IBSEN'S FEMALE CHARACTERS AND THE FEMINIST PROBLEMATIC

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis locates Ibsen within the intellectual context pertaining to gender that is provided by such influential nineteenth-century texts as Mill's The Subjection of Women and Bachofen's Das Mutterrecht, both of which seemingly feminist works in actuality foreground women only for their importance in the production of better-quality sons who will ensure the endurance of the patriarchy. The attraction of feminists to the dramas of a playwright who avowedly wrote from this patriarchal standpoint is elucidated by a consideration of the appropriation of the woman-centered texts of patriarchal "feminism" by recent feminists seeking material to reinforce their own movement. The apparently paradoxical project of the analysis of three Ibsen characters, Nora Helmer, Rebekka West and Hedda Gabler, in terms of contemporary feminist literary theory suggests a parallel means of appropriation. These potentially redefined female characters are afforded an added dimension of reality by their embodiment by actresses in stage performances that allows theatre history to be related to real-life history, in which, contemporaneously, nineteenth-century women were beginning to take part.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse permet de situer Ibsen dans le courant intellectuel qui prévalait au dix-neuvième siècle à l'égard des sexes, époque profondément marquée par The Subjection of Women de Mill et Das Mutterrecht de Bachofen, deux ouvrages en apparence féministes qui valorisaient davantage la femme à la lumière du rôle essentiel qu'elle jouait dans l'enfantement de fils capables d'assurer la pérennité du patriarcat. L'intérêt que les féministes vouent au théâtre d'Ibsen, qui de son propre aveu écrivait en adoptant un point de vue purement patriarcal, est expliqué à la lumière de l'appropriation, par les féministes, des textes que les tenants du "féminisme" patriarcal ont consacré aux femmes, appropriation visant à étayer les arguments de leur propre mouvement. Le projet, à première vue paradoxal, d'étudier trois personnages d'Ibsen, Nora Helmer, Rebekka West et Hedda Gabler, en termes de théorie littéraire féministe contemporaine, implique le même genre d'appropriation. Grâce à leur incarnation sur scène, ces personnages féminins redéfinis en puissance revêtent une dimension supplémentaire en termes de réalité. L'histoire théâtrale peut alors s'apparenter à l'histoire réelle à laquelle, à l'époque, les femmes du dix-neuvième siècle commençaient tout juste à prendre part.

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PREFACE

The following analysis looks at Ibsen's female characters from several different perspectives, relying in each chapter on a limited number of representative texts for documentary support. It does not in any way pretend to be exhaustive in its research into the areas of Ibsen's ideological context, feminist literary criticism, dramatic theory and theatre history. Rather, it is intended as a theoretical overview that makes connections between these areas for the purpose of illuminating Ibsen's female characters as entities that have had political significance since their inceptions in the nineteenth century.

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CHAPTER I

IBSEN'S "FEMINISM"

Ibsen is acclaimed as the creator of several of the most dynamic and sharply perceived female roles in the entire repertory of dramatic literature; his Nora's controversial break with her husband has caused him to be upheld as a champion of women's rights. To consider him as such, however, and to regard his woman-centered plays as feminist documents is to ignore Ibsen's status as the "father" of modern drama and to insist on viewing his work as brighter and more emancipatory in terms of women's issues than it actually is. In a speech at a banquet given in his honour by the Norwegian Society for Women's Rights in 1898, Ibsen reminded his audience of a tendency among readers to find in literature the meanings that they themselves wanted to find rather than the meanings that the author originally intended. Then, relating this tendency to his own supposedly sympathetic and progressive stance on "the woman question," Ibsen quite categorically declared:

> I am not a member of the Women's Rights League. Whatever I have written I have written without any conscious thought of making propaganda.[1] I have been more of a poet and less of a social philosopher than people generally tend to suppose. I thank you for your toast, but must disclaim the honour of having consciously worked for women's rights. I am not even quite sure what women's rights really are. To me it has been a question of

> human rights. And if you read my books carefully you will realize that. Of course it is incidentally desirable to solve the problem of women; but that has not been my whole object. My task has been the portrayal of human beings.[2]

Clearly, whatever the feminists present at this talk might have thought, Ibsen's remarkably sensitive, complex and vital female portraits had not emerged from any special sympathy for the unique condition of women.

As the same 1898 speech reveals, women interested Ibsen primarily as tools. He was concerned that mankind was stuck in a sort of intellectual, moral and cultural mire and perceived the education and acculturation of womankind as a fundamental solution to many of the problems of nineteenth-century society. He told the Norwegian feminists:

> The task before my mind has been to advance our country and to give our people a higher standard. To achieve this, two factors are important. It is for the <u>mothers</u>, by strenuous and sustained labor, to awaken a conscious feeling of <u>culture</u> and <u>discipline</u>. This feeling must be awakened before it will be possible to lift the people to a higher plane. It is the women who shall solve the human problem. As mothers they shall solve it. Here lies a great task for women. My thanks! And success to the League for Women's Rights.[3]

In so far as the emancipation of women resulted in the development of mothers capable of producing better sons, the movement had Ibsen's support. Further than that, it did not. His complaint was not with the patriarchal social order itself but with the low standards of the people and more specificallly the masculine people who resided within that social order. These low standards are embodied in Ibsen's work in such superficially solid citizens as Torvald Helmer, George Tesman and John Rosmer, for whom morality, duty, religion and idealism have no substantive, independent existence and whose ethical stances are dictated instead by their own personal needs and ambitions rather than by any objectively determined set of values deemed desirable or necessary for the attainment of a higher standard of society. In Ibsen's opinion, women's emancipation was not an end in itself, as it was for the feminists, but a means to an end that was the elimination of society's "moral cripples"[4] and, consequently, a less equivocal and more invulnerable patriarchy.

Ibsen was not alone in his thinking on this subject. His attitude was shared by a number of intellectuals and scholars in an age whose ideal woman may be said to have been emblematized in Queen Victoria, who perpetuated and intensified the repression of women at the same time that she offered, in the name of her Empire, to inspire men to great enterprise in all fields of endeavor. This paper

will attempt to elucidate the attraction of feminists to the work of a playwright who avowedly wrote from such a patriarchal standpoint. It will begin by locating Ibsen within an intellectual context pertaining to gender that is provided by a range of influential texts written by men about women. Although such texts as Mill's The Subjection of Women and Bachofen's Das Mutterrecht seem initially to take the "woman's side" in gender debate, these woman-centered works are actually oriented by a persistent patriarchal ideology in which women are important primarily for their contribution to the production of better and more obviously superior men. This patriarchally based "feminism" signifies the immediate context for the apparently sympathetic representations of strong and rebellious women for which Ibsen has been noted. In the first part of this essay also, the woman-centered works of nineteenth-century male writers will be considered in relation to the work of recent feminist critics seeking to appropriate some of this material to reinforce their own movement. Then, in a seemingly paradoxical project that should nevertheless suggest a parallel means of appropriation, contemporary feminist literary theory will be used as the basis for a discussion of three of Ibsen's major female characters. These characters will include Nora Helmer of A Doll's House, as the Ibsen heroine who has generated the most overtly political debate over the years, Hedda Gabler, for the violently horrified reaction

she has so frequently ellicited from readers and audience members, and Rebekka West, whose foregrounding in a feminist reading of Rosmersholm can most instructively inform that somewhat obscure drama. Finally, these female characters and their situations delineated within the context of feminist criticism, the implications of the added dimension of reality afforded by their embodiment by actresses in stage performances will be considered and the theatre history of Ibsen's woman-centered plays will be related to real-life history, in which, contemporaneously, nineteenth-century women were beginning to take part.

A. Patriarchal "Feminists"

In 1869, John Stuart Mill published The Subjection of Women, which has been called a "cardinal document in the history of feminism"[5] and "that overwhelmingly important handbook of the nineteenth-century women's movement."[6] In this essay, having argued painstakingly in favor of education and equal rights for women, Mill asks, "What good are we to expect from the changes proposed in our customs and institutions? Would mankind be at all better off if women were free?"[7] In response, he predicts somewhat sweepingly the alleviation of the suffering of those unfortunate women who are brutalized by their husbands as well as the virtual disappearance of the "vicious propensities"[8]

of men that have resulted from the abuse of power permitted by those aspects of marriage that cause the institution to represent the last surviving instance of legalized slavery. Then, with regard to the larger and more equivocal issue of making women the equals of men in terms of educational and employment opportunities, Mill maintains that the notion of innate male superiority must necessarily be dispelled not simply because it is unfair to women but because it has an even more detrimental effect upon the men who seem to profit by it.

> Is it imagined that all this does not pervert the whole manner of existence of the man, both as an individual and as a social being? It is an exact parallel to the feeling of a hereditary king that he is excellent above others by being born a king, or a noble by being born a noble. The relation between husband and wife is very like that between lord and vassal, except that the wife is held to more unlimited obedience than the vassal was. However the vassal's character may have been affected, for better and for worse, by his subordination, who can help seeing that the lord's was greatly affected for the worse?...[9]

While strengthening the moral backbone of the male population, the admittance of women to professions that previously been barred to them also promises, for Mill, the doubling of

"the mass of mental faculties available for the higher service of humanity"[10] and, more importantly, the added "benefit of the stimulus that would be given to the intellect of men by the competition; or (to use a more true expression) by the necessity that would be imposed on them of deserving precedency before they could expect to obtain it."[11]

The next advantageous result of the release of women from their subjugation concerns the improvement and extension of their powers of influence over men. Presently, Mill writes, the female sex serves primarily to soften the male and to inspire him to impressive acts of courage and military prowess. However,

> [in] the chief of the greater trials to which virtue is subject in the concerns of life -- the conflict between interest and principle -- the tendency of women's influence is of a very mixed character....[With] the present education and position of women, the moral principles which have been impressed on them cover but a comparatively small part of the field of virtue, and are, moreover, principally negative; forbidding particular acts, but having little to do with the general direction of the thoughts and purposes. I am afraid it must be said, that disinterestedness in the general conduct of life -- the devotion of the energies to purposes which hold out no promise of private

> advantages to the family -- is very seldom encouraged or supported by women's influence. It is small blame to them that they discourage objects of which they have not learnt to see the advantage, and which withdraw their men from them, and from the interests of the family. But the consequence is that women's influence is often anything but favourable to public virtue.[12]

With education, women's breadth of vision will be expanded to include an altruistic interest in the state of the population at large as well as in the welfare of their own immediate families. They will cease to keep men "down in that mediocrity of respectability which is becoming a mark of modern times"[13] and will use their newly improved moral influence to encourage their husbands and sons to more elevated achievements.

As a final argument, Mill maintains that although marriage should ideally allow each party "the luxury of looking up to the other" and the alternating "pleasure of leading and being led in the path of development,"[14] it can, in its present state, only rarely be truly successful because men and women are so vastly different in terms of intellectual abilities, interests, feelings and tastes. As Mill sees it, even if a bright young man marries someone who has enjoyed the benefits of nineteenth-century improvements in the education of women, he still suffers in that his wife remains an inferior,

incapable of teaching him anything new. For this relationship, he has given up the stimulating company of those male friends who were his equals in both intellect and ambition in the "higher pursuits."[15]

> We see, accordingly, that young men of the greatest promise generally cease to improve as soon as they marry, and, not improving, inevitably degenerate. If the wife does not push the husband forward, she always holds him back. He ceases to care for what she does not care for; he no longer desires, and ends by disliking and shunning, society congenial to his former aspirations, and which would now shame his falling-off from them; his higher faculties both of mind and heart cease to be called into activity. And this change coinciding with the new and selfish interests which are created by the family, after a few years he differs in no material respect from those who have never had wishes for anything but the common vanities and the common pecuniary objects.[16]

Thus, in short, however blameless women may be in respect of their fundamental subjection, to Mill's mind, they are nevertheless ultimately responsible for many of the faults, weaknesses and petty concerns of the men who dominate modern society and so they are ultimately responsible for saving society by correcting those faults, strengthening those

weaknesses and elevating those concerns. This they can do within the marriage relationship. "The moral regeneration of mankind will only really commence," Mill writes, "when the most fundamental of the social relations is placed under the rule of equal justice, and when human beings learn to cultivate their strongest sympathy with an equal in rights and cultivation."[17] In the final analysis, therefore, he sees the emancipation of women as being considerably more desirable for the benefits it promises to effect on a society that is patriarchally controlled than it is desirable in its own right.

John Stuart Mill was a progressive social philosopher and so the many changes that characterized the nineteenth century were in his view mainly changes for the better. He speaks favorably, for example, of the movement away from absolute monarchy and of the abolition of slavery as positive steps in the direction of the desired goal of universal equality and freedom. Indeed, in so far as his attitude towards slavery was concerned, Mill saw modern man as surpassing in civilization such ancients as Aristotle, who held that some men, namely, the Greeks, were born with characters that fitted them to be free while others, the Thracians and Asiatics, were natural-born slaves.[18] For Mill, then, progress was a positive movement towards a fundamentally better or more moral society. For others, the opposite held true.

The mythologist Johann Jakob Bachofen regarded ancient

Greece as the apex in the history of civilization and saw the passage of time as a movement away from greatness and into decline. He writes in his autobiographical essay:

> If it is true, as Aristotle says, that like can only be grasped by like, then the divine can only be grasped by a divine mind....[Without] a return to the ancient simplicity and health of soul, one cannot gain the merest intimation of the greatness of those ancient times and their thinking, of those days when the human race had not yet, as it has today, departed from its harmony with creation and the transcendent creator.[19]

Bachofen felt that one of the ways of coming to understand the civilization of ancient Greece was to determine the circumstances that caused it to develop. Therefore, in Das Mutterrecht (1861), he compiled extensive mythological and historical evidence and offered a controversial new theory of social evolution that stated that the original human social condition was one of "hetaerism"[20] or promiscuity and that between that phase and the present state of patriarchal supremacy that began with the golden age of the ancient Greeks, there existed universally a "silver age"[21] of transition during which matriarchy prevailed.

According to Bachofen, it was motherhood that brought order and the beginnings of civilization to the chaos of primordial promiscuity. "The relationship which stands at

the origin of all culture, of every virtue, of every nobler aspect of existence," he writes, "is that between mother and child; it operates in a world of violence as the divine principle of love, of union, of peace."[22] The woman, as nurturer, learned much earlier than the man

> to extend her loving care beyond the limits of the ego to another creature, and to direct whatever gift of invention she [possessed] to the preservation and improvement of this other's existence. Woman at this stage [was] the repository of all culture, of all benevolence, of all devotion, of all concern for the living and grief for the dead.[23]

Demeter or some other form of the Great Goddess presided during this intermediate period. Women dominated family and religious life and the matriarchal world was peacefully bound up with the reproductive process, the cycles of nature and agriculture.

During this same period, men gradually began to become cultivated. Bachofen writes in Das Mutterrecht:

> [The] establishment of matriarchy represents a step forward toward civilization. It represents an emancipation from the bonds of crudely sensual animal life. Woman counters man's abuse of his superior strength by the dignity of her enthroned motherhood....The more savage the men of [the] first period, the more necessary becomes the

> restraining force of women. As long as mankind is immersed in purely material life, woman must rule. Matriarchy is necessary to the education of mankind and particularly of men. Just as the child is first disciplined by his mother, so the races of men are first disciplined by woman. The male must serve before he can govern. It is woman's vocation to tame man's primordial strength, to guide it into benign channels.[24]

In describing how patriarchal rule developed from this context, Bachofen explains that while the mother's relationship with her child is an immediate and material one, the father's is of a more remotely potent, "fictive" and "immaterial" nature.[25] Excluded from the mother's "material-corporeal"[26] world by the lack of a visible physical father-child bond, the matriarchal man began to turn his attention to more elevated and lucrative pursuits and the golden age of the patriarchy began to dawn.

> [The] triumph of paternity brings with it the liberation of the spirit from the manifestations of nature, a sublimation of human existence over the laws of material life. While the principle of motherhood is common to all spheres of tellurian life, man, by the preponderant position he accords to the begetting potency, emerges from this relationship and becomes conscious of his higher calling. Spiritual life rises over corporeal existence, and

> the relation with the lower spheres of existence is restricted to the physical aspect. Maternity pertains to the physical side of man, the only thing he shares with the animals: the paternal-spiritual principle belongs to him alone. Here he breaks through the bonds of tellurism and lifts his eyes to the higher regions of the cosmos. Triumphant paternity partakes of the heavenly light, while childbearing motherhood is bound up with the earth that bears all things....[27]

In Bachofen's vision, then, women are clearly essential to patriarchal greatness in that they stimulate in man his initial inclinations towards civilization while relieving him of the earthly responsibilities and cares that would deprive him of the freedom to explore and build upon those inclinations. In such a vision, the belief in the necessity of the emancipation of women translates into the notion that the restitution of women's rights will ensure that they will once again competantly and inspirationally serve as the wives and mothers of men who border on the divine.

B. Ibsen's Documents of Patriarchal "Feminism"

Ibsen can be located within the intellectual framework pertaining to gender that is suggested by the ideological posture and political technique evidenced in The Subjection

of Women and Das Mutterrecht. In A Doll's House, Rosmersholm and Hedda Gabler, female characters are foregrounded in apparent sympathy for their conditions as women whose dreams and potentialities cannot be realized within patriarchal society. In actuality, however, Ibsen's sympathy for women emerges from essentially the same source as both Mill's and Bachofen's. Hedda Gabler depicts the fate of a spirited but directionless young woman who, for lack of anything better to do and socialized to fear spinsterhood, marries herself off to a dull and insensitive but respectable scholar. Suffocating in her marriage and panicking at the irrevocability that her possible pregnancy represents, Hedda tries to alleviate the claustrophobic tedium of her circumstances and to regain some sense of control of her own existence by encouraging the writer Eilert Loevborg first to drink and then to suicide. When this misguided and desperate exercise of power backfires, Hedda finds herself in a worse situation than before. Now, in addition to being married to George Tesman and probably pregnant with his child, she is being blackmailed into an illicit sexual relationship with Judge Brack, who knows the secret of her involvement in Loevborg's death. Unwilling to accept her life in its present aspect and unable to envisage any other, Hedda kills herself. She dies a victim of patriarchal society as much in the conditioned thinking it has instilled within her as in the limitations it has imposed on her from without.

Rosmersholm deals with the relationship between the ambitious and radically political Rebekka West and a clergyman of aristocratic heritage, John Rosmer. Alone in the world and without means, Rebekka insinuates herself into the Rosmer household with the intention of influencing Rosmer to act as her political agent. Unfortunately, her political programme provided Rosmer with precisely the noble cause he requires to cleanse himself of the guilt he feels for his family's oppressive rule in the district. Subtly turning the situation around, he exerts his more powerful influence over Rebekka, mentally seducing her so that, by maddening and fatal innuendo, she drives to her death his unwanted wife Beatë, who has been threatening to dirty him with her sexuality. Beatë out of the way, Rebekka is drawn further and further under the sway of the house of Rosmer until eventually she loses all sense of herself as an autonomous individual and sacrifices her life, as Beatë did before her, to please Rosmer in his perverted expiation. Like Hedda, she dies a victim of the patriarchy.

In A Doll's House, Nora Helmer carries her conditioning as wife and mother to its logical extreme and breaks the law to save her husband's life. Thrilled and challenged by the opportunity to prove her love for him, Nora nevertheless expects that Torvald will as gladly offer up his life for her if she herself is threatened with danger. When he fails to do this, Nora realizes that she has overestimated both her

worth within her marriage and her husband's moral measure. Disillusioned and, regarding her children, shaken by the revelation of her naivety and ignorance, her social inconsequentiality and the possible abnormality the isolation of her rebelliousness forces her to consider in herself, Nora leaves her home and family to educate herself about the workings of the world.

In these three plays, Ibsen seems to suggest that the lot of women in nineteenth-century patriarchal society is not what it should be and that this lot needs to be improved. As with John Stuart Mill, however, the improvement of the conditions of female lives is not necessarily an end in itself but is, rather, a means to an end. Torvald Helmer, George Tesman and John Rosmer are the representatives of patriarchal society in A Doll's House, Hedda Gabler and Rosmersholm. None of these men are model citizens. Rosmer's political aspirations are motivated by his need to alleviate his own very personal burden of guilt. Tesman's initial expression of horror at his wife's destruction of Eilert Lœvborg's manuscript gives way to delight at the notion of Hedda having acted out of love for him and in the end, the whole matter is kept a convenient secret so that he can create a career for himself in the reconstruction of the lost text. Torvald Helmer's concern is essentially only for his position among other men. Concepts of morality, duty, honour and religion are therefore of value only in that they are a

means by which Torvald can keep himself beyond the reach of other men -- irreproachable and, thus, invulnerable and untouchable. When his position is threatened, all finer feelings are dispensed with and Torvald is quite ready to stoop to the level of the blackmailing criminal, Krogstad. Against the social backdrop represented by these men, Nora, Hedda and Rebekka do not suffer and die for moral or aesthetic ideals, but, in highly simplified terms, because they are unhappy at home. Moreover, their unhappiness is ultimately and pointedly attributable to the unworthiness and inadequacy of their mates.

The maternal or, more precisely, the non-maternal status of each of these female characters is significant. Rebekka West dies childless, Hedda Gabler may or may not be pregnant when she kills herself, and Nora Helmer has children but ceases to be a mother to them when she leaves her husband's home. In connecting Ibsen to the concealed patriarchal gender projects of The Subjection of Women and Das Mutterrecht, this motherhood of Nora's is most revealing. Throughout the history of A Doll's House, from its first production right up to the present day, Nora's desertion of her children has been considered a flaw in her character. This response, however, does not take in the full measure of her situation. She finds herself unable to meet the requirements that society has set down for wives and in this she is a deviant exception. Regardless of the measure of her disillusionment with her

husband, as the odd woman out, Nora lacks the self-confidence to assert that she is correct to leave Torvald when the whole of society says that what she is doing is wrong. "I must try to satisfy myself which is right, society or I,"[28] she says, but in the meantime, to be on the safe side, she had better leave her children where society says that they should be. Moreover, even if society should find that the children are better off with their mother than with their father, she had still better stay away from them because it was an uneducated and inadequate woman like her that produced Torvald in the first place. In the abandonment of her children, therefore, Nora becomes an extreme incarnation of the self-sacrificing female angel that the patriarchy requires for its perpetuation. With the right training, a woman like her could succeed in raising children free of the faults and baseness of the Torvalds, Tesmans and Rosmers who have made her so unhappy and who threaten to overrun patriarchal society and ultimately to destroy it. As a mother, a mentally and spiritually emancipated Nora would hold in her arms and at her breast the power to save the world.

C. Feminist Appropriation of Patriarchal "Feminism"

Like Ibsen, Bachofen had a partisan motive for foregrounding women and exploring their history. As Adrienne Rich remarks, "[In his] own mind there is no yearning for a

matriarchy of the future, and there is great ambivalence toward the idea of past matriarchy and indeed toward the female presence."[29] Das Mutterrecht intimates a fear on Bachofen's part that patriarchal greatness is on the decline and it is this fear that results in his reactionary desire for a return to the child that made the man so that the man's glorious prime may be lived through all over again. Paradoxically, despite this fundamental patriarchal bias, Bachofen's work, like Ibsen's, has been of importance to the women's movement.

Elizabeth Gould Davis, who has been called "the first contemporary feminist myth-maker,"[30] wholeheartedly supports Bachofen's theory of matriarchy in The First Sex (1971). However, while for Bachofen the matriarchal epoch was a silver age leading up to the golden age of civilization, for Davis, it is matriarchy that represents humanity's highest achievement. She maintains that most of the problems in the world today can be attributed to the fact that for the last fifteen hundred to three thousand years, "mankind has been worshipping the wrong deity and pursuing the wrong ideals."[31] God, in the present patriarchal system, is harsh, authoritarian, vengeful and inhumane and modern society has become progressively more dehumanized as "[patriarchal] peoples place more importance in property rights than in human rights and more emphasis on rigid moral conformity than on concepts of justice and mercy." Conversely, the Great Goddess is humanistic, compassionate,

kind and just and "[matriarchal] societies are characterized by a real democracy in which the happiness and fulfillment of the individual supersede all other objectives of society."[32] In The First Sex, Davis seeks to teach women "that their own sex was once and for a very long time the superior and dominant sex" and "to restore them to their ancient dignity and pride."[33] She takes the power that Bachofen has allocated to women for the revitalization of a patriarchal system gone stale and she uses it to promote a new matriarchal age. A "matriarchal counterrevolution" to the "patriarchal revolution," Davis believes, "is the only hope for survival of the human race."[34]

If, as Adrienne Rich suggests, The First Sex is of greater value as a counter-mythological work of imagination and desire than as a piece of scholarship, then Merlin Stone's When God Was a Woman (1976) argues for and, using similar evidence, documents most persuasively a historical interpretation of Judeo-Christian theologies in terms of a patriarchal conquest and subsequent suppression of woman-centered religious practices that threatened patriarchal control of property. Stone maintains that such a study

> may be used to cut through the many oppressive and falsely founded patriarchal images, stereotypes, customs and laws that were developed as direct reactions to Goddess worship by the leaders of the later male-worshipping religions. For...it was the

> ideological inventions of the advocates of the later male deities, imposed upon that ancient worship with the intention of destroying it and its customs, that are still, through their subsequent absorption into education, law, literature, economics, philosophy, psychology, media and general social attitudes, imposed upon even the most non-religious people of today.[36]

Margaret Atwood's Surfacing (1976) fictionalizes the cutting through of patriarchal images that Stone encourages. In this novel, the theory and symbols of matriarchy as defined by Bachofen are once again appropriated and realigned to serve a feminist project. Atwood's nameless heroine evolves backward from the patriarchal present to animal state and passes through both the matriarchal and hetaeric phases described in Das Mutterrecht. Bachofen notes that the left side, night and the moon are symbols of matriarchy and that their opposites, the right side, day and the sun, are characteristically patriarchal.[37] In Surfacing, when the woman has led her lover down to the beach to make love to him, she says, "I lie down, keeping the moon on my left hand and the absent sun on my right."[38] The absence of the sun as she conceives her child underlines her movement back in time, away from the oppressiveness and sterility of the patriarchal age. Contrastingly, in the earlier scene in which the lover, Joe, tries to make love to the woman and she stops him by warning

him that she will become pregnant, the sun is clearly present and associated with the man: "it was noon, the sun was behind his head; his face was invisible, the sun's rays coming out from a center of darkness, my shadow."[39] After the woman conceives her child, she destroys patriarchally created images of women by exposing the men's film to sunlight and she flees in the canoe to take refuge in a swamp, which is, for Bachofen, identified with the earliest phase of social evolution, promiscuity or hetaerism. From there, the woman regresses even further, to the point where she becomes a wild animal. What, in Surfacing, is a descent into madness, then, is also a return to the beginning of time. On the way, some of the poisons of civilization are washed away and some of its lessons are re-evaluated. When the woman "surfaces" again, she is sane and balanced and possesses a new and necessary sense of her own power and of the responsibility she must assume.

> This above all, to refuse to be a victim. Unless I can do that I can do nothing. I have to recant, to give up the old belief that I am powerless and because of it nothing I can do will ever hurt anyone. A lie which was always more disastrous than the truth would have been. The word games, the winning and losing games are finished; at the moment there are no others but they will have to be invented, withdrawing is no longer possible and the alternative is death.[40]

Finally, radically subversive versions of Bachofen's theory of matriarchy can be traced into such manifestations of feminist politics as the women's peace camps at Greenham Common in England. Bachofen sees Amazonism as an extreme form of matriarchy and writes of the phenomenon:

> Degraded by man's abuse, it is woman who first yearns for a more secure position and a purer life. The sense of degradation and the fury of despair spur her on to armed resistance, exalting her to that warlike grandeur which, though it seems to exceed the bounds of womanhood, is rooted simply in her need for a higher life...[44]

The segregated peace camps at Greenham were set up in response to conditions that were not dissimilar to those that gave rise to Amazonism. Caroline Blackwood writes in On the Perimeter:

> It was the acceptance that they were helpless to change the destructive course of all the governments who ignored the misery and unemployment of their people as they sunk the financial resources of the nation into death-dealing weapons that had made these women angry. It was a helpless anger that had given them the courage to put up a symbolic fight. If nothing was to be gained by their struggle, they certainly knew that nothing could be lost. By their symbolic presence on Greenham Common, they hoped to act as the voice of the millions of people all over the world who recognized that they had no voice.[42]

In protesting against the barbarism of politics in the nuclear age, the women at Greenham Common have been made by the press "to sound almost mythical in their horror. They [have] been described as 'belligerent harpies', 'a bunch of smelly lesbians', and 'the screaming destructive witches of Greenham'."[43] Like Bachofen's Amazons, who seem "to exceed the bounds of womanhood," in manipulating the means that have been allotted to them in order to move beyond the roles, functions and meanings circumscribed by patriarchal texts and contexts, the Greenham women have unfitted themselves for patriarchal images of women and so have become monsters who are other than women and who therefore demand to be seen and heard.

D. A Strategy for the Appropriation of Ibsen's Woman-Centered Plays

The charting of Bachofen's progress through the feminist movement suggests the beginnings of a strategy for the consideration of Ibsen's woman-centered plays. Margaret Homans writes that "women's place in language, from the point of view of an androcentric literary tradition...is with the literal, the silent object of representation, the dead mother, the absent referent...."[44] This is the position of women in Das Mutterrecht. However, when Davis, Stone and Atwood take hold of the matriarchs that Bachofen has written

about and manipulate his ideas to meet the requirements of their own work, they are assuming for themselves a position other than that of "silent object of representation." Instead of being the object that is written about, they are writing and, in writing, they are literalizing matriarchy in such a way that it is no longer simply Bachofen's figure of speech but is also an entity insisting on a reality of its own. Catherine Belsey states that to have the power to give meaning is to exist as a subject. Unlike an object that is only acted upon and passive, a subject may speak, write and act and in so doing may insist, like the women at Greenham Common, on occupying a significant position in society.

In terms of feminist criticism of Ibsen, an approach such as Roslyn Belkin's recognizes the contradiction between the actual content of the dramas and the traditional association of Ibsen and his female characters with the movement for women's emancipation. However, to state that these characters are no more than tools and to complain, for example, that Hedda Gabler is flawed because, in Ibsen's opinion, "Hedda was not to be thought of as an individual in her own right"[46] is to remain stationary rather than to begin the process of reclamation to which Bachofen's work has been subjected. The same is true for Inga-Stina Ewbank. Although she senses a need to qualify her conclusion that "Ibsen came to see the predicament of modern man (in the sense of 'human being') as most acutely realized in the predicament of modern women,"[47] Ewbank does

not really do so. Instead, she occupies herself with an analysis of Ibsen's use of women as metaphors and ends by saying that "to write his plays about human beings,"[48] the dramatist

> needed the emotional quality, the inconsequentiality, the staccato of simple sentences, the sense that experience is constantly outstripping both the vocabulary and structure of language, which he found in the language of women.[49]

In "Archimedes and the Paradodox of Feminist Ciricism," Myra Jehlen observes among male novelists of the nineteenth century, a tendency, similar to that Ewbank identifies in Ibsen, to represent the private or interior part of themselves, as opposed to the public or exterior, as female. She insists, however, that this tendency does not

> suggest thst European novelists were champions of women's rights. Their interest lay rather in the metaphorical potential of the female situation to represent the great Problem [sic] of modern society, the reconciliation of the private and public realms, once the cornerstone had been laid in their alienation.[50]

In the case of a character such as Richardson's Clarissa, the private self retains its integrity and vision, ultimately rejecting social controls even in its helplessness to act against them, for, Jehlen notes, as Belkin and Ewbank do

with reference to Ibsen, novels suppress "women's ability to act in the public domain" even as they thrive on the material of women's interior lives.[51] Jehlen emphasizes that

> in championing her alienated private self, the novel is not taking the side of real women, or even of female characters as female. Recent praise of Clarissa as a feminist document, or vindication of its heroine's behavior against her patriarchal oppressors, have not dealt clearly enough with the fact that her creator was a patriarch. If nonetheless he envisioned his heroine in terms with which feminists may sympathize, it is, I believe, because he viewed her as representing not really woman but the interior self, the female interior self in all men -- in all men, but especially developed perhaps in writers, whose external role in this society is particularly incommensurate with their vision, who create new worlds but earn sparse recognition or often outright scorn in this one.[52]

Jehlen warns against the tendency "to obscure the distinction between representation and reality, to fuse them so that the female self simply is woman, if woman maligned."[53] Woman in this context, as well as in the one defined by Inga-Stina Ewbank, is a metaphor and as such, she is a tool in the technical arsenal of patriarchal literature.

A stage play, however, as Roman Ingarden demonstrates, though closely related to a corresponding purely literary work, is nevertheless a different kind of work in that it "concretizes" much of that which, in a purely literary work, is left for the reader to perceive in his own imagination.[54] Even those "purely psychic" passages of a drama that are not physically acted out but that consist of described emotions or recounted events

> share their function of representation, at least to a certain extent, with the manifold phenomena of expression of the acting "stage player" and, in particular, with the manifestation qualities of words and sentences actually spoken by the player.[55]

A dramatist consequently cannot represent himself or his inner life as female in the same way that a novelist can. The female body that is physically absent when a reader reads a book is actually present when a stage play is produced. For this reason, a woman who serves as a metaphor on paper loses her metaphoricalness when she is transferred to a drama and bodily represented on stage by a living, breathing actress.

It was with the physical facts of Bachofen's evidence that the feminist appropriation of the nineteenth-century concept of matriarchy commenced. The "concreteness" of the stage play provides enough material evidence for the beginnings of a similar appropriation of Ibsen's work. This type of appropriation may be related to the assumption by

women of the position of subject in society. Being a subject implies ceasing to be a tool or passive object and beginning instead to speak and write, to act and give meaning. In a feminist consideration of Ibsen's female characters, it means, for instance, seeking out the literality beneath the patriarchal metaphor and defining its uncovered reality. It means refusing to assume, as Freud does,[56] that Rebekka West is the character in Rosmersholm who invites psychoanalysis and is, implicitly, abnormal in some way, and conducting instead an investigation into the workings of John Rosmer's mind. It means actively situating Rosmersholm, A Doll's House and Hedda Gabler within the parameters of an affirmative feminist discourse despite the fundamental patriarchal bias with which they were created.

CHAPTER II

IBSEN'S FEMALE CHARACTERS AS METAPHORICAL WOMEN WRITERS

A. "Feminist Reading" versus "Gynocritics"

Elaine Showalter divides feminist criticism into two different modes. The first, she explains, is a matter of interpretation and can be called "feminist reading" or "feminist critique."[1] Ideological in orientation, this type of criticism "is concerned with the feminist as reader, and it offers feminist readings of texts which consider the images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions and misconceptions about women in criticism, and woman-as-sign in semiotic systems."[2] The second mode of feminist criticism has its focus located in the study of women as writers. Showalter calls this mode "gynocritics"[3] and describes its subjects as "the history, styles, themes, genres, and structures of writing by women; the psychodynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career; [and] the evolution and laws of a female literary tradition."[4]

It is to the first mode of feminist criticism that the essays on Ibsen by Roslyn Belkin and Inga-Stina Ewbank belong. However, while Showalter warns that "to conflate [the two distinct critical modes] (as most commentators do) is to remain permanently bemused by their theoretical potentialities,"[5] in the case of an analysis of Ibsen's female characters, the application of one mode, that is to say, the first, as more suitable than the other is problematic. On the one hand, Hedda, Nora and Rebekka are male-authored creations and fit material for "feminist reading." On the other, these characters may be interpreted as metaphorical

women writers and may therefore be included within the parameters of Showalter's gynocritics, especially as they can be removed from the realm of the purely literary and, in Roman Ingarden's terminology, "concretized" on stage.

Ibsen's denial of any interest in the feminist movement, his insistence that women's rights were incidental to the larger cause of human rights, and his declaration that his dramatic canon should be considered "as a continuous and coherent whole"[6] have caused a number of critics to view his female characters as just so many more marchers in a long, predominently male parade of what Belkin calls "individualist rebels."[7] Ewbank, for example, remarks that "[the] liberation of human potential, and the various forms of oppression which meet us, openly or insidiously, wherever we look, would seem to be...the central theme of all Ibsen's plays...,"[8] while Michael Meyer writes that

> A Doll's House was not about female emancipation any more than Ghosts was about syphillis or An Enemy of the People about bad hygiene. Its theme, like theirs, was the need of every individual to find out the kind of person he or she really is, and strive to become that person.[9]

These two thematic overviews both suggest in Ibsen's central characters a sameness of essential experience that overrides any differences that might arise from the matter of a given central character's sex.

Contrastingly, Ibsen himself perceived between the sexes a fundamental divide that could not help but affect the statuses of the male and female characters in his plays. In his preliminary notes for Hedda Gabler, he wrote that "[men] and women don't belong to the same century"[10] and in preparation for A Doll's House, he observed:

> There are two kinds of moral laws, two kinds of conscience, one for men and one, quite different, for women. They don't understand each other; but in practical life, woman is judged by masculine law, as though she weren't a woman but a man....A woman cannot be herself in modern society. It is an exclusively male society, with laws made by men and with prosecutors and judges who assess female conduct from a male standpoint.[11]

The actress Elizabeth Robins recalls that once, when questioned by publishers who wanted to know what his father's next play was to be about, Ibsen's son Sigurd stated "that he was as much in the dark as anybody [and that] he didn't even know whether it was a man's play or a woman's play."[12] For Ibsen, the fundamental gender gulf evinced by his son's notion of "man's play" and "woman's play" went far beyond the biology of the main character to subsume the entire content and ideology of a given play.

The basic inequatability of the sexes in an analysis of Ibsen's work is perhaps most clearly expressed in the disparity

in the breadth of experience shared by the dramatist and his male and female characters. Autobiographical elements have been observed in many of these characters. Among the females, however, the resemblances to Ibsen are confined virtually entirely to the level of personal experience. Therefore, although in his biography of Ibsen he entitles the chapter on Hedda Gabler "Portrait of the Dramatist as a Young Woman," Michael Meyer can only point out such correspondences between Hedda's emotional composition and Ibsen's as the character's being "repelled by the reality of sex as (can we doubt) Ibsen was."[13] While similarly personal and specific resemblances may be discerned among Ibsen's male characters, the primary autobiographical aspect of these men resides in their status as artists or artist-figures and in the nature of their relationships to their chosen callings. As Roslyn Belkin remarks,

> Ibsen's men...are portrayed as world-shakers, visionary idealists, whose aim is nothing less than total religious or social reform or, in the case of artists like Solness in The Master Builder and Rubek in When We Dead Awaken, transcendence of the limits of human creativity.[14]

Hedda Gabler, Nora Helmer and Rebekka West may be said to be artist-figures as well in that they also, though mostly unconsciously, are striving for transcendence and reform. However, whereas, like Ibsen, the men of his self-portraits

all have professions of some sort and very strong senses of identity and purpose, the central female characters have no professions and not one of them can say, like John Gabriel Borkman, "...I had to do that because I was myself -- because I was John Gabriel Borkman -- and no one else."[15] As Myra Jehlen phrases this basic gender difference in a discussion of nineteenth-century novelists, a male author might write "without the support of publishers, critics, and audiences" because "despite their active discouragement," he had himself, "he took himself seriously,...he assumed himself." A woman who was his contemporary and who also lacked encouragement and support could not similarly begin by assuming herself because, as a woman, she had not yet created herself.[16]

Professionless and anonymous in terms of recognition garnered for accomplishments, Ibsen's female artist-figures bear considerably more resemblance to the subject of Virginia Woolf's portrait of the dramatist as a young woman than they do, in their occasional biographical correspondences, to the bulk of Ibsen's other self-portraits or to the playwright himself. In A Room of One's Own, Woolf tells the story of Shakespeare's sister, who, while her brother was out living it up and making his way in the theatre, was kept at home simply because she was female:

> She was as adventurous, as imaginative, as agog to see the world as he was. But she was not sent to school. She had no chance of learning grammar

and logic, let alone of reading Horace and Virgil. She picked up a book now and then, one of her brother's perhaps, and read a few pages. But then her parents came in and told her to mend her stockings and mind the stew and not moon about with books and papers. They would have spoken sharply but kindly, for they were substantial people who knew the conditions of life for a woman and loved their daughter -- indeed, more likely than not, she was the apple of her father's eye. Perhaps she scribbled some pages up in the apple loft on the sly, but was careful to hide them or set fire to them. Soon, however, before she was out of her teens, she was to be betrothed to the son of a neighboring wool stapler. She cried out that marriage was hateful to her, and for that she was severely beaten by her father. Then he ceased to scold her. He begged her instead not to hurt him, not to shame him in this matter of her marriage. he would give her a chain of beads or a fine petticoat, he said; and there were tears in his eyes. How could she disobey him? How could she break his heart? The force of her gift alone drove her to it. She made up a small parcel of her belongings, let herself down by a rope one summer's night and took the road to London. She was not seventeen. The

> birds that sang in the hedge were not more musical than she was. She had the quickest fancy, a gift like her brother's, for the tune of words. Like him she had a taste for the theatre. She stood at the stage door; she wanted to act, she said. Men laughed in her face. The manager -- a fat, loose-lipped man -- guffawed. He bellowed something about poodles dancing and women acting -- no woman, he said, could possibly be an actress. He hinted -- you can imagine what. She could get no training in her craft. Could she even seek her dinner in a tavern or roam the streets at midnight? Yet her genius was for fiction and lusted to feed abundantly upon the lives of men and women and the study of their ways. At last -- for she was very young, oddly like Shakespeare the poet in her face, with the same grey eyes and rounded brows -- at last, Nick Greene the actor-manager took pity on her; she found herself with child by that gentleman and so -- who shall measure the heat and violence of the poet's heart when caught and tangled in a woman's body? -- killed herself one winter's night and lies buried at some crossroads where the omnibuses now stop outside the Elephant and Castle.[17]

Echoes of Ibsen's female characters reverberate through Virginia Woolf's parable, suggesting that, contrary to what Meyer's

chapter title implies, Ibsen could put himself into Brand and Brand could take the person of a priest, a sculptor, a politician or Galileo[18] but neither Ibsen nor Brand could take the person of a young woman because both men's experiences would have been entirely different had they been born in female bodies. The female artist-figure in Ibsen strives to break through an entirely different, much more fundamental set of limitations and struggles to achieve an earthlier, more immediate but no less monumental ideal. Rebekka West, Hedda Gabler and Nora Helmer are not artists and do not, as far as Ibsen indicates, possess the strangled creative genius of Judith Shakespeare. They do, however, possess her desire to transcend the confines of patriarchy and they work as metaphors for the experience of the artist as exemplified by Woolf's paradigm in a way that they do not when they are used in connection with the supposed human condition that finds its paradigm in the experience of the male artist. In this respect, even if, unlike the Brontës, Jane Austen and George Eliot, Ibsen's female characters are not writers in any literal snese, as metaphorical women writers, they possess a literality on stage that allows them to move beyond the bounds of "feminist reading" and into the field of study that Elaine Showalter terms "gynocritics."

B. The Madwoman in the Attic:

A Narrative Framework of Gynocritical Theory

The Madwoman in the Attic is a gynocritical landmark that provides a narrative framework of theory within which readings of Ibsen's "women's plays" may be contained. In elaborating the "feminist poetics" that constitute the basis of this book, Gilbert and Gubar explain that until the nineteenth century, writers were almost exclusively male and the act of writing was, essentially and metaphorically, an act of literary paternity. For the male writer,

> a literary text is not only speech quite literally embodied, but also power mysteriously made manifest, made flesh. In patriarchal Western culture, therefore, the text's author is a father, a progenitor, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis. More, his pen's power, like his penis's power, is not just the ability to generate life but the power to create a posterity to which he lays claim....[19]

A writer "owns[,]...controls...and encloses...on the printed page"[20] both his male and his female literary creations. He tends, however, "to assume patriarchal rights of ownership"[21] over his female characters that he does not exercise over the males for the reason that "[further] implicit in the metaphor of literary paternity is the idea that each man has the ability,

even perhaps the obligation to talk back to other men by generating alternative fictions of his own."[22] Women enjoy the same privilege neither in life nor in literature. Rather,

> [lacking] the pen/penis which would enable them to similarly refute one fiction by another, women in patriarchal societies have historically been reduced to mere properties, to characters and images generated solely by male expectations and designs.[23]

The characters and images to which patriarchal society has insisted both real and fictional women conform may ultimately be grouped under the two all-encompassing headings of "angel" and "monster." Spiritually inclined, self-sacrificing, weak and beautiful, the angel-woman takes forms that range from saint to art object[24] but the unifying feature under her various guises "is the surrender of her self -- of her personal comfort, her personal desires, or both...."[25] The monster-woman, conversely, is freakishly materialistic, powerful and self-centered. She constitutes a hideous deformity of angelic womanhood and is generally identifiable by an "intransigent female autonomy"[26] that is frightening in its extremity. Although these two patriarchally circumscribed polar images of femininity allow for no middle ground, they are closely related, frequently existing side by side and at times even inhabiting the same body.[27]

As Gilbert and Gubar see it in The Madwoman in the Attic, the common experience of "social and literary confinement" to these images together with a shared "impulse to struggle free" from them resulted in a "striking coherence" in the work that nineteenth-century women writers produced.[28] The challenge of attempting to write a literature that maintained that they could not write and that required compliance with its reductive female images necessitated that women writers undertake within their writings a series of "strategic redefinitions of self, art, and society."[29] As a consequence, their literature is thematically related and its central though submerged common plot is essentially "a story of the woman writer's quest for her own story[,]...the story, in other words, of the woman's quest for self-definition."[30]

Whereas male writers experienced an "anxiety of influence" in having to write in the wake of those who had written before them, nineteenth-century women writers suffered from an "anxiety of authorship"[31] that was the result in part of an isolating absence of women and an overwhelming presence of men in literature and in part of "complex and often only barely conscious fears of that authority which seems to the female artist to be by definition inappropriate to her sex."[32] Creative energy had traditionally been thought to be a male attribute, literature and the arts a male domain. As passive objects rather than active subjects, women in this scheme were not expected to write or paint but to be written

about and painted and whatever existed of a female creative impulse was supposed to satisfy itself in motherhood. As Margaret Homans explains,

> In the nineteenth century, when women's lives were increasingly defined in relation to a standard of motherhood, regardless of whether or not they were of childbearing age, women who wrote did so within a framework of dominant cultural myths in which writing contradicts mothering."[33]

In such a cultural and moral climate, even a woman who only desired to write blasphemed and defied the patriarchy.[34] If she acted on that desire, she became dangerous. A woman seemed somehow masculine as she worked at something other than motherhood and as a masculine woman, she constituted a threat to the patriarchal sociopolitical order. For this reason, as August Strindberg vividly demonstrates, female writers were consciously or unconsciously classified as monsters and commonly dismissed and attacked:

> An infertile or childless woman is much to be pitied, but she is none the less a freak of nature, and therefore unable to see the relationship between man and woman in a true light, and her views on the subject should not be taken seriously. That is why we must not attach much importance to what is said about marriage by the four authoresses now writing in Sweden, for all four have childless

> marriages....A childless woman is not a woman. The ideal woman of today is consequently a horrible hermaphrodite, with a pretty close affinity to Greek practices.[35]

Pronouncements such as Strindberg's did not fail to have an impact on women writers. The sensation of something unfitting and irreconcilable in a connection between writing, which directed female creative energy into the self and away from mothering, and being a decent woman, which from a patriarchal standpoint was tantamount to being either a mother or a mother's metaphorical equivalent, contributed both to a tendency among nineteenth-century women writers to define writing as motherhood[36] and to their penchant for the male pseudonym.[37] More importantly, though, it influenced their orientation as they entered a literature whose conventions restricted women to two patriachal images in that it caused them to feel a fundamental affinity for the monster-woman, outcast as she was in her "intransigent female autonomy."

Because of this affinity, in the course of the subtle underminings and "strategic redefinitions" of patriarchal realities that the moving forward of the central plot of the woman writer's "quest for self-definition" requires, the monster-woman most especially is invested with new significance. As Gilbert and Gubar observe,

> even when [the women writers] do not overtly criticize patriarchal institutions or conventions (and most...do not overtly do so), [they] almost obsessively create characters who enact their own covert authorial anger....[Over] and over again they project what seems to be the energy of their own despair into passionate, even melodramatic characters who act out the subversive impulses every woman inevitably feels when she contemplates the "deep-rooted" evils of patriarchy.[38]

Along with other recurrent images and themes such as confinement and escape, this redefined monster-woman is present throughout the nineteenth-century women's literature discussed in The Madwoman in the Attic. She "is not merely, as she might be in male literature, an antagonist or foil to the heroine. Rather, she is usually in some sense the author's double, an image of her own anxiety and rage."[39] Analyzing Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre, therefore, Gilbert and Gubar argue that Rochester's insane wife Bertha, the paradigmatic monster who gives The Madwoman in the Attic its title, is a "dark double"[40] who does those subversive deeds that Jane secretly and unconsciously desires to do. She acts on Jane's unarticulated fears of and objections to marriage, destroying the wedding veil, for example,[41] and all her "appearances -- or, more accurately, her manifestations [are] associated with an experience (or repression) of anger on Jane's part."[42]

Because so much has been made of the connections between Charlotte Brontë and the fictional Jane Eyre, in Gilbert and Gubar's reading of the novel, Bertha, as an aspect of Jane, is also a representation of her creator and, as such, she is the means through which not only Jane but Brontë herself may express anger regarding her subordinate status in patriarchal society. At the same time, however, her madness provides a safety of distance that enables both Jane and Brontë to continue to function within demeaning and adverse social environments while nevertheless maintaining their senses of integrity. For the nineteenth-century woman writer, then, if Brontë may be considered representative, the monster-woman, with whom she had so frequently been associated, "is simply a woman who seeks the power of self-articulation"[43] that has historically been denied all women. She is a means through which the patriarchal literary system can be subverted in that she allows women writers "to come to terms with their own uniquely female feelings of fragmentation [and] their own keen sense of the discrepancies between what they are and what they are supposed to be."[44]

Ibsen's women-writer-figures possess the curious distinction of existing both as real women and as literary constructs and therefore may be said to stand as crystallizations of the experiences of the actual nineteenth-century women writers who were confronted both in literature and in their own daily lives with the confining roles and images that patriarchal society assigned to women. Although the work of Ibsen's

characters is as metaphorical as their status as writers and lacks the objective tangibility of the material that Gilbert and Gubar are concerned with analyzing, it literalizes that "quest" for the woman writer's "own story" and for "self-definition" that The Madwoman in the Attic posits as central to nineteenth-century women's literature. As metaphorical women writers, Ibsen's female characters are engaged in the project of attempting to author their own lives within a patriarchal context. In the process, they too, like their real-life counterparts, find themselves without precedent and without encouragement but with a lurking intuition that their desire for authority over their own lives is abnormal, unfeminine, or both. Consequently, compelled to seem to abide by patriarchal standards of womanhood while actually necessarily subverting and redefining them, Ibsen's female characters feel the nineteenth-century woman writer's unconscious sympathy for the monster-woman and frequently adopt some form of her guise in those moments when, instead of being dutiful, self-effacing, self-sacrifing angels, they are selfishly concentrating their energy and attention on themselves and on their personal struggles for autonomy and "self-articulation." Because their lives are their literature, however, these metaphorical women writers lack the necessary saving distance from the monster that is provided by the physical texts of the work of actual women writers. As literal characters in the patriarchal societies of patriarchal texts,

the conclusions to their stories are as foregone as that of the madwoman in the attic.

C. Hedda Gabler

The key scene in a gynocritical reading of Hedda Gabler is undoubtedly the one in which Hedda burns Eilert Loevborg's manuscript. There, in language reminiscent of the metaphor of literary paternity, Hedda feeds page after page to the fire, whispering, "I'm burning your child, Thea! You with your beautiful, wavy hair!...The child Eilert Loevborg gave you."[45] Thea, of course, is a paragon of patriarchal virtue who has run the range of possibilities for the angel-woman, having first willingly married a man who she knew only wanted her to care for his children and who found her cheaper to keep as a wife than as a governess and having then left him to serve instead as babysitter, secretary and muse to the dissolute writer Loevborg. In burning the manuscript that Thea helped Loevborg to author, the metaphorical woman writer Hedda is monstrously destroying a text that perpetuates the confinement of women to certain patriarchally imposed roles in literature and in life. The book-burning may therefore be regarded as a desperate, mostly unwitting attempt at what Gilbert and Gubar call a "[redefinition] of self, art and society." It is an attempt that takes on an added resonance when it is recalled that even as Hedda burns one patriarchal

text, she is still no more than a character bound within another.

Hedda is under tremendous pressure to conform to one or the other of the two standard patriarchal images of women. Initially, with her pistols and her horseback riding, she is seen as something of a monster. In a system in which patriarchs compete among each for positions of power, however, the man who marries this monster and transforms her into an angel greatly enhances his manhood and his social prestige. For this reason, Hedda is quite a catch for George Tesman and he says rather smugly on the morning of his return from his honeymoon, "Yes, I suppose there are quite a few people in this town who wouldn't mind being in my shoes. What?"[46] Unfortunately for him, having managed to snare her, Hedda's husband is not "man" enough to subdue the monster in her and bring out the angel, though this is not to say that he does not try. His incredible apparent ignorance in the face of all the probing hints concerning his wife's pregnancy must certainly constitute an effort on his part to extinguish through denial what he consciously or unconsciously perceives as the dangerous sexuality that, regardless of its repressed state, is fundamental to Hedda's -- and to the monster-woman's -- personality and is thus at odds with the self-denying angel that he wants for his wife. His absurdly naive response to Hedda's destruction of Eilert Loevborg's manuscript further demonstrates his remarkable determination to suppress

his wife's monstrousness by containing it within the realm of angelic activity. Having recovered from his initial shock, Tesman is more than willing to ignore the furiously rebellious defiance of Hedda's act, quickly accepting her explanation at face value and hurrying away saying, "Of course, no one must be allowed to know about the manuscript. But that you're burning with love for me, Hedda, I must certainly let Auntie Juju know that. I say, I wonder if young wives often feel like that towards their husbands? What?"[47]

This compartmentalizing pressure is exerted on Hedda not only by Tesman but by Eilert Loevborg and Judge Brack as well. Ever needy of a woman to inspire, guide and care for him, Loevborg insists on seeing only angelic motives for Hedda's prurient interest in his private life:

> I regarded you as a kind of confessor. Told you things about myself which no one else knew about -- then. Those days and nights of drinking and -- oh, Hedda, what power did you have to make me confess such things?...all those -- oblique questions you asked me --...that you could sit there and ask me such questions! so unashamedly --...That you could question me about -- about that kind of thing!... tell me, Hedda -- what you felt for me -- wasn't that -- love? When you asked me those questions and made me confess my sins to you, wasn't it because you wanted to wash me clean?[48]

Because the young, inexperienced and well-brought-up Hedda rejected the sexual advances that her questioning precipitated, Loevborg can only assume that she, like Thea Elvsted, is a selfless angel with no desire other than to serve him. Judge Brack, on the other hand, recognizes in Hedda unspeakable desires but for him such desires can only exist in a whorish monster and a whorish monster is dangerous unless one is master of her. The power that he would have over Hedda, in the ménage à trois that he attempts to blackmail her into, would allow Judge Brack to enjoy the monster-woman without being threatened by her.

Fittingly, it is her father's pistol that Hedda uses for her suicide. As the presence of his portrait on stage suggests, the General's influence over his daughter has been enormous and, indeed, it may be said that Hedda is essentially first created and finally destroyed by his conflicting legacy of a sense of the importance of power and authority together with a patriarchal value system that states that power and authority are inappropriate in women. Although she claims to want for once in her life "to have the power to shape a man's destiny,"[49] it is ultimately her own destiny that Hedda wishes to control. She unconsciously comes to associate this power of self-determination with her father's pistols, which she always handles with a defiance that belies her sense of the impropriety of such significant weapons in a woman's hands but which in the end do indeed give her a perverse

mastery of her own destiny.

Role models such as Tesman's old Aunt Julie, Bertha the maid and Thea ensure that Hedda's desire for authority over her own life story is no more than an undefined, repressed and floundering impulse. In endeavoring to fulfill her vague ambition, therefore, Hedda acts in ignorance, without calculation and lacking all articulateness of purpose and expression. A particular quality of the language of Ibsen's women, Inga-Stina Ewbank notes, is "the sense that experience is constantly outstripping both the vocabulary and the structure of language...."[50] This is the case with Hedda, who, responding to Judge Brack's questions regarding her cruelty to Auntie Julie in the matter of the bonnet, can only inadequately reply, "sometimes a mood like that hits me. And I can't stop myself....Oh, I don't know how to explain it."[51] For Hedda, her "quest for self-definition" is unspeakable. She no more knows who she is or what she wants than she knows why she behaves the way she does. She only knows with any certainty who she does <u>not</u> want to be and what she does <u>not</u> want to do.

This negativity is a key point in the play in that it accounts for the often apparently wanton destructiveness for which Hedda Gabler has achieved notoriety. Occasionally, at her lowest moments and in blackly humorous fashion, Hedda plays at being the angel that her husband is trying so hard to cause her to become. When she learns of his impending

financial difficulty, for example, she says in sweet resignation, "Ah, well, I still have one thing left to amuse myself with....My pistols, George darling....General Gabler's pistols,"[52] and when she burns Eilert Loevborg's manuscript, she prettily claims to have been moved by love for her husband and concern for his career. This latter act of destruction, however, is clearly monstrous in character and indeed it is usually as the monster-woman that Hedda chooses to appear. In the same way that Charlotte Brontë selects a madwoman as the means through which she can express her feelings about patriarchal society and through which her heroine Jane can achieve the sort of relationship with Rochester that she desires, Hedda Gabler assumes the role of monster so that she can express her anger at and resistance to the circumstances in which she finds herself trapped. Seeing no other way to escape the intolerable and seemingly inevitable fate that patriarchal society has designed for her, Hedda fires guns in Judge Brack's direction, cruelly insults Aunt Julie in the matter of the bonnet, and threatens to burn off Thea Elvsted's beautiful blonde hair. Without knowing exactly why, Hedda wants to maintain her separateness from these people and all that they represent. Her petty acts of hostility and destruction are all but one of the weapons of her private and desperate rebellion.

In a sublimation of the desire to control her own destiny, Hedda gives Eilert Loevborg a pistol to shoot himself with

and begs him to "[do] it beautifully...."[53] Loevborg drunkenly bungles her misguided effort at art by shooting himself in the genitals but Hedda herself manages a "beautiful" suicide with a shot in the head. This action signifies her ultimate and utter, blackly triumphant rejection of the patriarchally determined roles being pressed so insistently on her from all sides. However, with characteristic ignorant and destructive negativity, she rejects these roles without ever writing herself a viable alternative and the moment at which she claims true authority over her own life story is therefore concurrent with the moment at which she ceases to exist.

D. Rebekka West

Rosmersholm is not so obviously a "woman's play" as Hedda Gabler and Rebekka West is not so undeniably central a character. Nevertheless, it is Rebekka's presence at Rosmersholm that triggers the chain of events that lead up to the action of the play and this presence was initially due to Rebekka's desire "to take part in the new age that was dawning [and to take] part in all the new thoughts."[54] What precisely is meant by this "new age," however, and what exactly these "new thoughts" are is never made very clear. Michael Meyer calls Rosmersholm the last of Ibsen's political plays and Rosmer "the last of his characters to be caught up

in and undermined by local politics"[55] but the politics that Meyer refers to are so vague and so far removed from the actual subject matter of the drama that to be asked to consider them as central is somewhat jarring. Kroll, for example, on the side of the establishment, refers indeterminately to the Radicals who "have got so shockingly powerful"[55] and talks of fighting "this pernicious, subversive, disruptive spirit of our time...with all the weapons to hand,"[56] while John Rosmer, as the idealistic proponent of the new, dreams of creating a true spirit of democracy by going "from home to home, like a guest who [brings] freedom. To win over minds and desires. To make men noble all around [him] -- in wider and wider circles. Noblemen."[57] The only concrete issue that the play touches upon is women's emancipation, especially in its connection to the possibility of "pure comradeship between a man and a woman"[58] as opposed to free love. Therefore, although Michael Meyer might disagree, the politics of Rosmersholm have to do with the "woman question" and, as Rebekka West is the woman in question, the play may be said to be about her struggle for political status and a voice of authority.

As a metaphorical woman writer, Rebekka wants to take confident control of her own story and sets out subversively to redesign according to her own specifications the classifications of women as angel and monster that patriarchal society has established. Filled with new ideas from the

books in the library that her father has bequeathed to her and eager to be a part of a new age that promises the emancipation of women, Rebekka nevertheless realizes that this new age has not yet arrived. Although she is educated, she is still a woman without money, family or connections. She decides, therefore, to commit the monstrous crime of coldbloodedly selecting a male agent to use as the means for the fulfillment of her own ambitions and dreams. Naively believing that the master of Rosmersholm will be easily influenced, she sets out to insinuate herself into his household and to convert him to her way of thinking. She covers her tracks by superimposing an angel on top of her monster, appearing thereby to devote herself selflessly to the care of those she thinks she is manipulating, namely Beatë and John Rosmer. In reality, however, she has underestimated her prey. John Rosmer wants -- and gets -- the same thing as Rebekka's father, the "crippled and exacting"[59] Dr. West, who, for all his reading of radical books on the emancipation of women, nevertheless clearly expected his own daughter to serve as his angel-woman, willing "to let the whole of her youth slip away...sacrificing herself to other people."[60] Unfortunately for her, Rebekka does not learn from her first experience. Her ignorance proves fatal.

Rosmersholm is a bastion of the patriarchy, adorned as it is with "portraits, older or more recent, of clergy, officers, and government officials in uniform."[61] As Kroll

says, "Since time out of mind Rosmersholm has been like a stronghold of order and discipline -- of consideration and respect for all that is honoured and acknowledged by the best of our community. The whole neighbourhood has taken its stamp from Rosmersholm."[62] The powerful influence that Kroll describes is exemplified in the fact that because the members of the Rosmer family never laugh, the population of the entire district neglects to laugh. Unwisely, however, as her interchanges with Mrs. Helseth indicate, Rebekka is skeptical of the ancient traditions of Rosmersholm and this is her misfortune because these traditions are strong and subtle and can overpower the unsuspecting and the undefended like any contagious disease:

> Mrs. Helseth: Have you, Miss, ever heard or seen the Rector laugh -- one single time?
>
> Rebekka: No -- when I come to think of it, I almost believe you're right. But it seems to me people don't on the whole laugh much in this district.
>
> Mrs. Helseth: They don't. It began at Rosmersholm, they say. And so, I suppose, it's just spread, like any other kind of infection.[63]

In the end, when it is too late, Rebekka realizes that "the Rosmer view of life...has infected"[64] her will and kept her from her dreams and from the life she originally sought to create for herself.

Part of this "view of life" is the insistent imaging of woman as angel or monster that manifests itself most clearly in the male denial, perversion and dread of female sexuality that runs throughout Rosmersholm. John Rosmer quite clearly recalls Beatë as monstrous when he says so explicitly to Kroll, "I've told you about that uncontrollable, fierce passion of hers -- that she insisted I should meet. Oh, the horror she filled me with."[65] As for Rebekka, in time, he makes of her an inverted or perverted slave to love, a platonic angel and perfect comrade, whose devotion he tests by allowing her the intimacy of wearing her housecoat when she visits him in the study that adjoins his bedroom. Shortly after, however, this same attire is used as a weapon against Rebekka when Kroll, in his anger at Rosmer, casts aspersions on her character, implying that only a woman of questionable virtue would so deport herself in front of a man who was not her lawfully wedded husband. Significantly, when it suited his purposes in the previous act, Kroll spoke of Rebekka as the epitome of the virtuous, self-sacrificing angel, devoting her life to the happiness, comfort and well-being of others. Now, though, Kroll needs to see something monstrously indecent in Rebekka so that he can write at the end of his newspaper's denunciation of John Rosmer, "'excuse of ineperienced judgement' -- 'perverse influence -- perhaps extended also to matters that we will not for the moment make the subject of public comment or animadversion,'"[66] thereby leaving Rosmer enough room to

recant his expression of solidarity with the Radicals on the grounds that he was being led astray by Rebekka.

As latest master in the patriarchal line of succession of as oppressive a dynasty as the house of Rosmer, John Rosmer bears an enormous burden of guilt. As he says to Kroll, "I think it's an imperative duty for me to bring a little light and joy here, where the race of Rosmer has created gloom and oppressiveness all this long, long time."[67] Rosmer's political ideals are ultimately vague and superficial posturings, however, while his real efforts to alleviate his crushing sense of guilt are channelled not into issues of popular concern but into a campaign to return to a state of personal innocence. He tells Rebekka,

> Already while Beatë was alive, it was you I gave all my thoughts to. It was you that I longed for. It was you that I felt that quiet, glad, [sic] happiness without passion. When we think it over clearly, Rebekka -- well, our life together began like the sweet, hidden love of two children. Without desire and without dreams.[68]

Beatë, of course, was no pure and innocent little girl but a woman of great sexual energy who was tormented by her inability to bear children. Although this childlessness may have been attributable to some physical disability on Beatë's part, it was more likely caused by a lack of desire to produce heirs on her husband's part. Noting Rosmer's insistence that Beatë's "constant, hideous agony of mind" was "over something that

wasn't in any way her fault,"[69] and considering the guilt he feels about his heritage and his consequent desire to relieve that guilt by returning to a state of purity and innocence, it is feasible to infer that Rosmer avoided making love to his wife in order to avoid fathering children.

As Kroll reminds Rebekka, however, "The descendent of the men who are looking down on us here -- he won't succeed in breaking away from his heritage, that has come down inviolate from generation to generation."[70] Indeed, Rosmer, so thoroughly focused on himself and his own feelings and needs, perpetuates, in his manipulation of Rebekka, the very wrong he professes to be seeking to right. His masterful control of her is crystallized in the expression of power that he makes every time he ever-so-innocently catches himself inadvertantly and absentmindedly addressing or referring to Rebekka by her first name in Kroll's presence. Each of these seeming slips potentially exposes her to an attack by Kroll. Thus, they are a very subtle means by which Rosmer can ensure that Rebekka, dependent on him for total sustenance, will do exactly what he wants.

When the "emancipated" Rebekka comes to Rosmersholm intending to influence Rosmer to act on her behalf in the initiation of a new political age, she presents him, in her person and in her politics, with precisely the tool he requires for the execution of his own very personal project. Before long, she falls under a spell of unspoken promises of things

to come. Her will is seduced and, losing control of her own revisionist version of the monster-woman, she becomes instead the classic male one, devious, dangerously sexual as she rages with "a wild, uncontrollable passion,"[71] self-seeking to the point of murder. She gets rid of Rosmer's undesirable wife for him, turning Beatë into a supremely self-sacrificing angel in the process and thereby ensuring for Rosmer that he will not have to consummate his relationship with Rebekka, out of deference to his dead wife.

Once Beatë is out of the way, Rosmer has the opportunity to live at last in that blissful state of innocence that he has craved for so long. He seizes this opportunity so fully and determinedly that it is almost as if he cannot believe his good fortune and so must test the extent of his innocence by gauging the reaction of his wife's brother Kroll to his wallowing and self-satisfied speech in which the dead woman is referred to as if it were she who personified the intruding third corner of the triangle and not Rebekka:

> it's really not painful at all for me to think about Beatë. We talk about her every day. We feel as if she were still a part of the house... It's perfectly natural. We were both so deeply attached to her. And Rebek -- Miss West and I both know in our hearts that we did everything in our power for that poor, unfortunate woman. We've nothing to reproach ourselves with. And

> so I find there's something sweet and peaceful in thinking of Beatë now.[72]

Innocence as studied and controlled as this does not allow for cohabiting with monster-women. After Beatë's death, therefore, as if by magic or hypnotism or Rosmersholm's ghostly white horses, everything that is monstrous in Rebekka is sucked out of her and she finds herself transformed into the angel that John Rosmer requires for his consort:

> when I came to live with you here, in stillness, in solitude, when you told me all your thoughts without reserve, every mood you felt however tender and exquisite, then the great change happened. Bit by bit, you see. Almost imperceptibly; but yet overpowering in the end. Right to the depths of my soul....All the rest, the ugly passion, this delirium of the senses, went from me, far, far away. All these desires that had been roused sank quietly down over me -- like the stillness of the mountain-cliffs at home under the midnight sun....then love began in me. The great, selfless love that is content sharing life in the way we've done.[73]

By the end of the play, Rebekka is so far removed from the confident authority over her own life that she originally possessed when she set out to conquer Rosmersholm that when she is presented with the opportunity to have what she then wanted, she cannot take advantage of it. All "monstrous"

opportunism is gone from her. "...Rosmersholm has broken my nerve," she says. "I've had my will sapped here and crushed, my own, fearless will. The time is past for me when I dared tackle whatever turned up. I've lost the power to act, John."[74] Helplessly, she senses the perversion underlying John Rosmer's pure and noble posture but her regretful self-awareness does not contain the seeds of re-self-possession or re-self-determination. The metaphorical woman writer, who, in a feminized version of the role of monster, set out to shape the world to meet the requirements of the story she wanted to write for herself, ends up agreeing to "expiate"[75] her patriarchal sin of presumption by becoming, like Beatë, an angel-character in John Rosmer's sick ritual of purification.

E. Nora Helmer

Nora Helmer is the character whose life most neatly parallels the structure of Gilbert and Gubar's "feminist poetics"; the facts of her parentage, the nature of her crime, her dilemma within the play and her departing resolutions all amount almost to a practical manifestation of the literary theory outlined in The Madwoman in the Attic. Reflecting the patriarchal domination of the established literary order and the notion of writing as an act of paternity, Nora's mother is noticeably absent from A Doll's House. Not only has she

had no part in her daughter's upbringing, but she has also seemingly had no part in her birth. As the nurse Anne-Marie says, "Poor little Miss Nora, you never had any mother but me."[76] Nora's only female role model, therefore, has been a paid servant who cares for children that have been entrusted to her. Her father, on the other hand, if Torvald is to be believed, has been instrumental in the formation of his daughter's character and, although he does not bodily appear in A Doll's House, he plays a key part in the development of the plot in that the action of the play arises from Nora's forgery of his signature.

This forgery, like Hedda Gabler's book-burning, assumes a special significance in a reading of the play that is based on the perception of Nora as a metaphorical woman writer. In forging her father's name, Nora is claiming the identity and the authority to enter a world in which identity and authority reside in men. Her illicit experience in this forbidden territory includes a stint doing copy work and of this she says, "I shut myself away and wrote every evening, late into the night. Oh, I often got so tired, so tired. But it was great fun, though, sitting there working and earning money. It was almost like being a man."[77] This impersonation of a patriarch brings not only pleasure and pride but power in that at the same time that it enables Nora to save her husband, it gives her a weapon to use against him should his interest in her ever begin to flag. Most importantly, it

provides her with the experience that enables her eventually to respond to Torvald's assertion that she is "[first] and foremost...a wife and mother"[78] by saying,

> I don't believe that any longer. I believe that I am first and foremost a human being, like you -- or anyway, that I must try to become one. I know most people think as you do, Torvald, and I know there's something of the sort to be found in books. But I'm no longer prepared to accept what people say and what's written in books. I must think things out for myself and try to find my own answer.[79]

In picking up a pen to sign her father's name, then, Nora embarks on the woman writer's "quest for self-definition" that is submerged in the story of her life-saving forgery, subsequent blackmail, and ultimate abandonment of husband, home and children.

The manner in which Torvald addresses his wife vividly expresses the patriarchal determination to confine perceptions of women to one or the other of two reductive extremes. Calling out to ask if that is his "skylark twittering out there,"[80] Torvald identifies Nora as an angel before he even enters the stage at the beginning of the play and until well into the final act, she is alternately his "skylark," his "squanderbird" or his "little bird." The angel-wife is once again a virgin bride when, inspired by Consul Stenborg's good champagne, Torvald fantasizes to Nora "that we've just

come from the wedding, that I'm taking you to my house for the first time -- that, for the first time, I am alone with you -- quite alone with you, as you stand there young and trembling and beautiful,"[81] and in still another angelic incarnation, Nora becomes an almost heavenly, not-quite-human work of fine art in her performance of the "beautiful little Capri signorina"[82] at the ball upstairs. Afterwards, describing his choreography of the tarentella to Mrs. Linde, Torvald recalls the finale as "a swift round of the ballroom, a curtsy to the company, and, as they say in novels, the beautiful apparition disappeared!"[83] He steadfastly refuses to recognize Nora's state of turmoil, allowing her reality only as the construct or creation that he desires her to be.

The angel-woman abruptly ceases to exist for Torvald when he reads Krogstad's first letter. On the authority of that damning text, the "darling little songbird,"[84] "beloved wife"[85] and <u>objet d'art</u> vanishes and "a hypocrite,a liar -- worse, worse -- a criminal"[86] takes her place. She who moments earlier embodied for Torvald the image of the near-perfect wife becomes instead a hideous, wretched and shameful abomination no longer fit to share his bed or mother his children. A second letter from Krogstad causes this monster to disappear just as suddenly as she appeared and once again, the angel-Nora is back, her "feminine helplessness" making her "doubly attractive"[87] in her husband's eyes. "Try to calm yourself and get your balance again, my frightened little songbird,"[88]

Torvald tells her.

> Don't be afraid. I have broad wings to shield you....You are safe here; I shall watch over you like a hunted dove which I have snatched unharmed from the claws of the falcon. Your wildly beating little heart shall find peace with me.[89]

The monster-woman of course returns once again when Torvald realizes that his wife intends to leave him. Then, she is a freak ungoverned by the legal, religious and moral standards of patriarchal society and he accuses her of having gone out of her mind, saying, "What kind of madness is this?" and "But this is monstrous!"[90]

For all her husband's persistent pigeonholing, Nora initially thinks that she is in control of her own life -- that she is authoring her own biography, so to speak -- and so she performs with confidence a variety of roles ranging from wife to friend, mother to businesswoman, until realizing at the end of the play that her life has not been what she has thought it to be. Indeed, of Ibsen's metaphorical women writers, it is Nora who most self-consciously acts in scenarios that she has scripted for herself. When her husband accuses her of being "theatrical,"[91] therefore, he is not wrong in his accusation. When he calls her "melodramatic,"[92] he is not off the mark. Nora <u>is</u> melodramatic. Unfortunately for her, this embracement of melodrama together with the ingenuous belief that the leading man in her life can and will

play the part that she has written for him eventually both lead to the dissolution of her marriage.

Nora's play is entitled "The Miracle of Miracles" and might be said to be about an angel and a knight who love each other so much that they would die for each other. It reads like this:

> I've waited so patiently, for eight whole years -- well, good heavens, I'm not such a fool as to suppose that miracles happen every day. Then, this dreadful thing happened to me, and then I knew: "Now the miracle will take place!" When Krogstad's letter was lying out there, it never occurred to me for a moment that you would let that man trample all over you. I knew that you would say to him: "Publish the facts to the world!" And then when he had done this --....Then I was certain that you would step forward and take all the blame on yourself, and say, "I am the one who is guilty!"...You're thinking I wouldn't have accepted such a sacrifice from you? No, of course I wouldn't! But what would my word have counted for against yours? That was the miracle I was hoping for, and dreading. And it was to prevent it happening that I wanted to end my life.[93]

When she is writing her play, however, Nora does not realize that being a knight is about being a knight and not about dying for angels at all. Being a knight means conquering

other knights and getting lands and riches and horses and titles in reward. Knights don't die for angels; they die for honor and prizes and their angels are just supposed to help them along by inspiring them to win more tournaments, by taking care of them when they fall of their horses and get injured in jousting matches, and by being more beautiful than the other angels so that the rest of the knights back at the round table will all get jealous. If an angel somehow breaks the rules to help her knight along and the other knights by some chance find out about it, then they can fix it so that the first knight will never be allowed to compete again and then he'll have the angel but not the prizes and that's no good. So Nora's play doesn't turn out quite the way she plans. In fact, it's an utter failure.

Although she is a writer-figure, Nora is not a real writer. She has no power to create characters to fit the images she has in mind and so cannot write Torvald in the way that he and her father and Pastor Hansen have been able to write her. Before she can author other people's stories, she, along with real-life women writers of the nineteenth century, must first get far enough along in her own story to be able to "examine, assimilate, and transcend the extreme images of 'angel' and 'monster' which male authors have generated for her."[94] A Doll's House does not take Nora this far. It leaves her at the point at which she realizes that this is what she must do. For Ibsen's women, this realization is in itself an accomplishment.

Like Virginia Woolf's Judith Shakespeare, both Hedda Gabler and Rebekka West commit suicide. Only Nora, as she walks out the door at the end of A Doll's House, escapes this fate. It may, however, be argued that her survival is no more than an illusion. It is not uncommon for readers, spectators and critics to speculate as to what becomes of Nora after the final curtain has fallen. For example, Hermann J. Weigand writes,

> I would not predict with dramatic certainty what is going to happen. It is barely possible that not even Christina's sober counsels will succeed in dissuading Nora from leaving her home. In that case, granted that she succeeds in finding employment, will she find the tedium of the daily routine endurable? Working in earnest for a living will not provide any of the thrills of those nights of secret copying....It is hard to picture Nora as a bank clerk or a telephone operator, but it is harder to think of her playing the part for more than three days at a time. Other possibilities come to mind, too. One can choose to think of Nora taking to the lecture platform, agitating for the emancipation of women. Or, again, she may find a lover and weave new romances about a new hero.
>
> But personally I am convinced that after putting Torvald through a sufficiently protracted ordeal of

> suspense, Nora will yield to his entreaties and return home -- on her own terms. She will not bear the separation from her children very long, and her love for Torvald, which is not as dead as she thinks, will reassert itself. For a time the tables will be reversed: a meek and chastened husband will eat out of the hand of his squirrel; and Nora, hoping to make up by a sudden spurt of zeal for twenty-eight years of lost time, will be trying desperately hard to grow up. I doubt, however, whether her volatile enthusiasm will even carry her beyond the stage of resolutions. The charm of novelty worn off, she will tire of the new game very rapidly and revert, imperceptibly, to her rôle of song-bird and charmer, as affording an unlimited range to the exercise of her inborn talents of coquetry and play-acting.[95]

In light of what transpires in the third act of A Doll's House, namely, the utter devastation of the foundations upon which Nora's life has been constructed, Weigand's vision of the Helmers' reconciliation is inappropriate and ill-founded and undoubtedly results from his having rather perversely insisted on viewing the entire play as a comedy whose final curtain leaves the audience "in a state of comic elation."[96] In spite of its cloying chauvinism, however, Weigand's assessment of Nora's prospects is not entirely without perception.

It is hard to imagine Nora out working day upon day at some tedious job simply to keep herself fed, clothed and housed and it is doubtful whether she would even be able to find employment in the first place. After all, when Mrs. Linde asks Torvald for a job at the bank, he ensures that she is a widow before agreeing to hire her and would unquestionably have given the job to a worthier candidate had she replied that she had just walked out on her husband and three young children. If, therefore, it is impossible to imagine a future for Nora or if the future that is imagined is so radically different or so harsh that it alters the personality and appearance that have signified Nora during the action of the play, then the character, as we know her, is as good as dead as soon as she leaves the stage and, along with Rebekka and Hedda, lives only as long as her drama lasts.

Roslyn Belkin implies that the accomplishment of Hedda Gabler and, presumably, by association, Ibsen's other woman-centered plays is lessened by the dramatist's "failure to imagine that a woman might wish to survive on her own, even if the actuality was barred to her."[97] Perhaps in her "feminist reading," Belkin is not incorrect. Ibsen's female characters do not stand as exemplary figures in the struggle for the emancipation of women in literature and in society. Rather, they die or disappear, having achieved little or nothing, and are therefore of consequence only as works of art in the form of great roles created by the father -- or

patriarch -- of modern drama. In a "gynocritical" reading, however, these great roles begin to be invested with a significance that allows them to be appropriated, like Bachofen's matriarchs, to serve in the formulation of a constructive feminist discourse on theatre and on society.

CHAPTER III

IBSEN'S FEMALE CHARACTERS ON STAGE:

THE "CONTINUUM" OF THE ACTRESS, THE ROLE AND THE WOMAN

A. The Female Basic Dramatic Subject

Because it is "the intent of a subject"[1] that causes action and because it is action that constitutes "the basis of the drama,"[2] Jiří Veltruský suggests in "Man and Object in the Theatre" that the notion of the dramatic subject needs to be more clearly demarcated than it has been. As he explains it, there is first "the basic subject who is the originator of the intent [and] then there is the subject overtly performing the action, who may be identical with the basic subject, but [who] may also be his mere tool and thus only a partial subject."[3] For Veltruský, the humanity of the actor on stage does not necessarily guarantee his status as a subject. On the contrary, on the move down the ladder of "the hierarchy of parts,"[4] the actors in bit and extra roles frequently amount to nothing more than object-like "human props," while inanimate entities -- sets, costumes and props -- may at times surpass their usual capacities as passive objects to assume instead the position of acting subjects, as for example, when there are no human beings present on stage.

> [Then], the action does not stop. The action force of the object comes to the fore in all its power. The objects on the stage, including perhaps their mechanical movements such as that of the pendulum of a clock, exploit our consciousness of the uninterrupted course of events and create

> in us the feeling of action. Without any intervention of the actor, the props shape the action.[6]

In this sense, Veltrusky argues, "even a lifeless object may be perceived as the performing subject, and a live human being may be perceived as an element completely without will." "The existence of the subject in the theatre," therefore, "is dependent on the participation of some component in the action [rather than] on [that component's] actual spontaneity...."[7]

It was with Ibsen that female characters began to be elevated to the status of basic dramatic subject. Elizabeth Robins, the actress who independently produced and starred in the original London production of Hedda Gabler, claimed that "no dramatist [had] ever meant so much to the women of the stage as Henrik Ibsen"[8] and wrote of her initial encounter with his work:

> You may be able to imagine the excitement of coming across anything so alive as Hedda. What you won't be able to imagine (unless you are an actress in your twenties) is the joy of having in our hands -- free hands -- such glorious actable stuff. If we had been thinking politically, concerning ourselves about the emancipation of women, we would not have given the Ibsen plays the particular, wholehearted devotion we did give. We were actresses -- actresses who wouldn't for a kingdom be anything else. We

> got over that; but I'm talking about '89-'91. How were we to find fault with a state of society that had given us Nora and Hedda and Thea? Marion Lea and I never thought of there being anything difficult to understand in the Ibsen women till people challenged them. Then in sheer self-defence we became controversial. But whether we met abuse or praise, in the end it was all grist to our mill. It was tonic to be attacked. Ibsen had taught us something we were never to unlearn. The lesson had nothing to do with the New Woman; it had everything to do with our particular business -- with the art of acting. Events, after Hedda, emphasized for us the kind of life that stretched in front of the women condemned to the "hack-work" of the stage. That was what we called playing the best parts in plays selected by the actor-manager.[9]

Hedda was clearly a turning point for Robins, despite the fact that the "hack-work" to which she refers in this remarkable passage is not without primary female characters.

Melodrama, for example, flourished during the nineteenth century and featured many substantial roles for women, but, as part of the paradox that Martha Vicunus sees as central to this genre, the fact that these female roles were the leads did not necessarily mean that they were the basic subjects of the plays that contained them. "Domestic melodrama by its

very nature is conservative, however subversive its underlying message,"[10] Vicunus explains. "[It] defends the domestic ideal against a malign society under the belief that a larger moral order will prevail, yet in fact this moral order is a reflection of current social values."[11] This paradox is illustrated for Vicunus in Mrs. Henry Wood's popular East Lynne. The heroine of this melodrama, Lady Isabel, initially rebels against her lot as a bourgeois housewife by abandoning her husband and children and running off with another man. When eventually she realizes the folly of her ways and returns home again in true repentance, having [offended] against the middle class ideal of womanhood," she is made to "suffer endlessly, deliciously guilty, yet innocent in spirit,"[12] serving as governess to her own children and undergoing intense emotional and physical punishment as atonement for her transgressions. Regardless, therefore, of the inherently subversive nature of her initial discontentment with and rejection of her position in patriarchal society, Lady Isabel is ultimately "condemned," to use Elizabeth Robins' word, to abide by Mrs. Wood's socially approved moral of passive resignation to woman's lot. For this reason, although she is the central character of East Lynne, Lady Isabel is not its basic subject but, rather, the object of the basic subject that is the status quo whose ideology the play promotes.

Unlike Lady Isabel, Ibsen's female characters never repent their initial rejection of the social order that

subordinates them; even Rebekka, as she surrenders her life for John Rosmer, recognizes that there is something infectious and sickening in his "ennobling" "view of life."[13] She, Hedda and Nora struggle consistently if, in some instances, unconsciously to exert their own unavoidably subversive wills in societies that seek to suppress and confine them and their struggles constitute the central actions of their respective dramas. Ibsen's female characters are therefore basic dramatic subjects in a way that the heroine of East Lynne, who succumbs to the authority of a more powerful subject, is not. In light of this difference in dramaturgical status, it is significant that while Lady Isabel fits simply and comfortably under the heading of "fallen woman," Nora Helmer has been widely criticized as unnatural for leaving her children and Hedda Gabler, clearly a beautiful woman attractive to all of the men in her play, is commonly described as a sort of man in a woman's body, wanting to lead a man's life "in all respects,"[14] seeming "sexually...half-male,"[15] and "having rejected her own womanhood [and identified herself] with the dominant male role."[16] Clearly, attention is focused on Ibsen's women characters' femaleness (or purported lack of it) in a way that it is not in the case of the less complex -- and less threatening -- fallen woman.

Veltruský explains that, although everything on stage serves as a sign that communicates meaning, costumes, sets and props are not as dense in their significance as the figure

of the actor because the signs of inanimate objects can be and are selected and limited according to the requirements of a given play.[17]

> The actor's body, on the other hand, enters into the dramatic situation with all of its properties. A living human being can understandably not take off some of them and keep on only those he needs for the given situation. This is why not all the components of the actor's performance are purposive; some of them are simply given by physiological necessity (thus, for instance, various automatic reflexes). The spectator of course understands even these nonpurposive components of the actor's performance as signs. This is what makes the figure of the actor more complex and richer, we are tempted to say more concrete, as compared to the other sign carriers. It has in addition to its sign character also the character of reality. And the latter is precisely that force which forces all the meanings to be centered upon the actor.[18]

As there is generally more than one actor in a play and as all of a play's meanings cannot be centered upon all of its actors, the extent of an actor's significance is graded according to his rank within what Veltrusky calls the "hierarchy of parts."

> The more complex the actions of the figure of the actor, the greater not only the number of its purposeful signs, but also, and this is important here, of those without purpose, so that the reality of the figure is placed into the foreground. A figure whose actions are less complex is of course more schematic.[19]

The basic subject of a given drama, situated at the top of the "hierarchy of parts," is endowed with the greatest measure of meaning and reality; the "human prop," situated at the bottom, has little or no more significance than the costume on his body or the object in his hand.

The critical obsession with the femaleness of Ibsen's women characters and the violent reactions that his "women's plays" so frequently elicited when they were first produced together suggest that the female basic subject of the drama was a new phenomenon that was introduced to the stage by Ibsen. As basic dramatic subjects had traditionally been male, the presence of women in dramaturgical positions of such eminence caused the femaleness of the bodies of the actresses on stage to become endowed with a non-purposive significance that inevitably contributed to the meanings of the plays. Frightening to patriarchal critics and audience members, the unprecedented reality of Ibsen's rebellious female characters could be problematic as well for the actresses who undertook to portray them.

B. The Problems of the Significant Actress

Joseph Chaikin defines the actor as a "continuum of the actor, the role, and the person"[20] and states that, before an actor can truthfully determine a character's intention or give that intention form, he must first come into contact with the fundamental "condition" that both provokes his choice of intention and suggests its outer form. "The condition is the source from which the actor draws energy; it is his field of experience,"[21] Chaikin writes.

> Ideas may come in the form of feelings and feelings in the form of ideas, and the condition from which the actor can draw is infinitely vaster than nameable emotions. This condition cannot be given to him by another. The actor tunes into a particular condition which is among his limitless sources of mobile experiencing, and makes contact with it by lightly touching it with his breathing. The touch is subtle, explored the way fingertips touch the pulse on a wrist. If the actor presses too firmly, the flow stops, but when the actor touches the condition lightly, it flows through him.[22]

All too often, Chaikin maintains, actor training "[ignores] the fact that the study of acting falls within the larger realm of human action" and concentrates instead upon the mastery of "current 'stage behavior' itself."[23] As a result,

the range of emotions typically depicted on a stage is simplified, flattened out and emptied of the reality and dynamism of immediate experience.

The challenge that Ibsen's plays presented to nineteenth-century male performers was essentially that of getting away from stale, conventional and studied stage behavior and getting in touch instead with the truth of their own experiences or with that which Joseph Chaikin calls the "condition." Preparing for the Swedish premiere of The Wild Duck in 1885, the actor August Lindberg remarked to a friend, "My mind reels....Such unaccustomed problems for us actors! Never before have we been faced with the like."[24] To Ibsen, he wrote,

> With your new play...we stand on new and unbroken ground.... These are quite new human beings, and what will it avail to use the common approach of actors -- people who have lost touch with nature through spending their whole lives playing boulevard comedy?[25]

In a similar vein, George Bernard Shaw describes in The Quintessence of Ibsenism some of the difficulties experienced by nineteenth-century actors accustomed to performing in melodramas who found themselves faced with the task of playing one of Ibsen's complex characters:

> His idealist figures, at once higher and more mischievous than ordinary Philistines, puzzle

> by their dual aspect the conventional actor, who persists in assuming that if he is to be self-sacrificing and scrupulous he must be a hero; and that if he is to satirize himself unconsciously he must be comic. He is constantly striving to get back to familiar ground by reducing his part to one of the stage types with which he is familiar, and which he has learned to present by rule of thumb. The more experienced he is, the more certain he is to de-Ibsenize the play into a sort of melodrama or a farcical comedy of the common sort.[26]

Having less actor's technique to unlearn, an inexperienced actor would naturally have less diffficulty than an experienced actor in mastering the new style of performance that was the major novelty that Ibsen's plays held for nineteenth-century men of the theatre.

While these male performers were required for the first time to learn to live their parts with the reality of their own life experiences, female performers in Ibsen plays were required to learn to touch upon conditions that had never been explored on stage before and that may not even have been consciously acknowledged to exist in the actresses' own lives to begin with. Women attempting to act such characters as Nora Helmer, Hedda Gabler and Rebekka West had to consider the fundamental implications of the sex of their bodies in

relation to the action that arose from their intents as basic dramatic subjects. They were not simply rebels like Dr. Stockmann of An Enemy of the People; they were female rebels and the remarkability of their rebelliousness arose from the fact of their femininity rather than from any action that was in itself extraordinary. Their figures on stage were therefore not simply neutral "[continuums] composed of the actor, the role, and the person," but were, more particularly and pointedly, biased and political continuums composed of the actress, the role and the woman. Playing the part of a contemporary female character engaged in a struggle for authority over her own life story, the actress (in a deliberately feminized version of Chaikin's sense of the word) had to touch upon the conditions of her own experience as a woman living a similar struggle under similarly oppressive circumstances in the same type of nineteenth-century patriarchal society. In touching on this condition, she created in turn a new female condition that was the experience of being on stage as something other than a "human prop" and in something other than "hack-work." As Elizabeth Robins suggests, in respect of this new condition and the level of seriousness of the critical attention that the work that emerged from it merited, it must indeed have been "tonic to be attacked" as an actress in the role of one of Ibsen's female basic subjects.

In other respects, it was not. The critical attacks on Ibsen's "women's plays" included notices that described Hedda

Gabler as "a lunatic of the epileptic class,"[27] a woman whose "soul [was] a-crawl with the foulest passions of humanity,"[28] and "a horrible miscarriage of the imagination, a monster in female form to whom no parallel can be found in real life."[29] Now, while an actor playing a murderer or a fool was not generally thought to be one himself and while the enjoyment of that actor's performance did not usually reflect upon the moral character of a given audience member, even female theatre-goers and literature enthusiasts, expressing an interest in Ibsen and the issues that his plays considered, were attacked by a hostile press, who, in one instance, went so far as to label them "unwomanly women,... unsexed females, and [a] whole army of unprepossessing cranks in petticoats.2[30] The women who actually stood up on the stage and played the parts were implicitly far worse and insinuating associations were sometimes made between what were perceived as the dubious moral qualities of the Ibsen woman and those of the actress portraying her. For example, one nineteenth-century drama critic wrote,

> in Hedda Gabler, not to mention other plays from the same tainted source, evil only prevails, for, whether plotters or victims, the persons of the scene are recognised as being without shame or remorse, adulterers or homicides, or both, whose sole principle of conduct is selfishness disguised under the mask of individuality....The only wonder

> is that actresses of the approved artistic intelligence and mental refinement of the Misses Robins and Marion Lea, who are responsible for the presentations of Hedda Gabler, should demean their quality by worshipping at the feet of such an earthy Dagon; and the marvel of his notorious influence over the feminine rather than the masculine mind becomes the greater when it is considered that his characterisations of womankind deny her the purest and highest attributes of her nature, whether as maiden, wife, or mother.[31]

This tendency to correlate the character with the actress undoubtedly arose from the greater reality effect created by the character's status as a basic dramatic subject and, in light of it, it is hardly surprising that the female lead in the original German production of A Doll's House insisted on having the play's ending revised on the grounds that she herself would never leave her children as Nora does.[32] It is also understandable that Elizabeth Robins, not out of professional vanity, as Shaw implies,[33] but out of something far more profound, was unable to admit in Hedda Gabler any feelings of sexual attraction to Eilert Loevborg and wrote instead on the subject of that relationship,

> Hedda drove [Loevborg] from her in disgust; disgust at the new aspects of vulgar sensuality which her curiosity about life had led him to reveal. She

> never denied that it was her doing that he revealed these things; it was not her doing that he had them to reveal. They made her gorge rise. The man who had wallowed in that filth must not touch Hedda Gabler -- certainly not fresh from the latest orgy.[34]

The way in which the actress was commonly equated with or mistaken for the characters she was playing would have required Robins to rethink the moral standards by which she herself had most likely been raised and by which she was unquestionably surrounded in order to recognize in her character, and accept as not necessarily wicked, as radical and repressed a feeling as Hedda's frightening and illicit desire. Such a recognition and acceptance was not within the realm of possibility for Elizabeth Robins playing Hedda in 1891.

C. Extending the Meaning of the Female Subject

Sandra Harding points out that although the "sex/gender system" has only recently become visible, as "an organic social variable" and "not merely an 'effect' of other, more primary causes," it has always existed[35] and therefore necessarily informed Ibsen's writing regardless of his protestations that his concerns were for human beings rather than for men or for women. Inevitably then, the dramatist, writing in the naturalistic style, included signs in his work, such as Nora Helmer's forgery of her father's signature and Hedda Gabler's burning of Eilert Loevborg's manuscript, that

can be foregrounded and infused with meaning in a feminist appropriation of these plays. Because all the meanings of a drama converge upon the figure of the actor or actress who is the basic dramatic subject, Ibsen's female characters constitute the primary means of this appropriation. Their newly acquired authority as basic subjects does not extend beyond the bounds of dramaturgical construction however, in that the characters are still no more than metaphorical women writers imprisoned in and silenced by the patriarchal texts that have given them life and to which they consequently belong.[36] Nevertheless, Nora Helmer, Hedda Gabler and Rebekka West, possess, as subjects, the power to speak and to give meaning and the meaning that they have been empowered to speak may be extended, by the the fact of the non-purposive and inevitably subversive sign of the female body of the actress in a position which it is not accustomed to occupying, to include meanings beyond those initially intended by Ibsen.

Catherine Belsey writes,

> Signifying practice is never static, and meanings are neither single nor fixed. Meaning is perpetually deferred by its existence as difference within a specific discourse; it is perpetually displaced by the trace of alterity within the identity which is no more than an effect of difference. A specific discourse is always embattled, forever defending the limits of what is admissable, legitimate or

> intelligible, attempting to arrest the play of meaning as it slides towards plurality. Alternative discourses propose alternative knowledges, alternative meanings. For these reasons, signifying practice is also the location of resistances. Since meaning is plural, to be able to speak is to be able to take part in the contest for new meaning which issues in the production of new subject-positions, new determinations of what it is possible to be.[37]

An alternative new meaning of Ibsen's "women's plays" may emerge from a feminist consciousness such as the one created by a gynocritical interpretation of his female characters. As Belsey states, however, "the range of meaning it is possible to give at a particular historical moment is determined outside the subject."[38] Working within the confines of a literary discourse that attempted to reduce women to certain functions and images, nineteenth-century women writers extended the limits of what it was possible for women to be, both by the fact of their authorship and by their redefinitions within that authorship of reductive patriarchal meanings of women. In the role of basic dramatic subject, a nineteenth-century actress such as Elizabeth Robins could also work within a demarcated breadth of patriarchal meaning to extend the possibilities for women in the theatre and in society. The actress was confronted by or, as Robins says, "condemned to" the same images as the woman writer. Ibsen's plays

provided a vehicle through which she too could redefine those images and the extent of her success is perhaps measured by the appraisal of Robins' portrayal of Hedda Gabler by the vituperatively anti-Ibsen critic, Clement Scott:

> Miss Elizabeth Robins has done what no doubt she fully intended to do. She has made vice attractive by her art. She has almost ennobled crime. She has stopped the shudder that so repulsive a creature should have inspired. She has glorified an unwomanly woman. She has made a heroine out of a sublimated sinner. She has fascinated us with a savage.[39]

To begin this type of redefinition, Robins had to seek out and, if necessary, produce independently plays with parts that allowed her to be something other than a "human prop" serving the inherently political theatre of patriarchal society. She had to refuse to allow herself to be "condemned to the 'hack-work' of the stage," which included not only supporting roles in vehicles that showcased male performers, but also such deceptively primary roles as Lady Isabel in East Lynne and those "best parts in plays selected by the actor-manager" for their popular appeal and financial profitability. In her determination to appreciate Ibsen's female characters not as political statements but as "such gloriously actable stuff," Robins further implies that redefining reductive patriarchal images of women also meant refusing to be emancipated on

anyone else's terms. "Ibsen had taught us something we were never to unlearn," she recalls. "The lesson had nothing to do with the New Woman; it had everything to do with our particular business -- with the art of acting." With Ibsen, women had become subjects for dramatists just as they had become subjects for nineteenth-century anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, economists and political theorists. However, woman as subject or topic of patriarchal discourse was essentially woman as object, as angel sacrificing her own reality for the purpose of a given study or work of art. The New Woman was, therefore, in a sense, yet another patriarchal construct whose task might be "the moral regeneration of mankind," as it was for John Stuart Mill as well as for Bachofen and Ibsen himself. Not surprisingly, then, but very perceptively, Robins writes, "If we had been thinking politically, concerning ourselves about the emancipation of women, we would not have given the Ibsen plays the particular, wholehearted attention we did give." Her rejection of the New Woman and her concentration on the physical reality of her presence on stage in the part of Hedda was nevertheless an inadvertently political statement that constituted the beginnings of a feminist appropriation of Ibsen's work.

In an essay on her experiences as an actress preparing to play the part of Hedda Gabler in 1977, Janet Suzman writes,

> to act a character is to be entirely partisan about that character. You must defend that character

> to the death. You must love her as you love yourself. You must, if necessary, loathe her as you loathe yourself. If Hedda was merely a calculating animal she was not interesting to me. If she was simply unreasonably malevolent she was an unworthy individual. What demon winds blew her about? What did she get hurt by? What defensive about? What did she love? What bored her? What excited her? When did she lie? When tell the truth? What made her laugh? What cry?[40]

Nearly a century after Hedda Gabler was first introduced to the English stage by Elizabeth Robins, Janet Suzman is still using as the starting point of her interpretation of Hedda the character as she was evaluated by the majority of nineteenth-century male critics. That this standard orientation may be coupled with a critical practice that continues to downplay the gender issues in Ibsen's "women's plays" suggests that it is indicative of a larger tendency. Joseph Chaikin has stated that a particular condition must be touched lightly with an actor's breathing if it is to flow through him to determine his performance. If, indeed, "all the world's a stage,"[41] then, in the language of Chaikin's actor's process, the condition of subjection and confinement that informed Ibsen's representations of nineteenth-century women and gave rise to their intention and form has not yet been incorporated into the body of twentieth-century

society and made available, by a feminist consciousness, to the light touch of a liberating breath.

NOTES

Chapter I

[1]Henrik Ibsen, "Speech at the Banquet of the Norwegian League for Women's Rights, Christiania, May 26, 1898," Ibsen: Letters and Speeches, ed. Evert Sprinchorn (New York: Hill, 1964) 337.

[2]Henrik Ibsen, Christiania, May 26, 1898, in Michael Meyer, Ibsen (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin, 1985) 817. I have shifted from Evert Sprinchorn's to Michael Meyer's translation of this speech because I prefer the latter, which is, however, given only in part.

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[4]Henrik Ibsen, A Doll's House, Plays, trans. Michael Meyer, 5 vols. (London: Methuen; Eyre Methuen, 1980-1986) 2: 39.

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[9]Mill 219

[10]Mill 221.

[11]Mill 221.

[12]Mill 225-226.

[13]Mill 231.

[14]Mill 235.

[15]Mill 235.

[16]Mill 235.

[17]Mill 236.

[18]Mill 137.

[19]Johann Jakob Bachofen, "My Life in Retrospect, " Myth, Religion, and Mother Right, trans. Ralph Manheim, Bollingen Series 84 (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1967) 93.

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[22]Bachofen, Mother 79.

[23]Bachofen, Mother 79.

[24]Bachofen, Mother 143-144.

[25]Bachofen, Mother 109.

[26]Bachofen, Mother 109-110.

[27]Bachofen Mother 109-110.

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[29]Adrienne Rich, Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution (New York: Norton, 1976) 89.

[30]Rich 91.

[31]Elizabeth Gould Davis, The First Sex (New York: Putnam, 1971) 115.

[32]Davis 116.

[33]Davis 18.

[34]Davis 18.

[35]Rich 91-93.

[36]Merlin Stone, When God Was a Woman (New York: Harvest-Harcourt, 1978) xxv.

[37]Bachofen, Mother 77.

[38]Margaret Atwood, Surfacing (Toronto: McClelland, 1972) 161.

[39]Atwood 147.

[40]Atwood 191.

[41]Bachofen, Mother 105.

[42]Caroline Blackwood, On the Perimeter (London: Flamingo-Fontana, 1984) 35.

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[44]Margaret Homans, Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986) 32.

[45]Catherine Belsey, The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama (London: Methuen, 1985) x.

[46]Roslyn Belkin, "Prisoners of Convention: Ibsen's 'Other' Women," Journal of Women's Studies in Literature 1.2 (1979) 149.

[47]Inga-Stina Ewbank, "Ibsen and the Language of Women," Women Writing and Writing about Women, ed. Mary Jacobus (London: Croom Helm, 1979) 131.

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[49]Ewbank 131.

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[54]Roman Ingarden, The Literary Work of Art: An Investigation on the Borderlines of Ontology, Logic, and Theory of

Literature: With an Appendix on the Functions of Language in the Theatre, trans. George G. Grabowicz (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1973) 322.

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Chapter II

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[3]Showalter 185.

[4]Showalter 184.

[5]Showalter 182.

[6]Henrik Ibsen, "Advice to the Reader," in James Hurt, Catiline's Dream: An Essay on Ibsen's Plays (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1972) 3.

[7]Belkin 143.

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[9]Michael Meyer, introduction, A Doll's House, Plays, trans. Michael Meyer, 5 vols. (London: Methuen; Eyre Methuen, 1980-1986) 2: 21.

[10]Henrik Ibsen in Michael Meyer, introduction, Hedda Gabler, Plays, trans. Michael Meyer, 5 vols. (London: Methuen; Eyre Methuen, 1980-1986) 2: 285.

[11]Ibsen in Meyer, introduction, Doll's House 12-13.

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[14]Belkin 143.

[15]Henrik Ibsen, John Gabriel Borkman, The Master Builder and Other Plays, trans. Una Ellis-Fermor (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin, 1958) 342.

[16]Jehlen 207.

[17]Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own (London: Triad-Panther-Granada, 1977) 46-47.

[18]Meyer, Ibsen 263.

[19]Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979) 6.

[20]Gilbert and Gubar 12.

[21]Gilbert and Gubar 12.

[22]Gilbert and Gubar 12.

[23]Gilbert and Gubar 12.

[24]Gilbert and Gubar 25.

[25]Gilbert and Gubar 25.

[26]Gilbert and Gubar 28.

[27]Gilbert and Gubar 29.

[28]Gilbert and Gubar xi-xii.

[29]Gilbert and Gubar xii.

[30]Gilbert and Gubar 76.

[31]Gilbert and Gubar 46-53.

[32]Gilbert and Gubar 51.

[33]Homans 22.

[34]Jehlen 196.

[35]August Strindberg, preface, part I, Getting Married, Parts I and II, trans. Mary Sandbach (London: Gollancz, 1972) 41. This collection of short stories was written in reaction to A Doll's House, which Strindberg detested. Part I contains a story called "A Doll's House" that attempts to refute Ibsen's play completely.

[36]Homans 27.

[37]Elaine Showalter in Homans 20.

[38]Gilbert and Gubar 77.

[39]Gilbert and Gubar 78.

[40]Gilbert and Gubar 360.

[41]Gilbert and Gubar 359.

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[45]Henrik Ibsen, Hedda Gabler, Plays, trans. Michael Meyer, 5 vols. (London: Methuen; Eyre Methuen, 1980-1986) 2: 317.

[46]Ibsen, Hedda 248.

[47]Ibsen, Hedda 322.

[48]Ibsen, Hedda 291.

[49]Ibsen, Hedda 298.

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[51]Ibsen, Hedda 279.

[52]Ibsen, Hedda 272.

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[54]Henrik Ibsen, Rosmersholm, The Master Builder and Other Plays, trans. Una Ellis-Fermor (Harmondsworth, Eng.; Penguin, 1958) 97.

[55]Ibsen, Rosmersholm 37.

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[60]Ibsen, Rosmersholm 33.

[61]Ibsen, Rosmersholm 29.

[62]Ibsen, Rosmersholm 64.

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[64]Ibsen, Rosmersholm 109.

[65]Ibsen, Rosmersholm 60.

[66]Ibsen, Rosmersholm 85-86.

[67]Ibsen, Rosmersholm 65.

[68]Ibsen, Rosmersholm 87-88.

[69]Ibsen, Rosmersholm 60.

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[73]Ibsen, Rosmersholm 108-109.

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[75]Ibsen, Rosmersholm 97.

[76]Ibsen, Doll's House 56.

[77]Ibsen, Doll's House 37.

[78]Ibsen, Doll's House 100.

[79]Ibsen, Doll's House 100.

[80]Ibsen, Doll's House 24.

[81]Ibsen, Doll's House 88.

[82]Ibsen, Doll's House 85.

[83]Ibsen, Doll's House 85.

[84]Ibsen, Doll's House 84.

[85]Ibsen, Doll's House 92.

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[87]Ibsen, Doll's House 95.

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[90]Ibsen, Doll's House 99-100.

[91]Ibsen, Doll's House 93.

[92]Ibsen, Doll's House 94.

[93]Ibsen, Doll's House 101-102.

[94]Gilbert and Gubar 17.

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Chapter III

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