

IBSEN'S DRAMA OF SELF-SACRIFICE

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Henrik Ibsen, like Flaubert, is a fundamental precursor of all subsequent modern literature. His development, which takes place over a lifetime of playwriting, is nevertheless only obscurely recognized in theories of the modern. Critics quarrel about *his* antecedents: Scribe, Feydeau, as well as Norwegian and Scandinavian dramatists and poets. Yet nothing in any of his predecessors could prepare one for the great prose plays of the last twenty-five years of his career. How did he modernize himself?

Ibsen said of his transition to prose, that he could no longer allow his characters to speak in verse, the language of the gods.¹ It is tempting to begin reading Girard in here, because Ibsen offers us a fascinating variation on the historical moment of crisis represented by Flaubert, the moment of modernization itself, where the disintegration of an accepted political and cultural aristocracy forced everyone to compete for prestige and for unique being in a common marketplace.

In the case of Norway during Ibsen's time, it is the crisis caused by the delegitimation of Dano-Norwegian as the uncontested literary language, in favor of competing versions of an emerging national language for a

¹ Ibsen's famous comment is in a letter to Edmund Gosse, 15 January, 1874: "Speaking generally, the dialogue must conform to the degree of idealization which pervades the work as a whole. My new drama is no tragedy in the ancient sense. What I sought to depict were human beings, and therefore I would not let them talk the 'language of the Gods'" (Sprinchom 145).

uniquely national literature that provokes a rivalry for atavistic or nativist preeminence: Who is the most Norwegian of all?

Ibsen and Henry James (as well as Borges) do not choose chauvinist atavism, yet they also avoid becoming mere disciples of the dominant philosophical traditions which have marginalized them. They are more outspoken discussants of the significant historical and cultural developments analyzed in Girard's *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* because they are from "new" countries, outsiders to European culture.

It is here we must avoid the occupational hazard of critical theory: we must not permit a resemblance between a literary and a theoretical text to degenerate into a transcoding of the former into the latter, without ever considering that their resemblance means that each proposes some contribution to a converging theory of human behavior. Critics who merely convert literature into the theories they already know contribute little to literary knowledge, and nothing to theory. Girard has insisted on the quasi-theoretical potential of literary texts from the beginning. Only by staying as close to Ibsen as possible, can we ever hope to add to the considerable work that Girard's hypothesis has already achieved.

If there is a general principal at stake in not prematurely transcoding the language of Ibsen's plays into theoretical language (not being prematurely theoretical for the sake of a more inclusive theory), there is also the specific risk of burying the peculiar diversity of his dramatic accomplishment. Ibsen is above all the playwright of complex characterization—no one before him was as subtle in motivating the ordinary characters of everyday life. Yet during his time, his plays were awaited for the intense discussions of ideas that they were certain to provoke. How is it that Ibsen is not considered the most theoretical and didactic of writers?

Partly, the sheer number of controversial ideas and positions dramatized in play after play kept him from being seen (for very long) as the propagator of any one of them. Michael Meyer reproduces in his biography of Ibsen a contemporary Norwegian political cartoon, which depicts Ibsen flailing first right, then left, then all (Meyer 447).

More importantly, Ibsen, beginning with *Samfundets Støtter* (1877) [*Pillars of Society*], created a drama of ensemble theorizing conducted by characters themselves. Ibsen's work, beyond the creation of character, was to imagine the conditions and events that might make it possible for ordinary individuals to contribute discoveries about human behavior which, collectively, allow amplification and consolidation as a hypothesis.

The mimetic hypothesis first found itself explaining the spectacular results of negative reciprocity in modern resentment, the unperceived commonality of an isolation experienced by each alone ("they are together but I am alone") reflected and revealed in nineteenth century fiction. I have argued elsewhere (Johnsen 1989) that Girard's hypothesis goes a long way towards explaining the futile waves of successive modernisms, and the critical theories which attend them, which I would now call "mimetic modernism."

Having consolidated its grasp of misbehavior, it was logical that the mimetic hypothesis would turn to consider positive reciprocity and the latent positiveness of all reciprocity. If recent critical theory has often seemed a perfect expression of mimetic rivalry, its necessary inter-individuality (as one form of human behavior) can also sustain more than a "conflict of interpretations." Literary study can assume the value of research when one is willing to learn from literary and critical "others" what one doesn't already know, to be integrated into what *is* known. For literary history, this would redefine as a positive tradition the reciprocities of mimetic modernism submerged under the aggressive posturings of self-born originality.

Drama has historically represented conflict, perhaps resolved. The spectacular quality of dramatic conflict need not prevent someone from the community of author, cast, and audience from imagining how to reassemble or reorder the results of representative human behavior in a positive sequence for positive reciprocity.

If Ibsen's dramas present the potential for ensemble theorizing, what theoretical grasp of modern behavior is Ibsen's drama working on? Ibsen's groundwork in the sagas, which he first plundered to produce a Norwegian drama acceptable to his subscriber in Bergen in the 1850s, gave him, ultimately, an archeological grasp of modern behavior. Ibsen discovered the heroic rules which governed guilt and expiation for rivalry, and blood feuds in the sagas, apparently replaced by the modern judicial system, had survived under the guise of modern "psychological" behavior.²

² Daniel Haakonsen (1966) notes a beautiful example of Ibsen's awareness of expiation in the sagas in "Svanhild," an early draft for *Love's Comedy*. Falk mischievously reminds Svanhild that in the time of the *Volsungasaga*, "a victim (Svanhild) must suffer in order to appease the wrath of the gods." Haakonsen adds that "It will thus be seen that at this period Ibsen fully accepted the idea of vicarious suffering; and an analysis of the chief works he wrote between 1862 and 1873 would reveal that this concept was one that remained with

To begin to retrieve Ibsen's research on modern society, we might follow Ibsen's obvious interest in the remarkable omnipresence of the common word *skyld*. In the sagas, this word designates quantifiable and expiable guilt. Its degradation over time in the Scandinavian languages (and in Germanic: *schuld*) to a common mark of courteous exculpation (Norw: *unskyld*; Ger.: *entschuldigen*) is not unlike the gradual divestment of particular accountability in the English word 'sake'. We will have to pay special attention to language in Ibsen; it is not simply because his plays are about the ordinary people of modern society that makes his significance to modernism strategic. Ibsen had written about modern society while still writing in the older forms: *Kjærlighedens komedie* (*Love's Comedy*), *De unges forbund* (*The League of Youth*), *Brand*, and *Peer Gynt*.

The first modern prose play is *Samfundets Støtter* (1877), where Ibsen portrays the turbulent dynamics of solidarity at work in family and society as exacerbated by modern media. There are a few words that reiterate the syntax of modern solidarity here, and throughout the prose plays: sacrifice (*offer*), especially self-sacrifice, for the sake (*skyld*) of someone else, or to earn the right to be ranked as a supporter (to support, *å støtte*; supports or pillars, *støtter*) of the community (*samfunnet*), to bear their weight for their sake.

This looks like the syntax of primitive sacrificial rite, except that there are no gods addressed who require this suffering and expiation. Sacrifice is secular and interindividual, involving what others are reported to expect in one's own behavior. The drama of sacrifice, especially the appearance of self-sacrifice, is carried out for others, and at a certain level of community, for and in the press, rather than at some predetermined public arena or altar.³

Further, it is possible to reduce the knowledge which Ibsen's characters carry to a schema—in part, because characters themselves refer to its

him for a long time. Nevertheless it is difficult to believe that he could have made any use of it during his realistic period, where all his ideas were presented in such a way that they can be understood and accepted by the ordinary down-to-earth intelligence. The idea of vicarious suffering seems to have little in common with the world of ideas in which modern man exists" (28). Falk's use of the concept of vicarious suffering is clearly exploitative, not a sign of Ibsen's own ideas; Ibsen's realistic period exposes the hypocrisy of modern sacrifice. For a fine mimetic reading of "the chief works . . . between 1862 and 1873," see William Mishler.

³ Ibsen will explore the press' role further in *En Folkefiende* (*The Enemy of the People*), a play closely related to this one. In our time, the site is television.

operations more or less openly, as something well understood. What separates modern society from primitive rite is the secular, often even calculated and hypocritical nature of sacrifice. For the most part, modern sacrifice is psychological, which means it exacts its punishment in 'private'—not in secret, but in all those "nonpublic" areas unregulated and untouchable by the modern judicial system. Self-sacrifice is for prestige, for convincing others of one's superior being through practices that others (not the gods) are said to be persuaded by. It is as if modern society alone has mastered the hypocrisy which turn-of-the-century anthropologists (notably, Sir James Frazer) attributed to primitive ritual.

Aune, the foreman of Karsten Bemick's shipyard, initiates the rhetoric of the hypocritical solidarity of modern sacrifice in the play. When Krap (a senior employee who speaks in Bemick's name) accuses Aune of making speeches to the workers that make them "useless on the job," Aune claims with calculation that he did it "for a stotte samfunnet" (to serve as a support for society).⁴ Krap contests Aune's exclusive claim on the authority vested in this language, by replying that Aune's duty (*skyldighet*) is to the society of Bemick and Company, because it "supports" everyone who works there.

In the next room, Rørlund incites his female audience to self-sacrificial service to society by reading to them from a gilt-edged book entitled *Kvinnen som samfunnets tjenerinne* (roughly, "women as society's maidservants").⁵ He cautiously courts the lowly Dina Dorf, who is treated by the other mothers as a case for pity (Years before her actress mother scandalised the village by allowing the young men of the town to be her admirers). He excuses his timid and furtive lovemaking to her in the sacrificial syntax of the play:

⁴ Rolfe Fjelde's widely-used translation, for example, gives "for the betterment of society" (16). *Stotte* means to support, and is the verbal form of the plural noun in the play's title, *Samfundets Støtter*.

⁵ Clearly, Ibsen's mind is accumulating substance for his next play, *A Doll House*. There is an undercurrent of watching how women are the scapegoats of society in this play, from draft to the final version. Bemick, speaking of his sister Martha, tells Johan that *fordævelsen* [destruction, pollution] has not crept into Norwegian society as it has in America. Women here know that "people ought not to think of themselves first; women least of all. We each have our community, great or small, to support and work for" (Archer 305). Martha, in turn, takes care of Dina Dorf for fifteen years, thinking that Johan's misbehavior has ruined Dina's mother.

Når en mann er satt til å være en moralsk støtte for det samfunn han lever i, så-; man kann ikke være forsiktig nok. Dersom jeg blott var viss på at man ville forstå riktig å uttyde mine beveggrune. (Ibsen 17)

When a man is singled out as a moral pillar of the society he lives in, why—he cannot be too careful. If I were only sure that people would not misinterpret my motives. (Archer 256)

Rørlund's caution (forsiktig) emphasizes the figure that characters develop throughout the play, that a pillar *for*, not of the society (stotte for det samfunn), can be crushed by the same weight it supports to win prestige, should any person not interpret correctly his motivation (beveggrune) for being seen with Dina. Presumably, the correct interpretation for Rørlund's interest in Dina is that he wants to uplift her—he doesn't want her for himself. In any case, Rørlund takes fright at a sound of some potential eavesdropper, and pleads with Dina "for his sake" (for min skyld) to return to the group lest they be found out.

Samfundets støtter considers Karsten Bernick one of society's pillars. There is an uncertain mixture of self-deception and duplicity in the celebrators of self-sacrifice, varying between serving without question its compulsive force, and calculated manipulation of it. If Rørlund is of the former company, Karsten Bernick is mostly one of the latter.

Karsten is the only son of an influential shipbuilding family. When he returned home from extended European travel to take an active role in the family firm, he found it was insolvent. He turned his attentions away from Lona Hessel to become engaged to Betty Tønnesen, Lona's half-sister, who had just been named as inheritor of their family's fortune. He was nearly caught in the hotel rooms of an actress (Mrs. Dorf, Dina's mother), but someone else took the blame for him: Johan, Karsten's future brother-in-law.

In addition to letting his future brother-in-law take the blame for his own sexual misbehavior with Mrs. Dorf, he let others believe that Johan had taken money from the firm that the firm never had. This is a mythical pattern we know well—rival brothers, one of whom is blamed for everything, and expelled, while the other becomes king and benefactor, responsible for all civic blessings that follow this founding difference. Although real public works are bestowed on the community that forms

around Karsten Bernick, it is primarily in the psychologies of the public,⁶ mediated by the press, that the ritual purification of the community takes place.

We get an immediate demonstration of interindividual psychology from the conversation that develops within the Society for the Morally Disabled, which meets in the Bernick front parlor. Rørlund proposes a self-regarding comparison between the decadent societies of the greater world, and the stern moralism of the local community. His source of information is the newspaper. The pious way in which this community quotes "the news" is remarkable; yet, our relation to the news is the same, so it is never noted in the commentaries.⁷ Each character talks disparagingly of the newspapers, as a source of worldly contamination, yet surely this is the point of view proposed by the newspapers themselves, then and now. Each community learns from its newspapers how to piously disparage all these others, who reportedly commit acts of personal and public indecency.

But the force of Rørlund's comparisons do not stop at the edge of the community. Soon he is comparing the difference between the moral superiority of the Society for the Morally Disabled, the charity group sitting safely inside the Bernick's house, and whatever goes on in the street outside.

This group of women has very different interests, yet their gossiping is soon drawn to recite the founding event of the redeemed society to which

⁶ Bernick explains to Lona how the stories about Johan seem to have a life of their own: "You can easily imagine that there were all sorts of rumours in the air after you two had left. It was said that this was not his first misdemeanor. Some said Dorf had received a large sum of money from him to hold his tongue and keep out of the way; others declared she had got the money. At the same time it got abroad that our house had difficulty in meeting its engagements. What more natural than that the scandal-mongers should put these two rumours together? Then, as Madam Dorf remained here in unmistakable poverty, people began to say that he had taken the money to America; and rumour made the sum larger and larger every day" (Archer 337). In the ease with which stories of dishonour seem to spawn themselves and consolidate around their victim, we have a complementary pattern to the capacity for sagas to travel and combine. The sagas raise the hero up in admiration, while rumour pulls him down in resentment. No one knows the vertiginous position of society's "sacred" pillars better than Karsten Bernick.

⁷ Bjørnson's plays, *The Editor* and *The Bankrupt*, are often seen as provoking this play. Bjørnson clearly must also have seen a relation between commerce and the press; the composition date of the plays is very close. More importantly, we note with greater understanding and appreciation the habit remarked on by Ibsen's biographers, that Ibsen's only reading seemed to be the newspapers and the Bible.

they belong. Mrs. Bernick and Martha could have no wish to bring up the events of their own family's disgrace, yet their participation in disparaging others follows the dynamic of gossip, the contemporary arbiter of *fama* and *thumos*, that ultimately doubles back on them.

Several of the Society's members take this difference back to its source, by following up Mrs. Bernick's comment that this community itself was once like the outside: "everything ended in dissipation" (241) (da all ting gikk opp i forlystelser [13]). The Norwegian *forlystelser* usually translates as "recreation" or "entertainment"; William Archer's translation, quoted above, presumably offers "dissipation" to catch the way values are polarized; every social event ended ("resulted in" would better catch the formulaic quality of the idiom "gå opp i") in amusement then, every social event must be for the good of society now—no parties or theatrical events are permitted.

Dina is asked to leave the room, on an excuse that fools no one, when events that involve her mother are hinted at. Mrs. Bernick and Martha, with excuses that fool no one, excuse themselves when it is time to talk about the black sheep of Betty's own family: her older stepsister Lona, and her younger brother Johan.

Mrs. Rummel remembers Lona: "det var en for seg selv! Vil De tenke Dem, hun klipte håret av seg, og så gikk hun med mannfolkstøvler i regnvasr" (15) (a strange being! Would you believe it, she cut her hair short, and went about in rainy weather with men's shoes on! [249]). The Norwegian gives a sharper sense of her motives than Archer's English. She is "one (of those who is) for herself." Mrs. Rummel sees that Lona boldly appropriates the greater autonomy and freedom of men, who wear short hair and sturdy boots.

Mrs. Holt reports that when Karsten came forward with Betty Tønnessen on his arm to announce their engagement to her aunt, "Lona Hessel rose from her chair, and gave the handsome, aristocratic Karsten Bernick a ringing box on the ear" (249). This positive elaboration of the force of Lona's blow against Karsten's manly presumption ("gir den fine dannede Karsten Bernick en ørefiken, så det sang i ham" [15]), suggests that Mrs. Holt, at least upon reflection, is not entirely on Karsten's side. What can these beautiful details mean, but that Mrs. Holt hears in Mrs. Rummel's tone a potential sympathy for Lona's insurrectionary restiveness against male privilege, a buried resentment against the ascendancy of ("den fine dannede") Karsten Bernick.

Further, Mrs. Holt explains that Lona went to America after Johan, when the whole town was in an uproar over him ("hele byen naturligvis var opprørt over ham" [15]). Lona defiantly joined sides with the single antagonist of the whole community. The phrase, "hele byen" (the whole town), invoked several times in the play as supreme authority, carries the same register of mythological unanimity in English: they speak for an imaginary totality in just the way newspapers and other media do, only to remind each other of what everyone knows.

The whole episode is beautifully motivated by what everyone knows of the dynamics of modern gossip. Each interlocutor maliciously dares the other to break propriety by urging the other not to mention the single spots which mar an otherwise immaculate family ("å jo, Lona Hessel er nok også en av solplettene i den Bernickske familieulykke" [15]). The common traits of transgressive reportage and retributive "justice" link freeform gossip to investigative or "deconstructive" journalism in the modern period.

We learn of Lona's antithetical practice both from the behindback chatter of the Society for the Morally Disabled, and from Lona herself, who suddenly returns with Johan after fifteen years. Lona immediately scandalizes her family in a way that they all remember. When they ask her why she says "we" traveled second class, she answers "Jeg og barnet, naturligvis" (Me and the boy, of course [21]), daring them to misunderstand that she has a child and no adult male for a husband, nor a young boy for a companion.

Then Lona asks if there has been a death in the family, because they are all sitting around sewing white things in the dark, Rørlund, falling for the trap, says impressively that they are The Society for the Morally Disabled. Lona replies, "half to herself," "these nice-looking, well-behaved ladies, can they be—?" (271).

Lona fits herself beautifully into the expectations of insurrectionary behavior that have preceded her. Lona has a romantic ego. She has always sought the frisson of rubbing society the wrong way, certain of her singular preeminence if everyone is shocked. Ibsen, like Flaubert, Henry James, and James Joyce, is fascinated by the dynamics of modernism at work in the provinces of world culture. Lona, like Emma Bovary, seeks to scandalize the provincials, *épater les bourgeois*. Emma and Lona belong to the portrait of "masochism" that Girard presents of the nineteenth century: the avant-gardist who seeks punishment from the crowd, to certify his or her unique virtue in single opposition to the vulgarity of those who reject them. This psychology accompanies and even perverts the growing comprehen-

sion of the sacrificial system. Romantics deify themselves as victims, they scandalously wrap themselves in the hermeneutic of the sign of Christ, the Lamb of God, the perfect victim.⁸

To plot the return of the scapegoat, as the literary histories that follow from Northrop Frye suggest, is one way modern writers collectively theorize the interdividual behavior of their own historical moment. Yet the theory that writers do must work within the research consensus of a common reading public's common (in Virginia Woolf's sense of "common") understanding. What might a recognizably human character believably do? The most pressing question, asked first by Rørlund, is why has Lona returned? Does she want more scandal? Revenge on all those who have rejected her, beginning with Bernick, and the community that has crystallized around him?

Ibsen gives Lona an incredible role to play, one that has never been adequately understood. Like Christopher Newman in James's *The American*, she refuses revenge, having been refused in desire. Her difficulty is to articulate a postsacrificial nonviolence in a world where language is given over to hypocriticism. Her answer to Rørlund, which closes Act I, gave a young Irishman (James Joyce) a luminous alternative to that modern negative interdividuality that Girard in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* characterizes as "resentment, rivalry, and impotent hatred" (see Mason and Ellmann 46).

ADJUNKT RØRLUND: *Del* Med tillatelse, frøken, hva vil *De* gjøre i *vår* forening?

FRØKEN HESSEL: Jeg vil luften ut, herr pastor. (22)

RØRLUND: You? Allow me to ask, Miss Hessel, what you will do in our Society?

LONA: I will let in fresh air, Pastor (273)

If Lona's scandalous effect on the community is the same as it always was, things have otherwise symmetrically reversed from festival to antifestival. Over fifteen years, Bernick's company, his personal standing in the community and the community itself prosper from Johan's expulsion. The community as a whole gives up festival for one long antifestival, wary always of any disruptive force, any return to the gaiety of the past, for

⁸ There are several critics who discuss *Kindermord* as a romantic motif in Ibsen. For a good overview, see Terry Otten.

which playgoing is a recurrent emblem. The community forms around Bernick, under a program of never enjoying things, never doing anything for oneself. One must always appear to be doing for the sake of others.

Bernick is no Oedipus. He *knows* how the community was reconciled by a founding act of scapegoating, which made him its leader; the last thing he wants to do is to lead an enquiry into it, to deconstruct the founding myth.

Karsten knows that his own reputation must remain spotless, in order to continue his success in financial speculation. He clearly feels the necessity of approval from society as represented by the press. Throughout the play, he worries lest the whole society come down on him, should he ever show any fault. Karsten's speeches are a litany of modern hypo-criticism.

By Act II, Bernick's latent problems begin to converge on his household. He has secretly bought up land for an alternate rail route to the one he helped quash earlier, when he argued that the outside world would contaminate the community. In fact, the earlier route would have competed with shipping routes essential to his company's interests. If the town turns on him when it comes time to tell them that he bought all this land to benefit them, for their sake rather than his, he will lose everything.

He does not explain why. While we could rationalize that the town needs to approve the railroad, in order that Karsten's land-purchases be valuable, Karsten never offers this explanation. The absence of such a rational explanation allows the impression that public opinion has some metaphysical, life-and-death authority over his being, his safety, as if their looks of approval could turn into a curse to destroy him.⁹

It is just at this delicate moment that Johan, his wife's brother, and Lona Hessel, her half-sister, return from America. Karsten is in danger of being contaminated by the false reputation he created to accompany Johan's departure, fifteen years before.

To think of their coming home just at this time, when so much depends on unmixed good-feeling, both in the press and in the town! There will be paragraphs in the papers all over the country-side. Whether I receive them well or ill, my action will be discussed, my motives turned inside out. People will rip up all

⁹ In earlier drafts, it is clear that Bernick's business partners control influence over private and public funds. See McFarlane (141).

those old stories—just as you do. In a society like ours . . .
 [Tosses down his gloves upon the table.] And there isn't a soul
 here that I can confide in, or that can give me any support. (277)

Karsten asserts that his greater substance depends on his standing ("stemning" 23), the status of his being in the press—not simply the people who do business with him or who know him, but all who can read about him. In a way all too familiar to any modern public figure, Karsten knows that any stories about his scandalous relatives will damage him by contaminating him, no matter whether these stories tell of him welcoming or disowning these "Americans."

Karsten's anxiety first sounds like megalomania, he even worries about newspapers in neighboring communities (*avisene i nabobyene* [23]), but his good standing in his own community could be ruined by what other communities say about him. Given the circulation within modern media, the whole world could turn against him.

Literally, Karsten worries about "the uproar" over this old trouble (*Der vil bli rørt opp i alt dette gamle* [23-4]). The newspapers will bring attention back to problems that were overlooked at the time. The newspapers create an agoraphobic sense of a crowd, a roaring mob that could materialize at any moment at his very door to denounce him for historic sins.

Bernick sees threats everywhere. He complains to his wife about her relatives, then complains when she cries that the town will talk about how Mrs. Bernick was crying. Bernick's fears are augmented by media's ability to enhance rumor's flight, to get stories out and around. Newspapers dig up old trouble with the same unerring accuracy as a domestic partner.

In the end, Bernick fears, as Rørlund did, that they will be overheard. The "somebody" they hear in the hall is Aune. Bernick has pressed his shipyard to repair his own boat before other clients'. But "The Indian Girl" has kept ashore American sailors whose carousing is scandalizing "the whole town" (*hele byen*). Bernick reads in the newspaper accounts an attempt to blame the rowdy American misbehavior on him, because his shipyard has worked on his own ship, not "The Indian Girl." He must master these "*ondskapsfulle og skumlende avisskriverier*"(25). "*Enten å få pressen på halsen eller få den velvillig stemt for meg*"(21) (either they're on my neck, or they will serve as a willing support for me).

Aune's role in the sequence of Act II shows Ibsen's genius for imagining how individual "theorists" might arrive at conclusions in a

sequence or context that allows them to be consolidated into a general hypothesis. Without knowing anything of what Johan will say to Karsten, (and without being a mere mouthpiece for Ibsen or Girard), Aune's reply shows that he knows the nearest person, the one most likely to be sacrificed, will be the innocent, not the one responsible. Even his family will blame him, not Bernick for Aune's dismissal (*ikke gi Dem skylden* [26]).

Unlike Johan, Aune is an unwilling and inappropriate victim, he argues, because he already bears enough responsibility for others. If Bernick argues that society must come before Aune himself, Aune argues that his family is itself a little society, for whom he serves as pillar:

That little community I've been able to support and hold together because my wife believed in me, my children believed in me. And now the whole thing is to fall to pieces. (284)

Like Bernick, Aune could be crushed by the weight he carries of those who believe in his support.

Bernick, in reply, smoothly regains control of hypocriticism by identifying Aune as the minority that must be sacrificed to a majority greater than his family:

. . . the less must fall before the greater; the part must, in heaven's name, be sacrificed to the whole. I can give you no other answer; and you'll find it is the way of the world. (284)

Bernick declares this formula immutable, in God's name, as the way things go in this world.

Hjalmar, Betty's cousin, follows Aune. Hjalmar vividly contributes to the ensemble theorizing of sacrificial solidarity as well as Bernick's worst anxieties. When Lona and Johan walk in the street,

people turned round and looked after them. It ran like wildfire over the town—like a fire on the Western prairies. There were people at the windows of all the houses, head to head behind the curtains, waiting for the procession to pass. (286-7)

Public opinion, for better and for worse, is acutely contagious. Bernick is especially alarmed when Hilmar warns that the papers will put a stop to these "Americans" joined in the popular mind to Bernick's family. Hilmar explains that a journalist at his club has questioned him, and knows the

story Bernick allowed to circulate about Johan embezzling the firm's money.

As Karsten soon discovers, Lona Hessel has orchestrated this public spectacle which so scandalizes Hjalmar, as well as the entire community. Lona and Johan are a remarkable couple at the center of the mob. Each understands very well how public opinion is mobilized, yet Johan is so indifferent, and Lona so sedulous before public reaction. Johan's relative indifference to the pleasures of avant-gardist posturing grants additional valuable insights into hypocritical sacrifice.

Bernick fully admits to Johan that the founding event behind his success was the arbitrary designation of an innocent victim, who is blamed for everything that went wrong.

BERNICK: My house and home, my domestic happiness, my whole position in society—all these I owe to you.... Not one in ten thousand would have done what you did for me then. . . —that you should have the generosity to turn appearances against yourself and go away. (298-9)

While it is true that primitive sacrifice (as explained by the mimetic hypothesis) also tries to ensure the willingness of the victim, thus safeguarding his beneficiaries from the charge of persecution and the danger of reciprocal, contagious violence, Johan's affable willingness to take the blame strikes a modern, psychological note. Johan, fifteen years later, discusses his self-sacrifice with Karsten calmly, as an exercise in managing public opinion.

JOHAN:... Var vi ikke begge to unge og lettlivete? En av oss måtte jo dog ta skylden på seg ...

BERNICK: Men hvem var nærmere til det enn den skyldige?

JOHAN: Stopp! Den gang var den uskyldige nærmest til det. Jeg var jo frank og fri, foreldreløs___Og hvem ville ikke gjerne ha ofret seg for deg, især når det ikke gjaldt annet enn en måneds bysladder, og en så med det samme kunne løpe ut i den vide verden. (30)

JOHAN: . . . Were we not both of us young and a bit reckless? One of us had to take the blame upon him . . .

BERNICK: Yes, and the guilty one was the obvious person.

JOHAN: Stop! Then the obvious person was the innocent one. I was alone, free, an orphan. . . . Who would not gladly have

served as your scapegoat, especially when it only meant a month's town-talk, and an excuse for making a dash into the wide world. (298-9)

Johan insists that one of them had to take the *skylden* on himself, but says nothing about guilt—they are equal in youth and attitude. We must restrain ourselves from simply transcoding these remarkable parallels to Girard into a comprehensive and already complete expression of the mimetic hypothesis, in order to see how the full articulation of modern sacrifice, across several characters, establishes itself in the play. Ibsen never seems didactic even when he is most read for his ideas, because characters collectively work up the play's hypothesis of human interdividuality. Johan proposes the requisite singularity of the sacrificial victim by thinking that only one person, of all those men enamored of Mrs. Dorf, was caught in such a compromising situation.

Bernick does not disagree that only one person should take the guilt, but he argues that "the closer" (*naermere*) should have taken it. We know what Bernick means, but what does Johan mean when he counters that the "guiltless" one was the closest this time?

It is startling to hear Johan put aside so casually and knowingly Karsten's anxious commitment to the judicial determinism of guilt and punishment in favor of a device that will pacify public opinion. Modern literature suggests again and again that within the world of justice, wherever no laws are clearly broken, the primitive world of sacrificial reconciliation reigns at the level of interdividual psychology.¹⁰

We must continue to honor Ibsen's commitment to credible characterization. There are local and specific reasons for what characters say, as their in(ter)dividual thinking excavates elements of the mimetic hypothesis. Johan works from the inside, as the play works toward the outside, to a greater comprehension of the system. Johan probably uses "nearest" first of all because he is certain that he is turning Bernick's argument (and thus his language) back on itself. He elaborates his appropriation of Karsten's use of "nearest" by recalling that he was free of any prior responsibilities for anyone else's sake. Johan has no children and no parents—he could choose for whose sake he would bear guilt and expulsion.

¹⁰ In *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard points to the relations outside national boundaries that also succumb to primitive reciprocity.

Karsten concludes his discussion with Johan by explaining how his sister Martha has taken responsibility for Dina Dorf. Karsten's glib explanation of how he has cared for his sister in answer to Johan's concern is quite damning. Karsten explains that he made himself a partner to his mother in the family business. "Her" share after accounting amounted to nothing, and thus Martha inherited nothing.

When Johan replies that in America women are not thought of as mere retainers in a male-dominated household, Karsten answers that "here, in our little circle, where, thank heaven, corruption has not as yet managed to creep in—here women are content with a modest and unobtrusive position" (304). "People ought not to think of themselves first; women least of all. We have each our community, great or small, to support and work for" (305).

Ironically, Martha's own explanation reveals that she has sacrificed herself for Johan, not Karsten, "to expiate where . . . [he] had sinned" because a woman had died for his sake (307). Martha has sacrificed her life to pay for Johan's guilt. She has "stood in his place" (309) as his "substitute" (*vaert din stedfortreder* [34])—raising Dina, waiting for the prodigal to return. Karsten has never uttered the "exonerating" word (*unnskyldende ord*) for Johan, which would have also released Martha from her self-sacrifice.

Johan took the blame on himself because he admired Karsten, and only now mildly suspects that Karsten cultivated his friendship to get Betty. In any case, "exile" was preferable to grinding away in the office. At this point, he feels that he sacrificed very little of himself. In fact, the world beyond the community enhances the status of not only Karsten, but Betty as well; one returns glamorized.

Martha's sacrifice of taking Johan's place at home has cost her a good deal, yet it is perhaps solely in her analogy of the prodigal son that she expresses resentment against Johan, that she has dutifully, without credit, borne his burden at home.

Karsten attempts to head off trouble with Lona as he had with Johan, but she is a more formidable interlocutor, undercutting his self-serving posturing. Karsten begs Lona's forgiveness, but Lona asks him not to get sentimental—it doesn't suit either one of them. He wants Lona to believe that he loved her, that his entanglement with Mrs. Dorf was a temporary aberration. Why should this matter fifteen years later?

The line of Karsten's comments makes it clear that he is trying to exonerate himself (*jeg kan iallfall unnskyldte meg* [35]). He is listing off his

guilty behavior, not preparing an argument. Lona stops him by asking, "What do you think has brought me home just now?" (313). It is an apt question—Betty has already accused Lona of returning out of jealousy.

Karsten is like Burgundy in *King Lear*. He would not love what the community hates; if at first he appears to be different from the vulgar crowd, as Lona does, with his European sophistication, it soon becomes clear that he apes their desire. Lona accuses him of being unable to withstand the scorn the community directs towards her (which she has solicited). She reminds Karsten of the faintness of his love—how, when he returned, he was chastened by the community's attitude to Lona.

FROKEN HESSEL: ... da du hørte spotteglosene som haglet ned over meg; da du fornåm latteren over alt det som de her kalte mine forkjærtheter...

KONSUL BERNICK: Du var hensyntes den gang.

FRØKEN HESSEL: Mest for å egrer disse skjørtekledde og buksekledde snerper som sjokket om i byen. (35)

LONA:... when you saw the ridicule that poured down on me; when you heard the laughter at what were called my eccentricities ...

BERNICK: You were inconsiderate in those days.

LONA. Mainly for the sake of annoying the prudes, both in trousers and petticoats, that infested the town. (314)

Lona believes that the first reason Karsten became infatuated with Betty was that she had the approval of the entire community: "young, beautiful, idolized by everyone" (314). Archer's translation doesn't let us see how Karsten's comment on Lona's obstinate contrariness (*forkjærtheter*) corroborates Lona's analysis of him. Karsten doesn't sympathize with the people Lona "aggravates" (*egrer*) by being "inconsiderate" of their sensibilities. Rather, he finds her reckless (*hensynlos*) for deliberately setting the whole community against herself. She only adds as a second reason that it became known that Betty would inherit all her aunt's money, and Lona would inherit nothing.

Lona is shocked when Karsten tells her that he chose Betty "entirely for the sake of the money" (315) (for pengenes skyld likefrem [35]). He claims that he had to find some way to save the family firm. "So you saved the house of Bernick at the expense of a woman"(316). Bernick excuses himself by saying blithely that Betty loves him (anyway), but Lona never

lets him live in these lies. Lona's quick rejoinder "But I?" reminds Bernick that the deception has been at her expense.

The conversation between Bernick and Lona shows Ibsen's gift for representing how interdividuality makes research into human behavior possible. Lona doesn't already know the truth about Karsten, but she knows what the hypocrisy of a false, enforced unanimous resolution feels like, and resists it obstinately. Karsten, on the other hand, compulsively works to get the whole community with him; Lona knows she is right if the whole community is against her. Bernick always tries to close an argument, to enforce agreement; Lona always wants to open one, or start one. Together, they force each other to learn what they don't already know.

Bernick answers Lona's reminder of what his desertion cost her, by saying she wouldn't have been happy with him (anyway). Then Lona asks him if that was why he rejected her—for her sake? Bernick replies with an answer that he has already given many times, that he does not act for his own sake, but for the sake of the community that depends on the Bernick family business.

FROKEN HESSEL: Er det også for samfunnets skyld at du i disse femten år er blitt stående i løggen? (36)

LONA: Is it for the sake of the community, then, that for these fifteen years you have stood upon a lie? (316)

Lona deflects Karsten's answer by asking why he has lied to Betty, what she later calls a triple lie—to her, Johan, and Betty. When Karsten answers that he wished to spare Betty's feelings, Lona can go no further, except to begin again, to ask him if he is happy. His answer is enough to organize any audience against him.

Rørlund tries to stop Dina Dorf from going off with Johan by informing her that Johan was the cause of her mother's misfortune. Johan had remained indifferent to what the community accused him of, but demands that Karsten now "take the blame upon [his] own shoulders (340)" (ta skylden for). The verbal conflict between Karsten and Johan further exposes the scandalous spectacle of a hypocritical understanding of the sacrificial dynamics of society.

Karsten insists that his spotless reputation keeps him from being crushed by the community he supports. "All my opponents will join forces and overwhelm me They will crush me beneath the weight of rumors and slanders" (345). He is frightened enough to allow Johan to book

passage to America on a ship he knows has been improperly recaulked in his own shipyard.

In Act IV, Rummel (one of Beraick's partners in the rail scheme) orchestrates a public show of unanimous support for Consul Bernick. Rummel misses no opportunity for unanimity. When a procession of townspeople arrives at the Bernick household, their garden window curtains will be drawn to face the "surging multitude" (371). Sandstad will address the crowd about "harmony between the different classes of humanity"; Vigeland will "express the fervent hope that our new understanding may not disturb the moral basis on which we stand"; and Rummel himself will call attention to "the claims of Woman, whose more modest exertions are not without their uses in the community" (368).

That evening, Rorlund introduces Bernick to his fellow citizens, hitting all the themes of hypocritical solidarity, emphasizing Bernick's spotless reputation, as well as the benefit to the community from the recent departure of Johan. When Bernick faces the crowd, he has been providentially saved from being guilty of Johan's death and from the loss of his runaway son in the same ship.

Bernick's speech begins by wishing to "bring home to ourselves the truth—the truth which has, until this evening, been utterly and in all things banished from our community" (399) (*sannheten, som inntil i aften gjennomgående og i alle forhold har vaert husvill i dette samfunn* [62]). Bernick begins by identifying himself as the person who has been secretly buying up land for the proposed rail line, because he "knew and feared the tendency of our society to suspect impure motives behind everything a man undertakes" (400) (*fordi jeg kjente og fryktet vårt samfunns tilbøelighet til å skimte urene beveggrunner bakved alt det en mann her foretar seg* [62]). Bernick is still defensive, of course, but his disclaimer helps fill out the allomorphs of the mimetic paradigm, the self in relation to Other and others. Success over the Other and others only comes when one is seen as wanting nothing for oneself. Failure comes when one is found to want for oneself.

Finally, Bernick takes back the blame that Johan has carried onto himself. "Fifteen years ago I swung myself aloft by these rumors; whether I am now to fall with them is for you to decide" (403). "But do not decide this evening. I ask every one of you to go home—to collect himself—to look into himself. When your minds are calm again, it will be seen whether I have lost or gained by speaking out" (404).

When the crowd has been dispersed by Bernick's insistence that each collect himself back from the mob,¹¹ Bernick thanks his wife, sister, and Lona, calling them "the pillars of society." Lona once again serves as the reciprocal voice. She refuses a new mystification of self-sacrifice by asserting rather that "the spirits of truth and freedom—these are the Pillars of Society" (409) (sannhetens og frihetens ånd—*det* er samfunnets stØtter [105]).

Ibsen's subsequent plays continue to theorize different aspects of the hypocrisy of modern sacrificial solidarity, nowhere more powerfully sharing its understanding with an audience than in the exuberance of Nora's release from self-sacrifice for another's sake at the end of *Et Dukkehjem* (*A Doll's House*), or in the abominable scandal of *Vildanden* (*The Wild Duck*), where a child succumbs to the idea that she can win back her father's love by sacrificing herself for him.

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¹¹ In an earlier draft, Bernick asks the crowd, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone" (McFarlane 193). The draft shows that Ibsen knows of the "things hidden since the foundation of the world." Perhaps he withdrew the allusion to keep Bernick's ability to defuse the mob modern, secular, and hypocritical.

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