

A NEW BOUNDARY FOR IBSEN AND STRINDBERG

Maria Pia Pagani

Abstract

Book review for *On Ibsen and Strindberg: The Reversed Telescope* by Franco Perrelli.
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Contact

mariapia.pagani@unipv.it

The skilled use of a “reversed telescope” helped prof. Franco Perrelli to observe the work of the two great modern Scandinavian dramatists, Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg, under a new light. In this cosmic travel, a different and original perspective is due to the intercultural approach: in fact, the usual Nordic context is the starting point for a reflection which combines many other elements – anthropology, performing arts, Classical studies, Italian history, etc.

Ibsen was not indifferent to the problems of Italian Risorgimento, with its heroes and patriotic feelings. In his visit to Italy, after the unification, he could observe the political and social condition of the new country – with its problems and disillusion. He lived a sort of fascination for Southern Italy, and the most emblematic element is represented by Nora’s tarantella in *A Doll’s House*. The perturbing rite of tarantism, and the involving rhythm of the dance, do not have only an exotic value for the play of the Norwegian author: in fact, they can be considered also as a sort of therapeutic practice from madness, helping Nora in her critical position and giving her the gift of a new energy. «In the tarantella scene, Ibsen provides an emblematic change of musician: Helmer, who should be officiating the ritual, allows Rank to take his place when he cannot keep the situation in hand. The doctor (here exorcist-therapist) demonstrates on the piano that, as an old folk-violinist from Apulia used to say, “the treatment of the disease is music”; thereby developing a typical musical catharsis that encompasses both therapeutic music and the music of shamanism and possession» (pp. 22-23).

In his sharp evaluation of the play, Perrelli underlines that the influence of the tarantella crosses the limits of the specific scene, provoking a spiritual evolution for the characters: «the archaic ritual releases a catharsis; the essential fury of the tarantella scene channels itself into everyday rhythms, with a new consciousness and critical rationalization, and here “the modern tragedy” can start. So the play departs not only from the scenic conventions, but also from its theatricality and masks, thereby a different turning point and moving from the level of panic to a perturbing clearness that starts with Nora’s famous cue: “Sit down there, Torvald. You and I have a lot to talk about”» (p. 26). We can only image of the accent of the beautiful voice of Eleonora Duse...

The dissolution of patriarchal relations, the fight against the ghosts of the past, the controversial relationship between men and women, are common elements in the plays by Ibsen and Strindberg. In Perrelli’s critical opinion, one seems to be *the dark side* of the other: «essentially, we believe that – taking into account the differences of style, generation and temperament – we can only understand Strindberg through Ibsen, but we can also fully understand Ibsen through Strindberg: that is to say, there is no true contraposition, but on the contrary, there are sound reasons to maintain that between the two dramatists there exists not only a simple interference, but a very closing interweaving» (p. 53). In this perspective, the

“reversed telescope” is able to discover a new boundary for Scandinavian theatre – also considering the Italian Nineteenth-Century theatrical canon (especially with the actor Ermete Zacconi) and the stagings by Ingmar Bergman, Massimo Castri, Carlo Quartucci, Luca Ronconi, Gabriele Lavia. Moreover, the vitality of Ibsen and Strindberg in the contemporary theatre is demonstrated by the creative impulse of the Living Theatre, the unrealized ideas of Jerzy Grotowski, the work of Odin Teatret with the actresses Else Marie Laukvik and Roberta Carreri. This volume marks the importance of the two masters for the future, in the New Millennium.