

## IBSEN IN GEORGIA: MILESTONES IN THE RECEPTION

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From early on, Henrik Ibsen has played an important part on the Georgian stage, as well as in Georgian literary thought. Already in 1897 the Georgian newspaper *Kvali* wrote about Ibsen's creative work in its brief biography of the dramatist:

In these dramas there lives a great artist and philosopher paying great attention to the situation in this world. Ibsen is the founder of the naturalist school not only in his country but in Germany as well. He made the world see that the cruelty of life had been created by the will of people deviating from the right path in life. (*Kvali*, 1897, 363)<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, interestingly, the article points out:

Ibsen's creative work is illuminated by a kind of mysterious light: as if the writer lives at the edge of this world and makes us feel life's invisible forces through symbolic, mysterious pictures" (*Kvali*, 1897, 363)

In these excerpts from *Kvali* there is a clear polarization in the assessment of Ibsen's creative work. He is the founder of "Naturalism" both in Norway and in Germany, and at the same time the author of the *Kvali* essay underlines the mysterious, symbolic aspects of his plays. This may appear strange and unexpected, in particular to those whose appreciation of Ibsen has been formed by Norwegian and Anglo-American criticism, where Ibsen's realism is often seen in contrast to the naturalist school. At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, however, the conception of Ibsen as the founder of the naturalist school was widely accepted on the continent, in Germany, in particular, and we may assume that the anonymous author of the *Kvali* essay had formed his portrait of Ibsen against the background of the German reception of his late dramas.<sup>2</sup>

In the following, I will try to contextualize the Georgian reception of Ibsen through an analysis of the arguments and rhetoric employed by the critics.

Soon after the *Kvali* essay, in the repertoire of Georgian theatres, the leading place was taken by *Nora* (i.e. *A Doll's House*). This play was first performed on 20 February 1898 in Kutaisi, staged by the great Georgian producer Lado Meskhishvili, who played the role of Helmer. The part of Nora was played by the famous Georgian actress Nino Chkheidze. 20 March 1903 the first public performance took place in Tbilisi. It was played by "The company of actors", directed by the well-known producer and actor Valerian Gunia. The Georgian text had been translated from

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<sup>1</sup> Where nothing else is said, the translations from Georgian to English are my own.

<sup>2</sup> In German Ibsen scholarship the playwright is still situated between Naturalism and symbolism, e.g. in the volume *Ibsen im europäischen Spannungsfeld zwischen Naturalismus und Symbolismus: Kongressakten der 8. Internationalen Ibsen-Konferenz, Gossensass, 23.-28.6.1997*

Russian by him and the playwright Avqsenti Tsagareli. Quite well, according to common opinion.

Since 1903, the play *Doctor Stockmann* (i.e. *An Enemy of the People*) had been performed not only once by a cast from “The Georgian Dramatist Society”, produced by the great Georgian poet Akaki Tsereteli, and the famous theatrical figure Kote Meskhi. The play became very popular in Georgia at the time. It was performed not only by professionals, but also by amateurs who were oriented towards a less sophisticated audience. In 1903, referring to the first performance of *Dr Stockmann*, *Kvali* wrote: “At last an ideological play! At last our society could see pictures true to life from our stage” (Amirejibi, 1956, 13).

It is worth noting that Georgian critics generally responded to *A Doll's House* more coolly than *An Enemy of the People*. According to Shalva Natadze's assessment “the majority of the society recognized Nora's conduct as a slap in the face of morality” (Amerejibi, 1956, 13). However, there was a different kind of evaluation, too: In 1904, under the pseudonym of Negro, Grigol Rtskhiladze compared Nora and Mrs. Alving from *Ghosts* to each other in the Georgian newspaper *tsnobis purceli* (*Nyhetsbladet*). In order to defend Nora he declared: “If the main conditions for happiness are truth and freedom, happiness cannot be gained by the person whose activity and life are not based on this freedom and truth” (Amirejibi, 1956, 14).

Apart from the two plays mentioned above, *Ghosts*, too, was staged in Georgia in the first decade of the twentieth century. Once more, V. Gunia was the successful translator and producer, and he also played the part of Oswald. Somewhat later it was followed by *Pillars of Society*, which was translated by the Georgian actor Aleksandre Imedashvili.

In the first decade of the twentieth century Ibsen's creative work met with active responses from Georgian writers and literary critics. In 1906, presumably on the occasion of the death of Ibsen, there was an extensive article in the Georgian newspaper *Iveria*, published under the pseudonym M. Ad-Li by Mikheil Javakhishvili, later the classic author of Georgian prose and one of the leading figures in twentieth-century Georgian literature. At the beginning of the article, he discusses the different phases in the development of tragedy in the history of literature, observing that in this regard Ibsen laid the foundation for a new phase. And then the author continues:

What could not have been done by the splendid naturalist Zola was realized by the Norwegian dramatist of genius Henrik Ibsen, who like Zola was a kind of Darwinist. He dispensed with the kind of dialogue and popularization so characteristic of Zola, and introduced on the stage the kind of life that he saw with his own individualist eyes. One can clearly see the influence of the theory of heredity in several of Ibsen's plays: *Pillars of Society*, *The Wild Duck*, *A Doll's House*, *Rosmersholm* and *The league of Youth*. But the new Darwinist fatum was expressed most strongly and artistically in *Ghosts*, which Edgar Stager called the tragedy of syphilis. Ibsen called *Ghosts* a drama, but this is a weak characterization of the play. *Ghosts* is a tragedy, a severe and terrible one, which is no less dramatic than *Oedipus the King*, *Macbeth* or *Hamlet* [...] *Ghosts* started a real revolution

in nineteenth-century drama. If in ancient Greece the characters of Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripides were the victims of fate, fatum, that were invisible for them, if the heroes of Shakespeare were defeated by their own passions and consciousness, “now – said Ibsen – we are destroyed by a more real, severe, terrible and unfair cause. This is the hereditary disease, which is severe and horrible”. (M. Ad-Li, 1906, 6)

The bringing together of Ibsen and Zola as Darwinists suggests that Javakhishvili, too, had been inspired by the German Ibsen reception towards the end of the nineteenth century. According to John Osborne, “Ibsen, from *Pillars of Society* onwards and the writings – both theoretical and creative – of Zola constituted the principal foreign influences upon the work of the German Naturalists” (Osborne, 1967, 196).

Then M. Ad-Li evaluates Ibsen’s social opinions:

Ibsen is the implacable enemy of the tyranny and democracy of the majority, which the greatest writer of the North, as an extreme individualist, does not respect or obey. Ibsen’s aristocratic radicalism does not at all deny the love for the people, but it does not bow down before the majority, of which the people consist. Ibsen is an aristocrat from beginning to end. He rejects root-and-branch its morality and the philosophy of the crowd, and does not believe that the masses of people can do anything for mankind or play the role of the creator of history [...] His only criterion for a positive appraisal of human behavior is ethical aristocratism. (M. Ad-Li, 1906, 7)

In this passage Javakhishvili seems to go a step further in his German-inspired understanding of Ibsen. His use of the term “aristocratic radicalism” points directly to the Danish literary critic Georg Brandes, who coined the concept in a letter to Nietzsche in 1888, in which he described Nietzsche’s philosophy as “aristocratic radicalism”, a description which delighted Nietzsche. The concept of “aristocratic radicalism” influenced most of Brandes’ later works, as well as the works of German and Scandinavian intellectuals and writers. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, according to Osborne, “the interest of the young German Naturalists switches from novel to drama, in which political commitment, Social altruism and Utopianism, begin to give way to Nietzschean individualism and a overriding concern with ethical problems and in which Zola is supplanted by Ibsen as the most admired foreign model”. (Osborne, 1967, 196)

M. Ad-Li continues:

Ibsen’s opinion of the social condition and of the family is of great importance. [...] In this regard his most remarkable contribution is the individual drama *Nora*, which has mercilessly displayed the real hidden motive and basis of contemporary marriage. [...] From the point of view of contemporary morality and ethics, the kind of conduct such as Nora’s is a crime, but Ibsen the individualist does not pay any attention to

contemporary morality and only thinks and cares for the individual. (M. Ad-Li, 1906, 8)

At the time of its appearance in 1879, *A Doll's House* was perceived within the framework of Georg Brandes' *Main Currents in the Literature of the Nineteenth Century* (4 vols. 1872–75). Here, the Danish critic demanded from modern literature that it should debate contemporary social problems (“Det, at en litteratur i vore dage lever, viser seg i, at den sætter problemer under debat”). This was seen as the main criterion of *critical realism* and *A Doll's House*, in which the institution of marriage and the situation of the married woman are analyzed on the stage, was received as a model of this new current. In Javakhishvili's assessment of the play, however, the accents have been shifted towards Nora as a manifestation of Ibsen's individualism, an interpretation that is much more in line with the perception of Ibsen as a spokesman of aristocratic radicalism. The article concludes with the following assessment:

Henrik Ibsen died, but humankind will remember his name as long as the names of Shakespeare, Sophocles, Euripides and Aeschylus live in its memory. (M. Ad-Li, 1906, 8)

That *Ghosts* is a tragedy about syphilis as a sin Osvald had inherited from his father, and that he was destroyed by a combination of hereditary sin and social environment was an understanding of the play not confined to the German Ibsen reception of the period. In the 1890s, after the first performances of *Ghosts*, a number of critics were appalled by its presentation of the taboo theme of hereditary venereal disease and wrote rather disparagingly of its author. That Ibsen is a dramatist on a par with Shakespeare and the Greek tragedians was an opinion that was formed only gradually. By the time Javakhishvili wrote his essay, however, many literary historians shared the Georgian author's high opinion of the Norwegian tragedy writer. In 1900, for example, *The Literary Digest* had published a summary of professor Charles Harold Herford's article on Ibsen and Maeterlinck as successors of the Greek tragedians (XXI, No. 14, 309). In this summary, Herford is quoted to the effect that Ibsen, the author of *Ghosts* and “a poet of Naturalism” has “touched to modern issues the essential tragedy of ‘Oedipus the King’”. Going on to Ibsen the “Symbolist”, the summary asserts that he “differs from the school of M. Maeterlinck in using as 'symbol' not the most fantastic and visionary, but the most human and vernacular, element of his thought”.

In Georgia, an attempt to analyze the creative work of Ibsen and Maeterlinck in a comparative perspective was made by Petre Davadadze in his article “Ibsen and Maeterlinck” in *Theatre and Life*. The article was published in 1910, the year before Maeterlinck was awarded the Nobel Prize. Here, the author asserts that

among the individualist writers some of them adore the powerful, supernatural personality, strengthen the desire for struggle and inject hope into peoples' pallid lives, whereas others show the weakness of the human spirit and mind and promise everlasting suffering to already tormented

humankind [...] Henrik Ibsen belongs to the first group of writers and Maeterlinck to the second. (Dadvadze, 1910, 5)

Again, this echoes the Ibsen of “aristocratic radicalism” and Nietzsche’s supernatural personality. In Dadvadze’s opinion:

Ibsen and Maeterlink are obviously aware of the split between the individual and the universe. Ibsen supported the person. To his mind human beings should try their best to conquer the world down to the last drop of their blood and if they die in this struggle, then death itself will be the grand victory and the holiest victim. But Maeterlink could not find salvation in this disagreement, diseased by this feebleness he only looks at the merciless fate and the man demolished by it. (Dadvadze, 1910, 6)

The contrast is here between Ibsen, in whose characters we experience repeated human attempts at transcending earthly limitation and Maeterlinck’s Schopenhauerian conception of a humankind powerless against the forces of fate.

In 1928, almost thirty years after Dadvadze’s article, Konstantine Gamsakhurdia published his collection of essays, *The New Europe*, containing the great Georgian writer’s fascinating essay “Henrik Ibsen”. In an exalted tone and in deep sympathy with the Norwegian genius, Gamsakhurdia writes:

The last century had three great sources of inspiration. Friedrich Nietzsche, Henrik Ibsen and Leo Tolstoy. Friedrich Nietzsche disapproved of modernity and its civilization from an aesthetic point of view. Ibsen and Tolstoy were apostles of a new morality. The search for this new morality crushed the poet in them. Being a poet does not mean to move the center of gravity into the moral sphere at all. Maybe the greatest fault and dignity of Ibsen should be looked for here. I personally lack the contact with Ibsen’s spiritual world exactly here. It is strange to me as a writer, but I understand it perfectly as a human being. (Gamsakhurdia, 1963, 422)

Gamsakhurdia’s criticism in this passage is clearly directed against plays such as *A Doll’s House*, i.e. plays inspired by Georg Brandes’ demand for progressive, realistic literature debating problems. No wonder, then, that Gamsakhurdia considers *Peer Gynt* to be the crown of Ibsen’s works. As for characters like Brand and Dr. Stockmann, in the Georgian writer’s opinion they are

people poisoned by the ideals of the superhuman that is characteristic of Nietzsche. But if Zarathustra moved into the desert, Ibsen’s characters move out towards the people from the desert created in their own soul in order to preach the concept of a new, pacified, purified humanity to them. That’s why Ibsen used to struggle with ethical problems like a Goliath. He was above all a moral reformer, preacher and people’s tribune! (Gamsakhurdia, 1963, 424)

It looks as if Gamsakhurdia here sees Brand and Dr. Stockmann through Nietzschean lenses, which is interesting, considering the fact that *Brand* was written in 1866, long before Nietzsche had begun to publish his famous works. At the same time, Gamsakhurdia proclaims that “Ibsen was as fanatic and as fond of preaching as Brand. Either everything or nothing!” And he adds that it is exactly people like Brand who “create spiritual culture, such people make history go round, because fishlike, cold-blooded people are unable to create anything in the world except a stagnate, philistine existence” (Gamsakhurdia, 1963, 425) In this evaluation of Ibsen as another Brand, Gamsakhurdia again understands Ibsen through Nietzsche, but this time positively, as a creative genius in sharp contrast to the philistine world of the masses of uncreative, common people. “Causing a revolution in the human mind, this was Ibsen’s primary battle cry”, according to Gamsakhurdia:

As to Ibsen’s mindset, he was a universal soul. In his writings are realized the great ideas of both the nineteenth and the twentieth century. The aesthetic and religious-philosophical ideas, the ideas of social reforms, in short – all the cursed issues which were so problematic in the last century as well as nowadays. [...] It was well noticed by Bernard Shaw: only soft-brained idiots and people with broken minds do not understand the greatness of Ibsen. (Gamsakhurdia, 1963, 427)

It looks as if Gamsakhurdia may have known Shaw’s famous essay, “The Quintessence of Ibsenism” (1891), an essay largely devoted to a discussion of Ibsen’s recurring topic of the strong character holding out against social hypocrisy.

In 1928 it had still been possible for Gamsakhurdia to discuss Ibsen in Nietzschean terms. For even though Georgia had been forced against its will to be integrated in the Soviet Union at the beginning of the decade, it was only in the late 1920’ that the Georgian intellectuals had to conform with the doctrines of *Marxism-Leninism* in their writings.

In the same year 1928, however, a comprehensive essay on Ibsen from a Marxist-Leninist point of view appeared in the journal *Mnatobi* (*The Beacon*), written by the Georgian writer and publicist Varlam Khurodze on the occasion of the one-hundredth anniversary of Ibsen’s birth.

Khurodze, a convinced Bolshevik, became a member of the Russian Bolshevik Party already at the age of twenty-two, in revolutionary year 1905. In his article he writes:

Plekhanov says that Ibsen was given the rapturous applauses and ovations of the revolutionaries in the whole of Europe, the anarchists in particular. As it seems, Plekhanov himself has applauded him not only once, although the theory of Marxism was as far from the anarchists as the earth from the sky. But this was in the era before the World War. Today, at the time of revolutions, we are not so attracted by Ibsen, and his name has been quite overshadowed by modernity. How can this situation be explained? [...] What is the reason that we are not interested in Ibsen’s literary characters any more? (Khurodze, 1928, 191 & 192)

On the one hand, the author does not want to diminish Ibsen's gift and importance, but he sees problems when he begins to read Ibsen's creative work from Marxist positions. We see the conflict expressed in the following:

Ibsen's types struggle against bourgeois ethical decay, duplicity, weakness of will, opportunism, selfishness, morals. Ibsen is really a poet with "a rebellious soul". But from a Marxist point of view, granting Ibsen this kind of epithet would be a kind of metaphysics. As a matter of fact, Marxism does not believe in the man and his soul outside concrete circumstances. Generally, man does not exist as an abstract creature in the world. No, according to this doctrine, every human person is, first of all, a class creature and one's "rebellion of the soul" and one's calmness as well, should be studied from this point of view [...] Individualism and superman, these are the favourite ideas of two of the great thinkers Nietzsche and Stirner. And Ibsen expresses their opinions poetically, Nietzsche and Stirner say in philosophy what Ibsen displays artistically right in front of us in his universally known dramatic compositions (Khurodze, 1928, 192 & 195)

In Khurodze's criticism it is interesting to notice that he lumps Nietzsche with Max Stirner, the author of *The Ego and Its Own* (*Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, 1845) and one of the forerunners of nihilist anarchism later in the century. Stirner and his ideas played a prominent role in Russian intellectual life during the second half of the nineteenth century, in particular because of Dostoevsky's implicit critique of them in *Crime and Punishment*. The inclusion of Stirner in Khurodze's contextualizing of Ibsen suggests that he was more influenced by the Russian than by the German reception of the Norwegian playwright. Khurodze criticizes Ibsen severely from the point of view of Soviet ideology as it was propagated at the beginning of the Stalin era:

The strong individuals created by Ibsen totally contradict the idea of equality among people, reject modern democratic opinions, and advocate a mental and physical aristocracy. That is why Brand, Stockmann, and other characters in Ibsen's work struggle separately, personally, and they will never stand for the 'crowd'. In their hands, the crowd is a kind of raw material on the way to finding the highest type human being. [...] Neither Nietzsche nor Ibsen believes in the collective and in struggling together with it; they are totally against the social formula that is recognized by the proletariat. It is true that the aim seems to be the same [...] but the means of struggle are so different that finally the aim also turns out to be different. The struggle against the bourgeoisie with the help of the superman in order to create types of supermen – such is the formula of Nietzsche and Ibsen. The struggle against the bourgeoisie through rallying the working class in order to set the same working class free, this is the second formula. That is why, although bearers of the proletarian idea applauded Ibsen for quite some time, the applause did not last to the end [...] (Khurodze, 1928, 196 & 198)

Khurodze's Marxist reception of Ibsen is reinforced by an argument against the superman, well known in liberal nineteenth-century Russian critique of the Napoleon cult. This tradition would explain his strange characterization of Ibsen's heroes: "For them, the crowd is a kind of raw material on the way to finding the highest human being". The whole phrase is reminiscent of Pushkin's ironic criticism of the Napoleon cult of his contemporaries in his verse novel *Eugene Onegin*. Most readers of the novel used to know this passage by heart: "We all want to become Napoleons; / The millions of two-legged creatures / For us are just tools" (II, 14). A similar critique of Napoleon as an incarnation of the superman is also found in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* from 1866.

At the end of the article, in a kind of summary, Khurodze shows the reason why in his view modern man has lost his interest in Ibsen:

Ibsen declared that he gives the main importance to the explosion of the human soul and not to the political form [...] In his opinion, we are obliged to transform ourselves into human beings, and are not obliged to become citizens at all [...] Such are the general lines of the writer who at a time helped to make the great ideas fierce. Today we live in the different era of proletariat dictatorship and are striving for different ideals. That is why we are satisfied by only remembering Ibsen. (Khurodze, 1928, 199)

In his conclusion, Khurodze was obviously too rash. Bolshevik Marxism-Leninism is now part of the past, and the ideals of proletariat dictatorship were already forgotten when the Soviet Union collapsed, whereas Ibsen is more alive than ever.

However, in spite of Marxist-Leninist criticism of Ibsen, his plays continued to be performed, also during the Stalinist era. An example worth noting from the history of the Georgian Soviet theatre is the performance of *Ghosts* at The Sancultural Theatre. The premiere took place in the theatrical season of 1937/38. The play was translated into Georgian by Grigol Nutsbidze, and staged by Shalva Aghsabadze.

It was only after Stalin's death in 1953 that there was a gradual change in Ibsen scholarship in the USSR, a change that may also be observed in Georgian criticism.

In 1956, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Ibsen's death, the magazine *Soviet Art* published an article by the Georgian theatre historian Tamar Amirejibi. In her article, she repeats a widespread Soviet cliché about Ibsen's plays: "Of course, during the period of the building of socialism, Ibsen's dramas certainly lost their previous actuality" (Amirejibi, 1956, 14). But in Amirejibi's article, the prevailing view of Ibsen as a petit-bourgeois who, because of his abstract individualism and pessimism, never became a revolutionary, is used more as a precautionary measure, whereas the gist of her argument goes in a different direction. She sees Ibsen's criticism of Norwegian bourgeois society in almost all his plays. In order to bring out its significance, she emphasizes, in particular, the concept of "critical realism", which, as we know, goes back to Georg Brandes. Moreover, by claiming that Soviet scholarship has rejected Western critics' conceptions of Ibsen as an anarchist, a naturalist, a follower of Nietzsche, and a decadent, she indirectly reactivates in Georgian Ibsen criticism ideas that had been suppressed during the



Stalinist period. In spite of all his contradictions, Ibsen is, according to Amirejibi, “an enormous event in world literature”, and in Georgia, the popularity of his works and the admiration for their author never weakened.

On the same occasion, A. Chkadua assessed Ibsen’s creative work from a Soviet point of view in the magazine *For a Communist Upbringing*. In Chkadua, we find no trace of the skeptical attitude characteristic of Khurodze’s above-mentioned article. Instead, Chkadua makes the following stimulating remarks:

As if he [Ibsen] challenged the whole of society to a duel. That is why he lacked neither admirers nor enemies. Each of his new plays was met by curse and praise at the same time, but never by silence. Indifference is incompatible with the name of Ibsen. [...] Dream, hope and its disappointment, such is the human’s fate in Ibsen’s opinion, but this did not weaken the thirst for struggle in him, though it is obvious: the struggle attracted him more than its result”. (Chkadua, 1956, 80 & 81)

Chkadua evades earlier Soviet stereotypes and introduces into Soviet criticism a conception of Ibsen as a writer of dream, hope and disappointment, a conception in line with the “Thaw” (Ottepel’) that prevailed in Soviet literary criticism in the first decades after Stalin’s death.

In 1957 Akaki Gelovani published his brochure *Henrik Ibsen*. Here, Ibsen is already in the table of contents referred to as “The lion of the dramatic arts”, “The great realist”, and “The great citizen and poet of peoples’ brotherhood”. Following from this, it’s natural that in the book itself, the life and creative work of the great writer is valued positively, and this had now become possible, thanks to the post-Stalinist “Thaw” that we already saw an example of in Chkadua’s appraisal of Ibsen from the previous year.

It is symptomatic that in his 1960-article, “Henrik Ibsen Is Still Fighting”, Otar Jinoria focuses on Khurodze’s criticism of Ibsen in particular, and deliberately distances himself from it, even in the title, despite the fact that in Jinoria’s article some of the Soviet ideological stereotypes are still in evidence, e.g. the opening passage about anarchists and individualists recognizing Ibsen “as a person sympathetic to them”. But a comparison of these two articles brings out quite clearly the changes that have been made within the framework of Soviet ideology during the more than thirty years that separate them from each other. Jinoria notes at the very beginning:

Different groups of anarchists and individualists actually recognized Ibsen as a person sympathetic to them, but this only tarnished his image, and his enormous popularity did not rely on their recognition; the broader democratic society understood the dramatist of the twentieth century far better, seeing in him its own poet and companion-in-arms because of his relentless struggle against the cruelty and falsehood reigning around them, and his ruthless exposition of the bourgeois society’s obsession with the passions of self-interest and greed, spiritually perverting and weakening humanity. (Jinoria, 1960, 59)

Jinoria believes that Ibsen's implacability of "capitalist abnormality" and his "dream of people having a real, strong and independent personality" cannot be explained only by his personal, psychical-moral nature. Just like so many other authors of the Soviet period, Jinoria in his analysis is happy to be able to find support for his argument in a quotation from Engels:

The Norwegian petty bourgeois is a child of the free and as a result he is a real human, compared to the degraded German bourgeoisie [...] and whatever faults Ibsen's dramas have, they paint a petty and middle bourgeois universe, but not comparable to the German one at all, a universe where people still preserve their character and initiative, and act [...] independently. (Jinoria, 1960, 60)

The reference to Engels and the Norwegian petty bourgeois, as well as Jinoria's claim about a fundamental contradiction in Ibsen's creative work, conditioned by the petty-bourgeois framework of his humanist beliefs, do not convince us today. Less stereotypical, but still marked by Soviet prejudice, is his contention that "the poet having set up against existing reality the vague, abstract conception of freedom, and, more important, thinking that in this struggle for freedom and the future happiness of people the decisive role is played by strong, solitary individuals. This circumstance gives his revolt a groundless, romantic character" (Jinoria, 1960, 60). In Jinoria's opinion, the petty-bourgeois individualism turned out to be something Ibsen was unable ever to defeat, a fact he explains by the historic specificity of Norway. In support of this explanation he cites the evaluation of the well-known Marxist, G. Plekhanov:

At the time when Ibsen's opinions and aspirations were being formed, the working class, in today's understanding of this word, hadn't been formed in Norway and that is why it was not seen in the social life of the country (Jinoria, 1960, 63)

One is left with the impression that Jinoria did not fully understand the social background of Ibsen's upper middle class characters and of the author himself as the son of a degraded upper class father, and that he tries to hide his ignorance behind Plekhanov's sweeping generalizations. This rhetoric device becomes even more unconvincing when he goes on to describe the speech Ibsen gave at the union of workers in Trondheim in 1885. Here, the great writer expressed his hope in the possibilities of the proletariat. But, Jinoria concludes, "unfortunately, this hope had not been changed into the belief which would give him the chance to get rid of his individualist heroes and find the salvation and future in the proletariat", (Jinoria, 1960, 63).

As already mentioned, during the post-Stalinist "Thaw", a gradual devaluation of forcedly established values became manifest throughout the Soviet Union. In this process Georgia was in the forefront. The intellectual part of Georgian society became aware of the necessity of searching for new ways. According to the

assessment of the theatre historian Nino Kiria: “This phenomenon was also reflected in the theatre. The theatrical figures tried to awaken society, to tell them through metaphors that it was impossible to live in that way. Exactly at that time the plays of the Norwegian playwright appeared on the playbills of the Georgian theatre” (Kiria, 2006, 41).

In 1972, the producer Robert Sturua, later to become famous worldwide, staged *An Enemy of the People* at the Rustaveli Theatre in Tbilisi. In his production, Sturua used elements appropriated from the cinema. Before each of the acts there was a projection screen on which extracts from the text were marked in red. Thanks to this device, Sturua was able directly and openly to conduct the audience towards what to him was the basic idea of the play. In the third act, he placed dummies among the audience listening to Dr. Stockman’s speech. Dressed in black and with grey faces, these lifeless figures not only represented the bigoted crowd denouncing the doctor as an enemy of the people. To an audience that had grown up under communist totalitarianism and Soviet dictatorship, the crowd on the stage was turned into an allegorical image of the blind and obedient masses that had passively, and not so passively, stood by and watched as people in their own midst were being persecuted as “enemies of the people”.

In 1976 Temur Chkheidze staged *Ghosts* at the Marjanishvili Theatre in Tbilisi. In the play, the producer put forward the most important problem thinkable for his contemporaries. He showed the moral death of the members of a degenerated society, left without any foundation. The audience, however, felt that what they saw on the stage, was also a reflection of their own situation. The great value of this extremely successful play, lay in its cast of talented actors, including the living legends of the Georgian theatre: Veriko Anjaparidze, Akaki Vasadze, Sophiko Chiaureli, Nodar Mgaloblishvili, and Givi Berikashvili. Chkheidze’s characteristic way of producing enabled the actors to give a maximal presentation of the complex, deeply psychological character of Ibsen’s heroes.

In the autonomous Georgian republic of Abkhazia the producer and actor Giorgi Kavtaradze in 1988 staged Ibsen’s early play, *The Pretenders*, at the Sokhumi Georgian Drama Theatre, named after Konstantine Gamsakhurdia. In staging Ibsen’s play Kavtaradze paid attention to the themes that expressed his own opinion and pain during that period: “The interest in this play was caused by the political changes which were taking place in Georgia as well as in the rest of the Soviet Union at the end of the 1980s. The myth of the invincibility of the Soviet system gradually began to crumble. Georgia had come face to face with Freedom. In the era of remake and renewal the issue came up about what kind of person should rule the country”. (Kiria, 2006, 42–43). Staging this play about power struggle and rivalry, Kavtaradze must have had an uncanny foreboding of what was yet to come when Georgia in 1991 declared its independence in and the country was thrown into a fierce struggle for power.

After the end of the Soviet period, Ibsen has been staged at least five times in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. *Nora* (i.e. *A Doll’s House*) produced by Guliko Butkhuzi at the Sardapi Theatre (The part of Nora was played by Eka Chkheidze, the daughter of the above-mentioned producer Temur Chkheidze). In November 2008, a production of *Ghosts* by Maia Shengelia was performed at the Theatre of Young

Spectators named after Nodar Dumbadze. In 2010, Giorgi Kavtaradze once again turned to Ibsen. As in 1988, he chose a play loaded with political accents, staging *An Enemy of the People* at The Actors Theatre. Then, in May 2011, there was a performance of *A Doll's House*, produced by Ioane Khutsishvili at the Free Theatre. Furthermore, in November the same year, the Free Theatre staged *Ghosts* in a production by Davit Daniela.

As the overview above indicates, from the publication of Ibsen's biography in the newspaper *Kvali* in 1897, the dramatist has been continuously discussed, translated, written about and performed in Georgia. Ibsen has been received under different circumstances and by different generations: to pursue the reception of Ibsen in Georgia is, in a way, to pursue the development of Georgian intellectual and cultural history in the period.

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### **Summary**

From early on, Henrik Ibsen has played an important part on the Georgian stage, as well as in Georgian literary thought. Since the publication of Ibsen’s biography in the newspaper *Kvali* in 1897, the dramatist has been continuously discussed, translated, written about and performed in Georgia. Ibsen has been received under different circumstances and by different generations: to pursue the reception of Ibsen in

Georgia is, in a way, to pursue the development of Georgian intellectual and cultural history in the period.

In Georgia, various celebrations of Ibsen's birth and death were marked, in a number of articles, and even a little book on Ibsen by Akaki Gelovani were published.

Well-known Georgian authors have also been interested in Ibsen. In our context, one should mention that both Mikhail Javakhishvili and Konstantin Gamsakhurdia, the classic authors of modern Georgian prose, wrote famous essays on Ibsen.

Ibsen was and is constantly referred to in Georgian literary studies, not least in connection with Georgian writers. In post-Soviet Georgia, Ibsen is very much on the agenda, and his plays are produced and discussed as they always have been.

**Keywords**

Ibsen, Georgia, Drama, Reception, Tragedy.