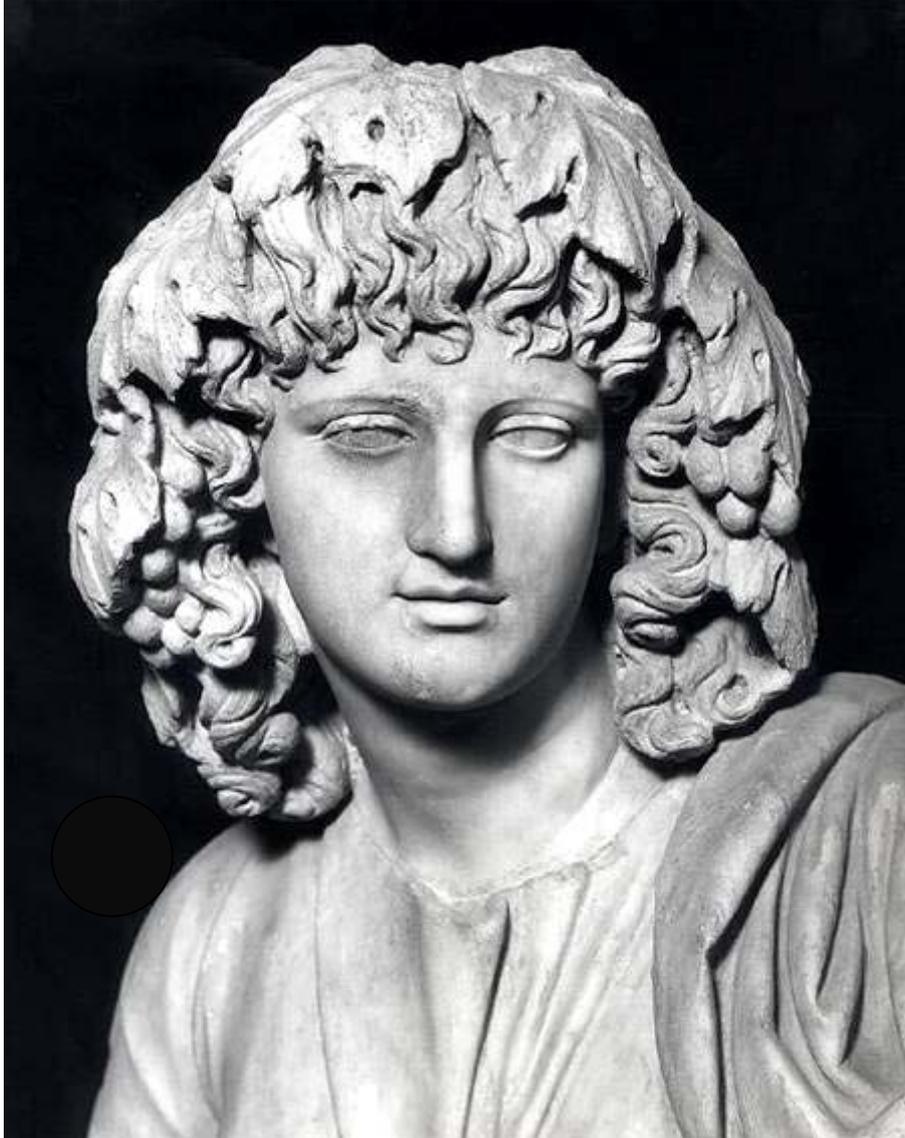


# **Modernity and Ibsen's "Tragic Muse"**



**Claudia Horntvedt**

**Master thesis in Ibsen Studies**

**Centre for Ibsen Studies  
University of Oslo  
Spring 2008**



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## 1. Introduction

During the international Ibsen conference in Athens in 2002, dedicated to *Ibsen, Tragedy and the Tragic*, a significant number of Ibsen scholars have attempted to pose and give answers to the topicality of Ibsen's tragic tradition by addressing questions like: "What does the word "tragic" mean when applied to art and what is a "tragedy" when the term is related to Ibsen's dramatic form? Can the concept of "tragedy" be applied in modern times when no tragic world-view exists? Can the story of "the lady next-door" (a Nora?) be a "tragedy" in this sense" (Sæther 2003:3)?

These are indeed pertinent questions, which yet have long been advanced and debated in one form or another by those interested in Ibsen's drama and the aesthetic of the tragic genre. What seems an accomplished project in terms of understanding and completion is a matter yet seemingly debatable. The struggle to endorse and exhaust this theme about Ibsen and his relation to the tragic art has evidently not come to its closure. Admittedly, this juxtaposing matter has exceedingly drawn my attention and as a consequence it has caused my question related to this topic therefore emerge. Subsequently, in my thesis, I will pose the question and discuss whether Ibsen's female characters indeed qualify as tragic heroines, that is, whether or not they epitomize in Ibsen's acceptance the generic concept of "The Tragic Muse".

In his letter to Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson written on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January 1865, Ibsen confesses to have been mesmerized by "The Tragic Muse" of Melpomene<sup>1</sup>, which to him suggested the epitome of Greek tragedy: "No statue that I yet have seen in Italy has taught me so much. I would say that it has revealed the essence of Greek tragedy to me" (Ibsen 1964:40). The aim of this project will not be to redefine something that already has been postulated, but rather re-evaluate consequences, and give new reasons for my reading Ibsen's so called "heroism" in a different manner. In my attempt to reassess and give a somewhat new approach to the topic of the heroic aspect regarding Ibsen's female protagonists, I will restrict my analysis to *Ghosts*, *Rosmersholm* and *Hedda Gabler*. The reason for my choosing only this limited number of plays from Ibsen's alleged tragic corpus, is quite simply due to the fact that these plays are

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<sup>1</sup> The illustration on the cover represents the statue of Melpomene (5th century B.C.), from Vatican Museums and Galleries.

often taken into consideration with regard to Ibsen and his aesthetic inclination towards the tragic mode of expression.

*Prima facie*, the question I proposed for discussion would seem to take the task, yet another time of redefining something that already has been extensively theorized about the aesthetics of the genre. I would like to make clear that my task in pursuing to answer the question I initially posed will merely derive in a novel manner from what already has been postulated. Therefore I will present in the introductory part of my thesis the established, leading and juxtaposing positions regarding Ibsen's heroism and his tragic tradition. My personal reading thereafter will argumentatively be deriving from that which presents relevance to my topic, together with individual guiding theories that will establish my own position, throughout my analysis of the plays and of the female protagonists, respectively.

Although the theory of the tragic tradition is rather difficult to pin down, nevertheless Peter Wessel Zapffe in his prodigious treatise *Om det Tragiske* (1941) takes up the task of analysing the genre. From the very outset however, there is a tone of disfavour which corresponds with his existentialist inclinations, regarding the numerous *lacunae* the theories of his forerunners have triggered through their postulations. He juxtaposes theories ranging from Aristotle, Kierkegaard, Hegel, Lessing, Nietzsche, and Schopenhauer with the attempt of showing his working hypothesis, namely that they all lack a concept which they can oppose the tragic genre to. Hence their endeavour lacks from the very outset realistic purposes. He deplores also the paucity of clarity in his opponents' theories when defining the term. Zapffe looks for a realistic mode that is an "objectively tragic" source of "pure causality" which can serve for defining the tragic experience, tragic feelings of tragic writings, the whole tragic process, as it were, from a non-tragic counterpart.

Clearly, the concept of the tragic related to Ibsen and his oeuvre has extensively and exceedingly been discussed, asserted and defined. Therefore in my answering the question I posed *ab initio*, I will limit the former part of my thesis to briefly present the general chief conceptual allegiance inside the Ibsen scholarly aesthetic climate on the subject, with the intention of giving my personal detached position, deriving from that. Subsequently, in order to show my perspective and understanding of the subject, I will commence with a concise analysis of what has already been discussed and then move further and give my explanation due to which I see a different reading of the dramas.

Leading Ibsen scholar, Professor Vigdis Ystad has proved to be preoccupied with the topic regarding Ibsen and the tragic tradition his oeuvre is tributary to. Hence the material Ystad has produced on this subject is indeed vast (1988-2003). From the very beginning she has taken a clear position that Ibsen's tragic tradition is generically influenced by Danish poet and thinker, Søren Kierkegaard.

In her chapter entitled "Det tragiske" ( Ystad 1996: 42) where the scholar examines tragedy in Ibsen's art, she appreciates that it is in his realistic phase, where he wrote the plays that made him famous, *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts*, *The wild Duck*, *Rosmersholm* and *Hedda Gabler*, that Ibsen primarily reverts to the tragic mode. Then she sustains the idea that having it on good authority (Harald Beyer's *Søren Kierkegaard og Norge*), Ibsen was directly inspired by the Danish philosopher. Referring to Kierkegaard's work *On the concept of Tragedy*, we are provided with the definition of the tragic hero, where according to Ystad, Ibsen's characters subscribe to. Subsequently, the tragic hero represents the epitome of the clash between the old and the new, where he becomes his own victim in his overriding fight for freedom (Ystad 1996:45). Hence Ibsen's characters abide by Kierkegaard's understanding of the tragic hero, where essentially the tragic tension and the tragic motif emerge precisely by the irrefutable struggle between the old and the new.

Furthermore, in her article entitled "Ibsen and Anagnorisis", (1997) she reads Ibsen's social dramas as fine examples that emulate the model of classical tragedy. Consequently, in the case of *Ghosts* this fact is due to the play's obvious *anagnorisis*- scenes:

The affinity of Ibsen's drama with the model of classical tragedy was pointed out already in the playwright's own life time. When *Ghosts* appeared in 1881, P.O. Schjøtt, professor of classical studies in Norway, stated: "Of everything we have read in the literature of modern drama, *Ghosts* comes closest to the drama of Antiquity." Few could contest that view, which is corroborated not least by the construction of the plot ( Ystad 1997: 399).

In her analysis of the drama Vigdis Ystad suggests that the concept of *anagnorisis* in the final scene of *Ghosts* is fundamentally linked to the concept of *suffering*. At this point, in view of her analysis of *Rosmersholm*, *Ghosts* and *John Gabriel Borkman*, the scholar draws the attention to Kierkegaard's fine treatise and perhaps his chief contribution to aesthetics through his work, *Either-Or*, more specifically his chapter entitled "The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama" (Kierkegaard 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2004). Here Kierkegaard

through his pseudonym, aesthete A. yields to the task of showing how the peculiar qualities of ancient tragedy can be appropriated to modern tragedy.

Vigdis Ystad (1997:401) points to Kierkegaard's understanding of the concept of *guilt* through the tragic hero as the focal point, where the genuine tragic issues surface precisely from the tension between individual and his/her absolute guilt. Then she further suggests from the philosopher's work that the concept of *anxiety*, which is factual in the modern acceptance of the tragic as opposed to the concept of *sorrow* in classical tragedy, emerges as a result of the hero's *recognition* of his *guilt*. As a consequence, there is a liberating effect in *anxiety* that Ibsen's characters experience that causes them to assume responsibility for their own lives. Throughout, Ystad (1997:409) concludes after analysing three of Ibsen's social dramas that the *anagnorisis-scenes* have consequences for the balance between *fable* and *character* giving an emphasis on the representation of the character in an Aristotelian manner, possibly greater than Ibsen may have intended.

"Aesthetics or ethics? Ibsen in the European tradition of tragedy", ( Ystad 2003) is an article that discusses the timeless dilemma of Ibsen's oeuvre being tributary to the tragic tradition, whether or not it pertains to the classical understanding of it or not. Her affirmative response to that is founded yet another time on Kierkegaard's famous treatise on modern tragedy, from his work *Enten-Eller* (1843). She engages in the challenge posed by Clifford Leech about the conflicting relation between ethics with regard to the concept of guilt. Hence, she exemplifies through a number of Ibsen's plays that precisely this fundamental concept of *guilt* is the element which has to be taken into consideration when analysing the dramatic effect. Her position on the matter is validated by the following:

But even if guilt as a rule has been questioned as a credential of "real art", the problem of guilt has never ceased to interest readers and audiences engaged in the nature of tragedy as a classical-and modern- version of drama . Guilt- which is to be defined as being connected to the question of morals and ethics-is often found as a theme in theoretical discussions and critical works on great playwrights, among whom Ibsen represents no exception ( Ystad 2003:51).

The overall issue that she seeks to explain here is whether it is possible to discriminate between ethics and aesthetics in explaining the essential qualities in tragedies as great works of art. The Ibsen scholar suggests that the answer to her question might be found by drawing a parallel between Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Poetics* where the focus should be held on the concept of *mimesis*. After listing the elements comprising formally Aristotle's observation on the concept, Vigdis Ystad's assessment considers the aesthetics of the genre

through the following maturing aesthetic stages, discussion which eventually culminates with 18<sup>th</sup> century European drama. During various periods, the mode of drama moved from the romantic expression of feelings, towards, as the scholar has it, a reawakening of seemingly classical and humanitarian definitions of art. These regarded the ethical or didactic mode, promoting human welfare and social reforms, where Georg Brandes and for a short Ibsen may be considered as spokesmen of this view (Ystad 2003: 54).

Though moralistically enough, one must be prudent in reducing Ibsen's work to merely this, suggests Ystad, since in such a case one would be facing melodramas, rather than tragedies. More importantly, the scholar sees Ibsen as a compelling authority who aimed at a rebirth of unified ethical and aesthetic sensibilities. Hence, the critic is of the opinion that Ibsen wrote problem plays that were at the same time tragedies, overriding the didactic element and incorporating it into plays more akin to the idea of tragedy shown in Aristotle's *Poetics* (Ystad 2003:55). Ibsen's plays become tragic due to his placing his heroes in ethically defined situations of choice and action. Commonly understandable, the characters' choice of reality is still the main challenge. This matter triggers an ethically flavoured tragic conflict regarded as *mimesis*, since this term suggested by Aristotle reflects an aesthetical expression of mundane cardinal problems. Still having in mind ethics as a main element of conflict, Ystad concludes that Ibsen writes his last series of cathartic plays through a delicate balance between realism and expressionism ( Ystad 2003: 58).

“Women's Utopia in Ibsen's writings” (1997), is an article which proposes a thorough analysis of the concept of utopia in relation to some of Ibsen's protagonists, based on the contradiction made between a social-critical and a personal-philosophical thematic on this topic. Her conclusion is based again on the Kierkegaardian theory of the tragic. Consequently, the basic concept of utopia must be evaluated as existentially fixed and therefore, according to the critic, there is no sense in relating it to any socially-critical discourse. Here she refers to another leading Ibsen scholar, Daniel Haakonsen, who ever since the 1950s has identified and analysed how Ibsen's female characters as a rule, defy ordinary social ethics because they are not endowed with any capacity to subscribe to it. This idea is further elaborated in his book *Henrik Ibsen. Mennesket og kunstneren* ( Haakonsen 2<sup>nd</sup>.ed. 2003: 117-130).

Daniel Haakonsen in “Kvinneskikkelser i Ibsens diktning” (1978), grounds this allegation on Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard's theory about the three existential stages, namely the

aesthetic, ethical and the religious, which the individual is compelled to experience during his human existence. The critic suggests that Ibsen adopted this Kierkegaardian theory with two modifications though:

Jeg tror da også at Ibsen faktisk har adoptert Kierkegaards idé, men med to modifikasjoner. For det første har han sett det etiske stadium som en slags forpliktelse overfor samfunnsnormene og allmenne kulturelt etiske forestillinger, og for det annet har han gjort det religiøse stadium om et åndelig eller idealistisk nivå, et nivå hvor man er i stand til å se rekkevidden og betydningen av de store ideer i tilværelsen. Hvis man etter en slik justering av begrepene sier at kvinnen springer over det etiske stadium, dvs. det sosialt og kulturelt etiske nivå og går direkte fra det umiddelbare plan til idealplanet, da rammer man noe vesentlig ved Ibsens kvinner ( Haakonsen 1978: 477).

That is, Ibsen's female characters' existential struggle does not find place between the public and the private sphere, since in Haakonsen's opinion they cannot orient themselves according to the ethical dimension. Theirs is rather a reflection of the clash of ideals that happens in their inner lives. Consistent with this idea, in his article "Ethical implications in Ibsen's drama" (1969), the scholar concludes that the essential point in the moral of Ibsen's plays and indeed in his entire authorship is namely that: "a human shall prove himself equal to his fate. He shall transform fate in its outward manifestation into his own personal fate by accepting the consequences of his past life without abandoning his ideals or the responsibility which rests upon him for the lives of the happiness of others" ( Haakonsen 1969:15-16).

When analysing "The function of sacrifice in Ibsen's realistic drama" (1966) Haakonsen distinguishes that these "passionate idealists" Ibsen displays, can be regarded as "doomed heroes." The explanation about "the doomed hero" consists in the fact that these characters take up an act of sacrifice in the completion of their existence. The sacrificial act means, according to Haakonsen, any form of suffering due to human will, as a recognition of their guilt which challenged the moral order. Accordingly, the critic considers Ibsen's "doomed heroes" pointing to the likeness between these and the classical prototypes of tragic heroes such as, Antigone, Macbeth, Brutus and Hamlet ( Haakonsen 1966: 23).

In his latter part of the chapter entitled, "Appolon og Dionysos" ( Haakonsen 2003:126-130) Daniel Haakonsen discusses the matter of Ibsen's artistic framework regarding the concept of tragedy. The scholar explains the Nietzschean view on tragedy, that is, on art and the artistic process, postulated by the German thinker in his seminal work: *The birth of tragedy from the spirit of music* (1872). Subsequently, Haakonsen draws here a parallel between Ibsen's plays

and the Nietzsche well-known dualistic opposition between Apollo and Dionysus, between order and chaos:

Den greske tragedie var for Nietzsche et samspill mellom de to gudene Dionysos og Appolon. Det dionysiske kaos mottar form fra Appolon. Den appollinske klarhet blir gjennomstrømmet av livsdrift fra Dionysos. Tragedien gir et bilde av det som er selve kulturen i dens essens: møtet med et kaos som livet må gi en foreløpig form for å kunne komme til syne selv, men som livet også i sin tur ødelegger, for å kunne bli gjenfødt på nye steder ( Haakonsen 2003:127).

Haakonsen explains that Ibsen's retrospective technique is symptomatic of this power play between order and chaos, life and shape, where the setting is moulded through unveilings and eventual confessions. All in all, Daniel Haakonsen's conclusion is unequivocally that: "Ibsen har virkelig greid å skape en tragedieform hvor de dionysiske og de apollinske krefter løper sammen og holder hverandre i balanse. Han har skapt et samfunnsdrama fylt av urovekkende avsløringer, men i en streng og velstrukturert dramatisk form" (Haakonsen 2003:130). The example that he derives from in his latter part of the closing chapter on tragedy is *Ghosts*: "Et mesterverk som *Gengangere* er til randen fylt av angst og gru, og likevel frapperende og enkelt bygget. Det eier en kunstnerisk orden av særegen skjønnhet og styrke, og stykket fører tankene til en av de ypperste av de klassiske greske tragediene, Sofokles' *Kong Oidipus*" (Haakonsen 2003:130).

John Northam, another Ibsen scholar of note, aims in his article on "Hedda Gabler", (1968) to give an analysis of the play through a parallelism with the Greek tragedy of Euripides, namely *The Bacchae*. His endeavour is to provide a comprehensive answer to Hedda's cold yet passionate character, and most importantly he looks for a reason in Hedda's suicidal act in the final scene of the play. Northam's intent hence is to give an explanation to the tragic substance the drama alludes to, through its thematic clash between the social and the spiritual values. The critic's position is that Ibsen gives through *Hedda Gabler*, his statement of what a heroic mind really should encompass, and the obliterating sacrifice the individual must overtake, as such. Hedda's character and actions are paralleled therefore by Northam to the protagonist god of the Greek tragedy, Dyonisus, the god of ecstasy and beauty, whose standards are questioned by Pentheus representing the conventional social order in Thebes. The only difference between the two heroes, according to Northam, is that Hedda unlike Dyonisus in opposing society, and social order alone, "she fights a terribly lonely battle, form a terribly vulnerable position of isolation" ( Northam 1968: 78). The tragic feeling transpires hence as an extension of this clash:

Hedda is not presented as an inviolate personality resisting the external pressures of society. Society has entered in and become part of her personality. The conflict between Dionysus and Pentheus takes place within the soul of this one woman. (...) In the modern world it is impossible to keep a soul inviolate and unspoiled, uncontaminated by social values. (...) We can no longer be heroes, only crippled heroes, no longer poets but only poets distorted and frustrated by the destructive inner conflict between Pentheus and Dionysus, between our social and our essential selves ( Northam 1968: 79).

Northam's conclusion is that Hedda mirrors Dionysus both in beauty but also in destructiveness. The tragic flavour that Ibsen presents in this drama discloses the fundamental disaccord between spiritual vision and social moral constraint: "Hedda is a compound of poetry with cruelty and destructiveness; society is a compound of corruption with warm humanity. For the full life, we need the poetry and humanity, the idealism and the stability. Ibsen shows that we cannot have both" ( Northam 1968:81)

Asbjørn Aarseth represents another conservative authority on this matter inside the Ibsen scholarly milieu. He suggests in his article dealing with "Ibsen's two most tragic dramas" (2003) that when analysing the tragic effect in Ibsen's plays, one can find an uncanny resemblance between the Greek tragedy and Ibsen's oeuvre: "Yet since 'tragedy' is a Greek concept, and since European drama originated in the Greek cultural context, a comparison between Ibsen and the Greeks in terms of structural elements is by no means farfetched." (2003:99). Aarseth gives a more elaborated analysis on this particular subject in his book *Ibsens samtidsskuespill* ( 1999) and *Peer Gynt and Ghosts* (1989) of what here resonates a sublimated verdict. He takes up the challenging radical discussion about Ibsen's allegiance to the tragic tradition that George Steiner proposes in *The Death of Tragedy* (1961) on the one hand, and Francis Fergusson in *The Idea of a Theatre* (1949) on the other. Aarseth scrutinizes Ibsen's tragic tradition with regard to Ibsen's *Lady Inger*, *Ghosts* and *Rosmersholm* and he verifies through parallelism whether these plays indeed attain a genuine tragic effect in terms of Aristotle's principles rendered in his work on *Poetics* (1954). Aarseth is of the opinion that after considering Aristotle's principles for the construction of tragedies, Ibsen's *Lady Inger* fails to qualify as a Greek tragedy: "because of the high level of unfortunate accidental circumstances" in the unfolding of the drama "it is possible to argue that this drama is not genuinely tragic in the sense of the ancient Greek tradition" ( Aarseth 2003:101).

The Ibsen scholar looks for a drama which can provide a more genuine tragic effect in the sense of the Greek tragic tradition. He therefore analyses *Ghosts* and *Rosmersholm*, respectively and he concludes that these two dramas have true tragic qualities. The critic finds

in *Ghosts* “the parallel to the tragic development in the myth of Oedipus” which according to Aarseth was “clearly intended by Ibsen” (Aarseth 2003: 103). The reason for this parallelism resides according to the critic generically in the “choice of words” Mrs. Alving uses when she decides to separate Oswald from his debauched father. Aarseth explains that Helene Alving’s choice of words “*satte ham ud*” literally suggests an act of “exposing” her son Oswald, that is “putting him outside” of the family milieu, just as “King Laios and Queen Iocasta decided to do with their newborn son, on hearing the message of the Oracle about his future acts;” (Aarseth 2003:103). The critic’s concluding remarks over the tragic effect of this play resides in the significance of the element of the “past” which “regardless of the metaphysical overtones”, fatidically strikes back on the present (Aarseth 2003:104).

Another drama that bears the imprint of Greek tragedy due to its manifold likeness is, according to Aarseth, *Rosmersholm*. The quality of the “past” plays an important role in this drama as well. This particular aspect that is, the forces of the austere past, “may be regarded as a silent, but not insignificant chorus, and Madam Helseth, the representative of the estate, is in a certain sense their spokeswoman, their coryphaeus”. Furthermore, Aarseth hints to another concept that Ibsen may have appropriated in his dramas, namely the concept of “collective damnation” that particularly parallels these two dramas to the Greek tragedies (Aarseth 2003:105). Finally, the tragic effect in these two plays occurs precisely from “the individual characters fighting in vain to liberate themselves from such unbearable conditions”, and more importantly from “the return of the past” haunting “characters who had imagined that it would be possible to escape from it” (Aarseth 2003:107).

Another Ibsen scholar of note, Atle Kittang, reconsiders though from a different perspective Ibsen’s relationship to the tragic genre in his book *Ibsens heroisme. Frå Brand til Når vi døde vågner* (2002). Kittang insists on the idea that the role of heroism is critical in understanding Ibsen’s oeuvre:

Men det eksisterer ei anna Tragedieoppfatning også. Der er basert på at det er ein radikal motsetnad mellom individet og dei overindividuelle kreftene i tilværet- mellom ’mennesket’ og ’maktene’. I siste konsekvens er det rett og slett tale om totalt inkommensurable ontologiar, der inga utjamning eller forsoning er mogleg. Dette er den reint eksistensialistiske forståinga av det tragiske, som truleg kan spore sine røtter tilbake til Søren Kierkegaard, og som ein finn utforma på radikalt vis i Peter Wessel Zapffes monumentale verk *Om det tragiske*. Viktige element frå ei slik tragedieoppfatning finst også i Ibsens drama (Kittang 2002:78).

Kittang builds his interpretation of the tragic in Ibsen's dramas exclusively on existential thinking deriving from Kierkegaard and continued by Nietzsche, Heidegger and then doubled by a Freudian psycho-analytical insight. According to Kittang, the metaphor of the *Old Man* that many Ibsen characters emulate bears heroic qualities, since the tragic substance is triggered through their propensity towards self-transcendence, in death. Consequently, the radical ideal of freedom in Ibsen's text is inextricably linked to the Nietzschean idea of the *New Man*. *The Third Empire* is a metaphor which derives from an existential ache for a better life, where there is freedom for living outside conventions and where the individual is deprived of forceful recognition of guilt.

(...) eit 'nietzschetidsleg paradigme' er etter mitt syn ein fruktbar formel for det andeleg landskapet Ibsens forfattarskap spring ut av. Men sjølve rørsle og retningane som denne forfattarskapen tar, kan ein berre finne i dei litterære verka sjølve. Eit ikkje uvesentleg poeng i dei tolkningane som følgjer, er at den same sjølvtranscenderande rørsle som etter mitt syn særkjenner kunstverket som historisk kraft, også ser ut til å vere ei grunninteresse og ein grunntematikk på ulike nivå i Ibsens dramatiske univers (Kittang 2002:23).

Subsequently, the tragic experience comes with the self-imposed acceptance that there is no potentiality for attaining in this life such tangible liberating goals. Due to this self-transcending sacrificial propensity, Kittang sees a high sense of heroism attached to Ibsen's characters starting from protagonists in *Brand* and ending with those in *When we dead Awaken*. These characters bear a heroic vision of self transcendence and the accomplishment of the ideal of the *New Man*. It is a goal they attain by giving up this life of petty existence. This type of interpretation of Ibsen's characters presupposes that there is a significant recurrence of the Nietzschean theme, where the drive to self-realisation is reified through the ideal of self-transcendence, in death. Subsequently, the absolute freedom comes to completion exclusively through death. This form of fighting for a form of new life, through negative-transcendence, is understood by the critic as tragic and highly heroic.

Helge Rønning, on the other hand detaches himself from these rather conservative readings with regard to Ibsen's text and the tragic genre. In his recent book, *Den umulige friheten. Henrik Ibsen og moderniteten* (2006) the critic elaborates his radical views on the matter fundamentally based on Raymond Williams's theory on modern tragedy. Rønning gives here through a socio-historical perspective an imposing argumentative study on Ibsen's oeuvre, with the attempt of showing how Ibsen scrutinizes the individual's experience of a world in an accelerated process of modernization, desperate to cope with society, politics, feelings and

family relationships as such. He addresses consequently what he discerns to be Ibsen's topical question, namely whether modern society indeed grants individual freedom.

In order to proceed with the analysis of Ibsen's oeuvre, through a modern outlook, he commences his analysis in his introductory chapters with a prodigious and complex description of the European social context of Ibsen's times, while grounding his theory on Eric J. Hobsbawm's perception of it (Rønning 2006:17). His social and philosophical foundation stands next to representatives of the Frankfurt School such as Habermas and Adorno and with Ulrich Beck and Richard Sennet as a further expansion of this socio-philosophical tradition. He analyses thematically, yet not chronologically Ibsen's plays ranging from *Catiline* to *When We Dead Awaken*. The survey of the dramas and of their characters has a realist thrill over it, and it is based on the bourgeois theory promoted by Peter Gay (Rønning 2006: 77). When he assesses the tragic gratifying effect of Ibsen's plays he relays on Williams' theory on *Modern Tragedy* (Rønning 2006: 83).

In the chapter "Den moderne tragedie", Helge Rønning explains the critic's view on the genre related to the modern era. To Williams the very core of the concept resides in the conflict between the individual and the forces that seek to destroy him/her. In creating his socio-historical theoretical foundation, Rønning presents Ibsen as a European dramatist and less of a Norwegian writer, in the chapter entitled "Europa og Norge": "Norge er et eksempel for Ibsen, det er ikke dramaer om Norge. Ibsen er derfor ikke først og fremst en norsk forfatter, men en europeisk dramatiker som tilfeldigvis var født i Norge, og som derfor skrev på norsk. Det norske samfunn i første del av 1800-tallet var en fattig underutviklet europeisk periferi" (Rønning 2006:22). With no national social basis to support this reductive formulaion, Rønning focuses his attention on the continent in order to sustain his theory about the modern liberal dilemma that Ibsen, according to the critic, must have been inspired by.

The Ibsen scholar elaborates his assumption about the consequences of the modernising process in Ibsen's art, in the chapter "Modernitetens motsigelser" (Rønning 2006:47). Here he underlines the fundamental importance the February revolution of 1848 and later the fall of the Paris Commune 1871 had, as aesthetical inspirational sources for the dramatist. As a consequence, it was these historical sequential events according to which Ibsen issued his radical views about the so called "utopian freedom". This holds, according to the critic, to the traditional Ibsenian-hero's quest for freedom, as an ideological germinating thought. The

tragic feeling attached to Ibsen's characters is disclosed through the contrast that guides the aesthetical and ideological foundation between reality and ideal. The tragic substance transpires from the Ibsenian hero's dream for freedom that is doomed because the ideals of liberation are impossible to be realised inside the bourgeois, liberal society. In his thesis on this topic Rønning's explanation is torn between subjective cases where the hindrance resides in the very individual (as it is the case with *Brand*), other times it is located in the bourgeois liberal society.

The critic captures the tragic effect in Ibsen's oeuvre based on Williams' theory on modern tragedy. He sums up the core of the tragic substance of the theorist in the following:

Williams fastholder at moderniteten er preget av en tragisk verdensanskuelse og trekker frem at det nittende og tjuende århundre nettopp utgjør perioder preget av tragiske ideologier. I det nittende århundre kan dette illustreres av liberalismens verdensperspektivsomslag fra grenseløs optimisme til desillusjon. I det tjuende århundre ytrer dette seg blant annet i marxismens utvikling fra frigjøringssteori til undertrykkelsesapparat, freudianismens bevegelse fra løfte om individuell frigjøring til tilpasset og utvannet terapiteknikk, og eksistensialismens grunnleggende tragiske perspektiv på at friheten er umulig, men at det ikke desto mindre nødvendig å strebe etter den. Williams er særlig interessert i forholdet mellom liberalismen som ideologi og det som han kaller den liberale tragedie, som han forbinder mer enn noe annet med Ibsens dramatik ( Rønning 2006:84).

Continuing Williams' theory on Ibsen and the tragic, Rønning concludes that if any, *Brand* is the best tragedy Ibsen ever wrote ( Rønning 2006:163). This remark derives from Williams' survey on Ibsen's art, namely that Ibsen was not really interested in the social, but only in individual liberation. The tragic dilemma, of course, which derives from this claim, is that the protagonist becomes a spokesman for humanity; the general guiding principles are the search for abstract liberation and truth: "Den liberale tragedie er preget av en følelsestruktur der den tragiske helt står overfor oppgaven om å helberede en syk verden, å gjøre et splittet samfunn helt igjen"(Rønning 2006:161). His noble feelings of love and compassion for his fellow individuals are soon reprimanded and then exchanged with a feeling of guilt as the critic further explains. His choice of isolation from a diseased society triggers a feeling of guilt that is paralleled in liberal tragedy to that of Greek tragedy. The difference between the two outlooks resides though in the fact that in liberal tragedy the hero is a social representative, whereas in Greek tragedy the hero's position is conventionally fixed and hence preordained (Rønning 1994, 2003, 2006).

I dette ligger i følge Williams den liberale tragedies kjerne. For det er ikke lenger tale om den individuelle frigjørers heroiske stilling i konflikt med samfunnet, men om en tragisk situasjon som det jeg som er i konflikt med seg selv, befinner seg i. Skyldfølelsen er blitt internalisert og helt personlig, som en parallell til den lengsel og streben som befinner seg i den innerste personlighet. Det vil si at det allmenne ikke lenger finnes utenfor jeget, bare i det isolerte individs avgrensete eksistens. Liberalismen

har beveget seg fra sin heroiske fase til sitt sammenbrudd, det isolerte individ full av skyldfølelse som befinner seg i sin egen indre verden. Det enkle mennesket er blitt sitt eget offer ( Rønning 2006:162).

These main authorities inside the Ibsen scholarly milieu that I referred to in this preliminary part, have generically differentiated themselves as referential voices, due to their positions related to Ibsen's *tragic corpus*. Subsequently, there are those who see Ibsen as a writer of Greek tragedies and then there are those like George Steiner (1961) who have lost their faith in this respect:

In tragedy, there are no temporal remedies. The point cannot be stressed too often. Tragedy speaks not of secular dilemmas which may be resolved by rational innovation, but of the unfaltering bias toward inhumanity and destruction in the drift of the world. But in these plays of Ibsen's radical period, such is not the issue. There are specific remedies to the disasters which befall the characters, and it is Ibsen's purpose to make us see these remedies and bring them about (Steiner 1961: 291).

In order to sum up the main trends on this juxtaposing subject, I will finally cite Terry Eagleton's (2003) sublimated understanding of it:

The traditionalist conception of tragedy turns on a number of distinctions- between fate and chance, free will and destiny, inner flaw and outer circumstance, the noble and the ignoble, blindness and insight, historical and universal, the alterable and the inevitable, the truly tragic and the merely piteous, heroic defiance and ignominious inertia -which for the most part no longer have much force for us. Some conservative critics have thus decided that tragedy is no longer possible, while some radicals have concluded that it is no longer desirable. Both camps agree that tragedy really does hinge on these dichotomies; it is just that the latter rejoices in it (Eagleton 2003:21).

The various traditions listed and explained above range between conservatives and the radicals. Subsequently, in my attempt to discuss the problem of heroism and the heroic character regarding Ibsen's female protagonists, I will in what follows present my position and understanding that derives from these.

## 2. Tragedy of social alienation

The varieties of methods and hermeneutical choices applied to Ibsen's text regarding his tragic tradition differ greatly. In order to show my own reading of this topic I will propose in this following part of my thesis a synoptic presentation of the theory of the modern tragic, as it transpires from Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard and Raymond Williams respectively. My intent through this survey is to show a logical pattern of interpretation my analysis subscribes to and which subsequently derives from this very contrasting juxtaposition.

Kierkegaard's chapter "The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama" (Kierkegaard 2004: 139) maieutically invites to a debate on the modern concept of tragedy which he builds against Hegel's aesthetics in his work *On tragedy* (1962). As it has already been shown by several Ibsen scholars, this is perhaps Kierkegaard's finest contribution to aesthetics. Admittedly, Kierkegaard makes a true contribution to the idea of the modern tragic in depicting a self-reflective "modern Antigone", who sympathetically epitomises the very expression of the concept, yet her authentication is existentially enclosed. Having it on good authority Kierkegaard gives his verdict that the source of tragedy emerges in the individual development from the existential clash between the ethical and the religious stage. Kierkegaard's aesthete reifies the concept of modern tragedy, through his fictitious character Antigone, but the real task of the essay is to show how the qualities of ancient tragedy can be assigned to modern tragedy as well. In order to secure a reliable phenomenology of the modern concept, he insists that "however much the world has changed, the concept of the tragic nevertheless remains essentially unchanged, just as weeping still comes no less naturally to man" (Kierkegaard 2004:139). His inquiry then resumes to showing "how the special characteristics of ancient tragedy can be discerned in the modern, so that the true tragedy in the latter may come to light" (Kierkegaard 2004:140).

After considering the definable elements of the ancient tragic as Aristotle has them, he then moves on to suggest the peculiarities between ancient and modern tragedy. Kierkegaard accepts and underlines the fact that according to Aristotelian theory, ancient tragedy inheres in the very *plot*, thus living the matter of the tragic hero become of secondary essentiality. The

plot plays a central role because it is through the tragic events that the cathartic effect eventually emerges.

Ancient tragedy subscribes to a pattern of reversal of fortune, where a character of high rank through a tragic flaw or error of judgement has to undergo lamentable misfortune that is supposed to evoke sentiments of pity and fear. However, an important characteristic attached to the Greek hero transpires through the fact that even though the protagonist could move freely as an individual, he is still largely determined by his descent, heritage and ultimately, fate. The tragic feeling derives according to the Aristotelian theory through the position of the hero who must be situated midway between good and evil. Moreover, Kierkegaard points to the fact that Aristotle required that the tragic hero should not have guilt but *hamartia*, the well known *tragic flaw*. Subsequently, in ancient tragedy the tragic collision is manifested through the idea that the hero feels an urge to share his affliction with the community, with the intent that “the other” should experience it as well. The theory about modern tragedy that Kierkegaard wants to underline in this essay comes forth as a consequence of the subtle thematic conflicting precepts he builds against Hegel’s aesthetics on the genre. Hence, Kierkegaard’s aesthete reifies through his “modern Antigone”, his own theory about the characteristics that a modern tragic hero/heroine should encompass.

What transpires through his theoretical heroine is the fact that a modern tragic character is not determined by an objective fate, but by something highly subjective, that is, the keeping of her secret becomes a private matter. The essential difference between ancient tragedy and the modern derives from the nature of the tragic guilt. In the latter case the guilt retains an ambiguous nature. The aesthete’s discussion about guilt brings forth the modern conceptualization of pain as opposed to sorrow which is the effect of ancient tragedy. The interest resides in the hero’s own acts that inflict his own nemesis. His responsibility towards the family and society at large is replaced by the concept of the guilty secret.

In modern tragedy, according to Kierkegaard, the individual experiences a state of anxiety which presupposes a relationship with the past that has great repercussions on his future. Ultimately, this sense of anxiety in modern tragedy brings about the question of identity, the individual develops into his own negative agent, and his flaw becomes his sin. The hero retains qualities of self-determination through his feelings which are subjectively reflected. As

a consequence, this reflection has nothing to do with his ties to society in general or family in particular. The individual himself plunges into his self-imposed annihilation:

The hero's downfall is therefore not the outcome simply of his own action, it is also a suffering, while in modern tragedy the downfall of the hero is really not suffering but action. In modern times, therefore, it is really situation and character that predominate. The tragic hero is subjectively reflected in himself, and this reflection hasn't simply reflected him out of every immediate relation to *state, race, and destiny*, often it has reflected him out of *his own preceding life*. What interests us is some certain definite moment of his life as his own deed. Because of this, the tragic element can be exhaustively represented in situation and words, there being nothing whatever left over of the immediate. Hence modern tragedy has no epic foreground, no epic heritage. The hero stands and falls entirely on his own deeds (Kierkegaard 2004: 143).

Raymond Williams, on the other hand, in his evaluation of Ibsen's social dramas underlines the fact that the problem of *guilt* emerges chiefly from social engulfing elements that cause the hero to succumb in his quest for self-realisation. He points out in his book entitled *Modern tragedy* (2006-1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1966), that the concept should be intercepted as the intricate junction between tradition and experience. The critic considers the genre, with regard to a compendious historical survey in its development. He also points to the fact that tragedy tends to flourish as a genre specifically in a period proceeding a quintessential collapse of an important culture, as opposed to what would originally be considered to be tragic, namely a period of open and deep social conflict ( Williams 2006:77).

Williams further asserts that the cause for this consists fundamentally in the austere clash between two social orders that is, between tradition and modernity. After having considered and analysed the genre through the ages, he indicates that Ibsen's drama should be contemplated as socially rooted, hence he appraises that the agency of nemesis in Ibsen's plays is fundamentally different from those representing the Aristotelian principles. The tragic effect derives in modern tragedy from a different and more of a social paradigm than that in ancient tragedy. The argumentation in modern tragedy mirrors the authoritative tension between two social orders: the order of the old and the order of the new, namely between received beliefs, embodied in institutions and responses, and newly and vividly experienced contradictions and possibilities (Williams 2006: 77-78).

Williams pins down the problem of the modern tragic to that of the struggling individual to liberate himself of the social hindering circumstances of self-fulfilment, the tragic result being the irreparable human loss. According to Williams the drama of modernity is inextricably connected to the concept of liberalism. The common idea between Kierkegaard and Williams in evaluating the modern change at the level of the drama resides in the fundamental concept

of *guilt*, though it is regarded from two different instances. The difference between the two theoreticians consists in Kierkegaard's case from a highly ambiguous aesthetical affirmation where the hero stands and falls on his own deeds, as Kierkegaard indicates, while in Williams' case it is fully and fundamentally socially grounded.

The conviction of guilt, and of necessary retribution, is as strong as ever it was when imposed by an external design. And this is the heart of liberal tragedy, for we have moved from the heroic position of the individual liberator, the aspiring self against society, to a tragic position, of the self against the self. Guilt, that is to say, has become internal and personal. The internal and personal fact is the only general fact, in the end. (...) Liberalism in its heroic phase begins to pass into the twentieth-century breakdown: the self-enclosed, guilty and isolated world; the time of man his own victim (Williams 2006:127).

The conviction of Williams' central argument is that the tragic element of modern times, with an emphasis on Ibsen's characters, mirrors the striving individual in his dynamic process to surpass himself. Hence the tragic feature of modern drama is reflected as grievous because it records the individual's defeat by society or the universe. This particular nature of the tragic is thus reflected in the money-oriented privacy of the bourgeois ethics to provide a positive conception of society.

In its actual course, the tragic action often undercuts the ordinary association between fundamental human values and the acknowledged social system: the claims of actual love contradict the duties of family; the awakened individual consciousness contradicts the assigned social role. In this transition from a feudal to a liberal world, such contradictions are common and are lived out as tragedy. (...) Liberal tragedy inherited this separation between ultimate human values and the social system, but in a mode which it finally transformed (Williams 2006: 92).

Essentially, what transpires through the juxtaposition of the two theoreticians, when it comes to the theoretical aspect of modern tragedy, is on the one hand that, as Kierkegaard has it, the suffering of the modern hero is internal and it is triggered by *guilt* of an ambiguous nature. Albeit on the outside, at a societal level, there is no fate magnetism or any obscure misfortune that is of imminent nature governing the hero or his actions.

On the other hand, Williams' theory about modern tragedy insists on the fact that in order to have any understanding of the concept of tragedy, one has to look at the events that linger at the level of experience. This experience subsequently has to be shaped by social manifestation, where the individual loses the battle against society, when confronting its standard, in a liberal acceptance. The core of liberal tragedy resides in the intricate dilemma where the individual succumbs under the social pressure and the external forces that seek to destroy him. Subsequently, according to Williams modern tragedy relies on the fundamental clash between human values that are engulfed by the conflicting social institution. In such a

modern context, the tragic hero loses his heroic valences, and hence transforms himself into a tragic victim (Williams 2006:37).

There is yet another theoretician that partially subscribes to the latter acceptance of modern tragedy, though from a different position. In his work on modern tragedy, John Orr (1981), partly continuing Williams' theory sublimates the concept of the tragic experience to that of *futile human loss*. The critic defines this quality as a representation a variety of events like murder, suicide, madness, and disintegration of either individual or a group. He stresses the fact that death is often considered as a natural feature of tragedy, but even though it is recurrent, it does not need to be a compulsory event (Orr 1981: xii).

In his work on modern tragedy, Orr (1981) proposes in his analysis of the genre, a terminology which encompasses a more diffuse tragic manifestation, concerned with the modern civilisation, which he entitles "tragedy of social alienation". His argumentation for the concept starts with an acknowledgement that the tragic outlook due to its tremendous heritage has to be considered retrospectively. Orr further sustains that part of this continuity of the concept in our modern times is due to the Aristotelian observation on the mode. This remark suggested that the tragic implication is demanded to bear a distinctive weakness causing a reversal of personal fortune, a unity of time, place and action, a tragic climax purging the emotions of the audience, and a realisation by the fallen hero of the true horror of his fate (Orr 1981: xi-xii).

In modern drama the protagonist has to deal with the duality of being an individual with personal values and wishes and at the same time the character has to deal with a conflicting social element. This provides the individual with a sense of estrangement, which is fundamentally socially located. In such a social environment, though, as Orr has it, the individual expresses himself dramatically through an alienating mechanism from the ruling hegemonic values of the culture, where the consequences for his outcome, have eventually tragic effects (Orr 1981: xviii).

Orr is of the opinion that:" Modern tragedy requires both literary and sociological analysis, looking thus not only at the immediate connections between drama and society but also at the intermediate ones, the connections between drama and social consciousness, and then in turn between varieties of social consciousness and the wider society" (Orr 1981: xi). The critic

motivates to ground the discourse analysis not unilaterally but bilaterally, first through the objective perspective of the social element, and then subjectively through an analysis of the text hermeneutically. He identifies in analysing the genre historically that there are three major events that have shaped world drama, namely the emergence of ancient tragedy, "the renaissance of the tragic form in sixteenth-century England and the seventeenth-century France, and finally the more diffuse tragic drama of the modern civilisation, written and performed in the period of industrial capitalism" (Orr 1981: xi).

In order to understand the modes of alienation and how they work in a dramatic fashion though, one has to understand that through the form of *historical discourse*. According to Orr, tragedy of social alienation begins with Ibsenian drama. Tragedy of social alienation, the emergence of it, that is, results in the effect of *periphery* which then expands to the urban locations. This is due to the fact, as Orr has it, that when European tragedy emerges at the end of nineteenth century, we are presented with the new phenomenon of *periphery*:

This *periphery* operates in the life of the writer, the institutional development of the theatres first performing the work, and finally in the themes of the drama itself. The dialectic of centre and periphery, characterized by this centripetal process, is linked to the development of capitalistic industrialization in major centres of European power (Orr 1981: xvi-xvii).

Subsequently, this tragedy of social alienation demanded, according to the critic, a geographical alteration in its commencement to the periphery, albeit it claimed attention from the civilized and prosperous urban bourgeoisie later on. This unchanged alienated condition remains a distinctive factor throughout the drama, where the obvious confrontation resides between the individual and the conflicting social values of the bourgeois social establishment. Orr proposes that the turmoil of the individual and the eventual outcome of the protagonist should be addressed through the concept of the tragic strife:

*Tragic strife* is not a summarization of violent struggle although, thematically, elements of that struggle can be present (...). The reversal of personal fortune becomes a key element in the dynamic process of estrangement, the self-recognition of tragic fate a liberating of social consciousness which comes too late to alter the experience of loss. (...) It is an estrangement from dominant cultural values rather than the relinquishment of productive powers which Marx saw as the alienated condition of the industrial worker under modern capitalism (Orr 1981: xvii).

The tension inside the mechanisms of alienation is to be understood hence bilaterally, according to the critic. The tragic character has a feeling of estrangement attached to himself, where the individual has to hold on to his noble values and at the same time oppose a constraining social culture. The result is the tragic effect of human alienation, as Orr asserts. The tragic strife of the protagonist subsumes some multifarious elements that have been

created through the artistic process. This process as Orr indicates mirrors a fundamental dialectics between the centre and the periphery. Hence the Ibsenian *tragic corpus* has to be understood and analysed bilaterally, first through the objective social element, and secondly through the hermeneutic subjective approach.

### 3. Modernity and the consequences

In 2006 two Ibsen scholars, Toril Moi and Helge Rønning published their books regarding Ibsen and his oeuvre, with the attempt to explain how philosophical, aesthetic, historical and social elements gave an important imprint to his dramas and the characters he portrayed.

Helge Rønning (2006) gives however a broader and somehow more complex view on Ibsen's work showing how the historical and the social crystallize themselves in his plays. He indicates how the dramatist analyses the individual's experience of a world in an accelerated process of modernization, desperate to cope with society, politics, feelings and family relationships as such. Rønning sees Ibsen's central question as being whether there is the possibility of achieving a free society with free individuals. As a consequence he analyses Ibsen's plays from *Catiline* to *When we dead awaken*, with the attempt to show how modernity shaped itself and the social aspect along with it, as well as how the dilemma of liberalism perplexed family order, women's position in society etc. The critic finds that the phenomenon of modernity presented conflicting metaphysical concepts like ideal and reality, illusion and authenticity, where Ibsen as a dramatist is portrayed as conspicuously scrutinizing the manner with which these dilemmas are taken from the social level to the very psyche of the human being.

Rønning sees the aesthetics of the tragic genre attached to Ibsen's plays deriving from the social phenomena assessed as a result of revolutionary reaction, that is, an epitome of social disorder caused by a violent crisis as a means of individual liberation. The tragic character connected to the individual is that liberty is fundamentally denied by the intricate social system. In the chapter "Den liberale Utopi" Rønning (2006: 39-86) gives his reasons for reading Ibsen's plays as liberal tragedies due to fundamental historical and social changes that Europe dramatically experienced, with the emergence of the February revolution of 1848 and more importantly later, through the dramatic events of Paris Commune 1871. The two most prolific personalities that embraced the ideals of the Paris Commune ideology were Georg Brandes and more importantly Ibsen, asserts Rønning. Ibsen expresses in his letter to Brandes that his theories about how the state should be as an institution turned out to be a dreadful disappointment because of the Commune's disintegration (Rønning 2006: 46).

Rønning reads Ibsen's dissatisfaction and letdown as an idea that was inspired by these two revolutionary moments which he carries out in the form of liberal tragedy and projects it unto his characters:" Det radikale i Ibsens måte å tenke og skrive på ligger i en drøm om å realisere en frihetens utopi gjennom en kompromissløs kritikk av de skranker som finnes i det liberale samfunn. Det konservative ligger i en tilsvarende kynisk kritikk av alle forsøk på å realisere friheten" (Rønning 2006:47). Rønning assesses the conflicts that are presented in his plays as fundamentally European and inspired by the February revolution and the Paris Comunne, and not by the social element of modernity Ibsen himself, clearly experienced. He grants that Ibsen's text presents a classical Norwegian setting, but the conflict is detached from a Norwegian social context:

De fleste av dramaene til Ibsen henter sin ramme fra Norge, men det er likevel ikke slik at problemstillingene og tolkingsmønstrene i dramaene er spesifikt norske.(...) Norge er et eksempel for Ibsen, det er ikke dramaer om Norge. Ibsen er ikke først og fremst en norsk forfatter, men en europeisk dramatiker som tilfeldigvis var født i Norge, og som derfor skrev på norsk. Det norske samfunn i første del av 1800-tallet var en fattig underutviklet europeisk periferi (Rønning 2006:22).

Toril Moi, on the other hand in her latest book *Henrik Ibsen and the birth of Modernism* (2006) tries to give a clear explanation as a reminder to the western literary world that the dramatist is the founder, par excellence, of the modernist theatre ( Moi 2006: 215-222). She engages thus in situating Ibsen both in his cultural context as a Norwegian, as well as, and more importantly, in a European culture, which according to her had formed the artists point of view on the kind of drama he wrote.

The aspect that both Rønning and even Moi seem to overlook is the vital importance Norway had for Ibsen. Hence both critics look at the Paris Commune as an inspirational motif for Ibsen's social plays, disregarding the fact that Ibsen already was acknowledged as an important writer by the year of 1871.

"Ibsen was indeed a brooding, philosophizing Norwegian, yet he did not grow up in the mountains, but in a small town on the south coast, and however Norwegian he was, he still needed to live in Rome, Dresden, and Munich in order to find his dramatic voice" (Moi 2006:38). Moi makes a point when she emphasises the tremendous importance idealism had as a dominant aesthetic paradigm during the nineteenth century. While the critic provides a new definition to the aesthetic trend, she finds that modernism is located at the threshold of idealism. Subsequently, she concludes that Ibsen's plays though tributary to the latter, find

their tension between portraying the scepticism of the mundane human existence and the utopia of modernity. Subsequently, in her endeavour she draws the attention on the meta-theatrical self-consciousness of the idealists, that partly Ibsen pertained to and the atmosphere and feeling of something new, that he was to find with the emergence of realism. Ibsen's modernism, Moi explains, draws the attention to his profound understanding of his time, for example the situation of women's individuality, as well as the arduousness of human relationships during his time. With the death of idealism that is with Ibsen's break with it, the immediate consequence was the advent of scepticism. When he gave free reins to what we call today modern scepticism, Ibsen made his audience doubt the power of words. When the characters lose the power and trust in the meaning of language, the individual is plunged in absolute despair (Moi 2006:212-217).

While Moi concludes that the aesthetic paradigms of Ibsen's doctrine subject the individual to narcotic scepticism, Helge Rønning finds at a social and a historical level Ibsen's message is that the individual in his quest for freedom remains perplexed at the subconscious game between the real and the unreal, between ideal and the factual, always in quest for an chimerical freedom. Both Moi's book and Helge Rønning's capture each in a different way the aesthetic aspect on the one hand, and the social on the other that characterized Ibsen's work and that overshadowed his plays with a feeling of uneasy deceptive quest for freedom, which the individual hardly ever achieved.

Albeit both Moi and Rønning portray in their own way a panoramic view on the historical events that have marked 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, they both seem too overlook the tremendous importance Norway had for Ibsen. They both lack to evaluate the importance of the upbringing and early life experience Ibsen had, not in a little town at the outskirts of Europe, but rather in the most flourishing and best developed town of Norway at the time that was, the Skien of Ibsen's childhood. The importance of Ibsen's upbringing and personal experience in Skien has already been underlined and evaluated by historian and Ibsen biographer Ivo de Figueiredo (2006:25).

Toril Moi (2006: 38, 63) asserts that Ibsen's place of birth and the country where he came from had altogether no vital importance in the artistic development as an author. Rønning sustaining essentially the same idea reflects in his work the overriding importance Europe played in the formation of the artist. It is in Europe, Rønning claims and while being here a

*homo Europeus* that he discovered the irregularities of the modern turmoil for self-affirmation of liberties, that Ibsen discovered his true talents and the means of expressing through his very complex characters the epitome of the tragic substance.

I will however detach myself from such allegations and in the following part of this chapter I will provide a detailed assessment of Ibsen's status and the influence that caused the tragic thrill to emerge in his art. My acceptance regarding this subject is mainly inspired by Raymond Williams' theory about modern tragedy. Helge Rønning also embraces Williams' radical theory in his book *Den Umulige friheten* (2006), though in a way which notably differs from my reading and understanding of it, when related to Ibsen's *tragic corpus*. I will look hence at a conflict emerging from a historical setting throughout a period which preceded a substantial breakdown and transformation of an important culture, which I assess has shaped Ibsen's literary career according to Williams' theory (Williams 2006: 77). Raymond Williams stresses that tragedy presents itself at a social level through "the dramatic clash of two social orders". This dramatic clash of two social orders has been thoroughly analysed by Jon Nygaard in "Ibsen and the Drama of Modernity" (1997). Jon Nygaard generically calls this topical dramatic clash "the modern drama" or "the drama of modernity" which pictures the individual frustrated of all traditional social interrelations and plunged in a post-traditional world of social insecurity. "Modernity breaks down the protective framework of the small community and of tradition, replacing these with much larger, impersonal organisations. The individual feels bereft and alone in a world in which she or he lacks the support and the sense of security provided by more traditional settings" (Nygaard 1997:94). This process has been evaluated by the critic as a two times *double drama* where Ibsen's central characters want to be freed from this tensional fight with tradition, but at the same time, tradition dramatically holds them back through ideals and lost normative beliefs reified through metaphorical images like "ghosts", "white horses" or "trolls" (Nygaard 1997:94). Williams calls this clash between two social orders which meets the individual at its half way the pinnacle of modern tragedy.

Its condition is the real tension between old and new: between received beliefs, embodied in institutions and responses, and newly and vividly experienced contradictions and possibilities. If the received beliefs have widely or wholly collapsed, this tension is obviously absent; to that extent their real presence is necessary. But beliefs can be both active and deeply questioned, not so much by other beliefs as by insistent immediate experience. In such situations, the common process of dramatizing and resolving disorder and suffering is intensified to the level which can be most readily recognized as tragedy (Williams 2006:77-78).

My reading of William's theory of the modern tragic differs from that of Rønning (2006) on various points regarding the historical facts referring to the dramatist and the source of which his artistic *tragic corpus* emerges from. My analysis of the genre as such, follows a logic paralleled to Giddens' (1990) and Calinescu's (2006) reading of the phenomenon of modernity that advances a dramatic effect projected unto a socio-economic and aesthetic level respectively.

Anthony Giddens declares in the preliminary part of *The consequences of modernity* that in defining the complex consequences of modernity, he will conduct an institutional analysis of it with cultural and epistemological overtones (Giddens 1990:1). According to the sociologist, modernity refers to modes of social life that emerged in Europe from approximately the beginning of the seventeenth century. Consequently, these modes of life due to their overpowering strong socio-ideological nature have been brought into being by modernity and hence caused the individual and society at large to break away from all traditional ways of social order, in an unprecedented fashion (Giddens 1990:4). On the other hand, there are the Marxist critics who read the modern change due to the emergence of capitalism:

For authors influenced by Marx, the major transformative force shaping the modern world is capitalism. With the decline of feudalism, agrarian production based in the local manor is replaced by production for markets of national and international scope, in terms of which not only an indefinite variety of material goods but also human labour power become commodified. The emergent social order of modernity is capitalistic in both its economic system and its other institutions (Giddens 1990:11).

According to Giddens the acute factor in shaping and creating the dynamism of modernity is caused by the immanent transformations provided by the splitting mechanisms between the notions of time and space. The "emptying of space" is a concept that appeared as a consequence of this fundamental separation. With any attempt to relate to and apprehend modernity one has to look at the dialectics of the two concepts as result of the constitution of modern institutions.

The dynamism of modernity derives from the separation of time and space and their recombination in forms which permit the precise time-space "zoning" of social life; the *disembedding* of social systems (a phenomenon which connects closely with the factors involved in time-space separation); and the *reflexive ordering and reordering* of social relations in the light of continual inputs of knowledge affecting the actions of individuals and groups (Giddens 1990:16-17).

With the development of abstract labour power there has emerged the social concept of capitalism, which according to Giddens has brought about the idea of the changing nature of control by means of violence and caused a splitting relation between temporality and location.

This capitalist type of power has contributed to the liberating factor from the institutions of the traditional world:

Capitalism is a system of commodity production, catered upon the relation between private ownership of capital and propertyless wage labour, this relation forming the main axis of a class system. Capitalist enterprise depends upon production for competitive markets, prices being signals for investors, producers, and consumers alike. The chief characteristic of industrialism is the use of inanimate sources of material power in the production of goods, coupled to the central role of machinery in the production process. (...) Industrialism presupposes the regularised social organisation of production in order to coordinate human activity, machines, and the inputs and outputs of raw materials and goods (Giddens 1990:55-56).

The restructuring of the axial relation of time and space is due on the one hand to elements promoting the acceleration and expansion of modern institutions, including the nation-states; on the other hand it reflected the effect of breaking with tradition. Tradition provides the individual with ontological safety. It presupposes routinised social habits that entrust the continuity of linear time, that is past, present and the future. Parallel to this ontological time experience comes the modifying social factors that modernity formulates. For instance money is an axial example of the so-called *disembedding* mechanisms that according to Giddens is associated with modernity. These *disembedding* mechanisms depend fundamentally upon trust. Trust according to the critic is related to absence in time and space. The concept of trust presupposes the inherent idea of risk that the modern capitalistic society requires. Subsequently, “risk” in modernity, “is not just a matter of individual action: There are “environments of risk” that collectively affect large masses of individuals (...)” (Giddens 1990:3).

These *disembedding* mechanisms presuppose that modernity deprives the individual with the notion of place, the individual not only experiences a sense of displacement and estrangement, but his experience resumes itself quite simply to the loss of the sense of belonging to his community. This takes its toll on the sense of intimacy as well (Giddens 1990:140).

In relations of intimacy of the modern type, trust is always ambivalent, and the possibility of severance is more or less ever present. Personal ties can be ruptured, and ties of intimacy returned to the sphere of impersonal contacts - in the broken love affair, the intimate suddenly becomes again stranger. The demand of “opening oneself up” to the other which personal trust relations now presume, the injunction to hide nothing from the other, mix reassurance and deep anxiety (Giddens 1990: 143).

The expectation of utopian realism is triggered by the fundamental dialectics between concepts as trust and risk, opportunity and danger, but ultimately the primary feature that shapes throughout the phenomenon of modernity and the sense of being individualised, is namely the feeling of power.

This very brutal, demanding and overwhelming process takes a toll on the very individual. This dramatic changing process liquefies social relations, that consequently are lifted out from their previous traditional positions and plunged into a fast forwarded changing world, where notions as danger and risk lead. This is a time where those who learn fast to adapt to the new changes are smoothly plunged in a different type of social archetypal organisation, subdued by the law of change, while the less flexible understand and dramatically experience the painful loss, due to their bonds with tradition they relish. This very process is described by Orr (1981) as a natural mechanism of modernity where the visible dramatic change at a social level started at the very *periphery* in Europe, with authors like Ibsen, Shaw and Chekov, only to become more centralised and powerful when it settled in the very main cities and capitals of Europe.

Giddens explains the consequences of modernity as being an apparatus of risk triggered by the economic into the social life. Therefore capitalist enterprise, Giddens points out, played a major role in levelling modern social life away from the institutions of the traditional world. None the less capitalism was conceived as a fundamental globalizing influence precisely because of the economic valence of it and less because of the political order. Since tradition is routine the individual by the means of the modern system is losing all sense of identity. By tradition, Giddens understands a factor of individual and social safety since:” Tradition, in sum, contributes in fashion to ontological security in so far as it sustains trust in the continuity of the past, present, and future, and connects such trust to routinised social practices” (Giddens1990:105). Consequently, with the emergence of the new capitalist system the bonds with tradition are broken and an empire on risk and acceleration in history engulfs the individual as well as the family institution.

Matei Calinescu in his capital work *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (9<sup>th</sup> ed. 2006-1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1977) makes a compendious analysis of the aesthetic, intellectual and cultural trend which has guided the literary sphere during the last one hundred and fifty years. Through his prodigious and complex analysis of modernity the critic assesses the problem of time, the opposition between aesthetic notions like “ancient” and “modern” , the paradoxes of aesthetic modernity, the idea of avant-garde, decadence, kitsch and postmodernism. According to Calinescu, such terms as “modern”, “modernity” and more recently “modernism” are meant to convey a sharp sense of historical relativism which

in itself presents a form of criticism of tradition (Calinescu 2006:3). The relationship of the artist is hence a complex endeavour as well, with regard to notions and definitions of time and space.

From a point of view of the artist -whether he likes it or not -is cut off from the normative past with its fixed criteria, and tradition has no legitimate claim to offer him examples to imitate or directions to follow. At best he invents a private and essentially modifiable past. His own awareness of the present, sizes in its immediacy and irresistible transitoriness, appears as his main source of inspiration and creativity ( Calinescu 2006:3).

At an aesthetic level this major cultural shift advances a substitution of from a time-honored aesthetics of permanence. Aesthetic modernity was founded on the ideal of the unchanging and transcendental idea of beauty, to an aesthetics which proposes an imitation of transitoriness and immanence, whose overriding qualities are according to Calinescu, change and novelty (Calinescu 2006:3). Modernity, as such presupposes a time of individual and social crisis. The consequences on an individual level are dramatic. The individual loses all sense of identity. “Individualism”, that is the human quality of being individualized, is eroded and its loss implies the change of personality into impersonality. The consequences of modernity reflect the individual as being perplexed, in total detachment from all conservative sequence, condemned to isolation from communitarian relationships. Modernity revolts, as Calinescu appreciates, against the normalizing functions of tradition and apparently lives on the experience of rebelling against all that is normative. It is a revolt that neutralizes the standards of ‘morality’ and of ‘utility’, hence the emergence of secularism and the secularization of all that mirrors the social.

Modernity in the broadest sense, as it has asserted itself historically, is reflected in the irreconcilable opposition between the sets of values corresponding to (1) the objectified, socially measurable time of capitalist civilisation (time as a more or less precious commodity, bought and sold on the market), and (2) the personal, subjective, imaginative *durée*, the private time created by the unfolding of the “self”. The latter identity of *time* and *self* constitutes the foundation of modernist culture. Seen from this vantage point, aesthetic modernity uncovers some of the reasons for its profound sense of crisis and for its alienation from the other modernity, which, for all its objectivity and rationality, has lacked, after the demise of religion, any compelling moral or metaphysical justification. But, being produced by the isolated self, partly as a recreation against the desacralized -and therefore dehumanized- time of social activity, the time consciousness reflected in modernist culture also lacks such justifications. The end result of both modernities seems to be the same unbounded relativism (Calinescu 2006:5).

The argument of Calinescu’s treatise, which focuses on analysing and defining the two modernities, resides in the idea that aesthetic modernity should be understood as “a crisis concept involved in a threefold dialectical opposition to tradition, to the modernity of bourgeois civilisation (with its ideals of rationality, utility, progress), and finally, to itself, insofar as it perceives itself as a new tradition or form of authority” (Calinescu 2006:10).

These consequences explained by Giddens on the one hand, through the complex manifestation of the capitalist civilisation, and Calinescu on the other, who focuses on the aesthetic and cultural substantiation of the trend, mirror the dramatic effects that have shaped Ibsen's early childhood in Skien, and more importantly they are effects which have contributed to animate a tragic resolution as an inspirational motif in his dramas.

According to Jon Nygaard (1997) Ibsen's modern drama or modern tragedy as a genre epitomizes an expression of the drama of modernity Ibsen went through. As a result Ibsen's characters retell the story of the drama of modernity Ibsen experienced in Skien in his childhood, through the retrospective method. Ibsen's modern drama turns into a minute description of the social crisis of the 19<sup>th</sup> century modern Norway. The quality of the modern tragic Ibsen represents in his dramas, proposes the concept of decline, of irremediable fall either of individual or individuals, of a family, of an entire social class. The accountability for that resides as Jon Nygaard explains in the drama of modernity Ibsen as a young man experienced.

Ivo de Figueiredo, in the first part of his Ibsen biography, *Mennesket* (2006) looks closer and gives credit to the influential and prosperous Skien Ibsen was born in.

Skien var kort og godt et differensiert bysamfunn i europeisk forstand med en sterk representasjon av statsmakten og en levedyktig privatsfære, med en tradisjonell dominans av store aristokratiske handelshus og sterke embetslekter - "aristokratisk" her forstått i mental og kulturell forstand; dette samfunnet var tross alt fundert i en merkantill og kapitalistisk økonomi, ikke en føydal. I virkeligheten var de færreste familier unnet en trygghet og tradisjonsfestet standsbevissthet som motsvarte det europeiske adelskapet. For mange var velstanden raskt vunnet, og for noen også raskt tapt (de Figueiredo 2006:25).

Jon Nygaard assesses that this shift of paradigm of the modern world was something very familiar with Ibsen, due to the place where he was born and spent the first part of his childhood in, namely Skien. Nygaard makes an elaborate assertion in favour of this position, in his capital work on this subject, entitled "Ibsen and the Drama of Modernity" (Nygaard 1997). He further emphasises here the importance Skien has had in the personal and more importantly artistic formation of the dramatist. The young Henrik Ibsen was brought up in an upper class family in the influential town of Skien. In his *Memories of Childhood*, (1964) he recalls living there apparently a most happy and carefree life in the imposing and dominant

Stokmann house, which his father Knud Ibsen eventually left, only to move to an even more lavish property, namely the house of Altemburg, as Nygaard explains (Nygaard 1998:93).

His first view of the world as the dramatist has it, was a life surrounded to a large extent of buildings, where there was hardly any reference to nature. This image Ibsen describes here as a grown adult is an image that in my opinion is full of symbolism and charged with artistic features which Ibsen used in the dramatic world he later constructed:

(...) I was born in a house on the market place-the Stockmann house as it was called. This house faced the front of the church, with its flight of steps and imposing tower. To the right of the church stood the town pillory and to the left the town hall with the jail and "the madhouse". The Latin school and the common school occupied the fourth side of the square. The church stood by itself in the middle. This prospect constituted my first view of the world nothing but buildings; nothing green; no country landscapes. But the air above this four-sided enclosure of wood and stone was filled all day long with the subdued roar of Long Falls, Cloister Falls, and all the many other rapids and waterfalls. And the roar was pierced from morning till night with a sound like that of a shriek and moaning women. This was the sound of the hundreds of saws in the mills up at the waterfalls (Ibsen 1964: 1-2).

Historians like Rolf Danielsen, Edgar Hovland (2002), Ivo de Figueiredo (2006) and Ibsen's own memories testify about a wealthy town, not at the outskirts of civilisation, but on the contrary; it was a town that epitomized modern European social values. Skien before Ibsen's time was a centre of trade, but it also became nearer his birth an important centre where industry and learning would meet (Nygaard 1997:90).

However, Skien was not only an industrial town. Most importantly it proposed a contradicting life-style where tradition and modern life would inevitably converge. The encounter at a social level would result in a fundamental and soaring clash, where the drama of modernity performed at its best. Tradition was empirically embodied by the old aristocracy; at a cultural level it epitomized the beliefs and moral laws it governed itself by. *Latinskolen*, the grammar school in Skien, would educate important representatives and some of the founding fathers of the University of Oslo, that is, A.M. Schweigaard, P.A.Munch and M.J. Monrad. These figures participated to the elevation of Norway politically and socially. They became political and social role models who moulded Norway into the modern era. With almost no feudal past and no noble representatives, title which was forbidden by the Constitution of 1814, there was a new middle class that emerged undaunted by the older aristocracy, that soon became the leading power on the Norwegian political arena (Nygaard 1997:92). Ibsen was on both of his parents' side of upper-class extraction, as Jon Nyggard explains. The town and the whole area

was indeed ruled by renown families who established the aristocratic tradition with sets of rules and beliefs that had been the guiding line of the community for centuries:

To a greater extent than any other district of Norway the Skien area was dominated by large landowners, many of them with noble past from the period when Norway was in union with Denmark (before 1814), who were at the same time important traders, ship owners and industrialists, like the Løvenskiolds, Aalls, Cappelens and Plessners. These important families established an aristocratic tradition or culture in Skien hardly known in their parts of Norway, mixing in the beginning of the nineteenth century, like their counterparts in Vienna, with the new class of wealthy traders and ship-owners and the most important representatives of the civil servants ( Nygaard 1997:92-93).

Knud Ibsen, the head of the family, who was at a certain point the largest tax payer in town, experienced together with other families in the area the dramatic consequences of modernity encroached through the mechanisms of capitalism. According to Giddens' presentation of the consequences of modernity, capitalism brings forth to the modern economic arena a change of paradigm from traditional trust to the drastic dimension of risk where there is no sense of support and familial comfort, as opposed to the pre-modern traditional social structure.

The abstract system of modernity dislocates the individual from the safe net of tradition and social refuge, and plunges the individual into isolation and despair. Jon Nygaard explained that the daunting alteration in the pattern of traditional social safety happened not only to Ibsen's family, but also to other families in Skien that found themselves in the same dramatic position. The critic sees young Ibsen as an "insider" partaking through his family social situation to the ceremonial rituals of tradition and culture represented by the upper class, but he was soon to discover the painful experience of being an "outsider" and an observer of this structure from the side (Nygaard 1997:94). The sense of betrayal and disappointment Knut Ibsen felt with his family and his social class is, according to Nygaard, a symptom of the social change of a dramatic calibre performing at a larger scale. This dynamic change in the social structure manifested itself just as harsh to other fallow traders in Skien, who in the end found their only alternative to emigrate to America (Nygaard 1997:94). Nygaard reads and associates this climatic alteration at a social level, as a distinctive mechanism that changed the life of young Ibsen and gave a dramatic imprint on his personal and artistic life:

His feeling of being betrayed by the local upper class and his wish for revenge and rehabilitation were also far more essential for him than we can imagine from *Catiline* or his other substitute fictional figures. At the same time it is obvious that the basic ideology of the young Henrik Ibsen was formed by his connection, no matter how short, to the European upper-class of Skien. In all his later efforts he wanted once more to be one of them, eager to get all kinds of orders and honourable titles from representatives of the remaining "islands" of aristocracy in modern Europe, such as the Duke of Saxe-Meining or of the Swedish-Norwegian king ( Nygaard 1997:95).

Modernity carries with it the means of fundamental restructuring of the social order. As the cult of the new, par excellence, it expresses the new time consciousness. It does more than just experience the mobility in society or of acceleration in history; it projects discontinuity in everyday life. Modernity affects not only interrelations between people at a lower scale, but it also affects entire communities as mentioned before, indeed it affects society as a whole.

Norway experienced these dramatic changes at a time where the new power consciousness of the old traditions was replaced by the modern more evolved version of it. The building of a nation-state, as Giddens' explained, as a result of the modernising process was a complex and at times turbulent and dramatic alternative. The reason for that came as a symptom of the acute need for a social transformation. The conflict had to a certain extent connection with the process of social change that Norway experienced for decades. At a certain point it became drastically radicalised due to society's growing self-awareness, so much so that it created auspicious conditions for new *social* and more importantly *political constellations*.

Skien, as a centre of capitalism and learning, produced the so-called *Intelligensen* that carried with them more traditional ways of thinking at an academic and later political level. Jon Nygaard has already pointed to the fact that there were higher powers at work at a political level, which were about to experience a dramatic descent and become altered through the complex and perplexing mechanisms of the modern times, namely the fall of *embetsmenn* state (Nygaard 1997:92-93).

I find my position and my reading of Ibsen similar to Jon Nygaard in this respect. The critic has thoroughly shown the dramatic process Ibsen experienced as a young man in the lavish and prosperous town of Skien, together with the imminent painful change his family and friends were submitted to through the violent consequences of modernity. Therefore I read Ibsen as a distinctive part and speaker of his age, though not as a European dramatist formed and shaped in the silence of his self-imposed exile in Europe as Rønning (2006:22) suggests. On the contrary, I read Ibsen's art and hence his *tragic corpus*, as a symptom of the dramatic events he experienced in Skien, where a social class dramatically lost their social position and eventually became extinct. Nevertheless, I agree with Rønning that Ibsen later was able to recognize the same social mechanisms that emerged in Europe. His focus was however on the dramatic turmoil and alienation of a social class and its individuals, which he experienced in

Skien and which he described in his plays from Rome, Dresden and Munich, however through his analytical method of the retrospective technique.

What happened then at a larger political scale with this ruling class and what were the distinct immediate motifs of their descent from power? In order to give a better understanding of what affected the dramatic fall of the *embetsmenn* and which as shown before, evidently took a dramatic toll on the Ibsen family, I will refer in what follows to some historians that have described the political process that has caused a shift in a political system, and the demise of a leading social class.

Jens Arup Seip, in his book entitled *Utsikt over Norges historie* (3rd ed.2006), describes the period after 1840 and until 1884 as a period governed by the privileged class of what was then called *Intelligensen*, better known as ‘the classical age of the *embetsmenn* state’. They however, encompassed only a small part of the electorate in the Storting, though they were in a leading position, in spite of their decidedly low number. The other two social classes representing the social landscape were the peasants and the bourgeois. These three social groups had, as Seip asserts, very different backgrounds, functions and ways of living. The historian agrees that it would be appropriate to look at them as three states, that of the peasants, the bourgeois and those pertaining to *Intelligensen*, or the circle of the academics. All of these classes acknowledged their individual legitimacy of action and function in the political and social system.

Strukturene innenfor hver av dem var forskjellig. Embetsstanden var hierarkisk bygget opp med overordnende og underholdende stillinger, hvor de dyktige eller de med gode forbindelser hadde sjanse til å klatre oppover. Der var de tre store sideordende hierarkier, knyttet til de tre mest tallrike profesjoner: jurister, teologer og offiserer. Den juridiske profesjon skjøt snart frem som den administrativt og politisk dominerende av de tre. Borgerskapet var vertikalt delt i stender med kjøpmenn og håndverksmestre som de to store koloner. I bondestanden var en viktig skillelinje av geografisk art med storbønder på Østlandet og småbønder på Sørlandet og Vestlandet som motpoler; dette skille kunne også gjøre seg gjeldende innen den enkelte bygd. Innenfor disse strukturer, så forskjellige de enn var, var der tendenser til lagdeling i høyere og lavere skikt, og denne lagdeling åpnet muligheter for politiske kombinasjoner på tvers av stenderdelingen. Dermed er angitt en dobbel tendens i embetsmannsstatens politiske utvikling (Seip 2002:64).

In spite of their rather scarce number, which in 1875 barely gathered 2300 members, the civil servants had political prosperity and power, since they were the official representatives of the Swedish king in Norway, in the period between 1814 and 1884. The emergence of the state of the civil servant occurred according to Seip through an ideological revival in the years between 1814 and 1834, where the *embetsmenn* state was established first through a political

and then an ideological revolution (Seip 2002:98). From 1830 onwards there crystallised itself an opposition to the *embetsmenn* government, namely the peasant opposition, which Rune Slagstad called the Left state, *Venstrestaten* (2001). However the period between 1840 and 1870 was represented politically and ideologically by the golden age of the high civil servant supposed to govern on democratic terms.

Sammenhengen er denne: Revolusjonen i 1814 skapte en stat som var truet; forsvaret ble gjennomført under bruk av slagord som betonet nasjonal enhet og menneskelige kvaliteter som frihet, likhet, mandighet, allmennånd.(...) Den andre revolusjonen kom da trusselen var avverget; den etablerte plattform for en politisk elite gjennom politisk teori og nytolkning av forfatningen, og den ga et sterk teoretisk begrunnelse for å avskaffe det privilegiebundne økonomiske system. Dette var en ideologisk ajourføring i retning av byråkratiets stat (Seip 2002:98).

Their allegiance to the king and their position as servants of the state gave them the privilege of ruling Norway in a democratic way, but at times their intensions could, *in extremis*, overlap with their controlling propensities over the political, academic and social system (Seip 2002: 111-112). Their power was due to the fact that they had no other form of political competition from other groups of the electorate. Their asset was that they had a great understanding of class-loyalty which other groups of the electorate lacked, in the beginning.

Those who, according to Rune Slagstad, primarily got credit for enhancing the modernization process of Norway as a country were Frederik Stang, Anton Martin Schweigaard and count Wedel Jarlsberg. Slagstad gives a minute description of the socio-political and ideological development of the regime in his book entitled *De nasjonale strateger* (2001). According to the historian the *embetsmenn* state was a regime founded on an administration which exercised a position of power, knowledge and ideological value. Hence, in the process of modernization of Norway there was a shifting power-play between regimes grounded on informational basis that formed a multifarious design of power (Slagstad 2001:18).

Den politiske strid har siden 1814 dreid seg om det rette forhold mellom disse tre felt: stat, marked og sivilt samfunn. Dette er modernitetens politiske tema som for Norges del fikk er særskilt utforming gjennom statens fremskutte plass. 1814-staten hadde en uvanlig bred demokratisk basis, som også legitimerte - ga muligheter for å legitimere – en sterk statsmakt. Staten hadde oppslutning i kraft av sin representativitet; den representerte samfunnet. Et nett av tillit og forpliktelse bandt samfunn til stat og stat til samfunn. Denne nærhet bidro i sin tur til å utviske det skille mellom stat og samfunn som var et kjennetegn ved det nye borgerlig-liberale system ifølge tidens ideologi ( Slagstad 2001: 17).

The founding fathers of modern Norway and the chief representative of the *embetsmenn* state had Schweigaard as the leader of the Storting, and on the other had Stang as the head of the government. After having welcomed the ideological orientation of utilitarianism, Schweigaard

applied that into the political and social arena. He embraced the ideological approach of utilitarianism that counteracted against the empty speculative approach proposed by those promoting the philosophical orientation of German idealism. Both Stang and Schweigaard developed, inspired by the utilitarian ideals, a practical programme of economical and institutional reform. The two philosophy professors who rejoiced in promoting the German idealism as an ideological system in the *embetsmenn* state, were Welhaven on the one side and Monrad on the other. This ideological flow of ideas gained distinct part in the Romantic revolutionary expression in the *embetsmenn* ideological world.

Staten var ifølge Monrads *Ethik* samfunnets høyeste uttrykk, ” den virkelige Sædelighed”, ” et Forhold, hvor en Fleerhed af Individier selv viser sig som en reel Enhed eller Individualitet, i hvilken den Enkeltes Selvstændighed er opbevaret.” Samfunnsinstitusjonene var ut fra en etisk synsvinkel kroppsliggjøringer av fellesskapets normer, som den enkelte samfunnsborger kunne anerkjenne - eller ikke anerkjenne - som sine egne. Monrad var ingenlunde en aparte filosof i systemets periferi, snarere reflekterte hans filosofi embetsmannsstatens sentrale ideologi (Slagstad 2001:24).

Schweigaard on the other hand was interested in holding balance between theory and practice, and he decided that it was time to apply the ideological propensities into more practical means of expression. Both Stang and Schweigaard had an understanding of the fact that in their wish to aspire and promote a modern society, the social development could not be ruled and controlled by a higher natural order or by preordained, immutable laws. Society undergoes a changing process where the various individuals that are a distinct part of it either individually or as a group, have to be able to partake in it, through their knowledge and volition. Hence the two leaders of the *embetsmenn* state governed the social arena through a fluctuation between knowledge, power, theory and praxis, asserts Slagstad (Slagstad 2001: 18). At an economical level this lead to a modern yet dramatic shift of paradigm:

Den lære Schweigaard doserte, var den økonomiske liberalisme. Ifølge en utbredt forestilling i tidens europeiske idéliv ville det si laissez-faire- liberalisme med selvregulerende marked, privat initiativ og privat stat. Schweigaards egenartede grep var å forene den økonomiske liberalisme med Stangs forestilling om ” Kraftig Statsstyrelse” og statlig initiativ. Resultatet ble den norske planliberalisme: ideologien om en kapitalistisk markedsøkonomi med staten i en fremskutt, intervenerende rolle. Schweigaards markerte front mot ” den engelske Skole” med dens lære om den passive, ikke-intervenerende stat (Slagstad 2001:16).

With the emergence of capitalism, society relates to a system of commodity production and inherently of risk, as a symptom of the changing mechanisms of modernity. This system is centred upon the relation between private ownership of capital and propertyless wage labour. This relation however becomes the forming main axis of the class system, having economic power, that is, as the main triggering force (Giddens 1990:55).

The way through which the two political leaders Stang and Schweigaard administered the country was hence by ideological astuteness put into practice. However through the democratic change there emerged from a much needed opposition that necessity to press things forward, into a much more fast-forwarded modernising process. This changing process came about in the 1870s when the power of the people manifested itself as an important driving force against the *Intelligensen* represented by the *embetsmenn*.

Historians Rolf Danielsen and Edgar Hovland (3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 2002) assess and describe concisely though thoroughly the process of modernization Norway went through during the golden age of the *embetsmenn* state, its decline and fall, the causality and the consequences it effected. Johan Sverdrup, a young solicitor from Larvik, made a breakthrough as the leading figure of the peasant opposition starting the 1860s. His initial wish however was not to gain governmental power, but through his attempt to restrain the *embetsmenn's* exercise of power, he wanted to make the opposition aware of their self-interest agenda ( Danielsen, Hovland 2002: 255).

He did however at the end of the *embetsmenn* regime become prime minister in 1884. The *embetsmenn* class was able to be in the privileged position of leading the country due to their comprehensive policy of economic modernization and more importantly due to the stability of the government, which inevitably brought to society's economic development and prosperity (Danielsen, Hovland 2002:261). However, the country experienced throughout the *embetsmenn* regime a more opened society which by expansion eventually ended their dominance of value system. Yet this elite ruling class did not want to lose ground, and influence through their ideology, but the modernizing economical and social effect paved the way for new political constellations. This came as a response to the swift change of democratisation as Slagstad points out: "Embetsmennenes vikende stilling som følge av økende demokratisering i folkebevegelse svarte til maktforskyvning i de parlamentariske institusjoner, men den var også uttrykk for en demokratisk modernisering av samfunnslivet i bredere forstand"( Slagstad 2001:150).

The period between 1872 and 1884 was a turbulent one with multiple conflicts between government and Storting, basically because the king vetoed a constitutional proposal made by the Parliament where members of government could be allowed to take part in sessions. The outcome of this tormenting process eventually ended with the king accepting Johan Sverdrup

as the leader of the parliamentary majority. During 1883 and 1884, as a culmination of the struggle between government and Storting, there were organised two political parties that laid the foundation for what was to become a new system of government, *parlamentarisme*. The Storting became divided between two parliamentary parties, the Liberals (Venstre) and the Conservatives (Høyre) which would unify their goals and eventually lead the country to the path of independence, through the birth of a new state (Danielsen, Hovland 2002:262-263).

The year of 1884 eventually, yet not abruptly, ended the dominance of the *embetsmenn's* value system though their demise of power. Because of their loss of alliance with the bureaucrats, businessmen and the large farmers who initially supported the already deficient elite-government, the old system, as a consequence was irreversibly forced to yield. The other aspect which invalidated their holding on to power was due to the large class of the socially repressed individuals who wished to attain more civil rights." The political pressure on the old regime was, to some extent, maintained by the unprivileged who were demanding full citizenship" (Danielsen, Hovland 2002:267).

Hence the emergence of the opposition, *Venstrestaten*, which came as an alternative to the old traditional type of government, is according to Slagstad a clear symptom of the modernity, where the pre-modern system of traditional values is replaced with new sets of values, through the socio-economical need of change:

Modernisering vil si liberalisering, dvs. at samfunnet differensieres, spesialiseres, i en rekke relativt selvstendige sfærer eller institusjoner som er underlagt sine egne logikker: økonomi, politikk, rett, vitenskap, kunst, religion osv. Modernisering i denne forstand innebærer en form for sekularisering, en verdsliggjøring av verden" (Slagstad 2001:129).

Ibsen obviously experienced a deep dramatic inner formation as Jon Nygaard has shown, while he grew up in Skien, through the changes that the *aporia* of modernity altered both at a social and more importantly at an individual level. Ibsen may at length address the juxtaposing problem of the individuals of the Norwegian society who did not benefit entirely by the democratic social system, but his basic statement is about individuals of the *embetsmenn* class caught in a disintegrating process both at an individual and at a social level. The effect of this social dynamics is dramatic.

It has reportedly been mentioned, by critics like Edvard Beyer (1980:205-232) and Francis Bull, that the literature of the mid nineteenth century has been governed by Georg Brandes'

encouragement to the authors of his time to set problems under debate, issues that should have raised questions in terms of individual liberation and moral inadequacies inside the bourgeois society. Ibsen is often cited as one of the chief authors that engage in such a debate in his drama. Georg Brandes' letter to Francis Bull, however, shows otherwise:

Hvor gidder De -for 1000 Gang- ride paa den halve Sætning at sætte *Problemer under Debat*, som jeg kort og knapt sagde i 1871 i en bestemt Sammenhæng, aldrig gentaget, aldrig gjort til Doktrine, og saa lade dette være Quintessesensen af mitt Vesen som Kritiker? For mig har det altid været som stod jeg mellem Maniakalske, naar de begynte med " at sætte Problemer under Debat". Meningen med Ordene var den simple, at Literaturen maa handle om Noget og at dansk Literatur i 1870 handlede om Ingenting ( Bull 1974:359).

Camilla Collett, feminist author and good friend of Henrik and Suzanna Ibsen, became inspired and approved of the dramatists efforts to show a less flattering side of the *embetsmenn* household where the women were endowed with little freedom. The impressive bond the two authors seemed to have shared especially in the latter part of their artistic career, is reflected by the correspondences between Camilla Collett and Ibsen. Apparently through their letters and articles, they seemed not only to appreciate each other, but also encourage each other in their very own special way to fight for the individuals' rights to live as perfectly free human beings.

Camilla Collett in *Sidste Blade, 2den og 3dje række* (1872) in "Om Kvinden og hendes stilling", writes prodigiously about the problem of the position of the women and their lack of purpose and freedom. She showed through her numerous protests that she was never at ease with her society's project that a woman's sole role and purpose in life was to marry, be financially provided for and become thereafter devoted to her family life. When this life's mission was not based on the free choice of a spouse, which was very rarely the case, women's adult lives were bound to be tragic, asserted Collett. The radical element in Camilla Collett's demand that women should be allowed to choose their own husbands, was that it would result in women being treated as independent and responsible individuals. She also calls indirectly for help from a male author to actually stand up and unravel women's tragic destinies. With the hope that another male author would stand together with her in this fight for women's liberation she writes: "Men jeg ved kun, at hvergang en Mand opløfter sin Røst i vor Sag, rystes der Tusender af disse frugtbringende Frø ned og drages vi Aartier nærmere Opfyldelsen" (Collett 1972: 210). The voice that Collett longed for presumably was soon about to come. Ibsen not only appraised her life long work for the cause of the women, as he writes to her in his letters of 1881, 1883 and 1889. Even more importantly, we find in his

concluding “Notes for a Modern Tragedy” (1878) that his society eagerly deprived its female individuals of the fundamental freedom they were entitled to alongside with its male members:

A woman cannot be herself in modern society. It is exclusively a male society, with laws made by men and with prosecutors and judges who assess feminine conduct from a masculine standpoint. (...) A mother in a modern society, like certain insects retires and dies once she has done her duty by propagating the race...Everything must be borne alone ( Ibsen HU VIII:368-369)

Ibsen indeed succeeds as later Lou Andres-Salome shows in *Henrik Ibsens Kvindeskikkelser* (1893) not only to glance at the minute psyche of his female characters, but from the assertions made by the critic, he really understands the deepest yearning of a woman’s mind and soul. Lou Salome finds that at the central core of Ibsen’s metaphors and imagery stands the idea of women’s captivity within her personality, family and society.

Astrid Sæther (2008) in her new book on Suzannah Ibsen captures some important female figures, especially from the inner Thoresen family circle, who allegedly performed the task of “muses” in Ibsen’s dramatic oeuvre. She also suggests that Ibsen’s understanding of the female psychology was not at all accidental, but it was due to the strong female role-models he interacted with throughout his life ( Sæther 2008:181-271).

Much could indicate by these calculations that Ibsen took a stand for women’s cause and that he might even have found his inspirational motif there when he constructed his dramas. Berthold Grünfeld suggests otherwise through a survey of the social arena of Ibsen’s Kristiania. Having it on good authority the critic suggests that the source for drama and tragedy was the situation of the workers and their families pertaining to the lower class of the social system. The double morals of the upper class and the degrading conditions of the lower class especially that of women in Kristiania’s Vika painted an even more grim and tragic picture, than what we are accustomed with Ibsen’s plays. Indeed, the true source for tragedy was the recurrent theme of prostitution, disease, alcoholism and suicide that many women forcefully subscribed to for a living (Grünfeld 1980:117-138). These particular details have been scarcely hinted at by Collett in the later part of her career. When it comes to Ibsen aesthetic tradition though they have obviously but not accidentally been completely overlooked.

Reality proves that Ibsen engaged at an artistic level to depict a drama that focused on higher social spheres, and this particular was not a fortuitous choice on his part. More than anything he was the poet who indulged in writing about individual freedom. It is a fact that in Ibsen's discourse held in Trondheim 1885, the dramatist envisioned the future of his country being in the hands of the working class and the women. Notwithstanding this fact, his dramatic art was not illustrating in a manifested way any feminist view on the matter, he insisted that his fight revolved around first and foremost "Mennesked":

Dette Adelskab, som jeg haaber at vort Folk skal forenes med, det vil komme til oss fra to Kanter. Det vil komme til oss fra to Grupper, som ednu ikke har taget nogen ubodelig Skade under Partitryket. Dette vil komme til os med vore Kvinder og med vore Arbeidere. Den Omformning af Samfundsforholdene, som nu forberedes ute i Europa, den besjæftiger sig væsentlig med Arbeiderens og Kvindens fremtidige Stilling (Ibsen H. XV: 408).

Finally, be it Laura Kieler functioning as a dramatic muse for the author's *A Doll's House*, or the impulses he got from Camilla Collett, or even his wife Suzannah as Sæther indicates (2008), Ibsen's social dramas show his astuteness of creating women characters and above all individuals. While these protagonists' individuality mirrors invariably a quest for freedom, their struggle and demise is arbitrary and subjective, but nonetheless important, since they focus on and modulate the *embetsmenn* social sphere. This particular element retains an essential position in Ibsen's *tragic corpus* and it is highly symptomatic of the dramatic modern social change. Ibsen was making his statement about individual freedom of the upper class and so was Collett, in her own way, but the target was definitely the *embetsmenn* class and its torn individuals, in Ibsen's case. In the following chapters I will engage in the analysis of Ibsen's women characters as individuals and representatives of their traditional world torn between duty and utopian freedom. In my assessment of the protagonists' dramatic modus operandi, I will look at the tragic substance of the plays, with inherent regard to the heroic quality attached to their character.

#### 4. *Ghosts*-idiosyncratic social alienation

*Ghosts* is a drama that proposes a multifarious aesthetic discourse generated by the intrinsic clash simulated by traditional institutions that oppose the entanglements of experience subjected to the “elasticity of the modern spirit”. *Prima facie*, the text advances an ideologically social critique which condemns all that is traditional, conventional and normative to the benefit of the archetypal modern discourse, where reality is dynamic transient and ephemeral. Helge Rønning’s evaluation of the text focuses on its overriding tragic qualities that emulate a family drama subsuming through internal projection, the essence of the human spirit struggling with utopian dilemmas in accordance with Williams’ liberal theory (Rønning 2006:281-294). Here the Ibsen critic refers to the liberal social powers that have shaped the European arena during the 1870s and where Ibsen’s plays of the time emulate the same dramatic social occurrences (Rønning 2006:355-362). With regard to the dramatic aspect of the play he further assesses that: “*Gjengangere* belyser en rekke av den borgerlige families problemer. Osvald og fru Alving er ikke bare individuelle psykologiske portretter, de er illustrasjoner på konsekvensene av sosiale spill” (Rønning 2006:283).

I believe that this last advancement regarding the dramatic consequences triggered by social interactions holds to a series of aesthetic mechanisms that release the tragic substance of the text. In my analysis of the drama I will focus on the external mechanisms that in my reading resonate in the private sphere and justify thus the protagonists to be actuated by social tension into tragic action. Subsequently, I will apply in the following part of this chapter Williams’ (2006) and Orr’s (1981) theoretic precepts on the genre in order to evaluate the heroic qualities the protagonists of the drama retain. As such, my appraisal of the text will follow through the assessment of the tragic substance, the fundamental antagonism between two social orders and the ideological power struggle it proposes according to Giddens (1990) and Calinescu’s (2006) theories regarding the phenomenon of modernity.

Williams’ theory on modern tragedy advances that tragedy happens through the quintessential collapse of a domineering social institution and its culture, which is reflected in a period of deep social conflict (Williams 2006:77-78). Ibsen’s artistic response to the clash of such social precepts materialises itself in *Ghosts*, at an aesthetic level. The problem of the modern

tragic in Ibsen's *tragic corpus*, revolves around the motif of the struggling individual who acutely seeks to liberate himself or herself from the social hindering circumstances of self-fulfilment. The tragic consequence deriving from this existential accomplishment results in the irreparable human loss. The particular aspect will guide my analysis of the drama through the juxtaposing social power play reflected as an ideological impact between two social orders; namely tradition and the experience of modernity that tragically engulfs the individuals in its core at its halfway.

Both Williams (2006) and Orr (1981) determine that in order to make sense of the concept of modern tragedy when evaluating Ibsen's text, one has to look at the events which take place at the level of the experience. Experience, as such, is intrinsically moulded by the all-encompassing social manifestation, where the individual loses the ideological battle with society due to its confronting standards, in a liberal acceptance. Williams points out the acute aspect that at the core of liberal tragedy resides the multifarious perplexity where the individual succumbs under the *social pressure* and the *external forces* that seek to destroy him/her. Subsequently, all human values are engulfed by the conflicting social institution. In such an environment the hero loses all heroic valences and becomes socially transfixed as a tragic victim.

When evaluating Ibsen's tragic tradition John Orr immediately underlines the importance of analysing Ibsen's plays in accordance with the social and historical events of the author's modern society. He further asserts that: "Ibsen's obsession with nobility as an attribute of life should be seen against the background of its negligible import as a class phenomenon within Norway itself" (Orr 1981:9). Ibsen could better evaluate and portray the social and private life of the late nobility from the distance of exile. He experienced the fall of his own family, corrupted by the dramatic consequences of modernity in the childhood town of Skien, and then in his self-imposed exile, as Jon Nygaard (1997) explains, he retrospectively recounted the story of the drama of modernity. When analysing the play one can find that the social and the tragic are indisputably linked. My interpretation of the play as an analysis of modern tragedy will follow the logic of "the tragic fall" both at a social and at an individual level, subscribing to the method proposed by Raymond Williams (2006) and John Orr (1981).

John Orr observes that Ibsen's interest with depicting the bourgeois life can be traced back to the social and historical background of Norway's early 19<sup>th</sup> century. His dramatic technique

concentrates therefore around individuals and families pertaining to the old aristocracy. Ibsen depicts in his dramas victims of the old establishment's mores and mentality who are corrupted by their hypocritical standard of living. Their propensity for heroic action is decidedly denied to them from the very beginning (Orr 1981:12). Accordingly, I will propose through my analysis of the drama a means to exemplify whether and how the consequences of modernity have influenced Ibsen's text and its protagonists in *Ghosts*, with a particular interest on the historical and aesthetic aspect of the modern tradition. The drama mimics the pernicious nature of the *embetsmenn*'s social ideals which collides with the ideology of modern times. Frode Helland pertinently notices in "Ideology and Hegemony" (2007) the important role ideology, or discursive hegemony, as he calls it, plays in shaping the social and individual sphere.

In *Ghosts* Ibsen places his characters in the isolation of Norway's countryside near the fjord, in the mansion of Rosenvold. The late head of the family, Captain Alving, late Court Chamberlain, died ten years prior to the start of the play. He is seen by the traditional community of the fjord, with the help of his wife, as a respectable family man with a good reputation. As the drama develops, Helene Alving reveals to the family friend Pastor Manders the true dissolute nature of her late husband. She endured her husband's debauchery, but sent away their son Oswald at the age of seven, with the hope that he would never discover his dead father's immorality. Her intent to erect an orphanage in the memory of her late husband is merely a fallacious device she uses, as she later confesses in order to get rid of the ignoble moral legacy of her late husband. The text mimics the *disembedding* mechanisms proposed by modernity that antagonize the conservative sphere, which is socially exemplified by the paraphernalia of traditional institutions and its exponents, the *embetsmenn* representatives, as such. The social power-struggle between preserving an old social order to the detriment of the new, is acute.

Judith Butler, in *The Psychic life of Power* (1997) explains what power can be defined as, and what the consequences of it are: "We are used to think of power as what presses on the subject from the outside, as what subordinates, sets underneath, and relegates to a lower order" (Butler 1997:2). It is equally important though to follow according to the theorist the Foucauldian expression of it as well (Foucault 1977). Foucault proposes as such to see the question of power as a dialectics which forms the subject, and which provides the condition for its existence and trajectory of its desire (Butler 1997:2). As a replica, power reflects itself

in the terminology of subjection. Accordingly, “*subjection* signifies the process of being subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject. Whether by interpellation, in Althusser’s sense, or by discursive productivity, in Foucault’s sense, the subject is initiated through a primary submission to power” (Butler 1997:2). My acceptance of it in the text is synonymous to the institutional social power of the old establishment dissonant with the new time consciousness ideology.

James M. Decker provides in *Ideology* (2004) an overall analysis of the term and acknowledges the influence it affected on literary theory. At the heart of most modern discussions about ideology, resides the dichotomy between common sense and irrational behaviour, where the process of ideology refers to the inherent relationship between ideas and material reality (Decker 2004:4-5). Ideology professes, as such, a relationship of power and empowerment of the collective consciousness. Decker suggests that those individuals who form the collective consciousness, “even if they fancy themselves ‘nonconformists’ or even ‘revolutionaries’, they nonetheless function within (and react against) the ideological parameters created by the society they live in.” One of such formulations of ideology refers according to Decker to their ability to problematize notions of “common sense”. Essentially, ideology’s mechanisms range from reinforcing its principles by reifying socio-political alternatives with an ideological label (Decker 2004:11-13).

The philosophical climate of the *embetsmenn* administration pended between two different approaches to the ethical doctrines; that is, utilitarianism professed by Schweigaard which contrasted Welhaven’s and Monrad’s deontological ethics that required binding the individual to his “duty”. The fundamental aspect is that the members representing *Intelligensen* thrived on ideological power. Inspired by the Kantian moral absolutism, the ethical message that gave an intrinsic identity to the students that were to inherit power positions in the state’s political apparatus, dealt with the all-encompassing concept regarding the “Overbevisning om Pligt” (Slagstad 2001:90).

A main aspect in Monrad’s philosophical ideology revolved around the transition from “Moralität” towards “Sittlichkeit”, from “morality” to “public morals”, which would permeate societal ethics through individual mores.

Monrads etikk var formet som en institusjonell etikk: familien som normativ organisering av ekteskap og barneoppdragelse, det borgerlige samfunn som normativ regulering av handlingsfeltet for de frie

individer og deres interesserealisering, og staten, samfunnets høyeste uttrykk, ”den virkelige Sædelighet”, ”et Forhold, hvor en Flerhed av individer selv viser sig som en reel Enhed eller Individualitet, i hvilken den Enkeltes Selvstændighed er opbevaret.” ”I det menneskelige Samfund har det Almindelige, Objective, som den Enkelte har at underkaste sig, en reel Auctoritet; men denne er paa den anden Side ikke noget absolut Ydre eller Fremmedt, thi Samfundet bestaaer af de Enkelte, af væsentligen Frie; i den almene Villie er den Enkeltes Villie et bestemmende Moment” (Slagstad 2001:91).

In the text, the prime representative of social mores who oozes power through ideological inclinations of the old establishment is par excellence, Pastor Manders. He represents the social institution that collides with the protagonist’s aspiration for self-liberation. The clash between the two main characters mimics thematically the fundamental clash between tradition and modernity that plunges the individual into victimised existential mystification.

According to Giddens (1990), modernity refers to modes of social life which provide the individual with the ideological expectation to break away from all traditional ways of social order, in a perplexing way. The text of *Ghosts* advances, as such, on the one hand the confronting aspect of devitalising all normative ethical ideology proposed by the *embetsmenn*’s establishment, and the futile struggle to welcome the new time consciousness, on the other. The tragic element of the text is enmeshed in this antagonising ideological *aporia* which coerces the main characters into dramatic social alienation.

The action of the drama takes place in the secluded, nearly Gothic confinement of Mrs. Alving’s mansion at Rosenvold, which is panoramically projected unto a misty fjord landscape, where the sun hardly ever shines. This particular descriptive device has obviously metaphorical connotations. The setting of the play seemingly revolves around bleak motives both at a relational level but more importantly at a psychological level. The scene directions suggest that the action takes place at a location absorbed by “a sombre fjord landscape” which is “hidden by the steady raining”. Orr states that Ibsen’s art depicts cultural isolation. Hence this mechanism sets the parameters for his artistic career. Ibsen’s drama invokes major comparisons of civilisation and wilderness through the fragile constricted urban existence doubled by the constant proximity of the forest, fjord and the sea (Orr 1981:3). Moreover Ibsen’s plays reflect a complex of social formation which is not at all symptomatic of the typically bourgeois drama at the turn of the century. On the contrary it is symptomatic and stands as “a total and uncompromising response to the peripheral nature of the society and the life to which it constantly referred and out of which it was undoubtedly born” (Orr 1981:4).

Admittedly, the text is maieutically built on the socially discursive impact between the institutions of tradition and modernity, with their social exponents, where the consequences of this antonymic encounter take a dramatic toll on its protagonists through the *aporias* of the new time consciousness. The play revolves around mechanisms of power through the ethical ideological discourse opposing the modern discourse which various characters become subjected to. The dialogue between the housemaid Regine and her alleged step-father, carpenter Jacob Engstrand, estimates from the very beginning the idea of a conflicting mentality of opposing generations, but more importantly the reader is provided with sets of juxtaposing standards of social double-morality. The power-mechanisms which Engstrand uses on Regine, when he entices her to help him with the “house for sailors” he is opening, which in reality is a high-class saloon, inherently suggests the conflicting mentality between the old and new time consciousness. Engstrand tries to control the discussion through a banal and vicious type of argumentation reminding Regine of filial piety. He speaks of “what a child owes its father” and his manipulative techniques are meant to open new perspectives of a morally debased status inside the country fjord, while her mind is set on going to the liberated Paris, and away from the secluded conservative social enclosure.

The dialogue between the two becomes an anticipative epitome of an undefined future that stands at the centre of clash between the two social orders. This first dialogue of the play is not only meant to suggest the real viciousness of Engstrand’s morally and physically crippled character, but it also alludes to the naivety and the fanciful imagination of a young woman who dreams to move up in the world. Moreover, the opening of the dialogue has anticipative and explanatory valences for the pivotal idea of the drama, namely the emergence of new time consciousness as a result of the modern development, where several characters experience the wish for flexibility and freedom as a symptom of acceleration of the “present-time” consciousness at a social level.

Mrs. Alving’s dramatic argument in the unfolding of the play is suggested by her propensity for erasing all that is normative and traditional while she becomes subdued, by the hypocritical need of it. Even though she married a representative of the *embetsmenn* establishment, and hence she is defined by their ethics, her struggle takes the form of exposing all that is normative as fraudulent and vile, since it impedes her self-realisation and her authentic self-experience. Paradoxically, her actions stand against her instincts of

liberation; her subjectivity is controlled by the person whom she once loved, and who ironically comprises in his very definition tradition, *per se*.

The couple which seems to clash at an ideological level is Pastor Manders and Mrs. Alving paralleled to Regine and Engstrand. There is a fundamental difference in attitude and moral inclination in Engstrand who is consciously manipulative and vicious, compared to the bigoted Pastor Manders who is the other important exponent of power in the unfolding of the play. With a reputation, *prima facie*, which is allegedly irrefutable Pastor Manders comes to Rosenvold in order to take care of the documents for the opening of the orphanage Mrs. Alving has erected for the memory of her husband, captain Alving. He seems in the beginning a character with good intentions that works for the interest of the Alving family, but as the play unfolds he proves to have a fickle sort of character, who lacks firmness in spite all of his protests, yet he presumes to know how to spiritually guide people in action. He mirrors the social exponent which fights against the liberating wishes of the protagonist. As such, he embodies the sanctity of tradition and ethos, as a representative of the *embetsemenn* morality, and he is solely guided by social opinion and idealistic judgement. This very aspect in his characters is revealed when he releases his judgemental discourse on the liberal and radical type of reading Mrs. Alving is conducting. His rhetoric oozes moral ideology and is highly conservative and uninspired, hence it becomes hilarious and fails to convince. He disapproves of the books based merely on the public opinion and the literature that condemns them, not because of actually reading the books himself.

MANDERS. (...) (*Goes over to the chair where his bags lies, takes out a sheaf of papers, sits at the opposite side of the table, and searches for a space to lay the papers of the table, and searchers for a space to lay the papers out.*) Now here, first, we have-*(Breaks off.)* Tell me, Mrs. Alving, where did these books come from?

MRS. ALVING. These books? I'm reading them.

MANDERS. Do you feel you've grown any better or happier for this kind of reading?

MRS. ALVING. I think it makes me feel more secure.

MANDERS. That's astonishing. What do you mean?

MRS. ALVING. Well I find it clarifies and reinforces so many ideas I've been thinking out all to my self. Yes, that's the strange part, Mr. Manders-there's actually nothing really new in these books, nothing beyond what most people think and believe. It's simply that most people don't like to face these things, or what they imply.

MANDERS. Oh, my dear God! You don't seriously consider that most people-?

MRS. ALVING. Yes, I certainly do.

MANDERS. Well, but not here in our society? Not among us?

MRS. ALVING. Yes, definitely-among us, too.

MANDERS. Well, I must say really-!

MRS. ALVING. But what exactly do you object to in these books?

MANDERS. Object to? You surely don't think I waste my time exploring that kind of publication?

MRS. ALVING. In other words, you know nothing of what you are condemning?

MANDERS. I've read quite enough about these writings to disapprove of them.

MRS. ALVING. My dear Mrs. Alving, there are many circumstances in life where one has to entrust oneself to others. That's the condition of this world, and it's all for the best. How else could society function?

MRS. ALVING. That's true; maybe you're right (Ibsen 1978:213-214).

The power play between the two epitomizes the clash between the fundamental discourse of tradition that opposes modern scrutiny. Manders' power mechanisms are reflected through his pietistic rhetoric which tries to subjugate any form of rebellion that Mrs. Alving might enact in order to persuade him. As an important exponent of the old structure he feels repulsion at any form of revolt against that, which according to him represents ethical behaviour. He is solely guided by common social ideas and his power mechanisms are carried through hyper activating the standards of both morality and utility as a symptom of the *embetsmenn* ideological establishment.

His statement not only rebukes and coerces her wish for free self-expression, but his conservative ideology also blurs the positive effect of welcoming the process of social modernization on the one hand; and he laments and reprimands on subjective grounds, the cultural development, on the other. His discourse derives from his desperate attempt to control. It is a statement of elusive form for authority that the past holds over the present. Manders as well as the protagonists of the drama, Mrs. Alving and Oswald undergo a process of existential realisation. While Manders only mentally assimilates the new time consciousness, he simulates constant shock and appal, though without allowing himself to become subjected to it. Mrs. Alving learns perhaps too late to relate to it, while Oswald dies by it.

What strikes, *prima facie*, in the dialogue between the Pastor and Mrs. Alving, is the way by which she, presumably a free-thinking woman is converted into accepting his clichés and nonsensical social precepts. The dialogue discloses that the pastor through his rhetoric wins another disputable argument. The way which Mrs. Alving is still very easily persuaded to act against her will is perfectly rendered in the discourse about the insurance of the orphanage. Here she gives into his hypocritical discourse and decides to leave it to the protection of "Divine Providence" (Ibsen 1978:216). He is constantly afraid of the "public opinion", because it defines him and as a consequence he lives by it and places his innermost judgement on it. The dialogue is hilarious and at the same time provoking. Mrs. Alving's schizoid morality is validated by her fickle character of being easily persuaded, doubled by her wish to emulate a radical free-thinking spirit; the collision of ideas is dramatic.

MANDERS (*leaning back in his chair*). But now, if here should be an accident—one never knows, after all—would you be able to make good the losses?

MRS. ALVING. I can tell you right now I absolutely wouldn't.

MANDERS. Ah, but you know, Mrs Alving—then it's a grave responsibility we're taking on.

MRS. ALVING. But what else do you see that we can do?

MANDERS. No, that's just the thing: we can't do anything else. We shouldn't expose ourselves to unfavourable opinion; and we certainly have no right to stir dissension in the community.

MRS. ALVING. Especially you, as a clergyman.

MANDERS. And also I really do believe that we can depend on a project like this carrying some luck along with it – standing, so to say, under a special protection.

MRS. ALVING. Let's hope so, Mr. Manders (Ibsen 1978: 217).

The virulent opposition between the order of the old and the order of the new becomes even more obvious through the dialogue Oswald and Pastor Manders have together about marriage and the “matters of the heart”. Oswald is the perfect image which mimics the mentality of the modern change. As the only heir of the Rosenvold estate, he has just returned home for the celebration of the orphanage erected in the memory of his father. He is presented as the estranged artist-painter “the prodigal son”, now “the homecoming son” ( Ibsen 1978:219) who has finally come back to Norway from a place where he spent most of his time animated by a bohemian existence in Rome and in Paris.

The question of heredity is triggered by Pastor Manders' claim that Oswald has an uncanny resemblance with his father. This particular remark uncovers a double significance as the dialogue between the two unfolds. The smoking of the pipe triggers retrospectively in Mrs. Alving and in Oswald as well, vicious memories of the only episode when father and son actually shared something genuine together. His only memory of the time that he now reconsiders as an adult inwardly generates at a subconscious level the gist of the morally contaminating discernment, namely the double-morals of the aristocratic status. Oswald emulates of the very qualities of the modern spirit. As such he has lost any relation with the past and its normative rules and with anything which is authoritative, like the imposing image of the father, he learned about from the letters he received from his mother. His relation to the father-figure nevertheless is one vitiated by the shallowness of one moment. The relation between father and son is revealed in Oswald's Proustian metaphorical recounting of the episode when he was first persuaded by his father to smoke. The memory is a highly vexing one since Oswald understands that he was his father's victim, and the more Mrs. Alving tries to make the ghostly apparition of the debauched father go away, the less she succeeds in erasing it:

OSVALD. (*Sets the pipe down*). All right. I only thought to try it because I'd once smoked it as a child.

MRS. ALVING. You?

OSVALD. Yes. I was very small then. And I remember going up to Father's room one evening when he was in such a marvellous humor.

MRS. ALVING. Oh, you don't remember anything from those years.

OSVALD. Oh yes, I distinctly remember him taking me on his knee and letting me smoke his pipe. "Smoke, boy," he said, "smoke it for real!" And I smoked it for all I was worth, till I felt myself go pale, and the great drops of sweat stood out on my forehead. Then he shook all over with laughter-

MANDERS. That's most peculiar.

MRS. ALVING. I'm sure it's just something that Oswald dreamed.

OSVALD. No, Mother, it was definitely no dream. Because-don't you remember-then you came in and carried me off to the nursery. I was sick then, and I could see you were crying. Did Father often play such tricks?

MANDERS. When he was young he was always full of life-

OSVALD. And still he got so much accomplished-so much that was good and useful; for all that he died so early.

MANDERS. Yes, Oswald Alving- it's a strong and worthy name you've inherited. Well lets' hope it'll inspire you-

OSVALD. It certainly ought to (Ibsen 1978:221).

All of the characters portrayed by Ibsen in this play live under denial of the truth. They are haunted by ghostly apparitions of heredity, by old beliefs that stand symbolically in an antithetical relation to the metaphor of the sun, which Oswald confesses never to have seen at Rosenvold. Oswald's affirmation might be symptomatic of the gloomy atmosphere of deceit community at large is subjected to, but more importantly it refers to the tradition of the old aristocratic mores the Alving family members lived by. The "Father" figure bears strong Gothic connotations with his ghost-like presence that constantly peers over the dialogue edges and threatens to repetitively enact in those left behind a vitiated relation with their past heredity. The only one who positively seeks the truth is Oswald, who virtually grew up in the liberated Paris. He mimics the essence of the modern thought and the emergence of a radicalised consciousness of modernity through the metaphors he often refers to, namely "the joy of life" and "the sun". He comes from outside the confinement of the community of the fjord, which is governed still according to a conservative ideology. He senses that through the hyper-sensitivity of the bleak climate of his hometown, which fundamentally mirrors the symptoms of a higher social mechanism that at the level of the text clashes at an individual level.

The society Pastor Manders is the spiritual leader of, still conducts itself according to the ideal of the community that is a group, and whose members are bound together by tradition. They share customs, rituals through which all members should and can communicate directly, because they are linked together and guided by common mores and behavioural patterns. This community Pastor Manders refers to is "pre-individual", since it precedes its individual

members and the roles of the individual are well defined from the moment he/she is born. The society Oswald matured in after being sent away by his mother is one moulded and defined by the effects of the spreading urbanization and rapid industrialization. Hence, the effects at a social level are dramatic, since this later type of society has lost the quality of being a “community”. The society Oswald matured in mirrors the qualities of a “collective” society. This collective society chiefly follows the development of the modern thought. Subsequently, it reflects that it has the quality of being a “post-individual” society, which organises itself by individual members existing prior to it. This matter has dramatic consequences in forming new identities, since it requires the expansion of private life which eventually leads to the complete disappearance of the quality of intimacy.

As Giddens asserts, the acute factor which shapes the dynamism of modernity is caused by the immanent transformations proposed by capitalism, regarding notions such as time and space, where the new time consciousness provides the individual with the concept of the “emptying of space”. The dramatic result is that the dialectics of the two social orders result in the emergence of modern institutions, where the notion of community is substituted by collective society, and where the individual becomes socially estranged to all that is institutionally normative. A perfect example which reifies these socially confronting institutions is provided by the example of the maieutically built dialogue between Pastor Manders and Oswald. The dialogue between the two characters juxtaposes the modern aesthetic distancing between terms such as *modernus* and *antiquus*. Matei Calinescu in his chapter on “Modernity, The death of God and Utopia” (2006:58-68), explains that, *modernus* designated a man of the day, a newcomer, while *antiquitas/ antiquus* conveyed the sense of the essential *oneness* of tradition.

The text proposes a subsuming blend of the automatism generated by the association between modernity and its secular view of the world. Their dialogue is symptomatic of the anti-transcendental modern spirit which opposes the normative past and its fastidious dogmas.

“Modernity, rendered possible by the consciousness of an irreversible time (which critical reason has purified of all transcendent or sacred meaning), engenders the utopia of a radiant instant of invention that can suppress time by repeating itself endlessly- as the central element of a new and final tradition (no matter how untraditionally conceived)” ( Calinescu 2006:68).

The fundamental clash of ideas and of ideals and modes of living materializes itself in the text through Oswald's and Pastor Manders' antonymic views about marital relations. The debate turns out to be dramatically afflictive. The pressures of the term have occurred because of the constraint mirrored by their opposing standards of living. They have no common ground, and they do not understand each other, because of the different environments they represent. The Pastor becomes appalled at the modern idea that a man not being married could live together with the mother of his children, since according to the laws of his community this is a matter utterly absurd. Notwithstanding social ethos, Oswald defends "free-love" due to its sincere grounds. They both deplore the antonymic social mores they are rhetorically presented with, and they reach no common understanding. While Manders manifests consternation at the idea of "free-love", he is equally made aware of the viciousness of the local social behaviour married men of high-society conduct abroad.

Without knowing, Oswald portrays the very debauched character his own father had, similar to those honourable men, "the pillars of society", who found entertainment outside the country. The tension between the two individuals that embrace opposite sets of beliefs escalates and becomes acute. The discussion he has with the pastor is again a brilliant example of the modern change through secularism and its confrontation with conventional religious thought:

MANDERS. But I thought most of those people hadn't the means to start a family and make a home.  
OSVALD. It's true that a number of them haven't the means to get married-  
MANDERS. Well, that's what I'm saying.  
OSVALD. But they can still have a home life. And several of them do-one that's quite normal and pleasant. (MRS ALVING, *following attentively, nods but says nothing.*)  
MANDERS. But it's not a bachelor's life I'm talking about. By home life I mean a family home, where a man lives with his wife and children.  
OSVALD. Yes, or with his children and with his children's mother.  
MANDERS. (*Jolted, clasping and his hands together*). Merciful God-!  
OSVALD. What?  
MANDERS. Lives together with- his children's mother!  
OSVALD. Well, would you rather have him abandon her?  
MANDERS. But you're talking about illicit relations! About plain irresponsible free love (Ibsen 1978:223).

While Manders is both horrified and perplexed by the free-spirited Oswald who witnessed such liberal ideas overseas, he is equally reprimanded and ridiculed about turning a blind eye to immoral matters that happen in his own country, possibly to people spiritually guided by him. The discourse is too powerful and reality too striking for Manders to accept when he is made aware of the unravelling of real life at home. The Pastor prefers to preserve a farcical

ideal that defies reality, which involves respectable gentlemen who pertain to his community, as a way of liberating his conscious of any responsibility attached to any tainted argument.

The oratory encounter the protagonists have is a fine example of modernity conflicting tradition. Osvald reifies the ideal of the modern artist, where he rendered as a painter throughout his work the beautiful “joy of life” he felt consistently enticed by, as he later confesses to his mother. Subsequently, he had as an inspirational motif the “consciousness of the present” free of any disturbing authoritative traditional inflections and more importantly free of any tie with the past. Baudelire suggested a broader concept of artistic modernity in *Le peintre de la vie moderne* (1863). To Baudelire modernity is more than the *Present* observed in its up-to-datedness, which is distinctive, fugitive, ephemeral, it is more importantly the *memory of the present*, “la mémoire du présent”.

Here Osvald resembles somewhat Eilert Løvborg, the modern utopian artist torn between the needed juxtaposition to break with tradition while he is existentially engulfed by the need to create a new tradition which would define his future. Calinescu writes that: “Modern artistic creation illustrates in diverse ways the utopian/antiutopian relationship with time. It has become almost a truism to describe the modern artist as torn between the urge to cut himself off from the past -to become completely “modern”-and his dream to found a new tradition, recognisable as such by the future” ( Calinescu 2006:67).

In order to reaffirm his control over the situation, Manders gives a pathetic innuendo about Mrs. Alving’s marital life not meeting the expectations of notions like *duty* and *social order*. Subsequently, he falsely reprimands her as a spiritual leader, for having abandoned her husband and sending away her child, for being too selfish and having a highly wilful character concerning the future of her family members she coldly disposed herself of. He deplores her so-called selfish attitude when leaving a dissolute man and he adopts a fallacious victimised position which plunges his attributes into the derogatory. He confesses to have embraced the task of “a humble instrument directed by a higher power” that bent her “will to duty and obedience”, when she sought consolation with him some time past, only to find out that both his advice and his idea about captain Alving as a husband and father was “nothing more than a hollow mockery” (Ibsen 1978: 228). Of course, at a symbolic level the ethical ideological discourse which Manders gives here is not only dogmatically inaccurate, which gives to the whole episode a whole new tragicomic imprint, but more importantly, it is symptomatic of

the notion of tradition desperately losing any substantial authority over immanence as a whole.

Mrs. Alving is compelled by the unjust denunciation on the part of the Pastor to expose the factual events so that the true argument might come to light and relent that her husband “died just as dissolute as he’d lived every day of his life” (Ibsen 1978:228). Under his insidious ethical protests, she is forced to tell the actual veracity about the fallacious existence she chose to show in front of the entire community. She finally exposes her fight to keep the façade of a happy home that consisted of an invariable “battle” to keep appearances, and nourish the ideals about Alving, matter which she later projected upon her son. Oswald had been sent away so that he would not learn that his father’s affair with the housemaid resulted in the birth of Regine. She decided to erase the imperative consequences of a perpetual dissolute manner of living her husband indulged in, by taking the responsibility of running the estate by herself and preserve her family’s respectability. She gives her reasons for keeping up a façade and erecting a false memorial in her husband’s honour because of her “bad conscious”, but more importantly because she desperately wanted that her son should inherit everything solely from her.

MANDERS. And for this man you’re raising a monument!

MRS. ALVING. There’s the power of bad conscience.

MANDERS. A bad-? What do you mean?

MRS. ALVING. It always seemed inevitable to me that the truth would have to come out someday and be believed. So the orphanage was meant to spike all the rumours and dispel the doubts.

MANDERS. Well, you’ve certainly accomplished that, Mrs. Alving.

MRS. ALVING. And I had still another reason. I didn’t want Oswald, my own son, to inherit the least little thing from his father.

MANDERS. Then it’s with the Alving’s money that -?

MRS. ALVING. Yes. The sums I’ve contributed year after year to the orphanage add up to the amount- I’ve figured it out exactly-just the amount that made Lieutenant Alving such a good catch at that time.

MANDERS. Then if I understand you-

MRS. ALVING. It was my selling price. I don’t want that money passing into Oswald’s hands. Everything my son inherits will come from me, and no one else (Ibsen 1978: 230-231).

This episode where she acknowledges her past faults is commonly regarded as an episode of *anagnorisis* of her *guilt*. John Orr assesses that such an interpretation of the episode overshadows the true intention of the dramatist. The fact of having preserved a farcical image of respectability for her late husband due to her “bad conscious”, (*guilty conscious* in Norwegian) is considered by Orr as an erratic interpretation.

The tendency to interpret Ibsen’s consistent use of the past as evidence of bourgeois guilt on either his part, that of his heroes, or both author and character, is to miss the point about compression. For

although the past is a significant and oppressive fact in Ibsen's work, its re-entry into the contemporaneous situation of the play is a necessary part of a wider process. This process is the dramatic refinement, or purification, by which the single central collision of the play stands out against the background of contemporary everyday life. To this end Ibsen sacrificed the dramatic form, accessible to any audience, of circumstance changing over time and drastically altered the tempo of dramatic action (Orr 1981:8).

Mrs. Alving's drama revolves around the dramatic clash of ideas. It consists in her attempt to unite a wish of self-liberation from the ties of the past, embodied here by the symbol of the "orphanage", and her hypocritical antithetical message of emancipation however still bound by ethos. Her antagonising discourse turns her pseudo-moral crusade into a tragic alienating experience. Her hope is that after the opening of the orphanage the farce will be over, where "the dead" will never have the chance to haunt their future again. Before the first tumultuous act is over, Ibsen introduces the theme of incest when Mrs. Alving confesses to have seen *ghosts* reified in Oswald's flirtations with Regina. By the end of act one the atmosphere succumbs in tenseness. While the pastor desperately seeks a means to master his composure in front of the community and not expose this absurd erroneous image, for fear of "any scandal", Mrs. Alving wants to exorcise the memories of "the dead" in the house and put an end to this "horrible farce" (Ibsen 1978:232).

The second act announces from the stage directions that there still lingers a "thick mist" which "veils the landscape" and the symbolism of this projection of the setting has the function of prolepsis<sup>2</sup> in the text, indicating that there still remain dark secrets to be exposed. Manders epitomizes the very ethical ideals of the civil servants' doctrine and his power play mechanism is again reflected in the second act. Here he recites the doctrinal beliefs he conducts his existence by, instead of showing compassion for an unhappy situation Mrs. Alving had to go through, partly due to his advice. He enacts in her the wish for preserving the dead "happy illusions" symptomatic of his idealistic normative creed even after having learnt the truth. The fallacious existence she led after the minister advised her to return to her husband is voiced when she admits to have been a companion to her husband's debauched ways. She had to take control over the household when it became unbearable, when the housemaid bore Captain Alving a daughter. Mrs Alving paid Regine's mother money to leave and not speak to anyone about the matter. However, instead of accepting his fault of having given her an erroneous advice, he characteristically chooses to cover up his mistake. He adopts a "proper" type of discourse about the coercion to preserve social mores and ethic

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<sup>2</sup> Analepsis and Prolepsis, mirror terms as "flashback" and "flashforward", respectively; they are devices through which a narrative's discourse re-orders a given story.

behaviour, since according to him society should be guided solely through law and order. Finally, he convinces her of the importance of keeping the precious “beautiful image” in Oswald’s memory.

The event re-establishes in Mrs. Alving a brief sense of perspective. Apparently, she realises her coward decision when she finally gives her pronouncement that law and order and the “webs of obligation”, indeed constitute “the root of all miseries on earth”. Her reaction holds to the radical modern spirit she subjected herself to, through her modern reading. Here, both mentalities symptomatically clash again. The disquieting position she faces is of an ambiguous nature, since she seeks a reconciliation of the impossible, namely traditional contentions with modern civilisation. The result is dramatic, and it only deteriorates further with every desperate mitigating attempt on her part. She is persuaded to keep “the happy illusion” in Oswald’s memory, while her whole being demands for the absolute truth to be released.

The power-play between Manders and Helene Alving stands as a symptom of a yet another external conflict namely that of the old against the new time consciousness, with its intrinsic internal grievous division, which results in a tragic imaginative form for evasion. Whimsical and tyrannical by turns, Manders’ quest to guide people back to the ethos that makes society function properly, portrays a pathetic defeated figure who fails to see that his idealistic philosophy merely functions as a way for imaginative escapism from immanence. His response to her is that which can sooth a conscious. He persuades Mrs. Alving to keep up appearances, a “fine alternative” that would not shatter any “ideals”, and more importantly the quality of “family duty”. The antagonism between the two becomes incisive. While Manders even after the truth has come out still clings to the “happy illusion”, which perhaps is the most proper metaphor attached to his character, Mrs. Alving desperately wants to verbalise the truth:

MANDERS. And you call it cowardice to do your bounden duty? Have you forgotten that a child should love and honor his father and mother?

MRS. ALVING. Oh, don’t let’s talk abstractions! Why don’t we ask, should Oswald love and honor Captain Alving?

MANDERS. It’s there something that tells you, as a mother, not to destroy your son’s ideals?

MRS. ALVING. Yes, but what of the truth-?

MANDERS. Yes, but what of his ideals-?

MRS. ALVING. Oh-ideals, ideals! If I only weren’t the coward I am!

MANDERS. Don't demolish ideals, Mrs Alving- that can have cruel repercussions. And especially now with Oswald. He hasn't too many ideals, sad to say-but as far as I can make out, his father is some sort of ideal to him.

MRS. ALVING. Yes, you're right about that.

MANDERS. And the impressions he has you've instilled and nourished yourself, through your letters.

MRS. ALVING. Yes, I felt it was my duty and obligation-so year after year, I've gone on lying to my own child. Oh, what a coward -what a coward I've been!

MANDERS. You've built up a beautiful image in your son's imagination- and that's something you mustn't take lightly (Ibsen 1978: 237).

George Bernard Shaw in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* makes clear, what the ideology of ethics with its inherent element of duty, which characterises so well the female protagonist of the drama, stands for: "Duty arises at first, a gloomy tyranny, out of man's helplessness, his self-mistrust, in a world, his abstract fear"( Shaw 1913:16). In order for the individual to achieve positive and total freedom it is required that he or she break with the law of tradition: "The point to size is that social progress takes effect through the replacement of old institutions by new ones; and since every institution involves the recognition of the duty of conforming to it, progress must involve the repudiation of an established duty at every step" (Shaw 1913:7).

The drama of *Ghosts* converges at two strictly linked levels, the social with deep influences on the private one. Mrs. Alving's paradoxical characteristic of being a free-thinking woman, as the pastor denounces, finds her trapped in the entanglements of false tradition. She insists on maintaining the demands of a fake image, namely that of an upper-class tradition on the verge of decline. The tragic character of the play consists in Mrs. Alving's propensity towards theatricality. When she realizes her mistake it is virtually too late:

MRS. ALVING. Ghosts. When I heard Regina and Oswald in there, it was as if I was seeing ghosts. But I almost believe we are ghosts, all of us, Pastor. It's not only what we inherit from our fathers and mothers that keeps on returning in us. It's all kind of old dead doctrines and opinions and beliefs, that sort of thing. They aren't alive in us; but they hang on all the same, and we can't get rid of them. I just have to pick up a newspaper, and it's as if I could see the ghosts slipping between the lines. They must be haunting the whole country, ghosts everywhere-so many and thick, they're like grains of sand. And there we are the lot of us, so miserably afraid of the light (Ibsen 1978: 238).

The metaphor of *ghosts* is definitely a multifarious one. My reading of it transcends the mere immediate congenial aspect of heredity, rather at a metaphorical level it pins the term down to the social sphere. Helene Alving sees both in Oswald and herself products of their social strata. She acknowledges that she is a product of the "old dead doctrines, opinions and

beliefs” (Ibsen 1978: 238), that do not live in them “but they hang on all the same” (Ibsen 1978:238). The *Ghost*-like reality equals metaphors of hypocrisy and façade conflicting elements like authenticity and revelation. Language as well as ideology functions as means for uncovering the truth.

Manders, on the other hand, is utterly mortified by her free-thinking speech and hopes to succeed in showing Oswald and Mrs. Alving, yet another time, the right way to do things in preserving the “happy ideal” and image of an honourable father and husband in front of the community. The dialogue between the pastor and Mrs. Alving is a highly revealing one since it highlights through Mrs. Alving’s confession, the ideological power-play and the great domineering dysfunctional influence that she allowed Manders play in her life, matter which eventually took a toll on various individuals. He rebukes those “disgusting, insidious freethinking books“, while she thanks him for having pointed her the fundamental difference in mentality they have. Now she declares that she is ready to work her way to freedom. Whether she indeed has the power to achieve that is, at length, less certain. The whole discourse stands on the antonymic set of ideas, namely idealism contrasting authenticity which is a clear symptom of the authoritative clash between tradition and radical thinking. Identity, as is the case with Oswald and partly with Mrs Alving, emerges in the text as a challenging task questioning the true value of it.

Helene Alving experiences a cathartic moment where she partly realises that false mores and conventions such as duty, law and order, the preservation of the “happy illusion”, are not enough in order to achieve happiness. She is not totally free from it, but she paradoxically craves authenticity, for herself and for the grievous situation she has projected on her son. The tragedy of the liberal self is encompassed by the dilemma of the social and physical inheritance which denies the struggle for self-fulfilment:

The conflict is then indeed internal: a desire for relationship when all that is known of relationship is restricting; desire narrowing to an image in the mind, until it is realised that the search for warmth and light has ended in cold and darkness. Every move towards relationship ends in guilt. (...) In this sense, to be born is to be guilty, and inheritance is inevitably “debt”. For the identity of the “free” self is limited and impugned by the necessary physical inheritance. That connection to others is involuntary, and is in the blood. To the liberal self this is not connection but tainting. Then, driven by individual desire, which cannot admit any final connection, Ibsen’s adult persons simply involve and damage each other, beyond the possibility of fulfilment. Freedom is defined as getting away from this net, or exposing it, in the name of truth. But there is nowhere to get away to, except by renunciation of the individual life and desire which are still active and compelling. Desire, consistently, betrays desire (Williams 2006:128).

The issue of identity and authenticity are important elements since they reflect the dynamics of transition from a traditional to a modern society. Identity, par excellence, is defined as a relationship with himself/herself and with “the other”. The man at the turn of the century begins to have no historical situation and no function. The individual defines himself by solitude and not by participation to normative social rituals, because he lives in a system that does not require participation, but submission, where there is no spirit of community. The *embetsmenn* state and its members in the text, through ideological discourse or otherwise, are a fine example of that.

Alexis de Tocqueville in *The Old Regime and the Revolution* (1998) and *Democracy in America* (2000) sustained that modernity should be defined in terms of democracy which in its turn performed an intricate relation with individual alienation and estrangement. Mrs. Alving and Osvald experience perpetual estrangement, matter which is socially and internally located. The protagonist’s inner conflict becomes more acute with the confession her son makes about the disease he unknowingly and inexplicably had inherited. His dramatic confession stands as a metatextual device which synthesises that his existence is literally “worm eaten” from inside. At a metaphorical level this mirrors the symbol of social erosion of the traditional *embetsmenn* representatives and their establishment. Their ideology is internally spoiled. The lamp on the table is merely a metaphoric artifice which is meant to project some light unto the devastatingly tragic confession Osvald makes about his illness, because of which he will never be able to work again. The “joy of life”, “the joy of work” he has experienced in Rome and Paris is one of the central symbols that stand in an antonymic position to the ghostly, gloomy atmosphere of dead doctrines he experiences at home. He recognises in Regine that yearning he relished away from home, and that is why he is inexplicably drawn to her: “OSVALD. (...) Mother, have you noticed how everything I’ve painted is involved with this joy of life? Always and invariably, the joy of life. With light and sun and holiday scenes - and faces radiant with human content. That’s why I’m afraid to stay at home with you” (Ibsen 1978:257).

The heartfelt talk son and mother have together voices as a metatextual artifice the question of heredity, where “the sins of the fathers haunt the living”, like ghostly apparitions, that have come back to torment those who are left behind. His life in Paris stands as a representation of a joyful carefree experience, as opposed to his life at home: “OSVALD. And this interminable rain. Weak after weak it can go on; whole months at a time. In all my visits at home, I never

once remember seeing the sun shine” (Ibsen 1978:252). Mrs. Alving decision to let the couple get married in spite of the pastor’s protests, and speak freely “without demolishing any ideals”, triggers the fatidic comments of the pastor at the end of the second act, who characteristically sees the burning of the orphanage as a providentially punitive response: “MANDERS. How awful! Mrs. Alving, this is God’s fiery judgement on a wayward house” (Ibsen 1978:259)!

The scene directions in the beginning of the third act indicate through the lamp burning on the table that the truth must come out and metaphorically turn away the mist of self-imposed utopian ideals. This extrinsic device starts off with Oswald’s premonitory remarks after he learns that the memorial erected in the memory of his father has burnt down to the ground.

OSVALD. (*going to the table*). What’s this house he was speaking of?

MRS. ALVING. It’s some sort of home that he and the pastor want to establish.

OSVALD. It’ll burn up like all this here.

MRS. ALVING. Why do you say that?

OSVALD. Everything will burn. There’ll be nothing left in memory of Father. And here I’m burning up, too (Ibsen 1978:265).

The dramatic aspect of the event resides in its tragic dynamics it produces reflecting as Williams assesses an existential disorder juxtaposed with the concept of order. Tragedy according to Williams is rooted in disorder (Williams 2006:91). Hence violence and disorder are seen both as acts but more importantly as institutions. By the end of the drama, the consequences of the revolutionary manifestation of ideology bring the conclusion of the play to the tragic argument that the old institution with its exponents, as a metaphorical manifestation of an evil-like constricting force, becomes alienated in its inflexibility in front of the new time consciousness. The traditional social order becomes extinct and its protagonists are a manifested projection, a substantial epitome forcibly subjected to it, which makes them succumb in existential alienation. Raymond Williams suggests that in modern tragedy the emergence of “evil” becomes culturally a resonance of multifarious kinds of disorder which destroy actual life and it takes a general character. As such, tragedy dramatises evil in various forms, in the text the traditional institution with its members can be interpreted as one of the ignoble forces which deter individual and plunge them into dramatic alienating occurrences (Williams 2006:83).

As the concept of “the civil servant tradition” has faded in Norway since 1884, people, families pertaining that social class have no choice but to hold on to a utopian ideal of their

normative ethical ideology. As a result their life is a futile one, with no present and no future. Presumably that is the reason why captain Alving turned into a debauched character, irrespective of his true natural drive for *la joie de vivre*. After moving to an isolated countryside village, he coercively failed to fulfil his public role, which indeed lacked practical institutional function at the time. As Mrs. Alving herself confesses to Oswald the reason he spoiled himself, in spite of his true corrupt nature, might have been because both his public and social role as a captain and later as a Chamberlain, found no true significance for his life any longer:

MRS. ALVING. And then, so full of that very joy, this child-because he was like a child then, really-had to make a life here in a mediocre town that had no joys to offer-only distractions. He had to get along here with no real goal in life-only a routine job to hold down. He never found any activity he could throw himself in heart and soul-only business affairs. (...) (Ibsen 1978:266).

Mrs. Alving's dramatic end comes from her two-folded morality. She believes to the end that idealistic thought and the compulsory façade are the means of happiness, until her son proves her wrong. Oswald tells his mother that the only image he has about his father is when he once made him sick and life at home and its confining social sphere has invariable dramatic effects which only empty him of the "joy of life". Finally, Mrs. Alving decides to break away from duty and façade and present Captain's Alving's children with the absolute truth that she has been hiding from them all these years. The result of that makes Regine leave, and Oswald in his turn tell the truth about the latency of his illness which will eventually turn him into a mentally retarded man depending on his mother for the rest of his life.

"MRS. ALVING. It's nearly morning. (*looking out through the greenhouse.*) There's the first light of dawn already on the mountains. It's going to be clear, Oswald! In a little while you'll see the sun" (Ibsen 1978:271). The sun, at a metaphorical and subconscious level is supposed to help her see and accept the truth that the fallacious image she projected on her son is just a lie. Her drama is that she fails to accomplish that. The self ingrained negation denies the means to accept reality, namely that her son has become a living projection of her fears, a replica of captain Alving. This alteration is utterly tragic. She also declines to see that his mental illness will not go away and that they're future will be anything but bright:

MRS. ALVING (*bending over him*). What a fearful nightmare this has been for you, Oswald -but it was all a dream. Too much excitement-it hasn't been good for you. But now you can have your rest, at home with your mother near, my own, my dearest boy. Anything you want you can have, just like when you were a little child. There now, the pain is over. You see how quickly it went. Oh, I knew it would- And look, Oswald, what a lovely day we'll have. Bright sunlight. Now you really can see your home.

*(She goes to the table and puts out the lamp. Sunrise. The glaciers and peaks in the background shine in the brilliant light of morning. With his back toward the distant view, OSVALD sits motionless in the armchair.)*

OSVALD (*abruptly*). Mother, give me the sun (Ibsen 1978:275).

Mrs. Alving's demise is due to her wish to preserve the double standard of the aristocratic mentality she married into. The "ghosts of the noble ethos of heredity" haunt her because she resolved to subscribe to them, in spite of her radically natural impulses. As such, her double drama subsumes to her internal conflict between the traditional dogmatic life she had to marry into, not because of love but because of economic necessity. She has become subjected to the rules of a social order of power and hence she had to accept the fallacious social precepts the *embetsmenn* ideology abide by. Her tragic drive resides in her juxtaposing wish to break free from her initial social conventions, just as Nora, Mrs. Linde, Thea Elvsted, Rebecca West and Ellida Wangel, while she yearns to revitalise her utopian ideal of a happy home in order to survive. As such, as an overall character she lacks the "elasticity of the modern spirit", therefore she fades inside her self-imposed social confinement.

Finally, there will be no heir to the legacy created by Captain Alving's aristocratic double-ethos, and Oswald will not inherit anything from his mother's ethically unbalanced morals either, because he in spite of his aristocratic birth, has learned la *joie de vivre* of the modern man, ideologically free of any social limitation. However his erratic decision to return to his original environment takes a fatidic toll on his existence. Hence the traditional, conservative world at Rosenvold is slowly falling apart. Oswald cries out in the end to break loose from the confinement she has created for him, he needs the sun, the truth and the "joy of life" more acutely than any false existence she has built up for him. At a symbolic level his entrapment indicates that the old establishment will forcefully give way to the ideology of the new, through the inherent institutional alienation.

Admittedly, *Ghosts* is a drama which proposes not only a tragic example of a family drama as Rønning suggests (2006), but more importantly it conveys the tragic encounter between tradition and the modern experience which engulfs the individual in tragic alienation at its very core. Both Rønning and I read Ibsen's tragic tradition through Williams' theory on modern tragedy. The difference in my approach is that I read Ibsen's dramas in a coherent Norwegian socio-political context, according to John Orr's theory regarding the phenomenon of *periphery* (Orr 1981: vxi-xvii). As such, the dramatic substance of the text, in my opinion, resides in the *disembedding* mechanisms that mirror a modern context. Unlike Rønning who

reads Ibsen's tragic art as an aesthetic disillusionment with the decline of the Paris Commune in 1871, I on the other hand, refer to the socio-political decline of the *embetsmenn* state (Slagstad 2001), as a replica of the Norwegian modern development, which accordingly has given Ibsen aesthetic impulses in his dramatic oeuvre. However, I will concur here with Rønning that the same dramatic social mechanisms Ibsen experienced in Norway are in fact, similar to those which he later could retrospectively identify and contemplate in his self-imposed exile in Rome, Dresden and Munich.

The main theme of the drama voices the extent to which society invades personal lives and causes the individual to find himself or herself engulfed in existential unbalance. The play apparently is an epitome of sharp criticism at an erroneous social behaviour which desperately calls for ideas like truth and genuine personal freedom. Subsequently, Ibsen concentrates his drama's main argument around confronting notions like the ideology of the normative past and the "elasticity of the modern immanence". The tableau described by Ibsen in *Ghosts* is edifying by the metaphor of the utopian quest for authenticity, light, truth, liberty and happiness. The tragic aspect resides in the fatidic mechanism where the protagonists find it impossible to fight the "ghosts" of old traditions and beliefs, which encompass their own heredity, where they eventually succumb under their own uncertainties and indeterminations. The past mirrors their false propensities for liberty and in the process they undergo a dramatic transformation through inner crisis and dispute. The tragic takes the form of the immanent present, the imaginative *durée*, "the subjectified personal time" through the emergence of the metaphor of "ghosts". Indeed the very title epitomises the idea of vicious behavioural reiteration of situations juxtaposed to the real, the authentic and the perceptive contradicting the reflective.

*Ghosts* is a modern tragedy on two levels, it causes the social drama to enact an acute resonance in the private lives. The device of the orphanage, Captain Alving's legacy burning down, is merely a metatext artifice. It refers both to the upper-class institution falling apart, and more specifically it predicts the tragic end of Captain Alving's heir: "Everything will burn. There'll be nothing left in memory of Father. And here I'm burning up, too" (Ibsen 1978: 265). The tragic character of *Ghosts* resides, par excellence, in the edifying position of its protagonists as representatives of an outdated social order on the verge of decline, who through their inflexibility become engulfed in individual and class alienation.

Finally, Ibsen tells a story of the decline of the old establishment the *embetsmenn state*, of the old manors and hence *Ghosts* is a perfect example of this theme. Subsequently, we are presented here with the drama of a social class on the verge of decline, but still, we are not presented with heroes, like in the classic tragedy who fight for fixed transcendental values. Ibsen, as Orr argues, uses his dramas as a form for the titanic clash of ideas, only to match it to “an extraordinary display of exotic spectacle” (Orr 1981:11). The protagonists are either social victims, or as it is the case with Mrs. Alving, self-imposed victims of the upper-class moral hypocrisy. The imperative struggle of its characters resides in their finding a way to adjust. Captain Alving finds his resolve in debauchery; Mrs. Alving clings on desperately to the upper-class family façade, while their son tries in vain to find an escape from the puritan system of Norway to a bohemian life as a painter always craving for the joy of life. Throughout the play, gloom, clouds, and rain symbolize hypocrisy, fear, duty, fallacious ethos and the general cowardice generated by an obsession with public reputation. The sunrise in the end of the drama antithetically symbolises the final symbol of light which clears away the gloom. Yet the result is not enlightenment but madness, decrepitude, fall and individual alienation.

Williams indicates that what interests him with the isolation of death and dying in tragedy is the effect of loneliness it formulates and the loss of human connection, that is the consequent blindness of human destiny, in a liberal substantiation ( Williams 2006:81).

The tragic action is about death, but it need not end in death, unless this is enforced by a particular structure of feeling. Death once again, is a necessary actor but not the necessary action. We encounter this alteration of pattern again and again in contemporary tragic argument. The most spectacular example, perhaps, is the resurgence of the concept of evil (Williams 2006: 81-82).

By following the strict pattern of a declining false tradition, the protagonists of the play know no way out to freedom. On the other hand, people from the lower class like Engstrand and Regine are seen as the winners, as they are flexible enough to adjust to the changes the whole society undergoes. They are the truly free, they have no scruples and are not subjected to any other social law but their own, and hence they have all the possibilities to succeed in the future. In the last act of the play there are made allusions by Regine that she should get the boat and find her place in the world. Indeed the fjord, the open ocean suggests liberty, freedom, prospects and future for some of Ibsen’s characters. Ibsen does not find any way out for his protagonists as Steiner (1961) implied because he is merely there to present the social

arena of his time. His characters are definitively tragic as Williams (2006) and Orr (1981) suggested, because of their irremediable fall they undergo, but in a modern social acceptance. The drama of *Ghosts* is essentially a modern drama reflecting the fall of the upper-class structure and of the individuals that hypocritically cling to their ties to tradition. Thus less heroic than their ancient Greek forerunners, they are doomed to an irremediable fall and tragic alienation. This alienation as it is the case with *Ghosts* occurs within the family itself and it is a product of a socially self-imposed estrangement that is internally divided.

## 5. Sublime fall-Gothic power structures in *Rosmersholm*

*Rosmersholm* is a complex drama that proposes, through an elaborated structure and an abundance of literary elements, a fascinating *modus operandi*, which creates a pivotal point in the structure of the play. *Rosmersholm* is at length, a play that deals with the tragic fall of two characters and of a whole archetypal world around them, at the same time. In my analysis of the heroic qualities of the female protagonist of the text, I will look at the external idiosyncratic mechanisms, as well at the subjective internal mechanisms that define her character, in order to determine to which extent the drama as a whole subscribes to the tragic mode William's tragic theory requires (2006).

The play thrives on symbolism and metaphorical artistic expressions that by the play's outset alludes to the paraphernalia of the Gothic genre. This aesthetic mode is triggered not fortuitously though, by the overriding constituent of the modern age confronting the normative past. This essential factor at length enhances the destructive element throughout the dramatic action. The protagonists of the play, Rebecca West and John Rosmer, represent textual mediators who interpret and express the means through which the cult of the immediate past shapes the "dark" present towards an unidentifiable future, through negative transcendence. The Gothic elements in the play are quite obvious and have been pertinently though not to their fullest analysed by Beret Wicklund in her article "Ibsen's Demons: *Rosmersholm* as Gothic Drama" (2001). Wicklund identifies the Gothic subtext of the play and she synthesises her reading of it to the following: "The gothic is romanticism with a shiver. It is full of superstition, fright, horror and terror; it presents old castles, evil villains and haunted women. And isn't that what *Rosmersholm* is about, even if it is a realistic drama written in 1886, reflecting the political conflict between the liberals and conservatives in Norway"(Wicklund 2001:335)? Beret Wicklund's assertion is an important remark when it comes to the aesthetical level of the play. In addition, it is one of the reasons for my trying to asses the role of the Gothic elements Ibsen obviously has used in order to shape *Rosmersholm*'s pivotal idea, namely that of death, irreversible fall and disintegration of the protagonists and their traditional social order. My point is namely to a certain extent tangible, but rather divergent really to that of Wicklund.

In order to give a somewhat different interpretation and a more complex meaning to the paraphernalia of the Gothic as I see it in *Rosmersholm*, I will use the theories of David Punter (1980) and Lucien Goldmann (1964). My starting point in the assessment of the dramatic outcome of the protagonists will focus on the question of the symbolism of the supernatural element and the power structure apparatus it coerces. Before I proceed to identify the meaning of the Gothic power structure provided by the supernatural element, I will firstly engage in pointing to the inextricable link between the theme of the social decline, and the dramatic consequences of modernity which engulfs the individual into social isolation, as David Punter pertinently shows (1980). However, beyond ghosts, nightmarish scenes and the paraphernalia of the grotesque, as Wicklund (2001) already legitimately identified, what makes *Rosmersholm* a Gothic definable substance? I will further engage in showing how Ibsen uses the paraphernalia of the Gothic in the text, as a symptom of social disintegration of the *embetsmenn* establishment, when he renders his pivotal idea of the drama. David Punter (1980) and Lucien Goldmann (1964) prove exactly this idea in their analysis of Gothic fiction. This social disintegration mirrors the dramatic contrast between tradition and modernity. As such, Matei Calinescu clarifies that such opposite terminological pairs as classic versus gothic can be traced to the cardinal distinction between ancient versus modern (Calinescu 2006:35-41). This last feature of opposing elements is further assessed by David Punter in his theory about the Gothic genre.

According to David Punter in *The Literature of Terror. A history of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day* (1980), the Gothic mode and its typical aesthetic figuration appeared as a specific reaction to certain features generated by the bourgeois cultural and social life. My interpretation of *Rosmersholm* being of Gothic substance, subscribes primarily to *this* deeper evaluation of it, which inextricably leads to the elements that have triggered this mode, namely the fall of the bourgeois pre-established and conservative social order, with its subsequent tragic consequences. Punter notes that by all accounts, the Gothic novel emerged at a time when the early forces of industrialization were bringing about major changes in people's lives and work. Consequently, it emerged in England and then it echoed on the Continent and then it moved further towards America. It is important to observe that the relative stability of a long-accepted social structure was dissolving under the pressure of new types of work and new social roles, as Giddens (1990) and Calinescu (2006) suggested. As such, the Gothic element was an aesthetic mode that rendered *this* particular phenomenon, that is, the ideology of an inner and social turmoil (Punter 1980).

The drama proposes from its outset the incompatibilities involved in the dramatic modern change inside the social structure that fundamentally influenced the family sphere and inherently the individual traditional values. Rosmersholm is a place of mystery that with its respectable mores, stands as an epitome of historical endurance. It is a place that bears the imprint of a mysterious past of the highly respectable family of civil servants, the Rosmer family. The drama unfolds indicating from the very first act that this is a play situated at two strictly related levels. Firstly, it deals with a drama situated at a personal level that deals with the dramatic development of its protagonists John Rosmer and Rebecca West. Secondly, it points to another level of a wider scope, namely that of the fate of the respectable Rosmer clan, which stands as an epitome of the dramatic social demise of the *embetsmenn* establishment and ideology. This latter level of the text is disseminated throughout the drama, and it fundamentally shapes the protagonists into tragic action. *Rosmersholm* is essentially a drama about the outcome of tradition, of a conservative way of life, strongly associated with state power and state service, which succumbs under the pressures of the immanence and its modern spirit. The clash of these two social orders is dramatic as Williams suggests ( 2006: 77-78).

Lucien Goldmann in *Pour une Sociologie du Roman* (1964) speaks about the importance with which modern liberal society shapes in a dramatic way the individual, through its capitalist norms and regulations, process which has been highly illustrated and discussed at an aesthetic level. These modern regulations inherently cause the individual to appropriate the social mechanisms as a suppressing force. Hence, they determine the protagonist to succumb into mechanical action. The victimised individual cannot surpass the social all-encompassing power and he/she becomes subjected to it. A perfect example for that is illustrated through the dramatic mechanisms that the bourgeois society undergoes. At an aesthetic level, these mechanisms take a dramatic toll on the qualities of the protagonist in general, who loses his/her heroic qualities together with the capacities to become individualised. Lucien Goldmann suggests that this apparent contradiction, which illustrates the quality of “individualism”, is an attribute that the protagonist lacks. As a consequence, the process enhances the idea of the dramatic perplexing effects the bourgeois societal pattern proposes:

Ce schéma hypothétique nous semble confirmé entre autres choses par le fait que, lorsque l'un de ces quatre éléments, l'individualisme, a été amené à disparaître par la transformation de la vie économique et le remplacement de l'économie de libre concurrence par une économie de cartels et de monopoles(

transformation qui commence à la fin du xix<sup>e</sup> siècle, mais don't la plupart des économistes situent le tournant qualitative entre 1900 et 1910), nous assistons à une transformation parallèle de la forme Romanesque qui aboutit à la disparition du personnage individuel, du héros (...) (Goldmann 1964:49-50).<sup>3</sup>

David Punter continuing Goldmann's theory affirms in *The Literature of terror* (1980) that Gothic literature stands as a perfect example of this distorted social mechanism that affected in a dramatic way bourgeois life and its individuals; so much so, that it produced the literature dedicated to this mode of writing. The effects of the modern development in literature illustrated through the Gothic genre, namely *this* social tension at a highly sublimated way through the aesthetics of fear. The Gothic mode stands as a perfect designation of the social turmoil individuals are subjected to, due to the modern change: "The individual comes to see him or herself at the mercy of forces which in fundamental ways elude understanding. Under such circumstances, it is hardly surprising to find the emergence of a literature whose key motifs are paranoia, manipulation and injustice, and whose central project is understanding the inexplicable, the taboo, and the irrational" (Punter 1980: 128).

Gothic literature, as such, emerges in the capitalist modern society, as an aesthetic response to the dramatic socio-economic mechanisms the new time consciousness presents society with. *Rosmersholm* emulates this aesthetic pattern and it inflicts its protagonists to succumb under their dramatic culmination. "(...) Gothic is thus a form of response to the emergence of a middle-class-dominated capitalist economy, and if such an economy prevails in important respects through the nineteenth century and on into the twentieth, it may be possible to explain the persistence of the Gothic symbols in the same terms. These symbols, we may say, were forged as a response to a period of social trauma ;( ...)" (Punter 1980:128).

The complex structure and aesthetic tradition of *Rosmersholm* does not have a fortuitous genesis. Its commencement has very much to do with Ibsen's return to Norway (Meyer 2004: 396). After the eleven years Ibsen spent outside Norway, he came back to his natal country with his wife Suzannah. In a letter to Hegel, he expressed that one of the things he dreadfully

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<sup>3</sup> This hypothetical scheme proves to me to be confirmed, among other things by the fact that, when one of these four elements, that is individualism became extinct, because of the transformations which occurred in the economical sphere, through the substitution of liberal economy that became threatened by an economy of cartels and monopolies (a transformation which started at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but mainly the economists situate it in the period between 1900 and 1910), we witness a transformation which parallels the form of the novel characterised by the disappearance of the individual character, that is of the hero. (My translation)

missed by being away from his home country, was the sea, which to Ibsen's characters stands chiefly as a symbol for potential freedom. After giving his famous speech in Trondheim on the 14<sup>th</sup> of June 1885, Ibsen left together with his wife for the little town of Molde with its lovely fjord, where they spent two full months. During this period, he was repeatedly seen either "staring down onto the water" or "rowing in a boat along the fjord to the open sea", Michael Meyer reports in his biography on Ibsen (Meyer 2004:396-397). A year later, Ibsen published his play, *Rosmersholm*, which initially was meant to be entitled *White Horses*. The reason why he changed the initial title was probably due to the fact that *White Horses* was too similar to the title of Ibsen's previous play, *Ghosts* (Meyer 2004:404). Indeed, there is a similarity in message between the two plays at an ideological level. Ibsen wrote to Georg Brandes that this play was bound to be written, and to Carl Snoilsky, the presumed inspirational source for John Rosmer, he disclosed that prior to writing the drama, he "made some close studies for it during his trip to Norway during the summer" (Meyer 2004:404).

The subtext of the play clearly indicates that Ibsen was influenced by the political rivalry he met when visiting Norway. However besides that aspect what else could have inspired the aesthetic pivotal idea of the drama? If one should read the abundance of symbols and aesthetic elements that recur in the text, the answer is almost clear: the enigmatic and powerful presence of the waters of the fjord. *Rosmersholm* abounds in the symbolism and imagism of water, the supernatural, and the way the two rule and gain power over the protagonists' psyche. The manor-house of Rosmersholm seems to be a gloomy mystical place, where temporality and space blend together in a *sub specie aeternitatis, sui generis*. Nevertheless, the dramatic discourse suggests the splitting mechanisms between time and space, with the tragic consequences it provides its protagonists with, by placing them in a moral and ideological dilemma of the new time consciousness (Giddens 1990).

The Gothic demonic power structure is revealed from the opening of the drama and it constitutes the aesthetical dynamics of the play. The power structure of the play in my reading is triggered by the element of the supernatural, as a consequence of the Gothic erotic outlook (Punter 1980:411). Firstly, I will engage in identifying the primary sources of the Gothic power structure as I read it, in order to analyze the way the female protagonist of the drama is plunged into dramatic action. In order to proceed to the survey of the protagonists' aesthetic response to the *aporias* of their modern society and their position to that, I will stop for a

moment in order to briefly clarify the terminology regarding power as Max Webber (1968), Steven Lukes (1981) and Michel Foucault (1991) define it.

The literature on power is marked by a deep disagreement over the basic definition of the word. Some theorists define power as getting someone else to do what one wants them to do; this is called *power-over*, whereas others define it more broadly as an ability to act, the so-called *power-to*. Hence, very many important analysis of power in political science, sociology and philosophy adopt the former definition of *power-over*. For example, Max Webber places the notion of power in the social sphere where he situates the actor, the individual that is, to take position on the one hand, to the laws and conventions which society emulates, and on the other, to the normative groups that sustain them. Webber defines power (*Macht*) as “the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests” (Webber 1968:53). Domination (*Herrschaft*) on the other hand “is the probability that a command with a given specific content will be obeyed by a given group of persons” (Webber 1968: 53). Steven Lukes, who continues Robert Dahl’s analysis of the “intuitive idea of power”, according to which “A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do” (Lukes 1981:41), finally suggests that the point “of locating power is to fix responsibility for consequences held to flow from the action, or inaction, of certain specifiable agents” (Lukes 1981:56). From a different background, Foucault’s influential analysis conflicts Habermas’ understanding of the notion, and he proposes that the term should be regarded through the logic of *power-over*, through a fundamental interaction of the relation between society and the individual as an agent.

The thought that there could be a state of communication which would be such that the games of truth could circulate freely, without obstacles, without constraint and without coercive effects, seems to me to be Utopia. It is being blind to the fact that relations of power are not something bad in themselves, from which one must free one’s self. I don’t believe that there could be a society without relations of power, if you understand them as means by which individuals try to conduct, to determine the behaviour by others. The problem is not of trying to dissolve them in the utopia of a perfectly transparent communication, but to give one’s self to the rules of law, the techniques of management, and also the ethics, the ethos, the practice of self, which would allow these games of power to be played with the minimum of dominion (Foucault 1991:18).

When analysing the genre, Punter suggests that Gothic fiction is erotic at root and it mainly displays many areas of emotional ambivalence: “it knows that to channel sexual activity into the narrow confines of conventionality is repressive and, in the end, highly dangerous, that is a denial of Eros and that Eros so slighted returns in the form of threat and violence” (Punter 1980:411). The tragic aspect attached to the mode, according to Punter, is that the very

repression of it kills the individual, because the subjection of the forces within, are more fragile than the subliminal conventionality can withstand (Punter 1980:411). The Gothic mode, declares Punter, enacts psychological and social dilemmas: “in doing so, it both confronts the bourgeoisie with its limitations and offers it modes of imaginary transcendence, which is after all the dialectical role of most art. Gothic fiction demonstrates the *potential* of revolution by daring to speak the socially unspeakable; but the very act of speaking it is an ambiguous gesture” (Punter 1980:417).

*Rosmersholm* apparently emulates the pattern of the Gothic erotic structure. The drama is a mock-love story of prohibited passions, transgressive actions in the name of love, and unfulfilled dreams of idealism, which as a consequence, lead to the eventual disintegration and tragic fall of the murderous couple. *Rosmersholm*, in my reading perfectly subscribes to this pattern, where the erotic subtext attached to the mode, delivers the fundamental basis of power structure of the drama. When the play begins, we are presented with the female protagonist, Rebecca West, a former live-in companion of John Rosmer’s dead wife Beata, now the present companion and friend of the owner of Rosmersholm, and as the play develops, a want-to-be mistress of the mansion. From the outset of the play Rebecca West is apparently portrayed as a charming young lady that emigrating from Finnmark<sup>4</sup>, comes to help Beata, at Rosmersholm, with the help of her brother, the staunch conservative spirit and *pater familia*, Doctor Kroll. As the play unfolds, we learn that she is the one who with her strong-minded, powerful character, apparently lures the former Pastor to renounce his childhood religion and embrace some more unorthodox, radical ways of thinking, with the ultimate goal of creating an aristocracy of mind in the local community. Her mechanisms of dominion subscribe to the logic of the *power-to* structure. The true sources that inspire the Pastor are Rebecca’s radical books that she inherited from her adoptive father, Doctor West.

The first act of the play suggests from the scene directions that the drama deals with the very respectability, sobriety and endurance of the Rosmer clan, indication underlined by the portraits covering the interior walls of the residence and by the ancient trees outside the estate. The old mill-path which Rosmer does not dare to cross, is charged with metaphorical meaning and functions as a prolepsis in the text, suggesting the continuous process of falling attached to the fate of the murderous couple. His reluctance to cross the mill-path by the bridge

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<sup>4</sup> Which in Old Norse mythology, sagas and folklore is the place, par excellence, of magic, of trolls and of Lapp shamanism.

indicates that the heir of the estate does not retain the capacity to confront his past. The antonymic relation between archaic time and modern temporality and space, creates through its *disembedding* mechanisms a colliding dramatic effect. The notion Mrs. Helseth refers to, that at Rosmersholm they “cling to their dead” disseminates in the text the idea of the past and past beliefs having a central role in the unfolding of the play, like the metaphor of “the white horse“ that hunts the estate in order to claim the life of its inhabitants. Hence, the protagonists rather, all the characters of the drama are in some way or another confronted and therefore defined by their relationship with the past and the tensions triggered by the immanent present. The disjunction between time and space is an axial relationship that shapes the unfolding of the text, and at length, shapes the tragic outcome of the main characters.

The innuendo through which Mrs. Helseth discloses to Rebecca the importance of the traditional family heritage, points to the metaphorical influence the normative past has over the members of Rosmersholm. It is also indicative of the symbolic subplot illustrated through the logic of the archaic Norse symbolism that Rebecca epitomizes through her origins. At the same time, it dramatizes the aesthetic consequence of the collision between tradition and modern thought, through the logic of the Gothic mode. Rebecca seemingly represents the very “new time consciousness”, which she ideologically and metaphorically simulates through her speech. Her mission at Rosmersholm transcends the mere infatuation she has with the inheritor of the estate, former Pastor John Rosmer. Her wish is to shape him into the mentality of the modern *desacralised immanence*, deprived and liberated from all hindering circumstances that would tie him in any way to his sacred heritage. She brings to the scene the vitality and freshness of the wild nature of Finnmark and after the death of Beata she manages, as Dr. Kroll observes, to make “the old place bright and inviting” by placing “flowers everywhere”.

Rebecca contrasts from the beginning the other protagonist of the drama, in absentia, Beata the dead wife, who more conservative by descent, action and mentality gave a rather clinical imprint to the mansion preserving it to its propriety in all respects. Rebecca fundamentally contrasts Beata’s *embetsmenn* heritage through her spirited character as well, since she deplores all that is normative and traditional because this “kills happiness”. She chooses instead to brighten up the manor with the scent and colour of wild flowers, revitalising thus the symbolism of her origins of the wild North and her exuberance and passion for living. Kroll proves to be in the unfolding of the text an agent acting on Beata’s behalf. He observes

Rebecca's manipulative techniques and her determination to change the place and its conservative respectable legacy, by the power she holds over its inheritor, John Rosmer. The power structure becomes of a somewhat more complex substance when Dr. Kroll learns with astonishment that Rebecca's influence upon the inhabitants of the house is stronger than that. With minute detective qualities, he discloses that Rebecca's ambitions were higher than merely those of illuminating the gullible Pastor; but that she managed to get rid of John's late wife, in order to fulfill her innermost desire, namely that of becoming the mistress of the Rosmer mansion. The apparent unfolding of the drama has Rebecca both as the protagonist of the play as well as the character that holds the reigns of power over the characters. If considering the text as a whole, however, one can notice that at a deeper level the power structure is meticulously conveyed by the overriding element of the supernatural that eventually takes control over the present and its protagonists. Besides the fact that Ibsen presents in *Rosmersholm* a rather peculiar blending of the prototype of "femme fatale" that bewitches the characters of the play, Rebecca West is at the same time a complex character that subdues and in its turn is subdued. She is overpowered not only by a villain that is the traditional pattern of the Gothic, but also by a higher power, namely the ancestral legacy of Rosmersholm.

The metaphysical element of the text is provided by a *mélange* of supernatural and preternatural beings that constitute the power structure of the drama and plays a conspicuous role for the outcome of the main characters, which fits the logic of *power-over*. The Gothic element is triggered from the very first act quite abruptly by the presence of the mysterious and extramundane element of the dead. The dead are prefigured by "the white horses" that apparently haunt the living at Rosmersholm. The feeling of terror John Rosmer experiences when crossing the millrace is a reiterative act, as the superstitious Mrs. Helseth discloses to Rebecca, and as such, it provides the text with an element of Gothic terror that calls for attention:

MRS. HELSETH. But, my heavens, it must be hard for the pastor to set foot on that bridge. Not there, after what happened-

REBECCA ( *gathers up her crocheting*). At Rosmersholm they cling to their dead.

MRS. HELSETH. To my mind, miss, it's the dead that cling to Rosmersholm.

REBECCA( *looking at her*). The dead?

MRS. HELSETH. Yes, it's so to say, as if they couldn't quite tear themselves free from the ones that stay on ( Ibsen 1978:498).

The drama predictively opens with the conversation between the housekeeper Mrs. Helseth and Rebecca intimating thoughts about ghostly beings, that haunt the Rosmersholm mansion and about the dead who cling to the living, or vice versa. The mythical law of the mansion that overpowers the domain of Rosmersholm, with its terrifying atmosphere, is further enhanced by the very representative of the Rosmers' and his fright of crossing the footbridge.

John is the last member of the respectable Rosmer family that has supplied the local community with priests and military officers, that is, dignified members of the *embetsmenn* state, and hence with a traditional way of life strongly associated with their ideological ethos. His fear of crossing the footbridge disclosed in the opening scene, can be translated as his metaphysical desire to fight the recoil of the past and its destructive consequences, which tradition holds upon the present, and hence death holds upon life. His own spirit though freed from the conservative ideology is not freed from the past. This is a leit-motif that will follow the development of this character. Ibsen's irony about the protagonist resides, on the one hand, in his antonymic wish to achieve and conduct a revolution in the human spirit that he would bring to his community. On the other hand, it refers to the uncomfortable disparity between the realm of noble sentiments he expresses, contrasting the subdued past that devastatingly returns to ruin his elite enlightening ideas.

Ibsen proposes from the beginning of the drama an excellent proof of Gothic writing of excess and transgression, as the reader is invited to join the protagonists in their obsessive world, by emphasizing the intuitive exploration of their own fears and fantasies. Dr. Kroll is a determined schoolmaster, an orthodox Conservative, a fine member of the patriarchal order. He is the representative of ethos and tradition, but more importantly his role in the play is that of a powerful agent acting on Beata's behalf. Before the first act is ended, Rebecca manifests her worries about Dr. Kroll meeting "the white horse", when she intimates to Mrs. Helseth her fears that they "may hear soon now from one of those ghostly beings" (Ibsen 1978:522). Ibsen's artistic technique of placing the mansion in a dimly lit sunset, with Mrs. Helseth prophetically "turning down the lamp", increases the atmosphere of gloom, suspense and fright.

The second act reveals more decidedly Kroll's the true mission at Rosmersholm and the function he has in the drama. He is the voice of the right wing party, but somehow his political beliefs are gradually blurred in order to release the drama's real core, namely that

justice is now present, so that the ghosts of the past are bound to come back and haunt the guilty living. The presence of the terrifying guilt and the menacing past is reiterated in the second act by Kroll, on the one hand, and Mortensgaard on the other, as they both stand as symbols for Beata appealing to Rosmer's conscious and emotions, by enhancing his guilt complex.

The political subtext of the drama has its importance, but it is however of a secondary essentiality. It was nonetheless grounded and built upon the political turmoil that emerged in Norway in the period of 1883-1884. The conflict between the parliamentary majority and the government became excessively acute and while it did not reach any resolution or compromise, various political events implicated the establishment of two opposing parties, the Liberals (Venstre) and the Conservatives (Høyre). The foundation of these two political parties paved the road for a new political system, namely *parlamentarisme*. The political crisis came to its conclusion implicating not only a power shift from the old political regime, the *embetsmenn* regime, which influenced the political life ever since 1814 until 1884, but this was an important signal of political settlement. On the other hand, it signalled a better form for reflecting the important political modernising principle of democracy (Danilesen, Hovland 2002:263). This particular idea of decline of the *embetsmenn* state has implicit dramatic connotations attached to the outcome of the characters that subscribe to the archetypal world of Rosmersholm.

The dialogue between Rosmer, the representative of conservative ideology by name and Kroll, the representative of the conservative traditional thought by action, and finally Mortensgaard, the radical spirit in the text, brings to the scene the idea of *parlamentarisme*, the democratic plurality of meaning. This considerable rivalry between the two political orientations is represented in the text by Kroll contrasting Mortensgaard's radical beliefs. There is a strong metatextual discourse attached to the plurality of views in the drama. Nevertheless, at an ideological level, the fervent dispute between the old ideology of the *embetsmenn* representatives, and the radical thought promoted by Mortensgaard, Brendel, Rebecca and Rosmer on the other hand, who aspire to fulfil their life mission of ennobling the people of the land and bring them individual happiness and freedom, encompasses the *disembedding* mechanisms of the modern social system, which victimises its conservative individuals. Certainly, the actual and only representative of the "new man" ideology is Mortensgaard seemingly through action, and more importantly through an ideology devoid of

any aspirations to false ideals. On the other hand, Rosmer, in spite of his generous wishes and Rebecca's persuasions, dramatically remains tied up to the past with its false considerations regarding duty to his family name and his respectable heritage. Kroll is conservative by action and Rebecca and Rosmer are radical by conviction, but the tragic aspect is that they lack the will and courage to act.

Ulrik Brendel, who also has a pen name, Ulrik Hetman, is John Rosmer's old teacher and Rebecca's presumed ideological inspiration. He is a mysterious character utterly anachronistic, who ventures to visit the estate again after having been cast away by Captain Rosmer with the whip, because he aspired to teach John some rather modern, radical precepts. Brendel is the alter-ego of Rosmer in the text, who thrives just as his old pupil on idealistic reflection. Not supported by action though, he lives in a delusional world where he envisions himself to be a misunderstood talent, with the gift of illuminating the masses. His most outstanding work, by his own calculations, resides however solely in his mind and he has never acted upon writing it on paper, matter which according to Rebecca deprived the audience of a most brilliant work. Rebecca is erroneously persuaded to think that Dr. West's radical books, which she inherited from her alleged step-father, had Brendel as the inspirational talent. Rosmer and Rebecca's attitude of taking him seriously to the end is utterly comical, and at the same time this feature attached to their character, better enhances the utopia that mirrors their ideological mission.

Brendel has the function of prolepsis in the text with fatidic overtones. After he leaves just as suddenly as he appeared, with the bounty of new clothes and money, he prompts Rosmer to disclose to Kroll the truth about his liberal thinking he newly embraced and his apostasy as well. As such, he admits to have been persuaded to welcome "a new summer in his life", which compelled him to embrace an existential individual revolution: "ROSMER. I'm not committed to the spirit that destroys. Not to any faction. I want to bring people together from all sides. As many as I can reach, as honestly as I can. I want to live and use all my vital energies toward the one end: the creation of a true democracy in this land" (Ibsen 1978:518). The utter confrontation between Kroll and Rosmer transforms itself from the discursive collision between tradition and modern thought, to a cliché utopian monologue of the germinating radical spirit. The confrontation triggers in Kroll a sense of subliminal fright, who remembers through analepsis Beata's confession about the illicit relationship developing in the household. The Gothic element surfaces in the text through the dialogue between Mrs.

Helseth and Rebecca, about the tempest and the emergence of “the white horse” revisiting the inhabitants at Rosmersholm. In the beginning of the second act, there is a certain feeling that lingers from Mrs. Alving’s self-reproach attached to Rosmer, about having been a coward and not having embraced those radical beliefs through action (Ibsen 1978:524). Rebecca is the character that as the play unfolds shows her controlling power over Rosmer through the logic of *power-to* and *power-over*. She persuades him to believe in a utopian task to make “the people of the land” acquire nobility of character, through “happy individual freedom”. What Rosmer and Rebecca attempt here, is to virtually carry out a revolutionary awakening of the human spirit. Their aspirations however withhold some valences of differentiation from any social aspiration due to their utopian basis. Williams suggests that in liberal tragedy, there is an inherited separation between the intent of the ultimate human values and the social system as a whole, but in a way that is finally transformed (Williams 2006:92). Both Kroll, from a conservative perspective, and Mortensgaard from a radical outset, are the agents who enact in Rosmer the guilty feelings about his late wife death and hint to his utopian pursuit. Notwithstanding his protests, Kroll still believes that John is recoverable from his erratic ways, and as such, he tries to remind him of family duty.

KROLL. Remember, you have a duty to your family traditions, Rosmer. Since time out of mind, Rosmersholm has been a kind of citadel of ceremony and order - of a delicate regard for everything that’s sanctioned and upheld by the best in society. The whole district has drawn its style from Rosmersholm. If it ever was rumoured around that you yourself had shattered what I might call the ruling idea of the Rosmers, it would create the most devastating and hopeless confusion.

ROSMER. I can’t see it the way, Kroll. It seems to me I have an overriding obligation to shed a little light and happiness here, where the Rosmer family has sown gloom and darkness far, far too long.

KROLL ( *looks at him sternly*). Yes, wouldn’t that be a worthy challenge for the last of the family line! Pass it up, Rosmer. It’s not the work you were cut out for. You were made to live quietly, among books.

ROSMER. Yes, perhaps. But I want to take part, for once now, in the battle of life.

KROLL. The battle of life-you know what that would mean for you? A fight to the finish with all your friends.

ROSMER ( *in a low voice*) They can’t all be as fanatical as you.

KROLL. You’re an innocent soul, Rosmer. You have no experience of the world. You have no conception of the storm that’s going to break over you ( Ibsen 1978:533).

Rosmer’s whole world is shaken when he learns from Kroll that Beata knew all along about his apostasy and about the close relationship between him and her live-in companion and that she drowned herself in her despair, so that Rebecca could take her place instead. Mortensgaard, on the other hand, makes Rosmer doubt even deeper his late wife’s mental instability, when he discloses that Beata eager to protect her husband appealed to Mortensgaard. She asked him not to harm her husband by publishing his enemies’ false stories, about him not being faithful to her in their marriage. The letter Mortensgaard

discloses brings Beata on the stage again in order to shed a negative and doubtful light upon “the beautiful and pure friendship“(Ibsen 1978:521) Rosmer and Rebecca were thought to share. The supernatural force around them menacingly brings the gloom of the past on the scene that starts the process of tormenting guilt and transgressive past actions, by logic of *power-over* structure. Both Kroll and Mortensgaard function in the text as instances of justice, which force Rosmer to deal with the ghosts of the past, with his guilt-ridden conscience. Moreover, Mortensgaard assures Rosmer about his late wife’s sanity and alludes to the guilty relation of the couple, at the same time, he also presents the former Pastor with the perplexing modern thought. That is, Mortensgaard finds it convenient to write about Rosmer having embraced more liberal inclinations, in spite of being borne in a respectable, conservative family, but he refuses “for the sake of the radical cause” to reveal his apostasy as well. This latter conversation which is also overheard by Rebecca, enhances the doubt about their mission ever being able to succeed. While Rosemer longs to regain the joy of innocence that would be the driving force for his mission, Rebecca requires of him to break free from the memories of the past and embrace the possibilities of the future, through action.

REBECCA (*standing behind him, her arms on the back of his chair*). How lovely it was when we’d sit down here in the living room in the twilight-and help each other make the plans that would change our lives. You wanted to plunge into the stream of life-the living stream of the life of our time, you called it. You wanted to go like the liberator from house to house, winning minds and wills to your vision and creating a new nobility-in wider and wider circles around you. Noblemen.

ROSMER. Happy noblemen.

REBECCA. Yes-happy. (...)

ROSMER (*sadly shaking his head*). I’ll never transcend this completely. There’ll always be a lingering doubt. A question. I’ll never again be able to relish the one thing that makes it so marvellously sweet to be alive.

REBECCA (*leaning over the back of the chair, softly*). And what’s that John?

ROSMER (*looking up at her*). The calm joy of innocence.

REBECCA (*steps back*). Yes. Innocence (Ibsen 1978:543-544).

The thought of Beata and the voice of the conscience coming alive, transform themselves into guilty instances of the past haunting the present. The terrible feeling of dread Rosmer senses becomes unshaken and increasingly escalates when he knows he cannot make amends anymore with his past. Subsequently, the feeling of will power transforms itself into a nightmarish vision where the borders between the past and the present become unclear:

ROSMER. How can I account for Beata’s horrible accusation?

REBECCA (*vehemently*). Oh, stop talking about Beata! Don’t think about Beata anymore! Here you’ve finally been freeing yourself from her. Because she’s dead!

ROSMER. Since I’ve heard these things, I have the eerie sense that she’s come alive again.

REBECCA. Oh, no- you mustn’t John! You mustn’t! (...)

ROSMER. I can’t help it Rebecca. I can’t ignore this rankling doubt, no matter how much I’d like to (Ibsen 1978:541).

Dishonesty, concealed intentions suddenly cover the scene with terror and torment, where the unsuspected supernatural forces from the outside, take lodging inside and overpower the psyche and the power to act: “ROSMER. Oh, these wild speculations! I’ll never be rid of them. I can feel that. I just know it. All of a sudden, they’ll swarm in on me, reminding me of the dead. REBECCA. Like the white horse of Rosmersholm” (Ibsen 1978:544). Rosmer haunted by guilt and remorse, “the white horse” reminding him of Beata, transform themselves in instances that cripple his will in his mission to ennoble people. Subsequently, he loses faith in his own ideas, beliefs, and he loses his coordinates. In his feverish despair, Rosmer thinks he can find his way out of this affliction by asking Rebecca to marry him in order to take Beata’s place, and the refusal is shocking.

Rebecca’s refusal has been a long debated reaction, one that has held, since Freud (1912), literary critics under scrutiny. Atle Kittang, for example, in his chapter on *Rosmersholm* entitled “Totem, tabu, og skuld”, shows that the incestuous relationship between Rebecca and Doctor West was indeed an intention which Ibsen was keen on rendering ( Kittang 2002:112), that Dr. Kroll will more explicitly hint at in the third act. Toril Moi, on the other hand, finds her explanation for Rebecca’s refusal in the theatricality concerning the metaphorical discourse Rosmer and Rebecca use, as they lose faith in language: “She wants Rosmer to be able to read her soul. Rosmer’s fantasy, on the other hand, starts with the disavowal of human separation, and takes the form of imagining that the other is part of himself” ( Moi 2006:284).

In addition to these two readings, I find that the theatricality Rosmer shows towards Rebecca is governed more by utter fear and despair of having to live with “a corpse on his back” (Ibsen 1978:546), that is, the guilty past, if he does not get married to Rebecca, rather than pure and sincere love. When reading the dialogue between the two, one cannot help wondering if Rosmer wants to marry Rebecca for the wrong reasons. Is it passion or is it fear of guilt, with Beata’s lurking shadow that menaces his future, or is it true love for his companion and friend, Rebecca? In my reading, the refusal Rebecca expresses to his offer can be translated as a delusion, due to her fallacious projection of a man that merely chases utopian dreams and is too afraid to act. Rebecca is discontent with Rosmer who is too weak to fight “the white horse” away. His proposal is also rejected because Rebecca realizes that being married to a man who is not entirely recoverable to tradition, is a deplorable outset. She realizes that

Rosmersholm, the past and her guilty conscious related to it, would cause Rosmer to continue to go “through life with a corpse around his back.”

This specific metaphor does not refer solely to the aspect of the dead wife haunting their conscious, it refers to the message he lacks to release himself from, namely his ties with tradition and its consequences. Rosmer’s marriage to Beata symbolises a life which he presumes he has forgotten, but he knows he has not, as the guilty allusions Kroll and Mortensgaard present him with, suggest. He proposes marriage to Rebecca in order to break with the inexorable past, while Rebecca expects him to act and submit himself “to the stream of life” he was beginning to master. The dramatic demise of Rebecca resides in her realisation that she has become entrapped by the Rosmer reality in her turn: “ROSMER. It can never be over between us two. You’ll never leave Rosmersholm. REBECCA ( *her hand on the doorknob*). No I expect I won’t. But if you ever ask me again, it’ll be over all the same. ROSMER. Over? Why so-? REBECCA. Yes, because then I’ll go the same way Beata went. Now you know, John” (Ibsen 1978:547).

The third act opens in the same mood as the previous one with sunlight metaphorically creating a dynamical image, where the past becomes subjected to the *immanent imaginative durée*. The scene obsessively points to the horrors of the past that demand to be exposed to the implacable desacralised present, but the more the persistence of it and the exposure, the harder it is to soften it away. Guilt ultimately coordinates the dramatic action. Superstition and the dark power of an ancestral order are also brought to light by the house maid. Rebecca’s hopelessness to fight the Rosmersholm ancestral power is consuming her vitality and it breaks her will to fight, as the ghosts start to haunt her too, like a curse: “REBECCA (*in an outburst*). Oh, all these doubts, scruples, anxieties-they’re the ancestral curse of the family! Around here they say that the dead haunt the living in the shape of white horses” (Ibsen 1978: 556).

The image of “the white horses” is definitely at a primary level, a metaphor regarding the dead wife and the guilt attached to her death, that haunts the guilty inhabitants of the manor. At a secondary level however, the metaphor, parallel to “the ghosts” of the previous play, mirrors more importantly the dead beliefs, the old normative doctrines about honour, duty and subjective manifested ethos, regarding traditional thought Rosmer cannot completely free

himself from, as a representative of the Rosmersholm ancestral beliefs and *embetsmenn* ideological order. Rosmersholm and its inheritor are fundamentally linked by tradition, because Rosmersholm entices, influences and empowers its inhabitants by the very repetitive appearance of “the white horse”.

In act three Kroll addresses the matter and accurately observes that Rebecca is “the force behind” the tragic outcome of the Rosmer family drama. Indeed in the dialogue the protagonists have together in the beginning of the act, it is obvious to see how she uses her powers to convince Rosmer about his overriding mission to ennoble people. The realization that her plan failed comes to light when Mrs. Helseth professes that people do not or rather cannot laugh at Rosmersholm, in other words, they do not possess the capacity to be happy. Rosmer who is blinded by Rebecca’s drive to fulfil their life-mission and bring it into the actuality of “a new and living reality” of the modern thought, fails to see that he cannot expect to influence people towards happiness, a reality of gladness deprived of constraints. This reality is fundamentally different from anything he has ever experienced; hence, he does not manage to break free from it.

REBECCA. Oh, don’t think of anything but the great, shining mission you’ve set for your life!

ROSMER (*shaking his head*). That can never be carried out. Not by me. Not after what I know now.

REBECCA. Why not by you?

ROSMER. Because victory is impossible for any cause that’s rooted in guilt.

REBECCA (*in an outburst*). Oh, all these doubts, scruples, anxieties-they’re the ancestral curse of the family! Around here they say the dead haunt the living in the shape of white horses. I think this is something like that.

ROSMER. Possibly. But what’s the difference if I can’t escape them? And believe me, Rebecca, it’s just as I say. Any cause that aims to win a lasting victory-needs a leader who’s free of guilt and full of joy (Ibsen 1978: 555-556).

To Rebecca a great mission is comprised by the liberating force to initiate the individuals in noble action, to free them from all normative rules of the past, while to Rosmer this great mission signifies an innocent conscious, devoid of any notion of guilt. Subsequently, their expectation of a mutual future mission together lacks common grounds. John Orr observes that there is a revelatory collision in the political interpretation of the play regarding Rosmer’s ideal of creating universal nobility:

Rosmer’s ideal of universal nobility is a contradiction in terms. Nobility presupposes hierarchical division and is the cultural product of a society of rank. When fully democratized, it loses its meaning. The transformation of passion into permanent love mirrors the dilemma of the transformation of nobility into a universal ideal. In both cases the original and unique attributes are inevitably lost (Orr 1981: 29).

Kroll on the one hand also pretends to possess a mission, namely to save his fellow countrymen from the farcical and degrading pretences the radicals want to implement in their country, through their liberated dogmas. In Williams' acceptance the individual in order to fulfil himself or herself absolutely, becomes or offers himself/herself as the liberator:

The evasion of fulfilment, by compromise, breeds false relationships and a sick society, but the attempt at fulfilment ends again and again in tragedy: the individual is destroyed in his attempt to climb out of his partial world. This is the crux of liberal tragedy, and it is in many ways difficult to understand (Williams 2006:123).

Kroll proves to both protagonists that their mission is of a utopian nature. He discloses to Rosmer the guilty truth about the couple's mission and forbearance. Moreover, he actually proves to succeed in showing Rebecca that her pretences of possessing radical ideas are merely that, and they lack practical grounds. Subsequently, he plunges her utopian mission at Rosmersholm into its bitter factuality.

KROLL. Well, I presume it's much the same with the greater part of what you call your "liberation". You've read your way through the whole slew of new ideas and opinions. You've acquired some kind of sense of the latest theories in various fields-theories that seem to overturn certain axioms that we've always taken to be hard and fast. But it's all remained on the intellectual plane with you, Miss West. It's never entered your blood.

REBECCA (*reflectively*). Perhaps you're right.

KROLL. Yes. Just put yourself to the test, and you'll see! And if that's how it stands with you, one can well surmise how it must be with John Rosmer. It's pure, unadulterated madness-it's rushing headlong into disaster-for *him* to come out openly and proclaim himself an apostate! Imagine it-a man of his delicacy of mind-exiled and persecuted by the one circle of friends he has. Exposed to remorseless attack from the very best people in society. He's the last man on earth who could stand up to that (Ibsen 1978:516).

Kroll shows to Rebecca that her past is not devoid of puzzling elements, as she had initially assumed. Hence the disturbing investigation he initiates brings about her guilty confession that she was the driving force behind Beata's suicidal act. There seems to be attached a sense of retribution to Kroll's character throughout the play. He points to the faults of judgement and action, but more importantly he serves justice in the name of the dead wife, until the final cathartic resolution of the suicidal couple.

Rebecca's rejection of John's marriage proposal suggests that she is susceptible of every matter which would legalise, that is deprive her of any feeling of power, which would eventually stand as a hinder to her passionate drive. Rosmer's fickleness of character and virtual instability is further enhanced by his decision to abandon Rebecca and follow Kroll after he learns that she is just as guilty as he ever was. His scruples for Beata's death come with his descent, which is a trace characteristic of his family's dogma. Rebecca speaks out

the truth in order to make a confession, but also to give him back his innocence. The result is that he leaves with his brother-in-law.

In the last act of the drama the power-play pattern seems to reverse. Subliminally though at this point, the logic of *power-to* structure between Rebecca and Rosmer changes. Rosmer's emblematic name and his position as the ruling element of the Rosmer legacy accounts for the symbolic power shift. Analysing the structure of the symbolic elements of the drama, Atle Kittang finds the explanation in the Old Norse mythology for the meaning of the name of the protagonist:

A "rosmer" is a "sea horse", but in this particular case, not exactly. The element in which Johannes Rosmer is finally absorbed, is in fact not the sea, but the stream, and the mythical being in Nordic folklore who lives in streams and waterfalls is the "nøkk", the water sprite that is mainly represented as a white horse seducing young girls at midnight, taking them with him into the foaming waters (Kittang 2002: 113).

Consequently, is Rosmer merely a gullible character and naïve, as Kroll portrays him (Ibsen 1978:518), or does he have unknown subliminal powers over Rebecca according to the tradition of the Rosmer clan that Mrs. Helseth evokes (Ibsen 1978: 498-551)?

Rebecca desperately tries at the end of the act to free him from his guilt, and from "the white horse" that haunts his conscience, by recognising her fault of having lured Beata into taking her life, in order to take her place. When Rosmer though at the end of the play still goes round the bridge, she prophetically catches "the glimpse of white horses", and then she decides to leave the place that has changed her completely and has caused her to lose the power to act. Her "femme fatale" qualities are somehow suddenly softened away. Will thus the mermaid from the north manage to flee the supernatural force of Rosmersholm that is menacing to take control over her completely? She chooses to go at the middle of the night with the steamer. The symbol of the night here is typically associated with the obscurity and mystery of darkness, with the moon as its singular eye. It is the symbol of ignorance, the unconscious and latent potential, and is represented by the goddess Nyx, who is the mother of sleep, dreams and death (Chevalier, Gheerbrant 1969).

In the last act of the drama Rebecca expresses her wish to leave North by the steamboat, to escape the strange law of Rosmersholm which has made her become devoid of her power. Her last denunciation about Rosmersholm is that its law cripples the will and makes people

unhappy. While she deplors the innocence she has lost here. Rosmer confesses that he lost his trust in her and hence her love, that is, he has no purpose to live any longer. Brendel, who is Rosmer's uncanny double, comes at the ending of the drama, as an explanatory prolepsis of their suicidal act and recites his obscure blessing over the couple. Ulrik Brendel is an archaic Gothic-like figure in the text, who through his departure into the night at the end of the drama, sardonically and sarcastically leaves the protagonists to their fate, in his prophetic vision of their double suicide. Rebecca and Rosmer's resolve finds its conclusion in going together the same way Beata went. They leave the reader not knowing who enticed whom into the fatidic suicidal fall into the mill-race. The Gothic elements and symbols abound here and form a cyclic rounding effect with the opening scene. The terror rendered by the mythological connotations linked to John's name is enhanced by Mrs. Helseth last words which are issued in a terrifying tone: "No. No help now - the dead wife - she's taken them" (Ibsen 1978:585). The power structure of the play is thus rounded by the housekeepers terrifying conclusion which subscribes to logic of *power-over* expressed by the supernatural element.

The other female protagonist of the play, in absentia, who rules over the paraphernalia of the supernatural is, par excellence, Beata. She is rarely long absent from each of the four acts, and her presence is always daunting, menacing and destructive. Beata's terrifying figure of the drowned wife, with the staring incriminating eyes calls for revenge. She achieves that as her function in the text mirrors the power structure of the supernatural over the protagonists. "The white horses", Beata, the spirit of Rosmersholm's ancient tradition and the anachronistic beliefs claim the life of the couple, which plunge the metatextual element of the ancient manor and its inhabitants into dramatic disintegration. One can read into the suicidal act the whole manor falling to the ground, marking thus symbolically the end of an outdated social order and traditional establishment, just like in E. A. Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839). The metaphor of this image stands chiefly as a symbol of the *embetsmenn* state and its ideology which succumbs into absolute dissolution, together with its last members subdued and enticed by it. If one should apply the two concepts of power, priorly named, to the power structures of the drama, one can see in the supernatural element, which is embodied by Beata, a logic of *power-over* that leads to the fatidic end in the mill-race of the protagonists. She revenges herself on the living, firstly in the tormented brain of her wretched husband, and she exasperates Rebecca, slowly wasting away her opposing force until the doleful catastrophe. There is something both tragic and Gothic in Beata's spectral raging impetuosity embodied by this perplexing protagonist of the mill-race. Like in Poe's tale, *Legeia*, the dead wife's return

from the dead has the function of being quasi-real or induced by superstition. The manifestation of the dead wife taking the couple becomes as real for Mrs. Helseth as for the reader, since the power structure of superstition and supernatural are intertwined in a mesmerizing manner with reality, under the symbol of the mid nightmarish dark, a sublime, poetic feature of the Gothic mode.

On the one hand, Ibsen literary scholars like Vigdis Ystad (1996:162) and Asbjørn Aarseth (2003:107) find in the last suicidal scene either a way of atonement through death, as well as a marital gesture of a spiritual union in death, of the couple. Toril Moi on the other hand interprets the scene as a mock-marriage, with no witnesses and no authoritative power, over the union (Moi 2006: 269). My own reading of the suicidal gesture indicates how the logic of the Gothic *power-over* structure leads to the fatidic end of the protagonists as a rounding echo from the very first act. Their tragic ending is not something that could have been helped. It is just a premeditated suicidal gesture that was bound to happen from the beginning and which the dramatist imposes on his protagonists, with the ultimate result of reaching the effect of the sublime, as a consequence of the Gothic mode. Mrs. Helseth's superstitious conclusive remark, where the dead cling on to the living at Rosmersholm is not a fortuitous detail. Since Rosmersholm stands as an epitome of the society's traditional order of the *embetsmenn* state, it is a power structure entrapped in its own fatidic disintegrative process, together with its last living member, John Rosmer.

The paraphernalia of the Gothic in *Rosmersholm* suggests the potential of revolution and at the same time of broken ideals, by daring to speak the socially unspeakable. Rebecca, John and Beata for that matter, become in one way or another victims of the normative beliefs the Rosmer family tradition ideologically propagates to all who come under its influence. The protagonists' victimization deprives them of any tragic greatness that would remind of their Greek forerunners, because it is socially located as Williams suggests. Their tragic demise is triggered by the dramatic disaccord between tradition and modernity, which here is rendered aesthetically through the Gothic outlook. Society rules over their liberating beliefs and the protagonists become ideologically and existentially overrun by it. As such, they succumb into their victimised alienation. However their fated outcome, due to their aristocratic origin, mirrors the dramatic thrill and the deplorable overtones that subscribe to their socially victimised position of the civil servants outdated sphere. Williams asserts that in liberal tragedy the search for self-fulfilment has ended in the denial of life: "It is the final tragic

recognition: That the self, which is all that is known as desire, leads away from fulfilment, and to its own breakdown. From this recognition, there is no way out, within the liberal consciousness” (Williams 2006:129).

The essential consequence for my analysis of the elements that clearly pertain to the Gothic genre was to show how the Gothic power structure of the supernatural renders in a sublime, poetic and tragic manner Ibsen’s pivotal idea of the text, namely that of death and irreversible fall of the protagonists. Subsequently, I have showed through Punter’s(1980) and Goldmann’s (1964) theory of the genre how this very fictional mode emulates aesthetically and symptomatically, the process of social and individual disintegration. Rosmer and Rebecca are forced into the drama’s fatidic action not only by a logic of *power-to* kind of structure, of their own trajectory, but more importantly by the element of the supernatural, embodied by Beata and the Rosmer’s ancestral ethos, which eventually rules over the fate of the couple, through a logic of *power-over*, that eventually prevails.

All in all, the Gothic element is not an arbitrary aesthetic device the dramatist ventured to adopt in the text. The supernatural element of the ghostly apparition or of the dead luring the living into the depths of disintegration is used aesthetically at a private level, as a symptom of something that recurs at a larger, social scale that mimics the decline of the *embetsmenn* establishment. Ibsen shows by means of sublime terror rendered by the Gothic element his own social tragic reality that plunges the individual into despair, since it does not provide an alternative for freedom. Ibsen’s most treasured idea of creating a nobility of will and mind was a utopian dream he was aware of when he gave his speech in Trondheim 1885, a little before he wrote *Rosmersholm*. The ending of the drama was bound to be dramatic. It forcefully led to the utter demise of the protagonists and of the whole archetypal *embetsmenn* ethos, due to the outer social mechanisms that coerced them into dramatic action. Finally, the tragic outcome of the *embetsmenn* tradition and ideology stands as a social symptom of the utter social struggle between society and the victimised individual, between tradition and modernity, where the outer social forces eventually prevail.

## 6. *Hedda Gabler* –the social”melancholy of fulfilment”

*Hedda Gabler* is a play which analytically contemplates a dramatic encounter between the normative past and the immanent modern social sphere. In my analysis of the topical aspect regarding the heroic qualities related to the female protagonist, I will analyse through Raymond Williams’ method the quality of the genre. On that ground I will pay particular attention to the fundamental clash between tradition and modernity, which at the level of the text is mimicked by class ideology incongruousness. Subsequently, I will further analyse the multifarious effect which the austere social impact eventually provides when shaping the female protagonist into dramatic action. Helge Rønning suggests that the social milieu presented by Ibsen in *Hedda Gabler* and in *A Doll’s House* for that matter, mirrors the bourgeois social sphere of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. As such he draws some parallels to George Elliot’s *Middlemarch* (1874) and Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1857):

De skikkelsene som opptre i disse stykkene og i andre av Ibsens dramaer, kan betraktes som bærere av bestemte sosiale grupper ideologi. Derfor må Hedda Gablers tragedie som aristokrat koples til hennes rolle som kvinne. Det er brytningen mellom den deklasserte aristokraten og kvinnen som objekt i det borgerlige mannssamfunnet som bestemmer hennes plass i dramaet, og som er forutsetningen for hennes skjebne (Rønning 2006:345).

My reading of the drama concurs to a certain extent with Rønning’s remark that Hedda’s tragic demise is due to the implications that retain socio-political reference, which generates as such the tragic substance and style of the drama. Even though there is obviously an impressive amount of literature that celebrates the bourgeois social consciousness and its significance, I will detach my reading of the text from any parallelism with the European drama of modern civilisation, written in the period of industrial capitalism. Notwithstanding this particular, I agree with Rønning that Ibsen as a modern writer could identify and relate to the same social dramatic mechanisms, which he himself experienced in Norway, during his self imposed exile in Europe. However, I will establish my analysis of the text according to Orr’s assessment that drama of social alienation begins with Ibsen and that the emergence of it resulted in the phenomenon of *periphery*. Subsequently, according to John Orr (1981: xi) in order to understand the modes of alienation one has to relate to it through the historical discourse bilaterally; first through the objective social perspective, and then through the subjective hermeneutical analysis of the text. In such a social milieu, the individual expresses

himself/herself through the alienating mechanism from *the ruling hegemonic values of culture* (Orr 1981:xviii).

The protagonist of the drama addresses in a shocking manner the confronting ideological limitations modernity proposes to all who subscribe to the normative, traditional social order. Tradition in *Hedda Gabler*, retains the time-space dialectical expression as an attempt to capture and adapt to the experience of the new time consciousness, through the acclimatization of the noble individual to the bourgeois ignoble milieu. The result is dramatic. Raymond Williams asserts that tragedy is centred at the point of intersection between tradition and experience (Williams 2006:37). The dynamics of the tragic effect in the text is triggered from the dissonant strategies of powers, which the protagonist becomes subjected to and which lead to her final denouement. In my analysis of the drama I will look at the overriding effect of alienation modernity inflicts on tradition. I will particularly focus on the concept of the past with its ruling hegemonic values of culture performing on spatial class intolerance, where the consequences for this outcome bring the protagonist of the play to the true horror of her fate.

Matei Calinescu asserts in his capital book *Five faces of Modernity* (2006) when analysing modernity as a historical, ideological and cultural phenomenon, that it was during the eighteenth century that the idea of beauty began to undergo a process of progressive change which led the concept to become a purely historical category. The colliding forces which shaped this notion had to do with the fundamental opposition between the typological antitheses such terminological pairs as ancient versus modern propose.

The romantics were already thinking in terms of a relative and historically immanent beauty and felt that to make valid judgements of taste one was supposed to drive one's criteria from historical experience –not from a “utopian”, universal, and timeless concept of beauty. The opposition between ancient and modern played the role of a shaping influence in this process (Calinescu 2006:36).

The critic further suggests that while the romantics thrived on presenting a transcendent type of beauty, which belonged to the past, the new time consciousness in art mimicked the blending of the *grotesque* and the *sublime* as an alternative for the classical ideology of the past. Subsequently, the preparatory opposition of this fundamental development in the new time consciousness was illustrated through the overriding opposition between “le beau idéal antique” and “le beau idéal moderne” as Stendhal observed in the style and the awareness of modernity (Calinescu 2006:38). The dialectics of time and space is questioned in the text on

the one hand by Hedda, who wishes to fulfil her utopian dream of freedom through her artistic projection of the life-intoxicated hero, that symbolically rescues her from the petty bourgeois environment; and by Løvborg on the other hand the iconoclast artist who wishes to aesthetically disclose the unknown, that is the future in all its subjective transience. The interesting and at the same time pernicious dynamics of their attempt resides in the fact that in one way or another the characters wish to grasp and define an illusory temporality exposed by the *aporias* of modernity. Baudelaire's *modernité*, deals with the paradoxes of time and the disruptive and splitting process, where the strikingly new confronts the authoritative past, and where the frozen traditions succumb under the pressure of "le caractère de la beauté présente". When characterizing modernity he points to the absolute importance of the concept of "now", which is strikingly subjected to assert the real source of the modern originality:

Modernity is the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art, of which the other half is the eternal and the immutable...As for this transitory, fleeting element whose metamorphoses are so frequent, you have no right either to scorn it or to ignore it. By suppressing it, you are bound to fall into the emptiness of an abstract and undefineable beauty, like that of the one woman before the first sin... In a word if a particular modernity is to be worthy to become antiquity, it is necessary to extract from it the mysterious beauty that human life involuntary gives it...Woe unto him who seeks in antiquity anything other than pure art, logic, and general method. By plunging too deeply into the past, he loses sight of the present; he renounces the values and privileges provided by circumstances; for almost all our originality comes from the stamp that time imprints upon our feelings (Calinescu 2006: 48).

Hedda is the individual who plunges her utopian aesthetic and factual world into the deep past. As a consequence, her defeat comes when she loses sight of immanence and of the present. The play mimics a theatre of rank division, where the tragic space is created as John Orr pertinently observes, through the circumstances where the means of tragic alienation repeatedly intersect and collide, and where the aristocratic and the bohemian are never entirely separate yet never entirely in agreement either (Orr 1981:39). The tragic character of the drama arises from a social hostile construct that plunges the female protagonist into personal and social alienation. The play revolves around the timeless aesthetic impact between the authoritative past and its concern with time and space, which burdens the new time consciousness of modern life. Matei Calinescu notes in the chapter "The Two Modernities" when he analyses ideologically the concept, that there seemed to appear a slight conceptual bifurcation of the very term. The one appeared due to economic and social considerations, while the second referred to the ideological construct which emerged as a consequence. The former was marked in the Western civilisation, by the scientific and technological progress brought about by capitalism, which is regarded by Calinescu as the

bourgeois idea of modernity. This idea of modernity was concerned with the cult of progress and with time, and on the other hand, it was concerned with the cult of reason and the ideal of freedom. By contrast stands the other modernity brought about by the avant-gardes, which was inclined toward radical antibourgeois attitudes (Calinescu 2006: 41-42).

It was disgusted with the middle-class scale of values and expressed its disgust through the most diverse means, ranging from rebellion, anarchy, and apocalypticism to aristocratic self-exile. So, more than its positive aspirations (which often have very little in common), what defines cultural modernity is its outright rejection of bourgeois modernity, its consuming negative passion (Calinescu 2006:42).

The play reverberates, especially through the choice of the title, the acute clash between two social orders and the status of disintegration of the old to the benefit of the new. Hedda Gabler is a preserver of the old traditional manner of living with its self-imposed social norms, which confront the Tesmans' and their less pretentious social ethos. The play marks Hedda's failed attempt to adjust to the bourgeois common circumstances of living and her unsuccessful personal unfolding into a new position, that is, the manifestation of a new middle-class marriage. Hedda epitomises the aristocrat who rejects the bourgeois modern ethos. Her defence mechanisms mirror the creation of a utopian projection of her subservient conscience, through the "beautiful illusion of the life-intoxicated artist", whom she can influence in action.

*Hedda Gabler* is a play which advances the fundamental clash between the aristocratic world of Hedda, with its normative past, which she cannot break loose from, and the bourgeois utilitarian aspirations and moral pettiness. The daughter of General Gabler, is an aristocrat by extraction, who is accustomed to the luxury of her high-class living and this particular detail in the beginning of the drama is tangibly but not fortuitously made clear by Juliana Tesman, the aunt of her now present husband, George Tesman. By having this social clash so painfully evident between the aristocratic ideological sphere and the petty bourgeois ideological scope, from the very outset, it marks a particular element which dynamically shapes the evolution of the play.

HEDDA enters from the left through the inner room. She is a woman of twenty-nine. Her face and figure show breeding and distinction; her complexion is pallid and opaque. Her steel gray eyes express a cool, unruffled calm. Her hair is attractive medium brown, but not particularly abundant. She wears a tasteful, rather loose-fitting gown (Ibsen 1978:702).

In the beginning of the drama there is marked a bitter sense of immediate aristocratic aloofness and coldness attached to Hedda's appearance, which essentially clashes with the

warmness and affability the Tesmans' are accustomed to share with each other. From the outset of the play, one can notice the obvious differentiation of ideas between Juliana Tesman, the house maid, George Tesman, the tesmanesque environment that is, and Hedda. The whole dialogue revolves around the disparity in behaviour and etiquette the members of the two social spheres subscribe to. On the one hand Hedda oozes formality and is detached and devoid of any emotions towards her new family member, and she shivers at any attempt Tesman's aunt makes to bridge the gap between the two social practices.

MISS TESMAN ( *going to meet HEDDA*). Good morning, Hedda dear-how good to see you!  
HEDDA.(*holding out her hand*). Good morning, my dear Miss Tesman! Calling so early? This *is* kind of you.  
MISS TESMAN ( *slightly embarrassed*). Well-did the bride sleep well in her new home?  
HEDDA. Oh yes, thanks. Quite adequately.  
TESMAN. Adequately! Oh, I like that, Hedda! You were sleeping like a stone when I got up.  
HEDDA. Fortunately. But of course one has to grow accustomed to anything new, Miss Tesman-little by little. ( *Looking toward the left.*) Oh! That maid has left the door open-and the sunlight's just flooding in.  
MISS TESMAN ( *going toward the door*). Well, we can close it.  
HEDDA. No, no – don't! ( *To TESMAN*) There, dear, draw the curtains. It gives a softer light.  
TESMAN ( *by the glass door*). All right-all right. Look Hedda-now you have shade and fresh air both.  
HEDDA. Yes, we really need some fresh air here, with all these piles of flowers-But won't you sit down, Miss Tesman ( Ibsen 1978:703)?

The very first dialogue Miss Tesman shares with Hedda withstands from Hedda's part all expression of warmness and familiarity with the excuse that "one has to grow accustomed with new things". The striking aspect in her character is that Hedda does not share the virtues of her elevated rank, indeed her character challenges any noble attribute. She is annoyed with everything and everyone that has to do the mansion as a whole. Hedda makes tedious comments about Miss Tesman's hat, she complains about Berte serving in the house, she is afraid of the thought of procreation, she deplors sunlight and, like Beata from *Rosmersholm*, she cannot stand the scent of flowers in the room. The interior of the mansion shows a clear discrepancy in style as well. The furnishings of the house have been done by both aunts' creditworthiness and according to the bourgeois taste. Hedda has only brought in the new home her father's pistols, her old piano and General Gabler's portrait, yet none of these items match the Tesmanesque bourgeois individuality. Hedda is virtually seen by Miss Tesman as some sort of an art object in their homely milieu. This prospect creates in Hedda immediate repulsion and anxiety: "MISS TESMAN. ( *gazing at her with folded hands*). Hedda is lovely-lovely-lovely. (*Goes up to her, takes her head in both her hands, bends it down and kisses her hair.*) God bless and keep Hedda Tesman - for George's sake. HEDDA (*gently freeing herself*). Oh-! Let me go"(Ibsen 1978: 705). She is regarded as an excellent and undeserved

prise that perfectly suits the house she has purchased for her beloved George: “And it was you who carried off Hedda Gabler. The beautiful Hedda Gabler! Imagine! She who always had so many admirers” (Ibsen 1978:699)!

Her being displeased with the mansion is an important yet striking particular, since in her later conversation with Brack she confesses to have fancied Lady Falk’s mansion, at least the façade. From the very beginning it is made clear that it was not emotional affection, but the financial commodities which came along with a marriage of interest, that prompted her to marry Tesman. The aristocratic and the bourgeois worlds have nothing in common and there is the factual power struggle between the two social spheres which is made clear from the start. Henrik Jæger’s claims that there can be drawn a clear parallelism between Hedda’s demonic character and that of Hjørdis from *Hærmændene på Helgeland*. The critic’s standpoint is that Hedda Gabler is only a restrained character, who with her determined personality willingly becomes engulfed in her self-imposed annihilation. Ivo de Figueiredo disagrees and detaches himself from such allegations. He further explains that Hedda’s deliberate decision of marriage is a matter which has to be regarded from a sociological standpoint in order to be fully understood. He proposes that to such a response one should take a closer look at the social occurrences which moulded Hedda in action: “Frivilligheten kan diskuteres; fra et sosiologisk synspunkt kan skuespillet leses som en studie av møtet mellom to lag av det borgerlige samfunn, en oppadstrebende middelklasse og en overklasse av høyborgerskap og aristokrati” (de Figueiredo 2007:383).

There are though some metaphorical elements that lead to the intricate unveiling of the female protagonist’s elevated character and as such, to the very core of the drama, namely the inner social collision which isolates and deters an individual, who does not surrender to the trivial. At a deeper level though, Hedda epitomizes the social typology of the aristocrat who dissociated from any link with a glorious past has to unwillingly bow to the petty existence she has married into. The inner clash comes with the realisation that her social *embetsmenn* ideological heritage has lost any function in the new coming age and as such, she is reluctant to cope with the past and the present. There is a striking aspect in her character indicating a strong idealistic view of both what would be regarded as aesthetic, and the socially acceptable. Her infringed honourable aristocratic legacy, as the daughter of the late General, has to surrender to what for her would be the social undesirable. Her marriage to a man of a socially far inferior importance, who lacks prospects, since he is materially provided by his

aunts, and virtually has no brilliant academic expectancy, triggers in Hedda utter appal. Her rejection of the fact that she is carrying the child of a vague being as Tesman, enhances this idea, since it follows the logic of class hybridization between those of noble and the ignoble extraction. Subsequently, she is determined to be the last morally untainted member of the old establishment's ethos.

There is characteristically enough some sort of tragic spontaneity in her actions, when she confesses to Brack her reasons for marrying Tesman. Her fall into commonness when marrying into the Tesmanesque milieu causes her to fervently seek means which would match her idealist aesthetic diversion. Hedda's aesthetic manoeuvre, where she is prone to a somewhat sublime inclination to destruction of the ugly contemporaneous time, matches an instance destitute of social position, regarding her social-class ideological heritage. Her playing with the pistols is not merely synonymous with her need for self-indulgence, due to boredom, matter that plunges her character into existential aggression. Her performance equally voices a wish to obliterate her social ordeal, namely her fall into the utterly mediocre status. Her comments about being late September and that time went by so rapidly, as well as the fact that her piano has grown old, are metaphors that point to her own absorbed and decayed social situation. Throughout the drama she deplores the lack of etiquette and formal propriety various characters manifest compared to what she was accustomed to. At the same time the symbols which mark the passing of time mirror a decaying position of the aristocratic world together with their idealistic social conventions. The highly allusive scene when at Tesman's suggestion she does not want to have her old piano removed in spite of the fact that, as she herself declares it is inconsistent with the appearance of the room, functions as a metatextual element that mimics her desperate need to hold on to the past and its ideological meaning.

The play bears a deep feeling of angst and decrepitude triggered by external and internal elements which project unto the female protagonist a feeling of numbness and existential malaise. The dark setting and the atmosphere of the first act which is enhanced even more intensely through the rest of the acts, functions as prolepsis of Hedda's final dramatic gesture. The drawing room which is succumbed in darkness, with furniture covered in black, the "high-black armchair", "the dark porcelain stove", the old piano create an atmosphere of disintegration further doubled by an autumnal September feeling outside, with "the leaves so yellow - and so withered". The sombre scene strikingly corresponds with Hedda's internal

frame of mind throughout the drama. The play essentially revolves around existential motifs of decrepitude, disintegration and social alienation. Lady Falk's mansion does not only represent the murderous place of the last member of the Gablers', but more importantly it shows at a higher level through the inner drama, the social disintegration of the *embetsmenn* state and its ideological dogma. Throughout the play it lingers at a subliminal level a feeling of social class corrosion, which paradoxically due to its considerations towards tradition and awareness about the normative past, fails to adapt to the modern new time consciousness. Hedda's upper class formal upbringing prevents her to consider family warmth. She cannot manage to call by her first name the woman who financially supports her husband and virtually dotes on her. "TESMAN. If you only could bring yourself to speak to her warmly, by her first name. For my sake, Hedda? Uh? HEDDA. No, no - don't ask me to do that. I told you this once before. I'll try to call her "Aunt". That should be enough" (Ibsen 1978:706). Apparently though, she only misuses this implacable rule as it is the case with Mrs. Elvstad, provided that she needs any favour.

Hedda's essential dynamics condemns an archetypal world that has lost any connection and propriety with present social standards. Her existential crisis comes from her deploring the decayed status of her aristocratic past, which is prompted to succumb under the social conventions of the new social class, the petty bourgeoisie. In this respect a character who stands in opposition to Hedda is the timid and unsophisticated Thea Elvsted. She abandoned her much older husband and came to town in order to follow Eilert Løvborg, the presumed academic of geniality and Tesman's great competitor. Thea grew attached to Eilert while he was a tutor for her step children. She worked passionately together with him and not only did she help him give up his debauched ways, but she also helped him write an outstanding book about the future. The rivalry between the aristocratic flamboyant Hedda becomes apparent when she realises that Thea, a married bourgeoisie of obscure origins has managed to reclaim Eilert, her life-intoxicated artist, from debauchery. The same rivalry at an academic level is introduced to the scene by Miss Tesman's remarks. She refers to George as a talent in the field of domestic industries of Brabant, who aspires at a Chair at Christiania University, and who antagonizes Eilert Løvborg, the iconoclast artist of genius and the author of a famous book, who defies the limiting conventions of bourgeois society. Juliana Tesman characterizes her brother's son as being very diligent at "collecting and ordering" documents, and according to Brack he is "most proper and worthy". Tesman is expected to be the talent of the drama,

but the genius who is superior through his aesthetic qualities, is Eilert Løvborg. Tesman is the mere researcher while Løvborg is the astute writer (Ibsen 1978: 699).

His aunt's reflection upon Tesman's life is indeed worth noticing on especially one account, namely that of which now stems his academic fortunate fate:

TESMAN. Oh, Aunt Julie-you never get tired of making sacrifices for me!

MISS TESMAN (*rises and places her hands on his shoulders*). What other joy do I have in this world than smoothing the path for you, my dear boy? You, without your father or mother to turn to. And now we've come to the goal George! Things may have looked black at times; but now, thank heaven, you've made it.

TESMAN. Yes, it's remarkable, really, how everything's turned out for the best.

MISS. TESMAN. Yes-and those who stood against you-who wanted to bar your way-they've gone down. They've fallen, George. The one most dangerous to you- he fell farthest. And he's lying there now, in the bed he made-poor, misguided creature.

TESMAN. Have you heard any news of Eilert? I mean, since I went away.

MISS.TESMAN. Only that he's supposed to have brought out a new book (Ibsen 1978: 701).

It is interesting that even though there is no mention of the person who tried to set obstacles in Tesman's professional career, there is immediately made a remark about Eilert Løvborg and his new book. This is however not a fortuitous detail since the mere mention of his opponents name causes Tesman to doubt his chances of getting the professorship he so enthusiastically longed for. He later admits without further explanations to Mrs. Elvsted that they were once good friends, but that their friendship ended some time past (Ibsen 1978:709). While Tesman is a rather pedantic, private and homely character, who indulges in "collecting and ordering "historic materials, his character deeply collides with the bohemian debauched scholarly colleague, the eccentric iconoclast Løvborg. Tesman dotes on the domestic crafts of the Middle Ages, as well as on Hedda, "the wife of his heart", and on his most beloved bedroom slippers, while Løvborg, still animated by Hedda, wants to write about "the unknown". There are made some allusions about the fact that Løvborg was of noble extractions, but that his family rejected him due to his conduct as Judge Brack readily notifies:

TESMAN. Well-he must have run through his inheritance long ago. And he can't write a new book every year. Uh? So I was asking, really, what's going to become of him.

BRACK. Perhaps I can shed some light on that.

TESMAN. Oh?

BRACK. You must remember that he does have relatives with a great deal of influence.

TESMAN. Yes, but they've washed their hands of him altogether.

BRACK. They used to call him the family white hope.

TESMAN. They used to, yes! But he spoiled all that himself (Ibsen 1978:718).

Løvborg's portrait comes forth through the antinomy of moral features: "the family white hope" clashes the retched fallen character of an important family, who because of his moral disgrace had to face rejection from his own and from society itself. The allusion made about the importance Løvborg's family had, may stand as a parallel to the social degradation

Hedda's own social class was subjected to, only that in Løvborg's case it could have been redeemed from financial dissolution, through Løvborg's academic and aesthetic breakthrough. As a continuation of this thought, Løvborg's desire to make amends with the past and start anew might be seen as the result of his wish to regain his family's trust and indeed society's validation of his new character. There are made some suggestions that Tesman was afraid of Løvborg, but that he did not expect his sudden reappearance and definitely not the amount of success his book received. Both Tesman and by turns Judge Brack as well, are scared of the amount of power Løvborg and his new book oozes on the social and academic sphere. The difference between the two scholars though is illustrated through the whimsical dialogue they have together regarding the appointment Tesman aspires to.

While Tesman aspires to a Chair at the University where he would go on celebrating his so called academic knowledge about "the domestic handicrafts of Brabant in the Middle Ages", Eilert Løvborg inspires and entices his contemporaries in his first part of the book to contemplate an ideological text "that everyone could agree with", because it was written based "on the course of civilisation-in all its stages" (Ibsen 1978:709), about the past and the present. In this respect he is indeed the winner over Tesman's academic achievements. This first book is meant to re-establish him as an astute writer in front of the social arena. Secondly, it is written in order to revive his success, through the second part of his monumental work, which Eilert calls "the real book - the one that speaks about his true self" and which also acclaims "the forces shaping the civilisation of the future".

TESMAN. The future! But good Lord, there's nothing we know about that"

LØVBORG. True. But there are one or two things worth saying all the same. (*Opens the envelope.*) Here, take a look-

TESMAN. But that's not your handwriting.

LØVBORG. I dictated it. (*Paging through the manuscript.*) It's divided into two sections. The first is about the forces shaping the civilisation of the future. And the second part, here- (*Paging further on.*) suggests what lines of development it's likely to take.

TESMAN. How extraordinary! It never would have occurred to me to write about anything like that.

HEDDA (*at the glass door, drumming on the pane*). Hm-no, of course not (Ibsen 1978: 733).

The book Eilert wrote in isolation from the civilised world with the help of Thea, indeed reflects qualities of the modern artist paralleled to Oswald from *Ghosts*. Eilert epitomises what Baudeliare identified as aesthetic modernity attached to the spirit of the artist. The second book written by the poet-prophet is concerned with the future, something that is unpredictable and deals with the unknown. Through his aristocratic guiding principle of time egalitarianism, the cult of the individual and subjective qualities, he is challenging the hostile, the utilitarian and mercantile middle-class civilisation Tesman subscribes to. As Tesman readily predicts, it

is merely a utopian attempt to subjectively rearrange time. The modern artist seeks to detach his work from the normative past and recreate time. This particular matter where Løvborg at least theoretically dares to establish the completion of such a project is a matter highly valued by Hedda, because she essentially parallels this thought about temporality. Therefore she deposits all her artistic and utopian aspirations in him.

The goals of the modern utopist are supposedly immanent and within reach, and to postpone attaining them would be irresponsible, despite the “melancholy of fulfilment.” Modern artistic creation illustrates in diverse ways the utopian/antiutopian relationship with time. It has become almost a truism to describe the modern artist as torn between his urge to cut himself off from the past-to become completely “modern”-and his dream to found a new tradition, recognizable as such by the future (Calinescu 2006:67).

Løvborg had a nobler descent than Tesman, since he pertained to an influential family who placed all its expectations in him and his academic success. In spite of his moral degradation he reappeared on the academic arena with his promising new book and he now stands in Tesman’s way as he once did. The only flimsy feature of the book and which gives even more credit to its modernist allure, resides in the utopian approach to time and time reflexivity it proposes. The manuscript seems always aloof and prohibited to the reader. Løvborg only reads some parts of it to Tesman at Brack’s bachelors’ party. Subsequently, its accountability relies entirely on Tesman’s ethos of judgement. The fact that it will remain to posterity as a collage put together by Thea and Tesman’s bourgeois “decorative” creation, carries a strong ironic imprint to Løvborg’s utopian project.

The book had as an inspirational source Hedda, who attempted to shoot at Løvborg when they ended their relationship. Hedda qualifies as Løvborg’s muse because her attributes mirror Løvborg’s inarticulate-self. Hedda expresses her inner most wish to control and have power over a human being as a means of retaining the past. As Francis Fergusson (1953) conclusively explains, Ibsen’s characters attempt to reinstate the past in their present. Hence, Løvborg emulates such a character that rhetorically restores an analytical mechanism in the drama. The end of the first act takes to a deeper level the colliding forces which are at play in the drama, namely the social tension that engulfs the individual into existential boredom. Tesman out of financial considerations finds sheer luxury the things that Hedda due to her previously elevated social position shape to her frivolous living. The social life-style, the parties, the butler and her riding horse all comprise and contribute to an obsolete life of social gratification, and hierarchical iniquity. When she is denied these items, Hedda’s resolution is to find existential consolation in playing with General Gabler’s loaded pistols. The end of the

first act might be regarded as trivial and ironically distracting, however in my opinion the episode is loaded with more than mere melodramatic overtones. The scene seemingly deals with the social malaise of a strong member of the upper class, who seeks to find consolation in flimsy rank based things. When these are declined, she finds alleviation in the destructiveness of the game with death, a game with human destinies, and pistols, which again mirror a prolepsis of her self-imposed alienation in life and in death.

The text focuses very much on the forces which destroy the main character both through inner projections and through outer more socially based influences. The scene directions in the second act have Hedda in the foreground. The element that calls for attention is the rearrangement of the living room. Her old piano is now removed and it is replaced with “an elegant little writing table with a book case put in its place.” We do not find the lady of the house either reading or writing, or performing any aesthetic gesture which would mimic her confident artistic or creative spirit. Rather, when Judge Brack calls, in a pseudo-ludic manner, Hedda attempts to shoot at him. Admittedly though, her guns rest loaded in a pistol case on the very object reminding of any attempt to perform an artistic gesture; they rest on the very writing table. If any, her artistic inclinations are towards not the creative but towards the destructive, “shooting into the sky”, or at those “who come sneaking in the back way” and in self defence, to prevent those who would threaten to expose her to what she fears the most, namely “the scandal”.

There is a constant power struggle at play in the drama. There is the bourgeois world which plunges Hedda’s noble ethos into existential attack, there is Hedda who wants to control the destiny of her hero artist, and there is Brack who wishes to gain overreaching power over the protagonist. Judge Brack’s position resembles to a certain extent that of Dr. Rank from *A Doll’s House*. They are both good friends of the family and pseudo-members of the household. They are both confidants to the female protagonists, but if Dr. Rank is an individual of a romantic and sympathetic nature, Judge Brack’s character emulates the emotionally selfish and tasteless villain, who wants to become “the trusted friend” and member in the Tesman family triangle. Although there are no sexual allusions, and in spite of what Hedda later confesses to Løvborg that she does not want to have extramarital relations, nonetheless the whole episode carries the flavour of adultery. “I had danced myself tired” she declares to Brack, so she had to marry. While she finds gratification in conducting vicious games out of boredom, involving dangerous items like pistols, or cosy tête-à-têtes with the

judge, she makes it perfectly clear that she never intends to get “off the train”. This means that ladies of her rank do not indulge in semi-adulterous relationships and in this respect he does not hold any power over her.

Her existential boredom and most utter dissatisfaction with her married situation gives Brack the means through which he can pry and later use her unflattering situation to rob her of her freedom, through his slavish domestic attachments. Perplexingly enough she confides in Brack and recounts the distressing episode when Tesman “kept pressing and pleading to be allowed to take care” of her. That is, she entered a marriage of convenience, where Tesman would provide her with Lady Falk’s estate and subsequently, he would be anticipating a comfortable living and secure material situation. Her marriage is clearly not based on love which for Hedda the word only holds “klisete”/“syrupy” connotations, but on interest. She admits to the pointless and frivolous item which essentially united Tesman and her in all respects, namely the mansion. Her remarks about it after having settled inside bring to attention her propensities for defeatism.

HEDDA. (...) But don’t you see, it was this passion for old Falk mansion that drew George Tesman and me together! It was nothing more than that brought on our engagement and the marriage and the wedding and the trip and everything else. Oh yes, Judge-I was going to say, you make your bed and then you lie in it.(...)

BRACK But even now? Now that we’ve made it somewhat comfortable for you here?

HEDDA. Ugh-all the rooms seem to smell of lavender and dried roses. But maybe that scent was brought in by Aunt Julie.

BRACK.( laughing). No, I think it’s a bequest from the late Mrs. Falk.

HEDDA. Yes, there’s something in it of the odour of death. It’s like a corsage-the day after the dance. (*Folds her hands behind her neck, leans back in the chair, and looks at him.*)

Oh, my dear Judge-you can’t imagine how horribly I’m going to bore myself here (Ibsen 1978:729).

There is a fatidic thrill which lingers over the mansion that bears connotations of inner deterioration and utter death, as Hedda pertinently senses. The metaphor leads to the idea of social class dissolution. Hedda’s role in the household is an indefinite one: she wishes to lead a life of comfort and priggish self-satisfaction, supplied by all the commodities her upper-class status requires. However she decides to face a bourgeois environment with laws, adjustments and virtues of a visibly petty nature that her whole being repulses against; and with events which swiftly undermine her aristocratic system of values. Ibsen’s metatextual devices in the text are by turns of an ideological nature, and they clearly refer to the *disembedding mechanisms* regarding time and place. They actually give a brilliant projection of modernity and its variations and influence inside the text, through the heterogeneous social spheres, dramatized by the characters of the play.

Hedda is the typical aristocrat who emulates through the imposing pseudo-presence of the General's portrait, an authoritarian stiffness and self-control that completely envelops her factual inner expectations for self-transcendent elements of power and beauty. Her attempts and wishes are forcefully of a utopian nature. Her whole upbringing is stultified by the moral norms of the bourgeois world she has married into. Her epoch however is marked by women who either end up as respectable old maids like George Tesman's aunts, or governesses as Mrs. Elvsted. She is definitely not prepared for wifhood or "new responsibilities", like motherhood, as Brack insinuates. The General took care that his daughter should be taught to ride and shoot, dexterities which stand as metaphors which gravitate around an overall fascination with violence and romantic exultation. Since the bourgeois materially restricted existence prevents her to indulge in her priggish rank gratifications, she confesses to Brack that her last alternative in is namely "boring herself to death."

She mirrors her father's projections of officious coldness and pride as well as an arrogant attitude towards all those who pertain to a lower rank. Hedda is unaffected by Juliana's dotting attitude towards her and much less by the weak bashful Thea. She admires the strong individuals like the iconoclast Løvborg and to a certain extent Brack in their relish for power and independence. Paradoxically enough her *femme fatale* qualities, which are here more prominent than in any other of Ibsen's social plays, and her utopian propensity for control and romantic violence, collide with her factual situation. Her drama is that she remains enslaved to a standard of social aristocratic conventionality, like Helene Alving. She becomes a victim of her own fears, namely the social "scandal", which transforms her like Helene Alving into a self-abased coward.

Hedda's infatuation with her life-intoxicated hero, Eilert Løvborg, becomes a projection of her admiration from afar of a forbidden world, where there is an unreserved freedom of expression that oozes exuberance of life. General Gabler's past overpowering influence has pseudo-constraints over the actual present. Hedda's encounter with Løvborg unleashes in her a value for what formally was the existentially and socially discreditable, namely her psychological liberation of the aristocratic ideology. Her reencounter with Løvborg triggers a sense of self-corruption and self-seclusion from the commonness of the bourgeois world which does not correspond with her expectations.

LØVBORG (*whose eyes have never left her, speaking in a low soft voice*). Hedda-Gabler!  
HEDDA (*with a quick glance at him*). Ah! Shh!  
LØVBORG (*repeating softly*). Hedda Gabler!

HEDDA (*looks at the album*). Yes, I used to be called that. In those days- when we two knew each other.

LØVBORG. And from now on-for the rest of my life-I have to teach myself not to say Hedda Gabler.

HEDDA (*turning the pages*). Yes, you have to. And I think you ought to start practicing it. The sooner the better I'd say.

LØVORG (*resentment in his voice*) Hedda Gabler married? And to George Tesman!

HEDDA. Yes - that's how it goes.

LØVBORG. Oh Hedda, Hedda –how could you throw yourself like that (Ibsen 1978:736)!

The drama of Hedda's individuality is that, like Mrs. Alving, she remains bound to the *embetsmenn* ideology and social etiquette. She used Løvborg in her former unmarried years as a means of enjoying the forbidden world of unrestrained surrogate experience of artistic creation and self-indulging step to freedom. Their confiding in each other, Løvborg notices uttered "the hunger of life" in Hedda. The dissolution of their friendship was due to her incapacity to accommodate the intensity of the demands of their relationship. Consequently, it is incomprehensible for Løvborg to understand Hedda who so passionate a person could end up married with such a tedious and emotionally plane man, beneath her status. Eilert Løvborg, now the virtually "freed", cannot behold without amazement the degraded image of the "captive", Hedda. The position which Eilert and Hedda have at present is fundamentally different from the one they shared when they dismissed their bond. Løvborg is now the well-established genius author, who no longer under her influence shows a distanced coldness to "the captive" of the bourgeois sphere. The shock resides on both sides: Eilert is the eloquent, self-possessed and successful artist, while Hedda is defined by her disastrous marriage with Tesman. Their relationship was a relationship between the subjected and the one who subjects. If one would read Ibsen's characters and their propensity towards temporality through Mircea Eliade's theory (1959) about the *sacred time* and the *profane*, the result would be that Ibsen's characters tend to relive a time which analytically mimics a reconstruction of a sacred living in terms of the normative past, projected on a profane timeless factuality. The process follows the logic of annihilation of their power to act, and as well as their archetypal gestures, as is the case with Hedda.

In spite of Løvborg's protests, George Tesman actually matches her emotional need for coldness and more importantly, she hopes that he would give her the material comfort and security her social rank requires. She realises only too late that her dramatic choice in a partner is a fatidic one, both to her character as well as to her social expectations. When Løvborg reappears in her life, she wants to regain the control she always had over the free-spirited artist. Hedda cannot abide to see a rival like Thea, of obscure descent, influence and

restore her projection of a life-intoxicated hero. The collision in ideology between the bourgeois world of pragmatism and Hedda's utopian image of freedom again comes to light through Thea and Hedda's opposing expectations of the modern artist.

Mrs. Elvsted is a gentle rather affectionate person; she is the exact opposite of Hedda, both through her personality and descent. In many ways Mrs. Elvsted's eccentric attitude of leaving her family, resembles a pseudo-Nora who sees no future in a marriage consolidated on material grounds. Her infatuation with the debauched artist came when he moved from the city to the Elvseds' as a tutor to her step-children. Her attachment and positive influence on him grew from companionship to something of a more romantic nature, throughout the time she worked as Løvborg's personal assistant. Thea's great achievement came when she inspired Løvborg to decline his dissolute existence and helped him gain control over his life. If Hedda is the *femme fatale*, who could passively peer through Løvborg's life of moral dissipation and transpose his artistic freedom unto her own enslaved standard of social conventionality, Mrs. Elvsted is the one who possesses more humane qualities. While Thea's expectations are to sacrifice her self-reputation and come to town in search of Løvborg in order to prevent that he suffers a relapse, Hedda's selfish disdain for the feelings of others causes her to idealise the man through whom she pretends to attain the "unattainable", as a projection of her wish for self-realisation.

MRS. ELVSTED (*having risen, moving restlessly about the room*). Hedda -Hedda-what's going to come of all this?  
HEDDA. At ten o'clock – he'll be here. I can see him now with the vine leaves in his hair - fiery and bold -  
MRS.ELVSTED. Oh, God-if only he comes as you see him now!  
HEDDA. He'll come back like that, and no other way! (*Gets up and goes closer.*) Go on and doubt him as much as you like. *I believe in him. And now we'll find out-*  
MRS. ELVSTED. There's something behind what you're doing, Hedda.  
HEDDA. Yes, there is. For once in my life, I want to have power over a human being.  
MRS. ELVSTED. But don't you have that?  
HEDDA. I don't have it. I've never had it.  
MRS. ELVSTED. Not with your husband?  
HEDDA. Yes, what a bargain *that was!* Oh, if you only could understand how poor I am. And you're allowed to be so rich! (*Passionately throws her arms about her.*) I think I'll burn your hair off, after all (Ibsen 1978:745)!

Benedetto Croce asserts in *European Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (1924:336) that Ibsen's both male and female protagonists are consumed and long for the expectation of the extraordinary, the sublime, and the unattainable; the stronger the expectation which devours the protagonist in action, the greater the dramatic loss. Hedda's utopian construction regarding

“the vine leaves” in her hero’s hair becomes a motto for her self-annihilation. Her dramatic image-construct has strong symbolic reverberations over her life, which was essentially led by pretensions, financial vulnerability and deception.

In the beginning of the third act there is a sense of solicitude in Hedda’s countenance when she finds from Tesman that her plan to control Løvborg’s actions dramatically failed. There are no “vine leaves” that would crown his magnificent work. Hedda’s romantic ideal of a free life-intoxicated poet-artist falls into the utter derisory, when after a night’s orgy Løvborg is deprived of his precious work, at the boisterous party inside Mademoiselle Diana’s private chambers. Tesman’s concern for Løvborg’s manuscript and his collecting it in such absolute secrecy seems indeed peculiar, especially when he confesses to have been envious of the outstanding work Løvborg has composed. Indeed the episode validates their previous rivalry mentioned in the beginning of the play. George Tesman, though not a vicious character, since he shows sympathy for his aunts and the tragic destiny of his rival, admits to the fact that he considers Løvborg as his academic competitor. When Løvborg visits Hedda and confesses that he has lost his manuscript, in her destructive psychological countenance and out of spite for the project Thea has initiated, Hedda does not disclose the fact that she possesses his manuscript. When Thea learns that Løvborg does not possess it any longer, the artist recounts a distorted version of the truth which makes Thea plunge into utter desperation.

MRS.ELVSTED (*wringing her hands*). Oh, God –oh, God, Hedda –to tear your own work to bits!

LØVBORG. I’ve torn my own life to bits. So why not tear my life’s work as well-

MRS.ELVSTED. And you did this thing last night!

LØVBORG. Yes, you heard me. In a thousand pieces. And scattered them into the fjord. Far out. At least there, there’s clean salt water. Let them drift out to sea-drift with the tide and with the wind. And after a while, they’ll sink. Deeper and deeper. As I will, Thea.

MRS. ELVSTED. Do you know, Eilert, this thing you’ve done with the book-for the rest of my life it will seem to me as if you’ve killed a little child.

LØVBORG. You’re right. It was like murdering a child.

MRS. ELVSTED. But how could you do it-! It was my child too.

HEDDA (*almost inaudible*). Ah, the child - (Ibsen 1978:760).

The “murdered child” as well as the image of the presence of the fjord are recurrent metaphors in Ibsen’s plays. While the “murdered child” represents the possibility of the couple to share an indivisible bond which otherwise would be “unattainable”; to Hedda the manuscript symbolises the scornful realisation that a petty creature like Thea did manage to gain power over the man she aesthetically fancied. Precisely because of this she calls Thea to be “so rich” and as a consequence Hedda is “so poor”, because she, unlike Thea could not manage to gain power and inspire Løvborg through the sublime artistic process. Hedda learns

from Løvborg to her anxiety that “Thea’s pure soul was in that book” and that for Thea as well as him there is nothing left to live for. Hedda’s demonic destructive character reaches the pinnacle when again in a utopian endeavour she gives Løvborg one of the General’s pistols to shoot himself. To Hedda, the subsequence of his heroic liberation would have the effect of powerful artistic elevation from Thea’s tedious attempt to plunge her artist into the degrading bourgeois sphere. She only requires that he should perform the suicidal act beautifully.

“HEDDA (*throwing some of the sheets into the fire and whispering to herself*). Now I’m burning your child, Thea! You with your curly hair! (*Throwing another sheaf in the stove.*) Your child and Eilert Løvborg’s. (*Throwing in the rest.*) Now I’m burning-I’m burning the child” (Ibsen 1978:762).

Løvborg’s book which he wrote with the help of Mrs. Elvsted, is not concerned as the previous one with ideological conglomeration of the past and present and its stages of civilisation. Indeed it deals with *the elliptical, the disjoined, the unknown, the unpredictable, the codified* signaling hence a break with the canonical value of historical lucidity of tradition. The book does not ideologically arise ex nihilo, but it is constructed as the modern artist would have it, through dispatched subjective experience and thought. The drama of the artist’s consciousness reminds of Baudelaire’s expectation of an order in art, where the real is the art that makes life. When art is gone reality bears no meaning any longer. It is made clear that Løvborg and Thea understand each other and that they have worked on this book side by side. Moreover, Løvborg confesses to Hedda that Thea’s “pure soul’s” values reside in its formulations and that the whole project speaks for Løvborg’s true self. Thea is described by Løvborg as merely naïve yet pure in her naivety; she is in the end as Hedda remarks only a “poor little fool”, a married bourgeoisie. However, on the other hand Thea as opposed to Hedda’s own feeble character, is uninhibited and determined to follow to town the man who “has made a real human being” out of her. In other words, if Thea has helped Eilert Løvborg to break loose from his debauched habits, he himself has helped Thea to become a free self-confident individual. When Hedda asks Thea if she does not fear what people would think about her leaving her husband, she simply replies as a reverberation of Nora’s resolution that she only did what she had to do (Ibsen 1978:714).

Admittedly, there is a strong connection between the modern artist and the woman who contributed to his artistic affirmation and who through the artistic process gained vitality and freedom from social preconceptions. In the episode when Hedda vindictively “burns the

child”, she mimics ecstatically not only a jealous revenge on the fortunate artistic couple. She essentially prevents to watch, through the nullification of Løvborg’s work, the imminent petty transformation of her idealised vision. Her requirement of Løvborg to end his life beautifully mirrors Hedda’s wish to preserve her romantic ideal of the free-spirited hero, who artistically simulates her own existential desires.

In the beginning of the last act of the play, Hedda is wearing mourning clothes for Aunt Rina’s funeral. “The drawing room is in darkness” and “Hedda dressed in black, is pacing back and forth in the dark room”. She “moves to the glass door, lifts the curtains aside slightly, and gases out into the darkness”, as if she attends paralleled to Nora for the miracle to happen. Hedda waits to finally behold an act of “beauty and of courage” from her hero-artist, an artist recued with her help from the bourgeois malaise and its petty existence.

Admittedly, in every act of the play there is mentioned the presence of death which is of an utterly Gothic nature. This outset is triggered here by the menacing portrait of the dead General who owns a happy central position in the bourgeois parlour and who seems to have the ability to control Hedda’s every move. Both inside Lady Falk’s mansion as well as outside through the presence of the autumnal September atmosphere, there is a repetitive theme of self-imposed seclusion and innuendoes’ of social decrepitude. Hedda never leaves her secluded environment; she is a prisoner of the bourgeois social sphere. The mention of death is not at all accidental and its recurrence is disseminated throughout the text. There is a sense of degradation that lingers not only with some of the characters in the drama, but also at larger level there is also present the imminence of death. In the play as a whole there is a manifested concern with the occurrence of recent history and with the legacy of the remodelling of social consciousness in the modern age.

Hedda’s idealisation of Løvborg, the artist who would come in the night “with vine leaves in his hair” is a utopian form for escapism. Hedda’s fallacious projection mirrors the pernicious nature of the declining social environment that still clings to the self-deceptive nature of their social ideals. Hedda identifies herself with the prototype of the morally freed artist, like Løvborg or Oswald, who indeed mimic through their art an intellectual revolt against the fallen *embetsmenn* ideology. Admittedly, if Løvborg is a victim of erroneous dramatic circumstances Hedda’s exist from the scene emulates the victimisation of her socially bound consciousness. The real gravity with Hedda’s self-imposed victimised position resides in the

awareness of her dysfunctional and insubordinate social predicament as a woman. That is, notwithstanding her aristocracy of character, she personally gravitates towards her confinement of the social bourgeois malaise. Hedda's ideal ambitions of heroic artistic beauty, that liberates the individual, recoil under the shattering predicament Brack makes about Løvborg having had an ugly and accidental death, not shot in the temple, but in his lower part of the abdomen. The image destroys her fallacious "beautiful illusion." The dramatic experience stultifies the social meaning which it was supposed to encompass. Subsequently, her idealised vision about noble artistic freedom and beauty are shattered by the ludicrous occurrence where Løvborg did not commit suicide by his own will, but he was shot accidentally in Mademoiselle Diana's boudoir "raving about the lost child". The matter heightens her sense of desperation and disgust: "HEDDA( *stares at him with a look of revulsion*). That too! What is it, this - this curse - that everything I touch turns ridiculous and vile" (Ibsen 1978:773)?

Her potential subjective freedom which was supposed to stand as a reverberation of her mystified artist's heroic deed is further encapsulated and plunged into utter disgust when Judge Brack shows her that she could be incriminated in the case of Løvborg's homicide, if he does not keep silent. To Hedda, unlike her bourgeois rival Thea, the scandal of such proportions would mean self-annihilation. Hedda Gabler, who in the beginning of the drama appeared so cold and serene with her aura of an uncompromising elevated social rank, who channelled her ambitions to attain power over a man's destiny, finally finds herself cornered in the power of a debased creature like Brack. By claiming her freedom, he plunges the female protagonist, who was morally situated above the petty Tesmanesque bourgeois sphere, into the socially detestable, namely the *ménage a trois*. With Tesman and Thea who attempt the reconstruction of Løvborg's pseudo-child for posterity, she faces the ignoble prospect Brack presents her with.

HEDDA. So I'm in your power, Judge. You have your hold over me now.

BRACK ( *whispers more softly*). My dearest Hedda-believe me -I won't abuse my position.

HEDDA. All the same, I'm in your power. Tied to your will and desire. Not free. Not free, then! (*Rises impetuously.*) No-I can't bear the thought of it. Never (Ibsen 1978:776)!

When she commits her suicide by shooting herself through the temple, the gesture is not to be regarded merely as a "noble" replica to Løvborg's ugly death. It is more importantly an act of rebellion against the modern pettiness of the bourgeois mercantilism and vulgar utilitarianism. The signals of the bourgeois circle mark an answer of disbelief and bewilderment: "TESMAN

(*shrieking to BRACK*). Shot herself! Shot herself in the temple! Can you imagine! BRACK (*in the armchair, prostrated*). But good God! People don't do such things" (Ibsen 1978:778)!

The idea of suicide is not an original replica, an aesthetic artefact Ibsen uses in order to shock and enrapture the *enbourgeoisment* reflective mechanism in the play. The theme of suicide goes back to Ibsen's own time and finds shocking reverberations in the fin-de-siècle generation, as de Figueiredo explains. Vilhelm Solheim, Arne Dybfest, Tryggve Andersen, Gabriel Finne, Knut Hamsun and Sigbjørn Obstfelder, they all epitomised individuals who pertained to the fin-de-siècle generation. They complemented themes like weakness, degradation and utter death in reaction to the replica of the modern *aporias* (de Figueiredo 2007:386).

Både den unge dekadensen og det noe eldre bohemmiljøet svermet for selvmordet, og Ibsen selv hadde skjebnene til Adda Ravnkilde og Viktoria Benedictson friskt i minne. Selv om statistikken viser at selvmorshyppigheten var konstant i Norge mellom 1876 og 1900, var altså ideen om selvmordet en del av både den norske og europeiske tidsånden, slik den blant annet kom til uttrykk i Emile Durkheims sosiologiklassiker *Selvmordet*, fra 1897 (de Figueiredo 2007:386).

The whole lamentable episode of Hedda's suicide does not merely address the concept of death's artful total gratuitousness. *L'art pour l'art*, is an aesthetic construct, promoted by Théophile Gautier in *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835) where art as such, proposed a polemical understanding of the concept of *beauty*. The notion was supposed to stand as a product of aesthetic modernity which would lay the parameters of rebellion against the modernity of the philistine (Calinescu 2006:45). Indeed *prima facie*, the message Hedda's suicidal gesture is sending through Tesman's astonishment and Bracks utter disbelief, is a circumspect, noble and powerful replica to the debased and ridiculous bourgeois tainted aspirations, which is comprised in the well known formula - *épater le bourgeois*.

When cornered by the ignoble and vicious Judge, as the law of a General in the war would have it, she simply chooses to die with dignity. Her gesture cannot by any means stand as a tragic occurrence in the classical sense of the word. Rather it can be regarded as dramatic, regrettable and a sad overall alternative to the social *embetsmenn* ideology, which comprised repellence regarding socially and morally erroneous conduct. Hedda's death is a death which she romantically idealises, but whether her death is a beautiful alternative is a matter which still opens for discussion. For instance Ivo de Figueiredo assesses that her suicidal act is not a gesture which retains beautiful connotations: "Men Hedda Gabler dør ikke I skjønnhet, det er ideen om det skjønnne som dør med henne. Også denne gangen lar Ibsen drømmen om det

aristokratiske menneske lide nederlag, ja, som aristokratisk kvinne er Heddas nederlag i virkelighet dobbelt” (de Figueiredo 2007:385).

Raymond Williams suggests that modern tragedy presents a struggling individual who in his pursue to free himself from his socially conflicting limitations, becomes a victim of the social hindering force. In this dramatic process the individual becomes his own victim and the result is the irretrievable human loss (Williams 2006:127). Hedda’s tragic demise mirrors a personal as well as a social resolution which gravitates towards “the melancholy of fulfilment”, through the aesthetic mechanism proposed by Williams. Her fight against the desacralised temporality and the philistinism of the middle-class hypocrisy results in her defeatism through the effect of social victimisation. The *embetsmenn* golden age came to its closure in the period of 1883-1884. The immergence of a new parliamentary system marked a new political atmosphere in Norway and thus a new social power shift. Monrad’s ethical philosophy together with the *embetsmenn* socially normative considerations regarding the “sacred past” had to bend under the aspirations of the democratic immanent new time-consciousness (Slagstad 2001: 17-24). Subsequently, the very title of the drama where the protagonist bears the name of a member of the past social order, plunges the character indeed the drama as a whole, into the victimised position of the social class alienation.

I argued in this chapter that according to Orr the concept of “tragedy of social alienation” resulted in the effect of the *periphery*. Contrary to Rønning’s position I expanded on the idea that the social mechanisms which are at play in Ibsen’s *tragic corpus* emulate the ruling hegemonic values of the Norwegian social environment (Orr 1981:xvi-xvii). That is, Ibsen did not contemplate in Europe the drama of modernity and then projected it unto a Norwegian context with Norwegian characters. Rather, his characters mirror and perform the drama of modernity according to their Norwegian social and cultural environment. Ibsen in his letter to King Charles XV in 1866 wrote that: “I am not fighting for an existence free from care but for that lifework which I firmly believe God has given me to do- the work that seems to me the most necessary and imperative to Norway, the work of arousing the people of our nation and urging them to think great thoughts” (Ibsen 1964:56-57). Consequently, Ibsen’s spirited aesthetic enjoyment reified through his drama characters which would ideologically elevate the people of his country. However, I do agree with Rønning that what makes Ibsen a great dramatist and a modern author is namely the fact that the conflicts he presents are universal and universally applicable. As such, they are still perfectly valid in some societies worldwide,

as it is the case with for example China and Bangladesh where Ibsen's plays enjoy vast popularity.

John Orr's theory advanced that in order to evaluate the overall tragic nature of the drama, it is necessary to look not only at the textual devices, the dramatic tensions which occur at the level of the text, but it is equally necessary to understand the larger social mechanisms which help create the tragic substance (Orr 1981: xvii). Hedda embodies the aristocratic demonic female character that marks through her exist from the scene the dramatic effect where the bourgeois utilitarian world prevails over the utopian noble social sphere, and where the social power struggle causes modernity to prevail over tradition. As such, her qualities transcend the heroic meaning. They rather emulate according to Williams (2006) and Orr (1981) a victimised and hence an inferior alternative to the transcendental sacred values the Greek heroes died for. Hedda is merely a victim subjected to the alienating process of her social class ethos, where her role in society as a representative of the *embetsmenn* sphere, becomes increasingly devoid of meaning and function. The metaphor of Hedda's aristocratic encapsulation and submission to the bourgeois reality stands as a means of reaffirming the importance immanence, temporality and topos play in the process of modern society. Under such circumstances, the aristocratic archetypal world and its members are bound to lose their inherent meaning and function for posterity, through their sensibilities of their imaginative durée.

## 7. Ibsen's "Tragic Muse"

In order to answer the question I initially posed regarding the heroic qualities Ibsen's female protagonists retain, I initiated a discussion based on some antithetical acceptances concerning the tragic genre attached to Ibsen's oeuvre. After having briefly described the major leading theories that have shaped the Ibsen academic milieu and which own an antipodean substance, that is, the anti-modern and the modern viewpoint regarding Ibsen's tragic tradition, I have indicated that my reading of the genre follows Williams's theory about modern tragedy (2006). Having departed from Kierkegaard's theory (1843) about modern tragedy I have shown the deontic difference the two readings of the genre propose, through parallelism with Williams' theory. The essence of this juxtaposition resides chiefly at the level of experience, which according to Williams is located and shaped by the social manifestation, where the individual in his struggle to free himself from the hindering influence of the social element, hopelessly loses the battle, in a liberal acceptance (Williams 2006:127).

In addition, I have tried to show the topical difference in Helge Rønning's understanding of the concept (2006) and my reading of Williams's theory attached to Ibsen's *tragic corpus*. At the core of modern tragedy transpires the complex dilemma of individuality, where the protagonist is defeated in his/her battle against the social standard and ideology. As such, the individual succumbs under the pressures of the conflicting social institution where all human qualities are lost. Hence, in a modern context such as this, Ibsen's protagonists are deprived of all heroic qualities, and the futile human loss retains as only tragic quality the compulsory valence of victimization (Williams 2006:92). While Rønning sees the liberal tragedy in Ibsen's drama starting with the year of 1871 as a momentous consequence of the emergence and defeat of the Paris Commune (Rønning 2006: 39-86), I on the other hand, read Ibsen's *tragic corpus* as a consequence of what Williams calls "the dramatic clash between two social orders", "the real tension between the old and the new" (Williams 2006:77-78). According to Williams, this is the institutional tension caused by the clash between tradition and modernity, which in itself retains modern tragic qualities. Jon Nygaard (1997) calls this dramatic clash "the drama of modernity" where the individual is plunged into a post-traditional world of

social insecurity. He further makes a point when he assesses this social collision reified in Ibsen's personal dramatic experience in Skien.

Antony Giddens (1990:14) has showed that tradition and the new time consciousness allow no mitigating circumstances. The dynamism of modernity causes immanent transformations and splitting mechanisms such as the double hermeneutic between *time-space separation*. The *disembedding mechanisms* of the social system mirror a reflexive ordering and reordering of social relations, "the boundedness" of social systems and the emergence of modern societies, such as nation-states (Giddens 1990:14-17). Modernity is a time of risk, which propels the individual into perpetual estrangement, moulded simply by the loss of a sense of belonging to his community, and as such, this mechanism takes a toll on the sense of intimacy. The argument of Matei Calinescu's treatise (2006) analyses the two modernities namely, the historical phenomenon and its cultural replica. Aesthetic modernity should be understood according to Calinescu as a crisis concept, which exemplifies a dialectical opposition between tradition, between the modernity of the bourgeois civilisation and lastly, it is an opposition to itself, since it perceives itself as a new tradition, that is, a new form of authority (Calinescu 2006:10).

John Orr has described that this natural mechanism of modernity has started at the very *periphery* of Europe, with authors like Chekov, Shaw and Ibsen and only afterwards became a centralised process, which moved to the main cities and capitals of the continent (Orr 1981: xvi-xvii). The modern restructuring of the axial relation between *time* and *space* promotes the acceleration and the expansion of modern institutions. On the one hand, this includes the phenomenon of the emergence of nation-states, as it was the case with Norway, and on the other hand, it reflects the mechanism of breaking with tradition through the emergence of a new socio-political order, as it was the case of the *embetsmenn* state's fall (Slagstad 2001:16-24).

When considered in the light of this typology, the ontological time experience emerges through the modifying factors that modernity advances. I have further concurred with Jon Nygaard's assessment (1997) that this shift of paradigm of the modern world was something familiar to Ibsen from his dramatic experience in Skien. Subsequently, I have advanced the idea that the quality of the modern tragic Ibsen's text emulates, proposes the concept of decline, par excellence. This means the irremediable fall of individuals, of family groups,

indeed of an entire social class, the *embetsmenn* social and ideological tradition. This concept of decline was not only an isolating experience that only Ibsen's family, or only the old aristocracy in Skien lived through. It was a dramatic mechanism that mirrored at a lower sublimated scale the social encounter, which resulted at a higher level in a soaring clash, where the drama of modernity performed at its best. Tradition and its normative institutions were daunted by their defeatism surfacing against the democratic mechanisms of modernity. Skien was a centre of capitalism and through its renowned Latinskolen, which produced *Intelligensen*, it educated the founding fathers of the University of Oslo, A.M. Schweigaard, P.A. Munch and M. J. Monrad. These were the very representative of the *embetsmenn* institution and ideology (Slagstad 2001: 18). Because of the paucity of democratic perspectives, the *embetsmenn*'s dominion of the social arena came to a closure after the year of 1884. Hence, the emergence of *Venstrestaten*, as a modern and democratic alternative to the old traditional type of government, came as a clear symptom of the mechanisms of modernity. Subsequently, the pre-modern system of normative values was replaced with new sets of values through the socio-economic need of change (Slagstad 2001:129).

In my thesis I have argued that *this* specific social mechanism reflects Williams' theory of modern tragedy attached to Ibsen's *tragic corpus*. Hence we witness at a social level a conflict emerging from a historical setting through a period which preceded a substantial transformation and breakdown of an important culture (Williams 2006: 77-78). At the level of the text, this mechanism mirrors the exact dramatic clash of two opposing social orders, namely the order of the traditional *embetsmenn* representatives, juxtaposing the modern institution of liberalism. Accordingly, I have showed that Ibsen's aesthetic technique is two folded. On the one hand, it dramatises the intricate dynamics of a social order which mimics the drama of modernity. On the other hand, at the level of the drama, it creates intricate encounters where the characters in their utopian search for freedom, take a victimised position as they become engulfed in the *aporias* of the new time consciousness.

"Ghosts", "white horses", "vine leaves" and dreams of heroic artistic gratification are metaphors that voice the precious commodity these protagonists aesthetically follow, through their *imaginative durée* in these three dramas. Their role is to reflect the irreconcilable opposition between two sets of values, which articulate the modern crisis. That is, the intellectual modernization and the institutional tension which degrades the demystified ideological myths of tradition and the normative past. The totality constituting the tragic core

resides in these socially antithetical co-ordinates that, per se, according to Williams qualify to be of modern tragic substance, which in the end mimics a fundamentally victimised position.

At an aesthetic level this major cultural shift is founded on the ideal of the unchanging transcendental notion of beauty as it is the case with *Hedda Gabler*, or on the utopian freedom and happiness of a noble spirit, as it is the case with the protagonists of *Rosmersholm* and *Ghosts*. The tragic character attached to the aesthetic and social mechanisms the protagonists subscribe to in these dramas, conveys a sharp sense of historical relativism. That is, they feel on the one hand the need to break with tradition and embrace the puzzling reflection of “the new”. At the same time however, they cannot break with it because tradition in sum contributes to ontological security, in so far it sustains faith in the continuity of the past, present and the future, and as such trusts the routines and social practices (Giddens 1990:105).

The theme of modernity is launched by Mrs. Alving’s dramatic discourse about the “ghosts” which through reiteration permeates her life and the Norwegian traditional society at large. She defies and criticises the hostile forces mirrored by the ideology of tradition, but the tragic substance attached to her character, indeed to all Ibsen’s characters, is that they fatidically lack the power to break with the normative past. The drama of modernity performs at its best in these dramas: “Je suis d’abord mon passé” is Hedda Gabler’s tragic realisation, or as Mrs. Alving has it “we are all ghosts”. On the other hand, Rebecca understands that through her identification of the mytho-poetical world of “white horses” and Gothic tradition of doubts, scruples and anxieties that rule at Rosmersholm, she is influenced and empowered by the very ancestral beliefs and norms emulated by the *embetsmenn* ideological order. Notwithstanding her rebellion, she eventually realises that Rosmersholm has forcefully drained her passion for living.

The dramatic demise of these female protagonists is located in their wish to preserve a double standard of the aristocratic mentality, they have either been born into as it is the case of Hedda or married into as it is the case of Helene Alving, or have become mesmerised and entrapped by, as it is the case with Rebecca West. The “ghosts” of the aristocratic ethical heredity reflect in the end their lack of flexibility and their impossibility to adjust to the changes the whole society undergoes. Essentially, Ibsen’s interest resides in his wish to provide his characters with freedom, even though, by all accounts, his project mirrors a utopian endeavour. He renders in his plays the drama of his time, the drama of modernity, which differs greatly from

the world of sacred myths, eternal values and ancient heroism of the Greeks. Ibsen was a modern, that is, he was a man of his time and as such, his characters perform in a dramatic way the juxtaposition of a fallacious past confronting the new time consciousness.

Indeed Ibsen has captured the idea which Baudelaire has released, namely that "modernity is the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent", while its replica "the other half, is the eternal and the immutable" (Calinescu 2006:48). In a letter to Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson (1867), Ibsen writes that "there is nothing fixed and eternal in the world of ideas" and that the Scandinavians of his century are not Greeks (Ibsen 1964: 67). These words of a modernist essence mirror Baudelaire's modernité that deals with the paradoxes of time and the disruptive process, where the strikingly new confronts the authoritative past of traditions and myths. Ibsen's time is historical. It mimics *avant la lettre* the essence of being *modernus*, and as such, it does not retain of the repetitive temporality of the mythological past.

It is clear, however, that the idea of modernity could be conceived only within the framework of specific time awareness, namely that of historical time, linear and irreversible, flowing irresistibly onwards. Modernity as a notion would be utterly meaningless in a society that has no use for the temporal – sequential concept of history and organises its time categories according to a mythical and recurrent model (...) (Calinescu 2006:13).

Ibsen's protagonists do not retain heroic qualities. Moreover any parallelism to their Greek forerunners, who epitomize the fixed, sacred and inalterable aesthetic ideals, would be highly inconsequent with the modern social and cultural context. His characters are presented with a fundamental change of paradigm that follows a challenge rooted in the dynamics of the project of modernity.

In order to answer the question I initially advanced, I looked at the three plays through Williams' (2006) and John Orr's theory (1981) about modern tragedy. Subsequently, I have applied Calinescu's (2006) and Giddens' (1990) understanding of the process of modernity. John Orr suggests that when analysing Ibsen's text one has to look both at the connections of the drama, and then look at the variety of social consciousness and the wider society (Orr 1981: xi). That is, in order to understand the level of the tragic discourse one has to look bilaterally, first through the objective perspective of the social element and then through a hermeneutical approach of the text. Ibsen's drama presents, par excellence, a tragedy of social alienation that is, the very emergence of it, through the actuality of the *periphery*. Deriving from Orr's phenomenon of *periphery* and the invariable mechanism of social alienation, I

have applied his social theory through Danielsen, Hovland (2002), Slagstad (2001) and Jon Nygaard (1997) unto the modern Norwegian social context in order to present my claim. Namely, that this invariable mechanism of alienation remains a distinctive factor throughout the dramas.

All in all, my claim and hence contribution through this thesis aimed to show that the confrontation in Ibsen's *tragic corpus* resides between the individual and the conflicting social values of the *embetsmenn* social and ideological establishment. The tragic demise of the characters pertaining to this declining social sphere consists in the fact that they lack flexibility to adapt to the new coming democratic socio-political system of modernity. Ibsen's characters are presented inside their secluded *embetsmenn* confinement, where they perform the dynamic process of their self-imposed estrangement, with the inherent effect of victimisation through social alienation. Essentially, this social and personal estrangement is due to their necessity to hold on to their dominant cultural values. The feeling of isolation is present through the very obvious element of the secluded mansion or manor where the drama of modernity unfolds inside the traditional *embetsmenn household*. Lady Falk's old mansion, which is Hedda's safeguard against the petty –bourgeois existence, or Mrs. Alving's location at Rosenvold in the isolated little town inside a fjord covered by mist and rain, or Rosmersholm, the place of myth and tradition which has brought up generations of civil servants, are all places that stand as metaphors for the tragic effect of human alienation of those pertaining to the ancestral traditional order.

There is something Gothic about all of these three plays. They retain the menacing thrill of death through the presence of the dead husband in *Ghosts* or of the dead wife in *Rosmersholm* and the dead father in *Hedda Gabler*, who seem to haunt and menacingly peer over the dialogue lines and influence the protagonists in their performance of their *past imaginative durée*. The double drama of these protagonists consists in the juxtaposing feeling of belonging and estrangement that rests inside their character. Oswald cuts off his ties with tradition when he has an epiphany of the modern self in Rome and Paris. These are the places where he finds his artistic voice and experiences for a short period the lovely "joy of life" he longs for. However, he returns to the gloomy ancestral place of Rosenvold where he will die and along with him, his *embetsmenn* heritage as well. Mrs. Alving's juxtaposing attitude makes her both preserve a fallacious traditional legacy of the past, while at the same time she wishes to break free from it. Rebecca's free-spirited, passionate personality becomes engulfed inside the

Rosmers' corseted moral precepts. Subsequently, she loses her passion for living when she allows to be enticed by Rosmersholm's ancestral traditional power. Hedda's demonic and utopian life-activity takes place inside the constraining topos of Lady Falk's mansion where she wants to escape from the bourgeois ethos. Essentially, these dramas epitomise the tragic process indicated by Orr, where the characters experience a feeling of individual and collective alienation attached to their heritage. As such, the individual is bound to hold on to his/her noble values and at the same time oppose the constraining social culture, with the eventual result of the dramatic effect of human and social demise (Orr 1981: vxii).

Ibsen's interest in this perplexing effect is sublimated in the letters he writes to Georg Brandes in 1870 and 1871, which ultimately resides in "the revolution of the human spirit" and the liberty of the individual that comes along with it (Ibsen 1964:106-107). The words of reproach, the Marxists have for Ibsen's dramas, consist in the fact that he creates protagonists who want to break with the past, but they never achieve true liberation or release from the ambiguities of their *imaginative durée*, that is their subjective private time, the time that robs the individual of the objectified socially measurable temporality of the capitalist civilisation. The answer for their dramatic exit from the scene, in spite of their radical inclinations, as it is the case with the protagonists of *Ghosts*, *Rosmersholm* and *Hedda Gabler*, might be interpreted through Ibsen's own words: "Yes - I for one must confess that the only thing I love about liberty is *the struggle for it; I care nothing for the possession of it*" (Ibsen 1964:106). The outcome of such an endeavour at an aesthetic level must modulate into the dramatic mode of expression.

Ibsen's interest with depicting the life of the old aristocrats can be interpreted as I have shown, through the social and historical background of Norway's 19<sup>th</sup> century. His dramatic technique revolves around individuals and families pertaining to the old establishment. Ultimately as Orr (1981:12) and Williams (2006:127) indicate, Ibsen's protagonists play the role of victims trapped inside their old establishment's mores and mentality that fight against it but, in the process they become corrupted by their hypocritical standard of living. Hence, their propensity for heroic action is decidedly denied to them from the very outset.

In *Ghosts* we witness a text maieutically built on the socially discursive clash between the institutions of tradition and modernity, where the protagonists, preponderantly Mrs. Alving experiences the power struggle between the past and the elasticity of the modern spirit, while

the encounter tragically engulfs her in its gist at its half way. The fundamental argument of the drama according to Williams' theory consists in the extent to which the *aporias* of the modern society invades private lives and cause the protagonist to sink into existential unbalance. The fallacious break with the ethos of the *ancient regime* causes Mrs. Alving to find it impossible to fight the "ghosts" of tradition, and eventually succumb under her indeterminations. At a metaphorical level the title of the play mimics through the illusive behavioural pattern of the protagonist, the drama of the irremediable fall of the upper-class structure and its ideology, while she still hypocritically clings to her ties with a declining social order of the past. *Ghosts*, *Rosmersholm* and *Hedda Gabler* are mirror-images of one another. Indeed, they epitomise the tragic pattern of the emergence of the quality of the normative past - followed by transgressive rebellion - then followed by the need to reconcile respectability and appearances, and in the end they perform a victimised pattern of their anti-social formation.

In *Rosmersholm* Ibsen reconciles the tragic feeling with the poeticism of the sublime rendered through the Gothic mode of expression. In this drama Ibsen transcends the limitations of the internal conflict between tradition and modern consciousness and accommodates a simulacrum of a mythical world mirrored by the paraphernalia of the grotesque. I have shown that through the device of the Gothic in the text, Ibsen achieves a sublime *modus operandi*, where he uncovers the tragic substance of the play. *Rosmersholm* deals with the fall of the overriding powers of tradition and normative rituals and beliefs, which at the level of the text pointed at the dramatic demise of two characters and of an entire archetypal world around them at the same time. Lucien Goldman (1964:49-50) clearly assesses that the modern capitalist norms and regulations cause the individual to become subjected to the suppressing force, of the social mechanisms. While the individual cannot surpass the social overriding force, he/she succumbs to it from a victimised position. John Rosmer cannot cope with the retrospective mortification regarding past actions and the utopian splitting image of his future mission. At the same time Rebecca, through a reverse mechanism, becomes subjected to the law of the normative past which rules at Rosmersholm and overpowers her power and passion for living. *Rosmersholm* metaphorically represents through the dramatic mechanisms of the text, an upper-class archetypal world which at an aesthetic level erases all potential qualities of "individualism" and as such, according to Goldman's theory, it erases all heroic qualities attached to its protagonists.

*Hedda Gabler* is a drama that addresses in a shocking manner the dialectical expression of time-space coordinates retained and adapted to the experience of the new time consciousness. Hedda's demise, as the last representative of the archetypal world of aristocratic tradition modulates into the tragic, through her wish to embrace the strikingly new, while she confronts the delimitations of her authoritative past. The play performs at its best a dramatic encounter of rank division. Calinescu describes the aesthetic modernity as a radical inclination which formulates antibourgeois attitudes (Calinescu 2006:42). The source of the tragic substance resides in Hedda's qualities of the declining aristocrat, who against all objective evidence rejects the bourgeois modern ethos, with the tragic effect that the bourgeois utilitarian milieu prevails over her utopian social sphere.

After the modernisation of the parliamentary system there was a deeper sense of aimlessness and fallacious social validation for the *embetsmenn* representatives and their ideology. The *embetsmenn* golden era was ended in 1884. Their substantiation, like it was the case with Monrad's philosophy, was plunged into increasing unsteadiness by the emergence of the bourgeois more democratic social system (Slagstad 2001:98). Subsequently, the very title, which indicates that the drama will deal with General Gabler's daughter and her destiny, implies from the very outset a dramatic end. In a fight against time, against immanence, which Hedda collectively contemplates, she is bound to lose. The modern effect of social transformation takes a toll in this drama as well as in *Ghosts* and *Rosmersholm*, on those who cling to the "sacred past" and its ideologies and those who thrive on nurturing fanciful aspirations. Hedda is of course the target from the very outset of the drama for social victimisation. According to Williams, this social mechanism subscribes to the mode of the modern tragic since "its condition is the real tension between the old and the new" where the social of vanity ultimately transcends the individual (Williams 2006: 78).

The recurrence with Ibsen's characters consists according to the critic in the fact that the protagonists reify an opposing world full of lies and compromises and dead positions. As the individual struggles against it, he realises that by belonging to the world, he retains destructive inherence in himself (Williams 2006:124). Hence, those who prevail in the dramas are those who pertain to the bourgeois milieu; those who are morally flexible enough to bow under the immanent present and its modern changing process.

There is something almost ludic in Ibsen's *modus operandi*. His protagonists perform at the level of the text a circular self-determining phenomenon. The tragic action starts at the level of the individual personality that performs as if from their id, or unconscious drive, major dramatic and self-generating mechanisms, that mirror the colliding mechanisms which take place at a larger social sphere. Their personal mechanisms epitomize at a social level the core of the decline of their social establishment, which again through its effects returns and victimises its characters through a subliminal rounding manoeuvre.

The actual flux of life in Ibsen's plays abjures protagonists that denounce the non-consensus of radical living and are isolated as such in their inclination. This particular matter inspires perplexity with respect to the *aporias* of change by means of action, since their privileged social positions allow no mitigating circumstances. Their defeatism resides in their personal, subjective *imaginative durée*, "the private temporality" created by the mystification of the desacralised new time consciousness. They are engulfed in the abyss of doubt and enmeshed in their choice of the elusive historical relativism. Their drama consists in their impossibility of elevation to a modern culture, that is, the objectified socially measurable time of the capitalist civilisation. This latter element regarding "subjective temporality" juxtaposes their antithetical social inheritance, a traditional position and social substance of their "isolated selves" and provokes a time of crisis and victimisation of the pseudo-modern self.

Ibsen acknowledged that "The Tragic Muse" of Melpomene impressed him greatly and that it inspired him to fully understand what tragedy metaphorically denoted: "That indescribably sublime, calm joy in expression of the face, that laurel-crowned head with something supernaturally exuberant and bacchantic about it, those eyes that look both inward and yet through and far beyond the outward object they are fixed on - that is the Greek tragedy" (Ibsen 1964: 40).

To Ibsen, tragedy represents a mode of expression that deals equally with capturing the outside values of the human essence, namely the social mechanisms that propel the individual in action, as well as the innermost intricate self-demeaning implications of the human soul. In this respect one could almost say that the epiphany of "The Tragic Muse" in the Vatican regards the inner validity of his work. Moreover, it retains the authoritative function of *prolepsis* in Ibsen's *tragic corpus*, indeed it is a technique exploited with the victimised protagonists he creates throughout his aesthetic activity.

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