

# An Eco-Feminist Reading of Four Plays of Henrik Ibsen

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Master Thesis in Ibsen Studies

UNIVERSITETET I OSLO

Summer 2012

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# 1 Introduction

One thing that has greatly fascinated me about Henrik Ibsen's plays is the playwright's ingenious use of landscapes. As a meticulous dramatist who never overlooks even the smallest detail in his work, Ibsen never made use of any landscape without a concrete purpose behind. Not only different degrees of light and shadow are in many plays indicative of the characters' psychological nuances, but also geographical ups and downs, seasonal climate changes, etc. always have something significant to convey to the reader/spectator on a symbolic or metaphysical level. In a broader sense, if we set up the contrast between nature and culture, all urban constructions, including houses, churches, etc., e.g. Solness' jerry-built houses in *The Master Builder* (1892), can be regarded as clues to man's exploitation and violation of nature, at least on a symbolic level. Such abundant natural/urban images in all Ibsen's plays, in my opinion, can be studied both separately and collectively. Separately looked, the representation of nature in each play offers an important clue to the understanding of the meaning of the play, for example if we want to decode the ultimate message of *Ghosts* (1881) we would have to first of all interpret the meaning of the sun rising at the very end of the play. Collectively looked, they form certain patterns that reflect on a deeper level the development of the playwright's idea on man's ultimate relationship with nature. For example, many scholars have noted that since *Hedda Gabler* (1890) the tendency to get out of the closed rooms to the high mountains is becoming increasingly obvious in the plays, and this pattern is significant in our understanding of Ibsen's later plays as a sequence. In short, it can be said that natural landscapes not only add to the richness of the plays, hence enriching stage setting, but also form a separate semantic dimension from which many hidden meanings can be derived.

There are many ways to read and appreciate Ibsen's plays, but what keeps our interest in and respect for the playwright and his works, as I see it, is their broad social implications apart from their supreme aesthetical beauty. Today, environmental deterioration as well as different forms of oppression between different classes, races and genders are two great problems the whole human society is faced with, and scholars from different fields have pointed out the interrelation between these two problems. In my reading of Ibsen's works, I find this interrelation is either obviously or obscurely alluded to in many plays: there is, as a rule, one or more characters whose relationship with nature is closer than the other characters,

and the relationship between these characters are to a certain degree reflected through their respective relationship with nature.

For example, in many plays the dominant male character is of the habit of referring to his wife using images from nature. Just as Torvald Helmer is well known for his fondness of calling Nora “my little squirrel”, “my little singing bird”, etc., Ellida Wangel is famously known as “the lady from the sea”. Also, in many of Ibsen’s middle and later plays there is a distinct industrial setting, ranging from lumbering, shipping, mining to shipping, the building industry, etc., all of which are major industries which were developing fast in Norway back in the nineteenth century to which Ibsen himself was a witness. In fact, broadly speaking, Ibsen’s very turn in his career from romanticism to realism was in a certain sense a literary response to the dramatic social changes resulting from the Industrial Revolution (1750-1850) which had significant social impacts in nineteenth-century Europe. Originating in the United Kingdom, the Industrial Revolution swept throughout the entire western Europe and North America and led to fundamental changes in agriculture, manufacturing, transportation and many other industries. Consequently, social, economical and cultural conditions in nineteenth-century Norway underwent great changes which greatly influenced Ibsen. Many scholars have pointed out that the fact that Ibsen gave up theater directorship and turned to writing had something to do with the increasingly popular use of printing (this fact is mentioned in *Pillars of Society* by Aune), which is one example of how almost every aspect of daily life in nineteenth-century Norway was in one way or another influenced by the fast spread of industrialism.

On the other hand, the woman issue is without question one of the most important topics in almost all Ibsen’s plays. Despite his own disagreement, Ibsen has been regarded as one of the foremost feminists in the nineteenth century by different generations of scholars as well as social activists. For example in China, Ibsen is considered as one of the most important figures in the history of woman emancipation. His ideas about individualism and freedom are an indispensable weapon for many outstanding Chinese intellectuals in their fight for the emancipation of women back in the early half of last century. In Ibsen’s middle and later plays, the female gender is often depicted as confined to a suffocating, domestic environment. They are treated like immobile indoor properties and long for going out, e.g. Ellida’s longing for the sea and Hedda’s wish to ride a horse in the outdoor. In contrast, there are a group of women who are considered by scholars as representing “the new woman”. It would be

interesting to examine how both groups of women are related with nature and my guess is that “the old women” are associated with the indoor while “the new women” are associated with the outdoor. By decoding the natural images, we can see more clearly Ibsen’s solution for women in general.

Thirdly, in addition to the above two objects of study, the conditions of the working class are now and then mentioned in many of Ibsen’s plays (though mostly in an incidental manner). Since Ibsen mainly wrote about his contemporary age, which was an age of industrial expansion and capitalist exploitation, the bourgeois class became his focal object of examination. The bourgeois class, in turn, lived on the labor of the working class, and therefore in almost all the middle and later plays of Ibsen we can see the implied oppression of the working class by the capitalists. Gail Finney points out that “Ibsen himself often linked the women’s cause to other areas in need of reform, arguing for example that ‘all the unprivileged’ (including women) should form a strong progressive party to fight for improvement of women’s position and of education” (Finney 1994:89). In a speech which he gave during his short stay in Norway in 1885, Ibsen expressed his confidence in women and the workers whom he regarded as the future pillars of the European society: “The reshaping of social conditions which is now under way out there in Europe is concerned chiefly with the future position of the workingman and of woman” (Ibsen 1910:54). It seems Ibsen was back then already aware of the shared fate between women and the working class as objects of exploitation by the capitalist patriarchal society. Therefore, in the last part of my thesis I shall relate nature, women and the working class with each other and discuss how their interrelation contributes to the overall meaning of the four selected plays.

Finally, the last reason why I become interested in the eco-feminist approach to Ibsen’s plays is because I myself am quite concerned about environmental issues such as deforestation and desertification, urban pollution, food security, etc. I come from China which is a heavily polluted country. To some extent, what is happening in today’s China is similar to what was happening in Norway back in the nineteenth century. For example the Three Gorges Dam, which was originally considered a national feat in the beginning of the twenty-first century, turned out to be problematic in May 2011. In addition to its damage to the natural environment, it has endangered the living environment of people in adjacent areas. This situation instantly reminds me of what is happening in *An Enemy of the People* (1882) where the construction of the municipal baths turns out to be problematic. Also, the working class in

today's China is suffering greatly from the oppression by the capitalists, and the desire for a luxurious style of life has reduced many women to "second wives" to men of power. In such a social context, many of Ibsen's middle and later plays become more relevant than ever. By adopting the eco-feminist approach I hope I can arrive at a better understanding of how Ibsen addresses such social and environmental problems.

Based on the above four reasons, I find it not only rewarding but also necessary to approach Ibsen's plays from the eco-feminist perspective which will not fail to shed new light on our understanding of the playwright's deep concern for humanity. In my master thesis, I shall attempt to interpret four of Ibsen's plays, i.e. *Pillars of Society* (1877), *An Enemy of the People* (1882), *The Wild Duck* (1884), and *John Gabriel Borkman* (1896) using various eco-feminist theories. Although it is my ambition to include all Ibsen's plays in my project, I am aware that that is not doable due to the limitation of time and thesis space. The reason why I have chosen these four plays is as follows: first, compared with the other plays, these four plays have a far more conspicuous industrial background: in *Pillars of Society* we are given the background of the construction of the railroad, an outward reason why Consul Bernick will protect his public reputation at whatever cost; in *An Enemy of the People* the pollution of the waterworks for the municipal baths cannot fail to remind us of the numerous kinds of pollutions we are faced with today; in *The Wild Duck* illegal conduct in lumbering destroys the Ekdals which culminates in the death of the innocent Hedvig; and in *John Gabriel Borkman* we witness the fall of Borkman with his unfulfilled ambitions in the mining industry. By the selection of these four plays, however, I do not mean that industrialism and capitalism is not an important issue in Ibsen's other plays: in the modern society, man's alienated state is more or less always related with his alienation from nature. It is only that in the other plays man's exploitation of nature is not given as much critical attention as in these four plays by Ibsen.

Secondly, in these four plays all the main women characters are suffering from different degrees of male oppression. In *Pillars of Society* and *John Gabriel Borkman* Ibsen parallels the oppression of Lona by Bernick with the oppression of Ella by Borkman. Both women are genuinely loved but end up abandoned by their lovers due to financial reasons; instead, their sisters take their place because of the promise of huge amount of fortune. In *An Enemy of the People* Katherine's staying loyally and devotedly at Dr. Stockmann's side results in nothing more than her husband's excited discovery that he, who stands the most alone, is the strongest

man in the world. And in *The Wild Duck*, we are shown in a comical yet ironical way how Gina takes great care to provide for the family in a secret way without hurting her husband's pride.

While certain women are forced into a subjugated and exploited role (as in the case of Lona and Ella), some willingly accept the dominant role of men (as in the case of Katherine and Gina) mostly out of genuine love for their husband, and all the man/woman relationships in these four plays are paralleled by the relationship between man/woman and nature, which is exactly the question I intend to look into in my thesis. Therefore, first of all I intend to examine how Ibsen represents nature in these four plays, i.e. how nature is described and how it is related to the structure and meaning of the play, and then I will analyze in what ways the gender issue in these four plays is related to man's exploitation of nature, which is the main study focus of eco-feminist theories. Finally I will address the shared oppression of woman and nature (and in the case of *Pillars of Society* and *John Gabriel Borkman* also the shared oppression of the working class, which is an extended focus of eco-feminist theories) and look at how this shared oppression is concluded by Ibsen in these four plays.

My decision to put these four plays in the current order in my discussion, i.e. *An Enemy of the People*, *The Wild Duck*, *John Gabriel Borkman* and finally *Pillars of Society*, is exactly based on how Ibsen concludes the shared oppression of woman and nature in these four plays, that is to say, according to their content rather than their form. In *An Enemy of the People*, despite her intelligent comprehension of the situation and her unconditional devotion to her husband, Katherine is throughout the play confined to a domestic, dependent role, never for a moment respected by Dr. Stockmann as a woman capable of independent thinking; in other words, the play begins and ends with the same man/woman relationship. In *The Wild Duck*, however, Hjalmar's pride and selfishness results in Hedvig's suicide, who in despair can find no other way to prove her love for her father than sacrificing her own life. This bloody ending can be seen as an extreme case of man's oppression of the opposite gender. In *John Gabriel Borkman*, on the contrary, women no longer allow themselves to be trampled upon; they fight against their male oppressor and finally manage to avenge themselves through a mythical alignment with nature. But in *Pillars of Society*, unlike in the previous plays, what we see at the end of the play is no longer any hostility or opposition between the two genders but their reconciliation with each other accompanied by mutual respect and understanding. Therefore, in my opinion, despite its crudity in dramatic technique, *Pillars of Society* offers the ideal

vision of man/woman relationship, in view of which I believe it is justifiable to discuss it lastly. On a higher level, in my opinion, these four plays mirrors the development of man/woman relationship throughout the entire human history. In the early stage of civilization man domesticated woman, making her dependent on him and server him; then woman's state of servitude gradually gets aggravated to the point that even her life is not respected by man; woman then has to fight for recognition and equality, and in her fight she takes revenge upon man; but ultimately man and woman will arrive at mutual understanding and reconciliation with each other, recognizing that both are indispensable to each other and are part of a truly wholesome existence.

In my analysis of the four selected plays I will primarily use eco-feminist theories. When necessary I will also employ relevant eco-critical theories and feminist theories which can serve as a useful supplement and enrichment to eco-feminist theories. Ecological feminism, or eco-feminism is a social and academic movement that mainly looks into the critical relations between the exploitation of nature and domination of women by the patriarchal society. Therefore, to thoroughly understand eco-feminism, it is first of all essential for us to arrive at a clear definition of patriarchy:

*“Patriarchy is the systematic, structural and unjustified domination of women by men. Patriarchy consists of those institutions (including, in a Rawlsian sense, those policies, practices, positions, offices, roles, and expectations) and behaviors which give privilege (higher status, value, prestige) and power (power-over power) to males or to what historically is male-gender identified, as well as a sexist conceptual framework needed to sustain and legitimize it. At the heart of patriarchy is the maintenance and justification of male-gender privilege and power (that is, power-over power).”* (Warren 1994:181)

As an oppositional force against patriarchy, eco-feminism “emerged in the 1970s predominantly in North America, although the term was coined by French feminist Françoise d’Eaubonne in *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* (1974)”, and is “considered by many to be a third wave of feminism” (Eaton 2006:1110). As Karen Warren points out in her introduction to her book *Ecological Feminism* (1994), rather than signifying one specific critical approach to literary works, eco-feminism “is an umbrella term which captures a variety of multicultural perspectives on the nature of the connections *within* social systems of domination between those humans in subdominant or subordinate positions, particularly women, and the domination of nonhuman nature”; such connections can be found in almost all social discourses, i.e. historically, empirically, conceptually, religiously, literarily, politically, ethically, epistemologically, methodologically, and theoretically, etc. (Warren 1994:1). In



their examinations of the above-mentioned connections many eco-feminists discover that “certain fundamental binary oppositions fit neatly over one another, creating the ideological basis for both sorts of harm:

male/female  
culture/nature  
reason/emotion  
mind/body”

which, according to Richard Kerridge, has become eco-feminism’s “key insight” (Kerridge 2006:538).

In 1980 the international conference “Women and Life on Earth: Eco-Feminism in the Eighties” was held at Amherst, Massachusetts in the United States which has since inspired much growth of eco-feminist organizations, actions and theoretical developments. Now the scope of research of eco-feminism is no longer limited to the correlation between nature and women, but expanded to the critical links existing between militarism, sexism, classism, racism and environmental deterioration <<http://fore.research.yale.edu/disciplines/gender/>>.

Roughly speaking, today’s eco-feminism can be categorized into “cultural eco-feminism” and “social eco-feminism”. Cultural feminism examines the characteristics conceived as opposites inherent in the two genders (masculine opposing feminine, natural opposing abstract, etc.) where one set of characteristics are elevated in importance over the other set, and seeks to reverse this hierarchy by “demonstrating the positive side of those characteristics previously held to be inferior and stressing the importance of women-nature links to the survival of nature” (Buckingham-Hatfield 2000:35). Social eco-feminism, on the other hand, “rather than believing that women are closer to nature through their bodily functions (after all, all bodies are part of nature)”, “argues that it is the social role ascribed to women which identifies them more closely with nature”. In this interpretation, “women’s closeness to nature is seen as socially constructed, that is, a product of the role women have been socialized into through generations” (36-37). Both approaches, in my opinion, are applicable in Ibsen’s plays. The cultural perspective is applicable because women are frequently accused of being excessively emotional and irrational by the male characters, e.g. Ella is accused of being overwhelmingly passionate by Borkman. In terms of the social

perspective, there are more than enough female characters in Ibsen's plays, e.g. Nora, Hedda, etc., that can serve as examples as to how women are socialized into the ascribed gender role which they finally rebel against.

I will mainly focus on the following theoretical works in my discussion of the four selected plays of Ibsen. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993) by Val Plumwood, *Ecofeminist Natures: Race, Gender, Feminist Theory, and Political Action* (1997) by Noel Sturgeon, *Feminism and Ecological Communities: An Ethic of Flourishing* (1998) by Chris J. Cuomo, *Gender and Environment* (2000) by Susan Buckingham-Hatfield, *Ecocriticism* (2004) by Greg Garrard, *Developing Ecofeminist Theory: The Complexity of Difference* (2005) by Erika Cudworth, etc. Also, I will refer to such academic journals as *Environmental Ethics* and *Ethics and the Environment* which are important scholarly periodicals dedicated to eco-feminist researches.

In international Ibsen studies, eco-criticism is in fact not an entirely new approach. In May 2009 the Green Ibsen International Symposium was held in Wuhan, China. Over 100 scholars from all over the world participated in the symposium, exchanging views on the "green thought" in Ibsen's plays and interpretations of his plays from an eco-critical perspective. It was the first time that the scholarly milieu gave substantial attention to the "green Ibsen". Among the many topics touched upon in the symposium, there are "how green is Ibsen", "multicolored Ibsen", "Ibsen and Darwin", "eco-ethical value of Ibsen's works", etc. In his paper "Rationalizing an Aesthetics of Contact: Nature, Women, *Peer Gynt*, and Ecocriticism" the Korean scholar Simon C. Estok actually touches upon the eco-feminist perspective, although not fully expounding on it. Such active scholarly participation proves that the ecological perspective is not only applicable but is also fruitful. So far except for the symposium proceedings there have not been any major publications on the ecological aspect of Ibsen's plays. There have, however, been quite a number of papers or articles focusing on "nature" as represented in Ibsen's plays, e.g. "There Must Be a Lot of Fish in that Lake': Toward an Ecological Theater" (1994) by Una Chaudhuri, "Nature's Revenge: The Dialectics of Mastering in Late Ibsen" (1993) by Peter Madsen, "Nature's a Joker: Self and Reality Worlds for Simmel, Ibsen, Dick, and Durkheim" (1994) by Jules J. Wanderer, "Terje Vigns Båt: Images of Nature Consciousness in Coastal Norway" (2006) by Carll Goodpasture, "Discord and Harmony Between Human and Nature: An Ecological Interpretation of *The Lady from the Sea*" (2010) by Danni Dai, "Ibsen and Chekov" in *Ecology and Environment in*

*European Drama* (2010) by Downing Cless, “Danse Macabre: John Gabriel Borkman’s Self in Eco-Critical Perspective” (2010) by Lanlan Xie, etc. We can see an ongoing interest on the part of Ibsen scholars in the eco-ethical space in Ibsen’s plays, and it seems that scholars coming from developing countries are particularly interested in this perspective since environmental deterioration is more severe in those countries.

With regard to the gender issue raised in Ibsen’s plays, there has been a manifest enthusiasm among Ibsen scholars from all over the world. A search in the International Ibsen Bibliography with a woman/kvinne-related keyword will generate up to several hundred results, in a great many languages. Among others, some of the most influential publications on Ibsen’s feminist ideas are: Vincent J. Balice’s *Ibsen’s Feminine Mystique* (1975), Ronald G. Popperwell’s “Ibsen’s Female Characters” (1980), Callie Jeanne Herzog’s *Nora’s Sisters: Female Characters in the Plays of Ibsen, Strindberg, Shaw and O’Neill* (1982), Declan Kiberd’s “Ibsen’s Heroines: The New Woman as Rebel” (1985), Gail Finney’s “Ibsen and Feminism” (1994), Johan Temple’s *Ibsen’s Women* (1997), Astrid Sæther’s *Suzannah: Fru Ibsen* (2008), Erika Lazarova’s “Henrik Ibsen and the Problem of the Eternal Feminine” (2008), to name only a few. In 2007 the Centre for Asian Theatre in Bangladesh organized an international conference specifically devoted to the gender issue in Ibsen’s plays, i.e. “Gender Issues in Ibsen’s Plays: International Ibsen Seminar and Workshop”. In the conference there appeared a good many excellent papers dealing with the woman characters in Ibsen’s plays, e.g. Asbjørn Aarseth’s “The Darling and the Demon: Female Characters in Ibsen’s Drama”, Astrid Sæther’s “Female Expectations and Male Ambitions in Ibsen’s Late Dramas”, etc. To this lively scholarly milieu Chinese scholars have also made their contributions. Among others, some of the most representative publications are: Kwok-kan Tam’s “Feminism and Ibsenism: Portrayals of a New Female Identity in Modern Chinese Literature” and “Ibsenism and Ideological Constructions of the ‘New Woman’ in Modern Chinese Fiction, Lanlan Xie’s “Peer Gynt’s Female World”, Chengzhou He’s “Woman and Decadence: *Hedda Gabler* Revisited”, Ying-Ying Chien’s “Feminism and China’s New ‘Nora’: Ibsen, Hu Shi & Lu Xun”, etc. In short, from the above publications we can see that studies on the woman issue in Ibsen’s plays continue to be vigorously carried out on an international scale, the topics of which are not only diversified in range, touching upon both Ibsen’s woman characters per se and their reception in different cultures, but also reach in depth into some of the most fundamental questions of womanhood in gender studies, e.g. the female role in society, the female identity, etc.

In such critical context, my project is related to previous research in that it attempts to combine the two heatedly-debated scholarly questions (i.e. Ibsen's idea of nature and Ibsen's idea of woman) together and look into their interrelationship with each other. In the four plays which I have selected for analysis, what I have found is that in all of them there can be drawn a correlation between the dominant male character's treatment of his closest (and usually dearest) woman and his treatment of nature. For example, in *An Enemy of the People*, Morten Kiil tries to bargain with Dr. Stockmann about the baths shares using Katherine and her children as bargaining chips. In *The Wild Duck*, there is significant resemblance between the way Hjalmar derives an illusory satisfaction from "hunting" in the loft and the way he makes Gina and Hedvig believe in his role as family provider and his potential talent for the great invention. In both *John Gabriel Borkman* and *Pillars of Society*, both male protagonists (who are at the same time industrialists and capitalists) manage to realize their business ambitions by exploiting nature to the greatest extent and trading the women they love for money and social influence. Apart from these four plays, in many of Ibsen's other plays where the industrial background is not so conspicuous we can also see this parallel between woman and nature. For example, in *Little Eyolf* (1894) Rita is associated with the "gold and green forests", implying the great fortunes hidden in the forest as well as the material wealth Allmers has acquired through marrying her. In *Hedda Gabler* (1890) the arms-bearing, horse-riding Hedda is associated with the outdoor while the slippers-loving Tesman is associated with the indoor. In *Rosmersholm* (1886) Rebecca is coming from the northern province Finmark which is characterized by the absence of industry and unexploited wilderness. Such examples are so abundant that the fact that Ibsen parallels the female gender with nature is unquestionable. Therefore, by relating nature and women with each other in my discussion of the four selected plays I hope I can continue the ongoing scholarly dialogues and contribute new understanding on Ibsen's idea on both nature and woman to the scholarly milieu.

As environmental deterioration is becoming increasingly serious on a global scale, in particular in China where I come from, I hope my study can also be of some social significance in addition to its contribution to the scholarly dialogue about Ibsen's aesthetics. To some extent, the fact that the Green Ibsen International Symposium is held in China is not a coincidence. Faced with environmental problems on small and large scales, the country is gradually realizing the importance of protecting natural environment. Also, with the rise of industrialism, capitalism and materialism since the introduction of the reform and opening-up

policy in the country in 1978, money and power has gradually been concentrated into the hands of the newly rising male capitalist class, who exploit the working class and keep “second wives” to an abhorrent extent. In such social context I believe the eco-feminist approach can have far-reaching social significance. My ultimate goal is that when people read Ibsen’s plays, they can derive not only delight, i.e. appreciation for the aesthecial beauty of Ibsen’s writing, but also instruction, i.e. a heightened awareness of the importance of environmental protection, social equality and finally individual emancipation, from Ibsen’s plays.

## 2 *An Enemy of the People*

Among all Ibsen's plays, *An Enemy of the People* (1882) is the only one that has professional expertise as a specific subject. Thomas Stockmann is referred to as "the doctor", and he believes in himself as "a man of science" (Fjelde 1978:289). In his letter to George Brandes 12<sup>th</sup> June 1883, Ibsen comments on Dr. Stockmann as a man "at least ten years ahead of the majority" (Ibsen 1905:370) with whom he has "got on so very well together" (360). They are both "conscious of incessant progression" (370), which distinguishes them from the majority. This "incessant progression", in other words, can be identified in Anthony Giddens' theoretical framework with the reflexivity of modernity. According to Giddens, "the reflexivity of modern social life consists in the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character" (Giddens 1991:38). In one of his banquet speeches in 1887, Ibsen himself had expressed similar ideas: "I am a pessimist ... so far as I do not believe in the everlastingness of human ideals. But I am also an optimist in so far as I firmly believe in the capacity for procreation and development of ideals" (Ibsen 1910:57). This has striking similarity with the eco-feminist way of thinking, for one of eco-feminism's key concepts is the constant rectification of individual economic sectors at the cost of one another due to reductionism.

In Vandana Shiva's book *Ecofeminism* (1993), she identifies reductionism as a crisis in modern science. According to Shiva, western patriarchy's epistemological tradition of modern science is reductionist because: "1) it reduced the capacity of humans to know nature both by excluding other knowers and other ways of knowing; and 2) by manipulating it as inert and fragmented matter, nature's capacity for creative regeneration and renewal was reduced" (Shiva 1993:23). In such reductionist way of thinking, "uniformity permits knowledge of parts of a system to stand for knowledge of the whole", and "divisibility permits context-free abstraction of knowledge" (24). Shiva further reasons that this reductionist perspective serves as the philosophical basis for modern economy, which is organized in a way that "individual firms and the fragmented sectors of the economy, whether privately or state owned, are concerned only with their own efficiency and profits; and every firm and sector measures its efficiency by the extent to which it maximizes its profits, regardless of the maximization of social and ecological costs" (24).

The reductionist modern science is criticized with a certain degree of humor in *An Enemy of the People*. The whole conflict in the play centers around the municipal baths, which is a modern establishment with a medical purpose. The industrial background of the play is as follows: up at Mølleedal are found a cluster of tannery factories, the biggest one among which is owned by Dr. Stockmann's father-in-law Morten Kiil. Tanning refers to the process of using animal skins as raw material to manufacture leather. It involves animal killing, skinning and the use of a number of chemical compounds. From the tannery mills a large amount of waste is poured out continuously which not only seeps accumulatively into the pipes supplying water to the baths but also drains out on the beach which is intended as the bathing area. From Morten Kiil's own account in Act 5 we learn that the family has been in this business for at least three generations; thus in an implied way we are given the contrast between the old, traditional enterprise and the newly rising enterprise which in the play is the baths. The municipal baths, on the other hand, is an enterprise through which alone that "this town has any future to speak of" (Fjelde 1978:315). Apparently that was the transitional period Norway underwent back in the 1800s from an agricultural society to an industrial society, and municipal towns were making investments in municipal enterprises to boost economical development. In the reductionist way of economy, the local becomes part of the global, and the economical value of the local is judged in a global perspective. As a country whose economy was not very strong compared with the other European countries in the nineteenth century, Norway's rapid industrial development back then was dependent on the ever-increasing industrial demand found on the entire European continent. Just as the country's industry is closely linked with countries abroad, the town's economical development is dependent on the market out of the town. In the play, the area where the town is located abounds in "resources for development as health resorts" (315), and the town is the first which discovered and invested in this potential. From the conversation between Aslaksen and the mayor we get the clue that the baths was built upon the investment of certain town capitalists as well as property taxes from the home owners. The construction of the baths greatly boosted the economical development of the town. To use the mayor's words, "it's simply extraordinary the way this place has revived in the past two years! People here have some money again. There's life, excitement! Land and property values are rising every day." (285) The word "revive" hints at the economic crisis Norway suffered from in the 1840s. Traditionally mining and timbering were the two strong industries that supported the country's economy, but during the 1840s "mine owners and timber dealers faced sales difficulties which led to low wages and unemployment" (Stenersen & Libæk 2003:84). This

resulted in the 1850s the famous Thrane Movement in Norwegian history, to which Ibsen himself was an adherent (85). In Act 4 where the public speech by Dr. Stockmann is held, the lumber dealer presents himself as a muddle-headed drunkard. Although Ibsen has not revealed to us explicitly why the lumber dealer took to drinking, it might be inferred from historical context that it has something to do with the slump in the lumber business—especially when we have in mind the fact that Ibsen’s own father succumbed to drinking after his bankruptcy. The play also hints at the prosperous shipping industry which Norway could never dispense with. During 1850s to 1880s “Norwegian shipping enjoyed its third golden age”, “and the country had the third largest mercantile marine in the world after Great Britain and the USA” (Stenersen & Libæk 2003:86). Captain Horster is a representative of the shipping industry in the play, and from his words we get the information that it is without any difficulty he can find a post with whichever shipping firm in whichever coastal town (Fjelde 1978:371) inside Norway.

Thus, while the traditional tannery and lumber industries of the town could no longer keep it thriving, it is the new enterprise, the baths, that helped it recover from the hit of economical crisis with bright prospects ahead of which the rising property value is a proof. However, as any other type of enterprise, it is accompanied by a certain degree of risk and if the enterprise fails the investment will come to nothing. We learn of the town’s economical dilemma in Act 3: the owners of the baths are “in no position to extend themselves further than they are already”, and if any construction change is to be made to the baths, it will be necessary to “take out a municipal loan” (Fjelde 1978:337). In other words, if the baths as an enterprise fails to make profits for the town, its economy will go back to recession with increased unemployment and poverty.

With this industrial setting Ibsen is criticizing the insolvable dilemma of modern industry which has its root in reductionism. In the reductionist way of economy, complex eco-systems are reduced to a single component, and a single component to a single function due to the demand of specialized commodity production (Shiva 1993:24). Just as a forest is reduced to commercial wood, animals are reduced to raw material for leather, water and the beach to bathing facilities. Their value is measured in the economical value they can generate for the enterprise owner. The boundary between value and non-value, as Shiva has pointed out, is just as arbitrary as the boundary between knowledge and ignorance. What is originally free and self-generative is subjugated to human colonization and control (25). In the tannery



industry described in the play, what is considered valuable is the animal skin as raw material, different sorts of chemicals necessary for making leather, etc., while the industrial waste and the land adjacent to the factories are reduced to non-value, the former being nothing more than filth and rot which needs to be disposed and the latter being a convenient site to pour the waste into. In this way the regenerative power of the land is gradually annihilated (we learn from the play that Morten Kiil's factory has been there for at least three generations) and the local eco-system is destructed, which leads to the contamination of the waterworks for the baths..

In the play, Dr. Stockmann is the first one who comes to an understanding of the intrinsic relation between the different organic parts of the eco-system, and it is this understanding that distinguishes him from the rest of the townsfolk and marks him as a man "at least ten years ahead of the majority". However, he is yet not able to identify the root cause of this contamination; in fact, his suggestion as to how to solve this problem will result in anything but betterment. The doctor makes mainly two suggestions: one is to rebuild the whole water system and the other is to resort to science to produce some germicide. The first suggestion is refuted by the mayor immediately as it requires not only a municipal loan but also the shutdown of the baths for two years. The reaction on the part of Aslaksen is even more telling. He remains willing to help the doctor until the mayor mentions to him the expenses, that is, "out of the empty pockets of the home owners" (Fjelde 1978:337). "But hell and damnation—excuse me, sir!—but this is a totally different picture," this exclamation of Aslaksen's exposes him as a petty-minded property owner who is obsessed only with his own economic benefits, which testifies to the eco-feminist view that in the reductionist, fragmented modern economy individuals maximize their profits regardless of social and ecological costs. The second suggestion made by Dr. Stockmann is to do some scientific research to produce some counter-agent or germicide. He uses the phrase "science should be able to" with an angry curse "damn it" (378), which shows his blind faith in science. Suppose he does have the means to mass-produce such germicide, it will incur the construction of new factories accompanying which is only more industrial waste. By then it is foreseeable that the play will repeat itself: the doctor fights for years for the production of germicide; when the plan finally comes to fruition, however, a new idea hits him and he makes a related investigation, which annihilates at once not only his, but all the others' former efforts. Therefore, although Dr. Stockmann is ahead of the majority in discovering certain problems in modern science and industry, i.e. he is conscious of the reflexivity of modernity and plays an active role in

accelerating the process of examining and reforming social practices, he fails nevertheless to identify the inherent deficiencies of modern economy which arises from reductionism, which, coupled with his spontaneous and impulsive nature, makes him a “muddle-headed” person.

The story with the baths, however, does not end with Dr. Stockmann’s denied discovery. The act after his public speech is characterized by the dramatic contrast between the humiliations the doctor’s family is forced to suffer and the sudden slump of the share values of the baths caused by the doctor’s speech. According to Morten Kiil, shares in the baths “weren’t hard to get today” (376). In social life, Dr. Stockmann is defeated by the majority, but in business life he is the winner, for he has virtually secured the failure of the baths, which in turn spells disaster for the town’s economy on which all home owners’ interest is hinged. What is foreseeable is that the rumor about the contamination of the baths will gradually get out of the town so that no visitors will come during the summer. The town will probably be labeled a “contaminated town” and have to struggle hard to get its reputation back. In other words, the town has lost its “value” to the consumers. In the arbitrary value/non-value economic system, the town is “valuable” because of its resources for development as health resorts, and when these resources are no longer available, the town immediately loses its value and the consumers will turn to new towns where such values can be found, just as timber dealers proceed from one wood to another, mining dealers from one mine to another, from what modern industry “has already transformed and used up towards that which still remains untouched” (Shiva 1993:25). This, however, is not part of Dr. Stockmann’s discovery. His attack on modern industry consists in merely exposing existent problems, and he goes on to lift the problems in the economic sphere up to the spiritual sphere, which are “greater things to discuss” (Fjelde 1978:352). “The pollution that descends upon the town from the surrounding hills” is made “insignificant compared to the pollution entering the community from the spiritual past” (Johnston 2006:136), and there is no clue in the play (even until the very end) that Dr. Stockmann will ever discuss the pollution problem again.

Dr. Stockmann launches a series of attacks on the spirituality of the townsfolk in his public speech. First he attacks the “stupidity of the authorities” (354), using his brother Peter Stockmann as a vivid example, that their ways of thinking are “those relics of a dying world”; then he proceeds on to attack the solid majority, exposing them as “the most insidious enemy of truth and freedom” (355) and exalting the minority as truth masters in the vanguard (356); finally, after his illustration of the reflexivity of modernity, i.e. how an ordinary, established

truth lives and then perishes, he concludes that “broad-mindedness is almost exactly the same as morality” (360).

When speaking of the narrow-minded majority, interestingly, Dr. Stockmann uses two metaphors. One is “hybrid animal” and the other is “old women/wives”. It is no coincidence that here animals and women are put alongside each other, for this is how Dr. Stockmann perceives the two species from a male-oriented perspective. In his public speech, the doctor makes such a comparison between “a thoroughbred and a hybrid animal”:

“What about the difference between a thoroughbred and a hybrid animal? Look at your ordinary barnyard fowl. What meat can you get off such scrawny bones? Not much! And what kind of eggs does it lay? Any competent crow or raven could furnish about the same. But now take a purebred Spanish or Japanese hen, or a fine pheasant or turkey—there’s where you’ll see the difference! Or again with dogs, a family we humans so closely resemble. First, think of an ordinary stray dog—I mean, one of those nasty, ragged, common mongrels that run around the streets, and spatter the walls of houses. Then set that stray alongside a poodle whose pedigree runs back through a distinguished line to a house where fine food and harmonious voices and music have been the rule. Don’t you think the mentality of that poodle will have developed quite differently from the stray’s? Of course it will! A young pedigreed poodle can be raised by its trainer to perform the most incredible feats. Your common mongrel couldn’t learn such things if you stood him on his head.” (359)

In traditional western philosophy, the human/animal division is justified by the dualistic polarization between reason and sensation. In her book *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993), Val Plumwood expounds on Descartes’ “main strategy for achieving hyperseparation and elimination of human/animal and mind/body continuity”, which is “to reinterpret the notion of ‘thinking’ in such a way that those mental activities which involve the body, such as sense perception, and which appear to bridge the mind/body and human/animal division, become instead, via their reinterpretation in terms of ‘consciousness’, purely mental operations, ‘modes of thinking’”. Animals, on the contrary, “have only the lower or bodily grade of sensation” and therefore “lead their lives merely by physical movements” (Plumwood 1993:115).

With in mind this division between human and animal as one of the fundamental notions of western philosophy, Dr. Stockmann is ahead of the majority in that he realizes that human being is no different from animal: “Oh yes, brother, we *are* animals! We’re the best animals, all in all, that any man could wish for.” (Fjelde 1978:359) By “the best” the doctor refers to man’s thinking ability, and through this assertion he bridges the mind with the body. Also, the analogy Dr. Stockmann draws between human and animal is fairly justifiable: a man without

a distinguished mind and free thinking will not be able to produce distinguished ideas or perform distinguished feats. However, in this analogy he still violates the doctrines of ecological thinking in that he reduces animals to mere functionality. In his speech Dr. Stockmann mainly focuses on two differences between a thoroughbred and a hybrid animal. The first is in terms of productivity: he measures the worth of domestic fowls by the amount of meat and the kind of eggs they can produce, and in this sense the Spanish or Japanese hen becomes much more superior to the barnyard fowl or crow and raven. The second distinction Dr. Stockmann draws between a thoroughbred and a hybrid animal seemingly has something to do with mentality. However, for a poodle the purpose of having a distinguished mentality is to serve and amuse its trainer, i.e. “perform the most incredible feats”, while the lack of such mentality on the part of the mongrel only means that it is not able to stand on its head. Thus while Dr. Stockmann acknowledges the bridge between human and animal, he reinforces the idea that animals serve mankind and their worth is measured in relation to their specific use to mankind.

The second metaphor Dr. Stockmann uses to refer to the mediocre majority is “old wives/women”. At the end of Act 3, when Katherine tries to defend her husband, saying “this is shameful. Why do they all turn against you, these men?” Dr. Stockmann answers “furiously”, “I’ll tell you why! It’s because all the so-called men in this town are old women—like you. They all just think of their families and never the common good.” (344) Also, when he denies corruption as a sort of by-product of culture in his public speech, he describes that line of thinking as “old wives’ tale” (361). It seems that in Dr. Stockmann’s opinion women’s role is to take care of home while the job of taking care of society is exclusive to men: “Balderdash, Katherine! Go home and take care of your house and let me take care of society.” (341) What I find rather ironic about this accusation of Dr. Stockmann is that he takes the male/female division of labor for granted—in fact he is part of the force that has not only inherited but also reinforced this system—while severely criticizing it.

As Barbara Rogers has pointed out in her book *The Domestication of Women: Discrimination in Developing Societies*, the domestication of women in western industrial society is rationalized by “beliefs about the central importance of women’s role in child-rearing, and the imputed operation of a maternal ‘instinct’”. Alongside this belief is “the assumption that all men are ‘naturally’ incapable of nurturing children and, to compensate, are ‘naturally’ stronger than all women, who are deemed incapable of heavy work”. The

housework that women perform “is seen as somehow ‘not-work’, or at best very light work” (Rogers 2005:7). This “natural” gender difference is used in turn to support the male ideology in western society “which seeks to exclude women from many important areas of modern life” (11).

Throughout the play, Dr. Stockmann has treated Katherine as an instrument who implements all household tasks while he himself is capable of nothing—he cannot even remember the maid’s name. She is praised by her husband as a woman who is good at saving and very “shrewd” in managing the house (Fjelde 1978:378). In other words, her worth is measured by Dr. Stockmann in the same way as animals, i.e. by the kind of service they can render to men. As has been pointed out by Rogers, “the social class and lifestyle of a family are determined mainly by the husband’s occupation outside the family and he is expected to control what happens inside it” (Rogers 2005:11), which is accurately reflected in the play. Dr. Stockmann is of the idea that “a man of science ought to live with a little style” (Fjelde 1978:289). In addition, as he has been “shut out” up in the north “for so long”, he cannot “deny [himself] the gratification of having people in” (290). Due to such demands of her husband, Katherine tries her best to make the home as cozy as possible. Ibsen hints in the play that this is by no means a simple task for Katherine: when the mayor lightly blames his brother for allowing himself such luxuries, Dr. Stockmann replies, “Oh yes. I can allow myself that. Katherine says I’m now earning almost as much as we spend” (289), which implies how difficult it is for Katherine to make the ends meet—in all probability with Petra’s financial assistance as it has been described in Act 1 how hard she works every day. Katherine does everything as her husband has required. She arranges meals in a way which perfectly meets her husband’s “precise” “regular mealtime” (283)—with roast beef and toddy, and she makes the room cozy with the new tablecloth and lampshade (which she buys out of savings) to suit her husband’s taste (289). She does it with willingness when Dr. Stockmann bids her to mend the trousers (367) and “scour the floors” (376).

From all public and professional occasions, which are the “important areas of modern life”, Katherine is excluded just as all other women in that period of western history. In Act 2 when Mayor Stockmann intends to discuss with Dr. Stockmann the report he has sent him, Katherine takes the hint and motions Petra to retreat with her into the room. In Act 3 when Katherine comes to Hovstad’s office to fetch Dr. Stockmann, the latter expresses his aversion by exclaiming “Katherine, what the deuce are you doing here” (340). In fact not only

Katherine's, but also Petra's presence at the office is seen as improper. Ironically, it is only after Katherine proclaims herself as a "man" who stands with Dr. Stockmann at the end of Act 3 that her presence in public in Act 4 is justified. I find Dr. Stockmann's disregard for Katherine's intelligence and integrity most evident in the scene at the end of Act 1. When both Hovstad and Billing are flattering Dr. Stockmann for his discovery, suggesting some sort of ceremony as an homage, the doctor replies, "No, my dear friends, please—forget all this nonsense. I don't want any ceremonies. And if the board tries to vote me a raise in salary, I won't take it. Katherine, I'm telling you this—I won't take it." (301) I find it rather disturbing that Dr. Stockmann has to repeat "I won't take it" emphatically to Katherine, as if she were the kind that *will* take it. By this "telling you" Dr. Stockmann arbitrarily differentiates himself as a man of moral integrity from Katherine as a woman obsessed only with material gain.

The real Katherine, however, is a woman of great sense. One fact that deserves attention about Katherine is that she is a motherless woman: she is only fostered by Morten Kiil, which puts her in the same line as Nora Helmer, Rebecca West, Hedda Gabler, etc. In her article "Ibsen's Motherless Women", Ellen Hartmann argues that "growing up without a mother might explain why [Ibsen's] female characters are such strong, independent, and contradictory personalities" as "having no maternal model may make it easier for women to choose their own way, to transcend the prescribed rules for women of their time, to emancipate themselves, to struggle for equality and independence, to be different and do things that 'people don't do'" (Hartmann 2004:81). Though Katherine may not be as strong as the more prominent woman characters such as Nora and Hedda, she has displayed her power of understanding and intelligence many times in the play. In Act 2 although she leaves the men alone in the living room to discuss business, she and Petra follow the matter closely inside the adjacent room. When Petra flings the door open and makes an angry appearance, which greatly annoys Mayor Stockmann, Katherine displays her tact by using loudness as an excuse. More importantly, compared with Dr. Stockmann, Katherine has a much clearer idea about what kind of person her husband is, as well as what kind of people her husband's so-called "friends" are, which is demonstrated in a comical way in Act 3 when she comes to Hovstad's office to fetch her husband. A muddle-headed person, Dr. Stockmann fails to see not only his own muddle-headedness but also the hypocrisy of the people around him. When he blindly indulges himself in the sense of "security" and "happiness" with "the solid majority behind [him]", Katherine hits the nail on the head when she counters "Yes, that's the trouble, exactly. An ugly lot like that behind you" (Fjelde 1978:341). In the next moment, the comical betrayal

on the part of Hovstad, Billing and Aslaksen precisely proves Katherine's assertion that those are "an ugly lot" and the doctor is "so very easy to fool" (341). In this way, as Joan Templeton terms it, Dr. Stockmann is "forced to moderate his poor opinion of his spouse's extra-mural capacities" (Templeton 1999:165).

The reason why Katherine changes her attitude at the end of Act 3, in Templeton's opinion, is because "witnessing the power clique betray her husband" arouses in her "her own buried integrity" so that "her responsibilities as a mother fade"(165). Indignation at the ugly betrayal on the part of the so-called liberals may be the direct reason for her change of attitude. However, in my opinion Katherine is never a woman without integrity. It is more that she purposefully and tactfully hides that integrity to cater to the gender role prescribed for women. Thus when she proclaims that she will show her husband "an old woman who can be a man for once" (Fjelde 1978:345) she is not forgetting or rejecting her family responsibilities as mother and wife, but rather rebelling against the whole discriminating social system which regards women as incapable of integrity. She is determined to prioritize integrity to everything else, and with this change of priority her "responsibilities as a mother fade". In that sense Katherine has embarked on a journey of self-emancipation and self-realization, although in a much less extreme way than Nora or Hedda.

As a woman whose very existence is dependent on her husband, Katherine's self-emancipation cannot be said to be thorough. Through her rebellion she proves more her intelligence and the ability to exercise judgment, i.e. proves herself as a woman of independent thinking and integrity, than a woman of independent means. She chooses to side with her husband and continues to perform her family duties such as mending trousers and scouring the floor. The will to stay at home, however, cannot be regarded as cowardice on the part of Katherine. The reason is twofold: first, as a middle-aged woman without any professional education, Katherine is aware of the impossibility of her ever supporting herself. In this respect her daughter Petra can be regarded as a continuation of Katherine, through whom a thorough search for independence is carried out, as has been expressed by Katherine: "Yes, it's easy for *you* to talk. If need be, you can stand on your own feet" (322). The second reason why Katherine chooses to stay beside her husband is she is a woman who values interdependence more than independence. In her book *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature* (1993), Greta Claire Gaard refers to Nancy Chodorow's and Coral Gilligan's studies which "have repeatedly shown" that "a sense of self as separate is more common in men, while an

interconnected sense of self is more common in women” (Gaard 1993:2). Gaard reasons that conceptions of self are “the foundation for two different ethical systems: the separate self often operates on the basis of an ethic of rights or justice, while the interconnected self makes moral decisions on the basis of an ethic of responsibilities or care” (2). Throughout the play Dr. Stockmann’s “sense of self as separate” can be seen as getting ever stronger. He separates himself from the rest of the society by distinguishing himself as the “minority” who “is always right” (Fjelde 1978:356). In similar ways he separates himself from the rest of his family by arguing “my family concerns no one else but me”—in the very presence of both his wife and his children. At one point the doctor’s desire for separation gets so strong that he even wishes to live in “some primeval forest, or a little South Sea island” where he could be utterly alone (369). Katherine, on the other hand, values and cherishes “the happiness [they’ll] share” as a family and has more than once beseeched Dr. Stockmann to think about his “duty to those who depend on [him]” (322). The most ironic contrast between the “separated self” and the “interconnected self” takes place at the very end of the play when Dr. Stockmann gathers all the family members around him and announces his greatest discovery: “And the essence of it, you see, is that the strongest man in the world is the one who stands most alone” (386). It is interesting to see the different reactions from Katherine and Petra: as a female version of Dr. Stockmann, Petra shows her admiration for this independent self by “buoyantly gripping [her father’s] hands, while Katherine resignedly makes her disapproval of this separate self by “smiling and shaking her head” (386).

By no means can we say Ibsen is an eco-feminist—even the term “feminist” can only be used with a certain degree of caution. In *An Enemy of the People*, however, Ibsen does display traces of eco-feminist thinking by relating woman with nature in more than one place throughout the play. In the above paragraphs I have discussed how both animals and women are reduced to the status of servants in the patriarchal society. To put in Gaard’s terms, they are “the used”, the “ideological icons to justify and preserve the superiority of men” (Gaard 1993:61). The most manifest male joint oppression of woman and nature, however, is to be found near the end of the play when Morten Kiil attempts to trade Katherine’s provisions for his so-called conscience.

As her foster father, Morten Kiil is to a certain extent obliged to provide for Katherine and her children, and as the owner of one of the biggest tanneries in the town he is more than capable to make some savings for his foster-daughter. However, the moment he learns that the



worst pollution comes down from his tannery, his immediate reaction is to trade Katherine's happiness for washing away this "disgrace on [his] head" (Fjelde 1978:377). It is interesting to see how his attitude toward the pollution changes over time. When he first hears from Petra about the water problem without knowing the pollution actually comes from his tannery, he looks at the story as "the best" "monkeyshine" Dr. Stockmann has "pulled off yet" (304) which he can use as a weapon against the town authorities who have "hounded" him out of the town council in a humiliating way back in the old days. He even uses the working-class poor as a tool to win Dr. Stockmann's support: "Make monkeys out of them, I say. If you can work it so the mayor and his cronies get their ears pinned back, right then and there I'll donate a hundred crowns to the poor" (304-305). He also promises to "remember the poor next Christmas with a good fifty crowns" (305). Later, however, when he learns the true nature of the pollution, that it actually comes from his tannery, he immediately turns against the doctor and threatens him with the cold remark "that could cost you plenty, Stockmann" (363). His conscience is not disturbed as long as the pollution has nothing to do with him, which exposes the hypocrisy of the ethics of the capitalists. Determined to get his grace back, he sets out to buy out the baths shares with Katherine's money as bargaining chips with Dr. Stockmann, which dramatically reminds us of those indulgence purchasers in western religious history who wish to exchange money with full or partial remission of temporal punishment. Morten Kiil's negotiating techniques can be described as either beguiling or intimidating with money and the working-class and his foster-daughter are only convenient tools for him to achieve his purpose. For him everything is measured in capital and can be sold or bought, whether it is his personal grace, his foster-daughter's happiness, or the poor's well-being.

"MORTEN KIIL. Do you know where I got the money to buy these shares? No, you couldn't know that, but now I'll tell you. It's the money Katherine and Petra and the boys will be inheriting from me someday. Yes, because, despite everything, I've laid a little aside, you see.

DR. STOCKMANN (*flaring up*). So you went out and spent Katherine's money for *those*!

MORTEN KIIL. Yes, now the money's completely bound up in the baths. And now I'll see if you're really so ranting, raging mad after all, Stockmann. Any more about bugs and such coming down from my tannery, it'll be exactly the same as cutting great strips out of Katherine's skin, and Petra's, and the boys'. But no normal man would do that—he'd *have* to be mad.

DR. STOCKMANN (*pacing back and forth*). Yes, but I *am* a madman; I *am* a madman!

MORTEN KIIL. But you're not so utterly out of your senses as to flay your wife and children.

DR. STOCKMANN. (*stopping in front of him*). Why couldn't you talk with me before you went out and bought all that worthless paper?" (377-378)

In the above dialogue between the two men who are the only men in the world on whom Katherine is dependent, both explicitly prioritize their life principle to Katherine's happiness: just as Morten Kiil values his Christian grace more than anything else, Dr. Stockmann honors

scientific facts and non-conformity as the highest virtue. It is not without significance that Morten Kiil uses the metaphor of skinning, which relates Katherine with the animals his workers flay up in the tannery. Ironically, by making such a threat Morten Kiil is intending to take advantage of Dr. Stockmann's sense of responsibility for Katherine; similarly, Dr. Stockmann is of the idea that Morten Kiil should undertake the financial responsibility for Katherine's future. Both shun the responsibility while expecting the other to be "not so utterly out of senses"; thus Katherine's position as a used, dispensable woman to the two most important men in her life is exposed to criticism. Just as the tragedy of the baths is a result of the male-dominating reductionist economic system, Katherine's passive suffering is the outcome of male selfishness and hypocrisy.

Although *An Enemy of the People* was written in the nineteenth century when ecological crisis barely came to the surface, its far-reaching significance is not only beyond times but also beyond national borders. In today's China where I come from, its significance can be more readily seen than ever. The performance of the play by China's Central Experimental Theater (now China National Theater) in 1996 was described by Wang Ning, a prominent Chinese Ibsen scholar, as "a huge success". Wang is of the opinion that "while on the one hand, the brisk development of the Chinese economy has largely raised the people's living standards and improved their material life, it has, on the other, exhausted natural resources and at times compromised human ethics". He criticizes in the same article the way many Chinese government officials and businessmen "go to great lengths to develop the economy ... without adopting any effective policies to protect their living environments". Ibsen thus links the realities of nineteenth-century Norway with China in the 1990s, and in this sense, Wang comments, Ibsen deserves to be "regarded as a prophet or hero anticipating the future need for environmental protection in contemporary China" (Wang 2011:204). In 2005 a new performance of *An Enemy of the People* was brought onto the Chinese stage, which brought ecological issues to the center for critical examination. Compared with ten years ago, the environmental issues in China have but grown into a greater concern for intellectuals despite the doubled size of the Chinese economy. In such context the performance was meant to arouse local consciousness of environmental protection by bringing pertinent current issues, i.e. the pollution of the Huai River, onto the stage. According to Xie Zhenhua, head of Ministry of Environmental Protection in China, the current pollution in Huai River is substantial and half of the river is below lowest standard in China. In the performance by the students of Nanjing Arts Institute, the main characters who are several college students come

back to their hometown only to be shocked by the serious pollution in the Huai River. Seeing this they are determined to stage the Ibsen play *An Enemy of the People* to awaken local awareness of environmental protection. However, contrary to their expectation, they meet strong opposition from almost every circle in town, especially from their family members. What I find particularly significant about this performance is that many issues which are peculiar to the Chinese society are brought under examination, such as the absolute authority enjoyed by government officials and profit-oriented collusion between the government and big businesses. Wang observes that “the productions of *An Enemy of the People* over different periods in China have always explicitly referred to current social issues” (205), and that is exactly the reason why both productions have been met with enthusiastic reception on the part of Chinese audience. As the country’s economy continues to grow with an incredible speed, it is foreseeable that many more environmental issues will have to be faced and dealt with in the future, and it is for certain that *An Enemy of the People* will continue to enjoy its popularity as a play so very pertinent to the Chinese society.

### 3 *The Wild Duck*

*The Wild Duck* (1884) marks a transition in the writing career of Ibsen. In September 1884 Ibsen wrote a letter to his Danish publisher Frederik Hegel, along with which he sent the manuscript of his new play *The Wild Duck*. In this letter Ibsen wrote: “In some ways this new play occupies a position by itself among my dramatic works; in its method it differs in several respects from my former ones. But I shall say no more on this subject at present. I hope that my critics will discover the points alluded to; they will, at any rate, find several things to squabble about and several things to interpret. I also think that *The Wild Duck* may very probably entice some of our young dramatists into new paths; and this I consider a result to be desired.” (Ibsen, 1905:384)

The “method” Ibsen referred to in this letter, J. L. Styan argues, is exactly “his conscious use of symbolism” (Styan 2002:268)—although Ibsen himself might not have termed it so. Many scholars have observed in Ibsen this inward turn from *The Wild Duck* onward, his endeavor to “[give] voice to what dimly moves in men’s consciousness” as Lee M. Hollander terms it (Ibsen 1910:36). Therefore, although in *The Wild Duck* we have even richer images related to nature than in its predecessors *Pillars of Society* and *An Enemy of the People*—the name of the play itself, i.e. the wild duck, is an image of nature, they are less significant in their social implications than in their projections into the psychological realm of the main characters. And social themes which are obsessive in previous plays, such as community ethics, business corruption, hypocrisy, etc., are less evident in Ibsen’s later plays, replaced by more inwardly themes such as “questions of knowledge, truth, certainty, doubt, trust, loneliness, community and the loss of community, love and marriage”, etc., as Toril Moi has summarized (Moi 2001:30).

As Ibsen himself has predicted, critics will find “several things to squabble about and several things to interpret” about the play; in fact, the play is considered one of the most puzzling one among all Ibsen’s plays and continues to baffle newer generations of Ibsen scholars. In her master thesis about modern dramatic elements in Ibsen’s plays, Milica Vasic-Jovanovic summarizes how different generations of scholars have argued about the major theme of the play, i.e. what the play is about. For example, Elias Bredsdorff is in a dilemma as to “whether the play is fundamentally about idealism, or about the desire to rule, to have power” as he “perceives the protagonists as representatives of social classes” (Vasic-

Jovanovic 2007:40), while Bjørn Killingmo interprets the play in the line of “crime and punishment”, arguing that “unconscious hatred and revenge are the deepest moving forces of the play” (41). Regarding the symbolic meaning of the wild duck and the attic, there is even more heated discussion among scholars, so much so that “critics agree that it is difficult to interpret the meaning of the symbols the way the writer imagined it” (48), especially when open-ended multiple meanings are a common feature of modern dramatic masterpieces. Moi even comes to the conclusion that the wild duck is a confusing, misleading and thus indecipherable symbol, which makes her less interested in decoding it than in how critics have excessively imposed meaning on it (49). In my opinion, despite the possible confusion the wild duck is still the central symbol of the play, related with its very meaning, and I will use the eco-feminist approach to analyze the relation between the natural images and the psychology of the characters, which I believe would shed new light on the meaning of the play.

The whole story of *The Wild Duck* starts from the works up at the Hoidal forests. Old Ekdal and Old Werle used to be business partners in the timber business who were once “so close” to each other (Fjelde 1978:404). A proud lieutenant, Old Ekdal used to be “a tremendous hunter” (423) in the “free life of the moors and forests, among the animals and birds (424) whose greatest achievement is shooting nine bears in all. However, on account of the crime he committed supposedly alone, the “illegal logging on state property” (405), he became the scapegoat for Old Werle and was cast into prison with all that incurred shame and disgrace. Old Ekdal was so destroyed by that blow that after almost two decades when Gregers invites him to return with him to the works where he believes lie “the very roots” of the old man’s soul which can “stir [his] blood and make [him] happy”, Old Ekdal refuses the invitation merely with this desperate declaration “I have nothing, nothing at all—!” (424) What mystifies the whole encounter scene between Old Ekdal and Gregers, however, is the old man’s mystic fear for the woods.

“GREGERS (*looking sympathetically at him*). And now you hunt no more.

EKDAL. Oh, I wouldn’t say *that*, boy. Get some hunting in now and then. Yes, but not that kind there. The woods, you see—the woods, the woods—(*Drinks.*) How do the woods look up there?

GREGERS. Not so fine as in your time. They’ve been cut into heavily.

EKDAL. Cut into? (*More quietly, as if in fear.*) It’s a dangerous business, that. It catches up with you. The woods take revenge.” (423-424)

Note that Old Ekdal has great difficulty in speaking out the words “the woods”. He stammers a few times and has to drink to overcome the anxiety when asking about the current condition of the woods, and after he learns that the woods have been “cut into heavily”, he becomes quite, “as if in fear”, murmuring words of prophecy, “the woods take revenge”. This mystic fear for the woods of Old Ekdal is repeated when in the final act Hedvig’s body is carried into the living room: “The woods take revenge. But I’m not scared, even so. (*He goes into the loft, shutting the door after him.*)” (488)

What is implied by the mysterious woods talk is open to discussion. From an eco-feminist perspective I quite agree with Joan Carr’s interpretation of the symbolic meaning of the woods in her article “‘The Forest’s Revenge’: Subconscious Motivations in *The Wild Duck*”. In this article, Carr eloquently points out that “through the identification of the attic with the Hoidal forest ... we can see another dimension in [the play’s] symbolism, one we might call archetypal rather than psychological” (Carr 1977:853). She considers it significant that Old Ekdal “intuits” that the crime of illegal logging on state property “involves more than a conflict between the Ekdals and the Werles” (853). What I find supportive of this argument is that in spite of the apparent betrayal on the part of Old Werle, Old Ekdal is far more obsessed with the “dangerous” timber business and its “revenge” than with Old Werle’s act of betrayal. In fact he believes it is the forest, rather than Old Ekdal, which has caused his current misery. Therefore on an archetypal level, argues Carr, “Old Ekdal and Old Werle were somehow accomplices in the crime of defiling nature” (853). This crime committed against nature, as far as I see it, is an important clue to understanding the later situations of both accomplices. As for Old Werle, although I do not find Carr’s opinion convincing that “this collusion in a crime of mythic dimensions” is one reason why his actual crime in legal terms “is never definitely established” (853), I agree that his exploitation of nature foreshadows on a metaphysical level his later exploitation of other human beings. Just as he once reduced the sacred, ancient forest to mere material profit and personal gain, he exploited in his later life numerous other human beings, both men and women, to become this tyrant, almighty figure in the play. As for Old Ekdal, on the other hand, the loft is a cozy but ironic illusion of the great forest which revenged upon him by taking away all his reputation and glory. This illusory domination of nature created by Old Ekdal in the loft, in my opinion, is of the same kind as the illusory domination of Gina and Hedvig created by Hjalmar, thus relating nature with woman. This I will elaborate on later in this chapter.

Although Old Werle and Old Ekdal meet with different fates after the Hoidal crime, what is common for the two old accomplices is that they have lost for good “that cool, sweeping breeze, that free life of the moors and forests, among the animals and the birds” (Fjelde 1978:424). Instead, they are in a way forced to “live in the middle of a stuffy city, cooped up in these four walls” (424), no matter whether it is the Werles’ grand mansion or the Ekdal’s shabby house. Symbolically, this exactly mirrors the progress of so-called human civilization. In the nineteenth century when Ibsen wrote the play, Europeans for the first time tasted the fruit of industrial revolution and believed that affluence and happiness of mankind could be achieved by exploitation of nature, a belief many of Ibsen’s characters share, such as Karsten Bernick, Halvard Solness, John Gabriel Borkman, etc. However, a century after the play was written, although industrial development has brought about economical prosperity in certain regions on the planet, human beings are more and more cramped in tall buildings in big cities not only for room and space, but also for fresh air and sunshine.

Carr calls Old Werle and Old Ekdal’s colluded crime against nature “the first and original antecedent”, bringing it to the height of the “original sin” in a biblical sense. She argues that the imagery of the “cut into” forests suggests “a fall from grace and man’s expulsion from Eden” (Carr 1977:854). Both Old Werle and Old Ekdal were expelled from the free forest life and ended up pent up in the stuffy city; both have suffered from disgrace though of a different sort: Old Ekdal bears the shame of a criminal record, “hunting” in the shabby loft in pathetic emulation of the glorious days of his past, while Old Werle suffered from, in addition to his gradual blindness, his expedient marriage with a woman whom he was not emotionally attached with and who relentlessly preached about his sins to their son, turning him against his own father. Carr is also of the opinion that Old Werle “played the role both of Adam and Cain in his youth, expropriating first nature to his own egotistic desires and then, repeatedly, his fellow man” (854). To this I would like to add my own understanding. In my opinion, not only Old Werle played the role of Adam and Cain, but also Old Ekdal played the role of Eve. In the same way Old Werle used Old Ekdal as his scapegoat for the sin they committed together against the forest, when God questions Adam about his eating the forbidden fruit, Adam denies responsibility and blames his woman for the mutual sin: “And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest *to be* with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat” (Carroll & Prickett 1997: 3-4). And just as Old Ekdal was thereof thrown into disgrace and poverty, a position submissive to and dependent upon Old Werle, so becomes woman condemned by God to a submissive role to man: “Unto the woman He said, I will greatly

multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire *shall be* to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” (4). In this way man gets not only knowledge from the forbidden fruit (exploitation of nature) but also domination of woman (exploitation of woman). In the play, while Old Werle accumulated great material wealth from the Hoidal works and unceasingly took one woman after another under his rule after his colluded sin with Old Ekdal, the latter could only find comfort and joy in the illusory forest in the dim attic, which to a certain extent confirms the eco-feminist assertion that woman is closer to nature.

Old Werle and Old Ekdal’s mutual sin against nature thus understood in the archetypal structure, I find it striking to come to the conclusion that Hedvig actually plays the role of Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. An innocent, good-natured child, Hedvig bears the cross passed down to her both by the Werles and the Ekdals. From Old Werle she has inherited blindness, a bodily, hereditary suffering which we can find counterparts in some of Ibsen’s other plays. She is also doomed to suffer the shame of illegitimacy and never will be openly acknowledged by his biological father. From the side of the Ekdals she is deprived of the normal careless, happy childhood. We learn from implications in the play that for economical reasons Hedvig has stopped school although the supposed reason is for not hurting her eyes. Despite her blind faith in her father’s promise to tutor her himself, it is fairly clear that Hjalmar will never find time for that. Unlike normal children of her age who have fun in many outdoor activities with other children, Hedvig is confined in the small house under the supervision of both parents. Her only amusement is to be found in the loft with “big cupboards with books in them”, the broken “huge clock with figures that are supposed to come out”, the “old watercolor set” (Fjelde 1978:436), etc., and the wild duck with which she finds immense identification. A happy child by nature, she likes things to be pleasant at home; therefore she develops at an early age the skill to cheer up the mood of her father by expressing her love and admiration for him. Yet her genuine love for her “dearest daddy” (419) is immediately rejected with disgust by Hjalmar when he learns her true origin.

As Carr terms it, she is cast out of the Eden both of Old Werle—the actual Hoidal works with its material value, and of Old Ekdal—the “free life of the moors and forests” with its spiritual value (Carr 1977:854). With the loss of Eden Hedvig is also doomed to lose fatherly love on both sides, just as mankind has lost the favor of God ever since their original sin.



Although in the play Hjalmar has repeatedly claimed “how inexpressibly [he] loved that child” (Fjelde 1978:485), in my opinion he has never loved her in a fatherly way. Rather, he is using Hedvig’s blind faith in him as a kind of psychological compensation. Near the end of Act 5 Hjalmar makes this confession to Gregers that he is aware that he is no more than a “fool”. He has never completely believed in his talent for inventing something in photography; therefore he needs Hedvig’s belief in him “with all the power and force of a child’s mind” to keep himself “blissfully happy” in that illusion (484). His fondness of Hedvig is not based on her being his daughter or her pureness and innocence, but based on her incessant expression of love for him, her “flying to meet [him] with those sweet, fluttering eyes” (485).

We can very well say throughout the play Hjalmar has been testing Hedvig’s unconditional love to him, of which we get the first example in Act 2 when Hjalmar comes home from the humiliating banquet at the Werles. Incapable of joining the conversations of the high-class folks and embarrassed by the unexpected encounter with his father, Hjalmar felt troubled and in this distraction forgot his promise to bring Hedvig treats. When he gets home he is met with the expectant nagging of his daughter who believes so firmly in the promised treats, just as she believes in her daddy’s great talent for invention. Failing to produce the treats, Hjalmar tries to cover up his forgetfulness by blaming Hedvig’s doting on sugar candy. Seeing Hedvig swallowing her tears (note the effort she makes not to upset her father), which in his eyes means insufficient love for him, Hjalmar enters a fitful anger and starts to whine about the breadwinner’s duty to remember things and the sour faces he immediately meets if he forgets even the tiniest detail. Noticing her father’s anger, Hedvig quickly overcomes her disappointment because for her her own happiness is a far lesser matter than her father’s. She offers to bring Hjalmar his flute, which gets refused, and then the “lovely, cool beer” (419). She proves her unchanging love by overcoming her own dissatisfaction and trying her best instead to please her father, and all of a sudden Hjalmar is overwhelmed by a combination of joy and guilt, following which is the dramatic scene of father and daughter hugging each other and expressing mutual fondness. We can well imagine that this kind of scene happens now and then in the Ekdal household; as Carr describes it, Hjalmar must have often teased Hedvig to “make her display love before he rewards her with a show of affection” (Carr 1977:849).

On the side of Old Werle, it is pretty clear that he has never had any fatherly love for Hedvig. Although he claims he has done everything he could, and although it is a matter of

fact that he is the one who provides for the Ekdal family all along, it is purely out of a deep sense of guilt as well as the need to protect his own reputation rather than pity or love. Those disgracing matters with the Ekdal family have “given [him] gray hair before [his] time” (Fjelde 1978:405); therefore he has to do something to ease his sick conscience and appear just in view of public opinion. He views the whole matter in economical terms, as if he was paying a sort of debt, hence his business-like remark “those people have already cost me enough expenses” (406). As a reader/spectator there is no way for us to know for sure who is Hedvig’s real father, as Gina has expressly declared that she does not know, but what is for certain is that Hedvig is in a strict sense fatherless, while she has to shoulder the sins passed down to her from both her biological father and her adoptive father. Therefore in the archetypal structure of the play she has to be sacrificed to cleanse the sins of both her “fathers”. There is something prophetic when Old Ekdal announces for the first time that “the woods take revenge”, which he repeats at the sight of Hedvig’s corpse. Carr remarks that this remark “is the kind of prophetic statement traditionally ascribed to the fool in myths and legends” and Old Ekdal “recognizes that the child is the scapegoat for her elders” (Carr 1977:854), with which I quite agree. It seems that by Old Werle and Old Ekdal’s illegal logging of the woods, a sin against nature, Ibsen is alluding to the original sin, and Hedvig is the Christ figure in the play it is inevitable that who will pay for the sin of all the elders involved, as Dr. Relling puts it near the end of the play, “nobody’s ever going to sell me the idea that this was an accident” (Fjelde 1978:489). Hedvig’s death naturally reminds me of the following lines in the *Bible*:

“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

...

For it, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.” (Carroll & Prickett 1997: 194)

Hedvig’s death reconciles Hjalmar both with his own family, Old Werle, and with himself. What is imaginable is that he will reaccept Gina as his capable wife who will continue to manage the home as usual; he will also from then on draw a monthly income from Old Werle’s office, as Hedvig has promised before her suicide, “you know I’ll give all the money to you and Mother” (Fjelde 1978:468); and he will gradually overcome the grief of losing Hedvig who “will be nothing more to him than a pretty theme for recitations” (490), and continue his old way of life which consists of the “hunting” entertainment in the attic and the self-appreciative pondering over his great invention.

Echoing Old Ekdal's mysterious remark "the woods take revenge" is Molvik's equally mysterious remarks "the child isn't dead; she sleepeth" and "praise be to God. Dust to dust, dust to dust—". Throughout the entire play Molvik rarely makes any appearance, and whenever he does appear on the stage he is mostly in a drunk state. But in his final appearance Ibsen makes him sober-minded and assigns him the same prophetic role as Old Ekdal. Old Ekdal's statement "the woods take revenge" is only the first part of the message, which is completed by Molvik's second part of the message. Note that he uses "sleepeth" instead of "sleeps", which corresponds perfectly to "the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth" (Carroll & Prickett 1997: 51) in the *Bible*. And by "dust to dust" it seems to be implied that Hedvig is brought back to the "dust" in the Eden where she originally comes from and will henceforth sleep peacefully there, nurturing grass and flowers which will grow on her grave.

In the above paragraphs I have analyzed the play in an archetypal pattern, which can be summarized as follows: Old Werle and Old Ekdal committed the original sin against nature and were expelled from the Edenic Hoidal woods; the woods take revenge and claim the life of Hedvig who bears the cross of both families. Her death pays for the sins the two families have committed and reconciles the Hjalmar with the Werles, Gina, and himself, and Hedvig is returned to nature in her eternal sleep. Throughout the play there seems to be suggested a mysterious connection between Hedvig and nature, which can not only be seen on the archetypal level but also on a psychological level.

In her discussion Moi has pointed out the totally different perceptions of the loft by Hedvig and Gregers. She calls "the encounter between Gregers and Hedvig" "an encounter between two different philosophical worlds" (Moi 2001:30). This encounter happens at the beginning of Act 3 when Gregers comes back from his morning walk after he messed his rented room up at the Ekdals the very first day after he has moved in. As a man obsessed with truth and ideal, Gregers views everything in a matter-of-fact way. Therefore the first impression he gets from the loft is that "it looks so very different by daylight than it did by moonlight", a purely physical, matter-of-fact observation. To this Hedvig answers with much excitement, "Yes, it can change so completely. In the morning it looks different from in the afternoon; and when it rains it's different from when it's clear". She elaborates on Gregers' simple, casual observation with three full sentences, trying to convey to Gregers her unique perceptions of the loft.

During their following conversation, Hedvig continues to talk excitedly about her personal experiences in the loft, about the “many wonderful things” such as the “big cupboards with books in them”, the “huge clock with figures that are supposed to come out”, the “old watercolor set”, “the flying Dutchman”, etc. However, Gregers’ replies are by no means enthusiastic. He perceives everything only in concrete terms. For example, when Hedvig was talking about the amazing clock with figures which are supposed to come out but do not, Gregers’ comment was cold and derogative, “even time doesn’t exist in there”. And instead of asking about what Hedvig reads from the books in the loft, he is more interested in “where did all these rare things come from” (Fjelde 1978:436). As Moi puts it, Gregers is only interested in the “certain knowledge about the true nature of the loft”, which to Hedvig is completely “incomprehensible” (Moi 2001:30). Therefore while Hedvig was so absorbed in her enthusiastic talks about the wonderful loft world, Gregers breaks her thought up and asks the following practical question: “Listen, tell me—when you sit in there and look at pictures, don’t you ever want to go out and see the real world all for yourself?” (Fjelde 1978:437)

It seems although Gregers presents himself as a man believing in ideals, compared with Hedvig he is far more down-to-earth and far less idealistic in his attitude toward the loft. As a reader/spectator we know before their encounter that Gregers and Hedvig have a special connection between them since they are in fact half-brother and half-sister, and it is not entirely a coincidence that both of them come to the same conclusion that everything in the attic, especially the wild duck, is “in the depths of the sea” (438). However, despite the exactly same diction, what they mean by “the depths of the sea” is entirely different. Gregers has the whole Ekdal family in mind when he mentions “the depths of the sea”, viewing their family life as built upon lie and illusion, and he himself would be the hound that plunges to the “depths of the sea” and restores the family to its rightful position. For Hedvig, on the other hand, the attic is a space of infinite riches where she can free her imaginative power as much as she can; it is a realm of mystery, imagination and freedom. And above all she identifies herself completely with the wild duck, which she proudly announces, “it’s *my* wild duck”. She describes the wild duck as a mysterious creature coming from nowhere and having “no one to turn to” (437). It is clear that Hedvig does not know about her illegitimacy throughout the play; therefore her identification with the wild duck is more instinctive than rational, which in turn should only be understood in a symbolic way. There are so far many different interpretations of the wild duck as a symbol, but one most obvious referent is undoubtedly

Hedvig. Just as the wild duck she herself comes from nowhere (it cannot be told whose daughter she really is) and has no one to turn to.

So fond of the loft world and so much identified with the wild duck, Hedvig's perceptions of that small cramped space is "far more vital and healthy" (Carr 1977:854) than all the men in the play. For Gregers, the loft is barely a valueless world constructed upon lies and illusions, and only the outside world is the "real world"; for Old Ekdal the loft is his Hoidal forests, the place where he can feel his past glory; for Hjalmar it is a place full of entertainment where he can run away from his daily "toil". To put it shortly, it is only Hedvig alone who attaches no worldly value to the loft; her identification with the wild duck is natural and instinctive, and her fondness of the attic world is genuine and pure. She is part of the loft, part of nature; it is only when she is in the loft that she is entirely herself. As for the male characters in the play, however, the loft is a place where they can get some worldly purpose achieved. While Gregers intends to shatter that false world built upon lies, Old Ekdal and Hjalmar find there entertainment and self-satisfaction which function as a kind of psychological compensation to their everyday disgrace and mediocrity. To put it shortly, the men either intend to destroy or seek comfort from the loft, or in the case of Dr. Relling who is aware of its illusory nature, deliberately helps with the Ekdal men's indulgence in it, while Hedvig finds true connection with it.

In eco-feminist theories it is a standard argument that woman is closer to nature than man. Sherry Ortner, a prominent American anthropologist, asks the following question, "is female to male as nature is to culture?", and her answer is yes.

"Ortner's explanation is that every culture attempts to transcend natural existence. Social groups universally distinguish the human realm from the natural realm and usually, although not always, accord greater prestige to Culture. Women are associated with Nature and thus are universally devalued. Women are seen as closer to Nature in reference to three dimensions: 1) Women's bodies are seen as more natural since they are more involved with the species' life; 2) a woman's social roles are viewed as closer to nature, specifically confining her to the domestic realm; and 3) social perceptions of female psyche or personality portray women as closer to Nature. Note that these cultural constructs place women as closer to Nature, not as Nature." (Moore 2004:309)

In Hedvig's case, her connection with or closeness to nature is more demonstrated on the third level as has been summarized by Ortner, i.e. in terms of her female psyche or personality. As a young girl, her gender role is still in the process of construction; as I have analyzed above, her identification with the small natural world in the loft is more congenial than

acquired. I find it very revealing when Ortner points out the mediative role of woman between man and nature: “This intermediate role [i.e. of women] means that women’s position, while always viewed as subordinate, may be given different sets of meanings depending on how a society view the Culture/Nature dichotomy” (309-310). In the context of the *The Wild Duck*, Hedvig apparently plays the role of the mediator between man (both the Werle and Ekdal men) and nature (Hoidal forests); only that it is somewhat a dear payment, i.e. her own life, which reconciles the sinned men and the revenging woods.

There are two other woman characters in the play: Gina and Mrs. Sørby, whose closeness to nature is shown primarily on the physical and social level. First I will talk a bit about Mrs. Sørby. She is by far the most capable woman in the play. She is able to flirt with men of different social classes; she manages the house of the Werles with professionalism; she finally finds her true love based on openness and equality and will soon get married with her soul mate and lover. Despite all this, however, she is still confined to her domesticated role, which by no means is a pleasant one. According to Dr. Relling, Mr. Sørby, Mrs. Sørby’s deceased husband, always got “drunk” and was “given to beating up his wife” (Fjelde 1978:462). It is in a way ironic that he was a veterinarian when he was alive, a profession which has much to do with animals. Yet he leaves an impression of being violent and brutal. Also, Mrs. Sørby has herself admitted that her relationship with Old Werle is “quite a nice piece of luck”, which in a way implies that luck is an important element in a frank, equal relationship between man and woman in the patriarchal society. Finally, she also emphasizes her “use” for Old Werle, that she can “care for him now better than anyone else after he’s helpless, i.e. when “he’s going blind” (463). This domestic “use” seems for her to be another important element in her relationship with Old Werle.

As for Gina, her domestic role is given a lot of description throughout the entire play. She is seen now and then busy preparing meals in the kitchen, dealing with customers at the door, and working at the photos in the living room, etc. In her article “Sense and Sensibility: Women and Men in *The Wild Duck*”, Templeton draws an insightful distinction between the two women housekeepers who “make up a solid minority of sense”, and the three high-minded men (i.e. Gregers, Hjalmar and Dr. Relling) who make up a solid majority of “sensibility” (Templeton 1999:167). The distinction between sense (woman) and sensibility (man), in my mind, can be seen in three dimensions in the play.

In the first place, in a philosophical dimension, as Templeton has accurately summarized, all the three men “reduce life to a simple system: Gregers insists on the necessity of truth, Relling, of lies, and Hjalmar greedily assimilates every experience to the life-lie of his virtuous toil” (166-167). They are theorizers and philosophizers who adhere to their life-stances through which they believe they will achieve their great missions. Gina, on the contrary, is a woman without any theoretical, systematic approach to life. On the one hand she has not received much education, which she is quite aware of as she calls herself “a woman of [her] sort” (Fjelde 1978:469); on the other hand she can’t afford to brood over mission or meaning of life since she has “got so much to think about just with the housework and the day’s routine” (457). As for Mrs. Sørby, she does have a systematic life outlook as she believes her way of handling things is the “wisest”, but compared with the much more complicated life theories of the men, Mrs. Sørby has only a simple approach to life, i.e. to be frank with everything and everybody. Note that although Gina does not have her own theory of life, she is the only one in the play that acknowledges the co-existence of different life-approaches, “Oh, women are all so different. Some live one way and some live another.” (463) All the other characters have tried to impose their own life-stance upon other people by either arguing for the legitimacy of their own life-stance or criticizing the illegitimacy of the others’ life-stances.

Secondly, men are portrayed in the play as totally incapable of any household matters, while women are more “hard-headed and resourceful” (457). Many comical elements in the play consist in the male characters’ clumsiness at housework. For example, Act 3 opens with how Gregers “got his room in beautiful shape” (431). He “wanted to do everything himself” so he started building a fire, which ended up with a heavy smoke and a strong stink. The same situation happens to Hjalmar in Act 5 when he makes the announcement that he is definitely moving out the house, while he is not even able to pack stuff by himself. It is interesting to see that in the comical packing scene Hjalmar’s focus is all on notebooks and papers, while Gina’s suggestion is far more feasible that he should “leave everything else for the time being, and just take a shirt and a pair of shoes with [him]” (481). Both Gregers and Hjalmar attempt at a seeking for household independence, but both end up being reaccommodated with Gina’s help.

The third dimension is the language dimension. Throughout the play we can see an obvious difference between the men’s and the women’s language. In her discussion of *The*

*Wild Duck* Templeton cites John Northam's insightful remark that "Gregers' language exhibits 'the grandiose vagueness and generality' of Hjalmar's, and that both men's speech shares an important rhetorical characteristic" (Templeton 1999:167). From their first encounter onward Hjalmar and Gregers' conversation has been permeated with what Templeton calls "a skin-deep high-mindedness" (167). "My best and only friend", "we two old classmates", thus addresses Gregers to Hjalmar, to which Hjalmar answers with a sentimental description of his "outer" man, who has not suffered, and his "inner" man who has suffered (Fjelde 1978:396). Also, whenever Hjalmar speaks of his life mission of "restoring the Ekdal name to dignity and honor" (442) and of his poor father, his speech will be full of sentimental rhetoric: "Poor old white-haired Father—lean on your Hjalmar. He has broad shoulders—powerful shoulders" (430), "I am going to rescue that shipwrecked man" (442), etc., which serves as a perfect foil to Gregers' high-flown speech about the "summons to the Ideal".

On the part of the women, however, their language is succinct, plain, and practical. There is hardly any rhetorical device in their speech, but whenever they say something they are always to the point. An interesting example takes place at the end of Act 2 when Gina and Hjalmar are arguing a bit about renting the room to Gregers. Meeting Gina's slight opposition, Hjalmar uses his old friendship with Gregers and his responsibility for Old Ekdal as an argument for renting the room to Gregers. Within one minute he becomes so absorbed in his partly imagined self-pity that he enters a high-flown lengthy speech. It is rather interesting to note the difference in tone and content in their conversation: when Hjalmar talks fervently about the humiliation he suffers from seeing "his gray-haired father go around like an outcast", Gina replies with a short but to-the-point reminder that he might wake his father up. And when her husband ignores that reminders and continues with his passionate speech about his "mission in life", his "broad shoulders", Gina cuts short his speech by a brief, positive answer to his question whether she believes he can fulfill his mission, and finishes the conversation with a more to-the-point imperative: "But first let's see about getting him to bed." (430) Here we can use Roman Jakobson's pragmatic theories to make a distinction between the women's and the men's speech features. In Jakobson's pragmatic theory there are six functions of language, or communication functions, according to which any act of verbal communication can be described: the referential (denotative, cognitive) function, the emotive (expressive) function, the conative function, the poetic function, the metalingual (or "glossing") function and the phatic function (Bublitz & Norrick 2011:243-244). Throughout the play we can very



well see that the men's language is marked by their emotive and poetic functions, while the women's language are much more referential and conative.

Confined to their domestic roles, women are lowered to a position much closer to nature by men who assign to themselves a higher position as closer to culture. Men use women in similar ways as they use nature; in the context of the play, Old Werle uses women for resource and entertainment, while the Ekdals use women for keeping their sense of male superiority.

Old Werle has used many women throughout his life. From his quarrel with Gregers we get to know that he married Gregers' mother for money, not for love, which is the purpose behind many marriages in Ibsen's works, such as between Alfred Allmers and Rita, John Gabriel Borkman and Runhild, etc. Although Old Werle's original plan failed, still he has exploited, in the same way he exploited the Hoidal woods, his wife's body despite the fact that he has no sexual attachment to it, the result of which is the birth of Gregers. And just as it has taken revenge on the Ekdal family, the Hoidal forest has also taken revenge upon Old Werle through his wife: used up and discarded, Mrs. Werle persistently troubled her husband by her obsessions with his real or imagined affairs, and with a vengeance, this hatred is passed down to Gregers, Old Werle's only son, who is determined to take revenge on his father on behalf of his deceased mother. As many scholars have pointed out, although on the surface Gregers' purpose for exposing the old affair between Old Werle and Gina is to answer to the "summons to the Ideal" and establish truth in the Ekdal family, on a psychological or subconscious level his real purpose is to avenge his poor mother. To this I would add that the other reason for this exposure is that Gregers needs psychological compensation and the proof of the incomparable value of mercy from the Ekdal family to put into practice his own forgiveness for his father, that is to say, his plan is to first avenge his mother by exposing Old Werle and Gina and then through Hjalmar's forgiveness for Gina forgive his own father. Therefore after he tells Hjalmar the past shameful history of Gina, he is expecting to be "met by a transfigured light" in both Hjalmar's and Gina's faces, and we have no reason not to believe him when he says "there's nothing in the world that compares with showing mercy to a sinner and lifting her up in the arms of love" (Fjelde 1978:459). However, contrary to his plan, he is met by "this gloomy, heavy, dismal" (459), which shatters his hope for the miracle of mercy. Many scholars argue that Gregers subconsciously intends to sacrifice Hedvig to avenge his mother from the very beginning. However, my opinion is that Gregers did not

intend to claim Hedvig's life in the first place; what he seeks is revenge and more importantly salvation; otherwise he would not have expressed his wish for forgiving a sinner with love. It is the failure of this wish that leads him to induce Hedvig to sacrifice the wild duck—the other Hedvig—for her father's sake. What in fact fatally worsens the situation is Hjalmar's wounded pride and selfishness, which, combined with Gregers' pursuit for the sacrifice of the wild duck, finally results in Hedvig's suicide.

The third woman Old Werle has used is Mrs. Sørby. It is true that their relationship and marriage is based on frankness and mutual understanding; yet in order to marry the woman he supposedly loves, it is essential for Old Werle to leave town for a place far away from public opinion. In addition, although Mrs. Sørby has served as housekeeper at the Werles for many years, she has to wait for Old Werle to be tired of all his past affairs and to lose his eyesight to begin a true relationship with him; as I have mentioned before, she herself is quite aware of her use for Old Werle.

While Old Werle uses women in a more exploitative way, the Ekdal men use women mostly to heal their wounded pride, the same reason why they built the loft. Once a high-ranking hunter and lieutenant, Old Ekdal could not handle the damage on his reputation and pride and was thrown into “self-contempt” and “despair” (476). In order to “keep life going in him”, to use Dr. Relling's terms, Old Ekdal “discovered his own cure himself”, which is to indulge himself in the loft as a hunter (476-477). For him the “dried-out Christmas trees” are the “green forests of Hoidal”, “the hens and the rooster” are the “game birds up in the fir tops”, and “the rabbits hopping across the floor” are the “bears that call up his youth again, out in the mountain air” (477). As for Hjalmar, although he is not the direct victim of the Hoidal scandal, in the patriarchal society in the nineteenth century all disgrace and shame is passed down from the father to the son. Despite all the good qualities in his nature, Hjalmar is evasive of responsibility and yet keen on proving that he is the provider for the family who will one day bring back to the family its past glory.

It is clear for the reader/spectator to see that Gina is the true breadwinner in the Ekdal family. A professional photographer, she is efficient at taking and retouching photos for the customers and earns “the money to buy the food she prepares for her husband to gobble up” (Templeton 1999:169); we even learn that she is in charge of the marketing part of their business. In addition, together with Mrs. Sørby the two women make sure that Old Ekdal is

overpaid by his copying work and kindly hide this from Hjalmar in order to “keep intact his self-image as the sole family provider” (169). In fact, there is no reason not to doubt that Hjalmar is actually aware of the fact that he has not earned much bread for the family since Gina so far has not succeeded much in getting Hjalmar “to do some of the retouching himself” (170). However, what is significant and deserves critical attention is that all the Ekdal family members (and also Mrs. Sørby) carefully keep this family provider image of Hjalmar and have expressed more than once their belief in this image.

The man/woman division of labor is one important object of eco-feminist criticism. Man is expected to be the family provider and protect his wife and children financially and socially; and woman is expected to stay at home to do housework and take care of children. This ideological pattern is passed down from generation to generation in the patriarchal society through education of the sons and daughters. In *The Domestication of Women: Discrimination in Developing Societies*, Rogers makes the following observation:

The husband “is expected to control what happens inside [a family], even deciding whether or not ‘his’ wife should have a paid job outside. Any deviation from this is seen as threatening the man’s very identity: for example, it is believed to be shameful for a husband to earn less than his wife; to be less tall; for the wife to have a stronger personality or greater intelligence. While primarily an ideology of marriage, this applies to almost all relations between women and men. Girls learn to fear success and to underachieve, concealing intelligence and initiative in order to be accepted as “feminine”. Men are expected to be “aggressive” and unemotional, women to be sensitive, intuitive etc. From a very early age they learn what is expected of them in terms of the “feminine” or “masculine” personality, and this is heavily reinforced at puberty” (Rogers 2005:11).

If we make a comparison between Gina and most other main female characters in Ibsen’s middle and later plays, we can easily see that Gina belongs to the rare type of woman who, with little education, is utterly focused on daily existence. She is at best praised by her husband as “not entirely without culture” because of her daily contact with his cultured mind (Fjelde 1978:398). Templeton uses Gina’s mispronunciation of the word “pistol” as “pigstol” as an example of her now-and-then “rebellion” against Hjalmar’s impractical high-mindedness with her “practicality” and “simplicity” (Templeton 1999:170). Therefore it is only imaginable that she is a woman that has not come to an awareness of the constructive nature of her gender role, that is, she accepts this code of behavior for women without questioning it. She believes it is her duty to appear to earn less than and obedient to her husband, partly out of her own ideological belief and partly out of her genuine love for Hjalmar. For the same reason she decided to keep her past affair with Old Werle as a secret when she married Hjalmar, because this past is not a desirable part of a proper wife role. Just

as she once conformed to her housemaid role and yielded to Old Werle's wish, she has also tried her best all along to conform to the role of a housewife. This ideology of gender roles she shares with Hjalmar, and together they have passed it down to Hedvig, who as I described before has developed the skill of flattering her father as a capable family provider just to make him happy. In the play Hedvig is described as having reached the age of puberty and it can be clearly seen that she is already performing her part of feminine role. She accepts the absolute authority of her father in the family without any questioning although she knows very well it is Mother who is doing most of the professional work. Mother and daughter together, they take good care of Hjalmar's pride and dignity, keeping reinforcing in his mind his belief in himself as a great inventor. In this sense, they are themselves a counterpart of the small natural world in the loft, or in other words, its incarnation in real life, through which alone can life be kept going in the Ekdal men.

## 4 *John Gabriel Borkman*

Among all Ibsen's major plays, *John Gabriel Borkman* (1896) is one of those which have seldom been put on the stage within or without Scandinavia. A possible reason is that the play is too dense in meaning while there is not much action in terms of plot. As a literary masterpiece, on the other hand, the play has been interpreted from a good many different angles, all aiming at digging out the buried meanings lying underneath the text. Some scholars approach the play from a Nietzschean point of view and identify Borkman as a superman with Titanistic vision; some are fascinated by the musical elements permeating the whole play and recognizes the deep poetry in Borkman; the metaphysical dimension in relation to Borkman's personal mythology has also been extensively discussed, in addition to the many revealing biblical allusions; moreover, the folkloric aspect regarding Borkman's waking up the slumbering spirits deep in the mountains has also been discussed. Love and power, life and death, crime and punishment, these are important themes of the play, but at the center is the relationship between man and woman, illustrated by the "northern triangle" (formed by Borkman, Ella and Gunhild) and the "southern triangle" (formed by Erhart, Mrs. Wilton and Frida), and the relationship between man and nature, illustrated by Borkman's obsession with founding his own mining empire.

In my opinion, just like Karsten Bernick, Borkman is first and foremost a typical nineteenth-century industrialist and capitalist who is obsessed with the attainment of power and wealth through exploitation of nature and woman. Many scholars have pointed out the alignment between *Pillars of Society* and *John Gabriel Borkman*. As Hermann Weigand comments, "in both plays the central figure is an unscrupulous financier who has renounced the woman he loved and married her sister, for the sake of making a career". But as in his later plays Ibsen turns more and more inwardly with many reflections on life and death, love and art, etc., in terms of treatment these plays become very "unlike": "while the former is a defiant trumpet-blast, calling society to account, the latter is a solemn dirge over three blighted individual existences—a dead man and two shadows" (Weigand 1960:356). In other words, what is foregrounded in this play is no longer man's role in society through the discussion of which Ibsen presents "truth" and "freedom" as two central concepts in his social ethics, but the estranged relationship between three originally intimate souls, and their later conflict and reconciliation. William Archer is of the opinion that *John Gabriel Borkman* is "immeasurably superior" to *Pillars of Society* (Postlewait 1984:282). I quite agree with

Archer so long as it concerns Ibsen's dramatic techniques; however, in terms of theme my opinion is that the two plays are not so comparable since their subject matters are somewhat different.

In this chapter of my thesis I will continue with the eco-feminist approach through which I hope I will add to a new understanding of the play. I will first describe how Borkman's exploitation of nature and his exploitation of Ella are mutually related, and then explain how the exploited (i.e. nature and Ella) come to a mythical alignment with each other and jointly take revenge upon Borkman, and this time, unlike in previous plays, the revenge claims the life of Borkman.

In his introduction to *John Gabriel Borkman*, Fjelde describes the nineteenth century as an age of "discoveries, innovations, progress, expansion, disruption, dashed hopes, mass miseries" and "extravagant dreams" (Fjelde 1978:938). In European history, perhaps no other ages can compete with the nineteenth century in terms of economical development and industrial expansion, which also applies to the situation back then in Norway. However, all material splendors, in essence, are built upon exploitation of nature, and as Fjelde points out, the originally "natural, organic environment" is gradually transformed into a "mechanized, industrial economy" (938). Also, this age witnessed the rise of the middle class and the downfall of the upper class, accompanied by the brutal oppression of the working class. Unlike Consul Bernick, Borkman was born as the son of a miner and therefore belonged initially to the working class. While the problem Bernick was faced with was how to help the company, which he had inherited from his mother, get out of financial predicament and keep its leading position in society, Borkman's working-class background determined that he had to work his own way up if he is to realize his business ambitions. In the play, Borkman succeeded in climbing up to the position of a capitalist by trading Ella, the woman he loved, away to Attorney Hinkel for his support who would clear all obstacles on his road to power (i.e. bank presidency), and at the same time marrying Gunhild, whom although he did not love but just as her twin sister was in possession of large quantities of share holdings, bonds and a huge estate as a member of the upper class. In addition, in order to accelerate his way to "reach the pinnacle of influence" (Jorgenson 1963:489), Borkman resorted to illegal means and manipulated the securities in the bank to make larger investments in the mining industry. His industrial vision to transform natural resources into material wealth to serve mankind is a vision characteristic of an expansionist age and can find resonance with many other

nineteenth-century capitalists. This vision, if we use a term from eco-criticism, is essentially anthropocentric.

From the very beginning western civilization has been deeply anthropocentric; that is, “they are oriented to the interests of human beings, who are viewed as opposed to and superior to nature, and free to exploit natural resources and animal species for their own purposes” (Abrams & Harpham 2009:88). This viewpoint is grounded in several sources. In Greek philosophy both Plato and Aristotle extol human reason and Protagoras is famous for his saying “man is the measure of all things”; in biblical account man is granted domination over all the earth by God; with Renaissance and Enlightenment emerges modern science and technology which later triumphs in the so-called “scientific-technological-industrial complex” in the nineteenth century (88). Man believes in and never questions his right to exploit nature as a rightful means to bring happiness—which in essence is material affluence—to the whole of human society. This is what Borkman firmly believes in, and more than once in the play he has tried to justify his criminal act of embezzlement by speaking resonantly out his convictions:

“BORKMAN. It wants to come up into daylight and serve mankind. (Fjelde 1978:968)

BORKMAN (heatedly). Yes, but I, who could have made millions! All the mines I could have controlled! Drilling new shafts, endlessly! Waterfalls! Stone quarries! Trade routes and shipping lines, girdling the globe. And all of these, I alone should have managed! (974)

BORKMAN. [...] All the sources of power in this country I wanted at my command. The earth, the mountains, the forests, the sea—I wanted to subjugate all the riches they held, and carve out a kingdom for myself, and use it to further the well-being of so many thousands of others. (986)

BORKMAN (with pride). I’ve loved power— [...] The power to create human happiness for vast multitudes around me.” (998)

In many senses Borkman is a great example of nineteenth-century industrialist and is ahead of most of his contemporaries. Compared with Consul Bernick, his vision excels that of the latter in that it is global instead of local, prophesying what now is called “globalization”. While Bernick’s goal is more to keep his power and influence in his small native town and expand its industrialization by building an inland railroad, Borkman has the “trade routes and shipping lines, girdling the globe” in his mind. Also, the fact that in his youth he turned down the offer of the post as cabinet minister, a post of promising political power which Bernick would probably have willingly accepted, further foregrounds him as a genuine industrialist. Furthermore, Borkman believes in the intrinsic value of “unremitting work” (1003) and

believes that “life is work” (1004), which sets him apart from those profit-driven industrialists commonly seen in nineteenth-century Europe. It might be argued that Borkman is under the influence of the Protestant working ethics, but unlike in *Pillars of Society* where the transition from a pleasant society to a stoical Puritan one is made clear by the casual conversations of many secondary characters, in *John Gabriel Borkman* there is no clue that Ibsen means to foreground this historical religious background; rather, it should be more understood as one of Borkman’s own personal characteristics. Finally, the ultimate aim of Borkman’s exploitation of nature is to create human happiness on a global scale, and his ambition to “make this whole round earth into one community” and “spread light and warmth into human hearts in countless thousands of homes” is indeed visionary and touching (1020). He deserves to be named “John”, a name Ibsen intends as implication of “big business, an association with the British origins of the Industrial Revolution”, and “Gabriel”, suggestive of greatness and genius (939).

However, no matter how great Borkman is as an industrialist and capitalist, the undeniable fact is that he wishes to subjugate nature and possess all the riches it holds, and that he craves for material wealth and power. As Theodore Jorgenson describes it, Borkman “had more power than the sovereign king” and “surrounded himself with great pomp and splendor” (Jorgenson 1963:489). Ironically, the way he sought to fulfill his ambition is not by honest hard work, but by betraying and trading away a woman he once loved, which is a strong indication of the intrinsic correlation between man’s exploitation of nature and man’s exploitation of woman.

According to eco-feminist theories, there have been dominant and ancient traditions connecting men with culture, or reason, and women with nature in western philosophy (Plumwood 1993:20). Woman is viewed as a “violent and uncontrolled animal” who represents “the interests of the family and sexual life” (19). In another word, women are subject to a twofold discrimination: biological (sex) discrimination and social (gender) discrimination. Biologically, in the tradition of dualistic western thinking, femaleness is relegated to an inferior state with regard to its less desirable physical qualities. While maleness is associated with “clarity and form”, femaleness is associated with “irregularity and disorder” (Buckingham-Hatfield 2000:12). The supposed inferiority of the female body further serves as a basis for the supposed inferiority of female intellectuality. Socially, since the patriarchal society is conceived and constructed upon objectivity and order, women are



considered not fit for the public sphere; instead, they are confined to the private sphere of the household and assigned the role of housekeeper, while men have full freedom throughout the public sphere (5). These two aspects combined together, women are reduced to the same state as nature, both characterized by irrationality (i.e. female hysteria, natural disasters, etc.), which can be subdued and domesticated, and fertility (i.e. giving birth to children, natural resources, etc.), which can be exploited and capitalized. Men are considered possessing the power to distance themselves from nature and women and are thus superior both physically and mentally. Through subjugation men acquire the state as the master while nature and women are consigned to servitude to men. In nineteenth-century Europe, just as nature is adored as an inexhaustible treasure trove waiting to serve men unreservedly, women are idolized as the “angel in the house” who selflessly devote themselves to their husband and children. Men exploit nature outside in their professions and women inside their home, and this men-nature/women dualism is passed down from generation to generation with on the one hand the development of science and technology and on the other hand the social construction of gender roles. Capitalism, which plays a key role in accelerating and consolidating men’s dominance over nature and women as money and power is increasingly concentrated in the hand of male capitalists, is considered “the modern form of patriarchal relations” (Salleh 1995:23).

In many of Ibsen’s plays the male protagonists are depicted as fond of associating their wives with nature. In *A Doll’s House* (1879) Helmer loves to call Nora “my little squirrel”, “my little singing bird”, “my pretty little pet”, etc.; in *The Lady from the Sea* (1888) Ellida is likened to a mermaid from the sea and Dr. Wangel is of the opinion that she “thinks and feel in images” as opposed to male logical thinking. This, though can be understood as Dr. Wangel’s respect for the female way of thinking, still shows that Dr. Wangel has completely denied Ellida’s ability of logical thinking. In *Little Eyolf* (1894), the immediate predecessor of *John Gabriel Borkman*, Rita is associated with the “gold and green forests” and is regarded as a purely sensual object by Allmers until near the end of the play. Accordingly, in *John Gabriel Borkman* Borkman has expressly voiced out his contempt for the female race and his conviction that women’s ultimate role is to serve men:

“BORKMAN. You could very well have been happy without me. [...] You could just as well have been happy with him. And I would have been saved, then. (Fjelde 1978:982)

BORKMAN. By your sister, yes. I’ve never intruded in these domestic questions. As I was saying, I know what you’ve sacrificed for me and for your sister. (983)

BORKMAN (*staring at her*). You're out of your senses.

BORKMAN (*backing toward the piano*). You're raving, Ella! (985)

BORKMAN (*with cold self-control*). How well I recognize that overbearing passion in you, Ella. I suppose it's very natural for you to see this the way you do. You're a woman. And so it seems, to your mind, that nothing else in the world exists or matters. [...] Only what touches your own heart. [...] But you have to remember that I'm a man. As a woman, to me you were the dearest in the world. But in the last analysis, any woman can be replaced by another." (986)

Borkman describes Ella as overwhelmingly passionate and inclined to be out of senses. For him women are characterized by their excessive subjectivity—only what touches their heart exists and matters—and as a man, he is proud of his own objectivity, his ability to distance himself from “what touches his own heart” and focus on external businesses which he believes really “matter” to the world, that is, is to build up an industrial empire that will promote mass happiness through mass production. He belittles Erhart's upbringing as “domestic questions” in which he will not lower himself to “intrude”. In his mind it is only women who are responsible for taking care of the child, in addition to their responsibility to make whatever kinds of sacrifice for the family. What is the most appalling, however, is Borkman's reducing women to a kind of commodity whose value can be measured in monetary terms so that “any woman can be replaced by another”, which even his counterpart in *Pillars of Society* will not agree with: as a model for his fellow townsfolk, Bernick is rather concerned about at least the ostensible harmony within his family. Borkman trades Ella away as a commodity, bargaining her to Attorney Hinkel for the position as president in the bank. Moreover, he extends his own perception of happiness, which is material extravagance, to Ella, and cannot understand why she cannot feel happy with Hinkel who would guarantee her a life with both wealth and high social status. In his perception of happiness everything connected with the heart is negated and only material wealth as evidenced by sumptuous living counts. He squanders money and wishes to influence the community by “setting the style”. In fact, not only does he try to extend his philosophy of happiness and living style to other people, but also his contempt for women. When Foldal complains about his domestic problems, Borkman's first reaction is to condemn his wife: “You made a decidedly poor choice when you married” (972). There is no clue in the play that Borkman is familiar with Foldal's family members. As a rather self-absorbed person Borkman cannot care less about other people's problems; yet immediately Borkman ascribes all Foldal's suffering to his wife. Even after Foldal has clarified he is not complaining about his wife, Borkman continues “full of indignation” with this topic and blames all women for bringing all misfortune and misery to men: “Oh, these women! They corrupt and distort our lives! They completely botch up our

destinies—our paths to glory” (978). Finally, this agonized conversation between Borkman and Foldal which is begun by Foldal’s domestic problems concludes in their agreement that the true, good women—“the angel in the house”—exist, but cannot be found.

Interestingly, although Foldal denounces all the women he knows, including Ella, the latter, on the other hand, sympathizes greatly with him as a member belonging to the working class. In fact, one core tenet of eco-feminist theories is the shared oppression of nature, women, people of color, and the working class by the male-dominated western society. Their oppressions, though in different social spheres, are interrelated in that all of them are forced to serve white, bourgeois men as different types of commodity. They can be commanded, exploited, traded and discarded. Just as Borkman takes advantage of Ella and trades her away for the position in the bank, so does he take advantage of Foldal and many other people and misappropriates all their securities. In Act 1 Ella repeatedly shows her sympathy with the working class:

“ELLA. Oh, Gunhild—there were many, many besides *our* family struck down by that blow. (946)

ELLA. This Foldal—he was among the ones who had losses when the bank failed. (953)

ELLA (*stressing her words slightly*). It was everything he had. (953)

ELLA. Yes, her father must be starving along, I can imagine.” (953)

At one point even Gunhild expresses her fellow feeling for the working class: “And what of those hundreds of others—the ones they say you ruined?” (997)

In contrast, Borkman considers Foldal’s loss to be on a much smaller scale although that is “everything he had”. His narcissistic obsession with his own greatness makes him focus only on his own loss and unable to see the working-class depositors’ loss. He regards his fraudulent appropriation of the depositors’ securities as rightful and meaningful, as if he had the prerogative to decide for others. He lacks the feeling of empathy which is always so strong in Ella.

Having discussed the shared oppression of Ella (and Gunhild) and nature by Borkman in the play, now I will talk about their joint revenge upon the male oppressor. As Inga-Stina Ewbank points out, “in the play there is no clear dividing line between the internal and external landscape (Xie 2010:190), which is exactly the case for Ella and Gunhild. More than

thirteen years have passed since Ella was deserted by Borkman, and during these thirteen years her inner landscape has undergone exactly the same sterilization process as the external natural landscape outside her estate. When she makes her first appearance in the play, she is described by Ibsen as follows:

*“She resembles her sister in appearance, but her face has more of suffering than of hardness in its expression. Its former great beauty and character is still clearly evident. Her thick hair, now turned silvery white, is swept back in natural waves from her forehead.”* (Fjelde 1978:944)

Although Ibsen has not used many words to describe the beauty of the young Ella, it is imaginable that in her youth she must have been full of female charm and vitality. Now, however, she is a “semi-invalid” plagued by a “terminal” illness. Although the play has not mentioned the exact cause of her deadly illness, there is strong hint that the “severe emotional upheaval” which has gradually crippled her has something to do with Borkman’s betrayal of her. She is repressed, mentally tormented and on the verge of death, and this transformation in her body and soul is irreversible, of which—as well as the reason for which—Ella herself is quite conscious:

“ELLA. The years have worn and withered me, Borkman. Don’t you think so? [...] I don’t have the dark curls tumbling down my back anymore. Those curls you once liked to wind around your fingers. (981)

ELLA (*reflecting powerful inner feeling*). Compassion, you say! (*With a laugh.*) I’ve never known any compassion—since you left me. I’m wholly incapable of that. [...] And I was never like that in my youth; I remember so clearly. It’s you who’ve made me this sterile, empty desert within me—and around me, too.” (988)

Just as plants and animals are essential to the exuberance and vitality of nature, so is love essential to the health and happiness of woman. Therefore, when many years ago Borkman abandoned Ella, he “committed the supreme, mortal sin” (985) of killing her capacity to love and “put to death all the natural job” (987) in her, rendering her life “a lifetime wasted” (981). Significantly, Ella herself describes her wasted life using images related to nature, i.e. “this sterile, empty desert within me”, which strengthens the tie between woman and nature. Also, what deserves to be noted here is that by trading Ella away for bank presidency, Borkman not only committed the “supreme, mortal sin” against Ella alone, but as well to Gunhild. Jorgenson points out that we should not forget that “Gunhild is equally as beautiful as Ella”; it can be imagined how happy Gunhild must have been when she married the man she loved thirteen years ago, but with her warm love never for once responded to through all these years

by Borkman, “her sentiments hardened into pride and hatred” and she became cold, bitter and vengeful (Jorgenson 1963:488-489). In other words, the twin sisters have undergone the same “sterilization” process because of Borkman’s manipulation of their sentiments thirteen years ago.

Likewise, the external landscape in the play has become as barren as the internal landscape of Ella and Gunhild. In their youth Borkman and Ella used to go to a small clearing high in the mountain woods and sit together on a bench under a beautiful fir-tree. They used to visualize Borkman’s grand industrial kingdom while overlooking the expansive landscape with fjords and high distant mountains. “It was a dreamland [they] were seeing then”, which was also “the dreamland of [their] lives” (1020). However, now it is “in the dead of winter” (963) and the “dreamland” has become “a land of snow” (1020). There is “raw winter air” (1013) and “the wind blows ice-cold from that kingdom” (1021). Even the fir-tree under which once they sat is now withered and dead. On a symbolic level, this desolate natural landscape is exactly the outward projection of Ella and Gunhild’s desolate mental landscape. Everything is still, static and lifeless, suggestive of imminent death. When Edvard Munch praises *John Gabriel Borkman* as “the most powerful winter landscape in Scandinavian art”, comments Lanlan Xie, he is acknowledging Ibsen’s “genius in portraying the frozen soul” (Xie 2010:190).

Nature and woman, however, are not totally passive; jointly they will take revenge and inflict punishment upon the male oppressor. In Lovelock’s theorization of nature’s revenge upon humankind, it is not without significance that he describes nature as an outwardly “tender and gentle” but inwardly “firm and indomitable” girl:

“Don’t assume that the earth will tolerate the improper behaviors of humankind. Don’t assume that she will be a tender and gentle girl who was in the extremely dangerous circumstances resulted from the boorish behavior of humankind. She is very firm and indomitable. She always keeps a warm and comfortable world for her offspring who obey the natural laws. Also, she can destroy the daredevils cruelly. The earth is not anti-anthropologized. We disobey her will and change the natural circumstances in the long term, so she revenged on us. In fact, we encourage her to create new adaptable species to replace us. (Xie 2010: 191)

To the great disappointment of Ella, until the very end of the play Borkman has shown no sign of repentance. Not only does he selfishly believe that the only one he has committed an offense against is himself (Fjelde 1978:997), but he still loves the riches down there above everything else, even though in the daylight :

“BORKMAN. That wind works on me like the breath of life. It comes to me like a greeting from captive spirits. I can sense them, the buried millions. [...] I love you, lying there unconscious in the depths and the darkness! I love you, you riches straining to be born—with all your shining aura of power and glory! I love you, love you, love you!” (1021)

The three “love you” once more confirms Borkman’s cold indifference to Ella’s warm emotions. Agitated but constrained, she condemns Borkman for crushing “a warm, living human heart that beats for [him]” (1021) and selling it for power. Thereupon she takes revenge and announces a prophecy:

“ELLA. [...] (*Her arm upraised.*) And so I prophesy this for you, John Gabriel Borkman—you’ll never win the prize you murdered for. You’ll never ride in triumph into your cold, dark kingdom!” (1022)

In a miraculous way nature quietly joins force. Immediately after Ella pronounces her solemn prophecy there comes “a hand of ice” that chokes Borkman’s heart. And again miraculously, Ella seems to have already expected this: “John! Now you feel it, the ice hand!” (1022), which she also judges is the best result for him. Nature and Ella seem to have a tacit understanding between each other and jointly they claim Borkman’s life, one by giving a prophecy, the other by carrying out that prophecy through natural forces, i.e. the cold night air.

In conclusion, read from an eco-feminist perspective, the play *John Gabriel Borkman* is about the shared oppression of women and nature by Borkman, who represents the nineteenth-century male industrialist, and their joint revenge upon the male oppressor. Borkman believes in mankind’s innate right to exploit nature as its master and wishes to create mass human happiness by mass industrial production. In order to achieve this ambition he traded Ella away for bank presidency when he was young, treating her as a kind of commodity whom he believes can be replaced by any other woman. By this betrayal he kills the capacity to love in Ella and renders her mental world empty and sterile. She comes back after thirteen years only to be reassured of Borkman’s utter disregard for her. Ultimately she takes her revenge upon Borkman by prophesying death and defeat for him, and her prophecy is miraculously carried out by nature which finally kills Borkman with the cold night air.

With the rapid development of science and technology, today mankind is capable of exploiting nature to a much greater extent than back in the nineteenth century. However, contrary to what the older generations of industrialists believed, mass production does not

necessarily guarantee mass happiness; instead, environmental deterioration coupled with conflicts between genders, races and classes has put the whole of humanity in an endangered situation. In such contexts, it is highly relevant to read Ibsen's plays from an eco-feminist perspective, which will not only shed new light on Ibsen's plays but also further testify to the relevance and importance of the playwright in contemporary societies.

## 5 *Pillars of Society*

*Pillars of Society* (1877) is “the first of [Ibsen’s] great social plays” (Thomas 1990:61). Ibsen himself is of the intention that *Pillars of Society* will serve as “the counterpart of *The League of Youth* (1869)”, the first play of Ibsen’s realist cycle, and will “enter pretty thoroughly into several of the more important questions of the day” (Ibsen 1905:291). Between *The League of Youth* and *Pillars of Society*, however, Ibsen was rather occupied with many other publications, such as *Poems* (1871), new editions of old plays, and above all *Emperor and Galilean* (1873).

In many ways Ibsen struggled with this new play. According to Edvard Beyer, “there are more drafts of this play than of any other play by Ibsen”, and each draft shows revealingly “how he grappled with the new form, and worked his way towards a natural, everyday style of speech” (Beyer 1978:111-112). With quite much certainty we can say *Pillars of Society* is the first play in which Ibsen’s retrospective technique came to maturity (Jorgenson 1963:310). What I find particularly significant about this play, however, is that in it we can identify certain main “questions of the day” which Ibsen will deal with repeatedly from different angles in his later plays, just like branches growing out from the trunk. We can very well say by *The League of Youth* and *Pillars of Society* Ibsen entered a new stage of his writing career, both in terms of his aesthetic ideas, i.e. what should be represented in his dramatic works, and of his dramatic techniques. Henry Rose calls this “the fourth stage in the evolution of the genius of Ibsen”, with his faith in “the ideals’ power of ‘propagation and development’” (Rose 1973:33).

In his discussions of the major Norwegian writers in the nineteenth century, James Walter McFarlane comments that “one thing inevitably emerges from any closer study of Ibsen, something rather unsettling to critical orthodoxy; and this is the realization that he does not seem to react very satisfactorily to any of the standard laboratory tests of criticism; further, that any account of his work that limits itself to what is positive and obtrusive in it seems destined to end in triteness” (McFarlane 1960:61). According to McFarlane, Ibsen’s middle and later plays comprise an “exponential series in which the plus and minus quantities function in a way altogether different from those that figure in an accountant’s statement of profit of loss” (62). This exponential series of plays, in my opinion, starts exactly from *Pillars of Society*. In this play, Ibsen raised the two of the most important themes in his reflections on



social ethics, namely, “truth” and “freedom”. In the later plays, however, these two concepts are reexamined over and over again. While truth is defined as one of the pillars of society in *Pillars of Society*, in *An Enemy of the People*, truth brings misfortune on the Stockmann family, turning Dr. Stockmann, who is a defender of truth, from a “pillar of society” to “an enemy of the people”; in *The Wild Duck*, truth claims the life of an innocent girl, Hedvig, through which Ibsen poses the question as to whether “truth” equals “fact” and whether “truth” is unconditionally better than “lie”. The same can be said about “freedom”. Its status as a “pillar of society” is brought to an even higher level in *A Doll’s House* (1879), manifested through Nora’s famous door bang; but in *Hedda Gabler* (1890), it leads to Hedda’s poetic, yet desperate suicide; and in *When We Dead Awaken* (1899), we can never forget Maia’s shout “I am free!”.

In terms of the “landscape of his authorship”, as is termed by Mcfarlane, *Pillars of Society* is also the starting segment of the whole map. In a sense it is not without a sense of irony that Ibsen started the whole map with “pillars of society”, the “central plateau” of the map, for after that Ibsen supplemented that map with the “dolls” of society, the “enemies” of society, the “ghosts” of society, and finally brought us “down among the dead men” (60).

The central figure in *Pillars of Society* is without doubt Karsten Bernick, the foremost citizen in the coastal town in the play. Among all Ibsen’s businessman characters, Bernick is one of the most impressive in many ways. I find his grand business plans rather prophetic of those of the later businessmen in Ibsen’s realist cycle. In Act 1, after a small meeting with the local tycoons, Bernick talks with a certain degree of excitement about the business prospects for the town which will be opened if the railroad is built: “Well, I should hope so! Think what a lift this will give the whole community! Just think of the vast tracts of forests that’ll be opened up! The rich lodes of ore to mine! And the river, with one waterfall after another! The possibilities of industrial development are limitless!” (Fjelde 1978:32) Although we do not know for sure if Bernick succeeds in materializing his industrial visions, we know for sure that his grand plans are realized by the businessmen in Ibsen’s later plays: in *The Wild Duck*, Old Werle makes great fortune from the timber industry at the cost of Old Ekdal’s reputation, both of whom are taken revenge upon by the woods; in *John Gabriel Borkman*, Borkman builds a great mining business yet gets revenged on by the mountain spirits because of his guilt toward the woman he loves; and in *An Enemy of the People*, the rivers, which are the natural facilities for the municipal baths, get polluted, resulting in not only physical disease

but also social corruption. It seems that in the later plays the conquering of the elements is always accompanied by human sacrifice and results in dissolution and revenge. However, in *Pillars of Society*, what we are presented at the very last is a reconciliation between Bernick and Lona, as well as between mankind and the elements, without any sacrifice or revenge. In this sense, I find it not improper to discuss this play after all the other plays, as a conclusion of man-woman and man-nature relationship.

In *Pillars of Society*, what is unfolded before the reader/spectator is the Norwegian society in the late 1870s. Compared with other European countries, industrialism and capitalism came somewhat late to Norway, but their “rapid development during the latter half of the nineteenth century transformed an economically backward country, dependent on agriculture, fishing, forestry and shipping, into an economically successful but socially divided industrial nation” (Thomas 1990:61). This transformation, however, rather than brought about by the collective effort of all social strata, is more “effected by a small group of powerful men”, who, according to David Thomas, are “mostly of foreign merchant stock” (62). In such social context, it is not entirely accidental that Ibsen let Bernick spend a few years in Paris and London before he comes back to Norway, which makes it easier for us to understand why Bernick has nurtured in himself a solid faith in his great mission of life and capability of carrying out that mission.

In fact, in certain ways Bernick is like a counterpart of Ibsen in the industrial realm. In his letter to King Charles written in Rome on 15<sup>th</sup> April, 1866, Ibsen has expressed similar ideas as voiced out by Consul Bernick: “It is not for a care-free existence I am fighting, but for the possibility of devoting myself to the task which I believe and know has been laid upon me by God—the work which seems to me more important and needful in Norway than any other, that of arousing the nation and leading it to think great thoughts” (Ibsen 1905:102). Just as Ibsen, Bernick believes that he is not fighting for any “care-free existence” but for the benefit of the whole community; he also believes that this task is laid upon him not solely by his personal motives but by a higher calling and can be completed by nobody else in the community than himself.

In Act 3 Bernick makes a thorough confession of his inner thoughts to Lona, the woman he loved wholeheartedly when he was young, and Johan, the scapegoat he found himself.

Speaking of the reason why he has to do the purchase of the properties along the railroad in secret, Bernick makes the following resounding speech:

“BERNICK. And isn't it society itself that makes us devious? What would have happened if I hadn't acted in confidence? Everyone would have swarmed in on the project, carved it up, parceled it out, botched and bungled it completely. There's not one man here in town, besides me, who knows how to manage as large an operation as this. In this country generally, it's only families from abroad who have any knack for big business. That's why I have a clear conscience on this score. Only in my hands can these properties have a long-term development that will feed any number of people.” (Fjelde 1978:80)

To this speech, significantly, Lona replies, “I guess you're right about that, Karsten” (80). Lona is not a person who hides her real opinions; therefore through her we are assured of Bernick's honesty in this speech. Also, it is not without truth when Bernick claims that if Lona and Johan mean to “strike this blow” (i.e. telling him out), they will not only ruin him but “a future of the greatest promise for this town” (78). In his final public confession, Bernick admits that even if he has not always “gone after profit”, nonetheless he is aware that “a hunger and a craving after power, status and influence has been the driving forces behind” most of his actions, after which he adds that he still believes he deserves “a place among the ablest businessmen here in town” (112). In fact, as reader/spectator we are quite aware that Bernick is only being modest; he is without question *the* ablest businessman in town, and as I have argued before, his industrial ambitions are carried onward by different businessmen in Ibsen's coming plays, another proof of Bernick's far-reaching influence. Therefore, although many scholars hold the opinion that Bernick prioritizes his personal profits to those of the community, for example Rose argues that “the design of Bernick throughout is to gain a maximum of advantage to himself (with relatively small shares to a group of necessary accomplices), but through it all to persuade the public that *their* good is his primary consideration”, my opinion is that Bernick does care substantially about the prosperity of the town and should after all be regarded as a convert to truth and freedom, a pillar of society in its true sense; otherwise the ending of the play would be too ironic to be in tune with the mood of the play and Lona's actions would seem rather misguided and in vain. After all, as Clurman points out, “Ibsen himself was not opposed to industrial innovation” (Clurman 1977:102).

As has been mentioned before, *Pillars of Society* depicts the Norwegian society which was in the transformation from a patriarchal, agricultural society into “an economically successful but socially divided industrial nation”. This is demonstrated first and foremost in

Consul Bernick's own shipyard. At the very beginning of Act 2 we are presented with an argument between Bernick and his foreman Aune about working methods. While Bernick insists upon replacing the old manual labor with the new machines, Aune is of the opinion that the new machines will make "one good workman after another turned out to go hungry" (Fjelde 1978:44). This transition from traditional manual ways of production to industrialized impersonal forms of production leads to, as Beyer terms it, an ever growing conflict between workers and employers (Beyer 1978:112). This conflict is not only economical, but also social. At the very beginning of the play Aune makes it clear, "My society isn't Consul Bernick's society"; therefore although both are only doing what they think is "for the betterment of society", they have different "betterments" and "societies" in mind. For Aune what he is working for is the working class, "the narrow faction" in Bernick's terms, and he accuses Aune of making speeches, stirring people up (Fjelde 1978:43); in other words, Aune pursues better economical and social conditions for the working class. On the other hand, Bernick pursues a greater kind of progress, that is, industrial progress of the whole society. In the short term, these two differently-oriented goals mean conflict between the workers and capitalists. Clurman mentions in his discussion of the play that similar incidents had happened in England, where "the same difficulty and dispute had provoked the insurgence of the 'machine wreckers' (Clurman 1977:102). In the long run, however, industrial progress will gradually merge these two different "social divisions" together, reducing their conflict with each other to a much lesser level, which has been proved by many successful developed countries today. Therefore, I find it rather meaningful that at the very end of the play Aune concedes to Bernick's view and willingly undertakes the task of implementing the new machines. Ibsen could have left this minor theme untreated (it is already quite enough to raise it in the play as a contemporary social problem), or he could have made Bernick concede to Aune's view. The fact that he put the reconciliation between the capitalists and the working class immediately after the reconciliation between man and woman/nature—which exactly conforms to the theories of eco-feminism—shows, as I see it, Ibsen's great foresight into the future, and that is exactly why even today his works are still in great circulation and his ideas having great influence.

Compared with other businessmen, my opinion is that Karsten Bernick is more aware of his business responsibilities. If we put him together with Morten Kiil, Old Werle and Borkman, what distinguishes him from the rest is his thorough understanding of what responsibilities the role of businessman incurs. Morten Kiil is only mindful of his Christian

conscience and clean fame; Old Werle pursues merely personal power and material gain; Borkman is obsessed with his grand visions of material affluence of the global community by establishing a mining empire, but Bernick's motive starts first and foremost from saving his mother's company. In her article "Life and Love: Thoreau's Life Philosophy on Man and Nature in the Age of Industrialization", Junhong Ma summarizes man's alienation in the wake of industrialization as a triple alienation: man's alienation from nature, man's alienation from others, and man's alienation from himself. And Consul Bernick, in my opinion, is exactly one such man who suffers greatly from this triple alienation.

Living in the early days of western industrialization, Henry David Thoreau had witnessed many businessmen of the kind of Bernick. Despite all the new inventions brought into an increasingly rich material life, Thoreau sensed the potential negative impact industrialization would have on human beings and their future dilemma, the result of which is his famous work *Walden* (1854), generally regarded as the first work of eco-criticism. In his reflection on industrialization, Thoreau "used poetic language to inquire about the rationality of science and technology, to describe the exploitation of life under the guidance of instrumental reason and to object to the material culture in which people's lives were eroded and degraded". Thoreau lamented that "man has lost the essential emotions and freedom of life within the industrial society, becoming apathetic and hostile to life. *'The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.'*" (Ma 2009:382)

Consul Bernick is exactly one such businessman who leads a life of "quiet desperation". In his confrontation with Lona in Act 2, Bernick tries to justify and rationalize his decision to abandon Lona fifteen years ago:

"BERNICK. You think I acted as I did out of selfish motives? If I'd only myself to consider, then I would have gloried in the courage to make a fresh start. But you have no conception how a businessman, under the pressure of immense responsibilities, grows to be part of the business he inherits. Do you realize that the lives and fortunes of hundreds—yes, thousands—of people depend on him? Don't you understand that this whole community that you and I call home would have been shaken to its foundations if the firm had gone down?" (Fjelde 1978:64)

Thoreau is opposed to excessive consumption in industrialization because he believes such consumption is not due to "true necessity". Besides basic needs, driven by a need "to have", human beings seek to increase their fortune and gradually slide into "material and sensory enjoyment" (Ma 2009:386). In this "having mode", human beings put more and more

emphasis on worldly possessions, which in Thoreau's eye are in fact "trivial things", while ignoring the real important things—"their inward life" (386). As a result, human beings lose their own innate value and have to resort to exterior possessions to reaffirm their value. This, in my opinion, is not only true in Thoreau's and Ibsen's time, but also applies to our present society. It is not uncommon that one is judged by the clothes one wears, the place one lives, the business one operates, etc. Consequently, while possessing these possessions, human beings are at the same time possessed by what they possess, for losing such possessions means losing their value in their society.

In *Pillars of Society*, Bernick's deceitful actions and his later troubled conscience all starts from his possession of Bernick & Company which he inherited from his mother. In order to keep and expand this possession, it is inevitable that he himself "grows to be part" of this impersonal business. In this way Bernick cuts himself not only away from his inner self with his foremost desire, i.e. a happy life with Lona, but also from all people around him; to use Ma's terms, he is alienated both from himself and from the others around him. All his choices and actions are made based on business calculations, he himself being the tool that implements such calculations. Bernick first suppressed his feelings for Lona and married Betty, a woman whom he had no feeling for but could bring him immense fortune. Then he sacrificed Johan's reputation in order to keep intact his own, as well as the company's. During the fifteen years in between, he gradually expanded his shipyard business and defeated one enemy after another in the business sphere; and now, he is about to make the next significant move in his grand plan: to build an inland railroad.

Interestingly, in his own days, Thoreau was famous for his dislike for railroad. In the 1800s, railroad was one of the most important inventions in transportation. According to Ma, in the United States, "by 1860, over 100,000 freight cars were rolling on rails and they were carrying 3.2 billion-ton-miles of freight" (383). Although the railroad came a bit late to Norway, this revolutionary means of transportation is a necessity rather than a choice for the country. In the chapter *Sound in Walden*, however, Thoreau expressly shows his dislike for this transportation means: "The iron horse makes the hills echo with his snort like thunder, shaking the earth with his feet, and breathing fire and smoke from his nostrils" (383). The hills echo because trees are cut down; with the thunder-like snort, i.e. mechanical noise, the train disturbs pastoral peace; the earth is shaken because mines are dug; and "fire and smoke" pollutes the air, upsetting ecological balance and leading to various environmental problems.

The other reason why Thoreau disliked the railroad is because it changed human beings' way of life. He called this changed life style a "train style": "The startings and arrivals of the cars are now the epochs in the village day They go and come with such regularity and precision, and their whistle can be heard so far, that the farmers set their clocks by them, and thus one well-conducted institution regulates a whole country" (383). Ma points out that human beings are made "mechanized and standardized" by this "train style" of life and "efficiency, profits and money" are brought to top priority (383). In the play, although the railroad has not yet been built, we are given many clues to Bernick's "train style" of life. His whole life centers around his business; except for his confidential conversations with Lona and Johan, he is seen either having business meetings with his partners and employees, or having routine, customary meetings with the "good, moral" society. In other words, his relationships with those who are around him are either defined in business terms or in ethical terms; none of these relationships are based on heart-to-heart understanding. For the company and community he is a managing tool; for his family he is the epitome of patriarchy. In this way Bernick becomes totally alienated from his true self and those who are around him. In the final Act when Bernick was making a last confession to Lona, he expresses his "inexpressible loneliness":

"BERNICK. Lona, you can't imagine how inexpressibly lonely I am here, in this small-minded, stunted community—how with every year I've had to pare down a few more of my hopes for a truly fulfilling existence. What have I accomplished, despite all it seems? Piecework—penny favors. But anything different, anything more wouldn't be tolerated here. If I wanted to move one step ahead of the sentiments and views cried up in the streets this morning, that would be the end of my power. You know what we are—we who've been labeled pillars of society. We're the puppets of society, no more than that." (Fjelde 1978:101-102)

Bernick's "inexpressible loneliness" is a direct result of his alienation from his true self and his fellow citizens. In order to keep his power in society he becomes part of that power, an instrument, a puppet. What is worse, because of his implementation of that power he becomes even more alienated from other people. For example, when Aune makes an objection to the use of machines, afraid that they will take away the work from numerous craftsmen, Bernick uses his position as employer and makes a threat of dismissal to force the obedience of Aune. This implementation of power not only strengthens but also distances the employer/employee relationship.

Another abuse by Bernick of his position as head of Bernick & Company is of an even more severe nature. When Johan announces his decision to reveal the truth to the public so that he may marry Dina, Bernick is determined to murder Johan with his secret by letting the *Indian Girl* go down. According to Beyer, in the nineteenth century it was in fact not uncommon that “Norwegian as well as British shipowners were speculating and sending unseaworthy ships to sea” (Beyer 1978:112). Although we do not know if Bernick has ever speculated in such ways, we do know for sure he is willing and capable to do it under necessary conditions. Beyer uses Samuel Plimsoll’s “struggle to reform the shipping laws” (112) as a proof of the severity of shipowners’ abusive management of the shipping business: in 1870s the ever-increasing losses of ships and crews due to overloading reached such a point that the English Parliament was forced to pass Plimsoll’s Merchant Shipping Act (1876). Interestingly, in his arousing speeches Plimsoll described such overloaded ships as “coffin ships”, a phrase which cannot fail to remind us of Ibsen’s famous lines “Because a surreptitious doubt, / sly rumours restlessly keep sneaking out / from after-deck and fo’c’stle, a farrago: / they think they’re sailing with a corpse for cargo” in his poem *A Verse Letter* (1875) written in almost the same year as *Pillars of Society*. Although by “corpse for cargo” Ibsen means the burden from a guilty past, it applies equally adequately to the currently context.

As opposed to a life as “puppet of society”, “a truly fulfilling existence” is presented as an alternative and more healthy way of life by Ibsen in *Pillars of Society*. In the play, this “truly fulfilling existence” finds frequent expressions in its connection with nature. The “small-minded, stunted community”, represented by the ladies who are members of the Society for the Morally Disabled, the hypocritical Hilmar and the prim and proper Rørlund, and finally the profit-oriented businessmen, is put in contrast with the free prairies in the United States, represented by Lona, Johan who have just returned from the New World, and Dina and Olaf (and perhaps also Martha) who have entertained a longing for freedom. It can be argued that in *Pillars of Society* we are presented with three groups of people who have different relationship with nature. One group is Bernick and the moral, urban society, who have an alienated relationship with nature as has been discussed above. The second group is represented by Olaf, Martha and Dina, who feel restricted by this instituted urban life and have a strong desire to go back to nature. The third group comprises of Lona, Johan and their fellow Americans who are depicted as behaving like “animals” but having a harmonious relationship with nature. The characters thus categorized, the play can be interpreted as a



victory of the third type of human/nature relationship over the first type and a successful transition of the second type of human/nature relationship to the third type.

When the play begins, the Bernick household as well as the whole urban town is portrayed as permeated with a stuffy air despite its superficial grandeur and promising economical prospects. Thomas points out that the society Ibsen intends to present is one that has newly gone through religious reformation, which in Norway was “intimately linked with” the development of capitalism. He shows “how the puritan ethic teaches both women, as guardians of the family, and paid workers, as the source of all surplus value, to be docile, inward-looking and suspicious of personal happiness and fulfillment” (Thomas 1990:62). When Lona breaks into the pious Bernick house, the ladies are seen sitting in the shadows and “sewing these white things”, after listening to Rørlund read the “morally inspiring” book *Women as the Servant of Society*. It is both ironical and comical when Lona expresses her bewilderment at this lugubrious atmosphere and raises the question if there has been a death in the family. Sick of the “moral linen reeks of decay” (Fjelde 1978:38), Lona “draws the curtains aside” to welcome in “broad daylight” and “opens the door and windows to the garden”. Lona’s actions, symbolically, are an attempt at renewing the link between nature and the Bernick household which has been alienated from nature for long. And through this link, more and more natural elements are brought into the household, finally bringing back to it truth and freedom. In addition, related with this renewed link with nature is seen an increased mobility on the part of the women. At the beginning of the play, only Bernick and his business partners are seen going back and forth across the stage while the ladies are either sitting in the living room or drinking coffee in the garden. In other words, the interior role of women and exterior role of men are distinctively separated with the latter being the dominant one. As the play goes on after the break-in of Lona, the women are seen having gradually increased mobility which finds its utmost expression in Betty’s self-willed setting out to look for her son without requesting her husband’s permission beforehand—a rather bold step on the part of a woman who has been docile for the most part of her life. This interrelation between increased mobility and renewed union with nature is not a coincidence; what is implied here is emancipation of women cannot be separated from their reunion with nature.

In Thoreau’s theoretical framework, man’s existence in industrial civilization is at most “one dimensional” (Ma 2009:388), and only in nature can man find a “truly fulfilling existence” which Bernick has already given up hope for. A true life, according to Thoreau,

should be “full of vivacity, growth and vitality”; it involves “perception of life, natural growth of the organism and active creation of living things and everlasting vigor and fertility of the world” (388). In the play, Bernick’s perception of everything in his life is based on its economical and social value and what use it can be of to him. One good example is when Krap lodges a complaint about Aune’s way of dealing with the *Indian Girl* at the beginning of Act 3. It is interesting to contrast Bernick’s real reaction upon hearing about Aune’s intention to let the ship go down with his faked one: at first he appears to be sympathetic and moral and condemns Aune’s disregard for “all those human lives”, but when Krap mentions that Aune regards the Americans merely as animals, Bernick only coldly replies “never mind about that”, indifferently agreeing with Aune and Krap on this point, and reveals his true concern—that is, for “the immense amount of capital that would be lost” (Fjelde 1978:72). Not only Bernick, but all men working in the shipyard fail to identify themselves with their fellow human beings from America. While Aune judges the situation by how much economical loss it will impose on the working class if the new machines are used, Krap and Bernick are only mindful of how much amount of capital the company will have to lose. Their way of thinking runs completely in the opposite direction of what is advocated by Thoreau, a love and reverence for all life forms in nature.

Secondly, to achieve a “truly fulfilling existence”, it is essential that man takes care to maintain the “vigor and fertility of the world”. Since the industrial revolution, such vigor and fertility of nature has been gradually exhausted. Large areas of forests are cleared for timber resources; mountains are dug for mines; industrial wastes are poured into rivers and seas, while at the same time urbanization develops at an incredibly fast speed, tearing away human beings from their original union with nature. In Ibsen’s time industrialization was still in its initial stage in Norway; environmental deterioration as is faced by our present society was yet not an obvious, serious issue. Although municipal towns are being built one after another, a larger part of the country was still rural. Therefore rather than condemning directly, as Thoreau did, the unstoppable process of industrialization and urbanization by referring directly to environmental issues, what is more common in Ibsen’s plays is the depiction of the lonely and confused state of man alienated from nature. In the eye of Consul Bernick, nature has only economic value; it is to be exploited for the purpose of both increasing social and personal wealth and guaranteeing himself power and influence in community. And in order to keep his social status and expand business, he is himself reduced to part of that business, representative of that force which will take away “vigor and fertility” from nature, and suffers

from an inexpressible loneliness. What is ironic here is although Bernick disregards the livings things in nature and its vigor and fertility, taking freely from it whatever he can to achieve his business and personal goals, he is, as a human being, rather concerned about his own creation of a particular living thing, that is, his son. In his confession to Lona, he expressly emphasizes the fact that it is his son that he is working for: "I'm preparing a lifework for *him*. A time will come when truth is rooted in our social structure, and on that he'll build a happier life than his father's" (102). To put it in another way, Bernick has totally ignored the fact that human being is just one living form in nature and all living forms are connected directly or indirectly with each other. He demands "vigor and fertility" for his own son while taking them away from nature without feeling any degree of guilt. Therefore, in a miraculous way, nature somewhat pretends to take revenge so as to give Bernick a warning. Confined in the stuffy house, Olaf has the habit of "slipping out of the house" and "stealing off to sea" (70). An innocent child, he has an instinctive urge to get out of the urbanized town and be part of nature. He has fancies about being a hunter in the forest and has an admiration for the imagined intact nature in America. Therefore, in a somewhat miraculous way, nature gives Bernick a warning about his disregard for "vigor and fertility" of nature by assuming to claim Olaf's life, reminding him that all life forms, including Olaf's and his, belong to nature. The result is a delightful one: overwhelmed by the joy of having Olaf back, Bernick immediately gives the command to delay the sailing of *Indian Girl* until all necessary reparation is done.

To achieve a "truly fulfilling existence", there is yet a third prerequisite in Thoreau's theoretical framework, that is, to be true to oneself and live not only an exterior, material life but also an inner, spiritual life. In industrialized civilization, human being's inner emotional life is "dulled and flattened"; therefore Thoreau maintains that in order to have a true life it is imperative for one to "recover the deep emotional experiences" by obtaining "a substantial release of instinctual energy" from nature (Ma 2009:388). In the play, what adds to the already "dulled and flattened" mind is, as I have mentioned above, the Puritan ethics. Industrialism and Puritanism combined together, the whole costal town becomes, as Lona describes, "lugubrious" as if there had been some death, and any action taken out of inward emotional desire is either laughed at or condemned by the whole town.

Fifteen years ago, when Bernick is disturbed by the terrible financial condition of Bernick & Company after his return to Norway, he followed his inner feeling and had an

affair with Mrs. Dorf. However, ashamed of this inner feeling (which in this specific case is distress at the business and affection for Mrs. Dorf) and fearful of the potential harm this relationship would do to his personal reputation, he turned away from Mrs. Dorf when he felt his social self was threatened, which resulted unfortunately in finding a scapegoat for himself. This turning away from his true emotions happened once again when he refused Lona's love and courted Betty instead for the purpose of using Betty's large amount of inheritance to save his company. After his marriage with Betty, Bernick has led a careful and calculated life which has no connection with his inner emotions, and has consequently become "inexpressibly lonely".

Another male character who made a very impressive rational action and who would usually escape critical attention is Mr. Dorf. He "left the two of them, wife and child" (Fjelde 1978:25). In essence he is no different from Bernick; both turned away from the woman they had feeling for and turned a blind eye to the suffering she was undergoing. Just like Bernick Mr. Dorf also attached much more value to his social status and reputation than to his emotional life and it was absolutely a rational action for him to leave his wife and daughter and start anew elsewhere. By contrast, Mrs. Dorf stayed in town "for an entire year" and even started "a school of dance". She remained true to both herself and her daughter, exploring possibilities of doing what she liked (i.e. dancing and acting) and fulfilling her responsibilities as mother for Dina. She is described by the gossipers as a woman who "had the nerve", but because of this "nerve", she ended up isolated by the community and dying in illness.

In addition to Mrs. Dorf, many other female characters are depicted as living a more full emotional life. Lona, in her fit of anger when she learned that Bernick had betrayed their love for each other, let her emotions take control and "gave that suave, debonair Karsten Bernick a box on the ear to make his head swim" (26). This is considered a shameful scandal by the local community and Lona has been all along a laughing stock whose "strange" and "out-of-line" behaviors are held in derision by those "moral" people. Lona's half sister Betty is equally emotional, and in her I find a somewhat more interesting pattern of emotional life compared with Lona. Betty is a person full of emotions; as Bernick describes it, when they married each other Betty "had any number of exaggerated notions about love". But since Bernick showed a total disregard for such unnecessary emotions, he made Betty gradually "get used to the idea that, little by little, it has to subside into a quiet, warm companionship" (64), which is not what Betty herself really wanted. Also, it is interesting when Bernick

remarks that it is through “her daily contact” with him which “could hardly fail to have its tempering influence” that Betty learned to moderate her emotional demand on him. And such a family with only tempered and moderated notions of love, according to Bernick, is “a model for [their] fellow citizens” (65). However, the fact that her emotions for her husband are tempered and moderated (which she did out of her love for Bernick) does not mean that Betty has been changed into a person as emotionless and feelingless as Bernick. As a docile wife who believes in her responsibility to follow her husband’s will and devote her entire self to him, during all these fifteen years Betty has been quietly trying hard to win her husband’s real commitment to her, yet without any success. An ironic scene happens at the beginning of Act 2 when Bernick blames the way Betty gossips about the past, announcing in her presence that he has not “one single person here [he] can talk to, or count on for support”. Deeply hurt by such harsh words from her husband, Betty cannot hold her emotions and burst into tears. This, however, annoys Bernick even more and he commands Betty to “stop this foolishness” (42). Betty’s whole inner life can be described as an inner struggle with her true self, a constant try to accommodate her emotions according to Bernick’s needs. Out of love for Bernick, she would rather oppress her own emotions to cater to Bernick’s liking. Therefore it is not without significance that her final win-over of Bernick’s real affection is a result from her disobeying Bernick’s will and following her own judgment, that is, her setting out to look for Olaf without telling anyone in the house. This daring act done out of her own free will not only reunites her with her true inner self, but also wins her Bernick’s affection and love. In other words, only by being loyal to one’s true self can one have a true loving, understanding relationship with another.

Somewhat different from Lona and Betty, Martha and Dina are characterized by their strong desire to go back to nature in their confined position in the patriarchal society. Martha is Bernick’s sister, but as a daughter she inherited nothing from their parents; everything was passed down to the son. She is kept in the house as a “nonentity”, a person who is totally “dependable” and “who’ll take on whatever comes along”, which in Bernick’s eye is a “good” thing (57). However, what is significant about her is that she has refused all marriage offers out of her commitment to Johan, and in this sense she is a woman true to herself. In addition, she also arranged the adoption of Dina, treating her as her own daughter. In a casual conversation in Act 1 Martha reveals her desire to return to nature: “Often, when I’m down there in the schoolroom, I wish I were far, far out of the wild sea”. This wish is denounced by the moral Rørlund as under the influence of “the sirens of temptation” (18). Dina is in a

similar situation with Martha. As the daughter of the supposedly fallen Mrs. Dorf, Dina is treated as a morally crippled young girl by every one around her who consider themselves as her moral superiors. Therefore, during all the years at the Bernicks she has nurtured a craving to escape to America where there are vast prairies with fresh air and what is more important, where people are “natural” (53). Through Dina Ibsen seems to point out that the “natural” way of life is connected with an intimate contact with nature while the “artificial” or “pretentious” way of life is connected with exposure to industrialism. Here what should be noted is that Ibsen by no means intends to depict America as an ideal country with intact nature and social freedom; as Weigand points out, “like most continental Europeans”, Ibsen “thinks of America as the home of mob rule and unadulterated commercialism”. The purpose of using America as a contrast is essentially to “make out a case against the Norwegian community, the hypocrisy of which he is scoring” (Weigand 1960:10). Either Martha or Dina alone cannot break the shackle of the hypocritical industrial society, but together they derive encouragement from each other and through Dina’s elopement with Johan, both have finally achieved emancipation and come to reconciliation with their true self. It is one small climax of the play when Martha rebels against conventions: “But sometimes or other I had to let it out. Oh, the way we suffer here from the tyranny of conventions, always conforming! Don’t put up with it, Dina! Marry him. Let’s have something happen that’ll break all their rules!” (Fjelde 1978:98) Encouraged by Martha, Dina finally resolves to elope with Johan, and through her emancipation Martha carries out her spiritual emancipation, too, though physically she is still bound to the conventional society. Weigand points out that it should be noted that when both women choose to follow Johan, Johan’s name has yet not been cleared; at that moment they still believe Johan was the guilty one. Therefore the decision is made entirely in answer to “the voice of [their] heart” (Weigand 1960:8).

In conclusion, reverence for all living things in nature, maintaining the vigor and fertility of the world and perception of and commitment to one’s innermost self are the three prerequisites for a “truly fulfilling existence”. In his theoretical framework, Thoreau makes a distinction between the “to-have” life mode and the “to-be” life mode. He believes that in the industrialized society human beings focus too much on material gains and possessions, which is the very source of various kinds of human agony, while in nature all forms of life are really “to be”. Therefore returning to nature to derive as much energy as possible from the primitive natural forces is offered by Thoreau as a remedy to people confined by the one-dimensional city life. At the end of the play, thanks to a “mischief” of the elements (i.e. tempting Olaf to

the ship), Bernick retrieves his reverence for human lives and an awareness of his inner self, and is converted into a true human being through making an honest public confession. Some of his fellow citizens, such as Rørund, Hilmar, etc., however, have yet not come back to the embrace of nature, just as many people in our present society. In China there can be found many capitalists who make money by making the workers work excessive hours; at the same time many governmental officials, who, tempted by huge profits, are allowing for excessive use of natural resources by the capitalists while preaching in public a social and business ethic built upon the principle of harmony. These “pillars of society” will surely have much to learn from Ibsen’s play *Pillars of Society*.

## 6 Conclusion

So far I have analyzed the four selected plays, namely, *Pillars of Society*, *An Enemy of the People*, *The Wild Duck* and *John Gabriel Bokrman* from an eco-feminist approach and have proved, I hope in a satisfactory way, my assumption in the introductory part that in these four plays there is a correlation between the male protagonist's exploitation of nature and the way he takes advantage of the woman (usually one that deeply loves him). Here first of all I would like to recapitulate my previous analyses.

In *An Enemy of the People*, there are two industries which are relevant to the central conflict of the play, namely the tannery industry and the municipal baths. The town is in its transitional period to an industrial town which is characteristic of many municipal towns back in nineteenth-century Norway, and has made heavy investments in the municipal baths through which alone it can be said that the town has a promising future. However, after certain investigations, Dr. Stockmann discovers that the waterworks of the baths are contaminated by the wastes poured from the tanneries and is determined to convince the town authorities to rebuild the whole waterworks. Because of the economic loss this plan will incur, Dr. Stockmann meets opposition from the whole town which labels him "the enemy of the people". If we have "truth" and "freedom" in our mind as the two pillars of society, Dr. Stockmann can be viewed deservedly as a brave defender of truth.

In addition to this understating about the role of Dr. Stockmann, in my analysis I have pointed out that just as much the story is about defending and fighting for truth, it is as much about the inherent deficiencies in modern industry. I used Shiva's eco-feminist theories of the reductionist modern industry and value versus non-value to argue that the dilemma the town is faced with essentially results from the fact that all the entrepreneurs or investors are only concerned with their own profits. That is to say, when the tanneries and the baths were built, the construction plan was made solely based on their respective maximized benefits. Anything that is not a direct source of profits is reduced to the state of non-value, such as industrial wastes. It is only when problems of contamination have surfaced that the townsfolk come to the realization that the two investments have some interrelations. However, even Dr. Stockmann fails to see the essential deficiencies of profit-driven modern industry, let alone the townsfolk; except for Dr. Stockmann who sticks to the so-called truth (which ironically is by no means a feasible plan for the town), all the other townsfolk hastily defend their own



interests. While Mayor Stockmann and the home owners will continue with the current plan of the baths at whatever cost, Morten Kiil, owner of the tannery, tries to save his reputation by forcing Dr. Stockmann to take back his words about the pollution using Katherine and the children's money as bargaining chips. Ironically, neither man would step back for Katherine's sake in spite of their responsibilities for her as father and husband. The play's irony culminates in Dr. Stockmann's triumphant announcement that he is the strongest man in the world because he stands the most alone while Katherine has all along stood firmly by his side. As a woman with intelligence and sensibility, Katherine proves her ability of independent thinking by choosing to side with her husband meeting all kinds of public shame; yet for Dr. Stockmann she has always been no more than a housewife who is able to shrewdly manage the home.

The second play I analyzed is *The Wild Duck*. Though written immediately after *An Enemy of the People*, the play shows an important aesthetic turn in Ibsen's writing career, namely, Ibsen's focus on the inner self of the characters as well as his use of symbolism. Therefore, rather than analyzing the play in its historical and biographical background, I analyzed the overall structure of the play from an archetypal approach. My argument is that in the play the Hoidal forest functions as the Eden of mankind, and by illegal lumbering on state property Old Werle and Old Ekdal collectively committed the original sin against nature and are thus exiled from the Eden. In their later life both of the two old men have been paying for this original sin: though free from any legal accusations thanks to his scapegoat Old Ekdal, Old Werle nevertheless suffered greatly from the unpleasant relationship with his wife and indulged himself in a succession of affairs; although he finally found his soulmate Mrs. Sørby, blindness has become his new suffering in addition to his increasingly distant relationship with his son.

On the other hand, in the Ekdal family Old Ekdal has for his whole life been under the shadow of the past shameful occurrence, i.e. his imprisonment, and lives his life in a state of poverty and disrepute. This shame is passed down to Hjalmar, who, despite his alleged great sorrow for his father and determination to lift him up once again, is just as evasive from his family responsibilities as Old Ekdal, and both derive entertainment and a feigned sense of achievement from hunting in the attic forest they built together.

It is Hedvig, however, who bears the cross from both families. As the illegitimate daughter of Old Ekdal, she will never be publicly acknowledged either by Old Ekdal or by

Gregers as his half-sister, and she is on the verge of losing her eyesight because of heredity. As the daughter of the Ekdals, on the other hand, she is deprived of an ordinary childhood with proper schooling and playmates because of family poverty. In other words, she is cast out of the Eden both of Old Werle—the actual Hoidal works with its material value, and of Old Ekdal—the “free life of the moors and forests” with its spiritual value. With the loss of Eden Hedvig is also doomed to lose fatherly love on both sides, and Hjalmar’s outrageous demand for absolute proof of her daughter’s love finally claims her life. In short, Hedvig bears the original sin committed by both Old Werle and Old Ekdal against nature and pays for it with her life on behalf of both families. Because of her suicide, the two families come to a reconciliation: Hjalmar reacknowledges Gina as his wife and accepts the handsome offer made by Old Werle.

In addition, I used Ortner and Rogers’ (eco-)feminist theories to draw an analogy between the way the men in the play exploit nature and the way they treat their closest women. My argument is that for Old Werle both woman and nature are resources from which he can acquire material wealth and sensual pleasure. For the Ekdal men, nature and women are in a position of servitude and they themselves are their masters. They keep the illusion of their past glory by “hunting” in the loft forest and demanding an absolute faith in them from the women, though ironically it is in fact the women who are running the whole family business. However, what is significant is that compared with many woman characters in other plays who are rebellious against the position of servitude, Gina and Hedvig more than willingly serve Hjalmar to make him happy as well as to create a pleasant family atmosphere—out of their deep love and concern for Hjalmar.

The third play in my analytical sequence is *John Gabriel Borkman*. Before my analysis of the relationships between the characters I pointed out that Borkman is one of the greatest nineteenth-century European capitalists whose industrial vision cannot be matched even by Bernick’s. Compared with all the other capitalists in Ibsen’s plays, Borkman is the only one whose vision reaches a global scale and who firmly believes that human happiness is based on exploitation of nature. Compared with Ella, the woman he once loved, what is more dear to him is the potential wealth in the mountains he can bring to daylight by making investments in the mining industry. Therefore, when he was to choose between a life with the woman he loved and bank presidency, he had no hesitation in choosing the latter, for women for him

are no more than a special kind of commodity which essentially can be replaced by one another.

Because of his abandonment of Ella and marriage with Gunhild, a woman he had no affection for, he has ruined both women's emotional life. Both women were beautiful, passionate and lively in their youth, but during these thirteen years they have undergone the same process of sterilization: Ella has never felt any compassion ever since she was abandoned by Borkman and physically she is now a semi-invalid plagued by a non-curable disease; Gunhild, on the other hand, has hardened into a cold lady full of hatred and vengeance. This process of sterilization of the inner life of the women is mirrored by the biological process of sterilization taking place in the surrounding natural environment. My opinion is that rather than hinting at the industrial invasion of nature, Ibsen depicts the natural environment in such a way so that it can serve as a foil for the sterilized inner life of the women characters.

Realizing through her final conversation with Borkman that he has never loved her as dear as the slumbering spirits deep in the mountains, Ella resolves to pass judgment on the conduct of this ruthless male oppressor and mysteriously nature joins force with her and carries out her prophecy of Borkman's death by killing the man with the freezing winter air. Through Borkman's death, the twin sisters finally come to a reconciliation and renew their bond of sisterhood.

The last play I analyzed in my thesis is *Pillars of Society*. Although it is chronologically written before all the other three plays, thematically I have given a few reasons why it should be discussed lastly: first, Bernick is, among all the businessman characters in Ibsen's plays, the one who is the most concerned about the management of his business as well as its social image. Unlike Borkman who is more given to a luxurious, kingly life style, Bernick is rather mindful of the social image of his family and has done all he can to set a perfect example for his fellow citizens in every aspect of life. It can be said that while Borkman is only obsessed with his own industrial visions, Bernick measures every achievement of his in terms of the benefits it brings to the community—in addition to the social power and influence it brings to him. Also, *Pillars of Society* is the only play where we see a final consummate reconciliation between different parties without sacrificing anybody.

I used Thoreau's theory of man's threefold alienation (i.e. alienation from nature, alienation from the others around him and alienation from his inner self) under the influence of industrialism to argue that Bernick has himself become a part of that business and a tool to implement certain functions of the company because of his position in the company and his responsibility to expand the company's business. Unlike Borkman, he feels lonely and constrained in the small-minded community and longs for a truly fulfilling existence. The only consolation for him is the hope that his son will inherit a better world from him. His exploitation of Lona, Betty, Johan, etc. was all a result from his being part of an impersonal business, which in turn adds to his inexpressible loneliness. According to Thoreau, reverence for all living things in nature, maintaining the vigor and vitality of nature and perception of and commitment to one's innermost self are the three prerequisites for a truly fulfilling existence, and my argument is that *Pillars of Society* is about how women and nature together bring Bernick back to this recognition and help him arrive at a truly fulfilling existence. At the end of the play we see not only the reconciliation between industrialism and nature—Bernick is guaranteed business success after his confession of his past sins and the new machines are welcomed by the workers led by Aune—but also the reconciliation between man and woman: Bernick realizes the importance of women in society and openly acknowledges it.

Thematically, the four plays as a sequence tells to a certain extent the playwright's own idea about the final solution to the relationship between man and woman/nature. Due to biological and historical reasons, women are domesticated by men and reduced to the position of servitude at an early stage of civilization. They are economically and socially dependent upon men, which in turn enhances their secondary role in the family. In *An Enemy of the People*, we see Katherine's futile fight for recognition from her husband; regardless of the intelligence and bravery she has demonstrated to every one in the municipal town, Dr. Stockmann has never regarded her as his equal, but all along as a woman whose expertise is limited to household matters. In *The Wild Duck*, we are shown how the loving mother and child try hard to make Hjalmar, the so-called "family provider" happy, hiding carefully from him the fact that it is the women who are supporting the family; yet what they get after all these years of living together with the man who is more dear to them than anything else in the world is his contempt for the child because of his wounded pride. To put it in another way, *The Wild Duck* is an extreme case of man's exploitation of woman: to prove Hedvig's absolute belief in and love for him, Hjalmar is willing to take away her life without feeling much remorse. This leads to the next step in the development of man-woman/nature

relationship, that is, women's fighting back and taking revenge upon men, which is the main theme in *John Gabriel Borkman*. In her final confrontation with Borkman Ella passes judgment on Borkman on behalf of all those who have been exploited by him. With the miraculous help of nature, i.e. "the ice hand" she prophesizes Borkman's death and avenges not only herself but also her sister and nature.

Revenge, however, is not what Ibsen hoped for (or at least originally hoped for if we take into consideration the fact that he wrote *Pillars of Society* before all the other plays). As Jorgenson points out, "the dramatist always held that man's labor-life must be harmonized with and dynamically supported by his love-life" (Jorgenson 1963:488). This I would love to rephrase, from an ecological perspective, that man's success in his career is not only related with the support of women, but is also a result from his harmonious relationship with nature. Based on this assertion, it is not a coincidence that only in *Pillars of Society* do we find a happy ending, because Bernick comes to the realization that women's support is indispensable to his success, or on a larger scale to the prosperity of a community. Also, the fact that Olaf is almost killed accidentally on the *Indian Girl* awakens in Bernick his deep awe for nature so that it is foreseeable that he will no longer send out any unseaworthy ships to make quick profits. His counterparts in the other plays, however, will continue with their disharmonious relationship with woman and nature and hence will never come to a truly fulfilling existence.

Therefore, although different generations of Ibsen scholars have expressed their admiration for Ibsen's uncompromising individualism, in my opinion, arriving at an independent existence is not the ultimate end; rather, that is only the first step if one is to achieve a truly fulfilling existence. The second step, as I have pointed out many times in my analysis of the four selected plays, is to have a harmonious relationship with both nature, the others and one's inner self, or to use a term in eco-feminism, come to a proper awareness of one's "relational self".

According to Plumwood, "each is dependent on the other for identity and organization of material life" (Plumwood 1993:52); in other words, the "self" is defined based on its relation to "the other". In the conventional patriarchal society, "this relation is not one of *equal*, or mutual, or equally relational" (52). Man's qualities are taken as primary and essential while woman "is defined and differentiated with reference to man" as "incidental"

and “inessential” (Beauvoir 1965:8). In the above plays I have discussed, the majority of the characters are either fighting for an “independent self” (as opposed to a “relational self”) or trying, consciously or unconsciously, to maintain the conventional relation between their self and the other. For example, in *An Enemy of the People*, Dr. Stockmann is so absorbed with himself that his self is more independent than relational. Ross Poole defines the independent self as a conception of oneself as “the self-contained center of [one’s] needs and desires, and others exist as the means through which these needs and desires may be satisfied” (Plumwood 1993:151). Dr. Stockmann’s triumphant announcement of his being the strongest man in the world who stands the most alone marks him as a self-contained person whose essential needs and desires have nothing to do with Katherine or the children; conversely, nor do Katherine and the children’s needs really matter to him. In *The Wild Duck*, Gregers is another good example of this “independent self” who, in order to satisfy his need to answer to the “summons of the Ideal”, will sacrifice whatever that lies in his way. On the other hand, Hjalmar is a typical defender of the patriarchal “relational self”: he believes in himself as the family provider and assumes a superior attitude to Gina in all aspects of life. In *John Gabriel Borkman* Borkman is somewhat a combination of the independent self (in view of his deep obsessions with his own industrial ambitions) and the patriarchal relational self (in view of his disregard for the female intellectuality).

There are, however, certain characters who fight for a true relational self. According to Jessica Benjamin, “we must understand the self as *essentially* related and interdependent, and the development of self as taking place through involvement and interaction with the other”. This “relational account of the self” brings about “a better account of the social and a common basis for dialogue and recognition between corresponding oppositional critiques” (153). In *Pillars of Society*, Bernick is exactly one that comes to this understanding of the “relational self”. He realizes that women’s support is indispensable to his success as well as to the prosperity of the community and therefore are also pillars of society just as himself. In this way he transcends his original patriarchal “relational self” into a true “relational self” based on mutual respect, understanding and interdependence. In addition to Bernick, Dina and Johan are also fighting for an equal, harmonious relationship in America where she would work first to “become something” (Fjelde 1978:98) herself the way Johan has before she can marry him. Old Werle and Mrs. Sørby can also be regarded as such a couple, though this true relationship comes a bit too late for both of them. And in *An Enemy of the People* we are

given the hint that a mutual appreciation and fondness is growing between Petra and Captain Horster.

In my opinion, the true, equal “relational self” is also related with the concept of “the new woman”, which is an important theme in many Ibsen’s plays in addition to the four selected ones here. For example, in *A Doll’s House* we have Mrs. Linde who, frightened by the “emptiness” and sense of loss brought about by the “independent self”—“To work for yourself—there’s no joy in that”—wishes to build a life together with Krogstad. That Mrs. Linde tells Krogstad that “[they] both need each other” (178) reveals her as a woman who is on the way of constructing a true “relational self”. In *Hedda Gabler* we have Thea and Tesman who are a similar couple to Mrs. Linde and Krogstad. In *The Lady From the Sea* Dr. Wangel’s final resolution to let Ellida follow her own free will brings the couple to a true relationship.

Transcending the patriarchal relational self with the male gender as the center into first of all an independent self which is committed to one’s innermost feelings and needs and then into a true relational self based on equality and interdependence with the other, these are the two points of the final message I have come to after my analysis of the four selected plays. Today, as environmental deterioration becomes an increasingly serious problem facing the whole of humanity, another dimension should be added to this relational self, that is, the ecological relational self, which is the third point of the final message I have arrived at. As I have proved in my thesis, man’s oppression of nature and man’s oppression of woman are interrelated; therefore, if one is to ensure a truly fulfilling existence, one need to relate oneself in a harmonious way to both nature, the other, and oneself.

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