The Master Builder

Henrik Ibsen’s The Master Builder has an aura of other worldliness, a gothic mysticism

that seems to take hold of the character. Its realism was unsettling as it went beyond a tragic play

as Solness is was doomed with the tragic flaw of hubris. Ragnar was a moral character, repressed

by Solnes s’ pride and dominance and never was justly revenged. The conclusion was necess ary

but not satisf ying, still leaving a lot of questions unresolved. Hilde was the most enigmatic

character in that her motivations were unclear and her own his tory, her own past and future was

ambiguous, her language almost absurd, suggesting her other- worldliness and providing that

complexity. This hint at absurdity in dialogue and in action invites symbolic exegesis as the

minimalist staging invites audience imagination. The simple wood delignments over the dirt

f loor and the staircase in back that was used for Solness’ ascent to the top of the Cathedral

partitioned the space simply, in doing so, gave the audience more room to imagine the

characters’ development and more room for the character psychologies to dominate the play.

These techniques simultaneously s tripped and replaced character veils, providing insight but

further complicating their motivations.

Solnes s’ motivations were unclear but his suspicion, fear and hub ris were apparent even

before the play began as Solness was seated on the stage as the audience trickled in. He was

seated slightly sideways on a simple wood chair, his arms crossed over his chest, his legs crossed

and his back was hunched as he carefully surveyed the audience. His facial expression was in

deep concentration, furrowed brown and tight lips, setting the tone. A similar stylistic effect

occurred when Aline first appeared on stage. She slowly descended from the staircase in the

back, her movements barely noticeable from one step to the next, camouflaging into the dark

stone background she was conservatively dress in all black, depicting her proximity to the grave

in mentality and her lack of life, of effervescence, of emotional sustenance. Throughout the

play, her asceticism and self-denial, cold sharpness became more and more encapsulating to her

being, ultimately determining her character, stripping her of the life Hilde so manifestly

represents.

In the introduction of the play, Ibsen describes the play as an exploration of sickly

consciences , psychological roots and tensions between individuality and convention. Hilde

represents somewhat of an untamed life force, a “wild-bird” rather than a devil or an angel. She

represents that uninhibited, imaginative and creative quality in man that pushes him to achieve

and realize his dreams. She is seductive, tantalizing to unrestrained beauty of lif e’s potential; and

a sexual tension supporting this life zest characterized her relationship with Solness. Her actions,

her past is ambiguous, Ibsen writes, “Her expression becomes more and more veiled as if she were looking into herself” (86). This is in strict contrast to Aline who represents that compulsion,

asceticism to duty, to convention. Almost all of the actions that she does she claims are

compelled by duty and this is an idea that Hilde dismisses. In this way, Hilde represents Solness’

life force, her “attendant and familiar” whom he has summoned to represent and to dust off his

lively demands, potentially evil; suggesting that both the capacity for good and evil are inside of

us and that conscience which determines how we use our internal forces is irreconcilable but

distinguishes man from all other forms of life. The introduction of the play suggests this

un predictability and mobility of the human soul; trolls represent “the impulse which human

beings feel towards the freedom of irrationality and irresponsibility—and the reaching out for

this freedom means that we must surrender to the bestial element which is also part of its makeup” (xviii).

characters.. This play is meant for theater and not for film because of the depth of the characters

was really exaggerated through that physical presence of stage actors. Cinematic effects were all

too powerful in keeping the authenticity and genuineness of the characters. For instance, when

was taken out, his uncle found him and prayed because at that time, he had the faith, and

believed in God). He begged God to save the boy and take away his faith. And this surprising

and shocking realization is why the family has renounced both James and his uncle, because a

miracle may have saved James. This anagnoresis is saturated with religious context and with

religious belief in a way that maybe doesn’t resonate with many readers. Upon hearing this,