

EARLY PLAYS

by

Henrik Ibsen

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Introduction

One of the most remarkable facts about Ibsen is the orderly development of his genius. He himself repeatedly maintained that his dramas were not mere isolated accidents. In the foreword to the readers in the popular edition of 1898 he urges the public to read his dramas in the same order in which he had written them, deploring the fact that his earlier works are less known and less understood than his later works, and insists that his writings taken as a whole constitute an organic unity. The three of his plays offered here for the first time in English translation will afford those not familiar with the original Norwegian some light on the early stages of his development.

Catiline, the earliest of Ibsen's plays, was written in 1849, while Ibsen was an apothecary's apprentice in Grimstad. It appeared in Christiania in the following spring under the pseudonym Brynjolf Bjarme. The revolutionary atmosphere of 1848-49, the reading of the story of Catiline in Sallust and Cicero in preparation for the university examinations, the hostility which existed between the apprentice and his immediate social environment, the fate which the play met at the hands of the theatrical management and the publishers, his own struggles at the time,--are all set forth clearly enough in the preface to the second edition. The play was written in the blank verse of Oehlenschlaeger's romantic dramas. Ibsen's portrayal of the Roman politician is not in accord with tradition; Catiline is not an out-and-out reprobate, but an unfortunate and highly sensitive individual in whom idealism and licentiousness struggle for mastery. Vasenius, in his study of the poet (Ibsens Dramatiska Diktning in dess Första Skede, Helsingfors, 1879), insists that Ibsen thus intuitively hit upon the real Catiline revealed by later nineteenth century research. The poet seems not to have heard of Duma's Catiline, which appeared about the same time, nor of earlier plays on the subject by Ben Jonson and others. The struggle in Ibsen's play is centered in the soul of Catiline; not once do his political opponents appear on the scene. Only one critic raised his voice in behalf of the play at the time of its appearance, and only a few copies of the original edition survive. Ibsen issued in 1875 a revised edition in celebration of his twenty-fifth anniversary as an author. Since then a third edition has been issued in 1891, and a fourth in 1913.

The Warrior's Barrow, Ibsen's second play, was finished in 1850 shortly after the publication of Catiline. Ibsen entered upon his literary career with a gusto he seems soon to have lost; he wrote to his friend Ole Schulerud in January, 1850, that he was working on a play about Olaf Trygvesson, an historical novel, and a longer poem. He had begun The Warrior's Barrow while he was still at Grimstad,

but this early version, called *The Normans*, he revised on reaching Christiania. In style and manner and even in subject-matter the play echoes Oehlenschlaeger. Ibsen's vikings are, however, of a fiercer type than Oehlenschlaeger's, and this treatment of viking character was one of the things the critics, bred to Oehlenschlaeger's romantic conception of more civilized vikings, found fault with in Ibsen's play. The sketch fared better than *Catiline*: it was thrice presented on the stage in Christiania and was on the whole favorably reviewed. When Ibsen became associated with the Bergen theater he undertook another revision of the play, and in this version the play was presented on the stage in 1854 and 1856. The final version was published in the *Bergenske Blad* in 1854, but no copy of this issue has survived; the play remained inaccessible to the public until 1902, when it was included in a supplementary volume (Volume X) to Ibsen's collected works. The earlier version remained in manuscript form until it was printed in 1917 in *Scandinavian Studies and Notes* (Vol. IV, pp. 309-337).

Olaf Liljekrans, which was presented on the Bergen stage in 1857, marks the end of Ibsen's early romantic interest. The original idea for this play, which he had begun in 1850, he found in the folk-tale "The Grouse in Justedal," about a girl who alone had survived the Black Death in an isolated village. Ibsen had with many others become interested in popular folk-tales and ballads. It was from Faye's *Norwegian Folk-Tales* (1844) that he took the story of "The Grouse in Justedal." His interest was so great that he even turned collector. Twice during this period he petitioned for and received small university grants to enable him to travel and "collect songs and legends still current among the people." Of the seventy or eighty "hitherto unpublished legends" which he collected on the first of these trips only a few have ever appeared in print; the results of his second trip are unknown. Ibsen had great faith in the availability of this medieval material for dramatic purposes; he even wrote an essay, "The Heroic Ballad and Its Significance for Artistic Poetry," urging its superior claims in contrast to that of the saga material, to which he was himself shortly to turn. The original play based on "The Grouse in Justedal" was left unfinished. After the completion of *Lady Inger of Östråt* and *The Feast at Solhoug* he came back to it, and taking a suggestion from the ballad in Landstad's collection (1852-3) he recast the whole play, substituted the ballad meter for the iambic pentameters, and called the new version *Olaf Liljekrans*. *Olaf Liljekrans* indicates clearly a decline in Ibsen's interest in pure romance. It is much more satirical than *The Feast at Solhoug*, and marks a step in the direction of those superb masterpieces of satire and romance, *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*. The play was twice presented on the stage in Bergen with considerable success, but the critics treated it harshly.

The relationship of the revised versions to the original versions of Ibsen's early plays is interesting, and might, if satisfactorily elucidated, throw considerable light on the development of his genius. It is evident that he was in this early period experimenting in metrical forms. He employed blank verse in *Catiline*, in the original version of *The Grouse in Justedal*, and even as late as 1853 in the revision of *The Warrior's Barrow*. There can be no question but that he was here following the Oehlenschlaeger tradition. Unrhymed pentameter, however, did not seem to satisfy him. He could with difficulty keep from falling into rhyme in *Catiline*, and in the early version of *The Warrior's Barrow* he used rhymed pentameters. After the revision of this play he threw aside blank verse altogether. "Iambic pentameter," he says in the essay on the heroic ballad, "is by no means the most suitable form for the treatment of ancient Scandinavian material; this form of verse is altogether foreign to our national meters, and it is surely through a national form that the national material can find its fullest expression." The folk-tale and the ballad gave him the suggestion he needed. In *The Feast at Solhoug* and the final version of *Olaf Liljekrans* he employed the ballad meter, and this form became the basis for the verse in all his later metrical plays.

Six years intervened between *The Grouse in Justedal* and *Olaf Liljekrans*, and the revision in this case amounted almost to the writing of a new play. Fredrik Paasche in his study (*Olaf Liljekrans*, Christiania, 1909) discusses the relation of *Olaf Liljekrans* to the earlier form of the play. Three years intervened between the first and final versions of *The Warrior's Barrow*. Professor A. M. Sturtevant maintains (*Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, XII, 407 ff.) that although "the influence of Oehlenschlaeger upon both versions of *The Warrior's Barrow* is unmistakable," yet "the two versions differ so widely from each other ... that it may be assumed that ... Ibsen had begun to free himself from the thralldom of Oehlenschlaeger's romantic conception of the viking character." He points out the influence of Welhaven and Heiberg on the second version, elaborates upon the superior character-delineation, and shows in considerable detail the "inner necessity ... which brings about the change of heart in Gandalf and his warriors."

The revision of *Catiline* came twenty-five years after the original version, and consisted largely of linguistic changes. Ibsen seems never to have completely disowned this play; it has been included in all the complete editions, whereas *The Warrior's Barrow* and *Olaf Liljekrans* appear only in the first complete edition, and were even then relegated to a supplementary volume. In suggesting the revision of *Catiline*, Ibsen proposed "to make no change in the thought and ideas, but only in the language in which these are expressed; for the verses are, as

Brandes has somewhere remarked, bad,—one reason being that the book was printed from my first rough uncorrected draft." He had at that time not developed his careful craftsmanship, and sought in the revision merely to put the drama into the form which he had originally had in mind, but which at that time he had been unable to achieve. The changes that were actually made are summarized by D. A. Seip (Ibsen, *Samlede Digter Verker*, 1918, VII, 114) who quotes Halvdan Koht and Julius Elias (Ibsen, *Efterladte Skrifter*, III): "The two editions 'agree in the sequence of tenses, with a few exceptions also in the sequence of speeches, and on the whole even in the sequence of lines. The changes involve principally the poetic expression itself; after the second act they become more and more extensive, and the last two acts have been augmented with 100 lines.' ... Not infrequently there appear words and expressions which are suggestive of Ibsen's later works."

These plays now appear for the first time in English translation. A. Johnstone published in *Translations from the Norse*, by a B. S. S. (Gloucester, about 1876), an English rendering of the first act of *Catiline* and a synopsis of the last two acts. William Archer explains at length his omission of *Catiline* from his edition of Ibsen. "A great part of the interest lies in the very crudities of its style, which it would be a thankless task to reproduce in translation. Moreover, the poet impaired even its biographical value by largely rewriting it before publication. He did not make it, or attempt to make it, a better play, but he in some measure corrected its juvenility of expression. Which version, then, should a translator choose? To go back to the original would seem a deliberate disregard of the poet's wishes; while, on the other hand, the retouched version is clearly of far inferior interest. It seems advisable, therefore, to leave the play alone, as far as this edition is concerned." *Olaf Liljekrans* and *The Warrior's Barrow* were acted in English in London in 1911 and 1912 respectively, but the English renderings used in these presentations have never appeared in print.

The text of *Catiline* in the present translation is that of the revised version as given in the edition of 1906-07; the text of the other two plays is that of the edition of 1898-1902. The meters of the original have been carefully reproduced. The great difficulty of rendering the ballad and lyrical meters of Ibsen into adequate English verse has made some stylistic changes necessary, such as the substitution of masculine for feminine rhymes, and the occasional alteration of the sense in slight measure.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge my gratitude to Professor O. W. Firkins, now of *The Weekly Review*, who suggested the translating of these plays and who offered from time to time invaluable criticisms; to Professor Howard M. Jones, of the University of Texas, Professor S. B. Hustvedt, of the University of Minnesota, and Professor W. W. Lawrence, of Columbia University, who read all or parts of these translations and made many helpful suggestions; and to Professor G. P. Krapp, of Columbia University, and my wife, who were of assistance in various ways.

ANDERS ORBECK.

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Catiline: Preface

The drama *Catiline*, with which I entered upon my literary career, was written during the winter of 1848-49, that is in my twenty-first year.

I was at the time in Grimstad, under the necessity of earning with my hands the wherewithal of life and the means for instruction preparatory to my taking the entrance examinations to the university. The age was one of great stress. The February revolution, the uprisings in Hungary and elsewhere, the Slesvig war,--all this had a great effect upon and hastened my development, however immature it may have remained for some time after. I wrote ringing poems of encouragement to the Magyars, urging them for the sake of liberty and humanity to hold out in the righteous struggle against the "tyrants"; I wrote a long series of sonnets to King Oscar, containing particularly, as far as I can remember, an appeal to set aside all petty considerations and to march forthwith at the head of his army to the aid of our brothers on the outermost borders of Slesvig. Inasmuch as I now, in contrast to those times, doubt that my winged appeals would in any material degree have helped the cause of the Magyars or the Scandinavians, I consider it fortunate that they remained within the more private sphere of the manuscript. I could not, however, on more formal occasions keep from expressing myself in the impassioned spirit of my poetic effusions, which meanwhile brought me nothing--from friends or non-friends--but a questionable reward; the former greeted me as peculiarly fitted for the unintentionally droll, and the latter thought it in the highest degree strange that a young person in my subordinate position could undertake to inquire into affairs concerning which not even they themselves dared to entertain an opinion. I owe it to truth to add that my conduct at various times did not justify any great hope that society might count on an increase in me of civic virtue, inasmuch as I also, with epigrams and caricatures, fell out with many who had deserved better of me and whose friendship I in reality prized. Altogether,--while a great struggle raged on the outside, I found myself on a war-footing with the little society where I lived cramped by conditions and circumstances of life.

Such was the situation when amid the preparations for my examinations I read through Sallust's *Catiline* together with Cicero's *Catilinarian orations*. I swallowed these documents, and a few months later my drama was complete. As will be seen from my book, I did not share at that time the conception of the two ancient Roman writers respecting the character and conduct of *Catiline*, and I am even now prone to believe that there must after all have been something great and consequential in a man whom Cicero, the assiduous counsel of the majority, did

not find it expedient to engage until affairs had taken such a turn that there was no longer any danger involved in the attack. It should also be remembered that there are few individuals in history whose renown has been more completely in the hands of enemies than that of Catiline.

My drama was written during the hours of the night. The leisure hours for my study I practically had to steal from my employer, a good and respectable man, occupied however heart and soul with his business, and from those stolen study hours I again stole moments for writing verse. There was consequently scarcely anything else to resort to but the night. I believe this is the unconscious reason that almost the entire action of the piece transpires at night.

Naturally a fact so incomprehensible to my associates as that I busied myself with the writing of plays had to be kept secret; but a twenty-year old poet can hardly continue thus without anybody being privy to it, and I confided therefore to two friends of my own age what I was secretly engaged upon.

The three of us pinned great expectations on *Catiline* when it had been completed. First and foremost it was now to be copied in order to be submitted under an assumed name to the theater in Christiania, and furthermore it was of course to be published. One of my faithful and trusting friends undertook to prepare a handsome and legible copy of my uncorrected draft, a task which he performed with such a degree of conscientiousness that he did not omit even a single one of the innumerable dashes which I in the heat of composition had liberally interspersed throughout wherever the exact phrase did not for the moment occur to me. The second of my friends, whose name I here mention since he is no longer among the living, Ole C. Schulerud, at that time a student, later a lawyer, went to Christiania with the transcript. I still remember one of his letters in which he informed me that *Catiline* had now been submitted to the theater; that it would soon be given a performance,--about that there could naturally be no doubt inasmuch as the management consisted of very discriminating men; and that there could be as little doubt that the booksellers of the town would one and all gladly pay a round fee for the first edition, the main point being, he thought, only to discover the one who would make the highest bid.

After a long and tense period of waiting there began to appear in the meantime a few difficulties. My friend had the piece returned from the management with a particularly polite but equally peremptory rejection. He now took the manuscript from bookseller to bookseller; but all to a man expressed themselves to the same effect as the theatrical management. The highest bidder demanded so and so much to publish the piece without any fee.

All this, however, was far from lessening my friend's belief in victory. He wrote to the contrary that it was best even so; I should come forward myself as the publisher of my drama; the necessary funds he would advance me; the profits we should divide in consideration of his undertaking the business end of the deal, except the proof-reading, which he regarded as superfluous in view of the handsome and legible manuscript the printers had to follow. In a later letter he declared that, considering these promising prospects for the future, he contemplated abandoning his studies in order to consecrate himself completely to the publishing of my works; two or three plays a year, he thought, I should with ease be able to write, and according to a calculation of probabilities he had made he had discovered that with our surplus we should at no distant time be able to undertake the journey so often agreed upon or discussed, through Europe and the Orient.

My journey was for the time being limited to Christiania. I arrived there in the beginning of the spring of 1850 and just previous to my arrival *Catiline* had

appeared in the bookstalls. The drama created a stir and awakened considerable interest among the students, but the critics dwelt largely on the faulty verses and thought the book in other respects immature. A more appreciative judgment was uttered from but one single quarter, but this expression came from a man whose appreciation has always been dear to me and weighty and whom I herewith offer my renewed gratitude. Not very many copies of the limited edition were sold; my friend had a good share of them in his custody, and I remember that one evening when our domestic arrangements heaped up for us insurmountable difficulties, this pile of printed matter was fortunately disposed of as waste paper to a huckster. During the days immediately following we lacked none of the prime necessities of life.

During my sojourn at home last summer and particularly since my return here there loomed up before me more clearly and more sharply than ever before the kaleidoscopic scenes of my literary life. Among other things I also brought out *Catiline*. The contents of the book as regards details I had almost forgotten; but by reading it through anew I found that it nevertheless contained a great deal which I could still acknowledge, particularly if it be remembered that it is my first undertaking. Much, around which my later writings center, the contradiction between ability and desire, between will and possibility, the intermingled tragedy and comedy in humanity and in the individual,--appeared already here in vague foreshadowings, and I conceived therefore the plan of preparing a new edition, a kind of jubilee-edition,--a plan to which my publisher with his usual readiness gave his approval.

But it was naturally not enough simply to reprint without further ado the old original edition, for this is, as already pointed out, nothing but a copy of my imperfect and uncorrected concept or of the very first rough draft. In the rereading of it I remembered clearly what I originally had had in mind, and I saw moreover that the form practically nowhere gave a satisfactory rendering of what I had wished.

I determined therefore to revise this drama of my youth in a way in which I believe even at that time I should have been able to do it had the time been at my disposal and the circumstances more favorable for me. The ideas, the conceptions, and the development of the whole, I have not on the other hand altered. The book has remained the original; only now it appears in a complete form.

With this in mind I pray that my friends in Scandinavia and elsewhere will receive it; I pray that they will receive it as a greeting from me at the close of a period which to me has been full of changes and rich in contradictions. Much of what I twenty-five years ago dreamed has been realized, even though not in the manner nor as soon as I then hoped. Yet I believe now that it was best for me thus; I do not wish that any of that which lies between should have been untried, and if I

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