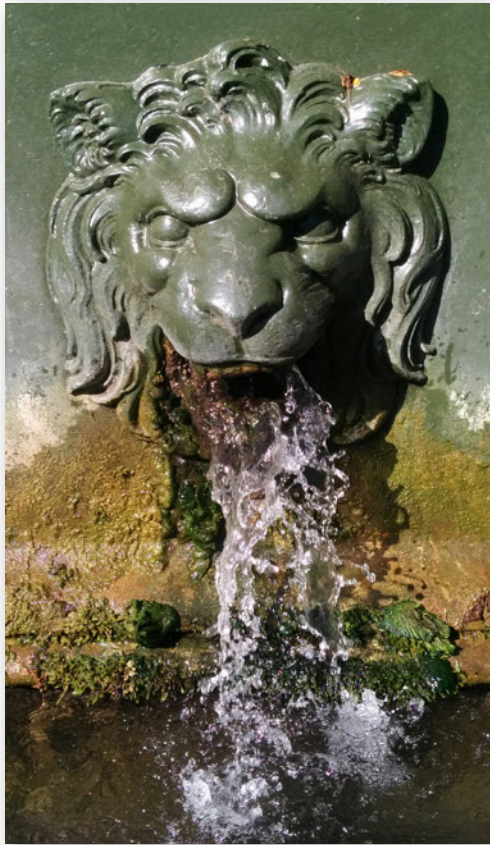


Henrik Ibsen

# An Enemy of the People

in a new English version by Michael Biddiss



Alton Fringe Theatre

November 2014

# He who stands most alone

In 1900 the young James Joyce hailed the ageing Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) with the comment that, 'It may be questioned whether any man has held so firm an empire over the thinking world in modern times.' Certainly there was at that epoch no living writer who could match the international renown, and notoriety, already achieved by this Norwegian playwright. Above all, Ibsen had transformed the meaning of drama itself, creating what one recent critic has called 'a new form of theatre which brought the inexorable and fatal sense of tragic awareness out of the world of kings and princes and into the bourgeois drawing-room'. For him the stage served, more clearly than ever before, as a mirror in which the audience would be compelled directly to confront its own image — one frequently furrowed by anxieties.

Even now Ibsen's works continue to provoke and stimulate, and none more so than those which were written during his most 'naturalistic' phase of direct social commentary. *An Enemy of the People*, first performed in 1883, belongs firmly to that period. Avoiding the increasingly intense Nordic gloom of Ibsen's final dramas, it remains among the most 'accessible' of his plays. Here he offers us a splendid and still-relevant satire on the foibles of small-town politics, and one that attacks obstinate reactionaries and shallow progressives alike. Dr Stockmann's increasingly frenzied confrontations — not only with his mayoral brother and the town newspaper but even with the ratepayers of the local civic society — reveal him to be a richly ambiguous central character. We are surely tempted to admire him for asserting the freedom of the lone individual; but equally we may conclude,

especially from the language that he uses to dehumanize his opponents, that he is also something of a fanatic gripped by certain deeply sinister and dictatorial characteristics as well.

You may well discern a resemblance between some of the dilemmas and attitudes that Ibsen depicted in his Norwegian coastal settlement 130 years ago and those still perceptible within any small market town located in present-day Hampshire. If so, you may also be inclined to credit this dramatist with the sort of creativity that succeeds in raising issues of lasting social and moral relevance. Here, after all, is an author whose plays quite often dispatched his audiences into the Nordic night at a point when they were still keen to begin wrangling over how things might have worked out in the non-existent Act 6. In the same spirit, the Fringe too will endeavour to send you home continuing to debate, as animatedly as the theatregoers of 1883, the rights and wrongs of what might have happened next to the defiantly independent but also exasperatingly reckless figure of Thomas Stockmann.

This new English version of the play, prepared specifically for our Fringe production, has involved some measure of abridgment, and an element of gender re-jigging too. But the basic aim has been to preserve especially the idiomatic force – and the subtle humour – of the original Norwegian text. After completing *An Enemy of the People*, the author remarked that he was unsure as to whether he had just written a tragedy or a comedy. Our hope is that this evening's presentation will enable you to enjoy both these facets of a theatrical masterpiece.

M.B.

# Cast

DR THOMAS STOCKMANN	STEVE ROWLAND
MRS KATHERINE STOCKMANN <i>his wife</i>	CHRISTINE HOLLOWAY
MISS PETRA STOCKMANN <i>their daughter</i>	JOANNA FOULKES
MAYOR PETER STOCKMANN <i>brother to the doctor</i>	JAMES WILLIS
MRS NORA EKDAL <i>Mrs Stockmann's aunt</i>	LESLEY WILLIS
MR HOVSTAD <i>editor of the local newspaper</i>	SIMON APPEGARTH
MISS BILLING <i>his assistant</i>	ANITA APPEGARTH
MR ASLAKSEN <i>Master-printer</i>	DAVID RAE
CAPTAIN HORSTER <i>friend of Dr Stockmann</i>	PETER COX
HILDE <i>maid to the Stockmann family</i>	CATHERINE GERLACH

## TOWNSPEOPLE *Attending a public meeting*

MICHAEL BIDDISS	RUTH BIDDISS	NICK CHARMAN
ALISON DE LEDESMA	IAN DUSSEK	CATH GERLACH
TIM GUILDING	DON HAMMOND	MORRIS HOPKINS
LESLEY RAE		BARBARA RAYNER

*“When a fellow goes out to fight for truth and freedom*

# Production Team

Stage management & props	LESLEY RAE
Lighting & sound	ANDREW STICKLAND
Costumes & ticket sales	ALISON DE LEDESMA
Posters & programme	JAMES WILLIS
Assistant director	TIM GUILDING
Director	SARAH CASTLE-SMITH

## Setting

The action of the play is located in a coastal town of southern Norway, towards the end of the nineteenth century.

**Act 1:** The Stockmann living room – a spring evening

**Act 2:** The same – mid-morning of the next day

**Act 3:** The Editorial Office of the *Herald* – afternoon of the same day

### *Interval*

**Act 4:** A large room in Captain Horster's house – evening of the next day

**Act 5:** The Stockmann living room – late morning of the following day.

*he definitely ought not to wear his smartest trousers."*

## A pleasant surprise

A professional Dramaturg, or just a keen theatregoer, glancing at the productions page of The Fringe website, would instantly be struck by three glaring omissions. In our twenty-six years of existence, we have yet to tackle any of the American playwrights (Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Eugene O'Neill to name but three), a play by Anton Chekhov or, until now, a work by Henrik Ibsen.

In the case of the Americans, there is always the difficulty of finding an amateur cast who are all capable of sustaining the same accent. While reading *A View from the Bridge* some years ago, the characters appeared to hail from California, Mobile, Detroit and even Karachi! However, if our friends across the Atlantic are willing to inflict Dick Van Dyke's cockney accent on the world, we might be persuaded to attempt *All My Sons* in the future.

Chekhov, although quintessentially Russian, has a tradition of being played with English accents throughout the world. Again, we have considered *The Cherry Orchard* and *Uncle Vanya* but they were always up against plays that were funnier or, at least, less depressing.

Which brings us to Ibsen. Here I must declare a certain prejudice as I once witnessed a production of *Brand* when, twenty minutes in, I lost the will to live. We once flirted with *Hedda Gabler* (she turned us down) and asked *The Master Builder* for a quote, but he never got back to us. So, what is the attraction towards *An Enemy of the People*? Firstly, an enthusiastic director who inspired the large cast to commit to the play. Secondly, the wonderful new





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And for our next production - watch this space...

[www.AltonFringe.com](http://www.AltonFringe.com)