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THE CALL FROM AFAR: A HEIDEGGERIAN– LACANIAN REREADING OF IBSEN’S *THE LADY FROM THE SEA*

HUB ZWART 

INTRODUCTION

The Lady from the Sea, written by Henrik Ibsen in 1888, is a compelling portrayal of fin-de-siècle marital existence. Like several other Ibsen plays, it is structured as a therapy, featuring Ellida Wangel as its “patient”.¹ But this predominantly pertains to the front stage of the drama, the narrative as it is enacted before the footlights. Another possible reading shifts the focus from front-stage to back-drop, and from the therapeutic talking sessions (Ibsen’s divan, as it were) to the ambiance. By this I do not mean the décor (the Norwegian coastal-provincial scenery, the panoramic landscape), but rather that which lies beyond it: the (invisible, un-representable) sea. For, interestingly, although the presence of the sea (in the far distance) is noticeable throughout the play, the sea *as such* can never be seen. Even from a panoramic hill-top, this “other”, maritime world remains “unseeable”.² Thus, rather than opting for an anthropocentric perspective (focusing on the therapeutic dimension: a combination of “individual therapy” and “relation therapy”), my rereading zooms in on the role of nature in Ibsen’s piece, on that which lies beyond the human realm (as a sociocultural ecosystem). Freud once captured the basic structure of psychotherapy in the formula “Where *Id* was, there *ego* shall be” (“Wo *Es* war, soll *Ich* werden”, 1932/1940, 86), but the rereading I propose will move step by step in the opposite direction, amounting to a “reading in reverse”. Rather than focusing

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on the ego, attention will shift towards diffuse otherness. What is the “sea” in Ibsen’s play? And what exactly is this fatal attraction to which Ellida has fallen victim?

The design of my article, therefore, is as follows. After a brief summary, I will first read Ibsen’s drama on the manifest level, as “therapy”. Subsequently, however, the reading direction will be reversed, as indicated. This will entail a shift in frame of reference as well, namely from a Freudian (therapeutic, psychopathological) towards a Heideggerian reading mode: from *ego* to *Id*, or rather: from *Dasein* (i.e. individual existence) to nature in the primordial sense (nature as φύσις). The Heideggerian reading will initially focus on the “Call of Conscience”, elaborated by Heidegger in *Being and Time*, but this thematic will subsequently become connected with the Call of (primordial) nature (φύσις), a core motif in Heidegger’s later writings. Finally, the work of Lacan, poised, as I will argue, midway between Freud and Heidegger, will serve as an intermediary, enabling me to bridge the two previous readings and to address the key question of this paper: what is the meaning of the sea in Ibsen’s play? The sea, I argue, represents that from which Ellida supposedly should liberate or emancipate herself: the call from afar, emerging from what Heidegger refers to as primordial nature and what Lacan refers to as the “Real”.

SUMMARY

Ellida (the main character) is the second wife of Dr Wangel, district physician in a Norwegian town located in the Moldefjord area, which attracts numerous tourists during the summer season (which is about to end when the play begins). She is much younger than her husband and neither happy nor successful in her role as housewife and stepmother to two adolescent daughters. She grew up in an isolated village on the Norwegian coast, where the fjord and the open sea meet, and still feels spellbound by the sea, as if she, somehow, belongs to it. Her life seems inauthentic and she clearly feels misplaced, out of her element: like a stranded mermaid, seeking solace in daily swimming exercises. Although her disconnectedness from the sea causes chronic malaise, no return option seems available.

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To alleviate his wife's unease, Wangel drugs her with tranquilisers, while he himself developed a drinking problem. The play, in short, is a drama of undomesticated and unsatisfied desires, but these are not presented as purely "internal", psychic problems. Rather, the unease is invoked by a call from afar, coming from nature, the open expanses. The sea as such seems to beckon Ellida, and she experiences a basic affinity between herself and maritime nature as such.³

The voice of the sea, moreover, is embodied by a third person, referred to as the Stranger. At a certain point, Ellida confesses to Wangel that, before their marriage, she had been in love with a mysterious sailor. They even became "engaged", but privately and unofficially, via an impromptu ritual. After committing a criminal offence (stabbing a sea captain, but claiming it to be an "act of justice") the sailor disappeared, but he sincerely promised that, one day, he would return to claim Ellida as his legal wife. Wangel now wants to be informed in more detail about their relationship, but Ellida tells him that they spent most of their time talking to one another:

Wangel. What did you talk of?

Ellida. Mainly about the sea.

Wangel. Ah! About the sea.

Ellida. About the storms and the calms. The dark nights at sea. And the sea in the sparkling sunlight, that too. But mostly we talked of the whales and dolphins, and of the seals that would lie out there on the skerries in the warm noon sun. And then we spoke of the gulls and the eagles and every kind of sea birds you can imagine. You know – it's strange, but when we talked in such a way, then it seemed to me that all these sea beasts and sea birds were one with him ... I almost felt that I belonged among them, too (1888/1978, 626)

Apparently, their relationship was predominantly of a verbal nature: an initiation, sharing profound insights and intimate affinities concerning nature (Zwart 2008, 3). And although the sea seems to have disappeared completely from Ellida's life, the Stranger's haunting image continuously reminds her of what she has given up.

When the Stranger unexpectedly shows up to fulfil his promise, Ellida is torn between two men, or rather between two worlds,

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the “smooth”, fluid world of maritime mobility and the “striated”, earthbound world of bourgeois civilisation. After a dramatic scene, full of wavering and doubts, she eventually decides to remain loyal to Wangel, and to become his truly faithful (if somewhat unhappy) spouse once and for all.

This summary indeed seems to indicate that the main purpose of the play is an egocentric one: the *ego* (Ellida) is to liberate herself from her irrational attachments to unresolved obstacles, from her psychic heritage of childhood and adolescent reminiscences. She must free herself from the “call of the sea”, which keeps reality at bay and prevents her from accepting her role as an earthly, civilised, domesticated, dutiful stepmother and spouse. The turning point (in Freudian terminology) is the “return of the repressed”, i.e. the arrival of the Stranger: an event which unleashes a process of catharsis, enabling Ellida to act-out her unresolved conflict and to truly become what she is supposed to be. She finally seems ready to adapt (“acclimatise”) herself to a modern, adult, Victorian lifestyle, in adherence to the “reality principle” (accepting restrictive living conditions as inevitable). And yet, some contra-indications can be noticed as well, pointing in a different, perhaps even opposite direction.

To explore this in more detail, the floor will first of all be given to a more traditional psychoanalytic (or even ego-therapeutic) understanding of Ibsen’s drama. A close reading of the manifest dimension of the play reveals that, although it seemingly adheres to an egocentric, therapeutic trajectory in various respects, such an approach remains unsatisfactory in the end. In the subsequent two sections, therefore, the results of the egocentric reading (focusing on the front stage of the piece) will be challenged by a rereading in depth, reassessing the key symptoms and components from a Heideggerian and Lacanian viewpoint. Let us have a closer look.

THE LADY FROM THE SEA AS “THERAPY”

The Lady from the Sea first of all stages a collective form of “therapy”, namely tourism. Year after year, tourists from urban areas as well as from abroad visit the Moldefjord area in large numbers to recover

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from the strains of modern city-life; they are attracted by the fresh air, the sublime Nordic panoramas and the opportunities for physical exercise. One of these tourists is a young man named Lyngstrand who aspires to become a painter and befriends Wangel's youngest daughter. He suffers from a lung disease, but hopes to "build up his strength" (595), to improve his "condition" (618) in the coastal summertime climate, apparently unaware of the fact that his affliction is actually fatal, so that his prospects of recovery are illusory. But Ellida is by far the most important "patient" in Ibsen's play.

Ibsen's drama stages a (successful?) therapy: a "neurotic" woman (a "divided", "amphibian" subject), who is dwelling in two worlds and is clearly impeded by her entanglement in something that should belong to the past, is finally cured. The sudden exposure to a mysterious, dream-like, phantasmagorical Other serves a therapeutic purpose, allowing her to realise her inevitable life-goal of acceptance and adaptation: the very things that bathing and tranquilisers failed to provide. Her healing is like a conversion, moreover, a secular form of baptism. For it is claimed that people living on the coast (exposed to the great outdoors) tend to remain heathenish (Ellida's "heathenish" name is a symptom of this susceptibility). Thus, the plot of the play is like a rite of passage, allowing Ellida to finally become part of modern existence.

In *Act I* we are informed in some detail about the patient's disturbances. Ellida is tormented by a guilty conscience, by the idea that, one day, the mysterious sailor of her youth will return to take revenge on his unfaithful fiancée. As a result, she is living in a dreary world of her own: an isolated, private life of which others are not a part. Her therapy of choice, namely bathing ("the one ruling passion of her life", 603) does not really help, because (in her experience) the water in the fjord is "stale and tepid" (604): a poor substitute for what she really desires.

In *Act 2*, the therapy really sets off. During a first "session", Ellida eloquently explains what is wrong with her, with Wangel acting in a double role: as her husband, but also (quite explicitly) as her "therapist". First of all, Ellida frankly admits that she feels unhappy in their relationship. But there is something else as well. She is tormented by what she describes as a singular form of homesickness ("Night and

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day, winter and summer, I feel it – this overpowering homesickness for the sea”, 623). On top of that, she is haunted by a sense of terror, being terribly afraid of her phantom lover, whose sea-eyes mesmerised her and who is bound to return sooner or later, although there is a rumour that he was drowned (611). Sometimes, she can see him standing “large as life” in front of her, wearing a stickpin, moreover, with a blue-white pearl, in the same uncanny colours as his blueish eyes, but also like the eye of a dead fish, staring at her (631),⁴ symbolising the call of the ocean with its magnetic powers. And then there is what she refers to as the “unspeakable”: a traumatic experience, the death of her and Wangel’s child, a little boy who died shortly after birth. Psychoanalytically speaking, the traumatic experience is “displaced” (“verschoben”), however. What is troubling her, apparently, is not the death of the child as such, but rather the child’s eyes, changing colour with the sea. In other words, their child had the sailor’s eyes (632).

In Act III, Arnholm, a friend who comes to visit, takes over the role of therapist from Wangel. The play now really becomes a Freudian couch, with Arnholm asking questions, while listening with evenly poised attention, and Ellida speaking quite freely about her experiences, her private, neurotic “mythology”. She believes that, long ago, humans were sea creatures, and that life would have been much better if we had stayed that way:

ELLIDA. I believe that, if only mankind had adapted itself from the start to a life on the sea – or perhaps *in* the sea – then we would have become something much different and more advanced than we are now. Both better – and happier ... And I think people have some sense of it, too. They bear it about inside them like a secret sorrow. And I can tell you – there, in that feeling, is the deepest source of all the melancholy in man. Yes – I’m sure of it (639)

This is Ellida’s explanation of what Freud (1930/1948) thematised as “discontent in civilisation”. Long ago, we humans for some reason took the wrong turn and became land animals, instead of sea creatures.

Arnholm voices the “reality principle” in response: it seems a little late now to amend the error, and Ellida (reluctantly) agrees:

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“Yes, that’s the unhappy truth” (639). Yet, a profound sense of being misplaced affects contemporary life. Even our moments of joy are tainted by it. And because of her past, Ellida is more acutely sensitive to this predicament than people usually are.

Then, suddenly, while Ellida is on her own in her garden, a strange figure enters the scene, greeting her, apparently knowing her first name (640). She initially seems to recognise him (“Oh, my love – you’ve come at last!”), but subsequently, she looks at him with astonishment and terror (as if she initially took the visitor for her husband). But she recognises his eyes (“The eyes, the eyes! ... Don’t look at me like that!”) and seems to *freeze* on the spot, paralysed by fright. The stranger had come on board of a big cruise ship, bringing in tourists, and announces that he will come back the next evening to take her with him (“Be ready to travel tomorrow night. I’m coming to take you”). He disappears and Ellida implores Wangel to save her, not from this mysterious Stranger, but from herself: “save me from myself ... You I can feel the undertow ... That man is like the sea” (648).

In Act IV, Wangel and Arnholm discuss the strange condition of their “patient”. It is no “ordinary illness”, they agree (656). At times Ellida seems quite calm, but her moods can suddenly change, due to something mysterious that Wangel cannot fathom. He finds her erratic, elusive and unpredictable, like the sea itself (656). Indeed, Ellida still belongs to those “sea people” living on the coast:

Haven’t you noticed that the people who live out close by the sea are almost like a race to themselves? It’s as though they lived the sea’s own life. There’s the surge of the waves – the ebb and the flow – in their thoughts and in their feelings both. And they never can be transplanted ... It was a plain sin to take her away from there and bring her inland. (656)

These sea people are still “pagans”, in a way (605).⁵

As soon as Ellida joins her therapists, another session unfolds. Wangel suggests that it may have been a good thing that, after all these years of suffering, “reality came” (661), so that now the “cure” may finally begin (662). And indeed, Ellida seems cured in a way, she seems to have a much clearer view of the situation, but the outcome

is not what Wangel had hoped for. She now overtly claims their marriage to be a failure. It really was a stroke of misfortune that they had come together (662). The life they are living is no marriage at all: they are lying to each other, and to themselves. On top of that, she accuses Wangel that he more or less had “bought” her (662), like a commodity,⁶ and begs him to release her: “Let me go free!” She is, she explains, attracted, mesmerised by something which she refers to as the “horrible”, something that both “terrifies and attracts” (666), tempting and beckoning her towards the inexorable. And Wangel now finally sees what she means with homesickness (“You belong to the sea. You both terrify – and attract. You have for me this same horrifying spell, this attraction”, 666). He even agrees (so it seems) that she really belongs to the Stranger and that she should “go home to the sea” (668).

Yet, in Act V, Wangel (as her husband *and* as her doctor, 672) has apparently changed his mind again. He now seems determined to opt for resistance, summoning Ellida to defy these tempting, treacherous, mesmerising powers, but for her, the current situation seems really untenable. The faults made in the past will sooner or later “retaliate on us”, 672. As promised, the Stranger appears, and Ellida faces the “return of the repressed” once more. Like a female Odysseus, she finds herself exposed to a terrifying, Siren-like spell, a “power that charms and tempts and allures”, that draws her “into the unknown” (685). All the forces of the sea converge in the gaze and voice of this man. He promises her release from conventions and limitations, reminding her that she is already wedded to the sea, evoking the prospect of a wholly different kind of life, of “raging and hunting dreams and desires” (685). He vouches to guide her into the environment she was made for: boundless and infinite, but seemingly unattainable.

Wangel initially tries to *force* her to stay, to *bind* her to their life together (he tries to *tie* her to the “mast” of their marriage, as it were), but when he senses her slipping away from him “inch by inch”, he decides to formally dissolve their “contract” (685), so that Ellida can choose her own path, can decide for herself, in full freedom, picking up the thread of her own true existence again. This is

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the final turning point, because now, feeling finally free to make her own choice, Ellida decides to stay. It seems to be a happy end:

WANGEL. Your mind is like the sea – It ebbs and flows. And the unknown – it doesn't attract you anymore?

ELLIDA. It neither terrifies nor attracts. I've been able to see deep into it – and I could have plunged in. I could have chosen it now. And that's why, also, I could reject it. (686)

Wangel finally seems to understand her. He now sees Ellida's longing and craving for the sea, her attraction towards the Stranger, as symptoms of a yearning for freedom, "nothing else" (686). Yet, after a brief moment of acceptance, Ellida's ambivalence quickly seems to resurge again: "Oh, I don't know what to say. Except that you've been a good doctor for me ... Once you've really become a land animal, then there's no going back again" (688). She seems able and willing to "acclimatise" herself (as landscape painter Ballested phrases it, 688), and to accept an earthly marital life as something inevitable, but not as wholeheartedly as Wangel would have hoped.

In short, *The Lady from the Sea* stages a series of therapeutic sessions. Ellida's task is to overcome her irrational attachment to the distant past, her brooding over past events. Indeed: "Where *Id* was, there *ego* shall be", the irretrievable past must give way to the demands of the present, fantasy must give way to reality, neurosis to an acceptable level of psychic well-being.

This surely seems a valid way of reading Ibsen's play. And yet, *The Lady from the Sea* would not be as intriguing as it is if Ellida's ego-therapy were really the whole story. Underneath this therapeutic surface, a "deeper", dramatic undertow unfolds: a latent dynamics that is not silenced by the "happy end". It rather seems probable that, in the end, the sea (as an unearthly, uncanny, "horrible" power) will continue to have a hold on her. We are left with the impression that somehow the therapy may not have been as successful as Wangel hoped it would be, and that the analysis may even prove "interminable" in the end.⁷ It seems unlikely that Ellida really has overcome her longing for the erratic, the elusive and the unpredictable. Quite possibly, she will continue to feel "transplanted". Her hunger

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for “the boundless, the infinite – the unattainable” that had been driving her mind “into darkness” (685) will not evaporate just like that. Her moods will probably continue to ebb and flow, while her current acceptance of the inevitable may prove a temporary stance. Her “guilty” conscience may continue to torment her after all.

To sound out this dramaturgic undertow somewhat further, I now propose to reread Ibsen’s play in a reversed direction, from the “happy” ending back to the chronic unease with which it started. This means that I will see Ellida’s tormented conscience not as a pathological phenomenon, but rather as a moment of truth and revelation. For that purpose, the Freudian perspective used so far will be replaced by a Heideggerian one: a reading stratagem that goes against the grain of the therapeutic design that dominates the surface structure of the play, amounting to a “reading in reverse”. The formula “*Where Id was, there ego shall be*” seems to convey the summons that Ellida should detach herself from the watery beckoning ambiance and the uncanny magnetism it entails, so as to overcome her singular susceptibility to this mysterious “Call” from the distance. Seen from this “ego-therapeutic” perspective, Ellida is a kind of female Odysseus, with the sailor as her Siren, as we have seen. Her exposure to the hypnotising call of maritime nature (voiced by the Stranger) is a kind of trial or test which allows her to salvage her autonomy in the end (to the extent that her therapy really is successful and a happy ending is indeed achieved). I will now argue that there is a deeper dimension to Ibsen’s drama and that the basic split or collision between Ellida-the-mermaid and Ellida-the-spouse is never really resolved. In other words, for me the really interesting character in Ibsen’s drama is not Ellida-the-patient, whose “recovery” (partial, so it seems) is meticulously and convincingly recorded, but rather Ellida-as-a-divided-subject who, more than others, remains sensitive to the experience of nature as φύσις.

This is the main purpose of the proposed reversal of reading direction. The therapeutic sessions are clearly there, but the rereading intends to bring to the surface what initially remains hidden and diffuse. By focusing on the horizon (the seascape of the play), I will explore what is contained in Ellida’s experience of being “one” with this element, of being “akin” to it. Rather than on the plot, I will

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now focus on the point of departure of the play, which inevitably resurfaces in the end.

WHAT IS THE “VOICE OF CONSCIENCE” TELLING US?

In *Being and Time* (1927/1986, §54–60), Heidegger analyses an intriguing and intrusive phenomenon which he refers to as the “voice of conscience,” a beckoning, disclosing Call which comes remarkably close to what Ellida is experiencing. A Heideggerian reading discourages us from framing Ellida’s predicaments as “neuroticism,” which would reduce her longings to symptoms in the psychopathological sense and implore us to come up with a “causal explanation” (Heidegger 1987). Rather, a Heideggerian perspective challenges us to come to terms with our symptoms in a different manner, namely as a revealing, disclosing experience. Let us have a closer look.

Heidegger describes conscience as a “silent voice”, striking us like a “silent call”, conveying an incitement, albeit strictly speaking without saying anything. Whenever conscience calls us, nothing is said (1927/1986, 273). The “uncanny” call of conscience (278) is something which befalls us, but at the same time it seems to be something coming from inside: “It” is calling, but at the same time we are calling ourselves. The call of conscience comes out of us and over us (275). Although it imposes itself on us, no articulate message, no commandment is conveyed. Rather than criticizing particular actions, the voice of conscience seems to point to existential possibilities of being (268), announcing themselves somewhere on the horizon.

The voice of conscience, moreover, goes against the grain of everyday morality and the accepted moral standards of modern existence. For Heidegger, conscience is the experience of being called or summoned to a more truthful way of life. And this should not be taken metaphorically, for conscience really is a call, a summons, an incitement. Instead of prohibiting or discouraging certain actions or behavioural options as “inadmissible”, it opens up and unlocks possibilities of human existence that we have somehow forgotten about. It is a positive, rather than a negative phenomenon, – although its positive content remains undetermined, since no concrete “instruc-

tions” are given. Rather, the voice recalls our ultimate destination, reminding us of our true existence. It is a remote and silent voice, a call from the distance, striking us. We are called back to our true and proper mode of being. The voice re-calls what we might be.

This intrusion of conscience means that everyday experience is interrupted by dreary fear. We suddenly realise that ordinary experience is but a thin facade or veil, concealing “homelessness” (276) and “nothingness” (277). By recalling dreary nothingness, however, human beings are not precipitated into an existential void, but rather reminded of what they may become. Conscience challenges us to break away from restricted ways of being-in-the-world, without really telling us *what* to do or *what* to become. Rather than outlining concrete courses of action, or ideals of life, conscience forces us into the clearing of blank resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*, 297 ff.). It is an experience of being released, so that we may become what we possibly are.

Conscience calls us into a position of readiness to become; it discloses for us our true potentiality of being (279, 280), while demanding from us openness to risk and fear. It is a voice, emerging from the quiet and hush of dreariness, recalling us to our truthful being, summoning us to resoluteness. This does not imply a commitment to available, ready-at-hand options, but rather an attitude of openness which precedes these (as yet undetermined) possibilities, allowing them to emerge.

In everyday existence, Heidegger argues, we are under the sway of accepted morality, where all basic choices have already been made. Resoluteness means that we allow ourselves to be incited, so that we may resume our authentic mode of being. The voice of conscience invokes in us a sense of guilt, but not in the sense that we are “in debt” to someone, or that we failed to act in accordance with a particular moral imperative (280, 283). Rather, the experience of guilt must be dissociated from ideas such as laws and duties (281). Guiltiness is the original condition of human existence (283). Conscience does not speak of concrete instances of failure, but rather evokes the sense that all human action is permeated by the experience of falling short. The voice of conscience does not allow us to distinguish the admissible from the inadmissible. Rather, it invokes

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“other”, “forgotten” possibilities of existence, other potentialities for being-in-the-world.

For me, this passage opens up a more revealing reading of Ellida’s experiences than the psychopathological approach presented in the previous section. Rather than interpreting her symptoms as dead weight from the past, the Heideggerian Call of Conscience points in the direction of a possible future. And rather than criticising her, in a repetitive manner, for specific faults made in the past (as an excessively harsh Kantian-Freudian super-ego tends to do, in accordance with the “court-of-justice view of conscience”, as Heidegger phrases it, 271, 293), the Heideggerian version of conscience instead reminds Ellida of what she might still become, namely a human being more intriguing than the “recovered” patient who seems to take the floor towards the end of Ibsen’s play, someone who (allegedly) has been cured from her symptoms, but who also has lost her sense of calling, her existential depth. Furthermore, the therapeutic interpretation of Ibsen’s drama seems bent on reducing the call of conscience to a purely internal, psychic (psychopathological) phenomenon, caused by a persistent phantasy or trauma. According to this model, Ellida may think that something or someone is calling her, but “in reality” she is tormented by her own unresolved psychic conflicts. As soon as these are adequately addressed (with the help of therapy) the terrible voice of conscience is bound to fall silent once and for all.

There is evidently something unsatisfactory in this view. First of all, from the very beginning it is clear that Ellida herself resists such a reductive reading. The voice that calls her, she consistently tells us, is coming from elsewhere; the “sea” is calling. Moreover, Ibsen’s play contains a series of provocative dialogues concerning the question what the sea really is. For Ellida, the sea refers to the boundless, the infinite and the elusive, in other words: primordial nature – nature in the sense of φύσις; that which remains beyond our grasp, and moves and changes without our doing, following its own laws (Heidegger 1939/2004). As was already indicated, we never really get to see the sea in Ibsen’s play. The mountains and the fjord come into view, as scenery, as a backdrop for touristic (therapeutic) promenades, but the challenging sea as such remains outside our field of vision. For Ellida, the sea has come to signify otherness: the horrible

and the terrifying, but also the awe-inspiring, that which “both terrifies and attracts”.

Nature as φύσις already briefly surfaces in *Being and Time*, as that which overwhelms and overpowers us (1927/1986, 70), but in Heidegger’s later writings, after the famous Turn or *Kehre*, shifting the focus from *Dasein* (i.e. human existence) to Being as such (Richardson 1963), it becomes a key motif of his thinking. Nature is now thematised as that which unfolds and reveals itself to us in a primordial way, as Being (Heidegger 1939/2004). It is not “reality”, brought about and cultured by science and technology (Heidegger 1953/2000b), but rather sublime Otherness: nature as the Real, as that which withdraws itself from techno-scientific objectivity, only to re-emerge in the folds and margins of the scientific representation of the world. Moreover, Heidegger refers to the untamed, undomesticated dimension of nature as “the terrifying”: δεινός in Greek (Heidegger 1953). Under modern conditions, however, the most terrifying force on earth, more terrifying than untamed nature itself, is human technological power (το δεινότατον), the hard core of modern civilisation.

Thus, Heidegger sees technology not in an instrumental manner, as a set of tools or devices, but rather as a particular “enframing” of nature (Heidegger 2000a). In Ibsen’s play, this technological dimension is represented by the big steamers that open up the Norwegian coastal landscape to modern tourism, thereby framing nature as scenery. Primordial nature is eclipsed, but not completely erased, by this new experience of nature, enabled by fossil fuels, steel and powerful machines. The “tourist” experience of nature is beautiful and enchanting, but no longer a terrifying tableau. For notwithstanding the spectacular features of the Nordic landscape, with its fjords and mountainous vistas (Rees 2013), this touristic view of nature is enabled by cruise ships and made visible from a “viewpoint”, easily accessible, and recently constructed especially for this purpose. All this underscores that we are actually facing a tourist diorama, rather than primordial nature.

For Ellida, however, the terrifying dimension of nature is still very much alive. She remains sensitive to a dimension of reality that seems lost to other individuals (allegedly more “normal”). In Ibsen’s

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play, most humans have become more or less insensitive to nature as primordial, awe-inspiring and terrifying Otherness, looming in the distance, like a distant threat, a threatening voice, a mesmerising Call. This explains not only Ellida's homesickness but also her profound sense of loneliness: there is no one with whom she may share her singular experiences (as she could in the past, through her dialogues with the Stranger).

In *Being and Time*, the voice of conscience is still described in fairly "subjectivist" (anthropocentric, individualistic) terms. Heidegger himself later acknowledges that *Being and Time* still suffered from an existentialist "emphasis on the individual" ("Betonung des Einzelnen", 2014, 21) which had to be overcome (37). In Heidegger's later writings, after the Turn, a shift of emphasis is unleashed from "doing" to "dwelling", and from *Dasein* to Being, – that is: Being in its original, evocative, primordial sense; nature as φύσις, that which is eclipsed, but never completely erased by modern technology (Zwart 2000); that which, moreover, may suddenly "return", may present itself again to us, in all its terrifying splendour.⁸ For this is what is calling Ellida: nature as φύσις, giving rise to a silent, uncanny, beckoning Call, embodied and enacted by the mysterious Stranger who, in her experience, remained one with nature. From a Heideggerian perspective, although Ellida's vicissitudes may be regarded as a desperate effort to come to terms with the unconscious, the latter should not be taken in the sense of psychic "complexes" (Heidegger 2014, 8), but rather as that which Heidegger (2014) refers to as "the unsurmountable" ("das Unumgängliche"): that which cannot and should not be ignored, but also that which continues to escape the modern scientific picture of the world.⁹ To live means to err, but it is only in erring, in wandering astray, or even running aground, than truth can really reveal itself.¹⁰

In Ibsen's play, primordial (natural) nature is covered up and eclipsed by a contemporary, technology-dependent view of nature, exemplified by tourism. This view is (rather stereotypically) enacted by Ballested, a painter and Jack-of-all-trades, always eager to follow the latest hype (always willing to acclimatise himself, as he phrases it), who is working on a painting of the fjord during the first act of the play: a prototypical exemplification of the tourist view of nature.

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In fact, Ballested, Lyngstrand and several other summer visitors adhere to one and the same recent fashion, namely painting pictures in the open air, equipped with new inventions such as field easels and paint in tubes, in the wake of impressionism and the School of Barbizon. And so, Ballested (a former painter of stage scenery) is about to add a stranded mermaid in the foreground of his composition. Real mermaids have become extinct and un-representable, as it were; they are no longer part of the world as we know it, only their iconic, stereotypical “image” has survived.

But precisely because of his entanglement in this now fashionable attitude, Ballested distinctively fails to notice that Ellida really *is* a mermaid¹¹: a truly amphibian being, a survivor of a distant, but nonetheless still noticeable (“heathenish”) past. Her mysterious sailor is likewise a heathenish, Wotan-like figure,¹² a Wanderer (comparable to Wagner’s version in *Ring of the Nibelung*), calling upon Ellida to remind her of different possibilities of existence, of a profoundly different (but now vanished) form of life, impossible to achieve, a life of “raging and hunting dreams and desires”, as we have seen. For that is the essence of Heideggerian “readiness” (*Entschlossenheit*): to be prepared for other modes of existence, albeit inconceivable as yet. This is indeed the Stranger’s summons to Ellida: prepare yourself for a dramatic elopement or escape from suffocating Victorian modernity, be ready to take a (backward/ forward) leap: back to nature and towards a more natural and authentic (future) life.

Initially, the mysterious, unsettling Call seems to come from a distance. Somehow, Ellida feels the voice approaching, as a “divided”, sensitive subject, wavering between two extremes, represented by two men: the merman (the mysterious Stranger who is – almost telepathically – calling her) and Wangel (the physician-husband who drugs her, that is: anaesthetises her, 637). The term aesthetics comes from the Greek, where αἰσθητικός means “sensitive” or “perceptive”. Whereas Ellida (immersed in “will-less hyperaesthesia”, Fjelde 1978, 590) remains hypersensitive to the Call of nature (personified by the calling Stranger), Wangel tries to anaesthetise her, literally: tries to make her *insensitive* to this “distant” dimension of reality, this looming threat, to which Ellida herself refers as the “sea”, and which

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Heidegger thematises as φύσις, – the great unfathomable (un-representable) outdoors.¹³

From a therapeutic (Freudian) perspective, as we have seen, a neurotic woman is transformed into a (somewhat unhappy) spouse. From a Heideggerian perspective, however, a sensitive woman becomes desensitised, anaesthetised, so that the therapy applied to her is basically similar to drugging her, albeit with different (verbal) means. The Heideggerian rereading brings to the fore what initially seems a mere backdrop: the sublime Norwegian landscape, bordering on the sea. By rereading the play in reverse, Ellida really is an amphibious mermaid who continues to feel one with the sea, and with the creatures that inhabit it. Thus, an anthropocentric (therapeutic) reading gives way to an “ontological” one, oriented towards nature. The focus shifts from Ellida’s (unhappy) marriage to her liaison with nature.

In Wagnerian terms, Ellida is Ibsen’s “Senta”, with the Stranger as her “Flying Dutchman” (cf. Johnston 1989, 196). What happens to the Stranger after Ellida refuses to join him? Would perhaps a marriage with a loyal woman have saved him, as in the Flying Dutchman’s case? Ellida shares Senta’s unspeakable desire to follow this mysterious, legendary figure into the open. And like Senta, Ellida feels “bought”, as we have seen. But whereas Ibsen opts for a more modern plot, so that Ellida manages to “acclimatise” herself after all, Senta plunges into the water towards a dramatic fusion, in accordance with her overwhelming sense of calling. As Lou Andreas-Salomé phrased it, Ellida eventually realises that the demonic vastness of the sea offers no opportunities for uplifting and edifying herself; she could only have made a risky leap towards it (1906, 140). There are thus two different outcomes, and yet the core problem (the key motif) is evidently congruous.

From a therapeutic perspective, Ibsen’s drama stages what Hegel (1807/1986) referred to as the “Struggle between Enlightenment and Superstition” (*Der Kampf der Aufklärung mit dem Aberglauben*). Wang, in his effort to convince Ellida that her paralysing concerns and guilty feelings are unfounded, aims to convert her to a modern, enlightened way of life. The Stranger, on the other hand, tries to

reconvert her back into a different mode of existence, a different way of being-in-the-world, much more open to (trust in) nature.

The truth of Ibsen's drama is that human beings have been thrown out of their natural position or habitat, have become chronically misplaced. We long for the impossible, like mermaids or mermen, bereft of their tails. We even seem to have forgotten what nature is, entrenched as we are in modern understandings of nature, such as the touristic one, in which nature is beautiful scenery, paintable with the help of easels and paint in tubes. That, for me, is the core morale of Ibsen's play. Like all great works of art, it speaks to us, addressing us with an injunction, namely that we "must change our lives" (Sloterdijk 2009), but without providing detailed instructions on how to do so. In order to probe the truth of our desire, it summons us to take up the (impossible) question "What is nature?" This exercise reveals that Ellida's recalcitrant longing is not "without a cause". But to fathom this cause (the object-cause of her desire) more fully, a third (Lacanian) rereading must be activated, allowing us to discern in Ibsen's play a different form of therapy.

IBSEN'S PLAY AS THERAPY (2): LACANIAN ANALYSIS

So far, I have presented a particular view of therapy, namely therapy as directed towards "strengthening the ego". From this perspective, the plot of Ibsen's drama may (perhaps) be seen as a "happy ending", a triumph of the present over the past, of the ego over the Id, of enlightenment over superstition. From a Lacanian perspective, however, this is a narrow understanding of what psychoanalysis is or aims to achieve, an understanding which he refers to as "ego-psychology" and vehemently rejects. In terms of sexual drives, for instance, ego-psychology claims that psychoanalysis should strengthen "genital eroticism", at the expense of non-genital forms of enjoyment and desire (Lacan 1967–1968, 20). Superficially speaking, this seems to apply to Ibsen's play. It is made clear that, as a result of Ellida's psychic problems, marital erotic life had come to a standstill (622), and intercourse had been replaced by solitary body practices such as swimming. But now, after the successful completion of her therapy, there is the prospect that genital sexuality may be resumed (the plot

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as a kind of second marriage ceremony). But again, from a Lacanian perspective, this is a fairly biased and impoverished reading of the processes that actually unfold in Ibsen's drama – even if we regard them as therapy.

In this third reading, I will therefore use Lacan as an intermediary perspective between the Freudian and the Heideggerian approach. Both Freud and Heidegger were decisive sources of inspiration for Lacan who, although emphatically presenting his views as Freudian, nonetheless makes it clear that Freud's revealing discovery of the unconscious (his truth event, in the sense of ἀλήθεια) had become eclipsed by subsequent mainstream (ego-psychological) interpretations. This is concisely captured by the phrase "Eurydice twice lost" ("*Eurydice deux fois perdue*") (Lacan 1964/1973, 32). In Lacan's rediscovery of the Freudian unconscious, Heidegger's views on truth, being and language played a decisive role. For Heidegger, language and being are intimately interwoven and the experience that primordial nature or the Real may "speak" to us, allows us to fathom true poetry and art. Thus, a Lacanian approach may help us to reconnect the therapeutic and the ontological dimensions of Ibsen's piece, as fleshed out in the previous sections.

To begin with, Lacan's rediscovery of the Freudian unconscious has practical implications for the structure and objective of psychoanalysis as therapy. The goal of analysis, according to Lacan, is not to rid ourselves of our symptoms, but rather to come to terms with them, to identify with them and even to care for them (Verhaeghe and Declercq 2002). Rather than allowing us to manage our emotions, or to adapt ourselves to the demands of modern existence more adequately, analysis enables us to discern the basic predicaments entailed in the human condition, seeing humans as irreparably divided subjects. Thus, a Lacanian reading takes us beyond egocentricity. The focus is not on eliminating symptoms, but on allowing the divided subject to come to terms with her desire. In addition, *The Lady of the Sea* is especially interesting because of its focus on female desire. As Lacan points out, the question of female desire, haunting Freud and other psychoanalytic pioneers ("what does woman want?"; "Was will das Weib?"), was closely connected

with the “Ibsenian” fin-the-siècle spirit: the context of discovery of psychoanalysis as such (Lacan 1960–1961 / 1986, 18).¹⁴

Seen from a Lacanian perspective, Ellida is an “amphibian” (=“divided”) subject (\$ in Lacanian algebra), whose “ego” is split in a rather profound and irresolvable way. She is dwelling in two worlds, and it seems impossible to wholeheartedly acclimatise herself to her striated, terrestrial, Victorian environment. Whereas from an ego-analytical perspective Ellida is basically a “patient” (with Wangel, in collaboration with Arnholm, acting as her therapist), from a Lacanian perspective, the very term “patient” is misleading because it literally places Ellida in a passive position. Therefore, Lacan prefers the term *analysand* (1967–1968, 31, 50). During her “talking-cure”, complemented by instances of “acting-out” (her interactions with the Stranger), Ellida is the one who is doing all the active work. And although she undergoes a kind of interrogation, this has a “poetic effect” (Lacan 1967–1968, 27) in the sense that the verbal production of the analysand (notably Ellida’s compelling, Aristophanes-like parable concerning our quasi-maritime, amphibian, pre-human past) increasingly takes the lead in the analytic process. Moreover, although Wangel tends to pose as the neglected husband (to whom Ellida is allegedly erotically “in debt”), a Lacanian perspective sees him instead as the one who, apparently, is unable to satisfy Ellida’s desire, as well as his own. Analysis allows the analysand to enact and discover her own truth (i.e. the nature of her symptoms, the object–cause of her desire), while the role of the analyst becomes increasingly marginalised towards the end.

The famous Freudian phrase “*Where Id was, there ego shall be*” is likewise re-interpreted quite drastically by Lacan. Rather than distancing ourselves from the Id (as a hindrance to societal acclimatisation and genital flourishing), the Id is rather that which pulls or pushes the analysand towards a certain limit, allowing her to recover the object–cause of her desire. In other words, a Lacanian therapy evolves in a juxtaposed direction: towards the Id, towards the “edge”, rather than away from it, entailing nothing less than a reversal (subversion) of the ego-analytical scheme. The objective is not “adaptation” but insight (“truth”). The symptom is not something we should leave behind, but rather something which provides access

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to what we have forgotten and lost, but towards which our desire remains oriented. This is what Lacan calls the *object a*. In the course of the analysis, the analyst increasingly disappears from view, while the analysand finally comes face-to-face with the Real, but in a condensed form, as *object a* (in Lacanian algebra: $\$ \diamond a$).

All this is enacted rather compellingly in Ibsen's play. The crucial turn, the decisive event in Ellida's "therapy" is, as we have seen, the "return of the repressed", namely her exposure to the Stranger's gaze, an experience which incites or allows her to re-enact her trauma of abandonment. The basic objective of Lacanian therapy is to allow the analysand to encounter the *object a* as object-cause of her desire. Herein resides the whole purpose of "analytical discourse". Wangel (the analyst) must eventually step back in order to allow this re-encounter to finally take place, as a reminder of what is irretrievably lost.

The *object a* is basically a "variable" and can be a particular trait or partial object connected with the Other. In Ellida's case, it is first and foremost the frightening gaze of the Other, manifested in the Stranger's mesmerising, sea-coloured eyes, a condensed left-over of a perished "oceanic" wholeness: the vanished, primordial Real. This gaze is what unsettles her, up to the point of paralysing her. Indeed, his uncanny, paralysing gaze had been circling towards her for years. Moreover, it detaches itself from the Stranger's body, displaces itself, becomes transferred to the frightening stickpin as a blue-white pearl, staring like a "dead fish eye", displaying the same uncanny, sea-like colours, piercing at her like a "third" eye, a detachable piece of the Stranger's body, a detached body part (1967–1968, 43). This is Ellida's *object a*, an uncanny entity par excellence, midway between being and non-being, living and non-living, dream and reality, organ and artefact, subject and object (cf. Rekdal 2000, 186). And at this point, face-to-face with the object-cause, Lacan argues, the analysand herself takes up the position of analyst; very much like Odysseus, whose close encounter with the Sirens functioned not only as a painful, almost lethal instance of jouissance, but also as a self-analysis.

Yet, in the final instance, Ellida once again seems to take the wrong turn, repeating her previous mistake once more ("Eurydice twice lost"). From a Lacanian perspective, coming to terms with the

cause of her desire would have been her “task”, her truly psycho-analytical “act”. Her experience of malaise, her inability to live and choose, had finally guided her towards her object of desire, allowing her to discover and affirm her irreparably “amphibian” condition, through identification with her symptom (i.e. the Lacanian interpretation of “*Where Id was, there ego shall be*”). This could have led to an attitude of readiness to enact and affirm new possibilities of existence emerging before her eyes. But instead, she opts for identification with a predetermined, standardised role, with the analyst’s ideal (i.e. Wangel’s ideal image) of what she should become. Thus, she allows herself to be “bought” into her marriage once again.

In order to further explore the significance of this plot event, we must view it in the light of Lacan’s core theorem concerning the three basic registers of human existence: the *Symbolical*, the *Imaginary* and the *Real*. The Symbolical can be defined as the province of laws and regulations, of duties and contracts, of norms and standardised procedures. In Ibsen’s play, this is primarily represented by the marriage contract and everything it entails, in combination with Wangel’s officially acknowledged authority as a physician and expert in matters of health and disease, of therapy and normalcy. The validity of the marriage contract is questioned at a certain point by Ellida, as we have seen, and wholly discarded (instead of acknowledged) by the Stranger who, according to the Law (the symbolical order) is basically a criminal, carrying an illegal gun (although in his own terms he committed an act of justice). He is not only a vagrant delinquent, but also an intruder when he enters Ellida’s garden uninvited, climbing over the fence and addressing her as “Ellida”, rather than as “Mrs. Wangel”, as he is supposed to do. He acts as if the symbolic order is non-existent. This does not mean that the Symbolical dimension as such is absent. Rather, he acts as if guided by norms and values (pre-Christian? pre-modern? non-terrestrial?) of bygone days, belonging to a different cultural stratum.

The Imaginary is basically the realm of “images”, and in Ibsen’s play this first of all applies to the touristic image of nature, already outlined above, and to the style of painting (in vogue in the 1880s) that captured and conveyed it: “post-card nature” as it were, nature as “scenery”, as “panorama”, exemplified by the legendary (“imag-

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inary”) mermaid as a stereotypical landscape icon. By presenting or portraying Ellida as a stereotypical “mermaid” (as both Wangel and Ballested aim to do), an iconic (i.e. sufficiently pacified) image is employed to cover up the unsettling aspects of her real amphibian unease.

The Real, finally, is that which lies beyond the symbolical and the imaginary; it is the impossible, the intangible, the un-representable, that which remains hidden, but may suddenly reveal itself, the frightening aspect of nature (δεινός) from which we are usually screened off with the help of civilisation and technology. For Lacan, the *object a* is a left-over (“déchets”) of the Real: that which the symbolical and the imaginary fail to process, fail to cover up, that which defies domestication. It is a remainder of an irretrievably lost wholeness or unity (cf. Fink 1995, 59; Rekdal 2000, 186). The *object a* is something which is both alluring and unsettling, coming into view when the analysand approaches a certain limit, representing Otherness (in Ellida’s case: the invisible, unreachable, unfathomable sea) in a highly condensed, uncanny form.

And indeed, this is what happens when the Stranger suddenly makes his appearance, taking Ellida by surprise. On the symbolical level, he reminds her of her binding allegiance to their mutual promise; in defiance of the symbolical regime which currently reigns. On the imaginary level, his appearance reveals the extent to which the other characters embody fairly stereotypical Victorian clichés, mimicking fashions and models (“ego ideals”) that happened to be in vogue at that time, while he himself, notwithstanding his dream-like aspects (hovering midway between a human being and a spectre) seems the only real individual on the stage, besides Ellida herself. The rest of the cast suddenly becomes unconvincing and untrue, as if social life is pervaded by a Sartre-like bad faith (Sartre 1943). Ellida’s intentionality is captured by what is both terrifying and fascinating about him, namely his sea-coloured stickpin. As an extension of his gaze this singular feature reflects the colour and movement of the sea, i.e. the Real, the dimension of untamed maritime nature; that which both frightens and attracts.

The Real, as Lacan phrases it, is that which, in spite of its dynamic and elusive nature, always returns to the same place (1960–1961 / 1986,

91–92). It is the “realm of the gods”, although (unlike Ellida) most modern humans no longer seem to have ears sensitive enough to receive their soundless messages (1964/1973, 54). This explains why the Stranger comes into view as a demonic apparition, returning towards her after a long elliptic voyage. Although erotic desire is part of the temptation, there is more to him than that. He embodies (resurrects) a vanished world, an obliterated moral landscape, a diffuse but different form of life. He is a Wotan-like Wanderer, as we have seen, but unlike Wotan, he has a third and extra (uncanny) eye, rather than a single one. He is a “demon”, a pagan deity, a voice from the past, someone who maintains a rapport with the realm of the natural Real. And Ellida’s previous relationship with him amounted to an initiation into a pre-Christian mystery-cult, involving close proximity to obsolete forms of knowledge and jouissance, something which, according to Lacan, has become extinct in the contemporary world (Lacan 1973–1974, 17).

When Freud put down his formula “Where *Id* was, there *ego* shall be” in writing, he was actually visiting a coastal landscape, namely in the Netherlands, where the *Zuiderzee* (untamed at that time, presenting a looming threat to Dutch fin-the-siècle coastal existence) was being reclaimed and transformed into a series of safe polders, with the help of dikes and powerful draining-machines.¹⁵ As Freud explains, the basic objective of psychoanalysis is to allow the ego to reclaim (“aneignen”) parts of the *Id* (*Es*). In other words, Freud wrote these lines because he discerned a basic affinity or correspondence between “culture work” (*Kulturarbeit*) on the hydro-technical and culture work on the psycho-technical level, between “water-management” and “mind-management”. In a cultivated landscape, rivers are regulated, and surplus water is drained off via sluices and canals (1930, 451) and in a similar manner the ego should be enabled to handle surplus psychic energy.

In the case of coastal Norway, a similar effect was achieved when the sublime landscape was opened up by steamers and cruise ships, by big machines. And again, this domestication of the landscape coincides with similar techniques in the psychic realm, notably psychotherapy, allowing individuals to acclimatise themselves to the strains and expectations of modern living. Thus the steamer on the

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one hand and Ellida's therapy on the other reflect and reinforce one another, as congruous forms of culture work, anaesthetising and immunising modern individuals against the Call of the Real.

Still, as Lacan emphasises, this can hardly be the end result. Rather, such an outcome puts us (as modern subjects) in a precarious position. What will await us when coastal nature is finally subdued? According to Lacan, we will most probably face the prospect that, sooner or later, the dikes may break (1954–1955/1978, 90). In the case of the Dutch waterscape for instance, the “threatening voice of the water” will always be heard, as the Dutch poet Hendrik Marsman once phrased it (Zwart 2014, 162). Like a landscape under pressure, the divided ego is bound to remain vulnerable in the end, as both cultural and meteorological conditions are perpetually in flux. The voice of water is the voice of the Real, which is never completely subdued once and for all. Or, in Heideggerian terms, it is the voice of $\varphi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\varsigma$, summoning us to endorse more dynamic possibilities of existence. Notwithstanding our penchant for “acclimatisation”, modern civilisation does not put an end to uneasiness and restlessness, to our desire for “apostasy” so to speak. The prospect of uncanniness (das *unheimliche*) and homesickness, i.e. the inability to dwell in a genuine “home”, has become an intrinsic part of the human condition, as Heidegger (1954/2000) argues. Wangel's house is experienced as “unhomely,” even uncanny (*unheimlich*) by Ellida, and it seems highly unlikely that a strengthened ego will really change that. From a Lacanian perspective, the conclusion drawn by Erinç Özdemir that Ellida “successfully completes the individuation process” so that in the end she is “able to heal the split in her psyche, bringing her conscious and unconscious into a harmonious whole” (Özdemir 2002, 47) remains highly questionable.¹⁶

The final outcome of Ellida's “cure” rather seems an egocentric diversion, a backward step compared to Ellida's centrifugal moment of lucidity, her truth event, when she (as a “mermaid”) experienced the “inner fish” within (Shubin 2008/2009).¹⁷ There is undoubtedly something fish-like in our morphology and embryology. Our foetal, fish-like existence, inside the motherly womb, inevitably gives way to the trauma of birth. But we humans arrive prematurely into this world, quite ill-prepared to live up to the demands of our (allegedly

“natural”) terrestrial environment. From the day we are born, we desperately seek shelter, while “Sirens” (alluring voices) remind us of a previous, far more fluid and “oceanic” ambiance.¹⁸ Sea-bathing is perhaps as close as we can get to this lost world.

The void that is left by this irretrievably vanished ambiance is covered up by the symbolic order (notably: the realm of marriage contracts and conjugal duties) in combination with imaginary elements (such as the tourist view of nature: enchanting and pleasant, but somehow distinctively un-real). From this it follows that Ellida’s marriage should not be seen as something that counteracts a more natural, pre-existing, premarital, maritime longing, as is suggested by the “repression hypothesis” (Foucault 1976). From a Lacanian perspective, it is instead the other way around; it is *because* of her marital status (the symbolical order) that a desire for other possibilities torments her. Marriage produces Ellida’s craving (as a “divided” subject) rather than constraining it, and monogamy should not be seen as an obstacle to, but rather as a precondition for the unfolding of her singular desire. It is in the folds and margins of her marital existence that a longing for something more oceanic comes upon her, represented by the mesmerising gaze of the Other, as a condensed left-over of the vanished, but nonetheless persistent Real.

And this does not place her in a passive position, far from it. Ellida, as a stranded sea-creature, is a Siren in her own way. In her telepathic rapport with the Stranger, she may actually be the one who has been sending out (silent) messages of longing, ambivalent calls from afar. Her (silent) voice is the Stranger’s *object a*, the cause of his desire, that which guides him through his erring journeys, his repetitive *errance* (*Irre*), as a duped and wandering pilgrim or *homo viator* (Lacan 1973–1974). The sound of Ellida’s “silent scream” (Lacan 1968–1969/2006; 225) reaches out to the world beyond, reaches the Stranger. He is Ellida’s Odysseus, but when he finally returns home, his Penelope is about to yield to a local suitor for the second time, sending him off to merge into the backdrop again, to become “one with the sea” again (Ibsen 1888/1978, 626). Her alluring silent voice had drawn him towards her, but now he suffers a (second) “shipwreck” (686), as he phrases it. But perhaps Ellida’s final (irreversible) decision will set him free (and release him from his spell) as well.

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Thus, rather than about strengthening the ego, Ibsen's play is about coming to terms with the Real and its symptoms, represented by the uncanny, unsettling, inexorable gaze of the Stranger: the drama's *object a*, the mark of the Stranger's "seaishness". In other words, rather than understanding psychotherapy in terms of "adaptation" and "ego strength", allowing us to become more firmly embedded in the present (by gradually liberating ourselves from haunting fantasies and irrational attachments), a Heideggerian–Lacanian rereading, in contrast, emphasises the precarious nature of such an envisioned finality, in view of the tenacity of $\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\varsigma$ (Heidegger) or the Real (Lacan), presenting itself to divided subjects as an (inaudible, silent, but inextinguishable) "Call".

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NOTES

1. "The drama has the effect of a very skilfully carried out, psychologico-fantastic experiment" (Brandes 1977, 102); "Ellida's cure furnishes a classic case history for modern psychotherapy" (Fjelde 1978, 590); "Ellida's story is from the first to the last a story of sickness, a bizarre psychological case history" (anonymous critic, cited by Meyer (1967/1971, 624), who refers to Ibsen during this stage of his authorship as "The explorer of the unconscious" (565)); Rekdal (2000) likewise introduces *The Lade from the Sea* as a "psykiatrisk kasus og patalogisk tilfelle" (193).
2. "It is crucial to keep in mind the fact that the sea ... is never directly represented scenically in *Fruen fra havet*" (Rees 2011, 211); cf. Stanton-Ife 1996, 48). The characters cannot see the sea. Even from a panoramic hill-top, the sea remains invisible.
3. "The heroine ... resembles the violently agitated and changeable sea on the west coast of Norway ... She is always longing for the sea and, like it, she is mysterious. A child of nature ..." (Brandes 1977, 102).
4. This staring, additional eye, both detached from and added to the body, both living and non-living, organic and artificial, exemplifies what Freud refers to as "the uncanny" (1919/1947, 239 ff.).
5. The fact that Ellida bears a pagan name indicates (psychoanalytically speaking) a failure on the part of the father to inoculate her (symbolically) against contagion by the sea (the heathenish element).
6. ELLIDA: The plain, simple truth is that you ... bought me. WANGEL: Bought! You say – bought? ELLIDA: Oh ... I met your offer – and sold myself to you ..." (662; cf. Johansen 2007).
7. Although the Wangel couple appears to become reconciled in the final Act, it remains "a fragile and tentative reconciliation" (Rees 2011, 199). As Brandes argued, it is a most

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- unsatisfying ending: “There are few things less capable of calming a woman who is longing for a free, adventurous life with all its mysteries, than the offer of such moral advantages as free choice with responsibility” (1977, 103).
8. This Heideggerian Turn parallels a similar turn in Ibsen’s oeuvre, from the inwardness and “enclosed-ness” of his early dramas to the “metaphysical” openness: the peaks and landscapes of his later plays (Paul 1997).
 9. “Die Natur (φύσις) bleibt für die Wissenschaft das Unumgängliche” (Heidegger 1953/2000b, 62).
 10. “Nur wenn wir wirklich irren – in die Irre gehen, können wir auf Wahrheit stoßen” (2014, 13).
 11. Ibsen initially used *Havfruen* (Norwegian for “mermaid”) as the title of his play, but changed it into *Fruen fra havet*. This reversal is reversed again, so to speak, in the First Act when Wangel, after having explained that the town people call her “The lady from the sea”, welcomes Ellida with the words “Well, there’s our mermaid!” (603). Thus, the identification of Ellida with the archetypal mermaid is noticeable for the very outset (cf. Hartmann 1994, 487; Özdemir 2002, 37).
 12. “There is something heathenish and even god-like about this man, not only because of his mysterious and awesome power over Ellida, but also because of his total indifference to all human, or social ties” (Özdemir 2002, 47).
 13. Keekok Lee has argued that modern humans “ultimately do not feel at ease among natural beings or entities ... We only feel at home when home is the world of humanised nature – in other words, only when the natural has become transformed into the artefactual ... This amounts to nothing less than the elimination of nature as “the Other” (2003, 26). Nature, for modern humans, has become a “blank canvas”, she claims, ontologically latent or void. Ellida Wangel may stand as a counter-example, a counteracting voice, refuting this assessment.
 14. Freud (1915/1946) published a concise analysis of *Rosmersholm*, with Rebekka West first in the role of “analyst”, but subsequently in the role of “patient”.
 15. “Wo Es war, soll Ich werden. Es ist Kulturarbeit, etwa wie die Trockenlegung der Zuydersee” (Freud 1932/1940, 86; Zwart 2008, 159–160).
 16. As Kari Lothe points out, also from a Jungian perspective, the conclusion that the crisis has redeemed her once and for all is “unrealistic” (Lothe 2003).
 17. Cf. Ibsen’s notes while preparing the play: “People are akin to the sea ... Must return to it. One fish species forms a basic link in the evolutionary series. Do rudiments of it still remain in the human mind? In the minds of certain individuals?” (Meyer 1967/1971, 620; Arpe 1972, 154; Fjelde 1978, 588).
 18. A similar vision can be encountered in the work of Rudolf Steiner. Once upon a time, Steiner tells us, human beings dwelled in Atlantis (1908/1995, 118). Their bodies were fluid, their flesh was soft and they were floating in water. Gradually, our bodies became more compact and we became land-animals. Yet, during the night, in dreams, we immerse ourselves again in the darkness and silence of this previous, more fluid world, so that we more or less return to our previous state (128). Psychoanalytically speaking, what Steiner is referring to is our life *in utero*: our (oceanic) foetal existence. The Atlantic continent is the womb, and the “astral body”, which used to accompany us, is the placenta (Steiner’s version of the *object a*).

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