

TÜRKİYE'DE İBSEN

IBSEN IN TURKEY

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Özet

Toplumsal çelişkiler üzerine kurulu tiyatrosuyla Ibsen, genç cumhuriyetin ilk yıllarında yaşanan aydınlanmanın lokomotifi olan Türk tiyatrosunun önemli simalarından biridir. Muhsin Ertuğrul Türkiye'deki ilk Ibsen sahnelemesi öncesinde yaşadığı korkuları anlatıyor: "Melodramlara ve basit vodvillere alışık türk izleyicisine Ibsen çok fazla gelecekti. Neyse ki yaşanan bu olmadı. Norveçli ozan akıllara ve duygulara hitap etmenin doğru oranlarını bildiğinden Türk izleyicisinin sıcak tepkisini ve alkışını kazandı.

Ne yazık ki Muhsin Ertuğrul'un 1979'daki ölümünden sonra Ibsen'i savunacak başka biri gelmedi. Son yirmi yıldır hiçbir oyunun sahnelenmemiş olması hâla önceki çabaları karşılayacak bir yönelimin olmadığını kanıtlıyor.

Abstract

Ibsen and his serious drama of social conflict have been instruments of Turkish enlightenment during the early years of the young republic in the leadership of the prominent figure of Turkish theatre. Muhsin Ertugrul states his fears about first staging Ibsen in Turkey :“ For a public conditioned to melodramas and hide-and seek vaudevilles (Ibsen) could have weighed too heavy. Thankfully that was not the case. The Norwegian sage who knows how to appeal to the intellect in proportion to the sentiments encountered warmth and applause from the Turkish audience.” Unfortunately Ibsen has not had an advocate after M. Ertugrul's death in 1979. The fact that none of his plays have been produced in the last twenty years proves that there is yet no substitute for previous efforts.

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The first Ibsen play to be staged in Turkey dates back to 1918. It was produced by Muhsin Ertugrul, who lived between 1892-1979 and came to be called the “father” of modern Turkish theatre. In his memoirs he gives an account of how he saw a French translation of *When We Dead Awaken* in the window of a French bookstore in Istanbul. He bought the book at the expense of skipping a meal. (His diplomat family rejected him when he chose to become an actor) Finishing the play with the aid of a French-Turkish dictionary, he found himself overwhelmed: “That was my first encounter with the Norwegian genius. My love started with that work but my attachment grew later”.

Ertugrul visited Paris in 1911 for the first time. Later, he went to Germany in 1918. There he attended twice weekly performances of *Peer Gynt* at the Lessing Theater, 47 performances in sum. He was particularly fascinated by the technique of scenery change.

The Municipal Theatre of Istanbul was founded in 1914 with the support of a theatre-loving governor. Several troupes however already existed in Istanbul at the turn of the century, consisting predominantly of Armenian actors. Ertugrul joined one of these and with unerring passion he built up a grandiose career with many ups and downs. As a founder of the Municipal Theatre company he finds himself faced with a decision to either play light comedies of the French boulevard type or serious drama of social issues. Supporters of comedies hold that for a public not yet aware of western bourgeois theatre conventions, light musicals and comedies could be a warm-up. Muhsin Ertugrul chooses the second alternative and in Ibsen he sees the perfect example of serious drama.

Returning from his 1918 travel to Germany he forms a different group he calls “The Literary Theatre Troupe”, in order to avoid conflict within the municipal troupe and stages Ibsen’s *Ghosts*. He has translated the text into Turkish, directed it as well as interpreting two different roles. Unfortunately his audience is not numerous. On the third evening they perform in front of

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eight persons, five of whom are foreign acquaintances living in Istanbul, who had already seen the play. Ghosts is found “provocative”. However the director confesses to be content with the result.

In 1933-34 M. Ertugrul makes his second attempt at producing an Ibsen play. This time he attains success. Peer Gynt remains on the repertoire of the Municipal Troupe up to 1938 and receives approval from intellectuals and journalists of the period, notably from Nadir Nadi.

In 1937 The Wild Duck is performed, again under the direction of Muhsin Ertugrul. The company has been existing for a while and seems to have developed an ensemble spirit. Even the smaller roles are played by well-known actors.

The State Theatre, which started as the school stage of the State Conservatory in 1941, under the direction of Carl Ebert from Berlin, becomes an official company in 1949. Musin Ertugrul is appointed “Intendant”. During this year of changes there are two Ibsen productions in Turkey. At the Municipal Theatre in Istanbul Brand is staged by a popular actor, Hüseyin Kemal Gürmen, whom Ertugrul trusted with this play. Again many famous names feature in the smallest roles, and most roles are double-cast so that each actor in the troupe gets a role. In Ankara Ertugrul himself stages Peer Gynt with young graduates of the new conservatoire, among them, Cüneyt Gökçer, to be the later and almost lifelong Intendant of the State Theatre, in the title role.

The next Peer Gynt in Turkey is staged in 1956 by another Max Reinhardt collaborator, Max Meinecke who found his way to Istanbul with the aid of the Orientalist Professor Herbert Duda in 1952. Meinecke was originally a stage designer. He had also studied theatre theory at the university in Köln. This 1956 production left memorable impression on the young audiences of that period. Mazlum Kiper of the present Municipal Theatre troupe, whose father played the role of the elder Peer remembers

technical details of perfect illusion on the stage. A leading theatre critic of the period, Lütfi Ay however writes on 20 Nov. 1956 in Ankara Telegraph that this version of Peer Gynt is not as brilliant as the former ones of M. Ertugrul. He notes that whatever Muhsin Ertugrul cut out of the text, Meinecke has preserved and those that he had kept, Meinecke cut out. He continues to add Peer being interpreted by two different actors is a convention which the Norvegians started by having a father and son interpret the old and young stages of the hero's life.

In 1957 The State Theatres of Izmir and Bursa were founded. Productions prepared in Ankara were sent for a term of performance in these towns. Ghosts of 1961 was such a production for the young stage in Izmir. The director is a member of the first generation of actors, Salih Caner with a cast of younger actors all graduates of the Ankara State conservatory.

During the same year a young man of theatre called Asaf Çigiltepe was back from his apprenticeship in France, at the Théâtre National Populaire of Jean Vilar, full of ideals for a theatre of the people. He was soon to start a group called "Ankara Art Theatre" in 1962. In 1961 when given the opportunity of selecting and staging a play at the Municipal Theatre, his choice was An Enemy of the People. It should also be remembered that 1961 was also the first year of a new constitution for the Turkish republic, which brought after the military intervention of 1960 much freedom of speech and democracy to last 10 years.

Unfortunately the young director Çigiltepe died in a car accident while touring Anatolia in 1967 at the age of 33. His theatre troupe exists to our day as one of the most consistent of private theatres with a socially responsible repertoire.

A Doll's House was also first performed in 1965/66 at the Ankara State Theatre. I personally believe this play to be the most incompatible of Ibsen's plays with Turkish social ethics. The fact

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that it had to wait until mid-sixties for a first production confirms this belief. Ideas about discretion and the woman's place in the family did not stir until much later even.

In the seventies *The Master Builder* (1971/72), *John Gabriel Borkman* (1976) and *Hedda Gabler*(1977/78) are produced by the State Theatre of Ankara. *Hedda Gabler* has previously been staged by a private troupe of Istanbul, the Dormen theatre with a relatively short run. The 1977/78 production which enjoyed a certain period of performance in Istanbul as well as Ankara is the most interesting of all Ibsen productions in Turkey in that the director dared experiment with a new style of interpretation. Raik Alniaçık had directed *John Gabriel Borkman* previously. With *Hedda Gabler* instead of a realistic-naturalistic stage he chose minimalistic sets and stylised acting. He was working with an experienced cast of skilled actors. However the critics were divided. Some applauded with enthusiasm, others (Cevat Çapan) saw Ibsen "betrayed".

The conservative eighties witnessed three different productions of Ibsen's plays on a variety of stages. In 1986 Ankara Art Theatre, founded in 1962 took *An Enemy of the People* in their repertoire as a tribute to their founder. In 1982 the State Theatre of Ankara staged *Rosmersholm* for the first time in Turkey. The Municipal Theatre of Istanbul, then under the direction of a woman intendant produced *A Doll's House*, directed by a well known Turkish director who spent his life between the US and Turkey, Tunç Yalman. In this production we saw a well known film actress, Meral Oguz in the title role.

The last play of Ibsen on the professional Turkish theatre repertoire was the *Ghosts* again. It was staged in 1987/88 at the newly founded State Theatre of the province town Adana.

So far I have mentioned all productions with the exception of a private theatre production of *The Lady from the Sea*, performed

by a small troupe with a woman leader , Lale Oraloglu in 1961. Also during the Istanbul Theatre Festival of 1998 theatre the theatregoers of of Istanbul had the opportunity to see Robert Wilson's and Susan Sontag's interperetation of The Lady from the Sea .

Ibsen's plays are noy infrequently performed at schools. I was first acquainted with the Ghosts by means of a high-school production in 1961/62. The department of Theatre at Anakara University produced Peer Gynt in 1997/98 with a very large cast and technical crew that enabled all the student bodyto partake of the possibility of stage practice.

Surely enough Peer Gynt has been the most popular of Ibsen's plays in the Turkish theatre.

In The Quintessence of Ibsenism Bernard Shaw draws attention to the difficulty of making the Norwegian soul penetrable for English audiences. The mixture of fantasy and reality manifest in plays like Brand and Peer Gynt are not in the least foreign to the eastern Mediterranean spirit. Our Turkish folk tales starting often with the same repeated lines "As I rocked my mother's cradle..... while the flea rubbed peoples' backs in the "hamam" and the camel was a barber....." are full of fantasy and incredulous turns. Reality mingles esaily with fantasy in the Turkish mind.

On the other hand Ibsen and his serious drama of social conflict have been instruments of Turkish enlightenment during the early years of the young republic in the hands of the leading figure of Turkish theatre. Muhsin Ertugrul states his admiration for Ibsen withy following thoughts in his memoirs: "Ibsen entered the Turkish theatre with that work (The Ghosts, 1918) There I saw that each member of the audience benefitted in accordingly with his own understanding. For a public conditioned to melodramas and hide-and seek vaudevilles it should have been heavy matter. Thankfully that was not the case. The Norwegian sage who knows

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Halk Düşmanı



Nora



Peer Gynt



Solness

