Brand and Agnes

Grief and Emotional Hegemony

Among the most agonizing scenes in Norwegian literature is Brand’s chastising of his wife Agnes in Ibsen’s drama Brand (1866). First he demands that she sacrifice her son, Alf, so that he himself can remain in his calling as a minister in an enclosed and unhealthy Norwegian rural district. Then he denigrates her grief over the dead child with merciless importunity. “Why do you tear my open wound so horribly in my frightful agony of grief?” (Ibsen 1972, 160). She begs for time and patience to grieve, but Brand believes that grief is sin and memories are idols. The contrast between them shows up in crass dialogues and unforgettable scenes, as in the episode where Brand forces Agnes to give away the last remnants of children’s clothing she has saved as a remembrance of Alf. While Brand is obsessed by a religious idea of sacrifice, Agnes is the grip of grief:

BRAND. [shakes his head] No. There is yet more to give.
AGNES. [smiles] Ask! I cannot give what I do not have!
BRAND. Give All!
AGNES. Why don’t you take it? Ah, Brand, you will find nothing there!
BRAND. You have your grieving, and your memories . . .
AGNES. [in despair] You have your flood of sinful yearning . . .
BRAND. You have your flood of sinful yearning . . .
AGNES. [in despair] Then tear my tormented heart out by the roots!
Tear it out! (Ibsen 1972, 181–82).

It is difficult to imagine a more piercing portrayal of the intensity of grief than the one Ibsen gives in Brand. If one is going to study emotion and narration, this is one of the most important scenes of dereliction in Norwegian literature. The depiction is dramatized by the rebuke, correction and punishment of the mourner by her closest potential comforter who simply refuses to relate to grief as a normal emotional reaction. Instead, he acts in accordance with a religious script in which he himself has a superior position. This means that the study of emotion and narration in Brand cannot be accomplished unless power and hegemony are included in the analysis. Even deep, personal grief is intimately influenced by social conditions and the

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21. All text citations from Brand are from the Oxford Ibsen edition of 1972, translated by James Kirkup in collaboration with James Walter McFarlane.
mourner’s position in the community to which he belongs. In the following I will first scrutinize Ibsen’s depiction of grief as an intense emotion with its own pattern of progression, as it is portrayed in Act IV. Then I will endeavor to confront the extensive and complex question pertaining to connections between individual emotional reactions and relationships of power in the social environment.

INTRODUCTION

It is pertinent to begin by giving a short survey of the entire drama. Brand is a five act drama in verse, published in 1866. It was originally intended as a play to be read, but was performed for the first time in Stockholm in 1885. The main character, Brand, is a young clergyman with a strong sense of mission, a calling. He believes that Christianity has been weakened of its seriousness, and has allowed itself to fit into “the spirit of compromise,” which is his diagnosis of his age. He sees his life’s purpose as fighting against the lax humanism of his time and restoring the strength of Christianity. We encounter him on his way over the mountain to his little home district, where he settles down and forms a little family with his wife Agnes and their son Alf. His mother, who is wealthy, is on her deathbed. With his inflexible demands of life he quickly comes into conflict with the district society’s authorities, the mayor, the doctor and the dean, in addition to his family. His sense of calling is more important than everything else, and when his son becomes life-threateningly ill from the inhospitable climate there, Brand refuses to move. Alf dies, as does his wife, which we will touch upon more closely. Still, Brand has the support of the inhabitants for a period of time. Towards the end of the play, however, they turn against him, and chase him from the settlement, up into the mountains where we met him at the beginning of the drama. He is engulfed in an avalanche and dies.

In one respect, the play tells two stories simultaneously. The one concerns the incorruptible, pure person who encounters the world unflinchingly and does not yield to adversity. He displays a rigid consistency in his choices in life, and manages his calling without a margin for bargaining. He exhibits the strength to demand all or nothing both from himself and from his surroundings. But his battle fails, and ends in tragedy. It is this version of the story that has made Brand a heroic figure in large segments of Norwegian literary reception. The other story is the undermining of this heroic figure partly on an ethical basis, and partly by means of elements in the play’s subtext in which his overall consistent personality is revealed, and the idealistic icon cracks.22

22. I have earlier published a relatively extensive analysis of Brand, in which these two stories in the play are pursued step by step through the text by means of a detailed analysis of composition. See “Stormen fra fjellet. Om Henrik Ibsens Brand” in Andersen 1997, 72–139.
The first two acts establish Brand as a heroic figure, the most important personages are introduced, and the main character’s project takes shape. Conflicts and problems are insinuated, so that the foundation for development in the play comes into focus. In the first act, when Brand is on his way over the mountain, we are presented with his main project, his battle against what he calls the “triple threat” or the three demons: rashness of mind, dullness of mind, madness of mind. Brand feels himself called to fight against these cardinal sins. He believes that he can save his generation from the “sickness of the world” by winning this struggle. The mission is developed and rendered concrete in the second act. Brand has arrived in the district and is confronted with two challenges – a lack of both food and soulfulness. The two challenges exemplify what we can call the “little” sacrifice and the “large” sacrifice, a contrast that corresponds to the material versus the spiritual. Brand denies that his call has anything to do with material goods, and refuses to help people in need. But he displays heroic courage in a mortally dangerous storm to help a person in spiritual need. The only one who dares to go with him is Agnes. After this deed Brand becomes a hero in the village, he is hired as the area’s clergyman, and Agnes becomes his wife.

A new phase of the drama arises in the third act. In both the third and fourth acts the hero is put to serious trials. The reversal in the play is demonstrated in both time and space. Three years have passed, and the action now takes place at the parsonage, where the conflict intensifies, and takes place most fiercely in his own family. Two clear-cut questions are put in the third act: Should Brand go as a clergyman to help his mother in her spiritual need as death approaches? And: Should Brand and his family move away in order to save their son’s health? In both cases, Brand chooses to behave passively, that is to remain where he is, because it is his understanding that his calling demands this of him. His mother dies without the consolation of a pastor, and Alf wastes away and dies. Brand’s trials continue in the fourth act. He again faces a choice, and this time he sacrifices his wife. The demands he makes of his wife appear as reinforced reiterations of the demands he made of his mother. Brand refused to visit his mother on her deathbed because she would not surrender all her worldly goods. After sacrificing her son, Agnes believes that she has nothing else to give. But Brand refers to her grief, her memories and her sinful longings. He demands sacrifices. She sacrifices. In contrast to Brand’s mother, who retained a portion of her own, Agnes yields to all demands. She gives everything and loses her will to live.

Parallel to the drama in the family, a struggle also continually takes place with the authorities in the society, a battle over the support of the inhabitants, and a clash about public utility investments. In the course of the fourth act, this struggle
comes to a head over the building of a new church in the district. This struggle over the church creates the basis for the conclusion of the fifth act. The church debate refers all the way back to the opening of the play, where Brand met the peculiar character Gerd on his way over the mountain. She declared that she had rejected the little village church in favor of “a church that is builded of ice and snow!” (97). The play ends as the inhabitants of the village turn against Brand and chase him up into the mountains. There he is seized by an avalanche and thus finds his final resting place in “a church builded of ice and snow.” So the fifth act moves the hero’s struggle out of the family confines and into the perspective of the community. But Brand also fails as a builder of society.

The following analysis will specifically concentrate on the family struggle in the fourth act.

GRIEF

In 2005 the American journalist and author Joan Didion published a memoir called The Year of Magical Thinking, as a reaction after the sudden death of her husband, the author John Gregory Dunne. Their daughter Quintana was at the same time seriously ill, and also died at a later time. In the description of grief a while after her husband’s death, Didion writes, among other things, the following:

I was not yet prepared to address the suits and shirts and jackets but I thought I could handle what remained of the shoes, a start.
I stopped at the door to the room.
I could not give away the rest of his shoes.
I stood there for a moment, then realized why: he would need shoes if he was to return.
The recognition of this thought by no means eradicated the thought.
I have still not tried to determine (say, by giving away the shoes) if the thought has lost its power.

(Didion 2005, 37).

Didion also mentions the memoir Caitlin Thomas wrote after her husband, the author Dylan Thomas, died. It was called Leftover Life to Kill (1957). In the scene where Agnes is forced to give away the last remnants of Alf’s clothing to a vagabond woman, this is precisely what happens: Brand forces her to kill the “leftover life” of her child long before she is ready to reconcile herself to his death. She interprets it as “sacrilige. A crime against my dead child” (189).
Grief is regarded by many as one of the most intense emotions that people can experience. The psychologist and psychiatrist John Bowlby for instance, writes in his massive work *Loss, Sadness and Depression*: “Loss of a loved person is one of the most intensely painful experiences any human being can suffer” (Bowlby 1980, 7). Many psychologists and psychiatrists have tried to describe the distinctive character of grief, its effects, its different parts and its progression. In addition to research literature, there also exists a series of guidebooks that offer advice for mourners on how deep sorrow can be overcome, and how one can return to a new and mastered condition of normalcy. These were likely not available in Ibsen’s day. Bowlby claims that the actual interest in research on grief sprang up in the 1940s, but it appears that Ibsen in his depiction of Agnes had a thorough understanding of the mourner’s situation. Moreover, it is evident from his portrayal of Brand that he must have had insight into the needs of the mourner; since he allows Brand to consistently act contrary to them. In their book *The Meaning of Grief. A Dramaturgical Approach to Understanding Emotion* (1987), Larry Cochran and Emily Claspell include a chapter on “Themes of Grieving,” in which, after interviewing a series of informants, they present a list of elements that the mourners have emphasized in their accounts, including “appreciation of support from others” (Cochran and Claspell 1987, 76). The researchers write: “What they seemed to appreciate most was someone who would listen or someone who would share his or her own experience” (ibid.) At the outset nothing would have been more natural in Brand and Agnes’ situation than to share their grief. After all, both have lost their son, and Agnes clearly believes that Brand too is suffering without wanting to admit it. Still even on this point, Ibsen has research on his side: According to Bowlby, disagreements between spouses in times of grief are quite widespread, and often lead to divorce. This is evident even in his materials from before the dramatic increase in divorce in the western world (Bowlby 1980, 118). Brand chastises Agnes incessantly and persistently because she is grieving, and punishes her by withdrawing and leaving her in isolation when she does not behave as he commands.

Ibsen likely had little professional material to draw upon when he portrayed Agnes and Brand’s reactions of grief after the death of Alf. Among the early endeavors to describe grief psychologically is Sigmund Freud’s well-known article “Mourning and Melancholia” from 1917. Freud’s main concern was melancholy, but as a basis for comparison, he gave a few concise characterizations of grief. It is striking that even in these short passages Freud stressed aspects that
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have also been quite important in many later interpretations. He establishes that profound grief is a reaction to the loss of a loved one, and that grief leads to an far-reaching feeling of loss that includes the abrogation of interest in the surrounding world and the abandonment of any achievement. Freud writes: “It is easy to see that this inhibition and circumscription in the ego is the expression of an exclusive devotion to its mourning, which leaves nothing over for other purposes or other interests” (Freud 1917, 153). When the bereavement process is considered, Freud was clear in regard to the complex, ambivalent and time consuming processes that take place. The mourner is able to perform “reality testing” and is aware that “the loved object no longer exists.” In other words, it is clear to the mourner that “All the libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to this object” as Freud expresses it (154). The language that he uses here is likely the explanation for why Didion and other mourners admit that they found insight, but little consolation, in reading Freud.24 At any rate, Freud’s point was that the ego exerts an intensive resistance to giving up the relationship to the person who was loved. He writes: “This struggle can be so intense that a turning away from reality ensues, the object being clung to through the medium of a hallucinatory wish-psychosis” (ibid.). Normally respect for reality conquers, but it happens only gradually and with great use of time and energy. In the meantime, “the existence of the lost object is continued in the mind” (154).

It is evident that Freud has pretty much described the condition in which Agnes finds herself when we encounter her in the fourth act of Brand. The far-reaching impact of grief and the exclusion of interest in one’s surroundings is called “Spread of loss” and “Numbed involvement in the world” by Cochran and Claspell, and is included in their “Themes of grieving” (Cochran and Claspell 1987, 64ff). The maintaining of the deceased in what Freud called a “hallucinatory wish-psychosis” is given less emphasis in Cochran and Claspell, but is included in almost all literature about grief in the term “denial.” The mourning Agnes we meet in Ibsen clearly experiences “denial.” She “talks” to Alf as if he were still alive, she lights candles and opens the shutters on the windows so he can see in from his “place of sleep” in the graveyard, and she also visualizes him in dream-like visions:

AGNES. Oh, Brand, last night, while you were gone,
He came into my room, his cheeks
Aglow with health, and in his thin little shirt
He toddled with faltering baby steps  
Towards me where I lay upon my bed . . .  
Stretched out his arms, called for his mother,

And with a pleading smile seemed  
To be asking me to warm him back to life!

(Ibsen 1972, 160)

And when Brand brutally throws himself into this process and wants to force through the “reality test,” Agnes feels that he is tearing “my open wound.” He orders her to close the shutters on the window and emphasizes words like graveyard and corpse, instead of the euphemisms that Agnes uses. He has no feeling for what Freud saw so clearly:

Each single one of the memories and hopes which bound the libido to the object is brought up and hyper-cathected, and the detachment of the libido from it accomplished. Why this process of carrying out the behest of reality bit by bit, which is in the nature of a compromise, should be so extraordinarily painful is not at all easy to explain in terms of mental economics. It is worth noting that this pain seems natural to us. (Freud 1917, 154)

It is not natural to Brand. Surprisingly enough, neither is it for some of those who have interpreted the drama, such as Atle Kittang in his book Ibsen’s Heroism. From Brand to When We Dead Awaken (2002). He writes:

…When Agnes refuses to admit the reality that her son is gone forever, refuses to acknowledge that a corpse resting in its grave no longer has any real place in our living world, and clings to the child’s possessions and effects, to all those material traces that make reminders of an absence into illusions of a presence, well then she, brutally expressed, represents precisely the type of attitude to life that, as we have seen, must be defeated if there is to be any discussion of the inner renewal in human life that both she and Brand are working towards. (Kittang 2002, 62)

Kittang perceives emotion as an “attitude to life,” and interpolates grief into a script about idealistic “renewal of human life,” where it therefore has no place.
This appears especially surprising in a scholar who otherwise was quite psychologically informed in his interpretations, and, moreover, knew his Freud.

In the extensive specialist literature about grief since Freud’s time, one rediscovers several of his observations and analyses. Larry Cochran and Emily Claspell tried to systemize the dissimilar professional positions by means of dissimilar models. They worked with a medical model, a stage model and a developmental model. In the medical model grief is described as a temporary state of illness with definite symptoms which make it possible to be diagnosed. Normally the illness requires no treatment. It will pass of its own accord. Medical assistance is only necessary in cases with complications. Cochran and Claspell take a critical attitude towards this model, both because it is oversimplified and also because there does not appear to be consensus about which symptoms are characteristic of the illness. They also believe that it seems unreasonable to define normal people’s reactions as illness, and point out that by using the illness model’s logic quite a few normal emotions would have to be considered as illnesses. The stage model depicts grief as a process with definite, recognizable stages. These can be described somewhat differently, but usually include denial, anger, negotiation, depression, panic, guilt, anxiety and acceptance. This model is found again in much of the self-help literature that is found on the market, for example in Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler’s On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss (2007). Cochran and Claspell’s objection to this model is that it appears linear, while from the empirical materials it is evident that many experience moving back and forth between different states in the bereavement process. Cochran and Claspell tie the developmental model specifically to John Bowlby’s contribution, and they are obviously of the opinion that his points of view are the most accurate and relevant, despite the fact that they only refer to individual articles and not to his major work, Loss, Sadness and Depression. Bowlby’s analysis of grief is included as a part of his comprehensive attachment theory, about which it would go too far afield to clarify here. The main idea is that the foundation for attachment behavior and emotional reactions depends on the relationship to the central attachment figure in early childhood. Patterns that are established at a young age are repeated in adult life. Bowlby’s work is based partly on psychoanalysis, and partly on ethology, control theory and cognitive psychology (Bowlby1980, 1) The framework around

25. The choice of the term “stage model” does not seem particularly well chosen since it is evident that all three of Cochran and Claspell’s models operate with phases or stages in the bereavement process. It is therefore difficult to grasp what is distinctive about this model. As a matter of fact, the whole point for Cochran and Claspell is to portray grief by means of a dramaturgic approach in which beginning, middle and end is the explanatory basic structure.
the study of grief is personality development with childhood’s attachment pattern as the point of departure. Bowlby too operates with phases in his description of the bereavement process:

1. Phase of numbing that usually lasts from a few hours to a week and may be interrupted by outbursts of extremely intense distress and/or anger.
2. Phase of yearning and searching for the lost figure lasting some months and sometimes for years.
3. Phase of disorganization and despair.
4. Phase of greater or less degree of reorganization. (Bowlby, 85)

These phases of Bowlby accommodate to a certain degree dissimilar forms of grief, for example grief after the loss of a cohabitation partner or the loss of a child. Transferred to Ibsen’s depiction of Agnes it would be natural to think that we encounter her in the fourth act in a condition that looks like Phase 2 and Phase 3, such as they are described here. Yet one of the most striking components in Ibsen’s portrayal of Agnes’ grief is the unusual outcome of the bereavement process he depicts in the ending of act 4. I will come back to this. First let us study a few central features of Ibsen’s representation.

EMOTIONAL SPACE

Act 4 opens by tying the two main characters to unequally coded emotional space. The act begins when Brand comes home from a trip on the sea in a severe storm that he describes dramatically for Agnes. The most important point seems to be the effect this outdoor space has had on him: “Oh, out there I was a man,” he says and adds:

I stood exultant at the helm, and felt myself
Grow tall and strong, like the hero of a legend,
For I was the man who took command;
I knew within my bones that some great power
Had anointed me for my mysterious calling . . . (Ibsen 1972, 158).

Agnes herself immediately calls attention to the contrast with her emotional space:

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? What about me?
However much I want to, I cannot
Kill my time … (ibid.).

The contrast between the man and wife is stressed already in the opening sequence. Brand “knew within his bones” that he was chosen, and grew as a heroic figure “out there.” Agnes stays confined at home and “dare not remember . . . and cannot forget!” (158). There is hardly any doubt that Ibsen is pursuing a well-known gender pattern when he places the woman in the home and the man in a place of exploits out in the world. At the same time there exists a certain “feminist” element in the fact that the woman does not at all feel that the home is a privileged place. The home represents “normalcy” as Hogan says, but Agnes does not feel any attachment to the home. It is not characterized by safety, security and tranquility. Agnes feels enclosed in crushing loneliness and grief.

The spouses are not just positioned in dissimilar emotional spaces; the dissonance between them is also soon expressed. Already in his second reply Brand starts his reprimand and chastising of his wife. One of the off-stage places in the opening sequence is the graveyard where Alf is buried. That is also an emotionally coded space – and coded differently for the two of them. Brand insists on calling the graveyard by its correct name, forthright, callously and brutally in order to try to orientate Agnes to reality. For Agnes, the place is so intensely connected to grief and longing for the deceased that she uses euphemisms such as “out there” and “that place… where he sleeps” (180). Her husband corrects her several times for this. Another off-stage space that plays an important role in the confrontations between the couple is Brand’s “chamber” or “sitting room.” For Agnes being alone is an extra burden. She is overwhelmed with grief. She even expresses this in her opening lines when Brand comes home:

Oh how long it’s been! Don’t leave me
Alone like that again. Say you won’t leave me!
When I’m here all alone, I cannot
Shake off the shadows of the night. (156)

Apparently these are feelings that Brand utilizes to punish his wife. He simply leaves her when she does not show the desired behavior, or he threatens to do so: “…Then your gift is cast away into the sea. You still have not surrendered all to
my demand. [He makes to go.]” (190). A little later the same is repeated. Brand accuses Agnes of idolatry, and wants to leave: “Stay in the power of your idols! [Is about to go.]” (ibid.).

In his Brand analysis, Atle Kittang writes that Ibsen put a politically-gendered explanatory aspect in the portrayal of the two, and the long and the short of it is that they exhibit the methods of adapting to grief of the masculine and of the “life of women” (Kittang, 62). The point is relevant, but it must be added that there is a lack of equality in the gendered difference. If we use as a starting point, as Kittang does, that Brand really grieves as deeply as Agnes, just in a different way, it would be interesting to pursue the idea of differing grief processes a bit further.

CAUSAL AND INTENTIONAL EMOTIONS

Agnes’ feelings are causally governed. Her grief is caused by the death of her son, and there is a direct chain of cause and effect from this dramatic event in her life to the feelings she has. She does not have full cognitive self-control of her feelings, something that we know is completely common in these types of circumstances in life. It’s a question of an especially powerful emotional stimulus that leads to a widespread emotional reaction.

If we presume that the same stimulus lies behind Brand’s pattern of reaction, it would be natural to consider this as a cognitively governed form of reaction, an ideologically guided pattern of responses. Brand doesn’t just act intentionally, even his emotions are intentionally focused. Brand is a self-evident example of an important feature in the emotional life’s remarkable connections to life goals and beliefs. Powerful ideological elements in the personality can override emotionality, so that the forms of reaction are governed more by objectives for the future than by reasons from past experiences. Kittang claims that Agnes and Brand have a common goal in life of creating “the new individual.” From Ibsen’s text there is at least no doubt that Brand himself feels a call from a “great power” to save the people from “the Spirit of Compromise,” from rashness of mind, dullness of mind and madness of mind. This calling guides all his choices, even if it costs lives. If it is the case that Brand too grieves deeply over Alf’s death, then we must be able to conclude that the objectives of the calling also guide his pattern of feelings. In “A Note on Ideology,” Patrick Colm Hogan claims that ideology of this type, that is to say, “a complex of goals and beliefs” most often “are functional in relation to some social hierarchy”, put briefly, “functions to maintain the currently dominant social hierarchy” (Hogan 2011, 24). At least in the Brand/Agnes family hierarchy it functions in this way. Her causally governed reactive emotions are condemned
on an ideological basis as idolatry, while Brand’s intentional pattern of reaction is embedded as the norm in the family, the dominant ideology. It is not certain, as Kittang asserts, that the husband and wife have a common goal. At any rate Agnes protests at times against Brand’s ideological managing of the goals in their lives.

Your kingdom is too great for me . . .
Everything here is too much for me . . .
You, your calling, your aims, the lonely
Furrow you plough, your almighty will,
Each path and precipice in this benighted place, (Ibsen 1972, 161)

We have an example of the way in which Brand himself uses ideological reinterpretations in his self-understanding precisely in reactions tied to Alf’s death. In the third act there is no doubt that Brand chooses to remain in the community in order to complete his calling, despite the doctor having warned quite clearly that Alf will die if he is not moved to better climatic conditions. But Brand projects the blame for Alf’s death onto his mother by means of a religiously rooted ideology of original sin:

Oh, my little boy, my innocent lamb . . .
Your death an atonement for my mother’s deeds!
A brain distracted brought me word from Him
Who has His throne beyond the clouds, and bade
Me make a choice between my destinies.
And that same distracted brain was brought
Into this world because my mother chose wrong!
Even thus does the Lord above employ the fruits
Of guilt to feed the roots of sanity and justice.
Even thus does He hurl down upon us from on high
Retribution – unto the third generation. (178)

In my opinion here we come close to classical ideology understood as false consciousness, applied specifically in overruling of emotions, in this case feelings of guilt. Nonetheless, it emerges that Brand actually was overwhelmed by feelings in the first phase after Alf’s death, that is, in the phase that Bowlby called the “numbing” phase:

And yet . . . in the days of our most desperate anguish,
In the tremendous, overwhelming moment of our grief,
When the child was sleeping his final sleep,
And when none of his mother’s kisses
Could restore that smile to his dear lips . . .
How was it then . . . ? Did I not pray then?
…Did He look down upon
This house of sorrow, and take pity on my tears? (179).

So as a mourner, we must view Brand as one who quite quickly after the paralysis
of the very first hours, obtained a cognitive, ideological control over his feelings.
His bereavement process is divergent according to most of the modern descrip-
tions of the phases of grief.

EMOTIONAL HEGEMONY

Agnes’ reactions match better with professional descriptions. But also in her case,
there is some deviation. In my opinion it is worth looking more closely at two ele-
ments, the absence of anger and the remarkable reversal to the feeling of freedom
at the end of the act. I will return to this at the end of the chapter. Here it is a ques-
tion of divergence from a widespread normal script. An anticipated reaction to
Brand’s many onslaughts and chastening conduct would be anger, possibly coun-
ter-attack or “flight,” that is, distancing. Agnes’ pattern of responses is different.
She articulates, as we have heard, a certain cautious resistance. But she seems to
be devoid of anger, and she fears distancing. On the contrary, she reacts repeatedly
by accepting the accusations, internalizing them and directing them towards her-
self. An obvious method of interpreting this is to consider her as a subjugated per-
son, subject to a dominant ideology that she is not able to achieve significant
opposition to. As Hogan points out, dominant ideology corresponds to dominant
social hierarchy. The very first word that Brand says to his wife in the 4th act of
Brand is “child.” Instead of an aggressive self defense strategy, Agnes’ practice in
married life is characterized by internalizing the dominant ideology and subordi-
nation of the social hierarchy in the home. The hierarchical relationship between
the two is plain throughout the entire dialogue, but perhaps becomes extra clearly
expressed when Agnes asks Brand – just like a child – for permission to unlatch
the window shutter facing the graveyard just a little bit:

AGNES. Brand, may I move aside a little
This horrid barrier . . . this shutter,
Just a little? Just a little crack? May I, Brand?
BRAND [at the door]. No.

[He goes into his room.] (183).

The internalization of the dominant ideology in the home is expressed as well in many places in dialogue but alternates, as we have seen, with elements of cautious resistance. The first time Agnes apparently accepts Brand’s command in Act 4 is when she is ordered to dry her tears. Agnes answers that “…soon it will be better; Once I am through the next few days, / You will never hear me complain again” (157). She adds that she knows she is not behaving as she should.

There is a succession of such examples in the text. The most pronounced is found in the last scene, where Agnes on her own initiative comes repentantly to Brand and admits her transgression: She has kept one last piece of clothing from Alf, a cap, even though Brand had directed her to give it all away to “the woman”:

AGNES. I lied . . .
See, I am repentant. I submit.
You did not know, could not suspect,
That I had not given everything away.
BRAND. Well?
AGNES. [takes a child’s cap, folded, from her bosom]. You see, I kept this back.
BRAND. His cap?
AGNES. Yes, wet with tears.
As with the cold sweat of death . . .
Since then, I’ve worn it next my heart! (190)

In this play, Ibsen gives an illustrative example of what the professor of philosophy Alison M. Jaggar calls “Emotional Hegemony and Emotional Subversion.” In a study of affective narratology, the question of emotionality and power must be included as a central concern. Emotional hegemony does not only shape social structures in the family arena, but in society generally, including cultural and political communities. Jaggar writes:

…mature human emotions are neither instinctive nor biologically determined, although they may have developed out of presocial, instinctive responses. Like everything else that is human, emotions in part are socially constructed; like all social constructs, they are historical products, bearing the marks of the society that constructed them. Within the very language of emotion, in our basic
Jaggar here is close to viewpoints we have also encountered in Martha Nussbaum and what Nussbaum calls “narrative emotions.” However, Jaggar adds an additional factor:

Within a hierarchical society, the norms and values that predominate tend to serve the interest of the dominant group. Within a capitalist, white supremacist, and male-dominant society, the predominant values will tend to serve the interests of rich white men. (ibid.)

Brand is hardly first and foremost depicted as a typical “rich white man,” although after his mother’s death, he actually becomes quite well-to-do. The configuration Ibsen has created is nevertheless a rather classic power structure: man – woman; reason – feelings; strength – weakness; feats in world of work – isolated home; the power of the word – the torment of the heart. The feminist point is conspicuous, but Jaggar is also engaged in widening the perspective as she considers the problematic of emotional hegemony. Emotional hegemony contributes to “forming our emotional constitution in particular ways” and thereby society ensures “its own perpetuation” (ibid.). Society’s emotional hegemony does not just befall women, and not just women in family relationships, but all under-privileged groups in a society; Jaggar mentions races, classes and sexual minorities.

“OUTLAW EMOTIONS”

As Jaggar represents it, the power of emotional hegemony appears to function in two ways. Both are clearly illustrated in Ibsen’s Brand.

In the first place, hegemonic power is exerted by the exclusion of what Jaggar calls “outlaw emotions.” Despite powerful norms it is still the case that “people do not always experience the conventionally acceptable emotions” (Jaggar, 159–60). These emotions that are not accepted Jaggar calls “outlaw emotions.” As far as I can see, it is difficult to imagine a more persistent and heartless battle against
“outlaw emotions” than the one Brand conducts in his wife’s responses to grief. He acts on the behalf of family hegemony, and fights to sustain the dominant ideology that guides their relationship. The result, to which we shall return, is tragic in the sense that it leads to Agnes’ death. This is in accordance with Jaggar’s observations: “People who experience conventionally unacceptable, or what I call ‘outlaw,’ emotions often are subordinated individuals who pay a disproportionately high price for maintaining the status quo” (160).

Secondly, hegemonic power is exerted by the internalizing effects that the dominant ideology produces. Jaggar’s viewpoints are clear:

Whatever our color, we are likely to feel what Irving Thalberg has called “Visceral racism”; whatever our sexual orientation, we are likely to be homophobic; whatever our class, we are likely to be at least somewhat ambitious and competitive; whatever our sex, we are likely to feel contempt for women. (159)

We have already seen how these effects influence Agnes. Jaggar’s main point seems to be that the subjugation of emotional hegemony is destructive when it is experienced by the individual, that is, in isolation.

When unconventional emotional responses are experienced by isolated individuals, those concerned may be confused, unable to name their experience; they may even doubt their own sanity. Women may come to believe that they are “emotionally disturbed…” (160)

Still, Jaggar’s feminist notion is that by joining together and forming fellowships with other “outlaws,” the destructive effects can be counteracted, and groups of societal critics can be created – to the advantage of the entire society, a point of view that likely was the basis for the feminist movement of the 1970s. However, Agnes is prevented from doing this because of her isolated position in the home.

But Brand manages this to a pronounced degree. And on this point we approach a new complexity in Ibsen’s play. The case is that Brand finds himself in a similar position in the village society that Agnes occupies in the family. Agnes’ grief is only an “outlaw emotion” within Brand’s family governance. In the village society’s governance, it is Brand’s extreme passion for his calling that creates an “outlaw emotion.” That is why he constantly comes in conflict with the society’s representatives, the mayor, the doctor and the dean. However his reactions in encounter with the village society’s emotional hegemony are quite different than Agnes’ encounters with Brand. Here there is no internalization of hegemonic val-
ues. Brand does not make any compromises, he stands his ground. That is the reason that so many have perceived him as a hero. He does not retreat from his own truths. Quite the contrary, from the first episode in the drama it is evident that Brand is provoked by opposition. In contrast to the isolated Agnes, Brand, the man of action, does what he can to create a critical fellowship of opposition that will be able to compete with the mayor’s majority of rash, dull and mad citizens. And for a while he is successful at this. When the mayor appears at Brand’s home in Act 4, it is precisely in order to surrender in the struggle between them as Brand now has the majority of support in the village. But what Ibsen shows, and what Jaggar does not address, is the transitory nature of such alliances. Ultimately Brand suffers the same fate in his social community as Agnes does in her family one. Death is waiting. The people of the community turn against Brand in Act 5, “exclude” him and chase him up in the mountains.

DISTORTED EMOTIONALITY

This brings us to the ending. One of the riddles of the play is the reversal in Agnes’ feelings towards the end of Act 4, in what proves to be the “death scene.” The scene is just as ambiguous as the end of the drama in Act 5 – which is one of the most debated and controversial text passages in Norwegian literary history. Beaten totally down and robbed of everything, Agnes does not feel desperation or despair, as one would expect. Her script is different. As I have already mentioned, Agnes herself brings the last remnant from Alf and gives it to Brand with the confession that she has lied, and that she feels remorse. To Brand’s question, she even answers that she is giving up the cap willingly. However immediately afterwards she says, “Robbed . . . stripped of everything . . .” (Ibsen 1972, 191). Then the remarkable reversal occurs:

[She stands motionless for a moment; little by little the expression on her face changes to radiant joy, BRAND comes back; she rushes joyfully to meet him, throws her arms about his neck and cries:]
I am free, Brand! I am free! (191).

At this point in the drama it is completely decisive which perspective the reader or spectator uses in understanding the play. In a psychological, secular interpretation there is no positive meaning in that a healthy person in the prime of life dies. Radiant joy and feelings of freedom fit poorly with such a departure from life. Certainly some of Agnes’ statements can be interpreted as expressions of freedom.
from the weighty power of grief: “All the terrors / That weighed like a nightmare
on my mind / Have now been cast out into the abyss!” (ibid.). From just such
expressions one could imagine that Agnes is experiencing a breakthrough in the
grief process, as Bowlby has described it; that is to say that she has reached a
phase of “greater or less degree of reorganization.” Brand also chimes in: “Yes!
Now you have truly conquered” (Ibsen 1972,191).

But it is no reorganization of life that Agnes experiences. It is a departure from
life that she is about to experience. She is a person who is dying of a broken heart
or who has been hounded to death. That she herself is aware of death emerges
when she several times remembers a Biblical quotation: “‘He who sees Jehovah
face to face/ Shall surely die.’”

A religious interpretative perspective is required to find a positive meaning in
Agnes’ emotional state at the end of Act 4. What she expresses is a breakthrough
of a religious realization. An affirmative reading of her own statements demand
that one assumes a belief in life after death. It is a heavenly life after death that
Agnes beholds:

Look there, on high!
Do you see him, standing
In the radiance of the throne,
Carefree as he was in life, and
Holding out his arms to us?
If I had a thousand voices,
If I dared to, if I could,
I should not raise one whisper
To beg him back again.
Oh, how great, how rich is God
In all his ways and wonders! (191–92).

But it is not Jehovah Agnes sees, but Alf. She is suddenly reconciled to his death.
Read at face value, Agnes experiences a form of religious euphoria at the end of
her life as she looks visionally into the hereafter.

However I must admit that this is an interpretation that I find it difficult to agree
with. To me, in the last scene Agnes is a completely broken person who rejoices
in her own destruction, gives thanks to him who has bullied and bewildered her,
and displays feelings that reflect internalized ideology rather than actual circum-
stances of life. The feelings do not appear false, not even composite or ambivalent,
just lacking in agreement with reality. Perhaps when the internalization process
has not only gained entrance ideologically in the personality, but also has conquered emotional life, a concept such as brainwashing can then be used? In the midst of “radiant happiness” the scene stands as totally heart-wrenching.

It is difficult to know how widespread feelings such as this are in the real world – and what kind of designation it should have. (Does it have one?) Currently media operate with the concept “radicalization” about people who feel religious euphoria at their own or others’ deaths, but that designation scarcely reflects a psychological analysis, and is unsatisfactory in Agnes’ case. In connection with the effort to explore an affective narratology this phenomenon presents a challenge. It is hardly a question of either causal or intentionally driven emotions, or of ambivalent feelings. It concerns a narrated story in which the involved actors experience an affective course of actions that misrepresents the events, as the reader perceives it. In Agnes’ case the disparity evokes empathy, and, as Hogan writes: “empathy tends to work against dominant ideology” (Hogan 2011, 139). The portrayal counteracts Brand, despite Agnes thanking him: “And thank you especially for this! How faithfully you guided me” (Ibsen 1972, 193).

But there are also cases of distorted emotionality that have a different effect, for example in stories about pathological murderers or sadists. Bret Easton Ellis’ American Psycho could be an example. In such cases one can speak about perversed emotionality. But this designation does not fit cases like Agnes’ very well either. Regardless, the theoretical point is that distorted emotionality is a phenomenon that occurs in narrative stories, and must be included in affective narratology’s repertoire of categories. And Ibsen’s portrayal of Agnes’ death stands as an unforgettable example.26

GUT REACTIONS

After thanking Brand for leading her to freedom, Agnes reverses the power play. She portends her own death, and places Brand himself in a situation of choice in which he is encouraged to sacrifice everything:

Now you stand in the valley of the Choice.  
On you now falls the burden  
Of this ‘All or Nothing’! (192)

26. Of course it can be difficult to establish text-analytically whether a distorted emotion occurs or simply if one as the individual reader would have felt differently in an equivalent situation. I have attempted elsewhere to reason from the text’s global composition that there is such a distorted emotion in Ibsen’s Brand. See Andersen 1997, 116 ff.
Brand does not understand what she means: “Your words are wild. All the torment/ Of your struggle now is over.” Agnes does not think that they are. She challenges Brand from a position of invulnerability; she has nothing left to lose: “Have you forgotten what I said:/ ‘He who sees Jehovah face to face Shall surely die’?” (ibid.). Then she reminds him of everything he has to sacrifice, if it’s true as he has said that it is a question of offering all or nothing. She utters lines that are reminiscent of Brand’s own demands of Agnes that she sacrifice her grief, her memories and her sinful longings:

Are you forgetting that the baptism
Of your calling binds you here . . .
And of your sacrifice as well?
Are you forgetting the thousand souls
It is your mission to redeem right here . . .
Those whom the Lord bade you to lead
Onward to the springs of their salvation?
Choose, at this crossroads in your life! (193).

In a sense Agnes’ reversal of the power play look like wicked revenge from one who stands on the threshold of death. But Brand refuses the challenge, and says “I have no choice” (ibid.). Then Agnes takes her leave of him in the form of an ambiguous good-night.

What is interesting in this context, that is, in connection with a study of affective narratology, are Brand’s reactions when he himself is placed in situations of serious choices. This especially becomes evident just as Agnes portends her death. Brand’s immediate reaction is vehement protest:

[shrinks back] Oh, what fateful
Fire is this you kindle? No!
It shall never, never be!
In my hands a giant’s strength.
You must not, shall not leave me!
Let all else on earth be swept away,
I can do without it all . . .
But never, never without you! (192).

But still, it is this he does a minute later when he says he does not have a choice to make. He has plainly actually just had the choice of bringing her back to the
living: “The woman still is sitting there outside –” (ibid.); he can restore the situation to what it was before he took everything from her: “…If you dare do this, and will, I am your wife as I was before” (193). The scene is a clear repetition of the choice Brand makes in Act 3 regarding Alf’s fate. Brand’s spontaneous reaction when he learns that the child is doomed to death if they do not move away is immediate departure:

Tonight, this afternoon, this minute!
Oh, he shall grow strong and healthy . . .
No icy blasts, no arctic gales
Shall ever freeze again that little breast. (148)

However, after that it only takes a few minutes before he has changed his mind. When he has thought about it, he would rather follow his calling than save his son. What we see in this situation is a type of emotional reaction that Alison Jaggar calls gut responses. In Brand’s case, they are after quite a short time set aside and overridden by ideological considerations. But it is nonetheless clear that Brand does have such gut responses. Gut responses are in accordance with society’s dominant values, and will be regarded by most as natural reactions. Gut responses are not the same as instinctive biological reactions such as blushing or ducking if an object approaches your face. Gut responses reflect the values of society, and are, in that sense, social constructions – although care for one’s own progeny appears to be among the most universal inclinations in the entire animal kingdom. That Brand has such immediate gut responses, but in the next instance sets them reflexively aside, show both his ambivalent feelings relative to the society of which he is a part, and his cognitively integrated emotional script. Usually emotional scripts work by triggering reactions of feelings that form fixed sequences, and such sequences will most often be experienced as “natural” or automated. In the case of Brand we encounter a type of personality that has forced itself into a script that violates the automatic gut response controls and creates a new “unnatural” pattern of reactions. Such gut responses and the violation of them in newly created ideologically controlled scripts also belong among the repertoire of affective narratology’s phenomena. In principle they appear as ambiguous. In Brand’s case, they very likely evoke alarm and aversion inasmuch as they violate such fundamental common values as concern for life and health of one’s nearest and dearest. What is most frightening about the ideological transgression of gut responses is that there is every indication that there exist no values that the human being is not capable of setting aside. But in a critical perspective, the phenomenon could
be important. There are probably *gut responses* in our culture that must be violated if necessary changes in society are going to take place. Perhaps it is also from this perspective that many have been able to consider Brand a hero figure, one who was capable of violating *gut responses* of the dull minded.

**CONCLUSION**

Emotions are an inescapable part of most literary depictions whether it concerns epic narratives, poetry or drama. Without any form of emotional charge almost all literature would evaporate quite unnoticed and mix with empty air. Authors write their texts with commitment, perhaps in frustration, anger, despair, longing or grief. Readers and the public likewise respond with active engagement and empathy, feeling sympathy and antipathy. They experience suspense together with the literary characters and are happy for them in their joy and grieve with them in sorrow. One knows all the time that it concerns fictional characters, and this plays an important, but not decisive role. We are probably not equipped with a separate emotional system for use in fictional contexts, but we have the awareness of fiction. We do feel joy, sorrow or fear when we read but in a remarkable way it does not involve the same type of joy, sorrow or fear we would feel in the real world. On their side, literary figures do not “have” feelings, but they have *narrated* feelings. And that is good enough. They work. We laugh, we cry, we feel intense excitement together with them.

There are many different interpretations of Henrik Ibsen’s *Brand*. We react differently to actions and feeling of both real and fictional people. But it is unlikely that scholars would have spent parts of their lives in trying to understand this literary work if it had not engaged us, shocked us and evoked our sympathy and antipathy. There are few works that have elicited more disagreement among professionals than Ibsen’s *Brand*. Eroll Durbach has summarized the disagreement over the conflicting views of the main character, Brand:

He’s a saint – he’s a sadist. He is God’s appointed Knight of Faith – he’s a self-appointed killer, who murders in the name of sacrifice. He’s a man whose extraordinary visionary imagination and whose questing spirit defy all moral judgements upon his conduct – he’s a destructive neurotic whose mission arouses ethical disgust. He burns with an energy that transforms his spirit – he is life denying, cold, and loveless. (Durbach 1994, 71–72)
In this chapter I have focused specifically on the conversations between the married couple Agnes and Brand in Act 4 because these scenes especially accentuate the contrasts Durbach calls attention to. They also show to what degree the contrasts involve the emotions of the participants. The central driving force of the play is Brand’s passion for his calling or his personal passion for truth. This is seriously tested, but stands above everything else for Brand. Brand is confronted with danger and fear and put to the test in both Acts 1 and 2. But Brand is fearless, and because of that he is made a heroic figure in the drama and in the eyes of the village inhabitants. In Acts 3 and 4 he is put to the test in his own home amongst his nearest and dearest where it is a question of the lives and health of his son and his wife. But even towards them, Brand proclaims his uncompromising passion for his mission, and he sacrifices both of them.

In Act 4 we have seen how Ibsen challenges Brand’s passion for his calling with Agnes’ grief after the death of her son. And we have seen that Ibsen’s depiction contains a good deal of knowledge of the psychology of grief; even that he is well on the way to anticipating later specialist literature in the field. Brand, in turn, exhibits no such insight. He disciplines his wife ruthlessly during life’s most difficult phase, and deprives her of the last remnants of her capability for life. In this struggle between the married couple where dissimilar emotions resist each other, we have also seen that emotionality, like most aspects of life, are concerned with power, hegemony, dominance and ideology. Brand executes his hegemonic power, with catastrophic results in Act 4 as in Act 3.

As a part of this study in affective narratology, the study of Brand has, in the first place, shown that authors can have an exceptional ability to portray specific emotional reactions to their existential depths, even independent of and prior to specialist’s investigations. In my opinion, Act 4 of Brand is an eminent study in the psychology of grief. Further, the Brand study has revived and brought to light several elements that must have a place in affective narratology’s special repertoire of phenomena, with their attending concepts. I have attempted to establish some of these, partly with the help of Alison Jaggar’s philosophy.

Ibsen makes active use of emotional space, like many other authors. Emotional spaces and their function in affective narratology have been discussed earlier in this book, and will not be further elaborated here. The same is true of emotional scripts, which have also shown themselves to be useful in this Ibsen analysis; that is, expectations and knowledge about how emotions enter into connections and shape sequences of emotional events. Because there are widespread normal scripts as well as individual scripts, it makes sense to see such scripts in relation to each
other. In the case of Agnes, it proved especially interesting to discuss violation of expected normal scripts.

Additionally, it was natural to examine more closely Brand and Agnes’ dissimilar forms of reaction. I tried to describe these as, respectively, causally controlled by the dramatic occurrence that Alf’s death represented for Agnes, and intentionally controlled by the goal Brand had set for his life’s work. In that connection the relationship between ideology and emotionality was also topical. The intentional control of Brand’s reaction patterns had its background in the faith and conviction he possessed.

Perhaps most important in the study of the relationship in the domesticity of the two was the exercise of masculine emotional hegemony. Power is practiced partly by sanctions and partly by ideology. Certainly one can say that Brand uses both means towards his wife to a certain extent. In any case, she accepts and internalizes the dominant ideology of the home. In connection with the execution of hegemonic power, Alison Jaggar’s philosophy also contributed with the concept of *outlaw emotions*. Brand’s exercise of emotional power included making Agnes’ grief into an *outlaw emotion* in the home. Similarly, the complexity of the play was in one way expressed by Brand’s passion for his mission appearing as an *outlaw emotion* in the community.

Agnes’ individual emotional script deviated from expected normalcy in several ways, among others, the “radiant joy” and feeling of freedom towards the end of the play appear as an enigmatic reversal in her reactions. I attempted to describe this by means of the term distorted emotionality, and presume that that term will be useful also in other special cases.

While such distorted emotions violate expected normalcy, Jaggar’s concept of *gut responses* designate the opposite. Ibsen’s text showed how even such an ideologically controlled personality as Brand has remnants of powerful *gut responses* in dramatic situations. They correspond to society’s common values, and occur more or less automatically. But Brand overrules them reflexively by means of ideology.

All of the phenomena mentioned here and the accompanying terms can and should be included in a repertoire of concepts for an affective narratology. I shall return to this in the book’s conclusion.