

Ibsen's New Drama

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Twenty years have passed since Henrik Ibsen wrote *A Doll's House*, thereby almost marking an epoch in the history of drama. During those years his name has gone abroad through the length and breadth of two continents, and has provoked more discussion and criticism than that of any other living man. He has been upheld as a religious reformer, a social reformer, a Semitic lover of righteousness, and as a great dramatist. He has been rigorously denounced as a meddling intruder, a defective artist, an incomprehensible mystic, and, in the eloquent words of a certain English critic, 'a muck-ferreting dog'. Through the perplexities of such diverse criticism, the great genius of the man is day by day coming out as a hero comes out amid the earthly trials. The dissonant cries are fainter and more distant, the random praises are rising in steadier and more choral chaunt. Even to the uninterested bystander it must seem significant that the interest attached to this Norwegian has never flagged for over a quarter of a century. It may be questioned whether any man has held so firm an empire over the thinking world in modern times. Not Rousseau; not Emerson; not Carlyle; not any of those giants of whom almost all have passed out of human ken. Ibsen's power over two generations has been enhanced by his own reticence. Seldom, if at all, has he condescended to join battle with his enemies. It would appear as if the storm of fierce debate rarely broke in upon his wonderful calm. The conflicting voices have not influenced his work in the very smallest degree. His output of dramas has been regulated by the utmost order, by a clockwork routine, seldom found in the case of genius. Only once he answered his assailants after their violent attack on *Ghosts*. But from *The Wild Duck* to *John Gabriel Borkman*, his dramas have appeared almost mechanically at intervals of two years. One is apt to overlook the sustained energy which such a plan of campaign demands; but even surprise at this must give way to admiration at the gradual, irresistible advance of this extraordinary man. Eleven plays, all dealing with modern life, have been published. Here is the list: *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts*, *An Enemy of the People*, *The Wild Duck*, *Rosmersholm*, *The Lady from the Sea*, *Hedda Gabler*, *The Master Builder*, *Little Eyolf*, *John Gabriel Borkman*, and lastly - his new drama, published at Copenhagen, December 19th, 1899 - *When We Dead Awaken*. This play is already in process of translation into almost a dozen different languages - a fact which speaks volumes for the power of its author. The drama is written in prose, and is in three acts.

To begin an account of a play of Ibsen's is surely no easy matter. The subject is, in one way, so confined, and, in another way, so vast. It is safe to predict that nine-tenths of the notices of this play will open in some such way as the following: 'Arnold Rubek and his wife, Maja, have been married for four years, at the beginning of the play. Their union is, however, unhappy. Each is discontented with the other.' So far as this goes, it is unimpeachable; but then it does not go very far. It does not convey even the most shadowy notion of the relations

between Professor Rubek and his wife. It is a bald, clerkly version of countless, indefinable complexities. It is as though the history of a tragic life were to be written down rudely in two columns, one for the pros and the other for the cons. It is only saying what is literally true, to say that, in the three acts of the drama, there has been stated all that is essential to the drama. There is from first to last hardly a superfluous word or phrase. Therefore, the play itself expresses its own ideas as briefly and as concisely as they can be expressed in the dramatic form. It is manifest, then, that a notice cannot give an adequate notion of the drama. This is not the case with the common lot of plays, to which the fullest justice may be meted out in a very limited number of lines. They are for the most part reheated dishes - unoriginal compositions, cheerfully owlish as to heroic insight, living only in their own candid claptrap - in a word, stagey. The most perfunctory curtness is their fittest meed. But in dealing with the work of a man like Ibsen, the task set the reviewer is truly great enough to sink all his courage. All he can hope to do is to link some of the more salient points together in such a way as to suggest rather than to indicate, the intricacies of the plot. Ibsen has attained ere this to such mastery over his art that, with apparently easy dialogue, he presents his men and women passing through different soul-crises. His analytic method is thus made use of to the fullest extent, and into the comparatively short space of two days the life in life of all his characters is compressed. For instance, though we only see Solness during one night and up to the following evening, we have in reality watched with bated breath the whole course of his life up to the moment when Hilda Wangel enters his house. So in the play under consideration, when we see Professor Rubek first, he is sitting in a garden chair, reading his morning paper, but by degrees the whole scroll of his life is unrolled before us, and we have the pleasure not of hearing it read out to us, but of reading it for ourselves, piecing the various parts, and going closer to see wherever the writing on the parchment is fainter or less legible.

As I have said, when the play opens, Professor Rubek is sitting in the gardens of a hotel, eating, or rather having finished, his breakfast. In another chair, close beside him, is sitting Maja Rubek, the Professor's wife. The scene is in Norway, a popular health resort near the sea. Through the trees can be seen the town harbour, and the fjord, with steamers plying over it, as it stretches past headland and river-isle out to the sea. Rubek is a famous sculptor, of middle age, and Maja, a woman still young, whose bright eyes have just a shade of sadness in them. These two continue reading their respective papers quietly in the peace of the morning. All looks so idyllic to the careless eye. The lady breaks the silence in a weary, petulant manner by complaining of the deep peace that reigns about them. Arnold lays down his paper with mild expostulation. Then they begin to converse of this thing and that; first of the silence, then of the place and the people, of the railway stations through which they passed the previous night, with their sleepy porters and aimlessly shifting lanterns. From this they proceed to talk of the changes in the people, and of all that has grown up since they were married. Then it is but a little further to the main trouble. In speaking of their married life it speedily appears that the inner view of their relations is hardly as ideal as the outward view might lead one to expect. The depths of these two people are being slowly stirred up. The leaven of prospective drama is gradually discerned working amid the *fin-de-siècle* scene. The lady seems a difficult little person. She complains of the idle promises with which her husband had fed her aspirations.

MAJA. You said you would take me up to a high mountain and show me all the glory of the world.

RUBEK {with a slight start}. Did I promise you that, too?

In short, there is something untrue lying at the root of their union. Meanwhile the guests of the hotel, who are taking the baths, pass out of the hotel porch on the right, chatting and laughing men and women. They are informally marshalled by the inspector of the baths. This person is an unmistakable type of the conventional official. He salutes Mr. and Mrs. Rubek, enquiring how they slept. Rubek asks him if any of the guests take their baths by night, as he has seen a white figure moving in the park during the night. Maja scouts the notion, but the inspector says that there is a strange lady, who has rented the pavilion which is to the left, and who is staying there, with one attendant - a Sister of Mercy. As they are talking, the strange lady and her companion pass slowly through the park and enter the pavilion. The incident appears to affect Rubek, and Maja's curiosity is aroused.

MAJA {a little hurt and jarred}. Perhaps this lady has been one of your models, Rubek? Search your memory.

RUBEK {looks cuttingly at her}. Model?

MAJA {with a provoking smile}. In your younger days, I mean. You are said to have had such innumerable models - long ago, of course.

RUBEK {in the same tone}. Oh, no, little Frau Maja. I have in reality had only one single model. One and one only for everything I have done.

While this misunderstanding is finding outlet in the foregoing conversation, the inspector, all at once, takes fright at some person who is approaching. He attempts to escape into the hotel, but the high-pitched voice of the person who is approaching arrests him.

ULFHEIM'S voice {heard outside}. Stop a moment, man. Devil take it all, can't you stop? Why do you always scuttle away from me?

With these words, uttered in strident tones, the second chief actor enters on the scene. He is described as a great bear-killer, thin, tall, of uncertain age, and muscular. He is accompanied by his servant, Lars, and a couple of sporting dogs. Lars does not speak a single word in the play. Ulfheim at present dismisses him with a kick, and approaches Mr. and Mrs. Rubek. He falls into conversation with them, for Rubek is known to him as the celebrated sculptor. On sculpture this savage hunter offers some original remarks.

ULFHEIM... We both work in a hard material, madam - both your husband and I. He struggles with his marble blocks, I daresay; and I struggle with tense and quivering bear-sinews. And we both of us win the fight in the end - subdue and master our material. We don't give in until we have got the better of it, though it fights ever so hard.

RUBEK {deep in thought}. There's a great deal of truth in what you say.

This eccentric creature, perhaps by the force of his own eccentricity, has begun to weave a spell of enchantment about Maja. Each word that he utters tends to wrap the web of his personality still closer about her. The black dress of the Sister of Mercy causes him to grin sardonically. He speaks calmly of all his near friends, whom he has dispatched out of the world.

MAJA. And what did you do for your nearest friends?

ULFHEIM. Shot them, of course.

RUBEK {looking at him}. Shot them?

MAJA {moving her chair back}. Shot them dead?

ULFHEIM {nods}. I never miss, madam.

However, it turns out that by his nearest friends he means his dogs, and the minds of his hearers are put somewhat more at ease. During their conversation the Sister of Mercy has prepared a slight repast for her mistress at one of the tables outside the pavilion. The unsustaining qualities of the food excite Ulfheim's merriment. He speaks with a lofty disparagement of such effeminate diet. He is a realist in his appetite.

ULFHEIM {rising}. Spoken like a woman of spirit, madam. Come with me, then!

They [his dogs] swallow whole, great, thumping meat-bones - gulp them up and then gulp them down again. Oh, it's a regular treat to see them!

On such half-gruesome, half-comic invitation Maja goes out with him, leaving her husband in the company of the strange lady who enters from the pavilion. Almost simultaneously the Professor and the lady recognize each other. The lady has served Rubek as model for the central figure in his famous masterpiece, *'The Resurrection Day'*. Having done her work for him, she had fled in an unaccountable manner, leaving no traces behind her. Rubek and she drift into familiar conversation. She asks him who is the lady who has just gone out. He answers, with some hesitation, that she is his wife. Then he asks if she is married. She replies that she is married. He asks her where her husband is at present.

RUBEK. And where is he now?

IRENE. Oh, in a churchyard somewhere or other, with a fine, handsome monument over him; and with a bullet rattling in his skull.

RUBEK. Did he kill himself?

IRENE. Yes, he was good enough to take that off my hands.

RUBEK. Do you not lament his loss, Irene?

IRENE {not understanding}. Lament? What loss?

RUBEK. Why, the loss of Herr von Satow, of course.

IRENE. His name was not Satow.

RUBEK. Was it not?

IRENE. My second husband is called Satow. He is a Russian.

RUBEK. And where is he?

IRENE. Far away in the Ural Mountains. Among all his gold-mines.

RUBEK. So he lives there?

IRENE {shrugs her shoulders}. Lives? Lives? In reality I have killed him.

RUBEK {starts}. Killed - !

IRENE. Killed him with a fine sharp dagger which I always have with me in bed -

Rubek begins to understand that there is some meaning hidden beneath these strange words. He begins to think seriously on himself, his art, and on her, passing in review the course of his life since the creation of his masterpiece, *'The Resurrection Day'*. He sees that he has not fulfilled the promise of that work, and comes to realize that there is something lacking in his life. He asks Irene how she has lived since they last saw each other. Irene's answer to his query is of great importance, for it strikes the key note of the entire play.

IRENE {rises slowly from her chair and says quiveringly}. I was dead for many years. They came and bound me - lacing my arms together at my back. Then they lowered me into a grave-vault, with iron bars before the loophole. And with padded walls, so that no one on the earth above could hear the grave-shrieks.

In Irene's allusion to her position as model for the great picture, Ibsen gives further proof of his extraordinary knowledge of women. No other man could have so subtly expressed the nature of the relations between the sculptor and his model, had he even dreamt of them.

IRENE. I exposed myself wholly and unreservedly to your gaze {more softly} and never once did you touch me...

* * * *

RUBEK {looks impressively at her}. I was an artist, Irene.

IRENE {darkly}. That is just it. That is just it.

Thinking deeper and deeper on himself and on his former attitude towards this woman, it strikes him yet more forcibly that there are great gulfs set between his art and his life, and that even in his art his skill and genius are far from perfect. Since Irene left him he has done nothing but paint portrait busts of townsfolk. Finally, some kind of resolution is enkindled in him, a resolution to repair his botching, for he does not altogether despair of that. There is just a reminder of the will-glorification of Brand in the lines that follow.

RUBEK {struggling with himself, uncertainly}. If we could, oh, if only we could...

IRENE. Why can we not do what we will?

In fine, the two agree in deeming their present state insufferable. It appears plain to her that Rubek lies under a heavy obligation to her, and with their recognition of this, and the entrance of Maja, fresh from the enchantment of Ulfheim, the first act closes.

RUBEK. When did you begin to seek for me, Irene?

IRENE {with a touch of jesting bitterness}. From the time when I realized that I had given away to you something rather indispensable. Something one ought never to part with.

RUBEK {bowing his head}. Yes, that is bitterly true. You gave me three or four years of your youth.

IRENE. More, more than that I gave you - spendthrift as I then was.

RUBEK. Yes, you were prodigal, Irene. You gave me all your naked loveliness -

IRENE. To gaze upon -

RUBEK. And to glorify...

* * * *

IRENE. But you have forgotten the most precious gift.

RUBEK. The most precious . . . what gift was that?

IRENE. I gave you my young living soul. And that gift left me empty within - soulless {looks at him with a fixed stare}. It was that I died of, Arnold.

It is evident, even from this mutilated account, that the first act is a masterly one. With no perceptible effort the drama rises, with methodic natural ease it develops. The trim garden of the nineteenth-century hotel is slowly made the scene of a gradually growing dramatic struggle. Interest has been roused in each of the characters, sufficient to carry the mind into the succeeding act. The situation is not stupidly explained, but the action has set in, and at the close the play has reached a definite stage of progression.

The second act takes place close to a sanatorium on the mountains. A cascade leaps from a rock and flows in steady stream to the right. On the bank some children are playing, laughing and shouting. The time is evening. Rubek is discovered lying on a mound to the left. Maja enters shortly, equipped for hill-climbing. Helping herself with her stick across the stream, she calls out to Rubek and approaches him. He asks how she and her companion are amusing themselves, and questions her as to their hunting. An exquisitely humorous touch enlivens their talk. Rubek asks if they intend hunting the bear near the surrounding locality. She replies with a grand superiority.

MAJA. You don't suppose that bears are to be found in the naked mountains, do you?

The next topic is the uncouth Ulfheim. Maja admires him because he is so ugly - then turns abruptly to her husband saying, pensively, that he also is ugly. The accused pleads his age.

RUBEK {shrugging his shoulders}. One grows old. One grows old, Frau Maja!

This semi-serious banter leads them on to graver matters. Maja lies at length in the soft heather, and rails gently at the Professor. For the mysteries and claims of art she has a somewhat comical disregard.

MAJA {with a somewhat scornful laugh}. Yes, you are always, always an artist.

and again -

MAJA... Your tendency is to keep yourself to yourself and - think your own thoughts. And, of course, I can't talk properly to you about your affairs. I know nothing about Art and that sort of thing. {With an impatient gesture.} And care very little either, for that matter.

She rallies him on the subject of the strange lady, and hints maliciously at the understanding between them. Rubek says that he was only an artist and that she was the source of his inspiration. He confesses that the five years of his married life have been years of intellectual famine for him. He has viewed in their true light his own feelings towards his art.

RUBEK {smiling}. But that was not precisely what I had in my mind.

MAJA. What then?

RUBEK {again serious}. It was this - that all the talk about the artist's vocation and the artist's mission, and so forth, began to strike me as being very empty and hollow and meaningless at bottom.

MAJA. Then what would you put in its place?

RUBEK. Life, Maja.

The all-important question of their mutual happiness is touched upon, and after a brisk discussion a tacit agreement to separate is effected. When matters are in this happy condition Irene is described coming across the heath. She is surrounded by the sportive children and stays awhile among them. Maja jumps up from the grass and goes to her, saying, enigmatically, that her husband requires assistance to 'open a precious casket'. Irene bows and goes towards Rubek, and Maja goes joyfully to seek her hunter. The interview which follows is certainly remarkable, even from a stagey point of view. It constitutes, practically, the substance of the second act, and is of absorbing interest. At the same time it must be added that such a scene would tax the powers of the mimes producing it. Nothing short of a complete realization of the two *rôles* would represent the complex ideas involved in the conversation. When we reflect how few stage artists would have either the intelligence to attempt it or the powers to execute it, we behold a pitiful revelation.

In the interview of these two people on the heath, the whole tenors of their lives are outlined with bold steady strokes. From the first exchange of introductory words each phrase tells a chapter of experiences. Irene alludes to the dark shadow of the Sister of Mercy which follows her everywhere, as the shadow of Arnold's unquiet conscience follows him. When he has half-involuntarily confessed so much, one of the great barriers between them is broken down. Their trust in each other is, to some extent, renewed, and they revert to their past acquaintance. Irene speaks openly of her feelings, of her hate for the sculptor.

IRENE {again vehemently}. Yes, for you - for the artist who had so lightly and carelessly taken a warm-blooded body, a young human life, and worn the soul out of it - because you needed it for a work of art.

Rubek's transgression has indeed been great. Not merely has he possessed himself of her soul, but he has withheld from its rightful throne the child of her soul. By her child Irene means the statue. To her it seems that this statue is, in a very true and very real sense, born of her. Each day as she saw it grow to its full growth under the hand of the skilful moulder, her inner sense of motherhood for it, of right over it, of love towards it, had become stronger and more confirmed.

IRENE {changing to a tone full of warmth and feeling}. But that statue in the wet, living clay, that I loved - as it rose up, a vital human creature out of these raw, shapeless masses - for that was our creation, our child. Mine and yours.

It is, in reality, because of her strong feelings that she has kept aloof from Rubek for five years. But when she hears now of what he has done to the child - her child - all her powerful nature rises up against him in resentment. Rubek, in a mental agony, endeavours to explain, while she listens like a tigress whose cub has been wrested from her by a thief.

RUBEK. I was young then - with no experience of life. *The Resurrection*, I thought, would be most beautifully and exquisitely figured as a young unsullied woman - with none of a life's experience - awakening to light and glory without having to put away from her anything ugly and impure.

With larger experience of life he has found it necessary to alter his ideal somewhat, he has made her child no longer a principal, but an intermediary figure. Rubek, turning towards her, sees her just about to stab him. In a fever of terror and thought he rushes into his own defence, pleading madly for the errors he has done. It seems to Irene that he is endeavouring to render his sin poetical, that he is penitent but in a luxury of dolour. The thought that she has given up herself, her whole life, at the bidding of his false art, rankles in her heart with a terrible persistence. She cries out against herself, not loudly, but in deep sorrow.

IRENE {with apparent self-control}. I should have borne children into the world - many children - real children - not such children as are hidden away in grave-vaults. That was my vocation. I ought never to have served you - poet.

Rubek, in poetic absorption, has no reply, he is musing on the old, happy days. Their dead joys solace him. But Irene is thinking of a certain phrase of his which he had spoken unwittingly. He had declared that he owed her thanks for her assistance in his work. This has been, he had said, a truly blessed episode in my life. Rubek's tortured mind cannot bear any more reproaches, too many are heaped upon it already. He begins throwing flowers on the stream, as they used in those bygone days on the lake of Taunitz. He recalls to her the time

when they made a boat of leaves, and yoked a white swan to it, in imitation of the boat of Lohengrin. Even here in their sport there lies a hidden meaning.

IRENE. You said I was the swan that drew your boat.

RUBEK. Did I say so? Yes, I daresay I did {absorbed in the game}. Just see how the sea-gulls are swimming down the stream!

IRENE {laughing}. And all your ships have run ashore.

RUBEK {throwing more leaves into the brook}. I have ships enough in reserve.

While they are playing aimlessly, in a kind of childish despair, Ulfheim and Maja appear across the heath. These two are going to seek adventures on the high tablelands. Maja sings out to her husband a little song which she has composed in her joyful mood. With a sardonic laugh Ulfheim bids Rubek good-night and disappears with his companion up the mountain. All at once Irene and Rubek leap to the same thought. But at that moment the gloomy figure of the Sister of Mercy is seen in the twilight, with her leaden eyes looking at them both. Irene breaks from him, but promises to meet him that night on the heath.

RUBEK. And you will come, Irene?

IRENE. Yes, certainly I will come. Wait for me here.

RUBEK {repeats dreamily}. Summer night on the upland. With you. With you. {His eyes meet hers.} Oh, Irene, that might have been our life. And that we have forfeited, we two.

IRENE. We see the irretrievable only when {breaks short off}.

RUBEK {looks inquiringly at her}. When? . . .

IRENE. When we dead awaken.

The third act takes place on a wide plateau, high up on the hills. The ground is rent with yawning clefts. Looking to the right, one sees the range of the summits half-hidden in the moving mists. On the left stands an old, dismantled hut. It is in the early morning, when the skies are the colour of pearl. The day is beginning to break. Maja and Ulfheim come down to the plateau. Their feelings are sufficiently explained by the opening words.

MAJA {trying to tear herself loose}. Let me go! Let me go, I say!

ULFHEIM. Come, come! Are you going to bite now? You're as snappish as a wolf.

When Ulfheim will not cease his annoyances, Maja threatens to run over the crest of the neighbouring ridge. Ulfheim points out that she will dash herself to pieces. He has wisely sent Lars away after the hounds, that he may be uninterrupted. Lars, he says, may be trusted not to find the dogs too soon.

MAJA {looking angrily at him}. No, I daresay not.

ULFHEIM {catching at her arm}. For Lars - he knows my - my methods of sport, you see.

Maja, with enforced self-possession, tells him frankly what she thinks of him. Her uncomplimentary observations please the bear hunter very much. Maja requires all her tact to keep him in order. When she talks of going back to the hotel, he gallantly offers to carry her on his shoulders, for which suggestion he is promptly snubbed. The two are playing as a cat and a bird play. Out of their skirmish one speech of Ulfheim's rises suddenly to arrest attention, as it throws some light on his former life.

ULFHEIM {with suppressed exasperation}. I once took a young girl - lifted her up from the mire of the streets, and carried her in my arms. Next my heart I carried her. So I would have borne her all through life, lest haply she should dash her foot against a stone... {with a growling laugh.} And do you know what I got for my reward?

MAJA. No. What did you get?

ULFHEIM {looks at her, smiles and nods}. I got the horns! The horns that you can see so plainly. Is not that a comical story, madam bear-murderess?

As an exchange of confidence, Maja tells him her life in summary - and chiefly her married life with Professor Rubek. As a result, these two uncertain souls feel attracted to each other, and Ulfheim states his case in the following characteristic manner:

ULFHEIM. Should not we two tack our poor shreds of life together?

Maja, satisfied that in their vows there will be no promise on his part to show her all the splendours of the earth, or to fill her dwelling-place with art, gives a half-consent by allowing him to carry her down the slope. As they are about to go, Rubek and Irene, who have also spent the night on the heath, approach the same plateau. When Ulfheim asks Rubek if he and madame have ascended by the same pathway, Rubek answers significantly.

RUBEK. Yes, of course {With a glance at MAJA}. Henceforth the strange lady and I do not intend our ways to part.

While the musketry of their wit is at work, the elements seem to feel that there is a mighty problem to be solved then and there, and that a great drama is swiftly drawing to a close. The smaller figures of Maja and Ulfheim are grown still smaller in the dawn of the tempest. Their lots are decided in comparative quiet, and we cease to take much interest in them. But the other two hold our gaze, as they stand up silently on the fjaell, engrossing central figures of boundless, human interest. On a sudden, Ulfheim raises his hand impressively towards the heights.

ULFHEIM. But don't you see that the storm is upon us? Don't you hear the blasts of wind?

RUBEK {listening}. They sound like the prelude to the Resurrection Day.

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MAJA {drawing ULFHEIM away}. Let us make haste and get down.

As he cannot take more than one person at a time, Ulfheim promises to send aid for Rubek and Irene, and, seizing Maja in his arms, clambers rapidly but warily down the path. On the desolate mountain plateau, in the growing light, the man and the woman are left together - no longer the artist and his model. And the shadow of a great change is stalking close in the morning silence. Then Irene tells Arnold that she will not go back among the men and women she has left; she will not be rescued. She tells him also, for now she may tell all, how she had been tempted to kill him in frenzy when he spoke of their connection as an episode of his life.

RUBEK {darkly}. And why did you hold your hand?

IRENE. Because it flashed upon me with a sudden horror that you were dead already - long ago.

But, says Rubek, our love is not dead in us, it is active, fervent and strong.

IRENE. The love that belongs to the life of earth - the beautiful, miraculous life of earth - the inscrutable life of earth - that is dead in both of us.

There are, moreover, the difficulties of their former lives. Even here, at the sublimest part of his play, Ibsen is master of himself and his facts. His genius as an artist faces all, shirks nothing. At the close of *The Master Builder*, the greatest touch of all was the horrifying exclamation of one without, 'O! The head is all crushed in.' A lesser artist would have cast a spiritual glamour over the tragedy of Bygmaster Solness. In like manner here Irene objects that she has exposed herself as a nude before the vulgar gaze, that Society has cast her out, that all is too late. But Rubek cares for such considerations no more. He flings them all to the wind and decides.

RUBEK {throwing his arms violently around her}. Then let two of the dead - us two - for once live life to its uttermost, before we go down to our graves again.

IRENE {with a shriek}. Arnold!

RUBEK. But not here in the half-darkness. Not here with this hideous dank shroud flapping around us!

IRENE {carried away by passion}. No, no - up in the light and in all the glittering glory! Up to the Peak of Promise!

RUBEK. There we will hold our marriage-feast, Irene - oh! My beloved!

IRENE {proudly}. The sun may freely look on us, Arnold.

RUBEK. All the powers of light may freely look on us - and all the powers of darkness too {seizes her hand} - will you then follow me, oh my grace-given bride!

IRENE {as though transfigured}. I follow you, freely and gladly, my lord and master!

RUBEK {drawing her along with him}. We must first pass through the mists, Irene, and then -

IRENE. Yes, through all the mists, and then right up to the summit of the tower that shines in the sunrise.

{The mist-clouds close in over the scene. RUBEK and IRENE, hand in hand, climb up over the snowfield to the right and soon disappear among the lower clouds. Keen storm-gusts hurtle and whistle through the air. }

{The SISTER OF MERCY appears upon the rubble-slope to the left. She stops and looks around silently and searchingly. }

{MAJA can be heard singing triumphantly far in the depths below. }

MAJA. I am free! I am free! I am free! No more life in the prison for me! I am free as a bird! I am free!

{Suddenly a sound like thunder is heard from high up on the snowfield, which glides and whirls downwards with rushing speed. RUBEK and IRENE can be dimly discerned as they are whirled along with the masses of snow and buried in them. }

THE SISTER OF MERCY {gives a shriek, stretches out her arms towards them, and cries}, Irene! {Stands silent a moment, then makes the sign of the cross before her in the air, and says}, Pax Vobiscum!

{MAJA'S triumphant song sounds from still further down below. }

Such is the plot, in a crude and incoherent way, of this new drama. Ibsen's plays do not depend for their interest on the action, or on the incidents. Even the characters, faultlessly drawn though they be, are not the first thing in his plays. But the naked drama - either the perception of a great truth, or the opening up of a great question, or a great conflict which is almost independent of the conflicting actors, and has been and is of far-reaching importance - this is what primarily rivets our attention. Ibsen has chosen the average lives in their uncompromising truth for the groundwork of all his later plays. He has abandoned the verse form, and has never sought to embellish his work after the conventional fashion. Even when his dramatic theme reached its zenith he has not sought to trick it out in gawds or tawdriness. How easy it would have been to have written *An Enemy of the People* on a speciously loftier level - to have replaced the *bourgeois* by the legitimate hero! Critics might then have extolled as grand what they have so often condemned as banal. But the surroundings are nothing to Ibsen. The play is the thing. By the force of his genius, and the indisputable skill which he brings to all his efforts, Ibsen has, for many years, engrossed the attention of the civilized world. Many years more, however, must pass before he will enter his kingdom in jubilation, although, as he stands to-day, all has been done on his part to ensure his own worthiness to enter therein. I do not propose here to examine into every detail of dramaturgy connected with this play, but merely to outline the characterization.

In his characters Ibsen does not repeat himself. In this drama - the last of a long catalogue - he has drawn and differentiated with his customary skill. What a novel creation is Ulfheim! Surely the hand which has drawn him has not yet lost her cunning. Ulfheim is, I think, the newest character in the play. He is a kind of surprise-packet. It is as a result of his novelty that he seems to leap, at first mention, into bodily form. He is superbly wild, primitively impressive. His fierce eyes roll and glare as those of Yegof or Herne. As for Lars, we may dismiss him, for he never opens his mouth. The Sister of Mercy speaks only once in the play, but then with good effect. In silence she follows Irene like a retribution, a voiceless shadow with her own symbolic majesty.

Irene, too, is worthy of her place in the gallery of her compeers. Ibsen's knowledge of humanity is nowhere more obvious than in his portrayal of women. He amazes one by his painful introspection; he seems to know them better than they know themselves. Indeed, if one may say so of an eminently virile man, there is a curious admixture of the woman in his nature. His marvellous accuracy, his faint traces of femininity, his delicacy of swift touch, are perhaps attributable to this admixture. But that he knows women is an incontrovertible fact. He appears to have sounded them to almost unfathomable depths. Beside his portraits the psychological studies of Hardy and Turgenieff, or the exhaustive elaborations of Meredith, seem no more than sciolism. With a deft stroke, in a phrase, in a word, he does what costs them chapters, and does it better. Irene, then, has to face great comparison; but it must be acknowledged that she comes forth of it bravely. Although Ibsen's women are uniformly true, they, of course, present themselves in various lights. Thus Gina Ekdal is, before all else, a comic figure, and Hedda Gabler a tragic one - if such old-world terms may be employed without incongruity. But Irene cannot be so readily classified; the very aloofness from passion, which is not separable from her, forbids classification. She interests us strangely - magnetically, because of her inner power of character. However perfect Ibsen's former creations may be, it is questionable whether any of his women reach to the depth of soul of Irene. She holds our gaze for the sheer force of her intellectual capacity. She is, moreover, an intensely spiritual creation - in the truest and widest sense of that. At times she is liable to get beyond us, to soar above us, as she does with Rubek. It will be considered by some as a blemish that she - a woman of fine spirituality - is made an artist's model, and some may even regret that such an episode mars the harmony of the drama. I cannot altogether see the force of this contention; it seems pure irrelevancy. But whatever may be thought of the fact, there is small room for complaint as to the handling of it. Ibsen treats it, as indeed he treats all things, with large insight, artistic restraint, and sympathy. He sees it steadily and whole, as from a great height, with perfect vision and an angelic dispassionateness, with the sight of one who may look on the sun with open eyes. Ibsen is different from the clever purveyor.

Maja fulfils a certain technical function in the play, apart from her individual character. Into the sustained tension she comes as a relief. Her airy freshness is as a breath of keen air. The sense of free, almost flamboyant, life, which is her chief note, counter-balances the austerity of Irene and the dullness of Rubek. Maja has practically the same effect on this play, as Hilda Wangel has on *The Master Builder*. But she does not capture our sympathy so much as Nora Helmer. She is not meant to capture it.

Rubek himself is the chief figure in this drama, and, strangely enough, the most conventional. Certainly, when contrasted with his Napoleonic predecessor, John Gabriel Borkman, he is a mere shadow. It must be borne in mind, however, that Borkman is alive, actively, energetically, restlessly alive, all through the play to the end, when he dies; whereas Arnold Rubek is dead, almost hopelessly dead, until the end, when he comes to life. Notwithstanding this, he is supremely interesting, not because of himself, but because of his dramatic significance. Ibsen's drama, as I have said, is wholly independent of his characters. They may be bores, but the drama in which they live and move is invariably powerful. Not that Rubek is a bore by any means! He is infinitely more interesting in himself than Torvald Helmer or Tesman, both of whom possess certain strongly-marked characteristics. Arnold Rubek is, on the other hand, not intended to be a genius, as perhaps Eljert Lovborg is. Had he been a genius like Eljert he would have understood in a truer way the value of his life. But, as we are to suppose, the facts that he is devoted to his art and that he has attained to a degree of mastery in it - mastery of hand linked with limitation of thought - tell us that there may be lying dormant in him a capacity for greater life, which may be exercised when he, a dead man, shall have risen from among the dead.

The only character whom I have neglected is the inspector of the baths, and I hasten to do him tardy, but scant, justice. He is neither more nor less than the average inspector of baths. But he is that.

So much for the characterization, which is at all times profound and interesting. But apart from the characters in the play, there are some noteworthy points in the frequent and extensive side-issues of the line of thought. The most salient of these is what seems, at first sight, nothing more than an accidental scenic feature. I allude to the environment of the drama. One cannot but observe in Ibsen's later work a tendency to get out of closed rooms. Since *Hedda Gabler* this tendency is most marked. The last act of *The Master Builder* and the last act of *John Gabriel Borkman* take place in the open air. But in this play the three acts are *al fresco*. To give heed to such details as these in the drama may be deemed ultra-Boswellian fanaticism. As a matter of fact it is what is barely due to the work of a great artist. And this feature, which is so prominent, does not seem to me altogether without its significance.

Again, there has not been lacking in the last few social dramas a fine pity for men - a note nowhere audible in the uncompromising rigour of the early eighties. Thus in the conversion of Rubek's views as to the girl-figure in his masterpiece, *'The Resurrection Day'*, there is involved an all-embracing philosophy, a deep sympathy with the cross-purposes and contradictions of life, as they may be reconcilable with a hopeful awakening - when the manifold travail of our poor humanity may have a glorious issue. As to the drama itself, it is doubtful if any good purpose can be served by attempting to criticize it. Many things would tend to prove this. Henrik Ibsen is one of the world's great men before whom criticism can make but feeble show. Appreciation, hearkening is the only true criticism. Further, that species of criticism which calls itself dramatic criticism is a needless adjunct to his plays. When the art of a dramatist is perfect the critic is superfluous. Life is not to be criticized, but to be faced and lived. Again, if any plays demand a stage they are the plays of Ibsen. Not

merely is this so because his plays have so much in common with the plays of other men that they were not written to cumber the shelves of a library, but because they are so packed with thought. At some chance expression the mind is tortured with some question, and in a flash long reaches of life are opened up in vista, yet the vision is momentary unless we stay to ponder on it. It is just to prevent excessive pondering that Ibsen requires to be acted. Finally, it is foolish to expect that a problem, which has occupied Ibsen for nearly three years, will unroll smoothly before our eyes on a first or second reading. So it is better to leave the drama to plead for itself. But this at least is clear, that in this play Ibsen has given us nearly the very best of himself. The action is neither hindered by many complexities, as in *The Pillars of Society*, nor harrowing in its simplicity, as in *Ghosts*. We have whimsicality, bordering on extravagance, in the wild Ulfheim, and subtle humour in the sly contempt which Rubek and Maja entertain for each other. But Ibsen has striven to let the drama have perfectly free action. So he has not bestowed his wonted pains on the minor characters. In many of his plays these minor characters are matchless creations. Witness Jacob Engstrand, Tonnesen, and the demonic Molvik! But in this play the minor characters are not allowed to divert our attention.

On the whole, *When We Dead Awaken* may rank with the greatest of the author's work - if, indeed, it be not the greatest. It is described as the last of the series, which began with *A Doll's House* - a grand epilogue to its ten predecessors. Than these dramas, excellent alike in dramaturgic skill, characterization, and supreme interest, the long roll of drama, ancient or modern, has few things better to show.