

Janet Garton

**“Are you really going to have this person in
your living-room?”
Ulrik Brendel’s difficult entry into Ibsen’s
*Rosmersholm***

Henrik Ibsen’s *Rosmersholm* was published in November 1886, two years after *Vildanden*, in what students of Ibsen have become used to thinking of as his regular biennial cycle. This notion of regularity, however, obscures the fact that all was not so carefully calculated as it may seem. Ibsen had started work on the play in late 1885, and had at first thought that it would be finished earlier than it was; but it took longer than expected for his ideas to coalesce into the final version, and in the event he had to miss his summer holiday in 1886 in order to finish it. We can see from the preserved drafts that his ideas about the relationship between the main characters – and their names – changed considerably as he went along, sometimes in mid-draft, and the minor characters too underwent wide-ranging modifications. He had particular difficulties with the character of Rosmer’s former tutor Ulrik Brendel, who appears with a number of different names and in a range of incarnations, which are so different from each other as to give him a different function in the play with each revision. In this article I shall firstly examine the development of the Brendel character from draft to draft, and then offer some suggestions about

the varying problems he poses or contributions he makes to the overall unity of the play.

The first jottings for *Rosmersholm* were made over the period December 1885 to June 1886, and consist of three separate undated sheets of notes. Following that there are three distinct drafts of dialogue. The first undated one, probably from the spring of 1886, is entitled “White Horses”, and contains the opening of Act 1. The second, also entitled “White Horses”, was written between 25th May and 15th June 1886, and consists of Acts 1 and 2 and the beginning of Act 3. The third draft of the complete play bears the title “Rosmersholm”, and was written from 15th June to 4th August 1886. The final version followed swiftly after, being written between 6th August and 27th September.

The character who eventually becomes Ulrik Brendel is present in embryo from the beginning of Ibsen’s notes about the play. On the single sheet, probably from December 1885, on which he jots down his ideas about the characters, making Rebekka the governess to Rosmer’s two daughters, he finishes with a note: “Journalisten; geni, landstryger” (ES 81) (“The journalist, genius, vagabond.” (OI 444)).¹ The first draft stops shortly before the entry of Brendel into the play, and there is no mention of him. However, the second and third drafts, and the final version of the play, confront us with three figures with very different intentions.

In the second draft, Brendel arrives just as he does in the final version, to interrupt the conversation between Kroll, Rosmer and Rebekka at the point where the last-mentioned declares that she is going to explain to Kroll why his ideas about getting Rosmer to edit his paper are so ludicrous – except that Kroll is Gylling and Rebekka is Mrs Rosmer. Brendel’s name has not been established;

¹ Norwegian quotations from Ibsen’s drafts are taken from Ibsen, *Efterladte Skrifter III*, 1909 (ES). English translations are taken from McFarlane (ed.), *The Oxford Ibsen VI*, 1960 (OI).

in the course of this draft he is referred to variously as Rosenhjelm, Sejerhjelm and Hekfeldt. It is interesting to note that he is the only character in the second draft whose physical appearance is described, and the description contains a fair amount of detail, so he must already have been vividly present in Ibsen's mind: "Han har uredt hår og skæg, og er klædt som en almindelig landstryger. Ingen overfrakke; dårligt skotøj; skjorte ses ikke. Gamle sorte hansker påtrukne; en bulehat sammenklappet under armen og en stok i hånden." (ES 97) ("He has unkempt hair and beard, and is dressed like a common tramp. No overcoat; down at heel; no shirt visible. He is wearing old black gloves, and has a wide-awake hat crumpled under his arm, and a stick in his hand." (OI 394))

Much of the backchat between the characters connected with him is already in place here. Mrs Helset gets his name wrong, calling him Uldrik rather than Ulrik; Rosenhjelm mistakenly greets Gylling, confusing him with Rosmer, and then recognises Gylling as the man who kept him out of the Student Club (in the final version, had him thrown out of the Debating Society); Rosenhjelm declares that he can tell that Mortensgaard is an idiot from the sound of his name; Gylling is president of the Temperance Society and does not welcome the suggestion that Rosenhjelm might enrol; Rosenhjelm is tempted by the offer of a drink to warm him up until he realises Mrs Rosmer means a cup of tea; and he borrows clothes and money because his things are being sent on later. What is not present in this scene is any particular reason for Rosenhjelm to be in the area, or any specific link to Rosmer. He is spoken of before he appears as "Den forlorne Rosenhjelm" (ES 97) ("That prodigal Rosenhjelm" (OI 393)), and is not Rosmer's former tutor but an acquaintance of whom Rosmer says: "Jeg har kendt lidt til ham i hans velmagts dage" (ES 97) ("I knew him slightly in better days" (OI 393)) – though he does address Rosmer with the familiar "du". And his intentions in coming to town are rather vaguely "Jeg tænker nemlig på at få en aftenunderholdning i stand. [...] Hvad

som bedst falder i smagen.” (ES 98) (“Actually I am thinking of organizing an evening’s entertainment. [...] Whatever suits the popular taste.” (OI 394)) There is no message he is burning to convey. After he has departed, there is quite a conversation about him; Rosmer suggests he might be rehabilitated and Gylling wonders whether his “flængende ubarmhjertige pen” (ES 101) (“slashing, merciless pen” (OI 397)) might be used in the service of his projected newspaper – provided, of course, that Brendel lives a blameless life from now on.

There is further discussion of the character in the following two acts. In Act 2, Gylling reports back to Rosmer that Ulrik Sejerhjelm has disgraced himself, pretty much as he does in the final version: he has visited “en sjofel kippe” (ES 106) (“a low tavern” (OI 401)) and got himself thrown out, pawned Rosmer’s overcoat etc. The idea that Rebekka has given him a note for Mortensgaard, and that the latter has redeemed the coat, is also in place, leading on to Gylling’s query as to whether things are going on in Rosmer’s house behind his back. In Act 3, Mortensgaard arrives to talk to Rosmer – a conversation which is moved to Act 2 in the final version. And he has more to say about Sejerhjelm, who has now become Hekfeldt. Rosmer asks if he can use Hekfeldt in his paper, and he replies: “Desværre, jeg tror det er for sent. [...] Han er ikke med i tiden; står så underlig udenfor det som rører sig. Ser på tingene med øjne som kan ha’ været radikale nok for tyve år siden – “ (ES 117). (“I’m afraid it’s too late. [...] He’s out of step with the age; he stands so strangely outside what is going on. Looks at things with eyes that might have been radical enough twenty years ago ... “ (OI 410-11).) This exchange is not present in the final version, where Mortensgaard simply says he wanted to thank Rebekka for her note. The second “Brendel episode”, where he returns disillusioned in Act 4, is not included in this draft at all.

The third complete draft of the play includes both Brendel episodes, during the course of which his name settles down rather

more; he has become Ulrik Hetman – the name used in the final version as Brendel’s pen-name. On his first entry he is still someone whom Rosmer knew a little in better days. His appearance has changed somewhat; from being unkempt he has become “en staselig skikkelse med gråsprængt hår og skæg” (ES 120) (“an impressive figure with grey-flecked hair and beard” (OI 413)). He clearly carries rather more authority here than in the previous version. And he has a mission; he intends to hire the hall of the Workmen’s Institute in order to embark on a lecture tour throughout the country. His mission is a political one, to attack the landowners who have appropriated the land which should be the common property of everyone: “Det er ingen som knyr imod at det faste land på kloden er i hænderne på en forholdsvis liden bande af røvere, som har udnyttet det i århundrer, som udnytter det den dag idag og som agter at udnytte det gennem al fremtid.” (ES 124) (“Nobody breathes a word against the idea of solid earth on this planet being in the hands of a relatively small band of robbers, who have exploited it for centuries, who are exploiting it today and who intend exploiting it for all eternity.” (OI 415)) Logical and practical as his message sounds, however, it is strangely mixed with an unclear and mystical sense of being chosen – by God or the devil: “Den tanke har jeg fra oven, – eller fra nedent, – eller fra de dunkle usporlige magter. Jeg har den gennem en inspiration...” (ES 124) (“This idea I have from above ... or from below ... or from the dark inscrutable forces. It has come to me by inspiration ...” (OI 415)). When Rebekka explains to him that his idea is not new, but that she and Rosmer have recently read a book which raises precisely the same issues, he collapses in despair at coming too late yet again, then rallies and decides to cut his losses by organizing a few evenings’ entertainment. After his exit, Rosmer and Gylling have a brief exchange about him in which they agree that he had once been so brilliant, “hele hovedstadens løve” (ES 127) (“the lion of the entire capital” (OI 417)), before he wrote the notorious book which rui-

ned his career.

By the second “Brendel episode” in Act 4 of the third draft, new ideas have taken shape in the playwright’s mind. Now Rosmer has become the former pupil of Hetman, who addresses him as “min gut” and “min søn” (ES 135, 137) (“my boy”, “my son” (OI 420, 421)). He does not have the failure of his plans to report – that had already happened before he left the stage in Act 1 – but now, it appears, he is on a totally different tack. He has realised that his whole doctrine is false – but not for any social or political reason. Everything is a swindle, mankind is beyond help – because “der var en fejl ved skabelsen fra først af” (ES 135) (“there was a mistake right at the beginning of Creation” (OI 420)). He launches into an attack on “Mesteren”, the master, who had been in the wrong mood or too much of a hurry when he created mankind, realised that there was a flaw in the work but pretended not to notice. So all he can recommend to Rosmer and Rebekka is to eat, drink and be merry together. Rosmer tells him that Rebekka is in fact leaving, and then the conversation turns to Beate, and Hetman very pointedly indicates the way her successor should go:

HETMAN. Hold hende i agt og ære. Den kvinde må dog ha’
hvt som et slags vinger, synes jeg.

REBEKKA. Vinger? Hvorfor vinger?

HETMAN. Hæved hun sig ikke så højt at hun kunde dø for
sin kærlighed?

ROSMER. Ja dette – at kunne dø for noget.

HETMAN. Jeg skulde forsvoret at nogen eneste levende sjæl
kunde det.

ROSMER. Dette – at ty til døden – for at føre vidnesbyrd om
sin kærlighed.

REBEKKA. Jeg rejser ikke i nat.

ROSMER (*angst*). Jo rejs! Rejs!

HETMAN. Bliv De, min smukke dame. For Dem er der ing-
en fare på færde. Dem slipper han nok for at få lokket ned

under vandene. (ES 137-38)

HETMAN. Respect and honour her. That woman must have had some sort of wings, I think.

REBECCA. Wings? Why wings?

HETMAN. Did she not raise herself so high that she could die for her love?

ROSMER. Ah! To be able to die for something!

HETMAN. I would have sworn that not a single living soul could do that.

ROSMER. Ah! to seek death ... as witness to one's love.

REBECCA. I am not leaving tonight.

ROSMER (*fearfully*). Yes! Go! Go!

HETMAN. Stay, my fair lady. For you there is no danger lurking. He's not likely to lure *you* into deep water. (OI 422)

This exchange, with its fairly overt reference to the legend of Rosmer the merman luring the maiden beneath the waves, is excised from the final version.

Finally we come to the play in its published form. Brendel arrives in Act 1 announced by Mrs Helseth as on previous occasions, although now Rosmer acknowledges him at his former tutor from the start. He is given a more colourful past, having both been on tour with a travelling theatre group and spent some time in the workhouse, as well as having been driven out of Rosmersholm by Rosmer's father with a horsewhip. When he appears, the description of his appearance has been refined yet more in a positive direction – he is “en stadselig, noget udtæret men rask og rørig skikkelse med gråt hår og skæg” (HU 359)² (“an impressive figure, with grey hair and beard, rather gaunt, but alert and vigorous” (OI 306))

² References to the Norwegian published version of *Rosmersholm* are taken from *Hundreårsutgaven*, Vol. X, 1932 (HU); those to the English version from the *Oxford Ibsen* as before.

– and he now wears a threadbare frock-coat. He addresses Rosmer as “Johannes – min gut, – du, hvem jeg har elsket mest –!” (HU 360) (“Johannes ... my boy ... my well-beloved...” (OI 307), a greeting with distinct biblical overtones. The banter with Kroll is little changed, but Brendel’s errand in town is a different one altogether; not organizing entertainment, nor embarking on political agitation, but revealing his visionary ideas. The language he is given to describe these ideas is more flowery and self-indulgent than ever, to the point of being parodic: “når gyldne drømme daled ned over mig, – omtåged mig, – når nye, svimlende, vidtrækkende tanker fødtes i mig, – omvifted mig med bærende vinger, – da formed jeg det ud i digt, i syner, i billeder. [...] bifaldet, takken, berømmelsen, laurbærkronen, – alt har jeg indkasseret med fulde, glædeskælvende hænder.” (HU 362-63) (“whenever golden dreams came over me ... enveloping me ... whenever new ideas were born within me, dazzling, audacious ... when I felt the rush of their beating wings ... these things I formed into poems and visions and images. [...] the applause, the gratitude, the eulogies, the laurel crowns ... all this I have abundantly gathered in with glad and trembling hands” (OI 309-10)). He is going to sacrifice his ideas on the altar of liberty “som en mor, der lægger unge døtre i ægtemands arme” (HU 363) (“like a mother who gives her young daughters into the arms of their husbands” (OI 310)). His rhetoric captivates Rebekka, who declares he is splendid to give the best he has – and more or less explicitly challenges Rosmer to do the same. After Brendel leaves, Rosmer defends him to Kroll more vigorously than he has in any previous version: “Han har i alle fald havt mod til at leve livet efter sit eget hode. Jeg synes ikke *det* er så lidet endda.” (HU 365) (“At least he has had the courage to live his life in his own way. I don’t think *that’s* such a small thing after all.” (OI 312))

Brendel then returns in Act 4, at the point when Rosmer is desperately asking Rebekka to give him back his faith in her love. He now presents himself as a man bereft of ideals, a bankrupt who has

been superseded by the man of the future, Peter Mortensgaard. He is not quietly dejected, however, but no less histrionic and bombastic than on his first appearance: "... slig, som du i denne nat ser mig, er jeg en afsat konge på askedyngen af mit brændte slot [...] Tidens tænder havde maset den til støv." (HU 432) ("... what you see tonight is a deposed king standing amid the ashes of his burnt-out palace [...] the mills of time had ground it all to dust" (OI 374-75)). He warns Rosmer not to build his house on shifting sand – and not to build on Rebekka, the "tiltrækkende havfrue" (HU 433) ("enchanting little mermaid" (OI 375)). She does not announce in this version that she is leaving, but Brendel tells her that Rosmer's only hope of fulfilling his mission is if she is prepared to make a sacrifice of herself. His recommendation is startlingly concrete: "At den kvinde, som elsker ham, gladelig går ud i køkkenet og hakker sin fine rosenhvide lillefinger af, – her, – just her ved det midterste led. Item at bemeldte elskende kvinde – ligeledes gladelig – snitter af sig det så uforlignelig formede venstre øre." (HU 433) ("That the woman who loves him goes out into the kitchen and gladly chops off her dainty, pink and white little-finger ... *here*, just here near the middle joint. Furthermore, that the aforesaid woman in love ... equally gladly ... cuts off her incomparably formed left ear." (OI 376)) He then leaves to go out into the dark night, with the biblical blessing: "Fred være med jer." (HU 433) ("Peace be with you" (OI 376)).

*

As the above summary demonstrates, Ibsen's ideas about Brendel did not just evolve during the course of his composition of *Rosmersholm*, but underwent drastic changes, right up until the final version. His character is reasonably well established from the start, as a previously brilliant but unstable thinker who has ruined his career by a morally dubious lifestyle, and his interaction with the other characters on stage does not alter significantly over the various drafts, except that his relationship with Rosmer becomes

more intimate. But his intentions, the reasons for him to seek admission into Rosmer's living-room and the play, vary considerably. In the second draft, he intends merely to put on an evening's entertainment, and why it should be in this town is unclear; he even admits to not knowing this part of the country and being unsure as to what kind of entertainment would be popular. In the third draft, he begins as a would-be political agitator, with a definite programme and a mission to spread enlightenment; then on his second entry he has become a kind of lapsed religious mystic who blames the Creator for having created an imperfect human race. By the final version, he has acquired a different and much less precisely-defined mission, to reveal his private visions to an astonished multitude; and it is the failure of this mission which preoccupies him during his second visit. He has changed from being only superficially connected to the action of the play – there seems to be little link between “an evening's entertainment” and Rosmer's ambitions to ennoble humanity – to providing a much closer parallel to his former pupil, and even offering very precise advice on the future of the relationship between him and Rebekka.

The question that arises in this connection is: why did Ibsen have such difficulties in determining Brendel's contribution to the action of the play? Some commentators have suggested using biographical material, and examining the events of Ibsen's life during this period to reveal the source of the conflicts in this play, and the material he was digesting as he worked. The mid-1880s was a comparatively turbulent time for him, with his first visit to Norway for eleven years in the summer of 1885. It was a visit on which he embarked with optimism about recent political events in Norway, with the establishment of parliamentarism under Johan Sverdrup in 1884, but from which he returned disillusioned; the politicians of the Left were weak, those of the Right fanatic. In his introduction to *Hundreårsutgaven*, Francis Bull suggests that Ibsen's disappointment with practical politics was mirrored in the disillusionment of

both Rosmer and Brendel.³ He also mentions the fact that Joachim Welhaven, the poet's brother, may have been a model for the latter.⁴ More recently, Eivind Tjønneland has continued a similar line of investigation, picking up on Ibsen's quarrel with his old friend Lorentz Dietrichson and the Norwegian Studentersamfund, and suggesting that Brendel might possibly be a caricature of Dietrichson – though he concludes that there is a greater similarity to Kroll.⁵

There is also no lack of literary forbears for Brendel, as several studies have shown. In the introduction to *Hundreårsutgaven*, Bull draws attention to the similarities between Brendel and characters in earlier nineteenth-century Nordic fiction which Ibsen must have known: the renegade Lorenz Brandt in Camilla Collett's *Amtmandens Døttre* (1854-55), the bombastic teacher Bigum in J.P. Jacobsen's *Niels Lyhne* (1880), and student Grip in Jonas Lie's *Familien på Gilje* (1883), a rebellious idealist who is defeated by conservatism and becomes a tramp (HU 335-36). He also draws parallels between Ibsen and Kierkegaard, suggesting that Brendel represents Kierkegaard's aesthetic stadium, taken to its ultimate parodic conclusion (HU 336). Sandra Saari has drawn attention to the parallels between Brendel's sacrificial demand and the plot of H.C. Andersen's "Den lille Havfrue", where the mermaid must agree to mutilation – having her tongue cut out – in order to reach her prince.⁶ Ibsen, of course, knew Andersen, who had presented him with a copy of his *New Tales and Stories* in 1872. Andrey Yuriev has suggested reading *Rosmersholm* in the tradition of the medieval mystery play, interpreting Brendel as a modern Mephistopheles, who turns out to be "a parodic 'petty devil', a carnivalized repre-

³ *Hundreårsutgaven* Vol.X, 1932, p. 319.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 335.

⁵ Tjønneland, "Selvmordene i Henrik Ibsens *Rosmersholm*", 1992, p. 54-56.

⁶ Saari, "Rosenvold and Rosmersholm", 1979, p. 101-119.

sentative of the so-called 'merry hell' originating from the medieval tradition."⁷ He also points out that Brendel's reference to Master Urian in the third draft is most likely borrowed from Goethe's *Walpurgisnacht*.⁸ Atle Kittang investigates further the echoes of Goethe's *Faust* in Brendel's Mephistophelian behaviour, and also maintains that there is something eerily unsettling about him, which suggests parallels with more modern figures: "Det er noko mobilt og ugripbart ved han, noko landstrykaraktig i meir enn fysisk forstand, som gjer at han snarare liknar på visse figurtypar hos Samuel Beckett og Harold Pinter enn på ein klassisk teaterklovn." (There is something mobile and indefinable about him, something of a vagabond in more than a physical sense, which makes him resemble more certain character types of Samuel Beckett's and Harold Pinter's than a classical theatrical clown.)⁹

Biographical and intertextual references are illuminating, and help to locate the play in its historical and literary-historical context; but it is the dramatic function of the Brendel character within the play itself I am most concerned with here. I shall not, in other words, speculate on what Ibsen had in mind, but examine the effect of Brendel's various incarnations on the dramatic economy of *Rosmersholm*. It is clear from his first entry in the second draft that he was intended to arrive at a key moment in the drama, as Rosmer's political and religious apostasy is about to be revealed to Kroll – and his arrival has the effect of delaying the announcement. His second entry too, which is given its initial form in the third draft, interrupts a moment of high tension, as Rebekka asks how she can possibly prove to Rosmer that he can still have faith in her and her love, and he has no answer to give. Brendel's second entrance in particular recalls the kind of dramatic device which Ibsen

⁷ Yuriev, "The Revelation of Things Unseen", 2001, p. 342.

⁸ Ibid., p. 344-45.

⁹ Kittang, *Ibsens heroisme*, 2002, p. 229-30. My translation.

commonly used, the arrival of the Stranger at a moment when there is a need for an external impulse to move the plot forward from an impasse – one thinks of the Stranger in *Fruen fra Havet* or Hilda Wangel in *Bygmester Solness*. In both of his appearances in the final version, Brendel acts as a catalyst, as Atle Kittang points out: “I begge tilfelle *utløser han handlingar* hos Rosmer som er heilt avgjerande for dramaets forløp” (In both cases he provokes actions by Rosmer which are decisive for the course of the play).¹⁰ In the first act, Kroll’s scorn after Brendel’s exit, combined with Rosmer’s admiration for a man with the courage of his convictions, provokes Rosmer into explaining where he now stands – which in turn leads directly to Kroll’s suspicions about his “liberated” relationship with Rebekka and his recollection of Beate’s fateful words about being in the way. In the fourth act, Brendel’s suggestion about self-sacrifice – although it has become more subtle and less direct than in the draft – takes root in Rosmer’s mind and leads him to the conclusion that there is only one way for Rebekka to convince him: “Har du mod til, – er du villig til, – gladelig, som Ulrik Brendel sa’, – for min skyld, nu i nat, – gladelig, – at gå den samme vejen, – som Beate gik?” (HU 436) (“If you have the courage ... gladly, as Ulrik Brendel said ... for my sake, tonight ... gladly ... to go the same way ... Beata went?” (OI 378))

The changes in the Brendel episodes in *Rosmersholm* can, it seems to me, best be explained in two ways: firstly in terms of integration into the dramatic structure of the play, and secondly in terms of refinement of psychological motivation. The first Brendel, from the second draft, is insufficiently integrated; he is incidental to the action and given insufficient motivation for appearing precisely here and precisely now. There is no particular relationship with Rosmer, and no parallel in terms of communicating any insights or convictions. There is a suggestion that he might be used – by either Kroll

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 228.

or Mortensgaard – as a political pen; but in the event he is welcomed by neither. The second Brendel, from the third draft, is greatly expanded, to the extent that the political material he brings into the play – a kind of early socialism – threatens to become too much of a distraction from the scene he interrupts. The sudden transformations he is required to undergo during his first scene from political ambition to crushed disappointment to devil-may-care resilience, in the space of a couple of minutes, are also psychologically unconvincing. In his later scene, he again introduces some extraneous material; although Rosmer's loss of faith is important in the plot, Brendel's comments about the Master's mistakes are rather comically irrelevant, and are also in no way linked to what he talked about on his first appearance. He goes on to make a far too direct suggestion about the value of dying to prove one's love – the kind of obvious pointer which is often present in Ibsen's drafts, like Mrs Helseth's bringing on a light when Rebekka needs to dispel the shadows of the past – but which in the final version is usually transferred to a different level of subtext, becoming part of what makes the plays so many-layered and so allusive.

The final Brendel is much more closely tied in on many levels than the earlier ones. He has a reason for returning to see his old pupil, for whom he retains a great affection – in spite, as he says of “visse erindringer” (HU 360) (“certain memories” (OI 307)) – and he is, emphasises Rosmer, welcome at Rosmersholm *now*. His references to “Johannes [...] du, hvem jeg har elsket mest!” (HU 360) (“Johannes [...] my well-beloved” (OI 307)) suggest that he sees himself as a Christ-like figure visiting his favourite disciple, and he is inspired by the dawning of a new age, like Rosmer, to contribute to public enlightenment. His ideas about what he is going to say are not precise enough to have any real effect on his audience's lives or thoughts – but then neither, of course, are Rosmer's. Rosmer intends to ennoble mankind, he says – but he has not the slightest idea of how to go about it. In this scene Brendel provides a drama-

tic foil to Rosmer, and a comic parallel to Rosmer's ambitions. He is utterly self-deluded; but his self-delusion is a grotesque exaggeration of Rosmer's own rather than a contrast to it. Both Brendel and Rosmer are doomed to fail in their self-elected tasks, and the fact that Brendel's failure is predictable from the outset should alert the audience to the signs of Rosmer's unfittedness for his own task which soon begin to show.

In the final act Brendel returns as a confirmation of bankruptcy. Rosmer has by now been convinced by Kroll and his friends that "arbejdet for at adle sindene, – det ligger slet ikke for mig. – Og det er desuden noget så håbløst i sig selv, du. – Jeg lar det ligge." (HU 425) ("the task of ennobling the minds of men ... is not really the thing for me. And you know, it's a pretty hopeless kind of thing, anyway. I'm giving it up." (OI 367)) Brendel comes in, describes his fiasco, and asks for a loan – this time of "et par aflagte idealer" (HU 432) ("one or two cast-off ideals" (OI 374)), but Rosmer has by now become as insolvent as his former tutor. Neither can help the other as far as ideals go. The parallel is complete. However, Brendel still assumes the role of mentor, telling Rosmer "du har konserveret dit barnehjerte, Johannes" (HU 432) ("you still have the heart of a little child, Johannes" (OI 374)), and advising him to forget everything Brendel himself ever taught him. To complete the reversal of his former roles, he changes from Christ-figure to Mephisto-figure, suggesting a sacrifice of the woman, or perhaps of sexual fulfilment – depending on how one interprets the mutilation – as a prerequisite for the success of Rosmer's mission. Although he exits with the words "Fred være med jer" (HU 433) ("Peace be with you" (OI 376)), Rebekka's remark immediately following – "Å, hvor her er kvalmt og lummert!" (HU 434) ("Oh, how close and sultry it is in here!" (OI 376)) is a direct reference to Gretchen's comment after Mephistopheles' visit to her room in Goethe's *Faust*: "Es ist so schwül, so dumpfig hie" ("Her er så lummert

og så kvalmt”).¹¹ The formerly unthreatening, almost clown-like character has taken on an aspect of menace; previously he seemed a figure of fun, here he can suddenly do real harm.

Rosmersholm is a play about which there have always been widely differing views. As Francis Bull put it in 1932, “Både hjemme i Norden og utenlands blev stykket fra første stund møtt med glødende begeistring i enkelte kretser og med iskald eller forarget kritikk i andre; den dag idag er vurderingen av *Rosmersholm* merkelig divergerende.” (Both here in Scandinavia and abroad the play was from the very first met with glowing enthusiasm in certain quarters and with ice-cold or indignant criticism in others; still today, assessments of *Rosmersholm* are strangely divergent.)¹² Eivind Tjønneland writes of the Brendel drafts showing “Ibsens kamp for å ‘tette verket’, å sette punktum” (Ibsen’s struggle to ‘seal the work’, to come to a full stop),¹³ and continues: “det er noe uforløst og uformelig ved Brendel-skikkelsen, samtidig som Brendel tematiserer det uforløste og mangelen som et estetisk problem ved diktverket” (there is something unresolved and formless about the Brendel figure, at the same time as Brendel represents unresolvedness and lack as an aesthetic problem within the work itself) (p. 65). The chameleon-like nature of Brendel reflects different facets of human aspiration and frustration which are at the centre of the play. The links which bind him to the central action and the central characters become more defined through the successive drafts; yet there remains an ambiguity about his motives, about the meaning of his final advice, and about his influence, which echoes the ambiguity at the heart of the relationship of the central characters. There is something unfinished about the Brendel character, and there is so-

¹¹ This is pointed out by Atle Kittang in *Ibsens heroisme*, p. 229-230.

¹² Francis Bull’s introduction to *Hundreårsutgaven*, p. 338. My translation.

¹³ Tjønneland, “Selvmordene i Henrik Ibsens *Rosmersholm*”, 1992, p. 64. My translation.

something unfinished about the play.

With *Rosmersholm* I would suggest that Ibsen, for once, sent a play to his publisher before he had quite achieved the sense of dramatic inevitability which characterizes most of his mature works.

References

- Bull, Francis: 'Rosmersholm. Innledning', in: Henrik Ibsen, *Samlede Verker (Hundreårsutgave)*, vol. X. Oslo 1932. pp. 313-340.
- Ibsen, Henrik: *Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. III. Kristiania and Copenhagen, 1909.
- Ibsen, Henrik: *Rosmersholm. Samlede Verker (Hundreårsutgave)*, vol. X. Oslo, 1932.
- Kittang, Atle: *Ibsens heroisme*. Oslo, 2002.
- McFarlane, James (ed.): *Ibsen*, vol. VI. (*The Oxford Ibsen*.) London, 1960.
- Saari, Sandra E.: 'Rosenvold and Rosmersholm: Protagonist Implies Interpretation', in: *Contemporary Approaches to Ibsen*, vol. IV. Oslo – Bergen – Tromsø, 1979, pp. 101-119.
- Tjønneland, Eivind: 'Selvmordene i Henrik Ibsens *Rosmersholm*', in: *Profil*, nr 2, 1992, pp. 50-80.
- Yuriev, Andrey: 'The Revelation of Things Unseen: A Mystery Play Tradition in Ibsen's Realistic Drama, with Particular Reference to *Rosmersholm*', in: Pål Bjørby and Asbjørn Aarseth (eds.), *Proceedings of the International Ibsen Conference, Bergen 2000*. Øvre Ervik, 2001.