

An Enemy of the People

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The Rubber City Theatre Company's *An Enemy of the People*, an adaptation of Ibsen's work by Les Hunter, directed by Lana Sugarman is a powerful show that asks you a simple question—what you are: Peter or Tammie? They represent two kinds of assessing an imminent danger. One represents conscience and the other represents profit-driven protectionism and capitalism, though some also call this “conscience” myopic and “false” conscience and enduring conscience. Flint, Minamata, the Hinkley groundwater, Lake Victoria and many other places with polluted water and people are all resurrected in the show.

Published in 1882 and premiered in 1883 in Christiania, followed by productions in Bergen, Gothenburg, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Berlin, Bern, Vienna, Paris, and London in the following 10 years, *An Enemy of the People* had received positive reviews, especially in comparison to his controversial work *Ghosts*.

The London production in 1893, two years after controversies instigated by the London production of *Ghosts* in 1891, was widely applauded and accepted by audiences and critics.

Ibsen published this play 15 years after the cholera outbreaks throughout Europe and the epidemiological discoveries that contributed to the treatments and prevention of the pandemics. Ibsen himself was in the proximity of a cholera outbreak in Sorrento in 1866.

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Six years later, in 1873, he witnessed another cholera outbreak in Dresden in 1873 while spending a few weeks in Pilnitz, "an hour from Dresden by teamer."^[1] In 1892, the year between the London production of *Ghosts* and *An Enemy of the People*, a cholera outbreak attacked the city of Homburg, killing 10,000 people.^[2]

Les Hunter's adaptation reflects Ibsen's message about the "limited" power of the individual who faces the mass interest and sentiment that values capitalism. The doctor—in this case, a female doctor—who tries to stop the contamination and its harm to the city (somewhere in NE Ohio) residents and their guests is sabotaged by the mayor and also her brother who is concerned about immediate losses.



The set designer Travis Daniel Williams created a space that asked the audience to use their imagination. The ascending stairs with a narrow landing and a door serve as an additional performance space. The liminal space is where the characters face new problems and facts including deception at the Newspaper's office while it also suggests an unidentified place where the characters of a Chamber of Commerce director Anthony Kalan (Stuart Hoffman) makes a secret call (so definitely this place is outside the public space). Brian C. Seckfort's projection/videography is brilliant. The last projected video tells Petra (in this show, not in Ibsen's) who sells her soul for her own immediate gain.

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Two actors—Courtney Brown and Jeff Haffner—are the pillars of this production, driving a story forward to the point that they are not reconcilable—so as for this sequel, I suggest Les use Arthur Miller's *The Price*. Andrew Pope, Jennifer Ruth, Keith Rasey, Katie Wells and Arianna Allen all support the production as people who vacillate between self-focused benefits and public welfare.

The low-intensity amber lights (designed by James Kyle Davis) suggest the depressed economic state of this town as well as the doctor's household. This adaptation captures the hardship that falls on many young professionals with student loan debts. When people are desperate they begin to form a narrative to blame others.

While Ibsen's original underplays the family dynamic, this adaptation makes the "father" a real father to Peter and Tammy, underscoring their sibling rivalry in relationship to their father and insinuating the impact of the absence of their mother. As Sugarman states, "while the play examines the environmental impacts of fracking, our relationship and access to clean water, and the struggle many local economies are facing, what stood out to me is how these issues show up in and affect a family." Sugarman's production illuminates our familiar family and holiday gatherings: "In recent years many of us have been to holiday dinners or family gatherings where it's 'best to avoid' certain topics of conversation."

Costume designer Irene Mack made sure that the characters "speak" through their outfits. Hazen Tobar's sound design—toilet flushing and I-phone tones—adds important information about the "environment" as well as the period.



[1] Michael Meyer Ibsen: A Biography New York Doubleday 1971 375.

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[2] Timothy Carlos Matos "Cholera Fictions: Epidemiology Medical Authority and An Enemy of the People" Modern Drama 51.3 (2008) 358