

Ibsen's Life

Gyldendal Collection, University Library, Oslo



Henrik Ibsen at the age of 35, 1863.

Henrik Johan Ibsen was born on March 20th, 1828, in the small port town of Skien, Norway. He was the child of a merchant family and suffered hardships in his youth when his father had to give up the family business in 1835. At the age of 15, Ibsen left home to become the apprentice to a pharmacist and began writing plays. In 1850, Ibsen moved to Christiania (now called Oslo, the capital city of Norway) to study medicine at the University, but he did not pass the entrance exam. Instead, he continued to write. He published his first play, *Catiline*, under the pseudonym Brynjolf Bjarme, soon followed by *The Burial Mound*, Ibsen's first play to be produced.

In 1851, Ibsen moved to Bergen, Norway to become an assistant at the *Norske Teater*, which was an important apprenticeship for his development as a dramatist. He wrote and staged plays for the theatre, mostly based on Scandinavian myths called *sagas*. He also directed plays, thus gaining insight into all aspects of theatrical production. He moved back to Christiania in 1857 to become the artistic director of the Norwegian Theatre and married Suzannah Thoreson, with whom he had one son, named Sigurd. The Norwegian Theatre went bankrupt in 1862, and in 1864, dissatisfied with Norwegian politics and his lack of success as a writer, Ibsen moved his family to Italy.

In 1865, he published what is considered his first major work, *Brand*. Ironically, this play was a great Norwegian success and earned him a state stipend and financial stability. His success continued with *Peer Gynt*, a fantastical verse drama for which Edvard Grieg composed the music. One reason the work became so popular was Ibsen's use of Norwegian fairy tales as inspiration for the story. However, even in this unrealistic drama, Ibsen had already begun to incorporate social satire into his work by creating a main character, Peer Gynt, who is completely selfish and unconcerned about the sacrifices others make to accommodate him.

In 1868, Ibsen and his family moved to Germany, where they lived for many years while Ibsen wrote the bulk of his major works. During this time, Ibsen began corresponding with Georg Brandes, a Danish literary critic. Together, they brought the modern movement to Scandinavia, rebelling against the old Romantic traditions and responding to the new concerns of the modern world. Ibsen began writing in prose instead of verse and began attacking modern, realistic social problems in his plays.

He was greatly influenced by his mother-in-law, Magdalene Thoreson, who was a leader of the feminist movement in Norway. Many of his plays contain criticisms of marriage, portraying dominant, complex female characters who are trapped in unhappy situations by the constraints of strict Victorian traditions. Plays in this vein include *A Doll's House* (1879), *Ghosts* (1881) and *Hedda Gabler* (1890.) Ibsen wrote *An Enemy of the People* in 1882, partly in response to the public outcry against *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts*.



Photography Collection, Royal Library, Copenhagen.

Ibsen's mother-in-law, Magdalene Kragh Thoreson, leader of the feminist movement in Norway.



Ibsen's wife, Suzannah Thoreson Ibsen, 1876.

Ibsen's later plays represented a transition from his realistic social dramas to more symbolic and psychological dramas. These plays include *The Wild Duck* (1884), *Rosmersholm* (1886) and *The Lady from the Sea* (1888). As Ibsen's successful dramatic career continued, he became a celebrated figure in Europe. A long black coat and white muttonchops became Ibsen's signature and a frequent subject of caricatures. For his 70th birthday in 1898, there were large-scale celebrations in Christiania, Copenhagen and Stockholm. In 1900, Ibsen suffered his first stroke, which ended his writing career. He died on May 23rd, 1906 in Christiania, and was he honored by a large funeral procession at national expense.

Today, Ibsen is known as the "Father of Modern Drama." Ibsen's plays pioneered realistic dialogue and characters with psychological depth on the stage, and gave birth to the modern movement in drama. Ibsen is also heralded as the greatest Norwegian author of all time, and he is considered the most frequently performed dramatist in the world after Shakespeare. Ibsen's depth of character, naturalistic dialogue and use of subtext changed the way modern drama is produced, and his social themes still have relevance when his plays are produced today. 

Ibsen's Works

1850	Catiline
1850	The Burial Mound
1852	St. John's Eve
1854	Lady Inger of Oestraat
1855	The Feast at Solhaug
1856	Olaf Liljekrans
1857	The Vikings at Helgeland
1862	Love's Comedy
1862	The Pretenders
1865	Brand
1867	Peer Gynt
1869	The League of Youth
1873	Emperor and Galilean
1877	Pillars of Society
1879	A Doll's House
1881	Ghosts
1882	An Enemy of the People
1884	The Wild Duck
1886	Rosmersholm
1888	The Lady from the Sea
1890	Hedda Gabler
1892	The Master Builder
1894	Little Eyolf
1896	John Gabriel Borkman
1899	When We Dead Awaken

Realism:

A Shocking Event in Its Time

Photo by Matthew Lawrence.



Victoria Ritchey as Aslaksen, Terry Edward Moore as Dr. Stockmann and Nikki Visel as Hovstad in Taproot Theatre Company's 2005 season opener, *An Enemy of the People*.

Modern audiences are accustomed to seeing characters on stage who look, speak and act like they do. It is not unusual to walk into a theatre or watch a television show and see a set that looks like the realistic interior of a living room, inhabited by characters who dress in contemporary clothing and deal with everyday social problems. In fact, audiences today *expect* characters to be realistic, criticizing the actors if their actions are not believable. Throughout theatre history, however, performance expectations were often very different. Performance traditions throughout the 1800s were very stylized. An actor's goal was to perform the text beautifully, not to imitate the motivations of a real person. Sets at the time consisted of painted backdrops. In the 1800s, three-dimensional, realistic settings and characters were shocking to theatre audiences. Our modern expectations for realistic theatre are largely due to the innovations of the "Father of Modern Drama," Henrik Ibsen.

In the early 1800s, mainstream theatre in Europe consisted of tragedies, melodramas, comic operas, vaudevilles and spectacle plays. Audiences attended performances of epic tragedies about idealized heroes, or melodramas with stock or stereotypical characters.

Many plays were written in verse, or heightened language, and performed in a larger-than-life, exaggerated style. However, with the scientific and technological advances of the 19th century, intellectual thought turned to social reform and everyday human concerns. These scientific advances led to the Realism movement in literature and the arts, started in the mid-1800s, in which authors addressed contemporary social issues, providing a forum for debate in their art. Realism, in theatre, sought to represent characters and situations from real life, without idealization or embellishment. Henrik Ibsen was at the forefront of this movement. He began to write plays in prose, the way that people spoke to each other in real life, and to focus on realistic social issues. His plays *Pillars of Society*, *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts* and *An Enemy of the People* are considered classic works of Realism that changed the way the western world viewed drama.

In each of these plays, Ibsen addressed a contemporary social problem and wrote his play as a forum for debate or criticism of the issue. Ibsen avoided the idealized heroes or stock characters from the other plays of his day. Instead, he created fully-developed, realistic characters with deep psychological motives.

The environment that they inhabited was not the traditional, two-dimensional backdrop, but a fully furnished living room—as life-like as the living rooms in the homes of the audience members. At this time, the tradition developed in staging realistic dramas in which directors would call the barrier between the stage and the audience the “fourth wall,” as if the stage were an actual living room with one of the walls removed to allow the audience to observe the happenings inside. Around this time, the house lights also began to be dimmed for the performance—taking the focus of the audience’s attention away from the social event of “being seen” at the theatre, and on to the work of art itself.

In his quest for realism, Ibsen also wanted his dialogue to be as natural as possible, mirroring the way people spoke to each other in everyday life. In a letter to a Swedish director in 1883, he wrote:

“The language must sound natural and the form of expression must be characteristic of each individual person in the play; one person certainly does not express himself like another. In this respect a great deal can be put right during the rehearsals; that is when one easily hears what does not strike

one as natural and unforced, and what must therefore be changed and changed again until the lines achieve full credibility and realistic form. The effect of the play depends in large measure on the audience’s feeling that they are sitting listening to something that is going on in actual real life.”

Instead of speaking in verse and heightened language, characters spoke in natural rhythms and broken trains of thought, interrupting each other and themselves as people do naturally. To portray these characters realistically, a new style of acting had to be created, which is the basis for most acting training today. Konstantin Stanislavski (1863-1938) was a Russian actor and director who invented a system in

which actors deeply analyzed their characters’ psychology and motivation and used their own emotional memory to portray genuine feeling. In addition, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) had begun his work on psychoanalysis, introducing the concept of the unconscious mind and the notion that people are motivated by underlying psychological causes. Actors who approached Ibsen’s realistic characters began to analyze their subtext—emotions and thoughts that motivate characters without being explicitly written in the text. That the actor would have to look beyond the text to create a three-dimensional character was an enormous departure from the verse dramas before Ibsen’s time, in which everything an actor needed to know was explicitly written in the text. The characters on Ibsen’s stage, then, were not heroes and villains who were very distant from the audience’s experience, but deeply human individuals who were motivated by the joys and griefs of everyday conflict.



August Lindberg and Hedvig Charlotte Winter-Hjelm in the first European production of *Ghosts*, Hälsingborg, 1883. Drottningholms Teatermusée, Stockholm.

Realism in the arts was a revolutionary as any other social movement of Ibsen’s day. The theatre of Ibsen and Stanislavski quickly became the standard against which all other drama was measured. These realistic dramas revealed and criticized the ills of their own society, making them dangerous to established

Victorian traditions. Realism became so widespread by the beginning of the 20th century that actors, writers and directors began to rebel against the tradition, breaking the “fourth wall” to engage the audience more directly in the quest for social reform. Some of the movements rebelling against Realism include Dadaism, Futurism, Expressionism, Surrealism, Epic Theatre and Theatre of the Absurd. Despite these movements, Stanislavski’s style of acting has become the accepted method used by actors today on both stage and screen, and Ibsen’s plays continue to influence theatre-makers around the world. Modern audiences continue to expect actors to hold the mirror up to life. 

Synopsis of *An Enemy of the People*

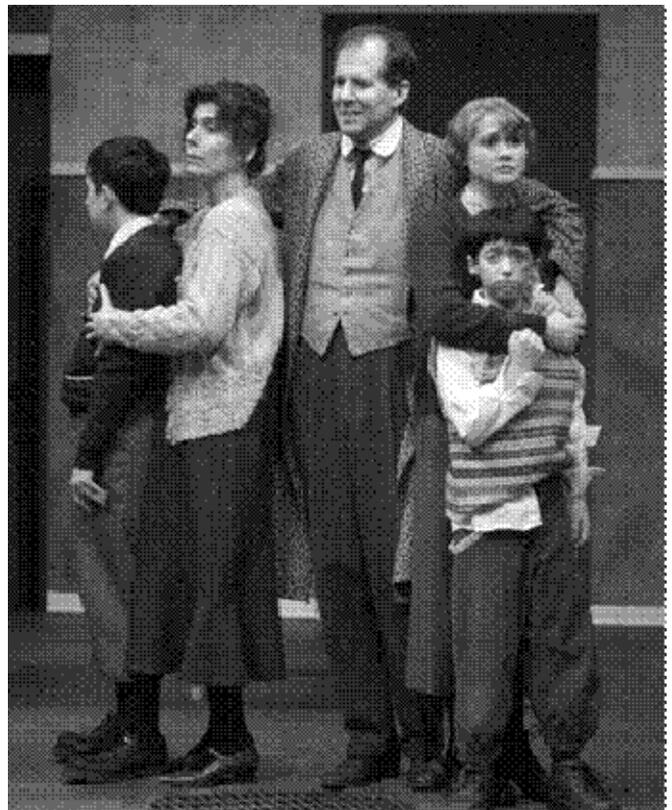
It is evening in a small Norwegian town. Mrs. Stockmann is hosting Mr. Billing and Mr. Hovstad, two reporters from the town's liberal newspaper. Dr. Stockmann has taken his two young sons, Morten and Eilif, out for a walk. Peter Stockmann, the mayor of the town and Dr. Stockmann's brother, arrives unexpectedly at the house. He speaks grandly about the recent economic boom of the town since it opened the baths, a health resort for the taking of waters. Peter is the Chairman of the Board of the baths, and Dr. Stockmann is the Medical Officer.

Dr. Stockmann bounds in and his generous energy fills the room. He is somewhat restless, however, in anticipation of a letter he is expecting at any moment. The letter arrives after the mayor leaves. It contains the results of laboratory tests of water samples Stockmann has taken from the town baths. He has long suspected that the spa waters are infested with bacteria that could prove fatal to the tourists who flock there, and this letter confirms it. The pollution comes from the run-off from a tannery. Stockmann is eager to reveal the truth, excited that he has discovered the danger before anyone can be hurt. He believes that the town will be grateful to him for his discovery, and the newspapermen instantly back him and prepare to publish his findings. A servant is sent to the mayor with Dr. Stockmann's report.

The next day Peter visits Dr. Stockmann, having read his report. The stiff, humorless and officious Peter declares his skepticism about Stockmann's findings. He points out that the expense of fixing the baths would have to be shouldered by the townspeople. Peter demands that Stockmann publicly refute his findings, and Stockmann refuses. The two brothers almost come to blows but are interrupted by Petra and Mrs. Stockmann. Petra champions her father's cause, but Mrs. Stockmann is more cautious, considering the effects on their family and income.

In the publishing office, Peter arrives and tells Hovstad that the money to repair the baths will have to come from the taxpayers. Seeing the impact this would have on their readership, the editors back off and decide not to publish the report. Just then they see Dr. Stockmann bursting through the door, so Peter hastily hides in the next room. Dr. Stockmann has come to check on the printing of his article, and his wife shows up unexpectedly, begging him not to print it. Stockmann finds Peter in the next room and confronts him.

The two editors then reveal to Stockmann that they are backing down and have decided not to publish the article because they believe it to be false. In shock and disbelief, Stockmann declares that he will read the report out at a public meeting. Mrs. Stockmann, seeing her husband backed against a wall, declares that she is behind his cause for truth. A public meeting is about to take place in a room in Captain Horster's house. The room is packed with a hostile crowd. A negative report about Dr. Stockmann has been published in Hovstad's newspaper. Stockmann attempts to speak about his findings, but the crowd prevents him. Faced with a mob, he speaks in outrage about the pollution of society and declares that the majority can never be in the right. The people vote unanimously to brand Stockmann an enemy of the people for getting the baths shut down and thus jeopardizing the economic future of the town. As the townspeople plan to vandalize his house, Stockmann leaves the meeting intending to depart for America with his family on Captain Horster's ship.



Tallis Moore as Eilif, Pam Nolte as Mrs. Stockmann, Terry Edward Moore as Dr. Stockmann, Sarah Lamb as Petra and Jeremy Lee Weizenbaum as Morten in Taproot Theatre Company's 2005 season opener, *An Enemy of the People*.

Photo by Matthew Lawrence.

The next morning, the windows of the Stockmann house have been shattered by rocks. They have been evicted from their house, Petra has lost her teaching job, the two boys have been thrown out of school, and Captain Horster has been fired for attempting to help them. Peter arrives and tells Stockmann that he has been relieved of his position as Medical Officer to the Baths. Peter accuses Stockmann of inventing the story about the baths to please his wealthy father-in-law, Morten Kiil, who hates the town's leaders, so that Kiil will leave all his money to the Stockmanns. No sooner has Peter gone than Morten Kiil arrives to tell Stockmann that he has bought all the shares in the baths with the money he was going to leave the Stockmanns. If Stockmann does not renounce his findings the baths will close, the shares will be worthless, and the family will get no money. To make matters worse, Hovstad and Aslaksen arrive, insinuating that Stockmann and Kiil have been planning all along to defraud the town, and they now want to blackmail Stockmann.

Stockmann resolves to remain where he is and not leave "the field of battle." Captain Horster offers his house to the family, and Stockmann decides to open a school for the homeless children of the town to teach them to be free-thinkers. Petra will be his assistant, thus regaining her career as a teacher, and his two sons will be among his pupils. As he talks through his plans, he gathers his family about him. **S**



Photo by Richard Feldman.

Mandy Patinkin and Annalee Jefferies in Williamstown Theatre Festival's 2003 production of *An Enemy of the People*.

The main character in *An Enemy of the People*, Dr. Stockmann, is a truth-teller who stands alone against a selfish, uneducated majority. This character, who Ibsen created in his own image, serves as a mouthpiece for the playwright's frustration with the critical response to his previous play, *Ghosts*. Ibsen wrote *An Enemy of the People* in a storm of fury while the controversy over *Ghosts* was still raging. *Ghosts*, in turn, was a response to the uproar caused by *A Doll's House*. Looking at the themes of the three plays, one can trace Ibsen's intellectual journey as he composed his first major works.

In *A Doll's House*, Ibsen creates the character of Nora Helmer, a woman trapped in an unfulfilling role in a stifling marriage. Her husband continually patronizes her and treats her like a doll. Nora has endured years of blackmail because she took out an illegal loan to save her husband's health. While attempting to keep the blackmail a secret and save her husband from being dishonored, Nora realizes that she has never been her own person. She has merely been subjected to the roles her father and husband have created for her. Nora asserts her right to her own individuality and decides to leave her marriage and children to pursue an independent life. Her husband reels from the decision, and the play ends with "the slam heard 'round the world": Nora walks out, slamming the door behind her.

A Doll's House was blasted by the critics in its time. Abandoning both her husband and children and rejecting her "duty" as a wife and mother was considered immoral by conservatives. Many critics attacked the "Realism" of the play, refusing to believe that any woman would choose to leave her children behind. Critical outrage eventually forced Ibsen to write a second ending. Ibsen regretted the decision to write the "happy" ending, in which Nora gives her husband a second chance after remembering her duty to her children. He called the ending a "barbaric outrage" and demanded it only be used when necessary.

After the uproar over *A Doll's House*, Ibsen determined to write a play in which a woman faces the consequences of choosing to stay in an unhappy marriage. *Ghosts* tells the story of Mrs. Alving and her son, Oswald. Mrs. Alving chose to remain with her husband and sent her son away to save him from his father's debauchery.



Henrik Ibsen as Disciplinarian, caricature in *Vikingen*, 1882. Ibsen criticizes the political left in *The League of Youth*, then criticizes the right in *The Pillars of Society*. Finally, he censures all political parties in *An Enemy of the People*.

Despite her efforts, "the sins of the father visit the son," and it becomes evident that Oswald suffers from a venereal disease. The play also suggests the possibility of incest between Oswald and his father's illegitimate daughter. The play ends with Oswald too sick to function, begging his mother to administer morphine to end his life. Through *Ghosts*, Ibsen shows that the adherence to constraining social norms does not ensure our salvation or happiness but can, in fact, inflict even greater harm.

The play received even harsher criticism than *A Doll's House*, it was condemned by critics as foul and disgusting. Theatres across Europe refused to stage it. The conservative press again blasted his work. The liberal press, who had defended Ibsen in the past, turned against him. He was attacked from all sides. Ibsen was angered by this betrayal and wrote his next play, *An Enemy of the People*, furiously and completely in secret.

In a letter to his publisher, he wryly mentioned the new play he was writing: "This time it will be a peaceable production which can be read by Ministers of State and wholesale merchants and their ladies, and from which the theatres will not be obliged to recoil." While Ibsen typically published a new play every two years, Ibsen wrote at twice his usual speed and published *An Enemy of the People* a mere year after *Ghosts*.

Dr. Stockmann, the main character of *Enemy*, becomes the mouthpiece for Ibsen's anger. The doctor's exposure of the truth about the baths quickly changes from concern over the practical issue of decontamination to a larger, more abstract battle between the truth-telling minority and the complacent majority. In the play, Dr. Stockmann finds allies in the publishers of the liberal newspapers, Hovstad and Billing. The two are soon revealed as hypocrites, however; while they were initially eager to publish the truth in order to criticize the current administration, they squash the story when they realize the decontamination of the baths will come at great taxpayer expense. This betrayal mirrors Ibsen's disenchantment with the liberal press.



Gyldendal Collection, University Library, Oslo.

Arnoldus Reimers as Dr. Stockmann and Henrik Klausen as Morten Kiil in the first Norwegian production of *An Enemy of the People*, Christiania, 1883.

Ibsen also viewed himself as an artist with an individual vision, and was continually frustrated by the public's rejection of his work based on what he believed were banal, old-fashioned ideas. Dr. Stockmann stands up for what he believes in despite public opinion. He goes so far as to compare the society he lives in to a cesspool—a worse one, certainly, than the contaminated baths—and states that the greatest enemy to freedom in society is the "solid majority" and that "the minority is always right." Finally, he declares that "the strongest man in the world is he who stands most alone."

Ibsen creates a complex character in Dr. Stockmann. The doctor is very idealistic and committed to truth, but at the same time, egotistical and prone to anger. His desire to save the town and its people from the contaminated baths eventually changes to rage and indignation against the society he lives in when faced with the townspeople's rejection. In this way, we can see Ibsen's complex reactions to the censorship and rejection of his own work—his desire to tell the truth, his hurt at being rejected, and his anger at the complacent majority. The result is a fierce, stream-lined play in which one can see both Ibsen's personal fury and his skill as a dramatist. Ironically, *An Enemy of the People* became a popular and critical success for Ibsen, eagerly received by theatres across Europe. **S**

Gyldendal Collection, University Library, Oslo.



Stockmannsgården, Ibsen's birthplace in Skien, is the last house on the right, facing the church, c. 1870.

Timeline of

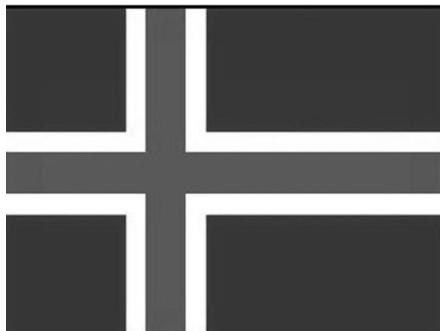
Ibsen's World

Ibsen's Life and Works

- 1828** Henrik Ibsen born in Skien, Norway.
- 1864** Disillusioned with Norwegian politics, Henrik Ibsen moves his family to Italy.
- 1865** Henrik Ibsen writes *Brand*, his first major work.
- 1868** Ibsen family moves to Germany.
- 1870-1880** Ibsen writes letters to friends and fellow intellectuals expressing skepticism about the calls for democracy in Norway.
- 1877** Ibsen publishes his first Realist play, *The Pillars of Society*. The play quickly spreads to avant-garde venues across Europe.
- 1879** Ibsen publishes *A Doll's House*, first performed in Copenhagen. The play is met with harsh criticism from conservatives throughout Europe.
- 1880** *A Doll's House* premieres in Germany with an alternate ending, which Ibsen terms "a barbaric outrage."
- 1881** Ibsen publishes *Ghosts*. Conservatives and liberals alike condemn the play, and theatres across Europe refuse to stage it. Ibsen feels particularly betrayed by the Norwegian liberal press, who had defended him during the scandal over *A Doll's House*.
- 1882** Ibsen publishes *An Enemy of the People* as a reaction to critical response to *Ghosts*. The play is warmly received throughout Europe.
- 1883-1890** While living in Germany, Ibsen continues to publish successful work, including *The Wild Duck*, *Rosmersholm*, *The Lady from the Sea* and *Hedda Gabler*.
- 1891** Ibsen family returns to Norway after 27 years living abroad.
- 1892-1899** Ibsen publishes his last plays, *The Master Builder*, *Little Eyolf*, *John Gabriel Borkman* and *When We Dead Awaken*.
- 1906** Ibsen dies as a national hero.

Political Developments

- 1814** After Napoleon's defeat, the European continent is restructured. Norway gains independence from Denmark, but soon enters into a Union with Sweden, subject to their monarchy.
- 1848** After a series of crop failures that leave the working classes starving, Europe is rocked by revolutions in France, Germany and Italy. Bourgeois reformers revolt, calling for social change. Observing the changing tide in Europe, calls for democratic reform in Norway increase.
- 1850** Austria and Prussia eliminate feudalism.
- 1864** Prussian-Danish War, a territorial dispute, begins. To Ibsen's dismay, Norway remains neutral, refusing to support the Danes in the conflict.
- 1874-1880** Norwegian political leaders struggle against the Swedish monarchy, attempting to gain more political power for the Storting, the Norwegian parliamentary body.
- 1884** Liberals take control of the Storting and impeach the prime minister. The Swedish monarchy is forced to recognize Norway's parliamentary system.
- 1905** Norway declares itself independent from Sweden and the union is dissolved.



Flag of Norway.

Scientific/Social Developments

- 1831** Electro-magnetic current is discovered, making electric engines possible.
- 1837** Samuel Morse invents the telegraph.
- 1848** Karl Marx publishes *The Communist Manifesto*, calling for Proletariat revolution to eliminate social classes, and stating that capitalism is inherently unstable.



The Norwegian Theatre in Møllergaden, Christiania, engraved by L. Kleiser, c. 1860.

- 1854** First railway line laid in Norway between Christiania (Oslo) and Eidsvoll.
- 1859** Charles Darwin publishes *The Origin of Species*, introducing the concept of evolution and rocking the scientific and religious worlds.
- 1876** Alexander Graham Bell invents the telephone.
- 1877** Thomas Edison invents the phonograph.
- 1879** Thomas Edison develops a longer-lasting electric light bulb.
- 1896** Sigmund Freud coins the term "psychoanalysis," continuing his research into the unconscious mind.
- 1908** Henry Ford mass-produces the Model T.

TO TELL THE TRUTH:

COVER-UPS, LIES AND SCANDALS



Photo by Richard Feldman.

Photo by Richard Feldman.

Mandy Patinkin and T. Scott Cunningham in Williamstown Theatre Festival's 2003 production of *An Enemy of the People*.

Mandy Patinkin and T. Scott Cunningham in Williamstown Theatre Festival's 2003 production of *An Enemy of the People*.

An *Enemy of the People* tells the story of an environmental disaster discovered by one scientist, who is then defamed and relieved of his position by the government of the town in order to avoid scandal and monetary expense. The following story was reported by CBS News on *60 Minutes* on April 4th, 2004. Read the summary below and compare the story to the synopsis of *An Enemy of the People*. Then consider the questions below.

(Full text of the news story can be found here: <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/04/01/60minutes/main609889.shtml>)

Jack Spadaro, former head of the National Mine Health and Safety Academy (MSHA), a branch of the Department of Labor, lost his job in 2003 when he blew the whistle on what he calls a cover-up by the Bush administration of a major environmental disaster. "I had never seen anything so corrupt and lawless in my entire career as what I saw regarding interference with a federal investigation of the most serious environmental disaster in the history of the Eastern United States," says Spadaro. In October 2000, 300 million gallons of coal slurry—thick, pudding-like waste from mining operations—flooded land, polluted rivers and destroyed property in eastern Kentucky and West Virginia. The slurry contained hazardous chemicals, including arsenic and mercury. "It polluted 100 miles of stream, killed everything in the streams, all the way to the Ohio River," says Spadaro, who was second in command of the team investigating the accident. The disaster is 25 times the size of the Exxon Valdez spill.

The slurry had been contained in an enormous reservoir, called an impoundment, which is owned by the Massey Energy Company, the fifth largest mining company in America. One night, the heavy liquid broke through the bottom of the reservoir, flooded the abandoned coalmines below it and roared out into the streams. Spadaro says that the Massey Energy Company knew the impoundment was unsafe. There had been a previous spill in 1994. Spadaro spoke to an engineer at the company who said the problem had never been fixed, and alleged that the company and the government knew about the risk. So why didn't they fix it? "It would have been expensive to find another site. And I think they were willing to take the risk," says Spadaro.

Spadaro and the team of investigators were going to cite the coal company for serious violations that would probably have led to large fines and even criminal charges. But all that changed when the Bush

administration took over and decided that the country needed more energy—and less regulation of energy companies. The investigation into Massey Energy, a generous contributor to the Republican Party, was cut short. “The Bush administration came in and the scope of our investigation was considerably shortened, and we were told to wrap it up in a few weeks,” says Spadaro.

Spadaro says his supervisor insisted he sign a watered down version of the report on the investigation—a version that virtually let the coal company and MSHA off the hook. “He said, ‘I’m in a hard spot here and I need you to sign this report,’” recalls Spadaro. “I said, ‘You’d best take my name off that report because I’m never going to sign that report.’”

Blowing the whistle on the cover-up has led to serious consequences for Spadaro. Last year, government agents entered Spadaro’s office, went through his files, and locked him out. “They changed the locks on my door and still have not allowed me to return to my work place,” says Spadaro, who spends his days at home. The government says he was removed from his job primarily for abusing his authority, failing to follow procedures, and also for using his government credit card without authorization. Spadaro denies all the charges. “You have a guy in one of the regulatory agencies that actually wants to stand up for what’s right,” says Linc Chapman, whose property was flooded in the accident, “And because he rocks their boat, he gets thrown overboard.”



Henrik Ibsen in 1883, woodcut by Wilhelm Rohr.

What is the government’s responsibility to its people?

Recent news is filled with stories of cover-ups, scandals and misinformation. What do you think was the government’s motive in covering up the Massey Energy spill? What effect did it have on local residents? Who is the government protecting?

In *An Enemy of the People*, the citizens of the town side with the mayor against Dr. Stockmann to avoid the higher taxes that would be required of them if the town were to decontaminate the baths. Why do you think Ibsen wrote this story? What does he think of the decision of the townspeople? Do you think they are manipulated into believing that Dr. Stockmann is an enemy of the people? What effect does money have on people’s commitment to truth?

What is the individual’s responsibility to society?

Both Dr. Stockmann and Jack Spadaro faced dire consequences due to their commitment to revealing the truth and not backing down in the face of authority. Both lost their jobs and were accused of crimes. Why do you think they did what they did? Would you have done the same thing in their situations?

Ibsen ends the play before we get to see Dr. Stockmann living with the consequences of his decision to stay in a town that despises and distrusts him. Jack Spadaro, after four years of fighting the government, was forced to retire from his battle for health reasons. (Coverage of Jack Spadaro’s decision can be found here: http://www.ohvec.org/newsletters/woc_2004_10/article_27.html) What do you think will happen to Dr. Stockmann and his family after the play has ended? In five years? In 10?

What is a journalist’s responsibility to society?

In the midst of cover-ups and scandals, it is a journalist’s responsibility to report the truth to the public. Do journalists today always fulfill that responsibility? In *An Enemy of the People*, the journalists of the town switch allegiances from Dr. Stockmann to the mayor when they find out that the exposure of the truth will come at great cost to the town and individual taxpayers. What factors get in the way of reporting the truth? How does a society preserve freedom of the press? 