

# SHAKESPEARE IN IBSEN'S DRAMA

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**Abstract. Shakespeare in Ibsen's Drama.** Through comparative reading, I elaborate on claims in previous Ibsen research on Shakespeare's influence on Ibsen. The main point is that aspects of Ibsen's way of creating dramatic characters from *Brand* (1866), Ibsen's Scandinavian breakthrough, via *An Enemy of the people* (1882) to his last and modernistic play *When We Dead Awaken* (1899), can be regarded as influenced by Shakespeare, especially one particular Shakespeare play, the one that according to T.S. Eliot is Shakespeare's most successful play: *Coriolanus* (1607-1608). Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* is a Roman general and a complex drama character whose virtues can be said to turn into his vices and who's moral absolutism makes him socially and politically homeless, and what I argue, is that these aspects might have influenced Ibsen's way of portraying characters.

**Keywords:** *Ibsen; Shakespeare; dramatic characters; influence.*

## I. Introduction

Harold Bloom is probably right in claiming that Ibsen was more influenced by Shakespeare than he was willing to admit himself (Bloom, 1994, p. 355). Ibsen did not speak or read English, though, and he only knew Shakespeare's plays from translations and performances. And whereas Strindberg often commented on other authors, including Shakespeare, Ibsen rarely spoke of other authors. In 1855, however, Ibsen gave a talk on Shakespeare, "Shakespeare and Scandinavian drama". Unfortunately, this talk is lost, and we know nothing about its contents.

In the majority of the academic studies – especially older studies – of Shakespeare and Ibsen, the main focus is on echoes, traces of, or references in Ibsen's oeuvre to specific Shakespeare plays or to specific characters or lines in Shakespeare plays. Whereas it is not really a frequent topic in today's Ibsen research, it was more frequent in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and there seems to have been a consensus that Ibsen was rather heavily influenced by Shakespeare in his early plays. There are, however, also studies that include Ibsen's contemporary plays and examine more extensive patterns of influence. Thomas F. van Laan, for instance, claims that although "The dramas of contemporary life [lack] conspicuous echoes and traces of Shakespeare [...] they did not disappear with these plays, as has been maintained, but [...] went underground" (van Laan, 1995, p. 300), and, moreover: "in play after play, Ibsen shapes his contemporary middle class action in such a way that sometimes particular details, sometimes the action as a whole echo elements of a familiar major tragedy of the past" (van Laan 1995, p. 301). It is easy to become overwhelmed by all the potential echoes, traces of and references to Shakespeare that critics claim to have found in Ibsen's early plays, but like van Laan I have something more extensive in mind, not *genre*, though, but *character*: The way Ibsen creates his characters.<sup>2</sup>

Norwegian painter Edvard Munch assumed that Ibsen in his portrait technique in *When We Dead Awaken* (1899), was influenced by him. At an art exhibition at Blomquist's in 1895 Ibsen had been amused by Munch's revelatory, almost caricatured portraits mixing human and animal traits. Ibsen did not necessarily take his portrait technique in this play from Munch, and he might as well have recognized Munch's technique as his own: Both Ibsen's biographers and Otto Lous Mohr, author of a book on Ibsen as a painter, give accounts of how Ibsen as a boy made animal caricatures of people he knew. But Munch is into something, and I will return to him later. What I will be arguing is that significant aspects of Ibsen's way of creating dramatic characters from *Brand* (1866), Ibsen's Scandinavian breakthrough, via *An Enemy of the people* to *When We Dead Awaken* (1899) are

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influenced by Shakespeare, especially one particular Shakespeare drama, the one that according to T.S. Eliot (in *Sacred Wood. Essays on Poetry & Criticism* from 1920) is Shakespeare's "most assured artistic success" (Eliot 1960, 99): *Coriolanus* (1607-1608).

## II. Readings

### *Coriolanus* (1607-08)

*Coriolanus* is one of Shakespeare's last tragedies written as it probably is around 1607-1608. The action is set in Rome around 490 B.C., after the fall of the last king of Rome (Tarquin) and thus in the transitional period between monarchy and republic. The story is based on the life of a historical person, the Roman leader Caius Marcius Coriolanus, who is given the name Coriolanus after having defeated the Italian city of Corioli in 493 B.C. Crucial in the play is the struggle between the plebeians and the patricians, dramatically represented as the conflict between protagonist Coriolanus and his friend Menenius Agrippa, Senator of Rome, as patricians, versus the antagonists, the representatives of the plebeians, the two tribunes Brutus and Sicinius. What happens in the play is that Coriolanus, after an extraordinary military success, is encouraged to run for consul. He is opposed by the two tribunes Brutus and Sicinius, reacts by attacking the idea of democracy, or popular rule, and the power of the plebeians, and is subsequently banished and exiled. He then banishes Rome (!), and together with Rome's enemy, Aufidius, he now plans an attack on Rome. Rome, represented by Cominius, consul, and senator Menenius, desperately tries to stop him, finally his mother Volumnia succeeds, and shortly after he is killed for his betrayal of Aufidius.

In the play Coriolanus is characterized as a man of admirable moral integrity, as totally fearless and absolutely honorable. He is, however, also depicted as totally inflexible, proud, aristocratic, utterly arrogant. His status in the play depends on which character perspective one chooses: Whereas to senator Menenius he is first and foremost fearless, honorable and characterized by moral integrity, he is highly unsympathetic and also dangerous to Brutus' and Sicinius' – proud, aristocratic and arrogant and a great threat to the plebeians. But the point is that in the play as a whole he is not portrayed as either or, but both extremely inflexible, arrogant, aristocratic, totally fearless and deeply honorable. This fundamental complexity has led to contradictory readings of the protagonist as well as of the play as a whole: Whereas some consider Coriolanus genuinely unsympathetic and thus flawed as a tragic character, others stress his tragic integrity and the play as genuinely tragic.

In my view Coriolanus is a tragic character. My understanding of him (and the play) comes close to Norwegian Shakespeare scholar Kirsti Minsaas' reading (Minsaas, 1996). Her main point is that in the play Coriolanus' virtue turns into his vice and that Coriolanus' moral absolutism makes him socially and politically homeless. His *hamartia* (or tragic flaw) is thus, according to Minsaas, not (only) a question of *hybris*. Coriolanus' fatal illusion, underlying his moral absolutism, is, according to Minsaas, that he believes that he can stand alone, completely alone, that is, and reject his people, his family, his social nature, his humanity, and she quotes a line by Coriolanus: "I'll never / Be such a gosling to obey instinct, but stand / As if a man were author of himself / And knew no other kin" (261). The play's turning point coincides with Coriolanus' recognition: In the last minute Coriolanus' mother, Volumnia, makes him change his mind, and the play ends with a (more) human version of Coriolanus silently holding his mother's hand, cancelling his furious attack on Rome, shortly before he is killed by Aufidius and his men.

### *Brand* (1866)

*Brand* represents Ibsen's breakthrough in Scandinavia. The play belongs to a phase of his oeuvre in-between late romanticism and the upcoming realism, a group of plays that in addition to *Brand* includes *Peer Gynt* (1867) and *Kejser og Galilæer* (*Emperor and Galilean*, 1873). It is a deeply idealistic play, and referring to Toril Moi's Ibsen study, we could say that it is one of the first Ibsen plays where idealism is the main subject. The emergence of *Brand* in 1866 created an intense debate in Scandinavia, and still garners profound disagreement in scholarship today. The protagonist's fanatic idealism, causing the death of his one-year-old son and of his wife, provoked Ibsen's contemporaries and still provokes.

Brand is a young priest who intends to make the world a better place by rehabilitating its inhabitants who, according to him, have degenerated. Brand marries Agnes, and they get a son, Alf. The little boy is ill, and the doctor urges them to move to a better climate to save his life, but Brand is not willing to give up on his project, and little Alf dies at the age of one year. Brand's wife dies shortly after, Brand has made her sacrifice absolutely everything that ties her to this world, even her sorrow. Brand also refuses to give his mother the sacrament unless she gives away all her money, and she dies without being absolved. Eventually Brand's moral absolutism makes the people, who have worshipped him, banish him. The play ends in the mountains with an avalanche killing Brand and Gerd, a mad gipsy girl.

The reception of *Brand* reflects the complexity of the protagonist and the ambiguity of the play. Per Thomas Andersen rejects Brand as well as the play itself, arguing that Ibsen makes Brand suspend ethics when letting him sacrifice his son and wife and thereby legitimize the suffering of the other (Andersen, 1997). Erik Bjerck Hagen condemns Brand's ideas altogether, comparing them with the totalitarian ideas of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Bjerck Hagen, 2009), whereas Atle Kittang reads the play more sympathetically as a kind of anatomy of will or will power, and Brand's sacrifices of his son and wife as his hybris and hamartia (tragic flaw) (Kittang, 2002). Norwegian author Dag Solstad is one of few who in recent time has presented a positive reading of the protagonist and the play, arguing that Brand's motivation is not (and here he is quoting Danish critic Clemens Petersen) "the hardness of the heart, but the greatness and power of the idea", not "Hjertets Haardhed", but "Ideens Vælde", a motivation that Solstad argues in itself is fundamentally positive, not negative (Solstad, 2008). Toril Moi blames Solstad for simply adopting Brand's idealism, while Ibsen's relation to idealism is far more complex (Moi, 2008). The problem is that, as Moi admits, Brand's idealism is foregrounded in the play without being rejected, i.e. that the play is totally open ended, fundamentally ambiguous when it comes to the status of the protagonist and his idealism. In a letter to Bjørnson from Rome 9 December 1867 were Ibsen responds to Clemens Petersen's negative critique of *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*, Ibsen himself insists that the play expresses an ideal and therefore should be regarded genuinely poetic according to the dominating idealistic aesthetic.

In 1936 A. E. Zucker argued that Ibsen's *Brand* is influenced by Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*. As far as I know, Zucker's article is the only comparative reading of *Brand* and *Coriolanus* (Zucker, 1936). Norwegian Ibsen scholar Halvdan Koht later disagreed, claiming that the similarities were "too trifling" (Koht, 1945, p. 85). Zucker's main points have later been supported by Norwegian Ibsen and Shakespeare scholar Kristian Smidt (Smidt, 2004, p. 46). According to Zucker "It would be hard to find two other characters in the works of great dramatists who are spiritually so closely akin as are Brand and Coriolanus" (Zucker 1936, p. 103), and: "The essential quality of both is a heroic hardness that leads them to deeds of bravery but also to unpardonable excesses; Coriolanus, the patriot, goes over to the army of the enemy and attacks Rome, while Brand, the priest, causes [...] the death of his wife and child." (Zucker, 1936, p. 104). On their deeds of bravery, he writes:

In the drama Brand gains the admiration and the following of the masses by the same means through which Coriolanus does it in Shakespeare's drama, namely, by risking his life in a deed of almost superhuman bravery. Brand sails the boat through the storm in the face of almost certain death, just as Coriolanus had alone entered the city of Corioli. (Zucker, 1936, p. 102)

In addition, he comments upon the revision from the epic to the dramatic *Brand*: "It is interesting to note which characters Ibsen added in the dramatic Brand [...] the leaders of the people who correspond to the tribunes in *Coriolanus*, forming the opposition to the hero." (Zucker, 1936, p. 103)

Koht may be right when he hints that Zucker may be downplaying the differences between the two plays, but I nevertheless think Zucker is right in that there are significant similarities between the two plays indicating some kind of influence. Whether Ibsen is directly or only indirectly influenced by Shakespeare's play, is impossible to know. What we do know for a fact is that Ibsen had read and greatly appreciated Hermann Hettner's theoretical book *Das moderne Drama* (1852), in which Shakespeare's

*Coriolanus* is thoroughly presented (7 pages) and referred to as Shakespeare's very best play and the ideal way of composing tragedies of character.

Let's have a closer comparative look at the two plays and protagonists and include some of the differences. Whereas Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* only criticizes the people of Rome, especially the plebeians, Ibsen's *Brand* intends to change the Norwegian people – his great project is not to win a war or an election but to restore the Norwegian people who, he believes, the authorities have helped degenerate from being a strong and brave population into a weak and cowardly folk. Against the weakness, Brand offers a cure: "Be what you are, complete and whole, / not a divided, piecemeal soul." (Ibsen, 2007, p. 360). The cure includes a law, or, as it is also referred to in the text, a commandment: "All or Nothing" (Ibsen, 2007, p. 796). This law, or commandment, echoes, and in my opinion probably – directly or indirectly – is influenced by Coriolanus' moral absolutism. I would also argue that as in Shakespeare's play, what happens in *Brand* is not just a question of hybris, but to paraphrase Minsaa's on *Coriolanus*, something far more disturbing: Brand's virtue, his (admirable) moral integrity, turns into his vice, making him totally unfit for family life as well as life in society. This may be the reason why Ibsen could insist that the play does express the ideal that the idealistic critics failed to see in it: In turning into a vice, the ideal/the virtue seems to be disclosed and rejected. But at the same time – and just like in *Coriolanus* – it is evident through the characterization of the antagonists in the play, that society needs this virtue as well as this type, i.e. that the ideal persists as an ideal.

There is one more significant difference between Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* and Ibsen's *Brand*. This difference is, I would argue, representative of Ibsen's personal twist on the Shakespearean influence: Whereas *Coriolanus* eventually listens to his mother and renounces his project of attacking Rome, *Brand* does no such thing. On the contrary: He completes his project, sacrifices everything, even his son and his wife, and after having sacrificed everything, he is killed by an avalanche. Ibsen's *Brand* is thus far more extreme than Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*. And if *Coriolanus*' fatal illusion, underlying his moral absolutism, is that he believes that he can stand completely alone, i.e. reject his social nature, his humanity, the very same illusion is represented in *Brand*'s idea of "being oneself", or "at være sig selv": Being oneself here logically means breaking loose from absolutely everything that prevents one from practising the law "all or nothing" – family and society included – and becoming totally autonomous and completely alone.

Zucker does not take into consideration these significant differences between the protagonists and the plays. As I see it, *Brand*'s extremism is Ibsen's dramatic main point, an extremism that makes the play an elaboration of idealism and *Brand* a genuinely Ibsenian character with a, referring to Harold Bloom, *troll-like* identity (like the one Bloom ascribes to Mrs. Alving and Hedda Gabler and also Peer Gynt). Ibsen's personal comments on this aspect of the play at least confirms the importance to the author himself of the extremism of the protagonist:

I could have constructed the same syllogism just as easily on the subject of a sculptor or a politician, as of a priest. I could have found an equally satisfactory vent of the mood which impelled me to create, if, instead of *Brand*, I had written, say, of Galileo, making him, of course, hold his ground, and not admit that the earth stands still. (Letter to Georg Brandes, Dresden June 26, 1869 (Ibsen 1965))

*Brand*'s (and Ibsen's) diagnosis of time and of man can be compared to German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's later diagnosis as presented in his *Genealogy of Morals* (1887). But, as noted by Norwegian Shakespeare scholar Kristian Smidt, *Brand*'s diagnosis of time might also be compared to that of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*:

Compare, for instance, *Brand*'s "Jeg ved at jeg til verden kom / som Læge for dens Sot og Brist" ("I know I came into the world as healer for its ills and faults" with *Hamlet*'s saying "The time is out of joint" and realising that he "was born to set it right". (Smidt, 2004, p. 46)

To this should be added the elaboration in the play of *Brand*'s *doubt*, a doubt that might be said to recall *Hamlet*'s paralyzing doubt. In comparison, *Brand*'s doubt is repeatedly suppressed.

### *An Enemy of the People* (1882)

In Ibsen's contemporary plays the focus has been moved from the extraordinary and heroic to the everyday life of ordinary people. One of these is dr. Tomas Stockmann in *An Enemy of the People*. The reception of *An Enemy of the People* is inextricably bound to the reception of his two previous Ibsen plays, *A Doll's House* (1879) and *Ghosts* (1881), as it is often read as Ibsen's furious reaction to the scandalization of especially *Ghosts* but also *A Doll's House*. In *An enemy of the people* a small coastal town has invested a lot of money towards the development of a baths, a project led by protagonist dr. Tomas Stockmann and his brother, and main antagonist, Peter Stockmann, the Mayor. They are expecting an increase in tourism and prosperity from the new baths that are said to be of a great medicinal value. However, just as the baths are proving successful, dr. Stockmann discovers that the water is contaminated by the local tanneries, causing serious illness amongst the tourists. The Mayor is unwilling to address the problem publicly, arguing it would mean financial ruin for the town, and seeks to stop dr. Stockmann from going public, and then turns popular opinion against him. Dr. Stockmann holds a public meeting in order to persuade people that the baths must be closed for renovation. At the meeting he is denied the right to speak about the baths and instead addresses according to himself an even more important problem, the problem of a contaminated popular opinion: "The most dangerous enemies of truth and freedom are the majority!" (Ibsen, 2000, p. 192). Dr. Stockmann concludes his gradually more raging speech in crying out that he would rather destroy his hometown "than see it flourish because of a lie" (Ibsen 2000, p. 198), and after a vote he is declared an enemy of the people. His last words are: "the strongest man in the world is he who stands most alone" (Ibsen, 2000, p. 222).

The standard interpretation of *An Enemy of the people* has been that dr. Stockmann is the good idealist fighting for the good values. After the 1960s, however, the tendency has increasingly been on Stockmann's negative sides and thus also on the complexity of this Ibsen protagonist, from Harald Noreng's "En folkefiende – helt eller klovn?" (Noreng, 1969, An enemy of the people – hero or clown?) via Thomas van Laan's "Generic Complexities in Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*" (van Laan, 1986) to Atle Kittang's "Heroisme i komisk modus" (Kittang, 2002, Heroism in the comic mode) and also, most recently, in Kristin Gjesdahl's "Nietzschean Variations" (Gjesdahl, 2014). As several critics have thoroughly and convincingly argued (Vasenius, 1882, Zucker, 1936:106-107, van Laan, 1995:302, Smidt, 2004), the title of this play – *An Enemy of the People* – may be adopted from Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*. An ordinary doctor, thus, modelled on a Shakespearean Roman general. Vasenius (HIS, 592) and van Laan (1995) argues that there are similarities in content too between the plays. Van Laan:

[...] *En folkefiende* also calls to mind much of the content of Shakespeare's play. Dr. Stockmann's confrontation with his community in Act Four might well have been modeled upon the scenes from the third act of *Coriolanus*, the act that Hettner so much admired, in which its protagonist must face the people and their tribunes in the marketplace in order to be elected consul. (van Laan, 1995, p. 302)

In addition, van Laan mentions Stockmann's exclusion from community, his emigration plan, his utterances about destroying the town and the series of tempters visiting him.

Most important, considering my overall hypothesis, is the protagonist himself: Stockmann's moral integrity and his idea of standing alone as an indication of personal strength, his social and political naivety, his rashness, his rage, his elitist critique of the townspeople and subsequent verdict as enemy of the people, or, in other words, Stockmann's main heroic as well as his main antiheroic traits, recalls Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*. There is one significant difference, however, between Ibsen's protagonist and Shakespeare's, as well as between Stockmann and Brand: Whereas Shakespeare's protagonist *Coriolanus* and Ibsen's *Brand* are parts of *tragic* plays, Ibsen's dr. Stockmann belongs in a play that is a genre hybrid, mixing its comic, serious and tragic aspects. Van Laan has analysed this genre experiment in detail, and concludes his analysis in this way:

*An Enemy of the People* constitutes an unusual experiment in form in which one familiar pattern of dramatic action, that of the realistic social problem comedy – the pattern perceived by adherents of the standard

view – is overlaid by two additional patterns, one traditional to comedy, the other more characteristic of tragedy. (van Laan, 1986, p. 99)

According to van Laan the comic treatment of Stockmann recalls Danish-Norwegian playwright Ludvig Holberg, most notably his protagonist and play *Erasmus Montanus* (1731), whereas the tragic treatment of him recalls Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*. The question, then, is how we are to understand the protagonist. My suggestion is that Ibsen's comic treatment of dr. Stockmann is restricted to dr. Stockmann as being representative of human weaknesses that disclose a more human and antiheroic side of him, and that this contributes to making him a complex character, comic, serious, tragic. More importantly, though, the virtue he represents, i.e. his moral integrity (as compared with his antagonists), is, as I see it, still foregrounded in the play in a profoundly serious manner – as a virtue that his society is in serious need of. The antagonists' (the townspeople's and the mayor's) decision not to close the contaminated baths and their willingness to sacrifice human lives as well as the environment, prove the need for radical engagement, i.e. for dr. Stockmann and his strong moral integrity. As Kristin Gjesdahl argues in a recent article on the play, this play

transcends the framework of elitism and misrecognition. [...] Ibsen stages a profound (Nietzschean) analysis of the way in which public life in the modern world is being usurped by private, economic interests – a topic that Ibsen was (and we should be) likely to take seriously. (Gjesdahl, 2014, p. 110).

Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* plans a military attack on his own town, Rome, and in act 4 Ibsen makes dr. Stockmann cry out that his town should be extinguished. But whereas *Coriolanus* renounces his destructive plans of attacking Rome, dr. Stockmann – like Brand before him, although in a comically undermined way – does not give up: the town as it is must be destroyed, and in order to achieve this, he plans to open a school to educate people to independent thought.

#### ***When We Dead Awaken* (1899)**

Ibsen's last play is considerably shorter than his other works, and a highly stylized, deeply symbolic *fin de siècle* play about art and life. It is subtitled *A Dramatic Epilogue*, and often read as a more or less autobiographical work of art commenting upon Ibsen's life and art. The protagonist, Arnold Rubek, is – like Ibsen himself – a world famous artist, a sculptor who has achieved great international recognition with his sculpture “The Day of Resurrection”, a title that echoes the title of the play that he is a part of. The model for the sculpture was Irene. They appear to have had strong feelings for each other, but Rubek refused to consider Irene as anything more than his model, and she left him. Since then, Rubek has not been able to create art. He has married Maja, a considerably younger woman, and the two of them have lived abroad in a marriage that no longer works. The play opens with Rubek and Maja staying at a seaside hotel in Norway, where Maja meets Ulfheim, a landowner and bear-hunter, who invites her to get up into the mountains with him, and Rubek meets Irene, who asks him to join her up in the mountains. A storm blows up, and Maja and Ulfheim go down the mountain into safety, while Rubek and Irene insist on climbing higher and – like Brand and Gerd – are killed by an avalanche.

The sculptor Arnold Rubek has created a sculpture – “The Day of Resurrection” – which has almost the same title as the drama he himself is part of: *When We Dead Awaken*. (In the work-in-progress version of the drama, the titles are identical). What complicates this picture of similarity and difference, is that the sculpture, a disillusioned work of art and a group of statues, contains a former, idealistic version of itself, a single statue which is, confusingly, also referred to as “The Day of Resurrection” in the play. In this way the sculpture, and the play, thematize idealism, Rubek's and Ibsen's idealism.

There are obvious parallels between *When We Dead Awaken* and *Brand*, for instance the vertical movements of the characters through symbolic mountain landscapes and the fact that both plays end with an avalanche burying the main characters. In addition, both protagonists harbor a vision of a new and better life and are extremely rigid. And it is precisely in the portrayal of the existential conflict, the rigidity of the protagonists, their moral absolutism, that we (as I have argued elsewhere, Wærp 2003)

see Ibsen constructing “the same syllogism” about the sculptor Rubek and the priest Brand: The plot in *When We Dead Awaken* rests on the opposition between *man* and *artist*, an opposition that like the *man-priest* opposition in *Brand*, reflects a fundamental existential conflict. In this case (i.e. *When We Dead Awaken*) Rubek’s existential conflict produces a series of identity and lifestyle changes in which one identity at the time (artist; man; artist again) is foregrounded, played out, lived, the other subdued, rejected, and in which his virtues thus turn into his vices.

### III. Conclusion

Ibsen makes his sculptor, Arnold Rubek, describe his portrait technique in this way:

Superficially, there are these “striking likenesses” as they call them, at which people gape, entranced. But deep within, I have sculptured the righteous and estimable faces of horses, the opinionated muzzels of donkeys, the lop ears and shallow brows of dogs, the overgorged chaps of swine, and the dull and brutalized fronts of oxen. (Ibsen, 2000, p. 219)

This is a technique that can be said to summarize Ibsen’s own technique: the point in both cases being complexity, foregrounding, suppressing. What I have tried to argue in this article is that significant aspects of Ibsen’s way of composing dramatic characters may be influenced by Shakespeare, and more specifically his play *Coriolanus*. Brand’s virtue, his admirable moral integrity, turns into his vice, his moral absolutism, his fanatic rigidity, making him unfit for life in society. The portrait of dr. Stockmann is comically undermined, but he too is characterized by the same rigidity and absolutism, and by virtues that turn into vices. So is Rubek, and his rigidity recalls Brand as well as dr. Stockmann, the two Ibsen protagonists that I have argued in one way or another, directly or indirectly, are influenced by Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*. And the foregrounding of one identity, the human, and subduing of the other, the animal, that Rubek presents as his method as a sculptor, is probably what Munch recognized in Ibsen’s play as his own portrait technique. Moreover, in Ibsen’s last play, this has developed into a modernist poetics, characterized by a foregrounded complexity and ambiguity.

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