"Man at the End of History": Henrik Ibsen's Works in the Light of French Post-Hegelian Theoretical Thought

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Abstract

"Man at the End of History": Henrik Ibsen's Works in the Light of French Post-Hegelian Theoretical Thought

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The dissertation argues that from today's point of view, Ibsen's plays can be divided into two qualitatively different groups: the first one consisting of plays that respond to particular socio-historical moments, and as such yield a strong notion of progress and history in them, and a second one, which comprises plays capturing the notion of already living "at the end of history" and express the problems that arise for humanity in relation to that. The ultimate purpose of the endeavor is to capture and reveal those dynamics in Henrik Ibsen's thinking which, combined with his dramatic art, give his works its unique power and longevity.

It argues that reading Henrik Ibsen's contemporary dramas through French post-Hegelian thought, specifically that of Alexandre Kojève and Georges Bataille, provides the basis for a new periodization of his production. There is a major philosophical shift in the works in the sense that the first part can be read as a clear

Hegelian progression (and this is valid for all the plays up to The Lady from the Sea): one play picks up the issues and ideas of the previous ones and builds gradually onto them, developing them further and taking them to a higher level of resolution. With Hedda Gabler Ibsen introduces an essentially different understanding of the human being, which can be equated to Georges Bataille's revision of the Hegelian system. Bataille claims that man at the end of history is not a happy satisfied human being, a "being-in-totality" that has acquired absolute knowledge, but that he is rather a frustrated individual left with an abundance of "unemployed negativity."

Examining the shift in the works allows us to better understand the surge in popularity of Ibsen's plays around the world during the last two decades of the 20th century.

The discussion also illuminates contemporary social phenomena like the "mid-life crisis" and the "quarter-life crisis": I discuss those in relation to the theatrical production of Ibsen's works today. The dissertation thus bridges between literary theory and criticism, theatrical performance and social studies in an attempt to offer a commentary on the present human condition.

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DEDICATION

For my sister—for her courage and inspiration.

INTRODUCTION

In 2000, Printer's Devil Theatre staged Hedda Gabler in Seattle to huge critical acclaim. This was the fourth production of the play that I knew of in the United States in that year. The play's phenomenal popularity continued in 2001 and in its December 26, 2001 issue, *The New York Times* proclaimed Hedda the theatrical "Anti-Heroine of the Year." Indeed, if one looks at the list of current productions of Henrik Ibsen's plays running in different parts of the world, two facts appear strikingly: first, that almost one hundred years after their creation, Ibsen's works enjoy extraordinary popularity; and second, that today Hedda Gabler is by far one of the most frequently produced Ibsen's plays. A natural question to ask would then be: what makes Henrik Ibsen our contemporary? And, secondly, why *Hedda* and why now? My argument is that from today's point of view Ibsen's plays can be divided into two qualitatively different groups: the first one consisting of plays responding to particular socio-historical moments and as such yield a strong notion of progress and history in them, and a second one, which comprises plays capturing the notion of already living "at the end of history" and express the problems that arise for humanity in connection to that.

There is, in my opinion, a clear linear development in Ibsen's works. I see his contemporary plays as outlining a distinct progression, as he is exploring

different social issues, especially in the earlier ones. He deals with the problems of his contemporaries in a dialectical manner; each play picks up the themes and motifs from the previous and enriches them with a new vision. He provokes a different understanding of the issues, and resolves them (or fails to resolve them,) but demonstrates a higher level of consciousness about them. Overall, there is a strong notion of progress and history in the last twelve contemporary plays, and I propose a reading of them that equates them to the progression of Spirit as developed by Friedrich Hegel in his Phenomenology of Spirit, and later revised by Alexandre Kojève in his Introduction to the Reading of Hegel. Besides the argument that Ibsen's plays can be read through the prism of the Hegelian structure, I also make two major points about them: first, that the last play which may still be read as Hegelian/Kojèvian is The Lady from the Sea, and, second, that the subsequent five plays signal Ibsen's departure from Hegel and entrance into the realm of ideas later developed by George Bataille.

Ibsen himself created social history through his works. Literature and theatre became strong tools in his hands, with which he stirred the latent forces within European bourgeois societies. Through them he reflected upon his environment and attempted to make sense of the contingency of existence, causing at the same time historical transformations.

Ibsen was more or less happy with his personal life. He had a smart, loyal and understanding wife by his side, and a diligent, obedient son. Eventually, he gained financial prosperity, was admired and respected for his literary activity, and occupied the highest societal ranks. This is reflected in the larger portion of his works. The main idea that underlies the earlier plays is that rationality *can* lead the individual to happiness—be it through social change or through personal development and fulfillment. People had the potential, in other words, to consciously achieve "livsgleden" (the joy of life)—a major term in Ibsen's universe. Yet, one cannot help but observe that, instead of getting ever brighter, his works only got gloomier, and the intense questioning and problematizing gradually took a different direction towards the end of the works. The last five plays written by Ibsen exude frustration and, to my mind, constitute an exploration of the paradoxality of existing at "the end of history," when all goals are achieved, yet one still feels deeply unhappy and is desperately looking for an explanation to that predicament.

To my mind, The Lady from the Sea is Ibsen's last attempt to harmonize the irrational forces within the individual and its socially constructed discursive environment, his last attempt to reconcile duty and the joy of life, freedom and responsibility. I view Ibsen's attempt to give this play a "happy end" as fruitless and amounting to what could be viewed as a refutation of Hegel's vision that Man

evolves at the end of the dialectical process of development of his consciousness, as a satisfied Being-in-totality which has acquired Absolute Knowledge and is rid of his human negativity.

In my reading, Ibsen's "Man at the End of History" is rather Hedda Gabler: a confused human being with an abundance of "unemployed negativity", to use George Bataille's term. The play anticipates Ibsen's realization of the essential lack of definable presence and meaning in human existence. This is further demonstrated by the subsequent (and last) four dramas: The Master Builder, Little Eyolf, John Gabriel Borkman and When We Dead Awaken. In them, in a period of two hours the reader/viewer is confronted with impressive self-projects which are unraveled at the moment of their construction, and ultimately—and it seems inevitably—end in death. The one exception, which rather confirms the rule than undermines it, is Little Eyolf where the protagonist consciously decides to ground his life on a particular socially beneficial project, which might not make him happy but at least would give meaning to his life. To me, this amounts to going back to "history" and employing negativity to help someone else's developing consciousness.

Ibsen elucidates the void of center and origin onto which Man could ultimately ground his existence. This is what makes the plays of the later period, from Hedda Gabler on, relevant in the Western world in the 90s, i.e. the pre-

September 11th world. This period was experienced by many as living "at the end of history": when we moved too fast through careers and relationships, only to find that we nonetheless felt deeply dissatisfied: there was nothing more to do, there were no more tasks for negativity, but we weren't happy.

My reading of Ibsen is informed by the philosophical thought of a group of French philosophers writing in the 1930's who similarly viewed their existence as being "at the End of History." Alexandre Kojève radicalized Hegel's thought by reading it anthropologically and exposed a major paradox within it: namely, that Man cannot confront and survive his death unless he is the Son of God, with the capacity for resurrection. Jean-Paul Sartre, Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot would consequently offer possible solutions or, rather, non-solutions to Kojève's problem, and their ideas would become the prevailing discourse in modern French intellectual thought. Remaining within the Hegelian/Kojèvian paradoxical discourse they express the sensitivity of modern man - man at the end of history, lacking center and foundation. Kojève's radical reading of Hegel and its consequences on Bataille's thought will be at the focus of discussion in Chapter I.

Chapter II argues that the progression in Ibsen's thought, as demonstrated in his later works, is parallel to the major shift in philosophical thinking that occurs with Alexandre Kojève's (mis)interpretation of Hegel and George Bataille's subsequent dealing with the problems arising as consequences of this reading. My

argument is that Ibsen's thought, in its development, bears a strong affinity with the way the Hegelian philosophy finds its transformation in the thought of Kojève and Bataille. I examine the way that the major notions developed by these thinkers illuminate Ibsen's works, and the implications that this bears on our reception of the plays, and indirectly – on our perception of ourselves as well.

Many critics have dealt extensively with the Hegelian aspects of Ibsen's drama, but they have for the most part taken into consideration only single plays. One of the most comprehensive studies is Brian Johnston's The Ibsen Cycle, in which he proposes that all of Ibsen's last twelve contemporary dramas be read as a complete Hegelian cycle dealing with the evolution of human consciousness. In other words, Johnston argues that the plays from Pillars of Society to When We Dead Awaken could be read as amounting to Hegel's dialectic ontology in which he attempts to account for Nature, Being, Consciousness and Man, including the whole of human history. I am going to deal in greater extent with this work in the second chapter of the dissertation. It will suffice to say here that our approaches are radically different and, not surprisingly, the results are quite different as well.

I do agree, however, that the series of first six contemporary plays—starting with Pillars of Society and ending with Rosmersholm—can be read as a Hegelian progression, and this will be the focus of Chapter III.

Ibsen's last five plays, similar to Bataille's later oeuvre, can be read as *a critique* of the Hegelian world view, in that they reveal its limitations. In them, Ibsen expresses ideas about being, meaning and happiness that are best illuminated by Bataille's thinking on those issues. The Lady from the Sea can be considered the first play with which Ibsen irreversibly enters the Bataillian realm of thought, while Hedda Gabler demonstrates Ibsen's ultimate exploration of the ideas developed by Bataille. Yet, just as Bataille remains within the Hegelian vocabulary in order to overcome its limits, Ibsen, in The Master Builder, Little Eyolf, John Gabriel Borkman and When We Dead Awaken returns to the Hegelian notions and proposes a philosophy that, like Bataille's thought, is suspended in the realm of recognition of the Hegelian system, yet at the same time tries to find outlets and ways to deal with its limitations and paradoxality. This gradual and fundamental shift in Ibsen's oeuvre is the topic of discussion of Chapter IV.

When Bataille first formulated the problem with the Hegelian system, he did not see any possible solutions to it, but at least proposed that the man of unemployed negativity became "the man of 'recognized negativity' – to be recognized for what it is: negativity without content" (Letter to X 91). Later Bataille would see solutions to the limitations of the Hegelian system in art, religion, play and laughter. Ibsen, previously, in his own right, proposes a different possible solution, namely in Little Eyolf he suggests returning to "history" and

engaging in service to those who have not yet reached "the end." Indirectly, though, Ibsen can still be associated with Bataille's idea of unemployed negativity becoming "recognized negativity": the abundance of productions of the plays of the second period, as well as the radical alterations of the plays of the first period can be read as Ibsen's indirect contribution to the *recognition* of unemployed negativity as being a considerable factor for being "at the end of history." That recognition seems to be ever more important, for, as Christopher Gemerchak states in his study of Bataille's thought:

> [We] must begin to more noticeably perceive something of a tragic wisdom at stake here, a sense of catastrophe built into human self-assertion, a principle of self-destruction that is immanent to the very rationale that led to the limits of human endeavor and the "end of history," and which opens onto an impersonal and depersonalizing space beyond the limiting veils of individual affirmation. (74)

This indirect impact of Ibsen's plays will be at the focus of Chapter V of the dissertation.

CHAPTER I

Spirit, History, Progress, Man at the End of History

One of the major characteristics of Ibsen's heroes and heroines is that they go in search of themselves. From Catilina, through Brand and Nora, to Rubek, his characters undergo vast and comprehensive "soul searching" and try to comprehend who they are and how that relates to what happens to them. They undergo extensive, often painful self-analysis with utmost scrutiny. Their plight to attain self-consciousness yields satisfying results in the earlier plays, when his protagonists seem to have reached a certain "truth" and certainty about themselves, and proves to be rather frustrating towards the end of the works, when they get steadily disappointed at the impossibility to figure out the path in life which will bring them happiness and satisfaction. It is on this scale that my thinking of Ibsen's heroes unfolds: it spans between the thought of Hegel and the thought of Georges Bataille, and their conflict on the issue of the very nature of self-consciousness. As Christopher Gemerchak puts it, while Hegel is "the paradigmatic figure in modern philosophy of the knowing certainty of self-consciousness", Bataille's claim will be that "regardless of any claim to the fullness of self-conscious knowledge, there nevertheless persists a disturbing subterranean awareness that there is, in humanity, something irreducible, something "sacred" which defies inclusion within the

parameters of self-conscious clarity" (3). In my interpretation of Ibsen, all his heroes up until Hedda Gabler either seem to have figured out what this "sacred" is for themselves or humanity, or firmly believe that if it evades them at the present moment, their successors will for sure be able to capture it. In this respect, these earlier plays are the "Hegelian" (or rather "Kojèvian", as I will clarify later) plays in Ibsen's works. For Hedda, Halvard Solness and many other characters in the later plays, the "sacred" will remain unknown and unknowable, and their realization of that fact will cause them deep sorrow and frustration. In my opinion, these are the "Bataillian" plays in Ibsen's oeuvre. A new periodization of the works can thus be proposed along those lines.

To grasp, in other words, this view of Ibsen's thought and its repercussions for the reception of his works, one must first unravel some of the specifics of Hegel's thought (as far as they pertain to the present study,) and examine the precise point at which George Bataille differentiates from Hegel, as well as the way in which he does so. Since both Hegel- and Bataille's thinking and writing are not ones that can easily be interpreted and summarized, to aid myself in this effort I will resort to a recent study by Christopher Gemerchak called The Sunday of the Negative: Reading Bataille Reading Hegel.

Hegel's dialectic ontology is an attempt to account for Nature, Being, Consciousness and Man, including the whole of human history: from the separation

of the human being from nature, through his evolution and gradual coming into Self-consciousness (which for Hegel is human history,) to becoming a Being-in-totality and acquiring Absolute Knowledge (the end of history,) to becoming again reunited with Nature, but this time conscious of himself. For Hegel, Man has only separated himself from Nature, negated Nature to attain his truth, his human essence, which is Spirit. Consciousness, in Hegel, progresses gradually, in a dialectical manner, through negating itself in matter, the given, the Other, appropriating it, becoming it and reaching in this way a higher level in its development: the *Aufhebung*.

As pointed out by Gemerchak, Hegel attempts to unify the two moments of Kantian knowledge, namely transcendental and empirical subjectivity. "In my view," writes Hegel, "which can be justified only by the exposition of the system itself, everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as Substance, but equally as Subject" (qtd. in Gemerchak 29). He does not, in other words, "cut the bond between the Absolute and the experience of historical, empirically existing individuals," explains Gemerchak: "the living individual (Subject) is in truth the (empirically?) existing Concept which slowly and painstakingly accomplishes the reconciliation between the Absolute and its external manifestations" (29). This is a point which will become the springboard for Alexandre Kojève's radical interpretation of Hegel's philosophy. As I will discuss

at greater extent later, Kojève puts man at the center of the dialectic, and the Absolute matters only as far as it is of any importance to the temporal human being. This is a major difference from Hegel's system, for in it "[...] in so far as the Subject is but the living manifestation of Absolute Spirit, its own internal difference, it can only be seen as a moment of the universal into which its particularity eventually vanishes" (Gemerchak 29).

In respect to previous philosophy, Hegel's contribution is that he essentially opens the possibility of the adequacy of knowledge to being – something of crucial importance for modern man. "Hegel posits," clarifies Gemerchak, "that the given is already mediated, pregnant with its form, and hence is known not by imposing determinations but through a progressive dialectical process of unveiling them." This amounts to "the refusal of thought to be intimidated by the matter at hand, to abdicate before the task of knowing the whole of reality, including God" (30). Yet, not surprisingly, in quite a Hegelian dialectical way, this "adequacy of knowledge to being," as important as it is for modern man and to Ibsen in particular, becomes exactly the point surrounding the debate around Hegel. As Gemerchak elucidates: "*That* Hegel insists on overcoming all forms of incomplete knowledge by thought's mediation of all "apparent" difference, all abstraction, and its discovery of itself in and as the divine comprehension of the totality, is not debated. *How* he does this, and whether or not it is justifiable, is the catalyst for interpretative dispute" (31). If

one reads Ibsen and Bataille, it is *not* justifiable. For in Hegel, there is a crucial presupposition, as identified by Joseph Flay, that there is "a whole that also makes sense as a whole", an Absolute (Being, God) that guarantees that everything "fits together meaningfully" *and* that there is a possibility for a finite being to achieve absolute comprehension of the Absolute to which it belongs, because the Absolute (Being) *fully discloses itself* in and to human thought" (qtd. in Gemerchak 32). Although not explicitly stated, Hegel's dialectic is based on the Christian Passion: God negates himself in Man, who, through his dwelling in Death, attains his true essence—the Absolute Free Spirit.

As far as Bataille's thought is concerned, it unfolds on the basis of Heidegger and Kojève's engagement with Hegel's philosophy and, specifically, with Kojève's radical altering of its main premises. To be able to eventually understand and appreciate Ibsen's thought and its illumination by the thinking of Bataille, we must follow the windings that Hegel's system experienced with the engagement of both of the above mentioned thinkers – Heidegger and Kojève.

Gemerchak presents briefly Heidegger's critique of Hegel (one that will eventually lead to Kojève and Bataille):

> [...] both Hegel and Heidegger are ultimately concerned with the manner in which transcendent Being crosses over the ontological divide and discloses itself in and to beings in the world. Hegel is

> thus a profound thinker of 'the difference'. But, as the criticism goes, he thinks the difference through in order to "eliminate" it, to "absolve" absolute knowledge from dependence on anything other than itself in assuring itself of truth. [...] The Absolute produces difference in order to reconcile its own differences in the absolute self-production of knowledge. (33)

Heidegger's reading, on the other hand, emphasizes not the cancellation but the preservation of difference in the absolute. Gemerchak examines further in his study the elements intrinsic to the Hegelian system which are the points of contradiction and concern for later philosophers. One of the most problematic and relevant ones is "the belief that the real is in fact rational":

> By assuming the rationality of the real from the start, [Hegel's] method appears more as a justification than an examination of reality, and seemingly even contradicts its experience. For the motor of the process is contradiction, a dehiscence between subject and object. Reflection has the task of dissolving this split through knowledge, the inwardization of the object by Spirit – Spirit being the total movement of self-mediation, which first creates the difference between subject and object only to negate it and consolidate all the particular moments into a whole. (34)

Bataille, whose thinking, as mentioned above, will be crucial for our reading of Ibsen, questions Hegel's claim "to grasp the whole of reality." He continuously calls into question the validity of dissolving "the split between subject and object *in knowledge"* (34).

Admitting the influence of Koyré and Kojève on his reading, Gemerchak also observes that this movement of self-mediation though particular moments is also in fact human history and that "[the] developmental process, the Becoming of Substance is none other than the "unrest" that is free, contingent and finite historical human being": "[the] 'restlessness' is negativity as the desire that drives the subject out of itself, giving human existence an ecstatic, transcendent, futurizing character – the openness of time" (35). The problem with the Hegelian structure then (and one that will be wiped out with Kojève's anthropological reading of it) is that the meaning of this movement "is not free but has been decided in advance" (35). The meaning of human existence in Hegel is that Spirit in the world "fulfills itself in knowing itself as having completed the process of Becoming". At this point though, the negativity that has been driving the process onward is cancelled, "and time along with it" (36). As I will discuss to a greater extent later, Ibsen does not emerge as truly Hegelian in any one of his plays for this very reason: that he is only concerned with the infinite Concept as far as it serves

the finite human being, while in Hegel we have the reverse dynamic: "the meaning of finite life is gained through its service to the infinite Concept" (36).

As mentioned above, the French philosopher Alexandre Kojève, after having read Heidegger, "was lured" as Gemerchak puts it, "by Hegel's admission of history and temporality into the Absolute – the finite becoming of the infinite" (36). Kojève radicalizes Hegel's ontology by emphasizing, somewhat unfaithfully to the Hegelian text, that this philosophy is about Man and Man alone. Man is Time and Discourse and therefore nothing exists outside of Man:

> [...] while [Kojève] clearly acknowledges the necessary circularity of the system – the teleological orientation that inserts becoming within an anticipative horizon of closure, relative to which every moment derives its meaning – he nevertheless denies that the Hegelian narrative transcribes anything other than *human* becoming. (36)

In other words, "Kojève sees in his Hegel a resolute atheist: [...] he asserts this specifically because of the circularity of the system, because knowledge is not related to an external Concept, or something outside of Time that will serve as an exterior criterion for truth" (36). As far as Ibsen is concerned, we will see that in Emperor and Galilean he still allows for the existence of a "world-will," as he calls it, which gradually realizes itself through Man, acts through Man, and is superior to

him. From Pillars of Society on this idea disappears in Ibsen and his thought bears a strong affinity to that of Kojève's where "the Concept (God) is identified with Time (Man, negativity) and therefore with History, so that Being (God) reveals itself to itself through discourse in the world" (36). "Hegel's *whole* philosophy or 'Science,'" concludes Kojève, "can be summed up in the sentence: '*Time* is the Concept itself which is *there (daseiende)* in empirical existence'" (qtd. in Gemerchak 231). Another notable suggestion that Gemerchak makes based on Kojève's interpretation, (and which resembles Ibsen's attitude,) is that one can alternatively say that a Christian (or a religious) view can be advocated provided that "the criterion for truth is not granted to a transcendent God, but rather to human existence in the world" (36).

Kojève elucidates, in other words, (without admitting or addressing them,) various contradictions, which inevitably arise when reading Hegel anthropologically. In Hegel, as Bataille points out, the movement of the Absolute mirrors the life of the Christian God: "the Absolute dividing or negating itself in becoming finite existence/Jesus (Subject), dying (the Calvary), and being sublated (the *Aufhebung,* or the Inwardization) into the original unity with the Absolute" (37). When stripped of its religious implications, Hegel's dualistic ontology ends up in a paradox: Man cannot confront and survive his death unless he is the Son of God with the capacity for resurrection. Therefore, the earthly human being

paradoxically cannot experience death and achieve its "truth" and sovereignty. Recognizing this paradox, Bataille realizes that Kojève has gone too far in his anthropocentric interpretation. In order to elucidate this resulting paradoxality he underscores Hegel's theism. Bataille's thinking, as Gemerchak specifies, is based on the very explanation for *why* the Hegelian dialectic cannot be stripped from God and why Kojève's anthropological reading simply does not work:

> [If] the movement of the *Phenomenology* is followed to its end, it reaches a state of satisfaction that could only belong to God--namely, absolute knowledge--or a satisfaction that could perhaps only be granted to God--namely, universal recognition--both of which are unknowable to humanity as God is. (36)

Gemerchak deliberates further on the implications that the Christian Passion has on the completion of the system:

> Hegel's God is a dynamic process of self-revelation that involves development in and through the finite. For the adequate self-revelation of God there must be differentiation and alienation: God must have a representation to overcome abstraction and become actual. Christ is this final representation of the Absolute, its self-alienation, but this alienation cannot remain, or we would have a God with an unhappy consciousness. The *Dasein* of Christ must be

> overcome so that the meaning of Christ can be appropriated. Thus, the true meaning of Christ does not lay with his incarnation or actual existence--which is in fact a dialectically surpassable moment--but rather with his death. The absence of his actuality permits the presence of Spirit. (37)

Bataille agrees that death has to occur and that it carries with it a transformative aspect, but he disagrees with Hegel's spiritual treatment of that death, which Gemerchak views as the "dividing line" between his and Hegel's thought: "That Hegel added 'speculative' to the Good Friday sacrifice implies that the negative is already a positive, that the death of Christ is the 'death of death', *the death of finitude itself* insofar as through this death the finite being attains universal significance in the eternal life of Spirit" (37). Yet Hegel postulates that "[...] the life of the Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death [...] but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it" (qtd. in Gemerchak 37). In other words, Spirit undergoes "utter dismemberment" but at the same time has the "magical power" that "converts death into being" or into *knowledge*. Bataille comments that if Christ is the incarnation of Spirit and Spirit knows that finite death is only a step towards eternal divinity, the tragic view of Christ's death is like comedy because it implies an arbitrary introduction of the notion that "an omnipotent and infinite God has

forgotten his eternal divinity" (Hegel, Death 13) With Kojève's antropologization this moment of the dialectic raises a whole other set of questions.

In Hegel's closed system Being is reduced to the meaning it has for knowing subjectivity—something which Bataille and Ibsen would disagree with. As we shall see later with our discussion of Emperor and Galilean, it is only natural to search for meaning while the system is not completed, and to anticipate that meaning will disclose itself once closure of the system has been accomplished. After having reached "the end of the system," Ibsen realizes that no clarity and knowledge have been achieved, and no satisfaction has been obtained. As Bataille also states: "[It] was Hegel's greatness to see that knowledge depends on completeness, [...] imagining an ingathering at the end of time (Hegel) or outside (Plato) is surely a mental necessity. This necessity is real: it's the condition of meaning..." (qtd. in Gemerchak 38). The journey has to have a sense of direction, a goal which gives it its meaning. This goal for Hegel is Absolute Knowledge. Gemerchak discusses the problem that this creates for Bataille:

> Hegel knew no other aim than knowledge and it is to self-mediating knowledge that he reduced the entirety of existence, effectively crushing the distinction between being-in-itself and being-for-myself. If Being consists in being-known, and being-known is

> equivalent to being-mine, then all of being is reduced to the meaning it has for knowing subjectivity. (38)

This necessity for meaning is something that both Bataille and Ibsen would end up questioning. Bataille essentially rejects the identification of Being and Knowledge in Hegel, for he identifies as the goal of Hegel's philosophy "the sufficient identification of an endless world with the finite world, an unknowable (noumenal) world with the known (phenomenal) world" (qtd. in Gemerchak 39). It is further clarified in the study of Bataille that his critical ideas arise "insofar as he adheres to Kojève's position—that humanity is negativity and that it is only thanks to that negativity that Being is revealed in human discourse" (39).

The two main critical ideas that Gemerchak identifies in Bataille (raised in regard to Hegel's philosophy,) can also be attributed to Ibsen's thinking as it comes forward in the later plays. "First of all," writes Gemerchak, "Bataille will reject the discursive 'knowability' of the sensuous, immediate unknown, the notion that the unknown is simply in the process of becoming known, that it gives itself of itself to knowledge--that it is the unknown *of* knowledge—and thus is not unknowable" (39). Second, Bataille raises the notion that "negativity will not disappear when thought reaches its goal. That is, the notion that Being and Thought are not identical will lead Bataille to the conclusion that there is a residue of Being beyond Thought" (40). The problem is further clarified by Denis Hollier: "All of Bataille's

reading of Hegel takes as its main line that the subject and knowledge are mutually exclusive. This exclusion is implicit everywhere, in every project for knowledge, but only the ambition to absolute knowledge brings it out into the open" (qtd. in Gemerchak (40).

As mentioned above, Bataille's reading of Hegel would not have been possible without Kojève's anthropological interpretation and, specifically, his hypothesis about the essence of "the end of history". What is at stake with both Bataille and Ibsen is not so much *when* history ends, but *what* happens then. Gemerchak indicates that both in Kojèvian and in Hegelian terms, the "end of history" signifies that "humanity—negativity—no longer has anything *to do*" (40). In both Kojève and Hegel though, the human being emerges rid of its human negativity and is happy and satisfied. Both Bataille- and Ibsen's texts show their disagreement with this proposition. Their claim can be summarized as follows: "even if action (negativity) has vanished, and philosophy along with it, the existence of humanity as negativity has not" (40). The question that they both explore is *what* happens with this negativity which is now unemployed? The subsequent questions, with I view to have utmost relevance for Ibsen's texts, Gemerchak formulates as follows:

> [...] can [negativity] be recognized for what it is once it no longer manifests itself in action? And if there is nothing to do with this

> negativity, does our existence become a question without doors or windows, with no way out? Does Hegel's "triumph of meaning" in the final reconciliation with all forms of otherness simply leave us at the gates of non-meaning, aimless, with only absurd pursuits to fill our time, discontented with everything because even absolute wisdom was insufficient? (41)

To understand Bataille's subversion of the Hegelian notions of negativity, desire and recognition, one needs to turn to the key process in Hegel through which Man, as a natural, given Being becomes an autonomous Self-consciousness: the "Master-Slave" dialectic. As both Borch-Jacobsen and Gemerchak point out, this process, which Gemerchak also calls "Hegel's most notorious dialectic," is returned to the forefront of philosophical thought in France by Kojève's teachings. His interpretation "inflated [it] into the foundational moment not only in the *Phenomenology* but as well in the movement of History" (Gemerchak 42). In Bataille's words: "the dialectic of the master and the slave [...] is the decisive moment in the history of the of the consciousness of self and [...] no one knows anything of *himself* if he has not understood this movement which determines man's successive possibilities" (42).

The importance of the Master/Slave dialectic, clarifies Gemerchak, comes from the fact that it is situated "in the transition between (natural) consciousness

and (human) self-consciousness, the movement toward which—for Hegel—is the path to self-certainty" (42). In Hegel's terms, this is the moment when "the subject comes to explicitly realize that which was implicitly established in the forms of consciousness (sense-certainty, perception, and understanding), as the subject comes to see itself in and behind, and thus independent of objective reality," or, in other words, "consciousness comes to see itself as the unity with the Concept which in fact creates the multiple distinctions it previously understood to be objective" (42).

In Kojève's unfaithful interpretation, as presented in his Introduction to the Reading of Hegel, through the dialectic Man gains his essence, which is not Spirit, but Desire, action and radical negativity. In order for this to happen, Man needs to reflect himself in the Other, to see himself in the other's Desire, to become an object of Desire himself, a value to be desired and thus be recognized as a free Self-consciousness. Moreover, he needs to be willing to give up his life (which is what essentially defines him as a given, natural being,) in order to obtain his *human* reality. "Therefore", writes Kojève "to speak of the origin of Self-consciousness is to speak of the fight to the Death for recognition" (7). Or, as Gemerchak observes, "[c]onflict is the first step on the path to intersubjectivity" (43). In the fight, "each subject involved views itself as the essential reality, independent of all otherness, a view which is then challenged by the other who holds the same attitude toward

himself" (44). In addition, only *one* can prevail in this fight, it has to be a fight to death. In other words, Man must face Death in order to become "a free and historical individual, conscious of his individuality, his freedom, his history and finally his historicity" (Kojève 6). But, "in order that the human reality come into being as 'recognized' reality," writes Kojève, "both adversaries must remain alive after the fight" (8) One must give up his desire, satisfy the desire for recognition of the other and accept the position of the Slave. Or, in Joseph Navickas words, "[when] confronted with the possibility of death and propelled into anxiety at this prospect, [the slave] chooses not to take the risk of dying and opts for a life of servitude and dependence" (qtd. in Gemerchak 44). The one who has not feared death becomes the Master. "In his nascent state", concludes Kojève, "man is never simply man. He is always necessarily and essentially either Master or a Slave" (8). For Hegel, this is a fundamental social relation and the historical dialectic is the dialectic of the Master and the Slave.

While the Slave shies away from death and prefers to remain tied to the given world, in the fight with the Master, facing Death, he has also realized that it—death—is his true essence. He has realized that it is not the Master he is afraid of, but himself. He steps back and submits to the Desire of the Master. Only later, through his concrete negation, formation and education he will achieve his freedom and attain his essence. "The complete, absolutely free man, definitely and

completely satisfied by what he is, the man who is perfected and completed in and by this satisfaction, will be the Slave who has 'overcome' his Slavery. [...] History is the history of the working slave," concludes Kojève (20).

The Master, on the other hand, would only "realize" his freedom through Death. He would believe to be a sovereign Self-consciousness, but would actually be in a state of intellectual impasse. Because of the slave's voluntary submission, the Master would reduce him to an object and thus would not be able to become conscious of his essence. The Master was not afraid of Death, did not face it, and does not know his essence. He would become dependent on the Slave and at the end of the dialectic would disappear as a type.

In Hegel's theoretical vision Man attains his true essence through "a trick." Because of his *fear* of Death, the Slave is able to really experience it in his *imagination.* Experiencing the *fear* of Death is in other words equated with the actual "dwelling" in Death: "Identifying with the one who takes the risk of life, *seeing oneself* in the other (Desire, 'absolute negating-negativity') who exists *for* slavish consciousness as its ideal representation, the slave became conscious of its own death, one's "nothingness" revealed by the other"(Gemerchak 49). Thus, in Hegel's system, the anxiety experienced at facing death is "the beginning of wisdom." Gemerchak summarizes as follows:

> Anxiety is treated by Hegel as a regrettably necessary passage way to productive work (the possible), the form in which life lives death. In other words, the anguish felt as a loss of self, as the impossibility of continuing to confront the void that has opened before and within one, [...] is avoided. And through the dialectical transformation of this nothingness/negativity into actuality through the long labor of death (action and discourse) which reasserts one's self in the world, not only is anxiety repressed, but it becomes an intermediary on the road to knowing divinity, the sovereignty of Absolute Knowledge. Economically speaking, one trembles before death and collects the wages of fear. (50)

In The Lady from the Sea Ibsen comes very near to the above mentioned Hegelian/Kojèvian proposition. His conclusion that "menneskene kan akklimatisere seg [...] i frihet [...] og under ansvar" (ISV 3:382) ("people can acclimatize themselves [...] if they are free [...] *and* act *responsibly*" (OI 7:124) can be equated to Hegel's insistence that "the true autonomy is gained by the slave based upon a compromise of desire, its inhibition." Ellida's final decision to remain with her husband in order to be of use to him and his two adolescent daughters can be viewed as Ibsen's agreeing with Hegel that "[by] putting his negativity to work the slave creates a real objective world, a cultural, human and historical world in which

he will subsequently recognize the independence of his own self-consciousness" (51).

Yet, at the same time, as we shall see later, this moment in Ibsen is of dubious nature, and is fleeting, for, as in Kojeve's Hegel, the play contains a contradiction which cannot easily be surpassed. Up until the The Lady from the Sea Ibsen's protagonists are historical people, in search of their essence, just as Ibsen himself is a historical man slowly progressing through the stages of consciousness. In this respect his oeuvre up to this point can be read as Hegelian/Kojevian. The Lady from the Sea is the dividing point in the works, for while it can be regarded as still being within the Hegelian/Kojevian parameters of thought (viewing the human being as "death... conscious of itself" (49) as discussed above,) it can also be read as Ibsen's first play demonstrating his gradually gained consciousness about negativity, death and desire being Man's essence. Ibsen shows in this play an awareness of the impossible Hegelian imperative for Man to live *through* death in order to realize his true essence. Ibsen's next play, Hedda Gabler, is already in line with Bataille's view of the human being as "death that lives a human life." In other words, the point at which Hegel and Bataille will part is also the point of major shift in Ibsen's thinking, namely, the issue of "how life lives death." We will follow the implications that this gradual shift has for Ibsen's subsequent plays. I shall return to this in detail in Chapter IV and discuss there Bataille's theoretical

reasoning of why and how Hegel's proposition, and its subsequent affirmation by Kojève, are inherently flawed and do not work. Also a subject of discussion there will be Ibsen's concrete theatrical world as illuminated by this theory. To summarize here, the movement in Ibsen's own works is similar to Bataille's movement away from the Hegelian: Bataille takes Hegel's system seriously, "was forced to immerse himself" in it, "to follow its reasoning to the end in order to watch it explode at the final moment by the force of its own imperative—negativity" (Gemerchak 27). In the case of Ibsen's protagonists, that which had made them progress through the Hegelian system—their human negativity—would ultimately unravel what had become of them. Bataille similarly addresses two major issues in Hegel: "the fact that the highest of the philosophical achievements may bear within it the force of its own undoing; and the pretension of the Hegelian *Aufhebung* to conceptually master every event it encounters, and thus to recover meaning even in the risible, redeeming the meaningless" (27). Gradually, and unintentionally, Ibsen's message, conveyed through his dramatic art, amounts to that of Georges Bataille's theory. Bataille examines those issues consciously and his work constitutes a deliberate project: he proposes to "reveal Hegel's truth only to show how it ultimately leads to non-sense"; he "'recommences' [it] to unearth the truth of its foundational concepts and their movement, only to 'undo' it in the

end and rescue them from Hegel himself, from the sense to which he subordinates them" (Gemerchak 27).

For Bataille, as for Ibsen, "[...] the issue is to push the very limits of self-conscious awareness" (Gemerchak 3). A crucial point made by Gemerchak further, (and one that will be of utmost importance for Ibsen heroes in the last five plays) is that "Bataille addresses the tension of a subject that fears the inevitable, and acts so as to avoid it, and the same subject nevertheless is compelled to look that which it fears in the face – *a confrontation that will lead to an altogether different employment of its powers in action"* (26). Ibsen's heroes similarly change their present course of action: suddenly they start behaving oddly; puzzle their fellow human beings with unexpected and unexplainable attitudes and actions. In a matter of two hours, (as long as the action in the play lasts,) Hedda, Solness, Allmers, Borkman and Rubek galvanize their environment with the stories of their lives, and ultimately—relentlessly, silently and irreversibly—explode it at the end to everyone's dismay captured well in Judge Brack's exclamation at the end of Hedda Gabler: "Men, gud seg forbarme, ...slikt noe *gjør* man da ikke!" (ISV 3:434) ("But, good God Almighty... people don't *do* such things!" (OI 7:268).

CHAPTER II

Ibsen and Hegel

If Ibsen's view of humanity, as it comes forward in his plays, develops steadily and gradually on the axis of thought *Hegel – Kojève – Bataille,* it is then from the beginning, and remains throughout, Hegelian in spirit. Just like the philosophies of Kojève and Bataille, it originates on premises similar to those of Hegel's thought, but takes a different course and, ultimately, discloses different parameters of the human being than those proposed by Hegel. Many Ibsen scholars, as we shall see later, have dealt with the Hegelian currents in Ibsen's works, but because they always have remained limited only to Hegel and not looked further into the thought of his later interpreters, their readings have been more or less summarizing, and have presented either a superficial, or a constraining view of Ibsen's oeuvre. By employing the thought of post-Hegelian thinkers I aim at breaking the capsule of Hegel's restricted system imposed on Ibsen, and at casting light on the present condition of his works: one of undiminishing relevance and continuous inspiration.

Emperor and Galilean has by many been considered to be the "most Hegelian" of Ibsen's plays. James McFarlane's view can be taken as a good explanation of why it has been so:

> The groundwork of thought in the drama shows certain obvious and immediate similarities with the Hegelian system. Its world is an arena of dualities: Christianity and Paganism, the flesh and the spirit, the claims of Caesar and the claims of God, the tree of knowledge and the tree of the cross, moral goodness and sensuous beauty, freedom and necessity, the individual and the world. Above all these, and thought of as embracing and reconciling and resolving these opposites, was the great mysterious synthesis of 'the third empire'. (223)

In my opinion this is a good example of the superficiality with which Ibsen's Hegelianism is approached. If one remains at this argument—that the play is Hegelian because it is "an arena of dualities" resolved by a synthesis—one might argue that each one of Ibsen's plays is Hegelian. I will return to Emperor and Galilean shortly, and ultimately agree that this is probably the play which bears strongest affinity with the Hegelian doctrine, but it will be for a reason different from the one McFarlane suggests. The true essence of Ibsen's Hegelianism for me lies in the works as a totality, and, specifically, in the meticulous and gradual examination of the individual human being and its interaction with its environment in the cycle of the last twelve plays. There is a tight internal relation between them: they build upon each other: the hero of each new play "negates" him- or herself in

the issues and conflicts raised in the previous play and brings them to a resolution—only to encounter a new set of conflicts that will be dealt with in the next play. In each one of the first seven of the twelve plays in the series, Ibsen proposes a newly found "truth," and, because it is related to a previous one *and* re-negotiated in the following play, it can be read as reaching a higher level, as it is in Hegel's dialectic. This dynamic can be equated to Ibsen's pointing to the direction that will lead to self-consciousness and knowledge, and, with it, to personal fulfillment and happiness. Having reached a certain level in the development of consciousness, Ibsen would encounter a new set of conflicts to engage his negativity with and would write another play, developing his thought further and emerging with yet another newly found "truth." As far as it is Man alone who is the creator of his own destiny and whose happiness lies strictly in his own hands, the plays can be viewed as Kojèvian. Yet Ibsen's overall approach to reality and his comprehensive philosophical view relates them to Hegel.

Ibsen's first play after Emperor and Galilean, Pillars of Society, which is also the first one in the series of last twelve plays, signals his withdrawal from his belief in a higher universal Spirit, and demonstrates a closer affinity with Kojève and his anthropological reading of the Dialectic. The Kojèvian view of reality remains in all of the plays until Hedda Gabler. With Hedda Gabler Ibsen enters the

Bataillian realm of thought, the world of unemployed negativity and frustration. He remains there for the last four works he writes.

As in Hegel, Ibsen's complete works can be viewed as an exploration of the issues of self-consciousness and knowledge. The conflict between what seems to be the *potential* of the human being for happiness and Absolute Knowledge and, simultaneously, the *impossibility* for ever achieving them, is at the focus of his work and can be considered *the* major field onto which his attitudes and maturing thought are displayed. While this problematic engaged him throughout his life, it is in the last group of contemporary plays that he embarks on a gradual and coherent examination of the issues—this time using the particularity of his contemporaries and their problems.

When it comes to a *single* play that most evidently demonstrates an affinity to Hegel, Emperor and Galilean is rightfully suggested as "the most Hegelian" of Ibsen's works. In the first part of his works he seems indeed to believe that there were "two powers in the life of the world": the "world-will" and the individual, Man and God. In several plays he explored their relationship, which for him was one of conflict and war. While the world, reality, and the totality of creation prompted him to believe in the existence of a larger all-encompassing Spirit, the contradictions within himself, the paradoxality of his own life made him speculate about the *nature* of this relationship. In particular, Ibsen seems to doubt that

Christianity, as traditionally believed in Norway, is the "true" and final doctrine for the human being. Emperor and Galilean presents Ibsen's reflections on the matter at that time.

A short summary of the intricate plot is necessary to inform my discussion of the play. Yet, to summarize a play which includes two large parts—each with five individual acts, many separate scenes and more than 30 characters—is not a simple matter. I will thus utilize Merete Morken Andersen's tight synopsis found in Ibsenhåndboken (The Ibsen Companion):

"The play covers a period of twelve years, from 351 to 363 A.D., in a time of conflict between Christianity and Hellenism. At the opening of the play Julian is nineteen years old and with his step-brother Gallos, the heir to the throne, he lives in terror of the Christian Emperor Konstanzios, who has had the whole of Julian's and Gallos's family murdered. Julian has been brought up as a Christian, but is haunted by doubt. Under the influence of his tutor, the philosopher Libanios, he goes to Athens to learn about the religion of the heathens. But he is unable to feel at ease with the belief in the old gods either, and he longs for a revelation to show him the way forward. Maximos, the Ephesus mystic, proclaims to him the vision of the "third kingdom", a kingdom to be based on both Christian ethics and heathen wisdom and joy in life. Maximos brings about a "symposium of the spirits" in which he calls upon the three men who have changed the course of history without

knowing that they were tools for the "will of the world." The first two are Cain and Judas Iscariot, but the third one does not appear, and Maximos realizes that either Julian or he himself must be the one to play this part.

Julian has high ideas of his own future, and feels that he is loved by the gods and appointed to carry out great deeds. He believes that he would be able to change the course of history if he could marry a "pure woman." He is informed that Gallos, the heir to the throne, has been killed, and so he receives the title of Cæsar and Helena, the Emperor's sister, becomes his wife. He interprets this as a sign of the mission decided for him by fate. He is sent to Gaul to stop the barbarians, and there he performs feats of war which arouse the suspicion of the Emperor, who sends a tribune to Julian to ensure that he does not proceed towards Rome. The tribune brings poisoned fruit for Helena, who turns out to be with child. Before she dies she hints in delirium that the child is not Julian's. He now abandons all his scruples and leads the army towards Rome. He declares publicly that he is no longer a Christian, and anointed with sacrificial blood he demonstrates his apostasy and his adherence to the old gods: Apollo, Cybele and Dionysos. This marks the end of the first part of the double drama.

It turns out that the Emperor Konstanzios had died before Julian reached Rome, and in the second part of the play Julian has himself become Emperor. He declares freedom of religion for all citizens, and emphasizes that the Christians may

retain their faith although he himself is a heathen. But the Christians adopt violent means to combat the re-introduction of heathen religions, and Julian gradually develops into a tyrant who hits back hard at the Christians. With his power diminishing, he goes to war against the Persians, but this time the fortunes of war are against him. He is now regarded more or less as an anti-Christ, and is killed in the desert by a former friend who is a Christian. It becomes evident that his inhuman rule has aroused the Christians and aided their cause. Like Cain and Judas he has served the "will of the world" and changed the course of history – in the opposite direction to his wishes, and without realizing it himself." (87-88; Trans. Joan Tindale in Ibsen.net)

James McFarlane distinguishes between two separate (though overlapping) areas of conflict in the play, "both of them productive of dialectic development: the one—a clash between The Christian and the pagan attitudes to life; and the other—a clash between the individual and the world-will" (230). In my interpretation the first one can be viewed as a derivative of the second, in the sense that Ibsen searched for answers about the mysterious and unsatisfying relationship between the Spirit and the Individual in the difference between paganism and Christianity. At that time, his view is that some synthesis between the two religions inevitably will occur, which is a notion rather similar to Hegel's idea of the dialectical development of Being and the final goal of Spirit. McFarlane mentions Ibsen's

belief at the time that "[...] both these philosophies were capable of displaying both admirable and reprehensible features, that both of them in their origins had been splendidly conceived but in time had become perverted and corrupt, and that some new revelation was now surely at hand" (230).

The deep conflict within the human being which was causing him so much pain Ibsen explained with a major contradiction which occurred at the creation of reality by some great primal Creator, or Spirit. Its will and intent to create harmony and peace in the world clashed with the power which its major creation—the human being—received. This is one of the "timeless and eternally valid" issues in Emperor and Galilean, as identified by Ibsen himself, namely, "the struggle between two irreconcilable powers in the life of the world, something which will in all ages repeat itself" (qtd. in McFarlane 231).

McFarlane elaborates on this view, based on Ibsen's text:

> When the great primal Creator had imposed order on chaos, he had nevertheless allowed into his creation a second creative power—the power of his creatures to re-create themselves, the will to survive, the urge to self-preservation and self-advancement. These are in essence the two great warring principles in the universe: the Individual and the Whole, Man and God, or—to select particular manifestations of them—Emperor and Galilean (231).

Although one could agree that the indications in the text about whether Spirit is identical with the Christian God are not quite clear, it is still a stretch to assume, as McFarlane does, that The Whole/God is in fact the Christian god. A stronger case can actually be made that what Ibsen alludes to is the belief that Christianity is only a temporary religion—imperfect and insufficient. The "world-will" he refers to seems to be something different and larger, something that will ultimately disclose itself to the human being through a new religion, which will not have the deficiencies of the previous two. This is explicitly stated in Emperor and Galilean in the discussions between the mystic Maximus and Julian in which the Christian faith is described as hostile to the human being. The Christians are described as renouncing the earthly life in their hope for afterlife in heaven: "[...] solen lyser for dem, og de ser den ikke; jorden byder dem sin fylde, og de begjærer den ikke; - alt hva de begjærer, er å forsage og lide for å komme til å dø" (ISV 2:369). ("[...] the sun shines for them and they do not see it; the earth offers them its abundance, and they do not desire it; their only desire is to renounce and suffer, so that they may die" (OI 4:311). Julian is faced with a choice between the Emperor, symbolizing the pagan joy of life, and Christ, symbolizing duty and obedience, a choice which he denies to accept: "Keiser eller Galilæer; - *det* er valget. Vær trell under redselen eler hersker i dagens og lysets og gledens land! Du kan ikke ville det motsigende; og dog er det *det* du vil. Du vil forene det

uforenlige" (ISV 2:369) ("Emperor or Galilean; *that* is your choice. Be a slave to fear or rule in the land of daylight and joy! You cannot have it both ways; but this is just what you do want. You want to unite what cannot be united." (OI 4:311)

The issue at stake which seems to be concerning Ibsen is "the excess of negativity" that the human being possesses, this "second creative power," as Ibsen calls it at the time, which does not fit within the "overall scheme" of the universe. The question arising then is: what to do with this excess? How to deal with it? The attempt to resolve this issue will eventually bring him to Bataille via Kojève. A crucial similarity with Hegel, which appears here, is that while Ibsen recognizes that the problem with human negativity is present *before* history has ended, he believes that it is actually part of the "world-will" which progresses dialectically while remaining unknown to the individual. At the end of the play, *after* Julian dies, it becomes clear that, while his goal was to fight Christianity, he has only contributed to the strengthening of the Christian faith. Christianity is considered to be a part of the progressive movement of the "World-will" which is slowly advancing toward "The Third Empire" of Spirit. As McFarlane writes, Julian "[...] had been a helper in denial, one who by his career of negation had furthered things, who in attempting to turn back the clock, to revive the past, had nevertheless paradoxically assisted progress and the advancement of Man" (228).

Two points need to be made here. First, that at the time of writing Emperor and Galilean Ibsen believed that history is still progressing, and that a resolution of the contradictions within the human being was possible and approaching. Second, as opposed to Hegel, Ibsen is concerned with the "advancement of *Man*" and *not* of Spirit's becoming conscious of itself. This is a crucial difference between Hegel and Ibsen, which in fact already signals Ibsen's future affinity with Kojève. Ibsen's focus, even in this "most Hegelian play" lies with the human being, for when "Det tredje rike" (340) (The Third Empire) is finally reached, the concern is only with humanity. Ibsen's hope is that the human being will be rid of its excess of negativity, and will have the capacity to achieve absolute knowledge and happiness, something which Julian at that time has not been able to acquire. At this time Ibsen believes that Julian's plight, as exemplary for the plight of all of humanity, is only a part of something larger, though the totality, the meaning, the purpose, or "necessity" of it, as he calls it, is not yet known. As he expresses it through Julian's line: "The unborn cannot be given a name." Still, there is an urgent need in Ibsen's universe for a *telos,* a goal toward which the human being is striving. In a way, the implication is that the Third Empire, in that it will also disclose the meaning of the movement, also signifies the achievement of Absolute Knowledge. As expressed in the text: "The third empire shall come! The spirit of man shall reclaim its heritage and burnt offerings shall be made for you and your

two guests in the symposium." The kernel of the struggle for Absolute Knowledge is presented as "worldly truth" (the given, the animal in man), which has "to wrestle with God's truth" (OI 4:236) ("verdens sannhet, som skulle brytes imot Guds sannhet" (ISV 2:326). Again, it seems that the implication is that the Christians, through their worship of Jesus, have *wrongly* appropriated or interpreted the will of God or Spirit. At the same time, as in Hegel, this is somehow purposefully structured by Spirit, which recognizes that this status is only a *stage* in the development of humanity. The Hegelian *man* at the end of the dialectic is, on the other hand, fundamentally different from Ibsen's man who has achieved the Third Empire. To briefly rehash Hegel's view (in Bataille's discussion):

> [...] the Hegelian man is a spiritual being [and] for the Judeo-Christian world, "spirituality" is fully realized and manifest only in the hereafter, and Spirit properly speaking, truly, 'objectively real' Spirit is God: 'an infinite and eternal human being'. According to Hegel, the 'spiritual' or 'dialectical' being is necessarily *temporal* and finite'. This means that death alone assures the existence of a 'spiritual' or 'dialectical' being, in the Hegelian sense. If the animal which constitutes the man's natural being did not die, and--what is more--if death did not dwell in him as the source of his anguish [...]

there would be no man or liberty, no history or individual." (Hegel, Death 12)

The end of Ibsen's dialectic, in the way it is envisioned not only in Emperor and Galilean but also in the later plays, is quite different from this. Ibsen's "end of history"—the Third Empire—will bring resolution precisely between the given, "animalistic" part of the human being and its spiritual side. This is what is at the core of most of Ibsen's inquiry: how can the corporeal and the spiritual exist in the human being without being in conflict, which causes so much pain and suffering; Why are they for the most part mutually exclusive, and how can this be overcome? Early on in the play there is an exchange between Julian and a pagan philosopher that demonstrates the common perception of these issues, their exclusivity, and the necessity for the human being to make a choice between the two. Ibsen attempts to challenge this position not only in this play, but also in all the plays until Hedda Gabler, which in my opinion is the play that signals his abdication from searching for the key to the unity. The exchange also demonstrates explicitly the above-mentioned major difference with Hegel, namely, that for Ibsen the human being needs to attain its true essence *before* and *without* dying. The resolution between "God" and "the world" has to be resolved during the lifespan of the earthly human being, so that it can experience joy and happiness. Ibsen envisions that it will be *knowledge* and wisdom that will solve the conflict:

PHILOSOPHER. There exists a whole world of splendor which you Galileans are blind to. Life there is an endless festival, among statues and temple songs, with foaming goblets full, and roses in our hair. Bridges span the dizzy void from spirit to spirit, away to the farthest stars in space... I know the man who might rule over this vast and sunny realm.

JULIAN. (frightened) Yes, at the cost of his eternal bliss!

PHILOSOPHER. What is eternal bliss? Reunion with the primal source.

JULIAN. Yes, but conscious of being alive; reunion for me, just as I am!

PHILOSOPHER. Reunion as of the raindrop with the ocean, as of the rotting leaf with the earth that nourished it.

JULIAN. Oh, if only I were learned! If I had weapons to fight you with!

PHILOSOPHER. Acquire your weapons, young man! The swords of thought and talent are in the classroom... (OI 4:219)

The same idea is explicitly expressed further in the play in the words of Julian: "Hva I trelldomsfullt håper på bak døden, det er det just den store hemmelighets mål å forverve alle medvitende her i vårt jordiske liv. Det er

gjenoppreisning som Maximos og hans lærlinger søker, ...det er den forspilte likhet med guddommen" (ISV 2:337) ("What you, like any slave, hope for after death is precisely what the great mystery aims at providing for all initiates here, in this earthly life of ours. What Maximus and his disciples seek is our *restoration*, ... our likeness to the deity" (OI 4:253). In Ibsen's view there have been two such god-like figures—Adam and Apollo: "[Jeg] sier eder, denne fulle kjødfulle slekt skal forgå. Det vurdende skal mer omfanges av ånden enn av legemet. I den første Adam var det likevekt, som i hine bilder av guden Apollon. Siden har der ikke vært likevekt" (ISV 2:337) ("I tell you this coarse gross race shall perish. The future shall be conceived in the spirit rather than in the flesh. In the first Adam the two were balanced, as in the images of the god Apollo. There has been no balance since." (OI 4:254).

In play after play Ibsen seeks ways to reconcile these two parts of the riddle of Man. This is why the action in the play is situated in the time of transition between Christianity and paganism, so the human being could be conscious of both, and either make a choice, or try to adhere to both at the same time. In Emperor and Galilean the second option proves to be impossible. Yet, the premises on which the play is built is that the condition of the human being is intolerable and something needs to be done, since "[den] gamle skjønnhet er ikke lenger skjønn, og den nye sannhet ikke lenger sann" (ISV 2:331) ("the old beauty is no longer

beautiful, and the new truth is no longer true" (OI 4:245), the "kernel of life" needs to be discovered: "I know everything that is written," says Julian, and explains further:

> Dette med det skrevne, det er ikke sannhet i kjødet. Føler du ikke ekkelhet og kvalme, liksom på et skib i vindstille, omtumlet mellem liv, skrift, hedensk visdom og skjønnhet? Der må komme en ny åpenbaring av noe nytt. Det *må* sier jegø ...tiden er inne. (ISV 2:331)

> What is written is not truth made flesh. Don't you have that horrible feeling of nausea you get on a ship becalmed, tossing backwards and forwards between life, scripture, pagan wisdom and beauty? There must be a new revelation. Or a revelation of something new. There *must*, I say; ...the time has come. (OI 4:244)

To illuminate the above point, I would also like to mention Bataille's nostalgic view of the man of pagan beliefs (or "naïve behaviors") in comparison to the Hegelian man, as far as their human sovereignty is concerned. In "Hegel, Death and Sacrifice" Bataille speculates that sacrifice, or the spectacle of it, can be a potential way for the Hegelian man to gain autonomy at the end of the dialectical process—without having to physically die. He concludes that this would essentially be impossible for him, while it is possible for the pre-Hegelian man. His argument

is that once sacrifice has consciously been given "useful ends," it can no longer be "a s*overeign, autonomous* manner of being". It can be so "only to the extent that it is uninformed by *meaningful* discourse. To the extent that discourse informs it, what is *sovereign* is given in terms of *servitude.* The Sage (who for Bataille is Hegel) is impotent to attain sovereignty "on the basis of discourse" (27). "Myth associated with ritual," summarizes Bataille, "had at first the impotent beauty of poetry, but discourse concerning sacrifice slipped into vulgar self-serving interpretation" (26).

It will also be beneficial for the present study to examine one of the major sources from which Ibsen's engagement with the above-mentioned issues originates, namely—the particularity of his personal life. It is important to mention, that, like his hero Julian, Ibsen's childhood and youth are strongly affected by circumstances outside of his power. When Ibsen was only seven, his father went bankrupt and the family suddenly fell to the bottom of the social ladder. Only fifteen years old, Ibsen had to move away from home and start working as an apothecary apprentice, hoping that this will lead him to medical studies. Robert Ferguson describes in his biography of Ibsen some of the facts surrounding Ibsen's employment in Grimstad: "The pay was poor, the food merely sufficient and the living accommodation cramped. [...] For the next six years [Ibsen] had to live 'in the open', [...] never alone, always observed, powerless to control any aspect of his

immediate environment" (13). At only eighteen years old, Ibsen fathered an illegitimate child with one of the maids in the household who was ten years older than him. Neither the child, nor the mother were later a part of his life. Ibsen was a self-learned man and studied diligently to be able to pass the university entrance examination, yet failed at some of the tests. He was establishing a reputation as a writer gradually, with successes and failures, taking advantage of every opportunity which presented itself to him. He built his career slowly and meticulously, and most of his earlier works were written out of necessity, while Ibsen was in utter poverty. At thirty-five he left Norway and spent the next twenty-seven years in self-imposed exile.

As far as Ibsen's attitude to Christianity is concerned, in Rosmersholm he discusses in a masterful way the crippling effect that religion may exert on human sovereignty. In his dramatic world, Christianity always seems to bear a critical thread. In many plays he painstakingly deliberates Man's relation to the Christian God, insofar as the Christian doctrine played a major role in the life of his contemporaries. Ibsen was far from believing in an overarching, caring God. One of the conclusions that his biographer Ferguson draws based on his childhood experiences and first poems is that "[...] for the twenty-year-old Ibsen the Christian faith, with all its moral certainties, was already a vanished world, gone like his childhood and his innocence lost at eighteen in the arms of Else Sofie" (21). Many

of Ibsen's protagonists resort to, or experiment with, believing in an outwardly power, but Christianity in particular always ends up being exposed as an empty doctrine: harming rather than providing meaning, relief and consolation. As mentioned above, the feeling of guilt, especially for those who stray away from the Christian ethics, is blamed for having an incapacitating effect on man and causing him deep sorrow. Those ethics for Ibsen are arbitrary: "Sin is only sin in the eyes of the beholder," comments the mystic Maximus in regard to Julian's concern that he is seeking the truth in "the tumult of the senses" (OI 4:256).

In his later plays Ibsen completely stops being concerned with any external reason, with any power beyond the human being which would help her in her plight through life. The world of these plays is devoid of any religious connotations, there are no indications that spirituality lies beyond Man alone. It is solely the human being—self-sufficient and independent—that is at the focus of his attention, even when he examines her in her relationship to God or Spirit. His characters' attempts to incorporate religious belief in their lives is permeated with irony. In their strife to achieve God they only confirm that it is absent, mute or irrelevant. In the words of Gemerchak, Ibsen wrote "from the modern position of atheism and believed in the technical capabilities of rational humanity," and he naturally assumed "the characteristic philosophical paradigms of modern man in its search for self-consciousness": the affirmation of an anthropological humanism and its

corresponding positivist scientism—both of which effectively reduce the world and the heavens to humankind itself. I will return to this in detail in my discussion of The Master Builder.

Ibsen was indeed a child of his time. As late as 1887, fifteen years after he, in Emperor and Galilean expressed his hope for "a new *revelation*," and three years before writing Hedda Gabler, when he was fifty-five, he declared in a speech his belief that "some new set of concepts—political, social, literary, philosophical and religious—would emerge out of the old; concepts which would give mankind a completely new potential for happiness. More particularly and more precisely," he said, "I believe that the ideas of our age, by suffering eclipse, show a trend towards what I have intimated in my drama *Emperor and Galilean* by the term *the third empire"* (qtd. in McFarlane 231).

Hedda Gabler is the first play which signals the major shift in Ibsen's works: his moving away from a positive view for the development of humankind, and into the sphere of George Bataille's frustrated and hopeless "unemployed negativity."

Before continuing further, I would like to engage with another work of previous Ibsen criticism, which is focused on the Hegelian notions in Ibsen's scholarship, namely Brian Johnston's comprehensive study The Ibsen Cycle. In it he examines the "cycle," as he calls it, of the last twelve contemporary plays, and

posits them against the principles of the encompassing Hegelian doctrine, arguing that they can be viewed as representing "a single, Hegelian, cyclical and evolutionary dramatic structure that might well come to be seen as the greatest single artwork of the nineteenth century" (xv).

Since my reading of Ibsen's series of those same plays deems his view of the world to be, first, Kojèvian (i.e. partially Hegelian), and then gradually becoming Bataillian (again, partially Hegelian but in a radically different way,) I was curious to compare Johnston's analysis with mine and find out where the difference originated. One would think that the difference in opinions about the extent to which Ibsen's thought bore affinity with Hegel's would be embedded in the different interpretation of the dramatic texts. Yet I found out that the reason for our different opinions stood outside of the texts themselves: Johnston's argument relies namely on accepting that there is a whole outside *mechanism* at work, both in the conception of the plays, and in their supposed interpretation by readers, viewers, etc., namely that of Freudian Psychoanalysis. This creates a number of problems for this critical text and invalidates its claims. Since it has been considered a major work within Ibsen criticism and one that directly relates to my topic, I would briefly account for it.

Brian Johnston and I agree that both Hegel- and Ibsen's thoughts unfold in an evolutionary manner and deal with "the advance of human consciousness."

There is a clear notion of progress with both of them. Johnston and I disagree about *where* and *how* this progress ends. Johnston's major claim is that "the realistic plays are structured directly upon Hegel's major philosophical work The Phenomenology of Mind and that the sequence of dialectical dramas in Hegel's account of the evolution of human consciousness is exactly paralleled in the sequence of dialectical dramas in Ibsen's Cycle" (1). Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind and Ibsen's last twelve plays are for Johnston *the* human works, *the* edifices of human thought which are "sufficient to [...] recover the foundations on which to build the "third empire" of the future" (20). He claims that there are twelve parallel matching actions in both Hegel and Ibsen, also called in the book dramas and realities.

Johnston views the function of Ibsen's and Hegel's work as peeling at the flawed layers of the given reality until "the naked spirit" is revealed. The given reality in Ibsen, as in Hegel is "the Objective world of evolved institutions, customs and laws, and the Subjective world of psychological repression and conflict which also had evolved through centuries of dialectical development." This given reality, continues Johnston, is "a structure of error, falsehood, injustice, and spiritual loss so massive that only the huge demolition effected by the entire Cycle of twelve plays was sufficient to clear it away and recover the foundations on which to build the "third empire" of the future" (10). Johnston does not expand though on what the

nature of this "naked spirit" is, or what the characteristics of this Third Empire are; Once Spirit is revealed—what consequences does this have for humanity? It is solely maintained that Ibsen's work is one of dissolution of the "illusory fabric" of the given reality, and the study focuses further on the details of *the mechanism* at work. A question that one may raise is whether Johnston views the results of this "spiritual strip-tease" (G. Wilson Knight qtd. in Johnston 11) (as Ibsen's method has been called,) as something close to Georges Bataille's notion of "intimacy"? Or, does he believe in a different utopian potential for the human being, as Hegel does? What happens once the given is dissolved and Spirit has regained its true essence and become conscious of itself? How is this possible through written artifacts?

Both works, claims Johnston, constitute *reenacting* and *reliving* "past sorrow and loss". In other words, Ibsen is only seemingly engaged with the present, but in essence his subject matter is different. An example of what Johnston means by this can be his discussion of A Doll's House:

> With A Doll's House, a profound transformation of the human spirit depicted in the Cycle begins. The resurrection of the animal community into the emerging human spirit, in the form of the awakening young Nora, is remarkably close to Rubek's description of his masterpiece, "Resurrection Day," [...] The point in A Doll's

> House where the human identity emerges from the animal is signaled when Nora, after dancing the tarantella, retires to take off her masquerade Neapolitan dress. The tarantella is traditionally the dance which the victim of the bite of the tarantula spider dances until he dies, or the dance by which he expels the poison of the bite from his system. Both situations fit Nora, for at this time of the death of the old year (Christmas) and the birth of the new and of the Christmas rebirth of the human spirit, Nora will die and be reborn, will die from her old identity and will desperately attempt to expel the poison of the terrible new knowledge Krogstad has injected into her. (95)

This analysis is far fetched and exaggerated since Nora's profound transformation hardly needs to be explained by resorting to "the dance of the tarantula spider" One may wonder about the idea behind this elaborate structure. An explanation is soon found in the text:

> In Hegel, that which was essential for the human spirit in each phase, or gestalt, through which it passed, is that which has survived within the structure of Consciousness in the Objective and the Subjective worlds. That which is accidental, unessential has dropped away, as if the human spirit continually is being refined in fire as it

> grows. *To attain to authenticity and freedom in our consciousness, therefore we must learn to come to terms with this essential content and to discard the unessential; we must in fact retrace the history of the origins and growth of human consciousness"* (11, my italics).

This is a key statement in Johnston, for what becomes revealed a little later is that, for Johnston, Hegel's and Ibsen's published work has the potential of exercising a profound effect on the human being through a mechanism identical to Freudian psychoanalysis. Situated at "the end of history" each individual has the capacity in their own way, just like Hegel, Ibsen and probably Johnston himself, to "attain to authenticity and freedom" simply by "retracing [...] the history of the origins and growth of human consciousness". Engaging with the works in an "informed way", being aware of what they present to us, is for Johnston the miracle process that will liberate us from the "unemployed negativity" which presents itself at the end of history. In other words, one of Freud's theories, namely becoming conscious of repressed childhood trauma, becomes the suggested model for how Ibsen's art "works." Reliving humanity's past traumas, becoming aware of them can heal the mental illness—"unemployed negativity"—which, unknowingly to us, has been inflicted by the trauma.

For an adherent to Freudian psychoanalysis this could indeed be an original idea whose validity does not need to be questioned. In the 1970s (when The Ibsen

Cycle was written) Freudian psychoanalysis still had the respectable reputation of *the* scientifically proven "science of the mind," and Johnston seems rightfully excited about it and inspired by it. In the subsequent decades though, psychoanalysis, in the way it was suggested and developed by Freud, was debunked as only a speculative theory whose scientific claims are based on fake scientific data and its biased interpretation (Crews et al.).

Furthermore, Johnston claims that Ibsen's project in fact constitutes the careful conception and meticulous execution of this *mechanism*. The last twelve plays, suggests Johnston, correspond precisely to twelve stages and realities discussed in Hegel, such as "Greek action", "Christian consciousness", "dialectical collision between enlightenment and repression," (14) etc. The study argues that, just as Hegel "painfully resurrects" "ghosts from the past" in the second part of the Phenomenology, so does Ibsen: his Cycle "is itself just such a succession of dialectical dramas in which, under the nineteenth-century surface, the ghosts of the Past, and the actions in which they lived and suffered, are reenacted" (11).

Even if one does not immediately discard Johnston's reading on the premises that it is based on a fake pseudo-scientific argument, it is still highly debatable whether Ibsen consciously and purposefully conceived his "last cycle," with the goal of executing the effect that Johnston ascribes to it. It is more likely that Ibsen's thought developed gradually and was spurred by the impact it made on

society and the effect it produced on him personally. Although the themes he explored remained largely similar throughout his works, there is a clear change and progressive development in his thinking and his dramatic art. The impact he had on his environment was so palpable and immediate, the reactions he provoked— so strong, the battles he fought—so severe, and the consequent change (or *evolution*)—so visible and rapid, that he truly experienced a "march of mind" (11). He gained a perception and maturity which he expressed in an unsurpassed way. Thus, one might say that the cycle, or the *interrupted progression* as I see it, developed unintentionally, while Ibsen moved ahead, observed and created.

The "ghosts of the past" that Johnston talks about are rather the ghosts of Ibsen's own time and the ghosts of today, the ghosts in general: "trollet i oss" (the troll in us,) or the paradoxal nature of the human being. This is why one does not need to prove that A Doll's House represents "the resurrection of the animal community into the emerging human spirit" in order to explain its current popularity all over the world. Ibsen certainly did not write the play in order to rehash past ghosts and "the actions in which they lived and suffered."

Johnston's method also leads to the unrealistic demand to directors and actors *not* to change anything in Ibsen's text because it is a part of a bigger structure and functions on a *subconscious* level. It is the complete trauma that has to be relived, argues Johnston, and every element there matters. He extends his

claim further to mean that whether Ibsen was conscious about his accomplishment or not is actually irrelevant: now that the critic has *discovered* it, directors and actors should keep it in mind when working with the texts. In Johnston's view, the artists become psychoanalysts who provoke healing of primordial trauma, while the audience is an unconscious patient.

It is interesting to mention that this interpretation of Ibsen's thought, and the proposed model for working with the texts are based on Shakespearean criticism: Johnston makes this parallel in order to support his own view. It may, in fact, be argued that it rather undermines the study further:

> The older, character interest school of Shakespearean criticism belonged to an age when only a handful of mutilated Shakespearean texts were considered suitable for production by actor-managers seeking prestige; with the more "intellectual" interpretation of Shakespeare which took into account the universal concepts of the Elizabethan world view, plays that once had been considered impossible on the stage (*Toilus and Cressida*, for example) are now considered full of dramatic interest. [...] The reason is that Shakespeare's plays simply *did not work* according to the old character-interest view of them, so that their dramatic structures seemed inexplicably clumsy and incompetent. The new interpolation

> of Shakespeare showed that the plays *worked admirably* according to the new idea of their intentions, so that their conventions and details made great dramatic sense and could be successfully embodied in a production by actors who were very far from sharing the Elizabethan idea of the cosmos and the human psyche. Once the director is aware of the underlying idea of the play, *even if that idea is alien to him, or not of his own culture*, he can work with it, get his audience to see it, or adapt it. (my italics, Johnston 17)

This model is stale and inefficient since knowing "a new idea of the intentions" of a work of art can hardly make it seem more exciting and relevant. If an artist at all decides to look for "the complete Idea" in Ibsen's oeuvre, it is because she has first become engaged on a personal level with the literary work and it refers directly to her. To presume that an artist would not personally relate to a text but would be impressed by and care about some *higher Idea* which does not belong to her spiritual world, but which criticism has "discovered", is, in my opinion, deeply flawed.

A quote by Mathew Arnold summarizes well Brian Johnston's attitude towards Ibsen's work:

> The grand work of literary genius is a work of synthesis and exposition, not of analysis and discovery; its gift lies in the faculty

> of being happily inspired by a certain intellectual and spiritual atmosphere, by a certain order of ideas, when it finds itself in them; of dealing divinely with these ideas, presenting them in the most effective and attractive combinations, - making beautiful works with them, in short" (qtd. in Johnston 6).

Contrary to this view, I envision Ibsen as a philosopher of his own stature. His thought may have intersected with Hegel's and he may have been influenced by him, but he is clearly and without a doubt an independent mind that, furthermore, surpasses Hegel. In Emperor and Galilean Ibsen comes closest to Hegel's view, but his focus is on the individual human being and his concern with Spirit is only as far as it has any relevance for humanity. In the first seven of the last group of twelve plays, which will be at the focus of the next chapter, Ibsen demonstrates a view which is in line with Alexandre Kojève's thought. In Kojève's radical reading of Hegel, Man is time and discourse and nothing exists beyond him. I do agree with Johnston that these are works about "a world subject to pressure and change, to the process of time, and to the "awakening" and evolving human consciousness within an historically created world" (7). These plays build upon one another: each one taking off from the issues discussed in the previous and taking it further. Each constitutes a step ahead in the works in that it engages with a higher level of the development of human consciousness within a historical world. The

"failed" ending of the last play The Lady from the Sea (frequently revised by directors nowadays,) and, moreover, the subsequent Hedda Gabler manifest Ibsen's realization that the process of "evolving" does not have a happy end and that Man at the end of history is not a satisfied "Being-in-Totality", but pure unemployed negativity.

CHAPTER III

Ibsen and Kojève

This chapter will focus on the first six plays in the series and will offer an analysis of each one of them aiming at demonstrating the Hegelian/Kojèvian thread that goes throughout. It will examine their construction and the way they relate to each other: one play picks up from unresolved issues of the previous and offers a resolution to them. It takes them to a higher level where yet another crucial knot of conflicts presents itself—only to be dealt with in the following play. In support of my argument that the plays are Kojèvian in spirit, it is important to point out that, while these dramas are mainly considered to be Ibsen's "social" plays, it can easily be detected that "society," just as God in Emperor and Galilean, is only of interest to Ibsen as far as it is a parameter of the quality of life of the individual human being. Society is of importance only as far as it relates to the happiness and self-fulfillment of the single characters in the plays. Since this society is based on the Christian ethics, most often in them Ibsen attacks the Christian belief and religious practice, as well as its servants who are exposed as guardians of stifling dogmas. Under attack in these plays is in fact anything *external* that obstacles the human being in its drive towards happiness, anything *outside* of itself that prevents its free development, such as old prejudices, imperfect laws, political intrigue, etc. In the

Kojèvian world, dealing with these "external" issues is a way for the human being to meaningfully engage its negativity and thus get rid of it. In the later plays, from The Lady from the Sea on, all external issues seem to be resolved and the problem with the remaining negativity, which now remains unemployed, urgently presents itself.

Ibsen seems to believe that if society is infused with the "the spirit of truth and freedom," this has to eventually create the conditions for the happy authentic life of each individual human being, which will essentially take care of its negativity. Human history is thus the Kojèvian human history, in which the human being is transforming itself and the world. The new "Julian" that is identified in the first three plays of the series is woman, youth and "the true artist," as also identified by Ibsen in a speech delivered in 1879:

> Jeg gentager det, jeg frygter ikke for de såkaldte upraktiske kvinder, kvinderne har noget tilfælles med den sande kunstner, ligesom med ungdommen overhovedet, noget, som erstatter det praktiske forretningsgreb. Se til vore studenterforeninger hjemme! Der afgøres sager, tigange så indviklede som vore; og går ikke alt godt, skønt ungdommen, den uøvede og uprøvede og upraktiske ungdom der er i en umådelig majoritet? Og hvorfor? Jo, fordi ungdommen har dette geniale instinkt, som ubevidst træffer det rette. Men netop

> dette instinkt er det, som kvinden har tilfælles både med ungdommen og med den sande kunstner. (Hundreårsutgaven 15:402)
>
> (I repeat, I do not fret the so called unpractical women; women have something in common with the true artist, as well as with youth overall, something which replaces the practical understanding of business matters. Look at our student unions at home! They resolve issues which are ten times more complicated than ours; and doesn't it all go well, given that youth, the inexperienced, untested and impractical youth is in an immeasurable majority? And why? Well, because youth has this instinct of genius which unconsciously get things right. It is precisely this instinct which woman has in common both with youth and with the true artist.)

These for Ibsen were the individuals who had the potential to change what he viewed as being the intolerable existential conditions of his time. They were the ones who could create the "Third Empire" of freedom and joy. He believed that women have retained more of their given instinctual nature and that they have remained less damaged by civilization than men. Women's role in society was restricted mainly to the home at that time, and Ibsen trusted fully that, because of their "unspoiled" nature, they had the potential to change their stifling environment

and create progress in society. In a draft of Pillars of Society and several speeches Ibsen explicitly defines his idea that women should be "servants" to society, but not through being obedient and quiet, and literally "serving" men, but, on the contrary, they must demand an opportunity to express their difference, their "true nature" and through that to create a more authentic environment for themselves and their fellow human beings—men. Women must simply "be themselves" and this is what men need "most deeply" in order to change their existence. Ibsen meant that women had not yet become irreparably damaged by politics and in this respect had "conserved" their true nature and right intuition, their "natural sense": "There are two kinds of laws, two kinds of consciousness, one in man and quite another in woman. They do not understand each other. A woman cannot be herself in today's society, it is an exclusively male society, with laws written by men and with prosecutors and judges which judge the female behavior from a man's perspective" (Efterladte Skrifter 318). It is important to note, though, that while he maintains this essentialist view of gender, it is for him only a part of his overall program to make the human being aware of the necessity to liberate herself from any restrictions and limitations which obstacle her in her struggle for happiness. Women were simply, like Julian and Ibsen himself, not fitting within their particular social context and needed to *change* it so they could unfold their full potential. They were the suppressed Hegelian/Kojèvian slave who had the driving force to liberate herself

through negation and appropriation. The evolvement of her consciousness through the work she had to do would make her free and would also cause evolution in society as well.

It is fascinating to follow Ibsen's development of this view throughout the first three of the plays, and to observe how his attitude towards women and his demands from them change, as he realizes the scope of the task that he situates before them. While in the first two there is utmost clarity of the ideas and message, the last one, Ghosts, finishes quite ambiguously, and the main female character gets help for her transformation from a "true artist"—her son. With the fourth play, An Enemy of the People, Ibsen shifts the focus back on men and their potential and responsibility for the progress of their fellow human beings.

The fifth play, The Wild Duck, presents Ibsen's examination of the rigorous demands for truth and authenticity which he posits in front of his heroes. He is questioning, in a very dialectical way, the effect that these demands may have in some circumstances. Having gradually realized that truth is contingent, he starts doubting whether truth is what humanity always needs, and proposes a new idea: a human being living a "life lie" might be happier than the one who is fully conscious of the reality of her existential conditions.

Rosmersholm, Ibsen's sixth play in the series, and the last one that will be discussed in this chapter, brings together most of the issues raised in the previous

plays and signals, for the first time in his oeuvre, the gradual loss of faith in the potential of the human being to create conditions for free, happy and joyful existence. Yet, once again, in this play the reason for this is situated *outside* of the individual; the blame is again placed on "ghosts from the past," which this time cannot be disposed of. In the next play, The Lady from the Sea, these "ghosts" become internalized, and there does not seem to be an *external* reality that can or needs to be changed in order to take care of them. Rosmersholm is the play which is at the end of the progressive movement in Ibsen. While The Lady from the Sea explores the possibilities of psychoanalysis (in the sense of "tricking" the psyche,) and attempts to have a happy triumphant end, its end is a failure, as I will attempt to demonstrate in the next chapter.

It is important to mention that Ibsen gradually became aware of the tremendous effect that his plays exerted on the development of the individual, mainly through actually causing progress in society. Not surprisingly A Doll's House is still considered to be a manifest work by the feminist movement. Ibsen viewed his mission in life as "å flytte milepæler" ("to move boundary posts") in the consciousness of his fellow contemporaries, and often said that his works should be read and considered as a totality. This study presents an attempt at such a reading. It recognizes in each play the one-sentence truth that Ibsen had reached, which could be read as the new, higher level of consciousness that Ibsen's human being

had evolved to. Again, the focus of attention in the brief analyses of the plays is not as much on what precisely *happens* in them, but rather, and more importantly, on how they relate to each other, how they build upon one another, thus outlining a progression. This progression can be viewed as representing the progression in the development of human consciousness. It is not to say that the external issues have completely been eliminated and that society has reached "the end of history." Rather, it is Ibsen who, in moving through the problems presented in the plays, through his own dealing with them, eliminates them for himself and gradually reaches the point where he feels that he has reached his own "end of history" and needs to deal with his own "unemployed negativity." This could, to an extent be compared to the popular social term "the mid-life crisis," and also, to the newly coined "the quarter-life crisis."

As mentioned above, the first three plays have female main protagonists and the focus of Ibsen's attention is on how, if at all, they execute a cleansing effect on their environment: the larger community and their family. In all three the woman is the subjugated, unfairly treated human being which has the capacity and will to change her life toward one with self-worth, dignity and happiness. Several critical moments in their development throughout the plays can be identified, though the degree and the nuances change. First of all, women have to realize the reality of their existential situation, which is one of limitation and subordination:

the reality of the Hegelian slave. Gaining consciousness of it, they inevitably change internally, but also need to revolt and start working towards changing their environment, the world around them, which is what will bring their liberation. With each one of the plays Ibsen gains a new consciousness of the scope of his program and what it entails.

Pillars of Society is the first play of the last series and it constitutes a powerful attack on the hypocrisy and false morals characteristic of a small town community, as well as those in a marriage. The main character, Karsten Bernick is a rich owner of a shipyard who has married a woman he does not love. Besides, most of his business dealings are based on fraud. While he was still engaged he was found in the room of an actress but let his childhood friend Johan take the blame. Johan escaped to America but returns at the outset of the play and threatens to reveal the truth. Bernick lets him sail on a ship which is not seaworthy and which he thinks will sink in the open sea. Soon he discovers that his son is also on board the ship. At the end that it becomes clear the ship has not sailed and Bernick admits all his sins.

There are four main female characters in the play which combined express Ibsen's message: Lona Hessel—Bernick's former love interest, Dina Dorf—the daughter of Bernick's lover, Marta Bernick—his sister, and Betty Bernick—his wife. Lona is the female character which has the capacity to transform her

environment. She herself does not need to change since she has never lost the vitality and freedom characteristic of a child: Lona has been lucky to have developed in another place, America, a space which Ibsen views at the time to be "the land of the free," a kind of a Third Empire where the human being can unfold in freedom and in correspondence with her "true" nature.

Lona has always somehow been aware of the hypocrisy in society and has never really respected empty conventions and old morals. In this respect she is already "outside" of the small town community whose pettiness she despises. Her speech, appearance and behavior stand out in sharp contrast to what is customary in the small town. Numerous examples from the text can be brought forward but it might be interesting to mention the stigma that Lona and her male companion experience when coming to the small town:

> [De] to amerikanske går omkring i gatene og viser seg i slektskap med Dina Dorf. [...] Lona var endog så taktløs å rope efter meg; men jeg lot naturligvis som jeg ikke hørte det. [...] Folk sto stille og så efter dem. De lot til å være gått som en løpeild over byen, ...omtrent som en brann på de vestlige prærier. I alle huse sto der mennesker ved vinduene og ventet på at toget skulle komme forbi; hode ved hode bak gardinene. (ISV 3:27)

> (Those two Americans are walking around town quite openly in the company of Dina Dorf. [...] Lona was even so tactless as to shout across to me, but naturally I pretended not to hear. [...] People stopped and stared at them. It seemed to run through the town like wild-fire... rather like a prairie fire out West. In every house there were people at the windows waiting for the procession to pass by, all with their heads together behind curtains. (OI 5:56)

Lona has paid dearly for her freedom and natural behavior: her beloved becomes frightened of her bad reputation and deems her unsuitable to get married to. Abandoned, she moves to America where she does not have to bend and adjust her personality, where she can be "herself". In this way she does not have to go through a personal transformation in order to transform her environment. Lona actually comes to the small town with a mission: "to air out" the stifling environment and liberate her former beloved from the lie he lives, and to cause him to lead a more authentic existence. She has already created change by bringing up her half-brother Johan in the spirit of freedom and truth. He is an accomplished personality and lives in harmony with his environment, and can be considered to be the future citizen as envisioned by Ibsen.

It is important for the argument of this study to briefly mention the other three women in the play and follow how they play out in Ibsen's overall scheme.

Marta Bernick, the sister of the male protagonist, is completely submitted to convention, but she is all along fully aware of it and deeply unhappy. This is unequivocally revealed in her conversation with one of the members of the small town community – the teacher Rørlund:

> RØRLUND: What do you say to that, Miss Bernick. Don't you find that devoting yourself to schoolwork has given you, as it were, a firmer foundation to stand on?
>
> MARTHA BERNICK: Oh, I don't know what to say. Often when I am down there in the schoolroom, I wish I were far out in the stormy sea. (OI 5:26)

Marta has nonetheless created change in her environment through raising her foster child in the spirit of freedom and authenticity. Dina Dorf, just like Johan Tønnesen, who is raised by Lona, is a young person with a mind of her own and determination to live life by her own standards. Furthermore, Marta's life is also transformed by the arrival of the guests from abroad: she surprises everyone when she encourages her foster child to marry following her heart. She explains eloquently: "Men engang måtte det komme til utbrudd i meg. Å, hvor vi lider under mishandling av vaner og vedtekter! Gjør opprør imot dette, Dina! Bli hans hustru. La der skje noe som trosser all denne skikk og bruk." (ISV 3:55) ("[...] I was bound to break out sometime. Oh, the tyranny of all this convention, doing the right

thing, how we are made to suffer under it here! Resist it, Dina! Be his wife. Let's see somebody kick over the traces for once. (OI 5:106).

Dina Dorf is the "unspoiled child" in the play who will never know restriction and convention. She is the daughter of artists and early on has been marked with the stigma of "daughter of morally corrupt people". Yet, she has been raised by a woman who has preserved her sense for right and wrong, and has let her live a free joyful life. Dina is thus lucky to be able to say that "duty" is something she "will never understand." Later she is able to sail to America with her beloved who is equally free of prejudice. An excerpt from a conversation between her and her future husband about America, the future space which they will inhabit, demonstrates Ibsen's perception of the small town "morality" as a threat to the free human spirit, in the sense that it is in opposition to what is "natural" to man:

> DINA: What I wanted to know was: are the people terribly...
>
> terribly sort of *moral* over there?
>
> JOHAN: At all events they are not as bad as the people here think they are. You needn't worry about that.
>
> DINA: You don't understand. I was hoping they wouldn't be so terribly respectable and moral.
>
> JOHAN: You were? And how would you like them to be then?
>
> DINA: I should like them to be natural. (61)

Betty Bernick, the wife of the main protagonist, is the female character that can be considered the most "realistic," in that she is closest to the way most of Ibsen's female contemporaries lived. She also bears the kernel of what will later be developed as the major problematic in A Doll's House and Ghosts.

In her youth Betty has been a pretty girl, adored by everyone. She had, as most of her peers, high expectations about love and marriage. One day a young man appears in town, having just arrived from Paris, and sweeps her off her feet. Soon Betty finds out that her ideas about marriage are far from reality: she is looked down by her husband and treated like a inferior and incomplete creature which has to be trained to fit society better. She learns that her "duty" is to serve her husband in the best way possible. Luckily she has been "good and compliant," and her husband is pleased with "his" creation. Betty is, in other words, the human being who is unfree and needs to liberate herself. Yet Ibsen also elaborates that men are in as much need as women of such liberation, but they are too comfortable with their position and are unable to recognize its harmful effects. In fact, Ibsen's goal is to demonstrate that men are also slaves to society with its organized structure, demands and necessity. Bernick talks openly about the way he has broken Betty's will and made her "fit" him and "his" society:

> BERNICK: To begin with, of course, she had a lot of rather hysterical ideas about love. She couldn't reconcile herself to the

thought that it must gradually give way to a kind of gentle affection.

LONA: But *now* she accepts that?

BERNICK: Completely. Daily contact with *me* has not been without some mellowing influence on her, you know. People have to learn to modify the demands they make on each other, if they are to do best for the community they belong to. Betty also came to see that eventually, and that is why our house now stands as an example to our fellow citizens.

LONA: But these fellow citizens know nothing about the lie?

BERNICK: The lie?

LONA: Yes, the lie you've been living on now for fifteen years. (74)

One of the main ideas that Ibsen explores in play after play is that the fake morals in society have a debilitating effect on *both* partners: Betty is deeply unhappy because of Bernick's degrading attitude, and he, for his part, is very lonely. He complains that there is not a single human being which can understand and support him. The problem with Betty is that she trusts her husband fully, and is completely incapable of realizing the emptiness of the social demand that is the duty of a woman to serve her husband. She is fully complacent and cannot

comprehend why she is unhappy and why her marriage is not as expected. The same is valid for Bernick: he is equally lost when it comes to the reasons for his loneliness. Lona Hessel comes to their rescue. The exchange between her and Bernick towards the end of the play discloses Ibsen's intention to link the unequal and unjust relationship between husband and wife with the overall falseness in society:

> BERNICK: All I know is she's never been any of the things I needed.
>
> LONA: Because you never shared your interests with her. Because you've never been open or frank with her in any of your dealings. Because you let her go on suffering under the shame you unburdened on her family.
>
> BERNICK: Yes, yes, yes. It all comes from this lying and pretence. (111)

The moment Betty finds out about the lie that her husband had lived all along, she gains insight about the reality of her marriage and simultaneously transforms herself. Yet this happens much too quickly and is rather painless considering how deep and all-encompassing Bernick's hypocrisy had been. In addition he had been considered by everyone to be the strongest "pillar" of their society. One would anticipate that learning the truth about her husband will cause a

deep spiritual crisis in Betty, that it will make her lose trust in him and, subsequently, will make her question the whole of society and its structure. Yet, that does not happen. Not yet. It becomes the topic of Ibsen's next play.

Despite this gallery of diverse female characters, most of the attention in the this first drama of contemporary material is devoted to the male protagonist Bernick. The play had huge success and was perceived by the contemporary critics as being about man within his social context (Jæger). Even in 1984 George B. Bryan interprets it as being about "condemnation of unscrupulous capitalists" (xvi). These are certainly valid ways of reading the play, but for me Ibsen's intent, as explicitly stated in the final lines of the play, and as the next play would show, is different. Karsten Bernick, after having publicly admitted all his sins declares his realization that it is "women who are the pillars of society", to which Lona responds: "Nei du; sannhetens og frihetens ånd, ...*det* er samfunnets støtter. (ISV 3:65). ("The spirit of truth and the spirit of freedom – *these* are the pillars of society" (OI 5:126). This is the kernel that remains at Ibsen's attention in the next two dramas as well.

Ibsen's next play, A Doll's House, takes these issues to a higher level. Several major points from Pillars of Society are revised, testifying to Ibsen's evolving grasp of the human being. Nora Helmer has features of all the female characters in Pillars of Society, but in her there is a critical difference in that there

is a clear connection between her realization about her situation, her personal transformation, and the transformation of her marriage (and society at large which happens on a meta-theatrical level with the debate that the play created.) These moments, perceived now by Ibsen as essential, are not represented in this succession in either of the four heroines in the previous play. The entity that they constitute is in fact taken even further in the next play, Ghosts, in the character of Helene Alving. The focus of attention will now be on Nora Helmer, the main protagonist in A Doll's House. She represents Ibsen's realization that the human being has to be able to *see through* the slew of deception that surrounds it, to realize that it is a slave, and then to make an active gesture towards personal liberation. The key to changing the *environment* of the human being towards one that is more receptive to its "true" nature, starts with the transformation of one single individual. Ibsen's quest to uncover the reasons for his dissatisfaction with life and by that to also change his existential conditions, amounts to the Slave's movement through "the course of history," and his active working towards his liberation. This takes care of his negativity and gives him a feeling a happiness and satisfaction. The stage in consciousness that is reached in A Doll's House might be called "questioning." As expressed through the words of Nora: "Jeg må se å komme efter hvem der har rett, samfunnet eller jeg." (ISV 3:112) ("I must try to discover who is right, society or me" (OI 5:286). One needs, in other words, to

question the visible, the form, and look beyond it in the attempt to reach the authenticity that is intuitively felt to be lying beyond. It is again woman and her place in marriage that in A Doll's House come to express Ibsen's message, which can be summarized in several ways: cohabitation does not equal marriage, a fake signature cannot mean more than saving someone's life, etc.

The play is about a housewife, Nora Helmer, who, to save her husband's life, has been forced to forge a signature. When her husband finds out about it, he gets enraged and attacks her for being morally corrupt, which causes a crisis in their marriage. Later Helmer, Nora's husband, receives the acknowledgement of the debt, including Nora's fake signature, and wants to return to the previous relations in the marriage. Nora cannot accept that and decides to leave her husband and three children.

Just as all of the women in Pillars of Society, Nora has been a happy child, unspoiled by societal convention. She does not have a mother and, under the influence of her father and of the literature she reads, she is quickly transformed into a "social animal". She has learned that she has duties and responsibilities in regard to her parents, husband and children, and she trusts the male figures in her life—her father and husband—fully. Her task at the outset of the marriage is only to be a homemaker, to follow the desires, demands and whims of her husband. Her only social role is within that marriage. Her husband Helmer, for his part, regards

as his duty to continue her education, especially focusing on those sides of her character that have been neglected by the father, as for example, her attitude towards money. Nora is continuously referred to by her husband with names which emphasize her affinity with nature and *not* culture and civilization. She is his "little [chirruping] sky-lark," his "[frisking] squirrel, his "singing bird," etc. Helmer wants to educate her, but at the same time is careful to preserve her wild, untamed nature since this makes her more exciting to him. Abundant are the references that bear the characteristic of interacting with a child. These early features of the communication within the marriage contrast heavily with the final scenes.

As mentioned above, Nora can be read as a continuation of the character of Betty Bernick. The difference between Betty and Nora is that Nora *knows* that she is not less worthy than Helmer, but *plays* along because the social conventions are such. While she is maintaining in him the illusion that she is irresponsible and carefree, she is hectically working and making payments on her loan. Though her relationship is based on a lie (or at least on withholding the truth,) Nora seems to be content with it. She does not care about society but knows that as long as she is playing her role, there will be "love" and "happiness" in the marriage. Nora cannot tell Helmer of her secret because "he is so strict about such matters" and "is a man with a good deal of pride," so it will be "terribly embarrassing and humiliating" for him to think that he owed her anything. Nora knows the truth "will spoil

everything" between them. Other than that she is impulsive, follows her intuition and acts as she pleases. She does not think twice when she forges her father's signature and is proud with her own decisiveness and acting power.

When discussing a similar illegal deed done by another man, she learns about Helmer's uncompromising view that such an act is a crime regardless of the reasons that have provoked it. This is a revelation to Nora, she is shocked, but just as Betty Bernick trusts her husband's judgment and respects his authority, so does Nora. She actually comes to *believe* that she is a rotten criminal, which causes her to undergo a deep spiritual crisis. Nora is trying to resolve the conflict between what she intuitively feels is right and what society tells her act means. Not only does she think that she is not suitable to raise her children, but is also convinced that if the truth about her deed came out in the open, her husband would take the blame upon himself. Nora decides to commit suicide and prevent this from happening. The contrast between what she expects from Helmer and what actually happens is so drastic that it leaves no room for resolution between the two. Unlike Betty Bernick and all the other women around the male protagonist in the previous play, who believe in his transformation and forgive him, Nora's shock by the difference in Helmer's behavior at the beginning and at the end of the play is so extreme that she loses her illusions about her marriage and is able to see through the falseness of their marital situation. As a result of this, the whole edifice of the

societal structure thus comes tumbling down for Nora. In his attempt to stop her from leaving Helmer resorts to appealing to her respect for morality and religion, but for his wife they are already devoid of meaning. She slams the door behind her back and takes the difficult road towards attaining a higher level of consciousness about herself:

> NORA: Tomorrow I'm going home – to what used to be my home, I mean.
>
> HELMER: Oh, you blind, inexperienced…
>
> NORA: I must set about *getting* experience, Torvald.
>
> HELMER: And leave your home, your husband, your children? Don't you care what people will say?
>
> NORA: That's no concern of mine. All I know is that this is necessary for *me*.
>
> HELMER: This is outrageous! You are betraying your most sacred duty.
>
> NORA: […] I have another duty equally sacred. […] My duty to myself.
>
> HELMER: First and foremost, you are a wife and a mother.
>
> NORA: That I don't believe any more. I believe that first and foremost I am an individual. […] I am not content anymore with

what most people say, or what it says in the books. I have to think things out for myself, and get things clear.

HELMER: Haven't you an infallible guide in questions like these? Haven't you your religion?

NORA: Oh, Torvald, I don't even know what religion is. [...] All I know is what Pastor Hansen said when I was confirmed. He said religion was this, that and the other. [...] I want to find out whether what Pastor Hansen told me was right – or at least whether it was right for *me*.

HELMER: [...] let me at least stir your conscience. I suppose you do have some moral sense?

NORA: Well, Torvald, that's not easy to say. I simply don't know. I am really very confused about such things. All I know is my ideas about such things are different from yours. I've also learned that the law is different from what I thought; but I simply can't get it into my head that that particular law is right.

HELMER: You are talking like a child. You understand nothing about the society you live in.

NORA: No, I don't. But I shall go into that too. I must discover who is right, society or me. (OI 5:282)

Although the play was an immediate success, much to Ibsen's dismay, it was largely misinterpreted: Nora's decision to leave her husband came as a shock to her contemporaries. The debate focused on the judicial issue, and whether Nora's transformation from a singing bird to a rebellion was believable. Most of all though, the public debated whether Nora had the moral right to leave her husband and children in order to take care of her spiritual liberation. Shortly after, the play became one of the most important works for the feminist movement.

Learning from the reaction and debate that this play created, Ibsen took the same issues to a higher level with his next play, Ghosts. While the problematic in it remains the same as in A Doll's House, he sees the necessity to revise two major points. Firstly, while Nora is not yet completely sure if she or society is right, and needs to figure that out, there is no doubt in Helene Alving that her intuition has been guiding her in the right direction, while society has contributed to her unhappiness. Secondly, Nora's transformation happens much too quickly—over a matter of an hour—which makes it hard for it to be taken seriously. Mrs. Alving, on the other hand, gains consciousness of her position slowly and painfully and, at the end of the play, is just in the initial stages of the difficult process, of the work that needs to be done towards her own education and transformation. From a formal point of view, A Doll's House is still written in the tradition of the well-made play and much of the action in the play is provoked merely by chance,

including Nora's transformation. There is little left to chance in Ghosts. The main theme is gaining consciousness of the "ghosts" in our lives: all those "authorities" which Helmer in A Dolls' House refers to. The main struggle, imperative for the human being if he was to achieve any progress towards freedom and happiness, is with the layers of "wisdom" which he receives from society:

> Men jeg tror nesten vi er gjengangere alle sammen, pastor Manders. Det er ikke bare det vi har arvet fra far og mor som går igjen i oss. Det er alle slags gamle avdøde meninger og alskens gammel avdød tro, og slikt noe. Det er ikke levende i oss; men det sitter i alikevel, og vi kan ikke bli det kvitt. Bare jeg tar en avis og leser i, er det liksom jeg så gjengangere smyge imellem linjene. Det må leve gjenganere hele landet utover. Det må være så tykt av dem som sand, synes jeg. Og så er vi så gudsjammerlig lysredde alle sammen. (ISV 3:137)
>
> ([...] I'm inclined to think that we are all ghosts, Pastor Manders, every one of us. It's not just what we inherit from our mothers and fathers that haunt us. It's all kinds of old defunct theories, all sorts of old defunct beliefs, and things like that. It's not that they actually live on in us; they are simply lodged there, and we cannot get rid of them. I've only to pick up a newspaper and I seem to see ghosts

> gliding between the lines. Over the whole country there must be ghosts, as numerous as the sands in the sea. And here we are, all of us, abysmally afraid of the light. (OI 5:384)

The play's main protagonist is again a woman, Helene Alving, who had earlier left her husband to join her true love, the pastor, who is also her main interlocutor in the play. At that time he convinced her to go back to her husband. She obeyed and gave birth to a son, Osvald, who, as it turns out, has inherited his father's syphilis. From the beginning of the play Helene initiates her conversation with pastor Manders, and it continues almost until the end of the play, with many events happening simultaneously, and the conversation gradually changing its course.

As mentioned above, considered in its totality, the development that Mrs. Alving undergoes is identical to Nora's, but its nuances and timing give the character a lot more sustenance and raise the play to a higher level in Ibsen's discussion of the issues. Just like Nora, Mrs. Alving has been a believer and a romantic, and has a rebellious spirit. Ibsen makes a point of emphasizing that because it will play a role when compared to the disastrous consequences which Mrs. Alving's submission to duty and necessity has had on her family. Manders reprimands her for being "behersket av en uhellsvanger selvrådighetens ånd" ("quite disastrously selfish and stubborn"):

> All Deres trakten har vært vendt imot det tvangløse og det lovløse. Aldri har de villet tåle noe bånd på Dem. Alt hva der har besæret Dem i livet, har De hensynsløst og samvittighetsøst avkastet, lik en byrde De selv hadde rådighet over. (ISV 3:130)
>
> (In everything you had done, you have tended to be headstrong and undisciplined. Never would you tolerate any kind of restraint. Anything that became an encumbrance to you in your life, you had no scruples and hesitations about throwing it off, as though it were a burden you could dispose of as and when you pleased. (OI 5:373)

Despite her own nature, Mrs. Alving had never been able to follow her instincts. She married a man chosen by her "nearest relatives" as was "her duty" and is deeply unhappy in her marriage. She decides to change her situation and search for the happiness she still believes she could experience: she leaves her husband and seeks support for her deed with her beloved, the pastor, who, instead of issuing support, reprimands her and sends her back to her "right place": "Hva rett har vi mennesker til lykken? Nei, vi skal gjøre vår plikt, frue! Og deres plikt var å holde fast ved den mann som De en gang hadde valgt, og til hvem De var knyttet ved hellige bånd" (ISV 3:129) ("What right have people to happiness? No, we have our duty to do, Mrs. Alving! And your duty was to stand by the man you had chosen, and to whom you were bound by sacred ties" (OI 5:371)

Because he is a priest, one of God's servants, one of the "pillars of society", a real authority, Mrs. Alving does not question that what he wants her to do is right. It turns out that going back to her husband—a man who is fundamentally different from her—has had tragic consequences for the lives of each member of her family. Also burdened by the unhappy marriage, her husband, previously "full of the joys of living", becomes an alcoholic and starts living a promiscuous life. Her son, whom she wants to spare from the truth is sent abroad early as a child. Furthermore, he has inherited his father's syphilis, but believes that this is a result of his bohemian life in Paris. Yet, all along Mrs. Alving has only been doing her duty: "to bear with humility that cross which a higher power had judged proper" for her, a duty assigned to her by "reasonable opinions," which Ibsen identifies here as "menn i så vidt uavhengige og innflytelsesrike stillinger at man ikke godt kan unnlate å tillegge deres meninger en viss vekt" (ISV 3:124) ("men in independent and influential positions of the kind that makes it difficult not to attach a certain importance to their opinion" (OI 5:362).

Mrs. Alving describes her unhappy life in detail, and, while the public could not agree that Nora was unhappy in her marriage, and could not forgive her for leaving her husband and children, Ibsen does not leave any chance for such a miscomprehension in Ghosts. Women were in a subordinate position in their

marriage and in society overall and thus had, or *should* have had, the capacity and the impetus towards revolting and transforming themselves and their environment.

As mentioned above, Nora's transformation happens almost simultaneously with her realization of the truth about her situation. With Helene Alving those processes are quite long and highly painful. Her description of the way the excruciating process of her gradual liberation had been unlocked is astonishing in its simplicity and acuteness. She explains to Manders that this happened when he, the man she loved and trusted, "praised as right and proper" what her whole mind "revolted against, as against some loathsome thing": "Da var det jeg begynte å se Deres lærdomme efter i sømmene. Jeg ville bare pille ved en eneste knute; men da jeg hadde fått *den* løst, så raknet det opp altsammen. Og så skjønte jeg at det var maskinsøm." (ISV 3:137) ("It was then I began to examine the fabric of your teachings. I began picking at one of the knots, but as soon as I got that one undone, the whole thing came apart at the seams. It was then I realized it was just tacked together" (OI 5:385).

Helene starts looking for answers to her existential questions and finds them in the progressive literature of her time which confirms what her intuition had brought her to realize. The next thing she has to do is to change her behavior, which also happens slowly and painfully, and after a lot of hesitation, which the audience witnesses in the course of the play. Only when she realizes that to her son

she is also a "ghost," and is slowly losing him, does Mrs. Alving begin her transformative odyssey. Winning Osvald back becomes her incentive to start speaking the truth and work herself out her current situation, towards a more authentic existence.

Ghosts is an artwork about the Hegelian/Kojèvian slave employing their negativity towards their gradual liberation and coming into self-consciousness. Yet, the play was again misunderstood and the response it received was highly negative, much to Ibsen's disappointment. A review published in the Swedish "Ny illustrerad tidning" can be quoted as representative for the general opinion of it. According to the review, the play was about four issues: "1. That free love is more decent than marriage; 2. That children should love their parents even if they are not as respectable; 3. The question about the right to incestuous marriage; 4. The right to suicide" (N 53). After Ghosts Ibsen is on the verge of losing his optimism for the human being and abandoning his combative spirit. The play becomes for him a test that shows "the true human nature." He is especially disappointed that even the liberal press reprimands the play—a bitter realization of the "true nature" of the liberals as well. He also senses a servile *fear* in their response, the fear of losing readers or offending someone's interests. Ibsen calls them "slaves of the presumed opinions of the subscribers" (ibsen.net). He distances himself from any political connections and emphasizes again that the only way to real liberation is through

solitude and independence: Ibsen is on the next level of his progressive thinking and writing. The one-sentence truth that his negativity has emerged to and which becomes the center of his next play, An Enemy of the People, is that "den sterkeste mann i verden, det er han som står mest alene" (ISV 3:216) ("the strongest man in the world is the man who stands alone" (OI 6:126). Besides anticipating Nietzsche, this truth also borders on the Hegelian notion of the Master, as we shall come to see in the subsequent discussion of the play.

The issues of marriage and relationship are already solved in An Enemy of the People. Dr. Stockman, the main protagonist in the play, has the firm support of his wife with whom he has raised three independent-minded children. The human being has a *new* enemy in its stride towards self-consciousness. Ibsen identifies it here as "the compact majority": the ordinary people with their passivity and their instinct for self-preservation, those who lack an impetus towards personal liberation. There is a broad discussion of the notion of *fear* in the play; many characters act against their will because of fear: fear for the survival of their given being, which is expressed through the concern for losing their means of livelihood. While the main character understands that this is the most common human behavior, he is not willing to surrender: "Jeg *er* en gal mann!" (213) (I *am* a madman,) he says, and is confident that it is him who expresses the true nature of humanity.

The focus of the play is now back on a male protagonist. Dr. Stockman has been the driving force behind an enterprise that his hometown is highly profiting from. A local spa gives livelihood to most of the town's citizens. When some of his patients develop unusual sicknesses, Stockman is prompted to carry out tests of the spa water, which show that it is poisoned. He proposes that the spa is closed until repairs are done. In the beginning he receives the support of the "middle class" and "the liberal press," but when it is disclosed how much the repair will cost the town and how long it will take, everyone withdraws their support. The "liberal press" refuses to publish his article and Stockman calls a meeting to announce the results of his discovery. At the meeting, he announces the truth that he has reached: that the mentality of the crowd is slavish and that it is the minority that it always right. As a result he is proclaimed to be "an enemy of the people," which has dire consequences for him and his family.

In this play Ibsen seems to retreat from his belief that the younger generations will discover the road to the Third Empire. He has realized that the inherent instinct for self preservation is in everyone, and that society, with its established structure, smothers the kernel of anything genuine that might exist in the human being. At the outset of the play, Stockman has high hopes for his young friends and tries to foster in his home an atmosphere where they feel welcome: "[Jeg] er så inderlig glad og fornøyet, skal jeg si deg. Jeg føler meg så ubeskrivelig

lykkelig midt i alt dette spirende, sprettende liv. Det er dog en herlig tid vi lever i! Det er som om en hel ny verden var i oppkomst omkring en. [...] For meg er det en livsfornødenhet å være sammen med unge, kjekke, freidige mennesker, frisinnede mennesker, virkelystne" (ISV 3:161) ("I can't tell you how happy I feel surrounded by all this growing vigorous life. What a glorious age this is to live in! It's as if a whole new world were springing up all around. [...] For me it's like one of the necessities of life – to enjoy the company of eager young people, with initiative and minds of their own." (29)

Similar faith is expressed about the media, which is supposed to be "blazing a trail for the advancement of truth, and of new and bold ideas" (73). Stockman is a frequent contributor to *"People's Herald"*—a newspaper supported by the "ratepayers association"—or, as otherwise referred to, "the middle class" or "the compact majority."

As the play progresses, it is exposed that all the initial support that Stockman receives is based on personal interest: acquiring a position in office, protection of investment, love interest, partisanship, etc. No one is concerned with the actual truth which has to do with the health of fellow human beings. While everyone initially assures Stockman of their support, once the most powerful figure in town, the Mayor, who is also Chief of Police, Chairman of the Board of the Baths and the doctor's brother, reveals to everyone the consequences of their

decision, their support is quickly withdrawn. Stockman's belief that "truth and the people will prevail" quickly evaporates. This fourth play in the series signals Ibsen's abandonment of the idea that the impetus toward liberation of the spirit will be achieved through a common effort coming from the people. Stockman's optimism and vigorous confidence in the beginning is gradually transformed into a different truth towards the end. In one of the initial confrontations with his brother, Stockman declares:

> Pytt; tror du den våknende folkeløve lar seg skremme av uniformshuer? Ja, for vi gjør revolusjon i byen i morgen, skal du vite. Du truet meg å avsette meg; men nu avsetter jeg deg – avsetter deg for alle dine tillitsposter... Tror du ikke jeg kan det? Jo, du; jeg har de seirende samfunnsmakter med meg. Hovstad og Billing vil tordne i "Folkebudet," og boktrykker Aslaksen rykker ut i spissen for hele huseierforeningen. (ISV 3:190)

> When a people rises from its slumber like a giant refreshed, do you think anybody's going to be scared by a hat? Because you might as well know, we are having a revolution in town tomorrow. You threatened to dismiss me; well now I'm dismissing you, relieving you of all your official positions... Perhaps you think I can't? Oh,

> yes, I can. Because I can bring irresistible social pressure to bear. Hovstad and Billing will put down a barrage in the *People's Herald,* and Aslaksen will sally forth at the head of the entire Ratepayers Association. (OI 6:83)

This immediately proves not to be the case and Stockman soon makes "a tremendous discovery": "the discovery that all our *spiritual* sources are polluted and that our whole civic community is built over a cesspool of lies." He exposes further the so called "leaders" who are "slow on the uptake and set in [their] ideas." Yet his concern is not about them since he is convinced that "these dodderers, these relics of a dying age, are managing very nicely to see themselves off" and, furthermore, they are not "the people who constitute the greatest danger to society, [...] and the worst enemies of truth and freedom" (96). His real discovery is that one needs to be an aristocrat in spirit in order to be able to see and say the truth. The crowd with its mass mentality "should not dominate the intelligent" for they have "the might" but not "the right": "*I* am right – I and one or two other individuals like me. The minority is always right" (96). Only strong intelligent individuals have the capacity to reach truth and speak it. Ibsen's Hegelianism is vividly expressed in Stockman's deliberation of this view:

> What are these truths that always bring the majority rallying round? Truths so elderly they are practically senile. And when a truth is as

> old as that [...] you can hardly tell it from a lie. [...] believe it or not, but truths are not by any means the tough old Methuselah people imagine. The life of a normally constituted truth is generally, say, about seventeen or eighteen years old, at most twenty; rarely longer. But truths as elderly as that have always worn terribly thin. But it's only *then* that the majority will have anything to do with them; then it will recommend them as wholesome food for thought. [...] All these majority truths are like salt meat that's been kept too long and gone bad and moldy. (97)

That's why it is the "intellectually distinguished people" who have "independence of mind" should have the right "to criticize and to approve, to govern and to counsel" (98).

The Bataillian Master also resurfaces in the figure of Stockman in his insistence that a slavish life, based on fear for preservation of the body, is not worth living, and that real teaching is one where the student does not learn "a blessed thing." Stockman promises that to his own children: "I skal aldri sette jer fot i skolen mer! [...] Jeg vil lære jer opp; ja, det vil si, I skal ikke lære noen guds skapte ting" (ISV 3:215) ("You are not going to set foot in that school again. [...] I'll teach you myself – what I mean is, you'll not learn a blessed thing" (124).

True to his belief in the expiration quality of truth, Ibsen is going to offer a new revised view of it in his next play The Wild Duck. This is also his first attempt to look for truth in the sphere of the non-discursive, into the evasive nature of the symbol. The character of Gregers Werle is the figure which picks up from Dr. Stockman. He is a man who is "delightfully lonely" and trying to make people aware of "the claim of the ideal"—this time with disastrous consequences for the fellow human beings whose fate he happens to touch. Furthermore, the idea of the marriage based on truth, which was developed in the first three plays, resurfaces.

Gregers Werle, one of the main protagonists in the play, is the son of a wealthy wholesaler. At the beginning of the play he comes back to his father's home and finds out that his father has arranged for his former mistress to marry Hjalmar Ekdal who is a childhood friend of Gregers. It is further revealed that Hjalmar's father, old Ekdal, has been put on trial and sentenced for a financial offence which Gregers' father, Haakon Werle, actually committed. None of the Ekdals is aware of these facts, which have come to shape their lives. They are actually thankful to Haakon Werle for his generosity and financial help. Indignant, Gregers leaves his father's home and moves in at the Ekdals. He has decided that it will be "his life's work" to disclose to his friend Hjalmar the truth about the circumstances of his marriage and his father's situation. Gregers' view is quite similar to Dr. Stockman's, and he explains to his shocked friend that the life-lie that

he has been living is crippling him: he has landed in "en forgiftet sump, [...] har fått en snikende sott i kroppen, og [...] har fått er gått til bunns til å dø i mørke (ISV 3:249) ("a poisoned swamp, [...] has picked up some insidious disease, and [...] has gone down to die in the dark" (OI 6:189). Gregers' belief is that revealing the truth to Hjalmar will help him win through to "that sublime mood of magnanimity and forgiveness" (218). Instead, Hjalmar sinks into despair, questions his own fatherhood, and rejects his fourteen-year-old daughter Hedvig. Gregers convinces Hedvig further to shoot her pet, a wild duck, telling her that her sacrifice will prove to her father that she loves him. Instead of shooting the duck, Hedvig shoots herself. There is another character in the play, Doctor Relling, who provides an outsider view to the actions and people in the play, and whose words may be considered to be Ibsen's current voice speaking directly in the play.

One of the major realizations that comes forward in the play is the necessity of distinction between different types of people. While in the earlier plays everyone is judged by the same standard, in The Wild Duck, a huge emphasis is placed on the diversity of human beings, the nuances of character of each human being and the necessity for a different approach towards everyone. "The life-lie," as Ibsen has come to realize, is necessary for the "weak" human beings in order to maintain in them a feeling of happiness from their daily existence. Gregers is blind in the sense that he believes in the empty rhetoric of grandeur that his friend Hjalmar maintains

about himself and his life. He overestimates the ability of his friend to face truth, and his endeavor ends up having disastrous consequences: the tragic loss of a young life being the worst of them.

There is a battle of perceptions in the play, two radically different views of life and of the human being are expressed. In my interpretation, Gregers represents the earlier Ibsen with his unwavering "claim of the ideal," while Dr. Relling, as mentioned above, is the maturing Ibsen who has evolved to a different understanding about humanity. Gregers' lines can be taken from anyone of Ibsen's earlier plays, but this time their meaning is completely subverted and bears deep irony. He approaches the couple which now is clear about the truth of what has brought them together, but his words are empty rhetoric, completely foreign to the spouses:

> Så stor et oppgjør, ...et oppgjør, som en hel ny livsførelse skal grunnes på, en livsfølelse... et samliv, i sannhet og uten all fortielse... [...] Jeg hadde ventet at så visst at når jeg kom inn av døren, så skulle der slå meg i møte et forklarelsens lys fra både mann og fra hans hustru. Og så ser jeg ikke annet for meg enn dette dumpe, tunge, triste... [...] Men du selv da, Hjalmar? *Du* må da vel ha tatt en høyere innvielse av det store oppgjør. [...] For der er da

> vel ikke noe i verden som kan lignes med *det* å ha tilgivelse for en feilende og løfte henne opp til seg i kjærlighet. (ISV 3:258)
>
> (Now that you have laid bare your souls – this exchange on which you can now build a completely new mode of life – a way of living together in truth, free of all deception… […] I was absolutely convinced when I came through that door that I should be greeted by the light of radiant understanding on the faces of husband and wife alike. And all I see is this gloomy miserable… […] But you now, Hjalmar? Surely this passage of arms has brought you to some higher resolve. […] For there is surely no joy in life comparable with that of forgiving one who has sinned, and of raising her up in love again. (OI 6:206)

Ibsen has slowly figured out not only the impossibility of his demands for truth, but also the consequences they may have for "ordinary" people. As he expresses it through the words of Relling, he has "had the sense to mark the price down a bit." Gregers' character is Ibsen's reflection on his own evolution. Gregers has not yet been able to see through Hjalmar's thick rhetoric of himself and believes that Hjalmar is "a man who *is* a man" and has the capacity to elevate his being through truth. Hjalmar's most enjoyable activity though is tinkering with the

objects in the loft of the house which has been converted to resemble an imaginary "forest" with "wild animals". The loft gives his old father the illusion of freedom, and gives Hjalmar the illusion that he is helping his father. Hjalmar is not a person who embraces "spiritual turmoil" after which to emerge to a higher level of consciousness. Relling comments about him: "Å! Personlighet... han! Hvis han noensinne har hatt ansats til den slags abnormiteter som De kaller personlighet, så er både røttene og trevlene blitt grundig ekstirpert allerede i gutteårene, det kan jeg forsikre Dem." (ISV 3:268) ("Personality? Him! If he ever showed any signs of anything as abnormal as personality, it was all thoroughly cleared out of him, root and branch, when he was still a lad" (224). Relling's prediction is that even after his daughter's suicide, Hjalmar will remain in the realm of empty rhetoric and will continue to hold a pathetic grandiose view of his own life:

> GREGERS: Hedvig has not died in vain. Didn't you see how grief brought out the noblest in him?
>
> RELLING: Most people feel some nobility when they stand grieving in the presence of death. But how long do you suppose this glory will last in *his* case?
>
> GREGERS: Surely it will continue and flourish for the rest of his life!

RELLING: Give him nine months and little Hedvig will be nothing more than a pretty little party piece. [...] (OI 6:241)

It is important to observe that in this play Ibsen still believes that there are external reasons for the way Hjalmar's character had shaped, that one could actually *explain* why he has become this type of personality. It is, in the first place, because of the circumstances of his childhood: he does not have a mother, his father has been "a bit of a blockhead," and he has been raised with a good amount of rhetoric by "two crazy, hysterical maiden aunts" who considered him "a shining light." Later his fellow students considered him to be "a man with a brilliant future" and that is what disfigured his self-image. As we shall see in the later plays, Ibsen will come to abandon the view that the particular circumstances of one's birth and growth are responsible for the way their character has shaped.

Besides Hjalmar, Relling also places a diagnosis on Gregers, which I choose to read as Ibsen's reflection on the previous stage of his own development: "For De er en syk mann, De også, ser De. [...] De lider at et komplisert tilfelle. Først er det nu denne brysomme rettskaffenhetsfeberen; og så det som verre er, ...alltid går De og ørsker i tilbedelsesdelirium; alltid skal De ha noe å beundre utenfor Deres egne greier" (ISV 3:268) ("[...] You are a sick man too. [...] In your case there are complications. First there are these troublesome inflamed scruples. But then there's something worse: you are subject of serious fits of hero-worship.

You've always got to go round finding something to admire that's not really any of your business" (225).

There is also another, *different* couple in the play which also comes to represent Ibsen's present view about the fundamental difference between human beings. Gregers' father, Haakon Werle, and his present mistress and future wife Mrs. Sorby, are less scrupulous. They can face the truth about each other's former lives, are aware of their respective virtues and vices, and are on the way of entering a real "true marriage." Human beings—men and women alike—are different, no single standard can be applied to them, and thus *no judgment* shall be felt upon them, as it is vividly expressed in the conversation between the two main female characters and Hjalmar Ekdal:

> MRS. SORBY: Frank is something I've always been. It's the best policy for us women.
>
> HJALMAR: What do you say to that, Gina?
>
> GINA: Oh, we women are so different – some one way, and some another.
>
> MRS. SORBY: And for his part, Mr. Werle has not tried to hide anything either. And that's mainly what's brought us together. Now he can sit and talk to me quite openly, just like a child. The whole of his youth and the best years of his manhood, all he

> heard was a lot of sermonizing about his sins – a healthy and vigorous man like him. (211)

There is nothing substantial in Hjalmar's life, yet there is a sense of purpose in it and he relishes his imaginary position in his family. This maintains a feeling of happiness and contentment in the life of everyone around him and, essentially, also keeps everyone physically alive.

The Wild Duck hints at the further development of Ibsen's works in two aspects. In the first place, unlike the previous plays, it does not have an optimistic end, reaching beyond the play and extending into the future. The new one-sentence "truth" it pronounces—"Take the life-lie away from the average man and straight away you take away his happiness." (227)—while constituting a progress in respect to Ibsen's previous plays, is sober and unyielding. Furthermore, there is the realization of the helplessness of the human being which, when placed in an unjust situation, hopes for higher providence and the possibility for retribution. Hjalmar is shocked to hear Mrs. Sorby's account of her relationship with his adversary and is confused in trying to see how it relates to his own life and situation. It is distressing to follow his argument with Gregers on the issue:

> HJALMAR: Men der er en ting som opprører min rettferdighetsfølelse. [...] jeg synes det er noe så opprørende å tenke seg til at nu blir jo det ikke meg, men ham som realiserer

> det sanne ekteskap. [...] Det var jo alt dette her vanskelige, som du selv sa hørte til for å grunne det sanne ekteskap. [...] Men jeg kan dog ikke komme fra at der i alt dette er noe som sårer og krenker min rettsbevissthet. Det ser jo akkurat ut som om der slett ingen rettferdig verdensstyrelse var til. (ISV 3:262)

> (But there is one thing that offends my sense of justice. [...] What I think is so distressing is the fact that it's now not me who is founding a true marriage, but him. [...] But from what you said [one] had to go through all this difficult business before [one] could found a true marriage. [...] But I can't get over the fact that there is something in all this that offends my sense of justice. It looks for all the world as though there was no justice at all in things. (OI 6:214)

While Hjalmar quickly finds a resolution and a consolation in the retribution he sees for Werle in his progressing blindness, the reader and audience know that this is deceptive in view of the fact that Hjalmar's own daughter is also going blind. His fumbling deliberation on this fact bears tragic connotations:

> Men på den annen side er det jo riktignok som om jeg øyner skjebnens regulerende finger allikevel. Han blir jo blind. [...] Det er

> utvilsomt. Vi bør ikke tvile på det iallfall; for just i dette faktum ligger den rettferdige gjengjeldelse. Han har i sin tid forblindet en troskyldig medskapning... [...] Og nu kommer den ubønnhørlige , den gåtefulle, og krever grossererens egne øyne. (ISV 3:263)

> Yet, on the other hand, I might almost claim to see the guiding finger of fate. He is going blind. [...] There is no doubt about it. At least we *ought* not to doubt it, for that is precisely what makes it a just retribution. He at one time has blinded a trusting fellow creature... [...] And now comes this mysterious implacable power and demands the man's own eyes. (OI 6:214)

Rosmersholm picks up and develops further ideas and observations from all the previous plays, and particularly builds upon Ghosts, An Enemy of the People and The Wild Duck. In this new play Ibsen continues to explore the struggle towards the "Third Empire," or "history" during which the human being works its way towards truth, freedom and happiness. With this play he returns to the notions expressed in A Doll's House and Ghosts in that he continues his exploration of the view that only a Slave who himself has attained his sovereignty can contribute to the liberation of fellow human beings. Yet this time Ibsen is far from being optimistic about the possible success of this historical mission.

To begin with, one can argue that with the main protagonist in the play, Johannes Rosmer, Ibsen continues to explore the life trajectory of Pastor Manders from Ghosts. Rosmer is the heir of a long line of "clergymen and soldiers... high officials... men of the highest principles" who, with the imposition of strict rules and regulations have smothered for two centuries the spirit of joy and freedom in their community. He comes from a family where children never laugh or cry. The heavy oppressive spirit, much in line with Manders', is emphasized poignantly in the text: "[M]enneskene ler nu i det hele ikke meget her på disse kanter [...] Det begynte på Rosmersholm, [...] og så har det vel bredt seg ut som et slags smitte. (ISV 3:310) ("people in this part of the world [do not] laugh very much at all. [...] it began at Rosmersholm. And then I suppose it spread, like a sort of infection" (OI 6:347). Obeying his father Rosmer became a pastor and married a woman whose needs for sensual passion he could not satisfy. The marriage was also childless. Rosmer had, in addition, been one of the moral authorities issuing sentences for "unmoral" behavior.

Just as Mrs. Alving attempts to shatter the belief system of Manders, in Rosmersholm it is Miss Rebekka West, a young free spirit, who is working gradually and meticulously to help Rosmer carry through with his personal transformation. As we shall see later, Rebekka West is a highly engaging case in herself, in that she could at the outset be compared to Lona Hessel in Pillars of

Society, yet the way the character develops further presents a major revelation for Ibsen, one that is explored at greater extent in most of the later plays. She is a Master who becomes subordinated only to regain Mastery and freedom through death at the end.

At the beginning of the play we find out that Rosmer has retired from his position as a pastor and has renounced his previous views. He now adheres to the new radical ideas of his time, which are related to the liberal politics of the time. He has found a "new mission" to devote his life to, or to engage his negativity with: to raise people's consciousness, to make them masters of themselves and their environment, to liberate them. He considers it his duty to "å tenne litt lys og glede her hvor slekten Rosmer har skapt mørke og tyngsel gjennem alle de lange, lange tider" (ISV 3:300) ("to bring a little light and happiness into those places where the Rosmers have spread gloom and oppression" for many years (329). It is soon revealed to him though that his new ideas and "liberation" may have caused his wife Beate to believe in his extramarital affair with Rebekka West. Guilt-ridden because she could not secure the continuation of the Rosmer family, Beate commits suicide so that her husband's reputation would remain unblemished and he could live a happy life. This revelation provokes in Rosmer a deep feeling of guilt, which becomes an unsurpassable obstacle in his quest to liberate the minds of his fellow human beings. In the meantime, Rebekka West reveals to him that he is in fact free

of guilt since it was her who gave his wife the wrong impressions about him, and infused in her the ideas that later lead to her death. Rosmer nonetheless loses faith in his ability to transform. In an attempt to prove to him that *she* has been transformed and that *he* still has this capacity, Rebekka West tells him that she is going to commit suicide. This becomes the moment of Rosmer's true liberation: he proclaims them a husband and wife and follows her into the millstream.

The mission that Rosmer plans to embark upon can easily be identified with the one that Stockman in An Enemy of the People sets out to accomplish. In this earlier play Ibsen proclaimed his disagreement that "det er massen og mengden, den kompakte majoritet, som sitter inne med frisinnet og moralen, ...og at laster og fordervelse og alskens åndelig svineri, det er noe som siver ut av kulturen" (201) ("it's the masses, the compact majority that has the monopoly of morality and liberal principles, and that vice and corruption and every kind of depraved idea are an overflow from culture.") It is not culture that is demoralizing, he says, but "stupidity and poverty and ugliness" (101). At the end of An Enemy of the People Dr. Stockman is at the threshold of initiating his mission to "make decent and independent minded men." He plans to start with youth, those who have not yet become subordinated: his sons and the "street-corner lads", "the real guttersnipes" (125). Rosmer's intended mission is also "å gjøre alle mennesker i landet til adelsmennesker [...] ved å frigjøre sinnene og lutre viljene" (292) ("to raise the

level of the masses," to make "all his countrymen noblemen [...] by liberating their minds and purifying their wills" (314). Yet in this play this is impossible. During the time frame of the play we see how his freedom is gradually taken away from him, how he is subordinated to an inferior position simply by who he is, due to his background and because of external manipulation. There is simply always something in the way—be it internal or external factors—something that affects the human being and prevents it from attaining complete freedom. It is the essential paradox of human existence that prevents Rosmer to fulfill his mission. He is not able to lead "a fight to the death against everyone" (329) like Stockman because, against his will, inadvertently, he has become "a marked man" and there is nothing in his power to change that.

It is also important to point out that with this play Ibsen has not yet reached consciousness about this essential paradox about human existence. The notion is not yet clearly discernible; it seems that Ibsen is looking for answers and finds explanations. One can still point out to concrete factors which make Rosmer incapacitated. In the following play, The Lady from the Sea, Ibsen attempts to go *around* this paradox, to "trick" it into resolution, while Hedda Gabler is the first play in which no reason or explanation for the impossibility of freedom and truth in the concrete human reality can be distinguished. As mentioned above, it is the second play after Rosmersholm which ends with suicide, and there is only one in

the group of last four plays that makes an attempt at proposing a different outcome "at the end of history."

Yet the particulars of Rosmersholm demonstrate the higher level of consciousness that Ibsen has gained about issues and problems that first appear in the earlier plays. One such realization, first mentioned in An Enemy of the People, is that freedom is associated with death and that the common human being is a slave which fears the end of the given. Thus, if one should gain power over it, in this case political power, new threatening ideas should be presented mildly, so that people still feel "secure." This notion is presented first in the words of Hovstad, the editor of the liberal newspaper *Folkebudet (People's Herald)*:

> Politikken er jo dog hovedsaken i livet... eller for et blad i all fall; og vil jeg få folk med meg på frigjørelse og fremskritt, så må jeg ikke skremme dem ifra meg. Når de finner en slik moralsk fortelling nedenunder i bladkjelleren, så går de villige med på det vi trykker ovenfor; ...de blir likesom mer *trygge* (my italics, 185)

> Politics is the most important thing in life. And if I want to win people over to certain liberal and progressive ideas, it's no good scaring them all off. If they find a nice moral story like this on the back pages of the paper, they are much more ready to accept what

> we print on the front page – it gives them a sort of feeling of *security*. (my italics, 72)

This notion is much more prevalent in Rosmersholm where the editor of the liberal newspaper *Blinkfyret (The Beacon,)* Peter Mortensgaard, asks Rosmer for support of his enterprise not, as one would assume, *because* Rosmer has renounced his Christian faith, but precisely because of the opposite: "det gir vårt parti et sterkt moralsk ryggstø hver gang vi vinner en alvorlig kristelig sinnet tilhenger" (301) ("it contributes to the moral backing of our party every time we get a supporter with serious Christian principles" (OI 6:331) When Rosmer informs him of his "total emancipation" and that he has "severed all connections with the teachings of the church," Mortensgaard responds that if Rosmer came out with "all this about throwing up the Church, it will be like tying [their] hands." The "wisest thing" for him to do, he advises further, will be "at [han] holder tett med alt slikt som ikke kommer almenheten ved" (ISV 3:302) "to keep quiet about any of the things that don't really concern the public" (OI 6:323). The irony of this plea is that it mirrors directly the one issued by the opposite conservative powers who also want to use Rosmer's name and reputation and are shocked to find out of his changed views: "Når galt skal være, så tenk og men og tro i herrens navn alt hav du vil... både i den retning og i den annen. Men behold bare dine meninger for deg selv" (300) ("[...] if this madness must go on, then in Heaven's name go ahead and *think*

whatever you like [but] see that you keep your opinions to yourself,") begs the leader of the Right wing Kroll.

Rosmer is appalled at this realization which goes drastically against his newly discovered knowledge and beliefs, against his mission and the necessity in him "to extricate himself from his false and ambiguous position." It is politics and power, and not truth and liberation that is at the center of the "civil war" raging in society then and now. Thus, the newly found truth, which shocks everyone in An Enemy of the People, that only a few aristocrats in spirit, "the distinguished people are the liberals" (101) is developed to its extreme in Rosmersholm.

Through the character of Ulrik Brendel, Rosmer's former tutor, Ibsen pronounces his bitter realization about the potential of the human being. Ulrik Brendel is a man with radical liberal ideas. He has had a great influence on the young Rosmer, but was later chased away by Rosmer's father. His radicalism (which can easily be associated with Stockman's,) and the fact that "[han] har [...] hatt mot til å leve livet after sitt eget hode" (291) ("he has had the courage to live his life in his own way,") make him an outcast in society. Within the duration of the play he returns to town "to sacrifice his ideals on the altar of liberty" at which he fails miserably because of his uncontrollable internal demons: he drinks and has a short temper, which compromises his integrity and ruins his reputation for everyone. Brendel can be considered another example of the paradoxality of the

human being. His character will be further explored in Ejlert Løvborg in Hedda Gabler.

When at the end of the play Brendel returns to the estate, he announces that all his ideals have evaporated, and that the bitter reality is that the future belongs not to the idealists, but to the pragmatists, to people like the "radical" politician Mortensgaard who "possesses the secret of omnipotence" and "can do whatever he wants" because he "never wants more than he *can* [and] is quite capable of living his life without ideals." "*Det* er just handlingens og seierens store hemmelighet. Det er summen av all verdens visdom. Basta!" (324) ("It is precisely *that* [...] that is the great secret of practical success. It is the sum of all the world's wisdom. *Basta!*") concludes Brendel and exits (375). As we shall see in the later plays, there is, indeed, no hope for Ibsen's idealists.

While Ibsen is interested in the political battles of his time, it seems that he only engages with them in order to expose their hypocrisy and the harming effect they have on the human being. It is the happiness of the individual that is at stake with the political battles. Rosmersholm is at the same time the last play in which Ibsen focuses on politics. Having explored this issue, having reached the "truth" about that sphere of historical progress, he will, from the following play on, focus his interest solely on the individual human being.

It is important to note, though, that Ibsen still hopes that youth might come to manifest a new direction for humanity. It is the brightest children at the school of the conservative headmaster Kroll who first embrace the new radical ideas of the time, and Kroll's own children spearhead the new movement at the school.

One may call Rosmersholm the most "historical" of Ibsen's contemporary plays, in that it is highly aware of the historicity of the moment which it explores. Just like with Emperor and Galilean, Rosmer is acting (or fails to act) at a time when ideas are turned upside down. He needs to take a stand and choose a political side. Unlike Julian, he refuses to do that, but this time Ibsen explores the reasons for which Rosmer in a sense fails to show the way to the "Third Empire" in a much more concrete and nuanced way.

The second major protagonist in the play is a woman who already lives "at the end of history," but her complete happiness and freedom are still impossible since she has to deal with her "excess of negativity": Rebekka West develops namely a devastating, overwhelming passion for another human being. Her character is just another facet of Ibsen's exploration of the contradiction within man. She is an early case of his realization that our negativity remains forever unsatisfied and prevents us from attaining ultimate freedom. In fact, Rebekka West is Ibsen's second character in this play which comes to question whether one *can* overall be completely free from scruples and considerations. She had indeed been

raised with liberal ideas and had never had any attachments or obligations. Rebekka seemingly has no considerations, until she reveals upon closer questioning that she is lying about her age. Ibsen is questioning whether Rebekka's emancipation is in fact "in her blood" or whether it is "an abstraction. Book knowledge." (357)

When Rebekka arrives at the Rosmersholm estate she is almost utterly devoid of scruples and has a free spirit. She reveals to Rosmer later the mind frame of a free individual, as envisioned by Ibsen. Her attitude resembles paganism: "Jeg tror jeg kunne drevet igjennem hva det så skulle være – den gang. For da hadde jeg ennu min modige fribårne vilje. Jeg kjente ikke hensyn å ta. Ikke forhold å vike av veien for." (321) ("I think I could have achieved any mortal thing – then. For I still had the courage of a free mind. I felt no scruples; I wasn't prepared to give way for anything" (369).

Yet Rebekka becomes bound by the wild insurmountable sensual passion which she develops for a man—and this is what breaks her will. This passion, which she cannot resist, takes a hold of her will and subordinates her in many respects. As mentioned above, this is Ibsen's first exploration of a case of a Master whose unemployed negativity ultimately causes her pain and suffering. Ibsen expands this exploration in the following several plays, and finds different names for this unemployed negativity: the troll in us, the devils, etc. Here it is Rebekka's passion which turns her into "a poor frightened thing." It is masterfully described

as being "som et vær ved havet [...] [det] tar en, ...og bær en med seg, ...så langt det skal være. Ikke tanke om å stå imot." (ISV 3:320) ("like a storm at sea [...] it takes a hold of you... and it carries you away with it... for as long as it lasts. It never occurs to you to resist." (OI 6:369)

Lead instinctively by this passion, Rebekka inspires Rosmer towards liberation of his mind and spirit. Pursuing her goal of being with him, she gradually manipulates his mentally and emotionally unstable wife into committing suicide. Yet, while gaining access to Rosmer, she slowly loses her acting power and becomes incapacitated. Rosmer's way of life, his noble thinking and honesty formed by the Christian ethics, exert a transforming effect on Rebekka. She is the heathen who has been converted to Christianity and is now noble and respectful of the Christian ethics, but she has become unable to act freely and is deeply unhappy. Standing within reach of her initial goal, marrying Rosmer, Rebekka's newly acquired scruples do not let her go forward: "Rosmersholm has [...] completely and utterly broken me. [...] Now I feel crushed by a tradition quite foreign to me. I feel after this as though I hadn't any courage left for anything. [...] My will-power has been sapped, my spirit crippled. [...] I have lost the power to act, Johannes" (370).

Being "in the power of the Rosmersholm view of life" Rebekka is willing to commit suicide—not as an act of regaining her mastery, but in a gesture of proving

to Rosmer that he has the power to convert: "Hva jeg har forbrutt, ...det bør det seg at jeg soner (326). ("Where I have sinned... it is right that I should atone." (379) Rosmer, on his part, commits suicide in an act of utter liberation: "Så er jeg under vårt frigjorte livssyn, Rebekka. Der er ingen dommer over oss. Og derfor så får vi holde justis selv" (326). ("I give *my* loyalty to our emancipated way of life. There is no judge over us. Therefore we must see to it that we judge ourselves.") Rosmer and Rebekka go "gladly" together into the mill-race.

Rebekka's final words will be echoed by many of Ibsen's later protagonists who look back at their lives, regret what they have done, and struggle with the prospect of what lies ahead of them. Paradoxically they do not realize that they could not have reached this particular conclusion about their life's trajectory if they had not gone through that path in the first place. Rebekka feels crippled by her experiences at Rosmersholm and regrets the way her life has unfolded: "Do you expect me to go through life dragging behind me a crippled existence? ...Forever brooding over the happiness I forfeited by my past? I must quit the game, Johannes." Rebekka fails to realize that if she had been different in the past this so called "happiness" would not have been an option for her. In fact, none of Ibsen's heroes is able to recognize this inherent paradoxality of the human condition, and is thus unable to have an alternative look at their "crippled existence." They are not able to embrace it for what it is, without feeling any sorrow and pain, and they

make no attempt to alter it—even later in life. It seems that it is mainly this lack of recognition that is the key to understanding Ibsen's bitter view of life and his ultimate epilogue: "Når vi døde vågner [...] vi ser at vi aldri har levet" (593) ("When we dead awaken, we realize that we have never lived.")

Ibsen's next play, The Lady from the Sea, can be viewed as a statement pronouncing the key to the Third Empire, where the human being, having attained its truth and sovereignty, now lives a happy joyous life. He formulates this key as being living "i frihet [...] og under ansvar." (ISV 3:382) ("a free choice of responsible behavior.")

CHAPTER IV

Ibsen and Bataille

The Lady from the Sea picks up the themes that surface in Ibsen's works with the character of Rebekka West. As mentioned earlier, Rebekka is the Master who becomes aware of the excess of negativity that prevents her from leading a sovereign life. Ibsen gradually becomes more and more involved in and fascinated by this problematic. The Kojèvian working slave is no longer at the focus of his interest; he has simply exhausted that direction as having a potential for achieving progress and happiness. Not only has he been exploring it through several plays, but his real life's trajectory had been changing as well. Not finding the satisfaction he expected, he felt increasingly puzzled and frustrated. The main focus of the new play can thus be considered to be "et vær ved havet [...] [det] tar en, ...og bær en med seg, ...så langt det skal være. Ikke tanke om å stå imot." (ISV 3:320) ("the storm at sea [which] takes a hold of you... and it carries you away with it... for as long as it lasts. It never occurs to you to resist.") Rebekka's weakness has, in other words, come to the forefront of Ibsen's interest. With this character Ibsen had already entered the realm of Bataillian thought and Ibsen remains there in The Lady from the Sea as well. Though the resolution of the conflict at the end of this play is ultimately Hegelian, it is the Bataillian vocabulary that resurfaces throughout the

text. As mentioned above, the Hegelian end seems artificial and enforced, and constitutes Ibsen's last, (and failed) attempt to propose a way for humanity to emerge to happiness and satisfaction. The Lady from the Sea also anticipates Hedda Gabler—the only purely Bataillian of Ibsen's plays.

Bataille's departure from Hegel and the subsequent development of his thought illuminates Ibsen's work in a way that unlocks the internal coherence within the last few plays and provides a different view of the relationship between them as entities. I will thus resort again to Christopher Gemerchak's study, in order to aid myself in laying out the major points that Bataille comes to make in his disagreement with Hegel. I will later examine how they relate to Ibsen's texts.

As we discussed in Chapter I, in Hegel's system, Man's truth is the truth of the working Slave who, because of his fear of death "knows" it, knows that it is negativity that is his true essence, has gained self-consciousness, and is able through gradual negation of his environment to gain freedom and Absolute knowledge. This became possible in the Hegelian system because facing death is equated in with experiencing it. Kojève describes it as follows: "death presented in the form of an other-object (the master) gave the slave *the impression* of dying, [...] the slavish consciousness 'melted internally, it shuddered deeply and everything fixed-or-stable trembled in it... [an] absolute liquefaction of every stable support.'" (qtd. in Gemerchak 49). "For the slave, then," summarizes

Gemerchak, "death had become a conscious possibility, and death having become conscious, he was in position to become fully human" (49).

Bataille does not accept this play of the imagination as a consciousness-transforming experience, for only actual death can accomplish that. At the same time, as Gemerchak emphasizes further, both Kojève (implicitly) and Bataille (explicitly) claim that "it is problematic to assert that one's negativity is 'manifest' to oneself in death, for [...] 'death in fact reveals nothing'" (Bataille qtd. in Gemerchak 48). Gemerchak comments further:

> [...] the fact that what death "manifests" remains hidden or unknowable – a notion unacceptable for Hegel – carries the further implication that the desire for complete self-consciousness cannot be satisfied, insofar as the combination of these incompatibles – death and consciousness – is the very condition of self-consciousness. Simply stated, the problem is that, self-consciousness is conditional upon the experience of death, and on the other hand, one cannot die and have consciousness of dying, or so it would seem. (48)

Emphasizing this paradox, Bataille concludes that the negativity of the Master does not disappear, just as the negativity of the Slave "at the end of history" does not disappear; it remains, but this time is "unemployed." This major disagreement with Hegel will become the point at which Bataille's thought would

pick up and develops on its own. In his writing he would attempt to find solutions for the excess of negativity and the consequences it has for the human being "at the end of history."

Ibsen's affinity with Bataille springs from the fact that, contrary to his earlier works, in the later ones Ibsen denounces *work* as a way of accomplishing sovereignty and satisfaction. In this sense, he departs from Hegel and Kojève and sides with Bataille's view of the problematic. Thus, understanding Bataille's notions of "sovereignty" and "servility" will be of crucial importance to our discussion of Ibsen's later works, and the understanding of the critical thought expressed by him in them. While these notions are clearly derived from Hegel, Bataille problematizes and subverts their meaning.

In the first place, Bataille questions that even the Master's attitude implies sovereignty since the two conditions of Hegelian mastery actually relate it to servility: "firstly, the master must stay alive despite having accepted the risk of death; and, secondly, the prestige gained through his lack of concern for life is *put to use* by exerting power over the slave [...] The Master thereby profits from his risk." Gemerchak concludes: "Both of these conditions pertaining to Hegel's mastery thereby fall into the paradigm of Bataille's servility: the projection of the self into the future, which again implies the fear of death. Sovereignty [...] must lie somewhere else" (45). Following Bataille's thought, Gemerchak outlines the two

main features of his notion of sovereignty which make it different from Hegel's notion of mastery, namely "*powerlessness and purposelessness* (indifference to ends)" (46). I will return to this in my discussion of Hedda Gabler.

The critical issue for Bataille is that everything in Hegel's system is on its way to another level and "is unilaterally directed toward a horizon of completion that confirms its meaning." Even death then is subordinated to this movement towards "meaning." "[Whenever] we encounter this *Erzittern,* this profound trembling in the depths of our being," or when we encounter death in Hegel, points out Gemerchak, "it is always the precursor to pure knowledge and restored self-conscious certainty, and ultimately to the reconciliation of man and God in Absolute knowledge." Bataille acknowledges Hegel for identifying "the anguishing and sovereign moment of 'absolute rending,' the moment when ground gives way under one's feet, when one gains consciousness of impending death" (52), and for him too this moment has its contribution to self-consciousness, but he maintains that no personal reconciliation with God occurs for him, and that the subjective experience of anxiety is irreducible. This discussion will be of utmost importance when we analyze the frequent self-imposed deaths of Ibsen's heroes in four of the last five plays written by him. At "the end of history" Ibsen's conclusion, just as Hegel- and Bataille's is that man has to "live through death" in order to attain his

human character, but this death cannot be a means to an end and man should not be able to survive it—otherwise it accomplishes nothing.

I would like to situate my analysis of Ibsen's seventh play in the series The Lady from the Sea, within the context of the above discussion since this play is the first one demonstrating clear awareness of the Bataillian disagreements with Hegel's system, yet it also constitutes an attempt to negotiate a clearly Hegelian resolution to the problems presented. Ellida Wangel's "internal trembling in the face of death," and her newly gained self-consciousness take care of the negativity within her and she emerges as a happy and satisfied Sovereign.

As even the title suggests, the play is about a creature which is somehow diverging from what has so far been presented in Ibsen as "essentially" human. It is about a woman who is "from the sea," and this already opens a new sphere of interest for Ibsen. Soon we discover that the play is indeed hardly concerned with any social issues and is strictly a family drama and an exploration of humanity from a different angle. Its main concern is the individual whose internal conflicts have little to do with the overall progress of society.

Early on in the play the idea of death as a considerable parameter in the life of the human being is introduced: the "jack-of-all-trades" Ballested presents his painting of a mermaid who "har forvillet seg in fra havet og kan ikke finne ut igjen. Og så ligger hun her og og omkommer i brakkvannet." (ISV 3:331) ("has strayed in

from the sea and can't find her way out again. [She] lies dying in the brackish water." (OI 7:30) Later Ballested will be one of Ibsen's "speakers" who will constantly remind the main protagonist Ellida that, unlike the mermaid who inevitably dies, the human being has the capacity to "akklimatisere seg" ("acclimatize") and remain alive. Ibsen's idea, which he desperately tries to infuse in the play, is that this acclimatization also leaves one *happy*.

As a young girl Ellida Wangel has lived a protected life up at the lighthouse where her father worked. At some point she met there a mysterious man, the Stranger, with whom she developed a relationship. Soon after he was forced to leave and return to the sea, but before that happened they became "engaged" through a pagan ritual, essentially marrying each other "to the sea." Ellida and the Stranger later exchange letters, in which she attempts to break off "the engagement." Ellida is soon approached by and proposed to by a widower many years her senior, a doctor with two grown-up daughters; she agrees to marry him. With the change in her marital status also comes a crucial change of location for her: she is no longer living by the open sea, but in the enclosed land between the fjords with stale water and no fresh air. Little by little Ellida starts feeling suffocated by her environment. She is not able to adjust to her new domesticated life and her new role as a wife and step-mother. A whole set of mysterious occurrences somehow related to "the Stranger" make her restless and alienates her

completely from her present life. Everyone around Ellida, including herself, feels that she is somehow "different" and call her "fruen fra havet" ("the lady from the sea.") This "difference" I interpret as Ibsen's equivalent of "unemployed negativity," and the way he "deals" with it as being his suggestion for its resolution. Ellida's earlier love, the Stranger, ultimately arrives and asks her to leave with him. Ellida's present husband Wangel lets her exercise her own free will in making a choice between him and her lover. Having been given her "freedom" in choosing, she decides to stay with Wangel and his two daughters. Ellida realizes that she is *needed* there and sees *a mission* for herself in raising them. This choice, claims Ibsen further, leaves her happy.

The Lady from the Sea amounts to Ibsen's last desperate attempt to find a clue, a direction for the human being toward a fulfilling, happy life. It is his new "prescription" for the road that might lead to the "Third Empire." He wants to believe in the power of rational thought to reach truth and lead the human being to sovereignty and Absolute knowledge. We *can* "acclimatize," claims Ibsen, and we can even be happy at that: "Jeg har akklimatiseret meg," ("I have acclimatized myself,") says Ballested, "Jeg føler meg knyttet til stedet ved tidens og vanens bånd." (ISV 3:332) ("I feel bound to the place by ties of time and custom." (OI 7:31) What is fascinating about the play is that all along Ibsen balances between myth and reality: for example, Ellida's account of her story as one of supernatural

events, and her husband's treatment of it as "an ailment," as "trouble with her nerves" for which she receives medication. He is unable though to figure out what is wrong with her, which I read as Ibsen's exploration and speculation about the nature of "unemployed negativity" and ways one might dispense of it.

Ellida is all along associated with the sea creatures, she feels an affinity with their non-discursive, mute world. As such she is closer to the given beings: untamed, not susceptible to the "slave" mentality, not working, not engaging in anything useful: "all she seems to live for [...] is bathing in the sea" (38). She is called "the heathen" because her father gave her "a ship's name instead of a decent Christian name" (41). She is simply not incorporated in the Hegelian system of economy, as we shall see in our later discussion of Bataille. Just like Rebekka West, Ellida is not able to explain the way she feels, but knows that, since it does not belong to "the system of society" it is treated like sickness, madness, and abnormality.

Ellida's confrontation with the Stranger can be read as a classic "Master-Slave" dialectical development, and the resolution—as a classical Hegelian one. The figure of the Stranger can be read as both a fearless Master, and as personification of death. He is a man with many identities who ends up lacking one: mysterious ghostly figure, an immigrant from Finland, a resident of Norway's northernmost parts, a man who says he *had* to commit homicide and flee. He sails

around the whole world and appears under different names: Johnston, Freeman, etc. He is clearly associated with death: he survives a shipwreck and is described as a "terrifying man," "a drowned man from the dark sea" who has come back to claim Ellida. He stands "så drivendes våt som de drar en opp av sjøen" (340) ("wet and sodden, like a body dredged up from the sea.") When at the end he is threatened by Wangel that he will be arrested for murder, he calmly pulls out a gun and is ready to commit suicide. All along he has a terrifying effect over Ellida who feels chased by his gaze and his shadow, and keeps imploring her husband to save her "from that man," until she realizes that it is the bottomless abyss in herself she is afraid of: "Å Wangel, ...frels meg for meg selv!" (360) ("Oh, Wangel... Save me from myself!" (83).

It is also implied in the play that leaving with the Stranger equals death for Ellida—both social and possibly physical. The Stranger does not offer her another clear "slavish" alternative, the choice for Ellida is either "work" or risk, chance, non-discursive reality, an existence without a goal. In her confrontation with him she actually confronts negativity and death. He is the unknown that the human being is, the being beyond knowledge which "is awesome": it both terrifies and attracts. Having realized that this is her truth, she chooses to submit to necessity and remains with her family in order to fulfill her duties and responsibilities. Ellida gradually has becomes aware of a clear task in front of her and this plays a major

role for her choice: it seems like a straw for her to avoid death. Wangel's two daughters need her care and attention and she is only happy to revert to that. When she is told that Hilde, the younger daughter, is yearning for "one single loving word from her" Ellida exclaims "Ah! Could *this* be where I am needed!" and the stage remarks specify that "Hun slår hendene sammen om hodet og ser ubevegelig frem for seg, liksom gjennemkrysset av stridende tanker og stemninger" (371). ("She clasps her hands to her head and stairs straight ahead, motionless, as though torn by conflicting thoughts and feelings.")

Choosing "freely" and "acting responsibly" is Ibsen's newly discovered solution: "of my own free will [...] Everything lies in this phrase. It has opened my eyes. And now I see" (99). Wangel also finally recapitulates in the last scene, after Ellida's miraculous transformation from a sovereign given creature to a subjugated to duty and necessity human being: "Your yearning for the sea... your attachment to this man, this stranger... these things were nothing more than an expression of your growing desire for freedom. That's all." Ellida's reply is eloquent: "I don't know what to say to that. But you have been a good doctor to me. You found... and had the courage to apply... the right remedy – the only one that could help me" (122). This Hegelian "happy end" could have been possible, had it not been for one major paradox that appears in Ibsen's text, namely that together with "freedom" Ellida is also handed "responsibility." I will return to this shortly.

Another minor paradox that presents itself in the play is the issue of why Ellida feels "unfree" to begin with. While for me she is all along "a Master" with a sovereign attitude, it seems that Ibsen could not quite recognize that her feeling "unfree" is a function of her unemployed negativity. He seems to need to find a source for her feeling frustrated, and it somewhat comes as a surprise when she "discovers" that the reason for it is that she has not entered the marriage with her husband "freely": "[...] you came out there... and bought me. [...] I accepted your terms. I went and sold myself to you." It is only after a few years that Ellida is able to come to such conclusion, and she is not very convincing in her argument, for the truth is that she *had* been excited about her marriage and only *after* the excitement of the new relationship wore off, and the quietness and comfort of their shared life lost its initial appeal, that her passionate nature was no longer satisfied. Only then she started looking for a clearly definable reason for her unhappiness within the constructed narrative of her own life. For a long time Ellida is unable to find an explanation, but once the Stranger appears back in her life, she seems to be able to attain clarity about her own situation and seems to find the key for unlocking her future happiness. The idea that she has entered her present marriage out of necessity and has not followed her heart but submitted to the demands of the everyday, is her explanation of her present situation. Thus, a key moment in her reasoning is that she has done all this not because she chose to, but because she was

forced to. Ellida believes, in other words, that she has never had the opportunity to exercise her own free will and make her own choice in regard to her personal life. (One might argue that she did, of course, make a choice even then, but did it *responsibly* and was unaware of it.) She is, in other words, still under the romantic conviction that we are able to do what we desire, and that as long as we do that, we will achieve absolute and permanent happiness. Having brought us to this point, Ibsen subverts this notion by adding to it the inevitable moment of human reality, which is duty and responsibility. He is all along trying to exercise "a trick" of his own, namely that desire can be satisfied in the conscious and "free" choice of necessity. Or, in other words, that the conscious "free" choice to employ the excess of negativity amounts to the truth and happiness of the human being. As already mentioned, this proposition is highly problematic and one does not need to look further than the text in order to expose its deficiency. If we focus on what for me is the decisive scene in the play—the one of Ellida exercising her choice—we will easily be able to trace the paradox in Ibsen's scheme:

> WANGEL: [...] Men nu altså, - nu er du fuldt ud løst fra mig og mit. Og fra mine. Nu kan dit eget rigtige liv – komme ind på - på sit rette spor igen. For nu kan du vælge i frihed. Og under eget ansvar, Ellida.

ELLIDA: *(griber sig om hovedet og stirrer frem for sig imod Wangel)* I frihed og – og under ansvar! *Under ansvar også? – Der er – forvandling i dette her!* (my italics, ISV 3:380)

(WANGEL: [...] But now... now you are entirely free... of me and all things that are mine. You can again make of your life what it properly ought to be. Now you can choose freely. And on your own responsibility, Ellida.

ELLIDA: *(clasps her head with her hands, and stares unseeingly at Wangel)* Freedom... and responsibility! *Responsibility too?... That... puts a different aspect on things.* (OI 7:121)

I cannot read this any differently than as a rude but necessary awakening for Ellida. She is suddenly shaken out of her belief that it is at all possible to choose *freely.* In my reading, she is not given any choice. She is only made aware of the burden of responsibility to the Other, the fellow human being, which she so far has been unaware of. Such responsibility accompanies every single choice we make, it is the responsibility which is always there, but which takes time to realize, and to resolve to live with, the responsibility which to a large extent equals *ufrihet* (the lack of freedom.) This short moment (which is only that short out of necessity,

required by the politics of the dramatic structure,) is the moment of Ellida's maturing, of losing the illusion that such fundamental freedom is possible, of realizing that forsaking one's responsibilities comes at the cost of being constantly tormented by bad conscience and deep feelings of guilt, something which Ibsen is going to explore further in his later works. So Ellida makes the choice to stay, but it is an incapacitated Ellida who does that, an Ellida who has undergone a deeply tragic transformation, a sobering, a recognition of the paradox of human existence. Yet, the final scene is one supposed to convince us of the true feeling of happiness she feels after she has exercised her choice: she is rid of her negativity and feels peaceful and satisfied. "Never can I go with you now," she says to the Stranger in "a firm voice" looking at him "intently": "Your will no longer has any power over me at all. To me you are a dead man... one who came back from the sea and who now returns there. But I no longer fear you. Nor am I swayed by you" (121). The fear of death is, in other words, overcome and the slave engages in her conscious pursuit of her happiness. All the characters then come onto the stage, laugh and talk, Ellida reaches her hand over to her lawful husband Wangel, at the same time that "musikken høres nærmere inne mot land" (382) ("[music] is heard coming from close in by the shore.") In my interpretation, in the final "happy" scene Ellida is only acting out being happy, but, in fact, has gone "underground."

The end of the play is beyond any doubt one of the many highly controversial episodes in Ibsen's works. The questions that Ibsen criticism has grappled with are several. For example: does Ellida make the right choice? Is she truly happy after making her decision? *Did* she have a choice? Can she truly acclimatize? Since one of the arguments of the present dissertation is that literary criticism is situational and even generational, I was determined to research the interpretations offered by scholars at different "historical" times.

I must first admit that while a decade ago I liked the play precisely because of the turn it takes at the end, (Ellida's conscious, voluntary and happy choosing to stay with her husband,) today I decry it, equally passionately, for the very same reason. While before Ellida's happy transformation was hailed by me as meaningful and justified, today it seems to me forced and faulty. The critical body devoted to the play, not surprisingly, displays the same dynamics: it encompasses a variety of contradictory attitudes ranging from supportive euphoria to bitter disagreement. I am tempted to briefly trace this winding curve, starting with Georg Brandes' condescending comments, which appeared shortly after the play's publication: "There are few things that will soothe less a woman who is after the mystery of adventure than decent virtues such as choosing responsibly." (qtd. in Sæther). His contemporary, Aftenposten's columnist Bredo Morgenstierne, on the other hand, embraced the play, almost with a sigh of relief:

> The new, which makes "The Lady from the Sea" signal a new era in this authorship is actually that the great question-asker, "whose call is not to answer", this time really gives us an answer [...] That this play, so to say, "ends well", is only an expression that Ibsen [...] points towards the *right* way in his opinion – the way to the Third Empire – the one of freedom, responsibility, joy of life and love, the one that he so often lets us glimpse in the background. (Fruen)
>
> (The new, which makes *"The Lady from the Sea"* signal a new era in this works is actually that the great question-asker, "whose call is not to answer," this time really gives us an answer [...] That this play, so to say, "ends well", is only an expression that Ibsen [...] points towards the *right* way in his opinion – the way to the Third Empire – the one of freedom, responsibility, joy of life and love, the one that he so often lets us glimpse in the background.)

The curve continues subsequently to climb with one of its highest points being the euphoria of the so-called "scientifically proven" successes of Freudian psychoanalysis. To mention but one example: Astrid Sæther, in her discussion from 1977 "Ibsen, Freud og Fruen fra Havet," states that "Konflikten i [Ellida] er løst. [...] Uansett om vi tror på Ellidas forvandling eller ikke – for Ellida skjer 'Det

vidunderlige'. Mannen stiller henne fri, og deretter kan hun velge i overensstemmelse med sin egentlighet." ("The conflict within her is resolved. [...] Regardless of whether we believe Ellida's transformation or not – for Ellida "The Miracle" happens. The husband sets her free and she can thereafter choose in correspondence with her own true nature.")

Nowadays the skeptics have again resurfaced and engage in indirect discussions with the "believers." In his newly published book "Ibsens samtidsskuespill" Asbjørn Aarseth quotes several "doubters," such as Otto Heller and Aage Henriksen amongst others, while himself concludes that "no textual grounds for such doubt can be found in the play" (213). He argues, rather, for interpreting the ending as open: the partners disagree on what exactly has provoked the cure and, probably because of that, the play remains unresolved:

> At den endelige resultatet skyldes en felles erkjennelse er selvsagt ikke noen grunn til å tvile på dets holdbarhet i et Ibsen-drama, snarere tvert imot. Det viser jevnbyrdighet mellom ektefellene. Noen samstemt fortolkning har de ikke etablert. På dette punktet har dramatikeren tydeligvis ønsket å la både den rasjonelle og den irrasjonelle muligheten stå åpen. (214)

> (That the final result is caused by mutual recognition is of course no reason to doubt its validity within an Ibsen drama, it is rather the opposite. It shows equality between the spouses. They have not agreed on an interpretation. On this point the dramatist has clearly wished to let both the rational and the irrational possibilities remain open.)

A cure is obtained, in other words, one way or another, but I question Ibsen's decision to present the end as "happy." Is a "cured" person, in other words, happy and satisfied; or is she disappointed, sad, somewhat bitter? In my opinion, realizing the paradoxality of being, recognizing the fact that there cannot be a successful merging of freedom and responsibility ends up causing a painful, deeply tragic process of "acclimatization," also identifiable as "gaining self-consciousness." Ellida's sadness is suggested earlier in the play when she laments the loss that humanity had come to suffer in its distinguishing itself from the given: "I don't think [we belong to dry land] I think if only man had learnt to live on the sea from the very first... Perhaps even in the sea... We might have developed better than we have, and differently. Better and happier." Her interlocutor Arnholm cheerfully replies that what is done is done and there is no going back: "We've taken the wrong track and become creatures of the land instead of the sea [...] it's too late to put things right now." Ellida's response is, again, eloquent: "Yes, it's sad

but true. And I suspect that people suspect something of this themselves. And bear with it as with some secret sorrow. Believe me, here are the deepest strings of human melancholy" (75). Ibsen touches here on the Bataillian notion of "intimacy": "the unknowable depth that [the human being] in multifarious ways, is continually searching for": "If we feel melancholia when we see an animal in a cage, it is because we recognize that something of ourselves has been caged" (Gemerchak 1).

The place of The Lady from the Sea is for me just at the end of Ibsen's Hegelian progression, and it constitutes a failed, unhappy, and frustrated end. This view comes heavily in opposition to most of the previous academic research on the play where the end, as pointed out above, has largely been interpreted as happy, i.e. Ellida's acclimatization has been deemed as successful and her deciding to stay with her husband—as a fortunate happy event. The belief is, in other words, that the Hegelian slave, conscious of himself, ends up gaining his autonomy and emerges as a free and happy human being.

To my mind, no happy fusion between freedom and responsibility is possible since at the moment that she is being handed her freedom, Ellida is also, simultaneously, with the other hand, also handed responsibility, and this is *not* the responsibility to her own self, but to the Other. (It is worth mentioning here that there is no questioning in this play of the *kind* of responsibility, as for example it is

problematized in A Doll's House.) At the end of The Lady from the Sea Ellida makes the mature conscious decision to act responsibly, but this does not entail freedom, and is not a happy triumphant decision, but, rather, a defeat. I look at it as Ibsen's last noble but failed attempt to reconcile freedom and responsibility (frihet og ansvar), duty and free will (plikt og fri vilje,) in a way that their merging also entails *livsgleden* (the joy of life,) or—The Third Empire.

In support of my intuitive view I will evoke present-day theatrical performance. Artistic sensitivity has in the last several years confirmed my interpretation. Many recent productions of the play change its end, and it is not the fact that Ellida chooses to stay with her husband that is largely questioned today, but the insistence that her decision constitutes a happy outcome. Here is several examples of dramatically changed final scenes.

A Norwegian ballet version from 1996, choreographed by Lise Ferner, displays a tragic final scene in which there is no communication between the characters. Lonely, they move on the stage, as if hypnotized.

Two German productions, Thomas Langhoff's from 1990 and Wolfgang Gropper's from 1999, also revise the ending. In the former, a terribly sad, almost crying Ellida remains at home, after the Stranger has exited. A door slams behind her forever closing the opportunity for something different than the prose of the every-day. In the latter production Ellida leaves the stage, but this time alone,

silently passing by both male contenders and ignoring both of them. Danish director Peter Langdal, whose production of the play premiered at the 2000 Ibsen Festival, also defied Ibsen's intended ending: after Ellida's declaration of her choice, everyone came on stage in contemporary clothing, and the different couples had exchanged their partners.

In Kate Whoriskey's 2001 American production, Ellida does not reach her hand back out to Wangel, but instead turns in the direction of the Stranger—frozen, desperate, and incapacitated. And, finally, another American production: the installation performance of The Lady from the Sea, staged in 2003 in New York, expresses a similar take on the play. It defied Ibsen's intent not only by revising its end—a passionate dance by all twelve performers, which could easily be interpreted as expressing profound sadness and desperation—but also by the form and content of the 11 installation sites that constituted the event. Mentioning their titles will suffice to indicate the provocative interpretative path taken by the young director: 1. *Ghosts*, 2. *Portals of the past,* 3. *1,000 Times,* 4. *Fairy tale* 5. *Storm (in her head),* 6. *Science of things,* 7. *Death of a mermaid,* 8. *Shipwreck,* 9. *Secret Sorrow,* 10. *Vertigo machine,* 11. *High tide.*

In her interview with the director of the installation performance Ivan Talijancic, Joan Templeton concludes regarding the changed ending: "We live in a cynical age." One may agree or disagree with such a comment, but my

argument is that even if it holds to the truth, this type of cynicism is actually based on tragedy; it is sad cynicism, not arrogant; it is a survivalist technique. It is based on experience, on our frustration with living "at the end of history," maturing "at the end of history," when all "unemployed negativity" surfaces quickly and remains vacant and unsatisfied.

History is a progression which eventually reaches its end; then conflict emerges again and the whole ordeal repeats itself. We still do not live in the paradise envisioned by Hegel—withdrawing back to nature as happy given beings. Historical development is a cyclical process, not so much temporal as logical. For Hegel, Napoleon signaled the end of history, for Alexandre Kojève, it was Hegel and his Phenomenology of Spirit which better suited this description. *Fin de Siécle* was also experienced by many as the end of history. Yet, there were always world wars which ensued, suffering and pain, and an urge, a thirst towards rationality. This gives rise to the supposition that maybe the generation growing up now, with the war in Iraq, with strong cultural antagonisms, the financial crisis, or in broken families, with divorced or separated parents, will have a different perspective on Ibsen's play The Lady from the Sea, and particularly on its ending. Maybe they will experience it as a *real* happy end, but for most of my generation it is tragic, ironic, even cynical.

From what we know about Ibsen's personality and from the facts of his life, he emerges as a strong, motivated self-project, a success, and a person for whom "livsgleden" ("the joy of life") was of major importance. One can only imagine in this respect, what this process of realization and maturation may have meant to him, and how much conscious effort he must have put into this happy ending. In all the plays leading up to The Lady from the Sea he explores the conditions for freedom: freedom from prejudices, from public opinion, from the restrictions of one's own gender, from religious dogma and from familial inherited burdens. There has always been present in them a strong and clear notion of the possibility for liberation, of the possibility for the human being to work herself out of her restricted situation or, in theoretical terms, the possibility for the Hegelian slave to become a world citizen conscious of his own humanity, which Ibsen envisioned as being work, freedom and knowledge. Maybe it did not happen on the level of the single character, but the possibility, though diminishing, was always there. With The Lady from the Sea, Ibsen begins his exploration of the *post*-historical condition, realizing that the creative negativity does not disappear, but remains "unemployed", which essentially means that one cannot liberate herself from the irrational forces, "the stranger" in her, the troll, the devils, the "sickly conscience," the Freudian "id," or, as Egil Wyller also puts it: "[...] det som de gamle grekere kalte en daimon, romerne en genius, vi norrøne folkeslag en fylgje, og som Ibsen

tar opp til ustanselig og variert behandling – helt fra vestalinnen Furia i 'Catilina'." ("what the old Greeks called a demon, the Romans – a genius, the Nordic people – fylgje, and which Ibsen explored in play after play, beginning with the vestal virgin Furia in 'Catilina'"). The Lady from the Sea is Ibsen's last noble attempt to allot human rationality, the power of the mind, a decisive place, or to equate, in other words, being with knowledge.

Ibsen's contemporary critic Bredo Morgenstierne expresses, alongside with his touchingly euphoric comments on the play mentioned at the beginning of the present discussion, a suspicion that the optimism manifested in this play will endure and be carried on in the later works. This demonstrates for me an astonishing perceptiveness of Ibsen's true character and vision:

> (...) man denne Gang synes at aande en renere Luft, se fremad mod lysere Perspektiver, være kommen tilbage til en Verden, som vi føle os hjemme i, til Mennesker af samme Art som vi selv. Er nu Digteren "akklimatiseret" i denne Verden, eller vil han af "Kravet paa det gænseløse, det uopnaaelige drives ind igjen i Nattemørket" med de "sorte, lydløse Vinger" over sig?
>
> ([...] we, this time seem to be breathing air which is cleaner, to be looking at brighter possibilities, to have come back to a world to

> which we feel at home, to people who are of the same kind as us. Is the poet 'acclimatized' in this world, or, would he out of the 'longing for the limitless, the unreachable' be driven again 'in the darkness of the night' with the 'black, soundless wings' above him?)

Morgenstierne is unable to predict, but he knows that Ibsen's next play will reveal the answer: "We will have enough time to brood over this – until the next time we hear from him."

The play that follows The Lady from the Sea is Hedda Gabler: the story of the constricted, lonely and suicidal 29-year-old for whom no acclimatization is possible. Hedda Gabler demonstrates Ibsen's realization that "the keystone of sovereignty or autonomy rests on the manifestation of negativity – the condition of possibility of self-consciousness," and that "the privileged manifestation of negativity is death," as expressed by Georges Bataille (qtd. in Gemerchak 47). Or, as Kojève's puts it: "there is no freedom without death... only a mortal being can be free. One might say that death is the last and authentic 'manifestation' of freedom" (qtd. in Gemerchak 47).

With Hedda Gabler Ibsen's thought is fully in line with Bataille's later theory. As mentioned above, all of Ibsen's later works can be read as *a critique* of the Hegelian world view, in that they reveal its limitations. Hedda Gabler is Ibsen's

pure anti-Hegelian play. In the plays after it he, like Bataille, tends to remain *within* the Hegelian vocabulary in order to transgress it. The Master Builder, Little Eyolf, John Gabriel Borkman and When We Dead Awaken are an expression of Ibsen's radically changed view of humanity.

In order to gain a better vantage point for our discussion of Ibsen's last five plays, I will follow Bataille's gradual challenging of the "glorification of work" and the "sovereignty of servility" emphasized in Kojève's interpretation.

As mentioned in Chapter I, for Bataille, neither the negativity of the slave, nor that of the master disappear; the subjective experience of anxiety is irreducible, which means that "work itself becomes nothing less than the fear of death – the "absolute master" – objectified and avoided" (Gemerchak 52). Work is indeed the "internalization and repression" of the fear of death, and with it, through transforming the natural given world into a world of things, anxiety is mastered. But for Bataille, this overcoming of anxiety is the history of subordination and *not* the gaining of autonomy (as it is in the Hegelian system.) While he does not contest that the subordination of the natural given is "the crucial step toward human autonomy," what he disagrees with in Hegel is that "the introduction of a human world of individuals and things – and the subsequent development of work, articulate language, and scientific thought – effectively *binds* one to those things as to the means to some end: the development of the human freedom to transform the

world has the result of subordinating *what is,* the present moment, to what will be, the future" (53).

Yet, Bataille's "most expressly contested" subordination of the human being, the one that underlies the subordination to work and positive knowledge, is "the subordination to life itself." This notion in Ibsen is most vividly expressed in the character of Hedda Gabler where "the subordination to the concern for personal survival, and thus to the fear of death, is based on the misconception that individual existence, of itself, is the ultimate basis for meaning. A meaning that will presumably arrive at some point in the future" (53). In Hegel, the confrontation with death is the source for human self-consciousness and sovereignty, while Bataille has a different view on the matter: it is anguish that defines us as individuals, the anguish "inspired by the possible loss of one's particular existence, which comes from taking death seriously":

> It is not death which is serious, it always inspires horror, but if this horror dismays us, to the point of abdicating in order not to die, we give death its seriousness, which is the consequence of having accepted work. Humanly, the fear of death not overcome, and servile labor, which degrades and levels out, are one and the same thing – immense and miserable... (53)

In other words, history, or the humanized world of work and knowledge is for Bataille "a world of servility pure and simple." He extends his claims for degradation further to concern Man as well – the one who acts: "If [man] places the world in his power, this is to the extent that he forgets that he is himself the world: *he denies the world, but it is himself that he denies"* (my italics, Bataille, qtd. in Gemerchak 54).

A point in Bataille that is crucial for the understanding of my reading of Ibsen's later plays is that, for Bataille, the limitation of negativity only to productive activity and to producing a world of meaning, amounts to reducing the human being—something that Ibsen will come to realize in the later stages of his life. "On the most elementary level," comments Gemerchak, "through work and the perspective that engenders it we deny our intimacy or continuity with the natural world and with other beings. [...] the autonomy from the given gained by work at the same time constitutes a self-estrangement, a denial in something in us that is transcendent in becoming properly human" (55). This "something in us" which we both fear and search for is called by Bataille "intimacy." We fear it because it equals "the possible death of one's newly autonomous existence." As we shall see in the case of all Ibsen's later heroes:

> [O]nce distanced from it, the indeterminate ground of intimacy from which the distinct being arose came to exert a pull on the individual

> being, drawing it toward what was lost in becoming an individual. [...] insofar as intimacy – which precedes and exceeds individuality and thus is positioned at the boundary of the distinct individual – is effectively the absence of individuality, signifying the death of individual existence, its approach is perceived in anguish. (55)

Yet reaching this awareness is only possible "at the end of history," which in Ibsen's world is expressed by the group of middle-aged men going through a "mid-life crisis": Solness, Almers, Borkman and Rubek, for whom "work and the fear of dying are interdependent." Only *because* they are individuals can they fear the loss of this individuality: "It is in so far as the world of things has posited [man's] duration as the basic condition of his worth that [man] learns anguish. He is afraid of death as soon as he enters the system of projects that is the order of things" (Bataille, qtd. in Gemerchak 52). The same is the case with the 29-year-old Hedda, who in her own right, is experiencing a "quarter-life crisis"— something that makes the play one of the most popular of Ibsen's plays today.

In this sense, there is a major distinction between Hegel and Bataille, which is also reflected in the distinction between Ibsen's first and second period. For Hegel, the meaning of any negation is the anticipated result: to gain awareness of the meaning of life one *has* to remain alive since the value of life is preserved through its negation (and it is possible on the cross.) Bataille, on the other hand, is

interested in *intimacy,* which "*is there* at the moment the individual disappears *as an individual*, a moment that therefore cannot arrive for that individual" (56). Gemerchak specifies: "It cannot arrive as anticipated because it is simply suddenly there; it cannot arrive because there is no individual to greet it." (It is interesting to mention that a recent Norwegian production of Hedda Gabler constitutes a circus performance which occurs in the time between Hedda's pulling of the trigger and the moment the bullet enters her brain.) Bataille reverses the "Hegelian economics" in that the movement towards sovereignty "is no longer from the 'impossible' (violent loss, destructive negation) to the 'possible' (servile activity, knowledge) which recuperates the negation, but from the possible to an impossible that cannot be appropriated as another possibility, and which thus is proposed as a sovereign end, without qualification" (56) "Humanly," specifies Gemerchak, "the death that is negativity is not recognized as death, but rather as the productive labor of life," and concludes: "Bataille's sovereignty, on the other hand, reeks of inhumanity"—something which can with full validity be said about Ibsen's Hedda Gabler. It is a view which also unlocks the last four plays for a different insight into the human being.

Besides acknowledging the intimacy sensed in animal life, both Bataille and Ibsen return to primitive man, to the savage, in order to examine the pre-Reformation, pre-Hegelian consciousness. Solness and Hilde in The Master Builder

for example, are longing for the Viking times, and Bataille's discussion of the primitive ritual of sacrifice focuses on the desire for destruction, one that remains an end in itself, is focused on the moment and unpunished. Sacrifice thus amounts to "[detaching] the object from the real order of things and profane activity, so as to restore it to divine order" (57). What both Ibsen and Hegel seem to long for is the distinction between work and play, between the profane and the sacred.

"With the Hegelian economy," specifies Gemerchak, "the profane time became sacred time, and play became an insignificant diversion, serving in fact, to augment the ability to profane oneself more effectively" (57). The same can be said of the world of Ibsen's earlier plays, though they are more in line with Kojève- than with Hegel's point of view, for in Hegel "the development of History is the development of Spirit – the Absolute descending into the profane to fulfill itself as Absolute. There is no profane finite time, nor divine infinite time in themselves. Profane history is divine time – even if those who realize history don't know it – and the divine is fulfilled in the work of history." With Kojève, the goal of absolute knowledge is also presupposed from the start—"[it] is achieved by the fragmented activity of fragmented individuals whose actions are added together to form a totality called history." This can be said to be valid for all of Ibsen's earlier characters if one considers the economy of each individual play, the economy of all the works up to this point, *and* the economy of Ibsen's life trajectory overall. It is

the economy of the "project Henrik Ibsen" in the way he meticulously worked on it.

Neither Bataille, nor Ibsen dispute the development of history itself. What they sense, though, is that "the individual who has accomplished this history—and those who retain its principles—has done so at the price of losing the claim to moments of sovereignty." "By acting," writes Gemerchak, "one turns one's existence into a project to be realized, one denies the time of existence itself." Bataille would call this "paradoxical time: it is the putting off of existence to a later point," and also: "the absurdity of an endless deferral." As mentioned above, Ibsen expresses it as follows: "Når vi døde vågner [...] vi ser at vi aldri har levet" (593) ("When we dead awaken, we realize we have never lived"). That is why Ibsen's later heroes alter dramatically their way of existence: they challenge death, reject work and are thus free to live in the present moment. In the Hegelian/Kojèvian and early Ibsenian system all activity is "profane, rational and productive," and so is the society that this activity serves. At this point, writes Gemerchak, "the desire to *manifest* [the] excessive moments which disrupt the efficient functioning of that society becomes anathema" (58). This is the way that Hedda Gabler was first received by its contemporaries. I will quote only two reviews which are exemplary of its reception:

> Ja, det maa vel siges, at det dunkle denne Gang grænser saa betænkelig ind paa det ligefrem uforstaaelige, og at det abnorme i det skildrede Sjæleliv mangesteds gjør et saa fremmed Indtryk, at man selv med den bedste Vilje har vanskeligt for at følge Digteren i hans Tankegang og se med hans Syn. Ibsen har jo som Regel i denne Henseende en merkelig illuderende Evne [men] Hedda Gabler hverken forstaar vi eller tror vi paa. Hun er ikke i Slegt med de Mennesker, vi kjende, mindst af alle i de Omgivelser, hvor hun er hensat, paa hjemlig norsk Grund. (Morgenstierne, *Hedda*)
>
> (It must be said that this time the obscure borders so critically on the downright incomprehensible, and that the abnormal in the mentality of the described often gives such a distant impression, that even with the best of will it is difficult to follow the writer in his thinking and to see with his vision. Ibsen has as a rule been consistent in this respect [but] Hedda Gabler we neither understand, nor believe in. She is has nothing in common with the people we know, least of all in the environment where she is situated, namely – Norwegian ground.)

Here is another example echoing the public sentiment:

Alt i Alt kan Hedda Gabler neppe kaldes Andet end et uhyggeligt Fantasifoster, et af Digteren selv frembragt Uhyre i Kvindeskikkelse uden tilsvarende Forbillede i Virkelighedens Verden. At Skildringen af hende er gjennemført med virtuosmæssig Dygtighed, og at der ligger en vis dæmonisk Magt over Figuren, er ikke til det Gode. Saa meget mindre, som hun af Digteren er behandlet med, hvad der ialfald i høi Grad har Lighed med Sympathi. Det er jo nemlig ikke alene hendes fuldkomne Perversitet, det, at hun uden Spor af Betænkning bruger hvilketsomhelst Middel til Opnaaelse af hvilkensomhelst Hensigt, der giver hende Indflydelse paa sine Omgivelsers Skjæbne; men hun er desuden udstyret med en stor Overlegenhed over dem, hvad Intelligens og Personlighed angaar, - mere overfladisk tegnede, som de derhos Allesammen ere. Men dertil kommer, at ingen af dem - undtagen den irregulære Eilert Løvborg, der hæver sig op i Heddas høiere Sfære - er gaaet fri for en vis Ridikuleren fra Forfatterens Side. (Larsen)

(All in all, Hedda Gabler can barely be called anything else than a creepy product of fantasy, a monster presented in a female figure by the writer himself, which does not have a prototype in the real

> world. That her description is carried out with virtuous skill, and that there is in the figure a demonic power does not make it better. Even less so contributes the fact that she is treated by the author by what can be considered as sympathy. It is not only her complete perversity in using without a second thought any means to achieve any goal that gives her influence over the destiny of her environment, but she is also equipped with a great sense of superiority over them. As far as intelligence and personality is concerned they are more superficially described than in any of the others altogether. But in addition to that is the fact that none of them—except for the unusual Løvborg who raises himself to Hedda's higher sphere—has avoided a kind of ridicule on behalf of the author.)

These views belong of course to a "rational society," and if we equate that with the Hegelian system, we can understand why these moments of negativity, not contributing to the constitution of meaning, are denied: "the paradigm of these moments," as Gemerchak summarizes, "would be the risk of the master—desire not yielding to the concern for preservation—*if* that risk was not used to compel the constitution of meaning, thereby turning the risk into an investment that provides its sense" (59). Denied in such society is, in other words, the excessiveness of

desire, "desire that passes through and beyond any definite aim or object." Ibsen's ideas in the second part of his oeuvre amount to the Bataillian "attempt to release the excessive negativity of desire from the chains of the Hegelian system" (59). Both Bataille and Ibsen accomplish that by evoking primitive societies where "if one acquired prestige it was due to the ability to represent the sacred time of nonproductive consumption," and they look for "the sovereign moments to which Hegel remained blind."

Bataille elaborates on the conditions of sovereignty. As summarized by Gemerchak, in the first place, "sovereignty must not expose itself and is indifferent to recognition. [It is] elusive, sudden moments in which the course of everyday life is interrupted and one is thrown beyond its limits" (60). In addition, in these moments desire cannot be restrained by reason, they are instances of negativity "so negative that [...] can no longer be called negativity because *it does not covert itself into positive.*" Finally Gemerchak mentions that "it may be that such an instant is only possible once history has ended, the circle closed." (my italics, 60) This last condition is of greatest importance when considering Ibsen's work. Bataille's realization has in fact full validity for Ibsen's sensitivity as well:

> [The] instant [of sovereignty] cannot be 'most important' except to the extent that man no longer has anything to do, when he has found Hegelian gratification in which his own dissatisfaction is no longer

> connected to the active negation of such and such determined form, but to the negation, which no activity can absorb, of the human situation. (Bataille qtd in Gemerchak 60)

The Bataillian "economy of negativity" is one that does not relate negativity to the constitution of meaning. It is an economy "related to the sovereign moments of senseless expenditure, 'and finally in relation to the *loss* of meaning'" (Bataille quoted in Gemerchak 60).

Upon hearing that Lovborg has committed suicide, Hedda Gabler expresses her satisfaction: "Å assessor, ...hvilken befrielse der er i dette med Ejlert Løvrbog [...] for meg. En befrielse å vite at der dog virkelig kan skje noe frivillig modig i verden. Noe som der faller et skær av uvilårlig skjønnhet over (ISV 3:431). ("Ah, Mr. Brack... what a sense of release it gives, this affair with Ejlert Løvborg [...] for me. It's a liberation to know that an act of spontaneous courage is yet possible in this world. An act that has something of unconditional beauty" (OI 7:262). This notion expressed by Ibsen mirrors the observation Gemerchak makes in regard to Bataille's philosophy, namely that "despite all the apparent weight of his emphasis on death, destruction, and transgression, one may perceive the manner in which these elements have a certain levity to them, a liberating effect on the various burdens shouldered by mankind in an age of mature rationality, a blossoming of mundane life" (61). Gemerchak quotes Bataille's articulation of his own

philosophy "in most basic terms": it "consists in saying that all is play, that being is play", or in other words that "all is risk and all is chance" (61). While the scope of this study will not allow me to account for the specific parameters of these terms in Bataille, I will nonetheless discuss the way I find them expressed in the world of Ibsen's later theatrical pieces.

"Impotent Beauty Hates the Understanding"

The following paragraph by Bataille illuminates Hedda Gabler in an unprecedented way: "What Hegel [...] unleashes is not the violence of Nature, it is the energy, or the violence, of the Understanding—the Negativity of the Understanding—opposing itself to the pure beauty of the dream, which cannot act, which is impotent.

Indeed, the beauty of the dream is on that side of the world where nothing is yet separated from what surrounds us, where each element in contrast to the abstract objects of the Understanding, is given concretely, in space and time. But Beauty cannot *act.* It can only be and preserve itself. Through action it would no longer exist, since action would destroy what beauty is: beauty which seeks nothing, which is, which refuses to move itself but which is disturbed by the force of the Understanding. Moreover, beauty does not have the power to respond to the request of the Understanding, which asks it to uphold and preserve the work *human* death. Beauty is incapable of it, in the sense that to uphold that work, it would be

engaged in Action. Beauty is sovereign, it is an end, or it is not: that is why it is not susceptible to acting, why it is, even in principle, powerless and why it cannot yield to the active negation of the Understanding, which changes the world and itself becomes other than it is.

This beauty without consciousness of itself *cannot therefore* really—but not for the same reason as life, which 'recoils in horror from death and wants to save itself from annihilation'—bear death and preserve itself in it. This impotent beauty at least suffers from feeling the breakup of the profoundly indissoluble Totality of what is (of the concrete-real). Beauty would like to remain the sing of an accord of the real with itself" (*Hegel, Death* 78)

Hedda Gabler is a 29-year-old woman who married a man she does not love; she was simply doing what society expected from a young woman her age. At the opening of the play she has just returned from a six-month honeymoon with her husband Jorgen Tesman, who has just received a doctoral degree and is hoping for an academic position at the local university. Tesman has been raised by two old aunts, and his view of being is petty and straight-forward, something which Hedda resents. Tesman and his occupation—researcher in cultural history—is Ibsen's first attack against the presumption that organized knowledge will lead the way to happiness for the human being. The young Ph.D. Tesman is considered by everyone to be an academic star and his research is viewed as important

contribution to human knowledge. Yet through the power of irony it is revealed that his work is an epitome of useless gathering of facts and of a futile attempt for their interpretation in a meaningful way. Tesman's thesis is "an account of the domestic crafts in medieval Brabant" and involves for the most part "collecting things and sorting them out," something which Hedda justifiably calls "sickening." The fact that this learned man could not make any significant contribution to the real life experience of anyone in his environment who might have needed it, and especially his wife, is eloquent.

A telling episode about the constrictive environment which Hedda has wrongly entered is the moment when Tesman, the bright learned man, receives from his aunt his old slippers. He becomes ecstatic about his gift. It is further revealed that his fondness of his old slippers has been a frequent topic of conversation between him and his young bride during their honeymoon. He is a man who "can't get too many" academic publications because "one must keep up with everything that's written," yet he was not able to say anything meaningful to Hedda during their courtship when he was following her home. One can continue bringing up examples in order to emphasize Ibsen's clearly expressed attitude towards knowledge or learnedness in the Hegelian sense, but it is not necessary since it is explicitly stated a couple of times by Hedda in her conversations with her friend Judge Brack. Through them the term "fagmenneske" ("academic," "a

specialist," "an expert") gradually acquires the meaning of someone who has a limited view of the experience of life and is not able to understand anything different. Authority and certainty are thus questioned: when Hedda expresses her satisfaction at Løvborg's suicide and speaks about "uvilkårlig skjønnhet" ("unconditional beauty,") she receives a condescending smile from Brack to which she replies: "Å jeg vet nok hva De vil si. For De er dog et slags fagmenneske, De også..." (431) ("I know what you are going to say. Because you are something of an academic too, in your own line [...]" (262).

In contrast to Tesman- and Brack's occupation and world view is situated Ejlert Løvborg's attitude towards life. In the past he had been involved in endless partying—something which he calls livsbegjæret ("the lust for life.") His academic career was not a priority, which can be interpreted as a sovereign attitude pertaining to "a master." This sovereign way of living does not fit the societal structure of work and progress, and Løvborg is thrown overboard: he loses the support of his family and gets close to being an outcast in society. Eventually he changes his ways and is determined to show everyone that he deserves to be respected. Quickly and easily he writes and publishes a study on the history of civilization which he *knows* will be "enormously praised" and nobody "could disagree with it," though for him "there's nothing much to it." Soon after this first publication, equally quickly and painlessly, he completes a second volume to it, which deals with "fremtidens

kulturmakter" and "fremtidens kulturgang" (the future course of civilization.) One can assume that this second book, just as the play "Hedda Gabler" is going to be very controversial since he admits that it will require an already favorable attitude towards the author. If it is for him "det riktige" ("the real thing") and is "det som jeg selv er i" (408) ("has something of [himself] into it"(216).

Løvborg also assures Tesman that his goal is not an academic position, but simply "to outshine" him "in reputation". Yet, in the course of the play, it is revealed that while on a revel, quite drunk, Ejlert loses both the manuscript of his brilliant new book containing the key to the future of humanity, as well as the respect of this same humanity which will no longer listen to his voice.

The irreversible loss of Ejlert's work of genius I interpret as one of the most bitter expressions of Ibsen's perception of the paradox that the human being and his existence is. Just as Ejlert had been able to conceive and write this thesis *because of* who he is, he is also, for the very same reason, losing it irretrievably. The contradictions within him are irreconcilable. Ejlert's bohemian attitude makes him a Master who is destined to extinction in the meticulously structured world of the Slaves. Furthermore, because of his sovereign attitude, the society of Slaves refuses to consider *his* truth about the state of the matter since the knowledge from a person like him could not be considered valid for a society based on ultimately different principles and regulations.

That Løvborg is fully conscious of the dynamics playing out in his life is certain. His sovereign attitude is inherent and deliberate. Throughout the course of the play it becomes clear that he will not be able to adjust to society. The process of "reformation" which he had undergone had clearly been an experience foreign to him, something he did not believe in and could not reconcile with. In his description of the influence that his assistant Tea Elvsted had on him, he expresses a view that can be identified as a sovereign consciousness discarding the slavish "economy of life." When Hedda suggests that his night of wild and senseless debauch may be just an episode, Løvborg replies: "Det blir ikke ved denne natt alene. Jeg vet det så sikkert. Men så er der *det* at jeg gidder ikke leve den slags liv heller. Ikke nu på nytt. Det er livsmoten og livstrosset som hun har knekket i meg" (424). ("It won't stop at last night. I know that well enough. But then there is another thing, I just can't be bothered with that kind of life either. Not now again. She's broken my courage, and my defiance" (248). The internal paradox within Løvborg carries no possibility of resolution.

Hedda Gabler is the second character in the play that displays the same notion. She is one of the most enigmatic of Ibsen's heroines and therefore one of the hardest to perform, simply because there is little in the play that can explain what she is thinking and the rationale behind her actions. The character lacks, in other words, a "psychological explanation." Hedda remains throughout in the realm

of the intuitive and non-discursive. There are stage remarks about her behavior, but only a few glimpses of verbal rationalization.

Hedda is first introduced through the conversation between Berte, the maid in the house, and Aunt Julie, Tesman's old aunt, both of them representing typical features of the Bataillian "slavish" existence: hard work, gradual progress, petty mentality and constant financial concerns. Hedda is the daughter of a general, she has been raised with no clear role model, as far as the expectations from her gender are concerned. The attitude displayed by the two women is one of awe and admiration for Hedda's beauty and different behavior. She is clearly described as a sovereign Master: "General Gabler's daughter. The way she was used to having things in the General's time. Do you remember her riding along the road with her father? In that long black habit? And with a feather in her hat?" (172).

In all her actions and reasoning, Hedda Gabler displays an attitude of someone living "at the end of history": "when everything has been accomplished and all there is left is to fill time with fruitless pursuits." (Bataille) Her father's occupation, the only thing revealed about her background, is not a profession typically associated with mental or physical labor. Hedda gets married because she "had really danced [herself] tired" and Tesman was "pathetically eager to be allowed to support [her]." She had been in love with Ejlert Løvborg but early on had understood the paradox about him and had realized that a life with him would

mean social death for her. Submitting to the fear of death she decides to succumb to necessity and take the slavish way of subordinate existence. It is clear that while Hedda has not expected to be happy, at least there was a hope in her that she would be comfortable and entertained. She is aware of the excess of unemployed negativity within her, though she cannot name it, but is hoping that she will have the means to engage her negativity in those "meaningless pursuits" that would keep her entertained. Marrying Tesman seemed to be the road to fulfilling that expectation.

At the outset of the play Tesman discusses with his aunt the financial parameters of being married to Hedda: he and his young wife embarked first on a six-month honeymoon only supported by his research fellowship, which made his situation quite strenuous, yet "Hedda had to have that trip, Aunt!" he explains. Hedda also comes back home with a load of suitcases, which implies the amount of purchases she had made. It is also revealed in the course of the conversation that the young couple has purchased an expensive house, counting only on the prospect of the upcoming professorship of Tesman. When it becomes clear that this appointment may not be granted and that the young couple may be facing financial hardship, Hedda refuses to budge to the new circumstances. When encouraged by their financial advisor Brack to refrain from more purchases, Hedda replies: "This can't change anything so far as that's concerned." Yet she has to slowly resolve to

the fact that her plans and hopes for at least being entertained may not be fulfilled: she is not going to get the horse or the servant she had been promised, and she is not going to be able to hold parties for her friends as she had been planning.

Another profound revelation that Hedda has come to make during her six-month long honeymoon is that the life of financial independence and granted entertainment has a price she may not be able to bear. She had not taken into account that marrying someone entails an incessant cohabitation with him. Suddenly she realizes that she is no longer free, in the sense that she needs to endure the conversations and behavior of her husband and his family, regardless of how boring and distant to her they might be. She does not have the choice of walking out on him, and her frustration gets rapidly aggravated: "Og så det som er det aller uutholdelige... evig og alltid å skulle være sammen med... med en og den samme..." (403) ("And then the most unbearable thing of all... everlastingly having to be together with... the self-same person. Hearing about the history of civilization day in and day out..." (205) Towards the end of the play she "knuger hendene som fortvilet" ("clenches her hands in desperation") and exclaims "Å, jeg forgår, jeg forgår i alt dette her!" ("Oh, it'll kill me... it'll kill me all this! ...this farce" (255). Her behavior reflects her exasperation. She purposefully insults Tesman's old aunt and explains later to Brack: "...slikt noe kommer over meg rett som det er. Og så *kan* jeg ikke la det være (405) ("[...] these things just suddenly

come over me. And then I can't resist them. [...] Oh, I don't know myself how to explain it." (210) In Ibsen's neatly structured dramatic world, where everything so far has been seemingly successfully explained and brought to a resolution, this utterance comes to bear a tremendous significance. In my interpretation, this is Ibsen's first admission that some aspects of the human being simply cannot be explained. It is the first signal of his realization that "at the end of history" human negativity remains unemployed, with no outlet and no possibility for satisfaction. Hedda's actions represent that which remains left out from the Hegelian system of economy.

Hedda's realization about the essence of humanity also makes her discard maternity as a possible solution for her negativity. Maternity, chosen as an outlet for unemployed negativity equals work and is essentially an escape from death: "Jeg har ikke anlegg til slikt noe, herr assessor. Ikke noe krav til meg! [...] Mangen gang synes jeg at jeg bare har anlegg til en eneste ting i verden. [...] Til å kjede livet av meg (407). ("I've no aptitude for such a thing, Mr. Brack. No responsibilities for me, thank you! [...] I've often thought there's only one thing in the world I'm any good at. [...] Boring myself to death" (213). Hedda has one last resort to engage in meaningless gratuitous activities and combat being "excruciatingly bored," or, as she puts it: "one thing at least that I can pass the time

with," and that is shooting her pistols, an activity which implies taking a risk or playing with death.

During the six months of Hedda's honeymoon and the two days since her return, her environment becomes increasingly constricted and eventually crumbles onto her. In addition to her frustration with her newly acquired family and her shrunken financial means she finds out that the man she truly loves but rejected for the fear of death has returned to town completely changed and is involved with another woman. Ejlert cannot tolerate even the smallest quantity of drinking and has therefore quit drinking altogether. He has succumbed to societal pressure and has altered his behavior. Ejlert's "transformation" makes Hedda's existence even less tolerable. She is weak, "feig," "a coward," and has retreated to slavish existence in the face of death, but has all along admired Løvborg's sovereign attitude and has believed that such existence was possible. She provokes Løvborg to behave sovereignly: she is urging him to have a drink, which amounts to risking his life. ("There is nothing lethal about cold punch,") says Brack, and everyone knows that the opposite is true. The stakes are high, but in her attitude towards being this risk is important, for if Ejlert remains a master of himself in this one moment, he will return "med vinløv i håret, [het] og freidig ("with vine leaves in his hair—flushed and confident,") and will be "en fri mann for alle sine dage" (415) ("a free man for the rest of his life" (230). Not surprisingly Løvborg loses

control of himself, loses his manuscript, and ends up fighting with the police, which essentially equals his second social death. Both him and Hedda realize that the only sovereign way of being left for him is death, and she gives him one of her pistols asking him to make sure that "det skjedde i skjønnhet" (425) ("it happens beautifully.")

Hedda believes that experiencing Løvborg's death will become a confirmation of *her* truth of humanity which she views as being unconditional beauty, sovereignty and mastery. In Løvborg's case it will unavoidably be expressed through his death. She is thus deeply moved by Judge Brack's account of Løvborg's presumed suicide and comments: "[...] Ejlert Løvborg had the courage to live his life in his own fashion. And then now... this! This beautiful act. That he had the courage to tae his leave of life... so early." (262) While to everyone else Løvborg's act is completely incomprehensible and they speculate whether it is a sign of madness or desperation, Hedda exclaims: "Endelig en dåd!" ("At last... a really courageous act!") and is frustrated that no one besides herself can see it in this way: "Jeg sier at dette her er der skjønnhet i" (430) ("I say that there is beauty in this deed").

To Hedda's deepest disappointment, Ejlert did not have the capacity to regain his sovereignty. The real circumstances of his death are far from Hedda's vision of it. She imagines it as him firing a gun at his chest, bold and proud, with

"vine leaves in his hair." Instead, as she learns, he was accidentally shot in the abdomen during a fight at a bordello. In addition, Judge Brack informs her that he has recognized her pistol at the police station, and that she is in his power if she wishes that he keeps quiet about it. As Hedda attempts to gain some kind of liberation from her constricted paradoxal existence increase, the results she gains only seem to provoke more frustration and pain for her. Her first attempt to "liberate" Løvborg has failed, and so has the second. Her rival Thea is about to start working with her husband and Hedda is informed that she is not needed for their endeavor. It is also implied that Hedda is pregnant. Finally, Judge Brack discloses to her that she is in a subjugated position to him and will have to put up with his indecent sexual moves. "Å det latterlige og det lave, det legger seg som en forbannelse over alt *det* jeg bare rører ved," (432) ("Everything I touch seems destined to turn into something mean and farcical,") concludes a desperate Hedda. Brack summarizes the mentality of the slave: "Man pleier ellers å finne seg i det uungåelige" (433) ("We usually manage to adjust to the inevitable.") Hedda's response to this is shooting a bullet through her temple, which I interpret as her act of revealing her truth of humanity. Paradoxically, her act is also highly inhumane since she cannot remain alive.

As Ibsen's first "Bataillian" play Hedda Gabler severs through his oeuvre and alters it irreversibly. It demonstrates Ibsen's lost faith that the human being will

ever achieve "the third Empire of the Spirit." There is a bitter realization in him that "at the end of history" the negativity that the human being is, is still there and remains unemployed, causing sadness and frustration. The reason that Ibsen (unconsciously) and Bataille (deliberately) are able to engage with the Hegelian system is that it feels as if it has already been realized in modern society. Both of them reach the point of living "at the end of history," though with Ibsen it happens much slower than with Bataille. It takes Ibsen almost a life-time. A quote from Bataille can easily be attributed to Ibsen as well: "I think of my life – or better yet, its abortive condition, the open wound that my life is – as itself constituting a refutation of Hegel's closed system." The titan of spirit Ibsen, rising from his lower social status, working, moving on, negating, fighting, changing—in an unwavering effort to attain freedom and happiness—ends up being bitter and disillusioned at the end of his life, pronouncing the caustic epilogue: "Når vi døde vågner [...] vi ser at vi aldri har levet" (593) (When we dead awaken, we realize that we have never lived).

If the character of Hedda Gabler is so popular today, it is because her actions seem perfectly coherent to the audience of readers and viewers. Although her behavior shocks, it certainly does not seem contradictory. She seemed sporadic and ridiculous only to Ibsen's contemporaries in whom she provoked laughter, but ever since then audiences have increasingly been captivated by her, while critics

have been desperately trying to explain why. If Hedda is appealing today, it is because she represents the modern human being that is desperately looking for a way to reconcile the uncontrollable irrational forces within her with the slaves' neatly structured social environment. Hedda is probably the only one of Ibsen's characters who does not have any project of and for herself. She is a sheer unemployed negativity and remains such to the end. The present-day popularity of Hedda Gabler is symptomatic of the existence of similar notions within Western audiences. I will discuss the play's recent production life in Chapter VI.

If we are to remain within George Bataille's realm of thinking, we can argue that, through depicting a character like Hedda and sacrificing her, Ibsen provides both himself and us with a near-death experience which puts life in a different perspective and, in the ideal case, becomes the impetus for engaging in positive, life affirming projects.

Ibsen's next play, The Master Builder, introduces the closed cycle of Ibsen's last four plays. They demonstrate, in a much more acceptable way than Hedda Gabler, that Ibsen's thought has surpassed the Hegelian and Kojèvian realms and can now fully be equated with Bataille's. To use metaphors from the play, the Master Builder has realized that building church towers (truth found in Spirit) and "building homes for the people" (the work of the Kojèvian slave) "isn't worth a brass farthing" because "people have no use for these homes of theirs. It

doesn't help them to be happy" (OI 7:439). ("Det å bygge hjem for mennesker, det er ikke fem øre verdt, [...] Menneskene har ikke bruk for disse her hjemmene sine. Ikke for å være lykkelige, ikke" (ISV 3:480). Instead, he has decided to build "luftslotter" ("castles in the air") with his young potential mistress, which I interpret as his desire to explore those parts of himself which have so far remained well-hidden and neglected. He wants to attempt to do something with his unemployed negativity with the hope of attaining happiness and satisfaction. The positive outcome of this attempt inevitably depends on the outcome of the Master Builder's facing death in order to recuperate the truth of his humanity. Not surprisingly, he does not survive the encounter. Thus, Ibsen's final words on the destiny of the human being and its capacity for happiness and freedom are deeply tragic. While I will not go at length into the three plays following The Master Builder, I want to make the point that they reiterate the same wisdom, expressed also in this stanza by Rilke, quoted by Gemerchak:

> ...always, everywhere,
> turned toward the world of objects, never outward.
> It fills us. We arrange it. It breaks down.
> We rearrange it, then break down ourselves. (55)

While in Hedda Gabler Ibsen discussed an extreme case in order to express his newly found wisdom, the last four of his plays are constructed in a much more

approachable way, conducting his message in a subtle, easier to grasp way. One might say that, in a way, in these plays Ibsen steps back and deliberates on the problem in a more consistent and gradual manner.

Halvard Solness, the main protagonist in the The Master Builder, is a strong charismatic personality. He comes from a family of humble means, "a God-fearing home out in the country." He "started as a poor country lad" who is now "at the top of [his] profession." Solness has, in other words, managed to slowly and gradually work himself up to the highest professional levels, acquiring on the way financial prosperity and the respect of his fellow citizens. To achieve this he has worked hard, but it is mainly the inner driving force within him, the powerful impetus for success that had been driving him forward. He married a woman who was about to inherit a large property and he did not hesitate to use any means to break his competitors or manipulate anyone he needed to. The description of his appearance is eloquent: "Han er en noe eldre mann, sunn og kraftig, med tettklippet, kruset hår, mørk knebelsbart og mørke tykke øyenbryn. Han bærer en grågrønn, tilknappet jakke med ståkrave og brede brystlag." (437) ("He is a man of mature years, strong and vigorous, with close-cute curly hair, ark moustache, and dark bushy eyebrows. He wears a gray-green jacket, buttoned-up, with a high collar and broad revers." (358) We find out that the man from whom he learnt the trade is now working *for* him and does not trust his own judgment about the abilities of his own son. Old

Brovik *needs* confirmation from the Master Builder that his son can build, and he insistently begs for it. When he is falsely told that his son "hasn't really learnt anything," he discloses the powerful impetus for success in the Master Builder: "You hadn't learnt much about the business either, when you were working for me. But that didn't stop you from launching out. [...] Or from getting on. You went and left me standing... and a lot of other people as well." (361)

At the outset of the play it becomes clear that Solness is pretending to be infatuated with his secretary in order to keep her fiancé working in his office. He is married to a woman from whom he has "tappet alt livsblodet fra henne" ("drained all [the] life's blood") and feels "levende lenket til den døde" (474) ("chained alive to this dead woman.") While he is perceived by everyone to be a happy and successful person, he feels frustrated and limited, burdened by a deep feeling of guilt towards his wife. He considers it his own responsibility that she is no longer joyful and vivacious. After building church towers and ordinary houses, Solness has now built a new house for himself, but recognizes that this will never be "et hjem" ("a home") for him. The Master Builder has been, in other words, up to this point, a perfect example of the Kojèvian slave: powerfully striding ahead, believing in his own strength, will and capacity to emerge as a happy and free sovereign. The play captures a decisive moment in the life of this strong self-project: a moment of recapitulation and change.

As Solness begins struggling with his own frustration that success has not made him happy but has instead exacerbated his feeling of guilt and his fear of retribution, a young woman suddenly enters his life. This is "exactly what [he] most needed," comments the Master Builder. She provokes him to revisit important moments of his life and to see them in a new light. This ultimately results in drastic changes in his behavior, which, not surprisingly is characterized by his wife and his doctor as "madness."

Hilde Wangel was thirteen years old when she first met the Master Builder. He had finished building the church tower in her home town and had climbed the scaffolding all the way up to the high top in order to place a wreath on his own creation. That act impressed her deeply. It was so bold and daring, the fearlessness with which it was approached – so grand, that the young woman was captivated forever by the human being which had the capacity to carry it out. She also heard the Master Builder sing a song while on top of the tower (later he tells her he was talking with God,) which added to her admiration. Hilde recalls that later that afternoon she was kissed by the Master Builder "mange mange ganger" ("many many times") and was promised that he would come back for her in ten years, would make her a princess, and would give her a kingdom. When he did not return she decided to go to him and claim what was promised to her. On the day when the ten years had passed she shows up at his home and demands: "kongeriket – på

bordet" ("the kingdom – on the table.") While Solness refuses that he had done anything like that, he concedes that he "må ha *tenkt* på alt dette her [...] *villet* det, *ønsket* det, hatt *lyst* til det" (451) ("must have *thought* it all [...] must have willed it... wished it... desired it" (384). I interpret this as Solness' realization about the excess of negativity in him which does not belong in his neatly planned life of work, marriage, progress and success. While he had been able to ignore it while struggling ahead, he now recognizes it and is faced with the inevitability of dealing with it. Hilde's persona and sovereign attitude touches on the core of his being, something which Bataille calls "intimacy." It kindles his desire to reconnect with it and this becomes a crucial first step towards authentic being and happiness: "Isn't it strange...," he tells Hilde, "The more I think about it, the more I seem to have been tormenting myself for years... Trying to identify... some experience I felt I must have forgotten. But I never discovered what it might have been" (389). ("Jo mer jeg tenker over det nu, ...så står det for meg som om jeg i hele lange år har gått her og pint meg med... [...] å komme *på* noe... noe sånn *opplevet,* som jeg syntes jeg måtte ha glemt igjen. Men aldri så fikk jeg tak i hva det kunne være" (453).

Solness and Hilde have similar existential experience and they share a specific language to discuss it. They try to capture a way to speak of the powers in them, their unemployed negativity. It is a language expressing a sensitivity which remains incomprehensible for anyone else. They speak of the "devils" in them, "the

troll in us [...] that calls on the powers outside." Solness compares Hilde to "a wild forest bird" and a sunrise. It is important to point out that they distinguish between the "light devils" and the "dark devils" in the human being, which I interpret as the distinction between negativity which is productive and belongs to the Hegelian/Kojèvian system of economy, and the excess of negativity, the "unemployed negativity" which remains hidden and surfaces only at the "end of history." Solness is deeply frustrated at this new experience and blames "him," whose "honor and glory" he served building churches, and who nonetheless "let loose this troll within [him] to rampage about as it will. He who bade them all [devils] to be ready night and day to minister to [him]" (438). His interpretation of the loss of his two little children is that God wanted him to "have nothing else to cling to. No love or happiness or anything like that" so he could spend his whole life *serving* – "building for Him" (439). Solness then defies what he feels is an imposed limitation, by accomplishing an act which asserts his human independence. Climbing to the top of the church tower he built he risks his life, faces death and manages to alter his life trajectory: "Så gjorde jeg det *umulige*" (475) ("I did the *impossible*,") he tells Hilde. He believes that he has become a sovereign who now knows the path to happiness and satisfaction. His hard work in service to people is what will bring him the feeling of fulfillment and the joy of living: "And as I stood there on high, at the very top, and as I hung the wreath on

the weathercock, I spoke to Him: Listen to me, Almighty One! From this day forward, I too will be free. A master builder free in his own field, as you are in yours. Never again will I build churches for you. Only home for the people" (439) Unfortunately, Solness ends up being disappointed in his expectation. After years of hard work he discovers that this had not brought him the awaited freedom and happiness. He struggles a lonely and bitter battle with his internal demons.

Hilde is the sovereign who is the necessary catalyst within the economy of the play provoking the change in the Master Builder. She is a free unsubordinated spirit, possessing everything that goes against the slavish existence. She acts fully undisturbed by the established and accepted societal norms: she does not read books because there is nothing useful in them, she does not care how she dresses and has left her father's home for good. She certainly does not want to study or work: "Nei, takk, det skal vi ikke ha noe av. [...] for her er da vel annet å ta seg til enn slikt noe." (449) ("No, thank you – we're not having anything of that! There must be better things to do here than that.") She is also not concerned that the Master Builder is married, and confidently comes to his home with no luggage or money—"But hell! What's it matter!" She is in search of something she is convinced belongs to her. Solness is inevitably provoked by this attitude: "You know, I like you for that!" (380) He gradually gains a different self-consciousness and starts behaving as a sovereign as well. This is precisely what Hilde wants: to

see him as a Master—grand and unsubordinated, just as she remembers him from their first encounter when he risked his life. "[It] was wonderfully exciting, standing down there and looking up at you," recalls Hilde, "Imagine now – if he were to fall! [...] It was marvelous – terribly exciting! I couldn't believe any builder in the world could have built such an enormously high tower. And then you yourself went and stood right at the very top! As large as life!" (382) ("Tenk om han nu falt utover! [...] For det var så forferdelig deilig og spennende! Jeg kunne ikke skjønne at der fantes en byggmester i hele verden, som kunne bygge så umåtelig høyt tårn. [...] Og så at De sto aller øverst der oppe selv! Lys levende!" (449) This is how Solness had inhabited her imagination – he is the human being that has achieved "the Kingdom" that she also wants and needs.

In order for Solness to change his life again, he needs to carry out a similarly risky deed as he did the first time he altered his views and life trajectory. Having realized that "building homes for people isn't worth a brass farthing," he wants to explore the meaningless act of eroticism with his young friend—something they call "building castles in the air." They characterize it as ""det deiligste i verden," ("the loveliest thing in all the world,") which are "så nemme å ty inn i" (476) ("where one can take refuge in" (432). In order for this to happen, Solness has to face death again. Incited by Hilde he agrees to climb to the top of the tower built on his new home and hang the wreath of flowers there. "Let me see you

standing on high again!" implores him Hilde. Solness is able to get to the top and hang the wreath but immediately after that falls down to his death. "Han maktet det altså dog ikke." ("So in fact he couldn't do it") concludes Solness' competitor Ragnar. "Men helt til toppen kom han. Og jeg hørte harper i liften" (482) ("But he got right to the top. And I heard harps in the air") triumphantly replies Hilde. The play thus becomes Ibsen's bitter proclamation of his realization of the paradoxality of human existence. Hilde's belief that there is a human being that lives a proud and insubordinate life is thus merely an illusion. The Kingdom which she claims Solness promised is in fact unattainable. The allusion with "The Third Kingdom" from the earlier part of Ibsen's works is not accidental, and I interpret Solness' death as Ibsen's realization that "The Third Kingdom," the realm of freedom and happiness, is impossible to achieve.

Not surprisingly, Ibsen's contemporaries were puzzled by the play. Bredo Morgenstierne, whose opinions on other plays were previously quoted describes it as a "step back" and concludes that this play has to be performed in order to be believable: "Men uden et saadant ydre Tilknytningspunkt til Kjød og Blod har vi vanskeligt for at tro paa disse Personer eller forstaa dem." (Byggmester) (Without an external connection to flesh and blood it is difficult for us to believe these personalities and to understand them.)

Ibsen's last three plays do not offer a different vision, but his next play, Little Eyolf, proposes a different idea about how to handle "unemployed negativity" at "the end of history." Alfred Almers, feeling guilty for the handicap of his son, searches for something meaningful to dedicate his life to: from writing his book on "human responsibility," to deciding to devote his life to his son, he is unable to find a source for happiness. Having to deal with his wife's sensuous passion and with his love for his half-sister with whom, as it turns out later, he is actually not physically related, he is in a constant state of quiet desperation. What makes this play stand out from the rest of Ibsen's last plays, is that at the end, the main protagonist and his wife seem to have acquired a social consciousness which makes them decide to devote their lives to service to the poor children in their neighborhood. This I interpret as a possible solution proposed by Ibsen for living "at the end of history": namely, service to those who have not yet reached that point in their lives.

Ibsen's next two plays, John Gabriel Borkman and When We Dead Awaken, are far from offering any resolution to the predicament of their main protagonists. Both Borkman and Rubek are strong men with a powerful internal drive within them, smart and strong, they end up disappointed at the choices they have made in their lives. Bitter and unhappy, they defy their existence and confront

death but without the illusion of surviving, yet with the consciousness that this is the only act that will make them emerge as sovereign and make them feel "alive."

While indeed Solness has to resurrect in order to live a happy life with Hilde, and Borkman, Rubek and Irene have to survive in order to alter the way they live their lives, one might argue that this realization—"to awaken from death and realize you haven't lived", or in other words: to view your life as wasted—is a faulty one. For if Ibsen's heroes had not been through these experiences, if they had not worked themselves "through history," they would not have been able to reach this state of unemployed and frustrated negativity "at the end of history." This is the essential paradoxality of human existence: that only *after* one has struggled slavishly, believing in obtaining happiness and satisfaction, only *after* being disappointed at their lack and having to deal with an excess of "unemployed negativity," can one attain clarity and make a resolution to alter their life trajectory. Solness, Borkman, Almers and Rubek slowly realize that "the closer [their] lives come to being their own creation, the more drastically [they are] cut from that life"(Debord, Guy qtd. in Gemerchak 55). Yet one can also draw constructive wisdom from these plays: recognizing as early as possible the different dimension about ourselves can prompt us early on to acquire a different view of existence and make us change the way we live our lives towards a more fulfilling life experience.

CHAPTER V

Current Performance and Reception

The tragedies of Ibsen's last plays are nowadays for the most part avoided, to an extent because "unemployed negativity" has indeed become "recognized negativity." "Dying" and "resurrecting" can also be viewed symbolically, as director Jo Strømgren points out in his discussion of When We Dead Awaken printed in the program for the production: "There are many ways to die. If you realize that your life has been built on false premises and you choose to throw away everything—this is also a form of death." We reach this point young enough, and are able "to die," symbolically speaking, and "resurrect" with a different life. I would like to propose in the following chapter my view of the awareness that exists in the artistic world of the relevance of these plays. Art reflects the current prevailing notions within society, and is indicative of the dynamics which govern it internally. I will thus focus on a few recent productions of Ibsen's last plays.

As mentioned in the beginning, Hedda Gabler enjoyed phenomenal popularity in the US in the 1990's, so much so that in its December 26, 2001 issue, *The New York Times* proclaimed Hedda the theatrical "Anti-Heroine of the Year." In its attempt to explain the play's "recent sweep across the United States," the author of the article, Stephen Kinzer, had sought opinions both from actresses who

had played Hedda, as well as from critics and intellectuals. The results, to use the words of director Ron Daniels, were "not terribly comforting."

This dissertation attempts to present the Ibsen of my generation, *Generation X,* which grew up and matured at "the end of history": the late 80s and the 90s; This is a generation which moved quickly, uninhibited, through careers and relationships, and has a strong affinity with the 29-year-old Hedda Gabler and her friends, all young adults: Tea, Tesman, Løvborg and Brack, all of them confused, unsatisfied, and desperate in a way.

I am referring to the period of relative peace in the 90s, probably the most peaceful decade of the century, after the end of the Cold War, when even communist China had become a friend, Cuba was opening up, Israel and Palestine negotiating, the stock-market blooming, employment rates rising, the welfare system expanding. This was the time of consumerism and globalization, of post-national formations, the time before September 11th and the new global antagonisms, before old conflicts reignited, and new ones emerged: the Palestinian suicide bombers, Al-Qaeda, the war in Iraq, NATO falling apart, North Korea's defiance, Europe splitting, etc. There had of course been tensions and conflicts around the world all along, but they were always somehow in the periphery, or even outside of our interest, marginal and partial—they simply did not concern us. We did not need to scatter much of our time and energy on social and political

issues. We could focus on our own development and careers, on our personal relationships—all in the context of unquestionable liberal democracy, which had "undoubtedly" asserted itself. We moved and achieved, but only to discover that something was somehow wrong. Regardless of the best conditions in which we navigated, regardless of the fast fulfillment of all our goals, we were not satisfied. What was wrong? There was no one and nothing to blame: gender inequality, stifling marriages, financial crises—all of these seemed to be irrelevant explanations. The phenomenon quickly found its researchers who named it "The Quarter-life Crisis" (Hassler).

Part of this chapter will focus on a recently created film based on Hedda Gabler since it illuminates my discussion in a brilliant way. I am going to approach it through the topic of adapting a play to film, and one of the first issues that reveals itself when thinking about it is the very fundamental question of purpose: *why* make a film out of a superbly constructed dramatic piece, which Hedda Gabler (and for that matter most of Ibsen's plays) undoubtedly is? What makes such an act necessary? In his informative study on the art of filmmaking, Louis Gianetti points out: "Some commentators believe that if a work of art has reached its fullest artistic expression in one form, an adaptation will inevitably be inferior," and concludes: "There is a good deal of sense in this view for we've seen how literature and film tend to solve problems differently, *how the true content of each medium is*

organically governed by its form" (my italics, Gianetti 386). In other words, how can the content of the play Hedda Gabler and the content of the film Hedda Gabler remain the same if they use fundamentally different language systems and use fundamentally different spectrums of technique to convey meaning? This is indeed a big issue to be resolved, so much so that Gianetti suggests that most often it is easier to write a completely new script than adapt an already existing one. Maureen Thomas, in addition, dedicates her presentation at the 1998 Seminar "Ibsen on screen," held at the Center for Ibsen Studies, to the exploration of this very same particular question. Her talk is namely titled: "Classics on the Screen—Why Do We Do It," and in it stresses several reasons for this undertaking. She discusses different types of adaptations and points out several examples for successes and failures.

I, on the other hand, had taken it for granted that someone else besides me, (in this case the director of the film who had first staged Hedda Gabler as a theatre production,) had, in his fascination with this enigmatic piece, simply and most naturally continued to explore it, yet in a different way. He used a different medium to reflect upon it, to deal with it, and to unravel not only the core of Hedda's tragedy and demise, but also that of the other four young adults whom we encounter: Tea, Tesman, Løvborg and Brack. In other words, the continuous fascination and engagement remained unquestioned for it seemed so natural.

A question that gradually became relevant, though, was about the roots for these two independent cases of almost near obsession with the play: while director Paul Willis had dealt with it first as a theatre production and then mounted it onto film, in my case it had resulted in translating the play, writing a dissertation about it, working with the script for the film, watching dozens of productions in different parts of the world and writing reviews for some of them. Why did we do this? What was it about this work that was so compelling? One conclusion that might be drawn is that the fascination with this play, the inexhaustible persistence to solve its riddle, touches upon fundamental questions of the relation between *life* (or *reality*) and art. The continuous delving into the play is *a phenomenon* which illustrates unmistakably the crucial role which art in some cases comes to play in our individual mundane everyday lives. In the case of Hedda Gabler, this role goes beyond mimesis and catharsis, beyond the purely emotional effect which art executes, as Aristotle articulates. In this case art becomes a means of a long term dealing with a crisis, and particularly in this case—a means of survival, of negotiating one's own conditions for existence. It is a means of shifting one's own personal narrative, of overcoming the deep existential crisis which the realization about the paradoxality of life brings about, a crisis which we today, just like the 29-year-old Hedda, realize much too early (as opposed to Ibsen's time, for example, when it happened later.) This is a dimension of the multi-faceted relationship

between art and reality which is much more complex than the mechanism of mimetic engagement and cathartic release that Aristotle suggests.

In the notes to Hedda Gabler Ibsen writes: "Livet er ikke sørgeligt... Livet er latterligt... Og *det* kan ikke bæres." (Life is not tragic, it is absurd and that cannot be tolerated). Ejlert Løvborg is the talented, passionate, brave and daring individual whom Hedda looks up to and in whose capacity to live in accordance only with his own free will she believes in. This sustains her through her dreary, uneventful everyday. Yet, the troll, the irrational, the ever-present internal failure (in Løvborg's case the lack of moderation,) is inevitably there, it undermines his potential, breaks him inside and he is eventually subdued and effaced from the societal structure. His failure adds to Hedda's utter disappointment with the way her own life has shaped up and confirms her tragic realization about the impossibility of ideals, of the drastic discord between what one imagined her life would be and what it ended up becoming. She realizes the omnipresence of banality, futility and pain and the lack of someone or something to blame for it. Yet *we* adjust to this realization, we "mature" and go on—struggling, unhappy maybe, frustrated, yet alive; To defy the paradoxality would mean madness or death. Yet, one might agree with Brack's sad cynicism: "People don't do this kind of thing," he tells Hedda, "We usually manage to adjust to the inevitable." This adjustment and maturing, as in the case with the long-term work with Hedda Gabler, happens

nowadays through the continuous engagement with works of art which deal precisely with the paradoxality of being. This engagement goes on for as long as it is necessary for this existential crisis to be overcome and for the demands of the daily mundane life to start making sense again. It is for this reason that Hedda was named "anti-heroine of 2000," which referred to its incessant staging that year. It is the type of story that makes it possible for our ironic generation to survive, not to pull the trigger, to mature and remain, subduing the demands for unconditional beauty and braveness. These are the fundamental reasons, which underlie the creation of the new film of Hedda Gabler. It is a piece, a link in a process of maturing.

The film is staged in today's United States and is shot in the small deserty town of Wenatchee in Eastern Washington. The story is drastically transposed: both temporally, spatially and media-wise. The major issues with such drastic transposition were already solved through and during a preceding stage production. What and how was changed?

Printer's Devil Theatre opened Hedda Gabler to full critical acclaim in October 2000 in a huge hangar at Sand Point Naval Base in Seattle. At this time the heavy period costumes and decors were already missing, the speech was contemporary, the actors were as old as Ibsen meant them to be: in their late 20s and early 30s (unlike 90 percent of other productions of the play where much older

actors are employed.) Hedda was played as a fragile, neurotic young woman with a complex psyche; Brack was a sleek and confident rival; Tesman—a good-hearted very busy graduate student; Tea—a naïve devoted friend; Løvborg—an attractive genius. They represented, in other words, a group of confused young adults who did not fit into their lives and did not understand why. Neither of them saw a feasible solution to their predicament. As director Willis explains: "All six characters are on the brink between their youth and their adult lives, reckoning for the first time their possibly mistaken life choices about career, family and love."

As mentioned, the director and the cast developed the play and the film simultaneously and, as a result, the two forms exert a significant (and probably inevitable) influence on each other. Quoting Willis again: "The development of the stage production revealed the story's structure and the immediacy of the action, while the development of the film helped to couch it in a contemporary American context and punctuated its relevance" (HG, Investment Offering Circular).This is of particular importance as it reveals that Hedda's tragedy was *not* that she was born *a woman* in the *19th century Norway*. (Let's not forget that the play was never embraced by Ibsen's contemporaries anyway.) The fact that the story *can* be so drastically transposed—temporary, spatially and media-wise—clarifies and underlines that its core problematics are existential and surpass the temporal and spatial restraints.

The image of an empty pool in the house of the main actress spurs in the director the idea that the story of the play Hedda Gabler yields well to the form of film and can become a powerful artistic product. The image serves as a kind of initial key which helps unlock the play, cracks it open to further ideas and towards its subsequent trans-forming into film. The pool becomes a seminal image in the film.

Other examples of great contemporary transpositions of Ibsen's later texts are two productions directed by the young Norwegian director Jo Strømgren. He is quite young indeed, too young to be concerned with the themes of The Master Builder and When We Dead Awaken—two plays that he staged to great critical acclaim in the early 2000s. Both productions approach Ibsen's texts quite creatively. The text is stripped from anything that seems superfluous. Some characters are substituted for others: in When We Dead Awaken, instead of proprietor Ulfheim, for example, there are two French playboys who fulfill his function. There is no hunting for bears or artificial sculptures. Instead, the bodies of the five actors, masterfully choreographed, bend and weave to represent the mysterious ways of life and love, the consequences of our existential or artistic choices. His new production of The Master Builder is "moved poolside" (Christiansen). As with When We Dead Awaken, the text is edited excessively, a third of it is missing, and so is the character of Dr. Herdal. The action takes places in and around a swimming pool. The swimming pool is thus a seminal image in both Willis' Hedda Gabler and Strømgren's The Master Builder.

It is important to compare the comments of the directors (both of them young men in their 30s,) in regard to this: they echo similar reasoning for the drastic cuts and changes in the dramatic text. To quote Strømgren:

> The swimming pool is the source of a new type of associations. Many think that we are tampering with Ibsen, but I think we do so to a lesser extent than many others. [...] There are very few who do not modernize or cut text. It is not an assault but involves progression in the plot, to let the text emerge more clearly. [...] Personally, I am concerned with respecting an intellectual work, but at the same time Ibsen has given Norway a cultural treasure that has also become public property. He has been liberated." (notes to the program)

Paul Willis explains that the image of the pool in his work "helps unlock the play": "We are stripping the text of anything "unnecessary," which is helping it stay lean and powerful" (Investment Circular). The common message of both directors seems to be that these later works by Ibsen are important pieces which should communicate. The one-sentence truth that can be extracted from them might be considered to be Solness' realization uttered in The Master Builder that "building homes for the people isn't worth a brass farthing," but that it is "the castles in the air" that is "the one thing that can contain human happiness."

Ibsen's plays help us realize this truth early on, early enough to change the trajectories of our lives, to reconfigure them, or at least to see them through a different perspective. This is where their value lies and this is why they are so significant: they help us gain awareness of a religious feeling lost, of an unfulfillable gap opened by consciousness, and provoke a change. Strømgren's commentary on the main protagonist of When We Dead Awaken, as interpreted in his production, captures well this sensitivity: "Vår Rubek er en mann av vår tid, og i våre dager tar vi selvoppgjøret tidligere. Vi lever lengre og en av konsekvensene er at vi etablerer flere liv etter hverandre." (Notes to program) ("Our Rubek is a man of our times, and in our days we look back and recapitulate earlier. We live longer and one of the consequences of that is that we start new lives.)

Because Ibsen's works address both living during "historical times" and "at the end of history," one might predict that some play or other will always be relevant. It is up to the next generation of artists to discover "their Ibsen."

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"A Translator's Dilemma – Performance Text vs. Dramatic Text." Crossovers: Language and Literature: Comparative Literature Graduate Colloquium, University of Washington. Seattle, WA 4/2001

"Selma Lagerlöf – The Storyteller." Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Studies. Chicago, IL 4/2001

"The Intellectual Dialogue: Ibsen's influence in Bulgaria" Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Studies. Madison, WI 5/2000

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Synnøve Fielding Endowed Fund Scholarship. Department of Scandinavian Studies. University of Washington. 6/2004

Graduate School Fund for Excellence and Innovation Travel Award. University of Washington. 4/2004

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American-Scandinavian Foundation Research Grant. Center for Ibsen Studies. 2002-2003

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SCAND 370: History of the Vikings (Prof. Terje Leiren). **Autumn 1999, Winter 2001**
Lecture presented:
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SCAND 230: Introduction to Folklore (Prof. Tom DuBois) **Winter 2000**

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Lectures presented:
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SCAND 367: Sexuality in Scandinavia. (Prof. Ia Dubois) **Spring 2000, Spring 2001**
Lecture presented:
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"Hedda Gabler – our contemporary?" NORW 321. Department of Scandinavian Studies. University of Washington. 2/17/04

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"Scandinavia and the Modern Breakthrough" SCAND 312. Department of Scandinavian Studies. University of Washington. 1/12/04

"Henrik Ibsen's *Ghosts* and its place in the Modern Breakthrough" SCAND 100. Department of Scandinavian Studies. University of Washington. 5/1/02

"Translating Henrik Ibsen's works into Bulgarian" SCAND 280. Department of Scandinavian Studies. University of Washington. 2/27/01

"The poetics of the Bulgarian folksong" RUSS 324. Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures. University of Washington. 1/26/01

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Undergraduate Orientation. Scandinavian Department. Organizer. 2006

Den Norske Klubben. University of Washington. Coordinator. 2000-2006

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"Strindberg and Photography" exhibit, Odegaard Undergraduate Library, University of Washington, assistant to exhibit curator Lotta Gavel-Adams. 5/2001

World Language Day Lecture "Sexuality in Scandinavia." University of Washington. 3/2001

Gear-Up Fair. University of Washington. Departamental Organizer. 7/2000

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Norwegian Researchers and Teachers Association of North America. 2001-

Modern Language Association. 2000-
(Delegate Assembly Member 2004-2007)

Ibsen Society of America. 2000-
(Council Member 2004-2007)

Scandinavian Section, South Atlantic Modern Language Association. 2000-2003
(Chair 2002-2003)
Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Studies. 1999-

Northwest Translators and Interpreters Society. 1998-

c. Community Service

Northwest Film Forum, *Hedda Gabler* production. Text and Translation Supervisor. Fundraiser. 2001-2004

Radost International Folk Ensemble. Fundraiser and Grant Writer. 1998-2006
(Board Member 2003-)

Mae West Fest. Theatre Festival for Women Playwrights and Directors. Seattle. Volunteer. 7/2003.

Washington Commission for the Humanities. 2000 Scandinavian Film Festival. Volunteer. 4/2000

VIII. LANGUAGES

Bulgarian (native), English (near native), Norwegian (near native), Swedish (fluent), Russian (very good), Danish (good), German (reading), French (notions)