

## THE PLAY-WITHIN-THE-FILM: PEER GYNT IN SKJOLDBJÆRG'S *EN FOLKEFIENDE* (A PUBLIC ENEMY, 2004)

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### I

Unfortunately, there have not been many successful attempts to adapt Ibsen's works to film. There are, however, some, and Erik Skjoldbjærg's *En folkefiende* (A Public Enemy, 2004) is one of them. This film is far from what is called "canned theatre". It is a creative adaptation of Ibsen's play, using the possibilities of the film media, and more in line with a film tradition originating in Swedish director Victor Sjöström's 1916 adaptation of Ibsen's *Terje Vigen*, where nature, or landscapes, are effectively exploited as more than pure background or setting, or aesthetic images. Other appealing qualities include: (1) The modernisation of the plot, especially the transformation of Katrine into Tomas Stockmann's most powerful antagonist, which represents a radical change in the plot composition, and, (2) also crucial as compared to the adapted text, the more serious mode of the film. This change in mode makes the idealistic and radical protagonist Tomas Stockmann seem far more extreme and dangerous, but at the same time he represents a necessary engagement that is, or at least seems to be, totally silenced in the end. Thus the serious mode contributes to making the conflict more tragic and the plot more relevant for our time of political extremism versus powerlessness or indifference. The main focus in this article will be on the complexity of the protagonist and the film as a whole, with the-Ibsen-play-within-the-Ibsen-film as a point of departure.

### II

Adapting literary classics might not be easy, but dealing with adaptations is challenging too. According to Linda Hutcheon's inspiring book on adaptation "[t]o deal with adaptations *as adaptations* is to think of them as [...] inherently "palimpsestuous" works, haunted at all times by their adapted texts" (Hutcheon, 2006, 6). This article will, viewed from such a perspective, focus on the way Skjoldbjærg's 2004 adaptation of Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* is haunted, not only by the adapted text, Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, but also – via the film's intertext, a Chinese theatre production of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* – by *Peer Gynt*, and via the production of *Peer Gynt* – paradoxically – by Ibsen's *Brand* too.

Hutcheon rightly stresses the importance of "the function of adapter intention *for the audience* when it comes to understanding both the interpretative and creative dimensions of an adaptation" (Hutcheon, 2006, 109). The question then is why did film director Erik Skjoldbjærg choose to adapt an *Ibsen* play? And why *An Enemy of the People*? In an interview from 2004 Skjoldbjærg reveals that he got the idea when he was directing the movie *Prozac Nation* (an adaptation of Elizabeth Wurtzel's autobiographic book with the same title) in Los Angeles: "Jeg la merke til hvor høyt respektert Ibsen er i filmmiljøet der borte. Og så kom jeg til å tenke på hvordan han er blitt et litt støvete ikon her hjemme." (Lismoen, 2004, 33. I noticed how highly respected Ibsen is in film

milieus over there. And then I thought of how he has become a somewhat outdated icon at home.)<sup>1</sup>. What made him choose *An Enemy of the People* among all of Ibsen's plays, is, according to Skjoldbjærg, it being "det mest underholdende og medrivende av dramaene hans [...] utrolig godt snekret sammen" (Lismoen, 2004, 33, the most entertaining and gripping of his plays [...] incredibly well construed). In addition, he and screenwriter Nikolaj Frobenius were fascinated by "en dobbelthet i Stockman-figuren som også lå i Ibsens verk" (Lismoen, 2004, 33, a complexity of the protagonist, a complexity that also characterizes the play as a whole). They saw in Ibsen's play the potential of an exciting film character, and part of their adapter intention was to present a new interpretation of this particular Ibsen character:

Den tolkningen vi ofte er blitt servert har jo vært veldig enkel – om at han var den gode idealisten som kjempet for de gode ideene. Men det er vanskeligere å skildre ham med den samme typen heroisme i dag. (Lismoen, 2004, 33. The interpretation we are often offered is very simple – that he is the good idealist fighting for the good values. But it is more difficult to depict him with the same heroism today.)

For a film director and a screenwriter to challenge this perspective might seem new, maybe even for a theatre director and an actor, but after the 1960s the tendency in Ibsen research, at least in literary studies of the play, has in fact increasingly been on Stockman's negative sides and thus on the complexity of this particular Ibsen character, 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 2005, Heroism in the comic mode). According to Frobenius, a crucial premise for the adaptation has been that the conditions for heroic or radical action are different today than in Ibsen's time, one of the problems being "en sleip, strukturell pragmatisme som gjør rebellens posisjon nesten umulig" (Wold 2005, a slick structural pragmatism that makes the position of the rebel almost impossible). The question, then, is how the complexity of the protagonist is dealt with in the adaptation.

Skjoldbjærg and Frobenius also aimed to make the film into a critique of the image of Norway, or, to be more specific, into "en indirekte kommentar til vår egen foretreffelighet og forestillingen om det rene Norge" (Lismoen, 2004, 33, an indirect comment upon our own selfishness, and the idea of Norway as pure). In an interview, where Skjoldbjærg elaborates on this, he makes a link between Norwegian morality, or better, the Norwegian self image, and Norwegian nature:

Eg meiner at nordmenn sitt sjølvbilete er falskt unnselig. Eigentleg kjenner vi oss overlegne, som berarar av den "reine" moral, og eg trur det heng saman med det norske landskapet. Den reine, ubesudla naturen vi lever i. (Kulås 2005. I think that the Norwegian self image is falsely modest. In fact we feel superior, like

representatives of “pure” morality, and I think it has to do with the Norwegian landscape. The pure, unspoilt nature that we live in.)

American playwright Arthur Miller, in his famous essay on Ibsen’s *An Enemy of the People*, “Ibsen’s Warning”, suggests that Ibsen in this play “needed an absolute good for evil to work against, an unarguably worthy brightness for dark mendacity to threaten” and that “perhaps nature alone could offer him that” (Miller, 1989, 74). In Skjoldbjærg’s film, however, not even nature can offer an absolute good, the point there being that even nature is not always what it seems to be: “Det var noe av motivet bak postkortbildene – det er for vakkert til å være sant”. (Lismoen, 2004, 33. That was part of our intention with the postcard images – they are too beautiful to be true). Skjoldbjærg’s further comments on Norwegian film history are interesting, claiming, as he does, that Norwegian film producers fail to exploit Norwegian landscapes in their films:

Jeg har ofte stusset over at vi ikke greier å bruke landskapene våre som karakterer i filmene våre. De er sjelden plassert inn i en kontekst hvor de kommenterer historien og tilfører den nye dimensjoner. (Lismoen, 2004, 33. I have always wondered why we do not succeed in exploiting the landscapes as characters in our films. They are seldom placed in a context where they comment upon the story and contribute to new dimensions of it.)

As examples of Norwegian films that succeed in exploiting the landscapes, Skjoldbjærg mentions *Jakten* (1959, *The hunt*) by Norwegian director Erik Løchen, and *Kalde spor* (1962, *Cold traces*) by Norwegian director Arne Skouen. He could of course also have widened his scope a bit, from Norwegian film history to Nordic, and included a very successful Swedish Ibsen adaptation, namely Victor Sjöström’s 1916 silent movie adaptation of Ibsen’s poem *Terje Vigen* from 1862, an Ibsen adaptation in which the sea, the ocean, plays an important role, not to mention the main part of the film. The film was shot in Sweden, but with a landscape completely interchangeable with the South Norwegian landscape of Ibsen’s poem. There are in fact some potential references in Skjoldbjærg’s *En folkefiende* (*A Public Enemy*) to this 1916 silent movie; I am thinking of the foregrounded exiled rage of the protagonist and of the melancholic prison flashbacks to happy family life.

Last but not least: Why did Skjoldbjærg and Frobenius choose to write *Peer Gynt* into the film adaptation of *An Enemy of the People*, as a play-within-the-play? Is this choice of play coincidental? Why not *Brand*? Tomas Stockmann, extreme as he is, more obviously resembles Brand, and is often compared with him in the literature of the play. Or, to be more specific and rephrase the question: What is the status and the function of the *Peer Gynt* sequence in the film? And what can it tell us about the film as an adaptation of Ibsen’s *An Enemy of the People*?

### III *Peer Gynt* – why and how

Why *Peer Gynt*? It could of course be a mere coincidence, although not totally since we are in fact dealing with a theatre sequence exclusively made for the film, a fictitious production, thus, not one that has actually occurred.<sup>ii</sup> In an interview, Nikolaj Frobenius at first seems to claim that the theatre sequence is “unødvendig” (unnecessary) and “mest for gøy” (mainly for fun):

*Et par Ibsen-referanser er lagt inn i filmen: Stockmanns familie går i teatret og ser en kinesisk oppsetning av Peer Gynt, og det er referert til det redselsfulle ”Ibsen P-hus”. Hvorfor?*

Man skal kunne se filmen helt uten å vite at det er Ibsen som ligger til grunn. Slik sett er disse små hintene helt unødvendige, og mest for gøy, smiler Frobenius. Men: De er også en påminnelse om [...] at “det ibsenske” er noe helt annet i våre dager enn på 1880-tallet. Det er derfor *Peer Gynt*-forestillingen er på kinesisk, og navnet hans knyttet til noe så verdslig som et parkeringshus i Oslo sentrum. Og så ligger det selvsagt noe uærbødig i dette. Vi vil slå i stykker ikonet Ibsen med kjærlighet. (Wold, 2005. *A couple of Ibsen references are written into the film: The Stockmann family go the theatre where they watch a Chinese production of Peer Gynt, and reference is made to the terrible “Ibsen parking garage”. Why?* One is supposed to be able to watch the film without knowing that it is based on Ibsen. The hints are thus quite unnecessary, and mainly there for fun. However, they are also there as a reminder [...] that Ibsen is something quite different today than in the 1880s. That is why the performance of *Peer Gynt* is in Chinese, and his name associated with something as mundane as a parking garage in downtown Oslo. Also, there is something disrespectful in this. We want to crush Ibsen the icon with love.)

As the second part of the quote shows, however, it is by no means coincidental, and interestingly enough, since the Ibsen theatre sequence is a part of an Ibsen adaptation, it is supposed to be a reminder of the globalized Ibsen of our time, i.e. of the ways different cultures are “indigenizing” Ibsen, to copy Hutcheon’s use of this anthropological term (Hutcheon, 2006, 150), and it turns out as a kind of metacommentary. And even if the play *were* accidentally chosen, it nonetheless gains a crucial status in the film: Simply by being an Ibsen play in an Ibsen adaptation, it is given a play-within-the-play-function.

The simple answer to the *why Peer Gynt* question could of course be this particular play’s high status: According to Harold Bloom’s *The Western Canon*, for instance, *Peer Gynt*, mainly because of its handling of the fascinating troll theme, is the best of all of Ibsen’s plays, and the reason why Ibsen deserves to be ranked number two in the Western drama canon, after Shakespeare (Bloom 1994). There is also a parallel between the troll theme of *Peer Gynt* and the raging, potentially dangerous protagonist of the film. *Peer Gynt* is also a satirical play, even a national satire, and that of course

supports the satirical part of the adapter intention, the critique of the Norwegian selfishness.

More interesting, though, than the *why* is *how* *Peer Gynt* is actually used in the film, and the *how* might also say something about *why*.

The *Peer Gynt* sequence is found in the early part of the film (exact time reference: 6.27). To celebrate Katrine's birthday, the family of three – Tomas, Katrine and Eilif – goes to the National Theatre in Oslo to watch an Ibsen play, a Chinese production of *Peer Gynt*. What we see is – first – their car driving into the parking garage that ironically enough is named after Ibsen, second, the monumental national theatre building and the four meter high Ibsen statue, and third, inside the theatre building, a Chinese production of *Peer Gynt*, and to be more specific, the scene we see depicts Peer fighting the invisible Boyg. The film editing alternates shots of two parallel actions, what happens *on stage* and *off stage*, in the audience, and English intertitles of the Chinese dialogue. The shots of the theatre action show Peer Gynt fighting the invisible Boyg. The intertitles reveal that Peer rejects the Boyg's demand "Gå utenom, Peer!/"Go round it!", and insists on going "Igjenom!"/"Through it!" by fighting the Boyg. The shots of the audience show the audience responses to what happens on stage, with a series of close ups of the Stockmanns: Eilif seems bored and gradually falls asleep, Katrine seems sceptical about the play, while Tomas is obviously thrilled by the performance, loudly applauding at the end.

One of the functions of this theatre sequence is that of characterization. Tomas Stockmann clearly identifies with Peer Gynt and his repeated utterance "Igjenom!", or "Through it!", in the fight against the Boyg. In my view, what happens here is that the film provides the protagonist of the film, Tomas Stockmann, with a *motto*: "Igjenom!"/"Through it!". The theatre sequence also underscores an important difference between Tomas Stockmann and his family, who clearly do not identify with Peer Gynt and his "Igjenom!"/"Through it!". The second major function of the *Peer Gynt* sequence, though, is that it serves to foreground a crucial topic of the work as a whole: the idealistic and radical hero with a strong engagement and an uncompromising motto. Likewise, pointing to the thematic core of the film is Katrine's and Eilif's response to the Chinese *Peer Gynt* performance, a response that serves to relativise the value of the motto and thus the value of the heroism of the protagonist. This is perfectly in line with the adapter intention of presenting a new and critical interpretation of the protagonist's heroism.

There is no such *Peer Gynt* play-with-in-the-play in Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*. To continue the examination of the sequence's status and function in the film, thus, we have to consult Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, and, more precisely, the context of the borrowed sequence. How does the Boyg scene go in Ibsen's text? Here it is:

*Bælmørke.*

*Peer Gynt høres at hugge og slaa omkring sig med en stor Gren.*

PEER GYNT

Giv Svar! Hvem er du?  
 EN STEMME I MØRKET Mig selv.  
 PEER GYNT Af Vejen!  
 STEMMEN  
 Gaa udenom, Peer! Den er stor nok, Hejen!  
 PEER GYNT *vil igjennem paa et andet Sted, men støder imod*  
 Hvem er *du*?  
 STEMMEN Mig selv. Kan du sige det samme?  
 PEER GYNT  
 Jeg kan sige hvad jeg vil; og mit Sverd kan ramme!  
 Agt dig! Hu, hej, nu falder det knusende!  
 [...] (*slaar og hugger*)  
 [...]  
 STEMMEN  
 Gaa udenom, Peer!  
 PEER GYNT  
 Igjennem! (*slaar og hugger*)  
 [...]  
 BØJGEN *svinder ind til intet og siger i et Gisp*  
 Han var for stærk. Der stod Kvinder bag ham. (Ibsen, 2007c, 561-566)

(*Pitch darkness*)

(*PEER can be heard flailing and slashing about with a great branch*)

PEER Who are you? Answer!  
 VOICE (*in the darkness*) Myself.  
 PEER Aside!  
 VOICE Go roundabout, Peer! For the highland's wide.  
 PEER (*tries another route but runs into something*)  
 Who are *you*?  
 VOICE Myself. Can you say the like?  
 PEER I can say what I please; and my sword can strike!  
 Look out! Way hey! And her comes the knockout!  
 [...] (*backs and smites*)  
 [...]  
 VOICE Go roundabout, Peer!  
 PEER Straight through now!  
 [...]  
 VOICE (*crumbles to nothing and gasps*)  
 He was too strong. There were women behind him.  
 (Ibsen, 1995, 50-52)

This scene occurs right after the troll sequence in the Throne-room of the Dovre-king. The film dialogue sticks very close to the dialogue of Ibsen's text, and only a few repetitions are omitted. There are some significant differences, though: Peer is not saved by women in the Chinese production, but saves himself, and, more importantly, he actually fights a *female* Boyg: The Boyg is invisible, but its voice in the film is clearly female, whereas in Ibsen's text the Boyg is male according to the pronouns used (in other passages than the quoted ones where there are none). Important too is the fact that the sequence in the film is presented as the *ending* of the Ibsen play, which is not the case in Ibsen's text: Here it constitutes the last part of act 2, and thus only one of a series of Boyg passages and references in Ibsen's text to the Boyg, a series that it can be said to be a condensation of. The overall pattern of Boyg passages in Ibsen's play is this:

Act 2: Peer's fight with the Boyg after the troll scenes, Peer rejects the Boyg's "Gaa udenom". i.e. "Go roundabout", and insists on his own "Tversigjennem!", "Straigh through!".

Act 3: The green woman visits Peer, reminds him of his relationship with her, who he is, and Peer decides to "Go roundabout" and leave Solvejg:

Gaa udenom, sa'e Bøjgen. En faar saa her. –  
 Der faldt Kongsgaarden min med Braak og Rammel!  
 [...] jeg var saa nær;  
 her blev styggt med et [...]  
 Udenom, Gut! Der finds ikke Vej  
 tvers igjennem dette till hende fra dig. (Ibsen, 2007c, 582)  
 Go round, said the Boyg. I must do that here.  
 Bang goes my palace – all broken and shattered!  
 [...] and I so near,  
 it's turned foul all at once [...]  
 Roundabout, lad! there won't be a way  
 straight through this mess to her, I should say. (Ibsen, 1995, 64)

Act 4: Peer's "Go roundabout" of act 3 leads on to act 4 and Peer's turbulent years abroad, where we find him living not only by the troll credo "Troll, vær dig selv – nok!" (Ibsen, 2007c, 550), "Troll be thyself – enough!", (Ibsen, 1995, 44), but also by the Boyg's motto ("Gaa udenom", "Go round"), leaving one project after the other as he is.

Act 5: In act 5 we find the play's anagnorisis and Peer's decision to go "Straight through!" and reunite with Solvejg:

Udenom, sa'e Bøjgen! (*hører Sang i Stuen*)  
 Nej, denne Gang

tvers igjennem, var Vejen aldrig saa trang!

*Han løber mod Huset* (Ibsen, 2007c, 743-744)

PEER Round about, said the Boyg!

*(hears the song inside the hut)* Not this time too;

be it never so strait, the way runs right through!

*(runs towards the house)* (Ibsen, 1995, 169)

What the overall pattern of Boyg passages reveals, is that the Chinese Peer Gynt of Skjoldbjærg's film is not identical with Peer Gynt as he is, or rather *behaves*, in Ibsen's text *as a whole*, but as he, according to its overall moral logic, *should* have been, or should have behaved all the time. The plot in Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* can be said to be based on the conflict between the two mottos or credos, "Go roundabout" versus "Straight through!", and what makes Peer an antihero is his fleeing the problems, or his tendency to "go roundabout", instead of confronting problems, most obviously of course when he chooses to leave Solvejg because of the green woman's visit, but also in act four where we see him leaving one project and identity after the other. He is, however, never reduced to being only an antihero in Ibsen's play. Part of Ibsen's technique is, as in several other plays, the double exposure of his protagonists. Ibsen's Peer Gynt is not only morally weak when fleeing upcoming problems; he is "fascinating and vitalizing" too, when going from one project and identifying with another. Here I agree with Harold Bloom who claims that Peer Gynt is "a borderline troll, fascinating and vitalizing". (Bloom, 1994, 367).

On closer inspection, then, the theatre sequence in the film actually indicates that Tomas Stockmann is given a motto "Straight through!" that is not really Peer Gynt's motto in Ibsen's play, but very similar to that of his *counterpart* in Ibsen's oeuvre, namely Brand. I am thinking, of course, of Brand's "*Intet eller alt*" (Ibsen, 2007a, 273), "*All or Nothing*" (Ibsen, 2007b, 41). In the film Stockmann is thus made to share Brand's idealism and heroism via a Peer Gynt that resembles Brand more than Peer Gynt, insisting as he does on fighting his way through. The complexity of the protagonist of the film is thus reflected in two opposed Ibsen characters, two opposites in Ibsen's oeuvre, Brand and Peer Gynt.

Even though in the film Tomas Stockmann never *utters* the words "Straight through!", what we see throughout the action of the film, is that he is *acting* like the Chinese Peer of the theatre production: Whereas Ibsen's Peer Gynt "goes roundabout" until the end of the play, Skjoldbjærg's Stockmann fights and never compromises, until the very end of the film, where we see him responding to Katrine's ultimatum.

Katrine's ultimatum is crucial in the film's adapted plot composition. Here it sounds like an echo of the female Chinese Boyg's "Go roundabout". When the poison is no longer a family secret, Katrine, fearing that people will find out where the poison actually comes from, and influenced by Peter Stockmann, presents Tomas with an ultimatum:

**Katrine**

Jeg vil at du skal velge, Tomas, hva som er viktigst, oss eller Stockmann.

**Tomas**

Og hvis jeg ikke kan velge?

**Katrine**

Ja, men da har du jo valgt, da. (Skjoldbjærg, 2004, 56.25-34)

**Katrine**

I want you to chose, Tomas. Our relationship or Stockmann.

**Tomas**

And if I can't make that choice?

**Katrine**

Then you've made your choice. (Skjoldbjærg, 2004, 56.25-34)

He does not choose, however, until the very end of the film, where his utterance “Jeg klarer ikke å være alene”, “I can't be alone”, the last utterance in the film, can be understood as a decision to choose the family. This is probably part of what Frobenius in the previously quoted interview, labels “structural pragmatism”. He refers to it as a reason why the heroism of Ibsen's play is impossible today, but as far as I can see, this “structural pragmatism” is just as crucial in Ibsen's play as it is in Frobenius' and Skjoldbjærg's adaptation: In Ibsen's play, Tomas Stockmann is just as dependent on his family, and, also, all kinds of invisible social and economic ties that make acting freely, radically and heroically difficult, or impossible, are foregrounded throughout the play. In act five, for instance, everybody affiliated with the Stockmann family refuses to help them, referring one after the other out of fear of how the others might react upon their supporting the family, leaving Stockmann and his family alone in the end.

Turning Katrine into Tomas Stockmann's most powerful antagonist in the film, Frobenius and Skjoldbjærg have made a radical change in the plot composition as compared to Ibsen's play: This makes the conflict of the adaptation a classical, tragic conflict between family demands (Katrine, Eilif) and the demands of society (the Stockmann company and the town). In Ibsen's play the tragic dimension of this very same conflict is modified not only by the play's comic modus, but also by the fact that Ibsen's Katrine always supports Tomas when necessary and never confronts him with any serious demands.

This change, thus, is a crucial aspect of their adaptation, and it is prefigured and foregrounded in the *Peer Gynt* sequence in the film, where the Boyg that Peer is fighting, as we have seen, is a woman, not a man. And whereas the Chinese Peer Gynt of the theatre production in the film wins the fight against the Boyg, the Tomas Stockmann of the film seems to loose it. Or does he? Let us have a look at the ending of the film.

**IV The ending of the film**

The ending of the film, the final scenes (1.21.44 and onwards), actually resemble the ending of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* more than the ending of Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*.

The setting is the same as in Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* – i.e. the house, the home – but the main action of the film is shot *outside* the house instead of *inside* it, and Stockmann is portrayed *on the threshold of entering the house*. Both facts point back to the ending of *Peer Gynt*, not *An Enemy of the People*.

Here is a part of the final scene of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*:

PEER GYNT *nærmere mod Huset*

Atter og fram, det er lige langt.

Ud og ind, det er lige trangt.

*(standser)*

Nej! – Som en vild uendelig Klage

er det at gaa ind, gaa hjem og tilbage.

*(gaar nogle Skridt, men standser igjen)*

Udenom, sa'e Bøjgen! *(hører Sang i Stuen)*

Nej; denne Gang

tvers igjennem, var Vejen aldrig saa trang!

*Han løber mod Huset; i det samme kommer Solvejg ud i Døren, kirkeklædt og med*

*Salmebog i Klædet; en Stav i Haanden. Hun staar rank og mild.*

PEER GYNT *kaster sig ned paa Dørstokken.*

Har du Dom for en Synder, saa tal den ud! (Ibsen, 2007c, 743-744)

PEER *(approaches the house)*

Backwards and on is as long a gait.

Out and in, the way's as strait. *(halts)*

No! – Like a wild lament, ever-yearning

is this entering in, going home, the returning.

*(takes step, stops)*

Round about, said the Boyg!

*(hears the song inside the hut)* Not this time too;

be it never so strait, the way runs right through!

*(runs towards the house; at the same moment SOLVEIG comes into the*

*doorway; dressed for church and with a hymnbook in a kerchief; a stick in*

*her hand. She stands there, upright and gentle)*

PEER *(throws himself down on the threshold)*

If you've sentence on a sinner, then noice it abroad! (Ibsen, 1995, 169)

After this, there is a dialogue between Peer and Solvejg, who sits down next to him, and intertwined with their dialogue is an ongoing dialogue between Peer and The Button Moulder, ending with Peer and Solvejg being reconciled, and The Button Moulder disappearing. In the film, Stockmann returns to the house, barely touches the door, looks through the window, and sinks down outside the house. Katrine comes out, so does Eilif and everything is silence and rain, except for the melancholic, non-diegetic music, until Tomas, without looking at Katrine, says: "Jeg klarer ikke å være alene" (I can't be

alone). This last utterance refers ironically to Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, but everything else – Tomas' homecoming, Katrine's coming out of the house and sitting down next to him, the (possible) reconciliation – most of all calls to mind the final scene of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*. Katrine has, as we have seen, demanded that Stockmann chooses between the Stockmann company and the family, and Stockmann's return, and the fact that his wife and son do come out to him, suggest that he has chosen his family instead of fighting for the case, and that reconciliation is thus possible. As compared to the Chinese *Peer Gynt*, however, everything now seems to suggest that Stockmann *loses* his fight by following the Boyg's "Go roundabout". But then again, viewed from perspective of the family, he can be said to win, transformed as the conflict is, by the new hierarchy of values, seen from the family perspective.

The film thus ends with what seems like a homecoming and a reconciliation of Stockmann with his family. Two things undermine the impression of dramatic resolution, though. First, Stockmann is actually *forced* to go home by the town sheriff: The sheriff has informed him that in order for him to be released from prison he has to go home, get his things and then leave town immediately. Second, the sound effects undermine what visually might seem like a dramatic resolution. The diegetic sounds, Stockmann's last and melancholic utterance and the sound of the rain, as well as the non-diegetic sound, consisting of the melancholic saxophone of Jan Garbarek, which effectively contribute to a complex and deeply ambiguous ending. There are in fact similarities between the melancholic music for this scene and *Peer Gynt*'s immediate response to his own homecoming: In *Peer Gynt*, Ibsen makes Peer utter these words just before he walks towards the house: "som en vild uendelig Klage / er det at gaa ind, gaa hjem og tilbage" (Ibsen, 2007c, 744. "Like a wild lament, ever yearning / is this entering in, going home, the returning" (Ibsen, 1995, 169). Even though this similarity might of course be the simple effect of the subject matter, the choice of returning home and leaving something else behind is interesting.

What the melancholic music of the film reminds us of, though, are the consequences of Stockmann's choice, i.e. of what – in either case – is *lost*: What kind of life Tomas Stockmann would have without his family, and, on the other hand, what kind of society would this small society represent without his fight against the economically motivated compromises, compromises that might be disastrous not only for the town's inhabitants, but also for the inhabitants of the country: The mineral water is distributed nationwide, and its devastating effect is infertility, and thus, ultimately, extinction.

Without his *family*, Tomas Stockmann would be an isolated rebel, radical, not to say extreme, with a potentially destructive rage. Without *him*, the small town would be left without an activist working against a serious environmental and health problem. The ending of the film thus represents a dystopian image of a society where economy and personal happiness has ended up more important than anything, even the life of future generations:

**Tomas**

Det [er] kanskje ikke så viktig om vi fortsetter å leve i denne bygda. [...] Jeg respekterer at dere vil drikke gift. Enkelte arter utrydder seg selv. [...]

**Programlederen**

Det du nå står og sier, Tomas, er at hele bygda...

**Tomas**

... kommer til å dø ut, ja. (Skjoldbjærg, 2004, 1.14.19-1.14.47)

**Tomas**

Maybe it's not that important that life goes on here. [...]

I respect that they want to drink poison. Some species extirpate themselves. [...]

**TV presenter**

What you are saying, Tomas, is that the entire settlement...

**Tomas**

... will become extinct, yes. (Skjoldbjærg, 2004, 1.14.19 -1.14.47)

The film can thus be said to stress the necessity of radical engagement. At the same time, it presents us with a dystopian image of a society where radical action seems impossible, where truth, visions and idealism are marginalized.

Also hinted at in the end is a dystopian image of a world of extreme, radical action, enacted by, or initiated by, a rebel characterized by a devastating rage and frustration: This scenario opens if the radical rebel is not silenced, but instead goes on.

There is, thus, a dimension of cultural criticism in the film, that we also find in Ibsen's play, and that in my opinion points back to Ibsen's *Brand*. Ibsen did in fact focus on the power of capitalism and the effects of the industrial revolution as early as in *Brand*, and in my view, the world that Ibsen creates in *An Enemy of the People* is a dramatic realization of Brand's dystopian and apocalyptic vision in act 5 of *Brand* (for a more detailed argument than is given here of the relationship between the cultural criticism in *An Enemy of the People* and *Brand*, see Wærp 2010). In *Brand*, the environmental poison comes from Great Britain. 16 years later, in *An Enemy of the People*, it comes from Norway itself, as it does in Skjoldbjærg's film of 2004.

**V Conclusion**

The major conclusion to my elaborations is that Skjoldbjærg's film adaptation is haunted not only by the adapted text, but also by the play-within-the-film, the Chinese *Peer Gynt*, and its counterpart in Ibsen's oeuvre, *Brand*, in a way that not unambiguously supports the adapter intention, i.e. to present a new, critical interpretation of the protagonist, but also challenges, or even undermines it. The critique of Tomas Stockmann as an extreme idealist, a destructive radical and an impossible hero, is confronted by the likewise obvious necessity of his kind. This undermines the explicit adapter intention, to present a critical portrait of Stockmann, the idealist fighting for the good. This might be one of the reasons why one of the first critics referred to the film as "unfocused" (Nettavisen 2005). But rather than "unfocused" it might be labelled

nanced, perfectly in line with the complexity of Ibsen's text, but also far more dark and sinister, and tragic, than his play.<sup>iii</sup>

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**Summary**

In Erik Skjoldbjærg's adaptation of Ibsen's *En folkefiende* (*An enemy of the people*), another Ibsen play serves as a crucial intertext: In the film, the protagonist and his family watch a Chinese production of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* at the National Theatre in Oslo. This article examines Skjoldbjærg's film as an Ibsen adaptation in which a second Ibsen play serves as a significant intertext, or play-within-the-film, by examining the status and the function of the play-within-the-film. The conclusion is twofold: (1) The theatre sequence in the film indicates that protagonist Tomas Stockmann, by identifying with the Peer Gynt of the Chinese play, is given a motto – "Straight through!" – that, however, is not really Peer Gynt's motto in Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, but very similar to that of his counterpart in Ibsen's oeuvre, namely Brand, and Brand's "*Intet eller alt*", "*All or Nothing*". In the film Stockmann is made to share Brand's idealism and heroism via a Peer Gynt that resembles Brand more than Peer Gynt, insisting as he does on fighting his way through. The complexity of the protagonist of the film is thus reflected in two opposed Ibsen characters, two opposites in Ibsen's oeuvre, Brand and Peer Gynt. (2) This does not unambiguously support the adapter intention, that according to the director is to present a new, critical interpretation of the protagonist, but also challenges, or even undermines it: The critique of Tomas Stockmann as an extreme idealist, a destructive radical and an impossible hero, is confronted by the likewise obvious necessity of his kind.

**Keywords**

Adaptation, film, drama, play-within-the-play, Henrik Ibsen, *En folkefiende/An Enemy of the People*, Erik Skjoldbjærg, *En folkefiende/A public enemy*

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<sup>i</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, translations from Norwegian are my own.

<sup>ii</sup> Screenplay writer Nikolaj Frobenius has confirmed to me in an e-mail (dated October 24, 2012) that the *Peer Gynt*-sequence is not an actual theatre production, but was exclusively made for the film.

<sup>iii</sup> Part of this complexity is the montage of the two main parts of the film, the sequence from Oslo and the sequence from Stockmann's home town. These parts are very different in many ways, but thematically the second can be seen a (tragic) repetition of the first. I do thus not agree with Arne Engelstad, who claims that the relation between these two parts is inorganic, ruining the coherence of the film (Engelstad, 2010, 381).