

THEATER J

AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE

By Henrik Ibsen

In a New Translation by Amy Herzog

Directed by János Szász

GUIDE FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

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ABOUT THEATER J

Theater J is a nationally-renowned, professional theater that celebrates, explores, and struggles with the complexities and nuances of both the Jewish experience and the universal human condition.

Mission

Our work illuminates and examines: ethical questions of our time, inter-cultural experiences that parallel our own, and the changing landscape of Jewish identities. As the nation's largest and most prominent Jewish theater, we aim to preserve and expand a rich Jewish theatrical tradition and to create community and commonality through theater-going experiences.

Theater J draws audiences from all eight wards of the District, as well as Maryland and Virginia, and reflects the diverse residents of the metropolitan DC region including both Jewish and non-Jewish professionals, African-Americans, Arab-Americans, Asians, Hispanics, the LGBTQ community, students, and senior citizens. Theater J is committed to creating partnerships that deepen our connections to our community. Through our Passports Free Ticket Program, we provide over 400 free tickets to senior citizens, clients of homeless and women's shelters, and students throughout DC every season, reaching populations that are historically underserved by arts organizations.

Theater J has been honored with the DC Mayor's Arts Award for Excellence in an Artistic Discipline, over 70 Helen Hayes nominations, and nine Helen Hayes Awards. Notable productions include: Dan O'Brien's *The Body of an American*, winner of the 2014 Horton Foote Prize for Outstanding New American Play; the world-premiere of Cateen Sinnette Jennings' *Queens Girl in the World*; and Tony Kushner's *The Intelligent Homosexual's Guide to Capitalism and Socialism with a Key to the Scriptures*.

History

Founded in 1990 as a program of the Edlavitch DC Jewish Community Center (EDCJCC), Theater J has become "the nation's most prominent Jewish theater" (American Theatre Magazine). Theater J began with a series of staged readings and productions in 1990 under the leadership of founding Artistic Director Martin Blank. Theater J's initial home was a 50-seat black box theater at 1836 Jefferson Place, NW, the original home of the EDCJCC. In 1993, Artistic Director Randye Hoeflich took the helm, producing the first full season and preparing the theater to move to a larger, permanent home.

In 1997, the EDCJCC moved into its current space, the Irwin P. Edlavitch Building, at 1529 Sixteenth Street, NW, which housed a newly built 238-seat proscenium theater, named for

Aaron and Cecile Goldman. Ari Roth was brought on as Artistic Director after the move, growing the theater during his eighteen-year tenure from an annual budget of under \$100,000 to a budget of well over a million and a half dollars. During that time, Theater J earned an international reputation as the nation's premier Jewish theater. In 2005, The New York Times recognized the quality of Theater J's new play development programs, hailing it as "the premiere theater for premieres." Theater J also became known for producing work from and about Israel and the Middle East, with the signature Voices from a Changing Middle East Festival.

Artistic Director Adam Immerwahr joined the theater in 2015 and under his leadership, 2017 was the first year of the Yiddish Theater Lab, which aims to revitalize the great works of Yiddish theater and make them relevant to modern audiences. In 2023, Hayley Finn joined Theater J as Artistic Director, with the goal of telling stories that illuminate the complexities and nuances of both the Jewish experience and the human condition through diverse perspectives and authentic visions.



Dani Stoller in Theater J's *This Much I Know* by Jonathan Spector, Directed by Hayley Finn, 2024. Photo by Ryan Maxwell.



Ensemble in Theater J's *The Chameleon* by Jenny Rachel Weiner, directed by Ellie Hayman, 2023. Photo by Ryan Maxwell

AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE SUMMARY

An Enemy of the People follows Dr. Thomas Stockmann, who discovers that the public baths in his Norwegian spa town are dangerously contaminated by pollution from a nearby tannery, which threatens public health. When he tries to reveal this truth to the community to protect them, he is met with fierce opposition from local officials, including his own brother, the mayor, who prioritize the town's lucrative tourism and economic interests. Stockmann's courageous stand to expose the truth ultimately backfires, as he is ostracized and declared an "enemy of the people" by the townspeople he tried to save.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

How is living in a small town different from living in a big city? How would you describe the lifestyle? The relationships of the people who live there?

In a small town funded by tourism from a popular spa, what role might that spa play in the economy and the lives of the townspeople?

Dr. Stockmann decides to take a stand when he discovers that the water in the spa is contaminated. How do you think this might impact his relationships?



Victoria Pedretti, Caleb Eberhardt, and Jeremy Strong in the 2024 Broadway revival. Photo by Emilio Madrid.

WHO WAS HENRIK IBSEN?

The first great modern playwright was Henrik Ibsen, a Norwegian. His plays show a wide variety of styles, ranging from the realism of 'Hedda Gabler' to the fantasy of 'Peer Gynt'. He is admired for his technical mastery, symbolism, and deep psychological insight.

Ibsen, born on March 20, 1828, in the small port town of Skien, Norway, was one of six children. When the boy was eight, his father went bankrupt. For the next eight years the family lived on a small farm near Skien. At 15 Ibsen was apprenticed to a druggist in the town of Grimstad. It was a lonely life, and the boy soon turned to writing, especially poetry.

In 1849 Ibsen entered the university at Christiania (now Oslo), but he soon dropped out for lack of money. His life was hard for many years. He did routine writing for newspapers and managed a small theater. He traveled in Germany and Denmark to study scene design. He also wrote poetry and unsuccessful plays.

Finally in 1864, aided by a small government grant and the help of friends, Ibsen left Norway to live in Rome, Italy. His first successful play, 'Brand', was originally written in 1865 as a narrative poem. Recast as a drama, it was first performed in 1885. It tells the grim story of a minister who renounces the compromises of his time in favor of a "true-to-onself" life. His next play was 'Peer Gynt' (1867), the tale of a world traveler involved in a variety of remarkable adventures. Wild as the story is, its point is clear—that a second-rate life has little meaning and purpose.

Then followed 'The League of Youth' (1868), about political corruption, and 'Emperor and Galilean' (1873), a plea for a new kind of Christianity. 'The Pillars of Society' (1877) and 'A Doll's House' (1879) deal with social reforms based on the principles of honesty and freedom. 'Ghosts' (1881), about the tragedy of disease that affects the mind, is perhaps Ibsen's greatest play.

Among his later plays are 'An Enemy of the People' (1882), a comedy with serious undertones; 'The Wild Duck' (1884), combining reality and poetry; and 'Rosmersholm' (1886), dealing with the conflict between conscience and desire for freedom. 'Hedda Gabler' (1890) is a powerful domestic tragedy ending in suicide. Among his last plays are 'The Master Builder' (1892) and 'When We Dead Awaken' (1899).

After years of living alternately in Rome and Dresden and Munich, Germany, Ibsen returned to Norway in 1892. He was rich, honored by the world, and loved by his own people. His plays were translated into many languages and staged in countries all over the world. He died in Christiania on May 23, 1906 – **Courtesy of *Britannica Kids***

WHO IS AMY HERZOG? (TRANSLATER/ ADAPTER)

Background

Amy Herzog grew up in the greater New York area. Her grandparents and many of her aunts and uncles were prominent political activists, although her immediate family was less politically inclined. Most notably, Joe Joseph, Herzog's paternal step-grandfather, shared American secrets with the Soviets during World War II, an act of espionage that came to light in 1999. Herzog shared her name with that of her paternal grandmother, Leepee Joseph (née Amy Taft), a proud Communist. Her paternal grandfather was prominent writer and lyricist Arthur Herzog Jr.

Herzog attended Yale University, where she focused on acting and received a bachelor's degree in English in 2000. Upon graduating from Yale, she embarked on a short-lived performance tour and, by the fall of 2001, had turned her attention to playwriting. Several years later, she returned to Yale, this time to obtain a master of fine arts (MFA) degree in playwriting from the university's school of drama in 2007.

As she pursued her burgeoning career, Herzog began to explore the political divisions within her family. Many of her relatives were active supporters of socialism and communism—a pair of leftist ideologies that did not always converge easily. Herzog, who, like her parents, was not particularly interested in politics or activism, started to appreciate the passions of her relatives. Many of her relatives, and particularly her grandmother Leepee, would eventually appear in her plays in both major and minor roles.

Career

In 2010, Herzog utilized many of the ideologies and characteristics of her socialist and communist relatives in her first professional production, *After the Revolution*. This play appeared during the Williamstown Theater Festival and at Playwrights Horizons in New York City. Straddling the line between fiction and biography, this play focuses on the political divisions that develop within a family when the elderly Vera Joseph takes up the mantle of her late husband's socialist activism. That play garnered Herzog the 2011 Lilly Award for playwriting, the 2011 Whiting Writers' Award from the Mrs. Giles Whiting Foundation, and the 2012 New York Times Outstanding Playwright Award. It was also named one of the best plays of the 2010–11 season in The Annual Best Plays Yearbook.

In the summer of 2011, Herzog's play *4,000 Miles*, a sequel to *After the Revolution*, was produced by the LCT3, the emerging artist division of the Lincoln Center Theater in New York. The play takes place ten years later, with the returning character of Vera Joseph and her grandson Leo, who is based on one of Herzog's cousins and has just returned from a cross-country bicycle trip. Among the props used in the production was the same bicycle

Herzog had used on her own transcontinental trek to raise funds for Habitat for Humanity after college. Herzog's sophomore play won the 2012 Village Voice Obie Awards for best new American play and for best performance and was named as a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for drama in 2013. It also garnered the 2012 Lucille Lortel Award for outstanding scenic design. Many of Herzog's family members, including her parents and her grandmother, attended multiple showings of her productions in New York. So successful was its initial run that *4,000 Miles* enjoyed a second production run at the LCT's Mitzi E. Newhouse Theater in the spring of 2012.

After the success of *4,000 Miles*, Herzog decided to venture away from characters based on her own family. However, she continued to explore the forces that bring people together as well as the impacts of history and experience on people's lives. *Belleville* (2011) focuses on the strained relationship between two married people living in Paris, while *The Great God Pan* (2012) describes the experience of a thirty-something man facing the recovery of the long-repressed memory of childhood trauma. *Belleville*, like Herzog's previous productions, received a great deal of critical acclaim. Reviews of *The Great God Pan* were more mixed.

Herzog's next play, *Mary Jane*, premiered in 2017 at the Yale Repertory Theatre and opened Off-Broadway later that year. It tells the story of a single mother facing the challenges of caring for a child with chronic illness, and critics praised its intimate take on deep, complex themes. The writer was inspired by her own experience caring for her seriously ill child. *Mary Jane* received many awards nominations, including for two Drama Desk Awards, six Lucille Lortel Awards, and the Susan Smith Blackburn Award. It was also recognized as the 2017–18 theater season's best new American play by the New York Drama Critics' Circle. In 2019 Herzog shared the Dramatists Guild of America's Horton Foote Playwright Award with fellow writer Heidi Schreck.

The writer went on to pen adaptations of several classics and revisit one of her own. Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* opened on Broadway in March 2023. Famed actress Jessica Chastain starred in the production, which was nominated for a Tony Award for best revival of a play and won the Drama Desk Award for outstanding adaptation. She also adapted Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, which opened in March 2024. Her husband directed the play, which won the Drama Desk Award for outstanding adaptation and was nominated for a Tony Award. The couple broke their longstanding rule about working together for this production, which they felt was particularly relevant in the twenty-first century because of its political and environmental themes. *Mary Jane* opened on Broadway the following month starring Rachel McAdams. The playwright noted before the show opened that it was difficult to revisit that part of her life because her daughter had died a year earlier at age eleven. It was nominated for the Tony for best play.

In addition to her own writing, Herzog also spent a great deal of time helping other aspiring playwrights master their craft. In 2003, she cofounded the Tank, a nonprofit, volunteer-run performance space for emerging artists in Manhattan. From 2007 to 2010, she taught playwriting to MFA candidates at Bryn Mawr College near Philadelphia. She also conducted readings and workshops at the Manhattan Theatre Club, the Hell's Kitchen nonprofit theater company Ars Nova (where she was playwright in residence in 2010), New York Stage and Film, Chicago's Steppenwolf Theatre Company, and Washington's Arena Stage, among others. Along with teaching, Herzog held commissions at Ars Nova, Playwrights Horizons, Steppenwolf, and Yale Repertory Theatre.

Impact

Herzog rose to become one of the most acclaimed playwrights of her generation. Many of her works are known for featuring characters, experiences, and situations that are closely drawn from her own life. Politics, whether clearly visible (as is the case in *After the Revolution*) or an understated influence (as is the case with *The Great God Pan*), are another common element. Also characteristic of Herzog's stories are the emotional and experiential factors that can strain and draw together a family or a romantic couple.

Personal Life

Herzog is married to the stage director Sam Gold. They had two daughters. Their elder child, Frances, was born in 2012 with a muscular disease, nemaline myopathy. Frances died in 2023.

This summary is courtesy of EBSCO.

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IBSEN AND HERZOG: QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION **(OR WRITING)**



What common themes do you see in the lives of Henrik Ibsen and Amy Herzog?

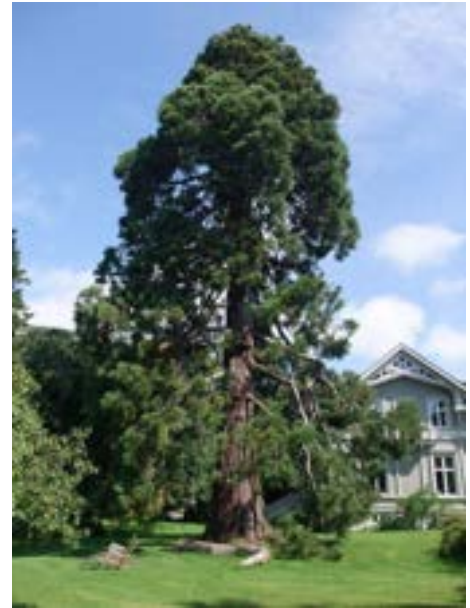
How do you think Ibsen and Herzog's personal experiences may have impacted their work as playwrights?

Both Ibsen and Herzog have written plays that explore complex relationships while grappling with the political and social issues of their times. In your opinion, how can this make a story more compelling?

SPAS AND PUBLIC BATHS AT THE TURN OF THE (PREVIOUS) CENTURY

Running water, flushing toilets, and hot water from a tap don't impress us today, but until very recently, they were luxuries reserved for the ultra-rich. People bathed by heating water over a fire and pouring it into a big metal container in their house, then getting inside it. Showers, with their complex technology, were not a standard feature of homes until the 1970's (!)

The turn of the (previous) century introduced a new type of vacation: the spa. In some cases, they were located in villages that had a natural water source such as hot springs. In others, they were a series of water experiences – hot baths, cold plunges, steam rooms – built inside hotels, and often near the ocean, so that people could bathe there as well. Spa vacations were touted as being healthy and a “cure” for the mind and body, and often a town's economy was based on the tourism that centered around the spa.



Fevik Kystsatorium was one of the spa hotels in Norway that attracted the upper crust seeking some fresh ocean air. (Photo: Aust-Agder Cultural History Centre) This photo is from the late 1800's and the spa, later called Fevik Bad, existed until the 1970's. The building and its beloved sequoia tree still exist today (above.)

THE SCIENTIFIC CONTEXT OF *AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE*

The scene that you're going to read is a turning point in the play. Dr. Thomas Stockmann, who suspected that the water in the baths might be contaminated, sent samples to a lab for testing. In this scene, he receives the results by mail and reveals them to his daughter and two of their friends: the editor of the town paper and a ship's captain.

VOCABULARY

Contaminated - infected in a way that impacts those who come into contact with it. Any substance can be contaminated: water, food, fabric.

Tannery - factory that is used to treat leather through a chemical process. Tanneries turn leather into a usable material for shoes, furniture, handbags, etc.

Groundwater - the layer of water under the layers of dirt and/or clay. If groundwater becomes contaminated it impacts people, animals, and plants.

Bacteria - tiny microorganisms first discovered in 1665 by Antoni van Leeuwenhoek, who identified them after Robert Hooke described the fruiting structures of molds in 1665. Both scientists had primitive versions of microscopes.

Typhoid or typhoid fever - a severe bacterial disease spread through contaminated food or water.

Pamphlet - informational, often political news, smaller and cheaper to print than a newspaper.



Torgallmenningen in Bregenz, 1890's

THE SCIENTIFIC CONTEXT OF *AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE*

BACTERIA, ILLNESS, and GERM THEORY

From very early times, people understood that drinking water or immersing oneself in it could be dangerous. For thousands of years, and across continents and cultures, beer, wine, and other alcoholic drinks were the most commonly consumed beverages by people of all ages because, unlike water, they did not cause people to sicken or die. But no one knew exactly why. Though scientists surmised that tiny creatures existed that were invisible to the naked eye, and bacteria was discovered in 1665, its relationship to disease was not established until two hundred years later. At the time that *AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE* was written (1882), germ theory was still not common knowledge.

Germ theory was developed by scientists like Louis Pasteur and Robert Koch in the second half of the 19th century, specifically in the 1860s through the 1880s. Pasteur's groundbreaking experiments, such as the famous swan-necked flask experiments, provided initial scientific proof that microscopic germs cause diseases, refuting the theory of spontaneous generation. Koch later established the specific criteria (Koch's postulates) to identify the particular microbe responsible for a given disease, solidifying the theory's acceptance within the scientific community The impact of the emergence of microbiology is monumental, not simply because of the scope of understanding that we have gained from its discovery, but also in terms of the increased prosperity of humans that has occurred as a result of our understanding of these "little creatures." (Excerpted from Aria Nouri's article "The Discovery of Bacteria.")

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Have any new discoveries in science or technology happened during your lifetime? How did people react to it?

Can you think of any examples of people disagreeing about an advance in science or new information?

How our environment impacts our lives is a major discussion point in 2025. Do you remember when you first became aware of environmental issues and/or climate change?

CHARACTERS

DR. THOMAS STOCKMANN - Medical director of the baths, brother of the town mayor

PETRA STOCKMANN - Dr. Stockmann's daughter, a schoolteacher

HOVSTAD - Editor of the local paper, the *People's Messenger*

CAPTAIN HORSTER - A ship's captain (only one line)

THOMAS. I made a discovery.

PETRA. You did? That's wonderful.

THOMAS. Well, not exactly. I wish Peter were still here. Maybe I should go straight to tell him –?

HOVSTAD. What's the discovery?

PETRA. Dad, hold on, stay here.

(*He obeys.*)

Tell us what you're talking about.

THOMAS. All right. Trusted friends. What I'm holding in my hands – lives will be saved. This could have been a catastrophe.

PETRA. Slow down and explain.

THOMAS. Our town – you think of it as a healthy place. Right?

HOVSTAD. Right.

THOMAS. An exceptionally healthy place. A place you'd recommend to someone who's sick or is / perhaps –

PETRA. What are you –

THOMAS. – seeking a healthier way of living, hold on, and I myself have recommended it. In the *People's Messenger* and in pamphlets I've published with my own money –

HOVSTAD. Right, we know –

THOMAS. The combination of the mineral-rich springs and sea air and the mild summer climate can be curative for any number of ailments, and that's why we built the Baths and

resort. Now listen to me, because I'm going to tell you something. The Baths? Our wonderful, miraculous, much-praised Baths, recommended by no one more fervently than myself?

They're utterly contaminated.

(Cries of "what?" etc.)

PETRA. Our Baths?

HOVSTAD. How could that –

THOMAS. It's a massive health risk. All that foul pollution up at Molledalen from the tanneries, that nasty stuff you can smell miles away, it's seeped into the groundwater which feeds the pipes for the Baths –

PETRA. Oh my God. /

HOVSTAD. How do you know this?

HORSTER. Oh no.

THOMAS. I've suspected for some time. Last year a number of visitors came down sick with typhoid –

PETRA. That's right.

THOMAS. We assumed they brought the infection here with them, but later I started to wonder. And I began examining the water to the extent I could myself.

PETRA. That's what you've been up to.

THOMAS. But I didn't have the right equipment so I took samples and sent them off to the university lab. And here are the results. The water at the Baths is rife with bacteria, tiny microorganisms that cause disease, it's completely unsafe.

PETRA. Thank goodness you discovered it in time.

THOMAS. You have no idea.

HOVSTAD. Sorry, wait – what'll you do now with this information?

THOMAS. Set things right, obviously.

SCENE STUDY: BREAKING IT DOWN

- 1) How would you describe Thomas' reaction to finding out the news that the water is contaminated? What does it say about who he is?
- 2) How would you describe the other characters' reaction to the discovery? What does it say about them?
- 3) What do we know about the relationships and status of the main three characters from this scene?
- 4) Why do you think that Thomas leads up to the news by saying "Lives will be saved" and then describing the way that they all perceive the spa as a place where people will become healthier? Why doesn't he tell them the news outright?
- 5) How much do you think the other characters understand about the implications of what Thomas is telling them?
- 6) Do you have an idea, from this scene, of who will think that Thomas is doing the right thing to make this public news and who won't?



Victoria Pedretti and audience of the 2024 Broadway production of *An Enemy of the People*.

ETHICS in *AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE*



Jeremy Strong in the 2024 Broadway production of *An Enemy of the People*.

In *An Enemy of the People*, Thomas goes up against his entire town to do what he thinks is ethically right. The people of the town, including his brother the mayor, are furious because they believe he's going to cause the baths to close and destroy their livelihoods.

What are five points that each side might make to justify their perspective and decision-making?

What would you do in this situation?

Have you ever been in or witnessed a situation that involved an ethical argument?

Is there a topic that's so important to you that you'd be willing to go against your community to stand up for it?

How do you think this play is relevant to the world in 2025?