Invisible Economic Hegemony, Visible Patriarchal Ideology: Ibsen's Critique of Bourgeois Society in *John Gabriel Borkman* and *Pillars of the Community*

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Abstract

This article juxtaposes Henrik Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkman* with *Pillars of the Community* to illuminate the bourgeoisie's discriminatory attitudes toward the male protagonists' sordid businesses. Through this comparison, the study reveals Ibsen's differing approaches to critiquing bourgeois society across the two plays. By drawing on socio-economic and feminist theories, this analysis critically examines the social, political, and financial implications of capitalism's invisible hegemony of the bourgeoisie and the visible ideology of patriarchy, highlighting Ibsen's nuanced depiction of power dynamic within bourgeois society.

Keywords

Ibsen; John Gabriel Borkman; Pillars of the Community; Class Contradiction; Mode of Production; Hegemony of Capitalism; Jameson; Smith; Invisible; Hand; Patriarchy; Feminism

DOI

10.54432/scand/ECPY7742

In January 1871, the Danish critic Georg Brandes wrote a compelling letter to Henrik Ibsen, in which, as Bjørn Hemmer notes, he urged Ibsen 'to put himself at the head of the revolution of the human spirit' (1994: 68). Later that year, Brandes publicly 'called upon writers to revolt' through his lectures on nineteenth-century European literature (Hemmer 1994: 69). He advocated a radical change in bourgeois values, pursuing 'liberty of the spirit, liberty of thought, and of the human condition' (Hemmer 1994: 69). Six years later, Ibsen responded to this call by seeking to revive the spirit of truth and freedom in his first contemporary drama. However, Ibsen's critique of bourgeois society evolved significantly over the course of his last twelve plays. This article conducts a comparative analysis of *John Gabriel Borkman* (1896) and *Pillars of the Community* (1877)[1] to explore how Ibsen's critique of bourgeois societal structures and gender dynamics developed over time. Therefore, juxtaposing these two plays reveals new dimensions of Ibsen's changing perspective on capitalism and patriarchal ideology.

A century ago, Hermann Weigand noted in his reading of *John Gabriel Borkman* that '[t]he alignment of the principal characters bears a striking resemblance to that of *Pillars of the Society*. In both plays, the central figure is an unscrupulous financier who has renounced the woman he loved and married her sister, for the sake of making a career' (1925: 356). Despite these parallels, which have been recognised by Ibsen scholars,[2] a pivotal question remains unexplored: why does Karsten Bernick manage to convince the community to overlook his flaws, while Borkman fails to persuade the authorities that his embezzlement was in the public interest? This question serves as a starting point for investigating how the hegemony of capitalism obstructs Borkman's plan due to the conflict between the dominant mode of production and Borkman's individual approach to wealth accumulation within bourgeois society. Furthermore, addressing this question sheds light on how Ibsen employs different approaches to critiquing bourgeois capitalism and patriarchal ideology in these two plays. Thus, the following analysis highlights Ibsen's portrayal of the bourgeoisie's discriminatory attitude toward the protagonists' misconduct while also revealing his distinctive depiction of the female characters' responses to repressive patriarchy.

Theoretical Frameworks and Analytical Methods

Fredrik Engelstad argues that '[w]hen a critique of capitalism is embodied in a drama, salient features of the capitalist system will appear mostly indirectly on the stage' (2015: 115). He emphasises that understanding Ibsen's critique of bourgeois society requires scrutinising his characters, their thoughts,

actions, experiences, motivations, and projects (Engelstad 2015: 115- 116). Accordingly, through textual analysis, this article focuses on the elements suggested by Engelstad to analyse Ibsen's response to both the economic apparatus of capitalism and patriarchal ideology in the two plays. Engelstad also poses two critical questions: 'what does capitalism do to people, and what do people do to capitalism?' (2015: 116). To answer Engelstad's first question, I suggest that, in *John Gabriel Borkman*, Ibsen portrays how the bourgeois economic apparatus exerts immense pressure on individuals, leading them to commodify human relationships in their pursuit of utopian fantasies. Ibsen explicitly grants financial privilege to Gunhild and Ella to illustrate how Borkman commodifies them to elevate his social position and realize his utopian vision. Moreover, Ibsen's penultimate play reveals how the hegemony of capitalism alienates individuals to the extent that their attempts to restore their place in society prove futile; even escaping this society does not guarantee a brighter future.

In response to Engelstad's second question, I argue that Ibsen in his pioneering critique of the bourgeois values in theatre employs two distinct approaches to capitalism in the two plays. In *Pillars of the Community*, the concept of truth and freedom holds the promise of a brighter future, whether read ironically or not. In contrast, in the play written nineteen years later, the concept of truth remains unrealized, and the pursuit of freedom is fraught with doubt. Ibsen's pessimistic view of capitalism is also symbolically embedded in the final scene of *John Gabriel Borkman*, where all the characters are finally liberated from their solitary confinement. The play's ending can be construed as a symbolic act on the part of Ibsen, as it leads to Borkman's death, the two sisters' belated reconciliation, and the young generation's uncertain future.

In *The Political Unconscious*, Marxist scholar Fredric Jameson contends that literary texts 'are to be read as symbolic resolutions of real political and social contradictions' (1983: 65). He explains that a symbolic act is simultaneously recognised 'as a genuine act, albeit on the symbolic level' and acknowledged as an act that is 'merely symbolic', with resolutions that remain imaginary and 'leave the real untouched' (Jameson 1983: 66). However, I emphasise that Ibsen's symbolic act does not imply that he ignored social problems but rather offers a symbolic resolution within the narrative framework. As Farid Manouchehrian notes, '[a]fter his return to Norway, Ibsen adopted a distinct aesthetic approach to representing social problems. He deviated from realism as his main vehicle for critiquing bourgeois culture' (2023: 138). The symbolic approach in his later plays provided Ibsen with 'a new aesthetic form through which he brought into consciousness the detrimental effects of alienation that bourgeois

hegemony and patriarchal ideology have long imposed upon individuals' (Manouchehrian 2023: 138).[3] Moreover, Ibsen's contrasting responses to the social problems of his time are further distinguished in the endings of the two plays. In *Pillars of the Community*, Bernick's misdeeds are forgiven by bourgeois society, and Lona Hessel supports his new mission. Conversely, in *John Gabriel Borkman*, Ibsen introduces Hinkel, an invisible character, to expose the pernicious effects of bourgeois hegemony that do not overlook Borkman's faults. He also presents Fanny Wilton as a challenge to patriarchal repression that has long limited the autonomy of female protagonists.

Class Contradiction

In *The Bourgeois: Between History and Literature*, Franco Moretti lists the occupations of Ibsen's male characters and observes that '[n]o other writer has focused so single-mindedly on the bourgeois world' as Ibsen (2013: 169). While acknowledging social historians' doubts about whether individuals such as bankers and photographers, or shipbuilders and pastors, truly belong to the same class, Moretti asserts that '[i]n Ibsen, they are, or at least, they share the same spaces, and speak the same language' (2013: 169). Nonetheless, there is a crucial disparity in the microcosm of Ibsen's plays between protagonists who were born into a bourgeois family and those who transcended their original social class to gain access to bourgeois society. Halvard Solness, Alfred Allmers, and John Gabriel Borkman exemplify this distinction.[4]Thus, at first glance, the reason why bourgeois society reacts differently to the misconduct of Bernick and Borkman becomes apparent upon scrutiny of their social status.

Regarding social class, two significant differences emerge between the two characters. Firstly, Bernick was born into a bourgeois family: 'dette gamle ansete hus, der havde stået i tre generationer' (Ibsen 1877: 105) ['this old, respected house that had stood for three generations' (Ibsen 2016: 52)]. His social status is further implied by his family business. Even though their business was on the verge of bankruptcy, there was still a firm that his mother once headed (see Ibsen 2016: 52). On the other hand, Borkman was born into a working-class family. He explicitly reveals his background to Frida at the very moment he appears on stage, stating that '[j]eg er en bergmands søn … Og min far tog mig med sig ned I gruberne iblandt' (Ibsen 1896: 76) ['I am a miner's son. ... my father sometimes took me down into the mines with him' (Ibsen 2014: 181)]. Despite his ostentatious behaviour, such as 'Kørte med firspand, – som om han var en konge' (Ibsen 1896: 11) ['driving around in his coach-and-four – as though he were a king' (Ibsen

2014: 160)], Borkman's previous social class remains evident. Throughout the play, there are several references to his former social status. The most conspicuous instance is when Gunhild reminds us at the end of the play: 'Han var en bergmands søn, – han, bankchefen. Kunde ikke tåle det friske drag' (Ibsen 1896: 243) ['He was a miner's son, the banker. He couldn't survive in the fresh air' (Ibsen 2014: 234)]. This recurrence implies that his society, particularly his family, is acutely aware of his original social class. Therefore, Bernick, Ibsen's first financial entrepreneur, and Borkman, his last, cannot inherently be considered part of the same class – or at least, their society does not perceive them as such.

Secondly, despite the fact that both protagonists sacrifice one sister to marry another, their intentions exhibit a significant distinction. Bernick rejects Lona and marries Betty for financial advantage and to save his family business. Supporting this view, Engelstad argues that Borkman's decision not to marry Ella 'was not an emotional conflict, but the assumption that his mentor Hinkel desires her makes Borkman sacrifice his love to advance his position as bank director' (2015: 121). However, a crucial aspect of Borkman's marriage must be considered. While Borkman rejects Ella to gain Hinkel's trust, he does not miss the opportunity to marry a girl from the same bourgeois family. By marrying Gunhild, Borkman not only gains access to bourgeois wealth but also elevates his social status and becomes a member of bourgeois society. Being outside the bourgeois circle would have hindered his overpowering calling to free the metal ores from the mines and bring them up to serve people. As he says, '[d]en vil op i dagens lys og tjene menneskene' (Ibsen 1896: 77) ['It (the ore) wants to come up into the light of day and serve people' (Ibsen 2014: 181)]. Borkman's lamentation over this matter is evident in his conversation with Frida when he asks how she feels about playing for Hinkel's guests:

> FRIDA. ... mest tænker jeg på, hvor tungt det er, at jeg ikke får være med at danse selv.
> BORKMAN (nikker). Det var just det, jeg vilde vide. … ikke at få være med selv, det er det tungeste af alt. (standser.) Men så er der en ting, som vejer det op for Dem, Frida. ... Det er det, at De ejer tifold mere musik i Dem, end hele danseselskabet tilsammen. (Ibsen 1896: 79-80).
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> (FRIDA: ... most of the time I think about how hard it is that I can't join in the dancing. BORKMAN [nodding]: That's exactly what I wanted to know. ... not being allowed to join in yourself, that's the hardest thing of all. [Stops] But there

> is one thing that counts for more than that, Frida. ... The fact that you have ten times more music in you than all those dancers put together.) (Ibsen 2014: 181-182)

With ten times the competence and ambition to conquer the wealth stored under the mountains, Borkman married into a bourgeois family and joined the party. He objectified Ella and Gunhild to mitigate his social inequality. Nevertheless, neither his position nor his capability – which makes him think he is among 'undtagelsesmennesker' (Ibsen 1896: 111) ['exceptional people' (Ibsen 2014: 191)] – guarantees him the trust of the bourgeoisie or grants him the privilege to act with impunity, as Bernick does.

However, being born into different social classes cannot be the sole reason why Bernick managed to convince his community to support his profitable business, while Borkman could not. I propose that in creating *John Gabriel Borkman*, Ibsen signifies a historical tension between the bourgeoisie's mode of production and the emergence of a new mode of production emanating from Borkman's utopian fantasy, to underscore the insoluble contradictions in his capitalist society.

The Conflict between Modes of Production and the Concept of the Invisible Hand

Although Bernick and Borkman share the same capitalist mindset and intend to exploit natural resources for their own commercial and industrial gain, their modes of production differ substantially. The major conflict between Borkman and the ruling class stems from the discrepancy between his mode of production and that of the dominant system. Borkman's method seeks to alter the process of financialization within the bourgeois economic apparatus, which Alisa Zhulina defines as 'the process by which financial institutions and elites gain control over economic policy' (2018: 289). Compared to *Pillars of the Community*, *John Gabriel Borkman* foregrounds the notion that in a capitalist society, one cannot gain control of capital unless one first protects the interests of the bourgeoisie. While Bernick's project provides this reassurance, Borkman's business plan directly challenges the financial policy of the ruling class.

Jameson explains the relationship between modes of production in a capitalist society and notes that every 'society has in fact consisted in the overlay and structural coexistence of *several* modes of production all at once' (1983: 80, italics in original). He further elaborates that social formations include 'vestiges and survivals of the older modes of production, now relegated to structurally dependent positions within the new [system],

as well as anticipatory tendencies which are potentially inconsistent with the existing system but have not yet generated an autonomous space of their own' (Jameson 1983: 80). Therefore, the relationship between modes of production in a capitalist society is conditional. When antagonism becomes visible between modes of production, it leads to a 'cultural revolution,' and the conflict permeates 'to the very center of political, social, and historical life' (Jameson 1983: 81). As a result, the dominant system inevitably overcomes and relegates the antagonistic mode to a marginal position. Analogous to Ibsen's text, due to the inherent conflict between Borkman's utopian fantasy and the bourgeois economic vision, Hinkel, like an invisible hand protecting the dominant system, demotes Borkman to the lower class once again and isolates him, first physically and then mentally.

The concept of invisible hand was first used metaphorically in economics by Adam Smith in his influential treatise *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), where he advocates for minimal government intervention in the economy and supports the free market. Smith posits that within industrial capitalism, an individual 'intends only his own security; and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention' (1976: 593). In other words, Smith contends that individuals pursuing their economic self-interest in a competitive market unintentionally contribute to the overall benefit of society. Joseph Roach extends this concept by linking Smith's invisible hand to the 'gossip system' in drama. He notes that '[t]he hand is invisible because the exchange of information at each transaction adds up to a total effect far larger than the sum of its parts' (2010: 297). Roach then argues that Ibsen 'seized upon the theatrical potential of the power of gossip in bourgeois life' to amplify the effects of money and information into what he describes as 'the bubble known as scandal' (2010: 299). As a case in point, in *Pillars of the Community*, Bernick circulates a rumour (false information) that Johan Tønnesen stole his money to save his family business. Although Bernick's lie is exposed, leading to a scandal, the cumulative effect of this deception results in a profitable project for his bourgeois associates, thereby reinforcing the interests of the bourgeoisie. Similarly, Zhulina argues that 'Ibsen's *Pillar of Society* captures in its language the turbulent transformation of the invisible hand of Providence into the invisible hand of the market' (2018: 393). In contrast to *Pillars of the Community*, where the concept of the invisible hand aligns with Smith's idea, this notion in *John Gabriel Borkman* differs radically from Smith's invisible hand. In Ibsen's penultimate play, the notion of the invisible hand is far from being a mere concept of 'the self-regulating nature of the

free market,' as Zhulina describes it (2018: 392). Instead, it symbolizes a hidden hand of bourgeois hegemony, embodied by Hinkel (the invisible character), who is assigned to control the market, protect the bourgeoisie's interests, and ultimately imprison Borkman.[5]

In addition, the concept of invisibility in *John Gabriel Borkman* can be recognised as what Andre Sofer, in his spectral reading of unseen phenomena in theatre, calls 'the dark matter.' He defines examples of dark matter as 'invisible phenomena' that are 'materially elusive though phenomenologically inescapable, dark matter is the 'not there' yet 'not not there'' (2013: 4). Sofer posits that the 'dark matter's presence observably distorts the visible [characters] through its gravitational effects' (2013: 10). Hinkel's powerful presence, as dark matter, can be observed through Borkman's alienation from society, especially when the recurring pattern of portraying two rivals is examined in Ibsen's contemporary dramas.

Lis Møller asserts that repetition is a crucial structural device in Ibsen's prose plays. She writes that '[i]t is not least because of the use of repetition that these dramas appear to possess a characteristic semiotic density, where every detail [...] has a function in relation to the work as a whole. To read Ibsen is ... to follow the track made by these repetitions' (2001: 7). In Ibsen's previous plays, unlike Borkman, characters who are ousted from their powerful positions manage to survive and, in some cases, fight back. For instance, despite being infamous for his fraud, Krogstad retains his job at the bank, and Ibsen, in *A Doll's House*, depicts how the future of both Torvald and Krogstad's careers depends on their choices. Similarly, in *An Enemy of the People*, Dr. Stockman confronts his brother by revealing the contamination in the spa water. Although defeated at the end, he becomes more determined to continue his fight. Even in *The Wild Duck*, the consequences of old Ekdal's sordid business do not completely make him an outcast from society, and notably, Håkon Werle, who seems to have ruined Ekdal with his questionable business ethics, is there to be confronted by his son. In *The Master Builder*, likewise, after being exploited by his business partner and demoted to a simple employee, Knut Brovik continues to work until his death, and his son witnesses Solness's fall at the end. In contrast, Borkman is utterly maimed in his battle like 'en syg ulv gående i bur deroppe på salen' (Ibsen 1896: 25) ['a sick wolf pacing in a cage up there in the gallery' (Ibsen 2014: 165)]. He is the only protagonist who not only failed to resurrect his career but also becomes completely alienated from society. The antagonistic discrepancy between the two modes of production in bourgeois society, rendered as the two business rivals, results in Borkman's imprisonment and his self-imposed isolation. The dramatic structure of the text, which juxtaposes Borkman's confinement with

Hinkel's freedom, constructs a dynamic sign system that exposes the irreparable damage of capitalism. Thus, the exertion of Hinkel's authoritative power on Borkman can be construed as representing the invisible hegemony of the bourgeoisie.

The Invisible Bourgeoisie

Hinkel is the most powerful and enigmatic figure among Ibsen's invisible characters. Thus, determining why Hinkel exposes Borkman's embezzlement requires an investigation into his motivations. Borkman believes that the blame lies with Ella for refusing to marry Hinkel. Therefore, Hinkel took revenge because he thought Borkman was behind Ella's rejection. However, Engelstad refutes the idea that Hinkel's motive for disclosing Borkman's misappropriation of public deposits is driven by revenge. Instead, he suggests that Hinkel's ulterior motive is to 'make Borkman do some dirty work for him, and when the right moment came, he was able to increase his own fortune due to the losses of the bank's depositors' (2015: 123). Engelstad argues that 'Hinkel must have been well aware of the consequences of revealing Borkman's plan and consciously chose the timing. Taking care of his own interests, he must have acted very deliberately in order to avoid being drawn into bankruptcy when the plan was made public' (2015: 122). Consequently, Engelstad interprets Hinkel as 'the one who raised [Borkman] up to his powerful position' (2015: 122). While I agree with Engelstad that Hinkel's motive is not rooted in revenge for Ella's rejection, I would challenge the assumptions that Hinkel is the only factor in Borkman's powerful position in the bank and that he masterminded Borkman's misdeed by setting him up to do his dirty work.

It is crucial to bear in mind that Borkman advanced his social position by marrying Gunhild, thereby becoming a member of bourgeois society. While Hinkel's friendship was beneficial for Borkman, and '[h]an kunde og han vilde skaffe [Borkman] den ledende stilling i banken' (Ibsen 1896: 136) ['He was able and willing to secure [Borkman] the top job in the bank' (Ibsen 2014: 199)], Hinkel is not the only reason behind Borkman's elevated position. Although the text does not specify when Borkman was appointed to manage the bank, an investigation into Erhart's age reveals that Borkman was the bank director for nearly eight years before his conviction. In the second act, Borkman complains to Foldal about Erhart visiting his enemy (Hinkel) and mentions that his son was six or seven when Ella took him to spare the child from witnessing his father's trial (see Ibsen 2014: 190). Since Borkman had been married to Gunhild at least eight years before his conviction, he must have sacrificed Ella's love prior to his

marriage. Assuming that Hinkel's condition for assigning Borkman to managing the bank was to marry Ella, he would have cancelled the deal upon receiving Ella's rejection eight years ago. Logically, when one side of the deal does not keep his bargain, the other side will not keep his. Thus, Borkman's position cannot be attributed solely to Hinkel. Moreover, it should be noted that Borkman objectifies Ella due to something greater than a mere position at the bank. As he says, 'det var højere hensyn … som tvang mig' (Ibsen 1896: 129) ['I was compelled by higher motives' (Ibsen 2014: 196)]. Borkman reveals his motivation when Ella accuses him: 'Og så tusked du mig bort alligevel. Købslog om din kærligheds ret med en anden mand. Solgte min kærlighed for en – for en bankchefspost!' (Ibsen 1896: 130) ['you bartered me away. Bargained away your right to love with another man. Sold my love for a – for the chairmanship of a bank' (Ibsen 2014: 197)]. Borkman replies:

> BORKMAN (mørk og bøjet). Den tvingende nødvendighed var over mig, Ella (Ibsen 1896: 130) ... For magtlysten var så ubetvingelig i mig, ser du! Og så slog jeg til. Måtte slå til. Og han [Hinkel] hjalp mig op halvvejs imod de dragende højder, hvor jeg vilde hen. Og jeg steg og steg. År for år. (Ibsen 1896: 137)
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> BORKMAN [*gloomy and bowed*]: I was in the grip of inexorable necessity, Ella. (Ibsen 2014: 197) ... The lust for power was untamable in me, you see! So I struck the bargain. Had to. And he [Hinkel] helped me halfway up to the beckoning heights I wanted to reach. And I climbed and climbed. Year by year. (Ibsen 2014: 199)

Becoming the bank manager was just halfway up to the heights. Borkman's ulterior movie was to seek financial support from the bourgeoisie to fulfill his utopian fantasy of subjugating 'Alle magtens kilder i dette land' (Ibsen 1896: 135) ('all sources of power in this country', Ibsen 2014: 198) in order to build his kingdom. Furthermore, he was cognizant of the fact that the only way to fund his business plan was through his connections with the bourgeois community. So, to impress his bourgeois associates and gain their trust, he lavishly spent money to which he had access through public deposits (see Ibsen 2014: 160). Pertinent to the point, Borkman could not have immediately engaged in embezzling public funds after becoming bank director. I suggest that he resorted to embezzlement when he realized that the bourgeois authorities would not underwrite his project. Additionally,

Borkman could not have surreptitiously misappropriated shareholders' deposits without detection. He needed to trust that Hinkel would remain silent. That is why Borkman tells Foldal: 'Det infameste er vens misbrug af vens tillid' (Ibsen 1896: 99) ['the most infamous of all crimes is abusing the trust of a friend' (Ibsen 2014: 188)]. In other words, Borkman could not have taken the money entrusted to him without Hinkel's silence, and Ella's love was the price he had to pay. Therefore, it was Borkman who intended to do the dirty work, not Hinkel.

One reason why Hinkel exposed Borkman's misconduct lies in the obvious fact that he was protecting his own career. Hinkel's timing for disclosing Borkman's fraud further illustrates this point. When Hinkel realized that the public deposits could no longer be recovered, he had to reveal Borkman's wrongdoing for his own sake. Otherwise, he would have been convicted as an accomplice due to his prior knowledge of Borkman's embezzlement and his failure to report it sooner. Even though Borkman believes he was close to implementing his plan, Hinkel exposed him before the catastrophic consequences of Borkman's scheme affected him:

> BORKMAN. … Havde jeg bare fået otte dages frist til at område mig. Alle deposita skulde da været indløste. … De svimlende store aktieselskaber var dengang lige paa et hængende hår kommet istand. Ingen eneste en skulde ha' tabt en øre – (Ibsen 1896: 97)
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> (BORKMAN: … If only I'd had a margin of eight days to sort things out, all the deposits would have been honoured. ... I came within a hair's breadth of establishing dizzyingly vast corporations. And not a single person would have been even one øre out of pocket.)(Ibsen 2014: 187)

The outcome after eight days remains uncertain, but the undeniable fact is that all the public funds were gone and could not be collected within the stipulated time. Had it been possible to do so, people would not have lost their money when Borkman was found guilty. Therefore, Hinkel's reason for exposing Borkman's plan was not due to Ella's rejection that happened nearly eight years ago but the fact that within eight days Borkman's misdeed would eventually become publicly known.

There are two more interrelated reasons why Hinkel reported Borkman's misconduct. First, as discussed, within the process of financialisation – where one class dominates capital – a major conflict arises

between Borkman's mode of production and capitalist economic policies. This conflict, however, does not manifest itself in Bernick's project. Consequently, Hinkel, acting as the protector of bourgeois interests, would have exposed Borkman's fault regardless of whether or not Ella married him. Second, unlike Bernick, Borkman does not present a viable business plan. Borkman claims that his project would bring significant benefits, first to himself and then to the public. Moretti observes that Borkman 'dreams the dream ... Dreams are not lies. But they aren't the truth, either.' He describes Borkman as 'visionary; despotic; destructive; self-destructive: this is Ibsen's entrepreneur' (2013: 183). Therefore, to understand why bourgeois authorities did not finance Borkman's project while Bernick's community supported his, it is necessary to investigate the disparity between their business plans.

Bernick's Business Project Versus Borkman's

In his analysis of *Pillars of the Community*, Lars August Fodstad identifies two distinct monetary systems prevalent in Ibsen's era: the savings banks and the commercial banks. According to Fodstad, the savings banks 'had philanthropic agendas and provided short-term, low-risk credit in the local community.' On the other hand, the commercial banks 'had a greater impact on economic modernisation' as they facilitated 'large-scale and higher-risk joint capital' and allowed 'saving to be turned into venture capital' (Fodstad 2020: 114-115). Fodstad further explains that 'in this system, credit banks sell promissory notes that bind temporal and monetary functions together' (2020: 122). Therefore, when establishing a business, one must be aware that risk 'is a function of time, while time is also a means for mitigating risk' (Fodstad 2020: 122). In this context, Bernick recognises that the timing of actions is of paramount importance. Thus, he bases his new business venture on constructing a railway in his coastal town and, with his associates, purchases the land adjacent to the railway before prices rise. As Fodstad points out, '[t]he most interesting aspect of this industrial capitalism is its fundamental understanding of property as a mediator of monetary value. Within this logic, land is primarily valuable not in itself but rather as a sign within a symbolic order of abstract money' (2020: 124). It is evident that, like Borkman, Bernick's mode of production structurally relies on bourgeois financial support. However, instead of seeking direct investment for his business, Bernick transforms financing into 'the procurement of physical capital,' as Fodstad describes (2020: 124). This fixed asset can be provided in the form of seemingly worthless land on which they can construct the railway. As a result, not only does he avoid demanding direct investment

from his bourgeois associates, but he also creates a profitable business by increasing the value of the land adjacent to the railway that now belongs to them. Therefore, the former valueless land becomes profitable, and with a well-calculated plan, the benefits of the scheme outweigh any potential risk. A quick examination of Bernick's business plan indicates that his ambitious project is likely to succeed. Michael Evans, in his account of Torvald Helmer's competence as a banker in *A Doll's House*, writes '[w]e may not like him personally, but we would trust him with our money' (2008: 35). Evans's description of Torvald's competence as a successful banker can also be applied to Bernick's business acumen.

In contrast, investing in Borkman's venture is a risky proposition because his grandiose plan is in a highly precarious position. That is why he did not risk investing Ella's savings because he was also uncertain about the success of his project:

> BORKMAN. Jeg husker bare, at når jeg gik der ensom og tumled i stilhed med alle de store foretagender, som skulde sættes i værk, så syntes jeg, at jeg var tilmode ligesom jeg kunde tænke mig en luftskipper. Gik der i de søvnløse nætter og fyldte en kæmpeballon og skulde til at sejle udover et usikkert, farefuldt verdenshav. ... Menneskene er slig, Ella. De både tviler og de tror på den samme ting. (Ibsen 1896: 127)
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> (BORKMAN: All I remember is that, when I'd go grappling there, alone in silence with all the great plans I had to set in motion, I felt rather like the captain of a hot-air balloon must feel. All those sleepless nights I'd inflate a giant air balloon, preparing to sail away over all the world's perilous, uncertain seas. ... That's what people are like, Ella. They both doubt and believe in the same thing.) (Ibsen 2014: 196)

While Bernick proposes a meticulously planned project to his associates, Borkman does not present any concrete plan to anyone. In addition, the discrepancy between the two entrepreneurs' modes of production becomes evident when their respective callings are compared. Bernick's explanation of how his business would benefit bourgeois society illustrates this point:

> BERNICK. Hvilken løftestang vil det ikke blive for vort hele samfund? Tænk blot på de store skovtrakter, som vil

> gøres tilgængelige; tænk på alle de righoldige malmlejer, som kan tages i drift; tænk på elven med det ene fossefald ovenfor det andet! Hvilken fabrikvirksomhed kan ikke der komme istand? (Ibsen 1896: 42)
>
> (BERNICK: Imagine what a powerful lever it'll represent for our entire community. Think of the enormous tracts of forest that'll be made accessible; think of all the rich seams of ore that can be worked; think of the river with one waterfall after the other. Just imagine all the industry that can be established there.) (Ibsen 2016: 22)

Moretti asserts that 'Bernick is excited here: sentences are short, exclamatory,' and that he tries 'to arouse his listeners' imagination ... [by] multiply[ing] results in front of [their] eyes' (2013: 182). Nonetheless, the mode of his speech – which can be inferred from the determiner 'vort [our]' preceding 'hele samfund [entire community]' – conveys the impression that Bernick is consciously aware of being part of the community which will profit from this venture. Bernick emphasises that the bourgeois society, alongside himself, will benefit from 'the rich seams of ore' in one way or another. Whereas Bernick is an integral part of the dominant economic system, Borkman does not truly consider himself to be a part of the bourgeois community. Had he felt that way, he would never have refused the post he was offered as a cabinet minister (see Ibsen 2014: 188). Borkman used to belong to the lower class, and now he seeks to transcend any class boundaries:

> BORKMAN. Alle magtens kilder i dette land vilde jeg gøre mig underdanige. Alt, hvad jord og fjeld og skog og hav rummed af rigdomme – det vilde jeg underlægge mig og skabe herredømme for mig selv og derigennem velvære for de mange, mange tusend andre. (Ibsen 1896: 135)
>
> (BORKMAN: I wanted to subjugate all sources of power in this country. All the wealth contained in the earth, the mountains, the forests and the sea – I wanted to conquer and build myself a realm and through that promote the well-being of many, many thousands of others.) (Ibsen 2014: 198)

Borkman's calling, despite its ostensibly benevolent aim, is afflicted by his obsessive individualism. It is ironic, however, that his idea of subjugating wealth aligns with the dominant bourgeois ideology, which advocates that capital should be governed by a limited circle of elites. Nevertheless, the distribution of wealth under Borkman's mode of production, which is to be controlled under his power, is incompatible with the financialization process in the bourgeois economic order. Borkman's approach would have enabled him to gain control over economic structure and capital. As a result, he would have ruled over the capitalist bourgeoisie. As Hemmer notes about the economic climate of bourgeois society of that time, '[c]apital gave a position of power in society; and once those positions had been won, the bourgeois individual had acquired something which had to be defended' (1994: 79). That is why Borkman's plan was thwarted by Hinkel, as an invisible force tasked with protecting his bourgeois community from the megalomaniac manager who does not wish to share power with his bourgeois associates.

Moreover, bourgeois ethical standards discriminate between Bernick and Borkman. In a capitalist society where the definition of honesty is flexible, the bourgeoisie consider Bernick as an honest businessman for confessing his misconduct, while Borkman is labelled a dishonest banker for refusing to admit his guilt (see Ibsen 2014: 208). Moretti remarks that honesty 'is the bourgeois virtue because it's so perfectly adapted to capitalism: market transactions require trust, honesty provides it, and the market rewards it' (2013: 173). In the final scene, when Bernick condemns himself so that his bourgeois society takes possession of the truth (see Ibsen 2016: 98), he manipulates the concept of honesty by advancing a profitable business for the system. Consequently, he is rewarded with his community's trust. Zhulina also asserts that '[i]f future profits could override past crimes that led to them, then the definition of what constitutes a crime and a truth becomes unstable' (2018: 394). Considering that financial benefits blur the line between crime and truth, honesty becomes a relative notion in capitalism. Within the bourgeois economic system, those who advance the interests of the bourgeoisie are considered honest. Moretti further recognizes that 'Ibsen's wrongdoings occur in an elusive grey area whose nature is never completely clear.' He identifies this area as 'ruthless, unfair, equivocal, murky – yet seldom actually illegal' (2013: 171). This explains why Bernick's sordid past is overlooked by his bourgeois community: not only does he offer lucrative business to the plutocrats, but his plan is also not considered illegal.

In contrast, in *John Gabriel Borkman*, Hinkel exposes Borkman's embezzlement to reveal the truth and secure his reputation as an honest

man. Since Borkman's actions deprive his bourgeois community of the potential benefits of his future business, he is deemed dishonest. Therefore, I propose that Hinkel, rather than Borkman, should be seen as Bernick's counterpart. Consequently, Hinkel's invisible hand confines Borkman within the walls of his scandalous house, which becomes a prison for the alienated character and his family. Unlike Bernick, who regains his reputation by aligning with the bourgeoisie's adaptable concept of honesty and thus escapes his predicament, Ibsen's eponymous character remains a dishonoured banker, unable to restore his family's reputation by which he once promoted himself. As a result, all the family members experience self-imposed isolation.

The Visible Patriarchy and the Twin Sisters' Project

The aftermath of the inconsistency created by Borkman's mode of production within the dominant system results in various forms of alienation for his family. Borkman is alienated by the invisible hand of the state apparatus, which imprisons him, expressed as a symbolic 'iron hand' that ultimately takes his life. Zhulina suggests that the iron hand 'might stand for Borkman's hubris and the capitalist megalomania of relentless expansion' (2018: 395). Conversely, the alienation experienced by Ella and Gunhild is a result of what Jameson terms 'commodity reification' (1983: 85). Put differently, the stones of this prison-house, which accommodated the shadow sisters, were first laid by Borkman himself, for he had already commodified them as objects of exchange. Borkman's attitude towards Ella vividly reflects this notion:

> BORKMAN. Men du får huske på, at jeg er en mand. Som kvinde var du mig det dyreste i verden. Men når endelig så må være, så kan dog en kvinde erstattes af en anden – (Ibsen 1896: 135)
>
> (BORKMAN: But you should remember that I am a man. As a woman, you were the most precious thing in the world to me. But in the final analysis, one woman can always be replaced by another.) (Ibsen 2014: 198)

Borkman's perspective exemplifies Ibsen's critique of patriarchal ideology, which leads the solipsistic protagonist to commodify the two sisters. Joan Templeton argues that 'of Ibsen's last four ambitious men ... Borkman seems the most ruthless' one because he first replaces Ella with Gunhild, then

objectifies both to achieve his utopian fantasy (2001: 291). Therefore, their alienation is fundamentally different from Borkman's. For Ella, the invisible hand primarily represents 'an icy hand that kills the capacity to love, that congeals love into a commodity for sale. For Mrs. Borkman, 'the cold' that Ella blames for Borkman's death evokes his tarnished reputation and fall from grace' (Zhulina 2018: 395). Because of Borkman's exposure and subsequent fall back to his previous social class, Ella and Gunhild were relegated to an inferior status. To escape their alienation, the sisters must restore bourgeois trust by distancing themselves from Borkman's name, albeit through different strategies.

To restore bourgeois trust, there are two alternative strategies for Borkman's family. Either Borkman's reputation must be rehabilitated by someone else, or his name must be replaced by the original family name he has ruined, Rentheim. In both scenarios, Borkman must die to achieve these ends. This is the only way Gunhild and Ella can be reconciled and hold hands once more. Gunhild's strategy involves erasing Borkman's legacy entirely. She plans to create a monument of oblivion over his grave, ensuring that his name is forgotten, as she explains:

> FRU BORKMAN. Jeg har opdraget en hjælper til at sætte sit liv ind på dette ene. Han skal leve livet i renhed og højhed og lys, således at dit eget grubeliv bli'r som udslettet heroppe på jorden! … det er Erhart. Min søn. (Ibsen 1896: 173)
>
> (MRS BORKMAN: I have raised a helper, someone who will dedicate his life to this one thing. He will live such a pure, elevated, radiant life that it will be as though your own pit-life has been wiped out up here on earth! ... it is Erhart. My son.) (Ibsen 2014: 211)

Gunhild condemns Borkman for the terrible shame that he brought upon 'En så fornem familie' as hers (Ibsen 1896: 7) ['such a distinguished family' (Ibsen 2014: 159)]. To counteract this shame, she envisions a monument of infamy for him. Mark Sandberg describes this monument as 'an architecture of forgetting' (2015: 175). In other words, the family's reputation must be rebuilt through Erhart so that everyone forgets about his father. As Robin Young notes, the plan is to 'efface the memory of John Gabriel Borkman from the world.' Young also argues that for Gunhild, 'the sole purpose of posterity is to obliterate the immediate past ... in favour of that wealth and position which seems to be all she remembers of her own

childhood' (1989: 183). Ultimately, Erhart, like Osvald who carried the sins of his father, is supposed to bear the burden of the responsibility that is visited upon him.[6]

Ella also seeks to take revenge on the man who turned her into an alienated shadow. While Gunhild is determined to objectify her son to restore her family's reputation, Ella believes that the shame cannot be erased unless the original family name of Rentheim replaces the disgraced name of Borkman. She proposes a new offer:

> ELLA RENTHEIM. Når jeg nu snart går bort, så efterlader jeg mig ikke så ganske lidet ... Og det er min agt at la' det altsammen gå over på Erhart ... Når jeg dør, – så dør navnet Rentheim også ... Lad ikke det få ske! Lad Erhart få bære navnet efter mig! (Ibsen 1896: 150-152)
>
> (ELLA RENTHEIM: ... When I'm gone, ... I'll be leaving a fair bit ... And it's my intention to leave it all to Erhart. ... When I die – the Rentheim name dies with me. ... Don't let it happen. Let Erhart carry on my name!) (Ibsen 2014: 203-204)

Ella offers to make Erhart her heir, before declaring her intentions. Templeton notes that 'Ella's declaration of what she wants from the young man shows that her own demands are as onerous as Gunhild's [demands]' (2001: 294). In other words, not only does she insist that Erhart becomes her son in order to take him from the woman she believes separated her from the man she loved, but she also requests Erhart's identity to make the house of Rentheim respected and pure again. Orley Holtan maintains that '[i]t is no sacrifice for [Borkman] to lose Erhart, for he knows that he has lost him already. However, if a man's existence is continued in his son, Ella is asking Borkman to give up that existence' (1970: 137). Ella's plan, therefore, implies that for the shame to be obliterated, Borkman must inevitably die. Even though the two sisters have different views on their desperate plight, both strive for the same aim, and the weight of this duty must be carried by Erhart.

What makes Erhart's role more significant than that of other children in Ibsen's contemporary prose plays is that Ibsen, for the first time, gives a child the luxury of choice. Previous children in Ibsen's works were either too young to make their own choices or never had a chance to live long enough to make one. Ibsen deviates from his paradigm of portraying victimised children, as Erhart does not intend to carry the burden of restoring

his family's reputation. Frustrated by his parents, Erhart repudiates any calling:

> ERHART (mander sig op). Herregud, mor, – jeg er da ung! Jeg synes, at stueluften her rent må kvæle mig tilslut. ... Å, tante Ella, det er ikke et hår bedre hos dig. ... nu kan jeg ikke bære dette åg længer! Jeg er ung! ... (med et høfligt, hensynsfuldt blik til Borkman.) Jeg kan ikke vie mit liv til soning for nogen anden. Hvem denne anden så end måtte være. (Ibsen 1896: 180-182)

> (ERHART [*summoning courage*]: For God's sake, Mother – I'm young! I feel as if the stuffy air inside this drawing room will suffocate me in the end. ... Oh, Aunt Ella, it's not a whit better with you. ... I can't bear this yoke any longer. I'm young! ... [With a considerate, polite glance at BORKMAN] I cannot dedicate my life to atoning for someone else. Whoever that someone might be.)(Ibsen 2014: 214)

Although his rejection underscores the generational shift, Erhart lacked the courage to confront his parents before meeting Fanny Wilton. Having striven to escape, Erhart realises that the only person who can help him is Fanny, the character whom Ibsen endowed with free passage through mimetic spaces (Rentheim's visible estate) and diegetic spaces (Hinkel's invisible house). According to Jørgen Dines Johansen, in Ibsen's plays, 'while some characters are free to move in and out and between [diegetic and mimetic] spaces, others are not' (2002: 134). He effectively asserts that '[i]n Ibsen, confinement to certain space, real or imagined, is a predicament; and the movements of the free movers, and of those who successfully struggle to become free, in and out of a given space changes the fate of those who are imprisoned' (2002: 134). Thus, the fate of Borkman's family lies in the hands of Fanny Wilton, one of the most autonomous female characters Ibsen ever created. Even though all characters, including Borkman himself, invest in Erhart to release themselves from their confined spaces, Ibsen provides Fanny with the power to liberate both the younger and older generations.

Fanny Wilton's Project

Erhart's intention to objectify Fanny as a means for his freedom is in stark contrast to Fanny's own sense of agency and autonomy. Unlike Gunhild and

Ella, who have been victimised by an egocentric man, Fanny is not absorbed in her victimisation. She is consciously aware of and honest about her past. When Gunhild sarcastically says that '[j]eg trode, at De allerede var uløselig bunden – til en anden' (Ibsen 1896: 192) ('I thought you were already indissolubly tied – to someone else', Ibsen 2014: 217), Fanny firmly replies that her ex-husband deserted her and now he is dead to her, and Erhart knows all about it. Fanny has overcome the failure of her first marriage and found her autonomous voice again. Accordingly, I refute Templeton's theory that in this play 'Ibsen is less interested in Borkman's abuse of Ella and Gunhild, cruel though it was, than in the women's continuing absorption in their victimisation' (2001: 292). Ibsen portrays Fanny Wilton to draw a sharp line between women who remain in their victimised position in the patriarchal society and those who fight and enhance their agency. Fanny displays her autonomy by her response to Gunhild's accusation of seducing her unfortunate son. She emphatically replies: 'Nej. Jeg har hverken dåret eller forlokket ham. Frivillig er Erhart kommet imod mig. Og frivillig har jeg mødt ham på halvvejen' (Ibsen 1896: 191) ['No. I've neither tricked nor seduced him. Erhart came to me of his own free will. And of my own free will I met him halfway' (Ibsen 2014: 217)]. Fanny's characteristics can be recognised as those of the 'New Woman,' a concept defined by Gail Finney: 'a literary type which flourished above all in Victorian fiction of the 1890s. The New Woman typically values self-fulfilment and independence rather than the stereotypically feminine ideal of self-sacrifice; [The New Woman] believes in legal and sexual equality' (1994: 95). Fanny's decisive response illustrates the fact that she has the power to make her own decisions irrespective of the repression of patriarchal ideology. She embodies the characteristics of the New Woman by valuing self-fulfilment and independence and by asserting her right to make choices about her life and relationships.

There is, however, a ubiquitous assumption that due to Fanny's sexual charm, Erhart is under her spell. This presupposition mostly emanates from her first appearance on the stage when Fanny explicitly demonstrates how her charm lures Erhart away from the companionship of his mother and aunt. In this regard, Zhulina writes that 'Borkman's son falls victim to a kind of icy, iron hand personified by Mrs. Wilton, a wealthy, older woman who seduces him. Instead of choosing either his mother or his aunt, Erhart leaves them for Mrs. Wilton' (2018: 398). Nevertheless, it is vital to note that Erhart is so desperate to release himself from his parents' control that even if there was someone else instead of Fanny, he would have left in any case. This granted, it is also safe to assume that there is, at least,

enough transparency in Erhart and Fanny's relationship to make them realize their feelings for each other are not going to last for a long time:

> FRU BORKMAN. Og hvor længe tror De, den lykken vil vare?
> ERHART (afbrydende). Kort eller længe, mor, – det får være det samme! ... Jeg bry'r mig ikke om at se fremover i tiden. ... Jeg vil bare få lov til at leve livet engang, jeg også! (Ibsen 1896: 196)

> MRS BORKMAN: And how long do you think this happiness will last?
> ERHART [*interrupting*]: However little or long it lasts, Mother – it doesn't matter! ... I'm not worried about what the future holds. ... all I want is to be allowed to live my own life – for once, like everyone else! (Ibsen 2014: 218)

Erhart claims he does not care about the future, but Fanny is mature enough to realize that he seeks an escape from his miserable life. She surpasses Ibsen's previous emancipated characters such as Lona Hessel who, in a self-deceptive manner, dedicates her life to helping Bernick fulfil his calling. There are nineteen years of experience, with eleven plays, between Lona and Fanny in Ibsen's oeuvre. Among Ibsen's late female characters who are financially privileged, yet are victimised by their ambitious husbands, only Rita acts autonomously due to her financial power in *Little Eyolf*. In *John Gabriel Borkman*, Fanny can be construed as a variant of Rita if Alfred Allmers had abandoned her. Juxtaposing Fanny with Rita, moreover, unmasks how patriarchal ideology belittles women's efforts to free society from patriarchal ideology. Like Rita, whose competence in taking care of the indigent children is overshadowed by her sexuality, Fanny's plan to free Frida and Erhart from the alienation imposed on them by the bourgeois hegemony has also been called into question because of her sexuality by patriarchal ideology.[7]

It is significant to note how patriarchal ideology adopts a radically different approach to men, like Borkman, who subjugate others' property, and women who commit the same crime. Simone de Beauvoir, in her seminal book, *The Second Sex*, writes:

> Patriarchal society, being centred upon the conservation of the patrimony, implies necessarily, along with those who own and transmit wealth, the existence of men and

> women who take property away from its owners and put it into circulation. [The men are considered] adventurers, swindlers, thieves, speculators [who] are generally repudiated by the group. [On the other hand,] the women, employing their erotic attraction, can induce young men ... to scatter their patrimonies. … Some of these women appropriate their victim's fortunes or obtain legacies by using undue influence; this role being regarded as evil, those who play it are called bad women. (1956: 261)

Ibsen's text does not suggest that Fanny induced Erhart to take the inheritance he is supposed to receive from his aunt. However, scholarship has either ignored Fanny or interpreted her character as a 'bad woman' who lures the young generation.[8] I argue that this interpretation is misleading. Labelling Fanny as a 'bad woman' due to her erotic attraction not only reduces her intentions to a mere scheme to seduce Erhart but also invalidates her genuine efforts to help Frida.

From the moment Fanny appears on the stage, her behaviour diverges from bourgeois expectations. Anne-Marie Stanton-Ife, in her translation of the play, writes that '[v]isitors were expected to be announced in bourgeois households, either by a card or by the maid' (2014: 305). Taking this into account, John Northam claims that 'we have already gathered that this deserted (or divorced) wife may not be quite respectable. Certainly, her entrance, so different from Ella's, is unconventional' (1970: 436). This perceived lack of respectability has led some scholars to view her as a manipulative figure. Elinor Fuchs, for instance, describes her as a sexually experienced divorcee who takes Erhart and Frida away to a 'far more playful universe' (2014: 74-75). Zhulina echoes this sentiment, portraying Fanny as a modern-day Snow Queen who ensnares Erhart and Frida (2018: 398). The bedrock of all these debates lies mainly in Fanny's announcement when she says:

> FRU WILTON. Jeg rejser sydover, ja. Til udlandet. Sammen med en ung pige. Og Erhart følger med os. ... Det er denne lille Frida Foldal, som jeg har ta't i huset til mig. Jeg vil, at hun skal ud og lære mere musik. ... jeg kan jo ikke godt slippe det unge barn løs alene derude. (Ibsen 1896: 198-199)
> FRU BORKMAN (med et ondt smil). Fru Wilton, – tror De, at De gør rigtig klogt i at ta' denne unge pigen med?

> FRU WILTON (gengælder smilet, halvt ironisk, halvt alvorlig). Mændene er så ubestandige, fru Borkman. Og kvinderne ligervis. Naar Erhart er færdig med mig, – og jeg med ham, – så er det godt for os begge, at han, stakker, har nogen at falde tilbage på. (Ibsen 1896: 202-203)

> MRS WILTON: I'm going abroad, to the South. With a young girl. And Erhart is coming with us. ... It's little Frida Foldal, whom I've had living with me. I want her to go abroad and study music. ... I can't very well let the young child loose out there on her own. (Ibsen 2014: 219)]
> MRS BORKMAN [*with a malicious smile*]: Mrs. Wilton, do you think it's wise to take that young girl along?
> MRS WILTON [*returning the smile, half ironic, half serious*]: Men are so fickle, Mrs. Borkman. Women too. When Erhart has finished with me – and I with him – it will be good for both of us if, poor thing, he has someone to fall back on. (Ibsen 2014: 220)

Regarding Fanny's plan to provide Erhart a 'readily available companion' when he is finished with her, Holtan maintains that '[i]t is difficult to accept Erhart Borkman and Fanny Wilton as symbols of the way life ought to be lived' (1970: 152). However, her dialogue can be read as an ironic gesture since Fanny emphasises that she and Frida are the primary travellers, with Erhart joining them: 'Erhart *følger* med os'. Her stress on who accompanies whom indicates Fanny is going to leave with Frida whether Erhart goes with them or not. This nuance indicates that her priority is to help Frida pursue her musical education and escape the stifling environment where human relationships are marked by deceit (see Ibsen 2014: 191). Fanny's autonomy and assertiveness challenge the patriarchal constraints of her time. I argue that Fanny underscores a critical aspect of Ibsen's evolving critique of societal norms, as seen from *Pillars of the Community* to *John Gabriel Borkman*: the tendency to undermine women's genuine efforts and capabilities by reducing them to their sexuality.

Zhulina supports this point and contends that 'Mrs. Wilton is no fairy sorceress, but rather figures as a personification of capital, as she carries away the progenies of the play, Erhart and Frida, promising to support them' (2018: 398). Although Fanny has the bourgeoisie's trust due to her access to Hinkel's home, she is not the symbol of capital. If she were, she would not have left the country with Frida and Erhart. Robert Dale Parker explains that, in a capitalist system, 'capital is more than simply money that

people exchange for goods or labor. It is money that capitalists use to purchase goods or labor for the purpose of making a profit.' He further clarifies, 'capital refers to money that is used to make more money' (2020: 231). Taking Frida and Erhart abroad offers no financial benefit to Fanny. Given that both parties agreed upon a temporary relationship, investing in Erhart or even Frida would have been a risky venture for her with no clear financial advantage. Hence, it is reasonable to argue that, unlike Borkman, who disregards his old friend Foldal, Fanny's concern for Frida's future is genuine. Fanny's genuine feeling for Erhart can also be perceived from her confession to Gunhild when she says: 'Jeg har aldrig før vidst, hvad lykke var i livet. Og jeg kan da umulig vise lykken fra mig, fordi om den kommer så sent' (Ibsen 1896: 196) ['I never knew what happiness was till now. And I can't possibly push happiness away, just because it's come so late' (Ibsen 2014: 218)]. As a result, Fanny's autonomous decision has significant implications for Borkman's family. Owing to her financial independence, Fanny not only alters the future of the next generation but also impacts the fate of the imprisoned characters.

Conclusion

As Young notes, the departure of Erhart and Frida represents 'the true climax of the play' (1989: 190). Their exit symbolises 'a moment of revelation. Now all the seals are broken'. It allows Borkman to finally free himself from his eight years of self-imposed confinement, leading to the reconciliation between Gunhild and Ella (Young 1989: 191). However, a nagging feeling remains: Erhart and Frida are in such a hurry to escape from their alienated parents that they do not even care about running over old Foldal. When Foldal wishes to visit Fanny's home to see his daughter before her departure, Borkman sarcastically comments: 'De rejste med hende i den vognen, som kørte dig over på vejen' (Ibsen 1896: 223) ['They took her away in the sleigh that ran you over' (Ibsen 2014: 228)]. He then adds:

> BORKMAN. … din datter er kommen godt op at køre. Og student Borkman også. – Nå, – la' du så mærke til sølvklokkerne?
> FOLDAL. Jo da. – Sølvklokkerne, siger du? Var det Sølvklokker, du? Virkelig ægte sølvklokker?
> BORKMAN. Det kan du forlade dig på. Altsammen var ægte. Både udenpå og – og indeni. (Ibsen 1896: 224)

> BORKMAN: ... your daughter is riding in style. And young Mr. Borkman too – Tell me – did you notice the silver bells?
> FOLDAL: Yes, I did – Did you say silver bells? Were they silver? Real, genuine silver bells?
> BORKMAN: You can be quite sure of that. Everything was genuine. Both outside and inside. (Ibsen 2014: 228)

Holtan interprets Borkman's sarcastic remark as indicative of youth 'rushing to its own destruction' (1970: 152). What casts a lingering doubt on the young people's future is that, unlike Nora who slammed the door to seek her true self, Erhart and Frida abandon their home not in pursuit of self-discovery but merely to escape their past. However, I argue that their departure does not inherently undermine Fanny's genuine plan but rather reflects Ibsen's evolving perspective on bourgeois hegemony, which suggests a pessimistic view of escaping such oppression. Eli Park Sørensen posits that '[t]he play's ending leaves everything unfinished. ... There is no dramatic after-life, no question to be answered, no new beginnings ... With Borkman's death, it all comes to an end – not because all has been resolved, but because it is too late to care. (2012: 290). As a result, I suggest that the play's conclusion, where characters are free from their confinement, can be construed as Ibsen's symbolic resolution of the insoluble conflicts generated by capitalist hegemony, the system that has long alienated human relationships. Borkman's expression after Foldal departs underscores this alienation: 'Farvel, Vilhelm! Det er ikke første gang i livet, at du er ble't overkørt, gamle ven' (Ibsen 1896: 226) ['Goodbye, Vilhelm! This isn't the first time you've been run over in life, old friend' (Ibsen 2014: 228)]. Thus, the ambiguous future of the youngsters, Borkman's death, the very late reconciliation between Gunhild and the terminally ill Ella, and Hinkel's perpetual invisibility all suggest that the capitalist system offers no hope for either the previous or the next generations. While in *Pillars of the Community*, Ibsen leaves a glimmer of hope for readers, in *John Gabriel Borkman*, he 'looks the bourgeois in the face, and asks: So, finally, what have you brought into the world?' (Moretti 2013: 170). Ibsen's penultimate play demonstrates how capitalism runs over lower classes and commodifies human relationships.

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[1] In the following, I cite from the new translation of Ibsen's play, entitled *Pillars of the Community,* which departs from the customary reference to this play as *The Pillars of Society*.

[2] On 15 December 1896, the day *John Gabriel Borkman* was published, Arthur Aumont, Ibsen's contemporary critic, also wrote – in his review of the play in a Copenhagen newspaper – that Ella Rentheim is a kind of continuation of Marta in *Pillars of the Community*: 'en Art Fortsættelse af Marta i *Samfundets Støtter*.' Moreover, see Holtan (1970: 136), Clurman (1977: 184), Ewbank (1994: 132), Durbach (1982: 58), Thomas (1983: 94), McFarlane (1989: 328-329), Templeton (2001: 292), Moretti (2013: 181-182), and Zhulina (2018: 393-397).

[3] To elaborate, the first quartet of Ibsen's last twelve plays, starting from *The Pillars of the Community* to *The Enemy of the People,* are considered as Ibsen's social problem dramas where his realistic approach to social problems is apparent. However, Ibsen's later plays are mostly known as psychological and symbolic; therefore, they are not considered as social problem drama. See He (2003: 54), Meyer (1971: 512), Johnston (1975: 88, 105), David (1983: 101–102), Lebowitz (1990:130), Nylander (2005: 106), Wright (2010: 303–304). Nevertheless, I suggest that Ibsen did not leave his critique of social problems, rather he employed a different approach in the later plays (see Miller (2021: 43) and Manouchehrian (2023: 138)). Thus, drawing on Jameson's theory, I argue that Ibsen's symbolic approach can be construed as a political act to address social problems in bourgeois society.

[4] In *The Master Builder* (1982), Solness is described as 'en fattig gut fra landsbygden' (Ibsen 1999: 51) ['a poor boy from the country' (Ibsen 2014: 21)], who later launched his career when his wife's family home burned down. In *Little Eyolf* (1894), Allmers also reminds Asta how they were 'stakkers fattige forældreløse' (Ibsen 1999: 212) ['Poor, penniless orphans' (Ibsen 2014: 103)], and now he 'sidder i velstand og herlighed' (Ibsen 1999: 212) ['surrounded by affluence and luxury' (Ibsen 2014: 103)] due to his wife's fortune.

[5] Christine A. Korte, likewise, argues that 'Hinkel uses John Gabriel as a scapegoat and as an emblem of speculative capitalism's checks and balances.' As she further notes, the bourgeois law 'becomes a way to sublimate the destructive dynamism of capitalism that can no longer accommodate the John Gabriel type under its façade of rational order' (2015: 158).

[6] Errol Durbach also compares *John Gabriel Borkman* to Ibsen's *Ghosts* and argues it is 'very like the connection Ibsen explores in *Ghosts* between Mrs Alving and Osvald, where the child becomes an instrument to exorcise the father's sins' (1982: 56).

[7] The notion that belittles Rita's competence mostly emanates from comparing her to the Rat-wife, and therefore presupposes that her sexuality is destructive. See, for example, Jacobs (1984: 606), Stanton (1999: 574), and Helland (2003: 142).

[8] This idea can also be observed in Holton (1970: 150), R. Lyons (1973: 304), Johnston (1979: 19), McFarlane (1989: 315), Park Sørensen (2012: 294), Fuchs (2014: 74-75), Christensen (2015: 111), Zhulina (2018: 398), and Sprinchorn (2020: 549).