

**THE COLLECTED WORKS
OF HENRIK IBSEN,
VOL. IV. PEER GYNT: A
DRAMATIC POEM**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649761074

The Collected Works of Henrik Ibsen, Vol. IV. Peer Gynt: A Dramatic Poem by Henrik Ibsen
& William Archer & Charles Archer

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HENRIK IBSEN & WILLIAM ARCHER & CHARLES ARCHER

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HENRIK IBSEN

VOLUME IV
PEER GYNT
(1867)



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HENRIK IBSEN

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LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN
21 BEDFORD STREET, W.C.

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HENRIK IBSEN

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VOLUME IV

PEER GYNT

A DRAMATIC POEM

TRANSLATED BY

WILLIAM AND CHARLES ARCHER



LONDON

WILLIAM HEINEMANN

1912

Collected Edition, first printed March 1907
New Impressions, April 1909, November 1912

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PEER GYNT.

INTRODUCTION.

THE publication of *Brand*, in March 1866, brought Ibsen fame (in Scandinavia) and relieved him from the immediate pressure of poverty. Two months later the Storting voted him a yearly "post-pension" of £90; and with this sum, as he wrote to the Minister who had been mainly instrumental in furthering his claim, he felt "his future assured," so that he could henceforth "devote himself without hindrance to his calling." This first glimpse of worldly prosperity, no doubt, brought with it the lighter mood which distinguishes *Peer Gynt* from its predecessor. To call it the gayest of Ibsen's works is not, perhaps, to say very much. Its satire, indeed, is bitter enough; but it is not the work of an unhappy man. The character of Peer Gynt, and many of his adventures, are conceived with unmistakable gusto. Some passages even bear witness to an exuberance of animal spirits which reminds one of Ben Jonson's saying with regard to Shakespeare—"aliquando sufflaminandus erat."

The summer of 1866 Ibsen spent at Frascati, in the Palazzo Gratosi, where he lived "most comfortably and cheaply." He found Frascati and Tusculum

"indescribably delightful." From the windows of his study he could see Soracte, "rising isolated and beautiful from the level of the immense plain . . . the battlefield where the chief engagement in the world's history took place." So he writes in a letter to Paul Botten-Hansen, and immediately afterwards proceeds: "I shall soon be setting to work in good earnest. I am still wrestling with my subject, but I know that I shall get the upper hand of the brute before long, and then everything will go smoothly." But was the play here referred to *Peer Gynt*? Perhaps not. From a letter to his publisher, Hegel, written three months later, we learn that at that time he was still turning over several themes in his mind, and that one of them dealt with the period of Christian IV. of Denmark. It is in a letter to Hegel, dated from Rome, January 5, 1867, that we find the first unmistakable reference to *Peer Gynt*: "Now I must tell you that my new work is well under way, and will, if nothing untoward happens, be finished early in the summer. It is to be a long dramatic poem, having as its chief figure one of the Norwegian peasantry's half-mythical, fantastic heroes of recent times. It will bear no resemblance to *Brand*, contain no direct polemics and so forth. I have long had the subject in my thoughts; now the entire plan is worked out and written down, and the first act begun. The thing grows as I work at it, and I am certain that you will be satisfied with it."

Two months later (March 8) the poem has "advanced to the middle of the second act." On August 8, he sends to Hegel, from Villa Pisani, Casamicciola, Ischia, the complete manuscript of the first three acts, and writes: "I am curious to hear how you like the poem. I am very hopeful myself. It may interest