

Literature analysis – “
an enemy of the
people”



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

" I think we must agree that fools are in a terrible, overwhelming majority, all the wide world over. But how in the devil's name can it ever be right for fools to rule over wise men?" (113). This quote describes Henrik Ibsen's philosophy towards the majority, which is also being portrayed as foolish and dangerous to the society. A theme of the story tells us that the individual who stands alone will be always stronger than the masses, for he has reached a point, unreachable for ". . . lower classes. . ." (116). In fact, Ibsen reveals it by showing us the importance of individualism, proving that majority is the enemy of the truth and freedom, thus emphasizing that individuals should never trust the masses.

Ibsen's characterization of Doctor Stockmann, as one who represents the truth, shows us a power that individuals contain. Doctor Stockmann is portrayed as an idealistic person, aiming to improve the society's well-being, even though no one asked him to do so. The first evocative example occurred when Doctor Stockman finds out about a bad Baths' sanitary conditions and reports them to the Mayor. " It would be dishonesty – a fraud, a lie, an absolute crime against the public, against society as a whole" (93). Doctor Stockman insists on informing about the bad condition of the Baths to the public, although the Mayor is trying to convince him to calm down; Doctor doesn't acknowledge the lies... and stands out as an individual, committed to tell the truth, without worrying about his own reputation. A second example comes out when Stockman is rejected in publishing an investigative report in a newspaper, " You think you can silence me and suppress the truth! But it won't be that easy. . . I shall read it at a great mass meeting; all my fellow citizens shall hear the voice of truth!" (107). In fact,

Ibsen characterizes the protagonist as a lonely stronghold of morality and truthfulness, in contrast with a vast majority that is ". . . poisoning the sources of our spiritual life" (114). Ibsen shows us one of the central themes... that individualism is an imperative that should be praised in a society, thereby contrasting it with the fact that the society is led by a tyrannical rule of "fools"(113), represented by a majority.

Ibsen's portrayal of the masses reveals to us that the most dangerous foe to the truth and freedom is the solid majority. Throughout the story, Ibsen emphasizes that a vast majority is a dictator, as the leaders of the society are fixated on receiving its mercy and gaining its approval : " The first thing that I saw was the colossal stupidity of the authorities... They are like goats let loose in a young orchard: They do damage everywhere; they block the path of a free man wherever he turn- and I should be glad if we could exterminate them like other noxious animals- " (112). We clearly see that Ibsen emphasizes that the leaders of the society are powerless; they are not able to form beliefs and convey ideas. Instead, majority acts as a ghostwriter, writing a script for a societal direction. Second vivid example occurs, when the Doctor decides to act against the majority rule and truths. " All these majority- truths are like last year's salt pork; they're like rancid, moldy ham, producing all the moral scurvy that plagues society" (114). Ibsen's characterization of majority as an incapable to see the truth, ". . . ignorant. . ." (114), ". . . undeveloped. . ." (114), and foolish reveal to us the fact that ". . . the masses are nothing but the raw material that must be fashioned into a People" (115). In fact, Ibsen emphasizes that the only ones, who have a right to lead the public, are bright individuals, who stand alone,

and are underrepresented however, still are wise and are in the right, for they have reached a point, which is unreachable for "fools"(113). "It is, I and the few, the individuals, who are always in the right. The minority is always right" (113).

An individual, who trusts majority, will be infringed, for he has made the mistake, believing in the mirage. Throughout the story, Ibsen prototypes the fact... that majority always betrays an individual, when being told a message that contradicts to their lifestyle and beliefs. Doctor Stockmann, therefore, serves as a vivid illustration of an individual who suffers from the society's apple, which is rotten on the inside. When Doctor discovers the Baths' condition, he becomes somewhat naive, thinking that the community will be proud of his crucial discovery; he thinks that he will be declared a town's hero, however, in a short time he becomes " . . . an enemy of the people" (117). The masses insult the Doctor, thereby showing him who is the real dictator of this world. Ibsen, however, accentuates that this rejection makes him even stronger, despite the fact that he is condemned. "They may kill you, but they don't put away you to slow torture; they clamp a free soul in a vise, as they do at home here. And then, if necessary, you can get away from it all." (120). Ibsen underlines and evidently shows us that even after a rejection and betrayal, individual transforms into the strongest man of the world, due to the fact that he stands alone, living a life of a hope for the future.

Because of Ibsen's usage of symbolism and characterization, he is able to produce a powerful effect that reflects on his own philosophy, which he implemented in the story. Evocative illustrations of individualism's power,

portrayal of the masses as a real threat to the truth and freedom, along with an indication that the majority always betrays an individual - all implies to the central theme that Ibsen is trying to show to us. By constructing a story in which we clearly see the rottenness of the majority, Ibsen leads us to the conclusion that only the individual who stands alone will be always stronger than the masses, because he reached a conscious point, unreachable for ". . . lower classes" (116).