

Introduction

House, Ghosts, An Enemy of the People and *The Wild Duck*¹ had appeared since *Pillars of Society*. Ibsen's fame was assured, and his self-confidence established upon good grounds; his methods were perfected and his touch certain. But anything approaching gaiety of mind seems to have been ground out of him by the pitiless wheels of life and experience; *Rosmersholm* is surely one of the grimmest dramas ever penned.

The genesis of the idea of the play seems to have been to some extent political—Ibsen's disgust with the Norwegian democracy of the time, and with the personalities and animosities which were allowed to obscure the actual political issues of the day, impelling him to a plea for the recovery of "some elements of nobility" (as he himself put it) in national life. This accounts for the mission which Rosmer, in the play, imagines to be his. The interest of this, however, is local. What is far more absorbing in the play is the development and conflict of character; the astonishing cleverness with which, gradually, veil after veil is lifted that has concealed Rebecca's true nature and the extent of her machinations; the pitiless veracity of the self-analysis with which she and Rosmer torture themselves; the master-hand evident in the structure of the play.

It was first performed in Bergen, early in 1887, and soon took a firm hold on the Scandinavian and German stages. It has been at various times played here, as well as in France and Italy. From the interesting posthumous volume of notes and memoranda of Ibsen's (translated lately into English with the title of *From Ibsen's Workshop*), we learn that *Rosmersholm* was at first to have been called *White Horses*; also that, in an early draft of the play, Rebecca was governess to two daughters of Rosmer's, who, however, eventually disappeared from the play and reappeared as Boletta and Hilda Wangel in *The Lady from the Sea*.

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March 1913.

¹ All translated in the volumes of Ibsen's plays in "Everyman's Library."