

Explorations of Personality: A Psychoanalytic Study of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*

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Abstract

Personality is the combination of behavior, emotion, feeling, motivation, and thought patterns that define an individual. People differ from each other in terms of their personalities and character traits. The unique personality of an individual is based on both internal and external factors which make people act, behave, and perceive the world differently from others. This research paper attempts to expose the personalities of the characters in Henrik Ibsen's play Hedda Gabler. However, this article observes in detail the eccentric and unusual behavior of the female protagonist Hedda Gabler. Attempts have been made to investigate the various circumstances responsible for shaping her odd personality. Moreover, it analyzes Hedda's psyche in the light of psychoanalytic theory proposed by psychologists such as Sigmund Freud, Erik Erikson, Karl Jung, and Karen Horney.

Keywords: aggression, conflict, frustration, personality, psyche

Introduction

Human beings are recognized and defined in terms of their specific characteristic traits. The name is not the only aspect that differentiates people from each other. Personality is another specific identification that differentiates one from another. The construction of human personality is a product of the different emotions, feelings, ideas, and thoughts one experiences throughout his/her life. Nelson and Miller state personality is an "individual's unique and relatively stable pattern of behavior, thoughts, and emotions" (qtd. in Baron 387). The dispositional factors such as personality traits, temperament, genetics, beliefs, and feelings, and the situational factors like environment, work and school, and people around us, play a key role in shaping our personality. But Sigmund Freud's notion of human personality is entirely based on the human psyche. He believes the interplay of the three psychic entities – id, ego, and superego have an immense role in forming an adult personality. Freud views all stages that an individual passes through constitutes a human personality. He calls it the process from 'womb to tomb'. Thus, the root of the present personality is the product of past experiences, shocks and traumatic events, and desires suppressed deep down into the unconscious mind. These hidden

drives shaped by childhood experience “play an important role in energizing and directing our everyday behavior” (Feldman 414).

This article makes use of this notion as the basis of discussion on the personality of different characters mainly through the female protagonist Hedda Gabler. In the play *Hedda Gabler*, Ibsen lays much focus on the unique personality of the central character Hedda Gabler. As a psychological play, Ibsen exposes Hedda’s inner conflicts and neurosis that shape her unusual personality. Bernard J. Paris states that “Ibsen brings forth psychological insight into how Hedda’s plight as a woman in an extremely restrictive society produces inner conflict that makes her life sterile and leads to her destructive behavior” (52). Hedda is quite an eccentric personality. The most confused and frustrated character in Ibsen’s repertoire is Hedda Gabler. We see oddities in her relationship, behavior, and feelings throughout the play. The causes of her psychological problem in her present life are her inadequacy to past happiness with her aristocratic father General Gabler, and the lack of independence and freedom which she fully enjoyed during her early stages of life. She seems to be completely detached from her past utopian world entering matrimony with the middle-class research scholar Jorgen Tesman and feels suffocation in the entirely new environment. As a result, she encounters psychological conflicts that drive her life in a different direction.

Hedda bears negative characteristic traits. She is an unpredictable but dishonest woman who is much delighted in manipulating people around her. However, she remains naturally bored, nihilistic, and almost demonic in her desire to influence other people’s fate. Lisi in ‘Nihilism and Boredom in Hedda Gabler’ argues Hedda’s boredom “as a consequence of a loss of authentic meaning in the world that is closely tied to nihilism” (26). She lacks within herself a sense of love, respect, honor, and compassion, but augments respect for power and independence, qualities she finds in Judge Brack, her family friend, and Ejlert Lovborg, her past romantic friend. As she lacks all these qualities, she involves herself in destructive activities. She turns insanely vindictive toward the people leading a happy social life. She becomes so insane that she drives her adolescent friend Lovborg to commit suicide, which she calls beautiful death by handing him a pistol, and shoots herself with another pistol to escape scandal. In the play, Ibsen presents Hedda’s psychological difficulties, frustration, and dejection which make her an eccentric personality.

Literature Review

When *Hedda Gabler* first appeared in 1890, it received multiple conflicting views. Ibsen’s portrayal of Hedda was met with vehement criticism. Most of the critics focused on Hedda’s neuroticism than the play itself and perceived her as mysterious and

incomprehensible. Some of the critics found Hedda weird and her character traits unfamiliar to contemporary people and society. A critic wrote in *Morgenbladet* that Hedda was a “monster created by the author in the form of a woman who has no counterpart in the real world” (Nilsen 8). Similarly, Alfred Sinding Larsen denounced the play and its protagonist Hedda that “Ibsen’s modern drama is the drama of abnormality. His main characters have nothing human about them save the flesh in which they are clothes” (qtd. in Meyer 671). The critic, here, observes Hedda’s negative instincts devoid of human love, respect, and compassion. Whitney Balliett in a review entitled ‘A Beautiful Snake’ in the *New Yorker* presented a bitter view that “Ibsen was primarily interested in exploring ironically the cold depths of that changeless and most fascinating of all women – the bitch” (qtd. in Spacks 155). Some critics such as Sos Eltis focus on the mode of drama rather than the nature of Hedda. She claims, “the play could be approached as darkest tragedy or more lightly as a social comedy with the tragic conclusion” (322). The play faces more criticism than praise. Even Bernard Shaw, who was much influenced by Ibsen, puts it in his treatise *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*:

. . . though she has imagination, and an intense appetite for beauty, she has no conscience, no conviction: with plenty of cleverness, energy, and personal fascination she remains mean, envious, insolent, cruel in protest against others’ happiness, fiendish in her dislike of inartistic people and things, a bully in reaction from her cowardice. (109).

Though *Hedda Gabler*, much like his previous works “initially received mixed views” (Egan 232), it has now become one of the quintessential works of realistic theatre. The dissatisfaction of the aforementioned critics is a misunderstanding of Ibsen’s new theatrical innovation. The real taste and merit of the Ibsen play remained insipid for the critics and even theatre audiences who were solely interested in the mid-nineteenth century bombastic and flowery melodrama. They were not accustomed to watching realistic and life-like characters dealing with real everyday issues on the stage. Peter Leonard admires Ibsen’s innovation in Scandinavian literary history. He affirms: “Writers such as Ibsen and Strindberg responded, ushering in a conscientious and productive period that resulted in some of the most renowned literature and drama Scandinavia has ever produced (191). Ibsen knew the actual value of depicting real human characters and it comes through in brilliant detail with Hedda. Ibsen himself writes: “With Hedda, there is deep poetry at the bottom. There is something beautiful in working for an objective . . . She doesn’t care about great affairs – nor about great ideas either – but about great human freedom” (qtd. in Jones 447). His aim in the play is to investigate a problem of a woman in conventional society. In this regard, he writes:

The play is to be about ‘the insuperable’, the aspiration to and striving after something which goes against convention, against what is accepted into consciousness. If we take Hedda seriously, even provisionally so, we suddenly find that her mind is organized, and creative. She is nothing like the women without purpose or knowledge or vision portrayed by so many critics and actresses. Indeed, she is both creator and creature of a vision of “great human freedom.” (qtd. in Jones 447)

Although Hedda’s personality seems peculiar in its surface observation, she is more complex and modern. She is a woman searching for her independence, freedom, and identity in a patriarchal society. She is exposing her vengeful nature against male members who confine women in a narrow sphere. Ibsen discloses human problems in society, especially women. Ryan Ernst states that Ibsen’s play “raised some important points and asked important questions concerning the perception and labeling of women. Ibsen had several works which call into question the role of a person, wife, and husband alike, should play within the household, and subsequently within a society, and Hedda exemplified those works” (6). The modern novelist Henry James after watching the play evaluates the character Hedda Gabler as: “And then one isn’t so sure she is wicked, . . . that she is disagreeable. She is various and sinuous and graceful, complicated and natural; she suffers, she struggles, she is human, and by that fact exposed to a dozen interpretations, to the importunity of suspense” (qtd. in Diamond, 79).

With the development of the science of human behavior and people’s full-fledged understanding of the play, it has become one of the most performed of all Ibsen’s plays. Gjesdal calls the play the “most appreciated and most thought-provoking play” (3). Now, it has achieved favorable criticism and is canonized as a masterpiece. However, the critics have not paid sufficient opinions to a psychological reading of the text specifically the Freudian principle of personality. Thus, this article attempts to fulfill the research gap by exploring the personality of Hedda Gabler from a psychoanalytic perspective.

Research Objectives

The objective of this paper is to expose the unique and eccentric personality of the female protagonist Hedda Gabler. It also tries to investigate the circumstances responsible for shaping oddity in her personality. Similarly, it aims to observe other characters in the play whose life and activities are affected by the forces generated by Hedda. Moreover, I have given much focus to the psychic problems of Hedda Gabler.

Methodology

This research article is descriptive and analytical in nature which is based on more qualitative information collected from secondary sources such as books, journals, and the internet as supportive tools for the thematic area. I have applied Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theoretical modality to investigate the psychic difficulties of the leading character in the play. By so doing, I have also followed the notions about personality developed by the neo-Freudians such as Carl Jung, Erik Erikson, and Karen Horney, to prove the hypothesis.

Theoretical Modality

Sigmund Freud, a clinical expert, is much interested in the human psyche and psychic disorders that constitute human personality. He claims human behavior, thinking, feeling, and emotion are the outcome of three levels of the human mind – conscious, preconscious, and unconscious. The conscious mind, according to him, is the layer of personality that we experience in our everyday interaction with the world around us. Our current thoughts, awareness, and experiences at a given moment belong to this realm. The preconscious contains thoughts and feelings of which we are not aware, but can be passed from the unconscious into the conscious. The unconscious as a receptacle contains most of our unpleasant and anxiety-provoking thoughts, desires, and impulses we are largely unaware of. The unacknowledged shameful experiences, unacceptable sexual desires, violent motives, fear, and irrational wishes are locked away in the unconscious mind as a form of repression. Our sudden, but unusual behavior at any given moment is the act of repression, to make the unconscious conscious.

Freud believes that our adult personality results from childhood events. Anxiety originating from traumatic experiences may cause problems during adulthood in the form of neurosis, according to Freud. He further states that children go through a series of psychosexual stages (oral, anal, phallic, latent, and genital) that lead to the development of the adult personality. With this development children experience repression, and storing of unpleasant events in the unconscious begins to occur. Similarly, the social dictation of our behavior causes 'repression'. Many of our inner urges are too hindering for the unconscious mind to face immediately. Therefore, we sublimate these psychic difficulties that we cannot face directly into the unconscious territory.

Within the unconscious there reside three distinctive but interactive entities id, ego, and superego. The id consists of all our primitive, innate urges such as bodily needs, sexual desires, and aggressive impulses. The id is a primitive innate urge that seeks extreme

pleasure, and is mostly concerned with the instant gratification of basic physical drives such as bodily needs, sexual desires, and aggressive impulses, and tempts us towards destructive activities. The drives are fueled by 'psychic energy' or 'libido', as Freud called it. The id is operated at an unconscious level by the pleasure principle whose principal goal is the immediate reduction of tension and maximization of satisfaction. The ego is born out of the id to control the id instincts. It compromises with the id by accepting 'good' and discouraging 'bad' feelings and thoughts. The ego works with the reality principle and tries to repress socially unacceptable activities of the id. In this process, there is always a constant struggle between the rational thoughts of the ego and the irrational instincts of the id. Being humble to social values, ego suppresses unpleasant instincts to construct a healthy personality. The final personality structure of the human mind is the superego which accentuates right and wrong as taught and modeled by our parents, teachers, and other significant individuals. By so doing, its sole object is to bring harmony and order without any compromise with ego and id but only directs us to the things morally right.

The Neo-Freudian focused less on inborn sexual and aggressive drives introduced by Sigmund Freud but more on psycho-social factors behind personality development. Erik Erikson modified and extended Freudian theory by emphasizing the influence of society on the development of personality. He believes the ego identity is the conscious sense of self that we develop through social interaction. Thus, ego identity is not a fixed entity, but constantly changing due to new experiences and information in everyday interaction with others in a social arena. He also believes that a sense of competence motivates our behavior and action. In each stage, Erikson believes, people experience a conflict that serves as a turning point in personality development. One of the most influential Neo-Freudians Carl Jung discarded Freud's notion of unconscious sexual urges. Seeing the primitive urges of the unconscious more positively, he suggests that people have a collective unconscious, a set of influences and experiences that we inherit from our relatives, the whole human race, and even nonhuman animal ancestors from the distant past. This collective unconscious, according to him, is shared by everyone and is exposed in behavior common across diverse cultures. It encompasses archetypes, universal symbolic representations of a particular person, object, or experience. Our everyday reactions, attitudes, and values are determined by these archetypes that form human personalities. Jung also believed that all human beings are born with innate tendencies, and they are primarily concerned either with their inner selves or with the outside world.

Karen Horney brings about a social approach to the development of human personality. She suggests that personality develops along with social relationships, especially

between parents and children. Renouncing Freudian fixation, she insists that the psychological disorder rests in disturbed interpersonal relationships during childhood. She talks about 'basic anxiety' – children's fear of being left alone, helplessness, and insecurity. In such conditions, children may express their emotions either being passive or aggressive or withdrawn. Although these Neo-Freudians accept many of Freud's basic ideas, they emphasize sociocultural factors in the personality development of an individual. These contrary approaches are vividly applied in this article to analyze the unique personality of individual characters in Ibsen's play *Hedda Gabler*.

Discussion

Henrik Ibsen exposes the eccentric personality of the female protagonist Hedda Gabler in the eponymous play. The eccentricity in her appearance and actions is the consequence of both external and internal circumstances. The retrospection of the play displays Hedda's freedom, independence, and carefree life with her aristocratic father General Gabler. She learned from him the strict rules and regulations, discipline, and feeling of superiority that dominate much of her mind and character. Before her marriage to the mediocre research scholar Jorgen Tesman, she was used to luxury and a sophisticated lifestyle. The famous General Gabler indoctrinated her masculine activities such as riding horses and firing pistols instead of teaching her conventional womanly values such as marriage, wifehood, and motherhood. The skills of military mystique became the basis of her fascination with the violent and romantic during the early stages of her life. The importance of independence, freedom, and courage remained a stronghold in her psyche that she wanted to administer in her upcoming days. But being a woman with strict compliance to social conventions, she fails to be the woman of her previous wishes.

Hedda Gabler is a good example of a play that exposes nineteenth-century conventional society which cannot entertain women's freedom, independence, and intelligence. Rather, women remained stultified, coerced, dependent, limited, and subservient to their fathers and husbands. The women became either respectable old maids like Jorgen Tesman's two aunts, or humble housekeepers like Mrs. Elvsted, but Hedda is an anomaly. She rejects the prevailing notion of femininity and masculinity. Her father's masculine teaching transformed her to admire the attractive and often sexual pursuit quite restricted during the time. Thus, Hedda constitutes a different personality. She is more the product of her father than society. Her behavior, ways of thinking, and actions are the result of her father fixation. She spends much of her time with her father's pistols, a possible Freudian 'phallic symbol', her latent wish to be a man. The portrait picture of her late father in her drawing room is symbolic of her excessive love for her father or Freudian 'Electra complex'. But, later in life, when she is compelled to acquiesce to

social norms and values, the fixation leaves its grip. As a result, she pushes all the desires deep into her unconscious mind. This psychological ‘repression’ ultimately turns Hedda neurotic. When her yearning for intelligence, independence, and courage remains stultified, she experiences frustration and boredom in life. She sublimates her frustration and boredom with people through unusual activities and behavior. In this process, she exposes her id instincts such as destructiveness, manipulation, power and control, and jealousy for temporary satisfaction.

The epicenters of Hedda’s frustration are her loveless marriage, unwanted pregnancy, class differentiation, and lack of control over her future. Hedda had fear of her age. When she turned twenty- nine, she felt marriage was the only recourse to life and society. In past in her heyday, she had rejected many marriage proposals, since she found no bachelor of her interest and aristocratic elegance. Finally, she accepted the middle-class Jorgen Tesman on the prospect of his professorship, and the income from the lucrative post to buy a villa of her choice. As Harvard Nilsen says, “She has not married her newlywed husband out of love, but out of a strange blend of convenience and desperation, possibly depression and loneliness” (16). Hedda’s aristocratic background does not coincide with her husband’s bourgeois mindset. She accentuates higher social status; she wants to continue the legacy of her father and his title throughout her life. The title of the play is *Hedda Gabler*, not Hedda Tesman. Ibsen himself writes a letter to a friend, “The title of the play is itself Hedda Gabler. My intention in giving this name was to indicate that Hedda, as a personality, is to be regarded as her father’s daughter than her husband’s wife” (qtd. in May 81). Ibsen presents in detail the picture of two societies whose conflict forms the background of the play. Una Ellis Fermor says, “Hedda’s society is important as it affects her mind and determines her thought and action. Her mind remains the same at the end as at the beginning. It has merely gone raw and round the cage she has built for herself, looking for a way of escape” (13-14). Hedda’s ego is changed as she enters loveless marriage and experiences a new socio-economic environment.

The relationship between Hedda and Tesman is cold and stiff though Tesman shares things with Hedda. But Hedda keeps things within herself. She does not share her feelings for Tesman’s family, her hatred of the house, and most notably the news of pregnancy. Both of them hold different personalities because they have different childhood upbringings. Hedda, as brought up by her father, adopts a masculine side of personality what Carl Jung calls ‘animus’ whereas Tesman has a feminine side of males’ ‘anima’ as he was brought up by his aunts Julian Tesman (hereafter called Aunt Juli) and Rina. Tesman is amiable, an indefatigable research scholar, romantic, extrovert, and helpful. He tries very hard to please his young wife and often does not realize that she is

manipulating him. He is considered an outstanding member of his society, and a representative of conventional bourgeois society. Tesman has entirely different emotions, feelings, behavior, and impulses. His personality is Ibsen's deliberate construction of a man who represents human qualities such as love, selflessness, helpfulness, and cooperation. He is not a husband to exert force, authority, and domination over his wife. In this sense, Tesman's personality is symbolic of a typical husband who railed against a nineteenth-century patriarchal mindset. Hedda has a different origin, a different psyche, and different background that is why she is not fit for Tesman's family. Even Berte, the housemaid says, ". . . I never thought it would be a match between her and Mr. Jorgen. Not in those days" (I, 265).

It is almost impossible for Hedda to become a member of Jorgen's bourgeois family. It heightens her tension. For her, the only option to minimize the conflict is to use a defense mechanism, a strategy for temporary satisfaction, as postulated by Freud. Thus, Hedda diverts her mind toward negative activities such as manipulation, power, and control to achieve temporary pleasure and satisfaction. When she first enters Tesman's house after six months of honeymoon, Hedda keeps herself detached from the family members. As Karen Horney states that the maladjusted person always copes with anxiety either by moving toward others, moving against others, or moving away from others. As an adult, the person 'moving away from people' keeps isolated and withdrawn to protect him/herself, giving the possibility of a real human relationship. Hedda as a personality of 'moving away from others, is unable to reciprocate a familial relationship. She does not respect and honor the aging Aunt Juli. She merely calls her Miss Tesman. The conversation between Tesman and Hedda shows:

Tesman: If you could bring yourself to speak a little more affectionately to her – as if you were one of the family. For my sake, Hedda? Eh?

Hedda: No, no. You mustn't ask me to do that. I've told you that once already. I'll try to call her 'Aunt', and that must be enough. (I, 277)

Hedda also seems to be indifferent to human pain, suffering, illness, or death. In response to Aunt Rina's death, she responds, ". . . I don't want to think of illness or death. You mustn't ask me to have anything to do with ugly things" (II, 333). In this sense, Hedda has an avoidance personality disorder. She comments sarcastically on Tesman's aunts as "These everlasting aunts", regarding Aunt Rina's illness, she only says, "so she always is" (II, 303). As Brack criticizes Hedda's behavior toward Aunt Juli she responds, ". . . That kinds of thing come over me. . . . And then I cannot stop myself" (II, 303). In this fashion, she expresses her anger by complaining about the rooms, the hat, the slippers, the doors, and even the sunlight. The maid Berte feels incompatible

with Hedda, and tells Aunt Juli, "I'm really afraid I'll never manage to suit the young mistress" (I, 264). She does not bear any womanly responsibility in the household because she is extremely bored. She tells Judge Brack the only gift she has got in the world is "boring myself to death" (II, 307). To kill her boredom and lonely time, she loads and plays with her father's pistols, a Freudian symbol of male genitalia, or Hedda's intense love for masculine power.

Hedda transfers her anxiety and anger onto everybody around her in the forms of hatred, violence, and aversion. These kinds of activities Freud calls transference, the redirection of feelings and desires retained from childhood towards a new object or person. She hates her husband and his aunts; she uses power over Lovborg and drives him to commit suicide, and she cannot endure Mrs. Elvsted's freedom and independence. She cannot see people being happy and satisfied in life. In this sense, she is an epitome of an unhappy person, whose nature is quite difficult to comprehend. Unhappy people see themselves as measurable in life. Such measurable persons invest their time to make others feel how they feel. They lack sympathy and compassion, but rather become happy seeing others' destruction in life. When these negative emotions are not met, they become envious and hateful and inflict on others. This is the story of Hedda Gabler. She does not have to do anything with her husband's academic prowess; she cannot endure Lovborg's creative writing or Mrs. Elvsted's achievement. She destroys Lovborg's life by burning the manuscript of his second book and handing him a pistol to kill himself. Her whole life is dominated by unconscious desires and the function of the id is paramount. The ego and superego fail to direct her toward the right destination. Her mind is obsessed with negative character traits that cause her destruction. Hedda's mission is to destroy other's life by cunningly using power and control to achieve pleasure. She says, "I want to have power over a human being's fate" (II, 324). The lust for power and control is Hedda's young day's instinct. In past, she exercised it over Ejlert Lovborg. When the wealthy and aristocratic Lovborg proposed to Hedda, she refused it threatening him with a pistol, but she recoiled only for the fear of scandal. But she enjoyed Lovborg's excessive alcoholism and his indulgence in debauchery, especially Mademoiselle Dina, a prostitute of a sort because she felt someone like Lovborg should exist for all the repression and restrictions of society.

The re-entry of both Lovborg and Mrs. Elvsted alters the mode of the play. Hedda finds Lovborg rehabilitated and socially esteemed. He has already written a book and the next more promising book he is going to publish. She creates anxiety in her mind because she knows Lovborg is more brilliant and erudite in the academic field than her husband. So, she assumes her husband's post of professorship and financial fortunes are at stake. On the other hand, when Mrs. Elvsted reveals that she has immense contribution to

Lovborg's creativity and social respect, Hedda begins to burn within herself. Hedda loses her conscience and begins to weave a satanic plan to destroy their proximity in life, and satisfy her unconscious desires. She reinstates Lovborg into his past habit of alcoholism. She forcefully induces Lovborg to join Brack's bachelor party and read the manuscript with 'vine leaves on the hair', the symbol of beauty achieved by defiance of society and escape from narrow social limits.

Hedda wants to see Lovborg rebellious and triumphant by returning "flushed and confident", "with vine leaves in his hair". Then he "will have got control of himself again". Then "he will be a free man for the rest of his days" (II, 324). But in his excessive drinking, Lovborg loses his manuscript, a symbolic child of Mrs. Elvsted and Lovborg. Tesman finds it on the way and leaves the manuscript with Hedda. When Lovborg returns in a dejected mood, Hedda senses her triumph. She takes the benefit of Lovborg's defeat. She asserts power by offering Lovborg one of her pistols to use on the right temple and die beautifully. Hedda throws every scrap of the manuscript into the fire in her extreme jealousy. She expresses her anger: "Now I am burning your child, Thea. You, with your curly hair. [...] Your child and Ejlert Lovborg's. [...] I'm burning it – burning your child. (III, 345). The act of burning the manuscript is symbolic to kill her unborn child through an unwanted pregnancy. It is an expression of her perversity; willful destruction of others' creativity.

For the first time in her life, Hedda experiences extreme happiness because she feels she has got victory over Lovborg. Harold Clurman, an American theatre director, and dramatic critic says that "the neurotics, the frustrated, and the physical or morally unsatisfied people often see beauty in destruction" (164). We can view this as Hedda's plight. She reveals to Brack that her desire is fulfilled when he brings the news of Lovborg's death. However, Hedda's satisfaction by no means turns into self-disgust when she discovers that Lovborg shot himself in the stomach at Mademoiselle Dina's boudoir, searching for his lost manuscript. Hedda does not find courage and beauty in that unplanned death. Nor was it Lovborg's heroic and courageous death she expects. At this point she finds herself defeated. In her self-disgust, she says, "The ridiculous and the sordid lies like a curse on everything I so much as touch" (IV, 359).

Mrs. Elvsted is an example of a healthy personality. She is creative, helpful, and freer than Hedda. Hedda is always jealous of Mrs. Elvsted, especially her hair. In their old school days, Hedda dreadfully frightened Elvsted because she used to pull Elvsted's hair on the stairs. She once said she would burn her hair off. Ibsen presents the physical difference between these two women on the dramatic stage:

[Hedda] is a woman of twenty-nine. Her face and figure show breeding and distinction, and her complexion has an even pallor. Her eyes are steel-grey; cold, clear, and calm. Her hair is a beautiful light brown, though not noticeably abundant (I, 272).

Mrs. Elvsted is a slender little thing with pretty, soft feature. Her eyes are light blue, large, round, and slightly prominent, with a startled, questioning expression. Her hair is remarkably fair, almost silver-gilt, and exceptionally thick and wavy. She is couple of years younger than Hedda (I, 278).

Ibsen's object of this stage direction is to show the distinct personality of these women. Hedda's gray eyes stand for depression, sadness, isolation, and boredom; whereas Mrs. Elvsted's blue eyes represent health, tranquility, understanding and softness, and reliability. Moreover, Elvsted's thick hair indicates fertility and creativity in contrast to Hedda's thin hair, symbolic of the sterility of her existence, despite her pregnancy.

The American psychologist Gordon Allport states that people are dominated by a single cardinal trait – the desire to help or the lust for power, and manipulative activities. In this sense, Mrs. Elvsted dominates the trait 'desire to help', whereas Hedda follows the trait 'the lust for power and manipulative activities. As a second wife of the widower District Magistrate, Elvsted selflessly cared and guided her step-children, and took charge of the house. As Lovborg entered the house as a tutor, Elvsted tried to dissuade him from old habits and put him into creativity. His success as a writer of a famous book is the result of her constant supervision and inspiration. The manuscript that Hedda burns is also her successful participation and guidance. When Lovborg says he tore the manuscript, Mrs. Elvsted assumes it as murdering a 'little child', and shattering her happiness and life's dream. She leaves her husband to enter the world of independence and freedom and wants to lead a creative life with Lovborg. At this juncture, Hedda becomes extremely envious of Mrs. Elvsted's courage and finds herself a coward because she is unable to leave her loveless husband on the one hand, on the other, she is afraid of Mrs. Elvsted's powerful influence over Lovborg. So Hedda's motif in indulging Lovborg in boozing and then into suicide is to break their relationship. Now Hedda feels Elvsted her nemesis, the woman who exhibits courage to defy convention. Hedda is burning in jealousy when Lovborg praises Mrs. Elvsted's tremendous courage regarding their relationship:

Lovborg: And then she has the courage that leads to action, Mrs. Tesman.

Hedda: Ah, courage. Yes. If one only had that (II, 319).

Hedda cannot endure Elvsted's courage. So, she uses a defense mechanism of acting out to win Mrs. Elvsted:

Hedda: But, Thea, what do you think people will say about you?

Mrs. Elvsted: Heaven knows, they say what they like [. . .] I have done what I had to do (I, 287).

Hedda despises herself for her conformity, fear of scandal, and cowardice. However, she tries to fulfill her repressed desire for freedom, courage, and fearlessness by Lovborg driving him to suicide. But, as Freud says, when all human desires in everyday life are not achieved, people may turn neurotic. Hedda's case is the same. When her dream of triumph over Lovborg is collapsed, she turns dejected. Hedda's 'drive' is leading her toward 'death instinct'. Freud states that people have strict psychic determinism, primarily motivated by 'drive' or 'instinct' over which they have little control. The 'life instinct' (Eros) is a life-sustaining instinct that seeks to make physical contact, integrity, and relationship, whereas the 'death instinct' (Thanatos) may be directed inward, as in suicide or masochism, or outward, as in hate and aggression. These two instincts are simultaneously working at the end of this play. Jorgen Tesman and Mrs. Elvsted are reconstructing the manuscript out of the loose notes. Lovborg is dead, but Mrs. Elvsted's search for glory is alive. She is now very close to Tesman, who is committed to writing Lovborg's book. At the same time, in the other room, Hedda is gratifying her 'death instinct'. She ends her relationship with the world by shooting herself.

Judge Brack is the only character Hedda cannot control. He is infatuated with her and wants to keep a triangular relationship with her. But, now, the shrewd Brack takes the opportunity of Hedda's helpless impasse. He blackmails her. He aims to be a 'cock in the yard'. He tells Hedda, "My dearest Hedda, believe me, I shall not abuse my position" (IV, 362). Hedda realizes him to be a dangerous person. Brack very well knows Hedda's complicity in Lovborg's suicide he gains a hold over Hedda. But Hedda cannot tolerate Brack's power she protests. She tells Brack, "In your power, all the same. At the mercy of your will and demands. And so a slave! [. . .] No! That thought I cannot tolerate. Never! (IV, 362). Brack generates psychological fear in Hedda exposing the court's torture, trial, and imprisonment. He suggests that among many possible explanations, the best one for her is to declare the pistol to have been stolen. But Hedda cannot be subject to Brack's wishes and command, nor she can face social stigma. She thinks the best way to release all she fears is to shoot herself. She uses the pistol on her right temple and dies. Hedda's suicide is interpreted in several ways. But, for Hedda, it is a triumph, an act of deliberate courage and spontaneous beauty, which she had expected from Lovborg. On

the other hand, it is her escapism from self-contempt by defying public opinion, and also her challenge against Brack's understanding of Hedda as a coward.

Conclusion

The play *Hedda Gabler* is a study of character. To comprehend the play, requires deep scrutiny of Hedda's personality, her psychological problems, and the factors responsible for her conflict. Although Hedda receives many more negative interpretations, she is a woman fighting against nineteenth-century conventionalism that produces her inner conflict, makes her life sterile, and leads her toward destructive behavior. She is forced to suppress her desire for independence, freedom, and openness. She has been driven by both socio-cultural and psychological coercion in which her sense of independence and freedom merely turns into an illusion. In this sense, Hedda's problem is the universal problem of women in a highly restricted society. The negative activities she performs in the play are the direct expression of her frustration. Finding no positive influence in the world, she can only expose her negative personality. Undermining her husband with her coldness, denying her unwanted pregnancy, destroying Mrs. Elvsted's life's work, burning Lovborg's manuscript, and finally committing suicide are her perverted attempts to satisfy her unconscious desires. She is presented as a woman who cannot find her own identity and in her quest for it, she ends up killing herself. By portraying Hedda as a frustrated woman, Ibsen protests against contemporary stereotypical society. Hedda's situation, position, and problem are not solely Hedda's, but of all women under a patriarchal stronghold.

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