

Henrik Ibsen

# Peer Gynt

A Dramatic Poem

Translated by John Northam

I b s e n . n e t

2 0 0 7

## CONTENTS

PREFACE.....	3
CHARACTERS .....	5
ACT I.....	6
ACT II.....	25
ACT III.....	41
ACT IV .....	53
ACT V.....	88
NOTES.....	120

## PREFACE

If 'Brand' traces the pilgrimage of a relentlessly moral crusader of heroic stature, 'Peer Gynt' can be mistaken, all too easily, for the story of an anti-hero, a scamp whose progress through an extraordinary range of fantastical events and confrontations is essentially comical. The folklore elements — Ibsen borrowed Peer himself from such a source — the troll scenes, the Button Moulder, the Strange Passenger, abetted by the music of Greig might suggest a romantic Nordic fantasy. I have heard the ending objected to on the grounds that it seems to provide Peer with an easy escape through the unwarranted charity of Solveig as she takes on the function of the uncensorious motherly redeemer of the erring male, a role distasteful to modern sensibility.

In fact 'Peer Gynt' depicts another spiritual pilgrimage through the modern world on a more extensive and expansive scale than that explored in 'Brand'. 'Brand' concentrates on Norway, its own spiritual and moral deadness: Ibsen, stimulated by his liberating voyage abroad to Egypt and elsewhere, scourges in 'Peer Gynt' the world at large. He castigates the immorality of nations — European support for Turkey against the Greeks, American capitalism, the cultural pretensions of France and Germany, the brutality of Prussian militarism, and the moral limpness of Swedish neutrality besides the inadequacies of Norway itself.

Another characteristic peculiar to 'Peer Gynt' is its stylistic variety, far greater than that achieved in 'Brand'. Each one of the vast range of characters has his or her own voice, Peer indeed has several, each one defining the progressive stages of his spiritual pilgrimage. The initial cocky fluency of his brazen lies to his mother gives way to the uneasy rhythms of his language as he approaches the hostile territory of the local village in Act I, his insensitivity shows in his response to the measured, generous solemnity of the funeral oration over a poor peasant — the perky rhythms of his reaction reveals his utter incomprehension of the priest's sermon. His smug complacency when, as a man grown wealthy on slave trading and gun running, he holds forth to his international cronies is conveyed by the extraordinary glibness of his verse and his flippant use of biblical references.

But since this is a pilgrimage, Peer's verse begins to register change. Later events begin to make him realise that his philosophy of "to thyself be enough" has stripped him of everything. His language begins to register a genuine despair — in the auction scene, in the scene when he returns home penniless, with no family or friends, above all in the final scene of his rediscovery of his old, abandoned love, Solveig.

That poignant scene is so much more than a sentimental let out, the salvation of a rascal by the love of a good woman. Peer Gynt is not saved; the scene emphasises what he has thrown away, but Ibsen does not suggest that a nice cuddle will put everything to rights. Throughout the piece Ibsen has made frequent and significant use of biblical references, none more so than here. He creates a whole context of imagery, verbal and otherwise, to emphasise his intention with this scene. The locals with their Pentecostal hymn, the church bells, above all Solveig's final song generate a vivid sense of the alternative values that Peer has refused to envisage

in his prodigal career. The ending, like the ending of 'Brand' offers no facile salvation; instead it presents a provocative ambivalence that challenges the reader. The final scene is one in which, for the first time, we hear the voice of genuine self-awareness, of genuine contrition. Peer's language here is at its barest, its most honest when he asks "Where was I, as myself, the whole man, the real, Where was I with my forehead marked with God's seal?"

The emphasis of the ending is not on a facile salvation but on the challenge it poses, both for Peer and for the reader, to recognise the alternative way of life that should be followed rather than that of egotistical self-satisfaction. Indeed the ending has an aura of splendour about it — the sun rises as Solveig's song ends; but Peer's desperate demand to be taken into Solveig's protective womb has a biblical source that raises the question of whether, after such behaviour, there can be any such sanctuary left. Peer's frantic desire to enter into Solveig's womb calls up a memory of Nicodemus's question: "Is it possible for a man in his old age to re-enter his mother's womb and be reborn?" Peer lies inert as the question is raised: *Can* he be saved, even by Solveig's faith, hope and charity.

The emphasis of the conclusion seems to be not on whether he will or will not be saved but whether anybody, Peer or Peer's fellow countrymen or those of other nations, dare conduct their lives with such blind disregard for the higher aspirations of mankind. Can there be, for that, any forgiveness? 'Peer Gynt' ends by offering a challenge, not a placebo, to its readers.

## CHARACTERS

Aase, a farmer's widow  
Peer Gynt, her son  
Two Old Women with sacks of corn  
Aslak, a smith  
Wedding Guests, Steward, Fiddler etc.  
A newly-arrived Man and Wife  
Solveig and Little Helga, their daughters  
The Farmer at Hægstad  
Ingrid, his daughter  
Bridegroom and his Parents  
Three Herdgirls  
Woman in Green  
Dovre-King  
Senior Troll, several similar. Troll boys and girls. A couple of witches. Gnomes, elves, goblins etc.  
Ugly Child  
Voice in the dark  
Bird Cries  
Kari, a cottager's wife  
Master Cotton, Monsieur Ballon, Herrer v. Eberkopf and Trumpeterstraale, travelling gentlemen  
Thief and a Fence  
Anitra, Slave Girls, Dancing Girls etc.  
Memnon's Statue (singing)  
Sphinx of Gizeh (mute)  
Begriffenfeldt, professor, Ph.D., director of the lunatic asylum in Cairo  
Huhu, a language activist from the Malabar coast  
Hussein, an oriental government minister  
Fellah with the mummy of a king  
Several inmates of the asylum, with their keepers  
Norwegian Skipper and Crew  
Strange Passenger  
Priest  
Funeral procession  
Bailiff  
Buttonmoulder  
Thin Person

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(The action, which begins at the start of this century and ends at about our own time, takes place partly in Gudbrandsdal and the surrounding high country, partly on the coast of Morocco, partly in the Sahara desert, the asylum in Cairo, at sea, etc.)

## ACT I

*(A wooded hillside near Aase's farm. A stream runs across it. An old mill-house on the far side. Hot summer's day.)*

*(PEER GYNT, a sturdy twenty-year-old lad, comes down the path. His mother, AASE, a frail, slight woman follows him. She is angry and fuming.)*

AASE Lies, all lies Peer!

PEER *(without stopping)* No they weren't!

AASE Right then, swear that it's all true!

PEER What's the swear for!

AASE Pah, you daren't.

It's just one big game to you!

PEER True, as sure as kingdom come!

AASE *(facing him)* Aren't you shamed before your Mum?

First you're up the mountain side  
months on end, and what's your reason? —

hunting, in our busy season! —

come home with a punctured hide,

lost your shot-gun, lost the game; —

and to crown it all you're trying

now to fool me with your same

brazen, bare faced, rotten lying! —

Well, this buck then — where'd you find it?

PEER West of Gjendin. \*

AASE *(sarcastic laugh)* Yes, I'm sure!

PEER The wind came off there pretty raw;

there's a alder-grove, behind it

he was scraping lichen-grooves

in the snow-crust —

AASE *(as before)* Yes, I'm sure!

PEER I stopped breathing, stood, ears straining,

heard the creaking of his hooves,

saw one antler-branch just showing,

crawled across some stony going,

closed in on the buck, with care.

Squinted from a gully there; —

what a buck! — you've never seen

one so fat, with such a sheen!

AASE Lord preserve us all!

PEER Then bang!

Down he crashed that buck of mine.

As he hit the ground I sprang

legs astride the brute like lightning,

by the left ear then I grab him,

but as I was set to stab him

right between his skull and spine —

10

20

30

heigh! What a bellow — it was frightening.  
 Suddenly he's up, legs working,  
 knocks the knife and then the sheath  
 from my fist, the backward jerking  
 pinned me to the flank beneath, 40  
 clamped me with his antler bending  
 like a pincer round my rump; —  
 then, with one almighty jump,  
 took off down the ridge of Gjendin!  
 AASE (*involuntary*) Name of Jesus!  
 PEER Have you seen or  
 been on Gjendin ridge before?  
 Two miles long, perhaps, or more,  
 stretching like a sharp scythe-blade.  
 From the glacier, slope and slide,  
 past the screes there, old and greyed, 50  
 you can see on either side  
 straight into the lochs that glower  
 black and heavy, some thirteen or  
 fourteen hundred metres lower. —  
 Along the ridge we raced together,  
 slicing through the wind and weather.  
 What a colt to ride — amazing!  
 As we set off at a pace  
 it was just like suns were blazing.  
 Brown-backed eagles swam in space 60  
 in between us falling pair  
 and the waters that were waiting —  
 specks of dust afloat in air.  
 There were ice-floes, grinding, grating  
 on the strands; but nothing sounded;  
 only wisps of vapour swirled  
 as if dancing — sang and twirled,  
 till my senses were confounded.  
 AASE (*dizzy*) Oh God help me!  
 PEER In a spot  
 steep and desperate, up shot 70  
 a cock-ptarmigan, took flight  
 cackling, flapping, wild with fright  
 from its dizzy roost and rose  
 underneath our very nose.  
 Then the buck half twisted round,  
 took us both in one great bound  
 without warning into space!  
 (*Aase totters and grabs at a tree-trunk. Peer continues*)  
 At our rear, the black cliff-face,  
 under us a yawning pit!  
 First a band of mist we shattered, 80  
 then a cloud of gulls we scattered,  
 sent them every which way streaking

rousing echoes with their shrieking.

Down we went, no pause to ponder.  
Something white though gleamed down yonder,  
like a reindeer hide a bit.—

Ma, it was our own reflection  
in the fell-tarn's still complexion  
up towards the surface scurried  
with the same wild speed that hurried  
our mad fall towards the lake.

90

AASE (*gasps for air*) Spit it out, Peer! For God's sake!

PEER Airborne buck, buck in the water  
locked horns, neither giving quarter,  
foam frothed round us as we clashed.

Well, we lay there and we splashed —  
then we made the north side, Mother,  
managed one way or another;  
the buck swam off with me behind him; —  
I came home —

AASE But what about — ?

100

PEER O, he'll still be there, no doubt.

(*snaps his fingers, turns on his heel and adds*)

You can have him if you find him! \*

AASE And your collar-bone's not broken?  
Both your thighs — are they all right?  
And your spine — no damage done?  
Dear God, thank Thee for this token  
of Thy kindness to my son!

True his breeches need attention;  
but that's hardly worth the mention  
when you think how much more dreadful  
could a jump be from that height — !

110

(*stops suddenly, looks at him open-mouthed and wide-eyed, at loss for words, then breaks out*)

O, you devil of a fibber;  
'pon, my soul, you've lies a-plenty!  
All that rigmarole you gibber,  
I recall I heard the same  
story as a lass of twenty.  
Gudbrand Glesne was his name, —  
never you, you —

PEER Yes, me too.

Things can happen more than once.

AASE Yes, and lies get changed, you dunce,  
get dolled up and magnified,  
fitted with a new-found hide  
so the carcass won't show through.  
That's exactly what you've done,  
made up such a whopping one  
with those eagles, brown of feather,  
and the rest of your foul blether,

120



lies on lies to left and right  
 brought on such a stupid fright  
 one can't recognise at last 130  
 things one knew of in the past!  
 PEER Now if someone else had said  
 such a thing, I'd make him rue it!  
 AASE (*weeping*) God, if only I were dead,  
 laid in earth, — his pranks will kill me!  
 Tears, prayer — he thinks nothing to it —  
 he's a waster, always will be!  
 PEER Loving, lovely little Ma,  
 you are right, of course you are; —  
 cheer up, smile and —  
 AASE Stop, you'll drive me — — . 140  
 How on earth can I be lively  
 when I've such a swine for son?  
 Aren't I bound to take it sadly,  
 poor lone widow left so badly,  
 paid with shame for all I've done?  
 (*crying again*)  
 What's the family got left over  
 from your father's days in clover?  
 Where's the bushels from the mint  
 left behind by Rasmus Gynt?  
 Your father ran them through his hand, 150  
 wasted them like so much sand,  
 bought up ground in every parish,  
 drove round in a gilded carriage — .  
 All that money, where's it wandered  
 that his winter parties squandered,  
 with the bottles, glasses, all  
 sent smashing back against the wall?  
 PEER Where the snows of yester-year? \*  
 AASE Silence for your Ma, d'you hear.  
 Look round! — half the panes are shattered, 160  
 stuffed with bits of rag, all tattered,  
 hedge and fence down altogether,  
 stock exposed to wet and weather,  
 leys and plough-land lying slack,  
 each month someone comes here knocking —  
 PEER Stop your nagging old wives' clack!  
 Luck can fail you something shocking,  
 then come right as rain tomorrow!  
 AASE Where my luck grew's salt with sorrow. 170  
 God, but you were cocky, son —  
 still the chappie, Number One,  
 big-head, ever since the preacher,  
 all the way from Copenhagen,  
 asked what Christian name you'd taken,  
 swore his oath a mind so witty

many a prince lacked, more's the pity,  
 so your father, for his labours,  
 gave him both the sledge and horse  
 for those nice, kind words, of course. —  
 Ho yes! Everything was fine. 180  
 Provost, captain, every creature  
 ate and drank here, stuffed away,  
 fit to burst with fat, all day.  
 But it's need sorts out your neighbours.  
 Folk fell off with our decline,  
 from the day that 'John-the-packet'  
 set off with his pedlar's packet.  
*(dries her eyes upon her apron)*  
 Ah, but you were big and strong,  
 should have been my prop, protected,  
 helped your poor old Ma along, — 190  
 should have seen jobs weren't neglected,  
 nursed the pittance you still own; —  
*(she cries again)*  
 why, dear God, was I selected? —  
 You're no use to me, you drone!  
 You just hug the fire and sprawl  
 poking in the coal and ashes,  
 bothering the good-folk's lasses,  
 scare them from the village hall, —  
 make a mock of your own mother  
 brawling with some lout or other — 200  
 PEER *(turns away)* Let me be!  
 AASE *(follows)* Well, weren't you slated  
 as the one who led the ruction,  
 all that rumpus, the destruction  
 recently down Lunde way,  
 where you fought like dogs, folk say?  
 Wasn't it you that amputated  
 Aslak-smith's arm at some point?  
 Anyway, who dislocated,  
 one or other finger-joint?  
 PEER Who's been feeding you that stuff? 210  
 AASE *(tartly)* Farmer's wife — she heard the thrashing!  
 PEER *(rubs his elbow)* I'm the one yelled, right enough.  
 AASE You, Peer?  
 PEER Yes, Ma — I took the bashing.  
 AASE What was that?  
 PEER He's pretty spry.  
 AASE Who's spry?  
 PEER Aslak, so say I.  
 AASE Pah! — and pah! — it makes me vomit!  
 Such a drunken, loud-mouthed mommet,  
 a soak like him, a wobbly, stammering  
 red-nosed oaf gave you a hammering?

(*cries again*)  
 Many a shame has come my way, 220  
 but that this should ever be,  
 that's the worst of shames to me.  
 What do I care if he's spry; —  
 did you have to stand and cry?  
 PEER Hammer, hammered what's it matter —  
 all I'll ever get is natter.  
 (*laughs*)  
 Cheer up, Ma.  
 AASE Have you been lying?  
 Have you?  
 PEER Yes, I have — for once:  
 dry your tears, don't look for trouble; —  
 (*clenches fist*)  
 Look — these tongs, they clamped the dunce, 230  
 held the smith down bent up double;  
 this right fist here was my hammer —  
 AASE O, you thug you! You will damn a  
 mother to her grave this rate!  
 PEER No, you're worth a better fate;  
 twenty thousand times the better!  
 Little, ugly, kind old Ma,  
 you'll be honoured near and far,  
 you can trust me to the letter,  
 just you wait till — well, just wait 240  
 till I've pulled off something great!  
 AASE (*snorts*) You!  
 PEER It could be — there's no knowing.  
 AASE You don't even have the brain  
 for the simple job of sewing  
 patches on your pants again!  
 PEER (*heated*) I'll be Emperor, king, a ruler! \*  
 AASE O my God, he's turned a drooler,  
 lost what's left him of his wit!  
 PEER Yes I shall! You wait a bit!  
 AASE Wait — till you're a prince one day, \* 250  
 as I recall I've heard you say!  
 PEER You shall see Ma!  
 AASE Hold your tongue!  
 Fool when all is said and done. —  
 Anyway, it's true as true, —  
 if you hadn't, day by day,  
 lived for lies and fun and play,  
 something might have come of you.  
 That young Hægstad girl was *right*.  
 You'd have won hands down there, really,  
 if you'd wanted to sincerely — 260  
 PEER Yes?  
 AASE The old man's much too hollow

to stand up to her and fight;  
in his way he's hard and cunning;  
but it's Ingrid makes the running,  
and where *she* leads, that old fright,  
that old stumping crab must follow.

*(start to cry again)*

Peer, my boy; a lassie, landed, —  
just imagine — freehold, too; —  
if you'd only had the stuffing  
the dashing bridegroom could be you, —  
you, you scruffy ragamuffin!

270

PEER *(briskly)* Right, I'll court then, as commanded.

AASE Where?

PEER At Hægstad.

AASE You poor toad;  
that way's blocked, the courting road!

PEER How's that?

AASE Ah, you set me sighing!  
Chance and fortune simply squandered —

PEER When?

AASE *(sobs)* When? While you mountain-wandered,  
airborne — on your buck's back flying, —  
the lassie went to that Mads Moen!

PEER What! That scarecrow? Him — that chap!

280

AASE Yes, that's where she's set her cap.

PEER Hold on here then, and I'll soon  
hitch a horse up —  
*(starts to go)*

AASE Wait, you loon.  
The wedding's taking place tomorrow —

PEER Pooh, I'll go this afternoon!

AASE Shame on you! Would you heap sorrow  
with a load of scorn and spite?

PEER Trust me. Everything's all right.

*(laughs and shouts suddenly)*

Come on! Let the cart stay there;  
takes too long to fetch the mare —

290

*(picks her up)*

AASE Put me down!

PEER No, at your service,  
to the wedding-place, in state!

*(wades into the stream)*

AASE Help! O, may the Lord preserve us!

Peer! We'll drown —

PEER O no, my fate  
calls for a classier death —

AASE Just so!  
Hanging is the way you'll go! *(pulls his hair)*  
O you monster!

PEER Keep your calm;

the bottom's slippery for walking.  
 AASE Donkey!  
 PEER Yes, you keep on talking;  
 that does nobody much harm. 300  
 Here we go then, sloping up —  
 AASE Don't let go me!  
 PEER Allez-ooop!  
 Let's play buck and Peer Gynt, mother.  
 (*gallops*) I'll be buck and you be Peer!  
 AASE O, I'm all a-whirl — O dear!  
 PEER Here we are; across — no bother; —  
 (*wades out*) so give the buck a great big kiss;  
 thanks for that nice ride of his —  
 AASE (*boxes his ears*)  
 Take that for the ride, you —  
 PEER Ow!  
 That reward was quite a blow! 310  
 Set me — !  
 PEER First the wedding party.  
 Be my spokesman. Use your wit;  
 talk to him, the soft old hearty,  
 say Mads Moen is a nit —  
 AASE Set — !  
 PEER And then to cap it, say  
 how you'd rate Peer Gynt your way.  
 AASE You can count on that, my lad!  
 All he'll hear from me is bad.  
 You'll be shown up in your badness;  
 all your devilry and madness, 320  
 I shall name it near and far —  
 PEER Will you?  
 AASE (*kicks with fury*) My tongue won't be bound  
 till the old man's set his hound  
 on you, like the fiend you are!  
 PEER Hmm; I'll have to go alone.  
 AASE But I'll follow, o I'll bustle!  
 PEER My dear Ma, you lack the muscle —  
 AASE Do I? I'm so cross, Peer Gynt!  
 I could crush a piece of stone!  
 I could eat a lump of flint! 330  
 Let me go!  
 PEER Yes, if you'll swear —  
 AASE Nothing! I'm still going there.  
 They shall know the sort you are!  
 PEER Shame — you'll have to stay here, Ma.  
 AASE No, I'll go like any other!  
 PEER Not allowed —  
 AASE What's your intention?  
 PEER Set you on the mill-roof, Mother.  
 (*lifts her. Aase shrieks*)

AASE Lift me down!  
 PEER Well, pay attention.  
 AASE Rubbish.  
 PEER Please, now please Ma dear —  
 AASE *(throws a turf at him)*  
 Lift me down this instant, Peer! 340  
 PEER If I dared, of course I would.  
*(comes closer)* Don't forget, sit still, be good!  
 Now, no kicking mind or scratching  
 to rip stones from off the thatching, — \*  
 or you'll hurt yourself — you could;  
 you might come a cropper.  
 AASE Swine!  
 PEER Now, don't squirm.  
 AASE No child of mine!  
 Changeling! I could wish you farther!  
 PEER Really, Ma!  
 AASE Shame!  
 PEER Give your blessing  
 on the risk I'm taking, rather. 350  
 Won't you? Eh?  
 AASE You may be stronger  
 but I'll beat you black and blue!  
 PEER Right, then Ma — good day to you.  
 Just be patient; shan't be longer  
 than I must.  
*(turns as he leaves, raises a finger and says:)*  
 And mind — no messing.  
 AASE Peer! — God sakes, he's really going!  
 Liar! You stag-jockey! Wheeee!  
 Listen to me! — He's not slowing —  
 straight across there —  
*(shrieks)* Help, I'm giddy!  
*(Two OLD WOMEN with sacks on their backs come down  
 towards the mill)*  
 WOMAN 1 Lord, who's screaming?  
 AASE Here, it's me! 360  
 WOMAN 1 Aase! On the tiles? Well, well.  
 AASE Not much help here, I can tell!  
 Heaven soon for this old biddy!  
 WOMAN 1 Pleasant journey.  
 AASE Fetch a ladder;  
 Get me down! That devil Peer —  
 WOMAN 2 That son of yours?  
 AASE You'll see no madder  
 goings-on of his than here.  
 WOMAN 1 We're your witness.  
 AASE Help's my worry.  
 Must reach Hægstad, in a hurry.  
 WOMAN 2 That's where — ?

WOMAN 1 So, you'll get your own back; 370  
he'll be there, you know, that Aslak.  
AASE (*wrings her hands*)  
God preserve my poor young chappie!  
When they've killed him they'll be happy.  
WOMAN1 That's been said, by one or other;  
what must be will be — life's the proof.  
WOMAN2 Lost all sense and wits, poor dear.  
(*calls up the slope:*)  
Eivind, Anders! over here!  
MAN What for?  
WOMAN2 Peer Gynt's stuck his mother  
up here on the mill-house roof!

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*(A small hill with bushes and heather. A public road runs behind it, separated by a fence)*

*(PEER GYNT, from a path, hurries to the fence, stops and scans the view)*

PEER There it is, Hægstad. Not far to go. 380  
*(half-climbs the fence and then hesitates)*  
I wonder if Ingrid's at home still or no?  
*(shades his eyes and surveys)*  
No. Wedding guests swarming like gnats down the track.  
Hmm; maybe it's better that I should be turning.  
*(steps down again)*  
There's always the laughter behind one's back,  
whispers that seem to go through you, like burning.  
*(moves away from the fence and plucks absent-mindedly at some leaves)*  
If only I had something strong to be drinking.  
Or could move around unseen in the throng. —  
Or could be quite unknown. — Something really strong  
to deaden the mockery's best to my thinking.  
*(looks round suddenly as though startled; then hides in the bushes. Some people with wedding presents pass by on their way to the wedding party)*

MAN (*in conversation*)  
His father was a drunkard, his ma a useless crone. 390  
A WOMAN It isn't to be wondered at the lad turned out a drone.  
*(as they pass, Peer Gynt emerges, shame-faced and stares after them)*  
PEER (*quietly*) Was it me they spoke of?  
*(with a forced shrug)* O, let them chatter!  
They can't take my life away, so what matter?  
*(throws himself down in the heather stretches out on his back, with hands behind his head and stares up into the air)*  
What a wonderful cloud. It looks like a horse.  
There's a man astride, — a halter, a saddle. —  
Then there's a broomstick, an old hag astraddle. —  
*(chuckles to himself)*

That's my Ma. "You swine" she says, yelling of course;  
 "Hi, you Peer!" — — (*his eyes gradually close*)  
 Yes, now *she'll* be scared hollow. —

Peer Gynt rides ahead and a crowd of folk follow. —  
 His horse silver-crested with gold shoes to step on. 400  
 Gauntlets for him and a scabbard and weapon.  
 Loose-flowing cape with a fine silk lining,  
 those in his train all resplendent and shining.  
 Nobody sits quite so sturdy and upright.  
 Nobody glitters like him to the sunlight. —  
 The people are crowding the barriers below,  
 waving their hats, gazing up at the show.  
 The women curtsy. Each knows and admires  
 Emperor Peer Gynt and his thousands of squires.  
 Florins are scattered and guineas that litter 410  
 the road just like pebbles till all's one great glitter.  
 Wealthy as lords are the folk in these quarters.  
 Peer Gynt rides on high as he crosses the waters.  
 England's prince waits for him there on the shore,  
 so do the English girls, lasses galore.  
 England's great nobles and England's great king  
 rise from high table at Peer's riding in.  
 The king, he raises his crown and he says —

ASLAK THE SMITH (*to some others as they cross behind the fence*)  
 If it isn't Peer Gynt, the drunken swine — !

PEER (*starts*) Your Majesty —  
 ASLAK (*leans over the fence and grins*)  
 Wake up lad, rise and shine! 420

PEER What the hell — ! It's Aslak! What's it to you?  
 ASLAK (*to the others*)  
 Got the booze in him still from the Lunde do.

PEER (*jumps up*) Go, while the going's good.  
 SMITH Or I might stay.  
 Where have you sprung from? You've been away  
 six weeks. What's happened? Pixified, eh?

PEER I've done some wonderful things, you know, smith!  
 ALSLAK (*winks to the others*)  
 Tell us, Peer.  
 PEER Things you've no business with.  
 ASLAK (*pause*) Are you off to Hægstad?  
 PEER No.  
 ASLAK Is it true  
 time was when the girl there fancied you?  
 PEER You sooty crow, you — !  
 ASLAK (*backs away*) Now, Peer, don't be sore. 430  
 If Ingrid's ditched you, there's plenty more — ;  
 just fancy; Jon Gynt's son! Come with us, do;  
 there's lots of young lamb coming, prime widows too —

PEER To hell!  
 ASLAK One'll fancy you, heavens above.



Good day, then. I'll give the bride all your love.  
*(they go off laughing and whispering)*  
PEER *(looks after them for a moment, shrugs, and half turns away)*  
For me, that Hægstad girl can swap oaths  
with any man she may choose, who cares?  
*(inspects himself)*  
Rough and ragged. Breeks full of tears. —  
What wouldn't I give for a change of clothes. *(stamps)*  
If only I had the butcher's knack — 440  
to rip from their breasts the scorn they all share!  
*(looks round sharply)*  
Who's that sniggered behind my back?  
Hmm, sounded real — no, nobody there. —  
I'll go home to Ma.  
*(starts up the hill but stops again and listens to the wedding party)*  
The dancing's begun!  
*(he stands there listening; descends a step at a time; his eyes shine; he rubs his hands on his thighs)*  
What a swam of young lassies! Seven, eight girls to one!  
I must go down there — but, hell, there's a catch! —  
There's Ma — still perched on the mill-house thatch! — —  
*(his eyes are attracted down the hill again; he gives a skip and laughs)*  
Heigh, they're off in the yard now, for dancing  
the Halling! Yes, Guttorm's hot stuff with the bow! \*  
It sounds and it spouts like a waterfall's flow. 450  
And that glittering bevy of girls is entrancing! —  
I'm off to the party — to hell with the catch!  
*(leaps over the fence and makes off down the road)*

---

*(The farmyard at Hægstad. The farmhouse at the back. Crowds of guests. Lively dancing on the grass. The FIDDLER sits on a table. The STEWARD stands in the doorway. SERVING WOMEN move between the buildings. The OLDER FOLK sit around talking)*

WOMAN *(joins a group sitting on logs)*  
The bride? O, she's bound to cry at the last;  
nothing there though, to worry or nag on.  
STEWARD *(in another group)*  
Come on, my friends, you must empty the flagon.  
MAN Thank you kindly, but you serve us too fast.  
LAD *(to the fiddler as he dashed past with a girl on his arm)*  
Go it, Guttorm, don't spare the stringing!  
GIRL Scrape till the meadows sound with their ringing!  
GIRLS *(in a ring round a boy dancing)*  
That's a great jump!  
GIRL He's got legs full of feeling!

LAD It's wide to the walls here and high to the ceiling! 460  
 GROOM *(approaches his FATHER who is talking with one or two other men, tugs at his sleeve whispering)*  
 She won't, Dad, she's proud, she's too proud by half.  
 FATHER What won't she do, then?  
 GROOM She's locked in, you see.  
 FATHER Well, then, why don't you look for the key?  
 GROOM I wouldn't know how to.  
 FATHER You gormless calf.  
*(turns back to the others. The Groom drifts across the yard)*  
 LAD *(emerging from behind the house)*  
 Lasses, this party here won't be a slow one!  
 Peer Gynt's just turned up!  
 ASLAK *(who has just come in)*  
 Who asked him?  
 STEWARD No-one.  
*(goes towards the house)*  
 ASLAK *(to the girls)*  
 If he should speak to you, just ignore him.  
 GIRLS *(to each other)*  
 No; we'll pretend that we never saw him.  
 PEER *(enters excited and eager, stops in front of the group and rubs his hands)*  
 Who's the liveliest girl? You must know one.  
 GIRL 1 *(as he approaches)*  
 'Tisn't me.  
 GIRL 2 *(likewise)*  
 'Tisn't me.  
 GIRL 3 Nor me — don't you kid you. 470  
 PEER *(to a fourth)*  
 Come on, before someone turns up to out-bid you.  
 GIRL 4 *(turns away)* Haven't the time.  
 PEER *(to a fifth)* You then!  
 GIRL 5 I'm leaving, alone.  
 PEER Today? Are you out of your mind? Why that's mouldy.  
 ASLAK *(a moment later, sotto voce)*  
 There she goes, Peer — to dance with an oldie.  
 PEER *(turns abruptly to an older man)*  
 Where are the spare ones then, mate?  
 MAN Find your own. *(moves away)*  
*(Peer Gynt is suddenly subdued. He glances furtively and shyly at the gathering. Everyone stares at him but nobody speaks. He approaches various groups. Wherever he goes, silence falls; when he moves on, people smile and follow him with their eyes)*  
 PEER *(to himself)*  
 Glances, gimlet-sharp thoughts and the smile.  
 It grates like a saw-blade under the file!  
*(he slinks along the fence. SOLVEIG, holding hands with little HELGA, enters the yard following their parents.)*

MAN 1 *(to another near Peer Gynt)*  
The folk who've just moved here.

MAN 2 The west country lot?

MAN 1 The ones out at Hedale.

MAN 2 Like as not.

PEER *(accosts the arrivals, points to Solveig and asks the husband)*  
May I dance with your daughter?

FATHER *(quietly)* You may, yes, but first 480  
we must go and pay our respects to our neighbours.  
*(they go in)*

STEWARD *(offering a drink)*  
Now you're here, d'you fancy a drink for your labours?

PEER *(staring after them)*  
Thanks, but I'm dancing. I don't have a thirst.  
*(the Steward moves on. Peer looks towards the house and smiles)*  
How fair! I've not seen the like before!  
Eyes on her shoes, the white apron she's wrapped in — !  
And she clutched at her mother's pinafore,  
and carried a prayer-book wrapped in a napkin —  
I must watch for that girl. *(moves to enter the house)*

LAD *(coming out with the others)* Are you leaving the do  
already?

PEER No.

LAD Why, then, your steering's askew!  
*(takes him by the shoulder to turn him)*

PEER Let me pass; move aside!

LAD Scared the blacksmith will get you? 490

PEER Me, scared?

LAD Yes, remember the Lunde great set-to?  
*(the group moves towards the dancers laughing)*

SOLVEIG *(in the doorway)*  
Are you the boy who would like to dance?

PEER I certainly am, can't you tell at a glance?  
*(takes her hand)*  
Come on then!

SOLVEIG Mum says I mustn't stay.

PEER Mum says? Mum — ? Were you born yesterday?

SOLVEIG Don't make fun — !

PEER You look young by my reckoning.  
You confirmed yet? \*

SOLVEIG I went to the priest last spring.

PEER Well, tell us your name, lass, we'll chat the more brightly.

SOLVEIG My name is Solveig. — And what are you called?

PEER Peer Gynt.

SOLVEIG *(takes her hand away)* O heavens!

PEER Why so appalled? 500

SOLVEIG My garter's come loose; I must tie it more tightly.  
*(leaves him)*

GROOM *(tugging at his mother)*  
Mother, she wouldn't —

MOTHER What wouldn't she, pray?  
GROOM She wouldn't, Ma!  
MOTHER What?  
GROOM Undo the locks.  
FATHER (*under his breath angrily*)  
O, for two pins you'd be stalled with the ox!  
MOTHER Don't bully the boy. He's all right in his way.  
(*they leave*)  
LAD (*who comes away from the dancing with a whole crowd*)  
Peer, some brandy? \*

PEER No.  
LAD Just a tot?  
PEER (*looks at him gloomily*)  
Got it, have you?  
LAD I might have come by some.  
(*pulls out a hip-flask and drinks*)  
Wow, does it burn! — Well?  
PEER Let me try some.  
(*drinks*)  
LAD 2 Now you must try the stuff I've got.  
PEER No!  
SAME LAD Come on! Stop whinging now, stop! 510  
Drink up, Peer!  
PEER Then give us a drop.  
(*takes another swig*)  
GIRL (*half under her breath*)  
Time we were off.  
PEER You're afraid of me, no?  
LAD 3 Who isn't afraid of you?  
LAD 4 No wonder,  
after the tricks you got up to at Lunde.  
PEER I could do a sight more if I let myself go!  
LAD 1 (*whispers*) Here comes the old Peer!  
SEVERAL Let's hear you say!  
Do what then?  
PEER Tomorrow — !  
OTHERS No, now, today!  
GIRL Are you a magician?  
PEER Can call up Old Nick!  
MAN And so could my granny before I was born.  
PEER Liar! There's no-one can match *my* trick. 520  
I once lured him into a nut one fine morn. \*  
It was worm-eaten, see?  
VOICES (*laughing*) Yes, that's nothing surprising!  
PEER He cussed and he cried, said he'd pay me, devising  
this way and that —  
VOICE But he had to stay in?  
PEER O yes. I plugged the hole with a pin.  
Heigh; should have heard him buzzing and grumbling!  
GIRL Just fancy!

PEER Like hearing a bee when it's bumbling.  
 GIRL Have you got him still in your nut, then?  
 PEER O no.  
 The devil's out now and on the go.  
 And it's his fault the smith always takes me to task. 530  
 LAD How's that?  
 PEER I went to the smithy to ask  
 would he please break me the shell with his wrench.  
 He promised; and set it down on his bench;  
 but Aslak now, has a heavy hand; —  
 it comes of using the sledge and no wonder —  
 VOICE Did he smite the fiend?  
 PEER Like a man, it was grand.  
 The fiend though was quick, — like a blazing brand  
 burst through the roof, split the wall asunder.  
 VOICES And the smith?  
 PEER He stood there, hands scorched, like a dummy.  
 Since that day, we haven't been chummy. 540  
*(general laughter)*  
 VOICE That yarn was a peach!  
 OTHERS The best of them, clearly.  
 PEER Think I was making it up?  
 MAN O no.  
 There you're not guilty; I got most of it, nearly,  
 from Granddad —  
 PEER Lies. It was me, you know!  
 MAN It is, every time.  
 PEER *(with a toss of his head)* Heigh, I can go through  
 air on magnificent steeds, I can really! \*  
 I can do lots of things, I shall show you.  
*(another roar of laughter)*  
 VOICE Peer, ride on the air for us!  
 VOICES Yes, come on Peer —  
 PEER You're whining and begging's not needed, you hear?  
 I shall ride o'er your heads like a raging thunder! 550  
 The whole parish shall fall at my feet in wonder!  
 OLDER MAN Now he's gone stark staring mad.  
 MAN 2 Agree.  
 MAN 3 Loudmouth!  
 MAN 4 You liar!  
 PEER *(threateningly)* Just wait, you shall see!  
 MAN *(tipsy)*  
 Yes wait; you'll end with your coat well lambasted!  
 VOICES A lovely black eye! Your back proper pasted!  
*(The crowd disperses, the older ones angry, the younger ones  
 with laughter and mockery)*  
 GROOM *(sidles close)*  
 Hi, Peer, can you ride through the air? Is it true?  
 PEER *(shortly)* Anything, Mads! — I'm, believe me, a swell.  
 GROOM D'you have the invisible cloak with you too? \*

PEER Hat, you mean? Yes, I've got that as well.  
*(turns away from him. Solveig crosses the yard holding Helga's hand)*

PEER *(brightens up, goes to meet them)*  
 Solveig! O, but it's good to be seeing you! 560  
*(takes Solveig by the wrists)*  
 Now I can twirl with you, light and free!

SOLVEIG Let me go!

PEER Why?

SOLVEIG You're as wild as can be.

PEER And the reindeer's wild too when the summer's due.  
 Come on, lassie; don't be so cross!

SOLVEIG *(removes her arm)*  
 I daren't.

PEER Why not?

SOLVEIG *(exits with Helga)* No, you've been drinking.

PEER O if only my knife-blade were sinking  
 deep into all of them — all that dross!

GROOM *(nudging him)*  
 Can't you find a way I can get to the bride?

PEER *(absently)*  
 Bride? And where's *she*?

GROOM In the store-house. \*

PEER So?

GROOM O please, Peer Gynt, you must have a go! 570

PEER No, you must cope without me at your side.  
*(a thought strikes him; he says quietly and keenly)*  
 Ingrid in the store-house! *(crosses to Solveig)*  
 Decided yet?  
*(Solveig wants to leave; he stands in her way)*  
 You're ashamed; I seem like a tramp to you.

SOLVEIG *(quickly)* O but you're not; that just isn't true!

PEER And, what's more, I'm a drink oversize;  
 but that was from spite, 'cos I was upset.  
 Come on!

SOLVEIG If I wanted to, well — I daren't!

PEER Who are you afraid of?

SOLVEIG Mostly Dad.

PEER Dad? Of course; the deep sort of parent!  
 Looks down his nose, does he? — Answer a lad! \* 580

SOLVEIG What's there to answer?

PEER Is Daddy your teacher?  
 Do you and your mother attend his class?  
 Now will you answer me!

SOLVEIG Please let me pass.

PEER No! *(subdued but sharp and threatening)*  
 I can turn into one of the trolls!  
 I shall come to your bedside as midnight tolls.  
 If you hear hissing and snarls from some creature,  
 don't imagine it's pussy you hear at its playtime.

- It's me, love! I'll drain off your blood in a cup;  
and as for your sister, I'll eat her all up;  
o yes, I'm a were-wolf once it's past daytime; — 590  
I'll nibble your loins and your back with my jowl — —  
*(changes suddenly and entreats her with anguish)*  
Dance with me, Solveig!
- SOLVEIG *(looks sombrely at him)* That was just foul.  
*(goes in)*
- GROOM *(drifts in again)*  
You'll get a steer if you help me!
- PEER Come on!  
*(they go behind the house. At the same time a big group enters from the dancing. Noise and excitement. Solveig, Helga and their parents emerge in the doorway with sundry other older people)*
- STEWARD *(to the Smith, who heads the group)*  
Keep calm!
- ASLAK *(takes off his jacket)* No, we'll settle things now, head-on.  
It's Peer Gynt or me that'll get a banging.
- VOICE Yes. Let them fight!
- OTHERS No, just a slanging!
- ASLAK Fists it must be; just words are no good.
- SOLVEIG'S FATHER  
Control yourself, man!
- HELGA Are they after his blood?
- LAD 1 Why not pay him back for all of his lying!
- LAD 2 Spit in his eye, then!
- LAD 3 Let's send him flying! 600
- LAD 4 *(to the Smith)*  
Seeing it through, then?
- ASLAK *(throwing down his jacket)* Nag must to knacker. \*
- SOLVEIG'S MOTHER  
See what they think of that blow-hard, that slacker.
- AASE *(enters with a stick in her hand)*  
My son, is he here? He's due for a whack!  
O, I'll wallop him, I shall mangle him!
- ASLAK *(rolls up his sleeves)*  
The rod's much too soft for that rascally back.
- MAN 1 Blacksmith'll mangle him!
- MAN 2 Dangle him!
- ASLAK *(spits on his hand and nods to Aase)* Strangle him!
- AASE What, strangle my Peer? You just try it and see!  
Fight tooth and claw will old Aase and me! — \*  
Where is he? *(calls across the yard)*  
Peer!
- GROOM *(runs in)* God's wounds and his passion!  
Quick, Ma and Pa and —
- FATHER What is it now? 610
- GROOM Fancy, Peer Gynt — !
- AASE *(shrieks)* Have they killed him some fashion?

GROOM No, Peer Gynt — ! Look, over the brow —  
VOICES With Ingrid!  
AASE (*lowers her stick*) The monster!  
ASLAK (*thunderstruck*) He's tackling the sheer  
rock-face, by God, and he climbs like a goat!  
GROOM (*crying*)  
He's carrying her, Ma, like a pig you might tote!  
AASE (*shakes her fist at him*)  
I hope you fall down!  
(*screams with terror*) Watch your footing, d'you hear!  
INGRID'S FATHER (*enters bareheaded and white with fury*)  
His life for this bride-rape — see if I don't!  
AASE O no, God punish me, O but you won't!



## ACT II

*(A narrow mountain track, high up. It is early morning)*

*(PEER GYNT moves hastily and sullenly along the track. INGRID, still half in her bridal gear, tries to hold him back)*

PEER Get away, — !

INGRID *(crying)* You've got no feeling.  
Where to?

PEER Hell, for all I mind.

620

INGRID *(wringing her hands)*  
O, you cheat!

PEER No good your squealing.  
Each one has his way to find.

INGRID Crimes — and more crimes, they're what bind us!

PEER The fiend's in all that helps remind us!  
The fiend's, all womankind that blind us, — —  
all but one —

INGRID And who is she?

PEER Not yourself.

INGRID Who is it then?

PEER Go! Back home with you again!  
Fast! To Daddy!

INGRID Darling, be — !

PEER Stop it!

INGRID You can't possibly  
mean what you're saying.

630

PEER Can and do.

INGRID First seduce her — then you're off her!

PEER And what terms have you to proffer?

INGRID Hægstad farm and lots more too.

PEER Like a prayer-book in a napkin?

Neck that flows with golden tresses?

Eyes down, on the white you're wrapped in?

Do you cling to mother's dresses?

INGRID No —

PEER Were you confirmed last year  
by the priest?

INGRID Peer, you know —

640

PEER Are you bashful with your gazing?

Can you, when I ask, say no?

INGRID Lord, I think his wits are crazing — !

PEER Is it bliss to have you near?

Answer!

INGRID No —

PEER The rest can go. *(turns to go)*

INGRID *(stands in his way)* It's a hanging case, I say,  
if you let me down —

PEER Expected.  
 INGRID You'll be rich and be respected  
 if you take me —  
 PEER There's no way!  
 INGRID You seduced me — !  
 PEER You stood beckoning. 650  
 INGRID I was desperate!  
 PEER I was tight!  
 INGRID (*threatening*) You'll pay dear, though — serves you right!  
 PEER Cheap at that, by any reckoning.  
 INGRID So you stand by that?  
 PEER Like stone.  
 INGRID Right; let's see whose luck's behind us!  
 (*goes down the hill*)  
 PEER (*silent for a moment; suddenly shouts:*)  
 The fiend's in all that helps remind us!  
 The fiend's, all womankind that blind us!  
 INGRID (*turns her head and calls out mockingly*)  
 All but one!  
 PEER Yes, one alone. (*they go their separate ways*)

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(*By a mountain lake; it is wet and boggy round about. A storm brewing*)  
 (*AASE, distracted, calling and looking all about her. SOLVEIG has difficulty in*  
*keeping up. HER PARENTS and HELGA follow a little behind*)

AASE (*waves her arms and tears her hair*)  
 The whole world's against me, it's overbearing!  
 Heavens, the waters, the ugly fells glaring! 660  
 Heaven is piling up mist to confuse him!  
 The treacherous waters will drown him, I'll lose him!  
 Fells will drop rock-falls right on him, they will;  
 and the humans! They're after him, out for the kill!  
 They won't though by God! I could never spare him!  
 O the changeling; to think the devil should snare him!  
 (*turns to Solveig*)  
 Yes, it's incredible, takes the prize.  
 Someone who lived for inventing and lies; —  
 someone whose tongue was the best of his brawn;  
 who dodged honest toil from the day he was born; — 670  
 who — which is better, to laugh or to cry?  
 Through thick and through thin, o we've stuck, he and I.  
 Well, I don't mind saying, my husband drank,  
 ran round the parish all big talk and swank,  
 wasted and trod all our wealth in the ground.  
 For me and young Peer, meanwhile, home was our setting.  
 Didn't know any better, relied on forgetting.  
 For to face up to things, that was too much, I found.  
 Grim, it's too grim to look fate in the eyes;  
 and besides, it is natural to want to shed cares 680

and to try to ignore them as far as one dares.  
 One uses brandy, another one, lies;  
 O yes, *we* lived on fairy-tale feasts  
 about princes and trolls and all kinds of beasts.  
 And bride-stealing too. But who'd credit the luck  
 that those dratted yarns were the ones that stuck?

*(startled again)*

Heigh! What a scream! Was it ghost or a sprite?

Peer! Peer! — Up there on the height — !

*(she runs to a little rise and looks over the water;  
 the others follow)*

Not a sight nor sign!

FATHER *(quietly)* That'll be to his cost.

AASE *(weeps)* O, my Peer! You're the lamb I've lost! \*

690

FATHER Yes truly, he's lost.

AASE Don't you say that — he's not!  
 There's no-one to touch him, he's the best of the lot.

FATHER You foolish woman! \*

AASE Yes, yes! But hold tight!

I may be foolish, but the boy is all right.

FATHER *(always gently, his eyes kindly)*

His mind has grown hardened; his soul's past cure. \*

AASE *(anxious)*

No, no! Our Lord's not so hard, that's for sure!

FATHER Can he repent, think you, all he's profaned here?

AASE *(eagerly)* No — but he *can* ride the air on a reindeer!

MOTHER Lord, are you mad?

FATHER What's that I hear?

AASE There's no task too big for Peer.

700

If they let him live for that long, you'll see —

FATHER Much better he hung from the gallows tree.

AASE *(screams)*

Jesus Christ!

FATHER In the hangman's hands, under sentence,  
 his mind might, perhaps, then turn to repentance.

AASE *(bewildered)* O — this talk sets my poor head singing!

We must *find* the lad!

FATHER Rescue his soul.

AASE Limbs too!

If he's stuck in the bog there's some lifting to do;  
 if he's pixified, we must set bells a-ringing.

FATHER Hmm! — Here's a sheeptrack —

AASE Rich reward I shall ask  
 of God to repay you!

FATHER It's a christian's task.

710

AASE Pah! Then the rest are all heathen, not church.

There wasn't the one of them offered to search.

FATHER They'd have known him too well.

AASE *(wrings her hands)* He's too good for the rest.

And fancy — his life is in danger at best!

FATHER Here's a human footprint.  
 AASE That's where our course is!  
 FATHER At the pasture hut we must split up our forces.  
*(he and his wife go on ahead)*  
 SOLVEIG Please tell me some more.  
 AASE *(dries her eyes)* O, my son you mean?  
 SOLVEIG Yes; —  
 all of it!  
 AASE *(smiles and tosses her head)*  
 All? You'd get tired on less.  
 SOLVEIG You would get tired of telling before  
 I should of listening, long before.

720

*(Low, treeless hills high on the plateau. High peaks further off.  
 Long shadows; it is late in the day)*

PEER *(dashes on and stops on the slope)*  
 All the parish is out in a pack!  
 Each armed with a stick and a gun on his back.  
 The gaffer from Hægstad, his bawl tells he's come there.  
 The hue and cry's up — Peer Gynt's out there somewhere!  
 Well, this beats a smith's rough-and-tumble affair!  
 It's life! Gives your limbs the strength of a bear!  
*(lashes out and leaps in the air)*  
 Topple! Fell! Block the waterfall's shute!  
 Bash! Rip the fir-tree out by the root!  
 It's life! It can toughen you, lift you up high!  
 To hell with the sloppy, the thin-blooded lie!

730

THREE HERD-GIRLS *(run across the slope, yelling and singing) \**  
 Trond on Valfjell! Kaare! Troll-hellers!  
 Baard! Want to sleep in our arms, you fellers?  
 PEER And who are you calling?

GIRLS Why the trolls, sure enough!  
 GIRL 1 Trond, do it gently!  
 GIRL 2 Baard, make it rough!  
 GIRL 3 The hut has got all those bunks that need filling!  
 GIRL 1 Rough is gentle!  
 GIRL 2 And gentle is rough!  
 GIRL 3 With no boys to play with a troll's good enough!  
 PEER But where are the boys then?  
 GIRLS *(sarcastic laugh)* Can't come, or not willing.  
 GIRL 1 He called his sweetheart, his coz, did my kiddo.  
 Now he's married a middle-aged widow.  
 GIRL 2 Mine met with a gypsy-wench, north in the heather.  
 They're tramps now, they travel the roads together.  
 GIRL 3 My lad murdered our bastard baby.  
 His head's on a stake, now, and grins like a gaby.  
 GIRLS Trond on Valfjell! Kaare! Troll-hellers!

740

Baard! Want to sleep in our arms, you fellers?  
 PEER *(leaps in amongst them)*  
 I'm a three-headed troll with a three-lassie stride!  
 GIRLS A real he-man, are you?  
 PEER For you to decide!  
 GIRL 1 To the hut! To the hut!  
 GIRL 2 We've got mead!  
 PEER Get it flowing!  
 GIRL 3 This Saturday night there'll be no spare bunks going! 750  
 GIRL 2 *(kisses him)*  
 He sizzles and sparks like iron that glows red.  
 GIRL 3 *(likewise)* Like baby's eyes from the blackest tarn's bed.  
 PEER *(dancing in with the group)*  
 Heavy mind and sexy thoughts.  
 A laughing eye, a sob of sorts!  
 GIRLS *(they thumb their noses at the peaks and sing)*  
 Trond on Valfjell! Kaare! Troll-hellers!  
 Baard! — did you sleep in our arms, you fellers?  
*(they dance off across the hills, Peer amongst them)*

*(Amongst the Ronde mountains. Sunset. Gleaming snow-peaks around)*

PEER *(dizzy and confused)*  
 Castle on castle rearing!  
 Heigh, there's a gate for display!  
 Stop! Won't you stop? It's sheering  
 farther and farther away! 760  
 The weathercock's wings are lifting,  
 poised in the air for flight; —  
 the mists are already drifting,  
 the mountain is barred and tight. —  
 What sort of roots are those growing,  
 trunks too in cracks up there?  
 They're giants, with heron's feet showing!  
 They're vanishing too in thin air.  
 A rainbow-like shimmer comes stealing;  
 it pierces my soul and sight 770  
 What far-off chime is that pealing?  
 What's clenching my brow so tight!  
 Aaah! O my head, how it's aching. —  
 A head-splitting, red-hot ring — !  
 Who the devil's to blame, who's been making  
 and the clamping me into the thing!  
*(sinks down)*  
 Flying off Gjendin's edges.  
 Stuff and damned nonsense, I lied!  
 Climbing the cliffs and sheer ledges,  
 eloping dead drunk with the bride; 780

hunted by kites and kestrels,  
 threatened by trolls and such,  
 tumbled by crazy vestals; —  
 fiction, damned lies — it's too much!  
*(stares into the air)*

A pair of brown eagles sail yonder.  
 And southward the wild goose flies.  
 And here I must trudge and must wander  
 in muck and mud to my thighs! *(leaps into the air)*

I'll go too! I shall wash myself clean in  
 the bath where the sharpest winds roll! 790  
 I shall soar! I shall plunge there to preen in  
 that shining baptismal bowl!  
 I shall swoop from on high on the sæter;  
 I shall ride to my heart's accord;  
 I shall cross the salt sea, the better  
 to soar above England's lord!  
 Yes, look girls, enjoy your viewing,  
 my journey's my own affair;  
 there's no point your waiting and queuing — !  
 Well, p'raps I'll drop in on you there. 800

What now, then? The eagles, brown feathered — ?  
 The devil's had *them*, I expect! —

The roof-line that's rising, now weathered;  
 each gable angle correct;  
 it's rising from piles of rubble; —  
 the door's standing open wide!  
 Aha! got it now, no trouble;  
 it's my granddad's farm in its pride!  
 Gone, all the rags and tatters;  
 gone fencing about to fall. 810  
 A gleam from each window scatters;  
 there's a party on in the hall.

I heard there the Dean applying  
 the back of his knife to his glass; —  
 the Captain sent bottles flying  
 so the mirror was smashed, alas.  
 To hell with it, spend and be hearty!  
 Hush, Ma; it's alright, it's fine!  
 The well-heeled Jon Gynt throws a party;  
 three cheers for the Gyntish line! 820  
 What *is* all that din, that bawling?  
 What *is* all that yelling, that row?  
 "The son!" — it's the Captain calling;  
 o, the Dean wants a toast to me now.  
 In, then, Peer Gynt to your session;  
 the verdict's in sound and song:  
 Peer Gynt thou art great by succession, \*  
 and to greatness shalt come before long!  
*(dashing off, he runs headlong into a rock, falls and lies*

*senseless)*

*(A hillside grove with tall rustling birches. Stars twinkle through the foliage; birds sing in the tree-tops)*

*(A GREENCLAD WOMAN walks into the grove. PEER GYNT follows with all sorts of amorous antics)*

GREEN *(stops and turns)* Is it true?

PEER *(draws his finger across his throat)*

As true as my name is Peer; —

as true as you are a beauty, so winning! 830

Will you have me? You'll see I'll behave, my dear;  
you won't have to thread looms or work at spinning.  
Food you shall have till you're splitting your dresses.  
I'll not be dragging you round by your tresses —

GREEN No beating me, neither?

PEER Come, that's too much!

We princes don't beat up our women and such.

GREEN You a king's son?

PEER Yes.

GREEN I'm the Dovre-king's daughter.

PEER Are you really? Well, well! That's right up my street.

GREEN The Ronde's where Dad has his palace retreat.

PEER Ma's got a bigger one, too, in that quarter. 840

GREEN D'you know my father? His name is King Brose.

PEER D'you know my mother? Her name is Queen Aase.

GREEN When father is cross, whole mountain-sides crumble.

PEER Ma's only to fret for a rock-slide to tumble.

GREEN My Dad can kick to the highest of vaulting. \*

PEER My Ma can ride through a flood without halting.

GREEN You have got a change from those rags, I suppose?

PEER Ho! You should just see me in Sunday clothes!

GREEN Satin and silk's what I wear every day.

PEER It looks more like tow and straw, I must say. 850

GREEN Yes! That's the thing you must keep in mind;

this is the Ronde-folk's custom you'll find:

all our possessions are sort of two-sided.

If you should visit Dad's place, you see,

it could easily be that you came and decided

that you stood in the midst of the nastiest scree.

PEER Well! If that isn't exactly our case!

Our gold will all seem to you dross and base;

and maybe you'll think, where the window-panes glitter,

that each pane's a bundle of socks and old litter. 860

GREEN Ugly seems fair and black seems white.

PEER Big seems little and filthy looks right.

GREEN Yes, Peer, I see we'll get on with no hitches!

PEER Like hair-comb and hair, like legs in their breeches.

GREEN *(starts towards the copse)*

Wedding-steed! Wedding-steed! Hither, my steed.

*(enter a gigantic pig with a rope's-end for halter and an old sack for saddle. Peer Gynt jumps on its back and sets the Greenclad Woman in front of him)*

PEER Here we come, Ronde! — Just you watch us for speed!  
Gee up, gee up, my goodly nag!

GREEN *(lovingly)*  
To think I've been finding my life such a drag — .  
No, one can never predict, that's about it!

PEER *(lashing the pig as they go off)*  
You can spot the nob's by their riding outfit!

870

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*(The throne-room of the Dovre-king. A great gathering of COURT-TROLLS, GNOMES and GOBLINS. The DOVRE-KING on his throne with crown and sceptre. His CHILDREN and NEAREST OF KIN on either side. PEER GYNT stands before him. Uproar in the hall)*

ELDERS Kill him! A son of a Christian dare  
seduce the Dovre-king's loveliest maid!

YOUNGSTER Can I hack off his finger?

YOUNGSTER 2 Can I pull out his hair?

GIRL Oooh! Let's have a bite at his thigh, just there!

HAG 1 *(with ladle)* Should he be soaked in a marinade?

HAG 2 *(with cleaver)*

Should he grill on a spit or be roasted with stuffing?

DOVRE Cool down, now. Cool it! *(beckons his counsellors)*  
Less huffing and puffing.

Over recent years our stock's taken a dive;  
it's touch and go between bust or survive,  
and refusing support from the public seems thoughtless.

880

Besides that, this lad here's pretty near faultless,  
and sturdy enough as well, by my score.

It's true he's got only one head for his ration  
but even my daughter can't manage more.

Three-headed trolls are right out of fashion;  
two-headed, even, are now quite rare,  
and the heads themselves are no more than fair.  
*(to Peer Gynt)*

So — it's my daughter you're wanting, I guess.

PEER Your daughter, plus kingdom as dowry, yes.

DOVRE You'll get the half while I'm still going strong  
and the other half when I've passed along.

890

PEER That suits me nicely.

DOVRE No doubt, lad — but you  
have certain promises you must be giving.  
Break one of them and the deal falls through,  
and you won't be making your exit still living.  
For a start you must pledge that you'll never ponder  
what lies beyond the frontiers of the Ronde;



shun day, rash deeds, any light-exposed spot. \*

PEER For the title of king, why, that isn't a lot.

DOVRE And next — intelligence; there I must vet you — 900  
(*rises*)

ELDEST COURTIER (*to Peer Gynt*)  
Let's see if your wisdom tooth's one that can  
crack nutty problems the Dovre-king's set you!

DOVRE What's the distinction between troll and man?

PEER So far as I know, there is none, by my score.  
The big want to roast you, the small ones to scratch you; —  
same as with us, if they dare but catch you.

DOVRE True enough; we're alike in that and more.  
But morning's morning, and night is night \*  
so there are differences still, all right. —  
Now you must hear what those differences are: 910  
out there, `neath the shining vault of day,  
"Man, be thyself!" is what humans say.  
In here with us, between troll-folk, that guff  
is expressed as: "Troll, be thyself — enough!" \*

ELDER (*to Peer*) Spot the profundity?

PEER A bit hazy so far.

DOVRE "Enough", my son, so piercing, with such an  
awesome power must grace your escutcheon.

PEER (*scratching behind his ear*)  
Yes, but —

DOVRE It must, if you want the position!

PEER O hell! So what? It's a minor condition, —

DOVRE Moreover you must show respect, meanwhile, 920  
for our steady, homely living style.  
(*he signals; two trolls with pigs' heads, white night-caps  
etc. bring on food and drinks*)  
The cow provides cake and mead the steer;  
don't ask about sweet and sour here;  
the main thing is, — and let's have no forgetting —  
it's home-brewed stuff that you're getting.

PEER (*pushes the things away*)  
To hell with this for your home-made drink!  
I'll never get used to your ways, I think.

DOVRE The bowl goes with it, — and that's gold you know.  
Whoever owns that is my daughter's beau.

PEER (*ponders*)  
O well, it's written: thy nature adjust; — \* 930  
the drink will, in time, seem less sour I trust.  
Here goes! (*submits*)

DOVRE There, that was sensibly said.  
You spit?

PEER Let's hope habit will stand in good stead.

DOVRE And next you must give all your Christian clothes over;  
for this you must know, it's the pride of our Dovre:  
that here everything's mountain-made, nought's from the valley,

leaving silk tail-bows out of the tally.  
 PEER (*angry*) I not got a tail!  
 DOVRE Then one must be got.  
 Steward, my Sunday tail — tie a good knot.  
 PEER Not on your life! Want me mocked far and wide? 940  
 DOVRE No courting my girl with a bare backside!  
 PEER Turning men into beasts!  
 DOVRE Son, nothing's less true:  
 I'm making a decent suitor of you.  
 You'll be given a bow of flaming yellow,  
 and here that's the height of prestige for a fellow.  
 PEER (*ponders*) It's said, it's true, man is no more than dust.  
 Besides, one can always, as usual, adjust.  
 Bind on!  
 DOVRE There's a co-operative chap.  
 STEWARD Show us how well you can swing it and shake it!  
 PEER (*crossly*) Compelling me, are you, to see how I'll take it? 950  
 Are you demanding my Christian faith too?  
 DOVRE No, that you're welcome to, that's up to you.  
 Faith travels free here; we don't charge a toll;  
 it's by cut and by style you can tell any troll.  
 So long as we're one about manners and right wear  
 you're free to call faith what we'd call a nightmare.  
 PEER You are, then, for all your conditions and fuss,  
 a more reasonable chap than one might have predicted.  
 DOVRE My son, we trolls aren't as bad as depicted;  
 that's another distinction between you and us. — 960  
 Well, that's all our serious business affords;  
 delights for the ear and eye now assemble.  
 Music-maid come! Let Dovre's harp tremble!  
 Dancing-maid come! Tread Dovre-hall's boards!  
 (*music and dance*)  
 COURTIER You like this, then?  
 PEER Like it? Hmmm ...  
 DOVRE Don't hold it in.  
 You see there —?  
 PEER Something that's ugly as sin.  
 A cow strumming cat-gut, playing tunes with her hoof.  
 A sow prancing round in short stockings forsooth.  
 COURTIERS Eat him!  
 DOVRE Remember his senses are mortal!  
 GIRLS Hoo — tear out his eyes and his ears too, the pest! 970  
 GREEN (*weeping*)  
 Boo hoo! All he does is insult us and chortle  
 when Sis and I are both dancing our best!  
 PEER Oh-oh; was that you? A wee joke at a function,  
 it's never unkindly meant, you know.  
 GREEN Do you swear it?  
 PEER Music and dance in conjunction  
 made, devil take me, a really nice show.

DOVRE It's rum is this human nature, it's brash;  
it has a remarkable gift for surviving.  
If it gets hurt in our mutual striving,  
there's scarring of course, but it heals in a flash. 980  
My son-in-law's up with the best at adapting;  
freely cast clouts such as Christians are wrapped in;  
freely drank mead from the cup we assigned him,  
freely attached the tail behind him, —  
so freely, in short, met our every demand  
it really seemed the old Adam had vanished,  
had, once and for all, been finally banished;  
but suddenly, look, he's back in command.  
Well, well, my son, we must find a cure  
for that damned human nature of yours, that's for sure. 990

PEER What will you do?

DOVRE Scratch your left eye a bit, \*  
just a little — and then you'll see things askew;  
but all that you see will look splendid to you.  
Then out with the right lens complete — more ambitious —

PEER Are you drunk?

DOVRE (*lays some sharp instruments on the table*)  
Here we are, a glazier's kit.  
You must have a tuck taken, like steers that are vicious.  
Then you will fancy the bride's delicious —  
and never again will your vision mislead  
over tripping young porkers and bell-cows indeed.

PEER This is crazy talk!

ELDEST COURTIER The Dovre-king's spoken; 1000  
he's the wise one, you're mad by that token!

DOVRE Consider the pain you'll avoid, how much sorrow  
you can save yourself with each passing morrow.  
Just bear in mind that sight's where emotions,  
whence grief's bitter smart and gall gush out.

PEER That's true; and it says in the book of devotions:  
if thine eye offend thee, then pluck it out. \*  
Here, tell me how long for the eyesight to mend  
and be human again.

DOVRE O, but never my friend.

PEER Well then! It's thanks very much and good day! 1010

DOVRE Why are you leaving?

PEER I'm on my way!

DOVRE No, stop! Sneaking in's quite easy, no doubt!  
But the Dovre-king's gate allows no way out.

PEER Surely you wouldn't detain me here forcibly?

DOVRE Listen and use your gumption, prince Peer!  
You've a gift for trolldom. Has he not shown here  
already behaviour that's trollish, quite plausibly?  
And troll you would be?

PEER O God, yes that's fine.  
For a bride, and a well-furnished realm in addition,

I'll put up with the need for some sort of submission. 1020  
 Yet everyone somewhere must draw a line.  
 The tail I've accepted, and that's quite true;  
 but what steward tied on I can well undo.  
 Breeks I've abandoned; they were old and sleazy;  
 but I'll button them on again, very easy.  
 I'm sure I can lighten ship overall,  
 ditching some of the lifestyle of Dovre's hall.  
 I'll be glad to swear that a cow's a wench;  
 one's oaths one can always eat on occasion; —  
 but that — to know there'll be no liberation, 1030  
 not to die like a human being — a wrench  
 to live as a mountain-troll all one's days, —  
 this never retracing your steps, as it says  
 in the book you defer in such a degree to; \*  
 no, that is something I'd never agree to.

DOVRE I'm getting, so help me, extremely cross;  
 and then I'm not someone who argues the toss.  
 Do you know who I am, you day-wizened ass?  
 First you're too intimate with my lass —

PEER Why you lie in your throat!

DOVRE You'll just have to wed her. 1040

PEER You mean to say — ?

DOVRE What? Deny that you led her  
 astray with your lustings, seduced her, alas? \*  
 (snorts) Is that all? Who the devil bears that grudge in mind?

PEER Human beings are all of a kind.  
 You acknowledge the soul in a cack-handed fashion;  
 but it's what you can grab that arouses your passion.  
 So you think, then, seduction's a trifle, my laddie?  
 Soon you'll have proof that it's not, you wait —

PEER You're not hooking me with your lying bait!

GREEN Before the year's out Peer, you'll be a Daddy. 1050

PEER Open up! Let me out!

GREEN He'll be coming too,  
 your kid, in his buckskin.

PEER (wipes the sweat off) O to be waking!

DOVRE Should he go to your palace?

PEER No, the parish can take him.

DOVRE Right, prince Peer, that's a matter for you.  
 But one thing is certain: what's done is done;  
 example, your offspring will grow; as a rule  
 he'll grow pretty fast, will a mongrely one —

PEER Sir, don't be stubborn — please, don't be a mule!  
 Be sensible, Miss! Let's make a deal!  
 Look, I'm neither a prince nor wealthy for real; — 1060  
 and whether you size me by weight or tape measure,  
 I can say, if you get me, you'll get no great treasure.  
 (the Greenclad Woman swoons and is carried off by Girls)

DOVRE (stares at him for a while in high disdain)

Smash him to bits on the mountain wall!

YOUNG TROLLS  
O Dad — can't we play hawk and owl first of all?  
The wolf game! Or Greymouse and Pussy-burns-bright?

DOVRE *(going)*  
Yes, but quick. I'm annoyed and I'm sleepy. Goodnight.

PEER *(chased by young trolls)*  
Stop it, you imps you — *(tries to go up the chimney)*

YOUNG TROLLS  
Come pixies and mannies!  
Bite his bum!

PEER  
Ow! *(tries to get out through the cellar flap)*

YOUNG TROLLS  
Block all the crannies!

COURTIER Don't the kiddies have fun!

PEER *(struggling with a little troll who had bitten onto his ear)*  
Let me go, you young swine!

COURTIER *(raps his knuckles)*  
Be careful, villain, with a child of the line! 1070

PEER  
A rat hole — ! *(runs towards it)*

YOUNG TROLLS  
You pixies! Make him reverse!

PEER  
The old one was bad but the young ones are worse.

YOUNG TROLLS  
Rend him!

PEER *(runs around)*  
If only I were small as a mouse!

YOUNG TROLLS *(swarming around)*  
We've got him! We've got him!

PEER *(weeping)*  
I'll settle for louse! *(falls)*

YOUNG TROLLS  
Go for his eyes!

PEER  
Ma, I'm dying, I tire!  
*(church bells in the distance)*

YOUNG TROLLS  
Bells on the mountain! It's the black fellow's choir! \*  
*(the trolls flee amid uproar and screams. The hall collapses; everything vanishes)*

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*(Pitch darkness)*

*(PEER can be heard flailing and slashing about with a great branch)*

PEER  
Who are you? Answer!

VOICE *(in the darkness)*  
Myself.

PEER  
Stand aside!

VOICE  
Go round about, Peer! For the fells here are wide.

PEER *(tries another route but runs into something)*  
Who are you?

VOICE  
Myself. Can you say the like?

PEER  
I can say what I please; and my sword can strike! 1080  
Look out! Way heigh! And here comes the knockout!  
King Saul slew hundreds, Peer Gynt knocked the lot out! \*  
*(hacks and smites)* Who are you?

VOICE  
Myself.

PEER  
That daft refrain;

you can keep it; it doesn't make anything plain.  
*What are you?*

VOICE The mighty Bøyg.  
 PEER Hurray!  
 The riddle was black; and now it looks grey.  
 Give way there, Bøyg!

VOICE Go roundabout, Peer!  
 PEER Straight through now! (*hacks and slashes*)  
 He's down! (*tries to move but can't*)  
 Hello! More of them here?

VOICE *The Bøyg, Peer Gynt! There's only the one.*  
 There's the Bøyg who's unscathed. The Bøyg sorely done. 1090  
 There's the Bøyg who is dead and the Bøyg still existing.  
 PEER (*throws away the branch*)  
 This sword's been bewitched; but I'll give him a fisting!  
 (*punches his way forward*)

VOICE Yes, trust to your fists, lad; your brawn too; don't stop.  
 Tee-hee, Peer Gynt, you'll soon get to the top.  
 PEER (*retreats*) Backwards and on is as long a gait; —  
 out and in, it is just as strait! \*  
 He's there! And he's there! Wherever I swing!  
 No sooner I'm out than I'm back in the ring. —  
 Your name! Let me see you! What sort of thing's by me?

VOICE The Bøyg.  
 PEER (*gropes*) He's not dead. Not alive. Something slimy. 1100  
 Fog-like, no shape. It's like meeting a number  
 of half-awake bears as they snarl from their slumber!  
 (*yells*) Strike then!

VOICE Strike? The Bøyg's not insane.  
 PEER Strike — !  
 VOICE But the Bøyg doesn't strike.  
 PEER Fight! Again!

VOICE The mighty Bøyg can win without brawling.  
 PEER O for a goblin to prick me and claw me!  
 A one-year-old troll, that would suit me just right!  
 Simply something to fight. But there's nothing before me.  
 He's snoring, now! Bøyg!

VOICE What now?  
 PEER Show fight!

VOICE The mighty Bøyg wins his battles by stalling. 1110  
 PEER (*bites his own arms and hands*)  
 Tooth in my flesh and my fingernails rending!  
 I must feel the drip of my blood where I pinch!  
 (*sound of the wing-beat of great birds*)

BIRDS Bøyg, is he coming?  
 VOICE Inch by inch.  
 BIRDS All you sisters afar! Fly here for the ending!  
 PEER If you're wanting to save me, lass, don't delay!  
 Don't keep your eyes down, all meek and shy. \*  
 The book with the clasp! Chuck it straight in his eye!

BIRDS He's trembling!  
 VOICE We've got him.  
 BIRDS Sisters, this way!  
 PEER It costs too much to buy one's life  
 with such a game of wearing strife. (*collapses*) 1120  
 BIRDS Bøyg, he's fallen! Now bind him! Bind him!  
 (*church bells and hymn-singing far in the distance*)  
 VOICE (*crumbles to nothing and gasps*)  
 He was too strong. There were women behind him.

(*Sunrise. The hillside outside Aase's mountain hut. The door is shut. Everything is still and deserted*)

(*PEER GYNT lies sleeping outside the hut*) \*

PEER (*wakes, looks round with dull, heavy eyes. Spits*)  
 O for a salt pickled herring to chew!  
 (*spits again, at the same time catching sight of HELGA arriving with a food basket*)  
 Hi, young'un, are you here? And what has brought you?  
 HELGA It's Solveig —  
 PEER (*jumps up*)  
 Where is she?  
 HELGA Round the back of the hut.  
 SOLVEIG (*hidden*)  
 Come any closer, I'm off and away!  
 PEER (*stops*)  
 Maybe you're scared I shall cuddle you, eh?  
 SOLVEIG Shame on you!  
 PEER Guess where I got to last night!  
 That Dovre-king's girl, she's a leech of a slut.  
 SOLVEIG Good thing the bells rang then, that's a fact. 1130  
 PEER Peer Gynt, he isn't a lad they'd attract.  
 Now what do you say?  
 HELGA (*cries*) O, she's off in full flight!  
 Wait! (*runs after her*)  
 PEER (*grasps her arm*)  
 See here, what I've got in my jacket!  
 A silver button! And all your own, —  
 only put in a word for me!  
 HELGA Leave me alone!  
 PEER Well, here it is.  
 HELGA Leave me — ! There's food in that packet!  
 PEER God help you if you don't —  
 HELGA Ow! You're upsetting me!  
 PEER (*meekly; lets her go*)  
 No; I meant: ask her — don't be forgetting me.  
 (*Helga runs off*)





### ACT III

*(Deep in the conifer forest. Grey autumn weather. Snowfall)*  
*(PEER GYNT stands in shirt sleeves, felling timber)*

PEER *(hacks away at a big fir tree with crooked branches)*  
O yes, you're tough, you poor old clown,  
but that doesn't help, for you're coming down. 1140  
*(hacks)*  
You're dressed in chain-mail, right enough  
but I'll slash it clean through, be it never so tough. —  
Yes, yes; you're shaking your crooked arm;  
and it's right that you're angry and show alarm;  
but all the same, it's down on your knee — !  
*(breaks off)*  
Lies! It's only a daft old tree.  
Lies! Not an ogre dressed in steel;  
it's only a fir tree rough to the feel.  
Just cutting the timber is hard enough,  
but to dream while you're cutting's devilish tough. — 1150  
It must stop, must all this, — standing all muddled  
and mooning away wide-awake but befuddled. —  
You're an outlaw, lad! And the wood's where you're huddled.  
*(hacks away violently for a while)*  
Yes, outlaw, yes. Your Ma isn't here  
to provide you a meal, and to serve and to clear.  
You must fend for yourself if you want your food,  
gather it raw from stream and wood,  
split your own kindling and light your own fire,  
make do and fix things and be your own hire.  
If you want to dress warm, hunt your deer alone, 1160  
want to build a house, you must break the stone,  
want to put it together, you must cut the rafter  
and carry it home on your back, your own grafter. —  
*(lowers the axe and stares in front of him)*  
It'll be great. A tower shall rear,  
vane toot, from the roof-ridge, high and clear.  
And then I shall carve, to top off the gable,  
a mermaid, shaped like a fish from the navel.  
Brass there shall be for the vane and the latching.  
Glass I must also get hold of, to glaze.  
Passing folk shall in wonder gaze 1170  
at the light on the ridge that's so very eye-catching.  
*(scornful laugh)*  
Load of damned lies! Your same old trick.  
You're an outlaw, lad! *(hacks)* What you need, hell for leather,  
is a bark-covered hut against frost and wet weather.  
*(looks up at the tree)*  
He's standing there swaying. Look, just one kick!

He falls and he measures his length on the ground; — —  
 the mob, that's the undergrowth, quakes at the sound!  
*(starts trimming the branches; suddenly listens and stands,  
 axe raised)*

There's someone after me! — So, there you are,  
 old gaffer from Hægstad; — too foxy by far.

*(ducks behind the tree and peeps out)*

A lad! Just the one. Looking terrified. 1180

He's gazing around. What's he trying to hide  
 in his jerkin? A hook. He's peering, he's placing  
 his hand down flat on the fence-post top.

Now what's he up to? Why's he standing and bracing — ?

Ugh! He's given his finger the chop!

His finger's right off! The blood's pouring out. —

He's off at a run — his hand in a clout. *(stands)*

There's a hell of a lad! Fore-finger! He'll rue it!

Hacked off! And with nobody making him do it!

Uh-hu! I've got it — ! The answer of course is 1190  
 it's the only way not to serve in the forces.

So that's it; they wanted to send him to fight;

the laddie, reluctantly, went on the run. —

But cut off — ? And lose it for good when it's done — ?

Yes, think of it, wish it; or *will* it for fun; — —

but *do* it! O no; that just can't be right!

*(shakes his head; then he goes back to work)*

*(A room back at Aase's house. Everything in disorder; the chest stands open;  
 scattered clothing; a cat on the bed)*

*(AASE and the COTTER'S WIFE are busy packing and tidying)*

AASE *(runs to one side of the room)*

Kari, you there?

KARI What's that?

AASE *(runs to the other)* You there?

Now where's the — ? I've lost it, my — . Tell me now, where — ?

What is it I'm after — ? I'm dizzy with shock.

Where's the key to the chest?

KARI It's there in the lock! 1200

AASE And what's all that rattling?

KARI The final load

being carted to Hægstad.

AASE *(crying)* I'd go the same road

with me in the funeral casket gladly!

O, that a body must suffer so sadly!

O Lord God a'mercy! The house is stripped clean!

What the farmer from Hægstad left, bailiffs collected.

Not even the clothes on my back were respected.

Shame on my judges, so hard and so mean!

*(sits on the edge of the bed)*

Loss of farmstead and land's what the family must suffer.  
 The old man was tough; but the law was still tougher; — 1210  
 no help to be had; no pity was shown me;  
 no advice was given; Peer had gone, left me lonely.

KARI You can stay in this place until you drop dead.  
 AASE Yes — puss cat and me, live on charity bread!  
 KARI Heaven help you, poor love; your boy cost you dear.  
 AASE Peer? You're mazed, why you're crazy, d'you hear?  
 That Ingrid came back in the end, safe and sound.  
 It's most likely the devil led them astray; —  
 he's the guilty one, he is, I'm bound so say;  
 he's the one tempted my son, the hound! 1220

KARI Don't you think we should send for the pastor, really?  
 It could be you're worse than you think you are.  
 AASE For the pastor? Well yes, I do, pretty nearly. *(starts up)*  
 But I'm blessed if I can! Why, I'm the lad's Ma;  
 it's no more than my duty to help and protect him;  
 do all I can when the others reject him.  
 Now this jacket I got him. I'll just have to patch it.  
 I wish I'd dared snaffle the sheepskin to match it!  
 Where are the stockings, — ?

KARI Where the rest of it's scattered.  
 AASE *(rummaging)*  
 What's this I've found here? O no, it's a battered 1230  
 cast-ladle, Kari! He'd play as a tramping  
 button-moulder, melting and shaping and stamping.  
 One party we had here, the boy came in  
 and asked his Dad for a lump of tin.  
 No, not tin, said Jon, but King Christian's mint; \*  
 silver; to show you're the son of Jon Gynt.  
 God forgive him, that Jon; he'd had all he could hold,  
 then he couldn't tell rightly what's tin and what's gold.  
 Here's the stockings. But, o — they're badly holed;  
 they need darning, Kari!

KARI I'm sure I agree. 1240  
 AASE And when that's done then it's bed-time for me;  
 I'm so poorly, so wretched and low in my mind —  
*(pleased)*  
 Two woolly shirts, Kari; — left them behind!

KARI Why, so they have, surely.  
 AASE That's really a find.  
 You'd best put the one of them out of sight.  
 No but wait; we'll hang onto both of them, right? —  
 The one he's got on is so torn and thin.

KARI But lor', mother Aase, that's surely a sin!  
 AASE O yes; but you know what the pastor teaches —  
 forgiveness for one and all's what he preaches. 1250

*(Outside a newly built hut in the forest. Reindeer horn over the door. The snow lies deep. It is dusk)*

*(PEER GYNT stands outside the door fastening a big wooden bolt)*

- PEER *(chuckling meanwhile)* Must have a bolt; a bolt that fixes  
the door against men and women, troll-pixies.  
Must have a bolt; a bolt that's for blocking  
those bad-tempered goblins when they come knocking. —  
They thump and bang when the sun is sinking:  
Peer Gynt, open up, we're as spry as your thinking!  
We sneak under beds, rake the ash glowing dimly  
and like fiery dragons swirl up through the chimney.  
Tee-hee, Peer Gynt! d'you think nails and some planking  
can keep angry pixie-buck thoughts from their pranking? 1260  
*(SOLVEIG enters on skis across the heath; she wears a  
shawl over her head and carries a bundle)*
- SOLVEIG The Lord bless your labour. You mustn't deny me.  
I came at your bidding, so you must stand by me.
- PEER Solveig! It can't be — ! It is! — You're here! —  
And you're not afraid to be coming so near?
- SOLVEIG Young Helga brought tidings, tidings from you;  
others in calm and wild weather came too.  
Tidings from your mother, in all that she told me,  
tidings that bred when dreams would enfold me.  
Days that were empty, the wearisome night-time  
bore me the tidings that now was the right time. 1270  
It seemed as though life down there had stagnated;  
I wasn't wholeheartedly sad or elated.  
I never felt sure of you, if I could trust you;  
I only knew well what I should, what I must do.
- PEER But your father?
- SOLVEIG I've no longer such a relation,  
nor mother, to call on in all creation.  
I've cut myself off.
- PEER O my Solveig, my dearest, —  
to come here to me?
- SOLVEIG Yes, it's you now who's nearest:  
you're my everything now, — both consoler and friend. *(through tears)*  
To leave my young sister hurt most in the end; — 1280  
but even worse was my parting from Dad;  
but leaving the one whose breast bore me, most sad; —  
no, God forgive me, the worst I must call  
the sorrow of leaving them one and all!
- PEER You know of the sentence passed on me last spring?  
It strips me of farm, from inheriting.
- SOLVEIG D'you think it was legacies, goods and chattels  
that made me leave loved ones, the hardest of battles?
- PEER You know of the verdict? Whoever sees me  
outside of this forest's entitled to seize me. 1290
- SOLVEIG I've come here on skis; kept enquiring the way;

they'd ask where I made for; "home" I would say.  
 PEER        Away with the nails then, away with the planking!  
 No need to keep pixie-buck thoughts from their pranking!  
 If you're settled on sharing a hunter's existence,  
 this hut can be sure of a blessing's assistance.  
 Solveig! Let me look at you! Don't come too near!  
 Just look at you! Why, you're so bright and so clear!  
 Let me lift you! Why, you're so slim and slight!  
 If I carried you, Solveig, the load would seem light!   1300  
 I shan't mess you up, look. The length of my arm  
 I'll hold you, your beauty, your warmth and your charm!  
 No, who could have thought you were ever attracted —;  
 but o, night and day I've been longing, distracted.  
 Here you can see what building there's been;  
 it must all come down; it's too ugly and mean —  
 SOLVEIG    Mean or splendid — this spot suits me well.  
 So easy to breathe in brisk winds from the fell.  
 Down there it was stifling; one yearned for more space;  
 it was partly that scared me out of the place.   1310  
 But here, where one hears the fir-trees sighing, —  
 what stillness, what music! — my home, no denying.  
 PEER        The rest of your days? You couldn't be mistaken?  
 SOLVEIG    There's no turning back on the road I have taken.  
 PEER        You're mine, then! Go into the hut! Let me look!  
 Go in! I'll fetch sticks for the inglenook;  
 it'll soon warm, the fire will be blazing,  
 you'll not feel cold, you'll just sit by it, lazing.  
*(opens the door; Solveig enters. He stands still for a moment then  
 laughs out loud with glee and leaps in the air)*  
 My princess! She's won now, at last she's found!  
 Heigh! Now for the palace, built firm on the ground!   1320  
*(seizes his axe and crosses the clearing; at the same moment an  
 elderly woman in a ragged green skirt enters from the forest;  
 an ugly child in a cap with a beer jug in its hand limps after, holding  
 onto her skirts)*  
 WOMAN     Good day, Peer Hotfoot!  
 PEER   What's this, who's this here?  
 WOMAN     We're old friends, Peer Gynt! My cabin's quite near.  
 We're neighbours.  
 PEER   Really? That's more than I knew.  
 WOMAN     As your cabin was building, so mine would grow too.  
 PEER     *(turns)* In a hurry —  
 WOMAN   You always were in the past;  
 but I plod on behind, and catch up at the last.  
 PEER     You're mistaken, ma.  
 WOMAN   I was once, a touch;  
 mistaken that time when you promised so much.  
 PEER     I promised — ? That's a load of old rubbish I'd say!  
 WOMAN     You've forgotten your drink at my father's that day?   1330  
 You've forgotten — ?

PEER Forgiven what's blank in my past.  
 What's all this about? When *did* we meet last?

WOMAN The last time we met was when we met first.  
*(to the child)*  
 Give your father a drink; he *must* have a thirst.

PEER Father? You drunk? Do you mean to claim — ?

WOMAN You can tell a pig by its skin, you'll find!  
 You've got eyes. Can't you see, that just as he's lame  
 in the leg, so you too are lame in your mind?

PEER Think you're taking me in?

WOMAN Think you're wriggling out?

PEER That long-legged brat — !

WOMAN He's grown fast, and grown stout. 1340

PEER Think you can argue, troll-snout, with me — ?

WOMAN Listen, Peer Gynt; you're as crude as can be!  
*(weeps)* How can I help it, not looking as pretty  
 as when you seduced me up there, more's the pity?  
 In labour last autumn the fiend took a hand, \*  
 and so if one's ugly, you'll well understand.  
 But if you want to see me as fair as before  
 then you've only to show that young woman the door,  
 turn her away, out of sight, out of mind; —  
 and then I'll be rid of my snout, you will find! 1350

PEER Get behind me, you troll-witch!

WOMAN Just see if I care!

PEER I'll smash in your skull — !

WOMAN Yes, try, if you dare!  
 Hoho, Peer Gynt, I'm built to stay!  
 I'll come back here every single day.  
 I'll peek through the door at the pair of you huddling,  
 you and the wench, on the settle there, —  
 when you're amorous, Peer, if you're larking and cuddling —  
 I'll sit there beside you and ask for my share.  
 Her and me, we'll lend you, and borrow.  
 Goodbye, my dear lad, you can marry tomorrow! 1360

PEER You fiend out of hell!

WOMAN O, I nearly forgot.  
 The child's for your keeping, you light-footed sot!  
 Go to your Dad, you young devil.

CHILD *(spits at him)* Not me!  
 I will chop you to pieces; you see; just you see!

WOMAN *(kisses him)* My word, what a head on his shoulders, that lad!  
 By the time you've grown up you'll be just like your dad!

PEER *(stamps)* I wish you as far —

WOMAN As now we are near?

PEER *(wrings his hands)*  
 And all this — !

WOMAN Just for thinking and lusting I fear! \*  
 I'm sorry for you, Peer!

PEER Worst for another! —

SOLVEIG, my purest of gold and so bright! 1370  
 WOMAN O yes; the fiend says the innocent suffer,  
 his ma beats the son 'cos his father was tight!  
*(she trudges off into the forest with the child, who throws the beer jug  
 at him)*  
 PEER *(after a long silence)*  
 Go round, said the Bøyg. I must do that here.  
 Bang goes my palace — all broken and shattered!  
 Put a wall between us, and I so near;  
 it's turned foul all at once and my joy's old and tattered. —  
 Roundabout, lad! There is no direct way  
 you can find through all this to her side I should say.  
 Straight through? Must be something that I can do.  
 There's a text on repentance, if memory serves true. 1380  
 But what? I've no book. What *was* the line taken? \*  
 Forgotten it mainly, and I'm clearly mistaken  
 in hoping for guidance in woods so forsaken. —  
 Repentance? But that could take ages perhaps,  
 before I won through. Such a life would be frightful.  
 To smash something delicate, fair and delightful,  
 then piece it together from bits and from scraps?  
 It won't work with a bell though it might with a fiddle.  
 Where you want grass, best not walk in the middle. —  
 But that witch with her snout, she must have been lying! 1390  
 All that foulness is out of sight now, sent flying. —  
 Well, out of sight maybe, not out of mind.  
 Vile, crafty thoughts, they will sneak in behind.  
 Ingrid! And the trio that pranced on the fell!  
 Will they be there, cackling with spite, on my traces,  
 claiming like her to be cuddled as well,  
 lifted gently, with care, in arms-length embraces?  
 Roundabout, lad; if my arm was as long  
 as a fir trunk or pine pole I'd still think it wrong; —  
 I'd lift her too close even then — I mean, 1400  
 to set her down again, spotless and clean. —  
 I must get round this somehow, find some way  
 so there's nothing been gained, and nothing's to pay.  
 One must put things behind one, forget the lot —  
*(takes a step towards the hut but stops)*  
 Go in after that? With that shameful blot?  
 Go in, and have all that trolery follow?  
 Speak, yet say nothing? Confess, and yet wallow — ?  
*(throws the axe aside)*  
 It's a Sabbath evening. I'm all on edge,  
 to go to her now would be sacrilege.  
 SOLVEIG *(in the doorway)*  
 Coming, Peer?  
 PEER *(low)* Roundabout!  
 SOLVEIG What?  
 PEER You must tarry. 1410

It's dark here and I've a big load to carry.  
 SOLVEIG Wait; let me help with the load, let me share.  
 PEER No, stay where you are! It's a load I must bear.  
 SOLVEIG But don't be too long, dear.  
 PEER Be patient, keep waiting;  
 a long while or short — keep on waiting.  
 SOLVEIG (*nods after him*) Yes, waiting!  
 (*Peer goes down the forest path. Solveig remains standing in  
 the open half-door*)

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(*Aase's cabin. Evening. A log fire is burning and lights up the fireplace.  
 The cat is lying on a chair by the foot of the bed*)  
 (*AASE lies in the bed, fumbling restlessly with the coverings*)

AASE O God, is he never coming?  
 The hours are dragging away.  
 I've no-one to do my running;  
 and there's so much I have to say.  
 There isn't an hour to be squandered! 1420  
 So quick! Who'd have thought it so bad!  
 If only I knew I'd not wandered  
 astray, clinging hold of the lad!  
 PEER (*enters*) Good evening!  
 AASE God bless you and spare you!  
 You've come then, — my own boy, my dear!  
 But risk coming here though, how dare you?  
 You know your life's forfeit here.  
 PEER O bother my life, I'll be chary!  
 I had to see how things went.  
 AASE Well, she'll be ashamed now, will Kari; 1430  
 and now I can go content!  
 PEER You go? What's this rubbish I'm hearing?  
 And where do you think you'll go?  
 AASE Ah, Peer the end is nearing;  
 I haven't much time, I know.  
 PEER (*jerks aside and crosses the room*)  
 Well I'm blowed! I've come here at the double;  
 thought here I'd be worry-free — !  
 Is it cold hands and feet that's your trouble?  
 AASE Yes, Peer; it's the end for me. —  
 When you see that my eyes are clouding 1440  
 you must close the lids, but take care.  
 And you've coffin to see to, and shrouding;  
 but make it a fine affair.  
 O no, and there's still —  
 PEER Now settle!  
 Time enough for such thoughts I say.  
 AASE Yes, yes. (*gazes restlessly round the room*)



You see just how little  
they've left me. That's just their way.

PEER *(jerks aside)*  
There you go! I'm to blame, to your thinking.  
What good does reminding me do?

AASE You? No! It's the cursed drinking, 1450  
it's there all your troubles are due!  
You were drunk love, — there's no point in hiding —  
then nobody knows what they've done;  
and besides, there's that buck you'd been riding;  
so of course you were lively, son!

PEER Alright; then let's drop the matter.  
Let's drop the whole thing, it's gone.  
What's awkward we'll save for a natter  
another day — later on.  
*(sits on the side of the bed)*  
Now, Ma, we can talk together; 1460  
but only of casual things, —  
forget all that's heavy weather,  
what's painful and smarts and stings. —  
Why, look at old puss there, sprawling;  
so she's still alive, full of beans?

AASE It's awful at night with her squalling;  
I'm sure you know what that means!

PEER *(evasive)* What's the parish-pump news been spreading?  
AASE *(smiles)* They say there's a girl about 1470  
that longs for the hills, to be heading —

PEER *(hastily)* Mads Moen, how has he turned out?  
AASE They say she's unmoved by their weeping,  
whichever the parent that cries.  
Perhaps you could see how she's keeping; —  
you might, Peer, perhaps advise. —

PEER The smith now — where has he landed?  
AASE Don't speak of that smith, he's so low.  
I'd rather name, to be candid,  
that girl I just mentioned — you know —

PEER No, now we can talk together, — 1480  
but only of casual things,  
forget all that's heavy weather,  
what's painful and smarts and stings.  
Are you dry? Shall I bring you some water?  
Can you stretch? The bed's small for you.  
Let me look; — well, it couldn't be shorter —  
it's the cot that I slept in once too!  
You remember, with evening coming,  
you'd sit on my bed-foot there,  
tuck me up in the fleece and start humming 1490  
some snatch of a song or an air?

AASE Remember! Then playing at sledding  
when daddy was out abroad,

for apron, the fleece from the bedding,  
 the floor was an ice-bound fjord.  
 PEER Yes, but the best, of course, is —  
 Ma, you remember this too? —  
 it was all those wonderful horses —  
 AASE You think I'd forget but not you?  
 It was Kari's cat we took over; 1500  
 on the old log chair, that's the one —  
 PEER To the West-of-Moon castle we drove her,  
 to the castle that's east of the sun;  
 to Soria-Moria castle, \*  
 the road sweeping high and low.  
 We found a stick, one of a parcel  
 in the closet, to make them go.  
 AASE Up front I'd sit, straight, in the well there —  
 PEER That's right! Reins kept loose in your hold,  
 you'd turn when we'd sped for a spell there 1510  
 and ask if I felt the cold.  
 God bless you, you dear old eyesore, —  
 you were truly a lovely soul — !  
 What's wrong?  
 AASE It's my back and thigh sore;  
 these hard planks, they take their toll.  
 PEER Stretch out; and let me just heave you —  
 there we are; you're more comfortable so.  
 AASE (*uneasy*) No, Peer; I must leave you!  
 PEER Leave you!  
 AASE Yes, leave; I can't wait to go.  
 PEER What rot! Spread the fleece, evening's coming. 1520  
 Let me sit on the bed-foot there.  
 That's right; make the time pass by humming  
 some snatch of a song or an air.  
 AASE Best go now and fetch me my prayer book;  
 my mind is in such a stew.  
 PEER In Soria-Moria there, look,  
 a party, with royalty too.  
 Relax now; your sled-cushion's righted;  
 I'll drive you there over the moor —  
 AASE But Peer, lovey — am I invited? 1530  
 PEER Yes, both of us are for sure.  
 (*throws a cord around the chair where the cat is lying, takes a stick  
 in his hand and sits on the foot of the bed*)  
 Stir yourself Demon, get going!  
 Ma, you're not cold as we ride?  
 That's it; the pace is showing  
 that Grane's got into his stride!  
 AASE Listen, Peer — what's that ting-a-linging —?  
 PEER The shiny sleigh-bells on board!  
 AASE O dear, what a hollow ringing!  
 PEER It's just that we're are crossing a fjord.

AASE I'm afraid! What's that sound of groaning 1540  
and sighing, so wild and so chill?

PEER It's only the pines, Ma, moaning  
on the moorland. Now just sit still.

AASE There's flashes ahead, winking torches.  
Now where does it come from, the light?

PEER From castle windows and porches.  
Can you hear them all dancing?

AASE Right!

PEER Saint Peter's outside, to meet you.  
He's welcoming you, that's fine.

AASE A welcome?

PEER Full honours to greet you, — 1550  
he's offering the sweetest of wine.

AASE Wine! Any cakes — Maidens' Kisses?

PEER Of course! A great dish, there's stacks.  
And the Dean's late lamented missus  
is laying out coffee and snacks.

AASE O lor' — do I have to meet her?

PEER It's however you want it to go.

AASE But Peer, for a wretched creature  
like me, what a lovely show!

PEER (*cracks his whip*)  
Stir yourself Demon, now hustle! 1560

AASE Are you sure, love, that this is the way?

PEER (*cracks again*)  
It's the broad way we're on.

AASE This bustle  
is taking my strength away.

PEER Look, there's the castle, we're closing,  
the driving will soon be done.

AASE I'll lie back, rest my eyes, try dozing,  
depending on you, my son!

PEER Grane my strider, get going!  
The castle is one great hum!  
There's a swarm at the gate to and froing. 1570  
Now here comes Peer Gynt with his Mum!  
What's that you say, Mr Saint Peter?  
Ma's not allowed to slip in?  
You'll have to look long to beat her  
or to find such a decent old thing.  
As for me, least said soonest mended;  
I can turn at the gate again.  
If you poured me one — that would be splendid;  
if not, I must leave, that's plain.  
Like old Nick when he preached I've been telling 1580  
great fibs, more than now and then,  
I've scolded my Ma for her yelling  
and cackling like some old hen.  
But you show respect now you've met her

and greet her with warmth and praise,  
there's no-one you'll come across better  
from hereabouts, nowadays. —

Hoho! Here's God, now, the Father!  
Saint Peter, you'll cop it, you'll see!

*(in a deep voice)*

— “You stop all this formal palaver,  
and leave Mother Aase be!

1590

*(laughs aloud and turns to his mother)*

Yes, wasn't it just as I said? Things  
will dance to a different tune!

*(in dread)*

But your eyes — why they bulge like a dead thing's!  
Have you passed away Ma, so soon — !

*(goes to the head of the bed)*

You mustn't just lie there, staring! —

Speak Ma; it's me, your son!

*(feels her brow and hands cautiously; then he drops the cord  
on the chair and says quietly)*

Ah well! — Grane, rest from your faring;  
for right now the journey's done.

*(closing her eyes and bending over her)*

Thanks, Ma, for the cuddling and spanking,  
for all of your life beside! —

1600

But now it's your turn to be thanking —

*(puts his cheek to her mouth)*

so there — that was thanks for the ride.

*(Kari enters)*

KARI What? Peer! Then we're over the weeping,  
the worst of her grief and dread!

Good Lord, how soundly she's sleeping — —  
or is she — ?

PEER Hush; she is dead.

*(Kari weeps by the body; Peer paces about the room; finally he stops  
by the bed)*

PEER See mother is decently buried.

I must try to escape the net.

KARI Going far?

PEER To the sea, to be ferried.

1610

KARI That far!

PEER And much further yet!

*(he goes)*

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## ACT IV

(On the southwest coast of Morocco. Palm grove. Table laid for lunch. Awning, rush matting. Deeper within the grove, hammocks. Offshore lies a steam yacht under the Norwegian and American flags. On the beach a jollyboat. It is close on sunset)

(PEER GYNT, a handsome, middle-aged gentleman in elegant travelling clothes, gold pince-nez dangling, presides as host at the head of table. MASTER COTTON, MONSIEUR BALLON with HERR von EBERKOPF and HERR TRUMPETERSTRAALE) \*

PEER Drink up, my friends! If man is made  
for pleasure, why should pleasure fret you?  
The scriptures say; what fades must fade, \*  
what's gone is gone — . What can I get you?

TRUMPETERSTRAALE Friend Gynt, you make a splendid host!

PEER I'll share the honour of that toast  
with cash, cook, butler —

COTTON As you will; \*  
one toast for all four fits the bill!

BALLON Monsieur, you have a *gout*, a *ton* 1620  
that nowadays is seldom met with  
amongst those living *en garçon*—  
a kind, I know not what —

v.EBERKOPF A whift,  
a gleam of psycho-liberation  
and cosmonopolexploitation, —  
a vision through the cloud-bank's rift  
unprejudiced and not beset with  
doubts, the mark of intellection, —  
endowment, plus life's education  
crowns the trilogy's perfection. 1630  
Was not that, Monsieur, your drift?

BALL Yes, probably; but not precisely  
as in French it sounds so nicely.

v.EBER *Ach nein*, that language is so dead. —  
But should we seek the basic ground  
of this phenomenon —

PEER It's found:  
it is because I've never wed.  
Yes, gentlemen, the matter's clear  
past cavil. What ought man to be?  
*Himself*; that's my short answer here. 1640  
His sole thought should be "his" and "he".

But can it, if where'ere he goes  
he's humping other people's woes?

v.EBER But this existence self-projected  
must have cost conflict in some ways —

PEER O yes, indeed; in bygone days;

but always I emerged respected.  
 Though once I pretty nearly fell  
 into the trap without intending.  
 I was a brisk and handsome lad; 1650  
 the lady whom I loved was — well —  
 of royal family, descending —  
 BALL Of royal — ?  
 PEER (*casual*) Yes indeed — of such an  
 ancestral —  
 TRUM (*bangs table*) Troll-nobility!  
 PEER (*with a shrug*)  
 Outmoded pomp, that sets too much on  
 avoiding blots to their escutcheon  
 from some plebian nullity.  
 COTTON So the affair fell through? That's sad.  
 BALL The family vetoed the arrangement?  
 PEER No, not at all!  
 BALL Ah!  
 PEER (*circumspectly*) For you see, 1660  
 one factor led them to agree  
 the shortest was the best engagement.  
 But, to be frank, I found it hideous,  
 the whole thing from the start, complete.  
 I am in certain ways fastidious,  
 prefer to stand on my own feet.  
 So, when the father of the bride  
 discreetly made it known that I'd  
 do well to bridge the class hiatus,  
 change name and rank, buy noble status, 1670  
 I found it, and much else, revolting,  
 indeed it might be said, insulting, —  
 so, I withdrew with dignity  
 declined to meet his ultimatum —  
 renouncing my young bride-to-be.  
 (*taps the table and looks solemn*)  
 Yes, yes; the rule of fate's the datum  
 mankind can bank on here below;  
 and that's a comfort, don't you know.  
 BALL And that then ended the affair?  
 PEER No, there were other trials remaining; 1680  
 some busybodies came complaining  
 whose outcry pierced the very air.  
 Worst were the family's younger members.  
 I had to fight a duel, with seven.  
 The sort of time that one remembers,  
 though I came through alright, thank heaven.  
 Cost blood, but that same blood confirmed  
 my personal high valuation,  
 and clearly points to what I termed  
 Fate's providential dispensation. 1690

- v.EBER You have a view of life's great stage  
that lifts you to the rank of sage.  
Whereas we all, in our delusion,  
regard life as disjointed scenes,  
and end up groping in confusion,  
you've formulated what it means.  
You've shown the underlying norm,  
you've focussed random speculation  
so that it casts illumination  
irradiating life's true form. — 1700  
And you've never been to college?
- PEER I said, just now, I am in fact  
a simple, plain, autodidact.  
My study's not methodical,  
but still I've gained a sort of knowledge,  
and thought and read about it all.  
I started late, and then it's normal  
to find it boring, rather formal,  
to plough through volumes page by page  
and take in all that verbiage. 1710  
I've tackled history — bits and parts,  
not having had the time for more.  
And since at times of stress men set a  
high price on something known and sure,  
religion, too, by fits and starts.  
That way it seems to slip down better.  
One reads, not to gulp all, but choose  
the bits of it that one can use —
- COTTON Now, that is practical!
- PEER (*lights a cigar*) My friends;  
consider how my life's progressed. 1720  
What was I when I first went West?  
A lad hard-up, on his beam ends.  
I had to sweat to eat — no quitter,  
trust me, I found it often tough.  
But life, my friends, is sweet enough;  
and, as they tell us, death is bitter. \*  
Well, luck, you see, was mediating;  
and good old Fate co-operating.  
It worked. — Since I'm accommodating,  
kept working, outstripped all outstrippers. 1730  
Ten years, and I was, by report,  
the Croesus of the Charlestown shippers.  
My credit spread from port to port;  
I had good fortune in the hold —
- COTTON What sort of trade?
- PEER I mostly sold  
my negro slaves to Carolina  
and heathen images to China.
- BALL *Fi donc!*

TRUM                            Why, Gynt — that's terrible!

PEER    You find the business verges nearly                            1740  
on the edge of what's permitted?  
I've felt the same myself, sincerely.  
I've even found it odious.  
Believe me, though, once you're committed  
then stopping's incommodious.  
It's very hard, at any rate  
in business of such wide deployment,  
providing too, so much employment,  
quite out of hand to terminate.  
That "out of hand" I can't abide,    1750  
but tend to the opposing side;  
I've always entertained respect  
for what are known as consequences,  
and all this breaking down of fences  
is something that I must reject.  
Besides, I'd passed my youthful blooming;  
near fifty, I had sown my oats, —  
I started going grey with time;  
and though my health was truly splendid,  
the thought would find me undefended:  
who knows how soon the hour will chime    1760  
for the great sessions that are looming  
to sort the sheep out from the goats? \*

          What could be done? It seemed too drastic  
to let the China business fade.  
I found a way, though: an elastic  
expansion of the same old trade.  
Each spring, shipped pagan gods and relics;  
each autumn I'd export some clerics,  
provide them everything required,  
like stockings, bibles, rum and rice —    1770  
But still for gain?

COTT                                        I took my slice.  
PEER    It worked. They toiled, they never tired.  
For every idol that was bought  
a coolie was baptised and taught,  
so the result was neutralised.  
Their tillage went on unabated;  
because each idol merchandised  
the clerics put in check and mated.

COTT    But what of Africa, those wares?  
PEER    There, too, the triumph of my creed.    1780  
I saw the trade was rash indeed  
for people entering their fifties.  
One never knows how short one's shrift is.  
On top of that, the thousand snares  
set by our philanthropic crew,  
not counting piracy, then there's



the risk from wind and weather too.  
 I was convinced: time I withdrew.  
 I thought: now, Peer, trim sail to weather;  
 you mind you pull yourself together! 1790  
 I bought, down South, my own plantation,  
 and kept the final load of flesh,  
 which, by the way, was top-grade, fresh.  
 They throve, filled out to such a measure  
 it was, to them and me, a pleasure.  
 Yes sir; without exaggeration  
 I treated them as father, friend, —  
 which paid its own fat dividend.  
 Built schools, too, for the preservation  
 of standards of morality 1800  
 throughout the whole community,  
 and took good care, or I'd soon know it,  
 its mercury never fell below it.  
 Besides, I've stopped both kinds of action  
 and pulled out of the business there; —  
 I've sold the lot in one transaction,  
 plantation, fixtures, hide and hair.  
 The day I left, I had them come,  
 the kids and grown-ups, for free rum;  
 the adults all got tight as hell, 1810  
 the widows got some snuff as well.  
 That's why I hope that inasmuch  
 as the saying isn't just hot air:  
 that "he who does no foul does fair" — \*  
 my trespasses are past, as such,  
 and, more than most, my faith's worth pinning  
 on virtues cancelling out the sinning.  
 v.EBER (*clinks glasses with him*)  
 How bracing is a demonstration  
 of principle in action, quite  
 set free from theorising's night 1820  
 unmoved by public condemnation!  
 PEER (*who during the forgoing has been drinking steadily*)  
 It has the knack, our Nordic nation, \*  
 of struggling through! It's the inventor  
 of life's art, viz: for heaven's sake,  
 be sure you keep your ears closed, take  
 good care a viper doesn't enter. \*  
 COTT Dear chap — what sort of viper's that?  
 PEER A little one, a strong seduction  
 to full and total self-destruction. (*drinks again*)  
 Where taking risk's concerned and daring, 1830  
 the art of hazarding great deeds,  
 is this: make sure your way proceeds  
 untrammelled through life's crafty snaring, —  
 don't risk your precious life, what's more,

upon the very battle-field, —  
 make sure you leave a bridge to yield  
 a route by which you can withdraw.  
 That theory has served me well;  
 has shaped my life at every stage;  
 that theory's my heritage 1840  
 from folk where I once used to dwell.  
 BALL You are Norwegian?  
 PEER Born so, ja!  
 World-citizen by nature, though.  
 For such success as I can show  
 I have to thank America.  
 My bookshelves, which are well provided,  
 the newer German schools have guided.  
 From France I got my waistcoat — vest —  
 my scrap of wit, my bearing, and  
 from England, an industrious hand, 1850  
 a nose for what would serve me best.  
 Jews taught me patience too, in plenty.  
 A taste for *dolce far niente*  
 I had shipped in from Italy, —  
 and once, when pressed quite bitterly,  
 I stretched my span of years, I feel,  
 thanks to the help of Swedish steel.  
 TRUM (*raises his glass*)  
 Yes, Swedish steel —!  
 v.EBER It's wielder, truly,  
 we first and foremost honour duly!  
 (*they clink glasses with him. The drink starts to go to his head*)  
 COTT All this is splendid in its way; — 1860  
 but, sir, I'd love to hear you say  
 what you will do with all your treasure.  
 PEER (*smiles*) Hmm; do, eh?  
 ALL (*draw closer*) Tell us, at your leisure!  
 PEER Well, first I'll travel, visit places.  
 That's why I picked you up on shore,  
 to keep me company, in Gibraltar.  
 I needed friends, a ballet corps  
 to dance around my gold calf's altar —  
 v.EBER Oh, nicely put!  
 COTT Who'd waste an hour 1870  
 on hoisting sail for sailing purely?  
 Some sort of goal you must have, surely.  
 And that goal is — ?  
 PEER Imperial power.  
 ALL What?  
 PEER (*nods*) Emperor.  
 ALL Where?  
 PEER Of all creation.  
 BALL But how, my friend — ?

PEER    The power of gold!  
The plan itself's by no means new;  
it's been my life's preoccupation.  
Upon a cloud I'd venture bold  
in boyhood dreams the briny blue.  
I strode with golden scabbard, train, —  
then bump! — back on all fours again.    1880  
But still, my friends, the goal stood firm. —  
Some text or spoken words affirm \*  
somewhere, I don't remember quite,  
that if you gained the world outright,  
but *lost yourself*, your profit's null:  
a garland round a cloven skull.  
That's what it says, or something near;  
and it's no fairy-tale, that's clear.

v.EBER     But what's this Gyntish *self*? — Come now —  
PEER     The world that lies behind my brow,    1890  
that means I'm me, not someone other,  
no more than God's the devil's brother.

TRUM  
BALL     I see your drift, now — yes, I know it!  
Sublime as thinker!

v.EBER    Grand as poet!  
PEER     (*with mounting intensity*)  
The Gyntish *self* — it is that host  
of wants, desires that stir one most, —  
the Gyntish *self*, — it is a sea  
of whims and needs and urgency,  
whatever stirs *my* breast precisely,  
and thereby makes me live — concisely.    1900  
But as our Lord has need of dust  
to ply his art as world-creator,  
even so for me, gold is a must  
if I'm to look the imperator.

BALL     But gold you have!  
PEER    But no great stock.  
Well, maybe for a little while,  
Kaiser, Lippe-Detmold style. \*  
But I must be myself *en bloc*,  
I must be Gynt the whole world over,  
Sir Gynt from root to crest, moreover!    1910

BALL     (*carried away*) Possess the world's supreme nubility!  
v.EBER     Johannisberg's best vintage cru!  
TRUM     Wield Charles The Twelfth's own weapons too!  
COTT     But first and foremost, profitability,  
and business openings —

PEER    They've been found;  
and hence we chose this anchoring-ground.  
Tonight our course is northerly.  
Some papers brought on board to me  
convey important information!

*(stands and raises his glass)*  
 Endless, it seems, Luck's predilection 1920  
 for men of high self-estimation —  
 ALL Well? Tell us — !  
 PEER Greece, an insurrection. \*  
 ALL *(spring to their feet)* What! Greece — ?  
 PEER In arms, against duress.  
 ALL Hurrah!  
 PEER And Turkey's in a mess! *(empties glass)*  
 BALL To Greece! The gate to glory beckons!  
 I'll back them with my Gallic weapons!  
 v.EBER Me, propaganda, — at a distance!  
 COTT Me too — supplies for the resistance!  
 TRUM Lead on! From Bender I shall plunder \*  
 that pair of spur-clips, that world-wonder! 1930  
 BALL *(falls on Peer's neck)*  
 Forgive me, friend, for doubting you  
 just for a moment!  
 v.EBER *(shakes his hand)* I'm dumb, too,  
 I took you for a scoundrel nearly!  
 COTT That's a bit strong; perhaps a fool —  
 TRUM *(offers to kiss him)*  
 I, friend, for just a true-to-rule  
 spawn of Yankee riff-raff merely — !  
 Forgive me — !  
 v.EBER We've all been benighted —  
 PEER What stuff is this?  
 v.EBER We see united,  
 in splendour, the whole Gyntish host  
 of wants, desires that stir you most — ! 1940  
 BALL *(admiringly)*  
 So *that's* where being Monsieur Gynt leads!  
 v.EBER *(likewise)* *That's* being Gynt through noble deeds!  
 PEER But tell me — ?  
 BALL Don't you understand?  
 PEER Hanged if I do — I must be slipping.  
 BALL What? Don't you mean to lend a hand —  
 supply the Greeks with cash and shipping?  
 PEER *(sniffs)*  
 No thanks I'll back the side that works  
 and lend my money to the Turks.  
 BALL Oh no!  
 v.EBER That's witty, but a joke!  
 PEER *(stands silent for a moment, leans on a chair and puts on a  
 dignified expression)*  
 Now listen, gentlemen: it's best 1950  
 we separate before the rest  
 of friendship drifts away in smoke.  
 The man with nothing gambles lightly.  
 When one's dominions scarce exceed

- the strip one's body shades, one's rightly  
predestined to be cannon-feed.  
But if one's raised above the mire,  
as I am, then one's stake is higher.  
You go to Hellas. I'll supply you  
arms and transportation, free. 1960  
The more you stoke hostility  
the more I'll gain and profit by you.  
Strike out for freedom and for right!  
You give it to the Turks! Go fight; —  
and end up, to admiring glances,  
impaled on Janissary lances. — \*  
Excuse *me*, though. (*slaps pocket*)  
I'm worth a mint,  
and I'm myself, Sir Peter Gynt.  
(*furls his sunshade and goes into the grove where the  
hammocks are visible*)
- TRUM The swinish oaf!
- BALL No sense of honour — !
- COTT Honour, o to hell with honour; 1970  
but what vast profits there would be  
for us if Greece in fact broke free —
- BALL I saw myself as all-victorious,  
ringed round with Grecian girls, all glorious!
- TRUM I saw within my Swedish grip  
that famed, heroic stirrup-clip!
- v.EBER And I, my land's supremacy  
of culture, spanning land and sea — !
- COTT The worst loss is the land for buying. 1980  
God damn it! I am close to crying.  
I saw Olympus in my pocket.  
That mountain, if it fits its fame,  
must still have veins of copper stock it  
for new extraction of the same.  
Then that Castalia's worth attention, \*  
the stream attracting so much mention —  
I calculate it could produce  
a thousand horsepower, could that sluice — !
- TRUM I'm going still! My Swedish blade 1990  
means more than Yankee gold from trade!
- COTT Maybe; but stuck there in the ranks  
we'll drown amongst the mob — no thanks!  
And where's the profit we should save?
- BALL So close to fortune's culmination; —  
and then, to stand beside her grave!
- COTT (*shakes his fist towards the yacht*)  
That black chest holds, from observation,  
the nabob's golden nigger-sweat — !
- v.EBER A master stroke! Quick! Off we set!  
His empire's coming to its knees!

Hurrah!

BALL                      You mean — ?

v.EBER                      To seize the lot!                      2000

The crew is bribable, with ease.

Aboard! I commandeered the yacht!

COTT                      You — what — ?

EBER                      I'll grab it while I can! \*

*(goes down to the jollyboat)*

COTT                      Self-interest sets me off the mark

to grab as well. *(follows)*

TRUM                      That man's a shark!

BALL                      A swindling villain! But — *enfin!* *(follows)*

TRUM                      I have to join their operation, —

but I protest to all creation —! *(follows on)*

*(Another part of the coast. Moonlight and drifting clouds. The yacht is well out to sea travelling at full steam)*

*(PEER GYNT runs along the shore. Now he pinches his arm, now he stares out over the sea)*

PEER                      Nightmare! — It's mad! — I'll soon wake from the dream!

She's putting to sea! And she's going full steam! —                      2010

It's just mad! I'm sleeping! I'm drunk and I'm high!

*(wrings hands)*

It just isn't possible I should die! *(tears hair)*

A dream! I insist that it must be a dream!

Appalling! But ugh; it's unfortunately true!

My asinine friends — ! O hear me Lord, do — !

You're wise and so righteous — ! Pass judgement extreme — !

*(with upstretched arms)*

It's me, Peter Gynt! Keep an eye at all cost!

Look after me, Father; or I shall be lost!

Make them go in reverse! Make them lower the gig!

Stop thieves! Cause a hitch when they're trying to rig!                      2020

Listen! Let other folk wait for attention!

The world can fend for itself a bit! — —

By God, he's not hearing! He's deaf, by convention! \*

What a mess! A God short of counsel and wit!

*(upward gesture)*

Psst! I'm all finished with Negro plantations!

I've been shipping those missionaries out to the Asians!

A good turn deserves just a bit of a hand!

O help me on board — !

*(a sheet of flame erupts from the yacht and dense smoke billows out; a hollow boom is heard; Peer Gynt lets out a cry and sinks down on the sand; little by little the smoke clears; the ship has disappeared)*

PEER                      *(pale and subdued)*                      That was vengeance's brand!

All drowned, men and rats — it was destiny struck!

O heaven be praised for that stroke of luck! — — 2030  
*(moved)* A stroke of luck? It was more than that.  
I was meant to be saved, they to die — that's flat.  
O thanks and praise for your kind intervention,  
for keeping an eye, despite all my flaws — — .  
*(exhales deeply)*  
What a remarkable comfort one draws  
from the knowledge one's getting some special attention.  
But a wilderness! What about food and drink?  
O, I shall find something. He's bound to supply.  
It isn't so dreadful; —  
*(loudly and ingratiatingly)*  
  *He* surely can't think  
a poor little sparrow like I am should die! \* 2040  
Just be humble of mind. Give God time, never fear. \*  
Depend on the Lord; chin up, that's the ticket —.  
*(start in panic)*  
Was that a lion that growled in the thicket?  
*(teeth chattering)*  
No, that wasn't a lion. *(plucks up courage)*  
  A lion! — The idea!  
These creatures, they like to keep their distance.  
In their master's presence, put up no resistance.  
A matter of instinct; — they sense, and it's true,  
that it's risky to play with elephants too. — —  
But all the same — . I must look out a tree.  
There's some acacias swaying, and palms; 2050  
if I climb one of those I'm as safe as can be, —  
especially if I can remember some psalms —  
*(climbs into a tree)*  
Morning's not evening, one knows which is which; \*  
that text has been pondered enough and debated.  
*(settles himself)*  
How lovely to feel one's soul elated.  
Thinking nobly is better than knowing one's rich.  
Simply build upon Him. He knows to a T \*  
what size cup of affliction, for me, is sufficient. \*  
It's paternal, the mind he displays toward me; —  
*(glances out over the sea and whispers with a sigh)*  
but economical, — no, that he isn't. 2060

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*(Night. A Moroccan camp on the edge of the desert.  
Watchfire, and SOLDIERS resting)*

SLAVE 1 *(enters tearing his hair)*

Gone — the Emperor's snow-white stallion!

SLAVE 2 *(enter tearing his clothes)*

Stolen — the Emperor's sacred cloaks!

OVERSEER *(enters)* Bastinado! A hundred strokes

unless you catch the rascalion!  
*(the soldiers mount and gallop off in all directions)*

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*(Dawn. The grove of acacias and palms)*  
*(PEER GYNT in a tree, with a broken-off branch in his hand,*  
*tries to ward off a swarm of monkeys)*

PEER Disaster! A truly deplorable night. *(flailing around)*  
 Not you again! This is a blasted intrusion!  
 They're pelting with fruit. No; a different conclusion!  
 Your ape's a revolting beast, all right!  
 The good book says: Thou shalt watch and be waking, \*  
 but so help me, I can't; I'm worn out, more or less. 2070  
*(interrupted again; impatiently)*  
 I must put a stop to this barbarous mess!  
 I must capture one of the brutes if I can,  
 hang him and skin him and rig myself out  
 from top to toe in the fur of the lout,  
 so that the others don't rumble my plan. —  
 What are we men? Just a speck of dust. \*  
 And one can adapt a bit if one must. —  
 Here comes another wave, hundreds at least.  
 Beat it! Shoo! They're mad, make me shudder.  
 If only I had a false tail as a rudder, — 2080  
 just something to make me resemble a beast — .  
 Now what? All that crashing, right over my head — .  
*(looks up)* The old 'un — his fist full of filthy crap — !  
*(cowers apprehensively and keeps still for a moment.*  
*The ape makes a move; Peer begins to wheedle and*  
*coax him like a dog)*  
 Hullo old fellow, nice old chap!  
 He's quite harmless is this one! Good sense and well-bred!  
 He's not going to throw it; — not likely, — chin-chin — .  
 Look, it's me! Pip-pip! We're good friends, we're pally!  
 Arph-arph!! D'you hear that? — right up your alley!  
 Old fellow and me here — we're both sort of kin; —  
 some sugar tomorrow, old chappie — ! The beast! 2090  
 He's chucked it all over me! Ugh! but it's nifty! —  
 Or perhaps it was foodstuff. It tasted quite iffy;  
 but it's habit that counts where taste matters at least.  
 Now who was that thinker who said, as I have it,  
 one should spit and rely on the force of habit? \*  
 There's the young 'uns there too!  
*(thrashes and flails)* It's a crazy jape  
 that mankind, lord of the universe,  
 should find he's reduced — ! Someone help me escape!  
 The old 'un was foul, but the young ones are worse!

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(Early morning. A stony region overlooking the desert. On the one side a ravine and a cave)

(A THIEF and a FENCE in the ravine with the Emperor's horse and clothing. The horse, richly furnished, stands tied to a stone. Horsemen in the distance)

- THIEF      Tongues of the lances, 2100  
               licking and lolling, —  
               lo! lo!
- FENCE      Already my noddle  
               in sand is rolling!  
               Woe! Woe!
- THIEF      *(folds arms)* My dad was a thief;  
               his son must go stealing.
- FENCE      My dad was a fence;  
               his son must go dealing.
- THIEF      You must live with your star; 2110  
               you must be what you are.
- FENCE      *(listens)* Steps in the thicket!  
               Let's run! Yes, but where?
- THIEF      The prophet is great,  
               there's a cave we can share!  
               *(they flee, abandoning the booty. The riders fade into the distance)*
- PEER        *(enters cutting a reed-pipe)*  
               What an attractive hour is dawn! —  
               Dung-beetles rolling their ball in the gravel;  
               snails creep out of their shell to travel.  
               Gold in its mouth, has this early morn. —  
               It's really a wonderful strength, in its way, 2120  
               that Nature invests in the light of day.  
               One feels one is safe, feels one's courage expanded,  
               makes one ready to tackle a bull single-handed. —  
               What a stillness around! Yes, the joys of the country, —  
               it's incredible how I've dismissed them before;  
               how one herds in big towns just for all and sundry  
               to crowd round besieging one's very door. —  
               Why, look at that lizard there scurrying round,  
               snapping and thinking of nothing profound.  
               What innocence, even in animal life. 2130  
               Each creature obeys its Maker infallibly \*  
               and keeps its particular stamp, indelibly;  
               is itself, itself in both play and strife,  
               itself as it was when it started life.  
               *(puts his pince-nez on his nose)*  
               A toad. In a sandstone block, all rough.  
               Encased in the stone. Just the head shows, amazing.  
               He sits there and views the world as if gazing  
               through a window, and is himself — enough. —  
               *(reflects)*  
               Enough? Himself —? The source? It appears  
               I read it as a boy, in some tome or other. 2140

In the Book of Adverbs? Or in Home-Texts with Mother? \*  
 A shame; I notice that with the years  
 my sense of time and place disappears.  
*(sits in the shade)*  
 Here's a cool place to rest, take the weight off the feet.  
 Look, here's some bracken. Roots you can eat. *(tastes)*  
 It's rather like animal food, it's true; —  
 but is says in the scripture: Thy nature subdue!  
 And further it says there: Pride needs to tumble. \*  
 And he'll be exalted who sometime was humble. *(agitated)*  
 Exalted? Yes, that'll be my part; — 2150  
 I can't imagine it otherwise, bluntly.  
 Fate will assist my escape from this country,  
 and bring it about that I get a fresh start.  
 Tribulation, all this, but salvation at length, —  
 if only the Lord permits me my strength.  
*(shakes off the thought, lights a cigar, stretches and  
 surveys the desert)*  
 What an enormous great desert, it's boundless. —  
 See there — just look at that ostrich stride. —  
 What can it mean that the Lord should provide  
 all this vast emptiness, deathly and soundless?  
 Here, in this dearth of all means of existence, 2160  
 here, in this furnace, without subsistence; —  
 in this hole of a place that is no use to man;  
 this corpse, that's not earned for its Maker one grateful  
 "thank you", not one, since the world began, —  
 what was it for, then? — Nature is fateful. —  
 Is that sea in the east there, all sparkling and shiny,  
 that's glittering? Impossible, trick of the mind.  
 The sea's to the west; it's up there, behind,  
 cut off from the desert by a rise that's quite tiny. *(a thought strikes him)*  
 It's cut off? Then it could be — ! Not much of a rise. 2170  
 It's cut off! Just one breach, — a canal that supplies \*  
 a gap for life-giving torrents of water  
 to pour through and fill the desert quarter!  
 Soon all this oven, this graveyard, would be  
 lying there fresh as a rippling sea.  
 Oases would rise — like new islands emerging,  
 Mount Atlas a green northern cliff for a shore;  
 ships under sail, wanton birds, would go surging  
 southwards on tracks that the caravans wore.  
 Blithely the breeze would disperse with its blowing 2180  
 the foulness, and dew from the clouds would descend;  
 folk there would build themselves farmsteads, no end,  
 and grass in the sway of the palms would be growing.  
 Land to the south of Sahara's wall  
 would turn into coastlands, fresh cultures and all.  
 Steam would provide Timbuctoo with its power, \*  
 Bornu be colonised quickly meanwhile;

explorers trek safely by cart any hour  
 up through Habes to the Upper Nile.  
 Set in my sea, at a lush oasis, 2190  
 there I'll breed livestock, Norwegian its basis;  
 that native blood's pretty royal, — well, nearly —  
 crossed with the Arab should suit me ideally.  
 Flanking a bay on some high-rising ground  
 I shall found my own capital, my Peeropolis.  
 The world's out of date! It's time my metropolis, —  
 my new Gyntianaland's turn should come round! (*leaps up*)  
 Just raise the cash, — it's a certainty! —  
 A key of gold to admit the sea!  
 Crusade against Death! The greedy old miser 2200  
 must open his sack, he's its supervisor.  
 For freedom stirs, every land explores; —  
 like Noah's ass, I shall sound a great bray \*  
 through the world, bringing Freedom's baptismal day  
 to the lovely, the latent, yet-to-be shores.  
 I must on! To raise money from any old source!  
 My kingdom — my half-kingdom now for a horse!  
 (*the horse whinnies in the ravine*)  
 A horse! Clothes and weapons! — Gems beyond measure!  
 (*Peer approaches*)  
 Impossible! Real, though — ! What's this? I've heard tell  
 somewhere a wish can move mountains at pleasure; — \* 2210  
 but that it can move a horse too, as well — !  
 Stuff! But in fact there's a horse here to go on; —  
 ab esse ad posse and so forth and so on — \*  
 (*puts the clothes on and surveys himself*)  
 Sir Peter — and Turk from top to toe!  
 You can never be sure what might come, that's about it. —  
 (*climbs into the saddle*)  
 Gee up, Grane, my goodly steed!  
 Stirrups of gold for me feet indeed! —  
 You can spot the nobbs by their riding outfit!  
 (*gallops into the desert*)

(*The tent of an Arab sheik, alone in an oasis*)

(*PEER GYNT in his eastern garb rests upon cushions. He drinks coffee and smokes a long pipe. ANITRA and a group of GIRLS dance and sing for him*)

GIRLS     The prophet he cometh!  
             The prophet, lord, the great future-decider, 2220  
             to us, to us now he cometh  
             the vast sand-ocean's rider!  
             The prophet, master, the great never-failing,  
             to us, to us now he cometh  
             through the sand-ocean sailing!  
             To fluting and drumming,

the prophet, the prophet is coming!  
 ANITRA His courser is milk, is the whiteness  
 of Paradise streams in their motion.  
 Bend ye the knee! Make thy devotion! 2230  
 His eyes are like stars, twinkling, mild in their brightness.  
 No mere mortal can stand the  
 ardent splendour the stars shed grandly.  
 Through the desert he fared.  
 Gold and pearls on his breast burgeoned bright.  
 Where he rode, there was light.  
 Behind him lay darkness;  
 behind lay simoon and starkness.  
 He, the mighty one fared!  
 Through the desert he fared 2240  
 in the guise of a mortal.  
 He himself has declared:  
 no-one throngs Kaba's portal! \*  
 GIRLS To fluting and drumming  
 the prophet, the prophet is coming!  
 (*the girls dance to subdued music*)  
 PEER I have read in print — the saying will stand —  
 “no man's a prophet in his native land.” \*  
 All this here, it strikes me as so much finer  
 than life amongst traders in South Carolina.  
 There was something false in the whole affair, 2250  
 something alien deep-down, something murky there; —  
 I never could feel quite at home, I remember,  
 and never quite felt like a paid up member.  
 What on earth was I doing in that *galère*? \*  
 Grubbing, grubbing in the business manger.  
 When I think of it now, I'm foxed, I declare; —  
 it *happened*, that's all; therein lies the danger. —  
 Being yourself on gold's basis, I've found,  
 is building your house upon shifting sand. \*  
 Before watches or rings or anything grand 2260  
 the good-folk will grovel and crawl on the ground;  
 they'll raise their hat to a clasp — the crowned version; \*  
 but a ring or clasp's not the same as the person. —  
 A prophet now, that's a clearer vocation.  
 There it's simple to know where you stand.  
 Do it well, it's yourself, it's you that'll land  
 — not your pounds and shillings — the great ovation.  
 One is what one is — without more ado;  
 one owes nothing to fortune or luck — nothing's due,  
 one doesn't rely on title or station. — 2270  
 A prophet; yes, that's for me, I must say.  
 And it happened so completely unforeseeably, —  
 simply by crossing the desert, agreeably  
 meeting these innocents on the way.  
 The prophet had come; it was clear, to their eyes.

I didn't exactly set out to deceive them — ;  
they're different, prophetic responses and lies;  
besides I can always resign and so leave them.  
It could have been worse; I have no obligation — ;  
it is, so to speak, just a private affair; 2280  
I can go as I came; my charger stands there;  
in short, I'm controlling the whole situation.

ANITRA (*approaching from the entrance*)  
O prophet and Master!

PEER My slave seeks permission?

ANITRA The sons of the desert without are insistent;  
they beg to behold thy features —

PEER Stay.  
Tell them to come and fall in — well away.  
Tell them I hear their requests although distant.  
Add — I'm refusing all males here admission!  
Men, my child, are a bad lot, I fear, —  
what you might call an ill-natured breed! 2290  
Anitra, they're swindl — I mean sinners, my dear!  
You cannot imagine how brazen indeed.  
Well, so much for that! Dance, girls — delight me!  
The prophet would banish the memories that blight me.

GIRLS (*dance*)  
The prophet is good! The prophet has pitied  
the evils the sons of dust have committed!  
The prophet is kind; all praise to his kindness;  
he openeth Heaven to us in our blindness!

PEER (*as he watches Anitra during the dance*)  
Legs working away like drumsticks tattooing.  
Hey! She's delicious, that wench, worth the wooing. 2300  
Her curves are a little excessively fruity, —  
not exactly conforming to standards of beauty;  
but what is this beauty? A postulate, —  
a currency liable to fluctuate.  
That's why it's nice to have something excessive  
when you're fed to the teeth with normality.  
While you bide by the rules you feel starved for a spree.  
Either terribly skinny or plumply impressive,  
either frighteningly young or so old she's pathetic; —  
half way is bathetic. — 2310  
Her feet — well, they're not exactly spotless;  
and her arms aren't either; there's one quite a lot less!  
But that isn't really a condemnation.  
I would rather call it a recommendation. — —  
Anitra, now listen!

ANITRA (*approaches*)  
Thy minion has heard.

PEER You're attractive, my child, the prophet is stirred.  
And here is the proof if you think I tell lies; —  
I shall make you a houri in Paradise!

ANITRA Impossible, Master!  
 PEER Do you think I'm delirious?  
 Just as sure as I live, this is deeply serious! 2320  
 ANITRA But I haven't a soul.  
 PEER You must get one, you see!  
 ANITRA But how so, my Master?  
 PEER Just leave it to me; —  
 I shall take charge of your education.  
 No soul? Well yes, it's true you are slow  
 as they say; I've noticed, with some consternation.  
 But tush; you'll have space for a soul to grow.  
 Approach! Let me measure your skull's dimension. —  
 There is room; there is room; it was right, my contention.  
 It's true, you'll never show *deep* understanding  
 especially; won't have a soul that's outstanding; — 2330  
 but hell, does it matter? You mustn't feel harassed; —  
 you'll have quite enough not to feel embarrassed. — —  
 ANITRA The prophet is good —  
 PEER Speak up! You're not shy?  
 ANITRA I would much prefer —  
 PEER Come on, let it all out!  
 ANITRA It isn't a soul I'm so fussed about —  
 I'd rather have —  
 PEER What?  
 ANITRA (*points to his turban*) That fine opal I spy!  
 PEER (*enchanted, as he hands her the jewel*)  
 Anitra, Eve's true and natural daughter!  
 I'm drawn like a magnet; for I'm a man,  
 and, as once wrote a respected author,  
 "das ewig weibliche zieht uns an!" \* 2340

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(*A moonlit night. A palm grove outside Anitra's tent*)  
 (*PEER GYNT, with an Arabian lute in his hand, sits under a tree.*  
*His beard and hair have been trimmed; he looks much younger*)

PEER (*plays and sings*)  
 I locked the gates of paradise  
 and took away the key.  
 I steered by winds from northern skies  
 while damsels mourned with streaming eyes  
 their loss beside the sea.  
  
 And southward, south the swift keel sheered  
 the briny water-ways.  
 Where palm-trees swayed and proudly reared  
 to wreath the bay for which I'd steered,  
 I set my ship ablaze. 2350  
  
 I climbed aboard a desert ship,

a ship four legs endow.  
 It foamed beneath the lashing whip;  
 I am a migrant bird — a quip! —  
 I twitter on a bough!

Anitra, thou art palm-tree wine;  
 I must affirm it clear!  
 Angora goat-cheese, I opine,  
 provides a dish scarce half as fine  
 as thou, Anitra dear!

2360

*(he slings the lute across his shoulder and moves closer)*

Silence! Did she hear for certain?  
 Listen to my little lay?  
 Is she peeking through the curtain,  
 veils and so forth cast away?  
 Hark! It's like the sound sent soaring  
 when a bottle-cork's been popped!  
 And again! It hasn't stopped!  
 Song, perhaps, a sigh adoring? — —  
 No, quite audibly it's snoring. —  
 Sweet refrain! Anitra's sleeping.  
 Nightingale, forbear thy song!  
 Thou shalt suffer torments strong  
 if thou darest, by clucking, cheeping — —  
 o well, as they say — ding-dong!  
 The nightingale must sing its raptures;  
 ah, and that's what I must do.  
 It, like me, through music captures  
 hearts so gently, sweetly too.  
 Made for song is night's cool veil;  
 song's the sphere that we all move in;  
 singing simply means we're proving  
 we're us, Peer Gynt and nightingale.  
 And the fact the girl is sleeping  
 is my bliss's crowning tip; —  
 would my puckered lips were creeping  
 o'er the cup, without one sip — — ;  
 there she is, in heaven's name!  
 It's as well, though, that she came.

2370

2380

ANITRA *(from the tent)*

Lord, you call me in the night?

PEER Yes indeed, the prophet's calling.

2390

A cat has put my sleep to flight  
 with its hunter's catawauling —

ANITRA Ah, Lord, not a hunting sound;  
 something naughtier, I'll be bound.

PEER What's that then?

ANITRA O spare me!

- PEER Say!
- ANITRA O I'm blushing —
- PEER (*approaching*) Could it be the  
same emotions felt by me the  
time I gave my gem away?
- ANITRA (*horrified*) Link thy worth supreme with that  
of an old, disgusting cat! 2400
- PEER Child, where love's concerned I'd claim  
tom-cats and prophets at the game  
work out pretty much the same.
- ANITRA Master, honeyed jests are streaming  
from thy lips.
- PEER Young friend you're just  
like the other girls, esteeming  
great men purely by the crust.  
Mine's a humorous disposition,  
especially when *tête-à-tête*.  
I'm obliged by my position 2410  
to adopt a mien sedate;  
mundane duties do constrain me;  
all those chores, affairs of state  
that all end up on my plate  
make me prophetically irate;  
though it's only tongue-deep, mainly. —  
To hell with that! When *tête-à-têteing*,  
I am Peer, — that's who, my dear.  
Hey, let's keep the prophet waiting;  
and you have my true self here! 2420  
(*sits down under a tree and draws her to him*)  
Come, Anitra, we'll be whiling  
where the green-fanned palms are swaying!  
I shall whisper, you'll be smiling;  
then we'll swap the roles we're playing;  
then thy lips in dewy fashion,  
while I smile, shall whisper passion!
- ANITRA (*lies at his feet*)  
Thy every word a song sweet-glistening,  
though my understanding falter.  
Master tell me — can thy daughter  
get a soul by simply listening? 2430
- PEER Soul, the spirit's light and reason,  
you'll be granted in due season.  
When dawn's orient streaks are printed,  
gold on red, with "day's approaching":  
then, my lass, my time's unstinted;  
then you'll get some proper coaching!  
But in night-time's genial stillness  
it would look like mental illness  
if, in cast-offs of a preacher,  
I paraded as a teacher. — 2440



But it's not the soul that scatters  
light upon the theme I'm broaching.  
It's the heart that really matters.

ANITRA Speak on, Master! While you're speaking  
I can spy bright opals peeking!

PEER Wit, pushed to extremes, is foolish.  
Cowardice's bud blooms ghoulish;  
truth when overdone's perverse,  
like an adage in reverse.

Yes, my child, — I am a lying  
hound if there aren't folk about, 2450  
stuffed with soul, who labour, trying  
painfully to sort things out.

I have known a chap like that,  
pick of all the bunch at that;  
he confused his destination,  
bullied into deviation. —

See the waste round this oasis?  
Swing my turban, one swift motion,  
and I'd make the world's vast ocean 2460  
fill up all those empty spaces.

What a blockhead though, I'd be  
to create new land and sea.  
Living — what does it denote?

ANITRA Teach me that!

PEER It's means to float  
dry-shod down the stream of time,  
as oneself, complete, sublime.

It's my manhood gives me power  
to be what I am, my flower!  
Ancient eagle sheds its feathers, 2470  
ancient beau decays and weathers,  
ancient beldame toothless lingers,  
ancient shark gets shrivelled fingers, —  
one and all, a wizened soul.

Youth! Ah, youth! Ah, I shall lord it,  
relishing a sultan's role, —  
not on the shores of Gyntiana  
under palm-leaf, vine, liana, —  
but secure in the unsordid  
musings of a young Diana. 2480

Do you see now, why you're granted,  
little maiden, my affection, —  
why your heart wins my election,  
where, if I may say, I've planted  
my essential caliphate?

I'll monopolise your passion.  
Tyrant in my love's estate!  
You shall be my own, and solely.  
Out of gems and gold I'll fashion

lures to make you mine, mine wholly. 2490  
 If we part, then life is finished —  
 that means you, by all that's holy!  
 Your every morsel, undiminished,  
 I must know for sure to be  
 will-less, choice-less, filled with me.  
 Thy sweet tresses, midnight's presents,  
 all that's not too crude for listing,  
 shall, like the Babylonian pleasance,  
 tempt me to a sultan's trysting.  
 So it's quite alright, then, really, 2500  
 that you've got an empty skull.  
 With a soul one's bound, or nearly,  
 to be egotistical.  
 Listen, since we're on that angle; —  
 if you like I shall bestow  
 an ankle-ring on you or bangle; —  
 best for both of us just so;  
 I'll provide the soul that's needed,  
 for the rest — well, status quo. (*Anitra snores*)  
 What? Asleep! Was I unheeded, 2510  
 talking way above her head? —  
 No, it proves my power instead  
 that she drifts away there, dreaming  
 on my love-discourse's streaming. (*rises and lays jewels in her lap*)  
 Here are brooches! Here! And here!  
 Sleep, Anitra! Dream of Peer — —  
 Sleep! By sleeping you have thrown a  
 crown about your Emperor's brow!  
 On the basis of persona  
 Peer Gynt's triumphed, here and now. 2520

(*A caravan route. The oasis is far in the distance*)  
 (*PEER GYNT, on his white horse, is riding through the desert.*  
*He has Anitra on the pommel in front of him*)

ANITRA Now stop it! I'll bite you!  
 PEER You little shrew!  
 ANITRA What's your game then?  
 PEER Game? Hawk and pigeon — that's you!  
 Carry you off! Be mad as a hatter!  
 ANITRA Shame, an old prophet like you — !  
 PEER O rot!  
 You goose, this prophet's not old, that he's not!  
 D'you think it's old age that — ? What does *that* matter?  
 ANITRA Let me go home!  
 PEER You're being a tease!  
 Home? What! — To pa-in-law if you please!  
 We crazy birds that have flown the cage  
 must never expose ourselves to his rage. 2530

Besides that, my lassie, too long a stay  
in one place, well it's something that doesn't pay.  
Familiarity grows and respect's diminished; —  
especially when you come as a prophet or such.  
One should show oneself briefly, like a poem, not much.  
My word, it was time that my visit there finished.  
Those sons of the desert, their souls are, well, fickle; —  
neither incense nor prayer by the end, not a trickle.

ANITRA Yes, but *are* you a prophet?

PEER Thy Lord, if it pleases!

*(tries to kiss her)*

Just look how the little woodpecker teases! 2540

ANITRA Give me the ring that sits on thy finger.

PEER Take it, Anitra; the lot, my sweet!

ANITRA Thy commands are music! Sheer bliss while they linger!

PEER Lovely to know one's adored with such heat!

I'll dismount! I shall lead the horse as your minion!

*(gives her the riding crop and dismounts)*

There now, my blossom, my rose, my delight;  
here shall I toil through this sandy dominion  
till I go down with sunstroke, and serve me right!

I'm young, Anitra; remember that clearly!

And don't judge my antics and pranks so severely. 2550

Larking and jokes are youth's desideranda!

If only your brains were not quite so unstrung,  
you'd possibly fathom, my sweet oleander, \*  
your lover is joking — ergo he's young!

ANITRA Yes, you are young. Are there rings still contained here?

PEER Are there not! Here — catch! I can leap like a reindeer!  
If I'd vine-leaves to hand I would crown myself prancing.  
Yes, my word I am young! Hey, watch me dancing!

*(he dances and sings)*

I'm a lucky young rooster!

Come, chick, peck at my noddle!

Heigh! Hop! See me waddle; —

I'm a lucky young rooster!

2560

ANITRA O prophet, you sweat; I'm afraid that you will melt;  
reach me the weight there that swings from your belt.

PEER Tender solicitude! — Here! — Make it snappy; —  
loving hearts don't need gold to be happy!

*(dances and sings again)*

This young Peer Gynt's quite a joker; —  
he hasn't a clue where he's at.

Pooh! says Peer — pooh to that!

This young Peer Gynt's quite a joker!

2570

ANITRA It's a joy when the prophet is dancing and hopping!

PEER To hell with the prophet! — Clothes off now, start swapping.  
Whee! Get 'em off!

ANITRA Your kaftan's not right,  
your girdle's too wide and your stockings too tight —

PEER Eh bien! (*kneels*) Then cause me a searing pain; —  
for suffering's sweet to the heart of a lover!  
Now when we're at home in my palace again —

ANITRA In thy paradise; — have we far to cover?

PEER O, a thousand miles —

ANITRA That's too far!

PEER But wait; —  
you will get the soul you were promised of late — 2580

ANITRA Well, thanks; I'll do without soul for a spell.  
But you asked for some pain —

PEER (*rises*) Yes, death and damnation!  
A fierce pain but short — two, three days' duration! \*

ANITRA Anitra pays heed to the prophet! — Farewell!  
(*she fetches him a sharp rap on the knuckles and dashes away  
at full gallop back through the desert*)

PEER (*stands for a long time as though thunderstruck*)  
Well I'll be — — — !

(*Same place. An hour later*)

(*PEER GYNT soberly and pensively removes the Turkish clothes, piece by piece.  
Finally, he takes his little travelling cap out of his coat pocket, puts it on, and stands  
once more in his European dress*)

PEER (*flings the turban aside*)  
Here I stand and the Turk lies there!  
That heathenish creature's not fit to wear.  
Good thing it involved just the clothing alone,  
wasn't scored, as they say, in flesh and bone. —  
What on earth was I doing in that *galère*? 2590  
A christian life's best without reservations,  
shunning the show of the peacock, what's more,  
basing one's conduct on morals and law,  
being oneself, and one ends with orations  
made at the graveside, and floral donations.  
(*takes a step or so*)  
That bitch; — in a hair's-breadth she came by the end  
of turning my head, she had got me so muddled.  
Well, I'll be a troll if I comprehend  
what it was that made me so drunk and befuddled.  
Right, well, that's that! If the game had been taken 2600  
one further step, she'd have cooked my bacon!  
I have failed, that's true; — but it eases the stings  
that I failed through a flaw in the scheme of things.  
It wasn't myself, me in person, at fault.  
It was really the fault of the life prophetic,  
so utterly lacking activity's salt

that it took its revenge as a violent emetic.  
 A terrible life, the prophet's career!  
 One's office constrains one to cloudy pretenses;  
 where a prophet's concerned, one is scuppered, I fear, 2610  
 the moment one's seen in command of one's senses.  
 To that extent I've lived up to the notion  
 of prophet by paying that goose my devotion.  
 But even so — (*bursts out laughing*) Hmm, the thought of it!  
 Tried to stop time with my tripping and dancing!  
 Tried to hold back the tide with my flaunting and prancing!  
 Playing the lute, then cuddling and clucking  
 to end like a cock — that submits to its plucking.  
 One could call such behaviour a prophetic fit. —  
 Yes, plucked! — Pah! Plucked very badly, I'd say! 2620  
 O well; there's a bit I've got still tucked away;  
 I've got some in America, some in my purse;  
 so I'm not quite reduced to a beggar or worse. —  
 And this middle road is the finest course.  
 I'm not tied, any more, to a coachman or horse;  
 as for go-cart and luggage, I have no obligation;  
 in short, I'm controlling the whole situation.  
 Now which road shall I choose? There's enough willy-nilly;  
 and it's choice that sorts out the wise from the silly.  
 My business career is a chapter that's closed; 2630  
 my joke of a love-life a garment disposed.  
 To move like a crab isn't my cup of tea.  
 "Backwards and on, it's as long a gait; —  
 out and in, it is just as strait", —  
 I think it says somewhere, so brilliantly —  
 so something that's new; a distinguished affair;  
 with a purpose that's worth all the cash and the care.  
 Such as write my biography, full revelation,  
 a handbook for guidance and emulation?  
 Or, no wait! I've got time to reflect, be methodical; — 2640  
 what if I, as a wandering scholar, should dare  
 to study the pasts that are distant and prodigal!  
 Exactly, yes; that's the thing for me!  
 Even as a lad I'd read all the stories,  
 and I've kept it up, so I know what the score is. —  
 I shall trace the path of humanity!  
 I shall float like a feather on history's stream,  
 bring it to life again just like a dream, —  
 see heroes there fight for what's great and good,  
 but just watch — at safe distance, that's understood, — 2650  
 see thinkers discredited, martyrs' blood flow,  
 see kingdoms founded and kingdoms decay, —  
 see great epochs start up in the tiniest way;  
 in short, I shall skim history's cream as I go, —  
 I must look out a book by that Becker man \*  
 and travel chronologically so far as I can. —

It's true, — that I've lacked a thorough grounding,  
 that history's workings are quite astounding; —  
 so what; where the starting-point's crazily minimal,  
 the outcome is often highly original. — — 2660  
 To set one's own goal is uplifting, I feel,  
 and to carry it through, hard as flint or steel!  
*(with quiet emotion)*  
 Break all connections and ties, all that tends \*  
 to bind one with bonds to home and to friends, — —  
 blow one's treasure sky-high to heaven above, —  
 bid a goodnight to the pleasures of love, —  
 all to uncover the truth's hidden mystery —  
*(wipes the tear from his eye)*  
*there* you've the true researcher in history! —  
 I feel there's no limit now to my pleasure.  
 Now I have taken my destiny's measure. 2670  
 Now, simply hold out, thick and thin, that's my stint!  
 I think I'm permitted a little vanity  
 in priding myself as the man, Peer Gynt,  
 otherwise known as the Prince of Humanity. —  
 I shall hold the key to all the past's byways;  
 never trudge on the living world's highways; —  
 the present is not worth a shoe-leather sole;  
 they are treacherous and spineless, men now, on the whole;  
 their souls have no wings and their deeds no weight; — —  
*(shrugs)*  
 and the womenfolk, — they're in a sorry state! — *(goes)* \* 2680

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*(A summer's day. Far in the North. A hut in the great forest. Open door with a great wooden bar. Reindeer antlers over the door. A herd of goats by the wall of the hut)  
 (A middleaged WOMAN, fair and beautiful, sits and spins outside in the sun)*

WOMAN *(gazes down the path and sings)* \*  
 Winter and spring, they may both disappear,  
 and the summer that follows, and all of the year; —  
 but some day you will come, I'm sure of you yet;  
 and I'll wait as I promised the last time we met.  
*(calls the goats, then goes back to spinning and singing)*  
 God guard and protect you where'er you've flown.  
 God gladden your heart if you stand by His throne.  
 Here I shall wait your return to the end,  
 and if you wait in heaven, we'll meet there, my friend!

---

(In Egypt. Dawn. The statue of Memnon set in the sand)  
 (PEER GYNT enters on foot and gazes about him for a while)

PEER      Now here's a good spot for my travels to start. —  
             That's why I'm Egyptian, a change on my part; 2690  
             but Egyptian on the basis of the Gyntian I.  
             Assyria's the next port of call, by and by.  
             Starting from scratch, with the world's creation,  
             is the sure road to failure, in my estimation; —  
             I'll skip bible history, other things being equal;  
             I can always pick up on its secular sequel;  
             and to plough through all that, as they say, hour by hour,  
             would be outside my plan and beyond my own power.  
             (*sits on a stone*)  
             Now I shall sit and I'll wait, while it's dawning,  
             till this statue's ready to sing to the morning. 2700  
             After breakfast I'll climb the pyramid's exterior;  
             if there's time a bit later I'll study the interior.  
             Then the Red Sea — but by way of land;  
             perhaps I'll find Potiphar's tomb in the sand. — \*  
             Then Babylon, that is my next destination,  
             its famed hanging gardens and whores — I'll be Asian, —  
             that's to say, the main traces of culture around.  
             Then the walls of Troy, in one big bound.  
             From Troy to old Athens, so highly regarded; —  
             by sea-route direct to that city alone; — 2710  
             and there I shall scrutinise, stone by stone,  
             in situ, the pass that Leonidas guarded; — \*  
             I'll acquaint me with thinkers, the pick; for a starter  
             find the prison where Socrates died as a martyr — —; \*  
             I forgot, but of course — there's a war on at present — !  
             Hellas can wait, then, till things are more pleasant. (*looks at his watch*)  
             It's really too crazy, how long it is taking  
             for the sun to rise. I've no time to spare.  
             Right, after Troy, then; — I'd got up to there — —  
             (*gets up and listens*)  
             What on earth is that curious din something's making — ! 2720  
             (*sunrise*)

STATUE OF MEMNON (*sings*) \*  
             From demi-god ashes rising rejuvenate  
                 Singing-birds congregate.  
                 Zeus's omniscience  
                 shaped them for dissidence.  
                 Wise owl, reveal where  
                 my birds sleep so long.  
             You must solve, or you die there,  
                 my riddling song!

PEER      Well really, — if I didn't imagine a blast  
             of sound from that statue! Music of the past. \* 2730  
             I heard the stone voice sound full strength and then taper. —

I shall write all this up for a scholarly paper. (*makes notes*)  
 “Statue sang. I heard the sound of it clearly,  
 though I couldn’t quite catch the words of it, really.  
 The whole thing, of course, was a trick of the mind. —  
 Nothing else for today of significant kind.” (*wanders off*)

(*Near the village of Gizeh. The great Sphinx carved out of the rock. In the far distance the spires and minarets of Cairo*)

(*PEER GYNT enters; he studies the Sphinx attentively, now through his pince-nez, now through his cupped hand*)

PEER        Now where in the world have I met before  
 something half-forgotten that’s like this chimera?  
 Up north or down south — but I’ve met it I’m sure.  
 Some person or other? Then who? I’m no clearer. 2740  
 Now Memnon, it came to me later, was like  
 the so-called elders of Dovre, so solemn,  
 sitting there stolid and stiff as a pike,  
 his backside planted on stumps of column. —  
 But this, this mongrel, this non-pareil,  
 this changeling, at once a woman and lion, —  
 did I get that too, from some fairy-tale?  
 Or was he, perhaps, from a past I’d rely on?  
 From a fairy-tale? Ha, I remember the lout!  
 It must by the Bøyg — I gave him a clout — 2750  
 that’s to say, I dreamt it, — my fever was high. —  
 (*draws closer*)  
 The identical lip; the identical eye; —  
 not quite so slow; a little more crafty;  
 essentially, though, the same old dafty. —  
 So that’s it, Bøyg; you look like a lion  
 when you’re viewed from behind and the sun’s in the sky!  
 Still busy with riddles? Let’s have a try-on.  
 See if you’ve changed your tune since I quizzed you!  
 (*calls out to the Sphinx*)  
 Hi, Bøyg; who are you?

VOICE       (*behind the Sphinx*)    Ach, Sphinx, wer bist du?

PEER        What! Echo replying in German, by jingo! 2760

VOICE       Wer bist du?

PEER        It copes very well with the lingo!  
 The sighting’s my own and new as a pin. (*enters in book*)  
 “Echo in German. Accent Berlin.”  
 (*BEGRIFFFELDT appears from behind the Sphinx*) \*

BEGRIF       A human!

PEER        I see; that was *his* contribution. (*another note*)  
 “Had occasion later to change my conclusion.”

BEGRIF       (*excited gestures*)  
 Forgive me, dear sir — ! Vital witness at last!  
 What leads you to choose today to come?



PEER A visit. To look up a boyhood chum.  
 BEGRIF What, the Sphinx — ?  
 PEER (*nods*) Yes, I knew him way back in the past.  
 BEGRIF Astounding! — And this after such a night! 2770  
 My forehead is pounding! It's very near splitting!  
 You know him, my friend? O say, if it's fitting —  
 what is he —  
 PEER What is he? I can do that alright.  
 He is *himself*.  
 BEGRIF (*starts*) Ha! Life's mystery flamed  
 like lightning to dazzle — ! Is it certain, quite clear,  
 he's *himself*?  
 PEER Well, that's what he always claimed.  
 BEGRIF Himself! Revolution's hour is near! (*takes off hat*)  
 May I know your name, sir?  
 PEER I was christened Peer Gynt.  
 BEGRIF (*with quiet admiration*)  
 Peer Gynt! Allegorical! As might be expected. — \*  
 Peer Gynt? That denotes: the unknown, the respected, — 2780  
 the comer of whose coming I'd had a hint —  
 PEER No, really? You're here now to meet the projected — ?  
 BEGRIF Peer Gynt! A genius! Profound and aloof!  
 Each word like a fathomless premonition.  
 What are you?  
 PEER (*modestly*) I've been, at least in ambition,  
 myself. And here's my passport as proof.  
 BEGRIF Once more that word, so elusive, profound!  
 (*grips his wrists*)  
 To Cairo! The prophesied Emperor is found!  
 PEER Emperor?  
 BEGRIF Come!  
 PEER Am I really known?  
 (*being dragged along*)  
 BEGRIF The prophesied Emperor — based on self alone! 2790

(*In Cairo. A large courtyard with high walls and buildings around. Barred windows; iron cages*) \*

(*Three KEEPERS in the yard. A FOURTH enters*)

K4 Schafmann — the Director, where is he? It's late.  
 K2 Drove out this morning, well before day.  
 K1 I reckon he's feeling upset in some way;  
 because yesterday —  
 K3 Quiet! That's him at the gate.  
 (*BEGRIFFENFELDT leads in PEER GYNT, locks the gate and puts  
 the key in his pocket*)  
 PEER (*to himself*)  
 A man of remarkable gifts, inbred;  
 nearly all that he says goes right over one's head.

(*looks around*)  
 So here's the club where the scholars all come?  
 BEGRIF Here's where you'll find them, crust and crumb; —  
 the Septuagint Circle, three-score and ten; \*  
 just increased by a hundred and three-score new men — 2800  
 (*calls to the keepers*)  
 Michael, Schlingenberg, Schafmann, Fox, —  
 in the cages with you, slam the locks!  
 ALL Us!  
 BEGRIF Who else? Quick, off with you!  
 When the world's in a spin, then we spin with it too.  
 (*forces them into a cage*)  
 He arrived here this morning, the mighty Peer; —  
 you can go join the rest — I have made myself clear.  
 (*locks the cage and throws the key down a well*)  
 PEER But good Doctor, Director — what was that for — ?  
 BEGRIF I'm neither one now! I was once before — —  
 Herr Gynt can I trust you? I must let off some steam.  
 PEER (*with increasing unease*)  
 What is it?  
 BEGRIF Now swear you won't shake with the shock. 2810  
 PEER I shall try —  
 BEGRIF (*draws him into a corner and whispers*)  
 Then Absolute Reason would seem \*  
 to have dropped dead last night at eleven o'clock.  
 PEER God help me — !  
 BEGRIF Yes, it is quite, quite regrettable.  
 And in *my* situation it is doubly upsettable;  
 for this institution was once, as they style 'em,  
 a Mental Asylum.  
 PEER A Mental Asylum!  
 BEGRIF But not *now*, understand!  
 PEER (*pale and subdued*) Now I see what's the matter!  
 And nobody's noticed; — the man's mad as a hatter!  
 (*moves away*)  
 BEGRIF (*follows*) I trust, moreover, you've taken it in?  
 When I say Reason's dead, it's a paradox: 2820  
 Reason's parted with Self. It's jumped out of its skin, —  
 just like Baron Munchausen, my countryman's, fox. \*  
 PEER Excuse me a tick —  
 BEGRIF (*holds him*) No, an eel, by the by; —  
 not like a fox. A nail through the eye; —  
 it squirmed on the wall — —  
 PEER What a pickle I'm in!  
 BEGRIF Just a snick round the neck and then off with his skin!  
 PEER Completely crazy! As mad as can be!  
 BEGRIF Now, then, it's clear — and it has to be swallowed, —  
 this parting-from-Self thing is bound to be followed  
 by total upheaval by land and sea. 2830  
 The people we used to call crazy, thank heaven

became normal last night, when the clock struck eleven,  
in conformance with Reason in its newer phases.  
And from deeper reflection on the affair,  
it's clear, on the stroke aforementioned back there,  
the sane ones, so-called, turned into the crazies.

PEER You mentioned the hour; my time is short —  
BEGRIF Your time? There you've given me food for thought!  
*(opens the door and calls out)*  
Outside! The future's come fresh from the mint!  
Reason is dead. Long live Peer Gynt! 2840

PEER O, please, my dear chap — !  
*(one after the other the lunatics come into the courtyard)*

BEGRIF Good morning! Good morning!  
Attention! and greet liberation's dawning!  
Your Emperor has come!

PEER What, Emperor?  
BEGRIF Indeed!

PEER But the honour's so great, so out of proportion —  
BEGRIF O, don't let false modesty counsel you caution  
at a moment like this.

PEER Time to think's what I need — !  
No, I just wouldn't suit; I'm completely dumbfounded!

BEGRIF A man who the Sphinx's riddle expounded?  
Who is himself?

PEER Yes, the snag is there, clearly.  
I am myself in every respect; 2850  
but here it is all, if my thinking's correct,  
a matter of being beside oneself, really.

BEGRIF Beside? No, you're making an odd mistake!  
Here one is condemned to complete self-assertion;  
one's self, nothing else, not the slightest diversion; —  
one's self it is sets all the sail one can make.  
Each shuts himself up in self's cask for safe-keeping,  
immerses himself in self-fermentation,  
is hermetically sealed in self-contemplation,  
and makes the staves swell with the self's own steeping. 2860  
Nobody grieves for another's tears;  
no-one has time for another's ideas.  
Our selves, we are that in thought and in tone,  
our selves to the springboard's uttermost span —  
and so, when an Emperor's sought for the throne,  
it's clear that you are the very man.

PEER I wish the devil — !  
BEGRIF Now please don't lose heart;  
most things in this world are new when they start.  
"One's self"; — come; here's a specimen for you;  
I'm choosing at random to pick you one out — 2870  
*(to a gloomy figure)* Good day, Huhu! Still going about \*  
hall-marked with grief, you old misery-bore, you?

HUHU How not, when each generation

dies deprived of information?  
*(to Peer Gynt)* You're a stranger. Like to hear?  
 PEER *(bows)* By all means!  
 HUUH Then lend an ear. —  
 Eastward, like a forehead's garland,  
 lies the Malebaric far-land.  
 Portugese and Dutch aggression  
 spread their cultural oppression. 2880  
 Furthermore, to swell the tally,  
 droves of genuine Malebari.  
*Their* tongue mixes all and sundry; —  
 now they dominate the country. —  
 But in ages long, long past, the  
 great orang-outang was master.  
 Held the forest in his power,  
 free to smite and snarl and glower.  
 So he grinned and gaped parading  
 just as nature's hand had made him. 2890  
 He would shriek with might and main,  
 he was king in his domain. —  
 Ah, but aliens then invaded, —  
 the forest's ur-tongue was degraded.  
 Four long centuries of starkness  
 brooded o'er the ape in darkness;  
 and nights, we know, of such duration,  
 mark a country's population. —  
 Ur-sounds of the forest — finished;  
 growls and snarls were quite diminished; — 2900  
 if we would express our thoughts,  
 then we need a speech of sorts.  
 A problem, that, for all conditions.  
 Portugese and Dutch traditions,  
 half-breeds, Malebari, sadly, —  
 each have equally done badly. —  
 I have tried to fight, by jingo,  
 for our genuine jungle-lingo, —  
 tried my hand at corpse-reviving, —  
 for the right to shriek kept striving, — 2910  
 shrieked myself, and demonstrated  
 its use where folk-song's indicated. —  
 My reward's been very scrappy. —  
 Now you know why I'm unhappy.  
 Thanks for lending me your ear; —  
 can you help? — I'd love to hear!

PEER *(to himself)* As they say: best join the howling  
 when the wolves are out and prowling.  
*(aloud)*  
 In Morocco's scrubland section  
 there's a tribe, sir, finds protection, 2920  
 — orang-utang stock, and I know it

- lacks interpreter and poet; —  
 their tongue sounded Malebarish; —  
 what a model for the parish  
 if you, a man of reputation,  
 went to benefit the nation —
- HUHU Thanks for lending me your ear; —  
 I'll make use of your idea.  
*(with a broad gesture)*  
 The East's dispensed with those that sang!  
 The West still boasts orang-outang! 2930  
*(goes)*
- BEGRIF Now, was he himself? I reckon so, surely.  
 He was full of himself and full of that purely.  
 He's himself in all he might say or do, —  
 himself, in being beside himself too.  
 Come here! Now I shall point out another  
 no less rational, after last night, than his brother.  
*(enter a fellah, bearing a mummy on his back)*  
 King Apis, how are you, your Royal Highness? \*
- FELLAH *(distracted, to Peer Gynt)*  
 Am I King Apis?
- PEER I confess, with some shyness,  
 I'm not quite in touch with the situation;  
 but I'm pretty well sure, from the broad implication — 2940
- FELLA You're lying too, now.
- BEGRIF Your Highness might mention  
 how matters stand.
- FELLAH That is my intention. *(to Peer Gynt)*  
 Do you see whom I got on my shoulders?  
 King Apis, of noble fame.  
 He goes by the name of a mummy,  
 and he's therefore quite dead — it's a shame.  
 He has built all the pyramids standing  
 and hewed out the mighty Sphinx,  
 and fought as Herr Doktor, the dummy,  
 would say, with the Turk *rechts und links*. 2950
- And therefore the whole of Egypt  
 revered him as god to the full,  
 and set him up in the temples  
 in likenesses of a bull. —  
 But *I* am the real King Apis,  
 it's clear as the sun at noon;  
 and, should you not understand it,  
 you will do and pretty soon.
- King Apis, you see, while out hunting,  
 got down from his horse, quite unplanned, 2960  
 and went on some private business  
 onto my great grandpa's land.  
 But the field that King Apis manured  
 has nourished *me* with its corn;

and if further proof is required  
I've got an invisible horn.

And isn't it simply disgraceful  
that no-one will honour my might?  
By birth I am Apis of Egypt  
but a peasant in others' sight.

2970

If you can advise on some action,  
then give me your counsel straight; —  
the question is, how can I manage  
to be like King Apis the Great?

PEER Build pyramids, then, Your Highness,  
and hew out a mightier Sphinx,  
and fight, as Herr Doktor would put it,  
with the Turk to both *rechts und links*.

FELLAH Blow that for a likely story!

A peasant! A starving louse!  
I've enough to do, keeping my hovel  
clear of the rat and the mouse.

2980

Quick man, — produce something better,  
the security, greatness I lack,  
whereby I'll exactly resemble  
King Apis here on my back!

PEER Suppose you should hang yourself, Highness,  
and then, in the earth's womb-like bed,  
in the coffin's natural confines,  
remain there aloof and quite dead?

2990

FELLAH I'll do it! My life for a halter!  
The gallows for me, that's flat! —  
At first it'll seem a bit different;  
but time will take care of that.

*(moves away, making preparations to hang himself)*

BEGRIF Now there was a personality, —  
a man with a method —

PEER Yes, I see — ;  
but he's hanging in earnest! O God defend us!  
I feel sick; I can't think, it is quite horrendous!

BEGRIF A state of transition. Soon over and done.

PEER Transition? To what? Excuse me — must run —

3000

BEGRIF *(holds him)*

Are you mad?

PEER No, not yet — . God forbid the mere mention!  
*(Uproar. Hussein the Government Minister pushes through  
the crowd)*

HUSS I've been told an Emperor's arrived here today. \*  
*(to Peer Gynt)* Is it you?

PEER *(desperately)* Well, yes, it does look that way!

HUSS Good. — There are papers requiring attention!

PEER *(tears his hair)*

Why not! Bad or worse — either way I'm a goner!

- HUSS Perhaps just one dip, if you'll do me the honour?  
(*bows deeply*) I am a pen.
- PEER (*bows still more deeply*) And as for me,  
I'm parchment, imperial stationery.
- HUSS Now my history's brief, sir, without a frill:  
I pass for a blotter, but am a quill. 3010
- PEER My own history's brief, Mr Quill, soon perused:  
a blank sheet of paper that has never been used.
- HUSS People simply can't see what I'm suited for;  
they just want me for blotting and nothing more!
- PEER A silver-clasped book in a girl's hand was I; —  
being sane, being mad, it's the same printer's pie.
- HUSS Fancy, what a frustrating life;  
a quill, and not know the edge of a knife!
- PEER (*leaps high*) Fancy, a reindeer; leap with abandon,  
then down, always down — without firm ground to stand on! 3020
- HUSS A knife! I am blunt — please slit me and splice me!  
It's the end of the world if I'm not sharpened nicely.
- PEER It's a pity the world, like most things home-made,  
was considered by God as so very high-grade.
- BEGRIF Here's a knife!
- HUSS (*grabs*) Ah, how I shall lap the ink!  
What a rapture to sharpen oneself. (*cuts his throat*)
- BEGRIF (*moves aside*) Use the sink.
- PEER (*in rising panic*) Take hold of him!
- HUSS Hold of me! That's the caper!  
Hold! Hold the pen! A table and paper — ! (*falls*)  
I'm worn out. And P.S. — don't forget, if you will:  
he lived, and died, a remote-controlled quill! 3030
- PEER (*fainting*)  
What shall I — ? What am I? Almighty — hang on!  
I'm whatever you like, — a Turk, a bad man, —  
a hill-troll — ; but help; something seems to have gone — !  
(*shrieks*)  
Can't think of your name with all this going on; — —  
help me, you — guardian of every madman! \*  
(*sinks in a faint*)
- BEGRIF (*with a crown of straw in his hand leaps astride him*)  
Lo, behold how he rears in the mire; — —  
beside himself — ! Now he's crowned — all cheer!  
(*forces the crown onto his head and cries out*)  
Long live self's Emperor, our new sire!
- KEEPER (*in the cage*) Es lebe hoch der grosse Peer!

END OF ACT IV

## ACT V

*(Aboard a ship in the North Sea, off the Norwegian coast. Sunset. Storm brewing)*  
*(PEER GYNT, a sturdy old man with iron-grey hair and beard stands on the poop. He is half-dressed in seaman's gear, in jacket and high boots. His garments are rather worn and shabby; he is weather-beaten and his expression is harder. The SKIPPER stands by the helmsman at the wheel. The CREW are forward)*

PEER *(leans on the rail and stares towards land)*  
There's Hallingskarv in his winter show; — \* 3040  
he's basking, the old `un, in evening glow.  
His brother the glacier's beyond, askew;  
he's still wearing his cold green ice-cape too.  
Folgefonn, she's a lovely sight, —  
lies like a virgin in sheerest white.  
Let's have no fooling, old laddies, now — ban it!  
Stay where you are; you are crags of granite.

SKIPPER *(calling forward)*  
Two hands to the helm — and see to the light!

PEER It's blowing up.

SKIP There'll be storms tonight.

PEER Any chance, from the sea, of seeing the Ronde? 3050

SKIP Not likely; — beyond where the Fonn lies yonder.

PEER Or the Blaahøy?

SKIP No; but up in the rigging,  
given clear weather you'll see Galdhøypiggen.

PEER Which way is Haarteigen?

SKIP *(points)* Thereabout.

PEER I thought so.

SKIP You've known these parts, no doubt.

PEER When I started my travels, I sailed right past here,  
and it's dregs, as they say, lingers longest in beer.  
*(spits and stares at the coast)*  
In there, where a pass and a crag's hazy-blue, —  
where a dale shows up black, like a notch in the view, —  
and lower, down by the open fjord, — 3060  
*that's* where folk have their bed and board.  
*(glances at the skipper)*  
The homesteads spread thin here.

SKIP Ay, see what you mean,  
the houses are few and far between.

PEER Shall we make it by dawn?

SKIP Yes, with luck we might,  
if it's not settling in for too wild a night.

PEER It's thick in the west.

SKIP You're right.

PEER Stop there!  
When we're settling up later, making things square, —  
I've a mind, as they say, to do right by the crew,



a trifle —

SKIP Thank you!

PEER Not much, it's true.  
I've mined lots of gold, and lost what I found; — 3070  
fate and I, we're at odds all round.  
You know what I've got in the hold full well.  
That's the lot; — the rest of it's gone to hell.

SKIP That's more than enough to settle you in  
with the folk back home.

PEER But I've got no kin.  
There'll be no-one to meet this wealthy old cuss. —  
Well; that way one lands without bother and fuss!

SKIP Here comes the weather.

PEER Now don't forget, —  
if your people need helping, all or any,  
I'll not be strict about every penny — 3080

SKIP That's right handsome. It isn't a lot they get;  
they all have a missus at home and youngsters,  
and just on their wages — well, ends don't meet;  
but to take something home as an extra treat,  
that's a parting gift we'll remember amongst us.

PEER A missus, and youngsters, is that what you're saying?  
Are they married?

SKIP Married? All, by my tally.  
The one that's worst off is the cook in the galley;  
sheer hunger's a guest he always has staying.

PEER Married? With someone at home there who's waiting? 3090  
Who's glad for their coming? What?

SKIP That's right, —  
in poor people's fashion.

PEER Suppose it's at night,  
what then?

SKIP I imagine the missus creating  
a meal, something special, —

PEER A candlestick shining?  
SKIP Maybe there's two; and a dram while they're dining.  
PEER Then they sit there all snug? Keep warm by the fire?  
The children around them, the noise getting higher;  
there's not one of them hears out the other politely, —  
such glee there is in them — ?

SKIP That's certainly likely.  
And that's why that offer was handsome of you, — 3100  
to splash out a bit.

PEER (*smites the gunwale*) I'm damned if I do.  
Do you think I'm mad? Expect me to hand 'em  
money for other men's youngsters, at random?  
Just making my pile was a hard enough stint!  
Nobody's waiting for old Peer Gynt.

SKIP O well; as you like; it was you had to earn it.

PEER That's right! It's mine, not for others to burn it.

Settle as soon as you're anchored and riding!  
 My cabin-class passage from Panama.  
 Then a drink for the crew. I will go just that far. 3110  
 If I give any more, captain, give me a hiding!

SKIP A receipt, not a thrashing, is all I shall owe; —  
 and now, excuse me; we're in for a blow.  
*(goes forward. It has turned dark; a light goes on in the cabin.  
 Rising sea. Mist and thick cloud)*

PEER Clutter their homes with their rowdy young devils; —  
 stuff them with notions of pleasures and revels; —  
 have other folk's thoughts keep them company — !  
 There's never anyone thinks about me.  
 Candlelit table? That's a light I'll be saving!  
 I shall come up with something — I shall get them all raving; —  
 not one of the rogues shall land sober, so there. 3120  
 Tight, they'll go tight to greet wives and their kiddies!  
 They'll bang on the table-top, curse and swear, —  
 frighten the wits out of waiting old biddies.  
 Wives will run screaming from home, for good measure, — —  
 clutching their kids! That'll ruin their pleasure!  
*(the ship heels heavily; he stumbles and has difficulty staying  
 on his feet)*  
 Well, that was a regular knock-down — took ages.  
 Sea's on the go like it's working for wages; —  
 They're still their old selves, these Northern approaches; —  
 sea on the beam, and the ship nearly broaches —  
*(listens)* What yelling was that?

LOOKOUT *(forward)* A wreck to lee! 3130  
 SKIP *(midships, giving commands)*  
 HELMSMAN Helm hard to larboard! Head her up if she will!  
 Are there men on the wreck?  
 LOOK I spotted three.  
 PEER Then lower the boat —  
 SKIP If we did it would fill. *(goes forward)*  
 PEER Who thinks about that? *(to some of the crew)*  
 Give a hand if you're men!  
 What the hell if your hide gets a drench now and then —  
 BOSUN Just can't be done in a sea like that.  
 PEER The wind's dying down! There's another yell —  
 cook, will you risk it? Quick! I'll pay well —  
 COOK No, not for twenty pounds sterling, that's flat.  
 PEER You curs, you! You cowards! Have you forgotten 3140  
 these are folk who have wives and young kids they've begotten!  
 They're sitting and waiting —  
 BOSUN Don't fret — be advised.  
 SKIP Bear away from that surf there!  
 HELM The wreck has capsized.  
 PEER Was it over so fast — ?  
 BOSUN If they're married, as you reckoned,  
 then the world's got three brand new widows this second.

(*storm builds and Peer moves astern*)

PEER There's no faith amongst men any more, I guess, — \*  
Christianity's gone, as once preached and respected; —  
small good they do, they pray even less,  
and regard for the powers above's quite neglected. —  
In a storm like tonight he's a menace, the Almighty. 3150  
The brutes should take care and reflect. And there's relevance  
in the truth that it's risky, is playing with elephants; — —  
yet they openly cross Him, get cheeky and flighty!  
I'm not to blame; when things couldn't be worse,  
I'm able to prove I was there with my purse.  
What reward did I get? — It says, the old lore:  
"A conscience that's clear makes a comfortable pillow."  
O yes, that may hold for the life ashore  
but it don't mean a thing afloat any more,  
where the decent man's lumped with the scum on the billow. 3160  
You're never really yourself when afloat;  
you must do as the rest do, right through the boat;  
if vengeance strikes for the bosun and crew  
then I'm bound to end up in the drink with them too; —  
one's personal needs are pushed to one side —  
one rates as a sausage at pig-slaughter-tide. —  
My mistake's been to have kept much too calm.  
And a fat lot of thanks I've got for my trouble.  
A bit younger, I think I'd have chanced my arm,  
and thrown my weight about, laid it on double. 3170  
And there's time enough! It'll spread through the quarter  
that Peer Gynt has flown through the air across water!  
I'll get back the farm by foul means or fair; —  
I'll rebuild; it'll shine like a palace up there.  
But no-one allowed to come in, not one mortal!  
They can stand twisting caps there in front of the portal; —  
begging and whining, that's theirs for free;  
but nobody's getting a penny from me, — —  
for if I've had to squeal to Fate's lambasting,  
they'll pretty soon find I can do my own pasting — — 3180

THE STRANGE PASSENGER (*stands in the darkness beside Peer Gynt  
and greets him in a friendly manner*)  
Good evening!

PEER Good — eh? And who might you be?  
S.P. I'm your fellow-passenger — how do you do?  
PEER Indeed? I wasn't aware there were two.  
S.P. A false assumption, put right, as you see.  
PEER But it's queer that I've not — before tonight —  
set eyes on you.

S.P. Daylight I shun altogether.  
PEER You're white as a sheet. Are you under the weather?  
S.P. No, thank you for asking — I'm quite alright.  
PEER The storm's getting up.  
S.P. Yes, a glorious blow!

PEER                   Glorious?  
S.P.                   Billows the size of some houses.                   3190  
Ah, it makes one's mouth water! Grand!  
Think of the wrecks in the storm tonight rouses; —  
and think of the bodies cast up on the land!

PEER                   Great heaven forbid!  
S.P.                   Have you seen someone choke —  
a hanged man — or drowned?

PEER                   That's beyond any joke — !  
S.P.                   Corpses laugh. But they laugh perforce;  
and most will have bitten their tongues, of course.

PEER                   Leave me alone!  
S.P.                   Just one question, brief.  
If we, for example, ran on a reef  
and sank in the darkness —

PEER                   You think that it's likely?                   3200  
S.P.                   I'm really not sure how to answer that rightly.  
But what if I stay afloat and you sink —

PEER                   Ah, rot —  
S.P.                   Just suppose — it could be, don't you think?  
But standing one foot in the grave, one might find  
one was dishing out gifts in a positive lather.

PEER                   (*grabs for his pocket*) Ho, money!  
S.P.                   No, but please be so kind  
as to make me a gift of your honoured cadaver.

PEER                   That's going too far!  
S.P.                   Just the corpse, you take me?  
To help my research —

PEER                   Get away! You can't make me — —  
S.P.                   But think, my dear chap, — you will profit this way!                   3210  
I shall lay you open to the light of day.  
What I'm looking for, really, is the seat of dreams, —  
and while I'm at it, I'll check all your seams —

PEER                   Get thee hence!  
S.P.                   My dear fellow — a torso, drowned — !  
PEER                   Blasphemer! You're stirring the storm I'll be bound!  
It is utterly mad! Here's this squall and rain,  
a tremendous sea, lots of signs making plain  
we're going to be topped in some awful disaster;  
and you're thinking of ways you can bring it on faster!

S.P.                   You are not in the mood for discussion that ranges;                   3220  
but time can bring, of course, so many changes — —  
(*takes leave in a friendly fashion*)  
We'll meet as you're drowning, if not before;  
perhaps in a mood when you don't feel so sore. (*goes below*)

PEER                   They're weird, those researchers, they're really the end!  
Free thinkers the lot —  
(*to the Bosun, who is passing*) just a word, my friend!  
Who's the passenger? What sort of lunatic's he?

BOSUN               You're the only one, according to me.

PEER                   No-one else? It gets worse and worse every minute.  
*(to the ship's boy who comes out of the cabin)*  
 Who's that in the cabin?

BOY   Ship's dog, sir, he's in it. *(passes on)* \*

LOOK                   *(calls out)* Land hard ahead!

PEER   My boxes, my case!   3230

  All luggage on deck!

BOSUN                                        We've got worse things to face.

PEER                   I was joking, Captain! Just foolery like; —  
 why of course I'll help the cook, more than a morsel —

SKIPPER                Storm jib's away!

HELM                                        And there went the fores'l!

BOSUN                *(yells out forward)*  
 Breakers ahead!

SKIPPER                Then she's bound to strike.  
*(the ship strikes. Din and confusion)*

*(Close to land, amongst reefs and surf. The ship is sinking. Through the fog there is a glimpse of the dinghy with two men in it. A breaker swamps it; it turns over; there is a shriek; then everything is silent for a while. Soon afterwards the keel comes into view)*

*(Peer Gynt surfaces near the hull)*

PEER                   Help! Send a boat! I'm done for! This way!  
 Save me, o Lord — as the scriptures say! \*  
*(grabs hold of the keel)*

COOK                   *(surfaces on the other side)*  
 Merciful God, — for my kids — I implore,  
 be kind! And let me reach the shore!  
*(holds on to the keel)*

PEER                   Let go!

COOK                                        Let go!

PEER                                        I'll hit — !

COOK                                        I'll hit back!   3240

PEER                   I'll fetch you such a nasty whack!  
 Let go! The hull won't take us both!

COOK                   I know that. Let go!

PEER                                        You let go!

COOK                                        My oath!  
*(they fight; the Cook damages one hand.; he holds on tight with the other)*

PEER                   Let go your hold!

COOK                                        O spare me — spare — !  
 Think of my babes at home back there!

PEER                   I need my life much more than you do,  
 for I'm still childless, not like you.

COOK                   Let go! You've lived your life; I'm young!

PEER                   Quick! Go on; drown! — you weigh a ton.

COOK                   Have pity! Go, in heaven's name!   3250

  There's no-one grieves for you the same —

(screams, lets go)  
 I'm drowning — !  
 PEER (grabs hold) Got you by the scruff!  
 I'll hold, you pray — the Lord's Prayer's enough!  
 COOK I can't remember — ; all going black — —  
 PEER Just essentials, — cut the slack — !  
 COOK Give us this day — !  
 PEER Just skip that, Cook;  
 you'll get all you need, the way things look.  
 COOK Give us this day — !  
 PEER The same old tune!  
 That marks you for a cook, you loon — (*looses his hold*)  
 COOK (*sinking*)  
 Give us this day — (*goes under*)  
 PEER Amen, my friend. 3260  
 You were yourself, right to the end. —  
 (*pulls himself onto the hull*)  
 Well, where there's life there's hope, no doubt —  
 STRANGE PASSENGER (*takes hold of the boat*)  
 Good morning!  
 PEER Ugh!  
 S.P. I heard a shout; —  
 how very nice my meeting you.  
 Well? Wasn't my prediction true?  
 PEER Get off! There's hardly room for one!  
 S.P. My left leg's swimming here like fun.  
 I can keep afloat quite nicely  
 with one finger placed precisely.  
 Your corpse, though, by the by —  
 PEER Not on! 3270  
 S.P. But all the rest's completely gone —  
 PEER Oh, shut your mouth!  
 S.P. Just as you please.  
  
 (*silence*)  
 PEER Well then — ?  
 S.P. I've shut.  
 PEER That's satan's ruse —  
 you've come to — ?  
 S.P. Wait.  
 PEER (*tears his hair*) I'll go insane!  
 What are you?  
 S.P. (*nods*) Friendly!  
 PEER More! Explain!  
 S.P. Just think now? Do you know another  
 like me?  
 PEER The fiend — could be your brother!  
 S.P. Does *he* light candles then to brighten  
 life's dark way when terrors frighten?

PEER I see! When things are viewed aright, 3280  
are you a messenger of light? \*

S.P. Friend — have you ever, say half-yearly,  
known what terror is, sincerely?

PEER A man gets scared when things turn sticky; —  
but what you're saying's sort of tricky —

S.P. Well, have you in your lifetime known  
the triumph won through dread alone?

PEER (*looks at him*) If you've come opening a door, \*  
it's daft you didn't come before. 3290  
Your timing's strange, it's strange I think,  
to choose the moment one could sink.

S.P. Would triumph's likelihood be higher  
in peace and comfort by your fire?

PEER Alright; — but what you said was ironic.  
How d'you expect it to act as a tonic?

S.P. Where I come from, we rate a smile  
as high as the pathetic style.

PEER A season for all things; what suits a publican, \*  
as scripture says, is wrong for a suffragan.

S.P. The host that sleep in urns, now clay, 3300  
don't wear their buskins every day.

PEER Get thee hence, scarecrow! Hop it, man!  
I will not die! I must reach land!

S.P. Where that's concerned, — why, man alive,  
one doesn't die in mid-act five!  
(*he glides away*)

PEER At last it came, the final twist; —  
he was a boring moralist.

(*A churchyard in a high-lying mountain district*)

(*Funeral service. Priest and public. The last verse of a hymn is being sung.*  
*PEER GYNT passes by outside on the road*)

PEER (*at the gate*)  
The way of all flesh for this yokel, I see.  
God be praised that it isn't for me. (*he enters*)

PRIEST (*speaking at the graveside*)  
And as the soul now stands before its God, 3310  
and only dust remains, an empty pod, —  
a word, dear friends, to indicate the worth  
of the departed's sojourn on this earth.  
He was not rich, nor great of understanding,  
his voice was meek, his manner not commanding,  
opinions he made weakly, feebly known,  
scarce ruled his household though it was his own;  
he entered church as though he had entreated  
permission, like the others, to be seated.  
He came from Gudbrandsdal, as well you know. 3320

And when he moved here, he was just a lad;  
and you'll recall the way he always had —  
of pocketing his right hand, not for show.

That right hand in the pocket was the feature  
that stamped the whole man's image on one's mind, —  
and then his bashfulness — the cringing creature  
that would, on entering, always lag behind.

But though he chose a quiet life of drudging,  
and though he stayed a stranger in our midst,  
you knew full well, in spite of all his fudging, 3330  
he'd but four fingers on his hidden fist. —

I well recall a morning long ago, —  
Lord knows how long —; the Lunde board in session. —  
It was in war time. All shared an obsession  
with our land's suffering and how things might go.

And I was present. At the table sat  
the captain, N.C.O's, administration;  
lad after lad was called for registration,  
signed as enlisted men, and that was that.  
The room was crammed, outside one heard loud laughing 3340  
where youngsters filled the courtyard with their chaffing.

A name was called. A fresh lad to emerge,  
one pale as snow upon the glacier's verge.  
They called him nearer; he approached the table; —  
the right hand was kept covered in a clout; —  
he gasped and gulped and groped for words, unable  
to find his voice, though ordered to speak out.  
But finally he spoke; his cheek was burning,  
his tongue now faltering, off now at a clip —  
he mumbled something, — accident, a slip — 3350  
a finger severed by a sickle turning.

And at that instant all the room fell still.  
Looks were exchanged; lips tightening spoke their fill;  
they stoned the youngster with their silent gazing.  
He might not see the hail, but felt it grazing.  
And then the captain rose, grey haired and slow; —  
he spat and pointing to the door said, "Go!"

And go he did. On either hand they parted,  
so that the middle formed a gauntlet-lane; —  
he reached the door; then ran with might and main; — 3360  
he headed up, — through groves and fields, then started  
to climb the wilderness of scattered boulders.  
His home lay hidden by the mountain shoulders.

He moved here six months later, more or less,  
with wife-to-be, his babe-in-arms, his mother. \*  
He leased some land high up, somewhere or other,  
where Lom forms frontier with the wilderness.  
He married just as soon he ever could;  
broke stubborn ground; and there a house soon stood;  
he got on well, as many a patch soon told 3370



that rippled with a brave display of gold; —  
 he hid his right hand when he came to pray, —  
 no doubt, though, those nine fingers, home again,  
 toiled just as hard as other people's ten. —  
 Then floods one spring swept everything away.

Their lives were spared. Poor, naked, improvising  
 he set once more to clear himself a plot, —  
 come autumn-time the smoke was once more rising —  
 above a hill-farm in a safer spot.

But safe? From flood, yes — not from glacier though; 3380  
 inside two years it lay beneath the snow.

And yet no avalanche could cow his mettle.  
 He dug, he cleaned, he carted, cleared the mess, —  
 before next winter's snow began to settle,  
 there rose his humble house, the third, no less.

He had three lively sons, and well they boded;  
 they needed schooling; long the trek to class;  
 a case of getting to the parish road-head,  
 by way of an abrupt and narrow pass. 3390  
 What did he do? The eldest was left coping  
 as best he could, and where the sheer, steep track  
 was bad, his father helped him out by roping; —  
 the others, in his arms and on his back.

So through the years he toiled; they grew to men.  
 He might expect some small repayment then.  
 Three prosperous New-World gentlemen had rather  
 forget their school-treks, their Norwegian father.

Short-sighted, yes. Saw nothing there, mere symbols,  
 outside the circle of his nearest kin. 3400  
 They sounded vain to him as tinkling cymbals, \*  
 those ringing words that hearts should revel in.  
 Folk, Fatherland, high, splendid verities  
 stood always veiled and clouded from his eyes.

But he was humble, humble all the same;  
 the memory of that session stuck, — guilt-ridden  
 as surely then as when he'd blushed for shame  
 and kept four fingers pocketed, well hidden. —  
 A malefactor by our law's decree?  
 Indeed! But one thing shines above the law 3410  
 as sure as Glittertind's bright canopy  
 is over-topped by clouds that higher soar.  
 He was no citizen. For church and nation  
 a useless tree. But on that upland shelf, \*  
 absorbed in family and occupation,  
 there he was great, because he was himself.  
 He kept his innate tone without a flaw.  
 His life was lute-play where the strings were muted.  
 So peace be with you, warrior unsaluted,  
 who strove and fell, in the peasant's petty war!

We'll not try hearts and reins as arbitrators — \* 3420

that is no task for clay, but its Creator's; —  
I end on this clear, sure, and hopeful chord:  
it is no cripple stands before his Lord!

*(The congregation disperses and leaves.*

*Peer Gynt stays behind, alone)*

PEER

Now *that's* what I call Christianity, look!

There's nothing to seize the mind terrifyingly. —

The theme, about being oneself undyingly, —

the line the preacher's sermon there took, —

works in its way, by and large, edifyingly.

*(looks down into the grave)*

Was it him, perhaps, who hacked off his finger

the day I was out in the woods felling timber? 3430

Who knows? If I didn't happen to stand

on the edge of this soul-brother's grave, stick in hand,

I'd easily think that the sleeper was I,

my dreams come true being praised so high. —

No, it really is nice, the Christian stance,

of casting a sort of backward glance

over the life of the dead with compassion.

I'd have nothing against being judged in that fashion

by the parish priest in his worthy way.

Still, there's a while left, I'm sure, of my ration, 3440

before the sexton invites me to stay; —

and "leave well alone" as the scriptures say, —

"sufficient unto the day", *that* one's heard, — \*

and "don't buy your funeral on tick" makes a third. —

It's still the church that consoles and rejoices.

I haven't regarded it specially before; —

but now I can see the advantage more,

of hearing it maintained by experienced voices:

"even as you sow, you shall reap" — of our choices. — \*

One must be oneself; must allow first call 3450

to you and yours in both great and in small.

If luck turns against you, one's honoured for opting

to live in accord with that learned doctrine. —

Now home! Let the journey be steep and strait; \*

let Fate keep behaving with spite as it may; —

good old Peer Gynt gangs his own sweet gait

and stays what he is; poor, but honest as day. *(he goes)*

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*(A slope with a dried-up river-bed. The ruin of a mill by the river; shattered foundation; devastation all round. Higher up, a large farmhouse)*

*(Up by the farmhouse an auction is being held. A LARGE CROWD gathered.*

*Drinking and noise. PEER GYNT sits on a heap of stones by the mill site)*

*[Amongst the crowd, a MAN IN MOURNING (Aslak) and a MAN IN GREY (Mads Moen) — translator's note]*

PEER

Backwards and on, it's as long a gait; \*

out and in, it is just as strait. —  
 Time consumes, streams scour, I fear. 3460  
 Go round said the Bøyg; one has to here; —  
 MAN IN MOURNING  
 Now there's just rubbish left at the end.  
*(catches sight of Peer Gynt)*  
 Are there strangers here too? God bless you, my friend!  
 PEER Good day! It seems pretty lively with you.  
 Is it christening party or wedding do?  
 MOURN I'd rather describe it in house-warming terms; —  
 the bride's abed in a nest of worms.  
 PEER And the worms are fighting for scraps and pieces?  
 MOURN It's the end of the song; it's how it ceases.  
 PEER The self-same ending all songs have had; 3470  
 and all of them old; I knew them as a lad.  
 YOUTH 1 *(with a casting ladle)*  
 Look what I've bought — it was too good to miss!  
 Peer Gynt used to cast silver buttons in this.  
 YOUTH 2 How's this, then, a shilling for a money-bag!  
 YOUTH 3 Is that all? Half-a-crown for a peddler's swag!  
 PEER Peer Gynt? Who was he?  
 MOURN An in-law, let's say,  
 to the woman who's dead and the smith in a way.  
 MAN IN GREY You're leaving me out! You're drunk, that's for sure.  
 MOURN You're forgetting Hægstad's store-house door!  
 GREY That's right; but then you were never fussy. 3480  
 MOURN So long as she doesn't fool Death, too, the hussy! —  
 GREY Come kinsman! A dram for kinship's sake!  
 MOURN Kinship be damned! You've had all you can take —  
 GREY O rubbish; blood isn't ever that thin.  
 We all know very well that Peer Gynt is our kin.  
*(takes him off)*  
 PEER *(quietly)* One meets one's acquaintances.  
 BOY 1 *(shouts after the man in mourning)* Your poor Ma  
 will be after you, Aslak if you swill like a pig.  
 PEER *(gets up)*  
 The agronomist's saying's not reached here so far:  
 the smell is sweeter the deeper you dig.  
 BOY 1 *(with bear skin)*  
 The cat from the Dovre! Well, just the hide. 3490  
 It's the one chased the troll at Christmas-tide.  
 BOY 2 *(with a reindeer skull)*  
 Here's the marvellous reindeer that took  
 Peer Gynt along Gjendin's knife-edge, look!  
 BOY 3 *(with a sledge hammer, calls after the man in mourning)*  
 Hi, Aslak — remember this hammer at all?  
 Was it that one you used when the fiend smashed your wall?  
 BOY 4 *(empty handed)*  
 Mads Moen — here's the invisible jerkin!  
 Peer Gynt and Ingrid flew off through its working!

PEER            Brandy, lads, please! I feel just a bit old! —  
I must have an auction, every scrap to be sold!

BOY 1            And what have you got?

PEER                            I've a palace to sell; —                            3500  
it stands in the Ronde; substantial as well.

BOY 1            One button is bid!

PEER                            You might stretch to a dram.  
A lower bid isn't worth a damn.

BOY 2            He's a card, the old'un! (*they crowd around*)

PEER            (*calling out*)            Grane, my horse; —  
who's bidding?

VOICE IN THE CROWD    Where is he?

PEER                            Westward of course!  
For the sunset, my laddies! That nag is a flyer,  
as quick, as quick as Peer Gynt was a liar.

VOICES            What else have you got?

PEER                            Some gold and some dross!  
It was bought with a shipwreck; it sells at a loss.

BOY 1            Call it!

PEER                            A dream of a silver-clasped book!                            3510  
Yours for the price of a button hook.

BOY 1            To hell with dreams!

PEER                            My Emperordom!  
I'll toss it to the mob; you can brawl in the scrum!

BOY 1            Does the crown come too?

PEER                            Of the loveliest straw.  
The first man to wear it, it'll fit him what's more.  
Look, something else! An egg that's blown!  
A mad-man's grey hair! Prophet's beard, as shown!  
All to the man who can point me today  
the sign in the wilderness saying: "This way"!

BAILIFF            (*who has come up*)  
The way you're behaving, my man, I'd think                            3520  
your road leads directly to the clink.

PEER            (*hat in hand*)  
Quite likely. But tell me, who was Peer Gynt?

BAIL            You're joking —

PEER                            O please! I beg you, a hint — !

BAIL            O, a terrible yarn-spinner — such his repute is.

PEER            A spinner — ?

BAIL                            Yes — everything under the sun  
he'd cobble together as marvels *he'd* done.  
But pardon, friend — I have other duties — (*goes*)

PEER            And where is he now, this remarkable man?

ELDER            He went off abroad to a foreign land;  
things didn't go right, as one might expect; —                            3530  
it's years now since he was hung by the neck.

PEER            Hung? My, my! but on *this* I'll stand fast;  
Peer Gynt, though he died, was himself to the last. (*takes his leave*)  
Goodbye — and thanks for a pleasant day!

*(takes a few steps but stops again)*

You lovely ladies, you sparky young gentry, —  
will you hear a tall story by way of pay?

SEVERAL Yes, d’you know one?

PEER

There’s nought to prevent me. —

*(he moves closer; a strange expression comes over him)*

In San Francisco I dug after gold. \*

The city crammed, all the freaks it could hold.

One scraped the fiddle — with his toes, if you please; 3540

another danced sarabands, down on his knees;

a third one recited in verse, it was said,

while having a drill driven clean through his head.

The devil, too, joined this freakish ruck; —

he wanted, like others, to try his luck.

His line was this: — in a lifelike stunt,

he’d mimic a genuine porker’s grunt.

Though he wasn’t a name, his persona drew.

The house was full, expectation grew.

He came on in a cape of swirling habit; 3550

*man muss sich drapieren*, as the Germans have it.

But under the cloak — and quite unsuspected —

he’s managed to sneak in a pig undetected.

And now commenced the presentation.

The devil’s pinch, the pig’s remonstrations.

The whole thing produced as a fantasy

on porcine existence, imprisoned and free;

to end with, a shriek as the slaughterman slew; —

there the artist, respectfully bowing, withdrew. —

Experts debated and judged several ways; 3560

the performance was greeted with censure and praise; —

one thought the vocal expression too blunt;

another, the death-shriek too glibly expressive; —

but all were agreed on one thing — that qua grunt,

there the performance was wholly excessive. —

So that’s what he got for being so dense

and for not sizing up his audience.

*(he takes his leave. An uneasy silence falls over the crowd)*

*(Whitsun Eve. — Deep in the forest. At a distance, in a clearing, a hut with reindeer horns on the door-gable)*

*(PEER GYNT crawls into the clearing and gathers wild onions)*

PEER Now here’s one situation. What is the next one? —

Try them all first then pick the least vexed one.

That’s what I’ve done — from as high up as Caesar 3570

and down to the level of Nebuchadnezzar. \*

So I’ve had, after all, to consult bible history.

The boy must return to his Ma, old and whiskery!

Besides, it’s written: “from earth art thou come.” — \*

All that matters in life is to fill your tum.  
 Fill it with onions? That's hardly sustaining! —  
 I'll set snares, use cunning — I've had the training.  
 There's a stream for water; I shan't die of thirst,  
 and amongst the wild creatures I ought to rank first.  
 When I have to die — that's as sure as can be — 3580  
 I shall worm my way under a wind-felled tree;  
 I'll heap me with leaves, it's the bruin's prescription,  
 and I'll carve in great letters on bark the inscription:  
 "Here lies Peer Gynt, a good fellow indeed,  
 Emperor supreme of the animal breed." —  
 Emperor? (*chuckles to himself*)

Why, you old shyster, you knew  
 you were never an Emperor; an onion, that's you.  
 Now I shall skin you, my dear little Peer!  
 You can holler or beg but it won't help you here.  
 (*takes an onion and peels it layer by layer*)  
 There goes the outer, the tattered old skin; 3590  
 that's the castaway clutching the wreck he was in.  
 Then the travelling wrap — it still carries a hint,  
 though scrawny and thin, of a taste of Peer Gynt.  
 Underneath that, there's the gold prospector;  
 lost all its juice, if any, that sector.  
 And this skin that's coarse in a tough, hard way,  
 that's the fur trade hunter from Hudson Bay.  
 The next one resembles a crown; — thanks, but no!  
 We'll chuck that without more ado, it can go.  
 Archaeologist next, he is short but snappy. 3600  
 And here comes the prophet, fresh and sappy.  
 He stinketh, as scripture has it, of lies, \*  
 fit to bring tears to all honest men's eyes.  
 Now this skin that curls with effeminate guile,  
 that's the gentleman, living it up in style.  
 Black streaks on the next one. Looks rotten right through; —  
 black can mean priest and mean negro too.  
 (*strips off several layers at once*)  
 The number of skins there are hidden away!  
 Time that the heart saw the light of day!  
 (*tears the whole onion to pieces*)  
 I'm damned if it does! To the very interior — 3610  
 the same old skins, only thin and inferior. —  
 Nature is witty! (*throws away the remains*)

To hell with this grumbling!  
 Let yourself think, and the next thing you're stumbling.  
 Well, I can laugh at the thought of falling,  
 for I've touched rock-bottom, I'm already crawling.  
 (*scratches his neck*)  
 All such a mess, it's hard to conceive!  
 Life as it's called has a card up its sleeve. \*  
 But try to grab it, and the fox is away,

and you've drawn something other — or nothing, to play.  
*(he has come near the hut, catches sight of it and starts)*

What's that hut? On the moor there — !

*(rubs his eyes)*

Ha! It's as though 3620

I should know that building from long ago. —

Reindeer antlers to set off the gable — — !

A mermaid, that's shaped like a fish from the navel — !

Lies! There's no mermaid! — Just nails, — some planking, —  
 bolts, to bar pixie-buck thoughts at their pranking — !

SOLVEIG *(sings inside the house)*

All is now ready for Whitsun-tide.

Will my long-lost boy be coming, —  
 back to my side?

If your burdens weight you,

then rest you now; —

3630

I shall await you,

my parting vow.

PEER *(stands up, quiet and deathly pale)*

One who remembered — and one who forgot.

One who has squandered — and one has not. —

It's real! — This isn't a game to be played!

Good grief! — My empire was *here* if I'd stayed!

*(runs away along the forest track)*

*(Night. — A pine-barren. A forest fire has devastated it. Charred tree-trunks for miles around. White mist here and there over the forest floor)*

*(PEER GYNT runs in across the heath)*

PEER Ashes, mist, dust scattered wide, —

building stuff galore — but, ugh!

stench and rottenness inside;

one great whited sepulchre. \*

3640

Poems, dreams, stale education

form the pyramid's foundation;

and from this the work shall rise

in a stairway build of lies.

From the top, a slogan flying

“Shun repentance, stick to lying,”

swells the last trump, then, to grace it:

“Petrus Gyntus Caesar fecit!”

*(listens)*

What's that sound of childish grieving?

Grief, but halfway to a song. —

3650

Underfoot there's threadballs weaving — ! *(lashes out)*

Give me room, now! Get along!

THREADBALLS *(on the ground)*

We are thoughts;

you should have thought us; —

tootsie sorts

of feet have brought us!  
 PEER *(going round them)*  
 I gave life to someone once; —  
 a botched-up, crook-legged, crippled dunce.

THREADBALLS We should have gone soaring  
 with voices befitting, — 3660  
 and here we crawl, boring  
 as balls of grey knitting.

PEER *(stumbles)*  
 Thread-ball, you infernal pup!  
 D’you want to trip your father up? *(runs away)*

WITHERED LEAVES *(flying before the wind)*  
 We are a war-cry  
 you should have made rousing!  
 See, now we’re small fry,  
 plucked while we’re drowsing!  
 The worm has devoured  
 our every shoot; 3670  
 we were never empowered  
 to garland fruit.

PEER O, your birth still signifies; —  
 just lie there and fertilise!

SIGHING IN THE AIR  
 We’re songs that chime;  
 you should have sung us!  
 Many’s the time  
 you’ve wrought havoc among us.  
 We could not provoke you,  
 we’ve lain there neglected; — 3680  
 we were never selected.  
 May your bile choke you!

PEER Bile yourself, you stupid rhyme.  
 Verse and stuff’s not worth my time!  
*(tries a short cut)*

DEW DROPS *(dripping from the branches)*  
 We are tears  
 that had no falling.  
 Could have melted spears  
 of ice that were galling.  
 The barb’s in your breast now,  
 a fate to endure; 3690  
 the wound can’t be dressed now;  
 it’s past our cure.

PEER Thanks; — I cried in Ronde’s hall, —  
 still got the tail though, after all!

BROKEN STRAWS  
 We are actions;  
 you should have endeavoured us!  
 Doubts, distractions  
 have crippled and severed us.



We shall crowd to the sessions  
 on Judgement Day, 3700  
 denounce your transgressions, —  
 and then you'll pay!

PEER Scoundrels! Are you not ashamed?  
 What, charges *negatively* framed?  
*(hurries away)*

AASE'S VOICE *(far away)*  
 Idiot! Drive decently!  
 Phew! How you've battered me!  
 Snow fell here recently; —  
 see how it's spattered me. —  
 Drove like the deuce, too.  
 The castle — where was it? 3710  
 The devil seduced you  
 that stick from the closet!

PEER All a wretch can do is run.  
 Bear the devil's sins, and one  
 soon finds that one's own back is breaking; —  
 your own are quite an undertaking.  
*(runs off ...)*

—————

*(Another stretch of the heath)*

PEER *(sings)*  
 A sexton! A sexton! Where are you, hounds?  
 A peal of baying bell-mouthed sounds;  
 a strip of crape for the hat on my head; —  
 I have many a corpse; I must follow the dead! 3720  
*(the BUTTON MOULDER, with tool-box and a big ladle,  
 comes in from a side path)*

BUTTON MOULDER  
 Well met, old gaffer! \*

PEER Good evening to you!

B.M. The man's in a hurry. I wonder where to!

PEER A wake.

B.M. O really? My sight's a bit queer; —  
 excuse me, — your name, I suppose, isn't Peer?

PEER Peer Gynt, as they call me.

B.M. My luck's in, alright!  
 It's precisely Peer Gynt I'm collecting tonight.

PEER O, are you? What for then?

B.M. You'll see, very soon;  
 I'm a button moulder. You're due in my spoon.

PEER And what when I'm in it?

B.M. You'll be melted, I mean.

PEER Melted?

B.M. It's here, look, quite empty and clean. 3730  
 Your grave's been dug, your coffin's on file.

Your corpse will provide for the worms in style; —  
but I am here, by command of my Master  
to fetch your soul — at once, if not faster.

PEER What! Without warning? For heaven's sakes — !

B.M. There's an ancient convention at births and at wakes  
for the day to be quietly fixed as seems best,  
not the slightest hint to the principal guest.

PEER Of course. I'm slow off the mark — getting older.  
So you are — ?

B.M. You heard me; — a button moulder. 3740

PEER Of course! There's many a name for a pet!  
So, Peer; that's the place you'll end up in yet!  
But this, old chap, is completely unfair!  
I'm sure I deserve milder treatment, and care; —  
and I'm not quite so wild as you might conceive, —  
done some good on this earth, I'd have you believe;  
the worst you'd call me is a bungling no-winner, —  
but not, absolutely, an exceptional sinner.

B.M. Now, *there's* the nub, man, at all events:  
you aren't a sinner, in the highest sense; 3750  
*that's* why you're spared the torments of hell,  
ending up in the ladle with others as well.

PEER Ladle or pit — you can play with the name;  
mild or bitter, it's beer all the same.  
Behind me Satan

B.M. You are never so coarse  
as to think I trot round on the hoof of a horse?

PEER On horse's hoof or on fox's pad, — \*  
hop it; and watch what you're at, old lad!

B.M. My friend, you're under a big delusion. 3760  
We're both pushed for time, so for quick conclusion  
let me explain the essential case.  
You've shown, as I've learnt from your lips, no trace  
of first-rate, so-called thorough-paced sinning, —  
why, hardly middling —

PEER You see, you're beginning  
to talk some sense —

B.M. Yes but wait a bit; —  
to call you virtuous would be stretching it —

PEER And neither would I want to make that claim.

B.M. So something between, then, so-so-ish and tame.  
A sinner of truly grandiose kind 3770  
isn't met with these days on the high road you'll find;  
it takes more than mere mud that you've wallowed in;  
you need dedication and strength for a sin.

PEER Your remarks are correct, yes, they give one to ponder;  
one has to charge in like Berserkers back yonder. \*

B.M. But you, my good friend, took your sinning lightly.

PEER On the surface, my friend, a bit muddied, but slightly.

B.M. Now we're agreed that eternal fire

is not for the man who has dabbled in mire —  
PEER Does it follow, my friend, I can leave as I came?  
B.M. No, it follows, my friend, you must melt in my flame. 3780  
PEER What sort of a trick have you hit on, what wheeze  
at home here, while I've been overseas?  
B.M. The method's as old as the Serpent, of course, is,  
and it's meant to avoid the waste of resources.  
Now, you know the trade, know that often it's sunk  
to producing casts little better than junk;  
sometimes the buttons are short of their shank.  
Now, what did you do?  
PEER I scrapped it as trash.  
B.M. Of course; Jon Gynt was well known for his swank,  
so long as he'd notes in his wallet to flash. 3790  
The Master, though, he will horde every scrap;  
and that is why he's a wealthy chap.  
To throw scrap away he would find inconceivable  
where the raw material might be retrievable.  
You were ordained as a button that shone  
on the coat of the world — but your shank has gone;  
and so for you it's the reject dump,  
there to be rendered (we say) in the lump.  
PEER You'll never intend I'll be poured in a brew  
with Tom, Dick and Harry, to make something new? 3800  
B.M. Yes, 'pon my soul that's just what I plan!  
That's what we've done with many a man.  
The Mint melts down coins, it's the same operation,  
if the stamp's worn smooth by prolonged circulation.  
PEER But that's so horribly skinflint and measly!  
Won't you release me, dear friend, just to please me? —  
A button that's loopless, a smooth-worn penny,  
what use to a man like your Master — if any?  
B.M. Depending on whether one's blessed with a soul  
one's scrap-metal value keeps up, on the whole. 3810  
PEER No, I say! No! I'll claw like a cat  
to stop it! Anything rather than that.  
B.M. But anything what? Use your brain. Heaven-material?  
You're not the right stuff, you lack the ethereal —  
PEER I'm modest. I wasn't aiming so high; —  
but I'll not let a scrap of myself be put by.  
I demand to be tried by the old jurisdiction! —  
Give me a stretch with Old Nick on conviction; —  
a century, say, at the worst; that's a scandal,  
but it's something one could probably handle; 3820  
for the anguish is only moral, not physical,  
and so not long-lasting, it's less pyramidal.  
A passing phase, as the scriptures say \*  
and the fox declared; — one just waits, the day  
of deliverance will come if one singe small  
and meanwhile one hopes better days will befall. —

This other thing's different — this having to end  
 as a speck in a quite inappropriate blend, —  
 all this ladle nonsense, this Gynt-ending notion —  
 it's setting the depths of my soul in commotion! 3830

B.M. Peer, my dear chap, no reason at all  
 to make such a fuss about something so small.  
 You've never been really yourself, as such; —  
 so if you should die, will it matter much?

PEER What, *I've* never — ? What! I could nearly split!  
 Peer Gynt's been something else, is that it?  
 No, button moulder, you're judging blind.  
 If you could examine my heart and reins \*  
 you'd come across Peer, only Peer remains,  
 there's nothing else or different you'd find. 3840

B.M. That just isn't possible. Here's my direction.  
 Look, it's in writing: "Peer Gynt for collection.  
 He's broken his contract times enough.  
 The casting ladle as substandard stuff."

PEER Utter tosh! Someone else was meant to have gone.  
 Does it really say Peer and not Rasmus or Jon?

B.M. That couple I smelted o, years ago.  
 Come quietly now — and don't try going slow!

PEER Damned if I will! What a charming event  
 if tomorrow revealed someone other was meant. 3850  
 You should serve your own interests, my good sir!  
 Think of the blame that you might incur —  
 I've got it in writing —

B.M. Just free me on bail!  
 PEER

B.M. What good would that do you?  
 PEER I'll prove without fail  
 I've been *me*, without faltering, all my life;  
 and *that's* been the cause of our present strife.

B.M. Prove? How?  
 PEER With witnesses, written submission.

B.M. I fear the judge will dismiss your petition.  
 PEER He couldn't! Besides, cross your bridge when you must!  
 Kind sir, let me borrow myself, on trust. 3860  
 Soon be back. We're only born once; and I find  
 that one tends to hang on to the soul that one's got.  
 Well, are we agreed then?

B.M. Alright, — why not?  
 But we meet at the second crossroads, mind.  
 (*Peer Gynt runs off*)  
 (*Further into the moor*)

PEER (*dashes in*)  
 Time is money, or so they say.  
 If only I knew where the crossroads lay; —  
 maybe they're close, and maybe they're not.

The ground burns like iron that's glowing hot.  
 A witness! A witness! If only I could.  
 It's almost unthinkable here in this wood. 3870  
 The world's a real bungle! The system's a blight  
 when a man has to prove his most obvious right!  
*(a bent OLD MAN with stick in hand and bag on  
 his shoulder trudges across in front of him)*  
 DOVRE *(stops)*  
 Spare a copper, kind sir, for a bloke sleeping rough.  
 PEER I'm right out of change for the moment, I fear me —  
 DOVRE Prince Peer! Ah, no! It's fate right enough — !  
 PEER Who are you?  
 DOVRE He's forgotten the Ronde-boss, clearly.  
 PEER You're never the —  
 DOVRE Old Man of Dovre, dear chap!  
 PEER The old Man of Dovre? D'you mean to say — ?  
 DOVRE Ah, what a come-down, I'm on my knees — !  
 PEER Destitute?  
 DOVRE Stripped to the very last scrap. 3880  
 I'm tramping the road like a wolf short of prey.  
 PEER Hurrah! Here's a witness — they don't grow on trees!  
 DOVRE The Prince, too, has gone a bit grey since we met.  
 PEER My dear pa-in-law, time destroys and devours.  
 Now, skip all those private concerns of ours, —  
 and, especially, no family row or upset.  
 I was hare-brained in those days —  
 DOVRE Ah well, young men  
 as the Prince was — the things they get up to then!  
 The Prince was smart, though, to ditch his bride;  
 he spared himself shame and a great deal of trouble; 3890  
 kicked over the traces she did, ran amuck —  
 PEER Really!  
 DOVRE And now she's quite down on her luck;  
 just think, — she and Trond, they made off at the double.  
 PEER Which Trond?  
 DOVRE Why, the Valfjell one.  
 PEER Him? Ho-hum!  
 It was him I pinched the sæter-girls from.  
 DOVRE But my grandson's grown up now, strong and stout,  
 and has strapping offspring all over, you'll find —  
 PEER Yes my good man, but don't spin it out; —  
 there's something quite different that weighs on my mind. —  
 I find myself placed in an awkward position, 3900  
 I'm seeking a witness, for one who'll attest;  
 and that's where a pa-in-law serves me best.  
 I could always scrape up a drink as commission —  
 DOVRE My word! Can I help the Prince — with all deference?  
 Perhaps in return you'll give me a reference?  
 PEER With pleasure. I'm just a bit short of the ready.  
 I've pinched and scraped every which-way already.

But here's what's involved. You'll remember alright  
 that I called as a wooer in the Ronde that night —  
 DOVRE Of course I do, Prince!  
 PEER That's enough of the Pringing! 3910  
 Now then. You wanted to slit a hole  
 distorting my eyesight — by force, without mincing —  
 and turn me, from being Peer Gynt, to a troll.  
 So what did I do? Opposed it, with heat —  
 I swore I would stand on my own two feet;  
 I sacrificed love, and the power and the glory,  
 all for the sake of my selfhood; — that's the story.  
 It's these facts, understand, that in court you must swear to —  
 DOVRE O, but I can't!  
 PEER What a way to respond!  
 DOVRE He'll surely not force me to lie! — Wouldn't dare to. 3920  
 He remembers the troll-brecks he donned,  
 the mead that he sampled —  
 PEER You were good at persuading,  
 but final commitment I kept on evading.  
 And for knowing your man, that's the thing one depends on.  
 A poem's as good as the line that it ends on.  
 DOVRE But the ending was quite the reverse in this case.  
 PEER What on earth does that mean?  
 DOVRE When you went from our place,  
 you bore in your bosom my slogan's inscription.  
 PEER Which is — ?  
 DOVRE The probing, all-potent prescription —  
 PEER Slogan?  
 DOVRE That separates humans, in rough, 3930  
 from trolls — it says: "Troll, be thyself enough!"  
 PEER (*recoils a step*) *Enough!*  
 DOVRE And with all the strength that's in you  
 you've lived it, with every nerve and sinew.  
 PEER Me! Peer Gynt?  
 DOVRE (*weeps*) It is rank ingratitude!  
 You've lived like a troll but concealed your true attitude.  
 The slogan I taught you has given you the cue  
 to get on in the world, as a man well-to-do; —  
 then you come along here, turn your nose up, you're hateful  
 to me and the slogan when you ought to be grateful.  
 PEER *Enough!* A hill-troll! An egoist! 3940  
 What a load of old rubbish it is, I insist!  
 DOVRE (*pulls out a bundle of old newspapers*)  
 I suppose you imagine we don't get the papers.  
 Wait; here you can see, in red on black,  
 how the Blocksberg Post has been praising your capers; \*  
 and the Hecklefell Times had the same to say,  
 right from the winter you went away. —  
 Would you care for a look? Help yourself to the proof.  
 There's this, with the signature "Stallion Hoof",

and here: “On the trollish-national element”.  
 The author is rubbing his main point in 3950  
 that the horn and tail are largely irrelevant  
 so long as we’re brothers beneath the skin.  
 “Our, *enough*”, he concludes, “puts the stamp of the troll  
 on a man” — and he names your exemplary role.  
 PEER A hill-troll? Me?  
 DOVRE Yes, it’s perfectly clear.  
 PEER Could have stayed just as well where I was then, — back here?  
 Could have sat at my ease in the Ronde with you?  
 Saved toil and trouble and boot-leather too?  
 Peer Gynt — a troll? — That’s sheer nonsense! A joke!  
 Goodbye! Here’s a copper to buy you a smoke. 3960  
 DOVRE No really, Prince — !  
 PEER Stop it! You’re off your head,  
 or it’s second childhood. Find a hostel bed.  
 DOVRE Ah, — it’s precisely for such that one looks.  
 But my grandson’s offspring, as I said before,  
 have so mightily come in this land to the fore;  
 and they say that I only exist in books.  
 It’s said that the worst are one’s own relations.  
 I reckon, poor devil, that’s right enough.  
 To rate as mere fiction is really tough.  
 PEER Dear chap, many suffer those tribulations. 3970  
 DOVRE We haven’t, ourselves, set up poor boxes yonder,  
 no piggy-banks, doss houses, charity care; —  
 of course, such things wouldn’t go down in the Ronde.  
 PEER No, that damned “be thyself enough” applies there!  
 DOVRE The Prince has no call to complain of that saying.  
 And if some road or other you saw your way —  
 PEER My man, it is wildly off course that you’re straying;  
 I am myself on the rocks as they say —  
 DOVRE But that surely can’t be! Is the Prince overdrawn?  
 PEER Completely. My Princeliness now is in pawn. 3980  
 And it’s you blasted trolls who have caused these privations!  
 It’s proof of those “evil communications”. \*  
 DOVRE So all of my hopes have been knocked on the head!  
 Goodbye! I’ll press on into town, that’s the caper —  
 PEER What will you do?  
 DOVRE I’ll try acting instead.  
 They’re asking for ethnic types in the paper —  
 PEER Good luck on your travels, and take greetings from me.  
 I shall follow your lead if I tear myself free.  
 I’m writing a farce, it’s mad but it’s vital;  
 it has “*Sic transit gloria mundi*” for title. 3990  
 (*runs off down the path; the Dovre-king calling after him*)

(*At a crossroads*)

PEER Well it’s crisis time, Peer, as never before!

That damned Dovreish “enough” has condemned me for sure.  
 One must cling to flotsam; one’s lost one’s ship.  
 Anything else; but not end on a tip!

BUTTON MOULDER (*at the junction*)

Well now, Peer Gynt, who’s vouched for your credit?

PEER Crossroads already? That’s quick I must say!

B.M. I can see in your face like a poster display  
 what the document says before I have read it.

PEER I got tired of running; — it’s easy to stray —

B.M. Yes; and where does it get you, anyway? 4000

PEER True, what with forest and night as well —

B.M. That shambling old tramp — . Shall we give him a yell?

PEER No; let him be. He is drunk, my friend.

B.M. But maybe he’s able —

PEER Sssh! No, — there’s an end!

B.M. Shall we leave it at that?

PEER One point, if I may.

How is this “being oneself”, then, defined?

B.M. A curious question, especially I find,  
 when put by a man who’s just —

PEER Come on now, say!

B.M. To be oneself is: oneself to slay. \*

But on you that’s a waste of an explanation; 4010  
 so let’s put it like this: above all, to obey  
 the Master’s intention without hesitation.

PEER But what if one’s never been able to aspire  
 to knowing what the Master intends?

B.M. Intuition.

PEER But everyone knows intuitions misfire,  
 and one could be scuppered half-way through one’s mission.

B.M. Precisely; it’s when intuition’s blind wishing  
 that the chap with the hoof gets his finest fishing.

PEER A highly confusing affair, I pronounce it. —  
 Look, all this being myself, I renounce it; — 4020  
 if it were to be proved, it would be to my cost.

I’m regarding that part of my case as lost.  
 But just now, as I wandered alone through the heather,  
 conscience pinched me like boots of new leather;  
 I said to myself: “there is still your sinning” —

B.M. You seem to be back at your very beginning.

PEER Certainly not; I mean sinning that’s *dire*;  
 not just in deed, but in word and desire.

Abroad there my life was one long dissipation —

B.M. Maybe; can I see, though, the documentation? 4030

PEER Yes, just give me time; I will find some pastor,  
 confess, and be back in a jiffy, or faster.

B.M. If you can do that, why, that’s proof enough  
 that you’re to be spared all this casting-spoon stuff.

But my orders, Peer —

PEER That summons needs dusting;



it clearly derives from some earlier date;  
 from a time when my life-style was lax and disgusting,  
 and I played being prophet and trusted to fate.  
 Well, can I just try then?

B.M. But —  
 PEER Please, old sport, —

you haven't a great deal to do, I'd have thought. 4040  
 The air of the district's deserving of note; —  
 it adds a span to the locals' life-tally.  
 Think on the Justedal priest, who wrote:  
 "it's seldom that anyone dies in our valley".

B.M. To the nearest crossroads; but after — no *more* steps.  
 PEER I'll get me a priest if I have to use forceps!  
 (*he runs off*)

(*A heatherclad hillside. The path winds across the landscape*)

PEER *That* could be handy for many a thing,  
 said Esben, and picked up a magpie wing. \*  
 Who would have thought that one's load of sin,  
 at the eleventh hour just might save one's skin? 4050  
 Well, a kettle of fish, to put it no higher;  
 it's out of the frying pan into the fire; —  
 but of course there's a saying, a well-worn trope,  
 that goes: "so long as there's life there's hope".

(*a THIN PERSON in a hitched-up cassock and with a  
 bird net over his shoulder comes running across the rise*)

PEER Who's this? A priest with a fowling net!  
 Heigh-ho! I am fortune's favourite yet!  
 Good evening, Pastor. Rough road on the whole —

THIN PERSON Indeed; but what wouldn't one do for a soul?

PEER Aha; someone heading for heaven?

THIN Nay;

I trust he's taking a different way. 4060

PEER May I keep you company, Pastor, a while?

THIN Delighted; company quite suits my style.

PEER Well, my heart it heavy —

THIN *Heraus!* Fire away!

PEER It's a decent man stands before you today.

I've kept to the law conscientiously;

I've never been under lock and key; —

but sometimes one loses one's footing and stumbles  
 and trips up —

THIN Ah yes; the best have their tumbles.

PEER Well, these small trifles —

THIN Just trifles?

PEER Yes;

I've always avoided sin to excess. 4070

THIN Well then, my man, spare my privacy, leave; —

I'm not quite the person you seem to believe. —  
 You stare at my fingers? And what do you find?  
 PEER Nails of a highly developed kind.  
 THIN What else, then? You squint at the foot below?  
 PEER (*points*) Is that hoof there a real one?  
 THIN I pride myself so.  
 PEER (*raises his hat*)  
 I could have sworn you're a priest — well I'm blessed!  
 And so I've the honour — ? Well, best is best; —  
 when the front door stands wide, leave the back door for monkeys;  
 if you're meeting the king — then bypass the flunkies. 4080  
 THIN Your hand, sir! You seem to me bias free.  
 Now tell me; what help would you like from me?  
 Now you mustn't request either money or power.  
 I couldn't grant those if I hanged the same hour.  
 You wouldn't believe just how slack trade's been getting; —  
 the market has gone down the drain — it's upsetting;  
 there's no steady supply now of souls — it's a boon,  
 is the odd one —  
 PEER Has man then improved so dramatically?  
 THIN No, quite the contrary — worsened emphatically; —  
 and most end up in a smelting spoon. 4090  
 PEER O yes, — that spoon, — I've heard quite a bit; —  
 I'm really here in connection with it.  
 THIN Speak out!  
 PEER If it wouldn't appear too importunate,  
 I'd very much like —  
 THIN A bolt-hole of sorts?  
 PEER Before I'd asked, you had read my thoughts. \*  
 Now business, of course, as you say, is unfortunate;  
 and maybe you might stretch a point on the sly —  
 THIN Dear fellow —  
 PEER My requirements aren't very high  
 there's really no salary needing decisions;  
 just a friendly arrangement as to place and conditions. \* 4100  
 THIN Central heating?  
 PEER Well, some; and to set me at ease,  
 a lease that allows me to leave when I please; —  
 a so-called escape clause, not tied to the letter,  
 if things seem to take a turn for the better.  
 THIN Dear fellow, I'm sorry that you should ask —  
 but you'd never believe the untold applications  
 from Tom, Dick and Harry, same specifications,  
 when they must retire from their earthly task.  
 PEER But when I consider my former behaviour,  
 then I am a fully admissible man — 4110  
 THIN But they count as trifles —  
 PEER In one sense they can; —  
 but it comes to me, I was a black-trading slaver —  
 THIN There are some that have traded in wills and minds

but botched it, and they've been excluded, one finds.  
 PEER I've shipped out some idols of Brahma to China —  
 THIN Still the old po-faced style! We'd class that as minor.  
 There are people who ship nastier idols in plenty,  
 like preachers and artists and literary gentry, —  
 yet they must stay out.  
 PEER Yes, but even so  
 THIN I'd gone around playing the prophet, you know! 4120  
 THIN Abroad was it? Humbug! Most indiscretions  
 end up as the ladle-spoon's possessions.  
 If you've nothing further to back up your claim,  
 then I simply can't house you although it's a shame.  
 PEER How's this then? A shipwreck — me sat on a keel, —  
 when you're drowning you clutch at a straw, they say —  
 every man for himself, too, they quote a good deal, —  
 well I more or less robbed a cook's life away.  
 THIN If you'd more or less robbed a kitchen wench 4130  
 of something else, I still wouldn't blench.  
 And what sort of more-or-less nonsense — I mean —  
 is this, with respect? Who would want to waste fuel  
 that's costly and scarce, when time's are as cruel  
 as these are, on rabble as wet as you've been?  
 Now please don't get cross; your sins need deriding;  
 and I'm sorry for being so blunt with my chiding. —  
 Now listen, my friend, stop picking that sore,  
 and get used to the thought of the ladle, stop dodging.  
 What's the point, my providing you board and lodging?  
 Think; you're a sensible fellow what's more. 4140  
 You'd have, true, your memory, as before,  
 but the view looking back across memory land  
 would, both for the heart and the mind, come to stand  
 as the Scots might say, for "a puir sort of stodging". \*  
 You got nothing to be grinning or whining over;  
 nothing to be cheering or repining over;  
 nothing to make you turn hot or cold; \*  
 just something likely to irk you, all told.  
 PEER There's a saying that goes: it's hard to decide 4150  
 where the shoe is pinching if your foot's not inside.  
 THIN That is true; I have — thanks to What's-his-name there, —  
 need of just one single boot, not a pair.  
 Well! That was lucky, my mentioning the matter  
 of footwear, reminds me it's leaving time; —  
 I've a roast to collect which I hope will be prime;  
 so I'd better not stand here indulging in chatter —  
 PEER And may one enquire what swill of sin  
 has fattened this fellow?  
 THIN I think he has been  
 day and night, himself, without intermission;  
 and that, in the end, is the crucial condition. 4160  
 PEER Himself? Do you have, then, such folk under you?

THIN It depends — but the door's kept ajar, that is true.  
Remember, a man has two ways to be  
himself: as a coat that's turned wrong side, or right.  
You know some Parisian, just recently, \*  
found a way to take portraits by means of light.  
You can either produce a straight, positive version  
or there's also the negative, so-called, inversion.  
The latter reverses light and dark,  
and seems to the ordinary eye quite stark; 4170  
and yet there's the likeness there, lurking about,  
but it's only a matter of bringing it out.  
Now, if a soul's had its photograph taken  
in the negative form on life's long haul,  
the plate is by no means, therefore, forsaken, —  
quite simply, it's handed to me, that's all.  
I set to and finish the full operation;  
and by suitable means work the great transformation.  
I steam it, I dip it, I burn it, I rinse  
with sulphur and such like ingredients, 4180  
till the picture comes up that the plate ought to give, —  
in a word, what's known as the positive.  
But if someone like you's half erased himself — why,  
then sulphur's no use nor is alkali.

PEER I see — to you one must come like a crow  
to depart like a snow-grouse. If it's right I should know —  
what name does he go by, this “negative” man  
you aim to turn positive, if you can?

THIN It says Peter Gynt

PEER Peter — ? Well, I declare!  
Mister Gynt is himself?

THIN Yes, to that he would swear. 4190

PEER He's thought to be sound, Mister Peter is, rightly.

THIN You know him, perhaps?

PEER Well, yes; only slightly; —  
one knows many people.

THIN Now, I must escape;  
where last did you see him?

PEER He was down at the Cape.

THIN Di Buona Speranza?

PEER Yes, but soon he'll be sailing  
off on his way, if my memory's not failing.

THIN I'd better be off, then, as fast as can be.  
I hope I can catch him still in position!  
This Cape-land, this Cape-land, we never agree; —  
full of nasty types from Stavanger — the Mission. \* 4200  
*(he takes off for the south)*

PEER The stupid tyke! He's off at a run  
with his tongue hanging out. He'll find he's been done.  
It gave me great pleasure, did fooling that lout.  
The oaf, with his airs and his strutting about!

He's got a lot to be proud of and boast of!  
 He won't get fat in his job — he's disposed of, —  
 he'll be down off his perch pretty soon, kicked out. —  
 Hmm, *I'm* not so firm in my seat as time passes;  
 I'm expelled, so to speak, from the *self*-owning classes.  
*(a glimpse of a shooting star; he nods to it)*  
 Cheers! From Peer Gynt, brother shooting-star! 4210  
 Shine, fade and die in the void where you are — —  
*(hugs himself in terror and moves deeper into the mists;  
 a moment of quiet, then he bursts out:)*  
 Is there nobody, none in this mad pell-mell —,  
 no-one in heaven and no-one in hell — !  
*(emerges further down the path, throws his hat on the path  
 and tears his hair. Then a calmness descends over him)*  
 So unspeakably poor, then, a man's soul may \*  
 return into nothingness, misty and grey.  
 You beautiful earth, don't be too cross,  
 that I trampled your grass for nought worth telling.  
 You beautiful sun, it was so much loss  
 was your radiant touch on a folkless dwelling.  
 There was no-one at home to be warmed and provided; — 4220  
 the owner, they say, had never resided.  
 Beautiful earth and beautiful sun,  
 to cherish my mother was stupidly done.  
 The spirit's a miser, and Nature's free-giving.  
 It's a stiff price, to pay for one's birth with one's living. —  
 I shall climb high up where the peaks are sheerest;  
 I shall watch the sun again rise at its clearest,  
 I shall stare at the promised land, stare my fill,  
 suffer the drifting to heap me with snow;  
 above they can write: "Here lies No-one below", 4230  
 and afterwards — later — ! Let it go as it will.

CHURCH-GOERS *(singing on the forest path)*

O blest be the morning \*  
 when tongues from God's dwelling  
 smote earth like a sword all a-flame!  
 We heirs of that dawning  
 now raise, voices swelling,  
 Heaven's language to whence it came.

PEER *(huddles in fear)*  
 Never look *there*! Desert waste, far and wide.  
 I'm afraid I was dead long before I had died.  
*(tries to slip away into the bushes but comes upon the  
 crossroads)*

BUTTON MOULDER  
 Good morning, Peer Gynt! Where's your list of wrong-doing? 4240

PEER  
 Don't you imagine I've been whistling, hallooing  
 for all I was worth?

B.M. And met no-one perhaps?

PEER Just a travelling photographer, taking snaps.

B.M. Well — time has run out.  
 PEER All other things too.  
 The owl can smell trouble. Can you hear it too-whooh?  
 B.M. It's the matin bell ringing —  
 PEER That light there, it's blinding!  
 B.M. Just a light in a hut.  
 PEER That sound spreading broader — ?  
 B.M. Just the song of some woman.  
 PEER Yes, there I'll be finding  
 the list of my sins.  
 B.M. (*takes hold of him*) Set thy house in order! \*  
 (*they emerge from the thicket and stand beside the hut. Dawn*)  
 PEER Set thy house in order? And here it is! Go! 4250  
 Clear off! If the ladle were coffin-size, still it  
 just wouldn't hold me and my list when I fill it!  
 B.M. Until the third crossroads, Peer, *then* though — !  
 (*turns away and goes*)  
 PEER (*approaches the house*)  
 Backwards and on is as long a gait.  
 Out and in, the way's as strait.  
 (*halts*) No! — Like a wild lamentation, a yearning  
 is this entering in, going home, the returning.  
 (*takes a few steps, but stops again*)  
 Round about, said the Boyg!  
 (*hears the song inside the hut*) No: not this time too;  
 be it never so strait, the way leads right through! \*  
 (*runs towards the hut; at the same moment SOLVEIG comes  
 into the doorway, dressed for church and with a hymn-book  
 in a kerchief; a stick in her hand. She stands there upright  
 and gentle*)  
 PEER (*throws himself down on the threshold*)  
 If you've doom for a sinner, then noise it abroad! 4260  
 SOLVEIG He's here! O he's here! Praise be the Lord!  
 (*gropes for him*)  
 PEER Cry out my sins that have forfeited joy!  
 SOLVEIG You've not sinned ever, my own dearest boy!  
 (*gropes again and finds him*)  
 B.M. (*behind the hut*)  
 The list, then, Peer Gynt?  
 PEER Shriek out my crime!  
 SOLVEIG (*sits down beside him*)  
 You have turned my whole life to a lovely refrain.  
 Blessings upon you for coming again!  
 Blessed be our meeting this Pentecost-time!  
 PEER And so I am lost!  
 SOLVEIG There's one can abet you.  
 PEER (*laughs*)  
 Quite lost! If you can't solve the puzzle I set you!  
 SOLVEIG Name it.  
 PEER Name it? Right! Very well! 4270

Peer Gynt — where's he been since last here — can you tell?  
 SOLVEIG Been?  
 PEER With his brow bearing destiny's mark;  
 been, as he sprang from God's mind long ago!  
 Can you tell me that? If not, home I go, —  
 down to the land of mist and dark.

SOLVEIG (*smiles*) That puzzle is simple.  
 PEER Then say what you see!  
 Where was I, as myself, as the whole man, the real?  
 Where was I, with my forehead stamped with God's seal? \*

SOLVEIG In my faith, in my hope, in my charity. \*  
 PEER (*recoils*) What's that you say — ? Hush! Your words are a kind 4280  
 of cheating. That lad was conceived in your mind.

SOLVEIG Yes, he was; but his father? No other  
 PEER than He who forgives at the plea of the mother.  
 (*a gleam of light comes over him; he cries out*)  
 My mother; wife; woman free of all sin, you! —  
 O hide me, hide me within you! \*  
 (*clings to her tightly, burying his face in her lap. A long  
 silence. The sun rises*) \*

SOLVEIG (*sings softly*)  
 Sleep my darling, my precious boy!  
 I shall cradle you, I'll watch o'er you. —

The lad on his mother's lap once lay.  
 The two have played the whole live-long day.

Mother's bosom has nursed the boy  
 all the live-long day. God bless you, my joy!

The boy has been lying close to my breast  
 the live-long day. He's weary, must rest.

Sleep my darling, my precious boy!  
 I shall cradle you, I'll watch o'er you; —

BUTTON MOULDER'S VOICE (*from behind the hut*)  
 We meet at the final crossroads, Peer!  
 And *then* we shall see if — , I'll say no more here.

SOLVEIG (*her song swells in the splendour of the day*)  
 I shall cradle you, I'll watch o'er you;  
 sleep and dream, my darling boy.

THE END

## NOTES

### ACT I

- 16 *For the transformation of folk-lore sources see the Oxford Ibsen Volume III p. 482ff (Editor James Walter McFarlane, London, Oxford University Press 1972). Gjendin, strictly speaking, Besseggen, a now much-walked ridge in the Jotunheim area. Ibsen takes the name from Lake Gjende below it.*
- 102 *A formula used in Norwegian fairytales.*
- 149 *“The poem contains much that is reminiscent of my own youth. For Aase my own mother — with necessary exaggerations — served as a model ...” (to Peter Hansen, 28<sup>th</sup> October 1870). “My parents ... belonged to the most respected families in Skien at that time ... My father was a merchant with an extensive business and the hospitality ... was quite reckless” (to Georg Brandes, 21<sup>st</sup> September 1882). In the draft of the piece Peer is blamed for his own especial delinquency; there the father is described as a gentleman lucky in having died before Peer could make him suffer, and Peer is given a brother who died in the service of his country (The Oxford Ibsen III 460).*
- 158 *The unexpected quotation (from the 15<sup>th</sup> Century French poet Villon), described as being currently fashionable. More evidence, perhaps, of the family’s previous standing.*
- 246 *“Emperor” for “Kaiser”, passim in the text.*
- 250 *“Wait long enough and you’ll become King of Sweden” — one of the common sayings that characterise the work as a whole.*
- 344 *A sod roof weighted with stones is indicated.*
- 449 *A country dance culminating, for the male, in a high kick — at the rafters, if indoors.*
- 497 *Confirmation, at around 15 years, normally a matter of preparation by the local priest, marked the transition from childhood.*
- 506 *A local brew, (brennevin), more fire-water than brandy proper.*
- 521 *A folk-tale (“The Boy and the Devil”) purloined, as usual, by Peer.*
- 546 *Peer likens himself to Sigurd the Volsung to whom Odin gave the wondrous steed Grani.*
- 558 *The hat, sometimes cloak, that makes the wearer invisible.*



- 569 *Unmarried girls slept in the storehouse on a Saturday night. A lad was permitted to lie on but not in the bed. Mads is not so lucky.*
- 580ff *Peer's gibe, "Is Daddy your teacher?" ("reader" in Norwegian) indicates that he takes the father to be a pietist, and as such a do-it-yourself Free-Church fanatic. His changing of the common "Hænger med Hodet" (Hangs his head) in the draft to "Hælder han med Øret" (Inclines his ear) may be an allusion to Isaiah 55.3: "Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live ...", an apt text for such a man. "In his class" is intended to suggest that he has indoctrinated his women-folk with his beliefs.*
- 602 *Proverbial phrase.*
- 608 *"Aase and me": a common colloquial usage.*

## ACT II

*The Act has many biblical quotations, echoes and allusions. All but the most obvious are quoted (Authorised Version) or indicated in the notes.*

- 690ff *Mat.18.12. "... if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not lead the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? ... 14. Even so it is not the will of your Father ... that one of these little ones should perish."*
- 693 *"Foolish woman" Job.2.1: "... Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh."*
- 695 *Prov.28.14. "... but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief."*
- 731 *Girls living in huts on remote upland summer pastures (Sæters). The blend of naturalistic and symbolic reference provides a bridge to the more symbolic yet still realistically rooted scenes in the hall of the Dovre King later.*
- 827 *The sudden archaisms may parody church ritual and possibly imitate the language of a tipsy Dean. The text vaingloriously reverses the sentiment of Gen.3.19: "For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return".*
- 845 *A reference to the Halling dance.*
- 898 *Trolls could not endure sunlight.*
- 908 *Perhaps a reference to Ps.90.5,6: "... in the morning [men] are like grass ... In the morning it flourisheth and ... in the evening it is cut down, and withereth."*

- 930 *Perhaps a reference to Gal.2.14: “Why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? We who are Jews by nature and are not ...Gentiles.”*
- 991 *The eye-scratching episode, borrowed from folk sources, may again refer to Gal.2 and the disagreement between Paul and Peter over the significance of circumcision — another kind of little nick — as an essential distinction between Jews and Gentiles.*
- 1007 *e.g. Mat.5.29: “if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out.”*
- 1034 *Isa.55.7: “... let [the unrighteous man] return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him ...”.*
- 1042 *Mat.5.28: “... whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after, he hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.”*
- 1076 *The parson’s church bells were, as reminders of Christ, anathema to trolls as was sunlight.*
- 1082 *1Sam.18.7: “Saul hath slain his thousands.”*
- 1096 *The biblical “strait” evokes the distinction made by Mat.17.13 between the wide road to destruction and the strait road to life.*
- 1116 *Solveig’s recurrent presence in Peer’s mind throughout becomes, by virtue of the values she embodies, an important factor in our final assessment of him.*
- 1123ff *The down-to-earth tone of this coda brings fantasy into direct relationship with the real life to be explored in much of Act III. In discussion with Greig over the first adaptation for the stage, Ibsen suggested that bell ringing and psalms should be heard in the distance immediately before — clearly as a further manifestation of Solveig’s spiritual presence.*

### ACT III

- 1235 *Christian XVII (1766 – 1808) fits accurately the turn-of-the-century date that Ibsen gave the original (17<sup>th</sup> century) Peer.*
- 1345 *Lit: “the fiend held my back”.*
- 1368 *Mat.5.28 again — see Act II 424.*
- 1381 *The Bible contains many texts that Peer could choose from, e.g. Acts 8:22: “Repent therefore of thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.”*
- 1504 *From the Arabic name for a small group of islands in the Red Sea area thought to be the abode of the blessed.*

ACT IV

*The names — Cotton, Balloon, Boarshead and Trumpetblast — express Ibsen's satirical intent towards the moral attitudinising of the Great Powers (Britain, France and Germany) and Sweden's reactions to it. Peer doubles as a representative of Norway and as himself — the old self moulded by trollish precept. Ibsen proposed to Greig that almost the whole of this Act be turned into a tone poem with occasional tableaux.*

- 1614 *Perhaps Eccles.3.1: "To everything there is a season ... a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance ..."*
- 1618 *"Werry well" in the text — Ibsen's sole venture into English.*
- 1726 *Eccles.7.26: "... more bitter than death ..."*
- 1762 *Mat.25.32f.*
- 1814 *A typically obtuse vulgarisation of Mark.9.40: "For he that is not against me is on our part".*
- 1822 *A hit at Norway, perhaps, for having survived the Dano-Prussian war of 1864 by declining to join forces with Denmark.*
- 1825 *Perhaps a vague reference to Eve and the serpent (Gen.1.3).*
- 1882 *Luke.9.25: "For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself ..."*
- 1907 *A tiny principality later (1870) absorbed into Germany.*
- 1922 *Greece's fight (1827-38) for freedom from Turkish rule was close, in time and objectives, to Norway's own struggle against Danish domination; hence Peer's attitude seems double insulting: to liberal sentiment in general and in particular to the idealism expressed at Norway's own tentative rebirth as a nation in 1814.*
- 1929 *Sweden's obsession with Charles XII, similar to Norway's with its own heroic past, was a favourite target of Ibsen's. Bender: Charles was imprisoned there (1707-13) after his defeat by the Turks; he is said to have ripped the robe of an emissary with his spurs. The spurs on display in the Swedish Royal Museum apparently lack buckles ("clips").*
- 1966 *The Sultan's bodyguard, recruited from young Christian captives.*
- 1985 *The spring on mount Parnassus, sacred to Apollo and the Muses.*
- 2003 *Further evidence of Ibsen's disgust at the time with Great-Power wheeling and dealing, see "Abraham Lincoln's murder" (1865) in*

*Ibsen's Collected Poems on this website.*

- 2009ff *As his role of international magnate collapses, the flashy style deserts Peer; he falls back on the familiar assurances of Bible, proverbs, sayings etc. The frequency of quotation and reference rises sharply.*
- 2023 *“By convention” — literally “as usual”. Perhaps from Prov.1.26-30: “I also will laugh at your calamity; ... Then shall they call upon me [God], but I will not answer ... they would none of my counsel”. Peer, typically, shifts the blame onto God's infirmity.*
- 2040 *Mat.10.29: “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.”*
- 2041 *Job.22.29: “He shall save the humble”.*
- 2053 *Ps.90.5, 6. again? — see Act II 908.*
- 2057 *1Cor.3.11,12: “... other foundation can no man lay than that is layed, which is Jesus Christ”.*
- 2058 *Luk.22.42: “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done”.*
- 2069 *Mark.14.38: “Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.”*
- 2076-7 *Verbal echoes, here and at line 2099, link this with the mob-scene in the Dovre.*
- 2095 *Proverbial.*
- 2100 *This seemingly pointless scene is made to relate to the unifying theme: what part does heredity play in shaping one's destiny?*
- 2131 *Gen.1.25: “And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind ...”*
- 2140 *Since Peer uses the illiteracy of Salomos Ordbok (for ‘Ordspråk’) perhaps Book of Adverbs (or Pronouns) might serve here. “Home Texts”, a collection of sermons for home use. Few households would have owned a Bible before the British Bible Society began distributing them (in Norwegian) from about 1826.*
- 2148 *Prov.16.18ff: “Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall ... Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly ...”*
- 2171 *Work on the Suez Canal meant that deserts were topical. Ibsen was to attend its opening in 1869 as official representative of his country (see “Balloon Letter to a Swedish Lady” in Collected Poems on this website); but the*

*focus here is on Oleana, a utopian socialist community that Ole Bull, the famous violinist who founded the Norwegian Theatre in Bergen, tried to set up in the USA in 1852. He was swindled over the purchase of land and the project failed.*

- 2187 *Timbuktoo etc: real places. Habes, the Arabic for Abyssinia.*
- 2203 *A joking riddle that occurs in a play by Holberg: Who cried out so loudly that the whole world could hear? Answer, the donkey in the Ark which contained at the time the sole survivors of humanity.*
- 2210 *Peer typically adjusts the biblical “faith” (Cor.1.13,2) to “wish”.*
- 2213 *A logician’s phrase: to argue from the actual to the possible.*
- 2243 *The Kaba at Mecca contains the holy black stone kissed by pilgrims.*
- 2247 *Mat.13.57: “But Jesus said, ... A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country ...”*
- 2254 *Molière, Les Fourberies de Scapin; a tag then current in Norway.*
- 2259 *Mat.7.26: “And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand.”*
- 2340 *A misquotation from Goethe; Peer’s German means “the eternal Feminine leads us on” (for Goethe’s “up”).*
- 2553 *A warm-climate shrub with pretty blossoms — but (appropriately) poisonous.*
- 2583 *Letter to Carl Anker, 30<sup>th</sup> July 1858: “... I have ardently longed for — indeed almost prayed for some great sorrow that would ... give my life meaning. It was absurd — yet there will always remain some memory of it ...”*
- 2655 *Becker’s World History (in German) had recently appeared in Danish.*
- 2664 *Letter to Georg Brandes, 6<sup>th</sup> March 1870: “... when a man invests his capital in a calling and a mission here in life, he has no right to keep friends ...”*
- 2680-1 *Ibsen’s juxtaposing here ensures that Solveig and the values she now embodies are kept fully active in the play; the abrupt transition proves how far Peer still is from comprehending them.*
- 2704 *Interest in Egyptian archaeology had been excited by French discoveries in the 1850-60’s.*
- 2712 *The Spartan king who defended the pass of Thermopylae to the death in*

- 480 BC with a thousand men against a huge Persian army.
- 2714 Socrates accepted without complaint the sentence of death (by hemlock) passed on him by his fellow citizens in 399 BC.
- 2721 In mythology, Memnon, confusedly son of Aurora, an Ethiopian king and a singing statue at Thebes (in Egypt), was honoured by Apollo's creation of a flock of birds from the ashes of his funeral pyre at Troy; they fought each other to the death. In topical terms, Ibsen alludes to the University of Oslo, whose emblem was the owl, for its failure to foster in its students a combative spirit.
- 2730 Ibsen may be referring to Wagner's *Zukunftsmusik* (Music of the Future) of 1848.
- 2764 A parodic specimen of a kind of Hegelian philosophising.
- 2791ff The asylum episode mounts a series of specific attacks on various national lunacies, with Peer, as both person and representative Norwegian, the supreme instance.
- 2799 Seventy (septuaginta in Latin) Jewish scholars are traditionally believed to have been invited to Egypt in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC to translate the Old Testament and Apocrypha. The additional 160 in the text are not accounted for.
- 2811 More abstract philosophising.
- 2822 One of the Baron's notorious tall stories tells how a fox, pinned to a tree by a spike through its tail, was whipped until it jumped out of its skin through a slit cut in its head.
- 2871 Huhu — a settling of scores with an ex-friend, A.O. Vinje, a leader, with the poet Wergeland and others, of a group who were in the 1860's trying to restore the "real" Norwegian language by eradicating all Danish influence. Vinje had published an unfavourable review of Brand.
- 2937 Historically king of Argos, in myth, the bull deity. A satire on Sweden's obsession with its warrior king Charles XII who fought the Turks, but Norway's own romantic addiction to its heroic past may share the ridicule.
- 3002 Count Manderstrøm, a Swedish Minister of State, is the likeliest target. Was he, a paper had asked, merely an able pen or a real statesman?
- 3035 "God is the guardian of all madmen" a common phrase at the time.

## ACT V

- 3040 *Ibsen's use of real place-names does not, apparently, suggest first-hand experience of the landfall; but the first scene serves brilliantly to return us from a world portrayed in emblematic fantasy to one where cold facts and hard consequences must be faced.*
- 3146 *Luke.18.8: "... when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"*
- 3229 *The association of dog with devil is old in folklore.*
- 3237 *Mat.8.25: "and his disciples came to him ... saying, Lord, save us: we perish ..."*
- 3281 *2Cor.11.13-4: "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light"*
- 3288 *John.10.9: "I am the door: by me if any man shall enter in, he shall be saved".*
- 3298 *Ecc.3.1: "To every thing there is a season". Publicans (tax collectors) were often equated with sinners, i.e. morally incompatible with the spiritual purity required of a bishop or apostle.*
- 3365 *In areas remote from church and priest, childbirth before marriage was nothing out of the ordinary.*
- 3400 *This splendidly measured address assumes the character of a sermon, studded with scriptural echoes and quotations: "tinkling cymbals" (1Cor.13.1), "useless tree" (Luke.13.7) "try the heart and reins" (Ps.26.2). Its dignity shames the laxness of the following jaunty lines in which Peer expresses his as yet unshakeable complacency.*
- 3443 *Mat.6.34: "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."*
- 3449 *Gal.6.7: "... whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap."*
- 3454 *Mat.7.14: "... because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life."*
- 3458 *The auction scene marks Peer's first step towards a true self-assessment — he wants to cast off his old dreams as rubbish. The rest of his journey leads to the more profound recognition that one of his rejected dreams, the dream of Solveig and her prayer book, is to prove the ultimate reality.*
- 3538 *In this yarn Peer challenges his audience and Ibsen his own critics not to judge a play by purely aesthetic criteria but to recognise the painful and fundamental realities that drama can represent.*
- 3571 *Ibsen's deliberate misspelling of the name for the sake of rhyme. The*

*Babylonian king was reduced to eating grass; his crime, the transporting of Israel into slavery.*

- 3574 *Gen.3.19: "... for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."*
- 3602 *Perhaps a reference to Prov.13.5: "A righteous man hateth lying: but a wicked man is loathsome ..."*
- 3617 *"... has a fox by the ear" in the Norwegian.*
- 3626 *Pentecost (Whitsunday) marks the end and climax of the fifty-day period of celebration that begins on Easter Sunday (the Resurrection), commemorates the Ascension forty days later and ends on Whitsunday itself. Ibsen invokes the solemnity of the occasion powerfully in his final scene (see note 4232).*
- 3640 *Mat.23.27: "Yea [scribes and Pharisees] ... are like unto whited sepulchres ..."*
- 3653 *The voices (which owe much to Goethe's Faust Act 2) not only accuse Peer of wasting his potential but the withered leaves and broken straws are addressed to Ibsen's fellow country-men at large.*
- 3721 *A figure drawn not from folklore but the Bible: Jer.9.7: "Therefore thus sayeth the Lord ... Behold, I will melt them, and try them ..."*
- 3757 *Both attributes of the devil in folklore.*
- 3774 *Berserkers, warriors who, because of their dedication to Odin, fought with reckless disregard of their own protection.*
- 3823-4 *The "scripture" may well be 1Cor.15.51 ff: "... we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump." "It's a passing phase", said by the fox as he was flayed alive (proverbial). "Heart and reins" an echo of the parson's funeral address in Act IV.*
- 3865ff *In this episode with the Old Man of the Dovre the targets for satire become once more national and social, aimed at the trollish element in modern Norway at large: the debasement of an old and imaginative folk culture, the folly of national-romanticism, the lack of social provision, the lack of a savings bank system (a start had been made, but only as late as 1865, to encourage peasants saving) and the debasement of the theatre.*
- 3944 *Actual places in Germany and Switzerland famed as witch-venues.*
- 3982 *1Cor.15.33: "... evil communications corrupt good manners."*
- 4009 *Mat.16.25: "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it."*



- 4048 *A folk-tale hero who wins a princess and half a kingdom with such gear.*
- 4100 *Peer absurdly negotiates his entry into Hell in the jargon currently used in job-seeking advertisements.*
- 4144 *Scots for Ibsen's Swedes.*
- 4147 *Rev.3.16: "So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold I will spue thee out of my mouth."*
- 4165 *Louis Daguerre, inventor of the Daguerreotype, precursor of the camera.*
- 4200 *Stavanger, headquarters of the Norwegian Missionary Society.*
- 4214 *Peer's first sustained and genuinely poetic recognition of his folly, still negative in sentiment and as such contrasting with the positive, celebratory associations of Pentecost.*
- 4232 *The hymn celebrates God's Pentecostal visitation to His disciples, and the descent on that day of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles with the gift of tongues "like as of fire" (Acts 2.2 ff).*
- 4249 *II Kings 20.1 "... Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, ... And it came to pass ... that the word of the Lord came to him, saying ... I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears; behold I will heal thee ..."*
- 4259 *Matt.7.14: "... strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life ..."* *This is the first time that Peer does not misuse the text.*
- 4278 *Rev of St John 7.3: "... we have sealed servants of our God in our foreheads ..."*
- 4279 *I Cor.13.4-13: "Charity suffereth long, and is kind ... charity never faileth ... And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.*
- 4285 *John 3.3ff: The ending, with Peer begging Solveig to take him into her womb, is poles apart from being a sentimental gesture.  
See John.3.3 — : "Jesus ... said ... Except that a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. "Nicodemus saith ... How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" ... "Jesus answered ... Except a man be born of ... the Spirit, he cannot enter in to the kingdom of God." "... Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."*
- For the stage direction "The sun rises", see John 3.19ff: "... men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. ... But he that doeth truth cometh to the light ..."*

*The last of Ibsen's suggestions to Greig for the 1874 production makes clear where he wanted the final emphasis to fall. After the singing of the hymn (4232) there should be music to suggest the ringing of bells and the singing of psalms up to the point where Solveig sings her song, and after the fall of the curtain "the singing of psalms is once more heard, closer and louder".*