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Compulsion vs. Volition: An Overview of Henrik Ibsen's Hedda Gabler

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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to explore the role that compulsion plays in the overall thematic structure of Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* (1890). As a modern dramatist, Ibsen presents the conditions of the individual in a society of self-contradictory values and norms. Along with tackling society's limitations and identity issues, Ibsen's drama deals with the theme of free will pitted against compulsion on the individual level. This article also examines how action in the play is socially, morally, and ethically bound for some characters who have freedom in making essential steps in their lives. In contrast, other characters seem mostly strained as their action is governed psychologically and individually. Though Ibsen' s protagonists appear liberal-minded, bold, revolutionary, and unconventional, they are categorically classified to remain wavering between the zones of volition and compulsion, unable to settle on either of them when making crucial decisions. The article aims to discuss the factors determining the two categories to which a character can belong: the one whose actions and decisions are beyond control at moments of crisis, or the one who experiences volition and never, thus, loses their identity and freewill. By analyzing the main characters, the article applies Judith Butler's theory of gender roles, promoting the notion that gender is a performative rather than a social construction.

Keywords: Role, Compulsion, Social, Freedom, Gender

1. INTRODUCTION

As a significant 19th-century figure, the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen is often known as the father of modern theatre and a founder of Modernism in drama. His works were considered shocking at a time European theatre was strict of such matters as family life and propriety. Ibsen's work examined the realities behind shining surfaces, bringing about some social disturbance and anxiety. To this end, it employed a critical view and free inquiry into the life conditions and morality issues. For these reasons, Charles Lyons depicts Ibsen as "the realist, the iconoclast, the successful or failed idealist, the poet, the psychologist, the romantic, the antiromantic" (quoted in Pravitasari 2013: 36).

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According to Raymond Williams (1969: 32), Ibsen was an artist whose primary concern is communicating an experience. Ibsen is famous for his deep philosophical and revolutionary attitudes, which influenced the growth of drama as an art throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Ibsen proves the first dramatist to write tragedies about ordinary people (the antihero becomes the tragic hero, so to speak). In addition, he developed problem plays or drama of ideas that emphasize the presentation of a realistic drama. In his *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, G. B. Shaw, remarks that "the Norwegian's significance lay in his having introduced social-political discussion into the drama through the agency of a villain-idealist and unwomanly woman" (quoted in Ghafourinia and Jamili 2014: 2).

Ibsen's early drama, which was intended for reading rather than performance, was characterized by the extensive use of symbols, native myths and religious aspects. Many of his works are defined by their realistic depiction of contemporary life along with its related concerns, a profound psychological portrayal of his

characters and their connections, a well-organized plot of rising dramatic tension, limited action, revealing dialogue, and demanding thought. Despite spending a long time abroad in self-imposed exile, Ibsen never stopped writing about Norway's social and national problems, embellishing his works with the scenery and memory of his homeland (Aryal 2007: 7-6).

Ibsen's impact on the evolution of modern drama is likewise observed by his introduction of techniques and themes that inspired many later dramatists, such as Eugene O'Neill, August Strindberg, Berthold Brecht, John Osborne, Arthur Miller, and others. It was Ibsen, as Whitfield states, who first manifested the powerful effect of a play that has the power to create an illusion in the audience that they are watching an episode that could be typically from actual life (Whitfield 1965: 133). Hence, Ibsen's central strategy is to block the possibility of the audience's identification with characters by allowing them to believe that they are watching a play. This awareness provides the possibility of digging deeper than the surface realities and finding hidden truths.

About the plot in Ibsen's drama, it is designed in such a way as to make the past always present and "to force out of the characters secrets from their past lives" (Altenberned 1966: 18). Thus, in such drama:

The roots of action often run far down into the past; but when the curtain rises on the first scene, we have already reached the beginning of the end, and the stage presentation is concerned only with the last term of a long series of events. (Hudson, quoted in Whitfield 1965: 133)

In this way, he shatters and obliterates one's preconceived perspectives, attitudes, and impressions formed on a particular character and situation. Based on this well-made technique, Ibsen play sees the obligatory scene and the cause-and-effect principle as an effective means of character revelation. For Luckhurst (2006: 43), the well-made play is carefully built around suspense in addition to a complicated blend of the main plot and sub-plots, automatically leading to the play's denouement or resolution. In Ibsen, the result must be shocking enough to bring both the characters and the audience back to their senses. Thus, through his technical command of the plot, Ibsen can force the audience to abandon their initially conceived impressions and start to look at things realistically and logically.

In his plays, Ibsen, all in all, displays the negative effect of lies (mainly domestic), shams, and elusions, showing the tragedy and degradation accompanying the distortion of personal integrity. In *The Wild Duck* and *A Doll's House*, for example, he is concerned with the problems of the individual as a spiritual being rather than a society member (Ellis-Fermor 1950: 10-13). Characters' critical reactions, no matter their form, depend on how rational and emotional they are when some sensitive and personal truth is finally revealed. Ibsen proves he has firsthand knowledge of how to win his readers to his side through his technical and structural contrivances, which proved quite effective.

2-Literature Review

Discussions of Ibsen's drama have generally centered on issues like realism and naturalism mingled with such a novel aspect as women's emancipation. The aspects, themes, and dimensions found in Ibsen's plays rendered him the most famous among his contemporaries (Aryal 2007: 7). His treatment of the then tabooed subjects as woman's emancipation, sex, and the like not only won him respect as an innovative writer but also rendered his works bestsellers, so to speak.

Research on Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* has already been conducted, tackling a variety of interpretations associated with various aspects and dimensions of the play. Most of the research attempts to study the play in the contexts of realism and symbolism with which Ibsen's drama is strongly associated.

In "Ibsen's Treatment of Women," Hossain (2016) discusses *Hedda Gabler* from the point of personal freedom, declaring that any human being who struggles for freedom must make a choice; therefore, Hedda realizes that she must know what she wants. To her, existence itself is an actual prison from which she aspires to turn herself away; death turns out to be her only way out and destination.

From a different perspective, Swarna (2020), in "Self-Liberation vs. Self-Renunciation in Hedda Gabler," argues that the heroine's final death is tragic because it is an act of self-renunciation rather than liberation. Hedda's death occurs because conventional society can in no way tame her free, wild spirit.

In "Eccentricity in Ibsen's Hedda Gabler," Pokharel (2015) tackled strangeness in human behavior. The article argues that Hedda has the character of a leader whose act of suicide can be taken as a sign of her strength rather than a surrender to the oppressive male-dominated society. In this way, Hedda becomes willing to commit suicide for the purpose of achieving victory in this world as well as in the next one.

In like manner, Aryal, in "Ellida as a New Woman: A Study of Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea*" (2007), asserts that in *Hedda Gabler*, the female protagonist, Hedda, seeks complete freedom as equally as man have in society. Thus, she is a rebellious new woman seeking to assert her independent existence. Characteristically, she barely cares about her traditional patriarchal norms and values. She intends to lead a free, respectable life, make friends, and be involved in extra-marital affairs.

Moreover, Torrens (2002), in "The Power of Desire in Selected Plays by Henrik Ibsen," indicates that the play's conclusion suggests that in death and defeat, there is a triumph, for Hedda finds courage and freedom in suicide, trying to obtain her identity at any cost. Unable to secure the individual rights that she fails to attain in her marriage, she sees suicide as the only alternative for the self-protection that she has long wished to achieve.

In their study titled: "Portrayal of Women in Ibsen's Plays: A Feministic Perspective Analysis," Shafiq, Masood, and Awan (2018) assert that Hedda commits suicide to set herself free from her boring, tiresome life and society's harsh principles. This study attempts to interpret literature by applying the feminist critical approach.

By the same token, Leonardo F. Lisi (2018: 26-27) argues that Hedda's boredom is "all-encompassing" and that this condition is directly associated with death. The play presents boredom first as a symptom of loss of authentic meaning in the world that is closely tied to nihilism; second, that Hedda (in a Nietzschean sense) views death as the only escape from this condition, the only authentic meaning available in the modern world; and third, that her husband's presence during the honeymoon never lessens this condition demonstrates that the problem does not lie in the locational shift established by travel. Instead, the deeper issue is that her husband barely belongs to Hedda's world, which signifies that her entire marriage forces her into a location other than her own.

In conclusion, Hedda is typically unlike the Ibsen's other female protagonists; she does possess almost all that she desires for, perhaps except that which matches her romantic, dreamy concept of the world with that world itself. The disparity between the two ensues the tragedy as an inevitable result.

3-Methodology

This study depends on gender studies in literature, particularly the subversion of topotypical gender roles. The development of the feminist movement caused a profound shift in the concept of gender and the conventional social roles assigned to men and women.

Gayle Rubin, a feminist anthropologist, argues that "Industrialization and urbanization have led to a reorganization of family relations and gender roles, enabling the formation of new identities . . . " (Habib 2011: 261). According to gender studies, gender has been discovered to be more determined by culture than by nature (Guerin 2005: 236). Such studies regard gender identities as "a subject position created by cultural and ideological codes" (Habib 2011: 260). Then, it is society, according to feminists and gender critics, that portrays such "binary opposites" as masculine and feminine as natural categories (Guerin 2005: 237).

Among the pioneering figures in gender studies is Judith Butler whose work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) is a landmark in this regard. In her book, Butler deconstructs patriarchal and feminist basic accounts of gender, attacking theories that argue for 'natural' or normative notion of a social construct. She utilizes the deconstructive rejection of binary hierarchy, denying the possibility of an expression of gender in its aberrant form. In fact, she is famous for her notion that gender is a performance (Lane 2006: 49). For her, the term "gender subversion" has nothing to do with sexuality, therefore, gender "can be rendered ambiguous without disturbing or reorienting normative sexuality at all. Sometimes gender ambiguity can operate precisely to contain or deflect non-normative sexual practice and thereby work to keep normative sexuality intact" (Butler 1999: xiv). Butler, tries in her renewed concept of gender identity, to clearly distinguish between fixed social norms and a new approach to gender roles in light of the above theory.

Indeed, Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, if read from this gender perspective, represents this drastic shift seen in the gender roles in the family environment. The stereotypical roles prescribed by society, essentially determining masculine and feminine roles, are no longer influential, as seen in literary works emphasizing social patriarchal hierarchy. In this regard, the discussion of Ibsen's play is focused on the heroine's break from the standard social codes, which ensues in the male's renunciation of the masculine role he is supposed to play.

4-Analysis

A common feature in Henrik Ibsen's drama is inheritance, prevalent in feudal and post-feudal society. In Ibsen's time, new conventions needed to emerge in drama, including new perspectives on destiny, responsibility, personality, relationships, and psychology. This feature may highlight the nature of *Hedda Gabler*, which is defined as domestic tragedy (Williams 1969: 28). Unlike Greek tragedies, however, the play offers no catharsis. The audience is left with a sense of "waste," viewing Hedda's potential and idealism without a social outlet for it (Thomas 1983: 92). Her only outlet, according to Raymond Williams, is represented in "the fantasy of self" (1969: 63).

In 1890, Ibsen told a Swedish poet in Munich that he was presently "engaged upon a new dramatic work, which for several reasons has made very slow progress, and I do not leave Munich until I can take with me the completed first draft" (Archer, n. d.). Ibsen is suggested to have intentionally conceived the work as an

"international" play whose scene is the "west end" of any European metropolis (Ibid.).

The title of Ibsen's play intends to let Hedda "to be regarded rather as her father's daughter than as her husband's wife" (Quoted in Williams 1969: 62). However, the play aimed to portray the human condition, in general, and individual women, in particular. Ibsen emphasized the depiction of "human beings, human emotions, and human destinies, upon a groundwork of certain social conditions and principles of the present day" (Archer n. d.). The discussion below is focused on the impact left by the shift of the traditional gender roles, which gives rise to the immense loss of freedom in thought and decision making. This shift is marked by such phenomena as assumption of authority, rush to action (mostly violent) and making (irrational) decisions, and pursuit of complete freedom and independence.

A-Assumption of Power & Authority

This section examines the applicability of Butler's conception of gender to the main characters of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, and especially to the character of Hedda. Hedda is obsessed by the desire to always being in the lead, and thus she never allows anything to disturb this design. In this respect, she plays the male role of being central in the family.

In *Hedda Gabler*, Hedda, the daughter of a general, romantically dreams of a perfect hero, yet her dream ultimately turns to a nightmare. In a desperate decision, she finds Jorgen Tesman, a man who is not her equal in social ranking and who remains "inarticulate," concealing "his mind not in silence but in a stream of garrulous and insignificant chatter" (Ellis-Fermor 1950: 17). As for her initial attachment to him, she ". . . can 't in the least see why" (Ibsen: 24). Hedda does not seem as interested in the man as in the surging desire for a significant rise in social identity, which can never be realized with Jorgen in dominance. Butler's theory finds expression in Hedda's determination to socially rise no matter how would that be.

Hedda's environment also has a man, Judge Brack, whose company Hedda enjoys, offering her some social status and prestige. Brack is essentially an opportunist who manipulates social conventions serving his purposes. Lovborg is Hedda's ex-lover whose talent is wasted on account of his heavy drinking. His rough manners, however, are said to have been cured or tamed by Thea, Hedda's ex-school friend (Thomas: 1983: 87-88, 91). The conflict is designed to set out with this love triangle and with Heda's narcissistic personality that is intrinsically molded to offer her superiority and dominance.

As a descendant of aristocratic parentage, Hedda loves being under the spotlight. Consequently, she feels her social position not only humiliated but also threatened by her wrong marriage to Jorgen, a man mainly preoccupied with his books and studies. He once declares to Hedda that "one can never have too many of them [books]. Of course, one must keep up with all that is written and published" (Ibsen: 71). His failure to obtain an academic position threatens Hedda with social relapse. To Judge Brack, she declares that she pushes her husband into that position: "Because I am bored, I tell you! . . . So you [Brack] think it quite out of the question that Tesman should ever get into the ministry?" (Ibsen: 79). To her, Jorgen's social failure would be a hard blow that she receives in her attempt to become powerful and dominant in her environment. Realizing this goal demands from her to constantly be active, which refers us back to Butler's notion of gender and gender roles.

Moreover, the only thing that gives value to her marriage is currently threatened, leading to her instant reach for her father's pistols (Thomas 1983: 88). Jorgen is a "promising but boring academic" (Thomas, 1983: 83) who never possesses that which charms his wife's attention and satisfy her ambition. Part of his marital failure is the inability to grant her the social identity she seeks:

Hedda: . . . It was part of our compact that we were to go into society—to keep open house.

Tesman [Jorgen]: Yes, if you only knew how I had been looking forward to it! Fancy—to see you as hostess—in a select circle! Eh? Well, well, well— for the present we shall have to get on without society, Hedda—only to invite Aunt Julia now and then. —Oh, I intended you to lead such an utterly different life, dear—-! (Ibsen: 57

She complains to Brack how terrible she feels without communicating with people from her social milieu: "you can surely understand it—-! To go for six whole months without meeting a soul that knew anything of our circle, or could talk about things we were interested in" (Ibsen: 64). From what she says, it is evident that she seeks unattainable renewal in light of the lack of marital understanding. While she is from that type of people who always fail to take responsibility of their action, which definitely defines her character, Miss Julian Tesman, Jorgen's aunt, ironically envies her nephew to be so lucky to win such a marvelous woman as Hedda, who "was so beset with her admirers" (Ibsen: 8). It is irony that also typifies Jorgen's remark that Hedda is "the best part of it all!" (Ibsen: 15). Jorgen is too naïve to penetrate deeper than the outward level of people and things in his surroundings.

In fact, Jorgen, Julian, and the maid, Berte seem to Hedda as a hostile power directed against her fundamental essence (Helland & Holledge n. d.). Therefore, Hedda is obsessed with one thought: using her

social power, position, and influence to dominate others. This finds expression in her new acquired role as the dominant figure in her environment. She tells Thea Elvested that she desires "to have power to mould a human destiny" (Ibsen: 115). For instance, she insults Julian for no sensible reason. Incidentally, Julian, who is not "tired of making sacrifices" (Ibsen: 13) for her nephew, is a character whose gentleness testifies to Hedda's shallowness, spiritual emptiness, and cruelty. Compared with Hedda, these people enjoy a considerable degree of volition in the decisions they make in their lives.

The reappearance of Lovborg in Hedda's life revives her hope to get rid of the dull and socially infertile life she leads with Jorgen. Lovborg's visit to the Tesmans in Act Two illustrates the vast gulf between her hopes and marriage reality. Hedda once thought she had loved Lovborg but was too ashamed to reveal it. The sight of Lovborg, however, refreshes a disturbing image of what life might have been with him. For her, he represents spontaneity and creative genius: a life shared with him would have been very different from the future she expects as Jorgen's wife (Thomas 1983: 91). She finds Lovborg the person whom she can shape or manipulate the way she likes, making him an expression of her authorial control. She has always desired "to have power to mould a human destiny" (Ibsen: 114). The reason behind Hedda's interest in Lovborg is his representation of the medium through which she can realize self-expression (Lisi 2018: 34). Nevertheless, Lovborg's current project is to become a public intellectual under Thea's positive influence. For this reason, Hedda is involved in a struggle for power with Thea about who has the right to control Lovborg and claim it as hers (Lisi 1980: 34-35).

In trying to amuse herself and reduce her constant stress, Hedda reenacts her late father's authoritative power, symbolized by the box of pistols she keeps in her drawer. She dares to raise a gun whenever her reckless impulse commands. As an example, she never hesitates in pointing her pistol at Judge Brack. Standing for her father's rank, his vocation, and personality, the pistols, as Rollyson notes, represent "Hedda's entrapment and her release" (2005: 490). For Williams (1969), General Gabler's pistols embody Hedda's pre-adult amorality (63). Notably, Hedda indulges in more masculine activities since she is used to "riding down the road along with the General . . . In that long black habit—and with feathers in her hat . . . "(Ibsen :5). Apparently, such habitual activities deprive her from much of the freedom she seriously seeks to attain. In her new masculine role, her feminine image is invariably distorted.

The fact that Hedda's mind is full of illusions of her superiority and eminence keeps her shut up in an unreal world with no practical communication with people from outside. Despite her husband's warning not to "touch those dangerous things" (Ibsen: 59), for her, using them becomes a habit, serving as a game through which she can "have one thing at least to kill [her] time with in the meanwhile" (Ibsen: 58). It makes no difference for her whether to kill her time or to kill somebody in the process. In effect, Jorgen is not the only one who is aware of this danger but also Judge Brack as well:

Brack: . . . Where is the case? Ah, here it is. [Lays the pistol in it, and shuts it.] Now we won't play at that game any more to-day.

Hedda: Then what in heaven's name would you have me do with myself? (Ibsen: 61)

Despite the temporary inflating sense of eminence that this game perhaps provides, she seems firm in her belief that the outcome can be nothing but death:

Hedda; . . . I often think there is only one thing in the world I have any turn for.

Brack. [Drawing near to her.] And what is that, if I may ask?

Hedda; [Stands looking out.] Boring myself to death. (Ibsen: 80-81)

The absence of love from the world of Hedda is a characteristic feature, delineating the vast change of roles women have come to assume. Naturally, women are the source of love, kindness, delicacy, and tenderness. Here, the case is quite different. It is Jorgen who is more capable of showing these typically feminine qualities and characteristics of tenderness and kindness. Yet, he is astonished and overjoyed at the same time, hearing that Hedda has burnt Lovborg's manuscript for his sake:

Tesman: . . . that affair of the manuscript—of course nobody must know about that. But that you love me so much, Hedda— Aunt Julia must really share my joy in that! I wonder, now, whether this sort of thing is usual in young wives? Eh? (Ibsen: 163)

Admittedly, Hedda's heart has no room for love; she hates love as she has never experienced any. Her idea of love is that it should be possessive and an expression or a demonstration of one's power. Lovborg attempts, in a way, to suggest the relevance and necessity of love to Hedda's world, desperately asking her whether she once developed love feelings for him:

Lovborg: Was there no love in your friendship for me either? Not a spark—not a tinge of love in it?

Hedda: I wonder if there was? To me it seems as though we were two good comrades—two thoroughly intimate friends. . .. (Ibsen: 97)

Nevertheless, Hedda's frustrating response, as shown above, is cruel and irresponsibly cold, stimulating Lovborg's further irrevocable thrust into despair. That is why he wonders why she has not already shot him with her pistol to end his emotional suffering: "Oh, why did you not carry out your threat? Why did you not shoot me down?" (Ibsen: 101). Here, it is the lover who wishes to die at the hands of his beloved, which is unlike the

traditional scenario where women are always the weaker creatures. Butler's idea of the shift of gender roles finds expression here and elsewhere in the play.

As Hedda is further trapped in frustration, she vents out her anger at Lovborg for what might have been and on Thea for daring to win her man to her side (Thomas 1983: 91). Aided by her intelligence and destructive egoism, Hedda grows uncontrolled, acting to spoil Thea's possible happiness with Lovborg (Archer n. d.). Unaware of the pain she causes to others through what she says and does, Hedda enjoys being a warrior, a male activity which satisfies her inner desire for power and authority. Her selfishness never allows her to see beyond her isolated world. Notably, David Thomas (1983: 90) argues that Hedda finds herself treated like an irresponsible child, allowing others to clean the shattered pieces of what she has destroyed. Hedda is a child of her "particular past," having inherited the "ethical nullity of her class." Her fear is of adult responsibility and inability to find herself through freedom (Williams 1969: 63). She is in a position and situation which emphasize her essential lack of freewill and volition. Her pursuit of power and authority must give rise to her assumption of rather masculine roles and, consequently, to her failure to make decisions free of compulsion, which will be discussed in a later section.

B-Pursuit of Freedom and Independence

Judith Butler's perception of gender identity definition in terms of action always applies typically to Hedda's insistent pursuit of freedom and independence in both thought and action. It is Hedda who always takes the initiative in this regard, making the others deal with the consequences.

Although Hedda is practically free, she finds no adequate means of expressing her desire for personal freedom and fulfillment. Her yearning was for life "in which there could be authenticity, truth and genuine reciprocity, in which there could be intellectual, emotional and sexual fulfilment without subterfuge and shame." Based on the hierarchical values of her social environment, she finds it impossible to get along with the life with Jorgen, finding herself suddenly stuck in a shallow marriage, with everybody and everything vulnerable to disaster (Thomas 1983: 92). In a Butlerian sense, she proves ready to rebel against everything with which she is dissatisfied, including the role she has once found herself obliged to perform.

The play's problem is related to Hedda's entrapment in a pointless conventional marriage. With reasons partly financial, partly social, and psychological, and having once taken such a decisive step, Hedda finds it hard to escape from her unbearable condition. Growing up in a male-dominated environment, she has acquired the same arrogance and aspirations as the men of her class without realizing how to fulfill them. As such, she seems to find that marriage is the only path open to her at the moment (Thomas 1983: 90). Yet, even this does not satisfy her mind that never accepts stereotypical gender roles.

Hedda's emotional conflict is basically a result of her estrangement from the essence of her marital life. She has no qualifications for the new identities of wife and mother offered her by marriage, and she is certainly unprepared for that (Lisi 2018: 28). Incidentally, she has no special professional skills or talents that enable her to find work to occupy her leisure time. She has never, as Brack puts it, "gone through any really stimulating experience" (Ibsen: 79). Here is part of a dialogue between the two, discussing this point:

Brack: Why should not you, too, find some sort of vocation in life, Mrs. Hedda?

Hedda: A vocation—that should attract me?

Brack: If possible, of course.

Hedda: Heaven knows what sort of a vocation that could be. I often wonder

whether—- [Breaking off.] But that would never do either. (Ibsen: 78)

The problem with Hedda largely lies with Jorgen. Despite his incompatibility with Hedda, Jorgen proves to be a loving husband. He once acknowledges her right to have a "honeymoon trip" because "Nothing else would have done" (Ibsen: 10). Nevertheless, Hedda fails to respond emotionally to her marital duties, and, in Archer's viewpoint, she "has nothing to take her out of herself—not a single intellectual interest or moral enthusiasm. She cherishes, in a languid way, a petty social ambition; and even that she finds obstructed and baffled" (n.d.). The couple never seem to have been in harmony in thought, attitude, or prospect, which may predict an imminent breakdown in that relationship. She opens her heart to Brack, who seems to understand her very well, complaining about the type of tedious life she has:

Hedda: And then, what I found most intolerable of all—-

Brack: Well?

Hedda: —-was being everlastingly in the company of—one and the same person—

Brack: [With a nod of assent.] Morning, noon, and night, yes—at all possible times and seasons. (Ibsen: 65)

To Hedda, Jorgen is "not at all amusing to travel with. Not in the long run at any rate" (Ibsen: 65). For her, the word "specialist" is "sickening" since it typically becomes applicable to her husband. In fact, she is tired of hearing "nothing but the history of civilisation, morning, noon, and night—-" and "the domestic industry of the Middle Ages—-! That's the most disgusting part of it!" (Ibsen: 66). She, thus, firmly believes that Jorgen barely matches her outgoing type. This realization forces her to take action by defying stereotypical relationships associated with wives

and their roles inside the family. This state explains her yearning for what Brack refers to as "a triangular friendship." Thus, she desires the existence of a third party in her marital life: "I have many a time longed for [someone] to make a third on our travels. Oh—those railway-carriage *tete-a-tetes*—-!" (Ibsen: 69). To be effective, such an imagined relationship must allow them to address different topics freely; the friend must be "with a fund of conversation on all sorts of lively topics" (Ibsen: 70). To this end, she wishes to go through a "stimulating experience" (Ibsen: 79) without taking responsibility of the consequences. Another example of this is found in her refusal to visit the dying Aunt Rina because she does not wish to "look upon sickness and death. I loathe all sorts of ugliness" (Ibsen: 131).

Hedda's character resists change or development, which is a characteristic feature in her. On Hedda's flat characterization, Ellis-Fermor comments that "Hedda's mind remains the same at the end as at the beginning; it has merely gone round and round the cage she has built for herself, looking for a way of escape" (1950: 13-14). From a different point of view, Hedda is an individual rather than a type, and that was what interested Ibsen. He learned of a German lady who killed herself because she was bored with life. *Hedda Gabler* embodies such an individual case (Gosse n. d.). if there is development in her character, it occurs only within the context which she has already set. Typically, Hedda is an epitome of different opposites, and here is how one critical perspective describes her:

Snobbish, mean-spirited, small-minded, conservative, cold, bored, vicious; sexually attractive but terrified of sex, ambitious to be bohemian but frightened of scandal, a desperate romantic fantasist but unable to sustain any loving relationship with anyone, including herself. (Helland & Holledge n. d.)

Hedda's reference to the criteria of freedom, courage, and beauty to describe Lovborg's death outlines the sense in which suicide can be the only place where one can still hope to obtain some dignity. As a freedom requirement, suicide cannot be something compelling to do since it expresses the forces that we suffer under (poverty, illness, the neglect others show us, and so on) rather than ourselves. Suicide, in this sense, is neither motivated nor executed by the individual (Lisi 1980: 39-40). In this respect, it becomes a compelling inner drive motivated by some circumstances or forces serving as a catalyst.

C- Irrational Decisions and Action

This part of the study moves to examine the aptness of Hedda's thought and action in light of Judith Butler's gender theory. In fact, it is in this very part that Hedda seems to have completely abandoned her traditional feminine role, and is thus, identified for what she does in terms of gender.

Hedda's desire to destroy any feelings or emotions through violence comes within the context of jealousy and grudge. At times, she is dangerous in terms of both threatening others with her pistol, which serves as a phallic symbol, and using fire to burn the fruits of others' efforts. Then, she cannot act but compulsively. She is destructive in her decisions and reactions, which also seems to be compulsive. She vents "her most destructive feelings" on the relationship established between Lovborg and Thea and "burns Thea's potential 'child,' the manuscript of the book Lovborg wrote under Thea's calming influence" (Thomas 1983: 89). As soon as the manuscript of Lovborg's book, dealing "with the march of civilization" (Ibsen: 30), comes into her hand at the end of Act Three, she, melodramatically and compulsively, throws it into the fire:

Hedda: [Throws one of the quires into the fire and whispers to herself.] Now I am burning your child, Thea! —Burning it, curly-locks! [Throwing one or two more quires into the stove.] Your child and Eilert Lovborg 's. [Throw the rest in.] I am burning—I am burning your child. (Ibsen: 153).

Whenever hatred turns to an obsessive thought, harsh punishment can very likely become a manifestation of a compulsive manner. Hiding Lovborg's manuscript is an unacceptable act, but Jorgen is fully aware that burning it is a crime of "unlawful appropriation of lost property" (Ibsen: 160). In self-defense, Hedda tries to provide a reasonable motivation, claiming that she has done so for Jorgen's sake: "I could not bear the idea that any one should throw you into the shade" (Ibsen: 161). Nevertheless, Hedda's real danger extends to people around her. Psychologically, when she is desperate for Lovborg and is done with his manuscript, she offers him the pistol, encouraging him to end his own life as well:

Hedda: . . . I must give you a memento to take with you. [She goes to the writing-table and opens the drawer and the pistol-case; then returns to Lovborg with one of the pistols.

Lovborg: . . . This? Is this the memento?

Hedda: [Nodding slowly.] Do you recognise it? It was aimed at you once.

Lovborg: You should have used it then.

Hedda: Take it—and do you use it now.

Lovborg: [Puts the pistol in his breast pocket.] Thanks!

Hedda: And beautifully, Eilert Lovborg. Promise me that! (Ibsen: 152-153)

Hedda's endeavor to justify Lovborg's act of suicide by stating that he "has himself made up his account with life. He has had the courage to do—the one right thing" appears quite reasonable and to the point (Ibsen: 170). In other words, Lovborg ". . . has had the courage to live his life after his own fashion. And then— the last great act, with its beauty! Ah! that he should have the will and the

strength to turn away from the banquet of life—so early" (Ibsen: 175). In this connection, she reveals to Brack that suicide gives her "a sense of freedom to know that a deed of deliberate courage is still possible in this world,—a deed of spontaneous beauty" (Ibsen: 174). What leaves her shocked, though, is Brack's declaration that "Lovborg did not shoot himself-voluntarily" and that for "poor Mrs. Elvested I idealized the facts a little" (Ibsen: 75-76). Astonished, she realizes that, Lovborg's suicide turns out to be a crime rather than a voluntary act.

Hedda's shock results from the belief that she shares Lovborg's characteristically impulsive manners. In a dialogue with Brack, she admits that her weird behavior is sometimes irresistible, and she has no reasonable explanation for it: "Well, you see—these impulses come over me all of a sudden; and I cannot resist them. . . . Oh, I don't know how to explain it" (Ibsen: 74). Hedda's acquired masculine irresponsibility, however, eventually gets her far from hope and throws her further into the abyss of despair, with none of her personal goals accomplished. Her destructive reactions to people around her results from her negative view of them and of their roles.

Lovborg's false claim of his tearing the manuscript "into a thousand pieces" (Ibsen: 147) is explained by the state of despair he has just incurred: "I have torn my own life to pieces. So why should I not tear my life work too—-?" (Ibsen: 157). The manuscript is metaphorically and symbolically compared to a child. This is precisely expressed in Thea's protest: "Do you know, Lovborg, that what you have done with the book—I shall think of it to my dying day as though you had killed a little child" (Ibsen: 148). Lovborg is aware that Thea's "pure soul was in that book" (Ibsen: 151), and for this reason, her mood initially indicates that she has sunk in loss and despair: "Oh, I don't know what I shall do. I see nothing but darkness before me" (Ibsen: 148). Learning of Lovborg's death, Jorgen feels sorry: "To think of Eilert [Lovborg] going out of the world in this way! And not leaving behind him the book that would have immortalised his name—" (Ibsen: 172). Like Hedda, Lovborg immensely lacks the power of sound judgment, and is thus left to violent impulses, leading to nothing but his utter destruction. In contrast, Jorgen is absolutely aware of the danger of rushing to irrational desperate action:

Tesman: . . . Oh Hedda—one should never rush into adventures. Eh?

Hedda: [Looks at him, smiling.] Do you do that?

Tesman: Yes, dear—there is no denying—it was adventurous to go and marry and set up house upon mere expectations. (Ibsen: 57)

Hedda's interest in playing the masculine role of her father ushers some disorder in the formation of her personality. What impacts that personality is her frustrated femininity and self-expression, which adds to a sense of personal isolation (Innes 2000: 70). Hedda's world is primarily made up of jealousy and selfishness. A frustrated feminist, embodying what has remained of the shattered aristocracy, she suffers from massive ennui and ends up as a sadistic psychopath (Rollyson 2005: 490). Hedda is jealous of Thea, who can serve as her foil. Unlike Hedda who, "in her cowardice, only hankered and refrained" (Archer, n. d.), Thea dares to love and venture. Thea's love for Lovborg is, unlike Hedda's, productive and fruitful, and the evidence is symbolized by the manuscript itself. Jealousy also motivates Hedda's threat to burn Thea's hair at the end of Act Two.

In the end, Hedda is further shocked with her exclusion from participation in piecing together Lovborg's manuscript, a "task" to which her husband "will dedicate [his] life" (Ibsen: 173). She suddenly realizes that Brack, fully aware of her complicity in Lovborg's death, is, practically, in control of her. Feeling trapped and rejected at the same time, she sees in suicide a gesture of "petulant defiance" (Thomas, 1983: 89). In other words, as soon as she realizes that she is morally and spiritually bankrupt, she cannot but pursue violence even if she herself turns, this time, to be the target. Ibsen renders "the difference between the initial glimpse of the character and the final truth both expository and dramatic" (Altenbernd 1966: 19). Hedda is a tragic antiheroine on account of whose recklessness the audience barely identifies with her.

Caught between "perfectionism" and "lack of alternatives," Hedda finally acts, according to Suzman (1980), in "a combination of expertise and taste. But it is also an absolute necessity, and in that sense, it is an act of passion and commitment" (90). Terribly shocked by the death of Lovborg at the hand of a bar singer and by her encounter with her husband and Thea sitting together attempting to recollect the lost manuscript, Hedda's idealism collapses, driving her to act impulsively by targeting herself with her pistol, putting an end to her restless life. Ellis-Fermor remarks that Hedda refuses to discover herself, and her conflict and tragedy result from that particular refusal (1950: 14). In a sense, Hedda's final bloody reaction, though selfish and irresponsible, is essentially meant to liberate her from "a domination she cannot accept" (Rollyson 2005: 490). Turning to death is by no means an escape from life but a way of gaining the conditions that life fails to provide. In other words, "if meaningful experience is impossible because life cannot offer tasks that are tempting, courageous, and beautiful, then death might" (Lisi 1980: 39). In effect, death seems the most honourable and desirable act to her (Suzman 1980: 101). Characteristically, she rejects her bondage and slavery to others, and so decides to take immediate action. Below is the last part of her exchange with the

blackmailing Brack, displaying to him her final redeeming act of abnegation:

Hedda: I am in your power none the less. Subject to your will and your demands. A slave, a slave then! [Rises impetuously.] No, I cannot endure the thought of that! Never!

Brack: [Looks half-mockingly at her.] People generally get used to the inevitable (Ibsen: 184)

In essence, Ibsen seems to indicate that what happens to Hedda Gabler throughout the play is:

. . . neither inevitable nor pre-ordained. Nor was she simply an abnormal personality, as some contemporary critics assumed. Her actions are perfectly intelligible, even if emotionally immature and destructive, responses to the extreme pressures confronting her in the ruthless, male-dominated world in which she lives. (Thomas 1983: 92-93).

In a nutshell, despair, a common disposition befalling human beings in the aftermath of catastrophes and misfortunes, results in compulsive action, often with tragic consequences. Hedda's actions become dangerous and violent whenever she is dominated by hopelessness, jealousy, and hatred. At those moments in which her eyes become blind to facts, her mind loses its way to rationality. Her gender, according to Butler's concept, is determined by her actions, which are chiefly masculine.

5-Conclusion

Judith Butler's recognition of gender identity in terms of performance well applies to Hedda, the protagonist of Ibsen's play of the namesake, as a case study. Gender classification is no longer subject to biological or cultural determiners; masculinity and femininity are determined by performance. In spite of the sense of freedom and independence from patriarchal dominance given to women based on the application of gender-role-based theories to Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, however, what is manifest in Hedda is her loss of rational thinking in favor of impulsive reaction and compulsive action.

In the play, the protagonist, Hedda, emotionally suffers from an inability to control her impulses and whimsical reactions that are often self-destructive. Under the influence of some compulsive power, these urges, along with their tragic consequences, highlight the intense psychological turmoil she experiences and suffers from.

It is noted that heritage and environment determining one's destiny in Naturalism have their share in the case of Hedda Gabler in Ibsen's play. Hedda, for the most part, and Eilert Lovborg, to a lesser degree, suffer in their struggle with constrains of every sort, and they are both victims of compulsion when exhibiting their attitudes. Hedda, however, seeks independence not from an overwhelming patriarchal rule but rather from certain inner drives, causing her compulsive reactions to events and to people. These quick reactions and decisions reach Hedda nowhere and end precisely in her utter destruction. On the other hand, Lovborg has no desire to live, and therefore, he wholeheartedly accepts Hedda's suggestion of suicide, symbolized by her father's pistol, which she offers him. In a moment of crisis, too, he sharply lacks the power of volition in favor of compulsion, leading to his death.

Hedda lives in an imaginary world she has created, isolated from the real world. Typically, when she reacts and responds to whatever happens and whomever she meets, she causes damage either to herself, to others, or both. The shock's traumatic effect leaves no room for reconciliation, first with herself and second with her environment. With their illusionary worlds, Hedda starkly contrasts with Jorgen, who serves as a tool used by Ibsen to set up complex character relationships that the audience can recognize.

Being the product of some domestic conflict, Hedda is placed in a limbo-like situation where her next step is fundamentally decisive concerning her future destiny. Characteristically, she finds that self-destruction is the best means to deliver herself and eliminate the illusions that have long dominated her actual world. Her pursuit of freedom, in essence, is an outcome of a rebellion against all social conventions and traditional roles, including those of gender.

Conversely, other protagonists in the play, such as Jorgen, Julian, and Thea, keep observing their traditional gender roles, and therefore never yield to violence and despair in their reactions to misfortunes and calamities no matter how severe they are. Butler's understanding of gender roles can hardly fit in with other characters who are guided by some wisdom, allowing for a space of volition in their actions and reactions. As they never act compulsively, it is volition that defines and marks their identities.

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