5. Peer Gynt: The Missing Years

Peer Gynt (Oscar Apfel, Morosco, 1915)
Peer Gynts Jugend and *Peer Gynts Wanderjahre und Tod*
(Victor Barnowsky, Richard Oswald-Film, 1919)

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This chapter examines the insertion of sequences that depict the missing years in the life of the eponymous hero of Henrik Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* (1867) into early film adaptations directed by Oscar Apfel and Victor Barnowsky and released in 1915 (USA) and 1919 (Germany) respectively. Ibsen describes these missing years, which transpire between the action of acts three and four in the dramatic poem very briefly, but they take on a surprisingly central role in these cinematic remediations. My focus is thus on what film theorist Robert Stam calls the "amplification" of elements in a hypotext (2000, 66). Both Apfel and Barnowsky use elements from popular film genres, such as the western and the colonial adventure, and both activate racial stereotypes in order to domesticate Ibsen's text for American and German audiences.

Before moving on to examine how the creators of the two *Peer Gynt* film adaptations have amplified Peer's activities during his missing years, it is useful to review how they are described in the dramatic poem itself. At the end of Act 3, we learn that Peer is leaving Norway, headed for "The sea – and ocean [...] And much further still" (Ibsen 1995, 72).[1] When we next see Peer, he has become a middle-aged man who reflects over his past experiences. He has been

1 "Mod Havet [...]. Og længer endda" (Ibsen 2007, 595).

a wealthy ship owner in Charleston (Ibsen 1995, 77; Ibsen 2007, 602), sold enslaved Africans, and exported alternately Hindu idols and Christian missionaries to China (Ibsen 1995, 78; Ibsen 2007, 603). He also recounts that he established himself as a plantation owner with enslaved workers (Ibsen 1995, 78; Ibsen 2007, 605). In the auction scene in the fifth act, after Peer has returned home as an old man, we learn that he had worked as a gold miner in San Francisco (Ibsen 1995, 143; Ibsen 2007, 703). Immediately after, as he peels an onion in one of the dramatic poem's most iconic soliloquies, he finds layers containing both his "gold-digger self" and the time he spent as a Hudson Bay fur trapper (Ibsen 1995, 145; Ibsen 2007, 705). And finally, when pleading his case for being considered a sinner to the Thin Person, Peer again brings up trafficking in enslaved people and exporting images of Brahma to China as among the worst of his transgressions (Ibsen 1995, 164; Ibsen 2007, 736). Ibsen describes none of these episodes in any more detail, and they remain outside the diegesis of the dramatic poem, on what literary theorist Gérard Genette (1980) calls the hypodiegetic level of the literary text. They are in essence kernels of larger stories inserted into the main narrative through only the briefest of references. Their very brevity and obscurity in Ibsen's original make it all the more interesting to observe how fully they are amplified in these two film adaptations.

Oscar Apfel's Adaptation: Peer Gynt as Immigrant

Oscar Apfel (1878–1938), a prolific director and occasional collaborator with his more famous counterpart, Cecil B. DeMille, directed *Peer Gynt* at a watershed moment, both in film history and in United States history more generally. As Black Studies scholar Cedric J. Robinson observes, 1915 famously saw the appearance of cinema's first blockbuster, D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, which coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the American Civil War and inspired a nationwide revival of the Ku Klux Klan (see also Sandberg in this volume). He further argues that 1915 "was a moment during which the mapping of American culture was re-inscribed, when the contours of the social practices which came to characterise twentieth-century American society

were fixed" (1997, 164). The American economy was growing exponentially, transitioning from an agrarian to an industrial society that rivalled the output of the most advanced European nations (ibid., 165). Not surprisingly then, Apfel focuses on the pursuit of wealth as the dominant theme in his adaptation of Ibsen's dramatic poem, but it is a pursuit carried out at the expense of non-white Others. While it comes nowhere near the overt white supremacist propaganda of *The Birth of a Nation*, this American adaptation of *Peer Gynt* has to be understood as part of the broader social context in which that ideology flourished. Film scholar Victoria Williams points out that cinema emerged as a new medium during a time when biological determinism influenced the prevailing scientific and popular views of race and argues that this, in conjunction with the chronological proximity of the Civil War, contributed to the widespread cinematic portrayal of African Americans (and, I would argue, by extension other racialised Others) as inferior to whites (2017, 1).

In the Apfel film, events that occur between Act 3 and Act 4 of *Peer Gynt* play a major structural role in the narrative. The three inserted sequences primarily comment on America rather than reflecting intertextually on Ibsen's dramatic poem. They introduce exciting intrigue into the narrative, in addition to illustrating Peer's moral ambiguity. Eirik Frisvold Hanssen describes Apfel's film as:

> a burlesque of Ibsen's story adapted to US locations, historical events, ethnic diversity, and conflict typical of many other instances of contemporary popular US cinema: the treatment of native Americans, the slave trade, and the system of law enforcement. The liberties taken with the plot in this film in particular illustrate the conflict arising from the attempt to combine highbrow cultural traditions with a popular cultural medium. (2017, 169)

As Hanssen suggests, one factor that may have influenced Apfel's decision to concentrate so much on the missing years in America was the questionable cultural legitimacy of the early film industry as a whole. Dominique Brégent-Heald explains the phenomenon:

> In light of ongoing pressures to regulate and/or censor films, various U.S. film companies adapted [...] renowned literary works as part of a broader attempt to elevate the cultural legitimacy of the motion picture

> industry. An added benefit to this strategy was increased profits; picturizations of notable plays and novels appealed to a middle-class clientele without alienating working-class patronage. Most of these early productions were adaptations of well-known works of fiction that took place in North American settings. (2010, 146)

The opening title indicates that *Peer Gynt* is a work "by Henrik Ibsen", who would have been known to educated audiences. *Peer Gynt* itself, however, was likely far less well known to American viewers than other Ibsen plays, having only been performed for the first time there in 1905, and then only in Norwegian (IbsenStage). While the first reel of Apfel's film opens with a reference to Norwegian folk tales, and Norway is presented as a pastiche of old-world folk culture, Apfel devotes significant screen time to Peer's immigrant experience in America, perhaps in an overt attempt to domesticate the narrative for American audiences.

Sadly, the second reel of the film has been lost, but it appears likely that the amplifications of Peer's "missing years" first appear in the third reel; an intertitle announces that "5 years later — Peer has traveled to America and become a trapper".[2] From this we can surmise that he has become an immigrant, allowing Apfel to tap into one of the most dominant narratives of the American experience. The ensuing sequence, which borrows from the western genre, depicts a rivalry between Peer and an unnamed Native American (who appears to be a white actor in redface) for the affections of the so-called "Half-Breed" Notanah. In the sequence, Notanah betrays Peer and then she and her lover steal from him; the two men confront each other in a knife fight that ends with Peer killing his rival. Other Native Americans pursue Peer, but he escapes after killing a second man.

The sequence activates a number of racially determined cinematic tropes that are also gendered. Peer, who among other things

2 The second reel probably contains Peer's encounter with the trolls, given that he meets what appears to be the Woman in Green after returning home to Norway in the last reel. In *Stage to Screen: Theatrical Method from Garrick to Griffith*, A. Nicholas Vardac references a contemporary review of the film that critiques the now missing scene of Aase's death, which also must have been part of the second reel (1987, 219).

demonstrates mastery of trapping, knife fighting, and canoeing, embodies "male-centered narratives that celebrated elemental justice, individualism, physical prowess, and virile action, considered to be key elements in early twentieth-century notions of ideal white frontier masculinity" (Brégent-Heald 2010, 161). As a rival for the affections of Notanah, he is held up against her nameless Native American lover. Michael Hilger argues that there are two main stereotypes of Native American men in American cinema, the "noble red man" and the "savage", noting that the "Western always measures the goodness of the Noble Red Man and the badness of the Savage by the way these character types react to the superior white characters, never by their intrinsic nature" (1995, 3). Notanah's lover is clearly meant to be an example of the latter, and in contrast to him Peer comes across as an ideal white frontiersman. Notably, the question of whether it is in fact Peer, as a European interloper, who is stealing from the Native Americans in the first place, rather than vice versa, is never raised in the film.

As a so-called "half breed" woman, Notanah has special status. According to Gretchen M. Bataille and Bob Hicks, compared to "pure" Native Americans the "half breed" was conceived of as "even more vicious and more dishonest, having inherited the worst traits of both Indian and Anglo" (Bataille and Hicks 1990, 10; see also Hilger 1995, 37–38). We see this stereotype clearly manifested in Notanah's betrayal of Peer. In direct contrast to Notanah, Solvejg is marked as Christian and fully white, and thus ostensibly "pure". Notanah, supposedly inherently duplicitous because of her mixed racial status, also foreshadows the appearance of the belly dancing North African Anitra (unnamed in Apfel's adaptation) later in the film, and both women serve as foils to Solvejg.[3]

3 It should be noted that both women are played by white actors. A more thorough discussion of the Anitra character falls outside the scope of this chapter, but as Daniel Pike points out, the "seductive belly dancer stereotype" is, along with the Arab "sheik", "one of the oldest stereotypes in filmmaking", dating back to the 1890s (2017, 33). Apfel uses a split screen image with Solvejg at the cabin and Peer abandoned in the desert after Anitra has stolen his horse and jewels to underscore the stereotypical demonisation of the Arab woman in contrast with the ostensibly "pure" white woman.

A new intertitle introduces Peer as a slave runner a further five years later. This sequence, which borrows from the gangster genre, focuses on an attempt to arrest Peer for trading illegally in enslaved people. A female secret service agent is tipped off about Peer's planned meeting at a hotel and sets up a romantic assignation with him onboard his slave trading vessel in order to entrap him. In the ensuing melee, Peer flees rather improbably through the hold, where numerous black men are being held, and jumps overboard, escaping to land; the question of why Peer manages to escape while the other men remain imprisoned is unresolved in the film, suggesting that the sequence serves primarily as a spectacle of the enslaved black body. Notably, the actors portraying the enslaved men are not white actors in blackface, a practice that dominated the film industry at the time, but African American actors (Gipson and Martinez 2017, 113). They are mostly shirtless men clad only in striped pajama pants, and their bodies dominate the frame. After Peer escapes, the film cuts away to a scene depicting Solvejg, and we see church bells ringing and Solvejg on her knees praying, presumably for Peer's soul. He is thus presented in a way that again prompts the viewer to sympathise with him, this time as a rakish crook for whom we cheer as he evades capture.

The third and final sequence from America presents Peer, now ensconced as a plantation owner, hosting a party where he flirts with a woman who is accompanied by another man. Viewers are reminded of white domination over black bodies by the insertion of a group of black musicians who play at the party and a black maid who tells her white mistress (the "flirt") that the dalliance with Peer has prompted a duel set to take place the next morning. This results in Peer shooting the other man dead.[4] This plantation sequence echoes what Williams describes as the "mini genre" of the plantation romance, which featured loyal and happy black servants who, according to Williams, might have been "intended to soothe white anxieties about social

4 While the duel itself is missing in this heavily deteriorated section of the film, we see it clearly in a flashback in the fifth act.

change". She argues that "by depicting African Americans as inept, childlike, and uncomprehending, white audiences could retain comforting feelings of superiority" and further that such depictions "offered white audiences assurances that a stable social order based on racial hierarchy could exist in which all participants were content" (Williams 2017, 4). This parallels Peer's improbable claims in Ibsen's text about the slaves he owned:

> They throve, filled out to such a measure
> it was, to them and me, a pleasure.
> Yes sir; without exaggeration
> I treated them as father, friend
> (Ibsen 1995, 79)[5]

Viewers are thus subtly guided to dismiss the inhumane consequences of the spectacle of the incarcerated black bodies in the previous sequence, and the film ultimately reflects a broader cultural discourse that argued that enslaved Africans were somehow better off under white control. Like the broader forces of white hegemony in the United States, Peer escapes without consequences for his immoral actions, regardless of what role he plays – lowly frontiersman, up-and-coming slave runner, or wealthy plantation owner (see Figs. 1–3).

After the plantation romance sequence, a cut to another intertitle signals that a further ten years have passed and that Peer, for no particular reason, is now on the Barbary Coast of Northwest Africa, and the film picks up the action of Ibsen's text at the point where he steals the robes and horse of the prophet (Ibsen 1995, 95; Ibsen 2007, 627). Apfel thus essentially replaces the entire first part of the fourth act of Ibsen's text, which consists of Peer's conversation with his four international companions, with the sequences from America. It might be argued that this is an instance of cinematic "showing, not telling", given that Ibsen's Peer tells his companions about his experiences in North America in

5 "De trivedes, blev blanke, fede, / saa det var mig og dem en Glæde. / Ja, jeg tør sige uden Skryden, / jeg handled mod dem som en Faer –" (Ibsen 2007, 605).

Figs. 1-3. Peer (Cyril Maude) as frontiersman, slave runner, and plantation owner in *Peer Gynt* (1915). Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

that conversation, but the content of Apfel's added sequences is so extensive and differs so much from what Ibsen has Peer recount in his conversation that it needs to be examined as original material. In these three amplified episodes, Apfel constructs a clear narrative of development, with Peer rising in social and economic status in each sequence, at each instance through the overt exploitation of people of colour.

From among the many narrative possibilities latent in Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, Apfel chose to develop a classic, linear "rags-to-riches" story as a meaningful way to structure the adaptation for American audiences. In a study of the "rags-to-riches" trope, Manuel Peña documents how deeply rooted it is in American culture, calling it "one of the classic neo-myths of American folklore" (2012, 60). He explains that:

> Its outlines were drawn as early as the Puritan days, although it found its first champion in Benjamin Franklin [....] For Franklin, as for his successors in the gospel of success-through-personal initiative, material enrichment was the reward for adhering to the tenets of the Protestant creed: obey God's primary mandate to humanity—to work hard—but always in the spirit of service to his Lord and the public good. (Peña 2012, 60)

There is a certain logic in connecting Ibsen's text to this narrative. Indeed, Peer himself suggests it in the opening of Ibsen's fourth act, saying:

> My friends;
> consider how my life's progressed.
> What was I when I first went west?
> A hard-up lad with empty hands
> (Ibsen 1995, 76)[6]

Yet it works only up to a point. If Peer is to be understood as an immigrant, it makes sense that the first three acts, which are set in the "old country", would function as a kind of vaguely folkloristic and prelapsarian backdrop for the more specifically American story of Peer's rise

6 "Kjære Venner; / betænk mit Levnetsløb forresten. / Hvorledes kom jeg først til Vesten? / Som fattig Karl med tomme Hænder" (Ibsen 2007, 602).

to wealth. The morality of Peer's actions in America, however, remains an open question. Because the film activates tropes and conventions of popular cinematic genres, in which the protagonist is construed as good, the viewer is prompted to interpret Peer positively. The film also reproduces standard American cinematic conventions that devalue non-white characters and thus implicitly lessen the impact of Peer's mistreatment of them for the viewer, who is presumed to share this ideological position that privileges the white protagonist.

After arriving in Africa, however, the film seems to stray from the rags-to-riches narrative. Apfel presents Peer's persona in the first scenes on the Barbary coast in a way that would have made him legible to American audiences in 1915 as a wealthy "robber baron", an unethical business tycoon. One could argue that Peer has reached the pinnacle of financial success, and that this film, as a rags-to-riches tale, could have ended at this point. Yet Apfel sticks to the geographic trajectory of the hypotext, if not its existential exploration, and has Peer continue on into the perceived incomprehensibility of Africa after his four companions steal his yacht. The last we see of him before the fifth act commences is that he is wandering alone in the desert, still wearing the robes of the prophet and bewildered by Anitra's betrayal.

The final reel of the film is introduced with the intertitle "Ten Years Later: Peer has tired of his travels and decides to return to his native land". This is a strikingly unconvincing motivation for the action of the plot. One contemporary reviewer blamed Ibsen for the difficulty in maintaining a convincing movie plot, writing rather ambivalently:

> The ways in which the peculiar brain of Ibsen may be spread on the screen are so limited that scenario writer and director are apt to flounder about for a while and then strike out for shore. But as both scenario writer and director, Mr. Apfel has found a way to make almost a continuous, coherent story out of Peer Gynt's allegorical vagaries, and an impressive picture is the result. (Thew 1915, 66)

Not originally intended for performance, Ibsen's dramatic poem is, in addition to being an exploration of national identity, more of an exis-

tential journey than a physical one, a point that seems to have escaped the reviewer. By returning home again to the pure (white) Solvejg, Peer reinforces the dominant social order for American audiences.

Through the insertion of hypodiegetic sequences depicting the non-white bodies that Peer exploits in his quest for wealth and power, Apfel strengthens a message of specifically white American exceptionalism in the film. Peer rises to wealth at their expense, and his mistreatment of them does not undermine his redemption. While not a simple rags-to-riches narrative, Apfel's *Peer Gynt* artfully encapsulates and activates the same complex relationships between wealth, race, and faith that continue to dominate the US today.[7]

Victor Barnowsky's Adaptation: Peer Gynt as Coloniser

Victor Barnowsky's (1875–1952) *Peer Gynt* also shifts attention away from major scenes in Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* and instead explores hypodiegetic narratives, not only from between the third and fourth acts but also from Peer's life before the first act. It appears to follow Ibsen's text less closely than Apfel's film, although this is difficult to determine because the extant print was at some point significantly shortened by almost two thirds of its runtime, and the full original is now considered lost. Barnowsky inserts a long opening sequence or prequel depicting Peer's childhood and the downfall of his father, Jon Gynt, and then rather briefly presents Peer's journey to America and rise to wealth mining for gold in California. Most notably, Barnowsky devotes significant screen time to Peer's experiences as a slave trader in Africa, though not, it should be noted, to his time as a slave owner running a plantation in America. It seems likely that this is because Barnowsky's main interest in adapting Ibsen's text lies in the African setting.

7 A similar case could be made regarding Peer's exploitative treatment of women in the film, although this is complicated by the female federal agent and Anitra, both of whom almost get the better of Peer.

This lack of fidelity has nothing to do with insufficient familiarity with the hypotext. As director of the prestigious Lessing Theatre in Berlin from 1913 to 1924, Barnowsky chose *Peer Gynt* as his very first production for the company, receiving widespread critical acclaim for it. Although *Peer Gynt* arrived late to the German stage, it virtually exploded in popularity there after 1910, and Barnowsky was particularly central to its dissemination (Hanssen 2018, 199). Heiko Uecker speculates that *Peer Gynt* took on special significance for the German public during and immediately after the Great War "as a joyful, helpful message to a people at war" (1985, 167).[8] None of the sources I have consulted indicate that Barnowsky explored the missing years of Ibsen's dramatic poem in his many *Peer Gynt* stage productions.[9] The fact that he went on to restage the dramatic poem numerous times at the Lessing Theatre in the years up to 1924 attests to his deep familiarity with and commitment to Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* at the time he produced his film adaptation. The significant contrast to his stage versions makes the amplifications in Barnowsky's film adaptation all the more striking.

Produced in 1918 during the Great War and distributed in two parts the following year, *Peer Gynts Jugend* [Peer Gynt's Youth] and *Peer Gynts Wanderjahre und Tod* [Peer Gynt's Migratory Years and Death], this harshly criticised adaptation became Barnowsky's first and last foray into filmmaking. Thor Holt argues that Barnowsky's film fits into a broader attempt on the part of the German film industry to support the war effort in a manner similar to the theatrical adaptations discussed by Uecker, and that "[i]ntended or not, this adaptation by star producer Richard Oswald, born Ornstein and rumored to have taken his professional last name after the character Oswald in Henrik Ibsen's *Ghosts* (1881), resonated with attempts to bolster

8 "[…] als eine erfreuliche hilfreiche Botschaft für ein Volk im Krieg […]."

9 Among other sources, I checked the lists of characters for each of Barnowsky's various stage productions of *Peer Gynt* to see if there are any names related to Peer's "missing years". See the entries for these productions in IbsenStage: ibsenstage.hf.uio.no/pages/contributor/444813.

national sentiments in World War I" (2019, xviii). Holt documents a shift in the early twentieth-century German reception of Ibsen from an interest in the social problem plays to earlier works, and *Peer Gynt* in particular; the dramatic poem developed into a kind of national epos for Germany during the first decades of the twentieth century, and Peer's circular journey out into the world and back again functions allegorically to justify the growing focus on the importance of *Heimat* and an increasing xenophobia that would reach its peak during the German Third Reich (ibid., xviii).

Barnowsky, then, "domesticates" *Peer Gynt* for a very different audience than Apfel, and the film needs to be understood within its specific historical context. While it may well have been initially conceived as a means of generating nationalistic support for the German war effort, it can be linked to a broader preoccupation with the European colonial enterprise. German colonial activity in Africa began in 1884 with the Berlin Conference and the ensuing "Scramble for Africa" and effectively ended with the German loss of the Great War and the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II – the emperor – in 1918. Germany was formally stripped of its African colonies in the Versailles Treaty of 1919. It thus appears that Barnowsky uses the sequence depicting Peer's activity in America as a mere pretext for the real heart (of darkness) of the film, Peer's imperial project in Africa.

Barnowsky structures the film explicitly around a narrative of empire. The question of empire arises in the opening sequences of the film, in which Barnowsky presents the viewer with two separate hypodiegetic imperial visions of Peer. In the first, Peer as a child imagines his adult self being married to the king's daughter. In the second, Peer, now a young man, imagines that he himself is king. These build on passages in Ibsen's dramatic poem, but the notion of empire is taken much more literally and is connected later in the film with the contemporary German context of empire and colonialism. In Ibsen's text, Peer's dreams of being an emperor essentially express his lack of connection to reality – his delusions of grandeur, as it

were.[10] In Barnowsky's *Peer Gynt*, this also appears to be the case in the early fantasy sequences, but the notion of empire takes a strikingly realistic turn in the latter half of the film once Peer arrives in Africa.

Roughly thirty minutes into the extant version of the film, after the prelude from Peer's childhood and depictions of the action of the first three acts, we see Peer signed up as a sailor on a large vessel where he gets in trouble for lying around and fantasising. An intertitle asks "O, Peer, where is your empire?" ("O, Peer, waar is je Keizerrijk?") and the film immediately cuts to an idyllic image of Solvejg and her goats.[11] It is unclear whether Peer himself actually realises that Solvejg is the answer to that question at such an early point in the narrative; it is only near the end of Ibsen's text that he understands this (Ibsen 1995, 147; Ibsen 2007, 706). In Barnowsky's adaptation, the sequence serves to establish the search for a supposedly external empire that in reality lies hidden at home as the major organising theme of the film.

We next encounter Peer working in a bar that caters to gold miners in a loose reference to Ibsen's text. There is a spectacular brawl and Peer causes a distraction that creates an opportunity to steal the equipment he needs in order to set up as a gold miner himself. Soon after, he surreptitiously claims a huge chunk of gold that allows him to establish himself as a slave trader. We then see him kitted out like a European colonial overlord – complete with pith helmet and parasol – on a ship that is presumably on the coast of Africa taking on a cargo of enslaved black people. Barnowsky thus moves very quickly through the North American material latent in Ibsen's text and shifts the focus of the film to Africa instead; North America serves only as background – a source of wealth to support Peer's activity in Africa.

10 We first see this motif in one of Peer's monologues from the first act, in which he fantasises: "The women curtsey and each soul admires / Emperor Peer Gynt and his thousands of squires. / [...] / England's great nobles and England's great king / Rise up from high table at Peer's riding in" (Ibsen 1995, 19–20); "Kvinderne nejer sig. Alle kan kjende / Kejser Peer Gynt og hans tusende Svende. / [...] / Engellands Stormænd og Engellands Kejser, / der Peer rider frem, sig fra Højbordet rejser" (Ibsen 2007, 504–505).

11 The intertitles in the version of the film I had access to are in Dutch; this and all other translations from the Dutch are my own.

At this point, Barnowsky introduces a series of events with no direct source in Ibsen's text. After two enslaved men escape from Peer's ship, Barnowsky cuts to a sequence entitled "Caravan of Death" ("De Doodenkaravaan"), in which a parade of enslaved people bearing heavy burdens passes and one man is tied to a stake. An intertitle comments, "The hand of the slave trader rests heavily on the recalcitrant."[12] This is followed by a sequence that aims to depict the supposedly duplicitous nature of the Africans whom Peer enslaves. The intertitle states, "Through piety, Peer Gynt silences the voice of conscience."[13] We see Peer in clerical attire and attended by nuns as he surveys a group of black Africans in the background; as soon as he passes by, the Africans raise their fists in defiance. The sequence is both brief and ambiguous. The intertitle sets "piety" up against "conscience", suggesting that Peer uses religion to justify his mistreatment of the Africans (presumably the reason for his pangs of conscience). Peer cuts a ridiculous figure as a missionary and the Africans seem justified in their anger, making it all the more difficult for the viewer to identify where the director's sympathy lies. The implication is that Peer is not really where he belongs.

Whereas non-white bodies in Apfel's adaptation produced associations with slavery in America, in Barnowsky's film, non-white bodies connote colonialism. As Krista O'Donnell explains, "Germans drew on popular readings of scientific and literary representations of race and empire. In ordinary Germans' minds, encounters with Africans took on the tenor of 'colonial contacts' and informed their understanding of Germanness and empire" (2005, 42). Notions of the domestic (the *Heimat*) and the foreign (the colony) are explicitly gendered and racially inflected in the German colonial enterprise:

> Among other striking differences, the image of Heimat was widely perceived as female, whereas, statistically, German colonialists were overwhelmingly male and symbolically the colonies were a male space. The

12 "Zwaar rust de hand van den slavenhandelaar op den weerspannige."

13 "Door vroomheid legt Peer Gynt het zwijgen op aan de stem van het geweten."

> Heimat also appeared as indisputably German and white, while the colonies represented the exotic, other, and nonwhite. (O'Donnell 2005, 44)

Barnowsky's insertion of the text of Solvejg's song in the intertitle and a shot of her sitting in front of the cabin Peer built for her with her spinning wheel at her side at the point in the narrative when Anitra has betrayed Peer firmly establishes the feminine purity of the *Heimat* in contrast to the perceived treachery of the colonies.

After the digression into slave trading in Africa, an intertitle rather inexplicably tells the viewer that "not satisfied with his success, Peer sets off again in search of his empire".[14] At this point Barnowsky's film starts to intersect more recognisably with the action in Ibsen's text; Peer finds the emperor's clothes and horse and has encounters with Anitra and Begriffenfeldt, all of which are key elements in the fourth act of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*.

After being abandoned by Anitra, a new intertitle tells the viewer that Peer "goes in search of his empire again and decides to travel to Egypt as an explorer in order to become the emperor of the researchers".[15] While this is technically no longer an episode from Peer's "missing years", thematically it relates to the question of colonialism and empire in important ways. Peer meets Begriffenfeldt alone in the desert, who promptly crowns him "emperor of the realm of the researchers" ("den Keizer het Rijk der Navorschers") and not, as in Ibsen's text, "emperor of the interpreters" or "emperor of the self".[16] This alteration appears to reference the development of the emerging scientific field of archaeology, and Egyptology in particular; Germany was in direct competition with Great Britain and other nations in a race to discover

14 "Niet tevreden met zijn success, gaat Peer weder op weg, op zoek naar zijn Keizerrijk."

15 "Peer Gynt gaat weer op zoek naar zijn Keizerrijk en besluit als naturronderzoeker naar Egypte te reizen, om Keizer van de Navorschers te worden."

16 John Northam mistranslates "Fortolkernes Kejser" (Ibsen 2007, 654 – literally "emperor of the interpreters" – as "the prophesied Emperor" (Ibsen 1995, 114). Northam's "Self's Emperor" (Ibsen 1995, 123) for "Selvets Kejser" (Ibsen 2007, 669) is more naturally rendered as "emperor of the self".

Figs. 4-6. Peer (Heinz Salfner) as slave trader, missionary, and researcher in *Peer Gynts Wanderjahre und Tod* (1918). Courtesy of the EYE Filmmuseum.

and claim important antiquities. These fields have come under criticism in recent years for their complicity in colonial exploitation (see for example Lydon and Rizvi 2010). Barnowsky thus in short order has Peer take on three of the most powerful roles that Europeans played in their attempt to subjugate and colonise Africa, namely the slave trader, the missionary, and the researcher (see Figs. 4–6).

In *Imperial Projections: Screening the German Colonies*, film scholar Wolfgang Fuhrmann documents a rich body of cinematic representations of Germany's colonial history, arguing that the German colonial endeavour held a central place in the popular imagination during the early twentieth century, and even beyond 1919, when Germany's role as a colonial power effectively ended (2017, 267). He emphasises the obvious but almost entirely overlooked fact that the development of early cinema coincided with late imperial colonialism and that the two cultural phenomena are in some ways inextricably linked (ibid., 1). Moreover, Fuhrmann argues that "[b]y watching films from the colonies, viewers participated in colonial rule, conquest, racism and salvage ethnography, as well as in virtual travelling, urbanism, moral uplift, visual spectacle and wildlife protection" (ibid., 2). Early German fiction films, in particular, "offered an identification with the white hero" and "[t]hrough their nationwide distribution the films joined the official discourse of war propaganda by creating an ideological bond between the colonies and the German Heimat" (ibid., 20). Although Fuhrmann does not refer to Barnowsky's *Peer Gynt*, I argue that it shares a number of important similarities with the films that are the main focus of his work.

Just as Apfel's *Peer Gynt* was domesticated to suit particularly American preoccupations with race, Barnowsky's *Peer Gynt* represents another kind of domestication that addresses particularly German preoccupations with empire. Like Peer, the newly forged nation of Germany essentially failed in its quest for empire. Peer's ultimate return home and salvation through the love of Solvejg thus provide a reassuring narrative of redemption, and his path back to Solvejg is remarkably unhindered by any of the existential hurdles that Ibsen's Peer faces. Barnowsky seems to suggest that German colonial expansion was, like Peer's adventures, a

misguided external search for the riches that remained hidden at home all along. Barnowsky thus remoulds Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* into a paean to the *Heimat* in contrast to what might be viewed as an ill-conceived attempt at global imperial dominance on the part of Germany.

Conclusion

It is notable that the kind of "amplified" adaptation we have seen in the films by Apfel and Barnowsky is extremely rare in the long and complex production history of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*. Other adapters have most often chosen quite different strategies. These include rearranging the sequence of episodes, significant cutting of scenes, relocations in time and setting, substantial changes to the cast of characters, and even using multiple actors in one production to play various aspects of Peer, as in the critically acclaimed stagings directed by Peter Stein in 1971 and Erik Ulfsby in 2018.

There has certainly been no lack of experimentation with Ibsen's dramatic poem, yet none of the major productions discussed by Frederik J. Marker and Lise-Lone Marker in their seminal study of early Ibsen stage production history contain amplifications of Peer's "missing years". Marker and Marker (2005) cover the most important international productions, from (among others) the premiere in Christiania in 1876 to Ingmar Bergman's existentialist adaptation in Malmö in 1957 to Peter Stein's spectacular Berlin production from 1971. While there may be some exceptions among the more than 3,000 *Peer Gynt*s produced between 1876 and the present that are registered in the IbsenStage performance database, I know of no major stage productions that amplify Peer's "missing years". Nor does this kind of amplification appear as a strategy in contemporary adaptations of *Peer Gynt* to the novel genre, such as Terje Holtet Larsen's *Peer Gynt-versjonen* (The Peer Gynt Version, 2003) or Atle Næss' *Innersvinger* (Inside Tracks, 2002), or in the two major television productions, Bentein Baardson's Norwegian *Peer Gynt* from 1993 and Uwe Janson's German *Peer Gynt* from 2006.

In fact, while experimental adaptations of *Peer Gynt* abound in many different media, I have found only two other remediations of the text that amplify the missing years between the third and fourth acts,

namely Per Opøien and Arne Øverland's comic strip *Peer Gynt* from 1970 and Geir Moen and David Zane Mairowitz's graphic novel adaptation of *Peer Gynt* from 2014.[17] Notably, both of these Norwegian adaptations are comics, which, like silent cinema, is a multimodal medium that combines image, sequence, and text. One can only speculate as to why amplification suggests itself as a strategy for adapting *Peer Gynt* in such specific (and quite different) cultural and historical contexts. It may be that the sequential breaks in the visual narrative brought about by the intertitles in silent films and the gutters between frames in comics serve to divide the adaptations into units that lend themselves to amplification; the inherently interrupted sequences of these media contrast with the flow of both stage performance, where the breaks between acts are far less frequent, and mainstream contemporary cinema, which tends to strive for the illusion of continuity.

In this chapter, I have suggested that in the case of America, Apfel constructed a narrative of white innocence and exceptionalism during a time of racial unrest, while in the case of Germany, Barnowsky created a narrative that underscores the superiority of the *Heimat* over the colony during a time of geopolitical losses for the nation. While none of these themes can be said to be central issues in Ibsen's *Peer Gynt,* they are not entirely absent either: Ibsen satirises them in hypodiegetic narrative "kernels" that Apfel and Barnowsky chose to explore in much more depth through amplification. Ironically, these directors thus appear to embrace some of the very positions that Ibsen satirised in the dramatic poem. In doing so, they inserted potent references to predominant cinematic genres and prevalent racial stereotypes in order to make Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* relevant to specific non-Norwegian audiences.

17 A facsimile of the Opøien and Øverland comic is available at the National Library of Norway. Mairowitz and Moen's graphic novel *Peer Gynt* was published by Minuskel forlag in 2014. Also see my *Ibsen's* Peer Gynt *and the Production of Meaning* (Oslo: Acta Ibseniana, 2014) and "Ibsen som tegneseriefigur: Fra Sfinksen til Dovregubben" (*Kunst og Kultur* no. 1, 2015) respectively for analyses of these comics adaptations of *Peer Gynt*.

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