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THE FUNCTION OF RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE IN IBSEN'S *BRAND* Oscar C. Daub

The significance of *Brand* in Ibsen's career — both as an artistic achievement and as a turning point — is widely recognized,¹ yet there is very little scholarship in English about this important play. Some of the reasons for this virtual disregard are obvious: as a verse play it almost demands to be read in Norwegian; for the same reason, translations are even less reliable than usual; there are many allusions to contemporary events which are remote from English readers in significance, as well as time; and the sense of mission to his countrymen which impelled Ibsen to write the drama in the first place² is obscured and undercut by lack of familiarity with nineteenth-century Scandinavian cultural development. Nevertheless, now that Gathorne-Hardy has provided a full translation, in verse,³ it behooves those readers of Ibsen restricted to reading him in English to attempt to come to terms with what is certainly one of his greatest and most important plays.

To examine the use of religious language in the play simultaneously excludes many other avenues of meaning and challenges Ibsen's stated position that he could just as well have written the play about a sculptor or a politician.⁴ Gathorne-Hardy has provided a succinct rebuttal of Ibsen's contention by observing, "This perhaps was not in a sense untrue, but it was certainly an equivocation. After all, he had in fact written a play on the same subject with *Peer Gynt* as the central figure, but the whole moral effectiveness of *Brand* certainly depends on arguments drawn from religion, and the Bible, which Ibsen had stated at the time was his only reading."⁵ Ibsen's protestations notwithstanding, then, one of the important entrances into the significance of the play as it is — not as it might have been — is to carefully trace the use of religious language in it. The religious terms in which Brand conceives of himself and his mission, the religious words in which he is characterized by the other characters, and the language devoted to the explicitly religious aspects of the play's meaning all contribute to such a study. The results of such a reading of the play provide interesting insights into the character of Brand and, by extension, into some of the basic meanings of the play.

In the brief first act, some of the basic religious tensions which inform the entire play are established. These issues are verbalized in two ways: either through one of Brand's soliloquies or monologues, or through Brand's conversations with Einar and Agnes and, later, Gerd. The central image of Brand's first soliloquy is his recollection of two childhood fancies which always caused him to laugh: "The figure of an owl scared by the dark,/ Or a fish afraid of water . . ." (p. 37). While these figures are not religious in nature, the humor they caused the young

Brand is analyzed by the mature Brand as consisting in "just the contradiction, dimly felt,/ Between the thing that is, and that should be" (p. 38). The real significance of this analysis rests in the application which Brand makes of it to his present situation. He is now a clergyman who sees a majority of the people involved in such a contradiction in that they "think that burden is too hard/ Which they were specifically designed to bear" (p. 38). It is important to notice that when Brand applies his childhood fancies to the present situation he is doing so in religious, but pre-Christian, terms. There is Biblical allusion to Matthew 11: 28-29, where Jesus urges his followers, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest . . . For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light," but despite the New Testament referent, the pre-Christian nature of Brand's allusion is apparent: he is not concerned with the quality of the people's faith, but with their ability to endure their own suffering, much as the pre-Christian Israelites were called on to do. This Old Testament theme is more explicitly verbalized when Brand, in his second soliloquy, spoken while he is surveying the village from the mountainside, likens the extent of his powerlessness to act in the local situation to that of Samson, "shorn and tamed" (p. 51). The culmination of the act, and of Brand's evolving sense of the nature of his mission, occurs in the closing soliloquy. Here Brand concludes: "I recognize my task: These monsters three [Frivolity, Slackness, madness] / Must fall, and thus redeem the suffering world" (p. 55). The remarkable aspect of this formulation is its essentially un-Biblical nature; it certainly makes Brand sound more like a social reformer than a Christian priest. The tone of Brand's conclusion, as well as the language of it, effectively dramatizes the fact that Brand considers himself a type of prophet.

Brand's personal reflections are both corroborated and modified by his dialogue with other characters during the act. In his conversation with Einar and Agnes, Brand is forced to attempt to explain himself and his mission. In the course of this explanation he makes it apparent that the state of contemporary religious life with which he is so impatient transcends, at this point in the play, any one-to-one equation with specifically Norwegian religious practice: as far as Brand is concerned, his call lies in the regions to the south. The most important piece of information which Brand divulges about himself in this scene occurs when he attempts to differentiate between himself and other reformers: "No I'm no pulpit-thumping Puritan,/ I am not speaking of or for the church,/ I hardly know if I'm a Christian;/ But that I am a man — that I know quite well:/ And I am sure that I can see the flaw/ Which saps our nation's marrow everywhere" (p. 45). This remarkable little speech clearly establishes two things. In the first place, the speech underscores the basically pre-Christian nature of Brand's evolving sense of mission. When seen in the perspective on the Judeo-Christian

tradition, however, his emphasis on his own manhood, and the fact that he is genuinely interested in a type of religious reform, again align him with the prophets of the Old Testament. This association is further borne out by Brand's posturing throughout the scene with Einar and Agnes, and in his warning to them which opens the scene, "Stop! Stop! There is a precipice beyond" (p. 39), which has overtones of much of the prophetic rhetoric found in the Old Testament. In the second place, a fact related to but importantly different from, Brand's conception of himself as a kind of prophet becomes apparent: Brand has a profound sense of his unique position as an aloof observer and judge of his society. The quality of egoism involved in such a position could, when applied to a religious crisis, result in martyrdom. Given Brand's confessedly uncertain convictions, however, his ego-strength must always be regarded as an essentially secular trait. Even later in the play, when his sense of mission begins to define itself in more explicitly New Testament terms, his reliance on his own strength and will disallows the assigning of particularly Christian commitment to his purpose.

As the conversation with Einar and Agnes proceeds, Brand finds that he is required to articulate for them precisely what his conception of God is. He combines his delineation of his God's attributes with an attack on the formalized, benign God of the state churches. The dual concern makes it clear that Brand conceives of his mission as one of purification through commitment, but it is noteworthy that he formulates his own perception of God in purely Old Testament, hence, pre-Christian, terms. Brand's God is "a storm . . . inflexible . . . all-loving . . . His voice with thunder and with terror rang/ When, in the burning bush of Horeb's mount,/ He fronted Moses . . ." (p. 47). With such a conception of God, it is not surprising that Brand then asserts, "I stand to champion the eternal law" (p. 49). There is an almost directly anti-Christian element in his desire to pursue his goal "till God shall know/ Once more His masterpiece, the man He made,/ His offspring, Adam, young and strong once more!" (p. 48) According to the New Testament, Christ was the "second Adam" who restored man's lost status in the cosmos, so Brand's ambition here even suggests an element of blasphemy. Quite apart from this, however, Brand has now clearly aligned himself with Moses and the tradition of law, as opposed to Jesus and the tradition of grace.

In the subsequent dialogue with Gerd Brand develops the first notion that his mission might be more local than world-wide. Refusing Gerd's invitation to accompany her to the Ice Church, Brand says, "You mustn't ever go there: — It's not safe"; to which Gerd retorts, gesturing at the village in the valley, "There you must never go: it's ugly there" (p. 54). This retort causes Brand to begin to countenance the idea that his mission might be directed to the local situation. In spite of the continuing uncertainty about the object of his mission, however, he persists in ver-

balizing the nature of it in terms which are reformist and Old Testament. Thus, by the end of the first act Brand has begun to narrow the scope of his mission as well as to define the object of his attack. Debilitating, institutionalized, apathetic State Christianity — and, increasingly, that branch of it found in Norway — emerges as his opponent, and his attack is conceived and verbalized in predominantly Old Testament language.

The primary action of the second act is Brand's decision to become the parson of the local village church. The language in which this decision is contemplated, made, and substantiated again underscores the basically Old Testament perspective in which Brand sees himself and in which he functions.

As in the first act, an interplay between three monologues by Brand and intervening dialogue structure this act. After the heroic, almost melodramatic, crossing of the fjord to schrieve the man who has murdered his child and taken his own life, Brand emerges from the cottage in which the man has just died and he reflects on the nature of death and guilt. His dismissal of his administration of priestly comfort as "vain illusion" (p. 64), allows him to discourse on his perception of the true nature of the dead man's guilt — *e.g.* the effect of the murder-suicide on the two children who witnessed it but who were not physically touched by it. Brand calls the survivors "the victims of his homicide," and anticipates that, from them, "perchance, [there] shall issue forth/ For generations, further sin and crime" (p. 65), because of the Old Testament precept that the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children. This theme becomes one of the major motifs of the entire act, for later Brand exclaims to Agnes, "But how discharge the load of debt/ Inherited from generations past" (p. 71), and his exclamation is immediately followed by the symbolic entrance of his own mother. In the course of his encounter with her, Brand again digresses on the theme of guilt, but he makes a much more personal statement in which he recounts to his mother how he had hidden in the room where his father was laid out and had watched her ransack the room looking for money. This information does much to explain Brand's obsession with inherited guilt; it also prepares for his decision to remain in the village church for the unarticulated, but dramatically inevitable, motive in this decision is the sense of reparation for the sins of his own fathers, the chief of which is that his parents were guilty of a loveless marriage.

In the third monologue of this act, Brand recognizes the many self-serving elements in his former vision of a world crusade, and he finally relinquishes that vision for a life of dedicated work in the village. He claims, "The one thing needful is to rouse the will;/ Will, which can either liberate or destroy," and he specifies his goal for the populace by saying, "We serve alike the dignity of man:/ We have one common object — to become/ Fit writing-tablets for the hand of God" (p. 81). Thus,

through the use of another image alluding to the Mosaic revelation, Brand indicates his genuine desire to serve God, but the way he proposes to attain this end — through the main strength of his will — simultaneously measures the dangerous power of his own ego, and the Old Testament, legalistic cast of his mind. The irony of the decision to remain consists, of course, in the fact that when Brand renounces one crusade because of its personally gratifying aspects, he fails to recognize the same forces operative — although on a more subtle level — in the choice he does make.

The thematically important dialogues of the second act begin in the second scene, after Brand has crossed the fjord. The first scene presented him with the opportunity for action; the second scene initiates the process of his decision to remain in the village, ostensibly as a consequence of that action. Brand's action has demonstrated to the people the degree of commitment which governs his life, and they appeal to him to serve them. In an ironic turning of Brand's own words upon him, one of the men counters his refusal to remain by observing, "If life you grudge, though all things else are bought,/ Remember that your sacrifice is nought" (p. 68). The irony is compounded by Brand's response to this challenge. He had originally scoffed at the idea of such a limited ministry, but, confronted by his own words, his ego is seduced into reconsidering the matter. The process of reconsideration is reinforced through Agnes' vision.

Agnes relates a vision of a barren world in which a voice commands her to "Discharge the solemn task assigned to thee,/ People this land" (p. 70). After she relates more details, the import of the vision breaks upon Brand, who exclaims, "That is the call! — It is written . . . there the new Adam must be born," (p. 70) and who demands the privilege "To be oneself/ Wholly" (p. 70). As if to undercut this possibility, while Brand ponders the role of inherited guilt in a man's life, his mother enters. It is most significant that in the subsequent encounter with his mother Brand reaffirms the appropriateness of the preceding Old Testament allusions by placing her under an injunction to "voluntarily cast aside/ All that which now is binding you to earth," (p. 78) before he will ever come to her spiritual aid. Thus he imposes upon her a standard of behaviour which is similar to, but which also exceeds, that which God imposed upon Job. Job underwent a process of loss and suffering imposed by God in a way which progressively tested his faith, but in which he, himself, was passive; Brand demands that his mother subject herself to only the final phase of a similar process without allowing her to undergo a progressive testing and without assuring her of faith as its outcome. Brand's demand also echoes the New Testament injunction, "Go, sell all thou hast," but in a way which again measures his dangerously pre-Christian mindset, for the end which he foresees for such casting aside is not faith but his own spiritual aid. Focusing on such a New Testament allusion one

might even argue that Brand commits a kind of blasphemy, for he inserts himself into the role which Christ fulfills in the source of the allusion.

The culmination of the decisions made in this act is, of course, Brand's decision to stay in the village, but this is not the only decision made: it is complemented by Agnes' decision to stay with Brand, rather than to go with Einar. The contrast between the two decisions could not be more marked. Brand's decision is a willful response to his call to serve the village; Agnes' decision is a response to her love for Brand. The drama of her fateful choice almost overshadows the most ominous note sounded in these closing scenes, for when Brand is delineating the life she can expect with him, he says, "My claim is 'nought or all'" (p. 82). The ominousness of this inheres in its egoism; Brand usurps the role of God in placing demands on people's lives. One would be amiss to construe this as a consciously blasphemous act on Brand's part, but it does serve to enhance his developing role as an Old Testament-like prophet speaking in the absence of complete Christian revelation.

By the close of the second act, then, important decisions have been made, accompanied by subtle, portentous revelations about Brand's character. Significantly, all of these things are verbalized in essentially Old Testament language. Ibsen is carefully and consistently signaling the sources of later, more spectacular, developments.

The major dramatic events of the third act are the death of Brand's mother and the decision which Brand makes to remain in Norway, at the inevitable cost of his son's life. The religious language of this act, too, is almost exclusively Old Testament in nature, the dominant image being one which Brand, himself, articulates when he realizes that, as Abraham was required by God to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, so he might be required to offer Alf. The savage irony of Brand's association of himself with Abraham is, of course, that while God required Abraham to be willing to offer Isaac, He did not permit the actual deed. Brand appears unable to discern that his demands, resulting in actual death, exceed those God made. Regardless, Brand's association of himself with the Old Testament patriarch-prophets is one of the major motifs of this act. At one time or another Brand identifies himself with Noah (p. 91), Adam (p. 91), or Moses (p. 92). In addition, he is characterized as a "stern judge" by one of the minor characters (p. 93).

Consistent with such frequent identification with Old Testament figures, Brand's major religious concern in this act is his effort to exalt the precept of no compromise "to a law" (p. 88). The falsity of this goal is pointed out by the doctor — although it remains unrecognized by Brand — who says that Brand's mother will be judged, "not by the law, but by the grace of God" (p. 105). The doctor further insists, "you [Brand] still believe/ The

covenant of the law is binding yet,/ Both upon God and ordinary men" (p. 105). This formulation of Brand's problem is certainly consistent with the previous religious language in the play, and is the very heart of the problem which Brand must resolve. Brand is not proposing a program of reform beyond men's capabilities, but the terms in which he proposes it — his demand for will and law, rather than faith — are terms which indicate how his own personality has been projected into his religious tenets. This charge by the doctor also clarifies his previous accusation, "Yes, vicar, in life's ledger, you can show/ Plenty of credit entries under 'will';/ But turn the page to 'love,' — you'll find it blank" (p. 90). To accept this as a blanket statement that Brand knows no love at all is to do violence to the play (cf. Gathorne-Hardy's *Introduction*, pp. 25-26); however, when rendered in spiritual terms, it is quite accurate. Brand does follow a covenant of law, and he refuses to rely on the covenant of grace — based on love — which supplanted it. Perhaps the most confusing aspect of this motif of the play lies in the fact that Brand bases his rejection of this New Testament love, not on theology — he explicitly admires the strength of God's love in refusing to alleviate Jesus' suffering in Gethsemane — but on the feeble manifestations of love in the life and religion of the people around him. Thus, there is a persistent element of the conscious "nay-sayer" in Brand. He attacks the Church for what it has done to the demanding love which God promulgated in the New Testament; ironically, in doing so he demonstrates time and again that he, too, does not really understand the nature of this love, for he allows his apprehension of it to dehumanize him, rather than to fulfill him. This confusion explains Brand's deep-seated affinity for the Old Testament; he has yet to experience God as love, but he is irreversibly bound to the Judeo-Christian tradition. Just as the Old Testament prophets were bound and restricted by the extent of their revelation, so Brand is bound and restricted by his.

This limitation is severely challenged by the suffering experienced in the fourth act. The entire sphere of Brand's functioning in this act is an expansion of his Old Testament apprehension of God. Agnes delineates the hardness of his God (p. 120), and Brand, himself, declares his pre-Christian view of man when he says, "a man is made/ To carry out the duty of mankind./ His aim is to attain to Paradise" (p. 125). The notion that a man is able to attain Paradise contradicts the entire import of the New Testament message of salvation as the gracious gift of God. The gulf between Brand's position and even a nominally Christian one becomes more obvious a few lines later, when Brand exclaims to the Sheriff, "But surely — black can never turn to white!" (p. 125) In traditional religious language this is a frequent metaphor for the effect of the Atonement, but it is literally incomprehensible to Brand. The terrible suffering which Brand inflicts on Agnes in the fourth act is another manifestation

of the limited nature of his apprehension of God. Since Brand is obviously not a sadist, it must be remembered that, because he loves her, her suffering causes him pain as well. But the rigors of his legalistic religion require him to persist in applying his "all or nothing" standard to her. The result of this process is that Agnes achieves a momentary sense of triumph, but that she must pay for it with her life. Ibsen here does not rely on mere allusion to the Old Testament, but he has Agnes quote to Brand the Old Testament admonition, "No one may look upon God's face and live" (p. 151). The mere fact that they consider this precept still operative within their lives as an inevitable corollary of certain actions effectively denies the complete theological meaning of the Incarnation. In the Old Testament economy, to see God was to die; in the New Testament era, God became man, and through His physical death and resurrection He obviated death for man. Thus, for Brand, the price of persistence continues to mount. His suffering, akin to Old Testament tribulations, cannot be expiatory, but can only prepare him for his experiencing of God as love. In this light, his use of the New Testament paradox, "Only what's lost — for ever is retained," (p. 152) becomes a part of his quietly desperate attempt to rationalize the calamity of his life.

The long last act of *Brand* is the most critical to a reading which concentrates on the use of religious language. The substance of the act begins with Brand's confrontation with the Dean. In one sense, the Dean is the personification of the organized religion which Brand has been fighting. In another sense, however, the Dean is a representative of an order of belief totally foreign to Brand, in that the Dean is a distinctly — if politically — Christian figure. The weakness of the Dean's position, and the fact of Brand's total inability to grasp Christian doctrine, is reiterated when Brand questions, "Unless a man is dead, he can't be used?" (p. 173) The Dean's ostensible rejection of this notion curiously coincides with Brand's confused expansion of it: "He has to have all his life drained away,/ Only a stiffened skeleton can suit/ The pale, anaemic sort of life you ask," (p. 173) for both of them fail to grasp the true meaning of Jesus' admonition. But, whereas this lack of understanding is a severe indictment of the Dean, the nominally Christian man, for Brand it merely serves to measure again the gap between him and the attainment of New Testament faith. Appropriately, then, Brand verbalizes his attack on the Dean (cf. p. 173) in a series of Old Testament allusions.

The Dean's closing attack on Brand (cf. pp. 174-75) is one of the most crucial speeches in the play. He attacks the egoism and hard selfishness which, as has been shown, have been a central, driving force in Brand's program of reform. With the central observation, "You must become as smooth as others are,/ And never stray along your private path," (p. 174) the Dean ostensibly presents Brand with the formula for ecclesiastical-political success, but Brand apprehends a much more telling truth in the

Dean's words. When the Dean leaves, the stage directions indicate that Brand stands "*as if petrified by his thoughts*": he then expresses his thoughts in the words, "All I have sacrificed upon the shrine/ Of what I blindly deemed the call of God!/ Now rings a blast from the dread trump of doom,/ To show me who the spirit was I served" (p. 175). He then determines — still, characteristically, willfully — "They shall not have my soul," (p. 175) but he closes his speech with a despairing — and uncharacteristically dependent — "Oh, could I meet with one believing soul,/ To give me confidence — to bring me calm!" (p. 176) Thus Brand undergoes a change which is really a reversal. Rather than the self-assured, self-centered, prophet-like figure of the first portions of the play, he is now a seeker, one who has the potential to discover true faith because he is open to it.

The following scene with the reformed Einar serves two important functions. In the first place, it confronts Brand with an embodiment of the heartless, dehumanized Christianity which could become the end of his new quest. Secondly, his rejection of this alternative reassures him in the strength of his individual integrity. When he says, "That was the man I needed: now all ties/ Are severed, I will fly my flag myself," (p. 179) he is asserting once more his own strength, but he is asserting it with the difference that he is now primarily concerned with the state of his own soul, and no longer obsessed with his scheme of attaining external religious successes.

This transformed understanding in Brand is concretized in the symbol of the new church. In one sense this edifice represents the ultimate material payment Brand makes to his own sense of inherited guilt, for he uses all of the money he has inherited from his mother to build it. Yet, he has ostensibly built it because the former church was too small and tradition-laden to allow the worshippers an appropriate sense of freedom in their worship. Only after the Dean's attack and the confrontation with Einar does Brand realize how he has used the new building for his own purposes; he is then able to regain a measure of his original sense of mission and to tell his parishioners, "I was too blind to see it was a case/ Of everything or nothing . . . I tell you, men,/ The spirit of compromise is Satan's self" (p. 184); he then urges upon them a vision which encompasses "soaring flights on high among the stars,/ And children playing around the Christmas tree,/ And David's royal dance before the ark" (p. 184). The very verbalization of this vision underscores the groping, tentative nature of it. It is too all-encompassing to mean anything in particular. This does not inhibit its rhetorical effectiveness, however, for the crowd is passionately moved. The irony of the people's sentiment — and a foreshadowing of the inevitable course their fervor will run — occurs in the language of their ecstasy. As the people begin to follow Brand out of the valley, they dismiss the practical — although spitefully motivated — challenges of the Sheriff and the Dean by reminding them, "Manna was granted, from the dew of

heaven,/ To Israel in the wilderness!" (p. 186) Thus, precisely at the moment when Brand has begun to redefine the nature of his mission and to relinquish the assurance of consistently Old Testament imagery, the people who follow him misunderstand him profoundly enough to begin to see themselves and their mission in Old Testament terms. What ensues is inevitable.

The disillusionment which the people suffer and their outraged attack on Brand are consequences of the deep misunderstanding which has been anticipated in the clashing imagery of the speeches. Throughout the early parts of the second scene, the people fit consistently into their identity with the wandering Israelites by complaining, grumbling and objecting. Simultaneously, they also echo the words of the would-be followers of Jesus who hedged in their commitment to his "sell all thou hast" dictum. Brand's identity at this point has lost enough of its original character that he begins to assume the bifurcated role of part prophet, part Christ-like figure. His message is still not Christian, but it has modified. The emphasis on will is still present, but the "Nought or All" summons is no longer Brand's but God's. Brand's association with a Christ-like figure is further emphasized when the people who have looked to him in anticipation of a temporal triumph reject him — "cheated — tricked — betrayed, betrayed!" (p. 189) — when they realize the spiritual nature of the conquest he is proposing. Like the Jews of Palm Sunday, the villagers turn upon Brand when he formulates his campaign in terms of "God's call" and lost souls (p. 196) rather than social and political revolution.

Only after Brand has been driven "*bruised and bleeding*" (p. 196) into the solitary heights of the mountains, does he undergo the conversion which is the previously unarticulated object of his quest. In his long soliloquy opening the last scene Brand mentions for the first time, "One [who] once suffered death to save them all," (p. 197) and his soliloquy then veers off on a long consideration of the relationship between the ineffective, cowardly faith of his countrymen and their paralysis in contemporary international events. With the questions, "And has that image of God, in which mankind/ Was fashioned, been forgotten or lost?/ Can our Creator's spirit know defeat?" (p. 201), Brand initiates the closing sequence of the play.

Downs has noted⁶ the visionary aspects of this closing sequence, but he has not developed the idea completely enough to explain the transformation Brand undergoes. It is true, as Downs points out, that the appearance of Agnes is visionary because she is a projection from Brand's subconscious. It is also true that Gerd is actually present because she was seen by the others following Brand in his ascent. What Downs overlooks is the brief use of the heavenly chorus to introduce the phantom of Agnes. It would appear, on first examination, that the chorus has an objective reality because, unlike Agnes, there is nothing in Brand's subconscious which he could project in order to create it.

However, seen in the context, it becomes apparent that the voices respond to Brand's questions in a way which indicates that they are essentially projections of his conscience. Brand has reached a state of still-faithless isolation and despair, and his conscience, as well as his subconscious, works to deepen his mood. It is supremely ironic that these forces drive Brand to a state such as Einar, in his pompous, dehumanized, converted self, described as his own condition just before his conversion. The positive aspect of the irony in Brand's situation is that his conversion also begins to emerge from the despair.

In the context of this conversion process, then, the vision of Agnes becomes a temptation, tempting Brand to persist in doting on his former self and its errors, rather than allowing him to pursue his quest. Brand, himself, realizes this when, after the phantom has assumed the form of a hawk and abandoned him, he says, "Now I see —!/
That phantom was the Spirit of Compromise!" (p. 206) As if to affirm the accuracy of this conclusion, Gerd enters the scene, claiming to have seen the hawk depart, and proposing that they hunt him together.

The proposed hunt is delayed when Gerd looks closely at the wounded Brand. From the nature of his wounds, which resemble the stigmata, the demented girl suddenly concludes that Brand is Christ: "it is you who were the Crucified" (p. 207). Brand rejects this blasphemous idea by — significantly — quoting (the line is printed as a quotation in the play) Jesus' rebuke to Peter, "Get thee behind me" (p. 207). The inclusion of such a startling event so late in the play must be carefully understood. It is accurate — if superficial — to say that Gerd is presenting Brand with another temptation which he overcomes. But it is far more important to notice Brand's status at this point; it is also necessary to insist upon the distinction between Christ-likeness and a Christ-figure. Brand's wounds, as well as some of the preceding events, could indicate either identification, but the context of the play precludes the latter alternative, for, within a few lines, Brand, himself, prays to Jesus (p. 208). Thus, the necessary conclusion about Brand at this point of the play is that he is developing greater and more explicit Christ-likeness, *e.g.* he is drawing ever nearer to the moment of his conversion. His human nature — as visualized by his physical self — is being prepared for transformation.

When Gerd invites Brand to the Ice Church, his sense of despair at his totally isolated position manifests itself in his lines, "O that I were a thousand miles away!/
How desperately I long for light and sun,
Kindliness, and the sabbath calm of peace . . ." (p. 208). This is immediately followed by his weeping, penitential prayer:

O Jesus, I have called upon Thy name,
But Thou has never clasped me to Thy breast:
Thou has been near to me, yet hast glided past,

As slips a well-known word upon the tongue.
Oh, let me now touch but the paltry hem
Of thy redeeming mantle,
Which is dipped
In the true wine of penitence! (p. 208)

When Gerd questions why he has never wept before, the tone as well as the substance of Brand's reply indicates that Brand has experienced a conversion. Ibsen's stage directions indicate that Brand replies, "*in a clear, radiant voice, as if rejuvenated,*" (p. 208) and Brand's words chronicle, in capsule form, the process of the entire play:

Man treads the path of law through frosty days;
But then comes summer, and the light from heaven.
Till now, it was my duty to become
The stony table on which God writes His laws; —
But from today the poetry of my life
Shall run meandering in warm pleasant streams:
Its icy crust is broken, I can weep,
And I can kneel, — and I can pray at last! (pp. 208-09)

The final moments of the play concern the reappearance of the hawk, and the avalanche caused by Gerd's shooting of the bird. Previously, Brand had recognized the hawk as a temptation, the spirit of compromise, and he had called it a hawk, but when Gerd shoots the bird and it begins to fall, she says, "Why, he is white — as white as any dove" (p. 209). The transformation of the hawk is a result of Brand's conversion. The dove is the traditional embodiment of the Holy Spirit; therefore, the hawk of compromising temptation is now recognized as really being the dove of God's spirit, which has alternately driven and led Brand to his conversion. The avalanche is, in a literal sense, an accident — the result of a gun-shot vibrating the loose snow. Brand had previously anticipated a whole new life (see above), but he falls victim to the avalanche. It is most incompatible with the text to attempt to render the avalanche as a form of judgment on Brand, for even in the midst of it his new-found faith persists, and, in his final speech, he addresses God concerning the problem which, had he lived, would have most occupied his attempt to understand and to reconcile his new and old ways of life: "Answer me, God, here in the jaws of death./ Can the full measure of a human will/ Weigh not an atom in the scales of heaven/ Toward his soul's salvation?" (p. 209) The success of Brand's prayer — the proof that it was heard — is found in the ambiguous answer ringing out over the roar of the avalanche, "He is the God of Love."⁷ The ambiguity of this statement does not lie, as many appear to think, in whether it is a censuring of Brand or a vindication of him; the ambiguity lies in the fact that it is not a direct answer to a very direct question. Cast in the light of the career and experience of Brand, however, the implication of the

reply appears to be that, if a human will firmly persists in seeking God, God, in His love, will redirect that will — even if it means virtually breaking it — until it recognizes that, in order to properly serve Him, love must provide the basis for any exercise of will. This is what Brand has learned.

Thus, in the last act, the shifts in religious language and imagery reflect the changes taking place within Brand. In the final act the nature of the religious language evolves from consistently Old Testament imagery to New Testament concern with repentance, prayer, and love.

A reading of the play from the perspective of its use of religious language is not definitive; however, it appears to confront the primary issues of the play in the terms in which they confront the title character. As such, the religious images reflect the changing nature of the main character, and chronicle his progress from an Old Testament prophet to a New Testament Christian. Simultaneously, the religious language allows fuller appreciation of the sheer human strength of the character as he persists in his quest. Combined, these elements perhaps clarify why Ibsen liked to think that Brand was himself "in [his] best moments."

NOTES

¹Almost everyone who writes on *Brand*, whether in a book or an article, mentions the great effect of its success on Ibsen's career. For example: M. C. Bradbrook, in *Ibsen the Norwegian* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1948), says that Ibsen "attained security and success with *Brand*" (p. 7); Theodore Jorgensen, in *Henrik Ibsen: A Study in Art and Personality* (Northfield, Minn.: St. Olaf College Press, 1945), also acknowledges the importance of the play in Ibsen's career; Halvdan Koht, in his standard *The Life of Ibsen* (London: American Scandinavian Foundation, 1931), suggests that the moral impact of *Brand* in Norwegian culture was almost an historic turning point for the nation, as well as for Ibsen; and George Brandes, in *Henrik Ibsen, A Critical Study* (New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1964), says "[*Brand*] was a book which left no reader cold." (p. 21).

²Halvdan Koht, *The Life of Ibsen* (London: American Scandinavian Foundation, 1931), p. 260.

³Henrik Ibsen, *Brand*, trans. by G. M. Gathorne-Hardy (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966). Specific references to play noted in text.

⁴George Brandes, *Henrik Ibsen, A Critical Study* (New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1964), p. 70.

⁵Gathorne-Hardy, *Introduction*, p. 21. Although the influence of Kierkegaard on Ibsen's thought at the time of the composition of *Brand* is important, the present essay is not concerned with such extra-textual speculations. Rather, I believe the use in the play of language from one source — the Bible — demonstrates an important way of reading the play. Whether this reading in turn suggests anything about Ibsen's own philosophical or religious positions remains, of course, mere speculation. Indeed, to posit any Ibsenian positions based on evidence from the play strikes me as the type of deduction which argues that Nora (of *A Doll's House*) demonstrates Ibsen's defense of radical feminism.

⁶Brian Downs, *A Study of Six Plays by Ibsen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), p. 33 ff.

⁷Henrik Ibsen, *Brand*, trans. by Michael Meyer (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1960), p. 157. This translation was used at this point because it is a more literal rendering of the Norwegian.