

## IBSEN

### Henning Howlid Wærp

#### I

And when we drove into the small Italian village, picking out a small bar with peeling green paint, a touch of red in the window frame, in the middle of the small piazza, with an atmosphere of calmness and tranquillity, a tiny fountain in the middle – there, slowly crossing the shiny threshold, greeting "buon giorno", asking for a Caffe latte and a glass of something strong, leaning to the soft leather bar chairs, watching the owner approaching, energetically, smiling, shaking his head, pointing to the shelves behind the bar, showing us that there were no bottles there any longer, but books, row after row, double stacks, and it is Henrik Ibsen's books – because in this café, in this village, he had been once, Ibsen, and now the cafe has turned into an Ibsen reading room, the whole village to an Ibsen centre, and they have nothing to serve, nothing to drink, but we are welcome to read.

#### II

Last time I was here, this was a palace from the 14th Century, and a church from the 13th, lit wax candles by the alter, I was watching the others bend down in prayers, not thinking so much about myself, these hot days with light shimmering in the dust through the stained-glass window, neither so much about God, but about what other people were thinking about, who they were, if they were happy or sad, had lovers or deceased and where they went after *here*. And I always went to the small, fragile souvenir shop in the palace where I could buy beer in plastic glasses – but one day: there were no lit candles in the church, no pews either, only books, on all the walls and in great piles on the floor, the souvenir shop in the palace was gone, replaced by a multimedia stand, and on a brass plate I saw the name of a fellow-country man, just busts of the same man, and the whole city turned out to be dead or transformed into a centre for the study of Henrik Ibsen.

#### III

And there, at the very beginning of Bygdø Alley there used to be a nice little restaurant with stars and numbers on the dice, and further along an obscure carpet shop which always had "Everything must go" sales, while I, on the other side of the street had my hair cut, or stood in the shop next to it, listening to cds, new ones, preferably from the day before, or sat in the coffee bar with brownies and espresso in thick white porcelain cups, grabbing the little handle with my puppet hand while the wind rustled in the chestnut trees, but that was *before* - because *now* all the trees were cut down to give place to an Ibsen centre, after the National library, with an implosion, did not have any more room, could not support itself, even if extended in four directions, but had to grab a bite of its neighbour street, quite a bit in fact, swallowing greengrocers and small delicatessens before in the middle of the night, eating the whole of Briskeby, and then Kirkeveien street, before turning down Bogstadveien street towards the castle.

**IV**

But there was no demonstration outside the US Embassy this autumn afternoon in the heavy rain, the embassy was closed down and abandoned and inside was an Ibsen centre and an Ibsen museum and an Ibsen a third thing, and in the lighted windows no longer secretaries with hair sprayed American hair were seen, but book spines packed tightly and with no cracks and the Americans were neither seen nor asked for.

**V**

And my wife is doing her ph. d. on Ibsen, day and night, but doesn't do me, and everything about Ibsen she loves, all the way down to his small, dusty poodle and she never gets enough.

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Henning Howlid Wærp

from the book *En avhandling kanskje, om noe vakkert. Gyldenlær.*

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