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T H E S I S  
on  
The Dramaturgy of Henrik Ibsen  
by  
Amy Robbins, B.S., U.M., 1901.  
1907

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Major Thesis  
on  
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Amy Robbins, B.S., U.M., 1901.  
Robbinsdale, Minnesota.

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The Dramaturgy of Henrik Ibsen.

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  - A. Historic-Romantic (2. "Warriors of Helgeland" 1857
  - (3. "The Pretenders" 1863
  - (4. "Love's Comedy" 1862
  - B. Poetic-Mystic---- (5. "Brand" 1865
  - (6. "Peer Gynt" 1867
  - (7. "The League of Youth" 1868
  - (8. "Pillars of Society" 1877
  - (9. "The Doll's House" 1879
  - (10 "Ghosts" 1881
  - (11 "An Enemy of Society" 1882
  - C. Zeit Dramas----- (12 "The Wild Duck" 1884
  - (13 "The Lady from the Sea" 1886
  - (14 "Hedda Gabler" 1891
  - (15 "The Master Builder" 1892
  - (16 "Little Eyolf" 1894
  - (17 "John Gabriel Borkman" 1896

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## OUTLINE.

1. Natural Fitness and Preparation.
2. Attitude toward his work.
3. Technic.

### A. External or eye Technic

1. Number of acts
2. Number of scenes
3. Number of characters
4. Stage setting
5. Stage-business
6. Asides
7. Soliloquy

### B. Internal Technic

1. Time Unity
2. Place Unity
3. Plot Unity
4. Style and Dialogue
5. Indirection
6. Curtain effects
7. Development thru (Introduction  
(Complication  
(Denouement

## 4. Themes.

### A. History, Legend, Fancy.

### B. Social

1. The pillars of society rest upon quicksands.
2. None but the highest marriage should maintain.
3. The sins of the fathers shall be visited.
4. A man who speaks truths is society's enemy.
5. The tie that binds, galls.
6. Only the fittest can survive.
7. Small irritations may drive one mad.
8. Relief from sorrow in altruistic work.
9. As a man sows so shall he reap.
10. Conventional religion is useless cant.
11. The strongest man is he who stands alone.

## 5. Conclusion.

## The Dramaturgy of Henrik Ibsen.

"They who have best succeeded on the stage  
Have still conformed their genius to their age."

If we accept this rational little couplet as our basis of criticism, the figure of Henrik Ibsen takes its place in the first rank.

A Norwegian by birth, he remained a Norwegian through all his literary career, altho for the larger part of the time he lived on the continent. In the hard school of experience, he learned the meaning of life. His learning was of the sort one rarely forgets - Ibsen never forgot.

The fact that he was a believer in independence per se, became evident even in his early career at Christiania. Here his socialistic tendency, his bitter democracy, got him into many predicaments from which, however, he extricated himself without serious trouble. These difficulties only helped to strengthen his independent cult. His confidence in Henrik Ibsen versus Society grew apace.

The part of his training which is of most importance to dramaturgic science, however, is his practical connection with theatres. In Bergen he was appointed theatre director, and dramatic author. In connection with this position he traveled, in order that he might observe the drama of the continent. To be assured of a steady income with a thorough technical study in Denmark and Germany was just what he needed. He lost no time in grasping the opportunity thus offered. Whether he could have accomplished what he has, without this training, is doubtful. With this ~~experience~~ <sup>advantage</sup>, the essential poet, social critic, and deep thinker, became the Ibsen of modern drama. By his long foreign residence he was enabled to take the far view of his native land. It is this impartial, broad scope which lends to his dramas such universal appeal. Where Bjornson wrote a drama for Norway, Ibsen wrote one for modern times-Society in general.

Ibsen has one other <sup>qualification</sup> noticeable characteristic on the side of training. He was the one thing, and nothing else for forty years, - a playwright. In him we see the wonderful result of conservation of energy.

Possessing a <sup>wonderful</sup> insight into human nature, he looks into the superstitions of society, in religion, politics, domestic relations and all conventional institutions. He evidently knows whereof he speaks. What he sees he treats with the keen interest of a scientist. His is not the relation of a physician toward a patient, nor is his position that of a philanthropist. His attitude is a little more sympathetic toward his subject than the attitude of a man who tries surgical experiments on a helpless animal. The aim is not dissimilar, both work in the cause of science, medical or social, for suffering humanity.

It is perfectly plain that he learned his trade by personal contact with the stage world, for he knows so well just how to gain the effect he seeks. His skill and power have been rather aptly summed up in the saying, "Ibsen is French Technic plus Northern Genius". *I might pause to remind you*

~~that~~ The technic, both external and internal must have a sympathetic correspondence with the theme. If this harmony is lacking, the drama falls short of the best. It is on the side of theme that <sup>his</sup> Northern Genius is apparent. ~~Ibsen~~ has produced a new form of dramatic literature in which the fitness of word to intent is a wonder. Both in his early and in his later work this is noticeable.

*and* First he tried his wings in romantic, historic drama. The boundary was too narrow for him and he soon soared away into the realms of unreality, through the music of poetry. His feeling for truth was too strong to allow him long to tarry in the regions of trolls and symbolism. He reached his <sup>true</sup> field of work, at length, when he entered upon his social dramas. The Zeit Geist conquered. Conventional theme and technic were together abandoned in his later work. By the consummation of his art he has set the mold of modern drama. The mold which has been used with varying success by all the myriad of so-called

Sons of Ibsen. He did not, however, attain this perfection in a day. A review of a few plays in chronologic sequence ~~may prove useful in this study; they will~~ show how Ibsen was profitted by his own efforts to improve his technic, and also his theme, till it met the need of modern times, centering our interest upon the questions of today, *but time is lacking to even read it.*

I have made a list of the early work with reference to external or eye technic and it has been of interest to me. In the ten years following 1853, were written his history dramas. During this period the subjects were romantic, they were set back in time to get the glamour of the past. These are less significant both in theme and technic than his social work, yet they are instructive. In them we find much of the old machinery retained, devices which he would scorn later, ~~abound here.~~

In 1863, "Lady Inger of Ostraat", a Norwegian historic subject, he treated in five acts with but two scenes. These two scenes are adjoining rooms at Ostraat, so that the effect is one of place unity. He observed time unity here also. Seven characters participate, with a number of peasants and soldiers. There is a slight tendency to situation, a grouping for effect which his later work does not show. He was quite successful in the use of indirection in this drama. The horror of the burial vault is introduced for dramatic effect. Also Lady Inger's son is slain almost before our eyes, but not quite; in this instance the dramatic effect is intensified by the effect upon Lady Inger herself. In some places there is a strong Shakesperian handling both of situation and character in these historical plays. This is noticeably true in Lady Inger's character; there is a striking similarity between her and Lady McBeth in many respects. *Macbeth*

*the* In 1857 came the "Vikings of Helgeland". This treats of legendary history of Norway, with numerous characters of the ancient Viking type. There is real clash of armor, murder, intrigue, and many devices to catch the eye of the gallery. Time unity and place unity are observed in a measure. The plot is entertaining, there really is a plot, a burning story interest. Yet the general hubub excludes this from the list of his typical work. Histrionic effect is secured by the use of extinct ideals of the

romantic past. The shuddering finale is consistent with the whole construction. As the wild untamable spirit of Hiorda urges the flying Death Steed on to Valhalla, the thrill and shudder are genuine.

"The Pretenders" in 1863 presents a formidable exterior. Five acts, eleven scenes, twenty characters, with crowds of *Subordinates*. Indeed it is almost as thickly peopled and as much divided as Shakespeare's own history-plays. The plot interest is somewhat scattered by the number and variety of characters. Time seems immaterial, men are betrothed, wedded, and have sons born to them within the five acts. *The* place moves around wherever war or coronation or any other event demands.

As to asides and soliloquies, they abound. All three of the important men soliloquize freely. The character of Bishop Nicolas is revealed thru three long talks with himself in the third act. Duke Skule indulges in verbal expression to relieve his feelings *for the distance* of two pages. Hakon follows in the same scene. The most improbable of all, however, is the way in which Skule talks aloud about his determination to steal Hakon's "King-thought". This he continues to do throughout Act IV. *Extent*

Indirection is used in "The Pretenders" frequently. Examples may be found in the ordeal of Hakon's mother, and choosing of the King, seen and commented upon by Margaret and her mother at the window. Skule and Peter are slain out of sight but within hearing of the audience.

These plays are consistent, they possess harmony of theme and technic. It is, however, hard to recognize even the potential Ibsen in this historic work. The technic is as thoroughly un-Ibsenesque as are the themes.

Between the "Vikings" and the "Pretenders" Ibsen had departed into verse. He brought out in this form the little three-act piece, "Love's Comedy". The light rhyme lines of sparkling versification lend just the color or atmosphere which Ibsen intended. The use of the three act division is significant in that it is the first time Ibsen tried it. It was not till much later that he came to realize the value of this form, and use it habitually.

After relapsing into the more elaborate, or rather, more histrionic style of "The Pretenders" he again tried poetic form in "Brand" and "Peer Gynt". The scene of both is laid in a region rich in fjord, scaur and tarn, where the spirits of earth and air are often confused with their not much more tangible human companions. The form is perhaps their main point of similarity. There is such a rapid-moving effect in the verse of "Peer Gynt", even in translation, that one becomes confused. The style is so perfectly fitted to the intention that you feel the unreal reality of it. It is difficult for anyone who hears not the call of the Hill Folk, to grasp this intangible poem. It is a veritable Peter Pan that lives and moves and has his being in Peer Gynt. Who can be sure that the distracted little mother was right when she wailed, "Peer, you lie!"? It is hard for us to say just where truth ends and imagination begins, or whether imagination be not, indeed, the truth. Peer's visions become real. Reality grows visionary and you feel like a sleep walker when you leave the volume or the play-house. This is accomplished by the wonderful harmony of theme and technic. Here is a new set of contrivances most cleverly handled. Rhyme, wit, whimsical fancy, and many other elements enter into it. Yet this drama will make you gasp in its bold disregard for every known unity. Here we find the world to be the stage; the length of a man's life, the time; and as for plot—~~it may be that there is one, but I have not discovered it yet.~~

The phantoms become human beings often enough to give a vital interest to the play. It is allegory, yet it is actable. This piece seems to me to prove what a poet-genius can do, contrary to all reason, and make it go.

After "Peer Gynt", Ibsen never used rhymes again. From this time on his intention was too serious to admit of the vehicle of verse. We seem to hear him saying, with the aged warrior scald of the Vikings, "Sing, no, I could do that yesterday: today I am too old" <sup>a letter</sup>

He himself gave this excellent statement with regard to his future style, "The illusion I wish to produce is that of truth itself; I want to produce upon the reader

*Story of a forgotten boy of the forest who grows up with his own of fantastic games. He falls in love with a maiden whom you could not find in the forest. In spite of this he stays in the forest and wishes her off to the city. Three years later he is a brilliant man in the forest but his feet find holes at the door and he leaves her. After he is old and spent and bitter an older is come for his soul, he returns and this beautiful piece gives us a beautiful picture of the same. It is a story that is not*

the impression that what he is reading is actually taking place before him". "I, myself, would not have Venus de Milo painted, but I would rather see a negro's head carved in black marble than in white."

The eternal fitness of things was strong in its appeal to Ibsen. When spirits talk he uses verse. He had the ghost of Bishop Nicolas speak in metrical lines with the intent to place him in the realm of visions and dreams. When he changed the nature of his theme, his style, too, changed accordingly. As soon as he began his social dramas, the language became prose of the homely type, with just the added touch which must be given, to produce an effect of reality. The difference between a mere report of what is said, and an atmospheric handling of the salient points in man's talk with man, Ibsen grasped as none but a genius can. The dialogue is tense. Every extra syllable has been cut till the result is ~~that~~ of great concision of phrase. It is not, on this account, choppy and incomplete, <sup>however,</sup> neither is it stupid and uninteresting. It is perfectly natural.

To quote again from his own words, "My new drama is not, indeed, a tragedy in the old world signification of the word, but what I have tried to depict in it is human beings, and for that very reason I have not allowed them to talk the language of the gods." "On the whole, my feeling is that literary form ought to be in relation to the amount of ideality which is spread over the representation."

In accordance with this belief, Ibsen has created a drama which answers the modern world in its needs. He has clothed it in a simple form, with precisely the amount of ideality which he wishes to spread over the representation. There is no complex machinery to distract the attention from the main issue. The main issues being psychologic processes, climaxes or curtains, result only in thought. The feeling of a tightening or intensity runs from the opening of the first act to the last curtain - with a steady increase in velocity to the point of the catastrophe. The psychologically unusual or intense takes the place of groupings for effect. We never "hold the picture" in Ibsen's social dramas; there is

no "picture", it is reality.

On the external side, from ten plays of the social period I have gathered the following facts. "The Young Men's League", and "The Wild Duck" have eighteen characters each; "An Enemy of Society" shows eleven; while "The Lady from the Sea" has eight principals with young people, tourists and summer visitors. All four have the old five act division.

In the "Young Men's League" he uses the French scene, <sup>(that is)</sup> which gives from nine to fifteen scenes per act, as the characters come and go. This is the only time Ibsen used this device. There are three rather glaring asides, but we must bear in mind that this is the first social drama. I cannot see how it could be done in three acts, the construction is not particularly good; several changes would have to be made before it would condense.

In regard to the second play, "The Wild Duck", I feel that if some brief substitute for the first act could be used, the piece would have a distinct gain technically. Some such device, for example, as he uses in the opening act of "Ghosts". In that way absolute place unity would be secured and nothing of value lost with the act at Mr. Werle's. The first act would then introduce the real characters of the play, leaving none to be thrown away. The third act would make a good second, and the last act remain as it is.

In "An Enemy of Society" the unities of time and place are not observed, tho the story is simple and continuous. Act I introduces the main characters, with more extraneous persons than seems necessary. The cause of the difficulty, the Baths, is suggested well toward the beginning of the act, with the antagonistic attitude of the Doctor's brother in evidence.

The second act develops the complication successfully to Petra's confident speech, "Father is brave! He will not give in!" I can feel no definite advance of the plot thru act three. The fourth should be the third and last act in this drama, if it were to come up to Ibsen's best work, structurally. It is true there would be many fine things lost if this were done, but they are fine things on the side of morals rather than dramaturgy.

*I will take up now a few points about  
the construction of some of the social dramas before  
turning now to mention a few that take up former interesting  
points their themes.*

The whole of the fifth act is a concession to Ibsen's feeling for a pleasant ending. There is nothing gained by it except the "happy family", effect as the curtain rings down. It is similar to the close of "Pillars of Society" but less strong, to my mind.

The third and fourth act might be condensed into one in "The Lady of the Sea", and better construction secured thereby, altho the development is steady and consistent as it is. It is free from asides and soliloquy. The "place" is not very widely scattered tho not a perfect unit. Four days elapse during the play; this could scarcely be made one, and a slight condensing would not improve it. The introduction of the unreal lends color and tone to this as to the "Wild Duck". The attraction of the unknown is personified in the strange Man of the Sea - it is almost allegorical in effect.

"Pillars of Society" and "Hedda Gabler" have four acts each. In the former, written in 1877, fourteen characters, five accessories and crowds are drawn. In the latter, which appeared in 1891, there are but seven in all, showing an advance in this regard. In fact there are not more than seven, in any of the five dramas following. "The Lady from the Sea", of 1886.

There are a number of interesting things about "Hedda Gabler" although it is a rather unpleasant study of a neuresthenic woman out of key and consequently not in harmony with her husband's family and home. The introduction by the Maid and Aunt is old, but good and well done; this gives the Key to Hedda's distaste for her new home and her new relatives. The moment the young bride enters, the preparation is complete, the catastrophe in sight. Could anything be more illuminating than the slipper episode?

There is a very clever curtain in the first act where the pistol motive is introduced, the effect of suspense produced by it is good. This act, however, is long, noticeably so; it is longer than three and four combined. The end of the second act has to do with the sub-plot, Løvborg and Mrs. Elvsted. Løvborg's manuscript makes act three, with pistols still on the boards. I am sure I should not miss this act if a few things from it were

*Lady from sea*

*story is simple  
Hedda has married a  
man who was not  
very congenial but  
who could furnish  
her mortal wants.  
Very monotony of  
his home drove her  
gets on her nerves  
& she shoots her  
self w. pistol  
of her old sweet  
heart*

thrown to the second end it were left a three act drama.

The indirection which is used in the fourth act curtain is quite effective. There is a little gallery play in this decided use of firearms, with the principle characters using them for self-destruction. Of course the real shooting is not in sight, there is no actual blood shed on the stage, yet it is ~~so~~ dramatic thru indirection. This is characteristic of Ibsen's handling of physical force. Whether love, hatred, despair, or any other passion is to be given violent expression, it must be veiled from sight. All the deaths, and also all the love scenes, so far as I have read them, are off scene.

"The Master Builder" is less consistent and not nearly as universal in appeal as "The Doll's House" or "Ghosts". There are but six characters in it, which is a very good point. In regard to the story interest, however, it is subordinate, ~~but~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>psychology</sup> is certain. Early in the first act, Kaia <sup>offers a</sup> good opportunity for the introduction of Solness' phylandering habit; but it seems to me Hilda could have illustrated it alone nearly as well, leaving out this extra character. His fear of youth as an enemy, is suggested in the same act, in connection with the building-plans, where the young man crosses his path. The development in the second act is good. By the middle of the last act Solness is completely in Hilda's power. He has even lent his name to help the dreaded Younger Generation, typified by Kaia's brother.

The final curtain I ~~should~~ <sup>think</sup> ~~was~~ excellent, with the stage business, <sup>(The ladies on the veranda wave their handkerchiefs, and shouts of "Hurrah" are taken up in the street below. Then they are suddenly silent, and the crowds burst out into a shriek of horror. A human body with planks and fragments of wood, is vaguely perceived crashing down behind the trees.)</sup> The gruesome facts of his death are reported by "a voice" and "voices below". It is worth noting that the fall is not seen, but merely vaguely perceived.

In "Ghosts" the technic is very consistent and thoroughly good. In Act I, the <sup>two</sup> in the dining room show great skill in the use of indirection, Mrs. Alving's gasp of "Ghosts", reveals her whole life of horrors. To complete the preparation, Engstrand is introduced in this scene.

Solness is the Master Builder & he fears the younger generation. He thinks they will overthrow him. To prove that he is their enemy he climbs dizzy heights of a pipe. He does this because Hilda, who had known him in his climbing days, urges him to do so.

Mrs. Alving makes love to Engstrand. He is his half-brother as Mrs. Alving alone knows.

who is supposed to be R.'s father

Act II. , develops the feeling of fear for Oswald to a creepy certainty that some gruesome fate awaits him. The third act is short and to the point. The psychologic height is reached, the spectre has him by the throat. This scene is one of the best illustrations of Ibsen's skill in stage-business. Of the last twenty-eight lines of the Act, nineteen are devoted to stage-business, it is so complete that even in reading, one sees it as it is ~~is~~ <sup>is</sup> acted.

"The Doll's House" is a wonderful piece of work, architecturally viewed. Only five characters are used, and the action covers but one days time. There are but three acts, <sup>in this play</sup> the smallest possible number for a full length drama. In the first of these acts, there is a complete revelation. The audience knows just what has happened, where the difficulty lies, and what the probable complication will be. The second act carries the thread of the story so perfectly that one scarcely realizes any pause between the first and second act. The descent from the first scene is continuous, it gains in velocity thru the second, and the crash comes in the third act. The crash, however, is Ibsenest; there are no grand speeches, merely a heart-rending <sup>dis</sup>illusionment. The handling of the whole third act shows the consummate artist; it is without a flaw from the opening to the curtain.

In this, as in the majority of Ibsen's plays, the scene is laid in a home. There are the typical settings, neither extravagantly luxuriant, nor yet poverty stricken. A stove, a stand with a shaded lamp, a high-backed arm-chair, and so on. These things place the drama geographically. Very evidently the action does not take place in an apartment of New York City or Paris; and yet the themes are so universal that they might have been in either one as well as in Norway.

In "Little Eyolf" which he wrote in 1894, Ibsen produced absolutely the play par excellence, both in method and interest. This masterpiece in dramaturgy leaves nothing to be desired in construction. It is superb, Ibsen at his best. Three acts, six characters, action plus psychology, this is what he used; beautifully wholesome teaching in a mitigated tragedy, is what he has given us.

*impending doom*

*Nora, a wife  
mother had  
forged her father's  
debt to save her  
husband. Idea  
selfish now  
of her sacrifice  
spans her eyes  
to the fact that  
she has lived  
9 yrs. w. a strange  
ex + born him  
3 children. +  
she passes out  
of his life as  
she makes  
discovery*

While there are three asides, they are such as might naturally take place. For instance, when the conversation about little Eyolf's uniform occurs, it would not much matter if the child heard what he is supposed not to hear. If the aside is to be used, it seems to me the effect is not so bad when this is true.

The first act gives perfect preparation and explains the final outcome. The selfish passion of the mother for her husband, the real cause of the tragedy, is very well shown at the beginning of the drama. The rat woman introduces a mystic element which appeals to the gallery, and to the rest of us as well. <sup>at a moment when the mother of woman that little</sup> There is a distinct <sup>is drowned.</sup> curtain at the news of Eyolf's death. The rushing and calling off scene of "a little crutch was floating", are tremendously impressive.

In this drama the second act opens at the point where most of Ibsen's plays begin, with psychology. It <sup>shows</sup> is the wrong effect of the first act disaster, the bitter rebellion of two souls in sorrow, <sup>over the passing of the little child.</sup>

The third act shows the spiritual value of suffering, shows how one may "attain to happiness thru purified emotions".

The whole piece is vibrant with poetry, there is nothing prosaic about it, and yet it is beautifully natural and simple. Even the final softening of the agony adds to the naturalness. All agony is softened in life- else no sane man would be left on earth.

There is really no plot interest, in the old sense of the word, even in this most dramatic of Ibsen's Zeit Dramas. In all the others the play begins where action ends. They deal wholly with psychologic processes. Nora has committed the forgery; Stockman is already downed; Bernick is to pay for what he has previously done; Borkman has been doomed; Oswald is poisoned thru and thru; before ever the first curtain rises. The tragedy consists in the struggle of a soul against circumstances, another character, God, or self. This struggle plus unshed tears is the drama of catastrophe which Ibsen introduced.

If Ibsen's work is to be regarded as didactic, it is only in such manner as life itself is so. He never attaches a moral tag, yet his characters often make such

salient criticisms of unsound institutions or debatable ideals that they start one in hot pursuit of one's own beliefs and ethical standards.

It is thru the Zeit Dramas that Ibsen will live and gain in strength of appeal until times shall have changed again; then they will become significant as social documents, - the history of our time. *for each of the 12 is an arrow in the heart of the goddess of modern society*

To illustrate the themes of these, I have selected a few typical plays. "An Enemy of Society", "The Lady from the Sea", "The Doll's House", "John Gabriel Borkman", "Pillars of Society", "The Master Builder", "The Wild Duck", "Ghosts", and "Little Eyolf", are the plays I have chosen. They cover the period of his best work, from 1869 to 1896. The subjects are so closely connected with technic that a study of the latter seems incomplete without the former.

All thru, he is the sworn enemy of convention. He feels that nothing can be taken for granted, and goes about his self-imposed task of showing up the facts with regard to time honored beliefs of all sorts. He is the exponent of individual conscience in every walk of life.

"The worship of authority must be rooted up in this town", says Hovstad, in "An Enemy of Society". We are prone to say, "And what?", but Ibsen does not give the answer. In the first act of this drama Dr. Stockman hilariously announces, "Katrine, do you know what I have behind me? The compact majority." To this Katrine makes the absurd response, "Oh, is that good for you, Thomas?" At the opening of the last act, Thomas has found that it is not good for him, and vehemently declares, "If I only <sup>knew</sup> whether there were any primeval forest, any little south sea island to be bought cheap-

The conclusion to be drawn from this drama is a puzzle to me. The man who speaks the bare truth at all cost, seems to be allowed to pay the price. This <sup>must</sup> may be the particular social fallacy which he wishes to expose.

By the end of the play Dr. Stockman has made a great discovery, "You see that the fact is that the strongest man upon earth is he who stands most alone". This is Ibsen's own belief, and probably it is true in this instance.

Woman is the key note of this whole period, Ibsen evidently feels that her position is the critical point

in the social situation. In the "Lady from the Sea" he treats one phase of the marriage question, and shows what one great trouble is. He who runs may read, in this drama that the tie which binds galls.

Ellida, <sup>by her</sup> is restive, vague unknown attractions call her, *Call her to un-known regions, to the sea*  
As soon, however, as the <sup>marriage</sup> bonds are loosened, a great love for her husband springs spontaneously within her. Then Wangel asks, "But now are you mine once more, Ellida?" "Yes, now I am, indeed, yours again. Now I can be, for now I go to you in freedom- of my own free will and responsibility". This is all right ~~so far as it goes,~~ but she herself expresses the practical difficulty when she says, "As once for all, we have become land-animals there is no way of escape out to sea again, nor to the life of the sea, either." And some might try the life of the sea if each were a law unto himself. There the danger lies. If this teaching of "free choice forever" were to be put in practice, what chaos would result in a society made up of mere men.

One of Ibsen's strongest convictions seems to be that the entire marriage convention is faulty. As in "The Lady from the Sea", so in every drama touching the subject, there is this fundamental wrong exposed, this breaking of the spirit's wings 'gainst the bars of conventionality.

In "The Doll's House" the complete subordination of the wife is typical of what Ibsen felt. The outcome merely shows the inevitable result of the treatment Nora received. The great sacrifice was made- in faith expecting a noble response. The response she received was maddening in its unideality, its lack of understanding. "I have forgiven you, Nora, and now you seem to belong to me in a double sense," says Torvald. In reality it is just then she ceases to belong to him in any sense. She takes off her doll's dress; that may be what Ibsen would wish *wish advice* every woman to do. *Who knows? when Torvald speaks of her duty, follows di-*

Nora: "I have other duties equally sacred." *algebra takes place*  
"My duty toward myself."

Torvald: "Before all else you are a wife and mother."

Nora: "That I no longer believe. I think that before all else I am a human being just as much as you are- or, at least, I will try to become one."

15.

1. It's exasperat; can you forsake your holiest duties in this way?
2. What do you call any holiest duties?
3. your duties to your husband + your children

"I must try to think things out for myself and try to get clear about them."

Torvald: "You don't understand the society in which you live."

Nora: "No I don't, But I shall try to. I must make up my mind which is right, society or I!"

The drama shows the dangerous possibilities that underlie the conventional application of the marriage relation, and suggests a way of escape which has, perhaps, still more sinister possibilities. Taken as a warning, however, it is well worth while.

The scene closes with a faint glimmer of hope, *as Torvald pleads*

"Nora, can I never be more than a stranger?"

*she replies* "Oh, Torvald, then the miracle of miracles would have to happen."

So there is a miracle of miracles in real life, even if it never happens for these two. The whole play rings true, Nora must have been Ibsen's firm conviction. It is the hand of a master that has drawn this piece of human life for us. It has been truthfully said that the object of this drama is unquestionably to hold up the highest marriage. That seems to me to be the final word with regard to it; to hold up the highest marriage, not to idealize the poor unsatisfying mockery of it.

The brutality of personal egoism in an ambitious man is displayed full length in John Gabriel Borkman. "He had walked on a human heart to which he owed much," in quest of his cold, dark Kingdom of Power. The following accusation made against him by the woman whom he had crushed, will suffice to illustrate this point.

*She says* "The Bible speaks of a mysterious sin for which there is no forgiveness.. I have never understood what it could be, but now I understand. The great unpardonable sin is to murder the love-life in a human soul. You have murdered the love-life in the woman who loved you and whom you loved in return, so far as you could love anyone. And, therefore, I prophesy to you, John Gabriel Borkman, you will never touch the price you demanded for the murder. You will never enter in triumph into your cold dark kingdom." And he never did.

*Turning over to another play*

A similar but less tragic condition exists in "Pillars of Society". Here again Ibsen digs below the surface in the life of a king of finance and industry. In this drama he shows how it may, and does, come to pass that being a pillar overshadows every consideration of right and all sense of justice. <sup>in said pillars</sup> Bernick is the magnate in this instance and is an excellently drawn type. In the latter part of the second act his old love, Lona, sounds the knell of his self-complacency, as Ella had sounded John Gabriel's doom. From that point on, it is a fight between pride and Lona's strength of character for control of his conduct. Lona wins. Altho Bernick knows that "a boyish error is never atoned in our society", still he confesses his deception and the lights which had burned in his honor, go out. In the united family, Ibsen gives an exceedingly optimistic turn to the closing scene. Here he sets forth what a hollow sham commercial supremacy is, any way. You wonder upon how many worm-eaten pillars you are leaning, when you finish the play. Altho there is no moral attached, the deduction is perfectly plain. <sup>it is plain for all to see</sup> If your house is built on quick sand- rebuild, <sup>before it sinks</sup>. There may yet be time.

"The Master Builder" as has been said, is really a character sketch of Solness. The difficulty ought to arise from his two decided weaknesses- freedom in his relation to woman and his morbid fear of the younger generation. That is exactly what happens. Solness and Hilda, however, have such an elaborate system of telepathic incourse that <sup>it is</sup> ~~it rises~~ the thread ~~faster than I find~~ <sup>of their talk</sup> it. They seldom finish a sentence, in fact their conversation is altogether too dim for me to follow them.

If the conclusion is logical, then Hilda typifies both unconventional love, in a pagan and almost impersonal way; and the younger generation, of which <sup>she</sup> ~~he~~ was so mortally afraid. She certainly was young, and she certainly was a woman who responded to his mesmeric power. He tried to link his life with hers for both <sup>of those</sup> reasons, and because of this double power of hers she was directly responsible for his death in the end.

Like Tomlinson of Berkeley Square or Ibsen's own own conception of Peer Gynt, Solness was neither good nor bad enough to survive. He was neither strong enough to

withstand the temptation of the sex principle, nor to meet the demand of the younger generation, and stand upon the heights, alone. He could not make good even by being bad. There is <sup>dead</sup> a law of the survival of the fittest and Solness was not fit.

"The Wild Duck" seems more confusing and vague than the "Master Builder". Here is a queer character, Gregers Werle, who goes about damning by faint praise. He had such a lofty humanitarian theory that he needed to be hoisted off the face of the earth. There is no place for such as he in this world. He made Hedvig understand that she was really at odds with the life around her, Hedvig, the only joy in Ekdal's life. Poor little weakeyed daughter of Gina Ekdal, the wild duck from the pond of the elder Werle. Even in the end Gregers did not see that those things that cannot be made right might better be let alone. The relation between the various members of Ekdal's family was not improved by his intervention. His humanitarian view of their life did not create the desired condition, but only destroyed what good did exist. In <sup>the end</sup> this more than in any other Zeit Drama of Ibsen we approach realism by way of unreality. The whole thing is symbolic. The loft, The Duck, the decrepid old hunter, everything has an uncanny odor.

From the standpoint of theme this seems the least strong of all Ibsen's dramas, it is too puzzling, it grows less clear with every reading, *and seeing it enacted does not seem to help much.*

It is a relief to come to a piece of work in which the intention is so clear cut as in "Ghosts". When we read this we have to bear in mind that any material is allowable with high aim, barring the fundamentally unaesthetic. In this pathologic study several facts are unmistakably set forth. First and foremost, "the sins of the fathers shall be visited". It is a significant fact technically that the sins were committed and the father dead before the drama opens. It is the consequence, not the original act, with which Ibsen deals. Oswald is the consequence.

That brings the next point to mind. Here we have the awful result of withholding the individual right of conscience, *in a sense, etc. Ibsen advocates in taking the law.* there must surely be a final reckoning for the pious Pastor Manders. He it was who, years before,

drove the fleeing wife back to her dissolute husband. He did this in the name of conventional religious belief. "Your first duty -" <sup>he called it</sup> he had taken her into the shelter of his home, <sup>at that critical moment</sup> all might have been well, <sup>and Oswald never would</sup> the inevitable conclusion is contrary to the established code of ethics. Ibsen has chosen to force this conviction upon us by the use of the superlative degree in "Ghosts". There could be nothing worse. Here is a moral lesson tending strongly toward pathology, yet a lesson whose power and truth are unsurpassed. There is but one thing in the whole drama for which we can be thankful, and that is the assurance Oswald gives us: <sup>As a rule, architects & builders erected in his father's memory</sup> "Everything will burn. There won't remain a single thing in memory of father. Here am I, too, burning down."

*have been from wife Mrs. G. had discovered + from wh. she fled.*

Ibsen certainly had <sup>a</sup> distaste for clergymen as a class. Wherever one is met with, he is beyond endurance in narrow, egotistical superstition and cant. To him Pastor Manders typifies the religion of society. Having learned his creed by rote, he has <sup>no</sup> power to understand special needs. <sup>wives should keep their</sup> Children should honor their parents, ergo, <sup>only into their hands,</sup> "Honor thy father, Oswald". (Honor indeed!). Rörbling is the same type <sup>of minister</sup> as Manders, only more so, if possible. It may be significant that <sup>in his early work he had the</sup> ghost of Bishop Nicolas return to earth as an envoy of the Powers of Darkness. In many places wise sayings of his characters voice Ibsen's own feeling on this question.

*burning down - go back to thy husband Mrs. G.*

*Regina  
live with  
father this  
is like a  
sailors  
resort.*

Nora makes answer, when Torvald offers religion as a help in time of trouble, "Oh, Torvald, I don't know properly what religion is. I know only what our clergyman told me when I was confirmed. I will see whether what he taught me is true, or at any rate, it is true for me." There we have the doctrine of individual ethics briefly stated. And if it be not true for me, what then?

The whole drama of "Rosner's Holm" is based upon religious fallacy, it is the ghost of a really dead religion stalking the earth. In this as in other things, Ibsen has not showed clearly what he would have take the place of "things as they are". There is a suggestion of peace thru nature in several places, for example, the first part of "Little Eyolf" speaks in glowing words of the glory of the Open. The plainest teaching, however, is

found in the latter part of this same little masterpiece. Here the despairing mother, made receptive thru sorrow, realizes, at last, that altruistic work will give her relief. Ibsen leaves that mother so calmed and strengthened by her decision that she stands on the height with outstretched hand, <sup>she says</sup> "All ye sorrowing, unsatisfied ones, this is the way to peace," ~~she seems to say.~~ This <sup>is an</sup> exquisite example of mitigated tragedy - mitigated in the best way.

Each drama is justified of its own existence, as a social document. Each is a thrust at one or more of the follies of life. Perhaps it would be nearer the truth to designate his themes as <sup>revelations of</sup> symptoms of the mortal sickness of society as he sees it. He examines whatever is unsettled in men's relations to themselves and each other, and diagnoses the case from his observation. Yet underneath the formidable exterior of this detached, impersonal judge, we can but recognize the beating of a very human heart. It seems as tho, if it were within his power, he would be glad,

"To grasp this sorry scheme of things entire,-  
To shatter it to bits---and then  
Remould it nearer to the Heart's Desire."

I am sincerely glad that I find nothing in his dramas to make me disbelieve in his essential kindness. Yet a man who mingled in friendly intercourse with his fellow-men could never have done what he has done. Just because Henrik Ibsen was "the loneliest man of the age", it was possible for him to live his life among Danes or Germans and never become one of them. Reading the Dramas of France, the while, and working constantly, he gained in skill from year to year without losing one whit in native power, but developing symmetrically.

Others have had skill, and still others power, but it is rare to find the blend of technic and genius which Ibsen verily possessed.

Respectfully submitted  
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