Hedda Gabler Study Guide

Hedda Gabler by Henrik Ibsen

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites".

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers".

Contents

Introduction

Hedda Gabler, published in 1890, was first performed in Munich, Germany, on January 31, 1891, and over the next several weeks was staged in a variety of European cities, including Berlin, Stockholm, Copenhagen, and Christiania (Oslo). Its premier performance in English occurred in London, on April 20 of the same year, in a translation by Edmund Gosse and William Archer (a translation that has continued to be employed throughout the twentieth century).

Many scholars link the play with what Ibsen described as the happiest event in his life, his brief liaison with Emilie Bardach, an eighteen-year-old Viennese girl whom he met in the small Alpine town of Gossensass in September of 1889. It is an ironic association, for in the months after the sixty-two-year old playwright stopped corresponding with Emilie, he wrote *Hedda Gabler,* which Herman Weigand termed the "coldest, most impersonal of Ibsen's plays" in *The Modern Ibsen: A Reconsideration*. It is almost as though the normally reserved and distant Ibsen had to exorcize his emotional attachment to Emilie by struggling to become yet more detached and objective in his art.

In its printed version, even before production, Hedda Gabler received the worst reviews of any of Ibsen's mature plays. Its earliest stagings fared little better. Conservative critics, predominately males, condemned the work as immoral, just as they had condemned many of Ibsen's earlier social-problem plays. It survived the critical deluge, however, thanks in no small part to the efforts of the dramatist's ardent admirers, many of whom□including playwright George Bernard Shaw□belonged to the new intelligentsia shaped by the revolutionary thinking of such philosophers and scientists as Karl Marx and Charles Darwin.

Hedda Gabler's reputation steadily rose in the twentieth century, engaging the interest of many important actresses who found in Hedda one of the most intriguing and challenging female roles in modern drama. They helped earn the play the eminence it now enjoys as one of Ibsen's premier works and a landmark of realist drama.

Author Biography

At the time Henrik Ibsen wrote and published *Hedda Gabler* (1890) he was sixty-two and a well-established but highly controversial dramatist, but the road to that success had been paved with deprivation and hardship. Although he was born in a well-to-do family in Skien, Norway, on March 20, 1828, financial reversals led to poverty, making Henrik's youth a dismal one. At sixteen, he began a lonely and unhappy six-year apprenticeship to an apothecary (a pharmacist). He found his principal solace in the theater and writing, which he hoped would provide a means of escaping from his misery.

His first serious attempt at drama, *Cataline* (1850), earned him the support of friends who helped him escape from drudgery. He moved to Christiania (Oslo), where he undertook an apprenticeship as dramatist with the Bergen National Theatre. He also spent time in Copenhagen, studying at the Royal Theatre.

Ibsen's first plays borrowed freely from the French intrigue drama that he derided for its artificiality. Hoping to write something new, in 1857 he left the Bergen Theatre to become the director of the Norwegian Theatre in Christiania. The next year, despite his wretched financial state, he married and began a family. Nothing seemed to go right, however. His plays and poetry gained no influential following, and his theater went bankrupt within five years.

Lack of public support forced him into exile. In 1864, he moved to Rome. It was the first major turning point in his long career, for it was as an expatriate that he wrote most of the plays on which his great international reputation was built. Not only did he leave Scandinavia, he left behind a direct participation in theater. While in Italy, he wrote *Brand* (1866) and *Peer Gynt* (1867), two important poetic dramas. The former play was an immediate success and helped alleviate Ibsen's dire poverty.

In 1868, the French invasion of Italy obliged Ibsen to move to Germany, where he began writing the series of plays on which his fame largely rests. He turned from writing mythic-poetic drama to realistic, social-problem drama in prose, starting with *The League of Youth* in 1869, which, like so many of its successors, caused an uproar when first staged. Although his success was limited, by the time he returned to Rome in 1878, he had permanently freed himself from debt.

In the next year, 1879, he published *A Doll's House,* garnering international acclaim and putting him, critically, at center stage. Each succeeding social-thesis play brought increased recognition and notoriety, for each was, in some quarters, condemned. For example, *Ghosts* (1881) created such a furor that it could not be staged immediately. Others, like *An Enemy of the People* (1883) and *The Wild Duck* (1885), though less sensational, still caused critical controversy. Ibsen's fame and his notoriety spread quickly.

By 1890, when *Hedda Gabler* was published, he had even become a national hero in Norway. He returned home in 1891, where, before his death, he wrote *The Master Builder* (1892), *Little*Eyolf(1894), *John Gabriel Borkman* (1896), and *When We Dead Awaken* (1899), dramas that are more symbolic and introspective than any of his previous works. He died on May 23, 1906, widely regarded as the most important dramatist of the age.

Plot Summary

Act I

Hedda Gabler opens in the drawing room of the Tesmans' villa in the prestigious west-end district of Christiania, Norway. George Tesman and his new wife, Hedda, have just returned from a six-month honeymoon. Juliana Tesman, George's maiden aunt, and Berta, the Tesmans' servant, talk about George's invalid Aunt Rina, Hedda's father, General Gabler, and George's fortunate marriage and bright career prospects.

George enters, greets his aunt, and sends Berta off to store his valise while he helps Juliana remove her new bonnet. They discuss his good fortune in winning the much-admired Hedda, who, Juliana hopes, may already be pregnant. The journey and the villa and its furnishings, arranged by Judge Brack, have put both George and his aunts in debt, but Juliana assures her nephew that he is sure to get his anticipated academic appointment. Eilert Lovborg, George's chief competitor for the position, remains in disgrace, despite his popular new book.

When Hedda enters, she is both brusque and ill-mannered. After implying that Juliana's visit is too early, she complains about the room's stuffiness. She refuses to take any interest in George's favorite slippers, newly embroidered by his invalid aunt, and declares that Berta will have to be discharged for carelessly leaving her old bonnet on a chair. She also gets annoyed with George when he talks of her robust health, of how she seems to have "filled out" on their journey.

When George sees his aunt to the door, Hedda reveals her mounting frustration and rage by raising clenched fists over her head. He returns and they talk briefly about Aunt Juliana and Hedda's refusal to become closer to her. Berta then shows in Mrs. Elvsted, who explains that Eilert Lovborg is in town; she implores the Tesmans to befriend him. After Hedda sends George off to write Lovborg an amiable letter, she begins grilling Thea about her marriage to Sheriff Elvsted and her relationship to Lovborg. Accepting Hedda's apparent friendship, Thea confides that she has helped reform the dissolute Lovborg. She also confesses that she has left her husband, but that Lovborg has not encouraged her feelings for him because he remains emotionally bound to a former lover who had once driven him away at gunpoint.

George returns to find that they have another visitor, Judge Brack. After introductions, Hedda sees Thea out and returns to find the men talking about Lovborg, his book, and his moral reclamation. Brack then tells George that his academic appointment is not a certainty, that there is to be a competition for the post, pitting him against Lovborg□this news greatly upsets the financially-strapped Tesman. He voices his concerns to Hedda after Brack leaves, explaining that they will have to become much more frugal. She tells him that she will be bored but will amuse herself with her father's pistols.

Act II

It is late-afternoon on the same day. Judge Brack, approaching the Tesmans' villa from the rear, is dismayed when Hedda fires a pistol in his direction. After chiding her, Brack presses Hedda for a more intimate friendship. She reveals her disenchantment with marriage, complaining that the unexciting Tesman is simply too absorbed in his dull studies. She scoffs at the idea of love, admitting that she married George, not from affection, but because he is solid and respectable and has good prospects.

George enters laden with several books, one of which is Lovborg's new work. When he goes into the study, Hedda confesses her dislike for Tesman's aunts and even the married couple's villa. She admits she had only pretended to believe that Juliana's new bonnet belonged to Berta. She also tells Brack that she has hopes of interesting George in politics, but he offers no encouragement. His suggestion that she might find an alternative interest in raising a child makes her bristle.

When George re-enters, the talk turns to Lovborg and Judge Brack's bachelor's party. Shortly after, Eilert arrives, hoping to read part of his manuscript to George. He refuses an invitation to the party but defers to Hedda's insistence that he stay for dinner with her and Thea Elvsted. He also indicates that he will not stand in the way of Tesman's appointment, much to George's relief.

Lovborg stays alone with Hedda while the other men go into an adjoining room to drink punch. They speak of their former intimacy, of a time when Eilert confided in her. She confesses that she dreads the scandal that their love might have occasioned, a fear she still carries. He then allays her concern by revealing that he has never told Thea of their love, that Thea was too stupid to understand it.

When Mrs. Elvsted arrives, she tells Hedda of her happiness in being a catalyst in Lovborg's moral and professional reformation. Hedda suggests that Eilert is not really very secure, that both he and others, including Brack, suspect a possible relapse. She then betrays Thea's trust by revealing to Lovborg that Thea had come to her in a distracted state, herself fearful of what Eilert might do. To Thea's chagrin, Lovborg reacts bitterly, resolving to go off to the party with Tesman and Brack, with plans to read his manuscript there.

The men depart, leaving the worried Thea and exultant Hedda alone. Hedda is convinced that Eilert will return "with vine-leaves in his hair." She admits that she desires the power to shape one person's destiny, and, reverting to a girlhood threat, says that she will yet have to burn the frightened Thea's hair off. At the curtain, she restates her conviction that Eilert will return in all his vine-leaf (drunken and disorderly) glory.

Act III

It is early the following day. Hedda and Thea have spent the night awaiting the return of Lovborg and Tesman. Hedda is asleep on the sofa, but Thea, restless, merely dozes in a chair. She wakes fully when Berta enters with a letter for George. Hedda also wakes, and after allaying Thea's concern, sends her off to rest in another room.

When Tesman returns, he tells Hedda that Lovborg had read part of his new manuscript to him and that is an extraordinary work. He also reveals that he has the manuscript with him, that he picked it up after Eilert carelessly dropped it, something only George knows. Hedda insists that he leave it with her. He is hesitant, but when he learns from the letter that his Aunt Rina is dying, he prepares to go to his aunt's bedside. Hedda stashes the manuscript out of sight, on the bookcase, just before Brack enters.

Brack describes Lovborg's behavior of the previous night, of how the scholar had gone to Mademoiselle Diana's room, charged everyone with stealing his papers, and, after striking a constable, been taken to jail. Eilert's fate comforts Brack, who had seen Lovborg as a threat to his plans to ensnare Hedda in an intimate relationship.

After Brack leaves, Hedda takes the packet of Lovborg's papers from the bookcase, but hearing voices in the hall, locks them in the drawer of a writing table. Lovborg barges in over the protests of Berta. Shortly after, Mrs. Elvsted also enters, and he tells her that she must leave him and go home again, that he is ruined. He lies to her, claiming to have torn his manuscript to pieces, scattering it on the fjord. She exits in despair, blaming Lovborg for destroying their work, their "child."

After Thea's exit, Eilert tells Hedda the truth, that he has lost the manuscript, and that he plans "to make an end of all." Hedda then begs him to end it "beautifully," and gives him one of General Gabler' s pistols. After he leaves, she retrieves his manuscript and destroys it in the drawing room's stove.

Act IV

It is evening of the same day. Juliana talks of her sister's death with Hedda and George. She announces her desire to find another invalid to nurse, then adds the hope that Hedda will also have another to care for, a baby. After Juliana leaves, Hedda confesses that she had burned Eilert's manuscript to ashes. George is horrified, but when she claims that she did it for his sake, and lets on that she is with child, his regret turns to joy, and he agrees that they should keep her destruction of Eilert's papers a secret.

Mrs. Elvsted then joins them. She has heard rumors that Eilert was taken to the hospital. These are soon confirmed by Judge Brack, who enters shortly after. He claims that Eilert is in the hospital, dying from a self-inflicted gunshot wound in the chest, news that only slightly distresses Hedda, who had expected him to shoot himself "beautifully," in the temple. When the talk shifts to Lovborg's destroyed manuscript, Thea suggests that from notes she has with her, she and Tesman might be able to recreate Eilert's

work. George is at once enthusiastic, and the pair go into an adjoining room to begin what George now perceives as his life's work.

Alone with Hedda, Brack tells her the truth about Lovborg, that he is already dead, having bled to death from a wound to his bowels accidentallyinflicted while Eilert was with Mademoiselle Diana in her boudoir. George then re-enters to say that he wants to work with Thea at the writing table. Hedda, after covering the remaining pistol with music sheets, moves apart, continuing her conversation with Brack *sotto voce* ("under the voice," in drama, a whispering technique that allows an audience to hear the dialogue). He reveals that he recognized the pistol that Lovborg used and warns her that a scandal could follow were he to disclose what he knows. She realizes what he is insinuating, that Eilert's death and her fear of scandal will put her completely in Brack's power.

As Thea and George work on Eilert's notes, Hedda goes into the adjoining room with music sheets and the pistol. She begins frenzied playing on the piano, prompting Tesman to protest the music's inappropriateness, given the death of Rina. George also tells Thea that they should work at Juliana's house in the evenings, leaving Brack to keep Hedda company. Brack is immediately agreeable, knowing that he can turn such occasions into sexual trysts. Hedda then fires the pistol, and when the men jump up and go into the room, they discover that Hedda has shot herself in the temple, something, according to the astonished Brack, that people just "don't do."

Act 1, Part 1

Act 1, Part 1 Summary

On a bright summer morning, Julle Tesman pays a visit to her nephew Jorgen, referred to as Tesman, and his new wife Hedda. As Julle opens the windows to let the sun in, the housemaid Berte, who had been Julle's housemaid before moving to work for Tesman and Hedda, tells Julle that Tesman and Hedda got in late the night before. Hedda had needed everything unpacked and put away in a very particular manner, and it was even later before everybody went to bed. Julle comments that it's not much of a surprise, and tells Berte to remember that Hedda was the beautiful, popular daughter of General Gabler before she married Tesman. She intimates that it's not a surprise that Hedda should be so particular. Berte asks about Rina, Julle's bedridden elderly sister. Berte had nursed Rina for several years and worries that the new housemaid won't do as good a job. Julle reassures her that Rina is fine, and that she will ensure everything is as it should be. Julle also tells Berte that she must address Tesman more formally now that he's been made a doctor. She also hints that soon she will have to address him with an even grander title.

Tesman enters, glad to see his aunt. As they greet each other, Tesman tells Berte to put the suitcase he's carrying in the attic. He tells Julle it was full of notes and research. We learn that Tesman and Hedda have been away for almost six months. Tesman spent much of that time working on an academic dissertation on medieval domestic crafts, and it's finally finished. As they wait for Hedda, Tesman compliments Julle on her new hat, which she says was purchased in Hedda's honor. They chat about the prospects for the future, although it seems that they're talking about different *kinds* of prospects. As they discuss plans for the house, Tesman's continues to focus on his books and his academic career, including a professorship he seems certain to get. Aunt Julle hints about other uses for the now-empty rooms. They also discuss how the large house was financed. Tesman says Hedda wanted this house more than any other, and Aunt Julle reveals that she took out a mortgage for its furnishings on the collateral of an annuity that she and Rina receive. When Tesman protests, Aunt Julle tells him it is the least she can do for her beloved brother's son. She tells him it is wonderful it is to see him successful after many years of difficulty and competition with his rival. She mentions that his rival, Ejlert Lovborg, is back in town. As Tesman digests that information, Aunt Julle congratulates him again, especially for winning Hedda Gabler's heart.

Hedda enters at that moment. She greets Aunt Julle rather formally, shakes her hand, and then complains about the open window. When Tesman goes to close it, she tells him it will be enough to close the drapes. Hedda invites Aunt Julle to sit, but Aunt Julle says she's must return to Rina. Before she leaves, she has to take care of something she had forgotten earlier. She hands Tesman a small package containing his favorite slippers, which he had forgotten when he went on his honeymoon. Hedda comments that he mentioned them frequently on their trip. Tesman tells her that Rina embroidered them for him, but she doesn't seem interested in looking at them. Hedda mistakes

Julle's hat for Berte's and tells Tesman that Berea will have to be dismissed for leaving her belongings lying around. As Aunt Julle takes her hat and leaves, Tesman mentions how beautiful Hedda is and how much she's filled out on the trip, but Hedda insists she is as she always has been. Aunt Julle kisses Hedda goodbye and promises to come every day and visit. As she leaves, Hedda paces the room, angry and tense.

Act 1, Part 1 Analysis

Character and relationship are established clearly in this scene. We see that Tesman is far more interested in his books than his marriage. He's more interested in the *idea* of being married to "Hedda Gabler" than he is in Hedda herself. We see that Aunt Julle is loving to the point of being smothering and over-protective. Most importantly, we see Hedda as willful, outspoken and self-centered. It's also very clear she feels that her marriage is a mistake after only a few months. She and Tesman are not a good fit, and Hedda knows it. Ironically, Tesman and Aunt Julle don't see things the same way, which sets up future conflict.

Hedda could also be seen as nasty in her words and actions regarding the window and the hat, but remember that she doesn't know that Aunt Julle was responsible for the window and she doesn't know it's Aunt Julle's hat. This means that she is tactless rather than mean.

On a number of occasions, Aunt Julle seems to have something other than the current discussion on her mind. Her mind seems to be elsewhere when she and Tesman talk about his "prospects" or what they intend to do with the extra rooms, and when she is affectionate towards Hedda before she leaves . The text does not clarify her true thoughts, but it's easy to imagine that Aunt Julle is thinking about the baby that she assumes Tesman and Hedda will have. The prospects Julle refers to are the prospects of fatherhood. She thinks that at least one of the extra rooms will be a nursery, and her rush of emotion when she leaves suggests that she thinks Hedda is already pregnant. What gives her that idea? Tesman mentions that Hedda is "filling out," and Aunt Julle believes he means that Hedda's pregnancy is starting to show.

Hedda's reacts angrily to the suggestion that she's filling out. She is either very proud of her physical appearance, doesn't want to be pregnant, or both. If we believe she is pregnant, this continues the central conflict of the play between Hedda's willful free-spiritedness, which we hear Aunt Julle speak about and see in action throughout this first act, and her feeling trapped in her marriage. A pregnancy would strengthen the trap, which makes her feel more desperate.

The action of the play is the story of this conflict. Hedda feels trapped, struggles to get out of the trap, realizes she can't and kills herself. She sees suicide as her only escape from the trap.

Act 1, Part 2

Act 1, Part 2 Summary

When Tesman returns from seeing Aunt Julle to the door, Hedda promises to try to be nicer to her. Tesman asks Hedda if there's something else wrong, and she tells him she's uncomfortable about her piano. She thinks that it doesn't fit with the new furniture. She also says she's confused about a bouquet of flowers that had arrived with a card signed by "Mrs Elvsted," a woman Hedda had known at school but hadn't seen much lately. Hedda and Tesman discuss how Mrs. Elvsted can live "up there" in a small distant town, and how Ejlert Lovborg moved there.

Just then, Mrs. Elvsted arrives. She seems tense and excitable. She explains to Tesman and Hedda that she's come to tell them that Lovborg is in town, and that he's published a new book. She also asks them to keep an eye on him since Lovborg and Tesman have so much in common. They do the same sort of academic work in the field of medieval culture. Mrs. Elvsted says she's making the requests on behalf of her husband, who took an interest in Lovborg when Lovborg moved "up there" and began tutoring his children. Hedda suggests that Tesman write Lovborg a note inviting him to visit. As Tesman leaves, Mrs. Elvsted begs him to not mention that she was there.

When Tesman's gone, Hedda sits Mrs. Elvsted down for a friendly, intimate chat. Hedda has sensed that Mrs. Elvsted hasn't revealed everything. Mrs. Elvsted confesses that her husband has nothing to do with her trip. In fact, she's left her husband. She feels alone and isolated, and she can't bear not to be around Lovborg. Hedda asks how the relationship between Mrs. Elvsted and Lovborg grew. Mrs. Elvsted tells her that they spent a great deal of time together, that she broke him of his "old ways" and that the happiest times were when she shared his work. However, she says their happiness isn't complete. Memories of another woman haunt Lovborg. When Hedda asks who that might be, Mrs. Elvsted says she only knows that the woman threatened to shoot him with a pistol when the woman and Lovborg separated. Hedda sees Tesman returning and makes Mrs. Elvsted promise to keep their conversation a secret.

Tesman comes with the letter. Hedda announces that she's about to see Mrs. Elvsted out just as Berte announces that Mr. Brack has arrived. Hedda gives Berte the letter to put in the post, and Mr. Brack enters. Hedda and Mrs. Elvsted leave after Hedda and Brack exchange greetings.

Brack tells Tesman that he's come with news that Lovborg is back in town. He's surprised and happy to see that Tesman has already heard. Tesman says he's glad to hear that Lovborg has settled down, written a new book and begun rebuilding his life. Hedda returns and Tesman tells her that he's invited Lovborg for a visit that evening. Brack reminds him that it's his bachelor party that night and suggests that Lovborg won't come. He reveals that Lovborg is being considered for the same professorship as Tesman. Tesman reacts badly. He says the job was as good as promised to him before

he left on his honeymoon, and that he and Hedda have built their lives on the assumption that the job was his. Brack reassures them that the job will still be his, just "only after a little bit of competition." Brack prepares to leave and asks permission to return for a chat that afternoon. Hedda agrees, and Brack leaves.

Tesman tells Hedda that their plans for servants, a horse and a social life will have to wait. Hedda tells him that there's still one thing she can use to fill the time, her father's dueling pistols. The curtain falls as Tesman urges her to leave the pistols alone.

Act 1, Part 2 Analysis

The piano, which represents Hedda is one of two main symbols that first appear in this act. It doesn't fit with the rest of the furnishings, and Hedda does not fit in with her new life. Her attachment to the piano, or her refusal of Tesman's suggestion that it be replaced with a new one, suggests that Hedda doesn't want to give up her old life. At the end of the scene, when Tesman and Hedda discuss all the things she can't have, we discover more about what that life must have been like. She wants servants, a horse and lots of parties, we begin to see more clearly the trap in which Hedda finds herself.

The pistols are the second major symbol that appears in this act. Hedda inherited the pistols from her father, the General, and like the piano, they symbolize Hedda's old life. They they are also an outlet for her anger and frustration. When Mrs. Elvsted talks about the mysterious woman in Lovborg's life who shot him, we realize she's talking about Hedda. We understand that Hedda doesn't react well when things don't go her way.

The trap around Hedda tightens when Brack reveals that Tesman may not get the professorship everybody assumed was his. The pressure begins to build on her, and her *climactic* choice to end her life is becoming inevitable.

Act 2, Part 1

Act 2, Part 1 Summary

Later that day, the piano has been moved into the back room. Hedda stands at the windows looking into the garden. She fires her pistol playfully at Brack, who hurries in, takes the pistol from her and puts it into its case. Hedda explains that it's an old game to shoot out into the blue. Once he calms down, Brack asks why she married Tesman and what it's like for her now. Hedda explains that she was tired of the social whirl she was living in, and she believed that Tesman would be able to provide for her. Since marriage, she's discovered that married life in general is dull, but Tesman is particularly so. Brack reassures her that he'll continue to be her friend and bring intelligent conversation into her life.

Hedda and Brack's discussion is interrupted briefly when Tesman returns from a visit with his two aunts. He is loaded down with academic publications that he just had to have, including Lovborg's new book. He says that Aunt Julle will be unable to visit that evening. Hedda asks whether it's because of the misunderstanding about the hat, but Tesman says Aunt Rina is particularly ill. He leaves to look at his books.

After Tesman leaves, Hedda explains the hat incident to Brack, and they continue to talk about her marriage. Brack suggests she should be happy to live in the house she wanted so badly, but Hedda explains that she didn't want the house at all. She had only mentioned that she did to Tesman to fill a silence in a their conversation. This, she says, is what led to their engagement, their marriage and all their current difficulties. She wonders whether it would be possible to get Tesman into politics, but she realizes how difficult it would be when Brack points out they would need a lot of money to make it happen. Brack suggests that soon, maybe within a year or so, she'll have something to keep herself occupied quite happily. Hedda responds angrily that it will never happen.

Tesman returns and asks whether Lovborg sent word he wasn't coming. She says he didn't, and Tesman says that he looks forward to seeing him again. Hedda reminds them that Mrs. Elvsted is also coming, and they'll have a nice sized group.

Lovborg arrives, and conversation immediately turns to his new book. Tesman praises it, and Lovborg reveals that it's the first of two parts. The second book will bring his examination of historical culture into the present and provide a look into the future. He's brought the manuscript of the second book to show Tesman. He promises to wait until Tesman has received the professorship before he publishes it and says that he wants to outshine Tesman only in reputation. While Tesman celebrates the fact that he's going to get his professorship after all, Brack comments on Lovborg's desire for reputation, and Hedda manipulates Lovborg into not going to Brack's house for a bachelor party. She convinces him to stays until Mrs. Elvsted arrives, and then manipulates him into agreeing to walk Mrs. Elvsted home. Tesman and Brack withdraw to drink punch and smoke cigars while Hedda and Lovborg chat.

Act 2, Part 1 Analysis

As this act begins, two of the main symbols of the play reappear. The piano has been moved, which symbolizes the effort made by those around Hedda to diminish the role of her past life in her present life. Hedda act of firing one of the pistols symbolizes her frustration with her current situation. The fact that she fires at Brack suggests that she blames him for getting her into this situation. This foreshadows the conversation between the two of them later in the play in which he makes an indecent proposition.

The third main symbol of the play, Lovborg's manuscript, also appears in this act. The manuscript represents a new life without Hedda inspired by the companionship of Mrs. Elvsted. This idea is supported by the way Lovborg describes the manuscript. He depicts it as moving beyond the work he did in the past about the past and into studies of the present and future. The book carries with it the energy and new life he carryies with him. Like the pistols, the manuscript assumes an even more important role later in the play.

Tesman's purchase of the manuscripts suggests that he is self-centered. It suggests that he's fine getting the things he wants despite their money issues, but Hedda does not get what she wants.

The more we learn about Hedda, the more complicated her character becomes. In her conversation with Brack, she hints of loneliness and frustration and even suggests that she married Tesman to escape that loneliness. We get the impression that she's impulsive and makes choices without thinking through the consequences. We also get the impression that she's restless and doesn't really know what she wants. She knows what she doesn't want and is frustrated at being in a position where she has exactly that.

There are questions in this scene about the kind of "friendship" Brack offers Hedda. There are hints and innuendoes that he might be interested in something else, which foreshadow the outright offer of sexual comfort that he makes later in the play, when the trap around Hedda is at its most dangerous. It may be that he wants a sexual relationship with Hedda all along, but at this point in the play, he doesn't feel able to make the suggestion He does later in the play.

Act 2, Part 2

Act 2, Part 2 Summary

Hedda and Lovborg flip through a photo album of her honeymoon. Though Tesman occasionally enters and leaves the room, Lovborg takes the opportunity to speak intimately with Hedda about their past relationship, He tells her that he loved her deeply, and he couldn't believe she ended their relationship and married Tesman. He says that it was incredible to him that he confessed all his indiscretions to her, and asks whether she had wanted to transform him. Hedda tells him that it was the curiosity of a well-bred girl about a life she was supposed to know nothing about. This curiosity made her confront him about what was going on, and that's why she ended the relationship. She could feel herself wanting to participate in life the same way he did, and she couldn't accept that. She calls herself a coward. She confesses that she was also a coward for missing when she shot at him, and she almost reveals what an even greater act of cowardice was when Lovborg interrupts. He says he understands, and he now realizes they are kindred spirits.

Just as Hedda warns him to not go too far, Mrs. Elvsted arrives. Hedda keeps her from greeting Tesman and Brack, insisting that she sit with her and Lovborg. Lovborg compliments Mrs. Elvsted's beauty, inspiration and courage, which Hedda takes badly. Mrs. Elvsted is uncomfortable, embarrassed and flattered at the same time. Hedda offers them punch, which they both refuse. Hedda insists. They continue to refuse. Hedda describes Lovborg as a man of principle, and then tells Mrs. Elvsted that she was worrying for nothing when she visited this morning. Mrs. Elvsted tries to quiet Hedda. She wanted that visit to be a secret, but Hedda continues, suggesting that Mrs. Elvsted was afraid that Lovborg would fall back into his "old ways." Lovborg takes that to mean that Mrs. Elvsted doesn't have as much confidence in him as she says she does. In other words, he thinks she's been lying. He takes a glass of the punch and drinks it, proposing a toast to "the truth."

Brack and Tesman re-enter. Lovborg asks if he may change his mind and join the bachelor party, and Brack agrees. Lovborg says he'll return later to walk Mrs. Elvsted home and leaves with Brack and Tesman.

Mrs. Elvsted paces, worried about how the evening will turn out. Hedda believes that Lovborg will return happy and fulfilled, with "vine leaves" in his hair. She says that "for once in her life she wants to feel as though she controls a human destiny," and when Mrs. Elvsted suggests that she already does, Hedda says she hasn't at all up to now. She grabs Mrs. Elvsted and suggests that she might burn the woman's hair off, as she had threatened to do in school. Mrs. Elvsted tries to leave, but Hedda forces her to sit down to dinner.

Act 2, Part 2 Analysis

Several aspects of Hedda's character and history are revealed in this scene. We now know for certain that she was the woman who shot at Lovborg. We find out why she missed, and why she was with him in the first place, but we don't discover her ultimate act of cowardice.

We also learn that Hedda's goal in this play, and in life, is to control the destiny of another human being. This explains why she manipulates Mrs. Elvsted and Lovborg in the way she does, but the question is why she wants what she wants. Does she want power for its own sake? Does she truly want Lovborg to be the kind of free spirit she knew him to be when they were together, the kind of free spirit she could never be? Perhaps that's the ultimate act of cowardice she refers to at the end of their scene together. Perhaps Hedda had the desire to escape from her restrictive life as a young woman, but couldn't follow through. Perhaps this also explains her choice to kill herself at the end of the play. To her, suicide may be the ultimate act of courage.

Another symbol appears at the end of the play. Hedda says Lovborg will return with *vine leaves* in his hair and refers to vine leaves again in later scenes. The leaves represent Lovborg's free-spiritedness and creativity, which Hedda both admires and envies.

Act 3, Part 1

Act 3, Part 1 Summary

This scene is set early the next morning. Mrs. Elvsted and Hedda are both asleep, and Berte enters with a letter from Aunt Julle. Mrs. Elvsted wakes up, and we discover that Lovborg and Tesman never came back from Brack's the night before.

Hedda wakes up as Berte leaves, and Mrs. Elvsted explains that Tesman and Lovborg never returned. Hedda imagines that they stayed up all night at Brack's, that Lovborg was "sitting there, reading aloud, with vine leaves in his hair" and that Tesman didn't want to wake her when he came home and spent the night at Aunt Julle's. Hedda sends Mrs. Elvsted to bed, saying she looks exhausted. When Mrs. Elvsted protests that she wants to know what happened to the men, Hedda promises to wake her up when they arrive.

Berte comes in to tend the fire, but Hedda tells her she'll take care of it. Tesman comes in, looking tired and serious as she's adding logs to the flames. He tells Hedda what happened at Brack's. Lovborg got drunk, read from his new book, which Tesman says is wonderful, and talked about the woman who inspired it. When Hedda asks if Lovborg said who the woman was, Tesman says no, but he thinks it was Mrs. Elvsted. Tesman reveals that he and Brack helped the drunken Lovborg to get home, and Lovborg accidentally dropped his manuscript. It is Lovborg's only copy, and Tesman is desperate to return it. When Hedda asks why he didn't give it back then, he explains that Lovborg was in such bad shape that he didn't trust him. He says he plans to return the manuscript right away, but then Hedda shows him the letter from Aunt Julle. It says that Aunt Rina is close to death, and Tesman must leave immediately if wants to see her before she dies. He wants desperately to go, but he worries about the manuscript. Hedda promises to take care of it. Tesman rushes around as he prepares to leave and tries to persuade Hedda to come with him. Hedda refuses, saying she needs to free herself from darkness and death.

Brack arrives just as Tesman rushes out the door. Brack and Hedda sit and discuss the evening's events. Brack reveals that Lovborg went to another party at the home of an ex-lover named Diana, drank even more, and accused Diana of stealing his manuscript when he realized his it was missing. There was an argument and a fight, and Lovborg was arrested. Hedda is disappointed. She says, almost to herself, that Lovborg wasn't wearing vine leaves in his hair after all. When Brack asks what she means, Hedda changes the subject and asks what will happen to Lovborg. Brack says he'll go to court. He hints that he's going to be barred from society as he was before, and suggests that Hedda bar him from her society as well. When Hedda asks what he means, Brack says it's clear that Lovborg intended to use her house as a place to meet Mrs. Elvsted. He suggests that behavior like that can't be encouraged. Hedda, however, understands that Brack doesn't want anyone else to be Hedda's "friend.." Brack admits the truth. He says that he'll fight for what he wants, and that he doesn't know what he would do to get and

keep what he wants. Hedda feels threatened, but the two of them laugh it off. Brack leaves out the back through the garden.

Act 3, Part 1 Analysis

This part of the act is about the destruction of Hedda's hopes for Lovborg. At the beginning of the scene, she imagines him expressing his free-spiritedness by reading his manuscript out loud at Brack's party. She refers again to the vine leaves in his hair, which represent that free-spiritedness. At this point, it seems to her as though her dream of controlling another person's destiny, by encouraging Lovborg to release his free spiritedness, might be coming true.

However, when Hedda learns that Lovborg was just drunk, that he lost his manuscript and created a disturbance, and that the evening ended with the police being called, she realizes that Lovborg isn't the free spirit she thought he was. He is someone who can't control himself and behave responsibly. Her disillusionment with him illustrates a basic conflict in her own character. She wants to be free spirited like Lovborg, but she can't stand the thought of making a spectacle of herself like he does, or of getting involved with something as low-class as the police. As a result, Hedda realizes that Lovborg can't or won't ever be what she wants him to be.

There are two moments of foreshadowing in this section when Hedda adds fuel to the fire, and when Tesman leaves the manuscript behind. We know that the manuscript represents Lovborg's new life and his dreams for the future, and we have the sense that something's going to happen to it. The building of the fire foreshadows what happens at the end of the act, when Hedda throws the manuscript into the flames.

The scene between Brack and Hedda takes their relationship in a new direction. We start to sense that there's something nastier about Brack than we previously believed. We begin to wonder whether Brack is trying to start a sexual relationship with Hedda, and whether Hedda might be willing to participate in such a relationship.

Act 3, Part 2

Act 3, Part 2 Summary

After Brack leaves, Hedda begins to look through the manuscript. She doesn't get far before she hears Berte and Lovborg arguing in the front hall and quickly hides the manuscript.

Lovborg enters, excited and full of apologies for not returning after the party. He asks to see Mrs. Elvsted. Mrs. Elvsted comes out of the back room, happy to see Lovborg and asking what happened. Lovborg tells her that their relationship is over. His book will never be published, and he's never going to write again. When Mrs. Elvsted tries to find out why and convince him that she can continue helping him work, he tells her that in his drunkenness, he tore the manuscript into pieces and threw it into the water. Mrs. Elvsted, in shock, says what he did is like killing their child. Lovborg agrees, and Mrs. Elvsted decides to leave, though she has no place to go and no idea what to do with her life.

Lovborg confesses that after the events of the night before, he has no strength left to live the kind of life Mrs. Elvsted helped him live. He also confesses that he lost the manuscript, and compares it to losing a child. In despair, he tells Hedda that his only way out is to kill himself. Hedda encourages him to do it "beautifully," and he assumes that she wants him to die as she used to describe him, "with vine leaves in his hair." She says she doesn't believe in the vine leaves any more and offers him one of the General's pistols as a gift to remember her by. As Lovborg leaves, she again encourages him to make his end "beautiful."

After Lovborg leaves, Hedda sits by the fire and burns the manuscript a few pages at a time. She says she's burning their child.

Act 3, Part 2 Analysis

In this scene, Hedda's suspicions are confirmed. She discovers that Mrs. Elvsted truly did help Lovborg, and has shaped someone's destiny in the way that Hedda never could. As a result, Hedda burns the manuscript as an act of revenge upon Lovborg, for disappointing her, and Mrs Elvsted, for accomplishing something that Hedda never could. The trap around Hedda is now almost completely closed. The one desperate hope she had of escaping her marriage has disappeared, and she's left with one pistol.. It seems certain that Lovborg will kill himself with the other, and this sense of impending suicide foreshadows Hedda's suicide at the end of the play.

In this scene, the manuscript also symbolizes Mrs. Elvsted's success at having the *only* kind of child that Hedda wants. Hedda wants to be the kind of inspiration to Lovborg that Mrs. Elvsted is, and to be the mother of the child of creativity and companionship. Instead, Hedda has married Tesman, whom she does not inspire, and is going to

become the mother to the kind of child in which she has no interest. When Hedda burns the manuscript, she's punishing both Lovborg and Mrs. Elvsted because she doesn't have the full life she both wants and feels she deserves.

Act 4

Act 4 Summary

Later that evening, Hedda paces restlessly, dressed in black. Aunt Julle arrives, also dressed in black. Aunt Rina has passed away. Hedda asks if there's anything she can do to help with the funeral arrangements, but Aunt Julle says it's not something with which Hedda should concern herself. Tesman arrives, also in black. He's confused and emotional, and he admits that he's probably not done half the things he should have done. Aunt Julle tells him that she'll take care of everything. She mentions that it won't be long before she will begin caring for another invalid. She also suggests that she'll get a lot of joy out of visiting and helping Hedda and Tesman. She imagines there will be lots for her to do soon enough.

After she leaves, Tesman confesses that he's also upset about Lovborg. He saw Mrs. Elvsted in the street, and she told him what Lovborg had done to the manuscript. Hedda confesses that she burned the manuscript. When Tesman asks why, she tells him that she burned it for him. She saw that Tesman had envied the manuscript and realized that its publication would prevent Tesman from getting his professorship. Tesman is torn between his sorrow for Lovborg and his happiness that Hedda cares for him so much. Hedda starts to tell him that it was important for her to act in his behalf "at this particular time," and then stops herself and says he'd better ask Aunt Julle about that. Tesman excitedly promises to do so. He says he'll also tell Aunt Julle about the manuscript and why Hedda burned it.

Mrs. Elvsted arrives, seeking news about Lovborg. She heard rumors that he was taken to the hospital, went to where he was staying and found out that he'd been out all night. Tesman volunteers to look for him, but Hedda restrains him.

Brack arrives, also wearing mourning clothes. He offers his sympathies about Aunt Rina, and then admits that he's come with bad news Lovborg is in hospital. He shot himself in the chest and isn't expected to live. Mrs. Elvsted and Tesman become upset, and Hedda proclaims that Lovborg did a beautiful act, an act of courage for doing what had to be done. Mrs. Elvsted says he must have done it in a fit of madness, just as he tore up the manuscript. This catches Brack by surprise. Tesman wishes there was some way to publish the manuscript on Lovborg's behalf, and Mrs. Elvsted suggests there might be. She still has all his notes. She and Tesman go into the back room to review them and determine what can be done.

Brack reveals to Hedda that Lovborg's suicide wasn't quite an act of courage as she had thought. He tells her that Lovborg is dead. He was found shot at the home of Diana, the singer, where he had gone to look for the manuscript. He has been shot in the abdomen, not the chest, and there is evidence the gun was stolen.

As Hedda digests this news, Tesman and Mrs. Elvsted return to find a work space with better light. Hedda clears off her desk and takes a pile of music into the back room. When she returns, she asks how the work on Lovborg's notes is going. Mrs. Elvsted says it's going to take a lot of work, but Tesman says he is good at this sort of work. As they keep working, Hedda pulls Brack aside and asks him to tell her more about the stolen pistol. He says he recognized it as one of hers immediately, and asks whether she left Lovborg alone with her pistols earlier in the day. She first tells him the truth and says no, but then she lies and says she was out in the hall for just a few moments. Brack warns her that there will be a scandal, and she will have to appear in court. He suggests there will be no scandal if he keeps quiet. Hedda assumes that she is now in his power, but she refuses to accept the fact that she is no longer free.

Hedda and Mrs. Elvsted briefly discuss how Mrs. Elvsted is working with Tesman in the same way that she worked with Lovborg. She comments that someday Hedda might be able to inspire Tesman in the same way. Tesman says there's really nothing Hedda can do to help, and Hedda goes to the back room to play the piano. Tesman asks her to be quiet out of respect for Aunt Rina and Lovborg. Hedda says that from now on she'll be silent. She closes the curtains to the other room.

Tesman suggests that Mrs. Elvsted move into Aunt Julle's where they can work together in the evenings. Brack shouts out to Hedda that he'd be happy to keep her company in the evenings. Hedda shouts back that he'll like that. Suddenly, a shot rings out. For a moment, Tesman thinks she's just playing with the pistols, and then has a horrible suspicion. He pulls back the curtain to reveal that Hedda has shot herself.

Act 4 Analysis

The action in this act builds steadily to the inevitable *climax* of Hedda's suicide. At the beginning of the act, she is restless as she tries to determine if Lovborg killed himself as she had wanted and needed, in the "beautiful" way. Her frustration builds when Aunt Julle implies again that Hedda is pregnant and expresses her joy at the upcoming event.

Hedda is joyful when she finds out that Lovborg *did* kill himself from Mrs. Elvsted. However, she discovers that Lovborg's "child" could still be "born," that Lovborg's death wasn't the beautiful suicide she thought it was, and that Brack has her more firmly in his power than ever. It becomes too much for her, and she takes the only way out that she can see. The question is whether she does it with the kind of courage she said she always lacked, or if she does it because she's afraid of being trapped. If we accept the argument that the pistols represent her frustration, then the final use of the pistols to end her life is more fearful than courageous. If, however, we see Hedda's struggle throughout the play as the struggle for freedom, then her final choice to take the only act that will set her free is an act of courage. Her use of the pistols transforms them, and they become a symbol of how frustration can be used to obtain freedom.

This, then, is the play's theme. Hedda's struggle to be free represents the universal struggle to be free and to be true to oneself. She sees that desire in Tesman. She tells him that she burned the manuscript for him to inspire him to live the kind of life of which he dreams. Her suicide gives him the freedom to do that. Also, Hedda desires to shape Lovborg's life into the kind of free-spiritedness she has always wanted to have but has never had the courage to live. This reading of the story interprets her final suicide as an act of courage. In choosing to kill herself, she makes a free choice about her own destiny for the first time in her life. The irony, of course, is that it's the last choice she'll ever make.

Characters

Berta

Berta is the Tesmans' middle-aged, maid. She is a loyal family retainer, formerly employed by George Tesman's maiden aunts but now in the service of George and Hedda at their newly purchased villa. Her closeness to Juliana Tesman makes her a minor threat to Hedda, who intensely dislikes George's aunt. Early on, Hedda threatens to discharge Berta, partly to discomfort George, but also because she clearly identifies Berta with George's family and its deeply affectionate binds that Hedda loathes. Although Berta appears often, she has no significant part in the play's action. She is very protective of George Tesman and his privacy.

Judge Brack

Judge Brack hides his desire for an intimate relationship with Hedda with an outward friendship for George Tesman and a cloak of respectability. He is, in truth, quite sinister and unprincipled, a sophisticated stalker who awaits an opportunity to seduce Hedda, to become the "one cock in the basket."

Brack is particularly dangerous because he is a fair judge of character, except, finally, in Hedda's case. He is genuinely shocked by her suicide, something he did not anticipate would result from his success in maneuvering her into a compromising position. He is otherwise a glib and masterful manipulator. At the outset, it is made clear that he has put George Tesman in his debt by arranging the loans for purchasing the villa. George, ingenuous to a fault, sees Brack only as an unselfish friend, one he trusts implicitly. Brack also challenges the hapless Lovborg, inviting him to his party, knowing full well that Eilert might slip again into his former dissolution. Hedda, on the other hand, penetrates Brack's mask of good will, identifying the leering innuendo in much of his seemingly harmless conversation with her.

It is Brack who forces Hedda into her last desperate act, her self-destruction. He knows that the pistol used by Eilert Lovborg was one of a pair of General Gabler's pistols in Hedda's possession. That he can expose her and subject her to scandal gives him the advantage he has sought, but Hedda, unwilling to become his "slave," elects to escape such a predicament through death.

Mrs. Elvsted

During the course of *Hedda Gabler,* Thea confesses that she has fled from her loveless and boorish husband, Sheriff Elvsted, and her stepchildren, destroying her reputation to follow Eilert Lovborg to Christiania. For the prior two years, she had both reformed the debauched Lovborg and inspired his new work. Despite her great influence on the brilliant Eilert, her hopes of securing his love are faint. A shadow sits on their

relationship: Eilert's residual feelings for a former lover, who, unbeknownst to Thea, is Hedda Gabler.

Thea and Hedda, like Eilert and George Tesman, are sharply contrasting characters. Thea has courage and hope, selflessness and warmth. She is willing to risk all for love, even the kind of scandal that cowers Hedda, and though she knows her love for Eilert Lovborg is futile, her chief concern is for him, not herself. Hedda, on the other hand, is selfish and severe, incapable of the generosity of spirit necessary to love.

The two women even contrast physically. Thea seems made of softer stuff, rounded, not chiseled like the obdurate, stone-cast Hedda. Both have a kind of beauty, but Thea's greater beauty lies within. It is reflected in her outer femininity, in her rich and luxuriant hair, particularly. Hedda's beauty is sharper, more masculine or androgynous.

Above all, Thea is devoted, her desertion of her oafish step-family not withstanding. Her loyalty to Lovborg inspires her to work with George Tesman to reconstruct Eilert's manuscript, their "child," which, she believes, Lovborg destroyed before his death. That Hedda is excluded from participating in their work contributes to Hedda's despair and suicide.

Hedda Gabler

Hedda is a complex character torn by opposing desires that make her both victim and victimizer. Her willfulness completely dominates the play, so much so that the other characters, even the more intriguing ones□Eilert Lovborg and Judge Brack seem to exist primarily to help sculpt her character in high relief.

Hedda is selfish, proud, and cold, cruelly heedless of the pain she inflicts on others in her efforts to satisfy the inner desires that she is unwilling to deal with honestly or directly. Inhibited by her upbringing, she is unwilling to sacrifice her own comfort to satisfy those longings, even though she finds her respectable marriage wearisome and her doting husband contemptible. Instead of dealing openly with her dissatisfaction and her growing fear of drowning in boredom, she becomes desperate, even hysterical, as is revealed in her sometimes treacherous and destructive behavior.

First of all, she rejects George's efforts to bring her closer to his family. In fact, from the start, she seems bent on ruining George's ties to his past. She refuses to address his Aunt Juliana with the familiar form of the pronoun "you" and, instead, treats her rudely. She also threatens to dismiss Berta, the loyal family servant. But her calculated coldness towards the Tesmans is most pronounced in her total lack of concern for George's Aunt Rina, whose death seems to affect Hedda not at all.

Secondly, Hedda responds only negatively to her new role as wife. Most particularly, she refuses to accept her own pregnancy, something in which she is unable to take any joy at all. She seems to sense that a child will forever bind her to a life of suffocating boredom. At best, marriage seems only to offer her a sort of sanctuary from a far more exciting but dangerous world beyond, the world of Eilert Lovborg, a world that she

perceives as romantic and beautiful but also terrifying. She does not love George, and she deeply resents having to rely on him for security, but she has almost a parasitical need for his respectability.

Thirdly, Hedda attempts to manipulate others, either from spite or to satisfy her needs vicariously. The doting George is an easy pawn in Hedda's cruel games. So is Thea Elvsted, a woman too trusting of Hedda's seeming good will. Hedda's jealousy of Thea, a feeling that extends back into their school days, makes her betray the woman's confidence, setting in motion the tragedy that at the last will destroy both Lovborg and Hedda. It particularly goads Hedda that Thea has played a major role in Eilert's reclamation, corralling his free spirit and directing his energies in a way she herself was unable or unwilling to do. Her dislike of Thea goes yet deeper, however. Thea, as her appearance suggests, is warm and engaging, even sensual, whereas Hedda, though attractive, is steely and distant. Thea's large, blue eyes are fixed with "an inquiring expression," while Hedda's "steel-grey eyes express a cold, unruffled repose." Most especially, Hedda is obsessed with Thea's luxuriant and abundant hair, which she treats like a hated thing to be destroyed, almost as if it were a reminder of the passion that, from fear, she represses in herself. Her own hair is described by Ibsen as "not particularly abundant."

As long as Hedda is able to manipulate others, she can deal with her dangerous passions, including her sexuality. She had once driven Eilert off, threatening him with her father's pistols, and she threatens Brack in the same way. However, her options run out when Brack gets her in a compromising position, one in which she can be manipulated, something that she will not endure. Her only alternative is to take her own life.

While it is impossible to excuse Hedda's selfish and destructive character, at least some of the blame for her behavior rests with external influences, particularly her upbringing and the social dictates of her age. As the daughter of a general, she had learned to shoot and ride□hard, masculine activities that did not fit a respectable woman's role. That she is unable to make a mature adjustment to a feminine role, surrendering her freedom, is not entirely her fault.

Aunt Julia

See Miss Juliana Tesman

Eilert Lovborg

Eilert Lovborg is George Tesman's potential nemesis. Unlike Tesman, he is both a visionary and genius, but he is cursed with an inability to moderate his behavior. He carries disreputability on his back, luggage from a past in which he ruined his reputation by unspecified but dissolute conduct. However, when he first appears, he has renewed

hopes. He has been inspired by Thea Elvsted, who has both prompted his reformation and been his able assistant in his scholarship and writing. He has also published a successful book and is close to finishing its more brilliant sequel.

Newly arrived in Christiania, Lovborg hopes to befriend George and interest him in his work, even though he is a threat to Tesman. He also attempts to refrain from any activity that might lead to a lapse into scandalous activity. However, his reformation proves both fragile and tragic when Hedda, his old love, reveals to him that Thea lacks sufficient faith in his self-control. He begins drinking, then goes off to Judge Brack's party. In the early morning, after heavy imbibing, he carelessly drops his manuscript on the street, where Tesman picks it up. It is later destroyed by Hedda, leading to Eilert's death and her own.

Lovborg offers a sharp contrast to Tesman. He is a disreputable and somewhat jaded genius, whereas George is a totally respectable and ingenuous plodder. Eilert has a creative, moody, and somewhat arrogant spirit; Tesman is unimaginative but steady and diligent. Hedda finds the latter boring but safe, and the former exciting but threatening.

Mrs. Rysing

See Mrs. Elvsted

George Tesman

George Tesman is a well-intentioned young man on his way to becoming a harmless drudge. He is a research scholar whose chief abilities, "collecting and arranging," are more clerical than insightful. He also seems more devoted to the minutia of history, the domestic industries of medieval Brabant, than he is to his wife, Hedda, around whom he usually seems doltish and imperceptive. He is unaware, for example, that she is pregnant, a fact that does not escape his Aunt Juliana. He also seems insensitive to Hedda's incivility and sarcasm, as well as her obvious discontent and bitterness.

On the other hand, George is devoted to his aunts, especially Juliana, who has been like a surrogate mother to him. He cares for her deeply, and he is upset that Hedda finds herself unable to develop a familiar relationship with her. To Hedda, Juliana is too much a busybody and too cloying in her affection.

Although professionally ambitious, Tesman is also essentially honest and fair. He recognizes in Lovborg the visionary genius that he utterly lacks, knowing, for example, that he could never make projections about the future the way Eilert has done in his manuscript sequel to his successful book. At the end of the play, he is willing to put aside his own work to collaborate with Mrs. Elvsted in an effort to reconstruct Lovborg's destroyed manuscript.

Tesman both bores and annoys Hedda. He treats life like his work, unimaginatively. At times he acts like a nincompoop, especially in his habit of responding to the most

serious turn of events with the same inane enthusiasm accorded matters of no consequence. His tag expression, "fancy that," registers his apparently equal astonishment at the fact that his aunt has bought a new bonnet as, at the end, the fact that Hedda has shot and killed herself.

Hedda Tesman

See Hedda Gabler

Miss Juliana Tesman

Juliana Tesman, George Tesman's maiden aunt, has a deep affection for her nephew, who regards her with equal fondness. She is, in fact, a parental figure for Tesman, who calls her "father and mother in one" to him.

Juliana, who is sixty-five, is also devoted to her sister, George's Aunt Rina, who is an invalid. Juliana selflessly cares for her, and when she dies, Juliana immediately starts thinking about taking in an invalid boarder whom she might nurse. Her life, in short, is given over to ministering to the needs of others. She is the quintessential nurse, willing to sacrifice herself for others. Only in that does she find much meaning in life. In this respect, and in most others, she is a stark contrast to Hedda, who detests her.

Thea

See Mrs. Elvsted

Themes

Betrayal

At a critical point near the end of Act II of *Hedda Gabler,* the titular character betrays the trust of Mrs. Elvsted by revealing Thea's fears regarding Lovborg. Hedda does this out of pure malice. She is jealous of Thea's influence over Eilert, a man with whom Hedda had once been involved but, afraid of her own passions, had driven off (at gunpoint). Hedda's betrayal is the last manifestation of a hatred that extends all the way back to her school years, when she had bullied Thea. She despised the younger woman from a deep-rooted jealousy of Thea's comfortable and natural femininity. The betrayal starts a chain of tragic events in motion, ultimately leading to Lovborg's death and Hedda's suicide.

Courage and Cowardice

One admission that Hedda openly makes to Lovborg is her fear of scandal, which prompts him to charge that she is a "coward at heart," which she confirms. It was her fear of scandal that compelled Hedda to drive Eilert away, a fear that overwhelmed her love for him. Lovborg, as a free spirit, had represented too much of a risk, for he had already been tainted by his scandalous, immoderate behavior.

Although she, unlike Thea Elvsted, is unwilling to be drawn into Eilert's life again, to sacrifice her respectability, she is willing to sacrifice him. She provides him with a pistol, expecting him to exit life with a grand and triumphant display of scorn for the tedium and convention of human existence. From his death, Hedda hopes to confirm that there is still beauty in the world and partake of it vicariously. She is, however, deluded by her romantic fantasies, even less capable of guiding Eilert's behavior than Thea Elvsted had been. He destroys Hedda's triumphant vision by accidently shooting himself in the abdomen. In the play's final irony, it is Hedda who shoots herself in the temple, not in a grand escape from life but from a cowardly fear of scandal and an unwillingness to become Judge Brack's sexual pawn.

Deception

Hedda, from selfish motives, uses deception as a tool in her efforts to manipulate others, particularly her husband and Mrs. Elvsted. Because they are both forthright and somewhat ingenuous, they are susceptible to Hedda's machinations. Hedda feigns a friendship with Thea, one that she does not and never has felt. She is, in fact, jealous of the younger woman and despises her. In her relationship with George, Hedda never has been honest. She finds him and their marriage boring, but she is unwilling to confront him with such truths for fear of losing the secure respectability that he provides. He is, as she says, "correctness itself." He is also a man with good if dull prospects.

Hedda is more open with Judge Brack, possibly because she recognizes in him a kindred spirit, a fellow deceiver, one who is too sly to fool. She knows that Brack's friendship with George is at least part sham. He also hopes to manipulate Tesman, ingratiating himself in order to enter a triangular relationship with the Tesmans, which, through innuendo, Brack suggests will involve more than a Platonic friendship with Hedda. She is able to play a verbal cat and mouse game with Brack until he gains the upper hand; it is the prospect of submitting to his will that compels her to destroy herself.

Duty and Responsibility

Hedda Gabler is a study in contrasts. Both Juliana Tesman and Thea Elvsted are foils to Hedda, for in their distinct ways they reveal that duty and responsibility must arise from a loyalty prompted by love, not fear. Unlike Hedda, Juliana is a selfless person, willing to sacrifice her life for those she loves: her sister, Rina, and her nephew, George. She profoundly annoys Hedda, who cannot understand how such devotion can give Juliana a sufficient purpose in life.

Thea Elvsted has a similar selflessness, but her circumstances are very different. She is willing to sacrifice her reputation in her love for Lovborg, leaving behind a loveless, joyless marriage. Society might condemn her for betraying her duty and responsibility, but Ibsen makes it obvious that society would be wrong. She had been exploited, turned into a mere household servant in her marriage to the Sheriff. In following Lovborg to Christiania, Thea is heedless of imminent scandal, showing the moral courage that Hedda lacks. The difference is that Thea allows love to guide her, an emotion that Hedda represses in allowing her fears to rule her.

Good and Evil

"Evil" is too strong an adjective to apply to Hedda in any absolute sense. She does exhibit self-centered traits, as do most intriguing, dramatic villains, but these tendencies are muted by the playwright's dedication to realism. Hedda's wretched behavior cannot be forgiven, but at least it can be partially understood. It comes not from the deep recesses of a corrupt soul but from emotional needs that have been warped by environmental influences□her upbringing by a military father and her context within a morally strict social climate.

Despite this background, Hedda is proud and wanton in her cruelty. She cares little that she inflicts pain on others. She burns Lovborg's manuscript, not from love for her husband, which she leads George to believe, but from utter spite and jealousy. She views the work as Eilert and Thea's surrogate child, something to be destroyed because it was created from a love that she deeply resents and cannot understand. No less vicious is her effort to shape Eilert's final destiny, the "beautiful" and "triumphant" death she envisions for him. Her misdirected passion only destroys, for in Eilert's death there is no beauty at all, only a terrible waste of genius.

The shame is that to be good in Hedda's terms means living with unrelieved boredom, married to a "proper" but dull, plodding, and predictable scholar whose only virtue is his "correctness" in all things. Without real love or devotion, her duties and responsibilities become major irritants. She reacts with precipitous and thoughtless behavior, running the gamut between the petty and the tragic.

Sex Roles

Much of the con flict in *Hedda Gabler* arises from Hedda's resistance to the role of wife and mother, a role defined by the straight-laced, paternalistic society of the time and place. Women were expected to behave in accordance with traditional values that placed them in subservient and dependant relationships with men, from whose labors and leisure activities, both by custom and law, they were largely excluded. One hope they might have is that they could have a positive influence on men, such as Thea Elvsted has on Eilert Lovborg. Hedda even imagines that she might have a similar impact on George. She hopes to persuade him to enter politics,where, because of her ability to manipulate him, she might yield some clandestine but substantial power. However, when she confides her hopes in Judge Brack, he dampens her enthusiasm with observations about George's unsuitability for and disinterest in politics.

Hedda clearly feels both trapped and bored by her role. Her unwanted pregnancy only serves to remind her of just how much more confining her existence is to become, but she is paralyzed by her deep-rooted fear of scandal. She is simply unwilling to sacrifice respectability to be her honest self. The conflict between desire and fear finally perverts her character, turning her increasingly frantic and destructive. Her only respite is to cling to her father's pistols, symbols of a male freedom that she has lost as an adult and can never regain.

By contrast, Juliana Tesman and Thea Elvsted are comfortable and untroubled in their roles. Juliana, as nurse and caretaker for her sister, is selfless. Her respectable role is personally rewarding. Thea, who has sacrificed her reputation by abandoning her husband, is untroubled by such things. She sees that her path lies outside of respectability, and she is not afraid to follow it. Hedda scorns both women, masking her envy with contempt. It galls her that they are both at peace with themselves, something she can never be.

Victim and Victimization

Paradoxically, Hedda is both victim and victimizer. In her desperate boredom, she attempts to use others, even for petty amusement. As she confesses to Judge Brack, she had known that the bonnet about which she complains in Act I was not old and did not belong to Berta, but she could not resist her cruel whimsy. At first, there is little harm done. Besides, Hedda's discontent enlists some sympathy, for her husband is something of a ninny, who, for all his doting behavior, is all but oblivious of her needs.

Hedda must bear the responsibility for the marriage, however. As she acknowledges, she had been the one to fashion it, not from love, but from her need for comfort and respectability. That she cannot abide either her husband or her marriage is her own fault, and in that sense she is her own victim. She responds with anger and resentment, taking her desperation out on others, those she envies because they have found a contentment that completely eludes her.

At the same time, Hedda is very vulnerable. The fears that had led her to reject Eilert Lovborg and enter a loveless marriage with George Tesman finally ensnare her in Brack's power, something that she can not tolerate. The alternative is scandal, which Hedda elects to evade by suicide, her final destructive act.

Style

Setting

While it is important, the physical setting of *Hedda Gabler*□the Tesmans' newly purchased villa in Christiania, Norway□is of less importance than the social environment of the time and place. The comfortably furnished house reflects both the class status of the Tesmans and their future expectations. In the first act, Hedda makes it clear that they plan to move beyond mere comfort to new levels of luxury. Her old piano, unsuited for the drawing room decor, must be moved into another room, to be replaced by a second, more elegant piano□ at best a frivolous and impractical expense. Hedda wants both the security of respectability and the extravagant lifestyle of the wealthy, something threatened by Lovborg's arrival.

There is a price to be paid, though, a price that makes the villa a kind of prison. Against her innermost desires, Hedda must act like a proper wife, deferring to her husband's authority. She attempts to feign that role, but she finds it extremely boring. She grows desperate, especially when George warns that his appointment is no certainty. Fearing the loss of comfort as much as the loss of respectability, Hedda destroys Eilert's manuscript and bamboozles George into believing that she did it out of love for him. Hedda will not live in such a cage unless it is extremely well-appointed and all her material needs are met. She is simply that selfish and abusive of others.

Structure

Hedda Gabler, a four-act play, has what at the time was probably the most common formal pattern of dividing full-length plays into discrete segments. Works from earlier eras are usually divided into five acts, while more modern plays are generally divided into either three acts or, as is the case with many contemporary plays, into two acts. As is also traditional, the acts of *Hedda Gabler* mark divisions in time, segments in which significant action occurs over the course of two days. The plot is linear in its progression, strictly adhering to a straight-forward, chronological order.

Equally important, each act reaches a climactic moment when something decisive or irreversible is said or done. These are memorable moments, when, for example, at the end of the second act, Hedda burns Eilert's manuscript or, at the end of the play, kills herself with one of her father's pistols. Each act has the classic dramatic structure characterizing the play as a whole, and the warp and woof of each is a rising action that takes the whole to a new plateau of tension. In short, *Hedda Gabler,* provides an excellent example of what constitutes "a well-made play."

Realism

Like the other social-problem or thesis plays of Ibsen, *Hedda Gabler* follows the tenets of realism prevalent in late nineteenth-century Europe. Principal among these was the idea that the writer should render life both objectively and faithfully, concentrating on fairly ordinary people who face problems that can only be resolved in a manner that is true to life. In his realistic works, Ibsen sought to capture a sense of reality by using the characteristics of ordinary conversation, unencumbered with ornate diction and insistent poetic effects. In their cadences and diction his characters speak like real people, if, from dramatic necessity, somewhat more effortlessly and pointedly, and, in Norwegian at least, somewhat more sonorously.

Generally, too, characters in such works have discernible and valid motives for their behavior, even if they are complex, as they are in Hedda's case. If they are not clear, they must at least have verisimilitude, that quality that allows the viewer to conclude that even very puzzling characters are true to life and have validity. Ibsen allows his audience glimpses into Hedda's deeper motives, those things which do not wholly surface in the play's verbal matrix but are suggested, for example, both in persistent symbols and in her actions.

It is in *Hedda Gabler* that Ibsen takes his realism in drama to his limits. It has been described as the dramatist's most objective work, almost clinical in its coldness and distance. His plot driver, Hedda, is a vicious, petty, and extremely selfish woman, for whom, in Ibsen's time, few could find an iota of sympathy. Perhaps to underscore her brusque incivility and abrupt mood changes, Ibsen experimented with a new technique, eliminating long speeches altogether. He also used insistent words and phrases to reveal and even encapsulate his characters, a prime example being the "fancy that" of George Tesman.

Foil

An important device used by Ibsen in *Hedda Gable* is the character foil. Contrasting figures help define their counterparts, providing a heightened sense of each character's personality. Hedda has two principal foils: Thea Elvsted and Juliana Tesman. Both women are very unselfish and at peace with life, willing to sacrifice themselves for others, even though, in Thea's case, it will destroy her reputation. Hedda's paralyzing fear of losing respectability stands in sharp contrast.

George Tesman and Eilert Lovborg are also foils. Tesman is "correctness" itself, a dull but steady plodder with a very limited imagination. His principal interest as scholar lies in rooting through the relics of the past, taking and organizing notes about the domestic industries of medieval Brabant. Lovborg, in contrast, is an erratic genius, prone to excess and easily drawn to hedonistic pleasures. As a visionary scholar, he is much more interested in the past for what it may reveal about the future, the unknown. He is, however, arrogant, self-destructive, and, at the last, somewhat pathetic.

Symbol

Ibsen makes it impossible to ignore some important symbols in *Hedda Gabler*. Primary are the pistols, Thea Elvsted's hair, and Eilert's manuscript. Because of the association made by both Hedda and Thea, the most obvious of these is Lovborg's manuscript. In the minds of both, the work is Eilert and Thea's "child," born of their love and affection for each other. It is partly from her intense jealousy that Hedda destroys it and sets out to break the bond between Thea and Lovborg.

Less open in symbolic significance is Thea's luxurious and abundant hair, especially as it contrasts with Hedda's own. Thea's hair is a point of fixation for Hedda, something that she despised in Thea when the two were schoolgirls; it continues to annoy her during the course of the play. Thea's hair seems to embody those qualities in Thea's character that Hedda lacks, including an engaging femininity that Hedda envies, perhaps even a sensuality that Hedda hates because she represses it in herself.

The pistols, on the other hand, suggest masculinity, and have long been identified as phallic symbols. It is noteworthy that both George Tesman and Judge Brack are appalled by the fact that Hedda plays with them. As extensions of Hedda's character, the guns suggest a masculinity, a hardening that has resulted from her repressed femininity. They represent the freedom that Hedda longs for but must sacrifice to respectability.

Historical Context

When Ibsen returned to his native Norway in 1891, he journeyed to a land that to a great degree was isolated from the revolutionary movements affecting both society and culture in the more cosmopolitan centers of Europe. That isolation was partly the result of inaccessibility. Modern communication and transportation were still in their infancy, awaiting the second major stage of the industrial revolution. The post and telegraph were the only real means of exchanging information over long distances, for the telephone was not yet in general use and wireless or radio communications were still the yet-to-be-realized dreams of Guglielmo Marconi and other inventors and engineers.

But Norway was also isolated in other ways. The dominate religion, Evangelical Lutheranism, was a conservative force in the social thinking of the country and one that, through his creative life, had not treated Ibsen well. The dramatist's frank treatment of taboo subjects and rigorous scrutiny of traditional mores offended many of his straightlaced countrymen. As a result, Ibsen was forced into a long artistic exile from his homeland.

A continent away, in the United States, as the historian Frederick Jackson Turner noted, the frontier was finally closing. In 1890, the last great Indian uprising was savagely crushed at the Battle of Wounded Knee, South Dakota, the final brutal "taming" of the West. The United States would soon look across the seas for new challenges and new opportunities.

Meanwhile, the British Empire was still in a major stage of development, making inroads in the near and far East by dint of its superior naval power. Indeed, it ruled the seas, though in Africa and other undeveloped areas of the world it had major competitors, including Germany and France, which, like Great Britain, looked for raw materials and markets to exploit.

The seeds of more revolutionary changes were also sown in the 1890s. By the middle of the decade, Sigmund Freud had begun developing his psychoanalytical method, Louis and Auguste Lumière had introduced moving pictures, William Roentgen had discovered X-rays, and Joseph Thomson had isolated the electron. The world was still reeling from the influence of two important thinkers, Karl Marx and Charles Darwin, whose impact was being felt in everything from religion and politics to arts and letters. Marx's theories of group ownership and a government run by the people were the first seeds of the communist movement that would later sweep across Eastern Europe and Asia. Darwin's theories of evolution challenged the religious notions of immaculate conception and divine spark. Great changes were underway, and they were coming at a rate never before experienced.

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, *fin de siecle* ("end of the century") artists were selfconsciously abandoning traditional and conventional forms and techniques in favor of more experimental ones. It was a complex period of transition, having as one of its maxims "art for art's sake." It also reflected the new philosophies that called so much

into doubt. The naturalistic school, for example, viewed humanity on the lower end of the socio-economic ladder, trapped there by environmental forces beyond its control.

Two fin de siecle British writers of importance were Oscar Wilde *(The Importance of Being Earnest)* and George Bernard Shaw *(Man and Superman),* both of whom wrote plays. Shaw was Ibsen's bulldog in England, his great apologist and advocate. In the course of his own long life, he would become the greatest British dramatist of his age, and, next to Shakespeare, the second greatest in the history of British theater.

Critical Overview

Hedda Gabler was published in December of 1890, a few weeks before it was first performed. Norwegian, English, German, French, Russian, and Dutch versions were printed almost simultaneously, with the result that the consternation many readers felt quickly spread throughout Europe. The play garnered the worst press reviews of any of Ibsen's mature plays, even *Rosmersholm,* which had been critically mauled four years earlier. The newer work offended many and puzzled more critics, who, as Hans Heiberg noted in *Ibsen: A Portrait of the Artist,* found the main character too monstrous, a "revolting female creature" who "received neither sympathy nor compassion." Just as damning, the work seemed to lack a message, a corrective purpose, the sort of social critique for which Ibsen had become so famous.

Hedda's character was the principal target of much of the negative criticism. Quoted in *Ibsen: A Biography,* Alfred Sinding-Larsen called her "a horrid miscarriage of the imagination, a monster in female form to whom no parallel can be found in real life," suggesting that the great realist had completely missed the mark in creating her and that he was only "pandering to contemporary European fashion." Similar complaints came from even the most ardent admirers of Ibsen, including Bredo Morgenstierne. Reprinted in *Ibsen,* the critic opined: "we do not understand Hedda Gabler, nor believe in her. She is not related to anyone we know." Also quoted in *Ibsen,* Gerhard Gran observed that while the play aroused his curiosity, it did not and never could satisfy it. For Gran, a figure as complex as Hedda was not suited to drama and could only be satisfactorily treated in the novel; the play, he argued, only "leaves us with a sense of emptiness and betrayal."

Much of the criticism was lodged on moral grounds, renewed objections that Ibsen had faced with earlier plays like *A Doll's House* (1879) and *Ghosts* (1881). Some Scandinavian critics suggested that the printed play "should not be found on the table of any decent family." Others dismissed the work as either too puzzling or too decadent. Harald Hansen, reviewing stage productions of 1891, dismissed it in as single sentence as "an ungrateful play which hardly any of the participants will remember with real satisfaction" *(Ibsen)*.

Ibsen and his play had their champions, including Henrik Jæger in Norway and Herman Bang in Denmark. Jæger, who had once gone on tour lecturing against A *Doll's House,* had become a pro-Ibsen convert. He saw Hedda as a very realistic, earth-born female, "a tragic character who is destroyed by the unharmonious and irreconcilable contrasts in her own character" *(Ibsen)*. He suggested that the poor reception of *Hedda Gabler* stemmed from the general unpopularity of tragedy, not from faults in the play. Meanwhile, Bang, in some of the play's most perceptive early criticism, argued that Hedda was the female counterpart of a familiar Ibsen character, the egotistical male. Without the socially-sanctioned outlets afforded men, she is driven "into isolation and self-adoration." "Hedda," Bang observed, "has no source of richness in herself and must constantly seek it in others, so that her life becomes a pursuit of sensation and

experiment; and her hatred of bearing a child is the ultimate expression of her egotism, the sickness that brings death"*(Ibsen)*.

Most criticism, both of the printed play and first staged productions, was hostile, which, in retrospect, suggests a remarkable short-sightedness on the part of Ibsen's contemporaries. Now, over a century later, *Hedda Gable*r is considered one of the principal stars in the dramatist's artistic crown, and it has been for some time. In his 1971 biography *Ibsen,* Michael Meyer said that the work was then "perhaps the most universally admired of Ibsen's plays," and noted that it was Ibsen's most frequently performed work in England. Today, its chief competitor in Ibsen revivals is *A Doll's House,* in part because of its protagonist Nora Helmer's appeal to the women's liberation movement. Unlike Hedda, there is nothing vicious about Nora, who is mostly pure victim in a society under male control.

Interestingly enough, it is because Hedda so completely dominates her play that her role soon became very attractive to actresses, and because it proved a great vehicle for the most talented and highly regarded among them, it evolved from its maligned beginning into a stage favorite. Among those who undertook the role were leading international stars, including Eleonora Duse, Eve Le Gallienne, Nazimova, Mrs. Patrick Campbell, Claire Bloom, Joan Greenwood, Ingrid Bergman, and Glen-da Jackson. That is the final irony, for it was the "monstrous" Hedda who, in the minds of the early critics, condemned the play, whereas it is now her character that makes it one of Ibsen's most durable works. The attraction of the part remains, despite the fact that the society that the play depicts is virtually extinct.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Fiero is a Ph. D., now retired, who formerly taught drama and play writing at the University of Southwestern Louisiana. In this essay he investigates the significance of the secondary female characters in Hedda Gabler, *with a focus on their function both as foils to Hedda and as women whothemselves fail to meet the woman's primary role as wife-mother in the conventional thinking of the time.*

Because the titular character so completely dominates Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler,* discussions of the play from a gender perspective seem to almost exclusively focus on Hedda. It is easy to understand why. She is clearly the central figure, the one whose grating dissatisfaction arises from a conflict pitting her needs against conventional notions of propriety and female fulfillment as an adoring, dutiful, submissive wife and nurturing, loving mother. She is, moreover, the play's prime mover, the plot driver, the one who has the most at stake, and the one whose name answers the most important question: whose play is it? It is, of course, her play, pure and simple.

Hedda struggles violently against the conventional wife-mother role, a role she does not want but is mortally afraid to reject. She suffers most from what Gail Finney called in *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen*"victimization by motherhood"; she is unable to face or to escape the suffocating reality of marriage and motherhood. That surely is as big a factor in her self-destruction as is her fear of being held sexual hostage to the sinister Judge Brack, who threatens to expose her to scandal, of which she is at least equally terrified.

More is learned about Hedda than any of the other female characters. She alone is prone to self-analysis, to confessing her fears and dissatisfactions, which, ironically, she reveals to the two men besides her husband who have pursued her: Judge Brack and Eilert Lovborg. Hedda has no real female friends, no confidantes with whom she is either close or honest. In fact, she perceives each of the other women as an antagonist. The fact that they seem at peace with themselves profoundly annoys her and contributes to her mounting hysteria. Towards Thea Elvsted, she feigns a friendship, and she quickly betrays what trust Thea places in her. She is also meanspirited towards her husband's well-intentioned aunt, Juliana, whom she views as an insufferable busybody, an unwelcome intruder, and a possible threat to Hedda's control of George. She is also determined to rid her house of Berta, the household servant whose loyalty to the Tesman family daunts Hedda as well.

Also, just as there is much more divulged about Hedda's past, there is also much more implied about Hedda than any other female character in the play. As Finney claimed, "the influence of her motherless, father-dominated upbringing is everywhere evident." Her inheritance reveals itself in her masculine traits, her fondness for horses and pistols, for example, or her excitement over the impending contest between Eilert Lovborg and her husband George, or her interest in manipulating George into the male arena of politics, where she might exercise some real power. In some ways, she seems

more masculine than George, the fussy foster-child of two maiden aunts who is uninterested in politics and is afraid of Hedda's handling of her father's pistols.

George also seems prone to what from a male point of view seems to be a typical female trait: excited chatter about trivial matters. His ubiquitous "fancy that" seems more appropriate to the tea table than the smoking room, saloon, or other haunt that in Ibsen's time were visited exclusively by men, unless, as in some saloons, disreputable females women like the unseen "singing woman," Mademoiselle Diana, were allowed. To Hedda, the masculine ideal is represented by her father General Gabler. His portrait, a constant reminder of his influence, hangs in a prominent place in her inner sanctum, her room adjoining the drawing room. There are hints of an Electra complex, a deeply-rooted but repressed incestuous and terrorizing desire that is an important strain in Hedda's enigmatic character. Under her father's tutelage, she had become a fit masculine companion for him, but not one suited for her husband, who merely bores her. As for the woman's world, the society of the tea table, she is clearly a pariah, though certainly by willful choice.

The other women in *Hedda Gabler,* even those unseen, have one thing in common with Hedda. They are women who have either failed to meet the male ideal of woman as wife-mother or have rejected it, as Hedda, the least suited to the task, desires to do. They also differ from Hedda in a vitally significant way: they have made peace with themselves. And therein they represent some of the limited alternatives to what society at large viewed as a woman's primary goal□marriage and motherhood. George Tesman's two aunts are maiden aunts, Thea Elvsted has fled a brutal and loveless marriage, and Berta, having given her life over to service, remains, presumably, unattached outside the Tesman family. Their relative contentment speaks volumes about Hedda's discontent, but they are, of course, very different kinds of women, interesting in their own right and not just because as foils they set off Hedda's more complex character.

Like so many secondary characters in drama, the other women of *Hedda Gabler* run much closer to stereotypes than the play's enigmatic protagonist. Two of them, Aunt Rina and Mademoiselle Diana, are superb examples of offstage characters whose presence is felt but never seen. The one is George Tesman's dying aunt; the other, "a mighty huntress of men," is a lady of pleasure for those who can afford her.

The unseen Diana is, in fact, one of those notorious fallen women. Talk about her is strained through polite euphemisms which only thinly veil that she is a prostitute, though not of the crass sidewalk variety. She and her friends entertain gentlemen, both in salons and boudoirs, with the implication, too, that they are under some protection from the authorities, thanks to a double standard that permitted respectable men a sexual license denied to respectable women. Judge Brack tells Hedda that Eilert Lovborg had formerly been one of Diana's "most enthusiastic protectors," even before his dissolution and disgrace. The implication is that during his wooing of Hedda, frustrated by her repression of sexual passion, Eilert had found easy solace in the ready arms of Mademoiselle Diana. Lovborg's renewed association with Diana helps ignite Hedda's perverse desire to see Eilert redeem himself through a triumphant and majestic suicide,

a kind of ersatz expression of the sexual freedom Hedda had repressed in herself, if only because, unlike Mademoiselle Diana, she could never thumb her nose at respectability.

A sickly invalid, Rina is most important because she is her sister's main burden. Since Juliana is a selfless and loving person, she bears the burden with affection, dignity, and grace, all to Hedda's annoyance. To her, Rina's death only means that Juliana may become a more frequent and troublesome visitor, even though Juliana confides to both Hedda and George that she plans to devote herself to caring for some other sickly person. She tells them that "it's such an absolute necessity for me to have one to live for." Juliana, a dedicated nurse, is simply beyond the selfish Hedda's comprehension. Juliana lives only for others, but Hedda lives only for herself. From Hedda's perspective, Juliana is both a fool and a threat.

Juliana is more than a nurse, however. For good or ill, she has also been a surrogate mother and father to George, as he cheerfully admits in the opening of the play. She and her sister helped shape her nephew's adult character, explaining why George utterly lacks the strong-willed and arrogant hardness of his wife. Unwittingly, they turned George into someone safe for Hedda. She can easily manipulate him, verbally beating down whatever objections the docile and compliant fellow raises. As regards Hedda, George is "correctness itself' not only because he is a respectable man with good prospects but because he lacks the intestinal fortitude to challenge her. She has none of the fear of George that Lovborg and Brack inspire in her.

Berta is another selfless woman who finds meaning and satisfaction in her service to others. In Act One, it is disclosed that she has been a loyal retainer in the Tesman family for years, and that with George's marriage to Hedda, she has come to the newlyweds' villa as servant and caretaker. Nothing is disclosed of her private life, but she speaks of "all the blessed years" that she spent with the Tesmans, suggesting that she has found fulfillment only in their employ and that she has had neither husband nor children. George and Juliana both treat her with affection and respect. Also, as if she were a member of the family, they confide in her, something that Hedda cannot do. That and her overly-protective behavior towards George irk Hedda, who wants to rid the house of Berta and threatens to do so with a petty complaint about her carelessness. Like Juliana, Berta represents a threat to Hedda's control over George, something that she will not tolerate *noblesse oblige* ("nobility obligates," a notion that those of high social standing were required to behave in an honorable manner) and familial gratitude be damned.

Hedda's most troubling female adversary is, of course, Mrs. Elvsted. She does not stand in Hedda's way of controlling George; she stands in Hedda's way of a greater challenge, controlling Eilert Lovborg. Hedda's frightful dislike of Theais mixed with intense jealousy. It goads her that someone who seems like such a simpleton has been able to redeem Lovborg from his recklessness and inspire his work. Thea, for all her experience, acts like an innocent compared to Hedda. She is gullible and vulnerable, easily duped by Hedda into believing that Hedda is her friend, believing that Hedda's

girlhood antagonism had been entirely vitiated over the years. She does not sense Hedda's spite and is both surprised and hurt when Hedda betrays her confidence.

Thea is, however, both a wholly sympathetic character and unlike Hedda□a survivor. She has devoted herself to redeeming the dissolute Lovborg with a love that he cannot fully return, even though she has sacrificed her reputation in the process by fleeing from her loveless and enslaving marriage to Sheriff Elvsted. It is her admirable courage and devotion that make Lovborg seem like an arrogant ingrate, someone at least partly deserving of his inept death. In fact, apart from his genius, nothing about his character is quite so memorable as his insufferable dismissal of Thea as being "too stupid " to understand the kind of love that he believes he has shared with Hedda.

Thea's eagerness to immerse herself with George Tesman in an effort to reconstruct Lovborg's manuscript has the aura of a magnificent obsession about it and argues that it is Thea who sees the truth about Eilert that the man's ideas are both more admirable and important than his life. Ironically, too, it is she who triumphs over her rival, Hedda, winning not Eilert but George, making him her co-conspirator in their efforts to breathe new life into Thea and Eilert's destroyed child, Lovborg's brilliant work. As much as Hedda's own unborn child and Brack's endgame sexual advantage, Thea's triumph drives Hedda to despair and suicide, proving that even in Ibsen's stark realism there is adequate room for at least a modicum of poetic justice.

Source: John W. Fiero, for *Drama for Students,* Gale, 1999.

Critical Essay #2

In this excerpt, Cardullo compares and contrasts elements of legacy in Ibsen's Hedda Gabler *and* Ghosts.

In Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler,* Hedda's ideal (to live beautifully, free from the constraints of her socialization) dies with her, but Løvborg' s ideal (a book on the future of civilization, in which he frees himself, and potentially others, from the poisonous constraints of society by writing a prescription for that society's health or liberation) lives□it is reconstructed from notes by Tesman and Thea. Hedda kills herself *with child:* Løvborg and Thea speak of the manuscript as *their* "child." Hedda dies to achieve the ideal she could not achieve in life; Løvborg kills himself (or is killed in a mistaken attempt to retrieve his manuscript from "Mademoiselle Diana's boudoir") because he felt he had achieved, or helped to make possible, the ideal through his book and then senselessly lost the manuscript.

In the same way as Osvald' s paralysis of mind could be said to be growing throughout *Ghosts,* to turn him at the end into a symbol of the paralysis of mind in Norwegian society, so too could the notes for Løvborg's book that Thea produces in *Hedda Gabler* be said to have been "growing throughout the play, to be given birth at the end as a symbol of hope for the future of civilization. Thea and Løvborg had spoken of the manuscript as their "child," as I mention above, and thus it is no accident that Thea "nurtures" these notes in the pocket of her dress throughout the play, (she says at one point, "Yes. I took them with me when I left home□they're here in my pocket□"), to produce them at the right moment for reassembly by herself and Tesman.

In the same way that Ibsen leads us to believe that in Osvald an artist of great promise is destroyed, ultimately, by the paralysis of mind of his society, so too does the playwright lead us to believe that in Hedda, a person of potential creativity, is destroyed by her upbringing as the daughter of the aristocratic General Gabler. Martin Esslin writes that

[Hedda's] sense of social superiority prevents her from realizing her genuine superiority as a potential creative personality. If the standards prescribed by the laws of noblesse oblige had not prevented her from breaking out into the freedom of moral and social emancipation, she might have been able to turn her passionate desire for beauty (which is the hallmark of real, spiritual, as distinct from social, aristocracy) to the creation of beauty, living beauty rather than merely a beautiful death. It is the creative energy, frustrated and damned up, that is finally converted into the malice and envy, the destructive rage, the intellectual dishonesty that lead to Hedda Gabler's downfall. *(Reflections: Essays on Modern Theatre,* Doubleday, 1969.)

Like Osvald, Hedda is a potential artist. Like Mrs. Alving, she has no true moment of recognition or perception: Ibsen is interested at the end more in whether Løvborg' s ideal will be promulgated, to the benefit of future Heddas.

Source: Bert Cardullo, "Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* and *Ghosts*'" in the *Explicator,* Vol. 46, no. 1, Fall, 1987, pp 23-24.

Critical Essay #3

Beerbohm is noted as one of the prominent voices of early twentieth-century drama criticism. In this review, which was originally published on October 10, 1903, he examines the expectations of typical theatregoers and the manner in which Ibsen's Hedda Gabler *goes against such preconceptions and yet still manages to be a work of popular theatre.*

Eecosstoetchiayoomahnioeevahrachellopestibahn-tamahntafahnta ... shall I go on? No? You do not catch my meaning, when I write thus? I am to express myself, please, in plain English? If I wrote the whole of my article as I have written the beginning of it, you would, actually, refuse to read it? I am astonished. The chances are that you do not speak Italian, do not understand Italian when it is spoken. The chances are that Italian spoken from the stage of a theatre produces for you no more than the empty, though rather pretty, effect which it produces for me, and which I have tried to suggest phonetically in print. And yet the chances are also that you were in the large British audience which I saw, last Wednesday afternoon, in the Adelphi Theatre□that large, patient, respectful audience, which sat out the performance of *"Hedda Gabler."* Surely, you are a trifle inconsistent? You will not tolerate two columns or so of gibberish from me, and yet you will profess to have passed very enjoy-ably a whole afternoon in listening to similar gibberish from Signora Duse. Suppose that not only my article, but the whole of this week's Review were written in the fashion which you reject, and suppose that the price of the Review were raised from sixpence to ninepence (proportionately to the increased price for seats at the Adelphi when Signora Duse comes there). To be really consistent, you would have to pay, without a murmur, that ninepence, and to read, from cover to cover, that Review, and to enjoy, immensely, that perusal. An impossible feat? Well, just so would it be an impossible feat not to be bored by the Italian version of *"Hedda Gabler."* Why not confess your boredom? Better still, why go to be bored?

All this sounds rather brutal. But it is a brutal thing to object to humbug, and only by brutal means can humbug be combated, and there seems to me no form of humbug sillier and more annoying than the habit of attending plays that are acted in a language whereof one cannot make head or tail. Of course, I do not resent the mere fact that Signora Duse comes to London. Let that distinguished lady be made most welcome. Only, let the welcome be offered by appropriate people. There are many of them. There is the personnel of the embassy in Grosvenor Square. There are the organ-grinders, too, and the ice-cream men. And there are some other, some English, residents in London who have honourably mastered the charming Italian tongue. Let all this blest minority flock to the Adelphi every time, and fill as much of it as they can. But, for the most part, the people who, instead of staying comfortably at home, insist on flocking and filling are they to whom, as to me, Italian is gibberish, and who have not, as have I, even the excuse of a mistaken sense of duty. Perhaps they have some such excuse. Perhaps they really do feel that they are taking a means of edification. "We needs must praise the highest when we see it"; Duse is (we are assured) the highest; therefore we needs must see her, for our own edification, and go into rhapsodies. Such, perhaps, is

the unsound syllogism which these good folk mutter. I suggest, of what spiritual use is it to see the highest if you cannot understand it? Go round to the booksellers and buy Italian grammars, Italian conversation-books, the "Inferno," and every other possible means to a nodding acquaintance with Italian. Stick to your task; and then, doubtless, when next Signora Duse comes among us, you will derive not merely that edification which is now your secret objective, but also that gratification which you are so loudly professing. I know your rejoinder to that. "Oh, Duse's personality is so wonderful. Her temperament is so marvellous. And then her art! It doesn't matter whether we know Italian or not. We only have to watch the movements of her hands" (rhapsodies omitted) "and the changes of her face" (r. o.) "and the inflections of her voice" (r. o.) "to understand everything, positively *everything.* " Are you so sure? I take it that you understand more from the performance of an Italian play which you have read in an English translation than from the performance of an Italian play which never has been translated. There are, so to say, degrees in your omniscience. You understand more if you have read the translation lately than if a long period has elapsed since your reading of it. Are you sure that you would not understand still more if the play were acted in English? Of course you are. Nay, and equally of course, you are miserably conscious of all the innumerable things that escape you, that flit faintly past you. You read your English version, feverishly, like a timid candidate for an examination, up to the very last moment before your trial. Perhaps you even smuggle it in with you, for furtive cribbing. But this is a viva voce examination: you have no time for cribbing: you must rely on Signora Duse's voice, hands, face and your own crammed memory. And up to what point has your memory been crammed? You remember the motive of the play, the characters, the sequence of the scenes. Them you recognise on the stage. But do you recognise the masquerading words? Not you. They all flash past you, whirl round you, mocking, not to be caught, not to be challenged and unmasked. You stand sheepishly in their midst, like a solitary stranger strayed into a masked ball. Or, to reverse the simile, you lurch this way and that, clutching futile air, like the central figure in blindman' s buff. Occasionally you do catch a word or two. These are only the proper names, but they are very welcome. It puts you in pathetic conceit with yourself, for the moment, when from the welter of unmeaning vowels and consonants "Eilert Lövborg" or *"Hedda Gabler"* suddenly detaches itself, like a silver trout "rising" from a muddy stream. These are your only moments of comfort. For the rest, your irritation at not grasping the details prevents you from taking pleasure in your power to grasp the general effect.

I doubt even whether, in the circumstances, you can have that synthetic power fully and truly. It may be that what I am going to say about Signora Duse as Hedda Gabler is vitiated by incapacity to understand exactly her rendering of the part as a whole. She may be more plausibly like Hedda Gabler than she seems to me. Mark, I do not say that she may have conceived the part more intelligently, more rightly, with greater insight into Ibsen's meaning. And perhaps I should express myself more accurately if I said that Hedda Gabler may be more like Signora Duse than she seems to me. For this actress never stoops to impersonation. I have seen her in many parts, but I have never (you must take my evidence for what it is worth) detected any difference in her. To have seen her once is to have seen her always. She is artistically right or wrong according as whether the part enacted by her can or cannot be merged and fused into her own personality. Can Hedda Gabler be so merged and fused? She is self-centred. Her eyes

are turned inward to her own soul. She does not try to fit herself into the general scheme of things. She broods disdainfully aloof. So far so good; for Signora Duse, as we know her, is just such another. (This can be said without offence. The personality of an artist, as shown through his or her art, is not necessarily a reflection, and is often a flat contradiction□a complement□to his or her personality in life.) But Hedda is also a minx, and a ridiculous minx, and not a nice minx. Her revolt from the circumstances of her life is untinged with nobility. She imagines herself to be striving for finer things, but her taste is in fact not good enough for what she gets. One can see that Ibsen hates her, and means us to laugh at her. For that reason she "wears" much better than those sister-rebels whom Ibsen glorified. She remains as a lively satire on a phase that for serious purposes is out of date. She ought to be played with a sense of humour, with a comedic understanding between the player and the audience. Signora Duse is not the woman to create such an understanding. She cannot, moreover, convey a hint of minxishness: that quality is outside her rubric. Hedda is anything but listless. She is sick of a life which does not tickle her with little ready-made excitements. But she is ever alert to contrive these little excitements for herself. She is the very soul of restless mischief. Signora Duse suggested the weary calm of one who has climbed to a summit high above the gross world. She was as one who sighs, but can afford to smile, being at rest with herself. She was spiritual, statuesque, somnambulistic, what you will, always in direct opposition to eager, snappy, fascinating, nasty little Hedda Gabler. Resignedly she shot the pistol from the window. Resignedly she bent over the book of photographs with the lover who had returned. Resignedly she lured him to drunkenness. Resignedly she committed his MS. to the flames. Resignation, as always, was the keynote of her performance. And here, as often elsewhere, it rang false.

However, it was not the only performance of Hedda Gabler. There was another, and, in some ways, a better. While Signora Duse walked through her part, the prompter threw himself into it with a will. A more raucous whisper I never heard than that which preceded the Signora's every sentence. It was like the continuous tearing of very thick silk. I think it worried every one in the theatre, except the Signora herself, who listened placidly to the prompter's every reading, and, as soon as he had finished, reproduced it in her own way. This process made the matinée a rather long one. By a very simple expedient the extra time might have been turned to good account. How much pleasure would have been gained, and how much hypocrisy saved, if there had been an interpreter on the O.P. side, to shout in English what the prompter was whispering in Italian!

Source: Max Beerbohm, "An Hypocrisy in Playgoing" in his *Around Theatres,* Simon & Schuster, 1954 , pp. 277□81.

Adaptations

By the time film became commercially viable, Ibsen's reputation as one of the world's greatest dramatists was secure. In Europe and the United States, many early film directors tried their hand at adapting Ibsen's plays to the early cinema. *Hedda Gabler* was adapted to the silent screen at least three times: in the United States in 1917, by Frank Powell; in Italy in 1919, by Giovanni Pastrone; and in Germany in 1924, by Franz Eckstein.

A 1963 British television version of *Hedda Gabler,* directed by Alex Segal, cast major film stars Ingrid Bergman as Hedda, Trevor Howard as Lovborg, Michael Redgrave as Tesman, and Ralph Richardson as Judge (Assesor) Brack.

Another television version of the play was produced by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC-TV) in 1972. Directed by Waris Hussein, its cast includes Tom Bell, Ian McKellen, and Janet Suzman. A video version is available from Time-Life Multimedia in the United States.

A film version of the Royal Shakespeare Company' s stage production was released in the U. K. in 1975 under the title *Hedda*. Directed by Trevor Nunn, it features Glenda Jackson, Peter Eyre, Timothy West, Jennie Linden, and Patrick Stewart. It is generally available on video.

In 1976, Films for the Humanities issued an educational film entitled *The Theatre of Social Problems: Ibsen, Hedda,* featuring an abridged version of the play, which, with commentary, runs 60 minutes. Produced by Harold Mantell, directed by Philip Hedley, and narrated by Irene Worth, its cast includes Darlene Johnson, Brian Protheroe, Rhys McConnochie, Sam Kelley, and Sara Stephenson. It is available in both video and 16 mm. formats from Films for the Humanities.

Another British television version, directed by Deborah Warner, was first aired in 1993. The cast includes Fiona Shaw as Hedda, Nicholas Woodeson as Jorgen Tesman, Donal McCann as Judge Brack, Stephen Rea as Eilert Lovborg, Brid Brenan as Mrs. Elvsted, and Susan Colverd as Berte.

Topics for Further Study

Investigate the influence of Ibsen's drama on the women's rights and emancipation movements of his day.

Investigate "Ibsenism" in England in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, especially the dramatist's influence on Eleanor Marx (Karl Marx's youngest daughter), William Archer, and George Bernard Shaw.

Research realism and naturalism as literary movements of the late-nineteenth century, relating their tenets to Ibsen's dramatic technique and themes in*Hedda Gabler*. You may want toconsider reading Emile Zola's celebrated essay "Naturalism in the Theatre" (1880) in your investigation.

Much modern drama reflects the strong influence of Henrik Ibsen, Anton Chekhov, and August Strindberg. Investigate and compare their particular contributions to the development of twentieth-century theater.

Research the official morality of Ibsen's day that led to his notoriety and the condemnation and censorship of his plays, especially *Ghosts* and *Hedda Gabler*.

Compare and Contrast

1890s: The world stands on the threshold of the second major phase of the industrial revolution, revolutionary changes in communications and transportation, the advent of the automobile, airplane, radio, phonograph, and film. These innovations will bring isolated communities into virtual proximity with the cultural and political centers of the world.

Today: In the advanced nations of the world, the industrial revolution has ended. It is the time of technological revolution, leading the world into the space and information ages. Satellite communications and the computer make it possible for even the most isolated people to communicate with anyone in the world.

1890s: Puritanical codes of acceptable behavior govern the social mores of Ibsen's day. Throughout Europe, social sanctions against such things as pre-marital sex, divorce, and family abandonment are strong, forcing many people to live miserable lives. The so-called "Victorian underground " teems with prostitutes and thieves, many of whom are "fallen women" who had to resort to such a life or face abject poverty. Officially, however, moral sanctions in society were strict and penalties for infractions severe.

Today: Life in most post-industrial societies is permissive. In the United States, many marriages end in divorce. In many urban areas, single-parent families are prevalent, with pregnancy among unmarried teenage girls reaching epidemic proportions, despite the availability of birth-control drugs and devices. Homosexuality has not only been decriminalized, it has reached considerably wide acceptance, at least in some quarters. The overall nature of this "non-taboo" society has led many conservatives to call for a return to "family values" and the respectable morality of Ibsen's day.

1890s: Official and unofficial protectors of the strict community moral standards put theatrical performances under close scrutiny, and many have the authority either to shut down productions or lead boycotts or protests, some of which result in riots. Plays can even be censored before they are performed.

Today: Both on stage and in media, especially film, there is virtually no official censorship. In the United States, for example, whatever moral codes relate to the substance of produced and broadcast works are self-imposed by the industries themselves. Frank treatment of what were once considered indelicate subjects is common, as are nudity, sex, and violence. Only the boycott remains as a possible avenue of protest, and it is rarely effective.

1890s: In Ibsen's day, men and women live separate lives. Although there are various women's organizations dedicated to change, women remain "unliberated," except, perhaps, in groups on the fringes of respectable society. They are educated in their own finishing schools and are excluded from most professions. Much of their leisure time is spent in the company of other women, segregated from men. They lack political power because, even in the democracies, they lack the vote. Their possibilities in life outside of

marriage are limited, unless, like Mme. Diana in Ibsen's play, they are willing to sacrifice their reputations.

Today: Although many feminists still argue that women have yet to complete their liberation, enfranchisement and greater freedom have resulted from the revolutionary changes that have occurred in this century. Women who sacrifice marriage and family for a career still earn reproach from more reactionary corners, but they are hardly censured or demonized by society at large. There remain few male-only bastions, and these are all under siege, at least in the United States. Women take the same jobs as men, go to the same schools, study the same subjects, and mix freely with men at all functions, from corporate board meetings to sporting events. The feminist complaints of today are not so much about exclusion now as they are about equal treatment and compensation.

What Do I Read Next?

Madame Bovary (1857), by Gustave Flaubert, is one of the important early works of French realism. The novel offers a brilliant and fairly sympathetic portrait of a shrewd and ambitious woman who attempts to better her circumstances by marrying and manipulating a country physician.

The Awakening (1899), Kate Chopin's long neglected novel of feminine self-consciousness offers a portrait of a woman defying conventional morality, including marital fidelity and taboos against miscegenation.

Sister Carrie (1900), Theodore Dreiser's first novel, depicts an immoral, self-serving woman with an unusual degree of sympathy.

Margaret Fleming (1890), by James A. Herne, is the first genuinely realistic play in America.Although now considered sentimental, it depicts a woman who defies convention in undertaking to care for the illegitimate child of her husband.

The Quintessence of Ibsenism (1913) may be more about George Bernard Shaw, its author, than it is about Ibsen, but it gives considerable insight into how Shaw and the British intelligentsia were attempting to transform theater into a vehicle for social improvement. The work grew out of a lecture Shaw gave in 1890, the same year that Ibsen published *Hedda Gabler*.

Women in Modern Drama: Freud, Feminism, and European Theater at the Turn of the Century (1989), by Gail Finney, offers an excellent survey of the depiction of women in European drama towards the end of Ibsen's career.

Further Study

Barranger, Milly S. *Barron's Simplified Approach to Henrik Ibsen,* Barron's Educational Series, 1969.

This brief monograph offers uncomplicated readings of *Hedda Gabler* and two other major Ibsen plays:

The Wild Duck and *Ghosts*. It is a helpful guide to interpretation focusing on character, themes, and dramatic technique.

Durbach, Errol. *Ibsen the Romantic: Analogues of Paradise in the Later Plays,* University of George Press, 1982. Durbach discusses the romantic and counter-romantic currents in Ibsen that underlies his characters' search for meaning, their efforts to redeem themselves from an inhibiting and stultifying, uncreative life. It is a search that can be destructive, as in Hedda's case.

Lyons, Charles R. Hedda Gabler: *Gender, Role, and World,* Twayne, 1990.

Lyons discusses both the cultural and historical milieu of *Hedda Gabler,* then discusses the play as a kind of mimetic snapshot of human behavior caught in that historical matrix and argues that reader responses should reflect that limitation.

McFarlane, James, editor. *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen,* Cambridge University Press, 1994.

A collection of articles by contemporary scholars, this anthology includes important pieces on such topics as Ibsen's realistic problem plays, his relationship to feminism, and his impact on modern drama. The work includes helpful aids, including a chronology and notes on the first publication and performance of each of Ibsen's works.

Meyer, Michael. *Ibsen: A Biography,* Doubleday, 1971. A well-documented critical biography, this study makes extensive use of Ibsen's correspondence and summarizes the critical reception of his works in his own day.

Northam, John. *Ibsen's Dramatic Method: A Study of the Prose Dramas*, Universitetsforlaget, 1971.

A recommended starting place for the study of Ibsen's technique, this work approaches the plays by analyzing the playwright's language and its correlation with visual, on-stage images, as, for example, the opposing physical differences between Hedda and Thea Elvsted.

Young, Robert. *Time's Disinherited Children: Childhood, Regression, and Sacrifice in the Plays of Henrik Ibsen,* Norvik Press, 1989.

Young's central thesis is that the motives and needs of many of Ibsen's major characters reveal the disinherited child in the adult.

Bibliography

Finney, Gail. "Ibsen and Femininism" in *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen,* edited by James McFarlane, Cambridge University Press, pp. 99-100.

Heiberg, Hans. *Ibsen: A Portrait of the Artist,* University of Miami Press, 1967, p. 257.

Weigand, Herman J. *The Modern Ibsen: A Reconsideration,* Books for Libraries Press, 1970, p. 242.

Copyright Information

This Premium Study Guide is an offprint from *Drama for Students*.

Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

Permissions
Mary Ann Bahr, Margaret Chamberlain, Kim Davis, Debra Freitas, Lori Hines, Jackie Jones, Jacqueline Key, Shalice Shah-Caldwell

Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Drama for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535