The Master Builder Study Guide

The Master Builder by Henrik Ibsen

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Initially, the response to Henrik Ibsen's *The Master Builder* (*Bygmester Solness* in Norwegian) was mixed. The play received overwhelming praise when it was published in Scandinavia in 1892, but the demands it placed on actors made it difficult to stage, and as a result, the early performances of the play were criticized. As the actors and audience became accustomed to the play's innovative technique, however, audiences began to applaud Ibsen's creative mix of realism and expressionism in his compelling portrait of a middle-aged architect who assesses his obsessive drive to succeed.

The Master Builder chronicles the career and personal relationships of Halvard Solness, a man who has not let anything stand in the way of his rampant ambition. As he struggles with the destructive consequences of his monomaniacal pursuit and his growing fear that he has lost his creative powers, a mysterious young woman appears. She will help Solness gain a glimpse of his former robust self as she leads him to his tragic fate. In *The Master Builder*, Ibsen paints an intriguing portrait of one man's consuming desire for success.

Author Biography

Henrik Ibsen was born on March 20, 1828, in Skien, Norway, to Knud (a businessman) and Marichen (Altenburg) Ibsen. His wealthy family was thrown into poverty in 1834 when his father lost his store. As a result, Ibsen was forced to leave school at age fifteen and accept a position as a pharmacist's assistant. The humiliation his family suffered as they sold off most of their property to pay off debts became a dynamic in his later plays, especially in *A Doll House* (1879) and *John Gabriel Borkman* (1896). Fire, which was a constant threat to Skien's wooden shacks, was another subject in some of his plays, including *Ghosts* (1881) and *The Master Builder* (1892). In the early 1850s, Ibsen attended Christiania University in what is now Oslo and began writing poetry. In 1850, he wrote his first play, *Catiline*, but it did not appear on the stage for several years. Soon after completing the play, he began a stint as stage manager for the Norwegian Theater in Bergen, where he was required to write and stage a play each year. These plays were not well received; however, they helped Ibsen fine-tune his dramatic skills. The plays explored the intricacies of human behavior against the backdrop of a repressive society, a theme that would reemerge in his later work. His fears that he was illegitimate, coupled with the birth of his own illegitimate child, surfaced in his characters, including Dina Dorf in *Pillars of Society* (1887), Regine in *Ghosts*, and Hedvig in *The Wild Duck* (1884).

In 1864, Ibsen left Norway after suffering severe mental stress brought on from overwork. Assisted by government grants and scholarships, he traveled through Italy and Germany for the next few decades, continuing his playwriting, which became increasingly well received. By the production of *Master Builder* in 1892, Ibsen's reputation as one of the world's leading dramatists was cemented. Although he never completed his degree at Christiania University, he was awarded an honorary degree from the University of Uppsala in 1877. After suffering a series of strokes, Ibsen died on May 23, 1906, in Oslo, Norway.

Plot Summary

Act 1

The play opens in a workroom in Halvard Solness's house where his assistant, Knut Brovik, and his son Ragnar are working on blueprints, and Kaja Fosli is tending the books. Knut, who is having difficulty breathing, declares, "I can't go on much longer," noting that his health is quickly deteriorating. His son shows great concern over his father's condition. Knut refuses to go home and rest until he has tried to convince Solness to recognize his son's drafting abilities and to allow him to head a project. Solness, however, insists that Ragnar is not yet talented enough to work independently. Knut admits that Ragnar drew up plans for one of Solness's clients who considered them new and modern, an assessment that angers Solness.

Solness accuses Kaja of being behind Knut's request, so that she and Ragnar could marry. Kaja, however, insists she has had no part in it, although Ragnar and her uncle have been pressuring her to marry soon. She admits that she has fallen deeply in love with Solness. The master builder pretends to return her affections in an effort to make sure she, and thus Ragnar, does not leave.

During a visit, Dr. Herdal, the family doctor, tells Solness that his wife, Aline, suspects that he has feelings for Kaja. Solness admits that Kaja has fallen in love with him but insists that he wants her to stay only to keep Ragnar, whose work is valuable to him. He recognizes the fact that he is exploiting her but claims that he cannot prevent it. When Dr. Herdal suggests he tell his wife that he is not in love with Kaja, he declines, admitting that he wants his wife to think badly of him, finding "a kind of beneficial self-torment" in letting her think that he is guilty. Solness expresses his fear that he may be losing his mind.

The doctor admits that Solness has had a lot of bad luck, beginning with the burning down of Aline's family home, where they used to live. He notes that the builder began as a poor country boy and now he is at the top of his profession. Solness expresses a Faustian dread that he will have to pay for his good fortune. He is certain that the young will cause great changes, which will make him obsolete.

Hilda, a young woman dressed in hiking clothes and "shining with happiness," appears at the Solness home. She explains that Aline had invited her to visit after the two met at a mountain lodge last summer. Her true motive, however, begins to emerge when she reminds Solness that ten years ago, when she was twelve, she had met him when he built a tower on the church in her hometown. The doctor tells Solness that he must be able to predict the future since youth has indeed come knocking at his door.

As Hilda describes the moment when Solness climbed to the top of the tower during a wreathing ceremony, she admits that he became a thrilling, godlike figure to her. She then reminds him that when he came back to her family home that evening after the

celebration, he called her his princess. He insisted that he would come back in ten years and buy a kingdom for her, and then kissed her several times. She declares that it has been ten years to the day, and she has come to claim her kingdom. Solness cannot remember the incident but thinks he might have willed it to happen.

Solness admits to her that he does not build church towers any longer, only homes "for human beings," but he has built a new home with a tower for himself. After telling her of his present discontent, he notes how happy it makes him to talk to her.

Act 2

Later that day, Solness promises Aline that they will be happier when they move into the new house, but she notes that the house is not important to her. She has never recovered from the loss of her parents' home and the death of their two children, for which she blames herself.

Solness explains the past to Hilda, telling her that after the fire, Aline was so despondent that she could not properly nurse her babies and she refused to let anyone else care for them. They died as a result. After the fire, he subdivided the land on which it had stood, and built homes that were quite lucrative for him. After the death of his sons, he could not build another church, only homes.

Solness admits that he knew there was a crack in the chimney in their old house but did not fix it, knowing a fire would allow him to build on the land. The fire broke out in a closet, though, not the chimney. Solness suspects that he has special powers; when he desires something, he gets it, which proves, he claims, that he is one of the chosen. Yet he blames himself for the children's death and Aline's condition.

Hilda convinces Solness to write some encouraging words on Ragnar's drawings, since his father is dying. He is convinced that change is coming and retribution is inescapable. When Hilda shares her vision of him placing a wreath on a high church tower, he asks her what she wants from him, and she replies, "her kingdom." Later, Solness tells Kaja that he will not be needing her or Ragnar's services any longer. When Aline discovers his plan to place the wreath on the tower of their new home, she fears for his safety, but Hilda urges him on.

Act 3

That evening on the veranda, Aline shares her pain with Hilda and her guilt over the death of her children. She then expresses her hope that they can be friends. Hilda is moved by her talk with Aline and tells Solness that she should leave. However, when Solness admits that he no longer cares about his craft, Hilda tries to convince him that he should not be held back by guilt. She implores him to build a castle with a high tower. He agrees to construct a real castle in the air with solid foundations.

Ragnar arrives with the wreath and announces that his father is in a coma and never was able to read Solness's comments on his work. When he claims Solness will be too afraid to climb the tower, Hilda professes her love and confidence in the master builder. Later, Aline expresses her fears that Solness will become dizzy and will fall.

Before he climbs the scaffolding, Solness tells Hilda that he is afraid of retribution. Yet, he reiterates his promise to build a castle for them. He claims that he will climb the tower so that he can talk to God and tell him he will build a beautiful castle "together with a princess that I love."

Ragnar and his friends come to watch Solness, sure that he will not have the courage to climb up the tower. He does, however, and Hilda declares him "great and free again." She sees him struggling on the tower with someone. He waves, then falls with some planks and splintered wood. Refusing to acknowledge the fact that he is dead, Hilda fixes her vision on the tower, crying with wild intensity "my—my master builder!"

Act 1, Part 1

Act 1, Part 1 Summary

Brovik, his son Ragnar and Kaia work at their desks. Brovik suddenly gets up, breathing with difficulty and saying he can't bear working much longer. Kaia and Ragnar urge him to go home but Brovik refuses, saying he won't leave until he's had a word with the boss. Kaia hears footsteps, and hurries Brovik and Ragnar to their desks in the inner office.

Solness enters. He pretends to speak with Kaia about business but in quiet tones flirts gently with her, making her nervous.

Solness asks Ragnar whether anyone's called. Ragnar tells him that a young couple wanting Solness to build their new home came by, eager to see his drawings. Solness tells Ragnar they can wait, that he's not interested in building something that's merely a roof over someone's head. He says the couple can apply to someone else for all he cares. Brovik asks if he means it, Solness says he does, and then Brovik leaves his desk and asks for a private word with Solness.

Solness sends Kaia into the inner office and listens impatiently as Brovik pleads with him to give more work to Ragnar, who's desperate to marry Kaia and begin their life together. Solness complains that Ragnar has no experience but Brovik reminds him that he (Solness) had no experience when he started and managed to become quite famous. Brovik suggests that Ragnar might be offered the contract with the young couple, saying that the couple found his sketches new and original. Solness takes that to mean that the couple found his ideas old fashioned and accuses Ragnar of trying to force him into making room for the younger generation. Brovik pleads for the chance to enjoy his son's success while he's still alive, but Solness tells him he must face his death as best he can.

Solness goes to the inner office and tells Ragnar it's time to take Brovik home. Ragnar asks Kaia to come too, but Solness says he needs her to type a letter for him. After Brovik and Ragnar leave, Solness asks Kaia whether it's true she wants to get married. She says that it's Brovik and Ragnar who are so insistent. She's happy loving Solness. Solness suggests that she persuade Ragnar to not give up his position, that way he can keep Ragnar working for him and Kaia nearby for affection. Kaia falls to her knees in devoted gratitude. Solness hears his wife coming, pulls Kaia to her feet and sends her to her desk.

Mrs. Solness (Aline) appears. Solness tells her that Kaia was just preparing a letter for him to sign. Aline asks him to join her and their visitor, Dr. Herdal, in the drawing room. Solness wonders suspiciously whether the doctor has anything particular to say to him, but is assured the doctor came to see her and would just like to say hello. Solness says he'll join them in a moment. With a look at Kaia, Aline leaves.

Kaia worries that Aline is suspicious but Solness dismisses her concerns, ordering her to take care of the business with Ragnar right away. She tells him she'd gladly break off her engagement if that's the only way she can stay, and asks fearfully whether it's Ragnar he truly needs. Solness reassures her that it's her he needs and tells her to go home. As she goes he asks whether the drawings Ragnar prepared for the young couple are still on his desk. Kaia finds them, hands them over to him, and leaves.

Just as she's going Aline and Dr. Herdal come in from another door. Aline comments on Kaia having finishing the letter so quickly and tells Solness he's lucky to have her. Solness responds with a pointed comment about being unused to having a good natured and willing spirit around. Aline reproaches him gently, and Solness apologizes. Aline invites Herdal to come back later for a cup of tea, then leaves him alone with Solness.

Act 1, Part 1 Analysis

This first section of the play vividly and effectively introduces us to the central character, his primary conflict, and several key aspects to his personality. Solness is depicted as having a lot of power even before he comes in the door. This is illustrated by the way his staff scurries back to their desks when they hear him approach. His initial dialogue with Kaia adds a suggestion of sexual power when we see how he controls her. Finally, in the climax of this section, we see how forcefully he deals with Brovik's request to help Ragnar and how violently he reacts to even the slightest suggestion that it's time to retire. At this point it becomes clear that the demonstrations of power, sexual and otherwise, are masking desperate insecurity about his age.

This is Solness' primary conflict and therefore the primary conflict of the play, the tension between youth and maturity. The argument over Ragnar's work clearly indicates that Solness is deeply resistant to the ideas of youth and of growing old - specifically to the possibility of work being taken from him by the younger generation. The character of Brovik represents what Solness is afraid he's going to become, old and feeble. He's even more afraid of old age than Brovik, however, because as we later discover he has no children to take care of him the way Ragnar takes care of Brovik. As the play progresses, particularly through the development of his relationship with Hilda, we see Solness' fears slowly retreat as he embraces his own youthful spirit, leading him to his climactic act of tragic recklessness in the final moments of the play. For now, however, Solness is in control of every aspect of his life and work, which makes his downfall even more drastic.

Aline Solness is portrayed clearly as a woman of perception and perhaps wisdom. It seems evident that she can see what's going on between Kaia and Solness, yet makes no comment on it. She does, however, stand up for herself when Solness makes the snide remark about Kaia being good-natured. This suggests that Aline is strong enough to take care of herself when her personal integrity is challenged, and wise enough to see that her husband's weakness for younger women isn't that kind of challenge - either that or she's given up fighting with him about it.

Act 1, Part 2

Act 1, Part 2 Summary

Alone with Doctor Herdal, Solness asks him whether he's noticed anything unusual about Aline's behavior. Herdal comments that the only thing he's noticed is that Aline doesn't much like Kaia, wonders whether the situation might be too much of a strain for her, and asks whether it's true that there have been a number of relationships with young women in Solness' life, some of whom he became quite attached to. Solness doesn't deny any of it, but when Herdal asks whether his relationship with Kaia is of the same sort, Solness changes the subject.

Solness tells a long story about how he hired Ragnar and Brovik to fill a need in his firm. He was doubtful of Ragnar staying because he (Ragnar) wanted to be independent as soon as possible. Kaia came on an errand, and Ragnar became completely infatuated with her. Solness wondered whether Ragnar would stay if Kaia worked there, and the next day Kaia came in and made arrangements to work there on the assumption that she'd been offered a job. When Herdal asks what the point of the story is, Solness tells him he's been wondering whether it's possible that he created the situation by thinking about it, by wishing and imagining. He also admits that he doesn't really care for Kaia but keeps her around so he can keep Ragnar, and complains about having to keep up the pretext of caring for her. When Herdal asks whether Solness has ever considered telling all this to his wife, Solness confesses that he wants Aline to misunderstand, implying that he deserves her blame and resentment. When Herdal says he doesn't understand, Solness changes the subject again.

Solness accuses Herdal of thinking he's insane the way Aline does. Herdal protests that he thinks no such thing and neither does Aline. Solness says they must agree to disagree and wonders if Herdal thinks Solness is a happy man. Herdal asks if Solness feels happy. Solness laughs and suggests that he couldn't be happier. Herdal comments on Solness' luck, which helped him re-establish his career when his house burned down. Solness reminds him that it was Aline's house, and that even though it's been twelve or thirteen years, Aline is still haunted by what happened. Solness goes on to say that he's afraid his luck will turn and his place will be taken by the younger generation. He says he feels the change coming, that the younger generation is "knocking on his door," and when they come in that will be the end of him. Just then there's a knock on his door.

Act 1, Part 2 Analysis

This section is almost exclusively exposition, telling us more about Solness' history and life to this point. However there are other narrative factors at work here as well.

The revelation that Solness has a history of relationships with young women puts a different light on his relationships with both Kaia and Aline. It makes us wonder whether he's shaping the truth to make himself look less predatory when he tells Herdal the story of how Kaia came to work for him. It also makes us wonder whether Aline's relative calmness in to seeing him with Kaia is the result of seeing the same thing over and over again. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it foreshadows the development of his complicated relationship with Hilda.

Solness' story about how he "created" Kaia's presence in the office just by thinking about it foreshadows his growing belief later in the play that his mind is capable of creating anything and transcending anything, another factor that leads to his tragic downfall. This also suggests the possibility that, by asking Herdal whether Aline thinks he's mad, Solness himself is actually asking the doctor because he's afraid he actually is mad.

The audience sees again Solness' fear of the younger generation, underlying his comments about youth from the first section and foreshadowing his ultimate destruction through the influence of the youthful Hilda. Also, for the first time we hear about the fire that destroyed Solness and Aline's home, an incident that haunts them as individuals and colors their entire relationship as a couple. Because the house is a symbol of Solness' past vigor and passion, the fact that it's mentioned here foreshadows both the later revelations of what happened and the inevitable destruction of Solness' renewed passion once he reconnects with that passion through Hilda.

Act 1, Part 3

Act 1, Part 3 Summary

Solness opens the door and admits Hilda, who comes into the room wearing hiking clothes and carrying a knapsack. She greets Solness excitedly, and when he isn't immediately overjoyed to see her asks if he knows who she is. Herdal recognizes her from a trip to the mountains they both took last summer. When Hilda mentions her last name - Wangel - Solness asks whether she's related to a Doctor Wangel from a town he visited several years before. Hilda tells him she's his daughter, and reminds Solness that he was there building a tower for the church when she was just twelve or thirteen. She also mentions that she knows Aline, and Solness calls to Aline to come in. Herdal leaves, commenting that the younger generation did in fact come to Solness' door.

Aline comes in and recognizes Hilda from a health spa they both visited. Solness tells Aline that Hilda's asked whether she can stay, Aline says of course, and goes off to prepare a room. Solness suggests one of the nurseries, Aline agrees, and goes off.

Hilda and Solness are left alone. At first they engage in small talk - whether Hilda, who arrived without clothes, plans to go shopping, whether her father is still alive, and whether Hilda plans to study at the university. Suddenly Hilda asks Solness whether he truly does remember her. Solness suggests that Hilda tell him what she remembers, and she tells him in great detail how they met, how Solness built a magnificent tower for the church, how he climbed the tower and placed a wreath on the weather vane, how there was a dinner in his honor, how she wore a white dress to that dinner, how he kissed her several times, and how he promised to return in ten years to take her to a magnificent new home which she, half playfully and half seriously, calls her new kingdom. Solness denies that any of it ever happened. Hilda falls silent and seems upset.

Solness is at a loss, then suddenly wonders if he created this meeting with the spirit of youth in the same way as he thinks he created the situation with Kaia, by thinking about it, wishing it and willing it. Hilda cheers up, and tells him that she's there because it's been ten years to the day since that encounter, and she's come to get him to take her to her new kingdom. When Solness tells her to be serious, she says that she's actually come to see everything he's built, hopefully a lot more towers like the one he built in her hometown. Solness tells her he doesn't build those any more; he just builds homes for human beings. When she suggests he should build towers on those homes, he says it's just what he's longed to do but hasn't because he's been afraid of what people would say. He adds that he's building a new home for himself and Aline, and there's a high tower on that. Hilda promises to go out and see it for herself the next morning.

Solness asks what her first name. She tells him, reminding him that she told him her name that day they first met. He tells her that since they first met he's felt haunted by a half-forgotten experience he kept trying to recapture, and tells her it's a good thing she's

come to him now, saying he's desperately lonely and afraid of the younger generation. Hilda tells him he should open the doors wide to the younger generation and to their friendship and offers herself to be useful. Solness accepts her offer, saying she can help him in his fight. "Youth against youth."

Herdal returns and comments on how Solness and Hilda are still visiting. Aline follows him in, saying that Hilda's room is ready. Solness tells Aline he knew Hilda as a little girl, and Aline receives the news very calmly and goes out with Herdal. As he helps Hilda with her things, Solness comments that she's the one thing he's needed the most. As they leave, Hilda says that means she's almost found her kingdom.

Act 1, Part 3 Analysis

Hilda bursts into the action of the play with all the energy and passion of the younger generation that Solness seems to resent. Because his ultimate destruction takes place at least partly as the result of Hilda's influence, her very presence foreshadows his death at the end of the play. Her memories of how they met also foreshadow his death, which takes place when Solness falls from the same kind of tower that Hilda celebrated him climbing at their first meeting.

This point in the play is the first time that nurseries are mentioned. The fact that they're in Solness' and Aline's home suggests there are children somewhere in their past, although they're not specifically mentioned at this point. Combine this with the hints of tragedy and guilt that have come before, and we begin to wonder whether that tragedy involves children. All of this foreshadows the revelations of the truth that come later in the play.

The question of who truly remembers what is a key aspect of the long scene between Hilda and Solness. The amount of detail in Hilda's story certainly suggests that she's remembering something that really happened, at least as far as the construction of the tower and the celebrations of its completion are concerned. Her story about what happened at the dinner party afterwards is perhaps a little more suspect. We find ourselves wondering whether even a man like Solness, whom we know is interested in younger women, would repeatedly kiss a twelve or thirteen year old girl in the manner Hilda suggests he did. We then have to wonder about Hilda's mental state, and whether someone who's truly thinking clearly would believe in things said so long ago and act on that belief in the way she says she has.

The audience also has to wonder what Solness truly remembers and whether his memories are suggested and/or influenced by Hilda's enthusiasm. Again because we've already seen how attracted he can be to young women, we wonder whether he participates in this joint remembering because he has hopes of becoming intimate with her. Another possibility is that, in spite of his claims of being haunted by something half-forgotten, he has let the incident and all its implications slip from his mind. A third possibility is that Hilda is right when she suggests that Solness has difficulty remembering these events because he's ashamed of them. The text offers no concrete

explanations as to what he remembers, but is very clear about why he opens himself to Hilda and moving forward in life with her. He feels she can be an ally in his fight against the advances of the younger generation. His hope and optimism prove to be deeply ironic, as it's his alliance with Hilda that eventually leads to his destruction.

The various towers spoken about by Solness and Hilda represent youth, power, and vigor. It may even be possible that the towers are a phallic symbol, and represent not only creative power but sexual power as well. The tower that Hilda recalls Solness building and climbing represents the height of all Solness' youthful powers and abilities, while the fact that he hasn't built towers in years suggests that he feels those same powers have left him. The tower that Solness is building on his new home represents the new stage of youth that he's about to enter as a result of Hilda's presence in his life. This is the central character journey of the play, Solness' transformation from a once-successful man fearful of growing old into a newly re-successful man excited about his youthful energy, hope and enthusiasm being reborn.

Act 2, Part 1

Act 2, Part 1 Summary

This act takes place in Solness and Aline's drawing room. Silently, Solness flips through Ragnar's drawings while Aline tends her flowers.

Kaia comes in to let Solness know she's arrived for work and that Ragnar isn't with her because he's staying with Brovik, who's very ill. She asks whether Solness will want to see Ragnar when he arrives. Solness says he's got nothing to say to him. Kaia leaves.

Solness suggests that Aline should go for a walk. She says that would be a good idea, but stays. They discuss how Hilda's already up and moving about, and Solness comments on how things will be different from now on. Aline thinks he means because of Hilda, but Solness tells her it's because of the new house. Aline tells him that the new house will never be a home for her because of how difficult it is for her to bear what happened not just to the old house (which was her parents' home) but what happened afterwards. She blames herself for not being strong enough to get on with life, especially for the sake of the children. Solness angrily wonders whether there will be any relief from the gloom of their marriage, whether there will be any "sunlight." He also wonders why they built the house in the first place. When she says that's a question only he can answer he accuses her of putting hidden meanings in everything he says and tells her that she and Herdal are wrong, he's perfectly sane. When Aline asks what troubles him he tells her it's his sense of debt towards her, his sense of guilt. Aline says that if he feels those things he must be ill after all. Solness sees Hilda coming in and says that sunshine is entering the room.

Hilda bids Solness and Aline a cheerful good morning saying she slept wonderfully, like a princess, even though she kept having dreams of falling. Aline gets ready to go into town, promising to pick up some of the things that Hilda needs. Hilda embraces her, but Aline moves away quickly, saying it's really nothing more than her duty. Hilda protests that she should be able to go into town herself, now that she's changed her clothes and looks a little more respectable. Aline suggests that people in the town might stare anyway, Hilda wonders why, and Solness suggests they might think she's mad as well, saying they already think he's mad. When Aline and Hilda both react with surprise to this statement he says they must surely have noticed how peculiar he is. Hilda says she did notice one thing, and then playfully says she won't tell what. Aline leaves, saying she has no doubt Hilda will tell Solness what she's talking about when they're alone.

Act 2, Part 1 Analysis

This section opens in silence with Solness and Aline busy with their own activities. It's only a brief few moments but it adds another layer of information to what we know about their marriage, symbolizing how they essentially lead very separate lives. Yet another

layer of information is revealed through their conversation about the house, which includes the first actual mention of children. We get the sense that both Solness and Aline feel a great deal of guilt about what happened, which perhaps explains their silence and unease with each other. The discussions of children and guilt foreshadow the revelation later in the act of what actually happened after the house burned down.

The house and tower Solness is building represent the new life he desperately wants for himself. Again, the tower represents the power, perhaps even sexual power, that he wants to regain. We hear suggestions that he wants to build this new life with Aline but, as this section makes clear, their marriage doesn't appear to be working anymore. His asking why he's building the house at all is rhetorical to him but is answered for us by Hilda's appearance - Solness isn't quite aware at this point in the play that Hilda's presence means a new life for him. It's possible, however, that at this point he has his hopes. If he didn't, he probably wouldn't refer to Hilda by the very obvious sunshine metaphor.

Hilda is quite brazen in this scene. With her reference to sleeping like a princess and her coyness about the madness she sees in him, she's obviously flirting with Solness even while Aline is in the room. This reinforces her statement in the first act that she's never cared that he's married and illustrates her willful single-mindedness. Her dream of falling foreshadows Solness' actions at the end of the play and the tragedy to come.

Act 2, Part 2

Act 2, Part 2 Summary

Hilda comments that Aline doesn't like her and complains that Aline described going into town to do the shopping as a duty, saying that Aline should have said she looks on it as a pleasure. She wanders around the room and ends up looking at Ragnar's drawings. She tells Solness he must be stupid for teaching all these other people when he should be the only one doing any building. Solness confesses that he feels exactly the same way and that he broods over the thought incessantly. He wonders whether that's what Hilda meant when she talked about seeing something in him that made her think he's mad, but she says that isn't what she was thinking of and refuses again to tell him.

Solness takes her over to the window to look at the new home he's building for himself and Aline. She comments on the tower that's being built, and then asks if there will be nurseries in that house as well. Solness tells her there will be three, just like in the current home. Hilda asks whether there will be any children, Solness says no, and Hilda tells him that's what makes her think she's a little mad - his keeping the three nurseries empty and building a home which will also have three empty nurseries. Solness tells her that he and Aline did have children, twin boys who were born several years ago but lived only two weeks. He bursts out that he's glad that Hilda is there with him because he finally has someone that he can talk to. She sits down and listens intently as he tells the story of what happened to the children.

The boys were born just before the fire, and were rescued along with Aline just in time, Shortly afterwards Aline developed a fever which infected her breast milk, and it was that that killed the boys. He says that from that day forward he took no joy in building churches or towers, not even the one in Hilda's hometown. All he's interested in building now is homes for people to live in. He tells Hilda how he divided the old garden into lots, built family homes on all of them and experienced great success and prosperity, all of which felt hollow as the result of his ongoing grief about the boys.

Hilda suggests that building homes and creating happiness for so many families must have been a source of joy for him, but Solness tells her that that joy came as the result of the sacrifice of his own happiness and that of others. Hilda asks whether he means Aline. Solness says yes, adding that Aline had a talent for raising children just like he had a talent for raising buildings, but that her talent's been wasted all because of him. He describes her talent as being in "a smoldering heap of ruins." Hilda tries to get him to believe it's not his fault, but he tells her that he can't be sure, suggesting it may have been his fault. Hilda tells him that if he keeps talking like that she's going to start believing he is mad after all.

Act 2, Part 2 Analysis

Moving forward on his journey toward renewed hope and enthusiasm is only possible for Solness once he's let go of the burden of the past, and as he tells the stories of what happened to the house and to the children, we see that burden beginning to lighten. This is ironic, however, because it takes place as the result of the actions of someone who hasn't let go of the past at all - Hilda.

In her own way she is as obsessed with what once was as Solness. The difference is that the past that Hilda's obsessed with had a powerful element of hope and moving forward to it. In other words, her past contains her dreams for the future. Solness' past is simply a nightmare preventing a future from coming into being. Hilda's presence and joy in him, however, helps him move away from that nightmare and into the dream he's desperately sought since the tragedy of the fire.

The building of family homes literally on the ashes of the old house is a symbol of the hope possible even after the deepest tragedy. It's an ironic symbol because while building hope and happiness for other people Solness has been unable to build his own, or help Aline to build hers. The way he uses the image "a smoldering heap of ruins" to describe Aline's talent for raising children reinforces both the symbol and its irony.

Solness' hint that perhaps the fire was his fault foreshadows the information to come later in the act, reinforces the idea that there are ever-deepening layers of truth to this story, and suggests that there are also ever-deepening layers to Solness.

Act 2, Part 3

Act 2, Part 3 Summary

Ragnar comes in, hoping for compliments from Solness to take back to Brovik, who seems to be on his deathbed. Solness bluntly tells him that there will be no compliments. He also says that Ragnar can continue to work for him and even marry Kaia, but that he shouldn't think about striking out on his own. Ragnar takes the drawings and prepares to leave, saying he'd better get back home before his father dies. Hilda asks him to leave the drawings so she can look at them. Ragnar agrees, then hurries out.

Hilda berates Solness for doing what she calls a wicked thing to Ragnar, but he says she doesn't understand the facts. When she's about to become even angrier Solness changes the subject, and tells her about a crack in the chimney of the old house that may have been a cause of the fire. He tells her he knew about the crack but left it un-repaired and un-reported. He confesses that he did in fact imagine exactly what happened - that the burning down of the house could eventually lead to the building of his reputation as a builder. He even tells Hilda his fantasy of how the fire would start as a result of a spark flying out of the cracked chimney, but then surprises Hilda, and us, by saying the fire started in a closet. He explains that he was using his fantasies about the chimney to illustrate his theory that there are people who have the power to will things into being. He says that's why he believes he's to blame for the deaths of his sons and for Aline never becoming what she longed to be.

Hilda suggests that Solness is indeed ill - not insane, as he fears, but suffering from a weak and sickly conscience. She admits that sometimes she suffers from the same thing, saying that she feels remorse at leaving her father and at the likelihood that she will never go home again. Solness asks why she's staying away if she feels so guilty. She tells him it's because the ten years mentioned in his promise are up and there's something inside her calling her to him. Solness becomes excited and says they're in the same situation, that they've each got something inside them that calls to the greater powers outside their control that force them to give in to what those powers want them to do. He talks excitedly about tales of ancient Vikings, in which they experienced the same sort of call, sailing to foreign lands, pillaging and burning - and, Hilda adds, capturing the women and carrying them off. She says she's quite excited by the idea of being captured and carried off, adding that she believes she's already found her Viking. Solness compares her to a bird in the woods, a bird of prey. Hilda agrees, saying she has every right to be a bird of prey, to hunt down what she wants and capture it.

She asks Solness whether he's sure he never called her to him. He says he must have, and tells her that he called her because she's youth, admitting that it's youth that he longs for so desperately.

Act 2, Part 3 Analysis

The destruction of Ragnar's hopes mirrors the destruction of similar hopes that Solness once felt about his own future but which ended with the two tragedies (the house and the babies) all those years before. The metaphoric elimination of Ragnar's house (the drawings) as a source of hope parallels the destruction of Solness' house in the past, while Brovik's impending death echoes the death of Solness' happiness.

Solness finally admits that Hilda represents youth to him, in all its positive aspects, as opposed to Ragnar who represents all the negatives. Now that he's admitted to his longing for youth, Solness feels free to take the next stage on his journey and embrace the hope and energy and passion she brings into his life. This begins his journey toward his eventual downfall.

The story of the crack in the chimney and Solness' wondering about whether he created the fire out of his desire for success suggests to us even more strongly that he is extremely self-centered, acting and thinking and believing that everything in his life revolves around him and happens because of him. The same charge of self-centeredness can be said of Hilda. Right from the beginning she gives the clear impression that nothing matters except how she feels and what she wants. It's easy to see that her support, encouragement and compassion are all tactics she uses to get Solness to live up to his promise of ten years ago. In other words she really is like a bird of prey, hunting for and carrying off her prey. What both of them are coming to realize is that in the same way as Hilda wants to be carried off by a Viking, Solness wants to be carried off in her claws. This image is another foreshadowing of the end of the play, in that in the same way as a bird of prey destroys its quarry, Hilda eventually destroys Solness.

As it develops further, we clearly see that the relationship between Solness and Hilda is that of two deeply selfish, self-aggrandizing and self-absorbed people discovering that they both want the same thing - the freedom that the other can bring into their lives. The problem is that they both want and need this freedom so much that they act recklessly. This leads to the impulsive actions that follow in the next section (Hilda getting Solness to write on Ragnar's drawings) that have a positive result, and the equally impulsive actions at the end of the final act, which end in tragedy.

Act 2, Part 4

Act 2, Part 4 Summary

Hilda grabs Ragnar's drawings and insists that Solness write something positive on them. Just as insistently Solness refuses, becoming angrier and angrier as Hilda insists more and more forcefully. He shouts that if he makes this gesture Ragnar will rise up and destroy him in the same way as he (Solness) destroyed Brovik. Hilda tells him to stop talking that way, saying that hearing him talk of his destruction robs her of "what means more to [her] than life ... the need to see [him] great." She convinces him to take out a pencil and write something supportive on the drawings.

As he writes Solness asks why Hilda never contacted him in the ten years since they met. She says she was afraid that if she did it would ruin everything. He then asks her whether she ever loved anyone else. She says she did, when she became angry with him for not coming for her. Finally he asks her why she came. She tells him point blank she wanted her kingdom. He continues to write on the drawings.

Aline comes in, saying she's brought a few things for Hilda and that others are being delivered. Solness asks whether Kaia is still in the next room, and when Aline says she is he prepares to take the drawings in to her. Hilda decides she wants to give Kaia the good news and calls her in. Solness hands Kaia the drawings and tells her to take them to Brovik as soon as possible. When she asks whether Ragnar can come and thank him Solness harshly tells her he wants no thanks and adds that he will no longer require either of their services any more. Kaia leaves.

Aline wonders how Solness will manage without her and whether he's got someone ready to take her place. Hilda immediately suggests she'd be useless at a desk. Solness quickly reassures Aline and tells her everything will be fine once they move into the new house, saying that that very evening they'll hang the traditional wreath on the tower to mark the official moving in. Hilda says it will be wonderful to see Solness on the top of the tower, but Aline tells her that Solness gets dizzy when he's up high. Hilda says she remembers seeing him at the top of a tower but Aline says she must have been imagining things. She adds that if Solness really is planning to climb the tower it's a sign he really is ill, and runs off to call the doctor.

Hilda asks Solness whether it's really true that he gets dizzy. Solness avoids the question and tells her she could live in the top room of the tower like a princess. Hilda says that's what he promised, Solness asks whether she's sure it's not just something she dreamed, Hilda sharply asks whether he's suggesting he didn't actually do it, and Solness confesses that he doesn't know any more. He says, however, that he does know that he should have done it and promises that that evening they will hang the wreath over the new house that will never be a home. As he goes out Hilda says to herself that it will be thrilling.

Act 2, Part 4 Analysis

Hilda's insistence that Solness write on Ragnar's drawings is basically her forcing him to put his money where his mouth is, pushing him into acting as fearlessly about youth as he's now talking. This foreshadows what happens later as she talks him into climbing the tower and hanging the wreath in spite of his fear of heights.

The surge of hope that Solness feels as a result of connecting with Hilda isn't enough to calm his fear of being replaced, which resurfaces when she persists about the drawings. This fear, and her apparent goodwill towards Ragnar and Brovik, makes him ask why she's really there. Her answer, that she came to claim her kingdom, reveals her selfishness and childishness, and reinforces the idea that she's as self-centered and self-obsessive as he is.

His obsessive-ness shows up again in his dismissal of Ragnar and Kaia. We get the clear impression that now Hilda's around nothing's going to stop him from being the "Master Builder" he's always intended to be. The only difference is that now, because of Hilda, he's free of the guilt that kept him from truly reveling in his success.

For the first time we hear about Solness' fear of heights which foreshadows his death at the end of the play and which calls into question again whether things happened ten years ago the way Hilda remembers them. We see again that Solness is doubtful about her story himself, but at this point he's so caught up in the youthfulness and passion that Hilda is bringing into his life that he doesn't seem to care. This sense of recklessness in Solness continues into the final act, where it leads to tragic consequences.

Act 3, Part 1

Act 3, Part 1 Summary

This scene takes place on the veranda of Aline and Solness' home. In the early evening, Aline sits quietly wrapped in a white shawl as Hilda comes onto the veranda after exploring the garden. Hilda talks about how fierce Solness was being with the workmen at the new house, but Aline comments that underneath all his bluster he's really very gentle. When Hilda hints that she doesn't believe it, Aline says she doesn't really know him yet. Hilda then asks whether Aline is glad to be moving into the new house. Aline says she's glad for Solness' sake and that she has to try to make him happy since she's got so many faults. Hilda suggests that because Aline has suffered so much she deserves to be happy. When Aline wonders what Hilda means, Hilda explains that she was talking about the destruction of the house and the deaths of the boys. Aline tells her that it was easier to come to terms with the deaths because they were the will of God and because the boys are in a safer, happier place.

She also says that the loss of the house was harder to bear because there were priceless family treasures there, along with her own collection of dolls. She begins to cry when she remembers them, telling Hilda she took care of them when she was a child and continued to take care of them when she was an adult, looking after them like they were her own children. She says that she thinks Hilda is probably laughing at her, but Hilda says she's not laughing at all.

Herdal appears in response to being summoned by Aline. As she leads him off, she suggests to Hilda that they be friends. Hilda embraces her and wishes it were possible, but Aline gently puts her arm aside and leaves.

Solness arrives and asks Hilda what she and Aline were talking about. When Hilda doesn't tell him, he assumes it was about the boys. Hilda tells him she has to go away, and when he protests that he needs her she tells him that he knows perfectly well what would happen if she stayed and that she can't do that to someone with whom she's become friends. Solness asks what will become of him if she goes. She says he'll live according to his duty to his wife, but he says he can't live his life chained to a dead woman and needs joy in his life.

For a moment Hilda surrenders to despair, but Solness talks to her again about the Viking spirit and the strength of birds of prey and she soon cheers up. They talk happily together about building a castle for their new kingdom, and make plans to build it on a tall hill and give it a high tower. Solness says that it will be the last thing he will ever build, but Hilda says it will be beautiful, a "castle in the air" where builders with sickly consciences can leave all their cares and worries behind. Solness says they will build their castle together, on a firm foundation.

Ragnar comes in with the wreath that's to be hung on the top of the tower. Solness is surprised to see him and assumes that Brovik is better. Ragnar tells him that the opposite is true, that Brovik is dead. Solness tells him to go home and that he'll take the wreath down to the workmen at the new house. He takes the wreath and goes out.

Hilda angrily tells Ragnar that he should have thanked Solness. Ragnar tells her he knows that it's she he ought to thank, and warns her that she doesn't really know Solness yet. When Hilda asks what he means, he tells her that Solness has held him back all these years and destroyed Brovik's career all because he wanted to keep Kaia around. Hilda refuses to believe it, insisting that it can't be true and that she won't let it be true. She tells Ragnar the real reason Solness kept him around was because be wanted Ragnar to stay. When Ragnar asks her whether Solness told her that, Hilda says he didn't but that she wants it to be true so it will be true. Ragnar tells her that Solness kept him back because he was afraid of Ragnar's potential.

Ragnar calls Solness a coward, and when Hilda protests he tells her that Solness doesn't have the courage to climb the tower because of his fear of heights. Hilda says that Solness isn't afraid of heights, that she saw him climb a tower and that he'll climb this tower as well. Ragnar comments he'd heard about that incident, that Solness was "supposed" to have done that once in his younger days and that the incident is something of a legend among younger architects and builders. But then he says no one will ever see that, Hilda shouts that she will see it and must see it.

Aline comes out looking for Solness. When she finds out he's gone down to the site with the wreath she becomes frightened and insists that Ragnar go down to fetch him. Once he's gone, Aline confides her fears to Hilda, saying that she's been talking to Herdal who told her some of the things Solness told him. Just then Herdal comes out, saying that some ladies have come to call and they're asking for Aline. She almost refuses to go in but realizes she has to do her duty and urges Hilda to try to talk Solness out of climbing the tower. She and the doctor go in just as Solness reappears.

Act 3, Part 1 Analysis

In the first part of this scene, Aline's confession that she felt the loss of the house more deeply than she felt the loss of her children is something of a shock. When we hear her explain that the children are in a better place we can almost understand her thinking, but the story of the dolls seems perhaps a little extreme to us until we remember that this is a play about people trapped in their pasts.

Solness is trapped and wants to be free, Hilda doesn't even realize she's trapped and therefore doesn't want to be freed, and with Aline's story about the dolls we realize that she too is trapped in the past but not for the reasons Solness believes her to be. She was trapped in her past, in her childhood with the safe and constant love of her dolls, before she even married Solness. We therefore realize at this moment in the play that Aline represents the ultimate emptiness of the present that results from living too intently in the past. The emergence of this story at this point in the play marks the

simultaneous emergence of its theme, which explores the relationship between focusing too much on the past and destruction. Aline lived in the past most of her life and has already been destroyed. Solness is trying to recapture his past and is about to be destroyed, and when he's destroyed Hilda's dreams of the past will end up destroyed.

The audience, and Hilda, learn more about how self-centered Solness is when he makes the assumption that Aline has been talking about the deaths of the boys. We see at this point that he's never really made the effort to learn the truth about Aline's grief. By contrast we see Hilda become less self-centered for a moment when she says she can't continue her relationship with Solness if it means hurting someone she's close to. There's some question as to whether the friendship Aline offered is genuine or whether it's the same sort of maintaining of appearances that Aline's clearly been doing for years, part of the duty she continually refers to. However, that at this point, Hilda believes the offer of friendship to be genuine and therefore changes her attitude, at least until she's convinced by Solness that their affair has to continue.

Throughout their conversation about new kingdoms, towers, birds of prey and castles in the air, Solness' enthusiasm and joy build as he imagines his youth and power returning. Ragnar's appearance with the news of Brovik's death brings him down to earth, but only for a moment. His quick exit tells us that he doesn't want to be reminded in any way of either death or youth.

For the second time in this section Hilda is told that she doesn't know Solness well at all. This, and her repeated insistence that things will take place as she wants them to, reinforces the idea that she is truly trapped in the past, living the dreams of a child and isn't facing reality like an adult.

Act 3, Part 2

Act 3, Part 2 Summary

Solness comes in, wondering who asked for him. Hilda says it was her and tells him she wants to ask him whether something she heard about him being afraid is true. He sits her down and tells her he's afraid of retribution, explaining that God had given him a mission to build churches and only churches. He says that that's why God caused the house to burn down so he could become more powerful and more successful and build even greater churches. But, he says, he built the church in Hilda's hometown and climbed the tower so that he could make a vow to God that never again would he build churches but focus on building homes for his fellow human beings. Then he says that he's realized that homes mean nothing. People have no real use for them. He tells Hilda that what he's going to do now is build the one possible dwelling place for true human happiness, castles in the air - and he'll need Hilda's help to do it. She asks him whether it will be with her help alone, and specifically asks about Kaia. Solness refuses to answer her question, insisting that Hilda trust him completely the way she's done for the last ten years.

Hilda tells him that for her to trust him she has to see him the way she first saw him, free atop the tower. When he says he can't do that, she says he must, that she wants him to! Solness tells her that if he does, he will talk to God in the same way as he talked to God before and tell him there will be no more churches, only a beautiful castle built with the help of his beautiful princess whom he will kiss many times. Hilda responds enthusiastically and says that she sees him again the way she saw him first, with music in the air.

Just then Aline and Herdal come out from the house and Ragnar comes up from his meeting with the workers. A band plays in the background. Ragnar announces that the foreman is ready to go up with the wreath, and Solness says he's going down to be with the men. Aline asks him to stay on the ground. Solness comments that that's where he usually stays, and goes out. Aline and Herdal comment that it's a relief to see that he's forgotten about climbing the tower, with Aline adding that two workmen have already been killed on the site. Herdal comments that it was Hilda's influence that did it.

Ragnar stands with Hilda and tells her there's a group of his fellow students in the street watching, saying they like to see him kept on the ground the way he's kept them down. Hilda tells him triumphantly that Solness is actually going to climb the tower. Ragnar doesn't believe her.

Herdal shouts that the foreman has started to climb. Ragnar is the first to see that it's in fact Solness. Aline reacts with terror and starts to run to get him down, but Herdal holds her back. Hilda narrates Solness' journey to the others, recounting how he's climbing higher and higher. Everyone watches breathlessly, Aline actually turning away. Hilda shouts exultantly, saying how proud and powerful he looks and that she hears a

triumphant song. She sees Solness wave his hat, grabs Aline's white shawl, waves it back and shouts hurrahs up at "Master Builder Solness!"

Suddenly, Aline, Ragnar and Herdal gasp. Solness has fallen. A voice calls out that he's dead, and another calls that his head is crushed. Herdal comforts Aline and Ragnar comments that Solness couldn't do it after all. Hilda, quiet but still triumphant, says to no one in particular that he climbed to the very top and that she heard music. She waves the shawl again and cries out "My - my master builder!"

Act 3, Part 2 Analysis

Solness' story about the churches and his climbing of the tower sounds on one level as though it's the truth. It may be that as the result of Ragnar's earlier comments about the incident becoming a legend we believe now that it actually did happen. But once he gets to the end of the story and tells Hilda that he's going to devote himself to building castles in the air, we see that his desire for her and the positive youthfulness she represents has taken control of him. This, combined with the lack of clarity earlier about who remembers what and what exactly is true, suggests that he's bought into at least some of Hilda's fantasies as much as she has. Although in his case it is motivated by desperation to keep old age at bay.

Solness' final line about staying on the ground has a double meaning. He's referring to what he does at other ceremonies like this one, but we understand that his line also means that he's been staying on the ground for the last ten years. This double meaning suggests that he's decided that he's not going to stay on the ground any more, but is going to do as his princess asked and climb the tower. Herdal's comment about Hilda's influence over Solness also has a double meaning, but the second meaning in this line is ironic. We know at this point that Hilda has influenced Solness to do exactly the opposite of what Herdal thinks she's got him to do.

Solness' climbing the tower is the climax of the play, and is the climax of his journey toward youth, hope and freedom. Its impact is lessened somewhat by the fact the actual act of climbing takes place offstage, but because the watchers react so strongly to what they're seeing the moment is still powerful. A question that exists in our minds is why, exactly, he fell. Is it possible that he jumped? Did he realize at the top of the tower that nothing in his life would ever compare with this moment and that, even if he did build a castle in the air with Hilda, it would never be as truly fulfilling as this and jumped? Did he realize that he was committing an act of profound foolishness in trying to stave off old age and kill himself before experiencing Brovik's physical death or Aline's emotional/spiritual death? Did his already over-sized ego motivate him to exit his life in a way that would get him the greatest possible attention, even after his death? Was it merely vertigo? Did his dizziness actually cause him to become disoriented and fall?

The answer lies in Hilda's final line, in which she refers to Solness as "her" master builder. Yes his choice to climb the tower is the result of his own reckless desperation to be youthful; but the only reason he's able to act on that desperation is because of her

insistence that he has to be something that she wants. This reinforces the suggestion that she represents the lure of recapturing the past, the hopeless dream of regaining youth in the face of inevitable aging. Thus by saying that he is "her" master builder, she makes the thematic statement that the past has won, that the past has claimed the future. In other words Solness' death makes the play's final thematic statement - that living in the past leads to destruction.

Characters

Knut Brovik

Formerly an architect, Knut Brovik is now an assistant to Solness. At the beginning of the play, his deteriorating health prompts him to confront Solness over the lack of support Solness has shown Ragnar. He admits that his confidence in his son has been shaken by the fact that Solness has never appreciated his son's work. Calling on the little strength he has left, Knut demands that Solness evaluate and appreciate Ragnar's drawings. Solness responds too late, however, and Knut falls into a coma before he reads his employer's comments.

Ragnar Brovik

Knut's son Ragnar works as a draftsman for Solness. He appears stooped in the play, which reflects his inability to stand up to his boss and demand recognition. When his resentment over Solness's refusal to recognize his talent prompts him to confront the older man, he quickly backs down when he is told his drawings are worthless. Yet, he becomes for Solness the symbol of youth—everything of which Solness is afraid.

Ragnar's lack of perception surfaces when he determines that Solness has not allowed his father or himself any measure of independence because Solness wanted to keep Kaja close to him. His bitterness emerges in the final scene when he comes to the celebration of Solness's new home so that he can see his employer fail in his attempt to climb the tower. Ragnar notes "how horrible" Solness's fall is, yet his final words in the scene reinforce his employer's failure.

Kaja Fosli

Kaja works as Solness's bookkeeper. She has fallen desperately in love with him, even though she is engaged to Ragnar. Ibsen never develops her character, using her, for the most part, as reinforcement of Solness's power and status.

Dr. Herdal

Dr. Herdal serves as the family doctor and advisor. He councils Solness about his wife's condition and offers her comfort and support.

Aline Solness

Aline Solness, Halvard's wife, has become barren physically and emotionally, due to the tragedies that she has experienced. When her parents' home and everything in it went

up in flames, Aline could not get over the loss of her possessions and mementos. The mental and emotional strain that resulted prevented her from adequately nursing her babies, and her stubbornness caused her to refuse anyone's help. She admits that she did not have the strength of character to endure the fire, and she determines that she was punished for this through the death of her children.

The sense of duty she displayed regarding the nursing of her children has been magnified during the ensuing years. Her daily activities center on her duties to others. When Hilda appears at the house with few possessions, Aline promptly buys her enough items to make her feel comfortable. Yet, when Hilda thanks her, Aline responds that it was her duty to take care of her guest, removing all sense of spontaneity or real connection. She treats her husband in the same manner. She tells Hilda that it is "her duty to give into him." She reveals her estrangement from him when she leaves the room each time he walks in.

She appears to take no pleasure in her tasks or her interactions with others, especially her husband. Haggard and depressed, Aline dresses in black, as if she were in perpetual mourning. She does however, show openness to Hilda toward the end of the play, when the young woman takes the time to talk to her about the past. Halvard suggests that his wife had the potential for living a life of fulfillment, noting that she had a talent for "building up the small souls of children," but that potential was destroyed by the death of their boys.

Halvard Solness

Master builder Halvard Solness is a forceful, ambitious man, used to getting his own way. He has become successful through his drive to be the best in his field and through his ruthlessness. Knut Brovik insists that Solness's ambition caused him to "cut the ground out from under" all in his way. Solness himself admits that he beat Brovik down and broke his spirit. He refuses to let Ragnar become independent, claiming that he will "never give ground" over to the young. His determination to keep Ragnar from succeeding springs from his fear that if the younger man gets a chance, he will "hammer [him] to the ground" and break him the same way he broke Ragnar's father.

Solness tries to justify his ambition in his explanation of his initial goals. He tells Hilda that his dream was to build churches as monuments to God, determining that this activity would be the noblest thing he could do with his life. Yet, somehow, his plans went awry. He explains, "I built those poor country churches in so honest and warm and fervent a spirit that . . . He should have been pleased with me," but for some reason, He was not. As a result, Solness insists, God "turned the troll in me loose to stuff its pockets, put devils in me," which turned his ambition toward more selfish ends.

Solness feels that the house burning is evidence of God's displeasure, and that God took his children to prevent him from becoming attached to anything except his mission. He claims that his life has been ruined as a result. Yet, he also blames himself for his and his wife's tragic fate. He feels that he owes a debt to Aline since his desire to parcel

the land on which her parents' home stood caused his "troll" to burn down the house and so "suck all the lifeblood out of her."

His spirit and confidence in himself returns, however, with Hilda's arrival. She refocuses his attention on his craft when she begs him to build the two of them a "castle in the air." She also reinvigorates him through her obvious sexual desire for him, which allows him to feel youthful and thus powerful again.

Hilda Wangel

Hilda is a mysterious young woman who comes to stay with the Solnesses after Aline invites her for a visit. The two had met at a mountain lodge the previous summer. Hilda's real motive for the visit, however, is to seduce Solness and to convince him to fulfill his promise to build a castle for her, which he had made ten years earlier when she was twelve. He made such an impression on the young Hilda that she has become obsessed with the man she envisions as a god.

In her middle-class Victorian world, Hilda tries to absolve herself of responsibility for her desires, which threaten to break up a marriage. She insists that like Solness, she too has a "troll" and "devils" inside of her that have driven her to him. Solness admits that when these internal forces gain strength, "we have to give in—whether we want to or not." This sense of Hilda's possession by uncontrollable forces is reinforced by Solness's description of her as a "little devil in white," screaming his name as he climbed up the tower in her hometown.

Periodically, though, Hilda's concern for others overrides her obsession with Solness. She insists that Solness find some words of praise for Ragnar's drawings to help ease his father's mind as he approaches death. Also, she shows compassion for Aline as the older woman describes her tragic life. At one point, Hilda is so overcome with sympathy for her that she tells Solness that she plans to leave. However, when Solness admits that he no longer cares about his work, she becomes incensed at the thought that anything would interfere with his artistry, and so her passion for him reasserts itself. When he falls from the tower at the end of the play, she cannot accept his fate, refusing to take her eyes off the heights he has attained.

Themes

Self-Deception

Solness is aware of the suffering he has caused others, especially his wife, during his self-serving rise to power. In an effort to cope with the harsh consequences of this unchecked ambition, he tries to convince himself that he has not been completely responsible for his actions. He struggles to persuade others, as well as himself, that he is beset by internal devils, "players" that impose his will on others, without his consent. Solness insists that all he has to do is think of something he desires and immediately with no instruction from him, his devils carry out the deed. For example, the first time he meets Kaja, he thinks that he would like her to work in his office so Ragnar "would stay put too." As he is telling this story to Dr. Herdal, he swears he "didn't breathe a word" of these thoughts to anyone, but the next day, Kaja came back to the office, acting as if he had already given her the job. As a result of these thoughts, Solness admits to the doctor that he fears that he is going mad.

Hilda reinforces this self-deception when she insists that she also has a troll inside of her and that the trolls in each of them have brought them together. By absolving them of the responsibility of their desire for each other and their plans to run off together, Hilda tries to assuage their guilt over destroying Solness's marriage and abandoning Aline.

Age versus Youth

As Solness struggles to cope with the consequences of his actions, he becomes obsessed with the idea that he is losing his creative edge. This obsession is compounded when Brovik tells him that Ragnar has drawn up blueprints for a young couple who have applauded his "new modern" ideas. Solness admits to Dr. Herdal that he harbors "a terrible fear" that an inevitable change is coming, heralded by the young, and as a result, he will become obsolete.

In an effort to stop this process, he tries to break Ragnar's spirit and confidence in his abilities by refusing to allow him to work independently on a project. Solness cannot overcome his consuming fear even when Ragnar's father, with his dying wish, begs him for a word of praise for his son.

Rejuvenation

Rejuvenation comes in the form of Hilda, a young woman who sparks Solness's waning creativity and sexuality. When Hilda first comes to the house, Solness admits that he is no longer interested in building homes, for no one appreciates his work. When Hilda tells him that the sight of him climbing the tower in her hometown was "wonderfully thrilling" and "lovely," and reminds him that he kissed her several times that evening, his pride in his work reemerges along with his sense of sexual prowess. After Hilda

expresses unwavering confidence that he can again build and climb magnificent towers, he admits, "all these years I've been going around tormented by . . . a search for something—some old experience I thought I'd forgotten." She helps him remember the passion and creativity of his youth and instills in him the belief that he can regain his old powers. Hilda convinces him that he can carry her off to a magnificent castle in the air that he will build for the two of them. As a result, he admits to her, "you are the one person I've needed the most."

What Hilda helps him recapture during these musings is youth, the very thing that he thought would usurp his power and position. Solness, however, is ultimately unable to retain his sense of rejuvenation, and as his old fear of failure returns, he falls off the tower to his death.

Style

Realism and Expressionism

Ibsen combines elements of realism and expressionism in the play. Most of Ibsen's plays can be grouped into the realist movement, the dominant literary form in the latter part of the nineteenth century. In *The Master Builder*, however, Ibsen experiments with expressionism, a new movement that was coming into vogue. Realist and expressionist techniques merge in his characterizations. As Ibsen charts the rise and fall of master builder Halvard Solness, he takes a close look at cause-and-effect relationships. As in most realist works, the main character in Ibsen's play faces a moral choice, in this case whether or not to allow his ambition to run unchecked. When he decides that he will let nothing thwart his dream of rising to the top of his profession, he must face the destructive consequences. Ibsen presents a realistic depiction of the pain Solness's choice has caused not only his wife but also, ultimately, himself.

Ibsen's expressionistic techniques emerge in Solness's insistence that he has devils and trolls that enforce his will. When Solness claims that these devils were responsible for the burning of his home and Kaja's decision to seek employment with him, Ibsen suggests they are manifestations of Solness's own guilt. Ibsen also employs expressionism in his depiction of Hilda, who reenergizes Solness's creative spark and thus his confidence in himself, which provides him with the will to climb the tower again. Her mysterious arrival, just at the moment Solness needs to rejuvenate his creative energies, coupled with her unexplainable obsession for him, suggests that she may be a fantasy figure.

Symbolism

The dominant symbol in the play is the tower that Solness climbs on two occasions, a phallic structure that suggests his authority and sexuality. Hilda watches transfixed both times as he climbs the vertical edifices to the top, thrilled at the power and courage he displays as he rises high above the town. Her active observance of Solness's physical prowess causes her to become obsessed with him, so much so that she is willing to break up his marriage to the long-suffering Aline.

Historical Context

Realism

In the late nineteenth century, playwrights turned away from what they considered the artificiality of melodrama to a focus on the commonplace in the context of everyday contemporary life. They rejected the flat characterizations and unmotivated violent action typical of melodrama. Their work, along with much of the experimental fiction written during that period, adopted the tenets of realism, a new literary movement that took a serious look at believable characters and their sometimes problematic interactions with society.

To accomplish this goal, realistic drama focuses on the commonplace and eliminates the unlikely coincidences and excessive emotionalism of melodrama. Dramatists like Henrik Ibsen discard traditional sentimental theatrical forms as they chronicle the strengths and weaknesses of ordinary people confronting difficult social problems, like the restrictive conventions nineteenth-century women suffered. Writers who embraced realism use settings and props that reflect their characters' daily lives and realistic dialogue that replicates natural speech patterns.

Anna-Marie Taylor, in her overview on Ibsen for the *Reference Guide to World Literature,* comments that the author's realism centered on middle-class manners. She argues that his plays effectively deflated "bourgeois self-confidence" as they suggested that the "cosiest and best furnished of drawing rooms could harbour grim secrets, dissatisfaction, and despair." The exposure of deception and restrictions became a main focus of his social dramas, especially *A Doll House* and *Pillars of Society*. Later, when his plays became more experimental, Ibsen incorporated realistic techniques into a more symbolic structure.

Expressionism

Dramatists during the early decades of the twentieth century also adopted the techniques of another new literary movement. expressionism eschewed the realists' attention to verisimilitude and instead employed experimental methods that tried to objectify the inner experiences of human beings. Influenced by the theories of Freud, playwrights like August Strindberg used nonrealistic devices that distorted and sometimes oversimplified human actions in order to explore the depths of the human mind.

Ibsen's long career reflected the shifting styles of the theatre at the end of the nineteenth century that would continue into the twentieth. His early social dramas were realistic depictions of the interactions between family members and between men and women. In the later part of the decade, he experimented with more symbolic forms of drama, most notably in *The Master Builder* and *When We Dead Awaken*. In the former

play, the action is centered on the consciousness of the central character. Often viewers are not certain whether Solness's life becomes a construct of his dreams and desires, especially his relationship with Hilda, who becomes a muse figure in the play.

Critical Overview

When *The Master Builder* (*Bygmester Solness* in Norwegian) was published in Scandinavia in 1892, the public response was greater than for any other Ibsen play since *A Doll House*. Henrik Jaeger praises the structure of the play in *Dagbladet,* writing that it becomes "a dialogue" between Solness and Hilde "so powerful and brilliant that it is more gripping than the most exciting 'scene.'" Christian Brinckmann, in his review in *Nyt Tidsskrift,* applauds the way "despair resounds like jubilation and madness sounds like wisdom" in the play.

Some reviewers, however, criticized what they considered obscure subject matter. George Göthe, in *Nordisk Tidskrift,* insists that the play presents "precious and pretentious abstract grandiloquencies." He notes that solving riddles can "be amusing," but "when the riddles are so complex that one suspects that even the riddler himself does not really know the answer, the game ceases to be amusing."

The response to the initial stage performances of the play, which opened simultaneously in Berlin and Trondhjem, Norway in 1893, however, was mostly negative, due to its intricate structure, which placed heavy demands on the actors. Reviews of a later staging in London included one in the *Daily Telegraph* that claimed that in the play, "dense mist enshrouds characters, words, actions, and motives." A writer for the *Saturday Review* called it "a distracting jumble of incoherent elements" and argued that "there is no story" and "the characters are impossible." Appreciation of the play, though, has grown since its first productions. Most critics now consider *The Master Builder* to be one of Ibsen's finest, echoing Edvard Brandes's assessment in *Politiken* that the play blends "supreme craftsmanship" and "characteristic profundity."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Perkins is an instructor of twentieth-century literature and film. In this essay, Perkins examines Ibsen's adaptation of the Faust myth in Ibsen's play.

The story of a man who sells his soul to the devil so that he can gain knowledge, power, and riches can be traced back to the beginning of Christianity. This tale has been told under various names until the Renaissance, when it became known as the Faust myth. A German history of Dr. Faustus, the first known written account of the legend, inspired Christopher Marlowe's celebrated version, *Dr. Faustus* (1604). Since Marlowe's play, the story has appeared in various forms including Goethe's *Faust* (1808). In *The Master Builder*, Ibsen creates his own version of the myth as he weaves it into the thematic fabric of his play. Through the tragic Faustian tale of architect Halvard Solness, Ibsen explores the nature and devastating consequences of unchecked ambition.

In Marlowe's version of the Faust myth, the central character embarks on a quest for knowledge—in this case medical knowledge—so that he may "heap up gold" but also so that he can "make men to live eternally." His monomaniacal pursuit of knowledge prompts him to enter into a pact with the devil, which fulfills his ambitions to acquire this godlike power. Ultimately, however, Faustus's arrogance is punished when he must give up his soul at the end of the play and suffer eternal damnation.

In *Master Builder*, Ibsen's central character, Halvard Solness, has been driven by overweening ambition to gain the position of "master builder." He was able to achieve this acclaim after his in-law's home, in which he and his wife were living, burned to the ground, affording him the opportunity to subdivide the land and build on it. Initially, he had built country churches with a fervent spirit, but his ambitions turned him toward more selfish ends.

Solness believes that he willed the fire, aided by a personal troll and devils, "helpers and servers" whom he calls on incessantly to help him realize his ambitions. As a result, Solness has achieved a godlike status in his position as master builder, reinforced by the adoration of two young women: his bookkeeper Kaja, and Hilda, the mysterious guest who comes to stay with him and his wife. His superior position is symbolized when he climbs the church tower in Hilda's hometown to place a celebration wreath at the top. It was then that Hilda fell in love with him, explaining how "wonderfully thrilling" it was for her to stand below, looking up and seeing "the master builder himself."

In his ruthless climb to the top, he has ignored the needs of others, especially his wife, whose despair over losing her parent's home led to the death of their two sons. Although he never imagined the tragic effects his ambition would have on Aline, he has been more pitiless with his employees. In an effort to guard his supremacy, he has "broken" Brovik, his assistant, and impeded his son's development, fearing the young man will eventually surpass him. He also cruelly manipulates Kaja's feelings for him, in an effort to keep Ragnar in his place.

As Faust must eventually relinquish his soul in payment for his success, so too must Solness, although the master builder has suffered during his entire climb to the top of his profession. He feels a great sense of guilt over the loss of his sons, which he directly attributes to his desire for power and position. This guilt is compounded by his acknowledgement that Aline's despair stems from her inability to cope with the loss of their children. He admits that the devilish powers within him have "sucked all the lifeblood out of her," that she is now emotionally dead, and so he has been "chained to the dead." As a result, there is "never a touch of sun, not the least glimmer of light" in their home.

In her introduction to Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus,* Sylvan Barnet discusses the problem of ambition in the play. She notes that while his "ideals are corrupted . . . they reveal an abundance of energy that makes Faustus indisputably greater . . . than any of the other mortals in the play." The same can be said of Solness, who has risen to greater heights, as symbolized by his climb to the top of the tower, than has any other architect. He has been a commanding and dominant presence to those who come into his circle, cementing his reputation as master builder. Yet, at the beginning of the play, his position at the top has become undermined.

Solness's guilt and growing fear that he is losing his artistic abilities, and so will soon be overtaken by the young, paralyzes him to the point where he does not want to build any more. His lack of confidence in himself prevents him from recognizing the value of Ragnar's work and causes him to deny the younger man's request to build a home from his own "new, modern" plans.

Hilda's adoration, however, gives him new confidence in his artistic abilities and his manhood. Her appreciation of his artistry, coupled with her obvious sexual attraction toward him, prompts her insistence that he carry her away and build them a castle in the air. In his guilt and despondency, Solness opens himself up to Hilda and accepts her fantasized image of him. As a result, she convinces him to again climb to the highest heights where she insists he belongs, this time to decorate the tower of his new home.

A consideration of Solness's ultimate fate raises similar questions to that in the Faust myth. Barnet notes that Marlowe's Faustus is responsible for the choices he makes, but those choices have been influenced by "a hostile cosmos that entraps him." Barnet suggests the devils in his cosmos may be "not so much independent external creatures as they are aspects of himself, symbols perhaps of his pride." In a similar way, Ibsen complicates the vision of Solness's responsibility for his fate. Solness explains that his initial goal was to build "poor country churches in so honest and warm and fervent a spirit" that God would be pleased with him. However, he claims, he instead earned God's displeasure and as a result, He caused his house to burn and his children's death, so that Solness would not attach himself emotionally to anything except his work. When he climbed up the tower in Hilda's hometown, successfully suppressing his fear of heights, he determined that he would be an independent creator, in his own realm. At that point, he swore that he would no longer build churches, but instead "homes for humans." Yet, the achievement of his artistic goals resulted in the shattering of his personal life.

Solness insists that God has been aided in his plan to control and to punish him by influencing the "troll" and "devils" within him. He claims that God "turned the troll in me loose to stuff its pockets." When Kaja appeared to read his mind as he was thinking that she should work for him, he determines that the "players" within him carried out his will and prompted her to ask for a position. Hilda confirms the existence of these internal devils when she insists that the trolls within each of them have brought them together.

Throughout the play, Ibsen suggests that the devils within Solness are most likely manifestations of the same pride that controlled Faust. Yet the final scene adds a note of ambiguity. At the end of the play, Solness's fears that the younger generation will cause his downfall are realized in an ironic sense. He is destroyed not through the jealousy of the young, but through the worship of a young woman who encourages him to climb the tower one more time. After Solness moves up the side of the tower attached to his house, Hilda watches from below. When he reaches the top, she insists that she sees someone up there struggling with him. Seconds later, he falls, along with "some planks and splintered wood," suggesting the possibility that as with Faust, devils have come to demand the payment of his soul.

The final scene of the play reinforces the complex image Ibsen has created of his protagonist. As the others look at his broken body lying on the ground in a heap, Hilda keeps her steady gaze on the tower and on her vision of Solness as the master builder. Through this portrait of the driven architect in *The Master Builder*, Ibsen reinvents the Faustian myth of a magnificent, powerful man who is celebrated yet ultimately destroyed by the corruption of his ambitious vision.

Source: Wendy Perkins, Critical Essay on *The Master Builder,* in *Drama for Students,* The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, the author gives a good overview of Ibsen's play The Master Builder.

Two different kinds of play are interlinked in *The Master Builder*. The first introduced is a naturalistic social drama concerning a successful, middle-aged man's attempt to block the path of a potential younger rival (Ragnar Brj vik), whose father he himself displaced; working on the susceptible nature of Ragnar's finacée, Kaia, Master-Builder Solness has created an infatuation with himself which will keep both young people, and Old Brj vik, working in his office. Still within Act I, a drama of the inner life—of fantasy, obsession, and neurosis—begins with the arrival of youth personified in Hilde Wangel and ousts the first level of the play from the centre of attention. The disturbing strangeness of the work as a whole springs from Ibsen's maintaining and interrelating the two dramatic modes to the end, so that Solness's inner renewal allows him to release Ragnar, and his death by falling from a tower suggests a multiplicity of meanings.

A direct reflection of Strindberg's *The Father* appears in Solness's suspicion that his wife, Aline, and Dr. Herdal believe him to be insane. The Swedish playwright's example had undoubtedly encouraged Ibsen to tread more boldly in dramatic territory represented in all his plays after *The Wild Duck* (1884). This advance involves recognition that the human mind operates in stranger ways than the limited, naturalistic view that rationality admits, and that human motivation and action can have a mythic dimension. He uses the technique of intimate duologues, as developed in his social plays (especially Ghosts), as a method of tracing the influence of the past in the present, to explore the secret mind and the innermost nature of human relationships. One school of critics, clinging to the tenets of naturalism, interprets the play as a study in mental abnormality: Solness, Aline, and Hilde in turn qualify for the madhouse. It is more rewarding to move with the play into a more imaginatively conceived understanding of reality, not choosing between alternatives, but reaching out to encompass divergent views.

Ibsen is careful to locate Hilde in the social world: both Dr. Herdal (the confidant) and Mrs. Solness remember meeting her before, in mundane situations; it is Solness who does not recall her. She has a history outside the play: the younger daughter of Dr. Wangel of Lysanger, in *The Lady from the Sea,* has put on years and arrived unexpectedly at the Solness house, come like the devil cheerfully on cue. To all the other characters she appears an attractive, lively, unconventional young woman, spontaneously friendly, if self-willed; to Solness, in their long solitudes *à deux,* she is an enchanting inquisitor who draws out of him all his hidden fears, desires, and sense of guilt, opens the prison of his everyday life and gives him hope. He is not troubled to verify or reject the story she tells him of their earlier meeting and her reason for seeking him out. Its fairytale quality insulated them from actuality in a world of the imagination and provides a language of metaphor in which they can talk freely. An emotionally adult

woman, Hilde uses her fantasy from the past as an erotic challenge to Solness which he finds irresistible.

Although each of the three main characters recalls memories, the past that they reveal is ambiguous and unstable, as they do not verify each other's accounts. This is not the past as historical fact, but the fiction they each construct to live by. Ibsen has left it open to the actress playing Hilde to allow the character an awareness of the process that neither Solness nor Aline shares. The oddity of a mature young woman claiming a childish hero-worship of the Master Builder, and clinging to a pubertal fantasy of how, ten years before to the day, he chose her as his future princess, may be simply piquant. Solness, who spares scarcely a thought for the ruthlessness with which he treated Knut Brj vik in the pursuit of his own ambitions, and less for having failed to give his wife a love through which she might have blossomed as a woman, has attached his sense of guilt to the burning down of her home which he knows, rationally, he did not cause. Aline's is the most horrifying displacement: grieving, not for the babies who died, but for her dolls and her own lost childhood. The obsessional symbols may have a deeper truth to tell.

An unnatural arresting of time emerges as one of the play's themes through its repetition within each of the main characters: Hilde's fixation on the day, ten years ago, when Solness climbed the church tower at Lysanger; Aline, who has grown old without growing up; and Solness, intent on resisting the process of change whereby men pass from youth to age and others take over from them. The "out-of-time" quality of the duologues is entirely apt. It is also a condition of contemplation in which the play's poetic reach can be explored. As a psychological drama, *The Master Builder* testifies to the symbolic and superstitious modes of thinking sophisticated human beings still employ alongside the scientific and rational, and which poets utilise most deliberately. It is a kind of poets' thinking that passes between Solness and Hilde, and it forces its way through into the action at the end of the play.

From the play's first appearance it has been regarded as partly autobiographical, the various phases of Solness's career as a builder corresponding to the major changes in Ibsen's dramatic style from the great philosophical plays in verse onwards. Yet it has also taken its place among the supreme modern tragedies. The obvious, phallic symbolism is subsumed in the traditional tragic symbolism of the rise and fall of overweening ambition. Hilde's recollection of the master builder, high in the air, challenging some invisible power and triumphing, is matched both by Solness's terrified thought that he has called down fire from heaven and by his response to the lure of the impossible: building a new house for Aline and himself, unhappy though they are together, with three nurseries, though they neither have nor can expect to have any children, giving it a tower, and siting it vertiginously on the edge of a quarry, even though he has lost his head for heights. An impression of more than human stature attaches itself to the fault-ridden human figure, and the philosophical ideas are not far away: Aline has nothing to live by but the categorical imperative of duty, to which Ibsen opposes *livsglede* (the joy of living); and Solness, in going beyond his nature to achieve the impossible, takes on the quality of the Nietzschean vision of man becoming superhuman. Hilde, who has goaded him out of mere idealistic dreaming (building

castles in the air) and waves Aline's shawl at him in ecstasy, may be seen as his destroyer. But the Solness who takes the wreath to climb the tower is a better man than we have seen earlier in the play. He may not know that he is going to his death, but he is ready for it. The achievement is real.

Source: Margery Morgan, "*The Master Builder,*" in *International Dictionary of Theatre-1: Plays,* edited by Mark Hawkins-Dady, St. James Press, 1992, pp. 493-94.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Hornby examines The Master Builder *as a "point of departure" from the realist dramas of Ibsen's middle period to a combination of realism and romanticism that anticipated such twentieth-century movements as surrealism and expressionism.*

It has long been known that Ibsen's late plays—*The Master Builder*, *Little Ejolf*, *John Gabriel Borkman*, and *When We Dead Awaken*—represent a departure from the famous realistic plays of his middle period. Even Bernard Shaw, who had been obsessively concerned with Ibsen the moralist, described Ibsen as now having "completed the task of warning the world against its idols and anti-idols," and instead having written "tragedies of the dead." But more than this, the late plays demonstrate Ibsen's greatness, both as a significant (though independent) figure in the Symbolist movement of the 1890s, and as a significant precursor of twentieth-century literary movements. In his late plays Ibsen anticipates such twentieth-century concerns as the function of the artist, the use of personal experience in literature, and the importance of the inner life of both the conscious and the unconscious mind.

The Master Builder, published in 1892, shows all these concerns. Its hero is an artist, Halvard Solness, a successful architect (or "master builder," as he prefers). Perfection of the work seems to have blocked perfection of the life; his artistic success has coincided with contempt for his clients, ruthlessness toward his associates, the loss of his children, the mental breakdown of his wife. He is restless, alienated, and afraid of being superseded by younger architects. Into his life comes a strange, alluring, naive young woman, who seems to know his deepest secrets, and who claims to have had a near-sexual affair with him ten years before, when she had been little more than a child. In contrast to the drab, realistic world in which he works, she talks of trolls and magic kingdoms and harps in the air, fascinating him and ultimately leading him to destruction.

Solness's psychological problems—a fear of growing artistic and sexual impotence, and a fascination with a young girl—reflect those of Ibsen himself at the time the play was written. *The Master Builder* is Ibsen's most personal play. Indeed, it has become common for critics to compare the details of the play with the pattern of Ibsen's career as a playwright: Solness began by designing churches, then shifted to houses, and now designs houses with steeples; Ibsen, at the time the play was written, had gone through three similar phases, first writing Romantic plays, then realistic plays, and finally realistic plays with Romantic overtones like *The Master Builder* itself. The shift in style in *The Master Builder* is not truly a reversion to Romanticism, however; the play instead looks forward to the work of the Surrealists and Expressionists of our century, in its exploration of inner psychological states.

The realistic plays of Ibsen's middle period were far more than simplistic problem plays taking moralistic stands on social issues. Nevertheless, they did follow standard realistic conventions, which, I shall attempt to show, provide a point of departure for the pivotal late play, *The Master Builder.* In *A Doll House* (1879), for example, we find ordinary,

middle-class characters inhabiting a mundane, realistic world. The setting is an ordinary bourgeois living room. The characters' concerns are work, family, love, money. The action arises from conflicts between characters rather than within individual ones; Nora has forged a note to get money to treat her sick husband, Torvald Helmer, but this caused her no inner anguish—if anything, she is proud of it. Her problems arise when the loan shark, Krogstad, discovers the forgery and uses it to blackmail her. She fears being exposed (because she thinks that her husband will take the blame onto himself and go to prison), but she still feels no guilt.

All the information needed to drive the plot forward in *A Doll House*, as in Ibsen's other realistic plays, is provided by an extraordinary amount of exposition, necessitated by the late point of attack of the plot—in *A Doll House*, long after the forgery, after the husband's recovery, and just as the note is at last about to be paid off. A convention of this kind of realistic exposition is that it is always presented to the audience as *factual*; even though Nora has always cheerfully lied whenever it was necessary to cover up her scheme, when she explains it all to her confidant, Mrs. Linde, we take her every word for truth. This truth never comes into question, and is always perfectly clear. The play moves toward a climax in which Nora's husband is exposed as a hypocrite (instead of taking on the blame himself, as she had always expected he would, he plots a coverup), and in which Nora herself, bitterly disappointed in Helmer and seeing her whole life in a new light, leaves him to cast out on her own. It is a powerfully dramatic conclusion, but it is not in any sense a psychological one.

Although Ibsen's later realistic plays, such as *Rosmersholm* or *Hedda Gabler*, are decidely psychological, the psychology still exists within the same framework of realistic convention. The exposition, again, is presented as clear, uncontradictory truth. Thus when Rebecca West, in her famous speech, describes how she drove Rosmer's wife mad, it comes out in a blunt, straightforward manner:

> I wanted Beata out of here, one way or another. But even so, I never dreamed it could happen. With every step ahead that I gambled on, it was as if something inside me cried out: "No further! Not one step further!" And yet I *couldn't* stop. I *had* to try for a tiny bit more. Just the least little bit. And then again—and always again—until it happened. That's the way these things *do* happen.

Rebecca is describing her own psychological turmoil, but her tone is clinical, as detached as a doctor describing a patient. Her conclusion—"That's the way these things *do* happen"—is a profound insight, but again, is meant to be taken as straight truth by the audience, as is her whole speech. The audience may well be shocked by Rebecca's compulsion, but they experience no disorientation themselves. The psychology here is vivid, pitiable, even terrifying, but definitely *understood.* It is still realistic, in the sense of being clear and comprehensible.

The Master Builder, however, is in fact a "deconstruction" of realism. Using conventions that would have been familiar to late nineteenth-century audiences, Ibsen first creates apparently realistic characters in a realistic situation. Gradually, however, he moves into his hero's mind, to an inner world of unconscious desires and exotic symbolism. Written at the time of Freud's early work, the play anticipates much of Freud's theory, exposing the existence of the unconscious mind, the significance of dreams and mistakes, the ambivalence of emotion, and the unconscious belief in the omnipotence of thought. Nineteenth and twentieth-century techniques are thus combined in the play, which represents a major turning point in the history of dramatic literature.

The play opens in Solness's "plainly furnished workroom," immediately establishing a realistic, mundane atmosphere for the audience. Solness's two assistants, Knut Brovik and his son Ragnar, are seated, busy with blueprints and calculations, while a young bookkeeper, Kaja Fosli, stands at her ledger. We are in the everyday world of work. Solness enters, and in a brief aside with the girl, Kaja, reveals that they are intimate. There follows a scene between Solness and Knut Brovik. Brovik is ill, and probably dying; he is concerned that his son be given a commission, to establish his career as an independent architect. Unaware of Solness's relationship with Kaja, Brovik speaks of his son wanting to marry her. Solness is callous toward Brovik, and frightened of giving up a commission to a younger man.

Thus, all the materials for a realistic problem play are here: the realistic setting with a workaday atmosphere, the sexual hypocrisy, the problems of aging and loss of power. The audience would expect that young Ragnar would ultimately triumph, winning a commission and the girl, while, Solness would either die or somehow become reconciled to his loss. The audience would also expect to draw moral conclusions about the nature and abuses of power, the importance of kindness and fidelity, the limits of individualism. Instead, the trio of Brovik, Ragnar, and Kaja turn out to be relatively unimportant in the play. After a few brief scenes, Ibsen introduces a *raisoneur,* in the character of Dr. Herdal; in his scene with Solness, a major incident warns us that we are in for a very different experience from the realistic power struggle that we expected.

Dr. Herdal tries to get Solness to see that he really is very well established, with nothing to fear from young Ragnar, but Solness is vehement. "The change is coming," he insists. "Someday youth will come here, knocking at the door—", when lo and behold, there actually is a knock at the door, and youth does enter, in the person of Hilda Wangel, a girl whom Solness had met ten years earlier. The moment is one of the great *coups de théâtre* in the history of drama, grotesque, funny, shocking—and awkward. (It has often been ridiculed.) What critics have not recognized is that the literal representation of a metaphor, such as this one, is something that Freud was noticing, around the time the play was written, as a common element in dreams. In *The Interpretation of Dreams,* published in 1900, Freud was to give many examples, such as the dream of a horse frolicking in a field of the finest oats being an obvious manifestation of the expression, "feeling one's oats." Expressionist playwrights, in the early decades of twentieth century, were often to use the concrete manifestation of aphorisms as a device for inducing shock and laughter; Ibsen uses it for the same

purpose here, starting his deconstruction of the realistic atmosphere and action that he had so carefully established.

The scene with Hilda at first seems realistic, however. She is no imaginary construct of Solness's, but a real flesh-and-blood girl, the daughter of a public health officer (a position of social responsibility, perhaps echoing Ibsen's own *An Enemy of the People*). Even Dr. Herdal has met her before, and recognizes her now. She has real bodily needs, too: she mentions that her underwear needs to be washed, that "they're real grimy." The grimy underwear represents Ibsen's sly evocation of naturalism, the extreme form of realism that depicted man in purely physical, animal terms. The audience seems to find itself on familiar ground once again.

The familiarity is an illusion, however, Dr. Herdal soon exits, leaving Solness and Hilda alone. Gradually, without a seam showing, the tenor of the scene changes. Grimy reality melts away, to be replaced by something like a dream. Hilda describes the occasion of their first meeting, when she was a girl of twelve or thirteen. Solness had built a church tower in her town, and dedicated it by climbing to the top and hanging a wreath on the weather vane. In the late twentieth century, we hardly need to be told the sexual symbolism of climbing a tower, but to the audience of the time it would have seemed evocative and disturbing. More important, however, is what follows: Hilda says that she and Solness met afterwards, alone, and that he first promised that he would come back in ten years, carry her off "like a troll," and buy her a kingdom. Then, she says, he held her in his arms, bent her back, and kissed her—"many times." Solness is shocked and dazed, first denying the incident, then saying, "I must have willed it. Wished it. Desired it. And so—Doesn't that make sense? Oh all right, for God's sake—so I did the thing too!" We have again left the external world of realism for the inner, dream world of Expressionism.

This passage is extraordinary in its anticipation of Freud's theory of "the omnipotence of thought." The infant cannot distinguish between dreams and reality, between wishing a thing and doing it. As adults, we continue to equate thought and reality in our unconscious minds, which is why we can feel guilty for something that we never did, but only wished. Here Solness cannot remember whether he actually kissed Hilda or not, but he realizes that he *wanted* to, which in his unconscious mind is equivalent to having done it. As for Hilda, she no longer seems the real live girl with the dirty underwear she was earlier. She has shifted to a mythic plane, describing herself as a princess and Solness as a troll, and demanding that he come up with the promised kingdom. Troll, princess, and enchanted kingdom show an obvious connection with the Symbolist movement, but we never leave the real world entirely. Ibsen's purpose is not so much to evoke a magical, poetic vision as it is to explore, very precisely, his hero's unconscious mind. Hilda now appears to be a fantasy, a projection of Solness's desires and fears.

The second act begins the following morning; Hilda has spent the night at Solness's house. She says that she dreamed the night before of falling over "a terribly high, steep cliff." As in Freud, her dream seems charged with significance; it also foreshadows Solness's own fall at the end of the play. In addition, however, it signals another deconstruction of realism to Expressionism. As in the first act, there is another long

scene between her and Solness. He tells of a disastrous fire that consumed the house in which he and his wife lived early in their marriage. The fire helped make Solness's reputation; he was then able to subdivide the land and build houses on it, which established him as an architect. As a result of the fire, however, Solness's two children died. Here again we have the basis for a realistic struggle of career versus family (a distinct echo of the great neoclassical theme of honor versus love), but the details are odd: the children did not die in the fire itself, but rather because of Mrs. Solness having taken sick from the strain, which affected her milk. Instead of the kind of simple, surface causality that we would expect in a realistic play, the causality here is strangely oblique, as if some inner, unseen mechanism were operating. The information that follows is even stranger: it turns out that Solness had noticed a crack in the chimney of the house, long before the fire, and neglected to fix it. He sensed, even then, that if the house were to burn down, he would be given a wonderful opportunity to advance his career. Here, we might think, is the kernel of the play, the original sin. Solness's neglect—a "Freudian slip," fulfilling his wish to get rid of the house—brought him fame and fortune, but cost him his children. "What price glory?" But then, in another bizarre and cunning stroke, Ibsen destroys our standard reaction. Solness says that "It's been proved without a shadow of a doubt that the fire broke out in a clothes closet, in quite another part of the house." It seems that Solness had nothing to do with starting the fire at all!

Yet once again, Solness believes that his inner state at the time represented true reality. In a key speech, he reflects on the power of wishes:

Don't you believe with me, Hilda, that there are
certain special, chosen people who have a gift and
power and capacity to *wish* something, *desire* something,
will something—so insistently
and so—so inevitably—that at last it *has* to be theirs? Don't you
believe that?

This is omnipotence of thought once again, which Solness is coming to think of as an actual reality. Such omnipotence is found elsewhere in the play. For example, Solness says that he has got Kaja to come to work in his office simply by wishing it one day; then, "in the late evening, . . . she came by to see me again, acting as if we'd already struck a bargain." But Ibsen in the long run is not so crude as

to suggest that thought is literally omnipotent; all the things wished for could have occurred by accident, or in this case, by Kaja's sensitivity to nuances of expression and attitude in Solness. Ibsen's focus is instead on Solness's confusion and fear with regard to his inner life, on his awareness that it *might* have powers far beyond his conscious understanding, and on his guilt for the immoral desires that seem to come true. Freud maintained that unfulfilled desires actually make us feel more guilty than fulfilled ones; the undischarged psychic energy of the desire turns inward, against the self. This is the case with Solness. He is not at all guilt-ridden about his sexual affair with Kaja, but feels extremely guilty about his desires for Hilda, even though they were never actually consummated. In the same vein, Solness's wife, Aline, feels more upset about the loss of her collection of dolls in the fire than about the loss of her two sons; her imaginary

love for the dolls is more real to her than her ostensibly real love for her flesh-and-blood children. The pattern in the play is always that a character's inner life is paramount; the outer, realistic world, while genuine enough (Ibsen is no solipsist), is not the world in which one actually *lives.*

Ibsen continues his exploration of the inner life in his depiction of Solness's death. Solness, afraid of heights, no longer climbs towers to plant celebratory wreaths on them. Nonetheless, Hilda demands that he climb the tower on his latest building. Solness's acrophobia is distinctly ambivalent, in keeping with Freud's theory that strong conscious feelings of revulsion against something are always accompanied by equally strong unconscious feelings of desire for it. Solness unconsciously seems to yearn to climb and fall, just as he unconsciously wanted sex with the forbidden Hilda. In the end, it is the power of thought that again seems the catalyst: Hilda wishes his climb, twice saying, "I *will* see it!" At the ultimate moment, she excitedly snatches a white shawl and waves it at Solness, shouting from below to him high on the tower, "Hurray for master builder Solness!," causing Solness to plunge to his death. Again, the exact nature of causality is ambiguous: did Solness fall because Hilda distracted him by shouting and waving, or because she *willed* him to fall? Is Hilda a real girl with an obsessive neurosis, who destroys Solness by palpable methods, or a witch, troll, a projection of Solness's own fantasies, who destroys him by the power of the unconscious mind? The greatness of the play is that it explores the boundary between outer and an inner reality, deconstructing the former to bring us to the latter. At the final curtain, the audience is as confused and frightened as Solness, confronted with the power of the unconscious mind, and unable to determine its extent or its meaning. They have entered the twentieth century.

Source: Richard Hornby, "Deconstructing Realism in Ibsen's

The Master Builder," in *Essays in Theatre,* Vol. 21, No. 1, November 1983, pp. 34-40.

Topics for Further Study

How would you stage the last scene of the play? Consider how you would show Solness climbing up and falling from the tower. How would you direct Hilda in this scene?

Read Ibsen's *A Doll House* and compare the theme of power to that of *The Master Builder*.

Research the causes and consequences of an overweening sense of ambition. What kind of counseling could Solness have received that might have helped change his behavior?

Investigate the class structure of Norwegian society at the end of the previous century. How difficult was it for those of the lower classes to become financially successful?

Compare and Contrast

1890s: In the latter part of the nineteenth century, realism becomes the dominant literary movement in the Western world. In the last decade of the century, symbolism and naturalism emerge as important new movements.

Today: Musicals, like *The Producers,* and reality based plays, like *Rent,* dominate Broadway.

1890s: The Klondike gold rush begins in 1896 in northwest Canada. News of the discovery of gold there prompts thousands to rush to the area, hoping to strike it rich.

Today: Eastern nations criticize what they see as rampant materialism in the Western world.

1890s: Samuel Clemens dubbs this decade "The Gilded Age," due, in large part, to the industrialization of the West. During this period, a handful of large industries gain control of the economy in the United States. Those industrialists who profited saw their fortunes grow at a rapid rate, while the working class suffered with low wages and dangerous working conditions.

Today: Public awareness of major companies exploiting foreign workers has grown. Many fear that the current push for economic globalization will reinforce the imbalances between the rich and the poor.

What Do I Read Next?

A Doll House (1879), Ibsen's most celebrated play, uses the realist techniques to study the life of a woman repressed by the tenets of her society.

Dr. Faustus (1604) is playwright Christopher Marlowe's rendition of the Faustian legend.

When We Dead Awaken (1899), Ibsen's last play, presents an expressionistic view of the intricacies of the human mind and personality.

History of the Theatre (1998), by Franklin J. Hildy and Oscar Gross Brockett, presents a comprehensive view of theatre through history, including an examination of different types of drama.

Further Study

Bentley, Eric, *The Playwright As Thinker,* Harcourt Brace, 1987.

This study examines the philosophical point of view in Ibsen's works.

Egan, Michael, *Ibsen: The Critical Heritage,* Routledge, 1972.

Egan traces the history of the critical response to Ibsen's plays.

Haugen, Einar, *Ibsen's Drama,* University of Minnesota Press, 1979.

Haugen engages in a comprehensive examination of the themes and structure of Ibsen's plays, including *The Master Builder.*

Meyer, Michael, *Ibsen: A Biography,* Doubleday, 1971.

Meyer presents a thoughtful analysis of Ibsen's life, tracing "his development as a man and as a writer" and offering an assessment of his work, "both intrinsically and historically." He also discusses Ibsen's impact on the theatre.

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Brinckmann, Christian, Review of *The Master Builder,* in *Nyt Tidsskrift,* 1892-1893, pp. 272-81.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

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□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

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Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

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