Stockholm in 1869 and immediately took up its few and rather meagre proposals, like changing to lower case in the spelling of nouns, and replacing the double vowel 'aa' with the 'Swedish' 'å'. Hegel had no problem with this and he was pleased that Ibsen did not follow Bjørnson's more radical approach. Ibsen replied that 'I would regret it very much if Bjørnson sticks to his decision of supporting the Knudsen method; this is the most unpopular one in Norway and in the case of Denmark and Sweden the most incomprehensible and offensive one.'<sup>91</sup>

It is hard to find a discernible strategy behind Ibsen's linguistic development. *Catiline* was written in more or less plain Danish and Ibsen's manuscripts from the 1850s reveal inconsistencies and hesitations. He followed Knudsen some of the way, but was reluctant when it came to the 'hard consonants'.<sup>92</sup> But even though Ibsen might seem rather cautious in his reform efforts, he clearly had an identity as a Norwegian writer, and just as importantly: He was conceived of as such in Denmark. A Norwegian linguistic identity was bestowed upon him by Danish authorities almost from the start. When *The Pretenders* was reviewed by the censor of the royal theatre in Copenhagen in 1863, the playwright Carsten Hauch, he remarked that the language was partly incomprehensible and 'even madder than with the other Norwegian-Norwegian Norwegians'. Hauch gave several examples of words and expressions that he thought came from

various peasant dialects which have now been adopted by the Norwegian writers in order to hastily acquire a language which differs from Danish; with us it can hardly appear except in translation, and least so in a theatre whose task it is, among other things, to guard the purity of the language.<sup>93</sup>

In 1866 a more sympathetic Danish author published an eighty-eight page dictionary of Norwegian aesthetic literature since 1842,<sup>94</sup> containing

<sup>91</sup> Ibsen, Letter to F.V. Hegel, 12 February 1870.      <sup>92</sup> Lønnum, 'Knudsen', 29–31.

<sup>93</sup> Quoted in Edvard Agerholm, 'Henrik Ibsen og det kgl. Teater', *Gads danske Magazin* (1910–11), 277.

<sup>94</sup> A. Listov, *Ordsamling fra den norske æsthetiske literatur siden Aaret 1842, alfabetisk ordnet og forklaret* (København: Gyldendal, 1866).

common words in Norwegian popular language, often stemming from Old Norse but no longer present in Danish; words from Danish literary language gone out of use in Denmark; and words deviating in spelling or content from corresponding Danish ones.

Being treated as a foreign author could only reinforce Ibsen's sense of national difference, and to the extent that it was based on a sense of superiority, also his anger at what he conceived as Danish indifference and arrogance. During the first years at Gyldendal he called Copenhagen 'the real Scandinavian centre',<sup>95</sup> he said that his intention was 'as much as possible to tie myself to Denmark',<sup>96</sup> that 'our Scandinavian literary activity' had to be concentrated as much as possible in the Danish capital,<sup>97</sup> and that he figured he would settle there.<sup>98</sup> As it turned out, he never went to live in Copenhagen, and during the 1870s his ambivalence about what he took to be Copenhagen's hegemonic pretensions seems to have grown in proportion to the advancement of his own literary reputation. His most explicit formulations on this issue came in a letter to Georg Brandes in 1874. Ibsen commented on the plans for the journal which came to be *Det Nittende Aarhundrede* (The Nineteenth Century), accusing Danes of being ignorant about what was going on in the other Nordic countries, of regarding it 'as almost an act of grace to acknowledge that what is strictly Norwegian has the right to express itself in literature', and always supposing 'that Denmark sets the standard':

The Copenhagen ignorance of Scandinavian affairs surpasses everything but Copenhagen arrogance [. . .] Your population of two million cannot support a periodical. If it is to succeed, you must not, in your Copenhagen superiority, overlook the four million Swedes, the two million Norwegians, the one million Finns, and the almost equally large Scandinavian population in America. This makes a public of about ten million in all. Give up your Copenhagen particularism. Write for them all. Then I will join you.<sup>99</sup>

Ibsen acknowledged that Brandes too was 'antagonistic to this "Copenhagenism"', but that he nevertheless was affected by it: 'The whole first volume of your *Main Currents in Nineteenth-Century Literature* is more an attack upon Copenhagen narrow-mindedness than upon the narrow-mindedness of Scandinavia in general.'

<sup>95</sup> Ibsen, Letter to M. Thoresen, 3 December 1865, *Letters of Henrik Ibsen*, trans. John Nilsen Laurvik & Mary Morison (New York: Duffield & Comp. 1908), 93.

<sup>96</sup> Ibsen, Letter to F.V. Hegel, 7 March 1866.

<sup>97</sup> Ibsen, Letter to F.V. Hegel, 22 August 1866, *Letters of*, 123.

<sup>98</sup> Ibsen, Letter to G. Brandes, 25 April 1866, *ibid.* 109.

<sup>99</sup> Ibsen, Letter to G. Brandes, 20 April 1874, *Letters and Speeches*, 148.



Speaking from a position on the periphery of the periphery, Ibsen performed a double distancing from Brandes. He both stressed the need, obvious for an author aware of being from a small nation, of transcending one's national context, and he attacked the 'provincialism of the centre', the confidence that in the centre 'the world comes to you anyway'.<sup>100</sup>

Ibsen repeated his criticism when a new issue of the journal was out by the beginning of 1875 – it is one of the rare occasions of him immediately answering a letter from Brandes. Although having found much of great interest in the new issue, he could still not 'help thinking that your magazine is far too exclusively Danish, or rather Copenhagenish, when your aim should absolutely be to take in all of Scandinavia'.<sup>101</sup> Ibsen advised Brandes to seek assistance in Norway and Sweden, and registered that there was one Swedish contribution, appearing in Danish translation:

do you Copenhageners believe that the Swedes will read original Swedish articles in Danish translation? Are the Danes really still so ignorant of Swedish that communications from that country cannot be understood unless they are translated? If so, the outlook for the most important of all our causes is very bad.<sup>102</sup>

For Ibsen, 'the most important of all our causes' was the Scandinavian idea, and to him that idea had two basic components: it aimed at levelling the internal cultural hierarchy between the Nordic countries, and it meant that Scandinavian readers should get used to reading each other's literature in the original languages. Ibsen always stuck to this principle and he was able to enforce it with the mutual Scandinavian agreements on copyright by the end of the 1870s. In practical terms, it meant that he would not authorise translations into Swedish for other purposes than theatre productions.

A strategy like this was probably only conceivable from a Norwegian position, thought of as a position in the middle, between Danish and Swedish. But even in Norway Ibsen's strategy meant a radical departure from established cultural practices. In Norway Swedish literature was read in translation, if read at all. In Norwegian book collections from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there are hardly books in Swedish and even few books by Swedish authors. The only contemporary Swedish author widely read in Norway before the middle of the nineteenth century was Esaias Tegnér with his hugely popular *Frithjof's Saga*, published in

<sup>100</sup> Martin Puchner, 'Goethe, Marx, Ibsen and the Creation of World Literature', *Ibsen Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1 (2013), 32.

<sup>101</sup> Ibsen, Letter to G. Brandes, 30 January 1875, *Letters and Speeches*, 154. <sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

Swedish in 1825 and translated and published in Norway the following year.<sup>103</sup> Conversely, Ibsen's strategy probably restricted his own dissemination in the Swedish book market, making his readership there smaller than what it might have been if he had allowed translations.

Another occasion for expressing his Norwegian identity came in 1878, when Ibsen wrote to the author, and later the model for Nora, Laura Kieler. Kieler was a Norwegian living and publishing in Denmark and she had been attacked in the Danish press. A reviewer had criticised her spelling of vowels, using short spellings instead of composite in accordance with Norwegian pronunciation, for example 'gåt' for 'gået' (gone), 'lamslåt' for 'lamslået' (paralysed); '[Just] because Ibsen's language is moving towards Swedish, Danish writers ought not to do it.'<sup>104</sup> Kieler had answered that her mother tongue was Norwegian and that the expressions she used was not only part of 'educated Norwegian speech, but also the written language, without in any way belonging to the "New Norwegian"'. The reviewer regretted that Norwegian authors always came up with this answer and thought that as long as Norwegian authors were published in Copenhagen, the Danish should have a say in the matter of language. In fact, criticism ought to be even stricter and should demand from the Norwegians that if they wanted to uphold the common literature they ought also to uphold the common language. If not, what would happen to Danish in the end? Major authors like Bjørnson and Ibsen were in a position to dictate their own conditions, the Danish critic admitted. But every year inferior authors joined them and with the great productivity of Norwegian literature they might one day make up half of what was published in Denmark. By that time it would be too late to 'protect the purity of our own language':

The good Norwegians would prefer, and we cannot blame them, to be free of Danish speech on their stages. Nor would we want to have Norwegian in our books. Exceptions will always be made in respect to the literary heroes, but if the lesser spirits in the future want to enjoy the material advantages which a Danish publisher can offer, they will have to speak and write Danish.<sup>105</sup>

Ibsen was critical of a manuscript that Kieler had sent him, but he supported and encouraged her in this particular matter. He told her not to let anyone influence her: 'There is so much inane correctness in Denmark. Be on your guard against it and similarly be on your guard

<sup>103</sup> Eide, *Bøker*, 39, 214, 288; Fredrik Paasche, *Norges litteratur* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1932), 37.

<sup>104</sup> Quoted in Tveterås, *Norske*, 409. <sup>105</sup> Quoted in *ibid.* 410.

against acting like a Dane, do not be ashamed of continuing to think and feel in Norwegian; one can obviously make you un-Norwegian, but you will not therefore become Danish.<sup>106</sup>

Norwegian authors were constantly reminded that they were on someone else's linguistic ground and not 'legitimate heirs' to the literary language.<sup>107</sup> They were immigrants, maybe even intruders, expected to comply with the owner's rules and regulations, not language users with full and equal rights of citizenship. The uneasiness of this situation is indicated by Ibsen's reluctance to give his language a national name. This was a common problem in Norway throughout the nineteenth century and Ibsen was in accordance with general practice when he usually settled for terms like 'the common' or 'the written language'. There are, however, examples of Ibsen using the double national designation: to a German he used 'the Norwegian-Danish language' and to a Dane 'the Danish-Norwegian language'.<sup>108</sup> In his late correspondence he would even resort to calling his language 'Norwegian', but never when writing to Danes.<sup>109</sup>

Ibsen was, then, located in the middle of a tension between the received vernacular language and literature and the demand for a new national language and literature, caused by the redrawing of the political state map by the beginning of the century.<sup>110</sup> His response was to resist enrolment on either side. This situation, although conflict-ridden, may also be considered highly privileged and productive for a writer; if we return to the resources available in this particular periphery, it may even be seen as a competitive advantage. The Norwegian 'language struggle' was accompanied by a heavily essentialist rhetoric of the sort we have also found in Ibsen in the 1850s, but the effect was nevertheless the opposite: Language was thoroughly de-naturalised and politicised. The Royal Theatre in Copenhagen was set to protect the purity of the language; the mission of the Norwegian theatre, and Norwegian literature, was to reform it. Language was not self-evident and natural for Norwegian authors; language stood out as a problem in its own right. No matter what particular choice was taken on the issue – opting either for Aasen, Knudsen, moderate adaptation, or the Danish status quo – it was a matter of choice, not a matter of course. All talk of 'purity' was to Ibsen 'inane correctness', because language to him was always under construction, impure – something that constantly had to be reflected upon.

<sup>106</sup> Ibsen, Letter to L. Kieler, 26 March 1878. <sup>107</sup> Casanova, *World Republic*, 262, 272.

<sup>108</sup> Ibsen, Letters to E. Brausewetter, 18 February 1886 and to J. Hoffory, 16 November 1888.

<sup>109</sup> Ibsen, Letters to R. Darzens, 6 May 1890, G. Vollmar, 22 August 1890, R.A. Armstrong, 4 May 1891, and G. af Geijerstam, 29 March 1892.

<sup>110</sup> Alexander Beecroft, 'World Literature without a Hyphen', *New Left Review*, no. 54 (2008), 96–7.

With reference to Ireland, Terry Eagleton describes this kind of linguistic situation as 'being stranded between two tongues'. He takes it to be an important reason why Ireland experienced a 'flourishing native modernism, as opposed to one imported from abroad'.<sup>111</sup> Being caught between different cultures and languages can only spur verbal self-consciousness; Joyce, notes Eagleton, 'observed that it was his freedom from English convention, including linguistic convention, that lay at the source of his talent'. Many Irish writers recognised a similarity between the Irish and the Norwegian literary and linguistic situation and felt, even though interpreting this situation in very different ways, a deep affinity with Ibsen in particular. Such will be the situation for any writer in fraught political circumstances; it is only in the 'centre' that language appears settled and natural.

A final far-reaching consequence of Ibsen's transition to Gyldendal was that it made him prioritise the book. His first two publications at Gyldendal, *Brand* (1866) and *Peer Gynt* (1867), were written as verse dramas primarily for reading. They gave Ibsen his Scandinavian breakthrough in the book market, at a time when he had still not been performed at The Royal Theatre in Copenhagen and only one play, *The Feast at Solhoug*, had been produced by The Royal Theatre in Stockholm (1857). With *The League of Youth* Ibsen went back to writing for the theatre. By the end of 1867, Hegel in fact asked Ibsen if he would not consider returning to 'dramatic writing for the theatres, which are lacking in new plays'.<sup>112</sup> Ibsen soon confirmed that this was his intention, and that publishing therefore had to wait. In October 1868, he wrote that publication was not to be considered 'until next autumn or winter, since the play is intended for the theatres; I will of course send you a transcript ['afskrift']'.<sup>113</sup> Hegel then offered to have the play set and printed as 'manuscript', that is: in just three copies for the theatres in Kristiania, Copenhagen and Stockholm. If it was accepted, the play should be available as a book after five performances.<sup>114</sup> The major reason for doing it in this order was that the theatres would not pay for published plays, or at least not very much; the theatre in Stockholm had even been criticised for having paid Bjørnson for the already printed *The Newly Married*.

By the beginning of 1869 Hegel reminded Ibsen that he was about to be too late for the present theatre season, but Ibsen had already realised this

<sup>111</sup> Terry Eagleton, 'An Octopus at the Window', *London Review of Books*, vol. 33, no. 10 (2011), 24.

<sup>112</sup> See comment to Ibsen, Letter to F.V. Hegel, 24 February 1868.

<sup>113</sup> Ibsen, Letter to F.V. Hegel, 10 October 1868.

<sup>114</sup> See comment to Ibsen, Letter to F.V. Hegel, 22 December 1868.

and had a plan: 'If it could be sent in to the theatres in May, then it would be possible to have it performed in September, and have it in the book-shops by October.'<sup>115</sup> Hegel replied that it might be impossible for the printer to have the set standing that long, and asked if the whole edition could be made at once if only he guaranteed that just the three copies, plus one for Ibsen himself, came out.<sup>116</sup> Ibsen had no objection. Hegel advised him to demand that the play be staged by September since it ought to be on the book market by October. Ibsen answered: 'If the play is accepted in Copenhagen, there can be no question of waiting for the performance there – the book must, of course, come out in the autumn; and I am quite prepared to be paid less by the theatre in consequence of this.'<sup>117</sup>

It all ended with the original plan being reversed – and never repeated. The priority of the book was underpinned by the expansion of the book market in the 1870s, a topic to which we will return. It was also strengthened by the state of copyright legislation. In the 1870s, when Ibsen was still not treated as a native author by Danish and Swedish theatres, the lack of protection could only motivate him to give priority to the book market. And when mutual protection was put into effect, his market value was such that increasing costs did not scare off the major theatres in Copenhagen and Stockholm.

This chapter has shown that the restrictions and opportunities facing Ibsen and other Norwegian authors were framed by a particular set of tensions between 'Norwegian', 'Danish' and 'international'. When the political union with Denmark ended in 1814, the two countries had shared a vernacular culture for centuries. Applying the new state borders to the established and contemporary practices of cultural production made the received tradition 'Danish' and 'foreign', just as Denmark itself had to reconstruct its cultural history and identity on national grounds. However, the vernacular system of cultural circulation did not disappear with the redrawing of state borders; in some respects, it was reinvigorated. In Norway, the written language continued to be basically Danish and from the 1860s, Copenhagen again became Norway's publishing capital, giving Norwegian authors access to a Danish-Norwegian book market. In the history of literature, the national principle took hold already in the nineteenth century and it has had a profound impact ever since. One of the effects of this bias has been to obscure the co-existence and tensions

<sup>115</sup> Ibsen, Letter to F.V. Hegel, 20 February 1869, *Letters of*, 163.

<sup>116</sup> See comment to Ibsen, Letter to F.V. Hegel, 14 March 1869.

<sup>117</sup> Ibsen, Letter to F.V. Hegel, 10 June 1869, *Letters of*, 168–69.

between the vernacular and the national throughout the whole of the nineteenth century. Norwegian authors have been excluded from the Danish history of literature, even if they wrote in Danish, were published in Copenhagen and had a wider Danish readership than those of native authors. On the other hand, the Danish publishing history of Norwegian literature has been treated more as an external issue than as something integral to its existence.

At the same time, the restrictions of Ibsen's theatre experience have tended to be associated primarily with a national program and a Norwegian, supposedly provincial audience. But it seems more apt to suggest that the restrictions Ibsen experienced were the restrictions of European theatre in general, and particularly the artistic limitations imposed under the commercial hegemony of the French theatre industry. In this respect, the most important aspect of Ibsen moving abroad and his move to a new publisher was that it meant an 'exile' from the institution of the theatre.<sup>118</sup> In 1864, Ibsen broke with the theatre as the institutional setting for playwriting. He later came back to the theatre, but when he returned, it was from the distanced position of literature. This was how he came to revolutionise both drama and theatre – at home and beyond.

<sup>118</sup> We want to thank Martin Puchner for helping us make this point.