

# Henrietta Frances Lord: Translating Ibsen for the Theosophical Movement

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## **Abstract**

This article focuses on the English translations of, and especially the introductions to, Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts* by Henrietta Frances Lord (1848-1923). Lord was a British women's rights activist and Theosophist and her translations epitomise an integrated system of Theosophical, feminist and socialist thought which arose in Britain during the 1880s. Treating Theosophy as a peripheral discourse of 'rejected knowledge' that stands in opposition to mainstream culture, the article discusses how Lord's distinctive reading of Ibsen reflects its grounding in this social and intellectual periphery. It argues that such a reading demonstrates the value of re-assessing receptions of Ibsen which have taken place outside the mainstream and which – like the spiritual and social movements of which Lord's translations are an expression – have continued to be sidelined by the classic Ibsen reception narrative.

## **Keywords**

Ibsen, translation, feminism, activism, Theosophy, occultism

## Introduction

The study of the reception of Henrik Ibsen's works in England has a long and rich history. Starting with Miriam Franc's doctoral dissertation in 1919, scholars have discussed how his plays were introduced to the British stage, how the socialist and women's rights movements influenced his reception, and how middlemen such as William Archer and Edmund Gosse contributed to his success on page and stage, not least through their translations of his work. More recently, scholars have also attended to the dynamics of canonisation and to the 'provincial' status Ibsen was awarded during his early English reception (see, for instance, Franc 1919, Egan 1972, Britain 1983, Postlewait 1986, Jan 1995, Shepherd-Barr 1997, Lausund 1999, Rem 2004). Yet there remains a side to this story that has received little attention and that concerns the English translations of *Et Dukkehjem* (*A Doll's House*) and *Gengangere* (*Ghosts*): published by Henrietta Frances Lord in 1882 and 1885 respectively. As I will argue, this oversight derives from the context in which these translations took shape, namely Theosophy. In Victorian England, Theosophy was an esoteric and 'peripheral' discourse that sustained forms of knowledge and culture rejected by the mainstream. It is therefore unsurprising that when Lord's translations first appeared they were criticised or ignored and seldom appeared on the stage. For the most part, later Ibsen scholarship has upheld this judgement and dismissed Lord's work as 'bizarre' (Britain 1983: 15). My contention, by contrast, is that the social and intellectual periphery from which that work emerges constitutes rather a site of possibility, a place from which Ibsen could be appreciated in ways that were not yet available to the mainstream and which have only gradually been discovered in the last few decades.

Above all, Lord's translations of *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts*, and especially her introductions to them, represent one of the first attempts in Ibsen scholarship to look at his plays in a spiritual way. Rather than being celebrated for the pioneering and refreshing insights into Ibsen's writings she thereby offers, however, Lord remains an obscure and peripheral figure in Ibsen studies. This requires some explanation. The concept of the 'periphery' is not, after all, unknown to accounts of the

reception of Ibsen in England. Previous studies have emphasised how Ibsen was associated by the British with a 'provincial' and 'peripheral' culture and literature, which was held to be of little significance compared with their own cultural and literary heritage (Rem 2004). The notion of the periphery at work in these discussions is therefore twofold: it is geographical (Norway was perceived to be an exotic place, far away in the North); and it is geopolitical (the Norwegian Ibsen was deemed *provincial* by virtue of his station outside the global British Empire). The notion of the periphery I will be employing in this article, by contrast, is of a different kind. It is defined by culture and religion rather than geography. It also applies to the reader of Ibsen rather than to Ibsen himself. Lord's interpretation of Ibsen in no way treats him as a peripheral author in relation to English literature, but it is itself peripheral in so far as it emerges out of a position at the margins of the theological, social, cultural and moral thinking that informed the mainstream reading practices of the English at that time.

My purpose in taking Henrietta Frances Lord's readings of Ibsen more seriously than usual is to demonstrate the value of treating the periphery as a site of possibility in the reception of Ibsen. In order to make my case, I will first justify my understanding of Theosophy as 'rejected knowledge' and then explain its role in the late Victorian cultural and political environment (Hanegraaff 2012: 221). After that, I will consider how Lord participated in this discourse through her role as a female translator, discuss her introduction to *A Doll's House* in the light of Anna Kingsford's Theosophical work *The Perfect Way; or the Finding of Christ* (1882), and analyse her introduction to *Ghosts* in relation to Theosophy and Christian Science, which she had embraced shortly before. Finally, my conclusion will assess the value of Lord's introductions both for what they can tell us about the early reception of Ibsen in England and for their promotion of a spiritual understanding of his works.

### **Theosophy as 'rejected knowledge'**

Theosophy is commonly understood to be a form of 'esotericism' or 'occultism', although all three of these terms have a complex history

and have proven difficult to define. Wouter J. Hanegraaff recently sought to refine the traditional characterisation of esotericism as a ‘form of thought’ focused on alchemy, astrology and magic – and occultism as a late nineteenth-century variant of it (Faivre 1994: 4-8) – by proposing that, in the wake of the Enlightenment, these three esoteric disciplines merged in ‘a conceptual waste-basket for “rejected knowledge”, which ‘has kept functioning as the academy’s radical “Other” to the present day’ (2012: 221). From this point on, Hanegraaff continues, esotericism declined from its position as a respected field of academic interest to one increasingly dismissed from and discredited by the academy. This decline in its standing continued in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a result of the ongoing processes of Western modernisation and secularisation which finally cast these three esoteric disciplines beyond the ranks of academic mainstream culture (ibid.: 252-256) and relegated it to the status of a peripheral discourse.

Several generations of Ibsen scholars would seem to have drawn upon this characterisation of esotericism and Theosophy as (rightly) ‘rejected knowledge’ in their assessment of Lord’s translations. As early as 1919, Miriam Franc found Lord’s introduction to *Ghosts* ‘delightfully amusing because of the solemn absurdities of Miss Lord’s doctrines’ (1919: 61). Later scholarship has continued in this tone. Ian Britain, for instance, calls her translations ‘bizarre appropriations’ (1983: 15), while Michael Egan dubs Lord ‘a genial crank’ (1972: 5). Others have ignored or downplayed the Theosophical inspiration of Lord’s texts, such as her contemporary William Archer (quoted in Egan 1972: 61-62) and, more recently, Kirsten Shepherd-Barr, who points out that ‘Eastern philosophical ideas were becoming increasingly attractive’ (1997: 41) but never mentions the word ‘Theosophy’. For these scholars, it would appear Theosophy is something risible or negligible. Attitudes such as these explain the absence of serious studies of Lord’s translations.

It is crucial, however, that we approach the Theosophical inspiration behind Lord’s translations with an open mind if we want to understand the context in which these texts arose and the reason Lord employed such seemingly ‘bizarre’ elements in her introductions. Taking Theosophy seriously also allows us to understand how Lord’s translations participate – albeit from a peripheral point of view – in the

multifaceted radical movement that embraced Ibsen in England at the end of the nineteenth century. In the context of the European 'occult revival', which arose in the wake of scientific naturalism, Theosophy became for many a 'third way' in the struggle between established religion and science, an attempt to investigate spiritual questions using a scientific method (Godwin 1994: 187-379). Some scholars have also called Theosophy an 'occultism of the left' because its members often became involved in humanitarian and social causes, such as women's suffrage, antivivisection, pacifism, anti-imperialism and socialism (Hanegraaff 2012: 243, Dixon 2001: 10). As a consequence, Theosophy's status as 'rejected knowledge' situated at the margins of mainstream thought and activity offered people like Lord a site of possibility from which to advocate countercultural views and take an oppositional stance.

It is in this context that Lord read Ibsen. In the two sections that follow, I will show how Theosophy ties in with different radical currents of the age and how Lord participated in them as both a Theosophist and a *female* translator of Ibsen.

### **Theosophy, feminism, socialism – and Ibsen**

Theosophy is often understood in connection with the Theosophical Society, which was founded in New York City in 1875. Two of its founders, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott, quickly became its most representative members and ideologues, and a British branch was founded as early as 1878. Drawing upon a growing fascination with science and spiritualism, which suggested that the spiritual realm was scientifically verifiable, the society maintained that Truth or Divine Wisdom (*theosophia*) is to be found in all religions, with an emphasis on the Eastern ones as particular repositories of such 'ancient wisdom'. The Theosophical Society therefore encouraged the study of comparative religion, philosophy and science. It also called for a 'Brotherhood of Humanity', without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour (Dixon 2001: 3-4).

This call resulted in members of the Theosophical Society becoming involved in a series of radical movements. One of these was the

women's rights movement and bears witness to the growing status women had achieved in late nineteenth-century occult movements and organisations, especially in Britain and America. As scholars like Ann Braude (1989) and Alex Owen (1989) have pointed out, spiritualism developed in the same period that various movements for women's rights were also gaining ground in those two countries. Women played a crucial role in both the American and the English spiritualist movements, where the majority of mediums – by far the most important figures in spiritualism – were female. As Braude puts it:

dependent for spiritual knowledge on the unhindered autonomy of female mediums [spiritualists] found a need for drastic changes to allow women to express their true natures as human beings. They found that the norm imposed by society dictated both an immoral theology and an immoral structure of relations between human beings. (1989: 56)

A privileged attention to women's rights was one of the key ideas Theosophy inherited from the spiritualist movement, especially in England. In fact, the local Theosophical Society managed to recruit a number of feminists who, while they were disappointed with the Anglican Church for its conservative stance toward women, did not entirely reject religion. Theosophy thus became an attractive arena for people involved in both female activism and occultism; for them, feminism was a 'political theology' and causes like women's suffrage 'a spiritual crusade' (Godwin 1994: 196-199 and 281-282, Dixon 2001: 5-7, 154-157, 179-180). This process of merging the political and the spiritual took place in exactly the same years – the 1880s – that Ibsen's British reception took off, and 'the "New Woman" of late-Victorian feminism, as epitomised by Nora, seemed to be fairly represented in Anglo-American occultism' (Pasi 2009: 64). The most representative female members of the Theosophical Society, Blavatsky and Annie Besant, had, for instance, both left their husbands.

The link between Theosophy, feminism and Ibsen is nevertheless not fully explained until we add the growing British socialist movement to the mix. As Joy Dixon has demonstrated, spirituality was not absent

in British socialist discourses of the 1880s, which could also combine Marxism, radical Christianity, anti-industrialism, secularism and Fabian Socialism (2001: 121). The early reception of Ibsen was to a certain degree a domain of the Fabian Society, which produced a number of private performances, translations and criticisms during the 1880s (Rem 2012a: 111-117). Many Fabians were involved in the feminist cause, and this often led to socialist and feminist perspectives merging in the early reception of Ibsen (Finney 1994: 89 and Rem 2012b: 59). Due to its appeal to feminists as well as to those socialists who did not reject religion, Theosophy became the third prominent discourse in this cauldron of radical thinking. For the proponents of this radicalism, Ibsen was a common point of reference.

### **Henrietta Frances Lord: the female translator as activist**

Henrietta Frances Lord was born in London in 1848. After two years of study at Girton College Cambridge, the first institution to grant women access to higher education in Britain, she joined the Manchester National Society for Women's Suffrage in 1881 and was elected a poor law Guardian a year later, the same year she published her translation of *A Doll's House* (Crawford 2001: 357). By 1883, Lord had become a Theosophist and encouraged Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a prominent American women's rights activist, to read Theosophical literature (Stanton 1898: 377). Between 1886 and 1888, during a stay in the US, Lord developed an interest in psychical research and Christian Science, which culminated in the publication of her monograph *Christian Science Healing* in 1888 (Crawford 2001: 357-358). She died in 1923, after participating in a number of other movements for women's rights.

It is not yet possible to confirm for certain that Lord was a registered member of the Theosophical Society in England, since her name does not appear in the membership records, which start in 1889. Nonetheless, the period she translated *A Doll's House* coincides with the beginning of her commitment to women's suffrage and her interest in Theosophy. The fact that her translation of *Ghosts* (1885) came out in a Socialist journal, *To-Day*, also confirms she must have had some contact with this milieu. There is, moreover, another important sense

in which Lord occupied a peripheral and resistant position in relation to mainstream culture. As well as being a feminist and Theosophist, she was also a female translator.

Translation has often been explained in metaphorical terms based on the supposed condition of women. The seventeenth-century metaphor of *les belles infidèles*, which first associated translation with 'female' qualities, for instance, characterises translation as a 'woman', 'submitted' to the authority of the 'male', which is to say the original literary work (Simon 1996: 9-10). Women translators' 'peripheral' position in literary history has also, however, served as a site of possibility, a privileged position from which one might launch countercultures and generally conduct political or cultural activism. The nineteenth century was a fertile period for such activism, when British women translators 'belonged to the middle or upper classes, [...] enjoyed a high standard of education, moved in cultivated circles, and chose to translate intellectually challenging texts' (Stark 2006: 125). A typical example is Eleanor Marx, who translated Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and several works of Ibsen as part of her feminist and socialist commitment (Simon 1996: 67-68 and Stark 2006: 129-130). As Sherry Simon observes, it is not a coincidence that a high number of female translators combined their work with progressive social causes: 'they understood that the transmission of significant literary texts was an essential, not an accessory, cultural task. The translation of key texts is an important aspect of any movement of ideas' (Simon 1996: 40). Studying the work of female translators therefore provides a useful insight into the mechanisms of domination and subversion (ibid.: 39). This is another key feature of Lord's introductions that derives from her position as a peripheral translator.

Maria Tymoczko and Edwin Gentzler have claimed that every form of translation is embedded, in one way or another, in a discourse on power. Although translation is readily used as a tool for maintaining political or cultural power, they argue that it can also be used to foster countercultures, to 'conspire and rebel' (2003: xxi). More recently, Tymoczko has theorised the role of translation as a form of resistance, 'borrowed from the designation for clandestine activist movements opposed to oppressive forces' (2010: 7). However, she also stresses



that translators ‘cannot resist, oppose, or attempt to change everything objectionable in either the source or target culture’, and that they must

make choices about what values and institutions to support and oppose, determining activist strategies and picking up their fights, even as they also make choices about what to transpose from a source text and what to construct in a receptor text. (2010: 9)

Activist translation, therefore, presupposes a narrative – a public and a personal story that guides the translator’s behaviour (Baker 2010: 25) and shapes the translated text. In other words, this position presupposes an identifiable enemy and a basic position of subordination on the part of the ‘resistant’ translator. Lord’s efforts as a female translator operating within the realms of feminism, political radicalism and rejected knowledge can therefore be looked upon as an example of an activist attitude towards translation that not only resists Victorian mainstream literary and social narratives, but also constructs a new narrative in which the women’s rights movement and Theosophy merge into one another. In the next section I will demonstrate how this is the case in Lord’s introduction to *A Doll’s House*.

### **Lord’s introduction to *Nora* (1882)**

In an early article, Luise von Flotow (1991) emphasised how feminist translation operates according to three main strategies: supplementing (i.e. changing or adding words and phrases in order to underline concepts of feminist interest), prefacing and footnoting (i.e. providing paratexts that supplement the translation and possibly influence its reception), and ‘hijacking’ (i.e. accounting for an intrusion in the text and modifying it accordingly). In the next two sections, I will discuss how Lord’s translation of *Nora* employs prefacing and (more or less explicitly) hijacking, while supplementing is largely absent.

Although it is presented as a ‘Life of Henrik Ibsen’, Lord’s introduction to *Nora* (as she entitled the play) immediately takes a surprising direction. After a short paragraph on Ibsen’s previous plays

and an account of her visit to Sweden, where she became acquainted with the debate on the play, Lord goes straight to what she considers the key issue of *Nora*: marriage. According to Lord, 'marriage is still an unsettled problem' (Ibsen 1882: vi). She argues that

the union between two people is only true according as they love and understand each other in thought, feeling, and will, tasks of duty and sources of joy, and are consequently able to fight life's battles, bear its pains, and enjoy its glory together. (ibid.: vii)

Lord next turns to Ibsen, first explaining that 'it is, then, marriage in its widest sense, the common work of man and woman, which is the question of questions to the great poet.' She next maintains that his views on marriage are the opposite of what many people may assume – namely, positive. Ibsen, she points out, opposes the idea that 'for two to become one and blessed is a mere dream, but that marriage is something practical' and he 'protests that human passions cannot be controlled by locks or by opiates, and that the only possible help is for passion and duty to go the same way' (ibid.: xii). The accomplishment of such an ideal marriage is corroborated by the rise of 'Woman':

Ibsen sees the world deluged by masculine qualities [...]. He sees womanly qualities hidden, fled away, or misunderstood. [...] He considers [women] [...] a latent force whose accession humanity needs, and that his task is to release the Sleeping Beauty, as the prince did in our childish fable. (ibid.: vi-vii)

According to Lord, *Nora* is a prophetic play about the dawn of a new woman, one who is awakening 'to being able to love devotedly and really' (ibid.: viii). Such an awakening, which takes place in communion with rather than opposition to men, leads Lord to her conclusion about the thesis of the play:

The idea in *Nora* is: the object of marriage is to make each human personality free. [...] [T]he poet's work tells us, until the

relation between man and woman turns in this direction, the relation is not yet Love. This is the idea in *Nora*, freed from all side issues, and no other key will unlock it. (ibid.: xiv)

Lord explains that marriage, as 'the common work of a man and a woman', is a process. It involves the development and liberation of the individual of both sexes. She concludes:

People shoot beside the mark, too, when they will not see the subject of *Nora* as one of universal human application, when they think that Ibsen wanted to make Helmer hateful. What Ibsen wanted to make hateful, and what he has made hateful, is Helmer's false view of half humanity [...] It is this social pest, this expression of what is unnatural, that Ibsen hates. (ibid.: xxiv)

In Lord's view, that is, Ibsen criticises current views on marriage, in which men have both material and psychological power over women. He is not critical of marriage per se, which he sees on the contrary as the supreme manifestation of love between a man and a woman and a milestone in the process of the liberation of the individual, both male and female. In order to accomplish this liberation, however, a new woman must arise, here represented by Nora. Such a woman is not considered to be in conflict with the male, but rather a necessary companion in this self-realisation in marriage. From this point of view, Helmer is as much a victim of modern society as Nora.

### **Anna Kingsford as a key to *Nora***

Taken out of context, such theories may appear bizarre, as has been the usual assessment in Ibsen scholarship. Even Shepherd-Barr, who gives Lord credit for her involvement in the growing fascination for Oriental philosophy in the 1880s, does not seem interested in their nature. This is perhaps because Lord's theories, especially those regarding *Nora*, have very little to do with *Eastern-oriented* Theosophy. Their inspiration is to be found instead in another branch of Theosophical thought,

the chief representative of which was Anna Bonus Kingsford (1846-1888). Like other female Theosophists, Kingsford was a freethinker and a feminist activist who had experienced a loss of Christian faith, marriage and separation. Together with Edward Maitland (1824-1897), she developed a form of thought that, although it partly resembles Blavatsky's Theosophy, emphasises Christianity and the Western esoteric tradition, in contrast to the predominance of Hinduism and Buddhism found in Blavatsky (Kingsford and Maitland 1882: xii-xiii, 1-2 and Godwin 1994: 333-339). Her theses were presented in a series of lectures in London in the summer of 1881 and were published a year later under the title *The Perfect Way; or, the Finding of Christ* (Godwin 1994: 339). They were to leave a mark on the Theosophical Society in England and led eventually to a schism between Theosophists who 'looked East', following Blavatsky, and those who 'looked West' and followed Kingsford.

The absence of any reference to Eastern philosophy and religion in Lord's introduction suggests that Kingsford is her main frame of reference for *Nora*. Lord's statements in her 1888 treatise, *Christian Science Healing*, corroborate this view, as *The Perfect Way* is the only book on Theosophy she recommends (Lord 1888: 325-327), whereas she dismisses 'Buddhist Theosophy' as a 'fraud' (ibid.: 303). The very fact that Lord joined the Christian Science movement illustrates how her esotericism remained within a Christian framework.

If we look at Lord's introduction in the light of *The Perfect Way*, things start to fall into place. Briefly put, Kingsford and Maitland's book is meant to lead the individual towards the 'finding of Christ', a Redemption of the human being that follows a process of purification. *The Perfect Way* also teaches reincarnation in different 'bodies' or personalities as a necessary step towards uniting with the divine spirit, or 'the Christ within'. In this way, Kingsford's Theosophy does not deny the existence of Jesus, but promotes him as a person who had achieved such as union. He was thus neither the only Son of God nor a personal saviour (Godwin 1994: 340-345).

The important link between Lord and Kingsford regards the role of women in this process. According to Kingsford, Western society had neglected the spiritual role of women, a fact that had led to a

degeneration in society as a whole (Kingsford and Maitland 1882: 279-286). In response to this, she argues that the necessary faculty for finding Christ is Intuition, which in the human social system is fulfilled by Woman. Woman's role is therefore to guide the other human faculty, Intellect (represented by Man), to Redemption, or the finding of Christ in oneself (ibid.: 3-7, 61). Both the feminine and the masculine principle are necessary and complementary to one another for reaching Redemption: they are present in both God and human beings (ibid.: 55-58). Kingsford's discourse unfolds on several planes, wherein the union of the masculine and feminine has to happen both inside each human being and among human beings:

Man is a dual being, not masculine only or feminine only, but both of these; not man only or woman only, but man and woman. And he is this in respect, not of his exterior and physical, but of his interior and spiritual nature. [...] On this plane it takes two persons, a man and a woman, to express the whole humanity. (ibid.: 185-6)

The unfolding of this theory on an inner and outer plane leads Kingsford, like Lord, to acknowledge marriage as the starting point for the Finding of Christ (ibid.: 83, 185-6).

Against this background, one can understand Lord's reading of *Nora* more clearly. Ibsen's play and its main character are an allegory of the traumatic breakthrough of the female principle that will lead humanity to find Christ. According to Lord, Ibsen sees the world deluged by masculine qualities, while the feminine principle is neglected. The starting point is exactly the same as Kingsford's. The fact that Nora leaves Helmer exposes him as a man who has not yet acknowledged either the feminine principle in himself or the importance of Nora as a woman for his process of Redemption. Lord devotes a great deal of space in her introduction to explaining why Nora had to leave him anyway, precisely because his deluded understanding of the moral and spiritual structure of society is so corrupted that a radical rupture from Nora's side is the only way out of the impasse. But, as she makes clear in the preface to the second edition of the play, Lord is convinced that

their separation is merely temporary, and therefore that marriage – and Redemption – is still reachable for them (Ibsen 1890: vi-vii). This is the *universal* value that Lord attributes to *Nora*: a message of the possibility of Redemption for both man and woman, not exclusively the liberation of women. As Lord explains, Ibsen's negative example is intended as a warning, a way of reinforcing a *positive* view of the relationship between man and woman – hence her emphasis on marriage as a way to 'make each human personality free'. Nora becomes the archetypal representative of a woman who has refused the negative example of modern society and marriage and has started a process of development that will lead her to the unfolding of her feminine principle and to the finding of Christ.

### **Lord's translation of *Nora***

Against this background, it may seem surprising that Lord's translation of *Nora* does not include modifications or omissions that strengthen her thesis. There is not sufficient space to discuss the translated text itself, so I will instead highlight a couple of features most relevant to this discussion. Some of the criticism it has received relates, for instance, to the question of which version is deemed to have been her source text. William Archer accused her of having translated from the 1880 Swedish translation by Rafaël Hertzberg, based on the fact that 'Ibsen discards the foolish French fashion of marking a new "scene" at every entrance or exit, whereas it is religiously followed in that version' (quoted in Egan 1972: 62). Lord replied to Archer's accusation by saying she had translated from Ibsen's Norwegian (quoted in *ibid.*: 63). However, the real source of Lord's *Nora* might be neither the Norwegian nor the Swedish text. Surprisingly, the Swedish version mentioned by Archer does not contain any divisions into scenes, seemingly undermining his critique. A more likely candidate for Lord's source text, I would suggest, is Wilhelm Lange's German translation from 1879, since this does feature the same scene structure as Lord's translations. A couple of tiny but significant errors also point in this direction: Lord uses the title *Nora*, as does the German translation, and does not translate either the Norwegian *Et dukkehjem* or the Swedish

*Ett dockhem*. Furthermore, Lord calls one character Mrs. *Linden* and not Linde, which is an error present only in the German version. The same Mrs. *Linden*, moreover, has not arrived by Ibsen's 'dampskibet' (Ibsen 2008: 7, 225) or Hertzberg's 'ångbåt' (1880a: 14) – i.e. 'steamer' – but, like Lange's 'der Bahn' (1880b: 11), with 'the train' (1882: 10). This suggests Lord's primary source was the German translation and not the Norwegian original or the Swedish translation. It must be said, however, that Lord did not follow Lange's text slavishly. For example, whereas Lange takes the liberty of renaming Torvald Helmer 'Robert', Lord keeps the original Norwegian name.

Apart from its philological importance, establishing Lord's source text allows us to reassess a few assumptions critics have made about Lord's translation. Shepherd-Barr, for instance, argues that Lord operates in a paradoxical way:

on the one hand, Lord does not always translate properly Torvald's most glaring patronizing remarks to Nora, or on the other, her most spirited returns. This is surprising given Lord's views on the repression of women in marriage, expressed so lucidly in her introduction. (1997: 44)

Shepherd-Barr contends, too, that Lord makes Nora weaker, against the expectations of a 'feminist' activist translation. For instance, Lord mistranslates the noun 'kvinde' ('woman') as 'baby', when it is used of Nora (1997: 44), and generally downplays sexual references and gender-related expressions (ibid.: 44-47). The issue of Lord's mistranslations and their significance in an activist translation is, however, more complicated than this. In the first place, the majority of the modifications Shepherd-Barr ascribes to Lord are present in Lange's translation, and this is especially the case with those expressions that, in Shepherd-Barr's view, undermine Torvald's patronising behaviour and make Nora weaker.<sup>1</sup> It is an open question whether Lord consciously kept these modifications or just followed the German text without checking the Norwegian original or the Swedish translation.

However intentional these changes might be, the explanation for this absence of 'activism' in Lord's translation might be simpler. As Mona

Baker (2010) points out, textual manipulation in activist translations is actually quite rare, as the risk of being unmasked is high. Activist translators, she notes, choose carefully which borders to trespass and which to respect – a strategy that can even lead to bowdlerisation and self-censorship. This is just an apparent paradox, for the task of the activist translator is to make the text reach its recipients; this also means avoiding censorship and/or moral judgement, and making the text more palatable for the public. All these precautions are perfectly applicable to Lord. It is likely, too, that she had performance in mind when she translated *Nora* and made the text more useful for English actors and audiences (this is how she replied to Archer's criticism, see Egan 1972: 63). Finally, one might argue Lord did not need to supplement her text to fit her readings. By means of an introduction, masked as a 'Life of Henrik Ibsen' but actually an essay on the marriage issue and the advent of Woman, she had already 'hijacked' the text. She did not need to modify it, for her goal was already reached. In the next three sections, I will show how she developed these strategies of prefacing and hijacking in her translation of Ibsen's *Ghosts*.

### **Lord's introduction to *Ghosts* (1885-1890)**

Lord's translation of *Nora* was seldom performed. It was used for an obscure production at the School of Dramatic Art in London in 1885, which made very little impact (Shepherd-Barr 1997: 26), and for a private reading at Eleanor Marx's home in 1886 (Ibsen 2008k: 248). That reading has left its mark on Ibsen's reception history because of its cast (Marx as Nora, her partner George Aveling as Torvald, and George Bernard Shaw as Krogstad), but it did not extend beyond the circle of its immediate audience or inspire other productions.

In 1885, a new translation by Lord came out, this time of *Ghosts*. The very fact that Lord translated this particular play was a radical statement in itself, since it had been banned from the major Scandinavian theatres, censored in Germany, and would trigger a great scandal when it first reached the English stage in 1891, precipitating a censorship that would last until 1914 (Ibsen 2008: 7k, 455-479 and Rem 2012b: 61). With the publication of this translation in *To-Day*, a



periodical edited at that time by H. H. Champion, a prominent official of the Social Democratic Federation (Britain 1983: 20), Lord's activism, which had to this point unfolded mainly along the axes of feminist and Theosophical thought, now acquired an additional socialist hue. Although there is no proof that Lord was directly involved in any socialist organisation, the fact her translation came out in *To-Day* confirms she must have had some sort of contact with that milieu.

This translation remained unnoticed until 1888, when Archer revised it and published it in a collection of Ibsen's writings (Postlewait 1986: 14). Lord's 1885 version also came out in two book editions in 1890-1891. By that time, Lord had been back and forth between England and Chicago, where she became acquainted with the Christian Science movement and took ownership of *Woman's World*, a magazine devoted to the advancement of women (Lord 1888: vii-viii). This experience culminated in the publication of the book *Christian Science Healing* (1888) mentioned earlier.

In the preface to the 1890 edition of *Ghosts*, which is more succinct and less 'masked' than the preface to *Nora*, Lord starts with a fairly conventional interpretation of the play at that time: that *Ghosts* was a drama about heredity.

*Ghosts* affects me as a story from real life, and as such I will speak of it. The keys to real life are the sex-cleavage of the soul for its course of evolution, and the harvest it makes meanwhile, through successive lives. [...]. The Indian philosophical name of this harvest - Karma - is on the lips of many just now, who have vague or incorrect ideas of its real meaning. They think its operation is punitive, not evolutionary. The Indian name Karma does not include the doctrine of the Twin soul (Ibsen 1891: vi-vii).

Lord then proceeds to introduce her interpretation of *Ghosts*:

To my thinking, the disorder and hopelessness of *Ghosts* disappear, directly we read it with these deeper views of evolution. Stating my philosophy of the play, I would say, part

of our sense of pain and disorder arises from so many of the characters having travestied their sex; Chamberlain Alving was really a woman-soul, Mrs. Alving a man-soul; Mr. Manders is a woman; so is Oswald [sic]; Regina [sic] is a man. This leaves the arch-humbag Engstrand as the only one in a genuine position; he is a man. Some souls perform all their evolution, sub-human and human, attached to and acting through bodies of one sex; sometimes their own; sometimes the opposite; – some adopt change for selfish, some for noble reasons – education, mission, etc., Ibsen himself being a woman-soul, who has taken man's form for his work's sake. (ibid.: vii)

With this preface, Lord widens her esoteric reading of Ibsen by introducing the concepts of Karma and reincarnation, which she had not addressed in her 1882 introduction to *Nora*, and only touched upon in her preface to the second edition. In addition, she parts ways from Theosophy and incorporates elements from Christian Science, as I will now illustrate.

### **Karma and reincarnation in a Theosophical context**

In the West, the idea that souls reincarnate in different bodies before going on to a higher existence has long provided a recurrent alternative to the Christian belief in bodily resurrection and the afterlife (Keller 2006). It was boosted by the flourishing of Theosophy in the late nineteenth century, which largely popularised this concept (Zander 2006: 985-986). From a Theosophical point of view, reincarnation is evolutionary, which means that a soul incarnates in different bodies in order to acquire experience and knowledge before reaching a higher state of existence. The mechanism of reincarnation is regulated by karma, 'the law of retribution', which balances punishment and reward with a mechanism of cause and effect: good and bad deeds in one previous incarnation will result in positive or negative outcomes in the next (Godwin 1994: 340-342).

Kingsford was one of the first Theosophists to incorporate karma and reincarnation in her doctrines, despite her association with 'Western'

Theosophy. She wrote extensively about it in *The Perfect Way* and later works (1882: 15-25, 44-53 and 1889: *passim*) and it is probably from these sources that Lord borrowed the view of karma she presents in her introduction to *Ghosts*, although there are some important differences. While Theosophy claims the forms and conditions of reincarnation are regulated by karma (Blavatsky 1889: 141-142, 168, Kingsford 1889: 137-138), Lord states that the characters of *Ghosts* deliberately (and wrongly) chose the sex of their present reincarnation. As she writes in *Christian Science Healing*, spirit-guides counsel the soul between one incarnation and another on how to choose the best suitable life for gaining the knowledge needed on the path to perfection. Yet, as Lord puts it, 'the final decision must be made, and voluntarily made, by the candidate for Re-incarnation himself' (1888: 417).

Lord's view on reincarnation also seems to part ways with Theosophy in her idea of a 'man-soul' and a 'woman-soul', which appears to presuppose that souls have intrinsic gender differences. Both 'Eastern' and 'Western' Theosophy point in other directions. According to Blavatsky, the unconditioned soul is both male and female and incarnates in beings of different sexes (Dixon 2001: 154); according to Kingsford, the soul is feminine (1882: 216 and *passim*). Lord's peculiar view on the soul is due to a third unusual Theosophical element, namely, 'the Doctrine of the Twin Soul', or the idea that souls originate from a nucleus that was later split into two parts looking for one another.<sup>2</sup> Lord had introduced this concept in the preface to the second edition of *Nora* (1890), where she explains that the destiny of each character was dependent on their karma and that Nora and Helmer ultimately did not find one another in the present incarnation, because they were not twin souls; Mrs. Linde and Krogstad, on the contrary, bore the mark of a 'soul communion' (Ibsen 1890: x-xi). In her introduction to *Ghosts*, Lord explains how the play portrays the unsuccessful meeting and failed recognition between twin souls: Mrs. Alving-Manders and Osvald-Regine (Ibsen 1891: viii-ix). She also shows how reincarnation was responsible for these twin souls meeting at a particular moment in time and space, since spiritual affection, according to Theosophy, can cause souls to become incarnate in the same family group (Blavatsky 1889: 150).

The theory of the twin soul is what allows Lord to complete her interpretation of *Ghosts* as a snapshot of the life of the soul. The souls incarnated in the characters of *Ghosts* are portrayed at a negative moment in their evolution, in which they have chosen the wrong incarnation. This regards both the sex in which they reincarnated (as Lord points out, Engstrand's is the only soul which chose its original gender) and the very form of life (the bourgeois woman; the clergyman; the painter; the maid) they have chosen in their path to evolution. Given these premises, it is no surprise that the two couples of twin souls (Mrs. Alving-Manders and Oswald-Regine) did not manage to find one another. Also, the 'travesty of sex' makes the play end tragically for them all, except Engstrand, who has made the only 'right' reincarnation choice (although one can wonder whether his stratagems will not hinder his path of evolution and his karma grant him a fair deal of suffering in his next incarnation).

Lord is silent on other aspects of her interpretation, such as the reason why the characters (and Ibsen himself) should be women- or men-souls, and her reading of this play ends up being more obscure than her reading of *Nora*. Yet there is another element that allows us to understand her interpretation better, and to assess the meaning Lord gave to reincarnation in the play. Early in her preface, Lord states that *Ghosts* strikes her as 'a story from real life'. Given the degree of esoteric knowledge that is required to understand Lord's doctrines and interpretation of *Ghosts*, one might think she is reading the play as an allegory of a path of inner development, as was the case with *Nora*. Her emphasis on the 'real' aspect of the play points, however, towards another interpretation. Lord does not hint at the play's literary realism, but at the fact that *Ghosts*, as a portrait of reincarnations gone bad, is a picture of realistic family dynamics. For Lord, reincarnation, karma and related concepts did not involve a higher sphere of knowledge, but could be perceived in everyday life. She shows this in a discussion of Oswald's sickness which concludes her preface. Having made it clear that heredity is not the cause of Oswald's sickness, she states that 'the next great lesson' *Ghosts* has to teach is that of the 'relation between the Seen and the Unseen':

had Mrs. Alving's inquiries turned in this direction, she was quite intuitive enough to have seen for herself how Oswald [sic] was being worked upon to abandon the citadel of his own life in favour of an intruder, [...] and equally able to understand, that she was as competent to protect her darling boy as though the tempter stood by him in the flesh. (Ibsen 1891: x-xi)

To understand the meaning of these words, we must turn briefly to Christian Science and its views on healing.

### **The influence of Christian Science**

Christian Science is a self-help psychology movement that originated in the United States in the 1870s. It advocates 'mind over matter' and promotes the belief that the individual can create his or her own reality according to personal belief. The healing of physical and/or mental illness is central in Christian Science, and is based on a mechanism of both denial ('I am not sick') and affirmation ('I am healthy') that helps 'reprogramme' the mind of the patient. The Christian Science movement claimed to achieve its results by using the invisible laws that govern reality, and therefore presented itself as a 'science', although the religious aspect was also always present. Christian Science, in fact, taught the recognition of an 'inner divinity' as a key to practising healing (Hanegraaff 2006: 861-862).

Lord's journey from Theosophy to Christian Science was not an uncommon one, as the latter movement has roots in the former. The idea of an 'inner divinity', for instance, also has a parallel in Kingsford's 'the Christ within', which Lord mentions in *Christian Science Healing* (Lord 1888: 325-327). In her treatise, Lord parts ways with Theosophy, especially Blavatsky's, labelling it a doctrine which only gives 'a restless desire to get more books, so as to learn more' (ibid.: 302). On the contrary, she presents Christian Science as offering 'service, not information; peace, not political machinations or secret understandings; and instead of "The Mahatmas" and their strange agents, direct access to the Personality of the Christ whose name it bears' (ibid.: 306). *Christian Science Healing* is a guide to 'its principles

and practice', accessible to all and capable of bringing happiness and health in life.

Lord's introduction to *Ghosts* can fruitfully be interpreted at the intersection between Theosophy and Christian Science. In her treatise, she makes it clear that a belief in karma and reincarnation has no place in Christian Science, but it can help the healer understand the origin of the illness and treat it better (Lord 1888: 409-424 and Ibsen 1891: xii). *Ghosts* is not only a snapshot of an unfortunate stage of soul development, but also an episode from 'real life', where a person (Osvald) suffering from karmic problems should have been treated according to Christian Science healing practices. From this point of view, Lord's translation of *Ghosts* also has a practical goal: to give Christian Science practitioners an example of a critical situation and suggestions for solving it.

One can dismiss such a reading as bizarre, as Ibsen scholars have generally done, but this means taking it out of its context. Lord's *Ghosts* is, like her *Nora*, an activist translation. The context is no longer feminism or Theosophy but that of a militant Christian Science practitioner who 'hijacked' a text and partly used it as a tool for her campaign. This view is corroborated by the fact that Lord was actively promoting Christian Science in this period (Harley 2002: 59). Her interest in translating Ibsen therefore seems to be twofold. On the one hand, she was translating an author who had, in her view, realised how his era was going to change socially and spiritually (as she points out in her introduction to *Nora*). On the other hand, as Ibsen had become popular and widely-debated in 1890s Britain, Lord would ensure the doctrines of karma, reincarnation and Christian Science a visibility which would probably not be achieved by her treatise alone. Thanks to *Ghosts*, she reached a larger audience.<sup>3</sup>

## Conclusion

What in the end is the value of Lord's introductions to her translations of Ibsen? As the work of a figure who located herself on the peripheries of the religious, philosophical, cultural, political and intellectual thinking of her time, they have not left any mark in Ibsen criticism and

scholarship and have been mentioned only as curiosities.

First of all, Lord has to be given credit for *not* having appropriated Ibsen for her own philosophy, as she never tries to demonstrate any kind of direct link between Ibsen and occultism. She should also be commended as a historical and critical pioneer. Lord was, for a start, the first to provide an English readership with a version of these plays that was reliable and not abridged or adapted. Her interpretations are also very early examples, if not the very first, of a tradition of Ibsen scholarship that has focused on the spiritual aspect of his bourgeois plays. During their early reception, in fact, *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts* were mainly discussed as works of social critique (Ibsen 2008: 7k, 227-232, 250-265, 434-449, 470-479).

Lord's voice was, in an English context, totally isolated and it is here that the importance of her peripheral status as a feminist and occultist activist resides. Such a site of possibility provided a spiritual insight into Ibsen's oeuvre that, at such an early stage, would hardly have come from a mainstream, Christian perspective. The reason for this is that *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts* attacked the very foundations of conventional Christian lifestyle, and Christian critics were therefore unable to see their spiritual implications. Later, when the storm had passed, scholars became more receptive to spiritual and Christian interpretations, especially those conducted within a Kierkegaardian framework. This approach has proven very fruitful (see, among others, Cappelørn et al. 2010). In a recent monograph, Jørgen Haugan has offered an intriguing interpretation of Ibsen's oeuvre that contests radically his position as a social reformer and reinterprets his plays in a Christian-evangelical light. He insists in particular on seeing Nora as a representative of the Holy Ghost and a beacon of a 'third Empire', and Mrs. Alving as the house's 'evil spirit' who has not realised her relatives' spiritual and human needs (2014: 268, 286).

Reading Haugan's analysis often brings Lord to mind, and juxtaposing his and her readings allows a clearer and more nuanced assessment of Lord's 'absurdities' and 'bizarre' interpretations to emerge. In fact, while Haugan reads Ibsen literally, ascribing to him an evangelical agenda which is difficult to support, Lord reads his plays allegorically, as a beacon of a new age for mankind (be it women,

as in the case of *Nora*, or enlightened Christian Science practitioners, as in the case of *Ghosts*). From this point of view, her introductions, however instrumental, are very intriguing. Her reading is not dogmatic, but takes Ibsen's drama as symptomatic of an era of great changes, spiritually as well as socially. Indeed, if *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts* do address spiritual matters, as well as contemporary social problems, as has been suggested by many later Kierkegaardian and Christian readings, the starting point for this school of thought was Lord. Her readings could hardly have arisen from any other stance than one located on a peripheral site of rejected knowledge and it is this that gives her strange and yet intriguing readings of *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts* in the light of Theosophy and Christian Science their true value.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> A thorough investigation of this issue of Lord's primary source deserves a study of its own, but here are a few relevant examples. Lord's 'baby' (1882: 3) originates from Lange's 'Kind' (1880b: 7), though the latter uses it only once and not twice as Lord does (Shepherd-Barr 1997: 44). Torvald's sexist squirrel metaphor, which is substituted by a neutral 'wry faces' in Lord's translation (1882: 4), is motivated by Lange's 'Mäulchenverziehen' (1880b: 7). The fact that Lord's Nora says 'please do what I ask you, Torvald' (1882: 5) instead of the correct and stronger 'let's do what I ask' (Shepherd-Barr 1997: 45), originates from Lange's 'thu mir nun den Gefallen' ('do me a favour', 1880b: 8). Also, Helmer's bland 'that is just what I hope' (1882: 4) instead of the original 'yes, you'd certainly better do that' (Shepherd-Barr 1997: 45) is based on Lange's 'Das hoff'ich' (1880b: 7). It must be said, however, that Lord also made her own share of modifications: for example, the stage direction in which Nora seizes Mrs. Linde's hands, which is absent in Lord's translation (1882: 10), is present in Lange (1880b: 11, see Shepherd-Barr 1997: 46).

<sup>2</sup> The idea of the twin soul participates in an old tradition that dates back to Plato's *Symposium* (360 B.C.). Lord's source is unclear: Kingsford wrote of a 'Recognition' and 'Communion' of the souls of the beloved after the reincarnation process (Kingsford and Maitland 1882: 143, 339-342, Kingsford 1889: 154), and Emanuel Swedenborg, whom she often quotes in *Christian Science Healing*, wrote about a marriage of soul mates in Heaven in his *De coelo*



*et ejus mirabilibus* (1758, chapter 383).

<sup>3</sup> As far as I have been able to check, *Ghosts* does not include any particular modifications, apart from the domestication of some of the character names (Osvald-Oswald, Helene-Helen). Lord is often precise in rendering Engstrand's linguistic pastiche or explaining Norwegian language issues (Ibsen 1891: 46, 58, 93). Not coincidentally, Archer revised Lord's translation in 1888 instead of making a new one, and paid her tribute when republishing it (Postlewait 1986: 15).

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