Harmony Achieved between Human and Nature:
An Analysis of the Deep Ecological Thoughts in The Lady from the Sea

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1. Introduction

The sea has become the core subject of Henrik Ibsen’s play from the very beginning. In the earliest notes on the play on June 5, 1888, Ibsen wrote that, “Temptation of the sea. Desire for the sea. Human beings’ affinity towards the sea. Bond of the sea. Attachment to the sea. Impulsion of returning back to the sea. Fishes are the archetypes of the evolution of species. Are there still this sort

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of memory rudiments in people’s minds? Maybe in certain people’s brains?” (Salome 38)

_The Lady from the Sea_, a drama full of romantic colors in Ibsen’s later writing career, whose implicative deep ecological thoughts are still enlightening nowadays, concentrates in depth on paying close attention to human’s spiritual ecology and the relationship between human and nature.

The female protagonist of Ellida in this play changes from “a half-dead mermaid lying in the tide pools” into a free and happy lady who is sound both physically and mentally. This thought-provoking life course focuses on reflecting the deep ecological perspectives which Ibsen endeavors to express in this play.

2. A Mermaid Dying in the Tide Pools

Even towards the end of the whole play, Ellida always leads an extremely abnormal spiritual way of life: she lives in her own world all along; however, it seems to other people that she is strangely ill with nervous trouble and restlessness day and night, while the cause of which is invariably unknown.

In Act I, Ibsen has already set a keynote for Ellida’s spiritual ecology through Ballested’s words, “She’s wandered in from the sea and can’t find her way out again. And so, you see, she lies here, expiring in the tide pools.” (228) Ballested is no other than a casual passerby in Ellida’s life, who has no substantial intimate contact or communication with her, therefore, his opinions can exactly represent Ellida’s image in most people’s eyes. Thus it can be seen

1) All the lines of The Lady from the Sea in this article are taken from Henrik Ibsen: Four Major Plays, Volume II, translated by Rolf Fjelde. Signet Classics, 2001. Only page numbers are indicated. Same hereinafter.