

THE MANIFESTO AS GENRE IN IBSEN'S *JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN*

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As the resonance of two recent productions of Henrik Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkman* (1896) have demonstrated – both the Abbey Theatre's production in Dublin starring Alan Rickman in 2010 and Vinge/Müller's twelve hour deconstructed version at the Berliner Volksbühne in 2011 – staging *Borkman* in the aftermath of the global financial crisis highlights Ibsen's remarkable foresight in creating modern drama's prototype of the fallen capitalist speculator. As I will argue in this article, Ibsen's *Borkman* is also a play that illuminates the tectonic rumblings of a labour force that is in the process of becoming a self-conscious subject as proletariat on the world-historical stage. John Gabriel Borkman's professed mission is to ameliorate the lives of the iron-ore miners, albeit in service of his megalomaniacal visions of empire and domination. His ongoing delusions of a rightful authority are expressed in a neo-aristocratic performance of pomposity and manifesto-like future visions which take their cues, dramaturgically, from the feudal past. Meanwhile, the miners, whose lives he genuinely wishes to improve by bringing them "light and warmth", haunt his visions of the future with their own desires – the contours of which exceed the limits of John Gabriel's bourgeois fantasies of power.

The death of the tyrant John Gabriel is Ibsen's swan song for a Romantic vision of development that dissipates along with industrialization's so-called gilded-age. John Gabriel embodies the ambiguities of the "robber baron" type who makes his fortune through questionable means, but leaves behind a philanthropic legacy of hospitals, libraries, schools and charities. Although John Gabriel is himself a casualty of speculative capitalism and fails in achieving both empire and infrastructure, he is a figure who embodies a persistent dialectic between the emancipatory features of industrialization and a desire for "progress" at all costs that can go horribly awry. It is this dialectic that Marx and Engels illuminate in their analysis of the bourgeois project in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). According to Marx and Engels, where there is industrialization there will be a working class; and where capitalism reigns, a "sorcerer" will be conjured whose daemonic force takes on amoral and unpredictable contours (Marx & Engels, 1955, 15). Ibsen situates *Borkman* in the personal wreckage this sorcerer has wrought – the human cost of an unfettered desire for "progress" that has led John Gabriel to make a Faustian deal with the lawyer Hinkel and which has turned his heart to ice long before the action takes place.

Considering John Gabriel's visions as manifestos – as "will of the sovereign" type declarations of his policies and aims – highlights the manifesto *form* as definitive for Ibsen's age. It enables us to consider competing uses of the manifesto to produce either declarations of bourgeois "progress", or to impel revolutionary zeal on behalf of the workers themselves. Both *Borkman* and *The Communist Manifesto* address the issue of labour power that necessarily becomes salient concurrent to industrialization; and both make propositions for the future of this becoming-subject – the proletariat (still only

recognized as “workers” in John Gabriel’s mind). With Marx and Engels’ *Manifesto*, however, an entirely new manifesto *genre* is formed. This genre not only replaces the voice of the “sovereign” with the self-authorizing voice of the proletariat, but it also defines a new, future-oriented form-content relationship that – much like the communist revolution itself – “derives its poetry not from the past, but only from the future” (Marx, 1955, 50). Hence, as John Gabriel continues to perform the manifestos of an outdated model of neo-aristocratic rule, he fails to hear the rumblings of the labour force who are the real agents or enablers of his would-be project. The mobilization of the proletariat by means of *The Communist Manifesto*, on the other hand, will alter the course of world history impelling revolution on a global scale. Ultimately, John Gabriel’s visions attempt to address, but simultaneously misrecognize, the desire for emancipation of the proletariat that is definitive for the political future of his age.

Thinking about Ibsen’s *Borkman* in relation to *The Communist Manifesto* does three things: (1) it accounts for some of the imagery Ibsen might have tangentially or indirectly absorbed in creating the contours of John Gabriel Borkman and his world as bourgeois industrialist “type”, (2) it challenges us to think about power and legitimacy in terms of performance and “theatricalization” following Martin Puchner’s work (2006) on the manifesto genre (3) it impels us to consider the iron-ore miners in *Borkman* as a desiring force— a body of workers whose lives John Gabriel genuinely wishes to improve, but who are effaced by his reification of labour and commodity fetishism. This effacement is, as Ibsen shows, an inevitable corollary of speculative capitalism and abstraction, which has a bewitching hold over the capitalist.

Both historically and within the play, the immense power harboured by the “robber-baron” type will dissipate in the crises and social upheavals at the end of the 19th century. This is a period during which the robber barons exit the stage of history and capitalism intensifies its façade of rational and bureaucratic order. As such, we are shown that John Gabriel is a type of Romantic “hero” untenable on the eve of the 20th century – a century which, according to the late historian Eric Hobsbawm, is no longer defined by great events wrought by “great men”, but rather by social movements, masses and labour. John Gabriel’s inability to attune himself to the “masses” or to adapt to a mode of speculative capitalism that purports to have checks and balances, signals the end of his type of charismatic authority in a period of transition wrought by crises and instability.

I.

No document more powerfully or thoroughly saturated mid-to-late 19th century industrializing Europe than Marx and Engels’ *Communist Manifesto*. No work is more respectful of the bourgeoisie’s ability to conjure “whole populations from out of the ground” and to show what “man’s activity can bring about” (Marx & Engels, 1955, 12). In fact, the entire first chapter of the *Communist Manifesto* is an ode to the feats of progress wrought by the bourgeoisie as the penultimate revolutionary class – one that has given birth to the final and true revolutionary class, the proletariat. At the same time, the *Communist Manifesto* produces a terrifying elaboration of bourgeois nihilism and

destructive impulses. The bourgeoisie, according to Marx and Engels, is a class that is by necessity invested in perpetuating crisis and upheaval – continually revolutionizing modes and relations of production in order to retain its power. Where the professed goal of the bourgeois industrialist is often to build stable, long-term infrastructure for the benefit of all humankind, the results have often been havoc and instability for the alleged beneficiaries of “progress”: the workers.

The *Communist Manifesto* paradoxically produces not only a defence, but admiration for the bourgeois “type”. Marx and Engels seem to suggest that the hideous features of the bourgeois class are often a by-product of the capitalist system, since they have a great deal of praise for the ingenuity and dynamism of the bourgeois character. It therefore seems as though the havoc the bourgeoisie wreak is often in spite of themselves. Such a delineation of the bourgeois character accounts for John Gabriel’s genuine bamboozlement at the situation he finds himself in – in spite of his “noble” intentions – in the aftermath of his downfall. Although criminally accountable for illegally speculating with investors’ money, John Gabriel expects, at any moment, a knock on the door to signal his “rightful” reinstatement as chairman of the bank and the rehabilitation of the Borkman name. For John Gabriel, his illegal dealings were a mere means to an end and the logical display of his heroic, superhuman qualities that distinguishes him from “ordinary people”. After all, his formidable talent, which is to say his ambition and ruthlessness, enabled him to rise from humble means to become bank chairman. Why should he not suspend the law to turn untouched and abundant resources into an expansive empire that would see the lives of the workers genuinely improve?

There is a pointed disparity, however, between John Gabriel’s ruminations, self-justifications and comportment in his once resplendent upstairs parlour, and the dynamics that play out in the Borkman household. In his parlour, he is able to carry on as if untouched by the corrupting force of capital. In reality, however, capitalism has encroached upon every relationship in his household, creating a cold atmosphere of mistrust and recriminations. Everything in Ibsen’s depiction gives us the impression of a family where all kinship bonds have dissipated. Even those bonds that might have kept husband and wife united in a relationship of mutual support in the face of crisis have been eradicated. John Gabriel and his wife Gunhild live apart from one another in the Rentheim villa, alienated in an insurmountable upstairs-downstairs divide.

Furthermore, the fact that Gunhild and her sister Ella Rentheim are twins – once physically tied together in the womb, but now “severed” by the aftermath of financial ruin – seems to fit Marx and Engels’ depiction of capitalism’s atomizing thrust. In the play, as in bourgeois society, all human relations are informed by “naked self-interest” (Marx & Engels, 1955, 12) and the bourgeois family reveals itself to be an institution informed solely by “capital and private gain” (Marx & Engels, 1955, 26). Gunhild, mistrustful of both her husband and her sister, accuses Ella of shrewdness and cunning in relation to the fact that Ella retains her personal fortune and acquires Gunhild’s son Erhart in the aftermath of John Gabriel’s downfall. Ella, on the other hand, has been stripped of her ability to love after John Gabriel’s cutting off of their courtship for his

strategic gain. Ella describes an ongoing “emptiness” and “barrenness” within her, and accuses John Gabriel of an unforgivable sin: the murder of his soul and her own. Both love and the human soul have become mere commodities to John Gabriel – things that can be bought and sold. Ella’s primary objective in the play is to repossess rights over her adoptive son Erhart for her dying days, which she tries to achieve by reinforcing his indebtedness to her. Cynically, therefore, no relationship in Ibsen’s portrayal of bourgeois family life is devoid of a calculating, transactional element.

The discrepancy between the empire of “light and warmth” that John Gabriel wishes to engineer, and the reality of his household as a microcosm of his “cold, dark kingdom” (*JGB* 92) could not be more striking. More importantly, the Borkman family dynamic reflects Marx and Engels’ “all that is solid melts into air” (Marx & Engels, 1955, 13) as a crass unhinging of every relationship and bond. Though this condition ought to compel John Gabriel to finally face “his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind” (*ibid*), no such recognition takes place. John Gabriel and Gunhild are unable to conceptualize any future beyond the rehabilitation of their social status and the immortalization of the Borkman name. Ibsen, therefore, like Marx and Engels, shows us capitalism’s alienating and reifying effects on the emotional life of the individual and the family unit.

II.

John Gabriel has spent the past eight years since his release from prison isolated in the only space within his fallen empire where his “authority” is maintained: the upstairs reception hall. Here, his megalomaniacal visions and justifications are held together by an elaborate dramaturgy wherein he “receives” visitors such as the grovelling yes-man William Foldal, an elderly clerk and amateur playwright, and his hired entertainment Frida, Foldal’s daughter who plays the ominous “Danse Macabre” for him on the piano.¹ John Gabriel’s once great reception hall has now become a veritable theatre for his ongoing performance of rightful power and authority. Any questioning of his delusions for a future reinstatement as bank chairman is kept at bay. Here, John Gabriel is able to continue to affirm his “by divine right” authority and exceptionality in distinction to the “masses”. Prior to the scandal, emphasizing his distinctiveness involved a public display of neo-aristocratic ostentation such as being driven by a four-horse carriage “like a king” and having people “bowing and scraping to him as they would to a king” (*JGB* 26).

As his sole “subject”, Foldal’s role in this dramaturgy is to bear witness to John Gabriel’s pageantry like an obedient minion. The unspoken condition of their “friendship” is that Foldal can expect some encouragement for the tragedy he wrote decades ago if he unequivocally supports the fantasy of John Gabriel’s reinstatement at the bank. In Act II, both John Gabriel and Foldal’s delusions verge on the tragicomic. While Foldal waxes poetic about his muse, *die ewige Weibliche* (the eternal woman) –

¹The *Danse Macabre* is music based on a folkloric idea wherein the dead are permitted to rise from their graves at midnight and dance for one hour before they must again descend.

an ideal that John Gabriel dismisses as naive “poetic nonsense” – John Gabriel himself demands full attention and support for his proclamations:

No, stay seated! When the hour strikes and I am reinstated... when they realize that I am irreplaceable... when they come to me in this drawing-room, humbling themselves, begging me to take the reins of the bank again... (stands at the desk before and strikes his chest). Here I shall stand and receive them! And the conditions that John Gabriel lays down shall be known and discussed all over the country... (*JGB* 50)

These lines also produce a striking image wherein John Gabriel subsequently becomes like a petrified statue – a kind of relic or iconic image harkening back to the days of Napoleonic Empire. Standing by his desk and striking his chest in solemn oath reflects the kind of posturing that is used as a trope in bourgeois reception halls to adorn and legitimate their power. Like Napoleon “maimed after his first battle” (*JGB* 51), John Gabriel’s performance is insidiously cloaked in the Enlightenment virtues of “brotherhood” and “solidarity”, but is ultimately spread by means of empire and domination. His purely instrumental relationship with Foldal – company he did not keep prior to his fall from grace – demonstrates the disparity between his pretence of a “noble” character and “code of honour”, and his inability to see friendship as any more than a bearing witness to his exceptionality.

Where we can see John Gabriel’s performance in the upstairs reception hall as highly “theatrical”, we must also recognize his claims to visionary authority as “manifestos” – and hence as a form intimately tied to a *legitimizing* performance, according to Martin Puchner (2006). Here we must return to the etymology of the term “manifesto” from the Latin *manifestos* meaning proof, or a “public declaration explaining past actions and announcing the motive for forthcoming ones”.² We see this anachronistic and outdated form of manifesto – one that takes its cues from the past – reflected in John Gabriel’s justifications throughout the play. An example from Act II, uttered in defense of his crimes against Ella, clearly takes on this archaic form:

I had to command all the sources of power in this country. All the wealth that lay hidden in the earth and mountains, in the forests and the seas. I had to be master of it all...To create an empire for myself, and by it, to improve the lot of many many thousands of others. (*JGB* 62)

Here, the manifesto takes shape not only as a justification for John Gabriel’s criminal actions, but also delineates the vast dominion over which he was to rule, as well as his vision of benevolent progress. Considered as such, the manifesto becomes a form through which to consider all manner of New Jerusalems put forth by Ibsen’s megalomaniacal protagonists, from Brand and Julian Apostata, to Dr. Stockman.

²<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/manifesto>

John Gabriel's manifestos become a way for him to *auratize* himself in a fantasy of development that bears both progressive and reactionary features. John Gabriel believes himself to be compelled by a "higher motive" that grants him immunity from the corrupting force of capitalism. In other words, his talent and greater purpose have enabled him to operate outside of bottom-line imperatives. This can be compared to him wearing the "halo" that Marx and Engels claim has been stripped from vocational professions by the introduction of wage-labour. John Gabriel's "halo" is also reflected in his second name after the archangel Gabriel – a hallowed status that should have exempted him from the law and enabled his mission to supersede his illegal actions. However, in spite of trying to create something epic, expansive and to some degree progressive in his Romantic vision of empire, what he attempted to achieve was done so by means of financial speculation – a terrain of abstraction that prevented him from acting honourably or in the name of the miners. .

Recognizing John Gabriel's pronouncements as manifestos highlights the way each new historically dominant class appropriates the tropes and stylings of an earlier one. Hence, this form of manifesto couches its claim to progressive content (Enlightenment ideals) in a regressive (neo-aristocratic) form. The bourgeois performance of the manifesto, therefore, is embedded in a broader dramaturgy of charismatic authority and future utopias wrought by "progress" (as distinct from revolution). The disparate models of the manifesto form – those rooted in the past and those that, like the *Communist Manifesto*, stake their claim in a future that the *Manifesto* itself will bring about – mark a turning point for the future of labour in John Gabriel's age.

III.

Stripped of any real power or authority, John Gabriel's manifestos are necessarily invested in "theatricalization", which, according to Martin Puchner, is inextricably tied to the manifesto genre. According to Puchner (2006), "All manifestos are intertwined with the theatrical, driven by it, troubled by it; manifestos seek to turn the theatre into a source of authority." (25) The "theatricality" of the manifesto describes a posture of authority without which it could not "utter" a single word. Using "scenes" such as baptism and marriage, Puchner also uses J.L. Austin's speech act theory to explore how words "do things" vis-à-vis the concept of performativity. For example, words legitimate new states of being or they transform statuses or relationships. Crucial here, however, is *who* is doing the speaking: devoid of legitimate authority, the speech act is meaningless. Hence, without officialdom, John Gabriel persists in his theatricalization of power and continues to act *as if* his speech act was bestowed with the authority of a sovereign figure. However, this is precisely the kind of authority usurped by the bourgeoisie in the name of "the people" and, in the *Communist Manifesto*, the self-authorizing voice of the proletariat – a becoming-subject willed into class consciousness by the very advent of this new Marxian genre. In fact, any authorizing power is always already performative – and needs to stage its own legitimacy. The *Communist Manifesto*, however, doesn't "wait" for legitimation and challenges all preceding models of authority. Instead, "it

exposes its speech acts as self-authorizing and openly “agonistic”. It wishes to do away with the past and “produce the arrival of the modern revolution” through acts of “self-foundation and self-creation” (Puchner, 2006, 36).

Comparing these two types of manifestos, therefore, marks a crucial distinction between a bourgeois power that is rooted in the past and in aristocratic posturing, and the advent of a revolutionary, future-oriented genre wrought by Marx and Engels. If the insidious mechanism of the bourgeoisie is to use crises and instability to reframe capitalist modes of operation, then John Gabriel shows himself to be ineffectual – a stagnant, petrified relic, looking backwards rather than forwards. That he is grossly out of touch is also exemplified in his claims of intimate acquaintance with the iron-ore miners. As the son of a miner himself – a notion that is part of his romantic self-mythologizing – it is comically apparent that he has no real connection to their world. Rather than real solidarity with the workers, he possesses an uncanny ability to hear the iron-ore “singing” and to decode the messages of “solidarity” from friendly steamships on the fjord (*JGB* 91). In the final scene of the play, looking down upon his kingdom with Ella by his side, John Gabriel interprets the desire for a fraternity of workers as a message from industry itself:

Can you glimpse the smoke from the great steamships out on the fjord? ...They come and they go... bringing friendship and brotherhood to all the world...giving light and warmth to people in thousands of homes. That's what I dreamt of doing. (*JGB* 91)

John Gabriel also hears the voice of the inanimate “spirits” of liquid capital he wishes to “unleash” emanating from the veins of iron ore (*JGB* 92). These voices, he claims, are his “subjects” – captive, yearning beings. It is to these spirits that he gives the play’s only profession of love: “I love you, you riches longing for life...your retinue a blaze of power and glory” (*ibid*). Meanwhile, the miners, who are coalescing into a unified subjectivity as proletarians in his midst, are effaced in John Gabriel’s wistful dreams of an industrial “kingdom” and capital gain. Thus, John Gabriel’s true allegiances are revealed at the end of the play, culminating in an “ice cold hand of ore” gripping his heart. This symbolizes the protagonist’s fatal flaw: exploiting the capitalist system, whilst not recognizing his own gradual spiritual, emotional and ultimately biological death by its “hand”.

In Ibsen’s text, finance and the wonders of abstract representation are given primacy over the organization of labour that ultimately mobilizes industry. This is not to say, however, that the invisible workers in Ibsen’s play do not come replete with their own palpable dynamism, hurtling towards a brighter and warmer future through “progress”. We are privy to this dynamism, but only through the limits of what John Gabriel can conceptualize: the masses as either desirous for better working conditions and/or labouring in factories under the umbrella of his benevolent rule. The rumblings of a new form of class-consciousness harbour a spectral operation over John Gabriel’s visions. This operation is part of a broader condition of ghosting or “hauntology”

(following Derrida in *Spectres of Marx*) that, arguably, permeates the entire Ibsen canon. According to Derrida, a ghost is not ontological, but rather a *hauntological* phenomenon. It is something non-existent that *re-curs* –disturbing us and bringing us “out of joint” with ourselves. In *Borkman*, these spectres are not merely the traditions or the inheritances of the past, as in other Ibsen plays. Rather, they are the demand for “justice” that workers have made throughout history and which are *beyond* John Gabriel’s scope – even as these spectres are inherited from the Borkman family lineage of iron-ore miners.

John Gabriel is, in many ways, himself a mere spectre playing out a phantasmagoric scene in the “fading splendour” of his parlour. As such, the Rentheim villa can be perceived as a diorama-like set wherein John Gabriel, Gunhild and Ella – a “dead man and two shadows” – ultimately stage their own critique of speculative capitalism. The theatricality of John Gabriel’s dramaturgy also functions, in one instance, as a kind of meta-theatricality – a play within a play. In Act II, John Gabriel sees himself reflected in Foldal’s unpublished tragedy – a *bürgerliches Trauerspiel* as an outdated genre reflecting the Enlightenment values of bourgeois heroes. Furthermore, the “Danse Macabre” – the musical leitmotif that Frida plays for John Gabriel *ad nauseum* – also reflects the aging tyrant’s state of being as a kind of living dead. Marx’s “let the dead bury their own dead” (Marx, 1955, 50) therefore proves to be ominous as John Gabriel plays out the self-destructive impulses of the bourgeois industrialist “type”.

Thus, as one document, the *Communist Manifesto*, is spreading like wildfire with its self-authorizing, confrontational form and revolutionary content – aiding and abetting the spectre of communism’s haunting of Europe (Marx & Engels, 1955, 8) – John Gabriel’s authority has dissipated and we see the once great financier as a mere spectre of his former self. Like the Napoleonic dynasty preceding John Gabriel’s own era, he and the robber baron type have become frozen tropes of industrialization’s “golden age”. Furthermore, the ubiquitous “law” that “doesn’t make distinctions” (*JGB* 55) becomes a way to sublimate the destructive dynamism of capitalism that can no longer accommodate the John Gabriel type under its façade of rational order. This is represented in the play by the no-less corrupt lawyer Hinkel, who uses John Gabriel as a scapegoat and as an emblem of speculative capitalism’s checks and balances.

Conclusion

The manifesto genre provides us with a way to think about the intersecting thrusts of John Gabriel Borkman’s justifications and pronouncements and Marx and Engels’ *Communist Manifesto* as two different visions for the future of workers on the eve of the 20th century. Both are directly invested in the labouring class. However, where John Gabriel’s type of visionary authority is in a historical state of entropy and disintegration, the *Communist Manifesto* mobilizes a form of future authority by usurping sovereign posturing in the name of the proletariat. As per Puchner, “the agent – the proletariat – does not yet exist, but it is through the very speech acts of the *Communist Manifesto* that the context and agent are being wrought” (Puchner, 2006, 24). In other words, a *stage* is being set for a new protagonist – a becoming-subject mobilized by the desire for justice which is haunting *Borkman’s* age. As the historical conditions that wrought the

Communist Manifesto also underwrite John Gabriel's fantasy of development, these two works collectively mark the space of labour in the latter half of the 19th century. Although *Borkman* only does so implicitly, each accounts for the primacy of labour power in a materialist teleology of industrial capitalism.

Read through the lens of the manifesto, Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkman* reveals the decisive struggle for power in the late nineteenth century to be about addressing the labouring masses as an emerging and desiring collective – as a becoming-subject on the world stage. In the play, we see the rationalizing thrust of capitalism exorcising the neo-Romantic tyrants from the platform of history to make room for the Hinkels who, although equally corrupt and quite possibly devoid of the visionary qualities or progressive features of John Gabriel, can accustom themselves to an abanal world of bureaucratic checks and balances. As the emerging consciousness of a new historical class exceeds the focus of Ibsen's concern with a crumbling bourgeois empire, so it exceeds John Gabriel's fantasy of power. But this does not mean that they are not a spectral and desiring force throughout the text. Furthermore, the manifesto is, in both *Borkman* and the *Communist Manifesto*, a "theatre of power", whose voice is one of feigned authority, which parades as either the intentions of a charismatic authority to his subjects, or as the self-formulated interests of the masses. In *Borkman*, the visionary authority attempts to address the needs of the crowd, but Ibsen shows us his inevitable failure in the disintegrating age of bourgeois empire.

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Abstract

This article examines John Gabriel Borkman's neo-aristocratic performance of power and authority in Ibsen's eponymously titled play (1896). After his downfall, John Gabriel has retreated into his once grand reception hall wherein he has become like a petrified relic from a preceding era. His performance within the "fading glory" of the upstairs hall– a veritable theatre for his delusions of grandeur – is one of an outmoded type of bourgeois "hero" whose flagrantly illicit dealings are no longer tenable as capitalism becomes ever-more "rational" and bureaucratic in its façade. The article focuses on John Gabriel's performance of a "sovereign" or charismatic authority and examines his future visions as "manifestos". The manifesto is a form belonging to a feudal era of rule by divine right – one that is necessarily "theatrical" in its performance of a legitimate authority. Assuming the voice of the sovereign, John Gabriel attempts to

address the needs of the iron-ore miners – a desiring, albeit latent force in Ibsen’s text. The desires of the workers, however, are continually effaced by the bewitching powers of capitalist abstraction, which account for the alienation of family and individuals in Ibsen’s play.

Comparing John Gabriel’s manifesto with Marx and Engels’ *Communist Manifesto* not only accounts for the end of an age of neo-aristocratic bourgeois decadence, but also marks labour as the definitive socio-political issue of the late 19th century. Where John Gabriel uses a dramaturgy rooted in past models of rule to address the workers in his vision of a benevolent “kingdom”, the *Communist Manifesto* heralds the death of his class and replaces the voice of the “sovereign authority” with the self-authorising voice of the workers themselves. Borkman’s fatal flaw then is failing to sufficiently address the plight of the iron-ore miners with whom he claims intimate acquaintance but with whom he is grossly out of touch. Ibsen shows us his inevitable failure and the disappearance of the John Gabriel “type” of Romantic industrialist in favour of corrupt lawyers such as Hinkel, who are more adaptable to capitalism’s ever-changing incarnations.

Biographical Note

Christine Korte is a PhD candidate in the Joint Programme in Communications and Culture at York University in Toronto. Her dissertation research examines the legacy of the late 19th century labour movement as it “haunts” the contemporary dramaturgies of the Berliner Volksbühne. Her project traces the persistent tropes and themes of the Faustian deal, the desire for *Gemeinschaft*, and the *working through* of the National Socialist past in the dramaturgies of directors such as Frank Castorf and Christoph Schlingensiefel. In 2007 Christine played Fru Alving in *Ghosts* at the Blackbox Teater in Oslo (Dir. Vinge & Müller), which received the National Critic’s prize. This experience led to her concurrent interest in the field of Ibsen Studies.

Keywords

John Gabriel Borkman; speculative capitalism; manifesto; Marx and Engels; *Communist Manifesto*