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## **Psychological Motivations of Hedda Gabler**

Manipulating and controlling everyone around her, Hedda Gabler is an unlikeable character, but this doesn't mean she can't be a sympathetic or understandable one. When first introduced to Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, a reader or audience member can have difficulty understanding Hedda's motivations for her behavior. Examining Hedda's role in society, her relationships with the few people in her life, her psychological pain and her final situation and given circumstances make her motivations and actions that lead to Løvborg's death and her suicide logical.

At first glance Hedda's manipulative behavior can seem evil as she uses words as weapons, cunningly insulting and offending her husband's Aunt Julie while still remaining on the edge of propriety. She claims friendship with Thea only to wring information out of her. She destroys the relationship between Løvborg and Thea in order to gain control over Løvborg. She shows no patience for Tesman, promises Brack a 'triangular relationship,' to and gives a gun to Løvborg, the only person she seems to have cared about, encouraging him to commit suicide. Without looking further into her character, it is easy to write Hedda off as simply bad.

The myth of the femme fatale: what might be described as Hedda's

“evil,” manipulative behavior- everything from giving Løvborg a gun to hurting Aunt Julie’s feelings about her hat- has been far more provocative, and compelling, than her pain. Gender prejudice: controlling women do not suffer, they make others suffer, is a judgment commonly held. (Norseng 10)

It is a simple thing to pick and choose aspects of Hedda with which to define her, but all of her must be taken into consideration before passing judgment. Many early and Freudian readings look at the sexual and romantic behavior of Hedda, or the lack thereof. Some psychological interpretations claim that Hedda is afraid of sex and would be improved by loving and giving herself to a man. These schools of thought don’t take into account Hedda as an intelligent, thinking woman, and “to claim that Hedda is a defective or neurotic woman because she loves none of the men in the play is to assume that simply because they are there, she ought to love one of them; it is to ignore her own feelings about them, as though she has no rights in the matter” (Templeton 211). Hedda should be allowed to choose who she loves, just as the men in the play are allowed. Taking the context of their aristocratic marriage into account, Hedda should not be expected to have sexual feelings for her husband. She clearly explains to Brack that she had no other options and married Tesman out of convenience. She tells him “I had danced myself tired, my dear Judge- and I wasn’t getting any younger” (Ibsen 112). Tesman promised her the life of comfort that she expected to have and she married him to get it. Her disgust at any hint of intimacy between the two of them is completely understandable, as she has never been physically attracted to him. Both Tesman and Brack treat her as an object and don’t seem to truly care for her. Brack is only interested in her now that she is not available, while Tesman and his Aunt speak of Hedda in terms of a prize that he won

or a feat that he accomplished instead of a person that he loves. If Tesman doesn't truly love Hedda, she should not be required to love him in return.

Hedda was shaped by her role as a lady in society. She outwardly conforms to social expectations and carefully crafts an external persona to present to the world. She is attractive, quick witted, good at controlling and directing conversation, and has many of the talents expected of a young bride, such as playing the piano and being a hostess. The thought of scandal is abhorrent to her, which she admits to  
Tesman:

Hedda: I have such a fear of scandal.

Løvborg: Yes, Hedda, you are a coward at heart.

Hedda: A terrible coward. (Ibsen 137)

Brack later confronts her with this fear, reminding her that if she was discovered as the owner of the pistol Løvborg shot himself with, she would be dragged into the court case. This thought is abhorrent to her, and forces her to be under his power, but the thought of being under someone's power is just as repugnant, which leads to her suicide. While it is easy for Hedda to wear bravado in the world she knows, she fears stepping outside of that world. Though Hedda has continually pushed the boundaries of that world by becoming dangerously close to Løvborg in her youth, enjoying more masculine hobbies, and walking a dangerous line in her battle of wits with Brack, she never allows herself to go too far as her world prizes her name and reputation second only to wealth. Societal expectations have shaped Hedda, and "the sense of *noblesse oblige* which, in spite of her lack of nobility in the simple things of life, is yet a strong factor in much of her behavior" (Le Gallienne, 8). A constant reminder of the noble world she was born into and her societal obligations, her

father, General Gabler, looks out at her from his portrait throughout the play. To survive in her upper-class world, Hedda has finely crafted her external appearance to show everything that a lady of her station should be. She is able to take full advantage of her limited resources. All she really controls is her appearance, her words and her body language, but that is all she needs to maintain her power in her immediate world. Everything from her outward demeanor to the garments in her closet have been carefully constructed to present an image. Le Gallienne, who has frequently played the role, came to the conclusion that

Hedda would choose her clothes carefully and with a subtle art. They would be quite definitely 'her own', for she is in everything an individualist while never going beyond the bounds of good taste and refinement. She is enormously aware of the impression she creates, very self-conscious always, and exquisite. (Le Gallienne 10)

Hedda seems very aware of the image of a lady that she presents to the world and, as she is almost constantly with others onstage, there are very few times that she allows that image to lapse. Hedda rarely speaks without other people around, and even in the presence of others she always keeps it brief. Ibsen has not given her any monologues, which would have given readers and audience members alike a chance to see a deeper side of Hedda.

To understand why Hedda organized Løvborg's destruction, their relationship must be examined. She has commonly been read as a woman who is afraid of sex or not sexual. One can take argument with that, however, by looking at her relationship with Løvborg. "While the violence with which she ended their relation suggests the force of her desire, Hedda has too much self-respect to become Løvborg's woman" (Templeton 222). The description of their comradeship and passion of their parting

shows a sexual energy. She chooses not to act on it, but this is not as much out of fear of sex as it is fear of scandal. Hedda knows she cannot be what she and others expect her to be if she yields to him. It has been argued that if Hedda had given in to Løvborg she would have been happy or would have become a more complete woman, but if she had married Løvborg neither of those things would have been possible. "The fascination of his complex, demonic personality, had spoiled her for more ordinary men, and yet her conventional nature told her that such a match would be disastrous to her welfare, even had it been possible to win General Gabler's consent" (Le Gallienne 29). Unlike Thea, Hedda is not a natural caretaker. She would never be content giving up so many aspects of her life to nurse and guide an alcoholic husband. She has a fantasy of Løvborg with "vine leaves in his hair. Flushed and fearless" (Ibsen 147), but the reality of his bacchanalian tendencies would cause Hedda misery, not joy.

Hedda's motivation to give a gun to Løvborg, enabling his death, and then commit suicide herself becomes more understandable when Hedda's desire for control is taken into consideration. Hedda wants to control and manipulate Løvborg and "her egotistical nature would have had him forever crushed and lost, since he could not have her. In fact, it is she who has been frustrated and lost through not having dared accept his love, through not having had the courage to really live" (Le Gallienne 21). When she meets Løvborg again she does everything in her power to regain her control of him. Aware of his drinking problem, Hedda offers him punch but Løvborg refuses, even when she insists.

Hedda: *[Looks at him intently.]* But if I want you to.  
Løvborg: It makes no difference.

Hedda: *[Laughs.]* Poor me! Have I no power over you at all, then?  
Løvborg: Not in that respect. (Ibsen 141)

When confronted with this denial, she turns it to Thea, telling her that she had nothing to worry about where Løvborg is concerned, and her anxiety was unfounded. This is news to Løvborg and he becomes upset with Thea's lack of trust, causing him to drink in front of her, as if to punish her. Hedda steps in to stop him after his second glass, reminding him that he plans to go out with the other men, and with that she is in control once more. Even though she cannot allow herself to be with him, she cannot stand to let anyone else have a hold over him. Regaining her control set him on the path to self-destruction, and the only way for her to keep her power is by continuing to shepherd him down the path. The loss of his manuscript causes a final rift between Løvborg and Thea, leaving Hedda as the only woman in his life. He comments that she is the only one he can be honest with. As a final act of guidance and control, she gives him her pistol as a token to remember her, guiding him towards his death. As a married woman, there is no way she and Løvborg could be together, and being together doesn't seem like something either party could actually bring themselves to do.

To those who have not seriously considered self-harm, the reasons behind Hedda's eventual suicide can be hard to decipher. In *Suicide And Ibsen's Hedda Gabler*, Norseg notes that, "ultimately authorities on suicide return to psychological pain as 'the basic ingredient.'" A closer look at Hedda can reveal this psychological pain. In her few moments of solitude, Ibsen's stage directions give her a desperate energy. The audience is given a glimpse of another side of Hedda, because "we never

once during the play see her lose control when there are other people in the room. Only when she is alone do we penetrate deeply into her inner hell. Her restlessness of spirit is revealed only in a matching restlessness of movement” (Le Gallienne 14). Hedda is trapped and confined by restrictions placed on her by both society and herself. Her need to marry led her to Tesman, a man she cannot stand, for the rest of her life. A fear of scandal and need to protect her reputation made her reject Løvborg. She is not allowing herself to be who she truly is and wants to be; she is an aristocrat as the aristocracy begins to decline. There is no question that her home and living conditions with Tesman are less than she became used to while living with her father, although they are better than the conditions she was left in after his death. The reality of her situation will not allow her to keep an open house in the way she would like, which would at least keep her busy. She and Tesman do not have the resources for her to push him into politics, and Hedda blanches at having traditional role of mother fill her time. Hedda is occupied by more masculine, independent activities, like riding horses and shooting pistols. While she is careful to show a meticulously crafted noble exterior, she possesses of strength of mind, body and will that are atypical of the gentler sex and more typical of a man. Hedda seems to be completely on her own. She cannot stand Tesman. She confides in Brack, but still keeps him at arms length. “Beyond the frame of the lonely daughter, every cameo of Hedda in the past is of someone existentially alone, isolated from the rest, be she taunting Thea, riding her horse, or walking home with a man who bored her” (Norseng 17). Looking at the pain Hedda feels, the steps leading to her suicide fall into place.

Before she kills herself, her circumstances are closing in on her. Throughout the play she frequently engages in battles of wits with Brack; all of their conversations resemble a fencing match. Her mastery of language allows her to walk the fine line between domestic and destruction. She flirts with him, allowing him to push the boundaries of civility and even hinting at impropriety herself, but correcting the conversation before it can go too far. She asserts her power over the situation, not allowing Brack to hint at Tesman's foolishness. Hedda holds her own in these exchanges until Brack brings her the threat of scandal connected with her pistol. He corrects the story of Løvborg's death, destroying Hedda's idea of Løvborg's perfect death. When first hearing the news of Løvborg's death, it gives Hedda hope. She even speaks out loud to the horrified group, exclaiming "I say, there is beauty in this" (Ibsen 189). She revels in his perfect death, which is something she wants for herself. "But through her pistol she has privately participated in Løvborg's great deed, and he has freed her, symbolically, along with himself" (Templeton 226). Brack destroys this ideal by telling her the truth of what happened. The shining act that Hedda had planned to depend on is suddenly turned to dust, leaving her with nothing to look to. Between Brack's revelation of Løvborg's death and his knowledge of the pistol, he gains power over both the situation and Hedda herself for the first time- something Hedda cannot have. He assures her of his secrecy and tells her that he looks forward to all the time they will have together, implying that he may take advantage of her. In Hedda's last moments, Brack has begun to blackmail her, Thea and Tesman have sat down to work together, and Tesman has assured Hedda she is not needed. Hedda has no obvious course of



happiness, or even contentment. Instead she can see a future filled with having to please Brack, deal with Thea as a new presence in her life, and continue to manage Tesman and his overbearing Aunt.

Appearing cruel and calculating, Hedda was raised in a world where a good reputation came before personal happiness, and does not know how to be both happy and refined. She has an inner monologue of pain and a yearning for a beautiful ideal that drive her actions and her need for control and independence encourage Løvborg's death and her own suicide. Once some of these layers are peeled back, they reveal a pained, unhappy woman who may never love. If that isn't motivation enough to be unkind and manipulative, nothing is.

## Practical Application

Set in the late 1800s, *Hedda Gabler* is a shining example of early realism, which needs to be taken into account when staging a production. To allow this genre to shine, most aspects of the staging need to be minimized so that the acting can take precedence. The lighting should be minimal and appear natural, as if caused by lamps and windows, though of course modified enough to fully illuminate the stage. The lighting should never draw attention to itself and need rarely change, though discreet specials or area lighting could add to the overall production. Sound is hand in hand with this. Pre-show music might add to the production, but the show itself does not call for many sound effects. The only required sound appears to be the gunshots, which might be best if handled if the actress is given a gun that shoots blanks, so as to be in control of the sound herself.

Ibsen has placed the entire play in a single location, so a realistic box set is needed. Ibsen gives very precise stage directions as to how this drawing room should look at the beginning of act one, which should be consulted when designing the set. Le Gallienne, who has worked on many productions of *Hedda Gabler*, reminds us that Hedda has not furnished the room herself, but

There should be one or two pieces of really good furniture, which she will notice and appreciate, for she has taste. The only things that she brings with her from her old life are her piano, a large portrait of General Gabler which hangs over the sofa in the inner room, and her pistols. (8-9)

These elements are important to include, and they help show Hedda's juxtaposition between her old world and the world she now finds herself in. As the final action

depends quite a bit on the portières that lead into the back area, this doorway should be stable and the curtains should be sturdy.

Although the character of Hedda is timeless, the show as a whole isn't, and would not do well if it was modernized. A great majority of the conflict in the show could be solved by modern technology and instant communication, which would be a hard thing for the audience to forget if faced with a world in any way similar to our own or to our recent past.

A psychologically motivated acting technique should be used when approaching this play. Ibsen has given every character a wealth of information that can be discovered by closely examining the text, something all actors should do when faced with *Hedda*. This will inform their motivations and objectives. First and foremost, the actors should prize honesty in their approach to this show. Le Gallienne gives advice to actors in the show, using the scene in act one, when Thea and Hedda are having their tête-à-tête:

This is a masterly scene. It is so clearly and brilliantly conceived from a psychological point of view, so closely knit, so economical in writing, so unerringly accurate, that the actresses concerned need do nothing but be honest. But they must be that. (21)

This view of acting can and should be applied to any and all of Ibsen's characters.

Actors must face the role with simplicity instead of indicating complex emotions. As Le Gallienne says, Ibsen gives the characters everything they need in the text; if an actor brings a true understanding of the words they need not try to improve on them by adding anything else. Although the show is a drama, there are many comedic elements. Actors and directors approaching the show should not forget this, and while they should not try to 'play up' these comedic elements, they should

not try to stifle them for fear of getting laughs. Tesman's foolishness could easily be chuckled at, and Hedda's mastery of social situations could cause ironic amusement. If these elements are embraced, they will help unite the show as a whole, rather than as solely a dark drama.

## Background

Henrik Ibsen is commonly referred to as the father of modern drama. His years of writing lead to many innovations in the theatre. He was born on March 20<sup>th</sup>, 1828, Ibsen died at age 78 in 1906. Born into a wealthy merchant family in Skein, Norway, Ibsen was interested in theatre from the start. As a child he frequented the theatre and put on his own magic shows. His family was very well off until his father became bankrupt, forcing a move to the country. It is easy to image his family being plunged into poverty, however it is important to know that “The Ibsens had been rich; then they became not poor, but much less wealthy; and yet they were keen to keep up appearances. This conflict between reality and appearances is what still draws audiences to Ibsen’s work it is a depiction of the beginning of the modern world” (“Mind out of time”). At the age of 15 Ibsen was apprenticed to an apothecary in Grimstad. While there he had an illegitimate son with the servant of the same man who employed him. As the servant was 10 years his senior, marriage was not considered an option. He contemplated going into medicine, but after failing his entrance exams he turned his attention to writing.

In 1851 he began his theatre career by working as stage manager and playwright-in-residence at the Ole Bull’s Norwegian Theatre in Bergen, Norway. After six years he became the artistic director of the Norwegian Theatre in Christiania, now Oslo. He remained there from 1857 to 1862. While working there he married Suzannah Thoreson. In 1864 he and his family left for the continent and stayed in Rome, Austria, Munich, and Dresden, before returning to Norway 27 years later in 1891. Despite his family and children, Ibsen looked for emotional

satisfaction outside of his marriage. As he grew older, he developed an obsession with youth and began a string of platonic affairs. After his return to Norway, he had a series of debilitating strokes, the first of which in 1901. Eventually he died in Christiania on May 23, 1906.

Ibsen's work can be broken into three phases. He began with historical dramas. Published in 1850, his first work *Catalina* was a "dramatic treatment in blank verse of the rebellious Roman senator" (Brunsdale). It didn't sell very well, and his first breakthrough didn't occur until 1866, when *Brand* was published, quickly followed by *Peer Gynt* in 1867. Distinctly nationalistic, these plays began his success and lead into his second, most famous phase. This phase encompassed realistic social drama, including *A Doll's House* in 1879 and *Hedda Gabler* in 1890. These works were not always well received, and "his work was sharply scrutinized and criticized in efforts to suppress socially objectionable aggressive female protagonists" ("Henrik Ibsen"). His final period encompassed symbolist introspection and included *Master Builder* in 1892.

Ibsen introduced many new theatrical conventions that are commonly accepted. His writing encouraged psychologically motivated acting, and "he was first to involve ordinary human beings in drama, abandoning the old artificial plots and instead creating scenes that might be encountered in any stuffy drawing room or aching human heart" (Brunsdale). His plots focused on the contemporary issues of everyday people, instead of specifically on aristocratic people. Allowing for subtext and understandable motivation, "he conveyed for the first time in centuries a depth and subtlety of understanding of human character and relationships, especially

those of women, evocative of the height of human tragic experience seen previously among the Elizabethans and the Periclean Greeks” (Brunsdale). His writing, coupled with Stanislavski’s acting technique shaped how theatre is approached today. He created a small group of characters shown in limited locations; this simplicity allowed the psychological workings of his characters to draw more focus. His writings, especially from his second phase, “are crafted around tightly constructed plots which are based on the careful unraveling of past events. Their terse, choppy dialogue is loaded with double meanings, their décor is reflective of the moods and shifts of the characters, and their conflicts are intensely psychological” (Rosefeldt). This detailed, well-planned writing began a new style of theatre.

## Story of the Play

Act I opens with Miss Tesman, or Aunt Julie as she will come to be known, conversing with Bertha, the maid, about the couple that has just arrived home from their wedding trip: Miss Tesman's nephew George Tesman and his new wife Hedda. In the first of many selfless acts, Julie has given up Bertha, who has always cared for George, so that Bertha can be a servant for George and his new wife. Tesman enters and speaks with his Aunt about his trip, childishly oblivious to his Aunt's hinting questions about his anticipations. When the talk turns to money, Julie urges George not to worry, as she has used her annuity as security for his new house's furnishings. Hedda enters and proceeds to make a series of comments designed to subtly attack Tesman's aunt, beginning with thanking her for her early arrival. She disapproves of the window Aunt Julie opened, insults her new hat by assuming it belongs to the maid. All is forgiven, however, when Tesman unknowingly implies that Hedda is pregnant by commenting on how her size has changed during their wedding trip, a thought that is thrilling to Aunt Julie.

After she leaves Mrs. Thea Evsted is announced and enters. She has come to ask Tesman for help. She tells him that Eljert Løvborg, who studies the same material as George and used to be his rival, is back in town after years of tutoring her husband's children. Her husband is concerned for Løvborg as he has a history of overdrinking and wildness, and her husband fears the city will cajole him into his old ways. She asks that Tesman reach out to him. Hedda insists that Tesman immediately write him a long letter. While Tesman is out of the room, Hedda begins to dig into Thea's knowledge of Løvborg. She creates an intimacy between them,



playing on the theme of past friendship, even though Thea remembers being frightened of Hedda when they were at school together. Nevertheless, Hedda's tactics work and Thea tells her story. She married her employer after his wife died because she was already taking care of the children and he thought her useful. Her husband employed Eljert Løvborg as a tutor, who it is later discovered that Hedda knows quite well and has a history with. Thea began helping Løvborg and sharing his work and their friendship grew. After his successful book, Løvborg returned to the city. Thea has now left her husband to follow him. She is happy, but mentions that there does seem to be one impediment between her and Løvborg- a shadow of a woman between them who threaten to shoot him once. She assumes it is a cabaret singer he used to be involved with, but Thea doesn't know that one of Hedda's most prized possessions is her father's pair of pistols. Tesman reenters with his letter, and Thea leaves.

Introduced next is the bachelor Judge Brack, a very refined friend of Tesman. He discreetly hints to Tesman that Løvborg has had recent success with his book and is a competitor for the professor position Tesman thought was his. Brack worries that Tesman might have spent too much money on his wedding trip before having a secure income, and may not have the money his lifestyle requires. While this news obviously upsets Tesman, Hedda is indifferent to it and act one closes with Tesman trying to discuss future finances with Hedda as she exits carrying her father's pistols.

Act two opens similarly to how act one closes, with Hedda and her pistols. Hedda is cleaning them when Brack approaches the house from the back. She laughs

at him for sneaking in the back way and shoots over his head. Brack enters, and they begin a scene of verbal sparring. Brack begins flirting with Hedda, knowing that he has come too early for Tesman to be home. Hedda engages and responds, walking the careful line between flirting and respectability. He tells her that he wished he had come earlier and that he missed her a great deal while she was gone on her wedding trip, and Hedda confides how bored she was the whole time. Answering Brack's implied questions, she explains that although she had suitors, this was likely the only offer she could get, and she needed to marry. It is revealed that, while a flirt now, Brack is content to be a bachelor and never had any intent to marry Hedda or anyone else. He suggests a triangular friendship between them and her husband to ease her boredom. Tesman returns, entering briefly. His Aunt Rina, who has been sick for a very long time, is even sicker and he Aunt Julie cannot visit Hedda that night as she needs to care for Rina. Tesman decides that he will go to the stag party that Brack is hosting but first will look at his new books since there is time, and quickly goes off to read them. Brack and Hedda continue talking. Hedda admits that she knew that hat belonged to Aunt Julie and only pretended to think it was the servant's. Brack scolds her, getting her to admit that she is not happy, then suggests that she needs something to fill her time. Hedda considers pushing Tesman into politics, but they don't have the money. Brack suggest that she could occupy herself with motherhood, something Hedda vehemently declares she has no instinct for.

Tessman reenters, quickly followed by Løvborg, who has received Tesman's note and invitation. They discuss Løvborg's book, which Løvborg dismisses as nothing of importance. He shows the manuscript of the new book he has been

working on, which is leaps and bounds above what he has previously published. Brack invites Løvborg to his stag party, but Løvborg declines. Saving him from being pressed into going, Hedda invites Løvborg to stay and have supper with her and Thea. Løvborg accepts, then tells Tesman that he will give a series of lectures but won't compete for Tesman's professor position. Hedda orders refreshments to be brought into the other room, knowing Løvborg has a newly reformed drinking problem. When offered a glass of punch, Løvborg refuses, leaving him and Hedda alone together while Brack and Tesman exit into the other room to drink. Hedda shows Løvborg pictures from her wedding trip while Løvborg speaks of when he and Hedda were comrades, and refers to her by her maiden name, Gabler. Hedda remains proper, telling him that she must be called Mrs. Tesman and not allowing him to speak ill of her husband. They reminisce about how they used to be, remembering that Løvborg would tell Hedda all about his wild nights and show her the world that was forbidden to her. They speak about their final parting when Hedda threaten to shoot him. He asks why she didn't and she gives an answer mysterious enough to confuse him. She tells him that she couldn't face a scandal, but that was not her only regret from that night.

When Thea enters, Hedda begins her role of devil's advocate. She offers a drink to Thea and Løvborg, both of whom decline. Hedda tries to tempt and taunt Løvborg into accepting the drink first for her sake, then for his own, insinuating that people will think him a coward. He insists that Hedda doesn't have that sort of power over him, and that he doesn't care what Tesman and Brack think about him. Hedda then turns to Thea, telling her that she has nothing to worry about, which

implies that Thea had shared her worries about him with Hedda that morning. Løvborg feels hurt and betrayed at her lack of trust and Thea's anxiety on his account. He immediately grabs and down the two glasses of punch on the table, when Hedda stops him, reminding him of the party later. He is under her power once more. He apologizes to Thea, but still accompanies the men to the stag party with his manuscript, promising to return before long to take Thea home. After the men leave, Thea fusses, but Hedda dismisses her worries, saying, "at ten o'clock Eilert Løvborg will be here with vine leaves in his hair "(148).

Act three finds the two women at dawn, still waiting for Løvborg's return. While Hedda has fallen asleep on the couch, Thea has stayed awake, and has a talk with the maid. Berta's exit wakes Hedda, who sends Thea into her room to take a nap, promising to get her when Løvborg returns. Instead of Løvborg, however, Tesman soon enters. He tells Hedda that Løvborg read part of his manuscript at the party and raves about what it will become, admitting that he felt jealous of Løvborg after hearing what he'd created. Tesman then explains how Løvborg became completely out of control, dropping his manuscript. Tesman recovered it but didn't want to return it to Løvborg while he was still in his drunken state. Hedda requests he give her the manuscript so she can read it. First Tesman refuses, insisting that Løvborg will be in a panic when he discovers his manuscript is gone. After Hedda diverts his attention to a letter that had arrived from his Aunt Julie, Tesman gives the manuscript to Hedda for safekeeping. He must go to his Aunts' house because his Aunt Rina is dying.

Brack enters and tells Hedda more of what happened at the party. Løvborg left Brack's party and accepted an invitation to the party of a local red-haired singer, Mlle. Diana, who he used to be involved with. At the party, he discovered that his manuscript was missing. He thought someone stole it and made a scene. The police were called, and he assaulted an officer. Brack tells Hedda that most respectable houses will not accept Løvborg, and that she should not either. She correctly guesses that Brack wants to keep their 'triangle' and not allow Løvborg to be a part of it.

As Brack exits the back way, Løvborg forces his way through the front. Thea comes out when she hears him, but Løvborg abruptly tells her that they have to part ways. Thea objects and mentions the book, and Løvborg tells her that the book will not be published because he has destroyed the manuscript. Horrified, Thea exclaims that it is as if he killed their child and leaves. Løvborg then confesses to Hedda that he actually lost the manuscript and wants to kill himself. Hedda tells him that she doesn't believe that he can have vine leaves in his hair, but gives him one of her pistols and tells him to make his death beautiful. After he takes the pistol and leaves, Hedda uncovers the manuscript, which has been in her possession since Tesman left it with her. She burns it, saying she is killing the child of Thea and Løvborg.

Act four begins with both Hedda and Aunt Julie dressed in mourning, discussing the death of George's Aunt Rina. Julie tells Hedda that Rina's death was beautiful. Tesman enters in a whirl, and Julie assumes he is upset about Rina's death. She tries to comfort him, then declares that she must live for someone else and have someone to care for. She will find an invalid that she will nurse, and hints that she hopes that there will soon be a child to occupy her. After she leaves Tesman

confesses that he is concerned about Løvborg. He has heard of Løvborg's distress over the manuscript and wants to return it as soon as he can, as he fears Løvborg may harm himself. Hedda admits to burning it, which shocks Tesman, but she claims her actions were driven by her love for her husband, which delights him. She reminds him that he said he was jealous of Løvborg, and insists that she couldn't allow him to stand in anyone else's shadow. Tesman shows some doubt, so to secure him she hints at her pregnancy. Tesman finally understands and it completely overjoyed. Despite his joy, he still worries about Løvborg.

His concerns are warranted; Thea enters, having heard a rumor that Løvborg is in the hospital. Brack enters and confirms this, adding that Løvborg is dying from shooting himself in the chest. Hedda correctly 'guesses' that he tried to kill himself. Brack gives vague details to appease Thea, saying that it happened in the afternoon, he didn't know where, that Løvborg shot himself through the heart, and surmises that by now he is dead. Tesman feels very guilty, and wishes that his manuscript could have been saved. Thea reveals that she carries all the notes Løvborg used to write his manuscript, and Thea and Tesman sit down to sort them out and reconstruct, while Brack approaches Hedda.

Hedda is glad that Løvborg ended his life beautifully, but Brack cannot have this and tells her what really happened. He admits to changing the story for Thea's sake, but now confides that Løvborg was discovered having been shot in Diana's bedroom and was taken to the hospital already dead. A pistol was found in his coat pocket, and it can be assumed that it went off accidentally, wounding him in his bowels near his groin. Brack begins his final point when Tesman, who wants to use

Hedda's desk, interrupts them. He then insists that the pistol Løvborg had must have been stolen, because he recognized it as one of Hedda's. He tells her that the police now have the pistol, and will not discover that it belongs to her unless he tells them. Hedda is horrified by this ugly version of the story and terrified of scandal. Now under Brack's power, Hedda realizes she is only safe if he keeps quiet, and he may take advantage of her in more ways than one. Turning her attention to Tesman and Thea, Hedda observes that they are working in the same way Thea must have worked with Løvborg. Tesman tells her that there is nothing she can do to help, and that Brack will have to keep her company. Claiming fatigue, Hedda exits into the other room and begins loudly playing the piano, which shocks the group. Hedda peers back on stage for the last time, promising to be quiet. Tesman suggests that he and Thea work at his Aunt's, leaving Hedda alone with Brack every evening. Brack wholeheartedly agrees to stop in every evening, and Hedda shoots herself in the temple. The door is thrown open and Hedda is revealed, dead on the sofa.

## Review and Summary of a Critical Article

### I. Publication information

Title of Journal or Book:

Scandinavian Studies

Title of Article or Chapter:

Suicide and Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*

Name(s) of Author(s):

Mary Kay Norseng

Publisher and date of publication (give volume and issue # for journals):

(The journal publisher is not necessarily the journal name; Theatre Journal is published by Johns Hopkins and TDR is published by MIT.)

University of Illinois Press Spring99, Vol. 71 Issue 1.

### II. Outline of Article, Chapter or Topic

- A. Prologue
  - a. "what if we saw what Hedda saw?"
  - b. production descriptions
- B. A Short Discourse
  - a. "to see or not to see"
  - b. how clearly should Hedda's suicide be shown?
- C. Suicide
  - a. References to past and modern research about suicide
  - b. The nature or suicide- anguished mind
- D. Hedda's Suicide
  - a. Many scholars deny or invalidate Hedda's suffering
  - b. "Gender prejudice: controlling women do not suffer, they make others suffer"
  - c. because she cannot conform
- E. Hedda's Suicide in the Context of Contemporary Understanding
  - a. "Once inside he closed world, there seems never to have been a time when one was not suicidal."
  - b. Hedda's draining situation.
  - c. Psychological interpretations
- F. Sources and Sets
  - a. "The culture of death"
  - b. Ibsen's possible models for Hedda
  - c. Death in the play
- G. Disembodied Language
  - a. "Hedda's vocabulary of pain"
  - b. discussion of language of the suicidal



H. Loss

a. Loss consumes the depressed

I. Epilogue

### **III. The Main Idea or Argument**

Hedda should be read in the context of her suicide. Her actions should be seen within the framework of her emotional state, and her emotional state should be looked at through the given circumstances and background provided by Ibsen within the text.

### **IV. Central Quote**

(Select the quote that you believe is the essence of the article or chapter.)

“The question is, if we can accept that Hedda is in the grip of a lethal nightmare visible only to her, is it possible for us, critically, to break into it?”

### **V. Evaluation of Essay**

I mostly agree with the author. She presents valid arguments for Hedda’s suicide supported by many literary and scientific sources. She looks at emotional motivation for Hedda’s actions provided by Ibsen’s text, and argues viewpoints that write off Hedda. I disagree with her section looking at Hedda’s language of suicide. I feel that she is really stretching what is found in the text to fit her argument and reading too much into what is given. For example, I don’t agree with her statement that Hedda’s comment about the hat is trying to move the viewpoint from Tessman’s slippers, or the feet, to the hat, or head, where her pain is. I wish Norseng would have taken a closer look at Hedda’s suicide in the context of her pregnancy.

### **VI. Evaluation of Usefulness for your topic/topic formulation**

This article is useful to me as it delves into motives and objectives for Hedda and looks at her suicide as motivated by an emotional state.

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