Chapter IV
FROM SELF-IMPOSED CONFINEMENT TO LIBERATION: CHOICE OF FREE WILL

The protagonists indulge in illusion through which they draw satisfaction. At one point, they are driven towards reality. Sometimes they rebel against accepting reality and refuse to submit to conditions which they consider intolerable. The spirit of rebellion gains intensity when the individual is confused with the absurdity of his existence. According to absurdists, suffering is individual and this feeling is shared with all men, and the entire human race suffers from division between itself and the rest of the world. Sometimes this feeling of strangeness leads to suicide or murder. Rather than suffering limitations, the unhappy self chooses the dark victory which annihilates the world.

Eric Fromm in *The Fear of Freedom* clarifies the reasons behind such hostile attitudes among individuals:

> Life has inner dynamism of its own. It tends to grow, to be expressed, to be lived. When this tendency is thwarted, the energy directed towards life undergoes a process of decomposition and changes into energies directed toward destruction. (158)
According to Martin Heidegger, the existentialist, the idea of death is nothingness. He remarks in “Being and Time”, “Nothingness, in the form of death, is my final nothingness” (50).

Death plays a predominant role in the plays of Ibsen. The protagonists of Ibsen are viewed as outsiders because of their behaviour, attitude and their position in the family and society. They feel alienated and undergo a deep anguish. The estrangement from the ‘self’ and from other aspects make the protagonists select the path of self-destruction. The self-destruction occurs in almost all the plays due to their past guilt and illusory ideals. They would like to live a peaceful, complete life. But, “To be wholly oneself! But how, with the weight of one’s inheritance of sin?” (Ibsen The Critical Heritage 143-144).

The discovery of guilt or moral failure, the marriage made for security rather than love, the conflict of the individual with society, the search for a vocation, or rather the struggle to affirm the self through a vocation cause death to protagonists. The protagonists get convinced themselves with death, that they could deserve death due to their past guilt. In Arthur Miller’s The Crucible, Proctor refuses to compromise his principles and condemns himself to death which he feels he deserves for his betrayal of his wife.

All the personal catastrophes are the consequences of errors of free will. “Death was the necessary outcome of life, that everyone owes nature a death” (Freud 77). It is expected to pay the debt in short, that death is natural, undesirable
and inevitable. Death becomes a choice to the protagonists of Ibsen. They are pushed towards death in terms of salvation, atonement and redemption. Death is used as a mode of escape from life's reality. They may justify their actions. In *Everyman*, the crucial transformation of everyone is from a state of sin to a state of grace. The protagonists never try to transform themselves into a well being. This transformation is accomplished, in the central sequence of the play, by a closely detailed act of repentance. Having achieved the consciousness of his own spiritual illness, everyman is ready to receive the specific doctrine of repentance.

Hedda in *Hedda Gabler* is not for salvation. Though many circumstances make Hedda repent her behaviour, she refuses it and she is ready to embrace death. Like all protagonists, Faustus in *Dr. Faustus* struggles and suffers beyond the limits imposed on ordinary people. In the beginning of the play, Faustus's pride in his abilities leads him to reject all human learning except magic. Despite all the warnings, he sets out on a self-destructive course, "A sound magician is a demi-god" (*Drama Classical to Contemporary* 216). Towards the end of the play, when he has almost been persuaded by the old man to repent, Faustus instead embraces the demon, Helen of Troy. He once again alienates himself from salvation through his own choice, as he has done throughout the play.

Nevertheless in Tennyson's *Tithonus*, Tithonus is condemned to choose death because he does not have control over his life. Existing as a withered being is a burden to him. He longs to die. But he is denied the felicity and his life is in
the hands of Aurora. He cries, "Of happy men that have the power to die, /And 
grassy barrows of the happier dead. / Release me, and restore me to the ground; / 
Thou seest all things, thou wilt see my grave" (134). Living is a confinement to 
him. He wants to embrace death but it is out of his reach. The choice of free will is 
denied to him.

Hedvig in *The Wild Duck* strikes the readers at the very outset as a pathetic 
creature. She is a mere child, knowing nothing of life or life’s stern realities. She is 
deeply attached to her father and she gives expression to her deep affection for 
him again and again. Her constant effort is to make her father happy. She is also 
deeply fond of the wild duck which is kept by old Ekdal in the garret with the 
other birds and animals.

When Hjalmar comes to know about the paternity of Hedvig, he spits fire 
on the child. She does not understand the reason for his complete change from 
deep affection to deep hatred. She desperately wants her father to come back, and 
it is because of this intense desire that she promptly accepts Gregers’s suggestion 
that she should kill the wild duck. Her father’s words deeply hurt her which she 
ever expects from him. Hjalmar cries, "Get away! Get away! (To Gina) make her 
get away from me, will you!" (*WD* 479). He adds, “These last moments I’m 
spending in my former home, I’d like to be free from intruders – ” (*WD* 481).

Hjalmar treats her as an intruder in the family, who spoils the happiness of the 
family. He wants to get rid his daughter. Gina’s words hurt Hedvig and the child is
stunned at the happenings of the family. Gina says, “Stay in the kitchen, Hedvig. Or, no – go into your own room instead” (WD 481). She is mentally upset and numbed. Her appearance on the stage vividly gives a picture of Hedvig as if frozen by fright and bewilderment, biting her lips to keep the tears back; then she clenches her fists convulsively. The child does not have the intention to kill herself.

Gregers guarantees that her sacrifice in killing the bird which is her dearest possession would please her father who would then come back. The cardinal fact about Hedvig’s character is her deep and intense love for her father. She cannot bear separation from him. She confirms that in the previous night, Gregers’s suggestion seemed to be very attractive; in the morning when she wakes up she feels that his suggestion is rather “queer”.

Hedvig has two choices, the killing of the wild duck and the killing of herself. Out of free will, she decides to give up her life. Gregers becomes the force of leading her to death. He encourages her, “But what if you now, of your own free will, sacrificed the wild duck for his sake” (WD 471). He further instigates her by saying, “Oh, if only your eyes were really open to what makes life worth living – if only you had the true, joyful, courageous spirit of self-sacrifice, then you’d see him coming up to you. But I still have faith in you” (WD 478). Living is not a confinement to Hedvig, but she is pushed to the state of considering herself a burdened soul in the house.
A moment later her grandfather comes out of the garret and she confirms with her grandfather the shooting of the wild ducks. This shows that because of Gregers's insistence, she is probably reconsidering the matter. Old Ekdal reaffirms that it is easy to shoot if the proper technique is employed. She then tries to steal the pistol from the shelf but cannot do so immediately because she hears Gina's foot steps. Subsequently, when Hjalmar again snubs her, saying that he wants to have nothing to do with her because Hedvig does not belong to him, she makes up her mind on what she must do. She now stealthily picks up the pistol, a shot is heard from the garret, and Gregers endorses that the wild duck has been shot. But soon it is found that Hedvig has killed herself with the pistol.

Gregers has made the suggestion that in order to please her father who has become hostile to the wild duck, she should shoot the wild duck herself or have it shot by her grandfather. Christiani comments:

> It has always seemed to me that Gregers' shaking horrors upon Hedvig's death at least to his inward recognition of what he really wished of her when he suggested that she sacrifices the wild duck; but that Hedvig should intuit this wish, unrecognized at the time even by Gregers was perhaps a during hypothesis, if an attractive one. (211)

Gregers's intention is intuited by the child and she puts herself in the place of the wild duck. Thus Gregers destroys the only vulnerable extension of Werle's self.
Hedvig faced death very courageously and without any regrets she selects death as her choice. She believes peace and happiness can be restored in the family only by her sacrifice. One possibility is that she now finds life no longer worth living because her father has resolved to leave the house. She therefore thinks it necessary to put an end to her life. Without her father’s love life would be meaningless to her. The second possibility seems nearer the truth. Gregers has suggested to her that she should prove to her father that she really loves him, and he has affirmed that the most convincing proof of her love would be for her to make a sacrifice for her father’s sake. The sacrifice suggested by Gregers is that she should kill the wild duck.

It might have occurred to Hedvig that she could make even greater sacrifice which proves to her father that she has always loved him. This greater sacrifice is the sacrifice of her own life. And indeed Hedvig fully succeeds in her purpose even though Hjalmar would have felt convinced of her love even if she had killed the wild duck and not herself. When the pistol shot is heard, Gregers says that the wild duck has been killed by Hedvig as a sacrifice to please Hjalmar.

He snubs Hedvig when he learns that she belongs to Werle he could not bear it. He could not imagine a life without Hedvig and also he is not ready to handover her to Mrs.Sorby and Werle. He says, “They can take her away from me any time they like” (WD 485). Just before her bullet shot, Hjalmar says with intense feelings:
Don’t be too sure of that. If they stand beckoning her with all
they have - ? Oh, I who’ve loved her so inexpressibly! I
who’d find my highest joy in taking her tenderly by the hand
and leading her as one leads a child terrified of the dark
through a huge, empty room! (WD 486)

But it is a part of the design of the play that through her death the character
of Hedvig should also be revealed to the readers in some greater detail.

For Hjalmar, his daughter’s death is something to be denied, for Relling it
is an occasion to reprove Hjalmar for his sentimentality. For Gregers, it is a
symbol. The following conversation captures everyone’s reaction beautifully:

RELLING. The bullet’s entered her breast.
HJALMAR. Yes, but she’s coming to!
GINA. (breaking into tears). Oh my child, my child!
GREGERS (hoarsely). In the depths of the sea. (WD 488)

Hedvig’s death might very well have been melodramatic, especially as the shot
is heard. Ibsen, however, emphasises what is tragic in Hedvig’s death, as in Hjalmar’s
life, by presenting both as tragicomic. Hedvig’s suicide itself, of course, is in no way
comic. But it takes place off stage, there is a delay before it is discovered, and what the
audience is primarily called upon to respond to is not the death itself but the reaction of the other characters to it, and especially Hjalmar's. These multiple voices pull the audience in different directions and block a fully tragic response to Hedvig's death.

Relling and Gregers discuss whether Hedvig's death would have any effect on Hjalmar, as whether he would be ennobled by it or return to wallowing deeper and deeper into self-pity. Gregers is convinced that some good would come of the sacrifice he has unwittingly caused. But Hjalmar's words are heart rending and he regrets what he has done to Hedvig. He pathetically laments, "And I drove her from me like an animal! And she crept terrified into the left and died out of love for me. (Sobbing). Never to make it right again! Never to let her know-!

(Clenching his fists and crying to Heaven) Oh, you up there - if you do exist why have you done this to me" (WD 488-489).

Their conversation strongly recommends that Hjalmar would soon forget Hedvig, and she would be nothing more to him than a pretty theme for recitation. If it happens so, then there is no meaning in the sacrifice of Hedvig. The child has to atone for the sins of her elders. But anyway, by death, the child can be freed from the sins of the parents. Of her own free will, she takes decision to shoot herself, instead of killing her pet wild duck. She could not tolerate her own father's denial of love and she is ready to die and dies inorder to prove her real love and affection. A mere slip of a girl shows herself to be capable of supreme self-sacrifice. If Hedvig had not killed herself, the play would have ended happily
and there would have been no tragedy because the death of a mere duck cannot be regarded as tragic. The catastrophe consists in the death of Hedvig, and the ending of the play becomes deeply moving and poignant because of Hedvig’s death. The confinement is not a self-imposed one, it is thrust on Hedvig and this makes her choose killing herself. She also believes that by her death the family would regain its happiness.

In *Rosmersholm*, Rosmer and Rebecca are wedged by guilt of their past and the self can be freed only if it conquers the past, breaking the “mind forg’d manacles” that imprison the spirit. Brand cries out, “Within! There’s the summons! /There’s a path that we must follow,/ In each heart the new world’s fashioned, /Shaped for a new life with God” (Ibsen the Critical Heritage 143-144). The cry of Brand can be attributed to Rebecca and Rosmer. Both of them could not forget their past and the past devours them. Brand boldly screams, to attain self-fulfilment, he is ready to fight even death. He asserts, “Then, by heaven, to death I’ll fight it. / The world’s whole space at least is needed/ For the self’s complete fulfilment (143-144). But Rosmer and Rebecca fail to fight against misfortune and they succumb to it. Nietzsche’s concept of ‘will to power’ [Theoharis 48] applies to all living things, suggesting that adaptation and the struggle to survive is a secondary drive in the evolution of animals, less important than the desire to expand one’s power.
Theoharis places a record of Nietzsche’s words, “This world is the will to power – and nothing besides! And you yourselves are also this will to power – and nothing besides!”(47). This is the clearest presentation of reality as nothing is equal to one’s will. Rebecca and Rosmer in Rosmersholm could not expand their will to live happily on earth, instead the past guilt overpowers them and they choose the path of self-destruction. When the play opens, the wife Beata Rosmer was committed suicide and Rosmer is left with an agent of the suicide, Rebecca West. In the opening act itself, the readers observe the dominance of death in Rosmersholm. Her dialogue with Helseth shows this:

REBECCA. At Rosmersholm they cling to their dead.

HELSETH. To my mind, miss, it’s the dead that cling to Rosmersholm. (RS 498)

The white horse symbolizes death and even Rosmer fears to cross the bridge due to the fear of his wife’s death. The atmosphere is eerie in Rosmersholm and death is dormant in the mansion. Rebecca, involuntarily threatens Beata with her bewitching beauty and knowledge. She finds herself overcome by a sudden storm of passion for Rosmer, which soon finds the means to Beata’s removal. Even after a year of mourning, Beata’s presence persists ghostlike in the house, another of Ibsen’s vampiric ghosts, like the night-riding white horses, that, by local legend, appears to foretell imminent death in the household.
The past of Rebecca is revealed through Kroll that her real name is Gamvik and her birth was illegitimate. Later she was adopted by the district health officer, Dr. West. Unknowingly she becomes his mistress, setting himself beyond the good and evil of traditional morality.

Her conscience pricks her when she comes to know the truth and her past makes her withdraw from her passion for Rosmer. The transformation takes place in Rebecca and she confesses:

> All that other—the unbearable sensual desire—ebbed out of me, far, far away. All those turbulent passions quieted down and grew still. A profound inner peace descended on me—tranquility, like an island of sleeping birds, up north, under the midnight sun. (RS 575)

She admits her heart has achieved tranquility and she is ennobled with the doctrines of Rosmer. She is infected with his ideals. Kroll discloses the secret of Rebecca's actions in the family, against Beata who was driven to suicide.

Rosmer understands that his association with Rebecca should have hurt Beata and he admits his guilt. Rosmer talks about sin and guilt but seeks expiation from his guilt by proposing to marry Rebecca. It is something Rebecca has been longing for and perhaps it is the motive for which she drove Beata to death, but to his surprise, she refuses to marry him. Rebecca agrees with Rosmer's view of life...
that the "innocence" is the secret of joy and happiness. It should be maintained if one has to walk on the path of victory, if one has to acquire the capacity to lead man to be ennobled. Rebecca shows the sacrificial love to Rosmer to redeem him, to give back faith to him: faith in himself, faith in his mission and faith in God.

According to Rebecca, death may purge her of the past and she is pretty sure that innocence is divinity and brings salvation. Rebecca decides to follow the footsteps of Beata only because she believes, "If I go, it will save what is best in you" (RS 577). She wants to save Rosmer. She wishes him to hold his ideals and ennoble thousands of people just as he has done to her. Moreover, Rebecca chooses this way of self-destruction because she feels otherwise a cripple. But her love is tested by Rosmer. He bestows her with guilt that it is she who once destroyed him and now she wants to restore him to his original position. Rosmer shouts: "You must! (Pacing the floor) I can’t bear this desolation – this awful nothingness – this – this –" (RS 577). Lou Salome opines: "Through their mutual influences, Rosmer and Rebecca exchange the highest gifts of love; these are fatal gifts. They are unable to fully join and complement each other; they simply infect each other" (87).

Ellida’s past strangles her to death and she chooses it as atonement. She proceeds with it and the urge for death is kindled by Rosmer by pointing out the death
of Beata. Rosmer discourages her, “Never, You’re not like Beata. You’re not driven by a warped view of life” (RS 583). Rebecca retorts, “But my outlook is shaped by Rosmersholm – now, for the stain of my sin – I have to atone” (RS 583).

Rosmer trusts that without Rebecca he would not survive in Rosmersholm; surely aware that the past would haunt him. He speaks ideals but his inner soul is not liberated and ennobled. He banks on Rebecca; she could direct him in the path of success. Unfortunately, the sense of guilt dominates her and she strongly believes that through death she could liberate her life. Rosmer is helpless and is left with no option but to follow her in the path of destruction. She loses innocence when she turns out to be the mistress of her own father. For Rosmer, death is a means to escape from the thoughts about his wife and Rebecca. He admits: “Yes, that’s the question that is going to haunt me – after you’ve left this house. Oh, I have an image of you, so clear in my mind’s eye – standing out on the bridge—there at the center (RS 582). Already Rosmer has delusions of his dead wife in the form of white horse. He does not want to add one more; he is highly passionate about Rebecca which surely intensifies his trauma.

Rosmer all of a sudden speaks out that he wants to join hands with her; Rebecca does not suspect that he wants to throw himself overboard. She thinks that perhaps he still does not trust her and that might be the reason that he wants to accompany her. She immediately agrees to this, accompanying him hoping that he wants to witness her show of courage. Wellwarth says, “He experiences anguish,
having reached a "boundary situation". Ashamed of his miserable defeat and
finding his life being stripped of all purpose, Rosmer contemplates suicide as a
way out of the existential dilemma" (93).

When they draw near the stream, Rosmer is unable to leave Rebecca. He is
convinced of her honesty. Rosmer accepts her as his wife. He accompanies her
until they both fall in the millstream. Gray opines:

But for a lover, as Rosmer appears to be, to demand such a
sacrifice not as retribution but in order to reassure himself
that human beings can be strong enough to kill themselves,
to prove their repentance, he is more eerily perverse than
Brendel was. (121)

Rosmer is pushed to a state of existential dilemma. The only way to get rid of this
crisis is death. He courageously faces death to expiate his sins.

Rosmer is already half dead when he happens to learn the reality that dream
of making, "all my countrymen noble" is a half-baked dream. Rebecca herself is
noble (though immoral and deadly) and therefore dies with Rosmer, declaring in
effect that such a death is superior to a meaningless life. 'Death by Water' in
T.S.Eliot’s The Waste Land, suggests drowning in water purges the soul. The
vegetarian God gets immersed in water and the country acquires fertility. It
suggests purification and fertility. In the same way, Rebecca in Rosmersholm
drowns into water in order to purge her. Ellida in *The Lady from the Sea* and
Rebecca in *Rosmersholm* feel an elemental attraction to a terrible danger,
represented for Rebecca by the millstream, for Ellida by the sea. Both end with the
reconciliation of husband and wife, as Rosmer and Rebecca finally become,
though theirs is reconciliation in death, whereas Ellida’s with Wangel is
reconciliation for life. Ellida is able to cast her off hypnotic fascination with water
and turn her mind to the freedom which Rebecca also desires.

The deaths of both Rebecca and Hedvig are similar in a way and they die to
prove their faithfulness and love for others. They sacrifice their lives to give an
authentic proof of their uncorrupted love for others. Padma opines, “According to
Ibsen, the authentic new woman is one who chooses freedom on her own
responsibility” (66). Rebecca fails to achieve this; unlike Nora she demands her
right to live fully and freely as a human being.

The protagonists of Ibsen have to escape from their yokes because they all
know the difference between duty and joy and have all taken steps to move their
lives from confinement to liberation. Rebecca willingly out of her own free will
chooses death and feels joy in it. Rosmer also finally decides to fall from the
millstream and both husband and wife would like to travel the untraveled path.

Theoharis states, “Joy is an absolute condition, while happiness is a
contingent one. Being absolute, joy, unlike happiness, is a law unto itself. It does
not emerge from natural or social conditions, but exceeds them entirely. In this it
resembles death" (284). Death is a joy which gives tranquility to Rebecca and she admits that death really transforms her to the next world where she could live a guilt-free, innocent life. She wants to erase the past through self-destruction.

Even though Rebecca is more mature than Ellida in *The Lady from the Sea*, she could not convince Rosmer that she selects death as liberation from the confinement of the self and society. But Ellida totally surrenders to the suggestion of Wangel; she reviews her relationship with Wangel.

Ellida is mentally sick and could be expected to meet death. But fortunately she escapes from the clutches of cruel death; she grabs at a life-line. When she is introduced in the play, it is clear that both Ellida and Wangel have drifted into a dull and loveless life. She is suffering from a severe depression, worsened by her lack of a fulfilled relationship with her husband and his two daughters from his first marriage. She manages only by consuming medicines, prescribed by her husband. He could not diagnose her mental state of depression or her refusal to sleep with him. She becomes addicted to drinking and this state changes when Arnhelm visits them. Arnhelm’s visit makes positive changes in Ellida; gradually she discloses her secret worries. Wangel tries to break the deadlock and he achieves it by inviting Arnhelm.

Wangel wisely builds on Arnhelm’s intervention and diagnoses the reasons for Ellida’s depression. The reason for her agony is the loss of a baby before three
years. She is obsessed with a stranger, who happens to be the mysterious seaman, possibly a murderer, to whom she has symbolically betrothed herself; she correlates his eyes with the dead child’s eyes.

She is infatuated with the stranger and the sea. She could not separate one from another. According to her, both have an enticing nature. She shouts, “Oh – this power that charms and tempts and allures me – into the unknown! All the force of the sea is in this man!” (LS 684).

The attraction of Ellida to the sea is the prime factor for her detachment and dejection. It makes her bathe daily, frustrates her desire to be a happy married wife to Wangel and haunts her with the terrific thoughts about the stranger. Rebecca does not make up her mind until quite late. She dies in atonement for her guilt. If Ellida were to die within the play it would not be on account of anything so specific.

Initially her obsession is so huge that it could be rectified only by self-immersion. It is a longing for self-immersion in the whole that Ellida experiences, the feeling which Freud calls oceanic. It is a feeling of eternity where the individual feels connected to something much larger than himself. Freud asserts, “This feeling is merely a feeling of helplessness and powerlessness against fate” (60). Ellida feels desperate and her condition is hopeless. She has an attraction towards the sea. Wangel explicitly says, “This hunger for the boundless, the infinite—the unattainable—will finally drive your mind out completely into darkness” (LS 685).
Fjelde opines:

By seeming infinite to the eye from shore or ship board, the sea has been conceived metaphorically as containing the sum of all possibilities, both negative and positive, destructive, yet germinative as well. Comprehending within it the antitheses of being, it is a both and domain of a sort likely to appeal to Ellida with her dual mermaid nature and her irrational need to live with Wangel and the Stranger, the one in fact and the other in fantasy. (384)

Ellida is caught between these two extremities of life illusion and reality. In the beginning, Ellida craves for freedom and wants to break the contract with Wangel. She pleads with Wangel to free her, because she could join hands with Freeman, as an unbound lady when he comes to claim her. But soon she withdraws from this and surrenders to the decision of Wangel. Wangel strengthens the spirit of Ellida. Whereas in Rosmersholm, Rosmer fails in this, Rebecca does not allow Rosmer to play a role in the reconciliation with life. She herself gets reconciled with death. Ellida wonders, “Defend me? Against what? There’s no threat here from outside. The horror goes deeper, Wangel. The horror – is the force of attraction in my own mind. And what can you do about that?” Wangel replies, “I can steady and strengthen you to fight against it” (LS 666).
Fighting against the wishes of Freeman is almost equal to fighting against death. When Wangel threatens him with the arrest for the murder he has committed some years before, the stranger draws a revolver to threaten Ellida and Wangel but at last he shoots himself. Ellida is ready to be killed to save Wangel. When Wangel repeats his offer to Ellida to “choose in freedom and on your own responsibility” and chooses Wangel as her partner without any confusion, readers wonder why this choice would have been made by Rebecca for her happy living. She has a strong intention to atone and she believes that atonement is possible only in death. She feels that death would liberate her from the confinement she has been so far burdened with.

Ellida acts on her own free will and falls into the arms of Dr. Wangel instead of becoming the lover of Freeman, where happiness is uncertain. Hedda’s death does not occur of free will but she is pushed to a helpless state where she wants to escape from the entanglements of life. Hedda suffers as a fragmented and alienated identity. She is incomprehensible in her debt of passion. Along with the pistol she has inherited destruction from her father, the General. In fact Hedda remains at the center of all the characters in the play, attempting to find a stable identity in a shifting world. Finally, she falls prey to her impulses. She neither comprehends nor controls herself. She never thinks about death in her life, and she becomes a victim of situations which strangle her to death.
Hedda wants to enjoy her married life with Tesman in the old Falk mansion but she is bored with loneliness and Tesman’s indulgence in learning. In conversing with Brack, she says, “Boring myself to death, and that’s the truth” (*HG* 730).

Even the smell of lavender and dried roses reminds her of death. She is fed up with loneliness in life. She is jealous of Thea Rysing who is the main drive behind Lovborg’s manuscript. She is the vital force who brings Lovborg to the limelight of fame and reputation as a writer. Hedda suppresses her envy in her heart. Buddhism says, “Jealousy (issa) is a vice that poisons one’s system and leads to unhealthy rivalries and dangerous competitions” (613). It is true with the case of Hedda and she develops enmity towards Thea.

The bottled up emotions burst out when she is helpless especially when Brack reveals the secret of Lovborg’s suicide. Lovborg’s death isn’t so “beautiful” because he goes to Diana’s boudoir, blabbers about the lost manuscript, and ends up getting shot in the stomach. She is well aware that it is her machinations that create this unfortunate circumstance.

Brack discloses the secret that it is Hedda’s gun that killed Lovborg and tells her that the only way she could avoid scandal is by making him quiet. Hedda has always been terrified of scandal because it would definitely tarnish her father’s reputation or it would limit her freedom as an impartial observer. Even more she is frightened of losing
her free will entirely. She is faced with an impossible choice: throw herself on the mercy of society or become Brack's "slave" ultimately. But she realizes that there is a third option, 'death'.

Hedda loses her free will which finally leads her to make her deadly decision. She is driven to a corner from which she cannot escape. She sees her life spoiling before her; she would remain wedded to Tesman, who would in all likelihood fall in love with Mrs. Elvsted. She would be a prisoner of Judge Brack, who would "own" her for the rest of her life. She would bring a child into this toxic environment and would most likely have to spend each and every day in the company of Aunt Julia. She considers that her life would be drained of free will, drained of possibility, and so she gives herself to beautiful death as she is convinced that it might set her free after all. Hedda says, "No, no, don't ask me. I don't want to look at sickness and death. I must be free of everything that's ugly" (HG 764). Actually she wants to run away from life's reality, but at last it confronts her.

Hedda's desperate need to break free of her expressions and her human limitations find expression in an act of violence and fantasies of destruction. Hedda knows that Thea's child is, after all, only a book; and the death of her own unborn child, however terrible, is incidental to her own suicide and not deliberately calculated.
She is like a child and she wants to play with everyone. As a living child, she has to bear the death of her unborn child with all its pity and human defects; it destroys life in all its vulnerability and defenselessness.

Hedda Gabler (1890) is portrayed like Strindberg’s Miss Julie (1889), a modern “man hating half-woman” who struggles to be equal to men. Both Julie and Hedda strike a similarity between them because both are dominated by their fathers. Hedda’s father, the General dominates her, in the same way Julie is overpowered by her father, the Count; even though he is far away from her, his dominating presence is always felt on stage, represented by his boots. Like Hedda Gabler, Julie is trapped; she sinks deeper and deeper into what she sees as the depravity of her rebellions. She says, “Can’t repent, can’t run away, can’t stay, can’t live— can’t die” (Strindberg, Drama Classical to Contemporary 608).

Freud says, “The ego instincts are death instincts” (85). Moreover in ego, there is a complete tangle of sexual desire and accomplished violence, impulsive attraction and cultivated repulsion. This is very well portrayed in Sylvia Plath’s lines, “Entering the tower of my fears, I shut my doors on that dark guilt; / I bolt the door, each door I bolt, blood quickens, gonging in my ears” (Mathur Women in the plays of Eugene O’Neill and Tennesse Williams 33).

While she picks the pistol from her father, Hedda has taken the death wish along with her pistol. She always wants to be the daughter of a General with the same autonomy and authority that overrule Sylvia Plath.
Hedda encounters death courageously without giving up her ego. Her death is an act of boldness. She is propelled towards death because of her situations. In the end, she is helpless and the only available recourse is death. She proves herself that she is the daughter of old General Gabler. Her suicide is a romantic fulfilment, a finding in death of beauty which Hedda is unable to find in life.

Nobody shows any interest in Lovborg’s death or grieves for him, not even Thea, and they all go on with their affairs very promptly. But the moment of Hedda’s death too, is not presented as something about which one has feelings. Death gives safety which she could not get while she lived, for she is as lamed in her emotional capacities by her attachment to her dead father. Lou Salome says, “The glance Hedda casts—once more—upon her home and her husband, in her leave taking, works with a shattering effect; it is a glance that reveals to her eyes, with glaring clarity, that life itself has in a certain fashion exiled her” (143).

Hedda is driven towards a situation where she happens to see both Tesman and Thea, working at the table; they both hear a dance tune played on the piano from the back room, something wildly out of tune, which breaks into their concentration. Nora too arises before the viewers as she, with a deadly decision in her heart, is compelled to dance the tarantella.

Lou Salome states: “The deathlike darkness is filled with the supernatural glow of the wondrous and with sacred sounds that drown out the wild music. That wondrous element in Nora’s dreams of life appears in Hedda’s life” (144).
Hedda does not die for another person as does Rebecca, and she does not live for another person, as does Ellida. She dies for herself as she has lived for herself.

In the dark, Hedda lays on the sofa with a pistol pressed to her temple. Throughout her life she has toyed with that weapon and she shoots the blue sky is the symbol of a drive for freedom, but it is without inner truth, strength or target, and therefore without value. The pistol shot reaches the sole target of possible worth; it wins the only truth possible through the power ever to set itself up as a target. According to Keith May:

Death was “purity” in the sense that one no longer compromised oneself, for example is the very direction of Christianity or for the sake of professional acclaim. Death meant reaffiliation with the earth, the sheerly physical, anti-platonic, material reality. (Neitzche and the Spirit of the Tragedy 146)

Brack exclaims, “But, good God – people don’t do such things!” (HG 778). Hedda’s virtuosity is achieved only in her extraordinary death. Like Cleopatra, Hedda sees suicide as the great deed, “That ends all other deeds; / which shackles accidents and bolts up change; / Which sleeps, and never palates more the dung, / The beggar’s nurse and Caesar’s” (Shakespeare Ant. v ii, 5-8).
Hedda’s deeds come to an end by one daring deed dying. She may be unscrupulous in certain moments, especially with Tesman’s aunt, Lovborg and Thea. But she never surrenders to the lust of Brack. Instead of being a ‘sexual slave’ to Brack, she wants to end her life and her death seems to be ethical. She breaks through the crippling impediments of cowardice and finds at last the courage to act, to act for herself.

Hilda in *The Master Builder* makes Solness act for her. She happens to be the second daughter of Dr. Wangel, in *The Lady from the Sea* reappears here, encourages Solness to dare death. Unfortunately, death engulfs Solness, as he is on the verge of enjoying life with Hilda. Both Rebecca and Hilda project themselves as idealists who strive to bring out the best in their men. Contrarily, they meet failure in their experiment. Hilda offers him fanciful delusions and he accepts it as truth. This really supports him to face failure and guilt. It also creates anxiety towards his union with Hilda after his achievement, but this anxiety is actually a madness, which finally ends in death. The sense of aging and retirement from his profession haunts him both existentially and professionally. He finds it difficult to reconcile with the change.

Death shows its crudity by destroying Solness’s two children in the fire accident. Along with the twin boys, Mrs. Solness lost nine dolls which she possessed from her childhood and this causes depression in her. The misery makes life insecure. He loses faith in himself and directs his gloom towards budding
architects. He hides his cowardice in the name of the Master Builder. To ventilate his dejection, he indulges in sexual teasing of Kaja, but later on, he is hypnotized by Hilda. He trusts Hilda that surely she would lead him to achieve mastery, regain his reputation as a master builder, to wear vine leaves around his head, but the hidden feeling of death takes a magnificent shape in front of Solness, which makes him surrender to death. He delves deep into death and his dream reflects this. He discloses his dream of death-wish to Hilda and this is brought out in her conversation with Solness:

HILDA. Yes 'cause I dreamed I was falling over a terrible high, steep cliff. You ever dream such things?

SOLNESS. Oh yes – now and then.

HILDA. It’s wonderfully thrilling – just to fall and fall.

SOLNESS. It makes my blood run cold. (MB 819)

He can foresee his doom in the form of dream. By restricting Ragnar’s talent, Solness invites doom from both, Ragnar as well as Brovik. Durbatch says:

With pathetic insistence he maintains their nurseries and even builds them into his new house hoping for the impossible, for the redemption of age by youth… wrenched from his grip by other men’s sons as he had wrenched it from Brovik. (130)
The innate talent of Ragnar is denied by Solness as a natural passing of heritage from the father to his son. Both old Brovik and Solness share a common sorrow. Solness is doomed because he lost his sons in the fire.

The difference between Hilda and Rebecca is, Rebecca does not assure what it is impossible to achieve from Rosmer, but Hilda transcends Solness to achieve the impossible thing for him. Solness wants to reverse his youth and this impossibility is offered by Hilda. She is responsible for instilling the Viking spirit in him which rejuvenates Solness to dare death. Durbatch connects this with the Neitzchean spirit:

I taught them to work on the future and to redeem with their creation all that has been. To redeem what is past in man and to re-create all ‘it was’ until the will says: ‘Thus I willed it! Thus I shall will it!’—this I call redemption and this alone I taught them to call redemption. (132)

Ibsen’s lovers are committed to an impossible recreation of the circumstances of their original sexual encounter which, at its most romantically magnificent, promises Neitzchean redemption through reconstituted time. Neitzche’s form of redemption is so individualized that it can only be achieved by man coming of his own design to the transformation and holy thought of Eternal Recurrence. Solness’s fantasy is transformed into death-wish in the consummation; it is fuelled by the reactions of Hilda when he climbs the steeple.
When Solness climbs the new house’s church spire, he once more asserts that the death of his children was not a punishment for his creative passion, but an occasion to exert it more strongly. He boldly faces death, encouraged by Hilda, in an attempt to conquer that fear. The fear, instead of giving enlightenment, destroys Solness. He does not sense his scare. He is obsessed with the thought of gaining the kingdom Orangia for Hilda, his princess. He is in the illusory world to build castles in the air. They dream together of castles in the air, with high towers that the master builder will have to climb if he wants to visit his princess. At the end of the act, he attempts to climb the tower of his new house in order to please his princess. But Solness’s powers are already failing; in reality he could not climb as high as he builds. While Hilda shouts and waves at him, he falls from the tower and is killed. The quest for freedom, assurance of permanence and the man’s desperate need for completion and wholeness in soul kinship with his lover are the main traits of Ibsen’s heroes like Rubek and Solness.

For Solness, the only possible solution is to climb the tower or die. He must climb it to prove that he is worthy of Hilda’s love that he is truly the master builder, the man that she has dreamed of. He must climb it, and he must succeed, standing at the top, waving and talking to god. But he must also die, because he would not bear coming down again – for what? He can neither go back to Aline nor go off with Hilda. Death is the only answer or another end, may be it is a final
reality. Solness has gone as far as a person may go alone. A statement by the British psychiatrist K. D. Laig is apt here:

True sanity entails in one way or another the dissolution of the normal ego, that false self competently adjusted to our alienated social reality; the emergence of the ‘inner’ archetypal mediators of divine power and through this death a rebirth and the establishment of a new kind of ego functioning, the ego now being the servant of the divine, no longer its betrayer. (20)

Hilda has engineered a kind of death and rebirth for Solness, in which the new ego, instead of using all its energies to keep youth down, is the servant of God within. He obeys the words of Hilda and he believes that it is his need to serve her by climbing the tower. Though his face marks his physical death, he is Hilda’s master builder forever, because he has been true to the deepest instincts within himself and in that sense, his death is a triumph rather than a defeat. In May’s words, “Ibsen saw death as heroic whenever it is the result of Maximum Endeavour” (20). The maximum endeavour might be death. He tries to the utmost of his energy for climbing the tower. Here Solness resolves to fulfil that task or he must die. “Do or die” becomes the essence of his life.

Solness and Rubek want to live and they yearn to live more abundantly. Hilda comes to bring Solness the more abundant life and Irene in *When we Dead Awaken*
gives both Rubek and herself the chance to live. Both heroes risk death for love. In a way, Hilda can’t die. She is the muse, the spirit of life and creative activity itself. Her spirit like that of the wild duck transcends the deaths of the characters in Ibsen’s last plays. The characters who live live because they give up something, the protagonists like Ellida, Maja and Allmers. The characters who die, like Hedvig, Hedda, Rosmer, Rebecca and Solness, die because they risk too much.

The death in *Little Eyolf* is entirely different from deaths in many plays. It is like Hedvig’s death in *The wild Duck*. The deaths of both Hedvig and Eyolf are looked upon as sacrificial rather than accidental or suicidal. By the death of these children, the whole family gets redemption. Durbach opines, “A child, more than all other gifts that earth can offer to declining man, brings hope with it, and forward looking thoughts” (75).

The child especially in *The wild Duck* and *Little Eyolf* remains as a symbol reminding the adult’s guilt. Their presence gnaws the adults, but the death of the child brings enlightenment to the parents.

Eyolf’s misfortune is that he has the wrong parents. The mother never helps him and he accepts the inevitability of being on the crutch. His real mother hates him as an intrusion on her possessive claims to Allmers’s individual attention; and his father, for whom he is a constant remainder of the guilt, engendering consequences of sexual desire. The twisted leg and the crutch are inescapable reminders of their neglecting Eyolf in the throes of their passion. They could not
dare to meet the gaze of the child due to their guilt and self-recrimination. They want to devise some strategy to ignore this. Allmers wants to utilize this drive to redeem the fallen world of sexuality and death. Like Gregers, he fashions an ideal out of his own deep neurotic disturbance and in the name of this ideal he suspends all human and ethical responsibility to his wife, his sister and most damagingly, to the real little Eyolf. It is only lip service and responsibility in Allmers’s sense almost loses its value and envisions this responsibility in little Eyolf. Durbach comments:

Its echo is heard whenever he envisions Eyolf as a surrogate for his own unrealized ideals; The child will not only become an apotheosis; a symbol of ultimate meaning, an answer to time and death; he will also redeem his father’s failure, as Christ redeems mankind .(100)

Eyolf’s death changes everything. Rita finds a reason to hate Eyolf in Act one because she feels Eyolf’s role as son dominates the family. She is highly passionate, his sudden death plunges her into the guilt of her own feelings. In Act two, both parents admit that they have never really loved the child. Alfred’s role as a father takes more of the schoolmaster than of the father and Rita feels that the great pain she has suffered in giving birth to him is that all could ever be expected of her. As the child is left alone on the table during his sleep, Allmers totally surrenders to the passion of Rita and forgets his responsibility of guarding his son.
At the moment of their deepest intimacy, he reveals to her the “Eyolf game” that he and Asta have played for years. But he confesses everything to Rita and wants to kill off his fictional brother and to become Rita’s entirely, but at that very moment the real Eyolf suffers this crippling fall. After Eyolf’s drowning, the couple takes different directions.

The arrival of rat-wife, Ibsen’s representative of fate, heralds the death of rats, becomes true in the house of Allmers. Rita chides, “Ugh, that old hag; I swear, she brings the smell of corpses with her” (LE 879). The “luring game” emphasizes the destructiveness inherent in it and it destroys all the rats and engulfs in the depths of water. In the same way, Rita’s luring game ensnares Allmers and it devastates her son’s life.

The lively child is almost turned out to be half-dead. The rat-wife intrudes and says, “My apologies for intruding. But are the master and mistress bothered by anything gnawing away here in the house?” (LE 874). This suggests the master and mistress bother about the crippling child in the house. Actually Rita wants to get rid of this child. Because he consumes most of her husband’s time and life, she is unwilling to share Allmers with little Eyolf. Rat wife mentions ‘rats’ as ‘sour apple’. The ‘sour apple’ suggests little Eyolf for Rita. She spits the harsh words, “But if Eyolf had never been born? Then what … then I could wish I’d never borne him” (LE 888).
Before the drowning, she says Eyolf’s eyes are evil eyes and they frighten her. She says with terror, “Yes, I’ve begun to believe in the evil eye recently. Mainly in the evil eye of a child” (LE 893).

Now they both see Eyolf’s death as retribution, and Alfred is eager to leave Rita forever. At first, Eyolf’s death does not change Asta’s situation. Borgiheim wants desperately to marry her, but she persists in refusing him. The impact of the death of Eyolf on Allmers, Rita and Asta takes different dimensions. Allmers wishes to live only for Eyolf and Asta is treated as ‘Big Eyolf’, but after the death of his son he wants to cut off the relationship with Rita and continue with Asta as a brother. But Asta is forced to reveal the secret that they are not siblings at all and as far as she is concerned, their relationship is subject to change. Before making her shocking revelation, she enters the house carrying water lilies, “They’re the kind that shoot up from the farthest depths” (LE 917). These symbolic flowers repeat the rising motion that, where little Eyolf gets sunk into the waters, there she picks the flowers and brings them to give as a parting gift to Allmers. The flowers serve to link the two Eyolfs. Both are dead and get drowned among the rats. One is little Eyolf and the other is the role of the fictional brother to ‘big Eyolf’, Asta.

After Eyolf’s death, Rita, like Ellida in The Lady from the Sea undergoes an irrational crisis so deep and so shattering that it threatens to destroy her. But she courageously overcomes and aspires to give meaning to what Allmers used to call his title for his responsibility for human beings. Rita considers the loss of Eyolf’
retributive punishment for her former selfishness, and this punishment has a significant effect on her life. Jacobs opines:

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\text{In Nozick's terms, she has internalized her repentance for future action, and the desperate needs of the poor children from the village now offer her an opportunity to save herself through repentant actions. The Rat Wife, who considers herself to be an errand of mercy when she is exterminating Vermin, expresses great tenderness for the rats and their babies, whom everyone hates and persecutes. (613)}
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The rat wife lures rats to their death by bringing peace to people who assign the task of clearing the rats, whereas Rita plans to lure the village children out of their hiding places not to death, but to the possibility for a better life. Alfred Allmers is essentially unchanged by little Eyolf's death. Allmers raises the flag to show that the mourning for Eyolf is not an end; he recalls and interacts with the floating crutch and water lilies to provide a helping hand to Rita in her mission. Eyolf, the child, the human reality is denied many times by Rita before his drowning. It is especially instigated by the rat wife and it is only a redemptive myth to serve the Allmerses. The rat wife serves the purpose of removing the child from the family. Eyolf is not like Hedvig placed amidst adults. His drowning, in any case does not relieve a suffering humanity of sin and guilt. Once they want to evade the presence of little Eyolf but they are actually haunted by the child's
reproachful eyes and the rhythmic insistence of the cry at the quayside—‘The crutch is floating’. Immediately Allmers finds all his ideals and wishes shattered. Durbach records his views:

Once the Allmerses are able to see the child they have neglected, they are then able to see the suffering of a whole world of cruelly deprived Children; and by pledging themselves to the care of the outcast waifs of the quayside settlements, they move towards the incarnating the abstract thesis of Allmers’ unwritten manuscript. If they can make it viable, they can also change the meaning of ‘Eyolf’ from an evasion of responsible commitment to others to a principle of ethical involvement (99).

The Allmerses dedicate their life to tending the village children and through the death of little Eyolf, they find a meaning in their living. Death redeems the sin of Allmerses.

The conviction of guilt and of necessary retribution become strong when imposed by an external design. The result is death. In Arthur Miller’s The Death of a Salesman, Willy Loman becomes a victim who has no living way out, but who can try, in death, to affirm his lost identity and his lost will. The sense of personal assertion by death is the last stage of liberal tragedy. Raymond affirms:
At the centre of liberal tragedy is a single situation: that of a man at the height of his powers and the limits of his strength, at once aspiring and being defeated, releasing and destroyed by his own energies. The structure is liberal in its emphasis on the surpassing individual, and tragic in its ultimate recognition of defeat or the limits of victory. … *(Drama Classical to Contemporary 749)*

The liberal tragedy insists on renewal and assertion of individual energy. The desires of man are intense and imperative. The individual rebellion is humanistic, at a conscious level. But the condition of desire, unconsciously, is that it is always forbidden. In Romantic tragedy man is guilty of the ultimate and nameless crime of being himself. Acting on his own, and for his own reasons, a single man could change the human limits and transform his world. By an act of choice, by an act of will, the individual refuses the role of victim and becomes a new kind of hero. The heroism is not in the nobility of suffering, but in the limits. It is now, unambiguously, in the aspiration itself. What is demanded is self-fulfilment, and any such process is a general liberation.

Ibsen’s protagonists though defeated by life could not have lived it honestly in any other way. In their death, disillusionment or isolation, they who strive hard for existence appear to have discovered some values of life, love, nobility, dignity and authenticity. Hedvig’s death in *The Wild Duck* is a sacrifice. The child proves
her love and affection to win the heart of her father. Rebecca’s death in *Rosmersholm* signifies that, to live one’s life is the same as to live without guilt and that the road to becoming free of guilt is atonement. Basically this seems to be close to the Christian way of thinking. But Rebecca does not make her sacrifice for the purpose of finding vindication in God’s eyes, but for the purpose of restoring Rosmer’s faith in his own values and to make him able to live his life free of guilt. Rosmer’s death may be irrelevant but he becomes desolate after Rebecca’s death.

Hedda in *Hedda Gabler* spells her own doom by her reluctance to surrender to the mundane realities of life. At the end of the play, it becomes clear that the conditions for the continued existence of Hedda Gabler no longer exist. The suicide is the physical manifestation of a disintegration which has already taken place. In *The Master Builder*, through death Soleness conquers fear and proves to his princess that he forever remains a master builder in her heart. Eyolf redeems the sin of the Allmerses through his death. The protagonists like Ellida, Rita, and Allmers choose life instead of death. But characters like Hedda, Rebecca, and Rosmer make suicide as their choice. Children like Hedvig, Little Eyolf and an adult architect Soleness meet with accidental death. The main characters of Ibsen find life as absurd reality in which everyone is expected to live.

The austerity and despondency of this existence is conveyed through Sisyphus by Albert Camus. Presumably, Sisyphus is unable to escape his
condition through suicide. He makes his life endurable and that endurance really adds meaning to his life. The value and purpose of that objectivity do not exist in the world and it can be restored by an act of will. To live one’s life, one must exercise the freedom to create a life. Just going along with conventional values and forgetting the absurdity of the world is not authentic. Authenticity is to exercise one’s free will and to choose the activities and goals that will be meaningful. With this approach even Sisyphus could be engaged and satisfied with what he is doing.

The protagonists assert their self-identity by their existence or by denial of living on Earth. Whether they live or die, they are pushed towards the state of realization. This self-realization transforms the “self” into a contented being.