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Ibsen's stagecraft: the symbolic setting

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IBSEN'S STAGECRAFT: THE SYMBOLIC SETTING

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate Faculty of the
University of the Pacific

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
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This thesis, written and submitted by

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# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. <em>An Enemy of the People</em></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <em>Rosmersholm</em></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <em>The Lady From the Sea</em></td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. <em>Hedda Gabler</em></td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. <em>The Master Builder</em></td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Final Word</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1. Sitting Room, Acts I and II  
*An Enemy of the People* | 3 |
| 2. Editorial Office of People's Messenger, Act III  
*An Enemy of the People* | 5 |
| 3. Captain Horster's Dining Room, Act IV  
*An Enemy of the People* | 6 |
| 4. Dr. Stockman's Study, Act V  
*An Enemy of the People* | 7 |
| 5. Sitting Room at Rosmersholm, Acts I, III, IV  
*Rosmersholm* | 14 |
| 6. Rosmer's Study, Act II  
*Rosmersholm* | 16 |
| 7. Carp Pond and Garden, Acts III, V  
*The Lady From the Sea* | 23 |
| 8. Wangel's House and Garden, Act I  
*The Lady From the Sea* | 24 |
| 9. Wooded Height in Prospect Park, Act II  
*The Lady From the Sea* | 25 |
| 10. Dr. Wangel's Garden Room, Act IV  
*The Lady From the Sea* | 26 |
| 11. Living Room and Back Room, Acts I-IV  
*Hedda Gabler* | 32 |
| 12. Living Room With Empty Rooms, Act I  
*Hedda Gabler* | 33 |
| 13. Solness's Workroom, Act I  
*The Master Builder* | 42 |
*The Master Builder* | 44 |
| 15. Solness's Veranda, Act III  
*The Master Builder* | 46 |
Henrik Ibsen's critics have long acknowledged his mastery of the stage, that is, his use of the physical and off-stage settings, architectural details, props, and space as symbol. However, study of Ibsen's symbolic settings has been limited to one play or to aspects of his stagecraft in general terms. Peter Tenant's *Ibsen's Dramatic Technique* discusses the settings and stage directions of his major plays as they relate to plot and theme. In *Patterns of Ibsen's Middle Plays*, Richard Hornby studies the settings and scenic background only for *An Enemy of the People*. Edvard Beyer in *Ibsen: The Man And His Work* focuses on the plays' symbols as they relate to theme. Finally, David Thomas presents an excellent study of stage space in *The Lady From the Sea*. These authors and others have touched upon the genius of Ibsen's stagecraft. More can and should be said because understanding Ibsen's symbolic settings will lead to a deeper reading and appreciation of his plays.

Ibsen's use of the symbolic setting provides focus and unity to the plays that were written between 1882 and 1892. His settings become a projection of his major themes and the characters' souls or psyches. Areas on and off the stage, props, furniture, and architectural details may be a stage projection of the protagonist's mind, intention, motivation, or suppression. Since the essential nature of drama is conflict, Ibsen often uses his settings as symbols of conflict. Varied settings, architectural details, placement of the furniture, and the characters' positions and movement on the stage provide a visual symbolism for his themes in *An Enemy of the People*, *Rosmersholm*, *Lady From the Sea*, *Hedda Gabler*, and *The Master Builder*.
Ibsen's settings often caused a great deal of trouble to stage because they were complicated. Indoor settings were his effort to create a realistic illusion, while his later abandonment of indoor settings coincided with his reversion to romantic symbolism, according to Tenant (67). With The Lady From the Sea in 1888, his plays expanded to the open air. Three plays, Rosmersholm, The Lady From the Sea, and The Master Builder, begin in an enclosed setting that gradually and symbolically takes the protagonist to the outdoors and freedom. However, in An Enemy of the People, Ibsen uses enclosed settings that are mirror images of one another, thus symbolizing the pattern of thematic contrasts. Only Hedda Gabler takes place in one enclosed set, which becomes a symbolic entrapment for Hedda. In these latter two plays and The Master Builder, Ibsen enlarged his stage with the help of an inner room or a back room that functioned not only as a way to place his characters and therefore complicate the plot, but also to project his themes and his characters' psychological states. In addition, he uses off-stage settings not only to symbolize further the conflicts within his characters, but also to enhance his themes.
Written in 1882, *An Enemy of the People* contains four sets that actually repeat each other in arrangement of architectural details. For example, in Acts I and II the mirror becomes windows in Acts III and IV and the dining room becomes the printing office at the People's Messenger. The settings or scenic background realistically reflect the course of the action and symbolize the thematic contrasts between old and new truths. The off-stage settings of the baths and the solitude of the cold North represent another element of conflict: the purity of truth learned in isolation superimposed on the diseased baths of the present and the town's economic future.

Acts I and II take place in Dr. Stockman's sitting room (figure 1). A door on the back wall to the dining room represents the entrance to healthful nourishment. On the right wall two doors present another conflict.

The door to the hall allows public truths to come and go while the door to the study leads to Stockman's private domain, his mind. Symbolizing the
friendly public side of Dr. Stockman's personality, the sitting room and dining room receive the various men and ideas that in the beginning support his own views. During Act I in the sitting room while ethical discussions of the city's baths, the town's economy, and its political power structure occur, Billing sits in the dining room stuffing himself with roast beef. Billing is a muckraking journalist, whose name in Norwegian is billig meaning cheap. His name suggests his character. The initial scene establishes Billing as a man of appetite, gobbling the doctor's food in the same way that he ingests his ideas, but when those ideas become unpalatable, he spits them out. Dr. Stockman's carefulness about mealtimes suggests that his appetites are regulated, but Billing is concerned only with having a good feed (Hornby 162-163). From the first moment, we are shown that the issues in this play are not pure, that they take place against a background of appetite (Hornby 170). The tables throughout the play represent a meeting place to ingest or exchange ideas. Food symbolizes those ideas. By Act II, the closed dining room foreshadows the friends' rejection of the doctor's ideas or nourishment. The sitting room and study appear neat and orderly, reflecting the doctor's mind and world. His name also suggests his character; "stokk" in Norwegian means stick or stiff and unyielding, which reflects Dr. Stockman's tenacious position on the baths (Hornby 151).

In Act III the setting changes to the editorial office of the People's Messenger. The editorial office corresponds to both the sitting room and study of Acts I and II. The office still functions as a place where people meet and exchange truths. However, the dining room of Acts I and II has been replaced with the printing office. Symbolically, they are places of truth or nourishment, but the kinds of truths that emanate from each are very different. Throughout An Enemy of the People body and health imagery
appear, and since this play concerns the moral and ethical decay of the body politic, it is fitting that the settings reflect parts of the body. The doctor's study represents the mind, a world of truths, books, and logic, the dining room the stomach that digests truths, the printing office the bowel where selfish motives and diseased truths eliminate ethical principles, and Captain Horster's home the womb or heart, the temporary center for Dr. Stockman's new education and independence. The editorial office is an ironic set because the truth it prints comes from within, that is, from the back room or printing office (figure 2).

The ambiguity of the first act is reversed. Now the ethical, business discussions remain in the background while the selfish behavior, such as the betrayal of Dr. Stockman's cause, has moved to the foreground (Hornby 172). The bowel overtone is evident in the room's appearance. Motivated by expediency and self-interest, Hovstad and Billing dwell in this disordered, dingy and uncomfortable room filled with old furniture and stained, torn chairs. The furniture symbolizes the old truths these men print; the disorder suggests the weakness in the newspapermen's characters, and the old newspapers and
books represent worn out truths. The newspaper disseminates the truths upon which people base their decisions that become the foundation of society. Through his setting Ibsen shows that the foundation for truth is rotten, seedy, and worn out and therefore needs a purge.

In Act IV a big old-fashioned room in Captain Horster's house becomes the battleground where old-fashioned truths will contest the doctor's new truth (figure 3).

Figure 3
Captain Horster's Dining Room - Act IV

The time is night signifying that the old truths still reign supreme. Since it is neither Stockman's place nor the newspaper office, the room is neutral ground where the many faces of truth present themselves. The setting's semi-public nature visually presents the conflict between the compact majority's apathy and the determinism of personal belief. Horster's home represents the non-political captain, yet it becomes the house of the mob (Hornby 173). In this room Dr. Stockman's truth must stand independently from the others. At the end of Act V, Dr. Stockman will use Horster's dining room as his new school where twelve disciples will digest Dr. Stockman's new truths. The biblical allusions suggest that the room will be a church and that Dr. Stockman's truth the new communion. Act I's dining room
and Act III's printing office become an anteroom bringing citizens and their ideas together to test the new truth. Further, in Act V a platform upon which various characters will speak their minds replaces the study representing Dr. Stockman's singleness of mind.

Act V is set in Dr. Stockman's study, befitting a man of ideas because bookcases and cabinets line the walls (figure 4). However, the room stands in disarray, symbolizing the mob's disorder and rejection of Dr. Stockman's truth. Isolated from the compact majority, Dr. Stockman will create a new truth from the disorder and ruin. He will make "liberal-minded and high-minded men" of the twelve children (Act V, 679). Hornby, on the other hand, states that the setting ironically reflects the disorder in the doctor's own character (170). Throughout the play, his walking up and down rubbing his hands shows the doctor is quite excitable and nervous. Nevertheless, the need for individual decision-making, the value of individual courage, and the necessity for individual responsibility become the new truths forged in Dr. Stockman's study, his mind.

![Figure 4](image-url)

**Figure 4**

Dr. Stockman's Study - Act V

In attempting to understand the complex nature of truth, Ibsen presents
different origins from which truth derives its authority. According to Dr. Stockman, the old truths are outmoded, but the new truths are temporary, just as Horster's house will be a temporary setting for the new school. Ibsen also carries his theme of the origin and nature of truth to the characters' references to off-stage settings like the baths and the North. The polluted baths represent the moral and ethical decay Ibsen found in his own society. He hated majority decisions and the acceptance of majority rule. The baths are the economic life blood of Stockman's community, but they are polluted like the compact majority he defies. Like the ridicule Ibsen suffered over Ghosts, this play traces Dr. Stockman's disbelief and exasperation at being subjected to insult, slander, and violence for publishing distasteful truths about a polluted economy. Further, to seek truth in his private life apart from society, Ibsen imposed a twenty-five year self-exile (1864-1891). Dr. Stockman, too, refers to his living "in my little corner up north almost without ever seeing a stranger who might bring new ideas with him" (Act I, 601). The isolation reinforces Peter's assessment of his brother as a man of ideas, not practicality. The unspoiled North is clearly contrasted with the materialistic city of the baths where Dr. Stockman finds himself "comfortably off" (Act I, 601). Through his setting, then, Ibsen has established variations on the main theme of the nature and origin of truth.

The furniture, props, and architectural details also symbolize these variations on Ibsen's theme. Doors in any Ibsen play are usually charged with dramatic tension because they often represent the play's thematic contrasts. In Acts I and II the left door of the dining room represents Dr. Stockman's private or family life, and the right door to the hallway represents his public life. These two sides of his life come into conflict as the play develops. In Act I the right door from the hallway introduces the various characters.
Peter Stockman enters late suggesting that he is a late comer or an opportunist. His refusal to eat some roast beef illustrates that he will not accept the doctor's truth. Petra also enters through that door carrying an armload of books, an ironic symbol of old truths in the hands of youth. She is Peter's opposite because in standing with her father she will be a symbolic foundation for the new truth. In Act II the dining room door is shut symbolizing the isolation and rejection of Dr. Stockman's truth. In Act IV that door is replaced with folding doors through which the mob enters suggesting that the body politic's truth is easily manipulated and even collapsible.

Windows, lamps, and mirrors reveal theme and character. In Act I the mirror over the couch is a symbol of the human psyche, wisdom, and self-reflectiveness. Hovstad, Billing, Horster, and Dr. Stockman sit on the couch under the mirror and Mrs. Stockman later brings a lamp. The couch unifies the men and their views at this point. All four men represent types of truth that will be illuminated throughout the play. Earlier, Dr. Stockman refers to his lamps having lampshades, suggesting that the full truth has not been fully illuminated. A window in Act III replaces the mirror meaning there is no wisdom or truth reflected in the editorial office and that Hovstad and Billing are two-faced like glass. In Act IV three windows on the left-hand wall replace the mirror and window of Acts I-III. Lamps placed between the windows and candles on the tables light the room. These windows and lamps are highly symbolic because the crowd stands with their backs to them, symbolizing their refusal to listen to and accept the truth about the diseased baths. Like Dr. Stockman's truth, the candles suggest a small, flickering light that can easily be extinguished. By Act V rocks have broken the windows in Dr. Stockman's study, showing the power of the mob's truth over his. Ibsen's
use of the Christ metaphors, however, suggests that Dr. Stockman, the sufferer and martyr, will bring the new word and order to replace the mob's old truths and chaos.

Chairs, sofa, desks, and tables also reveal character and theme. In Act I Dr. Stockman sits with Hovstad, Billing, and Horster on the couch symbolizing their unity. In Act III the couch is replaced with a desk and a high stool, suggesting isolation and no exchange of ideas. The dining table of Act I is replaced in Act III with a large table covered with papers, newspapers, and books placed in the middle of the room, symbolizing that disorder and old published truths reign at the editorial office. Easy chairs by the table and other chairs standing along the wall remain empty, suggesting that deals are made but people do not stay long. The faces of truth come and go in the newspaper business. Chairs also symbolize human beings. Since these chairs are stained and torn, they appropriately represent Hovstad's and Billing's characters. In Act IV the chairs are placed against the walls, but since it is an open room to hold a crowd, the chairs are unnecessary. In fact, the characters talk across the room to each other, suggesting an abyss or a conflict of ideas. The table in the center of Acts III and V is replaced in Act IV with a platform where contrasting beliefs can be expressed. Littered with books and papers, Dr. Stockman's desk in Act V replaces the platform. Symbolically, his desk or truth, even though in disarray, occupies the center of the room. Ibsen's technique of exchanging props or filling space with new props or leaving an empty space from one act to another generates meaningful overtones of theme and/or revelation of character.

Finally, the characters' use of the stage space becomes thematic when Ibsen places Dr. Stockman with another character or a group of characters to present conflicting truths. Dr. Stockman's movement about the stage reflects
his refusal to accept old truths or worn out points of view. When Thomas and Peter Stockman appear together, Ibsen reveals that part of Thomas's character that is self-seeking, headstrong, and impulsive like his brother. When Captain Horster and Thomas appear together, Ibsen reveals Thomas's idealistic, firm and unswerving dedication to principles. In Act III Thomas enters the newspaper office from the street door, the new truth coming from the outside. After speaking with Hovstad, Thomas goes into the printing office, symbolic of the new truth being hidden from view while the "diseased" truth of Hovstad and Billing dwells in the front room. In Act IV, Thomas and Peter's entrances are significant. Peter enters and takes his position on the left while Thomas comes in by the right-hand door, opposing points of view visually depicted on the stage. In Act IV their stage positions become even more significant thematically when Thomas and Aslaksen mount the platform. Here, Ibsen objectifies three points of view: the new truth and the truth of the compact majority or moderation as symbolized by Aslaksen while Peter agitates from the left with his own view of the truth. Generally, Thomas Stockman moves all about the stage, in and out of rooms, symbolizing the ubiquity of the new truth.

Both Billing and Aslaksen often enter from or position themselves in the back room. In Act I, Billing is first seen in Dr. Stockman's dining room at a table empty of people, but full of food. A lamp sits on the table illuminating the kind of truth this man represents. In Act III, Aslaksen comes in and out of the printing room, thus signifying his nature of moderation or middle-of-the-road politics. Aslaksen's presence on the platform in Act IV represents the strength of the compact majority, which Ibsen despised.

Finally, in Act V in the final tableau of the play Ibsen sets up a visual irony that exposes Dr. Stockman's inaccurate and exaggerated vision of himself
as the redeemer of man. On Dr. Stockman's statement, "The strongest man in the world is he who stands most alone," he has his family and Captain Horster gathered around him. Dr. Stockman cannot bring the new word alone. Horster's kindness, Petra's strength of principle, and Mrs. Stockman's love and moral support are the necessary foundations to support truth.
CHAPTER 2
Rosmersholm

In searching for truth in Rosmersholm, Ibsen's settings function symbolically to contrast the old truths of Rosmer's ancestors with the new truths represented by the outside world of Rebekka West, Mortensgaard, Brendel, and Kroll. Even though the play takes place indoors, Ibsen alludes to the outdoors, giving the stage expanded boundaries as well as symbolic meaning. Unlike An Enemy of the People in which Ibsen used four sets to symbolize theme and character, Rosmersholm concentrates on the entrances of four characters into an enclosed setting to represent the many faces truth. Unlike his earlier plays, Rosmersholm relies heavily on exposition of the past in order to create the present conflicts. The frequent use of exposition creates an unusual handling of the symbolic setting because the indoor physical setting is less significant than the unseen, off-stage outdoor settings of the mill-race, footbridge and the mill. The indoor settings heighten the dramatic tension because truth and freedom from the past lay outside Rosmersholm. Rosmersholm is not the world of the living; it is a draped and shawled world that hides from reality, a world of solid traditions, order, and obedience. Outside the home stands an avenue of fine old trees connoting ordered and rigid boundaries. Inside Rosmersholm, the power of an unchanging, timeless past founded on fixed, absolute truths contrasts with the world outside, principally the mill, the mill race and the footbridge where life and truth change constantly. With its ever flowing energy and life force, the mill race beckons the characters to free themselves of Rosmersholm.

The inner conflict for Rosmer is immediately evident from the setting
within which he is trapped in Acts I, III, and IV. Even though the sitting room is described as spacious, old-fashioned, and comfortable, it is an ironic set in its suffocating and oppressive features. Wild flowers, fresh birch branches, and open windows and doors, representing freedom, spontaneity, life and a foreshadowing of the play's ending conflict with the portraits of clergymen, officers and government officials in uniform, society's symbols for respectability, honor, morality, reputation, and the past. The time is after sunset, the threshold of death. As seen in other plays, the middle of the sitting room remains empty, representing the vacuity of conservative ideals and the void in Rosmer's essence. In the downstage right corner stands a stove as in Hedda Gabler, but the table, sofa, and easy chairs near it make the furniture placement askew, suggesting that in spite of the seemingly stable environment all is not right at Rosmersholm. (figure 5).

As the play unfolds, we learn of Beata's irrational behavior, superstitions about white horses, and liberals who really are not what they profess to be. The room's appearance presents thematic contrasts between conservative and liberal, past and present, truth and lies. As in Hedda Gabler, the beginning and ending actions with flowers become ironic. Symbolizing
Rebekka's fresh influence on Rosmer in Act I, the flowers will foreshadow her death in Act IV.

The placement of the furniture also represents tension in the set. Placed upstage left, a flower stand counterbalances the wild flowers and birch branches decorating the stove downstage right. The furniture near the stove is juxtaposed with Rebekka's chair near the window. The wild flowers and the large white shawl she crochets contrast with the formal elegance of the furnishings and family portraits. By Act IV the shawl will be finished and found draped over the sofa, signifying that Rebekka's own destiny is completed. The shawl becomes a shroud and a visual symbol of the white horses of Rosmersholm that appear whenever someone is to die (Thomas 112).

The time frame of the play is also meaningful. The play progresses from just after sunset in Act I to harsh morning sunlight in Acts II and III when a number of important discoveries and confessions are made. Finally, Act IV takes place in the eerie half-light of a northern summer night. Thematically, Ibsen ends the play in ambiguity. Has the power of the past, represented by the white horses and the dead wife, or the characters' inability to cope with their guilt and liberal idealism hurled them to their deaths?

Act II takes place in Rosmer's study located upstairs off his bedroom (figure 6). Like Dr. Stockman's study, it represents Rosmer's mind and his retreat, but in Act II four characters representing various aspects of liberal and conservative idealism invade his world and provide exposition of the past. The entrance door to the study is on the left, suggesting that all the ideas that will affect Rosmer will only lead to his destruction. At the back of the room leading to Rosmer's bedroom stands a doorway with a curtain drawn aside. Later, when Rebekka emerges from the curtain, she fuels Kroll's suspicions about her morning gown and learns the truth about her hidden past.
On the right a window suggests a freedom to the outside. In front of the window stands a writing table covered with books and papers, which in the other plays represented knowledge and the world of ideas. Its placement suggests that knowledge and wisdom occur outside the confines of Rosmersholm. Simple furniture and an old-fashioned sofa represent Rosmer's inherited nature contrasted with his outward appearance. Placed on the left, the sofa signifies that the old ideals still have a hold on him.

![Rosmer's Study Act II Diagram](image)

Figure 6

Rosmer's Study - Act II

Act III returns to the sitting room. The window and hall door are open and the sun is shining. After Rebekka's revelation in Act II, the truth of Rosmersholm begins to shine. The profusion of light and the open window and door indicate that Rebekka, who begins the act standing at the window watering her plants, will face the truth of possible incest with her father. After Kroll cross-examines her about her "so-called Emancipation" of new ideas and opinions, he insists that Rosmer marry Rebekka, and she confesses that she drove Beata to suicide. The light of truth springs to life in this act and ironically leads into the darkness of Act IV.
While Act IV takes place in the sitting room, the action climaxes off-stage at the mill-race. A lamp with a shade lights the room, meaning that the final truth is yet to come. At the beginning of the act, the window is closed, but later Rebekka opens it and stands by it as she has done in Acts I and III. When Rebekka and Rosmer make their suicide pact, they exit hand in hand to the left, leaving the room empty. Rosmersholm endures even though its ideals failed Rosmer. Entering from the right, Mrs. Helseth reveals the off-stage action at the bridge where Rebekka and Rosmer find their freedom, death.

The use of stage space in this play is extremely significant because the entrance and exit of characters and their placement on the stage represent the influence of one mind on another. Ibsen said that this play is "first and foremost a play about human beings and human destinies" (Beyer 150). Principally, the interaction of the outside characters with Rosmer and Rebekka create a plot of exposition as well as the themes. In Act I the entrances and exits of the characters symbolically frame or entrap Rosmer and Rebekka, representing the power of the past over the present. While Rebekka and Mrs. Helseth discuss Rosmer's whereabouts, Mrs. Helseth shuts the door and is about to close the window when she sees Rosmer on the path near the mill. Rebekka stands behind the curtains. Their actions are symbolic in shutting Rosmer out of the house, foreshadowing the ending and Rosmer's use of the path in Act IV. As it begins to grow dark, Kroll enters, bringing the dark truths into Rebekka's life. The sofa and chair become an area of revelation. When Rosmer enters, he greets Kroll most cordially and they sit together on the sofa. In an ironic conversation about Rosmer's deceased wife Beata, Rosmer states, "We speak of her every day", and Rebekka lights the lamp (Act I, 351). Rebekka seats herself in the arm chair, symbolizing her seeming stability and security in Rosmersholm. Walking to the window while Rebekka
busies herself with the lamp, Kroll explains that he has come to ask Rosmer to join him against "this dangerous and destructive force--this anarchy" (Act I, 353). Kroll represents the conservative ideals of the past. Next enters Brendel dressed like a common tramp. A symbol as Rosmer's liberal thinking double when he borrows Rosmer's clothes, Brendel represents what Rosmer's new liberalism really is: threadbare and begging. After Brendel exits, Rosmer and Kroll argue about faith and freedom with Kroll threatening that "This is an end to all your former friendships; now you must take the consequences" upon which Rebekka opens the door wide (Act I, 365). The scene ends as it began with Rebekka and Mrs. Helseth, who now turns down the lamp. The entire act, and indeed the rest of the play, reflects a series of characters standing and turning, symbolizing the paths that truth must often take in order to come to light. In this play, Ibsen twists and turns the various faces of truth so that the question of what is truth is difficult to answer. The standings and turnings represent truth as equivocal. Further, the actions illustrate man's inability to distinguish between truth and non-truth.

These thematic conflicts develop more fully in Act II to illustrate what happens to Rosmer's mind and spirit under the various stresses of liberalism when Rebekka, Kroll and Mortensgaard enter his study. One effect is that the three influences will lead to his inability to act rationally. Rosmer learns from them that life is complex and that ideals do not always work in practice. In addition, Rebekka begins this act in control by wearing a dressing gown when Kroll enters; she ends the act hysterically. When Kroll enters, Rebekka hides behind the curtain to Rosmer's bedroom, symbolically hiding from the truth. When Kroll and Rosmer sit down to talk, they sit opposite each other, emphasizing the polarity of their ideas. Mortensgaard enters by the door on the left, meaning that the truth he brings is not an ethical one. He represents
the *Beacon*, a paper of a similar expedient nature as the *People's Messenger*. Since Rosmer has revealed that he is no longer a pastor, his defection from the church will hurt him politically. Mortensgaard, therefore, cannot support him since the party needs a Christian element. Further, Mortensgaard reveals another truth about Beata's letter regarding scandalous rumors. Meanwhile, Rebekka, who has overheard both Kroll's and Mortensgaard's conversations, reveals her own motives at Rosmersholm. The doorway to Rosmer's study has been the entry way for new revelations that not only connect the present to the past, but also project future action.

In Act III the action reveals Rebekka and Rosmer's guilt over Beata's death. Kroll forces Rebekka to understand her past and her ability to manipulate and bewitch. Rebekka's principle of absolute freedom crumbles in this act as symbolized by her torment and psychological agitation indicated in the stage directions. Rebekka walks about clenching and wringing her hands, looks scornfully, speaks in outbursts, and tears, crushes, and throws paper behind the stove. As the truths emerge, Rebekka and Rosmer spring, rise, and sink from and into their chairs, symbolizing their surprise and acceptance of the truth, their passion for each other, the fluctuating currents of the mill-race, and the play's rhythm.

The actions in Act IV show utter resignation to the harsh light of truth in Act III. Even Mrs. Helseth speaks in a low voice and appears ill at ease. Rebekka and Rosmer speak in low voices quietly, thoughtfully and wearily, have faint smiles, sit listlessly, and rise slowly. When Brendel enters announcing that he is ethically bankrupt and that Mortensgaard, who is capable of living without ideals, is the "sum of worldly wisdom", Rosmer's liberalism is destroyed. Brendel tells him that the "dark is best" (Act IV, 417). Since Rebekka feels that Rosmersholm suffocates her, she goes to the
window and opens it. Rosmer sits in the arm-chair by the stove, Rebekka's chair in Act I, depicting that his liberal idealism is destroyed as hers was by Kroll. At the stove Rosmer declares Rebekka will have to leave. His pronouncement and her opening the window foreshadow the ending of the play when they seal their love in a suicide pact at the mill-race.

Ibsen says that life is ambiguous. In this play the absolutes that society accepts as correct reside in Rosmersholm. Outside, however, is the mill-race, a revolving, changing universe that grinds down all truths. Ibsen did not resolve the questions concerning the changing faces of truth, but he did raise them. The conflict between the timeless, unchanging, absolute truths of the past as represented by Rosmersholm and the flowing energy of the ever-changing life processes crush those who live in a world of absolutes. That is why Rosmer and Rebekka die in the shadows. Leaning on the chair-back at the end of the play, Mrs. Helseth remains at the window, a symbol of moderation as Aslaksen was in An Enemy of The People; hence, they endure and truth balances precariously.
CHAPTER 3

The Lady From The Sea

Written in 1888 between the immensely popular presentations of Rosmersholm in 1886 and Hedda Gabler in 1890, The Lady From the Sea is often overlooked by the critics and the public alike. With the exception of Act IV, The Lady From the Sea takes place outdoors on a veranda, atop a mountain peak, and in a garden near a carp pond. Nature imagery dominates with vistas of the fjord and alpine peaks beyond, shade trees, a leafy arbor, and water. Ibsen brings together the forces of nature with the psychological forces of love, possession, fear and jealousy. He adds the beauty of the artist's vision with the elements of myth to create a powerful play about love, freedom, and responsibility. The title and bits of dialogue link the main character Ellida Wangel with the mermaids of folklore while the plot is a variation on an old theme from legends and ballads about the lost or dead bridegroom who seeks out his faithless bride and demands her return. It is also a play filled with moments of sad beauty revealing a world in which there is little scope for genuine fulfillment (Hornby 162-163).

As in Rosmersholm, the off-stage setting in The Lady From the Sea is a powerful force representing the mysterious power that grips Ellida Wangel's life. For Ellida, the image of water sums up her longing to regress from the pain of being a human to a less complex but more mystical form of being in the primeval sea (Hornby 170). The sea's ebb and flow, calm and fury, provide the play's rhythmic action and illustrate the characters' passions. Unlike Rebekka West, Ellida is bound to the sea. It is intimately associated with her past, particularly her relationship with an American seaman to whom
she once pledged her word and bound herself symbolically when they joined rings and threw them into the sea. Ellida constantly seeks the sea, bathes at all times of the day, and lives as a stranger with her husband and his two daughters. The sea is not only dangerous and terrifying, but it is also the unknown, the boundless and unattainable. It is the freedom the Stranger represents for Ellida and it is both her escape and trap. The painter Ballested and the sculptor Lyngstrand wish to create a picture of a dying mermaid, but they need a model. Symbolically, Ellida is that mermaid who is separated from her home, the sea. Like the mill-race, the sea offers freedom and change.

The carp pond and the fjords function as ironic settings. While the fjords lead to the sea and freedom, they also trap. In all five acts, the characters have a glimpse of the fjords, meaning their destinies may lie beyond their isolated little town. In Acts IV and V a great steamer glides up the fjord only to leave at the end of the play. The steamer brings the Stranger back into Ellida's life, and it symbolically takes him away in Act V as well as releasing Ellida from her fear and inability to love. The steamer also indicates that the town, inhabited by tourists in the summer, is a crossroad full of life like the sea. However, by the end of the play, summer will draw to a close and ice will eventually block the fjords, the way to freedom. As Ballested says, "We'll soon be icebound. 'Trapped in an icy prison,' as the old melodrama says" (Act V, 504). The statement becomes an ironic comment on theme because through the first four acts, the little town would have been a prison for Ellida. But by Act V Ellida has come to realize that once one has become a land creature it is hard to find one's way back to the sea and freedom. However, if the person has been free to choose her new life, she will survive. The fjords serve another function for Ellida. Because she feels that she allowed Wangel to come and buy her in marriage, which has left her feeling soiled and
tainted, she washes herself clean every day in the waters of the fjord, a form of purgation (Hornby 151).

The carp pond, on the other hand, is a very negative setting that is symbolic of the characters' choices in life and ironic because in spite of its stagnation, the characters who sit near it ultimately choose not to stagnate any longer. Acts III and V take place in the remote corner of Dr. Wangel's garden at the carp pond, a damp, swampy, stagnant setting over-shadowed by large old trees, symbolizing the condition of the Wangel's lives (figure 7).

![Diagram of the garden and carp pond](figure7.png)

**Figure 7**

Carp Pond and Garden - Acts III and V

Torn between his past, represented by his daughters and home, and his second wife Ellida, who often sits in the arbor in the garden, Wangel exists in a precarious balance. In Act IV in an ironic speech Wangel says of himself, "I neither believe nor disbelieve. I just don't know. I can only suspend judgment" (Act IV, 480). The daughters also visit the pond. Both dream of far away places and falling in love, but Bolette is too shy to reveal her true feelings until Act V, and Hilde, who behaves cruelly toward her step-mother
and Lyngstrand, is unable to reveal her true self. Afraid of rejection, Hilde insulates herself emotionally. All of their lives are stagnant or rooted in the past. They are like the carp swimming aimlessly in the stagnant pool, while outside real life passes by on the footpath or the steamer. The low open fence separating the garden from the footpath and the fjord and mountain peaks in the background suggest freedom and change.

The setting for Act I immediately reflects the conflicts among the family (figure 8). Wangel's house is a symbol of his first marriage. After her mother's death, Bolette takes responsibility for the home and her father. It becomes a prison for her. Surrounded by a garden on the front and side, the house is positioned at the left of the stage, suggesting its negative influence on the family. Opposite the house on the right stands an arbor where Ellida likes to sit on warm summer nights. In the background a hedge surrounds the yard and beyond it a road along the shore, lined with trees.

![Figure 8](image)

Wangel's House and Garden - Act I

In the distance, one can see the fjords and high mountain peaks. The hedge and trees symbolically isolate the home from the outside world, but the road, mountain peaks, and fjord suggest escape and freedom. The two choices are the major conflict as well as the theme for the play. Ellida must choose
between the responsibility for deciding her own life's path or submitting to the
duty and obligations of an unhappy marriage and family. Into this setting
arrive two men, Bolette's former tutor Arnholm, who reveals knowledge of
Ellida's past, and Lyngstrand, a sculptor who suffers from a lung disease.

Act II takes place in Prospect Park, a wooded mountain peak behind the
town that presents the characters with new prospects or choices in their lives
symbolized by the characters pairing off as they climb the path (Figure 9).

Bolette and Arnholm walk together up the path foreshadowing the end of
the play when she consents to marry him. Hilde and Lyngstrand climb the
path together, she learning from him that in spite of a fatal disease life means
taking risks and giving of oneself at every moment. Finally, Ellida and Wangel
mount the path together and sit on large stones, symbolizing the foundation
of truth that needs to be laid before she can make a free choice and he can
free himself from his past. With its islands and promontories the outer fjord
remains visible. The allusion to off-stage sights and sounds of singing
symbolizes the constant reminder of freedom and happiness that lie just
beyond their enclosed lives. Also, the location of the park high above the
town represents a clarity of vision, a freedom from society's restraints.
Act IV takes place in Dr. Wangel's garden room. The room has two doors, one right and one left, representing the two choices in Ellida's life. On the back wall between the two windows, an open glass door leads to the veranda. Part of the garden is visible (figure 10). Hinting at escape and freedom, the setting reflects the action of Ellida's demanding her freedom to choose her path in life.

![Diagram of Dr. Wangel's Garden Room - Act IV]

Trapped in the Wangel home, she wants to bloom as an independent woman. Also during this act Lyngstrand presents his views on marriage as "a kind of miracle," one "founded on true love and mutual happiness" (Act IV, 473). This is Ibsen's ideal, but Lyngstrand succumbs to Victorian reality; woman submits to man and his views. In a scene that doubles Ellida's long ago promise to the Stranger, Bolette gives her word to Lyngstrand to keep on sending "faithful, loving thoughts" (Act IV, 475). Their discussion of love and choice presents two of Ibsen's themes, while Ellida and Wangel's conversation presents another: the responsibility individual freedom requires. From act to act the setting and time changes resemble the waves the sea. Act I begins in Wangel's house on the veranda, ascends to the heights of
Prospect Park, descends to the remote corner of Dr. Wangel's garden near the carp pond, broadens to the open and airy garden room of his home, and finally returns to the pond. The movement of the sun also connotes the ebb and flow of the tide. Beginning on a warm, sparkling summer morning when life holds new promise, the sunlight reveals the problems in the Wangel household. Act II at Prospect Park occurs at twilight when the light and dark of the sky reflect two directions in life. Act III occurs during the late afternoon in an isolated corner of the garden where Ellida encounters the Stranger who demands she make a choice about her future. Since time is running out symbolically, she must act. Ellida says that after the long summer days there is "a knowledge of the dark days to come. And that knowledge clouds our joy, like clouds that sail over the fjord" (Act III, 464). Act IV begins in the late morning in the full bloom of the day. A blooming rose bush occupies a table in the middle of the stage. The windows, open door, a view to the garden, the rose bush, and the time of day represent Ellida's desire to have freedom to choose. Act V occurs during the deepening summer twilight, suggesting not only the coming of fall and winter, but also that a phase in all their lives will be ending. For Ellida and Wangel, life will change. In Act V Wangel finally gives her complete freedom to choose, but it is freedom with responsibility. In relinquishing his authority, Wangel gives Ellida incontrovertible proof of his affection. She now can freely choose him and relate more openly and genuinely to the daughters. Ambiguous and mysterious as the sea, the ending is cast in deepening twilight. Freely choosing the path of duty, Ellida has denied the validity of her longings for a more expansive, romantic freedom, what Wangel calls her "craving for a vague shadowy world of unreality" (Act V, 502).

The deepening twilight is significant for the other couples also. In
another doubling scene, Bolette and Arnholm enter into a bargain; she will become his wife, and in turn he will offer her a free and happy life. Like her step-mother, Bolette trades her independence for a life of comfort and escape from the town's isolation. For Arnholm it is a chance to feel needed because he will guarantee her financial security and education. Before he leaves to create his masterpiece, Lyngstrand and Hilde have a conversation full of multiple meanings. Even though Hilde finally reveals her true feelings, Lyngstrand does not understand that she is the girl who will be wearing black and grieving her lover's death.

The furniture, props, and the use of stage space symbolize the polarity of choices. In Act I Bolette enters the veranda through the open door from the garden room carrying a large vase of flowers, foreshadowing her choice of freedom and escape at the end of the play. Later, she brings a rocking chair to the veranda, representing her conflicting sense of duty to her father and her desire for freedom. Arranging the setting for a party becomes symbolic of her role in her father's house. Entering from the house to the veranda, Hilde carries a footstool, representing her low self-esteem. Not until the end of Act V does Bolette tell Ellida that all Hilde wants is a sign of Ellida's love. Positioning himself inside and outside the garden, the painter Ballested moves freely and works several jobs illustrating his philosophy that in order to survive one must "acclimatize" himself. Lyngstrand, who comes from outside the garden on the right, shows his timidity by standing on the stairs to the veranda. He moves up and down the steps, bows and turns by the gate, and steps in and out of the garden, symbolizing his indecisive nature. Later, he will re-enter from the left with a bouquet of flowers, thinking that it is Ellida's birthday when in fact it is the dead wife's birthday. His error casts the family into the unhappy past. With his second entrance, he presents his
Idea for his new sculpture. In his description of it, Lyngstrand reveals the haunting story of the sailor betrayed by his wife, a dramatic irony revealing Ellida's secret past. As a reminder of Ellida's past and Bolette's purchased love in the future, Arnholm enters from the left. Also, gliding in from the fjord at the left, the steamer will take Arnholm and Bolette away. Ellida enters through the trees by the summerhouse wrapped in a large light cloak, representing her tie to the water she loves, while the cloak means she is bound in her present role. Preferring to sit in the arbor because it is cooler and free of the family constraints, she isolates herself. When Wangel enters the first time from the right, he wears traveling clothes and carries his doctor's bag, an ironic symbol since he cannot use his medicine to cure his wife's melancholy. He moves left to his home. When he re-enters from the left, he has changed his clothes and announces, "Now I'm a free man again" (Act I, 443). His movement on stage and his entrance are ironic; he is neither free nor changed at this point. As doubles, Arnholm, Wangel and Ellida exchange places with Hilde and Bolette in the garden.

In Act III the stage positions continue to present the conflicts within the characters. At the beginning of the act, Bolette sits on a stone bench stage left sewing. A couple of books and a sewing basket lie beside her, symbolizing the conflict between her domestic duties and her desire for knowledge of the world outside. Hilde and Lyngstrand enter with fishing rods, showing that each is looking for his purpose in life. Like Ellida and Wangel in Act II, Arnholm and Bolette sit on the stone bench, a solid foundation for a life of truth. Ellida's solitude at the pond represents her attitude towards her present life. When a stranger dressed in travelling clothes enters from the left on the footpath and climbs over the fence, he invades Ellida's life. His action also means that no boundaries can keep out the past. Ellida leans against a
tree trunk, clinging to the roots of her life with Wangel. Wangel, then, also enters from the left through the trees. The men represent her destiny, and at this point, neither is a positive choice. Unhappy in her marriage, she is terrified but fascinated by the stranger and the sea. Ironically, Ellida exits with her husband through the garden to the left, indicating that she has made her choice.

In Act IV the polarity of choices is intensified. Bolette sits on the sofa by a table in the garden room and Lyngstrand sits on a chair opposite her, signifying their opposite points of view on the roles of husband and wife. Later, the same scene will be repeated at the table between Ellida and Wangel. Ironically, collecting his things throughout Bolette and Lyngstrand's conversation, Ballested exits right through the garden. Bolette and Lyngstrand are not acclimatized or settled yet, like Ballested. At the center of the stage stands a table with a blooming rose bush on it and a piano to the right of it. Before his conversation with Ellida, Wangel walks to the piano and tells Arnholm, "I'd be ready to make any sacrifice for them--all three of them!" foreshadowing the end of Act V. Arnholm, Bolette, Hilde and Lyngstrand end the act in the garden, suggesting that their will change and bloom.

At the beginning of Act V the above four characters punt along the shore from the left, an action repeated later when the steamer glides in from the left. Ballested appears from the right carrying some music and a French horn, suggesting a new voice or a new sound in the Wangels' lives. Wangel and Ellida position themselves downstage right while Arnholm and Bolette enter along the upper back of the pond to re-enact the same bargain Ellida made when she married Wangel. Bolette and Arnholm's position near the pond at the back of the set and their subsequent exit left indicate the bargain they
will make may lead to unhappy futures as it did for Ellida and Wangel in the past. The stranger enters from the left again and climbs over the fence. In a scene charged with great tension Ibsen has added the sounds of a brass band and the ringing of the steamer's bell in the distance to remind Ellida, Wangel and the Stranger that the real world is beckoning. After making her choice, she and Wangel join hands in a symbolic gesture of unity. All the characters except the Stranger re-enter, while young townspeople and summer visitors pass along the footpath, representing the flux of life. The crossroad objectifies life and change for all the characters in the garden. The play ends with Ellida and Wangel holding hands, the steamer gliding noiselessly down the fjord, and the music playing close inshore. The polarity of choices, the inner conflicts, and the division of characters on stage have dissolved into a harmonious unity.
The setting for *Hedda Gabler* is Jorgen Tesman's fashionable villa on the west side of Oslo. The action takes place principally in a Victorian drawing room full of dark colors and massive furniture, yet the room has the propensity for light from the garden outside the glass doors. The time is an autumn morning full of sunshine. The contrast of light and dark in the setting symbolizes the contrasts in characters' personalities such as Lovborg and Tesman and Hedda and Thea. In addition, the contrasts represent the light and dark sides of Hedda's mind. In the back wall of the drawing room a doorway leads to a smaller room decorated in a similar fashion (figure 11).

![Diagram of Living Room and Back Room - Acts I-IV](image)

Dividing the stage between an inner and outer room immediately sets the psychological conflict between Hedda's conventionalized self and her passionate, aggressive inner self. Thematically, the inner room with the
general's portrait and her piano also represents Hedda's past and its power to control her. The set is a rather large one, perhaps 35 feet wide and 20 feet deep, even deeper for the inner room. Ironically, the house itself is Tesman's love token to Hedda, but it is also her prison and a symbol of her old class status. Because of its occupants and the actions that will take place there, it also represents moral bankruptcy.

To give a feeling of space, Tesman refers to the many empty rooms in the house, which Aunt Julia hopes will be filled with children (figure 12). Ironically, one empty room stands between the drawing room, renamed by Hedda as the living room, and Hedda's bedroom, symbolizing the frigidity of Hedda's love for Tesman, the emptiness of their marriage, and the eventual destruction of Hedda's unborn child.

![Diagram of Hedda's house](image)

**Figure 12**

Living Room With Empty Rooms - Act I

In addition to the enclosed set, Ibsen has his characters refer to two off-stage settings, Aunt Julia's house and Mademoiselle Diana's. A direct contrast with Hedda's home of manipulation and death, Aunt Julia's radiates life and altruism. Mademoiselle Diana, on the other hand, represents the huntress of men, and like Hedda, she is passionate and cruel. When Lovborg
attends her party and accuses her or her friends of stealing his manuscript, Diana proceeds to tear his hair out. She is a negative double for Hedda, who earlier tries to burn off Thea's hair. Later, Lovborg accidentally shoots himself in the bowel while in Diana's boudoir. The ugliness of his death and the reference to the boudoir reveal two sides of Hedda's hidden passionate nature that Brack teases.

The language of the setting reflects a condition of a class or a particular member of the class, namely Hedda. The dark decor represents Hedda's repression of her dark, inner self. Handsomely furnished, the setting of Act I suits Hedda's handsomeness as well as her station in life. However, the furnishings are heavy, covered, and dark. Thick carpets cover the floors, chairs surround the covered oval table, upholstery decorates the furniture, shades top the lamps, and curtains cover the windows. The sheer weight of the furnishings reflect Hedda's fixed emotions. Knick-knacks fill the etageres. Cluttered and oppressive, the room symbolizes the conflicting thoughts within Hedda's Inner self and the Impossibility of changing her world (Soule 366). Contrasting with the darkness, however, the vases and glasses of flowers give the room beauty, color and a sense of life. The contrast provides a dramatic difference between the beginning and ending of this play, a technique also used in Rosmersholm. Richly ambiguous, the flowers represent life and death, joy and rejection. The glass containers represent Hedda's psychological fragility that eventually leads to her death. The darkness, coverings, flowers, and time of year foreshadow death, a principal symbol in the play. From its dominant position in the back room hangs the portrait of General Gabler. Hedda is paralyzed to the depths of her being by the upper-class, aristocratic, authoritarian male society represented by her father. The general's daughter was brought up as if she were his son; she rides and shoots. The portrait and
the masculine setting symbolize Hedda's emotional conflict: a protest against her very womanhood. Ibsen indicated "It is really the whole life of a man that she wants to lead" (Beyer 160-161). Like the portraits of Rosmersholm, the portrait of General Gabler recalls Hedda's past and its powerful hold on her in the present.

The placement of the furniture further adds to the setting's symbolic nature. Different parts of Ibsen's stage invite different kinds of action. Conversations occur at a table, the stove, or on the sofa. The sofa placed in the right corner of the drawing room is a station for the love relationships between Hedda and Lovborg and later between Tesman and Thea. The placement of the stove downstage right becomes an area of destruction and aggression. Here Hedda destroys Lovborg's manuscript and Brack wields his power over Hedda. Near the stove rests a high-backed arm-chair, a footstool and two tabourets. The chairs also symbolize aggression. In Act IV Hedda sits on the footstool while Brack towers over her leaning on the arm-chair. The table in the center of the set becomes a station where various aspects of Hedda's nature emerge. Tables in any Ibsen play serve several functions; principally, they represent an exchange of ideas. How the chairs are arranged around the table will dictate the type of ideas that will be exchanged. For example, in A Doll's House Nora and Torvald Helmer sit opposite each other when discussing their marriage, symbolizing their conflicting points of view. In Hedda Gabler the oval table has a unifying function for Tesman and Thea but a dividing one for Hedda and the other characters. In the back room the table groups characters representing the conflicts within Hedda's psyche. Tesman, her conventional mate, sits there with Brack, her erotic double or Lovborg, her creative, passionate side, or Thea, her opposite as a giver of life and love. Over the table hangs a lamp with an opalescent glass shade,
signifying the eventual illumination of truth and creativity by Act IV. At the end of Act II Berte the maid brings in a lighted lamp which she places on the drawing room table, thus bringing to light the truth of Hedda's motives regarding Lovborg: "For once in my life I want the power to shape a human destiny" (558). Lamps suggest the force of life and ironically the force of death and destruction. The stove functions in the same way. Here the lighted lamp illuminates, clarifies, and sustains, yet what Hedda reveals will ultimately lead to Lovborg's suicide.

Other pieces of furniture have a symbolic function. Hedda's piano does not suit the room's decor, an obvious symbol for Hedda's own predicament. Ironically, the piano, a symbol of Hedda's happier past, is moved to the back room where General Gabler's picture hangs. When out of tune with the present in Act IV, Hedda, too, will move to the backroom, to the past, to kill herself. Replacing the piano in Act II, an elegant little writing table with bookshelves hides Hedda's aggressive nature in the form of her pistols and her evil nature when she places the manuscript there. Symbolically, the music of Hedda's past has been replaced by writing, Tesman's book and Lovborg's manuscript; ironically, the reconstruction of Lovborg's manuscript becomes a creative life force for Tesman and a destructive one for Hedda. Most of the flowers have been removed from the room symbolizing the absence of life and impending death. Only Thea's bouquet remains on a large table downstage center, meaning her goodness will endure. In this act, Hedda stands near the glass door to the garden. This door becomes a "killer" station for Hedda, symbolizing her frustrated desires. Even though she desires freedom, she fires the pistols out the door as if she were literally killing any chance for future happiness. Brack also enters from the back through Hedda's glass door, an overt sexual allusion to his erotic aggression towards her.
By Act III the setting darkens more as the conflicts within Hedda rage nearly out of control. The portieres covering the opening to the backroom and the glass door are closed, the shaded lamp on the table is turned low, and the fire in the stove is nearly burnt out. Covered with a blanket, Hedda lies asleep on the sofa, projecting the image of death, life spent, a corpse. The setting foreshadows the deaths of Lovborg, the manuscript, Hedda and her unborn baby. Later, opening the curtains on the glass door, Hedda floods the room with sunshine, illuminating her evil when she hides Lovborg's lost manuscript.

Act IV begins at evening in the dark drawing room. The drawn curtains over the glass door and Hedda dressed in black symbolize death. The audience learns that Rina Tesman and Lovborg have died, the manuscript has been destroyed, and Hedda will die. Another thematic conflict arises. In the inner room the hanging lamp lights the table, representing the birth of the new manuscript. Out of that birth will come life, but not in the way that Hedda has romanticized it. Aunt Julia will open her house to life, and out of Thea's pocket Lovborg's notes will become a new manuscript. Further, Tesman and Thea will create a relationship built on love and a mutual purpose. The new manuscript will become their child. Tesman moves the lamp from the table by the corner sofa to the writing table where he and Thea will re-create the manuscript. The new light of creation brings ruin to Hedda, who still clings to worn out romantic ideas of love and death. Isolating herself in the back room, Hedda retreats to her past, playing a wild dance tune on the piano, a symbol for her mental chaos. Ironically, at the end of the play Judge Brack sinks into Hedda's armchair, another overt sexual allusion to his power over her.

Ibsen exploits space symbolically. Like a restless, caged animal, Hedda moves frantically about the stage. Tesman's entering on the right and Hedda
on the left from the back room in Act I reveals their marital conflict. The other four characters enter from the hall, outsiders into an enclosed world. Symbolizing her restless spirit, Hedda "paces about the room, raises her arms and clenches her hands as though in desperation. She flings backs the curtains of the glass door" after Tesman has alluded to her pregnancy (Act I, 519). She crosses from the glass door to the stove to the center near the back room opening frequently, revealing her emotional and psychological conflicts of frustrated desires, anger, aggression, and a refuge in the past. Hedda's and Brack's movements also reveal theme: male dominance of the Victorian woman. Brack's entering through the glass door and disarming Hedda represents the powerful, dominant male principle. She then walks to the writing table and puts the pistol case away. Symbolically, the action combines two polarities: the creative spirit of the writing table and the ugliness and horror of life represented by the pistols. Symbolizing the aggressive eroticism she feels in the back of her mind when he is about, either Brack or his coat seems to rest at the back of a chair, the sofa, or Hedda herself. Enter Tesman on Brack's prophetic line: "The triangle is completed," symbolically two males whose roles hold Hedda in a vice of boring convention and wished-for eroticism (Act II, 539). Tesman once again mentions Hedda's looking "so positively flourishing" at which Hedda crosses to the glass door to the garden. The two references to her pregnancy upset her. Shooting the pistols into the garden, therefore, means killing her child and her ability to produce life, and the glass door also represents a yearning to be free of her pregnancy.

In the first two acts of the play the characters' movements on stage represent their relationship to Hedda as well as a projection of Hedda's psychological state. When Brack enters from the left through the garden and often stands or sits behind Hedda or joins Tesman in the back room, he is an
aggressive, erotic, manipulative man who dominates and then replaces her in the arm chair at the end of Act IV. Hedda moves principally among three stations: the glass door to freedom, the stove for destruction and desire, and the back room, her inner self.

In Act IV Ibsen symbolizes Hedda's psychological distress culminating in her death by her movement about the stage. She begins pacing in the dark drawing room, moves to the back room on the left and plays the piano, returns to the drawing room and crosses to the glass door, moves to the arm chair where she confesses to Tesman that she burned the manuscript, greets Thea at the hall door, moves to the stove, and sits in the armchair and talks with Brack, clears her desk, hiding the pistol under some sheet music, and goes into the backroom, returns to stand behind Thea's chair to ruffle her hair, crosses to the stove and sits on the foot stool while Brack, towering over her, asserts his erotic power by blackmailing her. Hedda moves to the writing table to learn how Tesman and Thea are doing on the manuscript, runs her fingers through Thea's hair again, goes into the back room, closes the curtains, plays the piano, and shoots herself.

In depicting Hedda's loss of power and control over her environment, Ibsen creates several ironies. During the first three acts, she exercises a decisive influence over the way the stage space is structured and used. She decides where to place the furniture and also where the different characters will sit. In Act II she cleverly directs Brack and Tesman to use the back room for punch and cigars so that she can use the drawing room for her encounter with Lovborg. Ironically, the extremes Brack and Tesman represent lead to Hedda's self-destruction. In Acts I-III Hedda bullies Thea into sitting or standing, which make Thea vulnerable. By Act IV, however, all changes when the consequences of Hedda's actions become known. Visually, she is
politely but firmly dislodged from every corner of the stage. Tesman and Thea invade her private room upstage to piece together Lovborg's notes and then use her writing table for better light. When Hedda moves to her corner by the stove downstage, Brack stands over her menacingly, quietly making sexual threats. Once a symbol for her burning passions and aggressions, the stove now represents Brack's sexual dominance that destroys Hedda's personal autonomy. When she retreats to her room again and draws the curtains, she cannot do as she wants. She attempts to play the piano but is immediately silenced, another irony when she says, "I promise to be quiet" (Act IV, 588). Ibsen has prepared the audience for the inevitable shot that finally rings out, according to David Thomas (89-90). Physically, Brack has taken her place in the arm chair, and Thea, the giver of life, now occupies the center of the room and Tesman's life. The arrangement of furniture clearly underscores Hedda's entrapment. Since she has been dislodged from every corner of the room, her present life is empty like the middle of the stage. She can only retreat to her past, which is already dead (figure 11). At the end of Act IV, Tesman and Thea will leave the drawing room to recreate the manuscript at Aunt Julia's house, a symbol of life, regeneration, and unselfish love.
Like its predecessors, Rosmersholm and An Enemy of the People, The Master Builder deals with the subject of truth and its various ramifications. As in the previous two plays, Ibsen explores the conflict between freedom and idealism versus life and compromise. For Ibsen it is the reality that even though life may be futile and idealism ultimately destructive, there are men who must climb their towers, who must follow their dreams (Holtan 111-112). The spiritual resurrection of the artist Ibsen and the artisan Solness is depicted beautifully through Ibsen's stage craft. The symbolic setting is thematic and it provides the play's structure.

The Master Builder, like Rosmersholm, moves from the inside to the outside, but the movement is more gradual to represent Solness's gradual self-awakening. The play begins with an enclosed setting. Act I takes place in a windowless workroom, masculine in its appearance. The room represents the strength and the weakness of its owner, Halvard Solness. At the back of the room is the draughtsmen's office, to the right is a door to the inner rooms, and the rest of the room remains spacious with an empty middle (figure 13). Symbolically, the front and back rooms reveal the division within Solness' spiritual self, the major conflict of the play. At the back, the creative center or drafting room represents Solness's hidden idealism while His present talent occupies the austere, empty front room. The larger work room's relation to the back room reveals Solness's power over Brovik and Ragnar, who represent Solness's fear of the younger generation and his guilt over usurping Brovik's
position in the past. These two psychological forces are always in the "back" of Solness's mind. The drafting room represents his power, strength, and success, yet it is a room of guilt and fear. The inner rooms to the right of the drafting room symbolize Solness's inner dreams and demons.

![Diagram of Solness's Workroom - Act I](image)

Figure 13
Solness's Workroom - Act I

Significantly, the windowless, almost claustrophobic setting symbolizes Solness's trapped creative spirit, a major aspect of theme. Ibsen uses this same setting quite differently in *Hedda Gabler* where Hedda begins outside in the living room of the present and withdraws to the inner room of the past to kill herself. Artificial lighting fills Solness's work room, suggesting that the "truth" in this room is artificial. He has found that building homes for human beings is not the glorious task he thought because people only want "a mere roof over their heads." Also, the absence of natural light might suggest "a tomb-like confinement of the spirit appropriate to the action and dialogue that follow" (Johnston 258). By the end of the play the three lamps become symbolic of the old truth represented by former architect Knut Brovik, the empty vanity of success or Solness's present truth, and the new truth brought
by the younger architects and Ragnar. Ibsen used the lamps and candles in the same manner in Act IV of An Enemy of the People.

The workers' stations and the furniture are placed in such a way as to create an empty middle representing an emptiness in Solness's life and his power over his workers. For example, Kaja Fosli's desk is placed downstage left, an appropriate position for the young girl whose affections Solness tosses aside. Her placement on the stage and the masculine appearance of the room tell something else about Solness's character. His power over Kaja reveals a harshness, a cold brutality. His careless remarks show how confident he is of his dominion over her.

Into this room enters Hilde Wangel on the prophetic line "one of these days the younger generation will come knocking at my door—that will be the end of Master Builder Solness" (Act I, 609). From the mountains Hilde descends into this enclosed setting, a symbolic entrance because she will link Solness's past with his future. By Act III, Solness will have ascended his tower, thus moving spiritually away from his confinement and material success, while Hilde and Ragnar will remain on the veranda of Solness's present home as symbols of youth occupying the present. "Each of the three acts enacts a movement from entombment to the emancipation" of Solness's soul (Johnston 272).

Act II has a completely different setting from Act I (figure 14). The setting is Aline's room. Unlike the windowless set of Act I, it is a small, prettily furnished drawing room full of windows, a glass door, and a mirror. The extensive use of glass and windows suggests an opening, an escape, a release for Solness's soul. The doorways lead to the outside, whereas in Act I two of the three doors lead to inner rooms. The flowers and plants suggest that the room is full of life and potential for new growth. They clearly
symbolize Aline's "children," for she cares for them in a ritualistic way as part of her "duty," the key word for her existence. The desk in Act I that was covered with papers and the ledger book now becomes the table where Ragnar's drawings lay. Ragnar's drawings also represent growth, life and new ideas. The table stands in front of a bay window, suggesting that the drawings of the younger architect will be the new truth. The glass door at the back of the stage leads to the veranda and garden—the freedom of the outdoors as seen in other Ibsen plays. It is the exact replacement for the door and draughtsmen's office of Act I, a confined environment. Appropriately, the center of this set is also empty because it represents the Solness's empty marriage and Aline's barren womb. Aline says at least twice that her home and the new home are "empty and desolate," referring to the three empty nurseries of the now childless marriage. However, in this act one learns that Hilde occupies the center nursery, meaning new life in the house, another child, and later her birth as Solness's princess.

Ibsen does an extraordinary thing with the setting in Act II. Because of the windows, the characters can see the new house that Solness feels will
bring a happier, easier life. Solness tells Hilde to look out the window towards the new house. While she does so, he describes the old house that burned down. Ibsen has created a symbolic situation that brings together three time dimensions of the play. When in the present house, Hilde can see the future home while listening to the tragedy of the past. The interplay of past, present, and future is thematic as well as symbolic of the forces that war in Solness' soul. Ibsen achieves the same effect in *Hedda Gabler* and *Rosmersholm* with the use of old portraits.

Another function of the setting in Act II is that it represents a contrast between the beauty and light of the room and Solness's harsh manner. As in his other plays, the setting symbolizes the protagonist's conflict and the play's themes. During this act Solness reveals his past to Hilde and she her remembrance of the day at Lysanger. He declares to her his belief in the Helpers and Servers, his troubled conscience, and his fear of Ragnar usurping his position as the master builder. The profusion of natural light, plants and flowers sets the scene for Solness's eventual emancipation. At the end of this act Solness announces that he will place the wreath upon the tower of his new home. Through the window he can see the tower, an off-stage setting that symbolizes a past achievement and high ideals.

The use of light and mirrors further symbolizes the emancipation of Solness' soul. Hilde's talk of robust consciences and Viking myths appeals to Solness's view of his own strong character. She brings to light that part of his soul that had been darkened by material success, a sad past, and the fear of the new generation. Solness constantly refers to her as the dawn, light, sunlight, a person who brings dreams or fantasies to light. Hilde's reflection in the mirror functions as a mirror of Solness' soul. When she overhears the confrontation between Ragnar and Solness, she sits on a chair near the mirror
and tells Solness that what he did was disgusting, hard, cruel and wicked, all characteristics of the man's soul. Like the movement of Act I, the movement of Act II progresses from self-estrangement, doubt, guilt, and self-torture to affirmation (Johnston 288).

At the same time that the setting in Act II is symbolic for the emancipation of Solness' soul it also becomes a confinement for Hilde because she sees the harsher side of his character and learns about the family's past. This awareness creates a burden for Hilde that is depicted even more clearly in Act III when she sees Solness's weakness. Ironically, by the end of the play it is Hilde who will remain on the veranda.

Act III takes place on the large, broad veranda of Solness's house (figure 15). It is clear that Ibsen has moved his master builder from confinement to open spaces, thus preparing for the symbolic ascent of the tower and release of Solness' soul.

A glimpse of the tower from the veranda brings the past, present and future together. In the background, the old garden is bounded by an old wooden fence as it is in The Lady From the Sea, symbolically closing in the
world of the Master Builder. Along the fence runs a street lined with low
rundown cottages, presumably ones that Solness built in the past and
therefore a reminder of compromised principles. The past remains always in
the back of Solness's thoughts, making the setting symbolic by bringing
together the forces at war in his soul. Aline appears as his past, Hilde as his
princess of the future, and Ragnar as the present threat of the new
generation.

The tower has obvious symbolic connotations. It is a physical reminder
of Solness's past triumph, his youth and virility, his courage and bravery, his
defiance of God, the Master Builder of the universe. Ten years earlier, Solness
defied God by refusing to build churches for His glory. Solness felt that
building homes for human beings would be a more noble calling, but this ideal
did not fulfill him. In reality, it was not the glorious task to which he
aspired. Now, with this ascent, Solness attempts to share God's domain, to
declare his independence not only from God, but from material success, to be a
free builder, to assert the artist-idealist within his soul.

The props in Act III move Aline and Solness back to the past. Objects
such as old family portraits, old silk dresses, laces, jewels and the dolls are
decorations of the spirit or lost artifacts of the past (Johnston 298). By
mourning the loss of these objects and complacently accepting the death of
the twins as the destiny to which she must submit, Aline reveals a spiritual
center of death. Her view of life overwhelms Hilde, who feels drained and
spiritually crushed. In a reversal of roles, Solness resurrects Hilde's spirit.
At this point, Hilde goes around the table and sits on the bench. The table
has figured prominently in all three acts as a place where an old or new
knowledge presides. While in Act I it holds the ledgers for Solness's business
and in Act II Ragnar's drawings, in Act III it binds Hilde to Solness's truth,
that one must grasp what little joy there is in life. Solness reminds Hilde of the Viking spirit and the robust conscience she mentioned in Act II. At his words, Hilde "sits erect on the bench, once more full of animation. Her eyes are happy and sparkling" (Act III, 655). Now Hilde wants her kingdom, and rapping on the table, she says, "my castle on the table! It's my castle and I want it at once" (655)!

Act III's setting accomplishes much symbolically. The time is evening and the sky autumnal as it was for Hedda and Ellida. From Act I to Act III there is a rhythm of the sun's rising and setting, of seasons changing from autumn and winter to spring, of the old generation giving way to the new, of death and rebirth of the spirit, of confinement giving way to the elevation of the spirit. The veranda setting of Act III brings together the conflicting elements. The house itself is a testament to the dead and in itself embodies a dead marriage, Aline's dead spirit, and empty nurseries. The veranda views the potential of life, a future, a new ideal. The tower beyond represents the future, a new house, a new life, a freedom of spirit. The past, present, and future join in a final act that witnesses Solness' spiritual resurrection.

The use of stage space in The Master Builder is similar to that of Hedda Gabler in its placement of furniture and the action that will occur at the various stations. However, movement about the stage is considerably less. In Act I the characters' movements symbolize their roles of power and servitude. Solness's position indicates that he is the boss, for he towers over Kaja as she sits at the desk, he stands over Brovik who sits in a chair, and he never enters the drafting room where the workers reside. Brovik's movement from the drafting room to the outer workroom symbolizes his attempts to make Solness realize that Ragnar should have a chance to build his own future. Fear of the younger generation's coming forward grips Solness' soul. Several
times during this act Solness walks about the spacious room, but it is a saunter, not a pacing, which suggests that Solness thinks he is in control. The spacious setting, though, is an ironic one. Brovik tells Solness "there is plenty of room for more than one single man..." (Act I, 598). Even though Solness knows that Brovik's words are true, he fears that truth. The stage directions for Solness's dialogues reveal this inner conflict. His temper fluctuates between gentle, firm, growling, impatient, sulky, sharp, peevish, irritated, and angry. His inner restlessness contrasts with his outward actions. For example, he whispers softly with Kaja and gently strokes her hair, but ironically he is manipulating her. His power over her is further represented when Kaja stands at the desk on the left side of the stage and Solness stands at the right near the arm chair. He calls for her, she obeys, and then in a gesture similar to praying she clasps her hands, holds them out toward him, and sinks to her knees. She even utters "Oh, God!" (600) The symbolic action accentuates Solness's egoism.

In Act I the desk on the left represents Solness's materialism and compromised creativity. The table and chairs on the right become an area of revelation and eventual emancipation; there Solness reveals his erotic nature to Doctor Herdal and Hilde reminds him of his youthful idealism. In a repetition of actions, upon her entrance, Hilde, too, walks about the spacious room, showing that she will become an integral part of Solness's life and future. Putting her walking stick by the stove and her knapsack on the sofa symbolizes Hilde's settling in. As she strolls about the room, she looks at everything; at the desk she examines the books and papers; finally, she sits in the rocking chair and takes off her hat as if she were home. When she tells the story of the Lysanger ascent, Solness refuses to believe that he kissed her. Hilde moves upstage left to the stove, turning her back on him. The stove
then represents the destructive passion which Hilde brings into Solness's life. Hilde returns to the armchair this time secure in her position now that Solness has admitted that he did kiss her. Symbolically, he leans against the rocking chair, showing that he is now on unstable ground. At the end of Act I the god of the beginning has been reduced, for when Solness asks why Hilde has come, he sits in the rocking chair near her, not away from her or over her as he did with Kaja. He then leans back in his chair, symbolizing his acceptance that all these years something has been tormenting him. Hilde has put him in touch with himself.

In Act II the stage directions indicate that Solness crosses the room frequently. Since it is Aline's room, he is understandably uncomfortable and out of place. He alternates between great calm and softness and a vehement, suspicious nature as he did in Act I. Facing his competition, Solness sits by the little table in front of the bay window with Ragnar's portfolio while Aline moves about noiselessly watering her plants. Appropriately, Kaja enters from the left, because out of her love for Solness she has promised to stay with him and reject Ragnar. In a confrontation with his wife, Solness calls himself a half-mad man, a lunatic, and then asserts he is sane. He walks up and down the room. When Hilde enters, she repeats her actions from Act I by walking around the room, touching Solness's possessions and finally looking at Ragnar's portfolio. In the following scene, she sits on the sofa and Solness in a chair next to her. Here he reveals the family's past, present and future to Hilde as she looks through the window at the new home. In the mirror scene mentioned earlier Hilde becomes Solness's double, representing the conflict between passionate idealism and conventional materialism. Since she sees Solness as a Viking spirit, she makes him realize that he must accept Ragnar's drawings and not be afraid of the younger generation. In a reverse of power,
Solness sits at the table and Hilde stands behind him, leaning over the back of his chair, the inner voice of vanity, egoism, and idealism. He accepts the drawings, but Hilde gives them to Kaja. At the end of Act II Solness's exit through the garden door seals his fate, an action symbolic of Adam's fall from the garden of Eden, for with his new idealism Solness has chosen to ascend the tower "Over the new house--that will never be a home for me" (Act II, 648).

In Act III the movement on stage is confined to the veranda for all of the characters except Solness. Hilde has now ensconced herself in the middle nursery. She sits on a stool next to Aline's armchair as Aline lays her hand on the back of Hilde's hand in a symbolic gesture of mother and child. Like a child, Hilde lays her arms on Aline's knee and looks up at her affectionately. The scene reveals Aline's past, causing Hilde to announce that she will go away. In a sign of resignation, Hilde stretches her arms flat across the table and rests her head on them. Resolute in his decision to ascend the tower, Solness sits in an armchair at the table. His castles-in-the-air speech stirs Hilde's soul and brings her back to life signified by her rising abruptly from the table. Solness exits through the garden to begin his ascent of the tower. The entire movement in this act has been to the outdoors, to freedom and the emancipation of Solness' soul. The movement and the setting are ironic, however, for Hilde remains in Solness' home and his freedom is death.

The off-stage settings of the tower, cottages, and the new home reveal Solness's weakness of character. The tower represents his egoism, the cottages his compromised talents as a builder, and the new home a material substitute for his loveless and childless marriage. Hilde's descent from the mountain returns to one of Ibsen's favorite themes, where can truth be found. In all five plays, Ibsen makes it clear that truth does not reside in a society that creates its own truths and clings to them. Whether it comes from the
mountains, the sea, the mill race or outside the characters' enclosed worlds, Ibsen's truth is individual, changeable, and always a risk.
A FINAL WORD

A contemporary critic complained that Ibsen no longer wrote to be acted, but to be read, that a play like *Hedda Gabler* was too full of psychological subtleties to be dramatic. This line of development can be most easily traced in the settings and stage directions which became more and more detailed (Tenant 46). By 1887 while writing his later plays Ibsen's technique of dialogue, setting and characterization gave commonplace reality a symbolical significance, as in *The Master Builder*, a poetic drama. Repeatedly, Ibsen addressed the themes of truth, love, choice, and freedom. From these central ideas, his work as a whole possesses an organic unity objectified in the symbolic setting both on and off stage.

The symbolic setting provides understanding of the themes and characters. As seen in the five plays discussed, Ibsen likes to place his characters in settings that visually depict thematic, philosophical, and psychological conflicts and then watch what they do with their lives. As in *Hedda Gabler*, the setting often represents the oppressive society in which his characters live. In exploiting stage space, entrances, exits, and movements symbolize their inner conflicts, desires, and their psychological states. Further, Ibsen's fondness for the divided stage contains rich psychological and thematic symbols while movement from an enclosed setting to the outdoors depicts freedom, discovering the ambiguities of truth, and finding one's true self. Finally, his off-stage settings provide a dramatic catalyst, either as a thematic contrast or as a psychological or philosophical alternative for the characters.
Ibsen's favorite props become symbolic in each of the plays. While mirrors reflect the inner spirit of his characters, lamps always represent the illumination of truth. His sofas, tables and chairs create unity, tension, and revelation. Even the type of chair and the shape of the table represent character, conflict, and theme. Symbolizing a spectrum of human emotions, the stove, vases of flowers, writing desks, books, and food reveal fragility, intellect, aggression, and so on.

Ibsen's intricate sets use architectural details for symbolic effect. Every door and window has a dramatic role such as the glass door in Hedda Gabler, the haunting view of the white horses from the windows of Rosmersholm, or the meaning of truth in Rosmersholm and An Enemy of the People. Ironic, thematic, and symbolic, his settings reveal character and provide rhythm and structure. His resonant and rich use of settings helps us understand the depth of his power and the scope of his genius.
Works Cited


