Peer Gynt Study Guide

Peer Gynt by Henrik Ibsen

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Introduction

Henrik Ibsen wrote *Peer Gynt* in 1867. He never intended that the work be performed on stage; instead, Ibsen envisioned his work as a poetic fantasy to be read. However, *Peer Gynt* quickly became recognized as a masterwork of Scandinavian literature, and in 1876, Ibsen adapted his work for the stage. One reason for the work's popularity derived from Ibsen's use of Norwegian fairy tales, particularly, Asbjornsen's *Norwegian Fairy Tales*. But Ibsen was also poking fun at some of the popular new ideas, including the emerging trends about getting back to nature and simplicity, ideas also popular in the United States since Henry David Thoreau espoused them. Since Ibsen originally intended this work to be read, he had little concern about including Peer's travels or about creating situations or locations that would later prove more difficult to translate to a stage performance. Obviously, he also had little concern about the poem's length, since there are no such restrictions on printed verse. But adapting the lengthy fantasy poem into a play presented some challenges, with Ibsen ultimately forced to cut the work by about one third. Instead of simply removing a large section, such as the adventures that occur in Act IV, Ibsen cut almost every scene by a few lines.

As a play, *Peer Gynt* consists almost entirely as a vehicle for Peer's adventures. He is a character who runs from commitment, and who is completely selfish, having little concern for the sacrifices that others are forced to make in accommodating him. Ibsen's use of satire and a self-centered protagonist suggests social implications for nineteenth-century society, a topic that always interested Ibsen.

Author Biography

Ibsen was born March 20,1828, in Skien, Norway, a lumbering town south of Christiania, now Oslo. He was the second son in a wealthy family that included five other siblings. In 1835, financial problems forced the family to move to a smaller house in Venstop outside Skien. After eight years the family moved back to Skein, and Ibsen moved to Grimstad to study as an apothecary's assistant. He applied to and was rejected at Christiania University. During the winter of 1848, Ibsen wrote his first play, *Catiline*, which was rejected by the Christiania Theatre; it was finally published in 1850 under the pseudonym Brynjolf Bjarme and generated little interest. Ibsen's second play The *Burial Mound* was also written under the pseudonym Brynjolf Bjarme, and became the first Ibsen play to be performed when it was presented on September 26,1850, at the Christiania Theatre.

In 1851, Ibsen accepted an appointment as an assistant stage manager at the Norwegian Theatre in Bergen. He was also expected to assist the theatre as a dramatic author, and during his tenure at Bergen, Ibsen wrote several plays, including *Lady Inger* (1855) and *Olaf Liljekrans* (1857). These early plays were written in verse and drawn from Norse folklore and myths. In 1857 Ibsen was released from his contract at Bergen and accepted a position at the Norwegian Theatre in Christiania. While there, Ibsen married Suzannah Thoresen (1858). Their only child, Sigurd, was born the following year.

By 1860, Ibsen was under attack in the press for a lack of productivity. When the Christiania Theatre went bankrupt in 1862, Ibsen was left with no regular income, relying on a temporary position as a literary advisor to the reorganized Christiania Theatre for his livelihood. Thanks to a series of small government grants, by 1863 Ibsen was able to travel in Europe and begin what became an intense period of creativity. During this period, Ibsen completed a dramatic epic poem, *Brand*, which achieved critical notice (1866). This was followed by *Peer Gynt* (1867). The first of Ibsen's prose dramas, *The League of Youth* (1869), was the first of his plays to demonstrate a shift from an emphasis on plot to one of interpersonal relationships. This was followed by *Emperor and Galilean* (1873), Ibsen's first work to be translated into English. *A Doll's House* (1879) and An *Enemy of the People* (1882) are among the last plays included in Ibsen's realism period. Ibsen continued to write of modern realistic themes in his next plays, but he also relied increasingly on metaphor and symbolism in *Hedda Gabler* (1890).

A shift from social concerns to the isolation of the individual marks the next phase of Ibsen's work. *The Master Builder* (1892) and *When We Dead Awaken* (1899) all treat the conflicts that arise between art and life, between creativity and social expectations, and between personal contentment and self-deception. Many critics consider these last works to be autobiographical. In 1900, Ibsen suffered his first of several strokes, and his ill health ended his writing career. Ibsen died May 23, 1906.

Plot Summary

Act I

The play opens with Peer telling his mother, Ase, about the deer hunt he has just returned from. After delivering an exciting story filled with details from the hunt, Peer, who has no deer carcass in sight, admits that he fabricated the whole story. Ase accuses her son of being a lazy liar who is doing nothing to save them from poverty. After she tells him that he might have had a fine dowry if he'd chosen Ingrid as he wife, Peer agrees to marry her. But Ase replies that she is already promised to another, with the wedding scheduled for the next day. Peers states that he intends to stop the marriage, and when Ase protests, he picks her up and places her on a roof. On the way to the wedding, Peer overhears some guests talking and thinks they are speaking of him. He lies on the grass and begins to daydream about how he might be someone grand and important. In the distance, Peer can hear the wedding celebration and music.

Peer arrives at the wedding, but no one will dance with him, and people move away at his approach. Only a young farmer's daughter, Solveig, will speak to him, but she, too, quickly moves away. As a drunken Peer begins telling stories, filled with exaggeration and fancy, many of the young men present begin to make fun of him. When Solveig again appears, she tells Peer that her father has warned her to stay away from Peer. In spite of alternating threats and pleadings, Peer cannot convince her to dance with him. The bridegroom, Mads, who is not very bright, believes the fables and stories that Peer has been telling, and he now asks Peer for help in getting into see the bride, who has locked herself away from him. Sneaking in to see Ingrid is just what Peer has wanted to do and so he agrees to go around back with Mads. As Act I ends, the crowd is in disarray as they see Peer running up the mountain with the bride clutched over his shoulder.

Act II

It is early morning, and Peer is preparing to leave Ingrid. She is still clothed in her wedding finery and begs Peer to take her with him, but he replies that he wants another woman. As the two separate, Ingrid yells threats after Peer, who appears not to care. Meanwhile, Ase, accompanied by Solveig and her parents, is searching for Peer. Ase laments that she had never expected Peer to do such a thing, since he has never done much of anything in the past. Solveig's parents think Ase is as crazy as Peer evidently is, but they continue to help her search for him because it is their Christian duty. But Solveig wants to hear more about Peer and asks Ase to tell her about him. As the men from the village continue to look for Peer, he is given a hiding place by three herdgirls.

Eventually, Peer meets the daughter of the king of the mountain, and after telling her he is a prince, Peer asks her to marry him. The mountain king has several tests for Peer to pass before he is given the king's daughter to marry. The last test, blindness, has no

appeal for Peer and he abandons his new bride. Next Peer encounters the Great Boyg, who will not let him pass. Again Peer is offered riddles he must solve, but just when it seems hopeless and Peer sinks to the ground exhausted, the Great Boyg withdraws claiming that Peer has women to help him and the Great Boyg has no power against women. Peer awakens next to his mother's hut, and when he sees the child, Helga, he asks that she bring Solveig to him.

Act III

Peer is an outlaw, hiding from the men of the village. He has built himself a hut in the forest, where he is able to be with Solveig. Meanwhile, Ase has had to pay a harsh fine in her son's name and has been left with nothing. Solveig has also paid a huge price to be with Peer. She has left her family and everyone she loves behind. Peer is safe only while he remains in the forest. If he leaves, he becomes fair prey for whoever wants to hunt him down. Peer and Solveig know only a few brief moments of happiness. The mountain king's daughter appears with an ugly malformed child and tells Peer that the child is his. She threatens Peer and promises to haunt him and destroy any happiness he might find with Solveig. Peer remembers from his early religious training that repentance can offer him hope and salvation. Peer tells Solveig to wait in the hut for him, no matter how long it takes. Peer leaves and heads into the village to his mother's hut, where she is dying. Peer tells Ase stories to comfort her and when she is dead he thanks her for all that she has given to him. Peer leaves his mother's body to a neighbor's final care and says that he is leaving for the sea and beyond.

Act IV

This act opens in Morocco. Peer is older and obviously successful, but in many ways he has not changed. As he dines with friends, Peer fills the air with exaggerated stories and complete untruths. Peer also relates that he has made much money in trade, some of it in heathen religious idols and some of it in bibles. Peer also says that he sees himself as a citizen of the world, taking something from each country he visits. Peer is full of bravado, wanting to be emperor of the world. But he alienates those around him and he is robbed of all his goods as his yacht is seized and he is put ashore; but when Peer prays to God for help, the yacht mysteriously blows up with all on board. Peer next moves to the African desert, where he is again robbed. Meanwhile Solveig is still waiting in the hut for Peer to return, although she is quite middle aged now and does not know that Peer has continued in his aimless wanderings.

ActV

Peer is now an old man, and as this act opens he is at sea on a ship headed back toward Norway. But the ship wrecks and Peer barely survives and must push aside the ship's cook who is also trying to stay afloat. When he finally comes ashore, Peer decides that it is time to return home and settle down. Peer meets with the Button

Moulder, where he is forced to confront his deeds and account for his life. Peer finally understands that he has been selfish and that his life has been without direction. At that moment, Peer hears Solveig singing and he hurls himself at her feet, begging for her forgiveness. When he would have her cry out his sins, Solveig replies that he has made her life beautiful. Hearing her words, the Button Moulder leaves, but promises that he and Peer will meet again.

Part 1 Act 1 Scene 1

Part 1 Act 1 Scene 1 Summary

This part of the play tells the story of Peer Gynt's youth.

On a hillside near their farm, twenty-year-old Peer Gynt struggles to convince his elderly, frail mother Aase that the story he's telling, about how he went hunting and lost his gun, is the truth. She calls him a liar and then tells him to tell her again the story of what happened. In passionate poetic language, Peer tells her how he found a beautiful deer, shot and wounded him and then jumped on his back in order to slit its throat. He goes on to say that the deer wasn't as wounded as he thought it was and that it jumped up and ran with him across the countryside. Again in passionate language and with vivid images of soaring eagles, rushing air and gaping caverns that catch Aase up in the excitement of his story, he tells how the deer ran and jumped and leapt in an effort to get Peer off its back. At one point, Peer says, the deer encountered his reflection in a lake. He says the reflection came to life and fought with the real deer, which eventually won the battle and swam across the lake to freedom. Peer says the deer ran off and he made his way home.

At first Aase is relieved that Peer wasn't hurt, but then she realizes that his whole story is just another of Peer's lies and that everything he talked about actually happened years ago when she was a young woman to a man named Gudbrand. Peer tries to tell her that things can happen twice, but Aase is having none of it. She starts weeping and wailing about how Peer is so irresponsible, how he's just as cocky and sure of himself as he was when he heard a visiting preacher say that his mind was sharper than most, and complains about how lazy he's been since his father left. Peer tells her to be patient, and says he's destined for great things, like being king or emperor. Aase tells him he belongs in a madhouse, but then she remembers that there's a rich girl in town, Ingrid, who seems to think he's worth spending time with, and says he can't be all bad.

Peer starts to leave, saying he's going to go court Ingrid, but Aase tells him that while he was out having his adventure with the deer Ingrid accepted the marriage proposal of another man, and that the wedding's the next day. Peer says he can get to the farm where the wedding is taking place by the evening and pretends to be the deer that he just spoke about. He grabs Aase up onto his back and in spite of her telling him to let her go, jumps about with her. He lets her off, and starts on his journey. Aase says she'll be right behind him, but Peer sets her on the roof of one of the farm buildings and runs off. As Aase shouts after him to get her down, two Old Women arrive. Aase tells them what Peer did, and where he's running off to. As she worries that Peer will probably be killed, the two old women call to some men to come and help her down.

Part 1 Act 1 Scene 1 Analysis

The story of Peer Gynt is an archetypal one, meaning that in its fundamental patterns and events it has parallels in the stories of every human being. The details of each individual life are different, but everybody is young, as Peer is in this scene, and everybody ages and everybody dies, as Peer does throughout the course of the play. This means that in this scene, as we watch Peer and his mother we see the tensions that arise between all children and all mothers. We see youthful energy contrasted with maternal worry, we see passion and excitement contrasted with infirmity and physical feebleness, and we see idealistic hopes for the future contrasted with long-suffering, hard earned wisdom. The other relationships Peer has throughout the play echo and parallel similar universal relationships in the same way.

The archetypal nature of the play also means that the truths revealed in the story of Peer and his experiences illuminate universal truths. Specifically, the story Peer tells about his encounter with the deer makes the play's central thematic statement, which in turn makes a statement about life in general. The deer that Peer rides represents the uncontrollable, unpredictable energy of life itself, while the story of the ride illuminates the way that each human being faces the challenge of dealing with the untamed, the wild, the unpredictable and uncontrollable. This means that the play's central image and theme are contained in the climactic moment of the ride at which Peer and the deer see themselves reflected in the lake and then fight with that reflection. Their struggle represents how we as human beings, in the midst of dealing with life's unpredictability, are faced with the struggle between who we truly are, as unpredictable in our essence as the essence of life itself, and how we want and need to be in control. In other words, it's the struggle between two sides of human nature - the animal and the spiritual, described later in the play in terms of being the Sufficient Self and the True Self. Peer's vision of himself and the deer in the water both represents and foreshadows his, and our, entire journey through life towards self-awareness, spiritual consciousness, and fulfilment.

In terms of the story itself several references in this scene foreshadow events later in the play. Peer's comment that he'll become an emperor foreshadows the way he becomes a financial emperor in Part 2 and sets himself up as a Spiritual Emperor, also in part two. Aase's comment that Peer belongs in a madhouse foreshadows Peer's entry into an actual madhouse, also in Part 2, while Aase's absorption in Peer's storytelling foreshadows the final scene in Part 1 in which she becomes absorbed in one of Peer's stories in a similar way and therefore eases her death.

Part 1 Act 1 Scene 2

Part 1 Act 1 Scene 2 Summary

On his way to Ingrid's wedding, Peer wonders how he's going to be received, overhears travellers comment negatively about him and his family, and then plays out a fantasy in which he's an emperor and everyone worships him. Another traveler, Aslak, passes by, and teases him about how easy it will be for him to find someone else if Ingrid rejects him. When he's gone Peer looks down at his clothes, realizes he probably doesn't have a hope of impressing Ingrid, and resolves to go back home to his mother. He then thinks he hears someone laugh at him, but when he doesn't hear it again believes that he was imagining things. In the distance he sees that the dancing at the wedding has begun, for a moment is torn between continuing on and going back to his mother and then impulsively runs down and join s the wedding feast.

Part 1 Act 1 Scene 2 Analysis

One of the ways this play illuminates its archetypal story about what it means to be a human being is the way that it's written as an extended poem, using rhyming language rich in imagery. This heightened sense of language allows for a similarly heightened sense of emotion, so that in Peer's fantasy about being emperor, for example, and the vibrant and colorful portrayal of his ambition and triumph, make his feelings and reasons for feeling very clear for us to experience and empathize with.

The comments that Peer overhears foreshadow similar comments about him made under similar circumstances in Part 3. In both cases the comments are made by the same characters and occur within the context of a stage in Ingrid's life - in this case her wedding, in Part 3 her funeral. This, along with several other elements of foreshadowing and repeated imagery, suggests the archetypal idea that life is made up of repeated patterns. Meanwhile, the mysterious laughter that Peer hears foreshadows his face-to-face encounters with mystery. In this first part of the play, in which we see his youth, such encounters include Peer's meeting with the Troll King, while later in the play he encounters representations of Death and other mysterious, powerful influences.

Part 1 Act 1 Scene 3

Part 1 Act 1 Scene 3 Summary

The wedding festivities suddenly come to a stop as Peer arrives. He goes from group to group, looking for someone to dance with. None will dance with him. As Solveig and her family arrive, Peer asks if he can dance with her. Solveig's father says they have to pay their respects to the hosts first, and leads his family indoors. Peer starts to follow, but he's forced to stay outside. After a moment, Solveig comes back out looking for him. They dance together for a moment and then Solveig runs off. The young men who kept Peer from going inside tease him into telling them one of his stories, and he tells them how he once trapped the devil in a nut-shell. He goes on to talk about how he can fly, and the young men react angrily, calling him a liar. Solveig returns, and Peer asks her to dance again, but she refuses, saying he's been drinking.

The Groom asks for Peer's help in luring the bride (Ingrid) out of the storehouse where she's hiding. On his way to get her, he again meets Solveig, and says he'll turn himself into a troll if she doesn't dance with him. Suddenly he changes his tactic and begs her, but she refuses. He goes off with the Groom. Meanwhile the other wedding guests come back out, arguing over how they're going to get rid of Peer. Aase arrives, looking forward to seeing Peer get the beating he deserves. The Groom runs back on, shouting that Peer has taken the bride and is running away with her. The Bride's Father shouts that he's going to kill Peer, but Aase says she'll never let that happen.

Part 1 Act 1 Scene 3 Analysis

Peer's treatment at the hands of the wedding guests represents the way individuals who don't fit with society are rejected by people living "normal" lives. Granted, Peer doesn't make things any easier by being a liar and telling tall stories, but the fact remains that he's teased, baited and almost attacked by people who fear him, resent him, and just plain think he's weird. This is another aspect of the archetypal nature of Peer's journey, in that just about every human being feels like an outcast from his community at one point or another in their lives.

Solveig is the only character, other than Peer, who appears throughout the entire play and all three stages of Peer's life - young, middle aged, and elderly. Even though she isn't seen all that frequently in the latter two thirds of the play, her influence is a thematically significant aspect of his life and journey. In this scene not much is revealed about her other than the way she seems to have a similar attitude towards Peer as the rest of his community. What she represents in his life becomes clear later. Meanwhile, Peer's threat to turn into a troll foreshadows his encounters with the Troll King later in the play.

Part 1 Act 2 Scenes 1 and 2

Part 1 Act 2 Scenes 1 and 2 Summary

Scene 1 - The next morning, the bride (Ingrid) runs after Peer, pleading for him to come back to town with him. Their conversation reveals that they've been intimate together, that Peer could be hanged if he doesn't marry her, and that Peer has realized he loves another woman. He sends her back to town and goes his own way, cursing all women - all women, Ingrid says, but one.

Scene 2 - Aase, Solveig and Solveig's family are all out looking for Peer. Aase has a long speech in which she talks about the irony of searching so hard for someone who made her life so miserable. Solveig's Father tells her she needs to get used to the idea that Peer may be dead and then as Aase starts to cry he follows a set of footprints off. Solveig tries to comfort Aase by getting her to tell stories of Peer's childhood. Aase says she'll get bored, but Solveig says she could never become bored hearing about Peer.

Part 1 Act 2 Scenes 1 and 2 Analysis

Scene 1 - Several important elements are revealed by implication rather than by being spoken of outright. For example, we're not told in so many words but we nevertheless understand that Ingrid and Peer have been intimate, that Peer has realized he loves Solveig and not Ingrid, and that Ingrid never wanted to marry her fiancy but was hoping for Peer all along. The fact that Peer could be hanged for what he's done sets up the rest of the play in that as a result of what's just happened he can't go home since he'll be killed if he does, which sends him off on his lifelong journey, the story of which is told in the rest of the play.

Scene 2 - We see in this scene that in spite of her reluctance to dance with him, Solveig has fallen in love with Peer in the same way that he's fallen in love with her. This is another manifestation of the archetypal nature of the story, the power of love at first sight.

Part 1 Act 2 Scenes 3, 4 and 5

Part 1 Act 2 Scenes 3, 4 and 5 Summary

Scene 3 - Peer meets three farm girls who are dancing to attract trolls, after their men have all gone from their lives, becomes seduced by them, and dances off to their home.

Scene 4 - Peer has a vision of mountains and eagles, imagines himself back on the back of the deer, takes a leap as he would have done while riding it, but then hits his head and collapses, unconscious.

Scene 5 - Peer encounters the Woman in Green, who convinces him to come and meet her father, a king. When he eagerly agrees, she warns him that where she lives can be seen two ways. To the people that live there it's a palace, but to other people it's usually seen as a pile of rocks. Peer agrees to go with her, and she calls out her "bridal steed" - a pig.

Part 1 Act 2 Scenes 3, 4 and 5 Analysis

The trolls in this play, and in mythology, and folklore in general, represent the darker side of human nature, specifically sexuality, greed for food, power and/or possessions, and emotions like anger. In Peer's case, his encounters in these scenes represent encounters with sexuality (Scene 3), hallucination (Scene 4), and ambition (Scene 5). In Scene 3 His encounter with the Trolls is indirect, in that the lustful part of himself that he encounters through meeting the three girls is actually the Troll side of himself, but it's this encounter that makes his meeting with the "real" trolls possible. The following scene plays out Peer's conflict with those dark aspects of humanity in a more direct way, an aspect of the story which illuminates and illustrates the play's archetypal theme as originally expressed in the image of Peer and the deer confronting their reflection, which as we've seen suggested that the adventure of life is an ongoing series of confrontations between the True Self and the Animal Self. This image of reflection and double meaning is reinforced in the conversation between Peer and the Woman in Green about how things can appear one way to one person and another way to someone else, a reference that suggests that the truth can be disguised by perception or desire.

The fact that Peer knocks himself unconscious suggests that his encounter with the Trolls is actually a dream, or hallucination. This possibility is reinforced by the way Peer wakes up at the beginning of Scene 8. If the encounter is in fact a dream and then the encounter with the Trolls can be seen as a dramatization of Peer's confrontations with his own dark desires. Either way, Peer's conflict with the Trolls is a dramatization and externalization of his own inner turmoil.

Part 1 Act 2 Scenes 6 and 7

Part 1 Act 2 Scenes 6 and 7 Summary

Scene 6 - Peer stands calmly before the Troll King as members of the Troll Kingdom shout that he should be killed. The King calms the crowd and then tells Peer that he can have his Daughter (the Woman in Green) and half the kingdom if he meets certain conditions. The first condition is that Peer renounce the life of the outside world, which Peer quickly accepts. The second condition is that Peer accept the Troll's way of life, which states that each individual has to be "enough" for himself. The Troll King calls this the philosophy of the Sufficient Self, which he says is different from the philosophy of the outside world that suggests that an individual has to be "true." He calls this the Philosophy of the True Self. Peer struggles to understand just what he means, but eventually accepts the philosophy of the Sufficient Self. The King says that in order to live according to that philosophy Peer has to live only for himself as Trolls do, eat and drink what they eat and drink, have a tail, and wear the clothes they wear. Peer accepts the clothes and drinks from a golden bowl to symbolize his acceptance of their food, but refuses to have a tail. The King says it won't be long before he changes his mind.

Dancing and celebrations begin, but when Peer comments negatively, the Woman in Green starts to weep, saying that he doesn't respect their way of life after all. The Troll King says that in spite of his vows to accept their life, Peer's human nature hasn't changed. To help him become more of a troll, he says he'll cut Peer's eye to make it look more like a troll's should. Peer says that that's a step too far and tries to leave. The trolls try to keep him there, but Peer wrestles desperately with them to keep his freedom. Church bells are heard in the distance, frightening all the trolls away. Peer becomes surrounded by darkness, and quickly becomes the victim of another attack.

Scene 7 - In darkness, Peer fights with something neither he, nor we, can see. He asks repeatedly whom he's fighting, while the voice says repeatedly "myself." The voice then says he's the Boyg, and describes himself in contradictory terms like unhurt but in pain, and dead but alive. Peer tries again and again to chase the Boyg away, but the Boyg remains. A flock of birds appears, eager to join in the attack. Peer quickly becomes overwhelmed and sinks to the ground. As the birds prepare to strike, the church bells sound again. The birds flee, and Peer is left alone.

Part 1 Act 2 Scenes 6 and 7 Analysis

These two scenes dramatize, in two different ways, the play's central dramatic and thematic tension between the spiritual or True Self and the animal or Sufficient Self, the play's central conflict that continues throughout the action until its final moments. Peer's conversation and eventual argument with the Troll King illuminate the symbolic sameness of the Trolls' and Peer's animal self fairly clearly, while Peer himself

represents the potential for the ultimate triumph of the spiritual self as he ends up resisting the Trolls' various temptations, sometimes in spite of himself.

The Boyg, meanwhile, represents the part of himself that Peer is most afraid of. The question is whether this part is his Sufficient Self or his True Self. The juxtaposition between the fight with the Boyg and the fight with the Trolls suggests that they both represent the same thing, i.e. Peer's animal or Sufficient Self. This idea is reinforced by the idea that both conflicts are ended by the ringing of church bells, which in this scenario may represent the power of Peer's spiritual self. It's also possible, however, that in fleeing from his animal self Peer metaphorically encounters the aspect of himself that he's fleeing towards, his spiritual self. In this scenario his fearful reaction to the Boyg suggests that he's afraid of being "good," for lack of a better phrase, in the same way as he is of being "bad." It may be that to Peer, being good means giving up on his life of adventure, whether his adventures occur in his made up stories or in his life on the run.

In either scenario, the point of this scene and the scene that follows is that Peer is simply not ready, at this point in his journey, to embrace his spiritual self.

Part 1 Act 2 Scene 7

Part 1 Act 2 Scene 7 Summary

Peer wakes up outside his mother's hut and sees Helga, Solveig's sister. Solveig herself soon appears, but warns Peer that if he tries anything she'll run away. Peer brags that the Troll Princess tried to seduce him, Solveig comments that it was a good thing the church bells were rung so Peer could keep his freedom and then runs off. Helga is about to follow but Peer holds her back. As Helga tries to escape, Peer gives her a silver button to give to Solveig as a token of his love and then tells Helga to tell Solveig not to forget him.

Part 1 Act 2 Scene 7 Analysis

It's clear by this point in the narrative that Solveig is a representation of Peer's spiritual (True) self and his capacity for controlling his animal (Sufficient) self. Her rejection of him in this scene suggests that she knows he's not ready to accept her fully and completely, an aspect of his personality which becomes clear to us when we see the way in which he brags about his encounter with the Troll Princess (the Woman in Green). Her reaction illustrates how Peer still has got a way to go on his journey towards self awareness, something that Peer himself seems to express in his final words to Helga when he asks her to tell Solveig not to forget him. In other words, he knows he's yet not worthy of Solveig, or living a true spiritual life, and is asking for Solveig to be patient and wait for him until he is.

Peer's offering of a silver button as a token of remembrance foreshadows the appearance of the Button Molder at the end of the play. Since the Button Molder represents transformation, the gift of a button foreshadows Peer's final reunion with Solveig, who as we've seen represents his true spiritual self, in the final moments of his life.

Part 1 Act 3 Scene 1

Part 1 Act 3 Scene 1 Summary

Alone in the forest, Peer chops down a tree. He refers to it in poetic language describing it as an old man, and imagines turning it into a beautiful ship. He narrates the action as the tree bends and falls and then starts to strip off the branches. As he does so, he notices a young boy and narrates the action as the boy cuts off his finger and runs away. Peer assumes that the boy did what he did to avoid being drafted for military service, says he couldn't do it, and goes back to work.

Part 1 Act 3 Scene 1 Analysis

This short scene consists of just one long speech from Peer, but it's a speech rich with imagery and foreshadowing. His action in chopping down the tree foreshadows his actions later in the play as he chops down his animalistic self-image, while his imagining of the tree as a ship foreshadows his own journeys around the world and into exotic lands that make up the play's latter two thirds.

The most important section of this scene is the story of the boy chopping off his finger. Appearing at this point of the play it's simply a story about the way that some people do extreme things in extreme circumstances, and therefore echoes the extremity of Peer's actions in, for example, kidnapping Ingrid. The ultimate symbolism of the boy's act, and therefore this story, isn't revealed until the end of the play. It's at that point that we understand that cutting off his finger was a choice the boy made in order to live life according to his True Self. This means that the boy and his actions are a complete contrast to Peer and his.

Part 1 Act 3 Scene 2

Part 1 Act 3 Scene 2 Summary

Back in Aase's home, Aase and her friend Kari are packing up what's left of Aase's belongings. Their conversation reveals that everything else was taken as payment of the fine levied against Aase because of Peer's criminal actions at the wedding. Aase discovers a ladle that Peer used to play with when he was a child and pretending to be a button molder.

Part 1 Act 3 Scene 2 Analysis

The two important elements of this scene are the information that Aase is being punished for Peer's transgressions and the mention that Peer played at being a button molder when he was a child. This last is particularly important since it foreshadows two things - the ladle's reappearance in Part 3 of the play, where it symbolizes the way in which all things return to the point where they first came from, and more importantly the appearance of the Button Molder at the end of the play. As has been discussed, the Button Molder represents transformation, which means that the fact that Peer played at being a button molder suggests that transformation is a part of him, an inescapable aspect of life. This, therefore, is another aspect of the way in which the play is archetypal, in that transformation, such as that associated with death, is an inevitability in every life.

Part 1 Act 3 Scene 3

Part 1 Act 3 Scene 3 Summary

Peer attaches a door to the new forest home he built for himself with the chopped down tree. Solveig appears, and in poetically romantic language tells him that she's left her home and her family to be with him. Peer reminds her that because of the sentence that's been passed upon him he can't ever leave the forest or else he'll be executed. Solveig says she'll stay with him no matter what. He promises to love her and treat her well, and Solveig promises to be happy. He lets her into the house, and says he's finally found happiness.

An Old Woman in Green and a Child appear. The Old Woman says she's finally found Peer, reminds him of when they met, and then tells the Child to get "Daddy" a drink. Peer realizes that the Old Woman is actually the Woman in Green, and the Child is his son. The Old Woman vows to be in his life forever and to haunt his marriage and then disappears into the forest. Peer wonders to himself whether all the women from his past are going to come back and haunt his marriage and then decides he's not pure enough for Solveig and resolves to leave. Solveig comes looking for him and asks him to come in, but he says he's got to go fetch something and asks her to wait. Solveig says that she'll always wait, and watches as Peer leaves.

Part 1 Act 3 Scene 3 Analysis

The tensions between Peer's Sufficient Self and his True Self are never dramatized more clearly as they are in this scene through the appearances of the two key women in Peer's life. The Old Woman in Green and Solveig clearly represent Peer's two sides, and as such also represent two aspects of Peer's soul. Peer's departure, therefore, represents how he is still essentially unable to reconcile those two aspects of himself, and how he must voyage further into both the world and himself to find a way to make that reconciliation happen. To put it in terms of one of the play's earlier images representing this conflict, the Old Woman in Green represents Peer riding the deer, while Solveig represents the reflection of Peer and the deer in the water.

Part 1 Act 3 Scene 4

Part 1 Act 3 Scene 4 Summary

Aase lies ill in bed, wondering why Peer hasn't come to see her. Just then Peer comes in, and Aase says she's grateful he risked being arrested so she could see him one more time. Even though Aase tries to talk about Ingrid, Peer gets her talking about how he was as a child and the imaginary games they used to play. Peer imagines that Aase's bed is a carriage and that he's the coachman, and they start to play one of their games together. As Peer begins to get carried away with his fantasy, Aase dies. Peer realizes she's gone, kisses her gently, and closes her eyes.

Kari appears and asks how Aase is doing. Peer tells her she's dead. As Kari weeps, Peer paces the room and makes a decision, telling Kari to make sure that Aase is given a good burial and announcing that he's going away to sea "and farther still." He goes out.

Part 1 Act 3 Scene 4 Analysis

The archetypal nature of the story appears again in this scene, which essentially represents that stage in a life when the child lets go of his parents, and therefore of childhood, and becomes an adult. That point of transformation isn't always connected to the death of the parent, often occurring under more symbolic circumstances such as a wedding or moving away from home. In the case of this story, however, because of the aforementioned poetic intensity of the emotions that drive the story, it has to be a powerful emotion like the intensity of Peer's grief that gives him the final push onward into his deeper journey into the self. There is no letting go like the final letting go, and it is Aase's ending that, perhaps ironically, provides Peer with his true beginning.

Part 2 Act 4 Scene 1

Part 2 Act 4 Scene 1 Summary

This part of the play tells the story of Peer Gynt's middle age. On a beach in Morocco, Peer (now in his mid-fifties and very prosperous) entertains a group of wealthy friends, Mr. Cotton, Monsieur Ballon, Herr von Eberkopf and Herr Trumpeterstraale. They drink brandy and smoke cigars as Peer tells the story of his success. First he explains that one reason he's so wealthy is that he's escaped married life, and tells a story of how he once came close to marrying a princess whom he'd gotten pregnant but escaped after an argument with her parents, which was bad, and a physical battle with her younger relatives, which was worse. The guests comment on the wisdom of Peer's philosophy, on the fact that he's never been formally educated, and on his generosity. Peer goes on to explain that he became rich by using his own initiative and not relying on anyone else, trading in slaves in America and in pagan images in China. When his listeners react with disbelief, Peer tells them that as he aged he realized he'd put more bad into the world than good, and therefore started to balance his trade by setting up an independent plantation for a cargo of slaves and for every image he sent to China he also sent a Christian missionary. This, he says, is the crowning achievement of his philosophy, that for every so-called evil that he's done he's also done a good.

In response to a toast from his guests Peer begins to drink heavily. Mr. Cotton asks what Peer's plans are for his fortune, which Peer says has resulted from his dealings with America. Peer says his goal is to become emperor of the world, explains that he'll accomplish his goal by dominating the world financially, comments that he's dreamed of doing it since he was a boy, and then adds that his drive is the result of his "Gyntian philosophy." This philosophy states that the power to achieve everything he wants and needs comes from the wants themselves and from the desire to have, to own, and to control. As his three guests toast his philosophy, Peer tells them that his first goal is to go to Greece and participate in its war with Turkey. The others think he's going in on the side of the Greeks, but Peer explains that he sees more opportunity for profit, and therefore achieving his goals, by helping the Turks. Ignoring the protests of his guests, Peer takes his wine and cigar and rests in a hammock.

The guests complain among themselves about Peer's deviousness and greed and then hatch a plan to steal his yacht and all its supplies, sail to Greece, and make profit for themselves. They hurry out, leaving Peer dozing.

Part 2 Act 4 Scene 1 Analysis

This scene illustrates how Peer, in spite of having physically rejected the life of a Troll, has embraced the Troll Philosophy of the Sufficient Self and transformed it into his Gyntian Philosophy. This philosophy sounds a great deal like the philosophy of free enterprise, which basically allows every individual to do whatever he wants in order to

get what he wants, usually means money and/or power. In Peer's case he wants both, and has gotten both, but only to a point. He wants more, something that, in general, is another component of the philosophy of free enterprise.

The fact that Peer has gained most of his money and influence through dealings with America is no coincidence. Neither is the way in which his dinner guests compare him to an American, since the free enterprise philosophy in all its positive and negative aspects, is a cornerstone of American culture and society. The comment the play makes, in this scene and the rest of the action, is that Gyntian / free enterprise philosophy leads to greed, selfishness and an empty life. The action of this act, and the rest of the play, bears this out as we see Peer struggle to both fill that emptiness and atone for the evil he's done as a result of his beliefs.

Other important aspects of this scene include the way we see how Peer has changed in some ways and remained the same in others. He's certainly wealthier now; less troubled by his conscience, and has actually begun to make his dreams a reality as opposed to just talking about them as he did throughout the first act. What hasn't changed is that he is still a teller of tall tales and a bender of the truth. His story of his near marriage is clearly a re-telling of his encounter with the Trolls, dressed up and slightly altered. His telling of his escape is ironic, however, since, as we've seen through discussions of his philosophy, he's just as much a troll as he would have been if he'd stayed in the Troll Kingdom, if not more so. He just doesn't look like one.

Part 2 Act 4 Scenes 2, 3, and 4

Part 2 Act 4 Scenes 2, 3, and 4 Summary

Scene 2 - Peer wakes up, realizes that his yacht has been stolen by his faithless friends, and cries out to God for justice. Just then the yacht explodes. Peer thanks God and then prays for help in keeping himself alive, saying that God won't let someone like him, who's done so much good, starve to death. He becomes frightened of what he imagines to be the roar of a lion, and climbs a tree to get away. At the top of the tree he comments on how good it feels to be so high up, like God.

Scene 3 - Soldiers in the Moroccan Army rush about searching for the Emperor's horse, robes and jewels.

Scene 4 - Late at night, up in his tree, Peer fights with a band of monkeys flinging feces at him. He fights back, and wishes he had a tail so he could look more like them and perhaps evade the attack. In a lull he sees an older monkey watching him closely and extends a hand of friendship, but the old monkey dumps a huge load of feces on his head. Then the younger monkeys attack again, and Peer comments that the old one was bad but the young ones are worse.

Part 2 Act 4 Scenes 2, 3, and 4 Analysis

Scene 2 - This scene dramatizes the way in which Peer is punished for living his Gyntian philosophy. His boat explodes, which he sees as an act of justice punishing his thieving friends but which can easily be interpreted as an act of justice punishing Peer himself, if we regard the yacht as a symbol of Peer's greedy success, which it clearly is to him.

Scene 3 - This scene sets up the plot complication to follow, in which Peer discovers the stolen robes and becomes a false emperor. As we shall see as that part of the story unfolds, it's a sequence of events that illustrates the foolishness and falseness of his desire to be an emperor, an ambition is clearly a manifestation of his living according to the dictates of his Sufficient / Gyntian self.

Scene 4 - The attack by the monkeys clearly echoes the way Peer was attacked following his decision to leave the Troll Kingdom. Firstly, his wish that he had a tail is ironic, given that in the Troll Kingdom he refused to accept a tail, which in his mind would make him too much like a troll. Secondly, his line about the old one being bad and the young ones being worse is a deliberate echo of the way he referred to the King and the younger royalty in his story to his friends in the first scene of this act, which as we've seen was itself a re-telling of the story of Peer's encounter with the Trolls. This means that the attack by the monkeys (which is typical of the way monkeys fight in reality) suggests that in the same way as he left the Troll Kingdom behind, Peer is

moving towards finally leaving Troll/Gyntian Philosophy behind. However, it takes him the rest of the play to get to that point.

NB. In all of these scenes and throughout the rest of the act, Peer speaks frequently in soliloquy, meaning that he speaks his inner thoughts aloud.

Part 2 Act 4 Scenes 5, 6, and 7

Part 2 Act 4 Scenes 5, 6, and 7 Summary

These three scenes chronicle Peer's escapades as an emperor and prophet. Scene 5 - Two thieves appear carrying the stolen robes and jewels and leading the stolen horse. As they comment on how their fathers were thieves as well, they hear a noise that frightens them off. Peer then appears, rejoicing in the beauty of the morning and of nature. He nibbles on some roots and speaks in soliloquy about the joys of the humble, simple, back to nature life. Then he looks at the land in terms of its potential for development, realizes all the money he could make, and starts making plans to generate investment capital. He discovers the jewels, robes and horse, interprets them as a good omen for his plans, puts on the robes and jewels and rides off.

Scene 6 - Some time later, Peer has been accepted as a prophet. He reclines on a pile of pillows in a tent as a troupe of young women, led by the beautiful Anitra, dances for him and sings a song about how wonderful he is. They finish singing but continue dancing as Peer speaks in soliloquy about the differences between being revered in America, which felt hollow because he was revered for his money, and being revered here, which feels better because he's revered for who he is as opposed to what he has. He then comments on Anitra's beauty and calls her to him, asking her to become his lover. She refuses, saying she has no soul. Peer promises to give her a soul by educating her. Anitra says she'd prefer to have the opal on his turban. He gives it to her quite happily.

Scene 7 - Later that night, Peer plays a lute and sings a love song outside Anitra's tent. After a while she comes out and, after words of love from Peer, nestles in his lap and asks him whether it's truly possible for her to gain a soul just by listening to him. In intensely romantic language, Peer talks about a man who talked so much about the soul that he emptied himself of truth and ended up talking nonsense. He goes on to talk about his hopes for recapturing his youth and deterring his old age by uniting physically and sexually with Anitra. Suddenly he realizes that in the middle of all his talk she's fallen asleep. He puts a pile of jewels in her lap and leaves, saying that her sleep is a sign of his intelligence and wisdom.

Part 2 Act 4 Scenes 5, 6, and 7 Analysis

The most important element of these three scenes is irony. Peer clearly thinks that by setting himself up as a prophet he's moving away from the evils associated with his Gyntian / Sufficient self, but it's just as clear to us that he's substituted one form of empty worship for another. He doesn't see that setting himself up as a false prophet is just as spiritually empty as setting oneself up as a profiteer, especially since his desire to possess Anitra is essentially the same as his desire to possess money.

On a less symbolic level it's possible to interpret Peer's infatuation with this new identity and with Anitra as the somewhat typical longings of middle age to recapture youth. Peer refers to this possibility himself. On that level this stage of Peer's journey reinforces the idea that his story is an archetypal one - there are middle aged men all over the world who have set themselves up in new lives to be worshiped, adored and sexually serviced by beautiful young women.

Part 2 Act 4 Scenes 8, 9, and 10

Part 2 Act 4 Scenes 8, 9, and 10 Summary

These three scenes relate to how Peer discovers the spiritual emptiness of this phase of his life.

Scene 8 - Peer rides with Anitra across the desert. She complains she's being kidnapped, but Peer tells her that they're leaving to make a new and better life together. She starts to sweet talk him and he gets off the horse, saying he'll be her slave and lead it. Saying she's concerned for him, Anitra gets him to take off his heavy jewels and bags of coin and then strikes him with the whip and rides off, leaving Peer alone in the desert.

Scene 9 - As he removes his robes, Peer speaks in soliloquy about realizing he was made a fool of, how being a prophet was an empty life, and how he was lured into it by Anitra. Once his robes are all off and he wears only European clothes, he reminds himself that he's still got some money in his pocket and in America, decides that to wander the world is the best way to truly find his soul, and vows to ignore women for the rest of his life.

Scene 10 - In a hut in the forest, a middle aged woman whom we understand to be Solveig sits, works a spinning wheel, and sings a song about how she'll always wait for the man who promised to come home.

Part 2 Act 4 Scenes 8, 9, and 10 Analysis

The action of Scene 8, including Peer's claims that he's still youthful, reinforces the idea that what's really going on underneath his adventures as a prophet is the archetypal middle aged foolish desire to be young again. Anitra's theft and departure mark the beginnings of awareness of the truth, but then he convinces himself that the failure of this part of his life were not his fault. In other words, we see how this stage of Peer's journey towards a spiritual life has gone a little further, but how he still has a way to go. Scene 9 takes him in that direction as he realizes that the only way to get closer to his true self is to let go of other relationships and be as alone with the world as he possibly can. Solveig's reappearance in Scene 10 illustrates how this time he's made the right decision since Solveig, as we've seen and will see again, represents Peer's truest, spiritual self.

Part 2 Act 4 Scenes 11, 12, and 13

Part 2 Act 4 Scenes 11, 12, and 13 Summary

Scene 11 - Peer arrives in Egypt, and in soliloquy talks about all the inspirational places he'll visit. A mysterious voice from a statue challenges him with a convoluted poem, saying that he has to make sense of the poem or die. Peer merely makes a note that the statue talked and moves on.

Scene 12 - At the feet of the Sphinx, Peer discovers that it looks familiar and then realizes that it looks like the Boyg he encountered when he was young. He calls out to the Sphinx, asks it to reveal its mysteries and then refers to it as the Boyg. He hears a voice answer in German and, very surprised, writes what just happened down in his notebook. Suddenly the person who actually spoke comes out from behind the Sphinx and introduces himself as Begriffinfeldt. He asks Peer who he thinks the Sphinx is, and Peer says the Sphinx is simply who he is and introduces himself. Begriffinfeldt says that Peer is the chosen one, calls him The Interpreter's Emperor, and takes him back to Cairo.

Scene 13 - Four Keepers appear, wondering where "the director" has gone. Begriffinfeldt comes in with Peer, locks the keepers in a cage, and tells Peer that reason died the previous night. Peer realizes that Begriffinfeldt is insane, and that he's now locked in an insane asylum. Begriffinfeldt calls for other inmates of the asylum to come out and introduces Peer as their emperor. Peer says there's a misunderstanding and suggests that the inmates of the asylum are far from being themselves; they are beside themselves. Begriffinfeldt happily tells him that the inmates are more themselves than anybody, and that Peer is their perfect emperor. An inmate, Huhu, tells of how culture and traders and influences from the west invaded his home country in the East, and how the apes that lived there have lost their natural voices. Peer comments that he's just come from a land where the apes have also lost their natural voices, and urges Huhu to go and save them. Huhu agrees and goes out as a second inmate appears, carrying a mummy and describing himself as King Apis. He asks Peer how he can be more himself, and Peer says that since King Apis is dead, the way for the man to become more himself is to kill himself. The man agrees and fashions a noose. Just as he's about to kill himself a third inmate rushes in, shouting that he's a pen. Peer says he's a piece of paper, and the man says he's empty of ink, grabs a knife and cuts his wrists so he has something to write with. Peer struggles to keep him from dying but it doesn't work. Peer calls out to God for help and faints. Befriffinfeldt crowns him with a crown of straw and pronounces him emperor of the self.

Part 2 Act 4 Scenes 11, 12, and 13 Analysis

The action of this section illustrates the dangers of the Troll/Gyntian faith of the self. Scenes 11 and 12 are essentially set up, getting Peer into the insane asylum. It's

possible to infer that the Voice from the Statue and the Voice of the Sphinx are both provided by Begriffinfeldt, who has been following him and, for reasons known only to Peer's destiny, has decided he's an Emperor. Meanwhile, because the Sphinx is an ancient symbol of mystery and hidden truths, Peer's observation that the Sphinx resembles the Boyg has a key thematic significance. Because the Boyg, as we've seen, represents Peer's deepest self, Peer's encounter with the Sphinx represents the way in which Peer is drawing closer to the ultimate confrontation with his True Self, the mysterious side of him that's been hidden from him all his life.

Before Peer can experience that encounter, however, he has to be stripped of his illusions about the Troll/Gyntian philosophy of the self. This is what happens as a result of his vivid confrontations with people who we're told are more themselves than anybody. It's at this point that the play takes on a satirical tone, satire being a kind of storytelling in which a dramatic point is made about a person or a characteristic by exaggerating it. In this case, the play is making a point about the dangers of faith in the Sufficient Self by showing extreme examples of what happens to those who have too much of that kind of faith. Begriffinfeldt's comment that Peer is the Emperor of the Self suggests that because of his unquestioning faith in the Self Peer is the most insane of all the people we've just seen, that the Troll/Gyntian philosophy of the Sufficient Self is an insane faith, and that destruction is the ultimate result of such faith. Finally, this section of the play contains a powerful and immediate relevant warning to contemporary society, in which it seems that faith in the self is promoted as the ultimate source of truth.

Part 3 Act 5 Scene 1

Part 3 Act 5 Scene 1 Summary

This part of the play tells the story of Peer as an old man. Peer stands with the Captain on the deck of the sailing ship that's taking him home. As he and the Captain look at the familiar mountains of the coast, the Captain comments that there's a storm rolling in. Peer asks him to remind him to pay the crew, saying he doesn't have much, thanks to the shifting tides of fortune but what he does have he'll gladly share. As the Captain keeps his eyes on the storm, he mentions that the money will come in handy for the sailors and their families, mentioning the Cook in particular. Peer quickly becomes angry, saying that he doesn't want his hard earned money going to support other men's wives and children and commenting on how he' s got nobody waiting for him. The Captain calmly tells him he can do what he wants with his money and then goes below to make preparations for the storm. Left alone, Peer comments in soliloquy that families don't matter to men like the sailors, they'll take whatever money they get, go out and get drunk, and frighten their families.

The storm hits and the ship starts to roll. The Lookout spots a wreck nearby with a trio of survivors clinging to debris. The Captain gives orders to try to rescue them, but the storm is too powerful and the wreck and survivors disappear. On his way to the rear of the boat Peer speaks in soliloquy how everyone's less than themselves on a ship, and talks about how he'll make his money back when he gets home and can be a proper boss again. At the back of the ship he encounters a Strange Passenger whom Peer describes as being white as a sheet. The Passenger comments on the glorious power of the storm, on the excitement of so much approaching death, and asks Peer whether he'll allow him to take his body once he's gone and use it for dissection and research. Peer angrily tells him to go away, and the Stranger disappears, saying he'll see Peer again when the ship has sunk.

The storm worsens, the crew struggles to keep the ship afloat, and Peer asks for their help in securing his luggage. They ignore him, the ship runs around, and the lights go out.

Part 3 Act 5 Scene 1 Analysis

Setting this section of the play on a ship symbolizes how Peer, both literally and metaphorically, is coming to the end of his journey. Not only is he coming back home after years of adventures abroad and also coming to the end of his life, he's also coming to the end of his spiritual journey towards living according to the philosophy of the True Self. His conversations with the Captain and the Strange Passenger, his soliloquies, and the encounters he has later with the Cook and the Button Molder, among others, indicate there are lots of ways in which Peer is still living according to the Gyntian / Sufficient Self philosophy, but the wreck of the ship represents how that philosophy

must be destroyed so that Peer can live truly. Meanwhile, while the encounter with the Strange Passenger, who represents the inevitability of the death and decay of the body, foreshadows the death of Peer's body and the freeing of his soul.

Part 3 Act 5 Scene 2

Part 3 Act 5 Scene 2 Summary

The ship has sunk. Peer and the Cook cling to the sides of a raft, which is overloaded by their weight and is about to sink. They each try to convince the other to let go, the Cook saying he's got children at home to take care of and Peer saying he's more in need of life. The Cook, who has an injured hand, starts to go under. Peer tries to hold him up and urges him to say the Lord's Prayer. All the Cook can remember is the phrase "Give us this day." He repeats it three times then goes under.

The Strange Passenger appears and asks Peer whether he's re-considered his offer. Peer shouts that he's still got life to live, and then tries to figure out who the Passenger is. He wonders if he's the Devil, but the Passenger suggests that the Devil doesn't offer the promise of light the way he does. Peer insists that the Passenger go away, saying that he's still got the right to live. The Passenger leaves, saying that Peer doesn't have to worry about dying since no hero in any play dies halfway through the last act.

Part 3 Act 5 Scene 2 Analysis

Through Peer's encounter with the Cook, the play seems to suggest that Peer and his philosophy of the Sufficient Self are selfish at their core. There is, however, the suggestion in this scene that at the core of the Sufficient Self philosophy is simply the basic human instinct to survive, no matter what. Both the Cook and Peer are struggling to do exactly that, but the implication of Peer's survival is that the drive to survive isn't enough, thereby suggesting that the survival instinct has been corrupted by greed.

This point is reinforced by the Cook's last words in contrast with what we know of who Peer is. When he starts by saying, "Give us this day," the Cook intends to complete the phrase with, "our daily bread," which means that all he's asking for is that which is sufficient to survive. Compare this with Peer, who all along has been driven to financial and power-based success and who even in this scene as he faces death suggests he still needs to have more.

The true identity of the Strange Passenger is hinted at in his second scene with Peer, in which the Passenger refers to himself as a bringer of light. Since angels are traditionally bringers and messengers of light, the implication is that the Passenger is himself an angel. His earlier interest in Peer's body is perhaps an unusual interpretation of an angel's traditional role, but upon deeper reflection if an angel's role is in fact to bring a soul to heaven, why shouldn't s/he also have an interest in the end of the body as the Strange Passenger is? In any case, the Passenger's final reference to the "last act" is witty, self-conscious and ironic, making it clear that the Passenger knows he's a character in a play, and thereby adding another level to our perception that he transcends the literal world.

Part 3 Act 5 Scene 3

Part 3 Act 5 Scene 3 Summary

Peer is on the road back home when he passes a funeral procession. He joins in, glad that it's not his procession but curious to hear who's died.

The Pastor speaks over the body of the dead man, and tells the story of his life. His long speech reveals that it's the young man that Young Peer saw back in the first act cutting off his finger. Peer's belief that the man was avoiding the war turns out to be true, while the Pastor's speech reveals that the man did what he did so he could stay home and take care of his family. He goes on to explain how the man rebuilt his farm after floods and avalanches and how his three sons went to the new world, made a lot of money, and forgot about him. Finally, the Pastor praises the man for being nothing but himself, and living according to his own truth.

As the procession leaves Peer realizes that the story of the man should have been his story, and decides to live from that moment on according to the drives and demands of his true self.

Part 3 Act 5 Scene 3 Analysis

The Pastor's moving eulogy is a thematically powerful illustration of the play's central theme, that the life of the True Self is a life well lived. The story of the man who cut off his finger is opposite in just about every way to Peer's story, but most notably in the way that the man lived his life to provide for others as opposed to Peer having lived to provide only for himself. This scene is the thematic climax of the play, with its power affecting even Peer and perhaps actually making his decision to live the life of the True Self take hold. We might justifiably have doubts, however, since he's made similar vows in the past and has continued living in exactly the same way.

Part 3 Act 5 Scenes 4, 5, and 6

Part 3 Act 5 Scenes 4, 5, and 6 Summary

Scene 4 - Peer encounters a group of men attending the auction of the belongings of a dead woman. As the men discuss the items they've bought, including Peer's old ladle that he once used when he pretended to be a button molder and others belongings, it becomes clear that the dead woman was Ingrid, whom Peer kidnapped from her wedding when he was a boy, while the men are revealed to be some of the men who teased Peer at the wedding. None of them recognize him, and are interested in the story he tells of being in San Francisco and seeing a performance based on the life of a pig in which the performer, praised for the realism of his performance, actually had a live pig concealed under his cloak. The listener's drift away confused.

Scene 5 - Peer searches a forest for something to eat. He finds an onion and peels it, discovers its layers, and as he peels layer after layer comments in soliloquy on how the layers of an onion are like the layers of a life. He becomes frustrated and throws away the onion without eating it. He continues on his way through the forest and discovers the hut he built for Solveig. At first he doesn't recognize it, but after he hears Solveig singing inside realizes where he is, feels that he's not worthy of her, and runs away.

Scene 6 - As Peer runs through the forest, he encounters a series of hallucinations that challenge his past actions - thoughts he should have allowed to fly free, watchwords and morals he should have lived by, songs he should have sung, tears he should have shed, and deeds he should have done. Peer justifies his actions each time. Finally he hears Aase's voice, singing of how Peer has been misled by the devil. Peer runs out, saying all these sins are hard to bear.

Part 3 Act 5 Scenes 4, 5, and 6 Analysis

This series of short scenes illustrate how Peer is drawing closer to his true self but is still afraid of meeting it head on.

Scene 4 - The auction of Peer's belongings and the story of the performer and the pig both relate to the play's theme in that they reinforce the idea of the emptiness associated with the life of the Sufficient Self. In the case of the auction, this is because the belongings being auctioned are associated with Ingrid and therefore with the vacuous selfishness of Peer's desires in kidnapping her. In the case of the story of the performer and the pig, the story is a parable of falseness, of the dangers of trying to fool people. Because this is something we've seen Peer do throughout his story, his telling of the story is both ironic and revealing in that he finally seems to realize his way of being has been antithetical to living according to the True Self.

Scene 5 - Peer's soliloquy about the onion is similar in technique, if not in content, to the famous "All the world's a stage" speech from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. Both

analyze life in terms of several layers, or stages. The main difference between the two is that while the Shakespeare speech follows life through to its ultimate end, i.e. death, Peer throws away the onion before both it and his train of thought reach its natural conclusion. This suggests that Peer is still unready to face the reality of his death, a suggestion reinforced by his running away from Solveig, who as we've seen represents his True Self.

Scene 6 - The voices that Peer hears, like the Boyg in Part 1, are externalizations and manifestations of his True Self. His thoughts, songs, tears, etc. are all aspects of true feeling and of his soul that has been ignored, while Aase's voice clearly states he's been led astray. His fleeing from all the voices and the truth they speak again represents how he's still struggling against letting go of the way he's always lived. The next encounter, with the Button Molder, suggests just as clearly that Peer's time for reconciling with his True Self is running out.

Part 3 Act 5 Scenes 7, 8, and 9

Part 3 Act 5 Scenes 7, 8, and 9 Summary

Scene 7 - As Peer hurries across the moors, he meets a Button Molder, who tells him that he's come to melt him down and use him in the creation of new life in the same way that old metal buttons are melted down and used in the creation of new ones. Peer protests that it's not his time, but the Button Molder tells him that "the Master" decides when it's time and no one else. He goes on to explain that if Peer were a really bad sinner he'd be sent to Hell, but because Peer's sins are relatively insignificant he's only going to be melted down. Peer asks what his sins are, and the Button Molder explains that his principal sin has been not being himself. Peer protests that that's all he's ever been, but the Button Molder tells him that the Master has made his decision. Peer pleads for a little more time to prove that he has in fact been himself, and the Button Molder grants it. Peer runs off to find witnesses to support his claim.

Scene 8 - As he searches for his witness, Peer encounters the Troll King. He tells Peer that he and his daughter have both fallen on hard times, but that his grandson (Peer's son) is doing well. Peer interrupts him and asks him to provide a reference saying that Peer has lived according to the dictates of his True Self. The Troll King tells him, however, that since Peer left he's lived solely according to the Troll's philosophy of the Sufficient Self, and proves it by showing him Troll newspapers in which Peer's name comes up again and again as an example of how to live like a good Troll. He then asks for money, saying that his grandchildren aren't supporting him the way they should and adding that nobody believes in Trolls anymore. Peer tells him he hasn't got any more money and runs out.

Scene 9 - Peer encounters the Button Molder again, and asks what it means to live according to the True Self. The Button Molder explains that it means living according to the will of the Master. When Peer asks how someone can determine what the will of the Master is, the Button Molder says he must use intuition. Peer then admits that he's sinned, and asks whether finding a priest and giving his confession will save him from being melted down. The Button Molder agrees, but says it's his last chance. Peer runs out, desperate to find a priest.

Part 3 Act 5 Scenes 7, 8, and 9 Analysis

Scene 7 - The Button Molder takes the premise first suggested by the Strange Passenger, that after death the body is an empty shell that can be used for anything, and takes it a step further by suggesting that the entire being, body and soul, is to be recycled. Meanwhile, Peer's continued protests that he has indeed lived according to his true self reinforce the premise that he still has a lot to learn and a lot of false illusions to dispel before he can truly live in the way the Master (i.e. God) created him to live.

The appearance of the Button Molder follows through on the foreshadowing earlier in the play in which it was revealed that Peer pretended to be a button molder when he was a child. Given the symbolic meaning of that earlier revelation, that Peer himself was the author of his own transformation, the appearance of the Button Molder in this scene is another example of the way Peer's inner personality is portrayed through external means in the same way as the Boyg and the spirits in Scene 6 of this act were.

Scene 8 - The reappearance of the Troll King confirms for us what we've understood about Peer all along, that he's been living according to the Troll philosophy of the Sufficient Self. As a result of this encounter Peer finally realizes, at least to a point, how he's been lying to himself all along. His final realizations occur in the following scene with the Button Molder.

Scene 9 - In this scene Peer fully and finally realizes that he truly has been living according to the Troll Philosophy of the Sufficient Self, but what he doesn't realize is that in his desperate desire to evade his fate as proposed by the Button Molder he's still living according to that philosophy. Given that the Button Molder says the way of the True Self is living according to the will of the Master, and given that the Button Molder is in fact a manifestation of the Master's will, by evading the Button Molder Peer is in effect evading the Master's Will and therefore still focused on his Sufficient Self. His quest for a Priest, in a desperate attempt to preserve his identity and being, leads us into the play's final scene and its dramatic climax.

Part 3 Act 5 Scene 10

Part 3 Act 5 Scene 10 Summary

Peer encounters a Lean Man who at first looks like a priest, but whose conversation hints at the possibility that he is in fact the Devil. When Peer bids him farewell in the same way as he would any other fellow, the Lean Man comments that Peer doesn't seem to have any prejudices and asks what he can do to help him, but adds that Peer shouldn't ask for money or power. He says that those things aren't his to give any more since so many people seem to be taking them for themselves. Peer asks for a place to stay so that he can keep his identity and avoid being melted down, thereby losing his identity. When the Lean Man says that Peer's sins have hardly been bad enough to warrant him having a place in Hell, Peer lists all the evil things he's done - lied, trafficked in slaves, sold pagan idols, and caused death (this refers to the death of the Cook). The Lean Man says that none of these so-called sins is bad enough, and says he can't afford to waste any more time talking with Peer since he's off to take custody of a soul that's ready to be transformed. When Peer asks what he means, the Lean Man explains that people can live their True Selves either by living right or living wrong, and that one of his jobs is to take souls that have lived wrong and transform them through the various tortures of hell into souls that have been purified and made right. He then tells Peer that the soul he's looking for, and intending to take away for purification, belongs to a man named Peer Gynt. Peer tells him that he saw the man some miles away, and the Lean Man hurries off to complete his mission.

Left alone in the forest, Peer apologizes to Nature for not having gratefully accepted its gifts and beauty, saying all he wants before he dies is a chance to see one last sunrise. He then hides as a small parade of churchgoers passes by, saying he's unworthy to even be near their faith. As he hides he again encounters the Button Molder, who asks for the list of sins that Peer was supposed to get. When Peer tells him he has no list, the Button Molder tells him his time is up. Peer hears a woman singing, realizes its Solveig, realizes that his rejection of her is the sum of all his sins, and runs to her. The Button Molder tells him this is his last chance.

As Solveig comes out of the hut Peer built so long ago for her, Peer falls at her feet. She recognizes him instantly, welcomes him home, and forgives him. The Button Molder is lingering nearby, and asks Peer again for his list of sins. Still hoping to be saved from being melted down, Peer asks Solveig to explain where he's been all these years. Solveig says he's lived in her heart and soul. Peer realizes that through her love he is redeemed and can truly live according to his true self. As the sun rises, he collapses into Solveig's lap and she sings him a lullaby. The Button Molder leaves, saying that this is truly Peer's last chance. Solveig continues to sing, her arms wrapped protectively around Peer.

Part 3 Act 5 Scene 10 Analysis

Peer's meeting with the Lean Man adds an interesting twist to the interpretations that we, and Peer, have made of his life. As it turns out, Peer has lived according to his True Self after all, but the wrong side of that self. In other words, the Lean Man's revelation tells us that the philosophy of the Sufficient Self and the philosophy of the True Self are not two different things but are actually two sides of the same coin - one could not exist without the other.

The Lean Man's description of the process by which he transforms souls bears a strong resemblance to Purgatory. This is a kind of halfway point between Heaven, the home after death of souls that have lived right, and Hell, the home of souls that have lived wrong. In Catholic theology, Purgatory is the place where souls that are not too evil, as Peer's soul apparently is, can be redeemed by time and punishment. This is something different from what the Button Molder plans, which is to have Peer melted down and re-used just as he is with little or no chance of redemption. As a result of Peer's encounter with the Lean Man, Peer chooses to attempt to redeem himself rather than having to go through the Lean Man's purgatory and redemption. This choice leads us into Peer's final encounter with Solveig, which represents his long-delayed union with the living right side of his True Self.

Peer's encounter with Solveig is the play's dramatic climax, the point at which his physical and spiritual journeys both come to an end. He finally understands what we have understood all along, that Solveig is his physical and spiritual home and that for him to live with her is for him to live in accordance with his True Self. The fact that their reunion occurs at sunrise suggests that Peer is experiencing the dawn of a new life in the same way as the world is experiencing the dawn of a new day. Finally, Peer's peaceful coming home to Soveig represents the peace that awaits all of us at the end of our days, whether in death or in letting go of the trials, worries and beliefs of life, thus bringing to a close his archetypal journey of discovery and transformation.

Bibliography

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Characters

Ase

Ase is Peer's mother. She loves her son very much and makes many sacrifices for him. But from Peer's words at her death, it is also apparent that she was willing to punish, even beat him, if necessary. Ase wants to believe in Peer, and so, when he tells her his stories, she initially believes him. She pushes Peer to make something of himself, even berating him and calling him lazy when she must. When Peer is banished, she is the one who is fined and who loses everything she has. But in spite of all that she suffers, Ase is happy to see Peer when he appears at her deathbed.

The Button Moulder

The Button Moulder represents Peer's future. In a sense, the Button Moulder is death, who has come to claim Peer. Peer is neither bad enough for hell, nor good enough for heaven. So the Button Moulder has come for Peer, to melt him in his ladle. Peer is destined to become just one more of the lost souls, indistinguishable from the others who are sent to this nonentity of existence. The Button Moulder is turned away by Solveig whose love for Peer proves that he must be worthy of such devotion.

The Great Boyg

The Great Boyg represents the riddle of existence. He is a shapeless, frightening monster, who cannot be conquered. He blocks Peer's way up the mountain, and he tells him that although he never fights, he is never beaten. When it seems that the Boyg will take Peer, the sound of a woman singing sends him away. The Boyg cannot beat a woman.

Ingrid

Ingrid is the bride kidnapped by Peer. Since she is hiding from her bridegroom at her own wedding, it does not appear too unlikely that Peer is really rescuing her. In fact, when Peer abandons her, Ingrid is very angry, wanting to continue on with him.

Mountain King's Daughter

See Woman in green

Old Man of the Mountain

The father of the woman in green, whom Peer seeks to marry. He has a number of tests that Peer must go through to prove that he can become a troll, and thus, worthy of his daughter.

Peer Gynt

Peer is the central protagonist in this play. When the play opens he has no plans, no future, and no money. He seems not to care about not having these things, and it is his mother who berates him for his lack of ambition. Peer kidnaps Ingrid on her wedding day, but it does not appear to be from love. Instead, he wants her for her dowry, and he really just takes her because he has been denied her. Rather than work for what he wants, Peer simply takes what he thinks he should be given. Peer has many adventures after he abandons Ingrid, but in all of them, he is completely selfish and self-centered, thinking only of what he wants or what will benefit him. Although he finds great wealth, and much of it dishonestly or at least dishonorably, Peer loses what he has several times, and when he finally returns to *Peer (Derek Jacobi, on the left) aboard the ship just before the fateful wreck* his home, he brings no riches home with him. Instead, Peer finds the greatest riches of all, the love of Solveig, which was always there for him to discover.

Solveig

Solveig is a young farmer's daughter who Peer meets at Ingrid' s wedding. She is initially interested in Peer, but she is warned off by her father. After Peer runs away with Ingrid, Solveig joins Ase in searching for him. And when Peer is banished, Solveig chooses to leave her sister and parents and join Peer in living an isolated life in the forest. After only a brief time together, Solveig is left alone while Peer, who has left to pick up firewood, leaves for good. She promises to wait for him and she does so, even though the wait has lasted many years. Solveig's love for Peer is far greater than he deserves, but it is her love that saves him and gives meaning to his life.

Woman in green

Believes Peer's lies and agrees to marry him. He abandons her, and later she reappears with a troll-child, whom she identifies as Peer's child. Her threats to destroy Peer's happiness with Solveig cause him to run away.

Themes

Absurdity

Because *Peer Gynt* was conceived of as poetical fantasy, Ibsen had little concern with creating reality. Many of the things that Peer does are unrealistic and absurd, beginning with Act I when the play opens to Peer's inventive and clearly exaggerated story of hunting, a story his mother believes. Another example occurs within a few lines when Peer picks up his mother and sets her atop the roof of her house. Still another sequence that is absurd is Peer's meeting with the trolls in the forest. Peer is willing to become one of the trolls, even wearing a tail and consuming the troll's natural food. Ibsen uses these absurd situations and characters to poke fun at society. The playwright makes clear that the situations Peer is placed in are as absurd as some of the elements within the society where Ibsen lives.

Love

Although Peer kidnaps Ingrid on her wedding day, it is clear that love is not the reason. In fact, Peer is too selfish to really be motivated by love of anything. In his selfishness, Peer wants Ingrid for the dowry she would bring, a dowry that would enable him to escape having to work. However, there is love in this play, and that is the love that motivates Solveig. She sacrifices her family, friends, and home to live with Peer, isolated and ostracized in the forest. And although she can only share his life briefly, Solveig waits patiently for him to return. Peer never tells her when he might return, and in fact, he is gone for many years. But still, Solveig waits, alone in the hut, and when Peer finally returns an old man, she quickly greets him with love and thanks him for having made her life fuller and happier. Solveig offers an example of enduring, committed love for someone who spends much of his life trying to escape any commitment.

Return to Nature

The trolls espousing organic nature mirrors a trend in the 19th century, a back to nature movement and a more natural life that Ibsen was satirizing. The trolls embrace a "simple, homey lifestyle" of natural foods. The food may taste terrible, but the fact that it is "local produce" is more important than taste. The clothing can only be local, nothing imported, which the troll refers to as "Christian clothes." Peer's beliefs are ok, because the trolls care only for outward appearance; if he agrees with the trolls on style, Peer may believe whatever he wants, even if it gives the trolls, "the creeps." Ibsen creates a world where what is natural, regardless of taste or appearance, is more important than ideas or intellect.

Punishment and Revenge

Peer's kidnapping of the bride, Ingrid, results in condemnation and punishment. Much of this is simply revenge, directed toward someone whose bragging and outlandish behavior has flaunted accepted societal rules. The punishment, though, is also shared by Peer's mother, Ase, who loses everything to pay fines leveled toward the only member of Peer's family who is available for punishment, his mother. Ase loses her farm, inheritance, furnishings, everything she owns. She becomes subject to the charity of the town, when she is given a house to live in until her death. Peer can remain free only as long as he remains isolated in the forest. If he should leave the safety of the forest, Peer becomes vulnerable to capture. This means that Solveig, if she wants to share his life, will also have to share Peer's punishment.

Morality

Peer is constantly challenged to explain his moral identity. He quotes William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, "To thine own self be true," but he lives his life by the troll motto, "Be true to yourself-ish." When he is an old man, Peer finally recognizes that while he has often quoted the former lines, he has lived the troll's lines. Peer has been selfish and self-centered, thinking only of his own desires and needs. When he is confronted with Solveig's steadfastness and loyalty, he finally recognizes his own moral failure. Humanity, that trait that the trolls wished to eliminate from Peer, is largely defined by man's morality. Without morality, Peer loses much of his humanity and nearly succumbs to the Button Moulder's advances. Only the selflessness of Solveig' s love could transform the troll's maxim for life into the adage that Peer needed to embrace for his moral survival "To thine own self be true."

Religion

Religion is represented by the allegorical figures of the Great Boyg and the Button Moulder. Both of these figures represent the future that Peer must face as he cannot find a moral compass by which to live his life. The Great Boyg represents the riddle of existence, which must be confronted and answered to live life as a moral human being. The Button Moulder represents Peer's fate when it appears that his life has been without meaning. When Peer lives his life by taking and never giving, he becomes vulnerable to the fate that the Button Moulder offers, a life of nothingness. It is a death worse than an eternity in hell.

Style

Act

A major division in a drama. In Greek plays the sections of the drama signified by the appearance of the chorus and were usually divided into five acts. This is the formula for most serious drama from the Greeks to the Romans, and to Elizabethan playwrights like William Shakespeare. The five acts denote the structure of dramatic action. They are exposition, complication, climax, falling action, and catastrophe. The five act structure was followed until the nineteenth century when Ibsen combined some of the acts. Although, *Peer Gynt* is a five act play, Ibsen deviates somewhat from the traditional format. The exposition occurs in the first act when Peer kidnaps Ingrid. The complication occurs in the second act when Peer makes a hasty alliance with the Mountain King's daughter. The climax occurs in the third act when Peer must flee from the woman in green and the troll child. The fourth act contains the story of Peer's adventures. The falling action occurs in act five when Peer is confronted with his own selfishness and the love of Solveig offers him salvation. There is no catastrophe in this play, since Solveig averts it.

Character

A person in a dramatic work. The actions of each character are what constitute the story. Character can also include the idea of a particular individual's morality. Characters can range from simple stereotypical figures to more complex multi-faceted ones. Characters may also be defined by personality traits, such as the rogue or the damsel in distress. "Characterization" is the process of creating a lifelike person from an author's imagination. To accomplish this the author provides the character with personality traits that help define who she will be and how she will behave in a given situation. For instance, Peer is immediately identified as lazy and a liar. He also is quickly established as selfish and reckless.

Drama

A drama is often defined as any work designed to be presented on the stage. It consists of a story, of actors portraying characters, and of action. But historically, drama can also consist of tragedy, comedy, religious pageant, and spectacle. In modern usage, drama explores serious topics and themes but does not achieve the same level as tragedy.

Genre

Genres are a way of categorizing literature. Genre is a French term that means "kind" or "type." Genre can refer to both the category of literature such as tragedy, comedy, epic, poetry, or pastoral. It can also include modern forms of literature such as drama novels,

or short stories. This term can also refer to types of literature such as mystery, science fiction, comedy or romance. *Peer Gynt* is fantasy, written in a mixture of prose and verse.

Plot

This term refers to the pattern of events. Generally plots should have a beginning, a middle, and a conclusion, but they may also sometimes be a series of episodes connected together. Basically, the plot provides the author with the means to explore primary themes. Students are often confused between the two terms; but themes explore ideas, and plots simply relate what happens in a very obvious manner. Thus the plot of *Peer Gynt* is the story of Peer's adventures. But the theme is of how Solveig's love is able to save Peer from the destruction his selfishness has wrought.

Setting

The time, place, and culture in which the action of the play takes place is called the setting. The elements of setting may include geographic location, physical or mental environments, prevailing cultural attitudes, or the historical time in which the action takes place. The locations for *Peer Gynt* include a small village in Norway, a nearby forest, Africa, and a boat at sea. The action begins when Peer is a young man and lasts over many years. During the course of the play, Peer progresses from young man to middle aged man to an old man. Actual ages and a time setting are never provided.

Historical Context

Legend has it that when Mark Twain visited London during the Diamond Jubilee celebration of Queen Victoria, he observed that British history had advanced more in the sixty years of her reign than in all of the two thousand years that preceded it. This was certainly true of the whole of Europe, which saw dramatic change occur within the 19th century. With just one invention, the steam engine, the industrial revolution began. Improvements in the steam engine led to faster ships and the easier transport of goods, which led to increased trade, improved economic conditions, and better availability of goods. But the improvements in steam power also led to faster railroad transportation, superior manufacturing looms, more efficient printing presses, and automated farming and agricultural equipment, such as the combine. But industry was not the only area to undergo dramatic change. Education, especially the development of compulsory primary and secondary education, was spreading around throughout the world. At the same time, universities and colleges were spreading quickly, and there was a new emphasis on learning. Meanwhile, newspapers were being founded in major cities around the world, encyclopaedias were being published, and the *World Almanac* was printed for the first time.

The introduction of the telegraph and the intercontinental cable quickly linked the world and made communications easier, as did the invention of the telephone. Other developments also occurred, such as photography, which improved quickly, especially with the ease in which pictures could be taken and developed. Improvements in canning make it easier to process, preserve, and transport previously perishable foods. In addition, the invention of refrigerated rail cars made shipping of food and meat safer and easier. In science, the new study of ecology was invented to describe environmental balance, and the followers of Charles Darwin begin to study the evolution of man. Advances in medicine identified many of the bacteria that spread disease, while the weapons of war also changed with the invention of the Galling gun, which made it easier to kill people.

The influence of Darwin in the midst of all this scientific and industrial progress cannot be ignored or underestimated. His books, especially *The Origins of Species*, fed a growing debate about the role of man and religion. Darwin questioned long-standing assumptions about humanity and man's role in the world. His next book, *The Descent of Man*, only continued to fuel the fire. Religious leaders, who felt that Darwin was attacking a literal interpretation of the bible, were outraged. And the movement to subject the bible to a rigorous scientific examination that it was not designed to withstand, further fueled the debate. The Utilitarian Movement of the mid-nineteenth century also raised questions about the usefulness of religion in man's life. If man's existence was subjected to reason, then religion provided little benefit for men, who should rely more completely on technology, economics, and science for survival. Jeremy Bentham and his followers sought to subject every institution to the light of human reason. However, religion is based on faith, not reason. In many ways, religion was seen as a luxury that modern men did not need for survival. Thus Ibsen's conclusion of *Peer Gynt* appears as almost a rejection of this scientific approach to life.

Ibsen is basically arguing that a man's life must have a moral center to have meaning. Society's fear of science, and the loss of humanity that all of this very rapid change had brought, reinforced for many the need to embrace religion if humanity was to endure.

Critical Overview

In his translation of *Peer Gynt*, Kenneth McLeish states that Ibsen intended his work to be read and not performed on stage. But, McLeish notes, Ibsen's work was quickly recognized as a masterpiece of Scandinavian literature, of equivalent status to Goethe's *Faust* in Germany or Manzoni's / *promessi sposi* in Italy. The reason for this acclaim did not simply lie in the text's brilliance, although many critics did embrace *Peer Gynfs* poetic narrative. Instead, it was Ibsen's use of Norwegian folklore, especially Peter Christen Asbjorsen's *Norwegian Fairy Tales*, upon which Peer's early adventures are based, that broadened the text's appeal. McLeish also declares that Ibsen's satirizing of several contemporary trends also increased the poem's appeal. Some of these trends, states McLeish, include satire on.

The new 'science' of archeology, of superstition and above all of the 'back to nature' movements of the 1860s: his trolls believe in making their own clothes and eating such 'organic' foods as cowdung and bullpiss, and one of the lunatics fights for the purity of the ancient language, unsullied by importations from foreign tongues a preoccupation of mid-19th century Norwegian intellectuals.

However, McLeish says that Ibsen was not serious with any of this satire. Purportedly, he intended *Peer Gynt* to be a funny fantasy that would move quickly and hold the reader's attention. As a poem, it largely succeeded.

In 1876, Ibsen adapted his verse poem to the stage. In doing so, he was required to cut sections of the text and make the work shorter in length. Incidental music was added, and McLeish reports that a full orchestra accompanied this first performance. The music helped to fill the time it took to move the sets between scenes. According to McLeish, Ibsen hated the idea of his verse poem being translated into prose, and so McLeish's translation includes a combination of the verse and prose in an effort to capture more of Ibsen's intent. In contemporary productions, as in the one staged by the National Theatre for which McLeish provided a translation, the largest number of cuts in Ibsen's work occur in the African scenes, which contain much of the 19th century political satire. McLeish points out that these scenes contain much repetition and that many of the ideas would be incomprehensible to modern audiences.

Critics often appreciate satire that pokes fun at society's so-called "sacred cows," and Ibsen's nineteenth-century critics and audience were no different. Although no reviews of the 1876 theatrical production are readily available, Edvard Beyer has provided a compilation of reviews of the printed verse poem when it was published in 1867. These reviews of *Peer Gynt* were mostly positive, although a few critics had serious complaints about the last two acts of the poem. Bjornstjerne Bjornson reviewed Ibsen's new work for his own publication, *Norsk Folkeblad*. Bjornson states that Ibsen's work was "a satire on Norwegian selfishness, narrowchestedness, conceitedness." Beyer points to Bjornson's comments about the Button Moulder scenes, noting that "they serve to bring the tale onto 'Christian ground.'" Bjornson thought that Ibsen intended for the conclusion to demonstrate that Solveig loved Peer because she "loves in us, our image of God,"

but that Ibsen's conclusion "is unfortunately unclear and by no means carefully worked out." According to Beyer, many of Bjornson's comments concerning the "topicality and validity of the text" are representative of other Norwegian critics of this period. Bjornson notes that Ibsen's poem "includes in its details and as a whole such a grand and bold statement into all our commotion as we have never received before." An unidentified reviewer for *Morgenblader*, says that *Peer Gynt* is

from beginning to end a veritable torrent of polemic depictions, an adventure drama about egotism, which borrows the licence of folktales in order to give the buoyancy of imagination course for bold symbols, but employs the structure and means of drama in order to impart spontaneous life and vigor to shaping the image of the soul.

This reviewer also says that all the elements of the play are provided and that the reader or audience need not ask additional questions. Beyer notes that this unnamed reviewer offers a review that is "qualified but sympathetic." A strength of the drama is that "by using motifs from folktales" Ibsen "has freed himself from many curbs and restraints, and symbolic allusions have served to bridge gaps." However, this reviewer continues, "the fourth act does not contribute to the progress of the play; nothing changes in a decisive manner until near the end of the fifth act, and the end is no conclusion," but, instead, it leaves more questions. A review in *Aftenbladet*, by Frederik Baetzmann, also finds fault with the final acts, especially the concluding scene with Solveig. Baetzmann points out that having Peer saved "because a woman, Solveig, has remained true to him ... is of course just as absurd in Christian as in psychological terms." Beyer quotes from several additional reviews of Ibsen's poem, but the essence is that Ibsen's work offers some important and interesting political satire, but the work is flawed by the last two acts, which do not work well with the first three acts. However, in spite of this significant problem, most reviews did recommend Ibsen's newest work.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4

Critical Essay #1

Metzger is a Ph.D., specializing in literature and drama at the University of New Mexico. In this essay, she discusses the 20th-century use of Peer Gynt as Nazi propaganda.

During the period that encompassed the Third Reich, *Peer Gynt* was a favorite production of German theatres, who saw in Henrik Ibsen's work elements that could be manipulated to support Nazi ideology. Ibsen was not a socialist, nor would he have embraced the racism and inhumanity that marked the years of Adolf Hitler's reign. Ibsen was familiar with the need for critics and audiences to attribute a political agenda to his work. Of the claim that *A Doll's House* was a feminist work, Ibsen remarked that he was not a feminist, but instead, he believed in human rights and in exposing social injustice. From this claim, it is easy to see that Ibsen would not have approved of Nazi uses of *Peer Gynt* to support a claim of Aryan superiority. As Martin Esslin notes in his study, *Ibsen and the Theatre: The Dramatist in Production*:

Ibsen's first and most obvious impact was social and political. His efforts to make drama and the theatre a means to bring into the open the main social and political issues of the age shocked and scandalized a society who regarded the theatre as a place of shallow amusement.

Thus Ibsen saw the theatre as a place to expose and question social and political issues, not as a place to embrace injustice. Audiences were not shocked by a play that endorsed society; they were shocked by theatre that questioned those conventions. Had Ibsen simply wanted to assert the superiority of social conventions, there would have been no need to write a play about them and no need to move the theatre beyond that of "shallow amusement." But Ibsen had a social conscience, and he would no doubt have been shocked at the use of *Peer Gynt* as a spokesman of the Nazi political machine.

In considering the Nazi-era productions, it is first worthwhile examining a post-World War II German production of Ibsen's play. In this case, *Peer Gynt* still maintains a political ideology, but Aryan superiority is replaced by a fondness or nostalgic effort to recapture an atmosphere reminiscent of nineteenth-century theatre. In his discussion of the 1971 German stage production of *Peer Gynt*, Fritz Paul points out that the German producer, Peter Stein, used eight different actors to play Peer on stage. Paul describes the intention behind this and states that, "through these different emanations and theatrical metamorphoses, Peer loses his individuality and appears simply as a representative of the nineteenth century." Instead, according to Paul, "the modern notion of subjectivity and individuality and all conventional ideas of self and identity are called into question by the change of actors." Or, as Paul argues, "generalization is achieved through individualization." Paul sees this as a stroke of theatrical genius, but in subverting the individual, Stein also recalls the Victorian fear of the individual that was awakened by industrialization and socialist theories. The demand for better wages and living conditions frightened business owners and the aristocracy, and Ibsen's play, with its use of traditional folktales, seemed, on the surface at least, to be recalling a more

traditional past, when life was more predictable. In this production of *Peer Gynt*, Stein also recalls that past, when the individual and all the demands that he might make upon society are subordinated to the needs to the general.

When in Act V, Stein has Peer and Solveig reclining in a stylized version of a Pieta, Paul concludes that Stein's stage production includes a non-verbal message for the audience: "In today's world this story from Norway about a man called *Peer Gynt* is also no more than a museum piece. At the same time no judgement is passed on the value of museums and their exhibits in general." Although this 1971 production does embrace subtle social and political ideology, it does so in an effort to recall a different era. Stein might have thought he was making a statement about the complexity of modern life in attempting to recall what he considered to be the far simpler life of the nineteenth century, and indeed, there are probably few twentieth-century audiences who would understand the complexity of nineteenth-century life.

A far more political use for *Peer Gynt* is attributed to the many productions during 1933-1944. In an article that explores why Nazi Germany found this play so appealing, Uwe Englert argues that only certain of Ibsen's plays were useful to the Third Reich. Ibsen's social plays, says Englert, were not as useful as the dramas of religion or those with Germanic characters. One of the efforts of the National Socialist cultural policy was to establish new links to Germanic myths. Englert states that during this period in Germany, "theatre was considered the 'stage of the nation,' which could witness here 'its fortune, its rise and fall, its metamorphosis, its sacrificial offering and the purification of the soul of the nation.'" Thus Germany could use the stage to reinvent itself in whatever reincarnation it chose. There was also a move, according to Englert, to move away from what the National Socialists called "unheroic bourgeois drama."

Ibsen fit these initial criteria, but there were several other reasons why this particular playwright became so popular during this period. Englert asserts that the National Socialists "firmly adhered to German and foreign classics [and] thus National Socialist ideology was firmly imbedded in a great context of tradition and was positively sanctioned by the adoption of great names in theatre literature." That the Third Reich considered classical dramas extremely important is not something that should be underestimated, according to Englert. Consequently, the National Socialists undertook an effort to reinvent Ibsen. First, Ibsen's "Scandinavian origin and his allegedly Germanic appreciation of art were untiringly stressed" in the popular press. There were also, according to Englert, attempts to link Ibsen to the ideas of the German philosopher, Johann Georg Hamann. Ibsen's genealogy was also traced, and Ibsen was found to have German ancestry through both his mother and father's distant ancestors. To make all this work, the National Socialists had to concentrate on using Ibsen's earlier works, since these were felt to contain superior links to Fascism, and thus says Englert, "Ibsen was declared an enemy of liberalism and advocate of an order of absolutism."

Peer Gynt was chosen, argues Englert, because Peer sacrifices his humanity as "an embodiment of imperfection and of self-deception, [and] he ostensibly develops into an Americanized money-and-business-man, who does not even hesitate to trade slaves and false idols." In short, Peer becomes the perfect Nazi hero because he embodies all

the worst traits of an American. In another example of a stage production of this play, Englert relates a story wherein the Germans met with more resistance than anticipated in their invasion of Norway, and blaming this on Norway's allegiance to England, Peer was depicted as an 'unscrupulous merchant' who embodied the British mercenary spirit of which Ibsen intended his play to be a warning. So popular was *Peer Gynt* that it was performed 1,183 times during 1933-1944. Only William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was performed more often, states Englert. Much of this popularity can be traced to Hitler's friend, Dietrich Eckart, who made changes in Ibsen's drama to focus more on an "anti-modern interpretation of Ibsen," an interpretation that rewrites much of the play to create a Peer who rejects materialism and who is able to "overcome the inferior race of the trolls." The trolls, of course, are Jews. In fact, Englert relates that in some performances, the king of the trolls was depicted as Jewish, as he was in a 1938 Munich production.

According to Englert, as a result of Eckart's influence, his version of *Peer Gynt* was the basis for nearly all performances in the following years. Englert concludes that in *Peer Gynt* "the National Socialist cultural politicians saw a literary model that they could use for their propaganda purposes in an unrestrained manner. For this reason, there is hardly another drama which was performed so often in the Third Reich as Henrik Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*. Unfortunately Ibsen's play was also appropriated by other venues, as well.

In 1934, *Peer Gynt* was adapted to film, finding yet another audience in German theatres. In a discussion on the play's transformation onto film, Lilia Popova and Knut Brynhildsvoll state that the film's writer chose to select and stress specific motifs present in the play. While observing that Ibsen's play was well suited to film, since Peer's many adventures and the stories contained within the play are more easily captured by a camera, the authors also note that this film deletes Peer's dream sequences. It is worth considering why the film should delete such an important element of the play, since Ibsen used dream sequences in many of his works, and as Esslin notes, the dream visions are always present, even when suppressed. However, the dreamlike Peer would not be in keeping with the Nazi agenda, where hard work is emphasized. Popova and Brynhildsvoll also find that in the film version, even Solveig becomes a propaganda tool, as "a natural woman, who denies her sexuality at least until Peer's return. By means of her purity and virtue she represents the ideal woman of Fascist ideology."

These authors conclude that this adaptation does not "project the fantastic and Utopian ideals of its model." Again, this would not be in keeping with Fascist ideology. As did Englert, Popova and Brynhildsvoll, find that adaptations of this play during this period serve more for propaganda than for an accurate depiction of Ibsen's work. The attempts to use Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* in this manner only serve to indicate the strength of his work. There would be little point in taking the work of an obscure playwright and using it to rewrite history. To use someone of Ibsen's stature to white-wash Nazi ideology was an important goal for the Nazi's, but it was an abomination. Ibsen would have horrified.

Source: Sheri E. Metzger, *for Drama for Students*, Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

Reviewing a 1989 production staged at the annual Shaw Festival in Canada, Bemrose affirms the lasting power of Ibsen's play and its ability to provoke deep thought "long after the final line has been spoken."

Any theatre that dares to tackle Ibsen's classic 1876 drama, *Peer Gynt*, has its work cut out for it. Not only does the sprawling saga of a Norwegian folk hero run to nearly six hours in performance, but the play demands an emotional range and a level of technical virtuosity there are over 50 speaking parts that few companies can muster. All the more credit must go then to the Shaw Festival for its new production of *Peer Gynt* which comes closer than most to what Ibsen had in mind. In some ways, it is surprising that the company in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont., took on *Peer* at all. It is better known for mounting dramas of a sunnier, lighter sort, such as its current pleasing interpretation of George Bernard Shaw's 1908 comedy *Getting Married*. But in doing the Ibsen drama, the Festival has successfully stretched itself into new territory. There are rough patches in the production, and the generally worthy text by London, Ont, translator John Lingard contains such awkwardly up-to-date terms as "lifestyle." But there are many moments when the Festival's streamlined version of *Peer* it has been reduced to three hours turns into exhilarating theatre.

Among Ibsen's works, *Peer Gynt* is something of an anomaly. The Norwegian playwright is known mostly for such dour, realistic prose-dramas as *Hedda Gabbler* and *The Wild Duck*. But *Peer Gynt*, a much earlier work, is exuberant, frequently humorous and written in lively, highly colored poetry. Its hero, Peer Gynt (Jim Mezon), is one of those figures of world literature who, like Falstaff or Don Quixote, seem even larger than the works that gave them birth. Peer is a Nordic Everyman, who in the course of the play ages from a brawling, fantasy-prone youth to an indomitable old man. During his long life, he suffers the pangs of love, wins and loses power and fortune, and has preposterous adventures with trolls, monkeys and Arabian belly dancers. Those adventures are essentially a dramatization of his spiritual progress or lack of it. Chronically restless, Peer is usually faithful to only one thing his desire to run away from himself. In the play, that trait is symbolized by his desertion of Solveig (Gabrielle Rose), the one woman he truly loves.

Peer eventually returns to Solveig, but not before he comes to see that he has wasted his life. The revelation comes from his meeting with a subtly frightening character called the Buttonmoulder (memorably played by Robert Benson), who approaches Peer near the end of the play. It is the Buttonmoulder's job to round up all the souls who are neither bad enough for hell nor good enough for heaven and melt them down like so many imperfect buttons so they can be used in the making of new souls. He tells Peer that he too must be melted down because, like all the other mediocrities, he has "never been himself." His words set Peer on a last, desperate search to discover what the Buttonmoulder means and to become, if possible, "himself."

Peer is easily one of the most demanding roles in all drama. The actor who plays him is onstage most of the time, the main focus of attention in a story that, in the wrong hands, can seem absurd and tedious. Mezon is by no means a complete Peer: he lacks the resonant sexuality that would make his attractiveness to his various lovers wholly believable. But he displays a physical exuberance that expresses Peer's boundless energy of mind and body. In the opening scene, he tells a tall tale to his mother, Aase (given a wry earthiness by Joan Orenstein), about how he has ridden on the back of a stag and fallen off a mountain summit. Mezon acts out Peer's tale with wildly vivid gestures, until he is finally writhing on the floor with the abandon of a three-year-old. And that is the main gift that Mezon brings to his role: he suggests the constant presence of the child within the man.

Indeed, there is a childlike, fairy-tale quality about the entire play. Peer may be lying about the stag, but even more unlikely events happen to him. At one point, he enters the core of a mountain and becomes embroiled with a tribe of trolls. The whole interlude may either be a nightmare or a real event. It is unimportant; the play breaks down the distinction between objective and subjective perceptions and shows that they are equally important. In keeping with that merging of reality and imagination, director Duncan Mclntosh has given his production a deep stylistic unity, assisted by Kevin Lamotte's artfully moody lighting. The world they have created for Peer's inward and outward journey is as gloomy and oppressive as the long Norwegian winter, lit by the sudden shafts of Ibsen's poetry.

Most of the 16 actors who play the more than 50 characters whom Peer meets are excellent and there is something mysteriously satisfying about seeing them in their multiple (sometimes up to seven) roles. Time and again, Peer meets the same faces: Benson appears variously as a man in Peer's native village, a ship's cook and also as the Buttonmoulder. Such repetition symbolizes the fact that, for all his travelling, Peer never gets anywhere: again and again, he is failing to become himself. Near the end of the play, Peer asks the Buttonmoulder what is meant by "becoming oneself." The Buttonmoulder tells him it means "putting yourself to death." That is more than Peer can grasp, but it is a measure of the Shaw Festival's production of *Peer Gynt* that such questions continue to cast a radiance in the mind, long after the final line has been spoken.

Source: John Bemrose. "A Radiant Revival" in *Maclean's*, Vol. 102, no. 30, July 24, 1989, p. 50.

Critical Essay #3

Simon offers a mixed review of a 1989 production staged by the Hartford Stage Company and starring Richard Thomas (John Boy from television's The Waltonsj *in the title role.*

Peer Gynt is one of those very rare plays that see humanity whole. All of man is in it, and most of woman. To look at it is to gaze into an abyss: the abyss of the human soul. Ibsen's hero is artist and wheeler-dealer, dreamer and scrapper, visionary and fool. This eternal adolescent yearns for the heights; this coward needs no banana peel for his pratfalls. Around him are Aase, the overprotective, carping, impossible mother; Ingrid, the Woman in Green, Anitra, three versions of unidealized woman; and Solveig, the ideal beloved-cum-mother figure.

Around Peer, too, are the world and its people; also history, politics, religion, and pusillanimity. It is, like *Lear* and *Faust* and a couple of others, a dramatic summation that encapsulates a universe in some ways the most inclusive and essential. Certainly it is the last word on man's double nature as questing spirit and wallowing troll. And it squarely confronts the ultimate questions of being and extinction, of the possibilities of God, devil, and mere dissolution. Boldly, it asks what is salvation, if such a thing exists. More boldly yet, it probes deeper and deeper into life with poetic fancy and earthy humor. Boldest of all, it does not stoop to easy answers.

That's why *Peer Gynt* continues to be a fruitful puzzle for successive generations of scholars and critics, theater people and audiences; that is why to produce it and see it remain, after 122 years, thrilling challenges. It is to Mark Lamos's hefty credit to have given us, with his Hartford Stage Company, a two-part, five-hour version that, though judiciously pruned, preserves all the essentials and keeps tickling, stimulating, extending us almost all the way. The difficult madhouse scene is not solved; yet only after the shipwreck scene does invention slacken as Lamos and his gallant band fail to come up with images as lyrical, funny, and daring as have gone before.

One big problem is that Lamos allowed Michael Meyer's *Ibsen* to be his chief guide through the play: that he swallowed whole the misinterpretations Meyer offers especially on page 272 of his book. No, Peer does not die in the lunatic asylum or stormy sea, and the great fifth act is just as really and surreally, psychologically and symbolically, the portrait of a confused, contradictory human being. So as not to give us an allegedly romantic, sentimental, banal protagonist Meyer's bugbear Lamos has chosen not to let the hero age and become a figure of pathos; rather, he has him bounce around in youthfully immature vitality all the way. This is a huge mistake: *Gynt* is about life entire, which includes old age, exhaustion, fear of death. The ending of the play can be done perfectly straight without the least danger of banality or sugariness. Correctly understood, it is anything but simple and sentimental; rather, like the rest, funny, absurd, satirical, and sad. Also immensely moving.

Richard Thomas proves such a warm, athletic, intelligent, well-spoken, imaginative, and manifold actor that he could easily have handled that last required dimension: aging. In the supporting cast, Patricia Conolly, Leslie Geraci, and one or two others do handsomely; but some of the other supporting roles, and all the lesser ones, are shortchanged. I admire the courage of the translation by Gerry Bamman and Irene B. Berman, which espouses Ibsen's rhyme and metrics; lacking real poetic powers, however, it falls into a number of pitfalls. Still, it has its good moments and it serves.

There is something anticlimactic about music that is by Grieg, Beethoven, and Mel Marvin. But John Conklin, Merrily Murray-Walsh, and Pat Collins have supplied enough splendid design elements (as well as a few miscarriages) to make this *Peer Gynt* a joyous, unsettling, necessary experience.

Source: John Simon. "The Way We Don't Live Now" in *New York*, Vol. 22, no. 17, April 24, 1989, pp. 141- 42

Critical Essay #4

While offering a mixed appraisal of the Phoenix theatrical companies production o/Peer Gynt, *Brustein has nothing but praise for the power and literary significance of Ibsen's play.*

The intentions of the Phoenix company, which aspires to create a repertory of "time-honored and modern classics," are lofty and honorable, but their productions this year have overwhelmed me with fatigue, impatience, and gloom. My anguished imagination is now subject to a fearful hallucination in which I see the finest works of the greatest dramatists strewn about the Phoenix stage like so many violated corpses, while a chorus of newspaper reviewers gleefully sings dirges in the wings. Perhaps it is unfair to blame anyone but the reviewers themselves for the absurdities they write about Aristophanes and Ibsen; certainly, journalists occupied with exalting the present have always been inclined to knock the past. Yet, it cannot be denied that the Phoenix has provided a generous supply of corks for this pop-gun fusillade.

For it seems to me that the Phoenix, while outwardly more deferential toward the past than the reviewers, is inwardly just as indifferent to it. Instead of letting these plays stand on their own legs, the company's policy is to hale them into the twentieth century by the nearest available appendages. In *Lysistrata* this resulted in extremely painful attempts at topicality (as when an assorted collection of pneumatic females chanted "Sex Almighty, Aphrodite, rah, rah, rah!" or an ungainly chorus carried placards across the stage announcing that "Athens is a Summer Festival"). In *Peer Gynt*, the effort is less clumsy but no less obfuscating a varnish of "theatrical values" is spread thickly over the surface of the play. The Phoenix production never betrays the slightest hint that *Peer Gynt* has an intellectual content, a consistent theme, or, for that matter, any interest at all beyond a histrionic sweep. Stuart Vaughan, the director, has staged the mad scene, for example, as a frenetic phantasmagoria which is quite chilling in its effect, but one has not the vaguest idea what such a scene is doing in the play. With the directorial emphasis on stage effects, crowd scenes, and occasional "Method" touches in the relations between characters, what was conceived as a masterful play of ideas emerges as just another stage piece, and a pretty boring one at that.

But *Peer Gynfs* claim to "classical" stature does not rest on the fact that it provides fat parts for actors, compelling scenes, or the opportunity for designers, directors, and technicians to display their wares; nor is the play particularly distinguished by any profound psychological insights. Considered strictly as *theatre* (a word which is coming to mean the very opposite of drama), the play undoubtedly has severe defects, especially in form. But like all great works, *Peer Gynt* survives because it transcends the facile notion of "theatre," because it is larger than its characters or its effects, and because what it has to say about the nature of existence remains both wide and deep.

In fact, *Peer Gynt*, written nearly a hundred years ago, tells us more about our own condition than almost anything written in America in recent times, for Peer's concern with Self is one of the central problems of our national life. A fanciful storyteller with a

prancing imagination, Peer might have developed into a great man, but he is too absorbed in appearances to become anything more than a great illusionist. As rapist, as honorary troll, as slave trader, as entrepreneur, as prophet, he is the incarnation of compromise, the spirit of accommodation, the apotheosis of the middle way. He whirls giddily around the glove, justifying his absolute lack of conviction and principle with the protest that he is being true to himself. The inevitable conclusion to this maniacal egotism is insanity (where the ego turns in upon itself completely), and it is in the madhouse that Peer is crowned Emperor. Neither saint nor sinner, Peer finally learns he has been a worthless nonentity who existed only in the love of a faithful wife, and at the end of the play he is waiting to be melted down, like all useless things, by the Button Moulder. "He who forfeits his calling, forfeits his right to live," wrote Kierkegaard, who believed, like Ibsen, that careerist self-absorption and mindless self-seeking are the most monstrous waste of life. Or, as the Button Moulder puts it: "To be yourself, you must slay yourself."

"To be yourself is to kill the worst and therefore to bring out the best in yourself' is the way the passage reads in the Phoenix production, which will give you some idea how easily a profundity can become a copybook maxim. But although Norman Ginsbury's doggerel, inaccurate rendering makes William Archer's Victorian bromides seem sublime and precise, the adapter is not exclusively to blame for the general amorphousness of the evening. Stuart Vaughan's cutting is almost guaranteed to make the work incomprehensible, and the central roles are all pretty well miscast. If the Phoenix were a true repertory company, Fritz Weaver would have been ideally placed in the part of the Button Moulder; since it is not, he plays the leading role. A heroic actor with a fine gift for irony, Weaver begins to make sense when Peer gets older; but his heavy style is inappropriate to the younger, quicksilver Peer who is turned into an earthbound swain with monotonous speech inflections and a clumsy pair of hooves.

In brief, we must be grateful to the Phoenix for wanting to mount this play, at the same time wondering what the animating impulse was to do so. In the past, the Phoenix had no policy other than to survive; today, its brochure speaks of creating a "new tradition in the theatre." But since the Phoenix has developed no new methods of staging, no new methods of playing, no new interpretative approach, I am puzzled about what this new tradition will be. There seems to be an authentic desire, as yet unrealized, to create a "working, professional group that can grow as a unit," but we have yet to see any sign that the "time-honored and modern classics" will function as anything more than showcases for the company. Alas, the trouble with the Phoenix is the trouble with the American theatre at large; isolated within its theatre walls, it shows no willingness to abandon itself to any purpose higher than its own existence. In this regard, Ibsen's play remains a cogent lesson; for if the American theatre is ever to be a place for art, it must learn to slay itself.

Source: Robert Brustein. "What's Wrong with the Phoenix? " in his *Seasons of Discontent: Dramatic Opinions 1959-1965, Simon & Schuster, 1965*, pp. 218-21.

Adaptations

An American version of *Peer Gynt* was filmed in 1915.

Peer Gynt was filmed in 1934 by German director Fritz Wendhausen. This film is an adaptation of some of Ibsen's motifs and is not a true version of the play, as Ibsen created, since this film represents Nazi ideology and propaganda and not Ibsen's ideology. Availability of any remaining copies of this film is unknown.

Topics for Further Study

Discuss the use of Christian allegory in *Peer Gynt*.

Peer Gynt has been described as the national story of Norway. Research the social history of 19th century Norway, and try to explain why you think this play has such appeal.

Peer Gynt is based on myths and fables. Research some Norwegian fables and try to explain how this play might be similar or different from those fables.

In Act IV, Peer travels extensively and has many adventures, all as he seeks to become wealthy. Do some research into the economic situation in 19th-century Norway. Try to determine what life was like for people without family wealth. Consider what Ibsen might be saying about the relative importance of economic security.

In *Peer Gynt*, Ase loses everything after she is fined. However, the crime is Peer's. Investigate the legal system in place in 19th-century Norway, and discuss the social implications and options for family members of an accused criminal.

Compare and Contrast

1876: The International Association for the Exploration and Civilization of Africa is founded under the auspices of the Belgian king, Leopold II.

Today: There are few areas of the earth that remain unexplored, thus the exploration of the space beyond the earth remains a motivating force behind the United States support of NASA.

1876: *Robert's Rules for Order* by U.S. Army Engineer Corps Officer Henry Martyn Robert is published. This nonfiction work establishes rules for maintaining order and a democratic procedure for any self-governing association, such as in church or civic organizations.

Today: The rules that Robert's book established for maintaining order and voting on decisions remains the hallmark of civic, volunteer, and church organizations since its implementation more than one hundred years ago.

1876: Although the first typewriters were introduced several years ago, and an improved version is introduced at this year's Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, their expense keeps demand restricted and production is limited. Most people continue to write with pens and pencils.

Today: The computer had made writing far easier than anyone might have imagined a hundred years ago, and as a result, the typewriter is becoming obsolete.

1876: The publication of Englishman Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859 has led to an explosion of interest in the new science of anthropology; subsequently, this led to a greater interest in archeology. This new emphasis on science provided Ibsen with material for his new play, *Peer Gynt*.

Today: The interest in man's past, especially the discoveries available because of archeology, continue to draw the attention of a public seeking answers to the meaning of man's existence.

1876: The completion of the Suez Canal in 1869, the completion of the transcontinental railroad in the United States, and the invention of the telephone in 1876 mean that the world has become much smaller.

Today: Instantaneous communications and satellites have made the world even smaller than it was 120 years ago. People in the developed nations think nothing of flying to destinations that would have taken weeks or months to reach in the 19th century. Nor do people hesitate to complete overseas telephone calls, and with the ease of using internet access, instantaneous communications have become even easier and less expensive to undertake.

What Do I Read Next?

Henrick Ibsen's *Brand* (1866), written the year before *Peer Gynt*, is also written in epic verse. *Brand* is the first of Ibsen's works to achieve both critical and popular attention. This work explores the inhumanity of uncompromising idealism.

Edmund Spenser's *The Fairie Queene* (1590) is an early verse epic that includes allegorical characters and a fairytale-like motif to explore the meaning of truth.

Orlando Furioso (1532), by Ariosto, is a verse epic that includes love, war, and honor and focuses on man's responsibility to fulfill his duty.

Norwegian Folk Tales: From the Collection of Peter Christian Asbjornsen, Jorgen Moe (reprint 1982), by Peter Christen Asbjorsen, etal., is a collection of fairy tales in contemporary translation. Asbjornsen's stories were the source material for much of Peer Gynt.

Peter Christen Asbjornsen's *East of the Sun and West of the Moon: Twenty-One Norwegian Folk Tales* (reprint 1990) is a collection of folktales; many, if not all, would have been familiar in Ibsen's world.

Favorite Folktales From Around the World (1988), by Jane Yolen, is a collection of more than 160 folk tales from over 40 different cultures and traditions.

Further Study

Gunnarsson, Torsten. *Nordic Landscape Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, translated by Nancy Adler, Yale University Press, 1998.

Examines the themes and the social and political environment in which Scandinavian painters worked. There is a good representation of the forests and fjords of this area of Europe.

Hanson, Karin Synnove, editor, *Henrik Ibsen, 1828-1978: A Filmography*, Oslo, 1978.

Contains details about the film productions of Ibsen's work.

Hemmer, Bjorn, editor. *Contemporary Approaches to Ibsen VII*, Norwegian University Press, 1991.

A collection of essays on Ibsen's work. Of particular note, this volume contains several interesting discussions about Nazi productions of Ibsen's plays.

Hemmer, Bjorn, editor. *Contemporary Approaches to Ibsen VIII*, Norwegian University Press, 1994

Includes a discussion about the initial production of *Peer Gynt* in 1876.

Lambourne, Lionel. *The Aesthetic Movement*, by Phaidon Press, 1996.

Presents a discussion of a movement that brought change in architecture, a change that Ibsen refers to in *Peer Gynt*. The motto of this movement, "art for art's sake," created more than just changes in outward beauty; it also resulted in cultural changes that this author explores in this text.

McFarlane, James, editor. *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen,* Cambridge University Press, 1994.

This book contains 16 chapters that explore different aspects of Ibsen's life and works, including important themes.

Von Franz, Marie Louise. *Psychological meaning of Redemption Motifs in Fairytales*, by Inner City books, 1985.

This author uses Jungian theories to assign psychological significance to fairytales. This is of interest to students who think that fairytales need to have a significance beyond that of enjoyment.

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Popova, Lilia and Knut Brynhildsvoll. "Some Aspects of Cinematic Transformation: The 1934 German version *of Peer Gynt*," in *Contemporary Approaches to Ibsen VII*, edited by Bjorn Hemmer, Norwegian University Press, 1991, pp. 101-111.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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