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Hedda Gabler

The seminal works of Henrik Ibsen are persistently effective in challenging and enriching the perspectives of his readership and audience. Accounting to his ability to explore the emotional and psychological tensions of various characters in narratives that are relatively simpler, Ibsen has been regarded as the “Father of Modern Tragedy.” Laden with social grace due to her lineage from an aristocratic family, Hedda is an intelligent and beautiful woman and the daughter of the influential General Gabler. Hedda’s social ranking due to her father is a notable aspect of the play and is mentioned by the playwright in his correspondence during the creation of this play. At the beginning of this play, Hedda is 29 years old and has an intense lust for life. Taking a leap beyond the conventional desires of girls and young women her age, she merely yearns for beauty and courage. Pushed by her impulse to influence the fate of other people, she also displays shades of nihilism and egoism. In an attempt to seek entertainment and satisfaction, she drove her adolescent friend Ejlert Lövborg to the throes of suicide, ironically describing it as a ‘beautiful death’. To escape a potential scandal and the monotony of her bourgeois life, Hedda shoots herself with her father’s pistol.

The argumentative thesis statement of this essay is that Hedda Gabler was a product of society and a victim of ideals that were prevalent in society during the Victorian Era. Hedda Gabler, as a realistic drama, is a depiction of differences between the bourgeois and aristocratic classes, their moral faults and the niche of women in this patriarchal society. The manipulative schemes propounded by Hedda allow the scholarship and the audiences to think about the psychological impacts that affect women. This essay is an attempt to persuade people so that they accept her actions and do not reject her unique character as the epitome of evil.

The techniques used by Henrik Ibsen in sketching different characters of this play are highly appreciable. The creation of Hedda Gabler is a perfect fit to exhibit the complications and resulting consequences of modern tragedy. The concept of tragedy according to Ibsen is entirely different from those writers who utilized the conventional techniques for curating tragedy in their works. Ibsen created Hedda Gabler to portray an individual with psychological problems. The main character of the play has been meticulously detailed by him (Nilsen). Hedda has a vast spectrum of psychological, moral, and social problems which are evident in many instances of the play. The characteristics and qualities of a traditional woman of the Victorian era have not been shown in Hedda’s character. As far as the conceptualization of tragedy in literature and classical writing is concerned, Hedda is altogether a different and new concept. Many symbols have been inter-related and associated with this major character of this play and Hedda is, beyond the stretch of any doubt, the most allegorical character of the play. In the play, Hedda is representative of the behavior patterns of elite class people. She is married to George Tessman who is an intelligent and young scholar. The accounts of the couple’s interactions and conversations in the play demonstrate that how hard Tessman tries to please and satisfy Hedda. George Tessman is unable to identify in many instances that his wife is manipulating him. Most often, he seems imprudent and unwise for his age and the audience rightfully sympathizes with Hedda when her husband annoys her through her childish acts. Hedda is married to George Tessman but both have extremely different personalities and nature.

Writing off Hedda as an evil character is justified because the play is written during the 1980s which did not prove to be a conducive environment for the emancipation and growth of women. Hedda was not allowed to go out unless she was accompanied by a chaperone, or to be casual in her conversation because then people around her could interpret differently. The women in that era mostly had only one job, sitting all day and looking pretty for their husbands. Throughout the play, Hedda poses one question to herself and to the people around her in an explicit manner repeatedly that what she should make out of this boredom that has surrounded her life. The men in the play are not bothered by this problem because they are largely explicated by the virtues of their profession. Hedda’s father is a mighty general, her husband is a potential professor. Therefore Hedda addressed this problem by making use of ever-worsening contrivances and manipulative schemes. Fake friendships (demonstrated in Act I), fabrication of hidden motives (Act II), and the suppression of her rage are some manifestations of her unorthodox behavior.

The symbolic significance of choosing ‘Hedda Gabler’ as the title of the play has been examined by many scholars. After her marriage, Hedda’s name is Mrs. Hedda Tessman and the playwright has used this name in that list where he introduces all the characters. The employment of ‘Gabler’, the maiden name of Hedda for the title of this play sheds light on the aristocratic background of her family and her close ties with the bourgeois people and their spiritual and material standards of living (He). The title also suggests the complications and various difficulties that pose a barrier in Hedda’s hesitant attempts to adjust in the Tessman family, which is largely middle-class as demonstrated in the play. The title of the play signifies that Hedda could not transition from Hedda Gabler to Hedda Tessman because of her internal struggles. From the account of physical descriptions in the play, it is perceptible that the house in which Hedda lived with her husband was visibly elegant but it was not the material discomfort which infuriated her. Hedda is actually insolent of her husband and is not able to associate with his bourgeois standards of living. In various acts of the play, George Tessman, the elderly maid in his house, and Tessman’s old aunts and their collective interactions portray a unified bond. There are striking similarities in their ways of thinking, memories, and their attitudes towards the circumstances of life are also similar. Hedda thinks of their bond as prejudicial and it appears to her as foreign power posing threats to her fundamental nature (Thresher). The disparities between Hedda and Tessman were too great in magnitude and could not let them unite. In another book by Else Host illuminating different themes of the book, she notes that Hedda primarily used her husband for social security and a provider, and had very little to do with him as far as the duties of a wife are concerned towards her husband (Host). Hedda responded to the romantic initiatives of Tessman very formally and did not hold his opinions in high regard (Moi).

Annotated Bibliography

He, Chengzhou. "Hedda and Bailu: Portraits of Two" Bored" Women."." *Comparative Drama* (2001): 447-463.

This article strives to dwell deeper into the expressions of boredom and frustration as displayed by Hedda. The heroine is pushed further and further to the edges of her capacities to tolerate the unwanted circumstances in which she is present. In the pursuit of changing the events of her life, Hedda in disguise ends up preparing for her own death. Her death arouses a range of different feelings in the audience and cannot be categorized as an ultimate defeat or complete victory. The play depicted several times how Hedda had the courage and willingness to rise above the monotony of her life through courageous acts. Although Hedda does not strike as a traditional heroine to me, still this article will help me to look at her character through the lens of essentialism. Her fights against the prosaicness of her life circumstances are central to many themes of this play.

Moi, Toril. “Hedda's Silences: Beauty and Despair in Hedda Gabler.” *Modern Drama*, vol. 56, no. 4, 29 Oct. 2013, pp. 434–456., doi:https://doi.org/10.3138/md.S89

In this article, Toril Moi writes about the three times in which Hedda Gabler remains silent or chooses to demonstrate indifference within the play. Moi believes that Gabler’s silences speak volumes about her characteristics and the way in which she fits into the play. This article extenuates Hedda’s silences as a way to explain why she chooses to die and this can be useful information when trying to evaluate and discuss Hedda as an important character in the play. I will use this article to scrutinize the dynamics behind Hedda’s choice to end her life, even though she was a powerful personality. I will explore her silences in order to determine why she wanted to die and this will give me insight into her character.

Nilsen, Havard. “How Ibsen Found His Hedda Gabler.” *Ibsen Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, Jan. 2003, pp. 1–1., DOI:10.1080/15021860304320

This article is research done on the playwright’s past because after watching the play there was an element of curiosity among people who questioned if there was ever a person of the same personality characteristics present in the life of the playwright from whom he drew inspiration. The reason behind this thinking was a result of marveling at the detailed portrait of Hedda Gabler as curated by Henrik Ibsen. The prominence of her character and the elaborate delineation of her actions led people to question the presence of such a woman in the playwright’s past. Upon in-depth scrutiny, it was found that there had been an object of interest in Ibsen’s life with whom he corresponded through letters but it was later discovered that Ibsen was acquainted with a woman who was a model by occupation and she poisoned herself, thereby committing suicide. This article is an attempt to outline different theories about the existence of a person mirroring the personality characteristics of Hedda Gabler in the playwright’s life. This article has been employed in this essay in the pursuit of exploring various personality attributes and traits of Hedda and to simultaneously write about the perspective of the playwright.

Thresher, Tanya. "Vinløv I håret”: The Relationship between Women, Language, and Power in Ibsen's Hedda Gabler." *Modern Drama* 51.1 (2008): 73-83.

Examining the relationship between gender, language, and power, this article indicates the process in which Hedda fails to negotiate her shrewd potential and eventually chooses permanent silence in the pursuit of challenging her niche in the patriarchal society. There is a striking lack of garrulity in Hedda’s character but at the same time, she is acutely aware of the power of her words and social ranking which gives the character dominant and feminine shades at the same time. During the Victorian era, men were the only societal figures who were considered dominant and this article denotes the uniqueness of Hedda’s character in that society. Hedda also handles her feelings in a distinct manner while expressing her love for others or power over her contemporaries. Since the beginning of Hedda’s entrance on the stage, there is an evident development of a chain of linguistic endeavors to control reality. This article determines that this reality is shaped by the domineering ideology of the time which is patriarchy. I will use this article to see how Hedda attained power through words and utilized them to set up an efficacious barrier between the commonalities of the Tessman family and herself.

# Works Cited

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