APPROVAL PAGE FOR GRADUATE THESIS OR PROJECT

GS-13

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF REQUIREMENTS FOR DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS AT CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, LOS ANGELES BY

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Theatre Arts
Field of Concentration

TITLE: The Sound and Music of Ibsen

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DATE: October 13, 2011

THE SOUND AND MUSIC OF IBSEN

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Music, Theatre, and Dance

California State University, Los Angeles

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

By

Dan Terrence Belzer

October 2011

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Susan Mason for her advisement and guidance throughout my graduate studies and thesis writing. Her insight and expertise have been invaluable to me. Additionally, I thank Dr. David Connors and Professor Jane McKeever for serving on my thesis committee and for giving me so much individual attention during my directed studies with them.

I also thank my mother, Geraldine Belzer, who has been completely supportive of and interested in my endeavors and pursuits throughout my entire life. Her encouragement to pursue a graduate degree and her interest along the way, including discussing several of the plays I read in my coursework, made this journey all the more memorable.

ABSTRACT

THE SOUND AND MUSIC OF IBSEN

By

Dan Terrence Belzer

Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen included specific sound and music stage directions and details in his nineteenth-century realistic prose plays. The importance he gave to the aural element of his work—exclusive of the spoken word—and the manner in which he treated it marked a critical step in representing objective reality on stage.

In this thesis I claim that Ibsen carefully used sound and music as realistic detail and as thematic enhancement in his realistic prose plays, and that its use over the last two decades of his writing reveals an increasingly nuanced and subtle integration.

Ibsen is often considered the father of the modern drama. I contend an important aspect of what is modern about his plays is his innovative use of sound displaying an acute understanding of aural semiotics. His masterfully integrated sound communicates necessary information, delivers emotional content, informs character, and assists in advancing plot in a way none before him had achieved.

Similarly, Ibsen employed music in a manner that illustrates the influence of popular melodramas from the first half of the nineteenth century, yet in a distinct departure from this form, he integrated it realistically. His skillful and strategic inclusion of music demonstrates an understanding of the emotional power of music as well as its ability to assist in both supporting and advancing plot.

My thesis examines *A Doll House* (1879), *The Lady from the Sea* (1888), *Hedda Gabler* (1890), and *John Gabriel Borkman* (1896) that span nearly twenty years of

Ibsen’s writing and illustrate his brilliant aural scoring of these prose plays, and by inference his others, with sound and music.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Working primarily in the theatre as a professional musician, pianist and music director for many years, and with education and experience working as an actor, I am interested in the ways music and sound operate as communicators of information. How are sound and music used to enhance a scene or advance the plot of a play, and what do we learn about a character's background or emotional state through the use of these elements?

When I entered graduate school, I studied Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll House* in the Graduate Research in Theatre seminar taught by Dr. Susan Mason. I was immediately struck by Ibsen's masterful integration of sound and music in his plays, and I was impressed by the height of the overall musicality of these aural elements. What was especially interesting to me was that, as Dr. Mason pointed out, the stage directions which include specific and detailed information regarding sound and music in the play were written by Ibsen himself. These instructions were not added after the play's initial publication by a stage manager of a subsequent theatrical production. It appeared to me that with these aural elements, Ibsen had successfully composed a three movement theatre score of sound and music running through and supporting his three act play, *A Doll House*. I wrote my first graduate paper, "Nora's Sonata," exploring that.

Throughout the course of my studies I regularly found myself reflecting back upon and considering Ibsen's writing, and my continuing graduate work increased my interest. I was fortunate to have a directed study with Dr. David Connors, in History and Analysis of Lyric Theatre, which covered European theatre, opera, operetta and

melodrama in the 1800s, the period during which Ibsen was writing. My Theory in Theatre and Performance Studies seminar with Dr. Susan Kwan opened the door to semiotics and phenomenology for me, piquing my interest in examining and considering more closely the possible meanings behind words, actions and sounds. Additionally, an American Literature 1860-1914 course with Dr. Andrew Knighton examined the literary realism movement, and I discovered that many of the themes and issues present in the period's literature reminded me of *A Doll House.*

Although I intended to examine the sound and music of *A Doll House* more fully at some point, what interested me on a larger scale was how Ibsen used sound and music in all his realistic prose plays and how that implementation may have changed during two decades of writing. I decided I wanted to examine this for my graduate thesis and asked Dr. Mason, an Ibsen scholar, for her help in choosing which plays to analyze. Since Ibsen's twelve realistic prose plays span nearly twenty-two years of writing, we decided that without examining all twelve of them it would be informative to examine plays from the beginning, middle and end of this period.

I was fortunate in my final coursework to study the history of sound in European theatre in the 1800s with Professor Jane McKeever. This proved extremely valuable to me in researching my thesis and provided me with the opportunity to learn much more about this aspect of Western theatre. The study was the ideal platform on which to begin my thesis.

In my thesis, "The Sound and Music of Ibsen," I claim that Ibsen carefully used sound and music as realistic detail and as thematic enhancement in his realistic prose plays, and that tracking its use chronologically over the last twenty years of his writing

reveals an increase in nuance and subtlety in its integration. My original intention was to create a CD of the sounds and music in Ibsen's four plays I discuss, but the number of cues involved—more than seventy-five in *A Doll House* alone—made that a significantly larger project than I had anticipated.

In my thesis I examine Ibsen's plays not as literature but as performance, and thus I utilize several key terms in specific ways. When I use the term "realism," I specifically mean "realistic" or having the illusion of or appearance of objective reality on stage. Although Ibsen's prose plays are sometimes categorized as "realism," a description about which scholars do not completely agree, my thesis is not exploring the genre called "realism." Rather, I examine the representation of objective reality on stage, such as pianos, doors, paper, walls and furniture, with particular emphasis on the presence of sound and music. This representation of objective reality on stage is also referred to as "illusionism": giving the illusion or appearance of reality.

I also use other terms that relate to plays in performance (as opposed to literature). The term "diegetic" means to be logically located within the believable world of the play, a part of the visible or understood circumstances of the environment. It can be used to describe sound and to describe music. For example, in a play the diegetic use of piano music would occur when the environment (seen onstage or imagined offstage) includes a piano that a character plays as part of the plot or action. Nondiegetic use of piano music in a play would occur when piano music is heard despite the absence of the instrument, similar to the way music is used in a film score. In addition I use the term "theatre score" for all aural events of the play excluding verbal language which, for the purposes of my thesis, includes human nonverbal vocal expression, such as laughter.

The structure of my thesis is to first describe the background of sound and music in Western theatre leading up to Ibsen's work, followed by a chapter on Ibsen's background prior to the time he began to write exclusively in prose. In the subsequent three chapters I discuss selected dramatic works from the beginning, middle and end of his realistic prose canon. These plays include *A Doll House, The Lady from the Sea, Hedda Gabler,* and *John Gabriel Borkman.* In the final chapter I describe my conclusions about the trajectory of Ibsen's use of sound and music in his realistic prose plays.

In my thesis I use Rolf Fjelde's translations of Ibsen's plays, *Henrik Ibsen: The Complete Major Prose Plays.* The stage directions I examine are precise translations of the original Norwegian stage directions written by Ibsen.

CHAPTER 2

Sound and Music in Nineteenth-Century Western Theatre

In the West we often discuss "seeing theatre," and the word "theatre" is itself derived from the Greek word *theatron*, or seeing place. This common perspective ignores and disregards the equally important element of the aural sense–that of listening and hearing. Much like listening to a radio drama, a spectator attending the theatre can experience a performance with eyes shut and, assuming familiarity with the language, acquire the necessary information to follow the plot and action. However, a significant aspect of the aural experience is that which is heard beyond the spoken word: sound and music.

In Ibsen's prose plays he utilized sound and music as fully integrated theatrical elements of communication, supporting and contributing to his development of character, enhancement of the action and advancement of the plot. To illustrate this claim I examine four of Ibsen's prose plays covering a span of seventeen years: *A Doll House*, published in 1879; *The Lady from the Sea,* published in 1888; *Hedda Gabler,* published in 1890; and *John Gabriel Borkman,* published in 1896. Each of these plays integrates a theatre score as a necessary component of the play's whole, soundly supporting ancient Roman writer and architect Vitruvius in his recognition that "theatre is viewed from auditoria, which are immersive environments that affect the mood or feel of what is being observed" (Brown 125).

Since the ancient Greeks and Romans, sound and music has played a significant role in Western theatre. Although the two cultures had differences in use and importance given to both, the presence of the aural conventions validates its ability to support and

heighten a dramatic performance for spectators, as well as suggests its influence upon future Western drama illustrated by the subsequent development and presence of such genres as opera and American musical theatre.

Aristotle's *Poetics*, the oldest surviving treatise on Western drama containing longstanding tenets of dramatic structure, lists the "sensuous attraction" of "song-composition" as the fifth most important element of tragedy's six constituent elements, placing it higher even than visual spectacle, including the adornment of the actor (Worthen 129). Song-composition generally translates as music.

According to Oscar Brockett in *History of the Theatre,* the music of the Greek theatre consisted of its use as accompaniment to "passages of recitative" as well as it being an integral part of the chorus. Although music was normally used strictly as accompaniment and was seldom heard aside from the voice, occasionally solo music was used as a "special effect." Brockett claims that music became "more elaborate," with "other instruments . . . and various forms of percussion" used occasionally for special effects" (31). Ibsen's incorporation of Aristotle's fifth element, at times accompanying dialogue and at other times creating special effects, reflects the importance of sound and music in the ancient Greek model but in a modern style reflecting the artistic values of late nineteenth century visual realism.

Music was used extensively and frequently in Western theatre into the nineteenth century, firmly demonstrated by the well-established popularity of opera among the upper classes as well as the popular appeal of operetta and melodrama. Grand opera operated under the strict rule that music always reigned supreme over words, while operetta valued the music and lyric equally. Melodrama, most closely resembling Ibsen's integration of

music in his prose plays, used music to support and enhance the words.

While opera preceded and influenced both the genres of operetta and melodrama, possibly its most powerful effect on Ibsen was not transmitted directly but rather through the achievements of Ibsen's contemporary, Richard Wagner. Immensely influential in the direction theatre would take in the second half of the nineteenth century, early German modern theatre pioneer and opera composer Richard Wagner believed that the composer should control all aspects of a theatrical production. Though he strived for complete illusionism in scenery and costumes in his productions, as Brockett states in *History of the Theatre,* he "rejected the trend toward realism, arguing that the dramatist should be a mythmaker" and in the style of his work he created spectacle and fantasy (543).

Wagner sought total illusion on a grand scale in his productions, and through this theatre design charted the course for modern Western theatre. He insisted upon historical accuracy in the areas of scenery and costuming and implemented the use of moving panoramas as well as the means to create such realistic effects as fog and steam. In addition he immersed spectators in complete darkness, an innovative device effectively enabling audiences to accept the illusionism of his music-dramas. Similarly, in Ibsen's determination to address contemporary domestic issues in his prose plays he integrated realistic visual and aural elements, demonstrated by his detailed stage directions regarding both. Ibsen's representation of a visual objective reality onstage provided the perfect marriage partner for his integration of realistic aural elements.

By the early 1800s melodrama was gaining mass-appeal among all socio-economic groups. In contrast to elite opera where music was the primary element,

melodrama was popular theatre in which music was secondary. According to Alison Latham in *The Oxford Dictionary of Music,* music in melodrama accompanied the dialogue providing "musical commentary" with the intent to unite rhetorical expression with musical expression (757). In *The Essential Theatre* Brockett suggests music in melodrama "enhanced the action and emotional tone of scenes" (163).

The music of melodrama featured "signature music" associated with specific characters and actions, accompanying entrances and exits of characters. Depending upon the theatre and finances, the number of musicians performing ranged from an orchestra of many to a single pianist. With advances in theatre design and the resultant differences in theatres, the placement of the musicians varied: newer theatres with orchestra and proscenium arches allowed the music to emanate from an unseen offstage space, while theatres lacking this capability found the musicians onstage in a role of both spectacle and song-composition.

As the nineteenth century progressed, melodrama's increased emphasis upon spectacle was accompanied by ever increasing advances of realistic detail in well-equipped playhouses. Some theatres had treadmills for horse races and included cataclysmic acts of nature: floods, volcanoes, and fires.

By the middle to late 1800s some dramatists such as Ibsen were making decided departures from customary and established ways in which music was used in the theatre. In his book on theatre sound, historian and sound designer Ross Brown quotes David Mayer's observation that "one of the sharpest breaks . . . was to end the practice of accompanying dramatic action with music." Mayer explains this claim with the example of *Hedda Gabler* where "'short bursts of piano-playing" and the pistol shot that

accompanies her suicide "happen against offstage silence, not above and in addition to . . . a thirty-piece orchestra" (65). Ibsen's inclusion of music in his prose plays both before and after *Hedda Gabler* illustrates that he did not abandon the melodramatic convention entirely but reinvented its application with insistence upon a realistically believable presence of music. He was aware of music's ability to participate in and simultaneously communicate aurally both the visual spectacle of a scene and its emotional content.

Melodrama's influence on Ibsen's prose plays is well-documented. Ibsen and his audiences would have been familiar with the plots and characters of early nineteenth century German playwright August Friedrich Ferdinand von Kotzebue, for example. John C. Coldeway describes the "controversial subjects" in Kotzebue's domestic melodramas that included "repentant wives and forgiving husbands" (534-544).

Thus by the time Ibsen began working in the theatre in the middle of the nineteenth century, the tradition of music enhancing, accompanying, or dominating performance may be traced as a central element in performance back to the Greeks. But where does that leave non-musical sound and sound effects? According to Brockett in *History of the Theatre,* the documented use of sound and sound effects coincides with the *intermezzi* of Italian Renaissance theatre in the 1500s. He claims that "sound was also important" and that "thunder was created by rolling cannon balls or stones down a rough channel; wind . . . by whirling thin layered strips of wood through the air rapidly" to support the elaborate visual spectacles (178). Yet Brockett makes few references to sound or sound effects in the rest of his book, and it is similarly overlooked in most theatre history texts.

In their book, *Sound and Music for the Theatre,* Deena Kaye and James LeBrecht

cover sound history more thoroughly and state that in addition to the Elizabethan theatre using music for atmosphere and "to convey the message of the players," it included sounds of "bells, alarms, clocks, whistles, chimes . . . gunshots . . . animal sounds and birdcalls." However, they claim, with heightened importance placed upon visual spectacle as theatre evolved into the nineteenth century, including the use of gas lighting in many theatres by 1850 as well as an increased importance placed upon costumes, sets and props, the "emphasis on offstage sound and music went in and out of style" (5), implying a diminished value placed upon the aural aspect of productions.

A critical step in increasingly realistic staging, including sound, may be attributed to the Meiningen Players of the late nineteenth century whose work Ibsen knew well. Their tremendous prominence and influence was aided by extensive touring throughout Europe, where the troupe was noted for its sensational sound as well as a display of pictorial illusionism which far surpassed any achieved before it. Of particular importance, and a convention present in Ibsen's prose writing, was the innovative "diegetic" use of music and sound: that which emanated logically from within the visible world of the play (Brown 69). Ibsen had direct experience with the Meiningers in 1876 when he was invited by the troupe to attend its performance of his drama *The Pretenders* in Berlin. This event marked only the second performance of an Ibsen work outside of Scandinavia—the first occurring just one month earlier in Munich when *The Vikings of Helgeland* was performed. It was during this time, according to Ibsen biographer and translator Michael Meyer, he saw "for the first time the greatest theatrical company of his age" (427). Later the Meiningers performed *A Doll House* and *Ghosts.*

According to Ross Brown in *Sound: A Reader in Theatre Practice,* although the

Duke of Saxe-Meiningen Georg II maintained a high level of control over the troupe and apparently oversaw "all creative departments of his ensemble," more likely the man responsible for the achievement of such "theatrical concertos of sound, light and costume" was Ludwig Chronegk (69-70). Chronegk's first association with the Meiningers began in 1866 as an actor, but two years later he became stage director and under his leadership the company's work became more realistic when " the power of carefully orchestrated speech, music, vocal and non-vocal sound bound together scenic elements in one vast scenic illusion" (70).

In his book on sound, Brown suggests sound and music have the ability to "create, reinforce, or counterpoint the atmosphere or mood; reveal character; or contribute to the advancement of the plot." He further maintains that if sound is treated as music, which is known to possess the power to elicit emotions, that it too "can achieve emotional response" (34). By his specific, deliberate and intricate weaving and integrating of sound and music into his prose plays, Ibsen displays a complete understanding of the operative abilities of sound and music and appears to have been aware of the powerful overall effect these aural elements can achieve in the theatre.

CHAPTER 3

Henrik Ibsen

Henrik Ibsen was born in Norway in 1828, and before he was thirty years old he had a solid foundation of skills and knowledge from which he could successfully and masterfully pioneer a new world of playwriting and theatre. Although Ibsen wrote for most of his life he did not experience success early as did some of his contemporaries, but rather gained it by a continued maturation and commitment to his developing craft, often resisting and departing from standard practices of writing and subject matter along the way.

Other than experiencing the effects of financial ruin in childhood as a result of his father's bankruptcy, Henrik's early life in the small town of Skien was not extraordinary. By the age of eighteen he left his hometown and became an apothecary's apprentice in the small village of Grimstad, living in extreme poverty. Ibsen considered painting as a profession, being especially drawn to landscapes, and during this time he "was often to be seen reading or painting on . . . a high crag above the town" (Meyer 46-47). By this time he had begun writing what primarily consisted of poetry, and in preparation for his matriculation to the University in Christiania (Oslo) he was reading extensively, essentially becoming self-educated in literature and developing an incredible attention to detail, both invaluable to him in future writing.

After spending only a year as a student at the University in Christiania during which time he continued to write and also work as a newspaper editor and dramatic reviewer, he embarked on an unexpected journey in 1851 when the famous Norwegian violinist Ole Bull offered him a position at the National Theatre in Bergen. Bull had been

asked by the townspeople of Bergen to head the theatre in an attempt to develop a Norwegian company with a repertoire derived from and speaking to their national culture. Prior to Bull's invitation the two had collaborated artistically for a concert in Christiania to benefit the theatre when Ibsen wrote a choral piece sung to Bull's accompanying musical composition. The Bergen position paid very little, but what Ibsen lacked in finances he was to make up for in the extensive skills and knowledge of the theatre he gained.

The productions of the National Theatre included Norwegian works, poor adaptations of melodrama, farce and comedy, including numerous productions of popular mid-century plays from England, France and Spain. These endeavors resulted in both success and failure with the spectators, yet the company was regularly challenged by the inexperience of its Norwegian actors. Although Ibsen was hired as a dramatic author for the company with the obligation of writing one new work each year, Michael Meyer states that "during the six years he was to spend in Bergen, Ibsen performed practically every task associated with theatrical production except that of acting," including playwriting, directing, designing sets, and that he also "ran the business side and saw to the accounts" (106). The development of his competency in attending to and addressing this range of duties surely contributed to his ability to include thorough and detailed information in his writing, leaving no detail forgotten or unfinished.

While working in Bergen Ibsen toured several foreign theatres in Hamburg, Copenhagen, Berlin and Dresden through the company's effort to equip him with the necessary skills to be an "instructor" at the theatre. This new position as instructor would permit and qualify him to work in nearly every area of the theatre including instructing

the actors, as well as give him "responsibility for everything pertaining to the furnishing, equipment and decoration of the stage," including costuming the actors (Meyer 110). As Norway struggled to find its own cultural and artistic identity, this tour in 1852 opened his eyes to the more advanced stagecraft and sophistication of prominent theatre companies in Europe, and as Toril Moi notes in *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism*, "for the first time in his life Ibsen saw Shakespeare performed" (56).

While in Bergen Ibsen's writing continued to develop as he experimented in dramatic structure and form—prompted by his acquisition of Herman Hettner's book *Das moderne Drama*—eventually resulting in his first play written entirely in prose, *Lady Inger of Østraat,* published in 1855. His work as dramatist, director, designer, stage manager and accountant at the National Theatre in Bergen prepared him for his next theatre position and gave him the experience and vision that would allow him in his future writing to incorporate control over detailed aspects of his work. By the end of seven challenging years in Bergen, Ibsen had been involved in the mounting and staging of nearly 150 productions and had written several plays.

As Ibsen moved on to his next position as artistic director of the Norwegian Theatre in Christiania, the latest attempt to form a reputable national theatre, he discovered the difficulties of operating a theatre committed to performing the works of Norwegian playwrights. The lack of quality material available to produce, in addition to the public's desire for the standard Danish fare, proved a challenging venture. However, here Ibsen experienced his first marked success as a writer when, soon after his arrival, his play *The Vikings at Helgeland* was performed at the Norwegian Theatre in 1857. Although Ibsen attempted to include serious drama in the theatre seasons, the public's

taste and necessary attendance financially demanded “a virtually unbroken diet of comedy, preferably with music and dancing” (Meyer 193). During Ibsen’s time at the Norwegian Theatre, playwright Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson wrote of Ibsen that “he must find a new and different road before I can have any faith in him” (Meyer 168). When the theatre closed in 1862, Ibsen was left jobless. Two years later a self-exiled Ibsen settled in Rome, making his home outside of Norway for the next twenty-seven years.

This departure from Norway ultimately allowed Ibsen to develop fully as a dramatist. No longer under the confines of the social and cultural mores of his motherland, and no longer in direct association with his fellow Norwegians who were viewed with contempt by the neighboring Scandinavian countries, he experienced life other than that which he had known. Ibsen contemporary and biographer Edmund Gosse suggests that surrounded by the art, music, architecture and beauty of Rome, “all the tense chords of Ibsen’s nature were loosened,” and the artist was freed (92). Ibsen established himself with the success of *Brand* (1866), written in verse and set in Norway. The success of the dramatic poem *Brand*, followed a year later by the publication of the verse drama *Peer Gynt*, secured Ibsen financially at nearly forty years of age, and for the first time he was able to support himself and his family solely as a writer.

When Ibsen decided to write a musical adaptation of *Peer Gynt* several years following its initial publication, he wrote to the young Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg in 1874 and asked him to compose the music necessary to realize his vision. This letter clearly illustrates Ibsen’s comprehensive understanding of the role music would play in achieving his artistic goal, with conceptual plans specifying where and how it would be utilized. Ibsen pens his desire for moments “to be treated as melodrama or

recitative," while others would include dance and appropriate music as means of communication. His letter describes bells ringing, psalm singing and musical accompaniment and serves as a prelude to his stage directions contained in his prose plays just a few years later (*Letters and Speeches* 145-147).

As Ibsen's writing shifted from historical and mythical subjects and settings to the lives of ordinary contemporary people, he increasingly strove to achieve visual and aural illusionism demonstrated by his stage directions including realistic stage, sound and music details. Consequently, with Ibsen all sound and music operated logically and realistically within a plot's natural progression, supporting the accompanying pictorial scene.

In addition, Ibsen discarded many of the standard practices of theatre, such as soliloquies and asides, as well as any non-realistic conventions such as all illogical presence of music. He carefully detailed all aspects of his writing and included information and language that described the physical environment, revealed aspects of character complexity, and provided exposition or advanced plot. His stage directions included specific sound and music instructions using them in new and dramatic, yet realistically integrated ways. If "seeing" leads to believing, with Henrik Ibsen "hearing" leads to understanding.

CHAPTER 4

Early Prose Years

Poetry to Prose

Ibsen's plays until 1869 had been written both in verse and prose, at times using the two styles within a single play. When he wrote *The League of Youth* entirely in prose and published it in 1869, it began a thirty year period during which Ibsen wrote all his plays in prose. Although his movement toward prose was already in motion as early as 1852 in *Saint John's Night*, criticism by the most prominent reviewer in Scandinavia claiming that *Peer Gynt* was not poetry may have angered Ibsen so much that he rebelled against accepted conventions of writing. Michael Meyer recounts that, responding to the unfavorable critique, Ibsen wrote to his friend Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson: "If there is to be war, so be it! If I am not a poet, I have nothing to lose. I shall try being a photographer. I shall deal with the present time up there, person by person." Thus, he proceeded to spend the next two years writing *The League of Youth* and ventured on an extraordinary prose writing path (287).

Ibsen's aforementioned commitment to "being a photographer" materialized in *The League of Youth* when he used the colloquial Norwegian dialect in the fictional village depicted, written "in prose" and dealing "with forces and frictions in modern life" (*Letters and Speeches* 75). Striving to create an environment which was realistic, while living in Dresden he read newspapers from Norway to stay informed, all the while considering the work's eventual performance on the stage. Insistence upon creating and including realistic environmental details combined with the knowledge that those conditions could be produced on the stage provided Ibsen with a rich palette of

expression and a unique vantage point as a playwright.

Coinciding with Ibsen's commitment to prose playwriting was the growing literary realism movement, whose tenet of depicting life as it appears in some ways supported his new task. Prominent nineteenth-century realist author and occasional reviewer of Ibsen's published works, Henry James, claimed in "The Art of Fiction" that to write well one must "possess the sense of reality," but he admits that the challenge lies in accessing that necessary "sense quality" (10). Ibsen strove to create the sensory details of reality, illustrated by his prose dialogue, pictorially realistic stage directions, and masterfully augmented realistic aural environments including sound and music.

In 1873, one year prior to his letter soliciting Grieg's compositional skills for the musical adaptation of *Peer Gynt*, Ibsen's prose play *Emperor and Galilean* was published and prompted reviewer Edmund Gosse to lament Ibsen not writing in verse. In explanation, Ibsen informed Gosse of his intention to create an illusion of reality, contending that using verse would have prevented that achievement and claiming that his characters were human beings and as such he would not allow them to speak "the language of the Gods" (*Letters and Speeches* 145). The illusion of reality that Ibsen strove to produce would only be possible through his unmatched ability to unite realistic prose with realistic visual and aural components.

A Doll House

When Ibsen's second realistic prose play, *A Doll House*, was published in 1879, he had been writing exclusively in prose for more than ten years and creating illusionistic environments for his dramas. In *A Doll House*, Ibsen's landmark play exposing lies in a marriage, sound and music are critical components in creating the domestic environment

the play demands while also communicating infinite levels of information to spectators. The aural fabric of *A Doll House* is rich in many ways.

Ibsen imparts an extraordinary amount of information in act 1 of the play through numerous instances of sound and music, using sound created by the human body and sound created external to the human body. He sets into motion the critical aural pieces active in the play, beginning with the visual presence of an onstage piano immediately introducing a musical element to the drama. Although the stage directions place the piano physically in a prominent position—as in several of Ibsen's prose plays—the instrument does not sound until late in act 2. However, the mere presence of the piano along with the rest of the home furnishings announces its importance and communicates crucial information about the Helmer family: they appear to be of the bourgeois class, wealthy enough to own a piano and aware of the importance of the cultural significance of the instrument, music and the arts.

Richard Leppert highlights the significance of pianos for Victorian bourgeois families in his book *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation, and the History of the Body* by equating its importance to that of the dining room table. Possessing this musical instrument signified "family position and accomplishment" and by being placed in a "semipublic" location in the home where both guests and family gathered, it provided a link between the public and private worlds (153). Ibsen firmly grounds his play with the central placement of the piano, a musical instrument often seen in the homes of many of his theatre spectators.

Within moments after the play begins and preceding any dialogue "a bell rings in the entryway" sonically followed by the percussive sound of the "door being unlocked"

(125), both suggesting the separation of worlds existing inside and outside the household as well as the portals between those worlds: doors and doorways. Additionally we learn through the doorbell and character entrances into the household made possible by the maid, that Nora, the woman of the household, does not have a key to her home. She must ring a bell to enter, similar to an outsider or visiting guest. The musical sound of the bell followed by the mechanical sound of the lock displays formality, procedure and etiquette while simultaneously delineating power. Though powerless to enter her own household without assistance, Nora enjoys the services of a maid and is able to summon her upon command.

Ibsen specifies that Nora is the first to enter the room, "humming happily to herself" as she does so and continuing to hum expressively while she gets settled and attends to the gifts she has purchased (125). Nora's behavior illustrates Peter Ostwald's suggestion in his book *The Semiotics of Human Sound* that humming "may be used to express pleasurable emotions related to mother-love and satiation" (71). In fact, Nora's first spoken line references her children and her desire to hide certain items from them, revealing the relationship between mother and child and foreshadowing the upcoming game playing. In subsequent interactions with Torvald, Mrs. Linde and Dr. Rank, Nora hums happily and playfully on five occasions in the act, and in each the behavior is directly associated with money and what appears to be her sense of having an adequate amount of it. Possibly this audible vocalization is an expression of her feelings of security and safety related to money. Nora's humming additionally connects to and reinforces the musical potential of the piano and is in concert with the doorbell, providing a countermelody to its repeated tone.

Establishing early a recognizable and frequent aural element and in foreshadowing preparation for the climactic final moments of the play, Ibsen skillfully employs the four onstage doors of the household as communicants by giving them a voice in each specified shutting. Nora commences this percussive chorus of doors as she "shuts the door" after paying the delivery boy in the opening scene (130). Ibsen calls for seven additional instances of a door being shut in the first act alone, each closure contributing its distinct timbre to the theatre score and reinforcing the separation between the private and public worlds and environments of the drama. Nora demonstrates her awareness of this compartmentalization as she shuts a door four times throughout the act, while Rank, the maid Anne-Marie and Torvald each do so once in participatory illustration of awareness of space and privacy.

The formal and civilized signal of the doorbell announces guests at the household, sounding two more times in the first act after Nora's initial entrance. Mrs. Linde and Krogstad announce their arrivals at the Helmer residence through the nonthreatening and nonintrusive ringing of the bell.

Throughout the act Nora's demonstrative behavior includes "clapping her hands" periodically in displays of excitement (142), like a young child, and occasions of vocal expressions such as "a cry" (127), "a quiet laugh" (132), and "a strangled cry" (144). The prevalence of these physical and nonverbal vocal expressions contributes to and assists in revealing aspects of Nora's character and magnifies her frequent attempts at conforming behaviorally to please Torvald, displaying basic infantile expressions. In addition she plays with the children, accompanied by her own laughing and shouting, using nonverbal emotionally communicative sound. With the exception of Torvald

laughing once early in the play (128), no characters besides Nora and the children display nonverbal vocalization in this act. Thus, Ibsen magnifies Nora's vulnerability and childlike behavior early in the play and provides juxtaposition to her controlled strength at the play's end.

In sharp contrast to the sound of the nonthreatening doorbell, a percussive knock at the door announces Krogstad's return and contributes aurally to the game Nora and her children play (143). The unexpected rapping sound of a knock, rather than the doorbell that has been established to announce the arrival of a guest, suggests Krogstad's attempt at secrecy by only allowing the immediate room to hear. Furthermore, knocking is a more primitive and less formal manner of announcing one's presence, the latter perhaps demonstrating Krogstad's excessive familiarity of which Torvald will eventually accuse him. The sound is answered by Nora's "strangled cry" of surprise and fright before she can speak (144).

Ibsen introduces a final critical aural texture near the end of the act: the sound of paper. Pieces of paper play an important part in the plot of *A Doll House,* from holding the binding information of Nora's monetary contractual agreement to a letter containing Krogstad's termination of employment to Rank's announcement of his imminent death, and Ibsen skillfully incorporates the sounds of these serious matters into the aural fabric of the play by the vehicle of paper.

When Krogstad confronts Nora with her act of forgery, the threat is seen and heard by his "taking out a paper" (147); thus this sound of paper joins the theatre score of the play. Ibsen personifies the paper when it voices its crisp warning to Nora of the impending danger that lies ahead. A short time later, in two separate instances, Torvald's

papers sound as he searches among them and gathers them together, contributing to the development of this recently introduced aural quality.

The culminating moments of the act contain what Ibsen describes as the sounds of closing doors, the final closure securing Nora's position alone onstage in a confused and shaken emotional state, symbolically trapped in her own home. Act 1 contains no less than thirty-five moments in which the theatre score actively supports the unfolding plot, the development of characters, and the establishment of locale.

Echoing the opening of the play, act 2 begins silently with the familiar sight of the still silent piano. Following an absence of sound and music for much of the act, Ibsen describes Torvald "searching among his papers" for Krogstad's termination letter (161). The sound of the paper, created by Torvald, would contribute to the aural effect. The rustling of the papers again effectively acts as a warning to Nora, audibly underscoring the power they possess by virtue of the contents they hold. Moments after Torvald sends Krogstad's letter, he leaves Nora alone in mounting panic, her sense of imprisonment audibly accented when he closes the door (162).

The musical doorbell interrupts Nora's brief isolation, offering an instant of reprieve from her dire situation, and reconnects her awareness to the outside world. In Rank's subsequent visit she hums one final time while flirting with him in what may possibly be a manipulative seduction to ask for a loan, further reinforcing the correlation between Nora, money and humming (164). Moments later Rank confesses his love for Nora, leaving her unable to ask for his financial assistance. The absence of humming after this moment suggests that Nora has reached a turning point emotionally, feeling neither happy nor playful in the midst of this crisis, as her financial worry heightens and

the possibility of her forgery being exposed looms ahead.

Doors again provide privacy and the separation of worlds in the Helmer residence as well as suggesting a means of control when Nora bolts Torvald's study door (167), locking him in without his knowledge: the sound heightens the visual action. Next, the maid secures Nora and Krogstad's privacy by shutting the door after allowing him into the home (167), her action contributing to the door sounds. Immediately upon Krogstad's exit, Ibsen describes the sound of a letter dropping into the mailbox, followed by Krogstad's retreating footsteps descending a stairway and Nora's reactionary cry (170). These sounds attached to the visual actions clearly communicate the advancement of plot: Nora's secret will be revealed to Torvald.

Offering a glimpse into the future when he is left powerless to her actions, Torvald's knock from within the study confirms that Nora has confined him and he is unable to escape, aurally supporting and enhancing the situation. Her responding "cry of fear" sounds involuntarily (172), representing her conditioned behavior within their marital relationship, and she follows it with a lie about her reason for bolting the door. This juncture near the end of act 2 is followed by the musical climax of the play: the *tarantella* rehearsal.

The *tarantella* is the crown jewel of the sound and music theatre score of *A Doll House*, and Nora symbolically wears that crown when she embodies the dance. Ibsen engages in a series of false starts in a realistic depiction of the impromptu rehearsal, begun when Nora plays the first notes of the composition on the piano to distract Torvald from checking the mailbox (173). The first notes heard from the piano successfully stop Torvald and pull him toward Nora, illustrating in that moment the operative power of

music and Ibsen's awareness of it.

While the *tarantella* reveals traits and backgrounds of the trio of characters involved in the scene and heightens the situation, Ibsen integrates this highly theatrical musical dance in a convention-breaking manner. In her book *Re-Dressing the Canon: Essays on Theater and Gender,* Alisa Solomon suggests that not only is Nora's dance a physical expression of her emotional state, it acknowledges "that old staginess" of melodrama and "is an *appropriation* of it" (55). Ibsen skillfully and cleverly borrows from the melodramatic model and comments on it, but embeds the material visually and aurally within this realistic prose play. Additionally, all three characters operatively drive the scene and participate in the rehearsal, securing its diegetic presence.

In *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation, and the History of the Body,* Leppert claims the piano in the nineteenth century was regarded as a "female instrument," meaning that it was generally thought to be a woman's instrument and mostly played by women, despite the vast majority of prominent composers being male and the many male pianists of the time (134). In addition to revealing that Nora plays piano, Ibsen soon reveals that both Torvald and Rank play proficiently, adding a "feminine" aspect to the male figures and by equipping them with this artistic ability creating less stereotypical and more realistic characters. The ability to play piano informs us about the backgrounds of all three characters, suggesting that in their upbringing each had the privilege, opportunity and patience necessary to develop this skill.

Ibsen chose a *tarantella* for this scene and it efficiently operates on many levels. The lively dance with origins in Italy was initially performed to ward off the ill effects of a tarantula bite, and by the nineteenth century many famous composers were writing

music specifically for these dances which had become popular social activities. Having lived in Italy for several years before writing *A Doll House,* Ibsen would have been well aware of the significant social and cultural history of the dance. Likewise, the character Nora would have known this dance from her time living in Italy with Torvald made possible as a direct result of her committed forgery.

The *tarantella* provides a purely physical expression of the growing panic and fear manifesting itself in Nora resulting from her situation. Possibly she dances to attempt to rid herself of the ill effects felt from the recent metaphorical bites of the three male characters: Krogstad's exposing letter, Rank's unwelcomed romantic advance, and Torvald's dismissal of Krogstad.

Further informing the scene, Ibsen has Nora play the tambourine throughout the dance, and the percussive sounds of this ancient instrument contribute to the primal nature of the frenzied scene and to the continuing theatre score he is composing (173-174). The *tarantella* effectively symbolizes Nora's emotional state at this point in the play, and it provides a means by which both Torvald and Rank engage her nonverbally.

By playing the piano the men essentially "play" Nora by generating a physical and emotional response from her as a result of their actions. The intimacy of making music together allows Rank to metaphorically make love to Nora through the instrument, despite her rejection of him earlier. Musically, a *tarantella* typically becomes faster in tempo as the piece progresses, and Ibsen has used this musical construction brilliantly as the intensity and passion of the scene mounts with Nora dancing wildly and uncontrollably, driven by Rank's playing and Torvald's shouted orders. Mrs. Linde's interruption prevents the completion and full climax of this musical act, achieved by

Rank suddenly stopping playing and Nora "throwing away the tambourine" (174). Nora's action possibly suggests desire to regain self-control while the percussive crash of the small drum signals the end of this aural orgy. A noticeable silence accompanies the two or three minutes until the act ends.

The final act begins with soft dance music emanating from the apartment above, momentarily joined by what Ibsen describes as quiet footsteps heard from the hall stairway (176). The soft footsteps, while adding to the aural texture and complexity of the scene, allude to secrecy and a hesitancy to invade a private space. The continuing offstage music upon Krogstad's entrance effectively accompanies the proceeding intimate romantic conversation between him and Mrs. Linde, harkening back to a music device of melodrama but appropriated through its diegetic presence.

The music segues into a reprise of the *tarantella* music heard in act 2, revealing to the audience that Nora is now performing her dance at the upstairs party. Shortly following the conclusion of the *tarantella* "a key turns in the lock" of the front door (180): the accompanying sound announces the return of the Helmers. Thus begins a series of audible accents moving toward the play's dramatic conclusion.

Act 3 contains several instances of the sound of doors, percussively accentuating and reinforcing the isolated environment of the household and its seclusion from the outside world. When Mrs. Linde leaves shortly after the Helmers return home, Torvald closes the door after her in an acoustic notification that Nora is alone with her husband (182). Moments later a knock is heard at the outside door (183), and while functioning as a theatrical device to announce Rank's visit, it directly connects to Krogstad's knock in act 1. The knock on both occasions eventually leads to bad news: Krogstad's threat to

Nora, and Rank's final visit marking his impending death.

The percussive jingling of Torvald's keys further warns Nora of her secret being discovered as he goes to the mailbox (185). The shuffling mail symbolically voices its contents: Rank's death card and Krogstad's exposing letter. When Torvald shuts the door to his office (186), the sound of the closing door reinforces the seriousness of the situation and informs Nora that the time has arrived for her secret to be revealed.

Stage directions specify that Torvald "throws open his door and stands with an open letter in his hand" (187), actions which likely would create accompanying sounds of the door latch mechanism and handled paper. These sounds enhance the compartmentalized environment and reinforce the prominence of paper and its contents which reveal Nora's forgery. Nora screams in response (187), aurally displaying her fractured emotional state, followed by the sound of Torvald locking the hallway door, audibly amplifying her imprisonment.

The doorbell breaks a short silence in the theatre score (188), and although familiar from the beginning of the play, it does not announce an outside visitor. Instead the maid Anne-Marie enters holding a letter which Torvald snatches. He immediately shuts the door after her exit, securing privacy and his containment of Nora. Moments later he "rips open the letter" and "cries out joyfully" in an aurally wordless advancement of plot informing the transpiring onstage visual element (188). In a reconfirming gesture he looks at the note returned by Krogstad and then "tears the note and both letters to pieces," disposing of them in the stove where they burn (189), sounds which essentially signify the destruction of the power of the paper.

For the extended dialogue between Nora and Torvald which follows, Ibsen

includes no stage directions pertaining to sound; the underlying silence heightens the seriousness of the realistic situation he has created. The final moment of the play is accented aurally upon Nora's unexpected exit, when "from below, the sound of a door slamming shut" is heard (196), a marked punctuation making such a powerful impact that Bernard Shaw referred to it as being "more momentous than the canon of Waterloo or Sedan" (208). In the first production of *A Doll House* in 1879 in Copenhagen, reviewer C. Thrane remarked in *Illustreret Tidende* on the moment, confirming that the sound of the "theatrical effect" was "Nora leaving the house" (n. pag.), a testament to Ibsen's adeptness at using sound to enhance the moment as well as communicating and advancing plot.

In *A Doll House* Ibsen integrated the aural elements of sound and music as a part of the play's objective reality with much of the corresponding theatre score reminiscent of melodrama. However, the theatre score of *A Doll House* which includes the sounds of doorbells, knocks, rustling papers, closing doors and dance rehearsal is entirely diegetic as a result of Ibsen's commitment to visual and aural illusionism. Furthermore, the suspense leading to *A Doll House*'s unexpected denouement was not accompanied by supporting music typical of that used in melodrama, but instead introduced a noticeable and unexpected silence.

CHAPTER 5

Middle Prose Years

Silence

The juxtaposition of extended silence in the final scene of *A Doll House* against the aurally textured preceding action effectively mirrors the rising and dying and the presence and absence of sound in everyday life, a critical depiction in achieving illusionism. But does this blanket of silence supporting the conversation between Nora and Torvald provide an aural preview for its more frequent use in future Ibsen plays? Though Ibsen includes important and necessary sound and music in the middle prose plays *The Lady from the Sea* (1888) and *Hedda Gabler* (1890), published a decade after *A Doll House,* in contrast to the earlier play each play relies heavily on an underlying silence accented by strategically positioned realistic aural events.

The Lady from the Sea

In *The Lady from the Sea*, Ellida is emotionally torn when her former lover visits unexpectedly and reminds her of the commitment she made with him several years earlier. Choosing to stay with her older husband Wangel and her two stepdaughters, Ellida finds peace by freely accepting her circumstances.

Four of the five acts of *The Lady from the Sea* are set outdoors, differing greatly from the exclusively indoor setting of *A Doll House.* Hence the mundane sounds accompanying the activities of a partitioned and compartmentalized household are absent. Ibsen specifies only two aural moments in the stage directions of act 1, set on a veranda. Each event serves a clear purpose. The first occurs when Bolette exits into the house and closes the door behind her (602), the single occasion when Ibsen calls attention

aurally to the physical separation between the opposing living spaces of the play's environment. On a symbolic scale the sound of this door foretells the many binaries and oppositions active in play: indoors/outdoors; male/female; teacher/student; land/sea; married/single; healthy/sick; and old/young.

Much of the plot of *The Lady from the Sea* surrounds Ellida's attraction to and gravitation toward the sea, and Ibsen's dialogue, long before she enters, indicates that she has been swimming in the fjord. When she does appear with wet hair, this visually establishes her connection to the water. The long underlying silence which accompanies act 1 serves a dual purpose: it highlights the peace and tranquility of the outdoor setting of the veranda, and it provides a blank aural canvas free of any competition for the exposition and initial character development of the play.

Ellida "pouring herself a glass of water" is the only other sound specified in act 1 (613), an action that breaks the tension of the story Lyngstrand is telling her about a man she believes to be her former lover. I suggest the pouring water is symbolic as it simulates sounds of swimming, waves crashing, boats on the sea and steamers on the fjord, as well as the mythical mermaid discussed in the play. Additionally the sound's connection to the image of Ellida pouring water suggests the title of the play. If Ellida's daily swims are in fact an attempt to cleanse herself externally of her past and achieve a purified state (albeit in stagnant fjord water) as translator Rolf Fjelde posits in *Henrik Ibsen: The Complete Major Prose Plays* (589), I suggest drinking water at this moment illustrates an attempt at purification attained by internal means.

Music aurally begins act 2 set in a park on a wooded hill as "the sound of four-part singing drifts faintly up the hill" (616). This music accompanies and enhances in a

realistically integrated manner the developing plot and the action of tourists and couples strolling in the evening. By "four-part singing" I think Ibsen means a quartet comprised of two men and two women, because he would be musically representing, embodying and announcing the theme and plot of the play which pertains to relationships, marriage, and the desire for harmony within the institution. The quartet metaphorically heralds the subject matter and by way of a musical ensemble imitates the couples in the play: Ellida and Wangel, Ellida and the Stranger, Bolleta and Arnholm, and Lyngstrand and Hilda. Although Ibsen does not specify an end to the music, it might drift in and out audibly as the action unfolds, realistically representing a strolling quartet. No other sound is specified until Wangel's vocal emotional reaction of "an involuntary cry" to Ellida's confession about their dead child's eyes (632). Wangel's audible reaction reveals his shock and emotionally vulnerable state which has grown out of concern for Ellida's well-being and it forecasts his inability to take control of dangerous or escalating situations.

In yet a third outdoor setting, the mostly silent act 3 both illuminates the peacefulness and tranquility of the environment and without changing provides the blank aural palette for the more suspenseful moments of the act. Bolette sighs once in audible resignation to her perceived obligations and circumstances (638). The few additional directions of the act are Ellida's vocal cries, illustrating her extreme emotionally fraught state and her growing anxiety and agitation surrounding the return of her former lover. Reflecting act 1, this act is bookended by silence.

As in the Helmer residence in *A Doll House,* the interior of Wangel's conservatory also boasts a piano visible at the beginning of act 4. The instrument serves to reinforce the societal position and class of the family in addition to revealing the

importance bourgeois society placed on material possessions. Richard Leppert contends that the role of the piano in the nineteenth century was first and foremost to be seen—a visual object—and "second, it was to be heard," adding that ownership of the musical instrument had no bearing on whether it was actually played or not (155). In *The Lady from the Sea* this claim is fully supported by the visible piano which never sounds, and in the Wangel home the piano lives off to the side rather than in a central position. Four characters onstage engage in various artistic activities such as embroidering and painting, yet no one plays the piano. It is quite plausible that with the daughters' biological mother gone and the lack of a strong mother/daughter relationship established between Ellida and the girls, in addition to Wangel's inattention to his daughters, no one insisted upon them receiving lessons.

Other than the visual of the piano, the remaining aural moments in act 4 occur when Bolette again sighs audibly in a resigned emotional expression (655). Repeating her earlier sigh, the sound is attached to her feelings of obligation to her father and lack of freedom of choice in life. Moments later Wangel's footsteps sound on the stairway (655), as if in answer to Bolette's sigh concerning him.

The culminating act of the play, set in a garden outside the house, contains nearly as many instances of sound and music as the prior four acts combined, beginning with the appearance of Ballested carrying a French horn as he makes his way to the steamer's final sailing of the year. This brief appearance forecasts the upcoming celebratory music accompanying the vessel's departure as well as contributes to what has been revealed about his multifaceted character: he's a painter, barber, dance instructor, music director, and French horn player. Additionally Ballested's stutter, "accli-acclimatize" (671),

percussively accents the theatre score while reinforcing a theme of the play: man must adapt and adjust to the changes of life to evolve.

Midway through the act Lyngstrand "laughs quietly" in a vocal emotional expression indicating his happiness at being with Hilda and delight at seeing everyone "in couples . . . two by two" (680). This further reinforces the contribution of the mixed vocal quartet heard earlier in the play. Lyngstrand laughing after having shown difficulty breathing throughout the play, a result of having had pneumonia, suggests improved health as his lungs physically generate laughter. Additionally his vocal expression provides a gentle bridge to extended silence which pervades until the final series of aural events begins the climactic action of the play.

Announcing the nearing departure of the steamer and alerting Ellida to her approaching inevitable encounter with the Stranger, "the music of a brass band is heard far off" (683). This jubilant and celebratory band music offers a counterpoint to the heightened emotional and dangerous situation which arises with the presence of her former lover, the Stranger. The accompanying band music, unlike the music of melodrama which would accompany this scenario, provides aural juxtaposition to enhance the visual action when Ellida physically protects her husband—a role reversal subverting the typical male protecting female of the melodrama genre.

The "ship's bell sounds" during this climactic exchange and contributes to the suspense of the action, acting as an aural hourglass (683). At the height of the intense scene Ellida percussively strikes her hands together (685). On this occasion the action is not indicative of childlike emotionally expressive excitement as Nora displayed in *A Doll House* but rather an exclamatory realization and understanding of her relationship with

Wangel. Moments later, signaling Ellida's final chance to choose her future, "the ship's bell rings again" (686).

Ibsen does not indicate whether the band has played continuously under the action of the act, but realistically the ensemble would have taken a break from playing at some point. The use of silence at this point provides juxtaposition to the aural excitement of the preceding scene and allows the music to recommence at the play's end. The silence following the Stranger's exit assists in restoring the sense of peace and tranquility established earlier in the play and highlights the renewed relationship of Ellida and Wangel. Ibsen's stage directions ending the play specify a visible but unheard steamer traveling the fjord while the band music accompanies its departure. Thus the music moves forward in and through time as the vessel moves physically through the waters.

Hedda Gabler

Similar to *The Lady from the Sea* published two years prior, *Hedda Gabler* continues with an underlying silence throughout the play. In this drama Ibsen makes great use of what in modern theatre has been called "the horizon of sound," that point where sound disappears into "nothing," or silence (Brown 142). The silence of the household setting of *Hedda Gabler* contrasts significantly to the busy aural tapestry of *A Doll House*, with its mostly dark indoor environment, and to the silence of *The Lady from the Sea* with its light summer exteriors. In *The Semiotics of Human Sound* Peter Ostwald writes that "most investigators feel that silence symbolizes death" (56). Ibsen powerfully reinforces this symbol with his skillful employment of the absence of sound in *Hedda Gabler*. This prominent silence symbolizes the house—a house of death.

In *Hedda Gabler,* the newly married protagonist and title character violently

revolts against what she perceives will be a dull and confining life with a man she doesn't love while being blackmailed by another. Hedda violently commits suicide in the final moments of the play.

Reminiscent of *A Doll House*, in the first act of *Hedda Gabler* a piano is present in the Tesman residence, although it is positioned to the side and by the second act is removed from sight. Miss Tesman draws attention to the piano as she places a bouquet of flowers upon it at the beginning of the play, uniting two visual things of beauty: the piano and the flowers. Also echoing *A Doll House,* George hums early in the play in addition to "singing to himself" (697). I suggest that George's humming is an expression of his feelings of well-being and happiness on account of being in his new home with his wife, the yet unseen Hedda Gabler. George's humming occurs only in the first scene of the play and prior to Hedda's appearance. The cessation of humming may indicate his awareness of Hedda's mounting dissatisfaction with him and her environment, which in turn affects his own sense of contentment. Thus it operates similar to Nora's humming behavior and signals a strong emotional shift.

Sounds are also made by handling paper, letters and manuscripts that contribute significantly to the theatre score of the play. In addition, act 1 contains a card being withdrawn from its envelope, a slip of paper being passed from one person to another, and unwrapping a gift: whispers introducing this important aural element. Particularly striking is the physical passage of George's letter to Løvborg between George, Hedda and the maid Berta that effectively invites the important manuscript into the play in the second act (716).

Ibsen includes in his stage directions for the first three acts seventeen instances of

laughter, the majority voiced by Hedda and Brack in what appears to be calculated nonverbal vocal expression and posturing used strategically throughout their exchanges. Additional moments involving George and Miss Tesman imply laughter resulting from nervousness or situational discomfort. No moment clearly signifies laughter resulting from a character's sense of well-being or from a humorous situation. In his discussion of laughter categorized as "repetitive . . . chains of sound" Peter Ostwald states that psychiatrists examine and analyze the "conditions that precede emotional sound-making," such as "tension build-ups before laughter" (246-247). I suggest that the uncomfortable tension present in the Tesman household leads to laughter primarily fueled by uneasiness, fear and anger.

Act 2 begins with the realistic, harsh, mechanical sound of Hedda "loading a revolver" (722). Moments after loading the revolver she fires it, causing an extremely loud and violent sound that displays her unpredictability. The sound is unexpected in any household and Hedda's behavior implies that she intended to startle Brack, a reaction she achieves while also startling spectators in the theatre. Coinciding with the sound of the revolver is the visual absence of the piano. This partnership of the noticeably absent piano and the very present revolver dramatically and cleverly foreshadows the final aural events of the play.

Significant aural aspects of this act include what Ibsen describes as George turning through the pages of Løvborg's manuscript after it is introduced (727). Sound emanating from the actual pages personifies it, informing the moment in the following act when Hedda calls it a "child" (762). Hedda responds to George turning pages of the manuscript by "drumming on the pane" of the window (733). Ostwald posits that

"clicking with the fingernails" can "transmit fairly complicated messages when the rules about the usage of such signals are known to both sender and receiver" (69). In *Hedda Gabler* the receivers include Hedda, George and performance spectators. This common physical behavior displayed by Hedda solidly supports her verbal insult of George and illustrates, in an auricular nonverbal manner, her dissatisfaction with his writing accomplishments. Ibsen further reinforces her growing discontentment and frustration and indicates Hedda's overall emotional state by her "clapping the album shut" (740) while talking with Løvborg. The sound of the album shutting is loud and abrupt like the shot of a pistol; both sounds are attached to Hedda.

I suggest these sounds Ibsen assigns to the characters of George and Hedda sharply contrast the recently married couple. Humming and the hush of pages turning speak in a gentle legato for George, while clicking fingernails, the clatter of a pistol and the slamming shut of an album answer in harsh staccato for Hedda. The percussive sounds associated with Hedda allude to the beginnings of her fractured emotional and mental state.

Foreshadowing the play's climactic ending, act 3 begins in silence while Hedda, "fully dressed, is asleep on the sofa" (747). She is soon awakened by Berta shutting a door, the percussive closure suggesting an attempt to give Hedda and the visiting Mrs. Elvsted privacy, much like the compartmentalized home environment of *A Doll House*.

Other than the laughter discussed earlier, few additional sound and music stage directions exist in this act, the most notable being that of the bell used to summon Berta (749). Hedda rings the bell as she did in act 2, the only other time the sound is heard. As with Nora and Anne-Marie in *A Doll House,* the bell serves purposes of both

communicating from Hedda to the maid and delineating class and power. No verbal language is required.

Shortly after Berta's summoned entrance, she says, "There's the front doorbell, ma'am" (749), indicating a bell connected to the outside world had been heard. The front doorbell is the only sound in the play which literally connects the enclosed, isolated world within the Tesman residence to that of the outside world. Ibsen illustrates in an aural manner Hedda's attempt to control the situation by having her ignore the doorbell; Hedda's permission is required for Berta to answer the door. The subsequent entrance of George confirms Hedda's power. As Nora had to ring a bell to gain entrance to her own home eleven years earlier, so George must now await Hedda's consent to enter his.

Sounds of the door shutting upon the departures of Brack and Løvborg in act 3 inform us about Hedda's desire for privacy and secrecy. Likewise, the sounds accompanying what Ibsen describes as drawers opening, closing and locking signify concealing and securing items, all augment the theatre score (757). Paper continues to accent aurally throughout with letters handled and opened and the manuscript grows in importance in the plot.

In the final moments of act 3 Hedda destroys the manuscript, "throwing some of the sheets into the fire" and then "throwing in the rest" (762). Ross Brown claims in his book on theatre sound that by 1878 the Meiningen Players had developed the ability to produce realistic sound effects supporting the "flickering of the fire" (71). Ibsen would have been well aware of this in 1890. In the final scene of the act, Hedda throws the manuscript into the burning fire, personifying the book as Thea's "child" (762). Thus, she effectively kills it in a gruesome, violent and aurally enhanced manner.

Hedda burning the manuscript operates in *Hedda Gabler* similarly to Nora dancing the *tarantella* in *A Doll House.* For each of these women the situation is emotionally charged, and Ibsen channels their expression into visually and aurally exciting rituals. The aural aspects of these scenes operate on multiple levels by enhancing the visual spectacles, and additionally Hedda tearing and burning the manuscript is similar to Torvald tearing and burning the contract between Krogstad and Nora. The action destroys the threatening paper and the attached sound aurally announces the event to the characters and the theatre audience.

The play's final act begins in silence. Like the three preceding acts, this silence supports visual action necessary to inform and advance the plot. Ibsen reinforces the gravity of the situation in the Tesman household as well as Hedda's emotional instability as she paces about the dark room and then exits to the offstage adjoining room. Unseen, Hedda strikes "several chords . . . on the piano" (763), breaking the silence. Although visible in act 1, the now unseen piano sounds for the first time in act 4. Hedda does not play a song or what might be heard as any constructed, composed music—she merely plays chords. Although Ibsen does not indicate a specific composition or kinds of chords in the stage directions, I suggest that he intended for the music to be dissonant and disjointed, loud and percussive, alluding to and expressing Hedda's unstable mental state. Short, staccato chords are similar to the aforementioned sounds attached to Hedda.

Emotional vocal and physical expressions sound sporadically throughout the act, including Mrs. Elvsted's "crying out" and "wailing" responses to the news of Løvborg's suicide (769), illustrating her emotionally shaken state. Similar to Ellida striking her hands together to indicate understanding her relationship with Wangel in *The Lady from*

the Sea, George "claps his hands together" telling Hedda that he is starting to understand her (767). When George and Mrs. Elvested begin the task of examining and organizing her notes for Løvborg's manuscript, the sound made by handling the papers announces a threat to Hedda. Thus paper in *Hedda Gabler,* as in *A Doll House,* signifies danger.

In contrast to the defensive laughter of their earlier scene at the beginning of act 2, an extended silence late in act 4 amplifies the serious conversation between Hedda and Brack. To remove herself from this tense and threatening situation she exits to the offstage adjoining room (where she struck chords at the opening of the act). Then, in an expression reflecting her inner turmoil and sense of hopelessness, she "is heard playing a wild dance melody on the piano" (777). Ibsen's stage direction, "wild," specifically describes Hedda's emotional state as she reaches a point of desperation and loses control of her life and immediate surroundings. Ibsen again does not indicate a specific musical composition or dance in his stage directions, but I suggest that, similar to Nora's *tarantella,* he intended for the piano music to be fast and frenzied outwardly expressing Hedda's internal feelings. Moments later Hedda enters briefly and fatefully announces, "From now on I'll be quiet," then disappears behind the curtain separating the rooms. Shortly after "a shot is heard within" (777), and the startling, staccato sound causes all to rise. George immediately thinks she's playing with the pistols just as she had been playing the piano. However, upon opening the curtain he learns the violent sound carried a far greater message, as Hedda now "lies, lifeless, stretched out on the sofa" (778), in silence.

Thus in these two middle prose plays Ibsen continues his illusionistic depiction of bourgeois life, enhanced with realistically integrated sound and music elements.

Noticeably present in the final scene of *A Doll House*, silence occurs more frequently in *The Lady from the Sea* and *Hedda Gabler* and is used to powerfully accompany the emotional conversations between Ellida and Wangel and between Hedda and George. Although paper is not a prominent aspect of *The Lady from the Sea*, it does operate in *Hedda Gabler* similarly to *A Doll House.* Music is heard in all three plays I have discussed, but only in the first play does the music emanate from onstage within the visible world of the drama. Although Ibsen integrates the music in the middle plays diegetically, from within the understood and believable circumstances of the play, the stage directions, dialogue and action of both plays dictate the music sounds from the unseen offstage area.

CHAPTER 6

Late Prose Years

More Silence

In 1896, six years after *Hedda Gabler* was published, Ibsen wrote and published what was to be his second to last play, *John Gabriel Borkman*. In this play, as in the previous plays discussed, Ibsen continued to use sound and music as an integral and necessary enhancement of the plot. However, he used far fewer aural events in *John Gabriel Borkman* than in *Hedda Gabler, The Lady from the Sea,* and particularly *A Doll House* of nearly twenty years earlier. In *John Gabriel Borkman* Ibsen maintains his depiction of everyday life achieved through prose and supported by realistic visual and aural elements. Although his writing contains less melodramatic theatricality than in *A Doll House* with its clearly understood characters from nearly twenty years earlier, Toril Moi suggests the increased difficulty in understanding the characters has led to the prevalence in labeling Ibsen's late work as symbolism. Additionally, she suggests that "if realism simply means the representation of reality," *John Gabriel Borkman* is no less realistic than those before it (320). In this late prose play Ibsen exposes a convicted man's desire for acknowledgement and restoration of his reputation against an aural backdrop composed of abundant silence.

John Gabriel Borkman

In *John Gabriel Borkman* the protagonist and title character attempts to reach an internal resolution with his past banking crime, damaged reputation and destroyed financial life. Realizing the impossibility of returning to his former position in life through the assistance of his unwilling son, Borkman dies knowing he sacrificed love for

career.

Similar to *A Doll House* nearly twenty years earlier, *John Gabriel Borkman* begins with what Ibsen describes as a fire burning in the onstage stove of the living room (943), the familiar sounds of kindling suggesting the warmth and comfort of home. In this play, I suggest Ibsen capitalizes on the home fire's visual and aural message to contrast the actual emotional state of the inhabitants, Borkman and his wife Gunhild, who are neither happy nor at peace. Gunhild sits alone onstage and crochets, a silent type of needlework. Crocheting requires only one needle, while knitting uses two and produces a distinct sound which accompanies the activity.

The silence attached to Gunhild's activity also communicates information about class and craft. In their book *Crochet Then and Now,* Elyse Sommer and Mike Sommer state that crocheting became extremely popular in Europe following the 1840s famine in Ireland as "a leisure time delight" (3). The wealthy engaged in this needlework which produced more decorative and delicate designs than knitting; its product was less functional. Additionally the upper class thought the lower classes should not engage in this activity but stick to knitting. Nearly twenty years earlier in *A Doll House,* Torvald and the practical Mrs. Linde discuss the fact that she knits, and he encourages her to take up embroidery, which he says is much more beautiful. Furthermore, he declares the action of knitting is as unattractive as that which it produces (181). I suggest that Gunhild's crocheting symbolically suggests her desire to weave her way back to the social and financial status she enjoyed before Borkman's crime and imprisonment.

Announcing an arrival in a manner similar to the doorbells in the earlier plays, the "sound of bells on a passing sleigh" interrupts Gunhild's needlework (943). She expects

the bells to herald a visit by her son Erhart but soon discovers through information on a paper card handed to her that it is not he. Ibsen introduces the musical sleigh bells prior to any dialogue in the play by using a common realistic device: a mode of transportation. In doing so he lays the foundation for the significance and symbolic meaning of the bells late in the play. Although Ibsen introduces paper as a messenger of information almost immediately in the play and implements it similarly to Mrs. Elvsted's visiting card announcing her arrival in act 1 of *Hedda Gabler* and to Dr. Rank's cards announcing his imminent death in *A Doll House,* its presence here is dramatically diminished from the earlier plays.

After Gunhild's twin Ella Rentheim enters, the two women "stand in silence" (944). The absence of sound represents and magnifies the eight years leading to this moment during which time the women have not communicated. A short time into the conversation between the two, Gunhild physically expresses her anger by "striking her hands together" (945). This physical action results in audible sound and is similar to an action by George in *Hedda Gabler,* Ellida in *The Lady from the Sea,* and Nora in *A Doll House* where it is associated with pleasure. Here it appears to be instigated by a far different underlying emotion. I suggest the sound created by Gunhild's action violently arises out of her anger.

Following several minutes of dialogue between the two sisters, enhanced by silence in the theatre score, Ella says, "I hear him walking upstairs" (950). Gunhild replies that she too hears footsteps, "From morning to night. Day in and day out" (950). Ibsen, however, makes no reference to the sound prior to this moment. If Ibsen intended for an audience to not hear footsteps, the absence of sound suggests that the sisters alone

hear Borkman. This illustrates the unique intimate emotional connection each shares with the man, as well as their hypersensitivity to him, his actions and movements. Had Ibsen intended for the footsteps to be heard throughout the theatre, he may have omitted the stage directions due to significant advances in stage technology and his assumption that a director would add the sound. If the footsteps are intended to be heard by the audience, as assumed by Brian Johnston in *Text and Supertext in Ibsen's Drama* (239) and David Edgar in *How Plays Work* (45), I suggest the perpetual sounding "beat-beat" of the feet might metaphorically mimic Borkman's pulsing heart. However, I prefer to think Ibsen intended for the footsteps to be unheard by the audience.

Music is discussed later in act 1 when the sisters speak of Borkman's love of music, and thus begins a powerful symbolic musical motif in the play. Gunhild states that the piano Ella sent is upstairs in the salon with Borkman and that young Frida, the daughter of Borkman's former clerk Foldal, regularly plays for him (953). This information reveals the characters of Borkman and Frida before either is seen. As in *A Doll House,* music plays an important role in *John Gabriel Borkman* but Ibsen incorporates it quite differently. In *A Doll House* a piano is seen but no dialogue pertaining to music or the piano occurs until act 2, while in *John Gabriel Borkman* the piano is at first absent visually yet discussed in dialogue. This late prose play also differs from *Hedda Gabler* where the piano is first seen in act 1 and at the beginning of act 2 has been removed from the same room; its noticeable absence heightens its importance.

In *John Gabriel Borkman,* extended silence of several minutes following the discussion of the piano and music is interrupted by Gunhild's "hard laugh," a defiant and derisive vocal communication directed toward her sister and reflecting the animosity she

feels. Moments later "a brisk knock on the hall door" is heard (959). The knock is representative of the demeanor of its lively producer, the vivacious Mrs. Wilton. During Mrs. Wilton's short visit she laughs three times lightheartedly and good naturedly in sharp contrast to Gunhild's laugh. She percussively accents the end of her visit audibly by shutting the door after herself (963).

Within a few minutes piano "music is heard overhead" (965), audibly bringing to life the music motif. Ibsen specifically calls for *Danse Macabre*, a popular musical piece at that time composed by Camille Saint-Saens in 1874. According to *The Oxford Companion to Music*, it is "based on a poem . . . in which Death the Fiddler summons skeletons from their graves at midnight to dance" (Latham 342). Audiences would have been familiar with the symphonic composition which the contemporary piano virtuoso Franz Liszt had transcribed for piano solo. Additionally, depictions of death as a fiddler were popular in nineteenth-century art (Latham 341). By integrating this popular composition into the play, Ibsen musically supports the action where a love triangle of now, elderly people, is revisited and he aurally foreshadows the end when Borkman leaves his house late at night in the final act.

The piano music, played by Frida according to dialogue, emanates from the upper floor and accompanies the remainder of the act. The technical difficulty of the piano solo reveals character by demonstrating the advanced musicianship of the unseen Frida. Like the scene between Mrs. Linde and Krogstad in the final act of *A Doll House* accompanied by music from the offstage party, Ibsen enhances the culmination of act 1 of *John Gabriel Borkman* by this diegetic integration of music. As the act ends with Gunhild "moaning," an expressive emotional vocalization, alone onstage, "music swells in sound

from overhead" joining in dramatic aural union (966).

Act 2 begins moments later in the upstairs salon as Borkman listens to Frida play the final strains of the *Danse Macabre,* followed by silence as indicated by Ibsen (967). In an earlier draft of the play, the first music of the play was heard at the beginning of the second act as Borkman played a Beethoven composition on the violin and was accompanied on the piano by Frida (*Oxford Ibsen* 8: 333). In *Danse Macabre,* Death plays a violin; hence Ibsen had Borkman portray Death in this earlier draft. I suggest that Ibsen's decision to have Borkman abstain from the pleasurable act of making music suggests a self-imposed punishment and self-deprivation by Borkman. Ibsen describes Frida "putting her music away in a folder" (968), an action which would cause a soft rustling sound. The paper operates dually as a carrier of information in the form of musical notation dictating Frida's playing, and additionally it is capable of making its own sound. Frida exits quietly through a small rear door generally used by servants, leaving Borkman alone in silence.

After a brief silence accompanying and enhancing Borkman's "restless" movement about the salon, Ibsen describes a knock on the main door. Borkman fails to respond and the knock is heard "again, louder" (970). These knocks announce the entrance of Borkman's former business associate Foldal, and moments later in a physical gesture repeating that of the pent up Hedda Gabler, Borkman expresses his frustration by "drumming his fingers on the table" (971). After a few minutes of silence accompanying the dialogue, Foldal "shuffles the papers" of his manuscript (973), the sound possibly alluding to his desire for acknowledgment by Borkman. Moments later the manuscript is put away and effectively silenced when Borkman expresses his disinterest.

The ensuing dialogue between the men is occasionally textured aurally by Borkman. Using his body as an instrument, he "strikes his chest" (973). The animalistic physical action creates a percussive declaration of pride, ego and strength alluding to his dreams of reclaimed glory. Additionally, this primitive behavior strengthens the animal imagery of Borkman established when Gunhild refers to him as "a sick wolf pacing his cage" (951). Minutes later, in an apparent expression of irony, Borkman laughs quietly, followed by more percussive "drumming on the table" with his fingers (977). Foldal exits quietly through the main sliding doors, punctuating the end of a few silent minutes.

Echoing Foldal's duo of knocks, Ella must also repeat this physical action as a request for permission to enter Borkman's territory (980). Ibsen's inclusion of repeated knocks informs spectators of Borkman's reluctance and hesitancy to accept visitors. Once inside the salon, Ella secures their privacy by "shutting the door after her" (980), an audible confirmation of security allowing intimacy. Silence lasting several minutes supports the charged emotion of the first conversation in several years between Borkman and Ella. Her bitter laugh singularly bridges a period of more silence until "the tapestry door is thrown open" by Gunhild (992). This action would likely produce sound and surprise Borkman and Ella, alerting them that they are no longer alone. Moments later Gunhild exits and shuts the door behind her, suggesting her awareness of the boundaries and separation which exist in the home—much like that of the Helmer's in *A Doll House.* The short dialogue between Borkman and Ella until the act ends is accompanied by more silence.

After Gunhild enters the living room at the beginning of act 3 and moves about restlessly for a short time, she rings for the maid in a power delineating gesture similar to

Hedda Gabler and Nora Helmer before her. Moments later "she rings again, more violently" (994), displaying her agitated emotional state following the encounter with Borkman and Ella. As the maid prepares to exit after a short exchange with Gunhild, Ibsen describes the hall door opening (995), the accompanying sound announcing Borkman's first departure from the upstairs salon in several years. The sound of what Ibsen describes as the maid shutting the door as she exits effectively aurally signals the containment of the love trio (996), similar to that achieved by Mrs. Linde's exit in *A Doll House* immediately preceding that trio's rehearsal of the *tarantella* (172).

Although *John Gabriel Borkman* has far fewer instances of laughter than *Hedda Gabler,* Ibsen calls for the vocally communicative expression several times as demonstrated previously by Borkman, Gunhild and Mrs. Wilton. Two aural events sound during the few minutes of dialogue following the maid's exit. Gunhild "laughs contemptuously" at Borkman when he laments having lived his life with no one to wake him "like a morning bell" (998). Ibsen's use of the imagery of the bell effectively continues its importance in the play. Borkman answers Gunhild's ridicule and comments on her pride "with a short, dry laugh" (999). I suggest Ibsen's description of their laughter illustrates the feelings of animosity, hostility, and possibly great misunderstanding between the married couple following several emotionally and financially challenging years.

In a physical act that would be accompanied by sound, their son Erhart "bursts open the hall door" (1000), symbolically releasing the pressure that has grown in the living room from the intense emotions. The two short aural accents in the act's several remaining minutes result from what Ibsen describes as Erhart opening and closing a door

for the entrance of Mrs. Wilton (1005). After Erhart shuts the door, silence accompanies the dialogue to the end of the act highlighting the importance of the dialogue in this scene. Additionally, this silent scene is reminiscent of the several minutes of unaccompanied dialogue between Ellida and Wangel in act 2 of *The Lady from the Sea* during which they discuss their relationship.

In the play's only outdoor setting, the fourth and final act begins in silence outside the house on the winter evening. Shortly after the act begins, sleigh bells sound, and although the sleigh is unseen, Gunhild claims, "Those silver bells, I know them" (1012), stating that they belong to Mrs. Wilton. Ibsen uses the sound of the bells and the imagery in multiple ways in this extended scene.

Gunhild explains that the sleigh is passing by them unseen, and Ibsen's stage directions describe "the sleigh bells sound close at hand" and "the sound fades in the distance" (1012). Such explicit directions imply his desire for this aural element to inspire active visual imagination in a theatre spectator through aural imagery. Additionally, Gunhild's recognizing the specific sound of the bells suggests that few sleighs were adorned by bells made of that particular precious metal. Similar to the sound of the bells announcing an unexpected arrival at the play's beginning, in this final act, the sound "signals the escape of Erhart and his companions" that Brian Johnston describes in *The Ibsen Cycle* (146).

Silence accompanies dialogue for several minutes, interrupted periodically when Borkman laughs. Neither secluded in the upstairs salon nor uncomfortable in the living room occupied by Gunhild where his laughter was derisive and combative, his outdoor vocalizations express his newfound freedom in a more relaxed manner. Foldal's laughter

shortly following Borkman's reflects and expresses his delight at the possibility of surprising his daughter, Frida.

Ibsen brings the bells which have aurally diminished to silence to the forefront when Foldal learns that Frida has ridden out of town in the sleigh that ran him down—the very same sleigh heard at the beginning of the act. Thoughts of silver bells adorning what Foldal describes as an "elegant . . . closed sleigh" bring him joy (1017), and the bells ringing suggest the possibility of a better life for his daughter. The bells—made from silver, a mining product—metaphorically carry Frida away and in doing so allow her to continue her study of music. Brian Johnston affirms this play's connection between metal and music in his book *Text and Supertext in Ibsen's Drama*. Act 1, he writes, "opens with the metallic sound of sleigh bells" and "closes with the swelling sound of the piano hammers striking the metallic strings" (240). This connection between metal and music operates as powerfully in the final act.

A few minutes later Borkman laughs easily alone with Ella just moments before they journey into the woods to a clearing. His expressive vocalization illustrates his changed emotional state outside the confining walls and ceiling of the upstairs salon.

Having arrived at the clearing, Borkman looks into the distance at the fjords and mountains described in Ibsen's stage directions. Borkman insists that he sees "the smoke from the great steamers . . ." though Ella doesn't see them. After "listening," he excitedly declares he hears "the factories whirring" by the river and asks Ella if she too can hear them (1020). Again she replies, "No" (1021). Borkman's hallucinations, both visual and aural, illustrate his heightened emotional state and specifically allude to his desire to be part of the industrial, commercial world again.

The unseen factory, heard only by Borkman, operates in two ways in this scene. Its internal workings described by Borkman as "whirring" and functioning "night and day" while the "wheels are spinning" (1020), personify it and conjure the image of a heart—possibly his heart. Borkman sacrificed heartfelt love for Ella for his career and work, seduced by his dream and desire to build a metal empire. Additionally I suggest the factory symbolizes the Fiddler—Death the Fiddler—of *Danse Macabre* luring Borkman into the night and allowing the popular musical composition integrated early in the play to metaphorically represent the play as a whole.

A few minutes later Borkman puts his hand to his heart "with a cry," and proclaims that a "hand of metal" has let him go (1022). I suggest that in these final moments of his life, his realization that he sacrificed love for career physically manifests itself and his heart releases. After a lifetime of deprivation, and with the woman whose love he sacrificed by his side, he pays the ultimate price as his heart gives out. Much like the veins of ore in the heart of the mines no longer accessible to him, his own veins carrying the physical lifeblood to his heart defy him.

Silence accompanies the remaining few minutes of dialogue between Gunhild and Ella until the play ends, the silence now holding the postpartum space of death similar to the silence foreshadowing death in *Hedda Gabler*.

Although *John Gabriel Borkman* utilizes many of the conventions Ibsen integrates into the previous plays discussed—doors, paper, laughter, music, and silence—the use of all but silence diminishes in this play. The theatre score of the final act contains no sound or music other than silence after the first few minutes.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

After examining these four of Ibsen's twelve realistic prose plays, and acknowledging that eight remain unexamined, I arrive at several conclusions. I suggest that the results of my research might apply to the body of all twelve realistic prose plays.

Most obvious to me in this study is that Ibsen integrated the sound and music detail in these plays as realistic elements of the plot and action. All aural events exist as diegetic occurrences while simultaneously operating in non-superfluous ways which include revealing character, enhancing the action, and advancing the plot.

The use of sounds created by the human body such as laughter, clapping hands, and cries remains consistent in the plays and does not drastically increase or decrease. Ibsen specifies laughter often in his stage directions, and *A Doll House*, *Hedda Gabler,* and *John Gabriel Borkman* all contain numerous instances of laughter as communication and expression of various human emotions. With no vocal humming in *The Lady from the Sea* and *John Gabriel Borkman* and only one instance of it in *Hedda Gabler,* it appears Ibsen used the sound very little following *A Doll House.*

Although the sounds of handling paper are especially important by virtue of the threatening contents in *A Doll House* and *Hedda Gabler,* Ibsen uses the device sparingly in the two other plays. Additionally, the plays in which paper is most prominent contain aspects more melodramatic in theatricality with heightened suspense, secret information and strange coincidences, an important document, as well as a perceived secure domestic setting. In these two plays paper acts as a "telltale artifact," a trait from melodrama in which, according to Jeffrey Richards in *Early American Drama,* "an object like a letter

often gets passed from character to character, full of meaning . . ." (xxix).

Before I began to research my thesis I knew of the famous door slam at the end of *A Doll House,* but I hadn't considered the power that doors as a collective possess by their ability to separate, compartmentalize and complete boundaries. This power is affirmed by the sound attached to opening and closing, actions which Ibsen clearly understood and intended to occur, made evident by his consistent attention to this detail in his stage directions. Even *The Lady from the Sea,* set almost entirely outdoors, contains Ibsen's specification of a door separating the indoor world from the outdoor.

Ibsen includes music in all four of these plays with the medium operating differently in each. The earliest play, *A Doll House,* implements music by way of an extended onstage rehearsal of the *tarantella*. It operates logically within the plot and serves to inform character, advance plot and enhance the action. *The Lady from the Sea* includes two moments of music sounding from offstage. The first instance of music by virtue of its form—a four part vocal quartet—comments on, reinforces and enhances the theme pertaining to marriage and relationship. The second occurrence of music, played by the brass band and accompanying the physical threat to Wangel, dramatically accompanies the onstage action in an unexpected and unconventional yet believable and realistic manner. In both scenes Ibsen skillfully integrates the diegetic presence of music; it arises from within the believable and understood circumstances of the play.

Hedda Gabler contains the most unstructured music with it being neither a rehearsal nor a performance of a composition embedded within the plot. Hedda's frantic piano playing immediately preceding her suicide implies a spontaneous and desperate attempt at communication through nonverbal means. The piano solo *Danse Macabre* in

John Gabriel Borkman alludes to and foreshadows the overall action of the play: Borkman ventures from his figurative crypt into the dark of night and dies. Thus it operates as an aural metaphor. In Ibsen's middle and late plays examined, music emanates from an imagined offstage location or concludes onstage as the act begins, an integration that would allow the best actor to play a role regardless of the ability to play a musical instrument.

While the sound and music elements in *A Doll House* initially compelled me to explore in "Nora's Sonata" a three movement theatre score created by Ibsen, the structure of his late prose play *John Gabriel Borkman* resembles a musical composition in an entirely different way. As a musical composition begins and ends with no break in time from beginning to end, continuous and existing in "real time," *John Gabriel Borkman* operates similarly. Differing from the three earlier plays in which Ibsen stretches time over a period of two or three days, in *John Gabriel Borkman* Ibsen restricts the events to a single winter evening continuous in time. I suggest the songlike "real time" of *John Gabriel Borkman* enhances and strengthens the representation of objective reality on stage.

As explicit as Ibsen's stage directions are in these four realistic prose plays, through my research I discovered that he only specifies domestic sound and does not indicate sounds of nature such as rain, wind or birds. Several scenes take place outdoors, and *John Gabriel Borkman* begins as "a snowstorm swirls in the dusk" (943). I suggest that with Ibsen's insistence upon visual and aural realistic elements and with his vast knowledge of the theatre, he understood that recreation of nature's sounds would be inferior, fake versions of the real thing detracting from the total experience. An audience

would not hear real rain or birds had he specified those sounds of nature, yet the sleigh bells, doorbells and all other sound and music he specified authentically occur in the moment. Fire, although an element of nature, is man-made in Ibsen's plays and as a domestic sound, might be acceptably realistic aurally.

In addition to these many examples of Ibsen's musicality, his integration of silence demonstrates incredible sensitivity to music. Ross Brown suggests that Ibsen used silence "as part of a rhythmic and melodic narrative of human action" (74). I think the beauty in music is often found in the rests—silences—where no sound is heard, and those periods of nothingness must exist for a composition to be whole. Ibsen increasingly used silence over the twenty year period of his realistic prose play writing, most notable in the outdoor settings of *The Lady from the Sea* and *John Gabriel Borkman,* natural environments free from domestic confinement. Additionally, Ibsen composed theatre scores with long rests—silences—that support the most critical and intimate conversations between Nora and Torvald, Ellida and Wangel, Hedda and Tesman, and the trio of Borkman, Ella and Gunhild. Ibsen's use of silence contributes to the representation of objective reality in his prose plays and with the diegetic sound and music elements present assists in creating illusionism.

In his biography of Ibsen, Michael Meyer quotes Ibsen's friend Christopher Due who, when reminiscing about his time spent with Ibsen in Grimstad in their early twenties, wrote that "Ibsen was not musical." However, Due's understanding of "musical" was clearly literal and narrow since he further explained that "when we had a sing-song, he [Ibsen] would join in, but incorrectly, since he had no ear" (71). Although the young Ibsen may not have been a singer or played an instrument, I think that as a

mature writer he possessed incredible musicality and understanding of the operative powers of music, sound, and silence as illustrated by their seamless integration into his writing.

When Emil Jonas asked permission to adapt Ibsen's first realistic prose play, *The Pillars of Society* published in 1877, Ibsen responded most adamantly. His reply: "I should have thought it would be obvious to even the most naive hack writer that in this play nothing can be left out . . ." (*Letters and Speeches* 173). I agree with Ibsen's response and suggest that his statement can apply to his subsequent eleven realistic prose plays.

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