

## ***Il signor Erminio Ekdal* and the first translation of “The Wild Duck”: domesticating Henrik Ibsen for late Nineteenth-Century Italy**

Giuliano D’Amico, University of Turin

The early reception of Henrik Ibsen in Italy was different from other European countries. The theatre of *grande attore*, the star actor who was to attract the audience’s complete attention, did not easily accept the complex and controversial nature of Ibsen’s plays: they were often changed and modified according to the local taste. Such a domestication did not only take place on stage, but already in the translated texts provided for the performances. *The Wild Duck* is a relevant case.

*L’anitra selvatica*, the title the play received in Italy, was premiered by Ermete Novelli’s company at Teatro Manzoni in Milan, on September 28, 1891. Half a year after *Una casa di bambola* (*A Doll’s House*), with Elenora Duse impersonating Nora, this was the second Ibsen play to be staged in Italy.<sup>1</sup> The response of the public was not completely negative, but many theatregoers shared a certain perplexity about the plot and the themes of the play. The theatre critic Giovanni Pozza recalled:

The play was applauded more than I had expected, yet very few got into its artistic essence and grasped its philosophic meaning.<sup>2</sup> [...]

Who heard people discuss the characters and the themes of *L’anitra selvatica* in the foyer? People talked only about its strangeness with hilarious tones. The audience turned the duck into a goose with great amusement. [...] Some people in the audience could not hear of the wild duck without laughing. The actors did not dare to call it by its name. Fortunately the end and Edvige’s suicide stopped the hilarity and the play was applauded. Yet, if one is to tell the truth, just a minority applauded. The audience was sometimes moved by the play, but was not convinced.<sup>3</sup>

Pozza insisted on the problems the audience had in understanding the play; a peculiar cultural clash was indeed that of the title itself, the wild duck being a rather noble, wild animal in Norway, but quite funny and clumsy in Italy, more likely to be eaten roasted than to be elevated as a symbol. Pozza concluded with a criticism of the acting and the text used on stage:

Some of the actors did not succeed in impersonating their characters. Cristofori did not give us the most important characteristic of Erminio Ekdal. He is not only simple-minded, but a false genius, a false worker, a false man. He uses his rhetoric as a mask. [...] [Moreover,] the variations to the text were indeed relevant.<sup>4</sup>

---

1 The first, real premier of *Casa di Bambola* was staged on February 23, 1889 by the company led by Emilia Aliprandi and Vittorio Pieri, at Teatro Gerbino in Turin. This performance could not compete with the Duse production in resonance and relevance for Ibsen’s introduction in Italy. See also Roberto Alonge, *Ibsen – l’opera e la fortuna scenica*, Firenze, Le Lettere 1995, pp. 77-78.

2 Giovanni Pozza, *Cronache Teatrali*, Vicenza, Neri Pozza Editore 1971, p. 138. [My translation]

3 Ibid., p. 124. [My translation]

4 Ibid. [My translation]

The actor might not have deserved all the guilt for his unsuccessful performance. Pozza, who presumably had read the play in the faithful French translation by Maurice Prozor, noticed radical changes in the translation used for the staging: especially the character of Hjalmar (Erminio in the Italian translation) was deprived of much of its grotesque nuances.

The text for the performance was provided by Enrico Polese Santarnecchi, who translated the play with the help of a German professor, Paolo Rindler. Polese's figure, quickly sketched by Roberto Alonge and Francesca Simoncini in their papers on Ibsen<sup>5</sup>, is rather interesting and not satisfactorily researched. He was the son of Icilio Polese Santarnecchi, founder of the first Italian theatre agency and of the theatre periodical *L'arte drammatica*. Since an early age Enrico worked as a co-editor in the periodical, and succeeded his father after his death in 1894. In the years of the first introduction of Ibsen in Italy Polese was active as a theatre agent, i.e. as a middleman between his agency, the actors, the theatres and the companies, as an editor of a theatre periodical and as a translator of Ibsen. His was a quite ambiguous situation, as "the periodical became then paid publicity. Newspaper and agency supported each other."<sup>6</sup> Usually the reviews of Ibsen's performances in *L'arte drammatica* were more positive than the ones in other periodicals, and it is very likely that Polese had a personal interest in a succeeding performance or in the selling of an Ibsen play in printed form.<sup>7</sup> "This does not exclude," continues Alonge, "that these periodicals were supported also for political-ideological reasons and not only for economic interest. [...] Icilio Polese had been [...] close to radical milieus, and this explains his choices in favour of Naturalism."<sup>8</sup>

If it would be unfair to limit Polese's interest in Ibsen to a mere commercial exigency, it is clear that he was operating a domestication and Italianization of Ibsen's texts. In the printed version of his translations it is stated that he translated from German, but the source is never reported. The German translations issued before 1891<sup>9</sup>, the year of the premier of *L'anitra selvatica* in Milan, are very faithful to the original and leave no doubt about the origin of the modifications in the text. As Alonge notes, however, "it is not a philological issue, about translating Ibsen from Dano-Norwegian, from French [...] or from German"<sup>10</sup>; Polese's goal was to provide the actors with a text which would be acceptable to the Italian audience. While translating Ibsen's plays, he modified and cut them deliberately, trying to make them shorter, simpler and less obscure, depriving them of their most controversial and ambiguous aspects. A fair

---

5 Roberto Alonge, *op. cit.* and "'Spettri', Zacconi e un agente tuttofare: traduttore, adattatore (e anche un poco drammaturgo)", *Il castello di Elsinore I* (1988), pp. 69-94.

Francesca Simoncini, "Strategie di scena di fine Ottocento. Le prime traduzioni italiane di Ibsen: *L'anitra selvatica* e *Spettri*", *Il castello di Elsinore XVI* (1993), pp.123-142.

6 Roberto Alonge, "'Spettri', Zacconi e un agente tuttofare: traduttore, adattatore (e anche un poco drammaturgo)", p. 69. [My translation]

7 Between 1892 and 1895 the publisher Max Kantorowicz issued seven translation of Ibsen's contemporary plays made by Polese. *L'anitra selvatica* was published in 1894.

8 Roberto Alonge, "'Spettri', Zacconi e un agente tuttofare: traduttore, adattatore (e anche un poco drammaturgo)", p. 69. [My translation]

9 Henrik Ibsen, *Die Wildente* (translated by Ernst Brausewetter), Reclam, Leipzig 1887.

Henrik Ibsen, *Die Wildente* (translated by M. von Borch), Fischer, Berlin 1889.

10 Roberto Alonge, *Ibsen – L'Opera e la fortuna scenica*, p. 86. [My translation]

deal of what could raise scandal or disapproval among the theatregoers was softened, modified or eliminated in Polese's translations.

*L'anitra selvatica* is no exception. Such a domestication takes place at different levels, but it is especially in the shaping of some characters that Polese makes the most changes. In this article I will look closer at the good-to-nothing husband Hjalmar Ekdal, and at the way Polese rendered his character in the Italian text. I will also refer to the first English translation by Frances E. and William Archer (1890), which is famous for its faithfulness and can be a tool for those readers who do not understand Italian and/or Norwegian. Furthermore, it may give some basic outlines of a text which was translated and issued in a country where the works of Ibsen encountered a radically different reception from Italy.<sup>11</sup>

Before looking closer at issues in translation, a brief summary of the plot can be of some help. The play opens at the industrialist Werle's house during a party for the return of his son, Gregers. Gregers' old friend, Hjalmar Ekdal, is also invited. His father, Old Ekdal, was a partner to Werle until a forestry scandal sent him to prison; he now works as one of Werle's copyists. Hjalmar tells Gregers about his life after his father's disgrace: Werle helped him begin his photographic studio and made it possible for him to marry. Coincidentally, Hjalmar's wife, Gina, worked in Werle's house before she got married. Once Hjalmar has left, Gregers accuses his father of passing the forestry scandal onto Old Ekdal, and recalls his father's interest in Gina. Gregers leaves the house in a fury, announcing that he finally sees his mission in life. A little later Gregers appears at Hjalmar's house. Old Ekdal shows him his treasure: he has a fowl in the garret - a wild duck that belongs to Hedvig, Hjalmar's daughter. Suddenly Gregers insists on taking the Ekdals' spare room. The following day Hjalmar tells Gregers that he has dedicated himself to a great invention, in order to redeem the family's name. But in reality he is doing nothing, not even his job, while it is Gina that actually runs the house. Gregers talks privately with Hjalmar, who later announces that he will take up the studio work himself and wants to wring the wild duck's neck. Hjalmar confronts Gina on her secret past: she had been Werle's concubine. In the meantime Hedvig has received a birthday gift from Werle, who has promised a monthly income to Ekdal that will pass onto her upon his death. Gregers warns that Werle is trying to buy him off, and Hjalmar tears the birthday letter in half. He confronts Gina and asks whether Hedvig is his, and she replies that she cannot know. Hjalmar forsakes Hedvig and flees. Hedvig wonders why her father no longer wants her: Gregers suggests that Hedvig sacrifices the precious to prove her love for her father. The morning after, an unkempt Hjalmar comes home and Gina convinces him to stay in the sitting room for a few days. He also glues Werle's letter back together. Suddenly a shot rings out from the garret. Gregers triumphantly announces that Hedvig has crept in there with a pistol to sacrifice the duck to her father, but once the garret is opened they discover a prostrate child. Relling declares her dead: she has clearly killed herself.

---

<sup>11</sup> As for the original text, I referred to the first printed edition (Henrik Ibsen, *Vildanden*, Gyldendalske Boghandels Forlag, Copenhagen 1884). The translated text was printed by Kantorowicz after the 1891 staging (Enrico Ibsen, *L'anitra selvatica*, Kantorowicz, Milano 1894). The English quotations are taken from Henrik Ibsen, *The Wild Duck* in *Ibsen's Prose Dramas* Vol. 2, London, Walter Scott 1890.

The first symptom of domestication happens before the play opens, i.e. in the list of the characters:

Gregers Werle	Gregorio Werle
Hjalmar Ekdal	Erminio Ekdal
Gina Ekdal	Gina
Hedvig	Edvige
Fru Sørby	Signora Sorbi
Gråberg	Groberg
Pettersen	Pietro
Jensen	Giovanni
En blegfed herre	A, un uomo grasso e pallido
En tyndhåret herre	B, un uomo basso e calvo
En nærsynt herre	C, un uomo miope

One notices how some of these characters have either had their name modified following the Italian spelling (Groberg instead of Gråberg, Sorbi instead of Sørby) or turned into an Italian correspondent (Gregers-Gregorio, Hedvig-Edvige and Gina, which caused no problems in translation). The most interesting examples come when no Italian correspondent was available, as with Pettersen (a second name translated with a first name, Pietro), Jensen (translated with Giovanni) but above all Hjalmar, translated with the somewhat questionable Erminio. The point is that Ibsen did not choose the name Hjalmar by chance, as the *Norsk personnamnleksikon* reveals to us: **Hjalmar** m, nord. namn, norr. *Hjalmarr*, sms. av *hjalmr* m 'hjelms' og -> -ar, her truleg 'krigar'<sup>12</sup>

The choice of Hjalmar, etymologically related to *hjelms* ("helmet") and here meaning *krigar* ("soldier") sounds rather ironic from Ibsen, who presumably wanted to play with Hjalmar's character starting with his first name. The choice of Erminio, which neither carries an equivalent meaning nor sounds archaic and pompous as Hjalmar, is probably due to the expectations of the Italian audience, which would probably have problems in relating to such a distant name. It is also interesting to look at the names of Werle's guests (who will be addressed as *signor A*, *signor B*, etc. in the play). As early as this point, nuances get lost in Polese's text.

The changes become more relevant as the character of Erminio develops in the play. The impression is that Polese felt that too much sarcasm about the figure of a father and husband would have been uncomfortable for the average Italian theatregoer. Let us look at how the Italian Erminio behaves once he is back from the dinner at Werle's house:

HJALMAR. Jeg ved ikke, hvorfor jeg just skal sørge for underholdningen når jeg er ude en gang iblandt. Lad de andre anstrænge sig. Der går de fyrene fra det ene madhus til det andet og æder og drikker dag ud og dag ind. Lad dem vær'sog' gøre nytte for al den gode mad, de får. (p. 71)

---

<sup>12</sup> Kristoffer Kruken and Ola Stemshaug, *Norsk personnamnleksikon*, Oslo, Det Norske Samlaget 1995, p. 130.



ERM. No! Non ero mica andato là per divertirli, a loro tocca far divertire, loro che passano la vita a pranzi e colazioni. (Polese, pp. 29-30)

HALMAR. I don't see why I should bother myself to entertain people on the rare occasions when I go out into society. Let the others exert themselves. These fellows go from one dinner-table to the next and gorge and guzzle day out and day in. It's for them to bestir themselves and do something in return for all the good food they get. (Archer, p. 274)

Polese cut the line, which sounds much less pompous and pretentious than in the original. One can only wonder whether he did so for the sake of conciseness or to soften the sarcastic tone which springs from the line (Hjalmar is lying about what happened at the dinner), yet the irony of the original is rather weakened.

HJALMAR. Jeg har glemt det andet, hører du. Men du kan tro mig på mit ord: det er en dårlig fornøjelse med det slikkeri. Sæt dig nu bort til bordet og læs på den seddelen, så skal jeg siden beskrive dig, hvorledes retterne smaker. (p. 74)

ERM. No, non scherzo, ti prego scusami. Però ho qualche cosa per te. [...]È il *menù*; qui sta la lista di tutto ciò che ho mangiato. – Via Edvige per poche ghiottonerie non mettere il broncio. (Polese, p. 31)

HALMAR. I forgot the other things, I tell you. But you may take my word for it, these dainties are very unsatisfying. Sit down at the table and read the bill of fare, and then I'll describe to you how the dishes taste. (Archer, p. 277)

Here Hjalmar has forgotten to bring the food from the dinner he had promised Hedvig. One notices that Erminio does not appear as the clumsy father Ibsen depicted. He complains to Edvige (*ti prego scusami*) but does not exaggerate as Hjalmar does in the original (*det er en dårlig fornøjelse med det slikkeri*, the rather stupid attempt to justify his error with “these dainties are very unsatisfying”). Moreover, he behaves quite rudely with Edvige – as a real, strict Italian father – by telling her *Via Edvige per poche ghiottonerie non mettere il broncio*, literally “come on, Hedvig, do not be angry just because of a few good things to eat”. Of this last sentence there is no trace in the original text.

HJALMAR. Ikke noget andet? Å nej, når man ikke griber sig an, så –  
[...]

HJALMAR. Det var jo at vente. Når man ikke er om sig, så -. Man må ta' sig rigtig sammen, Gina! (p. 75)

ERM. Lo prevedevo...Non ve ne prendete cura! Non ve ne prendete cura!... (Polese, p. 32)

HALMAR. Nothing else? Oh no, when one doesn't set about things with a will –  
[...]

HJALMAR. That was only to be expected. Unless one's on the alert -. The thing is to make the real effort, Gina. (Archer, p. 278)

In these lines Ibsen uses the expressions *å gripe seg an* and *å ta seg sammen*, fairly translatable with “make the effort”. Such a choice of verbs is rather ironic, as Hjalmar has never made an effort in his whole life. We can also see that Polese cut the lines and made Erminio give Gina and Edvige quite a strong scolding, telling them that “they do not care about it” [i.e. the room they have to rent]. In the original text Hjalmar reminds Gina that she is not “setting about things with a will”, she is not making “the real effort”: this slight piece of irony is in this way eliminated by Polese, who also translated badly in the other case where “the effort” is nominated:  
HJALMAR. [...] Nå, ser du det, Gina, - når man bare er om sig, så – (p. 87)

ERM. [...] Vedi Gina cosa è mai il caso. (Polese, p. 43)

HALMAR. [...] Well, you see, Gina – if you just keep your eyes open – (Archer, p. 294)

In this case Polese makes Erminio wonder about the lucky strike they made, thus destroying any reference to “keeping one’s eyes open”.

Later, when Hjalmar tells Gregers about his invention, Polese changes radically the line:

HJALMAR. [...] Hver eftermiddag, når jeg har spist, lukker jeg mig inde i dagligstuen, hvor jeg kan gruble i ro. Men man må bare ikke jage på mig; for det nytter ikke til noget; det siger Relling også. (p. 105)

ERM. [...] Io mi occupo costantemente della mia invenzione e molte sono le notti che passo in camera mia, dinanzi al tavolo studiando. (Polese, p. 59)

HALMAR. [...] Every afternoon, when I’ve had my dinner, I shut myself up in the parlour when I can ponder undisturbed. But I can’t be goaded to it; it’s not a bit of good; Relling says so too. (Archer, p. 314)

Here Hjalmar turns into a real, hard-working husband. There is no trace of the veiled irony with which Ibsen makes him say that “every afternoon, when I’ve had my dinner, I shut myself up in the parlour when I can ponder undisturbed” – as Gina has told us, a few pages before, that he usually sleeps after dinner. Erminio “has spent many nights working at his table”, and his character gets a completely different shape. Polese, as well as changing the line, also omitted the sarcastic reference to Relling, who tells people not to disturb Hjalmar while he is “at work”.

When one comes to the history of Hjalmar’s and Old Ekdal’s suicide attempts, Polese’s text is at first faithful:

HJALMAR. Da dommen var afsagt og han skulde sættes fast, - da havde han pistolen i sin hand - [...] men han turde ikke. Han var fejg. Så forkommet, så ruineret på sjælen var han ble’t allerede dengang.[...]. (p. 103)

ERM. Quando il verdetto dei giurati condannò il luogotenente Ekdal alla galera, egli impugnò quell’arma, deciso di finirla con la vita...

GREG. Ebbene?

ERM. Non ne ebbe il coraggio. Fu un vile. Perduto, non gli rimaneva che di uccidersi. (Polese, pp. 57-58)

HIALMAR. When the sentence of imprisonment was passed – he had the pistol in his hand - [...] but he dared not use it. His courage failed him. So broken, so demoralised was he even then! [...] (Archer, p. 312)

In this case almost all the details are maintained by Polese, Erminio addressing his father as *vile* (“coward”) and *perduto* (“ruined”). But let us look at what Polese makes him say when he turns to *his* suicide attempt:

HJALMAR. I en sådan stund havde Hjalmar Ekdal pistolen rettet mod sit eget bryst.

GREGERS. Du tænkte også på at -!

HJALMAR. Ja.

GREGERS. Men du skød ikke?

HJALMAR. Nej. I det afgørende øjeblik vandt jeg sejr over mig selv. Jeg blev i live. Men du kan tro, der hører mod til at vælge livet under de vilkår. (p. 104)

ERM. [...] Fui vile...Io non so cosa provassi allora, ma comprendevo che altri avessero a ridere mentre io piangevo; mi sentivo solo, abbandonato, dimenticato da tutti...Volevo uccidermi, capisci.

GREG. (*triste*) Anch'io ho provato ciò quando è morta la mia povera mamma.

ERM. Perché non ho sparato?! Rimasi in vita...ma credimi ci vuol del coraggio anche per preferire la vita alla morte. (Polese, p. 58)

HIALMAR. In that hour Hjalmar Ekdal pointed the pistol at his own breast.

GREGERS. You too thought of - ?

HIALMAR. Yes.

GREGERS. But you didn't fire?

HIALMAR. No. At the decisive moment I won the victory over myself. I remained in life. But I can assure you it takes some courage to choose life under those circumstances. (Archer, pp. 312-313)

Apart from Polese translating freely and making Gregorio speak about his mother (something he does a few lines before in the original text), what interests us here is that Hjalmar addresses himself as “coward” and asks rhetorically *perché non ho sparato?* (“why did I not shoot?”). Hjalmar is admitting his weakness at that time, and this shows quite paradoxically that he is aware of his loss and has regained his dignity after that. The rather irritating statement of the original text, in which Hjalmar depicted himself as a hero, is in this way completely rubbed out by Polese, and his Erminio acquires a higher status than the Norwegian Hjalmar. Also Erminio's statement *credimi ci vuol del coraggio anche per preferire la vita alla morte* (“believe me, it takes courage even to prefer life to death”) gets another flavour after the lines above, sounding more as a retelling of his past troubles than as a praise to himself.

Finally, let us look at how Polese rendered the scenes in which Gina manages to keep Hjalmar home, by, among other things, reminding him that he would have to tell his old father about his decision:

GINA. Og så er det jo det til, at først måtte du vel sige ham, at du ikke længer vilde leve med os andre.

HJALMAR (*skyder kaffekoppen fra sig*). Det også, ja; at skulle rippe op igen alle disse forviklede forhold -. Jeg må område mig; jeg må ha' pusterom; jeg kan ikke bære alle byrderne på en eneste dag. (p. 152)

GINA. [...] E come farai a dire al nonno che mi lasciate?

ERM. (*penseroso*) Mah...Povero vecchio, povero vecchio (Polese, p. 105)

GINA. And besides, you'll have to tell him first that you don't mean to live with us others any longer.

HJALMAR (*pushes away his coffee cup*). Yes, there's that too; I'll have to lay bare the whole complicated history to him – I must turn matters over; I must have breathing-time; I can't take the whole burden upon my shoulders in a single day. (Archer, pp. 370-371)

We see how Erminio does not justify himself by telling Gina that “he must have breathing-time” or other simple-minded excuses. In the Italian text he is *penseroso* (“thoughtful”) and only reflects on his father's misery. There is no trace of his original meanness.

Later on Hjalmar glues together Werle's donation letter, which he had previously ripped in a fury.

HJALMAR (*flytter på grossererens brev*). Jeg ser, det papiret ligger her og slænger endnu.

GINA. Jeg har ikke rørt det.

[...]

HJALMAR (*tar en sags*). Bare en papirstrimmel på bagsiden - . (*klipper og klistrer*) Det være langt fra mig at ville forgribe mig på fremmed ejendom, - og aller mindst på en uformuende oldings. Nå, ikke på – den andens heller. – Se så. Lad det ligge der så længe. Og når det er ble't tørt, så ta' det væk. Jeg vil ikke se det aktstykke for mine øjne mere. Aldrig! (pp. 152-153)

ERM. [...] (*vede la donazione*) Sempre questa carta sotto gli occhi.

GINA. Io non l'ho toccata, io non voglio trarne profitto.

[...]

ERM (*come parlando tra sé*) E poi non è cosa mia...è di mio padre...Se vorrà fruirne...

[...]

ERM. Metti via quella carta, metti via quella carta. (*Gina mette in tasca la donazione*) (Polese, pp. 105-106)

HJALMAR. (*touching WERLE's letter*). I see that paper is still lying about here.

GINA, Yes, I haven't touched it.

[...]



HALMAR (*takes a pair of scissors*). Just a strip of paper at the back – (*clips and gums*). Far be it from me to lay hands upon what is not my own – and least of all upon what belongs to a destitute old man – and to – the other as well. – There now. Let it lie there for a time; and when it's dry, take it away. I wish never to see that document again. Never! (Archer, p. 371)

One notices how Polese translated correctly only the first two lines of the passage, and rewrote the rest with a slight reference to Old Ekdal as possessor of the donation (*è di mio padre...se vorrà fruirne*). What is important is that Polese completely eliminated the passage in which Hjalmar turns pathetic and ridiculous by gumming the ripped paper together again, which means that he accepted Werle's offer he had refused until a minute before.

The omission of Hjalmar's pathetic side has probably its most striking example in the following dialogue between Gina, Gregorio and Erminio:

GREGERS. Hvad har du så bestemt dig til?

HJALMAR. For en mand, som jeg er, er der kun én vej at gå. Jeg er i færd med at sanke sammen mine vigtigste sager. Men det tar tid, kan du vel tænke.

GINA (*lidt utålmodig*). Skal jeg så gøre stuen i stand til dig, eller skal jeg pakke vadsækken?

HJALMAR (*efter et ærgerligt sideblik mod Gregers*). Pak, - og gør i stand! (p. 153)

GREG. Che decisione hai preso dunque?

ERM. Un uomo come me non può seguire che una strada...Fuggo da questa casa. Vi tornerò per prendere i miei libri!...

GINA (*non guardando Gregorio*). Allora farò la tua valigia.

ERM. Sì... (Polese, p. 106)

GREGERS. What have you decided to do?

HALMAR. For a man like me, there's only one way to go. I'm just putting my most important things together. But it takes time, you know.

GINA (*rather impatiently*). Am I to get the room ready for you, or shall I pack your portmanteau?

HALMAR (*after a glance of annoyance at Gregers*). Pack – and get the room ready! (Archer, p. 372)

When Gina comes and asks Gregorio about what she has to do with his luggage, the translator omits Hjalmar's exhilarating reply "Pack – and get the room ready!". Erminio is a strong Italian man, who sticks to his decisions: he cannot answer otherwise than *Sì* when his wife asks him if he wants to leave home. The ambiguity of the original line, so crucial for the development and the tone of the play, gets irremediably lost<sup>13</sup>: Polese has finally succeeded in shaping his new Hjalmar, the Italian Erminio Ekdal.

From the examples analyzed above one notices an organic rewriting of the text and a reshaping of the character of Hjalmar, who indeed appears as a more authoritarian, coherent and Latinate father, rather the opposite of what he is in the original text and

<sup>13</sup> For other comments on this scene see Roberto Alonge, *Ibsen – L'opera e la fortuna scenica*, p. 88.

of what Giovanni Pozza was expecting to see interpreted by Cristofori. Such a tendency was common throughout the whole corpus of Polese's translations, and deeply influenced the first reception of Henrik Ibsen in Italy. The passages examined might make one think of a general incapacity by Polese as a translator, yet a mere linguistic analysis is in most cases misleading. In fact, the circumstances in which these plays were translated are still quite obscure, and one cannot exclude that Polese referred to other texts than the German translations. On the other hand, the modifications the plays underwent are symptomatic of the values and customs of the cultural milieu from which they sprung. These excerpts, in other words, are an important document not only on the introduction of Ibsen's plays in Italy, but also on the situation of late Italian Nineteenth-Century theatre itself. And if the first reception of Henrik Ibsen in Italy is also a history of the domestication of a playwright, it indeed passes through *L'anitra selvatica* and its signor *Erminio Ekdal*.



# Nordicum-Mediterraneum

*Icelandic E-Journal of Nordic and Mediterranean Studies*