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**A
Doll's
House**

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University of British Columbia

Frederic Wood Theatre Presents

A Doll's House

by
Henrik Ibsen

Directed by
Charles McFarland

September 16-26
1987

The Frederic Wood Theatre Magazine
A Seasonal Publication of University Productions Inc.

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Frederic Wood Theatre

Coming Attractions

The 25th Season

At The Frederic Wood Theatre

THE COLLECTED WORKS OF BILLY THE KID by Michael Ondaatje
Directed by Arne Zaslove November 18 - 28, 1987

THE COLLECTED WORKS OF BILLY THE KID, by Michael Ondaatje, is a crafted collage of violent and sensual scenes, songs and stories by one of Canada's leading contemporary writers. Ondaatje has culled this epic play from his Governor General's award-winning book. He evokes the myths of the wild American West with searing language to create striking pictures of nature and bizarre relationships. Billy the Kid, one of the most controversial folk-heroes of the era, is presented as a complex observer/narrator of his own destiny and self-destruction. The play explodes with dynamic imagery that excites the imagination and stuns the senses.

JUNO AND THE PAYCOCK by Sean O'Casey
Directed by Stanley Weese January 13 - 23, 1988

Sean O'Casey (1880-1964) had a tragic attitude towards existence, yet was capable of producing scenes of gorgeous laughter based on his profound knowledge of lower-class city life. A born fighter, O'Casey was involved with both the Irish labour struggle and the national uprising. He startled his associates, however, by his condemnation of their most cherished fancies. O'Casey's *JUNO AND THE PAYCOCK* (1924), a tragic-comedy characterized by a rich sense of language and keen insight into character, is set against the Irish revolutionary movement. It concerns a romantic boaster, Captain Jack Boyle (the 'Paycock') and his drinking companion, the loveable yet utterly useless Joxer Daly. Around these two a family circle is drawn - a fatal circle, poverty-stricken, with death and the breaking of dreams leaving it shattered at the end, yet ennobled by Juno, the Paycock's wife, a figure of pity and love.

A FLEA IN HER EAR by Georges Feydeau
Directed by Denise Coffey March 9 - 19, 1988

What better way to end the season than with one of the most hilarious comic pieces ever conceived for the stage. First performed in 1907, Georges Feydeau's *A FLEA IN HER EAR* has since attracted audiences all over the world. Any discussion of farce will inevitably refer to this play, as all comic ingredients of the genre here seem distilled with perfect craftsmanship. The ingenious manipulation of the plot; the furious pace with which the improbably probable events unfold; the richly drawn gallery of eccentric characters; the calculated anarchy of it all: this irresistible mix has made *A FLEA IN HER EAR* a classic farce, and beyond that, a classic of world drama.

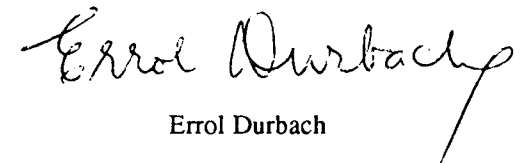
The Frederic Wood Theatre was built during the great theatrical surge that saw the inauguration of a number of Vancouver playhouses 25 years ago - The Playhouse and the Arts Club, among them - each with its own role and function in the community. The "Freddy Wood" Season, for the playgoers of the city, has now become synonymous with a repertoire of classical plays usually appropriate to the budgets of subsidised National theatres, or to the high-risk ventures possible only in heavily subscribed theatres like ours.

As a teaching theatre, we have accepted a tacit mandate from the University to present to our campus community of scholars and colleagues, and to the public in general, a range of plays mirroring the dramatic achievements of the theatre from Euripides to Beckett, and to keep alive the great traditions of the stage from Shakespearean and Restoration modes to the radical innovations of Pirandello and Brecht.

Our primary intention to instruct our student actors, designers, and technicians in a wide variety of traditional theatrical styles has been balanced, moreover, by frequent experiments in the unconventional - by directorial approaches which constantly revitalize familiar material and thereby avoid the peril of turning the Frederic Wood Theatre into a mausoleum of what Peter Brook has called "dead theatre". By blending a fairly orthodox season of plays with an imaginative and progressive approach to staging them, we have managed to establish over the years a distinctive and recognizable "house-style" at UBC.

Another of our goals as a university theatre has been to ensure accessibility by keeping prices low, despite inflation and the great rise in production costs. The Frederic Wood Foundation remains an invaluable source of funding, and I should like to acknowledge a deep debt of gratitude to the Wood family and our various other benefactors on behalf of all who benefit from their generosity - students and the theatre-going public alike.

We look forward to the next 25 years of Frederic Wood productions with expectation of even greater successes, high hopes for improved facilities, a more extensive season, the participation of the other Performing Arts departments in our ventures, and the continued contribution of distinguished guest-artists to our programmes. My sincere thanks and appreciation, finally, to our audiences whose support remains the mainstay of our enterprise as a leading University theatre.



Errol Durbach

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Ibsen and 'The Problem of Women'

In May 1898, true to fashion, Ibsen affirmed his reputation for contradiction and contrariness. To an over-enthusiastic attempt by the Norwegian Society for Women's Rights to claim his partisanship, he uttered this well-known objection:

"I thank you for your toast, but must disclaim the honour of having consciously worked for women's rights. I am not even quite sure what women's rights really are. To me it has been a question of human rights. And if you read my books carefully you will realize that. Of course it is incidentally desirable to solve the problem of women; but that has not been my whole object..."

This is Ibsen at his most disingenuous. "The problem of women" is clearly a central, not a merely incidental, issue in *A Doll's House*; and I imagine that he was over-reacting to that tendency among his feminist supporters to reduce his complex analysis of freedom in that play to a political issue. Read the book carefully, he might have said, and you'll find a dialectical contradiction at its centre; for Nora's slamming the door on the doll's house must be viewed in the dramatic context of Mrs. Linde's motives for re-entering that secure domestic world. "The problem of women" is that the need for liberation is countermanded by an equally insistent need for the security of the doll's house, and to regard the play as a recommendation to domestic revolution is to ignore its balanced dramatic structure. And yet this is precisely the way in which an entire generation of readers, in the 1960's and throughout the 1970's, was encouraged to see it. Kate Millet's influential and persuasive *Sexual Politics* claimed Ibsen for her militant sisterhood even more enthusiastically than the Norwegian Society for Women's Rights. *A Doll's House*, she wrote, was a blow against the patriarchy, with Nora as "the true insurrectionary of the sexual revolution... battling the sexual politic openly and rationally... [with her band] of revolutionaries." But the point of the play, I should have thought, is that there is no band of revolutionaries and no sisterhood to support Nora in her heroic decision. Her one potential ally - the friend who escapes from her intolerable burden of "freedom" into domesticity - provides the dramatic counterpoint to Nora's tragic impulse towards a lonely liberation. In 1879 it was Nora's iconoclastic gesture that challenged explanation and defense. In 1987 it is Mrs. Linde's surprisingly accommodating choice that challenges the liberated feminist. But the meaning of *A Doll's House* is inseparable from the contradictory nature of "liberation" at its dramatic centre.

It is Mrs. Linde who interests me. One by one, she has shed the ties, and the roles that they imply, which confine the women to the doll's house. The unloved and unloving husband is dead - the "wife" is free. There are no children of the marriage - the "mother" is free. Her young brothers have all grown up - the "nanny" is free. Her own ailing mother is dead - the "servant" and "nurse" are free. Nora, ambiguously comfortable in her macaroon-filled Paradise, sustained by deceit and a willing collaboration in her own suppression, is momentarily envious of this free unshackled state: "What a relief it must be for you!" On the contrary. It is not liberation that Mrs. Linde experiences at all. Her answer is disconcerting: "No. Only unspeakably empty." She speaks instead of feeling

displaced and redundant, lonely, isolated, and useless: and she sums up her condition, finally, in the harrowing metaphor of the flotsam to which her existence has been reduced: "Here I am, like a shipwrecked woman in the wreckage." At the end of the play, when Nora herself goes through an equally harrowing ritual of selfdispossession and redefinition - "in total freedom", as she insists - it becomes impossible to dissociate her emancipated life from the context of shipwreck and alienation, the frustration of human needs and the deprivation of wifely and motherly security that Mrs. Linde so poignantly articulates: "No one to live for. ...No one to care about. No one to care for." The free spirit who leaves the doll's house of shattered values does so absolutely alone, without vocation, without support, a model of the devastation to which she has heroically committed herself. For to choose such freedom is to look into the face of death.

The tragic ambiguity of the free spirit, in Ibsen's plays, lies in mankind's entrapment between two equally compelling but seemingly irreconcilable needs: the need for a free and autonomous selfhood, and the need for connections and alliances with the world. Nora's bid for freedom, which asserts individuality, also jeopardizes her security; and the self-liberating gesture may simultaneously isolate and leave the individual anxious, uprooted, and uncertain. This, as I have suggested, is the condition in which Mrs. Linde finds herself, which she would willingly forfeit in favour of the bonds of belonging and exchange her intolerable burden of freedom for some kind of relationship to assuage her loneliness. To achieve this without Nora's errors of submission to her husband, without Nora's loss of autonomy in her marriage, is one way of liberating the doll even within the confines of a doll's house - and, perhaps, in her relationship with Krogstad, Mrs. Linde achieves some minor miracle. She may, in a marriage based upon trust and honesty and dignity and genuine human need, be more essentially free than Nora, who must step into the cold and unfriendly world as a tragically isolated being. Nora (to borrow Erich Fromm's terms in *The Fear of Freedom*) is free from the secure bondage of her doll's house - but not yet free to govern herself or realize her individuality. And Ibsen leaves her at that moment of tragic crisis where the strength of clarification and positive decision is counterbalanced by the emptiness and the insecurity of her hard-won freedom. This is the first phase of his deliberation on the idea of freedom and its fears, his first dramatic image of an ambiguous emancipation which the women in his later plays - Mrs. Alving, Rebekka West, Ellida Wangel, and Hedda Gabler - will enact in increasingly more complex variations on a major tragic theme.

Errol Durbach

Reprinted, in part, from "Ibsen's Liberated Heroines and the Fear of Freedom," *Contemporary Approaches to Ibsen*, Volume V. Errol Durbach is Professor of Theatre and Head of the Department at the University of British Columbia.



The Impact of Ibsen

The evening of Friday June 7th, 1889 is a significant moment in the cultural, social, and intellectual history of late nineteenth-century England. This was the first real production of *A Doll's House* on the English stage, and it signalled the beginning of a decade of spirited - and at times ferocious - controversy about Ibsen's plays. When *Ghosts* opened in London in 1891, it was denounced in the *Daily Telegraph* as "simple only in the sense of an open drain; of a loathsome sore unbandaged; of a dirty act done publicly; or of a lazaret-house with all its doors and windows open"; and the newspaper asserted that "Morality, Criticism, and Taste alike must certainly draw the line at what is absolutely loathsome and foetid." To look back now at the abuse that was poured on Ibsen's work a century ago is to realize what a sensitive nerve these plays touched.

The *Daily Telegraph's* response to *Ghosts* concerned itself particularly with what it (not too decorously) called "the gross, and almost putrid, indecorum of this play," but it was not only the play's oblique references to venereal disease and sexual misconduct that provoked a sense of unease. Ibsen's plays challenged something deeper than a late Victorian commitment to propriety on the stage.

One reason why Ibsen's plays aroused strong anxieties is that audiences found themselves looking at tragic, tormented characters whose lives were not so very different from their own. In contrast to earlier plays by Ibsen set in a remote Viking past, the middle and later plays that arrived on the English stage in the 1890's had contemporary nineteenth-century settings. Prominent among the characters were those with such occupations as bank manager, photographer, physician, university lecturer, and housewife. And the situations in which these characters were placed were often close to ordinary middle class preoccupations and tensions about such matters as career and money. *A Doll's House*, for example, opens by bringing onto the stage a newly-promoted bank manager speaking anxiously about his wife's extravagance over Christmas presents.

Beneath these surface tensions in Ibsen's plays there are the much more disturbing forces that cannot easily find expression in speech, but make themselves felt in dramatic gestures and in tremors beneath the language. The threatening abyss of panic and emptiness, of personal collapse and failure, is another reason for the shattering, disruptive power of Ibsen's plays, a hundred years ago and today.

A further element in the impact of Ibsen's plays in the late nineteenth-century is the way in which they call into question the moral certitudes. Among the most certain of these Victorian certitudes was the sanctity of the family, and in *A Doll's House* we have the picture of an ideal husband, his wife, and their children, about to celebrate Christmas. Not only does the play undermine this domestic paradise, but it keeps all the moral questions open. "I'm not content any more with what most people say, or with what it says in books," Nora declares near the end of the final act. "I have to think things out for myself, and get things clear." The play leaves it to the audience to think things out and get them clear. *A Doll's House*, like most of Ibsen's plays, subverts the established moral categories, and creates a dramatic world in which people are compelled to face moral challenges on their own, without the traditional supports. These moral ambiguities, and the mere fact that moral questions are seriously and insistently raised, help to explain Harley Granville Barker's comment on Ibsen in relation to the English drama of the 1880's: "A fancy dress bazaar in the Vicarage garden, with everyone enjoying it very innocently; suddenly the wind veers to the east! Such was Ibsen's advent."

Jonathan Wisenthal

Jonathan Wisenthal is a distinguished Shavian scholar and editor, and author of *Shaw and Ibsen: Bernard Shaw's Quintessence of Ibsenism and Related Writings*. He is Professor of English and Associate Dean of Arts at the University of British Columbia.

A Doll's House

by
Henrik Ibsen

Directed by Charles McFarland

Production

Adapted from the Christopher Hampton Translation

Set and Lighting Design by
Robert Gardiner

Costume Design by
Mara Gottler

Technical Director Ian Pratt
Properties Sherry Milne
Costume Supervisor Chelsea Moore
Set Construction John Henrickson, Don Griffiths,
Robert Moser
First Hand Celia Brauer

Cast

Torvald Helmer Lawrence Kagan
Nora Helmer Victoria Maxwell
Dr. Rank Mark Weatherley
Mrs. Kristine Linde Janine Payne
Nils Krogstad Neil Gallagher
Anne-Marie Tracy Holmes*
The Helmer Children Ezra Cannon, Andrew Seebaran,
Kelly Sullivan
Errand Boy Randall Plitt
Helene Cathy Golf

Stage Manager Elana Honcharuk
Assistant Stage Manager Randall Plitt
Properties Assistant Cathy Golf
Scene Design Assistant Katherine King
Lighting Design Assistant Kairiin Bright
Makeup Cynthia Johnston
Assistants to the Director Bruce Dow, Michael Groberman

Box Office Carol Fisher, Timothy Hyland, Linda McRae
House Manager Alan Brodie
Business Manager Marjorie Fordham
Production Norman Young

Act I: Christmas Eve, late morning
Act II: Christmas Day, late afternoon
Act III: Boxing Day, mid-night

There will be two intermissions of 10 minutes.

*Appearing through the courtesy of
Canadian Actors' Equity Association.

Acknowledgements

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Kyla Gardiner
Noah Cannon
Terry Kuzyk
Vancouver Youth Theatre

Thank you to all staff, faculty and friends who
loaned their Christmas decorations.

A Doll's House

Notes from the director

There are two kinds of spiritual law, two kinds of conscience, one for men and one, quite different, for women. They don't understand each other; but in practical life, woman is judged by masculine law, as though she weren't a woman but a man.

The wife in the play ends by having no idea of what is right or wrong; natural feeling on the one hand and belief in authority on the other have altogether bewildered her.

A woman cannot be herself in modern society. It is an exclusively male society, with laws made by men and with prosecutors and judges who assess female conduct from a male standpoint.

She has committed forgery, and she is proud of it; for she did it out of love for her husband, to save his life. But this husband with his commonplace principles of honour is on the side of the law and regards the question with masculine eyes.

A mother in modern society, like certain insects, goes away and dies once she has done her duty by propagating the race.

-Henrik Ibsen, *Notes for a Modern Tragedy*, 19.10.1878

Hypocrisy, pretexts, euphemisms and rationalizations are widely practised by one or both partners in "successful" marriages.

Another factor which may perpetuate the union is the individual's particular orientation to life. Many people are 'institution-oriented'. They conform to society; the marriage vows must not be broken. A good marriage, they feel, is not to be equated with personal happiness or self-fulfilment.

A more obvious reason that divorce is less frequent is that most people are bound in marriage by "traps". There's the ecclesiastical trap: conscientious Roman Catholics eschew divorce. The cultural trap: by tradition, Jews as well as other groups hold sacred the cohesiveness of the family and the welfare of the children. The career trap: society still penalizes, however subtly, the man who leaves his wife. Top posts tend to go to the man with the 'clean' personal record. The pride trap: many people are prepared to endure a private hell rather than publicly admit that they have failed at marriage.

Separations and divorces are more likely if one of the partners is 'person-oriented', which is to say he thinks in terms of self-fulfilment, self-realization and personal happiness.

Of the small proportion of good man-woman relationships, a surprisingly high number are carried on outside of marriage. Usually the man, the woman, or both are married to somebody else. The extramarital relationship with "the other woman" (or man) often has many constructive qualities. These are frequently important, meaningful and central in the lives of the two people concerned. About half the time the other spouse is aware of the relationship, and often condones it. Often the extramarital affair does not include sex yet still retains its significance.

The Mask of Modern Marriage, Macleans 19.10.1963

What, then, is that incalculable feeling that deprives the mind of the sleep necessary to life? A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world. But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity.

-Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*

Living is a war with the trolls
In the depths of the mind and heart;
Writing means summoning oneself
To court and playing the judge's part.

- Henrik Ibsen

Charles McFarland - Director

Born in England of Canadian parents, raised in Stratford-upon-Avon and graduating from Cambridge University, Charles McFarland returned to Toronto, his family home, in 1981. Since then, his work has been seen across Canada, and he has spent three seasons at the Stratford Festival as assistant director of *Separate Tables*, *Antigone*, *The Beaux' Stratagem* and *Pericles*, directing the 1985 Young Company in a special production of Shakespeare and Fletcher's *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.

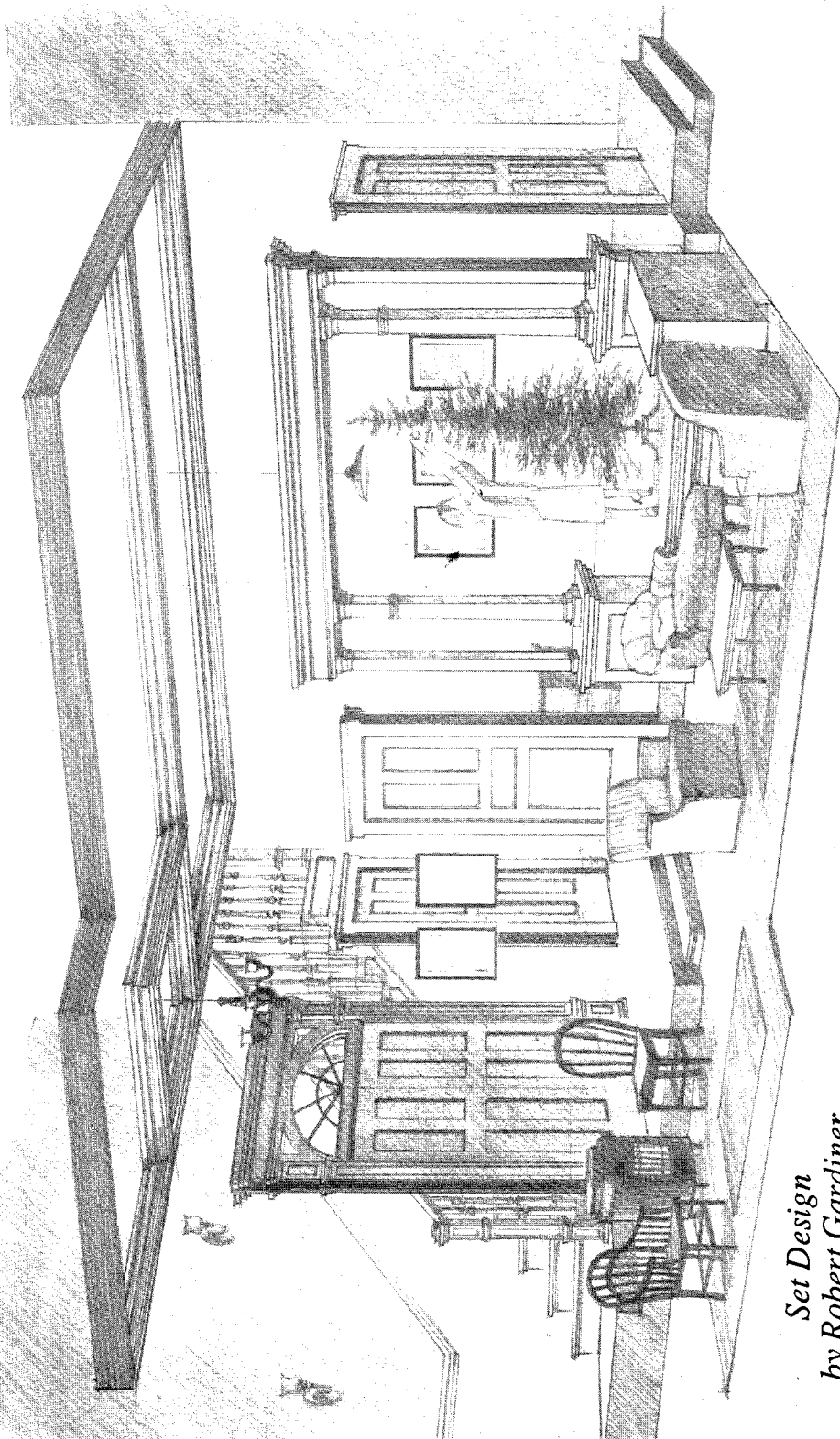
His work ranges from *Children of a Lesser God* and *Salt-Water Moon* at Halifax's Neptune Theatre, *Educating Rita* and a one-character play about Truman Capote at London's Grand Theatre, and a new version of Sophocles' *Ajax* for Equity Showcase Theatre in Toronto to a collaborative adaptation of Dario Fo's *We Can't Pay? We Won't Pay!* at the Manitoba Theatre Centre and a season's training with the Canadian Opera Company, assistant directing *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Adriana Lecouvreur* and *Rigoletto*.

For the 1987-88 season, Mr. McFarland is an associate director of the Manitoba Theatre Centre, directing Joe Orton's *Loot* and Athol Fugard's *The Road to Mecca*; he also returns to Neptune Theatre for a Christmas production of a modern-dress *Cinderella*.

Henrik Ibsen

A Brief Chronology

- 1828 Henrik Johan Ibsen born at Skien in south-east Norway on 20 March, second child of Knud Ibsen, a merchant, and his wife Marichen, née Altenburg.
- 1834-35 Father becomes ruined. The family moves to Venstøp, a few miles outside Skien.
- 1844 Ibsen (aged fifteen) becomes assistant to an apothecary at Grimstad, a tiny seaport further down the coast. Stays there for six years in great poverty.
- 1849 Writes his first play, *Catiline* (in verse).
- 1851 Is invited to join Ole Bull's newly formed National Theatre at Bergen. Does so, and stays six years, writing, directing, designing costumes, and keeping the accounts.
- 1856 The Feast at Solhaug acted at Bergen: his first success.
- 1858 Marries Suzannah Thoresen. *The Vikings at Helgeland* staged: a failure.
- 1859 His only child, Sigurd, born.
- 1860-61 Years of poverty and despair. Unable to write.
- 1864 *The Pretenders* staged in Christiania: a success. He leaves Norway and settles in Rome. Remains resident abroad for the next 27 years.
- 1867 Writes *Peer Gynt*, in verse, in Rome, Ischia, and Sorrento. It, too, is a great success; but is not staged for seven years.
- 1871 Revises his shorter poems and issues them in a volume. His farewell to verse: for the rest of his life he publishes exclusively in prose.
- 1876 *Peer Gynt* staged for the first time.
- 1879 Writes *A Doll's House* in Rome and Amalfi. It causes an immediate sensation.
- 1881 Writes *Ghosts* in Sorrento and Rome. It is violently attacked: all theatres reject it, and bookshops return it to the publisher.
- 1884 Writes *The Wild Duck* in Rome and Gossensass. It, and all his subsequent plays, were regarded as obscure and were greeted with varying degrees of bewilderment.
- 1886 Writes *Rosmersholm* in Munich.
- 1890 Writes *Hedda Gabler* in Munich.
- 1891 Returns to settle permanently in Norway.
- 1892 Writes *The Master Builder* in Christiania.
- 1894 Writes *Little Eyolf* in Christiania.
- 1896 Writes *John Gabriel Borkman* in Christiania.
- 1899 Writes *When We Dead Awaken* in Christiania.
- 1900 First stroke: partly paralysed.
- 1901 Second stroke: left largely helpless.
- 1902 Dies in Christiania on 23 May, aged 78.



Set Design
by Robert Gardiner

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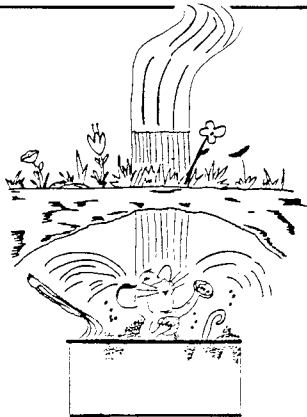
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