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Sofija Todić

Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade
sofijatodic@gmail.com

**IBSEN'S *DANSE MACABRE*:
THE IMPORTANCE OF AUDITORY ELEMENTS IN HENRIK
IBSEN'S DRAMA *JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN***

Abstract: In the drama *John Gabriel Borkman* Ibsen attributes great importance to sounds. The contrast between presence and absence of sounds, other sound effects and especially the *Danse Macabre* played on the piano emphasize the drama's eerie atmosphere. *Danse Macabre* can be also seen as the drama's key metaphor, and it connects the first and the second acts and creates unity of time and action. The allegorical meanings of this composition can serve as a paradigm in the interpretation of each character, their relations, and the whole dramatic action even. The focus of this work is on the auditory layer of the drama, emphasizing the important function of the auditory as part of a dramatic work.

Keywords: literature, piano, Henrik Ibsen, *John Gabriel Borkman*, *Danse Macabre*

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between music and literature has often been a creative and productive one, which has not always been the case with their scholarly disciplines. However, in the last couple of decades, musicological and literary studies have been brought in a closer relationship by researchers interested in the narrative aspects of music, musical narratology. The topic of such research is still mostly focused on the fundamental question: whether purely instrumental music possesses narrative qualities, or, in other words, can music be or generate a narrative (Kramer 1991; Maus 2005). Fred Everett Maus, who undertook extensive research into the arguments for and against a musical narratology, concluded in 2001 that: "The exploration of instrumental music as narrative remains a tantalizing, confusing, problematic area of inquiry" (Maus

2001: 642). Now, more than ten years later, this question is still not resolved, which gives rise to compelling discussions, and is thus repeatedly brought up in narratological, musicological and literary journals and at conferences.¹ This shows the clear need for an interdisciplinary approach, as well as the need for collaboration between these areas of research. This paper, therefore, aims to bring these three disciplines into a closer relationship, as its object of inquiry is a musical passage in a dramatic text whose overriding role is to provide the text with a powerful interpretational narrative.

More specifically, its aim is to analyze the different roles of the auditory elements and the *Danse Macabre* accounted for in Henrik Ibsen's drama *John Gabriel Borkman* from 1896. It will propose an answer to the following question: to what purpose or purposes does Ibsen include an entire piano performance of *Danse Macabre* in the play and why is the drama's auditory layer so prominent? Recent studies have pointed out that nineteenth-century literary works teem with references to piano music and scenes of girls sitting at the piano and playing, and have offered analyses of the literary responses to cultural ideologies of music (Clapp-Itnyre 2002; Todić 2011; Weliver 2000). Does Ibsen's use of piano music in *John Gabriel Borkman* also comment on some peculiarities of established nineteenth-century bourgeois culture, and if so, what other roles could Ibsen have attributed to music in the drama?

Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906) is considered by many of his biographers to be “not musical, if one disregards his excellent sense of rhythm” (my translation, Haakonsen 2003: 233) and is renowned for his not-so-jovial works where he mercilessly discloses social and individual flaws. Nevertheless, the Norwegian dramatist includes musical passages in many of his dramas. Piano music, in particular, appears in three dramas written prior to *John Gabriel Borkman*, and it is a very important motif in two: *A Doll's House* (1879) and *Hedda Gabler* (1890). Before we point out the musical motifs in *John Gabriel Borkman*, and go deeper into the analysis, a brief outline of the drama's plot is called for.

¹ *The Second Conference of the European Narratological Network* taking place in Denmark in March 2011 dedicated a panel to this very topic; also at the conference *Music Theory and Analysis*, which took place in Belgrade on May 2011, many papers were concerned with narrative aspects of music.

THE PIANO MUSIC: *DANSE MACABRE*

The Norwegian painter Edvard Munch once called this drama by Ibsen the “most powerful winter landscape in all of Scandinavian art” (qtd. in Helland 2000: 293). Munch can be said to be absolutely correct. In *John Gabriel Borkman* Ibsen builds up in a masterly way an uncanny, eerie atmosphere: the world of the drama is a world of cold estrangement and repressed hatred and frustration. It is set in a lone, desolate mansion on a cold winter night, with a snowstorm swirling outside. The plot revolves mostly around three aged characters: John Gabriel Borkman, the bankrupted bank manager, his wife Gunhild Borkman and her sister Miss Ella Rentheim. The relations between them are even colder than the snowstorm swirling outside. Other important characters are the son of John Gabriel and Gunhild – Erhart Borkman, Erhart’s passionate love, the divorced Mrs. Fanny Wilton and the young pianist Frida Follidal, Fanny’s protégé. The old characters are marked by remorse, bitterness and unfulfilled desires, and are opposed to the young characters’ unappeased lust for immediate fun, life, and the bodily needs.

Into this setting Ibsen introduces one of the most powerful and ghostly musical passages in all of his oeuvre: the *Danse Macabre*. The *Danse Macabre* is played in the end of the Act One and lasts until some time in the Act Two. It starts while the action is still set in Mrs. Borkman’s living-room on the ground floor, interrupting the emotionally tense dialogue between the twin sisters Ella Rentheim and Gunnhild Borkman fighting over the affections of Erhart Borkman, who is also present on stage:

MRS. BORKMAN (*turns on her menacingly*). You want to tear him from me!

ELLA (*rising*). Yes, Gunhild, if I only could

(*Music is heard overhead*)

ERHART (*writhing as if in pain*): Oh, I can’t take this anymore! (*He peers about him.*) Where’d I leave my hat? (*To ELLA.*) Do you know that music upstairs?

ELLA. No. What is it?

ERHART. It’s the *Danse Macabre*. The Dance of Death [...] Yes, it’s that music there—that’s what’s hounding me out of this house. (Ibsen 1978: 965–6).

The music from the piano in John Gabriel Borkman's salon upstairs "swell[s] in sound from overhead" well after the quoted conversation, until the end of Act One and even some time into the Act Two. Why does Ibsen include such a long musical passage in his particularly somber drama? One can look for answers to this question from a number of different perspectives: for example the historical and biographical perspective, the compositional perspective and the perspective of symbols and metaphors on the purely aesthetic level of the drama. Each of these offers a piece of the complex, though very well-built puzzle of meanings evoked in the *Danse Macabre* in *John Gabriel Borkman*.

Due to the limits of the paper, the historical and biographical layer will not be discussed separately, but will be often referred to. In the first part of my analysis, I will look into the significance of this particular piece of music for the plot of the drama, as well as to the play's overall metaphoric meanings. In the second part of my paper, I will return to Ibsen's very interesting and rather unconventional formal use of piano music, as a dramatic tool: I will inquire into the function of the *Danse Macabre* in the drama's structure.

THE METAPHORIC MEANINGS OF THE MUSICAL PIECE *DANSE MACABRE* TRANSPOSED ONTO THE DRAMATIC TEXT

The characters in the drama do not perceive the music "swelling in sound" from Borkman's salon as a purely aesthetic phenomenon. Rather, their reaction to its sounds is intuitive, even corporal: Erhart is "writhing as if in pain", Mrs. Borkman "hurls herself down on the floor, writhing and moaning" (Ibsen 1978: 966). John Gabriel Borkman, for whom Frida Folldal plays the music, finds it uplifting, joyful even, reminiscent to the sounds of the miners' hammer blows that set free the dormant ore. Either way, the piano music in the drama is interpreted through the codes of its contextual metaphoric narrative, rather than through its purely instrumental or the qualities of Frida's performance.

In 1817 Franz Schubert composed *Der Tod und das Mädchen* and the same motif was retaken in 1874 by Camille Saint-Saëns in his composition *Danse Macabre*. In the text, Ibsen never explicitly states which exact version of the *Danse Macabre* Frida Folldal is playing: the composer is never men-

tioned. Nonetheless, critics mostly agree that it is Saint-Saëns' version transposed to piano by Franz Liszt (Aslaksen 1993; Grinde 2008; Helland 2000). The critics offer several arguments for such an assumption, of which I will name a few. According to the Ibsen's biographer Jens Arup Seip, at the time when Ibsen was composing the drama, Camille Saint-Saëns' *Danse Macabre*, op. 40 was often played in Oslo (Ibsen 1937: 17). Moreover, at the time when he was writing the play, Ibsen was frequently meeting with a young prominent Norwegian pianist Hildur Andersen, who supposedly played this piece to him on a number of occasions. Some biographers, thus, find that the intriguing friendship between the aged dramatist and the young lady pianist was decisive for the inclusion of musical elements in *John Gabriel Borkman* (Grinde 2008; Koht 1954; Nævdal 1996).

Be it as it may, the fact that the name of the composer is never mentioned may be a further clue that Ibsen's intention was to focus primarily on the secondary, symbolic, meanings of the musical piece, as some critics have already suggested (Aslaksen 1993: 77–83; Grinde 2008: 337–41; Helland 2000: 333–6). Indeed, there are many indications that Ibsen was purposefully insisting on the metaphors of the particular story behind this musical piece. As we know, the narrative behind the *Danse Macabre* which is immediately understood by the characters of the drama, derives from a widespread medieval folk belief. The myth gained considerable popularity during the nineteenth century, and was taken up by painters, writers and composers alike. According to the myth, at midnight, on a winter night, the sound of church bells announces the start of the dance of the dead – *danse macabre*. Death itself plays the tune on the violin summoning the dead to rise from their graves and dance. This macabre dance lasts for one hour, until the sound of bells brings the “dead who live” back to their graves again.

Several Ibsen critics are prone to agree that *Danse Macabre* could be seen as the play's underlying metaphor, or at least as the metaphor for the protagonist's project (Aarseth 1999; Haakonsen 2003; Helland 2000). This underlying narrative of the music piece gives us a strikingly adequate key for the interpretation of the drama: there is every possibility to read the drama through the main concepts of the myth underlying the *Danse Macabre*.

Essential to the storyline of the myth are the following: the setting of the dance, the participants, and the fundamental idea of a metaphoric “new life of the dead”. I will now successively consider these key moments of the myth and the music alike, and find their analogies in the text.

Let us first compare the beginning of the musical composition and of the drama. Saint-Saëns’ piece starts out with light and rhythmical sounds of the harp representing the church bells that strike midnight. The exact same paradigm, the sound of bells, sets off the action of the drama. It opens with a still, *immobile*, picture of Mrs. Borkman “*sit[ting] erect and immobile at her crocheting. Then from outside comes the sound of bells on a passing sleigh [...]* MRS. BORKMAN (*in an involuntary whisper*). Erhart! At last” (Ibsen 1978: 943). Just like in the musical piece, the bells on “*a winter evening*” infuse life into the lifeless body of Mrs. Borkman, announcing the beginning the drama, or, in the metaphoric paradigm of the music, the hour-long grotesque dance of the living-dead.

Let us now concentrate on the setting of the drama. The action “*takes place during a winter evening on the Rentheim family estate near the capital city [...] a snowstorm swirls in the dusk*” (Ibsen 1978: 942–3). In all, the interior of the villa resembles a tomb, with its suffocating, old grey furnishing of withered elegance. Here is a brief account of the description of the salon of the bankrupted bank manager John Gabriel Borkman. It is the room which the main character has not left in five years. Ibsen describes his self-imposed prison-cell as follows: “*The former grand salon upstairs in the Rentheim house. The walls are covered with old tapestries, depicting hunting scenes, shepherds and shepherdesses, in faded, mottled colors. In the wall to the left, a sliding door, and closer in the foreground, a piano*” (Ibsen 1978: 967).

Ibsen’s stage descriptions indicate that the room is, for the nineteenth-century standards, scarcely furnished. Apart from the piano, there is a desk, one sofa, one table and a couple of chairs and lamps. Without a doubt, in “*all the emptiness surrounding*” John Gabriel Borkman, the dominating element is a massive, black piano (Ibsen 1978: 970).² Since the piano was the instrument reserved only to the wealthiest members of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie,

² This is a rare example of Ibsen’s use of qualitative stage instructions.

this interior description signals, on the one hand, of the family's former high social status and of its subsequent social and economic downfall.³ On the other hand, the piano serves to emphasize the overall dreariness of Borkman's salon. The reader will notice that the salon does not have a single window, and is dimly lit. The piano's massive black body in a desolate, hermetically sealed-off dark room adds up to the imagery of a tomb or a coffin. In general, the atmosphere of the drama resembles most that of the famous Gothic novels such as, for example, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, or Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. However, it also perfectly corresponds to the setting evoked in the musical composition *Danse Macabre*, which is that of a graveyard – the home of the dead.

Let us now turn to the second key point in the myth: the participants to the dance. Walter Benjamin once pointed out that the typical bourgeois interiors could be said to be best suited for a corpse (Benjamin 2011: 11). This is strikingly adequate in the case of Ibsen's description of the Borkman mansion, which, as we have concluded, attains the metaphoric aspects of a tomb. Following the semantic paradigm, it would imply that its inhabitants are the dead. Analogous with the *Danse Macabre*, the inhabitants of this somber mansion: Gunhild and John Gabriel Borkman, as well as the arriving Ella Rentheim, all possess the characteristics which connect them more to the supernatural world of the dead than to the world of the living. Firstly, Ibsen's main characters are all clad in black and have "*silvery white hair*" (Ibsen 1978: 944), they communicate in whispers, and they often refer to themselves as if their lives have terminated years ago.

Finally, the third main point of the myth evoked by the performance of the *Danse Macabre* is the idea that a certain melody can awake the dead and grant them a short moment of a life-like existence, for which the newly awaked dead cling to, desolately trying to perpetuate it. In the play, the piano performance of the *Danse Macabre* evokes the same idea. Further, if one can speak of the purpose of this "awakening dance of the dead", then the objective of the dance of the Borkmans' would be the vampire-like circling

³ Several, more detailed, studies have been dedicated to the piano's fascinating role in the development of the cultural identity of the nineteenth-century rising bourgeoisie (Kjeldsberg 1985; Loesser 1954; Weber 1978).

about the young, hot-blooded Erhart Borkman. Just like the *Danse Macabre* is the music which infuses the Ibsen' characters with life is a macabre travesty of the idea of dance, so is the vitality given through it a distorted one. The "life" which the trio gains is, in fact, its somber imitation. Hence, they try to substantiate it through a living being, or more specifically Erhart Borkman. Obeying the occult principle of the melody initiating the *Danse Macabre*, Mrs. Borkman, summoned from her slumber by ringing bells, awakes to start her macabre dance with one goal on mind: "MRS. BORKMAN [...]: Erhart! At last" (Ibsen 1978: 943). To this dance joins another "dead-who-lives", another shadow: Ella Rentheim. The trio of the undead circling around young Erhart is complete when John Gabriel Borkman joins in. Ella Rentheim seeks to eternalize herself, and her family name through Erhart, Gunhild Borkman wants him to be a living "monument over [Borkman's] grave" and make her final reputation stainless (Ibsen 1978: 999). Lastly, John Gabriel Borkman articulates their blood-thirsty desire for life: "Erhart – would you go in with your father and help me win this new life?" (Ibsen 1978: 1004).

Repeating the paradigm of the *Danse Macabre*, their vampire life-in-death terminates when the sound of bells is heard again: in the last act. The three "undead" characters: two shadows, and a dead man, as Ella Rentheim calls them at the very end of the play, stand on the porch of the house, listening to the sleighs taking Erhart on his journey to quench his longing for physical (and sexual) unfolding: for life, which had been suffocated in the deadly atmosphere of the Borkman mansion:

MRS. BORKMAN (*Listens.*) Shh! What's that?

ELLA (*also listening*): That sounds like sleigh bells –

(---)

MRS. BORKMAN (*stands indecisively a moment; then stiffens, hard and cold*): No, I won't cry after him...

(*The sound fades in the distance.*)

MRS. BORKMAN: To me they sounded like funeral bells (Ibsen 1978: 1012).

The bells of the departing sleigh can be interpreted as a reformulation of the church bells which strike one calling the dead back to their graves, signaling the ending of the *Danse Macabre*. Indeed, as the "funeral bells"

fade away in the distance, the three characters are bound up to return inside, to their graves. However, Borkman refuses to go back to his death-chamber. He will not “rest quietly where he lay” (Ibsen 1978: 1019). Refusing to return to his “life” of a dead man, he attempts to repeat the rhythmical magic dance-formula: “ELLA. But where will you go? BORKMAN. Just walk and walk and walk. See if I can win my way through to freedom, and *life*, and people again” (my italics, Ibsen 1978: 1019).

He takes Ella, as his partner in the dance, to accompany him up through the trees. Imitating the movements of the ritual dance of the *Danse Macabre* which has brought them to life, the two characters climb up, away from the house – their metaphoric grave – in a fruitless effort to regain vitality. However, this proves to be impossible, since the death bells have already stricken one, binding them to return to their resting place. The ritual of *Danse Macabre* that has for a brief moment brought them to life is over.

As a conclusion, on the level of its metaphoric meanings, the plot of Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkman* can be said to rely in its entirety on the metaphoricity of the musical composition *Danse Macabre*. This interpretation is suggested by Ibsen as well, when he specifically included the entire performance of this musical composition in his drama, and by having his characters react corporally and intuitively to its melody. Now, I will turn to the formal, or structural importance of this musical performance for the drama.

STRUCTURAL PERSPECTIVE: PIANO MUSIC AS A DRAMATIC TOOL

The auditory layer in this drama is, as we said, outstandingly prominent, so that the hearing sense seems to be the most privileged one, as the Ibsen critic Astrid Sæther has first pointed out (Sæther 1993). The insistence on *sounds* and the *auditory* is emphasized already in the beginning of Act One in the conversation between the sisters:

ELLA: Well – Gunhild, it's nearly eight years now since we saw each other last.

MRS. BORKMAN (*coldly*): Or since we've spoken, at any rate.

ELLA: Since we've spoken; yes, that's better (Ibsen 1978:945).

Sounds are also very important in Ibsen's construction of the drama's feeling of eeriness. Clinging bells on passing sleighs, footsteps on the ceiling, but also the absence of sounds create suspense and a gothic atmosphere in the play. However, they also mark the progress or breaks in the action, and are therefore also important *dramatic tools*.

Nearly every development in the dramatic action is either preceded or directly caused by sounds. The play opens, as mentioned earlier, with a scene, or tableau, deprived of any motion or activity. Mrs. Borkman "*sits erect and immobile at her crocheting for a short while. Then from the outside comes the sound of a passing sleigh. She listens, her eyes lighting up with joy*" (Ibsen 1978: 943). Bells on a passing sleigh make an incision in the grim still-life. This sound infuses life into the immobile body. "Life" and action in the play may start.

The same method is repeated throughout the play, linking the scenes, or abruptly cutting them. However, the most gripping, and metaphorically superior among this multitude of structurally important auditory elements in the play is unquestionably the *Dance Macabre*. I will, in what follows, address the paramount role of this musical piece in the *composition of the drama*. The sound of the piano music from Borkman's upstairs salon makes a sudden break in the action revolving in the downstairs quarters of the villa. The already tense relations between the characters now snap. Upon hearing the *Danse Macabre*, they react passionately – young Erhart storms out saying: "Yes, it's that music *there* – that's what's hounding me out of this house" (Ibsen 1978: 966). As the "*music swells in sound from overhead*" Mrs. Borkman "[...] *hurls herself down on the floor, writhing and moaning and whispers in anguish*" (Ibsen 1978: 966).

As mentioned earlier, Ibsen introduces piano music near the end of Act One. However, the music composition lasts, in its entirety, throughout the act, continuing until some time in the Act Two, and finishing in the same act. By using the "*Dance of Death*", Ibsen does not only make a break in the action. It is, as we see, a dramatic tool which links two dramatic acts but also two disparate spaces together. Namely, by means of music, Ibsen creates the unity of time between the acts, and the unity of space, in spite of the change in scenography. Namely, *Danse Macabre* is first heard while the action is set in Gunhild's quarters, downstairs. While the music is still being

played, the action moves to a different space – the Act Two is set upstairs, in Borkman's salon. This is a very unusual and innovative technique for the time of the drama's creation, and must have presented great challenges to the contemporary stage directors. I will not discuss here the actual records of the difficulties this brought to the European theatres. What is, however, important to stress again is that music is the means Ibsen uses in order to connect the action and disparate spaces.

The formal importance of Ibsen's use of music was first perceived and examined by Mark Sandberg in his 2006 article "*John Gabriel Borkman's* Avant-Garde Continuity" (Sandberg 2006). The critic recognizes elements in the drama which resemble what were later to become common cinematic techniques known as: "sound bridge", "cross-cutting" and the "doorway" technique. "In each of the seams between acts, there is a clear attempt to move to a new space without losing track of time or gesture" (Sandberg 2006: 333). The play's most prominent "sound bridge" is Frida Follidal's piano performance of the *Danse Macabre* to John Gabriel Borkman. Linking the first and the second act, by means of music a "convincing visual mobility" is achieved between the acts (Sandberg 2006: 331). Piano music is, however, not the only example of Ibsen's use of auditory elements in the dramatic composition of the drama.

The rather unusual performance of an entire musical composition in a drama from 1894 has given rise to some, not entirely positive comments in the scholarship about Henrik Ibsen's work. Namely, it has been questioned whether this "auditory curtain" between the acts could be interpreted as a relief in the dramatic action known from other theatrical genres from Ibsen's time, the melodrama and the vaudeville (Grinde 2008)? If so, the *Danse Macabre* would be a means by which Ibsen intended to fill the necessary intermission during the change of setting for the two acts. However, I would argue that this is a hardly the case, since the *Danse Macabre* is, unlike the common musical interludes in the nineteenth-century theatres, an integral part of the drama. Second, it could hardly be called a "relief" since it, quite to the contrary, intensifies the dramatic suspense.

CONCLUSION

Indeed, in the particular moment in the play when the massive grand piano in Borkman's salon becomes animated, its "voice" is heard louder than any other sounds, reverberating through the dark rooms of the Borkman mansion with the most menacing and bone-chilling tones a piano has in all of Ibsen's work. The dreary silence, the howling of the wind, shrieking planks and the particular piano music are fundamental means by which Ibsen suggests that the key to the interpretation of the drama is, in fact, contained in the very powerful motif, and dramatic device: the piano performance of the *Danse Macabre*. Following the narrative underlying this piece of music, one can, thus, interpret the house as a tomb, and its inhabitants as macabre vampires granted one hour by the most macabre travesty of a dance. In *John Gabriel Borkman* the bourgeois salon, which has been the recurrent space of dwelling in Ibsen's later dramas, attains its most macabre image, with the piano, and its music, as its hallmark. When the piano in *John Gabriel Borkman* is adorned with "voice", it not coincidentally, "speaks" of death.

In the drama *John Gabriel Borkman*, Ibsen's technique which is considered revolutionary for dramaturgy in so many ways, is also innovative in its interdependent treatment of the interplay between the literary and the auditory. Piano music in *John Gabriel Borkman* has a very prominent role. It is an important motif, means for creating a special "mood" or "feeling", it suggests a certain code of metaphors for the interpretation of the dramatic plot, and finally, it is a crucial dramatic tool, or device, which helps to bring the action, the time and the space of the drama in a closer relation. The metaphoric narrative of the *Danse Macabre* is an independent, although an integral one, but it also provides a framework of meanings, thus enriching and supplementing the dramatic text. The music used in this drama, as well as other dramas by Henrik Ibsen, is not a remnant of the vaudeville or singspiel-tradition which was still very much alive at the time of the composition of the drama, it is far more formally and semantically significant. Its importance for the dramatic structure was compared to the well-known cinematic devices, such as the "sound bridge". In a similar way as film music which "often rises above the types of action-specific reinforcement"

and “reinforces spectator expectations not just of events internal to the narrative but in fact of the ongoing durativity of the narrative itself” (Brown 2005: 461), so the *Danse Macabre* reinforces the reading and the interpretation of the play. As I hope to have shown, piano music in Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkman* is not an ephemeral motif, but a tool used in a highly sophisticated way, showing the growing need for tighter interdisciplinary studies, and a need for further exploration of the interplay and the interrelation between literary, musicological and narratological research.



HENRIK IBSEN AND HIS DRAMA *JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN* IN SERBIA AND FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

In the bibliography of the Scandinavian books translated into Serbo-Croatian, professor Ljubiša Rajić notes that one of the first Norwegian works translated in its entirety (1891) was Henrik Ibsen's drama *A Doll House*, bearing the title *Nora*. This makes it also the oldest dramatic work translated from a Scandinavian language (Rajić 2008: 17). However, even prior to this date, Ibsen's works were being performed in Serbian and Croatian theatres. The premiere of the first Ibsen's drama in the National Theatre in Belgrade was in May 1878, and it was *The Pillars of Society – Stubovi društva* (Cvetković 1966: 64, Stojković 1979: 191). From that moment on, Ibsen's dramas remained on the repertoires of the Serbian theatres, and Borivoje S. Stojković i Sava V. Cvetković note that Ibsen's dramas were performed 59 times between the years 1927 and 1933, which makes them the most popular foreign pieces after Shakespeare, Molière and Shaw (Stojković 1979: 983). Stojković finds that until the beginning of the 20th century, Serbian theatres were mostly looking up to the repertoires from France and Germany in their selection of foreign dramatic works (Stojković 1979: 311). However, in accordance with the encompassing changes in the society, the Serbian theatres of the “flourishing period” show an even greater interest in “the pieces with contemporary social topics and progressive ideas” (Stojković 1979: 570),

and, as a result, the National Theatre in Belgrade stages Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkman* for the first time in 1902, with the title *Gabrijel Borkman* (Cvetković 1966: 64). According to the study done by the Norwegian critic Siv-Katrine Leirtrø, Ibsen's works were firstly performed by traveling theatre groups in Croatia since 1888 (Leirtrø 2001: 6). In the honor of Ibsen's seventieth birthday, the play *John Gabriel Borkman* had its premiere in Zagreb in 1897, only six months after its world premiere (Leirtrø 2001: 7).

Until this day, only one translation of this drama has been published into Serbo-Croatian. The translation by Zeina Mehmedbašić from 1978, is, unfortunately, done from the authorized German translation, and has, as a result, several shortcomings. They range from incorrect transcriptions of the names of the characters ("Erhard" instead of "Erhart", "Renthajm" instead of "Rentheim" or "Renthejm"), to the disappearance of the distinct Ibsen's style (Ibzen 1986: 154). The newer collection of Ibsen's dramas in the translation from the original Norwegian to Serbian does not, unfortunately, include the drama *John Gabriel Borkman* (Ibzen 2004). As a consequence, this drama is still rather inaccessible to the readers.

Even though it may be difficult to discuss about direct influences of Ibsen's oeuvre on the writers and dramatists from Serbia and former Yugoslavia (cf. Rajić 2008: 19 and Palavestra 1965: 169), many of them have published fragments of translations of his dramas along with commentaries of his work, especially during the period preceding the First World War. Predrag Palavestra mentions, for example, an article by Borivoje Jevtić in *Srpska riječ*, in which Jevtić, at the time member of "Mlada Bosna", critically examines Ibsen's works, "defending them from the condemnation of being immoral", (Palavestra 1965: 142). Another prominent intellectual will in 1927 return to Ibsen's alleged feminism. Ksenija Atanasijević's article "Ibzenova shvatanja žene" ("Ibsen's understanding of women") published in *Letopis Matice Srpske* is, namely, a very fine analysis of Ibsen's female characters, in which the author concludes that Ibsen is more serious and profound in his literary presentations of women, and is not only addressing feminist issues, but that it is "undeniable" that "the dramatist has attributed great dignity to women" (my translation, Atanasijević 1927: 248). Today, the discussions

about Ibsen's works and their importance are still alive in Serbia, which is proven by the works of Mirjana Pavlović, Sofija Todić, Anka Marjanović, Ljubiša Zlatanović and others. One should also point out that Ibsen's plays are continuously performed in Serbian theatres: *Peer Gynt – Per Gint*, Užice (2000), *The Master Builder – Graditelj Solnes*, Zrenjanin (2005), *Lady from the Sea – Gospa od mora*, Belgrade (2008), *A Doll House – Nora*, Sombor (2010), *Hedda Gabler – Heda Gabler*, Belgrade (2011).

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*Софија Тодић*ИБСЕНОВ *DANCE MACABRE*: ЗВУЧНИ ЕЛЕМЕНТИ
У ДРАМИ *ЈОН ГАБРИЈЕЛ БОРКМАН* ХЕНРИКА ИБСЕНА
(Резиме)

У драми *Јон Габријел Боркман* (*John Gabriel Borkman*) из 1896. године, норвешки драмски писац Хенрик Ибсен (1828–1906) велику важност придаје звуцима. Оштри контраст између присуства и одсуства звукова, али и други звучни ефекти попут шапата, еха, звона, а нарочито извођење композиције *Danse Macabre* на клавиру поспешују стварање језиве атмосфере у драми. Иако музика, а поготову клавирска музика, има једнако важну улогу, у формалном и значењском смислу, и у другим Ибсеновим драмама, музика у драми *Јон Габријел Боркман* јесте њена централна метафора. Спајајући први и други чин драме, нелагодни звуци композиције *Danse Macabre* одзвањају пустом вилом пропале породице Боркман. У раду су алегоричка значења овог музичког дела коришћена као парадигма за тумачење појединачних ликова у драми, њихових односа, али и читаве радње. Музика је и моћно драмско оруђе којим Ибсен постиже јединство времена и радње чак и преко паузе између чинова, што је, само по себи, веома модеран поступак, типичан за кинематографију. Акцент овог рада је био на музичким елементима али нису занемарени ни други звуци који граде готичку атмосферу у драми *Јон Габријел Боркман*. Тиме је истакнута веома важна улога аудитивних елемената у драмским текстовима, али и могућност интердисциплинарних истраживања књижевности, музикологије и наратологије.