

Ibsen's Brand: Drama of the Fatherless Society

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Raymond Williams described Ibsen's drama as a conflict between vocation and the legacy of inherited guilt. With respect to *Brand*, which he considered one of Ibsen's most dramatic plays, he wrote: "For the paradox of Brand, the exceptional individual, is that he is seen, by his creator, as the essential spirit of man; it is for the general human liberation that this exceptional man struggles. And this is, then, decisively, a modern consciousness: the classical position of late, desperate liberalism. . . . The vocation is liberation: the realization of what 'man can become.' The debt is received experience and received institutions, as embodied in others but active also in his own inevitable inheritance."¹ Subsequent Ibsen criticism has at least tacitly supported Williams' insight into the modernity of Ibsen's drama. The best of it discovered the spirit of his drama in unresolved thematic tensions, dramatic irony, or the open form of tragicomedy which the German romantics first associated with modernist drama.² While I do not wish to challenge Ibsen's modernism, I do not propose yet another variation of the same theme expressed in a different and admittedly more resistant critical idiom. Rather, I wish to refer dramatic conflicts, thematic and formal contradictions, and ambiguous characterizations to a specific historical context which is incompletely but legibly inscribed in the subtext of *Brand*. I want to elucidate this subtext with the help of the critical theory of the *Frankfurt School*, especially the research of Horkheimer, Adorno, Habermas--and peripherally Mitscherlich--on the institutions and cultures of liberal and late capitalist societies. This approach is based on the assumption that Ibsen's drama chronicles the painful transition from one culture to the other and that the subtext of *Brand*, which consists of three separate but related family narratives,

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presents this transition more completely than other plays.

The narrative of Brand's childhood and family past comprise what I should like to designate as the textual "real" of the family. I am calling it the fatherless family because it is characterized by the erosion of paternal authority due to historical developments which displaced the economic and social functions of the bourgeois family to corporate and educational oligopolies of the modern industrial state.³ Brand's moral critique of this family and his vision of a robust age where idea and action, intellect and sensibility, and individual and community are once more reconciled in a primary and personal relationship to the Father are discursively tied to the earlier Protestant model of the patriarchal family of the liberal era. The text also proposes implicitly a "progressive" family ideal in which maternal values predominate. There are decided advantages to rereading this subtext through critical theory because the *Frankfurt School* views the transformation of the family as neither wholly progressive nor regressive and because it relates those changes to broader social transformations. Critical theory does not reduce the traditional bourgeois family to an agency of male power or the "progressive" family to an emancipated private sphere. Critics such as Horkheimer, Adorno, or Habermas concede that the traditional family was deeply implicated in the reproduction of capitalist relations and that it mediated phallogocentric authority relations between family members and between the family and society. But they also insist that it understood itself differently, as an intimacy sphere which kept alive the promise of personal autonomy and parity among members as human beings and that this utopian ideal was not mere ideology. Conversely, while they applaud the diminished role of the *pater familias* in the progressive family, they also stress that its internal realignment was undertaken from without and in the interest of redefining and marginalizing the family in an era of corporate and administrative power. Their retrospective reading does not relegate the past to poststructuralist oblivion and it refuses to look longingly to a romantically transfigured golden age. Instead, it confronts the present with the past and the past with the present in order to understand critically what ails us today. Such readings of dramatic texts are ideally intended as prolegomena to productions which can make Ibsen emotionally and intellectually meaningful to us and help us understand our reality. But before examining the triadic structure of the subtext, I should like to recall the significant events which shape the action of the play.

The temporal ordering of events or plot time covers a period of about five years.⁴ In this time frame Brand's search for the vital center of the self is compressed into a series of dramatic events. The sequences comprise Brand's return from meditative isolation (Act I), a heroic deed--Brand risks his life to minister to a father who had killed his starving child in despair--the discovery by Brand and Agnes that the path to spiritual renewal must lead inward, and Brand's decision to define his calling by an unwavering devotion to his daily duties as parish priest (Act II). The events of Acts III and IV occur after a

hiatus of three years and chronicle Brand's sacrifice of his family to his calling. Act V dramatizes Brand's expulsion from the community eighteen months after the death of his wife. Brand wants to achieve social change by changing the individual. The utopian thrust of his ideals as well as his authoritarian practice are rooted in values associated with the traditional family. This connection is encoded in the text's chronological time. The events, including those reported, span the period of Brand's life from childhood. His past is recalled in Brand's soliloquy ending Act I (95) and in the confrontation between Brand and the Mother (II, 115-23). Brand's geneology shapes him as subject and determines the discursive limits of his critique of society. The family produces Brand, and his ideas and acts are never his own.

The family circumstances of Brand's childhood trigger a bitter confrontation between mother and son. In discussing the scene I am going to stress the historically typical aspect of the family and then relate it to the societal structures signified by the text. I will discuss Brand's understanding of his past and his relationship to it as subject later. Brand tells his mother that he had watched her rummage through his father's belongings, looking for hidden cash while he lay on his deathbed. When he accuses his mother of heartlessness, she defends herself by claiming that she needed money desperately and that she had a right to an inheritance. Her own father had forced her to renounce her love for the young son of a cottager and marry an older man, Brand's father, because he would be a better match. But his business failed miserably and when he died he left her destitute. Since she became a widow, however, she had succeeded in making a small fortune and now expects her son to inherit the wealth with the understanding that he will support and comfort her in her old age.

A number of disclosures situate the Mother in the extraterritorial grids of the traditional family whose savage egocentrism is narrowly focused on the accumulation and transmission of family wealth and the maintenance or promotion of social standing by means of strategic marital alliances. Her youthful body was bartered in exchange for prospects of wealth and social legitimacy. She expected a strong spouse who could compete successfully in the market. After his failures and eventual demise she assumed the role of family patriarch and now expects her son to guard the wealth and care for her. These expectations are consistent with the functions of the traditional family whose relative social independence derived from the autonomy of the *pater familias* in his role as small businessman and proprietor.⁵ I would like to retain two important revelations: 1) the family appears not as a protected, private preserve but seems to be vulnerable to market competition; 2) the father, who once wielded authority, is weak while the Mother's exposure to marital and economic market pressures has destructive effects on her personality.

The Mother's pathos is poignantly recalled: "Right from the start I paid the price in full-- / I see now I paid with the shipwreck of my life. / I gave it all away--and now it's gone forever. / I seem to see it now as something bright

and fleeting, / Something foolish, light as air, but beautiful. / Something I now hardly know the meaning of . . . / People used to call it love" (11, 119). The Mother loved a cottager's son but was pressured into marrying a bourgeois. Her suffering accuses the practice of marriages of convenience. This critique is not insignificant. To the bourgeoisie of an earlier period the family seemed to be founded on consent, to form a community of love, and to foster human relations among equals which encouraged the development of cultivated, inner-directed human beings. As Jürgen Habermas has pointed out, this self-representation of the bourgeoisie was not mere self-deception.⁶ Her suffering accuses not just the dissymmetrical relations between marriage and happiness or the unequal relations between male and female subjects, but the brutal repression of the body as the site of love and sexuality. The critique of this oppressive aspect of marriage transactions is developed further through the characters Gert and Einar. The solitary and mad Gert who worships nature in the inhuman regions of glaciers is the illegitimate child of the cottager's young son and bears witness to the destructive power of unrequited love.⁷ Einar, who lost Agnes to Brand, becomes a fanatically distorted missionary.⁸ The text, however, fails to thematize the relations between the family and the market or the effects those relations might have on the subject producing functions of the family. Yet those relations are signified by the weakness of the father and the destruction of the Mother's humanity who assumed his role in the exchange process. One could, of course, assume that the structure of Brand's family is episodic. In that case, Brand would have been a different person had his father been strong or had his mother been less successful in replacing him. But I think it makes more sense to argue that the paradigm is historically typical. The father's position as small property owner was an important source of his authority prior to the advent of monopoly capitalism during the second half of the nineteenth century.⁹ It guaranteed the material security of the family which, in turn, created the conditions of privacy. It carved out a terrain which was relatively protected from the violence of sibling rivalries in the market where the independence of one was achieved by the destruction of another. The promise of equal relations between persons could be kept alive in the family despite the actual domination of the *pater familias* because its members thought of the family as a human space which was independent of the order of property.¹⁰ Horkheimer and Adorno recall eloquently that such a family did not just produce authoritarian personalities. It was also capable of educating children endowed with moral courage, discipline, and a strong sense of self, who would become individuals capable not just of representing authority but of criticizing its abuses. But they required the mediating influence of paternal will and perseverance as well as the maternal capacity for understanding, compassion and love.¹¹

The weakness of Brand's father suggests not just that the family had lost its sense of economic autonomy. It also suggests the attendant loss of primary authority relationships and models which shaped the subject of humanism, the

individual. The idea of the "whole self" which motivates Brand's striving becomes problematic when its discursive site, the family, loses its autonomy and social functions. Instead of educating "whole persons," those charged with mediating authority relations are themselves crippled by the encroachment of market forces. The Mother was an object of exchange on the matrimonial market and she became the function she was compelled to exercise when she took the father's place and competed successfully in the market. Those necessities twisted her into a cold and calculating competitor who lacks human warmth and overrates property. In her double role as savagely competitive father and unloving mother, she communicates the destructive effects of market forces on a family which no longer educates whole human beings who act autonomously with conscience and compassion but creates pathological and homeless subjects. These textual implications are never fully explored and characters such as the Mayor, Brand, and the Doctor only perceive her obsession with money.¹²

To the extent to which Brand's family can be seen as the ruined remnant of the traditional family, it points to the weakening of paternal authority. It discloses the naked irrationality of that power in specifying that the maintenance of family property, which once legitimated paternal authority, consumes the very privacy to which property empowered. The weakening of the father can therefore not be interpreted as a progressive development. What disappears with the patriarchal family is not just paternal power and privilege, but the utopian and revolutionary moment, the principle of love for the whole person which Hegel identified with "womanliness" and Engels with matriarchy.¹³ The fatherless family is also motherless. It survives in the margins of a textually signified world which can be characterized as fatherless to the second degree: "Fatherlessness to the second degree dissolves the personal element of power relationships; one is aware of authority as ever, but it cannot be visualized. The fatherless (and increasingly also motherless) child grows up into an adult world with no visible master, exercises anonymous functions, and is guided by anonymous functions."¹⁴ Mitscherlich identifies fatherlessness broadly with overorganized and administered mass society with its intense specialization of labor, mass production, and tentacular bureaucracies. In such a society power is not associated with an individual. It is inherent in official functions, diffuse and nameless, yet total in its depersonalized and rationalized form.¹⁵ For the purpose of this study, only three aspects of fatherlessness need to be stressed: sibling rivalries, the reduction of human relations to exchange relations, and the abolition of the past. They are linked to Brand's quest and connote negatively society's concern with material progress, self-interest, and the shrinking of individuals to mere functions in contrast to Brand's call for spiritual renewal and sacrifice under the aegis of the Father and his striving for wholeness. This means that social and political issues are encoded in the play of oppositions of a moral discourse. This subordination of socio-political issues to a morality of ends associated with

absolute paternal authority accounts for the simplistic portrayal of the social world and the reduction to caricature of authority figure such as the Mayor, the Dean, the Sexton, and the Schoolmaster. But inasmuch as these scenes produce the conditions of fatherlessness in the loss of autonomy and ethical integrity of authority figures, in the dispersion of power, and in the dehumanization of a social order divided into an anonymous mass and opportunistic functionaries, they are dramatically necessary. They provide a rational basis for Brand's quixotic attempt to reintegrate the "primal horde."

The plot elements which connect the Mayor to Brand and the townspeople articulate a mode of human relations which is typical of the fatherless society. As an elected official whose power depends on votes, the Mayor strives to neutralize Brand's growing influence over his constituency. At first, he attempts to persuade Brand to leave the district and move to the more prosperous southern regions of Norway, where his message of spiritual renewal might be received more sympathetically than in the poverty-stricken North. When Brand refuses, he warns him not to challenge his power since he has the majority on his side (III, 139-45). Yet prior to their meeting he had spread rumors suggesting that Brand would abandon his flock once he had received his mother's inheritance (150). On his second visit he changes tactics because he no longer enjoys the support of the majority. He admits defeat cheerily, but with the intent of soliciting Brand's financial support for social projects which he intends to propose as part of his election campaign strategy. When Brand informs him that he wishes to spend his inheritance for the construction of bigger church, the Mayor hastily abandons his war on poverty and supports Brand's project (IV, 164-78). Finally, when it appears that he might lose control over the masses--they are following Brand into the mountains--he falsely claims that a large school of fish had been sighted in the fjord and promises food for everyone, if they would return with him for the catch (V, 233).

The Mayor's actions derive from the political divisions of an unenlightened and politically disenfranchised mass, whom he must control if he wants to stay in power, and the uneasy alliance between elected and appointed officials. They are a ruling elite of town notables who exercise control over political, religious, and educational jurisdictions. The Mayor can flatter, support, threaten, or even injure his adversary without appearing villainous because he is no more than effect of a force field of the social division of bureaucratized power. He acts in accordance with the rules of the game. There is an implicit understanding among notables not to invade the jurisdiction of the other and to maintain themselves in power by tacitly agreed upon alliances.¹⁶ Yet relations between notables are potentially sibling rivalries. When Brand challenges the arrangement, the others band together and expel him from the community. There can be no ethical center or personal mediator in a society where relations between men have become relations between competitors. Values are dissociated from the life-process, administered according to areas

of specialization, and put in the service of social control. "After all," the Mayor concedes disarmingly, "you've got to look out for number one, haven't you?" (III, 139). The utilitarian ethics of the scientific civilization, which conquers nature for the purpose of creating material wealth, comes full circle when the subject who objectified nature is himself transformed into an object. Brand is valuable to the Mayor only to the degree to which he can use him to further his own political ambitions, and the masses are computed into his political program only to the extent to which his knowledge of their needs can be transformed into political rhetoric. Human relations have become object relations, exchange value euphemistically passed off as enlightened self-interest. In fact, the Mayor professes that he works for the general good: "Through my efforts, / The population has doubled--nay, indeed, / Well nigh tripled--because I have assured / A source of livelihood for everyone. / We have forged ahead / As if driven by a veritable steam-engine progress / In an unremitting battle against hostile nature. / We have built roads. We have built bridges . . ." (III, 143). One has good reasons to suspect that the Mayor is not committed to the ethics of the emerging welfare state since he proposes building poor-houses in order to win reelection and shelves the idea when a temporary alliance with Brand promises better political returns. He processes the liberal rhetoric of material progress for personal advantage. But regardless of the personal motives one may attribute to the dramatic character, the ideology of material progress in which he positions himself depends on quantitative planning, production, and communication without regard for the individual and therefore cannot furnish the discursive schemes in which personal or group identity could be thought.¹⁷

The past once provided the context and continuity for personal and group identity in the form of tradition; but only the empty gestures of tradition remain: "If only you could bring yourself to visit / Some of our village celebrations, where I and the constable, / The sexton and the magistrate are given seats of honor, / Then you would see, when the punch goes round, / That King Bele's memory is far from dead. We remember him / In rousing toasts, the clinks of glasses, the drinking songs" (III, 142). This is the Mayor's response to Brand's critique of society's forgetfulness of tradition. The past is reduced to pomp and preserved for the drunken approval of otherwise sober organization men who blindly reproduce a world which has exchanged heroism for self-interest, passion for calculation, and the barbarism of Viking conquests for the barbarism of economic hegemony. Even the ideology of progress, which promised not only freedom from want, but personal freedom and human solidarity, is twisted into a shabby apology for mediocrity: "Society today is more humane. We do not demand / Any more drastic sacrifices. The pity of it is, / I was one of the first to advocate this / 'Humane society' stuff, . . ." (IV, 166). With the Mayor's assimilation of human values to stuff, viz. to goods and nonsense, the emancipatory thrust of the Enlightenment is effectively throttled.¹⁸ Its covenant with the future is cynically transformed into an

expedient subterfuge: "A people's promise, my dear man, is / . . . / . . . something everybody looks to, / Because they are attracted by some great idea-- / Some great thing about to happen to them . . . / In the people's *future*, you will observe. Sexton: That's one thing I've got clear at last. / But there is something else I can't get straight. / Schoolmaster: What's that? / Sexton: Tell me, what is this great future / They talk about? And *when* is it? / Schoolmaster: Aha, the future never comes! / Sexton: Never? / Schoolmaster: It stands to reason. . . . / For when what we call the future arrives, / It becomes the *present*--is no longer the future" (V, 197). Such false *plaidoyers* tend to reduce characters to functional automatons who are unaware of their alienation. But this reduction is consistent with a social order where alienation no longer knows itself. The characters are agents of a world without historical memory and without the mediating power of tradition. And since it has also abrogated its compact with the future, it has no critical concepts by which it might judge the present. "In the final analysis, to promise is / To prevaricate...." (197-98). With these words the Schoolmaster pronounces the assimilation of Enlightenment's promise of a more humane world to the instrumental rationality of social control. The Mayor's campaign against poverty is a promise without future. Although he is actively engaged in charitable distributions of grain to the poor (II, 100-04), he merely intends to control poverty as a source of vice: "The poor will always be with us. / In all communities, it is a necessary evil. / . . . / But with a little contrivance it can be made / To take on other forms. In time, / . . . / It can be strictly controlled. We all know, of course, / That poverty's the muck on which the country's vices thrive" (IV, 169). Misery is traded for the dispensation of goodness and this symbolic exchange of charity reinforces the control of notables who cloak their self-interest in the mantle of benevolence. The Mayor's dream of constructing a poorhouse is the bureaucrat's fantastic vision of the eternal return of the same. What is incommensurable with this world, poverty, madness, or critique, must be excised so that an unredeemed present can reproduce itself endlessly.

Such are the conditions of "fatherlessness" which motivate Brand's quest and yet doom it from the outset. This ambivalence is inscribed in the opening scenes. Brand is introduced as an implacably strong iconoclast who has the faith and courage to cross treacherous glaciers and defy conventional wisdom. Yet when he sees his mother's cottage, he becomes paralyzed: "I see. . . / The widow's cottage--my childhood home. / Memories and memories born of memories. / There among the stones along the shore / My child-soul dwelt alone. / My soul was ever weighed and oppressed / By this burden, by this kinship / With a spirit ever earthward-trending, / Ever away from my true self. / Everything I yearned for then / Now seems lost in the mists of time. / My courage and my strength have failed, / My mind and soul grown slack and feeble, / And coming home, I feel a stranger. . . . / I wake up bound and tamed and shorn, / Like Samson in Delilah's bosom" (I, 95). Memories of the

past weigh like an alien power which crushes and cripples. The periphrastic reference to his childhood home as "the widow's cottage" connotes the absence of the father and his alienation from his mother. He presents himself not just as homeless and betrayed--the references to his home as the cottage of another and to Delilah, who betrayed Samson--but as burdened with the legacy of a loveless past which writes him differently than he wills himself and fills him with a sense of powerlessness. Although he is shaped by the contradictions which derive from the incompatible functions of a family which was expected to produce "whole" human beings and acquire or maintain a predominant position in the class structure, Brand's relationship to the past remains moral. He sees himself scarred by a scene of paternal desecration, condemns his mother for her obsessive materialism, and attributes social crises of a highly complex character to the betrayal of the Father.

His search for the vital center of personality becomes a search for the absent father: "You strive to elevate your souls, but not to lead the full life. / For this kind of decrepitude you need a God who turns a blind eye, / Like men themselves, this God of yours / Is turning grey and thin on top and so / Must be depicted as wearing a skull cap. / But this God is not my God. / Mine is a gale where yours is a zephyr, / Mine an obdurate judge . . . yours hard / Only of hearing. Mine is all love / Where yours is passion-spent. And mine / Is young like Hercules. . . ." (I, 91-2). In the same exchange with the painter Einar, Brand prophesies the birth of a new man: "But of these dismembered wrecks of souls, / From these heads, these hands, there shall arise, / A whole being, so that the Lord / May recognize his creature Man once more, / His greatest masterpiece, his heir, / His Adam, powerful, tall, young" (93). I have quoted these passages at length because they map the contradictions inherent in Brand's will to break the genealogical ties to his family and era. Clearly, the household god attired in skull cap and carpet slippers (91) is Brand's vitiated representation of the domesticated and weak *pater familias* who has retreated to his private preserve. He is the authority figure without authority, the powerless father of a family which had become progressively isolated from public life and whose functions devolved to more impersonal and depersonalized surrogates. In contrast, his ideal mediator exudes an aura of authority, youthful vigor, and the capacity for love and compassion. Brand's frequent references to heroes of the old Testament, Antiquity, and Viking sagas is consistent with his longing to reinscribe a centrifugally dispersed community into the living text of a heroic tradition. Yet his supreme mediator of the new cosmological subject of ostensibly literary parentage is modelled on the paternal and maternal moments of an idealized bourgeois family, just as the household god, who is the icon of powerless fathers.¹⁹ Brand's youthful Adam is the idealized son of the patriarchal family who acts in the world instead of being coerced by it and who draws his strength from a stern but compassionate ethical disposition. Epic and household gods are specular images of this family,

correlatives of the lost utopian moment and its marginalization as a social institution.

The problematic character of Brand's Father becomes apparent when one examines the statements he makes on the subject of his faith or his idea of the self. When Einar reproaches him for being an ascetic priest obsessed with sackcloth and hellfire, he responds: "No, I'm no preacher. / I do not speak as a priest of the church. / Indeed, I hardly know if I am a Christian" (1, 89). He also counsels Einar: "Be what you have to be, / Wholly and completely, not / A little bit here and a little bit there. / You know where you are with a Bacchante, but / A drunk is neither one thing nor the other" (1, 90). And he urges the Man who had asked him to be parish priest: "If you cannot be what you ought to be, / Then try to be what you honestly can. / Be utterly a man of clay" (II, 113). Brand's remarks concerning his religious convictions are made in the context of a religious practice restricted to home and Sunday services and separated from the conduct of one's life.²⁰ Yet it is precisely this absence of a religious communal experience and the absence of the secular home which transform Brand's project into an abstract construct, into a blueprint for self-definition and social action. Brand's Father is a self-centering paradigm rescued from the ruins of the family, a projection of a purified, almighty paternal mediator--who still contains the maternal moments of love and compassion--safely ensconced beyond the vagaries of the market. His exhortations to Einar and the Man suggest that his understanding of the human subject is incompatible with the self of religion. The admonition that Einar, the painter who wants to celebrate life, should be wholly Dionysian, or that the Man, who is fearful and unheroic, should be wholly average, reduces personality to a single quality. This pathological narrowing of personality is consistent with the self of modern drama, as Lukaacs points out.²¹ It attests to the collapse of the family as a subject producing institution. Brand's paternal mediator is a ghost from the past who reappears in the shape of his compulsions and authentic sense of homelessness. The vision of reconciliation survives as a memory of the utopian moment of family life, but becomes a nightmare when dreamed by its crippled son.

Consistent with the familial origins of his Father, Brand abruptly decides to abandon his heroic quest and confine himself to a sober life devoted to his duties as parish priest and *pater familias* (II, 113-115). His decision is prompted by Agnes' inner vision of god's divine plan. The scene is dramatically important because it prepares the phase of Brand's marriage to Agnes and serves to re-establish the broken circuit between calling (profession) and family. It also points to a narrowing of Brand's understanding of the Father and to a sharp delineation of male and female persons in accordance with the social division of labor. Brand discovers that the path to renewal leads inward: "Within! Within! That is my call! / That is the way I must venture! / . . . / There shall the vulture of the will be slain. / And there shall the new Adam at last be born again" (II, 114-15). The revalorization of the inner-directed life

is dramatically inconsistent with the destruction of the family by market forces which the text signifies but does not *thematize*. The critique of the family remains prisoner of its discourse of interiority. Since the sudden rediscovery of interiority cannot be accounted for--dramatic action originates in the *ruination* of the family--it has to come from without, as revelation. Nevertheless, within these discursive grids Brand and Agnes attribute paternal and maternal values to the Father in accordance with the roles of male and female subjects in the traditional household. God bids Agnes to procreate, "Thou shalt people this earth" (114). He is also ". . . full of love and sadness, radiant and gentle as the dawn." Brand's god promises personal autonomy in the family: "O, for room in this world's wide arch, a place / Where I may be myself entirely! That is the lawful right / Of every man . . ." (115). He also grants a privileged place and meaning to Brand's calling: "I shall perform my daily work, my humble toil, / With such devotion that it becomes a holy task" (124). For a fleeting moment Brand and Agnes dream of the simpler albeit harsher world of their Protestant ancestors, a world where the appointed rounds of daily toil were testimonials to god's favor and where the human couple found purpose in the affirmation of consecrated roles. Yet the very narrowness of identities directed toward the public and private spheres respectively becomes an unbearable burden to Agnes.

Three years have elapsed between Acts II and III and during that period Brand seems to have been humanized by the warmth of the hearth: "It was as if all that tenderness I had borne / Within me, in secret and in silence, / I had treasured up for him and for you, my dear wife" (III, 129). Agnes and his son Alf appear to have built a bridge of tenderness between Brand and his parishioners and restored the maternal, humanizing power of love to the family. Yet Agnes sees him differently: "But even now, your love / Is still hard. It has the touch that hurts" (130). Although she is referring to his severity as priest which requires the sacrifice to the Father of every attachment to this world, Brand will apply the same iron rule to his family. Despite his mother's pleas for understanding, he will not forgive her until she renounces her worldly possessions. She will die echoing Agnes' reproach: "God is not as hard as my son" (146). He does not heed the Doctor's advice who urges him to move to a more temperate climate to save his dying son. When Agnes recoils from him in horror, he demands brutally: "Answer me, was I not / A priest before I was a father?" (154). He will kill his grieving wife on Christmas Eve by commanding her to give all of her dead child's clothing to a gypsy family and to do it willingly as proof of her fidelity to his calling: "I can command / That you give your life entirely / To this calling. It is my right" (IV, 183). The authority of the Father and of the *pater familias* clearly merge here into an absolute principle of domination. The violence of these acts alone communicates the progressive narrowing of a paternal model of identity distorted by Brand's past and inconsistent with the realities of the family.

The idealization of paternal authority on the pretext that it derives from divine will glorifies an institution which functioned well as long as it was economically autonomous. But the separation of its paternal and maternal moments, the obsessive narrowing of the self to spirit, discipline, will, and absolute law reproduce the naked power of the father, not the promise of uncoercive relations between persons. Brand is the disinherited child of the fatherless society, shaped by the repressive and materialist forces of family life. In rejecting what was made of him, he strives to create himself as other by an act of will: "A man must never weaken, or he loses all" (III, 137), says Brand. He cannot for a moment forget what he wills himself to be without running the risk of suffering a dizzying loss of identity. He needs the centering power of the will, the rigorous adherence to the laws of a relentless Father, the pathological reduction of the self to a single, all embracing category in order to exorcise what was made of him. The search for the Father leads to domination in the name of the Father because Brand's notion of the self is radically dissymmetrical to the historical context signified by the text and can therefore only be an abstraction. And this abstractness betrays its modernity. Brand's vision of a society which is reconciled with the Father in the form of tradition is inextricably rooted in the rootlessness of the fatherless society: "We have turned / The people's minds from mouldering ruins / To this contemporary spire in the sky" (V, 204). With these words Brand acknowledges that the church he built in the hope of restoring the past inevitably produces its liquidation in another form.

Agnes remains Brand's obedient spouse until her death. Yet her sensitivity to the suffering of others, her emotional distress, and her resistance to Brand's law transform her into a voice of protest against Brand's idea of the Father in Acts III and IV. She feels deeply for the suffering Brand: "You endured, despite the evil, and toiled and slaved. / I know how in secret your heart wept tears of blood . . ." (III, 129). However, this same capacity for love prompts her to question Brand when he refers to love contemptuously as a word debased by insincerity: "Yes, love seems a vain delusion. And yet, / I often ask myself--is it really so?" (133). She is initially portrayed as a happy and ingenuous young woman who is romantically in love with Einar (Act I). Her infatuation with the painter ends abruptly in the presence of the "heroic" Brand, who is prepared to brave the storm in order to comfort a disconsolate father (Act II). But she is not attracted to Brand's idea of the Father. She accompanies him on his dangerous crossing of the fjord not because she wants to test her will and courage in a struggle with the elements, but because Brand is on a mission of mercy. She responds to a Father who has compassion for the suffering of others. When she has to choose between Brand's armor-plated Father and her child, she recoils in horror from Brand, "Agnes, [approaches and says in a low voice.] Let us go in now. It's time we went. Brand: [stares at her.] What? Where? [He points to the gate, then to the house door.] That way? Or this way? Agnes: [recoils aghast.] Brand! Your child!" (154) She

will yield to Brand and return into the house with him; but the subsequent death of her son destroys her. Brand's search for the Father and for the lost home of tradition transforms the family into a solitary prison cell. While his calling gives meaning to his life, Agnes waits: "Not yet! No sign of him yet! / How hard it is to wait like this . . . / To utter cry after cry of longing . . . / And never to receive an answer" (IV, 156). When Brand finally returns from a voyage across the fjord, he is flushed with a sense of purpose: "Oh, out there I was a man. / . . . / My eight men were resting on their oars. Like eight corpses on a ship of ghosts. / I stood exultant at the helm, and felt myself / Grow tall and strong like the hero of a legend" (158). Brand still dreams the ghosts of his Viking past, but Agnes lives a different reality: "Oh, it is easy to stand against a storm, / Easy to live a life of action, / But what about me, left here all alone, / And sitting silently amid the memories of grief? And pain and death? . . . / However much I want to, I cannot / Kill my time as men are able to do. / What about me, denied the thrill of battle, / Never warmed by the fire of action . . . ?" Brand expects Agnes to play her assigned role in his romantically figured vision of the traditional couple. He is the warrior who assumes the risks of victory and defeat and urges his wife to ". . . wrap the cloak of tenderness / To keep me warm beneath my breastplate of steel . . ." (160). But the fire of the hearth dies in the solitude of silent hours filled with the painful memories of maternal love. In the radically privatized family, the promise of warmth, friendliness, and interiority has turned into unrelieved despair and the compulsion to kill time. Agnes' solitary suffering is exacerbated by Brand's cruel insistence that she renounce the memory of Alf willingly and gladly. Agnes is violently severed from her maternal self in the suffocating presence of Brand's paternal idol: "Agnes: Shut! Tight shut... everything shut! Even oblivion is shut from me. / Bolted and barred my grief, my sighs; / And locks on Heaven and on the grave! / I must get out! I can not breathe / Here in this agony of loneliness!" (IV, 183-84) The Father has buried her alive in the desolation of unspeakable grief.

The Mother lost in the exchange of desire and maternal love for social position and the inheritance. The vengeance of repressed desire transforms her into a predatory proprietor. The unloved son becomes the repressed and repressive *pater familias* and his spouse his reluctant and unintended victim. Einar set forth in celebration of life but returned a missionary zealot denouncing the vanities of this world (V, 216-20). It is implied that he was driven mad when he lost Agnes. Gerd is the mad progenitor of unrequited love. A dying Brand asks imploringly: "Is there no salvation for the Will of Man?" (V, 250). But the Father replies: "God is love" (250). Thus the text accuses the victimization of the Mother, Gerd, Agnes, and Einar and assigns a privileged place to *eros* and *agape*, desire and compassion, as the constitutive elements of the human subject. Consistent with this reading, the Doctor is cast in the role of *raisonneur* who establishes the normative boundaries of a "progressive" model of the family which serves as referent for the critique of

the traditional family. His values can be extrapolated and his role constructed on the basis of information provided by other characters and by himself. For example, Einar discloses that the doctor threw a rather wild party during which he himself became quite inebriated (I, 86). He is reasonably permissive compared to the Puritanical Brand and actively promotes the happiness of a young, loving couple. He attends to the Mother when Brand had turned his back on her even though he concedes that ". . . she's an old skinflint when it comes to payment" (III, 132). Such actions cast him in the role of the materially disinterested healer. He demonstrates his compassion for others following the death of Brand's mother. Brand shows little understanding on hearing that she had clung to her possessions during the last moments of her life, but the Doctor shows sympathy: "Let us hope that she will be lightly judged--not by the laws / Of God, but compassionately, according to her own lights" (III, 146). He repudiates the belief in absolute paternal authority and acknowledges the human and circumstantial limitations of personal choice. He also tells Brand frankly that he lacks compassion but is sensitive to his despair over the state of the world: "Let the tempest in your soul blow itself out. / Let the tears flow . . . you'll feel better then" (147). Finally, he applauds when Brand initially decides to leave the parish in order to save his son: "You are behaving like a father should. / Do not think I blame you for your present stand. / I think you are a bigger man now, / With your wings clipped, than you were before, / When you declared yourself the voice of God" (150). Compassionate, materially disinterested, and an authoritative spokesman for maternal values, the Doctor is portrayed as an autonomous individual. He is the advocate of the healthy life who promotes the affective investment in relationships, devotes himself to the happiness of the family, solicits intimacy between spouses, and shows the father his obligations to the family. One is led to believe that his profession allows him to express and act on the full range of humanistic values which were nurtured in the bourgeois family when it still possessed the economic independence to cultivate inner-directed persons. Even though the alliance between the Doctor and Agnes serves to contain paternal authority, the authoritative voice of the family physician is ostensibly fatherless, i.e., it does not issue from an identifiable source of power. It is presented as the voice of reason which condemns excess, consoles the disconsolate, alleviates pain, and speaks the language of love and compassion.

Agnes' pathos and the Doctor's reasoning reconstitute the family as *value* determined by maternal love. This love is the truth of the subtext since the Father himself declares love to be his essence. The implied model of the "progressive" family reprocesses the utopian moment of the traditional family inasmuch as it proposes an ideal of uncoercive, equal, and caring relations between persons. But love is merely posited as a power which can overcome the objective process of alienation in the family and in society; it does not derive from an autonomous economic and social position of the family. This model presents a number of problems. The maternal cannot simply be posited

as value independent of its discursive site in a given historical configuration. Jacques Donzelot has argued persuasively that an alliance developed during the nineteenth century between the family physician and the mother of the bourgeois household which served specific functions of social management and control and which enhanced the social status of the woman in her role as mother.²² The doctrine and practice of love and compassion is clearly an idealistic response to an increasingly depersonalized social life and to the exercise of a paternal authority which had lost its rationality with the destruction of the traditional family. Agnes' suffering accuses the arbitrariness of paternal domination. But the maternal side of human subjectivity cannot be emancipatory when it becomes the tacit collaborator of an order characterized by unfreedom. Brand's vigorous defense of the Father is a defense in the Protestant spirit of the critical freedom of thought against external pressures to conform and against inner fears. It is an attempt, however quixotic, to recall that the social edifice of bourgeois society rested on the foundations of a socially relevant family which produced individuals who assumed responsibility for their acts. When the Doctor tells Brand that he is a bigger man with his wings clipped and consoles him with the kindly advice to let the tears flow because he will feel better, he becomes implicitly the humane mask of an inhuman society and a proponent for an idea of the family which has ceased to be an active protagonist and has become the sphere of an unmediated and self-enclosed intimacy. Of course, this is not overtly stated; however, there are passages which, in fact, question the ethos of the Doctor and which permit the reader to see the family physician as an agent of the fatherless society. He tells Brand that his position is unrealistic: "What you want can never be . . . / To bring back to life an age long past. / . . . / But each generation has its different ways. / Ours cannot be cowed by threats of flaming scourages, / Or old wives' tales of souls sold to the devil. / Its first commandment is: 'Thou shalt be humane'" (147)! Yet the word humane is also bandied about by the manipulative Mayor, who counters Brand's call for personal sacrifice by insisting on the humane aspects of society: ". . . If the worst comes to the worst, / All that sacrifice means / Is a loosening of people's purse strings. / Society today is more humane . . . (IV, 166). There is an obvious parallel between the Doctor, who merely has kind words for an activist priest, and the Mayor, who demands that the leading citizens restrict their participation in public life to charitable contributions. Brand accuses his adversaries contemptuously of hiding in the "sheltering skirts" of the word humane (147). The valorization of the maternal is the final paternal gambit of the fatherless society and the Doctor its transvestite father figure.

The historical narrative embedded in the subtext tells the story of the destruction of the foundations of the patriarchal family. Vulnerable to market forces and stripped of educational functions, it is no longer capable of raising autonomous individuals with ethical attitudes toward vocations and political life. The dialectic between public and private life is broken. Brand can only

resurrect the irrationality of paternal authority as an abstract principle of self-discipline and control. Under the power of his inflexible will, desire is blocked and the maternal transformed into unredeemed pathos. The new family is not an adequate response to the growing imbalance between social power and mutilated individuals, but an administratively promoted adjustment to the *status quo*. It is a mirage of intimacy and humanity in a dehumanized world, a therapeutic response to alienated work and alienated political life. Brand and Agnes ultimately reject Brand's inhuman father figure; but they also reject the inhumanity of an administered world: "Until this moment, what I wanted to be / Was a table on which God might write, / But from today, the poem of my life / Shall surge and fountain warm and rich . . ." (V, 249). In attempting to restore to the Father a central place in his own life and the village, Brand tried to expunge history--his own and that of the community--and become the literal inscription of a resurrected Father. This literal adherence to abstract and unhistorical principles is as deadly as the anonymous sway of benignly regulated life. Agnes discovered this before him when she warned that "He who sees Jehovah face to face / Shall surely die" (IV, 192). Yet Agnes finally resolves to follow Brand's calling and does so gladly by sacrificing her life. Brand continues his ascent of the mountain unwaveringly until death overtakes him too. The ambivalent ending is consistent with the text's critique of modernity and its inability to name the conditions under which the modern world could be reconciled. Brand's illuminating experience of the warmth and friendliness of being surges from a vision of life transformed into poetry. The longing for a reconciled world takes refuge in a densely poetic art form which critiques what we have become in a language which speaks obliquely of what can be.

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Notes

1. *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* (London, 1968) 39.
2. John S. Chamberlain associates Ibsen's drama with German romanticism and the tragicomic genre in *Ibsen, The Open Vision* (London, 1982). See also his concise outline of the history of Ibsen criticism 1-22. Brian Johnston has offered a penetrating analysis of the multilayered symbolic landscape of *Brand* and the allegorical levels of the heroic quest in *To the Third Empire, Ibsen's Early Plays* (Minneapolis, 1980), 130-63. Rather than writing against this model interpretation, I am shifting the critical focus from a boldly conceived cultural context stretching from Greek and Elizabethan drama to Ibsen to the socio-cultural context of modernity. This shift in critical perspective presupposes a radical break between tradition and modernity and cannot accommodate metaphysical affiliations between a modernist text and the tragic vision of Greek or Elizabethan drama.

3. Although the transformations were gradual, Jürgen Habermas places the end of the liberal era around the great depression of 1873. See *Strukturwandel der bürgerlichen Öffentlichkeit* (Darmstadt, 1986, c 1962) 175. *Brand* was written in 1866.

4. All textual references are to *Brand*, ed. James Walter McFarlane, *The Oxford Ibsen*, vol. III (London, 1972) 77-250. Whenever possible, act and page numbers will be given in parentheses ff. citations.

5. Acc. to Max Horkheimer, the patriarchal family served these social functions: the management of the household, the reproduction, raising, and education of children, the control of population growth and of genetic lines, the development of sociableness, the care of the sick and elderly, the accumulation and hereditary transmission of capital and other property, and the choice of occupation. ["Authority and the Family," in *Critical Theory*, tr. Mathew J. O'Connell (New York, 1972) 47-128, 102.] Although this family was the formative institution mediating authority oriented subjects required for the reproduction of the bourgeois order, it clearly possessed a measure of economic and social independence. Jürgen Habermas has pointed out that this sense of independence was not merely illusory. The small businessman could ply his trade without governmental interference, subject only to a market which appeared to him to follow just and rational laws. (See *Strukturwandel der bürgerlichen Öffentlichkeit* 63-64.)

6. Habermas establishes parallels between the autonomy of property owners in the market and the self-representation of autonomous human beings in the family. The family understands itself as a realm which is free from economic necessities and where relations between independent human beings are uncoercive. Despite the actual authority relations in the patriarchal family, the ideals of freedom, love, and cultivation were not merely ideological screens masking existing relations of domination: "These ideas are also real as objective meaning attributed to a real institution. Without the subjective reality of this meaning society could not reproduce itself. With the concept of humanity an understanding of the existing social order begins to circulate which promises redemption from that order without making the leap into transcendence. The transcending of an arrested immanence is the moment of truth which raises bourgeois ideology above ideology. This occurs primarily where the practical knowledge of humanity originates: in the humanity of intimate relations of human beings qua humans under the protection of the family." See *Strukturwandel* 65-66. (My translation.)

7. This information is provided by the Mayor who makes the connection between the young cottager's unrequited love for Brand's mother and Gerd: "His offspring thus exists / By virtue of her from whom you sprang— / For the real origin of all that brood / Lies in his unrequited love for your mother." (IV 177) But the mayor regards these illegitimate offsprings as delinquents who should be put in irons.

8. Einar, who wanted to travel and celebrate the world in his art, became instead a missionary. On his return (V 216-20), he denounces the vanities of this world.

9. The father's power " . . . sprang originally from the material basis of society and the man's place in this mode of production, but the consequences of this dependence can in individual instances continue long after the father had lost his job." (Horkheimer, "Authority and the Family," *C.T.* 123.) Horkheimer focuses almost exclusively on the naked authority of the *pater familias* and of patriarchy in general: "The male and, concretely, the male as formed by existing circumstances, dominates her (the woman) in a double way: societal life is essentially managed by men, and the man is at the head of the family." (119) Nevertheless, he concedes that paternal authority had a rational basis as long as the father was an independent property owner: "In the bourgeois golden age there was a fruitful interaction between family and society because the authority of the father was based on his role in society, while society was renewed by the education for authority which went on in the patriarchal family." 128.

10. "In the intimacy sphere of the small family the private persons think of themselves as independent even with respect to the private sphere of economic activity—as human beings who can have 'purely human' relations with each other." (Habermas, *Strukturwandel* 66.) This is the redemptive moment of the experience of the family. See my note 6.

11. "Under the pressure of the father children were supposed to learn not to conceive failures in terms of their societal causation, but to stop at the individual aspect and to render this absolute in terms of guilt, adequacy, and personal inferiority. If this pressure was not too harsh, and above all, if it was suffused by maternal tenderness, then this resulted in human

beings who were also capable of seeing fault in themselves; human beings who learned through the father's example an attitude of independence, a joy in free dispositions and inner discipline, who could represent authority as well as freedom and practice these. "The Family," in Max Horkheimer & Theodor Adorno, *Aspects of Sociology*, tr. John Viertel (Boston, 1972, 1956) 141.

12. In recalling how his mother searched for money in his father's room, Brand compares her to a hog rooting out hidden treasures. (II 119) The Doctor refers to her as ". . . an old skinflint when it comes to payment." (III 132) The Mayor confirms this general perception when he tells Brand: "They do say she keeps a tight hold / On what she's got put away." (III 139) These judgments are of course not fortuitous. Even the Mother agrees with this assessment: "I'm not the sort that needs petting and fussing. / Be hard, be stubborn, be cold as ice . . . / You'll never best me." (II 117) Her defiant challenge to Brand is not unlike Shlink's challenge to Garga in Brecht's *Jungle of the Cities*. But Brecht shows that in a capitalist society the need for love and solidarity is twisted into hate and violence. In contrast, the Mother is portrayed as a morally flawed character.

13. Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of the Mind*, tr. J. B. Baillie (New York, 1931). Acc. to Hegel, men compete with each other in society while individuals are valued for their own sake in the family: "The positive purpose of the family is the individual as such." (469) But this potentially revolutionary maternal moment remains separate from civil society and implodes into the sphere of blood relations, where man is ". . . a universal being divested of his sensuous, or particular needs." (470) Engels associates the patriarchal system with class conflict and with the separation of family and public life. Matriarchy connotes the absence of class conflict and of the reduction of man to object. See *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*. tr. Ernest Untermann (New York, 1942) 49.

14. Alexander Mitscherlich, *Society without the Father*. tr. Eric Mosbacher (New York, 1969, 1962) 278. Fatherlessness to the first degree is the phenomenon of the invisible father. Mitscherlich argues that in social conditions characterized by regular, seasonal tasks handed down unchanged from generation to generation, the father could be both a teacher in his work, transmitting object related contacts, and a model for behavior who fosters personal, affective contacts. But the separation of the place of work from the home and the increasingly abstract nature of administrative and office work which leaves no visible results, weakens the father as a personal model of authority. 140-44.

15. "Where the last relics of feudalism have been extinguished, however, and new casts find themselves in the saddle, power does not derive from them; instead, they administer a power system, a flow of authority, fed by many channels of interest. . . . When 'no identifiable individual' holds power in his hands we have a sibling society." 277.

16. The alliance is cemented by a common interest in perpetuating the *status quo*: "Schoolmaster: We are the district's public officials. / Our duty is to protect the status quo, / To foster church discipline, instruct the young, / And not concern ourselves with vulgar human passions." (V 196) The passage also suggests that the authority figures have become surrogate fathers; however, they are grotesquely depersonalized functions of their office: "Schoolmaster: No man, even should he desire such a thing, / Can be both a human being and an official." 199.

17. "Genuine bourgeois ideologies, which live only from their own substances—offer no support, in the face of the basic risks of existence (guilt, sickness, death) to interpretations that overcome contingency; in the face of individual needs for wholeness (Heilsbedürfnisse), they are disconsolate; —do not make possible human relations which are fundamentally objectivated nature (with either outer nature or one's own body); —permit no intuitive access to relations of solidarity within groups or between individuals; —allow no real political ethic. . . ." [Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, tr. Thomas McCarthy (Boston, 1975) 78.] Habermas argues that identity securing world views, viz. myth, religion, were first separated from and eventually impoverished by science. Universal morality, sanctioned by the inner authority of conscience, stands in conflict with public morality, which is subject to the concrete morality of the more powerful.

18. For Horkheimer / Adorno the Enlightenment represents the culmination of a historical process which ushered in the reign of the system, i.e., of the objectification of man and nature

by instrumental reason. However, reading the Enlightenment through Kant, they also associate reason with utopia, at least in the self-understanding of the Enlightenment: "As the transcendental, supra-individual self, reason comprises the idea of free, human social life in which men organize themselves as a universal subject and overcome the conflict between pure and empirical reason in the conscious solidarity of the whole. This represents the idea of true universality: utopia." [*Dialectic of Enlightenment*], tr. John Cumming (New York, 1972, 1944) 83.] Of course, the authors are highly critical of this schematism of idealist philosophy which leaves the empirical individual at the mercy of the objectifying powers of instrumental reason. Yet in "The Family," *Aspects of Sociology*, the authors concede that the utopian moment of rationality pertained to the experience of the bourgeois family during its golden age. (See my note 11.) This position is also argued by Habermas in *Strukturwandel*.

19. I am following Sigmund Freud who pointed out that ". . . god is in every case modelled after the father and that our personal relation to god is dependent upon our relation to the physical father, fluctuating and changing with him, and that god at bottom is nothing but an exalted father." [*Totem and Taboo*], tr. A. A. Brill (New York, 1961) 190.] I am also attributing the maternal moment to the father here because I am suggesting that Brand's vision of god is a projection of an ideal authority mediation.

20. The Mayor recommends that Brand confine his zeal to Sunday sermons: "But keep your office to Sundays! Don't go / Making holy days out of the other working six." III 144.


21. Lukacs extends Weber's concept of disenchantment to materials of artistic production and argues that without the anthropomorphic world of mythology or religion modern theater has to concentrate on character instead of destiny. Stylization of character ". . . can only be the stylization of a single quality, exaggerated to a degree beyond any found in life, so that the single quality will be seen to rule the entire man and his destiny as well. To use the language of life, pathology will be needed." ["The sociology of Modern Drama," tr. Lee Baxandall, in ed. Eric Bentley, *The Theory of the Modern Stage* (New York, 1983, 1968) 448.] Acc. to Lukacs, the abstractly free individual of modern society is objectively dependent on impersonal, complex systems of economic law, production, and bureaucracy. This dependence blurs the demarcations between the self and the environment. I am arguing that the narrowing of personality is not merely a response to a formal problem and that the centrifugal dispersion of the self does not exclusively derive from the disintegration of mythological and religious narratives. With the demise of the family as a primary subject producing institution in the context of an abstract, rationalized system of dependency, the decentered subject has to construct identity abstractly and propositionally, e.g., with references to nature (Dionysian) which are incommensurate with actual relations to it.

22. Donzelot's thesis is roughly this: In order to preserve the liberal state which was confronted with pauperism and political unrest on the one hand and the erosion of morality in bourgeois family on the other, a double-edged philanthropic strategy was implemented during the 19th century. The population was morally enjoined to save and the family became the object of a strategy of physical, moral, and educational hygiene. Priest and family physician became the principal mediators of a policy of control which valorized the status of the *mater familias* as executor of the physician's medical and moral counsel. "The *hygienic norms* pertinent to raising and educating children and to work could be effective because they offered children, and correlatively women, the possibility of an increased autonomy in the family against patriarchal authority. [*La Police des familles* (Paris, 1977) 57-g. My translation.]

EXCERPTS FROM RECENT ISSUES OF MISSISSIPPI REVIEW

Fred Hoffman

"Mona Lisa Jumping" from MR46

She is such a willing victim,
Too nice a girl to be married to me.
In the orphanage
She asked her friends to ride their bikes
Over her toes while she
Stood patiently holding her forged
Birth certificate;
Then, perhaps, an afternoon at
The bottom of the lake 
Looking for her parents.

Now, once or twice a year, usually on a Sunday
(When there's a game on!)
She leaves me a note that reads,
"Sell the house, sell the car, sell the kids!"
And climbs up on the roof,
Sitting for a few minutes
Savoring the months ahead on crutches
(The extra parking spaces!)
Then jumps 10 feet, without a parachute,
Without a care in the world
And lands face down
In the outline I've drawn.

Leon Rooke

*from
"Sweethearts,"
MR45*

What I say is,
Sweetheart, this
isn't working
out. She says,
Whose fault is
that, if I may
ask you? Who

started this?
You always
want to argue.
Why do you al-
ways want to
argue? You'd
better get
straight with
yourself before
you want to
start making
time with a
woman like me.
Am I making

time? I say, Is
that what I'm
doing? I say,
How much time
am I making if
you come over
and nothing
happens? She
says, Did I say
that? Did I? So
we argue about
what happens
and what does
not happen. We

argue
at
con-
siderable length
about that. We
are shouting
into the phone
and she says,
Why are you
shouting? Stop
shouting, get a
grip on yourself.
But things have

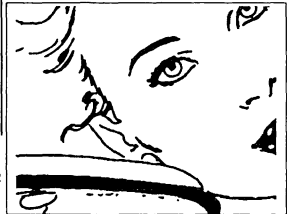
gone too far, I
can't get a grip
on myself. I
can't get
straight with
myself. She
says, I know. I
know, that has
always been
your trouble.

Edmund White

*interviewed by Larry
McCaffery & Sinda Gregory,
MR39*

McCaffery: You seem
to have largely aban-
doned the use of ironic
tone since *Forgetting
Elena* . . .

White: F. R. Leavis said
when he was at school
there was a group of
young men who were
ceaselessly ironic, but
that they used irony in
order to disguise from
themselves whether they
were truly serious or not
about anything. That
sort of attitude can be
harmful, both personally
and artistically. Irony
seems to be a very
juvenile dodge, and it's
one of those modes or
themes in modernism
that I find utterly
tiresome.



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