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THE STRUGGLE FOR EXISTENCE. IBSEN'S *THE WILD DUCK* (VILDANDEN, 1884)

LISBETH P. WÆRP

1. INTRODUCTION

In *The Wild Duck* the struggle for existence is humorously referred to in the dialogue:

FRU SØRBY. Kammerherrerne mener, at bedes man til middag, så skal man også arbejde for føden, herr Ekdal.

DEN FEDE HERRE. I et godt madhus er *det* en ren fornøjelse.

DEN TYNDHÅREDE. Herre gud, når det gælder kampen for tilværelsen, så – (Ibsen 2009a, 27–28)¹

Moreover, the symbolism of the wild duck is clearly influenced by Darwin, either by Darwin's reports in *Variations of Animals and Plants under Domestication* (1868) about how wild ducks degenerate in captivity (Bull 1932, 23–24; Downs 1950, 148–149; Zwart 2000, 94–95), or, more probably, by the chapter on domestication and variation in *On the Origin of the Species* (1859), which was translated into Danish in 1872 (Aarseth 1999, 127–128, 2005, 6; Rem 2014, 163). In the literature it is underscored that in this play Ibsen foregrounds domestication as degeneration, whereas Darwin's main point is that it leads to variation in the species (Tjønneland 1998; Zwart 2000; Aarseth 2005; Shepherd-Barr 2015; Rem 2014). What I will argue is (1) that Ibsen, or the play as a whole, does not equate domestication with degeneration, (2) that the key to the play is the total constellation of animals and birds in the loft, not just the duck, and (3) that the loft is a scenic metaphor for the struggle for existence fought within and between the two families. In this way the image of the loft, an image in which the characters in the drama are reflected,

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acquires much greater meaning as a metaphor than assumed thus far in the research literature.

A recurring interpretation of the duck is that it is a symbolic representation of vulnerability, weakness, domestication and degeneration, inauthentic life (see for instance Høst 1967, Aarseth 1999, 2005; Tjønneland 1993, 1998, Zwart 2000; Shepherd-Barr 2015). But the image of the duck is, as I will argue, complex; the duck is domesticated, yes, but also favored due to its wildness, and is part of an overall, much more comprehensive image: Ibsen visualizes the phenomenon of domestication by furnishing the Ekdals' urban apartment with a loft of living birds and animals. However, by including a variety of animals—not just the titular bird, injured by a hunter's shots, favored because of its wildness and treated as a pet, but also pigeons, poultry, and rabbits that are mercilessly hunted and killed in the loft—he develops this into an image of what Darwin calls the struggle for existence between the favored and the not favored, in order to allow the cast of characters to be reflected in it. In this way, he renders the drama a moral-philosophical version of the existential struggle for existence, overlapping Nietzsche's ideas of the favored few, the robust conscience and the master-slave morality, as well as being influenced by Darwin's theory of selection. Considered in this way, the loft metaphor acquires validity for the cast of characters' two families in a completely different way than as yet seen in the literature on the drama: it applies both to the weak as well as to the strong, and the metaphor itself does not exalt freedom and authenticity—what we are confronted with is a value-neutral image of existential struggle under differing prevailing conditions for the domesticated.

2. OTHER LITERATURE

An urban apartment with an attic full of living animals and birds—a winged wild duck, rabbits, poultry and pigeons—where hunting takes place: The peculiar loft in *The Wild Duck* leads us

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straight into issues of interpretation, yet unresolved. The prevailing interpretation of the loft and the animals within it is that it is a representation of the Ekdal family's miserable existence subsequent to their bankruptcy and fall in status. This is, for example, formulated thus by Asbjørn Aarseth:

the animals confined in the loft room and made to forget life in the real forest serve as an eloquent metaphor for the vulnerable and wretched human beings in the Ekdal family and their dissipated neighbours. (Aarseth 2005, 7)

There are many relationships that this kind of interpretation fails to take into consideration. First, the animals in the loft are not a uniform group. Second, there is more to the animals in the loft than them living domestically, on the verge of forgetting their former lives; they are hunted: Hjalmar and his father go hunting there—commented upon by Gregers as he shakes his head, “They what! [*Walks over to the loft door.*] Are you hunting, Hjalmar?” (Ibsen 1999, 162).² Third, neither is the wild duck in itself an unambiguous entity; while it is winged, injured, shot beneath the wing so that it cannot fly, it is also in a unique position to the others, favored due to its wildness, promoted as pet and not hunted as the rabbits are. The consequence of such an interpretation as the prevailing one is, moreover, that freedom and authenticity can come to be understood as the drama's fundamental values, even though these values are foregrounded by the scrupulously egotistical merchant and his naively and destructively idealistic son. When the play permits a broken Hjalmar Ekdal to express his frustration that Werle and Mrs Sørby—not he and Gina—seem to be the ones who will fulfill a genuine marriage, without lies and conceit, it questions the blind praise for the free and the authentic. Gregers argues back: “But that's something quite different, Hjalmar. Surely you're not going to compare either yourself or her with those two ...? You see what I mean, don't you?” (Ibsen 1999, 191).³

Making comparison, however, is precisely what Ibsen is doing in this drama: not just between these two couples, but also between characters and relations in every direction between the two families. It is this constellation of characters and the two

contrasted families that is the drama's core concern, not one or two of the individuals.⁴ This constellation and contrast is reflected—and is given meaning—by the entire strange constellation of animals in the loft, not just the winged wild duck, as well as by the items stowed away there—the books, objects, and furniture. In this article, my concern is therefore a rereading of the meaning of the loft in an attempt at a new understanding of the drama.

The interpretation of the loft as a metaphor of a miserable existence has deep roots in the history of research into the play, and we find it well substantiated in Else Høst's monograph, *Vildanden av Henrik Ibsen* (Høst 1967). Høst stresses the play's mixture of "elegantly naturalistic depictions of reality" and symbolism (Høst 1967, 33)⁵ as well as the blending of comedy and tragedy, together with the turn away from idealism resulting from its inbuilt criticism of the idealist Gregers Werle. She interprets the loft as "a reflection of life lived at the realistic level" and, more specifically, as "a metaphor for the life of the Ekdal family" (Høst 1967, 172). What the Ekdals are up to in the loft is "vegetating in daydreams and illusions" (Høst 1967, 172). Eivind Tjønneland later pursues the interpretation of life in the loft as a representation of a life of misery, which, in *Ibsen og moderniteten* (1993, Ibsen and modernity), he himself construes as a representation of modernity's withdrawn and solitary subject: "This isolation of the subject – and the emotional and notional problems that consequently arise – are the key to Ibsen's modernity" (Tjønneland 1993, 16). In a later article, "Darwin, J.P. Jacobsen and Ibsen" (1998), he argues that in *The Wild Duck* Ibsen foregrounds domestication as degeneration, but he also notes that in *An Enemy of the People* (1882) and *When We Dead Awaken* (1899), he presents it more neutrally or in a less negative way.

In *Ibsens samtidsdramatikk. En studie i glasskapets dramaturgi*, Asbjørn Aarseth interprets the loft as a scenic metaphor for what he calls "the little world, the hideaway of wounded creatures"

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(Aarseth 1999, 132). Moreover, he claims that Ibsen's point is a moral-philosophical evaluation:

He has applied an implicitly moral-philosophical evaluation of the transition from wild to tame states, from natural to artificial existence, from freedom to captivity. In this context, wildness, nature and freedom are perceived as authentic life, while tameness and captivity are branded as second rate (Aarseth 1999).

This interpretation is more generally connected with Aarseth's understanding, also in "Ibsen and Darwin: A Reading of *The Wild Duck*" (Aarseth 2005), of Ibsen as a "liberal Romantic": "in his moral universe freedom is an absolute value. Darwin finds an astonishing variety and interest in domesticated species; for Ibsen domestication means degeneration" (Aarseth 2005, 7). An authentic life is therefore tied to freedom as the drama's fundamental moral value: "For Ibsen, the moral obligation is to follow the natural impulse: Be free, and you will remain true to your species." (Aarseth 2005, 8). Aarseth is onto something essential: The metaphor for life provided by the loft is, in one sense or another, viewed from a moral-philosophical perspective. What we get, then, is, according to Aarseth, an image of domestication as degeneration, and a representation of "society's losers," i.e. people who need illusions or "life lies" (Aarseth 2005, 4). "Life lie" is the expression used by Dr Relling that gains the status of leitmotiv in the drama, and which is generally, in retrospect, associated with the play. But is it relevant only to "the losers in society"? And what about freedom and authenticity? In my view (and as I will argue) Ibsen's moral-philosophical analysis is an investigation rather than an evaluation.

In his 2005 article, which elaborates upon points from the book, Aarseth convincingly argues that the particular collection of animals and birds in the loft—rabbits, poultry, pigeons (two types, pouters and tumblers), duck—can be interpreted as an allusion to Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, more precisely the chapter on domestication and variation.⁶ It is not just the four species—rabbits, pigeons, wild duck, poultry—that are mentioned here, but also the particular breeds of pigeon that Ibsen includes—tumblers and pouters (according to the Norwegian Academic Dictionary, *tumblers* "are a breed of pigeon that fly with a leaping, tumbling

movement,” while *pouters* are “a breed of pigeon in which the male vigorously inflates his crop during courtship”). As Aarseth writes, this is no accident (Aarseth 2005, 6). This is a vital observation, and the issue is what it means and what the consequences are for our understanding of Ibsen’s drama.

In a refreshingly different reading of the play, H.A.E. Zwart argues that Ibsen’s wild duck is subjected to a quasi-experiment: “She is deprived of her natural surroundings, in order to observe whether she will adapt herself” (Zwart 2000, 99). According to Zwart, this experiment dramatizes the conflict between the scientific and the romantic understanding of animals, and anticipates real scientific experiment and research on domestication. In this article, too, domestication equates with degeneration: “The fate of the duck [...] seems a dramatization of a quote borrowed from Darwin” (Zwart 2000, 94–95). The quote, as quoted by Zwart: “We have seen how soon the wild duck, when domesticated, loses its true character, from the effect of abundant food, or from taking little exercise” (Zwart 2000, 94).

According to Moi (2006), though, it is not the duck symbolism in itself that is essential in or to *The Wild Duck*, but the problem of language and meaning as well as the focus on everyday life. Although I find it difficult to agree that the symbolism of the duck is not among the most important aspects of the play, her focus on the problem of meaning sheds new light on this play and others by Ibsen. When it comes to the focus on everyday life, she brings up as examples such as the general focus on food, cleaning, and housekeeping. One could argue, however, as I will do, that Ibsen’s thematic point is more the contrast between the two households—effectively exemplified by the juxtaposition of the lavish feast at Werle’s villa in the first act, and Gina and Hedvig in the second act, who have refrained from eating dinner in order to save money. In this way, the thematic focus shifts more toward life as such—the differing circumstances and struggle for survival—than on everyday life.

In 2014 a book was published on Darwin’s significance in European literature and culture: *The Literary and Cultural*

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Reception of Charles Darwin in Europe, edited by Thomas F. Glick and Elinor Shaffer. In it, Tore Rem is the author of a nuanced chapter about Darwin and Norwegian literature. Rem, referring to Tjønneland (1998), expresses a similar view as Tjønneland, Aarseth and Zwart on domestication in *The Wild Duck* as equated with degeneration, but compared to them he states this more openly, almost questioning it, cf. his “what seems a more negative perspective”: “In *The Wild Duck* Ibsen clearly adapts such material for his own purposes, also, along the way, communicating what seems a more negative perspective than Darwin’s on domestication as a form of degeneration [...]” (Rem 2014, 163). The year after, in 2015, another study in the field was published, Kirsten Shepherd-Barr’s *Theatre and Evolution from Ibsen to Beckett* (2015). In her Ibsen chapter Kirsten Shepherd-Barr thoroughly examines the extent of Ibsen’s engagement in his writings with evolution and evolutionary ideas, which she documents is very broad, and discusses sources of influence. She foregrounds the influence of Darwin and German zoologist and philosopher Ernst Hæckel, underlining that their influence varies from play to play, and argues that what characterizes Henrik Ibsen’s response to evolutionary ideas is contrarianism. One of her main examples concern *The Wild Duck*, more precisely Ibsen’s understanding of domestication as it—according to her—is inscribed in the play:

[W]here Darwin hails domestication as positive because it yields greater variety in species, Ibsen equates domestication with degeneration and as therefore negative. This “creative misprision”—the misunderstanding of domestication as weakening the organism—becomes a brilliant dramatic stroke in plays like *The Wild Duck*, *The Lady from the Sea*, and *When We Dead Awaken* (1899). (Shepherd-Barr 2015, 78)

As already mentioned, and to conclude this overview of other literature, I view this, and will argue otherwise.

3. THE LOFT IMAGE

The animals in the loft are closely specified and described. This occurs at the point in the plot when the two large sliding doors are opened—almost ceremoniously—for the first time. The

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occasion is that Old Ekdal is reacting to Gregers Werle, who is on a visit to the town for the first time in 16–17 years and is concerned that he, the old outdoorsman and hunter, lives a miserable life in the little, cramped apartment:

How is it possible for a man so fond of the outdoor life as you are to live cooped up here in town, hemmed in by these four walls? [...] what about all those things that came to be so much a part of you at one time? The cool, caressing breezes, the open-air life in the forest and on the moors, among the beasts and the birds... (Ibsen 1999, 144)⁷

Here, moreover, we see that the hierarchy of values upon which the prevailing interpretation of the loft symbolism is based—wild nature as freedom and authenticity; town, the indoors and tamedness/domesticated existence as confinement and inauthenticity—reiterates the idealist Gregers's understanding. Ekdal wants to show Gregers that this is not the case, i.e. that he enjoys himself in the urban apartment, and gets Hjalmar to help him open the two sliding doors:

GREGERS [*beside the door, looks into the loft*] So you keep poultry, Lieutenant Ekdal!

EKDAL. I'll say we keep poultry. They've gone to roost now. But you should just see *this* poultry in daylight!

HEDVIG. And then there's...

EKDAL. Hush! Hush! Don't say anything yet.

GREGERS. You've got pigeons as well, I see.

EKDAL. Oh yes! Sure, we've pigeons! They have their nesting boxes up under the eaves. Pigeons like best being up high, you know.

HJALMAR. They're not all ordinary pigeons, though.

EKDAL. Ordinary! No, I should just say not! We've got some tumblers, and we've also a pair of pouters. But come over here! Can you see that hutch over there by the wall?

GREGERS. Yes. What do you use that for?

EKDAL. That's where the rabbits sleep at night, my dear fellow.

GREGERS. Well! So you've got rabbits as well?

EKDAL. Yes, I should damn' well think we have got rabbits! He's asking if we've got rabbits, Hjalmar! Ha! But *now* we really do come to something! *Now*

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it comes! Out of the way, Hedvig! Come and stand here, that's right; now look down there. Can you see a basket with straw in?

GREGERS. Yes, I can. And I can see a bird sitting in the basket.

EKDAL. Ha! "A bird"!

GREGERS. Isn't it a duck?

EKDAL [*hurt*] Yes, obviously it's a duck.

HJALMAR. But what *kind* of duck do you think it is?

HEDVIG. It isn't an ordinary duck...

EKDAL. Hush!

GREGERS. And it isn't one of those foreign breeds either.

EKDAL. No, Mr... Werle; that's no foreign breed; that's a wild duck.

GREGERS. No, is it really? A wild duck? (Ibsen 1999, 145–146)⁸

The effect of the twice-announced opening of the sliding doors and the ceremonial display of what lies within is, on the one hand, surprising and comical.⁹ On the other, the painstaking pointing-out and focusing on the wild duck is a link not just to the title of the drama, but also to merchant Werle's previous allegorical line about Ekdal's existential circumstances after his period of imprisonment, illustrating a deep and merciless contempt for weakness:

When Ekdal was let out, he was a broken man, past helping. Some people in this world only need to get a couple of slugs in them and they go plunging right down to the depths, and they never come up again. (Ibsen 1999, 123)¹⁰

When, in the scene with the opening of the sliding doors and the display of the loft and the animals, Old Ekdal himself then claims the same of the winged wild duck as Werle claims of the wounded human type, it becomes clear that we are dealing with a symbol:

Always do that, wild ducks do. Go plunging right to the bottom... as deep as they can get, my dear sir... hold on with their beaks to the weeds and stuff – and all the other mess you find down there. Then they never come up again. (Ibsen 1999, 147)¹¹

That we are being helped in this way to see the symbol and allegory of the wild duck, which is neither especially deep nor

difficult, is obvious. The duck is a duck, but also a metaphor for people. This is nothing new in the research literature; it is a rather well worn point.

Hjalmar and his father repeatedly emphasize the necessity of the animals in the loft (“I should damn’ well think we have got rabbits!”), and the unique about them: The chickens are, in one way or another, prettier than they look to be in the moonlight (“you should just see *this* poultry in daylight!”); the pigeons are “not all ordinary pigeons”; and the duck is not “an ordinary duck”—neither is it “one of those foreign breeds,” but “a wild duck.” When Ekdal points out the uniqueness and necessity of the animals in this way, and the wildness of the duck, it is because it demonstrates the resemblance of the arrangement of nature in the loft to wild nature itself. Before his conviction and sentencing, he would go hunting in the forests around Høidal. After his conviction for illegal logging on government land, it is here, in the loft, that he hunts; he has become afraid of the real forest: “The forests avenge themselves” (Ibsen 1999, 144).¹²

In addition to their representation of different species and types, there is another fundamental, but often neglected, difference between the animals that are housed in the loft: Some of them are potential quarry, while others are not. Certain animals are hunted by Old Ekdal and his son—the rabbits, at least, cf. Hjalmar’s somewhat embarrassed line about his hunting: “Just a bit of rabbit shooting” (Ibsen 1999, 162).¹³ On the contrary, they do not hunt the eponymous bird; this is, however, emphasized in such a way that may imply that all the other animals are potential victims of their hunting. We learn that the Ekdals have taken in the duck in order to care for it after it was wounded by merchant Werle, and that it is precious in one sense or another to everyone in the family except Gina, who sneers at the great deal of attention the duck receives. It is said to be wild, but is so only by name or by origin. Wild birds grow up and live in open nature; this one is winged, lives in a basket, and swims in a trough in an urban loft apartment, where it eats, and is apparently happy. It has adapted. It is weakened, or degenerated,

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only in the sense it has been shot and cannot fly. Yet it is not merely said to be wild; its wildness is called to attention and emphasized again and again. Gina comes from a lower social stratum than her husband, and by way of one of her many idiomatic blunders—“[villanden] gøres der da krusifikser nok for” (Ibsen 2009, 120, *krusifiks* means *crucifix*, but Gina mixes it with an idiom, *gjøre krus på*, meaning *make a fuss of*, and, as *krus* also means *stas* and *smiger* (decoration and flattery), *flatter*)—it is implied that the Ekdals’ relationship to the duck’s (apparent) wildness is not merely an exceptional degree of attention (fuss, decoration, flattery), but also a form of adoration and worship (crucifix).¹⁴ And it is kept as a pet. The wild duck is thus not merely winged and enfeebled, but also glorified and favored as wild (cf. Gregers’ appraisal of freedom and authenticity), and as a consequence it has a clear advantage over the other animals in the loft when the Ekdals go hunting: It is not hunted.

With this, what we see is that all the animals mentioned are gathered under one roof, but live under utterly different existential circumstances dependent upon how wild or tame they are considered to be, a favoring of wildness. What this image shows is thus an existence for life or death in which those who are favored are better disposed toward survival than others, who are not favored. In this way the image of the loft acquires much greater meaning as a metaphor than assumed thus far in the research literature. First, the characters in the drama are reflected not only in the wounded wild duck’s “shadow existence,” but also in a wild creature’s favored existence, and in a life-and-death struggle. Second, the metaphor consequently encompasses not just the weak, who are doomed to lose under the prevailing conditions, but also those who, in contrast, appear to be strong because they are especially favored. With that, I interpret the assembled image thus: What the constellation of animals envisions in its entirety is that which Darwin, in *On the Origin of Species*, calls the struggle for existence.

Darwin's book comprises fourteen chapters, and can be said to fall into three parts. The opening chapters deal with the mutability and variation of species (chapters one and two) and the struggle for life (chapter three), while chapters four and five elaborate upon points from the first three chapters. In the next section, chapters six to nine, Darwin considers possible objections to the theory, while in the book's final section, chapters ten to thirteen, he draws organisms in the geological layers and the extent of their propagation into his reasoning, before concluding in chapter fourteen. Thus, it is the first three chapters, in particular chapters one and three, that are relevant for us; more precisely, the struggle for life as it transpires for the domesticated. Darwin distinguishes between the struggle as it transpires for the non-domesticated and for the domesticated, and deals with them separately (chapters one and two). The main point, however, is that in both cases (wild and tame animals), in the struggle for life some animals will be especially favored in comparison to others:

As many more individuals of each species are born than can possibly survive; and as, consequently, there is a frequently recurring struggle for existence, it follows that any being, if it vary however slightly in any manner profitable to itself, under the complex and sometimes varying conditions of life, will have a better chance of surviving, and thus be *naturally selected*. (Darwin 1952, 7)

Considered in this way, the loft metaphor acquires validity for the cast of characters' two families in a completely different way than as yet seen in the literature on the drama: it applies both to the weak as well as to the strong, and the metaphor itself does not exalt freedom and authenticity—what we are confronted with is a value-neutral image of existential struggle under differing prevailing conditions for the domesticated. The main point of the image is therefore, as I see it, the struggle that plays out between those that have been domesticated, and not that domestication implies a degeneration toward inauthentic life, even if Ibsen clearly toys with and exploits such an understanding too as he arranges the peculiar—and striking—image of the animals in the urban apartment's loft for us. Darwin's point in the section on domesticated animals is, as already mentioned, also value-neutral and concerns

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domestication leading to variation, new varieties of species, variation owing to human selection, and legacy.

The Latin *domus* in the word “domesticated” means *house*, and what the play is concerned with is the struggle and suffering as it blossoms and takes hold in and between the two families’ houses, not to say homes, when the son from one house returns home for the first time in 16–17 years. Before entering this second part of the interpretation, we will look closer at what else is to be found in the loft: objects and books, as well as how the characters make use of the loft.

The loft not only accommodates animals, but also stored objects: large bookcases, books, old paintboxes, a writing desk, an old clock with mobile figurines that no longer move. One of the books, the only one to make an appearance, is *Harrison’s History of London* with engraved illustrations that we learn Hedvig holds very dear: illustrations of churches, palaces, streets, and ships sailing on the oceans. We learn that this book has a front-page illustration that she does not like: A picture of death, an hourglass, and a maiden. We are told that all of these objects belonged to the apartment’s previous occupant, a sea captain who went by the nickname the flying Dutchman. He traveled the world, then suddenly vanished.

The only one who cares about the objects and books in the loft is Hedvig; Hjalmar and Old Ekdal are only concerned with the birds and animals. For Hedvig, the loft is a place of wonder, a world “all of its own” (Ibsen 1999, 158)¹⁵; she considers the objects there to be “strange” (Ibsen 1999, 158)¹⁶ and speaks of the loft and all the objects within it as “the briny deep” (Ibsen 1999, 161).¹⁷ The latter makes sense both in light of the narrative of the flying Dutchman: in one of the versions of the myth, the ship finally founders in a storm (once the curse is lifted) with all hands; and in light of the allegory of the wild duck, in so far as wild ducks (according to Old Ekdal) dive to the bottom when wounded.

The objects in the loft represent (1) literature and art (the books, the paint boxes), (2) history and topography (the book on

London), (3) mythology (the mobile figurines on the wall clock) and allegory (the illustration of death with the hourglass and the maiden), and (4) house and home (cupboard, writing desk, wall clock). As such, they are placed in a contrastive relationship to the rest of the objects in the loft: the live animals, birds, and withered trees. As a group, the objects fall under what we call culture, while the animals, birds, and trees come under the opposite, nature. Taken together, this constitutes the fundamental aspects of human existence, cf. my interpretation of the loft as a representation of existence, and the struggle for life.

Equally important as the objects themselves and the particular collection that they constitute, is the action tied to them, as well as to the animals, and thus the use of the loft. This also undermines an interpretation of the loft as a metaphor for inauthentic life.

Hedvig withdraws to the loft to read and look at pictures in the books. She is not permitted to read as much or as often as she would like, so has to do so in secret. She has an eye condition and has to take good care of her eyesight; her father is unhappy about her reading. For Hedvig, the loft is therefore a place to retreat to, not simply in wonderment, which is often highlighted in the literature, but to be alone and to be able to do what she likes—to read, and to immerse herself in book illustrations. Here she is able to live out one aspect of herself that she has to conceal in the company of others in the family; in this way, it is a room of her own.

While Hedvig withdraws to the loft in order to be alone and to read, Old Ekdal and Hjalmar go hunting and walking there. Through his use of the loft, Old Ekdal fulfills an aspect of himself that he is no longer allowed to show in a normal manner. Following his conviction he is no longer permitted to wear his lieutenant's uniform and cannot stroll the streets with it on, and because he was convicted of illegal logging without even realizing that that was what he was doing, he is traumatized, which is evidenced through his fear of the forest ("Because the forest, you know ... the forest ... the forest ...," Ibsen 1999, 143; and "The

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forests avenge themselves,” Ibsen 1999, 144),¹⁸ and he no longer dares to hunt in the forests of Høidal. Hjalmar also uses the loft in such a way: He withdraws there to avoid being the photographer which, after the financial and social fall in status that resulted from his father’s conviction, he is doomed to be, but does not see himself as being; it is entirely obvious that he likes neither the profession nor his clients.

In other words: The use of the loft is connected to a need for freedom in the sense of self-fulfillment, not just in Hedvig’s case, but also in that of Old Ekdal and Hjalmar. The loft becomes a free space in which to live out aspects of themselves that they are prevented from to living out; ergo the use of the loft—and consequently the loft as a scenic metaphor—represents the act of standing one’s ground asserting oneself, living one’s own life, regardless of how comical this—especially the hunting in the loft—may look. If domestication implies degeneration and inauthentic life, or otherwise forgetting one’s real life, what Ekdal, Hjalmar, and Hedvig do via their use of the loft is, on the contrary, cling on tightly to a part of their “original” or “real” selves.

4. THE CONSTELLATION OF CHARACTERS

The constellation of animals is, as noted, associated with the cast of characters through the explicit allegorizing (the wounded wild duck as a human type), and the loft as such can be understood as a figure, or a scenic metaphor, as Aarseth does most explicitly (Aarseth 1999, 2005). In keeping with my interpretation, it is more natural to understand the loft as a scenic metaphor for life or existence as such, as a struggle for survival, than as “a scenic metaphor for the small world, the winged creature’s hideaway” (Aarseth 1999, 132). It is clearly a “figure that gathers and intensifies” what the characters experience, but what it gathers and intensifies is far more than “the experience of isolation, confinement, non-committal fantasy lives and inauthentic existence” (Aarseth 1999, 133).

How, then, is the constellation of animals reflected—more specifically—in the cast of characters?

One family has become wealthy at the expense of the other. What becomes obvious when one conducts a close reading of the constellation of characters in light of the constellation of animals is how Ibsen's construction bears the mark of concepts of the time, not just those embodied in Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, but also ideas that Ibsen himself has grappled with in earlier dramas and that later had a strong impact on the work of German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. In an article on Ibsen and Nietzsche, Anathon Aall asserts that Nietzsche elaborates on Darwin: "The theory of the favoured is nothing more than a particular application of Darwin's theory of selection" (Aall 1906, 289). There are, nevertheless, parallels between Darwin's theory of selection and survival and Nietzsche's ideas of the favored few that manifested themselves in his moral-philosophical ideas of the superman (*Also sprach Zarathustra/Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 1883–85), master-slave morality and the robust conscience (*Jenseits von Gut und Böse/Beyond Good and Evil*, 1886, and *Zur Genealogie der Moral/On the Genealogy of Morality*, 1887) in so far as both Darwin and Nietzsche deal with strength and selection by way of specific qualities. The latter two books represent a fundamental criticism of Christianity and traditional morality, or what Nietzsche labels slave morality, which renders humans dependent and oppressed through conscience, while what he calls the master morality—which entails a disregard of conscience—makes so that it can develop itself and its will freely. In the notes to *The Wild Duck* (Ibsen 2009c, "Notater"), Ibsen gives expression to the same fundamental idea: "Christianity demoralises and restrains both men and women in different ways."

In the play, no answer is provided as to the question of who was actually at fault in the acquisition of the forest and the illegal logging on government land, even if it is hinted at that Werle was by no means innocent. Read with the perspective that I propose, what the drama does show, however, is that it went this way for one family, and that way for the other, and that this is

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owing to these two elder paterfamilias' entirely differing personalities, not to mention morals: Werle most probably understood what they were doing when he and Ekdal acquired the forest and felled timber on government land, and he knew how he himself would avoid being caught; something Ekdal did not. Werle exploited this to the full, with prosperity for himself and his own family, and catastrophe for the other family.

The drama, however, deals not just with these two highly different types—the merchant and the lieutenant, and their different personalities and morals—but also with the two families. What the drama shows, in addition to the relationship between them and that they live under hugely contrasting life circumstances with different conflicts, suffering and sorrows, is—through a series of portraits—how similar—with variations—the members of each family are internally. A pattern of these similarities and differences emerge via the mirroring in the basic pattern of the constellation of animals: the strong versus the weak, the favored versus the not favored.

4.1. The Werle family: The merchant, Gregers and Mrs Sørby

How are the Werles reflected in the loft image? Werle is described differently by different people, but the sum of the descriptions, together with what he himself says and does, points in a particular direction: a strong and brutally self-assertive sort who both lets himself be understood in light of Darwin's theory of "the naturally selected," those especially "favored" in the struggle for existence, and in light of Nietzsche's master morality—as not only equipped with a force of will, or will to power, but also a particularly robust conscience.

Hired servant Jensen implies that the merchant has been "en svær buk i sine dage" (Ibsen 2009, 12). The animal metaphor is not preserved in McFarlane's translation: "a bit of a lad in his day," Ibsen 1999, 109; but is in Fjelde's: "a real goat in his day" (Ibsen 1978, 393). Mrs Sørby hints at the same promiscuity, but mentions it as something positive, as one of the merchant's particular strengths:

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The whole of his youth and the best years of his manhood, all he heard was a lot of sermonizing about his sins – a healthy and vigorous man like him. And many's the time, from what I've heard, those sermons were about entirely imaginary offences. (Ibsen 1999, 189)¹⁹

Her description, moreover, unmistakably recalls Mrs Alving's description of how her Christian morals contributed toward the destruction of Chamberlain Alving in *Gengangere/Ghosts* (1881).²⁰

Gregers has an extremely negative image of his father. He compares his father's way of life to the destructive conduct of a warlord: "When I look back on everything you've done, it's as if I looked out over a battlefield strewn with shattered lives" (Ibsen 1999, 128).²¹ He also characterizes his father as a cynic, as one who has married for money: "That must have been a bitter pill to swallow, when you found out you had miscalculated, after expecting her to bring you a fortune" (Ibsen 1999, 174).²² Last but not least, Werle is referred to by Hjalmar Ekdal as "a favoured person." *Begunstiget*, "favored," is the same adjective as that used in J. P. Jacobsen's Danish translation of Darwin, which is probably (cf. Aarseth 2005) the one that Ibsen read (if not all, at least some): "Og så at vide, at alt, hvad jeg her ser for mine øjne – (*sparker til en stol*) – hele mit hjem, – det skylder jeg en begunstiget forgænger! Å, denne forføreriske grosserer Werle!" (Ibsen 2009, 159).²³ On one occasion the merchant portrays himself to his son as lonely and sick: His sight has worsened, he is on the verge of going blind and losing hope. He is therefore going to withdraw from the town's social life; specifically, move to Høidal. He does not elaborate on his loneliness, but there is an obvious connection to his self-assertive and egotistical conduct in life: This conduct has not only cost him his closest associate and friend (Ekdal), but also destroyed his relationship with his family, wife and only son. As such, he emerges as a powerful man who has lost his nearest and dearest and is about to fade away, not to mention become helpless—the adjective "helpless" is used about him by Mrs Sørby: "now that he'll soon be helpless" (Ibsen 1999, 189)²⁴—and who is therefore going to withdraw from what has been his life, the town's social circles. He is going to marry Mrs Sørby in what appears to be an arranged

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marriage with obvious advantages for them both (even though there might be some affection between them too). And it is symptomatic of his brutally egoistic personality that he is ending up alone, without close friends, without close family, and marrying his housekeeper.

Just as the Ekdals do, Werle bases his life on an illusion or life lie: He has not only convinced others, but also himself, that he was blameless in the illegal logging case, and all his outward success—his favored position in the town, his money and social status—stands and falls precisely on this. He therefore becomes rightfully troubled when his son, who has come home on his invitation, begins to tear this apart and once again pose the old questions about guilt. Revelations and disclosures will bring catastrophic consequences for him, and Mrs Sørby most probably would not marry him then—she is marrying into money and prestige.

The merchant and Mrs Sørby seem to be imagined as two of a kind. When she is about to marry the merchant, she again betrays her love for Dr Relling for financial security, something that Relling takes badly: “RELLING [*with a tremor in his voice*]. Surely this is never true?” (Ibsen 1999, 187).²⁵ Afterwards he leaves and gets drunk. She characterizes herself thus: “I’ve always taken care not to act on impulse”; “A woman can’t just throw herself away, either” (Ibsen 1999, 188).²⁶ She has confided her earlier relationships to Werle (including the relationship with Dr Relling). Gregers therefore describes her as “more than usually frank” when he comes to hear that she has told Werle about all her previous relationships with men (Ibsen 1999, 188). Hjalmar perceives this frankness as admirable, and she thus becomes Gina’s direct opposite—Gina has not told him about her previous relationship with Werle, and Hjalmar reprehends her—naively enough—for not being like Mrs Sørby.

Gregers is marked intensely by his relationship to his father—both his father’s egotistical behavior toward Gregers’ mother (infidelity) and his cynical conduct toward his associate before and after the disclosure of the company’s illegal logging. Gregers

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emerges on the one hand as his father's direct opposite: where his father is unscrupulously self-assured, Gregers is destructively guilt-ridden (both because of his father's behavior toward Ekdal, and because he himself did not speak out about what he thought and knew about the case), marked by a sickly conscience (according to himself, because of his father's deeds; according to his father, a legacy of his mother). Throughout his upbringing, he has been afraid of his father and has not dared to speak out about what he knew. This is his own description of himself in a dialogue with his father:

GREGERS. You've messed up my whole life. I'm not thinking of all the business with Mother... But it's thanks to you that I now suffer the torment of a desperately guilty conscience.

WERLE. Aha! So it's your conscience that's a bit queer, eh?

GREGERS. I should have stood up to you at the time the trap was laid for Lieutenant Ekdal. I should have warned him, for I had a pretty good idea how things would turn out in the end.

WERLE. Yes, you really should have spoken out then.

GREGERS. I didn't dare. I was scared... too much of a coward. I can't tell you how frightened of you I was then and for a long time after, too. (Ibsen 1999, 173–174)²⁷

GREGERS. And besides, if I am to go on living, I must find something to cure my sick conscience.

WERLE. It will never recover. From being a child, you've always had a sickly conscience. It's a heritage from your mother, Gregers... one thing she did leave you. (Ibsen 1999, 174)²⁸

Here Werle calls attention to what he believes Gregers has inherited from his mother, but what the drama thematizes is variation (cf. also Darwin's theme in *On the Origin of Species*), and thus also what he inherited from his father: Gregers clearly has—on the other hand—somewhat of the same strong character as his father. But where his father asserts himself, Gregers proclaims his ideals, thus something beyond himself. As such, and in contrast to the merchant, he resembles Brand (in *Brand*, 1866) in no small measure in his uncompromising insistence on the right—ideal—way of being. Dr Relling diagnoses Gregers thus:

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RELLING. [...] In your case there are complications. First there are these troublesome inflamed scruples. But then there's something much worse: you're subject to serious fits of hero-worship. You've always got to go round finding something to admire that's not really any of your business.

GREGERS. I must indeed look for something beyond my own self.

RELLING. But then you go and make such tremendous blunders about these wonderful beings you imagine you see and hear around you. Now you are at it again, coming to another labourer's cottage with that claim of the ideal. There just aren't any solvent people living here. (Ibsen 1999, 203)²⁹

However, as opposed to Brand, who is also destroyed by his great faith in others, Gregers's idealism is unequivocally condemned as naive and destructive by the text in which he is incorporated, even if, growing up with the father that he has, it makes sense that he has become this way. When Gregers decides to reveal to Hjalmar how Hjalmar's family life is really tied together and to save him from the ruinous delusion ("the lie") under which he believes he is living, this is—though naive, seeing as he utterly misjudges Hjalmar's forbearance—well meant. It is, however, also made to seem—even by himself—like a project he needs, not only to survive his intense feelings of guilt and heavy conscience for not speaking out about what he knew, but also in order to go on living (cf. his "*if I am to go on living*, I must find something to cure my sick conscience," Ibsen 1999, 174, my italics)³⁰ and, in this way, as a life lie insofar as the project is doomed to fail, something that is already hinted at when Gregers allegorizes himself as the dog that will rescue the wild duck: The hunter's dog does not fetch the duck from the water in order to save its life, but for the hunter to finally take it.

What these three representatives of the Werle family have in common is that they are strong figures who use their power to their own ends without concern for, or understanding of, others. Consequently, among the assembled cast of characters as seen in the light of the constellation of animals—in whose light we are invited to understand them—they emerge as the favored, the most fortunately positioned in the struggle for existence, which among other things includes the illegal logging on government land and its consequences. Where Werle and Mrs Sørby appear

as self-assured bearers of robust consciences, Gregers proclaims ideals, in other words something beyond himself—and behind and beneath this idealism, as its catalyst and motivation, lies his destructive conscience. We later find a similar nuancing through the conscience in Nietzsche’s distinction in *On the Genealogy of Morality* between the strong and the weak according to how “robust” a conscience they have (Nietzsche 2016). And in both cases, what weakens the conscience is Christianity or the notion of a right, or ideal, way of being. (Gregers appears not as a Christian, but as an idealist, whereas Hjalmar, who seems to be closer to Christianity, believes in justice.)

Nevertheless, in the drama, this is about to change: the merchant, who has hitherto lived a life as the favored or the most fortunately positioned of the two associates, is on the verge of going blind and becoming helpless. He is, in other words, reflected in both aspects of the symbolism of the wild duck—favored/strong, and wounded into helplessness. Gregers emerges as the most fortunately placed of the two families’ sons, but then suffers from a destructive idealism and conscience, and in conversation with his father, is suggested to be suicidal.³¹

4.2. The Ekdal family: Hjalmar, Old Ekdal, Gina, and Hedvig

How, then, is the Ekdal family reflected in the loft image? Hjalmar Ekdal is marked by the fall in social status that the family have experienced since his father was caught for his crime. The outcome of this is an intense sense of shame, a melancholy outlook on life and a fundamental need for security. The shame makes him shun social life and worship the warm bosom of his own family. This is clearly demonstrated in Hjalmar’s aversion to being a guest at the merchant’s dinner party, and is most clearly expressed in the scene when his father, Old Ekdal, suddenly and unexpectedly makes an appearance at the event: “Hjalmar starts up at the sight of his father, puts down his glass and turns toward the fireplace” (Ibsen 1999, 119).³² His shame is so intense that he turns his back to his own father, disowning him. What keeps him going is his belief in the invention he is going

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to create and his perception of himself as the family breadwinner:

I know it's only the humble home of a poor photographer of modest means ... and the place is not very grand. But I am an inventor, you know ... and a breadwinner too. That's what keeps me above all these petty things. – Ah! Here they are with the lunch! (Ibsen 1999, 167–168)³³

Both are illusions, cf. also Werle's alleged innocence in the illegal logging on government land and Gregers's rescue project (and, perhaps, what seems to be Relling's dream about a life together with Mrs Sørby): Financially, the family is dependent on the money from Werle, and the invention is Relling's idea, cf. his point about the life lie as cure (cf. also Nietzsche's emphasis on the necessity of illusion, particularly in *The Birth of Tragedy* from 1872, but also later, despite for him the truth also being synonymous with strength).

Hjalmar claims that he is not cut out to be unhappy: “Everything around me has got to be nice and secure and peaceful” (Ibsen 1999, 213). In *Ibsen's Houses. Architectural Metaphor and the Modern Uncanny*, Mark Sandberg shows how Hjalmar clings to a borrowed delusion, a cliché, about home comforts, which he surprisingly quickly replaces with another cliché, the home that falls to ruins, as soon as he finds out how things really are, and in spite of his continued concern for both Gina and Hedvig (Sandberg 2015, 97–98).

It is not, however, just the painful shame, dejection and need for assurance that characterizes Hjalmar. There is also another way in which he stands in contrast to Gregers, Werle and Mrs Sørby: As they appear—though in different ways—as strong, self-assured figures with robust consciences, he appears, like his father Old Ekdal, not only as weakened and secluded by his sense of shame, but as emotional and intuitive rather than quick and calculating. Relling and Gregers disagree over whether he is simply stupid (Relling) or merely childishly sensitive and naive (Gregers). Hjalmar has grown up without his mother, with two aunts as his closest caregivers. In Relling's eyes, Hjalmar was given an upbringing by “two crazy, hysterical maiden aunts”

(Ibsen 1999, 202) and according to him, is someone who has mistakenly been regarded as bright, but is in reality stupid, like his father, “et fæ”/“a blockhead”:

RELLING. [...] Ekdal's misfortune is that in his own little circle he's always been considered a shining light ...

GREGERS. And don't you think he is? Deep down within, I mean.

RELLING. I've never seen any sign of it. Whether his father thought that – that might well be. The dear Lieutenant has always been a bit of a blockhead, all his life. (Ibsen 1999, 202)³⁴

Relling's evaluation makes sense in so far as Old Ekdal does not seem to have realized what he (Ekdal) and Werle were doing in Høidal, or how he would wriggle free of his troubles, something that Werle knew and was successful in doing. In Gregers's eyes, on the other hand, Hjalmar was raised by two affectionate aunts with the correct idealistic outlook, and according to him Hjalmar has a child's temper:

... and now there he sits, so tremendously trusting and innocent, in the midst of deceit, living under the same roof with a woman like that and not knowing that what he calls his home is built on a lie. (Ibsen 1999, 128)³⁵

Hjalmar's emotional and intuitive behavior is behavior that, together with Hjalmar's seemingly Christian belief in justice, in the great constellation of characters reflected in the constellation of animals in the loft, emerges as diametrically opposed to that which characterizes Mrs Sørby and Werle, cynically self-assured and calculating, as well as Gregers's insistent idealism with no understanding for the forbearance of others.³⁶

Gregers also regards Hjalmar's father as furnished with “the spirit of a child”: “He has always been a man with the spirit of a child. *That's* what you don't understand” (Ibsen 1999, 202).³⁷ Regardless of whether we view him as less clever or simply sensitive and intuitive, he consequently emerges as someone who is not especially favored either in the struggle for existence in general, or in the past struggle against Werle in particular. Old Ekdal is thus also financially, socially and existentially marked by the conviction: He is excluded from his previous social life, he is no longer permitted to wear his lieutenant's uniform, and he no

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longer dares to go hunting in the forests of Høidal. He can certainly utter veiled, angry diatribes against Werle's servants and assert himself and his own interests within his home's four walls, but outside, or together with anyone other than his immediate family, he appears cowed, submissive and anxious.

In the larger constellation of characters, Gina, as we have already touched upon, constitutes Mrs Sørby's opposite. Where Mrs Sørby appears as not just an independent, but also a self-assured woman, Gina emerges as someone who, if she does not subordinate herself, at least adapts: Where Mrs Sørby has confided the merchant everything about her previous relationships with men, Gina has not dared to tell Hjalmar about her previous relationship with the merchant. And where Mrs Sørby is marrying for money and security, Gina claims she did it for love: "That's why I didn't dare say anything at the time. Because I'd come to like you so very much, you know. I couldn't go and make my whole life a misery ..." (Ibsen 1999, 181).³⁸ She recognized that the relationship with the merchant was morally objectionable, something for which Hjalmar would condemn and disapprove of her, and which therefore had to remain hidden. Gina stands out from the Ekdal men by coming from another social class than them; and in the dialogue, Hjalmar's attempts to give her more learning (cf. the domestication theme) are underscored, especially in correcting her language but also, for example, here, where he boasts about his effect on her: "Life is a great teacher, you see. Contact with me every day ... and then we have pretty regular visits from one or two most intelligent people" (Ibsen 1999, 115).³⁹

Hedvig belongs to the Ekdal family even if there is much to suggest that her biological father is Werle. This is not clarified in the text. Gina tells Hjalmar that she does not know who the father is, and as such both possibilities are maintained, but the fact that Hedvig has an eye condition that will make her blind points toward Werle being her father. Hedvig is still a child (she is fourteen) and openly devoted and affectionate, but is also precocious in her interaction with adults. She is lonely; she has been

taken out of school due to her eyesight, and has no schoolmates or friends. She stands apart from Gina and Hjalmar in that she likes reading (we are not told why Hjalmar does not like to read, and there is nothing to suggest that Gina likes to read), and would like to become a book illustrator. She is, then, a child with clear intellectual interests and qualities. She prays her evening prayer, but only because she worries about losing those close to her (her father, the wild duck, cf. Ibsen 1999, 198. In McFarlane's translation *aftenbønn*, "evening prayer(s)," is turned into *bønn*, "prayer," in such a way that Hedvig appears to be more religious than she necessarily is). The uncertainty surrounding his paternity, and Hjalmar's sense of inferiority—he fears that she will choose to live with the Werle family if she finds out that Werle is her father—leads to him brutally rejecting her, and in her despair, she takes her own life.

While the Werles appear in this way as the strong or the favored ones in the struggle for existence playing out (and from which the merchant escaped judgment), the Ekdals appear as the weak ones (and Ekdal was convicted). This, however, needs to be nuanced: That which makes Werle strong, destroys his close relatives and friends and makes him lonely, as we have seen; and it is only in the Ekdal family that we find intimacy, affection and the ability to show consideration. Both in itself and seen together with Werle's thematized fear of loneliness, this nevertheless emerges as a strength in the thematized struggle for existence, even if it will not make them rich.

As such, *The Wild Duck* can be said to be a form of moral-philosophical reasoning in the form of a play. Neither freedom and authenticity—and thus self-fulfillment—nor love and charity are upheld as being of overriding value, even though it may appear so. The good and the bad are thematized all the same, most clearly, perhaps, in the way in which Werle betrays his friend and associate, and in how Hjalmar rejects his own daughter with the result that she takes her own life. The ethical perspective is sharpened at the level of the metaphor by means of a recurring animal metaphor in which the Werles are depicted as

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goats and dogs and the Ekdals contrastively as *fē*, i.e. livestock.⁴⁰ While *fē* denotes livestock, domesticated animals, animals domesticated by and subordinate to humans, *bukker* are—cf. *Bokmålsordboka*, the Standard Norwegian Dictionary—males of both domesticated and wild animal species (*geitebukk*, billy goat, *reinbukk*, reindeer buck, *råbukk*, roebuck) and of the human species, who distinguish themselves in their conduct, general promiscuity and strong will, cf. for example *gammel bukk*, old goat, *horebukk*, whoremonger, *stabukk*, stubborn old mule, *stribukk*, hard-head. This is scarcely accidental, and, more importantly it is a contrast with biblical connotations, even though Ibsen uses *fē* (domesticated animals), and not *får*, sheep; the point is the contrast with the rampaging goats. The Gospel of Matthew, chapter 25, deals with the day of judgment and Jesus's separating of the good (the sheep) from the wicked (the goats) so that the good shall enter heaven and the wicked shall enter hell. The Bible's criterion for being saved is charity. What we are confronted with in the drama is, on the contrary, a value-neutral representation of an existential struggle under certain differing life circumstances, with differing preconditions and differing means. Both affection, love, and charity, and their opposite, self-fulfillment (or freedom and authenticity) are thematized, as we have seen, but without us being given any biblical—or on the contrary, Nietzschean—ranking of these as values where one would favor love and charity, the other self-fulfillment. It is the investigation of the existential struggle's actors themselves—the varying circumstances, conditions, means, sorrows, and sufferings—that seem to be the point in *The Wild Duck*.⁴¹

5. CONCLUSION

The great conflicts and sorrows of this play take place in two houses, two homes, and what the characters experience are “the family pains” (Ibsen 2009b, “Arbeidsmanuskript/notater”). This unfolds by way of a *mise-en-abyme* like composition in which the characters and the plot are reflected in the

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constellation of domesticated, hunted versus not-hunted animals in the loft. Considered in this way, the loft metaphor acquires validity for the cast of characters' two families in a completely different way than as yet seen in the literature on the drama: it applies both to the weak as well as to the strong, and the metaphor itself does not exalt freedom and authenticity—what we are confronted with is a moral-philosophical investigation of the existential struggle for existence, influenced by Darwin's theory of selection, and overlapping Nietzsche's ideas of the favored few, the robust conscience and the master-slave morality.

NOTES

1. The reference to Darwin is missing in the English translation that I have used, The Oxford World Classics version:
“MRS. SØRBY. What they mean is that, if you are invited out, you are expected to work for your supper, Mr. Ekdal.
THE FAT GUEST. And *that*, where the food is good, is just sheer pleasure, of course!
THE BALDING GUEST. Good Lord, if it's a matter of keeping body and soul together, I must say ...” (Ibsen 1999, 117–118).
The reference is represented in Penguin Classics' translation: “MRS Sörby. What these good gentlemen mean is that if one is asked out to dinner one should do some work in return, Mr Ekdal.
THE FAT GUEST. Pure pleasure, in a household that gives you a good dinner.
THE THIN-HAIRED GUEST. Bless my soul! When it comes to the battle for existence –”. (Ibsen 1961, 150–151)
2. «Hvad for noget! (*henne ved loftsdøren*) Går du på jagt, Hjalmar?» (Ibsen 2009, 119).
3. «Men det er jo på en ganske anden måde, Hjalmar. Du vil da vel ikke sammenligne hverken dig eller hende med disse to –? Nå, du forstår mig nok.» (Ibsen 2009, 178).
4. The lack of a clear protagonist in *The Wild Duck* is often commented upon in the research literature. In one article on Ibsen's transformation of the Aristotelian plot composition, Thomas Van Laan proposed that the role of protagonist is split between three characters – Gregers, Hjalmar, and Hedvig (Van Laan 1998, 371): While Gregers initiates the action, the

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recognition (Greek: *anagnorisis*) is placed with Hjalmar when he realizes that Hedvig is not, perhaps, his daughter, while Hedvig performs the final phase, suicide.

5. My translation. If not otherwise indicated, translations from Norwegian are mine.
6. Aarseth's interpretation is also presented in *Henrik Ibsens Skrifter*, vol. 8, in which Aarseth wrote the introduction to the drama (Aarseth 2009).
7. «Hvorledes kan en mand som De, – slig en friluftsmænd, – leve midt i en kvalm by, her inde mellem fire vægge? [...] Men alt det, som Deres sind er vokset sammen med? Denne svale strygende luftningen, dette fri livet i skog og på vidder, mellem dyr og fugl –?» (Ibsen 2009, 81).
8. «GREGERS ved døren, ser ind i loftsrummet. De holder jo høns, løjtnant Ekdal!

EKDAL. Skulde mene *det*, at vi holder høns. De er fløjet op nu. Men De skulde bare se de høns ved dagsens lys, De!

HEDVIG. Og så er der –

EKDAL. Hys – hys; ikke sig noget endnu.

GREGERS. Og duer har De også, ser jeg.

EKDAL. Å jo; kunde nok være, det, at vi har duer! De har rugekasserne sine der oppe under tagskægget, de; for duerne vil helst ligge højt, kan De skønne.

HJALMAR. Det er ikke almindelige duer alle sammen.

EKDAL. Almindelige! Nej, skulde da vel tro det! Vi har tumlere; og et par kropduer har vi også. Men kom så her! Kan De se den bingen der borte ved væggen?

GREGERS. Ja; hvad bruger De den til?

EKDAL. Der ligger kaninerne om natten, far.

GREGERS. Nå; så De har kaniner også?

EKDAL. Ja, De kan da vel for fanden tænke, at vi har kaniner! Han spør, om vi har kaniner, du Hjalmar! Hm! Men *nu* kommer det rigtige, ser De! *Nu* kommer det! Flyt dig, Hedvig. Stil Dem her; så ja; og se så der ned. – Ser De ikke der en kurv med strå i?

GREGERS. Jo. Og jeg ser, der ligger en fugl i kurven.

EKDAL. Hm – «en fugl» –

GREGERS. Er det ikke en and?

EKDAL *stødt*. Jo, begribeligvis er det en and.

HJALMAR. Men *hvad* slags and, tror du?

HEDVIG. Det er ikke nogen simpel and –

EKDAL. Hys!

GREGERS. Og en tyrkisk and er det heller ikke.

EKDAL. Nej, herr – Werle; det er ikke nogen tyrkisk and; for det er en

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vildand.

GREGERS. Nej, er det virkelig? En vild and?" (Ibsen 2009, 85–86)

9. At an earlier point in the same dialogue, Ekdal wants to show Gregers the loft, but is then stopped by Hjalmar (Ibsen 1999, 144).
10. «Der gives mennesker her i verden, som dukker til bunds, bare de får et par hagel i kroppen, og så kommer de aldrig op igen mere.» (Ibsen 2009, 38)
11. «Gør altid så vildænderne. Stikker til bunds – så dybt de kan vinde, far; – bider sig fast i tang og i tarre – og i alt det fandenskab, som *dernede* find's. Og så kommer de aldrig op igen.» (Ibsen 2009, 88)
12. «Der er hævn i skogen.» (Ibsen 2009, 81).
13. «Bare lidt kaninjagt en gang imellem.» (Ibsen 2009, 120).
14. This critical detail is not preserved in McFarlane's translation: "That blessed wild duck! All the carrying-on there is about that bird!" (Ibsen 1999, 163).
15. «en verden for sig selv», «Så rent for sig selv» (Ibsen 2009, 112).
16. «så mange underlige ting» (Ibsen 2009, 112).
17. «havsens bund» (Ibsen 2009, 116).
18. «For skogen, ser De, – skogen, skogen –!» (Ibsen 2009, 81); «Der er hævn i skogen.» (Ibsen 2009, 81).
19. «Han, den sunde livskraftige mand, fik hele sin ungdom og alle sine bedste år igennem ikke høre andet end straffeprækener. Og mangan gang drejede de prækener sig om de mest indbildte forgåelser, – efter hvad *jeg* har lad't mig sige.» (Ibsen 2009, 173)
20. There are several such references to Ibsen's own literary works in the drama, references that may suggest that *The Wild Duck* can be thought of as a form of summary of his ideas in his authorship up to this point. Shideler characterizes Alving's joy of life as 'a biocentered consciousness that can be either productive or destructive' (Shideler 1999, 90), and with reference to his interpretation, Werle can be understood as the productive or successful version of Alving, in the sense that he, likewise a biocentered consciousness, succeeded in business.
21. «Når jeg ser tilbage på al din færd, da er det, som om jeg så ud over en slagmark med knuste menneskeskæbner langs alle vejene.» (Ibsen 2009, 48)
22. «Har du endnu ikke kunnet fordøje den tort, at du regned galt, da du trode, du skulde få formue med hende?» (Ibsen 2009, 143).
23. This possible reference to Darwin is not incorporated in McFarlane's translation: "To think that everything I see around me here ... [*kicks a chair*]. My entire home, all of it I owe to a previous lover. Ah, this lecherous old Werle!" Ibsen 1999, 182).
24. «nu, da han snart blir hjælpeløs» (Ibsen 2009, 173)
25. «RELLING *dirrer lidt i stemmen*. Dette her er da vel aldrig sandt?» (Ibsen 2009, 170).

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26. «Ja det må De nok sige. Men jeg har altid ta't mig i vare for at gå efter indskydelser. En kvinde kan da ikke kaste sig rent væk heller.» (Ibsen 2009, 172).
27. «GREGERS. Du har forkvaklet hele mit liv. Jeg tænker ikke på alt det med mor –. Men det er dig, jeg kan takke for, at jeg går og jages og nages under en skyldbetyngt samvittighed.
WERLE. Aha, det er samvittigheden, som det er galt fat med.
GREGERS. Jeg skulde ha' trådt op imod dig dengang, der blev stillet snarer for løjtnant Ekdal. Jeg skulde ha' advaret ham; for jeg aned nok, hvor det vilde bære hen.
WERLE. Ja, da burde du sandelig ha' talt.
GREGERS. Jeg voved mig ikke til det; så fejt og forskræmt var jeg. Jeg var så usigelig ræd for dig – både dengang og længe bagefter» (Ibsen 2009, 141–142).
28. «GREGERS. Og desuden – skal jeg bli' ved at leve længer, så må jeg se at finde helsebod for min syge samvittighed.
WERLE. Den blir aldrig frisk. Din samvittighed har været sygelig lige fra barneårene. Det er en arvelod fra din mor, Gregers; – den eneste arv, hun efterlod dig.» (Ibsen 2009, 142–143).
29. «RELLING. Jaha. De lider af et kompliceret tilfælde. Først er det nu denne brydsomme retskaffenhedsfeberen; og så det, som værre er, – altid går De og ørsker i tilbedelses-delirium; altid skal De ha' noget at beundre udenfor Deres egne grejer.
GREGERS. Ja udenfor mit eget må jeg visselig søge det.
RELLING. Men De tar så skammelig fejl af de store vidunderfluerne, som De tror at se og høre omkring Dem. De er atter igen kommet ind i en husmandsstue med den ideale fordringen; her bor ikke solvente folk her i huset.» (Ibsen 2009, 201–202).
30. «Og desuden – skal jeg bli' ved at leve længer, så må jeg se at finde helsebod for min syge samvittighed.» (Ibsen 2009, 142).
31. Cf. his line '*if I am to go on living, I must find something to cure my sick conscience*', Ibsen 1999, 174, my italics, together with what he replies he will live off when he breaks from his father:
GREGERS. I've saved a bit out of my pay.
WERLE. But how long will *that* last!
GREGERS. *I think it will last my time out.*
WERLE. What do you mean by that?
GREGERS. I'm not answering any more questions. (Ibsen 1999, 175, my italics)
WERLE. Nå, men siden da? Hvad vil du så leve af?
GREGERS. Jeg har lagt lidt op af min løn.

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WERLE. Ja hvor længe vil *det* forslå!

GREGERS. Jeg tænker, *det* forslår min tid ud.

WERLE. Hvad skal *det* sige?

GREGERS. Nu svarer jeg ikke på mere. (Ibsen 2009, 144–145)

32. «*Hjalmar farer sammen ved synet af sin far, sætter sit glas fra sig og vender sig mod kaminen.*» (Ibsen 2009, 31).
33. «I den fattige fotografers hjem er taget lavt, *det* ved jeg nok, – og mine kår er ringe. Men jeg er en opfinder, du, – og jeg er familjeforsørger tillige. *Det* bærer mig oppe over de små vilkår. – Ah, der kommer de med frokosten!» (Ibsen 2009, 130).
34. «Ekdals ulykke er, at han altid i sin kreds er ble't holdt for et lys –
GREGERS. Og *det er* han måske ikke? I sindsdybet, mener jeg?
RELLING. *Jeg* har aldrig mærket noget til *det*. At hans far trodde *det*, – lad *det* gå; for gamle løjtnanten har jo været et fæ alle sine dage.» (Ibsen 2009, 200)
35. «– og der sidder han nu, han med sit store troskyldige barnesind midt i bedraget, – lever under tag sammen med en slig en, og ved ikke, at *det*, han kalder sit hjem, er bygget på en løgn!» (Ibsen 2009, 48).
36. If we extend the perspective to the literary works before *The Wild Duck*, this behavior resembles the sensitive, naive and intuitive behavior that is thematized in *A Doll's House* (1879), represented by Nora—before her transformation, of course—a way of acting or reacting to which a certain reservation is made: Nora cannot not remain *there*, outside society's rules and conventions.
37. «Han har alle sine dage været en mand med barnesind; *det er det*, De ikke skønner.» (Ibsen 2009, 201).
38. «Nej; men derfor så turde jeg ikke sige dig noget dengangen. For jeg kom jo til at holde så svært af dig, som du ved. Og jeg kunde da ikke gøre mig selv rent ulykkelig – » (Ibsen 2009, 159).
39. «Nej, livet opdrager, ser du. Den daglige omgang med mig –; og så kommer der jo jævnlig et par begavede mennesker til os. Jeg forsikkrer dig, du vilde ikke kende Gina igen.» (Ibsen 2009, 22).
40. “Buk” (goat, used about Werle, Ibsen 2009, 12, not translated in McFarlane: cf. “a bit of a lad in his day,” Ibsen 1999, 109; but in Fjelde: “a real goat in his day,” Ibsen 1978, 393); “blindebuk” (literally “blind goat,” which is the Norwegian name of playing Blind Man’s Buff, used about Mrs Sørby, Ibsen 2009, 48 [the expression in English does not contain goat: “your guests are playing Blind Man’s Buff with Mrs Sørby”]); and “hund” (dog, Gregers’s allegorizing of himself as a dog who will fetch the winged wild duck from the water, Ibsen 1999, 149), “fæ” (livestock, used about Old Ekdal and his son Hjalmar, Ibsen 2009, 200; not preserved in McFarlane’s translation, where “fæ” is translated as “blockhead”).

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41. Through this value neutrality, we are given a suggestion of a fundamentally existential and ethical conflict—the conflict between self-fulfillment versus love and closeness to others, but this is not a conflict that the characters in *The Wild Duck* face. In the aforementioned dramatic epilogue, *When We Dead Awaken*, however, it is this conflict that the protagonists struggle with, especially the protagonist shaped along autobiographical lines. Should he fulfill himself as an artist, or invest in love? (Wærp 2002)

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