

The Translator and the Playwright: P. Em. Hansen's Translations of Ibsen on the Russian Stage

When the work of a foreign dramatist is presented on the stage, few critics and theatregoers are genuinely conscious of the fact that it is not the words of the author they are hearing, but those of the translator. Critics direct their praise and their blame alike at the playwright, and the very existence of the translator is lost sight of. Few scholars have devoted serious attention to the effect of the translator on the reception of the works of a dramatist on the stage in a foreign country. The share of the translator in the success or failure of a dramatic work on the stage is admittedly difficult to determine; in fact, it is often almost impossible even to identify the translator of a given foreign dramatic production of the past.

An example of undeserved lack of recognition of the translator of works for the stage is the case of Peter Emanuel Hansen (1846–1930), a Dane who spent the years 1871–1917 in Russia and devoted most of those years to translating and popularizing Scandinavian literature in general, and Scandinavian drama in particular, with the help of his Russian wife Anna Vasil'evna (1869–1942).¹ Hansen had begun his career as an actor in the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen, where he had been a member of the troupe from 1865 to 1871. Though he had not attained success as an actor, he never lost his interest in the theatre, and this interest was reflected in his many translations of dramatic works. Among the many Scandinavian writers whom the Hansens introduced or popularized in Russia was Henrik Ibsen. A few Russian translations of the Norwegian dramatist had been published before those of the Hansens, but these had for the most part been made from German intermediary translations, and the Hansens were the first to translate the body of Ibsen's work directly from the original language. After a few individual translations of Ibsen, the Hansens published their monumental eight-volume 'complete' Ibsen, 1903–7. The edition was nominated for the coveted Pushkin Prize of the Imperial Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg,

1 For a biographical sketch of Hansen, who in Russia was known as Pëtr Gotfridovič Ganzen in accordance with Russian custom and phonetics, and a survey of his published translations, see the following: Kenneth H. Ober, 'P. Em. Hansen and P. Ganzen: A Danish Literary Missionary in Russia,' *Svantevit* (Århus and Copenhagen) 2, No. 2 (1977) 5–17; Kenneth H. Ober, 'A Hansen (Ganzen) Bibliography of Translations, Books, and Articles in Russian 1885–1917,' *Svantevit* 3, No. 2 (1977) 89–100.

and two noted judges were appointed by the Academy to review it. These reviewers were the well-known poet and translator Pëtr Isaevič Vejnbërg (1831–1908), a member of the Academy who had himself translated Ibsen, but from German; and Professor Ólaf Broch (1867–1961), the internationally known Norwegian Slavist and translator, who later received a Pushkin Medal from the Academy. Their assessments of the Hansens' translation were printed in the *Sbornik otdelenija russkogo jazyka i slovesnosti imp. Akademii nauk*, 84 (1908), No. 5, pp. 42–7. Vejnbërg wrote (pp. 42–3), '... the translation in general ... reads rather easily and renders (especially in *Brand*) rather clearly thoughts of the author which are often expressed very obscurely,' and (p. 46), '... the translation of A. and P. Hansen, in view of the undoubted difficulty of coping with such an author as Ibsen, represents a serious work, carried out conscientiously.'² Broch commented (p. 47), '... the Hansens' translations, as a whole, from the point of view of exactness of translation, in my opinion are undoubtedly fine work deserving both praise and sincere gratitude from the great dramatist's fellow countrymen.'³ Both assessors concluded by recommending the work for the Pushkin Prize, but it received only honorable mention. The success and popularity of the Hansens' translations of Ibsen are attested by the fact that two further editions of the collected works quickly followed, put out by A.F. Marks and the 'Znanie' publishing house, both in 1909, and translations of individual plays were issued separately, concurrently with the collected edition. The Hansens' translations of most of Ibsen's plays still provide the basis for the standard translations being published in the Soviet Union.⁴ Among literary translations, however, those of dramatic works form a unique category, since the published versions provide only an incomplete index of popularity and success. Many published versions of plays are never performed on the stage, and some versions used in stage productions are never actually published. The present paper will deal with the translations actually staged.

Although the Hansens did more to popularize Ibsen than any other Scandinavian dramatist, they also introduced other leading playwrights to Russian audiences; for example, the first of Strindberg's plays to be staged in

2 '... perevod voobšče ... čitaetsja dovol'no legko i peredaet (osobëno v *Brandë*) často očën' tumanno vyskazannye mysli avtora dovol'no jasno'; '... perevod A. i P. Ganzen, v vidu nesomnënoj trudnosti spravljat'sja s takim avtorom, kak Ibsen, predstavljaetsja trudom ser'ëznym i ispolnënym dobrosovestno.'

3 '... perevody gg. Ganzenov, v obščeij summe, so storony točnosti peredači, po moëmu mneniju – bezuslovno xorošaja rabota, zasluživajuščaja u zemljakov velikogo dramaturga i xvaly i iskrennej blagodarnosti.'

4 In Vladimir Grigor'ëvič Admoni's four-volume edition of Ibsen's collected works – *Sobranie sočinenij v 4-x tomax* (Moscow: Iskusstvo 1956–8) – almost all the plays are given in the Hansens' translations, with some revisions, and a more recent edition of Ibsen's plays (*Dramy. Stixotvorenija* [Moscow: GIXL 1972]) also relies heavily on their versions.

Russia was the Hansens' translation of *Brott och brott* (*Crimes and Crimes*).⁵ Plays by Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Hjalmar Söderberg, Edgard Høyer, and Karen Bramson were also staged for the first time in Russia in the Hansens' translations.

There has been a plethora of articles and books on the topic 'Ibsen in Russia',⁶ but these, like contemporary reviews of Ibsen's plays on the Russian stage, look through the translator without seeing him, and none has acknowledged the unique importance of the translator in transmitting the works of the dramatist. The present article is not an attempt to add to this 'Ibsen in Russia' scholarship, but, as the title suggests, the emphasis is here rather on Hansen, the translator.

Hansen was personally acquainted with Ibsen; they had met in the summer of 1870, and Ibsen still remembered their meeting in 1888, for he mentions it in a letter to Hansen, written from Munich on 27 November 1888.⁷ Thereafter, Hansen maintained contact with Ibsen in connection with his translations of the dramatist's works. Hansen had long entertained the idea of translating Ibsen into Russian, and some of his first – and unsuccessful – efforts at translation into Russian involved *De Unges Forbund* (*The League of Youth*) and *Samfundets Støtter* (*Pillars of Society*). The first belletristic translation which the Hansens published was that of *Hedda Gabler*, which appeared in 1891 in the journal *Severnyj vestnik* (July number, pp. 129–200). Several other translations of individual plays followed, before the publication of the 'complete works.' By 1896, Ibsen was

5 It was staged on 8 December 1901 at Lidija Javorskaja's theatre in St. Petersburg, but was never published; see D.M. Šarypkin, 'Strindberg v Rossii,' *Istoričeskie svjazi Skandinavii i Rossii IX–XX vv.: Sbornik statej* (Leningrad: Nauka 1970) 306. Further information and confirmation is contained in a personal letter to me from D.M. Šarypkin.

6 See Olaf Broch, 'Lidt om Ibsen i og fra Rusland,' *Samtiden* 11 (1900) 459–66; Erik Krag, 'Ibsen i Russland,' *Edda* 28 (1928) 72–95; Erik Krag, 'Ibsen i slavisk åndsliv,' *Edda* 56 (1956) 289–302; E.M. Meletinskij, M.S. Morščiner, and Z.V. Žitomirskaja, *Genrik Ibsen: Bibliografičeskij ukazatel'k pjatidesjatiletiju so dnja smerti* (Moscow: Vsesojuznaja gosudarstvennaja biblioteka inostrannoju literatury 1958); Martin Nag, *Ibsen i russisk åndsliv* (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk 1967); Nils Åke Nilsson, *Ibsen in Russland* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell 1958); B.A. Šajkevič, *Dramaturgija Ibsena v Rossii: Ibsen i MXAT* (Kiev: Kievskij universitet 1968); B.A. Šajkevič, *Ibsen i russkaja kul'tura: Očerk* (Kiev: Kievskij universitet 1974); D.M. Šarypkin, 'Ibsen v russkoj literature (1890–e gody),' *Rossija i zapad: Iz istorii literaturnyx otnošenij* (Leningrad: Nauka 1973) 269–303; Martin Nag, 'Ibsen og Rusland,' *Ibsenårbok 1974* (Oslo, Bergen, Tromsø: Universitets forlaget 1974) 161–75. In comparison, other leading Scandinavian dramatists 'in Russia' have been slighted; cf. the following: Nils Åke Nilsson, 'Strindberg på rysk scen,' *Meddelanden från Strindbergssällskapet* No. 20 (Dec. 1956) 5–16; Nils Åke Nilsson, 'Strindberg och Konstnärliga teatern i Moskva,' *Meddelanden från Strindbergssällskapet* No. 21 (April 1957) 23–4; as well as Šarypkin's above-cited article on Strindberg; cf. also Sergej Kara-Murza, 'Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson på den russiske scene,' *Edda* 34 (1934) 168–74.

7 A copy of the letter is preserved in Brevsamling 166, University Library, Oslo.

having the proofs of his plays sent directly to Hansen for translating, before the plays appeared in print in the original; in that year he wrote to August Larsen of the Gyldendal publishing firm in Copenhagen (Ibsen's publisher), that 'Director Emanuel Hansen in St. Petersburg, whom you may know, will be doing the Russian translation of my new play [i.e., *John Gabriel Borkman*] and I am taking the liberty therefore of requesting that the proof sheets be sent to him as they are printed.'⁸ That this arrangement was a permanent one is indicated by a letter which Hansen wrote to Karl Larsen on 21 January 1907, after Ibsen's death, in which he writes, 'Ibsen himself in his time showed me the kindness of letting me receive, through your uncle, his new plays as they were printed.'⁹ Hansen was not content with merely translating Ibsen – he also published popular critical articles, often paraphrased from articles printed in Scandinavia, in the Russian periodical press.¹⁰

This period – around the turn of the century – was one of intensive activity in the theatrical world of Russia. The ban on private theatres had been lifted in 1882, and the imperial theatres in Moscow and St Petersburg could no longer satisfy all the demands of the Russian theatregoers or of the new generation of innovative directors. Several new theatres were established, the most famous of which was Stanislavskij's and Nemirovič-Dančenko's Moscow Art Theatre (MXAT), opened in 1898 and still in operation. Vera Komissarževskaja founded her own theatre in St Petersburg in 1904; Lidija Javorskaja established her 'Novyj teatr' (New Theatre) in 1900, also in St Petersburg; and P.P. Gajdeburov's 'Narodnyj teatr' (People's Theatre) opened there in 1903. Vsevolod Mejerxol'd left the Moscow Art Theatre and was engaged by Komissarževskaja in 1906. The Hansens' translations of Ibsen, as well as of other dramatists, were performed on almost all the stages, old and new, of the two capitals, and were used in the provinces by touring companies. The imperial 'Malyj' (Little) theatre in Moscow, for example, staged the following Hansen translations of Ibsen during the period immediately preceding the Revolution (the date of the first performance is

8 'Direktør Emanuel Hansen i St. Petersburg, hvem De måske kender, kommer til at besøge den russiske oversættelse af mit nye stykke og jeg tillader mig derfor at anmode om at korrekturarkene efterhånden må blive ham tilsendte.' *Henrik Ibsens Samlede Verker, Hundreårsutgave*, ed. Francis Bull, Halvdan Koht, and Didrik Arup Seip, xviii (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk 1949) 388.

9 'Ibsen selv i sin Tid har vist mig den Elskværdighed igennem Deres Onkel at lade mig faa hans nye Skuespil efterhaanden som de trykkedes.' The unpublished letter is preserved in the collection NkS 4630,4^o, in the Royal Library, Copenhagen.

10 These articles included 'G. Ibsen, dramaturg,' *Vsemirnaja illjustracija* No. 16 (1891) 270; 'Ibsen i ego kritiki,' *Severnij vestnik*, May 1897, pp. 109–21; 'Genrik Ibsen kak čelovek i pisatel': *Po Vospominanijam norvežskogo pisatelja Džona Paul'sona*, *Mir božij*, March 1901, pp. 57–86; and 'Genrik Ibsen v russkix perevodax,' *Russkije vedomosti*, 29 Dec. 1903.

given where known): 19 November 1904, *John Gabriel Borkman* (18 performances); 30 September 1906, *Kongs-Emnerne* (*The Pretenders*) (19 performances); 11 January 1907 (in the 'Novyj teatr,' a branch of the 'Malyj'), *De Unges Forbund* (8 performances); 5 November 1909, *Gengangere* (*Ghosts*) (20 performances); 7 March 1911, *Et Dukkehjem* (*A Doll's House*) (10 performances); 10 November 1916, *Hedda Gabler* (12 performances).¹¹ Vera Komissarževskaja's theatre in St Petersburg staged the following of the Hansens' Ibsen translations: 17 September 1904, *Et Dukkehjem*; 7 April 1905, *Bygmester Solness* (*The Master Builder*) (Komissarževskaja's troupe performed both these plays on tour in Moscow and in the Volga provinces that same year and the following year); on 10 November 1906, Mejerxol'd directed *Hedda Gabler*. He also directed *Et Dukkehjem* in the Hansens' translation in Komissarževskaja's theatre in 1906.¹²

Although Komissarževskaja's theatre in St Petersburg was called the 'Ibsen theatre,' it was the Moscow Art Theatre under Stanislavskij and Nemirovič-Dančenko which played the greatest role in introducing and popularizing the Hansens' translations of Ibsen,¹³ and it is primarily through their translations of Ibsen that the Hansens have earned a place in the history of the pre-Revolutionary Russian stage. No other playwright was performed so often by the Moscow Art Theatre, which staged the following of the Hansens' translations of Ibsen: 24 February 1903, *Samfundets Støtter* (15 performances); 31 March 1905, *Gengangere* (13 performances); 20 December 1906, *Brand* (87 performances); 5 March 1908, *Rosmersholm* (20 performances); 9 October 1912, *Per Gynt* (42 performances).¹⁴ All were directed, at least in part, by Nemirovič-Dančenko.

Several circumstances made Hansen the right person at the right place and at the right time to translate Ibsen and popularize his works in Russia. There was unquestionably a blossoming of interest in Scandinavian writers of all genres in Russia at the close of the nineteenth century, stimulated in no

11 See N.G. Zograf, *Malyj teatr v konce XIX-načale XX veka* (Moscow: Nauka 1966) 539, 562-5, 569-71, 574, 577-9. Other Hansen translations of Scandinavian dramatists performed at the 'Malyj' included Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson's *Maria Stuart i Skotland* (8 performances, beginning 14 December 1892), 30 September 1905, Strindberg's *Fadren* (at the 'Novyj,' 13 performances); 2 October 1910, Hjalmar Söderberg's *Gertrude (Amor - omnia)* (20 performances); 18 January 1911, Bjørnson's *Naar den ny Vin blomstrer* (13 performances); 7 February 1913, Edgard Høyer's *Frøken Venus* (18 performances); 21 March 1916, Karen Bramson's *Lykke* (10 performances).

12 See Vera Fedorovna Komissarževskaja: *Pis'ma aktrisy, vospominanija o nej, materialy* (Leningrad and Moscow: Iskusstvo 1964) 335-6; and V.É. Mejerxol'd, *Stat'i, pis'ma, reči, besedy* (Moscow: Iskusstvo 1968) 1, 231-2, 234. Mejerxol'd also directed Strindberg's *Brott och Brott* in Terijoki (now Zelenogorsk) in the Hansens' translation in 1912.

13 Cf. Nils Åke Nilsson, *Ibsen in Russland* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell 1958) 15-16.

14 See *Moskovskij xudožestvennyj teatr v illjustracijax i dokumentax 1898-1938* (Moscow: MXAT 1938) 154-5, 190-1, 204-5, 226-7, 308-9.

small measure by the Hansens' own massive efforts. Hansen was personally acquainted with Nemirovič-Dančenko, but he was out of the country when the latter and Stanislavskij founded the Moscow Art Theatre and began performing Ibsen. At first, the theatre used translations from German, but when Hansen returned to Russia and learned of this, he renewed his acquaintance with Nemirovič-Dančenko and convinced the theatre director that the theatre should use only translations made directly from the original Norwegian – i.e., the Hansens' translations – and Nemirovič-Dančenko then agreed to use exclusively the Hansens' translations of Ibsen in the future.¹⁵ Incidentally, Hansen must not have enjoyed such a friendly relationship with Nemirovič-Dančenko's co-director, Stanislavskij, or perhaps he annoyed the theatre staff over the years with his protective attitude toward Ibsen's plays, for Stanislavskij wrote, in a letter to Leopold Antonovič Suleržickij dated 22 December 1911, '... Hansen, who considers *Brand* his own work, is ridiculous ...'¹⁶

Another and more subtle advantage Hansen brought to his Ibsen translations was the somewhat favoured position he enjoyed relative to the tsarist censor – a position he owed to the fact that the tsar's mother was the former Princess Dagmar of Denmark. Hansen had early in his career in Russia become known to her, and had at that time been given ample signs of her official favour. He himself wrote that Ibsen's plays had suffered from the censor and had been in part banned. He added that the ban had been lifted when the censor had read the plays in the Hansens' translation, in which there were no 'unclear' or 'obscure' passages to frighten the censor – passages created by earlier and less qualified translators who did not know the

15 Hansen described the situation and its fortunate resolution in an interview printed in the Copenhagen newspaper *Dannebrog* for 5 August 1902, p. 1: 'Men hermed traf det sig saa uheldig, at da jeg for 3 Aar siden var optaget med Undersøgelsen af Velgørenhedsforholdene i de nordiske Lande, opstod der i Moskva et nyt privat kunstnerisk Theater, som begyndte at spille Ibsen med stort Held, hvorved man desværre, paa Grund af min Fraværelse, benyttede mere eller mindre uheldige Oversættelser fra Tysk. Da Selskabet i Fjor ved denne Tid kom herop til St. Petersburg for at give en Række Forestillinger, fornyede jeg Bekendtskabet med Direktøren, Wladimir Nemirovitch Dantschenko, og efter at jeg havde overbevist ham om det mislige i at give Ibsen paa anden Haand, besluttede han herefter kun at benytte mine Oversættelser ...' ('But in this connection it unfortunately happened that when three years ago I was busy with investigating welfare conditions in the Scandinavian countries, there was established in Moscow a new private art theatre which began to perform Ibsen with great success, but they unfortunately – because of my absence – used more or less infelicitous translations from German. When the company last year around this time came up here to St Petersburg to give a series of performances, I renewed my acquaintance with the director, Vladimir Nemirovič-Dančenko, and after I had convinced him of the riskiness of presenting Ibsen at second hand, he decided in the future to use only my translations ...')

16 '... смею Ganzen, считаяшчij *Brand* своим произведением ...' K.S. Stanislavskij, *Sobranie sočinenij v vos'mi tomax*, VII (Moscow: Iskusstvo 1960) 537

original language well and presumably had had to rely on other intermediary translations. Hansen added also that his critical and bibliographical articles appended to the plays had helped.¹⁷ A comparison of the Hansens' translation of *Et Dukkehjem* (*A Doll's House*) with the original, for example, demonstrates that Hansen indeed managed to minimize any potential difficulties with the censor. The controversial ending is preserved intact, and the rare omissions are negligible (for example, in the third act, in Nora's reply to Helmer's question, 'Men kan vi da ikke bo her som broder og søster – ?' ['But can't we live here like brother and sister – ?'], the line 'Du ved meget godt, det vilde ikke vare længe – ' ['You know very well, it would not last long – '] is omitted). The Hansens were faithful and conscientious translators, and were, respectively, native and cultured speakers of the two languages involved (Ibsen's Dano-Norwegian was practically indistinguishable from Hansen's Danish).

Peter Emanuel Hansen as a boy had dreamed of a career in the theatre. Although he was unsuccessful as an actor at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen, in a certain sense he did realize his greatest ambition after all, by introducing and popularizing in Russia the plays of one of the world's greatest dramatists, and doing this on the stage of one of the world's most famous and prestigious theatres. An obvious but somehow overlooked fact must be stressed here – the Russians were not hearing Ibsen's words from the stage; they were hearing Hansen's. Ibsen may have been speaking to them, but he was speaking through Hansen's mouth. Hansen – or any really successful translator – is not just a transparent medium through which the original author's works pass somehow unchanged: he is a peculiar creative artist with his own unique claim to be recognized on his own terms and in his own field. It is impossible to compare the translator with the original writer; he is not 'inferior' to the original author – he is working in a different medium, and he can be as much an artist as the original writer. It is irrelevant to assert that Ibsen would have gained fame in Russia even if Hansen had not existed; Hansen *did* exist, and it is through his translations that most Russians became acquainted with Ibsen's works, and it is to a great extent through his translations that they are still becoming acquainted with them.

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17 'Zapret byl snjat posle predstavlenija v dramatičeskiju cenzuru ètix p'es v našem perevode, v kotorom uže ne vstrečalos' 'nejasnyx' ili 'tumannyx' mest, pугavšix cenzuru i sozdannyx perevodčikami, ne znavšimi jazyka originala ili ploxo ego ponimavšimi. Bol'šuju pomošč' k ustranjeniju cenzurnyx zatrudnenij okazali, konečno, i ob'jasnitel'nye kritiko-bibliografičeskie stat'i, priložennye k p'esam.' *Literaturnyj arxiv* 6 (Moscow and Leningrad: AN SSSR 1961) 70 (note)