

Peer Gynt

at Gålå
Summary - 2017





Introduction

Henrik Ibsen published the drama Peer Gynt in 1867. Five years earlier, he had been on a journey across Norway in search of inspiration. In the Gudbrandsdalen valley he was told myths and stories about a local huntsman, fisherman and adventurer named Peer Gynt. In the three first acts of the play, the story takes place in the Gudbrandsdalen valley region and the surrounding highlands.

When Peer Gynt was initially published, Ibsen said the play was not a suitable drama for the stage - it was a closet drama, intended for a reading audience. The play rapidly gained popularity, and in 1876 it was performed on stage for the first time at Christiania Theatre in Oslo. The popularity may in part be due to the way Ibsen weaved in Norwegian folklore and mythical figures, but the play was also quite sarcastic, poking fun at several contemporary issues. In 1989, Peer Gynt finally returned "home". The dream of performing the drama in the Gudbrandsdalen valley was finally made true.

Henrik Ibsen's Peer Gynt has inspired artists from all over the world, having been adapted to ballet and opera productions - and much more. Edvard Grieg's Peer Gynt suite is possibly even more famous than the play itself - interpreted by famous jazz performers such as Duke Ellington and rock bands such as The Who, - and Grieg's melodies have been used in countless films and commercials all around the globe. One of the many painters and artists who have been inspired by the play is the famous painter Edvard Munch, who identified strongly with the Peer Gynt character.

Henrik Ibsen (1828 - 1906) remains one of the biggest names in world literature, and is considered to be the founder of modern drama. It is said that Ibsen is the world's most-played playwright after Shakespeare.

Photo:
Bård Gundersen



Part 1

1. Act Scene 1

Peer, a young man in his twenties has been away from the farmstead for a long time, and his mother, Aase, insists that he tell her what he has been up to. He claims he has been hunting game in the mountains, and to explain why he has no gun or game to show from his hunt, he starts telling a tall tale about the incredible events he has been through. Aase is quite dazzled by his tale; Peer says that as he was hunting a reindeer buck, he suddenly found himself sitting astride it. He rode the buck across the precariously narrow Gjendineggen; a ride that ended abruptly as they plunged off the edge of the mountain – hurtling hundreds of meters down into the icy mountain waters below.

It dawns on Aase that she has heard this story before, and she calls Peer out on his lies. Mother Aase scolds him for his lies, alleging that he has only been out partying and playing hooky. He should help his poor mother on the farm and not be so irresponsible. Once a thriving estate, the farm has become increasingly decrepit with each passing day now that Aase must manage everything on her own. Aase is a widow. She is concerned that Peer, now that he is coming of age, is taking after his late father Jon, who was an alcoholic. He ought to marry and settle down.

Peer tells her to be patient, and says he's destined for great things, like being a king or emperor. Aase tells him he belongs in a madhouse.

Aase declares that one of Peer's old sweethearts, Ingrid, heiress to the wealthy Hegstad farmstead, has been betrothed during Peer's absence. An extravagant wedding will be taking place the next day: the arranged marriage between Ingrid and Mads Moen. Aase contends that Ingrid would much rather have chosen Peer as her husband - a challenge Peer brazenly accepts. He promptly sets off to Hegstad to propose to Ingrid.

Aase desperately tries to stop her son from bringing further shame upon the family, with no luck.

1. Act Scene 2

Peer is standing outside the gates of a neighboring farm, called Hegstad. A wedding is taking place. Then, a group of people passes by, laughing and cheering. Peer wonders why they are so happy. Aslak Blacksmith, who got in a fistfight with Peer, some weeks back, at a party at the Lundefarm, teases Peer. He mocks him for running into the mountains for so long at a time that the bride, Ingrid, has left him for a new groom. Peer does not bother: He'll show them!



1. Act Scene 3

At the Hegstad farmstead the feast has begun. The bride is not taking part in the festivities. Nervous and anxious, she has locked herself in the storage house. Out in the courtyard stands the groom, trying to coax her out.



Peer arrives at the feast and quickly gets the attention of the guests. The reputation of this wild, carousing young lad is widely known. Aslak the blacksmith, gets the others to ignore Peer, so when he asks, none of the girls wants to dance with him. A family of newcomers, who recently moved to the rural community from Hedalen with their daughters Solveig and Helga, also arrive at the feast. Following custom, Peer asks the father's permission to dance with the eldest daughter, and it is granted. Peer is enchanted by Solveig and her pure and pious countenance, but when he tells her his name, Solveig too is scared off.

Dejectedly, Peer accepts drinks of moonshine from the other guests and drinks until his self-confidence and courage are restored. The alcohol has its expected effect, and with the other guests egging him on, Peer begins boasting and telling his usual lies. As Solveig comes walking across the yard, he tries to talk to her once more. Solveig is fascinated by the freedom and imagination of this wild young man, but is afraid of how her conservative Christian family will react if she is seen with him. Peer eventually goes too far in his drunken revelries. Solveig scolds him and leaves.

The groom is struggling to free his bride from her self-imposed isolation in the storehouse. He begs Peer to help him. Peer sees this as his chance to steal the bride.

Aslak Blacksmith wants to beat Peer up as revenge for last time at Lunde. Peer, who joined the groom to the bride, has now stolen her. As the whole thing plays out, the guests are startled. The wealthy and powerful Hegstad farmer banishes him for this misdeed.



2. Act Scene 1

Next morning, Peer and Ingrid find themselves high up in the mountains. Peer regrets taking her, and asks her to leave. Ingrid, with only half her bridal wear intact, tries to keep him from abandoning her. She insists that he must go back with her and marry into wealth, but Peer can only think about Solveig. In his mind, Solveig is the pure and pious one, the one he longs for. Ingrid runs off back to the village alone.

2. Act Scene 2

The family of newcomers helps Mother Aase search for Peer. Solveig gets to know Peer through his mother's tales.

Further up in the mountains, the lawless Peer flees from the villagers. He encounters three desperate milkmaids wailing and calling for their lost boyfriends. Peer boasts that he can take care of all three of them; a claim that is enthusiastically welcomed by the trio of girls. The party continues for Peer.



2. Act Scene 3

Peer is wandering in the Rondane mountains all lost and bewildered. He is drunk and dizzy; filled with feelings of both remorse and pride. He regrets his actions in the past few days, and yet he is struck by the grandeur of the breath taking alpine landscape. The scenery changes character as he turns it into a royal manor, a stately farm. It's the old house of his grandfather Rasmus and Jon and Aase Gynt – restored to its former glory.

2. Act Scene 4

A woman in green comes walking into the grove. She says she is the daughter of the Mountain King and Peer, not wanting to seem inferior, boasts that he too is of royal ancestry. Two such dashing, noble people must surely be meant for each other! The Woman in Green invites him inside the mountain, where her father's palace is, to arrange the wedding. She calls for a gigantic pig, which serves as her bridal mount.



Delights for the ear and eye now asseble. Mu-
sicmaid come! Let Dovre's harp
tremble!

2. Act Scene 5

A great gathering of court trolls and goblins receive Peer and the Woman in Green in the Mountain King's throne room. The Mountain King is sitting on his throne, telling the trolls to beware of this man who has entered the kingdom of the trolls.

Peer asks the Mountain King for his daughter's hand. However, before the father can allow his daughter to marry one of the human kind, his wits must be put to the test. In the kingdom of trolls there is a set of rules and values that are absolute. Breaking any of these means death.

The Mountain King asks him what difference there is between trolls and men. Peer claims the differences don't seem all too great as far as he is concerned, but he is wrong, and the Mountain King rebukes him. He refers to the trolls' ideal rule of life, as represented by the maxim "Troll, to thyself be - enough!". This selfish philosophy differs from the human ideal; "Man, be thyself!". Although the philosophical subtleties are lost on Peer, he shrugs and accepts this maxim of the trolls, finding it to be reasonable enough.

Peer must also show that he appreciates the trolls' customs and way of life. He eats and drinks the home-made troll fare of dung and urine, and a troll's tail is fastened to his bottom. But when his bride to be, the Woman in Green, loses her glamour and reveals her true troll self, Peer is aghast. The Mountain King, seeing that Peer is far from cured of his human nature, fetches a number of sharp instruments to blind and distort Peer's vision so that he will see the ugly as beautiful and the wicked as good.

Peer realises what madness he is about to give his life to. He refuses any further marriage negotiations, but his rejection is badly received as the Woman in Green is already pregnant with Peer's child since desire in mind is similar to desire in action. The Mountain King flies into a rage and orders the trolls to kill him. Peer tries to escape but is overpowered by the trolls. Then, suddenly, they hear church bells ringing. The tolling bells scare off the trolls and Peer is saved.

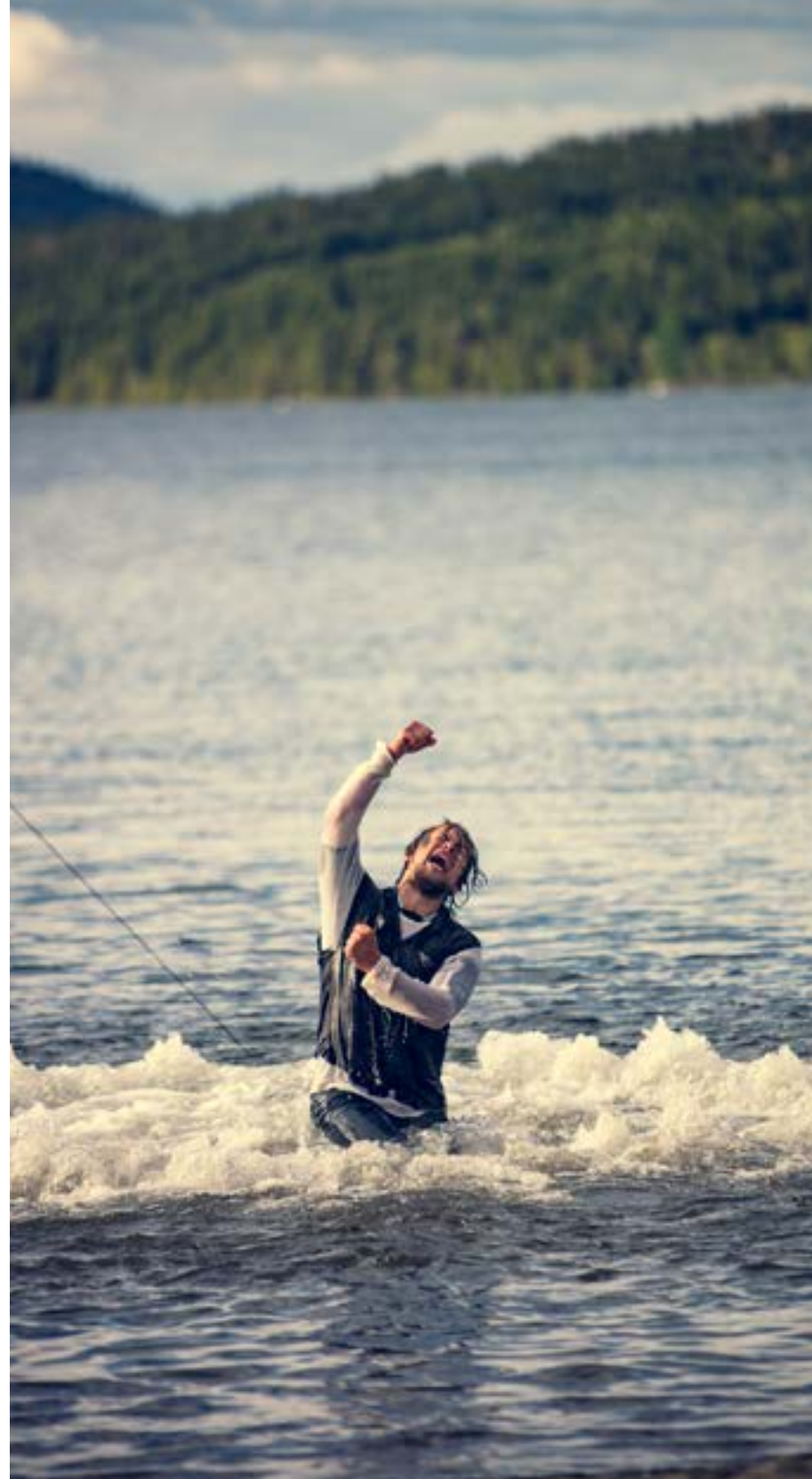
2. Act Scene 6

Peer turns towards a voice – a voice which is undefined and disembodied, but is nonetheless assertive and superior. The voice calls itself the Great Boyg, insisting that it is “itself” – with apparent reference to the maxim from the previous scene. Can Peer say the same for his own part, though – is he “himself”?

The Great Boyg is strong and superior and seemingly invincible. In order to avoid a fatal clash, Peer must choose to “go roundabout” – a phrase we hear for the first time here.

2. Act Scene 7

Peer wakes up as if from a stupor and sees Helga, Solveig’s little sister, approaching him with a basket of food. Solveig stands behind her. Peer jumps up, but Solveig shrinks away from him. Peer carelessly and rudely begins recounting last night’s escapades with the Mountain King’s daughter. Disheartened, Solveig backs away and runs off. Before Helga can follow her, Peer gives her a silver button and instructs her to urgently tell Solveig she must never forget him.



3. Act Scene 1

Deep in the forest, Peer is felling timber in the grey autumn weather. He is building a crude hut to shield himself from the frost. Life as an outlaw is wearing on his spirits. He feels lonely and sorry for himself, with only this confounded imagination of his to keep him going. Suddenly, a young man comes by. He is a deserter and incapacitates himself by cutting off his finger to avoid being sent off to war. Peer witnesses the whole thing from his hiding place. He cannot fathom that such an action, which cannot be undone, would be someone’s choice.

3. Act Scene 2

In Mother Aase’s room, everything is in disarray. As punishment for Peer’s running off with the bride, the farmstead has been seized and all of their clothes and belongings have been carried away by the Hegstad farmer and the bailiff.

Peer is lawless and can be killed by anyone if he appears outside the forest where he has applied for shelter.

Aase, Solveig and the cotter’s wife, Kari, sort through what’s left, including an old casting ladle that Peer used to play with and mould pewter buttons in as a boy.

Mother Aase has grown quite old and her health is rapidly declining. She reminisces about better days and despite her pitiful fate, Aase still defends her son and the things he has done. Peer is her most precious treasure.



3. Act Scene 3

Peer has built a crude woodcutters’ cabin in the forest. Then, suddenly, Solveig appears. She has longed for Peer, thinking about him day and night, until she finally decided to break with her family, leave the rural community and come to support the lawless Peer in the wilderness. The mountains will be her home. That is, if Peer wants her. Peer admits he has longed for her and can hardly believe that she has really come to be with him for the rest of her days.



3. Act Scene 4

A hag with an ugly child limping behind her approaches Peer. She greets him like an old friend, but Peer does not recognise her. It is the Woman in Green who has come to hand over her child to its father – Peer. Peer is furious and threatens them. He wants nothing to do with them, but the Woman in Green tells him it's not quite that simple. She will always be there – just like the reckless misdeeds of his past – to tarnish the relationship between Peer and his dear Solveig.

The Woman in Green and the child depart, leaving Peer alone. They are out of sight, but not out of mind.

3. Act Scene 5

Peer cannot free himself from the memories of his selfish and reckless behaviour in the past. He fears his wicked past will stand in the way of a life with the good and selfless Solveig. His joy turns to sorrow. His new future seems unrealistic, smashed to pieces and impossible to piece together into something beautiful again. He must “go roundabout”, escape, give himself time.

Peer tells Solveig that he has “a heavy load to carry”, and asks her to wait for him as he has to go away for a while. She promises. She will wait.



3. Act Scene 6

Mother Aase is in bed, feeling very ill, when Peer suddenly appears in her room. She is overjoyed to see her son and showers him with compliments. Yet, at the same time, it is clear that she is dying and that Peer does not want to accept this fact. Rather, he tries to maintain a conversational tone with her, until he realises she is actually lying in the bed where he slept as a child.

They are flooded with memories of how they played sleigh rides when he was young, with the bed as the sleigh. Now, though, the roles are reversed. Peer holds the reins and Mother Aase is his passenger. They play out their roles as they remember them from old, and Peer races towards the distant Soria Moria castle. However, as Aase becomes ever weaker and ever sicker, Peer adds a new twist to the story. Outside Soria Moria, Saint Peter, the guardian of the Heavenly Gates, is waiting to greet Mother Aase. With reverence, he lets her in. Even the Lord himself wishes her welcome when he hears Peer wax lyrical about his mother. Mother Aase passes away in her bed as Peer spins a tale sending her beyond the Heavenly Gates.

Peer moves on, without any plans or goals – but his journey will indeed take him far away.





Part 2

4. Act Scene 1

Peer is on a beach on the Moroccan coast with a number of businessmen of various Western nationalities. The older Peer sits at the bar.

Peer has become a wealthy middle-aged man with several successful (albeit morally questionable) ventures behind him. He is hosting a party, and is praised by his guests. He is the centre of attention, lecturing his guests about his business career, saying in conclusion that much of his success rests on the fact that he is free as a bird and without any obligations. Peer claims this is what “being thyself” is all about.

Peer’s arrogance and pride becomes clear when he reveals the ultimate goal for his career – a desire he has nourished since childhood – namely to be the Emperor of the world!

His Western friends turn their backs on him. They decide to put an end to his plans before he can carry them out, and plot to rob Peer of all his wealth. They leave the beach and board Peer’s yacht, which is filled with all his riches and belongings.

4. Act Scene 2

The older Peer sits at the bar and considers the girls who is dancing in front of him. He wonders; what is beauty.

The younger Peer is in the desert. He looks at the surroundings and the greatness of the deserts. He admires a frog and his ability to “be him self enough”. Suddenly, the younger Peer Gynt discovers a horse and some clothes lying in the desert. Peer is saved.



4. Act Scene 3

The younger Peer arrives in a city. He is received as a prophet. The new identity suits him perfectly. Peer calls Anitra over to him. Peer is quite enticed by the princess, making overtures to her. The quick-witted Anitra does not give in so easily, but exploits the situation. She makes him give her a costly jewel. Peer's advances become increasingly base and vulgar, and for each advance he makes Anitra uses her charms to trick him into giving away another treasure: rings, purses, robes.

4. Act Scene 4

Peer is in the desert, stripped of all his possessions once more. He mulls over all the pitfalls he has stumbled into in his life and concludes that the common denominator in all his projects has been that they were driven by a search for the truth.

4. Act Scene 5

Sunrise in Gizeh, a village in Egypt. Peer looks at the Sfinx. The place is filling up with tourists also looking at the Sfinx, the mythological guardian of riddles, called "Abu Hol" in arabic, the "father of fair". Peer wonders where he has met the Sfinx, before he concludes that the Sfinx is the Great Boyg.



Behold, where he in **mud lies** glorious, -

beside himself-!

**His crowning's
here!**



4. Act Scene 6

Peer meets Professor Begriffenfeldt who immediately takes an interest in him. The professor perceives everything Peer says to be admirable, profound and wise, especially after Peer tells him that he knows the Sphinx. So, who is the Sphinx? Peer thinks it resembles the Great Boyg, and the Great Boyg, the Sphinx that is, is "himself". Begriffenfeldt is thrilled. Peer is just the man he has been looking for, an Emperor of interpreters on the fundament of the self. Begriffenfeldt reveals that there have been great upheavals recently and that everything has been turned upside-down. Reason is dead, and Peer is the Emperor" of the new normal: the madmen who are shut inside their own minds, their own "selves". Peer gets cold feet about the whole situation, not wanting to be pulled into Begriffenfeldt's universe.

The younger Peer thinks he is the Pen. He shows up with a piece of paper which must be signed. The Pen is blunt and must be sharpened. The Pen cuts his throat and dies in the older Peer arms. Begriffenfeldt crowns Peer as "the Emperor of Self-hood".

4. Act Scene 7

Solveig is singing by a cabin in the mountains. She longs for Peer, insisting that she will wait for him, just as she promised.



5. Akt Scene 1

We are on a ship off the Norwegian coast. Peer is returning to his home country after many years of absence. He is once again a wealthy man, but he is bitter, knowing that there is no-one waiting for him back home.

5. Act Scene 2

Peer is back on home ground. He is standing by a churchyard in a high-lying mountain village. He is watching a funeral procession while listening to the priest's eulogies over the deceased. The priest portrays a man who lived by ideal principles and put other people first. It turns out that the man being buried is the same person Peer saw in the woods when he was young – the boy who cut off his finger in order not to be sent off to war. The priest concludes that this man set a shining example to be followed, as he was "himself". Blind to his own faults as always, Peer thinks this conclusion applies to him as well.

5. Act Scene 3

Back in the farming community Peer is from, the possessions of the recently deceased Ingrid are being auctioned off at Hegstad farmstead. Peer encounters some old acquaintances – but Mads Moen and Aslak the blacksmith don't recognise him. All around him, Peer sees people making off with objects that the Hegstad farmer seized from Mother Aase after Peer carried off the bride: a casting ladle, a bearskin, a reindeer skull.

Peer is despondent as he sees his childhood, his life, being treated like nothing more than trinkets and junk. Tired, but still as reckless as ever, he starts auctioning off his own life. But the goods he has to offer are nothing but thin air. No thing of value remains. The things he thought of as great and important are met with a shrug. People have all but forgotten about Peer. Only rumours and silly stories remain.



Emperor? You
astrolger's dupe! You're no
Emperor! Why, you're simply an onion!

5. Act Scene 4

In a moment of unusual honesty, Peer examines his life and the way he has lived it. He realises he is not, and never has been, any kind of Emperor or great person. No – he is an onion. Like the layers of an onion, Peer has played numerous roles in his life. But an onion has no core, and neither does Peer.

Peer hears Solveig singing inside the cabin. He turns deathly pale as he realises that he has wasted his life. It was with Solveig, whom he failed, that his greatness could have lain.

5. Act Scene 5

Peer arrives a forrest where the Gyntianapark comes to sight like a lost dream. The whole world blames him – the dewdrops, the withered leaves, the sighing breeze, broken straw, balls of yarn, Mother Aase's voice. They all remind Peer of his many betrayals.





5. Act Scene 6

Peer encounters the Button Moulder, who appears carrying a toolbox and a big ladle in his hand. Peer's time is up. It is time for him to be remoulded. Peer refuses: What is this supposed to mean? The Button Moulder explains that Peer has never been exceptional in any sense of the word, so he will not wind up in Heaven or in Hell. Into the ladle he will go, where he will be melted and recast like all other discarded scrap. Peer, however, claims that he has been "himself" all his life, which must surely be a mark of greatness. Given some time, he will find witnesses and proof of this. The Button Moulder accepts, giving Peer another chance.

5. Act Scene 7

Peer rushes along to provide a witness. He encounters an old beggar, who turns out to be the Mountain King – the king of the trolls – who almost became Peer's father-in-law when Peer was a young man. Peer asks him to vouch for the fact that Peer has always "been himself". Indeed, the Mountain King saw with his own eyes how Peer refused to be transformed from a man into a troll as the king had ordered. But the Mountain King cannot do that for him, because it is precisely the life of a troll that Peer has been living ever since. The trolls' maxim, "be thyself – enough" has followed him throughout his entire life up until this point.

5. Act Scene 8

The Button Moulder appears and asks for proof that Peer has really been himself. But Peer has nothing to show him. Peer ponders this and asks the Button Moulder what it really means to "be oneself". The Button Moulder explains that it is to live selflessly; "to be oneself is: oneself to slay". Each one of us must apply our faculties and resources to benefit all of Creation, to "stand forth everywhere with Master's intention displayed like a signboard".

Peer is forced to admit that, in that case, he has not really "been himself". However, he tries to convince the Button Moulder that he has been great in a different sense – namely a great sinner. The Button Moulder gives him yet another chance to find proof of this.

5. Act Scene 9

Peer is searching for a priest who will allow him to confess his sins so that he can present proof of all his misdeeds to the Button Moulder. A scrawny man in a cassock, carrying a birding net over his shoulder, comes rushing by. But the Scrawny Man is not a priest but Satan, hunting for wicked souls. Peer hints that he might belong in Hell but the Scrawny Man shrugs off Peer's sins, considering them to be mere trifles.

The Scrawny Man is in a rush. He is about to pick up a man who has been "himself" all along. This gives Peer pause – do people like that really belong with the Devil, too? The Scrawny Man explains that there are two ways in which a man can be himself: "there's a right and wrong side to the jacket, you can be straight or inside-out". He says he is tracking down one Peter Gynt, who lived life as himself, but with the wrong side out. Peer does not admit that he is the self-same "Peter" Gynt. He runs off.





5. Act Scene 10

All hope is lost for Peer. He feels incredibly despondent and empty. The Button Moulder appears. Peer's time is up, and he has no proof of his sins.

It is dawn. Suddenly, they hear song and see a cabin with a light shining within. A woman is inside – singing. Inside that cabin, Peer declares, there is proof of my sins. He can no longer “go roundabout”, but must go inside to receive his judgment from the one he has failed the most. The Button Moulder gives him a third chance. If Peer fails, he is doomed.

5. Act Scene 11

Solveig meets Peer. She has waited faithfully for him and is happy to see him again. She knew he would come! Peer pulls away and fervently asks her to accuse him, to state all the sinful ways in which he has betrayed her. But Solveig accuses him of nothing; she forgave him long ago. In Solveig's faith, in her hope and love, Peer has been his true “self” all his life. In her faithful love lies his salvation.

Written by Njål Helge Mjøs

Characters



Peer

Peer is a complex figure. He is creative, fanciful and adventurous, with a bubbling spirit - yet at the same time he is lazy, irresponsible and tends to shirk away from any challenge or difficulty that crosses his path. After stealing a bride from her wedding, he is banished by his community. He ends up in exile abroad. He roams the world, visiting both America and Africa, possibly even Alaska and China. He amasses a fortune through unscrupulous business ventures, but loses his wealth, and returns to his old homestead as a poor, old man. He encounters different characters who question the way he has lived his life, and he is put to a final, decisive test.



Aase

Widow after the rich and powerful farmer Jon Gynt, who had been drinking and feasting until the farm started falling apart and his family was left more or less penniless. Åse feels like an outcast in the rural community, but finds comfort in her close relationship with her only son, Peer, who is heir to the farm. She tells him stories and tales to brighten their destitute days.



Ingrid

The daughter at the wealthy Hægstad farm. She is beautiful, rich, proud and haughty. Ingrid is reluctantly about to be wed to the pathetic, but rich Mads Moen, who is from another wealthy farm nearby. Instead, she is abducted by Peer, who carries her into the mountains. However, as soon as he has had his way with her, he is bored with her and sends her away again. And so, Ingrid's reputation is destroyed.



Solveig

The most loyal female character ever to appear in Norwegian literature! Solveig is the daughter of newcomers to the rural community in which Peer lives. They are so-called "readers" - highly pious people. Solveig is young and innocent, and apparently not accustomed to being around young people her own age. Yet she has a keen eye for other people - especially Peer, who she immediately feels some kind of intuitive connection with. This is truly love at first sight. She promises she will be his - but she must wait her entire life and grow old and blind before Peer returns to her.



Bøygen

The most enigmatic character in the play! The Mighty Bøyg is a shapeless, slimy and invisible entity, with no beginning and no end. What kind of creature is this? The Bøyg teaches Peer a piece of wisdom that will subsequently become his life's maxim, and eventually his doom: To always "go roundabout". Some have interpreted this to mean that the Mighty Bøyg might be a characteristic of Peer himself, and not an actual physical being or a concrete adversary.

Den Grønklede

The Mountain King's daughter is a fairy tale figure who has several characteristics in common with the mythical Huldra, famous in Norwegian folklore. Peer is spellbound by her, and she leads him into the mountain. However, when Peer refuses to see the world the way trolls do, the scales fall off his eyes and he sees the troll king's daughter as the repulsive creature she really is. He flees. His lust for the troll's daughter nonetheless bears fruit: Peer fathers a son, half troll, half human.

Dovregubben

The Mountain King is consumed by ideas of his own power and greatness. Everything in his mountain world is made by the trolls, not admitting anything from outside into their world. The maxim "to thyself be enough" illustrates such an attitude perfectly. He wants to cut Peer's eyes in order to give him a troll's view of life.

Knappestøperen

The Button Moulder chases anyone who has been spending their lives drifting around aimlessly, those who have never made good of their talents in accordance with their human capabilities. He wants to melt them in his casting-ladle to use them as feedstock. Their individuality and personality will disintegrate, but their soul's fibre can be used to mould new humans.



A short biography on Henrik Ibsen

Henrik Johan Ibsen was born in Skien in 1828. His father was a wealthy merchant, but he lost his fortune when Henrik was 8. This made its mark on Ibsen in a way that can be seen throughout his entire literary production. When he was 15, he moved to Grimstad town to start working as a pharmacist's apprentice. There he fathered a child with a 10 year older maid. In the years that followed, he was repeatedly threatened with being sent off to do hard labour for failing to pay child support. This has also had a great impact on Ibsen's work.

Henrik Ibsen eventually became a productive writer, and his first play, *Catalina*, was published in 1850. Ole Bull had just established The Norwegian Theatre in Bergen, and asked Henrik Ibsen to come work as a playwright at the theatre. Ibsen later became a stage director there after studying performing arts in Copenhagen. This probably influenced Ibsen's development as a playwright a great deal. He learned the tricks of the trade, and several of his plays were performed at the theatre. After Bergen, Ibsen moved to Oslo, marrying Suzanna Thoresen. After a strenuous and financially difficult time as director at Christiania Norske Theatre, he was awarded a scholarship which landed him in Italy. This was the beginning of a stay abroad which would last, with a few minor exceptions, for 27 years. Ibsen's literary production picked up pace again. First, he published his play *Brand*, about the uncompromising priest who demands "all or nothing", and the year after, *Peer Gynt* came along - *Brand*'s antithesis in every way: a charming lazy charlatan and adventurer who eventually finds salvation through his faithful Solveig. His international breakthrough came with the play *A Doll's House* in 1876.

Ibsen returned to Christiania in 1891, where he lived until his death in 1906. Henrik Ibsen was never awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. He was too disruptive and not "idealistic" enough for the Nobel Committee. However, in time Ibsen has come to be recognized as one of the greatest playwrights of them all.

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www.peergynt.no

