

Tribhuvan University

Eccentricity in Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*

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By

Sandhya Pokharel

Roll No. 407

T.U. Reg No. 6-2-1-1086-2005

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Tribhuvan University
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled "Eccentricity in Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*" submitted to the Department of English, Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus by Sandhya Pokharel has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

Prof. Dr. Bijay Kumar Rauniyar
Internal Examiner

External Examiner

Prof. Dr. Bijay Kumar Rauniyar
Head, Department of English

3rd March 2015

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Sandhya Pokharel

Abstract

Eccentricity is the quality of difference. Both the state of being different, as every individual of every age is. It is different from an indifferent difference in our state of being different in which we are more or less accidentally the unique individuals that we are. Eccentricity is the quality of deliberate difference whereby we intentionally embrace the difference that we are and that we can become in order to make a difference.

In Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, the main character Hedda does not conform to the norms of the society. Rather she acts like her male counterparts. She rejects the notions of masculine and feminine activities. She wages a life and death struggle to overcome her sense of futility, to escape from her despair at being unable to live creatively. For Hedda is no more able to create a living conception of her own life than she is to conceive of a life for the child she has conceived with Tesman. So, Hedda shoots herself to prove that her eccentricity bypasses the social norms and codes. Her death doesn't confirm her fragility; instead it makes her a winner in both present and next worlds that she is going to delve into.

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I. Eccentricity, Causes, and Effects

Eccentricity is an unconventional and slightly strange view or behavior.

Eccentricity is defined as the state or quality of having an odd or unusual manner. It is a deviation from what is ordinary or customary, as in conduct or manner. In this way eccentricity is the attitude towards life itself, the way we attach value to things around us. Thus, on a very basic level, dealing with the question of how we understand ourselves and our relation towards others. In the piece of literature the notion of eccentricity is deployed in a very weighty and numerous ways. Depicting the odd and in a narrower sense misfit character in the piece of writing, it indirectly hits traditional, oppressive and dominative characteristic of the society. So eccentricity has got lime effect in the arena of literature for presenting its values and realities in the written form.

The eccentric person judges and decides only out of their very own values and never takes into account values and reasons stemming from the objective viewpoint. The world of the average person involves a variety of sources in addition to the subjective viewpoint: oneself, the interests of others, cultural and moral values. Thus, the whole process of valuing functions in a totally different way. In fact, it is highly probable that other people who form their values out of the interplay between the subjective and objective viewpoint would simply cease to understand the egocentric. There would be no common ground to relate to because the egocentric is not interested in the reasons and values of those other people.

Intimate relationships during the early stages of a person's life help to form the personality of that person. During infancy, childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood, new needs and tensions arise in the individual. In attempt to seek ways of adapting to these newfound stresses, people develop different kinds of intimate

relationships that ultimately form their personality. Relationships formed during each stage of life serve as a prototype for interactions in later stages. For this reason, there exists a continuum of relationships formed throughout a lifetime that shape and mold specific personality traits.

Neither intimacy nor individual development can exist alone. The birth of a child initiates a human being into a life-long process of mutual adaptation between the child, his or her intimate relationship partners and the broader social environment. Intimate interactions and relationships affect adaptations to the changing needs and stresses that evolve with each stage of development throughout one's lifetime. Intimate interactions from early life serve as the basis upon which relationships later in life are formed. Environmental contingencies to which individuals must adapt are rooted in these relationships. In an attempt to adapt to other people's styles of relating, one must adjust his or her own behaviors. Based on the fact that human development is a product of complex interplay of forces that reside within the individual human being and the environment by which he or she is surrounded, it can be proposed that interpersonal interactions and relationships shape individual personality and coping styles. Psychological maturity involves integrating intimacy into a life framework that encompasses all parts of the self.

Freud's theory of personality consists of the levels of consciousness, the nature of human beings and the source of human motivation, the structure of personality and the development of personality. Freud argued that there were three levels of consciousness. The conscious mind is the layer of personality that we experience in our everyday interaction with the world around us, in other words what we are aware of at any given time is the conscious. The preconscious exists between the conscious and the unconscious. The preconscious contains thoughts and

feelings which are not currently conscious but they are able to pass from the unconscious into the conscious. Moreover, what we cannot become aware of is the unconscious due to the fact that the unconscious mind holds thoughts and feelings which were forgotten either because they were unimportant or threatening. Freud called this process of keeping material in the unconscious 'repression'. At times repression may weaken making materials which were previously unconscious conscious.

One of the earliest theories of personality development was given by the 'Father of Psychiatry', Sigmund Freud. Freud emphasized the role of childhood experiences in shaping the adult personality. He claimed that childhood experiences are repeated throughout life and are critical in determining one's adult relationships. It is now known that childhood experience is pivotal in creating neural networks that shape the personality and person's expectations of how others will respond to them. According to Freud, each individual goes through various stages of psychosexual development and how an individual progresses through these shapes his/her personality. The first Oral Stage occupies the first 12-18 months of life, and centers on the mouth, lips and tongue. It is manifested by chewing, biting and sucking. The objective is to establish a comfortable expression and gratification of oral needs without excessive conflict. In this nexus Freud opines:

I suppose the best thing that can happen next to having a number of confreres who are also slow in maturing is to be able to take the early stage of adolescence before one has really gotten to it, which is sometimes possible; that is, the adolescent change means a moving of an interest toward members of the other sex, but one can often find an eccentric member of the other sex who also has not undergone the

puberty change, but is glad to go through the motions. That reduces the stress on one's feeling of personal worth and security which delayed adolescence may otherwise bring. (78)

The second is the anal stage where a child of 18-36 months of age involves bowel function and control. This is essentially a period of striving for independence and separation from dependence and control by the parent. Maladaptive character traits such as excessive orderliness, stubbornness, willfulness can be a result of fixation on anal functions, while on the other extreme can be heightened indecisiveness, lack of tidiness, messiness and defiance.

After crossing the Phallic and the Latency Phase of life, a children involves in the Genital Stage. The *Genital or adolescent phase*, extends from the onset of puberty at around 11 to 13 years and continues to young adulthood. The physiological maturation of systems of sexual functioning and associated hormonal system leads to an intensification of drives and impulses. The primary objective of this phase is the ultimate separation from dependence on and attachment to the parents and the establishment of adult, mature relationships. The person reaches a satisfying capacity for self-realization and meaningful participation in the areas of work and love; fulfilling one's adult roles and duties.

For Freud, the mind is best conceptualized in two distinct components, the conscious and unconscious. The unconscious portion contains the thoughts we may potentially have, as well as the desires which dictate our behavior without our awareness. Zizek refers to this region as storing the "unknown-known" - the things we don't know that we know. Societal regulations force us to repress certain aspects of ourselves, and the unconscious serves as the storehouse for this collection. Many of our inner urges are too disturbing for the conscious mind to cope with

immediately. Therefore, we sublimate these secrets into a region we cannot face directly.

The role of the unconscious is only one part of the model. Freud also believed that everything we are aware of is stored in our conscious. Our conscious makes up a very small part of who we are. In other words, at any given time, we are only aware of a very small part of what makes up our personality; most of what we are is buried and inaccessible. In Freud's own words,

The final part is the preconscious or subconscious. This is the part of us that we can access if prompted, but is not in our active conscious.

Its right below the surface, but still buried somewhat unless we search for it. Information such as our telephone number, some childhood memories, or the name of your best childhood friend is stored in the preconscious. (121)

Because the unconscious is so large, and because we are only aware of the very small conscious at any given time, this theory has been likened to an iceberg, where the vast majority is buried beneath the water's surface. The water, by the way, would represent everything that we are not aware of, haven't experienced, and that has not been integrated into our personalities, referred to as the non-conscious.

The ego is responsible for repressing unconscious thoughts. Things that are too disturbing to face immediately are pushed out of awareness by the ego. However, the unconscious continues to exert influence on the behavior of the individual. This psychological pressure creates a continuous battle between the ego and unconscious portions of the psyche. The dynamics of this struggle are the target of much of Freud's psychoanalytic theories. He described the mind as composed of various components. Each component is responsible for one of the various functions

the mind executes. The relations of these parts are the subject of much debate in psychoanalysis.

Freud conceptualized three separate but interactive psychic parts. The id is the source of drives, including biological drives such as the sex and death drives. The id also stores the repressions the superego passes from conscious experiences. Ideologies and beliefs guide our behavior, and these reside within the superego. The superego restricts the flow of unwieldy drives upon the conscious mind. The ego regulates the conscious mind's rational decision making processes, coping with the environment, and so on.

Freud expanded upon his model of the unconscious to account for these inefficiencies. Masochism and sadism are also poorly explained by his pleasure principle. The unconscious, Freud postulated, is comprised of three instincts. The life instinct (Eros) pushes the individual to improve their skills, become better people, and succeed in life. Eros fuels personality development as it is conceptualized by authors like Dabrowski - allowing us to adopt more effectively to our social environment. The sex drive creates libidinal energy. This includes the desire for sex, but also creates desire for all bodily pleasures. The death drive, pushes us towards rest - with the ultimate rest residing only in death. Although the superego tries to override the urges of Thanatos, the unconscious will often take control. These battles are frequent and ferocious. Think of the drug addict who must pass drug tests during probation. The death drive forces them to consume the drug, and the life drive forces them to "clean up" for their tests. The winner of this battle will determine the fate of the individual. Freud eventually realized the profundity of this idea, and integrated it as a fundamental concept used to explain the other forces.

If we are to take it as a truth that knows no exception that everything living dies for internal reasons — becomes inorganic once again — then we shall be compelled to say that ‘the aim of all life is death’ and, looking backwards, that ‘inanimate things existed before living ones. (246)

From this perspective, we can see why Eros and Thanatos, in reality, cannot be separated. They are mutually dependent and psychic energy bounces between them. Libido is of course the source of this energy, and Freud articulated the intimacy of this force and its channels.

In organisms the libido meets the instinct of death, or destruction, which is dominant in them and which seeks to disintegrate the cellular organism and to conduct each separate unicellular organism into a state of inorganic stability. The libido has the task of making the destroying instinct innocuous, and it fulfills the task by diverting that instinct to a great extent outwards — soon with the help of a special organic system, the muscular apparatus — towards objects in the external world. The instinct is then called the destructive instinct, the instinct for mastery, or the will to power. A portion of the instinct is placed directly in the service of the sexual function, where it has an important part to play.

By moving self-destructive forces away from the self and directing them toward the outer environment, libido curtails masochism and redirects the death drive toward sadism. This process doesn't need to result in harm towards another person or object. Many aggressive actions are actually encouraged by society, such as placing stress on other people to work harder. Because libido often guides the death instinct, the two share a dialectical rather than oppositional relationship.

How does Freud explain personality development? With all of the emphasis on seemingly negative drives, a developmental psychologist may wonder what makes us progress as individuals. One obvious insight is that the life drive pushes personal progress. Its need for harmony and balance within the nervous system creates incentive to do the things we deem acceptable as a society. From this perspective, it appears that personality development, for Freud, was driven by the desire for immediate resolution of the problems we face as human beings. This, picture, however, is incomplete. Think of the patient who repeats poor behavior. Or, think of the suicidal artist or work addict who constantly seeks to push the limit, never finding satisfaction, always feeling discomfort. Motivation is not a simple thing to understand.

Freud explained that libido is often sublimated into desexualized energy. This energy is invested in all kinds of other psychic efforts - both productive and destructive. In fact, Freud argued that it is this desexualized energy which pushes the individual to develop in all aspects of their lives. The mechanics of this process are outlined in the relations between the ego, id and superego. The ego manufactures and stores the "object-cathexes" sexual energy directs itself toward. The superego diverts this energy into non-sexual ambitions which are often more socially permissible.

The ego wants above all to be loved. But it only becomes the id's love object by diverting, or sublimating, part of the drive, and repressing the remainder. Ultimately, the id will not reward the ego for managing - and inevitably frustrating - its demands. When the superego emerges, as an incorporation of the father whose strength is to bolster the ego against the id the superego also serves to represent the id's grievances to the ego.

With the possibility of sublimation arises the independence of the death drive, which may now operate without dependence upon libido. The death drive may then motivate personality development by encouraging pursuit of sublimated cathexes. This is yet another motivation for the vast array of activities we engage in. In this regard Starchy opines as follows:

[...] the differentiation of the super-ego from the ego is no matter of chance; it represents the most important characteristics of the development both of the individual and of the species; indeed, by giving permanent expression to the influence of the parents it perpetuates the existence of the factors to which it owes its origin (458).

The question that naturally arises is: at what level of control does the individual have in determining their motivations? What are the mechanics of the process of sublimation? Psychoanalytic theorists - especially Lacan - really dug into the details of these questions and have taken Freud's theories to a new level of sophistication.

II. Eccentricity as a Psychological Problem

Psychoanalysis is the theory of human mental development and how the mind works. Using a combined set of psychological theories and techniques patients can work on behavior patterns stemming from childhood experiences. These behaviors are traced back to unconscious thoughts and repressed emotions. By getting to the root of these thoughts and emotions, patients are able to become conscious of their unconscious thoughts and then begin resolving their issues.

In *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, Freud explains the principal tenets on which psychoanalytic theory is based. He begins with an explanation of the three forces of the psychological apparatus--the id, the ego, and the superego. The id has the quality of being unconscious and contains everything that is inherited, everything that is present at birth, and the instincts. The ego has the quality of being conscious and is responsible for controlling the demands of the id and of the instincts, becoming aware of stimuli, and serving as a link between the id and the external world. In addition, the ego responds to stimulation by either adaptation or flight, regulates activity, and strives to achieve pleasure and avoid displeasure. Finally, the superego, whose demands are managed by the id, is responsible for the limitation of satisfactions and represents the influence of others, such as parents, teachers, and role models, as well as the impact of racial, societal, and cultural traditions. In the course of understanding Id, Ego and Superego Engler states:

In discussing the id, ego, and superego, we must keep in mind that these are not three separate entities with sharply defined boundaries, but rather that they represent a variety of different processes, functions, and dynamics within the person... Moreover, in his

writings Freud uses the German personal pronouns, *das Es*, *Das Ich*, and *das uber-Ich*. Literally translated they mean "the it," "the I," and "the above-I." The Strachey translation into Latin pronouns has made them less personal, raising the issue of the desirability of attempting a new translation. (90)

Freud states that the instincts are the ultimate cause of all behavior. The two basic instincts are Eros (love) and the destructive or death instinct. The purpose of Eros is to establish and preserve unity through relationships. On the other hand, the purpose of the death instinct is to undo connections and unity via destruction. The two instincts can either operate against each other through repulsion or combine with each other through attraction.

One of the cardinal theorists of psychoanalysis, Erik Erikson, wrote of Gandhi and Martin Luther, and visited Indian tribes, was a major figure in educating Americans to the societal influences on childhood as well as expanding human development beyond the earliest influences of early childhood. Erikson wandered through Europe hoping to become an artist. He found himself in Vienna where he taught school and trained at the Vienna Psychoanalytic Institute. His personal analysis with Anna Freud ended in 1933 when, in spite of Miss Freud's assurance that the Nazis would never invade Austria, he left for America. His theory of psychosocial development is one of the best-known theories of personality in psychology. Much like Sigmund Freud, Erikson believed that personality develops in a series of stages. Unlike Freud's theory of psychosexual stages, Erikson's theory describes the impact of social experience across the whole lifespan. One of the main elements of Erikson's psychosocial stage theory is the development of **ego identity**. Ego identity is the conscious sense of self that we develop through social interaction.

According to Erikson, our ego identity is constantly changing due to new experiences and information we acquire in our daily interactions with others.

When psychologists talk about identity, they are referring to all of the beliefs, ideals, and values that help shape and guide a person's behavior. The formation of identity is something that begins in childhood and becomes particularly important during adolescence, but it is a process that continues throughout life. Our personal identity gives each of us an integrated and cohesive sense of self that endures and continues to grow as we age.

In addition to ego identity, Erikson also believed that a sense of competence motivates behaviors and actions. Each stage in Erikson's theory is concerned with becoming competent in an area of life. If the stage is handled well, the person will feel a sense of mastery, which is sometimes referred to as ego strength or ego quality. If the stage is managed poorly, the person will emerge with a sense of inadequacy. In each stage, Erikson believed people experience a conflict that serves as a turning point in development. In Erikson's view, these conflicts are centered on either developing a psychological quality or failing to develop that quality. During these times, the potential for personal growth is high, but so is the potential for failure. In this way using the methodological tools of Sigmund Freud and Erik Erikson, the present thesis unearths the eccentric behavior of the protagonist inherent in the play of Henrik Ibsen. This thesis is a library-based research. The research is based on the authentic cites. Guidance from the lecturers and professors is taken as the supportive tool. In addition to it the notion of Psychoanalysis conceptualized by Sigmund Freud and other applicable ideas of Erik Erikson are used to make the thesis prove the hypothesis. Different extracts from the play related with the notion of personality, ego, revolt contrast and tussle of person with society

are brought to prove the appropriateness of implementation of psychoanalysis. One of the other cardinals in psychoanalytical theory, Melanie Klein, has also developed the notion on building the unique personality studying Freud's psychoanalytical theory. He has extended many notions of Freud's ideas in a convincing way.

Freud introduced the concept of unconscious phantasy and phantasising but Klein and her successors have emphasized that phantasies interact reciprocally with experience to form the developing intellectual and emotional characteristics of the individual; phantasies are considered to be a basic capacity underlying and shaping thought, dream, symptoms and patterns of defense.

Melanie Klein extended and developed Sigmund Freud's *Understanding of the Unconscious Mind*. By analyzing children's play, much as Freud had analyzed dreams, she explored the uncharted territory of the mind of the infant, finding an early Oedipus complex and the earliest roots of the superego.

Klein's understanding of the child's deepest fears, and its defenses against them, enabled her to make original theoretical contributions to psychoanalysis, most notably the 'paranoid-schizoid position' and the 'depressive position', and she showed how these primitive mental states impact on the adult. Her groundbreaking theories have been taken up and developed by later generations of psychoanalysts.

By analyzing children Klein was able to show the symbolic significance of play and how sublimation depends on a capacity to symbolize. Segal further developed Klein's theory of symbols, distinguishing between the symbol properly formed in the depressive position and a more primitive version, the symbolic equation, belonging to paranoid-schizoid functioning.

The emotional development of children was of considerable interest from the earliest days of psychoanalysis, and Freud's 'Little Hans' case is probably the most

famous example of early work with children. It is probable that many of the group around Freud were young parents with concerns about their own children, and who would have wished that they could have the same kind of help as Little Hans was receiving. However, it was not until after the First World War that the first children became subjects of analytic treatment in their own right.

It was obvious that children could not be expected to manage an adult psychoanalytic setting of the couch and free associations and this was going to be a considerable problem. Other pioneers, in particular Anna Freud, felt at that time that children under the age of seven could not be helped directly, because before that age they could not co-operate with the adult technique.

To overcome these challenges, Klein developed a technique in which children could express themselves through toys and play. She wanted, as far as possible, to be able to analyze children in the same way that adults were analyzed, paying attention to the meaning of the play, the transference and the unconscious phantasies being expressed.

Instead of the child being expected to lie on the couch and bring verbal associations, the analyst would have a simple playroom with a box or drawer of his own containing play material such as paper, crayons, string, a ball, small cups, a sink with taps and small figures that a child could manipulate easily and would not be too representative, giving maximum opportunity for the child's own imagination to be expressed.

The child would then be free to use the materials, the room and the analyst himself as he wished, including the analyst being drawn in to play different roles - for example, being the naughty child while the child became the strict teacher. In

current practice, the basic setting and approach to child analysis is still largely as Melanie Klein described it.

It is interesting to notice how accessible child analytic material is to adult analysts, whilst the superficial characteristics of the setting are so different. However, once we see adult material as consisting of a constant process of action through words, that it is not so much that children are like little adults in their analyses, but rather that adults in analysis continue to be children, then it is not so mysterious. Using this technique of child analysis was of enormous importance in the development of Melanie Klein's theories, and especially on her emphasis of the importance of infantile experience in disturbance of later life. In *The Psychoanalytic Play Technique* Klein states that:

....my work with both children and adults, and my contributions to psycho-analytic theory as a whole, derive ultimately from the play technique evolved with young children. I do not mean by this that my later work was a direct application of the play technique; but the insight that I gained into early development, into unconscious processes, and into the nature of the interpretations by which the unconscious can be approached, has been of far-reaching influence on the work I have done with older children and adults.(122)

According to Klein, children adopt various psychic defense mechanisms to protect their ego against anxiety aroused by their own destructive fantasies. Klein defined fantasy of taking into one's own body the images that one has of an external object, especially the mother's breast. Infants usually interject good objects as a protection against anxiety, but they also interject bad objects in order to gain control of them.

B. Projection: The fantasy that one's own feelings and impulses reside within

another person is called projection. Children project both good and bad images, especially onto their parents. C. Splitting: Infants tolerate good and bad aspects of themselves and of external objects by splitting, or mentally keeping apart, incompatible images. Splitting can be beneficial to both children and adults, because it allows them to like themselves while still recognizing some unlikable qualities. D. Projective Identification: Projective identification is the psychic defense mechanism whereby infants split off unacceptable parts of themselves, project them onto another object, and finally interject them in an altered form.

After interjecting external objects, infants organize them into a psychologically meaningful framework, a process that Klein called internalization. Internalizations are aided by the early ego's ability to feel anxiety, to use defense mechanisms, and to form object relations in both fantasy and reality. However, a unified ego emerges only after first splitting itself into two parts: those that deal with the life instinct and those that relate to the death instinct.

Klein believed that the superego emerged much earlier than Freud had held. To her, the superego preceded rather than followed the Oedipus complex. Klein also saw the superego as being quite harsh and cruel. Klein believed that the Oedipus complex begins during the first few months of life, and then reaches its zenith during the genital stage, at about 3 or 4 years of age, or the same time that Freud had suggested it began. Klein also held that much of the Oedipus complex is based on children's fear that their parents will seek revenge against them for their fantasy of emptying the parent's body. For healthy development during the Oedipal years, children should retain positive feelings for each parent. According to Klein, the little boy adopts a "feminine" position very early in life and has no fear of being castrated as punishment for his sexual feelings for his mother. Later, he projects his

destructive drive onto his father, whom he fears will bite or castrate him. The male Oedipus complex is resolved when the boy establishes good relations with both parents. The little girl also adopts a "feminine" position toward both parents quite early in life. She has a positive feeling for both her mother's breast and her father's penis, which she believes will feed her with babies. Sometimes the girl develops hostility toward her mother, whom she fears will retaliate against her and rob her of her babies, but in most cases, the female Oedipus complex is resolved without any jealousy toward the mother.

In drama the spectators can find some issues that occur in society such as crime, racism, materialism, sexism, social conflict and so on. From all of those issues, the writer is interested in social conflict and chooses it as the theme of analysis. In this way, the play has received different kinds of criticism since its publication. Critics have unearthed the multiple dimensions that the play touched though one of the major issues of the play - psychoanalysis - has not been touched yet so the gap is fulfilled by the present research through the character analysis of Hedda in the novel *Hedda Gabler*.

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory of personality argued that human behavior was the result of the interaction of three component parts of the mind: *the id, ego, and superego*. His structural theory placed great importance on the role of unconscious psychological conflicts in shaping behavior and personality. Dynamic interactions among these basic parts of the mind were thought to carry human beings through five psychosexual stages of development: oral, anal, phallic, latency, and genital. Each stage required mastery for a human to develop properly and move on to the next stage successfully. Freud's ideas have since been met with criticism,

mostly because of his singular focus on sexuality as the main driver of human personality development.

III. Hedda as Eccentric Personality

In Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, the main character Hedda does not conform to the norms of the society. Although being a female she doesn't behave as per the social norms and convention but rather acts like her male counterparts. She rejects the notions of masculine and feminine activities. As an eccentric character, Hedda seems strange in her actions and behaves as if she is totally guided by her sexual drive. Being born in sophisticated family, she doesn't hesitate to make relationship to unmatched people only to quench her thirst of sex guided by unconscious mind.

Hedda Gabler faces an impasse in her life. She finds no outlet for her personal demands; she is constantly torn between her aimless desire for freedom and her commitment to standards of social appearance. Refusing to submit to her womanly destiny, Hedda has such an unsatisfied craving for life that she is incapable of being emotionally involved with others. Written in 1890, *Hedda Gabler* is a high point in Ibsen's creative life. Although the "social dramas" of his prose period depict full-bodied and believable characters, Ibsen has achieved a certain psychological depth in *Hedda Gabler* that his later works don't seem to have surpassed. Having investigated the feminine character in a male-oriented society in *A Doll's House*, Ibsen enlarged his scrutiny to encompass the full pathology of the social female. Although Hedda Gabler is an example of perverted femininity, her situation illuminates what Ibsen considered to be a depraved society, intent on sacrificing to its own self-interest the freedom and individual expression of its most gifted members.

Hedda is the daughter of the famous General Gabler; as a child she was used to luxury and high-class living. As the play begins, she is returning from her honeymoon with Jürgen Tesman, a scholar with good prospects but not as much

money as Hedda is accustomed to. Her married name is Hedda Tesman. Hedda is an intelligent, unpredictable, and somewhat dishonest young woman who is not afraid to manipulate her husband and friends. Jürgen Tesman is an amiable, intelligent young scholar. He tries very hard to please his young wife, Hedda, and often does not realize that she is manipulating him. In fact, he often seems foolish for his age, and when he annoys Hedda, the audience has reason to sympathize with her.

Tesman is hoping for a professorship in history, and at the beginning of the play it seems that his one great rival, Ejlert Lövborg, a notorious alcoholic, no longer stands in Tesman's way. Tesman was raised by his Aunt Julie.

Juliane Tesman, or Aunt Julie, is the aunt of Jürgen Tesman. After Tesman's parents died, Aunt Julie raised him. She is well-meaning, and she is constantly hinting that Tesman and Hedda should have a baby. Aunt Julie tries to get along with Hedda, but the difference in their class backgrounds is painfully apparent. Aunt Julie lives with the ailing Aunt Rina, another aunt of Tesman's.

Placed in similar crises as previous Ibsen heroines, Hedda Gabler faces an impasse in her life. Hedda finds no outlet for her personal demands; she is constantly torn between her burning desire for freedom and her commitment to standards of social appearance. Refusing to submit to her womanly destiny, Hedda has such an unsatisfied craving for life that she is not even trying to be emotionally involved with others.

When Nora Helmer recognized her own unsatisfied needs, she left her husband and children. Considering her most "sacred duty" was to find her own self, she left home to discover her personal worth through facing life's experiences before being able to relate to others. However, lacking Nora's daring and defiance of conventions, she is unable to undergo the trials of self-evaluation and becomes a

morbidly self-vindictive, destructive virago, capable only to strike out against the successful socially conforming individuals who represent an implicit reproach to her uninformed cravings. In the play, Ibsen provides enough information to show how Hedda's problem is the product of her inner self which has also affected her outlook.

HEDDA enters from the left through the inner room. Her face and figure show refinement and distinction. Her complexion is pale and opaque. Her steel-grey eyes express a cold, unruffled repose. Her hair is of an agreeable brown, but not particularly abundant. She is dressed in a tasteful, somewhat loose-fitting morning gown. (21)

Raised by her military father, Hedda must have grown up in an atmosphere of strict discipline and conformity to rules. Becoming a beautiful sought-after young woman, she attended many social affairs but never found anyone to marry; probably she was not rich enough to interest the eligible bachelors of high social standing.

As a product of the nineteenth century, when women were destined to become either respectable old maids like George's aunts or humble housekeepers like Mrs. Elvsted, Hedda is an anomaly. Instead of preparing his daughter for wifehood or motherhood, General Gabler taught her to ride and shoot, skills symbolic of the military mystique which became for Hedda the basis of her fascination with the violent and the romantic. Inheriting from her father, whose forbidding portrait hangs in the Tesman's drawing room, his pride and coldness as well as his imperious commanding attitude toward others of a lower rank, Hedda lacks compassion for weak and submissive creatures like Thea and Aunt Julia but has a respect for power and independence, qualities she finds in Brack and Lövborg.

Since it was unthinkable at the time for a woman to receive either an intellectual or a professional education, Hedda's intelligence remained stultified.

Unable to recognize the demands of her individuality, she remains enslaved to a standard of social conventionality and can only admire from afar the forbidden world where there is freedom of expression and an uninhibited exuberance of life. Eilert Lövborg provides Hedda with the vicarious experience of an individual who enjoys an unfettered creative life. She drew sustenance from his soul's outpourings as he told her of his dreams, his work, and his excessive way of life. At the same time, Hedda was too ignorant and inexperienced to accurately evaluate Lövborg's character; she regarded him not as a creature of reality, but as the person — and realization — of her adolescent quest for the romantic. When Lövborg made serious demands on her, Hedda rejected him. Stultified at the emotional level of an adolescent and repelled by his unconventionality, she could no longer tolerate the intensity of an actual relationship and shrank from responding to his demands.

In the play, it is apparent that her strength emanates from the ability to both masculine and feminine characters. However, at the same time, this very ability kills her at the end of the play. All her strength was not enough to deal with the harsh realities of the contemporary society. Early in the play Ibsen is able to demonstrate Hedda's masculinity and the problems that arise in her associations with her new husband. Hedda displays no emotion or affection towards this man. This outward show of apathy is a trait that is usually common to men, who must stoically face any battle that arises. An example of this can be seen in the play as Tesman yelps with joy when Aunt Julie gives him his old slippers. Though Aunt Rina had made them for Tesman a long time ago, Hedda, cold and calculated, plays the role as a man and does not take to her husband's slippers with any interest. She refuses the offer to see the shoes, telling Tesman, "Thanks, but I really don't care to." (229).

With the suggestion of pregnancy, Hedda is not only reminded of her feminine role as a mother, but also as a wife of Tesman, something that she has as much contempt for as his lowly bedroom slippers. Hedda resents the gender conventions that dictate that she now belongs to the Tesman family, a situation that would not occur were she a man. Because of this situation, Hedda uses all her strength to keep her emotions shut in. When Tesman suggests that she is part of the family, all Hedda can say is, "Hm—I really don't know—" (232). The only way she is to carry on with this conflicting life is to remain quiet. Hedda has become completely convinced that it is wrong to express emotion, and as a result she will play with her pistols in an effort to amuse herself instead of actually voicing her male opinions. These pistols themselves represent masculinity and Hedda finds some comfort in cherishing them. The pistols are Hedda's outlet from the reality around her. Tesman begs her to not play with the pistols at the end of Act 1, but at the beginning of the very next act, Hedda is seen loading them and even pretending to shoot Judge Brack.

With Lovborg, Hedda finds the consummate genius of a man and is envious of his talents. She has always craved what he possesses as a creator of words and beauty. Hedda has known this genius since her childhood when she and Lovborg had an intense relationship. As a single young woman, not fully comprehending the emotions she felt, Hedda had been attracted to the "secret closeness, the companionship that no one, not a soul, suspected" (265).

Thus, typical of a woman, she sought the closeness of another. However, as the relationship grew, her masculine traits sharpened, and Hedda realized that she could not love a man, because she wanted to play the role of a man herself. She had learned not to let emotions get in the way of her actions, and thus broke off the

relationship when she started to have feelings for Lovborg. This was the first act of manipulation that she had exercised on someone else. Now as an adult, nearly thirty, she has completely realized the strength and character of her male side. She uses this power, however, in cruel and demeaning efforts. In a cold act of manipulation, Hedda pretends to have been friends with Thea in their childhood days in order to gain Thea's confidence.

Thea has a definite purpose in life, to fulfill the role as a woman and as a caretaker of the male in her life, whether the male is her husband or later Lovborg. Hedda lacks this strength to influence someone purely in the role of the female because she also wants to play the role of the man, so she must use other tactics. Thus, while Thea can use her power to care for and influence Lovborg, Hedda uses the only femininity she knows to manipulate both of her admirers, Lovborg and Brack. She achieves this through her sexuality. She encourages Brack's flirtation with her by telling him that her marriage to Tesman is only one of convenience.

Hedda persuades Brack to believe her when she says that she had merely "danced myself out" (251). Brack is emboldened by Hedda's availability and pursues the notion of a "triangular arrangement" (252). Not only does Hedda's sensual behavior towards Brack exhibit her manipulative nature, it also demonstrates that in some instances she has given in to society's expectations as a woman. Hedda's reference to her time being up shows the socially accepted view that women must marry. By conforming to this aspect of her society's standards, Hedda demonstrates that she has been labeled as a female and, in some ways, acts this part out. With Lovborg, Hedda is able to skillfully confirm his beliefs that they had established quite a relationship in their childhood in order to gain his trust in the

present. Eilert tries to make the assumption that they share a common passion for life, but Hedda does not want Lovborg to get carried away. As a married woman, she tells him that he no longer may call her by her maiden name, Hedda Gabler, because it is a reality that Hedda has married Tesman and he should accept it as much as she does. However, Hedda feels emboldened with the thought that she has so much influence over this intelligent man and decides to challenge his masculinity.

She manipulates him into going to Brack's party and resuming his old drunken ways. Hedda is delighted then to find that as a result of this excursion, Lovborg's manuscript, his and Thea's "child", has come into her hands. She burns it, destroying the bond that Thea and Lovborg had, and creating the situation for Hedda to take charge (286).

She senses triumph and quickly, yet subtly, gives him one of his pistols and advises him to die beautifully. Thus, when Brack comes to reveal the death of Lovborg, Hedda is momentarily satisfied. She is excited that she been able to control another's life, as a man would feel when determining the fates of his enemy at war. At the same time, Hedda is upholding her virtues as the wife of Tesman. She even tells him that she has burned the manuscript for his benefit. However, Hedda's satisfaction is soon replaced by disgust when she discovers that Lovborg has shot himself in the stomach at the singer's wretched apartment, searching for his manuscript. His death, far from symbolizing the courage and beauty that Hedda had intended, is instead revolting because it was unplanned.

It was not the death Hedda had created. While the climax draws near, Tesman, devastated about the death of his friend, decides to dedicate his life to reforming the manuscript that had been lost, Thea is ready to take the place as the source of inspiration. Hedda makes a halfhearted attempt to play the role as a female

and pathetically offers to help Tesman and Thea. When her offer is denied, Hedda then realizes that her femininity is of no use to her, even in her own house. Hedda is perceptive enough to see that soon Thea and Tesman will create a bond of companionship that Hedda could never create with anyone. Hedda has been trying to hide her male side for the sake of her expectations as a female.

When she realizes that these efforts have been in vain, she is crushed. Thea will replace her as the new female of importance in Tesman's life and Hedda will have not have anything that Thea can not offer. She cannot, however, now live her life as a male, because that is not what society sees her as. Thus it is a culmination of these events that forces Hedda to suicide. In the final acts of the play, her struggles with her masculinity reach new proportions when the maleness of her character is challenged with the ungraceful death of Lovborg. His death shows her defeat at an attempt to orchestrate and command another's destiny.

This convinces Hedda that suicide is the only option. She cannot be the caretaker of Tesman because she has been denied that outlet, and now she cannot act as a male because she herself will be controlled by Brack. She cannot control what society expects of her nor can she control what she truly is. Remaining silent will not work, nor will pretending to be someone she is not. She is both a man and woman, and at the same time neither a man or a woman but a human being that cannot tolerate the struggle between the forces brought upon her.

Although in his two previous works, *Rosmersholm* and *The Lady From the Sea*, Ibsen had begun exploring the human psyche in more symbolic, mystical terms, Hedda marked a return to the theatrical style which we term a method of playwriting in which the internal motivations of the personalities in the play are explored within a specific social context. Other hallmarks of the realistic style include the avoidance

of devices such as soliloquies in favor of more natural exposition, causally related scenes leading logically to a denouement, and the creation of individual behavior directly attributable to the heredity or environment of the character.

In the meantime, HEDDA walks about the room, raising her arms and clenching her hands as if in desperation. Then she flings back the curtains from the glass door, and stands there looking out. HEDDA: Once more calm and mistress of herself.] I am only looking at the leaves. They are so yellow—so withered. (26)

All external stage details were authentic to the specific and current environment; all costumes, dialogue, and settings were carefully chosen to reveal the characters' more critical psychological impulses. Though his dialogue may appear to modern readers as somewhat awkward and even coy, part of Ibsen's genius was the ability to use conventional surroundings and conversation to express sentiments and circumstances that were considered unspeakable to the audience of the time.

Although he himself expressly denied being a feminist such scholars as Elinor Fuchs and Joan Templeton have convincingly shown that he was at the very least pathetic to the beginnings of the women's movement, and was even actively involved in the push to redefine the role of women in society. Certainly the creator of such seminal feminist archetypes as LonaHessell, Nora Helmer, Helena Alving and EllidaWangel could not have been blind to the implications of the plays in which they appeared.

Mrs. Elvsted: Perfectly irreproachable, I assure you! In every respect. But all the same—now that I know he is here—in this great town—and with a large sum of money in his hands—I can't help being in mortal fear for him.

Tesman: Why did he not remain where he was? With you and your husband? Eh

MrsElvsted: After his book was published he was too restless and unsettled to remain with us. (31)

Having thus married to insure herself from any internal threats, Hedda coldly plans to base her life on the enjoyment of external advantages. The drama begins at this point and develops characters and events which swiftly undermine Hedda's system of values. Her pregnancy is the first disturbance to her calculated system of inner protection. Hedda then learns that George's appointment may be deferred, a situation which deprives her of luxury and active social entertainment.

Brack administers the final blow to her dream of independence when he threatens her with blackmail. After all her efforts at manipulating others so that she can remain free of fettering responsibilities and slavish domestic attachments, Hedda learns that she is forever at Brack's beck and call if she wishes to avoid being involved in a sordid scandal. With this final disillusion, Hedda no longer has a life worth facing. In a tragic attempt to "do it beautifully," she puts a bullet through her temple.

Wilson Knight describes Hedda as 'Dionysian', by which he means that she is not cowed by the world of men; she refuses the role of submissive domesticity and the whole range of customary feminine virtues. Moreover she rejects the whole Apollonian nexus of values and goals which characterizes Western civilization. She has a lust for a larger life than her world can contain, for drama and beauty. But whereas the women of Athens could on occasion leave the city and their menfolk, take to the hills, and participate in the secret female rites of Dionysos, there was no such safety valve in Ibsen's Norway. Hedda is too noble to accept the safety valve of

cynical adultery offered by Brack. The values of her class and culture have so infiltrated her spirit that she is paralyzed by fear of scandal. Hedda has no alternative but to nurse unacted desires, and thereby, in Blake's terms, murder an infant in its cradle.

Hedda is destructive by nature attacking goodness because she cannot understand it, but Tesman does not see her as evil, rather as a wonderfully realized example of a psychological type subsequently recognized and described by such psychologists as Melanie Klein and Winnicott.

Hand draws attention to the centrality of the image of the child, and the book as brain-child, and claims that 'the struggle within the play to constitute a realm within which the child-book might survive is the play' . :

The unborn child of the Tesman's marriage has been conceived but not conceived of, while the book-child of Thea and Lövborg has been conceived of, but is not a fleshly child. *Hedda Gabler* uses the intriguingly subtle theme of the imaginary child to explore what it means to live creatively, and more particularly, what it means when one is unable to find the clue to doing so. For Ibsen, as for Winnicott, there is no more fundamental theme.

In *Hedda Gabler* Ibsen's most memorable character wages a life and death struggle to overcome her sense of futility, to escape from her despair at being unable to live creatively. For Hedda is no more able to create a living conception of her own life than she is to conceive of a life for the child she has conceived with Tesman.

According to Hand, 'Hedda's notion that she breaks up the Lövborg-Thea relationship in order to 'liberate' Lövborg is a transparent rationalization of the ruthless envy which impels her to destroy this creatively parental liason' (22).

Hedda's mother is never mentioned in the play. It is as though she had never had a mother to present the world to the child in a way which enables the child to link up its inner life with the outer life of objects and other people. As Hand writes: 'It is as if there has been some tear in the fabric of things whereby Hedda is denied access to this realm of experience. At a loss to find the gesture which would affect the transformation she yearns for, she will seek to animate her existence through manipulation of the lives of others.

Being unable to conceive a meaningful future for herself, she is 'caught up in the repetition of a ghost-filled past'. Hence the portrait of her father dominating the stage, and the fatal attraction of his pistols. In Ibsen genetics and early conditioning replace the ancient idea of fate, which is the opposite of fulfilling one's destiny. Hand quotes Christopher Bollas who writes in *Forces of Destiny*, not in relation to Hedda, but very appropriately:

A person who is fated, who is fundamentally interred in an internal world of self and object representations that endlessly repeat the same scenarios, has very little sense of a future that is at all different from the environment they carry around with them. The sense of fate is a feeling of despair to influence the course of one's life. A sense of destiny, however, is a different state, when the person feels he is moving in a personality progression that gives him a sense of steering his course. (45)

It is some consolation to her to find that she can, at least, influence the course of other lives, and this becomes a substitute for a destiny. But when she fails in this too, fails to contrive a 'beautiful' ending for Lövborg, she is, in Hand's words, 'thrust back, even more deeply, into the void of her self-experience: it is as if

life has no place for her, whether as begetter or begotten'. She succeeds to find her belated destiny in suicide. Hands concludes his account:

It is when she destroys everything – that is to say herself and the future (her unborn child) – that Hedda finally succeeds in making her own idiomatic gesture. To destroy everything is to leave nothing left to want, nothing left to envy. If nothing is left to be reduced to nothing, something may begin to be. 'A terrible beauty is born', and a destiny is fatefully fulfilled. (50)

One can often tell from the appearance of Hedda alone – casting, make-up, costume, bearing – where the emphasis is going to lie. This is how Ibsen himself envisaged Hedda:

Slender figure of average height. Nobly shaped, aristocratic face with fine, wax-coloured skin. The eyes have a veiled expression. Hair medium brown, not especially abundant. Dressed in a loose-fitting dressing gown, white with blue trimmings. Composed and relaxed in her manners. The eyes steel-grey, almost lustreless. (87)

According to Henry James, Ibsen found the 'infinite of character' 'an endless romance and a perpetual challenge'. *Hedda Gabler* is a play, he says, about a condition rather than an action, a portrait of a nature, 'a state of nerves as well as of soul, a state of temper, of health, of chagrin, of despair'; in short, 'the study of an exasperated woman'. If we look for antecedents and explanations, 'we must simply find them in Hedda's character.

James had read the play in proof and been puzzled by it, finding the subject dramatically unpromising, but in the theatre, in the 1891 production, he was completely convinced, finding it alive 'with an intensity of life'.

The distinguished thing is the firm hand that weaves the web, the deep and ingenious use made of the material. What material, indeed, the dissentient spirit may exclaim, and what ‘use’ is to be made of a wicked, diseased, disagreeable woman? That is just what Ibsen attempts to gauge, and from the moment such an attempt is resolute the case ceases to be so simple. And then one isn’t so sure she is wicked, and by no means sure that she is disagreeable. (90)

Nearly forty years later Elizabeth Robins wrote an account of that production which reveals why she was one of the finest actresses of her generation, and why her performance as Hedda so transformed the play for James.

Hedda’s first and dearest dream had been to find contacts with life through the attractive young man of letters, Eilert Lövborg. That hope ended in driving him from her at the point of a pistol. Hedda drove Lövborg from her in disgust; disgust at the new aspects of vulgar sensuality which her curiosity about life had led him to reveal. They made her gorge rise. The man who had wallowed in that filth must not touch Hedda Gabler – certainly not fresh from the latest orgy. The effect of that experience, plus the conditions of her own life and upbringing, was to throw her into marriage with the least ineligible man she can find who is decent, and no one can deny that poor Tesman was entirely decent.

Glenda Jackson played Hedda in an RSC production by Trevor Nunn. She, too, looks very much the part. But her determination to re-interpret the play led her to underestimate Hedda. Jackson insisted on reinterpreting Ibsen on the grounds that ‘we’re all indoctrinated about the classic roles’. She sees Hedda as a funny play, ‘a mordantly black comedy about Norwegian society’. Hedda, she said, was not calculating or ruthless but stupid. No doubt to an intelligent, courageous, liberated

and urbane woman such as Glenda Jackson, who has never suffered fools gladly, if at all, Hedda must have seemed foolish... But in her own time and society Ibsen, if he condemns her at all, does not condemn her for stupidity. It is the stupidity which surrounds her (usually in the guise of respectability) which exasperates her. William Archer, Ibsen's leading English advocate, spoke of Hedda's 'rapidity and subtlety of intellect', and Ibsen himself spoke of her as part of the 'female underground revolution in thought'.

Glenda Jackson claimed that Hedda has no courage and is none of the things she is told she is. Jackson admired her only because she actually acknowledges that there is no way out for her, and she chooses not to conform. It's the only element of choice she has. In the end she does what people least expect. The next significant Hedda was Fiona Shaw in Deborah Warner's TV production in 1993. Shaw entirely lacked Glenda Jackson's aristocratic arrogance and disdain of all the other characters. Nigel Hand, who particularly admired this production, describes her as 'almost girlishly unsure of herself':

Hedda herself makes her first entry into the room by backing into it, carrying a chair. During the course of the play she continues to move the furniture about, and, at dramatic moments, to smash things or throw them across the room. In short it is as if she can make no sense of the relationship between herself, her environment, and the objects in it: the relationship remains beyond both her and the audience's grasp. (117)

The crucial question is whether they are also mutually exclusive. Do actresses and their directors have to choose between them, or is Ibsen's Hedda both Heddas at

once, and therefore one of the past and present theatres' challenges for the characterization. Richard Eyre notes;

Is there any other dramatic heroine who possesses such an extraordinary confection of characteristics? She's feisty, droll and intelligent, yet fatally ignorant of the world and herself. She's snobbish, mean-spirited, small-minded, conservative, cold, bored, vicious; sexually eager but terrified of sex, ambitious to be bohemian but frightened of scandal, a desperate romantic fantasist but unable to sustain any loving relationship with anyone, including herself. And yet, in spite of this, she mesmerizes us and compels our pity. (126)

Eve Best's immediate West End predecessor in the role was Harriet Walter in 1997. Best is very like a younger version of Walter. Best, quite apart from her versatility, had the advantage of age over almost all her predecessors. Hedda Gabler is one of those roles for which actresses are usually not considered good enough until they are too old. Hedda, we are told, is twenty-nine. Hope is not yet dead in her that she might still find a life, or a purpose, or a hero.

Later on a visit, Lövborg is offered a drink. He refuses and Hedda, jealous of the influence that Thea has on Lövborg, tempts him into taking a drink. He then goes to a party where he loses his manuscript. When George Tesman returns home with Lövborg's manuscript, Hedda burns it because she is jealous of it. Later, Lövborg comes to her and confesses how he has failed in his life. Hedda tempts him through her discourse into committing suicide by shooting himself in the temple for beautiful death. Lövborg does commit suicide later but it is through a wound in the stomach. George then begins to reconstruct Lövborg's manuscript with the help of

notes provided by TheaElvsted. Suddenly, Hedda leaves the room, takes her pistols, and commits suicide.

HEDDA.[Speaking loud and clear.] Yes, don't you flatter yourself we will, Judge Brack? Now that you are the one cock in the basket—
[A shot is heard within. Tesman, Mrs. Elvsted, and Brack leap to their feet.] Tesman. Oh, now she is playing with those pistols again. (131)

The drama starts with the trip of bride and groom. Aunt Julia, George's aunt, arrives to welcome them the following morning. As the curtain rises, the motherly old lady enters the well-furnished living room. She hands a bouquet of flowers to Bertha, the servant, who places them among the others which decorate the room at every corner. The aunt and the maid converse about the newlyweds, remarking with wonder and pride that the orphan nephew Miss Tesman raised is now a professor married to General Gabler's daughter.

At this point George enters, greeting his aunt with warmth and affection. She inquires about the honeymoon, expecting to hear details of the romantic journey the young couple took touring southern Europe. Instead, George delightedly recalls his tours through the archives and the collections of various libraries in order to gather research materials for his intended book, "The Domestic Industries of Brabant during the Middle Ages." His aunt, still curious, asks if George has "anything special" to tell her, if he has "any expectations," but George merely answers that he expects to be appointed a professor. Aunt Julia mentions George's former colleague Eilert Lövborg. Despite publishing a recent book, she says, Lövborg has fallen a victim to his own misguided excesses. She is glad that her nephew's abilities will no longer be eclipsed by Lövborg's.

This brilliant but undisciplined young man was in love with Hedda some years ago, and they were close comrades. Confessing to her all his extravagant indulgences, his ambitions, the young man exposed his soul to this sheltered girl who was fascinated by a knowledge of life forbidden to her. When the friendship became serious, Hedda threatened Lövborg with her pistol, and he disappeared from her life from that moment on. George has no knowledge of his wife's former relationship with his friend.

The brief mention of Lövborg prefaces Hedda Gabler's entrance. She is tall and lovely, about twenty-eight years old, and responds coldly to the warmth of Miss Tesman's greeting. She is obviously bored by George's relatives and shows no interest when her husband exclaims with pleasure over the pair of his old slippers Aunt Julia has brought him. Embroidered by Rina, the invalid sister of Miss Tesman, the slippers recall for George cherished memories of his childhood.

HEDDA.[Beside the whatnot on the right.] Well, what is it?

TESMAN. My old morning-shoes! My slippers.

HEDDA. Indeed. I remember you often spoke of them while we were abroad.

TESMAN. Yes, I missed them terribly. [Goes up to her.] Now you shall see them, Hedda!

HEDDA.[Going towards the stove.] Thanks, I really don't care about it. (185)

Hedda abruptly changes the subject, complaining that the servant has thrown her old bonnet on one of the chairs. The hat, however, belongs to Aunt Julia, who has just purchased it in honor of George's bride. To overcome the embarrassment, George hastily admires the bonnet, then bids his aunt admire Hedda's splendid appearance

and to note how she has filled out from the journey. Angry, Hedda insists she looks the same as always, but Miss Tesman is enraptured at the implied pregnancy. Emotionally, she blesses Hedda Tesman "for George's sake." Promising to call each day, she takes her leave.

The maid announces an unexpected caller, a younger schoolmate of Hedda and a former acquaintance of George. Nervous and shy, Thea Elvsted explains the purpose of her visit. For the past year, Eilert Lövborg has lived in her house as tutor to her husband's children. The writer's conduct this past year has been irreproachable, Thea says, and he has managed to complete his successful new book while at the Elvsteds' without once succumbing to temptation. Now that Lövborg has left their village, she is worried, for he has already remained a week "in this terrible town" without sending news of his whereabouts. Thea begs the Tesmans to receive him kindly if Eilert should visit them. Eager to extend hospitality to his former friend, George goes to write a letter of invitation.

Left alone with Thea, Hedda aggressively questions the reluctant younger woman, promising that they shall be close friends and address one another as "du." Thea admits that her marriage is not a happy one. She has nothing in common with her elderly husband, who married her because it is cheaper to keep a wife rather than a housekeeper to look after the children.

Gaining confidence, Thea tells Hedda how a great friendship grew between Lövborg and herself until she gained an influence over him. "He never wrote anything without my assistance," (41) she proudly declares; sharing Lövborg's work was the happiest time she has known all her life. The relationship means so much to her that Thea has run away from home in order to live where Eilert Lövborg lives.

MRS. ELVSTED. Yes! He never wrote anything without my assistance. HEDDA. You were two good comrades, in fact? MRS ELVSTED. [Eagerly.] Comrades! Yes, fancy, Hedda—that is the very word he used!—Oh, I ought to feel perfectly happy; and yet I cannot; for I don't know how long it will last. (42)

Yet her happiness is insecure, she tells Hedda. Although Lövborg had mentioned it only once, a woman's shadow stands between them. Hedda intently leans forward, eager to hear more. All that Lövborg said, Thea replies, is that this woman threatened to shoot him with a pistol when they parted. Mrs. Elvsted has heard about a red-haired singer whom Eilert used to visit, and she is especially worried now that this woman is in town again.

Some of the modern critics have passed harsh judgements on Hedda.

Caroline Mayerson, for example, concludes her essay on the play:

Her colossal egotism, her lack of self-knowledge, her cowardice, render her search for fulfilment but a succession of futile blunders which culminate in the supreme futility of death. Like Peer Gynt she is fit only for the ladle of the button-moulder; she fails to realize a capacity either for great good or for great evil. Her mirror-image wears the mask of tragedy, but Ibsen makes certain that we see the horns and pointed ears of the satyr protruding from behind it. (18)

But many modern critics, especially the feminists, have followed the now well-trodden path of responding to Hedda as a passionate, clever and independent woman stifled by the mediocrity and conformity of a bourgeois society.

The judge talks with George about his debts while Hedda sees her guest to the door. When she returns, Brack announces his bad news: because Lövborg's book

has been received so well, the writer might favorably compete for George's promised professorship. George is thunderstruck, but Hedda shrugs indifferently. "There will be a sort of sporting interest in that," she says, and her husband apologizes for being unable to provide the necessities she expected: a livened footman, a saddle horse, means for "going out into society." After Brack leaves, Hedda concludes wearily, "I shall have one thing at least to kill time with in the meanwhile - my pistols" (167). She crosses to the next room, smiling coldly at her startled husband. "General Gabler's pistols!" she adds mockingly, and the curtain rings down.

TESMAN.[Beaming.] Oh thank heaven for that! What is it, Hedda.
 Eh? HEDDA.[In the middle doorway, looks at him with covert
 scorn.]My pistols, George.TESMAN.[In alarm.] Your pistols!
 HEDDA.[With cold eyes.]General Gabler's pistols. (49)

This first act, besides introducing characters, acquaints the audience with Hedda Gabler's surroundings in her new life as Mrs. Tesman. Brought up as a general's daughter accustomed to travel in aristocratic social circles, Hedda must confront her future as a housewife in a middle-class household. The fact that she is pregnant reinforces her potential role as homemaker. The nature of her doom is underscored by the character of Miss Juliana Tesman, who represents the older generation of domestic womanhood and who has devoted her life to the care of others.

The main protagonist, Hedda Gabler, can be regarded a prototype of an eccentric personality, it is not hard to comprehend that for Hedda the only point of reference indeed is she herself. She decides what is "appropriate" in a given situation and is uninterested to other people's interests and values. This becomes clear not only in the way she treats adults, but also in every other aspect of life: her

house, the way she dresses, her pets, her super-power. This is why other people, especially adults, have a very uncomfortable feeling with regard to Hedda because they do not know how to handle such a strange person.

As regards his heroine, Ibsen establishes her as an unconcerned person with her life: a profound emotional distantness, eagerness to interest herself in anything besides social pleasures, and a destructive desire to control the lives of others. Hedda cannot respond to the warmth of Aunt Julia, she cannot entertain the idea of expecting a child, and was totally bored during her wedding trip.

BRACK. Fortunately your wedding journey is over now.

HEDDA.[Shaking her head.] Not by a long—long way. I have only arrived at a station on the line. BRACK. Well, then the passengers jump out and move about a little, Mrs.Hedda. HEDDA. I never jump out.(56)

To further express her emotional sterility, Ibsen shows how Hedda is unable to reciprocate a relationship. Like a young child, she can only receive without knowing how to give in return. Without reciprocating, she accepts George's love and support; by pretending friendship, she learns all about Thea's personal life yet reveals no confidences of her own. Later on, when Lövborg recalls his previous relationship with Hedda, he describes how she extracted detailed confessions from him yet withheld her own self-revelations. This intense, almost morbid interest in the lives of others is another aspect of her empty emotional life. At the same time that investigating and analyzing other people's lives is one way for Hedda to gain some understanding of her own unsatisfied nature, she reveals her personal frigidity and adolescent self-centeredness.

HEDDA.[Nervously crossing the room.] Well, you see—these impulses come over me all of a sudden; and I cannot resist them. [Throws herself down in the easy-chair by the stove.] Oh, I don't know how to explain it. BRACK.[Behind the easy-chair.] You are not really happy—that is at the bottom of it. HEDDA.[Looking straight before her.] I know of no reason why I should be—happy. Perhaps you can give me one? (59)

The drama is constituted of four acts and eight scenes. Each act is interrelated to each other. At the same time they are able to carry the main thrust of the drama too. This first act also demonstrates a pathological quality in Hedda's personality. Cruelly insulting Aunt Julia by complaining that it is the servant's bonnet lying in the chair, Hedda tries to undermine Miss Tesman's sense of worth. Compelling Thea to reveal her innermost feelings, she seems to search for Mrs. Elvsted's weaknesses so she can later use this knowledge for her own selfish purposes. Having established that his heroine is emotionally empty yet eager to learn how other people face life's experiences, Ibsen shows how the imperious and unsubmissive Hedda tries to destroy the personal values of those whose satisfactions she cannot attain.

In the third act, Hedda has confronted another frustration. Instead of seeing Lövborg rise to his full stature as a liberated artist victoriously imbued with life's joy, she views a demoralized reveler who ruined the evening in a drunken orgy, facing, in addition, a possible jail sentence for assaulting a police officer.

Going beyond the destruction that Hedda began in the previous acts, circumstances depicted in the final scene destroy the life's work of each other character. Julia's sister dies, leaving the old aunt with no one to care for; George

relinquishes his work on medieval Brabant; Thea has definitely lost Lövborg; and Hedda confronts profound disillusion when she learns of Eilert's ignoble death.

The secondary characters, however, all find vocational rebirth as they confront their ruined life purposes. Thea, having saved Lövborg's notes, begins, with George Tesman, to conceive a new "child"; the professor so expert at assembling other people's manuscripts can dedicate his abilities to reconstruct his dead friend's brilliant ideas; and Julia can again care for her beloved nephew now that Hedda is gone.

Hedda alone faces a life without a future. Deprived of her satisfaction at the beauty of Eilert's suicide, she learns that she was in fact responsible for the abhorrent manner of Lövborg's death. Her ideal of freedom, courage, and beauty turns into a loathsome reality. Judge Brack applies the final vulgar touch to a situation that Hedda already finds repulsive; he alone can inform the police of the facts that would implicate her in a shocking scandal. The conventional Hedda must either succumb to Brack's power or face a public inquiry. Now that even her husband has no further need of her, no one depends upon Hedda at this point. On the other hand, she is unwillingly enthralled by the ruthless Brack. Deprived of freedom, Hedda faces either "boring herself to death" or committing a valiant suicide.

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BRACK.[Shrugging his shoulders.] Well, I regret to say
Eilert Lovborg has been taken to the hospital. He is lying at the point
of death. HEDDA.[Involuntarily.] So soon then—

MRS. VSTED. [Not heeding her.] I must go to him! I must see him
alive!

BRACK. It is useless, Madam. No one will be admitted. (198)

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IV. Conclusion: Hedda as Ultimate Winner against Society

The problem of *Hedda Gabler* illuminates the universal problem of woman in a society built by men. Being a unique and invincible character, Hedda must make an independent decision about her life. Women, however, in all but the most progressive societies, are barred from participating in the world outside their households and are not equipped for independence outside their families. Thus, Hedda Gabler, despite having a profound craving for independence, has no personal resources with which to realize self-responsibility.

Having the desire for a constructive effort at self-determination, Hedda becomes a modern Medea, expressing her frustration in destructive attempts at self-realization. Not having any positive influence in the world, Hedda Gabler can only define herself negatively: she destroys what she cannot accept but finally reverses all her presumptions converting suicide into meaningful winning game. Undermining her husband with her coldness, denying her pregnancy, destroying Thea's life-work, burning Lövborg's creative product, ruining the child-manuscript, and finally, committing suicide are all perverted attempts to satisfy her craving for life. By depicting the pathology of a frustrated woman in *Hedda Gabler*, Ibsen declares his most powerful protest against the double standard society.

Hedda believes that the power to determine when and how one dies is the ultimate freedom, and is perhaps the only real control that an individual has in life. At first, she attempts to prove this vicariously by encouraging Lovborg to have a "beautiful death" - she gives him one of her pistols, essentially pulling all the strings that might make him veer towards suicide. However, when Lovborg dies from an unintended shot to the groin, Hedda realizes that the beautiful death is still a fantasy and she can only bring it to life for herself.

At the time Ibsen wrote *Hedda Gabler*, the term New Woman had emerged to describe women who were pushing against the limits which society imposed on women. The new woman sought self-determination and freedom, as well as equality with males and a true understanding of female sexuality. Hedda is a model case of a "New Woman" who ultimately finds no satisfaction in liberation. This is not to say that Ibsen by any stretch of the imagination intends *Hedda Gabler* as a critique of the New Woman; to the contrary, he is offering a critique of the resistance against it. In this way, One of the great questions of *Hedda Gabler* is whether Hedda's actions are inspired by genuine principles, or whether she is motivated entirely by boredom. If we examine the above theme of Old Woman vs. New Woman, it is possible to interpret her character as a New Woman shoved into Old Woman trappings, and who thus naturally gravitates towards pushing limits, pulling strings, and manipulating others in the hopes of freeing herself. She is a New Woman, then, looking for her place in life. However, Hedda continuously finds that her efforts only leave her even more bored. At one point, she even tells Tesman that her only talent in life is an eerie prophecy of the events to come.

Oppression in Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* is one of the social issues dealt in Ibsen's problem plays limiting them to a domestic life. In *Hedda Gabler* the heroine struggles to satisfy her ambitious and independent intellect within the narrow role society allows her. Unable to be creative in the way she desires, Hedda's passions become destructive both to others and herself. Raised by a general Hedda has the character of a leader whose act of suicide cannot be taken as surrender to the oppressive male dominated society but it should be taken as her strength. She becomes eager to commit suicide in order to win in the present as well as in the next world.

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