TRANSITION FROM ROMANTIC ILLUSION TO REALITY

Reality is nothing but truth. Truth and freedom are the central watch words of Ibsen. Truth alone can achieve liberation. Without truth there could be no change, no genuine ‘freedom’. The protagonists evade reality and find escape through self-indulgence in fantasy. The importance of illusion or fantasy, however, has been recognized by playwrights since classical Greek drama, but the discovery of its relevance to the modern industrial society has been a significant contribution to the drama.

The Greek theatre visualized illusion as a constituent part of the tragic spirit and it also believed that the knowledge of illusion and the consequent self-discovery of the hero led to suffering and redemption. Suffering and sense of guilt have a universal grandeur about them, so much so that the fate of the tragic hero has been equated with that of the suffering humanity. Illusion in the Shakespearian theatre had the same function as in the Greek drama but true to the man-centric vision of the Renaissance, its focus on the immediate human world had been sharpened. In the modern theatre, that of Ibsen for example, illusion is used as a constituent part of modern life. Ibsen’s drama is a stupendous spectacle of modern man’s efforts towards self-realization and freedom, although the mighty efforts of his heroes, Ekdal’s, Rosmer’s or Ellida’s, often create nothing more than illusions. The conflict of appearance and reality, which the finest of Ibsenite theatre depicts,
is part of the vision of a poet deeply disturbed over the contradictory aspects of life. Ibsen’s approach with the activities and ideals of his protagonists is of a poet rather than of a logical thinker in his dealings.

The insignificance of material ambition and power frequently figures in his drama, but one wonders if he was very much concerned with evolving an area of specific values; possibly the best part of his astounding spiritual energy was directed towards the understanding of the mystery of life. In play after play, he presents the vision of a poet contemplating reality and illusion that mould one’s passions and actions, motives and ideals. By recognizing the hard facts of life, his vision of reality embraces ideals as well as appearances. He explores, with increasing insistence in his later plays, the significance of struggle with illusion, the grandeur of defeat that reveals other dimensions of a man’s character. He asks again and again if a man’s relation with society gives a comprehensive meaning of his intentions and dreams; but he takes into account the ambivalent aspects of life, and expectations and frustrations are given their rightful place in a man’s life.

Ibsen’s interest in the social man in relation to his community seemed to have been considerably waning, and the rest of his creative period had been devoted to the exploration of man alone with his own soul. In a remarkable series of plays, he endeavours to probe deeper into the nature of dreams and illusions, the phantoms that delude man and the expectations are shattered. He rarely intends to prove anything, but with the imaginative wealth of a poet, he attempts to
capture the mystery that surrounds life. The final note of this series of plays is associated with a sense of great affirmation, a sense of dignity and also of resignation.

The male protagonists indulge in romantic fantasy with other women, neglecting their legal partners resulting in confusion in the family. As a result, they feel alienated in the family. The intensity of alienation and depression gets deeper and the protagonists are pushed to utter helplessness. Finally, they choose a path of self-destruction. It means not only the falling of greatness from felicity to suffering but also the external expression of mental upheaval or realization.

One of the strongest patterns is making a choice and then facing the results of that choice. The protagonists of Ibsen choose their end by their own free will. This can be found in Sophocles' *Oedipus, the King* and many of Ibsen's plays. The hero regains his identity. He has to pay a terrible price for what he has done. Isolation is the immediate price the hero pays for taking up his burden. It is an isolation which gives him identity. Oedipus is a man who attempts to do his best at the terrible fate predicted by the oracle (that he would kill his father and marry his mother). But he is not able to foresee what is in store for him. He is under the illusion that if he takes the sins of the city upon himself, his punishment would be salvation for others. A contrast is repeatedly drawn between a physical power of sight and the inner sight of understanding. Though Tiresias is blind, he can see the
truth which escapes Oedipus, who has penetrated the riddle of the Sphinx but cannot solve the puzzle of his own life. When it is revealed to him, he blinds himself. The enlightenment comes after he becomes blind.

In *King Lear* both Lear and Gloucester are deceived by appearances. They both believe the lies told of their false children. As in *Oedipus, the King*, a contrast is drawn between physical sight and spiritual blindness. After he becomes blind, Gloucester realizes the truth. In Lear's case, madness is substituted for blindness. Tennessee Williams' *A Street Car Named Desire* serves as an example of the usual naturalistic defeat. Blanche Dubois lives in a world of illusion and shows herself as a woman of sophistication. She finds refuge in the slum of New Orleans, when her sister lives with her apelike husband, Stanley Kowalski. But Blanche has visions of finer things and she tries to rescue her sister and herself. She selects Mitch, the gentlest of Stanley's rough friends and finds a secure corner. But her past life destroys the dream. She hesitate to accept the reality and her brother-in-law sees his home invaded by a difficult intruder. Her insults make him rape her. In Blanche’s case, the realization is not fulfilled and at last she finds her place in a mental asylum. The intensity of the conflict, with important values involved on both sides, gives the play considerable stature as a tragedy.

Similarly, almost all the main characters of Ibsen are trapped in a world of illusions which pull them away from the stark realities of life. In all these great tragedies, the tragic flaw is woven around a great man who is the protagonist. But
Ibsen concentrates on the common man. Being wedded to realism, he cannot give the readers a tragic character separated from the world. Domestic tragedy is a typical by-product of the Post-Romantic Era. Actually, tragedy is a real confrontation with reality. All characters of Ibsen wallow in disillusionment and as a result many of them fall into the tragic mire.

Man may entertain himself with illusions, but they are really delusions. He may live for a short time by those delusions, but they are lies that may not serve them in anyway and he tells himself life-lies. In this dilemma, the tragic formula is simple. The hero tries to apply his subjective values to objective reality, but the tragedy is that even that reality destroys him. This is well brought out on the stage by Ibsen.

Theatre itself is an illusion wherein the audience obviously comes to any theatrical performance with suspension of disbelief, and the viewers are always ready to submit to the illusion. Theatres use various devices in order to make this illusion appear real.

The plot of *The Wild Duck* is constructed on the base of an illusion. It opens with a feast to celebrate the home coming of Gregers Werle. The celebration makes the readers ponder over whether the host and hostess and the guests are hypocritical or not. Hjalmar and Gregers have nothing in common. Hjalmar leads a life as an artist, and he is fond of calling himself a “bread winner”. He laments, “In a poor photographer’s house, life is cramped I know that. My lot is a poor one, but you
know, I'm an inventor. And I'm the family bread winner, too" (WD 444). Hjalmar provides for his family by allowing Gina to look after the business. He always shuts himself up in his living room and sleeps in his study in the name of creating something noble. If he is asked to do any retouching, he begins to complain.

The seeming generosity of old Werle makes Hjalmar study photography and the old man also helps him marry Gina Hansen, his former mistress. Despite this deception, Gina proves to be a courageous and industrious woman. By allowing his wife to do the work Hjalmar sinks into a lazy half-slumber in his studio and indulges in a world of illusion. He feels that he has a great fortune of making a discovery which would bring him fame and fortune. The conversation between Hjalmar and Gregers substantiates this idea.

GREGERS. But it's (invention) making progress, isn't it?

HJALMAR. Oh, yes. It's making progress. I meditate upon my invention every day. It fills my mind. Every afternoon, after lunch, I shut myself up in the sitting room where I can ponder in peace. But it's simply no good at all. That's what Relling says too. (WD 443)

The longing for something higher resides in Hjalmar, makes him mouth words of illusions and vanity. He is in an illusion that his future invention on photography will
compensate his father’s loss in the business and also cures his sickening past life. Eventually it also secures his daughter’s future by restoring her vision.

This web is immediately shattered by the blunt idealism of Gregers. He assumes that Hjalmar has enjoyed a loving upbringing whereby “the claim of the ideal has not been forgotten” (WD 475). They treat the motherless boy like the star of the future and spoil him to the limits of their ability. Relling and Gregers agree that his father always had the highest expectations of Hjalmar, without understanding him. So that when he eventually entered university, no one had higher hopes of Hjalmar than Hjalmar himself.

Gregers grows up in the isolated wooded mountains of his father’s mines. He believes that his ideals are accepted by the people. His belief drives him to a state of idealism where he possesses precious idealistic riches and acts like a missionary. He is in the world of illusion and is not aware that his ideals are too harsh and burdensome. Relling’s view is that he is a sick man who is suffering from moralistic fever.

RELLING. Because you’re a sick man, you know that.

GREGERS. There you’re right.

RELLING. Oh yes, your case has complications. First there’s this virulent moralistic fever and something worse – you keep going off in deliriums of hero worship; you always have to have something to admire that’s outside of yourself. (WD 446)
The person who believes in brutal powers of life is Dr. Relling who highly contradicts Gregers. His firm belief is that life must possess some lies which ensure the happiness of man. He is not a mere word-monger but he applies "the life-lies" (WD 476) to his patients to whom they may be sugar-coated pills.

Relling replies to Gregers:

GREGERS. The life-lie? I don’t think I heard –

RELLING. Oh yes, I said the life-lie. The life lie, don’t you see

– that’s the animating principle of life. (WD 476)

It helps people forget the unfairness of life and it also serves as a painkiller. The illusions encourage the man to hide his uncomfortable weaknesses and he can lift his self-esteem. Relling emphasizes to Gregers, “No need to use that foreign word-ideals; we do have a perfectly good Norwegian word for it –lies” (WD 477).

Relling is a good doctor who manufactures lies in the shape of pills which help enrich one’s body and mind. He fights against Gregers asserting, “When you take away his life-lies from the average person, you take away, at the same time, his happiness” (WD 477).

His aim is to give consolation and comfort, whereas Gregers’s desire is the elevation of man. He makes the person believe that they are all right. Gregers is in an illusion that he can elevate the life of Hjalmar by revealing the secret to him. His family life has been built on the deceptions committed by the merchant, Werle. Gregers wishes
to contribute his share to transform everything for good and to lift their marriage to wonderful heights. The moral preaching of Gregers does not bring any transformation. But Hedvig’s death is the price for his blunt idealism. Gregers’ idealism makes Hedvig sacrifice herself in order to prove her real love for her father.

Hjalmar’s mind is shrouded by illusions. His life takes a different turn when he comes to know of the past life of Gina. He rages at her, “Tell me – don’t you every day, every hour, regret this spider web of deception you’ve spun around me? Answer me that! Don’t you really go around in a torment of remorse?” (WD 457).

He gets fed up by his illusion and hesitates to accept the reality and this makes him lament:

I wonder – what happens now to the breadwinner’s dream?

When I lay in there on the sofa pondering my invention, I had a hunch it would drain my last bit of strength. I sensed that the day I took the patent in my hand – that would be the day of departure. And it was my dream that then you would go on as the departed inventor’s prosperous widow. (WD 458)

He stumbles to accept the clearance in the sky of his life as it was clouded with illusions in the past. He forgives Gina but rejects Hedvig’s love. When he comes to know that she has shot dead, he cries for her love, “No, no she must live! Oh, for heaven’s sake, Relling – just for a moment – just so I can tell her how inexpressibly! I loved her all the time!” (WD 488).
Even towards the end of the play one can see Gregers keeping illusions close to his heart. He affirms Hedvig’s death, “will set free what is noble” in Hjalmar, and, “increase all his life!” (WD 490). But Relling retorts, “In less than a year little Hedvig will be nothing more to him than a pretty theme of recitations” (WD 490).

Gregers tries to impose his idealism even on Hedvig, but she is not mature enough to analyze his ideals. She simply accepts Gregers as he is and moreover she is alien to illusions and deceptions. Though her father finds it difficult to satisfy her petty needs, she knows her limitations as a child.

When Gregers compels her to see the real world which she finds in the books, she expresses her wish to remain always at home and help her father and mother. In Hedvig’s childish joy, the attic room with its fir trees, birds and hatching baskets all metamorphosed into a beautiful setting. Old Ekdal spends his time in the attic which provides a source of his imagination. The Sun, the Moon and the Stars are closer to the Ekdals, and the setup of the attic suggests the duplication of reality.

Every character in the play tries to show heroic pretensions to Hedvig, one way or other. She finds no chasm between Gregers’s relentless drive for truth and Hjalmar’s search for illusions. Hedvig is the one who makes her father escape briefly from misery by bringing him his flute to play. The mellifluous musical flute momentarily silences the false sounds of life. He delivers a speech: “And if I should seem unreasonable at times, then – good Lord – remember that I am a man assailed by a host of cares. Ah, yes! (Drying his eyes.) No beer at a time like this. Bring me my flute” (WD 420).
The revelation of his family situation makes Hedvig face certain critical situations where she sacrifices her self instead of sacrificing something for real love. She runs like a stream which is immediately dried up by the pretensions of all in the family. The realism loses its vigour amidst deception and hypocrisy. Though she is a child, she differs from Gregers in idealizing the truth. By sacrificing herself, she does not idealize any man or thing that is the object of her love, but she idealizes her own love. She becomes a prey to the gun of old Ekdal who repeats, “The woods will take revenge” (WD 488).

While discussing the household accounts, two realities emerge: one is that the mother and daughter discard realities by going through mundane rituals; the other is that they try to analyze how they can pay for the groceries. Gina states, “The amount of butter we (euphemism for Hjalmar) go through in this house!” (WD 412). The passage points towards a real sacrifice though not in an emphatic way.

Gregers’s arrival as a tenant produces horror in the mind of Gina. She feels that the darkness of the past may be brought to light by Gregers. Gina’s happiness, built on the ground of deception, may be slackened by his arrival. Gina does not seem to make any attempt to hide her deception from Hjalmar by her hospitality and skill in work. Though her pretension and deception may be unintentional, it devours the life of her daughter. Reality comes in the form of Mrs. Sorby and her words enlighten Gina. Mrs. Sorby reaffirms that the happiness of marriage depends on mutual trust.
The marriage of Hjalmar and Gina entirely differs from the marriage of Werle and Mrs. Sorby. As a former mistress to Werle, Gina fails to establish herself whereas Mrs. Sorby succeeds in her life. She finds out the truth of marriage, which was once a pain to her, because of her husband’s beastly nature. Werle also possesses some treacherous animal qualities, but his vices are slowed down by his physical imbalance and loneliness. However Mrs. Sorby accepts the situation in a very realistic way.

In *A Doll’s House* Mrs. Linde and Krogstad at the end discover the ability to appreciate what is best in each other and to tolerate what is worst in them. Mrs. Sorby accepts Werle as he is, and impresses him by her qualities. This enables Werle to shed all his mental sickness. She seems to have retained both self-respect and an appreciation for life. She finds Werle’s deception and pretensions fading and giving way to a new perception of life.

They select Hoidal to settle down in life. It is not mere escape, but an escape from deceptions and superfluities. For them, their lavish dinner party is a farewell to “polite” society and their life together at Hoidal is expected to be a simpler one. In the opinion of Gregers and Relling, Hoidal is a place habituated by impoverished working people and their families. Werle’s and Sorby’s actions are something greater than Gregers’s “claim of the ideal” and have an edge over Relling’s “life-lies” (*WD* 476). Mrs. Sorby’s action opens the eyes of Gina. Werle sends a letter through Mrs. Sorby and the letter states that the old Ekdal could draw one hundred
crowns till his death and after that it would go to Hedvig. This produces a suspicion in the mind of Gregers that it might turn out to be a trap for Hjalmar. He fails to see the intentions behind the action of his father. Actually, Werle wants to make amends for his past deeds. It is really an act of repentance which others could not understand. Gregers warns, “Hjalmar, this is a trap that’s been set for you. When he was here this morning, he said, ‘Hjalmar Ekdal is not the man you think he is’” (WD 468).

Apparently, the characters who move on the path of illusion face failures, like Gregers Werle, Hjalmar Ekdal and old Ekdal. The characters who lead a life of realism find happiness like Werle and Mrs. Sorby. According to Werle, the heads of all the wounded ducks should be kept well down in the weeds and a person like him who places himself between the worlds of reality and escapism must know the necessity of submersion. Gregers’s formulation of doctrines is not beneficial to anybody in anyway. The people who listen to his ideals lose their positive nature and also a sense of direction in their life. Relling’s view of life suggests that it can be dangerous to overestimate human capacity and weakness. In the play, Hedvig remains a median line amidst all illusions and deceptions. She connects all human hearts whether they are illusory or real.

The duck symbolizes almost all the characters in the play and it is an apt title for the play. Through action and suffering, Gina is shown to be like the duck. Werle seduced her and brought her down as low as the duck and subsequently “raised her up”. Old Ekdal is clearly associated with the duck and he has lost all
sense of responsibility and reality. Werle is the hunter who wounds the duck. Werle decides that the duck is unfit to cope with its natural life and it should be granted release. But Petterson rescues it. Werle constructs his own allegory about life on land and death in water. According to him, some people are like the duck; once they “get a couple of slugs in them” (WD 405), they dive into the depths of some lake or fjord and they “never come up again”. Gregers, the saviour, would plunge into the water, plunge his head under, and grasp the drowning ducks. Though unwilling they might be and when they are dragged ashore, he would breathe wholesome drafts of idealized “truth” into their lungs. Relling curses Gregers’s duck but he calls Hedvig tenderly, “a little wild-duck mother” (WD 477).

The chiaroscuro effect contributes much to the theme. This is the effect where the artist uses extreme contrasts of light and shade. This contrast suggests that life is not completely understood. When Act III commences, the day light illuminates the scene and the viewers are reminded that in the preceding acts they have been watching the play by artificial light. It suggests the extraordinary events in the lives of both the Werles and the Ekdals. In Act I, the viewers observe the dining room with brilliant light and another room with lighted lamps with green shades. This alternation of light and shade suggests that the characters are under the world of illusion and reality.

Rosmer and Rebecca live in a fantasy world in Rosmersholm an ideal life free from sufferings. He believes that he could elevate all his countrymen into
noblemen, to breathe the air of democracy. This is highly ridiculous to any practical man and also to Kroll, and he mocks: “You’re a dreamer, Rosmer, will you liberate them? And temper them?” (RS 518).

To make his ideal true, Rebecca comes his way with the hope that she could be an intellectual companion to Rosmer. Highly influenced by his ideals, she plays a tricky role to clear Beata from her way to Rosmer. He believes that Rebecca can lead him in his idealistic path and his vision could be accomplished only with the help of Rebecca. His vision to make every individual attain inner freedom gets shattered when he could not achieve it by himself.

Rebecca’s past is revealed through Kroll and his illusion of being a good companion to Rosmer is broken as she carries the guilt. Rosmer says, “The question I’ve been wrestling with is – whether the two of us weren’t deceiving ourselves all the time when we called this bond between us friendship. Victory is impossible for any cause that’s rooted in guilt” (RS 555).

This shakes the illusion of Rebecca and she realizes that she is travelling the illusory path which leads to the road of falsehood. The past which discloses the secret of Rebecca that she happened to be the mistress of her own father was heavy on her. There is no meaning in life if she builds her life on this guilt. Rosmer’s illusory ideals make a sea change in the life of Rebecca and forces her to end her life.
When Rosmer wishes to join hands with her in death, she reminds him of his ideal. He chides: "Don't remind me of that. It was only a half-baked dream, Rebecca. A hare brained notion I don't believe in anymore. Human beings can't be ennobled from without" (RS 576). He comes to the realization that whatever he holds as an ideal gets shattered and he loses faith in himself and also in Rebecca. His idealistic master Brendel is turned out to be a mocking stock in front of Mortensgaard. This comes as a heavy blow to Rosmer and Brendel's advice really shakes him and Rosmer is reminded that he is building a castle in the shifting sand. He tells Rosmer of Mortensgaard's achievement and success to Rosmer. Brendel explains:

Because Peter Mortensgaard never wants anything more than what he can do Peter Mortensgaard is wholly capable of a life without ideals. And that, you see – that, essentially, is the great secret of successful action. It's the sum of all worldly wisdom. Basta! (RS 579)

As a free thinker, Mortensgaard has no illusory ideals, which contrasts with the ideals of Rosmer. Practicality in life counts success to him. Brendel suggests, "Brein! Then follow the Beispill of your old teacher. Erase everything he ever once imprinted on your brain. Build not your castle on the shifting sand" (RS 579).

After this discussion, Rosmer is dispirited and loses faith in life. Rosmer is encouraged by Rebecca and he wants to renew their love as "spiritual marriage".
Rosmer’s emotions are effectively captured in the words of Lou Salome, “He wanted a new reality that would kill the past; a stronger will, first of all, would have built upon an already dead past and not have used love as a means of abusing a new life” (97). He is craving for a new reality that would surely rejuvenate him but Rebecca denies it as she is already burdened by her past guilt. Rebecca realizes that so far what she has been living is not at all life. She has created an illusory life which gives fantasies and cheer but she strongly believes that death is the reality which would give true meaning to her life. Finally she understands the reality and she accepts it whereas Rosmer does not.

Ibsen creates an illusion as ‘hidden past’ in the lives of his protagonists and later on reality is revealed through the revelation of the past secrets. Thereby the protagonists are found to be in existential dilemma and they are helpless.

Death is not Rosmer’s choice but unwillingly he accepts the wish of Rebecca and follows her. The reality comes as an awakening to Rebecca and she starts holding a liberated view of life. Her guilt-ridden past which so far burdened her gets melted and she attains inner happiness. She is really a true sample of Rosmer’s idealism. It is impossible for him to materialize his ideals and he is in utter chaos. To him, Brendel is a bad example. He expects Rebecca to be the same as once she was and does not accept her transformation. Rosmer gloomily concludes, “Happiness for all” which was his dream would not be made real through him or for him” (Gomez 93).
She also adds:

Self realization of faults, repentance, redemption and building
up a community of fraternal love – these ideals are the
dreams of Rosmer. Thereby the people come close to the
ideals of Christianity preaches the possibility of achieving all
this through faith in a saviour. Rosmer claims that this would
be done by individual human strength alone”. (92)

He is under the illusion that his ideal needs only human strength. He asserts,
“Yes, of course by their own strength. There is no other to be had” (RS 530).

But his idealism proves to be illusory and could not be materialized. To
Rebecca, death is atonement and she feels satisfied to accept the reality. She
comes out from the web of illusion and chooses a realistic path. There is no
transformation in Rosmer even in the end; he tests Rebecca’s ennobling spirit by
insisting on her following the footsteps of Beata. He feels that he does not have
any hold on life and is pushed towards death. He is under the illusion that without
Rebecca, he could not continue his life and he is ready to accept death.

Rebecca accepts the reality which restores peace and happiness. It is her
illusion that death heals all her past wounds and purges her from the guilt. But
Ellida in *The Lady from the Sea* proves that an individual who can also atone even
by living in an existing world. Ellida is completely immersed in an illusory life
from the beginning, but she has a positive spirit by which she emerges as a wonderful personality in the end. Rebecca, an ennobled individual, meets with a fatal end.

Ibsen stretches the play *The Lady from the Sea* before an open sea which creates an impression of taking viewers to the sea. The play is set in a small town in western Norway and it is reminiscent of Molde where Ibsen spent two months in the summer of 1885. It explores the complex state of mind, particularly of a woman, Ellida Wangel. The changing state of the sea is reflected in the shifting moods of Ellida. Fjelde opines:

People akin to the sea. Bound by the sea. Dependent on the sea.

Must return to it. One fish species forms a basic link in the evolutionary series. Do rudiments of it still remain in the human mind? In the mind of certain individuals? ("Introduction" *Complete Major Prose Plays* 588)

Ellida Wangel is obsessed with the sea. She is the only daughter of a light house keeper and as a young girl, she is mesmerized by the first mate of an American ship. His sea-eyes hypnotize her. One day in an obscure quarrel, he kills the captain. He brings Ellida to Bratthammer, the headland near the lighthouse. There they unite their rings and cast them out into the ocean in the name of a symbolic wedding. As the years roll by, her infatuation continues though she marries Wangel, who is very honest and kind. Two years later, she bears a short-
lived son, whose eyes resemble the eyes of that man. This makes her disallow her husband in her bed. She keeps her health by taking medicines and frequently visits the sea for swimming. When the stranger returns with his claim on Ellida that she should follow him and marry him. She is allowed to take the decision on her own: whether to continue her life with Wangel or to go with that stranger. At last she realizes the state of her being and takes a decision against the tidal flow of the unconscious in the self. Fjelde says, “The sea possesses a power to affect one’s moods which operates like the power of the will. The sea can hypnotize. Nature at large can do this. The great secret is the dependence of the will on ‘the will-less’ ” (588).

Ibsen the Romantic presents The Lady from the Sea in the form of a romantic tragedy that gives a new dimension to life’s realities. The theme of romantic fantasy and reality is diffused in all the characters in the play. When the play opens, the readers find Hilda and Bolette decorating the house with flowers. That day is their mother’s birthday but it is mistaken by Lyngstrand. Ellida keeps herself away from the house and lives in her own world of imagination. Her indulgence in the world of illusion makes her forget the responsibilities of her life. He is an artist under the impression that his foreign travels will provide him with an opportunity to earn reputation in the world of art. The conversation between Hilda and Bolette is a clear indication of the fact that Lyngstrand has been caught in a web of illusion:
HILDA. To watch him and to get him to say it isn’t serious
and that he’s going to travel abroad and be an artist. He
really believes every bit of it, and it fills him with such a
joy. And yet it’s all going to come to nothing, absolutely
nothing. Because he won’t live long enough. When I
think of it, it seems so thrilling. (LS 619)

Lyngstrand’s illusion does not stop with himself but it extends to Ellida too.

Durbauch opines:

At last she is seized by a kind of nostalgia, homesickness for
an unknown country. She lives as if she were constantly on
the brink of some great fulfillment. As if she was waiting for
prince charming to take her away from all this. All what? The
solitude of living inside her own soul? (159)

Ellida feels homesickness and she longs for the foregone days which are delightful
realities to her. She remembers the golden summer bathed in light and decked with
flowers. She is dragged from that state to the private region of secret sorrows
which negate present joy and pleasures. She reveals with a distress:

The joy – it’s much like our joy in these long, light summer
days and nights. It has the hint in it of dark times to come.
And that hint is what throws a shadow over our human joy –
like the drifting clouds with their shadows over the fjord.
Everything lies there so bright and blue – and then all of a sudden –. (LS 639)

Her passion for the sea draws her closer to the stranger who possesses the characteristics of the sea, free of all limitations. But the irony is that she does not have the freedom that she desires as she is compelled to take care of the family. She fails to fulfill the responsibilities of a family life and instead tries to get satisfaction out of her imagination. W.H. Auden’s analysis of the romantic iconography of the sea reminds the readers of man’s ambiguous situation in the world. He concludes:

Land is the place where people are born, marry and have children, … changing seasons create a sound of different duties and feelings, and the ocean, by contrast, is the place where there are no ties of home or sex… sea can signify the freeing of the spirit from finite nature, its ascetic denial of the flesh, the determination to live in one directional historical time rather than in cyclical natural time. (68)

The sea attracts Ellida and its terrible attraction is due to the “homesickness for the unknown country”. It assures freedom from the processes of land life. She has the sea in her mind and the ebb and flow of the waves drive her into an imaginary world. But land reminds her of familial bindings and responsibility. It is expected on the part
of each one to fulfill one’s commitment to the earth. When Ellida and Wangel converse, she discloses: “But my mind – my thoughts – all my longing dreams and desires – those you can never constrain! They’ll go raging and hunting out – into the unknown that I was made for – and that you’ve shut out for me!” (LS 685)

Ellida resides both at home and in the sea and she is caught up between these two. Fjelde calls this “psychic bigamy”. It suggests the state of dichotomy in Ellida’s life. In a sense, Ellida’s legal and binding marriage to an ordinary man and a mystic sea marriage to a mysterious prince of darkness are a proof of her confused state of mind. He emphasizes, “The ‘halfness’ of the mermaid’s divided nature is located not only in the sea-land dichotomy, but in the tension between romanticism and reality, dramatized most brilliantly” (Ibsen’s Positive World-View 163).

The land marriage satisfies her romantic yearning but it does not give her a feeling of security. She loves both her husbands and she feels contented with Wangel, “Oh yes! I do – I have come to love him with all my heart! That’s terrible—so inexplicable—so completely incomprehensible …” (LS 614). Ellida is Wangel’s second wife and she is not mature enough to adjust with his grown-up daughters. She believes that they are bound by memories of the dead woman, just as she feels bound to her past life with the stranger from the sea. She excludes the family from her secret memory. She asks Wangel, “To support me – to help me. Nothing to draw me in, no sense of things in common, of shared intimacies” (LS 647).
Ellida escapes from responsibilities and indulges in contemplating the stranger. Though she feels secure in the company of Wangel, the thought restrains her from loving him with all her heart. She is obsessed with the stranger. But Wangel is under the impression that Ellida is fixated with the thought of his first wife and he confesses, “You think my heart is divided between you and her. That’s what’s upsetting you. You see something, as it was immoral in our relationship. That’s why you can’t – or won’t live with me anymore as my wife” (LS 622). Ellida is haunted by the mysterious eyes of her child. She confides with trembling, “The child had the eyes of the stranger – Now you must understand why I won’t – why I daren’t ever live with you again as your wife!” (LS 632). She stumbles to articulate her trauma, at the same time; she finds it difficult to perform the role of a wife. Lyngstrand’s idea of sculpture makes Ellida link the past with her imagination. Wangel confirms, “I assure you that was simply your imagination” and tries to convince her, “The child had exactly the same eyes as other normal children” (LS 631).

Durbach documents from Jung’s *Fear of Flying* which gives an analysis of the sexual quest and clarifies Ellida’s mental state at the end of the play:

Perhaps the search was really a kind of ritual in which the process was more important than the end perhaps it was a kind of quest. Perhaps there was no man at all, but just a mirage conjured by our longing and emptiness… may be the
impossible man was nothing but a specter made of our own yearning...or may be he was really death, the last lover. (163)

The stranger offers her what she exactly needs – the freedom. He says: “Yes, Ellida – be ready to travel tomorrow night. I’m coming to take you away” (LS 645).

No mortal man can guarantee the satisfaction of all her needs.

When the stranger returns a second time to ask Ellida to make her final decision, there is no correspondence between what he is and what he stands for. If she were merely called upon to choose between a former lover, even one with whom she had performed a kind of marriage ceremony, and Wangel, she would be in a different situation. She is not in love with the stranger, though she is frightened of him, she has no prospect of any future with him, no home, no country even to which she could go. All he offers is a cabin on the ship, Ellida has no craving for the stranger as a man. So the genuine choice which Wangel tries to offer her is not what it seems. Ibsen has in mind a husband at the opposite extreme from Nora’s Torvald, a man who does not dominate his wife, but who unselfishly offers her complete freedom to go her own way. Wangel encourages her to give expression to her thoughts, perhaps he is much worried about his wife living in a world of illusion. The dialogue between Wangel and Ellida brings out her inner hidden strengths and weaknesses. He says, “Not so strange, actually. There’s a new image in you now, shaped out of reality- and it’s eclipsing the old one so you can’t see it anymore... Yes. And it’s shutting out the sick fantasies, too. It’s a good thing the reality came” (LS 661).
Wangel has the responsibility of protecting her though she wants to meet the stranger. Ellida declares that it is very difficult for him to protect her because he is powerless to oppose forces which have no ‘real’ existence in the physical world. She states in a hapless condition, “This thing is much more deeply seated, Wangel! The pull is within my own mind! And what can you do about that?” (LS 661). Ellida wants freedom to choose, “I have no choice. Because then it would be no real decision...I must be free to choose... I must be able to let him go away alone...or to go with him” (LS 665). Wangel refuses her the option of going with the stranger. He argues, “You need your husband... And your doctor...” (LS 672).

The stranger encourages her to think and act on her own ‘free will’. His words begin to influence her in spite of the fact that he is neither sincere nor liberal. But Wangel seems to be making a sincere attempt to bring her back to her senses. Ellida is intoxicated by his words “free will” which reveal the drastic consequences of a negative choice on her part. “And be clear about one thing, if you don’t leave with me tomorrow, that’s the finish of everything ... I shall never come here again ... I shall be as though dead and gone from you forever” (LS 645).

Moreover the stranger’s liberality suggests no security and safety. Finally ‘freedom defined by responsibility’ liberates Ellida from the world of illusion and romantic attachment. The reality shatters the illusion and the alienated being immediately accepts the responsibility. She attains motherhood for which Hilda yearns.
She frees Bolette to live an independent life and assures her that her father would now have a 'real life'. She asserts, "I am coming back to you", and to Hilda, they look like a "newly engaged couple" (LS 687).

Ellida not only liberates herself from the world of fantasy through her power of choice but liberates others also. Wangel believes that she would be his best companion but she breaks his hope. As a wife, she lives a superficial life with him but he is under the impression that he is living a meaningful life with Ellida. The hopes of Wangel are shattered by her words. She believes that she is bound by his love and wants to break that. She mentally lives with the romantic stranger but now she wants freedom from everything. Actually she wishes to be like the stranger, as open and free as the sea.

ELLIDA. I see that this life we're living with each other – is really no marriage at all.

WANGEL (bitterly). What you say is true enough. The life we have now is no marriage. (LS 663)

Ellida confesses that she does not love Wangel and the sharp utterance shakes him. He always has a soft corner for her.

Wangel's encounter with the stranger in his own house makes him feel that the stranger has been a tremendous motivating force behind Ellida's actions. Her confidence in the stranger helps her make certain choices which she could not
have made otherwise. The illusion which has dominated her mind so far suddenly
gives way to a reality. That reality removes the screen which blinds Ellida so far.
His preoccupation with his profession and personal problems makes him
indifferent to the daughter Bolette who wants to learn something about the world.

Bolette expresses her desire to Arnholm that she wants to learn more about
the world and she finds no ventilation for her feelings. The situation appears more
complex when the readers find that Arnholm has already made his marriage
proposal to Ellida and it has been rejected by Ellida.

Ibsen makes symbolic use of the sea and the carp pond to enrich the theme
of illusion and reality. Symbolism is a mode of perceiving reality, originating from
the habit of finding parallels. Ramesh K. Srivastava states, “The incidents and
characters, subjects and objects, words and expressions all become meaningful
connotation more than meets the eye” (xxxi).

The sea is highly symbolic. It symbolizes Ellida and the stranger. Her
emotions are like the ebb and flow of the sea. Bolette makes a comparison of the
carp pond and the sea. The carp pond suggests a life with limitation and ignorance
but the sea suggests freedom. Bolette says:

It’s true. I don’t think we live very differently from the carp down there
in the pond. They have the fjord so close to them, and there the shoals of
great, wild fish go streaking in and out. But these poor, tame pet fish know nothing of that, and they’ll never be part of that life. (LS 635)

The carp pond signifies the nature of Bolette who aspires to learn and get exposed to the outer world whereas Ellida symbolizes the vast sea which stands for freedom. Sometimes, this spirit becomes dangerous as she invites danger from the stranger. Freedom with responsibility and limitation always secures happiness. So Bolette asserts that they live a little life in a fish pond, “What good is it to us if the great, strange world goes by on its way up to see the midnight sun? We never go along. We never see the midnight sun. Oh, no, we live our snug little lives out here, in our fish pond” (LS 635).

Hedda in Hedda Gabler is narcissistic in nature and admires herself and is unwilling to show herself to anyone, even to her husband Tesman. Like Ellida in The Lady from the Sea, Hedda chooses her unexciting husband not out of love but for social status. Both are self-absorbed individuals. She is under the illusion that she can conquer anyone and outwit any situation. Hedda believes she is of enchanting beauty that could bewitch any male on her way. Ejlert Lovborg is a former admirer of Hedda. Even after her marriage she lures Ejlert Lovborg and feels possessive of him, as he is claimed by another lady, her schoolmate Thea. Hedda lives in a world of fantasy, forgets her reality and responsibilities in the family.
By indulging in romantic fantasy, she invites a lot of trouble to herself.

Fjelde opines:

Though she has imagination and an intense appetite for beauty, she has no conscience, no conviction: with plenty of cleverness, energy and personal fascination, she remains mean, envious, insolent, cruel in protest against others' happiness, fiendish in her dislike of inartistic people and things; a bully in reaction to her own cowardice. (Complete Major Prose Plays 692)

Her appearance and her nature itself are deceptive. She is a woman of paradox; the inner promptings of a nature born wild but pretending to be tamed. Most of the times she is in an illusory state and forgets to realize the reality of her life; she lacks inwardness and the capacity to develop, and hers is a poverty-stricken soul. Lou Salome states:

She does not appear to us like a creature who wrestles with her existence and vainly seeks to bring her inmost self into outer expression; on the contrary, she controls herself completely and is an all-hardened surface, a deceptive shell, a mask prepared for every occasion. (130)
The romantic fantasy provides warmth and comfort to her soul. She lacks connectivity with people especially with her family members. She is surrounded by males, like Tesman (her husband), Lovborg (her past admirer) and Brack (the lawyer) who are ready to exploit her. To survive amidst these males, she has to throw an aura of romanticism around herself. She is not aware that, one day it will turn against her. Rebecca has an intellectual charm to allure only Rosmer, whereas Hedda entices all men around her. The illusory mind spends time idle and feels bored. To avoid boredom she trifles with everyone. Hedda’s motto becomes, “I stand here idly and shoot into the blue sky” (*HG* 731).

Even from her childhood, she was not allowed to express her real feelings; she practises hiding her feelings due to her patriarchal restrictions. She hides her malicious intentions behind a measured politeness and a smooth mark which she never discards. Hedda is only concerned with superficialities. She spent most of her time with Lovborg when she was in her father’s house, and she does the same with him when he first comes to visit her in the presence of Tesman. She believes that she can exploit freedom as much she could. But when reality encounters her, she could not face it. She wishes to be with Lovborg and listens to his filthy confessions and he is unclean and forbidden to tell her about a world of seduction.

The threatening danger of reality comes as a heavy blow to Hedda in the form of Thea, who gains Lovborg’s love and affection and becomes an important source for the publication of his manuscript. This arouses jealousy in Hedda who
is unable to bear this reality. She wants Lovborg forever to be her sole admirer. She instigates Lovborg to shoot himself after losing his manuscript by giving him a pistol. When she receives the news that he shot himself with the pistol, she admires his beauty and courage in his death.

Hedda's aesthetic sense leads her to be caught in the web of illusion. She wants to enjoy her married life with Tesman as an aesthetic object in the new villa of Lady Falk. Her attitudes are aesthetic rather than moral. But finally, losing her status as an aesthetic object, Hedda has lost her identity. As Shaw says, “Hedda Gabler has no ethical ideas at all, only romantic ones” (The Quintessence of Ibsenism 168).

Hedda fancies that Lovborg not only liberates him and also her. But the reality is different which shakes her much after hearing the words from Brack: “It grieves me, Mrs. Hedda – but I’m afraid I have to disburden you of this beautiful illusion” and she bursts, “Illusion?” (HG 772). Brack reveals the fact that Lovborg was found shot in Mademoiselle Diana’s boudoir. She would not even expect the reality turned against her. The reality is, he was shot dead more or less below the stomach. That horrifies Hedda and she alleges “That too! What is it, this – this curse – that everything I touch turns ridiculous and vile?” (HG 773). Hedda does not regret his death, instead she at once formulates her aesthetic requirement in a new way and she comments, “Something that shimmers with spontaneous beauty” (HG 772).
Now Thea supports Tesman in resurrecting the bits and pieces of Lovborg’s manuscript, which develops her intimacy with Tesman. It is unbearable for Hedda to consider Thea as a companion to her husband. Addition to this, Brack’s closeness also irritates her. The most painful thing is, Tesman recommends Brack’s company whenever Hedda is left alone. Now Hedda is left unaccompanied and feels like an outcast in the dark. Once she was under the illusion that she could dominate everyone by her demeanor but the reality shows its raw face that she is a desperate human being without any support. She becomes nothing and she decides to hold death close. From the beginning till the end, she remains an outsider, without realizing the point of reality.

_The Master Builder_ is woven as a romantic fantasy. Halvard Solness, a distinguished architect, is found to be in a depressed state due to the loss of his twin sons in the aftermath of the fire accident. To forget this, he indulges in sexual chitchat with Kaja Fosli, his book keeper. He admits to the doctor that through telepathic measures, he lures Kaja towards him. Being shut in his room, he spends time with Kaja and engages her in romantic illusion. He forgets himself as a responsible husband in the family. He whispers caressing her head with both hands: “Because I can’t be without you. You understand? I’ve got to have you close to me every day” (MB 792).

To distort this and make him realize himself as a master builder, Hilda, the younger daughter of Dr. Wangel comes as a rescuer of Solness from the troubled
thoughts. Now she guarantees his complete romantic fantasy and invites him to build a castle for her. She relates a strange story that ten years ago to the day, during the celebration of the inauguration of the church tower Solness had successfully completed the construction and he kissed her in the privacy of the father’s home and also assured her a kingdom in a decade’s time. Now she comes to demand the same from Solness and slowly Solness is dragged towards her. He enjoys the company of Hilda and the romantic fantasy provides good relief to him. Thereafter they exchange secret dialogues and they gradually build a castle in the air. He is ready to do anything for her. Once he shuts the door to the young, Brovik not allowing him to start his own business but now he allows him to do so, complying with the pleading of Hilda.

The illusion is predominant in the mind of Solness, so as to prove that he wants to achieve youth now but it is beyond his limit. He is completely caught in the web of illusion that as a master builder he could climb high the steeple but it is highly impossible for him to achieve. Hilda goes on strengthening his illusion, she encourages Solness, “I want to see you great. See you with a wreath in your hand – high, high – up on a church tower! (Calm again.)” (MB 835).

Hilda is not aware of the reality whether Solness could perform the task of climbing the steeple. But Mrs. Aline and the doctor know the reality that he dare not and he would get dizzy if he climbs it. When Hilda challenges him, she addresses him as ‘master builder’, which triggers his spirit. Solness feels
encouraged; he justifies God’s actions. He is ready to build what Hilda aspires for. He fantasies the castle and wishes to climb up along with Hilda. His imagination is limitless and he adds, “Build it together with a princess that I love-” (MB 856).

Durbach emphasizes, “A castle in the air, a projection of the visionary imagination described with her habitual – the nebulous gaze in the eyes, which is Ibsen’s dramatic notation for her regression from reality into dream, from actuality into impossibility” (128). Hilda encourages Solness to achieve impractical things. But actually it is a discouragement towards destruction. Both of them are unaware of their potential and possibility.

He has achieved the success of climbing and has reached the top. Solness’s climb converts the impossible deed into a possible one. But it only lasts for a short period. When the master builder progresses towards the newly constructed building, Hilda shouts in happiness. She wonders, “All these ten years I’ve seen him like this. How strong he stands! Terribly thrilling, after all. Look at him! Now he’s hanging the wreath on the vane!” (MB 858). And what Hilda offers him is an escape from the meshes of guilt and the sickness of mind.

Durbach affirms, “Relinquish youth to life, and fortify yourself against it by becoming young again – by recapturing past conviction and strength and the qualities of a Viking conscience” (132).
Ibsen beautifully correlates the extremities through symbols. This is substantiated by James L. Calderwood, “the arrangement of building in vertical order” suggests,

Castles in the air

Churches with towers

A new house with tower

Homes for human beings

Tomblike houses. (627)

It vividly reflects the illusion in one extreme and the realism at the other. This hierarchy of buildings shows the structure of symbolism itself. It attempts to do justice both to reality and to more than merely real. The new house presumably combines the best features of the two structures. Earlier Solness rejects God’s churches and people’s homes. So to combine these, he constructs a new house with a church-like tower at the top. It also suggests the unification of Solness’ aspiring spirit and the dizziness that keeps him grounded. Ibsen here unites the romantic illusion with reality as his yearning toward Hilda and his binding towards Aline. “The building apparently symbolizes the ideal toward which Solness should strive both as man and builder” (627).

The reality dismantles the hope of Hilda that soon after he reaches the top, he falls from the heights and he is smashed to bits. It is impossible for her to accept that her master builder is dead. Because of her illusory romance, she leads
him towards destruction. Even in the end, she does not realize the truth and she
shouts, “But he went straight, straight to the top. And I heard harps in the air.
(Swings the shawl up overhead and cries with wild intensity.) My – my master
builder!” (MB 860). The master builder is completely immersed in illusion and the
reality evades him. The illusion destroys him and death is the price for it.

*Little Eyolf* opens with the reality that Alfred Allmers has a lame son on
whom he rests lot of hopes for the future. He is on a tour to write a book but he
returns without completing it. Like Hjalmar in *The Wild Duck* and Rosmer in
*Rosmersholm*, he is involved in his dreamy project i.e. the publication of a book.
But it turns out to be an illusion. He wastes years in the mountain and he
acknowledges, “Just walked and thought and thought” (*LE* 871).

He always boasts about his meticulous plan in making his son a good
citizen but it seems to be highly impractical and too idealistic. He tries to escape
from his responsibilities by claiming that his main aim in life is to spend time only
for Eyolf and not on any other thing. Rita is so passionate towards Allmers and he
could not cope with her attitude. McFarlne suggests, “Alfred’s capacity by no
means matches his aspiration and that his mission to transform Eyolf into an
intellectual paragon is mere self-devotion” (165).

Rita is very possessive towards Allmers and she even forbids her son to claim
Allmers. But Allmers’s mind craves to indulge in a relationship with Asta, his half-
sister. He is torn between two women. After the death of his son, he replaces little Eyolf
with Asta by calling her big Eyolf. He indulges in romantic fantasy with Asta and asks her to live along with him, even after she has selected Borjehm, the road builder as her life-partner. He doesn’t even think of his dead son as his whole mind is overcrowded with fanciful thoughts of Asta which makes Allmers forget his pain and sorrow of his son’s loss. The romantic thoughts erase the painful thoughts about little Eyolf, even when Eyolf is alive, he is burdened with the guilt that his son is lame only because of his carelessness. He could not show his affection and love toward Rita who actually longs for his love and care. Instead, he deviates towards Asta who wants to flee from him and throws herself into the arms of the road builder as the only means of preserving her respect and sanctity.

Being nostalgic, Allmers recounts his delightful past life with Asta that they spent together their early life as small children. He lives only in memories rather than in real time. He even marries Rita, owner of gold and of green forests, to protect his half-sister Asta. Even after learning Asta is not his half-sister as it is revealed in her mother’s letters, he tries to retain her at home and wants to be separated from Rita. He says, “Good. Then I’ll come to you – my dear, dear sister. I have to come back –back home to you, to be cleansed and raised up from my life with –” (LE 916).

His impression is that only his life with Asta makes him complete and what he has been living with Rita is not a contented life. When she comes to know that she is not the sister of Allmers, and she fears what the world will consider her if
she continues her life with Allmers. The reality is bitter to Allmers, but she understands her role and she withdraws from the role of sister. In anguish, she whispers, “Yes Alfred. I am running away (whispers) from you – and from myself” (LE 912).

Allmers does not desire to come out from his fantasy world where he enjoys his time with Asta and the changed atmosphere encumbers him. He really wishes to escape from the reality and admits that he is going to continue his life in solitude in the mountains. But the passionate Rita has completely transformed into a lady with the noble responsibility of tending village children into better human beings. Her decision is purely noble and realistic whereas Allmer’s decision to live in the mountains is illusory and sheer escape from the reality. He is helpless now, without any decision of positivism. But Rita realizes her condition; her consciousness pricks her and surrenders herself to atonement. When Allmers expresses his wish to live in the mountains, she remarks, “But that’s pure fantasy, Alfred. You couldn’t live up there” (LE 930).

Finally, Allmers appears ready to face a problem for the first time in his life. Presumably he is now able to put his theories of human responsibility into practice. He understands the reality and is inclined to follow the footsteps of Rita. Actually, Rita is enlightened with reality, sheds her illusory romance with Allmers. He follows the path
of Rita which leads towards real nobility. The Mountain is the symbol of fantasy. Allmers always wants to escape from the real world to live in the mountains. But at last Allmers chooses to live on land, with Rita.

The characters in the select plays of Ibsen make effort to achieve self-fulfilling lives in a world of their own creations. They move into a sense of complexity of relationships and feelings, they are contemplating, often marked by a sense of confusion and of the breaking down of normal distinctions. The plays end with something like reconciliation, but on closer examination the reconciliation consists in the character’s recognition of a drastically and tragically unchangeable reality.

In *The Wild Duck*, Hjalmar comes into contact with reality only at the moment of Hedvig’s death. He feels that the price for his illusion is too heavy and wants to get back the child’s life. In *Rosmersholm*, whatever Rosmer and Rebecca hold as a reality becomes an illusion and they realize their guilt. The realization transcends them towards enlightenment. But unfortunately they are not ready to reconcile with life, but with death. In *The Lady from the Sea*, the characters get reconciled without any drastic changes. Ellida gets back a secured life in the end, despite the fact that she has been suffering from the beginning. In a way, her imagination and sensitivity help her hold on to life and to the surprise of all she accepts life as it is.
Hedda in *Hedda Gabler* feels as a castaway in her family. The Romantic fantasy with men denies the guarantee of a secure life. It is unbearable to the fact that Tesman’s love and affection will be shared by someone and moreover she is sexually cornered by Brack. Her illusion gets shattered and she accepts death as her fate and final reality. Romantic fantasy engulfs Solness completely and on the verge of achieving his status as a master builder, he falls from the top of his house and dies. From the beginning till the end he is in an illusory state, unaware of the actuality. He is ignorant of the reality even in the end. Hilda is unconscious of the truth that her master builder is dead at last. In *Little Eyolf* Allmers and Rita come out from the illusion and embrace reality. Especially, Allmers can break the web of illusion with the help of Rita and steps towards the realistic path where life is so happy and valuable. The characters, consciously or unconsciously, manoeuvre towards an awareness of the realities of life. They travel through the tunnel of illusion and view the light of reality at the end of it. Ibsen establishes a balance between romantic illusion and reality and presents a total picture of men and women.

The main characters move from the furthest reach of the most daring dreams to the most fumbling sense of personal inadequacy. The chief protagonists in the select plays, though wallowing in illusion and reality, are representatives of modern men and women who have in them some unknown forces capable of charging their life for good
or bad. The protagonists find liberation from the self-imposed confinements by making choice of free will. The necessity of choice is very crucial in one’s life. Some characters reconcile with life and some with death.