

Henrik Ibsen's *PEER GYNT* in a new version

ERROL DURBACH

ABSTRACT: This version of *Peer Gynt* is one of many adaptations of Ibsen's original "dramatic poem" into a stage presentation of the archetypal journey, spread over a lifetime, of a man in search of himself. Ibsen was the first to transform his *lesedrama* into a theatre piece (by omitting one entire act and commissioning a musical score from Grieg to cover the gaps). There have since been numerous modern innovations of *Peer Gynt*, each with its own emphasis. This current version attempts to reconcile Ibsen's Norwegian concerns and mythology with a series of Canadian references, and the challenges facing the translator/adaptor and his solutions are recorded in the introduction to the play. It has been staged in Canada and Norway (the last act only) and won Vancouver's Jessie Award for the best production of 2006.

RÉSUMÉ : Cette version de *Peer Gynt* est l'une des nombreuses adaptations du « poème dramatique » original d'Ibsen, en une présentation sur scène du parcours archétype, réparti sur toute une vie, d'un homme à la recherche de lui-même. Ibsen a été le premier à transformer son *lesedrama* en pièce de théâtre (en omettant tout un acte et en commissionnant une partition musicale de Grieg pour combler les vides). Il y a eu, depuis, de nombreuses adaptations modernes de *Peer Gynt*, chacune avec sa propre mise en valeur. Cette version tente de concilier les préoccupations et la mythologie norvégiennes d'Ibsen avec une série de références canadiennes; et les défis auxquels est confronté le traducteur/adaptateur et ses solutions sont consignés dans l'introduction de la pièce. Elle a été mise en scène au Canada et en Norvège (le dernier acte seulement) et a remporté le Prix Jessie de Vancouver pour la meilleure production de l'année 2006.

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Notes on Translation and Adaptation

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Ibsen's original play was written in rhymed verse, and he intended it to be read rather than acted. This version of *Peer Gynt* is the final product of a series of tough decisions:

Why yet another translation of *Peer Gynt*?

This translation / adaptation of the play came about as the consequence of a chance remark by John Wright, a colleague of mine in the Theatre and Film Department at the University of British Columbia. He was recalling, nostalgically, a production of the play he had acted in when a student, directed by the legendary Dorothy Somerset. It was our mutual decision that I would produce a Scandinavian / Canadian version of the play, and that he would direct it. The Scandinavian content (Grieg's music, some of the original language, the trolls, the Nordic myths) would remind the audience of the play's origins; the Canadian content (current political references, etc.) would establish a more contemporary gloss on the play's relevance.

Translation: Rhymed or Unrhymed Verse?

Ibsen's first translator into English was William Archer, and he posed the self-same question. Because he was a stickler for accuracy, he chose to sacrifice Ibsen's rhymes to the principle of precise verbal equivalence (on the correct assumption that you cannot hope to replicate rhyme in a translation committed to exact English correspondence.) My working principle was that "accuracy" is of no particular advantage when one is reducing a seven-hour piece to one-third of its length, and that all of Ibsen's wit is contained in his rhyming four-beat couplets and quatrains. Archer's blank verse version misses all the fun—as do the many translations that opt for prose. I have been guided, moreover, by José Ortega y Gasset's theoretical premise that "translation is not a duplicate of the original text; it is not—it shouldn't try to be—the work itself with a different vocabulary. The simple fact is that the translation is not the work, but a path towards the work" (109). So I have used various forms of Gilbertian rhyme schemes, alternating with passages of prose to break the relentlessness of the verse.

Adaptation: Dramatic Poem or Poetic Drama?

Peer Gynt appeared in 1867, subtitled “A Dramatic Poem.” When it was finally staged some eight years later, it was adapted without any change to its structure—except for the fact that it was drastically cut at Ibsen’s suggestion; and Grieg’s music was added (ostensibly to cover the gaps.) My intention has been to transform a dramatic poem into a poetic drama: to dramatize abstract ideas as actions and poetic concepts as stage symbols. I have incorporated most of Ibsen’s major scenes, but I have restructured many of them and rearranged their order to create a coherent through-line: the search for an authentic self when the hero is called upon, like the medieval Everyman, to provide a “reckoning” of his life. Characters who appear only in the poem’s background narration, now appear (for the first time) on stage. Some incidents have been retrieved (not for the first time) from Ibsen’s discarded material. And I have interpolated some material, which, I hope, is in keeping with the spirit if not the letter of Ibsen’s complex ideas about identity, reality, and the nature of theatre itself.

Peers: How many?

Because *Peer Gynt* is a picaresque play that spans a lifetime, with Peer aging from a youth of about 20 to an old man of about 70, one might very well consider parceling out the role to several actors. Directors who choose to work with a single actor must opt either for a young man who can play old, or an old man who can play young. Neither alternative is very satisfactory. Other directors have chosen to play the various “ages of man” in the Peer role and cast a whole sequence of actors in the part. (Peter Stein has five actors playing seven different phases of Peer’s career.) My choice has been two Peers—a young and an old version—played not sequentially, but simultaneously. In Part One, old Peer appraises his Romantic origins, their imaginative vitality, and their potential dangers; and in Part Two young Peer evaluates the implications of his choices and omissions as he journeys towards self-consciousness. I am interested in the dynamic relationship of cause and consequence in the crafting of Self, and the young / old Peers make this exploration possible in the deliberately non-realistic dramatic forms in which Ibsen cast his original. (The “doubling” device was shamelessly borrowed from Beckett’s *Krapp’s Last Tape*.)

Production History

This version of *Peer Gynt* was first staged at the Frederic Wood Theatre on the University of British Columbia campus in 1999, under the direction of John Wright. The last act was invited to the first International *Peer Gynt* festival in Vinstra, Norway, in 2000. The play was subsequently staged at the University of

Lethbridge, and it received its first professional production by the Blackbird Theatre Company, under John Wright's direction, in the Ibsen centenary year, 2006. The current version of the play is an amalgamation of the 1999 and 2006 productions, and some of the political references will therefore be out of date. In the event of subsequent production, they would have to be rewritten.

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Peer Gynt

CAST OF CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

| | |
|--------------------|------------------|
| OLD PEER GYNT | [OP] |
| BUTTON MOULDER | [BM] |
| ÅSE | [ÅSE] |
| YOUNG PEER GYNT | [YP] |
| GROUP OF OLD WOMEN | [W1, W2, W3] |
| WEDDING CELEBRANTS | |
| BRIDEGROOM | [BG] |
| BRIDE | [B] |
| ASLAK | [ASLAK] |
| SOLVEIG | [SOL] |
| SOLVEIG'S FATHER | [FATHER] |
| SOLVEIG'S MOTHER | |
| SOLVEIG'S SISTER | |
| GROUP OF COWGIRLS | [C1, C2, C3] |
| GREEN TROLL WOMAN | [GTW] |
| TROLL-PIG | |
| GROUP OF TROLLS | [T1, T2, T3, T4] |

| | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| TROLL KING | [KING] |
| THE GREAT BOYD | [GB] |
| MAN WHO CUTS OFF HIS FINGER | [MAN] |
| TROLL CHILD | |
| BAILIFF | [BAIL] |
| BALLON | [BAL] |
| COTTON | [COT] |
| VON EBERKOPF | [vEB] |
| CHORUS OF HOURIS | [CHO] |
| ANITRA | [AN] |
| CHORUS: SPHINX | [SPH] |
| BEGRIFFENFELDT | [BEGR] |
| CHORUS: MADMEN | |
| HIS WHONESS | |
| KING APIS | [APIS (1), APIS (2)] |
| HIS NIBBS | [NIBBS] |
| GROUP OF SAILORS | |
| SHIP'S CAPTAIN | [CAPTAIN] |
| SHIP'S COOK | [SC] |
| STRANGE PASSENGER | [SP] |
| GROUP OF MOURNERS | |
| PRIEST | š |
| VILLAGER | |
| THIN MAN/DEVIL | [TM] |

PROLOGUE

[A ragged figure is asleep, on the periphery of the stage which is dimly lighted. It is OLD PEER GYNT.]

[The BUTTONMOULDER enters with a lighted kerosene stove and a large casting-ladle, full of buttons. He rattles them loudly, calling the name of the man he has come to get: "Peer Gynt...Peer Gynt...." He sees the audience, and introduces himself.]

BM:

Jeg er knappestøberen. I'm the Buttonmoulder. I collect broken, wear-worn buttons. Ever since Eden, I've been picking up the broken bits: scraps that we can use again, the fragments of lives partly lived... Any to spare?... Maybe a button without a loop... ? Maybe a flaw in the moulding ...? Any buttons for my ladle? I'll melt them down, with all the other flotsam and jetsam, and reuse what's still usable.

God's a good ecologist.
Nothing goes to waste for Him.
When a button's not redeemable,
I turn it into paste for Him.
A little raw material
Always serves Him well.
So why not salvage what we can
From the garbage heap of Hell?

Any buttons for my ladle?

[He surveys the audience. He approaches about three or four and rattles his ladle. He calls on people he may know in the audience—or on well-known public figures, like Gordon Campbell, or on some of the theatre critics, like Colin Thomas: "A button, Gordon Campbell? A button anyone?"]

All the shiny buttons on the waistcoat of the world! Not quite ready for the ladle yet? Lots of use still left ? Still firmly threaded to your garments?

Well—tonight I've come for a worn-out, shabby button, hanging by a thread from a broken loop, its pattern worn so smooth that nothing can be seen of it. He's been scurrying over the face of the earth, like a man rushing to a funeral feast. What he doesn't realize is *it's his own*.

[He calls into the darkness, and slowly the assembled cast emerges around the edge of the stage, and joins the call.]

Peer Gynt... Peer Gynt.... Peer Gynt.

[OLD PEER GYNT (OP) rouses himself from the dark: he's an old man, ragged, and a bit dazed and bewildered—like someone dreaming about himself.]

OP:

Ja så? Who called? I have to be getting along....

BM:

Peer Gynt, not so fast! ... I've been sent for you tonight.

OP:

What? Sent for me? What for?

BM:

Your reckoning.

OP:

I'm not ready to give a reckoning. Who are you, anyway?

BM:

Jeg er knappestøberen.

OP:

Why a buttonmoulder? I was expecting...

BM:

A man in black? A game of chess?

OP:

Well, at least a cloven hoof or some roaring flames—something suitable, something dignified. Not a kerosene stove and a ladle.... What do you intend to do with me?

BM:

Melt you down.

OP:

Melt? Me? Peer Gynt become a formless, molten glob? I demand consideration!

My life has not been blameless.
 At worst I've been a fool.
 But I'm damned if I'll consign my soul
 To a buttonmoulder's tool!
 Lose Peer Gynt's identity?
 Suffer Selfhood's loss?
 Disintegrate? Dissolve into
 Undifferentiated dross?

It's not that I've been a large-scale sinner! Consider my career. It's fairly innocuous. I've done what any politician would do—nothing exceptional, nothing really criminal. Petty sins, at best. Sins of omission, perhaps.

BM:

That's why it's me, and not the One with the cloven hoof. That's why it's the ladle, not the Pit. The kerosene stove and not eternal hellfire.

As a sinner you're a joker—
 All your faults are ... mediocre.
 Are you sure you have a Gyntish soul to lose?

OP:

I'd rather roast in Hell, if I could choose!

BM:

But the Devil's grown particular and nice—
 He now expects superior forms of vice.
 I don't think that he'd admit you;
 On your record, he'd acquit you...
 Your coin's too small to pay damnation's price.

It's a meltdown, Peer. I'm here to recycle you. Merge you with the other mergibles.

OP:

But I'm me, Myself. You can't compound me with every Gordon and Colin and Harry and lose Peer Gynt in the product!

BM:

But your stamp's been worn away
 We can't remind you.
 Why preserve your DNA?
 We can't re-Gynt you!
 There's nothing there that's whole,
 You've exhausted all your soul—
 Your account is bankrupt, empty,
 Broke and skint! Peer Gynt!!

OP:

Look: I'm not asking for the full redemption. I just don't want to lose my Self....
 What about a season in Purgatory. I don't mind waiting for a bit—as long as
 I'm still Me, not merged with other odds and sods. Once in your ladle, it's
 tickets for Gyntishness. It's no more Peer.

BM:

What a fuss! You've *never* been your “self”—so what's to lose?

OP:

Never been my “self”?
 Don't make me laugh!
 Has someone else played “Peer”
 on my behalf?
 I'm Peer Gynt through and through!
 Hello!! It's ME!!
 I'm quintessential Self!
 God would agree!

BM:

Your claim is null and void.
 Hear God's decree:
 “Peer Gynt has forfeited
 Eternity.
 His ‘Self’ is damaged goods,
 And turning rotten!
 Melt him down ! His life was
 Misbegotten.”

OP:

No, no. That's not me. There's been some mistake. God means my cousin, or my uncle, or my Dad.

BM:

I melted them all down years ago.

OP:

Look—all I need is time.

BM:

For what?

OP:

For my reckoning. For my life's review. I'll show you that I've been Myself—truly Me—all my life. If that's what it takes.

BM:

How will you convince me?

OP:

Give me a ticket-of-leave! Lend me myself for a few hours, and I'll call my life to witness. I'll dream it into being—no sweat, since we're there already—and you'll judge for yourself the spectacle of "Peer Gynt."

BM:

I doubt whether my Master will accept this as evidence. But I have all the time in the world. And I always liked theatrical diversions.... What's first? Remember—you're at the crossroads. Make it sharp!

OP:

Scene One: "PEER GYNT RIDES THE BUCK ALONG THE RIDGE OF GJENDIN!"

ACT 1. i.

[Peer, Åse (his mother). In this and following scenes, Peer (YP) is played by a much younger version of the Old Peer—here an adolescent youth.]

ÅSE:

Per, du lyver! Tell me lies! Eh?

YP:

Cross my heart, and hope to die!

ÅSE:

Pull the wool across my eyes, eh?

YP:

Ma—I'd never tell a lie....

ÅSE:

Then where've you been for months on end? Chasing reindeer in the snow while I break my back? Where's your gun, now? What's happened to your clothes? Don't give me that cock-and-bull about the one that got away....

YP:

But Ma, it was the great buck of Gjendin that I caught!

[Narrative mode]

The wind swept down from the west. And when I looked up from my shelter in the alderwood—there I saw him! Pawing through the snow-crust, snuffling after moss, his antlers branching like trees. Huge and sleek and fat!

ÅSE:

[Half incredulous, half swept up in the narrative]

Gaaaarn!

YP:

Bang! I fired! Whoosh—he crumpled,
And I jumped upon his head,
Jerked his neckbone back and fumbled
With my knife to stab him dead.
Yiiiiiii! He reared up, antlers flashing,
Arched his back—Christ! What a jump!
Pinned me down, then took off, dashing,
With his antlers round my rump!

ÅSE:

Jesus save us!

YP:

Flying air-borne, windstorm-tossed
 Along the knife-edge of the scree—
 Through the ice and perma-frost,
 Just the Gjendin buck—and me!

Glaciers open up above us,
 Down below to left and right
 Fathom-deep and dank beneath us
 Lurk the waters of the night.

Halfway down some eagles glide
 Dust-motes whirling, lost in space.
 Ice-floes crack against the hill-side—
 Silent noise pervades the place.

ÅSE:

God in Heaven....

YP:

Then! It shatters with a shock!
 Ayukayuckayuckayuck!
 A panic-stricken partridge cock
 Screeches from behind its rock—
 Balance jolted, rhythm shattered,
 Buckboy breaks his breakneck ride.
 Suddenly the world's inverted
 And we're plunging off the side.
 Down we hurtle—seagulls screech—
 Through the mist-enshrouded space,
 Death in the abysmal breach
 Stares us bleakly in the face.

ÅSE:

My boy! I've lost my boy!

YP:

Hang on, Ma. Listen to this bit. I haven't finished yet. Just as we're facing the end of our ride something miraculous happens—

Our reflections rise to greet us
As we plunge into the sea:
A weird mirror-image meets us
With the same velocity.
Buck above and buck below—
Illusion or reality?—
Buck of water, buck of snow,
Merge into infinity.

What was it that swam away?
The Buck of Gjendin or its other?
Is it Peer who lives today?
And you? Reflection? Or my mother?

ÅSE:

As long as you're OK, my boy, what does it matter. No bones broken?

[She feels him all over for fractures.]

Thank God for that. What do I care if your clothes are a bit torn or your....

[A penny drops.]

Wait a bit... hang on... I've heard this thing before—about the Buck of Gjendin and the jump and flying through the air, and all that.... It's in that book by whatshisname.... You've swiped his story! Liar!

YP:

Surely one poet can live through the dream of another. Dreams aren't lies, Ma.

ÅSE:

No—but you can't tell the difference!

You take a lie and dignify it,
Stringing your poor Ma along,
Embroider it and magnify it
'Til you can't tell right from wrong.

Dreaming's fine—if you wake up!
 But you're lost inside your lie.
 Truth's not something you make up...
 Tamper with it, it will die.

You evade your life by dreaming:
 Nothing's done. The farm's decayed.
 All well and good to claim you're scheming...
 Debts must be settled. I've been betrayed.

YP:

We've had some bad luck, Ma. It's not because I dream.

ÅSE:

Luck needs a helping hand, my lad. And what help does it get from you? When you're not dreaming into the embers, you're fighting in the village—Peer the Giant-Killer who broke the blacksmith's arm in an epic tussle. Tales about hearing Aslak bellowing a mile away.... My son, the Hero!

YP:

Actually, Ma. It was me. Yelling. It was Aslak who beat *me* up...

ÅSE:

What? Another lie! Where did you find that one? In whatsisname's book of dreams and lies?

YP:

One day the lie will be a truth, Ma, and the whole village will honour you as Peer's old lady. One day I'll do something—I don't know what—something impossible and magnificent. Wait and see.

[*SONG. Music: "Peer Gynt's Serenade," from Grieg's Peer Gynt Suite.*]

I'll buy up all the diamond fields—
 Blusson's and De Beers'!
 I'll invent a magic speed-machine
 And fuel it on gasoline,
 And patent it as "Peer's!"

I'll find the cure for syphilis
 And vanquish all disease!

I'll fund a university,
Discover relativity—
Do anything I please!

ÅSE:

I don't put it past you to make something of your life... maybe. But not if you keep deceiving yourself with nonsense. Like that girl from the farm in Hegstad—you could have married her... and her money. Lots of it. You could have been set up for life....

YP:

Well, I'll go and ask her.

ÅSE:

Too late. You've missed the chance. While you were cavorting on Gjendin with your buck—Ha!—she promised herself to that fool, Mads Moen. They're getting married tomorrow.

YP:

I'll put a stop to it! Right now! And you're coming with me.

[He picks her up. She wriggles and struggles.]

You talk some sense into them—you're so good at it.... Tell her father what Peer Gynt is.

ÅSE:

Put me down!—Yes, I know what you are, and when I tell him he'll sic the dogs on us. Put me down!

YP:

Right. I'll go without you. And to make sure you don't ruin my chances, I'll tuck you up nicely.

[He puts her on a ledge / on a roof / up a tree, while she shouts to be put down.]

Stay there. Hush. No thrashing about. You might do yourself an injury. Now, bless me nicely, Ma. I'm off to make a match....

ÅSE:

You lunk! I'll whip you! Liar! Thief of other men's tales!

[Peer laughs and leaves her up there. Exits.]

Peer! Peer! Help! Help!

[Three old women enter, and contemplate her.]

W1:

Ooo, Mrs. Åse. You've certainly gone up in the world.

ÅSE:

Yes, and unless you help me down I'll end up even higher than I want to be tonight.

W2:

May we all go happily in that direction.

[Crosses herself.]

ÅSE:

Bugger your piety! Get me down. I've got to get to Hegstad before Peer gets there. I'll whip him black and blue.

W3:

Aslak will save you the bother, Mrs. Åse. He'll be at the wedding, waiting to ward off trouble.

ÅSE:

Christ! Get me down. You don't know what will happen.

[The Buttonmoulder intervenes, and helps Åse out of her predicament.]

BM:

What's the trouble, old lady? Why are you so het up?

ÅSE:

Why? Because he's gone to rape the bride, that's why. Don't you know the story?

BM:

[to Old Peer]

Rape her, Peer?

OP:

Only in a manner of speaking. No harm done. Not really. Wait and see.

Scene Two: "THE WEDDING DANCE AT HEGSTAD: SCENES OF RAPE AND ROMANCE"

ACT 1. ii.

[The scene is mimed, the story told in dance and movement. A wedding-dance in progress. It would be nice to have a single fiddler who could play Harald Sæverud's "Bridal Dance" (Peer Gynt Suite 2, Op. 28) at double or triple tempo, and/or Grieg's "Halling" (one of the very short—90 seconds—Lyric Pieces, Op. 47, #4) for a group of skilled male dancers, or Grieg's "Prelude: At the Wedding" from the PG Suite. The following narrative events must be very clearly shown.]

- 1 A bridal dance is in progress, a Halling where the men perform a high kicking routine. The bridegroom is incompetent and a laughing stock. The bride whacks him over the head and runs off. She locks herself up in the privy, where she spends the rest of the scene. The bridegroom, throughout the following episodes, keeps drawing his guests' attention to his wife's confinement and soliciting their help.
- 2 Peer enters and tries to break into the dance. Aslak the Blacksmith—a burly "bouncer"—keeps him out of the circle. The girls laugh at Peer.
- 3 A family group enters, strait-laced, very proper: a stern black-suited father, a mother, and Solveig—our heroine—dressed very plainly in white. Peer sees her, she sees him, and time and action freeze: all the conventions of love-at-first-sight. Peer and Solveig dance, very briefly, a lilting slightly elegiac Romantic waltz (nothing will come of their encounter)—Grieg's "Remembrances" ("Nachklänge") from the Lyric Pieces op. 71 #7. This piece of music will be the play's Romantic leitmotif.

YP:

[SONG: To Grieg's "Arietta," Lyric Pieces, op. 12.1 (an upbeat version of "Remembrances")]

Live with me and
 Love me still
 With the deer
 Upon the hill
 In a cabin
 Built for two
 There we'll take shelter
 Me and you
 Snow-storms won't blow there
 To harm us
 I'll light a fire
 To warm us

SOL:

Your Romantic
 Paradise
 Won't outlast our
 Lover's sighs
 We'd grow hungry as
 Passion dies
 We'd start to quarrel
 From boredom
 What will become of
 Your Kingdom?

YP:

Can't you help me make it real?

SOL:

Not if your castle's in the clouds. Even a dream-house needs foundations.

YP:

Help me, Solveig!

SOL:

With all my heart.

[Then time and place are reasserted; Solveig's father breaks them up and escorts Solveig out of the dance arena. Peer is left hankering after her.]

- 4 *A group of youths encircle Peer, and each offers him a swig from his bottle. They make him drunk. He cavorts for their amusement—the dance equivalent of one of his tall stories. They are entertained and egg him on with the brandy.*
- 5 *Solveig re-enters, looking for Peer. The revelers return to the dance circle, and a somewhat drunken Peer tries to resume his Romantic waltz with Solveig. The music is distorted now. Solveig is disconcerted by his drunkenness, and extricates herself from the dance. She runs off, and Peer tries to infiltrate the dance. He grabs at some of the pretty girls, but they push him off. Aslak comes to their assistance, grabs Peer, and starts to beat him up when—*
- 6 *Åse suddenly appears, with her stout walking stick, apparently to belabour Peer. But seeing he's in difficulty, she turns her wrath on Aslak and beats him up to the great delight and amusement of the assembled crowd.*
- 7 *With the mob distracted, Peer makes his escape. The bridegroom, early on, had indicated the whereabouts of the bride—so Peer has no difficulty in locating her and persuading her to run off with him. They scamper off the stage, and only when they are over the hills and far away does the bridegroom (BG) realize his misfortune.*

BG:

Robber! Thief! Peer Gynt! My wife!
I'll kill them both!! Who's got a knife?
Hey, Peer Gynt! You've got what's mine....

W1:

They're rutting like a pair of swine.

BG:

My whip! My gun! My blunderbuss!
I'll shoot the bugger up the ass.

ÅSE:

Your bride's a pig. Protect your own!

Just you leave my son alone!

[She beats him up with her stick. Then she turns to speak to the Buttonmoulder.]

God help us!... Lies and dreaming weren't good enough for him. He had to act them out. And now of course, they'll all blame *me* for nurturing him on fairy tales—

Fantastic magic carpet rides,
And thrilling tales of stolen brides...
Harlequin Romantic plots—
Asbjørnsen's and Sir Walter Scott's.

But she's no bride of Lammermoor!
She's a small-time farmer's whore!
Peer's Godlike imagination?
No. The Devil's fornication.

[Enter Peer and the bride, in post-coital disarray and recrimination.]

YP:

Go to hell!

B:

Where do you think I've been? Where am I to go now?

YP:

To a nunnery. And the devil take the lot of you—except...

B:

Except who?

YP:

Except the sort of woman I would want to marry.

B:

You could marry me. I've got the farm and money.

YP:

That's not enough.

B:

What more do you want?

YP:

Everything that can't be bought.

Generosity and Grace.
Modesty that hides behind
The Beauty shining in her face.
Elegance of thought and mind,
Epitome of Womankind.

B:

Fuck off Peer! You make a whore of me, and then you want the Virgin Mary.
I hope they hang you! I hope you pickle in your sin! You'll pay for this.

YP:

It'll be worth it. Whatever the price.

[The Bride runs off.]

God! Why wouldn't she dance with me. This would never have happened.

[He buries his head in his hands, as Solveig waltzes slowly out of the darkness: part vision, part reality.]

Dance with me, Solveig!

[They waltz, briefly.]

[Åse comes rushing in with her stick, accompanied by Solveig's father.]

ÅSE:

Rapist! Thief! They're after you. What have you done with the bride? Give her up, or they'll have your balls.

SOL:

Let him be. He's sent her home.

ÅSE:

Home? In her state? You'd better run, my boy!

FATHER:

Run from responsibility, eh Peer? Your life will be a marathon....

YP:

Let Solveig come with me, then. She's my promise of tomorrow. My joy, my life.

FATHER:

Take her, then.

YP:

Take her!

FATHER:

But only on condition—

YP:

Anything....

FATHER:

Consequences must be faced.
 A farmer's daughter's been disgraced.
 Respect the law, and pay the price
 Of casual dabbling in vice.
 Find courage to confront your fears.
 The penalty is seven years
 For abduction of a maid.
 Serve your term, and when it's paid
 You shall have my girl. Decide.
 Maid for maid, and bride for bride.

YP:

Your law is harsh, your justice cold.
 I cannot choose a crippled life.
 Seven years will make me old.

 Solveig, wait to be my wife!

Wait until I've seen the world
And stretched my wings, and learned to fly.
Caged in prison, clipped and furred,
My pent-up soul will surely die.

BM:

Come Peer. This is your cross-road. What's your reckoning, now?

YP:

Seven years is long....

BM:

Eternity is longer.

YP:

Solveig!

SOL:

[Reprise]

Though Hope and Faith and
Charity
May outlast
Eternity
Please, Peer Gynt, come
Back to me
Time flows into
Futility
When life is spent in
Vanity.

[A short waltz of farewell. All fade from the scene, as the lights focus on Old Peer and the Buttonmoulder.]

BM:

And so you made your choice.

OP:

Not really. Things just happened.

BM:

Not to choose is also a choice.

OP:

Sometimes life chooses us. And how can we resist? Remember those cowgirls shackled up with the herds all summer long? Who looks a gift cow in the mouth...?

[We hear three cowgirls whooping offstage. They descend on Young Peer—uninhibited in their craving for a man. Rap rhythm. Spice Girls movements.]

ALL:

[SONG]

We haven't had sex for a year and a day
Stuck in these hills with the cows and the hay
Our udders are full, and we've milk to spare

CG1:

Take me up front, or take me down rear

CG2:

Love me up smooth, or love me up rough

CG3:

Whatever you offer, it won't be enough

CG1:

I'd sleep with a troll

CG2:

or a goat, or a bear

CG3:

No need for that, if we can have Peer!

OP:

Thank God for the compensations of the flesh! What's the point of sacrifice without some tangible reward!

CHORUS:

Stiff as a poker
Hard as lead
Hot as embers
Great for bed!

[They pick Young Peer up and carry him off singing their song.]

ACT I. iii.

[Interlude: Old Peer and the Buttonmoulder.]

OP:

All experience is grist for the mill! Peer Gynt never missed an opportunity....
I lived my life! I feasted at the Viking's smorgasbord!

BM:

What about the scraps you *never* used? Choices *never* made? Decisions *never* taken? What if you're the unborn child of your own life? Listen deep inside, and tell me what you hear.

[He puts his hands over Peer's ears. Peer listens.]

OP:

The sound of children weeping.

CHORUS:

[SONG]

We're your thoughts—you never thought us:
Unformed poems left unsaid.
We're your words—you never spoke us,
Voiceless, dumb, and left for dead.

We're your tears—you never shed us:
Congealed pain that went unshared.
We're your griefs—you never wept us,
Broken hearted, unrepaired.

We're your deeds—all left undone,
 Actions unperformed for fear.
 We're omissions—steps not taken,
 Craven yielding to despair.

OP:

I'm damned for what I *haven't* done?
 Is justice not my due?
 My own life is my punishment?
 Is this "Catch-22"?

BM:

I reserve judgment. We're not through yet, are we? What comes next?

OP:

Next scene: "PEER'S JOURNEY TO THE TROLL-KING'S CAVE."

I bumped into his enchanting daughter in my flight across the Dovre hills....
 She was green as grass....

ÅSE:

Green?? My arsel!

ACT 1. iv.

[Young Peer, somewhat disheveled, and post-coitally depressed after his bout with the cowgirls, wanders high up in the mountains. Night is approaching, and twilight falls on mountain gloom and mountain glory. His soliloquy is underscored with MUSIC suggesting wind, rising mist, and dusk: possibly Sæverud's "Peer-ludium."]

YP:

Mountain ranges tower above me
 Burnished by the dying light—
 Insubstantial pageants, melting
 In the vapours of the night.

Stop time! Stop process! Halt the drift
 Of life dissolving into mist!
 The "evermore about to be"
 Is wrecked by mutability.

The mountains lock me in! They press down on me.... I can't breathe.... My head's on fire.... I'm trapped in this hell-hole with my wings clipped, while eagles soar overhead and the wild-geese head South.

Mired in filth, I long to fly
And cleanse my soul in air and sky.
Where's redemption? No escape
In reindeer rides, or bridal rape!

Fantastic dreams are waste of breath
When life evaporates, and death
Confronts us where the four roads cross.
Yes, Buttonmoulder. Life is loss.

[The Green Troll Woman has wandered in and overhears the last of these musings. She is a beautiful and voluptuous seductress as she presents herself to Peer. But the audience sees what Peer does not: a pig, with a twirly pig's tail. Like the trolls in the scene that follows, she is both fair and foul, human and animal, a "double" vision of human nature. Her pigginess is not of the Miss Piggy variety, but a very real and ugly mask worn (for the time being) on the back of her head.]

GTW:

Oh!—don't be so gloomy, Peer!
Sex will save you from despair.

[The Green Troll Woman dances sexily around Peer: a dance of seduction in which he very readily participates. MUSIC: Grieg's "Dance of the Mountain King's Daughter." While the dance progresses, Old Peer comments on the event.]

OP:

I met this Green One in the meads,
Full beautiful—a troll-king's child;
Her hair was long, her foot was light,
And her eyes were wild.

She, while searching roots and honey,
Found me loitering, alone,
And looked at me as she did love,
And made sweet moan.

She took me to her trollish cave,
Seduced me there, and sigh'd full sore,

And there I saw sights weird and strange
Not seen before.

I fell asleep beneath that hill,
And dreamed about my green-clad bride,
And the humans she turned into trolls
On the cold hill side.

YP:

Marry me! Turn my life into a dream,
And you shall eat strawberries, sugar, and cream!
You'll never do housework! No spousal abuse!
What's sauce for the gander is sauce for the goose.

GTW:

By night we'll make love...

[as pig, to audience]

... Yeah! We'll snog all the day!

YP:

And between bouts of lovemaking?

GTW:

[as pig, to audience]

... Grunt in the hay!

Well, Peer. You'll first have to ask Daddy for my hand. Shall we go and meet my family? They're a wee bit unusual, you know—so don't be surprised. Daddy's palace, for instance. Now it *may* look like a pig-sty to some. But that's because you haven't found the right angle of vision. It's all a question of how you *see*, you see....

Things are not as they appear.
Fair is foul, and foul is fair.
We see what we prefer to find,
For seeing is a state of mind.

YP:

Some things *are*, and some are *not*?

GTW:

Rather like a Rorschach blot.

YP:

White is black and black is white?

GWT:

It's all contingent on your sight.

YP:

[Cottoning on]

Clean is dirty, dirty clean!

GTW:

Preposterous as that may seem....

YP:

Large or small: what we call "size"
Depends on the beholder's eyes.

GTW:

Now Peer, I'll test the way you see.

[She swivels her pig-mask on to her face.]

Behold "Le cochon sans merci!"

[Peer screams and covers his face. She swivels the mask again, and resumes her semi-human identity.]

Silly boy! I took such trouble
To prepare you for my double.
Haven't you discovered yet
That what you see is what you get?

Now, Daddy has a great big book
On training humans how to look.
He'll fix your gaze and set your eyes.
You'll get a helluva surprise!

[She whistles for her carriage. Enter a troll-pig.]

Let's try again, Peer. What do you see?

YP:

A pig!

GTW:

Now I ask you! Would King Brose's daughter travel by pig! Would she expect the great Buckboy of Gjendin to ride on a swine?

YP:

I suppose not.

GTW:

So—look again. What would you expect to see by way of transportation?

YP:

An Arabian mare!

GTW:

And what have we got, Peer?

YP:

An Arabian mare?

GTW:

Right, my boy! We're halfway there!

Scene! "PEER LEARNS THE CONSEQUENCE OF KNOCKING UP A TROLL"

[Peer mounts the troll—"piggy-back"—and they move away with whoops of giddyup, giddyup, as the scene changes to the Hall of the Old Man of the Dovre.]

ACT 1. v.

[MUSIC: A middle passage from Sæverud's "Dovretroll Jog" from the Peer Gynt Suite; or, more conventionally, the raucous last minute of Grieg's "In The Hall of the Mountain King."]

[Trolls swarm into the space, and King Brose's throne—with the Old Man ensconced—is wheeled in. The trolls, in this version of the play, are not cutely “folkloric,” nor are they emblems of the unconscious. They are, like the Green Woman, “doubles”—the pig (or cow) beneath the skin. They all have masks (pig or cow) which are their “normal” state. But they swivel them when they want to deceive. All wear pig or cow tails. In this scene, the Green Troll Woman grows increasingly more pregnant. What Peer does not know, until later, is that his lustful desires can impregnate without physical penetration. The trolls are all hysterical.]

T1:

Kill him!

T2:

Castrate him!

T3:

He's knocked up your daughter!

T1:

Rip out his eyeballs, and whack off his thumb!

T2:

Spit him and roast him!

T3:

Prepare him for slaughter!

T1:

Then stew him in horse-piss,

T2:

... and bite off his bum.

T1, T2, T3:

[screaming, all together]

Castrate, kill, rip, whack, roast, stew, bite, etc.

KING:

[roaring at them]

Isvand i blodet!!!

[Silence falls.]

Cool, calm, and collected, if you please.

Our numbers have declined of late
 And Peer's a perfect candidate.
 Instead of causing such a fuss—
 Let's welcome him as "one of us."

T4:

One-headed trolls are two a penny.

KING:

But we can never have too many....

Parliament needs far more trolls
 To influence opinion polls;
 And provided Peer is not too sinister,
 He'd make a very good Prime Minister!
 As Premier Troll he'd play it sharper
 Than Troll Duceppe —

T4:

Or Stephen Harper.

[They have a good guffaw.]

Let's have him in. We'll soon pervert him!

KING:

I think you mean to say "convert him."

[Another good guffaw.]

[They swivel their animal masks, as Peer is brought in by the Green Troll Woman. All becomes very orderly, rational, and almost elegant.]

KING:

My dear Mr. Gynt. Welcome to my Trollldom. How may I help you?

YP:

I've come for your daughter.

KING:

And what are your terms?

YP:

Your crown, and your Kingdom!

KING:

An answer worthy of a Troll Crown Prince!—Now, as an earnest of my intention, you can have half my Trollldom as dowry, and the other half when you succeed me. So: you're halfway there already!

YP:

[ready to shake on it]

Done!

KING:

Ah, but contracts cut both ways. May I make a few provisos? Minister, if you please.... Item number one.

T4:

[reads from a legal document, dripping with seals, etc.]

That trollldom be your sole confine.

Abandon fresh air and sunshine.

Forget the world you used to roam.

Accommodate to your new home.

YP:

Easily. Fair price for power!

KING:

Good. We're getting there.... Now, a simple skill-testing question. Minister...
Item number two.

T4:

Riddle-me, riddle-me, riddle-me ree.
What is the difference twixt you and me?
You are a human, and we are all trolls.
How do we differ in values and goals?

YP:

[Pause to think.]

A trick question! We're all alike. You're a pretty vicious mob—"kill him, castrate him, roast him," et cetera. Well, we'd be vicious too, if we only had the guts! It's a question of degree....

KING:

Nicely answered! But not quite the conventional way of summing up the situation. Minister, tell him.

T4:

The generally accepted view
Is "Human! To thyself be true."
But trolls think this is more efficient:
"To thyself be... juuuuuust sufficient."

KING:

Ah! That's the key to real success,
For power lies in doing less.
Politicians strut their stuff
By practising what's... juuuuuust enough!

If a job's worth doing, do it by halves. And never do today what can be put off
for the day after tomorrow. And remember that a stitch in time is simply not
worth the bother.

Be satisfied! Prevaricate!
Your "True Self" is a horrid state!

YP:

No problem.

KING:

I thought not. Next: Item three.

[Claps his hands. Pig-faced trolls bring in food and drink in golden containers.]

T4:

Now, a little food and wine!

[Gives Peer a golden beaker. He drinks, gags, and spits it out.]

YP:

Christ! What's this? The devil's brine?

KING:

I'll have you know, Mr. Gynt, that this delicious brew—although it may taste bitter to your palate—is, in fact, a home-grown product and not to be spat on my floor. It's good Trollsheim Spätlese '67, and you better learn to appreciate the vintage. Try again. And pray remember this: if you want the container, you bloody-well take the contents! And that goes for my daughter as well.

YP:

[aside]

It's swill! It's bitter and pernicious.
I guess I'll have to cry, "Delicious!"

[He drinks again. Pause. They wait expectantly. He finishes the swill to the last drop.]

Ah! Delicious!

KING:

You'll find that trolls accommodate to anything in time. Item four?

T4:

If you would be Prince of Wales
You must wear our tie and tails.

KING:

It's merely a matter, Mr. Gynt, of a small change in clothing. Now, if you would kindly doff your Christian outer-garments, we'll provide something more trollish.

YP:

Did you say a tie and tails? I've always fancied something formal.

KING:

Minister... if you please. The "Sunday Best" attire.

[T4 helps Peer out of his clothes, and a pig-troll brings in a cow-bell and a tail with a pretty pink bow at its tip. Before he knows it, Peer is wearing "tie-and-tails."]

YP:

Hey! What's up? I'm not a beast! Get me out of this!

KING:

You protest to no avail!
 A bare-arsed troll without a tail
 Is no fit suitor here.... Besides, I think
 That you look glorious in pink.
 A little shake? A little wag?

[Peer obliges.]

Behold, my trolls—a pig in drag!

YP:

Anything else that I should discard?
 My Christian faith? My hope in God?

KING:

Oh, dear me no. Faith is none of our concern, as long as you don't actually practise it. Observe, for example, the conduct of Sunday morning believers, and their afternoon activities.

If you must, you can wear your heart on your sleeve.
 But it's how you appear—not what you believe.

YP:

Sounds good to me!

KING:

And now to minor matters. Let's celebrate our contract with a dance.

[He claps his hands, and the frolic commences. MUSIC: A drunken version of Grieg's "In the Hall of the Mountain King"—Grieg intended it to sound like falling cow-pats, as it should. All the trolls are in full pig or cow masks, in a wild animal rut. Peer watches from the sidelines.]

KING:

What do you think of my corps-de-ballet?

YP:

Gross! They're pigs and cows! I've never seen anything more disgusting!

[Shocked silence. Then they all swarm him, as before.]

TROLLS:

Kill him! Devour him! Gouge out his eyes!
Cut off his ears! Mangle his thighs!
Kill him! Devour him! Rip out and bite!
Something is radically wrong with his sight....

KING:

[roaring at them]

Isvand i blodet!!! Remember, my trollish ones—

He still sees with human eyes,
Can still distinguish truth from lies.
His sight is ten percent intact,
He's seen right through our trollish pact!
Up to now he's been compliant,
But human nature is defiant.

Mr. Gynt, our contractual agreement leaves only one term unaccounted for.
And so—

To facilitate your troll-vocation

I must perform an operation.

YP:

Operate?

KING:

There's nothing to it.
 A tiny little scratch will do it.
 A slight adjustment to the eye
 Will help you see the world awry.
 Although it makes some humans frown,
 The right way up is upside down!

YP:

You're crazy!

KING:

I can tamper with your eye
 To ensure you never cry.
 Only beauty you'll behold
 Once your eyesight has been trolled.
 Pray, let me adjust your vision,
 It only takes a small incision.

YP:

Let me out of here!

[He rips off his cowbell and tail.]

Our bargain's off. I'm not like you...
 I will not see the world askew!
 I lack the instinct of the troll
 To trade your Kingdom for my soul.
 I'll see the way I want to see.
 My independence sets me free.

[He tries to make a break for it; the trolls bar his way.]

KING:

Cut him off!—He'll not escape

This truly heinous charge of rape!

[The trolls lay hold on him.]

My daughter's pregnant with your brat!
Sweet talk your way out of that!

YP:

I want to make this very clear:
I've never had a love affair
With that woman—that pig-faced tart....
I only lusted in my heart.

KING:

Well, that's how trolls get impregnated!
One filthy thought—Bam! Penetrated!

T4:

In this Kingdom there's no ducking
The consequence of mental fucking!

GTW:

You'll be a Dad in six weeks, Peer.
We gestate rapidly down here....

T1:

You'll file a bi-weekly report...

T2:

Pay alimony, child support....

T3:

He'll grow at an alarming rate...

ALL:

And eat up your entire estate!!

YP:

Stop this nightmare, for Christ's sake!
Dear God in Heaven, let me wake!

KING:

A typically human cry.
 When Christians know that they must die,
 Of lust and greed they make no mention,
 But howl for Jesus' intervention!

YP:

Your majesty, show me the door!
 I'd make a rotten son-in-law.
 I'm not a Prince! I am not rich!
 And I won't tolerate that bitch!

[The Green Troll Woman screeches, and all the pig-trolls descend at once upon Peer, grunting and yelling the lines that opened the scene.]

All:

Kill him! Castrate him! He's knocked up your daughter!
 Rip out his eyeballs, and whack off his thumb!
 Spit him and roast him! Prepare him for slaughter!
 Then stew him in horse-piss, and bite off his bum.

YP:

Help, Ma! I'm done for! Ma! Ma! Help me, help me, Ma!

[He's a child having a nightmare and calling for his mother.]

[Åse rushes in with her stick and attacks the trolls. Church bells peal, the stage grows very bright, and the Hall of the Dovre Troll vanishes.]

ÅSE:

[an incantation]

Ring the Sabbath bell
 Dispel the night
 Trolls—return to Hell
 Let in the light

Go back to sleep, Peer. Next time dream better dreams.

[Peer remains in a fetal position, trembling; Åse cradles him in her arms, and sings Grieg's lullaby—"Solveigs Vuggevisse"—that traditionally concludes the play. It sounds better in Norwegian.]

Sov du, dyreste gutten min!
 Jeg skal vugge dig, jeg skal våge—
 Gutten har siddet på sin moders fang.
 De to har leget hele livsdagen lang.
 Gutten har hvilet ved sin moders bryst
 hele livsdagen lang. Gud signe dig, min lyst!
 Gutten har ligget til mit hjerte tæt
 hele livsdagen lang. Nu er han så træt.
 Sov du, dyreste gutten min!
 Jeg skal vugge dig, jeg skal våge!
 Jeg skal vugge dig, jeg skal våge;—
 sov og drøm du, gutten min!

Right... That's enough... Let's have the next scene in which "PEER GYNT IS SUCKERED BY THE BOYG."

[The lights fade on this tableau and come up on the Buttonmoulder and Old Peer.]

ACT 1. vi.

BM:

Life's a constant bloody battle
 With the trolls that haunt existence.
 Mind must reason with its demons,
 Heart must hammer out resistance!

OP:

But they're everywhere—inside us, and out—thick as sand. They hide themselves in our darkness, and we give them living space and nourish them on our failings. It's not that we can't dislodge them. We don't want to. It means letting in the light.

ÅSE:

What would you do without your Ma, Peer? You're damn lucky to have women around to lay hell into your demons.... Remember the time you ran into that

slime-bag Troll, that lump of festering obstruction! Filthy thing. What did he call himself...?

[Young Peer struggles within a circle of light, swirling with murky shadows. He tries to move through it—to no avail. It's like encountering an invisible wall of clammy rubber, which surrounds him. His panic rises. He's trapped in a shaft of nothingness.]

YP:

Who are you?

GB:

[The Great Boyg is only the voice of an invisible presence. It reverberates ominously throughout the space.]

MEEEEEE!

YP:

Let me pass.

GB:

NEVER TAKE THE PATH THAT'S STRAIGHT.
GO ROUNDABOUT, AND DEVIATE.
NEVER GO THE SHORTEST DISTANCE—
CHOOSE THE ROAD OF LEAST RESISTANCE!
ALWAYS CIRCUMAMBULATE,
DETOUR, AND PROCRASTINATE!

YP:

Who is it?

GB:

MEEEEEE! MYSELF!

YP:

What "self" are you?

GB:

DEN STORE BØJGEN! I'VE TURNED IN UPON MYSELF, LOOPED INSIDE OUT AND ROUNDABOUT, AND SUCKED ME INTO A BLACK-HOLE OF ETERNALLY RECIRCULATING SELFHOOD.

YP:

Can't go forward.... Can't go back.... Can't get out.... Can't get in....

[He strikes violently and blindly at the Boyg.]

For God's sake—hit back! How can I fight you if you won't take shape? How can I battle scum and vapour?

GB:

I NEVER FIGHT. I MERELY OBSTRUCT. CALL IT APATHY. I AM INERTIA TRIUMPHANT!

GO ROUNDABOUT AND DEVIATE.

TAKE CROOKED ROUTES TOWARDS YOUR FATE.

YP:

Let go of me! Let me pass!

[He is slowly being sucked into the black hole of the Boyg, and struggles like a man sinking into quicksand.]

Christ! I'm losing it. I can't feel who I am!

[He starts to bite and rip at his own flesh.]

Christ! Let me bleed! Let me feel the blood in my veins! It's sucking me in! It's turning me in upon myself! Help me! Help....

GB:

GO ROUNDABOUT GO ROUNDABOUT GO ROUNDABOUT

YP:

Help! Help me, Solveig! Save me from myself! Save me from the Boyg!

[Peer collapses, as he is sucked into himself. High above the action, in a pool of light, Solveig reprises her waltz-song from ACT 1.ii. As she sings, so the murky Boyg-light begins to contract and we hear him moan as he recedes.]

SOL:

Hope and Faith and
Charity
Will outlast
Eternity

I'm here forever
 Call to me
 Save yourself from waste and
 Futility.
 Don't turn our lives into
 Vanity.

ÅSE:

That's done for the bloody Boyg, all right! It's women, you see. *They* get straight to the point. No beating round about!

[Peer remains huddled on the ground, as it begins gently to snow. Enter the three cowgirls on their way home from the pasturage. Their sexy song from the earlier scene is now subdued, nostalgic of summer.]

CGs:

In this scene "PEER BUILDS SOLVEIG A HUT — HA! HA!"

ACT 1. vii.

CG1:

Hey, it's Peer! What's up?

CG2:

I can tell you what isn't! His asparagus is boiled!

CG3:

Flaccid as a bladder
 With its air let out!
 As a lover he's as useless
 As a frozen trout!

CG1:

[She prods him to consciousness.]

Hey, Peer! Still on the run? Want to come home with us for the winter?

YP:

I can't. They're still out to get me in the village. I must hide where I can....

CG2:

Poor Peer! Running from the law,
Scavenging your grub from the forest floor.
Mummy's not around to prepare your dinner—
Have to get it for yourself, like every other sinner.

CG3:

Have to light your own fire—if you know what I mean....

ALL:

No women! No sex!
No company!
Living like an outlaw's
Not the life for me!

YP:

Please—take three messages back for me. Tell the farmer's daughter I'm sorry. Tell my mother I'll be back to care for her. And.... tell Solveig that I'm building a house. I've chopped the trees for her. I've broken stones for her. And give her this button.

[He rips a button off his waistcoat.]

Tell her to keep it safe. She'll understand what I mean. Tell her... not to forget me.

ALL:

Poor Peer! Living on his own!
Outcast yearning for a cosy home,
Performs hard labour, now, to safeguard his survival—
And dreams romantic dreams about his Solveig's swift arrival.

Goodbye, Peer. We'll deliver your messages. Have a good winter!

[The cowgirls skip off, humming their sexy song. Peer, in earnest, picks up his axe and starts splitting wood. It's hard work, but then he sets aside the axe and starts drifting off, as usual.]

YP:

[sings]

Live with me and
 Love me still
 With the deer
 Upon the hill
 In a cabin
 Built for two
 There we'll take shelter
 Me and you
 Snow-storms won't blow there
 To harm us
 I'll light a fire
 To warm us

I'll build you a palace, Solveig. It'll have a tower, and mermaids carved on the gable, and brass fittings, and sparkling panes of glass....

[While he has been fantasizing, a young man—very like Peer in age and appearance—creeps in and grabs the axe. He raises it high above his head in a violent gesture. Peer spins around and shouts in terror. But the man brings the axe down on his own hand, severs a finger, and screams in pain. Blood spurts.]

YP:

Oh, Jesus! You've crippled your hand! Are you mad? You'll bleed to death. Why did you do it? Why would you want to mutilate yourself. Fingers don't grow back, you know. You're crippled forever!

[He strips off his shirt, and binds the man's hand. The blood seeps through the cloth. As Peer tends to the man, the lights fade to a blackout onstage. The focus shifts to the Buttonmoulder and Old Peer as they contemplate the spectacle.]

OP:

Yes—I remember him! Want to know why he did it? It was his trigger finger, you see. If you can't pull a trigger, they can't conscript you! He couldn't look on death... Poor bugger! I can imagine dreaming my way out of the draft—but *doing it, actually doing it....* To be maimed forever....

BM:

Self-injury takes many forms:
 Some mutilate the fragile soul,
 While others damage mind and brain.
 Is any human being whole?

OP:

But suffer such appalling pain,
Display—for life—the brand of Cain!

BM:

His body is his site of shame.
But others hide the crippled “me”
So we can’t see disfigurement.
Who can claim integrity?

OP:

I can! I hold together—I’m intact!

BM:

No fatal flaw? ... No hairline crack?
We all see what we damn well please,
In love with our own deformities....

[By now the man has long since departed, and the lights come up on Peer and the small little hut that he has built on the hillside. There are reindeer horns on the door—the Gjendin buck has been domesticated—and there is snow on the ground.]

YP:

Love in a hut! We’ll have to make do...
No castle in Spain! But sufficient for two,
With a bolt on the door to lock out all harm,
From the goblins and trolls—and the Hegstader’s farm.

Oh, Solveig! I’ll keep you safe here from malice and evil thoughts....

[MUSIC: “Solveig’s Song” from Grieg’s Peer Gynt suite. It plays gently throughout the love scene that follows. Solveig enters on skis across the snowfield.]

SOL:

You sent for me, and I appear.
Wind-borne, wafting in the air,
Your message came: “I need you. Peer.”
For God’s sake, bid me welcome here!

YP:

Solveig! I never thought you'd come.

SOL:

In barren nights I dream of you,
 My desolation held at bay
 By visions of our joyful life.
 You fill the emptiness of day,
 You light the bleakness of my night.
 The meaning of myself is you,
 I have no joy apart from us.
 I know I've done what I must do.

YP:

Your family? Your father's home?

SOL:

My home is you. You are my all,
 My father, mother, sister, self.
 My summer, winter, spring, and fall.

[She sings the first stanza of "Solveig's Song." The context is sufficiently clear for the Norwegian to be understood. Her preceding lines, here and when she sings the last stanza at the end of the scene, are a paraphrase of the original.]

Kanske vil der gå både vinter og vår,
 og næste sommer med, og det hele år;—
 men engang vil du komme, det véd jeg visst;
 og jeg skal nog vente, for det lofte jeg sidst.

YP:

But Solveig, I have nothing! What will we live on? They've confiscated the farm, and the land, and everything....

SOL:

You are all I need. I didn't leave my life and those I loved for land and chattels.

YP:

I'm a fugitive! They can arrest me any time.... I have nowhere to go. No home to return to.

SOL:

Wherever I am is home for you, and you are home for me. I ask no more. Hold me. Love me. Console me.

YP:

Solveig! My bride of grace! My blessing! No—don't come too near. Let me look at you.... Just look.... My angel, pure as air! My touch will tarnish you! My hand will bruise you. You have answered my longing—but all is unworthy. Me. This hut. It's not fit for your presence in it.

SOL:

Peer, I'm your bride of flesh and blood!
Your hut is perfect for my needs.
I can breathe the pine-filled air,
And find good herbs among the weeds.
The silence fills my soul with song.
I have returned where I belong.

YP:

You're sure? Forever, and a day...?

SOL:

There isn't any other way.

YP:

It's a miracle... Come in, then. I'll bring some wood for light and heat.

[Solveig goes into the hut, and Peer is about to go off with his axe when the Green Troll Woman enters—much the worse for wear, old and tattered, wearing a sagging pig-face. She has with her a crippled troll-child, a puling and whining brat. This is Peer's son.]

GTW:

Hey, Peer Gynt! Not so fast!
I've caught up with you at last....

YP:

With me? You must be quite mistaken.
I don't associate with bacon.

GTW:

Do you forget our rendezvousing
 And your imaginative screwing?
 Well—here's the trollish procreation
 Of your Platonic copulation.
 Say "Hi" to Daddy, Piggy-pie.

[The troll-brat bashes Peer in a tender spot and snarls at him.]

YP:

Ow! I'm not his father! That's a lie!

GTW:

He looks like you! Two of a kind!
 One lame in the body, and one in the mind!
 It takes a pig to make a pig.

YP:

He's not my son. He's much too big.

GTW:

He's shot up like a little weed,
 The troll-spawn of your Gyntish seed.

YP:

[Makes the sign of the cross to ward off evil.]

Pig-Devil, get thee to perdition!

GTW:

OK, Peer. On one condition:

Get rid of that insipid woman
 With her sanctimonious air,
 And her vile disgusting pureness,
 And that halo in her hair.
 Turn her loose, and chuck her out
 And I'll remove my piggy snout.
 I'm much lovelier than that virgin—
 And, what's more, I need no urgin'.

YP:

Bugger off! Troll-hag! Witch!

GTW:

Beware my vengeance on that bitch....

I'll suck out your desire and turn it into filth. Make love—I'll interpose my body! Kiss her—I'll shove my lips between you. Touch her—you'll feel my pig-skin in your hand. We'll share you, turn and turn about. Here, take your brat. Go to Daddy, you little shit!

[The troll-child grabs the axe and runs at Peer. But the troll woman stops him.]

Already showing his Gyntish qualities! Right—I'll bugger off. But we'll be back.... Too bad about the girl, Peer, but that's the way it has to be. When the innocent suffer, all's right with the world. Bye, for now. Dream and lust... they keep the world going round.

[She walks off with the troll-child who hisses at Peer as they depart. The Boyg light once more encircles Peer, and on its periphery stand Solveig's father, the Troll King, and the Green Troll Woman and Child]

YP:

My castle's smashed! My light snuffed out!

BOYG VOICE:

GO ROUNDABOUT GO ROUNDABOUT

YP:

My past returns and blocks the way....

BOYG VOICE:

DETOUR, TURN ROUND AND RUN AWAY

YP:

Is there no path towards repentance?

FATHER:

You must serve out your prison sentence.

YP:

But I've atoned my sexual sin!

TROLL KING:

I still smell "troll" beneath your skin!

YP:

Does consequence admit no pity?

GTW and Child:

Can mercy cleanse a soul that shitty?

YP:

What if troll-dirt stains her life?
Dare I contaminate my wife?
Solveig! Now, on All Saints' Eve,
Forgive me! I must take my leave!

BOYG VOICE:

GO ROUNDABOUT AND DEVIATE.
TAKE CROOKED ROUTES TOWARDS YOUR FATE.

[Peer runs off. Solveig comes out of the house and watches him go. The phantom figures disappear, and the Boyg light shrinks when Solveig begins to sing.]

SOL:

God knows when we'll meet again.
He's gone. The Gjendin buck must roam...
And Peer is Peer. But I remain,
Forever, his enduring home.

[sings]

Gud styrke dig, hvor du i verden går!
Gud glæde dig, hvis du for hans forskammel står!
Her skal jeg vente, til du kommer igen;
og venter du histoppe, vi træffes der, min ven!

[The light slowly dies as she concludes the song and goes to gather the bits of firewood that Peer neglected to carry into the hut to warm it.]

ACT 1. viii.

[In Åse's cottage. Much noise. She's clinging to the only chair in the house while the Bailiff's men carry out the rest of her belongings. The three old women of ACT 1.i. hover around her.]

OLD WOMEN:

“ÅSE RIDES HER BUCK ACROSS THE GJENDIN RIDGE”

BAIL:

Come now Åse, don't you fret!
The law demands you pay your debt—
So, if you please, I'll have that chair.

W1:

If I were you, I'd send for Peer.

ÅSE:

Pay my debts? Do you suppose
I haven't paid up through the nose
To compensate that Hegstad bugger
For Peer's abduction of his scrubber?
Take my chair? Awwww—take me too
In a pauper's coffin! Shame on you!

BAIL:

Not my fault, old woman. The law's the law. Property must be restored in kind: moveables, farm, land, whatever may be seized. You're lucky to have this roof over your head.

[He finally dislodges her from the chair, and leaves her on the floor, the house now stripped bare.]

W2:

So, where's your boy when you really need him?

W3:

Always bites the hand that feeds him!

W1:

Ruins his mother! Wrecks the farm!

W2:

God damn him... All he does is harm!

ÅSE:

Hold your tongues! Peer's not to blame
 For other people's guilt and shame!
 The bride returned—*almost* intact—
 What more can you expect than that?

W3:

She's crazy and she's getting worse.
 She blesses where she ought to curse....

ÅSE:

My darling boy! I hid the box
 That holds your winter shirts and socks,
 [In triumph, she extricates it from beneath her skirts.]
 A needle and a bit of thread!

 [Starts darning like the fury.]

W1:

I'll go get Peer. She'll soon be dead....

[She leaves]

ÅSE:

And look: your casting-ladle toy
 You loved to play with as a boy!
 [She takes it from a pocket.]
 Remember? Buttons made from tin....
 Your Dad, dead drunk on bootleg gin,
 Said: "Find the boy some gold to mint...
 Naught's good enough for my Peer Gynt!"

W1:

The Gynts! A bunch of drunken dreamers—
A pack of get-rich-quickly schemers!
Put tin in the ladle, and tin will come out—
Like Peer, that good-for-nothing lout!

[Thus announced, Peer comes bursting in. Åse tries to get up to greet him, but can't. She's dying, and grows weaker throughout the scene. MUSIC: softly, in the background, Grieg's "The Death of Åse."]

YP:

Ma!

[He gets down on the floor with her, and cradles her in his arms.]

ÅSE:

Hello, my lovey—and goodbye!
I'm glad you've come. But please don't stay.
They'll suck your blood if you don't fly.
The two of us must go away....

YP:

Where d'you think you're going, Mor?

ÅSE:

Some place I've never been before....

YP:

Forgive me, Ma! I've done you wrong—
I've ruined you. And they've stripped you bare....

ÅSE:

It's not your fault. The drink was strong,
And you were high on Gjendin air—

Poor Peer! It's your infernal luck
To ride forever on that buck!

YP:

Forget it, Ma. Leave hard times alone... Remember the old days... you used to tuck me up and sing me to sleep:

Sov du, dyreste gutten min!
Jeg skal vugge dig, jeg skal våge—

ÅSE:

[She is suckered into Peer's recreation of childhood and sings the next two lines.]

Gutten har siddet på sin moders fang.
De to har leget hele livsdagen lang.

Remember our fantasy horse-buggy rides?
We'd slide on the blanket, pretend it's a sleigh!

YP:

The floor was our ice-field. We'd skate round the sides,
And the room would spin round in a magical way....

ÅSE:

Gee-up, little horsies! Christ, Peer—it was fun!
We'd gallop like mad to a world high and deep....

YP:

West of the moon, and east of the sun,
And arrive just in time to fall deeply asleep.

ÅSE:

Ahhh... Peer. It's time to go. I long for it, now...

YP:

Shall I take you? Here. Help her.

[He squats in front of Åse, and the women lift her onto his shoulders.]

There? Is that better? East of the sun and west of the moon, they're having such a feast.... His Majesty awaits your arrival, Queen Åse!

ÅSE:

But Peer, I haven't been invited!

YP:

Don't worry, Ma. He'll be delighted.

[He starts a gentle gallop, marking time rather than moving. This is Åse's own Gjendin ride. During the course of the journey she must be seen to take leave of this world, and enter the next through her visionary fantasies.]

YP:

Comfortable? Not too cold? Listen to the silver sleigh bells ringing? Hold on tight. What do you hear? What do you see?

ÅSE:

I can feel the pine-woods sighing—
I can hear the waters roar—
I can sense the daylight dying—
I can see the Castle door—

YP:

Look! St. Peter's at the gate
Opening it wide for you!
In his hand's a golden plate
Of cakes and sweets and wine for you!

Who else is there, Ma! Who do you see? Who's that Lady in a bright blue dress....

ÅSE:

The Virgin Mary with a dish
Of delicate, poached Bergen fish!!
Is it for me? Who would have guessed....
Old Åse saved? Oh, I am blessed!

YP:

Look, Ma! Who's walking on the fjord?

ÅSE:

Oh, Jesus! Peer—it's Christ our Lord!
I hardly can believe my eyes—
My escort into Paradise!
We're almost there. I'm going fast

But I'll embrace my God at last!

[Peer begins to gallop around the stage, as Åse gradually gives up the ghost.]

YP:

Gallop-a-gallop. I fear I'm too late!
St. Peter is ready to lock up his gate!
Hey—wait for Mor Åse!

[He stops. Waits for signs of life, then slowly lowers Åse to the ground.]

Dear Heaven above,
May the Lord in His wisdom
Please grant her his love!

[He feels her hands and her feet, then shuts her eyes and cradles her in his arms once again. He sings two lines of the lullaby.]

Jeg skal vugge dig, jeg skal våge!
Jeg skal vugge dig, jeg skal våge;—

Hav tak for alle dine dage.

[He kisses her.]

Now, Ma, don't you thank me too for your final ride?

[He bends his cheek to her lips.]

That's right. The horseman's fare...

[To the three women.]

Bury her. I must go.

W1:

Go where, Peer Gynt?

YP:

Away. I'll make my fortune somewhere—east of the sun, or west of the moon.
What does it matter...

I'll catch a boat to Timbuktu,
Morocco, Cairo, or Peru!

When I return I'll be "King Peer"—
A monarch, and a billionaire!

[He snatches up the shirts and socks, and goes.]

[Pause—then Åse sits up, rises from the dead, joins the Buttonmoulder and Old Peer, and speaks harshly to her now elderly son.]

ÅSE:

St. Peter's gate?? Again, you lied!
Another cheating Gjendin ride—
A fraud, a trick, a waste of breath....

[then, rapturously]

But—Christ!—I died a lovely death!

[The music punctuates her sense of ecstasy and ends the Act.]

[CURTAIN]



Button Moulder

Costume renderings created by Alison Green for the 1999 performance at the Frederic Wood Theatre, UBC.



King Troll

Costume renderings created by Alison Green for the 1999 performance at the Frederic Wood Theatre, UBC.



Troll #2

Costume renderings created by Alison Green for the 1999 performance at the Frederic Wood Theatre, UBC.



Solveig

Costume renderings created by Alison Green for the 1999 performance at the Frederic Wood Theatre, UBC.



Young Peer

Costume renderings created by Alison Green for the 1999 performance at the Frederic Wood Theatre, UBC.



Peer as Anthropologist

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Solveig's Father and Mother

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Old Peer

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Mother Åse

Costume renderings created by Alison Green for the 1999 performance at the Frederic Wood Theatre, UBC.



Anitra

Costume renderings created by Alison Green for the 1999 performance at the Frederic Wood Theatre, UBC.

ACT 2. i.

[In this Act, Young Peer shares the peripheral area with the Buttonmoulder. There is a shift in perspective: the young man sees what he will become. Old Peer is now the protagonist of the play.]

YP:

[Reprise]

I'll catch a boat to Timbuktu,
Morocco, Cairo, or Peru!
When I return I'll be "King Peer"—
A monarch, and a billionaire!

BM:

And so you ran away to sea
To realize your destiny?
You saved your meagre sailor's pay,
And wound up in the USA,
Grew rich by being smart and thrifty—
Behold yourself! You've just turned fifty!

[Lights up on Old Peer Gynt, a figure of affluence and power. He wears the gear of a wealthy traveller in the tropics, with a solar topi. The setting is somewhere in North Africa, an outpost in the heart of darkness. There should be some suggestion of a ship on stage. Later in the scene it will blow up.]

YP:

So how did I amass my wealth?

BM:

You'd better ask your older Self—
This bourgeois merchant's now Peer Gynt:
Filthy rich, and hard as flint.

YP:

How did I get from *here*—to *there*?
Which one of us is the *real* Peer?
Are you the "me" who rode the buck?

OP:

I'm the Peer you're *going* to be.—It takes good luck,
Some capital, some business sense,
Some self-instruction, some pretence
Of moral dealing—

YP:

A little stealing?

OP:

When required... Add a touch of pious feeling,
And behold!—a great Philanthropist!

YP:

Or a self-serving Capitalist?

OP:

Same thing—depends on how you view it:
Business acumen? Or theft?
“Wealth” is how you might construe it
If you're cash-*rich*, or cash-*bereft*.

YP:

I'd like to know where I've been and where I'm headed. I ran away with nothing
at the end of Act I—and that was thirty years ago! What's been our career
since then?

BM:

Let's resume.—Your destination
Was a Southern slave plantation....

OP:

Yes. Near Charlestown. And, by Jesus,
I grew prosperous as Croesus!—
Amassed a fortune in the trade,
(Learned *not* to call a spade a spade!)

YP:

What sort of trading were you in?

Don't tell me it was human skin!

OP:

*Importing blacks to Carolina—
Exporting gods to Indochina....*

YP:

Revolted! You disgust me, Peer!
You're the mythic "Self" I fear....

OP:

Look, it wasn't *only* greed—
Call it "my Socialistic creed."
I gave employment to the mob—
Every Negro got a job!
Why consider me a swindler?
I was a Yankee Oskar Schindler!

YP:

And what about this Indonesian venture? How does your "creed" condone
supplying heathen statuettes in pious Christian ships?

OP:

I was one of God's true visionaries!

First Sell idols—*then* send missionaries
To convert the heathen scum!
Good Christian profit's to be made
In Bibles, nylons, rice and rum!

BM:

And thus appease the life to come?

YP:

Flog a God today, baptize a heathen tomorrow! Conscience nicely set off
against profit....

OP:

Exactly. It's called "balance of trade" ... My reckoning is perfectly squared.
My good deeds cancel out a few minor misdemeanors.

BM:

Like gun-running? Like that cartel of rogues you took on board at Gibraltar to fix the price of ammunition in the Peloponnesian war? A minor misdemeanor?

OP:

My hands are clean! I didn't profit by a penny.... Here—look what happened!
And judge for yourselves....

“PEER GYNT SETS EUROPE ALL ABLAZE”

ACT 2. ii.

[The stage becomes the deck of a ship, with the members of the cartel—Cotton (English), Ballon (French), and von Eberkopf (German)—each entering in national colours, to his national anthem. Peer takes his place to the tune of “Yankee-doodle-dandy.” Music: Sæverud’s “Mixed Company” from the first Peer Gynt Suite is a possibility. They are drinking.]

CHORUS:

[singing a snatch of Gilbert and Sullivan]

“Pour, oh pour, the pirate sherry,
Fill, oh fill, the pirate glass.
And to make us more the merry,
Let the pirate bumper pass.”

OP:

Drink up, Gentlemen! Your health!
Here's to escalating wealth!
Forget the past!—our profit lies
In forward-looking enterprise.

BAL:

M'sieur Pierre, je vous en prie...
I salute your piracy!

COT:

To skull and cross-bones! And perdition

To all opposed to ammunition!

vEB:

I drink to cosmonopolisticaretellizing of all belligerent resources!
And investments in gunpowder, bullets, cannon, rifles, ammunition—and also
horses!

COT:

Old boy, let's have your recipe
For amassing such prosperity....

OP:

Celibacy.

BAL:

Celibacy??

COT:

No sex?

OP:

No *marriage!* Bachelorhood
Is the basis of financial good:
Living for yourself alone,
Lord of everything you own,
Nothing shared, no split possession!
Married love? It's an obsession....

vEB:

Mein Gott! Such übermenschliche power!
A Nietzsche! Hegel! Schopenhauer!
Hast du einen Ph.D.
In Gyntischselbstphilosophie?

OP:

Sicherheit... Selbstheit...? I call mine
"The Egotistical Sublime"!

BAL:

L'egotisme? Mais, pourquoi

Won't Pierre reveal le "Gyntish" *moi*?

OP:

The Gyntish Self?—Exert your Will!
Be *Self*-satisfied—for good, or ill.

That Ocean of craving for all I desire.
That Peak of Ambition to which I aspire.
That bottomless well of whatever I need.

YP:

That cesspool of endless, conspicuous greed!

OP:

Now, Gentlemen... to business. With your infusion of capital, we have a boatload of gunpowder to market on the battlefields of Europe. According to dispatches from Casablanca, the iron of conflict is hot for striking. Here—look at these news headlines.

[He distributes some newspapers among the group.]

TURKS INVADE PELOPONNESE

BAL:

GREEK INDEPENDENCE ON ITS KNEES

[He is stunned.]

COT:

MISSOLONGHI FALLS TO TURK
LORD BYRON DEAD

[He is stunned.]

OP:

Right! Let's get to work...
Let's fuel this war—provide the means
For whatever genocidal schemes
The Ottoman Empire may devise.
They've got the cash! We've got supplies!

COT:

Lord Byron dead?—This gives me pause.

[He pauses.]

Sir! I can *not* support your cause.
 England's Romantic hero died
 A sacrifice for Grecian pride!

OP:

No, no... He died of marsh disease.
 Facts before sentiment, if you please.

BAL:

M'sieur! Your Turkish scheme betrays
 La Revolution Française!
 France supports la liberté!
 With Greece we feel fraternité!

OP:

Look, Gentlemen, it makes no matter—
 Supply the former, or the latter...
 Sell to either national force,
 And let the conflict take its course.
 I'll arm the Turks, and you the Greeks—
 Prolong the war for twelve more weeks!!
 Think of the profit! (God be willing...)

YP:

Forget the carnage and the killing!

vEB:

Bitte, Herr Peer.

[He pulls a pistol on him.]

Surprise, surprise!
 Anyone who helps him dies!
 I commandeer our pirate mission.
 The cargo's ours. Peer is *beschissen*!

COT:

Make the bastard walk the plank.
We'll run crying to the bank!

BAL:

Egalité! Divide his cash!
Revolution! Smash! Smash! Smash!

vEB:

Amerikanische Schweinerei!
Kaiser Gynt is dead today!

OP:

What about your high ideals?

COT:

Hark! The Gyntish piggy squeals!

BAL:

M'sieur Gynt, you've taught us well.
We've all learnt your creed of Hell.
Le Gyntish *moi*—"Exert your Will!
Be Self-satisfied—for good, or ill."
Now it is ours! Au revoir.
Europe is our abattoir!

OP:

Auf Wiedersehen! Adieu! Goodbye!
Peer Gynt does not roll up and die.
My sole possession's one cigar—
But profit's door remains ajar.
Goddamn you all! You bunch of clowns!
I hope each man-jack of you drowns!

[He lights his last cigar, tosses the match on board, and steps off the ship.]

vEB:

[screaming]

No cigarettes! Put out that flame!

[Too late. The ship explodes in a sheet of fire, and smoke fills the space. The gentleman disappears.]

OP:

Well—would you say that I'm to blame?
Gunpowder's volatile, unstable.
An accident... BUT: I was able,
With a match, to guarantee
Greece's fight for liberty!

BM:

So—a coincidental good
Redeems a vicious, bad intention?
And we see, in happenstance,
Proof positive of God's intention?

OP:

I'm one of God's sparrows. He looks after his own!

YP:

Two for a penny!

OP:

Well, that's better than nothing.

YP:

What price the celibate Self?

OP:

Let me assure you: my sex life was great!
I had sex on demand! Both early and late...

YP:

That's not what I mean.

OP:

I once had a whore,
I should say a "houri." Could one ask for more?

Her name was Anitra... Yes, those were the days!
 I was Sheik of Morocco: my Peeropolis phase...
 The cartel proved a failure.—But the end of one scheme
 Is merely a pretext for the following dream!

ACT 2. iii.

OP:

“PEER THE GREAT PROPHET LOSES HIS SHIRT”

[Music: “Peer Gynt’s Serenade,” from Grieg’s Peer Gynt Suite. An exotic Arabian robe falls from the flies. Old Peer dresses himself in it. Then a turban and jewels fall from the sky, and Peer assumes his next fantasy life. Peer sings.]

I’m born again!!—a new-made Peer!!

God said, “Here’s Paradise...

Go forth upon your new career,

I license you to profiteer—

I bless your enterprise!”

The Lord helps those who help themselves.

This is my promised land.

I’ll build a great metropolis,

My city of Peeropolis,

On sub-Saharan sand.

My Kingdom of Gyntiana! My death-defying stroke of genius! The desert is my oyster.... A little grit won’t hurt it. All it takes is water to make the desert bloom!

[A sudden flash of genius]

I’ll chop a canal from Suez to Abyssinia! I’ll... I’ll...

Invent an irrigation scheme

By damming up the Nile!

I’ll benefit humanity

With hydro-electricity—

And make myself a pile!!

Can you see it? Steam-mills pounding away in Timbuktu? Gambling casinos from Cairo to Babylon! Oases of exploitation! PROFIT! PROFIT!

[*Music: Sæverud's "Anitra" from the First Peer Gynt Suite. A chorus of Bedouins has been the audience to Peer's fantasy of transformation, and they now reveal themselves—in ecstasy. Among them is a chorus of dancing girls, very like the cowgirls in Act I, and Anitra—dressed, of course, in Green.*]

CHORUS:

The prophet has come! The prophet is here! Hail, Master! Our prophet has come!

[*They ply him with pillows, food, and drink, and bow down low as Peer confers with the Buttonmoulder.*]

OP:

Prophet? Prophet? Do they mistake me for an emissary of Allah?

BM:

Semantics, Peer, have caused confusion.

OP:

Well—why dispel their fond illusion?
 I'll offer them prophetic gains—
 And preach the lore of Maynard Keynes!
 Buy low! Sell high! Invest in dreams!
 Speculate in mutual schemes!
 Hear my prophetic expertise:
 "Buy bonds, and stocks, and equities!"
 I'll sell you shares in Gynt and Co...
 Just watch your virtual fortunes grow!
 Cash is trash! My new vocation
 Is *Prophetic Exploitation!*

AN:

O, my Prophet! O, my Lord!
 We do your bidding! Speak the word!
 The Master burns with holy fire—
 We obey your least desire!
 The Prophet's good as he is wise.
 Let's dance him into Paradise!

[*Anitra and the chorus of houris dance. Music: the passionate passages from Sæverud's "Anitra."*]

OP:

I always liked them plump...

BM:

and *dirty*?

OP:

Sexy, sleek...

BM:

and over *thirty*?

OP:

Sometimes beggars have no choice.

BM:

Just lie back and cry "*Rejoice*"?

OP:

She's alluring! Passions burn!

BM:

What can he give her in return?

AN:

My Prophet! If we should go all the way,
What can I expect as pay?

OP:

Umm... I'm authorized to offer you Redemption!

AN:

What???

OP:

It means “buying back”—you give me sex, I save your soul. I buy on credit here and now, and settle in the world to come. Ain’t that a deal? It’s spiritual economics—like buying futures!

AN:

But do I have a soul to save?

OP:

A detail, surely, we can waive...
Sex with a prophet!—and your prize?
A passport into Paradise!

AN:

But I need a “this-world” guarantee,
Some tangible security
In case my saviour proves untrue.

OP:

Here’s an opal. Will that do?

AN:

Very nicely! ... Quite a treasure....
Now—strip off!! It’s time for pleasure!!
Come my houris. Make him harden
For entry to my perfumed garden.

[They help Peer undress, and pass his clothes and turban and jewels, etc., along the line until they disappear offstage.]

OP:

You’re Eve—and I’m Adam! Was Eden such fun?
“*Das ewig weibliche ziehet uns an.*”

[sings]

A jug of wine, a loaf of bread
Anitra, in the buff...
In couplets tuned in rhyming verse
The Kama Sutra we’ll rehearse

'Tis Paradise enough!

The glory of the world is *now*!
 Joy will not come again...
 All wealth and pleasure melt like snow,
 The rose of life will quickly blow,
 And *nothing* will remain!

AN:

How you sweat, my Lord and Master! How heavy is your ring! How laden is your purse!

[She cases off Peer's burdens.]

OP:

Now—let's resume business. Remember our deal?
 My "sex-for-salvation" is a helluva steal...
 I trade you bodily pleasure and laughter
 For spiritual profit in the pleasant hereafter.

AN:

Your every wish is my command!
 My manipulative hand?
 Or would you prefer some special tricks
 I keep in store for perfect pr... ophets.
 Bring me a feather and some cord!
 Shall I tickle and

[she whispers in his ear]

my Lord?

[The houris come with ropes and tie Peer up.]

OP:

Oh! I'm in bondage! I'm enthralled!

AN:

If I were you, I'd be appalled...
 My "Saviour," "Prophet," and "Redeemer"!!
 What a shyster! What a schemer!

You embezzle women's souls!
 Rape and plunder are your goals!
 Don't preach me that prophetic crap,
 Peer Gynt! I hope you get the clap!!

[The hours take what little remains and depart, leaving Peer tied up.]

OP:
 Help me, someone! I've been plucked!

YP:
 Poor Peer expected to get...

BM:
 ... Yes. Precisely.
 A purblind prophet could foresee
 That oldest trick in history...
 A gullible, romantic goose!
 I suppose I'd better cut him loose.

[He releases Peer from bondage.]

OP:
 It's not my fault! She led me a dance...
 I was a victim of circumstance!
 This prophetic career has taught me a lesson;
 Next time I'll select a more mundane profession.

BM:
 High finance is out!

YP:
 And so is theology!

BM:
 Should he pursue Science?

YP:

Or Anthropology?

OP:

Thank God I've never been to college—
I'm an amateur of knowledge:
My intellect is strictly Peer's—
Innocent of all ideas,
Uncontaminated, free
To cultivate "World History"!

[sings]

I'll solve the mystery of life,
The key to Human fate!
I'll shape the future of the West,
Put Oswald Spengler to the test—
Professor Gynt, the Great!

All it takes is the standard gear of a research scholar in the field of ancient cultures. Fortunately, I have secured a little cash in the Bank of Cairo against such an emergency—so that's where I'll begin! And to hell with the distractions of sex. "Das Ewig Weibliche...?" There's no such creature....

[Peer leaves the stage—and the lights go up on Solveig who is visibly older. She spins, as she sings. Music: Grieg's "Solveig Sings in the Hut."]

SOL:

Nu er her stellet til Pinsekveld.
Kære gutten min, langt borte,—
kommer du vel?
Har du tungt at hente,
så und dig frist;—
jeg skal nog vente;
jeg lofte så sidst.

[The lights slowly fade as the music does, and then—]

ACT 2. iv.

BOYG VOICE:

“PEER GYNT GOES ROUNDABOUT AND FINDS HIS TRUE AND ONLY KINGDOM”

[In a burst of desert sunlight, we see the Great Sphinx of Gizeh (which could possibly be created physically by the Chorus.) It is illuminated by the Boyg-light. Music: a few stirring bars of Grieg's "Peer Gynt at the Statue of Memnon." Enter Peer dressed like an Anthropological Historian, with binoculars, climbing ropes, a knife, and a large guide-book, which he now consults.]

OP:

Can this be the Great Spinx of Gizeh?

Baedecker gives *this* thing four stars?

This sculptural tautology?

Half beast, half woman... Lion's paws....

Some localized mythology?

I really wouldn't be surprised

Were this the Boyg "Egyptianized."

Hey, Boyg! Who are you, Boyg?

SPH:

[echo]

Who am I? Who am I? Who am I?

VOICE:

Wer bist du?

SPH:

[echo]

Wer bin Ich? Wer bin Ich? Wer bin Ich?

OP:

Good God! It speaks with a Berliner accent!

[Enter Begriffenfeldt from behind the Sphinx.]

BEGR:

Ach, no, *mein Herr!* It has this infuriating way with questions in any tongue. Ask it who it is, and it throws the riddle back! That's why it's called the Great Sphinx of Gizeh.

OP:

Sphinx? I know it as the Great Boyg of Etnedal. It's a question of cultural anthropology. It's an archetype.

BEGR:

You know him?... her? We have been going crazy trying to find out what it is! Tell me! Tell me!

OP:

The "Thing Itself"!—Its quiddity
Is the quintessential "ME."
This "thingness" Hegel would define
As "Das insichseiende Fürsichsein."

BEGR:

Of course! It's SELFNESS!! All's resolved!
Life's timeless riddle has been solved!!
We have the answer! Plain and true!
Begriffenfeldt!

[He shakes hands with Peer.]

And who are you?

OP:

Peer Gynt. That's me. That is my name.

BEGR:

Another archetype!!—Your fame
Shall ricochet from age to age:
"Peer Gynt! Our hermeneutic sage!"

[The Chorus picks up the chant: "Peer Gynt! Our hermeneutic sage," as they slowly disintegrate the Sphinx and form themselves into the crazy SSHRC.]

We have been expecting you, Your Gyntship! Welcome to your Kingdom of Selbstheit! Welcome to our newly formed Society of Self-centred and Highminded Rightbrain Critics.—It used to be the Great Madhouse of Cairo. But we put an end to that last night. At 11 p.m. precisely!

OP:

Why 11 p.m.?

BEGR:

That was when Absolute Reason imploded! Poof! Finished!
 No more Hegel! No more Kant!
 We can think what we damn well want!
 No more logic! No more reason!
 Crazyiness is back in Season!
 Crazyiness is back in Season!

[The Chorus picks up the chant: "Crazyiness is back in Season!"]

Now the mad are as sane as I am—or as you!... And if they all seem to be walking on their heads, it's because the world is a little upsidedown at present, and we need to accommodate! Poor Hegel couldn't do it... Mad as a Hatter. Quite beside himself!—Come my Philosophers! Come greet the Emperor of Selfhood!

[The chorus picks up the chant: "The Emperor has come."]

OP:

No! No, Herr Begriffenfeldt!
 You've got the wrong man! I am *thoroughly* Peer!
 Peer Gynt, top to toe! But nobody here
 Is essentially "Self." Each is out of his mind!
 This outside-of-oneself-ness is not of my kind....

BEGR:

On the contrary, Your Gyntship. No one here is "beside" himself. They couldn't be more quintessentially "Self"-centred!
 Each plays out his selfish role,
 His egocentric paradigm.
 His world is "ME," ingested whole—
 Nothing else exists in time!

Let me introduce you to His Whoness—totally autistic. Knows *who* he is, but no one else. Who! Who!

[Peer tries to shake his hand. He is ignored by the catatonic Who.]

Pickled in his self-esteem,
In solipsistic apathy,
He never hears the other scream,
He sheds no tears of sympathy.
Indifferent to all outside him,
His “Self” is totally *inside* him.

And here is King Apis—at least one of them is, though I’m not sure which.

[King Apis is a sort of Siamese twin: two men linked back to back, arms intertwined, so that their only means of movement is an alternate swinging of the one on the other’s back.]

One of them’s the symptom, and the other the disease,
But which is which, and who is who, nobody agrees!
One of the them’s the consequence, and one of them’s the cause—
A perfect demonstration of our schizophrenic laws!

APIS (1):

I’m the one who’s living—

APIS (2):

No!—you’re the one who’s dead.

APIS (1):

You’re the corpse upon my back!

APIS (2):

You’re the shadow that I dread!

APIS (1):

Rid me of this incubus!

APIS (2):

Destroy this other me!

APIS (1):

Make division whole again!

APIS (2):

Only death can set us free!

BEGR:

Shall we resolve this for them, Your Gyntship? Maybe a little bit of rope will do it? Bitte...

[He takes some rope from Peer and loops it around their necks leaving one end in each pair of hands. They strangle each other.]

OP:

I think I'm going to vomit!

BEGR:

It will soon pass! There's nothing *more* nauseating than Selfhood at odds with itself.... The same cannot be said of our next distinguished member. May I introduce you to His Nibbs, Professor of Theoretical Philosophy?—Before 11.00 p.m. he was completely out of his mind. Now, of course, it's all post-modernism!

NIBBS:

I'm a little quill-pen! Hold me tight—
Dip me, dip me. Shall we write!

BEGR:

Indulge him, Your Gyntship. He loves splashing in ink, and penning hieroglyphics!

NIBBS:

Give me paper! Sharpen my tip!
I'm dying to inscribe my professorship!
My criticism's more arcane by far
Than Foucault's, or Jacques Derrida!
Cut my quill! Where's the ink?
Eagleton wants to know what I think!

BEGR:

Humour him, Your Gyntship. Slit his nib a little!

[Hands Peer his knife.]

OP:

He's my obverse! He can't write,
And I'm a sheet of foolscap, blank and white!

NIBBS:

[grabs the knife from Peer.]

Slice me to the quick! Let ideas flow free!
These are my final words to all posterity—

[He slits his throat with the knife. Blood spurts onto Peer's robe. Nibbs falls.]

BEGR:

Nibbs! How many times do I have to tell you?—Don't splatter! Sorry, Your Gyntship.... I see he's written all over you! Hear his dying message to the world:

[He reads the splattering on Peer's robe.]

“Es lebe hoch der grosse Peer!” Es lebe hoch der grosse Peer!!

[The chorus of madmen slowly pick up the chant, which grows louder and faster. They hoist Peer onto their shoulders in a triumphant celebration of his Kingship, while Begriffenfeldt crowns him with a wreath of straw. Peer is panic-stricken and cries to be set down.]

BEGR:

I hereby crown you Emperor of Self! Hip-hip-hooray! Long live the Self-made Emperor! O, Ego Imperial! Long live Peer, our Emperor of Self!

[The madmen pick up the chant, “Emperor of Self.” Peer keeps protesting.]

BEGR:

Here's your Kingdom! We're your own,

Subjects loyal to your throne!

[Peer meanwhile has fainted on their shoulders. Silence. They throw him to the ground. He curls up in a fetal position.]

Beside himself! What ecstasy!
The King that he was born to be!

[Blackout. The madmen screech. Then we hear Åse, somewhere in the balcony, singing the first section of her Act I Lullaby. Lights slowly up on Peer, who has had another nightmare, and on Åse.]

ÅSE:

What's become of you, my Peer?
A nightmare life! A mad career?
Your immortal soul has died
In mid-flight on your Gjendin ride....

OP:

No, Ma! I'm still in transit! The journey's not over until its over. There's still a little life in Peer...

[He dimly remembers the lines of a song once heard, and tries to sing them.]

"Hope and Faith and / Charity / Will outlast / Eternity..." *The meaning of myself is you.*—Perhaps she's still there?

BM:

When Paradise is lost—it's lost.
You never can go home again....
Process cannot be reversed
And life is sorrow, loss, and pain.

ÅSE:

[sings the last line of the lullaby as the lights fade on her]

Sov og drøm du, gutten min!

["Sleep and dream, my darling boy!"]

Sov og drøm du, gutten min!

OP:

Yes!—I can still dream it!... I can still redeem it!... I'll following the path of my longing, and dream myself home again! The next scene, please! On board a ship in the North Sea, off the coast of Norway. "PEER JOURNEYS HOME TO HEGSTAD."

ACT 2. v.

[Ship's whistle and bustling shipboard activities by the Chorus]

CAPTAIN:

Bound for Norway! All aboard!!

BM:

Can we redeem this pious fraud,
And save him from the Troll's "enough"?

YP:

I fear the crossing will be rough.

OP:

My passage, Captain, if you please.
I'll cast my bread upon the seas....

CAPTAIN:

Step on board, Peer Gynt. I hope you don't mind sharing your cabin with the ship's dog—he's been with us to Hell and back! He's seen it all.... We sail with the tide, and without any expectation of fair weather.... All aboard!! All aboard for Norway, and for home!!

[The chorus, in sou'westers, assume the shape of a ship and sway with the pitching of the waves to mime a sense of stormy and choppy waters. Darkness. Lightning. Music: Grieg's "Peer Gynt's Homecoming: Stormy Evening on the Sea."]

CAPTAIN:

Man the helm! Two to the wheel—give me some light in the rigging! Brace yourselves!

[A huge wave. All are knocked sideways.]

Helm hard to starboard! Keep her close to the wind!

[Another wave knocks them sprawling.]

OP:

Jesus, I'm done for. Never learned to swim! Help me, someone! I'll pay!!

[Another wave. Peer clings to the sailor nearest him, the Ship's Cook.]

A life-boat! A life-boat! Half my fortune to get me into a life-boat!

[The Strange Passenger appears out of nowhere: white-grey in dress, and appearance—on stilts (or cothurni). Very friendly and pleasant in demeanour. It carries a lamp.]

SP:

Half your Kingdom for a boat?
It takes more than cash to keep afloat....

OP:

Who are you? I've not seen you before?

SP:

I never venture above deck—
Unless there's an impending wreck.
Your travelling companion, Peer!

OP:

You're gray as ash! You're sick, I fear....

SP:

Never better! I keep score
Of corpses to be washed ashore.
Ever seen the mirthless grin?
The bloated belly? Puckered skin?
Eyeless sockets? Severed tongue?

OP:

I can't go yet! I'm far too young!
Save me! Never mind the rest...
I'll pay whatever you request!

SP:

If you should drown in this palaver,
May I have the rights to your cadaver?
Sign right here.

[He produces a document.]

Your kind compliance
Will benefit the ends of Science.

OP:

Why me? I haven't drowned! I still draw breath!

[in panic]

Do you anticipate my death?

SP:

I have an NSERC grant to probe
Dream-reflexes in the cranial lobe.
May I post-mortemize your brain?
So far, research has been in vain...
Colossal dreams are hard to find
In the crannies of the mundane mind,
So—I'll trepan yours to compare
My specimens with bits of Peer.
You'd be most comfy in my lab,
Dreaming on a marble slab....

OP:

Never! I'll outface this gale!

SP:

Remember Jonah? *I'm your whale.*

Auf Wiedersehen—until you're lost
Beneath the breakers, tempest-tossed!

[He disappears.]

CAPTAIN:

Steer clear of those waves! Man the pumps! It's blowing hard!

OP:

Captain! Who was that madman...?

CAPTAIN:

I've no other passengers.

OP:

... That apparition who accosted me then disappeared?

CAPTAIN:

Ship's dog.—It's getting worse!—The jib's cracking!! We're headed for the rocks!! Foresail's gone!! She's breaking up!!

[The storm breaks up the ship. Panic and confusion. All drown, except Peer and the Ship's Cook he had been bargaining with. They cling to a spar.]

OP:

I ordered a life-boat! Is this the best you can do? Unless you let go of it, I won't pay a penny—

SC:

Please, sir! I have a wife and children!

OP:

Let go. It won't hold both of us.

[He bashes the Cook's hands and tries to fling him into the water.]

Don't sentimentalize to me about "wife and children."... I haven't any children, so I need my life all the more.... Let go, damn you!

[He pries the Cook's fingers off the spar.]

SC:

[going under]

Help me, God!

OP:

[grabbing him by the hair]

Look—I'll hold you up for thirty seconds! Say the Lord's Prayer, and hurry up....

SC:

"Our Father, who... who..." It's going black on me.... "Our Father..."

OP:

Hurry up! Just the important bits....

SC:

"Give us this day... Give us this day... "

OP:

Never mind the bread!

SC:

"And forgive us our trespasses... as we... as we..."

OP:

"Forgive those who trespass against us."

[He lets go of his hair, and the Cook drowns.]

Amen. Nice of him to remember that bit. What now...?

[The Strange Passenger reappears, lamp in hand, out of nowhere.]

SP:

Good morning, Peer.

OP:

Hands off my log!!

SP:

No problem.—
 I'll just drift here, in the fog,
 Until your lungs fill up and freeze!
 To harvest corpses from the seas
 One must have patience.... I can wait....
 Hypothermia will be *your* fate.

OP:

Waterlogged! And cold! And dead!
 God spare me from this awful dread!

SP:

Kierkegaard says, "Dread has its uses."
 Conscience examines its abuses
 When we look danger in the face.
 Awe of Death is no disgrace.
 Transcend your terror. Master fear!
 Triumph over your despair!

OP:

I'm in extremis, weak and faint—
 I'm not a hero, nor a saint.
 So go to Hell! Don't bother me
 With Danish-style Philosophy!

SP:

No hero? I must disagree.
 We all have the capacity
 For tragedy and mental strife.
Live through your unexamined life!

OP:

What's your mission? I don't understand...
 Saviour—or Goblin damned?

SP:

I'm surprised at you Peer Gynt!
I'll provide a cryptic hint:
"I'm the One who Bears the Light,"
Who's plumbed the reaches of the night....

OP:

You're the Devil!!

SP:

Au contraire...
I'm your fallen angel, Peer.
I've come to leave you "high and dry."

OP:

Do you mean that I must die?

SP:

Well...

[consults his watch]

We have thirty minutes yet to go
Before we end your "Peer Gynt Show."
I'm your stage-manager, and this is certain:
No hero dies before the curtain!
I'll claim your corpse some other day...
No urgency....

On with the play!!
Resume your role as King of Kings.
I'll be waiting in the wings!

[The Strange Passenger blows out his lamp. Pitch darkness.]

Let's have cue number thirty-four:
Lights up on the Norwegian shore!

[Peer, dazed, finds himself in an icy, white field of light.]

OP:

Where am I?... I dreamed of drowning.... What place is this?—Kierkegaard says smell the soil to locate your whereabouts in the world. I'll try...

[He does so.]

I thrust my finger in the earth.—

[He smells it.]

It stinks of *nowhere!*—Yes! *My land of birth,*
Where humans toil in mountain cleft,
Of light and air and sky bereft;
Where glaciers obliterate the sun,
Hallingskarv and Folgefånn:
Ice on granite, frozen, vast....
O, Norway! “PEER IS HOME AT LAST!”

[Segue straight into—]

ACT 2. vi.

[A tolling bell, and a procession of villagers bearing a dead body. Solveig, visible in her hut, sings Grieg's “Whitsun Hymn” from the Peer Gynt Suite.]

BM:

Look, Peer. There's a funeral.

OP:

Who's dead? Not me, thank God!

BM:

It might have been... Shall we pay our last respects to a countryman?

[They join the mourners. The Priest addresses the assembled group.]

PRIEST:

Dearly beloved:

Consider, now, this farmer's life and death—

A self-effacing man, as if some shame,
 Some crime, prevented him from drawing breath!
 His whole existence screamed: "I am to blame.
 Forgive me for my heinous offence...."
 Remember him? Recall his crippled hand?
 He'd chopped his finger off on some pretence....
 A coward? A deserter? Try to understand
 How devastated lives can be redeemed,
 How insignificance may be esteemed.

[The self-mutilating man from Act 1 rises from the dead, and we see him with Peer's bloody shirt still wrapped around his hand. He stands enhaloed in light.]

He worked and struggled with his barren soil,
 To grow good crops. Then came the flood!
 All washed away! No remedy but toil,
 And sweat, and tears, and pain, and guts, and blood...
 Rebuilt his house...restored his farm... raised sons:
 Three boys. But how, in this remote location
 Could he ensure they got an education?
 Upon his back, or in his arms, he bore them.
 Through drifted snow, across ravines and ice
 He took his daily pilgrimage, and saw them
 Schooled. Would any of you pay that price?

So what shall we say of him? "A bit short-sighted..."
 "No brains inside his head." "He broke the Law..."
 That's true: the Church considers him "benighted."
 The State will not condone a "traitor's flaw."

[The man begins, slowly, to unwrap the bloody shirt from his hand.]

But the land on which he farmed still harvests praise,
 And his little life spells out *resilience*....
 In the narrow boundary where he lived his days
 His "Self" discovered new significance.

He takes his place in God's seraphic bands,
 And—look! Ten healthy fingers grace his hands!

[The man holds up two uncrippled hands in triumph, and the light slowly fades on him.]

OP:

It's a lie that "time will mend"!
 My beginning is my end...
 Life's a circular direction.
 Decay's implicit in perfection.

Where are we friend?

VILLAGER:

Hegstad, friend....

OP:

Must I revisit past offence?

BOYG VOICE:

TURN YOUR BACK ON CONSEQUENCE
 BACK OR FORWARDS—IT'S THE SAME
 DON'T ADMIT THAT YOU'RE TO BLAME!

[Peer makes conversation with the mourners, and they pass around a bottle.]

BRIDE:

Remember me?— I went astray...
 Got knocked up on my wedding day!

BRIDEGROOM:

I was her groom. Peer stole my wife,
 And wrecked my hope, and fouled my life...

ASLAK:

She and I... we lived in sin.
 Aslak and Peer Gynt—kith and kin!

BG:

We're reconciled.

ASLAK:

We've come to terms.

BG:

We're food for maggots....

ALL:

Food for worms...

BAILIFF:

Look friends—I've got a bag of rubbish! Old Åse's stuff—the late Peer's Gynt's unclaimed estate. Nothing to be done, but auction it off and buy a round of drinks....

OP:

Excuse me, friend. The *late* Peer Gynt?

BG:

Gone to the dogs, I hear.

ASLAK:

Hanged himself, most likely.

BAILIFF:

Dead and buried long ago. Come now, friends...

[Empties the contents of the bag: some clothing, the box, and the ladle from Act I scene viii... Also some reindeer antlers on a skull.]

Who'll make me an offer for Peer Gynt's apparel?

BG:

Two kroner!

BAILIFF:

Sold to Mads Moen!—Lock, stock, and barrel!

Now, who's in the market for an old-fashioned ladle?
They say it was Peer's when a child in his cradle?

W1:

Two kroner!

BAILIFF:

Knocked down to that woman! And what am I bid
For Old Åse's box with detachable lid?

W2:

Two kroner!

BAILIFF:

Yours, madam! And what have we here?
The Gjendin buck's skull! The last relic of Peer!
With his arse in these horns he defied Newton's laws—
He never came down!! Twenty crowns, and it's yours!

W3:

Two kroner.

BAILIFF:

Done! And done, at last, with Peer!

OP:

Hey! Can I auction off *my* detritus?

BAILIFF:

You've got *nothing*, old man. You can't sell *nothing*.

OP:

Who wants to buy my rubbished dreams?
I'm selling cheap Moroccan schemes,
And Empires built on desert sands,
And crowns of straw, and Promised lands,
And trashy castles in the air....

ASLAK:

Hey, shut up, old man! You're bad as Peer....

CHORUS:

[*ad lib*]

Dry up. Get lost. Don't bore us with your troubles....

OP:

Thank you for your drink, friends, and your kind attention. You've been the perfect audience. Such discerning critics of my life.... But tell me this:

A slaughtered pig is heard to squeal.
 So, do you ask: "Is that noise real?"
 And if it's killed within a play,
 Does that same shriek not cause dismay?
 Is there no bridge from life to art?
 Peer Gynt dies... "Oh, just a part,
 Just 'theatre'—counterfeited grief..."
Try suspending disbelief!

[He leaves the group of mourners contemplating, in puzzlement, what he has said as the lights go down on the scene.]

ACT 2. vii.

BM:

Don't blame them, Peer! It's drama's curse—
 Real men don't speak in rhyming verse!
 The play will end, and "Peer" will fade...
 A dreamer's dream, a shadow's shade.
 The actor's all that will remain—
 But *he's* not you. He mimics pain!

OP:

Damn you! I will not despair!
I am the substantial Peer.
They've been watching me all night....

[gestures towards the audience]

I exist within their sight!
They are proof of my existence.
 It's ontological persistence!!

BM:

Remember Ibsen's metaphor
 For the meaning hidden at the core? ...

An onion!

[He produces one]

Every casing, every layer
 Enfolds an existential player
 In your Selfhood's long career.
 Which one's the *quintessential* "Peer"?

[Peer peels the onion, layer by layer]

OP:

"One man in his time plays many a part...."
 OK, Peer Gynt. Where shall we start?
 Let's work our way backwards.—In Act Two, Scene Three
 I was King of the Crazy SSHRC—
 My Gyntian Kingdom confined to a cell
 Where I lorded it over escapees from Hell!

So much for that rôle!

[discards onion casing]

No—it's not the real me...
 Never the man I intended to be.

Now the Sheik and the prophet: they were fun for a while...
 But... they weren't *really* me.... One: a victim of guile,
 Who was trussed like a turkey, then robbed for his pains.
 The other? His entrepreneurial gains
 Were a figment, like sex, of some *other* man's schemes.
 Their vision of failure still stinks up my dreams...
 Damn this false and fragmented shard!
 In life's poker-game I've been dealt a "discard."

[He flings aside the onion casing.]

My Moroccan adventure? Was *that* the real me?

YP:

That gun-running pirate? O! Democracy—
 In your name all of Europe was sold up the creek...
 What the hell did you care for the Turk, or the Greek!

OP:

No... This layer obscures the true “me”
I must dig deeper for authenticity.

[discards casing]

[sings]

Live with me and
Love me still
With the deer upon the hill....

I almost found my Paradise
Where *her* love was my *own* love’s sphere...
Evasion. Flight. Deception. Lies....
What remains of Solveig’s Peer?

[In desperation he rips the onion apart]

YP:

And I? Your self-created myth?
The buck-boy on the Gjendin cliff?

OP:

There’s *nothing* at the onion’s heart—
No *essence* linking part to part!
What substance in my fantasy?
“NO ONE’s” the authentic ME.

BM:

This existential wear-and-tear
Demands an answer, loud and clear.
Is there anybody there?
Wer bist du? And who is Peer?

OP:

Help me God! It’s what I fear:
A *cipher* masquerades as Peer....
A *zero!* *Emptiness!* A *sham!*
Who am I? ... A *nowhere man!*

“The Gyntish Me”?—a cliché talking,
The chatter of a dead man walking!

BM:

Romantic Selfhood’s a delusion—
Significance? A stage illusion!
Don’t put your faith in anything...
Ne rien! Nichts! og ingenting!

[Peer weeps. In radiant light, Solveig’s consoling presence—somewhere in the balcony—sings her Act I song.]

SOL:

Hope and Faith and
Charity
Will outlast
Eternity
I’m here forever
Call to me
Save yourself from waste and
Futility.
Don’t turn our lives into
Vanity.

[The light fades on her.]

ACT 2. viii.

YP:

“THE RECKONING”

BM:

Time’s up Peer Gynt. These folks

[gestures to the audience]

are tired.
Your ticket of leave has now expired,
And I’ve proved my point: the authentic “you”
Has failed his Selfhood’s life-review!

YP:

Peer Gynt, do *not* admit defeat!
 Cynicism is a cheat.
 We *must* not yield to such despair—
 It's cowardice and craven fear!
 You are *yourself*, a *human* soul—
 Prove to him you're not a troll!
 Call witnesses—find those who'll swear
 That Peer is Peer is Peer is Peer!

OP:

Who can vouch I'm without flaw?

YP:

Let's summon up our Pa-in-law....

[They whistle Grieg's "In the Hall of the Mountain King"—and this summons the Troll King on stage. He dances rather lumpishly to the tune, old and tired, now.]

KING:

[to Young Peer]

Son-in-law! You haven't changed a jot... though you're a grandpa, now, you know! Your boy turned out a perfect Gynt.... he's shagged every cowgirl from Hegstad to the Rondë... and the hills are bouncing with your little buggers....

YP:

[indicates Old Peer]

His little buggers, too.

KING:

[to Old Peer]

Well—you've grown a little gray, son-in-law.... What do you want of me?

OP:

I'd like a favour.

KING:

Favours don't come cheap, Your Highness.

OP:

I need an affidavit that I never was a troll,
That I never bought your "just enough" and compromised my soul.
You must swear a legal statement that I sacrificed a throne
To remain MYSELF, to be MYSELF, to be PEER GYNT alone!

KING:

My dear son-in-law, I'd be happy to perjure myself—for a consideration!
Who ever said, "Crime doesn't pay"?
As Trolls, we understand no other way!

YP:

What "perjury"? No need for lies—
I never let you scratch my eyes!

KING:

You wore my tail.... You drank my mead....
You reveled in our Trollish greed....

YP:

I resisted all the way!
I triumphed at the end of play....

KING:

The play's not over. Your defence
Ignores *this* living consequence!

[He points at Old Peer.]

"Enough" is branded on his soul,
Beneath his clothing he's a Troll
Whose secret guile is evident!
Hail to the Chief, our President!

(If the casting-ladle scares you shitless,
For twenty crowns, I'll bear false witness.)

[Old Peer searches for some money to bribe the Buttonmoulder, but his younger Self stops him.]

YP:

Forget it! I want no part of this...
Must Old Peer be my Nemesis?

KING:

Well—au revoir dear sons-in-law!
I'm on my way to Ottawa
To scratch the eyes of Steve and Jack,
And bring old Liberal values back!

[snorts]

[He shuffles out to a little jog-trot version of the "Hall of the Mountain King."]

BM:

Suborning a witness?—You're destined for scrap...
I'll melt you both down with the rest of that crap!
There's *no one* to witness the "Self" that you boast!
My fire is ready... Peer Gynt—you're toast!

OP:

Hey! What's your hurry? I've one last request....
You speak of "Selfhood." I'm mighty impressed—
But how the Devil can "Self" be defined?
Is "Selfhood" a figment of the dramatist's mind?
What is the point of this Ibsenite play?

BM:

Let's turn to the Riksmål.

OP:

Well, what does it say?

BM:

[consults a book entitled PEER GYNT]

“At være sig selv, er: sig selv at døde.”

OP:

What?? “*Being oneself is a form of self-murder*”??
How can selfhood survive self-annihilation?

BM:

It’s largely a problem of English translation.

OP:

Got you that time! Like a fish on a hook!
Come on! “*Being oneself*”???

BM:

Let’s consult the Good Book.

[Opens up a BIBLE]

Matthew 16, 25:

“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it.”

Who would live his life must choose it.
The Self is shaped by being willed,
But Selfishness must first be killed,
And Self intuits it has won
When it can say, “*Thy will be done.*”

OP:

But how can I fathom the Master’s intention?

BM:

Try using your God-given imagination!
Without insight, Peer, you’re Devil’s bait!
Come now, don’t prevaricate.
You’ve lost the bargain. Time to leave....

YP:

[aside to Old Peer]

Wait! I’ve something up my sleeve.

Let's admit we've lost this round.
 Our case for "Self" was never sound,
 So dump it! Now: we know that Fate
 Debars us from the pearly gate,
 And the ladle's molten destiny
 Is not for the likes of me and me.
 Guess! What's my solution?—Well???
 Let's damn ourself to deepest Hell!!

OP:

Right!—anything's better than the ladle.... At least we'd be myself in Hell. It's worth a try.

[To the Buttonmoulder. OP and YP—linked like the King Apis pair—speak as a single individual.]

OP:

On second thoughts, I'll change my plea:
 I cannot prove to have been "me"—

YP:

Correct! No "Self"! No "Soul"!

OP:

No "I"!
 My life has been an empty lie.

YP:

BUT: I have led a life of crime,

OP:

Embezzlement, murder, and....

YP:

... rapine!

OP:

Heinous in word and deed,

YP:

I've violated every Christian creed.

OP:

My mind is slime, my soul is shit.

OP&YP:

I deserve the sulfurous Pit!!

BM:

New evidence? OK... Nice try...
So *now* you beg my leave to fry!

[He consults with an audience member about the time. Ad lib.]

Ten minutes, Peer, to find the proof
That you deserve the horn and hoof!

[Enter the Thin Man, in a clerical collar and cassock, carrying a fowling-net and a polaroid camera.]

OP:

A priest! I'm in luck! He'll vouch for my sins. Good evening, Pastor! I'm ready to confess!!

TM:

Oh, for God's sake! Bugger off! You merely dissipate my time!
You're a middle-range delinquent, and you're innocent of crime!
I have other sharks to fry, bigger vultures to surprise.
Let me introduce myself. (Forgive me this disguise.)

[shows his nails, hooves, horn, and tails]

OP:

Christ! What a stroke of luck! You can help me out, Mephist...

TM:

Sorry. Don't trade souls for power nowadays.... The market's flat... and money's out of the question....

OP:

No, no. I mean you can help me out of the casting ladle! You can haul me off to hell—for a while, at any rate. Until this thing blows over. If business is bad, let's make a deal. I come cheap.

TM:

Sorry. We can't accommodate amateur sinners for all eternity....

Expenses have been escalating ever since the Fall,
And we really cannot guarantee fair punishment for all.
It's not that we've ignored you—
We simply can't afford you!
You've done nothing to offend or to appall!

OP:

I drowned the ship's cook!— Homicide—in cold blood!

TM:

It was nothing! God drowned the whole world in the flood!

OP:

I trafficked in slaves and... and... financial coercion!

TM:

Fuel is too scarce for such small-time perversion.

OP:

What about cheating those heathen in China?

TM:

Political cheating's much subtler and finer.

YP:

Sloth and lust and gluttony? Envy, anger, greed, and pride?
Fornication? Rape and plunder? Running off with Moen's bride?

TM:

Your sexual peccadilloes are the pastime of a novice—
They pale in all comparison to Clinton's Oval Office!
So don't be such a bore.

Get thee hence and *sin some more*,
Apply again for Hell—but show some promise!

Now, I must hobble off. I've a truly superior sinner to bag....

OP:

And what makes this sinner much better than me?

TM:

He was always Himself. Call it “con-sis-ten-cy.”

A *positive* scoundrel—not one by default.

A *proactive* sinner, and well worth his salt.

You, I'm afraid, commit sins by omission...

A *negative* rogue—and hence our derision!

Consider the principles of photographic art. They discovered, long ago in Paris, that to create a positive, you have to work from a negative. Well—it's the same in Hell. We start, at it were, with the undeveloped soul—

Where light and darkness are reversed

The psychic shade must be immersed

In an alkaline solution

Til we reach a “resolution.”...

So: I soak it in sulphur and bleach it and burn it
And steam it in brimstone and tweak it and turn it—

Then, lo and behold! A clear image appears!

Shall we try for the positive obverse of Peer's?

(Modern polaroid technology

Affirms the same analogy.)

Just say “gjetost”!

[He takes a photograph with his polaroid and shows Peer the result.]

— that's Norwegian for cheese.

Now look at *this* photo—There's *nothing*.—It's Peer's!

No positive likeness... Just shadow and shade...

This thing you call “me” is a ghostly charade!

OP:

But surely I'm damned by my *negative* fate!

TM:

No! Damnation, my friend, is a *positive* state...
 The *ladle* awaits you!—I bid you farewell...
 Your qualifications exclude you from Hell!

[The Thin Man bows and hobbles offstage with his equipment.]

OP:

Well I'll be damned!

BM:

On the contrary, Peer. Now you know bloody well
 That the Devil won't *have* you. You *can't* go to Hell!

YP:

Maybe God will relent and assign us a place—
 Let's look to the Heavens for an omen of grace?

[Old Peer and Young Peer look upwards. Darkness and silence. Then a twanging in the air, and a shooting star blazes above, arcs, and fades away.]

YP:

There's our sign! A shooting star...
 An emblem, Peer, of what we are:
 We shine, we blaze, we fade, we die.
 All in the blinking of an eye!

[Old Peer sinks to the ground. Young Peer cradles him in his arms.]

OP:

Life's the penalty of birth:
 Dust to dust, and earth to earth...
 No comfort in our desolation,
 No human touch, no consolation.
 Sunlight gladdens us in vain,
 When all is dreariness and pain.
 On Gjendin, I'll glance one last time
 At the unattainable sublime—
 Then let the snowdrifts cover Peer.

My epitaph? NO-ONE'S BURIED HERE.

[Counterpointing this despair, Solveig's song echoes in the distance.]

SOL:

Hope and Faith and
Charity
Will outlast
Eternity
I'm here forever
Call to me
Save yourself from waste and
Futility.
Don't turn our lives into
Vanity.

OP:

This I will vouch for, with my very last breath:
Peer Gynt's been a dead man before his own death!

[The Buttonmoulder hauls him to his feet. This is the crisis.]

BM:

The four roads meet. Now, pay your dues!
At points of crisis we must choose.
At the intersection of the cross
Balance gain, and balance loss.

BOYG:

GO ROUND ABOUT! ITS NOT TOO LATE!
EVADE ALL CHOICE. PREVARICATE!

OP:

No.—I must take the path that's straight!
The best of "me" is all forgotten...
Conceived in dreams, of dreams begotten.
Selfhood blurs...I disappear...
For God's sake!

[to the unseen Solveig]

Please—remember “Peer”!
“The meaning of myself is you...”
Dream me whole! Dream me true!
Here is the kingdom where I reign....

[As if in response to his need for her, Solveig enters. She is old now and blind. She uses a stick.]

YP:
The circle’s closed. We’re home again!

SOL:
Dear God! It’s Peer come back to me!
I still can see you feelingly....

[She runs her hands over his face in the manner of the blind.]

OP:
Forgive me, Solveig, for my wrong!

SOL:
You made my life a blissful song....

The river flows, but time is kind—
You were never absent from my mind:
Eternal presence, glancing light,
Does not depend on touch or sight.

OP:
So—tell me now, at Pentecost,
Where was my “Self” when I was lost?

YP:
Where was the Essential Peer?

SOL:
In Solveig’s love.

ÅSE:

[who now returns from the dead]

In Åse's care.

MAN:

[likewise the man with the severed finger in Act I, who now holds his hands up in benediction]

In our belief that wounds are healed,
That human fate is never sealed,
That "Self" is dynamic revelation,
That time brings round our transformation.

BM:

A nice reprieve when faith is broken!
The woman claims she's not forsaken...
Mothers love delinquent youths....
And platitudes parade as truths!

[He turns on Peer: this is the moment of reckoning.]

God's image remains obscured in you!
I claim your remnant. It's my due!
The ladle waits... Your bond is broken.

[Solveig takes out of her pocket the button that Peer sent her, 50 years ago, with the Cowgirls in Act One.]

SOL:

I've kept Peer's button as a token.
Look—God's stamp is sharp and clear,
Etched in my memory of Peer.
This we know—as wife and mother—
We live intensely in each other.

ÅSE:

[sings to young Peer]

“Jeg skal vugge dig, jeg skal våge....”

SOL:

[sings to old Peer]

“Gud styrke dig, hvor du i verden går!....”

BM:

Women have always been Peer Gynt’s protection!

But we’ll meet again, Peer, at the last intersection.
I wish you the wisdom that comes with old age,
And remind you that I will be waiting—back-stage!

ÅSE:

Thank God! No need to groan and grieve,
My boy’s been granted a reprieve!

OP:

Dear audience, this dream has ended.

Can human frailty be amended?
Are we judged by choice, or by intention?
Can we be changed through intervention?

YP:

Is “Self” an essence—or an action?
Is it substance—or abstraction?
What I *dream*—or what I *do*?
Who am I? And who are you?

TROLL KING:

Do what’s easy! Shun what’s tough!
And to yourselves be...just enough....

BOYG VOICE:

PURSUE THE UNEXAMINED LIFE
AVOID UNNECESSARY STRIFE

SOL:

Let your imaginations range
 Through worlds of wonder, wild and strange.
 And when you take *your* Gjendin ride,
 Let Ibsen's hero be your guide.

OP:

And if your world-view's slightly squint—
 Acknowledge kinship with Peer Gynt!

BM:

Now—answer me, if you are able:
 Any *buttons* for my ladle?

[He rattles his casting-ladle, as the light slowly fades. Lights up, and the cast dances and takes their bow to the rousing "Prelude: At the Wedding" from Grieg's Peer Gynt Suite.]

[CURTAIN]

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