

“The future belongs to crowds.” -Don DeLillo

Henrik Ibsen

Critics have titled Henrik Ibsen “the father of modern drama,” and students of the theatre would be hard-pressed to dispute this claim. Born in Norway in 1828 Ibsen radically redefined Western dramatic form during his life. His catalog of twenty-five plays showcases Ibsen’s innovation and range, stemming from 1848’s *Catalina* to 1899’s *When We Dead Awaken*.

1850 saw the first production of one of Ibsen’s plays, *The Burial Mound*. While the work attracted little public attention it did lead to Ibsen’s appointment as resident dramatist and stage manager at the Norwegian National Theatre in Bergen. While there he wrote seven plays and assisted in the staging of over 145 others. In 1857 the playwright relocated to the Norwegian Theatre in Christiania (now Oslo), where he remained until 1862. The plays he wrote during this early period were primarily verse-dramas concerned with Scandinavian history, including *Lady Inger of Ostraat* (1855) and *The Vikings at Helgeland* (1858).

Ibsen’s early associations with these theatres did not prove financially lucrative, and the dramatist was left nearly destitute. Frustrated with the progress of his career, Ibsen departed Norway for Italy in 1864, beginning would turn out to be a twenty-seven year expatriation. The first two works of this expatriate period were *Brand* (1865) and *Peer Gynt* (1867). *Brand* presents a portrait of “an uncompromising idealist who sacrifices everything, including his family, to his vision” (Brockett, 391). *Brand* was a success and gave Ibsen the critical respect and financial security he had sought. *Peer Gynt* furthered this critical and economic success, but its subject matter diverged strongly from that of *Brand*. *Peer Gynt*, a blend of reality and fantasy, presents a man who avoids confrontation on any issue, and was interpreted by many as a satire of the Norwegian character.

Yet despite the success of these verse plays Ibsen soon announced that he would be adjusting his style. Feeling that verse was not conducive to portraying reality onstage, he abandoned it in favor of a more naturalistic writing style. In the period from 1877 to 1884 Ibsen refashioned theatre with realism as the dominant style. Ibsen was revolutionary in his presentation of ideas onstage: addressing them directly, without contrivance or melodrama. This transformation began with 1877’s *The Pillars of Society*, but was most noticeable and significant in the three plays that followed.

1879 brought *A Doll's House*, considered by many to be Ibsen's finest work. Its portrayal of a woman who leaves her husband and children in search of her own identity and personal development was scandalous at the time. John Gassner writes:

That Nora's marriage might be reestablished on sounder foundations than those she had repudiated, that Ibsen's aims were essentially reconstructive rather than destructive, eluded Ibsen's critics not so much because his plea for feminine emancipation was new (others had made it before him), but because he was not content with pleading. He took the offensive instead, stripping masculine egotism to the bone and depriving a conventional 'doll's house' type of marriage of all its romantic and sentimental frippery. And he climaxed the awakening of his heroine not with the expected reconciliations of domestic drama, but with Nora's closing the door on her husband, home, and marriage. An anarchist's pistol shot could not have reverberated more frighteningly in the Victorian world than the closing of that door. (Gassner, in Ibsen and Sharp, viii-ix)

The controversy continued with 1881's *Ghosts*, which contained something of the flip side of *A Doll's House*. In *Ghosts* the character of Mrs. Alving is made to return to a marriage that is devastating her and to an insufferably unfaithful husband. The play's references to marital infidelity and frank discussions of venereal disease were even more appalling to the conservative mainstream that the play was prohibited in many countries. The European drama critics were merciless in their critiques of *Ghosts*, deeply wounding Ibsen.

Ibsen's response was to pen the 1882 play *An Enemy of the People* (the play on which *Paragon Springs* is based). Gassner writes that in *Enemy* "Ibsen made controversy the very core of the action once he pitted his idealistic hero Dr. Stockmann against an entire community determined to defend its vested interests. The conflict was by its very nature a debate between Stockmann and his opponents on the issue of conscience and integrity *versus* opportunism." (Gassner, x)

Next came 1884's *The Wild Duck*, a play in which Ibsen's broad ideological statements were reigned in a bit in favor of crafting strong characters. With *Wild Duck* Ibsen had truly mastered the art of the modern naturalistic play, years before Russian playwright Anton Chekhov would be lauded for the same traits. Yet *The Wild Duck* also marked one more important development in Ibsen's playwrighting career: the use of symbolic elements. While symbolism had been present in all of the plays of this period, *Wild Duck* emphasized it more than previous works.

Symbolic elements became more prevalent in Ibsen's work at this point. *Rommersholm* (1886), *The Master Builder* (1892), *John Gabriel Borkman* (1896) and his final work *When We Dead Awaken* (1899) all utilized symbolism and focused on subjects more intensely personal for the characters than large social issues. He continued to write naturalistic plays during this period as well, notably 1892's masterwork *Hedda Gabler*. In 1891 Ibsen finally returned to his native Norway, where he lived until his death in 1906.

Steven Dietz

Steven Dietz is one of America's most widely-produced contemporary playwrights. Since 1983, his twenty-plus plays have been seen at over one hundred regional theatres in the United States, as well as Off-Broadway. International productions have been seen in England, Japan, Germany, France, Australia, Sweden, Russia, Slovenia, Argentina, Peru, Singapore and South Africa. His work has been translated into seven languages.

Mr. Dietz received the 2002 John F. Kennedy Center Fund for New American Plays Award for his play *FICTION*, which premiered at the McCarter Theatre in New Jersey and will be produced by the Roundabout Theatre Company in New York in '04-'05. Mr. Dietz received the 1994 PEN USA West Award in Drama for his play, *LONELY PLANET*,; the 1996 Kennedy Center Fund for New American Plays Award for *STILL LIFE WITH IRIS*, the first play for young audiences to ever receive the award; and the 1995 *Yomuiiri Shimbun* Award (the Japanese "Tony") for his adaptation of Shusaku Endo's novel, *SILENCE*, which toured internationally. Other widely produced plays include *PRIVATE EYES*, *GOD'S COUNTRY*, *TRUST*, *ROCKET MAN*, *TEN NOVEMBER*, *HANDING DOWN THE NAMES*, *FOOLIN' AROUND WITH INFINITY*, *PAINTING IT RED* and *MORE FUN THAN BOWLING*.

Mr. Dietz's award-winning stage adaptations include *FORCE OF NATURE* (from Goethe), *OVER THE MOON* (from P.G. Wodehouse), *THE REMEMBERER* (from Joyce Simmons Cheeka), *PARAGON SPRINGS* (from Ibsen), *DRACULA* (from Bram Stoker), and, with Allison Gregory, *GO, DOG. GO!* (from P.D. Eastman).

He lives in Seattle.

"It's good to keep [the story of An Enemy of the People] somewhat in the past. We can see similar issues in the story without saying that it's our world."

-Steven Dietz in the April 6, 2000 Shepherd Express Metro

Arthur Miller's Production of *Enemy of the People*

"I have attempted to make An Enemy of the People as alive to Americans as it undoubtedly was to Norwegians...and I believed this play could be alive for us because its central theme is, in my opinion, the central theme of our social life today. Simply it is the question of whether the democratic guarantees protecting political minorities ought to be set aside in time of crisis."

-Arthur Miller, in the introduction to his adaptation of *An Enemy of the People*, 1951

Coming in the midst of the "Red Scare" and the beginnings of the Joseph McCarthy hearings, Miller found resonance in Ibsen's tale of a lone voice standing out against a crowd, daring to be different. In the June 17, 2000 edition of *The Guardian* published Miller's article, "Are You Now or Were You Ever?" In that article, Miller wrote the following:

In 1948-51, I had the sensation of being trapped inside a perverse work of art, one of those Escher constructs in which it is impossible to make out whether a stairway is going

up or down. Practically everyone I knew stood within the conventions of the political left of centre; one or two were Communist party members, some were fellow-travellers, and most had had a brush with Marxist ideas or organisations. I have never been able to believe in the reality of these people being actual or putative traitors any more than I could be, yet others like them were being fired from teaching or jobs in government or large corporations. The surreality of it all never left me. We were living in an art form, a metaphor that had suddenly, incredibly, gripped the country.

In today's terms, the country had been delivered into the hands of the radical right, a ministry of free-floating apprehension toward anything that never happens in the middle of Missouri. It is always with us, this anxiety, sometimes directed towards foreigners, Jews, Catholics, fluoridated water, aliens in space, masturbation, homosexuality, or the Internal Revenue Department. But in the 50s any of these could be validated as real threats by rolling out a map of China. And if this seems crazy now, it seemed just as crazy then, but openly doubting it could cost you.

1926 – Facts and Statistics

World News Highlights

- The Makwar Dam is completed on Egypt's Nile River.
- Abd al-Aziz ibn Saud is proclaimed leader of the nation he would soon name Saudi Arabia.
- Gertrude Ederle becomes the first woman to swim the English Channel.
- John Logie Baird proudly displays his mechanical television system in London.

American News Highlights

- Bad illegal liquor kills 750 people in New York.
- Philadelphia hosts the World's Fair.
- Chicago business leaders implore Congress to investigate their city's serious problem with organized crime.
- Henry Ford institutes the five-day work week and eight-hour work day at his factories.

President of the United States – Calvin Coolidge

Vice President – Charles Dawes

Pulitzer Prize Winner – Arrowsmith, by Sinclair Lewis

Nobel Prize Winners – Aristide Briand and Gustav Stresemann

Average Life Expectancy – 54.1 years

Average Income - \$2,310.00 per year

Cost of a New Car - \$360.00

Cost of One Gallon of Gasoline – 12¢

The Hamlet Reference

What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god: the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals; and yet to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me; nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so.

-Hamlet, Act II, scene II, lines 312-319

Discussion Questions

Is Erik's ultimate betrayal of Dr. Stockman and his cause an act with or without justification?

How does the story/spirit of Percy Fawcett inspire Dr. Stockman over the course of the play?
How does this compare to the way the lives of the great thinkers that Lorna admires inspire her?

Why is the Mayor ultimately successful at winning the crowd while Dr. Stockman is not?

Contrast the characters of Katrina, Lorna, the Widow Kroger and Rose. How do each of these characters reflect the changing attitudes and roles of women in the 1920s?

Why does Dr. Stockman reference Hamlet in his hillside speech ("Oh the common man, what a piece of work he is!")?

What about the events of *An Enemy of the People* would cause Steven Dietz to want to adapt it today? What made Arthur Miller adapt it in the 1950s?

How is the presence of the radio crucial to the play? In what ways does the existence of radio shape the events of the play? How does it change people?

How are each of these characters shaped by the events of their time? How does World War I impact characters such as Erik, Lars, Rose, Hollis and the Widow Kroger? How does Prohibition impact Odegaard and the Mayor? How does the women's rights movement affect the women of the play? How is the fury over the teaching of radical thinkers like Charles Darwin affecting the characters and the town of Paragon Springs?

Why do Lorna and Hollis choose to leave with Dr. Stockman at the end of the play? Why do Katrina and Rose choose to stay?

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