Routledge Studies in Nineteenth Century Literature

IBSEN AND DEGENERATION

FAMILIAL DECAY AND THE FALL OF CIVILIZATION

Henrik Johnsson

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Henrik Ibsen's plays were written at a critical juncture in late-19th-century European culture. Appearing at a time when notions of evolution and heredity were commonplace themes in literature and the arts, Ibsenian drama highlights the creative potential offered by contemporary evolutionary thought. In his plays, Ibsen explores variations on the theme of degeneration, imagining how families can become affected by ill-health or other forms of "weakness" that lead to the extinction of the family line. *Ibsen and Degeneration* looks at the recurrence of ideas of degeneration in three of Ibsen's plays: In *Ghosts*, it is the motif of syphilis, highly shocking to Ibsen's contemporaries, which serves as an allegory of degeneration. In *Rosmersholm*, degeneration is reconfigured as an overcultivation that eventually makes a family unfit for life. In *Hedda Gabler*, meanwhile, Hedda, having been, for all practical purposes, raised as a man, has come to think of herself as one, a circumstance that informs her final decision to end her life – her final degeneration. By reading these three plays from a fresh perspective, *Ibsen and Degeneration* sheds new light on some of Ibsen's most enduring contributions to world drama.

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Introduction

This book explores how the drama of Henrik Ibsen engages with a discourse on degeneration that permeated the culture of his time. Degeneration discourse is a historically contingent interpretation of the mechanisms of heredity. The concept of degeneration is centered on the idea that biological and environmental factors, detrimental to the proper functioning of the human organism, can be acquired by one generation and passed on to the next. Once acquired, a state of degeneracy will exacerbate over time due to the degenerative factors at work accumulating over time. If degeneracy has been introduced into a family line, the burden of degeneracy will grow to such an extent that the family line collapses upon itself. This gradual process of decline is described in terms of wasting away, the final extinction appearing as the last sigh of an exhausted organism that is no longer viable. Ibsen's use of degeneration discourse in his drama aligns his work with a sustained trend in late-19th-century European literature of portraying the institutions of marriage and family, to borrow Rudolph Binion's phrasing, in "a depressive, defeatist, even destructive mood" (Binion 1994, 679). Family formed the centerpiece of an array of works written by authors of Ibsen's generation.[1] Degeneration represents an existential threat to the family and by extension to the fabric of bourgeois society. When engaging with degeneration discourse, Ibsen is speaking to the fears of his bourgeois contemporaries that the foundation on which their social order is based may come to an end.[2] Degeneration was thought of as spreading in ever-widening circles from an afflicted individual to the family and on to society as a whole. The decline of families mirrors the decline of a society that is considered incapable of sustaining itself. A society that has grown old and decrepit will waste away and will gradually be replaced by a younger and more vibrant society. This cycle of degeneration, downfall and regeneration provides Ibsen with a model for how societies that are no longer viable may come to find themselves either rejuvenated or replaced.[3]

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The concept of degeneration underwent a process of transmission whereby what was originally an elite medical discourse became popularized and entered into the vernacular of 19th-century culture. The mass of knowledge produced on the topic of degeneration will in the following be designated as degeneration discourse, helpfully defined by Stephan Karschay as "the historically specific body of knowledge about degeneration circulating at the Victorian *fin de siècle*" (Karschay 2015, 14). Coexisting with hereditarian thinking, as well as with evolutionary thought and a primarily literary discourse on decadence, degeneration discourse became an integral part of the social imaginary of a bourgeois public concerned with what it perceived to be threats to the political and economic order on which it rested. Ibsen, who was both fascinated and alarmed by scientific progress, engaged with degeneration discourse by integrating the concept of degeneration into his dramatic oeuvre. In *Ghosts* (*Gengangere*, 1881) the patriarch of the Alving family has fallen into a state of degeneracy, contracted syphilis, and passed on the disease to his son, a sequence of events that spells the doom of the Alving line. In *Rosmersholm* (1886) the aristocratic Rosmer family comes to an end when its last scion, having failed to fulfill his obligation of continuing the family line, commits suicide together with his lover. In *Hedda Gabler* (1890) the titular character imagines herself to be a man to such an extent that she, when she finds herself defeated by a representative of bourgeois patriarchy, chooses to take her own life rather than endure subjugation. These three plays are related to each other not only on the level of imagery, dialogue, and character, but more importantly on the level of dramatic structure. The plays are based on what I will refer to as Ibsen's degeneration plot, which conforms to what William Greenslade refers to as the "teleological component" (Greenslade 1994, 16) of degeneration discourse. The plot of degeneration discourse, so to speak, can be summarized as follows: a degenerative factor is introduced into an individual, causing degeneration, inherited degeneracy afflicts the next generation, and the process continues until extinction occurs. The factors at work will vary, as will the nature of the victims and the extent of the damage, but the "hidden narrative development" (Pick 1996, 51) of degeneration discourse, to employ Daniel Pick's phrasing, remains the same. In Ibsenian drama, as well as in contemporary degeneration discourse, morbid heredity acts as an organizing principle that gives rise to an array of thematically related stories of the downfall of individuals, families, and societies.

My central argument is that Ibsen engages with degeneration discourse by transposing it onto the stage and exploring its ideological intricacies and potential consequences. This is not to say that Ibsen in any way believes in the concept of degeneration; I am not arguing that Ibsen is a proponent of degeneration discourse. My understanding is rather that Ibsen infuses

his drama with elements of a discourse that is preoccupied with many of the same concerns that are central to Ibsen's realist drama: the rise and fall of families and by extension social classes and entire societies. Ibsen's use of a degeneration plot does not imply that he actively sought out and read the literature being produced on the topic. Although he was certainly interested in scientific advances, there is no evidence that he read the writers who originated and disseminated degeneration discourse. I will instead maintain that Ibsen, like so many other Scandinavian and European authors during the 1880s and 1890s, found material to work with in a popular discourse that would have been readily available to any interested layperson at the time.[4] Authors of Ibsen's time found a rich source of material in the concept of degeneration, aptly described by Kelly Hurley as "a gothic nightmare of heredity" (Hurley 2004, 67), a concept that offered a pessimistic yet alluring counterargument to belief in progress. Where Ibsen differs from the political thrust of degeneration discourse, which tended to be of a conservative slant and directed toward the working classes, is his focus on the upper echelons of the bourgeoisie as being the most afflicted with degeneracy. In my readings I will argue that Ibsen's degeneration plot makes the *haute bourgeoisie* out to be corrupt and beyond redemption, whereas the lower bourgeoisie or the middle class contains a potential – not always realized – of regeneration and rebirth. While Ibsen adapted degeneration discourse to his own purposes, transforming it into a tool with which to critique society's elite, he was nonetheless indebted to the contemporary understanding of degeneration, as well as related issues such as heredity, disease, and vitality.

In order to provide the reader with an understanding of a discourse that was in many ways designed to be flexible enough to accommodate multiple and conflicting points of view, I will delineate the development of degeneration discourse from a broad historical perspective. I will summarize degeneration discourse as having developed in three distinct stages. In the first stage, spanning roughly from mid-century until the 1880s, we can identify a strain of thinking on degeneration that is indebted to the theologically inflected work of French physician Bénédict Augustin Morel (1809–1873), whose theory of degeneration combined hereditarian theories with the doctrine of original sin. Morel's theory of degeneration stands as a fountainhead to later generations of writers who, by modifying, revising and adding to Morel's theory, create the broader phenomenon of degeneration discourse. From the 1880s onward degeneration discourse becomes wedded to evolutionary thought, and the focus shifts from morbid heredity to the concept of retrograde evolution. This shift is prominently reflected in the works of literary naturalism, which formed an important part of Ibsen's aesthetic context. In the 1890s we see another shift, and degeneration discourse now becomes employed as a tool of cultural critique directed

toward authors who today are seen as proponents of early modernism. Of these stages, the first two are most immediately relevant to Ibsenian drama. The third stage is less so, due to a reduced focus on morbid heredity and the entanglement of degeneration with decadence; Ibsen was not a writer of decadent literature. Nonetheless, all three stages share certain fundamental traits, most significantly an emphasis on the weakening and wasting away of families and societies.

The following overview is intended as a historical and intellectual backdrop to Ibsen's engagement with degeneration discourse but should not be seen as an assertion of what Ibsen may or may not have read or thought. The overview includes developments in degeneration discourse that occurred after the time of writing of the plays studied. My choice in doing so is motivated by the purpose of the overview, which is to establish a contextual framework for understanding the role of degeneration in Ibsenian drama. Degeneration discourse was an important aspect of both the writing and reception of Ibsen's plays. Ibsen's plays were conceived and received in a literary culture suffused with degeneration discourse, which will become evident by examining how authors and critics of the day make use of degenerationist imagery in order to describe Ibsen's characters. This habit of describing characters such as Osvald and Hedda as degenerates attests to the prevalence of degenerationist discourse in Ibsen's time.[5] To this can be added the fascinating but somewhat incoherent attack on Ibsen's oeuvre contained in Max Nordau's *Entartung* (*Degeneration*, 1892–1893). The reception of the plays testifies to how degeneration discourse had become part and parcel of the vocabulary of literary criticism already in the 1880s, a tradition that Nordau carried on into the 1890s.

The chapter will conclude with a section on which aspects of degeneration discourse Ibsen adhered to or deviated from. Before moving on to the field of intellectual history, however, I wish to clarify how I understand Ibsen's drama in relation to social class. I find this positioning necessary due to my interest in what appears to me as Ibsen's sustained attack in dramatic form on the same class to which he belonged. I consider Ibsen a solidly bourgeois writer; I view degeneration discourse as an instrument created by the bourgeoisie to keep the working class at bay, and yet the dramas studied suggest that perhaps the single most important foundation of the bourgeois social order, the institution of family, is irredeemably corrupt. Family was a cornerstone of bourgeois patriarchy, and in *Ghosts*, *Rosmersholm*, and *Hedda Gabler*, we can identify the figure of the patriarch whose degeneracy hints at the instability and finitude of bourgeois patriarchy as such.[6] I understand Ibsen's position as that of an internal critic of the bourgeoisie, an insider who castigates his own class while also acknowledging the possibility of reform and renewal. This position has

been eloquently formulated by Ivo de Figueiredo in his biography of Ibsen. Figueiredo argues that authors enjoyed a privileged position in late-19th-century capitalist culture:

> Only rarely have artists, and in particular writers, enjoyed the sort of status that they attained during the decades that coincided with the span of Henrik Ibsen's life. Poets were the priests and the shopkeepers of capitalist society rolled into one. They were to fulfil the role of the poet-genius, responding to a call that elevated them above the material world, at the same time as they by and large lived by the same market principles as any merchant. In the final analysis it was the poets, perhaps for want of something or someone better, who were both to chastise society and to formulate its new ideas, pointing the way forwards towards progress and the future.
>
> (Figueiredo 2019, 38)

Ibsen's position as an ever more influential participant in the bourgeois social order was the driving force of his criticism of the bourgeoisie; he was criticizing the failings of his peers. To better understand Ibsen's position when engaging with degeneration discourse, I would contrast him to Strindberg, who, as I have previously argued (Johnsson 2015), consistently adopts the perspective of the working class when making use of degeneration discourse to attack the bourgeoisie. Ibsen's approach is vastly different, as Figueiredo clarifies:

> it was never Ibsen's purpose to wage war against bourgeois society, neither in life nor in literature. In time he certainly became a rebel, but he was and remained a *bourgeois rebel*, though his writing had qualities that extended far beyond the four walls of the bourgeois living room.
>
> (Figueiredo 2019, 78; emphasis in original)

Ibsen's criticism of the *haute bourgeoisie* as degenerate should not be construed as sympathy for the working class. Indeed, as Franco Moretti has noted, the working class is almost entirely absent from Ibsen's realist drama: "No workers, because the conflict Ibsen wants to focus on is not that between the bourgeoisie and another class, but that internal to the bourgeoisie itself" (Moretti 2010, 118).[7] As I will seek to demonstrate in my readings, Ibsen's use of degeneration discourse remains squarely confined within the established parameters of the bourgeois social order. When a forceful and energetic character appears to offer a remedy to bourgeois degeneracy, such characters will tend to be, or will at least strive to become, part of the bourgeoisie.

Morel and the rise of degeneration discourse

Morel elaborated his theory of degeneration in his book *Traité des dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles et morales de l'espèce humaine* (1857).[8] Morel's theory is rooted in a Lamarckian belief in the heritability of acquired characteristics. Morel argues that an individual who has attained a state of degeneracy will transmit this state to his or her children. Morel defines degeneracy as "a deviation from the original or normal type of humanity."[9] Deviation from this normal type was caused by the introduction of degenerative factors such as alcoholism, inadequate nourishment, unsanitary working conditions, or various forms of reprobate living (Morel 1857, 57–58). Morel conceived of the human being, to quote Daniel Pick, as "a unified ensemble, composed of matter and of spirit" (Pick 1996, 50), and this understanding led Morel to regard biological and moral degeneration as inextricably linked. Once degenerative factors had been introduced into a bloodline, heredity would aggravate the impact of degeneration (Dowbiggin 1985, 192). This generational thinking placed a special responsibility on the living to ensure the long-term viability of the family line (Tjønneland 2010, 116). Morel argued that degeneracy in the present could be caused by the accumulated degeneracy of previous generations: "There are individuals who encapsulate in their person the depraved organic dispositions of several preceding generations."[10] Morbid influences would accumulate with each passing generation, causing a "progressive degradation,"[11] which ends in sterility and death. At a given point in time the degenerate would no longer be able to conceive children. Morel suggested that measures could be enacted in order to proactively prevent degeneration, such as improving the conditions of the working class (Morel 1857, 608), the promulgation of a moral law among the populace (Morel 1857, 686), and the prohibition of marriage between degenerates and non-degenerates (Morel 1857, 15). Morel's belief that degeneracy could be averted meant that he was not entirely a fatalist.

The gradual acceptance of Darwinism caused a substantive transformation, from the 1880s and onward, in how degeneration was understood. Morel's definition of degeneration proved difficult to reconcile with the idea that humankind might be descended from primates. The emphasis that Darwinian thought placed on the adaptability of organisms contributed to the redefinition of degeneration. The intertwining of discourses on degeneration and evolution can be exemplified by Edwin Ray Lankester's (1847–1929) influential booklet *Degeneration: A Chapter in Darwinism* (1880). Lankester outlines the mechanisms whereby an organism becomes either less or more complex in order to adapt to its surroundings. Lankester designates these routes as degeneration and elaboration: "Degeneration may be defined as a gradual change of the structure in which the

organism becomes adapted to *less* varied and *less* complex conditions of life; whilst Elaboration is a gradual change of structure in which the organism becomes adapted to more and more varied and complex conditions of existence" (Lankester 1880, 32; emphasis in original). A process whereby an organism is left "in a lower condition, that is, fitted to less complex action and reaction in regard to its surroundings" (Lankester 1880, 32) should properly be designated as degeneration. Lankester extends his argument to human societies: "The traditional history of mankind furnishes us with notable examples of degeneration. High states of civilisation have decayed and given place to low and degenerate states" (Lankester 1880, 58). Lankester's argument is that human societies can be reduced from a high to a lower state of development, mirroring the simplification undergone by certain invertebrates: "there is no doubt that many savage races as we at present see them are actually degenerate and are descended from ancestors possessed of a relatively elaborate civilisation" (Lankester 1880, 59).[12] Lankester's remarkable leap from the animal domain to that of human civilization is several steps removed from Morel's schema, which focuses more on the health of the individual. While Lankester appears disinterested in exploring the possibility of humanity undergoing a process of "elaboration," the idea that humanity could evolve toward a state of perfectability did find its way into later Darwinian-inflected degeneration discourse. Writing in the 1890s, French physicians Valentin Magnan (1835–1916) and Paul-Maurice Legrain (1860–1939) argued that it was impossible to conceive of "a perfect type at the origin of our species"[13] and that the notion of a perfect humanity belongs squarely to the future (Legrain and Magnan 1895, 75).[14] Their definition of degeneration as "a movement of progression from *a more perfect state to a less perfect state*"[15] does not rule out the obverse; humanity possesses the capacity for both evolution and devolution.

Max Nordau's *Entartung* exemplifies the conflation of degeneration and decadence during the 1890s. Nordau's reactionary critique of contemporary authors fundamentally adhered to Morel's conceptual framework. Nordau acknowledges his indebtedness to Morel but also and more significantly to Cesare Lombroso (1835–1909). Lombroso formulated a theory of criminal anthropology that sought to identify physiological and psychological traits that were taken as evidence of an individual having been born with a predisposition toward criminal behavior.[16] Nordau dedicates *Entartung* to Lombroso and credits him for having applied Morel's theory to the field of criminology and describes his own work as an attempt to extend Lombroso's findings into the realm of art and literature:

> Degenerates are not always criminals, prostitutes, anarchists, and pronounced lunatics; they are often authors and artists. These, however,

> manifest the same mental characteristics, and for the most part the same somatic features, as the members of the above-mentioned anthropological family, who satisfy their unhealthy impulses with the knife of the assassin or the bomb of the dynamiter, instead of with pen and pencil.
>
> (Nordau 1895, vii)

While the most attention-grabbing aspect of Nordau's book is his designation of authors such as Ibsen as degenerates, the rationalist underpinnings of his critique, as well as the relationship he establishes between degeneration and modernity, can easily be overlooked. In a comparative study of Nordau and Friedrich Nietzsche, Steven Aschheim situates Nordau politically as a liberal who felt that the ideals of the Enlightenment were presently under threat from anti-humanistic forces. Aschheim notes that both authors contributed to degeneration discourse, although from diametrically opposed perspectives:

> Both Nordau and Nietzsche – each in their own way – regarded culture and civilization as under threat, both were fundamentally concerned with the sources of decadence, a debilitating loss of energy and vitality and the possibilities of recovery. Both constructed a world of ideal and anti-types and looked forward to a cleansed world purged of the lower, degenerated elements they posited. Both envisaged new, non-decadent, forms of humanity. Both employed naturalistic quasi-biological language.
>
> (Aschheim 1993, 650)

Degeneration discourse provided a means to identify and propose solutions to "a prevalent – if inchoate – sense of social and cultural crisis through an exercise of eugenic labelling and a language of bio-social pathology and potential renewal" (Aschheim 1993, 649). The difference between how Nordau and Nietzsche employ this tool comes down to what they hoped to achieve. While Nietzsche tended to focus his criticism on societal institutions such as organized religion, Nordau sought to preserve those structures that he saw as beneficial to human growth. Nordau believed in humanity's potential for progress and viewed degeneration as an impediment to human flourishing: "His positivist vision represented itself as part of a direct continuity, an advanced stage, furthering the classical humanizing axioms of Western morality, rationalist Enlightenment and liberal notions of progress" (Aschheim 1993, 652). This humanistic (albeit elitist) vision underlies Nordau's criticism of authors who in his view prioritize subjectivity or even solipsism and undermine belief in the capacity for society to evolve and improve the lives of its citizens.

Nordau's train of thought can be illustrated by examining how he defines artistic trends such as decadence not primarily as a movement in the arts but rather as an instance of degeneration. Nordau dismisses the notion that the West has reached a point of cultural senility or *fin-de-siècle* on the grounds that centuries, unlike human beings, do not grow old and enter into decline (Nordau 1895, 1). Belief in decadence is instead a characteristic of degenerates. If one were to subject "the originators of all the *fin-de-siècle* movements in art and literature" to "a careful physical examination of the persons concerned, and an inquiry into their pedigree" (Nordau 1895, 17), one would find that they have a family history of degeneracy. According to Nordau, proponents of decadence fail to understand that the increased pace of modern life is a cause of degeneration. An inhabitant of a city "is continually exposed to unfavourable influences which diminish his vital powers far more than what is inevitable" (Nordau 1895, 35), which may cause "fatigue and exhaustion" due to "the vastly increased number of sense impressions and organic reactions, and therefore of perceptions, judgments, and motor impulses, which at present are forced into a given unity of time" (Nordau 1895, 42). Nordau's analysis is an indictment of modernity; his argument is that humanity has not adapted to the rapid changes undergone by society. Other factors such as warfare have contributed to a decline of national vigor, but there is no reason to believe that modern European societies are unable to regenerate. It is only under extraordinary circumstances that a society finds itself at risk of having "[h]ysteria and degeneration," which have always existed, spread to such an extent that they become "a danger to civilization" (Nordau 1895, 537). In the end humanity will adapt to the conditions of modernity, discarding its degenerates along the way: "Degenerates, hysterics, and neurasthenics are not capable of adaptation. Therefore they are fated to disappear" (Nordau 1895, 540).

Where the arts are concerned, the trends associated with the *fin-de-siècle* will give way to a renewed faith in progress and rationalism. Nordau's criticism of Ibsen as having adopted an understanding of heredity that is more Christian than Darwinian is instructive in this regard. Nordau argues that what has commonly been seen as "the idea of heredity influencing all Ibsen's works" is simply "the everrecurring original sin of St. Augustine" (Nordau 1895, 358). Nordau argues his case by claiming that heredity only ever appears in Ibsenian drama "in conjunction with the two other theological ideas of confession and redemption" (Nordau 1895, 358). Taking his argument one step further, Nordau accuses Ibsen of misunderstanding the laws of heredity by only having his characters inherit detrimental traits:

> Now what is good and wholesome is just as frequently inherited as what is evil and diseased – even more frequently, according to many

> investigators. Hence if Ibsen had really wished to exhibit the operation of the law of heredity as understood by Darwin, he would have offered us at least one example, if only one, of the inheritance of good qualities. But not a single instance is to be met with in all his dramas. What his beings possess of good, comes one knows not whence. They have always inherited nothing but evil.
>
> (Nordau 1895, 358)

This depiction of Ibsen as an essentially Christian writer is key to understanding Nordau's hostility toward Ibsen's oeuvre. Nordau's rationalism leads him to categorize Ibsen as someone who adheres to the ideals of the past and who does not embrace progress. Literary movements such as "realism or naturalism, 'decadentism,' neo-mysticism, and their subvarieties" are not "heralds of a new era" but rather "point backwards to times past" (Nordau 1895, 43). Nordau thus couches his criticism of Ibsen in evolutionary terms, as an instance of retrograde evolution, which is to say degeneration. Nordau's treatment of Ibsen demonstrates the flexibility of the concept of degeneration, but it perhaps goes without saying that Nordau singularly fails to take into account the complexity of Ibsenian drama.[17]

Marriage, family, and incest

Fear of degeneration was exacerbated by the fact that degeneration appeared at once readily observable and invisible. Contributors to degeneration discourse could only point to what they perceived as signs of degeneration, and the process of degeneration could only be demonstrated by observing its effects. These effects would tend to gravitate toward the working classes. Stephen Arata's characterization of degeneration discourse as "at once a branch of biology and a form of cultural criticism undertaken by a beleaguered bourgeoisie" (Arata 2010, 2) highlights the class aspect of degeneration discourse. The association of degeneration and the working classes was present in Morel but was later challenged by a critique of the aristocracy, which was portrayed as a remnant of the past (MacDuffie 2014, 195).[18] Degeneration discourse was moreover wedded to bourgeois ideals of productivity. Degeneration was thought to deplete the limited energetic reserves at the disposal of the individual, thereby limiting one's capacity for work. Production and reproduction were linked in that the child of a degenerate parent would be born with diminished vitality. Industry and health were intertwined in a discourse that prioritized production in the workplace and at home. Degeneration discourse can thus be characterized as an expression of "the anxieties of a middle class worried about its own present status and future prospects" (Arata 2010, 32).

Degeneration discourse tended to focus on identifying and counteracting threats to the vested interests of the established class. A class that prioritized the institution of family, marriage, and childrearing would tend to view factors such as disease, reduced vitality, and incest – all commonly associated with degeneracy – as a danger to the perpetuation of the class itself.

The risk of incest, explored by Ibsen in *Ghosts* and *Rosmersholm*, posed a particular problem for a bourgeoisie that displayed a propensity for consanguineous marriage. The bourgeoisie was both fearful of incest and committed to patterns of marriage that veered dangerously close to incest. In his study of consanguineous bourgeois marriages, Adam Kuper argues that the bourgeoisie should be understood as a "status group" (Kuper 2009, 8) composed of a variety of vocations. Typically bourgeois occupations tended to be filled by individuals united through family ties. The bourgeoisie functioned as an extended clan that barred outsiders from entry by practicing endogamy. The coalescing of the bourgeoisie into a tight-knit community occurred in tandem with the emergence of the modern family as "the most reliable source of value and meaning" (Kuper 2009, 14) for the middle class. Once the family unit became a locus of affection, it followed that spouses would be sought within kinship networks. Marriages between cousins or in-laws served to protect class interests. Social and economic capital amassed by one generation could safely be transmitted to the next without risk of dilution. The conceptual proximity of kinship marriage and inbreeding transformed bourgeois marriage practices into a potential wellspring of horror that left its imprint on the literature of the time. Kuper notes that the theme of love between brother and sister was especially prominent in late-18th- and early-19th-century literature (Kuper 2009, 41), a period that roughly coincides with the era of Gothic fiction. Ruth Perry observes that the Gothic emphasis on exploring transgressive sexual desire within the context of family demonstrates "the terrific power of sex and to its dangerous and omnipresent potential in the family" (Perry 2004, 398). Perry argues that the increased visibility of incest in Gothic literature at this time was due to the institution of marriage becoming associated with romantic love (Perry 2004, 375). This transformation can be illustrated using Michel Foucault's classic study *L'Histoire de la sexualité* (1976–2018) as a point of departure.

Foucault traces the development of discourses on sexuality that converge in bourgeois patriarchy. Foucault identifies "four great strategic unities which, beginning in the eighteenth century, formed specific mechanisms of knowledge and power centering on sex" (Foucault 1978, 103). Foucault designates these as the "*hysterization of women's bodies*," the "*pedagogization of children's sex*," the "*socialization of procreative behavior*," and the "*psychiatrization of perverse pleasure*" (Foucault 1978, 104–105;

emphasis in original). Socialization is intimately tied to the institution of marriage and signifies a process whereby couples intent on starting a family internalize an array of societal values meant to ensure that they understand their responsibility toward themselves, their children, and society. Foucault contrasts this process, which he labels a "deployment of sexuality," from earlier patterns of familial organization, a "deployment of alliance," which formed "a system of marriage, of fixation and development of kinship ties, of transmission of names and possessions" (Foucault 1978, 106). The purpose of alliance was to ensure the "homeostasis of the social body" (Foucault 1978, 107), which is to say the maintenance of the status quo. Sexuality, rather than alliance, was employed by the bourgeoisie in order to safeguard the "body, vigor, longevity, progeniture, and descent" (Foucault 1978, 123) of the bourgeois class, which "staked its life and its death on sex by making it responsible for its future welfare" (Foucault 1978, 124). Medical science was enlisted in this endeavor and made to identify potential threats to the health of the bourgeoisie. The insistence that love should enter into a marriage was a means by which to ensure the fecundity and well-being of the bourgeois social body. A mechanism intended to protect the survival of the family line thus turned in on itself by injecting sexuality into the familial sphere. Incest was thought of as a degenerative factor that increased the risk of children being born who would be considered unfit for life. Such children would be unable to perpetuate the family line.

Disease, diathesis, and syphilis

Hereditary illness provided another obstacle to the propagation of the family. Kelly Hurley comments that heredity took on the role of an "invisible source of contamination, with the infection jumping across bodies, across the generations, and manifesting itself in visible physical deformity" (Hurley 2004, 66). As a case in point, Francis Galton (1822–1911) suggested that detailed charts should be kept of the health of families and deposited in specially designated medical registers. Galton argued that knowledge of the hereditary illnesses plaguing certain families would enable us to better understand "which are the families naturally fated to decay and which to thrive, which are those who will die out and which will be prolific and fill the vacant space" (Galton 1883, 245).[19] The preoccupation of degeneration discourse with hereditary illness came to be shared by the eugenic movement, giving rise to a confluence of degeneration and eugenic discourse that impacted late-19th-century literature.[20] Heredity did not differentiate between health and sickness as it was, to quote from Danish author Karl Gjellerup's (1857–1919) thesis on heredity, simply "an indifferent force of

nature."[21] An eugenicist might argue that the destruction of families prone to hereditary illness would be a positive development.[22]

A conceptual link between degeneration and the medical understanding of morbid heredity was the notion of diathesis, which signified an inherited predisposition to developing an illness. The origins of the concept of diathesis lie in Hippocratic medicine, in which illness was attributed to an individual's constitution.[23] As Robert C. Olby notes, diathesis was most often used in 19th-century medical literature to refer to "chronic conditions which progressively or intermittently affected the individual, such as gout, epilepsy, asthma, tuberculosis, and cancer" (Olby 1993, 414).[24] Once acquired, a diathesis could be passed on to one's children as an inherited constitutional predisposition to disease. Diathesis thus functions in much the same way as degeneration: "Some environmental poison produces the disorder, and in the course of several generations it becomes fixed as a hereditary tendency which resists our efforts to remove it" (Olby 1993, 415). A diathesis could spread from afflicted individuals and families to the healthy part of the population through marriage, and marriages between first cousins was thought to increase the risk of transmission of a diathesis (Olby 1993, 424). The chances of a diathesis recurring in subsequent generations would be heightened by improper living, but careful living could also lessen the risk (Bynum 1983, 48). The concept of diathesis thus contains an ethical component.

A latent diathesis could become active due to external factors that stressed the body's resilience. Kenneth S. Kendler argues that the concept on this point prefigures the diathesis-stress model of mental illness.[25] Diathesis was an integral part of a "predisposition-excitation framework" (Kendler 2020, 576) according to which external stress factors, such as traumatic events, would excite and activate a diathesis. Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840–1902) provides an example of how this framework operates in the medical literature of the time:

> The etiology of mental disease is essentially that of other cerebral and nervous diseases, and therefore they belong to the same pathologic family. A superficial consideration of the causal elements divides them into two large groups: – predisposing, or, more correctly, exposing; and accessory – *i.e.*, exciting and often accidental. A sharp distinction of these two classes in the concrete case, however, is not always possible, since a predisposing cause (hereditarily abnormal brain organization, improper training) may also be at the same time the exciting cause, in that it leads to affects, passions, and perverse manner of life, which cause the ultimate outbreak of insanity.
>
> (Krafft-Ebing 1905, 137)

A diathesis was also a threat to one's health in less immediately apparent ways. A diathesis brought with it a weakening of the individual's constitution, which would be more brittle than it would otherwise have been. This risk was based on an understanding of vitality as being finite and susceptible to depletion. This idea lay at the heart of what can best be termed a "fixed fund of energy" theory. Strenuous physical activity and physiological processes such as puberty could act as stress factors that would have a detrimental effect on an individual who was lacking energetic resources. Henry Maudsley (1835–1918) gives an example of this line of thinking when he argues that a diathesis could become activated following the changes undergone during puberty: "In persons of delicate constitution who have inherited a tendency to disease, and who have little vitality to spare, the disease is apt to break out at that time; the new drain established having deprived the constitution of the vital energy necessary to withstand the enemy that was lurking in it" (Maudsley 1874, 199).[26] Fatigue and overexertion are included in the category of external factors that may be injurious to one's health. Krafft-Ebing's comment on how cerebral lesions caused by syphilis are more likely to appear in a brain "weakened by predisposition, overwork, or excesses of any kind" (Krafft-Ebing 1905, 594) demonstrates how the concept of diathesis can be combined with an energetic economy that is centrally important to degeneration discourse.

Perhaps the most significant disease from the standpoint of degeneration was syphilis, the medical literature on which evinces striking similarities to degeneration discourse. Syphilis was thought to impede the successful transfer of energy from parent to child due to the disease depleting the sufferer's vitality. The "fixed fund of energy" theory is integral to both medical discourse on syphilis and degeneration discourse. The close relationship between syphilis and degeneration discourse can be illustrated by Cesare Lombroso's use of an imagery of degeneration when describing *Ghosts* as a depiction of how "the fathers' weaknesses and illnesses on an ever-increasing scale are passed down from generation to generation, until the family line ends up dissolving."[27] Syphilis can be made to symbolize the wasting away of the bourgeoisie due to the introduction of hereditary disease into the family line. Syphilis and degeneration discourse are moralistic discourses that identify immoral behavior as the cause of degeneracy. Allan M. Brandt has clarified the relationship between the two discourses:

> But the concerns about venereal disease also reflected a pervasive fear of the urban masses, the growth of the cities, and the changing nature of familial relationships. As concerns about eugenics and race heightened on both sides of the Atlantic, these diseases were typically associated with so-called "degenerative racial stocks." Rates of infection were

> cited as an index of sexual immorality and a failure to exercise individual control. By the early twentieth century, these infections had become, pre-eminently, a marker of sexual transgression and moral degeneracy. (Brandt 1993, 572)

The medical literature on syphilis offered a biological foundation for notions of syphilitic degeneration. Medical specialists on syphilis, or syphilologists, sought to trace the sources of infection and speculated on the effects of various routes of transmission. In order to understand present ills, the failings of past generations must be laid bare. Such investigations tended toward a deterministic outlook, emphasizing hereditary influences at the expense of individual agency. The tracing of syphilitic infection to its source was especially important given the impact of syphilis on the viability of the family line. While syphilologists differed in their analysis of the etiology of the disease, they agreed on its lethality, often expressing a fear of familial extinction. A quote from the most prominent syphilologist of Ibsen's time, Alfred Fournier (1832–1914), exemplifies this concern:

> The two aforementioned facts (death of the *fetus* and death of the *child*) can be added one to the other and being only too subject to repetition, a third, even more harmful, is often derived, namely: *polymortality of the young* in syphilitic families. Certain syphilitic families are in fact tested in the most cruel manner by a specific heredity, which literally depopulates the domestic hearth by killing, one after the other, a whole line of children.[28]

The various forms of transmission of the disease were associated with different effects on the family line. Syphilologists distinguished between acquired and congenital syphilis, as well as between congenital syphilis inherited from the mother, from the father, or from both parents. Paternal transmission, which is to say the transmission of syphilis via the father's semen, was strongly associated with the child being born with a frail constitution. It was this specific form that aligned syphilis discourse with the "fixed fund of energy" theory. Infection from the mother, on the other hand, was singled out as more lethal and more likely to result in the death of the child, *in utero* or as a stillbirth. Children infected by paternal transmission would routinely be depicted as little old men who would, should they survive infancy, grow into adults lacking the vitality needed to continue the family line. The effects of congenital syphilis were thus configured on an energetic economy that established a clear link between vitality and masculinity. It was most of all the father's responsibility to ensure that his child was born with a sufficient amount of vitality, and it was this transfer that syphilis prevented.[29]

Energetic economy and the "fixed fund of energy" theory

In the context of the "fixed fund of energy" theory, vitality was necessary for the child's well-being and a finite resource that must be husbanded. Vitality should in this context be understood as life force, an animating principle that distinguishes organic from non-organic matter. Vitality can increase or decrease and can be conserved by the individual or spent for the benefit of others. Such thinking gave rise to what I will term an energetic economy, meaning a model of conservation and transfer with a pronounced capitalist aspect and which forms an integral part of bourgeois patriarchy.[30] This system has a built-in gender component that accords value to women depending on their vitality and capacity for reproduction. Women who are past childbearing age, or who for whatever reason choose not to have children, will tend to find themselves relegated to a position of devoting their resources to their extended family. The expectation that women should either conceive children or sacrifice their own vital energy for the children of others can be described as a bourgeois ideal of domesticity. Men, on the other hand, were expected to direct their energies toward productive and meaningful labor, which would provide them with a vocation in life, the pursuit of which would in turn accrue status to the family name. As Vincent Branick Fitzgerald notes, however, an inability to "deposit, invest, and store bodily energy or nerve force" (Fitzgerald 1997, 86) was considered a symptom of degeneracy, regardless of gender.

Michel Foucault understands the bourgeois energetic economy as a process of self-cultivation whereby vitality is amassed through proper living, a project that amounts to an effort to achieve an "indefinite extension of strength, vigor, health, and life" (Foucault 1978, 125). Central to this process was an understanding of the human body as a closed system containing a set amount of energy. Hilary Marland has summarized the "fixed fund of energy" theory as the belief that "the body contained only a limited supply of vital energy to fuel its physical and mental activities" (Marland 2013, 17). The theory was popularized by public figures such as Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), who provides an illustrative example: "Let it never be forgotten that the amount of vital energy which the body at any moment possesses, is limited; and that, being limited, it is impossible to get from it more than a fixed quantity of results" (Spencer 1861, 180). When the body engages in activity, energy is directed from other parts of the body to fuel that activity, per Henry Maudsley: "When Nature spends in one direction, she must economise in another direction" (Maudsley 1874, 199). The "fixed fund of energy" theory was applied differently to men and women, the latter being seen as particularly susceptible to overwork and exhaustion (Taylor 2007, 18).[31] Perhaps unsurprisingly, the idea of limited

energy was invoked to curtail women's freedom, the argument being that activities such as exercise and education might cause energetic depletion (Johannisson 1994, 31).[32]

The "fixed fund of energy" theory proved easy to integrate into degeneration discourse, a process facilitated by a flawed understanding of the laws of thermodynamics. Chamberlin and Gilman argue that degeneration discourse was to some extent incorporated into the natural sciences: "Scientists formulated the law of increasing entropy as the second law of thermodynamics, according to which the available energy of any closed system (such as the universe) decreases over time – its 'work-content' declining to a lower order, as it were" (Chamberlin and Gilman 1985, ix). Degeneration could in this sense be understood as a gradual loss of vital energy on the part of the degenerated organism. This was an essentially incorrect application of thermodynamics to human physiology, as the principle of the conservation of energy cannot be applied to the body (Burstyn 1973, 85). Degeneration discourse nonetheless posited a fixed fund of energy and warned against any behavior that could threaten this fund and thereby invite degeneration. Thinking in terms of energy could also extend to include willpower, which could similarly be thought of as a form of energy and thus capable of depletion. Karl Gjellerup exemplifies this conception of willpower: "But this sum of spontaneous energy, which thus each individual possesses, and which is more or less different from that of other individuals, cannot originally be conditioned by anything other than heredity" (Gjellerup 1881, 139).[33] Fears of depletion of vitality and willpower gave rise to an ideal of spending and conserving energy that sharply differentiated between investing one's energy into productive and beneficial pursuits, on the one hand, and wasting one's energy on the pursuit of pleasure and other unproductive endeavors on the other hand. As I will demonstrate in my readings, this differentiation is central to Ibsen's degeneration plots.

What does Ibsen do with degeneration discourse?

I intend for this book to complement scholarship on Ibsen's engagement with evolutionary discourse. While Ibsen's interest in evolution is a well-researched topic, this line of investigation tends to either overlook his similarly pronounced interest in degeneration. Research on Ibsen and evolution is an interdisciplinary effort to understand how extratextual material, in this case a scientific discourse that rapidly disseminates until it operates on the level of common knowledge, can be appropriated by an author and come to inform the content of a literary text. I will adopt a similar approach, but will shift the focus to degeneration discourse. Degeneration discourse has its own intellectual tradition, rests on a relatively stable set of

value judgments, and makes use of recurring tropes that can be identified in the medical and popular literature of the time. In order to understand to what end Ibsen employs degeneration discourse, however, I must first clarify the difference between degeneration and evolution as it relates to Ibsen's oeuvre.

Ibsen scholarship has a propensity for conflating evolution with degeneration, on the one hand, and degeneration with heredity, on the other hand. I will exemplify this tendency by highlighting a few points of disagreement I have with the work of Kirsten Shepherd-Barr, who has contributed immensely to our understanding of Ibsen's theatricalization of heredity. In a book chapter examining how evolutionary discourse was transposed onto the Victorian stage, Shepherd-Barr discusses certain aspects of Ibsen's use of evolutionary discourse that to my mind are more closely aligned with degeneration discourse. One such aspect is the idea that humanity has deviated from a natural course of development: "Ibsen frequently suggests that the human race has 'gone astray' and this may well be linked to his concern about racial senility, or worn-out genetic stock" (Shepherd-Barr 2014, 161). Shepherd-Barr exemplifies this notion with reference to *Hedda Gabler* and *Little Eyolf* (*Lille Eyolf*, 1894). I see this notion as indebted to the Morelian understanding of degeneration as a deviation from a natural type. Furthermore, the idea that a race can grow old, or that a genetic stock can lose its vital properties, offers a parallel to Morel's emphasis on the wasting away of degenerate families. Shepherd-Barr is discussing degeneration while failing to mention the term. A similar lack of precision can be seen in her examination of eugenic and social Darwinist discourse in Ibsenian drama. Shepherd-Barr notes that *An Enemy of the People* (*En folkefiende*, 1882) is "suffused with eugenic ideas about the survival of the fittest, lower and higher orders, and extermination of the unfit" (Shepherd-Barr 2014, 162), and notes that similar notions are to be found in *Ghosts* and *Little Eyolf*. While I agree with Shepherd-Barr that Ibsen does make use of eugenic discourse, what I am missing is a discussion of the link between eugenic and degeneration discourse. This link would have been immediately obvious to Ibsen's contemporaries and can be summarized as an ethical imperative: if an individual has degenerated, it is right and proper that he or she should be exterminated, for the good of humanity.[34] Eugenicists based their arguments on the concept of degeneration, and yet these ideological affinities are not brought to the fore in Shepherd-Barr's analysis. On a similar note, what Shepherd-Barr describes as Ibsen's pessimistic view of humanity's future reads as a perfect encapsulation of the teleological underpinning of degeneration discourse: "At his most pessimistic, Ibsen sees human evolution as regressive; we are going 'astray' and possibly extinct, and he flirts with eugenic ideas as a way of reversing this downward turn" (Shepherd-Barr 2014, 162). This

observation can be rephrased as Ibsen toying with the notion that eugenics might offer a necessary corrective to degeneration.

I am perhaps being uncharitable toward Shepherd-Barr's research, but the point I wish to make is that evolution and degeneration should not be conflated.[35] This point is made by Shepherd-Barr in her wide-ranging monograph *Theatre and Evolution from Ibsen to Beckett* (2015). Here Shepherd-Barr counsels against making "a too-easy equation of evolution with degeneration, as if the two are synonymous" (Shepherd-Barr 2015, 9). Shepherd-Barr revisits the notion of humanity having gone astray, noting that Ibsen views humanity as being "on a downward evolutionary trajectory, possibly heading for extinction" and describing this line of thought as an "equation of evolution with degeneration and regression" (Shepherd-Barr 2015, 78) that was common at the time. I differ from Shepherd-Barr in that I do not believe Ibsen conflated evolution and degeneration. I will rather argue that he differentiates between the two and that he specifically focuses on degeneration, but not on evolution *per se*, in *Ghosts*, *Rosmersholm*, and *Hedda Gabler*. What Ibsen explores in these texts is the issue of morbid heredity causing the end of a family line.[36] This point can be clarified using Shepherd-Barr's commentary on the theme of familial extinction in *Hedda Gabler*. In this play Ibsen "is focused on not only heredity but also extinction; Hedda is the last of her line, and she seems determined to kill it off" (Shepherd-Barr 2015, 80). I regard heredity and extinction as interwoven concepts. As I will argue in my reading, heredity is part of what compels Hedda to end the Gabler line. I would therefore modify Shepherd-Barr's observation to read that Ibsen in the texts studied is preoccupied with heredity that *causes* extinction. The causal relationship between morbid heredity and the petering out of the family line is a key aspect that aligns these texts with degeneration discourse.

In order to clarify the distinction between evolutionary and degeneration discourse, I will turn to Tamsen Wolff's pioneering dissertation "Mendel's Theatre: Performance, Eugenics, and Early Twentieth-Century American Drama" (2002), in which Wolff examines a number of case studies of how evolutionary and eugenic discourse came to influence the works of authors such as Eugene O'Neill. The introductory chapter traces the impact of evolutionary thought on the drama of Ibsen and Strindberg. Where Ibsen is concerned, Wolff discusses *Ghosts*, *The Wild Duck*, *The Lady from the Sea* (*Fruen fra havet*, 1888), and *Little Eyolf* and also notes the presence of eugenic discourse in *An Enemy of the People*. Of these texts, I would argue that Ibsen only directly engages with degeneration discourse in *Ghosts*. The presence of evolutionary discourse does not imply the presence of degeneration discourse. It should be noted that theories of heredity predate both Morel and Darwin. Wolff observes that the lines between discourses

were blurred at the time in that "hereditary theories remained largely indistinguishable from evolutionary theories until the establishment of Gregor Mendel's laws of heredity in 1900" (Wolff 2002, 20). The conceptual proximity between discourses has implications for Ibsen scholarship. When Ibsen explores issues of heredity, this does not automatically entail that he is focused on evolution. Similarly, a drama that features a degeneration plot should not immediately be read as an exploration of evolution. These discourses should only be approached in conjunction when the text of the play calls for an integrated reading. The distinction I am making is one of degree. As I will clarify in my chapter on *Ghosts*, a play that does contain elements of evolutionary and eugenic discourse, I see the concept of degeneration as providing the main thrust of the drama. *Ghosts* can be compared to *The Wild Duck*, a play in which the concept of degeneration, while making a brief appearance in Ibsen's notes, is not the central structuring principle of the text. Turning to Wolff's other examples, I would find it difficult to argue that a play such as *The Lady from the Sea* engages with degeneration discourse to the same extent as it does with evolutionary discourse. In *Ghosts*, *Rosmersholm*, and *Hedda Gabler*, degeneration discourse supplies both the basic plot, as well as an imagery and a highly specialized vocabulary, the combined weight of which warrant that these plays should be read together. While these texts may exhibit some level of engagement with evolutionary thought, the preponderance of evidence is slanted toward the side of degeneration.

Turning to the question of why Ibsen would choose to make degeneration the centrepiece of some of his plays, I can venture an explanation that I will divide into the social sphere, on the one hand, and Ibsen's immediate interests and intellectual contexts, on the other hand. One should take into account the societal impact of hereditarian theories at the time. Different views on the mechanisms of transmission were advanced throughout the 19th century, and the debate was never entirely settled as to the relative importance of heredity versus environment. Wolff notes that heredity tended to be understood as a blending of parental influences: "Most theories emphasized 'blending inheritance,' meaning that an offspring's characteristics, or traits, were always intermediate between those of its parents" (Wolff 2002, 20). Furthermore, there was an element of flexibility to heredity: "Heredity at this time was also considered 'soft,' meaning that a newborn's traits could be attributed to a wide variety of parental habits, environments, mental or physical conditions, all of which were presumed capable of altering the genetic composition of the fetus in utero" (Wolff 2002, 20–21). The view of heredity as malleable opened avenues of investigation into matters such as the relative influence of either parent, the impact of environmental factors, and the risks associated with congenital diseases and traits acquired by the parents. Debates on heredity were

tinged with an element of fear. Wolff describes how heredity became a focal point for the cultural anxieties of the time:

> Heredity remains a constant source of interest and contestation during this period largely because so many cultural anxieties are able to to find a place under its heading, among them: anxieties over breakdown in marriage; over paternity in the breakdown of marriage; over decreased birth rates; over disease; over the importance of physical vs. psychological influences; over animality in general and its relation to the human condition; over raising children as the future generation in a debased world; over the desire to control for human use the new and intimidating knowledge that science is presenting; and over the possibility of human degeneration and stagnation.
>
> (Wolff 2002, 22)

Some of these anxieties rank among the central preoccupations of Ibsenian drama. The issue of paternity is integral to *The Wild Duck*, the raising of children lies at the heart of *Ghosts*, and so on. It is the last anxiety on Wolff's list that I will investigate.

The second part of the explanation as to why Ibsen engages with degeneration discourse relates to his attitude toward science in general, and the role that science plays in the Scandinavian literary milieu ca. 1880–90. Kirsten Shepherd-Barr characterizes Ibsen as an author who was "deeply interested in science both as a source of ideas and as the main driver of progress" (Shepherd-Barr 2021, 82) but who also exhibited a "cavalier attitude to accuracy, even distorting or muddling the facts" (Shepherd-Barr 2021, 82). Ibsen was far from alone in his scientific interests. The prominence of literary naturalism during the 1880s provided an impetus to a variety of Scandinavian authors who chose to integrate scientific discourse into their literature. Unlike some of his colleagues, however, Ibsen's engagement with science remained within the realm of literature. J.P. Jacobsen, with whom Ibsen was acquainted and who possibly introduced Ibsen to Darwinian thought (cf. Tjønneland 1998), translated Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man* into Danish (1872; 1874–1875). Another instructive example is Strindberg, who in the early 1890s quit fiction to instead focus on developing what he described as a monist chemistry in works such as *Antibarbarus* (1894). Ibsen did not go quite so far, and he can perhaps best be described as an interested but wary observer, who also evinced a degree of skepticism toward science: "He oscillates between respecting science, medicine and technology's role in humanity's progress and disparaging their destructive capabilities" (Shepherd-Barr 2021, 82).

Some scientific disciplines mattered more to Ibsen than others, and these helped shape his understanding of the relationship between man and

nature. Shepherd-Barr outlines the most significant aspects of Ibsen's scientific interests as they relate to his drama:

> Heredity, evolution and disease (or broadly speaking, mechanisms of transmission), coupled with an abiding interest in geography, geology (particularly the fundamental elements of earth, fire, water, air), landscape and "deep time": these biological and environmental sciences forge his theatrical vision of nature and the place of humans within it.
>
> (Shepherd-Barr 2021, 83)

Ibsen's use of degeneration discourse is tied to his interest in the mechanisms of transmission. Morbid heredity and congenital disease supply Ibsen with a stock of tropes and themes that can be explored in a dramatic format. Evolution offered much the same, but there is still a missing link between Ibsen's interest in the broader category of mechanisms of transmission and the specific concept of degeneration. The gap can be filled by noting that Ibsen's "sustained concern with families, with generational change and inheritance" (Shepherd-Barr 2021, 83) accommodates both a fascination with heredity in general and with morbid heredity in particular. The family unit provides the glue that binds these interests together. While Ibsen explores morbid and non-morbid heredity in different plays, both variants of heredity are tied to the composition and behavior of individual families. What Ibsen does in the plays that I will study is to introduce an element of morbid heredity into a family unit, provide an account of how this introduction came about, and then allow the consequences to play out on stage. In this regard Ibsen proceeds much like an experimental scientist. Shepherd-Barr argues that Ibsen makes use of the family as a staging ground for an experiment of sorts:

> So the human family becomes Ibsen's Petri dish, in which he experiments with the basic ingredients of human evolution – heredity and environment – to test familial bonds, gauge the extent of biologically determined instincts and suggest radical, alternative familial constellations whose common theme is the displacement or complete absence of a dominant patriarchal figure.
>
> (Shepherd-Barr 2021, 84)

To this I would add that the root causes of degeneration that I will highlight pertain to the category of morbid heredity. These causes include forms of disease, such as a case of congenital syphilis, and insalubrious environments, such as a provincial town, a family estate, or a bourgeois interior. In all three texts the reader is provided with an account of how a combination

of morbid heredity and environmental factors conspire to bring about the end of a once-prominent family.

Ibsen's focus on heredity and environment might suggest that he is indebted to literary naturalism. His theatricalization of the decline and end of families could similarly indicate that he shares some thematic affinity with the art and literature of the *fin-de-siècle*. In an effort to situate *Ghosts*, *Rosmersholm*, and *Hedda Gabler* in their literary context I will argue for the former and against the latter. The insistence on heredity and environment displayed by these texts suggests an affinity with naturalism. Furthermore, degeneration was a prominent theme in naturalist fiction (cf. Pick 1996, 74–96).[37] What Ibsen and naturalism also share is a habit of confronting bourgeois respectability. Brian Nelson characterizes naturalist fiction as "a major assault on bourgeois morality and institutions" that strives to reveal "the vice and corruption behind the respectable facade" (Nelson 2012, 294). Ibsen's depiction of the high bourgeoisie as corrupt serves a similar purpose. Keeping in mind Kirsten Shepherd-Barr's observations on Ibsen's literary-scientific method, Nelson's description of Émile Zola's Rougon-Macquart cycle could just as well be applied to Ibsen's degeneration plots:

> The subtitle of the Rougon-Macquart cycle, "A Natural and Social History of a Family under the Second Empire," suggests Zola's two interconnected aims: to use fiction to demonstrate a number of "scientific" notions about the ways in which human behaviour is determined by heredity and environment; and to use the symbolic possibilities of a family whose heredity is tainted to represent a diseased society – the corrupt yet dynamic France of the Second Empire (1852–70).
>
> (Nelson 2012, 296)

In *L'Assommoir* (1876), Zola "transgressed the limits of what could be written about" (Nelson 2012, 300); Ibsen did much the same by staging a case of syphilitic deterioration in *Ghosts*. If a central feature of naturalism is a theme of "disintegration and decomposition – an 'entropic vision' that reflects a real crisis of human values" (Nelson 2012, 308), then Ibsen's degeneration plots would fit under the label of naturalism. Despite these parallels, Ibsen scholarship has tended to view him as disdainful of naturalism. I believe this to be a fundamental error in need of correction. An oft-repeated anecdote is usually taken as evidence of Ibsen's distaste for naturalism. The anecdote appears in Michael Meyer's biography of Ibsen: "Ibsen hated being compared with Zola, for whom he had a low regard. 'Zola,' he once remarked, 'descends into the sewer to bathe in it; I, to cleanse it'" (Meyer 1971, 299). Meyer's source is given as Erik Lie's book on the life and work of his father, Jonas Lie (Lie 1933).[38] Turning to Erik

Lie's book, the anecdote itself is a retelling, attributed to the Norwegian painter Christian Meyer Ross (1843–1904), of a comment made by Ibsen to the Swedish painter Georg Pauli (1855–1935). The trustworthiness of the anecdote is questionable. This is a third-hand account (Paulli – Ross – Lie), published half a century after the exchange is supposed to have taken place. The anecdote has nonetheless found its way into Ibsen scholarship and appears in such works as Ivo de Figueiredo's biography of Ibsen (Figueiredo 2019, 439) or Shepherd-Barr's essay on Ibsen and science (Shepherd-Barr 2021, 88). I see no reason to ascribe validity to the anecdote, and there is no other documentation of Ibsen's supposed antipathy toward naturalism. The only mention of Zola in Ibsen's letters is contained in a letter to Georg Brandes in which Ibsen thanks him for having sent a copy of his essay on Zola (Brandes 1887). Ibsen writes that he has read Brandes' essay repeatedly and with great interest.[39] This statement, as well as the lack of polemical references to Zola or naturalism in Ibsen's letters, suggests that Ibsen was positively inclined toward naturalism.

The case cannot be made, on the other hand, for a reading of Ibsen's degeneration plots as either prefiguring or being influenced by literary decadence.[40] On a surface level there might appear to be certain affinities between Ibsen's degeneration plots and decadent literature, especially as pertains to *Rosmersholm*, in which Ibsen makes repeated references to the fall of the Roman Empire. A parallel could perhaps be made between the theme of familial decay in Ibsenian drama and themes of decline and decay in decadent fiction. That being said, I believe there are compelling reasons why degeneration and decadence should not be conflated in Ibsen's case. Although decadent writers were fascinated with the idea of civilizational decline, this was hardly a novel preoccupation at the time. As Matei Călinescu observes, the meaning of "decadence" in European intellectual history evolves in stages. At first the concept referred to the decline of a highly cultured state, most often the Roman Empire, as in de Montesquieu's *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence* (1734) and Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–89). From there the concept developed during the 19th century into the "new and more specific notion of *cultural decadence*" and then on to "the aesthetic-historical category of 'decadentism'" (Călinescu 1987, 157; emphasis in original). The fall of the Roman Empire played an important part in the European social imaginary during the 19th century, and Victorian artists and authors made frequent reference to the later stages of Roman history (cf. Vance 1997). I will argue that when Ibsen makes use of an imagery of the late Roman Empire, he partakes in a tradition that significantly predates the use of such imagery by the decadent writers of the 1880s and '90s. When Ibsen wrote his degeneration plots, decadence

as a concept was primarily to be found in the realm of art and literature. The category of "decandentism" that Călinescu refers to was at heart the creation of a group of writers who labeled themselves as decadents.

The term was introduced as a literary concept by the French critic Désiré Nisard (1806–1888), who in his *Études de mœurs et de critique sur les poètes latins de la décadence* (1834) sought to advance "a theory developed on the common characteristics of poetry in decadence" (Nisard 1834, v), referring to a type of poetry that is no longer capable of innovation but only of "scandalously destroying languages" (Nisard 1834, vi).[41] Matthew Potolsky notes the significance of Nisard's work to the later development of literary decadence: "Nisard's study fixed the constellation of ideas and metaphors literary decadence still evokes today, from the imagery of Roman decline to sensual indulgence, extreme erudition, and linguistic complexity" (Potolsky 2012, 3). The concept of decadent poetry was later to become part of the literary program of Théophile Gautier (1811–1872), who used the term decadence to express his admiration for the poetry of Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867). In his preface to the 1868 edition of *Fleurs du mal*, Gautier comments that Baudelaire "loved what is improperly called the style of decadence, and which is nothing other than art that has reached that point of extreme maturity that characterizes aging civilizations with their oblique suns" (Gautier 1868, xvi).[42] While Gautier regards decadence as a literary style, the connection would later be made between a decadent style and a decadent society. In his 1883 essay on Baudelaire, Paul Bourget (1852–1935) applies the label of decadent both to a society that "produces too many individuals unfit for the labors of communal life" (Bourget 1883, 24) and to a literary style characterized by fragmentation: "A style of decadence is one where the unity of the book breaks down to give way to the independence of the page, where the page breaks down to give way to the independence of the sentence, and the sentence to give way to the independence of the word" (Bourget 1883, 25).[43] Bourget transfers the concept of decadence from the domain of literature to that of society. I would argue that this shift is due to the influence of evolutionary and degeneration discourse. When Bourget exemplifies his argument of decadent societies using the falling demographics of the late Roman Empire, he expresses himself in Darwinian terms: "A society subsists only on the condition of being able to fight vigorously for existence in the competition of races. It must bring forth many beautiful children and raise up many brave soldiers" (Bourget 1883, 26).[44] Bourget's essay is an example of how a literary term may be given new meaning when combined with pre-existing discourses on degeneration and the decline of empires. This conflation in how terms such as decadence were used at the time may cause confusion among modern readers.

Returning to Ibsen, I see no reason to link his references to the Roman Empire in *Rosmersholm* to literary decadence. Ibsen does not avail himself of the recurring tropes and themes that brought together a wide variety of texts under the common heading of decadent fiction. The editors of the anthology *Decadence, Degeneration, and the End* (2014) enumerate these themes:

> the imagery of an exhausted civilization in decline, for which artificiality had come to triumph over any life that might be in tune with nature; the link between decadent society and sickness, especially neurosis and mental instability; the need for language to find arcane, unfamiliar modes and terms of expression; and the correlation between fading civilization and the imagery of death and dissolution.
>
> (Härmänmaa and Nissen 2014, 2)

Of these themes, only that of civilizational decline might possibly be relevant to Ibsen's degeneration plots, again as relates to *Rosmersholm*. As I will demonstrate in my reading of the play, however, the decline in question is limited to the high bourgeoisie represented by Rosmer. One might also argue that Hedda's suicide embodies, in her mind at least, the central decadent motif of "death *in* beauty, the sublimely aesthetic experience of *mourir en beauté* (dying in beauty)" (Härmänmaa and Nissen 2014, 3; emphasis in original), but I will rather argue that Hedda's suicide is portrayed as wasteful and ultimately inconsequential. Finally, what the editors describe as the overarching attitude of decadent writers toward society is entirely at odds with my understanding of Ibsen's degeneration plots:

> In their defiant revolt against artistic convention, the Decadents and Symbolists provided an exuberant polemic against positivism, rationalism, materialism, faith in progress, and the virtues of bourgeois conformity, rejecting descriptions of nature in favor of a kind of aesthetic artificiality, of an indulgence in the realms of the senses, imagination, and individual experience.
>
> (Härmänmaa and Nissen 2014, 4)

My understanding of Ibsen's use of degeneration discourse is that he employs the concept of degeneration in accordance with a rationalist and positivist view of heredity; he directs his criticism against the bourgeoisie in order to advance the cause of progress, which is being blocked by a bourgeoisie that refuses any attempt at social reform; and he favors everyday realism over artificiality. In other words, there is nothing decadent about Ibsen's use of degeneration discourse, which is based on source materials existing outside the purview of literary decadence.

A note on the form and scope of the book

This book contains three chapters focusing on the degeneration plots in *Ghosts*, *Rosmersholm*, and *Hedda Gabler*. On the basis of intertextual and other links between these three texts, I will argue that they constitute variations on a common plot that provides the structure for the action. I am not arguing that Ibsen's use of a degeneration plot is evidence of his having read the disseminators of degeneration discourse. Ibsen was notoriously loathe to admit instances of influence, and even had he read writers such as Morel, he most likely would not have admitted to doing so. My approach on this point is indebted to the distinction that Dionýz Ďurišin made, pertaining to intertextuality in literature, between genetic contacts and typological affinities. As César Domínguez notes in his essay on Ďurišin's theory of world literature, typological affinities do not operate on the same level as genetic contacts, which are explicit references in the work of one author to another text. Typological affinities between two texts instead derive from "a literary similarity that may be due to economic, political, social, or psychological reasons" (Domínguez 2022, 63). Instead of chasing nonexistent clues as to which treatises on degeneration Ibsen may or may not have read, I will argue that degeneration discourse was ingrained in late-19th-century European culture to such an extent that Ibsen would have become familiar with this discourse, even had he never read a single work on degeneration. I am adopting the argument made by Stephen Arata that degeneration discourse, albeit originating in a domain of specialized scientific knowledge, rapidly disseminated into the domain of mainstream culture:

> "Knowledge" about degeneracy quickly achieved the status of popular wisdom, available for use by a wide variety of non-specialists. One need not have studied, or even have read, the works of pathologists or clinicians in order to "know" what degeneracy looked like or what it entailed.
>
> (Arata 2010, 3)

Degeneration discourse, as Arata's study and the other studies of degeneration referenced in the preceding have shown, was part of the cultural fabric of Ibsen's time.

My readings will adopt a genetic approach. I will trace the genesis of the degeneration plots in these three dramas from conception until completion. I will examine Ibsen's drafts in order to establish the centrality of the concept of degeneration to his writing process. I have taken into account Ibsen's letters before and after writing the plays, insofar as they shed light on the issue of degeneration; occasionally Ibsen will

make comments to critics, theater directors and others that underline the importance of the degeneration plot. Finally, I have chosen to include Ibsen's essays and public statements. These texts were made in public and published, which adds to their relevance when studying Ibsen's dramas. All references to Ibsen's works are to the most recent edition of his collected works, *Henrik Ibsens skrifter* (2005–2010), abbreviated as *HIS*. Ibsen's notes are conveniently available in facsimile and in transcribed format on the *HIS* website.[45] For reasons of space I have chosen to quote the text of Ibsen's plays using the English translations of Deborah Dawkin and Erik Skuggevik, which are based on *HIS* and maintain a consistently high quality. I have on occasion amended what I consider to be misleading or imprecise translations. In instances where less-than-precise translations have been a recurring issue, I have made reference to other translations for comparative purposes. With the exception of Dawkin and Skuggevik, all translations from Norwegian, Danish, Swedish, French, and German are my own.

Notes

1 On the bourgeois concept of family, see (Shorter 1977).
2 Chris Baldick argues that fears of familial extinction are one of the central themes in Gothic fiction (Baldick 1992, xxi). Degeneration discourse is conceptually similar to Gothic literature, the main difference being that Gothic writers tend to emphasize the possibility that a corrupt, old order may return to power. On the Gothic in Ibsen, see (Rühling 1998), (Sandberg 2015), and (Thakur 2018). The Gothic elements in Ibsenian drama are tangential to my own investigation.
3 How Ibsen conceives of this cycle can be illustrated by a comment in his notes to *The Wild Duck* (*Vildanden*, 1884) in which the rise and fall of the Werle family is described: "Every family 'runs out' in one generation, and within this generation, in a certain individual. The Werle family has reached the pinnacle: the old merchant. – The son represents something new. – The reverse is the case with Hedvig." (Quoted from www.ibsen.uio.no/DRVIT_Vi%7CVi81944.xhtml; accessed February 1, 2024.) ["Enhver familje løber 'linen ud' i en generation, og i denne i et visst individ. Familjen Werle har nået toppunktet: den gamle grosserer. – Sønnen repræsenterer noget nyt. – Det omvendte er tilfældet med Hedvig."] That being said, I consider degeneration in *The Wild Duck* to be peripheral to the main plot and will not conduct a reading of this particular play.
4 Ibsen was not alone in engaging with degeneration discourse in his drama. For purposes of comparison, I will on occasion refer to the works of August Strindberg, who made frequent reference to the topic of degeneration. As I will argue in the chapter on *Hedda Gabler*, Ibsen was directly influenced by Strindberg's literary treatment of degeneration.
5 Eivind Tjønneland has examined the contemporary reception of Ibsen's female characters, noting the use of an imagery of degeneration on the part of Ibsen's critics (Tjønneland 2022). Tjønneland does not investigate how degeneration would have been understand by these critics. Tjønneland's study is exclusively

focused on the reception of the plays and does not engage in textual analysis, which makes it less useful for my purposes.

6 Gerda Lerner offers a succinct definition of patriarchy: "Patriarchy in its wider definition means the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general" (Lerner 1986, 239).

7 For a fuller treatment of the bourgeoisie as a historical backdrop to the literature of Ibsen's time, see (Moretti 2013).

8 Morel's treatise has not been translated. On Morel's life and works, see (Pick 1996). On the relationship of degeneration theory to 19th-century medical science, see (Carlson, Eric T. 1985).

9 "une *déviation du type primitif ou normal de l'humanité*" (Morel 1857, 682; emphasis in original).

10 "Il existe des individus qui résument dans leur personne les dispositions organiques vicieuses de plusieurs générations antérieures" (Morel 1857, 62).

11 "dégradation progressive" (Morel 1857, 5)

12 On Lankester's views on degeneration, see (Barnett 2006).

13 "un type parfait à l'origine de notre espèce" (Legrain and Magnan 1895, 74).

14 Magnan and his pupil Legrain were trained psychiatrists. On the impact of degeneration theory on psychiatry in late-19th-century France, see (Walusinski 2020).

15 "un mouvement de progression d'*un état plus parfait vers un état moins parfait*" (Legrain and Magnan 1895, 76; emphasis in original).

16 For a discussion of how Lombroso's criminal anthropology relates to degeneration discourse, see (Pick 1996).

17 Put simply, Nordau appears to lack a basic reading comprehension of a play such as *Ghosts*. Nordau argues that Osvald cannot be suffering from a case of late onset congenital syphilis because he is "depicted as a model of manly strength and health" (Nordau 1895, 354). I will argue the exact opposite in my reading, that Osvald is portrayed as lacking vitality.

18 An example of this line of criticism can be found in an essay by Carl Nærup (1864–1931) on heredity and evolution in which Nærup argues that the future will belong to an aristocracy of merit: "The aristocracy of the future will be an aristocracy of nature, which will not be artificially sustained by imagined inherited eminence, supported by social favors, but which by excellent ability and personal skill will assert itself as the leader of development" (Nærup 1899, 605). ["Fremtidens adel vil blive et naturens aristokrati, der ikke kunstig må holdes oppe ved indbildt nedarvet fornemhed, støttet af sociale begunstigelser, men som ved fremragende evner og personlig dygtighed vil hævde sig som leder af udviklingen."]

19 On Galton and hereditarian thought, see (Bulmer 2003).

20 On degeneration and eugenics in the fiction of the period, see (Greenslade 2016).

21 "en indifferent Naturkraft" (Gjellerup 1881, 365).

22 Publications such as Robert Reid Rentoul's (ca. 1855–1925) *Proposed Sterilization of Certain Mental and Physical Degenerates* (1903) and *Race Culture; or, Race Suicide?* (1906) exemplify the overlap between degeneration and eugenic discourse.

23 On the history of the concept, see (Ackerknecht 1982).

24 Jonathan Hutchinson (1828–1913) provides a contemporary definition: "I would define a diathesis to be any bodily condition, however induced, in virtue

of which the individual is, through a long period, or usually through the whole life, prone to suffer from some peculiar type of disease" (Hutchinson 1884, 3).

25 The diathesis-stress model "postulates that etiologic factors underlying psychiatric illness can be divided into those that are present from an early age and are temporally stable in their effect (diathesis) and those that are temporally discrete, occurring close in time to disorder onset (stress)" (Kendler 2020, 576).

26 In *The Pathology of Mind* (1879) Maudsley applies the concept of diathesis to his understanding of mental illness: "The conclusion, then, which we have reached is, that an individual who, by reason of a bad descent, is born with a predisposition to insanity has a native nervous constitution that, whatever name may be given to it, is unstable or defective, rendering him unequal to bear the severe stress of adverse events. In other words, the man has what I have called *the insane temperament*" (Maudsley 1879, 186; emphasis in original).

27 "fædrenes svagheder og sygdomme i stadig forøget maalestok gaar i arv fra generation til generation, indtil slegten ender med at opløses" (Lombroso 1893, 396). The article in *Samtiden* is a translation of Lombroso's "Ibsens *Gespenster* und die Psychiatrie," originally published in *Die Zukunft*, 16 September 1893.

28 "Les deux faits précités (mort du *fœtus* et mort de l'*enfant*) pouvant s'ajouter l'un à l'autre et n'étant que trop sujets à répétitions, il en dérive souvent un troisième, encore plus néfaste, à savoir: *polymortalité des jeunes* dans les familles syphilitiques. Certaines familles syphilitiques sont effectivement éprouvées de la façon la plus cruelle par l'hérédité spécifique, laquelle dépeuple littéralement le foyer domestique en tuant coup sur coup toute une lignée d'enfants" (Fournier 1891, 315; emphasis in original).

29 I will speculate that Ibsen kept up to date on syphilis research. Two possible informants who may have aided him were Daniel Cornelius Danielssen (1815–1894), author of a work on innoculations against syphilis and leprosy (Danielssen 1858) and with whom Ibsen was acquainted since the 1850s, and Cæsar Hakon Boeck (1845–1917), with whom Ibsen was on friendly terms during the 1890s (Dingstad et al. [eds.] 2013, 59, 105). Boeck was the nephew of Carl Wilhelm Boeck (1808–1875), Norway's most authoritative syphilologist.

30 The connection to capitalism can be exemplified by the use of imagery drawn from the world of finance. The American neurologist George Miller Beard (1839–1883) provides a typical example: "The man with a small income is really rich, as long as there is no overdraft on the account; so the nervous man may be really well and in fair working order as long as he does not draw on his limited store of nerve-force. But a slight mentaI disturbance, unwonted toil or exposure, anything out of and beyond his usual routine, even a sleepless night, may sweep away that narrow margin, and leave him in nervous bankruptcy, from which he finds it as hard to rise as from financial bankruptcy" (Beard 1881, 10).

31 On the relationship between energy and women's health, see (Moscucci 1990) and (Vertinsky 1990).

32 On a side note, overexertion plays a role in *A Doll's House* (*Et dukkehjem*, 1879), in which Helmer and fru Linde are described as suffering from overexertion (*HIS* 7:228, 231, 244).

33 "Men denne Sum af spontan Energi, som saaledes hvert Individ besidder, og som er mer eller mindre forskjellig fra andre Individers, kan ikke oprindelig være betinget ved andet end Arveligheden."

34 One possible source for Ibsen's knowledge of social Darwinism might have been his son, Sigurd. Ivo de Figueiredo notes that Sigurd "was convinced of

the validity of Social Darwinism: 'Never mind, that a number of individuals go to the dogs, this is the way of the world, the majority of the human race are canon fodder in the struggle for life,' he wrote on one occasion" (Figueiredo 2019, 485).

35 The book chapter includes a reference to William Greenslade's *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel, 1880–1940* (1994) in a footnote but does so in the context of discussing Max Nordau's critique of Ibsen. Pointing out the irony of Nordau reading Ibsen as an instance of degeneration (Shepherd-Barr 2014, 162), Shepherd-Barr fails to note the double irony that Nordau stamped the label of degenerate onto the oeuvre of an author who was deeply invested in exploring degeneration discourse.

36 Shepherd-Barr's monograph contains a single mention of Morel as part of a brief discussion of Dr. Rank in *A Doll's House*. Shepherd-Barr notes that Ibsen's drafts reference the idea of morbid heredity (Shepherd-Barr 2015, 87), but she does not explore the issue further. The draft in question features Dr. Rank blaming his father for his own failing health (NBO Ms.4° 1113b; available at www.ibsen.uio.no/DRVIT_Du%7CDu41113b.xhtml; accessed February 1, 2024).

37 On the history of literary naturalism, see (Chevrel 1982) and (Baguley 1990).

38 The anecdote in full (note that Meyer gives the page number as 169, which is incorrect):

> The painter Ross said that the Swedish painter Paulli once complimented Ibsen on his works at a dinner table. "They resemble those of the modern French –"
>
> Ibsen was outraged.
>
> "I mean, those of the modern French," continued Paulli. "A Maupassant, a Zola –"
>
> "The difference being," Ibsen replied sharply, "that Zola descends into the sewer to take a bath, I to clean it." (Lie 1933, 162–163)
>
> [Maleren Ross fortalte at den svenske maler Paulli engang ved et middagsbord komplimenterte Ibsen med hans arbeider. "De ligner de moderne franskmenns –"
>
> Ibsen ble fortørnet.
>
> "Jeg mener, til de moderne franskmenn," vedblev Paulli. "En Maupassant, en Zola –"
>
> "Kun med den forskjell," svarte Ibsen hvasst, "at Zola stiger ned i kloakken for å ta sig et bad, jeg for å rense den."]

39 The letter is dated October 30 and November 4, 1888. "Tillad mig da, skønt lovlig sent, at takke Dem for telegrammet, som De glædede mig med på min fødselsdag. Dernæst for afhandlingen om 'Temperamentet og Virkeligheden [sic!] hos Emile Zola,' hvilken De i sin tid havde den godhed at sende mig og som jeg gentagne gange har læst med levende interesse" (*HIS* 14:489–490).

40 On Nordic literary decadence, see (Andersen 1992) and (Buvik 2001). The anthology *Nordic Literature of Decadence* is an up to date treatment of the topic (Lyytikainen et al. 2020).

41 "une théorie développée sur les caractères communs des poésies en décadence"; "détruire avec scandale les langues."

42 "aimait ce qu'on appelle improprement le style de décadence, et qui n'est autre chose que l'art arrivé à ce point de maturité extrême que déterminent à leurs soleils obliques les civilisations qui vieillissent."

43 "produit un trop grand nombre d'individus impropres aux travaux de la vie commune"; "Un style de décadence est celui où l'unité du livre se décompose pour laisser la place à l'indépendance de la page, où la page se décompose pour laisser la place à l'indépendance de la phrase, et la phrase pour laisser la place à l'indépendance du mot."
44 "Une société ne subsiste qu'à la condition d'être capable de lutter vigoureusement pour l'existence dans la concurrence des races. Il faut qu'elle produise beaucoup de beaux enfants et qu'elle mette sur pied beaucoup de braves soldats."
45 References to *HIS* include volume and page number. *Ghosts* is quoted from volume 7: *Samfundets støtter; Et dukkehjem; Gengangere; En folkefiende* (2008). *Rosmersholm* is quoted from volume 8: *Vildanden; Hvide heste; Rosmersholm; Fruen fra havet* (2009). *Hedda Gabler* is quoted from volume 9: *Hedda Gabler; Bygmester Solness; Lille Eyolf* (2009). References to commentary volumes are indicated with "K."

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1 The Rot of the Bourgeois Body
Ghosts (1881)

Contemporary critics of *Ghosts* identified Osvald as an instance of degeneration. In his highly critical review of the play in *Morgenbladet*, Georg Brandes blames Helene for having remained with Alving, resulting in her giving birth to "a being born ruined, a son, whom deathly tiredness, despair, insanity, idiocy strikes at the entry into manhood" (Brandes 1881, n.p.).[1] Brandes' description is infused with an eugenicist undercurrent that suggests that Osvald would have been better off dead.[2] Amalie Skram employs similar rhetoric, complimenting Ibsen for his courage in depicting generational decay: "In short, he must have the expensively paid for ability to follow mankind down through all the stages of degradation and suffering of the family, until it stops where Osvald sits, a disgusting invertebrate organism in human form" (Skram 1882, n.p.).[3] While Skram's high opinion of the play differs from Brandes' more critical view, they both employ an imagery of degeneration when describing Osvald and the fate of the Alving family. I will in the following pursue the line of interpretation made by Brandes and Skram, that *Ghosts* presents the reader with a degeneration plot focusing on the downfall of a bourgeois family following the introduction of degeneracy into the bloodline. This degeneration plot in turn revolves around an energetic economy in which characters and ideals are situated on a spectrum ranging from vibrant and vital to depleted and obsolete. An ideal that no one subscribes to will be described as overripe and in need of replacement; similarly, individuals, families and social classes may be regarded as lacking the energy required to sustain their existence. Children figure into this energetic economy by virtue of being the means whereby their parents' economic and social capital, and by extension their class, may be kept alive. Osvald was supposed to ensure the continuation of the Alving line, but due to his having been born with congenital syphilis transmitted from father to son, his vitality has been severely compromised. Osvald's energetic depletion compels him to seek out infusions of energy from other sources, including people. Although syphilis represents, to quote Owsei Temkin, "the ruin of family and

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progeny" (Temkin 1977, 483), it is specifically the *haute bourgeoisie* of the Alvings that is most at risk. The syphilitic contagion entails a break in the line of transmission of vital energy from father to son, and the Alving family has thus lost its capacity for propagation.

The relationship I am establishing between Osvald's lack of energy and his role as the last of his family line depends on one particular aspect of the medical discourse on syphilis of Ibsen's time. The mode of transmission of syphilis from parent to child was not well understood, and various explanations were offered, some of which we now know to have been incorrect. Prime among these was the notion that syphilis could be transmitted from father to child via the father's semen. Cases of paternally transmitted congenital syphilis were generally not considered to be fatal, but they were associated with detrimental effects to the child's health. Such children were routinely described as having the appearance of old men and were thought of as lacking vitality and having a weak constitution. To make matters worse, these children would on occasion barely exhibit any symptoms in childhood, the disease instead breaking out on the verge of adulthood. These cases were designated as *hérédo-syphilitiques*, a concept popularized by the French syphilologist Alfred Fournier in the 1880s but well-established in the medical literature before then. I will argue that Ibsen was aware of this aspect of syphilis discourse and that he conceived of Osvald as a heredo-syphilitic child. The idea of inherited frailty caused by paternally transmitted congenital syphilis provided Ibsen with a fitting metaphor for the sins inflicted by bourgeois patriarchy on its children. Ibsen thereby employed a specific element of syphilis discourse that would fade into obscurity in the 20th century, following the discovery of the actual mode of transmission of congenital syphilis, which is to say from mother to child *in utero*. This medical breakthrough meant that paternally transmitted congenital syphilis could no longer serve the function of indicting an immoral bourgeois patriarchy (Schonlau 2004, 195). Historically speaking, *Ghosts* could only have been written before the notion of paternally transmitted congenital syphilis was disproven.[4]

Osvald's efforts to counterbalance his energetic inheritance alert us to the fact that the energetic economy at work in *Ghosts* is a zero-sum game. Energy is a limited resource and is desired by those lacking it, while those who possess sufficient quantities are faced with the dilemma of investing their energy in themselves or spending it tending to the needs of others. This conflict between self-preservation and self-sacrifice is expressed using an imagery of spending and wasting. Energy that is directed to improving one's lot in life is spent wisely. The individual who invests in his or her own self will stand to fare better than those who have misspent their energies on wasteful endeavors. Investing one's energies in industry or the propagation of healthy children is spending wisely and is not considered wasteful.

Wastefulness attaches to the spending of one's energy on activities such as debauchery or useless pastimes; in short, any activity that is not productive may be regarded as a drain on one's resources. Osvald's depleted energy mirrors the quality of being depleted that his father exhibited while alive. Alving wasted his energies, and Osvald is thus the son of a father who was not in possession of a sufficient amount of energy to ensure his child's vitality. Osvald's congenital syphilis is the cause of his reduced vitality, but it is ultimately the latter, and not the disease itself, that causes his final breakdown.

Reduced vitality is a quality attaching to men in *Ghosts*, but not to women. This gendered aspect of the energetic economy is crucial to my understanding of Helene and Regine. Helene is a woman who, when faced with the truth of her husband's proclivities, chose to redirect her energies outward, to the Alving estate. Her doing so relates to her frustrated attempts at directing her energies toward the man she loved, Pastor Manders. Possessed of a great inner strength but unable to channel this strength into a loving relationship with Manders, Helene assumes her husband's mantle as head of the household, effectively becoming a matriarch replacing the failed patriarch Alving. This transformation comes at the expense of her love toward her son, and in this sense her failure as a mother reflects her husband's failure as a father. Upon Osvald's return she attempts to direct her energies toward her son, unaware of the fact that her ministrations will never be able to compensate for Osvald's congenital decrepitude. Osvald's final moments are the death-throes of a bourgeoisie lacking the energy required for its own propagation. In the end, the working-class Regine, possessing a considerable vitality and having learned the ways of the bourgeoisie, departs the Alving home for a future in which she will invest in herself, extricating herself from the demands made on her energy by a fading bourgeoisie.

My focus on the medical understanding of syphilis of Ibsen's time is at odds with the tendency of earlier Ibsen scholarship, best exemplified by Erik Bjerck Hagen, to disregard the historical context of syphilis discourse in favor of interpretations that stress the metaphorical import of syphilis: "As for the actual facts that Ibsen has included in his plot, there has been some discussion about how Osvald got syphilis, but that discussion seems *beside the point*. His illness is primarily a central image of the revenant and that is that" (Hagen 2015, 64; emphasis in original).[5] I instead maintain that interpretations that fail to take the syphilis discourse of the time into account risk succumbing to misinterpretation. I am at odds with readings that focus too narrowly on the metaphorical impact of syphilis, a tendency that has the unfortunate effect of turning *Ghosts* into less of a realist text than it actually is. To give one example, Alexis Soloski's comment that Ibsen's "use of an innately theatrical disease (one with a particular talent

for disguise and impersonation) works to destabilize the play's apparent realism, undercutting the solidity of the bourgeois world and its values" (Soloski 2013, 288) belongs to the same category as Hagen's relegation of syphilis to the level of metaphor. I believe that readings focusing on syphilis as metaphor, at the expense of the medical reality of the disease, will tend to disregard central aspects of the play.

Environmental factors and heredity are both central to the play's degeneration plot. Heredity is an obviously important element in a text that, to borrow Tamsen Wolff's phrasing, "makes explicit use of an elaborate intersection of biological, social, behavioral, and psychic forms of inheritance" (Wolff 2002, 30). Equally important are environmental factors such as the insalubrious environment of the Alving home, or for that matter the asylum. The latter, in particular, serves the purpose of preventing children from following the downward trajectory of degenerate parents by means of removing such children from their homes. The play's focus on degeneration should thus not simply be equated with determinism. Degeneration carries within itself its conceptual counterpart, regeneration. I will posit that Alving's illegitimate daughter Regine represents a hope for regeneration. Occupying an uncertain position between the working class and bourgeoisie, Regine strives to rise above her station and enlists every means at her disposal to achieve her goal. While earlier scholarship has tended to regard her as a soon-to-be prostitute, destined to end up in a brothel run by the conniving Engstrand, I will argue that she embodies the vitality of a working class that may come to replace the decaying bourgeoisie. I subscribe to Ellen Mortensen's characterization of Regine as a woman who "represents a kind of femininity that warns of a double revolt to come; one from below, from the lower classes, the other from women and the emerging feminist emancipation" (Mortensen 2007, 177). It is Regine's vitality that enables her to move through the world and realize her ambitions, and it is this energy that Osvald seeks to capture, and that Helene seeks to contain. Mark Sandberg notes how the term *gengangere* implies a "contest between the living and the dead for possession of an architectural space, as a matter of intergenerational property rights: the dead assert their rights of prior occupancy, and the living insist in turn that the dead yield their claim on the space" (Sandberg 2015, 137). In my reading, it is the bourgeoisie who occupy the role of the dead refusing to yield their space to the working class, with Helene, Manders, and Osvald representing a patriarchal order on the verge of collapse.

Ibsen's commentary on *Ghosts*

My choice of focus on the degeneration plot in *Ghosts* finds support both in Ibsen's notes and working drafts and in several of his letters. While the

extant notes and drafts for *Ghosts* are relatively few in number, they nonetheless attest to the significance of degeneration to Ibsen's writing process. In an early note Ibsen lays out the play's central theme: "The basic mood shall be: The strong blossoming spiritual life among us in literature, art, etc. – and then as a contrast: the whole of humanity gone astray."[6] The notion of humanity deviating from a right and proper path is conceptually proximate to the concept of degeneration. In a similar vein, a state of degeneracy is attached to the Alving character, who is described as a fallen man who was saved through the efforts of his wife: "In his youth he was fallen and decrepit; then she, the religiously roused, stepped in; she saved him; she was rich. He had wanted to marry a girl who was considered unworthy. He had a son in his marriage; then he returned to the girl; a daughter."[7] The character's desire to marry someone else may be alluded to in a comment on Nemesis: "It brings a Nemesis upon the offspring to marry for extraneous reasons even religious or moral."[8] Another comment is similarly concerned with the impact of the past on the future: "These women of today, ill-treated as daughters, as sisters, as wives, not brought up according to their endowments, kept away from their calling, deprived of their inheritance, embittered in mind, – these are the ones who deliver the mothers of the young generation. What will be the consequence?"[9] In these comments we can identify the tropes of a degenerate man being rehabilitated by a woman, a baleful generational inheritance, and the notion that women are being denied the opportunity of finding their vocation in life. These tropes are, as I will demonstrate, closely linked to the play's degeneration plot.[10] The idea that women, to their detriment, are unable to lead productive lives is of particular importance to my understanding of Helene. Because of her husband's degeneracy, Helene has been forced to work for her own benefit, and has thus been able to experience a joy in work, if not a joy in life. The importance of the theme of the joy of work is attested to by a line on a piece of paper inserted into Ibsen's working manuscript: "The happiness of work – living *by* work, – living *for* work" (*HIS* 16:495).[11]

Apart from these notes relating to various stages of Ibsen's creative process we may also examine three documents that the editors of *Henrik Ibsens skrifter* do not regard as directly related to *Ghosts* (*HIS* 7K:483).[12] While I agree with the editors on this point, I believe that the documents do shed light on some of the ideas that preoccupied Ibsen at the time of writing *Ghosts*. A comment on memorials and disease is reminiscent of the plot of *Ghosts*: "Among us, monuments are erected over the dead; for we have duties toward them; we allow lepers to marry, but [their] offspring –? the unborn –?" (*HIS* 16:495).[13] Another comment concerns the evolution of mankind: "The perfect man is no longer a product of nature, he is a product of art, as is the grain, and the fruit trees, and the Creole race, and

the noble breeds of horses and dogs, vines, etc. –" (*HIS* 16:494).[14] This comment can be understood in terms of the creation of a more perfect human being through the admixture of disparate elements. A distinction is made between nature and cultivation, and humanity is compared to other products that result from practices such as selective breeding and grafting. The inclusion of the "Creole race" suggests that humanity is improved by means of mixed marriages. The comment fits into an evolutionary framework centered on notions of the perfectability of the human species.[15] Degeneration discourse presents a mirror to this line of thought, suggesting that while humankind can evolve, devolution also remains a possibility.[16]

The raising of bourgeois children

The institution being built to honor the memory of Alving is often referred to in the text as an "asyl," a term usually translated as "orphanage."[17] There is, however, nothing in the text to indicate that the asylum is, to quote Mark Sandberg, "an institution intended to provide orphaned children with shelter" (Sandberg 2015, 89). The term "asyl" designates a different kind of institution. Children's asylums were constructed in 19th-century Norway for the purpose of safeguarding children whose parents were considered unfit by the municipal authorities.[18] Children living with parents who for instance abused alcohol or engaged in criminal behavior could be removed from their homes and placed in an asylum, thereby ensuring that the children did not follow in the footsteps of their parents.[19] There was a particular economic benefit to placing children in asylums in that the sheltering of at-risk children prevented them from turning to crime or to begging in the streets. While asylums were to some extent sponsored by the municipal authorities, they were most often financed by wealthy benefactors, and would often be named after these benefactors. Such collaborations between philanthropic donors and local government formed a departure from the earlier practice of placing at-risk children in foster homes. This practice had been directed toward orphans and children whose parents could not pay for their upkeep (Seip 1984, 46). Children placed in foster homes were designated as *pleiebarn*, which can be literally translated as "children who are given care." The practice of placing *pleiebarn* with families, often in rural regions, was referred to as to *sette ud* ("place" or "lodge") children, and this is the term used in reference to Helene sending Osvald away.[20] This practice was complemented by the founding of privately funded asylums from the mid-19th century onward.[21]

Children's asylums served a dual function of safeguarding children from the influence of their parents and giving children a proper moral education. Michel Foucault relates the founding of children's asylums to a societal push that saw state authorities enact legislation, based on a fear of too

close sexual proximity in working-class families, enabling the separation of children from their families:

> An entire politics for the protection of children of the placing of "endangered" minors under guardianship had as its partial objective their withdrawal from families that were suspected – through lack of space, dubious proximity, a history of debauchery, antisocial "primitiveness," or degenerescence – of practicing incest.
>
> (Foucault 1978, 129)

In a Norwegian context, the twin purposes of safeguarding and education would later inform the child protection law (*vergerådsloven*, formally *Lov om behandling av forsømte børn*) of 1896, which stipulated that the municipal child welfare authority (*vergerådet*) could separate children from their families if the child had committed a crime or was otherwise found to be "mistreated, abused, or morally impaired," at which point the authorities would be compelled to intercede (Theiste 1935, §1).[22] The removal of a child from a dangerous environment would be followed by measures to make sure the child was raised properly (Seip 1984, 212).

The role of children's asylums in imparting proper values to at-risk children is crucial to my understanding of the Alving asylum. The raising of children is intimately tied to the notion of providing children with a moral code defined and propagated by the bourgeoisie.[23] Asylums were conceived as a means by which the immorality associated with the working class could be counteracted. The building of asylums in Norway was spearheaded by *barneredningsbevegelsen* (the "child-saving movement"), a motley gathering of Christian liberal philanthropists who viewed themselves both as saviors of the poor and as crusaders against immorality (Dahl 1992, 23). Children housed in asylums would grow into responsible adults with the capacity to form ideal family units, the asylums thereby serving to produce well-functioning families (Dahl 1992, 43). These privately funded asylums are a central feature of the philanthropic phase of the Norwegian child welfare system, a phase that came to an end in the late 1870s, at which time municipal authorities took charge of the asylums (Dahl 1992, 16, 42). The financial instability associated with being dependent on the donations of wealthy patrons contributed to the system falling into disuse (Grude 1987, 41). *Ghosts* can thus be read as a commentary on a process whereby the state took on a higher degree of responsibility for children's welfare. By contrasting Helene's sending away of Osvald with the construction of the asylum, *Ghosts* enacts the shift taking place in the understanding of child-rearing as a collective undertaking rather than as a familial responsibility.

Although the text gives no indication as to where and by whom Osvald was raised after having been sent away, I am of the opinion that he was sent away to a foster family. This would make Helene's behavior all the more extraordinary; by engaging in a practice commonly directed toward the children of the lower classes, she has in a sense de-classed her own son. The Alving asylum should be understood as a site for the propagation of bourgeois values. The children placed in the asylum may well be orphans, but they may also simply have been removed from their homes in order to save them from parental corruption. The asylum highlights a conflict between heredity and environment, the children being housed in the asylum in order to counteract the hereditary influence of their parents. This conflict underlies contemporary notions of heredity, which, as Elizabeth M. Armstrong notes, "revealed a remarkably labile social ideology that expressed both a powerful social stasis – children as predetermined replicas of their parents' failings – and an exuberant optimism about the ability of the present generation to protect and improve the lot of the next" (Armstrong 2003, 37). The asylum is a staging ground for this conflict, with the children housed in the asylum being taught to embrace the values of the bourgeoisie. The asylum thereby becomes a site of moral decay, the next generation becoming infected with ideals that are depicted in an entirely negative light throughout the play.

The asylum is linked to the act of teaching, both in the narrow sense of giving children an education and in the broader sense of shaping children into future propagators of bourgeois morality. The instruction received will be both secular and religious, as indicated by the construction of new buildings, including a schoolhouse, lodging for teachers, and a chapel (Ibsen 2016, 204). This proliferation of buildings should give us an indication that the asylum is more than just an orphanage. Ibsen scholarship nonetheless exhibits a certain confusion on this point. Mark Sandberg's comment on the asylum is illustrative: "What is not often noted about Mrs. Alving's orphanage project, however, is its obsessive aspect: it is not just a single building" (Sandberg 2015, 169). There is nothing obsessive about Helene's project; all these various buildings are required to fulfill the asylum's purpose of raising children who will conform to bourgeois values. Our understanding of the role of the asylum can be rectified if we translate "asyl" as asylum and not as orphanage. The apparent confusion is similar to that accruing to faulty translations of the expression to *sette ut* children, which have led to a variety of diverging interpretations.[24] When read against the backdrop of the asylum's purpose, Helene's sending her son away gains an added level of symbolism. If the asylum is understood as a site of teaching, then the late Alving comes to inhabit the role of teacher of the next generation. Ross Shideler's observation that the asylum represents Helene's "attempt to kill the heritage of the dead father, an attempt quite literally to get him out of her house

and into his own" is entirely correct, but his comment that the "orphanage also represents a fatherless humanity" (Shideler 1999, 84) slightly misses the point. Alving is being driven into the asylum to take on the role of father, and thus also teacher, to the children housed there. Once placed in the asylum, the children will be taught to embrace the bourgeois values that Alving and also Pastor Manders are made out to represent. Osvald avoided this fate by being sent away. Instead of growing up bourgeois, Osvald has come to espouse the views of his bohemian friends in Paris. In this sense he has escaped his father's education.

The children of the working classes will not be as fortunate. The asylum will propagate the values of the bourgeoisie but will not house the children of bourgeois families. The economic status of the children who will inhabit the asylum can be inferred from Pastor Manders' comment on how the asylum will save the council money (Ibsen 2016, 206). The municipal government stands to benefit financially by having the children of unfit parents placed in an asylum and molded into upright citizens. The asylum's instrumental nature is highlighted by Engstrand's description of the asylum as "a charitable institution" (Ibsen 2016, 248). Although charitable may imply benevolence, the asylum is being built in the service of the upper class. This is a point that has to some extent been lost on earlier scholarship, which has instead focused on how Helene secured funding for the asylum. Over the years she has set aside an amount equaling what she refers to as the "purchase price" (Ibsen 2016, 220) that led her family to consider Alving a fitting match. Joan Templeton notes that "[t]his deliberate, excessive calculation is the mark of an obsessed soul" whose ultimate goal is to "obliterate Alving forever" (Templeton 1986, 60). But Helene is nonetheless financing an institution in which a set of values that contributed to her becoming trapped in a loveless marriage will live on. Mark Sandberg argues that the "central irony" of the asylum is that "it is a memorial structure that is designed to make people forget" (Sandberg 2015, 169). While this is certainly true, the unforeseen consequence of perpetuating Alving's moral decrepitude is a similar and equally important irony. As opposed to Sandberg, who understands Helene's efforts as an attempt to "bury both the captain's money and influence at once in the new building" (Sandberg 2015, 155), I will argue that Helene is using her own money to finance the construction of an institution in which the bourgeois (lack of) morality exemplified by Alving will exert its influence on the next generation of working-class children. The proper raising of children is the higher calling alluded to in Pastor Manders' comment that the asylum will be dedicated to "a higher purpose" (Ibsen 2016, 205). By financing the asylum, Helene is ensuring the transmission of a set of values whose main proponents, Alving and Manders, display few redeeming features.

By reading the asylum as a site for teaching I am also drawing attention to the responsibility of adults toward the young. These responsibilities also include the transmission of wealth, health, and social standing. The parent furthermore has a responsibility to make sure that the child does not squander its inheritance. This is the role vacated by Helene and Alving, Osvald having in a sense been forced to raise himself. Engstrand, on the other hand, has chosen to fulfill the role of teacher toward Regine despite knowing that she is not his biological daughter. A closer examination of Engstrand will clarify the role of parents as teachers of their children. The fact that Engstrand helped build the schoolhouse that will form part of the asylum draws attention to his role as teacher. His early comment to Regine that she has learned something while in the employ of the Alvings (Ibsen 2016, 196) establishes his interest in her education, and gnomic utterances such as "for we are but frail, my child" (Ibsen 2016, 194) testify to his self-appointed role of teacher. His dialogue with Regine contains a series of implicit and explicit admonitions intended to guide her along what Engstrand considers the right path for her. These tend to revolve around issues of energy and willpower. His incredulous comment on Osvald sleeping late (Ibsen 2016, 193), followed by his assumption that Osvald is recovering from a night of drinking, is intended to distinguish between himself and the supposedly weak-willed Osvald. By contrast, Engstrand's twice-repeated "the temptations are manifold in this world" (Ibsen 2016, 194; 195) is an implied assertion that temptations can be resisted by those possessing strength of character. As Frode Helland notes, Engstrand's use of quasi-religious imagery also serves to buttress his authority in conversation with Regine (Helland 2006, 33). Engstrand counsels Regine that she must pay attention to how others view her. His promise not to drink during the opening of the asylum, so as to not give an impression of incontinence, testifies to a preoccupation with how others regard him (Ibsen 2016, 194). The question is what he hopes to achieve with his self-praise and his criticism of Osvald. If Engstrand is understood as a teacher, he is telling his daughter to live her life for herself and not chain herself to Osvald, while still taking care not to let her reputation interfere with her prospects. B.S. Field, Jr. argues that Engstrand's boasting of his capacity for drink and work is in fact his celebration of the joy of life and the joy of work (Field 1972, 28). What Engstrand's comments amount to is an encouragement to Regine to find joy in her life and in her work. Even though he is aware of Regine not being his biological daughter, he still describes himself as a "a good father" (Ibsen 2016, 232) to Regine. I would argue that he has in fact been more of a parent to Regine than the Alvings have been to Osvald.

Engstrand's objection to Regine remaining in the employ of the Alvings can be read as part of his scheme to enlist Regine in his plan to open a sailor's home, but a more charitable interpretation can be made that

he has an earnest desire to see his daughter improve her lot in life. The relationship between Engstrand and Regine demonstrates the connectedness of raising a child and wanting that child to rise above its station. In the case of Engstrand, an important corollary to the notion of rising is the issue of the reputation of disreputable women. Engstrand takes credit for salvaging Johanne's reputation by marrying her, thereby raising her from the status of a fallen woman. The explanation she offered Engstrand regarding Regine's paternity, of having conceived a child with a visiting sailor (Ibsen 2016, 223), placed Johanne in the position of a woman whose reputation could only be salvaged through marriage. Engstrand suggests that men have a duty to raise up fallen women (Ibsen 2016, 231). Referring to Johanne as having engaged in sinful behavior (*begåt et syndefald*, *HIS* 7:462)[25] and of being "a fallen creature" (Ibsen 2016, 232), Engtrand subsequently extends the religious imagery to include himself as "an angel of deliverance" (Ibsen 2016, 250) for having saved Johanne from disgrace. This imagery establishes an associative link between fallen women and angels, a link that reflects back on Engstrand, whose actions and dubious morality situate him rather in the role of a diabolical tempter. In his capacity of devil, Engstrand is able to penetrate the inner lives of the bourgeoisie. Engstrand as the devil is an accuser of the bourgeoisie but, also and more significantly, an advocate of the working class.

Engstrand's devilish attributes are emphasized in the text. Regine refers to his limp using the phrase "Pied de mouton" (*HIS* 7:390), meaning a sheep's foot, which is to say a cloven hoof. He enters the house dripping in rain, calling it "God's rain," Regine replying that it is "the devil's rain, more like" (Ibsen 2016, 193). He has a habit of never pronouncing the letter "d" in "God" as if saying the whole word causes him pain.[26] Engstrand's demonic attributes, and in particular his left leg, which is slightly bent and shorter than the other, allow for an identification of Engstrand as an instance of the Asmodeus motif. The figure of Asmodeus can be traced back to the apocryphal book of Tobit, in which the demon Asmodeus preys upon a young woman, Sarah, killing her suitors. Asmodeus would gradually be transformed into a more benevolent figure, appearing in the later *aggadah* as "a gay creature, inclined at worst to drunkenness, mischief, and licentiousness" and in Jewish folklore as "a degraded hero – the butt of popular irony and humor" (Asmodeus). Asmodeus was associated with sexual transgression, as exemplified by the reference to Asmodeus as "the demon of fornication and the prince of that filthy act" (Kramer and Sprenger 2006, 2:89) in the *Malleus maleficarum*.[27] Asmodeus enters into literary history with Luis Vélez de Guevara's *El diablo cojuelo* (1641), which would later inspire Alain-René Lesage's *Le Diable boiteux* (1707). Lesage's novel was hugely successful and gave rise to a literary tradition of

roguish devil-figures with impaired mobility that saw the Asmodeus figure transformed into what Sara Hackenberg describes as a "playfully devilish social commentator" (Hackenberg 2015, 455). The Asmodeus motif features in plots that can be summarized as Asmodeus taking a young man as his protégé and showing him the truth behind the façade of respectable society.[28] In Lesage's novel this is accomplished by Asmodeus removing the roofs of houses, allowing the protagonist to glimpse into the homes of the upper class. In 19th-century literature the means of revelation tends to be church steeples, which, once ascended by Asmodeus, enable a panoramic view of cities such as London or Paris. The motif offered authors a flexible tool for critiquing social mores. In her analysis of Charles Dickens' use of the motif, Estelle Murail comments on the potential for satire in Lesage's Asmodeus:

> The choice of a devil's eyeview of the cityscape, that reverses the traditional God's eye-view of the world, immediately foregrounds the intent to inspect and see through social conventions. [. . .] Diminution, exaggeration, juxtaposition, and irony are some of the literary devices most commonly used by satirists to ridicule and criticize contemporary society. The distanced Asmodean gaze takes up and performs these processes by showing us comic scenes from everyday life.
>
> (Murail 2017, 62)[29]

The literary history of the Asmodeus figure will help clarify Engstrand's role in *Ghosts*. Ibsen scholarship tends to regard Engstrand as fundamentally amoral and thus, to quote Anne-Marie Stanton-Ife, "an unlikely candidate for moral arbiter" (Stanton-Ife 2003, 169). But his helping to build the asylum can be read on a deeper level as having afforded him insight into the recesses of the Alving household. He enters the play in a privileged position, as an accuser of the bourgeoisie, criticizing Osvald's excesses and counseling Regine to seek her fortunes elsewhere. His comments on Regine's marriage prospects show how he conceives of marriage as transactional, and his advice is geared toward her making use of her vitality and good looks to attract a wealthy husband. His views on marriage align neatly with those attributed by Helene to her family, who she depicts as essentially having sold her as chattel to Alving. The selling of young and inexperienced women for the benefit of the economic and social standing of the family forms part of a bourgeois marriage ideology, the main proponents of which are Pastor Manders and Engstrand. In his suggestions to Regine, Engstrand is parroting the ideology that led to Helene's unhappy marriage. Returning to the function of the asylum of inculcating bourgeois values in working-class children, we can note that it is Engstrand who most consistently promotes the notion that marriage should be entered

into not for love, but rather for benefit. In other words, bourgeois marriage ideology is being propagated by the demon of fornication.

The taint attached to bourgeois marriage ideology by Engstrand's parroting stands in contrast to his sincere belief in living a life in service to one's self. Although he has few kind words to spare for his late wife, he nonetheless expresses a measure of admiration for how she managed to both extricate herself and profit from a delicate situation. Johanne's self-determination is part of the lesson he is attempting to convey to Regine. If Regine leaves the Alving household, her departure would be at the expense of the children's asylum. His desire to have her refuse Helene's offer of employment is a conflict between two fathers whose class interests collide on the issue of Regine's future. Her working in the asylum would entail her participation in what Mark Sandberg has described as a piece of theater, a "performance" centered on the "fictional deceased protagonist" of Alving, "with Regine playing a supporting role as one of the staff" (Sandberg 2015, 170). This observation can be extended to include Regine's role as daughter; she would be moving into her father's house and would become an integral part of the transmission of bourgeois values. As the play suggests by means of an imagery of consumption, her doing so would come at the expense of her own well-being, per Engstrand: "Have you got such a slavering desire to go and work yourself to death for the sake of them filthy brats?" (Ibsen 2016, 197)[30] The fate awaiting Regine in the asylum is to be devoured by needy children, causing her own health to become depleted. The perpetuation of bourgeois values requires the working class to give of its own vitality. Faced with the choice of living for the bourgeoisie or for herself, Regine is encouraged to rebel against the upper class. Engstrand thereby fulfills yet again the role of Asmodeus, taking the side of the downtrodden in opposition to the established order.

Engstrand's gospel of self-interest revolves around the question of how Regine can best make use of her youth and vigor. Health and beauty are the preserve of the young, and with Engstrand's aid, Regine comes to realize the potential of her energetic and sexual capital. Her refusal of Helene's offer is followed by her choice not to devote herself to the sickly Osvald, who makes similar demands on her health. The association of children and hunger extends to include Osvald, whose craving of Regine's health paints him as a child in search of a maternal figure who can provide him with sustenance. Regine consistently refuses to take on a parental role toward children of any age. This is important to note when taking into account her departure at the end of the play to work in Engstrand's sailor's home. The sailor's home is modeled on the asylum in that Engstrand conceives of it as a refuge for wayward children with himself as father. By building a lower-class replica of the Alving asylum, Engstrand will finally be able to replace Alving as Regine's father. His need to become recognized not

only as father to Regine, but as a patriarchal authority esteemed by other men, is indicated by his comment that he will keep "a father's watchful eye" (Ibsen 2016, 233) over visiting sailors. He is portraying himself as a shepherd in charge of his flock, offering moral guidance to sailors lacking in moral refinement. His intent echoes his earlier account, in conversation with Manders, of how he injured his leg. This story involves Engstrand falling off a table in a dance hall after seeking to convince the audience of sailors to stop drinking (Ibsen 2016, 231). Engstrand's story, while an obvious fabrication, points to his frustrated desire to be taken seriously as a paternal figure. The substitute father of a daughter raised in another man's household, Engstrand has never been given the opportunity to realize his potential as father and as teacher to a child, and these dual roles compel him to found an establishment that he will call "Chamberlain Alving's Home" (Ibsen 2016, 251) as a final insult to his rival. If we understand Engstrand to be responsible for burning down the Alving asylum, then the devilish Engstrand has saved any number of working-class children from being transformed into little Alvings. The burning of the asylum and the establishment of the sailor's home can thus be read as an allegory of the replacement of the bourgeoisie by the working class, Engstrand's values having conquered those of the bourgeoisie.

Class, health, and sex

In a similar manner to how the children's asylum has been misinterpreted as an orphanage, Engstrand's home for sailors has commonly been misunderstood as a brothel. If one follows this interpretation, which is standard among Ibsen scholarship, then Regine ends up working as a prostitute.[31] I will argue against this interpretation and will instead suggest that the sailor's home is in fact a sailor's home. The reading of Regine as a soon-to-be prostitute stands in contradiction to what I consider to be her fundamental characteristic, which is her desire to rise above her station. Although I agree with Evert Sprinchorn that "the Alving heritage is one of degeneration and disease" (Sprinchorn 1979, 362), I will argue that Regine represents the possibility of regeneration, in that her vitality and initiative may counterbalance the Alving inheritance. Any interpretation that sees Regine prostituting herself must account for why she would decide to abandon her long-standing desire, expressed throughout the play, to attain to a higher level of social standing. Is Regine, in her "search for a rich protector" (Templeton 1986, 64), hoping that one of her customers will marry her? Why would Regine, in her "ambitious struggle to rise in society" (Mortensen 2007, 177), jeopardize her ambitions by becoming a prostitute?

The standard interpretation relies on the interpretative strategy of declaring the sailor's home to be a euphemism for a brothel. This

interpretation is an instance of presentism, with modern readers failing to take into account the complicated historical reality of 19th-century locales such as sailors' homes. This apparent need for euphemism is also puzzling given how prostitution was legalized at the time. Prostitutes were required to register with the authorities and undergo regular inspections in order to prevent the spread of disease. A covert and thus unregistered brothel, however, would be against the law.[32] I see no reason that the self-serving Engstrand would choose an illegal rather than a legal alternative, at the risk of facing incarceration. I will instead argue that the sailor's home acts as a contact zone in which an attractive, young working-class woman can find a husband who might be able to elevate her social standing. Regine's desire to rise is what eventually drives her to accept Engstrand's offer, and this desire cannot be reconciled with life as a prostitute. I recognize that the misinterpretation of the sailor's home is easy to make, since the locale is quite clearly associated with bourgeois marriage ideology and the practice of buying and selling women for status and profit. This is what Regine hopes to achieve, having subscribed to an ideology based on an instrumental understanding of marriage. This ideology, however, reflects back on the bourgeoisie. The sailor's home calls to mind the practice of prostitution, which is exactly the point. The sailor's home feeds into the depiction of bourgeois marriage as a form of prostitution. The sailor's home is also an integral part of the energetic economy, in that not only sexual allure but also health and youth are treated as commodities to be exchanged in the marital marketplace. As suggested by Linn B. Konrad, vitality is integral to Regine's plans; toward the end of the play Regine leaves, "claiming her vitality intact, which she intends to display among healthy people" (Konrad 1985, 143). Regine's health and good looks are the assets she intends to use to attract a wealthy spouse. In my reading of Regine as embodying a potential for regeneration, I will focus on how vigor is configured within bourgeois marriage ideology, and how vitality relates to issues of birthright and self-determination.

Regine's ambitions are rooted in her childhood. She has grown up in the Alving household and has been treated "almost" (Ibsen 2016, 195) like a family member, which helps explain her resistance to Engstrand's plans. Her "Let me go" (Ibsen 2016, 221), uttered to fend off Osvald's advances, is a repetition of the same phrase used by her mother to reject Engstrand (Ibsen 2016, 195) and Alving (Ibsen 2016, 218). All these are instances of working-class women refusing unwanted sexual advances. But more than that, these refusals are indicative of a deeper desire to take control of one's own sexuality. Regine wants to be able to decide for herself when and with whom she engages in sexual activity. I agree with Alexis Soloski that Regine, upon learning that she is Alving's daughter, "claims an inheritance

of sexual licence" (Soloski 2013, 300), but I would also note that Regine's rejection of Osvald indicates that she was already on a path toward sexual autonomy prior to learning the truth of her parentage.

Regine's longing for the freedom to engage in sexual liaisons on her own terms lays the groundwork for her accepting Engstrand's offer. Her ability to make her own sexual choices would presumably be hampered if she were actually working at a brothel and not at a sailor's home. Her pursuit of sexual self-determination is combined with the realization that a woman's social standing derives from her husband, which leads her to employ her sexual allure to secure a husband who can elevate her standing. The issue of standing informs Engstrand's attempts to convince her to join him; a well-married daughter would reflect positively on him. He imagines that his establishment will be frequented by ship's captains, suggesting that he hopes that Regine will marry a captain (Ibsen 2016, 196). Such a marriage would benefit Engstrand, but having her engage in prostitution would not. The difference between attracting a husband and selling sex is not only one of respectability, it is also a question of short-term versus long-term benefit. If Regine were to become a prostitute, she would at best acquire modest sums of money for a limited time, her earnings potentially drying up as she ages. If she were to marry to a captain, on the other hand, she and any future children would be ensconced in her husband's status. We can identify Regine's ambitions as an instance of a popular trope in 19th-century literature, that of the working-class woman pursuing upward mobility through marriage. This trope can be exemplified in a contemporary context using Amalie Skram's short story "Madam Høiers Leiefolk" (1882) ["Madame Høier's Tenants"], in which the titular madame has risen higher (*høiere*) by marrying a ship's captain:

> She was moreover Norwegian by birth, but had come over to Newcastle when she was quite young to serve with the seamen's chaplain there. Since then she had been a "barmaid" at various boarding houses, where there were skippers, and at one of these she had been found and married by Høier, who was a widower and somewhat elderly. But since she, too, was of what one might call a certain age, one had to say that she had done well.[33]

This is comparable to the situation Regine strives to find herself in. The sailor's home belongs to a category of public locales in which different social classes were able to socialize. Such establishments commonly employed working-class women as serving staff and catered to a male bourgeois clientele who tended to view the serving women as commodities. Women hoping to attract a husband among the clientele would need to strike a balance between being seen as too available and not available

enough.[34] For unmarried women who were not allowed to live on their own, and whose career options were curtailed by legal prohibitions, making themselves available to bourgeois bachelors was sometimes the only option available. The bachelors would often take advantage of the plight of these women, and would expect sexual favors. As Jonas Liliequist has detailed, the gendered power structures that gave rise to such relationships led to a proliferation of working-class women taking on employment in locales that occupied a liminal place between classes:

> The same sexist structures also created a never-ending supply of female attendants and waitresses who surrounded the male homosocial gatherings of coffeehouses and inns. The restaurant business was traditionally a female occupation and it was also to this business that many young women first came for a short or long time. Many contemporary observers note that the attendants and waitresses did not receive any salary, while at the same time they paid in advance for food and accommodation from the beginning. This meant that the girls were left at the mercy of the guests' tips and "small favors" of appreciation. Here, room was made for men to take liberties and at the same time show themselves masculinely offensive, but also for a talented waitress to perhaps make her way up.[35]

The sailor's category belongs to this category of establishment and is thus distinct from a brothel. Regine chooses to work in the sailor's home because she intends to translate her sexual allure into a higher social rank, which is reminiscent of, but not identical to, prostitution. Engstrand encourages her to commodify her sexual allure, hoping that her marriage will make him a more respectable person in the eyes of others. His view of marriage as a means of improving one's economic and social stature shows that he has internalized bourgeois marriage ideology. Much like Helene's mother and aunts, he recognizes that marriage may elevate a family. His dismissal of the education Regine has received (Ibsen 2016, 197) is due to his belief that sexual allure is Regine's most valuable asset. Allure fades with time, however, which explains Engstrand's insistence that she must act quickly.

In his role as educator, Engstrand is acting as a financial mentor to Regine, teaching her how to maximize her profit. When Engstrand says that he will not give her any of his savings from working on the asylum (Ibsen 2016, 197), he is encouraging her to manage on her own. By refusing to send her a dress, instead insisting that she will be able to make her own dresses if she joins him (Ibsen 2016, 197), he is suggesting that she will be able to achieve a greater degree of financial independence. Regine would nonetheless be working for someone else, and her reply that she can make her own dresses (Ibsen 2016, 197) is her choosing a path of

self-reliance. Their different positions reflect a wider conflict between earning one's own wages and subsisting on the benevolence of others. If Regine were to follow through on making a living on her own, she would quite possibly remain unmarried, as she would lack any impetus to find a husband. Engstrand's alternative is for her to make her own money while still engaging in the pursuit of marriage, a middle option on a spectrum at the other end of which we find Helene's offer of employment, which would see Regine remain dependent on the munificence of the bourgeoisie. In economic terms, Regine's position can be described as subsistence economy, whereas Helene's position is that of alms-giving and subservience on the part of the recipient to the donor. Engstrand, on the other hand, represents a barter economy in which sex appeal and vigor can be translated into immediate gain through marriage.

Regine has become entangled in the expectations of others and is trying to find her own way. Helene has invested in Regine's upbringing and expects to be rewarded by Regine working herself to the bone in the asylum. Much the same can be said about Engstrand, who wants to be compensated for raising another man's daughter. Regine gradually realizes that a well to do husband will offer a means by which to extricate herself both from Engstrand's and Helene's plans. Marriage would entail her trading her vigor and beauty for a permanently elevated status, allowing her an increased but still limited independence. Engstrand believes that she can obtain a good match if she wants to, noting that she might even attract a ship's mate or a captain (Ibsen 2016, 198). Engstrand's distinction between classes of suitors appears to elide Regine, who lumps them together in her curt "Sailors have no *savoir vivre*" (Ibsen 2016, 198). Engstrand's reply does call to mind prostitution – "So leave off marrying them. It can still pay" (Ibsen 2016, 198) – but it is his reference to Johanne receiving money from Regine's father that causes Regine to show him the door. While her reaction is understandable, Engstrand's comment should be read in light of his views on finance. From his perspective, Johanne received a sizable cash payment and then went on to salvage her reputation by marrying Engstrand, who would go on to provide for her and her child. Johanne has thus maximized her profit, and Engstrand is telling Regine that she might well do the same. By arguing for an instrumental understanding of marriage he is providing Regine with an explanation of the inner workings of bourgeois marriage ideology. Marriages entered into for profit and standing are founded on an exchange of material and immaterial goods. Johanne's actions have proven to Engstrand that women can obtain money and respectability without taking recourse to prostitution, which, while facilitating the former, would also preclude the latter.

This point is best illustrated by Helene's history. The comparison of bourgeois marriage and prostitution extends to include Helene, whose

marriage is associatively linked to both Johanne and Regine, all three women being likened to prostitutes. The rhetorical juxtaposition of bourgeois women and prostitutes serves to criticize the institution of bourgeois marriage. Bernard F. Dukore argues that marriages of convenience are indicative of a society "that regards all actions in terms of money, duty, and respectability, and whose moral codes push people toward marriages based on monetary considerations, then keeps them there regardless of circumstances" (Dukore 1980, 34). The bourgeoisie can in itself be regarded as a site for the prostitution of women, Helene's mother and aunts having "acted as her procuress" (Dukore 1980, 31), effectively selling her to Alving for their own benefit. Helene is carrying on this tradition by first paying Johanne to keep silent and then having Regine enter into a marriage of convenience. By exerting her influence over Regine without taking into consideration the effect on Regine's future, Helene is acting in a similar manner to Engstrand. In both cases we are dealing with individuals who, despite not being biologically related to Regine, are acting as parents to her. Helene has sought to appropriate Regine, thereby displacing her late mother. By transmitting the values of the bourgeoisie to Regine, Helene is adopting a similar role to that of the spectral Alving to the asylum children. The fact that Helene is perpetuating a set of values that has brought her misery is perhaps unfortunate, but the future she suggests for Regine also enables a reading of the two women as leading parallel lives. Helene has been possessed of the potential to accomplish great things but has been forced to expend her energies on asserting her independence from Alving and on protecting Osvald. Never having lived for her own self, she expects Regine to do the same. As we will see, Helene's decision to live for others is revealed to have been entirely wasteful.

Bourgeois patriarchy and Helene's independence

Helene's desire to achieve independence from her husband was the driving force behind her assuming control of the estate. It is in her role as "long-term home renovator" (Sandberg 2015, 154) that she reveals the extent, but also the limits, of her independence. Narrating the story of how she assumed control in conversation with Manders, she traces her embarking on a path toward self-determination to his rejection of her. Faced with the reality of being unable to pursue her own joy of life, trapped in a loveless marriage and spurned by Manders, she instead chose to embrace the joy of work. Manders made note of how the estate prospered following her return to her husband, and ascribed this to Alving enlisting his wife as a collaborator in his business interests (Ibsen 2016, 215). Manders is indirectly taking credit for Helene's transformation from unhappy wife to head of the estate, and it is this misunderstanding she seeks to correct by

revealing her husband's misdeeds and defending her own achievements. The story of her transformation is one of her finding a source of strength within herself, marshaling her willpower to replace Alving as head of the estate.

Helene divides her struggle with Alving into two stages, which can be characterized respectively as passive and active. In the first stage, she seeks to protect Alving's reputation in order to protect Osvald's inheritance of social standing (Ibsen 2016, 217–218). She transitions into an active phase after learning about Alving's liaison with Johanne (Ibsen 2016, 218), an episode that galvanized Helene into taking action, forcing Alving into submission: "And so I took control of the household – total control – over him and everything else" (Ibsen 2016, 219). Having dominated her husband, Helene turns her attention to the estate, finding in her work the strength needed to endure: "I'd never have survived if it hadn't been for my work" (Ibsen 2016, 219). Her later comment that she sought to "work my way out to freedom" (Ibsen 2016, 225) stresses the importance of work in her efforts to achieve independence. Her travails have left her no time to enjoy life, and it would be easy to concur with A.F. Machiraju that "her life has been endured rather than enjoyed" (Machiraju 1992, 138). A reading of Helene's life as joyless, however, fails to take into account the fact that she managed to find joy in work. The burning of the asylum should be understood in this context. The fire tends to be read as the destruction of the false image she has constructed of Alving (Tjønneland 2005, 203). But what goes up in flames is also the result of the energy that she has sought to channel into an institution that would provide benefit to the needy. Helene, having diverted her joy of life into a joy of work, watches her achievement go up in flames. It would be unfair to simply regard her construction efforts as a sublimation of her frustrated desire for love (Haugan 2014, 284). Her diverting her energy from the domain of eroticism to that of work has allowed her to avoid the same fate as Alving, who found no outlet for his industriousness.

Helene's efforts and Alving's inaction signal the latter's displacement as patriarch by his wife. Ross Shideler describes Helene's choice to dedicate herself to "defending the false image of a father and a harmonious patriarchy" (Shideler 1999, 85) as a tragic turn of events. This might be true of the first stage of her struggle, but during the second stage Helene maintains the outward appearance of a functioning patriarchy while subverting it from within. Her subversion of patriarchy is signaled by a reversal of gender roles. If industry, hard work, and self-reliance can be posited as bourgeois male attributes, then she and Alving have crossed over into the domain of the opposite gender. Helene's victory over her husband is followed by the latter's adoption of a passiveness that is coded as feminine. As Linn B. Konrad notes, "it is precisely her husband's lack of strength

that forced Mrs Alving to become strong and assume power" (Konrad 1985, 142). Having abdicated from his role as patriarch, Alving lies on the sofa reading "an old government almanac" (Ibsen 2016, 219), which is to say a source of useless and outdated information, and often falls prey to "whining self-pity" (Ibsen 2016, 219).[36] Helene steps in to fill the void left by Alving and takes on the duties of a bourgeois patriarch, and she fulfils the patriarch's duty of preserving the integrity of the family name by covering up her husband's misdeeds. Having assumed the mantle of patriarch, Helene proceeds to send away the son whose intended position she has claimed. Her sending Osvald away can be read as the actions of a patriarch removing a rival.

Helene's actions have in a very real sense subverted the bourgeois order of things. By taking on the role of patriarch Helene has become the foundation on which bourgeois patriarchy rests. Ross Shideler is thus correct in noting that "the weakening or displacement of the male protagonist" (Shideler 1997, 278) is a common theme in Ibsen's realist dramas, but I believe that Shideler's assessment of how Helene comes to subvert the patriarchy is misleading: "When the female protagonists challenge patriarchal authority, they do so by undermining in one form or another both the dominant male and his family name" (Shideler 1997, 278–279). Helene has not undermined Alving; he has abdicated his responsibility, and she feels obligated to step in to safeguard the Alving name. Her adopting the responsibilities of a patriarch are only temporary, however, and she considers the maintenance of reputation a burden, which will be lifted once Osvald reaches maturity and can relieve her of her duty. But this replacement of a man by a woman is nonetheless an unacceptable challenge to the patriarchy. It is in this context that Manders' defense of the patriarchy should be understood. Manders makes use of religious discourse to mark Helene's desire for independence as satanic: "You have been governed by a disastrously wilful spirit all your life" (Ibsen 2016, 215).[37] What he describes as her willfulness should be read in relation to independence, a concept referenced earlier in the conversation. In their discussion of whether or not to insure the asylum, Manders worries if doing so might cause concern among "men with substantial influence" (Ibsen 2016, 205). It is to a similar position that Helene in effect aspires. She can only achieve her independence by crossing over into the domain of men. This carries with it the risk of ruining her reputation. If the first phase of her struggle with Alving was defined by her efforts to protect her husband's reputation, the second phase is characterized by her seeking to join the ranks of independent men whose reputations protect them from scandal.

Reputation functions much like an asset that can increase or decrease in value. In order to maintain one's reputation a barrier must be put in place separating one's private life and public persona. This division can

be exemplified with Manders' suggestion to Helene, after having seen the texts she is reading, that she should not publicize her reading habits (Ibsen 2016, 204). Helene revealing her beliefs would come at a cost to both herself and to the asylum. The consequences she would face would not have been faced by her husband, who in Helene's phrasing "was one of those people whose reputation seems undented by their conduct" (Ibsen 2016, 218). If Alving's actions had been made public, his economic status would have prevented his reputation from becoming tarnished. A society in which a male elite controls public opinion will necessarily take the side of men in all things and will deny women the protection of unassailable reputations. Helene's preoccupation with Alving's reputation is a reflection of her concern over her own reputation. Helene's worry is that her actions, specifically her attempt at leaving Alving, would imperil his and by extension her son's reputation. This episode, which, as Manders points out, jeopardized her reputation (Ibsen 2016, 215), necessitated the family's relocation to the country estate. This relocation could be seen as Helene's reaction to being spurned, but given the emphasis she places on reputation, it seems that part of her motivation was to safeguard the family's reputation after having allowed Manders a glimpse of her private life. Having isolated herself from Manders, Helene continues to perform her duties as patriarch. Her doing so raises the question of why she would choose, to quote Ross Shideler, to "sustain a tradition in which she no longer believes" (Shideler 1999, 88). If Helene is read as an innocent victim, forced to continue the traditions of bourgeois patriarchy, her decision would ensure the continuation of the same tradition. On the other hand, if Helene is read as a woman who replaces a bourgeois patriarch, she can be understood as a consequence of the failure of bourgeois patriarchy.

Helene's actions are a testament to the degeneracy of the bourgeoisie. Degeneration implies deviation from societal norms, which both Helene and Alving exemplify. The specter of degeneration is evoked by the use of the word "udskejelse," usually translated as excesses, to denote Alving's activities, as in Helene's mention of Alving's "excesses [*udskejelser*]" (Ibsen 2016, 214). The word is thematically related to "ryggesløs," with which it appears in proximity in Manders' defense of Alving: "And these youthful transgressions – these irregularities – excesses if you like, you call a debauched life [*ryggesløst levnet*]?" (Ibsen 2016, 217). Both these words have clear connotations of indecent and immoral behavior and signify deviation. Deviation, however, is a category that can just as easily be applied to Helene's actions. According to Helene, if she had left Alving, people would have blamed her for Alving's degeneracy: it wouldn't come as a surprise if he were to "deviate"[38] due to his wife leaving him. This is an admission that her leaving her husband would have been regarded as deviant behavior. The Alvings' move to their country estate was perhaps

intended to avoid scandal, but their relative seclusion also made it possible for Helene to assume her husband's role as patriarch. This move, following which Helene comes to oversee the management of the estate (Ibsen 2016, 205), can be read as her leaving civilization behind and finding freedom outside the bounds of society. An imagery of living in the wilderness emphasizes the cost of such freedom, and finds a parallel in Osvald's criticism of the institution of marriage. When Osvald defends the idea of cohabitation without marriage, Manders expresses shock at such "wild marriages" (Ibsen 2016, 212). Such relationships exist outside the strictures of bourgeois society. The conflict between the socially acceptable and the natural recurs in Manders' description of Helene's attempted flight as "the wildest moment of your life."[39] If Manders had agreed to flee with her, they would have embarked on a life in the wilderness, which is to say a more natural life. When Helene describes Manders' rejection of her as a crime against both of them (Ibsen 2016, 228), she is implicitly stating that adherence to the constraints of society is unnatural and destructive. Leaving society behind would, on the other hand, be natural and *not* a crime. Her reasoning illustrates how notions of deviation are reconfigured as a conflict between the proper and the natural. Remaining in a loveless marriage and denying her love for Manders would be the societally preferred option, but it would also be a form of deviation, in the sense of living in opposition to the natural. Her insistence that she has a right to happiness is such a threat to bourgeois patriarchy that Manders resorts to an imagery of satanic rebellion: "It is the mark of a rebellious spirit to demand happiness here in life" (Ibsen 2016, 214). His phrasing, taken together with his earlier comment on her rebellious spirit, emphasizes the existential nature of the challenge Helene poses to bourgeois patriarchy.

My reading of Helene is at odds with a tendency in earlier scholarship to overemphasize Helene's abnegation of her own needs. James McFarlane exemplifies this line of reasoning:

> Her crime is a self-inflicted wound, an outrage which she commits upon her own individuality in the interest of a misdirected altruism and for the preservation of appearances. She, the most dutiful of persons, is guilty of dereliction of the most important duty of all: to herself.
>
> (McFarlane 1989, 237)

I am arguing the opposite, that the Helene who wrests control of the estate from her husband is aggressively pursuing her own interests. Following Manders' rejection of her, she finds herself unable to channel her energy into any external cause and instead devotes herself to realizing her desire for independence from Alving. Her devotion to assuming the role

of patriarch leaves no room for anyone besides herself, including Osvald. Ross Shideler argues that *Ghosts* depicts "the discovery of the difference between the real, but dead father – with all of his related symbols, such as the orphanage or the pipe – and the patriarchal heritage that Mrs. Alving tries to overcome" (Shideler 1997, 291). I would modify this to state that Helene does not overcome but rather continues the tradition of bourgeois patriarchy. Not only does she assume her husband's position, she ensures that his values will live on in the minds of the asylum children. Whereas Alving spent his energies on debauchery, she has invested hers in the running of the estate and not in her child. Helene is part of the same system that gave rise to Alving. Once she has established dominance over him, she goes on to implement the values of bourgeois patriarchy in her own life. I disagree with Shideler's comment that Helene fails to recognize the import of her actions: "She tried to uphold the 'name' of her husband when he was alive, and she protected it even after his death without understanding the significance of her decision" (Shideler 1997, 292). This version of Helene, who is thrust into bourgeois tradition against her will and continues it without realizing why, is at odds with my reading of Helene as a dedicated and hardworking female patriarch. By transforming herself into the patriarch that Alving should have been she has become the distant father that Osvald never knew. Unfortunately for Helene, she is unable to gain recognition for her accomplishments, as she is only able to reveal her husband's failure in conversation with Manders. Upon Osvald's return she gradually relinquishes her position, taking on the role of mother that she had previously rejected. This development is a regression in the sense that she is returning to an earlier stage of her life, before she challenged Alving for supremacy. Her regression is predicated on the hope that Osvald will prove capable of assuming his assigned role as head of the household. Having sacrificed her status as patriarch for the benefit of her son, her state at the end of the play calls to mind Engstrand's warning to Regine not to sacrifice herself for the sake of others. Helene has chosen to live for herself, and in doing so she has in a very real sense wasted her life, much like her husband. Alving's downfall, on the other hand, provides an illustrative example of what happens when one is unable to direct one's energies into a productive cause. As we shall see in the case of Alving, an inability to find a joy in work may set an individual on the path to degeneracy.

Alving's decline and fall

Helene's renunciation of her independence is the culmination of one of the play's central themes, that of individual responsibility toward one's fellow man. The question of responsibility is central to my understanding of Helene's actions toward her son and husband, as well as the circumstances

leading to Alving's degeneration. Helene and Alving were trapped in circumstances beyond their control, but Helene, unlike her husband, accepts responsibility for the decisions she has made. In her case, she has chosen to take responsibility for herself and to a lesser extent her son, but not her husband. Manders makes this point in his criticism of her. His disapproval of her failure to protect Osvald from the temptations of Parisian life (Ibsen 2016, 216) echoes his condemnation of her failure to support her husband (Ibsen 2016, 215). Helene defends her actions with reference to Alving's corruption: "I felt sure my child would be poisoned just by breathing in the air of this infected [*tilsølede*] home" (Ibsen 2016, 219). Her use of "tilsølede" echoes Osvald's description of how the lives of his Parisian friends "should be sullied [*tilsøles*]" (Ibsen 2016, 213) by the visits of less than virtuous bourgeois men. The imagery of contagion undermines Helene's argument that she has taken responsibility for Osvald's well-being.[40] Helene's phrasing of Osvald *breathing in* his father's corruption illustrates how Alving has been functionally transformed into a miasmatic vapor. Helene's attempt at exorcizing Alving from the house will fail for the simple reason that Osvald is also his father's son. Alving's corruption lies dormant within his son and will inevitably come to exert an influence.

Helene's actions nonetheless demonstrate that she agrees with the basic premise of Manders' criticism, that she does have a responsibility toward her son. On the related issue of her responsibility toward her husband, Ibsen scholarship has historically tended to adopt the view that Helene's rejection of Alving's advances contributed to his degeneracy. Lou Andreas-Salomé provides an early example of this line of criticism, criticizing Helene for not embracing her husband's joy of life:

> Instead of without prejudice absorbing some of his life's passion, and, thus freed from the strictures of a gloomy upbringing, stepping fully into his lively nature, she, on the contrary, puts this narrowness with all its learned strictness and coldness in front of him as an obstacle.[41]

The underlying assumption is that Helene's frigid nature contributed to Osvald contracting syphilis. Alexis Soloski provides a more recent example of blaming Helene: "Contrary to contemporary medical and state attitudes, Ibsen presents Osvald's syphilis as the result, not of Captain Alving's transgressions, but of Mrs. Alving's obedience. [. . .] Had she left the marriage, she would never have borne Osvald or exposed him to his father's affliction" (Soloski 2013, 298). Soloski argues that if Helene had "behaved in a more unconstrained manner, [Alving's] enthusiasm might not have curdled into the depravity inherited by his son" (Soloski 2013, 300).[42] This line of reasoning was effectively countered by Joan Templeton. Basing her argument on Osvald's age, given by Manders as 26 or 27 (Ibsen 2016,

211), Templeton argues that Osvald was conceived after Helene's return to Alving.[43] Templeton adds to this Helene's comment to Osvald that Alving "was a broken man before you were born" (Ibsen 2016, 254). Templeton reads this comment as an acknowledgment that Alving had been infected prior to Osvald's birth.[44] Any effort on Helene's part to enliven the household would therefore have failed to prevent infection:

> Now a wife more welcoming to an undesirable husband could hardly have provided a solution here; she might have kept the captain home more, although this is doubtful, but Oswald would still have been born with his terrible malady, perhaps even earlier [. . .] no matter how "joyful" Mrs. Alving had made her husband's home, there is absolutely nothing to suggest that Oswald's condition would have changed a whit. The argument that the captain caught the disease after she had rejected him and that she is therefore responsible is not only a fallacious post hoc argument in itself but one impossible to maintain on any textual grounds whatsoever.
>
> (Templeton 1986, 59)

Templeton's argument rests on the assumption that Osvald's syphilis is congenital, a view to which I subscribe. I therefore concur with Templeton's conclusion that Helene could not have prevented Osvald from becoming infected. Helene's decision to engage Alving in domestic warfare following the discovery of his liaison with Johanne was a perfectly reasonable reaction, and her rejection of Manders' suggestion that she should have come to her husband's aid is equally reasonable. Helene simply refuses to accept responsibility for Alving's actions.

The exact cause of Alving's debauchery requires further elaboration, however, as I believe that the reason for his descent to some extent remains misunderstood. Alving's past sexual history is never explicitly described, but it can be reasonably inferred that he engaged in sexual liaisons with women, possibly prostitutes, well before marrying Helene. At the time of Helene's challenge, he appears as a man who has seen his masculinity diminish. Alving is an example of a fallen father, a man incapable of living up to the expectations of society. In the context of 19th-century understandings of masculinity, Jørgen Lorentzen argues that "the patriarch who does not master the task of building a masculinity that is solid, acceptable, and strong" (Lorentzen 2006, 826) would be regarded as a failure. A man unable to exhibit the attributes associated with manliness would be viewed as morally suspect:

> Strength, endurance, steadfastness, and decisiveness were essential characteristics for men in the 1800s, and men who showed these

> characteristics were viewed as strong and moral, while men who lost their strength or steadfastness were quickly seen as morally weak.
> (Lorentzen 2006, 827)

These attributes are precisely what the Alving of Helene's narration lacks. The reasons for his failure to live up to these ideals of masculinity are complex, and have to do with both the circumstances of his life and his own decisions. My understanding of Alving is that he was at one time possessed of energy and a desire to do something worthwhile with his life. Settling into the life of a bourgeois male living in a provincial town, he discovered that this existence could not provide him with an outlet for his industriousness. Finding himself unable to enact his masculinity through the accomplishment of fruitful endeavors, his frustration led him to seek sexual satisfaction with other women in a vain effort to regain his sense of manhood. Having internalized the values of bourgeois patriarchy, including the sexual double standard, and having engaged in liaisons prior to marrying Helene, the decision to engage in extramarital affairs was easy enough to make.[45] While living in town he had easy access to women, presumably prostitutes, but this changed after the family moved to the country estate. Faced with limited options, he turned his attention to Johanne, whom he essentially regarded as part of the property, in yet another vain attempt to regain his manhood. Helene's rebellion against his authority was the final step in Alving's process of emasculation. Helene succeeded in taking control of the estate because Alving's manliness had already been diminished.

Alving can be read as a victim of his upbringing and class. Helene's lengthy description of the young Alving contains a fair amount of sympathy and identification. Her narration is centered on the pairing of joy of work and joy of life, both of which were denied Alving. Earlier scholarship has a tendency to overemphasize the importance of the latter while disregarding the importance to Alving of the joy of work.[46] I will instead argue that Alving's inability to experience a joy of work caused him to seek solace in the joy of life, whereas both kinds of joy are necessary to living a full and productive life. Helene understands Alving's predicament because she found herself in a similar situation, from which she was able to extricate herself. She expresses regret at Alving's fate because she recognizes in him the same frustrated desire to express one's creative energy that she has experienced. Ibsen scholarship tends to view Helene's narration as merely an attempt to console Osvald.[47] According to this line of interpretation, the sympathy Helene expresses for Alving is not sincerely meant. Anne-Marie Stanton-Ife argues that Helene constructs a story intended to alleviate Osvald's "self-inflicted torture resulting from his understanding of the aetiology of the disease, namely his consorting with the happy band

of liberated artists in Paris" (Stanton-Ife 2003, 172). Stanton-Ife is right to observe that Helene's narration "negates the portrait of Alving so carefully established in Acts I and II" (Stanton-Ife 2003, 173), but this portrait is primarily communicated to Manders in what I see as an act of vengeance by a still resentful Helene. The argument of insincerity does not take into account the possibility that Helene might be sincere in conversation with Osvald. I regard both Alving and Helene as trapped within the confines of bourgeois patriarchy. In this context a distinction must be made between Helene and Alving: whereas Helene was able to break free of bourgeois constraints, Alving was not. Alving succumbs because he lacks strength of will, having depleted his willpower in a frivolous pursuit of pleasure.

My reading of Alving centers on the concept of creative energy, which should be channeled into productive and beneficial work. Willpower and creativity are linked in that the former is required in order to express the latter. An inability to manifest one's creative energy will diminish one's willpower. If this energy does not find an outlet it will either turn in on itself and consume the individual from within, or find outward expression in debauchery. It is therefore necessary to direct one's energy outward and into some pursuit that will provide the individual with a sense of accomplishment. The joy of work thus experienced must be distinguished from the joy of life, a concept that centers on pleasures such as sex, food, and drink. Alving's inability to experience joy of life is a mainstay in earlier Ibsen scholarship, as exemplified by Edvard Beyer's comment that Alving's "blocked joy of life brings about the great tragedy,"[48] but I will instead argue that it is Alving's inability to experience either type of joy that leads to his downfall. If Helene had somehow made his life more pleasurable, this would not have provided him with an outlet for his creative energy. A distinction between creativity and eroticism must be made since an inability to express the former results in one's energy becoming redirected toward the latter. It is the redirection of energy from the productive (joy of work) to the unproductive (joy of life) that stands at the heart of Alving's fall. Alving became a thrall to his carnal desire and thereby lost mastery over his own self. Lou Andreas-Salomé's comment on Osvald's frustrated desire can be applied to Alving's situation: "In the monotony of rural life, prevented by fatigue from enjoying the joy of work, and by the eternal gray rain from enjoying the joy of nature, Osvald begins to develop a taste for wine and to take an interest in the maid, Regine."[49] Creative energy acts as a blind force of nature, and if frustrated, it will find some other and less appropriate outlet.

This understanding of energy as an uncontrollable force comes to the fore in Helene's narration. The young Alving was "filled with the joy of life" and it felt "like a sunny Sunday just looking at him" (Ibsen 2016, 253). But the words Helene uses to describe his abundance of vigor, "such

incredible energy [*ustyrlige kraft*] and vitality" (Ibsen 2016, 253), imply forcefulness as well as a fundamental lack of control.[50] Alving is filled to the brim with a life force that he cannot control. The imagery used is that of an energy coursing through his body that threatens to engulf him.[51] The multiple meanings of "kraft" are significant, in that the word implies both an inner strength and the capacity to translate strength into action. Alving comes across as a man possessing a potential to achieve great things. The reference to Sunday weather, calling to mind Osvald's comment that he has always sought to portray the joy of life in his art by painting "light and sunshine and Sunday in the air – and radiant, happy faces" (Ibsen 2016, 244), underscores Alving's potential. If he had been able to divert his energy into worthwhile activity, he might have come to experience a joy of work and life. In a highly rhetorical passage, constructed on the juxtaposition of productive and unproductive, Helene blames the confines of Alving's small-town life for his inability to put his energy to good use:

> And then this joyous child [*et livsglædens barn*], because he *was* like a child back then – had to while away his time here, in a middling-sized town that had no real joy to offer, only diversions. He was stuck here without any vocation in life, with nothing but a civil service appointment. With no glimmer of any work which he could throw himself into with all his soul – he had nothing but paperwork. Without one single friend capable of feeling what the joy of life might be; only layabouts and drinking companions.
>
> (Ibsen 2016, 253)[52]

Helene's contrasting pairs illustrate Alving's inability to find a suitable means of expending his energy. It is important to note how Helene constructs her opposite pairs: the underlying structure is that of something productive that Alving *should* have had, and the unproductive contrast that he was in fact offered. From these pairs we can construct an alternative explanation of how Alving's fate could have been averted. Had he been able to divert his energy into a worthwhile undertaking, instead of being forced to squander his energy on menial tasks, his life might have turned out differently. This counternarrative, as it were, underlies Helene's narration but should also be interrogated. In describing an alternate set of circumstances Helene is expressing her conviction that Alving could have learned to make use of his energy. The possibility of Alving doing so is, however, belied by her depiction of him as a child governed by wild and uncontrollable forces. What Helene fails to realize is that the root of the problem is not the external circumstances of Alving's life, but rather his own self. He is a victim of an excess of energy, and as such he is Osvald's opposite. Alving's downfall is due to his having too much energy, a condition that in turn ultimately

leads to Osvald being born with too little, syphilis acting as the causative agent that turns surfeit into deficit.

Turning to the content of Helene's opposite pairs, it should be noted that she clearly distinguishes between the joy of work and the joy of life. Her focus on meaningful versus meaningless work is an assertion that Alving's lack of meaningful work deprived him of a purpose in life. It is on this issue that I see the main difference between Alving and Helene. Helene's struggle with Alving provided her with a vocation and thereby an outlet for her energy. Her recognition that she was more fortunate than her husband is key to my understanding of her motivation in telling the story of the young Alving. Because Alving was unable to find a vocation in life, he succumbed to degeneration, which in turn led to Helene finding a vocation in her life. I read her narration as an implicit admission that she has benefited from Alving's misfortune. In conversation with Osvald, she expresses regret at Alving being unable to find an outlet for his energy: "Your poor father could never find any outlet [*afløb*] for this excessive joy of life inside him" (Ibsen 2016, 253).[53] Given the forcefulness of his life force, the question becomes what happens once his energy is entirely blocked. The danger inherent in possessing too great a quantity of energy is that, once impeded, the current of energy will be diverted. With no external outlet, his energy is spent on himself, in a wholly unproductive manner – on drinking, having sex with prostitutes, lying on the sofa, and reading old almanacs.

Osvald risks the same fate, as he is unable to expend his creative energy due to his syphilis-induced state of permanent fatigue. He intensely fears degeneration: "I'm afraid that everything within me will degenerate into ugliness here."[54] Osvald is afraid that his creative energy, unable to find expression, will be diverted into foulness. While Helene does not explicitly employ the vocabulary of degeneration, she does refer to degeneration when she describes Alving's end, in an answer that ties Osvald's fears to his father's fate: "You said yourself earlier this evening, how things would be for you if you stayed at home" (Ibsen 2016, 253). The parallel Helene establishes between Alving and Osvald hints at the inevitability of Osvald's degeneration. The concept of degeneration may shed light on Helene's apparent sympathy for Alving. Having been forced by Alving to find an outlet for her energy, she has avoided sharing his fate. This recognition informs a series of statements culminating in an admission that she may have contributed to Alving's misery:

> They had taught me about duties and the like, things I've gone around believing in for so long. It always seemed to come down to [*munded det ud i*] duty – *my* duties and *his* duties and –. I'm afraid I made this home unbearable for your poor father, Osvald.
>
> (Ibsen 2016, 253)[55]

I assume that Helene is referring to her family, by whom she has been taught to place the needs of others before her own. She designates Alving as someone who has similarly been taught to adhere to an ideal of self-sacrifice. The last line seems to be an admission of guilt, but it is also at odds with her earlier, entirely negative portrayal of Alving in conversation with Manders. The use of "munde ud" may help explain Helene's reversal. Helene is describing how the energy that both she and Alving possessed was channeled, not into productive and life-affirming activity, but into obligations imposed on them by family and society. She is in effect stating that both she and her husband were forced to divert their energy into unproductive and unfulfilling tasks. She recognizes herself in Alving, and it is this identification that occasions what I consider to be an expression of genuine sympathy for Alving. Both Alving and Helene were subjected to having their energies constrained, causing deviation.

Alving's inability to constructively expend his energy was more devastating to him than to Helene in that his frustrated energy turned him into a failed father. Helene's comment on Alving's brokenness prior to Osvald's birth (Ibsen 2016, 254) has been interpreted as a reference to Alving's syphilis but gains an added meaning when read against the backdrop of an energetic economy. By depleting his finite reserve of energy Alving has ensured that Osvald, syphilis notwithstanding, would come to be born with a paucity of vitality. At work here is an understanding of vitality that should be seen in relation to 19th-century medical discourse on energetic wastefulness. The idea of vitality being a finite resource can be exemplified with reference to the long history of medical and religious literature condemning masturbation, an act routinely depicted in terms of depletion and waste. The concept of a "spermatic economy," a term used by Barker-Benfield (1972, 2000) to designate a strain of discourse on male potency relating to the proper expenditure of semen, may help to illuminate the underlying mechanisms of Alving's wastefulness. Central to this discourse was a fear of "spermatic *loss*, together with its concomitant losses of will and of order" (Barker-Benfield 1972, 49; emphasis in original). At worst, too high a loss would give rise to weak children.[56] Applying this logic to the case of Alving, his expending of semen on extramarital affairs can be compared to masturbation, both activities resulting in a quantitative and qualitative reduction of vitality. Sex for purposes other than procreation were linked in the medical imagination to degeneration. As Eva Palmblad notes, giving free rein to sexual desire contravened contemporary ideals of self-control:

> Mismanagement of resources was seen as inevitably leading to pathological conditions. The fear of acting on one's desires in general, and sexual desire in particular, must be seen in relation to the ideal of

> character which gained greater resonance at this time. Willpower and self-control were qualities that were highly valued, and being brought up into these required a restrained lifestyle where debauchery in any form was not allowed.[57]

Alving's energetic spending for no purpose other than selfish pleasure places him in the same category as the male masturbator, as a man unable to control his impulses and whose actions imperil his offspring. Jonas Liliequist argues that during the 19th century, sexual licentiousness came to be increasingly viewed in a negative light, sexual excess becoming associated with ill health (Liliequist 2006, 192). When combined with late century hereditarian discourse, the notion of seminal loss evolved into a threat to the integrity of one's children. Claes Ekenstam notes that the connection between semen and life force gave rise to the imperative that men must manage their resources carefully (Ekenstam 1993, 143). A failure to husband one's energies could potentially lead to disaster: "He who wastes his precious life energy through masturbation or too frequent copulation not only ruins his own health, but also threatens to undermine the next generation."[58] Having engaged in intercourse with women who could never have borne him legitimate heirs, Alving has squandered the inheritance of energy that should have been Osvald's by right.

Alving's wastefulness has rendered him incapable of producing a healthy child. He has allowed himself to become drained of energy, and this condition, acquired through his own actions, introduces a break in the chain of transmission of vitality from father to child. Added to this is the fact that Alving was denied the opportunity to realize his potential. Alving has been rendered useless by the circumstances of his life, but portents of degeneration could already be observed in his youth. Taking into account Manders' comment on the rumors concerning the young Alving's behavior (Ibsen 2016, 214), Alving can be seen as being predisposed to degeneration, his premarital exploits foreshadowing his later development. These tendencies were exacerbated in a small town setting where, to borrow Erik Østerud's phrasing, Alving's "incentive for life was taken away from him" (Østerud 1996, 486). If one posits that Alving's degeneration was caused by detrimental environmental factors operating in tandem with his own preexisting tendencies, it then follows that he is not entirely to blame for his descent into depravity. This reduction in the degree of Alving's responsibility for his own fate is what allows for Helene to express a measure of regret for the man that Alving could have become. But there is also an important subtext to her narration relating to Osvald's decline, which is foreshadowed by the story of Alving's fall. Above all, it is Alving's lack of willpower that signals the fate of his son. Depleted willpower is a characteristic acquired by Alving and then passed on to Osvald. George L. Mosse

notes that willpower was a defining trait of contemporary discourses on masculinity: "Strength of will was one of the distinguishing marks of the proper male ideal as opposed to so-called weak and womanly men" (Mosse 1996, 100). Willpower, conceived as a tool with which one's masculinity could be demonstrated, was intended to be exerted. Christopher E. Forth highlights the importance of displaying willpower through mastery of one's environment and self:

> The overall effort required to "be a man" was the sum of all the ways in which willpower could manifest itself, and included the ability to withstand pain, to display courage in the face of danger [. . .] and, in short, to steel the body as a means of overcoming the sensuality of "the flesh." (Forth 2001, 65)

Alving's reduced willpower signals his transition from virile to emasculated male, and the same quality of weakness of will is exhibited by his son. Lacking the willpower to express his masculinity through hard work, Osvald appears predisposed to become another failed male.

Osvald's energetic inheritance

Osvald's lack of willpower, manifesting most visibly in his inability to concentrate while painting, is caused by his having been born with a reduced measure of energy.[59] Helene is correct in her appraisal of Osvald's condition as having to do with a lack of energy – "It's nothing but over-exertion" (Ibsen 2016, 237) – but is unable to identify the root cause. Under normal circumstances, overspending one's energy could be alleviated through rest and recuperation. Osvald's congenital syphilis throws a wrench in this process. He has overspent his limited fund of energy, and he is incapable of recuperating. Regine's comment that Osvald is simply tired from his journey (Ibsen 2016, 199) is an observation of Osvald's symptoms but also misunderstands the nature of his condition. Manders seems to think that Osvald's fatigue is a natural period of rest in between painting sessions: "And thus prepare himself and gather his powers for something great" (Ibsen 2016, 209). But as Osvald will later admit, he is unable to sleep (Ibsen 2016, 252). Recuperation is predicated on notions of normal spending. Energy can only be spent up to a certain point, after which the organism will be unable to fully recuperate. This threshold is lower for Osvald who, due to his ignorance of his condition, believes that he possesses a normal amount of energy, which makes his overspending catastrophic.

This dynamic of expenditure and recuperation can be clarified by examining the concept of crisis. A crisis is an event that impacts the organism to such an extent as to activate a predisposition to disease, or in other words

a diathesis, and will typically entail an expenditure of energy. The connection between crisis and diathesis can be illustrated using an example from French syphilologist Charles-Paul Diday. Diday explains how a syphilitic diathesis may become activated following a crisis: if the symptoms of syphilis manifest "after violent emotions, or after fatigues or excesses, it is because, by virtue of these circumstances, a stimulus is superadded to the slumbering diathesis, and has called it into action" (Diday 1859, 130). In Osvald's case two crises can be identified, the asylum fire and Helene's narration of Alving's past. Ibsen scholarship has tended to focus on the fire as representing the destruction of false ideals, as exemplified by Joan Templeton's comment that "the Gotterdammerung of The Family takes place at the end of act 2 as the orphanage, marvelous symbol of sexual and social hypocrisy, burns to the ground" (Templeton 1986, 64). I believe that the effect of the fire on Osvald has been misunderstood. When the fire breaks out, Osvald rushes to help, failing to realize that he is spending energy he does not possess. It is in this specific sense that Helene's admonition, "You shouldn't have stayed down there so long, my poor boy" (Ibsen 2016, 251), is prescient. Osvald is incapable of recuperating the energy lost on mundane tasks such as travel and work, and the effort involved in this extraordinary exertion is far greater than his constitution can bear. The disparity between the amount of energy Osvald possesses and the amount he spends explains why Osvald becomes, as Erik Bjerck Hagen argues, fatally overexerted (Hagen 2015, 54). A person possessing a normal amount of energy could perhaps have recuperated from the exertion, but due to Osvald's compromised health, the result is a crisis that further undermines his constitution. In the medical parlance of the time, the fire is a crisis that activates Osvald's syphilitic diathesis.[60]

The crisis brought on by the asylum fire is not an isolated instance but rather the culmination of a lengthy process of enfeeblement. Osvald has already taxed his limited reserve of energy during his years in Paris. Following his arrival at the estate he engages in a pattern of identifying and pursuing sources of energy. I do not read Osvald as being aware of what he is doing; I rather see him as being compelled by the energetic void within him to seek out and incorporate other sources of energy, in particular food and drink.[61] His drinking is often read as an indication that he has inherited his father's profligacy, as exemplified by Stephanie Pocock Boeninger:

> Oswald's near-constant consumption of champagne, his frequent queries to his mother about when dinner will be ready, and his request to have both white and red wine at dinner hint at his indissoluble connection to his profligate father, from whom he has inherited syphilis.
>
> (Boeninger 2014, 459)[62]

To describe Osvald as a hedonist dedicated to pleasure is to overlook the importance he places on the joy of work. Moreover, a reading of Osvald as a libertine disregards the possibility that his drinking is a side-effect of his energetic depletion.[63] Osvald's craving for food and drink points to his lack of energy, and his habits do not necessarily signify gluttony or incipient alcoholism. His lust for food is interpreted by Helene as a sign of good health (Ibsen 2016, 209) but is rather a sign of energetic depletion. His request for both white and red port wine (Ibsen 2016, 220) is a similar attempt to obtain sustenance. His desire for drink is at once overwhelming (Ibsen 2016, 240) and fruitless, in that the two glasses of champagne he drinks (Ibsen 2016, 241) offer him no benefit. His frantic search for energy is accompanied by outbursts of excitement. His debate with Manders on the merits of free marriages causes a sudden onset of headache and a complaint about being tired (Ibsen 2016, 213). Helene's warning, "You mustn't over-excite yourself" (Ibsen 2016, 213), shows that his excitability is a cause for concern. His outbursts accentuate the urgency of his need for energy. Finding no reprieve in food and drink, he instead turns his attention to Regine, whom he regards as a source of energy.

The role Osvald intends for Regine amounts to that of a battery providing him with an infusion of vigor. The instrumental nature of his interest in Regine has been obscured by readings that emphasize how his pursuit of her mirrors his father's behavior toward Johanne. Although the parallels are obvious, the erotic component of Osvald's attraction to Regine should not be overstated.[64] I agree with Anne-Marie Stanton-Ife that Osvald's insistence on drinking while failing to offer Regine a drink "suggests that Osvald is not really concerned with her at all, but is drawn to her vitality as something which he knows is for himself unattainable" (Stanton-Ife 2003, 167). Osvald's need for Regine's energy is overwhelming to such an extent that he fails to take into account the possibility of his infecting her with syphilis (Stanton-Ife 2003, 186 n. 11). While Osvald can be seen as indifferent to Regine's welfare, I would argue that the severity of his craving overrides such objections. An indication of Osvald's instrumental attitude toward Regine can be seen in his comment on Regine's beauty: "Yes, but isn't she splendid [*prægtig*] to look at, Mother?" (Ibsen 2016, 241) Osvald asking this question prior to filling his glass accentuates the parity he establishes between Regine and sustenance. The use of "prægtig" is worth noting, as it recurs in Osvald's later comment on Regine's physique and health: "Isn't she splendid [*prægtig*] to look at? Look how she's built! So strong and healthy [*kærnesund*]" (Ibsen 2016, 242). Regine's splendidness is derived from her vitality and should not be equated with conventional beauty. The use of "kærnesund," literally meaning "healthy to the core," is also noteworthy, especially when taken together with the synonymous "kærnefriske" in Osvald's description of his hoped-for transfer of

energy: "when I saw that splendid, beautiful, healthy [*kærnefriske*] young girl standing before me [. . .] I realized that it was in her my salvation lay; because I saw the joy of life in her" (Ibsen 2016, 243).[65] What Osvald is describing is a one-way transfer that could conceivably drain Regine of energy altogether.

Osvald is obviously fascinated by the essential soundness of Regine and is first and foremost attracted to her vitality. His reference to the joy of life may suggest that he is simply drawn to Regine's capacity for enjoying life, and his comments on Regine's physique could be read as an expression of his desire to live a life of joy. This is the reading suggested by Egil Törnqvist in reference to Regine's watering of the plants: "And just as the flowers long for life-giving water, Osvald longs for the joy of life that their giver, Regine, embodies."[66] This line of interpretation, however, reduces the potential Osvald sees in Regine to a matter of enjoying life and does not adequately capture the physicality of what Osvald hopes to receive. Regine's physique is a topic of discussion, as seen in Manders' comment on how Regine was "noticeably well developed in the corporeal sense when I prepared her for confirmation" (Ibsen 2016, 228). Manders could simply be read as a lecherous old man, but the sexual connotations distract from the issue of health. Regine's full figure signifies an abundance of vigor; she is made out to be a picture of health, with energy to spare. In order for Osvald to live a full life, he must first obtain an infusion of energy, which is what draws him to Regine. Vitality is commodified by the imagery Osvald uses; his emphasis on Regine's corporeal presence and the vigor seemingly flowing from her body shows how energy becomes imbued with an almost tangible quality. Osvald's craving of Regine's energy is an expression of a deep-seated desire to incorporate her vigor into his own self.

What Osvald cannot see is that Regine's potential to live in joy is entirely dependent on her possessing a sufficient amount of energy. He is fixating on a mirage; the energy emanating from Regine seems to hold out the promise that he may somehow become energized by her vitality. No amount of energy can compensate for his constitutional deficit, however, and his efforts to have Regine replenish his energy can only prove fruitless. His referring to Regine as his salvation and his need to have her support him reinforces the image of Osvald as a man unable to achieve anything on his own. His restless pacing and complaining about an anxiety that he is unable to explain or even describe (Ibsen 2016, 242) further underlines his frailty. If men are expected to engage in productive labor, Osvald's incapacity for work, which he compares to being "like a dead man alive" (Ibsen 2016, 237), makes of him as failed a man as his father. Osvald blames his recurring headaches for his incapacity, describing how the pain makes it impossible for him to concentrate: "I wanted to start on a big new painting; but it was as though my talents had failed me; all my

strength was somehow paralysed; I couldn't focus on any firm ideas; the world swam before me – racing round" (Ibsen 2016, 238). This is Osvald confusing cause and effect. The pain he experienced was the result of his attempt to marshal energy he did not possess. Much like the crisis brought on by the asylum fire, his body reacted to the strain that Osvald failed to understand that he imposed on himself.

The gradual breakdown of his ability to paint takes place in Paris. The choice of locale is significant in that Paris functions as the site of Osvald's tentative entry into adulthood.[67] Manders notes that Osvald enjoys a growing recognition as an artist (Ibsen 2016, 209). Osvald's success as an artist is a relatively recent development, and the same can be said of his headaches. He dates the onset of his headaches to the time of his last visit to the estate (Ibsen 2016, 237), which according to Helene was more than two years ago (Ibsen 2016, 202). While he also mentions suffering headaches as a child (Ibsen 2016, 238), the recent and more serious headaches appear when Osvald is on the verge of establishing a name for himself. Recognizing that he is in need of medical counsel he visits a doctor whose verdict is commonly interpreted as a euphemistic diagnosis of syphilis: "right from your very birth something in you has been worm-eaten – he used exactly that expression, 'vermoulu'" (Ibsen 2016, 238).[68] I will rather argue that "vermoulu" refers to Osvald's worm-eaten constitution, and the doctor's statement thus designates Osvald as a victim of degeneration.[69] This would be an example of a doctor appropriating a biblical expression in order to convey a medical opinion.[70] Osvald is being informed, at precisely that point in his life when he is beginning to establish himself in his own right, that he will never become a healthy and capable man.

Osvald's reaction is to interrogate whether he has himself to blame for his condition, which aligns with the tendency of syphilis discourse to distinguish between innocent victims of syphilis and those who have brought the disease upon themselves. By his own indirect admission, he has engaged in sexual liaisons, which may be read as another step on his path to adulthood. Having forced the doctor to relocate the source of contagion to Osvald himself, Osvald frames his guilt in terms of a lifestyle that came at too high a cost. His youthful adventures "had been too much for my strength" (Ibsen 2016, 239), and he has become an "incurable wreck" (Ibsen 2016, 239). In a parallel to Helene's description of Alving, Osvald is describing himself as devoid of energy due to overspending. A young man possessing an insufficient amount of life force is a man with no future, and Osvald acknowledges that he will never be able to accomplish much of anything (Ibsen 2016, 239). His self-criticism is driven by his own ideals, which are rather chaste. Simon Williams makes the case that Osvald, "even more than Pastor Manders, understands the virtues of a quiet, enclosed family life" (Williams 1985, 252), an observation borne

out by the disgust Osvald expresses at bourgeois men engaging in sexual liaisons (Ibsen 2016, 213). Osvald's ideals of domesticity, as explicated in conversation with Manders (Ibsen 2016, 212), are configured in opposition to the immorality of bourgeois men. Osvald's distaste for the behavior that he at this time does not know Alving engaged in demonstrates an important dissimilarity between father and son. There is nothing to indicate that Osvald engages in sexual encounters with prostitutes; given the emphasis he places on monogamy and love, I see no reason to believe that Osvald has followed in his father's footsteps. Osvald's rejection of the bourgeois sexual double standard is difficult to reconcile with a reading of Osvald as somehow a libertine.

Osvald's criticism of bourgeois immorality should be read in conjunction with his habit of engaging in adult behavior. His ambivalence toward established norms of male behavior accentuates the precarity of his position as a young man on the verge of adulthood. Much of what Osvald does serves to visibly demonstrate his manliness, which may testify to a deep-seated fear that he will never become a man. His rushing to help extinguish the asylum fire without so much as grabbing his hat (Ibsen 2016, 246) stands in contrast to Regine, Helene, and Manders leaving through the hall door. His response to the fire signals a willingness to confront danger and demonstrates bravery. His penchant for drinking and smoking can similarly be understood as him putting his masculinity on display. The most noticeable instance of such behavior is Osvald's smoking his father's pipe. This scene echoes the childhood episode that saw Osvald smoking the pipe and falling ill (Ibsen 2016, 210).[71] That being said, the pipe does have certain sexual connotations that tend to go unnoticed. The pipe is made of meerschaum (Ibsen 2016, 208), another term for the mineral sepiolite, which has seen frequent use in the production of pipes. The porosity of sepiolite allows it to float on water, and its natural occurrence as "sea-foam" gives the mineral strong naval associations. Osvald's smoking of his father's meerschaum pipe establishes a link between these two men and the sailors who would one day visit Engstrand's sailor's home and whom Regine dismisses as unsuitable for marriage. Pipe-smoking seamen of the kind who travel the seas may be presumed to have a certain amount of sexual experience, and Osvald's choice of smoking utensil signifies a desire on his part to be taken seriously as a man and to be regarded as a viable sexual partner for Regine.

Osvald's adopting of his father's mannerisms indicates that he has taken his first steps toward assuming the mantle of bourgeois patriarch, a development encouraged by Manders. Manders' comment that he recognizes Alving in the pipe-smoking Osvald (Ibsen 2016, 210) requires elaboration. Helene's rebuttal that "Osvald has something rather more priestly about his mouth" (Ibsen 2016, 210) can be seen as a desire on her part to

de-emphasize Osvald's resemblance to Alving, thereby claiming Osvald for her own. One might also pose the question if Osvald could in fact be Manders' son (Helland and Åslund 1996, 12).[72] More important to my argument is the disparity between Osvald's childhood account and the evident pleasure he derives from pipe-smoking in the present. Whereas the young Osvald was unsurprisingly nauseated, he has now come to embrace a suspiciously phallic symbol of bourgeois patriarchy. Furthermore, Osvald's features appear more masculine when he smokes. Manders' observation that "many of my colleagues [*embedsbrødre*] do have a similar expression" (Ibsen 2016, 210) indicates that he sees Osvald's smoking as a sign that the young man is ready to enter into the fraternity of bourgeois men.[73] Helene telling Osvald to set aside the pipe is a refutation, on the part of the mother, of Manders' invitation to Osvald. If the church, as Jørgen Lorentzen argues, is "integrally involved in the maintenance of the traditional patriarchal authority and a part of the established phallic order" (Lorentzen 2006, 820), both the comments on Osvald's priestly features and his pipe-smoking should be understood in relation to a system of male dominance that Helene opposes. In her effort to keep Osvald from following in Alving's footsteps, however, she is encouraging Osvald to remain a child. It is significant that Osvald's recollection of the childhood episode ends with Helene carrying him from Alving's room to the nursery (Ibsen 2016, 210). In the present Helene is similarly treating Osvald as a child, thereby failing to acknowledge his maturity. If the pipe is read as a symbol of bourgeois patriarchy, the childhood episode can be understood in a different light. Alving was cultivating his son's masculinity, offering him the pipe in an attempt to toughen him and prepare him for manhood. In the tug-of-war between parents, Helene ultimately emerges the victor.

Osvald's transition into what effectively amounts to an adult child is tied to his incapacity for work. If men are expected to work and provide for their families, Osvald's complaint of his "inability to work" (Ibsen 2016, 236) is an admission that he will never be able to stand on his own two legs. When Osvald throws himself onto Helene's lap, sobbing (Ibsen 2016, 237), he is both renouncing his adulthood and imploring Helene to treat him as a helpless child. Helene is eager to accommodate him, having never fully acknowledged his actual age, as evinced by her habit of addressing Osvald as her "boy" (Ibsen 2016, 239, 242, 252). Having regressed to a childlike state, Osvald attaches himself to Helene as a potential source of strength. Helene's acquiescence signifies her relinquishing of her position as head of the household. The reversal of gender roles she enforced in order to protect Osvald from Alving's corruption is undone, and normative patterns of gender behavior are re-established. Were it not for Osvald's lack of energy, this regression on Helene's part would have enabled her son to establish himself as a bourgeois patriarch. What is expected of him in

this capacity can be seen in Manders' comment on Osvald having inherited "the name of an industrious and worthy man" (Ibsen 2016, 210). As the inheritor of the Alving name, Osvald is required to embrace his father's legacy of industriousness. Osvald's continued success as an artist would have enhanced the prestige of the Alving name, while possibly allowing Osvald to avoid his father's fate of being trapped in a stultifying environment. The break in the transmission of vitality from father to child caused by Alving's syphilis renders these goals impossible to achieve, and Osvald will always have to rely on the aid of others. Alving has thereby prevented his son from ever becoming a man. The Alving name ends in the form of Osvald, a grown child devoid of energy who is incapable of providing for himself, much less continuing the family line. This would be the end result of the process of degeneration that began with Alving. Where the *haute bourgeoisie* of the Alvings seems determined to extinguish itself, the promise of regeneration is held out by the working class, represented by the vital Regine.

Regine and regeneration

I have in the preceding sought to identify Alving, Helene, and Osvald as being connected in various ways to notions of degeneracy. The fact that all three members of the Alving family unit are associated with degeneracy suggests that the latter quality is linked more emphatically to the bourgeoisie than to any other class. The brunt of the criticism leveled at the bourgeoisie is specifically directed at a bourgeois marriage ideology that, while intended to ensure the successful propagation of the bourgeois social body, is depicted as an inherently corrupting force. The institution of marriage as practiced by Helene's family and subsequently used by Helene to ensnare Regine comes across as a socially acceptable manner of trading women for money and status. While the exploitative aspects of bourgeois marriage ideology are clear to see, I will argue that the relationship between this ideology and the issue of incest remains somewhat obscure. In short, bourgeois marriage practices invite incest. If the stated purpose of bourgeois marriage is to not only secure beneficial matches but also to ensure the transmission of economic and symbolic capital to the next generation, taking care not to distribute these resources too far beyond the confines of familial networks, then it would not be unreasonable to argue that too-close sexual alliances are part and parcel of bourgeois marriage practices. Although the theme of incest has been addressed by earlier scholarship, in particular in relation to Helene's permissive attitude toward Osvald's plan to (unwittingly) marry his half-sister, I will argue that the focus on Osvald slightly misses the mark. Incest in *Ghosts* is not primarily a question of whether or not Osvald should be able to go ahead with his plan.

Incest is rather made out to be an endemic feature of the bourgeoisie and is moreover an inevitable result of bourgeois concerns over the transmission of resources from one generation to the next.

Incest and degeneration enjoy a conceptual proximity in that both involve clear deviations from patterns of normative behavior and have detrimental consequences, especially in the long term. If Osvald and Regine were to marry, their children would be the product of syphilitic degeneration and incest. This makes Helene's apparent acceptance of their hypothetical union even more puzzling. Her statement that she lacks the courage to bless their union (Ibsen 2016, 226) obscures the fact that bourgeois marriage, as evinced by (Kuper 2009), allowed for a certain degree of consanguinity. Marriages between cousins were regularly enacted in order to preserve a family's wealth within a kinship structure. When Manders expresses his shock at Helene's suggestion, she replies that consanguineous marriages may be more prevalent than commonly assumed: "don't you think there are plenty of married couples around the country who are just as closely related?" (Ibsen 2016, 226) Manders reluctantly agrees with her, admitting that "family life isn't always as pure as it should be" (Ibsen 2016, 226). If consanguineous marriages are as common as Helene suggests, her willingness to countenance Osvald's marriage to Regine appears as her simply accepting an unacknowledged truth of bourgeois life. I have argued that Helene has transformed herself into the model patriarch that Alving never became. Her tolerance serves the purpose of ensuring the continuation of the Alving family line, which appears as a central imperative in comparison to the obligation to avoid incest, which seems to be of secondary importance. The imperative to continue the Alving line precludes all other considerations; the continuance of the family line through the degenerate offspring of an incestuous union is preferable to dying out.

Extinction will nonetheless inevitably occur. Osvald's final breakdown is patterned on a model of diathesis-stress, Helene's revelation of the truth about Alving having "shaken you badly" (Ibsen 2016, 255) and dealt the final blow to his constitution. Osvald claims not to fear death but rather the possibility of regressing to a childlike state: "Like being turned back into a baby again; having to be fed, having to be –." (Ibsen 2016, 258). His fear that he will "live like that for years on end – getting old and grey" (Ibsen 2016, 258) is a direct evocation of the trope of the syphilitic child born with features resembling those of the elderly. Calling to mind how the French doctor described Osvald's condition as "a kind of softening of the brain" (Ibsen 2016, 258), Osvald makes a curious association: "I'll always think of cherry-coloured, velvety drapes – something that's delicate to stroke" (Ibsen 2016, 258). This image has attracted a variety of interpretations. Erik Østerud sees the line as an indication of how Osvald's erotic desire has turned in on itself: "Here, he invades – or dissects – his

own body with a morbid obsession of sensual curiosity and erotic desire" (Østerud 1996, 484). Evert Sprinchorn finds a correspondence between this passage and descriptions of cerebral syphilis in Fournier (Sprinchorn 2004, 196). These readings miss the obvious point that Osvald is drawing attention to the gradual weakening of his intellect. Delicate silken drapes are fragile, as are cherries, and the image thus signifies a weakening of cognitive ability. Osvald's transformation into what Egil Törnqvist describes as "an imbecile, helpless child, a living dead"[74] is the culmination of the progressive deterioration of Osvald's constitution, a process that has been well underway for the past several years.

When this process of decline reaches its conclusion Osvald will have fully regressed to a childlike state. He will then have undergone a process that, had he not been suffering specifically from late onset congenital syphilis, would have played out in his infancy. The comparison of syphilitic children to little old men, commonplace in medical literature at the time, was reserved for cases when the child's condition was immediately apparent. The future that Osvald is describing amounts to a late onset of a disease that has been with him since birth. The case of Osvald evolving backwards, as it were, modifies the play's central theme of the ghosts of the past coming back to haunt the living. James McFarlane summarizes this theme in relation to Helene, who "is forced to recognize that the 'ghosts' of the past, whether they happen to be moribund ideas or outworn conventions or inherited characteristics or the latent hideousness of disease, continue to inhabit the living cells of the new, young life, in spite of the most tremendous efforts to deny them" (McFarlane 1989, 238). What is returning in Osvald's case is not merely the disease itself but also the specific state of decrepitude associated with cases of paternally transmitted congenital syphilis. The past is not simply intruding on Osvald's present; it is reshaping his present into the past that he at first appeared to have escaped at birth. And while his regression is ultimately caused by his father, he criticizes his mother for ever having given birth to him (Ibsen 2016, 260).[75] The failure of Alving to ensure the viability of his offspring, coupled with Helene's giving birth to a child whose compromised constitution will prevent him from ever enjoying life or work, signifies the failure of the bourgeoisie to propagate itself. A class that is no longer capable of reproduction is doomed to fail. The replacement of this class by an energetic and healthy working class, here represented by Regine, would in the context of degenerationist discourse be considered right and proper.

My argument that Regine represents a hope for regeneration rests on the issue of class. Ellen Mortensen notes that Ibsen scholarship has a habit of downplaying the importance of Regine, who tends to be reduced to being only "a representative of the lower classes" (Mortensen 2007, 185 n. 12). As opposed to the moribund bourgeoisie of the Alvings, the working class

shows no signs of having succumbed to degeneration. Regine's refusal to contemplate a life of "wearing myself out on invalids" (Ibsen 2016, 254), acting as helper to the ailing Osvald, is her choosing self-realization over self-sacrifice. James McFarlane argues that Ibsen was especially wary of the latter: Ibsen "noted the tendency to suppose that *any* concern for oneself was unworthy, and he was eager to point out instead that a proper concern for one's own self was rather one of the supreme duties" (McFarlane 1989, 233; emphasis in original). When this line of reasoning is applied to Regine, readings of her as heartless seem unwarranted.[76] Regine shows compassion to her own self by rejecting an offer that would have condemned her to a life of self-sacrifice that would not in any way have affected Osvald's condition. When Regine announces her departure, Helene's response of "don't throw yourself away" (Ibsen 2016, 254) is an expression of class interest; Helene prefers Regine to waste away in service to the Alvings rather than invest in her own self. Her assertion that Regine "belonged here" (Ibsen 2016, 254), echoed by Osvald's "this is where you belong" (Ibsen 2016, 254), communicate a sense of entitlement and possessiveness on the part of the Alvings toward the working class. Regine's rejection of their offer, as well as her transformation from resource to person, is an act of emancipation.

Regine's departure is the inverse of Osvald's regression and is moreover a success story compared to her biological father's inability to escape the obligations of his class and position. Living for her own benefit means not having to serve others, even if her goal is to find a husband who can provide her with financial stability and social standing. In this she is driven by a firm belief in her own capability. Helene's horrified "you're going to your ruin" (Ibsen 2016, 255) upon learning of Regine's plans to join her father is ironic in that Regine will come to rise above the station that Helene intended for her. Helene's shock at the thought of a working-class woman climbing the social ladder, possibly by means of a similar arrangement to that which secured the marriage of Helene to Alving, is an inversion of the trope of the fallen woman. While Helene toward the end stands as the last functioning vestige of the bourgeoisie, her class is destined for extinction. A fitting coda to the fall of the house of Alving is Manders' declaration of the asylum fire as divine judgment: "Mrs Alving, *there* blazes the judgement on this house of disorder" (Ibsen 2016, 246). A disordered house the heads of which have shown themselves to be degenerates and syphilitics will eventually crumble, and the class inhabiting such a house will inevitably come to be replaced by a class more fit for life than its predecessor.

Notes

1 "et fra Fødselen af ødelagt Væsen, til en Søn, hvem Dødstræthed, Fortvivlelse, Afsind, Idiotisme rammer ved Indtrædelsen i Mandsalderen."

2 Brian W. Downs notes that the final scene invites such speculation (Downs 1945, 164).
3 "Han maa, korteligt udtrykt have den dyrt betalte Evne at kunne følge Mennesket ned gjennem alle Slægtleds Fornedrelses- og Lidelsesstadier, indtil det stopper op der, hvor Osvald sidder, en modbydelig Bløddyrsorganisme i menneskelig Skikkelse."
4 I hope to have resolved the long-standing issue in Ibsen scholarship of how Osvald became infected in a forthcoming article in *Ibsen Studies* (Johnsson 2024). Readers who are interested in the medical context of *Ghosts* are referred to this article, which is intended to provide historical background to my interpretation of Osvald as a case of paternally transmitted congenital syphilis.
5 "Når det gjelder selve de fakta Ibsen har lagt inn i sin intrige, har det vært en del diskusjon om hvordan Osvald har fått syfilis, men den diskusjonen virker *beside the point*. Hans sykdom er primært et hovedbilde på selve gjengangeriet og ferdig med det."
6 "Grundstemningen skal være: Det stærke opblomstrende åndelige liv hos os i literatur, kunst o.s.v. – og så som modsætning: hele menneskeheden på afveje." NBO Ms. 8° 1452. The note can be dated to November 11, 1880 at the earliest (*HIS* 7K:491). Quoted from www.ibsen.uio.no/DRVIT_Ge%7CGe81452.xhtml; accessed February 1, 2024.
7 "Han var i ungdommen forfalden og forkommet; så trådte hun, den religiøst vakte op; hun frelste ham; hun var rig. Han havde villet gifte sig med en pige, som ansåes uværdig. Han fik en søn i sit ægteskab; så vendte han tilbage til pigen; en datter." NBO Ms. 8° 1219:2. The dating of these short comments is uncertain, but they are thematically linked to *Ghosts* (*HIS* 7K:484). Quotes in the following are from www.ibsen.uio.no/DRVIT_Ge%7CGe81219_2.xhtml; accessed February 1, 2024.
8 "Det bringer en Nemesis over afkom̄et at gifte sig af udenfor liggende grunde selv religiøse eller moralske."
9 "Disse nutidens kvinder, mishandlede som døttre, som søstre, som hustruer, ikke opdragne efter deres be[ga]velse, holdt borte fra deres kald, frataget deres arv, forbittrede i sindet, – disse er det, som afgiver mødrene for den unge generation. Hvad blir følgen?"
10 The trope of the fallen man recurs in NBO Ms. 8° 1946, which contains an early version of the plot of *Ghosts*. A woman marries a man described as "the 'brilliant genius,' 'the lost person'" ("det 'glimrende geni,' 'det forlorne subjekt'"). The man goes on to a successful career, and upon his death leaves a legacy that is to be commemorated by a foundation and a memorial. Quoted from www.ibsen.uio.no/DRVIT_Ge%7CGe81946.xhtml; accessed February 1, 2024.
11 "Lykken ved arbejdet – leve *af* arbejdet, – leve *for* arbejdet." NBO Ms. 4° 1114. The line does not appear in the finished play. For a discussion of the genetic status of the working manuscript, see (*HIS* 7K:496–501).
12 The texts are catalogued as Ms. 8° 1219:1, Ms. 8° 1219:2, and Ms. 8° 1219:3, and can all be dated to 1881.
13 "Hos os sætter man monumenter over de døde; thi vi har pligter ligeoverfor dem; vi tillader spedalske at gifte sig, men [d]eres afkom –? de ufødte –?"
14 "Det fuldfærdige menneske er ikke et naturprodukt længer, det er et kunstprodukt således som kornet er det, og frugttræerne, og kreolerracen og de ædle heste og hunderacer, vinstokke o.s.v. –"
15 Tamsen Wolff reads this as a comment on heredity with eugenic implications: Ibsen "identifies two critical eugenic concerns here: the question of breeding for

an improved human being, a possibility demonstrated by horticulturists and stock breeders through experiments in biological restructuring; and a focus on the unborn child" (Wolff 2002, 49–50).

16 I have found no explicit references to the concept of degeneration in any of Ibsen's letters, before or after writing *Ghosts*. I will note, however, that Ibsen repeatedly describes the writing of *Ghosts* as being something of a moral necessity. The play intruded upon him and demanded his attention (*HIS* 14:97), he was prepared for an overwhelmingly negative reception (*HIS* 14:103), he refutes accusations that the play preaches nihilism (*HIS* 14:110), and he stresses that writing the play was an absolute must (*HIS* 14:136). I believe that Ibsen's emphasis on the moral underpinnings of the play accords well with my reading of the play as a sustained engagement with degeneration discourse, which is at heart a moralizing discourse. Ibsen's comments can be read as a testament to his belief that societal corruption must be exposed, even at the risk of alienating his readers.

17 (Ibsen 1998, 92), (Ibsen 2003, 22), (Ibsen 2016, 194).

18 Sandberg's note on the historical associations of the word "asylum" is misleading: "In Ibsen's day, that word's connotation of protection would have been stronger than that of confinement, so it would have been a perfectly normal synonym for 'orphanage'" (Sandberg 2015, 90). Ibsen's audience would have had no trouble distingushing between asylums and orphanages.

19 Orphanages were referred to as *vaisenhus*, from the German "Weise," meaning "orphan." The first *vaisenhus* in Norway was constructed in Trondheim in 1637. For a history of these different types of institutions, see (Thuen 2002). On modern developments in Norwegian foster care, see (Hagen, Gerd 2001).

20 In the original: "De satte Deres barn ud til fremmede" (*HIS* 7:431). Sprinchorn's suggestion that Helene "may have placed [Osvald] in the care of her relations" (Sprinchorn 2004, 200) is contradicted by the text. On the practice of placing children with foster families, see (Sørjoten 2018) and (Andresen 2006).

21 Asylums were also seen as a more humane alternative to workhouses, cf. (Kvam and Tveiten 2018).

22 "vanvyrdet, mishandlet eller sedelig forkommet."

23 For a discussion of children's asylums in Norway from the perspective of class, see (Mollatveit 1977).

24 Helene "sent Oswald away to school" (Templeton 1986, 59), "away to Paris" (Stanton-Ife 2003, 159), or simply "ut i verden" [out into the world] (Haugan 2014, 271). Slightly sinister, and of uncertain relevance, is Asbjørn Aarseth's association of the phrase with the practice of leaving unwanted children out to die of exposure (Aarseth 1999, 96).

25 Engstrand's phrasing is difficult to translate, as "syndefald" is most often used in reference to the fall of man.

26 Examples abound: "ja Gu'" (*HIS* 7:386), "Nej Gu'" (*HIS* 7:387), "Nej-Gu'" (*HIS* 7:389), "Nej Gu'" (*HIS* 7:394), "Gu' bedre mig" (*HIS* 7:457), "Å Gu' hjælpe os" (*HIS* 7:457), "Gu' bedre det" (*HIS* 7:465), "Ja, jeg må Gu' døde mig" (*HIS* 7:496).

27 "Jpse tamen demon fornicationis et princeps illius spurcicie" (Kramer and Sprenger 2006, 1:259–260).

28 The elderly Hummel in August Strindberg's *Spöksonaten* (published in 1907; Strindberg 1991) is another example of the motif (Johnsson 2009, 167).

29 Murail also notes the motif's popularity throughout the 18th and 19th centuries (Murail 2017, 66). I cannot prove that Ibsen was familiar with the motif,

but I will argue that he was, based on the similarities between Engstrand and the Asmodeus figure.

30 The words "glupendes," meaning "ravenous," and "helseløs," which literally means "without health," are centrally important (*HIS* 7:393). Translations fail to accurately convey the imagery of consumption: "Are you all that keen on working yourself to death for the sake of a lot of dirty little brats?" (Ibsen 1998, 95); "Are you all that keen to go and work yourself to the bone for a lot of dirty kids?" (Ibsen 2003, 25). Dawkin and Skuggevik manage better.

31 Examples are plentiful: "a brothel set up by Engstrand" (Sprinchorn 1979, 362), "a thinly disguised brothel" (Dukore 1980, 28), "a prostitute in her father's cafe for seamen" (Konrad 1985, 143), "the brothel" (Templeton 1986, 64), "a life of prostitution" (Fechter 1993, 96), "a barely disguised whorehouse" (Theoharis 1996, 78), "sin stefars bordell" (Helland and Åslund 1996, 12) [her stepfather's brothel], "a house of ill repute" (Shideler 1999, 89), "et 'sjømannshjem' der stedatteren skal stå til tjeneste som seksualobjekt" (Rekdal 2004, 113) [a "sailor's home" where the stepdaughter will serve as sexual object], "Engstrand's future brothel" (Tjønneland 2005, 194), "a camouflaged whorehouse" (Østerud 2005, 261), "en slags prostituert i sin bordell" (Helland 2006, 35) [a kind of prostitute in his brothel], "Engstrøms [sic!] bordell" (Rønning 2006, 292) [Engstrøm's brothel], "en bordell" (Törnqvist 2006, 71) [a brothel], "Engstrand's brothel" (Mortensen 2007, 177), "home for wayfaring seamen (read brothel)" (Soloski 2013, 300), "et horehus" (Haugan 2014, 281) [a whorehouse], "a brothel" (Sandberg 2015, 90).

32 The system of regulated prostitution or *reglementering* was debated, and opposed by some. On the history of regulated prostitution in late-19th-century Scandinavia, see (Jansdotter and Svanström, eds. 2007).

33 "Hun var for øvrig norsk av fødsel, men var som ganske ung kommet over til Newcastle for å tjene hos sjømannspresten der. Siden hadde hun vært 'barmaid' på forskjellige losjihus, hvor det vanket skippere, og på et av disse var hun blitt funnet og ektet av Høier, som var enkemann og noe til års. Men da også hun var, hvad man kaller til skjels år og alder kommen, måtte man jo si, at hun hadde gjort det godt" (Skram 1943, 238).

34 Perhaps the most well-known instance of this trope is to be found in August Strindberg's novella "Dygdens lön" ("The Reward of Virtue," published in *Giftas*, 1884), in which the hapless son of the bourgeoisie Theodor falls in love with a serving girl whom he idealizes, only to find that her virtue is far from unassailable.

35 "Samma könsdiskriminerande strukturer skapade också ett aldrig sinande utbud av kvinnliga uppasserskor och servitriser som omgav det manliga homosociala umgänget på kaffestugor och värdshus. Krögarnäringen var av tradition ett kvinnligt gebit och det var också hit som många unga kvinnor först kom för kortare eller längre tid. Flera samtida iakttagare framhåller att uppasserskorna och servitriserna inte fick någon lön, samtidigt som de redan från början förskotterades för mat och husrum. Det innebar att flickorna var utelämnade till gästernas dricks och 'små favörer' av uppskattning. Här gavs utrymme för män att ta sig friheter och samtidigt visa sig manligt offensiva, men också för en försigkommen servitris att kanske komma sig upp" (Liliequist 2006, 181).

36 Erik Østerud argues that Alving is ashamed of his inactivity: "On and off his effort to help her, reveals how he is tormented by Christian guilt and self-contempt" (Østerud 2005, 267). I see no evidence of Alving's supposed shame in the text.

37 In the original: "De har været behersket af en uheldsvanger selvrådighedens ånd alle Deres dage" (*HIS* 7:431). "Uheldsvanger," a combination of "uheld" (misfortune) and "svanger" (pregnant), is difficult to translate, and tends to be rewritten: "you've always been disastrously selfish and stubborn" (Ibsen 1998, 115), "you've been ruled by deplorable wilfulness" (Ibsen 2003, 47).
38 In the original: "Havde folk fået noget at vide, så havde de sagt som så: stakkers mand, det er rimeligt, at han skejer ud, han, som har en kone, der løber ifra ham" (*HIS* 7:448). Dawkin and Skuggevik garble the translation (Ibsen 2016, 225).
39 "det mest forvildede øjeblik i Deres liv" (*HIS* 7:428). Dawkin and Skuggevik rewrite the line and fail to capture the connotations of wildness (Ibsen 2016, 214).
40 The presence within the home of a source of contagion could be read as an imaginative use of miasma theory, a now obsolete understanding of disease according to which disease spread by means of airborne vapors or miasma (cf. Corbin 1986). Diathesis was an important element of miasma theory in that disease was thought to be the result of miasma vapors coming into contact with individuals predisposed to disease (Schiøtz 2003, 30).
41 "Istedetfor fordomsfrit at optage noget af hans Livstrang i sig, og, saaledes selv løst af en mørksindet Opdragelses Sneverhed, træde udfyldende ind i hans livlige Natur, stiller hun tvertimod paa Forhaand denne Sneverhed med al tillært Strenghed og Kulde hindrende op imod ham" (Andreas-Salomé 1893, 40).
42 Soloski's article is heavily indebted to Evert Sprinchorn. Sprinchorn exhibits an equally dim view of Helene, who "realizes that she brought no joyousness to her own marriage, that her puritanism drove her dashing young husband back to the taverns and brothels" (Sprinchorn 1979, 361).
43 In an article published in 1986 and reprinted in 1996, Elaine Showalter subscribes to the traditional criticism of Helene: "Ibsen's young artist-hero Oswald Alving goes mad in the final stages of cerebral syphilis inherited from his promiscuous father. But Oswald's mother is forced to recognize that her own pious conventionality and frigidity, rather than male viciousness, had driven her husband to prostitutes" (Showalter 1986, 105). Showalter does not reference Templeton's study, which appeared in the same year. I find it more surprising that Soloski in 2013 engages in this line of criticism. Soloski seems not to have read Templeton's 1986 article, which was later included in Templeton's monograph *Ibsen's Women* (1997), neither of which are referenced by Soloski.
44 It is not possible to ascertain when Alving contracted syphilis. Egil Törnqvist's suggestion that Alving became infected ca. 22–23 years ago, some years after Osvald's birth, is pure speculation (Törnqvist 2006, 66).
45 Keith Thomas defines the sexual double standard commonly associated with the bourgeoisie as "the reflection of the view that men have property in women and that the value of this property is immeasurably diminished if the woman at any time has sexual relations with anyone other than her husband" (Thomas 1959, 210).
46 To provide examples, I would point to (Rekdal 2004) and (Hagen 2015), both of whom in my view place too great an emphasis on the joy of life.
47 Joan Templeton provides an example, arguing that Helene's "desperate desire to see the son through his anguish and to soften what she mistakenly thinks will be a terrible blow, the truth about the sainted father, makes her present her husband to his son as a victim like himself" (Templeton 1986, 62).
48 "Den blokerte livsglede skaper den store tragedie" (Beyer 1948, 145).

49 "I Landlivets Ensformighed, hindret af Træthed i at nyde Arbeidets, og af det evige graa Regnveir i at nyde Naturens Glæde, begynder Osvald at faa Smag for Vin og at interessere sig for Stuepigen, Regine" (Andreas-Salomé 1893, 48).

50 In the original: "Og så den ustyrlige kraft og livsfylde, som var i ham!" (*HIS* 7:506). "Ustyrlig" can perhaps best be translated as untamable, in the sense of being impossible to control.

51 Helene's "ustyrlige kraft og livsfylde" poses a problem for translators, who fail to convey the ungovernability of Alving's energy, instead emphasizing quantity: "All that boundless energy and vitality he had!" (Ibsen 1998, 154); "He was so full of vitality and boundless energy that it did your heart good just to see him" (Ibsen 2003, 92). I will rank Dawkin and Skuggevik's translation as equally problematic.

52 A literal translation of "et livsglædens barn" (*HIS* 7:507) would be "a child of the joy of life." The sense of Alving being a child of the joy of life is not conveyed by "lively, happy boy" (Ibsen 1998, 154), "this boy, so full of the joy of living" (Ibsen 2003, 92), or by Dawkin and Skuggevik.

53 An "afløb" signifies an egress into which a liquid flows away. "Outlet" does not necessarily capture the connotations of fluidity.

54 "Jeg er ræd for, at alt det, som er oppe i mig, vilde arte ud i styghed her" (*HIS* 7:489). To "udarte" means to develop in an unhealthy or otherwise deviant manner. Dawkin and Skuggevik rewrite the line entirely (Ibsen 2016, 244). McFarlane and Watts fail to note that Osvald is referring to something within himself: "I'm frightened that everything I care about would degenerate here into something ugly" (Ibsen 1998, 145). "I'm afraid that everything that matters to me will be turned into something ugly here" (Ibsen 2003, 83).

55 The expression "munde ud" or "munde i" is used primarily in reference to bodies of water. A river may "munde ud" in an ocean, for instance.

56 The possible causes are many: "'Runts,' feeble infants and girls would be produced by debilitated sperm, old man's prostrated sperm, businessman's tired sperm, masturbator's exhausted, debaucher's exceeded, contraceptor's impeded, coward's unpatriotic, and newlywed's green, sperm" (Barker-Benfield 1972, 50).

57 "Misshushållande med resurser ansågs oundvikligen leda till patologiska tillstånd. Fruktan för driftsutlevelse i allmänhet, och den sexuella i synnerhet, måste ställas i relation till det karaktärsideal som nu vann allt större genklang. Viljestyrka och självkontroll var egenskaper som värderades högt, och fostran till dessa krävde en återhållsam livsföring där utsvävningar i några som helst former inte tilläts" (Palmblad 1990, 79).

58 "Den som förslösar sin dyrbara livsenergi genom masturbation eller alltför frekvent kopulerande ruinerar dessutom inte blott sin egen hälsa, utan hotar också att underminera det kommande släktet" (Ekenstam 1993, 145).

59 As an historical aside, Max Nordau argues that Osvald's condition cannot be late onset congenital syphilis since "Osvald is depicted as a model of manly strength and health" (Nordau 1895, 354). I am arguing the exact opposite.

60 Dipsikha Thakur's reading of *Ghosts* as a Gothic text is relevant here. The conflagration marks the onset of Osvald's dread for his future. As Thakur notes, "'dread' in this play does not really mean the terror of the unknowable, but rather the terror of something that is known to the point of having its own professional diagnosis but which is nonetheless unspeakable and even unnameable" (Thakur 2018, 454).

61 On the contemporary understanding of food as energy and the relation of food and fat to health, see (Vigarello 2013).
62 In a similar vein, Evert Sprinchorn argues that Osvald only cares for sensual pleasure (Sprinchorn 1979, 364), Jean-Charles Sournia reads Osvald's drinking as a sign that he has come to adopt his father's behavior (Sournia 1990, 105), and Jørgen Haugan comments that Osvald focuses exclusively on his elementary bodily needs (Haugan 2014, 285).
63 Although degeneration theory does establish a strong link between alcoholism and degeneration, I do not regard Osvald's drinking as evidence of degeneration. For this reason, I will not delve deeper into the role of alcohol in degenerationist discourse, which is explored in (Bynum 1984), (Woiak 1998), and (Armstrong 2003).
64 Erik Østerud may exemplify the tendency to focus on Osvald's erotic desire: "His lust has caught sight of Regine's voluptuous body, and he explains to his mother how he will cynically do his utmost to possess this body for an immediate satisfaction of his burning desire" (Østerud 1996, 483).
65 The translation of "kærnesund" as "sound" (Ibsen 1998, 142) or "healthy" (Ibsen 2003, 79) and "kærnefriske" as "vital" (Ibsen 1998, 143) or "fresh" (Ibsen 2003, 80) fails to register the repetition of the prefix "kærne-" ("core").
66 "Och liksom blommorna längtar efter livgivande vatten, längtar Osvald efter den livsglädje deras giverska, Regine, inkarnerar" (Törnqvist 2006, 93).
67 I will suggest a rough timeline of Osvald's young adult life. The text does not state when Osvald moved to Paris, but I will assume that Osvald, having been raised in a foster home, moved to Paris in order to study art when he was old enough to make that decision and enroll in art school. If he moved to Paris at the age of ca. 18–20, spending perhaps three or four years in school, this would give him about three years to establish himself as an artist, which I think fits with Manders' comment.
68 I disagree with Egil Törnqvist's argument that "vermoulu" is a reference to Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit and that Ibsen is using syphilis as a metaphor for original sin (Törnqvist 2006, 77).
69 As I detail in (Johnsson 2024), "vermoulu" was almost never used by syphilologists in reference to syphilis.
70 A doctor co-opting religious authority can be seen as an instance of secularization. As Hendrik Voss notes, syphilis was reframed in a secular context in 19th-century literature (Voss 2006, 49). William Greenslade observes that evolutionary thinkers tended to "reappropriate traditional pieties for evolutionary science" (Greenslade 1994, 27). This makes the scene an instance of literary secularization; cf. (Schiedermair 2019).
71 The suggestion of Helland and Åslund (1996), that the childhood episode refers to Alving having sexually abused Osvald, stretches the limits of interpretation.
72 Marvin Carlson offers the intriguing suggestion that what we are seeing here is an instance of telegony, the idea that "physical characteristics of the partner of an unconsummated and illicit liaison appear in the later legitimate child of another father" (Carlson 1985, 778). I will not investigate the question of Osvald's paternity further, since I am basing my reading on the understanding that Osvald is indeed Alving's son.
73 The translation does not convey the association of brotherhood attaching to "embedsbrødre," which can be literally translated as "brothers in office."

74 "ett imbecillt, hjälplöst barn, en levande död" (Törnqvist 2006, 100).
75 Osvald's criticism can be read as an instance of the eugenically tinged argument that unfit individuals should not procreate. To give a contemporary example, Karl Gjellerup argues that the theory of heredity compels individuals suffering from hereditary disease or weak constitutions to not have children (Gjellerup 1881, 357).
76 To give an example, Anne-Marie Stanton-Ife presents Regine's choice to pursue the joy of life as almost inhuman: "Here *livsglæden* seems to represent an overweening instinct for survival which cancels all trace of human sympathy and compassion" (Stanton-Ife 2003, 175; emphasis in original).

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2 The Fall of the Old Order
Rosmersholm (1886)

Of all of Ibsen's dramas, *Rosmersholm* is the most heavily indebted to a Gothic literary mode. The plot revolves around the main character Rosmer, the last scion of a prominent family that more closely resembles a European-style aristocracy than the class of public servants or *embetsmenn* who dominated Norwegian politics in the 19th century. As Helge Rønning notes, Ibsen's contemporaries would not have understood *embetsmenn* as an aristocracy (Rønning 2006, 212). Ibsen's incongruous choice of depicting the Rosmer family as part of a social class that did not exist at the time can be explained by taking into account the play's depiction of Rosmer as not only a degenerate but also a demonic one at that. Ibsen conceived of Rosmer as possessing a demonic quality, as we see in what is presumably Ibsen's earliest note on the play, which reads in full:

> She is an intrigant and she loves him. She wants to be his wife and unwaveringly pursues this goal. Then he realizes it and she admits it openly. Then there is no more happiness in life for him. The demonic is awakened by the pain and bitterness. He wants to die and she must die with him. She does so.[1]

While the phrasing is somewhat vague, I interpret Ibsen's comment to refer to Rosmer's desire to exert control over another person. In this regard Rosmer prefigures Hedda Gabler, who is similarly described by Ibsen as having a demonic desire to control someone. Rosmer also calls to mind the figure of Alving in that Rosmer appears equally incapable of engaging in activity that would be productive and beneficial to others.[2] I will argue that Rosmer's project of ennobling the common man conforms to a type of Romantic idealism that is effectively parodied by virtue of being propagated by the weak-willed and ineffectual Rosmer. Much like Alving, Rosmer fails to live up to the expectations imposed on him by his class and his position as patriarch. While his predecessors in the Rosmer family adhered to a sense of duty, especially where the continuation of the family

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line was concerned, Rosmer appears repulsed by carnal desire, and his failure to produce an heir spells the end of the Rosmer line. The end of the family line, highlighted by Chris Baldick as a central theme in Gothic literature (Baldick 1992, xvi), has elicited comparisons to Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" (published in 1839; Poe 1969–1978).[3] *Rosmersholm* has been aptly described as a "Gothic tale of horror and intrigue, murder and suicide, incest and lesbianism, passion and impotence" (Leland 1991, 205), and to this I would add that I consider the Rosmer character to be the most Gothic element of the play. I believe that earlier scholarship has not sufficiently explored the consequences of taking Ibsen at his word and viewing Rosmer as a demonic character. I will also maintain that the nature and extent of Rosmer's deviation from what is referred to as the Rosmer family values has remained largely unrecognized. In the following I will commit to a reading of *Rosmersholm* as a degeneration plot focused on a demonic main character and all the death and destruction that he brings about.

Rosmersholm presents a variation on the degeneration plot centered on the concept of overcultivation. Overcultivation can be defined as the survival past its prime of a complex structure such as a family or a society. The concept depends on a view of such structures as similar to an organism that is subjected to processes of growth and decay. A superannuated society will be depicted as in need of replacement by younger and more vibrant forms of societal organization. Overcultivation carries with it connotations of the unnatural in that a natural cycle of growth, decay, and replacement has been arrested through artificial means. In the context of degeneration discourse, overcultivation can be compared to a morbid heredity that accumulates with each passing generation, eventually becoming an insurmountable burden that is only relieved when the family line or society in question is finally extinguished. The weight of history and the accumulation of tradition and culture becomes a burden that both prevents renewal but also acts to maintain the continued existence of a moribund structure. The concept can exhibit a class aspect in that the upper classes will tend to be viewed as unfit for life. An aristocracy that has lost its connection to the natural world and that depends on the labor of the working class for its subsistence will be derided as a relic of the past that is no longer capable or even deserving of existence. An overcultivated upper class will often be described in terms of weakness and frailty; a delicate constitution is usually combined with frail nerves and a predisposition for physical and mental illness.

I will argue that the concept of overcultivation informs the basic action of *Rosmersholm*. The play has been described as "more coloured by contemporary Norwegian politics than any other of Ibsen's plays" (Beyer 1979, 11), but the references in Ibsen's working drafts to the Roman Empire are a clue that *Rosmersholm* was written with a much grander

historical context in mind. When read against a macrohistorical backdrop, Rosmer can be understood as the last remnant of a decaying civilization on the verge of collapse. His relationship with Rebekka can be compared to the interaction of Germanic tribes, coming from the north and representing barbaric vitality, and a settled and inert south. Rosmer can in this sense be likened to a Roman patrician living in the last days of empire. One does not need to suggest, as Ingjald Nissen does, that Rosmer is impotent (Nissen 1931, 118) to recognize that Rosmer is weighed down by the traditions and values of his family, which include a procreative prerogative. The Rosmer family has lived for too long and has lost its connection to the natural order. To quote Marie Wells, "Rosmer and the whole Rosmer tradition is suffering from excess of culture and repression. The Rosmer line is dying out because it has become over-civilized and devitalized" (Wells 1998, 206). Rosmer thus represents the last offshoot of a family tree that is no longer viable. Rosmer comes across not only as indecisive and easily manipulated but also as unnatural. He is unable to free himself from the burden of his familial history (Andersen 1948, 349) and instead seeks to escape through a fantasy of political emancipation for the masses. When Rebekka aligns herself with Rosmer's empty idealism she does so in the belief that he represents a hope for the future. What she fails to recognize is that she thereby allies herself with the remnants of an aristocracy that will soon fade away (Alnæs 2003, 284). Rosmer is "too fine-grained, too passively receptive, too retiring" (McFarlane 1989, 264) to effect societal change. The demonic aspect of his personality awakens when he realizes that he is incapable of putting his ideals into practice. In order to compensate for his defeat, he turns his attention to Rebekka, demanding that she die to prove that he is not a failure of a man. The dual suicide represents the final act of self-destruction of the old order. I agree with Régis Boyer's argument that the central conflict of the play is the conflict between life and death (Boyer 2015, 173), and I will apply this observation in equal parts to Rosmer and Rebekka, who both choose death over life. Earlier scholarship has tended to read Rebekka as a forceful and determined woman who could have reinvigorated the Rosmer line through her strength of will and vitality, but I will instead argue that she was a perfect fit for Rosmer in that she was always weak-willed and incapable of mastering her emotions. Rebekka tends to conflate will and passion (Printz-Påhlson 1991, 194), leading her to believe that acting on her passion is the same as enacting her will. In my reading, Rebekka does not represent a hope for renewal but rather exemplifies what happens when a woman who lacks a sense of self and who mistakenly thinks of herself as aligned with the future forms a bond with an overcultivated degenerate in the form of Rosmer.

Rosmer's demonic aspect makes it impossible, in my view, to equate him with the values of his family, which, albeit austere, are not demonic.[4] The

importance of the demonic is underscored by repeated references to Goethe's *Faust* and by the presence of the grotesque figure of Brendel. Brendel acts as Rosmer's double, mirroring the void within him and enticing him on a path to destruction. Brendel is characterized by an intertwined set of desires: a desire for self-gratification and the pursuit of solitary pleasure, and a desire to extirpate one's self. The former reflects Rosmer's fear of carnality; the latter, his demonic nature. Rosmer's lust for domination derives from his own emptiness. He has neither energy nor willpower and leads a barren life marked by passivity and introspection. This situates him in the category of unproductive individuals who fail to live up to an ideal of productivity. Productivity may take many forms, such as managing an estate or bearing children, but there is an ever-present conflict between the productive and the unproductive. This dynamic most visibly manifests in the theme of childlessness, which includes Rosmer but more importantly extends to Beate, whose suicide was in part caused by her supposed infertility, a condition that she believed made her a superfluous woman. Rebekka is enmeshed in the same dynamic due to her choice of living for Rosmer. By attaching herself to him she has forsaken her own self and has wasted whatever potential she may have possessed.

By reading Rosmer as an overcultivated degenerate I will break entirely with a tendency in earlier Ibsen scholarship of drawing a line between Rosmer's idealism and Ibsen's own political convictions. This tendency of committing to a biographical reading of Rosmer as Ibsen's literary alter ego tends to be supported with reference to Ibsen's public statements at the time of writing *Rosmersholm*. Narve Fulsås and Tore Rem provide an example in their commentary on a speech given by Ibsen in connection with a procession organized by the Trondheim Workers' Association (Trondhjems Arbeiderforening) on June 14, 1885. In this speech Ibsen criticizes what he sees as a lack of progress where democratic reforms are concerned. Contending that "true freedom" cannot be attained within the confines of "our *present* democracy," he argues for the introduction of "a *noble* element into the life of our state, into our government, into our representation and into our press."[5] What Ibsen does here is to redefine nobility as a quality of character, will, and mind instead of birthright. This element of nobility will be introduced into society by women and the working class, two groups who are uncorrupted because they "have not yet taken any irreparable damage under party pressure."[6] Ibsen's argument is that the exclusion of these groups from the political process has enabled them to maintain their ethical integrity. Fulsås and Rem relate this speech to Rosmer's project of ennobling the common man, referencing Rosmer's description of his project in conversation with Kroll:

> Rosmer has left their conservative beliefs and decided to go into politics on the side of "the young." He wants to "create a true democracy." The true task of democracy, he explains to the conservative Kroll, is "to

> make all my countrymen noblemen," which is achieved "by liberating their minds and purifying their wills." This is almost word for word what Ibsen had said in Trondheim in 1885.
>
> (Fulsås and Rem 2018, 132)

Fulsås and Rem conclude by asking "why Ibsen chose to let this character represent his own programme" (Fulsås and Rem 2018, 132). I believe that this line of interpretation is absolutely mistaken. While Ibsen's speech can and should be read as a call for democratic reform, Ibsen's program does not correspond in any meaningful way with Rosmer's project, which as I will argue is both self-contradictory and impossible to put into practice. Even if one were to disregard the difficulties inherent in conducting biographical readings of literary texts, however, the issue remains as to why Ibsen would choose to make Rosmer a mouthpiece for his political agenda. Given Ibsen's explicit labeling of Rosmer as someone possessing a demonic quality, I would imagine that Ibsen could have created a more suitable alter ego. The implications of having Rosmer, who drives Rebekka to commit suicide for his sake, represent Ibsen's views are not addressed by Fulsås and Rem. I will instead suggest that there is a fundamental difference between Ibsen's call for democratic reform and the idealism of Rosmer, which, at the risk of repeating myself, is consistently parodied in the text of the play. If Rosmer represents Ibsen, then Rosmer is a curious example of Ibsen engaging in self-parody. A more rewarding line of analysis, in my view, is to read Rosmer as a denunciation of Romantic idealism in literary form. Equally important in my view is the notion that Rosmer, and the social order that he represents, must give way to a new and more viable social class. Read in this light, Rosmer's death is a necessary prerequisite for a process of societal renewal to begin. If I were given to biographical readings, I would support my argument with reference to a speech given by Ibsen in Stockholm on September 24, 1887, in which Ibsen denies being a pessimist, declaring that he does not believe in "the eternity of human ideals" but remains an optimist, "insofar as I fully and confidently believe in the reproductive capacity of ideals and in their ability to evolve."[7] Rosmer's ideals, as I will seek to demonstrate, are hardly worthy of emulation. If there is an evolution of ideals to be seen in *Rosmersholm*, it can be located in the figure of Mortensgård. Although he may appear to be a cynical manipulator, he can also be read as a representative of an up-and-coming bourgeoisie that has supplanted Rosmer's patrician order. This, too, constitutes a break on my part with earlier scholarship.

Hvide heste and its relationship to *Rosmersholm*

The process of writing *Rosmersholm* was unusually complicated for Ibsen. The different versions of what would eventually become the finished play

call for some measure of examination, not least because a review of draft materials and notes will help elucidate the central theme of overcultivation. In late 1885 Ibsen began work on a play entitled *Hvide heste* (*White Horses*), which he put aside in mid-1886 in order to commence writing *Rosmersholm*, which in turn was completed by September 1886. *Hvide heste* shares a number of thematic concerns with *Rosmersholm*, and an analysis of the former may help shed light on the latter. In particular, the theme of overcultivation and a conflict between old and new appears in Ibsen's earliest notes to *Hvide heste*. In a brief note simply entitled "Hvide heste" short descriptions are provided of the main characters.[8] The male protagonist is described as a frail free-thinker whose wife committed suicide: "He, the fine distinguished constitution, who has turned to a free-thinking point of view and from whom all his former friends and acquaintances have withdrawn. Widower; has been unhappily married to a brooding half-insane wife who finally drowned herself."[9] This proto-Rosmer appears in need of an injection of vitality from the female protagonist: "She, the governess of his two daughters, emancipated, hot-blooded, somewhat reckless but under a fine form. Considered by those around her as the evil spirit of the house; is subject to misunderstanding and slander."[10] A few supporting characters add minor elements of interest. A younger daughter characterized as "observant; emerging passions" perhaps calls to mind Beate; a journalist, "genius, vagabond," prefigures Brendel.[11] Proto-Rosmer's eldest daughter is reminiscent of Alving but also anticipates Hedda Gabler: "Oldest daughter; is succumbing to idleness and loneliness; richly talented with no use for it."[12]

Further on in the writing process we can identify the theme of the idle upper-class individual as a central element in Ibsen's draft version of the first act of *Hvide heste*.[13] In this text Rosmer is first referred to as Boldt-Rømer and later as Rosenhjelm, whereas the Rebekka character goes by the name of Frøken (Miss) Radeck.[14] Boldt-Rømer complains that he lacks responsibilities: "However, it is strange for me to sit here – during Easter week – and not have anything to take care of; nothing to bear responsibility for."[15] Frøken Radeck's offhand comment of "as soft as you are; and then all [that you have] inherited, that has left its marks on you"[16] establishes Boldt-Rømer as a delicate nature with a problematic inheritance. Upon the arrival of Rektor Hekmann, the Kroll character, the discussion turns to Boldt-Rømer's decision to renounce his position as priest, a decision that causes Hekmann to wonder "What are you going to do now – now in your prime."[17] When Boldt-Rømer suggests that he will fill his time with operating the farm Hekmann counters that he employs workers to do so, and instead counsels Boldt-Rømer to take part in public life. The point of their discussion is to accentuate the risk of idleness turning into uselessness.

Ibsen expands upon the theme of the unproductive Rosmer in an unfinished draft version of *Hvide heste* that contains the first two acts and an incomplete third act.[18] Kroll appears as a protector of the Rosmer family history: "I am well acquainted with those matters, I, who collects for the genealogy of the family."[19] Kroll is aware of Rosmer's weakness, hinting at his weak will (*HIS* 8:256) and criticizing him for his passivity (*HIS* 8:259). Brendel enters the stage as a former confidant to Rosmer. Brendel is a fallen man whose "interest in the lower strata of society"[20] has rendered him an outcast. While this prefigures Brendel's downward tendencies in *Rosmersholm*, the extent of his fall in the draft is less pronounced, as seen in the debate between Kroll and Rosmer on whether Brendel can be enlisted to the conservative cause (*HIS* 8:273–274). Kroll laments how Brendel has squandered his talents: "So much talent rendered useless by moral filth."[21] Brendel's function of highlighting what may befall the idle Rosmer is firmly established at this point in the writing process.

Rosmer appears unwilling to listen to Kroll's advice. He does not wish to take part in "today's battle" and instead seeks to "refine the work of emancipation" (*HIS* 8:289).[22] He portrays himself as someone capable of correcting the course of a wayward contemporary society: "Don't you think I see all the filth that this development brings with it and spawns along the way. This is what I want to step up against, warn against, dam, slow down, so that the current can flow clean and clear."[23] Rosmer's desire to counteract societal corruption is undermined by his tendency to withdraw from society. When Kroll asks what he intends to do with his life, Rosmer replies, "I will continue, tirelessly, to research and think. I will try, as far as possible, to get to the bottom of things. And I want to live. Be happy."[24] Instead of formulating practical solutions, Rosmer wraps himself in verbiage, and his idealism furthermore betrays a lack of willpower. When Kroll makes use of his newspaper to portray Rosmer as someone who belongs to the ranks of "unclear fantasists who lack will,"[25] the description seems apt. Rosmer's embrace of fantasy strengthens the connection between him and Brendel, whom Mortensgård describes as somehow living outside time: "He is not in time; stands so strangely outside what is moving. Looks at things with eyes that might have been radical enough twenty years ago."[26] Here we see two important traits that Rosmer and Brendel share in *Rosmersholm*, a lack of purpose and an inability to live *in* time.

The single most significant thematic parallel between *Hvide heste* and *Rosmersholm*, however, is the theme of the fall of the old order. This theme can be identified in Ibsen's curious choice of names for the men of the Rosmer family. In the draft version of *Hvide heste*, the name of Rosmer's father is given as Eilert Hanibal Rosmer (*HIS* 8:254). When read together with the name Boldt-Rømer (best translated as "brave Roman"), the reference to Hannibal indicates that the history of ancient Rome acts as a backdrop to

the play. Brian Johnston has examined the play's Roman underpinnings in his *The Ibsen Cycle* (1975), superimposing the events of *Rosmersholm* onto the macrohistorical narrative of Roman history. Johnston characterizes this narrative as a conflict between a staid civilized south and a less civilized but more energetic north: "the Latin and Mediterranean peoples, embodying civic, restraining, and cultural values, continually need rejuvenating by the violent but vigorous peoples from the north" (Johnston 1975, 208). Read in this context, Rosmer and by extension the Rosmer family represents a cultured south that has lost its vitality. This culture has accumulated a rich history, but has also become burdened by the weight of its past. The past may be the "reservoir of man's spiritual history and the source of much of his spiritual strength," but it is also "like a vampire sucking the life-blood of the present" (Johnston 1975, 214). The culture represented by Rosmersholm mirrors the late stage of the Roman Empire and thus constitutes a culture on the verge of collapse. The entry of Rebekka into Rosmer's life can be understood as an echo of "the first violent encounters between the northern and civilized worlds" (Johnston 1975, 219).

The struggle between old and new is necessary for the renewal of civilization, and one possible outcome might be the revitalization of the old order by means of an addition of northern vitality. Johnston reads Rebekka's acculturation at Rosmersholm as a triumph of Rosmer's idealism, arguing that Rebekka becomes "ennobled and purified through association with a noble but life-denying tradition" (Johnston 1975, 246). I will diverge from Johnston's reading by instead arguing that Rebekka's entry into Rosmersholm represents the victory of a decrepit and essentially parasitic south that drains Rebekka of her northern vitality. Errol Durbach's comparison of *Rosmersholm* to Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1607) will clarify this argument. Durbach suggests that both Antony and Rosmer gradually realize that the world they grew up in has been taken over by ruthless upstarts: "Confronted by the omnipotence of political pragmatism and by antagonists indifferent to integrity, both Antony and Rosmer are helpless. Their nobility is a totally inadequate defence against the disintegration of their worlds" (Durbach 1986, 8). Under such circumstances, clinging to antiquated notions of nobility might perhaps be viewed as bravery. What I see in this scenario, however, is a patrician figure who fails to recognize that the march of time has passed him by. And so while both plays can be said to "project a sense of civilization in crisis" (Durbach 1986, 8), I would modify this to read that Rosmer's patrician order has already fallen. Rosmer does not understand that his class has been superseded by the bourgeoisie, a class that despises the aristocracy but still attaches itself to the status and trappings of the old order.

My point of departure when reading *Rosmersholm* is the conflict between old and new, a conflict that informs not only the relationship

between Rosmer and Rebekka but also that of Rosmer and the bourgeoisie of Kroll and Mortensgård. I will commit to a reading of Rosmer as a degenerate character. His status as a degenerate is in part due to the impact of his family tradition, in the sense that he belongs to an overcultivated patrician order that is no longer fit for life. Rosmer's degeneracy, however, is in part also a deviation from the traditions of his family. If the traditions of Rosmersholm are understood as a code of conduct characterized by austerity and joylessness, but also by a sense of duty toward the institution of family, then Rosmer's unwillingness to countenance marriage and his distaste for carnality should be regarded as a form of aberration unique to Rosmer. In short there is something fundamentally wrong with Rosmer, as suggested both by Ibsen's previously referenced comments on Rosmer's demonism, as well as his emphasis on the oddity of the Rosmer character when *Rosmersholm* was about to have its premiere at Christiania Theater. In a letter to the head of the theater, Hans Schrøder, Ibsen gives a precise instruction on suitable candidates for the role of Rosmer: "For Rosmer, you must take the finest and most delicate person the theater has at its disposal."[27] In my reading I will argue that Rosmer's frailty and lack of willpower are intimately tied to his demonism, which manifests as a lust for power over the lives of others. When he realizes that he has dominion over Rebekka, he embarks on a quest to have her prove her dedication by dying for him. Metaphorically speaking, this would be the triumph of the moribund south over the promise of regeneration offered by the vital north.

Rosmer, Kroll, and the fall of the old order

Rosmer and Kroll represent the distinct but related tropes of the degenerate and the parvenu. Helge Rønning has contextualized the latter trope by reference to a sense of crisis afflicting the bourgeoisie toward the end of the 19th century, caused by a combination of financial disquiet and the political gains made by the working class (Rønning 2006, 213). Kroll's position is not secure, as his status depends in no small part on his alliance with the Rosmer family through the marriage of his now-deceased sister, Beate, to Rosmer. Kroll has aligned himself with the values of Rosmersholm, and yet he belongs to what the Rosmer patriarchs would have considered a lower echelon of society. The quality of overcultivation applies to Rosmer, but not to Kroll, in that the bourgeoisie has not been sapped of its vitality. Unlike Rosmer, Kroll is unburdened by a lengthy family history. The burden of history is introduced immediately in the setting description. The walls of the living room are adorned with portraits of the Rosmer patriarchs, "*clergymen, officers and other officials in uniform*" (Ibsen 2019, 111). Through the windows an alley of trees can be seen, signifying the natural world but also, by virtue of being old and well-kept, an established

order (Van Laan 1970, 46). Inside the living room, birch tree branches and wildflowers, representing nature and vitality, have been placed on a tiled stove, a testament to man's technological prowess. The Rosmersholm estate appears as a place where time has stood still, a place marked by tradition and cultivation. The portraits of a long line of Rosmers symbolize the intrusion of the past into the life of the living. The Rosmers have transformed nature into culture, thereby depriving nature of its vitality. As Asbjørn Aarseth notes, the estate is an example of a type of locale in Ibsenian drama that is "topologically connected with the idea of retirement from the living, real world, the open sphere of circulation and communication" (Aarseth 1979, 26). A place that sees no circulation of vital energy is inimical to growth and regeneration, and can rightly be described, to borrow Joan Templeton's phrasing, as an "enemy both of joy and of eros, and thus of life" (Templeton 1997, 194). Rebekka's introduction of wildflowers into the living room is an attempt at counteracting the stagnation of Rosmersholm, although we should recognize the futility of her adorning the room with flowers that will inevitably wilt. Kroll can be inserted into this dynamic of stagnation versus change in that he represents the former.

Rebekka's entrance into Rosmersholm can be described not merely as an infusion of vitality but also as an introduction of a destabilizing corruptive element into the estate. Madam Helseth's comment that "it's the dead that clings a long time to Rosmersholm" (Ibsen 2019, 112) signifies the estate as a place inimical to life. It would be easy to equate Rebekka at this juncture with the forces of life as opposed to the Rosmersholm culture of death, but there is an underlying element of danger to the flowers that points to a darkness surrounding Rebekka. When Kroll comes to visit, he complements Rebekka's adorning the room with flowers. Rebekka's response is to deflect and claim that the flowers are for Rosmer, who supposedly appreciates "fresh, living flowers" (Ibsen 2019, 113). When asked, Rebekka admits that she also enjoys the flowers because of their "delightfully calming effect [*de bedøver så dejligt*]" (Ibsen 2019, 113). Beate, on the other hand, would tend to become "bewildered [*fortumlet*]" by them (Ibsen 2019, 113).[28] Atle Kittang focuses on the aspect of vitality, linking the flowers to Rebekka (Kittang 2002, 219). This reading does not take into account the description of the flowers as somehow poisonous. Egil Törnqvist interprets the flowers as an erotic element symbolizing Beate's frustrated desire (Törnqvist 2006, 124). This is closer to the mark but still misses the semantic link of "bedøver" and "fortumlet" with sedation and confusion. Flowers that cloud the senses are not benign but are rather indicative of corruption. This undercurrent of danger is significant given the pleasure Rebekka takes in their anesthetic qualities. The exchange regarding the flowers can be read as an indication that Beate was frail and homebound (Jacobsen and Leavy 1988, 125), but I would rather

emphasize the threat lurking within the flowers and by extension Rebekka. If one reads this scene as an illustration of a conflict between culture (Rosmersholm) and nature (Rebekka), then it becomes clear that danger resides in both domains.

Rebekka's destabilizing influence extends to the realm of time, which appears to have been arrested at Rosmersholm. As Rebekka notes, every day at Rosmersholm seems like the last (Ibsen 2019, 113). With Rebekka's entry time begins to flow again. This movement forward in time can be related to the void left by Beate and which Rebekka has come to occupy; it is her assumption of Beate's position that sets in motion a process of renewal in time and space. When Rebekka and Kroll speak of Beate they tend to describe her using an imagery of absence, as in Rebekka's comment that Beate's death left "a huge void" (Ibsen 2019, 115). Beate lives on as a lacuna in the lives of others. Her continued presence is as unchanging as Rosmersholm, and she is no longer affected by the passing of time. When Kroll suggests that Rebekka might fill "the empty place" (Ibsen 2019, 116) left by Beate, this is an expression of his wish to turn back time. Doing so would efface the memory of Beate and place Rebekka in her stead. Kroll's promise to visit more often, as he used to (Ibsen 2019, 116), underscores his unwillingness to move *in time*.

A man who rejects change and who strives to return to the past can be said to have stagnated. Kroll remains fixed in time, much like Rosmer, who exhibits a similar tendency when hoping that his friendship with Kroll will be reestablished (Ibsen 2019, 117). Such fraternization would first require the void of Beate to be removed. Kroll explains his long absence by saying that he did not want to remind Rosmer of Beate (Ibsen 2019, 117). When Kroll returns the past returns with him. But it would also appear that the past is continually on the minds of the living, and Rosmer admits that he and Rebekka talk about Beate on a daily basis (Ibsen 2019, 117). Beate's presence in their lives is accentuated by Rosmer's comment that "We both feel that she still belongs here in this house somehow" (Ibsen 2019, 117), echoing an earlier comment by Rebekka on how she feels at home at Rosmersholm: "And I've grown so used to this house now, that I feel I almost belong here – that I too belong" (Ibsen 2019, 115). This verbal echo suggests that Rebekka finds herself in the same situation as Beate, as an unchanging part of Rosmersholm.[29] Given the fact that Beate is dead, the correspondence established between the two women suggests that Rebekka has become enmeshed with the domain of death. Her lighting the lamp (Ibsen 2019, 117) in the midst of discussing Beate can be read as Rebekka reasserting her place among the living. Such an attempt to exorcise the ghost of Beate would, however, be misplaced. Rosmer's phrasing of Beate as "the poor haunted one"[30] suggests that Beate was the one being haunted.

Rebekka can be described as poised between the past and the future, unable to find her footing in the conflict between the old and the new. This conflict is enacted in the rebellion of the pupils of Kroll's school, among them his own children, against their elders. When the pupils align themselves with the party of Mortensgård they are challenging Kroll's authority as bourgeois patriarch.[31] He wishes to stem the tide of progress, lamenting his inability to realize the threat posed by societal change (Ibsen 2019, 118). Taking recourse to biblical imagery, he complains of how the "spirit of revolt" (Ibsen 2019, 118) has entered into his school. This intergenerational discord can be read as a struggle of wills, the younger generation trying to assert its will at the expense of the old order. Kroll's present situation is defined by the frustration of his willpower. He has spent his life teaching the young, presumably doing his best to inculcate in them the values of the bourgeoisie. This has provided him with an outlet for his energy and given him a clear goal to focus on, and yet at present he feels that his "life's work" (Ibsen 2019, 119) is being threatened.[32] He has a need to be respected and will brook no dissent, including in his own home, where he expects that "one single and unanimous will" (Ibsen 2019, 119) should reign. When his children oppose him, he is no longer able to exert his will on his surroundings. His insistence on having others agree with him (Ibsen 2019, 129) masks an inability to countenance his authority being challenged. His response to the challenge of the young is to denigrate the "corrupting" (Ibsen 2019, 120) ideals of today's youth. He frames the spirit of rebellion among the young as a wide-scale reversal of established values (Ibsen 2019, 120). According to Kroll, contemporary society has deviated from the natural order of things. When society goes astray, Kroll takes it upon himself to correct its course. This explains his displeasure at Rosmer's unwillingness to engage with the events of the time. His complaint that Rosmer lives "walled in with your historical collections" (Ibsen 2019, 120) is a fitting image of the stagnation Kroll champions.[33] Unlike Mortensgård, whom Kroll describes as a man with a "tawdry past" (Ibsen 2019, 121) but who nonetheless manages to move beyond his past, Kroll remains immobile. By combating the ideas of the young generation, Kroll is opposing the natural cycle of decay and regeneration that might, if allowed to continue, signal the downfall of his class. The unraveling of his life's work of imparting bourgeois values on the young, as well as the undermining of his willpower, showcases him as a failed patriarch. A patriarch who finds himself unable to expend his energy on productive activity will seek out other opportunities to exert his will. Rebekka affords him such an opportunity. As a representative of the new, Rebekka appears to him as an agent of change that must be counteracted.

Compared to Rosmer, Kroll appears as a more stalwart defender of the aristocracy. Rosmer has taken the side of the young and acts against the

interests of his own class. His idealist mission to ennoble the common man undermines the foundations of the old order, as John Orr notes: "Nobility presupposes hiera[r]chical division and is the cultural product of a society of rank. When fully democratised, it loses its meaning" (Orr 1981, 29). What Toril Moi describes as Rosmer's "astonishingly democratic" (Moi 2006, 273) project would result in the end of the aristocracy. In the narrower sense of imperiling the future of his family, Rosmer has failed to produce any heirs to the Rosmer name. His failure to propagate and his ideals of democratic ennoblement are two sides of the same coin and can be related to a process of decline afflicting the aristocracy. Rosmer has been aptly described as "a representative of a declining class incapable of the virtues required to effect general social and spiritual reform" (Chamberlain 1974, 279), and his marriage to Beate exemplifies the diminished standing of the aristocracy. Rosmer's in-between status could perhaps be salvaged were it not for his own lack of willpower, which all but ensures that any project he chooses to undertake will fail. The end of the Rosmer line can thus not merely be attributed to historical circumstances but must also be located within Rosmer's self.[34]

Rosmer's trajectory can be described as a process of falling on both a social level and on an individual level. On the social level, earlier scholarship has tended to reduce the political plot in *Rosmersholm* to a conflict between radicalism and conservatism. To give an example, here is Nantawan Soonthorndhai's description of Mortensgård's party: "A new group, acutely conscious of social relations and determined to exert a decisive influence, aspires to overthrow the traditional ruling class. Largely rural-based, this populist party enjoys mounting support from the poor and the middle and lower middle class, all of whom are denied the franchise" (Soonthorndhai 1985, 205). This party stands in opposition to the establishment, which "draws its support from the urban and rural moneyed classes and the bureaucrats" (Soonthorndhai 1985, 206). What Soonthorndhai does is to lump together the urban class, to which Kroll belongs, and the landed gentry of Rosmersholm. This obscures the difference between the two men's social stature. Rosmer's name has an estate attached to it, but there is no equivalent Krollholm. Soonthorndhai is right to note that Rosmer belongs to "a transitional generation" (Soonthorndhai 1985, 217), but the fact that Rosmer is subjected to "a tribunal conducted by a petty bourgeois" (Soonthorndhai 1985, 214) suggests that the process of replacement of the aristocracy by the bourgeoisie is almost complete. The importance attached to the Rosmer name nonetheless still holds value and is instrumentalized by Kroll. Kroll's comment that he will not use his name in connection with his newspaper (Ibsen 2019, 122) demonstrates that a bourgeois name has no inherent value. Much like Alving's name being used to finance the running of a children's asylum, Rosmer's name

is to be employed as a front for Kroll's reactionary agenda. Kroll appeals to Rosmer's reputation, as well as his intellect and integrity, to recruit him to Kroll's cause (Ibsen 2019, 122). Kroll will soon realize that Rosmer's actions can only lead to the Rosmer name being brought into disrepute because of his radical ideas. Such an outcome would tarnish Kroll's reputation by association.

Kroll's concern for the Rosmer name illustrates his adherence to, and Rosmer's deviation from, the values of Rosmersholm. Unlike Rosmer, Kroll insists that unorthodox beliefs and untoward behavior should be kept quiet. Until now he has kept his politics to the confines of his home (Ibsen 2019, 114), but Mortensgård's attacks force him to enter the public arena. By contrast, Rosmer initially tries to avoid participation in public life and admits to having concealed his new ideals from his friends. He wishes for nothing more than to remain at home, reading his books:

> I thought I could stay and live here just as before, quiet, happy and contented. I wanted to read and immerse myself in all those works, books that had been closed to me before. To allow my mind to inhabit [*leve mig ind i*] the great world of truth and freedom which has been revealed to me now.
>
> (Ibsen 2019, 131)[35]

His dream of a life characterized by seclusion and passivity is at odds with his role as a patriarch, a role that attaches to expectations of engaging in practical pursuits. Rosmer sees non-activity as a prerequisite for happiness, and his focus on reading, tying in with Kroll's comment on Rosmer's fixation with historical reading materials (Ibsen 2019, 120), underscores Rosmer's understanding of a good life as being an idle life. The uselessness of such a life is accentuated by Rosmer's confused phrasing of wanting to delve into books that had previously been as closed books to him – literal books mixing with a metaphor of impenetrability – which suggests that Rosmer is not a gifted reader. His hope that books will provide him with some great insight is undercut by the imagery of revelation, implying that he will not achieve any insight through his own efforts. Put simply, he is too passive and lacking in willpower to effect change in the real world.[36] In her analysis of the role played by books and writing in *Rosmersholm*, Sara Jan contrasts the reading of books in a private setting with public dissemination of political discourse. Jan regards the printed book as "a medium whose intimacy and integrity opposes it to the 'fallen' discourse of political writing" (Jan 2006, 167). Rosmer's passivity undermines this argument and rather points to books having no intrinsic value; what matters is what one does with them. Rosmer's phrasing of living himself into the world, which is not the same as living and acting in the world, suggests

that any benefit from reading books will not be translated into action. He is content to live within the confines of his imagination, disconnected from the outside world. The idealist Rosmer defines happiness as a refusal to engage with anything existing outside the confines not only of his home but also of his own mind.

And yet he proposes to publicize his new, radical beliefs. When Kroll sees that his entreaties that Rosmer should keep quiet about his beliefs (Ibsen 2019, 143) have failed, he turns to the argument of Rosmer's debt to the family line. Kroll describes Rosmersholm as a guarantor of established truths and traditions (Ibsen 2019, 144), and he does not distinguish between Rosmersholm and the Rosmer family, instead simply assuming that Rosmer shares what he refers to as "the Rosmerian family principles [*familjetanke*]" (Ibsen 2019, 144). This concept should be understood as a set of values passed from one generation of Rosmers to the next, but it can also be interpreted more literally as the idea of family. The transmission of values and the propagation of the family are inextricably linked, and a failure to transmit the family's values can be equated with the extinction of the family line. When Rosmer claims that he has a responsibility to "bring a little light and joy where the Rosmer family has created darkness and gloom for so very, very long" (Ibsen 2019, 144), by which he means counteracting the effects of his family's values, he is calling for the end of the Rosmer line without realizing it. Kroll is more perceptive and understands that the death of the Rosmerian "familjetanke" means that "the ancestral line will die" (Ibsen 2019, 144) with Rosmer. The Rosmersholm values that Kroll defends insisted on the necessity of procreation. Rosmer's ideals result in a break in the continuation of the family line. The distinction between these competing sets of beliefs can be illustrated by Charles R. Lyons' description of Rosmersholm values as an "ethical attitude [. . .] bound to an ascetic Christian morality which denies the value of sensual pleasure" (Lyons 1972, 103). This description is appropriate, but lack of mirth does not necessarily imply abstinence. While the tradition of Rosmersholm may eschew taking pleasure in sex it also attaches great importance to marriage and the continuation of the family line. The portraits of earlier generations of patriarchs serve as a reminder that Rosmer's primary responsibility toward his family is to beget children. Joachim Schiedermair argues that Rosmer's departure from this norm is the most significant consequence of his freethinking: "it is precisely this carefree attitude toward filiation (meaning the continuation of genealogy) that represents the crucial novelty of Rosmer's atheist attitude" (Schiedermair 2019, 9).[37] The undercurrent of menace in Kroll's warning that Rosmer's entry onto the public arena will turn into a "life-and-death battle with all your friends" (Ibsen 2019, 144) should be understood in this context. A patriarch who is both weak-willed and incapable of propagating the family line serves no purpose, and may soon find himself replaced.

The potential demise of the Rosmer line poses a problem for Kroll. If the Rosmer line falls, Kroll would be left standing without the symbolic backing of the Rosmer name. Kroll's defense of Rosmersholm values is informed by his classism, which comes to the fore in his utter rejection of the notion of rule by the people, which would drag everyone "down into the mud" (Ibsen 2019, 130). Popular rule would deprive the old order of its standing, and so a process of democratization would naturally be anathema to Kroll. The description of popular rule as a fall is later echoed by Brendel's literal descent into the gutter after being thrown out of a disreputable drinking establishment (Ibsen 2019, 138). Brendel's origins in the bourgeoisie, as indicated by his earlier status as a teacher, fails to prevent his fall to a level beneath that of the working class. This episode suggests that once a process of decline has begun there is no telling how far one might fall. Kroll's fear of falling derives from his realization that his association with Rosmer may imperil his own standing. In this sense Brendel can be read as a double to Kroll, representing a fate that Kroll knows he may also suffer. Kroll's reference to mud and Brendel's visit to the gutter furthermore attests to the association of falling with impurity. When Kroll calls Rosmer "an apostate man" (Ibsen 2019, 142), Rosmer defends himself using an imagery of cleanliness and virtue: "So you don't believe that purity of mind can be found in apostates or emancipated people?" (Ibsen 2019, 142) The association between apostasy and impurity, calling to mind Helene's description of Alving, draws attention to Rosmer's status as a failed patriarch.[38] This comparison adds another layer to Kroll's condemnation of Rosmer as adding to the corruption of society (Ibsen 2019, 130). This is Kroll accusing Rosmer of having committed treason against the class interest of both the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy. Despite Rosmer's objection that it is rather Kroll who has fallen (Ibsen 2019, 145), it would be difficult to argue that Rosmer has not come to occupy the position of a fallen patriarch. The fall of the old order is brought about by Rosmer, who is acting on a set of ideals of his own making and which deviate from the aristocratic traditions of Rosmersholm.

Marriage as the scene of threats to the social fabric

Kroll's uncertain position in the transitional phase from an aristocratic to a bourgeois order highlights a key aspect of the rise and fall of social classes, which is that no one seems safe from falling. There is an element of instability at the heart of a strict hierarchical social order, which provides opportunities for talented members of the working class to rise. The social fabric appears under constant threat from destabilizing factors, the most significant of which are love and eroticism. The direst threats against the aristocratic and bourgeois orders play out in a marital context.

The vagaries attaching to the supposed stability of the established order are best illustrated by viewing Mortensgård, Kroll, Beate, and Rebekka through the lens of marriage. These characters exhibit a variety of attitudes toward marriage that tend to converge with the political aspirations of the social classes to which they belong. The destabilization of the institution of marriage and the efforts made to prevent this institution from becoming undermined are an integral aspect of the political plot of *Rosmersholm*.

Mortensgård's unorthodox relationship to a married woman can serve as a point of departure. Mortensgård's romantic entanglement with this unnamed woman has compromised his social standing. He was denounced by Rosmer, who acted in his capacity as defender of the established order, much as Kroll does when denouncing Rebekka. Kroll and Mortensgård are centrally important to an understanding of the conflict between old and new orders. This political plot tends to be read as an isolated theme that is disconnected from the rest of the play, as exemplified by Marie Wells' assertion that the social conflict "represented in the clash between Rosmer's conservative brother-in law, Rektor Kroll, and the liberal newspaper editor, Peder Mortensgaard [. . .] plays no part after the end of Act II" (Wells 1998, 205).[39] The contentious relationship between the two men masks an underlying dynamic of collapse and renewal, with Mortensgård representing a promise of regeneration following the fall of the old order. Such a reading of Mortensgård will necessarily depart from the tendency of earlier scholarship to portray him as an unsympathetic character with few redeeming qualities. He is customarily described as an "opportunistic, amoral editor" (Leland 1991, 205), as an "opportunistic publicist" (Lysell 1997, 122) who is characterized by his "cynicism" (Fulsås and Rem 2018, 133). He is not "radical in his heart or enlightened in his way of thinking" (Lysell 1997, 122), and his politics hold no promise for the future: "European liberalism, exemplified in Mortensgård, is bankrupt" (Leland 1991, 205). He is as much a threat to liberalism as is the nihilistic Brendel: "The ideological bankruptcy of Ulrik Brendel and the expedient politicking of Mortensgaard collaborate no less destructively to reduce the liberal ideal to mockery and cynicism and parody" (Durbach 1985, 18).[40] This line of interpretation precludes a reading of Mortensgård as an idealist whose idealism has simply been tempered by reality.[41] Mortensgård can be read as a force for change, and his realistic appraisal of how the world works offers a much-needed corrective to Rosmer's corrosive idealism. Furthermore, Mortensgård's actions betray an ethical dimension to his character that is often ignored. Arguments along the lines that Kroll and Mortensgård "do not fight for the truth or for freedom, but for political power" (Aarseth 1979, 31) are an oversimplification. Mortensgård does have ideals, but unlike Rosmer, he also has the ability to set his ideals aside in pursuit of a higher goal. Mortensgård's ability to adapt to the intricacies

of contemporary society makes him a more viable representative of the future than the inflexible Kroll.[42]

Readings that make Mortensgård out to be an amoral cynic are difficult to reconcile with his choice of entering into a relationship with a married woman whose husband had abandoned her (Ibsen 2019, 158). According to madam Helseth's recounting of events, Mortensgård subsequently had a child with this woman and would have married her if he could. Mortensgård's idealism in this regard becomes apparent if one compares his history to that of Helene and Manders. Whereas Manders refused to elope with Helene, Mortensgård chose to engage in a relationship that he knew would diminish his social standing. Mortensgård comes across as an idealist who either fails to recognize the consequences of his actions or who chooses to forge ahead because his love affords him no other option. That being said, Mortensgård does engage in underhanded politicking in his attempt to enlist Rosmer to his cause. His doing so should not, however, be equated with cynicism. I would rather argue that his entreaties to Rosmer contain an element of class-based resentment. Having seen his standing diminished due to Rosmer's indictment of him, Mortensgård has striven to regain his position, as madam Helseth notes: "he's built himself up since, right enough" (Ibsen 2019, 159). He has come to invest his energy in a political program that would hasten the downfall of the same establishment that ostracized him. I would posit that he has never abandoned his idealism but has rather retained it, all the while plotting his revenge on Rosmer's patrician order. His efforts in the present are an attempt at redressing the wrong done to him by way of preventing future Rosmers from doing to others what he did to Mortensgård. Mortensgård's actions are motivated by an idealism that has been bruised but not extinguished. This element of class-based resentment directed from a member of the bourgeoisie toward the aristocracy suggests a reading of Mortensgård as a parallel to Kroll and helps explain the apparent overlap between the two characters (Hagen 2000, 225). The similarities between the two men gradually become more pronounced, culminating in a rapprochement of sorts. The fact that both men seek to utilize Rosmer to advance their respective causes shows that they respect the aristocracy only insofar as Rosmer's class can be made to benefit their own agenda.[43]

Mortensgård's desire to hasten the downfall of the old order makes him an agent of change, a category to which Rebekka also belongs. In the case of Rebekka, however, the threat she poses to the social fabric is even greater. While Mortensgård seeks to undermine the aristocracy, Rebekka's rise from her status as Dr. West's unrecognized daughter to almost becoming Rosmer's wife poses a challenge to both the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy.[44] The seriousness of the threat is recognized by Kroll, whose interrogation of Rebekka contains an element of jealousy. If the marriage

of Rosmer and Beate was instigated by Kroll, as Nantawan Soonthorndhai suggests (Soonthorndhai 1985, 217), it can be inferred that Kroll is resentful of Rebekka's rise. Kroll's hope of gaining in social standing through a marital connection with the aristocracy would have been solidified by a child being born to Rosmer and Beate. This ambition was thwarted by Rosmer, who sought to free himself from expectations of marriage and parenthood (Soonthorndhai 1985, 228). When Kroll identifies Rebekka as the cause of his plan failing, this is not a sudden reversal on his part. His wife's antipathy toward Rebekka, as described by madam Helseth, suggests that the Kroll family has always been suspicious of Rebekka (Ibsen 2019, 160). Madam Helseth's observation should be read together with Kroll's assertion that his wife has always shared his views (Ibsen 2019, 119). I would posit that Kroll's wife's unfavorable attitude toward Rebekka originates with Kroll, who appears to have been infatuated with Rebekka (Ibsen 2019, 166). The hostility evinced by the Krolls toward Rebekka could be interpreted as a case of romantic jealousy, Kroll acting as a spurned lover and his wife harboring ill will toward the woman who threatened her marriage.

Mortensgård's return to a position of power and the Krolls' disdain for Rebekka serve to expose the essential instability of social classes. Mortensgård and Kroll are aware that social standing is fluid and liable to change at any moment. This element of peril is actualized in Kroll's change of position toward Rebekka. For as long as he believes that Rebekka will act to preserve the status quo he accepts her presence at Rosmersholm. When Rosmer reveals himself as a freethinker, Kroll sees this as a threat to his own position. He seeks to neutralize Rosmer without damaging the Rosmer name; with Rebekka, on the other hand, he acts to deprive her of her newly acquired status altogether. His criticism of Rebekka focuses on her having ascended into a higher position by means of manipulation. Her goal has always been to ingratiate herself with Rosmer, and she has merely used Kroll and Beate to achieve this aim (Ibsen 2019, 166). According to Kroll, Rebekka used her sexuality to manipulate others. Her ability to "bewitch" (Ibsen 2019, 166) those around her led to Beate becoming infatuated with her: "It turned to idolization – worship. It [deviated into] – what shall I call it? – a desperate kind of infatuation" (Ibsen 2019, 166–167).[45] While Kroll's accusations are explicitly framed in terms of sexual deviation, the verb "arte ud" has an underlying connotation of deviation or transgression against social norms.[46] Rebekka's weaponization of same-sex desire is comparable to her overstepping of the line between social classes; she appears to have little regard for boundaries and taboos. Even the concept of a conscience seems alien to her, if Kroll is to be believed; she can "act with premeditation and total control – because you have a cold heart" (Ibsen 2019, 167). Kroll's description of Rebekka is that of a woman who

is possessed of a strong will and the capacity to exert this will in pursuit of her goals, no matter the cost. This is obviously a one-sided portrayal of her, and there is no indication that Beate's attraction was reciprocated. Kroll's accusations reveal more about him than about Rebekka. His choice of emphasis is important in that he clearly distinguishes between Rebekka's goal and methods. He does not castigate her for making use of her sexuality but rather for her temerity in crossing the class divide.

Rebekka's manipulation of Beate and the latter's infatuation with Rebekka demonstrate that the established order is only as strong as its weakest link. The role played by Rebekka in Beate's demise is readily apparent, by her own admission, but it is equally important to note how gendered expectations of childbearing impacted Beate. Rebekka reinforced, but did not create, what Soonthorndhai refers to as "the bourgeois organization of domesticity, which promoted sex solely for procreation" (Soonthorndhai 1985, 233). Beate was led to believe that she was infertile, a condition that in the context of bourgeois patriarchy would have consigned her to the category of an unproductive individual. Her inability to conceive a child, in fact occasioned by Rosmer's distaste of carnality, was a deviation from a norm. When her desire to have a child was frustrated her sexual energies were diverted from their intended purpose and instead latched on to Rebekka. There is an association between Beate and degeneration, manifesting in the interrelated themes of same-sex desire and childlessness. The transformation of Beate's energies from productive to unproductive can be illustrated by slightly modifying Charles R. Lyons' comparison of the key metaphors of the white horses and the millrace. When Rosmer rejects her advances, Beate becomes consumed by desire: "Her 'frenzied passion' is an image of energy which is analogous to the sense of irrational power in the coursing of the white horses" (Lyons 1972, 104). What I see in this image is an unfettered energy that cannot be put to good use. Lack of control is what distinguishes the white horses from the millrace, an instrument whereby the forces of nature are harnessed by man. The image of the white horses does not fit into this dichotomy of nature versus culture. When Lyons describes Beate and Rebekka as being "directed by lust" (Lyons 1972, 108), the distinction between the two women is lost. The millrace represents the harnessing of energy toward a productive goal, which is what Beate sought. Although the images of the white horses and the millrace are both "related to the sense of passion or energy overtaking the will" (Lyons 1972, 109), Beate's loss of control is caused by an inability to marshal her reproductive energies toward a productive purpose.

Beate's suicide due to her supposed infertility singles out childlessness as a distinct threat to the well-being of women. Whereas Rosmer in his capacity as patriarch would be responsible for transmitting vital energy, social standing, and financial assets to a child, Beate's role would have been more

narrowly defined as the creation of new life. The bourgeois understanding of marriage as a vehicle for "bringing the natural will for powerful, joyous, and multiplying gratification under the rule of economic and historical planning" (Theoharis 1996, 108) cannot be reconciled with Rosmer's reformulation of marriage as a spiritual union, a view that Rebekka comes to share. We are dealing with a conflict between productivity and a lack thereof. Beate's upbringing has instilled in her an obligation toward continuing the family line. As Fredrik Engelstad notes, her class understands the purpose of erotic love to be the production of children (Engelstad 1992, 162). Abstinence would preclude Beate from fulfilling this duty.[47] This procreative imperative was reinforced by her reading of books previously belonging to Dr. West and lent to Rosmer by Rebekka. I find it reasonable to conclude that these books, described by Kroll as dealing with the topic of "the purpose of marriage – according to the progressive views of our time" (Ibsen 2019, 140), argued that the purpose of marriage was to produce offspring. To borrow Lou Andreas-Salomé's phrasing, these books depicted childlessness as an "annihilation of the purpose and meaning of marriage as such."[48] The general tenor of these works would be to exhort the individual to channel his or her energies toward the higher purpose of procreation. A woman of Beate's background who fails to live up to such expectations would in a sense become an empty void, desperately waiting for an opportunity to create life. In the present, Beate lives on as a signifier for a productive desire that cannot be sated. Atle Kittang describes Beate as an emptiness compelling Rosmer and Rebekka toward oblivion (Kittang 2002, 236). Having been denied an opportunity in life to create new life, the ghostly Beate now functions as an entropic force that seeks to consume the living. What Engelstad sees as Rosmer and Rebekka's mutual desire for destruction (Engelstad 1990, 53), culminating in the dual suicide, is a continuation of Rosmer's earlier refusal to provide Beate with a child.

Beate's fate can be read as a parallel to that of Alving. When her procreative energy was blocked it turned in on itself and began devouring her from within. An imagery of self-consumption is present in Rosmer's description of her "uncontrollable, wild passions [*ustyrlige, vilde lidenskabelighed*]" and the "groundless self-reproach that consumed her [*grundløse, fortærende selvbebrejdelser*]" (Ibsen 2019, 140) toward the end. What Rosmer fails to realize is that Beate's self-reproach was in equal parts the expression of a frustrated desire and an incontinence of will. What Rosmer describes as "her sick love" (Ibsen 2019, 153) was merely a symptom of an underlying problem. Unable to rein in her self-criticism, Beate lost control of her will. The use of "fortærende" signals that she has become overwhelmed by forces within herself.[49] And as with Alving, the presence of constrictive environmental factors impeding the expression of Beate's energy, in this case Rosmer himself, contributed to her declining mental state. Rosmer's

idealized spiritual marriage is an encapsulation of the notion of unproductive sex. Marriage without sex is functionally similar to masturbation or sex for the sake of pleasure, and it is no coincidence that the writings of the self-gratifying Brendel are included in Dr. West's collection. The logic of productivity underlying the bourgeois ideal of domesticity caused Beate to think of herself as a superfluous woman. Rebekka's suggestion to Beate that Rebekka was carrying Rosmer's child strengthened Beate's self-image as unproductive and therefore useless. As Astrid Sæther notes, Beate was raised to give of herself in order to provide for the needs of others, and transformed herself into the "ideal type" (Sæther 1985, 45) of bourgeois womanhood by sacrificing herself for Rosmer.

When Beate dies the norm whereby the worth of a human life is measured in terms of productivity transfers onto Rebekka. The issue of childlessness unites the two women, and Rebekka's dedication to self-fulfillment rather than childbearing accentuates her proximity to the category of the unproductive. If Kroll is right in assuming that she sought to ingratiate herself with Rosmer in order to gain a modicum of power, then her initial plan would have served her own interests. What she belatedly comes to realize is that Rosmer expects her to subordinate her needs to his own. Her acceptance of a submissive role sets her on a path that will eventually lead her to commit suicide for Rosmer's sake. When Rosmer asks her to become his second wife, promising that they will be able to "stifle [*kvæle*] these memories – in freedom, joy and passion [*lidenskab*]" (Ibsen 2019, 156), he is asking Rebekka to help him erase the memory of Beate from existence. As Janet Garton notes, "Rosmer's declaration is born not of love but of fear" (Garton 1994, 112). Rosmer appears haunted by Beate, and channels his fear into fantasies of murdering her. Toril Moi observes that "lidenskab" is "a strong, sexual word" (Moi 2006, 281) and one that occurs only here and in Rosmer's description of Beate's wild passion. This sexualized imagery has an undercurrent of sexual violence; "kvæle" can mean suppression but also strangulation.[50] The underlying threat of violence in Rosmer's proposal is directed toward Beate, who would now be murdered a second time by him.[51] Rebekka is thus requested to serve the same purpose as Helene's asylum – that of annihilating someone who is already dead. Reading Beate as a void helps explain the paradoxes at work in Rosmer's request to Rebekka: "There mustn't be an empty place left here by the dead any longer" (Ibsen 2019, 156). This statement can be read on a prosaic level as Rosmer simply asking Rebekka to take Beate's place, but on a symbolic level, he is seeking to eradicate a void. It is precisely his intention of not having to carry the memory of Beate with him (Ibsen 2019, 156) that will ensure her continued survival, as Rebekka will always be reminded of her role as Beate's replacement. Rebekka's rejection of Rosmer's proposal is at least in part due to the realization that

marriage with Rosmer would mean spending her life assisting him. As Fredrik Engelstad argues, Rosmer's proposal comes from a place of weakness and is the desperate plea of a man in need of assistance (Engelstad 1992, 170). This is the ideal of female self-sacrifice that Rebekka had previously sought to reject but now accepts due to her professed love for Rosmer. Beate has become part of the fabric of Rosmersholm and cannot be exorcised. Rebekka's threat of suicide when Rosmer refuses to concede that their relationship has ended can be read as Rebekka having come to realize that she will share Beate's fate. Her agreeing with Rosmer's assertion that she will never leave Rosmersholm (Ibsen 2019, 157) suggests that she understands that she is incapable of leaving.

Rebekka is doomed to live out the rest of her days at Rosmersholm all the while not having children. The alignment of Rebekka's trajectory with that of Beate, as evidenced by a pattern of mirroring whereby Rebekka comes to repeat actions undertaken by Beate (Carlson 1974), calls for an examination of Rebekka's comments on childbearing. In the beginning of the third act, Rebekka returns to the question of Beate's sanity in conversation with Helseth. The conversation revolves around the letter Beate sent to Mortensgård before she died and which appears to have suggested to Helseth that Beate had not lost her mind. Rebekka's reply is to assert that Beate's madness manifested itself upon learning that she was infertile (Ibsen 2019, 160). Rebekka's emphasis on the connection between infertility and insanity is significant, especially when read together with her offhand remark that it was for the best that Rosmer did not have children (Ibsen 2019, 160). This exchange leads into Helseth's account of how children born at Rosmersholm never cry or laugh when grown up. While Helseth's description of how this joylessness has spread to the surrounding region (Ibsen 2019, 161) points to the lack of vitality of the Rosmer line, this comment comes after Rebekka has already expressed her positive assessment of Rosmer's childlessness. The question should therefore be asked why Rebekka believes that Rosmer did well in not having children. One possible explanation could be that she has only ever sought power, per Astrid Sæther: "it is not a *child* that she wishes to have through the man; it is self-realization and power disgui[s]ed as socio-political idealism" (Sæther 1985, 45; emphasis in original). I would argue, however, that a reading of Rebekka as driven by a lust for power must take into account the benefits to her social standing if she were to marry Rosmer and bear his child. Her discussion of Rosmer's paternal qualities seems especially incongruous when read in the context of her rejection of his proposal, her reading of Dr. West's books insisting on the procreative duties of married women, and her dedication to serving only her own interests. Put simply, why would she belabor a moot point? I would suggest that her comments should be read in the light of her entering into a subservient role

made familiar by Beate. On the level of metaphor, the ghost of Beate has begun to possess Rebekka. The choices left to Rebekka, should she choose to remain at Rosmersholm, are limited. By rejecting Rosmer's proposal and discounting the possibility of having children, she has consigned herself to a position similar to that of Beate: a woman rendered superfluous by cohabitation with a man with whom she will never conceive children. Rebekka has allowed herself to become a new Beate. Given the association between childlessness and death inherent in the figure of Beate, this development suggests that Rebekka has embarked on a path that can only lead to destruction.

Strength and weakness of will

Weakness of will plays a central role in the play, in both the case of Rosmer and Rebekka. Rebekka's downfall can be attributed to a combination of external and internal factors. Rosmer's empty but contagious idealism, the criticism leveled at her by Kroll, and the enticing but destructive rhetoric of Brendel belong to the former category. Such external factors operate in tandem with aspects of Rebekka's own personality that compound the impact of these influences. The most significant of these is her lack of willpower, a quality that is not as readily apparent as Rosmer's weakness of will.[52] The issue of will is essential to understanding the events of the last act. Rebekka's willpower is insufficient to withstand Rosmer's influence. I depart from earlier scholarship in my insistence that Rosmer's lack of willpower is unique to him and does not derive from his family. John D. Hurrell argues that Rosmer, had he been able to free himself from outside factors impeding his will, would have been successful in applying his will to purposeful action (Hurrell 1963, 119). In a similar vein, Erik M. Christensen argues that Rosmer's project of ennoblement is hindered by the efforts of Kroll and Mortensgård to instill in Rosmer a sense of culpability (Christensen 1989, 2:374). Such readings are too generous with respect to Rosmer. My argument is more in line Maurice Gravier's depiction of Rosmer as "weak, end of race, incapable of resisting external attacks and even more so of showing off and boldly affirming his new faith."[53]

Rosmer's weakness of will contributes directly to the failure of his project of ennobling the common man. He does not have the capacity to ennoble people by "emancipating minds, purifying wills [*luttre viljerne*]" (Ibsen 2019, 130), which makes it all the more puzzling why he would conceive of his project in terms of hardening and exerting one's will. When Kroll asks how Rosmer intends to achieve his aim, he merely offers platitudes along the lines of how the people must ennoble themselves through their own efforts (Ibsen 2019, 131). This understanding of power as being located within the individual provides an important context for Rosmer's later

comment that he wishes to "test my strength" (Ibsen 2019, 132) by openly pronouncing his new ideals. Rosmer may well be sincere in his intention to test his willpower. His comment can be interpreted as him wanting to test his power in earnest, perhaps for the first time. The quantity of power he possesses, however, appears limited. As we have previously seen in the case of Osvald, a depleted energy reserve is indicated by unusual sleeping habits. Comments by Rebekka and Helseth indicate that Rosmer is easily tired and prone to sleeping in. He retires early (Ibsen 2019, 133) and rises late (Ibsen 2019, 158). Read in a context of lack of vigor, the expression "luttre viljerne" takes on a different meaning. The expression is often translated as purifying the will.[54] The word "luttre," however, also refers to the hardening of metal through the removal of impurities. "Luttre" can thus be understood figuratively, as a purification of one's heart and mind, but also as a process of hardening. These metallurgical associations suggest a different meaning to "luttre viljerne": a soft will is to be made hard through the removal of impurities. Such a process, were it applied to Rosmer, would transform him into a less weak-willed man. When Rebekka encourages him to continue his project, her phrasing of Rosmer "creating noble people around you" (Ibsen 2019, 154) suggests a model of influence whereby a goal is achieved through the directing of the individual's will toward an external and specific purpose. Rosmer's desire to ennoble others can be read as an indirect admission that he recognizes his own weakness of will. His project should thus be understood as a fantasy of potence masking his own lack of willpower.

Rosmer's feeble will constitutes an important deviation on his part from the tradition of his forebears. Rosmer's father was characterized by strength of will, as we see in Kroll's comment on how Rosmer's father ejected Brendel from Rosmersholm (Ibsen 2019, 123). The treatment of Brendel is similar to Kroll's attempts to prevent the intrusion of radical ideas into his home; in both cases a patriarchal figure reacted forcefully when faced with a challenge to his authority. Rosmer's father comes across as a man who possessed a strong will and who was not afraid to exert it. Rosmer has not inherited his father's strength of will. Kroll singles out Rosmer's will as his weakest point: according to Kroll, Rosmer is impressionable (Ibsen 2019, 129), easily influenced by others (Ibsen 2019, 143), and unable to stand alone when facing opposition (Ibsen 2019, 132). The latter characteristic provides context to Rosmer's refusal to choose a side in the conflict between conservatives and radicals, preferring instead to gather as many adherents to his cause as possible (Ibsen 2019, 130). His conciliatory tone can come across as sympathetic but is also an indication of his inability to arrive at a decision as to what he considers to be right and proper. His declaration that he wishes to "devote my life and all my energy" to the cause of "true democratic enlightenment" (Ibsen 2019, 130)

is ironic, given his limited capabilities. His indecisiveness manifests in an inability to react in a firm manner to uncomfortable situations. After realizing that Rebekka has been eavesdropping, his response that she should "do whatever you feel is right" (Ibsen 2019, 151) seems vague and listless, much like his "How do I know what I would or wouldn't do" (Ibsen 2019, 153) and his "But the choice is not mine" (Ibsen 2019, 155) on the topic of Beate. If one posits that Rosmer has never had the opportunity to exercise his will, this would account for his indecisive nature and his belated desire to exert his will by actually putting it to use.[55]

Rosmer's weakness of will is accentuated by his doubts regarding the causes of Beate's illness. These doubts function much like intrusive thoughts and are reminiscent of Beate's incessant self-reproach. When Rebekka complains of Rosmer's propensity for brooding (Ibsen 2019, 152), he replies that he is simply unable to allay his doubts (Ibsen 2019, 152). He understands that these doubts stand in the way of his happiness, and expresses a longing to be absolved of any guilt over Beate's death: "I shall never again drink of [*svælge*] that which makes it so wonderfully delicious to be alive. [. . .] The joy and calm of being free from guilt" (Ibsen 2019, 154). Rosmer's use of "svælge," best translated as "overindulging" or "feasting," is worth noting, especially as it echoes Brendel's self-satisfied comment on having "savoured and drunk deep [*svælget*] of creativity's mysterious rapture" (Ibsen 2019, 126). Rosmer's odd locution can be paraphrased as his wanting to gorge himself on the belief that he played no part in the death of Beate. Rebekka encourages this line of reasoning, encouraging Rosmer to take an active role in the outside world (Ibsen 2019, 155). The enthusiasm he displays at Rebekka's encouragement showcases his susceptibility to external influence. His fantasies of emancipation are instilled in him by Rebekka, who has convinced him to adopt her hopes for him, thereby demonstrating the malleability of his will.

When Rosmer declares himself a freethinker and decides to embark on his project of ennoblement, his weakness of will is exposed further. In the face of Kroll's public criticism of Rosmer in *The County Times*, Rosmer appears to think of himself as the only person capable of redeeming his fellow men (Ibsen 2019, 162). He has come to embrace a vision of peace characterized by all men directing their wills toward a higher goal: "Every will, every mind rallying together – onwards – upwards – each pursuing their own natural path" (Ibsen 2019, 163). He excludes himself from this vision since he can no longer feel happiness. But if his project of ennoblement can only be accomplished through his participation, and he is no longer able to participate, then he is in effect stating that his fellow men will be denied the salvation that only he can offer them. His resigned realization that he will be unable to undertake his project is more revealing than he understands, however, in that a multitude of wills all being directed toward a united purpose

is a fitting image of his own inability to muster his will for any purpose. His ambitions are at odds with his capabilities. If Rosmer is understood as a man who strives for goals he can never attain, his choice of ideals can be clarified. He espouses ideals that he knows he cannot achieve and that make a virtue out of his passivity and lack of emotion. His assertion that he has a "predisposition [*anlæg*] for happiness" (*HIS* 8:441) encapsulates the absurdity of a man incapable of expressing mirth striving to spread a message of joy. The hollowness of his ideals comes to the fore when he admits to his fondness for Rebekka, with whom he has experienced a "contented, desireless [*begærløse*], quiet bliss" reminiscent of "two children falling secretly and sweetly in love" (Ibsen 2019, 164). As Toril Moi notes, this is a conception of love devoid of carnality: "The sweet unspoken, unacknowledged childlike love described by Rosmer is without sex, without self-consciousness, and without sin" (Moi 2006, 284). Rosmer's use of "begærløse," much like his statement that he and Rebekka have lived in a "spiritual marriage" (Ibsen 2019, 164), illustrates how he disassociates carnality from love.[56] His idealism not only disconnects him from everyday life but also causes him to abandon his project due to his belief that he has failed to live up to his own ethical standards. Rebekka's effort to free him from what she describes as a form of ancestral guilt (Ibsen 2019, 165) cannot succeed, because Rosmer does not possess the strength needed to break with tradition. The immediate cause of his inability to join forces with Rebekka and free himself from doubt is not the weight of the Rosmer tradition, but rather his own weakness of will, which is noticeable enough to become a topic of conversation between Rebekka and Kroll. Kroll asserts that Rosmer would never be able to cast off the shackles of tradition: Rosmer will "never tear loose from everything that has been handed down so unerringly from generation to generation" (Ibsen 2019, 167). Rebekka, having already made note of Rosmer's weakness of will, which she describes as sensitivity (Ibsen 2019, 167), appears to agree with Kroll.

Rebekka's realization that Rosmer will never emancipate himself from what she understands as the Rosmer family values informs her decision to reject his proposal of marriage. She appears to have adopted these same values, depicting herself as having unknowingly succumbed to a life-denying tradition that has broken her will and forced her into submission to Rosmer. The values of Rosmersholm are fundamentally different from the values, or rather lack of values, that characterized her life in Finnmark with Dr. West. The ideal of feminine submissiveness to which Beate succumbed has been internalized by Rebekka, as seen in her crocheting of a white shawl, an activity that shows, to quote Nantawan Soonthorndhai, "how a mind, once given to active intellectual pursuits, can be subverted and submerged by conventional middle-class domesticity" (Soonthorndhai 1985, 259). The fact that Rebekka only realizes the extent of her domestication

after having completed her transformation into another Beate attests to the limits of her self-awareness. Rebekka does not fully understand herself, and her account of her transformation must be interrogated critically. The story she constructs can be summarized as her once having possessed a strong will that was gradually weakened by the influence of Rosmersholm (Ibsen 2019, 182). What she fails to address is her conspicuous habit of giving of herself to others. By devoting herself to aiding Dr. West and then Rosmer, she has directed her energies outward rather than invest in herself. When faced with the choice between living for someone else or for her own sake, she has consistently chosen to prioritize the needs of others.[57] If she has only ever focused her energies on helping others, and if her values have always been imparted to her by the men in her life, then the question should be posed if she can even be described as an autonomous individual. The issue of her self-abnegation is brought up in conversation with Kroll, who at first commends Rebekka for assisting Rosmer following Beate's death, in effect sacrificing herself for others (Ibsen 2019, 115). While Kroll is not yet aware of Rebekka's ulterior motives, the image she has constructed accords with what Sandra Saari describes as the idea of "the self-sacrificing, self-abnegating 'ideal woman' whose only goal in life is to minister to the needs of others" (Saari 1985, 33). This image prohibits her from accepting Kroll's praise for taking care of Dr. West (Ibsen 2019, 115) after moving from Finnmarken. When Kroll comments that Rebekka supervised the household during Beate's illness, she replies that her actions were rather "a regency in the mistress's name" (Ibsen 2019, 116). These instances can be read as the manipulative deflection of a woman who is merely pretending to care for others, but I would argue that there is more to her comments than she realizes. Even if she has only ever cared for others in order to further her own gains, she has nonetheless spent her life prioritizing the needs of others. Her responses to Kroll, while disingenuous, reveal a deeper truth.

Rebekka's life-long inability to live for her own self points to a fundamental paradox of her character. She comes across as a strong-willed woman who has the capacity to dominate others, but at the same time she is almost wholly dependent on men like Dr. West and Rosmer. I will argue that she was in fact not in possession of a strong will when she arrived at Rosmersholm. What she describes as the corruption of her will by Rosmer should rather be understood as the latest instance of her allowing men to dominate her. She has even failed to develop an identity of her own, having had her beliefs foisted on her by Dr. West. With the caveat that Kroll's account of her upbringing is contained within his interrogation of her, the story of her life indicates that she has always lived in a state of dependence.[58] According to Kroll, Rebekka's dependence derives from her parentage. The "moral predisposition" (Ibsen 2019, 168) accruing from

having been born out of wedlock determined the course of her life. In a hierarchical society in which social standing is linked to the circumstances of one's birth, Rebekka's life would inevitably be circumscribed by societal constraints. Kroll's comment that her birth explains her every action (Ibsen 2019, 168) may seem reductionist, but it does contain a kernel of truth.[59] Following her mother's death Rebekka was adopted by Dr. West. Kroll assumes that Rebekka must have known that Dr. West was her biological father, or else she would not have "let yourself be adopted" by him (Ibsen 2019, 168). Kroll's phrasing suggests that the adoption was a conscious decision on her part and not simply a unilateral decision by Dr. West.[60] Her decision is puzzling to Kroll, who describes Dr. West as a petty tyrant (Ibsen 2019, 168). Kroll attributes Rebekka's decision to "an unconscious daughterly instinct" (Ibsen 2019, 168), but this supposed bond does not provide sufficient explanation for her actions.

The common interpretation that Rebekka unknowingly engaged in an incestuous relationship with Dr. West muddles rather than clarifies the issue of her lack of willpower. If Rebekka were indeed in such a relationship with Dr. West, the question remains why she would allow herself to be adopted by her lover. While this might not technically constitute incest it would still have blurred the distinction between sexual partner and family member. Such an arrangement would have severe repercussions; she could hardly expect to marry her adopted father, and possibly even have children with him, and not face public condemnation. I believe the focus on whether or not Rebekka engaged in incest, a recurring topic in Ibsen scholarship, risks obscuring the extent of her dependence on others.[61] Rebekka has stunted her own development by never leaving the house of her father. Her decision to accompany Dr. West and care for him until his passing, following which she attached herself to Kroll and then to Rosmer, suggests that she in a sense never left home. Her dependence is accentuated by her clinging to bourgeois beliefs that are irreconcilable with her understanding of herself as a champion of the new. Kroll singles out specific ideas that are firmly rooted in bourgeois patriarchy, such as that women should marry young and that being born out of wedlock is undesirable.[62] Rebekka's failure to divest herself of those beliefs, and her acquiescence to a relationship with her adopted father, suggest that she is incapable of living by and for herself. Her intellectual dependence is directly addressed by Kroll, who argues that Rebekka has simply espoused the radical ideas of Dr. West without making them her own, the knowledge not having "entered your blood" (Ibsen 2019, 170). As Sara Jan notes, this is an effective line of attack, given how Rebekka has been shaped by the intellectual inheritance of Dr. West. By belittling Rebekka's capacity to form her own opinions, Kroll is reminding her of "her status as a dependent and isolated woman with little access to formal education or other discourses of power" (Jan

2006, 164). If Rebekka has indeed inherited the beliefs of Dr. West, and moreover without questioning them, then she is simply parroting the opinions of others. Her habit of attaching herself to men who dominate her attests to her lack of autonomy, a trait that makes her a perfect and unfortunate match for Rosmer. Two characters who depend on the strength and convictions of others find solace in each other, in the mistaken belief that the other will provide the support that they require.

Read against the backdrop of Rebekka's weakness, her confession to Kroll and Rosmer of her involvement in Beate's death can be understood in a new light. The confession can roughly be divided into two parts, the first focusing on her upbringing and arrival at Rosmersholm, the second on her manipulation of Beate. Rebekka begins by recounting how she arrived at Rosmersholm hoping to contribute to a process of renewal that she believed was currently taking place in society. It is unclear what she hoped to contribute to this process, or indeed if she had anything to contribute. If she had merely adopted the radical views of Dr. West, then her contribution would be at most an echo of someone else's ideas. She seems to acknowledge as much when commenting on how Dr. West "had taught me a great variety of things. All the fragmented knowledge I had of life back then" (Ibsen 2019, 172). Rebekka's assertion that she felt a sensation of entering a new world after moving away from Finnmark is an implicit admission that Dr. West's ideas, which did not precipitate a similar sensation, belonged to the old world. Her life in Finnmark seems to have been a cloistered life during which her beliefs were molded by Dr. West. This suggests that her relationships with Kroll and Rosmer were at least in part motivated by a desire to liberate herself from the influence of Dr. West. Instead of seeking independence by herself, she made her freedom contingent on that of Rosmer, thereby shifting her dependence from Dr. West to Rosmer. Her choice of Rosmer as intended partner is an odd echo of her life with Dr. West. Having noted during her time with Kroll that Brendel was able to influence Rosmer (Ibsen 2019, 173), she seeks to mold Rosmer's beliefs, much as Dr. West did with her. She viewed Rosmer's marriage as an impediment to his happiness: "you could never grow to be free unless you were in the bright sunlight. And here you were, wilting and sickening in such a dark marriage" (Ibsen 2019, 173). The imagery calls to mind a flower wilting for lack of sunlight. When read in the context of the imagery of poisonous flowers in the first act, her imagery at this point imbues Rosmer with associations of corruption and loss of vitality. The image of Rosmer as a sickly flower growing in darkness is a parallel to Rebekka's experience of life in Finnmark. She identifies with Rosmer's situation, and her effort to liberate him can be read as a delayed attempt at emancipating herself from Dr. West. Unable to assert her individuality under Dr. West's tutelage, she now seeks to realize herself through the combined liberation

of herself and Rosmer. By predicating the success of her emancipation on that of Rosmer she is, however, diminishing her own agency. And while her behavior is certainly "predatory" (Williams 1968, 59), her predation derives from her lack of self. Liberation enacted by means of another is not comparable to liberation achieved through self-determination. By making herself reliant on Rosmer, she is in a sense returning to her own unemancipated past.[63]

The second half of Rebekka's confession is more narrowly focused on her will and emphasizes her inability to control her desire. Rebekka admits to having manipulated Beate by suggesting that Rosmer was becoming a freethinker and that Rebekka was pregnant with his child. Rebekka defends herself by describing how she was overcome by the power of her effect on Beate, in effect becoming carried away by her own machinations. Rosmer's comment that Rebekka dominated Beate through strength of will (Ibsen 2019, 175) is a misunderstanding, and one that Rebekka is quick to correct. She insists that she was powerless to arrest her manipulation, making use of a subtle allusion to Goethe's *Faust*: "And a human being has two kinds of will, I'd have thought!" (Ibsen 2019, 173). The conflict in Faust's heart between a soul who strives for worldly pleasure and one who strives for a higher purpose is reconfigured as two wills being locked in struggle.[64] Although Rebekka admits that she wanted Beate out of the way, she tells of how her manipulation gained a momentum of its own:

> With each tempting step I ventured, I felt something scream inside me: No further now! Not a step further! – And yet I *couldn't* stop! I *had* to venture just one tiny bit further. Just one. And then another – and always another. And then it *came*.
>
> (Ibsen 2019, 173)

This account is difficult to reconcile with the image, conveyed by Rosmer and Kroll, of Rebekka as a cold and calculating schemer. The conflicting images of Rebekka at play appears to have posed a problem for Ibsen scholarship. Maria Løvland asks why the "vital, strong Rebekka allows herself to be influenced by the weak and inactive Rosmer to such an extent that she follows him to death" (Løvland 2023, 200).[65] To this I would reply that Rebekka was in fact never a strong-willed individual, but that she has rather been helpless in the face of her own desire. This trait situates her in the category of individuals who are, to quote Beret Wicklund, "in the grip of powers they cannot transcend" (Wicklund 2001, 339). Rebekka's depiction of herself as in thrall to her desire accords with her lack of willpower. Vigdis Ystad is correct to note that Rebekka has been engaged in a conflict between the free expression of desire and the free expression of will (Ystad 1996, 158), but this conflict was resolved when Rebekka's desire overrode

her will. Rebekka has never had the opportunity to strengthen her will by exercising it. Having first been subjected to Dr. West's will, and later becoming subjugated by her own ungovernable desire, she has no willpower with which to resist Rosmer's influence when he finally reveals the true extent of his demonism following Brendel's reappearance.

Brendel and the forces of entropy

Brendel is possibly the most obvious example of a degenerate in Ibsenian drama. He acts as an instigator of the double suicide, his rhetoric of sacrifice causing Rosmer's demonism to emerge fully. Brendel acts as a grotesque parody of Rosmer, and his rhetoric is in effect a parody of Rosmer's. Brendel amplifies Rosmer's empty and self-contradictory idealism, demonstrating its life-denying nature by arguing for the primacy of self-sacrifice and death over life.[66] While the destructive aspects of the Brendel character have been acknowledged in earlier scholarship, I will argue that the link between Brendel and the same dynamic of productivity and wastefulness that envelops Rosmer and Rebekka remains understudied. Returning to the concept of an energetic economy will shed new light on both Brendel's degeneracy and on Rosmer's parasitic nature. Brendel's insistence on self-gratification and the pursuit of pleasure vividly illustrates the consequences of leading as unproductive a life as that of Rosmer. Both men share a weakness of will that prohibits them from realizing their lofty ambitions. As Göran Printz-Påhlson argues, Brendel belongs to a category of individual who has achieved "weakness of the will, through long and arduous servitude to their petty desires" (Printz-Påhlson 1991, 194). While Brendel appears to have been a talented person at one point, he has allowed his creative energy to go to waste by not expending it fruitfully. His self-indulgence has caused his energy to turn inward and dissipate in a manner entirely reminiscent of the fate of Alving. When Brendel realizes that he is devoid of energy, he comes to long for self-annihilation and departs into symbolic nothingness. His departure is linked to the same realization of being superfluous that especially informs Rebekka's decision to die for Rosmer's sake. A closer examination of Brendel from the viewpoint of productivity will thus help clarify the motivating factors driving Rebekka toward her death.

Earlier scholarship has tended to emphasize Brendel's supposed manipulation of Rosmer, thereby depicting Rosmer as somehow a victim of Brendel's moral corruption. Astrid Sæther's comment that Brendel's "thoughts took root in the young Rosmer" (Sæther 1998, 150) or Behzad Sohi's reading of Rosmer as a "mimicking personality" (Sohi 2003, 201) who simply parrots Brendel's ideals both to some extent absolve Rosmer of wrongdoing. Readings that depict Brendel as responsible for corrupting Rosmer tend to use an imagery of him as a contagious or even Satanic figure. We see

this tendency in Theoharis C. Theoharis' comment on Brendel's call for Rebekka to mutilate herself: "That Brendel holds Rebecca's wrist while he presents the plan to her gives his recitation the physical appearance and force of an infecting, supranatural possession that instills a demonic curse" (Theoharis 1996, 123). Readings that portray Brendel as a corrupting influence on an otherwise guiltless Rosmer will tend to result in untenable conclusions such as that of Errol Durbach:

> To follow Brendel's scheme is to enact a madness, a rite of mere perversity. But, just as Lucifer's counsel of despair challenges Cain to assert morality and meaning in the void, so Brendel's negation contains the positive solution to Rosmer and Rebekka's dilemma: the abandonment of words for a form of symbolic action, the declaration in deed of what can no longer be spoken, and the discovery of joy in its performance.
>
> (Durbach 1982, 187)

Durbach's reading of the dual suicide as a triumph of idealism is the exact opposite of my reading. I regard Brendel's role as being to reveal the hollowness of Rosmer's idealism and by extension Rosmer himself. Sandra Hardy's description of Brendel as "an exaggerated parallel to Rosmer, the idealistic reformer who will emancipate mankind bringing nobility to even the most ignoble soul" (Hardy 1982, 278), misses the mark.[67] There is a demonic element to Rosmer that Brendel does not create but rather awakens. Brendel's vacuous speeches reveal Rosmer's idealism to be a façade concealing a much darker truth. A more appropriate reading of the dual suicide, in my view, is that of Eivind Tjønneland, who regards the dual suicide as a rejection of idealism (Tjønneland 1992, 72). Brendel exists to ridicule realism and to unmask Rosmer.

A reading of Brendel as a vehicle for anti-idealist criticism may help explain the character's curious Gnostic underpinnings.[68] This aspect of the Brendel character is most pronounced in two sections of Ibsen's working manuscript that were omitted from the final version.[69] In the second of these Brendel recounts what I read as a Gnostic parable concerning the flawed work of the creator in creating man. As opposed to Janet Garton, who argues that "Brendel's comments about the Master's mistakes are rather comically irrelevant" (Garton 2006, 90), I believe that these comments are significant in that they help explain his desire for self-annihilation. Brendel begins his speech by describing himself as a disillusioned man: "All my teachings are false. Have been false already from their first origins."[70] He then shifts to a criticism of humankind, exclaiming, "Humanity is beyond help."[71] This line of criticism lessens his own sense of failure in that he has done his best to help his fellow men. The reason he has failed is that "there was a flaw in creation from the beginning."[72] If he is flawed, it is only because the maker was

an inept creator. When Rosmer asks Brendel how he can be sure that "the flaw was there," Brendel's enigmatic reply is that "the Master has betrayed me, my son."[73] Brendel continues with a parable of how artists and poets feel when they have completed a work of art. Most often they will be satisfied, but every so often they will have made a mistake:

> But once in a while the master could happen to be unlucky. Either he wasn't really in the mood, or he was in a hurry, or whatever it might be. So what does my lord Urian do? Well, he cocks his head. Looks at his work with a knowing expression. Evaluates it from all sides. And then he says: this here, – this is, damn it, good. Really good.[74]

"Lord Urian" can be used as a derogatory expression for a person whom one does not wish to name, but given the reference to the devil in Goethe's *Faust* as "Herr Urian," I think the sense used in *Faust* is more relevant here.[75] The implication is that it was the devil, at best an imperfect creator, who created man. The idea that man was created by an incompetent creator can be related to Gnostic notions of a Demiurge who creates man but is unable to impart a divine spirit to him (Broek 2006, 408–409). Brendel's parable explains the fallen state of mankind and absolves Brendel of responsibility for his failures. Rosmer and Rebekka react to his parable with despondency. Rebekka questions if life is worth living, to which Brendel replies that one should simply enjoy life: "Eat, drink, and be merry, my fair lady."[76] Rosmer agrees with Rebekka's pessimism, noting that suicide is always an option: "Well, at least there is a way to end it all."[77] The conversation ends with Brendel suggesting that the pair can find solace in each other. While it is important to note that Brendel's parable did not carry over into the finished version of *Rosmersholm*, the text retains the association of Brendel with annihilation, specifically by means of suicide. Brendel's longing for the void is the logical conclusion of his rejection of the world. If the entirety of creation is flawed, suicide can be regarded as a form of protest against an unjust world. This is the end point of Brendel's parodic caricature of idealism: idealism leads only to the grave.

Brendel's refusal of life itself constitutes the foundation of his propensity for self-gratification. This tendency on his part is expressed through a sexualized imagery with obvious connotations of masturbation. Brendel describes himself as a champion of liberty who has lived too long in isolation but who is now ready to "seize life with an active hand" (Ibsen 2019, 126). During his first visit, he provides a description of his solitary life that amounts to an allegory of masturbation:

> I love to savour things in solitude. For then, my enjoyment is double. [. . .] I have savoured and drunk deep of creativity's mysterious rapture

> – in general terms, as I said – I have filled my hands, joyous and trembling, with the applause, the gratitude, the fame, the crown of laurels. Sated myself in my private performances with an ecstasy – oh, of such a dizzying magnitude –!
>
> (Ibsen 2019, 126)

This passage reads like a paean to pleasuring oneself. Jørgen Haugan notes that the pleasure Brendel describes exists within the confines of his own mind and that he has never put his ideas into practice (Haugan 1977, 128). A desire that is located within the mind and that is both solitary and unproductive is comparable to masturbation. Brendel has arrested the flow of his energies and turned them inward into a realm of self-fulfilling fantasy (Østerud 1981, 33). Furthermore, Brendel's sexualized imagery tends to focus on the throat, which, as Toril Moi notes, is "the site of voice and breath, and so the place of suffocation and strangulation" (Moi 2006, 275). Brendel's erotization of the throat can be related to Rosmer's fantasies of suffocating Beate, which adds an undercurrent of violence to Brendel's masturbatory imagery. Brendel the masturbator pleasures himself and consumes his own vital energy, or to put it more bluntly, he metaphorically ingests his own semen. He describes his actions in terms of purity, expressing disgust at the thought of sharing his ideas with others: "why would I profane my own ideals, when I could enjoy them in their purity, and for myself?" (Ibsen 2019, 127)[78] For Brendel, masturbation is a purer form of enjoyment than intercourse.

Brendel's penchant for "auto-erotic enjoyment of solitary intellectual ecstasies" (Jan 2006, 168) is tied to his hollowness, a condition shared by the equally sex-averse Rosmer. Reading Rosmer as a masturbator offers a new perspective on Rosmer's childlessness. When Rosmer echoes Brendel's "svælge" (to drink of), he is inserting himself into Brendel's allegory of masturbation. A patriarch who wastes his semen is sealing the fate of his family line. Conceiving ideas, refusing to share them, and then consuming them is a closed circuit of energy that is never released. Rosmer and Brendel both fail to expend their energy on productive pursuits. In Brendel's case this refusal has transformed him into an energetic wasteland. It is a thoroughly drained Brendel who returns to the estate in the fourth act. This visit is prefaced by Rosmer demanding that Rebekka provide him with some manner of proof of her devotion to him. Their conversation ends with Rosmer's exasperated "I can't bear this desolation – this appalling emptiness" (Ibsen 2019, 185).[79] Brendel enters immediately following Rosmer's mention of emptiness, and proceeds to inform Rosmer of his departure with a curiously phrased explanation of being "homesick for the great Nothingness" (Ibsen 2019, 185). Brendel has faced his own emptiness, employing a metaphor of masturbation to describe the depletion of

his energy: "Just as I'm standing there ready to empty my overflowing horn of plenty, I make a painful discovery – I am bankrupt" (Ibsen 2019, 186). His realization that energy that is not channeled into productive activity will dissipate informs his high praise of Mortensgård, who is able to achieve whatever he sets his mind to because he is "capable of living life without ideals" (Ibsen 2019, 186). Brendel's assessment of Mortensgård can be read through the perspective of passivity and productivity. Ideals inhibit action and circumscribe the individual's capacity to engage with the world. Living in accordance with a set of high-minded ideals, as Rosmer has done, leads to the same outcome as Brendel's hoarding of energy. Ideals are a form of mental prison that impedes action.

Brendel's rejection of idealism informs his advice to Rosmer that he must forge ahead with his mission in life (Ibsen 2019, 187). Brendel's call to action first requires that Rosmer abandon his idealism in order to be able to move forward. This message of purposeful action diverges from Brendel's earlier emphasis on self-satisfaction, which Brendel has now come to reject, having faced the consequences of his own inaction. In order for Rosmer to follow in Brendel's footsteps, he must first overcome his idealism. Brendel's proposal that Rebekka cut off her finger to prove her dedication to Rosmer (Ibsen 2019, 187) should be understood in this context. Brendel's suggestion is an exhortation for Rosmer to undergo the same process of transformation that Brendel has undergone: he must reject idealism and embrace the void within, the "nothingness" in his own self, in order to be able to move forward and take action. The ultimate rejection of idealism would be to have Rebekka sacrifice herself for Rosmer in an act that she perversely comes to view as the triumph of her own idealism. Once awakened, Rosmer's demonic need to exert control over the fate of another asserts itself through a strategy of coercion designed to make Rebekka obey Rosmer's will without realizing it. The fact that she is willing to die for his sake, without understanding that she is being manipulated in much the same way that she manipulated Beate, is a testament both to Rosmer's powers of persuasion and to the limits of Rebekka's self-understanding.

The useless deaths of Rosmer and Rebekka

My reading of Rosmer as a parasitic nature who relishes his dominion over Rebekka is predicated on the notion that Rosmer's lust for power is inherent to him. Rosmer's idealism amounts to little more than a mask concealing his inability to contribute productively to the lives of others. There is no reason to believe, as does Marie Wells, that Rebekka's embrace of Rosmer's values "rescues Rosmer from the despair and demonic possession into which he has fallen" (Wells 1998, 211).[80] What has happened is rather that Rosmer's inner qualities have finally been brought to light

through the intervention of Brendel. There is nothing idealistic about the Rosmer of the final act or his desire to have Rebekka die for his sake. Rosmer is not merely, to quote Andrey Yuriev, a "John the Baptist who has become unable to baptize with water" (Yuriev 2003, 106), but a John the Baptist who causes women to drown. As Lou Andreas-Salomé notes, the Rosmer of the final act has come to mirror the Rebekka who sought Beate's destruction:

> In this brutal egoism, he is reminiscent of Rebekka herself when she longed for Beate's death; even her imagination seems to have transferred onto him. But this similarity is not without reason; nor is it simply due to mutual contagion: it has its basis in the egoism of weakness of will, which cannot live without faith in others, without support, without being propped up; in the instinct for self-preservation of a divided, unprincipled spirit, for whom the real love for Rebekka at this time takes quite a step back.[81]

This is a striking description of a man whose continued existence depends on the support that others provide him with. The love he professes for Rebekka is an instrument intended to satisfy his lust for power, and her acquiescence emboldens him. Rebekka has allowed her will to be subjugated by a man whose own weakness of will appears to have been overcome through a form of transfer of willpower from Rebekka to Rosmer. Rosmer's parasitism manifests in him gaining strength of will while Rebekka's own will fades into subservience. Aage Henriksen argues that Rebekka has sought to entice Rosmer by making herself into an image reflecting Rosmer's idealism (Henriksen 1974a, 33). In doing so she has effaced her own identity, leaving her with neither the energy nor the sense of self required to withstand his demands.[82]

Atle Kittang argues that Rosmer and Rebekka undergo a development from a state of weakness to one of strength and vice versa (Kittang 2002, 211). This repositioning can be understood by examining the relationship between will and power. An individual possessing strength of will, such as Kroll or Rosmer's father, can use his will to exert authority over others. Such an individual will exhibit a self-confidence derived from knowing one's own strength and would not hesitate to counteract threats to his authority. A weak-willed individual like Rosmer, on the other hand, has no power over himself or others. The central issue is what happens when someone like Rosmer suddenly realizes that he can in fact exert authority over another. Fredrik Engelstad notes that this realization awakens in Rosmer an exhilarating sense of potency (Engelstad 1992, 178). Rebekka undergoes a transformation in the opposite direction. Her account of how this reversal came to pass should be read carefully, as it is filtered through

her limited self-understanding, but it nonetheless provides an illustration of how she understands the relationship between strength and weakness of will.

At the beginning of the act Rebekka has decided to return to Finnmark and complains of how she has somehow been broken by Rosmersholm. Rosmersholm has weakened her will: "I had such a fresh and brave will when I came here. Now I am bent under an alien law. – From this day on, I do not think that I will dare do anything at all."[83] Her use of words relating to bravery and vitality convey her understanding of the proper functioning of the will. A keyword is "brave" (*modig*), which is only ever used by Rebekka, and only in reference to her will (Ibsen 2019, 180, 182).[84] Rebekka regards a healthy will as a prerequisite for independence of thought and action. Conversely, a will that has been compromised by others should be described as diseased and weak. Rebekka admits that her enfeebled will has made her more susceptible to the values of Rosmersholm. By her own account she has come to mirror Rosmer's passivity. I would, however, go one step further and interrogate her portrayal of herself as having been strong-willed. The Rebekka who arrived at Rosmersholm was forceful in acting out her desire, but I will posit that her inability to constrain her desire attests to a fundamental lack of willpower. It may be tempting to take at face value her comment on how her desire for Rosmer broke her will (Ibsen 2019, 180). I would instead suggest that her dependency on others means that she has never been in possession of a will with which to rein in her destructive urges. For much the same reason she was unable to resist her desire for Rosmer. When Rosmer comments that he has been "the glove, and you the hand" (Ibsen 2019, 180), he is mistaken since Rebekka has never been the strong-willed manipulator he makes her out to be. Her only successful manipulation has been of Beate, whose will had already been compromised by Rosmer's frustration of her creative energies.

Rebekka's inability to restrain her own desire comes to the fore in an account that should be read against the backdrop of Helene's description of how Alving was unable to find an outlet for his joy of life (Ibsen 2016, 253). In both cases an imagery of water and stormy weather is used to describe an experience of helplessness when faced with overwhelming desire. Rebekka's chosen metaphor is that of a northern winter storm: "It grabs you – takes you with it – as far as it will" (Ibsen 2019, 181). To Rosmer's comment that this storm carried Beate out into the millrace Rebekka replies that "at the time it was as if Beate and I were battling on an upturned keel" (Ibsen 2019, 181), thereby accentuating the association of desire and water.[85] But when Rosmer tells Rebekka that she was "the strongest" (Ibsen 2019, 2019) person at Rosmersholm, he shows that he does not understand her actions. What Rebekka experienced as a robust

will was simply an unconstrained desire that dissipated once it turned toward Rosmer. Rebekka notes that a change seemed to come over Rosmer once Beate had passed (Ibsen 2019, 182). It is at this time, with no one standing in the way of Rosmer exerting his influence over Rebekka, that she underwent what she describes as "the great change [*omslag*]" (Ibsen 2019, 182).[86] Her account of how Rosmer began to confide in her and share his thoughts with her (Ibsen 2019, 182) can be read as the parasitic Rosmer attaching himself to Rebekka. Her curiously phrased admission that her "ugly, sense-drunken desire"[87] was replaced by "selfless love" (Ibsen 2019, 182) for Rosmer can be understood as her gradual abandonment of passion and activity. The calm she experiences points to her having come to inhabit what Charles R. Lyons describes as an "energy-less state" (Lyons 1972, 116) that seems disconnected from life itself. While it is true, as Maria Løvland notes, that Rebekka's base instincts have been made to subside due to Rosmer's influence (Løvland 2023, 246), I find it difficult to view this change as anything other than a process of weakening.

Rosmer shows himself to be equally powerless in the face of his desire. Rosmer and Rebekka form a bond of interdependence whereby they come to rely on each other for their own well-being or even continued existence. On Rosmer's part this is a clear deviation from the values of Rosmersholm, which emphasize self-sufficiency and mastery of the will. If this tradition can be described, following Kamilla Aslaksen, as characterized by reason, continuity and coherence (Aslaksen 2000, 119), then it seems to have bypassed Rosmer entirely. This is why Rebekka's complaint that Rosmersholm has sapped her strength and "disordered" (*forkluddret*)[88] her will is misplaced. It is Rosmer, not Rosmersholm, that has come to influence Rebekka. Her seemingly offhand distinction between "the ancestral Rosmerian view of life – or *your* view of life, at least" (Ibsen 2019, 183) suggests that she might be aware of the difference between the two. The disorder afflicting her is dervied not from the values of Rosmersholm but rather from the uniquely destructive aspects of Rosmer's character. Rebekka may well be correct in describing the values of Rosmersholm as inimical to joy (Ibsen 2019, 183), but it is Rosmer who takes the radical step of discontinuing the family line. Rosmer's ideals are antithetical to life, as evinced both by his rejection of having children and his inability to live without the support of others. His need for external sources of strength will eventually devolve into a need to incorporate Rebekka's self into his own.

Rosmer's demand that Rebekka sacrifice herself is patterned on a logic of productivity that sees Rosmer formulate a distinction between a productive and an unproductive life, the latter of which is not worth living. He claims to no longer believe in himself, in his project of ennoblement, or in Rebekka (Ibsen 2019, 184). This amounts to a complaint that his life

lacks purpose. When Rebekka counters with the suggestion that life has a purpose in and of itself (Ibsen 2019, 185), Rosmer remains unconvinced, as he equates purpose with meaningfulness. Brendel's fateful suggestion of sacrifice breaks the impasse. Rosmer's newfound belief in the necessity of Rebekka's sacrifice manifests as a compulsion; "*as though compelled against his own will*" he demands that they "put the final balance to the test" (Ibsen 2019, 188). At this stage Rosmer is wholly driven by desire.[89] The comparison can perhaps be made between Rosmer's compulsion and Rebekka's manipulation of Beate (Østerud 1981, 36), but Rebekka at least professes that she never intended to harm Beate and that she knew that what she was doing was wrong. Rosmer, on the other hand, fully intends to do Rebekka harm and does not display any semblance of a conscience. Where Rebekka was in thrall to her desire for Rosmer, he is now compelled by his desire to have her end her life.[90]

In order to accomplish his goal, he must first convince Rebekka to remain at Rosmersholm. He does so by telling Rebekka that her departure would cause him to doubt himself. Hans Sjöbäck notes that Rosmer uses doubt as an instrument to bring about Rebekka's sacrifice: "Rosmer subjects his destructive impulses to such a refined 'refinement' and intellectualization that their real, cruel nature dawns on us only when we begin to reflect on the core of the demand, under the well-polished exterior."[91] There is moreover a transactional aspect to Rosmer's demand. Rebekka is to provide him with a renewed faith in himself and in return she hopes to find redemption for her sins (Ibsen 2019, 190).[92] Her decision to sacrifice herself is the last stage of her tendency to place the needs of others above her own. This tendency on her part fits neatly into the values of Rosmersholm, which prioritize the giving of one's self to others, but is not aligned with Rosmer's insistence on taking from others while refusing to give of himself. She phrases her acceptance of the Rosmersholm tradition as her living in accordance with the "Rosmersholmian" (*rosmersholmske*) view of life.[93] Having internalized the Rosmersholmian value of self-sacrifice, she has become the perfect receptacle for Rosmer's desire. Rebekka now conceives of her purpose in life as providing Rosmer with a purpose in his. The horror of a life lived without purpose informs Rebekka's reasoning in the final scenes. After telling Rosmer that her death will "save the best in you" (Ibsen 2019, 190), Rebekka imagines what her life would be like should she choose to continue living: she would be "like a sea-troll hanging there hampering the ship on which you sail onwards" (Ibsen 2019, 190). Rebekka envisions herself as being reduced to the status of waste to be discarded or, to continue the nautical metaphor, of superfluous ballast, once she has served her purpose. Implicit in this statement is the realization that she can no longer conceive of a life that is not solely dedicated to aiding Rosmer. Her devotion

to him is expressed in the final scene, during a highly charged exchange in which the two appear to meld into one:

ROSMER: We two follow each other, Rebekka. I you and you me.
REBEKKA: I almost think you're right.
ROSMER: Because now we two are one.

(Ibsen 2019, 191)

On Rosmer's part, the dual suicide is the enactment of a desire with cannibalistic and parasitic overtones. The imagery of melding should be understood as Rosmer having consumed Rebekka's will entirely. His demonic craving for total control over Rebekka has been sated, and he can now join Beate and Brendel in the void.

The end of the Rosmer line is brought about by the triumph of one will over another in a struggle for power. Read against the backdrop of a macrohistorical allegory of the rise and fall of civilizations, what we see on the footbridge is a reversion to a state of barbarism that predates the advent of civilization. This point can be clarified by transposing Atle Kittang's comment on Rebekka's development "from strength to weakness, from amoral innocence to moral guilt," which Rebekka divides into the distinct phases of "will, desire and love,"[94] onto a macrohistorical level. The first phase is characterized by a struggle for power in which the individual focuses his or her will on the pursuit of goals benefiting one's self. In the second phase an object of desire is introduced that forces the individual to refocus the will toward cooperating with others, thereby laying the foundation for civilization. In the final stage civilization has become so far removed from a primitive yet vital state that it loses its connection to the natural order of things. When an overcultivated civilization finally falls, the first phase returns in full force. Through Rosmer's death, an overripe civilization is allowed to die. Yet the Rosmer who symbolically officiates over his own wedding while preparing for his death is also a forceful figure who stands in contrast to the failed patriarch of the preceding acts. Rosmer's transformation into the terrifying presence he has always imagined his father to be has best been described by Kittang:

> Because when Rosmer appears both as a kind of nixie [*nøkk*] and as a demonic judge in the final scene, he also merges with the ghostly version of a frightening archaic being: the primal Father, the great Seducer, the enforcer of Power before and above all Law, all discipline and order – and all guilt.[95]

The transformation undergone by Rosmer appears almost inexplicable unless one takes into account the presence within him of an element

of the demonic – a longing for struggle and domination that characterized humanity's pre-civilizational phase. When the overcultivated Rosmer line perishes, it does so in the form of the degenerate Rosmer, whose final moments serve as a testament to how civilization may devolve into barbarism.

Notes

1 "Hun er intrigant og hun elsker ham. Hun vil bli' hans hustru og urokkelig forfølger hun dette mål. Da kommer han efter det og hun vedkender sig det åbent. Så er der ingen livslykke mere for ham. Det dæmoniske vækkes af smerten og bitterheden. Han vil dø, og hun skal dø med ham. Hun gør det." NBO Ms. 4° 1291a, bl. 5. Quoted from www.ibsen.uio.no/DRVIT_Ro%7CRo41291a_5v.xhtml; accessed February 1, 2024.
2 The similarities between *Rosmersholm* and *Ghosts* have been noted by Francis Bull, who observes that both plays feature the tropes of the decaying family and the living dead (Bull 1932, 313).
3 (Chamberlain 1974, 280), (Printz-Påhlson 1991, 187), (Kittang 2002, 241 n. 69), (Sandberg 2015, 145). Curiously, Dipsikha Thakur does not include *Rosmersholm* in her discussion of Gothic elements in Ibsenian drama (Thakur 2018).
4 It would be a mistake to simply equate Rosmer's values with those of his family. To give one example, Kari Slyngstad argues that Rosmer, like his ancestors, is prone to brooding and possesses a highly developed ethical sense (Slyngstad 1969, 91). There is nothing to indicate that Rosmer's forebears were especially pensive, and his actions reveal him to be deeply unethical.
5 "virkelig Frihed," "vort *nuværende* Demokrati," "et *adeligt* Element ind i vort Statsliv, i vor Styrelse, i vor Repræsentation og i vor Presse" (*HIS* 16:502; emphasis in original).
6 "endnu ikke har taget nogen ubodelig Skade under Partitrykket" (*HIS* 16:502).
7 "de menneskelige idealers evighed," "for så vidt som jeg fuldt og trygt tror på idealernes forplantningsevne og på deres udviklingsdygtighed" (*HIS* 16:505).
8 NBO Ms. 4° 1291a, bl. 1r. The note can be dated to the turn of the year 1885/1886 (*HIS* 8K:212). Quotes in the following are from www.ibsen.uio.no/DRVIT_Hv%7CHv41291a_1r.xhtml; accessed February 1, 2024.
9 "*Han*, den fine fornemme natur, som er slået om til et frisindet synspunk og som alle hans tidligere venner og bekendte har trukket sig tilbage fra. Enkemand; har været ulykkelig gift med en tungsindig halvt sindssyg kone, som til slut druknede sig."
10 "*Hun*, hans to døttres opdragerinde, frigjort, varmblodig, noget hensynsløs men under en fin form. Betragtes af omgivelserne som husets onde ånd; er genstand for mistydning og ba[g]vaskelse."
11 "iagttagende; opdukkende lidenskaber"; "geni, landstryger."
12 "*Ældste datter*; holder på at bukke under for uvirksomheden og ensomheden; rig begavelse uden anvendelse derfor."
13 NBO Ms. 4° 1291b. Possibly written in early 1886 (*HIS* 8K:216). Quotes in the following are from www.ibsen.uio.no/DRVIT_Hv%7CHv41291b.xhtml; accessed February 1, 2024.
14 It should be noted that the opening scene is set during Easter week, which can be read as indicative of a theme of spiritual rebirth (Ólafsson 2008, 191).

15 "Det er dog underligt for mig at sidde her – nu i påskeugen – og slet ikke ha' nogen ting at ta' vare på; ikke noget at bære ansvar for."
16 "så blød, som De er; og så alt det nedarvede, som har sat sine mærker i Dem"
17 "Hvad vil du nu ta' dig til – nu midt i din kraftigste alder."
18 NBO Ms. 4° 1291c. Composed in May–June 1886 (*HIS* 8K:219). Ibsen experiments with different names for each character. In order to avoid confusion I will refer to the characters by the names they are given in *Rosmersholm*. Quotes in the following from www.ibsen.uio.no/DRVIT_Hv%7CHv41291c.xhtml; accessed February 1, 2024.
19 "De ting har jeg god rede på, jeg, som samler til slægtens stamtavle" (*HIS* 8:254–255).
20 "interesse for samfundets lavere lag" (*HIS* 8:267).
21 "Så megen begavelse gjort ubrugelig af moralsk smuds" (*HIS* 8:272).
22 "dagens strid"; "forædle frigørelsesarbejdet."
23 "Tror du ikke jeg ser al den uhumskhed, som udviklingen fører med sig og afføder undervejs. Dette er det jeg vil træde op imod, advare imod, afdæmme, bundslå, så strømmen kan flyde ren og klar" (*HIS* 8:289–290).
24 "Jeg vil fortsætte, utrættelig, med at forske og tænke. Jeg vil søge, så vidt muligt, at komme til bunds i tingene. Og så vil jeg leve. Være lykkelig" (*HIS* 8:292).
25 "uklare viljeløse fantaster" (*HIS* 8:313).
26 "Han er ikke med i tiden; står så underlig udenfor det som rører sig. Ser på tingene med øjne som kan ha' været radikale nok for tyve år siden" (*HIS* 8:316).
27 The letter is dated January 2, 1887. "Til Rosmer må De tage den fineste og sarteste skikkelse, teatret har at råde over" (*HIS* 14:379).
28 In the original: "de bedøver så dejligt" (*HIS* 8:334). To "bedøve" means to sedate or render unconscious, as in sedating a patient prior to an operation.
29 Patricia M. Troxel locates Beate within the confines of the estate, and Rebekka without: "While Beata is embodied by the house, Rebecca's power comes from her life and actions outside" (Troxel 1986, 57). I agree with this observation, but not with Troxel's conclusion that the dual suicide at the millrace cancels Beate's influence: "They cancel out Beata's dominance over that spot with their actual sexual climax, something Beata could not achieve. They also succeed because they are outside the house, outside Beata's domain" (Troxel 1986, 57). I see this as a misreading of Beate's place, which by the end of the play has come to include both the estate and the millrace. This equally applies to Rebekka.
30 "den stakkers hjemsøgte" (*HIS* 8:340). Dawkin and Skuggevik omit the association with haunting (Ibsen 2019, 117).
31 The fact that Rosmer takes the side of the children against their father is noteworthy. Atle Kittang reads Mortensgård's radicalism as a reaction against a patriarchal society and includes Rosmer's radicalism in the same category (Kittang 2002, 197). Rosmer's sympathies with the young suggests that he is engaged in a delayed revolt against his father.
32 There is an aspect of the theatrical to Kroll. His fondness for alliteration is readily apparent in comments such as "Hvilke infame grovheder de har trod at turde tillade sig?" (*HIS* 8:333) and "Har forstyrret familjelivets fred for mig" (*HIS* 8:343). It is as though he were reciting poetry on a stage. His alliterations are not conveyed in translation (Ibsen 2019, 114, 119).
33 Ivar Havnevik argues that Rosmer's bookish interests are not necessarily antithetical to life in that they are tied to questions of family and the Rosmer way of life (Havnevik 2006, 158). Havnevik misses the point that Rosmer fails in

his obligation to marry and produce heirs. Rosmer's reading habits are as useless as Alving's reading of old state calendars.

34 Inga-Stina Ewbank argues that *Rosmersholm* represents a shift in Ibsen's oeuvre in that Ibsen has now become "preoccupied, not so much with one single mind defining itself against its surroundings, its own past, etc., as with the interaction between minds, the effect of one mind on another" (Ewbank 1966, 113). Willpower plays an important role in such interactions between minds.

35 The last line in the original: "Rigtig inderlig leve mig ind i den store sandhedens og frihedens verden, som nu er ble't mig åbenbaret" (*HIS* 8:370). To "leve sig ind i," literally "to live oneself into," means to engage with something to such an extent as to identify with it. The expression has strong connotations of activating one's imagination but in this instance also has a double meaning of living in the realm of fantasy.

36 Arild Haaland argues that Rosmer's intellectual pursuits point to an inner strength on Rosmer's part (Haaland 1978, 120). I see Rosmer's focus on reading as tied to his lack of energy.

37 I agree with Schiedermair that Rosmer's failure to have children is a belated revolt against his father: Rosmer rejects "the identification with his father by refusing to become a father himself" (Schiedermair 2019, 10).

38 I am thinking in particular of Helene's description of Alving as a fallen man and her comment to Manders on Alving's lack of premarital purity (Ibsen 2016, 224).

39 Jørgen Haugan considers the political plot as irrelevant, arguing that it simply underscores the plot of erotic love (Haugan 2014, 371). Politics and eroticism are inextricably linked, however, in that the issues of love, marriage, and childbearing are informed by a class dimension.

40 A forceful instance of this tendency is Toril Moi's criticism of Mortensgård:

> Ibsen has placed his protagonists in a world disfigured by egoism, self-aggrandizement, and cynicism. At the end of the play, Brendel's scathing condemnation of Mortensgård stands uncorrected. It is *this* modern world, filled with despicable political maneuvers in equally despicable media, that Rebecca and Rosmer reject. In such a world, Rosmer's naïve and unlivable idealism shines like a beacon. No wonder Rebecca is attracted to him: he must be the only thoroughly good and decent man she has ever met. (Moi 2006, 291; emphasis in original)

Moi extends this line of criticism to include bourgeois democracy as such, arguing that Rosmer and Rebekka "are heartbroken romantics (not moralizing idealists) who cannot bear the world that bourgeois democracy has produced" (Moi 2006, 292). I am strongly opposed to Moi's reading, which fails to take into account the possibility that Rosmer's idealism is presented as worthy of ridicule. Moi is in a sense subscribing to Rosmer's idealism, ignoring the role played by Rosmer's ideals in the events leading to the dual suicide. Moi's reading of Rosmer discounts the troubling aspects of his personality, not least his demonism, and veers close to becoming an indictment of democratic modernity as such.

41 My reading is more in line with that of Theoharis C. Theoharis, who notes that Mortensgård "only hints at the potential scandal that could erupt over Rosmer's presumed sexual liaison with Rebecca. In this regard he cuts a more sympathetic figure than the respectable, sexist Kroll" (Theoharis 1996, 105).

42 Erik Bjerck Hagen views Kroll and Mortensgård as competent and adaptable politicians (Hagen 2015, 164). This is a fitting description, but I would add that Mortensgård is more capable of change than Kroll.
43 As Sandra Saari notes, the two men "both come to Rosmersholm for the same reason: to obtain the weight of the name of Rosmer for their political causes" (Saari 1979, 106). The importance they attach to the Rosmer name is indicative of their shared bourgeois background.
44 Elizabeth Hardwick poses the question why Rebekka did not attach herself to Mortensgård, who might have proven a better fit. Hardwick's answer is that Rebekka is driven by a need to compensate for her low birth: "The question of her own birth likewise inclines her toward the power of the long accumulations of the Rosmer family. Rebecca is too exposed to be a bohemian and a crusader, she wants to be a patrician liberal" (Hardwick 1974, 81). This is an astute observation that aligns Rebekka with Regine. In both cases we are dealing with women who are striving to reach higher than their birth would allow.
45 I have amended the translation of the second line. In the original: "Det arted ud til, – hvad skal jeg kalde det? – til et slags desperat forelskelse" (*HIS* 8:444). As discussed in the chapter on *Ghosts*, "udarte" has strong connotations of degeneracy.
46 There is a recurring imagery of deviation attaching to Beate, as in Rosmer's assertion that he was not to blame for her demise. In the original: "Det var hendes egne forstyrrede hjernenerver, som jog hende ind på de vildsomme afveje" (*HIS* 8:388). An "afvej" is a path leading away from the main or right path. Someone who has embarked on the wrong path can be described as having deviated. This sense of going down the wrong path is best captured by Ellis-Fermor's "drove her so desperately astray" (Ibsen 1976, 60).
47 Beate's upbringing should be distinguished from her actions while married to Rosmer. There is nothing to indicate that Beate was especially impassioned prior to marrying Rosmer, as suggested by Sandra Saari's description of her as having "a passionate nature that was unrequited at Rosmersholm" (Saari 1979, 111).
48 "en Tilintetgjørelse af Ægteskabets Hensigt og Mening overhovedet" (Andreas-Salomé 1893, 85). Daniel Haakonsen argues that Rebekka had sought to convince Beate that a childless marriage can and should be annulled (Haakonsen 1957, 75). But the question then becomes why Beate chose to commit suicide if the marriage could simply have been dissolved.
49 Ellis-Fermor's "groundless and consuming passion of self-reproach" (Ibsen 1976, 60) also retains the association with consumption, unlike Meyer's "illogical and remorseless way she reproached herself" (Ibsen 1980, 59) and McFarlane's "the way she used to reproach herself quite unnecessarily" (Ibsen 1999, 254).
50 A translation along the lines of "strangle all memories" is not the same as "stifle all reminders" (Ibsen 1976, 78), "lay all memories to rest" (Ibsen 1980, 75), or "stifle all memory" (Ibsen 1999, 272).
51 I would note that this combination of erotic desire and a murderous desire directed toward a dead woman has connotations of necrophilia.
52 Fredrik Engelstad discounts the possibility that there may be some inherent weakness to Rosmer, arguing that the suggestion of an inherited familial weakness plays little part in the plot (Engelstad 1992, 158–159). I maintain that Rosmer's weakness is of central importance.

53 "faible, fin de race, incapable de résister aux attaques extérieures et plus encore de se mettre en valeur et d'affirmer hardiment sa foi nouvelle" (Gravier 1979, 129).
54 Ellis-Fermor's "chastening their desires" (Ibsen 1976, 50) is incorrect.
55 Kroll's criticism that Rosmer has "an unexercised sense of judgement" [*en uøvet dømmekraft*]" (*HIS* 8:435) can be related to Rosmer's lack of will. (The translation by Dawkin and Skuggevik [Ibsen 2019, 162] is misleading in that "uøvet" means something that has not been exercised.) Making judgments implies exerting one's will, which Rosmer is unable to do. This line of criticism is later repeated by Kroll in conversation with Rebekka (Ibsen 2019, 166).
56 Nantawan Soonthorndhai makes an interesting observation on this point: "Rosmer's conservative utopianism constantly subverts his desire for meaningful social change by inducing him to embrace resignation and passive withdrawal from the world. Only in his private life – and specifically in the sphere of sexuality – does he vigilantly pursue his conservative vision of complete harmony" (Soonthorndhai 1985, 224).
57 Robert Raphael argues that Rebekka, in trying to impose her values on Rosmer, has compromised "his sense of identity and selfhood" (Raphael 1965, 125). I would turn this argument around and point to how Rebekka has undermined her own sense of self by making herself dependent on Rosmer.
58 Rebekka only becomes aware of her past because of Kroll's intervention, which is why I cannot agree with Leon Katz that her "journey of self-discovery [. . .] is self-engendered" (Katz 2012, 26).
59 Theoharis C. Theoharis' comment that Kroll seeks to demonstrate that Rebekka "is the illegitimate daughter of a prostitute and Dr. West" (Theoharis 1996, 110) is incorrect.
60 Meyer's "you were adopted by Dr West" (Ibsen 1980, 87) is a faulty translation.
61 The argument that Rebekka committed incest derives from Sigmund Freud's essay "Einige Charaktertypen aus der psychoanalytischen Arbeit" (published in 1915; Freud 1946), although Lou Andreas-Salomé had previously made the same observation (Andreas-Salomé 1893, 79; cf. Markotic 1998). Examples of this reading, which tends to focus on Rebekka's refusal of Rosmer's marriage proposal, include (Young 1989), (Møller 1990), (Hemmer 1991), (Fechter 1993), (Wells 1998), and (Wicklund 2005). Criticism has been directed against this line of interpretation by (Dahl 1969), (Gray 1977), and (Johnston 1989). As an aside, Yael Greenberg argues that Rebekka's refusal of Rosmer's proposal stems from her belief that she was responsible for the death of Dr. West (Greenberg 1994, 2017). Jacques Rancière's discussion of the play in *L'Inconscient esthétique* (Rancière 2001) focuses on the place of Sigmund Freud in literary studies and is not relevant to my argument (cf. Ross 2017).
62 Robin Young argues that Rebekka has been "brought up as a member of the gentry" (Young 1989, 120), but I do not see how the adopted daughter of a provincial doctor could be considered a member of the gentry. She has rather been raised in an uncertain position between social classes, which has come to influence her character and actions (Nissen 1931, 111).
63 James Hurt argues for a parallel reading of Rebekka and Rosmer. Rebekka "has been as much enslaved by her past as Rosmer, and her idealistic ambition to liberate Rosmer has been exactly parallel to Rosmer's high-minded plan to liberate his fellow countrymen" (Hurt 1972, 138). This argument can be extended to include a common desire to rid themselves of the burden of their respective pasts.

64 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust I*: "Zwey Seelen wohnen, ach! in meiner Brust, / Die eine will sich von der andern trennen; / Die eine hält, in derber Liebeslust, / Sich an die Welt, mit klammernden Organen; / Die andre hebt gewaltsam sich vom Dust, / Zu den Gefilden hoher Ahnen" (1112–1117).
65 "vitale, sterke Rebekka lar seg påverka av den svake og handlingslamma Rosmer, i den grad at ho følger han i døden."
66 A reading of Brendel as a caricature of idealism finds support in his speech patterns. John Northam notes Brendel's habit of using high-sounding words with connotations of idealism and ending in "-hed" (Northam 1977, 212). I would extend this observation to include Kroll, who does much the same. Examples in the first act include "overbærenhed" (*HIS* 8:335), "lydighed" (343), "skyldighed" (345), "virksomhed" (347), "hæderlighed" (349), and "ærværdighed" (349).
67 Otto Hageberg's argument that there is an erotic element to the relationship between Rosmer and Brendel (Hageberg 1980, 157), while intriguing, rests on insufficient textual evidence.
68 For an overview of Gnostic religion, see (Broek 2006). There is no commonly accepted scholarly definition of Gnosticism, and there is ample debate regarding the distinction between *gnosis*, understood as a particular form of knowledge, and Gnosticism, often used to refer to religious groups in antiquity that deviated in significant ways from Church teachings. These groups proposed different systems of beliefs, which shared a common understanding of the nature of the physical world: "The dominant idea in these systems is the assumption that the world has not been created by the supreme transcendent God, but by a lower, imperfect and even bad Demiurge" (Broek 2006, 404). It is the notion of Brendel commenting on the Demiurge that I wish to explore.
69 NBO Ms.4° 1291d. Quotes in the following are from www.ibsen.uio.no/DRVIT_Ro%7CRo41291d.xhtml; accessed February 1, 2024. The two sections are found on folios 8–10 and folios 38–40. The Brendel character is called Hetman at this stage, but I will refer to him as Brendel.
70 "Al min lære er falsk. Har været falsk i sit første udspring allerede."
71 "Menneskeheden er uhjælpelig."
72 "der var en fejl ved skabelsen fra først af."
73 "fejlen var der"; "Mesteren har forrådt sig, min gut."
74 "Men en gang imellem kunde mesteren slumpe til at være uheldig. Enten han nu ikke var rigtig oplagt, eller han havde forhastet sig, eller hvad det kunde være. Hvad gør så min herr Urian? Jo, han lægger hodet på skakke. Ser på sit værk med en kendermine. Mønstrer det fra alle kanter. Og så siger han: dette her, – det er, død og pine, godt. Såre godt."
75 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust I*: "Die Hexen zu dem Brocken ziehn, / Die Stoppel ist gelb, die Saat ist grün. / Dort sammelt sich der große Hauf, / Herr Urian sitzt oben auf" (3956–3959). As Atle Kittang notes, Rebekka's comment "Oh, it's stifling in here!" (Ibsen 2019, 187) following Brendel's departure is also a reference to *Faust* (Kittang 2002, 230).
76 "Æd, drik, og vær glad, min skønne frøken."
77 "Nå, der er da i alle fald den udvej at gøre slut på det hele."
78 In the working manuscript Brendel is preoccupied with the redistribution of land. He guards this idea with "jealous love" ("skinsyg kærlighed," folio 9), which further accentuates the erotic component of his refusal to share his ideas.
79 In the original: "Jeg bærer ikke dette øde, – denne forfærdelige tomhed, – dette, – dette –" (*HIS* 8:484) There is a double meaning attaching to "øde," which in

the Danish of the time could mean both "empty" and "destiny." (Modern Danish instead uses "skæbne"; Swedish has retained the use of "öde.")

80 Readings that portray Rosmer as an honest idealist are commonplace in Ibsen scholarship. Other examples include (Gravier 1979), (Saari 1979), (Haakonsen 1981), (Durbach 1985), (Leland 1991), (Voigt 1992), and (Ystad 1996).

81 "Han minder i denne brutale Egoisme om Rebekka selv, da hun gik og længtede efter Beates Død; endog hendes Fantasi synes at være gaaet over paa ham. Men denne Lighed er ikke umotiveret; den skyldes heller ikke bare gjensidig Smitte: den har sin Grund i hin Viljesvaghedens Egoisme, som ikke kan leve uden Troen paa andre, uden Støtte, uden Rygstød; i en splittet, holdningsløs Aands Selvopholdelsesdrift, for hvilken den virkelige Kjærlighed til Rebekka i Øieblikket træder ganske tilbage" (Andreas-Salomé 1893, 99).

82 Rosmer's infatuation with his mirror image is an instance of narcissistic self-love. Henriksen notes that the element of water is associated with devotion and a longing for love (Henriksen 1974b, 63), which suggests a reading of the dual suicide as a narcissistic act.

83 In the original: "Jeg havde så frisk og så modig en vilje, da jeg kom hid. Nu er jeg bøjet ind under en fremmed lov. – Herefterdags tror jeg ikke, jeg tør vove mig til nogen verdens ting" (*HIS* 8:472). The translation by Dawkin and Skuggevik (Ibsen 2019, 179) omits the mention of Rebekka's will. The connotations of health attaching to "frisk" also tend to disappear in translation. Ellis-Fermor: "I'd such courage when I came here and such a strong will" (Ibsen 1976, 105). Meyer: "When I first came here, I was so alive and fearless" (Ibsen 1980, 98). McFarlane: "When I first came here, I had some spirit; I wasn't afraid to do things" (Ibsen 1999, 297).

84 In the original: "min modige, fribårne vilje" (*HIS* 8:475), "min egen modige vilje" (*HIS* 8:477). A literal translation would be "my brave, free will" and "my own brave will."

85 The nautical terminology is absent from translations that simply refer to "a battle for life" (Ibsen 1976, 107), "a fight for survival" (Ibsen 1980, 100), or "a fight to the death" (Ibsen 1999, 299).

86 It should be noted that "omslag" is also used by Kroll to describe Rosmer's fall (*HIS* 8:396, 442).

87 In the original: "stygge, sansedrukne begær" (*HIS* 8:478). "Sansedrukne" should be understood as one's senses becoming overwhelmed. The word points to a lack of control that is difficult to convey in translation: "this ugly passion, this delirium of the senses" (Ibsen 1976, 108), "that blinding, sickening passion" (Ibsen 1980, 101), "that horrible, sensual passion" (Ibsen 1999, 300).

88 *HIS* 8:477. "Forkluddret" has overtones of deviation and can be understood as bringing into disorder or leading astray. The word has no exact equivalent in English and is often omitted in translation (Ibsen 1976, 108, 1980, 100, 1999, 300).

89 Maria Løvland describes the change in Rosmer as "the demonic side of Rosmer taking over" (Løvland 2023, 214; "Nå er det den demoniske sida av Rosmer som overtar"). Unfortunately, for my purposes, Løvland does not expand upon this observation and does not examine the exact nature of Rosmer's demonic traits.

90 Ewa Partyga offers an intriguing reading of Rosmer's suicide as motivated by a need to prove that his identity is of his own making: "Coming to the conclusion that there is no fundament he could build himself and his world upon, he realizes that he has to construct such a fundament by proving that he really is

what he stands for. [. . .] Rosmer's suicide can be thus interpreted as a performance by which he finally establishes his new, 'real' self, and persuasively tells his-story, a story of a strong, autonomous subject" (Partyga 2014, 71). This reading is based on the assumption that Rosmer's identity at this stage is not comparable to his past self. I am arguing the opposite, that Rosmer unmasks and reveals his true self in the final act.

91 "Rosmer utsätter sina destruktiva impulser för en så raffinerad 'förfining' och intellektualisering att deras verkliga, grymma natur går upp för oss först när vi börjar reflektera över kravets kärna, under det välpolerade skalet" (Sjöbäck 1984, 44).

92 I disagree with Elizabeth Hardwick's reading of Rebekka's agreement to the plan: "When Rebecca agrees to kill herself in the millstream it is not expiation but a furious disappointment in Rosmer and disgust with herself" (Hardwick 1974, 83). I think this is overstating the case, and I instead see Rebekka as having resigned to her fate.

93 "Men jeg er under det rosmersholmske livssyn – *nu*" (*HIS* 8:495). Dawkin and Skuggevik's "Rosmerian" (Ibsen 2019, 190) elides the distinction between Rosmer's values and those of Rosmersholm.

94 "frå styrke til veikskap, frå amoralsk uskuld til moralsk skuld"; "vilje, begjær og kjærleik" (Kittang 2002, 225).

95 "For når Rosmer framstår både som ein slags nøkk og som demonisk dommar i sluttscenen, glir han også saman med den spøkelsesaktige versjonen av eit skremmande arkaisk vesen: Urfaren, den store Forføraren, Maktas handhevar før og over all Lov, all tukt og orden – og all skuld" (Kittang 2002, 234). A "nøkk" refers to Nøkken (Näcken in Swedish), a spirit in Scandinavian folklore who lures people into drowning, often by playing enchanting music.

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3 Dominance and Deviance
Hedda Gabler (1890)

Hedda Gabler presents us with a degeneration plot focused on an upper-class woman who engages in gender transgression by adopting the characteristics of an idealized masculinity. I will argue that Hedda effectively considers herself more of a man than a woman, a circumstance that ultimately derives from her upbringing. Hedda has been raised by her father, the late general Gabler, and has come to internalize his values. Her mother having passed away, Hedda has had no female counterbalance to her father's patriarchal influence. Ibsen's remark in a letter to Moritz Prozor that Hedda is more "her father's daughter than her husband's wife" signals the importance to Hedda of her father's values but can also be read as a comment on the consequences of her mother's death.[1] Following Jack Halberstam, I will argue that Hedda embodies a type of female masculinity rooted in what would at the time have been considered a faulty upbringing. The root cause of Hedda's gender transgression is the imbalance between paternal and maternal influence occasioned by her mother's passing; she has too much of the male and not enough of the female in her. This imbalance in turn leads her to enact a female masculinity that sets her apart from those female characters who represent a more traditional ideal of bourgeois domesticity, specifically Aunt Julle and Thea Elvsted. In the parlance of the time, Hedda's female masculinity marks her as a degenerate, and the emphasis placed on her upbringing as the source of her degeneracy suggests that morbid heredity should be considered a central element of the play. Hedda's female masculinity does not, however, imply that she is a homosexual. This is a line of interpretation that finds some purchase in modern Ibsen scholarship, but which I think is based on a false equivalence between female masculinity and homosexuality. I will take recourse to contemporary literature on sexology and psychology in order to demonstrate that the female masculinity exhibited by Hedda would have been immediately recognizable to Ibsen's peers but would not automatically have been conflated by them with homosexuality.

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A reading of Hedda as a woman who thinks of herself as a man, and more importantly acts like a man, will necessarily focus on the paradoxical nature of the threat that Hedda poses to bourgeois patriarchy. Hedda's female masculinity makes her a more consistent and dedicated proponent of patriarchy than Tesman and Løvborg, who represent variations on the trope of the failed patriarch. Tesman's male femininity mirrors Hedda's female masculinity; Løvborg's incontinence echoes the inability of Alving and Rosmer to constrain their impulses. Hedda's closest parallel, in terms of enacting masculinity, is Judge Brack. Hedda is driven by a need to dominate strong men; she finds satisfaction in dominating men whom she considers worthy adversaries. This lust for power is a masculine trait, and one that Brack exhibits to Hedda's detriment. Hedda engages in a form of rivalry, in particular with Løvborg, which sees her seek to display her dominance over him by asserting control over Thea. Hedda's need for domination over men, while coded as a male trait, is to my mind the single most significant aspect of her female masculinity, in that it drives Hedda's actions throughout the play. It is also a "demonic" trait, explicitly labeled as such by Ibsen.[2] The label of demonic, having previously been applied to Rosmer, calls for a reading of Hedda as a destructive force with little regard for the well-being of others – in other words as a female variation on the trope of the upper-class degenerate.

My reading of *Hedda Gabler* as an instance of Ibsen's degeneration plots follows a well-established tradition going back to the play's initial reception. While the critical reception does not prove an intent on Ibsen's part to portray Hedda as a degenerate, I nonetheless find it noteworthy that degeneration discourse thoroughly permeated the play's reception.[3] An early example can be found in Georg Brandes' review, in which he describes Hedda as "a true degenerate type, without skill, without real ability, without even the capacity for spiritual or sensual devotion; she *cannot* even momentarily enter into another."[4] Brandes finds no redeeming qualities in Hedda's character and is therefore unmoved by her death. Gerhard Gran adopts a more sympathetic view in his review of the play but faults Hedda her lust for power: "no kind of relationship with other people entices her, not without her being able to have the pleasure of tinkering with the thread of a human destiny with her cruel hands."[5] In an anonymous pamphlet, Hanna Andresen Butenschøn assigns blame to both Hedda's milieu and her own self, describing Hedda as a woman who "through her own fault and the misfortune of fate, has her deepest female instincts distorted and displaced and comes to breathe in an air where all her peculiar faults come out like large, smelly poison flowers that end up killing her."[6] Brandes, Gran and Butenschøn all evince a degree of distaste for the character of Hedda and regard her as decidedly abnormal. The association of Hedda and degeneracy becomes even clearer in Herman Bang's lengthy

essay on the play. Bang uses an imagery of overcultivation and familial decay to explain Hedda's degeneracy: she was born into "a large and old society, where the life of the nerves is refined, where the life of the senses is refined, where desires have had time to tire themselves out."[7] Bang reads Hedda as a woman who overvalues her beauty and whose self-admiration leads her to distance herself from everyday life. Wilting from disuse, her capacity for translating her potential into action becomes atrophied:

> As Narcissus withered over the spring, Hedda Gabler has slowly withered from life, behind her mirrors. Every ability that we do not use withers and dies. It is law. But all the abilities in the soul that turn outwards, that turns eagerly to act or yearningly towards other people, towards fellow human beings – all those abilities have remained unused in Hedda: the ability to become tied in friendship, the ability of devotion, the ability to sacrifice, the ability to help, to give – they have not been used and they have died out. She was not in any real spiritual relationship with any fellow human being, and now she can no longer do that at all.[8]

Bang connects Hedda's narcissism to the issue of childbearing and regards Hedda's refusal of motherhood as the play's central theme. Hedda's lack of vitality and nonexistent propensity for motherhood brings about the end of the Gabler line: "The ability to love is dead, desire is subdued, the continuation of the family is denied."[9]

These Scandinavian readings can be compared to similar readings appearing in a broader European context.[10] Camille Bellaigue's review in *Revue des Deux Mondes* frames Hedda as a threat to civilization itself. Hedda represents "an evil from which centuries of culture and refined civilization such as ours suffer and may die from: the perversion of the moral sense by the intellectual sense."[11] Bellaigue clarifies this evil as "the sacrifice of the Good [. . .] to all the fantasies, to all the mirages, the most insane and the most criminal, which diseased minds and deranged imaginations, under the pretext of aesthetics and art, can become enamored with."[12] Bellaigue's indictment of Hedda's personality differs from Maximilian Harden's focus on Hedda's milieu in his review in *Die Gegenwart*. Harden blames society for Hedda's inability to find a vocation in life:

> Up to this point, not a trace of a "hereditary burden" or a unique abnormality can be discovered; we have all seen dozens of such higher daughters, unoccupied all their lives, irritable, miserable and unhappily coquettish, who, cleverer and cooler than the hetaeras, know how to acquire [financial] support for all times through what remains of their beauty.[13]

Harden expands on his argument in a later essay in which he compares Hedda's familial inheritance to that of Julie in Strindberg's *Miss Julie* (*Fröken Julie*, 1888):

> They are both descended from the old warrior nobility and have in common a depravity, derived from generational degeneration, a lust for dangerous play with prickly words, with loose love-affairs, with bare weapons. Julie is a miss, Hedda is not a woman.[14]

Harden elaborates on the latter point by linking Hedda's disdain for motherhood to degeneracy:

> She was not a woman, she did not want a child, she could not even nourish a single thought of her own. She was barren, unfit for life, the tragic type of a degenerate and impoverished feudal family which is no longer capable of fighting in the struggle of life.[15]

Even more condemnatory is Lou Andreas-Salomé's chapter on the play. Andreas-Salomé sees Hedda as "a distorted, malformed exceptional creature"[16] who does not deserve our sympathy. Hedda's lack of vocation compels her to manipulate others in order to overcome "the ennui of total inactivity."[17] If Hedda were to gaze inward, she would simply see "a dark emptiness out of which pure negation stares back at her."[18] Hedda finally comes to realize that she has nothing to contribute to the lives of others; she is "completely superfluous."[19] Andreas-Salomé finds nothing heroic or tragic in Hedda's suicide, as it is simply an expression of her emptiness: "a shot – a nothing."[20] Although highly critical of the Hedda character, Andreas-Salomé's reading is nonetheless philosophically grounded. She argues that Hedda's existential despair emanates from the gradual realization that she has wasted her life and that her continued existence benefits no one. Andreas-Salomé's analysis prefigures Leonardo F. Lisi's reading (Lisi 2018) of Hedda's suicide as an act of wasteful nihilism, an interpretation that will inform my own.

A reading of Hedda's suicide as essentially meaningless stands in contrast to a tendency in Ibsen scholarship of reading Hedda as a heroic character. I find this tendency to make Hedda out to essentially be an innocent victim of an oppressive bourgeois system puzzling, especially taking into account Ibsen's insistence on the demonic aspects of her character. Readings abound that view Hedda's lust for power as a reaction to a society that deprives women of agency (Fjørtoft 1986, 59), her *ennui* as an unavoidable consequence of the limits imposed on women at the time (Garton 1994, 122), and her suicide as an act of defiance against a corrupt society (Northam 1973, 184). Toril Moi takes this line of interpretation a few

steps further by engaging in what I consider to be an idealization of Hedda, reading her as a tragic heroine whose fate is due to the harsh realities of bourgeois society:

> Apart from Hedda, nobody in this play appears to know what it might mean to have high ideals. Løvborg might have been an exception, but if so, his erstwhile idealism has not survived his self-destructive tendencies. *Hedda Gabler* thus inaugurates a new phase in Ibsen's modernism, one in which idealism comes across as a baffling anachronism, yet, as in the case of Hedda, as an anachronism that has more splendor than the mediocrities that surround her. In *Hedda Gabler*, moreoever, the everyday is a negative force. More than anything else, Hedda's constant and intense sense of *boredom* signals the change.
>
> (Moi 2006, 318; emphasis in original)

This reading is aligned with Moi's reading of *Rosmersholm* as an indictment of bourgeois modernity and is equally problematic.[21] Moi does not take into account the possibility that Hedda's boredom is the outward expression of an underlying malaise that has little to do with her present circumstances. Readings of Hedda as a victim of society deprive her of both agency and guilt. There is no contradiction in stating that Hedda's development as a human being has been stunted by her social milieu but that society is not the sole cause of her destructive lust for power. While bourgeois patriarchy is certainly to blame for enforcing conformity on a woman entirely unsuited to a bourgeois ideal of domesticity, her need for domination is an illustration of what happens when bourgeois patriarchy does not function as intended. This need, which I as noted regard as a masculine trait, is tied to Hedda's female masculinity and derives from the failure on the part of her father to socialize Hedda into an appropriate set of gender norms. Hedda's male-oriented upbringing constitutes a deviation from a system that would under normal circumstances have produced women such as Aunt Julle and Thea Elvsted, who seem well-suited to exist within the strictures of bourgeois patriarchy. By making Hedda out to be a heroine who rebels against bourgeois patriarchy, the apparent contentedness of the other women is effaced. The root cause of Hedda's demonism, which is to say her lust for power over strong men, lies not in bourgeois patriarchy as such but in her (and her father's) deviation from the same. In this Hedda is fully comparable to Rosmer, whose deviation from the traditions of the Rosmer family leads to similarly destructive results.

It is worth taking a closer look at the content of the values Hedda has inherited from her father. What I will refer to as Hedda's patrician ideals can be summarized as a fascination with beauty, chivalry, and forceful action, on the one hand, and an expectation of having others serve her

and place her needs before their own, on the other hand. To borrow Jørgen Haugan's phrasing, Hedda lives "in a past world according to certain norms that are out of date."[22] Standing in opposition to the bourgeois Tesmans, Hedda's ideals are those of an aristocrat, as Caroline W. Mayerson argues:

> The aristocrat possesses, above all, courage and self-control. He expresses himself through direct and independent action, living to capacity and scorning security and public opinion. Danger only piques his appetite, and death with honor is the victory to be plucked from defeat. But the recklessness of this Hotspur is tempered by a disciplined will, by means of which he "beautifully" orders both his own actions and those of others on whom his power is imposed.
>
> (Mayerson 1950, 156)

Hedda's textual predecessors Alving and Rosmer failed to live up to similar ideals of self-discipline and continence of will. Much like these fallen patriarchs, Hedda represents a social order that has survived well beyond its prime. And yet she acts as though the patrician order were still intact, and treats the members of her household as servants (Blau 1953, 115). *Hedda Gabler* thus enacts a struggle for supremacy between Hedda's class, which belongs to the past, and the bourgeoisie of the Tesmans, which surrounds her in the present. (Judge Brack and Løvborg, by contrast, occupy in-between positions; Brack moves in the same social circles as Hedda, and Løvborg comes from money.) Hedda's rejection of motherhood is the final piece of the puzzle that puts an end to the patrician order, whereas the bourgeoisie of the Tesmans appears to thrive with the promise of a union between Tesman and Thea Elvsted. While the Gabler family line ends with Hedda, the now fully bourgeois Tesman line will continue into the future. As Evert Sprinchorn notes, we are witnessing the last gasp of an "aristocratic class that has been pretty much replaced by the bourgeoisie, leaving behind only a few relics like Hedda" (Sprinchorn 2020, 461). When read against the backdrop of a decrepit old order being replaced by a young and energetic class, Hedda's death is an end that paves the way for societal renewal.

I will pursue my reading of *Hedda Gabler* within the framework of a set of interrelated thematic concerns: an economic logic centered on the conflict between saving or spending one's resources, a dynamic of waste and usefulness that is tied to Hedda's lack of vocation in life, and Hedda's lust for power and rivalry with men. I will argue that earlier scholarship has tended to overlook the importance of economy as a determinant in relationships between characters. Repeated references to money are accompanied by an attitude on the part of the Tesmans of viewing Hedda

as an asset with which to increase one's prestige. Aunt Julle believes that Hedda will enhance the social standing of the Tesmans, whereas Tesman focuses on how his marriage to Hedda will increase his standing among other bourgeois men. Aunt Julle and Tesman are both preoccupied with managing their resources and investing wisely and exhibit a mode of thinking in terms of saving and spending that comes across as decidedly bourgeois, as opposed to Hedda's extravagant spending habits. The Tesmans' literally-minded mode of thinking about money is complemented by an imagery centered on overspending and wastefulness that is linked to the non-expenditure of energy. In Hedda's case there is a causal relationship between her inability to channel her energy into a worthwhile task. Her sense of having wasted her potential is first expressed as simple boredom but continues to build until it culminates in her suicide.

Her lack of a vocation in life establishes a clear link between her and the similar cases of Alving and Ulrik Brendel. The topic of vocation is addressed in conversation between Hedda and Brack and relates to her female masculinity in that the same demand for productivity that applies to men such as Alving also applies to Hedda. What she lacks is the ability to engage in, to quote Leonardo F. Lisi, "a task through which we can express our identity, our own personal presence in the world by means of the product that we bring about" (Lisi 2018, 30). Hedda's understanding of a meaningful task is one that is "courageous and beautiful" (Lisi 2018, 34), a viewpoint that echoes her father's patrician values. Unable to identify such a task, and unwilling to settle for the more traditional role of mother and wife, Hedda engages in a struggle for supremacy with the men in her life. I subscribe to Ross Shideler's explanation for Hedda's actions in this regard, which are motivated by the failure of men such as Tesman to live up to the masculine ideals of her father: "Her ambition to dominate comes, first, from her upbringing in the General's patriarchy and, second, from the vacuum surrounding her" (Shideler 1999, 93). Hedda is reacting to what she perceives as the unmanliness of Tesman. She is acting in accordance with a dialectic of strength and weakness that prevents her from finding satisfaction in dominating the weak-willed Tesman. Joan Templeton has observed that Ibsen, in his depiction of Hedda's marriage to Tesman, "reverses traditional masculine and feminine qualities in Mr. and Mrs. Tesman more strongly than in any other of his couples" (Templeton 1997, 230). It will therefore not suffice to merely state that Hedda dislikes living among the Tesmans; her distaste for her bourgeois surroundings is rooted in her view of Tesman as a man who fails to live up to her ideals of masculinity. When Løvborg reenters her life Hedda sees an opportunity to rehabilitate him, an undertaking that would in a sense restore the authority of the patriarchal order she grew up in. By redeeming Løvborg, Hedda is transforming him into a man whom she could take

pride in dominating. Her rivalry with Løvborg over Thea is one element of a struggle for supremacy, which sees Hedda attempt to assert her position as an insider in the patriarchal order. Unlike the failed males Tesman and Løvborg, however, Brack proves too strong for Hedda to dominate. Brack's victory over Hedda is both a reassertion of male supremacy within bourgeois patriarchy and a rejection of the element of degeneracy that Hedda represents in this context.

August Strindberg's "For Payment" as intertext

A reading of *Hedda Gabler* as a degeneration plot seems particularly appropriate when taking into account Ibsen's source material. Earlier scholarship has noted the similarities between the play and August Strindberg's short story "For Payment" ("Mot betalning"), published in the second volume of *Getting Married* (*Giftas*, 1886).[23] I regard Strindberg's story as his most explicit engagement with degeneration discourse in literary form, and the parallels between the two texts cannot be explained in any other way than Ibsen having read Strindberg's story. The importance of "For Payment" to Ibsen's play has not been the subject of close analysis and remains insufficiently acknowledged. Even a brief summary of "For Payment" will, however, demonstrate that the texts are based on a common central trope: that of the degenerate upper-class woman who seeks to dominate men.[24]

In Strindberg's story the protagonist Helène, the daughter of a general, has grown up surrounded by men, her mother having died when Helène was young. Helène's upbringing has been one of privilege, and her status has instilled in her a sense of superiority: "And as she was the general's daughter, she was accorded the same honor as her father. She had the rank of general, and she knew it."[25] She has grown accustomed to men doing her bidding and is dismissive of tasks associated with femininity: "She was used to commanding and being obeyed, she could never obey anyone. The free male life among men had also given her a decided aversion to female occupations."[26] She refuses to conform to the roles assigned by nature to women. Helène's degeneracy is explained as the impact of generations of her forebears having lived in a manner as to invite degeneracy:

> Belonging to an old family which on the paternal side had mismanaged its power on soulless military pursuits, night vigils, gluttony and drunkenness, and which on the maternal side had suppressed fertility to prevent division of the estate, nature seemed to have hesitated at the last moment in determining her sex, or perhaps not having enough force to decide on the continuation of the race. Her figure lacked a definite

> feminine character such as a healthy nature produces for its purposes, and she did nothing to remedy the defects by artifice.[27]

The understanding of heredity underlying this passage distinguishes between sets of traits inherited from one's forefathers and traits inherited from one's foremothers. Helène's forefathers have wasted their energy on fruitless activities, while her foremothers have sought to inhibit their fertility in order not to divide the family's wealth among too many inheritors. These sets of traits, both having to do with the husbandry of vital energy, have not complemented each other to form a stable median, but rather combine to aggravate Helène's inherited degeneracy.

Helène displays a disgust toward sexual activity, which comes to the fore when she witnesses two horses mating. Her reaction is one of horror: "Helène wanted to flee, for the scene filled her with horror. She had never seen the fury of the forces of nature in living bodies, and she felt perturbed to the uttermost by this unveiled outburst."[28] After this episode she immerses herself in Romantic literature and fantasizes about a life devoid of carnality. She refuses to contemplate marriage and childbearing: "That she was called to live for the family, that she had an obligation to promote the germination and growth of the seeds nature had deposited in her body, this she rejected."[29] She tries her hand at literature, submitting a poem entitled (not so subtly) "Sapfo" to a magazine, only to have it rejected. After her father's passing, she finds herself forced to consort with the bourgeoisie, and comes to understand that she must marry in order to retain some modicum of individual liberty. She is courted by a docent, Albert, who claims to share in her Romantic idealism and whom she marries. Helène, however, refuses to consummate the marriage, declaring that love is incompatible with carnal desire. Albert soon comes to despise Helène, but his love for her prevents him from leaving her.

Helène longs to reclaim her place at the higher echelons of society and uses her connections to secure Albert a professorship and a place as member of parliament. She manipulates him into proposing a bill to criminalize prostitution, at which point he realizes that she is using him to advance her idealist agenda. He directs his rage not at her but at the women's liberation movement, which he sees as an attempt to liberate one's self from nature: "What hellish rot lay beneath this mendacious morality, this insane rage for emancipation from healthy nature, the ascetic theories of idealism and Christianity implanted in the nineteenth century."[30] When he threatens not to propose the bill, she secures his support by consenting to intercourse. He considers this a form of prostitution and is surprised when she appears to revel in her triumph: "Then she appeared! Calm, smiling, triumphant; but more beautiful than he had seen her before."[31] She reverts to refusing sex, thereby subjugating him further: "He crawled like a dog after her,

obeyed her slightest beckoning, did everything she wanted, but in vain."[32] To make matters worse, he discovers that she has been employing contraception without his knowledge. He sees her rejection of motherhood as proof that her class has degenerated utterly: "Was the upper class degenerate as it no longer wanted to reproduce, or was it morally rotten."[33] The story concludes with his realization that he will never be able to leave her, because he loves her.

This short plot summary demonstrates that the similarities between "For Payment" and *Hedda Gabler* are extensive and far-reaching. In Strindberg's story a manipulative upper-class woman is labeled a degenerate and derided as unnatural. Her actions threaten the continuation of her family line and by extension the survival of the patrician order to which she belongs. There is nothing inherently tragic in the plot of "For Payment," however, and the story boils down to a diatribe against the women's liberation movement. When Ibsen expands on the plot of Strindberg's story, he adds an element of tragedy in the form of Hedda's suicide but retains the central characters of Helène/Hedda and her subjugated husband Albert/Tesman. The core of the plot, that of a degenerate woman who seeks to dominate men, remains intact. The trope of the dominating woman is central to Ibsen's conception of *Hedda Gabler*, and can be identified in his earliest notes to the play. As we shall see by turning to his notes and working manuscripts, the concept of degeneration informs his writing process from start to finish.

Degeneration in Ibsen's notes to *Hedda Gabler*

Ibsen's preserved notebooks and working manuscripts for *Hedda Gabler* are collected under the catalogue headings NBO Ms.8° 809, 1942, and 2638–39. The precise dating of the materials is difficult to establish and I will simply adopt the chronology suggested in *Henrik Ibsens skrifter*, along with the editors' designation of the individual manuscripts contained in each catalogue item (manuscripts 1 through 10; cf. *HIS* 9K:111).[34] Apart from materials containing notes of varying length we also have access to a lengthy working manuscript (NBO Ms.8° 808). I will in the following delineate how the theme of degeneration develops by examining Ibsen's notes in chronological order.

Manuscript 1 contains one of Ibsen's earliest notes, a brief description of a man and a woman: "The pale, seemingly cold beauty. Great demands on life and on the joy of life [*livsglæde*]. He, who has now finally defeated her, uncouth in person, but honorable and gifted free-thinking scientist."[35] This description establishes the Hedda character as a paradoxical figure, seemingly detached from life while at the same time having a lust for life. The key concept "livsglæde" establishes an intertextual connection to *Ghosts*. This echo of Alving establishes the Hedda character as someone who wishes to enjoy life but is unable to do

so. While coldness implies control, "seemingly" suggests some external restraint being imposed on her, as though she were forced to restrain herself from pursuing the joy of life.

Manuscript 2, a notebook that can be dated to April 1890 (*HIS* 9K:113), contains notes fleshing out the main character, who is now called Hedda, and her relationship to the other characters. The Løvborg character, here referred to as Holger, has completed a manuscript in which he criticizes contemporary society: "The manuscript that H. L. leaves behind states that the human task is: Upward, towards the light-bringer [*lysbringeren*]. Life on the current social basis is not worth living. Therefore fantasize away from it. By drink, etc."[36] The reference to the "light-bringer," or Lucifer, suggests that there is something demonic in the Løvborg character. He is unable to control his urges: "H. L's despair lies in the fact that he wants to control the world but cannot control himself."[37] He is portrayed as a gifted person, as evinced by the failure of others to understand his manuscript: "What an irony over the human pursuit of development and progress."[38] His personality also seems incomprehensible, even to the Thea character: "She can only guess but cannot understand his way of thinking."[39] Perhaps part of this can be attributed to his "double nature," his ability to "realize the lowly bourgeois" in order to "win support for his great central thought."[40] The picture that emerges of Løvborg is that of a gifted man whose inability to constrain his urges contributes to his downfall.

Manuscript 4 provides a substantial amount of information on Hedda's background, personality, and present circumstances. The first three pages of general commentary appear to have been written earlier than the subsequent pages, 4–46. The latter are labeled "Notes" ("Optegnelser") and may have been written in August–October 1890 (*HIS* 9K:131). There is an intriguing connection between the first three pages and a comment in manuscript 3 that concerns the rejection of the laws of nature: "They say: it is a law of nature. Well, but then you oppose it. Demand it abolished. Why retreat. Why surrender for grace and disgrace."[41] This comment can be compared to a comment in manuscript 4: "'The apostate's' defence of the cultured man. The mustang and the racehorse. Drinks – eats paprika. House and clothes Revolution against the laws of nature – but not [. . .] before the position is secured."[42] The idea of liberating one's self from the strictures of natural laws serves as a bridge between manuscripts 3 and 4. These comments introduce the motif of transgression against the laws of nature. A desire to transgress comes across as Hedda's defining characteristic in the subsequent "Optegnelser." One note, helpfully labeled "Main points" ("Hovedpunkter"), reads as follows:

1.) They are not all cut out to be mothers.
2.) Sensuality is in them, but they are afraid of scandal.
3.) They feel that there are life tasks at this time, but they cannot get hold of them.[43]

Most importantly for my analysis is the third comment, which indicates that Hedda's inability to engage in worthwhile pursuits threatens to render her a useless person. The theme of lack of vocation is emphasized in another note: "The mutual hate among women. The women have no influence on external state affairs. Therefore, they want to have 'influence over the souls'[.] And so many have no purpose in life (the lack of this is a legacy)."[44] This could be read as society constricting the ability of women to engage in productive activity. A few other notes may possibly relate to Hedda's existential despair: "The play will be about 'the insurmountable,' the craving and striving for something that is against convention, against what is accepted in the minds, – also in Hedda's."[45] This comment suggests a lineage from Helene Alving and Rebekka to Hedda, all of whom are women who feel constrained by societal conventions. To this can be added a comment on the role of women in effecting change in society:

> It is about the "underground forces and powers." The woman as a miner: Nihilism. Father and mother belonging to different ages. The female underground revolution in thinking The slave-fear outwards against the outside.[46]

If society is to blame for women being unable to find a vocation in life, it would be incumbent on women to change the facts of their lives by going on the offensive toward the restrictive structures holding them back, a process that can be likened to "nihilism," modern women acting as dynamitards who bring about the destruction of an oppressive social order. Hedda would in this context be a woman who is unable to break free of the strictures of convention. She understands that there are great tasks to engage in but is unable to contribute directly to reforming society, and instead seeks to achieve influence over others.

The image of Hedda can be fleshed out using notes that relate to her personality and appearance. Her physical appearance seems linked to her class status: "Nobly shaped distinguished face with fine waxy skin."[47] She has sparse hair and conveys a graceful impression, "Calm manners," but there is a coldness to her eyes: "The eyes are steel-coloured, with a dull sheen."[48] She is fascinated by the cause of the radicals: "Hedda feels demonically attracted to the trends of the time. But the courage is lacking. It remains theory, feeble dreams."[49] Her past is accentuated with reference to the disgrace of her father: "Then comes the story of the general's 'disgrace,' dismissal, etc. The most terrible thing for a ball-lady is not to be feted for her own sake."[50] As opposed to Hedda, the Løvborg character is clearly associated with the future. His manuscript bears the title "The philosophy of the future culture. Moral doctrine,"[51] indicating that his

manuscript outlines a potential for human advancement as well as a prescriptive ethics. There is no indication that Hedda would be able to contribute to his cause. The concept of vocation is highlighted in connection with the attempt by Tesman and Thea Elvsted to reassemble the manuscript: "It is a wonderful thing to work towards a goal."[52] Hedda shows no interest in having children and rejects bourgeois ideals of domesticity, expressing indifference to the health of Tesman's sickly aunt:

> I don't understand people who make sacrifices. Now look at old Miss Rising. There she has a paralyzed sister lying in the house – for years. Do you think she thinks it a sacrifice to live for this poor creature, who is a burden even to herself? Oh far from it! On the contrary. I do not understand it.[53]

Her reasoning extends to children: "H. talks about how children have always been a horror to her too."[54] She even rejects the notion of familial love: "Hedda takes a strong, albeit unclear, stand against the opinion that one must love 'family.' The aunts are nothing to her."[55] She appears to be pregnant but is afraid of what her pregnancy will bring about: "Hedda is completely preoccupied with the child that is to come, but when it has arrived she dreads what will follow."[56] Three traits that all deviate from the norms of bourgeois patriarchy can thus be identified at an early stage: an unwillingness to bear children, a disdain for the notion of caring for others, and a disinterest in the institution of family. Hedda's own values are not outlined, as we are only offered a catalogue of values that she rejects.

A corollary to Hedda's lack of vocation is her disinterest in the real world. Several notes emphasize the role of fantasy, as in a comment on the difference between the imaginations of men and women: "The female imagination is not active and independently creative like the male. It needs a little bit of reality to help."[57] In Hedda's case this could mean that she requires material to work with in order to engage in fantasy, and Løvborg provides this material. She appears preoccupied with Løvborg as an object of fantasy:

> Hedda is the expression of the lady in her position and with her character. One marries Tesman, but occupies one's imagination with Ejlert Løvborg. One leans back in the chair, closes one's eyes and imagine his adventures. – Here's the enormous difference: Mrs Elfstad "works on his moral improvement." For Hedda, he is an object of cowardly, alluring reveries. In reality, she does not have the courage to participate in such things. Then comes the realization of her condition. Tied down! Doesn't understand. Ridiculous! Ridiculous![58]

The impression given of Hedda is one of passivity. She lacks the courage to pursue Løvborg and instead satisfies herself with fantasizing about his erotic escapades. Her closing herself off to the world is seen as the driving force behind her actions: "Brack understands well that it is H.'s closed-in nature, her hysteria, which is actually the motivating factor in her entire course of action."[59] Hedda's retreat from life reinforces the connection between her and Rosmer, who similarly sought to retreat into a realm of fantasy. And like Rosmer, Hedda seems to possess some demonic quality: "The demonic in Hedda is: She wants to exert influence on another – If this is done, she despises him."[60] Her need for dominating others indicates that there is something unnatural about Hedda. This undercurrent of abnormality can be seen in a note on Hedda's relationship to the maid: "Hedda's discovery in the third act that her relationship with the servant girl cannot possibly be proper."[61] This comment can be interpreted as Hedda experiencing same-sex desire. Her female masculinity is emphasized: "It is really the man's whole life that she wants to live. But then come the misgivings. The inherited and the implanted."[62]

We find another echo of *Rosmersholm* in Løvborg's views on friendship between men and women, which are reminiscent of Rosmer's. True friendship between the sexes will bring about the advent of a spiritually elevated mankind: "Ejlert Løvborg's idea is that a relationship of comradeship between man and woman has to come about, from which the true spiritual person can emerge."[63] Tesman sees this as the most daring idea in Løvborg's manuscript: "The new thing in E. L's book is the doctrine of development on the basis of comradeship between man and woman."[64] The notion of friendship between the sexes is described as "The saving idea," but it has a potential downside: "If, for the sake of society, we are not allowed to live morally with them (the women), then we will live immorally."[65] Løvborg's camaraderie with women has the unintended effect of sublimating his erotic desire, which erupts in debauchery: "It is precisely the sensuality accumulated while spending time with female 'friends' or 'comrades' that is expressed in him through his deviations."[66] He blames society for his ills: "Why should I follow a social morality that I know will not last another half a lifetime. When I deviate, as they call it, it's an escape from the contemporaneous.'"[67] This dynamic of longing for friendship while also acting on his urges points to the central conflict of the Løvborg character. The tension between idealism and depravity allows for a reading of Løvborg as a grotesque character, at once a critic of bourgeois morality and a drunken degenerate.

Hedda's lack of vocation is a recurring theme in later manuscripts. Manuscript 5 contains lines of dialogue that emphasize Hedda's boredom. Hedda complains that she is predisposed to boredom, "I have no aptitude for anything but being bored," and complains "That life should not have anything at all to offer."[68] The idea of Hedda lacking a purpose in life is addressed

in manuscript 6: "Hedda's despair is the notion that there are certainly so many opportunities for happiness in the world, but that she cannot see them. It is the lack of a purpose in life that torments her."[69] The same manuscript contains relevant information on Hedda's father. A key line is Hedda's description of her father: "Remember that I'm an old man's child – as well as a worn-out man – or a decrepit one then – It may have left its mark."[70] The description of the general as a worn-out reprobate suggests a reading of Hedda as having been born with limited vitality. Another comment describes Hedda's realization that others treated her based on her father's status: "Hedda talks about how she felt pushed aside, step by step, when her father was no longer in grace, took leave and died leaving nothing. – It was bitter for her, as if it was because of him that she had been feted. – And then she was already between 25 and 26 years old. Close to going downwards, unmarried."[71] Manuscript 7 identifies Hedda's lack of purpose as the origin of her existential despair: "She struggles with the awareness that she has no purpose in life and at the same time finds herself upset that T. finds it alright. After all, she can share his interests."[72] This explains her resentment at being married to a man who cannot understand her frustration.

Manuscript 8 contains several lines relating to Løvborg that were crossed over by Ibsen and which do not appear in the finished play but which I would argue flesh out his character. Løvborg claims that he does not wish to have his relatives aid him in obtaining a position as professor: "Because I want to conquer through myself. Achieve victory by my own abilities."[73] Løvborg prioritizes accomplishments achieved through one's own efforts. He realizes that he will never be able to achieve his own goals because he is unable to constrain himself when facing temptation. He phrases this inability as a loss of willpower:

HEDDA: But can you never learn to tame yourself!
LØVBORG: No, – that's exactly what I can't do. And that is the despair. I don't have it like that, like so many others. They have it in their power to tell themselves to stop when they see that things are going badly. I will never learn that. I have condescended to become an unfree man. Lost power over my own will.[74]

This exchange suggest that Løvborg suffers from the same difficulty in mastering one's will as did Alving and Rosmer. Another intriguing parallel to *Rosmersholm* is the fact that Hedda's name is given as "Hedda Rømer." This could be an oversight on Ibsen's part, but it is nonetheless one that invites speculation. There are clear thematic overlaps between *Rosmersholm* and *Hedda Gabler*, not least in the character of Hedda. The theme of the fall of the old order, as expressed in her father's fall from grace and

her marriage to the bourgeois Tesman, establishes a connection between Hedda and Rosmer. Much like Rosmer, Hedda does not realize that the upper class to which she belongs has been superseded by the bourgeoisie. Ibsen's apparent misnaming can thus be considered significant rather than trivial.

The question of Hedda's sexuality

Hedda's female masculinity poses an interpretative challenge in that it situates her in proximity to same-sex desire. Her actions toward Thea seem to invite a reading of Hedda as a closet lesbian who is forced to sublimate her desire, instead expressing it as a kind of sadistic play directed at Thea. This interpretation has most prominently been advocated by Ellen Mortensen, who reads Hedda's homosexuality as "both a cause and an effect of her internal battle" and the driving force behind her destructive behavior: "In this interpretation, the repression of this libidinal drive causes her to act erratically and sometimes aggressively" (Mortensen 2007, 180). I will argue that what Mortensen designates as Hedda's "degenerate femininity" (Mortensen 2007, 186 n. 22) should instead primarily be understood in terms of female masculinity and should not be conflated with homosexuality.[75] Hedda's female masculinity has been discussed by Jenny Björklund, who takes as her point of departure Hedda's deviation from traditional gender norms, as expressed in Hedda's "emotional unavailability, distance, and desire for power" (Björklund 2016, 5), which clearly set her apart from Aunt Julle and Thea Elvsted. I will follow Björklund in asserting that the concept of female masculinity, explored by Jack Halberstam in *Female Masculinity* (1998), can readily be applied to Hedda. The readings of Björklund and Mortensen are not easy to reconcile, as female masculinity does not necessarily imply same-sex desire. Halberstam regards female masculinity not as an "imitation of maleness" but as a variety of unwanted traits expelled in the process of constructing masculinity: "female masculinities are framed as the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear to be the real thing" (Halberstam 1998, 1). Halberstam understands female masculinity in terms of deviance, in that it tends to be "received by hetero- and homo-normative cultures as a pathological sign of misidentification and maladjustment, as a longing to be and to have a power that is always just out of reach" (Halberstam 1998, 9). Equating female masculinity with homosexuality would be reductive and misleading. Halberstam instead views female masculinity as a phenomenon the meaning of which depends on context:

> Sometimes female masculinity coincides with the excesses of male supremacy, and sometimes it codifies a unique form of social rebellion;

> often female masculinity is the sign of sexual alterity, but occasionally it marks heterosexual variation; sometimes female masculinity marks the place of pathology, and every now and then it represents the healthful alternative to what are considered the histrionics of conventional femininities.
>
> (Halberstam 1998, 9)

The multifaceted nature of the concept risks being obscured by focusing on Hedda's erotic desire. To my mind, Hedda's sexuality is a less central aspect of her character compared to the fact that she conceives of herself as more of a man than a woman. By reading Hedda as an instance of female masculinity, not of homosexuality, her rejection of female and embrace of male gender norms can be better understood. Hedda's engaging in rivalry with Løvborg over Thea's affection and her variously successful attempts at emasculating Løvborg and Brack make perfect sense in the context of bourgeois patriarchy – if the person performing these actions were a man. By appropriating masculine patterns of behavior, and criticizing men whom she regards as insufficiently masculine, Hedda demonstrates that she has situated herself squarely within bourgeois patriarchy. Her female masculinity is thus both a deviation from, and an adherence to, bourgeois patriarchy, a tradition that seems a better fit for Hedda than for Tesman or Løvborg. But a tradition that is built on male supremacy and can only survive in the hands of a woman seems like a fragile tradition at best.

If Hedda is read as a closeted lesbian, on the other hand, the threat she poses to bourgeois patriarchy is reduced, as she could in this case simply be relegated to the category of the sexually abnormal. On this point I differ from Halberstam, who makes a distinction between lesbian and heterosexual female masculinity when it comes to acceptability. Halberstam argues that "female masculinity seems to be at its most threatening when coupled with lesbian desire," whereas heterosexual female masculinity often "represents an acceptable degree of female masculinity as compared to the excessive masculinity of the dyke" (Halberstam 1998, 28). I will contend that Hedda's heterosexual female masculinity is a particularly potent threat in that she combines an ideal masculinity with the most important role afforded to women by bourgeois patriarchy, that of mother. Hedda's pregnancy makes it difficult to label her a sexual deviant, in that her body is quite literally ensuring the continuation of the bourgeois social body. A lesbian Hedda would not have posed a problem to the sexologists of Ibsen's time, who would simply have labeled her a homosexual, and that would have been the end of it. A reading of Hedda as a lesbian reduces the complexity of her character. The argument I am making is instead that Hedda, who has been raised as a man and who acts and refers to herself

as a man, resents her biological sex. In short, she would have preferred to have been born a man.

All of this might appear to segue into the conclusion that Hedda is actually a lesbian, but this would be to misread the heteronormative structure of her erotic desire. While Hedda's fixation with Thea's hair, an obvious symbol of Thea's sexual allure, can be read as an expression of desire, my point is that Hedda's desire is that of a *man* for a *woman*. What I mean by this is that I am extending the concept of female masculinity to include Hedda's erotic desire. Hedda desires women in the same way that a masculine man would. She thinks of herself as a man to such an extent that she harbors a heterosexual desire for women and reacts with disgust or even panic when approached in a sexual manner by men. In modern parlance, one might say that Hedda was born in the wrong body, but this would be doing a presentist disservice to the text. Masculinity and femininity in *Hedda Gabler* are conceptualized as a matter of degree: gender normality is defined as someone having an amount of male and female traits that is appropriate to their gender. Gender abnormality, on the other hand, is understood either as someone exhibiting too high a degree of traits appropriate to the opposite gender, or an insufficient number of traits appropriate to one's own gender. How this plays out in practice can be seen in the troubled marriage of Hedda and Tesman. Hedda is too much of a man, and Tesman is too much of a woman. They both deviate from their respective gender norms, and in similar fashion, but from opposite ends of the spectrum. In this they complement each other, with the masculine Hedda dominating the feminine Tesman. Their union demonstrates the consequences of female masculinity joining male femininity in matrimony.

The desire emanating from Hedda is structurally similar to that of a man who desires women, and in this sense conforms to the model of gender relations on which bourgeois patriarchy rests. She flirts openly with Thea but does so primarily to establish her dominance over her competitor, Løvborg. Hedda embodies a male desire that is active and outgoing, engages in competition with male rivals, and recoils at the thought of male homosexuality. Her desire is stereotypically male, as is her idealization of competition and strength of will. The combination of masculine traits and female body may invite comparisons to a modern understanding of sexuality and gender, but in line with my historicizing approach I prefer to examine how Hedda aligns with a contemporary understanding of gender misalignment. A variety of labels were applied at the time, by psychologists and sexologists, to a specific category of individuals who identified more with the opposite gender than their own. For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to this phenomenon as gender transgression, a simplification used to clarify what is at stake. A man who adopts traits and mannerisms considered feminine, for instance, by acting or dressing as a woman

(and vice versa), undermines the supposed stability of the gender norms on which bourgeois patriarchy rests. Feminine men and masculine women were viewed as incapable of or simply disinterested in having children. Such individuals might express same-sex desire, but the notion was also entertained that gender transgression could be found among heterosexuals. Gender transgression and homosexuality sometimes overlap, but not always.

What I wish to highlight by turning to contemporary psychological and sexological literature is that gender transgression is configured through the deployment of a conceptual model of gender surplus and deficit. As outlined earlier, it is this model that informs the relationship between Hedda and the men surrounding her. In this model, femininity and masculinity complement each other, and both are considered necessary for the proper functioning of the family unit; degeneracy tends to occur when paternal or maternal influence is either lacking or deficient. An imbalance in the quantity, so to speak, of masculinity or femininity would be considered a sign of degeneracy. Max Nordau provides a typical formulation of the model in *Degeneration* when describing the tendency among degenerates of appropriating the gender traits of the opposite sex:

> Sexual psychopathy of every nature has become so general and so imperious that manners and laws have adapted themselves accordingly. They appear already in the fashions. Masochists or passivists, who form the majority of men, clothe themselves in a costume which recalls, by colour and cut, feminine apparel. Women who wish to please men of this kind wear men's dress, an eyeglass, boots with spurs and riding-whip, and only show themselves in the street with a large cigar in their mouths.
>
> (Nordau 1895, 538–539)

The phrasing of women seeking to please feminine men is an illustration of why gender transgression and homosexuality should not be conflated. Nordau does not equate the wearing of the clothes of the opposite sex with same-sex desire. Gender transgression and homosexuality are nonetheless linked in that both are described as the presence of male- or female-coded traits in the "wrong" body. Nordau's description of male masochists who seem to be attracted to masculine women still resides within the domain of heterosexual desire. Gender transgression could of course also be explicitly linked to homosexuality, as we see in the work of French physician Pierre Garnier (1819–1901), a popular medical writer at the time. In *Onanisme, seul et à deux, sous toutes ses formes et leurs conséquences* (1883) Garnier explores the topic of female homosexuality, or "saphisme."[76] Garnier devotes a section of his chapter on "oral masturbation" to women who engage in this practice. While some of these women exhibit an

"exaggerated timidity," others are distinguished by "a strong spirit, equal to or superior to that of a man."[77] All lesbians are united in their refusal of marriage, which they see as an act of subjugation to male authority: "They refuse to submit to a man and yet there are some who affect to prefer his company, his relationships and even his occupations, the better to deceive him, by showing themselves as indifferent as they are insensible with everyone."[78] Garnier's women who engage in oral sex are more straightforwardly homosexual than Nordau's male masochists, but in both cases the model of gender surplus and deficit is readily apparent.

The conceptual similarity of gender transgression and homosexuality can be illustrated further by examining the works of writers who discussed the topic of homosexuality from the perspective of medicine and psychology. In *Les Maladies de la personnalité* (1885), Théodule Ribot (1839–1916) differentiates between individuals who believe themselves to be members of the opposite sex, on the one hand, and individuals who are attracted to members of their own sex, on the other hand. Those belonging to the first category "take on the looks, habits, voice and, when they can, the clothes of their imaginary sex, without presenting any anatomical or physiological abnormality of the sexual organs" (Ribot 1885, 73).[79] In these cases "a cerebral disorder of an unknown nature (a woman who thinks she is a man, a man who thinks she is a woman)" manifests in the adoption of the "feelings, gait, language, clothing of the imaginary sex" (Ribot 1885, 74).[80] Ribot views the second category as more difficult to explain, arguing that same-sex desire must be the result of degeneracy, the origins of which should be sought "in the multiple elements of heredity, in the complicated interplay of male and female influences which are in conflict" (Ribot 1885, 76).[81] Ribot's understanding of same-sex desire as a type of inherited degeneracy can be compared to Richard von Krafft-Ebing's conjecture that such desire might be an acquired characteristic that is then passed on to one's descendants: "An explanation of congenital contrary sexual feeling may perhaps be found in the fact that it represents a peculiarity bred in descendants, but arising in ancestry" (Krafft-Ebing 1892, 228). Krafft-Ebing also distinguishes between homosexuals and individuals who merely adopt the characteristics of the opposite sex. He designates the latter as urnings and subsumes them under the heading of effeminacy and viraginity.[82] Urnings are characterized by a mismatch in terms of gender; male urnings are born male but are "females in feeling" (Krafft-Ebing 1892, 279). Children who manifest signs of gender transgression will tend to grow into urnings. These children are described as favoring the pastimes and traits of the opposite sex:

> The boy likes to spend his time with girls, play with dolls, and help his mother about the house; he likes to cook, sew, knit, and develops taste

> in female *toilettes*, so that he may even become the adviser of his sisters. As he grows older he eschews smoking, drinking, and manly sports, and, on the contrary, finds pleasure in adornment of person, art, *belles-lettres*, etc., even to the extent of giving himself entirely to the cultivation of the beautiful. [. . .] The female urning, even when a little girl, presents the reverse. Her favorite place is the play-ground of boys. She seeks to rival them in their games. The girl will have nothing to do with dolls; her passion is for playing horse, soldier, and robber.
>
> (Krafft-Ebing 1892, 279–280)

Krafft-Ebing argues that urnings consider themselves to be members of the opposite sex: "the men, without exception, feel themselves to be females; the women feel themselves to be males" (Krafft-Ebing 1892, 280). Because of this urnings will recoil at the thought of engaging in heterosexual activity, as this would in effect constitute homosexual behavior: "In cases of completely-developed contrary sexuality, heterosexual love is looked upon as a thing absolutely incomprehensible; sexual intercourse with a person of the opposite sex is unthinkable, impossible" (Krafft-Ebing 1892, 280).

In other words, a woman who considers herself a man cannot have sex with a man, as this would make her a homosexual. An individual who not only adopts the mannerisms but also identifies as a member of the opposite sex will thus enforce a heteronormative sexual code that prohibits any proximity to homosexuality. Applying our contemporary understanding of homosexuality to such an individual risks effacing the nuances of a discourse on gender and sexuality that differentiated between gender transgression and same-sex desire. Returning to the text of Ibsen's play, I will argue that depicting Hedda as a lesbian would be to collapse a distinction that would have been recognized and understood by Ibsen's contemporaries. While Hedda certainly engages in gender transgression, her sexuality exists within the boundaries of her female masculinity. The limits of her female masculinity can be traced by comparing her relationship to Tesman and to Løvborg. While she recoils in disgust at Løvborg's advances, she is apparently able to endure having intercourse with Tesman. An explanation for the difference in degree of disgust can be found in Tesman's feminine masculinity. Viewed through the lens of the model of surplus and deficit, the masculine Hedda can only endure having sex with the feminine Tesman, who seems singularly ill-suited to his position as head of the Tesman family.

Tesman as a failed patriarch

Aunt Julle's actions toward Hedda and her comments regarding Hedda's marriage to Tesman should be viewed through the lens of an economic

dynamic focused on the tension between investing in one's self and giving of one's self to others. A logic of investment is at work involving children and adults, with Aunt Julle regarding Tesman as both a child and an investment. Aunt Julle has decided to sacrifice her own resources for the sake of Tesman. She has acted as though she were his mother; the role of parent requires that one sacrifice for the sake of one's child. Aunt Julle's prioritization of Tesman is an instance of self-sacrifice and sets her up as Hedda's opposite. Aunt Julle's self-sacrificing instinct extends to her invalid sister, but a distinction must be made between investing in a child and nursing an adult. Aunt Julle has invested in Tesman with the expectation that he will come to achieve a higher station in life, which would in turn benefit Aunt Julle's social standing. The notion of return on investment is not readily apparent in relationships between adults. Aunt Julle's caregiving in this regard has more to do with a sense of fulfilment that, as Nantawan Soonthorndhai correctly observes, contains an element of parasitism:

> Aunt Julle takes care of the invalid, not to restore her to health, but to keep her in the state of invalidism, in other words, to preserve the quality of death-in-life. [. . .] An obvious element of morbidity characterizes this guardian role she deems so necessary to her own survival.
>
> (Soonthorndhai 1985, 150)

Aunt Julle's caring for her sister is motivated by her own needs and provides her with a sense of vocation. A similar intent can be traced in her investment in Tesman, which she also describes as providing her with a vocation in life.

Aunt Julle has invested in Tesman by contributing to the purchase of the Falk villa, forsaking her own needs to do so. During the first few scenes we are provided with clues that Tesman, who depends on his aunts for financial and emotional support, will turn out to be a bad investment. Aunt Julle is convinced that Tesman cannot manage on his own and that the maid, Berte, must remain in the household: "Jørgen *must* have you with him here in the house, you understand. He *must*. After all, you've been so used to looking after him ever since he was a little boy" (Ibsen 2019, 292). She appears to still regard Tesman as a child, and his apparent dependence on others suggests that he is ill-prepared to take on the responsibility of head of the household. Berte's response, which is to worry about Aunt Rina, establishes Berte and Aunt Julle as two women who consistently focus their efforts on the needs of others. Their dialogue accentuates Tesman's status as a grown child who, much like Aunt Rina, requires the aid of others. Tesman's dependence signals that he is not yet fully an adult. Even more striking is his male femininity, which manifests in both his habits while at home and in his chosen occupation. Commenting on Tesman's lack

of masculinity is a mainstay in Ibsen scholarship. Lou Andreas-Salomé provides an early example when she uses female imagery to describe Tesman. Tesman is "receptively and reproductively inclined," he relishes the thought of "working unselfishly to promote and restore another's work," and when he embarks on his mission to restore Løvborg's manuscript he shows that he is "better suited to working with other people's thoughts than creating independently."[83] Similarly, Jenny Björklund comments that "Tesman's masculinity is paradoxically characterized by a lack of conventional masculine traits; he is dependent on others rather than self-sufficient, and he is sexually ignorant and uncompetitive" (Björklund 2016, 10). Tesman conforms to an ideal of bourgeois domesticity that makes women out to be passive recipients of male energy.

An explanation for Tesman's male femininity is provided by his never having known his father, which, as Jørgen Haugan notes, has contributed to Tesman growing up to become feminine and almost sexless (Haugan 2014, 439). Tesman displays few of the features of bourgeois masculinity such as initiative, self-reliance, or strength of will. Nantawan Soonthorndhai argues that Tesman's unmanliness is due to Aunt Julle having destroyed his will (Soonthorndhai 1985, 151), but I would instead argue that Tesman's lack of a father figure is to blame, in that it is the father's responsibility to transmit strength of will to his child. The absence of paternal influence is seen in Tesman's greeting to Aunt Julle: "You, who have been both father and mother to me" (Ibsen 2019, 295). Tesman's arrested development is accentuated by the use of the verb "stelle," which has associations of caring for others but also of death. Berte has been taking care of Tesman, and Aunt Julle has done the same for Aunt Rina. Aunt Julle fears that she will no longer have a purpose in life if Rina passes, especially as she no longer has Tesman to "look after [*stelle for*]" (Ibsen 2019, 295). Following Aunt Rina's death, Aunt Julle again makes use of "stelle": "She must be tended to [*stelles*] and dressed nicely now, as best I can" (Ibsen 2019, 363). Through repetition and modification, "stelle" acquires connotations of wasting away. These connotations signal that there is something unwholesome attached to the act of caregiving. An individual who requires that others continually care for him can, moreover, hardly be described as an autonomous person.

Tesman's dependence on others comes into sharper focus when taking financial matters, and especially his pride in providing for Hedda, into account. Tesman does not provide Aunt Julle with details of how he was able to finance a honeymoon with the limited funds at his disposal (Ibsen 2019, 296). Aunt Julle belabors the point that traveling with a lady can be expensive (Ibsen 2019, 297). This is perhaps a delicate way of suggesting that Hedda has expensive tastes, which Tesman appears to confirm: "But Hedda *had* to have that trip, Auntie! She really *had* to. Nothing else

would do" (Ibsen 2019, 297). Tesman's satisfaction at being able to afford the trip can be read as him asserting his capacity to provide for his wife. His doing so would have been a point of pride for him as a man, but his pride is undercut both by Aunt Julle revealing that she has assisted with his finances and by his own admission that he spent money simply because Hedda demands that he do so. As Ross Shideler has observed, it is important for Hedda to have access to luxury goods, as we see in "her need for the expensive honeymoon, the house, the butler, horse, and so on" (Shideler 1993, 81), but her tastes must be read together with Tesman's desire to cater to her desires. If Tesman is read as an adult child, the honeymoon would be his first significant attempt at standing on his own two feet, thereby demonstrating his emancipation from his aunts. He has only been able to pay for the trip by acting as a penny-pincher, however, which indicates that he is dangerously close to living beyond his means. Hedda expects to be entertained with a measure of largesse that he is unable to provide. His weakness of will makes it difficult for him to deny Hedda's requests. Hedda compels him to overspend, as seen in his reply to Brack's suggestion that Tesman should have bought less expensive furniture: "I could hardly present her with petit bourgeois surroundings!" (Ibsen 2019, 315) A comparison can be made between his spending and Aunt Julle's choice to invest in him. By redirecting her resources to Tesman, Aunt Julle hopes to ensure the long-term growth of the Tesman family's social standing. This investment will only bear fruit if Tesman and Hedda produce a child. Tesman does not appear to recognize that his position as the sole male bearer of the Tesman name requires him to beget an heir. When Aunt Julle hints that he should populate the empty rooms of the house, he replies that he certainly intends to "expand [*forøger*] my book collection" (Ibsen 2019, 297). The use of "forøge," which can mean both "to increase" and "to have children," suggests that Tesman is incapable of living up to his obligation of carrying on the Tesman family line.

Tesman's overspending and bookishness strengthen the impression of him as a poor investment. His choice to prioritize Hedda risks wasting the benefit to Aunt Julle of having invested in him. Aunt Julle's admission that she has used the interest from her savings to finance the purchase of the house elicits alarm from Tesman (Ibsen 2019, 298). Her efforts at calming him reveals the nature of the financial agreement they have effectively entered into. She is willing to contribute her resources because she believes that he will be able to obtain a position in the future, which will provide him with financial stability. Tesman's designation of her actions as a sacrifice (Ibsen 2019, 298) shows that he does not understand the rationale behind her decision. A sacrifice is not a sacrifice if one expects to be compensated for it further down the line, in the form of status and children. Ellen Mortensen reads Aunt Julle's enthusiasm for Hedda's pregnancy as

a paradox in that Aunt Julle is childless (Mortensen 2006, 390). But there is nothing paradoxical about Aunt Julle having invested in Tesman's marriage in the hopes that his child with Hedda, with all the inherited prestige she brings with her, will raise the status of the Tesman family, which would in turn reflect well on Aunt Julle. She does not distinguish between Tesman's success and her own success: "And we are close to our goal now!" (Ibsen 2019, 298) The conflation shows that she views his achievements as the return on her investment.

What Aunt Julle has failed to take into account, besides Tesman's indulgence of Hedda, is his incapacity for engaging in productive labor and his distaste for competition. Tesman intends to write his book in the comfort of his home. The topic of the book, "Brabantine domestic crafts [*husflid*] in the Middle Ages" (Ibsen 2019, 299), is revealing. "Husflid" simply means to produce items at home for use or sale, but "husflid" in general and Brabantine "husflid" in particular are gendered activities associated with women working from home (*HIS* 9K:167–168). Married men would be expected to work in an office or another locale away from home. Instead of going out into the world and competing with other men, Tesman will remain ensconced in a typical bourgeois interior inhabited, as Bjørn Hemmer notes, by people who find contentment in everyday life and household matters such as career advancement and childbirth (Hemmer 2003, 414). Tesman's position appears closer to that of a Brabantine housewife than to that of a bourgeois patriarch. Jenny Björklund argues that Tesman in all aspects of life lives in close proximity to the domain of women: "Thus, personally as well as professionally, Tesman is connected to the feminine and the domestic – which, of course, was coded as a feminine domain" (Björklund 2016, 11). Hedda, on the other hand, rejects the symbols of femininity that offer Tesman comfort: "She refuses to go near his slippers, and she does not want to be associated with his aunts. Instead, she is associated with a masculine domain throughout the play – her father's" (Björklund 2016, 13). The connotations of femininity adhering to Tesman culminate in the final scene of the play, when he suggests to Thea that she should move in with Aunt Julle and help him reassemble Løvborg's manuscript (Ibsen 2019, 377). At the end of the play, Tesman envisions a future in which he lives surrounded by women, having moved in with his aunt/mother and occupying himself with another form of "husflid" in reassembling Løvborg's manuscript.

Tesman's unease at the thought of competition manifests in his reaction upon learning that Løvborg will compete with him for a professorship. Tesman admits to Hedda that he has wagered their future on what he believed to be the promise of a position (Ibsen 2019, 317). Tesman has failed to comprehend the reality of his financial situation. He has opted for a life of dependence and non-competition and only belatedly comes

to understand that he will now be forced to compete on his own merits. Success requires effort, and this realization causes him to worry about his future. His reluctance to engage in competition is tied to his curious insistence on eliciting approving comments from his male peers on Hedda's beauty. If there is one part of his life that he can describe as a victory over other men, it is his marriage to Hedda. Their marriage proves, at least to Tesman, that he is able to assert himself in competition with other men. He treats Hedda as a valuable commodity with which to inspire envy, drawing the attention of men such as Brack to Hedda's beauty. What Tesman fails to understand is that his desire to have other men recognize his supremacy in this regard increases the risk that the men in question will seek to compete with Tesman for Hedda's favor. His instrumental use of Hedda is tied to a motif of seeing and being seen and is introduced in Aunt Julle's recollection of Hedda and her father riding dressed in a "long black habit" with a "feather in her hat" (Ibsen 2019, 293). Hedda's choice of attire was meant to attract attention and display her status. A similar dynamic of inviting attention informs Tesman's habit of commenting on Hedda's body; while he prefers not to compete, he must also ensure that other men are appropriately envious of him. When Aunt Julle comments on his marriage to Hedda, "who was surrounded by so many admirers" (Ibsen 2019, 295), Tesman replies with satisfaction: "Yes, I do believe I've a few good friends around here in town who are rather envious of me" (Ibsen 2019, 296). Tesman must be able to observe how his male friends lust for Hedda. By involving men in proximity to his household in his efforts to be admired, he is trapping himself in a paradox of both avoiding and inviting competition.

The themes of male rivalry and of seeing and being seen can be further highlighted by examining how they relate to Hedda. Hedda rejects Tesman's unmanliness, as well as his and Aunt Julle's proprietary claims to Hedda. Frode Helland notes that Aunt Julle uses her new hat as a tool with which to demonstrate her ownership of Hedda: "Julle has bought it so that she can walk with Hedda in the street. The hat is therefore not just something that Julle wants to decorate herself with, it is a means that the aunt will use to be able to decorate herself with the 'lovely' Hedda Gabler."[84] Hedda finds her status as a showpiece for the Tesmans unacceptable, and she consistently treats the Tesmans with barely concealed contempt.[85] Tesman's phrasing of how Hedda is "part of the family [*hører til familjen*]" (Ibsen 2019, 301) has connotations of ownership, as Helland clarifies: "He says that she belongs to the family the way a house or a grand piano belongs to, and not that she belongs *in* the family, as an independent part of it or the like."[86] Hedda may prove to be a poor investment, however, as we see in the description of her pale skin and sparse hair (Ibsen 2019, 299) and her dislike of sunlight (Ibsen 2019, 300). Tesman notices none

of this and instead parades Hedda before Aunt Julle: "Look, how elegant and charming [*nydelig*] *she* is!" (Ibsen 2019, 301)[87] The use of "nydelig," which can mean charming but also pleasurable, demonstrates how Tesman appropriates Hedda into his own desire. Equally disconcerting is his comment that Hedda has gained weight: "Yes, but have you noticed how plump and buxom she's got?" (Ibsen 2019, 301) Aunt Julle kissing Hedda on the forehead in anticipation of her pregnancy accords with Aunt Julle's instrumental view of Hedda.[88] Frode Helland reads Tesman's comment as an attempt at asserting his primacy over her (Helland 1993, 71), but I wish to dwell on the question of why Tesman, who is not yet aware of Hedda's pregnancy, takes pride in her having gained weight. He references her weight once more when Brack enters: "Doesn't she look buxom?" (Ibsen 2019, 314) I see Tesman's behavior as motivated by his need to have other men lust for his wife, while at the same time dreading the possibility that something may come of it. If Hedda were to become overweight, Tesman's fear of competition might lessen somewhat.

Hedda, unable to respond to her husband's impertinence, vents her frustration at being treated as an object by pacing to and fro in a quiet rage (Ibsen 2019, 302). Her frustration is due in part to her realization that Tesman, through every fault of his own, will not be able to provide her with the level of comfort she expected. She had hoped to play the part of hostess and preside over social gatherings, a hope that sets the stage for potential infidelity.[89] But too sharp a focus on Tesman's financial status obscures the essence of Hedda's criticism of her husband. Part of their contract was that Hedda would be afforded the opportunity to have men admire her. This need on her part should be distinguished from her expectations of material comfort. Tesman would certainly have enjoyed showing Hedda off to his peers by having her act "as hostess to a select circle!" (Ibsen 2019, 318) Hedda being confined to the company of the Tesmans would deprive her of the attention she craves. This longing for admiration on her part clarifies a significant aspect of her character in that it relates to her desire to dominate men. Her fantasies of a good life focus on her being served by others, for instance, by a servant. Anne Marie Rekdal argues that attributes such as employing servants and owning horses are rooted in Hedda's past, which she seeks to recreate in her present (Rekdal 2000, 241). But a servant, in particular, would be someone who attended to Hedda's needs. This is what Tesman finds satisfaction in doing, as when he serves her drinks and cookies: "it's such fun to serve you" (Ibsen 2019, 336). Tesman enjoys acting as a servant to Hedda. Her being waited on by her husband does not provide her with any real satisfaction, however, for the simple reason that she cannot enjoy dominating a man who wishes to be dominated. She accepts his service but finds his obeisance pathetic. Her dismissive attitude toward his service is a rejection of his male femininity. Hedda's

desire to dominate others is specifically directed toward men who can offer her a challenge. When taken together, Hedda's disdain for Tesman's lack of masculine traits, her rejection of the ideal of female self-sacrifice, and her lust for dominating strong men allows for a clearer understanding of her female masculinity. As we shall see, Tesman is lacking in precisely those male attributes that Hedda exhibits.

Hedda's need for domination

An examination of Hedda's actions toward Thea and Løvborg will illustrate how Hedda's lust for power over men interacts with her female masculinity. Hedda's need to dominate strong-willed men is gender-coded as a male trait. Hedda's need explains her behavior toward Thea, which I read as motivated by jealousy at Thea's power over Løvborg. When Løvborg insists that Thea is the only women who exerts any power over him, Hedda takes this as a personal affront. Hedda understands human relationships in terms of domination and willpower, and her threats to burn Thea's hair, both in the present and during their schooldays, should be understood in this context. Realizing that Thea has a hold over Løvborg, Hedda seeks to undermine this power by inserting herself into their relationship. Hedda's transgressive behavior toward Thea are the actions of a male trying to steal a coveted woman away from a male rival. Thea is the site on which a contest between two men plays out, although Løvborg remains oblivious to Hedda's challenge. Thea appears to have a limited capacity for independent action and channels her energy toward helping others, specifically Løvborg. In this Thea serves as a contrast to Hedda. Unlike Hedda, Thea radiates vitality, as seen in her thick, blond hair (Ibsen 2019, 304). She has taken it upon herself to safeguard Løvborg from temptation and has followed him to the city, where he has come into a sum of money of uncertain provenance. Prior to attaching herself to Løvborg she had entered her husband's household as a governess, taking on the role of housekeeper and caring for his ailing wife, subsequently marrying him after his wife's passing. Joan Templeton argues that Thea and Aunt Julle represent an ideal of service to others that inhibits the development of one's self: "The selfless Miss Tesman and Thea Elvsted have no self; sentimentalists who have absorbed their culture's ideal of woman as servant, they are domestic angels to Hedda's devil" (Templeton 1997, 230). But this selflessness is also a boon to both women in that it provides them with a deep sense of satisfaction. Thea has dedicated herself to being someone who can "give something and be something for others,"[90] to quote Lou Andreas-Salomé, and her ministration of Løvborg gives her a vocation in life. It also enables her to achieve a modicum of independent thought – albeit under his tutelage. Elizabeth Hardwick describes Thea's caring for

Løvborg as "a mission, a sacred trust" and Løvborg as "the instrument through which Thea can find some purpose for her own intellectual possibilities" (Hardwick 1974, 59). Thea's willingness to care for others led her to marry Elvsted but also compels her to abandon her home to pursue the rehabilitation of Løvborg. I would even argue that Hedda admires Thea's dedication. Thea denigrates herself by stating that her husband only cares for her as a servant and that she does not cost much in upkeep (Ibsen 2019, 310). Hedda's response is significant: "That's stupid of you" (Ibsen 2019, 311). Hedda recognizes the transactional nature of Thea's marriage to Elvsted and criticizes Thea for selling herself too cheap. In a roundabout manner, she is counseling Thea to be more like Hedda, whose similarly transactional marriage to Tesman did not come cheap.

Thea's selflessness has left her with a curious lack of identity that is expressed as her not being a whole person unless she has someone else to live for. She understands that she exerts power over Løvborg (Ibsen 2019, 312). There is a reciprocal influence at work, and spending time with Løvborg causes an alteration to herself. Løvborg has "made a sort of real human being" of Thea, and has taught her to "think – and to understand so many things" (Ibsen 2019, 312). Her comment suggests that she did not consider herself a complete person before she met Løvborg. If she has only become a fully-fledged person in Løvborg's company, then it would appear that she has to some extent adopted a personality designed for her by Løvborg. She has in effect traded one master for another, the only difference being that Løvborg is now the source of her contentment. Her dependence on Løvborg highlights an important facet of the notion of a vocation in life. Aunt Julle and Thea have found their vocation, but at the expense of their own selves. Judging by their examples a woman may have a purpose in life or an identity of her own, but not both. Even if Hedda were to identify a vocation, one might suspect that this would entail a diminishment of her personality. By rejecting the ideal of female self-sacrifice, she retains her identity. This would be one of the benefits of her female masculinity, which prohibits her from taking on her gender-assigned role of caregiver.

The character of Thea can thus be read as an extended commentary on the consequences of the ideal of female self-sacrifice. The relationship between Hedda, Thea and Løvborg illustrates that giving of one's self to others is the equivalent of giving another power over your own self. The quality of having dominion over another is furthermore a coveted asset in that Hedda understands such power as being exclusive to one person. While Løvborg offers some challenge to Hedda's efforts, and Tesman none at all, Judge Brack proves competent at parrying Hedda's efforts at establishing dominion over him. Hedda's relationship to Brack demonstrates that there are limits to her capacity for dominating others. Brack seems to

possess some insight into Hedda's personality that can perhaps be explained by their common interests and shared class background. Brack displays a tendency toward voyeurism that suits Hedda's need to be admired. Helena Forsås-Scott emphasizes the significance of the gaze to Brack, as seen in his use of a lorgnette and in his references to the importance of being seen (Forsås-Scott 2004, 36). One such example is Brack's offhand comment that he would like to watch Hedda dress (Ibsen 2019, 321). Hedda appears to not mind the suggestion and allows Brack to in a sense peer into her life and learn about her marriage. Brack's offer of service and description of himself as a friend to Hedda and Tesman (Ibsen 2019, 324) is followed by his hardly subtle comment that such "three-way relationships – can in fact be hugely agreeable to all parties" (Ibsen 2019, 324). His offer to act as a trusted friend may appeal to Hedda's desire to be served. As long as his demands are limited to looking, she appears amenable to such an arrangement. An element of service informs her explanation of why she agreed to marry Tesman. While she admits to having fears of ageing (Ibsen 2019, 323), I would argue that Tesman's offer to act as servant to her was a more important factor. Tesman wooed her by promising to serve her: "And when he came along in full battle mode [*med vold og magt*] determined to be allowed to provide for me" (Ibsen 2019, 324). Hedda's phrasing of "med vold og magt" (literally "with violence and power") demonstrates the intensity of Tesman's desire to serve her. She chose Tesman because he, unlike his competitors (including Brack), was willing to serve her. This exchange can be transposed to Hedda's relationship to Brack. As long as Brack is content to spy on her, thereby satiating her need for admiration but not imposing any demands on her, he is useful to her.

Brack offers a corrective to Hedda's female masculinity by seeking to enforce conformity to the tenets of bourgeois patriarchy. His reply to her complaints of boredom is to suggest that she should seek out a vocation in life, "some sort of task" (Ibsen 2019, 328) that might provide her with a sense of purpose. This suggestion is countered by her fantasy of having Tesman enter into politics. Brack fails to understand how Tesman's success would address her sense of boredom (Ibsen 2019, 328), making the point that she is responsible for her own happiness. She burdens others with that responsibility, saddling Tesman with the obligation of providing her with a purpose in her life. Brack's argument hinges on the argument that she has never experienced something "to truly awaken you" (Ibsen 2019, 328). His suggestion that motherhood might provide her with a purpose is met with outright rejection: "I've no talent for such things, judge. Nothing that makes any demand upon me!" (Ibsen 2019, 329)[91] Their exchange is centered on the tension between living for one's self and living for another and allows us to determine how Hedda conceives of interpersonal relationships. She makes others responsible for her happiness and expects Tesman

to apply himself in order to benefit her. Her lack of interest in his professorship and her dismay at bearing his child illustrates her indifference to what he desires from her. But her shifting of responsibility for her own happiness onto Tesman can also be read so as to shed further light on her female masculinity. If she had been a man, she might have been able to enter into politics and find a vocation in a typically male pursuit that she, unlike Tesman, might have been well suited for. Her fantasy of effecting societal change by using her husband can be understood as an expression of her anger at being relegated to the role of mother. Hedda experiences a type of *ennui*, deriving from a lack of vocation and concomitant frustration of one's energies, that comes across as a specifically male condition. Men such as Alving and Rosmer – as well as Hedda, in her own mind – would be expected to take initiative, engage in competition, and expend their creative energies on worthwhile endeavors. The disconnect between Hedda's female masculinity and the gender conformity advocated by Brack furthermore shows that Brack, much like Løvborg and Tesman, does not truly understand Hedda. Hedda's female masculinity destabilizes gender roles to an extent that other characters fail to recognize. I have clarified in the preceding how Tesman fits into this pattern, but even more instructive is the case of Løvborg. Whereas Brack consistently appears as a ruthless and therefore successful embodiment of bourgeois masculinity, Løvborg occupies an uncertain position somewhere between the feminine masculinity of Tesman and the traditional masculinity represented by Brack (and Hedda). A closer examination of Løvborg's troubled encounter with gendered expectations of competition and self-control will further clarify the idealized masculinity to which Hedda aspires.

Løvborg's loss of manhood

Løvborg is an example of a man whose masculinity, at first appearing to be stable, gradually unravels until it collapses. Løvborg is a bourgeois wastrel whose utopian thought on the future is reminiscent, as Gunnar Brandell notes, of the idealism of Rosmer and Rebekka (Brandell 1993, 60). Løvborg's masculinity is undermined by Hedda in a process that is aided by Brack, who considers Løvborg a rival. Brack's suggestion that Løvborg should drink tea with Hedda and Thea while Brack hosts a dinner party unsuitable for "gentlemen of anything but the strongest principle" (Ibsen 2019, 330) is typical of his attempts at emasculating Løvborg. Løvborg's class background is similar to that of Brack and Hedda. He has previously possessed an inheritance and still has influential relatives who can come to his aid. This would be a safety net and one that Hedda wishes to deprive him of. If Løvborg were to regain his social standing due to the efforts of his relatives he would not be a man who is able to achieve success on

his own. What Hedda wishes to see is competition among men, which explains her excitement at learning that Tesman and Løvborg may come to compete for a position: "it'll almost be like a kind of sport" (Ibsen 2019, 317). In such a scenario the most talented man would presumably prevail and establish his dominance over the other. Having never seen Tesman engage in competition, Hedda relishes the thought. Løvborg's reluctance to engage in competition with Tesman is part of the reason that Hedda seeks to have him regain his masculinity; she values competition and wants to see the two men compete.

Løvborg is a fallen man due to his own failings. As David R. Jones has noted, Løvborg comes from a privileged background but "has long been fascinated with the *demimonde*" (Jones 1977, 456).[92] Significantly, he is unable to drink with moderation and therefore eschews alcohol completely. The description of him as having a "*wasted [udlevet]*" appearance (Ibsen 2019, 330) suggests degeneracy; "udlevet" signifies something that is past its prime and lacking vitality. Løvborg comes across as unassertive and gives a curious reply when Tesman asks if he wishes to compete against him: "No. I just want to gain a victory over you. In the public's opinion" (Ibsen 2019, 333). Løvborg's idea of victory without struggle is a departure from a masculine ideal of competitiveness. It could be argued that this tendency was manifest at an earlier stage, during Tesman's courtship of Hedda. Løvborg complains of how Hedda settled for Tesman (Ibsen 2019, 335). If he believed at the time that Hedda was throwing herself away, one wonders why he did not pursue her more vigorously. It soon becomes apparent that Hedda had relegated Løvborg to the status of non-threatening male friend, as we see in her comment on how excited she was to partake in a "secret sharing of confidences [*løndomsfulde fortrolighed*]" with him (Ibsen 2019, 337). Her phrasing is an intertextual echo of Rosmer's account of his sexless friendship with Rebekka (Ibsen 2019, 164). The pleasure Hedda derived from their friendship, and from listening to Løvborg's stories, is tied to her lust for power. Løvborg admits that he found the situation humiliating but was unable to break free of her spell: "Yes, Hedda – and when I confessed [*skrifted*] to you –! [. . .] what sort of power was it in you that drove me to confess such things?" (Ibsen 2019, 337) "Skrifte," often used in the sense of confessing one's sins to a priest, makes Løvborg into a penitent with Hedda as his confessor. He invests her with an almost supernatural quality, telling of how her questions enticed him to reveal more than he intended: "To think you could sit there and ask me such questions! So brazen, so bold!" (Ibsen 2019, 337) His blaming her by implying moral deficiency on her part is a deflection from the fact that he continued talking. Løvborg comes across as a man incapable of stopping himself from revealing his secrets and extricating himself from his

bondage. This retrospective account thus confirms that Løvborg's weakness of will is not a recent development.

A key point in their exchange is the issue of why Hedda rejected his advances. Joan Templeton argues that fear of scandal prevented Hedda from responding to Løvborg:

> Why Hedda did not pass from forbidden thoughts to forbidden acts is understandable. While the violence with which she ended their relation suggests the force of her desire, Hedda has too much self-respect to become Løvborg's woman.
>
> (Templeton 1997, 222)

On the surface this seems like a reasonable explanation, but I will argue that there are more subtle factors at work. Hedda suggests that she merely wanted to peer into the domain of men inhabited by Løvborg but then immediately disavows this explanation:

HEDDA: That she might want to take a little peep into a world that –
LØVBORG: That –?
HEDDA: That she is not permitted to know anything about?
LØVBORG: So that's what it was?
HEDDA: [That too. That too, – I almost think.]

(Ibsen 2019, 338)[93]

Hedda's phrasing suggests that there is something else going on that she cannot mention. Løvborg does not register the vagueness of her reply and instead states his belief that she sought "Comradeship in the lust for life" (Ibsen 2019, 338) When he asks why she discontinued the arrangement Hedda replies that he sought to change the nature of their relationship: "how could you want to take advantage of [*forgribe Dem på*] your – your brazen comrade [*kammerat*]!" (Ibsen 2019, 338) The word "kammerat" has strong connotations of male friendship in the Scandinavian languages, and it is worth remembering how Helene's use of the same word to describe Alving's lack of male companions (Ibsen 2016, 253). Hedda's use of "kammerat" positions her as Løvborg's *male* friend. Her use of "forgribe," with its overtones of sexual assault, further complicate the matter. What Hedda is saying is that Løvborg's advances were those of a man toward another man. Her rejection of Løvborg is part and parcel of her female masculinity, which manifests in a rigid adherence to a heteronormative code of conduct. The episode with Løvborg can thus be reconfigured as an instance of homosexual panic on the part of a woman who identifies herself as more of a man than a woman.[94]

Hedda's female masculinity also helps explain her interest in Løvborg's stories. Listening to Løvborg's tales would have provided her with the vicarious thrill of listening to him narrate his sexual exploits. Charles R. Lyons notes how Løvborg "functions as a substitute for Hedda herself in her imagination, a surrogate figure through whom she can experience the world" (Lyons 1991, 50). Her imagination is in this case geared not toward Løvborg but toward his stories. Listening to Løvborg allows for Hedda to inhabit the domain of men that she aspires to but is barred from. Her inability to voice her desire provides context to her calling herself a coward (Ibsen 2019, 338) in response to Løvborg's comment that it would have been better had she shot him. Hedda elaborates on the issue of cowardice in another exchange riddled with vague phrasing:

HEDDA: My not daring to shoot you –
LØVBORG: Yes?!
HEDDA: – *that* wasn't my worst act of cowardice – that night.
LØVBORG [*looks at her for a moment, understands and whispers passionately*]: Oh, Hedda! Hedda Gabler, my dearest! Now I glimpse a hidden depth to this comradeship! You and I –! There *was* that demand for life [*livskravet*] in you –
HEDDA [*quietly, with a sharp glance*]: Careful now! Don't you believe it!

(Ibsen 2019, 338–339)

These lines tend to be read as Hedda's indirect admission that she did in fact desire Løvborg, as in Toril Moi's reading: "In her confession to Løvborg, Hedda acknowledges that she grabbed the gun to hide the fact that she simply could not bring herself to respond to him, to express her feelings, to reveal herself. [. . .] Løvborg's sexual advances demanded a passionate and spontaneous response, which she couldn't give" (Moi 2013, 446). I will instead argue that Løvborg's apparent understanding is a sleight of hand; a look of comprehension is not the same thing as actual comprehension. Løvborg's assertion that Hedda was afraid to express her desire for him is immediately dismissed by Hedda. On a prosaic level her rebuttal could simply be read as a rejection of his advances, but it could also be read as an assertion that Løvborg has arrived at a faulty conclusion. I find the line of interpretation exemplified by Moi especially problematic given how there is no textual evidence that Hedda was ever attracted to Løvborg. Put simply, there is no indication in the text that Hedda wished to enter into a relationship with Løvborg. While this may be Løvborg's preferred explanation, it is predicated on the notion that Løvborg is correct in thinking that Hedda's demand for life involved him. I find such a reading too generous of Løvborg's interpretative abilities,

and I will instead argue that he is unable to as much as perceive Hedda's female masculinity.

The type of desire that comes to the fore in Hedda's and Løvborg's dialogue should not primarily be understood as erotic desire but rather a homosocial desire on Hedda's part to occupy a male space. I am making use of the concept of homosocial desire as explored in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's classic study *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985). Sedgwick adapts the concept from René Girard's *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (1961), in which Girard examines the structure of erotic triangles in European literature. In such triangles the male-female relationship seems of secondary importance to the relationship between the two men who are pursuing the same woman. As Sedgwick notes, Girard's study shows that "in any erotic rivalry, the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved: that the bonds of 'rivalry' and 'love,' differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent" (Sedgwick 2015, 21). This rivalry between men acts as more of a driving force than the supposedly central theme of heterosexual desire: "In fact, Girard seems to see the bond between rivals in an erotic triangle as being even stronger, more heavily determinant of actions and choices, than anything in the bond between either of the lovers and the beloved" (Sedgwick 2015, 21). The concept of homosocial desire extends to include a "pattern of male friendship, mentorship, entitlement, rivalry" (Sedgwick 2015, 1) that can readily be observed if the relationship between Hedda and Løvborg is read as a triangle with Thea at its center. Following Girard and Sedgwick, the rivalry between Hedda and Løvborg drives the actions of Hedda, in particular, to a greater degree than does Løvborg's desire (or for that matter Hedda's supposed same-sex desire) for Thea. Thea is the focus of Hedda's need for domination, a need that converges in a series of actions that Løvborg fails to register as a challenge to his relationship with Thea. The scene in which Hedda and Løvborg discuss Thea in her presence, and during which Hedda strokes Thea's hair, is particularly telling. When Hedda's female masculinity is taken into account the scene reads as a competition between two men. The scene begins with Løvborg, echoing Tesman desire to have others admire his wife, inviting Hedda to admire Thea's beauty (Ibsen 2019, 339). Tesman sought to both entice and dissuade his competitors; Løvborg, on the other hand, seeks to inspire jealousy. Hedda's response is to accept his challenge as though Løvborg were a male rival. When she strokes Thea's hair, she is not only establishing dominance over Thea, she is also demonstrating to Løvborg that she can freely violate the bodily integrity of his partner. Hedda's fondling of Thea's hair reduces Løvborg to the status of impotent onlooker. Hedda is at once undermining Løvborg's masculinity and threatening to turn him

into a cuckold. Løvborg's description of himself and Thea as "kammerater" (*HIS* 9:115), which inadvertently reduces Thea's feminine status, underscores his lack of virility, as it ironically suggests that he is Thea's friend and not her lover. Løvborg's praise of Thea's "courage of action" (*det handlingens mod*; *HIS* 9:115)[95] in coming to find him is another act of self-emasculation. He means to indict Hedda for her cowardice, but he has yet to demonstrate the same courage of action as Thea. His attempts at making Hedda jealous accentuate his own deficient masculinity.

The dynamic of competition between Hedda and Løvborg (unacknowledged by him) adds another layer to her challenging him to resume drinking. If he drinks and does not contain himself, he will have proven himself weak-willed; if he drinks and manages his drinking, he will have proven himself a more worthy competitor. Hedda initiates her challenge with a seemingly innocuous joke: "Do I really have no power over you? Poor me!" (Ibsen 2019, 340) When Løvborg refuses to drink, Hedda suggests that he might be unable to control his urges (Ibsen 2019, 340).[96] As Leonardo F. Lisi argues, Hedda is turning Løvborg's insecurity against him, undermining the image Løvborg presents of himself as a social reformer and public intellectual:

> The claim is that Løvborg's absolute abstinence shows that he does not actually have adequate confidence in his own commitment to the project of being a social prophet. If he were fully convinced that this project is the most important thing for him, then he would not be afraid to take the occasional drink. That fear only arises because he suspects there might be something in him that will be inclined to find the drinking more appealing than the future he has envisioned along with Thea.
>
> (Lisi 2018, 35)

Hedda identifies Løvborg's lack of self-control as a weakness and exploits it. Løvborg's reentry into polite society was predicated on his ability to restrain himself, but Hedda understands that this capacity was imparted by Thea. Hedda questions his self-discipline in front of Thea, using "turde," to dare, twice in conversation (Ibsen 2019, 340–341) in order to suggest that Løvborg is afraid of temptation. She goes on to sarcastically express admiration for his refusal to attend Brack's dinner party: "Staunch in his principles. Yes, that's how a man should be!" (Ibsen 2019, 341) Løvborg's false sense of self-control unravels after a few drinks, at which point he accuses Thea of acting on her husband's behalf to persuade Løvborg to return home. Løvborg's outburst indicates that he is at this stage governed more by emotions than by rational thought.

Hedda's attacks on Løvborg's self-control is ultimately derived from her desire to exercise power over a forceful man. The Løvborg who depends on Thea and who cannot contain his drink is not a worthy rival to Hedda; she wants him to become strong so that she can take pleasure in dominating him. This desire underlies her hope of seeing him return from the dinner party with "Vine leaves in his hair" (Ibsen 2019, 344). Hedda's vision of Løvborg is customarily read in connection with a Nietzschean dichotomy between the Dyonisian and the Apollonian, or in other words between hedonism and self-control.[97] As Lisi notes, what Hedda wishes to see from Løvborg is a melding of these ideals: "What Hedda wants, in short, is the unity of transgression and normativity, precisely the sort of balance between conflicting elements that the aesthetic ideal of a beautiful life aims for" (Lisi 2018, 38). Hedda envisions a reformed Løvborg as someone who is able to enjoy life without losing control. If Løvborg is able to exert self-control, he will have regained mastery over his own self. Hedda clarifies this point in conversation with Thea: "And then, you see – he'll have reclaimed the power over himself" (Ibsen 2019, 344). Løvborg must be free – which is to say not dominated, as opposed to Tesman – so that Hedda can dominate him. Hedda, as we see in an exchange between her and Thea, finds no satisfaction in dominating a weak man:

HEDDA:	I want, just once in my life, to have power over a person's destiny.
FRU ELVSTED:	But don't you already have that?
HEDDA:	Haven't – and never have.
FRU ELVSTED:	Over your husband's at least?
HEDDA:	Oh yes, that was worth the trouble. Oh, if only you knew how poor I am. Whilst *you* are allowed to be so rich!

(Ibsen 2019, 344)

Hedda's power over Tesman has no value for the simple reason that Tesman is not a strong man, as proven by his willingness to submit to her. If Hedda were to dominate a reformed Løvborg, on the other hand, she might find herself satisfied.[98] The financial imagery helps us understand her reasoning; she defines poverty and wealth in terms of having power over others. It is significant that Hedda at this point once again threatens to burn Thea's hair (Ibsen 2019, 344). By burning the symbol of Thea's allure and power over Løvborg, Hedda would finalize her victory over the one remaining impediment to her plan to dominate Løvborg.

Sexual competition and exclusivity

Hedda's attempted domination of Løvborg fits into a pattern of exerting power over men which falls short when confronted with Brack's assertive and ruthless masculinity. Brack responds to Hedda's attempt at emasculating him by engaging her in a struggle for domination in which he ultimately prevails. Brack's willingness to compete with Løvborg for access to Hedda's sex sets him apart from the non-competitive males Løvborg and Tesman. A closer look at how Brack interacts with Hedda and with other men will clarify his role as a patriarchal corrective to both Hedda's female masculinity and Løvborg's failed masculinity. Brack's single-minded pursuit of Hedda leads him to identify Løvborg as a rival to be eliminated. In this he is primarily motivated by the recognition that Løvborg, unlike Tesman, is a worthy rival. Brack's dinner party serves as the location where Løvborg's rehabilitation comes undone and the last vestiges of his masculinity evaporate. Løvborg is unable to contain himself and drinks too much, and ends up in Miss Diana's salon. The character of Miss Diana, although only referenced by others, further illustrates the theme of female masculinity. Brack's description of Miss Diana clearly situates her as inhabiting the *demimonde*. Her salon serves a similar function as Engstrand's sailor's home in offering bourgeois men an opportunity to express their desires, but it should not be equated to a brothel. Miss Diana, "a formidable huntress – of gentlemen" (Ibsen 2019, 353), is said to have a long list of conquests that includes Løvborg, back when he was still a respectable bourgeois and "at the top of his game [*i sine velmagtsdage*]" (Ibsen 2019, 353).

This description suggests a reading of Miss Diana as a counterpart to Hedda, as a woman who does not entirely conform to gendered expectations of behavior. A reading of Miss Diana as an albeit less pronounced instance of female masculinity finds support in Brack's account of the brawl that erupted when Løvborg could not find his manuscript: "Which led to a common cockfight [*hanekamp*] between the ladies and gentlemen both" (Ibsen 2019, 354).[99] There is an obvious contrast between Løvborg in his "velmagtsdage," a word with connotations of strength and vitality, and the Løvborg who engages in fisticuffs with men and – far more significantly – with women. Having lost his manuscript, his best hope for social redemption, Løvborg is reduced to a wholly pathetic figure. As Gail Finney notes, the process of writing the manuscript under the benign influence of Thea is gender-coded as a male activity: "For what is actually being invoked here is the common metaphor of literary *paternity*, not maternity, coupled with the conventional topos of female inspiration" (Finney 1989, 153; emphasis in original). Løvborg's loss of the manuscript is thus also a loss of what remains of his manhood.

The dismantling of Løvborg's masculinity is reflected in the recurring metaphor of the manuscript as being his and Thea's child. An emasculated man such as Løvborg will not be able to produce viable offspring; he is creatively sterile. He blames his dependency on Thea for his loss of masculinity: "It's life's courage and fighting spirit that she's crushed in me" (Ibsen 2019, 359). This is Løvborg admitting that he could not have produced a work of genius without external assistance. At this stage the manuscript comes to represent an existential failure on his part. Writing the manuscript provided his life with meaning, and the loss of the manuscript causes him to fall into a state of despondency. Bearing in mind Brack's suggestion that a child might provide Hedda with a vocation in life, the metaphor of the manuscript as a child suggests that the manuscript could have served a similar purpose for Løvborg. Thea's extension of the metaphor to encompass child-murder indicates that Løvborg's loss of creative ability is irreversible: "For the rest of my days, it'll be for me as though you'd killed a small child" (Ibsen 2019, 358). The metaphor of the manuscript as a child and its implications of Løvborg's sterility contains within it an element of sexual rivalry. When Løvborg tells Hedda of how he imagines the manuscript being handled by others he describes the manuscript as being soiled. He does not know "whose hands it's fallen into" and who has "laid their fingers" on the manuscript that he describes as containing "Thea's pure [*rene*] soul" (Ibsen 2019, 360).[100] Løvborg's complaint can be read as doubt having been cast on the manuscript's paternity. The image of fingers perusing his and Thea's child can be associated with adulterous penetration. If the manuscript is a receptacle for Thea's "rene" soul, meaning "pure" or "clean," and if others have had their fingers inside it, then Løvborg can no longer be sure that he is the father. The vagueness of his phrasing should not be taken as an indication that Løvborg imagines these fingers as belonging to anything other than men. In Løvborg's imagination, Thea has been despoiled by having had her soul, as deposited in the manuscript, laid bare to others. If Løvborg were to continue their relationship he would be entering into sexual proximity to these other men. In an ironic reversal Løvborg, the cause of Elvsted's cuckoldry, now thinks of himself as a cuckold.

Hedda's burning of the manuscript can also be understood in terms of sexual rivalry and exclusivity. When she burns the manuscript she repeats both the metaphor of the manuscript as child and her threats to burn Thea's hair (Ibsen 2019, 361). By touching and tearing the manuscript she is in a sense actualizing Løvborg's fear of Thea being fondled by other men. The scene is Hedda's triumph over Løvborg and puts an end to the latter's creativity and hopes for the future. Her burning of the manuscript moreover plays into Brack's hands by eliminating his only significant rival. There is an important distinction to be made between Løvborg and Brack when it comes to sexual rivalry. Whereas Løvborg appears devastated at the thought

of sharing Thea with others, Brack appears unconcerned by the thought of sharing Hedda with Tesman. His efforts at diminishing Løvborg in Hedda's eyes demonstrate that he, much like Hedda, distinguishes between worthy and unworthy rivals. Brack's acceptance of a partial exclusivity is expressed in conversation with Hedda, in particular through the use of the word "hane," meaning "cock" or "rooster."[101] Having first been used in connection with the "hanekamp" in Miss Diana's salon, the word reappears following Brack's assertion that every respectable household should remain closed to Løvborg. Brack does not want to see the "superfluous" Løvborg (*HIS* 9:152)[102] intrude on his relationship with Hedda. Hedda realizes that Brack seeks to eliminate Løvborg as competition and become "the only rooster [*hane*] in the coop" (Ibsen 2019, 355). As opposed to the earlier use of "trekant" to signify an arrangement between a married couple and their male friend, this exchange centers on the elimination of a sexual rival. Now that Løvborg no longer stands in his way Brack is free to pursue his goal.

Hedda acts on her realization by showing Brack that she approves of his willingness to compete. She smiles, says that he is "a dangerous person" (Ibsen 2019, 355), and expresses admiration for his forcefulness, provided that he does not have any real power over her.[103] As Toril Moi notes, Hedda recognizes Brack as a potential threat: "The phrase at once transforms Hedda from aristocrat to serf and stresses her status as a woman confronted with a sexual predator against whom the ordinary law of the land offers no protection" (Moi 2013, 445). But the exchange can also be read as an attempt by Hedda to undermine Brack's masculinity. She does so by likening him to a rooster, which is to say a domesticated animal. Although she appreciates his competitive nature, her dismissive attitude suggests that she does not take the threat he represents seriously. Brack's response is a thinly veiled threat: "Who can tell if I may not be a man capable of any number of things?" (Ibsen 2019, 355) His insistence on being man enough to dominate her is a rejection of her attempt at emasculation. When he jokingly refers to himself as one of Hedda's "tame cockerels [*kurvhaner*]" (Ibsen 2019, 356), Hedda replies that she would not shoot her only one. What may at first seem a lighthearted reference to Hedda shooting aimlessly into the garden at Brack's entrance takes on a different meaning when read in the context of sexual rivalry. By reducing Hedda's threats of violence to the level of banter, Brack reclaims his masculinity and asserts his claim to her sex. His jokes and threats are intended to counteract her desire for domination. Rather than becoming a tame cockerel in her collection, Brack uses his knowledge of Hedda having lent Løvborg her pistol as a means to achieve his goal. When Hedda realizes that Brack has subjugated her she calls out to him as "the only rooster in the coop" (Ibsen 2019, 377) and turns her other pistol on herself. While Brack may have eliminated his rival and thereupon asserted his dominion over Hedda,

this is a pyrrhic victory. For Hedda, suicide is preferable to subjugation. Much like Løvborg, Brack does not understand the woman he is pursuing.

Hedda's wasteful death

Hedda's suicide is possibly one of the most commented-upon scenes in Ibsenian drama. A variety of factors have been highlighted as contributing to her decision, some of which I find more compelling than others.[104] Toril Moi notes a few of the most obvious factors: "Hedda dies in order to avoid scandal, to avoid lowering herself, to escape Judge Brack's sexual blackmail, and to preserve her freedom" (Moi 2013, 443). To this Moi adds the less obvious factor of Hedda's refusal to be subjected to public ridicule if the circumstances of her lending the pistol to Løvborg were to become common knowledge (Moi 2013, 445). While Moi focuses on the character of Hedda, Ross Shideler exemplifies a line of reasoning that assigns a high degree of blame to bourgeois patriarchy. Shideler reads the suicide as a rejection of a social order that has sought to impose its moral code on Hedda: "Hedda's action represents the complete rejection of the nuclear family and the patriarchy that first created a false set of expectations in her, then deprived her of an independent identity, and finally confined her in a household she hated" (Shideler 1999, 95). More narrowly, Jenny Björklund focuses on Hedda's fear of being "locked into conventional femininity" (Björklund 2016, 7), which would require Hedda to accept the role of mother and submit to men such as Brack.

Which of these various factors is emphasized will vary from scholar to scholar. There is one line of interpretation that I will single out for criticism, however, and that is the tendency I alluded to earlier of depicting Hedda's suicide as a tragic yet heroic act. John Northam argues that Hedda dies "for a vision of human potentiality superior to the reality to which life condemns her" and reads the suicide as "one of the most impressive recreations in drama of the experience of what it means to have heroic aspirations in an age that almost, but not quite, denies all possibility of heroism" (Northam 1973, 185). Ellen Mortensen reads the suicide as "a heroic act" through which Hedda "exceeds the limits on her actions imposed by contemporary society," concluding that it stands as a "testimony to her magnificent, heroic pride."[105] Vigdis Ystad reads the suicide as a heroic response to defeat: "Hedda does not escape; she demonstrates her ideals of courage, beauty and order in the suicide" (Ystad 2001, 271). This tendency to heroize Hedda's suicide overlooks the presence of female characters such as Aunt Julle and Thea who are able to live and thrive within the confines of bourgeois patriarchy. Readings of Hedda as a heroic character also disregard those aspects of her character that actively contribute to the death of Løvborg. In order to arrive at a characterization of

Hedda as a woman who, to quote Roland Lysell, "stands spiritually higher than the men around her,"[106] one must ignore her need for domination, her refusal to give of herself to others, her contempt for Tesman, her habit of threatening and violating Thea, and her fatal manipulation of Løvborg.

Even more significantly, in my view, such readings invest her suicide with a level of meaning that it simply lacks. The argument of Hedda's heroism can be interrogated by examining the suicide as a futile and wasteful act. My reading of the suicide as an instance of wastefulness is in line with Leonardo F. Lisi's reading (Lisi 2018) of the suicide as a triumph of nihilism. What I see in the final scenes is a realization on Hedda's part that she has become superfluous. Her desire for power has assuaged her despair at lacking a vocation in life, and following Brack's subjugation of her, she comes to experience the full weight of the uselessness of her life. Nantawan Soonthorndhai's assessment of the suicide as a wasteful act is one with which I agree: "But the calm, deliberate manner with which Hedda kills herself, by default, seems senseless, unproductive, and profoundly lacking in utility. She has not left any material wealth, and she has destroyed another kind of inheritance: her unborn child" (Soonthorndhai 1985, 168). In the face of a logic of productivity that applies to her because of her female masculinity, Hedda seeks to divert her energy into manipulating the lives of others. When her machinations are brought to an end by Brack, she is left with nothing. She has entirely focused on her own self, and her final decision is predicated on her recognition of the fact that she will never be able to either satisfy her need for power or be of any use to another. In Hedda's case self-centeredness and uselessness are intertwined.

Hedda's understanding of her life as useless grows stronger in the aftermath of Løvborg's death. She recognizes Brack's strength and admits that she is now "In your power all the same" (Ibsen 2019, 376). She even begins to lose her grip over Tesman. When Tesman turns his attention to Løvborg's manuscript and to Thea, Hedda understands that her power over him will fade. Having refused to live for others, she finds that no one is prepared to live for her. Her awareness of the futility of her existence sets in motion the events leading to her suicide. The change in her circumstances is prefaced by death, Aunt Rina having passed away. When Aunt Rina was still alive Hedda could not bear to accompany Tesman to his aunt's deathbed. After Aunt Rina's passing, Hedda plays the part of dutiful wife and offers to assist Tesman with the funeral (Ibsen 2019, 363). Tesman's reply in the negative has a deeper significance. Perhaps for the first time in her life Hedda offers aid to another, only to have her offer rebuffed. She still fails to understand why anyone would prioritize the needs of others over their own. When Aunt Julle says that there will always be someone new to care for, Hedda's incredulous "Would you take such a cross upon

you again?" (Ibsen 2019, 364) demonstrates that her attempt at selflessness is shallow at best.

Løvborg's death provides another impetus to Hedda's suicide by depriving her of the notion that beauty may exist in the world. Upon hearing of his death, she idealizes what she perceives as a suicide, interpreting his actions as evidence that a life lacking purpose can be given meaning through an act of defiance. She views his apparent suicide as an exertion of willpower that allowed him to regain mastery of his fate and describes his defiance as a thing of beauty: "Something imbued with a glow of impulsive [*uvilkårlig*] beauty" (Ibsen 2019, 371).[107] Not only did he have "the courage to live life in accordance with his own self" (Ibsen 2019, 372), he also showed that he could muster "the strength and the will to break away from life's party – so early" (Ibsen 2019, 372). Her reaction to Løvborg's death is conditioned by her conception of an idealized masculinity. Her description of him as courageous and defiant is a vision of Løvborg as the revitalized man she sought to transform him into. Her satisfaction at hearing the news of his death derives from her belief that she has succeeded in rehabilitating him and, by virtue of having done so, of having exercised power over him. Brack's account of what happened dispels her sense of accomplishment. Brack offers two hypothetical explanations for why Løvborg fired the pistol, both of which further diminish Løvborg's masculinity. The first is that Løvborg accidentally shot himself when attempting to threaten Miss Diana into returning his manuscript. The second is that Miss Diana fired, which would be in line with her forceful nature: "After all, she's a handy [*håndfast*] sort of girl, that Miss Diana" (Ibsen 2019, 375).[108] The use of "håndfast" accentuates Miss Diana's female masculinity. In both scenarios Løvborg comes across as a failure of a man. Either he was incapable of handling his pistol – which, if the pistol is read as a phallic symbol, means that he cannot handle his own penis – or he was subdued by Miss Diana, the forceful hunter of men. Løvborg's death thus represents his final humiliation and the end of Hedda's project of restorative masculinity.

Hedda's dual defeat, having failed to rehabilitate Løvborg and becoming subject to Brack's whims, leaves her with no discernible purpose in life. Her lack of purpose should be contrasted with Tesman, who gladly embarks on a mission to reconstruct Løvborg's manuscript: "I'll put my life into it!" (Ibsen 2019, 371) Given the gendered connotations of the metaphor of the manuscript as child, Tesman positions himself as the midwife to Løvborg's posthumous recognition. His task is interwoven with a theme of memory that highlights the importance of being remembered after one's death. By reassembling the manuscript, the memory of Løvborg will live on. Hedda, on the other hand, realizes that no one will remember her. Remembrance depends on the presence of tangible objects, as we see in the case of the memories Tesman attaches to his

embroidered slippers (Ibsen 2019, 301), Hedda's reference to the pistol as a "memento" (Ibsen 2019, 360) when handing it to Løvborg, or her description of the manuscript as "Løvborg's memorial" (Ibsen 2019, 374). If Hedda is to remembered she must leave something behind. Her only options are her piano and her sheets of music. It is through these objects that Hedda can express something of herself. When she clears a table of her sheet music so that Tesman and Thea can use it to reconstruct the manuscript, Hedda is discarding the last reminder of herself. Her sudden playing of "*a wild dance tune*" (Ibsen 2019, 376) on the piano is a last attempt at reminding others of her existence. At this point Hedda appears to have lost herself entirely, mimicking Tesman's verbal tic of "No, just think [*tænk det*]!" (Ibsen 2019, 376) Her acknowledgment that Thea will come to inspire Tesman is an admission of defeat. Her offer of assisting their project is her asking if there is any purpose to her life: "Is there nothing the two of you can use me for here?" (Ibsen 2019, 376) Tesman's reply in the negative shows that there is not. Faced with the realization that her life means nothing to anyone, she gives in to her existential despair and commits an act of pure waste. Brack's exclamation of "people don't actually *do* such things" (Ibsen 2019, 377) underlines the futility of her action; her life matters so little that she is not even afforded an appropriately horrified response. Having devoted her life to her own self, she will be remembered for nothing and by no one.

Notes

1 The letter is dated December 4, 1890. ["Stykkets titel er: *Hedda Gabler*. Jeg har derved villet antyde at hun som personlighed mere er at opfatte som sin faders datter end som sin mands hustru"] (*HIS* 15:62).
2 See, for instance, Ibsen's comment in a letter (dated December 27, 1890) that the Hedda character should be played by Constance Bruun, "who will hopefully endeavor to express the demonic underpinning in the character." ["'Hedda' bør utvilsomt spilles af frøken Bruun, der forhåbentlig vil bestræbe sig for at finde udtryk for det dæmoniske underlag i karakteren"] (*HIS* 15:73).
3 For an overview of the play's reception, see (Shepherd-Barr 1997).
4 "Hedda er da en sand Degenerationstype, uden Dygtighed, uden virkelig Evne, uden Evne til aandelig eller sanselig Hengivelse engang; hun *kan* ikke engang momentvis gaa op i en Anden" (Brandes 1891, n.p.; emphasis in original).
5 "intet forhold til andre mennesker lokker hende, ikke uden at hun kan have den fornøielse at pille i en menneskeskjæbnes traade med sine grusomme hænder" (Gran 1891, 76).
6 "ved egen skyld og skjæbnens ugunst faar sine dybeste kvindeinstinkter forvredet og forrykket og kommer til at aande i en luft, hvor alle hendes særegne feil slaar ud som store, ildelugtende giftblomster, der ender med at dræbe hende selv" (Butenschøn 1891, 7. The author's name is simply given as "A Woman's Voice" (*En kvinderøst*) on the title page. The imagery of poisonous flowers,

echoing Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857), suggests that Butenschøn regards the play as an example of *fin-de-siècle* decadence.

7 "et stort og gammelt Samfund, hvor Nervelivet er forfinet, hvor Sanselivet er raffineret, hvor Drifterne har haft Tid til at løbe sig trætte" (Bang 1892, 832).

8 "Som Narciss visnede hen over Kilden, er Hedda Gabler langsomt visnet for Livet, der bag sine Spejle. Hver Ævne, som vi ikke bruger, sygner hen og dør ud. Det er Lov. Men alle de Ævner i Sjælen, som vender udad, som vender sig handlelysten eller længselsfuld mod andre Mennesker, mod Medmennesker – alle de Ævner er jo hos Hedda forblevet ubrugte: Ævnen til at forbinde sig i Venskab, Ævnen til Hengivenhed, Ævnen til at ofre, Ævnen til at hjælpe, give – de har været unyttede og de er døde ud. Hun stod ikke i noget virkeligt Sjælsforhold til noget eneste Medmenneske, og nu kan hun slet ikke mere gøre det" (Bang 1892, 834).

9 "Kærlighedsævnen er død, Driften ligger døvet, Slægtsfortsættelsen nægtes" (Bang 1892, 838).

10 There is also a tradition, which I will not examine here, of medical practitioners analyzing Ibsen's characters. Robert Geyer's assessment of Hedda provides an example: "Hedda Gabler is a classic degenerate type with moral idiocy" ("Hedda Gabler est un type classique dégénérée avec idiotie morale" [Geyer 1902, 70]). On readings of Hedda as a hysteric, see (Bondevik 2006), (Tjønneland 2006).

11 "un mal dont souffrent et peuvent mourir les siècles de culture et de civilisation raffinée comme le nôtre: la perversion du sens moral par le sens intellectuel" (Bellaigue 1892, 220).

12 "le sacrifice du Bien [. . .] à toutes les fantaisies, à toutes les chimères, les plus folles et les plus criminelles, dont peuvent s'éprendre, sous prétexte d'esthétique et d'art, des cerveaux malades et des imaginations détraquées" (Bellaigue 1892, 220).

13 "Bis hierher ist nicht die Spur einer 'erblichen Belastung' oder besonderen Abnormität zu entdecken; solche ihr Leben lang unbeschäftigte, reizbare, unfrohe und unbefriedigt gefallsüchtige höhere Töchter, die, schlauer und kühler als die Hetären, durch ihre Schönheitsreste sich eine Versorgung für alle Zeiten zu erlisten wissen, haben wir Alle zu Dutzenden gesehen" (Harden 1891, 125).

14 "Vom alten Kriegeradel stammen sie Beide ab und gemeinsam ist ihnen auch die aus langer Generationentartung stammende Verderbtheit, die Lust am gefährlichen Spiel mit stacheligen Worten, mit losen Liebeshändeln, mit blanken Waffen. Julie ist ein Fräulein, Hedda ist keine Frau" (Harden 1896, 52).

15 "Sie war keine Frau, sie wollte kein Kind, nicht einmal einen eigenen Gedanken konnte sie nähren. Sie war unfruchtbar, lebensunfähig, der tragische Typus eines entarteten und verarmten, zum Lebenskampfe nicht mehr kriegstüchtigen Feudalgeschlechtes" (Harden 1896, 57).

16 "et forvrængt, misdannet Undtagelsesvæsen" (Andreas-Salomé 1893, 169).

17 "den fuldstændige Uvirksomheds Lede" (Andreas-Salomé 1893, 153).

18 "en mørk Tomhed, ud af hvilken den rene Negation stirrer hende imøde" (Andreas-Salomé 1893, 166).

19 "fuldstændig overflødig" (Andreas-Salomé 1893, 173).

20 "et Skud – et Intet" (Andreas-Salomé 1893, 175).

21 The earliest Ibsen scholarship tended to simply dismiss Hedda as an empty human being (Weigand 1925, 248) or as a useless aristocrat (Olsson 1937, 385). This would be the obverse of Moi's idealization of Hedda.

22 "i en fortidig verden etter noen normer som er gått ut på dato" (Haugan 2014, 449).
23 See (Shideler 1999, 191 n. 51) and (Hoel 1998, 272–273).
24 For an analysis of how "For Payment" relates to Strindberg's conceptualization of same-sex desire, see (Roy 2001, 55–60).
25 "Och som hon var generalens dotter tillföll henne samma hedersbevisning som fadren. Hon hade generals rang, och hon kände det" (Strindberg 1982, 231).
26 "Hon var van att befalla och bli lydd, hon kunde aldrig lyda någon. Det fria manliga livet bland män hade dessutom givit henne en avgjord motvilja mot kvinnliga sysselsättningar" (Strindberg 1982, 232).
27 "Tillhörande en gammal ätt som på fädernet misshushållat med sin kraft på själlösa militära sysselsättningar, nattvak, frosseri och dryckenskap, och som på mödernet undertryckt fruktsamheten för att hindra hemmansklyvning, syntes naturen hava tvekat i sista stunden vid bestämmandet av hennes kön, eller kanske icke ägande nog kraft att besluta sig för rasens fortsättande. Hennes figur saknade en bestämd kvinnlig prägel sådan en sund natur alstrar den för sina ändamål, och hon gjorde intet för att med konst avhjälpa bristerna" (Strindberg 1982, 232).
28 "Helène ville fly, ty scenen ingav henne fasa. Hon hade aldrig sett naturmaktens raseri i levande kroppar, och hon kände sig upprörd till det yttersta av detta obeslöjade utbrott" (Strindberg 1982, 234).
29 "Att hon var kallad till att leva för släktet, att hon hade en skyldighet att befordra groning och växt av de frön naturen nedlagt i hennes kropp, det slog hon ifrån sig" (Strindberg 1982, 236).
30 "Vilken helvetets förruttnelse låg icke under denna lögnaktiga moral, detta vansinniga emancipationsraseri från den sunda naturen, idealismens och kristendomens askes-teorier inplanterade i nittonde århundradet" (Strindberg 1982, 251).
31 "Så kom hon! Lugn, leende, triumferande; men skönare än han sett henne förr" (Strindberg 1982, 254).
32 "Han kröp som en hund efter henne, lydde hennes minsta vink, gjorde allt vad hon önskade, men förgäves" (Strindberg 1982, 254).
33 "Var överklassen degenererad efter som den icke längre ville föröka sig, eller var den moraliskt rutten" (Strindberg 1982, 256).
34 NBO Ms.8° 809 is a collection of minor working manuscripts (manuscripts 1, 5, 6, and 9). NBO Ms.8° 2639 (manuscript 2) is a notebook with notes and lines of dialogue. NBO Ms.8° 1942 contains a list of characters (manuscript 3) and an outline of the first act and parts of the second act (manuscript 7). NBO Ms.8° 2638 (manuscript 4) is a notebook containing short notes, some of which can be related to *Hedda Gabler*.
35 "Den blege, tilsyneladende kolde skønhed. Store fordringer til livet og til livsglæden. Han, som nu endelig har besejret he[nd]e, tarvelig af person, men hæderlig og begavet frisindet videnskabsmand." NBO Ms.8° 809:1, bl. [1]r. Quoted from www.ibsen.uio.no/DRVIT_HG%7CHG8809.xhtml; accessed February 1, 2024.
36 "Manuskriptet, som H. L. efterlader, går ud på at menneskeopgaven er: Opad, imod lysbringeren. Livet på det nuværende samfundsgrundlag er ikke værd at leve. Derfor fantasere sig bort fra det. Ved drik o. s. v." NBO Ms.8° 2639. Quotes in the following from www.ibsen.uio.no/DRVIT_HG%7CHG82639.xhtml; accessed February 1, 2024.

37 "Fortvilelsen hos H. L ligger i at han vil beherske verden men ikke kan beherske sig selv."
38 "Hvilken ironi over den menneskelige bestræbelse efter udvikling og fremskridt."
39 "Hans tankegang kan hun nemlig blot ane ikke forstå."
40 "dobbeltnatur"; "realisere det lavt borgerlige"; "vinde position for sin store centrale tanke."
41 "Der siges: det er en naturlov. Nu vel, men så gør man opposition mod den. Forlanger den afskaffet. Hvorfor vige tilbage. Hvorfor overgive sig på nåde og unåde."
42 "'Den forlornes' apologi for kulturmennesket. Mustangen og væddeløbshesten. Drikker – spiser paprika. Hus og klæder Revolution mod naturlovene – men ikke [. . .] før positionen er sikkret." NBO Ms.8° 2638. Quotes in the following from www.ibsen.uio.no/DRVIT_HG%7CHG82638.xhtml; accessed February 1, 2024.
43 "1.) De er ikke alle skabte til at være mødre.
2.) Det sandselige drag er i dem, men de har skræk for skandalen.
3.) De for[ne]mmer at der er livsopgaver i tiden, men de kan ikke få tag i dem."
44 "Det indbyrdes kvindehad. Kvinderne har ingen indflydelse på de ydre statsanliggender. Derfor vil de ha 'indflydelse på sjælene'[.] Og så har så mange intet livs mål (mangelen heraf er en arv)."
45 "Stykket skal dreje sig om 'det uoverkommelige,' det, at hige og tilstræbe noget som står imod konventionen, imod det vedtagne i bevidsthederne, – også i Heddas."
46 "Det er om de 'underjordiske kræfter og magter' der handles. Kvinden som grubearbejder: Nihilisme. Far og mor tilhørende forskellige tidsaldrer. Den kvindelige underjordiske revolution i tænkningen Slavefrygten udad imod det ydre."
47 "Ædelt formet fornemt ansigt med en fin voksfarvet hud." This calls to mind the description of the delicate proto-Rosmer, as discussed in the previous chapter.
48 "Ro over manererne"; "Øjnene stålfarvede, med et mat skær."
49 "Hedda føler sig dæmonisk tiltrukken af tidens tendenser. Men modet mangler. Det blir ved teorien, ved de ørkesløse drømmer."
50 "Så kommer historien om generalens 'unåde,' afsked o. s. v. Det forfærdeligste for en baldame ikke at være feteret for sin egen skyld."
51 "Fremtidskulturens filosofi sædslære."
52 "Det er noget skønt at arbeide for et mål."
53 "Jeg forstår mig ikke på de opofrende mennesker. Se nu gamle frøken Rising. Der har hun en lam sengeliggende søster liggende i huset – i årvis. Tror De hun synes det er et offer at leve for denne stakkers skabning, som er til byrde for sig selv endogså? Å langt ifra! Tvert imod. Jeg forstår det ikke."
54 "H. taler om at også hende har børn altid været en gru."
55 "Hedda sætter sig stærkt om end uklart op imod den mening at man skal eller elske 'familjens.' Tanterne er for hende ingenting."
56 "Hedda er helt optaget af det barn som skal komme, men når det er kommet gruer hun for hvad der vil følge."
57 "Den kvindelige fantasi er ikke aktiv og selvstændig skabende som den mandlige. Den behøver en liden smule virkelighed til hjælp."
58 "Hedda er udtrykket for damen i hendes stilling og med hendes karakter. Man gifter sig med Tesman, men man beskæftiger sin fantasi med Ejlert Løvborg.

Man læner sig tilbage i stolen, lukker øjnene og imaginerer sig hans eventyr. – Her den uhyre forskel: Fru Elfstad "arbejder på hans moralske forbedring." For Hedda er han et objekt for fejge, lokkende drømmerier. I virkeligheden har hun ikke mod til at være med på sligt. Så kommer erkendelsen af hendes tilstand. Bunden! Begriber det ikke. Latterligt! Latterligt!"

59 "Brack forstår godt at det er det indelukkede hos H., hendes hysteri, som egentlig er det motiverende i hele hendes handlemåde."

60 "Det dæmoniske i Hedda er: Hun vil øve indflydelse på en anden – Er det sket, så foragter hun ham."

61 "Heddas opdagelse i tredje akt at hendes forhold til pigen umuligt kan være rigtig."

62 "Det er egentlig hele mandens liv hun vil leve. Men så kommer betænkelighedene. De nedarvede og de indplantede."

63 "Ejlert Løvborgs tanke er at der må skaffes tilveje et kammeratskabsforhold mellem man og kvinde, hvoraf det sande åndige menneske kan framgå."

64 "Det nye i E. Ls bog er læren om udvikling på grundlag af kammeratskab mellem mand og kvinde."

65 "Redningstanken"; "Kan vi for samfundets skyld ikke få lov til at leve sædeligt med dem (kvinderne) så lever vi usædeligt."

66 "Det er netop den i omgang med kvindelige 'venner' eller 'kammerater' opsamlede sandselighed, som hos ham får udtryk gennem hans udskejelser."

67 "Hvorfor skal jeg følge en samfunnsmoral, som jeg véd, ikke vil holde ud en halv menneskealder til. Når jeg skejer ud, som de kalder det, så er det en flugt fra det samtidige."

68 "Jeg har ikke anlæg til andet end til at kede mig"; "At da ikke livet skal have nogen verdens ting at byde på." NBO Ms.8° 809:2. Quoted from www.ibsen.uio.no/DRVIT_HG%7CHG8809.xhtml; accessed February 1, 2024.

69 "Heddas fortvilelse er den forestilling at der visst findes så mange muligheder til lykke i verden, men at hun ikke kan få øje på dem. Det er mangelen på et livsmål som piner hende." NBO Ms.8° 809:3. Quoted from www.ibsen.uio.no/DRVIT_HG%7CHG8809.xhtml; accessed February 1, 2024.

70 "Husk på jeg er et gammelmandsbarn – og dertil en udlevet mands – eller en affældig da – Det har kanske sat sine mærker."

71 "Hedda taler om hvorledes hun følte sig tilsidesat, skridt for skridt da hendes far ikke længere var i nåde, tog afsked og døde uden at efterlade sig noget. – Det stod da i bitterhed for hende, som om det var for hans skyld at man havde feteret hende. – Og så var hun imellem da 25 og 26 år allerede. Nær ved som ugift at gå nedad." The phrasing of "gå nedad" is significant, given the association of falling with degeneration.

72 "Hun vånder sig under bevidstheden om at hun ikke ejer noget livsmål og finder sig på samme tid oprørt over at T. finder det i sin orden. Hun kan jo dele hans interesser." NBO Ms.8° 1942:2. The manuscript can be dated to September 1890 (*HIS* 9K:128). Quoted from www.ibsen.uio.no/DRVIT_HG%7CHG81942.xhtml; accessed February 1, 2024.

73 "Fordi jeg vil sejre gennem mig selv. Sejre ved mine egne evner." NBO Ms.8° 808. The manuscript is dated by Ibsen to August–October 1890 (*HIS* 9K:131). Quoted from www.ibsen.uio.no/DRVIT_HG%7CHG8808.xhtml; accessed February 1, 2024.

74 "**HEDDA**. Men kan De da aldrig lære at tæmme Dem selv!
LØVBORG. Nej, – det er just det, jeg ikke kan. Og det er fortvilelsen. Jeg har det ikke på den vis, som så mange andre. De har det i sin magt at kunne sige

stop til sig selv når de ser at det bærer for galt i vej. Det vil jeg aldrig komme til at lære. Jeg har levet mig ned til at bli' en ufri mand. Mistet magten over min egen vilje."

75 (Mortensen 2007) should be read in conjunction with (Mortensen 2006), as both explore the topic of homosexuality in-depth.

76 On Garnier's writings on sexology, and on the construction of a discourse on same-sex desire in 19th-century France in general, see (Schultz 2018).

77 "une timidité exagérée"; "un esprit fort, égal ou supérieur à celui de l'homme" (Garnier 1883, 460).

78 "Elles refusent de se soumettre à l'homme et il en est cependant qui affectent de préférer sa société, ses rapports et ses occupations même, pour mieux donner le change, en se montrant aussi indifférentes qu'insensibles avec tous" (Garnier 1883, 460).

79 "prennent les allures, les habitudes, la voix et, quand ils le peuvent, les vêtements de leur sexe imaginaire, sans présenter aucune anomalie anatomique ou physiologique des organes sexuels."

80 "un désordre cérébral de nature inconnue (une femme qui se croit homme, un homme qui se croit femme)"; "sentiments, démarche, langage, habillement du sexe imaginaire."

81 "dans les éléments multiples de l'hérédité, dans le jeu compliqué des influences mâles et femelles qui sont en lutte."

82 Derived from virago, meaning a strong or overbearing woman. "Effeminatio und Viraginität" in the original German.

83 "receptiv og reproduktiv anlagt"; "gjennem uegennyttigt Arbeide at fremme og gjenoprette en Andens Verk"; "[b]edre skikket til at arbeide med andres Tanker, end til at skabe selvstændig" (Andreas-Salomé 1893, 163, 172). The focus on creativity is shared by Birgitta Johansson, who also describes Tesman as a man incapable of independent creation (Johansson 2008, 254).

84 "Julle har kjøpt den for at hun skal kunne spasere sammen med Hedda på gaten. Hatten er derfor ikke bare noe Julle ønsker å pynte seg med, den er et middel som tanten skal bruka for å kunne pynte seg med den 'dejlige' Hedda Gabler" (Helland 1993, 70).

85 Ibsen clearly intended to portray the Tesman family as an intolerable imposition on Hedda, as we see in a letter (dated January 14, 1891): "Jørgen Tesman, his old aunts and the long-serving Berte together form a holistic and unified image. They have a common way of thinking, common memories, a common outlook on life. For Hedda, they stand as a hostile and foreign power directed against her basic being." ["Jørgen Tesman, hans gamle tanter og det mangeårige tjenestetyende Berte danner tilsammen et helheds- og enhedsbillede. De har fælles tankegang, fælles erindringer, fælles livssyn. For Hedda står de som en mod hendes grundvæsen rettet fiendtlig og fremmed magt"] (*HIS* 15:89).

86 "Han sier at hun hører til familien slikt et hus eller et flygel hører til, og ikke at hun hører til *i* familien, som en selvstendig del av den eller lignende" (Helland 1993, 70; emphasis in original).

87 I find the translation insufficient in that "nydelig" has overtones of consumption, as in savoring a sweet. It is as though Tesman were consuming a delectable treat.

88 Ane Hoel argues against a reading of Hedda as being pregnant, basing her interpretation on the supposed inability of Tesman to engage in intercourse with his wife (Hoel 1998, 277). I think that this reading is overstating the extent of Tesman's lack of masculine traits. I also find unconvincing Hoel's argument

that Hedda knows that she is not pregnant, but decides not to tell the truth in the hopes that a pregnancy will secure her a protective husband (Hoel 1998, 282). I do not think that a pregnancy would increase Hedda's hold over Tesman, which is already absolute.

89 Patricia M. Troxel observes that Tesman's failure to deliver on his promises leads Hedda to feel that she is "entitled to break that contract in other ways" (Troxel 1986, 73).

90 "give noget og være noget for andre" (Andreas-Salomé 1893, 160).

91 In the original: "Jeg har ikke anlæg til sligt noget, herr assessor. Ikke noget med krav til mig!" (*HIS* 9:91). The translation of "anlæg" misses the mark. "Anlæg" is used here in the sense of innate qualities that can be developed further. A better translation would be "disposition." Ellis-Fermor's "gift" (Ibsen 1964, 306) and Arup's "aptitude" (Ibsen 1998, 209) are similarly imprecise.

92 Frode Helland commits to a reading of Løvborg as a fully autonomous man who embodies a modern ideal of self-control without repressing his natural urges (Helland 1993, 78). I am arguing the opposite, that Løvborg's lack of self-control means that he is governed by his urges.

93 In the original: "Det også. Det også, – tror jeg næsten" (*HIS* 9:111). The translation by Dawkin and Skuggevik of the last line as "In part. In part – I rather think" (Ibsen 2019, 338) changes the content of what Hedda says. I have instead given a literal translation of the line.

94 Hedda's lack of erotic interest in Løvborg can be supported by a comment in a letter (dated March 11, 1891) in which Ibsen clarifies that Hedda, who "feels that she is pregnant" but feels no obligation to "assume the duties of a mother," is not in love with another man (*HIS* 15:108–109). ["Det af Dem omskrevne sted i mit stykke er således at forstå at Hedda, som føler at hun befinder sig i svangerskab, aldeles ikke hos sig sporer noget 'kald' til at påtage sig pligter som moder. Det er dette 'krav,' denne fordring, som hun siger at ingen må stille til hende. Før vil hun dø. Om noget elskovsforhold til en anden mand er her ikke tale."]

95 In the original: "det handlingens mod" (*HIS* 9:115) Dawkin and Skuggevik omit "handlingens" (Ibsen 2019, 340), rendering the translation imprecise. Løvborg is commending Thea for demonstrating courage through her actions. Ellis-Fermor's "she has the courage that leads to action" (Ibsen 1964, 319) and Arup's "courage to act" (Ibsen 1998, 221) are better, and I have amended the translation accordingly.

96 Her line of criticism is ironic given her difficulty in mastering her own impulses. In her conversation with Brack regarding how she insulted Aunt Julle by belittling her hat, Hedda explains how she at times is unable to withstand her own destructive urges: "Well, you know – these things come over me every so often. And then I *can't* stop myself" (Ibsen 2019, 326).

97 For an in-depth discussion of this theme, which is not directly relevant to my argument, see (Lysell 2021). Else Høst's argument that Hedda's fantasies of a rejuvenated Løvborg transport her to an earlier stage of her life (Høst 1958, 188) are at odds with my reading, as I do not believe that the young Hedda ever thought of Løvborg as an idealized male figure.

98 Jens Arup argues that Hedda has no clear aim in mind when manipulating Løvborg: "Hedda's bid to control Løvborg is essentially predatory. She desires power over him for its own sake, and her purpose is largely uncomplicated by any very clear idea of an ultimate end to which she will apply her power once it is gained" (Arup 1957, 28). I am arguing that she has a clear goal in mind, which is to transform Løvborg into a man whom she can take pride in defeating.

99 Ibsen was particular about the word "hanekamp." In a letter (dated November 25, 1890), Ibsen requests the correction of an error in the print manuscript: "In the conversation between Hedda and assessor Brack in the third act, it is said in one of his lines – Common fight between both ladies and gentlemen. Please change this to – Common cockfighting, etc." ["I samtalen mellem Hedda og assessor Brack i tredje akt heder det i en af hans replikker – Almindeligt slagsmål mellem både damer og herrer. Dette bedes forandret til – Almindelig hanekamp o. s. v."] (*HIS* 15:53).

100 I would note that Ellis-Fermor omits "rene" in her "Thea's whole soul was in that book" (Ibsen 1964, 344), as does Arup in his "Thea's soul was in that book" (Ibsen 1998, 245).

101 The double entendre attaching to "cock" is not present in the Scandinavian languages. It is interesting to note, however, that the Scandinavian word for cuckold, "hanrej" (Danish and Swedish) or "hanrei" (Norwegian), is derived from "hane."

102 The translation of "en overflødig" as "an irrelevance" (Ibsen 2019, 355) is misleading. "Superfluous" (Ibsen 1964, 337, 1998, 239) is more appropriate, in that Brack is arguing that Løvborg serves no purpose.

103 Hedda's odd phrasing of "sålænge De ikke i nogen måde har hals og hånd over mig" (*HIS* 9:153), literally "as long as you in no way have throat and hand over me," is difficult to translate and is usually rewritten (Ibsen 1998, 239, 2019, 355).

104 Mary Kay Norseng argues that Hedda's decision is the culmination of the deterioration of her mental health (Norseng 1999, 31). Norseng's argument is an example of reading the play backwards, using the final scene to explain the events leading up to it. Sandra Saari reads the suicide as the culmination of "a series of attempts by Hedda to reinstate the past in her present life" (Saari 1977, 299). I do not see how Brack's subjugation of Hedda can be made to fit into this argument.

105 "Dette selvmordet representerer en heroisk handling, og må, ifølge samtidens konvensjoner, kunne anses som en svært 'ukvinnelig' handling. Men i det øyeblikket hun overskrider grensene for sin samtids handlingsramme, framstår Heddas selvmord som et ekko av de antikke dramaers tragiske verden. Selvmordet står da som et vitnesbyrd over hennes storslåtte, heroiske stolthet" (Mortensen 1996, 33).

106 "står andligt högre än männen i omgivningen" (Lysell 2021, 169).

107 "Uvilkårlig" can indicate a lack of control, which would translate to "impulsive," but I believe the word is used here in the sense of something absolute or limitless, as in Arup's "unconditional beauty" (Ibsen 1998, 258). Ellis-Fermor's "spontaneous beauty" (Ibsen 1964, 357) is misleading.

108 "Håndfast" can be used in the sense of someone who is strong and forceful or in the sense of action that is pursued purposefully.

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Conclusion

The purpose of this study has been to examine Henrik Ibsen's wide-reaching and long-lasting engagement with degeneration discourse. In *Ghosts*, *Rosmersholm*, and *Hedda Gabler*, the reader is confronted with variations on a common degeneration plot. Ibsen's degeneration plot follows a stable formula: an element of degeneracy is introduced into, or revealed to be pre-existing within, a family belonging to the *haute bourgeoisie*. Once degeneracy has attached to the family unit, the line is destined for extinction. In the three plays studied, a state of degeneracy is embodied in a gifted individual who is unable or unwilling to pursue any form of vocation in life. Saddled with an existential purposelessness, the degenerate figures of Osvald, Rosmer, and Hedda either waste away or embark on a path of destruction. The last scions of once-prominent families having proven to be unfit for life, the class they represent is by extension shown to be equally unfit. No longer possessing the energetic resources or even the will to propagate itself, an upper class that is only able to produce degenerates will inevitably come to be replaced either by an ascendant middle-class intent on appropriating the status of the patrician order, or by a vigorous working-class intent on leaving its old masters behind altogether.

The issue of raising children lies at the heart of *Ghosts*. The degenerate Alving has failed both his children, Osvald by failing to ensure his physical viability and Regine by depriving her of her paternity. Alving lives on as a specter haunting the asylum, a site for the inculcation of the values of a corrupt bourgeoisie. Still trying to replace Alving as father to Regine, Engstrand endeavors to teach her to value her own self. The demonic figure of Engstrand acts as a counterbalance to an ideal of female self-sacrifice that compels women to give of their own selves for the benefit of others. Engstrand's efforts are self-serving but nonetheless stand in contrast to Helene's attempt at enlisting Regine to sacrifice herself for children who are not her own. Engstrand's call for Regine to emancipate herself from the clutches of the Alvings hints at the possibility of a broader liberation of the working class from the established order. Although Engstrand may

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come across as a conniving and unsympathetic figure, he appears far more capable of adapting to his surroundings than the Alvings of the world. A similar adaptability is evinced by Helene, who presents the special case of a woman taking on the mantle of bourgeois patriarch. In doing so Helene displays male-coded values of initiative and purpose, taking charge of the estate and financing the construction of the asylum. As a female patriarch she acts both to remove the legitimate heir, albeit only temporarily, and to ensure Regine's continued subservience to the Alving family. Helene's marriage to Alving and her industriousness find parallels in Regine. The references to marriage as a form of trading women for status accentuate Helene's sense of having been sold to Alving. Regine wishes to avoid a similar fate and instead sets her eyes on a future that, while existing in conceptual proximity to prostitution, may nonetheless come to grant her a previously unattainable level of self-sufficiency. By leaving the Alving household, she is able to take responsibility for her own future, and in so doing she rejects the poisoned chalice offered by the bourgeoisie. Having taken Engstrand's teachings to heart, Regine realizes that she would be wasting her life caring for the children of the asylum or for Osvald.

Helene has proven to embody an ethic of hard work and self-restraint that Alving failed to live up to. Alving is imbued with female-coded traits such as an emotional incontinence that transforms him into a sobbing wreck. His inability to find a useful purpose in life and rein in his destructive urges sheds light on the instability of bourgeois patriarchy; a social order built on male privilege can only perpetuate itself by producing competent men. Helene's bizarre acceptance of Osvald marrying his half-sister similarly highlights a fundamental weakness of bourgeois patriarchy, as Helene appears willing to introduce incest into the bloodline in order to ensure her son's happiness. By comparison, Osvald appears to entertain a measured or even idealistic sexual morality. His vision of loving relationships between the unmarried seems almost chaste when compared to the bourgeois immorality of his parents. Osvald's present difficulties stem from the reduction of his fixed fund of energy, a condition caused by a case of paternally transmitted congenital syphilis with late onset. Osvald's inheritance of syphilitic degeneracy has rendered him incapable of work. Rushing to save the asylum from burning down, Osvald overtaxes his limited energetic reserve, further straining his system. His desperate search for external sources of energy drives him to plead for Regine's aid in counterbalancing his energetic depletion. When a second shock to his constitution arrives in the form of Helene's account of Alving's past, Osvald's syphilitic diathesis erupts in full force, reducing him to the status of a syphilitic child.

The question of energy is useful in understanding the mechanisms of degeneration in Ibsenian drama. Of particular importance is the issue of being unable to express one's creative energies in a productive and beneficial

fashion. Helene's account of Alving's descent into degeneracy amounts to an indirect defense of her late husband. Helene depicts Alving as victim of a set of circumstances beyond his control and whose overabundance of energy turned impossible to master once frustrated. In the context of an energetic economy in which the constructive expenditure of energy is prioritized, Alving's wasted energy comes across as the central cause of his fall. Helene recognizes that her husband's failure to find a vocation in life forced her to find her own. A reading of Alving as to some extent the victim of an oppressive social order suggests that part of the blame for his degeneracy should be placed at the feet of his own class. Morality or even common decency do not necessarily factor into whether or not a corrupt society is able to reinvigorate itself. If frustrated energy is identified as the cause of Alving's degeneracy, then Regine's choice of investing in her own self may enable her to avoid her father's fate. Helene, on the other hand, relinquishes her position and gives of herself to Osvald, who will turn out to be a poor investment. Devoting one's energy to one's self and to others are irreconcilable alternatives. In the end we learn that Helene's decision to live for her son was entirely wasteful, and Osvald's decrepitude signals the end of the Alving line. Alving's illegitimate child, however, lives on and will possibly help bring about a new social order in which talent and purposeful action matter more than the circumstances of one's birth.

The trope of the upper-class degenerate recurs in *Rosmersholm*. Rosmer, overcultivated and demonic in equal measure, brings about the destruction of a family line that bears an incongruous resemblance to a European-style feudal aristocracy. Overcultivation carries connotations of having lived for too long and having lost the capacity for renewal. Repeated references in Ibsen's notes to the fall of the Roman Empire call for a reading of *Rosmersholm* as an allegory of the decline of a patrician order framed as a struggle between a vital north and a decaying south. Rosmer does not realize that his class is in the process of being replaced by bourgeois upstarts and refuses to take sides in an ongoing conflict between elements of the bourgeoisie that respectively seek to preserve or challenge the status quo, as represented by Kroll and Mortensgård. Rosmer is an image of passivity, disinterested in the real world and deathly afraid of eroticism. Believing himself the savior of the people, he fails to understand that his project of ennobling the common man is a self-contradictory undertaking. He refuses to engage with the issues of the day and appears curiously detached from the passing of time. A failed patriarch in the mold of Alving, he appears wholly incapable of living up to the responsibilities associated with his station.

As opposed to Rosmer, Rebekka sees herself as aligned with the spirit of the times and expresses a desire to contribute to society. What her contribution would amount to remains in doubt, as she has depended on others

her entire life. Having been raised by the radical Dr. West, she has adopted his ideological outlook without making it her own. She believes in ideals that she admits are outdated, and her borrowed opinions read as a kind of self-deception. When she moved to Rosmersholm, she traded one domineering male for another and came to embrace Rosmer's empty idealism. Rebekka embodies the ideal of female self-sacrifice in her devotion to serving undeserving men. In this regard she offers a parallel to Beate, who lived and died for Rosmer. Rebekka's manipulation of Beate demonstrates both Beate's fragility, occasioned by Rosmer's frustration of her procreative urge, and Rebekka's weakness of will. Willpower provides a key to understanding Rebekka's subservience to Rosmer. A demonic lust for domination awakens in the formerly listless Rosmer when he realizes the extent of his power over Rebekka. The change undergone by Rosmer is tied to the appearance of his former mentor, Brendel, an obviously degenerate character. Brendel comes across as a gifted individual who has squandered his talents on frivolous pastimes. His wastefulness is expressed in a sexualized imagery with associations of masturbation and self-consumption. Brendel acts as Rosmer's shadow, encouraging Rosmer to give in to his destructive desire. Like Rosmer, Brendel inhabits a realm of fantasy, and his speeches are laden with meaningless rhetoric. Brendel's insistence that Rosmer must pursue his vocation in life appears grotesque when uttered by Brendel. The theme of wasting one's life extends to Rebekka, who comes to believe that her life can only have meaning if she is able to restore Rosmer's faith in himself. Rebekka's decision to end her life shows the futility of identifying someone else as one's vocation. The man whose idealism Rebekka believed in is revealed to be a demonic figure who manipulates Rebekka into choosing death. Rosmer joining her is a victory for the forces of entropy and reads as the last gasp of a long-dead patrician order.

With Rebekka having succumbed to Rosmer's influence, the question remains as to which character might conceivably offer a hope for societal renewal. This role could be filled by the bourgeoisie, and in particular the party of Mortensgård, who is attuned to the cause of progress. Kroll, on the other hand, represents that part of the bourgeoisie that still clings to the status associated with the patrician order it has replaced. Kroll is moreover a reactionary in opposition to the reality of his times and who, metaphorically speaking, is trying to turn back the clock. He engages in class-based conflict with Mortensgård, whose disgrace at the hands of Rosmer instilled in him a disdain for Rosmer's entire class. Mortensgård has managed to rehabilitate himself through a combination of hard work and a distinct lack of idealism. His amorality makes him both resilient and efficient. Much like Regine, Mortensgård demonstrates that determination and a flexible morality are a pathway to success and perhaps even to a brighter future for contemporary society.

In *Hedda Gabler* we meet a female variation on the trope of the degenerate aristocrat. Hedda's degeneracy is rooted in her upbringing. Having been raised to be more of a man than a woman, she enacts a female masculinity that clearly sets her apart from the other women in the play. She disdains motherhood and bristles at the idea of giving of herself to another. Her lack of a vocation in life has brought about an existential despair that she is unable to fully articulate. She stands in contrast to Aunt Julle and Thea Elvsted, two women who are able to find contentment within the bounds of bourgeois patriarchy. Hedda comes across as a narcissist who demands that others do her bidding while refusing to accede to the demands or even wishes of others. In an echo of the demonic Rosmer, Hedda desires to exert control over others, and in particular forceful men. Tesman does not fulfill this need as he lacks masculine traits. Hedda wants above all to lord power over men capable of offering her a worthy challenge. This urge is what motivates Hedda to seek Løvborg's rehabilitation. She takes no pleasure in dominating the weak-willed Tesman, but Løvborg holds out the promise of a satisfying victory, provided that he can regain his masculine stature. Hedda's female masculinity casts her as a more virile man than either Tesman or the unreformed Løvborg. Hedda demonstrates her adherence to the values of her father by encouraging competition between men and by dominating those around her. Her female masculinity was ultimately the cause of her rejection of Løvborg's advances, an episode that should be understood as panic on Hedda's part when she realized that she was in danger of breaking the taboo against expressing erotic desire between men.

Hedda's project of rehabilitating Løvborg suggests a crisis of contemporary masculinity. Rather than act the part of head of the household, Tesman treats his wife as his master. He has been raised by his aunts and has thus been deprived of male role models. By living for Hedda he is enacting the same ideal of self-sacrifice that is customarily associated with women. He is incapable of original creation and must content himself with restoring Løvborg's manuscript. Tesman loathes the idea of competing with other men for position and stature, whereas Hedda relishes the thought. Standing in opposition to the domesticated Tesman and the incontinent Løvborg, however, is Judge Brack. Brack represents an intact patriarchal tradition that is still able to exert its influence. Brack desires access to Hedda's sex and is unafraid of challenging his rivals. He recognizes that Løvborg, unlike Tesman, could present an obstacle to his plans, and makes use of strategically divulged information to eliminate his rival. Hedda is drawn to danger and risk-taking and fails to understand the danger posed by Brack until it is too late. Her efforts at emasculating him fall short. Brack is able to counteract Hedda because he is capable of making plans, following through on them, and restraining himself in the face of her

provocations. Brack is willing to operate within boundaries set by Hedda until an opportunity presents itself to assert himself. He has no issue with making a cuckold of Tesman, but he is unwilling to share Hedda with Løvborg. Brack's need for exclusivity is echoed by Løvborg, who breaks off his relationship with Thea after his manuscript, described as their child, has been despoiled at the hands of other men.

Hedda's suicide tends to be read as an escape from an intolerable situation and a defiant assertion of her beliefs in the face of defeat. Less frequently remarked upon is the essential wastefulness of her death. What Hedda comes to understand in the closing scenes is that her life has no purpose and that no one would mourn her death. Hedda's fate is similar to that of Rebekka, another woman who has never lived for her own self and thus become superfluous. The wastefulness of Hedda's life mirrors the squandered potential of the degenerates Alving and Brendel. Hedda finds herself in the same subservient position in which she had situated Tesman and that she intended for Løvborg. Unlike the latter, however, Hedda has created nothing of her own and will be remembered by no one. There is nothing inherently heroic about an individual bent on domination being dominated by another; the tragedy of her death lies in her inability to find a more worthwhile pursuit than dominating others. Idealizing her death as a romantic-heroic gesture distracts from the emptiness of having wasted one's life in the pursuit of power.

In this study I have sought to lay bare the full extent of Ibsen's investment in degeneration discourse. While Ibsen's interest in evolutionary discourse is well-documented, I hope to have shown that he was similarly engaged with contemporary discourse on the degeneration of individuals, families, and social orders. His interest manifests primarily in what I have described as a degeneration plot that provides a foundation for *Ghosts*, *Rosmersholm*, and *Hedda Gabler*.[1] Degeneration discourse offers Ibsen an instrument with which to criticize certain corrosive aspects of late-19th-century bourgeois society. The fall of an established class, either an *haute bourgeoisie* or a feudal-style aristocracy, is precipitated by factors intrinsic to the makeup of this order. The old order has lived on past its prime and should give way to a new order that can bring about societal renewal. The middle class and the working class offer this promise. The promise is not always fulfilled, as evinced by the draining and death of Rebekka in *Rosmersholm*, but in other cases a glimmer of hope can be detected, as we see with Regine's departure in *Ghosts*. In *Hedda Gabler* the extinction of the Gabler name, already halfway completed through Hedda's marriage and declassing, is barely acknowledged. In Ibsen's degeneration plots, those who fall do so due to a variety of reasons – their own decisions, their upbringing, or the strictures of society. In all cases, however, they remain

unlamented by those who come to replace them in a never-ending cycle of growth, decay, and regeneration.

Note

1 I would suggest that the avenue of inquiry I have pursued can be extended to plays such as *The Wild Duck* (*Vildanden*, 1884), *The Master Builder* (*Bygmester Solness*, 1892), and *John Gabriel Borkman* (1896), all of which depict prominent families in a state of decline.

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