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Muyi Li December 8, 2020

A Philosophical Spotlight on “Vine Leaves”:

Staging Ibsen Through the Lens of Hegel and Nietzsche

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Abstract

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Henrik Ibsen’s posthumous title “The Father of Realism” carries an illusory hint to present Ibsen’s prose dramas as nothing more than nineteenth-century cultural journalism. In this thesis, I explore the existential themes sometimes overlooked in traditional productions of Ibsen with philosophical frameworks provided in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Though philosophically divergent, Nietzsche and Hegel can be utilized as points of contrast that are nevertheless both useful in illuminating larger themes in Ibsen’s work. My goal is to use these deepening philosophical perspectives as inspirations for staging, design, and acting that might make Ibsen productions fuller, richer, and more implicative than commonplace realism. In Chapter One, I will introduce Ibsen’s twelve prose dramas written between 1875 and 1899, as well as Hegel and Nietzsche’s philosophy as presented in the aforementioned works. In Chapters Two, Three, and Four, I will discuss specific inspirations from Hegel and Nietzsche’s works for presenting three of Ibsen’s prose dramas: *Ghosts*, *When We Dead Awaken*, and *Hedda Gabler*. Finally, in my conclusion, I will summarize the three previous chapters and recapitulate my thesis statement about Ibsen’s prose dramas: that they suggest an asymptotic relationship between reality and ideals, that they indicate how neither drama nor life can be fully explained by any single philosophy, and that they demonstrate how drama can take a neutral position between the conflicting perspectives it represents while remaining empathetic and informed about them. Due to the outbreak of COVID-19, I modified this project from a live performance into a three-part theater photography portfolio consisting of tableaus of nodal moments in these plays. This thesis aims to contribute to scholarship on utilizing philosophical theories and theories from other disciplines in general for producing theater.

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Chapter One

Introduction

On February 27th, 1878, Henrik Ibsen found himself in the middle of an unusually emphatic speech to the Scandinavian Club in Rome, a workplace set up by and for Nordic intellectuals, motioning for the club to allow women to work in the positions of paid librarians and to be granted the right to vote on club matters:

> I repeat that I am not afraid of these so-called unpractical women; women have something in common with the true artist …. What I do fear is the worldly wisdom of the old; what I fear is men with little ambitions and little thoughts, little scruples and little fears, those men who direct all their thoughts and actions towards achieving certain little advantages for their own little and subservient selves.[1]

With this speech, a feminist could have proclaimed Ibsen an ally of her cause, but she would also find him awkwardly explaining himself in the widely-cited address to the Norwegian Women's Right's League, which Michael Meyer advises every dramatic critic to "learn by heart before reviewing any production of *A Doll's House*: 'I must disclaim the honour of having consciously worked for women's rights. I am not even quite sure what women's rights really are. To me it has been a question of human rights.'"[2]

To respect Ibsen's intentions and the plethora of scholarship before me, I shall not waste this chapter in discussing whether Ibsen technically passes as a feminist. I direct attention to this hardly-new topic as a clarification of my own approach to treating two equally relevant elements in Ibsen's work: the realist arena of Nineteenth Century Norway, not infrequently imbued with topical issues, such as the burgeoning of feminism, and what Ibsen claims to be "human" instead

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[1] Michael Leverson Meyer, *Ibsen: A Biography*, 1st Edition (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 449.
[2] Meyer, *Ibsen,* 774.

of simply female, political, historical, or accidental–the possibly universal, timeless elements that underlie isolated accounts of the human condition.

Doors Left Open by A Doll's House

A Doll's House (1879) is perhaps the most famous of Ibsen's plays. It is, however, relatively early in the sequence of all of Ibsen's prose dramas. Though vastly different from Ibsen's later, more symbolic plays, *A Doll's House* is no less imbued with an existential undertone, since it offers a glance into the universal impulse to self-realization that Ibsen is so intent on dramatizing. In subsequent paragraphs, I shall briefly discuss how *A Doll's House* can help us discover the potential of Ibsen's plays to be interpreted and produced as not only accounts of an awakening feminist consciousness, but also an awakening self-awareness as an individual coming into being. Our discussion of *A Doll's House* will hopefully transition our attention from a social realist Ibsen that everyone knows to an alternative, existential Ibsen hidden beneath his surface realism.

Before Nora leaves her house, her conversation with Torvald suggests that she is rapidly shedding the old consciousness, and is lost in the vast unknown seeking a new self:

> HELMER: You're a wife and mother, first and foremost.
> NORA: I don't believe that any more. I believe that, first and foremost, I'm a human being–just as much as you–or at least I should try to become one. I'm aware that most people agree with you, Torvald, and that your opinion is backed up by plenty of books. But I can't be satisfied with what most people say, or what's been written in the books. Now I've got to think these things through myself, and understand them.[3]

Nora's plight is a consequence of her society as an institution ("most people say"), interwoven with religion, law and even the intellectual ("in the books") in some cases; her plight

[3] Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House Ibsen: Four Major Plays*, trans. Rick Davis and Brian Johnston, 1st ed, Great Translations for Actors (Lyme, NH: Smith and Kraus, 1995), 60.

is specific to her gender ("a woman")–the expectation for a woman to comply with her husband's wishes, allowing her neither the opportunity nor the capacity to decide or act out of her own volition. This resulted in her child-like state of financial dependency and intellectual naïveté, due to lack of exposure to the rest of society ("like a child"). However, she has infinite potential–to comply with a "duty to herself," "think things over for [her]self." Nora realizes that human being is not only a status that comes with birth, but one to be created in independence and out of self-knowledge: if she is not already a human being, then she must "must try to become one." The phrase "a human being before a wife and a mother" is Nora's warning to not reduce herself to a slave-like existence defined only by duty to others. In essence, Nora has articulated the principle of self-realization: that the human being is an agent of becoming and self-creation.

As a woman who fearlessly speaks of self-realization, Nora seized the attention of many with the agenda of women's liberation. In 1892 Lou Salomé comments that "her slowly awakening strength and independence … now rears up and wrests itself free in enormous protest."[4] In 1883, Eleanor Marx and Bernard Shaw participated in a domestic reading of *A Doll's House.* Marx writes in a letter to Havelock Ellis that she "must do something to make people understand our Ibsen a little more than they do…."[5] Women's gender identities are an important reason why they experienced what they experienced. Each woman is a different entity, and the relationships between their femininity and self-realization are all equally significant to illuminating Ibsen's intentions.

However, one should also trace each individual thread of female identity to see the broader, collective fabric of self-realization. Ibsen's treatment of women in the later plays varies,

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[4] Lou Andreas-Salomé, *Ibsen's Heroines* (New York: Proscenium Publishers, 1989), 52.

[5] Havelock Ellis, "Eleanor Marx (Excerpt)," Marxist Internet Archive: Subjects: Marxism and Art: Literary Criticism, n.d., https://www.marxists.org/subject/art/lit_crit/ibsen_debate/ellis.htm.

but when we regard these women together, we can see that their experiences are different cases of the same statement: that a person in a society that prevents them from following inclinations central to their individuality is almost certain to experience devastating trauma, visited on themselves or others.

To see the larger perspective behind Ibsen's plays, we need to consider how each character and story, though inevitably idiosyncratic, relates to the universal human experience. In *A Doll's House*, as in Ibsen's other prose plays, the discussion self-realization as a universal human phenomenon and a heroine especially serviceable to feminism (or any other sociopolitical agenda, for that matter) need not present a conflict. After all, a woman is a human being. Even if being subjugated by the patriarchy is a problem unique to women, the suppression of autonomy in general is surely a universal experience. On this topic, Joan Templeton also wishes to make a case against those who say that Nora's awakening as a feminist tale is too topical to be universal, for the principle that Nora is voicing is an important one: "that women no less than man possesses a moral and intellectual nature have not only a right but a duty to develop it."[6] This statement will be no less true when "woman" and "man" are substituted with any other subgroups of humanity. And compared to actress Elizabeth Robins' play *Votes for Women* (1907), *A Doll's House* has already given us plenty of space to grasp not only a model of a self-realizing woman, but also a self-realizing human. Thinking Hedda Gabler, one of Ibsen's most famous heroines, an insufficient model of "feminine subjectivity,"[7] Robins created a feminist heroine, Vida, who seizes upon the moral and emotional transgression of her old lover Geoffrey

[6] Joan Templeton, "The Doll House Backlash: Criticism, Feminism, and Ibsen," *PMLA* 104, no. 1 (1989): 32, https://doi.org/10.2307/462329.

[7] Penny Farfan, "From 'Hedda Gabler' to 'Votes for Women': Elizabeth Robins's Early Feminist Critique of Ibsen," *Theatre Journal* 48, no. 1 (1996): 70, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3208714.

and forces him to commit to women's suffrage. However, as Farfan insightfully observes, in prioritizing her feminist agenda, Robins nevertheless created a somewhat one-dimensional protagonist who is not the sort of "complex and challenging roles" that she had seen in Ibsen's works and wish to play as an actress.[8] In contrast, Nora's realization of female inferiority in a patriarchal world is a key to unlocking a more fundamental consciousness that she is an individual in the struggle towards self-discovery. To this end, political agendas like woman's suffrage can surely be helpful to Nora, but Ibsen did not suggest in the political agendas *alone* are the answer to Nora's struggle, nor the struggle of any individual in search of their identity. That Nora wants to first figure out the relationship between herself and the world, not just a quick solution to her marriage, suggests that individuals must first come in touch with their own heart and soul and how they define existence in this world before they consider whether any social or political agenda can improve their lives.

I wish to make a further point here: while trying to understand Nora, and Ibsen's dramas in general, we should bear in mind that the impact of any immediate, local, even trivial issue in ordinary life is simultaneously existential. In a letter to Georg Brandes, Ibsen comments on those who mistake him as a progressive (due to his viewpoint on woman's emancipation): "These fellows only want individual revolutions, external revolutions, political, etc. But all that is just small change. What matters is the revolution of the spirit, and you must be one of those who march in the van."[9] Across his works, Ibsen depicts humanity gradually awakening to the idea of their spirit, and recognizing, by reflecting on their ideals, the deeply spiritual nature of their seemingly humdrum life. Politics, in Ibsen's eyes, are not spiritual. At his most radical, Ibsen had

[8] Farfan, 72.
[9] Meyer, *Ibsen: A Biography*, 329.

even dismissed organized government entirely[10], but in general, Ibsen's aversion towards politics is less a categorical hate for political movements, but a dissatisfaction with politics' frequent unawareness of the individual's spiritual being and the inability to improve it. If no spiritual development is present in the first place, then no politics can be the right way for humanity to truly advance. As a vehicle to spiritual advancement, self-realization is therefore central to Ibsen's plays. "It will help," Nordahl Rolfsen once wrote, "to dispel the idea that Ibsen is primarily a polemical writer. The real targets of Ibsen's indignation are mean-mindedness and pettiness, wherever they may be found."[11] Many political movements, the most progressive of which even advocated for anarchy, overlooked the fact that human beings must have established their hearts and souls as individuals in order to face the great void that follows any radical dismantling of institutions. The "door," or question, left open by *A Doll's House*, then, is how we should acknowledge the social realist façade while also making clear Ibsen's intentions to create dramas of existential significance.

In this thesis, I will consider Ibsen's emphasis on the self-realizing individual as a guide to discovering the common thread across his plays. Ibsen's prose dramas are not simply realistic studies of period living, but also allegories of the existential impact of self-realization on both the self and the environment. My goal is to use deepening philosophical perspectives as inspirations for staging, design, and acting that might make Ibsen productions fuller, richer, and more implicative than commonplace realism. In the subsequent sections, I shall discuss the philosophies of Hegel and Nietzsche as they pertain to Ibsen's dramas. Viewed together, Hegel and Nietzsche's vision present Ibsen's prose dramas as a chronicle of humanity's varied,

[10] Qtd. in Meyer, *Ibsen: A Biography,* 399.
[11] Meyer, *Ibsen: A Biography,* 431.

unyielding efforts at establishing its identity against the vast, unknown order of the universe under the guidance of spiritual ideals.

Ibsen's Realism and Romanticism

Before we commence our discussion, I would like to draw attention to Ibsen's heritage in romantic aesthetics. In my research, Errol Durbach's book *'Ibsen the Romantic:' Analogues of Paradise in the Later Plays* proved to be an invaluable roadmap. I will summarize Durbach's points and introduce them with other relevant sources.

Durbach states that the Romantic protagonist "must have had to make two assumptions: that some divine reality must necessarily inhere beneath the surface of phenomenal nature, and that the essential self can discover its analogue in the epiphany of 'natural supernatualism.'"[12] As nature images steadily increase in Ibsen's middle and late plays, culminating in the human family of Allmers and the mythical creature of the Rat Wife co-inhabiting the world of *Little Eyolf* (1894), Ibsen's protagonists are preoccupied with increasingly abstract and romantic ideals that are difficult to envision based on their surroundings. These characters also possess an adamant refusal of the ordinary life in its material and intellectual conditions as sufficient for their spiritual pursuits. If Émile Zola, the great defender of naturalist drama, represents a type of realism that does not assume any kind of broader reality underneath the façade of the commonplace, then Zola's realism must be clearly distinguished from Ibsen's. Eric Bentley calls Ibsen's dramas "a new and less overt Romanticism" in the place of naturalism.[13] For Bentley,

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[12] Errol Durbach, *'Ibsen the Romantic': Analogues of Paradise in the Later Plays* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1982), 16.

[13] Eric Bentley, "Wagner and Ibsen: A Contrast," in *The Playwright as Thinker*, NED-New edition, Fourth, A Study of Drama in Modern Times, Fourth Edition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 121, https://doi.org/10.5749/j.ctttv11j.9.

this is because of the subtly-embedded folklore-inspired elements in Ibsen's seemingly naturalistic settings, characters, plots, and designs. Bentley notes, furthermore, that in Ibsen's dramas "the world of trolls and goblins comes thronging back into his work, that the naturalism becomes less the substance and more of a mask, that a complex, shifting symbolism is employed–to the dismay of those who expect symbolism to be either purely decorative or purely allegorical."[14] Without reading Ibsen's compelling studies of historical living as entirely symbolic, I believe it is possible to explore relevant frameworks that illuminate the romanticism under Ibsen's realism. To do this, I consider the relevance of the following work in Ibsen's dramas: Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, published in 1807, in conjunction with Brian Johnston's Hegelian analysis of Ibsen's twelve prose plays, as well as Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1881).

Hegel and Nietzsche: Tripartite Spiritual Evolutions

Though Ibsen was notoriously reluctant to admit any influence by other thinkers on his writing, a young Ibsen likely studied Hegelian thoughts when he studied at University of Christiania in the 1850s, considering Hegel's pervasive European influence. On the intersection of Hegel and Ibsen, Brian Johnston has already produced monumental scholarship. Johnston's analysis of Ibsen's twelve prose dramas from *Pillars of Society* to *When We Dead Awaken* as a chronicle of the human consciousness journeying towards absolute knowing is what first drew me into this research. Johnston confirmed my intuitive sensation of a hugely repressed world of amorphous emotional impulses and veiled natural imagery in Ibsen's realism. Below I will briefly summarize Johnston's theory as it pertains to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

[14] Bentley, "Wagner and Ibsen: A Contrast," 126.

The assumption of Johnston's analysis is more clearly articulated in his book *Text and Supertext in Ibsen's Drama* (1989):

> There are criteria by which to tell whether one interpretation of a work of art is superior to another. As we have observed that account is superior which is able to draw the greatest number of details into the most coherent artistic intention. It does so by looking at the *objective implications* of each detail of the play–the supertext–to see whether all the details taken together build up, in their own terms, an artistic statement which it plausibly can be demonstrated that the artist could have intended. [15]

Johnston believes that the best interpretation of an artistic work is one that is the most coherent across the greatest number of details. With this procedure in mind, Johnston studied the twelve prose plays as a singular whole. Drawing on Hegel's expansive work, Johnston identified that, in chronological order, each play between *The Pillars of Society* and *When We Dead Awaken* corresponds to a single stage in the development of human consciousness in Hegel's *Phenomenology*. The first group of plays is *The Pillars of Society*, *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts* and *An Enemy of the People*. These plays are concerned with the ills of society in Ibsen's era. These plays, according to Johnston, represent human consciousness positioned within ethical communities that, discovering the irreconcilable tension between individual and their collective will, eventually dissolves. This is because the community **"**can only maintain itself by suppressing this spirit of individualism."[16] Defying such suppression, the "universal being" of the ethical communities therefore split up into a mere multiplicity of individuals, this lifeless Spirit is an equality, in which all count the same, *i.e. as persons.*"[17] The second group of plays spans across *Rosmersholm*, *The Wild Duck*, *The Lady from the Sea*, and *Hedda Gabler*. In this group,

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[15] Brian Johnston, "Text and Supertext," in *Text and Supertext in Ibsen's Drama* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), 79, http://search.ebscohost.com.proxy.library.emory.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=1029531&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

[16] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, ed. A. V. Miller, Reprint., Oxford Paperbacks (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013), 288.

[17] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit,* 290.

Johnston observes that "the emphasis shifts towards more indirect, internalized conflicts, reflecting the divided consciousness of this phase of Spirit."[18] In presentation, these plays show us "rich, submerged nature imagery of forest, mountain, sea-depth and the wild north."[19] In his foreword to *Phenomenology*, John N. Findlay observes that in this stage, humanity (as exemplified by thoughts in the Enlightenment) "poses too much pressure" to "progress further, to develop talents and possibilities" in the form of "state bureaucrat, culminating in the Monarch, and, on the other hand, in the endless open variability of economic life."[20] These large, organized efforts to progress is nevertheless in conflict with "individual subjectivity," embodied in the French revolution, "the pure self-assertion of the individual person."[21] Ibsen's characters across these plays exemplify most clearly the desire to self-realize, not according to the definitions imposed upon them by their society, but by their own definitions of their ideals–like Hedda Gabler's conception of beauty and the shared idea of love and reconciliation between Rebekkah and Rosmer in *Rosmersholm* (1886). It is also in this stage that the aforementioned romantic impulses gain focus in Ibsen's plays, corresponding to the characters' desire for freedom. The last group consists of *The Master Builder, Little Eyolf, John Gabriel Borkman*, and *When We Dead Awaken*. In this stage, Ibsen's plays turn from naturalism and repressed spiritual images to full-blown display of natural scenes, in which human and mythical characters such as the Rat Wife coinhabit the world. The expressionist symbols at the end of *John Gabriel Borkman* and the mysterious, esoteric language in these plays contribute to a strongly mythopoeic atmosphere. In the corresponding section of Hegel's *Phenomenology,* humanity enters the "religious" stage of

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[18] Brian Johnston, "The Corpse and the Cargo: The Hegelian Past in Ibsen's Naturalistic Cycle," *The Drama Review: TDR* 13, no. 2 (1968): 51, https://doi.org/10.2307/1144410.

[19] Johnston, *Text and Supertext,* 51.

[20] John N. Findlay, "Foreword," in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Reprint., Oxford Paperbacks (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013), xxiii.

[21] Findlay, "Foreword,":xxiv.

consciousness. The end of this spiritual journey, according to Findlay, is when "all forms of objectivity are identical with those essential to the thinking subject, so that in construing the world conceptually it is seeing everything in the form of self,"[22] or in Hegel's words, absolute knowing. The Spirit has progressed through all stages represented by all twelve dramas, reaching the next and ultimate level of human consciousness. It is important to note, however, that none of Ibsen's protagonists live to experience this new state of being. Besides Allmers and Rita, who live on with a new mission of caring for the Little Eyolfs of the world, Solness, Borkman, Rubek and Irene experience breakdown of the physical body or symbolic vanishing from the earth.

As a contemporary of Ibsen's, Nietzsche was gaining attention as a rising philosopher. But Nietzsche's comments on Ibsen's work were uninformed and unsavory. "One whole species of the most malignant "idealism"–which, incidentally, is also encountered among men; for example, in Henrik Ibsen, this typical old virgin–aims to *poison* the good conscience, what is natural in sexual love," writes Nietzsche of Ibsen at the end of his career.[23] Nietzsche has insisted on what Thomas F. Van Laan described as "respect for man–and not merely for virtuous man,"[24] which Ibsen has exhibited in plenty of his works. Nietzsche's comment is preposterous considering Ibsen's openly declared war on the hollow traditional morality that a community weaponizes against an individual. It is equally a shame, then, that Ibsen was wary as usual to disclose, if any, his intellectual kinship with Nietzsche. Unlike Hegel's systematic framework, Nietzsche's philosophy was refined largely in aphoristic writings, often quoted out of context.

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[22] Findlay, "Foreword," xxviii.

[23] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. Walter Kaufmann, Modern Library ed, vol. 1 (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 723.

[24] Thomas F. Van Laan, "Ibsen and Nietzsche," *Scandinavian Studies* 78, no. 3 (2006): 250, http://www.jstor.org.proxy.library.emory.edu/stable/40920694.

But one can still find a reliable roadmap to some of Nietzsche's most celebrated ideas in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

Previously we have discussed Johnston's triadic model of Hegelian spiritual progression across Ibsen's plays. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the three metamorphoses present a similarly tripartite evolution, though not of the collective human consciousness but of the individual. The "camel" stage is characterized by the individual's resolution to become independent in her thinking, to no longer rely on the masses and their values for finding significance in existence.[25] In this stage, the search for one's own values is inevitably confusing and painfully isolating, therefore metaphorized as a "burden," as camels often carry burdens across the desert. But it is only in this painful stage of isolation that the "camel" becomes a "lion." Here, "the spirit becomes a lion who would conquer his freedom and be master in his own desert."[26] The lion symbolizes the will to assert one's own freedom and autonomy, essentially embodying the will to self-realize. This is an individual who has overcome a tender conscience that, according to Nietzsche, issued from externally imposed systems of ethics, which it now resists entirely. From the "lion," the individual may mature into a "child," who wills its own laws, creates its own identity and defines its own morality. What sets the "child" apart from the lion is its ability to create "new values," [27] thus living according to self-defined significance of life, as opposed to finding the purpose and justification for life from others or, worse, an idol. The "herd," or a group that mindlessly follows societally imposed values and from which the "camel" flees, is largely in accordance with Hegel's Greek "ethical community," which eventually dissolves due

[25] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, Modern Library (New York: Random House, Inc., 1995), 26.
[26] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra,* 26.
[27] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra,* 27.

to its limitations. However, unlike Hegel's "religious" phase of Spirit, the "child" stage depends not on constructing a religious framework through reflecting on nature images, but on an act of creative self-determination. Interestingly, in the process of preaching, Nietzsche's Zarathustra himself experiences the existential alienation symbolized by the camel and tries to cope by seeking solace in his solitude. Zarathustra eventually realizes that eternal recurrence, the endless, chaotic cycle of creation and destruction, is all there is, and attempts to accept and find joy in both the beauty and the cruelty of this truth.

Perspectives of Hegelian and Nietzschean Tragedy in Ibsen's Drama

By comparing the tripartite progressions in Hegel and Nietzsche's accounts of the spiritual evolution, I am not suggesting that they are equivalent. While vastly different, both Hegel and Nietzsche influenced the intellectual sphere in which Ibsen composed his major works, and both provide perspectives on human existence that are relevant to Ibsen's dramas. But Ibsen's ultimate task was to create dramas, not to dramatize any particular philosopher's theories. Rather than reducing Ibsen to dramatized Hegel or Nietzsche, I want to use *both* philosophers' frameworks in a way that increases, not decreases possibilities of interpretation. For this reason, I will utilize Hegel and Nietzsche as points of contrast that are both indicative of aspects in Ibsen's texts. My thesis statement in this section is that between Hegel's universal, and Nietzsche's individual, existential philosophy, Ibsen's dramas demonstrate a fundamentally *asymptotic* relationship between reality and ideals and, indeed, between life and philosophy; drama, as Ibsen's *oeuvre* demonstrates, is capable of remaining neutral between conflicting perspectives as represented by its characters while demonstrating interest in and empathy for them.

In this section I will first clarify my definitions of a few critical concepts, including morality and tragedy. I will then compare the structure of the Greek hero's strife and downfall to the general narrative of self-realization in Ibsen's dramas, in order to establish the tragic perspective of these plays. Because both Hegel and Nietzsche relied on Greek tragedy to formulate their philosophy in the aforementioned books, I will then illuminate the connections and disconnects between Ibsen's dramas and each philosopher's theory of morality and tragedy. Based on my analysis, I will derive my conclusion about what each philosopher tells us about Ibsen's ultimate statement about life, philosophy, and drama. Finally, I will introduce a few general artistic choices that will be discussed in Chapters Two, Three, and Four.

At the beginning of our discussion, it is crucial to qualify the meaning of the term 'morality' in Hegel and Nietzsche's work. In my discussion of Hegel and Nietzsche, 'morality' has a closer meaning to 'ethicality,' or systems of ethics conceived and enforced by members of a society, usually in the forms of conventions, as they appeared in the history of culture. This definition is opposed to the general philosophical concept of 'morality' in itself. In other words, what is meant here is the human *interpretations* of 'good' and 'bad,' 'right' and 'wrong,' rather than 'goodness' or 'badness', 'rightness' or 'wrongness' themselves. This clarification is needed because, in Hegel's philosophy, morality as understood and practiced by human is considered an imperfect conception of what he believes to be the broader morality of the universe. Nietzsche's characterization of life as amoral in *The Birth of Tragedy* means that, to him, there is no such thing as morality 'in itself.' To Nietzsche, as long as morality continues to exist, there will always be ever-evolving, though ever-limiting, concepts of 'right' and 'wrong.' As I will discuss later, both Hegel's and Nietzsche's theories are based on their rejecting the adequacy of human ethicality, except that Hegel's position is supramoral, and that Nietzsche's is amoral.

My next step is to trace the development of the definition of "tragedy" and identify the classical tragic backbone of Ibsen's early work before moving on to further analysis of the tragic structure. Most readers would hesitate to call *A Doll's House* a tragedy, due to Nora's abrupt departure that cuts short the conclusion of a traditional well-made play, as well as the lack of a clear tragic catastrophe. However, aside from *The Pillars of Society, The Lady from the Sea,* and *Little Eyolf,* seven of Ibsen's twelve prose plays can be intuitively categorized as tragedies. The Oxford English Dictionary offers a few different definitions of tragedy. The earliest tragedy was Greek tragedy, a genre of plays featuring a chorus and involving strictly defined devices and rules. These tragedies are almost invariably about a protagonist who, believing himself or herself to be powerful or intelligent enough (hubris), challenges the fate imposed on them by the gods and experiences destruction as a consequence (catastrophe). Tragedy then evolved into "a classical or Renaissance verse drama, written in an elevated style and dealing with the downfall or death of the protagonist, typically a political leader or royal personage who is brought to ruin because of his or her error or fault, or because of a conflict with a greater force (such as fate or the gods)."[28] Later, tragedy transitioned out of a narrative of the aristocrats and into "a drama of a similar nature but typically written in prose and dealing with people of any social level; (also) any literary or dramatic work dealing with serious themes and having an unhappy ending."[29]

Interestingly, the OED uses a sentence from William Archer's commentary on the Danish actor Emil Poulsen's rise to prominence to illustrate tragedy: "Emil scored his first triumph as a character-actor in the part of the wily Bishop Nicholas in Ibsen's tragedy *The Pretenders.*"[30]A

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[28] "Tragedy, n.," in *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, September 2020), https://www-oed-com.proxy.library.emory.edu/view/Entry/204352?redirectedFrom=tragedy.

[29] "Tragedy, n."

[30] William Archer, "The Royal Danish Theatre," *Harper's Magazine*, 1892, https://harpers.org/archive/1892/02/the-royal-danish-theatre/.

dramatized history of two competing heirs to the Norwegian throne between 1223 and 1240, *The Pretenders* is not a drama concerning the middle class, the kind for which Ibsen is known. However, it closely follows the renaissance model of tragedy, reminiscent of Shakespeare. It would be another fourteen years before *Pillars of Society* (1877), but *Brand* (1864), *Peer Gynt* (1867), *Emperor and Galilean* (1873), though epic in their format, verse dramas with large numbers of characters, provided the tragic backbone of Ibsen's later, leaner prose dramas set in contemporary Norway. Across these works, the chief external contributor to the tragedy shifts away from the vice of a tangible antagonist to the interconnected effects of human decisions and unforeseeable, and thus inevitable, turn of events. These interwoven factors make it difficult to pinpoint the start of tragic momentum. As a result, the parties in dramatic conflict bifurcate into a foregrounded protagonist against the collective of all influences, blended and ever-changing, that pose obstacles to their desires, now possible to be generalized as "the environment." The OED simply terns it "a greater force"–God's will in *Brand* manifested in the encounters along his journey, or the fate that carries the Emperor Julian forward to "The Third Empire" and his untimely death. Though the epic figures and royal affiliates are gone, the narrative of an individual in a failed attempt to subvert their environment is alive and well in his later work. Ibsen's tragedies essentially evolved from the second definition of tragedy into the third, arriving at his (in)famous bourgeois individualism.

In subsequent paragraphs I shall show that Ibsen's dramas, some of which feature "happy endings," generally exhibits the protagonists in an attempt at self-realization under the romantic conception of ideals, which drives their overconfidence and ultimately results in them paying a considerable price. If catastrophe is the most essential element of tragedy, then the endings of *Ghosts* and the *The Wild Duck* put them squarely in the tragic category. The notable themes in

these plays are: 1) The almost exclusively harmless intentions of the protagonist, who is convinced that her ideals are perfect and worthy, and 2) The brutal sacrifice in the form of a child's life or health that makes the protagonist question their previous ideals. In *Ghosts*, Helene Alving reveals their father's philandering to Osvald and Regina in hopes of rectifying the delusion she constructed for them of a respectable household. However, in return, fate rips Regina away and gives Helene an Osvald writhing in syphilis. The sun, a conventional symbol of hope and warmth, now shines over the mother and son like a sadistic mockery. In *The Wild Duck,* old Ekdal declares that Hedvig's suicide is "the woods aveng[ing] themselves." The same malevolent fate that brought about Osvald's mental breakdown now kills Hedvig, another innocent child, when Gregers and Hjalmar's only transgression was following the most impeccably idealistic ambition to lift Hjalmar and his family out of squalor.

What disturbs Ibsen's audience is that, under closer analysis, such a mysterious influence of fate is equally present in Ibsen's tragedies and non-tragedies. *Little Eyolf* focuses on Rita and Allmers's journey out of grief for their son Eyolf, who drowned, by devoting themselves to charity for other deprived children. For this reason, *Little Eyolf* may not be a tragedy in the conventional sense. But this does not mean the play does not contain any elements that, in other contexts, would still have resulted in a tragedy. For example, The Rat Wife is a non-naturalistic element in the play. Her mythical nature questions whether Rita and Allmers, champions of human responsibility, have as much agency as the term 'human responsibility' presupposes. Would more honest relationships between Rita, Almers, and Asta be enough to prevent Eyolf's death? Not if the Rat Wife still shows up at the house at the beginning of the play, luring Eyolf away. The reason why the infant Eyolf was vulnerable in the first place is that, in an amorous fit to make love, his parents neglected him as he fell and crippled himself. Because of the Rat Wife

and the mysterious erotic energy that possessed his parents, *Little Eyolf* is less a story of learning from and prevailing against human errors than a story of coping with an influence beyond reason, comprehension, and prediction. Such influence disregards the characters' sincerest efforts at moral redemption. When it does not wreak havoc on the families, it still actively affects human decisions. Not even the happy ending of *The Lady from the Sea* can diminish the presence and power of such a contending force. By choosing her responsibilities as a mother and wife over the calling of otherworldly, erotic adventures, Ellida manages to keep her family intact. But Ellida paid her price, too: she has given up her ideals to adapt to an ordinary life. Neither will Ellida be immune to tragedy, for the play "does not go very far towards providing a corrective to the bleak portraits of marriage in Ibsen's other mature plays."[31] And most importantly, the same tides that brought Ellida's lover swept Eyolf away. Further, the mermaid analogy and ocean images of these plays call to mind the "depth of the sea"[32] that took Hedvig, in Gregers Werle's words. Wangel correctly realizes that Ellida's attraction towards the sea as an "awakened, growing rage for freedom in [her]. Nothing else,"[33] but he thinks, the power of the sea will evaporate once Ellida has voluntarily embraced her duties. However, the sea is very much alive, and as a form of irrevocable natural force, we have already seen its destructive potential in *The Wild Duck*. *The Master Builder* later reaffirms this destructive potential when Hilde, stepdaughter of the free-spirited Ellida, watches a power-crazed Solness ascend the ladder she has propelled him to climb and fall to his death. Tragedies or not, Ibsen's dramas contain a force that is often mysterious and sometimes cruel, unable to be neutralized by even the best intentions

[31] Janet Garton, "The Middle Plays," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen*, ed. James Walter McFarlane, Cambridge companions to literature (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 119.

[32] Henrik Ibsen, "The Wild Duck," in *The Complete Major Prose Plays*, trans. Rolf Fjelde, 1st Edition (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1978), 488.

[33] Henrik Ibsen, "The Lady from the Sea," in *The Complete Major Prose Plays*, trans. Rolf Fjelde, 1st Edition (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1978), 686.

and choices on the characters' part.

To summarize, the narrative of self-realization ending a fatalistic compromise due to the protagonist's unrelenting idealism, even when such compromise brings about a *seemingly* favorable stasis, is analogous to the elements of hubris and catastrophe in Greek tragedy. Further, elements generalizable as 'the environment,' like 'fate,' 'destiny,' or even gods in Greek tragedy, disregard human morality and impose agony upon the protagonists; these elements are increasingly palpable in Ibsen's middle and late plays as mythic images or characters. Johnston reminds us that "the gods of Greek tragedy are amorally powerful forces and, like the cosmic forces of modern scientific thinking, they ultimately elude the human categories by which we try to identify them."[34] Considered altogether, these factors are why Shaw's approach to Ibsen in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891) is reductive. By analyzing behaviors and relationship in Ibsen's plays solely from the moral perspective, Shaw demonstrates that right beliefs–those that adapt with time and circumstance–shall be rewarded with satisfaction, while wrong beliefs–those that refuse to be changed–shall be met with heartbreak and frustration. Although this is fairly relevant to Ibsen's first four prose plays, which are concerned with society's ills, it indeed becomes inadequate in Ibsen's last plays. Shaw's interpretation of *Little Eyolf's* is exceptionally shallow and clichéed:

> Thus we see that in Ibsen's mind, as in the actual history of the nineteenth century, the way to Communism lies through the most resolute and uncompromising Individualism.… When a man is at last brought face to face with himself by a brave Individualism, he finds himself face to face, not with an individual, but with a species …. He can have no life except a share in the life of the community….[35]

[34] Brian Johnston, "Ibsen's Cycle as Hegelian Tragedy," *Comparative Drama* 33, no. 1 (1999): 149.

[35] Bernard Shaw, "The Quintessence of Ibsenism 1891, 1912-13," in *Shaw and Ibsen: Bernard Shaw's The Quintessence of Ibsenism, and Related Writings*, ed. J. L. Wisenthal (Univ of Toronto Pr, 1979), 182. *Quintessence* was first published in 1891, and in 1912-1913 Shaw added new commentaries and edited some existing passages in

Shaw assumes that Ibsen's plays are cautionary tales about surrendering the seduction of empty, outdated ideals. Flexible, realistic thinking is right; inflexible, unrealistic thinking is wrong. Such an assumption makes it easy to extract political teachings. But the Rat Wife, the woods, the sea, and even the white horse in *Rosmersholm* not only fuse romantic imageries with naturalism but also complicate the moral significance of Ibsen's protagonists, making it hard to determine which parts of the protagonists' circumstance is their own doing and which parts are the profound trajectory of the universe. Ibsen's masterful irony is the delusion among his characters that, through subscribing to either the society's or their own morality, they can subvert the catastrophe that fate can impose on them. Their consciousness, in Nietzsche's words, is no more than "that which the soldiers painted on canvas have of the battle represented on it."[36] The universe in Ibsen's dramas encompasses conflicting human moral perspectives but cannot be fully explained or conquered by any.

Hegel's Supramoral "Eternal Justice" in Tragedy

I will now explicate Hegel and Nietzsche's theory of tragedy and morality respectively and connect them to Ibsen's dramas. I owe my understanding of Hegel and Nietzsche's conceptions of justice, art, and metaphysics to Leon Rosenstein's essay "Metaphysical Foundations of the Theories of Tragedy in Hegel and Nietzsche" (1970). To develop my comparison between Nietzsche and Hegel, I traced Rosenstein's arguments and quotations back to the primary sources and included them throughout this section.

Hegel's conception of art and tragedy is rooted in his metaphysics of a stage-by-stage

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the book. Since *Little Eyolf* was not published until 1894, Shaw's passage on the play was clearly added between 1912 and 1913.

[36] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy,* in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann, Modern Library ed, vol. 1 (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 82.

dialectical progression. *Phenomenology of Spirit* is not an account for any individual spirit, but of the universal human consciousness. Hegel's conception of "Spirit," as Findlay describes in his foreword to *Phenomenology*, is "what must be conceived as realizing itself in what is individual and empirical, and as responsible both for the being and intelligibility of the latter."[37] "In pressing forward to its true existence," writes Hegel, "consciousness will arrive at a point at which it gets rid of its semblance of being burdened with something alien, with what is only for it, and some sort of 'other,' at a point where appearance becomes identical with essence …."[38] In the end, the consciousness "will signify the nature of absolute knowing itself."[39] A nebulous concept, "absolute knowing" is never fully illuminated in *Phenomenology* or Ibsen's dramas.

Hegel's philosophy is that Spirit outgrows each stage of consciousness, and the conflicts between different moral positions are a necessary part of the evolution of the Spirit towards absolute knowing. Recall that the definition of morality here, as previously stated, is historically and conventionally situated. Johnston compares these stages to "theatres" in which the human spirit "tenaciously insist on their self-sufficiency but that are, under unremitting analysis, provably inadequate."[40] Without moral conflicts, there can be no process through which to advance. The universe encompasses these conflicting moral perspectives without ultimately rewarding or punishing some more than others. It runs its course through the resolution of such conflicts and the arrival of a new stasis. "As the absolute might of destiny"[41] in ancient tragedy, Hegel calls it the "eternal justice." To summarize, Hegel is saying that tragedy and arts in general

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[37] Findlay, "Foreword," viii.
[38] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 57.
[39] Hegel, *Phenomenology,* 57.
[40] Brian Johnston, *The Ibsen Cycle: The Design of the Plays from Pillars of Society to When We Dead Awaken*, Rev. ed (Univ. Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1992), 56.
[41] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of Fine Art*, trans. F.P.B. Osmaston, vol. 4 (London: G. Bell and sons, Limited, 1920), 341, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/55731/55731-h/55731-h.htm.

can (and should) demonstrate the unfolding of eternal justice, of the world advancing by resolving the conflicts between clashing moral perspectives, so that through this process it arrives at "a more complete reality."[42]

The tragic hero is only one among the many human moral perspectives represented in tragedy. Because of the tragic hero's "one-sidedness"[43] or their necessarily incomplete perspective of morality, they are doomed from the start. Any such one-sidedness will be destroyed and subsumed into a new, more complete stage of the Spirit before another one-sidedness emerges again. In this way, tragic heroes also serve the universe by carrying it forward. In the tragic hero's unsuccessful challenge of their environment, Spirit completes the dialectic with itself necessary for advancement.[44] Rosenstein identifies an "expansively personal" type of Hegelian tragedy, comprised of "subjectivity in its internal conflict and self-creation in opposition to and amidst the infinite breadth and variety of external conditions."[45] According to the OED definitions previously discussed, this view can be applied not only to Ibsen's tragedies but to his drama in general.

Hegel's position on human morality, then, can be characterized as "supramoral."[46] Because in its nature as a "one-sidedness," human morality is necessarily inadequate; Spirit–or humanity–must constantly discover such inadequacies and constantly surpass any historically situated morality. Tragedy depicts this arduous supra-moral process. Some of Ibsen's most celebrated tragedies exemplify Hegel's theory. *A Doll's House*, *The Wild Duck* and *Ghosts* leave

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[42] Leon Rosenstein, "Metaphysical Foundations of the Theories of Tragedy in Hegel and Nietzsche," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 28, no. 4 (1970): 524, https://doi.org/10.2307/428493.

[43] Hegel, *The Philosophy of Fine Art*, 4:302.

[44] Rosenstein, "Metaphysical Foundations of the Theories of Tragedy in Hegel and Nietzsche," 525.

[45] Rosenstein, "Foundations," 525.

[46] For a more extensive examination of Hegel's "supramoral" philosophy, see Mark Alzauer's analysis of Mark Alznauer, "Ethics and History in Hegel's Practical Philosophy," *The Review of Metaphysics* 65, no. 3 (2012): 581–611, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41635483.

their characters with profound confusion about their convictions, suggesting the need for humanity to reconsider the fundamental nature of such institutions of marriage and family. *An Enemy of the People* is essentially a total dismissal of socially based ethical life in general. Ruthlessly the play exposes the necessary occurrence of blind spots in socially based moral system, suggesting that Spirit is in need of evolution.

More importantly, if we accept Hegel's account of Spirit advancing by discovering the limits of each stage, then we must also accept Johnston's hypothesis that there is necessary continuity between each of Ibsen's plays, just as there is necessary continuity between each stage of the Spirit in *Phenomenology*. As Johnston puts it, the structure of the twelve-play cycle is "necessitating" and "fatalistic," such that, in chronological order, one play *must* follow the next in representing Spirit's development; one tragic hero begins where her predecessor ends.[47] The strongest evidence for this hypothesis is the continuity of characters across plays. Hilde is the only recurring character in the cycle, first appearing as a girl in *The Lady from the Sea* and later as a young woman in *The Master Builder*. Yet certain characters can also be considered a more developed version of a previous one. The theme of self-realization also becomes more intertwined with awakening romantic sensibilities, taking its protagonists from the confines of drawing rooms in the earlier plays to the vast open fields in the later ones; the characters' conversations and preoccupations become almost explicitly about such grand topics such as life and art in the last four plays, suggesting a growing existential awareness.

However, there are also questions: do Ibsen's protagonists, or characters in general, have any internality besides being a part of a larger, collective Spirit? And if there is progress in the characters' general consciousness towards a more existential level, is the Hegelian absolute

[47] Johnston, *The Ibsen Cycle*, 87.

knowing the destination? I share my concern in the first question with Errol Durbach, who worries that, in Johnston's supertextual analysis, the protagonist "must extend to match the immensity of Ibsen's intellectual intention. There can be no Freudian 'inwardness,' no Stanislavskian source of 'motivation' in this Theatre of Ideas."[48] If we merge similar characters from different plays into faceless archetypes based on their similarities, we risk discounting Ibsen as a skilled creator of unique personalities. How to preserve the idiosyncrasies of each character and showcase the conscious nature of their choices remain to be answered. To be sure, Hegel does pay attention to the individual's consciousness as well. In *Phenomenology*, there are a few sections prior to "BB. Spirit" that discuss how individuals as self-interested entities eventually triumph against an intended order of the world governed by what humanity presumed to be universal "virtues."[49] This is how individuals come to be individuals, independent agents of self-becoming, for "virtue aims absurdly at abolishing the individuality which is the very principle of actuality."[50]As I will discuss later, this account of awakening of the individual consciousness is similar to Nietzsche's. But in Johnston's analysis of Ibsen and Hegel, he focused on one section, "BB. Spirit," in *Phenomenology*, which has an unequivocally schematic model of *collective* progression of the human consciousness. On this note, I want to point out that the "fatalistic" nature of the cycle is only obvious when the cycle is taken as a whole; only when we assume that humanity moves towards "absolute knowing" do the plays only present themselves in as a coherent sequence. Humanity's progress towards a more existential awareness is indeed discernable across Ibsen's plays, but Ibsen never explicitly illustrates whether the Peak

[48] Errol Durbach, "A Century of Ibsen Criticism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen* (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 245.

[49] John N. Findlay, "Analysis," in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Reprint., Oxford Paperbacks (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013), 544–45.

[50] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 545.

of Promise at the conclusion of *When We Dead Awaken*, supposedly the end of humanity's spiritual journey, is indeed the kind of consciousness that Hegel proposes. As we shall see in Chapter 3, we as the audience are not allowed a glance into the transcendence, if any, of Rubek or Irene upon their death. This ambiguous ending of *When We Dead Awaken* seems to declare that the final stage of Spirit is beyond mortal capacities and therefore unknowable. What we know for sure, however, is that there are still living mortals like Maya and Ulfhejm on earth. With progress driven by what is best generalized as the desire to be free and grow into oneself, Ibsen's twelve dramas take us through humanity first suppressing, then experimenting with this desire, and, finally, they suggest a vague possibility of becoming fully transcendent at the end—but do no more than suggest.

Nietzsche's Amoral View of Life and Creative Will in Tragedy

Nietzsche wrote *The Birth of Tragedy* in 1872*,* in which he delineates the Apollonian and the Dionysian, an interdependent artistic binary. These impulses make up Hellenic art, symbolizing Hellenic wisdom. The Apollonian is "measured restraint, that freedom from the wilder emotions, that calm of the sculptor god."[51] In the Dionysian, "the nature which has become alienated, hostile, or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her lost son, man."[52] Tragedy is a synthesis of both. The Apollonian instruments of language, scenes, colors and most importantly, a protagonist, that weave together a sequence of events that brings the audience to such an emotional state. On the other hand, the feeling of awe and terror about the world inspired by a performance of tragedy is deeply Dionysian, going back to a "unity leading back to the very heart of nature."[53] Nietzsche's study of the Apollonian and Dionysian

[51] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 35.
[52] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy,* 37.
[53] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy,* 59.

are not historical accounts of the origin of tragedy, but poetic evocations of forces that gave rise to tragedy as an art form. With the aforementioned connotations, the Apollonian and particularly the Dionysian can be found in many symbols across Ibsen's plays. The repressed impulse of life-joy is represented by the plants, a Dionysian symbol in the background of *Ghosts.* Hedda speaks of "vine leaves" in her hair as she envisions Løvborg reborn with tremendous power like Dionysus. Maja and Ulfhejm, the carefree young couple that lives together at the end of *When We Dead Awaken*, carries the Dionysian animalistic energy.

The Birth of Tragedy is not all of Nietzsche's philosophy. However, the amoral view of life expressed in this work laid the foundation for his later work. Though the Apollonian and Dionysian might read like the conflicting moral perspectives in Hegel's theory, the relationship between these two forces are not Hegelian in the sense that they would be synthesized into a more complete reality. In *Ecce Homo* (1888), Nietzsche remarks that his first book "smells offensively Hegelian."[54] Nietzsche is fundamentally skeptical of the Hegelian stage-by-stage progression, and, more broadly, of metaphysics in general, as he makes clear in In *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*.[55] His ultimate goal in creating the Apollonian and Dionysian is to emphasize an amoral view of life, in which he dismisses any claim of morality (especially Christian morality) as an objective, universal concept. Life, like art, is in no need of external source of moral justification. "Confronted with morality," writes Nietzsche, "life *must* continually and inevitably be in the wrong, because life *is* something essentially amoral."[56]

Nietzsche's fascination with the Dionysian was lifelong. Later, in *Thus Spoke*

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[54] Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo,* 727.

[55] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, trans. Marianne Cowan (South Bend, IN: Gateway Editions, 1962), 27.

[56] Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, 23.

Zarathustra, Nietzsche no longer speaks of the Dionysian but ventriloquizes through Zarathustra the same kind of life-affirming perspective that defies conventional morality. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* provides useful vocabulary for characterizing self-realization in Ibsen's dramas. As Ibsen's characters come to understand the emptiness of the morality of the "herds" and the meaninglessness of "bad conscience," they affirm "their will to power."

When repressive ethics are imposed upon the individual by the herd, bad conscience arises as the consequence of denying life: "all the strong and savage instincts such as adventurousness, rashness, cunning, rapacity, lust of power, which till then had not only been honoured, but actually encouraged, were suddenly put down as dangerous, and by degrees branded as immoral and criminal."[57] For this, Ibsen supplies ample examples. *The Master Builder* finds Solness burdened with the obsession that his children's death was retribution for his reckless ambition to put humans before God. *Little Eyolf* finds Rita and Allmers ruminating over how, in a moment of sex and abandon, they failed to protect the infant Eyolf from breaking his leg from a crippling fall. *Rosmersholm* shows us John and Rebekka, who keep their relationship platonic, lest they dishonor Rosmer's late wife. Burdened by bad conscience, the individual needs to understand the amorality of life and the importance of the creative will. Instead of worshipping fabricated idols and deriving the meaning of life from a deity, hoping for a better life beyond this one, individuals should create meaning for themselves. This is the teaching behind the three metamorphoses. Individuals must rely on the will to power, which is not just a will to continue living, but a will to "self-increase."[58] Thus far antagonized and suppressed by religious states and societies, the will to power drives individuals to greater

[57] Georg Brandes, "Friedrich Nietzsche," trans. A.G. Chater, Project Gutenberg, 2014, 580–82, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/47588/47588-h/47588-h.htm.

[58] Brandes, "Nietzsche," 531.

autonomy and control. In the death of idols, the metaphysical void inspires humans to create the meaning of life on a blank canvas, just as "architects often think of the generation of locally meaningful environments out of natural waste to be a particular goal, a spur to activity."[59] Since Nietzsche dismisses objective morality, the will to power is amoral, or in Nietzsche's words, beyond good and evil. The Overman is the apotheosis of such amoral power. Even when the will to power proves destructive to the individual or those around them, it is only a part of the eternal recurrence, the endless repetition of creation and destruction.[60] Though the individual or the world may eventually perish, Zarathustra teaches individuals to embrace the eternal recurrence and their experienced lives, even with all its sufferings and its eventual demise.

Tragedy, then, is a portal for human beings to recognize eternal recurrence, especially its cruelty, and to develop an ability to recognize the destined of destruction while also embracing life along with its impermanence. To Nietzsche, such pessimism is necessary, but not all there is to life. As Joshua Dienstag summarizes, Nietzsche's Dionysian Pessimism stands distinct from the Schopenhauerian kind, because "all pessimism concludes that the universe has no order and human history no progress; the Dionysian variety is only one that can find something to like about this situation."[61] The tragic protagonist brings about a pessimism that segues to the Dionysian variety, the one with which the individual will hopefully develop a strong will against a cruel world. Through *Prometheus* of Aeschylus, Nietzsche sees that "the best and highest possession of mankind can acquire is obtained by sacrilege and must be paid for with consequences that involve the whole flood of sufferings and sorrows with which the offended

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[59] Joshua Foa Dienstag, "Tragedy, Pessimism, Nietzsche," *New Literary History* 35, no. 1 (2004): 91, http://www.jstor.org.proxy.library.emory.edu/stable/20057822.

[60] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Viking, 1954), 1966, 217–18.

[61] Joshua Foa Dienstag, "Nietzsche's Dionysian Pessimism," *The American Political Science Review* 95, no. 4 (2001): 933, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3117722.

dignities have to afflict the nobly aspiring race of men."[62] The Overman is not a state of being attainable for just everyone, for the more one asserts her power against the chaotic universe the more dangerous the consequences, yet the strife towards the Overman or the will to power, as the tragic protagonist exemplifies, is brave and admirable. Every protagonist who enacts this paradox inherent in existence, then, is heroic because how they serve humanity by instilling a practical pessimism that reconciles the finitude of human existence with the possibility to continue striving.

In contrast to Nietzsche, who glorifies tragic protagonists in the reasoning above, Ibsen is at best impartial towards them. Ibsen methodically shows his protagonists in attempts to embrace their will to power while refusing to glorify the pain, horror, and destruction that accompanies self-realization. And, in addition to the protagonists' viewpoints, Ibsen almost always articulates through certain characters the moral conventions of the society to which the rest of characters are bound, showing that the social consequences of the idealist's self-realization on those around her (usually family members) is often excruciating and not at all negligible. For this reason, I hesitate to call Ibsen a Nietzschean amoralist.

In climbing the ladder, Master Builder Solness recovers the invincibility he felt in his youth, but is such feeling worth one's life? Besides Hilde, whose amoral perspective frames Solness as a hero for his will to power, all other onlookers are appalled. Solness's rash behavior and death, furthermore, will not reverse the loss of his children in the fire and will most certainly burden his wife with more grief. Michael W. Kaufman thinks that in Solness's fall to death, "unlike Nietzsche, Ibsen insists that we remain aware of the incalculable cost of achieving this

[62] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 71.

freedom."[63] Thomas Van Laan writes that "where Ibsen parts from Nietzsche on the destruction of the protagonist–strikingly so–is his not seeing it as a positive thing, as a means by which we are reconciled to existence. He sees it, instead as the primary indication of what makes existence so [horrible], to use a word that frequently recurs in his tragedies."[64] To Ibsen, ideals and self-transcendence are perhaps romantic, but the disaster that ensues is just as grotesque as self-transcendence is seductive.

In summary, Hegel believes in a ladder of advancement on which the fate of an individual is only a fragment of broader, larger tendencies that carry the whole of humanity towards absolute knowing. Ibsen's plays do demonstrate humanity evolving towards greater existential awareness through self-realization but do not offer a definitive answer as to whether absolute knowing is where self-realization takes us. Nor is Hegel's universal perspective adequate for understanding characters as individuals. On the other hand, Nietzsche is skeptical of objective morality and Hegelian metaphorical progress. Nietzsche believes in the creative power of the individual to determine their destiny, which Ibsen affirms by consistently dramatizing characters in self-realization, but unlike Nietzsche's total dismissal of morality, Ibsen painstakingly illustrates the repercussions of defying ethical conventions on personal and communal life.

From here, we step back and consider the three things that Hegel and Nietzsche tell us about Ibsen's ultimate statement about life, philosophy and drama. To reiterate, my goal in this thesis is to use these deepening philosophical perspectives as inspirations for staging, design, and acting choices that might produce Ibsen productions fuller and richer and more implicative than

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[63] Michael W. Kaufman, "Nietzsche, Georg Brandes, and Ibsen's 'Master Builder,'" *Comparative Drama* 6, no. 3 (1972): 184, http://www.jstor.org.proxy.library.emory.edu/stable/41152586.

[64] Van Laan, "Ibsen and Nietzsche," 298.

commonplace realism. For this reason, I will utilize Nietzsche and Hegel as contrasting yet mutually informative viewpoints.

The first point is that in Ibsen's dramas, personal and collective progress is possible through self-realization, but one shall never wholly reach her ideals without any sort of sacrifice, whether that be life, a child, or their own ability to continue forward; for this reason, the relationship between human existence and ideals is fundamentally *asymptotic*. Caught in their fascinations, Ibsen's idealists become overwhelmed with romantic sensibilities, the kind that Errol Durbach describes as "the inability to conceive of an alternative to infinitude which is not tainted by gross imperfection."[65] This kind of idealistic drive is capable of getting the individual closer to the ideal. In *Pillars of Society,* for example, idealistic devotion and visions of freedom lead Johan and Dina to fight their way through difficult family relations for a new life together in America. The human consciousness represented *John Gabriel Borkman,* a later play, is more sensitive towards the importance of the "joy of life" than that in *Ghosts*, suggesting progress on the scale of the whole of humanity. But in reaching upward to their ideals, Ibsen's protagonists overlook their own situatedness in an ethical society, as well as the limits to their bodies and intellect. In Hegel's theory, because the idealist's morality is perspectival, it will be subsumed as the universe moves towards completeness and she, therefore, have to suffer catastrophe that prevents her from reaching the ideal. In Nietzsche's theory, the protagonists' downfall is a manifestation of the larger chaos of the world. But both philosophers would agree, however, that though ideals can be infinite, human beings are fundamentally limited. We can have clear visions of the ideals, the "axis" towards which we travel, but as the moving agent, we will never reach it even if we continue to move forever.

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[65] Durbach, *'Ibsen the Romantic': Analogues of Paradise in the Later Plays*, 199.

The second point is that analogous to the asymptotic relationship between reality and ideal, philosophy can constantly be improved upon, but it will never comprehensively explain life. If take Ibsen's dramas to be multi-faceted depictions of life, then no single philosophy can illuminate every perspective on life. Different philosophical theories should be used in conjunction to understand drama, just as elements like actors, sets, lights and sound work in tandem to produce a theatrical performance. In *Phenomenology*, Hegel's discussion of the individual rejecting external, universal ideas of "virtues" and acting instead based on self-given laws is strikingly similar to Zarathustra's teachings. Yet Hegel's writing, in his typical analytical manner, pales in the face of the poetic language of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which better fills in the void for the psychology of the individual. The Hegelian "Spirit" interpretation traces a metanarrative across Ibsen's plays, thus expanding the resources we have to understand each individual play, whereas a Nietzschean interpretation leads us to examine the plays as separate, independent narratives. Certain plays also fit better with one philosophy than another: for example, while *Ghosts* teems with the Nietzschean Dionysian imagery, *Hedda Gabler*, though conventionally approached as a Nietzschean play because of the symbol of "vine leaves," can be more fully understood with the Hegelian framework of Spirit in self-alienation. Both theatre and life are an arena for the communication and synthesis of more than one philosophy.

However, this is not to say that there is no consistency in Ibsen's dramas, or that all philosophical frameworks are equally effective for understanding Ibsen. Hegel and Ibsen are especially compatible with Ibsen's works because, despite the differences between these philosophers, both have developed extensive theories to explain the fundamental complexity of life that human ethics cannot fully capture. The fraught moral perspectives inherent in the tragic perspective of self-realization is Ibsen's way of exposing this inadequacy. As Elizabeth Jacobs

writes, as Ibsen realized that "individualism cannot disregard the limitations set by social conditions, he fought a life-long struggle to remain above the society whose morality he despised."[66] Hegel and Nietzsche cannot be completely harmonized, for they are not intellectual kin by any stretch. If I must produce a verdict as to which philosopher offers the better model for interpreting Ibsen, then, because we are considering Ibsen's prose dramas as a sequence of interrelated plays, Johnston's' Hegelian model is indeed more comprehensive at explaining the continued metamorphosis of earlier themes in Ibsen's later plays. We may even go further and say that a Hegelian analysis would consider Nietzsche's camel-lion-child transformation only a single, and thus inadequate, phase in the many phases of the human consciousness, though Nietzsche would disagree. But Johnston's analysis is not all of Hegel, nor all of Ibsen. The "BB. Spirit" section of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, expansive as it is, is predicated on an assumption of linear and necessary progress; if this assumption is rejected, then the model is comprehensive for nothing. After all, Ibsen's dramas still completely make sense even when they are not regarded as a continuous whole. But on what little ground Nietzsche and Hegel may agree, they would both look to Ibsen's plays as valid studies of the inherent tragic nature of human existence, though they have vastly different interpretations of tragedy. Because the individual's struggle against a social environment that inhibits her individuality is so consistent in and central to Ibsen's plays, philosophical frameworks that consider ethical conventions fallible or, on a broader scale, subjective and relative will proof more helpful in understanding Ibsen. Moreover, philosophies that consider human beings as agents with the potential, though not the necessary fate, of establishing themselves as individuals will also find plenty of foothold in Ibsen's plays.

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[66] Elizabeth Jacobs, "Henrik Ibsen and the Doctrine of Self-Realization," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 38, no. 3 (1939): 423, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27704526.

But this is as far as consistency goes. Because of the varied results of the protagonists' self-realization, some ending with personal triumph and family tragedy while others ending in peaceful compromise, it is difficult to summarize Ibsen's attitude towards self-realization in a singular position. The third and final point is that Ibsen's prose plays exemplify the capability of drama to showcase conflicting viewpoints while allowing each to be understood with adequate intellectual, emotional, and even spiritual depth, thereby taking an informed, sophisticated neutral position between them. Whether it be poised between the ethics of the individual and the ethics of the society, or between human morality and amoral nature, Ibsen's dramas are always permeated with a sense of tension. This tension is what makes his dramas fascinating.

Across all of his plays, Ibsen considers a revolution of the human spirit in the form of self-realization possible and necessary, but the sentiment across his plays towards self-realization seem to shift. In his early problem plays one can reasonably argue that Ibsen sides with the individual as a victim of the tyranny of an outdated, hypocritical society, but in his middle and late plays, Ibsen becomes masterful in depicting utopian bliss and sobering heartbreak, the vastness of the imagination and confinements of environment in equal magnitudes, so that the truth of what self-realization means to the individual and to the society around her intertwine into an intricate two-sided position. Jacobs almost perfectly summarized Ibsen's attitude towards self-realization: "Ibsen has no compassion for the human race. Man's only hope is to achieve truth and freedom, regardless of the price. He has no sympathy–only a feeling of comradeship–with those who suffer."[67] No sympathy, but at least plenty of empathy for humanity, as Ibsen's plays are constructed with a delicate balance, so that each perspective, element or impulse in

[67] Jacobs, "Ibsen and the Doctrine of Self-Realization," 421.

opposition with each other is thoroughly explored. In this fashion, Ibsen's dramas exemplify what Jessica Wahman calls drama's unique ability to "invite empathy with differing and sometimes unfamiliar or uncomfortable perspectives, often without asking the audience ultimately to take a side or agree with any of them but still aiming at a heightened degree of understanding."[68] This is why Ibsen's attitude across all twelve prose dramas can only be characterized as neutral, though it is not apathetic or detached, but empathetic and attentive towards all perspectives involved. Now that I have analyzed what the philosophers bring to the table, I will now discuss a few general artistic choices that I have made throughout the three subsequent chapters that have been partially inspired by Hegel and Nietzsche.

First of all, Johnston's Hegelian model of Ibsenite tragedy allows me to select and connect different scenes from different plays. I will stage them as a continuous narrative of spiritual evolution that unfolds in different plays, by different characters, in different circumstances. For this thesis I have selected *Ghosts, Hedda Gabler*, and *When We Dead Awaken*, as they are the most prominently existential ones among the twelve prose plays. As a privilege in staging Ibsen as contemporary practitioners, we can see which parts of Ibsen's dramas are merely topical, and which are eerily eternal because of our twenty-first-century hindsight. We must take risks with imaginative designs within the boundaries of realism to tap into existential nature of these plays.

Secondly, I will utilize ensemble-casting and masks to realize the concept of "archetypes" that Johnston discusses in *The Ibsen Cycle*. Archetypes and masks are familiar devices in theatre, from Greek tragedy to Commedia dell'arte, to Peking Opera. In Johnston's

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[68] Jessica Wahman, "Drama as Philosophical Genre," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 28, no. 4 (2014): 456, https://doi.org/10.5325/jspecphil.28.4.0454.

reading, characters are tragic archetypes burdened with a traumatic history. Characters need to be juxtaposed with others to "gain their full metaphysical stature" as archetypes.[69] Ibsen's characters exhibit a few recurring patterns across the plays: a husband obsessed with worldly duties and insecure of his inadequacies, a woman feeling trapped in her marriage and domestic life, and a young man or woman longing for a lifestyle of freedom, autonomy, and truth. When utilizing archetypes, however, there is need to balance the Hegelian universal archetypes and the Nietzschean (Apollonian) impulse to individuate. Nietzsche's radical individualism is the consistent with Ibsen's belief, in Georg Brandes's words, in "the individual, in the single great personality; the individual, and he alone, can accomplish anything."[70] Therefore, I will utilize an ensemble cast of two males and two females in performance. Each actor represents a different archetypal persona–the juvenile, who represents of youth, innovation, and vitality, the aged champion of tradition and old dogma, the woman of domestic values, the man of repressed artistic power. Actors will change into different costumes for different plays and make use of different postures for each character. Each actor's archetypal persona will remain the same. At the same time, I will rely on the poetic language and abundance of imagery in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as a source of visual inspiration for set design.

Thirdly, I will utilize the concepts of Dionysian symbols. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic protocols, indoor performance spaces will be inaccessible. It will therefore be difficult to realize Ibsen's carefully constructed Norwegian bourgeois homes, in which the location of each room, each piece of furniture and prop, mundane as they seem, carry profound symbolic significances. However, outdoor settings will give me a unique opportunity to highlight the

[69] Johnston, "Ibsen's Cycle as Hegelian Tragedy," 151.
[70] Meyer, *Ibsen: A Biography*, 389.

interplay of bourgeois life's confines and the romantic realm of the protagonists' imaginations. These open-air settings are relevant to the Christian-Pagan opposition in *Emperor and Galilean*. Freedom and restraint, instinct and intellect, like Yin and Yang, translates beautifully into the images of nature and architecture. Van Laan proposes that although Ibsen was trained in Christian melodrama, in which good and evil, reward and punishment are always unequivocal, from *The Pretenders* on his dramas start reflecting the amorality of the Nietzschean tragic worldview: the world as "a continuous flow of creation, change, destruction, and more of the same that utterly lacks guidance and purpose."[71] The plants in *Ghosts* and the "vine leaves" in the dialogues of *Hedda Gabler* shows the Dionysian creeping into and finally overtaking an Apollonian setting of a cold drawing room. These plays may begin with bored, neurotic, unhappy women in historical costumes, but they eventually shift to a solemn, primordial ritual of witnessing the awe-inspiring power of nature and fate.

As an example of incorporating philosophical framework into theater, Richard Hornby used a Kierkegaardian aesthetic-ethical continuum to designate colors in opposite qualities in costumes for the two maids in a production of *A Doll's House*, and to designate Nora before and after Torvald's tantrum about the letter.[72] She changes out of her tarantula dance costume into clothes with "straight, hard lines," and spoke "harshly and brusquely," marking her transition from an aesthetic being, childish and animal-like, to an ethical being, stoic and imbued with a sense of duty to herself.[73] Analogously, in my production, the Apollonian and Dionysian also allows me to map characters onto a spectrum according to their traits, and to associate color

[71] Van Laan, "Ibsen and Nietzsche," 295.

[72] Richard Hornby, *Script into Performance: A Structuralist Approach*, New ed. (New York: Applause, 1995), 165.

[73] Hornby, *Script into Performance,* 167.

schemes, locations and objects with one end or another.

Fourthly, and relatedly, both Hegel and Nietzsche were fascinated with myths. Likewise, Ibsen gives a mysterious aura to his plays with Nordic folklore elements, like the mermaid in *The Lady from the Sea* and the Rat Wife in *Little Eyolf*. Nordic Myth is a reservoir of nature-inspired symbols, undoubtedly archetypal, combining the timeless quality of Hegelian archetypes and the Dionysian primordial power. In subsequent chapters, I will also consult Per Schade Jacobsen and Barbara Fass Leavy's *Ibsen's Forsaken Merman: folklore in late plays* for inspirations for colors, light contrast, and spatial composition.

In the subsequent chapters, these artistic devices will work together to present Ibsen's drama as existential allegories. We begin at *Ghosts*, move on to *When We Dead Awaken*, and arrive at *Hedda Gabler*. Each play provides a different perspective in support of my thesis about Ibsen's statement on the relationship between existence and ideals: *Ghosts* tells warns the danger of repressing self-realizing nature and glorifying obsolete conventions, *When We Dead Awaken* presents humanity discovering and facing the finitude of the mortal body in self-realization, and *Hedda Gabler* illuminates the existential solitude through which ideals eventually lead its agent to destruction.

Chapter Two

Death as Dionysian Celebration in *Ghosts*

> As long as there have been men, man has felt too little joy: that alone, my brothers, is our original sin.
>
> –Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

Ghosts is a nightmare for mothers, but more importantly, for those who hesitate to abandon old and empty ideals. The life of a child is surely too great a price to pay for the illusion of tranquility and respectability and for the delusion that one can keep the dead from influencing the living. Duties to maintain a respectable household at all costs drove Helene Alving to kill the joy in her husband, but the punishment of her crime is the loss of joy in *her* life–her son. The joy suppressed in Helene herself, Chamberlain Alving, and Osvald manifests as shadows of the bushes, the rain on the fjord, and the radiant sun that bursts out at the end. It shines triumphantly over the limp body of Osvald as an assertion of its ultimate inevitability, as it is rooted as deeply in us as our human identity. In this chapter, I will explore various natural images as symbols of life to present *Ghosts* as an allegory of the danger that denied energy of self-actualization will turn violent and cruel.

Written immediately after *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts* continues to examine the burden placed by society upon woman. Helene's heavy conscience, which marks the brooding mood of the play, is also symptomatic of excessive demands and dehumanizing treatment from a patriarchal family. Katherine Rogers notes that "women tend to be chronically guilty because they are culturally pressured to stifle their normal feelings of self-assertiveness and to respond to male demands, even when these may be conflicting or impossible to fulfill;" [74] women are not

[74] Katharine M. Rogers, "A Woman Appreciates Ibsen," *The Centennial Review* 18, no. 1 (1974): 93, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23738068.

the only victims of such excessive guilt, but are "especially susceptible to it because they are under constant pressure to meet other people's demands."[75] Like her son, Helene Alving figuratively writhes under the weight of conventions and herd morality. As Nietzsche writes, "we are given words such as good and evil…. Like a camel we kneel down and let himself be loaded."[76] Like Nietzsche's analysis of bad conscience, Helene Alving's guilt comes from her own desire for love and personal freedom, which she suppressed for the sake of her marriage, and thus made her see such impulses as shameful. From Rogers' account, we can see that the sources of such guilt are the ideals and beliefs imposed upon woman by a society that does not consider her needs. These ideals, along with many things in a value system that places things like reputation, status, superficial respectability before harmless inclinations, made Helene and her household a place devoid of life's vivacity.

Despite abysmal reviews, *Ghosts* saw the first critic who recognized its monumental value in Peter Olrog Schjøtt.[77] As Schkøtt's insight might suggest, *Ghosts* contained all the essential elements of a Greek tragedy: a family whose blood relations are fraught with secrets, a protagonist who hopes to reverse the curse of fate with her own two hands, a peripeteia revealing the power of the amoral forces–in this case, not gods, a disease, and finally, the catastrophe that ensues on an almost merciless pace. The tragic structure of *Ghosts* provides a clear foothold for both Hegelian and Nietzschean frameworks of human existence.

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[75] Rogers, "A Woman," 93.

[76] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 193.

[77] qtd. in Meyer, *Ibsen: A Biography*. The original article, titled "Ibsen's Gengangere," appeared in the first issue of the magazine *Nyt Tidsskrift* i Kristiania in 1882, written in Norwegian. Translation by Meyer. Access provided by The Virtual Ibsen Archive, University of Oslo. Peter Olrog Schjøtt, "Ibsens Gengangere," *Nyt Tidsskrift i Kristiania*, 1882, The Virtual Ibsen Centre, https://www.hf.uio.no/is/english/services/virtual-ibsen-centre/ibsen-archive/text/reviews/ge/ge-p-o-schjott.html.

Hegelian Interpretation: Destruction of One-Sided Moral Law

In *The Ibsen Cycle* (1992), Johnston provides a lengthy analysis of *Ghosts*, in which he observes that Helene Alving's opposition to the "joy-of-life" exemplifies the conflict between Hegelian "human law" and "divine law." I will produce a short summary of Johnston's reading and relevant sections in Hegel's *Phenomenology*.

Duties are what Helene Alving is taught and forced to recognize as the "best" things in the world. Yet her catastrophe originates from her sincerest effort to abide by her duties. In *Phenomenology*, this ironic, yet inevitable, paradox leads to the dissolution of the Greek ethical realm: two warring sides of morality, each carrying out its own agenda under the name of duty and superiority, each finding the other less than legitimate, while, in fact, both are equally good. It is a not war between Good and Evil, but two Goods. Hegel writes:

> The ethical consciousness, because it is *decisively* for one of the two powers, is essentially character; it does not accept that both have the same *essential* nature. Since it sees right only on one side and wrong on the other, that consciousness which belongs to the divine law sees in the other side only the violence of human caprice, while that which holds to human law sees in the other only the self-will and disobedience of the individual who insists on being his own authority.[78]

Two equally good forces, duty and joy, places Helene Alving in a dilemma. When one is chosen, the other must sacrificed. Helene grew up being educated about the absolute importance of duty and the inferiority of emotional drives. This system of values, however, fails to provide her with assurance of her moral impeccability when she finally realizes the love and warmth of which she has deprived her son. Hegel notes that "The ethical consciousness must, on account of this actuality and on account of its deed, acknowledge its opposite as its own actuality, must

[78] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 280.

acknowledge its guilt."[79] Because Helene Alving fails to recognize, as previously mentioned, the one-sidedness of her moral position, her position must be met with destruction. In European history, the destruction of multiple, conflicting one-sided moralities took place in the form of the societal progression from Greek ethical community to Roman society. A community that coheres around a law purported to be universal now shatters into individuals, thus commencing "the legal individualism of Roman imperial rule, where individuals are regarded uniformly only as "persons," merely as bearers of "rights."[80] This is exactly the outlook provided by Ibsen's next play, *An Enemy of the People*.

Nietzschean Interpretation: The Gradual Onset of the Amoral Dionysian Force

In her suffering, Nietzsche would characterize Helene Alving as a spirit in the stage of the camel, writhing under the weight of conventions and herd morality. Her suffering seems entirely unfair, given her fairest intentions. But Nature cares not for intentions. By suppressing the joy of life, Helene has trespassed on the amoral forces of the cosmos, the Dionysian vitality that is not to be confined and stifled. She will receive her retribution, therefore, also in a way that she does not comprehend. The Parisian living that Pastor Manders condemns, the amorous escapades in Chamberlain Alving's youth, and the soul-deep happiness that Osvald longs to feel in his gloomy home–the Dionysian, is presented as a triad of life-sex-joy in *Ghosts*. Watching the play, one experiences a subtly Dionysian ritual from *The Birth of Tragedy*, in which the emotional energy is gradually released until, in Osvald's breakdown, the audience is finally face-

[79] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit,* 284.

[80] Jocelyn B. Hoy, "Hegel, Antigone, and Feminist Critique: The Spirit of Ancient Greece," in *The Blackwell Guide to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Hoboken, United Kingdom: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2009), 175, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/emory/detail.action?docID=437554.

to-face with terror and awe. Through the devastation of a family, *Ghosts* illuminates the cosmic chaos crushing individuals who dream of resisting the amoral course of the universe.

Ghosts*, in Nodal Moments*

Having completed this analysis, I want to propose a possible staging to realize these insights theatrically. I had originally hoped to stage a series of scenes for a live performance. When the COVID-19 pandemic made this impossible, I chose to express my ideas in graphic form by choosing locations that allowed for the essence of my ideas for the settings and posing actors within them in order to provide a rough guide to the ideas with which I would begin staging rehearsals for *Ghosts*. I have done the same for *When We Dead Awaken* and *Hedda Gabler*.

Joy, which springs from a source as deeply and primitively as terror and awe, finds shape in the plants, mountains and water Ibsen calls for in his backdrop. Refusing to be suffocated, life springs up from the hard foundations of the drawing room, foreshadowing the futility of Mrs. Alving's attempt to keep her husband's legacy away from Osvald. Based on this image, I derived a design concept of nature threatened by but actively breaking free from human architecture, a juxtaposition of trees, flowers, bushes and concrete-steel structures. Ibsen sets the play in a "A spacious garden room, with a door in the left wall and two doors in the wall on the right …. Through the glass wall can be glimpsed a gloomy fjord landscape, veiled by steady rain."[81] P.F.D. Tennant interprets Ibsen's use of locations as the following:

> Ibsen's nature, for all its realistic appurtenances, is reducible in fact to two categories. The first offers a setting for all Ibsen's ideals of freedom, individuality and truth, the scenes in which light predominates and which take place on mountain heights or open spaces; the second acts as a setting for the vices which Ibsen castigates, in which the

[81] Ibsen, *Ibsen: Four Major Plays*, 67.

> illumination is subdued and the atmosphere stuffy, the gloomy interiors which are contrasted with the wide open spaces of land and water outside.[82]

The garden outside room is an extended metaphor of life finding an outlet in a world anxious to keep it buried. Ironically, when suppressed to the extreme, life and truth have turned to alliance with disease and the dead. This interpretation brings us a strangely inverted, yet tremendously meaningful, imaginative and productive system of symbols. Osvald's syphilitic degeneration is at the same time an outburst of life. The rising sun is at the same time the victory of life over the living dead. *Ghosts* can be read as an account of the Dionysian life-sex-joy reclaiming its reign on an alter built by those who subscribe to life-negating beliefs. The drawing room of Helene's Alving's seemingly honorable family is this altar for traditions and duties. However, to utilize concepts in *Emperor and Galilean,* this is the exact site on which the pagan forces gradually consume the Christian establishment. As Mrs. Alving gets closer and closer to entering the truth and learning of Osvald's disease, the presence of the Dionysian strengthens. Therefore, although *Ghosts* is set entirely indoors, I designed a set that transitions from indoors to outdoors (Figure 2-1 to 2-3). Mrs. Alving says that she's "always haunted by the idea that the truth would someday come out and be believed."[83] Like the encroaching truth, while the leaves and branches are behind the glass in the first act, they peek into the edge of the patio in the second act, and finally bloom over the characters' heads in the third. I derived visual inspiration from the set design for National Theatre's 2016 production of Chekhov's *Platonov* (Figure 2-4), as well as Edvard Munch's painting *The Flower of Pain* (Figure 2-5).

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[82] Peter Frank Dalrymple Tennant, "Settings and Stage Direction," in *Ibsen's Dramatic Technique* (New York: New York: Humanities Press, 1965), 73.

[83] Ibsen, *Ibsen: Four Major Plays*, 89.

Figure 2-1. Act I: 1st Floor Lounge, PAIS Building, Emory University, Atlanta Campus

Figure 2-2. Act II: Patio outside the window of 1st Floor Lounge, PAIS Building, Emory University, Atlanta Campus

Figure 2-3. Act III: Benches outside the window of 1st Floor Lounge, PAIS Building, Emory University, Atlanta Campus

Figure 2-4. *The Flower of Pain* by Edvard Munch, 1898. Blood from a man's heart flows into the soil, from which a flower grows. "QUICKBORN" is written on the top, consistent with the motif of life springing from death in *Ghosts*.[84]

[84] Edvard Munch, *The Flower of Pain*, 1897, black crayon, with graphite, on tan wove tracing paper, 451 x 330 mm, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL, https://www.artic.edu/artworks/186321/the-flower-of-pain.

Figure 2-5. Set Design for Chekhov's *Platonov*. Grass sprouts from the gaps between wooden floorboards. Bare trees enclose the playing space, blurring the boundary between indoors and outdoors.[85]

Helene Alving's cowardice prevents her from confronting the temptation of liberated sexuality, but it also prevents her from living truthfully. She is enslaved by the delusion of a morally upright father that she fabricated for Osvald; for this, she must continuously be tortured by the guilt of lies and the fear that the illusion might be broken. The Mrs. Alving who carries the entire family's reputation on her shoulder is a far cry from the young Helene who ran away to Pastor Manders for a romantic escape. A true example of Nietzsche's bad conscience, she was trapped in a moral code that turns her against herself, making her ashamed of herself and those around her, who succumb to the natural impulses of sex and joy. Mrs. Alving is therefore dressed in a dark-green colored corset. In her conflicted mind, the presence of Dionysian inclinations in herself are the exact reason why her body and mind must remain restrained.

Osvald, on the other hand, hates the home where he can never be happy. In Edvard Munch's set design for *Ghosts* he sketched an offstage scene from Osvald's youth: then a toddler, Osvald sits on the laps of Chamberlain Alving, who teases his son with a pipe. This

[85] *Platonov*, written by Anton Chekhov, directed by Jonathan Kent, Set Design by Tom Pye, photographed by Johan Persson, National Theatre, London, UK, 2016.

moment of pure joy is under the vigilant yet disheartened gaze of Helene in the back. Standing motionless and dressed in dark colors, she is like a black hole threatening to swallow lives before her (Figure 2-6). In *Munch's Ibsen*, Joan Templeton remarks that this sketch shows us "the Alving unholy family of respected, profligate father, silent, suffering mother, and doomed child."[86]

Figure 2-6. Munch's imagination of an offstage scene in *Ghosts*. [87]

Raised under strict teachings of traditions and propriety, Osvald seeks respite in Paris and in art, where he could taste freedom. The golden embroidering on his vest reflects his longing for an unencumbered life while foreshadowing the sun that shines on him at the end of the play.

Manders and Regina are dressed in restrictive and dark-colored clothing. Their occupations are regulated by strict rules, and both involves serving a superior: Regina her employers, and Manders his God. Yet a Pastor Manders attractive to a young Helene would be a

[86] Joan Templeton, *Munch's Ibsen: A Painter's Visions of a Playwright*, New Directions in Scandinavian Studies (Seattle : Copenhagen: University of Washington Press ; Museum Tusculanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2008), 55.

[87] Edvard Munch, *Ghosts: Sketch of Offstage Scene*, 1915-20, Crayon, 200 x 265mm, The Munch Museum, Oslo, Norway.

young man full of life, despite the monotony of his job. While in *Ghosts* he is not young anymore, in his postures and gestures he should preserve the vivacity from his youth. Regina, in her feminine prime, has rosy cheeks and lustrous blonde hair–markers of youth and vitality.

Due to COVID-19 safety concerns, I decided to limit the number of actors on site. Therefore, I removed Jacob Engstrand for this production, though Engstrand is by no means dispensable in the drama.

Figure 2-7. Pastor Manders converses with Mrs. Alving.

In Act One, Helene Alving and Pastor Manders converse with each other while Regina tends to the flowers (Figure 2-7). Pastor Manders tries to persuade Mrs. Alving that "there are innumerable instances in life when you must rely on others for your judgments. How else would society function?"[88] Mrs. Alving has been reading books, helping her realize that many beliefs in this world are obsolete. This realization is the foundation of Mrs. Alving's recognition of the joy of life she had refused to value as a part of her old beliefs. The books are therefore placed close to the flower, a corner of the Dionysian in this cold-colored living room. Young and beaming

[88] Ibsen, *Ibsen: Four Major Plays*, 75.

with the force of life, Regina stands close to the flowers as a symbol of the Dionysian. Pastor Manders and Mrs. Alving, however, are on the opposite side of the stage as they are bound by traditional morality, decorum, and restraint. Their faces and bodies are in shadows, symbolizing old ideas and traditions. Mrs. Alving, however, looks to Regina, as if silently asking for help from this dull exchange with the Pastor.

Figure 2-8. Osvald indignant at Pastor Manders.

Osvald, who has just returned from his life as an artist in Paris, comes downstairs to join his mother and Pastor Manders (Figure 2-8). As they speak on the topic of how Parisians practice "free marriage," or cohabitation based on love as opposed to economic preparedness, Osvald advocates for such gestures of passion while Pastor Manders is appalled. Sickened with Pastor Manders's outdated thinking, Osvald cannot help but exclaim: "Ah!–This beautiful, glorious, free life out there–polluted like that!"[89] Osvald stands against the background of plants in the setting sun, with the joy of life boiling in him yet finding no outlet. As Nieztsche writes, "As long as there have been men, man has felt too little joy: that alone, my brothers, is our original

[89] Ibsen, *Ibsen: Four Major Plays*, 83.

sin."[90] Yet this momentary glance at the beautiful world that Osvald imagines is interrupted by Mrs. Alvings' reminder: "You mustn't excite yourself, Osvald. It's not good for you."[91] Osvald is again put back into the cold emotional restraints of his family, like the corner of concrete structures behind Mrs. Alving, cold and unbreakable.

Figure 2-9. Pastor Manders invoking God.

Pastor Manders and Mrs. Alving recount the past. When Mrs. Alving asks why Pastor Manders did not take her in when, in her youth, she once run away from home because she was too miserable from living with Chamberlain Alving, Pastor Manders explains that she must follow her duties: "I was but a humble instrument in the hand of a higher power. And from this moment–when I bent you to the yoke of duty and obedience–didn't there grow a great blessing which filled all the days of your life?"[92] The yoke of duty, to Mrs. Alving, was the demand to suppress her emotions and live only a slave to the empty ideals preached by the society. Johnston remarks that Pastor Manders' ideal is "the strange perversion of human sexuality that sees

[90] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 88.
[91] Ibsen, *Ibsen: Four Major Plays*, 83.
[92] Ibsen, *Ibsen: Four Major Plays*, 65.

marriage as a 'cross' to be borne!"[93]One would expect Osvald, if he were present, to respond as Nietzsche says: **"**They have called 'God' what was contrary to them and gave them pain."[94] Gazing at this man who now utters "false values and delusive words,"[95] Mrs. Alving wonders why she even loved him (Figure 2-9).

Figure 2-10. A moment in the production of *Ghosts* at Almeida Theatre. Half-translucent curtains make figures appear like apparitions.[96] [97]

Figure 2-11. Mrs. Alvings overhears Regina and Osvald.

[93] Johnston, *The Ibsen Cycle*, 220.
[94] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* 92.
[95] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 91.
[96] *Ghosts*, written by Henrik Ibsen, adapted and directed by Richard Eyre, set design by Tim Hatley, co-produced by Almeida Theatre and Sonia Friedman productions, photographed by Hugo Glendinning, Almeida Theatre, London, UK and Brooklyn Academy of Music, Brooklyn, NY, 2015.
[97] Alicia Dhyana House, "Haunting Ghosts," *BAM Blog* (blog), March 4, 2015, https://blog.bam.org/2015/03/haunting-ghosts.html.

At the end of Act One, Mrs. Alving hears Osvald and Regina speaking in the greenhouse. She remembers, to her horror, that Chamberlain Alving also used to steal away in the garden with the maid and Regina's mother, Joanna (Figure 2-11). "Ghosts–those from the greenhouse–are walking again."[98] Regina and Osvald appear as mere shadows behind the glass. Here they are fully living the joy of life, but only as shadows. The two figures are between two areas of immense plant growth, emphasizing the Dionysian nature of their passionate love. Ironically, the reflection of Pastor Manders overlaps with the shadow of the two in the distance. This is the closest Pastor Manders will ever come to feeling and understanding the joy of life, yet he is unaware, only looking at Mrs. Alving. Soon at the beginning of Act II, we hear Mrs. Alving utter the most important line in the play: "When I hear Regina and Osvald in there, I saw ghosts. I almost believe we are ghosts, all of us. It's not just what we inherit from our fathers and mothers that walk again in us–it's all sorts of dead old ideas and dead beliefs and things like that."[99]

Figure 2-12. Mrs. Alving and Osvald alone.

[98] Ibsen, *Ibsen: Four Major Plays*, 90.
[99] Ibsen, *Four Major Plays,* 95.

In Act II, Mrs. Alving spends some time alone with her son as he drinks champagne. He lays his head on her lap (Figure 2-12). Osvald complains of it being dark, so Mrs. Alving calls Regina in for a lamp. For the first time the shadows of the plants are illuminated. Mrs. Alving and her son find themselves surrounded–literally cornered–by nature, both in Osvald's language and in her environment. For the first time she can no longer deny the past philandering her husband has done, nor the unerasable legacy he has left Osvald. She is face to face with the Dionysian force. This quiet time with Osvald would be followed by her first attempt to come clean with Osvald and Regina about their father. The imagery of light against a dark background evokes a song from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: "In your eyes I looked recently, O life: I saw gold blinking in your night-eye; my heart stopped in delight: a golden boat I saw blinking on nocturnal waters, a golden rocking-boat, sinking, drinking, and winking again. At my foot, frantic to dance, you cast a glance, a laughing, questioning, melting rocking-glance."[100]

Figure 2-13. *The Lantern Bearers* by Maxfield Parrish. 1908. The branches and leaves illuminated against the night sky by the warm yellow light provided a visual inspiration for this scene.[101]

[100] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 224.

[101] Maxfield Parrish, *The Lantern Bearers*, 1908, Oil on Canvas, 101.6 x 81.3 cm, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, AR, https://collection.crystalbridges.org/objects/306/the-lantern-bearers.

Figure 2-14. Regina discovers fire at the orphanage.

Osvald says that Regina won't leave before she is his wife. Regina shouts fire as she discovers the orphanage engulfed in flame in the distance (Figure 2-14). In a golden glow, the fire illuminates the horrified faces of Osvald and Regina (Figure 2-15). Just after Mrs. Alving announces that she will tell the children "everything"–that Osvald and Regina are, in fact, half-siblings and their love would be incestuous, Pastor Manders interrupts. This is a seemingly accidental yet accurate metaphor of the Dionysian being once more suppressed by morals of Christianity. As the others look over in the direction of the orphanage, only Mrs. Alving turns back so that her profile is visible to the camera. She, and only she, knows how ominous a sign this is: what she has built to solidify a non-existent pristine reputation for her husband has fallen. The truth will not tolerate this establishment of lies, and it violently opposes Mrs. Alving's effort in the violent forces of a fire. Pastor Manders complains that the fire is "a fiery judgment on this wayward house." What Pastor Manders thinks is God's judgment, when viewed together with the elements of nature in the play, is another display of the Dionysian force that inspires awe and terror.

Figure 2-15. Regina and Osvald watching the fire.

Figure 2-16. Mrs. Alving after the fire.

"Everything burned. Right to the ground."[102] Act Three opens with Mrs. Alving, Pastor Manders and Regina returning from the fire. Here the raging flames is imaginatively transformed into flowers, consistent with the Dionysian power behind these two elements of nature (Figure 2-16 and Figure 2-17). It is the same force of life that makes a flower blossom and makes a fire burn. Fire, a destructive force, nevertheless has its roots in the life and joy, which has long been banished from Helene Alving's home. The outbreak of fire, an onslaught of pain and loss, and

[102] Ibsen, *Ibsen: Four Major Plays*, 112.

even death, is at the same time the celebration of joy, the beauty of which is exactly its cruelty. Mrs. Alving sits sitting on the bench, covered in white flower petals. A color of purity, white is used in an ironic manner to represent the fire that has broken out, along with the pollutive presence of Osvald's disease.

Figure 2-17. Regina and Mrs. Alving after the fire.

In Act Three, Mrs. Alving finally tells Osvald and Regina about the father they share. Frustrated that Mrs. Alving has not taken her in and raised her like a proper lady, Regina decides to leave for Engstrand's seaman's home (a euphemistic name for a brothel), where she could at least live and breathe freely (Figure 2-18). Regina, as the maid, regularly tends to the flowers, as seen in Act I. Regina says, "and *I've* got the joy of life in me, ma'am!"[103] When she leaves, I added the gesture of taking the flower with her. Regina plucks away the last bit of nature inside the house. Now the house is entirely devoid of life. The departure of Regina marks yet another point of no return for Mrs. Alving and Osvald on their destruction. Mrs. Alving watches in horror as Regina departs and Osvald tries to stop her. As Mrs. Alving stares blankly into the void ahead of her, overwhelmed by the agony of the situation, shadows of the plants creep up on her

[103] Ibsen, *Ibsen: Four Major Plays*, 118.

like the guilt and isolation she feels. The incestuous relationship is between Osvald and Regina accidental yet fateful, the amoral Dionysian chaos at its extreme.

Figure 2-18. Mrs. Alving appalled as Regina tries to leave.

The play now advances full speed towards catastrophe. Osvald brings the peripeteia of the play with the news of his diagnosis of a possibly syphilis-induced neurologically degenerative condition. Osvald speaks of "the illness I received as my inheritance– *(points to his forehead.)* It sits right here."[104] In shock, Mrs. Alving realizes that Chamberlain Alving, though dead and underground, is still very much alive in the irrefutable mark of disease that he left his son. Osvald says that the doctor "called it a kind of softening of the brain, or something like that…. it always makes me think of red velvet curtains, something soft and delicate to stroke."[105] As Osvald imagines the texture of red velvet curtains with a wistful smile, Mrs. Alving's face is not visible to him (Figure 2-19). She is terrified. Her face goes blank, then twists together before she screams "Osvald!" This tableau takes advantage of the unique vantage point of the stage and,

[104] Ibsen, *Ibsen: Four Major Plays*, 121.
[105] Ibsen, *Ibsen: our Major Plays,* 121.

in this case, the camera, where the audience can see the reactions of two characters without the characters being aware of each other's reactions. The white flower petals now come to symbolize Osvald's softening mind– "soft and delicate to stroke."

Figure 2-19. Osvald speaks of his diagnosis.

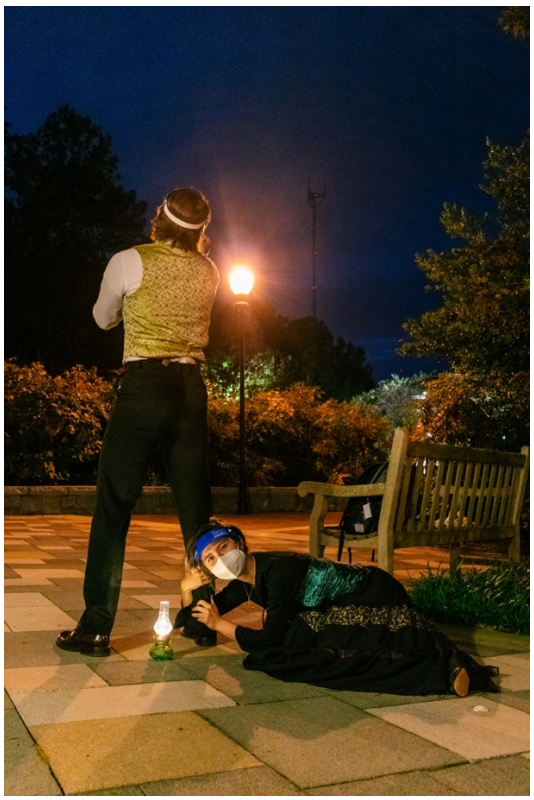

Figure 2-20. Osvald reaching towards "the sun."

Mrs. Alving and Osvald fight for the bottle of morphine pills. When she finally promises to use these pills in the case that he is entirely debilitated by his illness, Osvald gives in, collapsing. As his mother tells him to rest, the sun rises. A breakdown suddenly starts, causing Osvald to lose his sanity. He asks his mother to give him the sun. This pivotal moment is treated differently in different productions, primarily with a focus on the lack of life in Osvald, for he suffers a death of the mind. Ibsen's stage direction says that Osvald "sits in the armchair with his back to this view, without stirring."[106] However, in this production, Osvald stands, with wobbling knees, and reaches towards the sun–in this case, a streetlight beaming in the distance. This production emphasizes not the death, but the life in Osvald. In this moment Osvald is possessed, almost, by a ghost–his father's ghost, or life itself: the life that previously manifested itself in the quietly growing plants that slowly envelop the two figures, as well as the fire that swept the orphanage away, leaving its footprint of pain in the form of flowers. Osvald's decay is a testimony to the uninhibited life and sexual impulses of his father. In a highly ironic sense, the pinnacle of Osvald's suffering is therefore the triumph of his dead father and the Dionysian force he represents.

Mrs. Alving tries to keep Osvald sitting down, but she collapses in the struggle. She could only cling on to her son's ankle (Figure 2-20). Now the Dionysian force gains full momentum. Osvald lurches forward as if dancing in a trance, a *Dance Macabre* in which he is finally reunited with life-joy, recalling how Dionysus is resurrected in the end of individuation. Mrs. Alving, in numbing horror and a wash of realization, smiles. Now she is free from guilt, and her son is free from lies. She realizes that perhaps this is the only way that her son can be happy, even if it means he is mentally reduced to a child for the rest of his life. She smiles reluctantly,

[106] Ibsen, *Ibsen: Four Major Plays*, 123.

despite the horrific scene, now that the life that she has denied herself and her son all along is back. Though Nietzsche observes that "everybody considers dying important; but as yet death is no festival," [107] in *Ghosts*, Osvald's debility, in the true Nietzschean sense, becomes a morbid celebration of his freedom, a festival of life that comes at the cost of his life.

As *Ghosts* shows, the repressed impulse to self-realize ultimately turns destructive. In a particular sense of Greek tragedy, the natural inclinations towards truth, love and freedom are analogous to the amoral power of the gods; these things as ideals in themselves are crucial to human life. What is beautiful, if denied, inhibited or excluded, will eventually return as something ugly. The duality of the ugliness and beauty is deeply intertwined in the play. The death-related images of the unseen yet still powerful fire-destroyed buildings, the melted intellect, and the figurative pollutive presence of syphilis all takes visible expression in the most vibrant lives of flowers, plants, and young bodies and minds. Any human interpretation that calls itself ideals in the name of morality yet denies these genuine ideals, as both the Hegelian and Nietzschean perspectives demonstrate, will meet its destined collapse.

[107] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 71.

Chapter Three

Hyper-awareness and Transcendence of the Corporeal in *When We Dead Awaken*

> When Zarathustra had spoken thus to the hunchback and to those whose mouthpiece and advocate the hunchback was, he turned to his disciples in profound dismay and said: "Verily, my friends, I walk among men as among the fragments and limbs of men…. And when my eyes flee from the now to the past, they always find the same: fragments and limbs and dreadful accidents–but no human beings."
>
> –Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

If life and art cannot co-exist, then could death be the ultimate gesture that reconciles them? Written in 1899, at the end of Ibsen's productive life, *When We Dead Awaken* leaves us with these burning questions that soar above the heights of all the plays that come before. It is only appropriate that Ibsen raised the question of the relationship between life, art and death at the turn of the century, right before impulses to deconstruct the author, language and other tools heretofore taken for granted in human intellectual advancement took over. As Ibsen worked in the late 1890s, *When We Dead Awaken* eventually overshadowed a nascent thought of an autobiography.[108] His last play is therefore widely suspected to be a loosely autobiographical moment in his career, a darkly humorous if not radically self-deprecating criticism of artists and art itself–that is, the kind of art that reduces the exuberant "earth-life" from which it springs to empty shells of forms. *When We Dead Awaken* dramatizes the tension between self-realization and the life experience that must be sacrificed for it, through the characters' realization of how art, or work in general, immortalizes yet forever devitalizes human bodies at the same time; the hyperawareness of the body eventually fuels the transcendence of the corporeal for some and

[108] Meyer, *Ibsen: A Biography*, 786.

complete submission to physical impulses for others, demonstrating the ultimate unknown solution towards such tension and the need for further exploration.

Notably, *When We Dead Awaken* was completed merely a short two months before Ibsen suffered the first of a series of debilitating strokes. But regardless of what Ibsen thought of himself as an artist, or whether he intended to make his last play autobiographical, *When We Dead Awaken* makes a statement about all art that seeks to capture life but fails to retain the life of its objects. In his coincidental reunion with Irene, the model for his most celebrated statue "Resurrection Day," celebrated sculptor Rubek confronts the fact that his art has been made through objectifying human bodies. In the final, fatal avalanche, Rubek recovers the life and humanity that he had denied himself and Irene for the entirety of his career, freeing Maja, his young wife, to live with Ulfhejm, a bear hunter. Throughout the play, characters reflect their relationship with life through their attitudes towards the human body: in presenting it bare for sculptures, in the vigorous act of bear-hunting, in fairytales laced with sexual undertones, and in the horror of seeing one's own shadow come to life.

Written almost two decades after *Ghosts* and a decade after *Hedda* Gabler, *When We Dead Awaken* attempts an obviously existential portrayal of humanity. Set entirely outdoors and moving up in altitude across the three acts, the play no longer makes use of the claustrophobic, static, naturalistic sets of Ibsen's early and middle plays. Correspondingly, characters of *When We Dead Awaken* converse over matters much more philosophical than the placement of old slippers, the hat left by old relatives, and the insurance papers, all of which are extensively utilized devices of verisimilitude in Ibsen's previous work. Our exploration of *Ghosts* in the previous chapter involved reading richly symbolic meanings into commonplace, if not somewhat mundane, locations and prop items, so that the battleground for the profound Hegelian ethical

substances is only a drawing room with plants in the background, and the Dionysian life force is visualized through leaves, flowers and lights frugally sprinkled across the scene. In *When We Dead Awaken*, such philosophical frameworks are discernable in the stylized design of costumes (Irene and the Sister of Mercy as a yin-yang-like black-white duality), expansive sets with open fields and snow-clad summits. Even the distilled focus on the four characters that constitute the critical thematic dialogues. Rubek, Irene, Maja and Ulfhejm are only four points, but perhaps the only four points required to trace out the shape of humanity; they constitute several binaries, including the old and the young, the tamed and the wild, the forward-looking and the backward-looking, and perhaps most importantly, the living and the dead. The rest of the society, as Inga-Stina Ewbank insightfully notes, exists "expressionistically, as something on which the few central characters project their emotions of fear and hostility."[109] *When We Dead Awaken* isolates the internal existential inquiries that are often drowned out by fractured chores and trivial concerns in daily life, so that for once, the audience finally sees these inquiries played out between philosophical beings against the backdrop of a philosophical landscape. In a way, *When We Dead Awaken* is more archetypal than all other plays.

Because *When We Dead Awaken* provides a clear view of the archetypal foundation and intricate symbolic fabric of Ibsen's characters and settings, I would like to discuss *When We Dead Awaken* in this chapter before I analyze *Hedda Gabler* in the next. As one of Ibsen's early social problem plays, *Ghosts* acclimatizes us to the penumbral nature of its dramatic universe, situated in between the full-blown mythopoetic and the strictly naturalistic. As Ibsen's last play, *When We Dead Awaken* is almost explicitly imbued with presence of the Apollonian and the

[109] Inga-Stina Ewbank, "The Last Plays," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen*, ed. James Walter McFarlane, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 136.

Dionysian, while representing the phase of the Hegelian Spirit pushing forth in its journey towards Absolute Knowing, which Ibsen presents as a mystery at the end. As we shall see, the complete separation of symbolic binaries at the end of *When We Dead Awaken* gives us the tools to look for the interplay of deeper forces underneath the naturalistic façade of *Hedda Gabler*.

The Symbolist Question in When We Dead Awaken

Starting with *The Master Builder*, Ibsen allowed more presence of symbolist elements in his plays. In a 1900 letter to Moritz Prozor, Ibsen seemed to anticipate a new series of plays, written in a different style from his realism.[110] The sunrise towards which Irene and Rubek climb was potentially the beginning a new artistic era for Ibsen. But this does not mean that in *When We Dead Awaken* Ibsen had deviated from his long-time agenda of creating realistic studies of life in his era. Georg Brandes remarks on Ibsen's craft in *The Master Bulider*: "For twenty years or more naturalism and symbolism have been harmonious partners in his work.… Although both as a man and as a writer he loves reality, he is poet and thinker enough constantly to underlay the reality he portrays with a deeper interpretation."[111] A contemporary of Ibsen, the critic Francisque Sarcey likewise dismisses the late-century symbolist stagings of Ibsen:

> It has become a tradition… when they play Ibsen, that they strive to make the audience forget that these are real people of flesh and blood whom they see treading the boards. They move but little, use almost no hand gestures and, when they do, make them broad, almost sacerdotal. Their whole recitation is characterized by a slow recitation, which seems to emanate from supernatural and symbolic lips. [112]

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[110] Meyer, *Ibsen: A Biography*, 785. Ibsen writes in a letter to Moritz Prozor: **"**If it be granted to me to retain the strength of the body and spirit which I still enjoy, I shall not be able to absent myself long from the old battlefields. But if I return, I shall come forth with new weapons, and new equipment."

[111] Qtd. in Meyer, *Ibsen, A Biography,* 694.

[112] Qtd. in Meyer, *Ibsen, A Biography,* 700.

Like staging *Ghosts*, staging *When We Dead Awaken* required striking a delicate balance between the impulse to reduce the play to faceless humanoids and filling the play with so much period detail that the audience is distracted from its existential meaning.

The Hegelian Interpretation: Spirit as "the artificer"

The Hegelian interpretation of *When We Dead Awaken* rests on a central metaphor of the Spirit as an "artificer," represented by Rubek, experimenting with physical forms in one way after another to create adequate expressions of self-awareness. In this process Spirit discovers a paradox: the closer the work is to perfection, or the "essence" of its object, the further away from life the work moves. This is because the artificer utilizes the form of its object but does not treat its object, even if it is a living individual, as anything beyond a form. In this process life is metaphorically reduced to a surface, to appearance, from animate to inanimate. Life is therefore annihilated at the same time it is eternalized. For example, Hegel discusses the use of the form of plants as a stage of Spirit's experimentation: "The artificer who *grasps himself* as the being that is *for itself,* takes that plant life as something to be used and reduces it to an outer aspect."[113] But Hegel notes that the form of the plant "is not used unaltered; for the artificer of the self-consciousness form at the same time destroys the transitoriness inherent in the immediate existence of this life and brings its organic forms nearer to the more rigid and more universal forms of thought."[114] This paradox is the source of the central conflict of the play: Irene's indignation that Rubek only appreciated her body as a specimen for his statue but did not respond to her intellectually, emotionally, and most important of all, physically. He did not see her body as a vessel of life, and he did not see her as fully human. Rubek reduces Irene first from

[113] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 422.
[114] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit,* 422.

a person to a piece of flesh, then to the shell of a piece of flesh, for his work. In "Resurrection Day," Irene's individuality is murdered and only her image remains. Johnston remarks that this compromising process of artistic creation is, at the same time, a metaphor for how humanity progresses from one "rigid and universal form of thought" to another: "The history of the human spirit, after all, is of its being trapped, in culture after culture…."[115]

The Nietzschean Interpretation:

Bad Conscience as a Consequence of Self-Affirmation

The Hegelian and Nietzschean interpretations of *When We Dead* can be organically linked by the central conflict between Irene and Rubek, as it is between art and life, and Rubek's subsequent guilty conscience. Rubek is an individual channeling his creative will into artistic creation but tortured with a bad conscience about annihilating, to borrow Ella Renthem's phrase from *John Gabriel Borkman*, Irene's "love-life" for his work. Therefore, when Irene reappears, "she represents his guilty conscience, his betrayal of life for art."[116] In advocating for transforming from "the lion" into "the child," however, Nietzsche suggests that such bad conscience must be overcome with the realization that prices shall be paid for freedom and the will to power. One must acknowledge and embrace one's past as one embrace's one's fate of the future: **"**All "it was" is a fragment, a riddle, a dreadful accident–until the creative will says to it, "But thus I willed it." Until the creative will says to it, "But thus I will it; thus shall I will it."[117] Rubek is a "lion" struggling to grow into a "child." The tremendous difficulty of this intermediate phase is embodied by the half-animal, half-human figures in "Resurrection Day:"

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[115] Johnston, *The Ibsen Cycle*, 178.
[116] Ewbank, "The Last Plays," 152.
[117] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 141.

An artist sits with an agonized expression in the foreground of the statue, just as Zarathustra struggles to accept eternal recurrence in the company of his animal companions.

Design Concept: Hyperawareness of the Body

Under the Nietzschean interpretation of *When We Dead Awaken*, we find our protagonist Rubek in a psychological state of incessant guilt about having sacrificed life for art, torn about whether his effort at self-actualization, if it causes such others like Irene such great harm, is worth pursuing. Under the Hegelian interpretation, we are able to make sense of Rubek's guilt by analyzing on the nature of his art and art in general. Rubek's bad conscience is not only a personal response to Irene's accusations, but also a universal consequence of practicing the kind of art achieved through objectifying the models on which it is based. Together, these interpretations allow us to imagine Rubek's perception of his world. Rubek's guilt makes him *hyper-aware* of the form of the human bodies, of each piece of art he created and each living body that has thus been deadened, to the point of feeling besieged by overabundant, meaningless human forms. This ruminative state of mind inspired my wish to literalize Rubek's horror in the set design by littering fractured, white marble body parts all over his surroundings, in order to reflect the perceived omnipresence of human forms and the compulsive nature of Rubek's self-criticism. Rubek feels that he walks around "fragments and limbs," sharing with Zarathustra the frustration and isolation as the only living being among the not-fully-human. Different from Zarathustra, however, Rubek knows that their lifelessness is his own doing. They lie around him, victims of his crime.

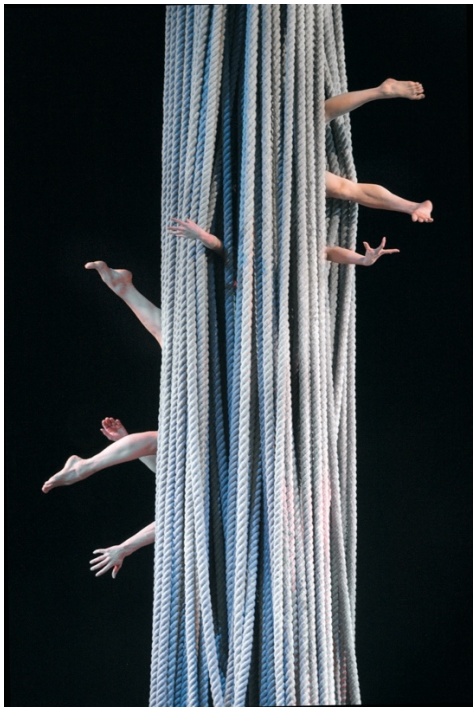

Figure 3-1. A moment in the performance of *Au Revoir Parapluie* at Crying Out Loud in London. The dispersed, exposed limbs provided visual inspiration for set design.[118]

Figure 3-2. A moment in the performance of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* at Bavarian State Opera. Characters kneel upon a rectangular platform made of compressed fake human bodies.[119] [120]

[118] *Au Revoir Parapluie*, written and directed by James Thierrée, co-produced by Sadler's Wells Theatre and Crying Out Loud et al., photographed by Richard Haughton, Sadler's Wells Theatre, London, UK, November 2007.

[119] *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, written by Richard Wagner, directed by Andreas Kriegenburg, photographed by Wilfred Hosl, Bavarian State Opera, Munich, Germany, 2013.

[120] Mark Swed, "A Wagner 'Ring' That's Sustainably Powered," *Los Angeles Times*, February 23, 2013, sec. ENTERTAINMENT & ARTS, https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-xpm-2013-feb-23-la-ca-cm-munich-ring-notebook-20130224-story.html.

Aside from reflecting Rubek's state of mind, the fragments of human bodies would also serve other thematic purposes. Not just Rubek, but all characters, and especially Maja and Ulfhejm, experience hyperawareness of the human body. The lifeless limbs in the surroundings would form a clear contrast to Ulfhejm and Maja's frolicking figures in Act Third, accentuating their joy of liberation and foreshadowing their lives together commanded by their "earth-life"–bodily impulses. On the other hand, the fragments of human bodies will also present Irene, dressed in all white as a creature between statue and human, showing Rubek's transition from perceiving Irene as only a model for his art to an individual. By wrestling with the dual perception of Irene as both human and statue, Rubek understands the magnitude of his crime. Irene and Rubek's final ascent symbolize transcendence of human bodies into eternal life, the incorporeal nature of which is illustrated by them leaving the fragmented limbs behind.

I also intended these fragments of human bodies to be an extension of the striking visual quality of the play, exemplified by the Sister of Mercy. Silent until the end, the Sister of Mercy is less a plot device than a part of the atmospheric palette. Although the purely visual nature of the Sister of Mercy may sound like justification for an expressionist or symbolist approach to design, Ibsen did not write the play with such intention. Mary G. Wilson considers *Woman in Three Stages* (1895) (Figure 3-3), an expressionist painting by Edvard Munch (1863-1944), a direct visual inspiration for Irene, Maja and the Sister of Mercy in *When We Dead Awaken*.[121] But this relationship between the two works is disputed by Joan Templeton, who considers Munch to be "illustrating" Ibsen's ideas, not the other way around. As contemporaries, both Ibsen and Munch could have been dramatizing the typical relationship between the male artist and the women who

[121] Mary G. Wilson, "Edvard Munch's 'Woman In Three Stages': A Source of Inspiration For Henrik Ibsen's 'When We Dead Awaken,'" *The Centennial Review* 24, no. 4 (1980): 492–500, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23739120.

participated in his work, though each in his own way.[122] Since full-blown impressionism and symbolism stand in opposition of Ibsen's style, I came to realize that the use of fractured statues of human body on set is too ostentatious for Ibsen's subtlety in the discussion of existential themes. Besides concerns about the inorganic nature of this artistic choice, the budget for this project also brings constraints. To comply with COVID-19 safety-guidelines, set dressing was to be minimized. These factors made it imperative to reconsider my initial set design.

Figure 3-3. *Woman in Three Stages* by Edvard Munch, 1894. From left to right: woman in white, or the virginal woman, linked to Irene. Naked woman, a symbol of unbridled sexuality, linked to Maja. Woman in black, a symbol of old age and repressed sexuality, linked to the Sister of Mercy.[123]

To work around restrictions, I adopted an alternative set design for *When We Dead Awaken.* The play takes place on an outdoor, monochromatic steps in light gray concrete. The Swiss theater designer Adolphe Appia's (1862-1928) utilization of neutralized steps that create areas of lights and shadows with straight edges inspired my work (Figure 3-4).

[122] Joan Templeton, "The Munch-Ibsen Connection: Exposing A Critical Myth," *Scandinavian Studies* 72, no. 4 (2000): 458, http://www.jstor.org.proxy.library.emory.edu/stable/40920257.

[123] Edvard Munch, *Woman in Three Stages*, 1895, Etching, aquatint, and drypoint, 37.6 x 49.8 cm, 1895, https://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/214656.html?mulR=31097%7C7.

Figure 3-4. Set design for *Orpheus and Eurydice* at Hellerau Festival Theatre, Dresden, Germany, 1913. Set Design by Adolphe Appia.[124] [125]

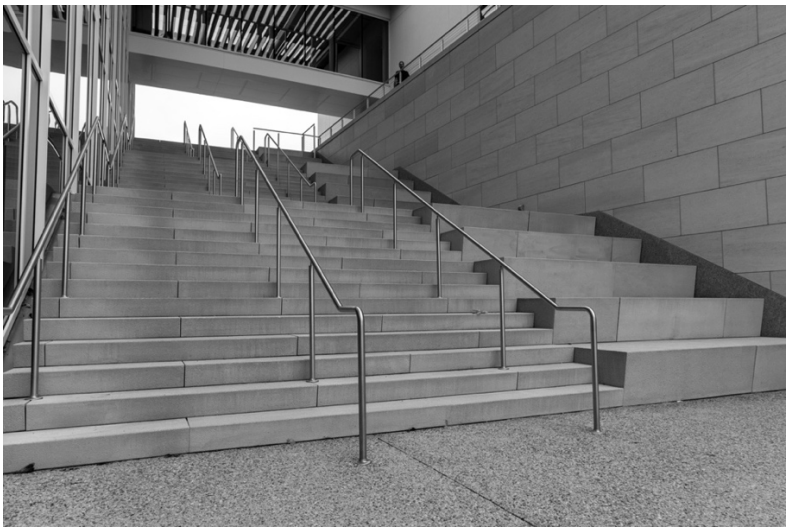

Figure 3-5. Outdoor steps between North and South wings of Emory Student Center. Emory University, Atlanta Campus.

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[124] Richard C. Beacham, *Festspielhaus Hellerau (1913) with calico walls and Appia's design for Gluck's* Orpheus and Eurydice in Rachel Hann, "Dwelling in Light and Sound: An Intermedial Site for Digital Opera," *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media* 8 (January 3, 2014): 65, https://doi.org/10.1386/padm.8.1.61_1.

[125] *Orpheus and Eurydice*, written by Christoph Willibald Glück, produced by Hellerau Festival Theatre, Set Design by Adolphe Appia, Dresden, Germany, 1913.

My choice of modern architecture is a far cry from the nature-filled set that Ibsen had envisioned in his stage directions (Figure 3-5). Nevertheless, I believe that this design suits the play adequately. The stairs illustrate the metaphoric significance of the characters moving up the mountains as the play progresses. The audience can better decipher the dynamics between characters through their spatial relationship, especially vertical ones. Maja and Ulfhejm, in their vibrantly colored costumes, look out of place, an intentional choice to show that the life force in them is so incompatible with the subdued Irene, who has come back to life from the dead. The space of dramatic actions is still a projection of Rubek's inner landscape. Without the fragments of human body, the concrete backdrop is still an accurate representation of his art. Johnston remarks that Rubek is "eminently a Hegelian artist for whom the sublimities, abysses, and mysteries of life are all discoverable within a recognizable reality, within the experience of our consciousness within the known categories of time and space."[126] In Nietzschean terms, the structure is also an epitome of the Apollonian "plastic" art impulse, of order, restraint and sharp shapes, devoid of the Dionysian influence of amorphous spontaneity. It is no wonder that Irene felt that her life had been murdered by Rubek in his art, for life, like the Dionysian vine leaves, cannot grow on such a landscape.

When We Dead Awaken*, in Nodal Moments*

The play begins with Maja and Rubek sitting in silent boredom. Despite the lighthearted mood of their vacation, it is difficult for the couple to make conversations with each other. Soon we realize that Rubek and Maja would be, if not for their marriage, worlds apart: he is a distinguished elderly professor finally returning home after a long life abroad, but she, young and

[126] Johnston, *The Ibsen Cycle*, 175.

impossible to be tied down, does not feel at home at all. The only thing to look forward to about their "lovely new house" [127]is that they might, for once, not "always have to be right on top of each other."[128] From the very beginning we are thrust into a scene of quiet introspection, with Ibsen's signature touch of ironic humor: though next to each other, Rubek and Maja are clearly less willing to converse with each other than to stay miles away in their minds. Puzzled by the obvious difference in their appearance–in a dark colored coat while Maja is fresh-faced in a brightly colored dress–one wonders if they belong together from the start (Figure 3-6).

The sluggish conversations that border on somniloquy in the warm stupor of the summer transport the two characters into a world deep in their own minds. After all, could not Irene, Ulfhejm and the Sister of Mercy all be just apparitions the couple sees in a shared dream? A dream inhabited by Rubek, filled with his deepest guilt about Irene, a barren ground where human forms he has painfully sculpted in the past are so great in number that they have lost meaning and fused into blocks of concrete. A dream world as dull as how Maja feels about her marriage, where she is acutely aware of the suppressed life force in herself. It is on this island of haunted consciousness that the story takes place. Rubek and Maja are the only organic beings on this expansive, steep landscape. Here Rubek is about to be awakened to the realization that the ground beneath him, the stairs upon which he rests, are the human bodies that he has objectified through decades of work.

[127] Henrik Ibsen, *When We Dead Awaken*, in *The Complete Major Prose Plays*, trans. Rolf Fjelde, 1st ed (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1978), 1032.

[128] Ibsen, *When We Dead Awaken*, 1033.

Figure 3-6 (a). Maja and Rubek sitting.

Figure 3-6 (b). Maja exasperated by Rubek.

Suddenly realizing the ridiculousness of their union, Rubek looks at Maja: "You really are a peculiar little person."[129] It is no wonder that Rubek finds Maja almost an alien species. Per Schelde Jacobsen and Barbara Fass Leavy compare Maja to a huldre, a mythical female creature who marries human husbands.[130] Here, dressed in bright red and yellow, colors of flowers in their prime, Maja carries in her movements the vivacity from a land full of life. Naturally, she detests being confined in a house, a place she would not like to call home. She is frustrated that Rubek never fulfilled the promise to take her to "a high mountain" and show her "all the glory of

[129] Ibsen, *When We Dead Awaken*, 1032.

[130] Per Schelde Jacobsen and Barbara Fass Leavy, *Ibsen's Forsaken Merman: Folklore in the Late Plays*, 1st Edition (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 290.

the world."[131] She is on the verge of losing her faith in him: "Were you only interested in coaxing *me* out to play, too?"[132]

Figure 3-7. Maja and Rubek catches a glimpse of Irene as she passes by.

The manager reports a "Madame von Satow," whom we later know as Irene. All in white, Irene "carries her body immovably, and her steps are stiff and measured." She is a living statue. Her otherworldly nature is enhanced by the reticent Sister of Mercy who follows, covered in a dark habit. Though juxtaposed with an icon of religious significance, Irene is not known to be a devout follower of any religion. We later learn that she was the one and only model for Rubek's statues, including "Resurrection Day." She was a muse of Rubek's creative energy and, like Maja, once filled with the energy of life in her statuesque body. Irene not only contributed to Rubek's hyperawareness of her body, she was hyperaware it herself: in letting Rubek recreate her body in marble, Irene was consciously enchanting the artist. Jacobsen and Leavy compare Irene to a "wild woman," an amalgamation of different folklores, "a malign ghost and sometimes

[131] Ibsen, *When We Dead Awaken*, 1037.
[132] Ibsen, *When We Dead Awaken,* 1037.

temptress," infanticidal, vengeful.[133] Irene later expresses that she "should have killed that child," referring to the statue "Resurrection Day," and that she killed her naturally born children, a statement of ambiguous metaphorical nature. An intersection forms between the Christian connotation of the color white as a symbol of female purity, which Rubek wanted her to illustrate in the statue, with the pagan connotation of a fearsome creature. Irene's body is a site where repressed tides of pagan sensibilities surges underneath Christian architecture, a home to two consciousnesses.

Figure 3-8. Ulfhejm recounting bear-hunting trips to Maja and Rubek.

Ulfhejm arrives with his alluring tales of adventures, charming Maja almost instantly (Figure 3-8). The animal motif that is only mildly discernable in Maja is now on full display in Ulfhejm. He enters "closing in" on the manager.[134] A bear hunter, Ulfhejm (whose name literally translates to "wolf home") sees the world, even with human, as a land inhabited entirely by animals. Upon seeing the Sister of Mercy, he calls her the "big black bird."[135] Before he invites

[133] Jacobsen and Leavy, *Ibsen's Forsaken Merman: Folklore in the Late Plays*, 281.
[134] Ibsen, *When We Dead Awaken*, 1042.
[135] Ibsen, *When We Dead Awaken,* 1045.

Maja with him to the mountains, he describes his dogs gnawing "huge knuckle-bones–they swallow them down whole–spew 'em up and choke 'em right down again."[136] Though not yet fully aware, Maja is drawn to the same sort of animal energy she smells on him. Jacobsen and Leavy note, interestingly, that in Norwegian folklore, "the bear is both troll-equivalent (by analogy to the wild man theme) and troll-antagonist. Ulfhejm plays both roles."[137] Ulfhejm's body houses not only his human identity, but also qualities of his prey: strong, loud and agile. In constantly moving and preparing to move, Ulfhejm is hyper-aware of his half-human, half-animal body. Maja, Rubek and Ulfhejm are an epitome of the Spirit expressing itself in half-human, half-animal statues Hegel discusses in *Phenomenology*. As human, Rubek walks among those for whom he had made busts like humans walking among animals. Surrounded by Ulfhejm and Maja, Rubek feels threatened by their animalistic presence.

Figure 3-9. Four photographs depicting Irene's first encounter with Rubek. Order see description in the paragraph below.

[136] Ibsen, *When We Dead Awaken*, 1046.
[137] Jacobsen and Leavy, *Ibsen's Forsaken Merman: Folklore in the Late Plays*, 279.

Figure 3-10. Irene accuses Rubek.

Irene's first reunion with Rubek plays out in a series of spatial relationships (Figure 3-9). She appears standing above, looking down at Rubek, almost like a deity descending to earth– Rubek sees his muse again like the goddess she was to him. As she speaks of her "child" with Rubek, referring to "Resurrection Day" that made Rubek famous, she stands on the same level with him. This shared level symbolizes their equal parentage in bringing the child to the world, as well as their shared history. As Irene recounts her painful past, she moves away from Rubek, not gazing back at him. She is lost in her thoughts as her speech becomes disorganized. Rubek, in the meantime, watches from a slightly higher level. He struggles to understand and relate, thus being a removed spectator of her emotions. The uncomfortable discussion of infanticide reinforces Rubek's hyperawareness of the body, of human flesh, blood and bones and soul, until their argument about whether life should be put before art climaxes:

> RUBEK. You, you were prodigal, Irene. You gave me all your naked loveliness–
> IRENE. To contemplate–
> RUBEK. And to glorify–
> IRENE. Yes, to glorify yourself. And the child.
> RUBEK. And your too, Irene.
> IRENE. But the rarest gift you've forgotten.
> RUBEK. Rarest–? What gift was that?

> IRENE. I gave you my young, living soul. And that gift left me empty inside. Soulless. *(Her eyes fixed on him)* That's why I died, Arnold.[138]

No longer is Irene a form devoid of substance and individuality, a vessel and vehicle for others' expression, like that in Hegel's description. She has now fully risen from the dead in Rubek's heart, standing before him, not above, not below, but a living, breathing body (Figure 3-10). Ibsen's wife, Suzannah, once complained that Ibsen preferred young and attractive maids, but "he never looks at them–that is, he looks at them, but only aesthetically, as one looks at a statue or a painting."[139] One wonders if this is Ibsen's most poignant criticism of himself.

Figure 3-11. Irene calls Rubek a "poet."

In Act Two, Irene, in her second encounter with Rubek, undermines his effort to justify his objectifying of her with the reasoning that it is simply what artists do. Their exchange culminates with Irene calling Rubek, disdainfully, a "poet."[140] Poet, a title with romantic connotations, is here used as an insult about Rubek's cowardice and self-indulgence. Rubek had

[138] Ibsen, *When We Dead Awaken*, 1055.
[139] Meyer, *Ibsen: A Biography*, 422.
[140] Ibsen, *When We Dead Awaken*, 1073.

taken Irene's "warm-blooded body" [141] as nothing more than a mould for a work of art because he wanted to realize his ambitions. Irene calls Rubek a "big, dear, overgrown child;"[142] the phrase takes on ironic significance when one considers "the child" in the three Nietzschean transformations in *Zarathustra*. While the Nietzschean "child" is a symbol of "wholesome, healthy selfishness welling from a powerful soul" in exercising the will to create meaning for himself,[143] Rubek demonstrated selfishness at the expense of others and without inherent maturity. In baring her body to Rubek, Irene went to great lengths to be vulnerable and trusting, but Rubek disregarded such devotion all the same. As dehumanizing as it was to be used for her body alone, it was outright devastating to Irene have her soul be casually rejected as only an "episode" in Rubek's life.[144]

Rubek is now burdened with crushing guilt, because he failed to realize that, in giving her body to him, Irene had given her soul as well. Rubek admits that "Resurrection Day" has been modified to show his ambivalence towards making art: though even those later-added human bodies with "disguised animal-faces"[145] are capable of breaking free from the soil, bursting with the happy energy of life, he, represented by a man in the foreground, is plagued by the fear that he will never spring up with such life energy and reach a new life. He cannot escape it, the negative hyper-awareness of human bodies as a result of his bad conscience.

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[141] Ibsen, *When We Dead Awaken*, 1070.
[142] Ibsen, *When We Dead Awaken,* 1074.
[143] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 190.
[144] Ibsen, *When We Dead Awaken*, 1075.
[145] Ibsen, *When We Dead Awaken,* 1072.

Figure 3-12 (a). Maja and Ulfhejm on their hike.

Figure 3-12 (b). Maja and Ulfhejm on their hike, continued.

Act Three begins with a glorious display of Maja and Ulfhejm's animalistic energy. They practically try to outdo each other with their stamina (Figure 3-12). In the acts of chasing and play-fighting, the two characters vigorously exercise their bodies. Seduction is in the air as the two begin discussing Ulfhejm's past escapades. Maja calls Ulfhejm a "satyr," a half-man, half goat creature. Ulfhejm recounts having been with a young girl, "picked her out of the gutter streets and carried her in [his] arms."[146] His hunting lodge has "put up more than one princess."[147] These stories, including Maja's story of a girl lured into a cold castle, sound-as if

[146] Ibsen, *When We Dead Awaken*, 1084.
[147] Ibsen, *When We Dead Awaken,* 1083.

they have been fabricated out of thin air. The spontaneous creation of these tales is Maja and Ulfhejm's way of probing and confirming each other's shared enthusiasm for freedom and adventure. Ulfhejm finally proposes to take Maja away, so that they can fully liberate their animalistic potentials. Excited about their eventual life together, Maja and Ulfhejm are giddily aware of their bodies (Figure 3-12 and 3-13):

> ULFHEJM. *(with a sweeping gesture.)* Then there we shall stand, free and easy–exactly as nature made us.
> MAJA. *(laughing).* You with your goat-legs yes!
> ULFHEJM. And you with your–well, enough said.[148]

Figure 3-13. Maja and Ulfhejm on their hike, continued.

[148] Ibsen, *When We Dead Awaken*, 1086.

In a brief exchange that involved all four characters of the play, Ulfhejm warns of an impending storm. His suggests that Irene and Rubek take refuge before people come "to fetch [them],"[149] triggering Irene's fear, perhaps issuing from the time she was taken away to an asylum. Here Irene and Rubek are seen on a generally lower physical level and Ulfhejm and Maja on a higher one, because they had just come from opposite directions. Ulfhejm is at the highest point of the picture speaking of the storm, as he is a messenger of their fate at the peak. Irene, more drawn to the idea of the mountain top, is on a higher level than Rubek as well.

Their parting (Figure 3-14), as Rubek and Irene continue their ascent and Ulfhejm and Maja continue their descent, is a transient but especially illuminating picture of the binaries represented by the characters in the play. Ulfhejm and Maja, the innocent Dionysians, descend to the earth world to live a life dominated by nature while Rubek and Irene, long fraught with their painful legacy in the Apollonian art of sculpture, seek life through transcendence of the physical form at the peak of the mountain. The bodily creatures, Ulfhejm and Maja, go one way, while the cultured spiritual creatures, Rubek and Irene, go the other.

Figure 3-14 (a). Irene and Rubek part with Maja and Ulfhejm

[149] Ibsen, *When We Dead Awaken*, 1088.

Figure 3-14 (b). Irene and Rubek part with Maja and Ulfhejm.

Figure 3-15. Irene gesturing toward the mountain top.

Irene had previously invited Rubek to come up into the mountain with her, an invitation that sounds so metaphorical that one is not sure whether she means it literally, until we see their pushing forward on the mountain. Interestingly, though Irene is incensed by Rubek's treatment of her in her youth, she calls him her "lord and master."[150] Though at the end of the second act, their conversation is interrupted by the appearance of Sister of Mercy, who spies on Irene as if to keep her from misbehaving, Irene manages to take Rubek to the mountain in Act Three. We learn then of her true intentions (Figure 3-15).

> IRENE. (*regards him* sadly). The desire to live had died in me, Arnold. Now I am risen. And I search for you–and find you. And then I see both you and life lie dead–just as I was lying.
> RUBEK. Oh, how totally mistaken you are! Life goes on breeding and spawning in us and around us, as it has forever.
> IRENE. (*smiles and shakes her* head). Your young woman risen from death can see the whole of life laid out and embalmed.
> RUBEK. (*throwing his arm around her ardently*). Then let our two dead souls live life to the full for once–before we go down into our graves again!
> IRENE. (*in an outcry*). Arnold!
> RUBEK. But not here, in the half-light! Not here, with the ugly, wet shroud flapping about us–
> IRENE. (*in an ecstacy of passion*). No, no–up in the light and all its flaming glory. Up to the Peak of Promise!
> RUBEK. Up there we'll celebrate our marriage-feast, Irene–my beloved![151]

The "marriage-feast" image reminds us that Irene has come dressed like a bride in a white wedding dress: her fate is to be united with Rubek. It is a shared understanding between Irene and Rubek that no earth-lives like Ulfhejm and Maja's, lives full of youthful and naïve obsession with thrill, is possible for them. As much as Irene is still unable to escape her trauma, Rubek's animalistic energy has been gnawed away clean by his remorse. But the Nietzschean will to power still remains. Their will to power is enriched by their resolute (albeit abrupt)

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[150] Ibsen, *When We Dead Awaken*, 1069.
[151] Ibsen, *When We Dead Awaken*, 1091.

willingness to seek a new mode of life for themselves beyond the broken ones that they have led so far. This recalls *Rosmersholm,* where Rosmer and Rebekkah take their own lives to be reconciled with each other in death since they cannot do so in life. Here the two characters' awareness of their bodies reaches the highest, as their bodies are about to be destroyed, yet their souls will forever be joined. The *amor fati* that Zarathustra preaches is the embrace of eternal recurrence, of loving the ruthlessness of the cycle of creation and destruction.[152] Though there is no realization of any recurrence, Rubek and Irene are exhilarated by the thought of transcending their battered hearts and feeble bodies, even if only in death. Shortly after this exchange, Irene and Rubek are obliterated in an avalanche.

Jacobsen and Leavy note how the theme of resurrection is abundant in stories of the "white lady," for she "thwarted quest for deliverance from some enchantment she was suffering."[153] Once Irene speaks of how the Sister of Mercy is a "witch" and that she has "turned herself into [Irene's] shadow."[154] The ironically named Sister of Mercy represents a trauma so strong that it manifests in the form of a nun, a symbol of strict discipline yet also an ironic employment of Christian symbols for an occult presence. Hoping to leave behind her trauma, Irene returns to Rubek–the father of her "child" –to lift her enchantment. Death is a hopeful affair for both Rubek and Irene, for he could finally escape his guilty conscience, and she, metaphorically, could be free from the enchantment of grief. In death both could be resurrected, as implied by the statue's name "Resurrection Day."

In being obliterated by the avalanche, however, Irene and Rubek suggests that the infinity towards which artistic creation leads has no place for the body; in order to continually realize and

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[152] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 221.
[153] Jacobsen and Leavy, *Ibsen's Forsaken Merman: Folklore in the Late Plays*, 300.
[154] Ibsen, *When We Dead Awaken*, 1068.

surpass oneself spiritually, one must eventually transcend the mortal functions fundamental to humanity. The hyperawareness of the body and its relationship with art has brought Irene and Rubek to the ultimate crossroad of the body and the soul. If they remain human, then they will forever have to endure the conflict between life and art, between preserving the earth-life and drawing close to the ideal life. If they choose to completely devote themselves to the ideals of beauty and harmony, then they will have to abandon the mortal body, which always falls short of the perfection of such ideals. As humans, Rubek and Irene have already reached the limit of their mortal bodies. They have undergone the ultimate test and emerged with an understanding of the conflict between life and art through years of the trauma and torture of bad conscience. To continue their self-actualization, they are essentially left with only one choice: to go beyond both life and art and become incorporeal beings. This is why Rubek and Irene's suicide are at a higher existential level than that of Rosmer and Rebekkah in *Rosmersholm*. While Rosmer and Rebekkah choose death as an extension, a concretization, of their human lives, Rubek and Irene die to leave their lives as humans behind. So long as art remains the creation of bodily beings, one can say that Rubek and Irene's death is their dismissal of, not only life, but also art, altogether. The play leaves us with the sound of Maja celebrating her newfound freedom. But in dismissing both life and work, Rubek and Irene also give up all the joy that make up mortal experience. We must remember that transcending the body is not the only choice for everyone, and that fully embracing one's earthly and animalistic identity like Maja and Ulfhejm is also a form of self-realization. The hyperawareness of the body, which is essentially the intense reflection of the tension between a bodily life and a spiritual life, eventually leads to divergent existential choices.

It is here, however, that we realize Ibsen would still not give us a full glimpse of the utopia that Rubek, Irene, Solness and many other idealists of his have ascended to. Humanity does seem to have overcome the ultimate dialectic to reach absolute knowing. However, Johnston writes,

> The avalanche that sweeps Ruben and Irene to their deaths, denying them the final summit vision (as if the earth itself will not permit its creatures to transcend it) is interestingly, Ibsen's second thoughts, for his first sketch of the play ended with their ascent to the peak…. As it now stands, the affirmation of this epilogue to the Cycle is not of an earth-transcending value but on the contrary, of "the love that belongs to the life of the earth–the beautiful and miraculous earth-life." Thus the Cycle seems to return to its beginning…for, beginning with the emergence from the "animal community," the Cycle ends with man becoming animalistic again.[155]

Similarly, Jacobsen and Leavy remark of the play's ending that "Life and art are as irrevocably split as nature and culture appear to be."[156] Though Johnston believes that the cycle returns to its beginning, I believe that Ibsen does not seem to have given a conclusion. The play lifts us up through the mountains, brings up through sunset to sunrise, yet denies us of the summit and the sunshine. Ulfhejm and Maja now believe they are free, but as wild men and women, they will have a difficult time taming each other.[157]After shrieking in grief (Figure 3-16), Sister of Mercy reluctantly giving her blessing: "Pax vobiscum!"[158] (Figure 3-17) Is Ibsen is asking us to make peace with the many tensions, contradictions, and difficult choices that will not go away any time soon for those among humanity who strive for self-actualization?

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[155] Johnston, *The Ibsen Cycle*, 93.
[156] Jacobsen and Leavy, *Ibsen's Forsaken Merman: Folklore in the Late Plays*, 291.
[157] Jacobsen and Leavy, *Ibsen's Forsaken Merman,* 290.
[158] Ibsen, *When We Dead Awaken*, 1092.

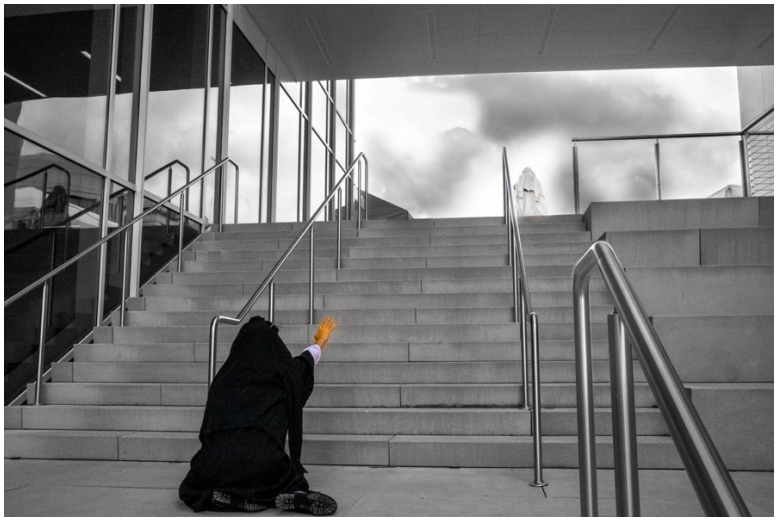

Figure 3-16. The Sister of Mercy devastated by Irene's departure.

Figure 3-17. The Sister of Mercy utters her blessing: "Pax vobiscum."

As the last phase of the Cycle, *When We Dead Awaken* distills humanity (the Hegelian Spirit) to four archetypal characters that explore their beliefs, impulses, and decisions about one of the most fundamental things that defines humanity–the human body. By presenting characters in hyper-awareness of their relationship with their own and others' bodies and, in turn, with the many layers of their human identity, Ibsen depicts humanity in its ultimate inquiry about the existential significance of self-realization. This difficult quest yields an ambiguous conclusion

about whether humanity's destination is transcendence or regression. The only thing Ibsen makes certain is the seemingly eternal nature of struggles between binaries, and the long way ahead that humanity shall go to discover the answer of where self-realization leads.

Chapter Four

Theatricalization of Existential Horror and Absurdity in *Hedda Gabler*

O solitude! O my home, solitude! How happily and tenderly your voice speaks to me![159]

–Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

Few dramatic heroines hold up a mirror to the disorientation of existence, trick us into believing we have finally found the reflection of ourselves at our most complex, yet continue to perplex us than Ibsen's Hedda. Surpassing Nora, Rebekka and Ellida, Hedda has taken the female psyche to unprecedented intricacy, making *Hedda Gabler* essentially the Everest of Ibsen criticism and performance. To the extent that the play can be cited to make statements of the intellectually, emotionally, and sexually repressed state of nineteenth-century women in general, it is also revelatory of the hopelessness for romantic individuals wishing to establish a self-determined identity against an extremely limiting sociocultural climate of Ibsen's era. The source of this hopelessness, *Hedda Gabler* demonstrates, is the psychological toll taken by isolation on an individual in a society that treats her, and that she treats, as completely alien. In this production, I interpret Hedda's seemingly malicious manipulation of others as her struggling to bring familiarity to a world she finds entirely foreign. This production utilizes masks to represent Hedda's theatricalization of others as a result of their perceived otherness. By theatricalizing the ways of life around her which she finds incomprehensible and hostile, Hedda copes with the horror and absurdity of feeling alien to her surroundings, thereby illustrating the existential isolation that accompanies self-realization.

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[159] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 1995, 184.

Ibsen as his own Hedda

As in *When We Dead Awaken*, we find Ibsen, in his personal life, in Rubek's role in his concurrent relationships with Emilie Bardach and Helene Raff, two young women who Meyer surmisesinfluenced Ibsen's craft in *Hedda Gabler* and subsequent plays. Having achieved great fame in Europe at this time, Ibsen once told Raff: "You are youth, child, youth personified–and I need that–for my work, my writing."[160] This also describes Ibsen's attitude towards Bardach. Psychiatrist Dr. Anthony Storr writes that Ibsen's antipathy towards licentiousness would have prevented him from liberating his physical impulses as Maja and Ulfhejm do in *When We Dead Awaken*: "This kind of character is built upon a fear of letting instincts or emotional forces loose. Emotions must be controlled, for spontaneity is dangerous."[161] Meyer believes that Hedda, who longs for freedom and beauty yet fears scandal, is a "portrait of the dramatist as a young woman."[162] Spinchorn suspects that in this affair, Ibsen himself was playing "Hedda to her Løvborg,"[163] conforming to the institution of marriage and channeling his romantic impulses into less destructive, intellectually creative work. As if reflecting the Ibsen's own conflicted mind, Hedda is caught between Tesman, her academic husband, and Løvborg, her ex-lover. She is torn between the desire to be free and the fear for scandal, both internalizing and externalizing such conflict.

Tesman and Løvborg represent the division between a bourgeois society preoccupied with materiality, conventions, and institutions, and the marginalized romantic, mythic sensibilities of the broader, freer imagination. This division gives rise to Hedda's feeling of

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[160] Meyer, *Ibsen: A Biography*, 619.
[161] Meyer, *Ibsen: A Biography,* 621.
[162] Meyer, *Ibsen: A Biography,* 628. This is the title of Meyer's Chapter on Ibsen's life and work between 1889 and 1890.
[163] Evert Sprinchorn, "Ibsen and the Immoralists," *Comparative Literature Studies* 9, no. 1 (1972): 75, http://www.jstor.org.proxy.library.emory.edu/stable/40245959.

alienation. Hedda was raised as an aristocrat, with a desire for control, wanderlust on horseback, and empowered curiosity for things that are "not permitted to her."[164] Hedda's inquisitive nature had driven her to a spiritually intimate relationship with Løvborg. Hedda's longs for what Løvborg had shown her: an uninhibited life with immense creative energy for beauty. Yet as she ages, she faces the ultimate question of marriage. Løvborg unstable, Hedda gives in to pressure from a bourgeois society gaining hegemony and marries Tesman. With her husband studying trivial academic subjects such as medieval artefacts and Aunt Julie busy caring for the dying Aunt Rina, in the four walls of Tesman's villa, Hedda finds herself a strange woman in a strange land.

Hegelian Interpretation: Self-alienated Spirit

"Self-alienated Spirit. Culture" is the title of the second section of the chapter "(BB.) Spirit" in *Phenomenology*. This title perfectly describes the mutually perceived otherness between Hedda and her surroundings. According to Johnston's analysis, *Hedda Gabler* falls under the second phase of the Spirit, described in this exact section of *Phenomenology.* In Hegel's text, we find an account of the tension between rational morality and natural instincts.

> Both of these, pure thought and the sensuous aspect of consciousness, are *in themselves a single consciousness*…. These urges and tendencies constitute an internal opposition to the purposes of the pure will. The moral consciousness remains one consciousness, however, and in virtue of this unity is obliged to terminate the conflict between its pure self and its contingent, sensuous urges: its essence lies in ending such a conflict …. Consciousness has, therefore, itself to bring about this harmony and continually to be making progress in morality.

To summarize, societies in this stage of moral consciousness preach that natural instincts, because they cannot be completely eliminated, should either be trained to align with the moral

[164] Ibsen, *Ibsen: Four Major Plays*, 252.

good or disciplined so that they do not interfere with the individual's compliance with moral conventions. In the war between the life of moral duty and the life of freedom. Spirit is thus split in two, entering self-alienation. Hedda, longing for freedom and duty-driven bourgeois society are thus mutually alienated. She is stranded on her own romantic island, besieged on every side by Tesman, Thea, Aunt Julie and even Berte, those whom Johnston calls the "Christian" army against Hedda's "pagan" resistance. In Act II, Hedda convinces Løvborg to go drinking with Tesman and Brack so that she could see him "with vine leaves in his hair, burning bright and bold" and finally "having power over himself."[165] This is Hedda's first attempt self-realization: to make Løvborg live out their shared ideal, to have an enclave of the Dionysian (explicitly symbolized by vine leaves) in an unimaginative Christian world.

Nietzschean Interpretation: Zarathustra's Solitude

The "vine leaves" is arguably the most famous symbol in *Hedda Gabler*, leading scholars to interpret Hedda as an apotheosis of the Dionysian in Nietasche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, published eight years earlier in 1872. In Act I of *Emperor and Galilean* (1873), Julian, the protagonist, sees men following a philosopher walking past, all with "wreath in their hair." The wreath symbolizes freedom and romantic pagan belief, driving him to escape a Constantinople under the shadow of strict Christian teachings. Hedda longs for an act to control one's own destiny that is voluntary, spontaneous, and with dignity. For Hedda, a "last great act–bathed in beauty," is the validation of the Dionysian.[166]

I would like to propose, however, that it is the solitary journey of Zarathustra–the "going under"–that best represents Hedda's existential isolation in a journey to discover and preserve

[165] Ibsen, *Four Major Plays,* 258.
[166] Ibsen, *Ibsen: Four Major Plays*, 282.

the Dionysian, establishing herself in an alien world. Zarathustra's journey is marked by extreme isolation as he descends from the mountains alone, thus physically going "under," to preach the death of God. He seeks solace in his solitude, for he knows that his solitude is a result of enlightenment to the doctrine of the Overman, which sets him apart from humans who have not understood its significance.[167] Though Hedda, unlike Zarathustra, does not descend from a mountain to preach to human beings, she shares with Zarathustra a kind of isolation resulting from being in touch with romantic ideals that her society fails to recognize. In Part Four, Zarathustra encounters various human archetypes, including two kings, a magician, a bleeding man, and a wandering shadow, all of whom have heard Zarathustra preach but have misconstrued his teachings. Like Zarathustra, Hedda remains foreign to those who do not truly understand her. Hedda's fall from a spiritual aristocrat to the wife of a middle-class academic is her version of going "under." In her truth, in her beauty, she is alone.

Mutual Otherness and Theatricalization of Horror and Absurdity

Hedda's isolation results from a surrounding that not only fails to understand, but also actively misunderstands her longing for power, freedom and beauty. Hedda either terrifies or amuses them, as it seems to them that she always has some abnormal ideas underneath her tacit agreement to normality. Not seeing that the pistols are Hedda's only link to some comfort of familiarity from her youth, Tesman shudders at the thought that his womanly wife is a violence-craving time bomb, while Judge Brack is aroused and mistakes her for a woman with a taste for scandal. Thea wants nothing to do with Hedda, a schoolmate and bully who hasn't aged a day. Although the will to power still remains in Hedda, it has now turned suppressed and subtle. But

[167] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 1995, 184.

Løvborg, who knew her to possess the "craving of life," thinks she had become content with the banal bourgeois life and lost her fiery streak.[168] Both her enemies and her ally misconstrue her intentions. To Aunt Julie, Tesman, and Thea, Hedda is dangerous; to Brack, she is tantalizing; to Løvborg, she is cowardly. To everyone, she is otherworldly, an *alien* to their sphere. To Hedda, those around her are just as strange as she is to everyone else.

Therefore, Hedda finds it impossible to communicate with those around her. She is never recognized as herself, and she never feels wholly connected with anyone else. In her incomprehensible surroundings, Hedda oscillates between amusement and horror. She feels as if she lives in a puzzling theatrical performance of faces, voices, and gestures, where the shape of a face, sound of a voice, and forms of bodies are discernable, but their meanings are completely indecipherable. Hedda thus theatricalizes those around her, observing them as if they are actors on a stage, experimenting with making them follow her "script," and most importantly, trying to penetrate the "acting" to find intimacy and authenticity as she attempts to realize herself by "help[ing] shape someone's destiny." Modifying my original set design that contained white, fractured human statues for *When We Dead Awaken*, I was inspired to use white, neutral face masks in *Hedda Gabler* to represent Hedda's theatricalizing of others.

The Five Significances of Masks

My use of masks was inspired by Toril Moi's article "Hedda's Silences: Beauty and Despair in *Hedda Gabler*" (2013) and Kirsten Shepherd-Barr's article "Against Interpretation? Hedda and the Performing Self" (2018). Combining their ideas, I derived five different significances for the use of masks in this production.

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[168] Ibsen, *Ibsen: Four Major Plays*, 253.

In her article, Moi highlights Hedda's almost imperceptible exclamation in the middle of Thea and Løvborg's conversation. Below is a reproduction of the conversation Moi discusses:

> Mrs. Elvsted: (*Defiantly*.) Where you are, that's where I want to be. I won't let myself be just driven off like this. I want to stay at your side–Be with you when the book comes out.
> Hedda: (*Half aloud, tensely.*) Ah, the book–Yes.
> Løvborg: *(Looking at her*.) Mine and Thea's, because that's what it is.
> Mrs. Elvsted: Yes, that's what I feel it is. [169]

In this moment, Hedda's exclamation functions almost as an aside, meant for either herself, or for us outside the fourth wall. Soon Løvorg reveals that he had destroyed the manuscript, infuriating Thea. Hedda pretends that she does not know this, although she is the one who hides it. She watches them, like a spectator of a play. Moi notes that Hedda is "withholding her acknowledgement of their humanity," or "their capacity to have an inner life, to feel sorrow and pain," so that she can hide due to "her sense of isolation, of being stranded in an alien world."[170] I would like to add that Hedda's act of theatricalization is a coping mechanism, a defense disguised as an attack in a hostile surrounding. Hedda cannot change her otherness and the isolation that results, but she utilizes such solitude for the ideals of freedom and power; this is accomplished by becoming a "goddess" in her own tragedy to sabotage human endeavors.

Shephard-Barr proposes another theory, that Hedda herself is the actress to her own director. Hedda's most authentic moments are the ones where she is alone onstage or not

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[169] Ibsen, 270. Moi uses the same excerpt from another edition of *Hedda Gabler*. Ibsen, Henrik. Hedda Gabler. Hundreårsutgave: Henrik Ibsens samlede verker [Hedda Gabler. Centenary edition: Henrik Ibsen's collected works]. Ed. Francis Bull, Halvdan Koht, and Didrik Arup Seip. Vol. 11. Oslo: Gyldendal, 1928–57.

[170] Toril Moi, "Hedda's Silences: Beauty and Despair in Hedda Gabler," *Modern Drama* 56, no. 4 (2013): 442,https://login.proxy.library.emory.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=92865896&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

speaking, making her interaction with others seem like calculated affectations. The famous actress Elizabeth Robins wrote in melodramatic physical acting notes for non-speaking moments where Hedda has privacy with another character, again emphasizing that Hedda is giving a performance–for herself, perhaps?[171] Ironically, we the audience interrupt Hedda's privacy with herself; we find her excessively histrionic by nature, while Hedda's theatricality is intentional in order to mask her true emotions. I would argue that, again, this is because Hedda is trying to turn an externally imposed isolation into a voluntary choice. By reducing herself to "mere surfaces," as Moi puts, she finds refuge in her otherness, so that she can remain a mystery to others (and indeed to us) while dealing with her isolation.[172]

Combined, these analyses tell us that Hedda is both affected by being alienated and choosing to alienate herself. Hedda feels severed from her surroundings in the first place, and in trying to cope with such isolation, she turns others into her subjects, thereby veering further away from them. The otherness, again, is *mutual*. This is why, to Hedda, others are always masked, and to others, Hedda, too is always masked. Productions that one-sidedly emphasize Hedda's otherness to those around her makes her an apathetic, conniving, sadistic femme fatale. Such productions annoy critics like Bredo Morgenstierne, who dismisses Hedda entirely: "We do not understand Hedda Gabler, nor believe in her. She is not related to anyone we know."[173] But though Hedda's reactions to existential isolation might be indefensible, such isolation is still a universal experience. And horror, as Hedda demonstrates, is only a natural response to extreme solitude. Moi notes that "if we aren't capable of seeing the world as Hedda sees it, if only for a

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[171] Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr, "Against Interpretation: Hedda and the Performing Self," in *Ibsen's Hedda Gabler: Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Kristin Gjesdal, Oxford Studies in Philosophy and Literature (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 189.

[172] Moi, "Hedda's Silences: Beauty and Despair in Hedda Gabler," 442.

[173] Meyer, *Ibsen: A Biography*, 643.

moment, we won't be able to acknowledge her plight of soul and body."[174] In this aspect Deborah Warner's 1991 Dublin production (recorded for television in 1993) towers above the rest. In the opening scene, Hedda, played by Fiona Shaw, nauseates as she rushes to open the window, horrified by the thought of pregnancy (Figure 4-1). She is tense and jittery throughout the production's television recording. A New York Times critic, John O'Connor, remarks that Warner's Hedda that "is already destroyed by her fears when the curtain goes up…"[175]

Figure 4-1. Hedda (Fiona Shaw) puts her hand between her thighs, realizes she might be pregnant, and rushes to open the window in *Hedda Gabler*, directed by Deborah Warner. Production Design by Hildegard Bechtler. BBC. 1993.[176]

I gave all characters neutral, white masks except Hedda. The first significance of masks is simply Hedda's otherness. From her first entrance into a setting with fully masked characters, the audience immediately notices that only Hedda is maskless, and the audience is forced to identify with Hedda, as all other faces are inaccessible. On the masks I added different patterns to distinguish between characters: a monocle for Judge Brack, a single tear falling from Thea's left

[174] Moi, "Hedda's Silences: Beauty and Despair in Hedda Gabler," 436.

[175] John O'Connor, "TV Weekend; Classic, But Hardly Traditional," *New York Times*, March 26, 1993, sec. C, New York Times Article Archive.

[176] *Hedda Gabler*, directed by Deborah Warner, set design by Hildegard Betchler, (1993; London: BBC), https://www-digitaltheatreplus-com.proxy.library.emory.edu/education/collections/bbc-studios/hedda-gabler.

eye and Løvborg's right eye, and a pair of gold-rimmed glasses that Tesman wears over his mask. The symmetrical design of Thea and Løvborg's masks indicates their relationship as partners. The tears symbolize their bond formed in the midst of agony: Thea in her unhappy marriage, and Løvborg in rehabilitation from alcoholism.

The second significance of masks is the hypocrisy inherent in the social codes to which characters are forced to conform. Conversations in the house are to be pleasant, respectful, and euphemistic, not to touch on private matters. But underneath the façade of altruism and righteousness, sweet Aunt Julie is capable of cursing Tesman's opponents: "And those who were against you–those who would have blocked your way–they're at the bottom of the pit."[177] Tesman says that he has Løvborg's manuscript for safekeeping, but he has many reasons to keep it inaccessible to Løvborg due to their academic competition. Judge Brack seduces and blackmails Hedda in the most courteous language. Even Løvborg, under the pressure of such a social code, puts on a display of a mild gentleman. Hedda feels surrounded by falseness.

The third significance of masks is Hedda's feeling of being threatened by the presence of those around her. The chorus masks in Greek tragedy erase features of the players, therefore making them "faceless" as they are supposed to represent the most archetypal of humans. But these masks also make players look less than alive.[178] Because of her inability to see others' true colors through the metaphorical masks, she finds them ridiculous in their clown-like pretentiousness and terrifying in their unreadability.

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[177] Ibsen, *Ibsen: Four Major Plays*, 219.

[178] Of course, performances of Greek Tragedy with masks also call for exaggerated movements to compensate the lack of varied facial expressions. Here I am discussing the visual design of the mask only.

Figure 4-2. Cassandra and the Chorus. *The Oresteia* by Aeschylus, directed by Peter Hall, 1981.[179]

Figure 4-3. *Girl and Three Male Heads* by Edvard Munch. There is no evidence that Munch created this painting specifically for the *Hedda Gabler*. But as we look for connections between these works, the woman can easily be interpreted as Hedda, and the three mask-like male heads: Tesman, Løvborg, and Brack (in no particular order). My inspiration came from the observation that the woman sits with her eyes downcast, as if feeling imposed upon by male presence. [180]

[179] *The Oresteia*, written by Aeschylus, directed by Peter Hall, mask design by Jocelyn Herbert, produced by National Theatre, photographed by Nobby Clark, Oliver Theatre, London, 1981.

[180] Edvard Munch, *Girl and Three Male Heads*, 1898, Oil on Canvas, 100 x 90 cm, The Kunsthalle Bremen, Bremen, Germany, https://bremen.museum-digital.de/index.php?t=objekt&oges=113&navlang=en.

The fourth significance of the (lack of) mask is the internal complexity of Hedda that cannot be reduced to unambiguous character type. In Hegel's theory of tragedy, "for the plastic character or ethos there is nothing behind that mask; the agents identify themselves totally with their personae, their pathos, as do the players/dramaturges representing them."[181] Jocelyn B. Hoy elaborates: "Antigone, for example, is not caught in the throes of Hamlet's inaction; she *knows* what she must do, and she does it."[182] Like Hamlet, what makes Hedda fascinating is not only the nebulous ideal that she describes, but also her ambivalence, hesitancy and confusion. She hates the idea of pregnancy because it "binds her to … the bodily functions of begetting and dying,"[183] but she still married herself off to Tesman because she was depreciating in the marriage market. She flirts with Judge Brack but is afraid of scandal. Hedda's "un-maskability," her contradictory impulses, make her a better epitome of humanity than other characters. She cannot be wholly represented by any single mask.

Having considered the first four points, we arrive at the fifth significance of the mask: Hedda's theatricalizing of others and herself. Due to mutually perceived otherness, Hedda lives in her environment like a caged beast, being a spectacle for others while also making others a spectacle to herself, trying to battle isolation and powerlessness.

Hedda Gabler*, in Nodal Moments*

The set design for *Hedda Gabler* requires a very clear division between the outer space of the drawing room, where Hedda and Tesman meets the guests, and an inner room, where the portrait of General Gabler hangs. Johnson notes:

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[181] Martin Donougho, "The Woman in White: On the Reception of Hegel's Antigone," *The Owl of Minerva* 1, no. 21 (1989): 65–89.

[182] Hoy, "Hegel, Antigone, and Feminist Critique: The Spirit of Ancient Greece," 176.

[183] Durbach, *'Ibsen the Romantic': Analogues of Paradise in the Later Plays*, 41.

> The basic choreography of the play is circular, following Hedda's emergence from her inner room (associated with her private world of values), her first attacks upon her enemies in the form of minor aggressions, the major campaign when she launches the bohemian Lovborg against the philistinism, his defeat, and Hedda's "beautiful" death like a pagan warrior preferring death to dishonor.[184]

Corresponding to the space layout is Hedda's inner personality, where the legacy of her father lives and where she dies, and outer personality, which she performs for others. To comply with COVID-19 safety regulations, I utilized a semi-outdoor corridor instead of an indoor set. I used a dark, shadowed space with a background view of vines as the inner room to reflect Hedda's ties to the Dionysian, and a fully lit patio with modern, white architecture as the drawing room to reflect the banality of coldness of Hedda's daily life. The space is decorated with plants, echoing the abundance of cut flowers in the first act and representing islands of the Dionysian on which Hedda seeks psychological refuge. The ground is littered with wilted leaves, accentuating death motifs.

Figure 4-4. Hedda enters as Tesman and Aunt Julie converses.

[184] Johnston, *The Ibsen Cycle*, 148.

Act One begins with Hedda emerging "from the left side of the inner room."[185] She is "aristocratic and elegant."[186] In Figure 4-4, Hedda emerges from the shadowy inner room as if born out of the vines in the background. Although Hedda is not formally dressed until Act Two, in this production Hedda does not undergo any costume changes so as to minimize the number of items needed and ensure the safety of actors from COVID-19. The color green a symbol of the Dionysian "vineleaves." Jacobsen and Leavy's also observes that Hedda, like Maja, embodies the animal energy of the huldre. The *huldre* is a "beautiful, seductive, fond of dancing, and attracted to human men. She desires a soul and is willing to marry a man and be a subservient wife as long as she is not mistreated too badly. But she has the power and strength and passion of nature in her even after her tail is gone. In a word, she is both desirable and dangerous."[187] A huldre's tail would betray her identity and is not meant to be seen. Similarly, Hedda is secretive about her passion for power, freedom and beauty, which if revealed will make her even more isolated. In the human world, she must live out her passion subtly, such as by dressing in a fully green dress. The color green symbolizes Hedda's huldre-like longing for ideals as vast as the mythical landscape.

Figure 4-5. Hedda in momentary solitude after Tesman leaves to see Aunt Julie off.

[185] Ibsen, *Ibsen: Four Major Plays*, 219.
[186] Ibsen,*Ibsen: Four Major Plays,* 219.
[187] Jacobsen and Leavy, *Ibsen's Forsaken Merman: Folklore in the Late Plays*, 108.

After Tesman leaves to see Aunt Julie off, Hedda alone onstage for a short moment (Figure 4-5). She "walks around the room raising her arms and clenching her fists as if in a rage. *Then* she draws the curtains back from the door, stands there and looks out."[188] Hedda is frequently associated with the curtain at her most theatrical: "her interaction with them places her self-consciously as an actress on a proscenium stage, controlling the opening and closing of the curtains that frame it."[189] However, I experimented with a display of quietly repressed fear, all concentrated in the actor's eyes and breathing. If Hedda is acting out a play for herself, in this moment this play is more of an understated, internal psychological drama, instead of full-blown melodrama. In this moment, Hedda realizes that her pregnancy denies her the privilege as a general's daughter; living with a grandeur that, in her era, was only accessible to men. In their analysis, Jacobsen and Leavy note that Hedda exemplifies "unfeminine character traits as sexual passion, personal ambition, fascination with war and weapons, and sometimes even a certain maliciousness."[190] Denied these impulses, Hedda feels out of touch with her father, who now only exists in the portrait on the wall. Kristen Gjesdal also insightfully proposed that Hedda has "los[t] her past: her legacy is reduced to empty phrases ([Aunt Julie's] proud comments about her legacy), framed and displayed, as a decorative feature, in the form of her father's portrait."[191] General Gabler therefore appears as a broken, featureless white mask.

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[188] Ibsen, *Ibsen: Four Major Plays*, 222.

[189] E. Shepherd-Barr, "Against Interpretation: Hedda and the Performing Self," 189.

[190] Jacobsen and Leavy, *Ibsen's Forsaken Merman: Folklore in the Late Plays*, 136.

[191] Kristen Gjesdal, "Ibsen on History and Life: Hedda Gabler in a Nietzschean Light," in *Ibsen's Hedda Gabler: Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Kristen Gjesdal, Oxford Studies in Philosophy and Literature (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 229.

Figure 4-6. Thea and Hedda in private.

Thea comes with news of Løvborg missing, and Hedda learns of their affair. Hedda then coaxes more details out of Thea. In Figure 4-6, Hedda leans against a plant, with green leaves behind her. She channels the chaotic spontaneity of Dionysian and the will to power, giving herself the permission to influence another person, an impulse that she has long suppressed. Hedda holds Thea so that Thea leans against her. For all the endearments Hedda whispers to Thea, however, she refuses to see Thea's face. As discussed before, Hedda theatricalizes Thea, entertaining herself with Thea's anxiety. Hedda's theatricalization of Thea comes after feeling threatened by her own pregnancy; she tries to establish a sense of control over her environment again.

Figure 4-7. Hedda and Tesman.

Seeing that Hedda was aloof when Judge Brack told them that Løvborg will be competing with him for the professor position, Tesman paints Hedda a picture of what he thought was their shared middle-class dream to remind her how important his appointment is. But Tesman's vision bores Hedda (Figure 4-7).

> TESMAN: Well, at least we have our home, Hedda, our wonderful home. The home both of us dreamt about, that both of us craved, I could almost say, hm?
> HEDDA: (*Rises slowly and wearily*) The agreement was that we would live in society, that we would entertain.
> TESMAN: Yes, good lord, I was so looking forward to that. Just think, to see you as a hostess in our own circle. Hm. Well, well, well, for the time being at least we'll just have to make do with each other, Hedda. We'll have Aunt Julie here now and then. Oh you, you should have such a completely different–
> HEDDA: To begin with, I suppose I can't have the liveried footman.[192]

Hedda wants to watch Tesman and Løvborg compete in "a sort of match," once again theatricalizing her situation.[193] Distancing herself from Tesman's emotions, she prevents herself from being invested in her middle-class life, emphasizing the aristocratic treatment she was used to with "liveried footman." Figure 4-7 is taken from within a glass-enclosed room. An obvious ridge separates Hedda and Tesman, suggesting their irreconcilable difference. Two parts of humanity are symbolically alienated: rational morality on the left, natural inclinations on the right.

[192] Ibsen, *Ibsen: Four Major Plays*, 235.
[193] Ibsen, *Ibsen: THe Major Plays,* 235.

Figure 4-8 (a) Hedda and Judge Brack in the drawing room alone.

Figure 4-8 (b). Tesman returns.

Act Two begins. Judge Brack visits the house to find Hedda toying with her pistol. Due to public safety concerns, this project did not feature any prop weapon in open spaces. Figure 8 features Hedda and Brack in the middle of their conversation before Tesman returns. As Judge Brack proposes an affair, Hedda refuses: "*(With a disdainful gesture)* I don't hold with that sort of thing. I'd rather remain sitting, just like I am now, a couple alone. On a train."[194] But Hedda feels the grip of temptation. This is the first time that she sees a way out of her boredom and

[194] Ibsen, *Ibsen: Four Major Plays*, 240.

isolation, having an "understanding friend, a proven friend."[195] In Figure 4-8 (a) Hedda leans against the plant as she considers the promise of primitive thrill, associated with the Dionysian. But having conflicted feelings about the scandalous nature of the affair, Hedda does not look at Brack. Brack sits on the edge of the plant, invading Hedda's Dionysian space as he invades Hedda's consciousness. By the time Tesman appears, Hedda and Brack have reached a secret agreement. Though Tesman completes "the triangle," Tesman's presence or participation, which used to make Hedda weary, is now unimportant and ineffectual. Therefore, Tesman's figure is only a shadow in Figure 4-8 (b).

Figure 4-9 (a). Hedda and Løvborg looking at the photo album alone.

[195] Ibsen, *Ibsen, Four Major Plays,* 241.

Figure 4-9 (b). Hedda and Løvborg looking at the photo album alone, continued.

Løvborg visits, and Hedda shows him the album of photos taken on her trip with Tesman (Figure 4-9 (a)). A series of intimate exchanges reveal their past relationship. Even though they were confidantes, Hedda refused to be physically intimate with him. Hedda is isolated by her cowardice, which prevents her from enthusiastically responding to either Brack's or Løvborg's advances for sex. Moi summarizes Hedda's reluctance as another moment of "silence," reflecting "more than a revolt against the ordinary destiny of women in her society," being a "refusal of sexuality itself."[196] Considering Hedda's theatricalization of others, we can discern that gender and family roles are only performances to Hedda, and she has to devise a performance of herself in return as a member of a family and society. Hedda cannot identify with Aunt Julie or Thea, the kind of woman that not only "performs" gender expectations but consider them her purpose. In her cowardice as a form of defiance, Hedda is alone.

In Figure 4-9 (b), Hedda averts Løvborg's gaze as she reflects on her past self. Hedda is aware of her own cowardice but she cannot overcome it. She cannot stand with Løvborg, who

[196] Moi, "Hedda's Silences: Beauty and Despair in Hedda Gabler," 477.

remains a mask instead of an individual to her. Plagued with unrestrained spending, excessive drinking, and volatile emotions, Løvborg is a better embodiment of the Dionysian than Hedda. His green cravat subtly matches Hedda's dress. He is dressed, however, in restrictive formal attire, suggesting the disciplinary influence of Thea. Thea's influence on Løvborg can also be found on their matching masks in Figure 4-10. Hedda has just coerced Løvborg into drinking. She watches with calm amusement as Thea panics about Løvborg relapsing into alcoholism. But Hedda the puppet master is not interested in her puppet's concerns. She waits for a catastrophe so that she can marvel at her own dramatic work.

Figure 4-10. Hedda convinces Løvborg to drink.

Emboldened by her success in inciting Løvborg to join Tesman and Brack in their nightly frenzy, Hedda finally unleashes all her Dionysian power on Thea (Figure 4-11). She admits that "just once in my life I want to help shape someone's destiny."[197] The thought of Løvborg coming into the Dionysian demigod that he is makes Hedda believe that just for one night, she will feel less powerless. A feeling of invincibility propels Hedda to intimidate Thea: "Oh, if you could

[197] Ibsen, *Ibsen: Four Major Plays*, 257.

only understand how destitute I am while you get to be so rich. (*She passionately throws her arm around her.*) I think I'll burn your hair off after all."[198] The control over Løvborg, which exclusive to Thea only moments ago, has now been transferred to Hedda.

Figure 4-11. Hedda and Thea after the men leaves.

In Act Three, hoping to welcome a hero who has liberated and embraced his inner being, brimming with confident beauty, Hedda receives news that a heavily intoxicated Løvborg caused a scene at the salon of a prostitute, resisted arrest, and injured the police, losing his manuscript in the process. She did not expect there to be such indecency. As Judge Brack recounts Løvborg's frenzy, Hedda is appalled: "So, that's how it ended? He had no vineleaves in his hair."[199] In Figure 4-12, Judge Brack's towering figure competes for space with the plant on Hedda's right side. Unlike before, Judge Brack's presence now reminds her of her weakness.

[198] Ibsen, *Ibsen: Four Major Plays*, 258.
[199] Ibsen, *Four Major Plays,* 267.

Figure 4-12. Judge Brack speaks of Miss Diana and Løvborg.

Learning that Løvborg had destroyed the manuscript, Thea is heartbroken (Figure 4-13 (a)). The comparison of the manuscript to her and Løvborg's child repeats the motif in Ibsen's plays that children are often sacrificed in the process of their parents' self-realization. In this instance, the child is metaphorical. The "child" dies indirectly from Hedda's attempt to assert power over Løvborg or, more broadly, her fight against her existential isolation and powerlessness. As discussed before, Hedda theatricalizes Løvborg and Thea, watching silently so that she can appreciate the tragedy she helped create, trying to find some respite in her isolation.

After Thea leaves, Løvborg tells Hedda that he had in fact lost the manuscript. The play has reached the most important turning point. This time, Hedda engages with Løvborg's heartache and listens to his confessions (Figure 4-14 (b)). Hedda senses an opportunity to finally create what she had not dared do but longed to witness: an act performed freely and beautifully, even if that means death.

> HEDDA: (*comes a step closer.*) Eilert Løvborg–Listen to me now–can you see to it that–that when you do it, you bathe it beauty.
> LØVBORG: In beauty? (*Smiles*) With vine leaves in my hair as you used to imagine?

> HEDDA: Ah, no. No vine leaves–I don't believe in them any longer. But in beauty, yes![200]

When Løvborg is about to leave, Hedda asks him to take her pistol, so that he would die, figuratively, in her hands.

> HEDDA: No, wait! Take a souvenir to remember me by.
> *(She goes to the writing table, opens the drawer and the pistol case. She returns to Løvborg with one of the pistols*)
> LØVBORG: (*looks at her.*) That's the souvenir?
> HEDDA: (*Nodding slowly.*) Do you recognize it? It was aimed at you once.
> LØVBORG: You should have used it then.
> HEDDA: Here, you use it now.
> LØVBORG: (*Puts the pistol in his breast pocket.*) Thanks.
> HEDDA: In beauty, Eilert Løvborg. Promise me that.
> LØVBORG: Good-bye, Hedda Gabler. (*He goes out the hall doorway.*)[201]

This is the most intimate moment of the play. Due to public safety regulations, I was not able to produce photo with the actors handling the pistol. But in description, the scene should play out as a moment of methodical adoration. Hedda finally bares her inner self, if only a little, for another person to see. Her conception of beauty is opaque, but specific enough to be understood only between the two of them. Hedda slowly takes off Løvborg's mask, looking into his eyes. In this secret agreement Hedda is comfortable with physical and emotional closeness but, ironically, only because she knows that Løvborg is going to die. With tenderness she points at Løvborg's temple with the pistol, telling him to die in beauty. By finally accepting him as a human being, Hedda trusts to live out her dream. For a moment Hedda is less alone, because now she is seen and sees her reflection in another. Now Løvborg, like her, is no longer a mask, but a human being.

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[200] Ibsen, *Ibsen: Four Major Plays*, 272.
[201] Ibsen, *Ibsen: Four Major Plays*, 272.

Figure 4-13 (a) Thea and Løvborg in an argument.

Figure 4-13. Hedda comforts Løvborg after Thea leaves.

At the end of Act Three, the play reaches its first climax with Hedda burning the manuscript (Figure 4-14). Hedda throws a few pages into the fire first, before throwing in the rest. She whispers, "Now, I'm burning your child, Thea–You with your curly hair."[202] As a foil to Hedda, Thea only has the best intentions, wanting only to live a peaceful, sober middle-class life for both herself and Løvborg. Jacobsen and Leavy surmise that Thea is a sanitized version of

[202] Ibsen, *Ibsen: Four Major Plays*, 273.

the huldre, a "romantic national muse" whose "soul would have to be won not merely through union with a mortal man but through the artist," who is Løvborg.[203] Burning the manuscript is the closest Hedda gets to triumphing as the amoral goddess in this tragedy. The hubris of Thea, a human, dreaming of bending the power of the god-like Løvborg to her will, is met with the ruthless catastrophe she deserves. The burning is Hedda's tribute to her own will that has survived in loneliness, successfully transformed from a "camel" into a "lion" in the spiritual desert. Hedda has, in her mind, been delivered from isolation by her power. She is not just performing an execution of Løvborg and Thea's future but also a celebration of the prospect of bringing her ideal to life in Løvborg's death. In Figure 14, Hedda inspects the pages before ritualistically burning them with increasing joy, relief, and excitement.

The ultimate irony, however, happens in Act Four, when the amoral goddess that Hedda tries to embody punishes her for her own hubris. Løvborg shoots himself in his genitals and dies. Hedda's dream of "something bathed in a bright shaft of beauty" bursts.[204] Thea produces Løvborg's notes, and Tesman practically rekindles his old romance with Thea as they work on restoring Løvborg's manuscript. Hedda herself is trapped in subjugation to Brack as he blackmails her with knowledge of her pistol at Løvborg's death scene. Hedda is cast into isolation again: no one around her to validate her ideals, living in horror and absurdity. What Løvborg could not accomplish, she must accomplish herself. In her very theatrical death, her body is concealed until after the gunshot is heard, after which an onstage curtain is pulled aside. Revealing her lifeless body. Hedda's death is not a painful struggle, but as a tableau, a work of

[203] Jacobsen and Leavy, *Ibsen's Forsaken Merman: Folklore in the Late Plays*, 220.
[204] Ibsen, *Ibsen: Four Major Plays*, 282–83.

art. Perhaps now Hedda has finally found beauty, but a beauty no ordinary person is privileged enough to understand. As Judge Brack exclaims: "People don't act that way."[205]

Figure 4-14. Hedda burns the manuscript.

What, then, does Hedda do all this for? Errol Durbach thinks that Hedda is chasing after "miraculous abstraction from the realities of life, a perfection of style which, paradoxically, only death can confer upon her."[206] In this paradox lies the source of her downfall. By her standards, nothing of the bourgeois world is high enough for the demands of the romantic spirit. No amount of coziness in her tastefully furnished drawing room can banish her boredom and despair. If *The Lady from the Sea* tells though Ellida Wangle's fate a tale of the possibility of reconciling ideal with reality (though not without compromise), then *Hedda Gabler,* which immediately follows, shows us Ellida in a parallel universe. No one knows what Hedda means exactly by 'beauty', and for this reason, we as the audience are not wholly invited to sympathize with her attempt at self-realization. One wonders if Hedda's beauty is beautiful only because no one, including her,

[205] Ibsen, *Ibsen: Four Major Plays*, 286.
[206] Durbach, *'Ibsen the Romantic': Analogues of Paradise in the Later Plays*, 35.

understands it. Hedda's theatricalization and manipulation of others also raises the moral question of whether, in reality, it is permissible to for anyone to deny others their humanity in the course of self-realization. But our goal is not to moralize Ibsen or Hedda. At its heart, *Hedda Gabler* tells us more about human existence than about morality. We learn from the play that an imaginatively impoverished environment can have an unerasable effect on the human soul, because our life is simultaneously material and spiritual. We understand, further, that the will to self-actualize is always with a price. Existential isolation may be a universal phenomenon, but individuals' attempts to cope with such isolation vary, and the merits and effectiveness of such attempts are almost entirely subjective. Thus Tesman, Thea, Judge Brack and we are denied a glimpse of Hedda's transcendence. In theatricalizing others, Hedda tells us only the loneliness of human existence and the emptiness of ideals so divorced from reality that reality itself seems less than real. Though where self-realization ultimately leads humanity is unknown, destruction is certainly possible for the pursuit of ideals predicated upon their unattainability.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Understanding Ibsen as a photographer of nineteenth-century Norway is no difficult task, but understanding Ibsen as a painter of the human spiritual landscape requires philosophical examination of Ibsen's texts for larger, richer themes that usually evade the eye. In dramatizing various attempts by individuals awakening into awareness of the self, the potential of the self, and the future of the self, Ibsen narrates not just historical figures caught in the period-specific realities and concerns, but timeless patterns relevant to the entirety of human existence. Since I mentioned in the introduction that Ibsen's plays illustrate an asymptotic relationship between reality and ideals, philosophy and life, as well as an informed and empathetically neutral position towards conflicting moral perspectives in the plays, here I will recapitulate how *Ghosts*, *When We Dead Awaken* and *Hedda Gabler* each relate to my thesis.

In *Ghosts*, one of Ibsen's earliest social problem plays, we can identify a clear structure of Greek tragedy. The protagonist, Helene Alving, not only suppressing her impulses to self-realization through love, freedom and truth, but also places unwavering faith in ideals that are outdated and life-inhibiting. I utilized elements of Greek tragedy from both Hegelian and Nietzschean theories for the design of this production. The Hegelian framework illustrates the play's allegorical significance of the conflict between individuality and the ethical community (social life), thereby helping me externalize Helene Alving's conflicted psyche in scene that juxtaposes nature and modern architecture. The Nietzschean theory of the Dionysian highlighted the intertwined elements of beauty and terror, giving me the central inspiration of "death as celebration" and allowed me to use plant images as an indication of the tragic amoral force at work. The play suggests that if one's ideals are empty and one denies one's most natural

impulses, then such ideals will surely bring about catastrophes. The combined use of Hegelian and Nietzschean frameworks gave me a richer staging of Ibsen's ideas. Through Helene Alving, the drama sees the complexity of the identity of those who subscribe to empty ideals, as they are both the perpetrator of themselves' and others' unhappiness as well as a victim of the "ghosts"–old ideas and false values–in their lives.

If *Ghosts* alerts us not to neglect or suppress the drive to self-realization in life, then *When We Dead Awaken* asks the ultimate question of where self-realization will take us in the end. Rubek suffers from the bad conscience of having objectified life for art in his ambitious climb to fame, while Irene is haunted by the trauma of being denied her humanity when being used for art. Both characters symbolize the tension between the life and art of the self-realizing individual. Together, Hegel and Nietzsche's writings inspired me to set the play on concrete steps as a manifestation of the special alertness among the characters for the body as they ponder on their spiritual and physical identities. In allowing us follow Rubek and Irene only to the last second before their bodies are eliminated, Ibsen leaves us with the question of whether the destination of the self-realizing life is transcendence. Yet, just as multiple philosophies can be used to explain life, multiple forms of self-realization–in Ulfhejm and Maya's case, fully embracing the mortal life on earth instead of life as idealistic, incorporeal beings–seem to be possible.

Combining the individual-social perspective from *Ghosts* and life-art perspective from *When We Dead Awaken*, *Hedda Gabler* presents yet an important aspect in the process of self-realization: existential isolation. Like *Ghosts*, *Hedda Gabler* warns of the danger of empty ideals. In her extreme psychological alienation from society, Hedda's longing for beauty sends her into an absurd journey of self-realization through manipulating those around her–a cause that, due to

the ambiguity of Hedda's ideal, was futile in the first place. While Hedda longs to make herself an idealistic work of art, she forgets that in every bit of art a bit of life is lost. The Hegelian and Nietzschean perspectives join to produce the design element of plant and nature symbols scattered across a white, enclosed set. In perhaps a most masterful display of his artistry, Ibsen's characterization titillates us with the shrouding of Hedda's vision and the brutality of her destruction, reminding us again of that we may draw infinitely close to our ideals but will never emerge unscathed.

In this project, not only did philosophy provide a useful tool to understand, expand, and correlate different parts of the dramatic texts, but philosophy also made it possible to draw connections between different plays in unexpected ways. The original inspiration for the set of *When We Dead Awaken* proved relevant for *Hedda Gabler*, and the Dionysian motif found three different expressions across three different plays. In this process, drama proved to be a medium through which philosophy can find more varied, imaginative forms, therefore becoming relevant to life. The rich reserve of Ibsen's dramas for philosophical readings and philosophically inspired staging also suggest that life is richer than any philosophical theory, and profound enough to allow many different ways of expression.

I should recapitulate here, as discussed in the introduction, that Ibsen is neither a fully Hegelian nor a fully Nietzschean dramatist. Though it might seem that this project have reached an inconclusion about the philosophical perspective in Ibsen's dramas, or taken only parts from Hegel and Nietzsche that organically relate to the dramas and discarded parts that are inconsistent with the plays, we must realize that herein also lies a significant revelation: that rather than a model to exhaustively explain all that takes place in dramas, philosophy should be utilized as an exploratory tool in understanding theater, one that brings to attention what had

previously been overlooked or trivialized, even if there is only a handful of such points of interest. As Ibsen's prose dramas show us, sometimes drama might only provide limited grounds on which different philosophies can be synthesized. But as theatre practitioners, we should evaluate philosophy's merit as a reservoir of inspiration according to what it illuminates, not how much it leaves in the dark. Drama can encompass a vast number of contradictions yet still stand as a valid depiction of life, for life itself is full of such mystery. What little progress philosophy makes might be dwarfed by the vastness of the still unknown, but such progress is still worth acknowledging.

Finally, Ibsen's drama provides an exciting insight into drama's ability to articulate not only one viewpoint, but a multitude of viewpoints from which a nuanced position of the drama towards the topic matter itself can be discerned. Ibsen is a master of dramatizing tensions. What Ibsen leaves us is ultimately the depth and intricacy of the human experience, the journey of self-realization as a narrative equally epic in its romanticism and agony. Even if ideals are far away from us, we might still move and rejoice as we get closer with each step; even if we stand forever separated from them, we may still marvel at the vibrancy of life, in both its joy and its pain, chronicled in each footstep behind us.

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