The Wild Duck Study Guide

The Wild Duck by Henrik Ibsen

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

In a letter accompanying the manuscript for *The Wild Duck,* Henrik Ibsen wrote to his publisher, "This new play in many ways occupies a place of its own among my dramas; the method is in various respects a departure from my earlier one. ... The critics, will, I hope, find the points; in any case, they will find plenty to quarrel about, plenty to misinterpret." Ibsen, however, was disappointed in these early expectations. When the play opened in Scandinavia early in 1885, critics paid relatively little attention to it. The play soon traveled throughout the continent. While a few luminaries commended it notably the playwright George Bernard Shaw and the poet Rainer Maria Rilke most early critics found the play incomprehensible and incoherent. Audiences, as well, showed little positive response to *The Wild Duck.*

In ensuing years, however, and as people began to understand both Ibsen's notion of "tragi-com-edy" as well as his insightful characterization, the play began to develop the fine reputation it still holds today. Now popularly regarded as one of Ibsen's more important works, *The Wild Duck* gains further eminence in its issuance of Ibsen into a new era of writing, one in which symbolism and charac-terization-as opposed to social realism-gained prominence. With *The Wild Duck,* an already esteemed playwright showed his continued interest in exploring new interests and concerns through his work.

Author Biography

Ibsen was born in 1828 in a small town in Norway. When he was fifteen years old, Ibsen left his family's home to begin an apprenticeship as an apothecary. Two years later, Ibsen fathered a child with an older housemaid, and he was obligated to provide financial support over the next fifteen years.

In the late 1840s, he began to prepare for university examinations. Once at university in Christiana (present-day Oslo), Ibsen became very involved with journalism. He edited a student paper, contributed articles to another paper, and worked on a satirical journal. He also spent a great deal of time on his writing. He completed and published his first play, *Catiline,* by 1849, and published poetry in a journal. In 1859, his one-act pla*y, The Warrior's Barrow,* becomes the first of his plays to be staged.

In 1851, when he was only twenty-three, Ibsen was engaged as playwright in residence at the National Theater in Bergen. Over the next several years, the theater company performed a new Ibsen play each year. By the end of the decade, his plays were also being performed at the Norwegian Theater in Christiana, where he assumed duties as the artistic director. In both of these capacities, Ibsen was expected to produce "national drama," which checked his artistic expression. The bankruptcy of the Norwegian Theater left Ibsen free to write for himself.

He was awarded a travel grant by the government, which was only the first of many grants that Ibsen received from the Norwegian government, including an annual stipend. He left Norway for Italy in 1864, and he spent the next twenty-seven years primarily living abroad, only returning to Norway for short visits in 1874 and 1885. Despite his absence from his native country, he remained a well-known figure there. For instance he attended the opening of the Suez Canal as Norway's representative, and in 1873, he was knighted.

With *A Doll's House* (1879), classic Ibsen was born. In his work, Ibsen began the exploration of controversial, social issues. Many of his plays created a furor among European audiences. By the late 1880s, however, Ibsen's work had become more self-analytic and symbolic. Works such as *The Master Builder* (1892) explore an artist's relation to society and contains an autobiographical element.

In 1891, Ibsen returned to Norway to live, and he continued to write plays. On his seventieth birthday, he was honored throughout Scandinavia. Also that year, the first volumes of the collected edition of his works was published in Denmark and Germany. In 1901, he suffered his first stroke. Another stroke two years later left him unable to write or walk. He died in 1906.

Plot Summary

Act I

Act I opens in Hakon Werle's home. In honor of his son's return after a long absence, he is hosting a dinner party. Gregers Werle has invited his old school friend, Hjalmar Ekdal. The men have not seen each other for more than 15 years, and Gregers learns that in the interim, Hjalmar has married Gina, a former housemaid of the Werles; been set up in a photography studio by Hakon; and had a child, Hedvig. The conversation also reveals Hjalmar's father's past: a business partner of Hakon's, Old Ekdal had been found guilty of illegal tree felling and sentenced to prison. This disgrace ruined the life that he had known, as well as his son's, who had to drop out of college. Now, Hakon generously compensates Old Ekdal for copying work. Gregers notes that his father was "a kind of Providence for you, "to which Hjalmar heartily agrees.

The other men who make up the dinner party, associates of Hakon, join Gregers and Hjalmar in the study. As they converse, Old Ekdal is forced to pass through the room to leave the house after picking up his work. Hjalmar looks away, pretending not to see his father.

After the party has ended, Gregers confronts his father about his help to the Ekdal family. Gregers implies that his father was also involved in the crime for which Old Ekdal was imprisoned and makes insinuations about his father's past relationship with Gina. Despite his son's chilliness, Werle offers Gregers a partnership in his business, but Gregers refuses. Werle then reveals that he is planning on marrying his current housemaid, Mrs. Sorby. Gregers declares his intention of leaving his father's house, saying that he now has "an objective to live for," but he does not share this objective with his father.

Act II

Act II opens in the Ekdal's apartment. Gina and Hedvig Ekdal are seated in the photography studio, which they also use as a living room. They are awaiting Hjalmar's return. Soon after he comes home, however, Gregers pays a visit. Privately, Hjalmar reveals to Gregers that Hedvig is going blind.

Old Ekdal has already returned home, and he insists that Gregers see the attic, which is filled with chickens, pigeons, rabbits, and a wild duck that Hakon gave to Hedvig. Hakon had shot and injured the wild duck, but his dog retrieved it, still alive, from the bottom of the lake. That evening, over Gina's protestations, Gregers also rents the vacant room in the Ekdal's home. He says he will return the next day.

Act III

Act III takes place the next morning. Gina has just returned from shopping and Hjalmar is retouching photographs. Old Ekdal comes into the studio, wanting Hjalmar to help him move the water trough in the attic. When Hedvig volunteers to take over her father's work, Hjalmar joins his father. While the men are in the attic, Gregers comes in. In the ensuing conversation with Hedvig, he learns that she cannot attend school because of her eyesight, but that she dearly loves her parents and her wild duck. They hear shots coming from the attic, which is how Gregers learns that the Ekdal men use the attic as a "forest" in which to hunt.

When Hjalmar reenters the studio, he is surprised to see Gregers. He tells Gregers about his invention. He does not describe it, but it will make "Ekdal" a respected name once again. Hjalmar tells Gregers how hard the disgrace has been on his father. Gregers tells Hjalmar that he is something like the wild duck, sunk in darkness. Hjalmar asks Gregers not to talk about "blight and poison" as he only likes to talk about pleasant things.

Then the two downstairs neighbors, Molvik and Relling, come over for lunch. During the lunch, Hakon Werle comes to the Ekdal's home to speak with Gregers. He has figured out his son's plans to "open Hjalmar Ekdal's eyes" and does not want him to do so. He says it will be no favor to Hjalmar, but Gregers is resolved. After Hakon leaves, Gregers invites Hjalmar on a walk.

Act IV

Act IV opens later that afternoon upon Hjalmar's return to his home. He rebuffs his family and speaks angrily. He sends Hedvig out for a walk so he can speak with Gina alone. He asks her the truth about her relationship to Hakon Werle, and she confesses that she once had an affair with him. He rails against his wife, and in the midst of this scene, Gregers enters, ecstatic that the truth has been revealed and that the Ekdal's can now form a "true marriage." Next, Mrs. Sorby comes over with the news that Hakon has already left town but is still available if the Ekdal's need any assistance. As response, Hjalmar declares his intention of repaying Hakon for all the assistance he has provided over the years. Mrs. Sorby reveals that Hakon is going blind and then leaves. Hedvig returns from her walk, carrying a letter that Mrs. Sorby gave her. Hedvig gives her father permission to open the letter, which is from Hakon. The letter bequeaths a monthly stipend to Old Ekdal, which Hedvig will inherit upon her grandfather's death.

Hjalmar sends Hedvig from the room and tears the letter in pieces. When he demands to know whether he or Hakon is Hedvig's father, Gina cannot answer him, for she does not know. Hjalmar declares that he will leave the house for good. Hedvig has overheard the conversation, but Gregers tells her that she can win back her father's love by sacrificing what is most important to her: the wild duck. He suggests that she have her grandfather shoot the duck.

ActV

Act V takes place the next morning. Hjalmar has not returned, but Gregers comes over as does Relling, the downstairs neighbor. Relling tells Gregers that his idealism is mistaken; Hjalmar needs to believe in certain lies in order to live. In fact, Relling encourages these lies. Gregers remains unconvinced, and after Relling leaves, he asks Hedvig if she has shot the duck. She has not, but she goes to her grandfather to ask the best way to do so. Hjalmar returns home, but it is only to get his belongings, for he plans to leave for good. Gina sends Hedvig out of the room, but Hedvig is terribly frightened by her father's thoughtless rejection of her. As her parents argue, Hedvig steals into the attic with the gun. Hjalmar and Gina continue to argue, but Hjalmar consents to sit down and eat breakfast. He contemplates staying for a few days after all, he and his father have no other place to live. Hjalmar confesses that what keeps him away is Hedvig maybe she never really loved him. Gregers, meanwhile, has heard noises in the attic. They hear a shot suddenly, and Gregers tells Hjalmar that Hedvig has just shot the wild duck as an act of sacrifice so that her father would love her again. Hjalmar searches around the apartment for Hedvig but cannot find her. He goes into the attic where he finds Hedvig lying on the floor. They fetch Relling, but the doctor declares that she is already dead. In an aside, he tells Gregers that Hedvig killed herself. Gregers believes that at least her death will bring out the nobility in her father, but Relling asserts that Hjalmar will simply use Hedvig's death as a further excuse for wallowing in self-pity and sentimentality.

Act 1

Act 1 Summary

In Werle's upper class home, two servants tidy the living room as a dinner party draws to a noisy close in the dining room. Toasts are proposed and laughter is heard in the background as the servants gossip about how Werle has feelings for his housekeeper, Mrs. Sorby and how Werle is throwing the party for his son who is taking a vacation from his job at the family factory up north, "The Works." Old Ekdal, who asks to be let into the office so he can collect some work, interrupts them. The servants comment on how Old Ekdal used to be a lieutenant in the army, went into business with Werle and then made a bad deal that got Werle into trouble and ended up in jail. Before they can speak any further, Mrs. Sorby leads her guests through to another room, telling the servants to follow with coffee. Two of the guests linger - Werle's son Gregers and Hjalmar, Old Ekdal's son and a friend of the Werle family.

Their discussion reveals that they're old friends from school, that Hjalmar still feels badly about the bad deal and that he feels he's suffered worse than anybody has. It's also revealed that Werle set Hjalmar up in business in a photography studio, which Gregers says is surprising because it sounds like his father, who he always thought all along had no feelings or sensitivity, is trying to atone for something. When Gregers congratulates Hjalmar on his marriage, he gets a second surprise - that Hjalmar has married the Werle's former housekeeper, Gina. After Hjalmar tells how he and Gina got together, Gregers asks whether the photography studio came before or after the marriage and Hjalmar tells him after.

Mrs. Sorby leads the other guests, including Werle, back into the room. They have a lively conversation about how they were thirteen at table and about wine. Hjalmar stays silent. In the middle of the conversation, Old Ekdal goes through on his way home and Hjalmar doesn't acknowledge him. Gregers whispers angrily that he should have at least said hello, but Hjalmar says that under the circumstances he couldn't bring himself to. He then says goodnight and leaves and then Mrs. Sorby leads the guests back into the other room. This leaves Gregers alone with Werle, his father.

Gregers confronts Werle with the question of why he has let the Ekdal family sink so low and refers to the way that Werle and Old Ekdal were friends. Werle tells him that Old Ekdal was completely responsible for the bad business deal that practically destroyed him, describes the Ekdal family with the image of a wounded duck sinking to the bottom of a lake to die and says he had to help them somehow. Gregers then accuses Werle of at one time being involved with Gina. Werle reacts angrily to Gregers' suggestion, but Gregers tells him he was told the truth by his mother, who knew about everything that went on between Werle and Gina. Werle says that nothing Gregers' mother said can be believed because she was sickly and hysterical. He explains his reason for asking Gregers to come home, proposing that Gregers go into a business partnership with him. He says that he'll go up north to supervise The Works while Gregers stays in town and

oversees the business as a whole. He explains that his strength is starting to fade and his eyes are working less well. He also confesses his plans to marry Mrs. Sorby, but is worried how Gregers will react given his affection for his mother. When Gregers reacts calmly, Werle says he knew he could count on his son's support.

Gregers realizes the real reason why his father called him home, so they could present a picture of "the happy family" to Mrs. Sorby. He angrily tells his father that there was never a happy family in their home, accuses him of tormenting his mother and of degrading Hjalmar by arranging for him to marry someone he himself had used and cast off. He collects his hat and prepares to leave, saying that he's discovered his purpose in life at last but doesn't explain what he means. As he goes, he comments on the way Mrs. Sorby and her guests are playing Blind Man's Buff.

Act 1 Analysis

Up to the confrontation between Werle and Gregers, this act consists mostly of exposition, or background information. There aren't many details, but there is enough information presented about the family relationships between the Ekdals and the Werles, as well as about the business deal, to establish the historical context of the current situation. In other words, in this section the focus is on the events in the past that have brought the characters to this point in their lives.

This section also introduces the secondary theme of redemption, or a positive act in the present that makes up for a bad act in the past. Specifically, Werle's attempts to create a decent life for the Ekdals are clearly honest attempts to make up for past wrongs. The way that Gregers interprets those attempts makes them appear negative and sets the main action of the play in motion.

On one level, the relationship between Gregers and his father is a parallel with the relationship that Hjalmar has with his, Old Ekdal. Both fathers were ruined by the bad business deal and the lives of both sons were changed as a result. In addition, both Hjalmar and Gregers are embarrassed by their fathers, as indicated by Hjalmar ignoring his father at the party and by Gregers' actions in this scene and later in the play. At the same time, Hjalmar and Gregers both display signs of self-pity. Hjalmar makes an outright statement that no one suffers like he does and Gregers' attitude about his family is displayed in the confrontation with his father. There are several differences, however, that indicate the relationships are also opposite. Since the deal, Werle eventually recovered and he has actually prospered, while Old Ekdal went to prison and became personally and professionally down and out. In addition, Hjalmar believes he supports his father, financially and emotionally, while Gregers is supported financially by his father and he deeply resents him emotionally. Finally, Hjalmar sees and accepts the parts of his father that are in him, while Gregers fights to be as different from his father as he possibly can.

Three important elements of foreshadowing appear in the confrontation between Gregers and Werle. The first is Werle's mention of the wounded wild duck sinking to the

bottom of the lake, an image that appears repeatedly throughout the play in various contexts. In all of those references, the image represents the same thing - the destruction of freedom, whether it's physical, emotional, financial or spiritual. Almost all the main characters, at one point or another, experience the destruction of some aspect of their freedom. The exception is Gregers, who despite the best intentions, in several instances becomes the cause of destruction.

The second element of foreshadowing is Werle's mention of the way his eyes are deteriorating. This foreshadows the important and traumatic revelation later in the play that Hjalmar's daughter Hedwig, who will appear for the first time in the next scene, is possibly Werle's daughter. The third element of foreshadowing is related to the mention of there being thirteen at table. This refers to a superstition that if there were thirteen people at dinner, there would soon be a death. The reference here foreshadows Hedwig's death at the end of the play and Gregers' final lines about how it is his destiny to be the thirteenth at table, a reference whose meaning is explored later.

The reference to Blind Man's Buff, a game in which one person is blindfolded and has to find another person in the room, is an ironic reference to both physical and spiritual blindness. The former refers to the blindness being experienced by Werle and Hedwig, while the latter refers to the blindness experienced by Hjalmar, or the fact that he doesn't see or know the truth about his life. Ending his blindness is, as the action of the play reveals, what Gregers has decided is his purpose in life.

Act 2

Act 2 Summary

In Hjalmar's photography studio, Gina sits sewing while Hedwig reads. Gina tells Hedwig to stop and rest her eyes. As Hedwig starts drawing, Gina suddenly remembers to add butter to her list of expenses for the day and comments on the amount of food they go through. She and Hedwig discuss the dinner party that Hjalmar's gone to, Hedwig says excitedly that Hjalmar promised to bring her something nice and Gina comments there will be no shortage of nice things.

Old Ekdal comes in, happily shows Gina and Hedwig the amount of work he's got to do, then looks into the back room and comments that "she" has settled down nicely for the night. Hedwig asks whether "she" will be comfortable and Old Ekdal says she'll be fine. He bustles in and out of his room, settling in for the evening, as Gina and Hedwig discuss the room they have for rent. As Old Ekdal closes his door, he announces that he doesn't want to be disturbed. The conversation between Gina and Hedwig once he's closed his door reveals that they know he's drinking.

Hjalmar comes back in and he is greeted joyfully by Hedwig. He tells her and Gina about the party: that he refused to be part of all the superficial chattering and he lets them believe he made the decisive point in the discussion about wine. Hedwig helps him change out of his dinner jacket and into something more comfortable and then asks him what he brought her. Hjalmar confesses that he forgot his promise and when he sees Hedwig's disappointment, complains that he's expected to think of everything. However, after some small talk about how "she" is doing in her basket and a brief argument with Gina over the way she's managing the business, he apologizes and Hedwig immediately forgives him. He asks her to bring him his flute, but after playing only a few notes, he stops and comments to Gina how lucky and happy they are even though they're poor.

The arrival of Gregers surprises Gina, who wasn't expecting to see someone she knows from her days as housekeeper to the Werles and Hjalmar, who wasn't expecting him at all. Hedwig brings beer and offers to bring sandwiches, which Gregers refuses but Hjalmar accepts, telling her to make the sandwiches with lots of butter. As Hedwig goes off, Hjalmar explains to Gregers that he and Gina are very concerned about her going blind and adds that the doctor says it might be hereditary. Gregers seems startled by that piece of news and also by the news that Hedwig is almost fourteen and that Gina and Hjalmar have been married almost fifteen years.

As Hjalmar comments that the fifteen years Gregers has been away at the Works must have been hard, Old Ekdal comes in, quite drunk. Hjalmar invites him to join him and Gregers for their sandwiches and beer and Old Ekdal accepts. As Hedwig brings the food and drink in, the conversation reveals that Old Ekdal used to be a well-known hunter and that he wants to show Gregers what's in the back room. Over Hjalmar's

protests, Old Ekdal shows Gregers that they keep rabbits, several kinds of birds and the "she" that the Ekdals have been referring to, a wounded wild duck they're nursing back to health. Hedwig explains that it's her wild duck and Hjalmar explains that it was given to them by Werle, who was out shooting one day and wounded it. Old Ekdal, about to fall asleep, murmurs about how when they've been injured, wild ducks dive down to the bottom of their lakes, deliberately get themselves tangled up in reeds and don't come up again. Hjalmar reveals that the duck was originally taken to Werle's home to recover but didn't do very well, so one of the servants persuaded Werle to let Hedwig have it. Gregers comments that it seems to be doing well in there and then says it's time for him to leave, since Old Ekdal has fallen asleep.

As Gregers goes, he asks whether the Ekdals still have a room for rent. When he hears that they do he insists on taking it, saying that he's decided to quit his job at the Works and move out of his father's home, adding that he can't think of anything worse than being Gregers Werle. When Hjalmar asks what he'd be instead, Gregers says he'd like to be the kind of dog that dives to the bottom of lakes and rescues dying ducks. He says he'll move in the next day and leaves. Hjalmar goes with him. Hedwig comments to Gina that the whole time Gregers was there, it was as though he was talking about something other than what he was saying. Hjalmar comes back in and as he's eating the leftover sandwiches Gina wonders how Werle will react to Gregers' moving out. Hjalmar says it doesn't matter. Still eating, he says he's got a sacred duty to take care of his father and having a tenant will bring in more money so he can do that. He and Gina then take Old Ekdal to his room.

Act 2 Analysis

There are two key elements to this scene. The first is the way Hjalmar is revealed as extremely self-centered. This is shown in the way he complains after disappointing Hedwig and also his insistence upon being in control of the business when it's perfectly clear that Gina has more of a grasp on it than he does. It's also shown in the gluttonous way he insists upon having lots of butter on his sandwiches and the way he indulgently finishes the sandwiches after Gregers is gone. All of this indicates how he feels that he's king of this particular castle and deserves to be treated as such. This combines with the self-pity we see in the first act to suggest that Hjalmar is quite content to act as and be seen as, a victim. This explains his reactions later in the play when he reacts melodramatically about the way his life has been ruined by the truths he's forced to face.

The second key element is the reappearance and development of the symbol of the wounded wild duck. The revelation that the Ekdals are keeping such a duck in their attic reinforces the meaning of the symbol, which as has already been discussed represents the destruction of freedom. In this act, we see the main aspect of that symbol, specifically the way the duck represents how the Ekdals have had their freedom destroyed. The wounding of the duck by Werle echoes the way he was the force behind that destruction. Perhaps most importantly in terms of the action that follows, we see how Gregers sees himself as the kind of dog that rescues such trapped ducks,

foreshadowing his well intentioned revelations of the truth intended to rescue Hjalmar later in the play.

The symbol also develops resonances with other characters and situations in the play. Hedwig's plight echoes that of the duck in that they're both physically wounded or damaged, the duck in its wing and Hedwig in her eyes. As a result, freedom for both of them is compromised and will eventually be destroyed. Also, the fact that the duck in the attic no longer has freedom but is safe and well taken care of represents the way that Old Ekdal, who was spiritually wounded in the land deal in the way the duck is physically wounded, no longer has freedom but is being taken care of by Hjalmar. The description of the duck as diving down to the reeds and getting stuck, effectively committing suicide, has clear echoes of Hjalmar's self-pity and determination to see himself as a victim as we shall see later when Gregers refers to Hjalmar's resemblance to the duck.

Act 3, Part 1

Act 3, Part 1 Summary

Hjalmar sits at the worktable, retouching some photographs. Gina comes in from shopping and complains about the mess Gregers made of his room. Hjalmar tells her that he's invited Gregers and their other tenants, Relling and Molvik, up for lunch. Gina worries that they'll be there before she's ready, Hjalmar tells her to take her time, Gina says that he'll be able to get some work done and Hjalmar protests that he can't do much more than the work he's already doing.

Gina goes into the kitchen as Old Ekdal comes out. He and Hjalmar talk about going into the back room and working there, but Hjalmar realizes he's got too much work to do. He lets Old Ekdal into the back then sits back down to the photographs. He's clearly more interested in working in the back room as he repeatedly gets up to join his father but sits back down when Gina and then Hedwig, come into the room and remind him to work. Finally temptation becomes too much. Hjalmar gives Hedwig the retouching brush, warns her to be careful about her eyes and joins Old Ekdal in the back.

Gregers comes in and when Hedwig tells him that Hjalmar and Old Ekdal are busy in the back, he sits and chats with her instead, promising to not distract her. They talk about how Hedwig isn't going to school because Hjalmar thinks it would be too hard on her eyes and how she enjoys staying home because there's always a lot to do, particularly in the back room. This leads to a conversation about the wild duck and they talk about how she's the most important thing in that back room, how she's truly wild and therefore alone and how she was rescued from what Gregers calls "the boundless deep." Hedwig says that she thinks of the back room as the boundless deep, but tells Gregers that he must think she's very silly, saying that after all the back room is just an attic.

Just as Gregers asks her whether that's really all it is, Gina comes in and tells Hedwig to help her get ready for lunch. As Gregers talks with her about her role in the business, suddenly a shot is heard in the attic. Gina explains that sometimes Old Ekdal shoots rabbits back there, remembering his old days as a hunter. Hjalmar comes in with the gun Old Ekdal used, puts it up on a shelf and warns Hedwig that it's still loaded. Gina and Hedwig go off to finish making lunch, leaving Hjalmar and Gregers alone.

Act 3, Part 1 Analysis

There are two important elements of foreshadowing in this scene. Gina's comment about the mess Gregers made in his room foreshadows the mess he makes in Hjalmar's life by telling him the truth about Werle and Gina, while the appearance of the loaded gun foreshadows both Gregers' plans for it later in the play and Hedwig's ultimate suicide. Meanwhile, Hedwig's conversation with Gregers reveals how the image

of the wild duck represents her as well, specifically how the duck is the most important thing in the back room in the same way that Hedwig is the most important thing in Hjalmar's life. It's also very possible that, at least in Gregers' mind, Hedwig is in need of rescuing from the bottomless deep as much as, if not more, than Hjalmar. In other words, he feels the need to free her with the truth in the same way he needs to free Hjalmar.

Another aspect of Hjalmar's character is revealed in this scene when it becomes clear that he's not really interested in his work. He's obviously distracted by his father and the back room. It's easy to infer that this is because he never wanted to be a photographer in the first place, his career having been something forced on him by Werle. Another explanation is that he's simply lazy, meaning in this case that he wants to do what he wants to do, as opposed to what he needs to do. This relates to the point mentioned earlier about his being self-indulgent. Yet another possible explanation for his so easily being distracted emerges in the next scene and his discussion with Gregers about his invention.

Act 3, Part 2

Act 3, Part 2 Summary

Hjalmar confesses to Gregers that he leaves much of the business to Gina so he can concentrate on other inventions, one in particular. When Gregers asks him what kind of invention, Hjalmar refuses to tell him, saying it's too soon to talk about it. He does say, though, that he considers the invention to be part of his sacred duty to take care of his father. He tells a long story of how it took Old Ekdal a long time to recover from the trauma of the bank deal, how he tried to kill himself and how he (Hjalmar) almost shot himself as well. He congratulates himself on how much courage it took to not pull the trigger, saying that he realized he had to live in order to finish his invention and redeem his father. Gregers compares Hjalmar to the wild duck, saying that he's been wounded, lost his way in a "poisonous swamp," and that like the duck he's sunk to the bottom to die. When Hjalmar protests, Gregers says that his insistence he's doing the right thing is part of how he's lost himself. Their conversation is interrupted by the arrival of Gina and Hedwig with lunch and the simultaneous arrival of the other guests, Relling and Molvik. Relling is a doctor and Molvik is a poet and theologian.

The men sit down to eat and drink while the women wait on them. Relling and Molvik talk about how they went out and got drunk last night, with Relling repeatedly talking about how Molvik is demonic in his appetites and obsessions. Relling talks about how Gregers used to go around talking about "the Claim of the Ideal" and wonders whether he got anybody to listen to him up north at the Works. Before they can talk any further about what that ideal is Old Ekdal comes in from the back with the skin of the rabbit he just shot. He talks about how rabbit meat is nice and sweet, tells the men to enjoy their lunch and goes into his room. Molvik gets up and runs out, about to be sick. The others drink a toast to Old Ekdal, calling him the old hunter. They also drink toasts to Gina and Hedwig and it's revealed that the next day is Hedwig's birthday.

Relling talks about how nice it is to be having a meal in such a loving atmosphere, but Gregers says the atmosphere is really one of poison. He refers again to the Ideal and he and Relling almost come to blows. They're interrupted by Werle, who has come looking for Gregers. He asks to speak with him alone. Hjalmar and Relling go out into the hall, while Hedwig and Gina go into the kitchen.

Their conversation reveals that Gregers intends to tell Hjalmar the truth about Werle's role in his marriage. Gregers says that it's the only way he can let go of the burden of guilt that continually sits on his conscience. He blames Werle for placing the burden on him, saying that he knew Werle laid a trap for Old Ekdal who took the blame for something that was actually Werle's plan. They argue over whether Hjalmar will actually be grateful for Gregers' actions and whether Werle's greed was the result of disappointment with his wife.

Finally, Werle tells Gregers that he plans to sign over the company to him but Gregers says he doesn't want it, saying that he only wants to fulfill his purpose in life and that he's got some savings that he plans to live on. Werle asks him whether he's certain, Gregers says he is and Werle leaves. The others come back in and Gregers says he wants Hjalmar to come on a long walk with him. As Gregers goes out to get his coat Gina warns Hjalmar not to go, hinting that she's mistrustful of what Gregers might say. Hjalmar says there's nothing to worry about and goes out. Relling comments that he thinks Gregers is mentally ill, saying he's got a case of "integrity fever." He thanks Gina for lunch and goes out. Gina says that Gregers has always been a troublemaker and Hedwig comments that it all seems very strange.

Act 3, Part 2 Analysis

The rescuing dog/wounded duck aspect of the relationship between Gregers and Hjalmar is spoken about directly in this scene, revealing the self-importance with which Gregers sees himself. His statements, combined with the conversation with Relling about the Claim of the Ideal and his conversation with Werle, suggest that he views himself as being on a righteous, desperately important mission, his intensity and conviction suggesting that he hasn't considered the potential consequences of his actions and has no interest in doing so. This is something else that's talked about quite directly, in the confrontation between Gregers and his father, which suggests that another of this play's secondary themes is the dangers of self-righteous action.

The importance of this theme is again hinted at with Greger's contention that Werle set Old Ekdal up in the land deal all those years ago, the inference being that back then Werle also acted from a place of self-righteousness. There are echoes here of Werle's wounding of the duck and the symbolic relationship between that act and the destruction of the Ekdals.

Previously discussed aspects of the play and its characters, aside from the imagery of the wild duck, reappear again in this section. These include Hjalmar's self-centeredness in the way he congratulates himself for not committing suicide and the secondary theme of redemption showing up in Hjalmar's conviction that his invention will bring his father back to emotional life. Meanwhile, a new symbol appears for the first time in this section and that is Gregers' *Claim of the Ideal*. The play never spells out what's actually in this little book, but the inference here and later in the play is that the Ideal holds that life cannot be truly lived without complete honesty. It's clear that Gregers' aforementioned mission is to not only live by that ideal but force others to live by it as well. The continually reinforced image of the doomed duck, however, as well as that of the looming loaded gun, foreshadows the way that Gregers' intensely pursued goal of total honesty will end in ultimate destruction. In fact, the rest of the play shows how Gregers becomes guilty of wounding the Ekdals and destroying their freedom in exactly the same way as he accuses his father of doing.

The phrase "integrity fever" basically means self-righteousness. In other words, Relling clearly thinks that Gregers is pretty full of himself and therefore blinded to reality.

Act 4, Part 1

Act 4, Part 1 Summary

Gina bids farewell to a client who's just sat for a photo. Hedwig comes in from the kitchen, asking whether Hjalmar is back yet and commenting that it's not like him to miss his dinner. Just then, Hjalmar returns, refuses dinner and after finding out from Gina that there have been no new clients, promises to work harder than ever starting tomorrow. When Hedwig protests that tomorrow's her birthday, Hjalmar says he'll start the day after tomorrow. Gina and Hedwig remind him how tired and frustrated he gets just doing his photographic work and of how much joy and relaxation he gets from the animals in the back room, especially the wild duck. Hjalmar says that he wants nothing more to do with those animals and that he'd like to wring the wild duck's neck, adding that nothing that came from Werle will ever be welcome in his house again. Hedwig bursts into tears and Hjalmar relents, saying he won't kill the duck for her sake. He then orders her to go for her walk and she does, bewildered.

Hjalmar announces to Gina that he's going to take care of all the finances from now on and asks her how they've managed to live on such little income. When Gina confesses that Old Ekdal's been getting more money from Werle than his work is worth, Hjalmar becomes angry. Gina asks him what Gregers told him and Hjalmar asks her whether it's true that she had an affair with Werle. Gina tells him that Werle wouldn't leave her alone until she let him have his way with her. Hjalmar says she should have told him before they were married and admits that he wouldn't have married her at all if he'd known the truth. He accuses Gina of feeling no remorse about what happened, of betraying his trust and ruining his hopes for success because now, after discovering her betrayal, he feels he can't be creative enough to complete his invention.

Gregers comes in, happy at the thought that Hjalmar and Gina have talked and are now able to live freely and honestly and quickly becomes confused and puzzled when he sees how unhappy they both are. He tries to convince them that their freedom from the lies of the past is a great opportunity, but neither of them is that interested in hearing it. He again compares Hjalmar to the wild duck, but before he can explain why Relling comes in. He takes Gregers aside and asks what he thinks he's doing, meddling in the Ekdals' lives. Hjalmar listens in as Gregers tells Relling he's helping them have a true marriage according to the Ideal. Relling, repeatedly referring to Gregers as "Mr. Werle Junior," warns them all to not drag Hedwig into what's going on, saying that she's at a delicate stage of her life and might react unpredictably, perhaps even commit suicide. Hjalmar vows to protect Hedwig as long as he's alive.

Act 4, Part 1 Analysis

In this scene, we learn exactly what Gregers has said to Hjalmar without actually hearing their conversation. Hjalmar's actions upon his return indicate clearly that

Gregers has done exactly what he said to Werle he would do, told Hjalmar everything he doesn't know about his family's history. Hjalmar essentially has a tantrum, throwing furniture around in the same way he throws around blame and accusations. Once again, we see how self indulgent he is, in that his feelings and reactions are far more important to him than any explanation Gina might have. Gina, by contrast, is very matter of fact, fighting to minimize the potential for damage to her family. Her efforts are ultimately useless, since Hjalmar is determined to have his way in the same way as he's determined to have extra butter on his sandwiches - he wants what he wants and is convinced that because he wants it he has a right to have it.

In his own way, Gregers is just as self-indulgent and self-righteous as Hjalmar. He's convinced he's done the right thing and that his way of living is the only right way to live. In his irritating smugness, he's just as oblivious as Hjalmar to how his actions, choices and reactions affect other people and as a result is completely bewildered by Gina and Hjalmar's reactions to the truth. This is why he again talks about Hjalmar in terms of the wild duck. His meaning is that Hjalmar is determined to self-destruct in the same way that the duck is when it dives to the bottom of the lake to die and as such is suggesting both Hjalmar and the duck destroy their own freedom.

Relling's continual reference to Gregers as "Mr. Werle Junior" suggests the ironic possibility that Gregers has acted to destroy the Ekdal family in the same way as Werle did when he set Old Ekdal up to take the fall for the crooked land deal.

Act 4, Part 2

Act 4, Part 2 Summary

Mrs. Sorby comes in to say goodbye to Gina and reveals that she and Werle are to be married and will move north to the Works. Relling reacts badly to the news, saying he's going to go out with Molvik that night and hints that he'll get drunk. Mrs. Sorby pleads with him not to but he doesn't respond and leaves. Mrs. Sorby confesses that she and Relling were once involved and that he had hopes of resuming their relationship. She adds that Werle knows everything about her history and as a result, their marriage will be harmonious and peaceful.

Hjalmar says pointedly to Gina that that's how things should have been done in their marriage and Gina says every woman is different, but Mrs. Sorby says she believes her way is best, saying that she will stand by Werle no matter what, especially since he'll so soon become helpless. When she explains that he's soon to become blind, Hjalmar suddenly tells her to tell Werle that he intends to repay every cent of the money that Werle has spent on his family. Mrs. Sorby leaves. Gina starts to walk with her, but Hjalmar orders her to not go past the threshold of the room.

Hjalmar asks Gregers to approve the commitment he just made, saying it's his way of living up to the Ideal. Gregers congratulates him and asks whether Hjalmar feels happier now. Hjalmar says he does, but hints that it will be some time before he can be truly happy again. He also asks Gregers how it's possible for Werle, a man who's behaved so badly in the past, to have what's evidently a true marriage. Gregers says it's not the same thing at all. Hjalmar reminds himself that Werle is going blind, saying that that means there is some justice and retribution left in the world.

Hedwig returns and says she saw Mrs. Sorby in the hall, adding that she gave her a letter for her birthday. Hjalmar asks to see it, notices that the writing is Werle's and insists on reading it. The letter contains the news that Old Ekdal doesn't need to work any more, but will draw a pension from Werle's business, a pension to be passed on to Hedwig when Old Ekdal dies. Hjalmar paces, a realization forming in his mind. Hedwig says the money will be passed on to him and Gina, but Hjalmar doesn't listen. Gina sends Hedwig to her room. Hjalmar asks Gina to be fully honest once and for all and tell him who Hedwig's father truly is. She confesses that she doesn't know. Hjalmar loses control, saying he has no child. Hedwig runs out of her room in tears, asking him what he means. Hjalmar runs out, unable to face her. Hedwig collapses in hysterics, Gregers tells Gina he meant well and as she's going out to follow Hjalmar, she forgives him.

Hedwig asks Gregers what's going on and suggests that maybe she's not Hjalmar's child. When it seems that Gregers doesn't understand, Hedwig talks about how Hjalmar should be glad; after all, the wild duck found a home unexpectedly and she is loved all the same. Gregers asks whether it's true Hjalmar threatened to kill the wild duck. Hedwig says he did and Gregers suggests to her that it might help the situation if she

killed it, sacrificed the thing she loved most to prove her love for the man she loved most. Hedwig is caught up in the romance of the idea and she says she'll ask Old Ekdal to do it. Gregers tells her to keep the idea a secret, saying that Gina wouldn't understand. At that point, Gina comes in and tells them that Hjalmar went out with Relling and Molvik. Hedwig worries that Hjalmar won't ever come back, but Gregers reassures both her and Gina that everything will be fine. As he goes out, Hedwig collapses into Gina's arms, crying.

Act 4, Part 2 Analysis

When Hjalmar realizes that Hedwig is probably not his daughter, the destruction of what he believed to be his freedom is complete. The question is whether he destroyed it himself, or whether it's been destroyed by the Werles, which is what he clearly believes. The text suggests that it's a combination of the two, that the truth is certainly damaging to Hjalmar's sense of self and his life but that it's his tantrum-like reactions that cause the most harm, to Hedwig, to Gina and ultimately to himself.

The secondary theme of redemption appears twice in this scene. The first time it's the result of Werle's actions in setting up a trust for Old Ekdal and Hedwig and in what we learn about his relations with Mrs. Sorby. It seems clear in both cases he's trying to redeem himself for the mistakes of his past, his poor treatment of Old Ekdal, the Ekdal family and his first wife. Once again, it's Hjalmar's reaction that makes Werle's gesture seem worse than it perhaps is. Hjalmar's tendency towards being overdramatic undermines any possible opportunity for peace and forgiveness. In this act it seems as though Gregers is absolutely right in comparing Hjalmar to the self-destructive duck.

The second time the idea of redemption comes up is when Gregers tempts Hedwig with the idea of sacrificing the wild duck, an act that in his mind suggests that the mistakes of the past will be redeemed if she makes this dramatic gesture of ultimate love. Aside from the dangers associated with Gregers again self-righteously butting in, he doesn't understand that by destroying the duck, Hedwig would be destroying an important symbol of meaning and hope in her own life. Hedwig realizes it, however and in the final act of the play, we see the tragic consequences of her subsequent confusion.

Act 5, Part 1

Act 5, Part 1 Summary

Gina is about to start cleaning up the studio when Hedwig runs in with the news that Relling had two people, one of which was probably Hjalmar, with him when he came home the night before. Just then, Old Ekdal comes in, looking for Hjalmar. When he finds out that Hjalmar isn't around, he goes into the back room and shuts the door behind him. As Hedwig wonders what he'll do when he finds out that Hjalmar isn't coming back, Gregers comes in, followed shortly by Relling, who reveals that Hjalmar is downstairs in his apartment sleeping. At first Gregers can't believe it, but then says that someone who's had the kind of spiritual upheaval that Hjalmar has probably needs sleep. Relling says it's not about spiritual upheaval; it's about having gotten drunk the night before. Gina and Hedwig go out, reassured by the news that Hjalmar's all right.

The subsequent conversation between Gregers and Relling reveals some of Hjalmar's history - that he was raised by two aunts who adored him, went to university and was adored there for his looks, his beautiful voice and his cleverness and the whole time never had what Relling calls an original thought. He adds that he knows that Gregers saw Hjalmar as a hero, saying that he believes that Gregers is trying to convince Hjalmar to live according to the Ideal because he can't stand his hero not living a perfect life. Relling says that as a doctor, he saw in Hjalmar the same belief system he saw in Molvik, the "Big Lie." In Hjalmar's case, it's the false belief he's destined for greatness because of his invention, while in Molvik's case it's the mistaken belief that he's "demonic." In both cases, Relling says, the lies that Molvik and Hjalmar tell themselves keep them alive. Gregers vows to rescue Hjalmar from his "big lie" just as Hedwig comes back into the room. Relling tells her he's going down to check on her father and leaves.

Gregers says that he can see in Hedwig's eyes that she hasn't killed the duck yet. She says that after sleeping on it, the idea doesn't seem quite so appealing. Gregers tells her to be strong and then goes out. Old Ekdal comes in from the back room and talks about how hunting isn't as enjoyable when the hunter is alone. Hedwig asks his advice on how to shoot birds and he tells her to shoot at the breast, that will guarantee a kill. He goes into his room and Hedwig looks at the still-loaded gun above the fireplace, but puts it back quickly as Gina comes in and sends her into the kitchen.

Act 5, Part 1 Analysis

Relling's stories of Hjalmar's childhood and youth offer some explanation of why Hjalmar is the way he is - because he was so indulged by others, he grew up indulgent of himself. Hjalmar's Big Lie, as explained by Relling, has fueled that sense of self-indulgence and self-importance. Meanwhile, the revelation that Molvik isn't truly the

demonic he believes himself to be foreshadows the revelation soon to come that Hjalmar isn't truly the inventor he believes himself to be either.

Hedwig's questions to Old Ekdal foreshadow her death and we get the sense that she sees herself being trapped in the "boundless deep" just like the duck. In Hedwig's case, it's grief over her father's rejection. Once again and for the last time, the secondary theme of redemption appears. It becomes clear that to redeem her father, Hedwig has to sacrifice the thing she still believes he loves the most, not the thing she loves the most.

Act 5, Part 2

Act 5, Part 2 Summary

While Gina is cleaning, Hjalmar comes in. In spite of her pleas that he stay, he searches the room for papers, notes, research, his diary, all the things he needs to write his memoirs and finish his invention so he can take them when he leaves. As he searches, he reveals to Gina that he plans to take Old Ekdal with him. He also refuses to eat anything while there. Hedwig comes in twice. The first time, she runs to him but he pushes her away. The second time, he refers to her as an intruder and tells her to leave. Almost in tears, she remembers the wild duck, steals the gun from above the fireplace and takes it into the back room.

Hjalmar continues to pack. When Gina says that he has to find a way to take some of Old Ekdal's animals, Hjalmar says that he'll have to learn to live without and adds that he (Hjalmar) is making far more significant sacrifices. Almost without thinking, he eats the food that Gina brings him. He refuses her suggestion that he take his flute, but does go looking for his gun. Gina says that Old Ekdal probably has it in the back room. Hjalmar looks for more butter. Gina runs out and gets it and when she comes back, Hjalmar spreads it thickly on his bread. As he eats, he comments that it will be necessary after all to stay for a few days, since it will be difficult to move Old Ekdal quickly. He also comments on Werle's letter, saying that it is after all up to Old Ekdal to decide what to do with the money. He tells Gina to file it away, keep it safe but keep it out of his sight.

Gregers returns and is surprised to see Hjalmar planning to leave. Gina goes out to pack his suitcase and Gregers says he hoped that the freedom Hjalmar found after discovering the truth would allow him to start fresh. He also mentions the invention, which Hjalmar confesses doesn't really exist. He says he only believed in the invention because Relling suggested to him he had the capacity to be an inventor and because Hedwig believed in him so deeply. He goes on to say that Hedwig is his real problem, that he's starting to wonder whether she ever truly loved him. Gregers asks him whether Hedwig could prove her love, but Hjalmar insists that Hedwig was just biding her time with him, waiting for something better to come along.

A shot is heard in the back room. As Gina worries about Old Ekdal shooting in the attic, Gregers tells Hjalmar that Hedwig got Old Ekdal to shoot the wild duck as proof of her love. Hjalmar's anger towards Hedwig immediately softens, but turns into worry when Gina says she can't find her. When Old Ekdal comes out of his room, Gina and Hjalmar realize that it must have been Hedwig shooting and run into the back room. They return quickly, carrying Hedwig's body. Gina runs out to get Relling and Hjalmar reveals that Hedwig's shot herself. Relling comes in and a quick examination reveals that Hedwig is dead, shot in the chest. As Gina bursts into tears and Hjalmar shouts angrily at God for doing this to him, Old Ekdal goes into the back room and closes the door. Hjalmar and

Gina carry Hedwig's body into her room, Gina reassuring Hjalmar that they can get through it if they help each other.

Relling tells Gregers that he can't believe that the shooting was an accident, saying the evidence points to Hedwig killing herself. He goes on to suggest that before long, Hjalmar will be drowning in self-pity. Gregers says that there's no way that will happen, says that Hedwig's death will bring out the best in Hjalmar and comments that if Relling is right and he is wrong life would not be worth living. Relling says that life would be fine if it were not for people insisting upon living according to the Ideal. Gregers goes out, saying that he's glad his fate is what it is - to be thirteenth at table.

Act 5, Part 2 Analysis

Hjalmar's basic self-centeredness appears throughout this scene. First of all, his plan to write his memoirs sounds egocentric and almost ridiculous - what kind of life has he had to write memoirs about? Then even as he's packing up to go, his greed for Gina's care leads him to eat everything she brings him and even ask for more butter, while his lack of desire to give up the comforts of home leads him to change his plans for leaving, using Old Ekdal as an excuse. Finally, it's easy to infer that when he looks at the letter from Werle to Hedwig, he realizes that the money from Old Ekdal's pension will go a long way towards making his life easier. All indications, then, point to the possibility that lazy, self indulgent Hjalmar will probably not leave after all.

There are also indications, however, that his self-indulgence is becoming something darker. He veers dangerously close to becoming paranoid as he begins to believe, with no evidence whatsoever, that Hedwig was just using him. There is also his reaction to Hedwig's death, which he sees entirely in terms of him - how it's robbed him of his chance to redeem himself, how he caused it by pushing her away and how God is doing this "to [him]". As a result of all this, we have no problem believing Relling when he says that in no time, Hjalmar is going to be wallowing in self-pity, thereby proving Gregers' comparison between Hjalmar's desire to self destruct and the wild duck's to be quite accurate.

Hedwig's death is both the dramatic and thematic climax of the play. Dramatically it's clearly the high point of the action, the point of deepest crisis at which emotions are at their most intense. Thematically it's the point at which the play's theme is most pointedly expressed. Throughout the play, Hedwig has been the catalyst for Hjalmar's most selfless, loving feelings. Even though he expressed them indulgently, there was no doubt that he loved Hedwig dearly. In that sense, Hedwig represented emotional and spiritual freedom for him far more than Gregers and his Ideal. This means that Hedwig's death is the ultimate symbol of the destruction of freedom: hers, Hjalmar's and Gina's.

The only person who emerges emotionally unscathed by Hedwig's death is Gregers, who clearly still sees Hjalmar as a great man, as opposed to the whining, self-pitying boy in men's clothing that the action of the play has revealed him to be. Gregers is almost impossibly self-righteous about what's happened, in that he doesn't show any

grief at all about Hedwig. Instead, he is convinced that her death will lead to a greater life for Hjalmar. His final reference to his belief that his destiny lies in being thirteenth at dinner reinforces the suggestion of his self-importance. The reference suggests that he believes himself to be the bringer so much of literal physical death, but the death of lies and falseness and therefore the bringer of ultimate happiness.

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Characters

Ekdal

Ekdal (also called Old Ekdal) is Hjalmar's father. Years ago, he was Hakon Werle's partner. Convicted of illegally cutting down trees, Old Ekdal was imprisoned, which led to the complete loss of his fortune, reputation, and military rank. After his release, Ekdal returned to live with his son. He has obtained work copying for his former partner, who remunerates him generously. Old Ekdal lives in a fantasy world. He creates a forest for himself in the attic; the rabbits that populate the forest are the bears he once hunted. He also has a drinking problem.

Gina Ekdal

Gina Ekdal is a hard-working, kind woman. She comes from a lower social class than her husband, which is demonstrated by her lapses in grammar, but she is far more efficient and caring than he is. Not only does she accept the role of taking care of the home and family, she also runs her husband's business. She sincerely loves her husband and tolerates his delusions with good humor. She makes every effort to conceal unpleasant realities from Hjalmar. She is intent on making her family happy. Despite her simple background, Gina is astute and intuitive. For instance, when Gregers wants to rent the room, she recognizes his potential for bringing destruction into her family, and she, not Hjalmar, does not want him to move in. In all facets of her life, Gina demonstrates that her primary goal is to protect her family.

Hedvig Ekdal

Fourteen-year-old Hedvig Ekdal is a sensitive, intelligent girl. Due to her failing eyesight, Hedvig's parents keep her out of school and consequently, she is a bit immature for her age. In other ways, however, she demonstrates remarkable maturity. For instance, when Gregers compares himself to the dog that saved the wild duck, she understands that he is speaking in symbolic terms. Unlike her father and grandfather, she uses the attic to broaden her experiences, not to escape reality. She eagerly reads the books left behind. Also unlike the adults, Hedvig believes in her father, thus when he says he is leaving never to return, she takes this as an absolute. Because she so deeply loves him, she intends to sacrifice her duck, which she also loves, as proof of her boundless affection.

Hjalmar Ekdal

Hjalmar Ekdal lives with his wife and daughter. He runs a photographic business, but his wife does most of the work. Hakon Werle has set him up in the business. He apparently once had more promise, but he was forced to leave school after his father's scandal.

When the play opens, Hjalmar is living a fairly happy and contented life. He spends his time hunting in the attic with his father in the "forest" they have created. He clings to his "life-lie": his dreams of inventing a photographic device that will restore the lost glory of his family's name. Despite his persistent talk of this invention, Hjalmar makes no effort to actually construct it, and it exists merely in his fantasies. Those around him recognize this truth, and they humor him, never pointing out the inherent laziness of his life. Despite the fact that he is lazy, self-indulgent, shallow, and egocentric, his daughter loves him dearly and his wife constantly strives to protect him from life's harsh realities, a job that she does quite well until Gregers' appearance. While Hjalmar claims devastation at Hedvig' s death, Relling points out that Hjalmar's life will merely continue as before, with yet another added touch of melodrama.

OMEkdal

See Ekdal

Molvik

Molvik is the other downstairs border. He is an alcoholic student. Dr. Relling provides for him a "life-lie," much as he does for Hjalmar. Relling asserts that Molvik drinks, not because he is an alcoholic, but because a demon takes over and makes him do so.

Dr. Relling

Dr. Relling lives downstairs from the Ekdal's. He is one of the few characters who see the world around him clearly. For instance, he perpetuates Hjalmar's "life-lie," understanding that it is what keeps the man going. He scorns Gregers's claims of creating an "ideal" existence and maintains the belief that humans need their illusions in order to live happily. Relling also serves as a general commentator on the other characters' behavior, and as a voice of reason. Thus, when he says that Hjalmar will quickly recover from Hedvig's death, it seems that he speaks the truth.

Mrs. Sorby

Mrs. Sorby is Hakon Werle's housekeeper. A widow, she is also a friend of Gina. She is engaged to Hakon, and after Gregers refuses his overtures, she is sent to the Ekdal's with Hakon's bequest for Old Ekdal and Hedvig.

Gregers Werle

Gregers Werle is Hakon Werle's son. Influenced by his mother, he strongly dislikes his father and has spent the past fifteen years in the north, away from his boyhood home. Upon his return when he pieces together the truth about Gina and his father and her

ensuing marriage to Hjalmar he decides to enlighten his friend to the truth. He mistakenly believes that Hjalmar and Gina cannot be happy since their marriage is based on a lie. He believes that once the truth is expressed, they will begin anew. In deciding upon this course of action, Gregers does not take into account the individual personalities involved; he believes that everyone will react the way he would react and is surprised when this turns out not to be the case. Not only does Gregers bring about a dysfunction in the relationship between Hjalmar and Gina, he provides the suggestion that leads to Hedvig's death, whether it is intentional or not. Thus he is implicated in the tragedy that befalls her.

Hakon Werle

Hakon Werle is a wealthy industrialist. He pursued Gina fifteen years ago, and after their affair ended and she was pregnant (most probably with his child), he took upon himself the responsibility for making sure that she and her family were financially cared for. He set up Hjalmar in the photography business, he provides Old Ekdal with a job and pays him handsomely, and his final gesture toward the family is a lifetime bequest for Old Ekdal and for Hedvig. He also reaches out toward his son, offering Gregers a partnership in the business, but Gregers refuses. Toward the end of the play, Mrs. Sorby reveals that Hakon is going blind, and the two are planning on marrying.

Themes

Truth and Falsehood

Truth and falsehood are major themes in *The Wild Duck.* Gregers is determined that Hjalmar learn the truth about Gina's past and why Hakon Werle has been so helpful to the family. Hjalmar has lived in blissful ignorance, never questioning why Hakon decided to be of such service to him and his family. He leads a contented life and actively seeks to avoid unpleasantness, as he childishly tells Gregers. Gina protects Hjalmar from unpleasant economic realities, truly catering to all his needs, both his physical and emotional ones. Hedvig adores him, never seeing how he makes use of her love. For instance, though he worries about her sight, he lets her do eye-straining work of retouching photographs so he can play in the attic with his father. His life is based on one simple, yet determined falsehood: the photographic device that he will never invent. For Hjalmar, the invention is what Relling calls a "life-lie" it enables him to live. Ironically, despite his exuberant protests, Hjalmar is quite able to survive knowing the truth about his wife's past and the parentage of Hedvig. Though he claims that he will leave the family, he makes only a show of carrying out these threats. Hedvig, however, a younger-than-average fourteen-year-old, takes her father at his word. She has not yet learned the pattern of lies that can exist in relationships.

Choices and Consequences

Gregers makes the deliberate choice to reveal his suspicions about Gina's past and Hedvig's paternity to Hjalmar. Gregers justifies his actions through claims to idealism and talk about helping Hjalmar and Gina form a marriage based on truth instead of on lies. In deciding to pursue this course of action, however, whether or not Gregers thought about the consequences is subject to debate. Some critics have suggested that Gregers acts as he does in order to exact revenge on his father. They have even suggested that Gregers deliberately urges Hedvig to suicide since her existence as his half-sister sullies his own identity.

Hedvig's suicide is another example of a choice and consequence. There are two possible interpretations of her action. One school of thought contends that Hedvig, coached by Gregers to sacrifice something that she loves to prove her love to her father, determines that self-sacrifice will make the most stunning gesture. An opposing viewpoint contends that Hedvig decides to kill herself only after hearing her father's scornful comment that Hedvig has been playing him for her own purposes. Regardless of why, Hedvig decides to kill herself, as Rolling's scrutiny determines. Aside from her death, her action has the consequence of binding her mother and father but they had begun that process even before her death and providing her father further opportunity for self-pity.

Identity

Identity is an important theme because it is Hedvig's possible identity as Hakon's daughter that leads to the tragic ending. Many of the other characters, however, raise the issue of identity. In Hjalmar's eyes, for instance, Gina's identity completely changes upon the revelation of her affair with Hakon. This knowledge causes Hjalmar to regard his wife in a completely different manner, thus, she is no longer the person that he has known for the past fifteen years.

Other characters have actually gone through significant changes in their lifetime. Mrs. Sorby was a housekeeper, but she is about to become the wife of a wealthy industrialist. Hjalmar had been a student, but because of his father's scandal, he dropped out of school. The greatest change in identity, however, is seen in the transformation of OldEkdal. Formerly Hakon' s partner, and thus an industrialist himself, he was found guilty of the crime of illegal tree felling. Sentenced to jail, Ekdal emerged from prison to a completely different lifestyle. Instead of being in charge of a company, he performs copying services for his former partner. Since he no longer has access to the northern forests, he creates a wooded scene for hunting in the attic of the apartment house. This action shows Ekdal's inability to let go of his past life and his pathetic clinging to his former identity.

Deception

Many of the characters practice self-deceit. Ekdal's creation of a forest in which he can hunt is one example of this. He pretends that the rabbits are the great bears he once shot down. He wears his army uniform although he has been stripped of his ranking because of his crime. He sports a brown wig, showing his refusal to accept his aging. Hjalmar also practices deception, particularly in respect to his father. He insists upon calling his father the white-haired old man, despite the toupee, as if that will make him more respectable. He steadfastly and vocally maintains his belief in his invention. This serves an ulterior purpose as well, because it provides justification for letting his wife take over most of the daily tasks of running the photography studio.

In contrast, the Ekdal women are remarkably straightforward. Hedvig believes everything she hears, taking her father's histrionics on a literal level. Gina sees through the deceptions of the members of her family, but she accepts and ignores them. Her deliberate innocence stretches from the harmless pretending not to know that Old Ekdal is drinking liquor to the fatal playing along with Hjalmar's game of leaving the household.

Relling occupies somewhat of a middle ground. He encourages Hjalmar's practice of self-deception because he understands it has a greater purpose. Relling alone has the capability of choosing which truths and lies he will see, which he will reject, and to which he will react. Such understanding of the deliberate deception affords Relling more control than the other characters.

Style

Symbolism

The wild duck is the foremost symbol Ibsen employs. The wild duck has come to live with the family after having been shot by Hakon, which in itself is symbolic. Hakon is the instrument of the duck's downfall, just as he was the instrument of Gina's downfall. Both duck and woman almost came to destruction. In the case of the duck, Hakon's dog saved the creature; in the case of Gina, Hakon's money saved her from disgrace. For Gregers, however, the duck, which became caught amidst the mire and rubbish at the lake bottom, comes to represent the Ekdal family: Gina; Old Ekdal, who according to Hakon is one of those people who "dive to the bottom the moment they get a couple of slugs in their body, and never come to the surface again"; and Hjalmar, who according to Gregers has "something of the wild duck" in him, having mired himself in the dark "poisonous marsh." According to some critics, when Gregers entreats Hedvig to sacrifice the duck, he is encouraging the symbolic destruction of the lie that has poisoned her whole family.

To further the symbolic relationship, Gregers sees himself as the "absurdly clever dog" that saves the duck or the family, or Hjalmar's life from the swamp. He determines to save Hjalmar and bring him to a truer existence. In seeing himself as a savior, however, Gregers denies the possibility that the duck or Hjalmar might lead a worse existence as a result.

The wild duck is a potent symbol for other characters as well. For Old Ekdal, she represents his past life in the wild, where he was the happiest. For Hjalmar, the duck represents a distraction from his present lifestyle.

Imagery

Sight imagery is important in the play. On a literal level, blindness plays a role in its plot. Hakon is going blind, which is why he needs a wife to care for him. Hedvig is going blind, which ties her parentage to Hakon Werle; but her eyesight is also used as a device to show Hjalmar' s general carelessness of her: he forbids her to read so that she might save her vision, yet when it suits his purposes, he has her do painstaking photographic work.

Yet, as pointed out by Otto Reinert in his essay "Sight Imagery in The Wild Duck," the idea of blindness and sight also plays an important role on a figurative level. Gregers is determined "to open Hjalmar EkdaT s eyes." Gregers declares that Hjalmar "shall see his situation as it is." The import of Gregers's actions is underscored by other commentary in the play. Hakon tells Gregers, "You have seen me with your mother's eyes... But you should remember that those eyes were-clouded at time," implying that

Gregers's vision of the world is not even a truthful one but one that has been imposed on him much as he wants to impose his vision on Hjalmar.

Similarly, Hjalmar is blind to the realities of life. He refuses to acknowledge his father at the Werle house, pretending that he "didn't notice" Old Ekdal's passage through the room. Hjalmar's spiritual blindness is further reflected in his belief that he has, in Reinert's words, "superior insight." When he leaves with Gregers on the afternoon he learns about Gina's past, he believes that it is Gregers who is in trouble and needs "a friend's wakeful eyes." Though knowledge of the truth causes him to look on his past as one long blind period, he persists in living in that false world, senselessly blaming Hedvig for her parentage. "I can't stand to look at you," he says, as if the mere vision of her has destructive qualities, yet again, he cannot bear to open his eyes to the truth. As Reinert writes, "Both [Gregers and Hjalmar] are incapable of seeing beneath the surface of facts; both are blind to their own reality."

Tragicomedy

The Wild Duck is at the same time both tragic and comic a tragicomedy. Its tragic elements derive primarily from the ruin that Gregers's flaw his compulsive and unrealistic need for the idealistic brings upon the Ekdal household and particularly on Hedvig. Single-handedly, Gregers takes a secure family and turns them into an isolated collection of people, none of whom trusts or has confidence in the other. Hedvig's tragedy, while instigated by Gregers's course of action, stems from her father's renunciation of her. His actions are inevitable, for they are based on his rampant egotism. Thus, the mantle of tragic character falls upon him as well.

The play's comedic elements derive from the ludicrous behavior of the characters and their surroundings: Hjalmar's insistence on his departure from the family at the same time he allows his wife to serve him breakfast; Old Ekdal's "hunting" amidst the decrepit Christmas trees in the attic; even the scenes involving Hj almar' s reproach of Gina are tinged with the comic. Additionally, Gregers's ideals, pretentiously shared and out of place in the shabby surroundings, are imbued with a broadly comic and unrealistic dimension.

Historical Context

Union With Sweden and the Constitution

Since 1536, Norway had been a province of Denmark, but in the early 1800s, Sweden attacked Denmark. The resulting peace treaty transferred Norway to Sweden. Crown Prince Christian Fred-erik, the nephew of the Danish king, refused to accept this transfer. He initiated an uprising and called for the convention of a national assembly. The delegates wrote and signed a constitution, and elected Christian Frederik king of a free and independent Norway.

Norway received no support from Europe. Swedish troops attacked, and Christian Frederik resigned two weeks later. Sweden accepted Norway's constitution, which was amended to reflect the union effective November 1814. A Norwegian government and the National Assembly, the Storting, would make national policy. Though Norway remained an independent nation, it shared Sweden's king and foreign policy.

Norway Becomes a Parliament

Despite the popularity of King Charles John, the popularly elected Storting continued to struggle against the king and his cabinet. In 1833 representatives from the farming class formed a majority in the Storting. The so-called Farmer Storting advocated greater local control over local matters. The farmers also forged a relationship with radical urban intellectuals, which led to the formation of Norway's first political party, the Liberal party, in 1869. The party's major goal was to introduce a parliamentary system of government to Norway. The Liberals passed three amendments to the constitution in 1874, 1879, and 1880 that would require the participation of the king in Storting sessions, but the king refused to sanction this proposal. Members of the Conservative party, who wanted to strengthen the union between Sweden and Norway, held the majority in the Storting, and they supported the king.

In 1882, the Liberals gained a majority in the Storting. They began an impeachment process and removed the government of the king's appointed prime minister from office in 1884. The king saw no option but to ask the Liberal leader to become the new prime minister of Norway. Parliamentarism was thus established.

An Independent Norway

Toward the end of the 19th century, Sweden and Norway were clashing frequently. The Swedish demanded that the union's prime minister be Swedish, and they did not want to give in to Norway's demands for its own consular service. In March 1905, the prime minister's government decided that the issue had to be settled unilaterally. The Storting passed the new consular law, but the king in Sweden vetoed it. The Norwegian ministers, however, refused to countersign the veto. When the king would not accept

their resignation, they gave up power to the Storting. The prime minister declared that, in refusing to form a new ministry, the king had left Norway without a government, which was unacceptable according to Norway's constitution. Failure to do his constitution duty, he argued, led to his abdication. The Storting thus declared the dissolution of the union.

Sweden demanded a vote by the Norwegian voters that would show whether the nation as a whole agreed with this action. In August 1905, only 184 Norwegian voters voiced dissenting opinion. A final agreement on the dissolution of the union between Sweden and Norway was made in September. Norway was a free and independent country for the first time since 1397.

Social Changes in Nineteenth Century Norway

Over the course of the century, many Norwegian towns saw enormous growth. For example, Christiania, which had a population of around 12,000 in 1800, had 228,000 residents 100 years later. New roads and railway lines improved communication and trade between towns. Industry grew dramatically, particularly the timber trade and the textile industry. Whereas at the beginning of the decade, Norway was predominantly an agricultural county, by 1900, about 27 percent of Norwegians relied on industry to make their living.

The specifically peasant culture, known as the *Bondekultur,* had flourished in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, but by the mid-1800s it was in a state of decline. Old stave-churches from the Middle Ages were pulled down; peasant costumes, arts, and crafts were neglected; folktales were forgotten or scorned. A group of scholars and intellectuals wanted to ensure the survival of the Bondekultur. They recorded folktales, ballads, legends, and music for future generations. They researched peasant arts and crafts, customs, beliefs, and values.

In 1851, the Society for Popular Enlightenment was founded by educationalists and intellectuals. This society contributed to a new school law in 1860, which called for the establishment of permanent schools in rural areas. Soon, high schools also began to be constructed in rural areas.

Arts in Late-Nineteenth Century Norway

In the 1870s and 1880s, Norwegian literature began to breakthrough on the European and world scenes with foreign translations of the works of writers such as Ibsen, Bjornstjerne Bjornson, Alexander Kielland, and Jonas Lie. These writers availed themselves of changes in Norwegian society particularly the rise of industry and the disintegration of old rural society to explore new themes. Norwegians were themselves interested in the new European literary realism, as represented by writers such as Charles Dickens, Gustave Flaubert, and Ivan Turgenev. Writers were also influenced by the Danish critic Georg Brandes, who demanded the new literature must present problems for debate. Many writers were supportive of the Pan-Scandinavian movement,

which called for increased solidarity between the three Scandinavian countries: Sweden, Norway, and Denmark.

By the 1890s, however, Norwegian literature underwent the period of New Romanticism. Writers were turning away from the exploration of the individual's role in society to a probing of the relationship between individuals and their inner lives and psyches. In their later works, Ibsen and his contemporaries had turned their ideas inward, as well, but a new group of writers also emerged in the decade, such as Knut Hamsun who later won the Nobel Prize for literature.

Other important developments were made in the arts. In 1899, the National Theatre opened in Christiania with Bjornson serving as its first director. The 1880s were a turning point in Norwegian painting. Young painters traveled to Paris to learn from the works of painters such as Claude Monet. When they returned home, they developed an indigenous school of painting that concentrated on realistically but vividly depicting Norwegian daily life

Critical Overview

Ibsen published *The Wild Duck* in 1884, and the following winter, it was produced on stage for the first time. Initially, most critics did not respond to Ibsen's humble setting and characters, his sense of humor, and what they saw as his pretentiousness. While some viewers greatly enjoyed the play, they were, at that time, in the distinct minority. Playwright George Bernard Shaw wrote in 1897 after viewing the play, "Where shall I find an epithet magnificent enough for *The WildDuck*\" He found the play to be "a profound tragedy," yet one that kept the audience "shaking with laughter ... at an irresistible comedy." The poet Rainer Maria Rilke lauded the poetry of Ibsen's words. "There was something great, deep, essential," he wrote. "Last Judgement. A finality."

Summing up the majority opinion of the play, Francis Bull wrote in *Norsk Litteraturhistorie* in 1937 that "[PJeople had got used to the idea that Ibsen's dramas should engage in controversial issues, and when *The Wild Duck* came out, 11 November 1884, the public was utterly bewildered. Alexander Kielland, quoted in Bull's "Norsk Litteraturehistories," found the book odd and was annoyed by 'these everlasting symbols and hints and crude emphases.' Bjornson, cited in Rilke's Review of *The Wild Duck* in *Selected Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke* "called the whole play 'disgusting,' and thought its psychological foundation false." In the years to come, many critics had a hard time understanding both the play and what Ibsen was trying to accomplish. An 1894 reviewer from *The Athenaeum* wrote, "The play must be a joke... it is a harmless, if not very humourous piece of self-banter, or it is nothing." In a review of a series of Ibsen's plays written by Edmond Gosse, quoted in Valency's "The Flower and the Castle," echoed what many had already said about the play: "This is a very long play, by far the most extended of the series, and is, on the whole, the least interesting to read ... There is really not a character in the book that inspires confidence or liking . .. There can be no doubt that it is by far the most difficult of Ibsen's for a reader to comprehend."

Havelock Ellis, a sexual psychologist, wrote in 1890 that *The Wild Duck* was "the least remarkable of Ibsen's [tragedies]. There is no central personage who absorbs our attention, and no great situation... [T]he dramatist's love of symbolism, here centered on the wild duck, becomes obtrusive and disturbing." Ellis, however, found redemptive factors in the play as a satire on ideals and beliefs expressed in Ibsen's earlier plays such as A *Doll's House* and *The Pillars of Society.* He also noted that "Ibsen approaches in his own manner, without, however, much insistence, the moral aspects of the equality of the sexes." More laudatory was W. D. Howells, the American author and literary critic, in a review of 1906. He put forth his analysis of Hjalmar's reaction to the truth, which, in light of the body of criticism available to modern readers, seems rather simplistic: "inference is that the truth is not for every one always, but may sometimes be a real mischief." Howells, however, was one of the first critics to explore the important concept of truth and illusion that Ibsen presented.

In years to come, other critics and scholars analyzed the characters. Psychoanalysts Smith Ely Jelliffe and Louise Brink published their analyses in terms of contemporary psychoanalytic theory in 1919. They found Gregers to be a caricature of "false

blundering therapy" and believed that he "whimsically represents" Ibsen's "own earlier zeal and fate as a reformer." In this analysis, they agreed with Ellis; later critics, such as Hermann J. Weigand and Ronald Gray would concur with this opinion.

"Only gradually," wrote D. Keith Peacock in *Reference Guide to World Literature,* "was Ibsen's play recognized as a painful, but at times ironically comic, comment upon humanity's need for the protection of illusion." In the years since its first publication, The Wild Duck has come to be viewed as one of Ibsen's masterpieces. Dounia B. Christiani, an Ibsen translator, noted in her preface to a 1968 edition of *The Wild Duck* that while it "gained early recognition [from literary critics and scholars] as the most masterfully constructed of Ibsen's prose dramas, its innovative combination of farce with tragedy and of realism with symbolism has only rather recently won the sort of appreciation that is based on acute critical analysis." More contemporary criticism of *The Wild Duck* has focused on symbolism, imagery, and characterization, and some critics have used the play as an insight into Ibsen's beliefs. The play continues to draw attention, both among students and scholars of literature and drama, as well as theatergoing audiences. When the play was staged in New York in 1986, Robert Brustein commented on the director's focus on the play's theme, "which is the malignant effect of Utopian idealism on those who need illusions in order to survive."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4

Critical Essay #1

Korb has a master's degree in English literature and creative writing and has written for a wide variety of educational publishers. In the following essay, she discuss the tragic and comic elements in The Wild Duck.

In comparison to current esteem for Henrik Ibsen's The Wild Duck, the play was vastly underappreciated upon its initial appearance on the stages of Europe. In Scandinavia, the play was somewhat successful but drew little interest from critics. While its Berlin audience applauded it, the play was booed in Rome, disliked in London, and received with indifference in Paris. The criticism it drew in the first few decades after its publication and performance was, generally, negative. Edmund Gosse wrote in an 1889 collection that it was "the least interesting" of Ibsen's plays to date. In years since, however, *The Wild Duck* slowly came to be regarded as one of Ibsen's more important works. Only a few decades after it first appeared in theaters, scholars and critics began to study and better understand the play, and thus appreciate it. As early as 1919, Smith Ely Jeliffe and Louise Brink asserted in *The Psychoanalytic* Review that "Ibsen's power and genius for touching the finer intimate realities of life close at hand, are perhaps most evident in *The Wild Duck."*

The play also ushered in the final period of Ibsen's career, signifying his shifting interest from social realism to symbolism and characterization. Ibsen portrays the self-deceiving Ekdal family with psychological insight and compassion. At the same time, his play reaches both the heights of tragedy and comedy. Indeed, Ibsen asserted that he had written a "tragi-comedy," an appraisal that has since been accepted by most scholars. The tragedy was as important as the comedy, Ibsen wrote, otherwise Hedvig' s death would become "incomprehensible." Indeed, this incoherence was one of the elements against which many early critics railed. Maurice Valency notes that amidst a backdrop of caricatures and melodramas, "Only the child suffers." Her death is the one tragic note in a "distinctly comic situation."

The Wild Duck is, at once, serious and farcical. The characters in particular manifest the comic elements. Old Ekdal charges around the attic, wearing his lieutenant's cap and dirty toupee and shooting pigeons and poultry and pretending that he is shooting bears. The wild duck, confined to the attic, has instead of a lake for swimming and diving, a water trough for splashing. Hjalmar, who has just terrified his daughter and is in the process of leaving his wife, still throws his overcoat on the sofa and complains about "All these exhausting preparations!"

In Hjalmar Ekdal and Gregers Werle, the opposing elements that make up comedy and tragedy are most clearly demonstrated. Each man strongly maintains his belief and his system of ideals, not realizing that his overwrought and overblown opinions appear ludicrous to onlookers. Hjalmar talks quite earnestly of a photographic device he will invent. "Sure, of course I'm making progress," he answers in response to Gregers's question. "I grapple every single day with the invention, I'm filled with it... But I simply must not be rushed;.. . The inspiration, the intuition look, when it's ready to come, it will

come, and that's all." Everyone around him understands this truth, what Relling calls Hjalmar's "life-lie."

Hjalmar's foolishness is more comically revealed when he returns home to pack his belongings after his night of drunkenness. He says to Gina, "I must have my books with me. Where are my books?"

Gina: What books? Hjalmar: My scientific works, naturally the technical journals I use for my invention. Gina *[looking in the bookcase]:* Is it these here that there's no covers on? Hjalmar: Yes, of course. Gina *{puts a pile of unbound volumes on the table]:* Shouldn't I get Hedvig to cut the pages for you?

This exchange eloquently demonstrates how little involvement Hjalmar actually has with his "project." It is only aprop a distracting toy, even.

In her article "The Will and Testament of Ibsen," Mary McCarthy notes the comical connection between the two men; "Hjalmar's pretended 'purpose in life' is a sort of parody of Gregers "purpose to live for.'" The reverse is true as well; Gregers's belief that he can effect a meaningful difference in other people's lives can be seen as his life-lie. In truth, his interference has no positive purpose and seems to mask his own emptiness more than it fulfills any other function. Gregers has spent the past fifteen years up at "the works," where he found life "Delightfully lonely." Though he had "Plenty of opportunity to think about all sorts of things," he never arrived at any project to which he could devote his life much in the same vein as Hjalmar and his "invention." The project of revealing the truth about Hakon's involvement with the Ekdals, however, gives him "an objective to live for." That Gregers should take upon himself the responsibility of opening Hjalmar's eyes is both tragic and comic. His sense of self-importance makes it tragic he cannot help but try and inflict his ideals on those around him as does the ultimate outcome his interference has on the family. At the same time, his self-importance, which leads to his ill-conceived plan, is comical, for clearly Gregers has no justification for his actions truly he seems to enjoy meddling and he has nothing else on which to spend his time. At the end of the play, he mournfully but with acceptance verbalizes his role what he calls his "destiny" in life: "To be the thirteenth man at the table."

Unfortunately, the rest of the Ekdal family is as ignorant to the intermingling of seriousness and foolishness reality and illusion as are Gregers and Hjalmar. Though Gina Ekdal immediately senses the danger that Gregers poses to her family and to the protected world she has created for Hjalmar, her recognition is based on her dependency on Hakon's economic help, thus she fears losing her reality, not her illusion. She protests letting Gregers rent out their extra room: "But can't you see there's something the matter between them again, since the younger one is moving out? . . . And now maybe Mr. Werle will think you were behind it... he could take it out on Grandpa. Suppose he loses the little money he makes working for Graberg." Gina also distrusts Gregers because, unlike her husband who is lost in his own world and concerns, she pays attention to Gregers's words and nuances.

Gregers: She's going look to like you in time, Mrs. Ekdal. How old might she be now? Gina: Hedvig's just fourteen; it's her birthday the day after tomorrow. Gregers: A big girl for her age. Gina: Yes, she certainly shot up this last year. Gregers: The young ones growing up make us realize how old we ourselves are getting. How long is it now you've been married? Gina: We've been married already fifteen years-just about. Gregers: Imagine, is it that long! Gina *[becomes attentive; looks at him]*: Yes, that's what it is, all right.

Only Hjalmar's careless interruption ends the flow of conversation, but the exchange gains much significance because it shows Gina's wariness at Gregers's questions. She understands the implications in his unspoken words and takes care to answer him honestly if cagily.

Despite Gina's initial sense of foreboding, she is unable to recognize the depth of the threat he poses, for her focus, as befits her role in life, is on the practical rather than the symbolic and emotional. For instance, she questions Gregers's assertion that he would like to be a clever dog, the "kind that goes in after ducks when they plunge and fasten themselves in the weeds and the tangle in the mud" because she mistakenly interprets his statement literally.

Though she is only a child, Hedvig understands that Gregers speaks symbolically:

Gina:... Wasn't that crazy talk, wanting to be a dog? Hedvig: You know what, Mother I think he meant something else. Gina: What else could he mean? Hedvig: Oh, I don't know. But it was just as though he meant something different from what he was saying-the whole time. Gina: You think so? Well, it sure was queer though.

Her tragedy, however, arises because she takes words *too* seriously. First, she believes Gregers's words that sacrificing the wild duck is the best way to demonstrate her love for her father. More importantly, she takes Hjalmar's rejection utterly seriously. When he calls her an intruder, Hedvig grabs the pistol and escapes into the attic. She overhears him speak of her "manipulation" of him, rhetorically stating: "If I asked her then: Hedvig, are you willing to turn your back on life for me? *[Laughs scornfully.]* Thanks a lot-you'd soon hear the answer I'd get!" In response and in despair, Hedvig kills herself.

Her parents' reactions further underscore the tragic-comic elements of the play. Upon discovery of Hedvig's body, Gina reacts as would a normal parent. She bursts into tears and cries out, "Oh, my baby! My baby!" Hjalmar, in contrast, describes how Hedvig must have "in terror . .. crept into the attic and died for love of me." He dramatically clenches his hands into fists and berates the heavens. "Oh, Thou above ... ! If Thou art there! Why hast Thou done this thing to me? ..." In the midst of his overdramatizing, however, the serious undercurrent remains ever apparent, for even at this moment of Hedvig's greatest loss the loss of her life Hjalmar cannot see past how it will affect his own life.

Source: Rena Korb, in an essay for *Drama for Students,* Gale, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Johnston discusses the symbolic meaning that lies within The Wild Duck.

In 1906, Rainer Maria Rilke wrote to Clara Rilke about his cultural activities in Paris and noted:

But the most remarkable part of this very long day was the evening. We saw Ibsen's *Wild Duck* at the Antoine. Excellently rehearsed, with a great deal of care and shaping marvelous. Of course, by reason of certain differences in temperament, details were distorted, crooked, misunderstood. But the poetry! ... all its splendour came from the inside and almost to the surface. There was something great, deep, essential. Last Judgement. A finality. And suddenly the hour was there when Ibsen's majesty deigned to look at me for the first time. A new poet, whom we shall approach by many roads now that I know of one of them. And again someone who is misunderstood in the midst of fame. Someone quite different from what one hears....

That the image of the Last Judgment should flash through Rilke's mind suggests that Ibsen's audacious supertext did well up "from the inside and almost to the surface" as it seems to have done for Robert Raphael too who, in a sensitive account of the play, observed of the strange Ekdal attic and its menagerie:

Hedvig and her grandfather approach their world with a devotion and ritual akin to religious reverence, for the attic with the duck and other treasures may be considered a metaphor for the Christian paradise: it performs in their lives exactly the same function as does a traditional church for many people. Existing on the top floor of the Ekdal microcosm, the attic is the *summuni bonum* in their lives; it provides them, just like heaven, with a world of pure value, a realm of nearly perfect orientation. The Ekdals keep returning to this private religion for sustenance just as people do with any traditional illusion that is sacred to them.

In *The Ibsen Cycle* (1975), I outlined how *The Wild Duck* recreated the Christian phase in the long history of the human spirit explored by Hegel and, I claimed, recovered in Ibsen's own imaginative and independent terms in his cycle of twelve realist plays. *The Wild Duck* inaugurated at the same time the second part of Ibsen's three-part cycle. The sequence in which Hegel acts out the spirit's long travail from the time of the Roman empire through the myth of the Fall and the sacrifice of the "natural world" up to the pre-Enlightenment period of the "sun king" and his court is perhaps the richest in the *Phenomenology.* It is a sequence, like the others in the *Phenomenology,* that has shaped our modern identity and that therefore, if we are fully to know ourselves, must be relived imaginatively by a present act of remembrance. In this essay I want to examine the interplay of competing levels of dramatic metaphor, verbal and visual, in Ibsen's drama: the highly conscious intertextuality of his art those moments in Ibsen's text when the supertext momentarily wells up through the language of everyday life. A struggle takes place between text and supertext for the play's dominant language, and it

is the struggle itself, the way in which the spirit invades and infuses a despiritualized everyday reality, that constitutes a major conflict of the play.

In *The Wild Duck* the struggle is especially rich because of the unusual number of competing voices and visions that contribute to the struggle, with the messianic (Gregers) and the diabolic (Relling) at the lingual extremes. Gina's language is literal, lapsing into malapropism; old Ekdal's a language of superstition and of the world of nature: "Der er haevn i skogen" ("there's vengeance in the forests"). His son Hjalmar has evolved a sentimentally evasive and self-deluding rhetoric under the promptings of Relling, who himself introduces to the discourse of the household the deceptive language of the "Iivsl0gnen" ("life-lie"). Gregers Werle infuses this lingual brew with a potent language of parable, symbol, and metaphor in the service of what he believes are truths transcending the quotidian world of the senses and at war with the lies of his father and Relling.

The still unformed child consciousness of Hedvig, assailed by these disparate voices, responds to this strange new language of Gregers, a secret language of "pa havsens bund" ("the depths of the sea") where "Tiden er altsa ista" ("time has stood still") and where the attic might not really be an attic. At the end of Act II Gregers declares he wishes to be "en riktig urimelig flink hund; en slig en, som gar tilbunds after vildaender, nar de dukker under og bider sig fast i tang og taere nede i mudderet" ("an extraordinarily clever dog. One that goes to the bottom after wild ducks when they dive and bite fast to all the weeds and waste down in the mud"). Gina, the literalist, is merely stupefied by this declared ambition, but Hedvig early on tunes in to Gregers' mode of discourse: "det var ligesom han mente noget andet, end det han sa hele tiden" ("it was as if he meant something different from what he was saying all the time"). She detects that Gregers talks in parables, that he inhabits something like a medieval world of marvelous correspondences between the God-created Book of Nature waiting to be interpreted and the human condition, where the history of the wild duck, its wounding and rescue, exist in an allegorical dimension to be decoded for hidden spiritual truth. In one odd passage Relling tells Gregers, "Men De tar sa skammelig fejl af de store vidunderfluerne, som De tror at se og h0re omkring Dem" ("But you're preposterously wrong about the great marvelous presences you believe you see and hear around you"). I will claim that Gregers' is a quintessentially Christian consciousness and mode of discourse sustained in the play by both its scenography its overall story and action and its pervasive imagery. That is, it is by recognizing the congruence of the play's verbal imagery with its scenography, action, and metaphorical topography that a distinctly Christian dimension of the play with its attendant dualisms powerfully emerges.

The scenography of the play is notably vertical: from the heights of H0ydal (High Dale) to the "havsens bund" ("depths of the sea") a macrocosm whose vertical structure is recreated, as Robert Raphael saw, in the microcosm of the Ekdal home, with the attic world above and the realm of Relling and Molvik below. This scenography, which is supplemented by character types, actions, and verbal and visual imagery, supplies the medieval Christian dimension of the play. It is not the only dimension but is the richest source of the play's poetry.

On 12 June 1883 Ibsen announced to his friend Georg Brandes that he was working on the plot of a new dramatic work that was to be *The Wild Duck*. He added, "Jeg gar i denne tid og tumler med udkastet til et nyt dramatisk arbejde i 4 akter. Der ansamler sig jo gerne mellem ar og dag diverse galskaber i en, og dem vil man gerne have et afl0b for" ("At the moment I'm setting about revolving the plot of a new dramatic work in four acts. A variety of wild ideas are inclined to gather together in one's mind, and one needs to find an outlet for them"). The variety of wild ideas ("diverse galskaber") in *The Wild Duck* is of a formidable audacity: as an example to which I shall return later, I will mention the trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Duck.

The realistic story of the play goes as follows: at the time when Merchant (Grosserer) Werle is about to marry his mistress, Mrs. S0rby, his son Gregers is invited to descend from H0ydal after a fifteen-year exile and attend a feast in his honor. Gregers invites his old friend Hjalmar Ekdal to join him. Hjalmar is humiliated at the party: Merchant Werle pointedly observes that Hjalmar's presence has meant they were an unlucky thirteen at table; then Hjalmar's incongruously shabby father disturbs the sumptuous feast. Gregers becomes convinced that his father has brought about the Ekdals' fall and also has arranged that Hjalmar should marry the merchant's discarded mistress. He decides to make right his own conscience by revealing the truth of how the Ekdals were betrayed.

When he visits their attic studio and dwelling, he finds them more or less comfortably reconciled to their fallen condition, against which they have compensated by constructing a fantasy world of the attic and its menagerie an escape from unhappy reality. Here, Gregers encounters an old opponent, Dr. Relling, living below the Ekdals with a companion whom Relling describes as "demonisk" ("demonic"). Whereas Gregers believes in bringing saving truth, Relling believes humanity needs "livsl0gner" ("life-lies") to survive....

Gregers' truth-bringing creates a crisis in the Ekdal family which, he convinces Hedvig, can be overcome through sacrifice the sacrifice of what she holds most dear, the wild duck. When the parents believe Hedvig has sacrificed the duck, it is important to note, they are reconciled, as Gregers predicted. But something goes wrong. Hedvig kills herself. The parents show "noble grief," but Gregers and Relling, resuming their old quarrel, dispute the value of this grief.

This summary of the plot inevitably has left out much, but it covers the main action. However, this action can be retold as much more than a homely domestic tragedy, and I now would like to superimpose upon the realistic story, like an enlarging grid, the story retold from the archetypal dimension.

A Son descends from on high (H0ydal) to undo the actions of his Father, whose victims live in a fallen condition of deceit and escapist fantasy. He will free these victims by bringing the Truth, and he uses the imagery of Light to describe this action. He sees this humanity as in the clutches of a Deceiver, living *below* with a demonic companion, indulging in drunken orgies. This fallen family has constructed a miniature landscape and menagerie in the attic which compensates for the lost world of nature, so that the

stage is divided, as in familiar Christian iconography, between the humble family in the foreground and a space with animals in the background. The Truth-bringer's action causes great anguish, and, when he urges sacrifice, tragedy ensues. After the catastrophe, the Truth-bringer and the Deceiver resume their dispute over whether humanity can be redeemed. The Son (who does not expect to live long) asserts it is his destiny to be, as if at a perpetual Last Supper, "at vaere trettende mand tilbords" ("thirteenth at table").

The world of the play is drastically divided between an idea of reality created by the past actions of the Father, powerfully presiding over the fall of the play's chief inhabitants (and abetted by the lies of the Deceiver), and an idea of reality envisaged by the Son, seeking through present actions and through the Truth these inhabitants' redemption. Like the medieval mystery cycles, therefore, *The Wild Duck* is divided between Old Testament (of the Father and Law) and New (of the Son and Salvation).

The second archetypal story runs parallel with the first ("realistic") one and in fact is the same action looked at from another perspective. (In Ibsen the symbol is always the real seen from another perspective.) Textually, the two stories continually intersect. Each by itself would be inadequate as a drama of human consciousness. The archetypal story alone would have the remote and abstract quality of, say, *The Castle of Perseverance*. The realistic story alone would be as confined and parochial in reference as most modern dramatic realism. The intersection of the two dimensions of action and language creates difficulties both for interpretation and for performance, but they are the difficulties of a major dramatic art and are worth solving. To evade the multidimensionality of Ibsen's texts is to settle for only a fraction of his intention. To cut him down to the size of one's psychological, moral, or political agenda instead of opening oneself up to the immensity of his intention is to create that idea of him a man "misunderstood in the midst of fame" (to recall Rilke' s words) which, in the United States, practically reduces his theatrical output to only two purportedly feminist plays, *A Doll House* and *Hedda Gabler.*

The Wild Duck, as noted above, is the first play of the Cycle's second group, and it inaugurates the profoundly *dualistic* aspect of this second phase of the Cycle. This dualism is visually present on stage in the division, in the Ekdal home, between a foreground space of reluctant work and a background space (the attic) of compensating fantasy a stage division also present in the Werle household. This dualism continues in the strongly vertical imagery of the play with its extremes of heights and depths, in the social division between the haves and have-nots in the ideological division of Gregers' and Rolling's agendas, and so on. How thoroughly Ibsen has *visualized* this dualism can be seen in two striking uses of an incongruity between character and setting: the shabbily dressed Ekdal emerging to interrupt the sumptuous feast of Grosserer Werle, and the appearance of the splendidly dressed Werle interrupting the shabby feast of the Ekdal home.

I would argue the Ekdals' fantasy attic stands for a realm of the human imagination, of memory of loss which within two-dimensional modernity usually is rendered impotent as fantasy and escapism e.g., in the trivial diversions of the modern media but which

contains potent hidden, unconscious forces that can awaken and explode into the contemporary world. It is under Gregers' prompting, I believe, that Hedvig awakens these dangerous but liberating powers. That invisible denizen of the attic, the Flying Dutchman, is just such a potent figure of liberating death to the Norwegian girl Senta in Richard Wagner's opera. The Flying Dutchman, I am convinced, is one of the identities of the Stranger from the depths of the sea in *The Lady from the Sea,* a play in which the miniature enclosed landscape of *The Wild Ducks* attic now explodes, through Ibsen's theatrical magic, into the expansive Romantic scenography of mountains and fjord. The strange symbolism *The Wild Duck* the secretive realm of the attic, its trees, treasures, and menagerie, with the wild duck at its center is both new in the Cycle and unique to this play. Such a symbolic or allegorical dimension to art, where the world must be "read" as a system of signs to be decoded, is most typical of medieval Christian art. And it is Gregers who reads the world in this way.

Profoundly connected to the Christian themes, action, and imagery of the play is the juxtaposition of the humble and the exalted. This is Ibsen's only play focusing on the "insulted and injured" the only play exploring so humble a condition of consciousness. Of all world religions or ideologies, in both its story and its iconography, Christianity above all emphasizes the humble and the homely in strong contrast to the emphasis on the heroic and the beautiful of the Hellenic tradition, whose recovery was envisaged in the first four plays. Such iconography (encountered in medieval drama) as the stable, the humble family in the foreground, the animals in the background, the angels appearing to the simple shepherds in Palestine, and so on, at the same time is coupled with the most extravagant claims for humanity (for whom specifically the entire cosmos was brought into being) ever made by a religion. Much of this imagery and iconography is repeated in *The Wild Duck.*

The eruptions of Christian themes and imagery are so remarkably frequent when linked with the plot and the characters' situations, conflicts, and actions and with the visual imagery and setting that I cannot see how such a dimension, as an insistent intertextuality, can be denied. In fact, the author of *Brand, Peer Gynt,* and *Emperor and Galilean* creates in the Realist Cycle, with intricate subtlety and delicacy, a multidimensional dramatic work on the most immense scale.

Ibsen's method is an incremental interplay of both visual and verbal suggestion in which the archetypal story gradually seeps through the modern realistic texture, as in the opening scene of the play. That is, instead of creating an overtly Symbolist or allegorical drama, Ibsen infiltrates his supertext into his realistic text little by little. It is only at the close of this incremental process that the full supertext emerges.

In the following excerpts from the play, this incremental process stands revealed. At many points, the allegorical references are self-evident; still, I have noted particular points at which close readings and exact translations clarify the archetypal supertext. I begin with the stage direction describing Merchant Werle's house in Act I....

The opening scene ushers in the first cluster of Christian images the Fall, hard labor and penance, the descent of the Son, the Last Supper without disturbing the requirements of the dramatic text to render a plausible modern reality.

Ibsen was being more than unusually disingenuous, I believe, when he assured his publisher, Frederik Hegel, that the play could not "possibly give offense to anyone." The "galskaber" which plays all through the text, as we will see below, is the expression of a creative impulse audacious to the point of genial blasphemy. First there is the Trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy ("velsignede") Duck.

Birds frequently are emblems of spiritual forces. The Holy Ghost traditionally is of course depicted as a dove. Ibsen maintains this avian iconography for the spirit from early in his career to the end. The idealistic lovers of *Love's Comedy* are named after the falcon and swan. The hawk and dove are crucial spiritual emblems in *Brand.* Talking birds accompany Peer's encounter with the B0yg and with Memnon's statue in *Peer Gynt.* Hilde Wangel in *The Master Builder* is a "rogfuglen" ("bird of prey"). The last words of the Cycle juxtapose Maia's "Jeg er fri som en fugl! Jeg er fri!" ("I am free as a bird, I am free!") with the words of the Deaconess "Pax vobiscum!" The idea that a wild duck might be an emblem of the free (wild) spirit, now trapped and tamed, is strongly reinforced by Gregers Werle's own forceful application of this idea.

The Norwegian term for "duck" is "and." The word for "spirit" is "and." (The Holy Ghost is "den hellige and.") There is only a slight dissimilarity in both the sound and the appearance of the two words. Gregers, the Son, declares he wishes to be an extraordinarily clever dog and save wild ducks who have sunk to the bottom among what Ekdal calls "alt det fandenskab" "all that devil's mess". To reinforce its archetypal dimension, the wild duck and its realm, before and after captivity is presented to Gregers, and to the audience, in the most striking manner.

In Act II, Gregers consoles Old Ekdal for his loss of the natural world, the world of forests and lakes that the wild duck also inhabited. Ekdal, he says, has nothing in the world to connect him to his more free, natural life, and this rouses the old man to reveal the world of the attic and its central denizen. The disclosure of the duck to Gregers and to the theater audience is a solemnly reverent, step-by-step revelation paced for maximum effect:

Ekdal (staring astonished at him). Nothing in the world to !

Gregers. Of course, you've got Hjalmar. But he's got his own family. And a man like you, who's always felt drawn to what is wild and free, is

Ekdal (Strikes the table). Hjalmar, now he's got to see it!

Hjalmar. But father, is it worth it just now? It's so dark

Ekdal. Nonsense. There's the moonlight. Come and help me, Hjalmer.

Hedvig. Yes, let's do it, father!

Hjalmar (getting up). Oh, very well.

Gregers (to Gina). What is it?

Gina. You mustn't think it's anything so very special.

(Ekdal and Hjalmar have gone to the rear wall, and each slides one of the double doors aside, Hedvig helping the old man. Gregers remains standing by the sofa. Gina sits unconcerned and sewing. Through the door-opening can be seen a large, long, irregularly shaped attic with recesses and a couple of freestanding stove pipes. There are skylights through which bright moonlight falls on some pans of the room while others remain in deep shadow.)

Ekdal (to Gregers). Come right over here.

Gregers (walks over to him). Just what is it?

Ekdal. Take a look and see. Hm.

Hjalmar (rather embarrassed). All this belongs to father, you understand.

Gregers (at the doorway, looking into the attic). So you keep poultry, Lieutenant Ekdal.

Ekdal. I should think we do keep poultry. They've flown up to roost just now. You'll need to see the poultry by daylight.

Hedvig. And then there's

Ekdal. Shh, shh. Don't say anything just yet.

Gregers. And you keep pigeons, too, I see.

Ekdal. Ah, yes. You could certainly say we keep pigeons! They've got their boxes up there under the rafters. Because pigeons like to roost high up, you know.

Hjalmer. Some are not just ordinary pigeons.

Ekdal. Ordinary! No, you can be sure of that! We have tumblers. And a pair of pouters, as well. But come over here. Can you see that hutch over there by the wall?

Gregers. Yes. What do you use that for?

Ekdal. That's where the rabbits lie at night, young fellow.

Gregers. No! So you've got rabbits as well?

Ekdal. Yes, you can be sure as the devil we've got rabbits. He's asking if we've got rabbits, do you hear, Hjalmar? Hm. But now comes the real thing, just wait. Here it is!

Move away, Hedvig. Now come and stand here, just so, and then look down there. Can you see a basket with straw in it?

Gregers. Yes. And I can see a bird lying in it.

Ekdal. Hm. "a bird"

Gregers. Isn't it a duck?

Ekdal (offended). Yes, of course it's a duck.

Hjalmar. But what kind of duck, do you suppose?

Hedvig. It's not just any ordinary duck

Ekdal. Shh!

Gregers. And it isn't a turkish [tyrkisk] duck, either.

Ekdal. No, Mr. Werle. That's no turkish duck. It's a wild duck [en vildand]....

In the iterations of this identity that follow, the term "en vildand" goes through three forms. Ekdal says simply "en vildand." Gregers separates the two parts of the noun and repeats "En-vild-and," emphasizing the strange wild/free aspect. Ekdal finally says "vildanden," which conjoins the article and the two parts of the noun. It would seem that the term has lost its strangeness for the Ekdals, and therefore the duck its challenging identity.

The ensuing story of the duck is told against our *memory* of its moonlit disclosure, like a parable glossing the strange revelation. The audience is bound to remember, all through the following narration, the strange vision it has just had.

The story of the wild duck ("and") and its fate is sufficiently poetic to magnify the Ekdals' story a supertextual enlargement of it that does not compromise its subtextual pathos. The imagery of the lost natural world, presented *visually* in the miniature moonlight disclosure, now *verbally* invades the stage through the dialogue's imagery, serving as a gloss to convey the dimension of the loss. The extent of this loss, and its consequences for the human spirit ("and"), will be the theme of the quarrel between the Truth-bringer Gregers and the Deceiver Relling. A broad hint of the messianic connotations of Gregers' identity comes at the conclusion of Act III, which gathers up a cluster of preceding themes:

Gregers.... if you once have to carry the cross of being called Gregers [Men nar en har del kors pa sig, at hede Gregers] "Gregers" and then "Werle" on top of that! Have you ever heard anything so revolting?

Hjalmar. But I don't think that at all.

Gregers. Ugh! Isch! I'd like to spit on a fellow with a name like that [a reference to the experience of the original bearer of the Cross]. But once you've borne the Cross of being Gregers Werle in this world the way I have

Hjalmar (laughing). Ha-ha! If you weren't Gregers Werle, what would you like to be?

Gregers. If I could choose, I'd like best to be a clever dog.

Gina. A dog!

Hedvig (involuntarily). Oh no!

Gregers. Yes, an extraordinarily clever dog. One that goes to the bottom after wild ducks when they dive and bite fast to all the weeds and waste down in the mud....

Here Gregers has taken over and expanded his father's metaphor about the wounded Ekdals from Act I and has reversed it from adverse Judgment of hopeless loss to an image of Redemption the New Testament compared to the Old Testament version of the Fall. Ekdal, describing the behavior of the wounded duck, merely reports its natural behavior, but Gregers blends Old Werle's and Old Ekdal's accounts to make a form of prospective parable. This is a language to which Gregers will get Hedvig to respond.

The strangest commentary on the duck's identity and its link with Gregers' messianic action in the play emerges from one of Gina's many malapropisms, occurring at the end of the following conversation about the duck:

Hedvig (going to Gregers). Now you can really see the wild duck.

Gregers. I'm looking at it. She's trailing a little in one wing, I think.

Hjalmar. Well, that's hardly surprising. That's where she was shot.

Gregers. And she's dragging a little on one foot. Isn't that right?

Hjalmar. Perhaps just a little bit.

Hedvig. You see it was in the foot the dog bit her.

Hjalmar. But she's hale and healthy otherwise. And that's really remarkable for one who's had a charge of shot in her body and who's been held in the jaws of a dog

Gregers (with a glance at Hedvig). And has been in the depths of the sea for so long.

Hedvig (smiling). Yes.

Gina. That blessed wild duck [Den velsignede vildanden]! There's more than enough crucifying over her [Den g0res der da krusifikser nok for; alternate translation: Enough crucifixes have been made for her]....

Here Gina's comment strays into wild and telling Christian malapropism. The Father has winged the duck, preventing its free flight, whereas the extraordinarily clever dog, whose action the Son wishes to emulate, makes difficult its terrestrial life.

Gregers' messianic identity is further irreverently evoked, I believe, in a very Joycean form of punning "galskab." Relling derisively terms Gregers a "kvakksalver" ("quacksalver"). "Kvakk" not only designates "charlatan": it is also the Germanic word for the cry of a duck. (*OED*: "quack *[kwaek]* sb. Imitative: cf. Du. Kwak, G. *quack,* Sw. *quak* [of ducks or frogs], Icel. *kvak*, twittering of birds.") Although in Dano-Norwegian the word for a duck's cry is "skraepper," the Swedish, German, and Icelandic equivalents are close enough. And what of "salver"? "Salve" and "save" derive from the same Latin root (as "salvation" attests). One entry in the OED notes that "salver," "One who salves or heals," is "applied to Christ or the Virgin Mary." Is a "kvakksalver" a charlatan healer or savior of ducks or of souls? Again, it is Gregers who gives himself this dual (and-and-salver) identity. When he declares he wishes to be the clever dog who dives to the bottom to save wounded ducks, we, like Hedvig, know he is not discussing canine and avian identities. We know a parable when we hear one.

The play, as noted above, contains some intri-guingly parallel and repeated images and actions. The sumptuous feast in the Werle household is paralleled by the humble feast in the Ekdal home. Both feasts are interrupted by an unwanted guest from the "other house," and each intruder is visually incongruous to the alien surroundings. The intrusion of Ekdal into the Werle feast leads to the breakup of the Werle family; the intrusion of Werle (and later Mrs. S0rby) into the Ekdal household leads to the breakup of the Ekdal family. Each intrusion of the Werle household into the Ekdal realm follows the resumption of the old quarrel between Gregers and Relling. This quarrel predates the action of the play, and the last lines of the play imply it will continue as if the two are in eternal conflict. . ..

The first interruption from the Werle household, exacerbating Gregers' quarrel with his father, alienated Hjalmar from his wife; the second will alienate him from his daughter. The Werle realm thus forcefully and destructively intrudes into the subordinate Ekdal realm. Gregers, in Act I, described his father's actions as a "slagmark" ("battlefield") with the "menneskeskaebner" ("smashed human forms" [IV, 243]) strewn all around a description that implies more than the Ekdals have suffered, lifting the quarrel between Father and Son to a universal conflict, whether the Father is a supreme capitalist power (as is Grosserer) or a celestial one.

In Act V we learn that Hjalmar has temporarily descended into the Relling realm of drunken orgy. His reaction to the experience, once he returns home, is strangely excessive:

HJALMAR (talking to himself, half aloud and bitterly, as he empties the table drawer) You're a scoundrel, Relling! A villain, that's what you are! Ah, you fiendish tempter! If only I could get someone to get rid of you on the quiet. *(He sets some old letters to one side and discovers the torn piece of paper from the day before. He picks it up and looks at the two pieces, putting them down quickly as Gina enters.)* (IV, 305)

The words Hjalmar uses are "skurk," "keltring," and "kaendige forf0rer," which, denoting "scoundrel," "villain," and "tempter" (forf0re is "to tempt or seduce," as in Genesis 3.13), clearly suggest Rolling's satanic identity. When Gina suggests that Hjalmar temporarily lodge with Relling and Molvik, Hjalmar explodes: "Don't mention the names of those creatures. It's enough to make me lose my appetite just thinking about them.... [T]hose two scum, they're capable of every vice"....

In a strictly realistic play one would be led to lurid speculation as to what it was that Hjalmar had witnessed between Relling and Molvik below. Here, I believe the intensity of his reaction and its vice and tempter imagery is used to establish Relling's abode as the diabolic location in the world of the play. By now the reader should be aware that neither the messianic nor the diabolic identities in the play carry their solemn traditional valuations.

Gregers counters the diabolic aspect of Relling's influence upon the Ekdal world with his own overstrained messianism. He urges upon Hedvig the supreme spiritual action of the sacrifice of what she loves most. When he suspects her of faltering, he exclaims, "I can tell by looking at you that it's not fulfilled [fuldbragt]," employing the same solemn words of Christ that Ibsen uses at other supreme moments in the Cycle (e.g., Hilde Wangel's "For nu, nu er det fuldbragt!" ["For now, now it is fulfilled!"] as Solness climbs his tower). Too frequently, Gregers is seen as the villain of the play and Relling its wise therapist adjusting fallen humanity to unhappy reality. This ignores the fact that Gregers' strategy does succeed: when Gina and Hjalmar believe Hedvig induced her grandfather to shoot the duck they are reconciled. Nor is it certain that Hedvig's suicide, like her near namesake Hedda's, is only negative. Estrangement and escape from an intolerable world can signal spiritual awakening. The Ekdals could just as well be seen as the victims of the manipulations of Gregers' opponents, Werle and Relling. (The play itself, of course, resists onesided endorsement of either Gregers or Relling.) When Hedvig retreats from her resolve to sacrifice what she loves most, Gregers will blame the environment in which she grew up:

Hedvig. Last night, at the time, I thought there was something so beautiful about it; but after I'd slept, and thought about it again, I didn't think so much of it.

Gregers. No, you can't have grown up here and not have been damaged in some way.

Hedvig. I don't care about that. So long as father comes back up here, then

Gregers. Ah, if only you had your eyes opened to what really makes life worth living, if you had the true, joyful, and brave spirit of sacrifice, then you'd see how he'd come back up to you. But I still believe in you, Hedvig....

The play ends on the swift conjunction of the Last Supper and the Devil.

Were we discussing James Joyce's realist textuality, none of this would astonish. It will seem strange to many Ibsenists because of the received ideas about the realistic method devised by Joyce's chosen mentor. The passages above and many others might be seen as coincidences (though so many in one text would be bizarre) were it

not for the ways in which they fit the rest of the play's pattern of scene, character-confrontation, plot and story, action, and visual and verbal imagery. Taken together they establish the presence of a huge archetypal story behind the foregrounded modern realist story a larger, richer, and more imaginative space for the poet to inhabit than the discourse of modernity would seem to permit. It might well be that audiences will not comprehend the references any more than they will detect, for example, multiple parallels and references in *Ulysses* or the elaborate Manichean structure and texture Samuel Beckett self-avowedly built into *Krapp's Last Tap*e. The mythopoetic procedure allows the poet imaginatively to grasp and shape his or her world, to make imaginative sense of it. The almost dizzyingly complex conscious intertextuality of *The Master Builder,* for example, lets the dramatist bring his major archetypal forces into aesthetic play, to make his art adequate to his imaginatively apprehended cosmos. This, and not the audience's comfortable and easy comprehension of what is going on, is the major artist's concern. As Ibsen adjured Georg Brandes, "There actually are moments when the whole history of the world reminds one of a sinking ship; the only thing to do is to save oneself." Nevertheless, when the artist employs an elaborate referential system this will give coherence to the art which the audience may enjoy even without understanding exactly what is going on. Though it be *galskab*, yet there's method in it.

I have discovered when teaching the play that students find the presence of Christian archetypes in the text obvious and even insistent, so it is necessary to point out that Ibsen's method actually is subtle enough to have gone undetected. There is a parallel here with T. S. Eliot's use of Euripides' *Alcestis* for the plot of The *Cocktail Party* a source that Eliot found himself obliged to point out to readers. Once pointed out, it becomes "obvious."

A good exercise would be for the reader to take a representative text from an accredited realist dramatist e.g., Harley Granville-Barker, John Galsworthy, or Arthur Miller and compare theirs with Ibsen's procedure. The out-and-out realist will be concerned primarily with establishing the everyday plausibility of characters, their situations and their speeches and actions, and not with building up any archetypal dimension: the speech habits will be far less "loaded," extravagant, and histrionic, more univocal, less emphatically identifying by repetition (the "claim of idealism," etc.), and, at first sight, more fluid and familiar than Ibsen's method. But any visit to "The Best Plays" of the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s, etc. that received the acclaim of sophisticated reviewers who believed Ibsen "dated" by comparison will find those plays' shelf-life, and that of the reviews, was short indeed, whereas the dialectical architecture of Ibsen's work, his welding together the contemporary and the timeless, has proved triumphantly durable. Certainly these plays are doing odd and unfamiliar things, none more so than *The Wild Duck*. But that is in the nature of a major art.

Ibsen's procedure, then, is to look closely at modern reality to discover its hidden archetypal content. This does not make Ibsen's procedure allegorical, nor are his texts unremittingly archetypal. The text has a dual loyalty: to the realistic and plausible modern story which must be convincingly and movingly rendered by the playwright and performed by the actors, and to the equally imperative archetypal realm that larger

human identity that modernity at all times is in danger of betraying but which for Ibsen justifies human existence.

The astigmatic nature of Ibsen's art is something it has in common with Greek literature from Homer to Euripides, in whose fictional universes events are simultaneously human and divine, local and universal, and where both perspectives are equally insistent, giving to the human condition in Greek epic and drama its extraordinarily numinous quality. It is this quality, I believe, that Ibsen wanted to recover for modern drama. Adrian Poole compares Ibsen's method to the art of Euripides. He points out how it finds an uncanny parallel in what seems to have been Ibsen's actual optical astigmatism and the astigmatism of his art. He quotes from the artist Stephan Sinding who painted the dramatist's portrait and asked Ibsen to remove his spectacles:

He laid them aside and looked at me. I have never seen two eyes like those. One was large, I might almost say horrible so it seemed to me and deeply mystical; the other much smaller, rather pinched up, cold and clear and calmly probing.

Poole notes how this is true of the two aspects of Ibsen's art, "one, as it were, short-sighted, with a keen grasp of the local, immediate and everyday, the other long-sighted, with a view to remote mythic or psychological vistas."

The Wild Duck, while making its modern characters speak the language of modern consciousness, refuses to abet modernity's attempt to erase the mythopoetic/spiritual past from human memory. Our authentic human identity is at stake in this art of *anamnesis* or unforgetting; this is its redemptive purpose, which cannot be served by insisting, in our interpretations, only on the vision of the smaller eye.

Source: Brian Johnston, "'Diverse Galskaber' in Ibsen's The Wild Duck," in *Comparative Drama*, Vol. 30, Spring, 1996, p. 41.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Foster relates The Wild Duck to modern tragic comedy.

Tragicomedy is an exceedingly slippery genre that can incorporate the tragic and the comic, the melodramatic and the farcical, the romantic and the satiric in a variety of combinations. It can boast antecedents in Euripidean, Terentian, and medieval drama and cognates in sentimental comedy, the *drame* (serious drama that is neither tragic nor comic), melodrama, savage farce, and so on. But the dramaturgical and emotional fusion of tragic and comic elements to create a distinguishable and theoretically significant new genre, tragicomedy, has developed only twice in the history of drama. Controversial in the Renaissance, tragicomedy has in modern times replaced tragedy itself as the most serious and moving of all dramatic kinds.

In the modern age it is almost impossible to write tragedy, especially within the realistic convention, which emphasizes ordinary human beings from the middle or lower classes speaking unexalted language and possessing failings that often seem more embarrassing than lethal. Any attempt to write tragedy today is likely to produce melodrama instead. But though the dramatic form *tragedy* no longer exists, what is *tragic* in human experience has found its aesthetic home in tragicomedy, where it is simultaneously subverted, protected, and rendered more painful by its peculiar relation with the comic. Ibsen seems to have realized this paradox in writing *The Wild Duck.* As the first modern tragicomedy of any importance, as a tragicomedy written in the realistic convention, and as a paradigm for later tragicomedies, *The Wild Duck* is central to any understanding of this genre of both the ways in which the modern form shares in the dramaturgy of its Renaissance counterpart and the ways in which it departs from it.

Ibsen remarked as early as 1875 that his plays were concerned with "the conflict between one's abilities, between what man proposes and what is actually possible, constituting at once both the tragedy and comedy of mankind and of the individual." But in *The Wild Duck* (1884), a self-proclaimed departure from his earlier dramatic method, Ibsen goes further in creating a dramaturgy that more precisely embodies his tragicomic theme and produces in the audience the inextricably mixed tragic and comic responses described by Shaw: "To sit there getting deeper and deeper into that Ekdal home, and getting deeper and deeper into your own life all the time, until you forget that you are in a theatre; to look on with horror and pity at a profound tragedy, shaking with laughter all the time at an irresistible comedy."

Frederick and Lise-Lone Marker argue that in referring to his new method in *The Wild Duck* (in a letter to his publisher, Frederik Hegel) Ibsen includes "the subtle mingling of comedy and seriousness in word, action and visual image" and a "deliberate diffuseness of focus." The play's multiplicity of emotional effects and perspectives derives in part from Ibsen's orchestration of the voices and attitudes of his ensemble of characters in a manner that was to become characteristic of Chekhov. But the single most important element in Ibsen's tragicomic dramaturgy is his conception of the play's central character, about whose representation he expressed some anxiety in a letter to

Hans Schr0der, the head of the Christiania Theater. Ibsen urged that it was extremely important that the actor of Hjalmar Ekdal should in no way create a parody or show any awareness of the comic contradictions in his language and behavior. But this advice does not mean that the audience also should remain unaware of what is ludicrous in Hjalmar. In fact, it is precisely *because* Hjalmar is unconsciously comic that he is also tragic.

Simply put, Hjalmar is a comic character caught in a tragic situation that he does not understand. His circumstances are potentially tragic. He has suffered a loss of social position and honor because of his father's disgrace, and he has been duped into marrying the cast-off, and probably pregnant, mistress of the author of his family's misery. His contribution to the suicide of his beloved daughter is undeniably the stuff of tragedy. Hjalmar certainly sees himself in a tragic light both in the early acts of the play when he tells Gregers that he has "felt a terrible blow from fate" and that "That pistol, there the one we use to shoot rabbits with it's played a part in the tragedy of the Ekdals" and later in his responses to Gregers' revelation about Gina's past and to Hedvig's death. But Ibsen provides the audience with a much more complex view of Hjalmar than Hj almar has of himself. In the contrast between his idealized self-image as breadwinner, artist, and tragic hero and his actual selfishness and laziness, Hjalmar represents the tragicomic "conflict between one's aims and one's abilities." Using techniques drawn from comic characterization, Ibsen continually subverts Hj almar's tragic pretensions and thus his status as a tragic protagonist. And yet at the same time it is through his comic qualities that Hjalmar engages the audience's sympathy and is able to elicit a response that incorporates pity and even terror along with laughter. The absurd juxtaposition of the two functions of the pistol, for example, is typical of how Ibsen undercuts Hj almar's rhetorical presentation of himself as a tragic hero while simultaneously safeguarding what is tragic in his situation against the audience's potential annoyance with his pomposity, lack of self-knowledge, and selfishness.

Throughout the play Ibsen comically underscores the exaggeration and shallow emotional base of Hjalmar's rhetoric by exposing his contradictions and self-deceptions and by playing his self-idealizing protestations against his selfish behavior. In the early acts, for example, Hjalmar variously describes his father's hair as "white", "gray", and "silver" when actually Old Ekdal is almost bald and wears a "reddish-brown" wig. His inability to make up his mind about the color of his father's hair in each of his sentimental references to the "poor old" man shows that he is thinking more about the effect of what he is saying than about Old Ekdal himself. Hjalmar's rhetorical imprecision becomes a running joke that both undercuts his supposed tragic melancholy and mitigates his self-centeredness. (Later in the play he has to cut himself short in saying that he will not hurt a "hair" of the wild duck's head when even he remembers that ducks have feathers.) Similarly, the repeated contradiction between Hjalmar's pretence of self-sacrificing abstemiousness appropriate to his poverty or his fatherhood of a child who is going blind and his willingness immediately thereafter to indulge in "lovely cool beer", offered by Hedvig, or a "crust" with "enough butter on" pits the physical man enamored of his comforts against the spiritual sufferer that he proclaims himself to be. In Act Three Ibsen even edges towards farce in his presentation of Hjalmar's laziness. Hjalmar dithers between helping Old Ekdal in the attic when he thinks he can get away with it

and ' *'hurriedly sitting again"* to work on the photographs whenever he thinks Gina or Hedvig might be watching. Because Hjalmar has no conception of his own selfishness or incompetence (there will be no photographic invention), he remains an essentially comic and thus endearing character. He possesses sufficient charm, after all, to make Gina and Hedvig happy simply by being himself.

But even in the early acts the comedy associated with Hjalmar has a painful edge. His comic gluttony covers over the fact that he has forgotten to bring Hedvig a treat from Werle' s dinner party, and his laziness leads him to permit her to touch up the photographs at the expense of her eyes. In the latter part of the play Hj almar's continuation in the habits we have previously laughed at produces a degree of uncertainty in our response to the sequence of events that leads to Hedvig's death and weakens any sense of tragic inevitability. For example, just as Hjalmar cannot make up his mind about the color of his father's hair, so he proposes a variety of "sole" rewards for which, he says, he is working on his invention: to allow his father to wear his military uniform again, to make Hedvig's future secure, to leave Gina a "prosperous widow", and to pay back Werle for all the money that the Ekdal family has had from him over the years. Hjalmar hits on this last plan when he realizes that the money Old Ekdal has been paid for copying has probably been payment to Gina as Werle's former mistress. But Hjalmar's determination to repay Werle is the fourth exclusive purpose he has proposed for his work on the invention, and the audience cannot take it very seriously, especially as for Hjalmar the expression of intention is equivalent to the deed itself: "now I' ve got that pressing debt off my hands". (The idea of getting something off one's hands, too, is several times repeated in the play and in this instance carries with it the resonance of earlier comic contexts, as when Gina urges Hjalmar to finish the retouching so that the photographs will be "off your hands".) Perhaps the most brilliant use of the reprise of an earlier comic motif occurs in act five as practical Gina uses the lure of bread and butter and hot coffee to persuade Hjalmar to remain in his home a little longer, at least until he can make plans for the future and buy a new hat. Ibsen sets off Hjalmar's cliched rhetoric against Gina's literal-mindedness, producing, in effect, comic cross-talk:

HJALMAR I can't shoulder all these burdens in one day.

GINA No, and not when the weather's like it is out....

This cross-talk reinforcing Hjalmar's comic inability to rise to his own rhetoric occurs just minutes before he is called upon to respond to Hedvig's death. In clumsier hands than Ibsen's, Hedvig' s death might very well have been melodramatic, especially as the shot is heard exactly on Hjalmar's cue ("Hedvig, are you willing to give up life for me?"). Ibsen, however, preserves what is tragic in Hedvig's death, as in Hjalmar's life, by presenting both as tragicomic. Hedvig's suicide itself, of course, is in no way comic. But it takes place off stage, there is a delay before it is discovered, and what the audience is primarily called upon to respond to is not the death itself but the reaction of the other characters to it, and especially Hjalmar's. Ibsen orchestrates the characters' multiple voices to produce a complex emotional effect. Both Gina's simple language of heartbreak "Oh, my child, my child!" and Relling's coldly factual diagnosis are

counterpointed with Hjalmar's melodramatic expression of his grief: "And I drove her from me like an animal! And she crept terrified into the loft and died out of love for me. *(Sobbing.)* Never to make it right again! Never to let her know ! *(Clenching his fists and crying to heaven.)* Oh, you up there if you do exist. Why have you done this to me!". Hjalmar is deeply moving here, in part because Hedvig's death is an appalling event for the audience as well, but at the same time his characteristically flamboyant and self-regarding rhetoric draws attention away from Hedvig and the weeping Gina and reminds the audience of what is facile in Hjalmar himself. The focus and mood of the scene are further diffused by Old Ekdal's visionary note ("The woods take revenge"), Gregers' metaphorical contribution ("In the depths of the sea"), and the "demonic" Molvik's drunken attempt to assume his priestly function ("The child isn't dead; she sleepeth"), which grotesquely underscores the emptiness of Hjalmar's own rhetoric, especially as Molvik has earlier been set up as a parallel figure to Hjalmar. The conclusion of the sequence is Relling's acerbic response to Molvik: "Rubbish!"

These multiple voices pull the audience in different directions and block a fully tragic response to Hedvig's death. But what we are left with is something harsher than tragedy because there is no justification of a moral order, no resolution, no closure. Instead the play ends with (in Shaw's term) a discussion between the representatives of a neurotic tragic idealism and a flawed comic skepticism. (Their voices indeed have from the beginning constructed the polarities of Ibsen's tragicomedy.) Gregers wants to believe that "Hedvig did not die in vain" and that "grief freed the greatness" in Hjalmar. But Relling, more plausibly in view of what we have seen of Hjalmar in the rest of the play, says that within a year Hjalmar will "souse himself in conceit and self-pity," will, in effect, construct for himself another life-lie about " 'the child torn too soon from her father's heart'". Hedvig's death has been rendered absurd, and Shaw is right in saying that Ibsen "established tragi-comedy as a much deeper and grimmer entertainment than tragedy."

The importance of the comic elements in Hjalmar's make-up and in the play as a whole can be seen if we look for a moment at the 1983 film adaptation of *The Wild Duck,* in which Liv Ullmann and Jeremy Irons play Gina and Hjalmar. Gone in this version is the comic quality of Hjalmar's (Harold's) contradictions because the film's omissions blunt their immediacy and obscure their frequency. Gone too is the comic exaggeration of Hjalmar's rhetoric. The result is a Hjalmar who is weak and tearful, possessing considerably less charm and vitality than his original. Gina, whose practicality should provide a comic foil to Hjalmar's effusions, becomes instead in the film a sensitive soul, and the comedy of Old Ekdal is similarly lost in pathos. Hedvig dies on screen, and the immediate cut to her funeral entails the omission of most of the responses of the other characters. There is no hyperbolical protestation from Hjalmar and no comment from Relling about his short-lived sorrow. The film ends sombrely enough with Hjalmar's silent grief and Gina's tentative attempt to comfort him, but it totally lacks the complex discomfort of Ibsen's rough-edged tragicomic irony. Rather, Ibsen's tragicomedy has been transformed into a beautifully acted and moving melodrama because of the excision of most of the comedy.

If it is revealing, therefore, to contrast *The Wild Duck* with melodrama in order to clarify Ibsen's contribution to modern tragicomedy, it is also instructive to distinguish the play from the *drame*. The *drame* originated in the eighteenth century (especially in France under the auspices of Diderot), developed into the social drama of the nineteenth century, and culminated in the early realistic works of Ibsen. The *drame* is essentially realistic in its maturgy, domestic and/or social in its orientation, and focused on a controversial issue of contemporary significance, a "problem" that is aired though not necessarily resolved during the course of the play. Ibsen's earlier realistic plays such as *A Doll's House* and *An Enemy of the People* are, in fact, *dromes* that deal with contemporary social problems. But Ibsen stressed that *The Wild Duck* is different in that it "does not concern itself with political or social questions."

The difference, however, does not have to be stated solely in negative terms. Of crucial importance is the play's use of symbolism. Critics have noted in particular Ibsen's new use of a central pervasive symbol that implicates the metaphysical in the mundane: the endlessly suggestive wild duck is metaphorically related to all of the major characters, while the loft full of junk that is like the "depths of the sea" evokes the recesses of the mind. In general, tragicomedy is distinguishable from the *drame* in that it deals with metaphysical rather than social issues, it produces a double vision of human experience, and its emotional effects, to adopt Karl Guthke's useful distinction,' *'embrace'"* both the tragic and the comic whereas those of the *drame* lie *between* the two polar genres. Nora, for example, calls for neither a tragic nor a comic response; debate over *A Doll's House* tends to deal intellectually with Nora's options rather than concerning itself with the kind of emotional response called for by her plight. Hjalmar, by contrast, evokes both a tragic and a comic response simultaneously; critics ponder what to make of the play rather than what to think about it.

Even Ibsen's use of realistic conventions in *The Wild Duck* can be distinguished from his use of the same techniques in earlier plays. Modern tragicomedy is distinguished from the *drame* and linked with Renaissance versions of the same genre by its tendency to be in some degree metatheatrical. Metatheatre (or theatrical self-consciousness) is related to tragicomedy's mixed emotional effects, for artifice recognizable to the audience creates distance and thereby blocks without entirely destroying our emotional participation in the characters' experiences. Ibsen's attention to realistic detail in *The Wild Duck* is as great as ever. In a letter to his son, Sigurd, he remarked, "I keep putting in more and more details all the time." And in a letter to Schr0der he said, "In both the ensemble acting and in the stage setting, this play demands truth to nature and a touch of reality in every respect." The dense realistic details in *The Wild Duck* root Ibsen's comic effects in a believable social and psychological context so that the audience cannot dismiss the characters' pain even when we laugh at the way it is communicated (Old Ekdal's drinking, Hjalmar's flowery rhetoric). The audience thus remains to an important degree emotionally engaged with the characters. But though the actors, particularly the actor of Hjalmar, should demonstrate no awareness that some of their lines are funny, as they might if they were acting in a comedy, Ibsen's utilization of comic techniques in a serious drama in itself at times detaches the audience's attention from the characters to the way they are presented. In this respect Ibsen anticipates Brecht's *V-effeckt* by constructing a

perspective other than the characters' own from which the audience is required to view them..

The metatheatrical element in Ibsen's dramaturgy in *The Wild Duck* is both embodied and rendered realistic in his self-dramatizing central character. Ibsen motivates Hjalmar's theatricality naturalistically by providing a cultural explanation for it: he was brought up by two idealistic or hysterical maiden aunts (depending on whether we believe Gregers or Relling) and was popular in his youth as one who could declaim other people's lines in an affecting manner. Small wonder that his expression of even the deepest pain is full of rhetorical cliches. Because self-dramatization is second nature to him, the metatheatrical element in Ibsen's presentation of Hjalmar actually feeds into the audience's sympathy for him even as it distances us enough so that we may also laugh at him. Engagement and detachment are held in a particularly fine balance in *The Wild Duck.*

The use of metatheatre to create dramatic distance is an important feature of both modern and Renaissance tragicomedies. However, the relationship between the two states of tragicomedy has been little understood and sometimes even denied. It is not necessary to posit a genetic connection but rather to observe "family resemblances" between tragicomedies that make it possible, as Alastair Fowler puts it, to discuss "widely divergent works" in terms of generic features of the kind to which they may be supposed to belong. In the case of *The Wild Duck* a fruitful comparison may be made with *Measure for Measure,* one of Shakespeare's so-called "problem plays" that is, like Ibsen's play, better characterized as an ironic tragicomedy.

Renaissance tragicomedy, to be sure, is formally closer to comedy than to tragedy in that it presents difficulties overcome and ends happily. (In the famous formulation of Giambattista Guarini, it presents the "danger but not [the] death" and is governed above all by "the comic order." In *Measure for Measure* the manoeuverings of Duke Vincentio, a metatheatrical figure who in some respects functions as a surrogate dramatist within the play, save Claudio from death and bring about the multiple marriages with which the play ends. Modern tragicomedy is structurally much more diverse than its Renaissance counterpart, but its final effect is often closer to tragedy than to comedy (Hedvig dies in this case), even though the play as a whole may have been more evenly balanced between the two.

However, whether they are ostensibly "comic" or "tragic," the endings of both Renaissance and modern tragicomedies are characterized by ambiguity and discomfort for the audience. Both *Measure for Measure* and *The Wild Duck* ironically subvert the audience's likely generic assumptions about what constitutes a comic or a tragic denouement. In Shakespeare's play a conventionally happy ending is modified in the direction of tragedy, while in Ibsen's a conventionally tragic ending is modified in the direction of comedy. Measure for Measure concludes with a set of arranged marriages whose inappropriateness bodes ill for the unwilling partners in them. Angelo, for example, is compelled to marry the long-suffering Mariana, whom he first abandoned and then had sex with in the belief that she was Isabella; and Isabella, who wished to become a nun, is asked to marry the Duke. At the end of *The Wild Duck* Hedvig's death,

as we have seen, evokes from Hjalmar a tragicomic posturing that is little different from his melodramatic manner elsewhere in the play and from Relling a cynical prophecy that Hjalmar's sorrow will be short-lived and soon comfortably sentimentalized. The discomfort aroused by the endings of both plays is an important part of tragicomedy's aesthetic.

The shared means by which Shakespeare and Ibsen create their tragicomic effects extend to the ways their protagonists combine within themselves tragic and comic possibilities that are represented in purer form by other characters. Duke Vincentio and Hjalmar Ekdal each stands between a tragic idealist (Angelo, Gregers) and a comic skeptic (Lucio, Relling). Vincentio and Hjalmar have self-images that are grotesquely reflected in, respectively, Angelo' s self-proclaimed incorruptibility and Gregers' adherence to the "Summons to the Ideal" and undermined by the sardonic commentary of the skeptics as well as by the central characters' own behavior. Hjalmar sees himself as called upon to restore his family's honor but is actually quite comfortable in his reduced circumstances, as Relling is quick to point out. The Duke regards himself as a wise and virtuous ruler, but he gets involved in an unsavory bedtrick and is unable to control either sexual corruption in Vienna or even Lucio's scurrilous attacks on his reputation.

Shakespeare, no less than Ibsen, uses the relations between his three characters to dramatize the tragicomic "conflict between one's aims and one's abilities." The disparity in both plays between aspirations and what is actually accomplished is worked out in terms of the traditional duality of soul and body. Traditionally, the needs of the body have been associated with comedy, while the soul has proved the ground of tragedy. Conflict between the two occurs in other genres, but in tragicomedy the duality is of the essence. In Ibsen's play, as we have seen, the tension between soul and body, tragic and comic, is classically embodied in Hjalmar. In *Measure for Measure* it is represented in the constant subversion of the Duke's moral and spiritual aims by the intransigence of other people's flesh: the sexual corruption of characters such as Pompey, Lucio, and even Angelo and the unwillingness of Claudio and the drunken Barnardine to give up the life of the body and "Be absolute for death" when the Duke, disguised as a friar, urges this spiritual advice upon them. There are times when even the intellectual Duke himself is, like Hjalmar, comically reduced to the physical. He sustains the indignity of hearing himself accused of lechery and drunkenness and finally of being manhandled by Lucio, who pulls off his friar's hood, and with it his spiritual persona, at the end of the play.

Embedded in *Measure for Measure,* and in Renaissance tragicomedy in general, is the optimistic pattern of fall and redemption that characterizes medieval drama. Though Duke Vincentio and Hjalmar Ekdal both have tragicomically inaccurate self-images, the Duke is the more competent of the two and he does have some control over the play's events. As an inherently serious and dignified individual, the Duke could be a tragic figure, but he is placed in a situation that makes him appear comic, and he inhabits a universe that allows second chances, even though nothing is ever quite as the characters would like it to be. The play's inherited comic contours, however, are obscured by its incorporation of psychological and sociological realism. The resulting

incongruities complicate and at times subvert the underlying redemptive pattern so that this Renaissance tragicomedy participates also in the dark irony of modern versions of the genre.

The comparison should be made; it should not be stretched too far. Ibsen in *The Wild Duck* negates altogether the possibility of either tragedy or redemption. In attempting to be "tragic," Hjalmar simply underscores the comic basis of his nature. But since he is placed in an irremediable situation, *The Wild Duck* as a whole is a bleaker tragicomedy than Measure for Measure. Its dramatic universe appears indifferent to the claims of individuals. If *The Wild Duck* contains any vestige of a redemptive pattern, it lies in Rolling's prediction of Hjalmar's recovery from the grief of Hedvig's death. But such consolation is bitter indeed. In its painful confrontations of tragic and comic effects, its presentation of a central character whose comic insufficiency renders his situation the more tragic, and the terrible indeterminacy of its ending, *The Wild Duck* stands as a paradigm for the line of modern tragicomic masterpieces that includes *Uncle Vanya, Juno and the Paycock, A Streetcar Named Desire,* and *Waiting for Godot*. In comparison with *Hamlet* or *King Lear*, a tragicomedy like *Measure for Measure*, disturbing though it often is, may look like comedy. In the modern drama tragicomedy takes the place of tragedy. Hamlet becomes Hjalmar, and Cordelia is driven to Hedvig's pointless suicide.

Source: Verna A. Foster, "Ibsen's Tragicomedy: The Wild Duck," in *Modern Drama,* Vol. 38, Fall, 1995, p. 287.

Critical Essay #4

In the following review, Brustein talks about the contemporary remake of The Wild Duck. At the Arena Stage, Lucian Pintilie's version of Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* is a genuinely new look at the play, which pulls it out of canvas realism into a world of poetic metaphor and savage farce. The opening act in old Werle' s house is not altogether promising, but then it's a fearfully difficult piece of exposition (the second act of this five-act play is largely expository too). Pintilie tries to distract our attention from the two servants who provide Ibsen's background material by using strained devices behind a transparent Mylar mirror, including a sumptuous banquet and an anachronistic slide show of vacation photographs, conducted by Mrs. Sorby while the Chamberlains sing "Harvest Moon." (Even in the twenties, the setting of this updated production, Kodak color carousels had not yet been invented.) Here the director appears to be forcing visual interest on a talky drama.

When the scene changes to Hialmar Ekdal's lodgings, however, the play begins to develop a cumulative power. Pintilie's setting is much too spacious to suit the humble means of the Ekdal family it has the dimensions of a fashionable loft in Soho while the metal stairway leading to the "attic" containing the denizens of Old Ekdal's simulated forest, wild duck included, is high enough to suggest they own the whole piece of real estate, substantial holdings for such impoverished people. (Pintilie is said to have made architectural modifications in the Kreeger in order to accommodate this ambitious design.) Still, the furnishings of this enormous room are gritty enough, including a metal desk and filing cabinet, a clothesline, and a huge arc lamp used for Hialmar's photography. And the squalor is enhanced, despite Gina' s heroic efforts to keep the place clean, by eggs periodically splattering on the floor from the atic above.

For all his concern with grandiose environments and visual punctuation, Pintilie keeps us focused on the theme of *The Wild Duck,* which is the malignant effect of Utopian idealism om those who need illusions in order to survive. In his effort to lead the Ekdals toward "a true conjugal union," Gregers Werle exposes Gina's adultery with his father, old Werle, and the dubious paternity of their daughter, Hedwig. It is astory that concludes morbidly with Hedwig's suicide, but Ibsen nevertheless realizes it is an occation for ferocious satire, even farce, especially since Gregers (played by Christopher McCann with flatop haircut, Trotsky whiskers, and mealymouthed self-righteousness) is such a priggish wimp and Hialmar (played by Richard Bauer with the flamboyance of a road company Cyrano) such a histrionic poseur. The confusion of styles is precisely what gives the play modernity, and the way the director treats the climax adds postmodern touches as well.

Despite prophetic warnings from Dr. Relling (played with sardonic brilliance by Stanley Anderson, looking like a squashy, whiskey-soaked Anthony Hopkins), Gregers's meddling has destroyed the entire family. While Hialmar vacillates between abandoning the household and completing his breakfast, Hedwig commits suicide in the attic to the accompaniment of screeching barnyard animals. Her body falls to the floor like another splattered egg. The arc light begins to turn in circles around the room. Old Ekdal stands

babbling on the stairs. Hialmar, in an orgy of self-pity, shouts hysterically at the ceiling ("How could you do this to me?") and turns to Gina for comfort. She shrinks at his touch. The spoiled priest Molvig starts praying. Dr. Relling hurls a drink in his face. Relling then drags Gregers the length of the stage to the couch and, shaking him like a puppy, forces his face into the dead body of his victim. Rising, Gregers pulls violently at Relling's nose, Relling pulls Gregers's hair, and with the two locked in a clumsy grapping match, Hedwig's body falls slowly off the couch. Gregers runs from the room, hitting his head on the door frame, as Relling shouts after him, "Go to hell" (adding, with a grin, "See you tomorrow").

This inspired scene, during which the audience is alternately juggling pathos, laughter, and surprise, is in retrospect the moment toward which the whole production moves, and it redeems whatever casting flaws, longueurs, or directorial excesses occasionally plague it. Using his own free stage version based on a translation by David Westerfer, Pintilie has made the work entirely contemporary and immediate without altering its essential structure. And that, of course, has been the major contribution of our expatriate Rumanian friends to our perception of the classics: to make us see them as fresh works of art rather than anthology pieces or curatorial artifacts. Ciulei, perhaps daunted by the critical atmosphere of New York, has momentarily flagged in his approach; but his protege, Pintilie, has picked up the fallen pennant and waved it proudly aloft.

Source: Robert Brustein ' The Wild Duck," (review) in *The New Republic*, Vol., 194, April 14, 1986, p. 27.

Topics for Further Study

Imagine that Hedvig had only injured herself, not killed herself. How do you think the family would react? Do you think Hjalmar would change at all? Would the play still be considered tragic?

Conduct research to find other dramas that are part comedy, part tragedy. What are some of these plays? What do they have in common with *The Wild Duck!*

Ibsen has raised feminist issues in plays such as *A Doll's House*, in which the heroine leaves her family for an independent life, and *The Wild Duck*, which touches upon issues of female sexuality. Do you think Ibsen could be considered a feminist writer? Explain your answer.

The symbolism of the wild duck is a much-discussed topic in the field of literature. What do you think the duck most symbolizes? The entry discusses ways in which the duck represents Hjalmar, Gina, and Gregers. Do you think the duck also represents Hedvig? Explain your answer.

Some critics have stated that there is no likable character in *The Wild Duck.* Do you agree with this assessment? Explain your answer.

Conduct research into societal values held by Norwegians toward the turn of the nineteenth century. Based on your findings, do you think the viewpoints and attitudes expressed by the characters are accurate? Why or why not?

Find out more about Ibsen's works. How would you categorize his body of work? What issues were of greatest concern to him? How do his early plays differ from his later plays?

Compare and Contrast

1880: The second half of the 19th century is an age of literary greatness in Norway. Along with Ibsen, Bjornstjerne Bjornson was a major writer. By the 1890s, writers such as Gabriel Scot and Knut Hamson are introducing symbolism and neoromanticism into the Norwegian literary world.

1990s: Today, Norway supports its writers through tax exemptions, monetary grants, and government purchasing for libraries. Norway ranks among the world's leaders in books published per capita. About 5,000 new titles are published each year of which about two thirds are works by Norwegian authors.

1870s: Industrialization begins in Norway. This shift in production causes a national migration to urban areas.

1990s: In the 1990s, industry contributes about one quarter to the country's gross domestic product and employs about one third of the labor force. Important industries include petroleum and gas production, food products, metals and metal products, machinery, and transport equipment.

1880s: In 1889, Norwegian law changes to require children aged seven to fourteen to attend school. The first compulsory education law had been passed in 1860.

1990s: In the 1990s, the law requires nine years of basic schooling with a tenth optional year. Mandatory subjects include Norwegian, religion, math, music, physical education, science, and English.

What Do I Read Next?

Ibsen's *A Doll's House* was first published in 1879 and performed the same year. The play centers on the Helmer family. When an outsider threatens to expose one of Nora Helmer's past acts, Nora's illusions about marriage and loyalty are shattered. This play is an early work portraying female independence.

Swedish playwright August Strindberg was a contemporary of Ibsen. His play *Miss Julie* is one of his most outstanding works. It centers on Julie, an aristocrat young woman who has a brief affair with her father's valet. In it, Strindberg combines dramatic naturalism with his own conception of psychology. With such works, Strindberg helped develop Expressionist drama in Europe.

George Bernard Shaw's play *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1898) centers on a young woman's discovery that her mother's rise from poverty was through prostitution, and that her mother still holds financial interests in several brothels. Learning these unpleasant truths forces the young woman to reevaluate her relationship with her mother and others.

Irish playwright John Millington Synge also dealt with unsentimental studies of the character of his people. His 1907 comedy, T*he Playboy of the Western World,* like *The Wild Duck*, was initially unpopular with local audiences, but has since won widespread acceptance as a masterpiece. It centers of a young Irishman whose self-reported murder of his father earns him much admiration.

Further Study

Ferguson, Robert, *Henrik Ibsen*, Richard Cohen Books Ltd., 1996.

This is a more recent biography of Ibsen.

Henrik Ibsen, edited by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House Publishers, 1998.

A collection of critical essays on Ibsen's most important works.

Ibsen, Henrik, *The Wild Duck*, translated by Dounia B. Christiani, W. W. Norton & Company, 1968.

This edition of *The Wild Duck* is annotated with contemporary reviews, scholarly criticism, Ibsen's letters, and suggested sources for the play.

Shafer, Yvonne, Henrik Ibsen: Life, Work, and Criticism, York Press, 1985.

This is a popular, accessible discussion of the influences on Ibsen's work and the scholarly assessment of it.

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Valency, Maurice, The Flower and the Castle, The Macmillan Company, 1963 pp. 168-76, 379-80,382-83, reprinted in The Wild Duck, translated by Dounia B. Christiani, W. W. Norton & Company, 1968, pp. 199-207.

BOOKRAGS

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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:

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