

Egil Törnqvist

**PAGE, STAGE AND SCREEN: THE OPENING OF
IBSEN'S *GENGANGERE* (*GHOSTS*)**

Thirteen years ago I dealt with the opening of Ibsen's *Gengangere* (1881) in this journal.¹ I was then primarily concerned with two problems: the relationship between the first-time-recipient (R1) and the rerecipient (R2) with regard to drama² and the inclination among drama critics to make little or no distinction between the reader of a play and the spectator of a (hypothetical) performance based on it. The opening of *Gengangere* was chosen as an example simply because a number of critics have analyzed it in some detail.

The present article may be seen as a complementary sequel to the earlier one. I shall deal with exactly the same part of the play,³ but this time I wish to focus on the way it has factually been presented in six television productions, three of which are moderately adjusted stage versions. It could of course be argued that a comparison between various stage performances would have been more fair to Ibsen, since the stage, not the screen, was his intended medium. On the other hand, it is a fact that play productions on the small screen in our time reach considerably more spectators than stage performances.⁴ Apart from this sociological justification, a comparison between the text and different screen versions is of interest in its own right, as a switch from one medium (text) to another (screen) sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly (via the stage). Another practical reason for my choice is that screen performances, unlike stage versions, can be preserved on videotape the way they appeared to the spectators when they were transmitted. As a

¹"Hur inleds Ibsens *Gengangere*? Kring dramareceptionens metodologi," *Tijdschrift voor Skandinavistiek*, IV:1, 1983, 79-101.

²I use 'recipient' as an umbrella term covering all types of receivers: readers, spectators, listeners, R1s and R2s.

³The section, based on *Samlede Verker. Hundreårsutgave*, ed. by H. Koht, Fr. Bull and D.A. Seip, IX (Oslo, 1932), 52-53, is reproduced in the aforementioned article, 80-81.

⁴Cf. Egil Törnqvist, "Ibsen on film and television" in James McFarlane (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen* (Cambridge, 1994), 215-16.

consequence, they can be examined in detail even long after they were first presented. For research purposes TV drama, unlike live theatre, has the advantages of the film medium. A videorecording of a TV play is in fact even closer to the original product than a recording of a feature film which, after all, is meant for the big rather than the small screen.

My decision to deal with the same section of *Gengangere* as in the earlier article is not only determined by the idea of complementarity. It also has the advantage of confronting the recipient with a part of the play which by definition, unlike any other part, has nothing presented to the recipient preceding it. This means that the reader of this article, who is unfamiliar with the play, is in a position comparable to the recipients experiencing it for the first time. This greatly facilitates a comparison between different productions.

The fundamental question to be posed in the following is: How does the play text compare with the TV presentations based on this text? To what extent and in what way do we perceive the text differently from the way we perceive audiovisual presentations? Since five of the six productions are based on translations, we may also wonder how the source language relates to the target languages. And how the signifiers of the source language and/or source culture compare with those of the target languages/cultures or, to put it more broadly, how cultural contexts influence productions. We must here remember that even the Norwegian production discussed below is almost a hundred years removed from the original text.

My comparison between the drama text and various performances based on this text does not imply that I consider the text as sacrosanct and a performance adhering to Ibsen's text as per se preferable to one deviating from it. The reason I wish to pay attention not only to the productions but also to the play text is (1) that it offers a different situation of reception, and (2) that it is the obvious starting-point for all the directors and in this sense the more or less common denominator underlying all the productions.⁵ As for the target texts, I shall limit myself to one, Michael Meyer's English translation.⁶ The choice is motivated by the fact that this is the rendering used in the British production discussed below.

⁵The qualification "more or less" refers to the fact that we deal not with one text but with many, one source text and many target texts.

⁶Henrik Ibsen, *Plays: One*, tr. Michael Meyer (London, 1980). Page references to the text in the following are to this edition.

At the end of the Ibsen volume that includes *Ghosts*, Meyer has a "Note on the Translations" which is remarkable. It begins:

I have translated Ibsen's text faithfully, but have allowed myself a certain amount of liberty as regards cutting. I do not think Ibsen can be played without cuts today [...] and judicious cutting seems to me to be almost as essential as accurate translation.

Ibsen, though marvellously taut in his construction, was not always taut in his phrasing and, especially in the opening and expository scenes of a play, underlines his points to a degree which today would sound tiresomely repetitive. I have trimmed these repetitions and have thinned out the language elsewhere, retaining some additional cuts which were found necessary in rehearsal and production.

Above all, I have not hesitated to strip the dialogue of many of its stage directions. (320)

Whether or not we agree with Meyer's view of Ibsen's text - this is not at issue here - his view of the role of the translator is principally unacceptable. A director must have a great amount of freedom with regard to the texts on which he is basing his productions. But a translator, especially one who translates from a minor language, must certainly adhere faithfully to the source text and render all of it. Meyer simply confuses his own role as translator with that of the director. He is handing the director, who in all likelihood is unable to check it against the original, a text that has already been slightly adapted according to his own personal taste. Fortunately, Meyer's practice is better than his worrying declaration concerning his method would make one believe. His translations have proved to be very actable and are frequently used both for stage and screen.

Ibsen's play has always, for want of a better word, been entitled *Ghosts* in English. Meyer sticks to the traditional title. But he omits the subtitle, *Et familjedrama i tre akter*,⁷ by which Ibsen seems to indicate that he was continuing the attack on the family as an institution begun with *Et Dukkehjem* (*A Doll's House*) two years earlier. After all, the Alving family has never been a family in any true sense.

⁷James McFarlane renders this as "A Domestic Drama in Three Acts." Ibsen, *Plays* (London, 1970), 195.

Meyer's list of the dramatis personae is as follows:

MRS ALVING, *widow of Captain Alving, late Chamberlain to the King*

OSWALD ALVING, *her son, a painter*

PASTOR MANDERS

ENGSTRAND, *a carpenter*

REGINA ENGSTRAND, *Mrs Alving's maid* (26)⁸

We notice how the translator provides an explanatory rendering of Ibsen's "*kammerherre*"; how he anglicizes two of the names, turning Oswald into Oswald and Regine into Regina;⁹ and how he demystifies the playwright's subtle description of her position ("*i huset hos fru Alving*"). As the late Captain Alving's illegitimate daughter - a relationship of which she is herself unaware - Ibsen's Regine occupies a very special place in Mrs Alving's house. This is indicated in Ibsen's somewhat enigmatic description. Meyer's Regina, by contrast, is described as though she was just an ordinary servant.

While there is a general indication of the *place* of action - "MRS ALVING'S *country estate by a large fjord in western Norway*" (26) - the *time* of action is not explicitly mentioned by Ibsen. Yet the date of publication combined with the cultural signifiers appearing in the text suggest that the period is the contemporary one, that is, around 1880. Similarly, although there is no explicit mention of the season, we may conclude from the continuous rain and the fact that it is getting dark early, that it is autumn - implied information that would be less self-evident the further removed the recipient is from western Norway.

In Meyer's rendering the opening reads:

ACT ONE

A spacious garden-room, with a door in the left-hand wall and two doors in the right-hand wall. In the centre of the room is a round table with

⁸McFarlane (196) and Rolf Fjelde (Henrik Ibsen, *Four Major Plays*, II, New York, 1970, 39) both render the last line as "*in service with Mrs. Alving.*"

⁹In the following, I shall use the anglicised forms only when quoting from Meyer's translation and the production based on it.

chairs around; on the table are books, magazines and newspapers. Downstage left is a window, in front of which is a small sofa with a sewing-table by it. Backstage the room opens out into a slightly narrower conservatory, with walls of large panes of glass. In the right-hand wall of the conservatory is a door leading down to the garden. Through the glass wall a gloomy fjord landscape is discernible, veiled by steady rain.

ENGSTRAND, *a carpenter, is standing at the garden door. His left leg is slightly crooked; under the sole of his boot is fixed a block of wood.*
REGINA, *with an empty garden syringe in her hand, bars his entry.*

REGINA (*keeping her voice low*). What do you want? Stay where you are!
You're dripping wet!

ENGSTRAND. It is God's blessed rain, my child.

REGINA. The Devil's bloody rain, more like.

ENGSTRAND. Why, Regina, the way you talk! (*Limps a few steps into the room.*) What I wanted to say is -

REGINA. Here, you! Don't make such a noise with that foot. The young master's asleep upstairs. (27)

As often with Ibsen, the stage is divided into three marked areas: the two rooms, contrasting with one another, and the exterior beyond them. There is a symbolic significance of this tripartition. Northam observes that the conservatory is "a protected, artificial haven from the awful weather."¹⁰ And Aarseth develops this idea further when pointing out that the conservatory resembles

et veksthus, dvs. et beskyttet rom mennesker har laget for å drive fram planter ved kunstige midler (Regines blomstersprøyte), hvor glassveggene virker slik at vekstfremmende krefter som sollys og varme slipper igjennom, mens nedbrytende krefter som vind, kulde og ukontrollerte mengder av regn stenges ute.¹¹

¹⁰John Northam, *Ibsen's Dramatic Method* (London, 1953), 60.

¹¹Asbjørn Aarseth, "Scenisk rom og dramatisk erkjennelse i Ibsens 'Gengangere'." In: Leif Longum (ed.), *Dramaanalyser fra Holberg til Hoem* (Bergen, 1977), 46.

In her attempt to prevent Engstrand from entering the conservatory, Regine invents a legitimate reason: "You're dripping wet!" In the source text, this sentence originally read: "Det driver jo af dig". Interestingly, Ibsen then substituted "drypper" for "driver."¹² Why? Undoubtedly because "drypper" is very close to the noun 'dryppert,' meaning gonorrhea. The note of sexuality is struck in a play dealing with adultery, prostitution, inherited syphilis and incest, and in which the opening, moreover, is set in the very conservatory where the late Alving once seduced Regine's mother. Now Engstrand enters it to persuade Alving's daughter - reputedly his own - to become a prostitute in the brothel he wants to open, euphemistically referred to as "a hostelry for sailors" (30). The phallic garden syringe handled by Regine seems quite appropriate in the context.

Yet all this does not explain why the garden syringe is empty. Since it must be exceedingly difficult to demonstrate this in a performance without creating a farcical situation, this seems to be information primarily for the reader. But what does the emptiness signify? It is, of course, an indication that Regine has finished watering the flowers. But such a trivial explanation cannot have been Ibsen's reason for including it in the play. Alan Downer offers another explanation when he relates the emptiness to Regine's attitude to Pastor Manders:

Just before the entrance of Pastor Manders, "Regina glances at herself, hastily, in the mirror, fans herself with a handkerchief, adjusts the collar of her uniform. Then she resumes watering of the flowers." Since the audience already knows that the watering pot is empty and that Regina is merely a serving maid in Mrs. Alving's house, the action indicates clearly her pretension and her ambition: she assumes the pose of a lady.¹³

The problem with this interpretation is that it is based on a defective translation of Ibsen's stage directions. Rather than resume "*watering of the flowers*,"¹⁴ Regine, in McFarlane's adequate rendering (203), more generally

¹²Henrik Ibsen, *Samlede Verker*, ed. Francis Bull et al., IX (Oslo, 1932), 139.

¹³Alan Downer, *The Art of the Play* (New York, 1955), 163.

¹⁴Meyer similarly translates: "*she begins to water the flowers*" (32).

"busies herself with the flowers" (*gir [...] sig ifærd med blomsterne*). Even if we accept the idea that the actress playing the part of Regine does indeed at this point spray the flowers, the spectators cannot grasp that she is merely feigning, since they cannot know, as Downer claims, that the pot - syringe, actually - is empty; it would take a close-up to show that no water is coming out of the syringe.

In fact, it seems much more natural to assume that Regine, knowing that the syringe is empty, does *not* water the flowers but that she fashions them, removes withered leaves, etc. Her reason for doing so is obviously that she wants to disguise to Manders that she has just been visited by her socially low-standing 'father'; we have just seen how she has been primping herself to make a good impression on the Pastor. But Ibsen's preference for a general rather than a specific description at this point has above all to do with the 'human' quality of the flowers, their symbolic relationship to Oswald, who has been called "en ekstra tander drivhusplante, en følsom rose på Rosenvold."¹⁵

Rather than relate the empty syringe to the Regine-Manders confrontation, I would link it with the Oswald-Mrs. Alving-Regine sequence toward the end of Act II. At Mrs. Alving's request, Regine has just fetched a bottle of champagne from the cellar:

OSWALD. And fetch another glass.

REGINA (*looks at him, surprised*). There is Mrs. Alving's glass.

OSWALD. But fetch one for yourself, Regina. (79)

Regine exits and quickly returns "*with an empty glass, which she keeps in her hand*." Oswald and Mrs. Alving tell her to sit down:

REGINA *sits on a chair by the dining-room door, with the empty glass still in her hand*. (79-80)

The recipient is at this point aware that Oswald wants to start an intimate relationship with Regine. And although we do not know yet that he is doomed, we understand that he needs her "joy of life" (79) as an antidote to the somberness that surrounds him. Eventually, we learn that he has been thinking of Regine as the one who is strong enough to do him the "last service"

¹⁵Aarseth, 49.

(euthanasia), when he is ready for it (96). When Regine is invited to drink champagne - this joyous, life-affirming beverage - together with Oswald and Mrs Alving, it is a ritual indicating a new relationship on an equal footing between her and them. But Regine's glass remains empty. No joy of life is poured into it. Instead the representative of somber puritanism, Pastor Manders, enters:

MANDERS. We must assist Engstrand with his sailors' home. Regina must go and help him....

REGINA. No, thank you, Pastor.

MANDERS (*notices her for the first time*). What! You here! And with a glass in your hand!

REGINA (*puts the glass down quickly*). Oh, *pardon!* (81)

Ironically, Manders has taken over Engstrand's initial role - again to no effect.

Let me recapitulate: At the opening of Act I we see Regine with an empty garden syringe in her hand. Toward the end of Act II we see her with an empty glass in her hand. Is there any connection? I believe there is.

The flowers of the conservatory need water in order to survive. Watering flowers is a life-giving act. Like Oswald, the flowers need a "helping hand." We have earlier seen Regine busying herself with them. And just as the flowers long for the life-giving water, so Oswald longs for the joy of life Regine incarnates. Yet, just as Regine does not have any water for the flowers - the syringe is "empty" - so she ultimately, when she discovers that she is his half-sister, proves neither able nor willing to help Oswald.

The point I wish to make is that while a reader of the play text may well come up with an interpretation along these lines, a spectator witnessing a performance of *Gengangere* would find it much harder to do so. First, because the sparsity of the stage directions in the text as compared to the wealth of audiovisual signs in a production makes it easier for the reader to discover how the playwright is pointing in a particular direction. Second, because the written stage directions make it easier for the reader to discover correspondences. For him/her the garden syringe is connected with the glass through the identical word "empty." For the spectator there is no visual equivalent of this verbal identity.

Let us now turn to the opening of the six productions and try to experience

them more or less in the same way as would a recipient who has no pre-knowledge of the play. In chronological order, they are:

- 1.A Norwegian 1978 NRK production. Direction: Magne Bleness.
- 2.A Danish 1978 DR production. Translation and direction: John Price.
- 3.A West-German 1985 WDR production. Translation: Volker Canaris and Helga Hamacher. Direction: Arie Zinger.
- 4.A British 1986 BBC production. Translation: Michael Meyer. Direction: Elijah Moshinsky.
- 5.A West-German 1987 ZDF production. Translation: Heiner Gimmler. Direction: Michael Gruner.
- 6.A Swedish 1988 SR/TV production. Translation: Gurli Linder. Direction: Margareta Garpe.

A comparison between screen time (in minutes and seconds) and number of shots of the opening scene gives a first idea of the difference between the six versions:

<i>screen time</i>	<i>shots</i>	<i>average shot time</i>
Bleness1'15	11'15	
Price1'20	30'40	
Zinger	1'59	50'24
Moshinsky1'25	30'28	
Gruner1'11	60'12	
Garpe3'05	220'8,5	

Not surprisingly, the oldest version represents a 'theatrical' extreme, the youngest a 'filmic' one. It should be remarked that Garpe's version falls into two parts. The second part, corresponding to Ibsen's play opening, begins not until shot 17. This part, lasting only 10 seconds, contains 6 shots.

Magne Bleness's version opens as follows¹⁶:

¹⁶In the following, the figures in the margin left indicate shots. The following abbreviations are used: L = left, R = right, BG = background, FG = foreground, C = centre, CU = close-up, MCU = medium close-up, MS = medium shot, LS = long shot, HA = high angle.

1LS of a blue-tinted conservatory. Sound of rain. White walls, big, decorated glass windows and a glass door in BG, two white wicker chairs and a small round white wicker table, green plants in pots. REGINE, in BG, is watering the plants.

Superimposed text: GENGANGERE
AV HENRIK IBSEN

REGINE, in gray-checked dress and white apron, up in FG. She is watering the plants R with a green can. Out in FG L. Slight track-in on conservatory.

ENGSTRAND appearing behind the glass door, approaches it, opens it and enters. He wears a black peaked cap, gray jacket above a brown waistcoat and a striped brown shirt, black trousers. Takes off his cap, dries his nose with the back of his hand, limps forward.

REGINE in from FG L. Hearing ENGSTRAND'S tramping, turns around towards him. Unfriendly. Hva er det du vil?

ENGSTRAND, smiling, takes a few steps towards her.

REGINE. Bli stående der du står. Det drypper jo av deg. Up the steps towards the conservatory.

ENGSTRAND smiling, waving his cap. Det er Vårherres regn, det, barnet mitt.

REGINE. Det er fandens regn, er det. Places herself next to ENGSTRAND.

ENGSTRAND, cap to mouth. Jøss' som du snakker, Regine. Down the steps. Men det var det jeg ville si -

REGINE. Klamp ikke så med den foten, menneske! Den unge herren ligger og sover ovenpå.¹⁷

Unlike the reader of the play, who has both the list of dramatis personae and the cue designations at his disposal, the viewer of a screen version is not aware of the names of the characters unless they have been mentioned in the credits preceding the performance or are mentioned in the dialogue. In the quoted

¹⁷For the dialogue of this fragment, I adhere to the modernized spelling in Henrik Ibsen, *Nutidsdramaer 1877-99* (Oslo, 1968), 117.

passage the former do not occur in any of the six versions and the latter do not appear until the penultimate speech - with regard to one of the characters. The spectator at this point learns that the young woman s/he has been watching is named Regine. S/he still does not know the name of the old man. For practical reasons - notably to facilitate comparisons with the text - I have disregarded this difference between reader and spectator in my transcriptions.¹⁸

From the list of *dramatis personae* the reader will logically - but falsely - conclude that young Regine is the daughter of old Engstrand, an assumption supported by their intimate form of addressing one another, notably Engstrand's "my child." (Actually the intimate "du"-form was not, in Ibsen's time, the form a daughter would normally use when addressing her father. We here deal with a temporal signifier whose disrespectful flavor is lost to a modern audience.) The spectator, by contrast, can only more vaguely arrive at the same conclusions. S/he would be less certain that the expression "my child" should be understood literally; characteristically, Pastor Manders addresses Regine in a similar, endearing way.

Bleness's version, contained within a single shot, seems quite theatrical. Variation is ensured, as in the theatre, by the characters moving around both horizontally and, assisted by the added stairs, vertically. In this way the verbal power struggle between Regine and Engstrand is underlined proxemically.

Unlike Ibsen, Bleness opens the play by showing only the conservatory, the furniture of which - Ibsen is not specific here - is white and light and, along with the green plants (signs of summer and youth), swept in a blue light closer to romantic stage lighting than to a realistic reflection of the miserable weather outside. The fjord landscape, hard to reproduce on the small screen with this kind of weather, is not visible.

Beginning a little earlier than Ibsen, Bleness has Regine finish watering the plants - with a green water can rather than a syringe. Engstrand is not standing by the garden door but - no doubt to clarify the situation - comes from outside when Regine has stopped watering the plants.

Since Ibsen says nothing about Regine's and little about Engstrand's appearance, the director has to fill in these gaps in the text. Bleness provides them both with a servile gray and makes Engstrand darkly bicolored,

¹⁸Unlike the spectator of a stage performance, who can infer, via the theatre program, who is who on the stage, the recipient of a screen production rarely has this foreknowledge.

indicating perhaps his compound nature. The peaked cap, turning him into a would-be sailor, ties in with his plans of creating "a hostelry for sailors."

John Price's production is a stage version very slightly adapted for television. A registration in the theatre, the adjustment to the TV medium is limited to variation of camera distances:

Noise of theatre audience. Tinkling of bell.

White text on black BG: GENGANGERE

AF

HENRIK IBSEN

1 *LS of empty stage. Heads of spectators in FG. The rather bare scenery is monochrome, dark gray. Round table and three slender chairs around it L. Books on table. Stately armchair with foot-stool next to it R.*

ENGSTRAND *in from FG L. He is dressed in a dark blue jacket covering a black undershirt, dark blue trousers, black shoes, the L thick-soled, and a black peaked cap. He carries a cane. He walks around the table to BG, stops, looks L, turns around, returns to the table, stops.*

REGINE *in from BG, stops there. She has dark-brown, put-up hair and is dressed in a simple but elegant long brown dress. Hvad er det du - ?*

Bliv stående der! Det driver jo af dig, gris.

ENGSTRAND. *Det er Vorherres regn.*

REGINE. *Det er fandens regn.*

ENGSTRAND. *Men det var det jeg ville si -*

2 *MS of REGINE. Klask ikke så med den foden, menneske. Walking forward. Den unge herren ligger og sover.*

3 *MS of ENGSTRAND in profile. Sover nu? Turning to frontal. Midt på dagen?*

The fact that Price's version was meant for the stage, not for the screen, makes it difficult to judge it fairly. Engstrand's walking across the room, for example, is a stage, not a screen device. The other way round, the medium shots reveal more of the characters' mimicry than (most of) the theatre audience would be able to see. Financially attractive for the producers, this version is aesthetically

an undesirable hybrid between the two media.

Price's garden room - the conservatory is lacking - is a closed-off room, without any sign of windows. We are introduced to a gray, claustrophobic world.

Unlike Ibsen and Bleness, Price opens with an empty stage, then has Engstrand enter, and after him Regine. The old man's walking around in the empty room - the noise helps to draw attention to his club-foot - creates a certain suspense. We notice the contrast between his simple clothing and the elegant furniture - suggesting that he is out of place in this environment. What is he doing there? Has he slinked in? His entrance seems suspicious, suggesting that we have the villain of the play before us. When he stops to look left, we naturally wonder: Who/what is he looking for? By costuming Engstrand in dark blue and a peaked cap, Price seems to indicate his weakness for seamen - as potential visitors of the brothel he is planning. Eventually, when Engstrand's diabolic nature becomes clear, we may even see a significance in his covered-up blackness (the undershirt).

Price's Regine, in an earth-colored but elegant dress indicating her split nature, is very disdainful towards Engstrand, reducing him to a "gris" (pig) - a word added by the director. Another significant change is that the suggestive "drypper," which could have been retained in Danish, is replaced by the draft's "driver."

Like Price's version, Arie Zinger's is a stage production - this time without a theatre audience - crammed into the small screen, a hybrid that is quite common in Germany. Transcribed it reads:

SCHAUSPIEL KÖLN ZEIGT:

GESPENSTER VON HENRIK IBSEN

INSZENIERUNG ARIE ZINGER

1 *Curtain up. Somber, mechanical sounds, soon mixed with cries of sea-gulls. Huge, rather empty stage. Blue light. C BG a gray concrete wall. On either side of it long blue-tinted windows. Sleet outside the windows. L a black table with books on it and two brown chairs, C BG a brown chair, R a black-and-brown sofa.*

REGINE, with red long hair, a long white dress of the period, black stockings and shoes, is lying on the sofa. Very slow track-in on her. By the footlight a row of potted ferns can now be seen. A small chair with a

pile of books next to the sofa.

REGINE *sings, gesticulating with her arms.*

Frère Jacques, frère Jacques,

dormez vous, dormez vous?

Sonnez les matines, sonnez les matines.

Din, Din, Don. Din, Din, Don.

./.

2MS of ENGSTRAND *in black coat, broadbrimmed black hat, black moustache and beard.* Don.

REGINE *offscreen, laughing.* Was willst du? Pan on ENGSTRAND *limping forward* L. Bleib stehen. Du triffst ja vor Nässe.

ENGSTRAND *spreading his arms, has a cane in his R hand.* Das ist der Regen des Herrn - mein Kind.

3MS of REGINE *who has stood up from the sofa. She takes a few steps towards him and puts her fingers like horns to her forehead.* Das ist der Scheissregen des Teufels.

4MS of ENGSTRAND. Du redest! *Limping L.* Regine, was ich sagen wollte -

5MS of REGINE *behind sofa, gesticulating.* Mach nicht solchen Krach mit dem Fuss-Krücke. Der junge Herr liegt oben und schläft.

Zinger's production is in every respect highly stylized: bare stage, monochrome costuming, emblematic gestures, loud voices. This creates problems when it comes to TV. Stylization works better on the stage than on the screen, which calls for intimacy, realism.

As the row of potted ferns indicates, Zinger, possibly influenced by Ingmar Bergman,¹⁹ turns Ibsen's two rooms around and places the conservatory in the auditorium. It is hard to see the advantage of this volte-face, one result of which is that Oswald, at the end, is facing the sun rather than, as in the text, turning his back to it. Like Bleness and Price, Zinger does not let us see the

¹⁹In his 1972 stage production of *Vildanden (The Wild Duck)*, Bergman placed the attic not upstage, as Ibsen has it, but in the auditorium.

fjord landscape. But the crying of the seagulls tells us that we are close to the sea. The blue light is dismal rather than romantic and the darkness and sleet outside the windows indicate that it is a cold late autumn afternoon.

Ibsen's Regine is trying hard to learn French. She dreams of going to Paris with Oswald. Zinger provides her with a pile of, presumably French, books. A more explicit sign of her attempt to learn French is her singing of "Frère Jacques." The song is well chosen not only because it reflects Regine's popular taste but also because the text relates to the situation in the play. At this moment Oswald, who later turns out to be Regine's half-brother, is fast asleep. And the play ends at the time of "les matines."

Engstrand, framed by the dark wall, is here - as often - all in black. The reason for this is not only that he is a diabolic figure but also that he is closely linked with Pastor Manders. The Pastor's costume is, of course, self-evident. By costuming Engstrand and Manders similarly, Zinger indicates how the Devil and God, both mentioned in the opening lines of the play, are, as it were, brought together. Regine's finger gesture ties in with this. Traditionally, however, this gesture points in another direction, turning Engstrand into a cuckold. Viewed in this way, it seems to presuppose that Regine is aware of the fact that Engstrand has let himself be persuaded to marry her mother and that she, Regine, is not his daughter. This in turn creates a problem when, toward the end of the play, Regine is told that she is Alving's daughter, a revelation that comes as a shock to her. The cuckold connotation undermines this revelation. In that sense it is a gesture that defeats its own purpose.

With her elegant white dress - she certainly does not look like a servant - and her red hair, Zinger's Regine seems a bit of a nymphomaniac parading as maid - on a par with the fiendish Engstrand, parading as a godfearing man.

Elijah Moshinsky's version represents a very different approach:

As Schönberg's Verklärte Nacht is intoned, the picture of OSWALD appears against a purple-blue BG. He wears a blue costume and is sitting in a blue armchair, a blue table next to him, a newspaper in his hands. His face, in profile and strongly lit, is turned R. Slow zoom-in on him synchronized with increasingly louder music during the following superimposed credits: JUDI DENCH MICHAEL GAMBON KENNETH BRANAGH FREDDIE JONES NATASHA RICHARDSON

GHOSTS

As OSWALD turns his face towards us, half of it is covered by darkness.

BY HENRIK IBSEN

TRANSLATED BY MICHAEL MEYER.

Sound of tramping. Fade-out OSWALD.

2Part of a gray-purplish door. The door is opened. Behind it CU of ENGSTRAND with gray beard and moustache, black bowler hat and black raincoat.

REGINA *offscreen*, unfriendly. What do you want?

3 Deep-focus of three rooms in a row. A mirror R in the first room. Filled bookcases in the second room. Everything blue-tinted. ENGSTRAND with a cane L, REGINA with long, ash-colored hair and a long blue dress R, a folded white sheet in her hands.

REGINA. Stay where you are! You're dripping wet! *Music stops*.

ENGSTRAND *raising his left arm*. It is God's blessed rain, my child.

REGINA *unfriendly*. The Devil's bloody rain, more like. *Walks into rooms in BG*.

ENGSTRAND *following her*. Why, Regina, the way you talk!

REGINA *turns around abruptly, points to ENGSTRAND'S club-foot, whispering*. Don't make such a noise with that foot. The young master's asleep upstairs.

The credits here inform the spectators, not of the names of the characters as we might have expected but of the names of the actors and actresses incarnating them. Clearly, names like Mrs Alving and Oswald are less telling to a British audience than those of Judi Dench and Kenneth Branagh. The signal to the spectators is: "Don't switch off! Don't zap! Stay with us! You are going to see some superb acting!" Surprisingly, also the name of the translator is mentioned already here. Usually this is done quite modestly in the closing credits.

The opening shot is most interesting. Framing the performance - it returns at the end - Schönberg's composition, from 1899, carries a title that excellently fits the theme and mood of the play, indicated also in the director's choice of a 'symbolist' *l'heure bleu* coloring. What we experience, along with the protagonist, Mrs Alving, in those hours before the final sunrise is, indeed, a transfigured night.

Since the young man is sitting dead still, the immediate impression is that we are watching a painting.²⁰ But suddenly the 'painting' comes alive. When the title is superimposed, we realize that what we have seen is a visual counterpart of it. It is not until later in the performance that we understand the full implication of this device. When Oswald appears, it becomes clear that it was a 'portrait' of him - perhaps even a 'self-portrait' (Oswald, we recall, is a painter) - that we saw in the initial shot. But since Oswald is said to look exactly like his father (44), we may also regard this emblematic shot as a youthful 'portrait' of Captain Alving (who, like Ibsen himself, certainly preferred newspapers to books). Not only is the close relationship between father and son, the dead and the living, hereby suggested. The idea that a dead person may come alive - a fundamental idea in the play - is suggestively visualized. The face of the 'portrait' is double also in the sense that it shows a split face, half of it sunlit, the other half in darkness - a visualization, it seems, of Oswald's - and Alving's - dilemma, both finding themselves torn between light and darkness, between southern *joi de vivre* and northern puritanism.

Moshinsky settles for a monochrome blue-purplish, somewhat hazy environment, thereby creating a visually melancholy and dreamy quality harmonizing with Schönberg's music. This is clearly a house haunted by memories, by ghosts. Omitting Ibsen's conservatory, with its suggestion of light and youth contrasting with the garden room, Moshinsky shows three more or less identical rooms - a narcissistic, closed-in world of culture and dreams.

Moshinsky's Engstrand looks neither like a carpenter nor like a would-be sailor; and there is nothing diabolic about his appearance. His Regine wears a blue dress, matching Oswald's blue costume. Both of them are visually very much a part of the bluish interior - as though they are products of the environment surrounding them. Having omitted the conservatory, the director also leaves out Regine's business with the flowers. Instead he provides her with another task which establishes her servile position but has little symbolic significance: the folding of sheets. As for the dialogue, we may note that the intimate, or deprecating, quality of Regine's way of addressing Engstrand is necessarily lost in English with its single pronoun of address.

²⁰Cf. Edvard Munch's purplish blue *Self-portrait with cigar* (1895), which may well have served as an inspiration.

Slightly more adapted to the TV medium than Zinger's version is Michael Gruner's stage performance:

1CU of newspapers (Arbeiderbladet) on a table. Sound of rain. Hard knocking. Pan R to

2CU of books on table.

3CU and tilt up a grandfather clock. Superimposed text: GESPENSTER.
Clock shows five past five.

4Pan L along dark windows, wet from rain. Sound of wind.

Superimposed text:

FAMILIENDRAMA VON HENRIK IBSEN

INSZENIERUNG MICHAEL GRUNER

EINE AUSFÜHRUNG DES SCHAUSPIELS BONN

5MCU of glass door. It is raining. The face of ENGSTRAND can be glimpsed outside. He knocks on the window.

6MS of REGINE with long blonde hair and in a long yellow dress. She enters through a door R, runs to the glass door, stops, whisks ENGSTRAND away.

7ENGSTRAND in FG outside the glass door, REGINE in BG inside in the conservatory. He knocks frenetically, his hands covered with fingerless working-gloves. She runs to the door.

8CU of ENGSTRAND outside the door, REGINE'S neck inside it. She opens the door. He has black hair and a black moustache, black coat and shawl.

REGINE. Bleibt draussen. Du triefst ja vor Nässe.

ENGSTRAND. Das ist Gottes Regen, mein Kind. Takes off his gloves.

REGINE folding her arms. Teufels Regen.

ENGSTRAND. Jesus, was ist das für Rede, Regine. Hesitantly, looking away. Was ich sagen wollte - Beats the rain from his trousers with the gloves.

REGINE. Mach nicht so mit dem Fuss, Mensch. Der junge Herr schläft noch.

Unlike the other directors, Gruner chooses to include the subtitle. And since he superimposes it on an image suggesting anything but domestic bliss, the irony implied in the subtitle is indicated.

The pre-credit close-ups inform the spectator that this is a home where there is room both for topical (the newspapers) and for more constant subjects (the books). The choice of the Norwegian socialist paper *Arbeiderbladet* (The Workers' Paper), founded in 1886 - for a German audience easily decipherable as *Das Arbeiterblatt* - further indicates the radical views of the owner of the estate, Mrs Alving. On the other hand, the grandfather clock seems to represent tradition. Why it shows five past five is an enigma. The fact that the exterior can still be seen, that Oswald is still in bed and that "the day's half gone" (27) indicate rather that in the text the time at the opening of the play is around noon.

We see another black Engstrand. The workman announces himself in the fingerless working-gloves. Ibsen's acting directions make it clear that he regarded Engstrand's club-foot as an important (diabolic) part of his outward appearance. Since screen versions rarely show characters full scale, the directors are here faced with a problem. Bleness suggests the club-foot by having Engstrand limp - which causes Regine to complain about the noise he makes. Gruner, less naturally, has Regine comment on the noise Engstrand makes with his "foot," when he is beating the rain off his trousers.

Regine's light yellow period dress, matching her hair, visualizes the sun - the joy of life - Oswald is longing for. Since Regine does not seem altogether unwilling to move into Engstrand's hostelry, well knowing that this means prostituting herself, the yellow color may also be seen as a sign of frivolity. Gruner has her and Engstrand play a game of hide-and-seek with each other, both of them pretending to be what they are not, both of them seeing through the other.

More radically adjusted to the TV medium than any of the other productions is Margareta Garpe's version:

1Black-and-white photo of a woman with a child on her lap. Next to them stands a man. A match is lit and a hand moves it close to the photo which

is lit up, then concealed by flames in front of it. Amplified sound of flames.

2White text on black BG: GENGÅNGARE AV HENRIK IBSEN.

Piano music (Chopin's Op. 28/15, The Raindrop Prelude), professionally played, begins.

3Text: TV-BEARBETNING MARGARETA GARPE OCH GUNILLA JENSEN.

4Text: REGI MARGARETA GARPE. *Dissolve to*

5Large light stone building in blue-tinted twilight rain.

6MCU of MRS ALVING, in underwear, watching her face in a mirror.

Track-in on her mirrored face; she moves her hand with a tired gesture toward her forehead and strokes back her hair from it.

7Slow track-in on REGINE in conservatory fixing her hair, then holding her hands as if praying.

8Painting in ceiling of cherubs; there is a hole close to the eyes of one of them. Water dripping from the hole.

9HA CU of bucket full of water. Drops are falling into it.

10MS of OSVALD asleep on a sofa. A cup of tea is put down next to him. He opens his eyes.

11MS of MRS ALVING leaving OSVALD'S room, looking at him.

12MS of OSVALD on bed.

13MS of MRS ALVING closing the door.

14Pan on her as she crosses the landing and enters a door on the opposite side.

15Exterior of the house in pouring rain. ENGSTRAND in dark clothes

walks towards the house. A big white dog approaches him, barking.

16ENGSTRAND *and the dog, seen by REGINE, approach the house.*

17ENGSTRAND *seen from behind opens a back door to the house and enters.*

18LS *of the white conservatory. REGINE is sitting by the piano clumsily playing The Raindrop Prelude.*

19CU *of REGINE.*

20REGINE *by the piano in FG, ENGSTRAND outside the door in BG, knocking.*
ENGSTRAND. Öppna.

21REGINE *runs to the door.*

22REGINE'S *back by the door, ENGSTRAND'S face through the door window.*

REGINE. Vad vill du? Stanna där. Du är ju dyblöt.

ENGSTRAND. Regine, jag kom för att säga - REGINE *opens the door.*

REGINE *whispering.* Schhh! Han ligger där oppe och sover.

The first, pre-credit, shot - a visual counterpart of the subtitle and a risky prolepsis since it can be grasped only in retrospect - shows us the Alving family before Oswald was sent away from home. When the family on the photo is annihilated by a hand putting fire to it, it is an act figuratively indicating how the photo's semblance of family unity (the pretty façade) will be destroyed - unmasked - in the course of the play. The burning of the photo, by an anonymous hand (fate?), anticipates both the burning of the asylum - symbol of the façade mentality - and the 'burning' inside Oswald. The final shot of the teleplay shows the same flames as the initial one.

The non-diegetic sound of Chopin's *Raindrop Prelude* provides a mood conforming to the weather outside; note the raindrops falling into the bucket (shot 9). Beautifully played, this non-diegetic version of the prelude is contrasted in shot 18 with Regine's clumsy playing of the same piece. Like so

many 19th century girls, Garpe's Regine is vainly trying to elevate herself socially by playing the piano - presumably in imitation of Mrs Alving and in a modest attempt to match Oswald's artistry.

After an exterior shot of the estate, Garpe cuts to its owner. Shown in her underwear - unmasked - before the mirror, Mrs Alving is not so much scrutinizing the wrinkles in her face - the sign of ageing - as her own self, thinking: "Who am I?" Her face next to its mirrored counterpart suggests a split ego. The middle-aged woman in shot 6 and the young woman in shot 7 - two crucial phases in life - are linked by their concern with the hair. But while the former seems to wipe cobweb from her brains, the latter makes herself attractive. Clearly, one is concerned with the past, the other with the future. Unlike the other directors, Margareta Garpe, being a woman - and a feminist - focuses on the women of the play, suggesting, in the fashion of Edvard Munch, what they have in common and what separates them.

Another striking difference is that Garpe pays much attention - as a filmer would - to the environment surrounding the characters. We see the mansion first, from Engstrand's point of view, in pouring rain, as he is approaching it from the back, the side of the servants' entrance and the side where you can slink in unheeded. Once inside the house, we discover that its painted rococo ceiling, pointing to a more joyous period, is leaking and that one of its cherubs is crying. The house and its inhabitants are clearly in a deplorable state.

The camera takes us up above, where Oswald is sleeping - or pretending to sleep - and where we see Mrs Alving caring for him.

Garpe then cuts back to the exterior, where Engstrand, a bit closer to the house now, is attacked by a white dog - as though the animal wanted to guard the house from the dark figure approaching it.

Although Garpe's opening is the longest of the six, her dialogue is the briefest - a logical consequence of her filmic approach.

It is still common to think that productions differ from one another mostly because every director interprets the text in his/her own way. This is a simplification of the matter. Since theatrical production - whether for stage or screen - means team work, it follows that there are many reasons why performances necessarily differ from one another, reasons which may be related to five codes. Let us, by way of summary, see how differences in the six presentations of the opening relate to these codes.

1. *The linguistic code.* All the directors delete some of the source text. Garpe's filmic approach especially means replacing words by images. There are also some significant additions, the most obvious being Zinger's "Frère Jacques." Translation problems relate, of course, to this code - as the example of "drypper" and the differences in pronoun of address have demonstrated.

2. *The cultural code.* This code is either spatially or temporally determined - or both. Moshinsky's credits, mentioning actors rather than characters, is a 'spatially' determined example of how the director tries to get a domestic audience interested in his product. Gruner's displaying of *Arbeiderbladet* is another example, related also to the linguistic code, since it depends on the proximity between Norwegian and German. The use of 19th century costumes - in this respect all the productions are alike - is an example of a temporally determined code.²¹ In quite another sense, the titles of the pieces by Schönberg and Chopin, which add intellectually to an understanding of the performances, presuppose a cultural knowledge on the part of the spectator.

3. *The media code.* In three cases (Price, Zinger, Gruner) we deal with transpositions from stage to screen. This results in another, less genuine type of TV drama compared to productions made directly for the TV medium. Spatial distribution (proxemics), movements and gestures (kinesics), mimicry and vocal characteristics (paralinguistics) are all determined by the presentational mode: stage or screen. A combination of the two leads to a hybrid form, in which devices intended for one medium are transferred to another with little or no adjustment. This product of a mismatched couple can only result in an unwanted child. Price's and Zinger's openings are set in what is visibly a theatre. This immediately creates a filter between the spectator and the the naturalistic true-to-life pretensions of the play text. Garpe's opening, by contrast, appears to be shot 'on location,' in a real environment.

4. *The directorial code.* This is undoubtedly the dominant code. The director decides the appearance of setting and characters (the *mise-en-scène*), the

²¹The common practice of relocating plays to a much later period frequently leads to inconsistencies with regard to the cultural code. This is especially true of *Gengangere*, which for obvious reasons always seems to be set in the period before syphilis became curable.

blocking (the grouping of the actors), the number, length and sequence of the shots, the camera distances and angles, etc. Compare, for example, how the directors let Engstrand behave when he says his line "It's God's blessed rain, my child."

5. *The actorial code*. Although actors certainly often come up with ideas of their own concerning appearance, movements, gestures, mimicry and paralinguistics, it is almost impossible for an outsider to separate the actors' self-direction from the director's influence. Consequently, by the actorial code is meant, not what the actors contribute to their parts but, on the contrary, that in them which does not belong to their parts. We all have our individual traits and mannerisms. And there is a limit to what an actor or actress can do to change or suppress these in performance. If we have seen the actress playing Regine or the actor playing Engstrand in other roles, we are bound to recognize some of their features as being outside the part they are presently performing. Although an actor's 'natural' appearance, manner of moving, gesticulating and speaking may be of great importance to the spectator, we are here faced with highly personal likes and dislikes. To measure such reactions is the task of empiric audience research.²² It falls outside the scope of an analysis such as the one presented here.

Since play text and play performance represent two radically different media, it follows that s/he who perceives the opening of *Gengangere* as a reader necessarily experiences it very differently from him/her who perceives it as a spectator. Although awareness of this media difference is today *commune bonum*, the examination of how play text and performance differ is by no means a trivial pursuit. On the contrary, it can tell us much about the problems involved when you write for a double audience - as Ibsen clearly did. More importantly, it can inform us how the graphic symbols of the text - the letters on paper - compare with the audiovisual signals of a performance.

An important distinction yet to be made is that between *obligatory* and *voluntary* differences between text and performance. The fundamental media difference obviously belongs to the former category, as do the difference

²²For a Scandinavian example, see Willmar Sauter, Curt Isaksson and Lisbeth Jansson, *Teaterögon: Publiken möter föreställningen. Upplevelse-utbud-vanor* (Stockholm, 1986).

between source and target text and what has here been termed the actorial code. These are all primarily 'givens.' The cultural code tends to stretch in the same direction. The directorial code, on the other hand, is largely determined by voluntary choices.

The present article has focused less on the difference between text and performance than on the difference between various performances, on the interplay in this area between obligatory and voluntary determinants. The implicit questions have been: Why do signifiers in one performance differ from those in another and why do they do it the way they do? Answers to these questions, to be found in relation to the five codes, aim at establishing the *signifiés* in each performance. Since this is necessarily a somewhat subjective undertaking, it is all the more important that it is based on careful observation and description of the signifiers. The registration applied here to the opening minutes of *Gengangere* has this methodological pretension.

Some fifteen years ago a leading drama and theatre theoretician observed that "semiotic analyses of specific performances are [...] rare."²³ Although the situation has improved since then, Elam's statement is still valid. When we turn to the field of *comparative* performance analysis, we may in fact speak of a *terra incognita*. The main reason for this, as I see it, is the difficulty of finding suitable material.

What, then, is the aim of this type of research? Martin Esslin has claimed that

only by starting from an overview of all the aspects of dramatic performance can we arrive at a clear differentiation of those features that each of the separate media - stage, film and television - can claim as specifically their own, as against the much larger number of aspects they have in common.²⁴

This applies *mutatis mutandis* to the area mapped out here: page, stage and screen. The first aim, in other words, is to get a clear picture of similarities and differences between these three media. But in addition to this, there is the aim of examining the role of the fundamental media code in relation to the other

²³Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London & New York, 1980), 214.

²⁴Martin Esslin, *The Field of Drama: How Signs of Drama Create Meaning on Stage and Screen* (London, 1987), 7.

four codes listed above. What are the constants, what the variables here? Last but not least, by examining various productions based on the same text we get a good perspective on the relationship between constants and variables in the play text itself, its potential range. Unlike poetry and prose, drama is penetratingly examined not only by scholars but also by those responsible for play productions, notably the directors. As drama scholars we can learn a great deal from them - also about the play text!