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### **The Surrogate Self in Ibsen's Mature Plays**

It is not hard to find in Ibsen's correspondence and recorded conversations the consistent affirmation of the ultimate value of self-realization. To Björnstjerne Björnson in 1882 Ibsen wrote: "So to conduct one's life as to realize one's self—this seems to me the highest attainment possible to a human being. It is the task of one and all of us, but most of us bungle it."<sup>1</sup> To a poet in 1884 Ibsen wrote, "I believe that none of us can have any higher aim in life than to realize ourselves in spirit and in truth. That, in my view, is the true meaning of liberalism."<sup>2</sup> And more than five years later he told Helene Raff that "self-realization is man's highest task and greatest happiness."<sup>3</sup>

Yet, it is not easy to determine what might actually constitute such self-realization in any of Ibsen's mature plays beginning with *A Doll's House*. Instances of the failure to realize the self fully and of generally misfiring attempts to do so are, as every reader or viewer of Ibsen knows, much less difficult to find. Nora slams the door on her doll's house as the first step in what looms beyond the final curtain as a painful and uncertain process of trying to become the human being she now believes she is or ought to be. Mrs. Alving, seeking to fight her way through to freedom by laying to rest the ghosts of her past, finds the goal of self-realization more elusive than she had anticipated. In contrast to these earlier heroines who are slow to acknowledge the validity of self-realization as a goal and human birthright, Solness, Borkman and Rubek in three of Ibsen's last four plays have devoted themselves with single-minded dedication to the goal of self-realization only to find near the end of their lives that the fulfillment they pursued has not, after all, come about. For only by denying one part of themselves have they been able to realize another part. Their error was to take the part for the whole, and the inexorable retribution demanded by the unrealized part of the self constitutes their tragedy. Yet neither is it clear that it ever would have been possible for them to pursue all potentialities at once. Solness, Borkman and Rubek must make particular choices which pre-

vent their full self-realization; but it is not clear that an alternative choice could have forestalled their final sense of self-betrayal. Self-realization remains an implicit value in Ibsen's late plays, but it is shown to be more problematic than its seekers had anticipated; by implication it would seem to demand synthesis, integration of the self, but for these heroes such synthesis appears not to have been possible.

For different reasons the pursuit of self-realization proves equally elusive to another kind of Ibsen character, the man or woman who seeks to realize him-or herself through others, through acting on others and causing others to act. Gregers Werle, Rebecca West, Hedda Gabler and Hilde Wangel, while they are sometimes grouped with Solness, Borkman and Rubek as "egoists" or "idealists," differ sharply from these three in their lack of any impersonal medium through which to fulfill the demands of their variously named "egoism" or "idealism." Though Solness and Borkman seek power over men as well as things, it is essentially through their command of inanimate materials that they, like Rubek, attempt to fulfill themselves: Solness, through the direction of building materials that go into the construction of, first churches, and then homes for human beings; Borkman, through the hard, cold metals that can create a financial empire subservient to the will; and Rubek through the similarly hard, cold marble which expresses an artistic vision. As a by-product, as it were, of this autonomous drive for self-realization they bring suffering to the human beings—invariably the women—who have loved and trusted them. But for Gregers, Rebecca, Hedda and Hilde, on whom I wish to concentrate most of my remaining discussion, realization of the self appears as uniquely dependent on the Other. Without the action of the Other they cannot hope to fulfill themselves. For these characters, then, self-realization never presents itself as an autonomous, impersonal process to which others may be sacrificed, indirectly, by neglect, and by neglect of the claims of the heart. Rather, for them self-realization presents itself at the outset as symbiosis, or, more properly, as an attempt at vicarious rather than autonomous fulfillment. No less than Ibsen's last heroes these egoists all (with the possible exception of Hilde) fail catastrophically in their bids for self-fulfillment, bringing disaster as well to those who love and trust them; in their case, however, this disaster comes not as a by-product but as a direct result of their misguided efforts at self-realization.

Ibsen's later plays, then, present two opposed yet related patterns of the quest for self-realization, both of which fail by an apparent inner logic of their own, bringing suffering or death to the questor and those close to him or her. From his gallery of failures we may infer that self-

realization in Ibsen's view requires a fundamental wholeness which, however, is not really possible for most of his characters to attain. All that is certain is that self-realization can be achieved neither by denying the claims of one part of the self in favor of another, nor by attempting to compensate for felt inadequacies in the self by manipulating another human destiny. Both the course which demands too thorough self-sufficiency as well as the one which reveals too little fail to deliver the fulfillment anticipated.

Gregers Werle's attempt in *The Wild Duck* to fill his life with purpose appears doomed at the outset, even before we sense clearly how others are going to be drawn into sharing that doom, because there is something fundamentally absurd in his effort to repair what is essentially an emptiness within himself by improving the lives of others. Quick to suspect and accuse his father of self-interestedly wanting to use him, Gregers is about to embark on his own attempt to use others; not many lines after his accusation to his father he unselfconsciously announces to him, "now at last I see my vocation."<sup>4</sup> But while Gregers seems sure enough of his purpose here at the end of Act I—to enlighten Hjalmar as to the lie on which, as Gregers sees it, his friend's marriage is based—by the time we see him again in Act II his momentary confidence appears to have left him.

HJALMAR. What do you intend to do?

GREGERS. Ah, if only I knew that, Hjalmar, it wouldn't be so bad. But when one has the misfortune to be called Gregers—with Werle on top of it—Hjalmar, have you ever heard anything so awful?

HJALMAR. Oh, I don't think it's awful at all.

GREGERS. Oh, nonsense, Ugh! I'd want to spit on anyone who had a name like that.

HJALMAR *laughs*. If you weren't Gregers Werle, what would you like to be?

GREGERS. If I could choose, I think most of all I'd like to be a clever dog. . . . Oh, yes, a tremendously clever dog. The sort that dives down after wild ducks when they have plunged to the bottom and gripped themselves fast in the seaweed and the mud. (II, 184-5).

This exchange suggests that Gregers ties his lack of purpose to his sense of a basically deficient self, and that the only way he can imagine overcoming the sense of his own deficiency is by the manipulation of others. Gregers' desperate grasping for purpose must be understood as an attempt to keep at bay his powerful sense of self-loathing.

As Gregers' purpose develops in Act III, it depends on convincing Hjalmar of the latter's similarity to the wounded duck, so that he himself, identifying with the clever dog, may then re-enact the rescue:

GREGERS. You've got a creeping disease in your body, and you've sunk to the bottom to die in the dark . . . Don't worry. I shall get you up again. I've found a mission in life, too, you see. I found it yesterday. (III, 203)

This drama of sickness and cure, which is Gregers' mission to see enacted in his friends, is of course a projection of the drama which Gregers knows he must act himself; as he tells his father, "If I am to go on living, I must try to find some cure for my sick conscience" (III, 210). Diagnosed twice by Dr. Relling as "sick" (III, 212, V, 239), Gregers is such even by his own admission. But he is unable to think of any way of healing himself except by acting on another in whom he can see re-enacted his own illness. Hjalmar's sickness seems to Gregers more directly susceptible to cure than his own, thus providing him with a means of curing himself indirectly by first curing Hjalmar. If Gregers' actions easily lend themselves to psychoanalytic interpretations ("projection," causing another to "act out" his own secret dramas), one may also perceive elements of what Sir James Frazer was to call "Sympathetic Magic" in Gregers' attempt to heal himself by manipulating his friend's destiny.

Gregers hopes to help others to live the meaningful, "ideal" life he knows he could never live. In a vicarious, parasitic way, he seeks to garner meaning for himself by providing it to others. Gregers, who describes Hjalmar as "my one and only friend" (I, 146), whom Gina remembers chiefly as "ugly" (II, 169) and "a queer fish" (II, 212), whom presumably no woman would ever want or has ever wanted to marry, hopes above all, "to lay the foundations of a true marriage" (IV, 221). Gregers, who clearly entertains suicidal fantasies, if not definite intentions,<sup>5</sup> who wants to sacrifice himself, is intent on encouraging others to sacrifice; so, thinking to persuade Hedwig to sacrifice the wild duck, he leads her to sacrifice herself. Behind these obvious ironies lies a consistent pattern. Accusing Gregers of hero worship, Relling makes the telling point, "You've always got to have something outside of yourself that you can idolize," to which Gregers acquiesces, "That's true. I have to seek it outside myself" (V, 239). All Gregers' destructive and self-defeating actions can be understood as attempts to find in and through others what he knows cannot be found in and through himself.

Hedda Gabler resembles Gregers Werle in her attempt to flee from her own sense of insufficiency—what she herself sees as her poverty—by directing the destiny of another. And as with Gregers, her effort to find fulfillment through the manipulation of another's destiny must be viewed as a flight from the burden of true self-realization. Entrapped by her own cowardly choices in a petty, bourgeois existence, she seeks a vicarious fulfillment by directing Loevborg to what she perceives as acts of daring, freedom and beauty. Like Gregers, too, Hedda fails to see any contradiction in her own professed objectives—to free another by appropriating for herself the power to shape his destiny.

Unlike Gregers' situation, however, there is a social and sexual component to the emptiness of Hedda's life, as to her subsequent groping for purpose. The torturing boredom and purposelessness from which Hedda suffers is determined not only by her own lack of inner resources—certainly a crucial factor that cannot be overlooked—but also by the social expectations governing the lives of women. When Judge Brack asks whether Hedda can't find some kind of occupation for herself, he raises a fundamental question, although he himself suggests only the "vocation" of motherhood which Hedda is already silently rejecting. The theme of vocational fulfillment—its rewards, its costs, its paradoxes—is of central importance in Ibsen's late plays, as it is in *Brand*. But if the price of vocational satisfaction appears to entail the forfeit of full self-realization for some of Ibsen's heroes, the insufficiency and failure of others of Ibsen's characters, particularly those who seek fulfillment through manipulation of people, can be at least partially understood in terms of the very absence from their lives of any vocation capable of demanding and extending similar sacrifices and gratifications.

The typical Ibsen hero or heroine, it has been observed, is a man or woman with a "mission," one who has experienced some kind of "call." But a distinction may profitably be drawn between those characters for whom the mission is truly vocational—a life work or a calling which is also a means of making a living—and those for whom it is merely avocational—an unremunerative, private undertaking. This distinction generally corresponds to the one drawn earlier, between those Ibsen characters who seek to fulfill themselves through command of inanimate materials and those who seek to fulfill themselves through other people. Moreover, autonomous vocational fulfillment through inanimate materials is sought exclusively by men, whereas the attempt to realize the self through manipulation of the other, which in its most usual form is an avocational endeavour, is generally the province of women;

Gregers, who though he speaks of finding a vocation has not in our sense found one, and Alfred Allmers (in *Little Eyolf*) during his short-lived resolution to devote himself to his son instead of his book, are exceptions to this sexual pattern. Possibly this distinction may help explain why Gregers appears so thoroughly mean and contemptible and why Allmers, though certainly neither of these, appears so immediately suspect in his change of direction: both men undertake to play what is essentially a woman's role. A man, the dramas seem to suggest, should have a higher, more autonomous calling than to be meddling in his friend's marriage or even seeking his own fulfillment vicariously through his child; perhaps at the least a calling that is also a means of making a living.<sup>6</sup>

Ibsen does not seem to have felt that what we call vocational fulfillment could be, or ought to be, as important to a woman as to a man. And in his plays independent vocational fulfillment never presents the realistic option for women that it does for men. Ibsen once proclaimed that "women have something in common with the true artist . . . something that is a good substitute for worldly understanding." But despite this shared "instinctive genius which unconsciously hits upon the right answer,"<sup>7</sup> none of Ibsen's female characters ever seeks that fulfillment through work which the male artist prototypes of himself (Solness, Rubek, possibly Borkman) strive so ruthlessly to achieve. Even in the early realistic drama most openly concerned with the "woman's issue" (*The Pillars of Society*), Lona Hessel's New World ventures into singing in cafés, lecturing ("which people laughed at") and writing a book ("which she's since laughed over herself," II, 60) are viewed as a means of livelihood rather than of fulfillment; and Dina Dorf's resolution that she wants first "to work and become someone" (IV, 104) before marrying Johan Toennesen is seen simply as a necessary preliminary to that marriage. Through work Mrs. Linde in *A Doll's House* has developed the independence and secure sense of self that enables her to extend to Korgstad the kind of love and support which comes from strength rather than weakness, but the work itself is not presented as independently gratifying. Having listened to her son affirming "the joy of work," Mrs. Alving in *Ghosts* begins to locate the source of her husband's tragedy in his having had "no purpose in life . . . no work into which he could throw himself heart and soul" (III, 189), but she never thinks of making a similar demand on her own behalf. Her management of her husband's estate has been an action of camouflage and emotional survival, but not a source of positive fulfillment, while her intellectual pursuits are the avocational pastime of an amateur.<sup>8</sup>

In a much cited speech at the Festival of the Norwegian Women's Rights League (1898) Ibsen specified that it was "as mothers . . . . And only as such" that "women . . . are to solve the social problem."<sup>9</sup> In his preliminary jottings for *Hedda Gabler*, however, he recognized that women "aren't all created to be mothers."<sup>10</sup> Hedda's rejection of motherhood is of course tied to a complex of neurotic difficulties, but the rejection of, or lack of opportunity for motherhood does not seem to take us very far in understanding the recurrent destructiveness of Ibsen's oft-called "predatory" women. Nor is it sufficient to understand Rebecca, Hedda and Hilde in terms of thwarted, unacknowledged or misdirected sexuality, though these elements are certainly present. Ibsen's best characters are too complex to be encompassed by any simplistic formulas, either psychological or social. But certainly an important contributing element in the destructive behavior of these heroines can be found in the social and psychological conditioning of women which made it difficult for them to seek—or think of seeking—avenues of independent creativity or vocational fulfillment. This observation need conflict neither with Ibsen's psychological insights nor with the generally accepted symbolic view of such women as repositories of dark, daemonic, Dionysian energies, as trolls, or possessed of a troll-like power to lure forth such energies from the men they attract. It is simply that seen as characters in their own right, much of their destructiveness may be understood in terms of the ill-chosen directions in which they channel those daemonic energies. For the daemonic impulses which these women embody are potentially creative as well as destructive. And a large part of their tragedy as individuals lies in their failure to find proper independent modes of activity through which to realize these potentially creative energies.<sup>11</sup> While motherhood is often linked with creativity in the popular imagination, can it really provide such an outlet?

However enthusiastic Ibsen was in his public endorsement of motherhood, one cannot but observe that in his plays he remains more skeptical of the value and the kind of self-sacrifice and disinterested devotion that is so often claimed for mother love. Nora's relation to her children is ultimately rejected as a charade; not being a full person in her own right, she is unable to find self-fulfillment through mothering others. While Mrs. Alving, as a mother, has been guided above all by love for her son, there is something pathetic and, one feels, misdirected in her vain boast, "Now my son shall speak for me" (I, 150); as her maternal efforts are foredoomed to a tragic outcome, so her maternal love cannot bring her the fulfillment which years ago she failed to de-

mand for herself. Though Masterbuilder Solness has for years been tormented with guilt for what he sees as his responsibility in depriving his wife of her true vocation, motherhood, this belief is revealed as tragic illusion since it is the loss of her dolls, not her children, that has crushed Aline.<sup>12</sup> The love that Ella Rentheim and Gunhild Borkman feel for Erhart is real and maternal; yet both women are seeking from Erhart a kind of egoistic gratification that no son or nephew can properly be expected to provide. While their attempts at self-fulfillment through a child figure can be no more than potentially destructive, since Erhart rejects their claims, as a variant on the increasingly familiar pattern of seeking a vicarious fulfillment through the actions of another, they are doomed to failure.

"Women have no influence on public affairs. So they want to influence individuals spiritually," Ibsen wrote in his preliminary jottings for *Hedda Gabler*.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps this too constituted an affinity between women and the artist. Ibsen himself, as an artist, and particularly an artist in exile, also had no influence on public affairs and yet sought, through the medium of his art, to influence people spiritually. And art itself may be regarded as a mode of vicarious fulfillment. But there remains the all important difference between the media on which women, as they appear so often in Ibsen's plays and in life, and the artist work. To women's lack of opportunity to influence public affairs, Ibsen might have added their general lack of opportunity (or inclination?) to act on inanimate motives. What is clear is that he saw their ensuing tendency to act on people, to seek vicarious fulfillment through others, as ultimately futile and destructive.

Yet the attempt "to influence individuals spiritually" by direct intervention need not at first appear destructive. Thea Elvsted, who offers an apparent contrast to Hedda, has nonetheless also sought, and gained, spiritual influence over Loevborg. Unlike the influence Hedda seeks and gains, Thea's appears beneficent and based on a submergence of self. On closer inspection, however, the beneficence of Thea's influence is limited and questionable; and if she has fulfilled herself through submergence in Loevborg's work, as Hedda could never be expected to, this may simply reveal that she has less of a self to fulfill. His book completed, Eilert has left Thea even before his renewed acquaintance with Hedda. And while Hedda has been both perverse and naive in romanticizing Loevborg's debaucheries, still, what he reveals to her of the ambiguous nature of Thea's influence—"She's broken my courage. I can't spit in the eyes of the world any longer" (III, 351)—does seem to point to a real loss, which may be no less terrible in its way than the loss

of the manuscript. There are many respects in which the self-effacing, "feminine," though physically barren Thea, who is loving and courageous, can be, and has been, contrasted with the egoistic, "masculine," though pregnant Hedda, who is jealous, hate-filled and cowardly.<sup>14</sup> But the similarities between the two women may run deeper than the contrasts. As with Hedda, the empty, entrapped, purposeless and largely powerless conditions of Thea's own life lie behind her efforts to have influence on another, just as her confession that she "developed a kind of power over [Loevborg]" (I, 300)—which may also be taken as a boast—mirrors the direction of Hedda's own ambition. If Hedda's attempt to fulfill herself through influencing another individual is overtly power-seeking, born of weakness, destructive and self-defeating, Thea's efforts may be seen, albeit less obviously so, in the same light.

The jealousy and self-hatred behind Hedda's actions should not, of course, be minimized. Unlike either Loevborg or Thea, Hedda can neither create nor assist in creation; she can only destroy what others have created, and destruction becomes for her a kind of negative image of creation. Likewise, she who will neither give nor renew life is eager to assist in bringing death. As her professed aim to "free" Loevborg is motivated by the desire to offset, in some vicarious way, her own (self-) entrapment, and her desire to gain power over another human being stems from her own helplessness, so too (as with Gregers) her own self-hatred as well as her egoism lies behind her encouragement of another's sacrifice; it is for Hedda herself, rather than for Loevborg, that death presents the only real liberation, though it takes her the whole play to realize this. Only after she is forced to recognize how thoroughly her bids for freedom and power through vicarious fulfillment have backfired, and how much in another's power she has become, does she have the courage to enact the ultimate deed of freedom and destruction upon herself.

Less obviously destructive than Gregers or Hedda, and appearing to act rather out of their own fullness of energy and imagination than out of any inner poverty, Rebecca West in *Rosmersholm* and Hilde Wangel in *The Masterbuilder* nevertheless, like Gregers and Hedda, seek to fulfill themselves through influencing others to act. Shortly before writing *Hedda Gabler*, in a conversation with Helene Raff on hypnosis and the power of the will, Ibsen "underlined that women's will in particular tends to remain undeveloped; we dream and wait for something that will give our lives meaning. As a result of this, women's emotional lives are unhealthy, and they fall victims to disappointment."<sup>15</sup> However much light these words may shed on the situation of the heroine he was

about to create, they provide a less accurate guide to the two heroines created before and after Hedda who reject the enforced passivity of the woman's lot. Both Rebecca and Hilde go in deliberate pursuit of making something happen. Yet the limited options open to women in their time, and their own responses to such limitations, lead them to direct their active, questing impulses to influencing others to undertake the decisive actions for them. While the wills of Rebecca and Hilde are not, properly speaking, undeveloped, the very nature of their undertaking precludes their ever attaining the kind of healthy self-fulfillment envisioned in Ibsen's comment, "What is healthy is the happiness one acquires through one's own will."<sup>16</sup>

Possessed of a vitality that finds no outlet in independent work or creativity, both Rebecca and Hilde undertake to act through surrogates. This entails refashioning another, a man, to accord with their ideal image of him. While the Pygmalion impulse, as the myth would suggest, is by no means a uniquely feminine one, it has nonetheless shown itself to be of as much relevance to the woman's position as to the artist's. Rebecca undertakes her task of re-creation more or less consciously, Hilde quite unconsciously. But neither woman takes adequate stock of the medium on which she wants to work. Human nature is far more intractable than, say, marble or building materials, and has many more hidden properties. Those who work on human nature can never attain the mastery of their materials that characterizes Ibsen's most successful artist figures.

Particularly ironic in Rebecca's case is that she fails to assess fully not merely the complexity of Rosmer's nature, but her own complexity as well, that attempting to free him from the prejudices and spectres of the past she should prove herself unwittingly so much in their power, that she, who seeks control over others' feelings and behavior, should finally be shown to have so little control over her own. But there are further ironies to Rebecca's position. Wanting "to be part of the new age that was dawning. To share in these new discoveries—!" (III, 406), Rebecca came to Rosmersholm with the aim of carrying on Ulrik Brendel's work, that is, his influence over Rosmer. But her aim from the outset would seem unsuited to implementing her desire, since to influence the teacher of others, and with ideas derived in turn from her own teacher, Dr. West, is hardly the same as sharing in "new discoveries." Perhaps teaching must always have about it something of the flavor of vicarious fulfillment; even directly teaching the rehabilitation and ennoblement of Man would not be the same as embodying it oneself. But teaching the teacher—and with a secondhand curriculum—must involve one in a

particularly circuitous mode of realization. Rosmer is right, at least as far as Rebecca's original intention is concerned, to accuse her of having used him to serve her own purpose, so that *she* might achieve something in life (IV, 413). But surely part of Rebecca's tragedy is that on her own and in her own person she cannot imagine either originating ideas, or fully living or even directly teaching those ideals she wishes to propagate; and yet the vicarious mode through which she seeks fulfillment is bound to be voracious and self-defeating.

Embracing the polarities of both the passive and the voracious female role, Hilde Wangel has indeed, in one sense—and for ten years—dreamed and waited for something that will give her life meaning; but when the ten years are up she initiates the quest for that fulfillment, which, however, she demands to be brought to her by the actions of another. Unlike Rebecca, Hilde is at once the archetypal princess who is, at least in her own view, chosen, wooed, and won by the knight in shining armour, as well as an inversion of this image—the predatory woman who actively seeks out her man, recognizing that on his own he will not bring the promised kingdom to her, and she must go to claim it. Or, in the shifting imagery of Solness's and Hilde's shared fantasies, she is both the passive woman, captured, abducted and ravished by the robust Viking warrior, and the active bird of prey, hunting for its spoil. By a curious mixture of both precision and confusion regarding time—not unlike Shakespeare's use of "double time" in *Othello*—Ibsen is able to convey this paradoxical quality to Hilde's position. On the one hand, she announces to Solness, when she arrives on the nineteenth of September, "the ten years are up. And you didn't come—as you'd promised you would" (I, 160). On the other, she must have anticipated that he would not come, since she manages to arrive at his home on that anniversary date with a set of dirty underwear in her knapsack—suggesting that she had set out at least the day before!

Although she finds Solness a less heroic figure than she remembered, she does not clearly perceive this, and undertakes, instinctively rather than consciously as had Rebecca, to make him into what she wants him and believed him to be. She is not entirely without success, since she does get him to climb the tower and to endorse Ragnar's drawings for Brovnik's gratification, but, as so often in Ibsen, her attempt to find self-realization through exercising her influence on another ends in disaster. (There is also, to be sure, an ambiguous victory in the conclusion of the play, but for Solness it is a victory won only at the cost of his life, and Hilde can hardly be expected to sustain her blind ecstasy on which the curtain falls.) If the Pygmalion image is one that comes to

mind in connection with Rebecca and Hilde, as to a lesser extent with Gregers and Hedda, the Beatrice image is another. But to suggest this is also to observe that, in Ibsen's world, for a woman of energy and imagination, the Beatrice role is no longer viewed as sufficient or beneficent.

Perhaps the most disturbing reflection on Hilde is, if she wants a kingdom, why doesn't she go after it herself? Why, in other words, aim to be Beatrice instead of Dante? For the late medieval poet, the Beatrice figure represented the noblest image of womanhood. But for the liberal, nineteenth-century European who regarded self-realization as "the highest attainment possible to a human being," the issue is no longer so clear. Hilde herself is filled with "joyful amazement" (I, 164) at Solness's indication that she can be of use to him; this prospect confirms her expectation that she will be able to find fulfillment through inspiring his work. For Hilde, as for a whole series of Ibsen characters, the desire to be of use cannot be separated from the desire to use. Subsequently Solness flatters her with the prospect of being a co-worker in the building of castles-in-the-air. ("From now on we two shall build together" II, 204). Yet the masterbuilder's suggestion can be taken as flattery only, even if unintentionally so—he alone is the builder—and it is doubtful how long a young woman of Hilde's temperament could be expected to remain content with being of use to another, even to the man she loves. In *John Gabriel Borkman* Ibsen seemed inclined to accept the view that a spirited, independent woman might have found fulfillment as the child-bearing wife and appreciated helpmate of the man she loved, though characteristically this possibility is glimpsed only as a missed opportunity. But Irene's enduring bitterness in *When We Dead Awaken* suggests that Ibsen's final view strongly called into question the notion that fulfillment could ever be attained, even for a woman, merely through inspiring the achievements of another. In regarding Rubek's sculpture as the child of them both, Irene has overrated her role in its genesis by obscuring the distinction between conscious and unconscious creativity. For while Irene's role, as indeed in biological motherhood, has been essentially passive, Rubek, as a conscious, deliberate artist, has been far more than a biological father. The intuition that she has not actively participated in the creative process, however otherwise she and Rubek may have represented matters to themselves, constitutes a strong component of Irene's maddened rage. Inspiring another, she has neglected her own self-fulfillment: "I, too, had a life to live, and a destiny to fulfil. But I turned my back on it all, threw it away to serve you. It was suicide; a mortal sin against myself (II, 363-4)." Though her

conscious regret is at not having borne real children, Irene's ringing words of reproach and self-awareness suggest that even had Hilde gotten her kingdom and her castle, whatever that might mean, being essentially Solness' creations they could not have satisfied her for long.

How it was that women were to fulfill themselves is never clearly illustrated. As I mentioned at the outset, Ibsen's mature plays offer hardly any positive examples of successful self-fulfillment—for men or women—and these usually occur among minor characters. Ellida Wangel's decision to remain with her husband in *The Lady From the Sea* may offer an exception to this pattern; but many have found her resolution unsatisfying. For the most part, the major characters in Ibsen's plays confront us with a catalogue of wrong choices or double-binds which play themselves out to their inevitably destructive and self-defeating conclusions. Positive alternatives usually can at best be inferred from the negative examples which Ibsen develops. The rejection of love is of course a cardinal sin in Ibsen's world, but love itself is also suspect as a cover for the manipulation of another in compensation for one's own inadequacies. It may be argued against Ibsen's view that, in life as in such literature, some people do fulfill themselves and even counteract inadequacies within themselves through self-suppression and devotion to others. For the major characters in Ibsen's mature plays, however, this is never true.

Ibsen's heroes and heroines consistently tend to fail either through their inability to attain sufficient autonomy and their consequent need to compensate through influencing others—the pattern with which this essay has been chiefly concerned—or else through their arrogant and misguided denial of the human need for love and their striving for an ideal autonomy that is not to be had because it is based on a fragmented sense of self. The two patterns are frequently linked—though not always predictably so—to sexual differences. It is largely, though not exclusively, women who pursue what is typically an avocational fulfillment through acting on others, whereas only men seek in vocational fulfillment that illusory autonomy which they expect to attain through acting on things. Where the latter pursuit undervalues the need for others, the former reveals excessive expectations of what others can provide; men too often suppress the emotional side of their natures, and women reveal too great—or too misdirected—an emotional hunger. Both paths are fraught with inner contradictions; both bring disaster to the self and others. Men and women in Ibsen's world are caught in deadly paradoxes of being. The ideal of self-realization, predicated on wholeness, yet open to love, provides the standard against which to measure Ibsen's heroic—and not so heroic—failures.

## Notes

1. *The Correspondence of Henrik Ibsen*, trans. Mary Morison (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1905), p. 359.
2. Cited in Michael Meyer, *Ibsen: A Biography* (N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1971), p. 526. See also *Correspondence*, p. 383.
3. Cited in Meyer, *Ibsen*, p. 633.
4. Act I, p. 162. This and all further Ibsen citations are to Michael Meyer's English translations of the last twelve plays, which are included in three Doubleday Anchor Books whose contents I shall specify here:  
*Hedda Gabler and Three Other Plays (The Pillars of Society, The Wild Duck, Little Eyolf)* (1961); *Ghosts and Three Other Plays (A Doll's House, An Enemy of the People, Rosmersholm)* (1966); *When We Dead Awaken and Three Other Plays (The Lady From the Sea, The Masterbuilder, John Gabriel Borkman)* (1960). Hereafter, act and page numbers will be included in the text.
5. See Act II, p. 211:  
 GREGERS . . . . I have left your service.  
 WERLE. But what will you do?  
 GREGERS. I shall simply fulfill my mission. That is all.  
 WERLE. But afterwards? How will you live?  
 GREGERS. I have saved a little out of my salary.  
 WERLE. Yes, but how long will that last?  
 GREGERS. I think it will see me through.  
 WERLE. What does that mean?  
 GREGERS. I think you've asked me enough questions.
6. Brand is the prototype for both patterns, seeking as a priest precisely that kind of vocational fulfillment which requires him to direct the lives of others. But although critics often cite Ibsen's reference to the "accident that Brand is a clergyman," his claim that, for example, "a sculptor . . . would have suited my syllogism quite as well as a priest," and that he might just as well have "taken, say, Galileo, with one modification . . ." (George Brandes, *Henrik Ibsen. A Critical Study* (N.Y.: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1964, p. 70), in later plays it proves significant whether characters seek to work on people or on things.
7. Cited in Meyer, *Ibsen*, p. 449.
8. See M.C. Bradbrook: "Mrs. Alving is reading books at the head of the fjord, which means that she is only following in the wake of the true pioneers." "Ibsen and the Past Imperfect," in Daniel Haakonsen, ed., *Contemporary Approaches to Ibsen* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1971), p. 16.
9. Henrik Ibsen, *Speeches and New Letters*, trans. Arne Kildal (N.Y.: Haskell House Publishers Ltd., 1972), p. 66.
10. Cited in Meyer, "Introduction" to *Hedda Gabler*, p. 265.
11. It is interesting to keep in mind in this connection that in his own life, Ibsen's elderly interest in younger women included two women artists, Helene Raff, a painter, and Hildur Andersen, a pianist, both of whom evidently took their careers seriously.
12. Aline's continuing grief at the loss of her dolls may be seen by some as displaced mourning for her sons; a version of this view is given in Brian Downs, *A Study of Six Plays by Ibsen* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1950), p. 200. However, as the ways of the heart are ever mysterious, I believe that it is safer in this instance to accept Aline's own disturbing account of her emotions, a view shared by F.L. Lucas, *The Drama of Ibsen and Strindberg* (London: Cassel & Co., 1962), p. 254.
13. Cited in Meyer, "Introduction" to *Hedda Gabler*, p. 265.
14. Caroline Mayerson nicely outlines some of the contrasts between Thea and Hedda in "Thematic Symbols in Hedda Gabler," *Ibsen: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Rolf Fjelde (N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp. 131-139.
15. Cited in Meyer, *Ibsen*, p. 617.
16. Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 633.