



Signature titles

Brand, 1866
Peer Gynt, 1867
Emperor and Galilean, 1873
The Pillars of Society, 1877
A Doll's House, 1879
Ghosts, 1881
An Enemy of the People, 1882
Hedda Gabler, 1890
The Master Builder, 1892

“The strongest man in the world is he who stands most alone.” *An Enemy of the People*

ABOVE: The hirsute Ibsen as he looked in 1901, just a few years before his death.

RIGHT: *Peer Gynt* Act II Scene VI, Peer before the King of the Trolls.

HENRIK IBSEN

Born: Henrik Johan Ibsen, March 20, 1828 (Skien, Norway); died May 23, 1906 (Oslo, Norway).

Style and genre: Ibsen's unflinching dialogue contains portraits of middle-class life, with tragic themes evolved through male hypocrisy and the futility of idealism.

A major playwright of the late nineteenth century, Ibsen was responsible for the introduction of modern realistic drama to the stage. His love for the theater took him firstly to Bergen and later Christiania (present day Oslo) working as a stage manager writing and directing plays. Despite gaining valuable practical experience Ibsen failed to connect intellectually with an audience he thought to be petty and small-minded. A self-imposed, twenty-seven-year period of exile ensued, taking him to Rome, Dresden, and Munich. Seemingly released from the constraints of his homeland, Ibsen wrote the bulk of his dramas abroad beginning with *Brand*, a play concentrated on a priest who puts his own religious and moral principles before the well-being of his family. The “all or nothing” philosophy of *Brand*, which ultimately leaves him broken and alone, proved hugely popular, as did follow-up *Peer Gynt*, an egotistical, aimless character, very much the antithesis of *Brand*.

It was *A Doll's House* that elevated him to international attention with its controversial denouement and scandalous (to Victorian audiences) lack of a happy ending. The ordinary household setting witnesses the heroine

Nora become gradually disillusioned with her husband, whom she comes to view as a stranger, leaving him and her children behind. He courted yet more damnation in *Ghosts* with its subject matter of venereal disease and central belief that to

ignore ugly truths is only to create dire consequences at a later point. Later works shifted focus from societal pressures on women to the psychological interpersonal conflicts of control and domination as explored in *Hedda Gabler* and *The Master Builder*. Ibsen rewrote the rules of drama remaining challenging and provocative to the end. **SG**

