HENRIK IBSEN--AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE

SENIOR HONORS THESIS

by

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APRIL, 1968

Punctually on the stroke of one, there, entering the doorway, was the dour and bristling presence known to all the world in caricature . . . the great ruff of white whisker, ferociously standing out all around his sallow, bilious face, as if dangerously charged with electricity . . . the immaculate silk hat, the white tie, the frock-coated martinet's figure dressed from top to toe in old-fashioned black broadcloth, at once funereal and professional, the trousers concertinaed, apparently with dandiacal design, at the ankles, over his highly polished boots, the carefully folded umbrella--all was there apparitionally before me; a forbidding, disgruntled, tight-lipped presence, starchily dignified, straight as a ramrod; there he was, as I hinted, with a touch of grim dandyism about him, but with no touch of human kindness about his parchment skin or fierce badger eyes. He might have been a Scotch elder entering before the kirk.

(Richard Le Gallienne's description of Henrik Ibsen, when the former went to interview Ibsen in Oslo in the late nineties, taken from: THE WILD DUCK AND OTHER PLAYS by Henrik Ibsen, published by Random House in 1961, p.xxxvii.)

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This writer cannot assign to Henrik Ibsen a final evaluation as to that playwright's rank in comparison with other established literary giants in the area of dramatic literature, as did Pirandello when he referred to Ibsen as a playwright second only to Shakespeare. Hermann J. Weigand writes:

> To have any vital meaning, an artist's greatness, comparative or absolute, must be intuitively experienced. Now the touchstone for measuring the degree of Ibsen's greatness is the intensity of the orginal imaginative response evoked in each individual reader by Ibsen's work. And that is the test from which there is no appeal.[1]

This writer, then, measured the degree of Ibsen's greatness from the point of view of a college freshman enrolled in Theatre 100, an introductory theatre course. At that time, the instructor, Dr. Edward Strother, requested that each student select a classical playwright to study in depth. This student selected Henrik Ibsen, upon the recommendation of the instructor, and began study by reading An Enemy of the People. The response or, rather, the "original response" was one of enthusiasm and respect for Dr. Thomas Stockmann as well as for a perceptive and powerful playwright.

This writer gratefully acknowledges the original "recommendation" and the subsequent advice and support of Dr. Edward Strother.

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[1]Hermann Weigand, The Modern Ibsen (New York, E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1953), p. 410.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It would seem that for a thesis to be truly exciting and memorable, the proposition set forth should be marked by its originality. The writer must arrive at conclusions via personal encounter with life; he must "create" in the true sense of the word--being allowed only the tools of his trade. This writer has chosen for tools with which to work eight plays written by Henrik Ibsen, plays which illumine but sometimes confuse an image of a playwright who did not write to please or to entertain but who wrote because he had something worthwhile upon which to expound.

The eight plays chosen are those of Ibsen's middle period of writing during which the realistic, social dramas or thesis plays were written, the first being The Pillars of Society written in 1877 and dealing with society's hypocrisies. This play served to announce to the public that a new Ibsen was about to emerge. No longer the poet or the intensely nationalistic playwright, Ibsen became a social critic concerned not only with contemporary issues but also with the men and women who were confronted with those issues, meaning not only the dramatis personae of the eight social plays but also the men and women in the audiences of yesterday and today.

The plays to be dealt with in this paper are: Pillars of Society (1877); A Doll's House (1879); Ghosts (1881); An Enemy of the People (1882); The Wild Duck (1884); Rosmersholm (1886); The Lady from the Sea (1888); and Hedda Gabler (1890). No attempt will be made to explore the psychological dramas of Ibsen, dramas which followed Ibsen's middle period of writing and marked the playwright's more personal and more symbolic period. The psychological plays offer a wealth of possibilities for literary analyis in particular, but the introspective nature of these dramas prohibit, in this writer's mind, their usefulness in a discussion of social drama.

The body of the paper has been divided into three sections based quite simply on what Henrik Ibsen, the playwright, had to say, how he said it, and the response his work received. The first portion, entitled "Ibsen--the Polemic", asks the rhetorical question, "Was Ibsen's sole intent that of arousing controversy?" The writer attempts to answer this question through a discussion of three of the themes with which Ibsen dealt, emphasizing that the theme, as in all dramatic literature, must assume dominance over the subject which is simply a hand-maiden to the theme. The second portion, entitled "Ibsen--the Rhetorician", will deal with the playwright's use of language, an element of drama which can only truly achieve its full effectiveness when spoken by the actors and actresses portraying the characters of a particular play. By necessity this writer is confined to a discussion of the written words of Ibsen's plays and will be unable to comment upon the further embellishment they might receive by being voiced. Ibsen's skillful use of

discussion and the rhetorical speeches of his characters will be examined in this section by citing illustrative examples selected from each of the eight social plays; these excerpts will give further crystallization to the three previously isolated themes examined in "Ibsen--the Polemic." The third portion will deal with the public's reaction to two of the most controversial of Ibsen's plays, Ghosts and A Doll's House. These two plays are two of the most thought-provoking plays in terms of the treatment of social issues; thus, the writer will dispense with further elaboration upon the three themes as the rather irrational public reaction implies that the shocked audiences displayed an unbalanced concern for subject matter over theme.

Henrik Ibsen boasted of the fact that he was not a great reader and that his ideas were his own, ideas which were instinctively felt in the heart of a poet. It is difficult to give this paper the "Ibsen treatment" by refusing to be influenced by the wealth of material available on the subject of Ibsen's social plays. It is merely hoped that a portrait of Ibsen the social critic will emerge from a careful perusal of those dramas of Ibsen's middle period of writing--from Ibsen himself as well as from what a host of brilliant critics have said about Ibsen.

CHAPTER II

IBSEN--THE POLEMIC

In social drama, the playwright may propound an easily discernible social thesis or personal philosophy which may assume dominance over the subject, the characters, and the situation--all of which indeed serve the former. There is a great deal of objection voiced in referring to Henrik Ibsen as a social critic; a more accurate term might be moralist. So, the first portion of this thesis will be devoted to Ibsen the moralist or, as viewed by many, the polemic. The second part will be devoted to an analysis of Ibsen the playwright, and, finally, the third part will deal with the reaction to Ibsen the public enemy who set himself apart from and not necessarily against the society of which he was a part and became, however intentionally or unintentionally, an "enemy of the people."

George Bernard Shaw, in The Quintessence of Ibsenism, defines Ibsen's technique as the application of forensics to real, human situations in order to heighten public awareness of social problems.[1] However, while such social issues as the emancipation of women, syphilis, fraudulent politicians, and sanitation inadequacies were

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[1]George Bernard Shaw, "The Technical Novelty in Ibsen's Plays," Essays in the Modern Drama, ed. by Morris Freedman (Boston, D. C. Heath and Co., 1964), p. 18.

at one time more highly controversial than they may be today, these subjects must not be called "dated," "dusty," and "passé" nor can Ibsen's entire list of social plays be dismissed for lacking universality of subject matter. The modern audience is probably very much disinterested in the matter of sewage disposal, but the emphasis of An Enemy of the People does not center around the question of sanitation save only as one of the means to an end, that being the freedom of speech or the importance of individualism.

Are Ibsen's plays simply the embodiments of moral lessons and, thus, attempts at persuasion? Is drama simply a tool chosen by an angry man who had something to say? Was Ibsen, who was undeniably a rugged individualist, simply intent on chiding and shocking the public? With Ibsen, it is vitally important that subject not overshadow theme. Ibsen dealt consistently with three themes, careful perusal of which may clarify Ibsen's true intent; though a great oversimplification, we can reduce Ibsen's themes to these three--truth, individualism, and freedom. These themes will be explored and developed throughout the remainder of the first section with an attempt being made to restrict each to its particular significance in the context of those of Ibsen's social plays to which each most suitably applies.

Raymond Williams, in "Ibsen's Non-theatrical Plays," quotes Ibsen as once having said, "Everything which I have written I have lived through. I never wrote because I had, as they say, found a good subject." Thus, Ibsen, says Williams, was not interested in heredity but in the experience of inheritance.[2] We would do well to listen to

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[2]Discussions of Henrik Ibsen, ed. by James Walter McFarlane (Boston, D. C. Heath and Co., 1962), p. 37.

these words of Ibsen and to realize that to approach Ibsen's social plays in the restrained manner of assigning each a subject while ignoring the possible universality of theme would be a gross injustice to ourselves as well as to the playwright. Let us turn, then, to the first of Ibsen's three recurring themes--truth.

Ibsen must have believed all truths to be relative, relative to the progress of history, relative even more immediately to situations. As history progresses, man changes in some ways, and as man changes, principles of morality are adjusted. There are no such things as absolute, eternal truths, even in Ibsen's drama, as evidenced by the disparity between the handling of the topic of truth in Ghosts and in The Wild Duck. Truth in the former instance would have been beneficial; truth in the latter was disastrous. Joseph Wood Krutch writes in "Modernism" in Modern Drama:

> Perhaps he[Ibsen]did mean to imply that the truth is only for the strong and that many human beings are weak. But he was also, I think much more concerned with something else, with a sort of warning to those who thought that he was solving all problems by proclaiming a new set of verities. Ibsenism--in so far as there was any such thing--was not another cult whose principles might be accepted and followed blindly, as the principles of the Church or Positivism or Socialism might be followed. A fool, Ibsen was saying, does not cease to be a fool because he has read Ghosts. In other words the moral of the two plays is the same. There is no such thing as an unqualified, unchanging truth. All truths, even Ibsen's, are partial and relative.[3]

So, with regard to Ibsen's concept of truth, we can only surmise that all truths are partial and relative and impossible to define in finite terms. Ibsen remarked in Stockholm in 1887, "Everyone has his own morality, there is no question of laying down laws for others, it is

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[3](Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1953), pp. 14-15.

a matter of each man deciding what is just for him, in such and such a case."[4] A true "individual" will attempt to make his life accord with his own beliefs; however, his moral consciousness will still be unable to shake free all of those traditions held dear in the past. In essence, then, Ibsen implores each man to be true to himself. Also, Ibsen tells us over and over again that the wise man will temper truth with illusion and, by the same token, will decide to abide by traditions which are meaningful in the present tense but never allowing the dead past to destroy the present via "ghosts" which lurk in the shadows in order to avoid the light of truth. Ibsen, then, asks for a compromise between truth and illusion and between past and present.

The term "individualism" as it applies to Ibsen's drama is at times indistinguishable from Ibsen's concept of truth, for again we arrive at the conclusion that we must face ourselves and not hide behind masks which shield us from others and even more disastrously from ourselves. Early experiences caused Ibsen "to become pregnant with great thoughts," as an actress once said of him, and these great thoughts were finally born via Ibsen's social dramas during his middle period of writing. Ibsen describes his own individualism:

> The main thing is to remain sincere and true in relation to oneself. It is not a matter of willing this or that, but willing what one absolutely must, because one is oneself, and because one cannot do otherwise. Everything else leads only to falsehood.[5]

Ibsen's philosophy that "the strongest man in the world is the man who stands most alone,"[6] is decidedly Kierkegaardian in nature. Here,

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[4]F. L. Lucas, The Drama of Ibsen and Strindberg, (New York, MacMillan Co., 1962), p. 268.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Henrik Ibsen, Six Plays by Henrik Ibsen (New York, Random House, Inc., 1957), p. 255. (An Enemy of the People, Act V).

an allusion to Kierkegaardian philosophy is necessary, though Ibsen denies having been directly influenced by Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard's three "stages on life's road" are the aesthetic stage typified by the sensual or "natural" state of man, the ethical stage or the level of the "universal" human which retains aesthetic beauty but also ties the individual to the rational and social order, and, finally, the religious stage where man discovers "the meaning of existence and sees himself as an individual who stands alone before God."[7] Indeed, Ibsen even reminded his mother-in-law of Soren Kierkegaard, whom she had met when she was a young girl, because each man had "that passionate desire to be alone with himself."[8] Ibsen was both socially and politically an individualist believing that the minority was almost always right. Conservatives he disliked because they held the past in high esteem; radicals he disliked because of their opportunism and tendencies toward hypocrisy. Ibsen felt that "an aristocracy of character, of mind and of will" should enter politics, the government and the press.[9]

The individual, if he is too defiant, may lose friends and is certainly far from being assured fair treatment. A weaker man will quickly abandon his isolated position, submerging his beliefs and convictions if they prove unfavorable to public opinion. Ibsen felt that an opinion once expressed demands adherence. Indeed, Ibsen's own convictions come to us through his characters, for example:

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[7]Harold H. Titus, Living Issues in Philosophy (New York, American Book Company, 1964), p. 302.

[8]Lucas, op. cit., p. 33.

[9]Ibid., p. 36.

> On the other hand, the basis of Dr. Stockmann's character--his belief that the individual, convinced of the justices of his 'mission' and of his undefeasible [sic] right to enforce it in the teeth of the majority, not only has right on his side, but is also the strongest--that is Kierkegaard's too, with his 'Truth is in the minority' and 'A single individual is the highest power.'[10]

Stockmann, one of Ibsen's most powerful and colorful "individuals", tries to realize himself, to discover his mission and see it through. There is nothing so tragic, to Ibsen's way of thinking, as a wasted life where a human being fails to become himself, to realize his potential.

The only real freedom in Ibsen's drama is personal freedom, freedom to realize one's individuality. For Ibsen, freedom meant responsibility and implied a conscious purpose in life which must be found and fulfilled. "It is not liberties," said Ibsen, "that matter; it is liberty."[11] Ibsen's philosophy toward freedom was almost existential in its Kierkegaardian overtones; one has the right to choose, but one must accept the consequences and responsibilities that that choice implies. Thus, freedom entails responsibilities. One has a responsibility to his choice and its consequences; one even has a responsibility to choose!

Many of Ibsen's characters are imprisoned and shut away from the light which would enable them to see the truth and to realize themselves. Hedda, who draws the curtains immediately after her first entrance, is imprisoned in her marriage as is Nora. Osvald Alving is kept from knowing the truth about his father. Helen Alving has met society's demands, not having the courage to defy convention, and lives the remainder of her life in a decaying world.

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[10]Brian W. Downs, Ibsen--The Intellectual Background (Cambridge at the University Press, MacMillan, 1948), p. 92.

[11]Lucas, op. cit., p. 211.

Ellida Wangel is a stranded mermaid until she decides to stay with her husband of her own free will. Some of Ibsen's characters purposely hide from the light by shutting it out--Consul Bernick exists under the delusion that he is serving the public, and Hjalmer Ekdal's proposed photographic invention gives him license to live in a dreamworld.

Again we arrive at the conclusion that self-knowledge is the only real means to freedom, and self-knowledge comes from acknowledging the truth, which in some instances proves disastrous. Ibsen's greatest characters become great only after they are freed from the past, through bold acknowledgment of the past, and begin to live in the present (Ellida, Consul Bernick, Nora); others fail because the harsh light of reality shatters their illusory worlds (Solness, Ekdal, Hedda), worlds they chose to inhabit. Illusion must be tempered with a sense of responsibility which necessarily entails the acknowledgment of the world of reality and the world of the present.

"If the modern age has been rightly called the age of anxiety," Eric Fromm has written, "it is primarily because of . . . anxiety engendered by the lack of self."[12] Individual liberty versus the will of the group is personified in Dr. Stockmann who grows richer and richer in self-knowledge as a result of constant opposition to what he stands for; and what he stands for is the truth. Stockmann becomes so self-knowledgable that he begins to appear self-centered, but, because of this fidelity to his "self", he is freed from the corrupted society around him.

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[12]Henrik Ibsen, Peer Gynt (New York, New American Library of World Literature, 1964), p. xxi of Rolf Fjelde's foreword.

Ibsen boasted often that he was no great reader; everything which he wrote had been part of his life experience. Brian Downs writes in Ibsen--The Intellectual Background:

> Ibsen's was not at all the kind of mind that reflects from its surface whatever has just been cast upon it from the outer world; everything that passed out of him was the effect of a greatly protracted rumination and thorough assimilation into his moral being; what he wrote, he said, had not been experienced but LIVED.[13]

Ibsen repeatedly stressed the importance of the poet in the writer, that"instinct" or intuition rather like a sixth sense. A poet should record his feelings, his sensory and emotional experiences; true knowledge may said to be found in the heart. In several sources, it is written that Ibsen once said that summer is best described on a winter's day.

We arrive, then, at the conclusion that Ibsen's intent was not to be polemic, however much he may have seemed so to his contemporary audiences. He was not consciously attempting to shock or irritate his public; he simply wrote what was felt in the heart of a poet.

"The true individualist differs from other people because he is himself; the false individualist tries to be himself by differing from other people."[14] Ibsen the individualist, then, tells the reader or spectator of his plays that truths are partial or relative but nevertheless often undeniable realities which need examining in the light of the present. Individualism, as a theme in Ibsen's drama, deals with the realization of "self" which can be accomplished only through an honest

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[13](Cambridge at the University Press, MacMillan), p. 23.

[14]Lucas, op. cit., p. 40.

attempt at soul-searching, demanding that the true individual reckon honestly with what is found there. Finally, Ibsen's freedom theme is only separable from the theme of individualism by the fact that freedom entails one more step in man's quest to find himself; freedom also means, or implies, responsibility for the consequences of freely choosing, for the consequences of facing up to one's self, realizing that absolute freedom is impossible--because we are never freed from ourselves.

CHAPTER III

IBSEN--THE RHETORICIAN

Ibsen has been referred to as an architect of drama who built with the materials of his age, but his drama is still meaningful for us today because Ibsen emphasized character over plot, the significance of this being that human beings are essentially the same regardless of the progress of time. The playwright's materials are those of life; the playwright must be an astute observer of human conduct, which serves as his source of inspiration--he must draw from life itself. Human character is the most essential material of the playwright. It would seem that Ibsen's drama would be assured its individuality on the basis of his treatment of character alone, for some of the most heartfelt and dynamic convictions of a rather aloof and often timid playwright come to us through the dialogue of Ibsen's social plays. As Ibsen turned to realistic prose dramas, after having written Love's Comedy in 1862, a satirical play in verse, and the dramatic poems, Brand in 1866 and Peer Gynt in 1867, he began to probe "real" problems of "real" people and to present their conflicts via realistic dialogue.

Throughout the next section, the writer will attempt to explore what George Bernard Shaw, in The Quintessence of Ibsenism, calls the "technical novelties" of Ibsen's drama, drama which by its very nature necessarily implies the ingenious and painstakingly

thorough treatment of character first and foremost. Indeed, with regard to character and dialogue, one necessarily implies the existence of the other, for a character, in a play particularly, is neither memorable nor believable if he has nothing significant to say, and one may as well write an essay if the messages to be imparted require no particular personage to give them embodiment. Character and dialogue are what dramatic literature is all about. Shaw, then, describes the "technical novelties" of the Ibsen and post-Ibsen plays as:

> . . . First, the introduction of the discussion and its development until it so overspreads and interpenetrates the action that it finally assimilates it, making play and discussion practically identical; and, second, as a consequence of making the spectators themselves the persons of the drama, and the incidents of their own lives its incidents, the disuse of the old stage tricks by which audiences had to be induced to take an interest in unreal people and improbable circumstances, and the substitution of a forensic technique of recrimination, disallusion, and penetration through ideals to the truth, with a free use of all the rhetorical and lyrical arts of the orator, the preacher, the pleader, and the rhapsodist.[1]

Thus, the discussion technique and the forensic technique, as they apply to the three previously mentioned themes--truth, individualism, and freedom, will be explored by partially examining the following social plays of Henrik Ibsen's middle period of writing: Pillars of Society (1877); A Doll's House (1879); Ghosts (1881); An Enemy of the People (1882); The Wild Duck (1884); Rosmersholm (1886); The Lady from the Sea (1888); and Hedda Gabler (1890). Passages will be quoted from the aforementioned plays, be those passages rhetorical speeches or dialectical exchanges of questions and answers, to illustrate the art of using words skillfully

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[1]George Bernard Shaw, "The Technical Novelty in Ibsen's Plays," Essays in Modern Drama, ed. by Morris Freedman (Boston, D. C. Heath and Co., 1964), p. 18.

in order to persuade audiences to acknowledge truth, to aspire to individualism, and to realize the implications of personal freedom.

Ibsen's concern for 'truth' as manifested in the social plays

In a play, dialogue establishes theme, reveals the characters and their relationships, and exposes conflict. The inner being of an Ibsen character manifested itself in relation to problems of day to day living through dialogue. As we read the social plays today, the dialogue often seems stiff and unnatural, but we must keep in mind that art is selective, and consequently the economy and careful selection of words is vital. Drama is inspired by life and living, to be sure, but it is life intensified and stripped of all that is irrelevant to the conflict which must be established. We will first examine the theme of truth as it is revealed to us through selected dialogue from Ibsen's social plays, with specific emphasis on The Wild Duck, Ghosts, An Enemy of the People.

In The Wild Duck, Ekdal Hjalmer lives in a dream, a dream which makes it all too convenient for him to ignore his obligations to his wife and his daughter. His dream? His "purpose in life" is to raise photography to "the level of a science and an art combined."[2] Gregers Werle might be referred to as a meddler whose idealism does more harm than good; his "purpose in life" is to find the truth at any cost. The two men have different views of life, and both are far too extreme; one has too many dreams while the other has none. How much truth and how much illusion must be combined to produce a balanced life? We see that issues are neither all black nor all white,

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[2]Henrik Ibsen, The Wild Duck in The Wild Duck and Other Plays (New York, Random House, Inc., 1961), p. 157.

that values are neither absolutely good nor absolutely evil; all is relative. Via what seems simply surface conversation between Ekdal and Gregers, a conversation which is almost dialectical in its movement through what seem to be the steps of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, one begins to realize that an equilibrium must be maintained between fantasy (which is represented by the wild duck living in his simulated, unreal world in the attic) and reality. One sees, too, that the balance will soon be destroyed because no compromise is reached between two extreme views. Each man encounters the other's concept of his own "purpose in life," and the topic at once assumes overtones of pending disaster.

GREGERS: What kind of invention is it? What does it consist of?
HJALMER: My dear fellow, you mustn't try to pin me down to details yet; these things take time, you know. And believe me, it's not a question of self-glorification--I'm not working on it for my own sake, I assure you! I have a fixed purpose in life--a sacred duty; and I consider this work part of it.
GREGERS: What is this "purpose in life" you speak of?
HJALMER: Are you forgetting that white-haired old man in there?
GREGERS: Your poor father--yes. What exactly do you plan to do for him?
HJALMER: I plan to give him back his self-respect by restoring the name of Ekdal to its former dignity and honor
. . . . . .
GREGERS: But you're making progress with it?
HJALMER: Of course I'm making progress! I wrestle with it every day--my mind is full of it. Every afternoon as soon as I've had lunch, I lock myself in the sitting room in there, where I can work in peace. But it's no use hounding me about it; as Relling says, that does more harm than good!
GREGERS: What about all this business in the attic? Don't you find that distracting? Doesn't it waste a great deal of your time?
HJALMER: On the contrary! You mustn't think that for a moment! I must have <u>some</u> relaxation, after all; something to relieve the strain of incessant concentration. And, anyhow, inspiration is quite unpredictable; when it comes--that's all!
GREGERS: You know, Hjalmer--I think you and the wild duck have a lot in common.
HJALMER: The wild duck! What on earth do you mean?

GREGERS: You dived to the bottom too, and got yourself trapped down there.
HJALMER: You mean that I was wounded--by the blow that almost killed my father?
GREGERS: No, not exactly. It's not that you're wounded, Hjalmer; but you've lost your way in a poisonous swamp. You've become infected with an insidious disease, and you've sunk to the bottom to die in the dark.
HJALMER: Die in the dark? I? Really, Gregers--how can you talk such nonsense!
GREGERS: But don't worry--I'll bring you back. I have a purpose in life, too, you see. One I discovered yesterday.[3]

Gregers' unrelenting commitment to his "purpose in life" results in the disruption of a marriage and the death of a child.

Of course, then, there is Ghosts with its plea for truth and the liberation of people from their outdated traditions and mores which allow these same people to close their eyes to actualities which seem too ugly to acknowledge. Mrs. Alving delivers a speech in which she not only alludes to her son's inheritance of an unknown disease and of a tendency toward waywardness from his father but also to the outworn prejudices and values of the past which are far from absolute.

> . . . Just now, when I heard Regine and Osvald in there--I felt hemmed in by ghosts--you know, Manders, the longer I live the more convinced I am that we're all haunted in this world--not only by the things we inherit from our parents--but by the ghosts of innumerable old prejudices and beliefs--half-forgotten cruelties and betrayals--we may not even be aware of them--but they're there just the same--and we can't get rid of them. The whole world is haunted by these ghosts of the dead past; you have only to pick up a newspaper to see them weaving in and out between the lines--Ah! if we only had the courage to sweep them all out into the light![4]

This seems, then, to be a protest speech, denouncing the holding of sacred, dead beliefs. Also, this play grew out of the Biblical quotation, "The sins of the father are visited upon the children;" Helen Alving laments the fact that from the moment of birth, man is plagued by every inherited debt.

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[3]Ibid., pp. 157; 159-60.

[4]Henrik Ibsen, Ghosts in Six Plays by Henrik Ibsen (New York, Random House, Inc., 1957), p. 119 (Act II).

Again, back to the relativity of truths, one of the most impassioned pleas Dr. Stockmann delivers, in a drama which is filled with the use of forensic technique, deals with the danger of believing any truth to be absolute and unchanging.

> . . . I tend to revolt against the lie that truths belong exclusively to the majority. And what are these truths the majority worships? They're truths so old and worn--they're practically decrepit. And when a truth reaches that age you can hardly tell it from a lie! You can believe me or not as you like; but truths are not such tough old Methuselahs as most people imagine. A normal, ordinary truth is good for, say, seventeen or eighteen--at most twenty years; seldom more. And truths as venerable as that are nothing but skin and bones; yet it isn't until then that the great majority adopts them and prescribes them to Society as wholesome spiritual food. But there's not much nourishment in that kind of a diet, I assure you; as a doctor you can take my word for that. These tired old truths are as rancid and moldy as last year's bacon; they're the cause of all that moral scurvy that plagues Society.[5]

Dr. Stockmann's rhetoric is directed against the complacent, compact majority and consists of sentences which are weighty and measured.

Allusions to Ibsen's concept of truth can be found in the dialogue of the remaining social plays. Pillars of Society sets before us a society built upon the sinking sand of lies and hypocrisy; Ibsen conveys to us the idea that society in such a state may as well cease to exist until that time when it has reached such a state of perfection that it can stand instead on a foundation of truth and freedom. In A Doll's House, we are given an idea of the conflict which may result from a "unity of opposites" where compromise is impossible. Nora and Helmer are perfectly orchestrated, for Nora lies and cheats as a child would while Helmer is meticulously accurate and truthful. In Rosmersholm, truth comes to the fore

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[5]Ibsen, An Enemy of the People in Ibid., p. 227 (Act IV).

when, in the presence of Kroll and Rosmer, Rebekka West confesses her crime against Beata and its original motive, her ambition. Ellida Wangel, The Lady from the Sea, lives in and talks of an unreal world of romantic longing and remains a stranger even in her own home. Indeed, she does not recount to her husband the story of her first love until the end of Act II, at which time her confession eases her mind and we only just begin to understand her and the play itself. In Hedda Gabler, Jörgen Tesman's simple honesty serves to underscore Hedda's perversity as is illustrated in dialogue exchanges between the kind, unassuming husband, who is horrified when Hedda burns Lövborg's manuscript, and the conniving, egotistical wife, who explains that she committed the deed for love of her husband.

Ibsen's concern for 'individualism' as manifested in the social plays

With regard to individualism as a theme in Ibsen's drama, one of the most dramatic and pathetic examples we can point to is Helen Alving whose slavery to convention caused her to shun happiness for respectability. Finding her marriage to a rich, young lieutenant unbearable, Mrs. Alving goes to Pastor Manders who, in the cause of respectability, sends her back to her dissolute husband, stating that a wife should not presume to judge her husband. Then, Osvald is born, doomed to die of an unknown illness inherited from his father. The dramatic appeal in Ghosts lies in Helen Alving's discovery of herself.

> MRS. ALVING: Yes--those three! [Her mother and her two aunts] They were the ones that settled the whole business for me. As I look back on it, it seems incredible. They pointed out, in the most forceful terms, that it would be nothing short of folly to refuse an offer of such magnificence! Poor Mother. If she only knew what that "magnificence" has led to.

PASTOR MANDERS: No one can be held responsible for the outcome--
The fact remains, that your marriage in every way conformed to
the strictest rules of law and order.
MRS. ALVING: All this talk about law and order!-- I often think
all the suffering in the world is due to that.
PASTOR MANDERS: That is a very wicked thing to say, Mrs. Alving.
MRS. ALVING: That may be; but I will not be bound by these
responsibilities, these hypocritical conventions any longer--
I simply cannot! I must work my way through to freedom.[6]

Nora Helmer actually realizes her individuality on stage for the audience to witness when she refuses at last to be bound by convention and the Puritanical expectations of society. "The little squirrel" rebels, at the end of A Doll's House, against being held captive any longer in a "doll's house."

NORA: Listen to me, Torvald--I've always heard that when a
wife deliberately leaves her husband as I am leaving you,
he is legally freed from all responsibility. You mustn't
feel yourself bound any more than shall I. There must be
complete freedom on both sides. Here is your ring. Now
give me mine.

. . . . . .

HELMER: But you'll let me help you, Nora--
NORA: No, I say! I can't accept anything from strangers.
HELMER: Must I always be a stranger to you, Nora?
NORA: Yes. Unless it were to happen--the most wonderful thing
of all--
HELMER: What?
NORA: Unless we both could change so that-- Oh, Torvald! I no
longer believe in miracles, you see!
HELMER: Tell me! Let ME believe! Unless we both could change so
that--?
NORA: So that our life together might truly be a marriage.
Good-bye.[7]

In other words, Nora is issuing an ultimatum, "Either our marriage will be a bond tying two INDIVIDUALS to one another, or it will be dissolved!" Nora's docility is a thing of the past.

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[6] Ghosts in Ibid., pp. 116-17 (Act II).

[7] A Doll's House in Ibid., p. 81 (Act II).

Hedda Gabler is vaguely similar to Helen Alving; however, she is obsessively afraid of gossip, and her neurosis stems from the fact that she is evil but nevertheless is such a slave to public opinion that she tries to rationalize her motives. Hedda burns Lövborg's manuscript because she imagines it to be the same as a love-child belonging to Ejlert and Thea; however, she rationalizes her action to her husband:

> HEDDA: I did it for your sake, Jorgen!
> TESMAN: For my sake!
> HEDDA: This morning when you told me that he had read it to you--
> TESMAN: Yes, yes--what then?
> HEDDA: You admitted that you were jealous of his work.
> TESMAN: Of course, I didn't mean that literally.
> HEDDA: All the same--I couldn't bear the thought of anyone putting you in the shade.[8]

However, simply because Hedda fears society, we cannot deny her her individualism, which indeed causes her inner turmoil--but she is an abnormal individual who is sadistic, masculine, and frigid. She is strong enough to manipulate others, but she is weak enough that she is unable to accept responsibility. Hedda need not fight for the right to exist as an individual; indeed, she even rivals the male for his position of dominance with her love for pistols, horses, and man-talk. She is the emancipated female who does not now what to do with her freedom. She aspires to be an individual, but she cannot attain individuality because her weaknesses are a deterrent to her strengths.

An Enemy of the People was Ibsen's counter-attack on those who so unfairly attacked A Doll's House and Ghosts and most certainly is based on Ibsen's Kierkegaardian-type philosophy that the strongest man is that man who stands most alone. In the public meeting, where

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[8]Hedda Gabler in Ibid., p. 417 (Act IV).

Dr. Stockmann is declared an enemy of the people for attempting to inform the community that the sewage from the upstream mills is contaminating the medicinal baths, the doctor stands alone and bravely denounces the majority:

> The majority is never right--never, I tell you! That's one of those social lies which every free, intelligent man ought to rebel. What does the majority consist of--of wise men or of fools? I think we must all of us agree that from one end of the world to the other the proportion is overwhelmingly in favor of the fools. And are wise men to be ruled by fools? What could be more senseless? You can shout me down if you like, but you can't deny it! The majority has the power, unfortunately--but right is on the side of people like me--of the few--of the individual. It's the minority that's always right![9]

Dr. Stockmann decides to leave town, but he then realizes that he has a duty to remain on the "battle-field" and fight for those things in which he believes.

In The Lady from the Sea, Ellida remains with her husband as a clearly-defined and whole individual, no longer living out her life in a romantic dream-world, and Consul Bernick, in The Pillars of Society, realizes his potential for individualism when he stops deceiving himself and his community. Rebekka West's strong individualism, her lack of scruples, her ruthlessness, her free spirit are all jolted when she discovers her love for Johannes Rosmer in Rosmersholm. Still, she is not stripped of her strength of character by the change in her nature, because she is willing to face death in order to prove her love. Rosmer asks that Rebekka, for his sake, "go the same way Beata went" to restore his faith in his "vision of life." His use of persuasion, though far more emotional than logical in its appeal, achieves grim results. Whether the theme of individualism

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[9] An Enemy of the People in Ibid., p. 226 (Act IV).

plays any significant part at all in The Wild Duck is difficult to say, for it is almost impossible to identify with any of the "story-bookish" characters of that play as one must necessarily remain aloof from the play to grasp its mood and its symbolism.

Ibsen's concern for 'freedom' as manifested in the social plays

To illustrate Ibsen's freedom theme, the following three plays will be examined: Pillars of Society; Rosmersholm; and The Lady from the Sea. In the first of Ibsen's realistic plays about "modern" society, Pillars of Society, the playwright certainly creates a mood of unbearable stuffiness. The back wall of the spacious garden room is entirely composed of glass, a stage technique which Ibsen seems to use often to emphasize the contrast between the microcosmic world of his often "small" characters and the large world outside. This smallness and stuffiness is given emphasis by the fact that the room is filled with busy, gossiping ladies making garments for "fallen women." The closeness of the atmosphere is adjusted by Lona Hessel, a feminist who is most surely symbolic of freedom as she has just returned from America and we see her first outside (through the window). Further, upon entering the room, she draws back the curtains saying, "We'll let some light into this dismal tomb."[10] She then opens the door and the windows commenting that what she can do for society is to let in some fresh air. Lona is a free spirit, unbound by convention and enjoying life. After Consul Bernick publicly confesses his misdeeds

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[10]Henrik Ibsen, Pillars of Society in The Wild Duck and Other Plays, (New York, Random House, Inc., 1961), p. 26 (Act I).

and accepts responsibility for his guilt, Lona says, "When Johann told me all this about the lie, I swore to myself: I must see the hero of my youth stand free and clear again."[11] At the conclusion of the play, it is Lona who proclaims "Truth and the Spirit of Freedom" as the "Pillars of Society."[12]

Rebekka West is symbolic of another kind of freedom in Rosmersholm, a freedom from the morality of the past--a freedom which turns sour. Her rationalism is bold and defiant in the face of tradition, but her conscience is not so easily dealt with. Once she realizes the possibility that she may have committed incest, she confesses that she edged Beata toward the mill-race. The past catches up with her because, as Professor Kroll says, her emancipation does not go very deep.

> I don't think this so-called Emancipation of yours goes very deep! You've steeped yourself in a lot of new ideas and opinions. You've picked up a lot of theories out of books--theories that claim to overthrow certain irrefutable and unassailable principles--principles that form the bulwark of our Society. But this has been no more than a superficial, intellectual exercise, Miss West. It has never really been absorbed into your bloodstream.[13]

Before Rebekka goes into the mill-race (at Rosmer's suggestion), we see that she is not free of the past, free as she would wish to be.

> REBEKKA: . . . I've fallen under another spell--the spell of Rosmersholm; and now I know that if I've sinned, then I must pay the penalty.
> ROSMER: Is that what you've come to believe, Rebekka?
> REBEKKA: Yes.
> ROSMER: (with resolution) Well, I still believe that man is a free spirit. There is no judge above us; we must judge ourselves.
> REBEKKA: (misunderstanding him) That's true, too. My going will save what's best in you.

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[11] Ibid., p. 100 (Act IV).

[12] Ibid., p. 102 (Act IV).

[13] Ibsen, Rosmersholm in Six Plays, p. 318 (Act III).

ROSMER: There's nothing left in me to save.
REBEKKA: Oh, yes there is! But as for me-- I should be nothing but a kind of sea troll, clinging to the ship on which you must still sail forward--pulling it back. I must go overboard. Why should I stay on in this world dragging out a stunted life? Pondering and brooding over a happiness that my past forbids me to enjoy? No-- I must get out of the game.
ROSMER: If you go--then I go with you.[14]

Ellida, the "mermaid" wife in The Lady from the Sea, turns back to reality having been provided the opportunity to so choose a life of reality by her husband, Dr. Wangel--the freedom to choose is the premise the play is built upon. Ellida considers going away with the stranger because it was not of her own free will that she married Wangel and because their life together was never really a marriage for she was not really free to choose whether or not she should enter into such a union. So, given the freedom to choose by her husband whether she will go with the stranger or send him off alone, she chooses to remain with her legal husband.

WANGEL: Ellida--your mind is like the sea; it ebbs and flows. What made you change?
ELLIDA: Don't you see? Everything changed--was bound to change-- when you set me free to choose.
WANGEL: The unknown--it no longer frightens you then?
ELLIDA: It neither frightens me nor fascinates me any more. I was free to gaze into it--to plunge into it if need be. I was free to choose it--and so was able to reject it.
WANGEL: Gradually I begin to understand you. You see things in images--in symbols. I believe now, your longing for the sea-- the fascination the strange man held for you--was only the expression of a growing need for freedom on your part.
ELLIDA: I've no way of knowing if that's true. But you've been a good doctor to me, Wangel. You found--and dared to use--the only remedy. The one thing that could save me.
WANGEL: In matters of life and death, we doctors have to dare!-- Are you coming back to me, Ellida?
ELLIDA: Yes, my very dear--my faithful Wangel! I'm coming back to you. And this time--of my own free will.[15]

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[14] Ibid., pp. 338-39 (Act IV).

[15] Ibsen, The Lady from the Sea in The Wild Duck and Other Plays, pp. 296-97 (Act V).

Freedom is a theme which can be found in the remaining social dramas, and excerpts validating its existence could surely be cited. In Hedda Gabler, Hedda's only means of obtaining absolute freedom is through suicide; she is so imprisoned in the confines of self that she can find release only through cessation of life itself. Dr. Stockmann frees himself from the shackles of public prejudices and intolerances by breaking the bonds of self-imposed restrictions in An Enemy of the People. In A Doll's House, Nora achieves a start toward emancipation when she leaves her husband, while Helen Alving appeases society and stays with her husband only to struggle with the "ghosts" of the past for the rest of her life. In The Wild Duck, Ibsen's dialogue conveys that, within their ivory towers of illusion, men feel that their only real freedom is insulated against the jolting, unpredictable forces of reality.

In summary, then, we have attempted to examine Ibsen's use of language to persuade and influence. We have investigated the playwright's skillful use of "technical novelties" by examining selected portions of dialogue from each of the eight social plays, attempting at the same time to give further crystallization and significance to the themes of truth, individualism, and freedom.

CHAPTER IV

IBSEN--THE PUBLIC ENEMY

Henrik Ibsen set as his task the careful, deliberate, provocative asking of questions; he did not attempt to answer his own questions. Ibsen's plays cannot be called immoral simply they deal with what at one time may have been rather shocking issues; rather, Ibsen shows us the consequences to be paid for misconduct, deceptiveness, and hypocrisy and asks in a rather subtle manner just what we think of all this. Ibsen utilized the ideas and situations of his time to illustrate certain basic truths and the possible violation of those truths with no particularly conscious effort or desire on his part to immediately revolutionize and drastically change those ideas; he skillfully and carefully set those ideas before an audience so that they might be objectively viewed and possibly evaluated by the very people who held them.

Ibsen used his superb technique as a dramatist to give dramatic form to simple, basic truths which cannot be violated without rather dire consequences. Ibsen battled against falseness and hypocrisy, characteristics which will exist as long as there exist human beings to possess them. The causes for which Ibsen pleaded have long ago been won, but his themes endure. In his social dramas, Ibsen dealt with actual human beings, not with trolls and symbolic characters; to give these characters life, he used fragmented,

realistic dialogue in lieu of the verse form which he had previously used. Ibsen got into the minds of his characters in order to show the true significance of their conflicts. The theater, for Ibsen, was simply a means of exposing truth by dissecting the characters he had so lovingly invented. Ibsen's plays, whether they be read or viewed on a stage, demand consistent and absolute concentration--not shocked dismay which closes the mind simply because startling topics have been touched upon only as a means to an end, i. e. to establish a theme, to acknowledge certain basic truths. It seems that many of Ibsen's audiences were unable to distinguish the forest from the trees, especially with regard to Ghosts and A Doll's House, two plays which will be examined here due to the fact that both dealt with what in the latter part of the nineteenth century were rather blatantly controversial subjects--moral dissolution and the feminist movement. Nevertheless, Ibsen lovingly created his characters with all their faults and assets, careful never to impose judgment himself. Why could not his audiences have been so wise?

After Ibsen's death in 1906, what was supposed to have been a tribute appeared in the July issue of The Theatre. Ibsen was praised on some counts to be sure, but he was also damned.

> Ibsen had exactly the same sentiment that Hamlet had in thinking the world was all wrong. Did he suggest a remedy? No. He simply exercised a certain skill and vented himself of a morbid hatred of existing things . . . . If he had a theory for the revolution and betterment of society he never lifted his hand in any commanding way in the cause of humanity. He simply railed at existing conditions.[1]

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[1] "Henrik Ibsen--His Plays and His Philosophy," The Theater, VI, No. 65 (July, 1906), p. 177.

The writer of this "tribute" seems to have missed Ibsen's point: People must first open their eyes before they can be confused with solutions to problems of which they are not yet aware!

The public furor caused by Ghosts was perhaps the most notable of public reactions to Ibsen's literature. None of the Scandinavian theaters consented to present the play. Its first performance was not, in fact, in Europe; it was first performed by a touring company in Chicago.[2] George Bernard Shaw provides us with a summary of Clement Scott's critique of the London performance of Ghosts:

> Mr. Clement Scott, dramatic critic to the Daily Telegraph, a good-natured gentleman, not a pioneer, but emotional, impressionable, zealous, and sincere, accuses Ibsen of dramatic impotence, ludicrous amateurishness, nastiness, vulgarity, egotism, coarseness, absurdity, uninteresting verbosity, and suburbanity, declaring that he has taken ideas that would have inspired a tragic poet, and vulgarized and debased them in dull, loathsome, horrible plays. This criticism, which occurs in a notice of the first performance of Ghosts in England, is to be found in the Daily Telegraph for the 14th of March, 1891, and is supplemented by a leading article which compares the play to an open drain, a loathsome sore unbandaged, a dirty act done publicly, or a lazar house with all its doors and windows open. Bestial, cynical, disgusting, poisonous, sickly, delirious, indecent, loathsome, fetid, literary carrion, crapulous stuff, clinical confessions: all these epithets are used in the article as descriptive of Ibsen's work . . . .[3]

And Shaw makes clear that Scott's criticism was only one of hundreds of others which appeared simultaneously and which voiced similar opinions. In the Norse Morgenbladet, for example, Ibsen was described as "a fallen star, buried in the black abyss where dwell horrors and poison and worms and vermin." And in other English reviews appeared the

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[2]Henrik Ibsen, Ghosts and Other Plays, trans. by Peter Watts (Great Britain, Hazell Watson and Viney Ltd., 1964), p. 11.

[3]George Bernard Shaw, "The Technical Novelty in Ibsen's Plays," Essays in the Modern Drama, ed. by Morris Freedman (Boston, D. C. Heath and Co., 1964), p. 24.

comment that " . . . 97% of the people who go to see Ghosts are nasty-minded people who find the discussion of nasty subjects to their taste in exact proportion to their nastiness." Indeed, Ibsen began to be regarded by both the Right and the Left as a writer "fallen into sheer delirium."[4] The review of a stock company's production at Baltimore in 1903 (one of Mr. George Fawcett's experiments with "pessimistic drama") called Ibsen "a master dramatist who undertakes, by a 'bloodless' but sickening method to wrench into place some of the dislocated moral and ethical bones of modern society."[5]

Another of Ibsen's plays which caused a sensation, though among a smaller and more select group, was The League of Youth, which was published at the end of September in 1869.

> Its first stage performance, a fortnight after publication, went splendidly, with loud applause after each of the three acts. In Act IV, when Bastian spoke his line about the Nation, there was some whistling from students in the gallery, but there were many curtain calls at the end, and the paper gave the play excellent notices. But Ibsen's prophecy was right; before the second performance, which was Ibsen's benefit, the Liberals had decided that it was a Conservative attack on their party, while the Conservatives took it as an attack on themselves. Both sides came to the theater prepared to make trouble, and the whistling broke out before Lundestad had finished his quite harmless opening speech. The curtain was lowered and the manager came out to appeal for quiet so that the play could proceed. Even so there were continual interruptions, and at the end the uproar went on so long that the gas had to be turned out before the audience could be emptied, and the battle went on in the foyer and in the street outside.[6]

Then, of course, there were Ibsen's admirers, Dr. Brandes, who urged Ibsen to channel his efforts in the direction of social drama, and the venerable George Bernard Shaw, who wrote on May 22, 1897:

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[4]F. L. Lucas, The Drama of Ibsen and Strindberg (New York, MacMillan Co., 1962), pp. 168-69.

[5]"Ghosts and Other Problem Plays," The Theatre, III, No. 65 (April, 1903), p. 100.

[6]Henrik Ibsen, A Doll's House and Other Plays, intro. by Peter Watts (Great Britain, Chaucer Press, 1965), p. 13.

> Where shall I find an epithet magnificent enough for The Wild Duck! To sit there getting deeper and deeper into that Ekdal home, and getting deeper and deeper into your own life all the time, until you forget that you are in a theatre; to look on with horror and pity at a profound tragedy, shaking with laughter all the time at an irresistable comedy; to go out, not from a diversion, but from an experience deeper than real life ever brings to most men, or often brings to any man; that is what The Wild Duck was last Monday at the Globe.[7]

There were several dramatists in those audiences who witnessed Ibsen's shocking play, A Doll's House, and who were not so much shocked as impressed and even began to imitate the playwright--Jones and Pinero and later Shaw in England; Hauptmann in Germany; Gorki in Russia, and others in France and Italy.[8] However, such discerning critics were in the minority, for others in those same audiences were appalled, thus setting off the "Ibsen madness, with its twenty years of folderol."[9]

Ibsen was saying that woman was man's equal, and Ibsen said this not necessarily because he was a feminist but because he believed in human justice and in the right of each human being to realize his or her individuality. There should not exist, he felt, a double-standard, two ethical codes by which men and women live. At its first presentation, A Doll's House caused a great deal of controversy. In Germany, public sentiment found Nora's desertion of her husband and children intolerable, and in Scandinavia, it was reported that invitations were sent out to parties with a warning

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[7]Bernard Shaw, Plays and Players, ed. by A. C. Ward (London, Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 234.

[8]H. L. Mencken, "Ibsen," Essays in the Modern Drama, ed. by Morris Freedman (Boston, D. C. Heath and Co., 1964), p. 7.

[9]Ibid.

attached stating that A Doll's House was not to be discussed, and notices were put on doors proclaiming, "Here it is forbidden to discuss A Doll's House."[10] Ibsen was warned by his translator and manager in Berlin, Wilhelm Lange, that a new version of the play was likely to turn up in several North German theaters. In other words, the ending would be changed! In an open letter to a Norwegian newspaper, National Tidende, on February 17, 1880, Ibsen wrote:

> In order to prevent such a possibility, I sent to him [Mr. Lange] for use in case of absolute necessity, a draft of an altered last scene . . . This change I myself, in a letter to my translator, stigmatize as 'barbaric violence' done to the play.[11]

Indeed, an American actress, in 1894, performed in A Doll's House at a benefit matinee at the Empire in New York where the audience was very impressed. However, the same actress took the play to Pittsburgh, where audiences remained seated after Nora slammed the door. "Despite blinking of house lights, people patiently waited for Nora to return and provide the happy ending."[12]

What was Ibsen's act of "barbaric violence?"

> Helmer forces Nora to look at her sleeping children; she finds herself unable to leave them, drops her travelling bag, and sinks to the ground as the curtain falls with masculine supremacy restored and Woman relegated to her proper sphere of Kirche, Küche, und Kinder.[13]

We might say that Ibsen dealt ruthlessly with all the social and moral inadequacies of the age in which he lived, but nevertheless he

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[10]Lucas, op. cit., p. 149.

[11]Henrik Ibsen, Six Plays by Henrik Ibsen, trans. by Eva Le Gallienne (New York, Random House, Inc., 1957), p. xviii.

[12]Allen Churchill, The Great White Way, (New York, E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1962), p. 173.

[13]Ibsen, A Doll's House and Other Plays, intro. Peter Watts, p. 18.

dealt with situations, with conventions, with hypocrisies, with truths which existed. He simply observed and felt obligated to share those observations. Sarah Barnwell Elliott in "Ibsen, the Man and his Work," which appeared in the Sewanee Review in January of 1907, shares a comment found in one of Ibsen's letters: "A man shares the responsibility and the guilt of the society to which he belongs."[14] How truly and keenly Henrik Ibsen must have felt this, for he so vigorously accepted the responsibility to comment on the society of which he was a part, and he commented in an honest, candid, and bold manner.

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[14]Vol. 15, p. 75.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Conclusions have been reached by this writer which quite probably have already been discovered by other readers of Henrik Ibsen's plays; one certainly cannot claim originality in saying that Henrik Ibsen set himself apart from and not necessarily against the society of which he was a part and became that which many referred to as an "enemy of the people", relentlessly pursuing truth, freedom, and the rights of the individual. Ibsen's ideas were not extraordinary nor were his ideas steeped in complex intellectualism; rather, his were ideas of the utmost simplicity, ideas which were given life and meaning by an expert's use of the dramatic form.

Discussion is not merely unembellished, realistic conversation in the plays of Ibsen; rather, Ibsen's dialogue is characterized by a concentration of intense feeling and thought-provoking ideas. The dialogue of Henrik Ibsen's social plays wastes no time in telling us to think, to evaluate, and to respond to what we hear, not only in terms of the play of which it is a part but also in terms of our own lives. Ibsen's words mean what they say; one need not search for symbolism nor allusion, for metaphor nor simile, nor does one need to read between the lines for inmuendoes of double meaning. Ibsen tells us what we need to know, and he talks to us through the dialogue of his

characters, people who cannot avoid speaking to us directly, for we come to know them by listening to them speak to one another--indeed, we often know more about them than they know about each other or even than they know about themselves.

We discover that Ibsen's dialogue is often less than subtle and natural, but this tendency toward artificiality is not without purpose. For example, the final scene between Nora and Helmer, in A Doll's House, cannot really be called a discussion in the sense of its being a private, personal conversation, for it seems more like a series of declarative answers to rhetorical questions, questions which simply provide the cues for Nora's declarations.[1] How much more jolting and memorable is the impact of the scene due to Ibsen's use of rhetoric!

Henrik Ibsen was not an iconoclast ridiculing traditional ideas, nor was he a preacher moralizing about the tragedies which may result from unwise marriages, the hypocrisies of public servants, or the right of the female to realize her individualism; rather, Ibsen was a poet and an artist who, with an acute sensitivity, observed life and began to assign meaning to the problems of life, problems which plague everybody everywhere, by creating believable characters and putting them in real situations and letting them speak to each other and to us.

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[1]Raymond Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Eliot (New York, Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 67.

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On his tomb they set a miner's hammer, in memory of one who had tunnelled so deep into the stony depths of life, and had written, fifty-five years before, a poem of his own about a miner who found too glaring the sunlight of the day:

No, the depths I must descend.
Peace is there, world without end.
Heavy hammer, hew in gloom
Way to the heart's most hidden room.

Hammer-blows on hammer-blows,
Till my life's last day shall close;
Though no gleam of dawning lightens,
Though no sun of promise brightens.

(Taken from Ibsen and Strindberg
by F. L. Lucas, New York,
MacMillan Company, 1962, p.22.)