

LITTLE EYOLF AND DRAMATIC TRADITION

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In many Ibsen dramas the final scenes are not only impressive on stage but they also give decisive clues to the interpretation of the play as a whole. Who does not remember Oswald's invocation of the sun in *Ghosts*, Dr. Relling's cynical skepticism at the end of *The Wild Duck* or the melodramatic last scenes of *The Pillars of Society* where the threatening catastrophes dissolve into relief and comedy? On surface the end of *Little Eyolf* might be interpreted as a reconciliation in humility. Alfred and Rita Allmers are mentally reunited in their charity work for poor children. Are the spectators supposed to believe in this or not? Some critics, like the Swedish commentator Gunnar Ollén, are sceptical and consider the end as "ganska ljusblått" ("rather light blue"), whereas the modern Norwegian scholar Bjørn Hemmer believes that Rita and Alfred turn away from their egoism; their "resurrection to earthly life" makes them realise their responsibility.¹ Stage directors, e.g. the anonymous author of "Directing Ibsen's Little Eyolf" on "<http://www.jkpd.net/Ibsen>" are often sceptical, as well as international scholars, e.g. Michael Meyer, who considers the possibility that there might be "no solution but merely another, more plausible, but equally insidious 'life-lie'".²

The Hemmer view would make Ibsen an evident moralist. The behaviour of the characters would seem to be criticized by the author and they would realise their mistakes during a final reversal. Would such a conception really fit into the total Ibsen text corpus? My own argument builds on the premise that Ibsen is watching his characters, not condemning them. I find the drama strikingly modern in its way of treating the latent conflict between sexuality and responsibility to one's children and the manifest conflict between private life and scholarly mission. My thesis is that the end of the play is open, and through an internal analysis I will try to show that most arguments point in the direction that the project of the Allmers's will probably fail. When analyzing the play I refer to an implicit spectator, i.e. an implicit reader who has so much theatre experience that he/she is able to construct an inner vision of a play being performed when reading the text. He/She notices not only the spoken words but also the scenography and the stage directions.

Act I

There is a certain irony already in the scenography in Act I: "A handsome and expensively appointed garden room, full of furniture, flowers and plants. Upstage, glass doors open on to a verandah, with a broad view over the fjord. Wooded mountain ranges in the distance." Above all: "the sun is shining warmly".³ What a contrast to the gloomy weather in *Ghosts*!

¹ Gunnar Ollén, *Ibsens dramatik*, Stockholm: Sveriges Radio 1956, p. 101; Bjørn Hemmer, *Ibsen. Kunstnerens vei*, Oslo: Vigmostad & Bjørke 2003, p. 487–492.

² Michael Meyer, "Introduction" in: *Ibsen: Plays: Three. Rosmersholm, The Lady from the Sea, Little Eyolf*, London: Methuen 1994, p. 219

³ *Ibsen: Plays: Three. Rosmersholm, The Lady from the Sea, Little Eyolf*, transl. by Michael Meyer, London: Methuen 1994, p. 227. References to this volume are henceforth given in the text in brackets.

Rita Allmers is presented as "a handsome, blonde, Junoesque woman", whereas Alfred's half-sister Asta "is slim, of middle height, with dark hair and deep serious eyes" (227). The eyes play an important part in this drama just as in *The Lady from the Sea*; before he enters, Alfred is said to have "gentle eyes" and Eyolf has "fine, wise eyes" (230). Asta notices that Alfred's eyes are sparkling. Asta is carrying the portfolio with the letters which later in the drama are of greatest importance. She has forgotten the key, however. Is this just clumsy and awkward of Ibsen or is the forgotten key an antiaristotelian trick: one of the important symbols of the play is forgotten and we do not find the key where we expect it?

The play starts in medias res – Asta comes to Rita to see Little Eyolf. Rita's possessive character is revealed in their conversation. When we learn that Alfred has just come home two weeks earlier than expected a telepathic contact Alfred/Asta is established. Already in his first line Alfred expresses his affection for Asta: "Asta! Asta, my dearest!" (230).

Our first question is: has the mountain air been good for Alfred? In Act I Eyolf walks out to play – according to Alfred's new style of education. When Rita and Alfred are alone Rita cries hysterically and tells Alfred that she wants to get rid of Asta and be alone with her husband (245). The whole conversation between the married couple is a bit strange: both want to test the other's feeling for Asta. The scene gets more and more explosive. The spectators learn that Rita has been jealous of Alfred's work and now also of Eyolf – culminating in Rita's ominous "Then I wish to God I had never borne him" (246). She criticizes Alfred who declares "I was blind. I had not come to realize" (246). Rita declares once again: "I want you – all of you – to myself" (246). In this scene they are completely neglecting their son, once again. Ibsen is extremely skilful as usual: what the implicit spectator sees with his/her own eyes repeats (and consequently proves) what is talked about. Neither Alfred nor Rita thinks of Eyolf when they are preoccupied with their own conflicts.

What is at stake? Rita had dressed up in white, let down her hair, put rose-coloured shades over the lamps and fetched champagne when Alfred came home. She had arranged a seduction scene, but Alfred was not interested. As Ollén mentions (151) some earlier critics have hinted at impotence. My own interpretation takes a different direction. I think it is actually the case that Alfred (like the protagonists of *When We Dead Awaken*) has passed into a new dimension of life. Rita is the egoistic seductress, making it difficult for her husband to reach this new dimension. The point is that Rita in her jealousy neither wants to change nor is able to change, whereas Alfred wants to change his life into a life of freedom, a life of the soul. In 19th century literature, as Peter Brooks and Helga Gallas and others have understood, metaphysical desire is not only a Freudian sublimation. Desire works on several levels: erotic, metaphysical (e.g. Alfred's projects) and textual (the author in the text desiring a solution).⁴

Alfred begs of Rita "for both our sakes – do not let yourself be tempted in anything evil" (249). Ibsen interrupts the dialogue exactly at the moment before Rita might wish that Eyolf were dead.

⁴ Cf. Helga Gallas, *Das Textbegehren des 'Michael Kohlhaas'. Die Sprache des Unbewussten und der Sinn der Literatur*, Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt 1981; Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot. Design and Intention in Narrative*, Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press 1992

Act I is dramatically effective as it ends in the tumult after Eyolf's death. The protagonists are told by the guttersnipes that a child has drowned and the crutch is floating. Eyolf is not in the garden; he has escaped. Rita and Alfred both declare in anguish that someone must save Eyolf (251).

Eyolf is a bitter symbol of humanity already when he first enters the room on the stage. A suit looking like a uniform is of course an over-compensation for his lameness; he is walking with a crutch. Even as a child, he is a living example of human illusion, a "puer senex" who does not realize his own limits. On stage he is often idealized, which is certainly not Ibsen's intention.

The two plots and Alfred's project

There are two main plots in *Little Eyolf*: the death-of-Eyolf plot and the Alfred-Asta-Rita triangle plot. To Rita it is clear that there is a traumatic episode that unites both these plots. Exactly at the moment when Eyolf, as an infant, fell from the table and hurt himself while Rita and Alfred were making love, Alfred mentioned that he used to call his half-sister Eyolf when they were children. This is, however, Rita's memory, not Alfred's or Ibsen's. To Rita things are obvious. Alfred loved Asta, his half-sister, but married Rita because of her seductive power and her gold and green forests to secure Asta's future. When the child was christened and got the name of Eyolf, this was a proof that Alfred's love for Asta was transferred to the child. Consequently, Rita became jealous both with Asta who cared for the crippled child and with Eyolf who turned out to be a new Asta to her husband. From this viewpoint, it is not surprising that Rita as a seductive and Junonic character develops her possessive tendencies and her fury.

Alfred Allmers is one of Ibsen's most complicated heroes. In the four late plays he is the only modern intellectual, one of those persons who might be a friend not only of the implicit spectator but also of the physical spectators in a contemporary theatre audience. We may laugh at Solness, the master-builder, Borkman, the industrial bank man, or even Rubek the sculptor, who sold his visions for money, but Alfred is the only protagonist to be pitied. He is not a narcissitic person like Hjalmar Ekdal. What is so ominous about taking care of your child and arranging its future? Why should Alfred be punished like Oedipus or Agamemnon?

Already when he enters the stage it is clear that Alfred's book project has changed; he has abandoned his life work "The Responsibility of Man" (239) and started a thinking project. On the surface this might seem to be a new kind of freedom, getting rid of intellectual dust, but Ibsen would not be Ibsen if one illusion would not be replaced by an even deeper illusion, instead of the clarification that the character believes himself to have found. "Thinking is what matters. What one can manage to put on paper is insignificant" (231). In his modern liberal way of looking at the world he reminds us of Mrs. Alving in *Ghosts*.

The paternal project of Alfred is evident and reminds the spectator of the traditional bourgeois way of looking at children as those who are supposed to make the idea of their parents real. A starting point such as "there is one who will come after me and who will do these things better" (231) might of course be dangerous concerning every child, but here it builds on an evident illusion: Alfred refuses to realize that Eyolf is a cripple: "anything you want to learn, you shall" (232).

Alfred declares his wish to reach "the mountains", the high peaks, just as Eyolf suggests "I think it would be nice if I too could climb mountains" (231). Thus, he (and to a certain extent also Eyolf) proves to be an evident case of the Solness-Rubek "Verstiegenheit" complex, once analyzed by Ludwig Binswanger.⁵ Even more bitter is that Eyolf wants to learn how to swim. Eyolf, consequently, wants the impossible: he even wants to become a soldier.

The tragedy is that Alfred now wants Eyolf to follow his *new* ideas, not to read books but to play with the other children – this immediately leads to the opposite of Alfred's wish, i.e. to Eyolf's death. Eyolf's friends are cynical enough to tell him the truth. Alfred seems to refrain from the truth in believing that the poor children are just envious. He refuses to see their cruelty.

In Act III we get a new insight into Alfred's mountain tour but in the first two acts we are only confronted with his new vision and his agnosticism, or even his atheism (it is Rita who hints at that). As a sensitive intellectual Alfred still sticks to the idea that there must be a meaning in life: "There must be some meaning in it. Life, creation, providence – have they no meaning, no purpose at all?" (253). – Or "Perhaps it's all haphazard. Things take their own course, like a wrecked ship drifting" (253). Eyolf "was to fill my life with pride and joy" (254). Alfred seems to be confronted with absurdity itself: "It can't be retribution; there is nothing to atone for. [...]. How senseless it is; how absolutely meaningless" (254).

To get rid of God is one thing – a Norwegian intellectual of the Brandes generation might be capable of that – but to get rid of those trolls everywhere present in Ibsen, especially of course in *Peer Gynt*, is a bit more difficult. In this play their revenge is terrible. At the end of the first scene Asta tells Alfred and Rita that she has seen the Rat Wife, whose real name is Mother Lupus.

The Rat Wife

The extended four-page Rat Wife scene is a striking anomaly in a realistic Ibsen play from the 1890s. It reminds us of the trolls in *Peer Gynt* or the ghost of Bishop Nicholas in *The Pretenders*. In contrast to the white horses in *Rosmersholm* the spectator is confronted with the supernatural (or should we rather say the subnatural?) on stage in *Little Eyolf*. In front of the Rat Wife in her old-fashioned, once elegant, clothes the easiest way for the spectator is to compare the strange woman to the Pied Piper of Hamelin. She even looks like a rat: "a little, thin, shrivelled old woman, grey-haired, with sharp, piercing eyes" wearing old-fashioned clothes and her first lines are ominous: "have your honours any troublesome thing that gnaws here in this house" (233). She and her little dog, Mopsemand, have rescued the islands from swarming, teeming hoards of rats. Eyolf is curious and more and more it is he, as a wise child, who directs the investigation through his questions. Finally it is clear that she has also once led a human being into the water. Poor Eyolf will be the second one. Is this the revenge of Fate? In a desperate moment in the second act Alfred declares: "And then it only needs a crazy old hag to come to the house and dangle a dog in a sack" (254). The obvious explanation is that we, just like

⁵ Ludwig Binswanger, *Henrik Ibsen und das Problem der Selbstrealisation in der Kunst*, Heidelberg 1949; Paul de Man, "Ludwig Binswanger et le problème de moi poétique" in *Les chemins actiöös de la critique*, Paris:Plon 1968, s. 63–89.

Mrs. Alving in *Ghosts*, are confronted with the revenge of those fatal powers that we want to be free from. At least this is the way Alfred sees things; The Rat Wife dragged Eyolf into the deep.

The connection between Eyolf and the Rat Wife is also structural. Immediately after the exit of the Rat Wife, when Rita fans herself on the balcony, Eyolf "slips unnoticed out through the door on the right" (237), probably through the same door as the Rat Wife. Eyolf might lack experience but mentally he is far from innocent.

Alfred's love

As we have seen it becomes more and more evident that what Alfred thinks is an intellectual progress is just a new, maybe even worse, lie. Both Asta and Rita realize that he has changed and he himself talks about a "transformation" (238). His past life with "The Responsibility of Man" seems like "a fairytale or a dream" (238, 239). But Alfred also mentions Rita's "gold and greens forests". In the next Ibsen play, *John Gabriel Borkman*, we find almost a caricature of both the theme of the husband who is saved by the wife's money and the theme of self-conscious love for children. Erhart, the son, is loved by both his father and mother and his aunt.

Exactly at the moment when Eyolf is absent and drawn into the water Alfred explains how often he thinks of Eyolf, so much so that Eyolf even replaces his book project (240). From now on he wants to be the father, not only the schoolmaster of Eyolf. Now he proves to be more than a bourgeois father, almost a progressive father. He wants to "reveal the potential of the dreams that are dawning in his [Eyolf's] childish mind" and put "happiness within his grasp" (240). Both Rita and Asta are sceptical – obviously Alfred learned something that they are not able to understand or accept in the mountains: "I climbed up into an infinite solitude. I saw the sun rise above the mountain tops. I felt – nearer the stars – almost as if I understood them, and belonged with them" (241).

In spite of his "hubris", I would maintain that Alfred reminds one of Nora, Ellida Wangen, Rebekka West or Hedda Gabler. He has reached another level than the other protagonists of this play and he is able to notice "that power of compelling and drawing things" (137). It is also interesting to see that he is conscious of supernatural powers "being alone in the mountains, up on those huge, open spaces – one feels that power" (137-8).

Alfred also loves, in an agape-like way, his relationship to Asta and he is surprisingly clear-sighted concerning everyone but himself. *Little Eyolf* is not a tragedy of blindness like Sophokles' *Oedipus Rex*, but it is, as we shall see, a tragedy of insight.

Borghejm

The function of Borghejm in the play is less clear and mainly connected to Asta. When Borghejm first enters he has just finished building a road and has got a new contract to build the next one (241). He proposes to take a stroll with Asta who first tries to refuse (243).

The third act starts with a scene with Borghejm and Asta. Both are going to leave. Borghejm to take the train, Asta the steamer. Both are grieving and the theme of their conversation is human happiness. In this dialogue it is especially clear that

both Asta and Borghejm say one thing and mean another. Borghejm probably wants to marry Asta and Asta wants to stay alone. More than Alfred, she has accepted that their childhood happiness was beautiful but is now gone. A contrast is established between brother and sister.

Alfred and Asta

In Act II the background of Alfred and Asta becomes clear. First we are confronted with one of the few outdoor scenes in Ibsen's social plays: "A small, narrow glen in the forest on Allmers's estate, down by the shore. On the left, old, tall trees lean out over the scene". It is raining: "Now, it is a heavy rainy day".

In the first scene Asta approaches Alfred who stares at her: "Has it really happened, Asta? Or have I gone mad? Or am I dreaming? Oh, if only it were a dream! How beautiful if I could wake up now!" (252-3). Even nature seems merciless to him. "How merciless the fjord looks today" (253). Little Eyolf has been taken far from them by the sea.

Usually neglected in the analyses are the crapes that Asta sews on Alfred's hat and sleeve; it is the third time that she sews crapes. First on Alfred's student cap when their father died and later on his arm when her mother died. The connection of the two is a connection of grief, and the death of Eyolf revives this aspect of their relationship. Asta formulates Alfred's problem: "One cannot circle round the same thought for ever" (257). Alfred sees things in another way: "I was sitting here tormented by this haunting, gnawing grief" (258). Here the first point where the two plots are joined is inserted in the play. Their relationship becomes even more evident when Alfred calls Asta Eyolf, just as in her childhood, and they reminisce how Asta used to wear Alfred's old clothes. However, this intimacy suddenly shocks Alfred – he notices that he almost forgot Eyolf when reminiscing". Absorbed in my memories" he felt that Eyolf "slipped right out of my mind" (257).

Ibsen's portrait of Alfred is a strikingly intelligent psychological portrait of grief – and Asta is Alfred's joy in his sorrow. In grief one suddenly associates back to a memory, immediately one feels bad conscience, sometimes when the tension gets weaker (258) one thinks of superficial things and daily customs like dinner.

The conversation between Alfred and Asta once again traps Alfred: he says that they are of the same blood, belonging to a family though their father did not love Asta as much as he should. At this point Asta already knows the truth, but she cannot tell Alfred. At the end of the second act Alfred declares that he wants to go back to Asta, but she tells him he cannot return to the past. Alfred declares: "Love between brother and sister is the one relationship which does not obey the law of change" (270). The dramatic point is of course when Asta at the end of the act reveals the truth that she has learned from the letters in the portfolio: they are not biological brother and sister at all. She gives Alfred the water lilies, reminding the Ibsen reader of Ibsen's last play where Irene and Rubek are reminiscing about the water lilies in Taunitzer See. (270-1). Alfred and Asta are bound by the law of change like everyone else. Once again we find a contrast to Sophokles. Sophokles shows an incest that the protagonists have tried to avoid to commit. Ibsen tells us about an incest that is no real incest. This makes the play even more frightening.

The eyes

At the end of Act I Rita and Borghejm start discussing the evil eye, one of the main symbols of the play growing more and more important (250). In Act II Eyolf gradually tends to be one of the haunting dead. His eyes are even more menacing than the eyes of the child in *The Lady from the Sea*. Alfred is embarrassed: "But the dead will not give us peace. Day and night they haunt us" (259). Asta just wants them to let the dead rest in peace (259), but Alfred still prefers to be alone sitting by the water (260).

Especially for Rita to whom the eye motive is introduced by Borghejm these eyes are embarrassing, to say the least. Eyolf lies dead on the bottom of the fjord with "his eyes wide open" (261) – until he is carried away with the undertow. And Rita knows that: "Day and night I shall see him lying there". Alfred supports her: "With his eyes wide open" (261). Rita: "Yes. With those huge, pone eyes. I can see them. I can see them now." More and more Eyolf becomes an obsession to his parents.

Alfred blames Rita for wishing that Eyolf were dead, which she denies. Alfred has an excuse: "Grief makes one cruel" – they both seem to be victims of "The evil eye of a child" (262).

Rita and Alfred

Rita's problem turns out to be extreme jealousy; she blames Asta for having stood between Eyolf and her. Rita blames Alfred for only having been in love with his book (263). She continues her mental torture. Why did Alfred give up the book? Rita: "You gave it up because you were eaten up with self-distrust. You had begun to doubt whether you had any great calling to live for after all" (263). The spectator might have an aside: "Who does not?" To Rita: "And what we call our loss, our grief, is merely the gnawing of our consciences. Nothing more" (265).

The horrible conclusion of these parents filled with anguish is: "No, we never loved him." "And yet we sit here bitterly mourning his loss". Rita: "That we are sitting here mourning a little stranger boy" (264). Alfred: "I forgot the child. In your arms" – that is why he sees Rita as a temptress. "In that moment, you condemned Eyolf to death." Alfred, of course, wishes that this only were an illusion – that this were only a dream (265).

Even the solution of Rosmer and Rebekka in *Rosmersholm* – to jump into the millrace – is refuted. Alfred hints at suicide when he asks if Rita is ready to follow Eyolf (265). This rather morbid dialogue finishes when they both declare that "This is where we belong. Here on earth. Living." – we belong to this world. Especially Rita wants to escape guilt, but Alfred, who believes in a certain kind of resurrection, is more aware: "Who knows whether huge child-eyes do not watch us night and day?" (267). Instead of love they feel "a sharing of guilt and remorse". Alfred constantly reminds Rita that she has neglected Eyolf: "Whole days would pass without you seeing him" (279).

Ibsen almost approaches the position of some of Beckett's characters: You cannot live and you cannot die, you just go on. Rita refers to "that terrifyingly beautiful moment" when they were making love and neglected Eyolf. Life is the retribution. Living together makes both of them cruel.

Act III

The stage of the third act is once again an outdoor scene at a "shrubcovered mound in Allmers's garden", where you can see the fjord. Dusk is falling and the act starts with Asta's scene with Borghejm mentioned above. Finally Rita goes so far as to beg Asta to "Be to us what Eyolf was." (278) By taking the boat, Asta declares, however, she runs away not only from Alfred but also from herself (278). To the spectator it is evident that her future in the Allmers family would be next to unbearable.

The last act is not a proof of the weakness of the play but a proof of its non-aristotelian character. Rita once again declares that she sees "huge open eyes staring at me" (277) and she notices that the steamer has one red and one green eye (279). The lanterns stare out of the darkness into the darkness. Rita realizes: "People are pitiless. They don't consider anyone. Neither the living nor the dead." (279).

Alfred notices that the steamer is sounding its bell and is about to leave. The last six pages of the play is a final dialogue between Rita and Alfred when the others are gone. Rita even has acoustic hallucinations; she hears another bell sounding like a funeral bell: "The crutch is floating" (280). Alfred means that "the law of change" will hold them together in spite of everything. Rita declares that *now* she could share Alfred with his book, i.e. now she could accept his metaphysical desire.

But suddenly the act turns into something else than a repetition – it is not like the second act of *Waiting for Godot*, which, to a great extent, repeats the first. Alfred tells Rita what happened to him in the mountains, until now a secret to the other protagonists as well as to the spectator: "I had no fear. I felt that Death and I walked side by side like two good fellow travellers. It all seemed so natural. So logical. In my family we do not live to be old –" (282). In the mountains, opposite to Solness and Rubek, Alfred has realized that he is earthbound (283). This final revelation solves many of the riddles of the play, among others Alfred's melancholic tendency to be bound by grief. At the same time however, he turns out to be dangerously close to "hubris". Gods may stay beyond fear, men not.

When Rita tells Alfred about her plans to start social work among the poor, Alfred exclaims: "But this is absolute madness. There's no one in the world less suited than you so such work" (284). Rita, however, has no illusions that she might be cherishing these plans out of love: "I want to placate the eyes that stare at me." (285). Now they can hoist the flag at half-mast and Alfred is persuaded to help Rita. "Up towards the mountains. Towards the stars. And the great silence" (286). However, in making these declarations, he comes to resemble Solness, Borkman and Rubek once again – to become a case of "Verstiegenheit". In an Ibsen context these lines certainly seem embarrassing – they seem to repeat Alfred's earlier mistakes as well as the mistakes of other Ibsen heroes.

The end of the play is ambiguous. Ibsen does not tell us if Rita manages to change into an organiser of social work and he does not tell us if Alfred's new metaphysical insight is a new illusion or a constructive idea. But most signs point in one direction: their future marriage can be nothing else than earthbound endurance filled with compromising, there are no hints of a new love. They will both placate Eyolf's eyes. In other words their marriage might be like the marriage of Rubek and Maia, or John Gabriel and Gunhild. If they will succeed they will succeed for the

wrong reason: Alfred out of metaphysics, Rita out of horror.

The Ibsen context

To summarize: In *Little Eyolf* we recognize themes from other Ibsen plays, i.e. the Rat Woman belongs to the same supernatural world as the white horses (*Rosmersholm*), the trolls (*Peer Gynt*) and the dead bishop (*The Pretendants*). Alfred Allmers's engagement in moral questions resembles Mrs. Alving's attitude in *Ghosts*.

World literature motives are turned upside down. In the *Oresteia*, Orestes and Electra recognize one another as brother and sister, in *Little Eyolf*, Alfred and Asta, whom he loves, turn out *not* to be brother and sister. In comedies, such new insight often leads to marriage, here it leads to definite separation. The drama *Little Eyolf* seems to be the opposite of Sophokles *Oedipus Rex*. The protagonists are clear-sighted, not blind. Incest is not revealed, but denied – Alfred's agape-like love for Asta was in no case incestuous.

Children usually symbolize a positive future; Eyolf stands for death and the past. The construction of Act I as a mini-tragedy and Act III as a recapitulation of certain moments of Act II, makes the whole play look non-aristotelian, i.e. the Aristotelian elements of drama are consciously rejected. In many plays the characters are looking, here they are looked at – by Eyolf's big eyes.

It is easy to agree with William Archer: "We find, in fact, that nearly everything that gives the play its depth, its horror and its elevation came as an afterthought".⁶ The play is over but both the problems and the ambiguous characters are still there.

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⁶ Meyer, p. 214

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Summary

The article criticises an Ibsen tradition who has seen the last scene of *Little Eyolf* as a reconciliation. Instead, the article discusses the improbability of a happy marriage characterised by social engagement. The play is open but it is hardly probable that Rita, with her erotic desire, and Allmers, whose desire has turned into metaphysics, can be happy together. The arguments refer to inner criteria and the constantly present dramatic tradition.

Keywords

Little Eyolf, dramatic tradition, metaphysical desire, nonaristotelian drama, Verstiegheit