



THR 110-4 INTRODUCTION TO THEATRE

COURSE PROJECT
An Enemy of The People

Playwright
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About Playwright:

Henrik Johan Ibsen, born in Skien, Norway on March 20, 1828, is widely regarded as one of the founders of modern drama and realism [1].

During the 19th century, Henrik Ibsen's plays were influenced by the societal changes brought about by rapid industrialization in Europe [1]. These changes included urbanization, class struggles, and shifts in traditional values [1]. Ibsen's works often explored the conflicts and aspirations of middle-class characters, highlighting the tensions between social expectations and personal desires [2]. His portrayal of complex female characters and examination of gender roles were ahead of their time and were influenced by the rising feminist movement during the late 19th century [1].

Ibsen's works focused on the ordinary aspects of everyday life and addressed social issues through realistic characters and situations [3]. Although Ibsen is primarily associated with realism, his plays also contain elements of naturalism [3]. Ibsen incorporated some naturalistic elements by emphasizing the influence of societal factors on his characters' actions and decisions [3] [4].

Ibsen's plays often criticized societal norms, conventions, and hypocrisies [5]. He addressed controversial topics such as political corruption, moral decay, and gender inequality [5]. His works challenged the status quo and sparked debates, making him a significant figure in his time's social and political discourse [5].

Time & Place of the Playwright and Play:

Henrik Ibsen wrote the play in 1882 while living in Italy [5]. Ibsen created a fictional Norwegian town called “Stockmannsbadene” (Stockmann’s Baths), which was inspired by his hometown of Skien, Norway [5].

While the time of the play is not explicitly stated and does not explicitly reflect specific historical events, it reflects the broader context of societal changes and the evolving political landscape in late 19th-century Norway [5]. Ibsen’s writing aimed to shed light on the challenges and complexities of Norwegian society during this period, prompting critical examination and discussion among audiences [5].

Summary of the Play:

The play tells the story of a doctor living in a coastal town in southern Norway. The play begins with the discovery of Dr. Stockmann that the water of the spa baths of the town, which becomes a major source of economic revenue for society, is contaminated and poses a significant threat to public health. Living many years away from his homeland, he is driven by a strong sense of duty and an unshakable belief in truth. Therefore, he expects to become a hero when he reveals the issue to society. Initially, he gets some support from others since he is respected in the town. However, the only truth for the influential people in society is their interests. Therefore, ultimately, he becomes alone with his family, branded as an enemy of the people, and realizes that the men who stand alone are the strongest in the world.

About Major Characters:

1. Dr. Thomas Stockmann: He is the medical officer of the spa baths. As a principled and idealistic scientist, he follows the truth even if it means facing opposition and risking his reputation and relationships. He is the protagonist of the play.

2. Peter Stockmann: He is Dr. Stockmann's older brother and the magistrate of the town. He represents the authority. Unlike his brother, Peter is primarily concerned with maintaining the town's economic prosperity and avoiding any actions that might harm its reputation or financial stability. He opposes Dr. Stockmann's efforts to expose the truth about the contamination and becomes a significant antagonist in the play.
3. Catherine Stockmann: Catherine is Dr. Stockmann's wife and a supportive and loving partner. She is cautious and tries not to do anything bold that may have consequences. While initially standing by her husband, she becomes increasingly concerned about his actions' effects on their family's well-being. Catherine is a voice of reason and practicality, often trying to mediate between her husband and the other characters.
4. Hovstad: Hovstad is the editor of the local newspaper and initially presents himself as an ally to Dr. Stockmann. He supports the doctor's cause and promises to expose the truth about the contaminated baths. However, as the play progresses, Hovstad's opportunism and desire to cater to public opinion become apparent, and he eventually turns against Dr. Stockmann.
5. Aslaksen: Aslaksen is a printer and a prominent member of the town's small business community. He presents himself as a representative of the moderate majority and promotes a cautious and compromising approach. Aslaksen acts as a manipulative figure, exploiting the majority's power and contributing to public opinion's turning against Dr. Stockmann.
6. Petra Stockmann: Petra is Dr. Stockmann's daughter. She is portrayed as an independent, strong-willed young woman who shares her father's idealism and determination. Petra is a

schoolteacher and actively supports her father's cause, even when facing opposition from others. She represents a voice of youthful idealism and the desire for social change.

7. Morten Kiil: He is Catherine's adoptive father and a wealthy businessman. He initially appears as a friend and supporter of Dr. Stockmann, but he reveals his true colors when he attempts to bribe Dr. Stockmann into retracting his findings about the contaminated baths. Morten Kiil's actions highlight the moral compromises and corruption that can arise in pursuit of personal gain.
8. Billing: Billing is an ambitious local reporter. Billing represents the fickleness of loyalty and the tendency to prioritize personal interests over principles.
9. Captain Horster: He is a friend of the Stockmann family. He provides a haven for Dr. Stockmann when he becomes an enemy of society. Captain Horster represents a sense of integrity, and loyalty, as he stands by Dr. Stockmann despite the social consequences and is an ideal person who does not care about the social norms that make him a free individual.

Ideas on Theme/Thought of the Play:

The play is a timeless masterpiece that explores themes of truth, morality, corruption, and the clash between individual conscience and societal pressure. It raises questions about the nature of democracy, the power of the majority, the role of the media, the power dynamics within a community, and the sacrifices one must make when standing up for what is right. It shows that the truth in society changes with the interest of the majority. The play processes thought in universal manner that can happen in any nation at any time, making it an excellent example of realistic theatre.

Possible Interpretations of the Play:

The play shows how the people in society are bound to societal expectations, economic interests, and the fear of going against the majority, making them lose true freedom in society. In Act 5 of the play, it is emphasized that all who want to break their relationship with Stockmann's family do so because of the fear of the majority's opinion. This interpretation is stressed by using Stockmann's family's great attitude toward the captain since the beginning of the play, who is the only free person in the play.

In act 4 of the play, where Dr. Thomas gives a speech to the chorus of society, the playwright emphasizes that the republic is not the optimal solution for society, considering the majority consists of the foolish ones (see Figure 1). He shows again the optimal one as the captain who isn't keen to vote in upcoming elections since he doesn't have the required knowledge. This interpretation even applies to today's world as to whether the vote of shepherd and professor is equal.

The play also explores the selfish nature of human behavior. The play suggests that self-interest often precedes moral principles, and individuals are willing to sacrifice truth and justice to protect their positions and privileges. This interpretation reflects a cynical view of human nature and highlights the corrupting influence of power and personal ambitions. The playwright cleverly shows the clues for this interpretation as the only character who uses the word "god", Billig, also the only character who identifies himself as heathen, which means the god of these people is their interests like today's politics that uses religion as a tool.

Notable Productions of the Play:

I read direct scenario of the play [9], and watched two made-for-television adaptations of the play. The first is a Turkish interpretation by Bugay yapım, and the second is an English

interpretation by BBC [6] [7] [8]. The Turkish interpretation was better than the original scenario in terms of Thomas (Serdar) being the bigger brother of Peter (Önder) and Serdar is only focused on the consequences of the contamination, but in the original text (act 3), his imagination of the parades made in honor of himself making him no different than others. Also, in Turkish interpretation, his family is so integrated into Önder's that it makes him in a more significant challenge. BBC's interpretation is closer to the original but more logical in Thomas' speech regarding the speech happens in the street (see the minutes between 52 to 64 in the video to watch his speech and chorus reaction) [8].

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Figures:



Figure 1: In BBC Production of the play, Dr. gives speech to society becomes enemy of society [8].