ERDAHL

Ibsen's John Gabriel Borkman

An Interpretation

Germanic Languages

A. M.

1913

IBSEN'S JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN: AN INTERPRETATION

BY

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A. B. St. Olaf College, 1911

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

IN GERMANIC LANGUAGES

IN

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

1913

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

June 5th, 1913

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY

Absalom C. Erdahl

ENTITLED Ibsen's John Gabriel Borkman; An Interpretation

BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF Master of Arts

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on
Final Examination

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Aim

It is my purpose in this thesis, First, to review briefly the evolution of Henrik Ibsen's dramatic technique, giving particular attention to his change from a writer of synthetic dramas to one of analytic and retrospective plays, Second, to attempt an interpretation of Ibsen's John Gabriel Borkman, a play in which the elements of his craftsmanship are in a marked degree in evidence.

A. The Evolution of Ibsen's Technique

I. Introduction

If students of the drama were asked to name the two whom they regard as the world's greatest dramatists, they would likely name the English playwright, William Shakespeare, and that consummate master of Greek tragedy, Sophocles. Perhaps the most significant difference between the two in the matter of technique was that in the plays of the former, with but few exceptions, the action of the whole drama was shown from the stage; in the case of the latter, only its culmination. The one was pre-eminently a synthetic dramatist; the other, an analytic.

It is interesting to observe how Henrik Ibsen in his long career as a writer followed both the synthetic and the analytic formula: In his early works. there is much that bears resemblance to Shakespeare; in his later, we find striking similarities to the method of Sophocles.

Among the qualities which his early works possess in common with those of Shakespeare, is a chronoligical presentation on the stage of a series of events, occuring perhaps in many places, often extending over a long period of time. Further likeness we observe in their many characters representing a var-

ied life, and also in the use of soliloquies.

Ibsen's early works bear a resemblance not only to those of Shakespeare: They contain many of the elements of the noted Frenchman Eugene Scribe. Among them may be mentioned The Aside, The Confidant, Monologue, Misunderstandings, Misplaced Letters, and Mistaken Identity.

In one important respect, however, Ibsen deviated already in his earliest plays from both Shakespeare and Scribe. An action extending only through one day as in Scribe could not according to Ibsen fully explain the causes of the catastrophe; nor was he satisfied that the external events depicted in Shakespearian drama would necessarily give a true explanation--In most of them, it seems, the exposition is brief, and of retrospect there is little, Hamlet forming a striking exception; in it we are given much information concerning the past life of its characters by means of soliloquies, the ghost of Hamlet's father, the players, the queen's confession, etc. In Othello, again, we find scarcely the least of retrospect.-- It seems to have been a conviction with Ibsen from the beginning that the catastrophe of the drama must be portrayed in the light of the past and the inner life of his characters.

II. Some Features in the Technique of Ibsen's Earlier Drama

For the purpose of illustration, I shall take The Feast of Solhang, published in 1856. -- The action of this play centers around a feast at Solhang, Norway, in the fourteenth century. The form and atmosphere of the piece are highly lyric. The romanticism of the time depicted pervades it: We find it in the poetry of the folk-song, the beaker containing poison, the cloister, and in allusions to the supernatural, as, for example, the Hill-King, the elves, and the nixies .

After having read the play we can, however, scarcely fail to realize that this remantic element is but the background of a deep and serious action. And in this lies the tragic story of Margit's married life.

The tragedy in the life of Margit is not brought about by all the out-

er events at the time of the feast; its causes lie deeper and further back in time. We need read but a few pages before we know that Margit's marriage to Bengt has brought her no inner joy and freedom. She married Bengt, not because she loved him but because of the splendors his riches would bring. But in spite of the splendors her life is blighted; she feels like a captive in a prison of gold. This we are given to understand by the folk-song she sings concerning the Hill-King. --We are taken back into the past and are shown the causes of Margit's unhappiness in her words to Gudmund after his long stay in foreign lands:

"He never to me was dear.
'Twas his gold was my undoing.
When he spoke to me, aye, or e'en drew near,
My spirit writhed with ruing. (Clasping her hands.
And thus have I lived for three long years--
A life of sorrow, of unstanched tears!" [1]

After the feast has begun, there appears again a retrospect into Margit's past, told here in the guise of a fairy tale, from which I quote the following:

"But now 'twas the Hill-King, he rode from the north,
With his henchmen and his gold;
On the third day at night he in triumph fared forth,
Bearing her to his mountain hold.
Full many a summer she dwelt in the hill;
Out of beakers of gold she could drink at her will.
Oh, fair are the flowers of the valley, I trow,
But only in dreams can she gather them now!"

We find that Ibsen in this drama avails himself of monologue to connect the past with the present and to effect self revelation of his charac-

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1. Archer's translation is used in this thesis.

ters. In her monologue in the beginning of the third act Margit says in part:

"To the light and life of summer blind--
(She springs up.
But now--! And I in this cage confined!
No, now is the worth of my youth revealed!
Three years of life I on him have spent--
My husband--but were I longer content
This hapless, hopeless weird to dree,
Meek as a dove I needs must be.
I am wearied to death of petty brawls;
The stirring life of the great world calls.
I will follow Gudmund with shield and bow,
I will share his joys, I will soothe his woe,
Watch o'er him both by night and day.
All that behold shall envy the life
Of the valient knight and Margit his wife.--
His wife! (Wrings her hands."

From what I have quoted it will be clear that Ibsen already in this early drama lays strong emphasis on what has transpired in the past. We find, however, that he still retains many features of the conventional drama. We find much action and episodic feature as we do in the Elizabethan drama. He avails himself of the mechanical contrivances of Scribe: We have confused motives, an example of which is found in the false notion that Margit at first entertains concerning the object of Gudmund's return after his long absence. We have misunderstandings, and element of Eugene Scribe, illustrated by Margit's impression that Gudmund means her when he tells of his love for Signe. Still another element of the French playwright is a confusion of effect: Gudmund and Signe, being ignorant of the contents of the beaker which Margit had left for her husband, came near drinking the poison; and Margit, thinking that they had done so, be-

came almost insane.

III. The Old and the New in the Ibsen of the Sixties

Hoping that the brief sketch of The Feast of Solhang will give a fair introduction to the sources of Henrik Ibsen's early technique, we shall turn to the dramas of the sixties. I select here for a brief examination Peer Gynt, published in 1867, eleven years after The Feast of Solhang.

Peer Gynt is a five-act play, presenting an ascending curve-like action to a point in the first act where the exposition might be said to end; then the action-proper begins and rises to a climax found a little after the middle of the third act; now follows the descending action until the catastrophe in the fifth act is reached. It thus follows the pattern of what we may call the normal drama. It resembles much the Shakesperian play. It ignores the unities of time, place, and action. And it is characterized by a profusion of scenes and characters, and by a somewhat chronological portrayal of external events.

These events, which are highly romantic in nature, present the chief facts in the life of Peer Gynt. In his wild imagination he constructs the most marvelous air castles. In his phantasy he resolves to do heroic deeds on a heroic scale; but when put to the test he shrinks from the smallest hardships. Step by step his character dwindles, and apace with it he becomes a most pronounced egotist. He lives in the splendors of his dreams, but dares and cannot meet the serious tests of real life.

From this brief characterization of Peer Gynt, it were not a surprise if some one should ask,"What purpose does the author have with this play? Does he wish to present only these frivolous outward manifestations in the hero's life? Is that the totality of impression we have received after reading the play?" Decidedly no. Is it not rather a psychological truth that the author wishes to impress? the truth that a life of mere phantasy will make an incomplete man, a mere half man. Peer had left Solveig, the love of his youth, whose

life of love could have made him a complete man. Thrown out of balance, he wanders about in the world, living a life of mere dreams and failures. But in spite of faults and countless failures, he has held fast to one anchor of hope: He has never been quite able to forget Solveig. And at last in old age he returns, confesses his sins against her and is saved.

Then as to events effecting the hero's life that have transpired before the events of the drama as shown from the stage: Does Ibsen also in Peer Gynt consider these past events? He does but not as extensively as in The Feast of Solhang; the many episodes extending through such a long stretch of time in the life of Peer Gynt, if they be true indexes of inner motives, afford far greater opportunity for understanding the evolution of Peer's character than the fewer events and more concentrated action that effect Margit in The Feast of Solhang. But even in Peer Gynt he does not take external action to be all-sufficient; only the early training and environment of the hero can fully explain. That Peer Gynt is largely the product of impressions received in his childhood home, is evident from the words which his mother, Aase, speaks to Solveig after he has carried off the bride from the Haegstad wedding:

"Now isn't it clean unbelievable this?
He, that did nought but romance and tell lies;-
He, whose sole strength was the strength of his jaw;
He, that did never a stroke of true work;-
He---! Oh, a body could both cry and laugh!--
    Oh, we clung closely in sorrow and need.
Ay, you must know that my husband, he drank,
Loafed round the parish to roister and prate,
Wasted and trampled our gear under foot.
And meanwhile at home there sat Peerkin and I--
The best we could do was to try to forget;

For ever I've found it so hard to bear up.
It's a terrible thing to look fate in the eyes;
And of course one is glad to be quit of one's cares,
And try all one can to hold thinking aloof.
Some take to brandy, and others to lies;
And we--why we took to fairy-tales
Of princes and trolls and of all sorts of beasts;
And of bride-rapes as well. Ah, but who could have dreamt
That those devil's yarns would have stuck in his head?
(In a fresh access of terror.
Hu! What a scream! It's the nixie or droug![1]
Peer! Peer!-- Up there on that hillock---!"

We get a hint as to the origin of Peer's vanity in the words spoken by his mother to another woman:

(Rummaging about)

"Why, what have we here? I declare it's an old
Casting-ladle, Kari! With this he would play
Button-moulder, would melt, and then shape, and then stamp them.
One day---there was company---in the boy came,
And begged of his father a lump of tin.
'Not tin', says Jon, 'but King Christian's coin;
Silver; to show you're the son of Jon Gynt.'
God pardon him, Jon; he was drunk, you see,
And then he cared neither for tin nor for gold.
Here are the hose. Oh, they're nothing but holes;
They want darning, Kari!"

And the following from Aases death-scene shows most vividly that his wild dreams of achievements beyond those of others were but the fruit matured

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[1] A malevolent water-monster.

from seed long since sown in the heart of Peer Gynt as a child:

Aase.
"Ay, mind you? And when we played sledges,
When your father was abroad.
The coverlet served for sledge-apron,
And the floor for an ice-bound fiord.

Peer.
Ah, but the best of all, though,---
Mother you mind that too?
The best was the fleet-foot horses---

Aase.
Ay, think you that I've forgot?---
It was Kari's cat that we borrowed;
It sat on the log-scooped chair---

Peer.
To the castle west of the moon, and
The castle east of the sun,
To Soria--Moria Castle
The road ran both high and low.
A stick that we found in the closet,
For a whip-shaft you made it serve."

IV. The Period of Transition----The League of Youth, Pillars of Society, A Doll's House

"All literature," says Jennette Lee, "would have to be searched to find a companion piece for Peer Gynt in its romantic emphasis." [1] In this drama with its romantic coloring Ibsen seeks to tell the truth, but as seen in the light of the ideal and on the wings of poetry. But no longer does this formula suit him. He now turns more definitely to the present, the life of his time,

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[1] Putnam's Monthly 1: 367

and prose becomes his vehicle of expression.

In 1869 appeared, in prose form, The League of Youth, which may be regarded as Ibsen's first social drama. This production is perhaps less analytic even than either Brand or Peer Gynt, and far less than The Feast of Solhang and others of his earlier plays which may be said to be half analytic. Almost all, if not all, the action comes within the "frame of the picture." [1]

But from now on he gives more and more room to those events in the action which lie outside the framework of the play, i.e. in the past; finally he presents from the stage only the catastrophe illumined by retrospective dialogue and conversation. This more than anything else constitutes the formula for Ibsen's later dramas.

In Pillars of Society, published in 1877, we find his craftsmanship in a transitional stage. What he in this piece presents on the stage is scarcely half the drama. The first and crucial half was acted fifteen years before. But this must be brought to light in order to understand what transpires in the present. And this he accomplishes by dialogue and retrospective group conversation.

The supposed illegal relation of Johan Tonnesen with the married actress fifteen years ago, as well as the false reports that he had robbed the firm "Bernick", is told in the conversation of the women who have met in Consul Bernick's home for the purpose of furthering the cause of missions.-- At the time the scandalous reports had been attached to the name of Johan Tonnesen, he and his half-sister Lona Hessel went over to America. After fifteen years they return, and in a conversation between Tutor Rorlund, Miss Hessel, Consul Bernick, and Hilmar Tonnesen, remarks are made that arouse a suspicion that consciousness of past, secret sin is tormenting Consul Bernick.

In the second act we find much retrospective dialogue. From dialogue between Mr. and Mrs. Bernick we understand that Mrs. Bernick's reference to the

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1. Mr. Archer speaks of the "frame of the picture" when he refers to action as being within or without the framework of the drama.

past is very disagreeable to Bernick and, further, that he fears the presence of Lona Hessel and Johan Tonnesen. In that between Consul Bernick and Johan Tonnesen, we find that it is Bernick, not Johan Tonnesen, who was the guilty one in the scandal connected with the actress.-- From the dialogue between Bernick and Lona Hessel, we hear that Bernick had been in love with Miss Hessel; but when it had become known that Betty, her half-sister, was to inherit all the money after their aunt, and that Lona should receive nothing, he broke the engagement and married Betty in order to rescue the firm, "Bernick," which then had been almost bankrupt.

In the conversation between Consul Bernick, Lona Hessel, and Johan Tonnesen in the third act, we find that the reports concerning Johan Tonnesen's robbery were false and that Bernick had acquiesced in order to create sympathy for the firm.

But the deepest and most comprehensive exposition we find near the end of the drama:--Consul Bernick was regarded as the strongest pillar of his society. as a man of unquestioned morals; as the untiring and unselfish citizen whose enterprise had brought to the community a high degree of prosperity. He owned a shipyard and was the moving spirit in a project that had for its aim the building of a railroad that would be of immense service to the community.-- His fellow-citizens desire to show their appreciation for his high qualities and unselfish service. They gather at his home, according to what we are told near the end of the last act, where Tutor Rorlund delivers a flattering eulogy and presents to Bernick in their behalf a silver coffee service as a token of their respect.-- Lona Hessel and Johan Tonnesen have urged Bernick to confess his sins, Lona, because she thinks it would be for the happiness and well-being of himself, his family, and his society; Johan Tonnesen, because he wishes to marry Dina Dorf, the daughter born to the aforementioned actress.-- Bernick's conscience now tortures him, and Rorlund's words of commendation and the demonstrations of the

crowd make his situation unendurable. He makes public confession, tells that power, influence, and prestige have been the impelling motives in all that he has done; that his society has been hypocritical and hollow; and that he was fifteen years ago the one who was guilty and that he rose on the false and wicked reports that followed.

I have referred somewhat at length to the portions of this play which consider past events, events that lie outside the frame of the picture, in order to show how far Ibsen since writing The League of Youth has advanced towards the retrospective method.

In the second act dialogue portraying past life is prevalent, a fact pointing strongly towards his later technique. And in the last scene of his next drama, A Doll's House, he seems, after a ten-year "trial-and-error formula," almost to have reached the masterful technique of his modern social drama. Throughout almost the whole of this play we have dialogue dealing very extensively with events that lie outside the dramatic structure.

And in more respects than in its dialogue it approaches the technique of his modern play: There is concentration of time, place, and action. He does not in A Doll's House present society in its varied phases as he did in The League of Youth and in Pillars of Society: He discusses only one section of the social fabric---the marriage relation. He has become more analytic and psychological and thus requires fewer characters. In The League of Youth there are no less than eighteen characters besides people from the neighborhood and guests; in Pillars of Society, nineteen besides citizens, sailors, passengers, etc.; but in A Doll's House, only eight besides Attorney Hinkel's three little children. While he in The League of Youth followed the normal play in having five acts, he has four in Pillars of Society, and only three in A Doll's House.[1]

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[1] When Ibsen had adopted the formula of placing before the audience only the catastrophe resulting frompast deeds, he used as many acts as were needed for the illumination of the catastrophe.

We, however, still find some of the less admirable features in Ibsen's craftsmanship:-- In *Pillars of Society* he retains the happy ending, it seems, out of deference to the taste of his audience in spite of the fact that psychological laws could scarcely admit it.--Never after *A Doll's House* is a confidante so external to the psychological action as Mrs. Linde, and yet occupying such a prominent place, permitted in Ibsen's dramas.--Another inferior element of the French formula, that of striking antithesis, he uses extensively, especially in the first two and the first half of the third act in *A Doll's House.* When Consul Bernick in *Pillars of Society* is afflicted with the awful pangs of hidden sin, Tutor Rorlund heaps upon him words of praise indorsed by the plaudits of the crowd. Exactly when Nora is having a merry time with her children, in comes the much feared Attorney Krogstad; and in the moment when Nora's afflictions of mind and heart, afflictions unknown to the outside world, have caused her to resolve upon taking her own life, she is dancing tarantella.

It is worthy of note that in the writing of *A Doll's House*, as Archer has pointed out, it must have dawned upon Ibsen that there is a deeper, more serious, and a higher form of drama than one involving such mechanical theatricalities. Before closing this play he frees himself from them forever, and the drama ends in honest obedience to vital logical and psychological laws.--The following from William Archer's masterful presentation of Ibsen's craftsmanship throws much light on this stage of Ibsen's art:

> "There is a point where Nora, after Helmer has 'forgiven' her, goes off the stage into her own adjoining room, and when Helmer asks her what she is going to do, replies, 'To take off my masquerade dress.' At that point, as it seems to me, it was Ibsen himself who, consciously or unconsciously, threw off the masquerade. He put away from him whatever was external and mechanical in the French technique. He had mastered and done with it. In *Pillars of Society*, and now in the first two acts of *A Doll's House*, he

had developed the method of Scribe, on a line parallel to that of Sardon, and had reached a point about even with that at which Sardon has remained stationary. He had to employ a somewhat grotesque image--danced his tarantella, and was henceforth to apply to soberer and more artistic purposes the skill, the suppleness, in a word the virtuosity he had thus acquired. When Nora, in her everyday clothes, confronts the astonished Helmer and says. 'It's not so late yet. Sit down, Torvald; you and I have much to say to each other', it is the true Ibsen, of his latest and greatest period, that for the first time appears on the scene." [1]

In this dialogue in the last scene of A Doll's House. Nora's past life is shown, and we are given a realistic analysis of her and Helmer's married life. The most vital things of mind and heart are revealed in a confidential way between husband and wife. And in this dialogue, lasting but a short while, is crowded the vital and crucial action of their wedded life, an action perhaps more true and comprehensive than two hours of external action could have portrayed. Here past events have merged into dialogue, a dialogue pulsating with human life. We have here, it seems, the first clear example of Henrik Ibsen's dramatic dialogue, an element constituting a most important factor in his consummate craftsmanship.

In order to show how vividly past events are laid bare in Ibsen's dialogue, I quote the beginning of the one just mentioned between Nora and Torvald Helmer:

Nora. (Looking at her watch.) It's not so late yet. Sit down, Torvald; you and I have much to say to each other.
(She sits at one side of table)

Helmer. Nora--what does this mean? Your cold, set face--

Nora. Sit down. It will take some time. I have much to talk over with you.
(Helmer sits at the other side of the table.

Helmer. You alarm me, Nora. I don't understand you.

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[1] Fortnightly 86(old series):111;80 New Ser. Living Age 250:566

Nora. No, that is just it. You don't understand me; and I have never understood you---till to-night. No, don't interrupt. Only listen to what I say.--We must come to a final settlement, Torvald.

Helmer. How do you mean?

Nora. (after a short silence) Does not one thing strike you as we sit here?

Helmer. What should strike me?

Nora. We have been married eight years. Does it not strike you that this is the first time we two, you and I, man and wife, have talked together seriously?

Helmer. Seriously! What do you call seriously?

Nora. During eight whole years, and more--ever since the day we first met--we have never exchanged one serious word about serious things.

Helmer. Was I always to trouble you with the cares you could not help me to bear?

Nora. I am not talking of cares. I say that we have never yet set ourselves seriously to get to the bottom of anything.

Helmer. Why, my dearest Nora, what have you to do with serious things?

Nora. There we have it! You have never understood me.--I have had great injustice done me, Torvald; first by father, and then by you.

Helmer. What! By your father and me?--By us, who have loved you more than all the world?

Nora. (Shaking her head) You have never loved me. You only thought it amusing to be in love with me.

The following table will show how extensively dialogue from now on appears in Ibsen's dramas and how it is filled with past events, or events lying outside the framework of the play. I have examined _Ghosts, Rosmersholm, Hedda Gabler_, and _The Master Builder_ and present the following table:

Name of Play	Pages of Group Conversation in Play	Pages of Dialogue Concerning Present Events	Pages of Dialogue Relating to Past Events
Ghosts	15	14	29
Rasmersholm	20	8	41
Hedda Babler	30	34	9
The Master Builder	17	14	37

B. Interpretation of John Gabriel Borkman

After this review of the evolution of Ibsen's technique of the introduction of the past, we shall now attempt a discussion of John Gabriel Borkman.

I. The Meaning of the Play

1. The Death Scene.

It is a cold dark evening after a heavy snowstorm. The clouds are drifting, and but faint glimpses may be had of the moon. At about 8 o'clock this evening we see an elderly couple walking up a winding forest path till they emerge upon a small high-lying, open plateau in the wood. They enter from the right and wade with difficulty through the snow till they reach the steep declivity on the left, where stands a dead fir-tree with a bench under it. One is a powerfully built man in the sixties; the other, an elderly woman of rather suffering expression and snow-white hair. They are Ella Rentheim and John Gabriel Borkman.

"To the left, far below," is an extensive fiord landscape, with high ranges in the distance, towering one above the other." [1] Borkman asks Ella Rentheim if she can see how the country lies free and open before them to the

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[1] Quotations here used are from the drama.

far horizon. She remarks that they have often sat on that bench before and looked out into a much, much further distance. He says that it was a dreamland they then looked out over, to which she adds sadly: "It was the dreamland of our life, yes. And now that land is buried in snow. And the old tree is dead."

Borkman then portrays what he had dreamt of doing. He asks Ella if she can see the smoke of the great steamships out on the fiord, which shed light and warmth in many thousands of homes; if she can hear the hum of factories that he would have created down by the river. But she can neither see nor hear the objects of his vision.--With increased rapture he says: "Ella, do you see the mountain chains there--far away? They soar, they tower aloft, one behind the other! That is my vast, my infinite, inexhaustible kingdom!"

When Ella Rentheim has remarked that "there comes such an icy blast from that kingdom, John!" he continues: "That blast comes to me like a greeting from subject spirits. I seem to touch them, the prisoned millions; - - - - - -. You begged to be liberated, and I tried to free you. But my strength failed me; and the treasure sank back into the deep again. (With outstretched hands.) But I will whisper it to you here in the stillness of the night: I love you, as you lie there spell-bound in the deeps and the darkness! I love you, unborn treasures, yearning for the light! I love you, with all your shining train of power and glory! I love you, love you, love you!"

Ella Rentheim. (In suppressed but rising agitation) Yes, your love is still down there,John. It has always been rooted there. But here, in the light of day, here there was a living, warm, human heart that throbbed and glowed for you. And this heart you crushed. Oh worse than that! Ten times worse! You sold it for --- for-------

Borkman. (Trembles; a cold shudder seems to go through him.) For the kingdom ---- and the power----and the glory ---- you mean?

Ella Rentheim. Yes, that I mean. I have said it once before tonight: you

have murdered the love-life in the woman who loved you. And whom you loved in return, so far as you could love any one. (With uplifted arm) And therefore I prophesy to you, John Gabriel Borkman---you will never touch the price you demanded for the murder. You will never enter in triumph into your cold, dark kingdom!

Borkman. (Staggers to the bench and seats himself heavily.) I almost fear your prophecy will come true, Ella.

Ella Rentheim. (Going up to him.) You must not fear it, John. That is the best thing that can happen to you.

Borkman. (With a shriek; clutching at his breast.) Ah---! (Feebly) Now it let me go again.

Ella Rentheim. (Shaking him.) What was it, John?

Borkman. (Sinking down against the back of the seat.) It was a hand of ice that clutched at my heart.

Ella Rentheim. John, did you feel the ice-hand again!

Borkman. (Murmurs.) No. No ice-hand. It was a metal hand. (He sinks right down upon the bench.)

Ella Rentheim. (Tears off her cloak and throws it over him.) Lie still where you are! I will go and bring help for you. (She goes a step or two towards the right; then she stops, returns, and carefully feels his pulse and touches his face.

Ella Rentheim. (Softly and firmly.) No. It is best so, John Borkman. Best so for you. (She spreads the cloak closer around him, and sinks down in the snow in front of the bench. A short silence.

2. What Caused the Death of John Gabriel Borkman.

We have summarized the scene of Borkman's death. I shall now attempt to point out the causes that brought about this tragedy. And I shall do so,

first, by a short review of the life of John Gabriel Borkman up to his death and, second, by a presentation of the five crises that were the immediate cause of death that evening.

a. Borkman's Life up to the Evening of Death.

Borkman's life quite naturally falls into four parts, that may be designated thus: (1) The Dreams of Youth, (2) A Partial Fulfillment of his Dreams, (3) Borkman's Downfall and Imprisonment, (4) The Revival of Youthful Dreams.

(1) The Dreams of Youth

From a conversation between Frida Foldal and Mr. Borkman in the beginning of the second act, we see what appealed to John Gabriel Borkman as a boy. He says that he is the son of a miner and that his father sometimes used to take him along into the mines. There he heard the metal sing for gladness when it was set free, and its music was like the tones which Frida has played on the piano.

In the dialogue between Borkman and Ella Rentheim in the same act, we learn more concerning the aspirations of Mr. Borkman as a young man:

Ella Rentheim. (Lost in recollection.) I know it. Think of all the evenings we spent in talking over your projects.

Borkman. Yes, I could talk to you, Ella.

Ella Rentheim. I jested with your plans, and asked whether you wanted to awaken all the sleeping spirits of the mine.

Borkman. (Nodding.) I remember that phrase. (Slowly.) All the sleeping spirits of the mine.

Ella Rentheim. But you did not take it as a jest. You said: "Yes, yes, Ella, that is just what I want to do." [1]

From what we have noted, it is evident that John Gabriel Borkman in

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[1] Archer's trans. p. 248; Mindeutgaven (In original) p. 329.

youth had put before himself the attainment of great riches and power as the goal for his efforts. Further on in the dialogue already quoted from, and in the last scene of the drama, we learn that he had hoped to acquire a kingdom and that power and glory were to be his.--Beyond this it is made clear that he has been deeply in love with Ella Rentheim.

We conclude, then, that the two strong forces that fought for supremacy in the heart of John Gabriel Borkman as a boy and a young man were, on the one hand, a craving for wealth and power; on the other, a love for Ella Rentheim.

(2) A Partial Fulfillment of His Dreams

But the power and the kingdom which Borkman had hoped for were not easily acquired. At last the means of their attainment seemed at hand: The directorship of a large bank was vacant. To this position Borkman aspired thinking it would be a stepping stone in the fulfillment of his plans.

But in order to secure the appointment, he must have the help of Attorney Hinkels; he only can bring it to pass. But for such a service Attorney Hinkels asks a price: He, too, loves Ella Rentheim, and he demands that Borkman shall give her up to him. Borkman strikes the bargain and marries Ella's twin sister Gunhild.

Borkman is appointed director and commands a position of power and prestige. He resolves to live a life of splendor, which shall be an index to his station; "he used to drive about with a four-in-hand as if he were a king." --He sets about to execute his far-reaching plans; and what they were we see from what he in a dialogue tells Vilhelm Foldal:

"(Vehemently.) Yes, but think of me, who could have created millions! All the mines I should have controlled! New veins innumerable! And the waterfalls! And the quarries! And the trade routes, and steamship-lines all the wide world over! I would have organized it all--I alone!" [1]

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[1] Archer's p. 221; Mindeutgaven p. 319.

And from what Borkman tells Ella Rentheim in the dialogue in the second act, "And I mounted and mounted; year by year I mounted----," it appears that he must have met with much success in his commercial enterprises.

(3) Borkman's Downfall and Imprisonment

But to carry out such vast enterprises, and to live in such a lavish manner, required much money, and he freely used millions that had been intrusted to him. Of this he informed no one except Attorney Hinkels; his wife, to whom he first of all should have confided these secrets, was entirely ignorant of his misdeeds.

As already told, Borkman bargained away Ella Rentheim to Attorney Hinkels; but we see from the dialogue between Borkman and Ella Rentheim in the second act that she had rejected Hinkel's repeated proposals; and, thinking that she acted on the advice of Borkman, he sought revenge by publishing the confidential letters which he had received from Borkman concerning the stringent condition of the bank.

With a crash the bank fails and all depositors except Ella Rentheim sustain heavy loss. One of those who suffered was Borkman's old friend, Vilhelm Foldal; he lost all he possessed. And we draw the conclusion from the beginning of the conversation between Ella Rentheim and Mr. and Mrs. Borkman in the third act that hundreds were ruined in like manner with Mr. Foldal.

Borkman's property was sold at public auction. Ella Rentheim bought in the "house, and the whole property," and she placed the house entirely at the disposal of the Borkmans. [1] Borkman himself is placed under arrest, is kept three years in detention and five years in prison. --Now has come the time of which Borkman speaks in the last scene, when he addresses the prisoned millions: "You begged to be liberated, and I tried to free you. But my strength failed me; and the treasure sank back into the deep again."

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1. Archer's p. 240; Mindeutgaven p. 325.

(4) The Revival of his Youthful Dreams

When his term of imprisonment was at an end, Borkman returned home. In the great gallery on the first floor, he has for eight years isolated himself from the rest of the world. And there, during these many years, he has been walking "backwards and forwards, up and down" like "a sick wolf pacing his cage."[1] In this long period he has scarcely, if ever, gone out into the fresh air.

Borkman is now forsaken by all his former friends except Vilhelm Foldal, who at times comes to see him, but only when it is dark, that no one may know that he makes calls on a man like Borkman. Mrs. Borkman is ashamed because of the scandal brought upon the home, does not even want to see her husband, and takes pains to keep Erhart, their son, away from him.

During his long isolation in the gallery, Borkman dreams over again the dreams of his youth. He hopes once more to rise to power and glory. He nourishes a grudge against the world. This grudge, as well as his hopes for the future, is seen from his words to Foldal:

"When the hour of my restoration strikes---when they see that they cannot get on without me---when they come to me, here in the gallery, and crawl to my feet, and beseech me to take the reigns of the bank again---! The new bank, that they have founded and can't carry on---(Placing himself beside the writing-table in the same attitude as before, and striking his breast.) Here I shall stand, and receive them! And it shall be known far and wide, all the country over, what conditions John Gabriel Borkman imposes before he will-----" [2]

The two great factors that now inspire Borkman with hope and confidence are, first, Vilhelm Foldal, who on his visits expresses faith in his future possibilities and, second, a belief of Borkman's that he has done no irremediable wrong. In his first dialogue with Ella Rentheim, he says that he has been compelled by higher motives. And further on he tells Ella:-- "I wanted to have at

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1. Archer's p. 172; Mindeutgaven p. 301.
2. Archer's p. 220; Mindeutgaven p. 318.

my command all the sources of power in this country. All the wealth that lay hidden in the soil, and the rocks, and the forests, and the sea---I wanted to gather it all into my hands, to make myself master of it all, and so to promote the well-being of many, many thousands." [1] In the conversation in the third act between Ella Rentheim and Mr. and Mrs. Borkman, Borkman says that during his five years in the cell and the eight years up in the gallery, he has carefully thought over his past deeds, and he has always come to the conclusion that the one person he has sinned against is himself. He had heard a call and followed it; others with power and brains would have done the same, and thus he stands acquitted.

b. The Crises of Borkman's Final Hour

I have now reviewed briefly the varying aspects of John Gabriel Borkman's life up to the time of death. In what has been said. I do not know if there is anything which indicates that Borkman is insane, unless it should be his isolation and walking back and forth in the old gallery. Nor do his conversations with Vilhelm Foldal and Ella Renttheim, found in the second act of the play, which occured only about two hours before his death, give such an indication. And yet, but a short while after, when he goes out to see to all his buried treasures and that follows which we saw in the death-scene, he clearly is on the verge of insanity. The question then arises, What brought about his insanity and death? In my opinion, the five great crises which so seriously effected Borkman in his final hour will explain.

(1) Borkman's Self-Confidence is Shaken

We have as the first crisis the visit by Foldal, who frequently had expresses hope and confidence in future success to Borkman; this time he refuses to do so.

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1. Archer's p. 247; Mindeutgaven p. 329

(2) The Realization of Unpardonable Sin

As has already been mentioned, Borkman did not feel that he was guilty of a great crime; according to his way of thinking, he had committed the greatest sin against himself.-- Ella Rentheim did not know the exact nature of his desertion of her before in the dialogue of the second act. She there becomes aware of the fact that Borkman had bargained with another man for his love and sold her love for a directorship; the dearest thing in the world he had bartered away for gain. And in what follows she informs him of the seriousness of his crime:

Borkman, What crime? What are you speaking of?

Ella Rentheim. I am speaking of that crime for which there is no forgiveness.

Borkman. (Staring at her.) You must be out of your mind.

Ella Rentheim. (Approaching him.) You are a murderer! You have committed the one mortal sin!

Borkman. (Falling back towards the piano.) You are raving, Ella!

Ella Rentheim. You have killed the love-life in me. (Still nearer him.) Do you understand what that means? The Bible speaks of a mysterious sin for which there is no forgiveness. I have never understood what it could be; but now I understand. The great, unpardonable sin is to murder the love-life in a human soul.

Borkman. And you say I have done that?

Ella Rentheim. You have done that. I have never rightly understood until this evening what had really happened to me. That you deserted me and turned to Gunhild instead -- I took that to be mere common fickleness on your part, and the result of heartless scheming on hers. I almost think I despised you a little, in spite of everything. But now I see it! You deserted the woman you loved! Me, me, me! What you held dearest in the world you were ready to barter away for gain. That is the double murder you have committed! The murder of your own soul

and mine! [1]

(3) The Self-Accusation

After Borkman had acquitted himself, of which we have already spoken in another connection, he experienced a terrible self-accusation because he had not begun work anew after his release from prison. In the conversation with his wife and Ella Rentheim near the beginning of the third act, he says:- "I have skulked up there and wasted eight precious years of my life! The very day I was set free, I should have gone forth into the world --- out into the steel-hard, dreamless world of reality! I should have begun at the bottom and swung myself up to the heights anew --- higher than ever before --- in spite of all that lay between."

(4) Dream of Restoration Shattered

Borkman had hoped that he should again rise triumphant; but immediately after his bitter self-accusation, his wife informs him that he is dead to the world and that Erhart, their son, shall redeem his memory. I quote the following from the conversation between Ella Rentheim and Mr. and Mrs. Borkman pertaining to this phase of Borkman's experiences:

Mrs. Borkman. (Looking at him with a lofty air.) Oh, you do not know what I have taken care of!

Borkman. You?

Mrs. Borkman. Yes, I. I alone.

Borkman. Then tell me.

Mrs. Borkman. I have taken care of your memory.

Borkman. (With a short dry laugh.) My memory? Oh, indeed! It sounds almost as if I were dead already.

Mrs. Borkman. (With emphasis.) And so you are.

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1. Archer's p. 245; Mindeutgaven p. 328.

Borkman. (Slowly.) Yes, perhaps you are right. (Firing up.) But no, no! Not yet! I have been close to the verge of death. But now I have awakened. I have come to myself. A whole life lies before me yet. I can see it awaiting me, radiant and quickening. And you --- you shall see it too.

Mrs. Borkman. (raising her hand.) Never dream of life again! Lie quiet where you are.

Ella Rentheim. (Shocked.) Gunhild! Gunhild, how can you----!

Mrs. Borkman. (Not listening to her) I will raise the monument over your grave.

Borkman. The pillar of shame, I suppose you mean?

Mrs. Borkman. (With increasing excitement.) Oh, no, it shall be no pillar of metal or stone. And no one shall be suffered to carve any scornful legend on the monument I shall raise. There shall be as it were, a quickset hedge of trees and bushes, close, close around your tomb. They shall hide away all the darkness that has been. The eyes of men and the thoughts of men shall no longer dwell on John Gabriel Borkman![1]

(5) The Departure of Erhart

Borkman feels that he has long enough fed "upon hopes and dreams." He wants to begin life over again, and he asks Erhart to assist him:

"I will work out my own redemption, that is what I will do. I will begin at the bottom again. It is only through his present and his future that a man can atone for his past. Trough work, indefatigable work, for all that, in my youth, seemed to give life its meaning---and that now seems a thousand times greater that it did then. Erhart, will you join with me and help me in this new life?"[2]

But Erhart will not grant the request of his father; he wants to marry

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1. Archer's p. 272; Mindeutgaven p. 339

2. Archer's p. 282; Mindeutgaven p. 342

Fanny Wilton and departs with her to a foreign land. And this loss of Erhart marks the fifth of the series of crises that Borkman passes through the evening of his death.

These crises following one upon another in quick succession, in addition to physical frailness which eight years of isolation had brought upon him. to past experiences, it were that within such a brief lapse of time completely upset the mind of John Gabriel Borkman; and he went out to see to his buried treasures.[1] And having for the last eight years accustomed himself only to the prison air up in the gallery, he could not withstand the icy blast of the cold winter night; and thus he met the tragic end which the death-scene, already presented, so sadly portrayed.

3. The Relation Between Mr. and Mrs. Borkman

From what we have observed of Mr. and Mrs. Borkman, their love for each other must have been, at the most, but artificial. Mrs. Borkman did not stand by her husband's side when disasters were heaped upon him; she only hated when she should have loved and sympathized. In the beginning of the third act it is made clear that they have never made an attempt to understand each other. Such a marriage relation is nothing but a lie and a hypocrisy and falls before the stress and storms of life.

4. The Effects of Borkman's Life on Ella Rentheim

We find that Ella Rentheim had deeply and sincerely loved John Gabriel Borkman. At the conviction of Borkman she took Erhart, Mr. and Mrs. Borkman's only son, to her home on the west coast of Norway, where he stayed till the age of fifteen. In the long dialogue between her and Borkman in act two, she gives her reason for doing so: It was because of the love of her inmost heart for Erhart and for Borkman.--We see also that her attitude would have been quite con-

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[1] Archer's p. 301; Mindeutgaven p. 350

trary to that of Gunhild, her sister, if she had married Borkman. She says that if she could have stood at his side when the crash came, she should have borne it all so gladly along with him. The shame, the ruin---she would have helped to bear it all---all![1]

Ella Rentheim further tells Mr. Borkman the effects of his desertion:

Ella Rentheim. (In strong inward emotion.) Pity. ha, ha! I have never known pity, since you deserted me. I was incapable of feeling it. If a poor starved child came into my kitchen, shivering, and crying, and begging for a morsel of food, I let the servants look to it. I never felt any desire to take the child to myself, to warm it at my own hearth, to have the pleasure of seeing it eat and be satisfied. And yet I was not like that when I was young; that I remember clearly! It is you that have created an empty, barren desert within me---and without me too!

Borkman. Except only for Erhart.

Ella Rentheim. Yes, except for your son. But I am hardened to every other living thing. You have cheated me of a mother's joy and happiness in life ----and of a mother's sorrows and tears as well. And perhaps that is the heaviest part of the loss to me.[2]

Ibsen's presentation of the effects of Borkman's betrayal on Ella Rentheim is a profound sermon on love and marriage. His betrayal has ruined the best and noblest in her; there remains the mere shadow of what might have grown into a rich and fruitful life.

5. The Significance of Ella Rentheim's Attitude towards Erhart

At the time Borkman was freed from prison, Mrs. Borkman took Erhart home. When Ella Rentheim the last evening Borkman lived made him a visit in the

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1. Archer's p. 245; Mindeutgaven p. 327
2. Archer's p. 251; Mindeutgaven p. 330

gallery,[1] she prevails upon him that she may again have her heart's only child, that he may remain with her until her fast approaching death; she further asks that he bear her name, for it is such a torturing thought that the name of Rentheim shall die with her.

What truth does Ibsen wish to impress by this attitude of Ella towards Erhart? Is it not that in order to see a true marriage relation, we may have to look beyond the sanction of external law and religion, of custom and conventionality? To be sure, these outward manifestations gave an appearance of marriage between Borkman and Gunhild. But if it be love and a complete understanding that bind husband and wife together for life, then, in fact, there existed a truer marriage between Borkman and Ella Rentheim than between Borkman and Gunhild. In her love Ella Rentheim embraced John Gabriel Borkman to the end; psychologically, it was as if he and she were one; in his offspring she has an interest and loves Erhart as her own child.

I have now attempted to trace the causes of Borkman's death and the effects of his desertion of Ella. In a dialogue between Ella and Gunhild following immediately upon the death of Borkman, they give as causes of his death the fresh air, and the cold "that had killed him long ago." And their conclusion, I think, is correct. Long ago when he rejected that "living, warm, human heart" of Ella Rentheim "that throbbed and glowed for"[2] him, a cold took possession of his heart. And this cold brought with it the misfortunes already noted; its final result is insanity, and in such a state he dies from the fresh air while in search for his hidden treasures. I quote the following from the above-named dialogue, which states the causes of death, portrays vividly the effects of Borkman's life, and ends the play:

Ella Rentheim. (Coming in front of the bench.) Will you not look at him, Gunhild?

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[1] See act two.
[2] Archer's p. 319; Mindeutgaven p. 356

Mrs. Borkman. (With a gesture of repulsion.) No, no, no. (Lowering her voice.) He was a miner's son, John Gabriel Borkman. He could not live in the fresh air.

Ella Rentheim. It was rather the cold that killed him.

Mrs. Borkman. (Shakes her head.) The cold, you say? The cold---that had killed him long ago.

Ella Rentheim. (Nodding to her.) Yes---and changed us two into shadows.

Mrs. Borkman. You are right there.

Ella Rentheim. (With a painful smile.) A dead man and two shadows---that is what the cold has made of us.

Mrs. Borkman. Yes, the coldness of heart.--And now I think we two may hold out our hands to each other, Ella.

Ella Rentheim. I think we may, now.

Mrs. Borkman. We twin sisters---over him we have both loved.

Ella Rentheim. We two shadows---over the dead man.

(Mrs. Borkman behind the bench. and Ella Rentheim in front of it, take each others hand.

II. The Technique of John Gabriel Borkman

1. John Gabriel Borkman as a Social, Psychological, and Symbolic Pla

Beginning with Pillars of Society, Ibsen's plays are commonly spoken of as either social. psychological. or symbolic. John Gabriel Borkman may. however, be said to enjoy a unique position, all three elements combine in the somewhat complex action of the drama.

a. Borkman as a Social Play

The elements that go to make it a social play are, first. Borkman, who has placed before himself a false standard of values. Wealth and power constitute the highest aim for his efforts. And the society of which he was a part worships the same standard; when Borkman became director of the bank, his fellow citizens regarded him as an exemplar of success and saluted him as if he were the king.--Second, the conflict between Ella Rentheim and Mr. and Mrs. Borkman, on the one hand, to win Erhart and Erhart's subsequent elopement and departure with Fanny Wilton, on the other, portray a society blinded by custom and convention but at the same time asserts the sacred right of every individual to live his own life.--As a third element that makes it a social play, we may mention the weakness it reveals of that society as a whole which is built upon such a tottering foundation as the home of John Gabriel Borkman.

b. As a Psychological Play

In his dramas Ibsen dealt profoundly with modern life, and the position of the individual in modern society. His long series of dramas touching social problems in their various phases are a testimony of this. His keen eye saw tragedies on every hand; purposeless lives. careers cut short before their time. And as a playwright so deeply concerned with life, he came to study and analyze the causes of these tragedies. In giving this dramatic treatment he employed a prevailingly synthetic structure up to the last scene in A Doll's House. The action is external and largely in the present. But later he held that if truth were to be the goal of his search, he must look beyond the mere exterior often, far back of the present for the causes of events in the present; the veil that hides the past must be lifted. And so he becomes the inventor of a type of dramatic action richer and more profound than that which our physical eyes may behold: the psychological action of mind and heart.

But such action will as a rule, very largely deal with past thoughts and experiences, which can only be presented in some form of narrative. A person does not, however, reveal the deepest secrets of the heart except in confidence to one person. Such a confidential heart to heart talk, laying bare the past deeds and the motives of these, is Ibsen's method of portraying psychological action. By this method John Gabriel Borkman becomes a highly psychological play. The contents of the dialogue between Gunhild and Ella in the first act, the dialogues between Borkman and Vilhelm Foldal and Borkman and Ella Rentheim in the second, and the dialogues between Borkman and Ella Rentheim and between Mrs. Borkman and Ella Rentheim in the final scene, reveal the events of the inner life. Dramatic action of a new type is presented through the agency of dramatic dialogue.

c. As a Symbolical Play

When Ibsen was feeling his way forward to a new, realistic technique that should lend itself to the expression of his views on the social order, he seems to have adapted two new devices, first, the unfolding of past events by means of dialogue, as already discussed, and second, an extensive use of symbolism. To be sure, symbolism had been used by writers before, and was used by Ibsen in his earlier dramas, as, for example, in Brand and Peer Gynt. But here, as well as in the works of other playwrights, it was often loosely connected wit the real action of the drama. In Ibsen's later plays, however, it becomes closely woven into the dramatic texture and lends color and substance to the action. Through the symbol the action is quickened; the symbol is a part of the drama.

The symbol may be an event or an external object. In The Wild Duck and in Rosmersholm we have external objects; the wild duck and the white horses in The Master Builder and in John Gabriel Borkman, an event: the climbing of tower in The Master Builder and the struggle for Erhart in John Gabriel Borkman.

Pillars of Society may perhaps be regarded as the first of Ibsen's plays in which a symbol occupies a prominent place and is intimately woven into the texture of the play. The rotten, unseaworthy vessel, "The Indian Girl," is symbolic of Karsten Bernick, the hero of the play, and of the society of which he is a pillar. The fortunes intrusted to Consul Bernick and his aids will be wrecked just as surely as the lives of those who sail on"The Indian Girl." Bernick does, to be sure, present a favorable outward appearance; but as the drama reveals, his life is one of lies, fraud, and hypocrisy.

The symbols of some of Ibsen's later plays, as, for example, Rosmersholm and The Master Builder set forth Ibsen's views on the conflict of the old order with the new, of custom and convention against truth and freedom. Rebecca and Rosmer in Rosmorsholm sought to emancipate themselves from the past; they wished to be wholly free in the present and build a happier, loftier future; but the white horses, symbolic of the power of the past as it had been incarnated in Beate, Rosmer's dead wife, haunted them until they, too, went to their death in the same manner as Beate.

In John Gabriel Borkman we find symbolism employed in the beginning of the first act where the struggle between Ella and Gunhild for Erhart begins. In the end of the act we already see that Erhart cares more for Fanny Wilton than for either of the twin sisters, as he leaves that he may accompany her to Attorney Hinkels.--The struggle is resumed towards the end of the second act: Ella Rentheim tells Borkman that she must have Erhart's heart. Pleadingly she says that she must have him. She wishes him to remember her when she is gone as a son remembers the mother he has lost; and he is also to take her name. At this moment Mrs. Borkman enters and vehemently asserts that Erhart shall bear his father's name and so live as to shed glory over the name that the father has shamed.--The symbol broadens throughout all of the third act. No less than four now lay claim to Erhart. Mrs. Borkman renews her demands because of the mission

that he must perform, and Ella makes her final plea. But Erhart says that he cannot live his life to atone for that of another; he wants to live his own life. Now Borkman asks his son to assist him in redeeming himself by a ceaseless work for all that in youth appealed to him as life itself. In turn Ella Rentheim and Borkman and his wife all three present their claims, but Erhart stands firm; and he goes out, as he says, to live his own life.

The struggle thus depicted is symbolic of both the past and the future: Certain elements of the past are symbolized in the efforts of Ella Rentheim and Mr. and Mrs. Borkman to gain possession of Erhart; those of the future, by the elopement of Erhart and Fanny Wilton, symbolic of the conflict between youth and age. The following from Jennette Lee's excellent study of Ibsen's symbolism is very elucidating on this point:--"In this play Ibsen returns once more to the struggle between the old order and the new. It is his final word. The old cannot hold the new. It may believe in itself--Borkman, the sick wolf, pacing his upper room, gloats over his success of the past and longs only to renew them in the life of his son. Mrs. Borkman, sitting below, hard and cold, broods over her injuries and plans how they shall be avenged by the same son; while Ella Rentheim, the sick, half-dead woman, is striving to lay hands on the youth, to carry him away from this stern, bleak house, to place him in a summer home where he may carry out the ideals of the past--<u>her</u> ideals of love and sympathy. But he slips from them, each and all, and glides away on the sledge with silver bells. He must live his own life. The symbol is closely inwoven with the plot. It is at once detailed and clear. The play is filled with shadows, but it has none of the perplexing interplay of 'Little Eyolf.' The shadows are clear, not confused. They are a pale, gray company that reach out entreating, threatening, loving hands to the life that is slipping from them." [1]

There is still another illuminative symbol in <u>John Gabriel Borkman</u>:

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[1] A Key to Ibsen, Putnam's Monthly 1: (369)

The vast expanse which Borkman and Ella Rentheim so often had seen green and teeming with life, now barren and frozen; the fir-tree which in their younger days had stood healthy and majestic. but which now is dead and withered, are symbolic of the tragic life-story of Ella Rentheim and John Gabriel Borkman.

2. The Poetry of the Play

There was in Ibsen's early work a highly poetic element, which certainly no one who has read Brand and Peer Gynt will deny. After Peer Gynt he became a writer of prose; he strove to give his public a realistic picture of life. In Pillars of Society, for example, we do not have the poetic and imaginative qualities of Peer Gynt. But when the poet again gives flight to his wings it is not in the form of verse, but in the form of symbol and allegory. Edmund Gosse speaks of this new tendency as found in Rosmersholm as "the proof of Ibsen's desire to conquer another field of drama----------. The landscape in Rosmersholm has all, or at least much, of the old enchantment. The scene at the mill-dam links us once more with the woods and the waters which we had lost sight of since Peer Gynt." [1]

His poetic genius is again set free in The Master Builder (a poem in prose) in the placing of the builders wreath upon the steeples; and it occupies a large space in the last two acts of John Gabriel Borkman: The winding path of the forest, the bench under the old fir-tree, from which Borkman and Ella Rentheim as young lovers looked out over life's dreamland, profoundly touch our poetic instinct. --William Archer makes tho following comments on this play and its poetry:

"He did nothing--absolutely nothing--more masterly from a purely dramatic point of view than the first act of Little Eyolf or the second act of John Gabriel Borkman; but in the conclusion of both these plays the lyric poet gets

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1. Edmund Gosse, Henrik Ibsen, p. 167

somewhat the better of the dramatist. And yet--after all--I am inclined to think that this is merely the inevitable consummation of the process of evolution I have tried to suggest. In breaking away from the French formula, which is, with all its merits, essentially prosaic, Ibsen was merely setting free the poetical element of his genius. When the poet of Brand and Peer Gynt produced The League of Youth and Pillars of Society, it was indeed a case of Apollo serving in the house of Admetus." [1]

3. The Individual Acts

Each act in a well-constructed play is a drama in miniature. It has its crisis and its problem. I shall now summarize briefly the acts of John Gabriel Borkman and try to show the relation of each to the whole play:

Act First

When we have read the first act, we have learned the following facts relative to the characters of the play:- The marriage of John Gabriel Borkman was not a union based on love. Mrs. Borkman's hatred and cold-heartedness towards her husband after his imprisonment shows how artificial it must have been. --We already get the impression that Ella Rentheim must at some past time have been deeply in love with Borkman.--Mrs. Borkman seeks to win Erhart by force and compel him "to live a life of such glorious achievements that the name Borkman shall again shine with its former luster." Ella Rentheim wishes to win his heart and love that through him her ideals of love and sympathy may be realized. But we see already that Fanny Wilton occupies a larger place in Erhart's heart than either Mrs. Borkman or Ella Rentheim.

The problem already touched in the first act is, it seems, Has every individual a right to live his own life? its crisis, the revelation of Fanny Wilton's power over Erhart.

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[1] Ibsen's Craftsmanship. Fortnightly 86 (Old Series): 112

Act Second

The second act is alone a magnificent drama. We need read only a few lines before we have received information that foreshadows the action which follows: When Borkman compares the tones of Frida Foldal's music to those which the metal in the mines sings when it is set free, we already receive a clew as to the dominant idea in John Gabriel Borkman's life. This may be called the exposition of the act.

As the action progresses we see how Borkman had been filled with an insatiable desire for the metals of the mountains and all sources of might, and how he had bartered away Ella Rentheim in order to become the head of a great bank. It was this act by Borkman that caused his downfall; and the act by the hero which causes either his final ruin or triumph, is the climax of the whole play. The stifling of Borkman's love for Ella was the cause of the threefold tragedy in the life of Miss Rentheim and Mr. and Mrs. Borkman.

And this act has also in full measure the elements of catastrophe, in the effects which the action constituting the climax had on Ella Rentheim, which we discussed above in connection with the topic, "The Effects of Borkman's Life on Ella Rentheim."

We have before noted how Ella Rentheim in this act revealed to Borkman his one unpardonable sin and how this revelation forms one of the crises preceding the catastrophe. The realization by Borkman of his great crime is the crisi of the second act. We have as its problem the crime of sacrificing love for power.

Act Third

Between Mr. and Mrs. Borkman there has at no time been true sympathy and understanding. Foremost in his mind was always the call from the mountain treasures; she has never shown understanding for his work, never helped to bear his burdens, least of all when such help was most needed.--The struggle for

Erhart is resumed again. In succession Mrs. Borkman, Ella Rentheim, Mr. Borkman, and Fanny Wilton present their claims. Fanny Wilton and Erhart are attracted to each other; each seems to have found an element of happiness in the other; and so Erhart slips away from the three old people who battle for the possession of him.

The problem in this act is one which was touched in the first, has every individual a right to live his own life? the crisis, the departure of Erhart and Fanny Wilton.

Act Fourth

Mrs. Borkman's hopes are shattered and with that all that made life worth the living for her. The music of the silver bells as Erhart and Fanny Wilton in the covered sledge leave for the foreign land, sounds to her like funeral bells.--Ella Rentheim wishes Erhart life and happiness together with Fanny Wilton. --The departure of Erhart, as before noted, was the last of the crises preceding Borkman's insanity. He goes out in the raw, cold winter night to see to his hidden treasures. Ella Rentheim goes with him, and Borkman remarks, "Yes, we two belong to each other, Ella." Thus, in spite of his heartless betrayal, she, now sick and reduced to a mere shadow, still loves him and sympathizes to the extent that she must accompany him on this his last adventure, while Gunhild, his wife, remains in the house, indifferent to his safety, "hard as the metal" he "once dreamed of hewing out of the rocks."

Though the whole drama is but the catastrophe of the larger drama of the life of John Gabriel Borkman, we have it in its final consequences in the last scene of the fourth act. The inevitable result of Borkman's past life is here portrayed. Having deserted the one who had loved and understood him; the craving for wealth and power yet burning within him; deprived of all that could inspire and give sympathy; the son, whom he had hoped would aid in relaizing his youthful dreams, embarked for a foreign land;--insanity follows. Such have been the effects of the coldness of heart; and while in this state of mind, being

accustomed only to the stifling air of the gallery room he dies from the cold of the winter night, symbolic of the "heart-cold" that had killed him long ago. And the bench from which he and Ella Rentheim when love burnt in their youthful hearts beheld their life's dreamland, Ella now beholds as her youthful lover's death-bed.

Thus each act in the play is in itself a short drama, having its crisis and its problem, and is at the same time an essential link in the drama as a whole. The problem of the second act, the need of a full understanding between husband and wife, has, to be sure, a most intimate relation to that fundamental idea of Ibsen that every man has a right, and it is his duty, to live his own life; be himself wholly and completely.

4. The Three Unities: of Time, Place, and Action

a. Of Action

The review just made of each act in the drama will perhaps have emphasized the striking unity of the action. The means by which Ibsen evolves such unity in his later dramas are a concentration of the action upon few persons and upon one certain aspect of life. In place of portraying life in its various aspects all within the framework of the play, he presents a minute analysis of character. Thus the limitation to few characters became a necessity; also the limitation relative to the aspects of life to be presented. The latter he chose from ordinary every-day life of his environment.

This concentration of action may be seen by comparing, for example, The Pretenders and Peer Gynt with Ghosts and John Gabriel Borkman. -- The Pretenders has five acts, ten changes of scene laid in various parts of Norway, twenty persons in addition to soldiers, crusaders, etc. Peer Gynt has five acts, forty changes of scene laid in several countries, forty-one persons in addition to wedding guests, dancing girls, slaves, madmen, trolls, funeral party, etc.-- Notice the concentration in the following: Ghosts has three acts, three changes

of scene, all in the same house and room, and five persons; *John Gabriel Borkman* four acts, five changes of scene laid in the "Rentheim House" not far from Norway's capitol, on the steps of the same house, in the forest above,- and eight persons.

In the unity and concentration of action so characteristic of his social plays, Ibsen is unlike Shakespeare and other writers of synthetic drama, but resembles very much the Greek dramatists.

b. The Unity of Time

Ibsen's modern drama forms a partial return to the other unities first formulated by Aristotle, those of time and place.

The unity of time, according to the Classic formula, was one revolution of the sun. In the French drama this unity was rigidly adhered to; in the Shakespearian and in the German drama it was usually disregarded, as also by Ibsen in his early works. Some of these cover several years; and in the case of *Peer Gynt*, a life-time. But in his analytic dramas he adheres also to this unity. In them he uses for the action as presented on the stage, usually from 16 to 40 hours; and in the case of *John Gabriel Borkman,* only an evening.

c. The Unity of Place

According to the Classic pattern, the drama should be played in the same place. The *Electra*, of Sophocles, admirably illustrates the observation of this unity among the Greeks. The French drama also retained it; Shakespeare ignored it; so also did Ibsen in his early plays, the action of *Peer Gynt*, for example, takes place in three continents. In his modern drama, however, he observed also this unity.

But Ibsen does not necessarily limit the action to one house or town; he extends it rather to include the locality.--In *Ghosts* the action occurs in the same house and in the same room; in *The Master Builder*, in two rooms in the

home of Solness, on the veranda of his house, and at his new villa a short distance from his old home; in John Gabriel Borkman, in Mrs. Borkman's drawing-room, in the great gallery on the first floor of the "Rentheim House," upon the steps of the same house, and on the way up to and on the open plateau in the wood not far from the house.

5. The Retrospect of the Drama

In the discussion of this phase of the drama, I shall begin by giving the following extracts from two literary critics that explain in few words the craftsmanship of Ibsen as revealed in his analytic drama, a craftsmanship evolved from a formula which we recognize also in John Gabriel Borkman.

"All of Ibsen's later pieces are really nothing more than so many grand final catastrophies. The situation is fully defined before the play begins; all the critical moments are past, and it becomes the task of the play merely to illuminate the given situation and to carry it out to its remotest consequences.[1]"

"A play of Ibsen is always compact and symmetrical. It has a beginning, a middle, and an end; it never straggles, but ever moves straight forward to its conclusion. It has unity; and often it conforms even to the pseudo-unities proclaimed by the super-ingenious critics of the Italian renascence. Sometimes a play of Ibsen's has another likeness to a tragedy of the Greeks, in that it presents in action before the assembled spectators only the culminating scenes of the story. Ghosts recalls OEdipus the king, not only in the horror at the heart of it and the poignancy of the emotion it evokes, but also in the being a fifth act only, the culmination of a long and complex concatenation of events, which took place before the point at which Sophocles and Ibsen saw fit to begin the plays. In the Greek tragedy, as in the Scandinavian social drama, the poet has chosen to deal with the result of the action, rather than with the visible struggle itself; it is not the present doings of the characters, but their past

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1. Quoted from Jaeger by Wm. Morton Payne, Dial 14: 68

deeds, which determine their fate; and it seems almost as though the ancient Athenian and the Modern Norwegian had taken as a motto George Eliot's saying that 'consequences are unpitying.' "[1]

The drama John Gabriel Borkman is but the illumination of the final tragic situation of the hero carried "to its remotest consequences," or, as Brander Matthews puts it, "the culminating scenes of the story," of the life of the hero. Whatever there is of present action takes place during one evening; the tragedies that we in this brief time behold, are not to be accounted for by that evening's events. The causes of these tragedi~~es~~y lie back far in the past; and in order to understand them, we must take a survey of the past, analyzing it in relation to the final catastrophe. In the events of this evening, there has been revealed to us the acts and the motives of acts in the lives of Borkman and Ella Rentheim during, so to speak, their whole life; and we have seen the terrible effects of past deeds in the death of Borkman and the two shadows that take each other's hand over his dead body. And so, instead of receiving only that small section of life which was shown this one evening, we got an intimate acquaintance with the whole past life of the characters, especially hidden motivating forces; and this we got because the drama is but the expansion into four acts of the conventional five-act play, giving us the catastrophe illumined by retrospection.

6. The Method or Exposition

This brings us to the method of exposition as revealed in John Gabriel Borkman. In Ibsen's early plays. his method was much similar to that of Eugene Scribe. He massed the exposition needed to follow and understand the play in the early scenes, perhaps it would occupy about all, if not all, of the first act; and then the action proper began. In The Pretenders, for example, the exposition covered nearly all of the first act. But when he has evolved the tech-

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1. Brander Matthews, Ibsen the Playwright , Bookman 22 : 568

nique of his analytic drama, he employs a different method: He gives little exposition before the drama opens, but supplies it as the action progresses, and the action follows on the heels of the exposition. It is a gradual exposition unfolded as the drama progresses and as the understanding of it requires. It is an exposition that broadens with the progress of the action. "But he is careful to supply exposition before it is needed, letting out in the first scene what is required for the understanding of the second scene, and revealing in the second scene what must be known before the third scene can be appreciated.

"This method is less simple than Scribe's: it is not only more difficult, it may be dangerous; but when it is managed successfully, it lends to the drama a swift directness delightful to all who relish a mastery of form. In Ghosts, for example, the play which is acted before us is little more than a long fifth act, in three tense scenes; and the knowledge of what has happened in the past is artfully communicated to the audience at the very moment when the information is felt to be most significant."[1]

John Gabriel Borkman, too, is little more than a long fifth act but in five scenes. And in this drama, too, past deeds are gradually laid bare when the economy of the action demands. When the end of the first act is reached, the exposition concerning nearly all past events that effect the final catastrophe has begun to unfold. That which has been told is sufficient for the understanding of the second act but not for the following acts. But as the drama proceeds, exposition continues to unfold the past until the end of the drama.--The following will serve as illustrations:

Let us take, for example, Borkman's married life:- Early in the first act, in the conversation between Mrs. Borkman and Ella Rentheim, the whole relation of husband and wife is at once made clear.--In act two Borkman tells Foldal that a woman was involved in his betrayal by Attorney Hinkels; in dialogue be-

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1. Brander Matthews, Ibsen the Playwright, Bookman 23:18

tween Borkman and Ella Rentheim we find that Borkman once loved Ella.--In the third act we discover that there has never been an understanding between Borkman and his wife; in the fourth act, that Borkman's love was with the hidden treasures down in the depths of the mountains, while in the light of day there was a "living, warm human heart that throbbed and glowed for" him, but which he has crushed and sold "for the kingdom and the power and the glory."

The lust for wealth and power, as it dominates the heart of Borkman, is gradually revealed:- first in the beginning of the second act, when Frida Frida Foldal's playing reminds him of the music which he in his youth had heard; the song of the metal as it was loosened from out the mines; in the dialogues that follow between Borkman and Foldal and Borkman and Ella Rentheim, this passion in Borkman and his ambition is laid bare step by step;--it is further revealed through Borkman's conversation with his wife and Ella Rentheim in the third act; in Borkman's going out to search for his lost treasures in the fourth; and, finally, when he from the frozen, snow-clad heights receives "a greeting from the prisoned millions" which he had hoped to free.

7. Ibsen's Dialogue

Finally, a brief discussion of the means employed by Ibsen in his retrospective exposition: In this exposition all that is hidden in the past is laid bare in so far as it has a bearing upon the events of this evening, is a factor in the catastrophe. Psychological analysis, and the present as the outgrowth of the past becomes the substance of the drama rather than a succession of external events. To accomplish this aim Ibsen no longer employs the artificial aside, the confidant, or the monologue. Nor does group conversation lend itself as a means to this end; the innermost secrets of the heart are not revealed in public or in the presence of many. Ibsen's mehtod of bringing about self-revelation is a frank heart to heart talk between two in realistic dialogue, lifting veil after veil from the past, revealing inner motives and the causes

of acts in the life of his characters.

An element especially worthy of note in Ibsen's dialogue, is the brevity of his speeches. This adds life and movement to the play.--Ibsen's dialogue, so to speak, vibrates with life and emotion, because the narrator is also the actor; and, as such, it becomes intensely dramatic.--The technique of Henrik Ibsen's drama: An expanded action involving the past as well as the present of the characters presented through a retrospective realistic dialogue would seem to be Ibsen's chief contribution to the technique of the drama.

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