From Brain Text to the Final Draft

— On Ibsen's Ethical Choices in *Pillars of Society*

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: On Ibsen's Ethical Choices in *Pillars of Society*

This paper focuses on the four drafts of Henrik Ibsen's play *Pillars of Society* as a manifestation of his brain text and his ethical choices, two key terms in Ethical Literary Criticism. By discussing the revisions in each draft, the paper investigates Ibsen's ethical choices through the process of "decoding" his brain text via the written text. The dynamic interconnection between ethical choice and brain text is also embodied in his characters' development, for example in Karsten Bernick's inner conflict between his rational and irrational will. The purpose of this paper is to identify Ibsen's ethical concerns evidenced in each revision, including the

relationship between the individual and society, the concept of the ethical public, and the status of women in their relationship with men. The paper posits that in discussing these issues, Ibsen emphasizes the importance of the individual pursuit of freedom, reveals the ugly side of society and affirms the role of women, which is congruous with the moral teaching of the play.

Keywords Henrik Ibsen(ヘンリック・イブセン), *Pillars of Society*(『社会の柱』), Brain Text(ブレイン・テキスト), Ethical Choices(倫理的選択)

Measured against such Ibsen masterpieces of social realism as *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts* and *The Wild Duck*, *Pillars of Society* hasn't received as much critical attention since its publication. By tracing the history of the work, Robert J. Cardullo observes that it is "the most ignored of the dozen major Ibsen prose plays"¹. Yet it is the work in which Ibsen first committed himself to realism and in which many subjects emerged which were to become prevalent in his plays over the succeeding years. And as Willard Wilson says, the play is "an excellent example of the work of an original and severely painstaking craftsman—an artist with his feet firmly on the ground" ("Genesis and Development" 53). Comparatively speaking, critics outside China have cast slightly more attention on

¹ Cardullo, Robert J. "The Pillar of Ibsenian Drama: Henrik Ibsen and *Pillars of Society*, Reconsidered." *Neophilologus* 95 (2011), p.360.

the work, and there have been critiques of the play from psychological, Darwinist, feminist and new historicist perspectives. Based on Jacques Lacan's re-reading of Freud, Oliver W. Gerland III argues that "*Pillars of Society* traces Karsten Bernick's shift from identification with a paternal figure to identification with a maternal figure"². Erinc Özdemir interprets the drama on the basis of Bakhtin's theory of chronotopes and comes to the conclusion that "industrial capitalism and technological modernization are the intertwined dynamics that propel the drama from beginning to end, forming its central axis of plot in the shape of the railroad enterprise"³. But only Willard Wilson has paid attention to the fact that Ibsen revised the play several times before its final publication. He has touched upon this by "focus[ing] attention upon the sources of his (Ibsen's) subject material, his motives, and his mental processes while putting the play together"⁴. By interpreting the play through the prism of

the key concepts of Ethical Literary Criticism, namely those of the brain text and of ethical choice, this paper aims to provide a relatively comprehensive comparison of all the drafts of *Pillars of Society*, and to offer an in-depth analysis of the reasons for successive modifications through the discussion of the interactions between brain text and ethical choices.

When composing his plays, Ibsen continuously revised them, as his first biographer, Henrik Jæger, confirms: "When he has chosen his material, he ponders it carefully for a long time before he sets pen to paper...When he has thought the thing through in broad outline, he writes an outline sketch...On the basis of this outline, he then sets about giving the thing shape...Then comes the revision of the second manuscript, and finally the fair copy in the third"⁵. McFarlane has described Ibsen's writing as "a highly interactive procedure, a dynamic process" (McFarlane 163). From the perspective of Ethical Literary Criticism, this process is one through which the brain perceives ideas and presents them in the form of written words. This paper examines the four drafts of *Pillars of Society* as a

² Gerland III, Oliver W. "The Lacanian Imagery in Ibsen's *Pillars of Society* and *The Wild Duck*." *Comparative Drama* 24.4(1990-91), p.343.

³ Özdemir, Erinc. "The Chronotopic Dynamics of Ibsen's *Pillars of Society*: The Triumph of Industrialism, or How Drama Becomes History." *Modern Drama* 57.2 (2014), p.143

⁴ Wilson, Willard. "Genesis and Development of Ibsen's *Pillars of Society*." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 25:1 (1939): <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00335633909380436>.

⁵ Quoted in McFarlane, James, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994, p. 161. Quotations from this book hereafter in this paper will be followed by McFarlane and page numbers only.

manifestation of Ibsen's brain text and a result of the ethical choices he made while writing the play. Notwithstanding the fact that Ibsen had intended to write a five-act play⁶, the fifth act did not appear until the final draft of the play. Therefore, there are only four acts in the three drafts collected in *From Ibsen's Workshops: Notes, Scenarios, and Drafts of the Modern Plays*. This paper compares the differences between the final version and the three drafts, investigates Ibsen's ethical choices in the process of "decoding" his brain text from the written text, interprets the conflict between the protagonist Karsten Bernick's rational and irrational will, explores the function of Ibsen's brain text in the formation of his ethical choices, and lastly interprets Ibsen's ethical concerns, thereby revealing the function of moral teaching inherent to the play.

1 The Role of Ibsen's Brain Text and Ethical Choices in the Writing of *Pillars of Society*

"For Ibsen, dramatic composition

⁶ Ibsen, Henrik. *Letters of Henrik Ibsen*. Trans. John Nilson Laurvik and Mary Morison. New York: Fox, Duffield and Company, 1905, p.291. The quotations from this book hereafter in this paper will be followed by *Letters* and page numbers only.

emphatically did not mean the mere supervention of language on an inspiration which was already complete"⁷. That's to say, the work of language is inherent from the start. From the perspective of Ethical Literary Criticism, the first linguistic iteration arrives in the form of "brain text". A literary work by definition relies on text as its medium, and in the framework of Ethical Literary Criticism, this text appears in three basic forms: brain text, written text, and today electronic (digital) text. Specifically, the brain text, "with the brain as its carrier, is a special biological form. Human beings' perception and cognition are first stored in the brain in the form of brain concepts, which are thereafter processed into thoughts. Once the thoughts are preserved in the human brain, the brain text is formed"⁸.

As early as 1869 Ibsen told his long-term sponsor and publisher Frederik Hegel that he was "pondering the plan for a new, serious modern drama" (*Letters* 180). Between 1869 and 1877, the year of the first publication of *Pillars of Society*, the only work Ibsen published was *Emperor Galilean* (1873), which was conceived by him in 1864. That's to say, the "modern drama" he

⁷ Quoted in McFarlane, James, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994, p.163.

⁸ Nie, Zhenzhao. "The Forming Mechanism of Brain Text and Brain Concept and the Theory of Ethical Literary Criticism." *Foreign Literature Studies* 5(2017), p.30. Quotations from this paper hereafter in the paper will be followed by "The Forming Mechanism" and page numbers only.

was referring to was none other than *Pillars of Society*. Before materializing as text, it existed in Ibsen's mind in the form of "brain concepts". These concepts were gradually coded into brain text, before Ibsen ultimately translated the brain text into the written one. Ethical Literary Criticism holds the view that "the brain will modify and assemble the brain concepts according to some ethical rule" (Nie, "The Forming Mechanism" 33). That's to say, the modification and assembly of these brain concepts is a process of ethical choice-making. The existence of several drafts of the play demonstrates such a process. By comparing and analyzing the changes across successive drafts, we can discern the fact that Ibsen made some important ethical choices in arriving at the brain text for *Pillars of Society*, and in transmuting the brain text into written text. Ibsen once said that "the first act is always the most difficult part of a play" (*Letters* 291). Accordingly, he carried out most revisions on the first act of *Pillars of Society*. As a result, this paper will specifically focus on three changes in the drafts of the first act and another important change in the fourth act.

The first and most important change is the composition of the cast of characters. The initial cast of characters includes the older generation, which is very influential in society. Mrs. Bernick Senior is the centre of ladies' gatherings and she speaks well of

Karsten Bernick, saying "When my son has resolved upon anything, he is capable of carrying it out"⁹. Mads Tonneson (Hilmar's father), whose nickname is the "Badger", is an aggressive figure in the community and also an influential one: "with those fists I hold on to what I've sweated so hard for... the Badger will show them that he has claws!" (43). He even asserts that "it (the railway) won't come off, for he (Karsten Bernick) wants to build it with our money" (66). This objection from an important figure in the older generation has the potential to be a great hindrance to Karsten's plan. However, after the first two drafts, the two older characters disappear, and the younger generation are given center stage, and play an indispensable role in the final draft. Olaf Bernick, Mr. Bernick's son, and Dina Dorf, who lives with the Bernicks because of scandal in her birth family, are representatives of those longing for the outside world. In response to Hilmar's curiosity about why he has never gone to America on his father's ships, Olaf says "I should like that awfully"¹⁰, and he becomes very excited about the coming of American

⁹ Ibsen, Henrik. *From Ibsen's Workshops: Notes, Scenarios, and Drafts of the Modern Plays* Trans. A. G. Chater. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911, p.34. Quotations from this book hereafter in this paper will be followed by *Workshops* and page numbers only.

¹⁰ Ibsen, Henrik. *Pillars of Society and An Enemy of the People*. Shanghai: The World Book Co., LTD., 1929, p.16. Quotations from this book hereafter in this paper will be followed by *Pillars* and page numbers only.

sailors who simply appear to be “horrid people” (43) in the ladies’ eyes. He finally decides to go to America with his uncle Johan. Meanwhile, Dina assumes herself to be “not like the other young girls” (73) in the society. This perceived difference does not derive from the fact that her mother committed adultery and died shortly after her husband left her, although the society ladies often hone in on this fact. Rather, Dina’s sense of her distinctiveness derives from her dissatisfaction with the roles and activities that are assumed to be central to women’s lives, such as, for example, needlework. She wants to go to America and carve out a position for herself there. She doesn’t blindly follow others’ views of her role, as do most women. She has her own assessment of Johan, who wants to take her to America with him: “Everyone here tells me I ought to hate and detest you---that is my duty; but I cannot see that is my duty, and shall never be able to” (156-57). She wants to start a completely new life, a life of her own in America. Through this new focus on the younger generation, Ibsen’s concern about the future is revealed. He also made this very clear in one of his speeches: “I believe that the time in which we now live might quite as good reason be characterized as a conclusion, and that from it something new is about to be born”¹¹. By jettisoning the

older generation from the first draft of the play, Ibsen attaches much less importance to the past. He has also smoothed the way for Karsten’s success, which highlights the suddenness of his later confession of his mistakes. Meanwhile, Ibsen has shown his hope in the future through the depiction of Dina successfully going to America to pursue her dream, and through Olaf’s ultimate release from his father’s various restrictions and his greater capacity to do what he desires. That’s why Ibsen claims himself to be an optimist, as he “firmly believe(s) in the capacity for the procreation and development of ideals” (*Speeches* 57).

The second change to the first draft is the book that the schoolmaster Rorlund reads to the ladies. He is another important character in the play, who has another identity, that of a clergyman, although he himself denies it. The changes in the book reveal Rorlund’s didactic nature as well as the hypocrisy of religion. In the first draft, the book is named *Hours of Repose in the Bosom of Nature*, which becomes *The Forest Community* in the second draft. In the final version, the book is entitled *Woman as the Handmaid of Society*, a change which is consistent with Ibsen’s attitude toward Rorlund. The teacher regards himself as so important that he sees himself as “a man [who] is singled out as a pillar of the society

¹¹ Ibsen, Henrik. *Speeches and New Letters*. Trans. Arne Kildal. Boston: The Gorham Press, 1910, p.56. Quotations from this book hereafter in this

paper will be followed by *Speeches* and page numbers only.

he lives in” (*Workshops* 65). What is common to the three books in the various drafts is that each of them is the type of text that a clergyman would read to society ladies. In the first draft, Rorlund explains “the whole (book) is inspired by a gentle religious spirit” (29), and in the second, he comments that the book “shows us in what wonderful ways providence sometimes furthers its designs” (60). He asks the ladies to be appreciative of what is given to them by God. The book in the final version seems to serve the same purpose, since Rorlund is preaching about the proper role of women, which involves subordination to men. However this strand of the play is in the service of irony because the women in the play, Lona Hessel and Betty Bernick in particular, ultimately turn out to be the real “pillars”. Rorlund is incapable of seeing this irony, as is clear in his comment about the book, which reveals his attitude towards the changing outside world: “It presents a salutary contrast to what, unfortunately, meets our eyes every day in the newspapers and magazines. Look at the gilded and painted exterior displayed by any large community, and think what it really conceals! ---emptiness and rottenness, if I may say so; no foundation of morality beneath it. In a word, these large communities of ours now-a-days are whited sepulchres” (*Pillars* 7-8). Rorlund is a typical representative and exponent of

tradition and conventional morality, which have been established on the basis of a lie. Through his insistence on what he believes and preaches, Rorlund is presented as a rather ironic figure. What’s more, Ibsen conveys the situation in which the seemingly important person in reality is peripheral to discussions concerning the development of society. He is only salient while in the company of the putatively ignorant ladies. This irony reflects Ibsen’s attitude towards religion, the hypocrisy of which, and of politics, he attacks in his plays. As he says, “religion is plague and opium, fooling people and making them know nothing about the truth of life but God’s heaven and the clergyman’s church”¹².

The third main change to Act I involves Karsten’s attitude toward the railway project, which is central to the play. Across drafts we see changes in the attitudes of the socially important characters. In the first two drafts, Ibsen makes a distinction between Karsten Bernick and other capitalists. Karsten rejects the project at first, but he always believes it is his duty to “promote reasonable and necessary progress” (*Workshops* 48). So when he realizes the railway project can bring progress to the community, he approves of it and promotes

¹² Ibsen, Henrik. 易卜生社会哲学 *Social and Philosophy of Henrik Ibsen*. Trans. Yuan, Zhenying (袁振英). Shanghai: Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences Press, 2017, p.3. Quotations from this book hereafter in this paper will be followed by *Social Philosophy* and page numbers only.

it again. Conversely, other capitalists such as Sandstad, Rusmussen (Rummel) and Vigeland are in strong opposition, with Vigeland saying “I am afraid it will lead us into worldliness...we must think of spiritual needs before all else” (*Workshops* 67). They are anxious about any development and the possible chaos it might bring about. As a result, Karsten has to reason with them in order to gain their support. But in the final draft, when he advocates for the project, there is no word of disapproval from these three, because as Rummel puts it, “we will stand or fall together...the thing shall go through” (*Pillars* 34-35). Bjørn Hemmer has pointed out that “the way Ibsen expresses his criticism of the social reality is through the formation of an alliance between capitalists who are in conflict with each other and who fear reform”¹³. This explains why Ibsen makes this change in the final draft. His critique of the bourgeoisie hinges on the alliance between Karsten and the other capitalists. Karsten confesses at the end of the play that the real reason for his support for the plan is to make the most profits that he can, and with this change, Ibsen tells us that there is no difference between Karsten and the other capitalists, all of whom are hypocrites.

Another important modification across the various drafts involves how Karsten

Bernick confesses his responsibility for cheating himself, his family and society. As the story unfolds, the conversation between Karsten and Lona Hessel prepares the ground for the climax. In the third draft, Karsten says “there are times when I despise myself...we are the slaves of society, neither more nor less” (*Workshops* 80). That’s to say, in this draft Karsten is capable of reflecting on his own motivations and is aware of the fact that what he has done is contrary to the dictates of his conscience, and he gives himself constant reminders of this. In contrast, in the final draft Karsten has always been complacent about what he has achieved and the role he plays in the community until the return of Lona, who pushes him to confront his true self. As Gail Finney puts it, “A crucial element of Ibsen’s relationship to feminism is the role played by actual feminists in his life and work” (Mcfarlane 90). Lona is such a figure, and by highlighting her role in Karsten’s transformation, Ibsen creates a clear contrast between the hypocritical Karsten and the truthful Lona.

As can be seen from the above analysis, Ibsen makes a series of ethical choices in the course of formation of his brain text, before translating it into written text. It is on the basis of these choices that we can identify his ethical concerns, which can also be seen in the brain texts of the characters in the play.

¹³ Hemmer, Bjørn. 易卜生——艺术家之路 (*Ibsen---Kunstnerens vei*). Trans. Shi Qin’e (石琴娥). Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2007, p.19.

2 Karsten Bernick's Brain Text and Ethical Choices

As James March observes, “Ibsen’s characters try to fulfill the identity ideals by which they and their positions in society are defined”¹⁴. He further points out that “in the face of the difficulty of satisfying the ideals, they lie...” (1280). In *Pillars of Society*, Karsten Bernick successfully fulfills his ideal identity by lying. He becomes a respected figure by betraying his true self, making several ethical choices in the process. Similar to the situation which pertains to the writer, the characters’ ethical choices are also closely related to their brain texts. Due to differing life experiences, the storage, processing and extraction of the brain text vary from person to person. Generally speaking, “the nature of a person’s brain text decides who he is” (“The Forming Mechanism” 33). That’s to say, the more positive the brain text a person stores is, the more she is inclined to make correct ethical choices. Karsten fails to store sufficient positive brain text to make any reasonable and noble choices until the return of Lona, as a consequence of which it is difficult for him to make correct ethical choices.

Karsten’s ethical morass starts with the unethical choice he makes at the very outset. He was once in love with Lona. When his family business is in danger, he is informed that Lona’s half-sister Betty is the only heir to her father’s money, money with which he could extricate his family from financial difficulties. Karsten is confronted with an ethical dilemma in the form of the choice between Lona and Betty. If he chooses to be true to himself, his family business will fail; if he chooses to save his family business, he has to betray his love. He discards his love and marries Betty, but ironically, this choice doesn’t really help his family business. Facing this ethical dilemma, he lies to himself and thereby chooses the ethical identity of a liar. Gradually, this identity becomes part of Karsten’s brain text. The accretion of such a negative text influences and determines the several following ethical choices he makes, which bring him an artificial or inorganic family and a status based on falsity.

In looking away from his true love, Karsten curbs his rational will and gives full play to his irrational will. Within the framework of Ethical Literary Criticism, irrational will is “opposite to rational will, [and] refer[s] to the irrational drive for emotions and behavior. It is free from the constraint and control of rationality”¹⁵.

¹⁴ March, James G. “Ibsen, Ideals and the Subornation of Lies.” *Organization Studies*. 28(08), p.1278.

When Lona leaves, Karsten's rational will goes with her and irrationality begins to grow within him until it fully controls his behavior. His irrational will leads him into a secret affair with a married lady. What's worse, when the affair is discovered, he tries to extricate himself from the situation and does not have the courage to accept responsibility. Instead, he entreats Betty's brother, Johan, to be the scapegoat. He indulges his irrational will beyond any constraints. What's more, when Johan leaves for America, Karsten spreads rumors about him stealing money as a way to secure the fortunes of his family business. Since Karsten has stored the identity of a liar in his brain, he cannot possibly be true to himself and others. Since he is bereft of rational will, he is not capable of making any right and noble ethical choices. Yet ironically, his family business flourishes and he gains a respectable reputation in society. This unearned status blinds him, as he enjoys rewards brought about by his deceit and assumes the role of a pillar of society. He reckons himself to be the main factor in the development of society: "Our little hive of industry rests now-a-days, God be thanked, on such a sound moral basis; we

have all of us helped to drain it... [You,] Mr. Rorlund, will continue your richly blessed activity in our schools and homes. We, the practical men of business, will be the support of the community by extending its welfare within as wide a radius as possible; and our women...will work on undisturbed in the service of charity, and moreover will be a help and a comfort to your nearest and dearest..." (*Pillars* 38-39). It is obvious that Karsten is used to being a leader and he assigns roles to people in the community. He naively believes that there is "a sound moral basis" for his life because he never realizes that everything he has constructed is based on deceit. He believes it is his duty to make himself "as prominent as possible in the affair" (35) of the railway project. Therefore, when he tries to push through the project, he deceives himself and others when he argues that it is for the good of the community, while its real impetus is pure self-interest.

Although his is an unearned status, Karsten doesn't realize this. The ethical identity of "the pillar of society" pushes him to make corresponding ethical choices, and he strives to consolidate his status. That's why when Lona and Johan return, Karsten feels threatened when he is made to face his past. To a certain extent, Lona and Johan represent the rational will in

15 Nie, Zhenzhao. 文学伦理学批评导论(*Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism*). Beijing: Peking UP, 2014, p.251.

Karsten. Johan wants Karsten to tell the truth to the public so he doesn't have to live with slander. Since Karsten's irrational will is still in a dominant position, his natural response when his identity is threatened is to protect it. He even deludes himself with the faux-noble reasoning that if his mistake becomes known to society, "the welfare of your (Johan's) native place is also at stake" (127). The brain text underlying this response is in fact that his status is at stake and he has to bolster it. Therefore, he offers a bribe to Johan to keep his secret, but is rejected. And when he realizes his guilty past can be forever buried with the shipwreck of the "Indian Girl", which Johan and Dina plan to board, he doesn't prevent the ship from setting out. His irrational will pushes him to the edge of committing a crime.

It is Lona Hessel who eventually awakens Karsten's slumbering rational will and who persistently gives positive input to his brain. She wants Karsten to find his true self. As Karsten says, "I have been thinking a great deal lately---since you came back" (164), so he is compelled to think about what he has done. He faces a choice between continuing to enjoy the prestige brought about by a lie, and telling the truth. He realizes what Lona truly means to him, and with her return

re-emerges the rational will which has been missing or suppressed in him, as he confesses to Lona : "If I had had you, I should not be in the position I am in tonight", because this position is the result of "lying and deceit" (165). The final element that overcomes his irrational will is the knowledge that his son, in whom he has invested all his hopes and who is on board the imminently doomed "Indian Girl", has safely come back home. He decides to unfetter himself from the identity of a "liar" and to "look into his own heart" (188). He declares to the public as follows : "...we begin a new era. The old era---with its affectation, its hypocrisy and its emptiness, its pretense of virtue and its miserable fear of public opinion---shall be for us like a museum" (186).

With the return of his rational will, Karsten ultimately fails to realise his ideal identity. However, he is free from the torment brought about by guilt and he eventually faces his true self, which is an invaluable form of moral growth for him. Regarding such abrupt transformations in Ibsen's characters, Elizabeth Jacobs offers an insightful explanation : "Because Ibsen was primarily interested in the inner conflicts and changes which constitute the drama of the individual, the climax of his play is usually the moment of realization, the moment in which his chief character,

for one supreme moment, regardless of what is to follow, comes face to face with his own soul in complete accord and understanding”¹⁶.

3 Ibsen's Ethical Concerns

“In the process of making ethical choices, because of the functioning of the brain text, man acquires his ethical consciousness and gradually develops his conscience” (“The Forming Mechanism” 33-34). From this perspective, the ethical choices the characters make in the play, in addition to being determined by their own brain text, are to a lesser or greater extent the reflection of Ibsen’s ethical consciousness. As Ibsen forecast in his letters, the play “will enter pretty thoroughly into several of the more important questions of the day” (*Letters* 291). In *Pillars of Society*, Ibsen investigates such ethical issues as the relationship between the individual and society, the concept of the public, and the status of women in their relationship with men. In discussing these issues, he emphasizes the importance of the individual pursuit of freedom, reveals the ugly side of society and affirms the role of women.

Outlining the similarities between Ibsen and Georg Brandes, the Danish writer and

literary critic, Bjørn Hemmer notes that “it was these two who powerfully challenged the values of the existing middle-class society and who formulated the basic rights and liberties of the individual”. He goes on to argue that “the point that Ibsen and Brandes were making was that this kind of society could not satisfy the natural need of the individual for freedom” (Mcfarlane 69). As Ibsen makes very clear in his letters, “what is all-important is the revolution of the spirit of man” (*Letters* 205). He is concerned about the individual pursuit of freedom. In *Pillars of Society*, generally speaking, there are two kinds of ethical choices in relation to the issue of freedom. One is represented by Lona and Johan, who live in a community where gossip is widespread and where public opinion has significant influence. Realizing that such social pressure has frustrated their pursuit of freedom, they decide to leave for America, which at that time was a new world promising freedom. As they expect, they are successful. Lona becomes a singer in a bar, gives lectures in public and even publishes a book, all of which appear absurd and unhinged to the society ladies. Johan has become “a fine fellow” (*Pillars* 70) and a rich businessman with the support of Lona. The other kind of ethical choice is represented by Karsten Bernick, who chooses to defend social conventions and social hierarchy, because he realizes that only in this way can he secure his position

¹⁶ Jacobs, Elizabeth. “Henrik Ibsen and the Doctrine of Self-realization.” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*. 38.3 (1939), p.425.

as a “pillar of society”. But “it is precisely the defenders of this society who are presented as least free” (Mcfarlane 69). Although in the eyes of public opinion, he has become “a man of the world and the pink of courtesy, a perfect gentleman, the darling of all the ladies” (*Pillars* 27), this nearly perfect image has been established on lies and is doomed to fall apart. Ibsen holds the view that society should not develop at the cost of the individual, and that man has to maintain his individualistic features (*Social Philosophy* 51). In that sense, Karsten Bernick, who sacrifices himself for the approbation of society and who doesn’t remain true to himself, can never be a figure who truly underpins society. Instead, he is a casualty of the hypocrisy required of those who aspire to eminence. The ending of the play, when Karsten prioritizes truthfulness over his own renown, may seem to be a sudden departure, but it is compatible with Ibsen’s validation of the importance of personal development and of the moral teaching function of literature. Karsten chooses to be true to himself and takes strides toward achieving spiritual freedom.

Since “the pursuit of spiritual freedom often represents the intellectual’s dissatisfaction with social realities”¹⁷, by depicting Karsten’s realization of spiritual freedom, Ibsen is in fact critiquing the hypocrisy of

contemporary society and religion. This is primarily revealed in the irony with which he treats Karsten and Dr. Rorlund. When Karsten refuses to exonerate Johan by exposing his own past action to the public, he explains as follows: “With the unblemished and honoured name I have hitherto borne, I can take the whole thing upon my shoulders, carry it through, and say to my fellow-citizens: ‘I have taken this risk for the good of the community’” (*Pillars* 125). The irony of these words is revealed firstly in “the unblemished and honoured name” he believes he has, as it has been won precisely through a dishonourable act. Secondly and quite interestingly, the term “for the good of the community” appears at the very beginning of the play, uttered by Aune, who is explaining why he has talked indiscriminately about the harm caused by machines. Who is really acting for the good of the community, Karsten or Aune? The latter is a foreman in Karsten’s shipbuilding yard, and his family has served the Bernicks for three generations. Nevertheless, Karsten discharges Aune without a second thought simply because he disobeys him in relation to the repairs on the ship. In doing so, Karsten simply says, “the individual must be sacrificed to the general welfare” (62). He doesn’t show any compassion for Aune, but in contrast, Aune is concerned about his community: “I am afraid for the number of men who will have the bread taken out of

¹⁷ Zhou, Ning (周宁) ed. *西方戏剧理论史* (*A History of Theatre Theories in the West*). Xiamen: Xiamen UP, 2008, p.568.

their mouths by these machines. You are very fond, sir, of talking about the consideration we owe to the community; it seems to me, however, that the community has its duties too. Why should science and capital venture to introduce these new discoveries into labour, before the community has had time to educate a generation up to using them?" (57) As these words suggest, Aune isn't rejecting the changes wrought by modernity, but is instead asking for the right to be allowed to acclimatize to them. This conflict shows that Karsten Bernick's instinct for what constitutes the community is delimited. It excludes the lower class, which makes his rationalization "for the good of the community" rather ironic.

Rorlund is another hypocritical character in the play, who is presented as ridiculous from the very beginning, when he is reading to the ladies. He is "reading aloud...but only loud enough for the spectators to catch a word now and then" (5). Despite this difficulty, when he finishes reading, the ladies respond with great ardor: "What an instructive tale! ... And such a good moral! ... A book like that really gives one something to think about" (7). There is no sincerity and frankness in their communication. Later, Rorlund proposes to Dina Dorf, saying, "when I come---when circumstances allow me to come---to you and say, 'Here is my hand', you will take

it and be my wife?" (33). A marriage proposal should be a very romantic thing but this one is definitely not a gesture of love. To Rorlund, marriage is simply something determined by "circumstances", not his own heart. What's more, he asks Dina not to tell anybody of his proposal. He knows nothing about love and he doesn't know how to shoulder the responsibilities of a man. This portrayal of a ridiculous figure continues to the end when Rorlund lionizes Karsten: "... We have on many occasions given you our thanks for the broad moral foundation upon which you have, so to speak, reared the edifice of our community. On this occasion we offer our homage especially to the clear-sighted, indefatigable, unselfish---nay, self-sacrificing citizen...You, sir, have for many years been a shining example in our midst...In a word---you are, in the fullest sense of the term, the mainstay of our community" (177-78). This sycophancy jars because everything Rorlund says and knows about Karsten turns out to be false. Ibsen describes Rorlund as a typical exponent of conventional religious ethics, and by revealing that what Rorlund defends is false, Ibsen derides him and the traditions and religion he defends.

In contrast, the female characters in the play, especially Lona and Betty, are presented in a very positive light. Ibsen is obviously approving of the potential of women to play a major role in society. He

even believes that “women are the hope for the future, and the main force in changing the current situation and bringing reforms” (*Ibsen—Kunstnerens vei* 12). Such appreciation of women is revealed in the contrast between Lona and Rorlund, as well as that between Betty Bernick and Karsten. The house of Karsten and Betty Bernick is the location of all the onstage action of the play. Its opulence suggests the status of its owner, but most of the drama takes place in relative gloom because the curtains are not opened. When American sailors appear on the street, the sounds of an excited crowd are heard. Rorlund “shuts the verandah door, and draws the curtains over it and over the windows, so that the room becomes half dark” (*Pillars* 44). He believes that by doing so he can keep a changing world at bay. As this scene shows, the curtains are an important symbol in the play. The juxtaposition of the dark and silent room and the bright and excited external world is symbolic of the conflict between tradition and progress. The choice to stay in a half dark room reveals Rorlund’s reluctance to engage with progress and change, and even his resistance to it. In contrast, Lona hates darkness. When she walks into the house, she opens the curtains because she believes the room to be a “vault” and says that she and Johan “must have broad daylight” (49). Lona has returned from a world that is in the throes of development, and she wants people in her hometown to

face the outside world and not to shun it.

Karsten cheats on Betty at the very beginning of the play. After they marry, he keeps all his business from her because he believes that women’s place is in the home. He doesn’t love Betty, because he thinks “she has been nothing to me of what I need” (165). It is Lona who makes him realize what has caused his estrangement from his wife: “Because you have never shared your interests with her; because you have never allowed her full and frank exchange of thoughts with you; because you have allowed her to be borne under by self-reproach for the shame you cast upon one who was dear to her” (165). In contrast, although there is little communication between them, Betty knows, understands and loves her husband. She takes every possible opportunity to defend his reputation, even though she is conscious of what he is guilty of. She is tolerant enough to excuse Karsten when he finally confesses his crime to the public, and in fact says to him, “you have opened out for me the happiest prospect I have had for many a year” (189). Therefore, both traditional women and modern women, as represented by Betty and Lona, play indispensable roles in the play.

Without brain text, humans cannot develop their sense of ethics. Neither can they develop a rounded conscience, nor differentiate themselves from animals. “In the literary world, the function of ethical

edification is realized through the transformation of the brain text” (“The Forming Mechanism” 34). Therefore, one important purpose of the study of literature is to identify the brain texts which underpin it. Although it is not possible to precisely determine the brain text underlying Henrik Ibsen’s work, as we have seen, the composition of his plays was comprised of a process of careful revision. By comparing the successive drafts of *Pillars of Society* and analyzing the ethical choices involved in the process, this paper demonstrates the workings of Ibsen’s brain text and the ways in which it interacts with his ethical choices. It is also through this analytical process that we can gain access to his ethical concerns, and become aware of the dimension of moral teaching of his plays, and of drama in general.