1974

The destructive Messiah: a study of Henrik Ibsen's search for truth as portrayed by rebel heroes in Brand, An enemy of the people, and The wild duck

Susan Taylor Soyars

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarship.richmond.edu/masters-theses

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons, and the European Languages and Societies Commons

Recommended Citation

THE DESTRUCTIVE MESSIAH:
A STUDY OF HENRIK IBSEN'S SEARCH FOR TRUTH AS PORTRAYED BY
REBEL HEROES IN BRAND, AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE,
AND THE WILD DUCK

BY

SUSAN TAYLOR SOYARS

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND
IN CANDIDACY
FOR THE DEGREE
OF MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

AUGUST 1974
THE DESTRUCTIVE MESSIAH:
A STUDY OF HENRIK IBSEN'S TREATMENT OF TRUTH AS FOUND IN
BRAND, AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE, AND THE WILD DUCK

APPROVAL COMMITTEE

Thesis Director
Chairman

AUGUST, 1974
DEDICATED

To my Parents

Earl and Margaret Taylor

Whose generosity and love
I believe helped in the completion
of this work and whose wisdom
and understanding has forever
been an inspirational
force in my life
TABLE OF CONTENTS

| Dedication                               | 1 |
| Acknowledgements                         | i |
| Preface                                  | iii |
| Introduction                             | 1 |
| Brand                                    | 12 |
| An Enemy of the People                   | 29 |
| The Wild Duck                            | 34 |
| Conclusion                               | 50 |
| Bibliography                             | 53 |
| Supplementary Bibliography               | 58 |
| Vita                                     |   |
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sincere appreciation and gratitude is extended to those people who have contributed their time, counsel, and guidance in the course of this study. The author feels especially indebted to Professor Irby B. Brown, thesis director, who so generously provided the much-needed instruction, and assistance necessary for the successful completion of this thesis. Appreciation is also extended to Professor Lewis F. Ball, for serving as the second reader and for providing assistance in recommending attention to defective and erroneous material.

This research could not have been completed without the cooperation of the Hanover County School Board, the late Mr. B. V. Aylor, Principal of Lee-Davis High School, and the presiding Co-cordinating Principals, Mr. Robert A. Crummette and Mr. Harold A. Stills. Their understanding and generosity is greatly appreciated during the last few months of this project.
Appreciation is also extended to Mary Cutherell Wilhelm who has given extensive time and effort to the typing of this paper. The author is grateful for her loyalty and dependability.

Finally, the author wishes to thank her parents and close friends for their encouragement and reassurances while this paper was in progress.
PREFACE

Having read Henrik Ibsen's major plays, I became interested in his treatment of truth. Brand, Doctor Stockman, and Gregers Werle all represented varied degrees of the truth, each embodying Ibsen's own ideas. It is specifically Gregers Werle's treatment of the truth that resulted in the conclusions found in this paper.

As Ibsen explored his personal convictions about the truth, a new type of rebel hero began to emerge, a destructive savior. Through this messiah, a Christ-like figure, Ibsen allows the truth to be exploited, which brings about complete destruction to communities, families, and friends.

Biographical material has been deleted. By focusing only on those necessary ideas that help to clarify a destructive messiah, I did not feel justified in presenting Ibsen's plays as autobiographical analyses. This is not intended. I only hope that the concepts presented here have been presented clearly and fairly.
Henrik Ibsen found it difficult to identify with any of the existing party systems or social programs of the nineteenth century. He was not even comfortable with the traditional bureaucrats or even the prevailing political and social movements. Being discontented with everything but a new beginning, he demanded nothing less than an ethical-religious revolution; and this revolution would be championed only by those individuals who were willing to defend unpopular causes.  

Because Ibsen found it increasingly difficult to share his views with contemporary society, his main theme in life became one of self-emancipation. He found this goal to be difficult because of his own inability to identify with current trends. However, his struggle was not futile, for he achieved later at Freie Bühne in Berlin, Théâtre Libre in Paris, and the Independent Theater in London a success which established him as the ancestor of modern drama. Ibsen wanted to

---

free man from all the ideologies that stood in the way of autonomy; he wanted the self to explode into a full consciousness, free of all restrictions. 2 As he pleaded for the freedom of an individual, his own quest in life became a personal one: the pursuit of Truth.

This pursuit may be found in most of his plays. For purposes of investigation, three representative plays are chosen for analysis in this paper. Brand (1866), An Enemy of the People (1882), and The Wild Duck (1884) all represent the playwright's struggling attempt to understand the truth. Brand is chosen because this is the first time Ibsen has completely revealed his rebellious interior life. Brand is a thorough-going revelation of Ibsen's battle within himself to understand the complexities of truth. He frees himself from all restrictions, allowing his inhibitions to be transformed into a dramatic work of art. Also, this is the first time Ibsen introduces a messianic rebel, a rebel who even challenges the nineteenth-century God. Ibsen has never explored a hero so completely dedicated to this cause. Of all the heroes Ibsen ever wrote about, Brand remains the supreme idealist, individualist, and rebel all in one. 3

---


An Enemy of the People is chosen as the second play for investigation because this is Ibsen's most straightforward and deliberate work. Ibsen had never before taken the opportunity to speak so frankly about the truth. In Brand, he merely begins to reveal his ideas, but he is not as outspoken as he is in An Enemy of the People. What Ibsen has said in previous works is not as clear as what he says here. His intent is obvious as he involves his central hero in a prolonged and controversial dispute. Ibsen plans to use Doctor Stockman to echo his staunch beliefs about the filth in modern society and the tyranny of the compact majority. As Ibsen searches for the real meaning of truth, he frankly speaks out against a mediocre democracy with greedy conservatives and smooth-tongued liberals. Also, Doctor Stockman is Ibsen's only hero whose uncompromising idealism never really threatens the happiness of others. There is no real test of human happiness in this play; no one is left emotionally crippled as in Brand and The Wild Duck. No one dies as a result of an idealist's claims.

Finally, The Wild Duck is the only play in which Ibsen completely denies the validity of revolt. He attacks the negative side of rebellion without bothering to affirm the positive side: this could have been done to correct the imbalance in An Enemy of the People. The disparity
is unmistakable: Ibsen praises Doctor Stockman for exposing the truth; but he denounces Gregers Werle for doing the same thing. Furthermore, this is the only time Ibsen mercilessly criticizes the messianic idealist: the play becomes a murderous satire on Gregers Werle, the truth-hunter.  

For the first time in Brand, Ibsen introduces a messianic rebel who is blindly devoted to his divine ideal; in An Enemy of the People, he completely supports the radical; and in The Wild Duck, he totally rejects him. All three plays represent a logical sequence in Ibsen’s exploration and development of the messianic idealist. Ibsen familiarizes himself with his new hero in Brand, observes him as he exercises complete freedom in An Enemy of the People, and becomes increasingly aware of the destruction a liberated radical can bring about, as seen in The Wild Duck.

These three plays were chosen for other important reasons. It is Brand, Doctor Stockman, and Gregers Werle that best represent the following: first, like Ibsen, each of these major characters identifies himself with an unpopular belief as he searches for the truth; second, these plays illustrate what happens to Ibsen’s hero as he seeks autonomy in the face of obstacles; third, these plays show what can happen to a

\[4\text{Ibid., pp. 71-74.}\]
radical who oversteps his bounds and forgets the concerns of the majority; finally, since the protagonist causes destruction in his personal quest for truth, he becomes not a messiah who saves but a radical who destroys. In each of these three plays, Ibsen is examining the consequences of a radical hero as he pursues an unpopular truth.

In addition, none of these heroes realizes that he is hurting others, nor does he worry about the happiness or salvation of the average man - his victim. Moreover, each is a fanatical individualist who tries to defend the safety of the community by imposing idealistic truths on the ordinary man. More importantly and unlike Ibsen's other characters, these three messianic rebels want to change the course of the world by raising the common man to heroic stature. In no other play does Ibsen explore this subject in such great depth.

Ibsen is frequently inconsistent in his treatment of the truth. In Brand, he seems both to approve and disapprove of man's allegiance to truth. In An Enemy of the People he glorifies the truth, applauding the hero for exposing the "lies" of modern society. On the other hand, in The Wild Duck, he denounces the hero for attaining the same goal; he excoriates the pedlar of ethical truths. In Ibsen's search for self-realization, he often struggled with the disquieting paradox: why does

\[5\text{Ibid.}, \text{pp. 44-45.}\]
truth, when it is supposed to set man free, destroy him? The truth can liberate one man, as it does in An Enemy of the People, but it can also destroy others, as seen in The Wild Duck. In The Wild Duck, Ibsen feels that truth can be very dangerous to others, especially the weak. Some men need to have an illusion of truth, their "life-lie," in order to survive. Therefore, truths should not be imposed on individuals, for what is one man's truth is another man's poison. A truth is only relative and not absolute; no truth is infallible. Ibsen would often advance a doctrine in one play, as evidenced by An Enemy of the People, only to retract it in the next, as in The Wild Duck. He seems to counterattack his own views on truth, and his dramatic career moves ahead on the principle of "logical antithesis." Ibsen's last words were "On the contrary," and in his search for truth, he enlarged and redefined "what a stage can be and perhaps even our sense


10 Krutch, p. 15.
of what a man can ask himself to become."\textsuperscript{11}

Ibsen attacks the problem of truth by using a fictional character in drama, a rebel hero, portrayed by Brand in \textit{Brand}, Doctor Stockman in \textit{An Enemy of the People}, and Gregers Werle in \textit{The Wild Duck}. Brand, a minister, assumes a God-like position, strict and unyielding, claiming new codes of spiritual purity; he is uncompromising, lacking humility and compassion. The man can be admired for his self-discipline and dedication, but he is easily disliked because he imposes his absolute will on others:

The next hero is Doctor Stockman, an aristocratic individual pitted against a democratic community. Stockman's quest for the truth fails because he does not know how to work successfully with the common man. His uncompromising idealism and his overbearing approach destroy the Doctor's good plan. Carrying out his ideal blindly, he cannot see the complexities of the situation.\textsuperscript{12} But Ibsen seems to praise Stockman for exposing the false pillars of a democratic community,

\textsuperscript{11}Adams, pp. 347-348, and Brustein, pp. 38, 39, 45, and 52. It is felt that one cannot adequately discuss the destructive messiah unless one becomes familiar with Ibsen's attitudes toward truth. It is the truth that Ibsen seeks, through his character-heroes, that aids in the development of the destructive messiah.

and simultaneously, with comic irony, he subtly rebuffs him for his aristocratic idealism. Finally, Gregers Werle in The Wild Duck is a "truth-hunter" who tries to save a family by destroying their illusions in life. As mentioned earlier, Ibsen seems to denounce Gregers for attaining the same goals that he praises Stockman for: each man exposes the truth.

In short, Ibsen usually criticizes any claim that demands absolute validity. He did not want to provide any solutions in his dramas. But he did want to present problems in life. He wanted to force the individual to exert himself in finding the best answer to life's riddles. Each of Ibsen's heroes does exert himself, becoming so individualistic in his search for truth that he fails miserably in his attempt to succeed.

Brand, Doctor Stockman and Gregers all exhibit characteristics of a destructive savior. Each considers himself to be the ideal messiah, a liberator, who knows the way, the truth, and a better life for his lost people. But each becomes a destructive messiah because he ironically destroys that which he tries to save. A destructive messiah, however, is much more than this. He is an idealist who imposes unattainable truths.

---

on a victim. He supports and projects his own personal beliefs which go beyond that which can be realistically attained by another. He is a messianic missionary, like Brand, who kills God and builds a church, a superman, having the qualities of both malefactor and benefactor. Or, he is a Doctor Stockman in a social drama, with "the claim of the ideal" for the townspeople. Or he may be a Gregers Werle who becomes a destructive messiah because he subjects the Ekdal family to harsh realities, which they cannot face. Basically, this "prophet-hero" is blinded by his own idealisms; he becomes a bill-collector who asks of those who simply cannot pay.

In summary, it will be proven that by examining the rebel hero, Ibsen's destructive messiah as found in the representative dramas of Brand, An Enemy of the People, and The Wild Duck, Ibsen's marked ambivalence towards the truth will be investigated. In each of his plays, Ibsen investigates different types of truth; in Brand, a highly idealistic, divine truth; in An Enemy of the People, a very authoritative, imperative truth; and in The Wild Duck, a misconceived, erroneous truth.

15Brustein, pp. 18, 49, 53, 71, and 72.
Before initiating a discussion of the destructive messiah, it will be helpful to become familiar with the two kinds of illusions and with the function of an illusion in a human life. The first illusion is a self-deception, which provides consolation or even justification for one's ideas or actions. Old Ekdal's and Hjalmar's illusion consoles them, helping them to exist in a chaotic world. The delusions of these two men help them in their struggle with reality. An illusion, then, is like an insurance policy that sustains the personality. 16

If an illusion does not harm another individual, then it may be acceptable. When a remedy is used for maintaining life and when this remedy is not imposed onto another human, then the illusion is harmless; it is an innocent illusion. This is the first type of illusion that is self-directed rather than self-projected. Old Ekdal's illusion is his attic, and Hjalmar's illusion is his great invention. 17 Neither of these illusions harms anyone. These illusions of the Ekdal family do not violate the personalities of another; they merely aid in sustaining a personality. Therefore, this illusion is basically harmless.


On the other hand, there is a second type of illusion that goes one step further. This illusion is injurious because it invades another's personal happiness. Gregers Werle, with his self-projected illusion of righteousness, invades the Ekdal home, destroying the emotional stability of each character. Next there is Brand, with his self-projected ideal, imposing on his family and his parishioners lofty illusions; this hero fails by destroying not only his victims but himself. Brand is never happy unless he is issuing commands, especially those which are either restrictive or prohibitive in nature. Hence, if an illusion is projected, then it demands more from another individual than he can give. Brand's wife is an excellent example of a human who cannot attain an unrealistic ideal that has been thrust upon her by her husband; she is a victim of a projected ideal. Also, Doctor Stockman's illusion, that all lies be exposed, is so emphatically forced upon the townspeople that they retaliate. The Doctor's illusion is not as severe as Brand's or Gregers Werle's illusion.

In conclusion, both illusions help man to sustain an existence. The Ekdals live happily in their home, and Brand and Doctor Stockman feel justified in pursuing their ideal claim. But it is the former illusion that is preferable because it does not injure anyone else. The loftier

---

illusion, advocating unattainable ideals, is preached by a missionary, such as Brand, who often wounds or even destroys the personalities of others. All three of these heroes become enraptured by their ideal, in varying degrees.

If an illusion is imposed on another, it can foster unfortunate circumstances for the destructive messiah and his victims. Further, one will try to show the relationship between a projected illusion and a destructive messiah: an ideal can manifest itself in a man to such a degree that he becomes totally enmeshed in the glory of his idea, which brings about rebellion and destructive messianism: this is Ibsen's destructive messiah.

In Brand, Ibsen launches his quest for absolute truth through a hero who is the conscious embodiment of Ibsen's imagination. The messianic hero exercises complete freedom to project himself and his personality in order to change the world into a better place. He believes that only through his own superhuman will can he bring order out of the chaos which surrounds him and his people; he is a Creator, a

---

19 Raphael, pp. 120-123.
God. Brand becomes an egotistical revolter who destroys an old order and builds one of his own. He establishes new laws and proclaims himself a savior. He feels that he is superior to other men and his environment; however, his superiority is not from noble birth or miraculous deeds but from lofty moral and spiritual qualities. It is these qualities which put him above the ordinary man, but it is also these same qualities that Brand uses as a justification for his aristocratic illusion of character and will.

Ibsen believed in the complete freedom of expression, and because he could not exercise this freedom at home, he left Norway in 1864 and moved to Rome. There, he felt a freedom and independence never felt before; in Norway, he felt constricted, but in Rome, he was able to vent his suppressed emotions. Two years later in 1866, Ibsen completed Brand, a major work that reflects Ibsen's new-found freedom of expression. Brand was Ibsen's initial step into the exploration

\[\text{Brustein, pp. 16-17. The text for this play was taken from C. H. Herford, trans. The Collected Works of Henrik Ibsen (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), pp. 3-262.}\]

\[\text{Ibid.}\]

\[\text{Ibid., pp. 21-22.}\]

\[\text{Ibid., p. 22.}\]

\[\text{Ibid., p. 22.}\]

\[\text{Ibid., pp. 51-52.}\]
of a man's quest for his self-realization, a personal step toward truth.

Even though Ibsen had not personally experienced all the action in Brand, he said he lived through it "inwardly." He had experienced all of Brand, most importantly the feelings of the rebel hero, spiritually if not actually. A spiritual, inward experience to a poetic dramatist is just as significant as an idea gained from empirical knowledge. 26 And so, Brand signifies Ibsen's freedom to write without regard to audience or Norway's critics; his self-expression has become unlimited as he transformed the battle within himself into an artistic creation of dramatic value.

The characteristics Ibsen attributes to Brand are not unlike the author's feelings towards himself. It is only through a study of Brand that one becomes aware of a hero, who because of his projected idealisms, becomes Ibsen's first destructive messiah. Brand, his name being symbolic of sword and fire, is a reforming minister who wants "to brand" all according to his dictated ideals. He is often equated with past and present messiahs. Like Moses, he wants to re-establish

new codes of spiritual purity on dreamers and idlers; like Christ, he wants salvation for all men via transformation of human character; like Luther, he is the "chastiser of the age," condemning man's excesses; and like Billy Graham, he becomes the fashionable, popular preacher of the day.

But Brand has additional traits that uproot or thwart his potential as a benevolent messiah. He is extremely strict, unforgiving, and unsympathetic, lacking the empathy and compassion of Christ; his demands are excessive and unrealistic. In addition, in his attempt to become a messiah, he becomes a God who is not gentle, soothing, or forgiving. His God is a "storm"; the Ideal itself, obtained only by unlimited striving of human will. His God is not really a God for the people, but one for himself, a projection of Brand's absolute will.

Ibsen is not concerned here with a priest's dedication to God but with a man's dedication to a cause 27 that eventually destroys. Brand's message to his villagers ardently exemplifies an excellent projected ideal: "All or Nothing." Further, Brand's God demands "all" of him just as Brand demands "all" of his parishioners, not promising redemption or eternal life. What is important is man's will, the absolute will to elevate one's self to higher forms of existence.

27Findlater, p. 342, and Brustein, p. 52.
It has been said that Brand symbolizes "man in his most God-like aspect in search of the absolute."\(^{28}\) He shows no pity for the meek and suffering, and he sacrifices his most intimate relationships (son, wife, and mother) in order to achieve his moral principles. While Brand visualizes God as "All or Nothing," he seeks the Devil as one of Compromise. Evil is analogous to "the middle of the road," moderation, accommodation, luxury, and moral laziness. He is even contemptuous of virtues: love is not a reality and charity even encourages weakness.\(^{29}\)

It is these characteristics of fierce courage, absolute will, and defective humanity that succeed in destroying Brand's family and parishioners. Even Ibsen associates him with snow, steel, iron, and stone; for Brand was "born by a cold fjord" close to a barren mountain. His relationships with his wife Agnes, his mother, the mayor, and the villagers all show a man who is torn between his "truth-ideal" and his intimate family and friends.

Brand meets Agnes and converts her to his "grayness." But at first, both Agnes and Ejnar are in direct contrast to Brand; they are


\(^{29}\)Hans Meyer, p. 25, and Brustein, p. 53.
identified with the "mountain air, sunshine, and dew," while Brand's conception of life continually pursues the Ideal. However, after he successfully converts Agnes to a purity of will, Agnes begins to repudiate her husband for his lack of compromise, and it is this inability to compromise that eventually causes his downfall. Toward the end, Agnes realizes that Brand's life is one willed by moral energy, and despite the love that she still has and wants to exercise, she knows she cannot defend herself against his arguments. Brand knew, too, that her love for life was still intertwined with the absolute will she attained after meeting him. After she died Brand praises this, "In the tiniest things she could always see the flame of greatness... uniting earth with the dome of heaven, as foliage overroofs a tree trunk."³⁰

Agnes dies because she has been forced to make unreasonable choices and forced beyond her power to adopt a role following an illusion projected on her by her husband, Brand. Because Brand emphasizes the heroic, ethical personality over humanitarianism, he has lost both his wife, Agnes, and his son, Alf.³¹ Even though Agnes was a young woman of idealism, she had one quality that Brand lacked: the ability to love with compassion and tenderness. In addition, she searched

³⁰Meyer, pp. 21, 25.

³¹Huneker, p. 2, and Brustein, p. 18.
for a God of love, not a stern God, like the Parson himself.

Not only did Brand persist in what to him is the right way of life with Agnes, but he also tried to continue with his impossible ideal of "all or nothing" with his mother. His mother is a lonely old woman whose values in life are not unlike those of the mayor. Brand remembers as a child his mother plundering the grave of her husband, which clearly illustrates a demonic greed. As a young girl, she was forced to give up the man she loved for the wealthy Brand senior. Being deprived of the trust and the power of love, Brand's mother turned to avarice to help her negate or suppress her true feelings. And like Brand, she tried to maintain her identity by trying to raise one small part of herself to demonic absolutism. 32

Brand's inflexible determination is again displayed when he refuses to visit his dying mother. Brand has asked that she give up "all" of her material possessions, even though she has already relinquished over half of her wealth. She does not and dies without receiving his prayers and blessings. 33

Toward the end of the drama, Brand begins to realize that he is a part of a corrupt institution, a church of compromise, and

33 Michael Meyer, pp. 31-32.
leads his followers out into the fields where God really is. Like Moses, he leads his people to the promised land. Because the people do not find a land of milk and honey, only "a crown of thorns," they begin to stone him; for Brand can only offer "a new will and a new faith." The people realize that Brand's goals are too high for them, and they become disillusioned. Brand does not understand that he has asked them to do what is impossible. The ordinary man cannot exercise the absolute will and determinism that Brand expects. This is one of his major faults. He commands unreasonable ideals and imposes them on people who are not capable of executing an aristocratic will. Because Brand cannot see that he is asking the impossible and because he is too blinded by his own egotistical will, he cannot understand why the people have rejected him.

As Brand is left torn and bleeding, the message of the unseen chorus confirms that Brand's quest was an impossibility. Next, the vision of Agnes, offering love, warmth, and forgiveness, seems to present a further rejection of Brand's ideal; he refuses these qualities. And, at the very end when the avalanche thrusts on the Ice Church, Brand

34 Brustein, pp. 56-57.
dies asking, "If not by Will, how can man be redeemed!" (V. 262).

The answer refutes Brand's position: "He is the God of charity, mercy, love" (V. 262). These events that happen at the end of the drama seem to confirm that Brand's ideal is questionable or even wrong. The villagers, the chorus, Agnes' vision, and the author's last words all tend to support this theory. Brand's goal for his family and townspeople has been too idealistic for them to attain.

The interpretation of the play's last line has been controversial, but it is generally accepted that Brand was forgiven because his judge was a God of love and not one of absolute will. Nonetheless, the ending has been ambiguous and inconclusive for many, because Ibsen did not connect his drama of ideas with the drama of action. 35

This ending allows the reader to reflect on Ibsen's refusal to adopt a positive doctrine; Ibsen is still exploring himself, offering no positive answers, no dramatic synthesis. One, however, can accept Brand not only as a hero-saint but also as a destructive messiah, an ice-cold being with a ruthless dedication to impossible ideals: ideals imposed on his wife, mother, and the villagers, causing suffering, anxiety, and death.

35 Ibid., p. 58.
Ibsen's split attitude toward Brand and his paradoxical treatment of him further represent a division in Ibsen's attitude toward truth. One becomes aware of the Romantic idealism of the rebel in conflict with the classical detachment of the objective dramatist. This dualism is evident when Ibsen examines the effect of absolute idealism on the private happiness of individuals. The theme obsesses him throughout his dramatic career and will be examined in *An Enemy of the People* and *The Wild Duck*: the clash between ability and aspiration, of will and possibility. 36

Some of the ideas of the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) seem most influential in *Brand*. Even though Ibsen had said he "had read very little and understood even less," many of his friends at Grimstad and even his wife, Susannah Thoresen, were ardent followers of Kierkegaard. The strict and austere interpretation of Christianity is prevalent in *Brand* just as contempt is held for any sort of moral or spiritual compromise. The importance of spiritual ideals, the "absolute ideal demand," of "all or nothing" parallels Kierkegaardian philosophy. Further, there is a belief that martyrdom is essential to Christianity; a man is most Christian when he is dead,

---

a basic paradox in Christianity. And finally, there is emphasis on the supreme importance of the individual to have the freedom to choose either good or evil. 37

In addition, the philosophy attains a more significant role in the play, especially in relation to Brand. Kierkegaard believed that a man must be wholly objective in his evaluation of another. He must be able to accomplish this without any preconceived ideologies or any previously acquired traditional, ethical codes. Therefore, if a man can be evaluated without these influences, then one is better able to see the "whole" man. Brand could not do this as a Parson, and he consequently had to rely on his preconceived adage, "all or nothing." 38

Kierkegaard's "either/or" must have influenced Ibsen's "all or nothing" because each, in a similar manner, makes a distinction between the aesthetic and ethical way of life. In Fear and Trembling (1843), Kierkegaard distinguishes between the ethical (Agamemnon and Brutus) and the religious (Abraham). W. H. Auden, who was


influenced by Kierkegaard, says that Brand is an ethical man, like Brutus, and not a religious, leader-savior like Moses or Abraham:

"Brand is a tragic figure whose courage one admires and whose fate one pities." But in Kierkegaard's discussion he says, "The tragic hero still stays within the ethical." But what is more essential to the discussion here is that Brand himself says that he knows only one law for all mankind; he feels that he cannot discriminate.

An ethical man knows he cannot make exceptions for anyone because ethical law applies to him in a personal way. For example, Brand's relationship with his mother is an ethical one. As she lies dying asking for her last rites, Brand refuses to make an exception for her because she cannot renounce her worldly possessions. Brand's relationship with his mother reflects Kant's imperative: "I ought never to act except in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law." Kierkegaard agrees because he feels that the ethical as such is the universe, and as the universe it applies to everyone.

40 Ibid.
41 Ibid. pp. 393, 395.
Essentially, some of Kierkegaard's philosophy is found in Brand. Brand and Kierkegaard both feel that ethical compromise deserves contempt and that a strict interpretation of Christianity will yield the absolute ideal demand.

In short, Brand exercises his absolute will, persisting to follow what he considers the right way of life, in spite of all emotional temptations to yield, in order to fulfill his impossible ideal of "all or nothing." Regardless of the consequences, Brand must lead his people to the heights. The end for such an extremist must be destruction and catastrophe. His inflexible determination to perform what he considers his duty leads to Agnes' death, Alf's death, the loss of his parishioners, and finally his own death. Hence, Brand does represent Kierkegaard's demand of "either/or" or choice between the aesthetic and ethical. Brand represents the demand to choose the ethical rather than the aesthetic or the demand to choose (which is basically ethical) rather than the failure to choose at all. As mentioned earlier, Ibsen denied that Kierkegaard was a model for Brand but later added: "But, of course, the depiction of a man whose

\[\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 399.\]
sole aim in life is to realize his ideals will always bear a certain resemblance to Kierkegaardian life."

In ending the discussion of Brand as a hero and messianic rebel, one finds it helpful, but hopefully not premature, to view briefly Brand, Doctor Stockman, and Gregers Werle: the three destructive messiahs. Gregers is almost a caricature of Stockman or Brand. However, Gregers' commitment to the ideal comes from without and not from within as with Brand and Doctor Stockman. Gregers tries to realize his heroic ideal not through heroic striving as Brand or Stockman but by artfully manipulating others. Moreover, Gregers may have Brand's destructive fanaticism, but he lacks Brand's heroic virtues.

Both men destroyed families because of their claim for the ideal, but Brand maintained an individualism and aristocratic will that Gregers did not. Brand was spiritually motivated while Gregers was selfishly motivated, full of vanity and pride; he was not really a hero, but a hero worshipper. Gregers, then, is a negative

---


44 Brustein, pp. 73-74.
caricature of the stern priest Brand, and the greatest difference lies in the motivations of the two men, Gregers' being tainted with selfishness. Consequently, Gregers is not Brand, for Brand sacrificed all for what he understood as the will of God; even if he erred, he is considered heroic.

On the other hand, Gregers induces the child Hedvig to sacrifice herself to win her father, as well as to help him attain his "claim of the ideal" marriage. Briefly looking at Brand and Stockman, one realizes that the demands of the absolute are too great for the ordinary man. The same villagers who clamored for Brand leave and stone him, casting him out. This incident may easily be equated with Christ, and Ibsen uses the same theme with comic irony in An Enemy of the People when Doctor Stockman is refuted by those same townspeople whom he tries to save; his trousers are torn by these people as he attempts to ennoble mankind. 45

What does all this mean and how can it justify Brand as being a destructive messiah? A more qualified approach will now be beneficial in understanding Brand as Ibsen's first destructive messiah. By examining Brand as being first "a savior," and then a "destructive"

45Haltan, pp. 27, 47, 48.
savior, one will have a clearer picture of this rebel hero. From the onset when Brand meets Gerd, listening intently to her colorful version of the Ice Church as being a wild and dangerous chasm far in the hills, he is inspired by what he has seen and heard to begin a mission in the world: to quest against the lighthearted, fainthearted, and wrong-hearted. 46

Further, as a "savior," Brand assumes a Christ-like figure as he walks over snow and ice, unmindful of his bleeding feet; his inexorable idealism is in direct contrast here to the carefree joyfulness of Ejnar and Agnes. Again, he successfully overcomes the dangers of the swollen waters enroute to aid an old man, both actions being typical of a savior but also complementing the iron-willed determination of a rebel hero who does his duty without regard to danger.

This is the first time Brand projects his ideal on the people; he replies to them that the idea of fear and suffering is spiritually beneficial. If Brand had terminated his idea here, he would have maintained the stature of a "savior"; however, it is from this point onward that he becomes so enmeshed in his verities that he begins to execute absolute will on his victims.

46 Brodwin, p. 11.
Brand is a savior because he has those qualities that characterize his being one. He personifies heroic striving with a commitment to the ideal, consistently and sincerely trying to quest for what he believes is right; his struggle is also internal and a virtuous one, for he seeks to improve mankind. He wants to set up new codes of spiritual purity; he wants salvation for all men; and he wants to cleanse man’s excesses. Brand is an individual with an aristocratic will who is not parroting philosophies for his own selfish gain; he has sacrificed all for his messianic mission, for God’s will. It is these virtues and probably others that justify Brand as a savior, but ironically it is also these virtues that transform Brand into Ibsen’s first replica of a destructive messiah: a prototype of what is to come.

One begins to gain insight into this savior figure when Brand tells Agnes about his cold, loveless home and his bleak childhood. This could have influenced Brand into becoming a cold, hard, determined man of God. He begins to exercise fully his fanatical determinism when, as mentioned earlier, he denies his mother her last rites, rejects leaving his homeland for Alf’s health, and finally leaves Agnes no choice but one, and that is to die.

Brand now emerges not as a savior but as a destroyer, for he has sacrificed all in his pursuit of the ideal. He has demanded unattainable ideals on his family and himself, which brings about
disaster. Even Brand has failed to find the absolute for which he has quested; he has failed because he is a man and not a God. This is his tragedy and also paradoxically his salvation. 47

In Ibsen's second play, An Enemy of the People, the scene shifts from Brand's radical cures to Doctor Stockman's careful diagnoses. Man is in conflict with the establishment: the community, the government, religion and his family. Ibsen's central character is typical of men in his society: he shares the same ambitions, obeys the same laws, performs domestic duties, and even speaks the same idiomatic language. One leaves the God-like figure Brand and meets an everyday, ordinary Doctor Stockman. Brand believes he can build a new order, and he suggests ways to do it; on the other hand, Doctor Stockman becomes increasingly frustrated as he proposes his new order. He does not suggest any clear-cut alternatives for the things he wants to destroy. He merely proposes a new beginning with idealistic goals, but no guidelines. Both men rarely question the limitations of human perfectibility. 48 Ibsen's real purpose in this social drama is to use Doctor Stockman as a rebel hero to expose a corrupt society.

47Haltan, pp. 27-28. Brand's salvation is ambiguous.

Doctor Stockman maintains his high standards despite the surrounding evil influences. He is an intense, dedicated, stubborn man who refuses to ignore a decaying society and who wants to change it by setting an example. He is also an honest man who is not tempted by greed: the Board of Directors offered him a raise in salary for exposing the pollution, and he did not accept it.\(^49\) He tries to bring truth to a society that has buried itself in modern lies. His attempt, however, is thwarted by reactionaries and liberals who act out of self-interest.\(^50\)

There are several of these men who try to obstruct the Doctor's plans. First, there is the Mayor, who is horribly experienced in manipulation of others by veiled threat or promise of a favor;\(^51\) he ignores any problem that does not aid in his own personal gain.\(^52\) The Doctor is easily caught in his snare. Then there is Horstad, the editor of the liberal \textit{People's Monitor}, who wants to bankrupt the upper


class and obtain economic control for the homeowners. Aslaksen, chairman of the Homeowners Association, denounces the Doctor when he realizes his people will have to pay for the renovation of the baths. All pretend to be searching for the truth, but they are only looking for selfish capital gain. It is this type of individual that the Doctor has to reason with and convince. He becomes a reformer and a constant fighter for his ideals of truth and freedom. In doing this, he never sacrifices his high standards.

However, there is another side to Doctor Stockman. Because he is unwilling to compromise these high standards of truth and freedom, his chances for success are reduced. Being independent and impetuous, he speaks his own mind regardless of the circumstances. In the last act of the play, his attempts to enlighten the people about the polluted baths are foiled. They are so enraged and do not care to listen to the Doctor's explanation. His impetuosity and his unwillingness to compromise overshadow his good judgment.

Furthermore, he is so carefree and optimistic that he is easily duped by the reactionaries mentioned earlier. His optimism forces him to look always on the bright side of things, and his obsessive

---

53 Lambert, p. 627, and Alder, p. 6.
concern for the ideal causes him to lose sight of reality. 54 Being bent upon his quest, he even forgets his wife and children, becoming a radical prober and destroying his chances for a successful project. 55

But the Doctor does have some of those characteristics that merit viewing him as the "savior" of a community. He rebels against outworn creeds and conventions, establishing himself as the interpreter and leader of a people who cannot determine what is right and wrong. He is an honest man, who is willing to cleanse his people and the baths; but as with Brand, his method of execution is questionable. His naïve and blindfold idealism, his inability to compromise, and his self-complacent egotism all usurp the "savior's" plan. 56 Both Doctor Stockman and Brand are heroes who feel strongly about standing alone and whose stubborn determinism does not allow them to yield. 57


56 Lepke, pp. 62-67, and Heneker, p. 28.

It is generally felt that Stockman will eventually win his point, even though he has incurred unpopularity\textsuperscript{58} and will continue to do so. It becomes noticeable at the end of the play that the Doctor rejoices less over the fact that his discovery of poison in the water supply will prevent greater danger to the community than he does over the realization that it will serve his own vanity; he thinks more of his "right" than he does of the welfare of the community. This is one of the reasons why he incurs the wrath of the townspeople. They begin to mistrust and lose faith in the respected Doctor.

On the other hand, Ibsen felt that the greatest danger of trust and freedom was the "compact majority."\textsuperscript{59} He frequently asked what should one do when the majority is wrong? His answer echoes Emerson: "Whosoever would be a man must be a nonconformist."\textsuperscript{60} Doctor Stockman, then, becomes an aristocratic individualist, but he loses the respect of the people. Ostracism seems to strengthen the Doctor as he begins to understand his own words at the end of the play: "The strongest man in the world is the man who stands alone." If a man holds on to the truth

\textsuperscript{58}Esslin, pp. 29-30.
\textsuperscript{59}Lund, pp. 312-313.
\textsuperscript{60}Lambert, p. 628, and Esslin, p. 29.
as Stockman does, he is bound to be unpopular and remain so, even if the masses do catch up with his ideas.

Is Doctor Stockman, then, Ibsen's concept of the destructive messiah? In Brand, man is denounced for imposing verities, and in An Enemy of the People, man is praised for seeking aristocratic ideals. However, one cannot overlook Stockman's lack of understanding and unsophisticated approach in his quest for the truth. Ibsen subtly rebuffs Stockman in his search for the ideal. Even though the Parson and the Doctor march onward with their blind idealisms, forgetting the family and the reality of their principles, they merely mark the beginning of the author's search. Ibsen is still exploring the ramifications of the destructive messiah.
In *The Wild Duck*, the tragedy of idealism is portrayed by the character Gregers Werle. He causes the destruction of the Ekdal family when he imposes his idealistic truths on Old Ekdal, Hedvig, and Hjalmar. Gregers exposes the realities of truth to this family; and as a result, he causes a landslide of revelations which brings about much unhappiness, a possible divorce, and a suicide.

Because Gregers Werle feels so justified in his mission, he becomes blind to life's realities somewhat like Brand and Doctor Stockman. These men are blind by their idealism; they cannot see beyond their claim of the ideal. On the other hand, Old Ekdal, Hedvig, and Hjalmar are blind in their illusion of the truth. They feel comfortable with their illusions because they do not have to face life's realities. All of these characters use an illusion either as a justification to accomplish a mission or as a remedy to maintain happiness. In short, it is Gregers' idealistic truth and the Ekdal's harmless illusions that all play a significant part in determining Gregers' role as a destructive messiah.

It should be kept in mind that Ibsen's life's work was to seek truth artistically. In each of these plays he has tried to explore the consequences of truth. He has observed himself like Brand, tested
himself like Doctor Stockman, and exploited others like Gregers. As he denounced traditional values in his quest for truth, he sought an "inspirational force" to replace these values: a force that could become a new ideal, a new way of life. He allows Gregers to experiment with this new ideal, the idealistic truth. But Gregers errs because he does not pursue this ideal as he should: he does not "artistically" seek the ideal truth.

In analyzing the play, the relationship between a harmful illusion and a destructive messiah will be illustrated. A harmful illusion is an idealistic truth that is imposed on another human. This idealistic truth can manifest itself in a messiah to such a degree that he can no longer be objective in his pursuit. He loses sight of the realities of life. When this happens, the messiah is no longer benevolent, being so possessed with his "right." He becomes a rebel, denouncing all established codes, leading himself and the people into unfortunate circumstances. This messiah has now become a messianic rebel, Ibsen's destructive messiah; Gregers Werle in The Wild Duck.

---

61 Fjelde, pp. 2, 4.

Before elaborating on Gregers as Ibsen's rebel hero, it will be helpful to look at the happy Ekdal family with their harmless illusions. The household is infected with a kind of magnetism and vitality. When Old Ekdal decides to show Gregers the wild duck, both men infect one another with excitement until Hjalmar, at last, joins in.\textsuperscript{63}

Lieut. Ekdal: That's where the rabbits go at night, old man!
Gregers: No, really? You've got rabbits, too?
Lieut. Ekdal: Yes, you can well believe we've got rabbits, Hjalmar! Aha! But now comes the great thing, look you! Now for it! Look out, Hedvig! Stand here! like that! now look in. So you see a basket full of straw?
Gregers: Yes. And I see there's a bird in the basket.
Lieut. Ekdal: Aha - "a bird"!
Gregers: Isn't it a duck?
Lieut. Ekdal: Yes, you can bet it's a duck!
Hjalmar: But what sort of a duck, do you think?
Hedvig: It's not an ordinary duck -
Lieut. Ekdal: Sh! Sh!\textsuperscript{64} (II. 356)

Much of the happiness and vitality in the Ekdal home may be partially attributed to this garret, an old attic with unusual pigeons, rabbits, a wild duck, and five withered Christmas trees. Old Ekdal hunts here with his treasured gun, and Hedvig is fascinated by the


fantasy world of illusions. For her, there is an old clock that does not run and a cupboard full of interesting books, like Harrison's *History of London* with castles, churches, and great ships.

Both Old Ekdal and Hedvig relish these treasures with a ritual devotion: the attic rejuvenates them, giving them a place to go so they can forget the world of reality. Their illusions here in the attic provide meaning for them, and it is these illusions of reality that help them to sustain their well-being. Old Ekdal is very comfortable; he is even so acclimatized to this illusory forest that he cringes when Gregers offers to take him back to Højdal: a real forest and a life full of realities. Ekdal's reality now "is" his "attic-forest" and an occasional drunken stupor. It is into this world of the Ekdal family that Gregers will appear, destroying their necessary life-lies.

Hedvig Ekdal, like her grandfather, also enjoys the harmless illusions found in the attic. She enjoys the excitement and pleasures

---

65 Raphael, pp. 120-121.
the treasures bring to her, and she loves to play and dream about the big world. But she has no desire to sail on the seas with her Flying Dutchman. She enjoys him at a distance.68 (The Flying Dutchman supposedly refers to the old sea captain who once lived in the home.)

Just like her grandfather, she has no real desire to meet the world of reality. Even if she had the opportunity, she would not take advantage of it. She lacks the self-confidence and self-assurance needed to be successful in a complicated world. Being shy, backward, and quite sensitive, she could only feel safe in the coziness of her home and happy with the illusions of her attic.69 The attic is her illusion in life, her necessary life-lie that Gregers Werle will destroy.

Hedvig has a strong capacity for love and is completely devoted to her father, Hjalmar. Because he represents a God-like figure to her, she would never question his tantrums when things became difficult around the house. She worships him to such an extent that

68Weigand, p. 137.

she is unable to see his weaknesses: she cannot perceive his short-comings, and she really does not care to. Also, she enjoys the love and what little attention Hjalmar gives her. But when Gregers Werle enters their home, destroying the love and attention she once received from her father, she begins to question. Now, too, her father seems to reject her love, and she becomes miserable because Gregers has destroyed the family's happiness.70

When she realizes that her father does not love her, she voluntarily takes her life. Gregers, who is no longer a welcome friend in the home, coaches her to kill her pet, the wild duck. According to Gregers, this should be done as a sacrifice in order to win Hjalmar's love again: Hjalmar has been offended and this sacrifice will appease him. Life's realities have become unbearable for her, and she does not understand them. Her duck has to be killed; her cozy home is in a state of turmoll; and her father has denied her. All this leads to the tragedy of her death.71 Gregers Werle's "truth-ideal" has destroyed Hedvig.

70 Reinert, pp. 181-182.
71 Bradbrook, p. 106.
Hedvig's death is puzzling; why she committed suicide has bewildered many. Some critics feel she committed suicide as a sacrifice to win her father's love; others feel she did it out of grief, because all of her illusions had been unveiled by Gregers. And several contend it was an impulsive act of self-destruction or even a childish desire for revenge.\textsuperscript{72} Despite the popular interpretations, it is generally felt that she would not have committed this act merely because all her illusions were destroyed. To conclude this would be naïve. Hedvig was too immature to have the foresight to comprehend the effects that this destruction could cause. Besides, she knew no other world but her illusory one. And the revenge act may be ruled out because Hedvig had never experienced a revenge motive in her comfortable home.

The reasons for her death are ambiguous and this ambiguity could symbolize Ibsen's own personal struggle. He is now becoming aware that an idealist, with his claim of an ideal truth, can cause personal harm to a family. The impact of sudden revelations on an unsophisticated family can erase all the enthusiasm, love, and

\textsuperscript{72}Ibid., p. 107.
spontaneity that they once had. Also, Ibsen can be asking again: why does truth, when it is supposed to set man free, destroy him? Ibsen now realizes that when Gregers does expose the truth to the family and Hedvig, it does not free them; it instead causes pain, suffering, and death.

Gregers, then, can only be considered a savior in a very limited way. He does come to the Ekdal home with a new life and a new truth for them. But his new truth is so idealistic that these people cannot possibly attain his claim of the ideal; they cannot function in life without their daily illusion. Gregers destroys these illusions, and worse yet he tries to replace them with his idealistic illusion. He feels that all past deceits should be exposed, that Old Ekdal, Hedvig, and Hjalmar give up their "remedies" for life, and that this family should begin anew.

What Gregers Werle does not understand is that this family is unable to meet his requirements for an idealistic truth. If they cannot meet the demands of a day-to-day existence, how can he expect them to fulfill an idealistic claim? Gregers feels so justified in his savior-like mission that he does not even stop to weigh the possible outcomes.
He destroys the harmony that once prevailed, causing disillusionment and death. This destructive messiah ruins that which he tries to save: the Ekdal home.

Hjalmar Ekdal, the father of Hedvig, is so bewildered by Gregers' assertions that he, too, becomes a vulnerable victim of the idealist's claim. Also, Hjalmar, not unlike Old Ekdal and Hedvig, has his innocent illusions, too. Just as the attic serves as a functional ideal for Old Ekdal and Hedvig, the "invention" serves as a convenient remedy to forget life's problems for Hjalmar. His vision of this "invention" is so fanciful that he cannot even give specific details of it; he only says:

...when I resolve to dedicate myself to photography, it wasn't just with the idea of taking portraits of all kinds of every-day people...I swore that were I to consecrate my powers to this craft, I should also exalt it to such a height that it would become both an art and a science. And that is why I decided to make the great invention. (III:362).

This valuable illusion is also supported by Doctor Relling who tells Hjalmar that someday he will have a great invention. Hjalmar
believes this, while Doctor Relling knows only too well that whatever originality Hjalmar had completely left him in his boyhood. Hjalmar, as his occupation implies, has only the ability to imitate or mirror what is there: a photographer and not an artist.

His naïveté and his innocent illusion of the invention shield him from reality. He is too blind to know that this illusion is maintained by Doctor Relling and supported by Hedvig and Gina, his wife. Moreover, he lacks the insight to realize that his occupation was given to him by an outsider, Werle. And finally, he fails to see that Gina and Hedvig carry on the real work while he spends his time on the sofa asleep or dreaming about an illusive invention that will never materialize. Hjalmar is so fascinated by his invention that he fails to see the realities around him.

There are other instances in which Hjalmar does not want to face life's realities. He unconsciously, or maybe even consciously, does this in order to avoid further problems. His vision becomes poor when his own father passes through Werle's home during the evening of the dinner; he refuses to "see," acknowledge, him and turns to a shortsighted dinner guest, commenting that he does not "notice" things.


well. Hjalmar does not want to face the reality of his downtrodden father. Second, when Hjalmar is cross-examining Gina about her past, he says: "Let me have the lamp lit" (IV. 368). Does he really want to "see" into her past, or is he frantically led by the idealistic role he is playing? When Gregers supposedly opens Hjalmar's eyes and makes him aware of Werle's gift to Hedvig, Hjalmar cries out. "Oh what vistas, what perspectives open up before me!" (Act IV. 374).

Ironically, he now thinks that he "sees" all: Gina and Hedvig have betrayed him because Hedvig's real father is Werle. Unfortunately, his sight is only partial, because he fails to see the destruction that Gregers' truth can cause. This is the most important vision he could have here. But he fails to see, and he exclaims that Hedvig is making him unhappy, she being the source of light for him and the family. He is blind to her love, and in rage, he sends her away, "I can't stand to look at you" (Act IV. 374). Even Gina cries out to Hjalmar: "Look at the child, Ekdal!" (Act IV. 374). Hjalmar fails to see that it is he who is causing the immediate problems in the family and not Gina and Hedvig.

75 Reinert, p. 180.

76 Ibid., pp. 180-181.
After he has talked to Gregers the following day, he stubbornly assumes a "prosaic attitude of common sense": the role of an evangelist reborn. He does not act very well because he condescendingly accepts coffee, bread, and butter from Gina. Reverting from his pretentious egotism only momentarily, he seems to reflect a childish naïve charm. But Hjalmar does not remain peaceful very long.

Gregers arrives and disturbs Hjalmar's relaxation; he is definitely alarmed because Hjalmar has been unsuccessful in his mission. He has not exposed the lies in his marriage. To Gregers, this is necessary so that a new marriage may begin on a true foundation. Up until this moment, Hjalmar has been unable to get Gina to admit her wrongdoings. He wants her to demonstratively plead for forgiveness. Since this is not her nature, he cannot comfort her in a melodramatic reconciliation. In order to cause a disturbance, he denies Hedvig. He knows full well that Hedvig's emotions will work directly on Gina.

It is quite evident that Hjalmar wanted to end this grating problem, for it is making shambles out of the tranquillity in his home. He cannot end it, however, unless he is the martyr. He is willing to sacrifice his home for his egotistical mania. Being under the auspicious eye of Gregers, what else could Hjalmar say when Gina has entered and asked which he wanted her to do, "to pack up his belongings or to get the room in order!" (V. 380). He could only say: "Pack - 'and' get the room in order!" (V. 380).

Hjalmar is the epitome of a spoiled child, dedicated to his illusory invention. He is an unproductive agent in his profession, homelife, and his marriage. Again, he is immature and cannot accept the responsibilities of an adult. He is a messianic idealist only because of an outside agent; his claims of the apostolic truth are merely the parroting demands of Gregers. Consequently, his claim, in contrast to Doctor Stockman's, is not a pure one, since he merely imitates that of another.


Hjalmar's life is one of imitation and dependency, almost parasitic. In order for him to survive, he is dependent upon Gina and Hedvig who supply not only the "food" on the table, the management of his affairs, but also the "light" of his life.

Hjalmar feels that it is his duty to deny Hedvig and to cross-examine Gina. Werle has bestowed his cast-off mistress, Gina, to be his wife, teaching her the art of photography. Second, he has Hedvig, who is not his daughter, but Werle's. And finally, he supposedly bears the burden of the tarnished family because of Old Ekdal's mishandling Werle's land. He now feels justified in assuming the idealistic role of the messianic apostle.

Hjalmar feels that he is a "wounded spirit" much like Old Ekdal, and is justified in proclaiming the ideals that Gregers has taught him. But his illusions of the truth become so grandiose that they cause nothing but destruction for his family. He is so enamored with his idealistic role of a savior that he lacks the vision to foresee the devastation these claims can cause.

It is the lives of Old Ekdal, Hedvig and Hjalmar that have been investigated. Before Gregers enters their home, all is peace and

- 48 -
happiness, but after he has exposed the ugly realities of life, each of these characters begins to lose the happiness he once had. After a brief look at Gina, Hjalmar's wife, Gregers will be studied in depth as the destructive messiah.

Gina Ekdal may be considered the life spirit of the Ekdal household. She has grown into a mature, warm-hearted woman whose struggles in life have been heroic. She provides Hjalmar with the comforts of a home, a loving daughter, and a business. She is happy in her efficiency and self-management of the household. Her housecraft has been handed down from generation to generation, and she never really questions her happiness. Besides, it is she who serves, for this is her profession. She may subconsciously question Hjalmar's invention, but she never does this directly or seriously.

Being in this subordinate position, she is content to serve him because he is cultured and has consented to marry a maid. Hence, her outward position appears to be servile and subordinate; but inwardly she is a powerful woman who knows she is indispensable to the Ekdal household and to the physical comforts of Hjalmar. Thus, when Hjalmar exclaims, "Pack - 'and' get the room in order" (V. 381), she

---

80 Heiberg, p. 227.
is hopeful because she knows that he will return. She is aware of her power, her life-spirit, and knows that there would be no Hjalmar or an Ekdal household without her presence.  

Gina's attitude toward Hedvig's parentage illustrates how she has accepted the realistic past, almost buried it, and is now living a comfortable life unhampered by illusion. What Gina knows about Hedvig's parentage is questionable: she does not feel secure or even comfortable when interrogated by Hjalmar about Hedvig's paternity. Her response to his inquisitions are only natural. Bristling up instinctively like an old mother hen, she protests: "You ask that!" (IV. 374). She may know Hedvig is Werle's child. If so, this is a good piece of acting for unimaginative Gina. But she may know that Hedvig is Hjalmar's, conceived out of wedlock. Or, her own answer, "I don't know" (IV. 374), may very well be the truth.  

---

81 Bradbrook, p. 105; Haltan, p. 44; and Lucas, pp. 182-183.


83 Weigand, pp. 149-150.
Because of her own uncertainty, she is on guard when Gregers' inquisitions are perceived to be accusatory. He interrogates her about the duration of their marriage and Hedvig's age. When Gregers draws implications between Werle's and Hedvig's blindness, instinctively she alludes to the weak eyes of Hjalmar's mother in order to thwart his speculations. Gina now realizes that Hedvig is not above suspicion.

At the end of the play, unemotional and matter-of-fact Gina responds with a dramatic display of tears when Hedvig commits suicide. All of the maimed dwellers surround Hedvig, each exhibiting a different emotion. For Hjalmar, it is pathos; and for Relling, it is one of cool detachment. Old Ekdal leaves for his secure illusion, the attic, muttering indistinguishable noises; and the theologian can only mutter Christ sayings. Only Gina conducts herself with dignity which adds a little stateliness to her otherwise drab character.

Respect should be maintained for Gina, for at least she lives her life of compromise without illusions. When Gregers begins to bring up the past, Gina realizes that her home may be in danger. But she is the only Ekdal member who is not shaken by Gregers' revelations. Because she has had no illusions and has always lived a life
of reality, she can now face life's problems without becoming distraught. In contrast, her husband needs his self-deceptions as much as he does his daily bread.84 Gina is asking for nothing but a peaceful home, and she knows she can maintain one without illusions and without Gregers Werle's ideal claims.

Gregers Werle is Ibsen's personification of a destructive messiah. Unlike Brand, Gregers' mission in life "evolves." He becomes a messianic rebel first, whose intentions are purely selfish, before he becomes an apostle who destroys. In order to understand Gregers first as a man, then a savior, and finally a destroyer, it will be helpful to look at his home, family, friends and most importantly, motives.

Sigmund Freud's letter of August 13, 1937, could possibly reflect Ibsen's thoughts on idealistic revelations: "...the moment a man questions the meaning and value of life, he is sick, since objectively neither has an existence."85 There is no need to question whether Gregers Werle is sick: he reveals his own neurosis when he says to his father that it is because of him that he has a guilt-laden conscience.

84Gassner, Masters of the Drama, p. 374.
85Larvin, p. 88.
Gregers may be asking questions about life's real meaning. There is nothing wrong with this. But Gregers abuses his ability to question, because rather than questioning life's meaning and value, he puts emphasis on life's rights and wrongs.

To Gregers, all is either black or white; his father is evil because he married his mother, thinking she had money; and when she became ill, he left her destitute; his mother is good because she was faithful and had been wronged by her husband. Also, being plagued by a morbid conscience, because he did not tell Old Ekdal about the land swindle, he feels justified in assuming a Christ-like figure in order to save this family from further falsehoods; to him this is good. But Gregers is never aware he is dealing with human beings. 86 Ibsen reveals Gregers' real intentions when he lets him say: "Besides, if I am to go on living I must try to find some cure for my sick conscience" (III.366). His motives stem clearly from one of selfishness, displaying no empathy for the family. 87

86 Ibid., p. 90; Bradbrook, p. 103; and Harmer; pp. 421-424.
87 Raphael, pp. 122-123.
In order to be successful in his messianic quest, Gregers feels he should be closer to the Ekdal family; he moves in across the hall in order to watch them more carefully. He wants to cleanse their past and lead them to a new way of life. Hjalmar soon begins to parrot Gregers' ideas to his wife and child, justifying his newly adopted role by saying, "there are certain demands that a person cannot set aside without injuring his soul" (IV. 368). These claims that Hjalmar and Gregers profess ironically have a turn with fate; the messianic heroes ruin the very soul they intend to purify. They destroy what they have hoped to build.

Gregers' actions are frequently impulsive in the play. He does this in order to save the Ekdals from a supposedly false illusion in order to elevate them to an unattainable, loftier illusion. The noble synthesis of this ideal ironically foils because not only is the idealist (Hjalmar may be included) often disillusioned in the attempt, but the oppressed are inevitably wounded.88 Gregers sustains his existence by being the "bill-collector" for the Ekdal family. He establishes his own harmful illusion by destroying the innocent illusion of the others.

---

Ibsen uses sight imagery which helps to reinforce his important ideas. In no other play does he use images of sight and blindness to unify and clarify the action of his characters as frequently as he does in *The Wild Duck*. Gregers' thoughtlessness and inconsideration is magnified in many of his speeches; his impetuosity and heedlessness is made clearer and strengthened by the actions Ibsen assigns to him. To inspect a few examples of this imagery will aid also in gaining insight into Gregers as a destructive messiah.

Some of the following statements confirm that Gregers' mission is purely selfish. At the play's beginning, Gregers is heard saying, "Now at last I see a mission to live for...to open Hjalmar's eyes. He shall see his situation as it is;..." (I. 349). Next, in his curtain speech he replies, "Look, father, the chamberlains are playing blindman's bluff with Mrs. Sørby" (I. 349). It is spoken to his father, who is bordering on blindness; and it is an affront to Mrs. Sørby. The use of this sight imagery in these two excerpts illustrate that Gregers is capable of a mission without mercy.

Gregers' actions also typify the bungling of his efforts. He tries to give light to his room, only to emerge in darkness and smoke;

---

this may parallel the Ekdal household when he tries to enlighten their dark past, only to ruin a happy home. He is also stunned when Hedvig commits suicide after his eloquent coaching. This blind bungler has ironically "opened her eyes to what gives life its worth." The play ends in a climax of irony when Gregers states: "After all, I don't consider myself completely blind" (V. 383). Unfortunately, Gregers is blind and completely unaware that it is his own careless remarks and ungoverned actions that has caused the problems in the Ekdal home.

Gregers Werle does not realize that people cannot be free from themselves unless they free themselves from within. Hedvig has no real desire to change her life or to follow Gregers' suggestions. An individual cannot conform unless he wants to. As the play illustrates, it is a mistake to try to make someone attain an ideal that is beyond his reach. As with Hedvig, many of Ibsen's characters make self-sacrifices to do what is believed as duty, only to reap negative results.

Sacrificing a human life is absurd. The idea becomes abnormal when Hedvig takes her life to satisfy the pathological truths of Gregers and the inner weaknesses of a man she believes to be her father.91

The Wild Duck can be a tragedy of idealism with Gregers being the moral savior. But this is not Ibsen’s real purpose; he wants to minimize this because Gregers really does not become great or noble like Brand. He has no real love for mankind, and no one really loves him. He exists without attaining any heroic stature, having no regret except that he feels he acted with his best intentions.92 He does not even try to think things out and begin again as Doctor Stockman does at the end.93 His idealistic view is muted and distorted. He is even blind because he cannot look beyond his own self-satisfaction to see the happiness and contentment of the Ekdals. Even after the suicide, he is incapable of seeing that their reality is illusory and necessary. He is a superfluous man whose destiny is to be the thirteenth man at the table, holding an empty vessel, hungering to have it filled.94

---

91Shaw, pp. 104-105.


What, then, is Ibsen saying about truth? Ironically enough, Kierkegaard's attitude toward truth is in direct opposition to Ibsen's analysis of the truth in *The Wild Duck*. Kierkegaard once stated: "Truth is in the minority" and "a single individual is the highest power."95 Based on Kierkegaard, Gregers is justified in his mission because he is seeking personal fulfillment. This is the very core of Kierkegaardian philosophy.

Ibsen goes a step further, and he illustrates this in the play when Hedvig is shot. Idealistic truths are detrimental to certain human personalities. There are dangers in losing one's integrity by obsession with integrity. Gregers loses his integrity because his illusion dictated that truth will save everyone;96 and, his ideal of the truth is defeated because he destroyed that which he ironically tried to save.

Why, then, is Gregers Werle a destructive messiah? First of all, Gregers is a human being who feels he has suffered from shame and humiliation due to his father's tarnished business dealings, affairs

---


96 Koht, p. 355.
with Gina and Mrs. Sørby, and most importantly, his father's rejection of his invalid wife. Because Gregers feels that all should be based on truth, he adopts the role of a savior-prophet (messianic hero), in order to save himself, his family, and the Ekdals. To establish new codes of spiritual purity and to adopt a salvation of all may be good; but when an individual becomes a chastiser of the age, projecting his idealistic claims on another's well-being and future happiness, he loses the right to be called a savior.

Gregers becomes destructive in his attempt to save. He is no longer simply a messiah for the Ekdals with codes of ethical purity; he becomes a destroyer because he peddles truths that this unsophisticated family cannot maturely handle. He allows personal feelings to enter; when this occurs, he can no longer function as an objective observer-participator. Selfishness, greed, and revenge become dominant in his life's mission. When these elements exist as priorities for a messiah, the mission is foiled from the onset.

Gregers' mission has become so egotistical and his ideal has manifested itself in him to such a degree, that he has become a destructive savior. His mission, then, is not the work of a benevolent messiah, but a revolter, a messianic rebel: an excellent example of Henrik Ibsen's internal struggle and quest for truth.
With the completion of *The Wild Duck*, Ibsen's internal struggle and quest for truth has been fulfilled. It also defines Ibsen's messianic hero, the destroyer of God, communities, family and friends. In each of these three plays, he rebukes the prophet-messiah who cannot distinguish between truth and reality; who is unrealistic in asserting his ideal, as Brand; who mouths his minority opinions into the teeth of the majority, like Stockman; and who meddles in a happy home with fanatical truths, like Gregers.

In each of these plays, Ibsen points out the clash between ability and aspiration, will and possibility. Brand and Gregers are enemies of society because they are men of ideals, wills, and aspirations, which go far beyond what the common man can attain. Like Parson Brand, Gregers is a man with a mission; and both fail to take into account the ability and possibilities of their followers. Gregers' mission is as nebulous as Hjalmar's invention, and Brand's ideal is as unattainable as his salvation for all.

Brand, Hjalmar Ekdal, and Thomas Stockman see men going about their common, daily life, expecting them to do better, never stopping to think about the "ability" these people may have in their attempt to reach an unattainable goal. All three proceed blindly,

---

97 Moses, p. 440.
believing that their victims should re-evaluate themselves: Brand for his new ideal, Stockman for truth, and Gregers for his selfishness. All believe that men should give up their old habits, erasing all indiscretions and lies, judge themselves and their neighbors, all for the same ideal. 98

Andre Gide in The Immoralist once said: "To know how to free oneself is nothing; the arduous thing is to know what to do with one's freedom." 99 All of these men, especially Brand and Stockman, are praised by Ibsen because they reach a point of self-realization; to Ibsen, this is admirable. But after their freedom is attained, they become so enraptured in their new-found liberties, that they fail because they do not consider the people. They move too far ahead and too fast; in doing so, they destroy the people's faith and trust.

A new-found freedom or self-awareness, if it is to survive, should "evolve" enthusiastically, but more importantly slowly and carefully. Because Brand is strict, unfeeling and unforgiving, he fails and destroys his mission. Because Doctor Stockman harbors

98 Downs, in D. Christiani, pp. 155-156.
99 Mendel, p. 178.
an obsessed concern for his ideal, he too fails in the eyes of his
townspeople. And, finally, Gregers turns his own selfish, heroic
mission into such a force that it becomes devastating, reaping only
unhealthy and painful consequences.

Ibsen now understands his destructive messiah. Brand,
Stockman, and Gregers are messiahs because they want to change
society and establish a purer code of ethical standards, but they are
destructive saviors because they lack the prudence and discretion
to proceed with their mission without harming their fellowman.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS


Adams, Robert M. "Ibsen on the Contrary."


Thompson, Alan Reynolds. "Ibsen as Psychoanatomist."

Valency, Maurice. "The Wild Duck."


- 64 -


PERIODICALS


Lepke, Arno K. "Who is Dr. Stockman?" Scandinavian Studies. XXXII. No. 2 (May, 1960), 57-75.

Matthews, Brander. "Ibsen the Playwright." Bookman. XXII (1906), 568-75.


SUPPLEMENTARY BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS


SUPPLEMENTARY PERIODICALS


VITA

Name: Susan Taylor Soyars
Birthplace: Richmond, Virginia
Date of Birth: January 26, 1945

Schools Attended:

- Kenbridge Elementary School (Kenbridge, Virginia) 1951-1958
- Kenbridge High School (Kenbridge, Virginia) 1958-1963
- Sullins College (Bristol, Virginia) 1963-1965
- Mary Washington College (Fredericksburg, Virginia) 1965-1966
- Virginia Commonwealth University (Richmond, Va.) 1966-1967
- University of Richmond (Richmond, Virginia) 1971-1974

Degrees Received:

- A.A., Sullins College 1965
- B.A., English, Virginia Commonwealth University 1967

Employment Record:

- Guidance Director, Senior Counselor
  Hanover County School Board, Lee-Davis High School, Mechanicsville, Virginia 1973-

- English teacher
  Hanover County School Board, Lee-Davis High School, Mechanicsville, Virginia 1967-1973