

# **LU XUN AND AUSTRALIA**

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# Lu Xun Travels around the World: From Beijing, Oslo and Sydney to Cambridge, Mass.<sup>1</sup>

Bonnie S. McDougall

Lu Xun did not travel outside China except during his student days when he lived for seven years in Japan. His knowledge of Japanese and German nevertheless enabled him to embrace the literary cultures of the West and Japan, both in their contemporary and older traditions: his outlook was cosmopolitan. In translating his essays (more so than his fiction) the translator can trace his intellectual journeys across the world. In this short essay I have attempted to demonstrate one episode of such travels, showing how, even beyond Lu Xun's own knowing, his translator must perform their own trajectories.

One of Lu Xun's most famous essays is 'What Happens after Nora Walks Out', based on a talk given to the Literature and Arts Society at Beijing Women's Normal College, 26 December 1923. If the young female audience addressed by Lu Xun had ambitions to make their own careers, they faced barriers that may well have seemed insurmountable: apart from teaching, what was open to them to be independent and earn their livelihood? For one student in the audience contemplating a future as a teacher, the talk inspired deep respect for the author. She did not marry him—that was out of the question, since he was already married—but then she did not care about marriage. She was Xu Guangping, a Nora who survived.<sup>2</sup> This essay, however, is not about Xu Guangping but about what lay behind Lu Xun's question and its answers.

In November 2013 I was invited by Professor Eileen Cheng to take

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<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank Dr Anders Hansson for his generous assistance in this research.

<sup>2</sup> Xu Guangping enrolled in Women's Normal College in 1922, and when Lu Xun took up a part-time post at the college in autumn 1923 she took his course on the history of Chinese fiction, sitting in the front row; see McDougall, *Love-Letters and Privacy in Modern China: The Intimate Lives of Lu Xun and Xu Guangping* (Oxford University Press, 2002) 16.

part in a project to compile a collection of English translations of Lu Xun's essays, and I am indebted to her for the present unexpected by-product.<sup>1</sup> 'What Happens after Nora Walks Out' was one of three essays I was allocated, and in translating it I came across several tricky problems that required access to works in English, Norwegian and German published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In Sydney I was fortunate in having access to two libraries with substantial holdings in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century materials in English, German and Norwegian: Fisher Library (founded 1909) at the University of Sydney and the State Library of New South Wales (founded 1826); reference to the British Library online catalogue was also helpful. However, the full record was only possible thanks to the world centre of Ibsen studies in Oslo: I acknowledge with lively appreciation the advice and assistance of my former colleague at the University of Oslo, Dr Elisabeth Eide, also formerly at the National Library of Norway, and in turn her colleague Mr Jens-Morten Hanssen of the Centre for Ibsen Studies, University of Oslo.

Thus the accumulation of notes to my translation grew longer and longer until it became too awkward to include them as footnotes. I am most grateful to the editors of this present volume for the opportunity to re-write them here more coherently. Apart from showing the kind of material Lu Xun had at his disposal in 1923 when he wrote his Nora essay, my short essay, I hope, demonstrates the need and the feasibility for research on Lu Xun to be part of an international cooperative effort.

Lu Xun's talk was first published in the *Journal of the Literary Association of Women's Normal College* in 1924, and subsequently republished in Lu Xun's first volume of essays, *The Grave*, in 1927. It is inspired by two of Ibsen's plays, *Et Dukkehjem* (A Doll's House), first performed and published in 1879, and *Fruen fra Havet* (The Lady from the Sea), first published in 1888 and performed in 1889. Ibsen's plays had from their first performances caused a sensation in Europe, Britain and the US, and *Et Dukkehjem* was among the most controversial. Sequels and re-writings, mostly on the play's notorious ending, seem to have been as common as straight translations into German and English over the next few years. Lu Xun did not know the Dano-Norwegian in which Ibsen wrote at that time but, being fluent in German, refers to Ibsen's plays by their German titles in his essay. It seems highly likely that he also drew on English-language sources published in Britain and America for information about Ibsen

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<sup>1</sup> This selection of Lu Xun's essays, edited by Eileen J. Cheng and Kirk A. Denton under the title *Jottings under Lamplight*, is scheduled for publication by Harvard University Press in 2017.

and the reception of his plays abroad.

Part of Lu Xun's inspiration for his talk was his knowledge of the many attempts by others to answer the implied question in his title:

A few people have given their opinions on this. An English playwright wrote a version in which a modern woman leaves home, but as she has nowhere to go she becomes degraded and enters a brothel. There's also a Chinese man—what shall I call him? Let's just say a Shanghai writer—who claims to have seen a version that differs from the Chinese translation, in which Nora eventually returns home. Unfortunately, this version has not been seen by anyone else, unless Ibsen himself sent it to him.

Sadly, it is not clear just how Lu Xun came by this information: did he read it? Was he told it? Or did he perhaps make some of it up?

The first German performance of *Et Dukkehjem* took place in 1880. Ibsen had with great reluctance written for it an alternative conciliatory ending in order to prevent a threatened spurious fourth act in which Nora returns home.<sup>1</sup> Lu Xun may have known about this 'German ending' but not necessarily through any German source.

The story of translations and performances in English, in Britain and America, are well documented. The earliest was a moderately accurate if stilted translation under the title *Nora: A Play*, by Henrietta Frances Lord, published in London in 1882<sup>2</sup> and re-published in the US in 1889 under the title *The Doll's House*.<sup>3</sup> A free adaptation, *Breaking a Butterfly* by Henry Arthur Jones and Henry Herman, was staged in London in 1884, but this version ends with Nora choosing to stay at home on hearing her children's voices.<sup>4</sup> The nameless (and apparently blameless) Shanghai writer mentioned in Lu Xun's essay may have seen this version; and it is possible that George Bernard Shaw was the source of Lu Xun's knowledge about *Breaking a Butterfly*.

Another free adaptation or sequel to *Et Dukkehjem* was given a reading in London in 1886: it was arranged by Eleanor Marx, and George Bernard Shaw had taken part. In this version, Nora returns to Helmer agreeing

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1 For the text see 'The Alternative "German" Ending', in *The Oxford Ibsen*, trans. and ed. James Walter McFarlane (Oxford University Press, 1961), 5: 287–8. See also Michael Meyer's 'Introduction' to his translation *A Doll's House* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1965), 16.

2 *Nora: A Play*, by Henrietta Frances Lord (London: Griffith & Farran, 1882).

3 Meyer, 'Introduction', 16; Arne Kildal, 'A Chronological Bibliography of Ibsen', in *Speeches and New Letters*, Henrik Ibsen, trans. Kildal (Boston: Gorham Press, 1910), 135.

4 Michael Meyer, *Ibsen: A Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), 495, 502, 525, 547; Egil Törnqvist, *Ibsen: A Doll's House* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 154–5; review by William Archer reprinted in *Henrik Ibsen: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Michael Egan (London: Routledge, 1972), 65–72. It may have been based on the 1880 German version.

to continue their relationship on a platonic basis, only for him to slam the bedroom door on her.<sup>1</sup> In 1890 Israel Zangwill and Eleanor Marx published *A Doll's House Repaired*, apparently with the same ending as in Marx's 1886 version.<sup>2</sup> In the same year, *Nora's Return: A Sequel to 'The Doll's House' of Henrik Ibsen* by Ednah D. Cheney, appeared in Boston.<sup>3</sup> Another early re-writing and sequel was in the form of an 1890 short story by Sir Walter Besant, entitled 'The Doll's House—and After', about which Shaw wrote a review published in 1913.<sup>4</sup> Shaw commented, 'I wrote a sequel to this [Besant's] sequel. Another sequel was written by Eleanor, the youngest daughter of Karl Marx.'<sup>5</sup> No mention is made in any of the sequels or re-writings listed above of Nora ending up in a brothel, and it's possible that Lu Xun made up this ending; I have not been able to identify Shaw's own sequel, if indeed he ever wrote one.

The first authorised translation of *Et Dukkehjem* into English, *A Doll's House* by William Archer, was performed and published in London in 1889.<sup>5</sup> Other performances took place in London in the 1890s and, following a pause of fourteen years, in the early twentieth century; it appears that all preserved the original ending.<sup>6</sup>

The first translation into Chinese of *Et Dukkehjem*, by Luo Jialun and Hu Shi, was published in *New Youth* magazine in June of 1918 under the title *Nuola* (Nora), and it is presumably to this Chinese translation that Lu Xun refers (without naming it) in his talk. In his talk Lu Xun also quotes from a famous speech made by Ibsen in 1898 in which he gives his own account of why he had written *Et Dukkehjem*:

However, Nora ends up walking out. What happens to her afterwards? Ibsen gave no answer, and now he's dead. Even if he weren't dead, it wouldn't be his responsibility to answer this question. For Ibsen was writing poetry, not raising a problem for society and providing an answer to it. It's like the

1 Meyer, *Ibsen*, 525; Ian Britain, 'A Transplanted Doll's House: Ibsenism, Feminism and Socialism in Late-Victorian and Edwardian England', in *Transformations in Modern European Drama*, ed. Ian Donaldson (London: Macmillan, 1983), 14–54.

2 Törnqvist, *Ibsen*, 153–5.

3 *Ibid.*, 155.

4 Shaw's comment occurs in a footnote to the revised edition of his *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (London: Constable, 1913), 86; see also McFarlane, 'The Alternative "German" Ending', 5: 457–61.

5 Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House*, ed. with an introduction by William Archer (London: Walter Scott, 1890).

6 For a comprehensive review of early translations and performances of Ibsen's works in English see Arne Kildal, 'Appendix', in *Speeches and New Letters*, 121–202; Ibsen, *A Doll's House*, ed. William Archer (rev. ed., 1900), vi–xxvi; Einar I. Haugen, 'Ibsen in America: A Forgotten Performance and an Unpublished Letter', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 33:3 (July 1934): 396–420; James Walter McFarlane, 'Contemporary Reception', Appendix II, in *The Oxford Ibsen*, 5: 456–64, 488; Meyer, Appendix 'English Stage History', in *A Doll's House*, 105–41; Törnqvist, *Ibsen*, 153–68.

golden oriole, which sings for itself and not for the amusement or benefit of human beings. Ibsen was a rather unworldly type of person. It's said that when he was invited to a banquet in his honour by a group of women, and their representative rose and thanked him for having written *A Doll's House* and giving people new insight into women's consciousness and emancipation, he replied, 'That was not what I had in mind when I wrote the play, I was just writing poetry.'

This speech, made in Christiania (an earlier name for Oslo) became widely known. Its first publication in English may have been in Ibsen's *Speeches and New Letters*, translated by Arne Kildal and published in 1910 and therefore in principle a work that Lu Xun may have read.<sup>1</sup> Alternatively, he could have seen a German translation, since there seems to be some confusion about the meaning of the Norwegian word *dikt* (equivalent to German *Dichtung*), which refers both to 'poetry' and to 'fiction' (i.e. as opposed to fact).

A decade after Lu Xun had imagined possible sequels of his own, Shaw was still preoccupied with Ibsen and the sequels; he noted that 'Literary people in the eighteen-nineties used to write futile sequels to Ibsen's *Doll's House*,<sup>2</sup> and he reminisced about the 1886 reading again in 1933.<sup>3</sup> That same year, Lu Xun met George Bernard Shaw in Shanghai (the occasion nicely commemorated with a well-known photograph), and it is tempting to assume that Ibsen would have been a subject of their conversation.

To conclude: Lu Xun's talk at Women's Normal College owes much to his knowledge of the reception given to *Et Dukkehjem* in Germany and England as well as its local reception in China. It is yet another example of the many different interpretations and re-interpretations that literary works undergo, and how re-writings occur both in translation and beyond it. Most reassuring, however, is the whole notion that literature can and does cross borders, and that to some extent the same is true of literary criticism and scholarship. Even if some baggage gets lost or damaged in transit, some fascinating new accretions can also be expected.

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1 Ibsen, *Speeches and New Letters*, 65–6. More recently, this passage has been quoted in Meyer, 'Introduction', in *A Doll's House*, 69; Britain, 'Ibsenism, Feminism and Socialism', 33; and Törnqvist, *Ibsen*, 6.

2 George Bernard Shaw, 'How William Archer Impressed Bernard Shaw', in *Pen Portraits and Reviews* (London: Constable, 1932), 12.

3 George Bernard Shaw, 'An Aside', in Lillah McCarthy, *Myself and My Friends* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1933), 1–8, esp. 3.