Hedda Gabler

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF HENRIK IBSEN

Henrik Ibsen was born into a wealthy, highly respected family. His father, Knud, was a merchant who met with success early on in life, but suffered a great financial loss when Henrik was seven. As a result, Knud became jaded and began to drink heavily. He took out his troubles on his children and his wife, Marichen Altenburg, who remained loving and self-sacrificing throughout this period of hardship. Ibsen would later model many of his characters after his mother and father. At the age of fifteen, Henrik was forced to discontinue his education after his father declared bankruptcy. He then moved to Grimstad to become an apprentice pharmacist, and also began writing plays. Ibsen resolved to seek a university education in Christiania (present-day Oslo), but did not pass the entrance exams. Fortunately, by this point Ibsen had persuaded himself that a university education would not help him succeed in writing great plays—he committed himself wholly to his art as a playwright from then on. He was, incidentally, remarkably unsuccessful in this vocation at first, and he and his wife Suzannah Thoresen were very poor. Their household survived on Ibsen's meager income as a writer, director, and producer at the Det norske Theater in Bergen. As his threadbare years of artistic anonymity ground on, Ibsen became increasingly dissatisfied with life in Norway. As a result, in 1864 he left his wife and their five-year-old son, Sigurd (who grew up to become the Prime Minister of Norway), and moved south, first to Sorrento, Italy, and later to Dresden, Germany. He didn't return to Norway until 1891. It was during this self-imposed exile that Ibsen came into his own as an artist. During this period he composed his visionary verse plays *Brand* (1865) and *Peer Gynt* (1867), which won him fame and success. A little more than a decade later, he had pioneered and perfected the realist, bourgeois drama, as evidenced by the stream of masterpieces he published between 1879 and 1886, including *A Doll's House*(1879), *Ghosts* (1881), and what some consider to be his masterpiece, *The Wild Duck* (1884). This period saw Ibsen ascend to his highest level of fame—he became a household name internationally, and was perhaps the most famous writer of his time. He was both celebrated for his perfectly crafted plots and deep character studies, and also denounced for his unflinching penetration into the sickness of modern life. After the most successful career in the theater since Shakespeare's, Ibsen died in Oslo in 1906, the result of several strokes. He is often considered to be "the father of modern drama" and has served as an influence for artists ranging from Arthur Miller to James Joyce.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, Ibsen focused his energies on writing what we have learned to call "problem plays" (e.g. *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts*, *An Enemy of the People*)—plays that, in the words of one critic, investigate "contemporary controversy of public importance—women's rights, unemployment, penal reform, class privilege—in a vivid but responsibly accurate presentation." *A Doll's House* is one of Ibsen's most famous problem plays, and it shares the same social groundwork as the later *Hedda Gabler*. The late nineteenth century was dominated by strict Victorian social codes and laws that severely restricted the rights of all women, and especially married women like Nora in *A Doll's House* and Hedda herself. While this historical background is important to Ibsen's purposes in *Hedda Gabler*, this play nonetheless represents a marked turn away from the earlier problem plays and toward the more personal, visionary, symbolic, and evocative dramas that constitute Ibsen's late period.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

As is perhaps inevitable for a dramatist, Ibsen was deeply influenced by the plays of Shakespeare. *Hedda Gabler* is particularly indebted to Shakespeare's plays *Othello* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, for Ibsen's portrait of Hedda draws on the character of the devilish Iago in the former and the melodramatic, charismatic Cleopatra in the latter. Like Iago, Hedda is egotistical, sadistic, and deceptive, and, to some minds, both characters are motiveless in their acts of destruction. Just as Iago plots the downfall of his dear general Othello, so Hedda plots the downfall of her intimate comrade, Ejlert Lövborg. Like Cleopatra, on the other hand, Hedda has a touch of the diva about her, and she is also committed to a vision of beauty (unlike Iago). Formally speaking, in plays like *Hedda Gabler* Ibsen pioneered and perfected realistic modern drama—that is, drama which focuses on everyday, middle-class life, written in a prose that imitates everyday speech. In this regard, Ibsen's influence cannot be overstated, as Chekov, Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw, James Joyce, and Arthur Miller all wrote plays indebted to Ibsen's dramatic innovations.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Hedda Gabler*
- **When Written:** 1889-1890
- **Where Written:** Mostly in Munich, Germany
- **When Published:** December of 1890
- **Literary Period:** Theatrical realism, modernism

- **Genre:** Drama
- **Setting:** The Tesmans' villa, located in a Norwegian city modeled on Christiania
- **Climax:** Hedda burns Lövborg's manuscript
- **Antagonist:** Hedda Gabler herself, to some extent, in her role as an antihero

EXTRA CREDIT

What's in a Name? It may seem surprising that Ibsen titles his play *Hedda Gabler* given that, when the action of the play begins, his main character is actually named Hedda Tesman. Why does he do this? The playwright wants us to understand, in his words, "that Hedda as a personality is to be regarded rather as her father's daughter than as her husband's wife." After all, she shares her father's aristocratic and warlike temperament, much more so than Tesman's bourgeois and bookwormish one. Hedda's first name, it should be added, appropriately means "strife."

A Stormy Rivalry. Ibsen's great dramatic rival and contemporary was the Swedish playwright August Strindberg, whom Ibsen regarded as "delightfully mad" and whose portrait hung in Ibsen's study as a provocation. After reading *Hedda Gabler*, Strindberg recognized that he himself had served as source material for the character of Ejlert Lövborg, whom Hedda inspires to suicide. Of this, Strindberg wrote: "It seems to me that Ibsen realizes that I shall inherit the crown when he is finished. He hates me mentally… And now the decrepit old troll seems to hand me the revolver! … I shall survive him and many others and the day *The Father* [a play by Strindberg] kills *Hedda Gabler*, I shall stick the gun in the old troll's neck."

PLOT SUMMARY

Hedda, the beautiful daughter of General Gabler, has recently married Jörgen Tesman, an academic who is facing financial hardships in attempting to satisfy his wife's grand and aristocratic ways. The two have just returned from their long honeymoon when the play begins—a journey during which Jörgen toiled away in archives and libraries, mostly. However, he did find time to impregnate Hedda, who is ashamed for this fact to be aired publicly. Hedda also finds her new life with Tesman monotonous and excruciatingly boring.

The morning after the couple's arrival back in town—the action of the play takes place in September—they are visited by Jörgen's childhood caretaker, Miss Juliane Tesman, or Aunt Julle, who dotes on her nephew. In the Tesmans' spacious, handsome drawing room, the two discuss, among other things, Jörgen's confidence that he will soon be appointed as a university professor: a prestigious, financially stable post. Aunt Julle also mentions that Jörgen's other aunt, Rina, is still very ill, and that Jörgen's old friend and rival, Ejlert Lövborg, is back in town. Several years earlier, Lövborg had gone on a spree of drunken debaucheries and fell from social grace—now, however, Lövborg has published a new book to enormous praise.

At this point, Hedda comes into the drawing room. She says that she cannot manage with Berte, the household maid, whom Hedda accuses of having strewn her old hat on a chair. Jörgen is appalled: the hat is his aunt's, not Berte's, and it is new. Miss Tesman is offended and prepares to leave. Before she does so, however, Jörgen smooths things over by hinting that Hedda is pregnant—to Hedda's perturbation and Aunt Julle's great satisfaction.

Soon after Aunt Julle's departure, another guest arrives, Mrs. Thea Elvsted, an old schoolmate of Hedda's and an old flame of Tesman's. She has come seeking Ejlert Lövborg, whom she fears will relapse now that he's back in the big city and surrounded by temptations. Hedda asks her husband to write a warm, friendly letter to Lövborg to invite him over so that they can keep an eye on him. Meanwhile, Hedda interrogates Thea and learns that she has scandalously come to town without her husband's permission, and that she has served as Lövborg's helpmate and muse.

Another guest then pays a visit to the Tesmans, Judge Brack, who has helped Mr. Tesman arrange his finances. Brack reminds Mr. Tesman that he promised to attend his bachelor party, to be held later that night. Brack also has some serious news: the appointment to the professorship which Tesman was counting on might well be contested—by none other than Ejlert Lövborg. Tesman is dismayed, as this development threatens to worsen his already strained financial situation. After Brack's exit, Jörgen tells his wife that, to save money, she will have to curtail her social life. Hedda says ominously that at least she has one thing to pass the time with: her father's pistols.

Later that afternoon, while Tesman is away at his aunts' house, Judge Brack pays another visit to Hedda. She playfully fires a loaded pistol at him as he walks up from the garden, shocking him. The two at last sit in the drawing room, and Hedda tells Brack about the hat incident—she says that she knew all along that the hat she mocked belonged to Aunt Julle and not to Berte. Hedda also confides in Brack how monotonously miserable her married life is. Brack, for his part, insinuates that he would like to be more than a trusted friend in the Tesman household. Hedda implies, however, that she would never engage in an extramarital affair.

Tesman arrives back at the villa, and Lövborg appears soon afterward. Lövborg reveals that, in addition to his newly published book, he has written a manuscript about the future course of civilization. He's poured his true self into this manuscript, and he considers it to be like his own child. Lövborg also announces that he will not compete with Tesman for the professorship, to Tesman's great relief. Judge Brack invites

Lövborg to his bachelor party, but Lövborg declines. He also declines to drink the alcoholic punch he's offered.

While Tesman and Judge Brack drink, smoke, and talk in the inner room, Lövborg sits with Hedda in the drawing room and the two pretend to interest themselves in a photo album. Really, they whisperingly reminisce: we learn that the two of them had a very intimate relationship during their adolescence, one Hedda violently broke off after it threatened to develop a sexual dimension. Hedda threatened to shoot Lövborg at the time, but at last didn't—Lövborg accuses Hedda of fearing scandal and being a coward. Hedda agrees with him.

Mrs. Elvsted enters and comes to sit in the drawing room with Hedda and Lövborg. Lövborg praises Thea's beauty and courage, and this inflames Hedda's jealousy. Hedda tempts Lövborg to drink, saying that the other men will think less of him if he doesn't, but Lövborg is firm in his principles. Hedda then reveals that Mrs. Elvsted came to the Tesmans' earlier that morning in a state of desperation, fearful that Lövborg would relapse. That Mrs. Elvsted demonstrably has so little confidence in her companion wounds Lövborg to his soul: he consequently delivers a grave toast, and then drinks two glasses of alcoholic punch. When Tesman and Judge Brack make ready to leave for the bachelor party, Lövborg announces, despite Thea's quiet pleas, that he's going to join them. He promises to return at ten o'clock that night.

Mrs. Elvsted passes a sleepless night at the Tesmans' villa, while Hedda sleeps quite well. At ten, neither Tesman nor Ejlert Lövborg has returned from the party. Mrs. Elvsted is panicked, but Hedda advises her to go into her bedroom and rest. Meanwhile, Tesman returns home. Hedda catches him tiptoeing in and asks how his night went. Tesman confesses to being jealous of Lövborg's manuscript. He also has a sad story to tell: Lövborg got debauchedly drunk, and while he was being walked home, he lost his precious, irreplaceable manuscript. Tesman, who had fallen behind the other men, found it in the gutter. Tesman says he must return it to Lövborg at once, but before he can he receives a letter informing him that his Aunt Rina is dying. Tesman hurries to her at once, leaving Lövborg's manuscript in Hedda's care.

Just as Tesman leaves, Judge Brack enters. He also has some news for Hedda: after the party broke up and the revelers went their separate ways, Lövborg went to the salon of one Mademoiselle Diana, who is the madam, or procuress, of a brothel. What's more, Lövborg accused Mademoiselle Diana or one of her prostitutes of robbing him. He started a fight over the matter, and when the police arrived he even struck an officer and tore his tunic. Lövborg then had to go to the police station—disgracing himself again. The Judge advises Hedda to close her doors to Lövborg from there on out. He exits.

Soon after, Hedda hears an altercation in the hall. Despite Berte's best efforts, Lövborg enters in a state of confusion and excitement. Mrs. Elvsted enters, also, from Hedda's bedroom. Lövborg lies and says that he tore up his manuscript and scattered its thousand pieces into the fjord. Mrs. Elvsted cries out that this act seems to her as though Lövborg had killed a little child. She exits.

Alone with Hedda, Lövborg says that his life is hopeless, and he confesses that he could not bring himself to tell Mrs. Elvsted the truth about the manuscript—namely, that he lost it. He also reveals his intention to kill himself. Hedda, far from protesting, just asks that he do so beautifully. She tells him to leave and never come back—but before he goes she gives him a memento, one of her father's pistols, to be used in carrying out his "beautiful" suicide. Lövborg exits. Once he leaves, Hedda takes his manuscript out from her bookshelf and feeds it into the fire of her stove.

That evening, Aunt Julle comes to the Tesmans' villa to inform Hedda of Aunt Rina's death. Tesman comes in soon after, broken up about not only the death of his beloved aunt but also about Lövborg's disgrace. He says that he must return his manuscript to him. Once Aunt Julle leaves, however, Hedda confesses that she destroyed the manuscript. To assuage her husband's outrage, she insists she did it out of love for him, so that he wouldn't be outshone by a better mind. Tesman is torn between doubt and happiness to learn this news.

Mrs. Elvsted enters. She's heard that Lövborg has had some kind of accident. Judge Brack enters soon after and confirms that Lövborg is in the hospital, fatally shot in the breast. To everyone's shock and alarm, Hedda praises the courage and beauty of his suicide. Tesman, moreover, is wracked by guilt: Lövborg's manuscript, which would have made its author's name immortal, is now lost to the world forever. Mrs. Elvsted says that that's not entirely the case, because she is in possession of the notes that Lövborg used to dictate the manuscript to her. On the spot, Tesman and Mrs. Elvsted decide to team up and reconstruct Lövborg's work.

Meanwhile, Judge Brack informs Hedda that Lövborg's death seems not to have been an intentional suicide: he was shot at Mademoiselle Diana's salon, while raving about his manuscript. He was also not shot in the breast, as Brack had previously reported, but rather in the abdomen. Hedda is disgusted to consider the fact that seemingly everything she touches becomes petty and farcical. Brack then reveals that Hedda will be implicated in a scandal when it comes out that Lövborg shot himself with *her* pistol. Brack says that no one need know that the pistol was Hedda's, however—so long as he holds his tongue.

Hedda understands at once that she is in the lecherous Judge Brack's power, a prospect she cannot endure. Nor can she endure the prospect of her husband being away with Mrs. Elvsted working on the manuscript all the time, leaving her with only Brack for company. Hedda retires to the inner room, plays

a wild tune on the piano, and then shoots herself in the temple with her remaining pistol. All in the house are horrified: "People don't do such things," exclaims Judge Brack.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Hedda Gabler – Hedda, the daughter of the great General Gabler and the pregnant wife of Jörgen Tesman, is a beautiful, aristocratic, intelligent woman, loaded with social grace and a steely, clear, dispassionate charisma. She is 29 years old when the action of the play begins. She has a fiery lust for life and desires above all else a vision of courage and beauty. That being said, she is also bored by the world, and is egotistical, nihilistic, and almost demonic in her desire to influence other people's fates. She behaves cruelly and destructively toward those around her while seeking to entertain and satisfy herself, going so far as to drive her comrade from adolescence, Ejlert Lövborg, to suicide. At the end of the play, to avoid scandal and escape the pettiness of bourgeois life, Hedda shoots herself with her father's pistol, an act that she herself might describe as a beautiful death.

Jörgen Tesman – Tesman is Hedda's husband and the holder of a University Fellowship in cultural history: he specializes in medieval domestic crafts. He is a slightly plump, bearded, and bespectacled man of 33. Tesman is a hard worker and an amiable fellow, and he is considered an outstanding member of his society, one destined to attain the highest social distinction. For all that, however, he is also conventional, boring, mediocre, and sometimes even ridiculous. He talks constantly about the mundane details of his studies, he is sappily sentimental, and he is an anxious climber of the career ladder. He does not create anything on his own, but instead merely studies the creations of others, as when at the end of the play he resolves to reconstruct Lövborg's partially destroyed manuscript. Tesman might be read in part as Ibsen's sketch of the conventional bourgeois man in modern society.

Ejlert Lövborg – Tesman's rival for a prestigious professorship, Ejlert Lövborg is a visionary historian and sociologist. He is also, like Hedda herself, ill-adapted to modern life—in his case, he is unable to drink in moderation. The despairing thing about Lövborg, as Ibsen has noted, is that he wants to control the world by seeing into its future, but he can't even control himself. During their adolescence, Lövborg and Hedda were intimate confidants and comrades, but Hedda violently broke the relationship off when it threatened to become sexual. When Lövborg comes back into her life during the action of the play, Lövborg's relationship with Mrs. Elvsted, his helpmate and muse, so inflames Hedda's jealousy that she at last sets about effecting Lövborg's destruction.

Mrs. Thea Elvsted – Mrs. Elvsted is a slight woman with soft attractive features, large blue eyes that tend to protrude with a scared, questioning expression, and almost whitish-yellow hair that is unusually rich and wavy. She is a couple years younger than her old schoolmate Hedda, and was once romantically involved with Jörgen Tesman. After Ejlert Lövborg's fall from social grace, Mrs. Elvsted and her husband, a sheriff, welcomed Lövborg into their home as a tutor for their children. During that time, Mrs. Elvsted served as Lövborg's helpmate and muse, and also seemed to fall in love with him, committing herself to him, body and soul. When Lövborg returns to the city where the Tesmans live, Mrs. Elvsted follows him without her husband's permission (she is repelled by her husband) in order to deliver him from his temptation to drink. She is as conventional as Tesman, in her way, and somewhat timid, but Mrs. Elvsted also has a capacity for passionate, courageous commitment that is rare in Ibsen's world—even Hedda is afraid of scandal—and this makes her, however quietly, somewhat heroic.

Judge Brack – Judge Brack is a shrewd and respected man in society, a cynical old bachelor, and a regular guest at the Tesmans' villa. He is a gentleman of 45, stocky and elastic in his movements, with short, almost black hair and lively, playful eyes. He takes pleasure in having a hand in other people's business, as when he arranges the Tesmans' finances and delivers professional news to Tesman himself. However, it is the mistress of the house, Hedda, with whom Brack especially seeks intimacy. The two deviously gossip together, but underneath their superficialities a campaign of control is being waged: Brack again and again obliquely propositions Hedda, and she again and again evades him. Their games of sexual innuendo, veiled threats, and a shared world-weariness provide both with a reprieve from the stale monotony of their lives. In the end, however, Judge Brack at last gets the upper hand over Hedda—but Hedda surprises him by doing the unthinkable.

Miss Juliane Tesman (Aunt Julle) – Jörgen Tesman's paternal aunt, Juliane Tesman is a good-looking, conventional, chatty woman who cared for her nephew after his parents' deaths. Though Jörgen is an adult when the play begins, his Aunt Julle, some 65 years old, still dotes on him, lending him money, bringing him sentimental gifts, and showering him with praise and encouragement. She looks forward to the day when he and his wife Hedda will bring a child into the world. Though Hedda can be cruel to Miss Tesman, Aunt Julle withstands her with a pinched dignity. Miss Tesman lives with another of Jörgen's aunts, Aunt Rina, who is an invalid. Aunt Julle would be just as bored as Hedda, the play implies, if she didn't have someone like Aunt Rina to constantly care for and tend to.

Berte – Berte is a plain, kindly, dedicated maid of a "somewhat countrified exterior" who served in Juliane Tesman's household before transferring into the service of Jörgen and Hedda. Miss Tesman and her nephew are very fond of Berte, but Hedda

decidedly is not. She is very severe with the maid, who fears she won't be able to accommodate Hedda's grand, aristocratic ways.

Mademoiselle Diana – Named for a Greek goddess of hunting and (ironically) chastity, Mademoiselle Diana is a redheaded singer and the madam, or procuress, of a brothel in town. She never appears onstage. During his wild drunken debauched days, Ejlert Lövborg was an ardent champion of hers. During the action of the play, however, after accusing Mademoiselle or one of her prostitutes of robbing him of his manuscript, Lövborg causes a fight to break out in her salon. Hedda seems to be vaguely jealous of Mademoiselle Diana's prominence in Lövborg's sex life.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Aunt Rina – One of Jörgen Tesman's aunts, Aunt Rina is an invalid who never appears onstage and who passes away quietly toward the end of the play. She is cared for and tended to by Aunt Julle.

Mr. Elvsted – Mr. Elvsted is a sheriff who lives north of town, and is the husband of Mrs. Thea Elvsted. Mrs. Elvsted claims to have nothing in common with her husband—he treats her like useful and cheap property, she claims. Mr. Elvsted never appears onstage.

General Gabler – Hedda's father, a famous general. He provided Hedda with an aristocratic upbringing, but she is unable to maintain this lifestyle given the state of Jörgen Tesman's finances. Hedda still has her father's pistols, and she enjoys holding and shooting them.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

POWER AND INFLUENCE

Every character in *Hedda Gabler* seeks power and influence of some kind. As one critic describes it, the play "is most convincingly read as the record of a series of personal campaigns for control and domination: over oneself, over others, and over one's world." Most of the power struggles are petty: Jörgen Tesman wants to know more than anyone else about medieval domestic crafts, of all things, so that he might gain the professional and social power that would come with a prestigious professorship. Judge Brack wants a hold over Hedda, his verbal sparring partner, presumably so that he can have sexual access to her (Hedda, for her part, cannot endure the idea of being "subject to [his] will and [his] demands"). More grandly, Ejlert Lövborg wants to intellectually control the world by seeing into its future, even though, ironically enough, he can't control himself when under the influence of alcohol. Mrs. Elvsted, for her part, comes to the "terrible town" where the Tesmans live so that she can exert a counter-influence over Lövborg and save him from his self-destructiveness.

While most of the characters in the play want power and influence for practical reasons, Hedda seeks to control and dominate others on a whim—seemingly she wants only to alleviate the excruciating boredom of her life, and so makes others suffer for no better reason than because she can. As Ibsen wrote in one of his notebooks, "The demonic thing about Hedda is that she wants to exert influence over another person." She has an insatiable will and burns to accumulate things, but finds no satisfaction in what she has. As such, she has exhausted her wishes—but her will itself still requires exercise, and she exercises it precisely by hurting others, which lessens her own suffering and pleases her as an expression of her power. Performing power, then, becomes an end in itself for Hedda, from insisting that her maid Berte refer to Tesman not as mister but as doctor, to something so monstrous as encouraging Lövborg to suicide. In this sense, Hedda is the most extreme example of her society's lust for power. Whereas her father, General Gabler, led men to death on the battlefield, Hedda leads men to death from the comfort of her drawing room.

PROVINCIALISM AND PATRIARCHY

Despite being well-educated and well-traveled, Hedda Gabler lives in a very small, small-minded world—that is, a provincial world. The streets she rode down as a young woman, accompanied by her father General Gabler, are the same streets she rides down now as a married woman. One of her early admirers, the academic Jörgen Tesman, is now her husband, a man who during the couple's honeymoon abroad revealingly neglects the cultural riches of Italy in favor of toiling away in libraries. When financial strain curtails Hedda's social life, her days become monotonous and stale. Consequently, she feels imprisoned: she has "not a single intellectual interest or moral enthusiasm," as one critic describes it. She spends her long, dull, oppressive days planning to make purchases she and her husband can't afford and gossiping somewhat deviously with Judge Brack—all the while fantasizing about freedom.

What's more, Hedda is especially limited in exercising her considerable intelligence and fiery lust for life because she is a woman living in a society dominated by men: a patriarchy. The men in her social circle have war, politics, and wild drinking parties to give scope to their action, thought, and feeling. In contrast, the women in the play mostly care for and serve the

men, as Tesman's Aunt Julle cares for her rather dependent nephew, or as Mrs. Elvsted serves to inspire the self-centered Ejlert Lövborg (revealingly, Mrs. Elvsted thinks her own husband treats her like cheap and useful property). Tesman sees Hedda as a prize and as the mother of his child, while Lövborg sees her as a fascinating maze, and Judge Brack sees her as a charming pet and toy. No one sees Hedda for the great and destructive soul she really is. In response, Hedda attempts to downplay her womanhood—by repressing her pregnancy as best she can, among other things—and to influence and even participate in the sphere of action traditionally dominated by men. She seems to have established her early comradeship with Lövborg, for example, both to subtly challenge her father's authority and also to live vicariously through her male comrade's confessions. As Hedda explains, it's understandable that a young girl should want to find out about a world that is supposed to be forbidden to her. The central symbol for her fascination with this male world, then, is General Gabler's pistols, the phallic objects of authority and power which Hedda takes delight in brandishing.

While it would be an oversimplification to say that Hedda's nihilism and cruelty are a product of patriarchal oppression, it is not too much to say that provincialism and patriarchy characterize the social world Hedda wages quiet war against.

MODERN SOCIETY V. THE INDIVIDUAL

Throughout his career, Ibsen investigated the interplay between modern society and the heroic individual, and in his plays he generally privileges the latter. The ordinary members of society whom he represents tend to be materialistic, and uncommitted to anything other than maintaining the status quo and advancing their petty self-interests. Jörgen Tesman, amiable though he may be, is just such a person: he mostly concerns himself with bourgeois comforts and conventions, and his academic specialization in history and medieval domestic crafts is at once arbitrary and spiritually trivial. He is in all senses a "secondary" man, studying only what other men have done and made instead of doing or making anything for himself. Indeed, by the end of the play Tesman vows not to imagine the future of civilization for himself, but rather to reconstruct Lövborg's partially destroyed manuscript on that subject. Nonetheless, Judge Brack refers to Tesman as "outstanding," if only because Tesman holds a socially prestigious academic post, makes good money, and is married to the great beauty Hedda. Judge Brack, for that matter, is also rather ordinary. His one violation of social convention—seeking intimacy with a married woman—is itself very conventional.

In contrast to the Tesmans and Judge Bracks of the world, Ibsen gives us the visionary Ejlert Lövborg and the extraordinary Hedda Gabler. Lövborg has risen from social disgrace to academic prominence with the publication of a conventional book that was met with enormous praise: "I put nothing into the book but what everyone would agree with," he explains (again suggesting that the most efficient means of rising in modern society is to tell people what affirms their prejudices and beliefs). However, Lövborg is no plodder like Tesman—he has also written a manuscript he has put his true self into, one not about the past but the future: a subject fit only for visionaries. Whether or not Lövborg really is a man of genius, Ibsen declines to reveal, but we know that he is at least a courageous thinker with passionate commitments. Lövborg's inability to drink in moderation is a sign of this passion, and it also suggests the extent to which an extraordinary person is out of place in modern society and especially vulnerable to its vices.

But it is ultimately Hedda who is the most extraordinary figure in the play. She is more intelligent, more elegantly destructive, and more possessed by a vision of courage and beauty (albeit a terrifying one) than any other character. She is an antihero who sees society as an abyss to play in, and she also has the skill to conceal her nihilism from others. We know this because her destructiveness, at least until the main action of the play, has not affected her high social standing. She limited herself to such cruelties as pulling the hair of fellow schoolgirls, brandishing General Gabler's pistols, and tactfully mocking Aunt Julle's hat—that is, she has been, in Lövborg's words, "a coward," unwilling or too canny to wholly reveal her true self. That all changes, however, when she takes it upon herself to pressure Lövborg to drink and tempts him to kill himself "beautifully." These actions, and her consequent suicide, at last prove that Hedda is supreme in the passion of her commitments and distinctly an individual over and against modern society. "People don't do such things!" Judge Brack exclaims after Hedda commits suicide, and, for the most part, he's correct. Hedda is unique in her isolated individualism and her more than unconventional commitment to fulfilling herself by destroying others.

MARRIAGE, LOVE, SEXUALITY, AND JEALOUSY

Lövborg accuses Hedda of fearing scandal because she is a coward, and Hedda concedes that she is. But it is perhaps her marriage to the mediocre Tesman that represents the far greater concession to her cowardice. Hedda chose Tesman for his socioeconomic solidity and respectability, and also because her own "marriageability" was ebbing. She does not love him—she finds the very word "love" to be "glutinous" and "sickening"—nor is she even amused by him. It is with a sense of wry deprivation that she now anticipates being in his company at all times, in all seasons, consoled only by the fact that he stands to attain to the highest social distinction. For Hedda, then, marriage is a wretched compromise one has to

make with one's body and one's society in order to live respectably and without scandal.

Hedda wants nothing to do with other men—at least sexually—either. Judge Brack repeatedly insinuates that he would like to be more than a trusted friend in the Tesman household, and he obliquely propositions Hedda. The passengers aboard the train of marriage jump out and move about a little, he suggests—meaning that people often and casually indulge in extramarital affairs. "I never jump out," Hedda responds. Her fidelity to Tesman may be motivated by her aversion to scandal, but it may also be motivated, as many critics have suggested, by sexual frigidity and repression on Hedda's part. She does tend to disengage from her male companions as soon as their relationship threatens to "develop into something more serious," in her words, just as she did with Lövborg when the two were adolescents. Furthermore, she is ashamed when Tesman announces to Aunt Julle that she, Hedda, is pregnant—and she is perhaps also disgusted that anyone should have a reason to imagine her engaging in intercourse. Ibsen, however, leaves us few clues as to the cause and significance of Hedda's sexuality. Perhaps she is disturbed by the fact that her destructive spirit is housed in a body capable of sexual reproduction, or perhaps she is merely unable to muster much more than egotism and hatred in relation to others.

While Hedda is evasive of her sexuality, she is readily and openly prone to jealousy. Her social world, after all, is fraught with love triangles: Judge Brack tries to get between Hedda and Tesman, Lövborg succeeds in getting between Mrs. Thea Elvsted and her husband, Hedda tries to get between Lövborg and Mrs. Elvsted, and so on. Hedda's jealousy of Mrs. Elvsted, however, is not so much motivated by love as by a lust for power and influence over the fates of others. Indeed, Hedda seems to confuse the products of love and the products of power. For example, she thinks of Lövborg's manuscript about the future as being his child, conceived by his helpmate and muse Mrs. Elvsted—and she burns this manuscript, murmuring as she does so, "Now I'm burning your child, Thea." If the manuscript is Lövborg and Thea Elvsted's labor of love, which Hedda's jealousy destroys, Hedda in contrast conceives with Lövborg the idea of his courageous, beautiful suicide. It would seem that she is keen to produce only destruction, despite being literally pregnant herself.

BEAUTY, TRAGEDY, AND FARCE

Modern life, at least to Hedda's sensitive mind, is full of routine ugliness. Because nothing is sacred, people become sentimental about personal trifles, as Tesman is about the slippers his Aunt Rina embroidered for him and which his Aunt Julle brings for him as a gift. "Oh, you can't imagine how many memories they have for me," Tesman exclaims. "But not for me, particularly," Hedda responds. Then there is the ugliness of being married "everlastingly," as Hedda is, to a solid man who nonetheless lacks the charisma necessary for the glories of politics. There is also the associated ugliness of being in the company of men like Judge Brack, who vulgarly sexualizes and tries to intellectually battle with Hedda. There is, moreover, the ugliness of debt, which threatens the Tesmans from the beginning of the play. It is no wonder, then, that Hedda defiantly longs for beauty, and not the trivial beauty of a new hat and parasol, but for tragic beauty—what she herself calls "an act of spontaneous courage… of unconditional beauty."

But where is such beauty to be found? Hedda would respond that one does not find beauty—rather, one *creates* it. So it is that she sets about like a theater director to produce a tragic spectacle, full of pity and terror. She opportunistically casts Ejlert Lövborg at first as a vine-crowned god on the rise and then, failing that, as a tragic hero, the flawed man who is nonetheless superior in degree to other men. Then, with a ruthless commitment she has never had the courage to make before, Hedda inserts her will into his destiny (and it is here that Hedda's accumulation of power at last finds a worthy purpose): she pressures him to drink because of his vulnerability to alcohol, she destroys the manuscript he loses that night, and then, in her crowning moment, Hedda gives Lövborg one of her father's pistols so that he can kill himself, asking Lövborg to "let it happen…beautifully." This suggests that Hedda consciously thinks of Lövborg's death as a work of art. As further evidence of this, Hedda imagines Lövborg throughout the play as having vine leaves in his hair: an allusion to the Greek god Dionysus, who presides over intoxication and tragic insight. In the end, Hedda praises Lövborg's "performance" of suicide, declaring, "I say that there is beauty in this deed."

Judge Brack, however, feels "compelled to disabuse [Hedda] of a beautiful illusion": Lövborg did not shoot himself intentionally, and, it would seem, he did not have the intention of committing suicide after leaving the Tesmans' house for the last time. To Hedda, then this means that Lövborg's death is not tragic at all, but rather farcical—that is, ludicrously futile and hollow—a mockery of her noble purpose. It is this disillusionment, and also the recognition that Judge Brack has control over her at last (through his knowledge that Hedda gave Lövborg the pistol he shot himself with), that compel Hedda to kill herself—dying what she perhaps thinks of as a beautiful death. We ourselves are left wondering, when the curtain falls, whether we have just witnessed a beautiful tragedy—the fall of the great Hedda Gabler—or instead something more farcical, hollow, and ironic.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in blue text throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

GENERAL GABLER'S PISTOLS

Hedda inherited her pistols from her father, the great General Gabler, and her intimacy with them suggests the extent to which Hedda is so much more her father's daughter than her husband's wife. In this vein, we might say that the pistols are Hedda's final material connection to her glorious aristocratic past—a lifestyle which is now unsustainable because of the state of Jörgen's finances. The pistols mean much more than this to Hedda, however: they are weapons for warfare, and phallic artifacts from a man's world which is inaccessible to women like Hedda in a patriarchal society. Hedda feels empowered and free when she holds these instruments of power and domination, as when she fires in Judge Brack's direction when he comes through the garden. Moreover, Hedda herself is a loaded gun, so to speak, in waiting as long as she does to unleash her powers for destruction, and the pistols underscore this characterization. In the end, however, the pistols only empower Hedda in effecting her own self-destruction.

ALCOHOL, DRUNKENNESS, AND VINE LEAVES

The excessive consumption of alcohol in the world of *Hedda Gabler* is a privilege enjoyed only by men, and so alcohol itself comes to symbolize, among other things, the social freedom accessible to men but not to women in a patriarchal society. Tesman and Judge Brack can escape from polite social conventions once in a while—during the Judge's bachelor party, for example—but Hedda, Mrs. Elvsted, and the other women in the play must always be on their best behavior—otherwise they risk a scandal.

While ordinary men, drink as part of a social ritual—to give themselves license to behave uninhibitedly or obscenely—the extraordinary Lövborg drinks to dissolve his ego and to render himself susceptible to creative inspiration. Drunkenness, it is implied, is an almost religious experience for him, full of free-spiritedness and courage. Given this, we need not wonder why Lövborg drinks to dangerous, outrageous excess. It is in this sense, moreover, that alcohol occupies a similar place in his life as Hedda does: both alcohol and Hedda inspire Lövborg, but not so much to creation as to destruction. Mrs. Elvsted, in contrast, inspires Lövborg in his work—and she also helps him control the influence alcohol has on his life.

It is worth noting here that Hedda does not will Lövborg to destruction consistently throughout the play—only after Lövborg fails so disgracefully to control himself while under the influence of alcohol. In fact, Hedda's first plot for Lövborg centers on her vision of him with vine leaves in his hair—an allusion to Dionysus, the Greek god of wine and tragic insight. Hedda (or at least her better part) wants Lövborg to go to Judge Bracks' bachelor party so that he can prove that he has become wholly master of himself. In Hedda's vision, the vine leaves symbolize this almost divine self-mastery. In the end, however, Lövborg only proves that he is no Dionysus, only an alcoholic, and so Hedda's vision of his courage and beauty must be modified: if Lövborg cannot live beautifully, she hopes that he can at least die beautifully.

LÖVBORG AND THEA'S MANUSCRIPT

While General Gabler's pistols and alcohol are destructive temptations launched from characters' pasts into their presents, Lövborg and Thea Elvsted's manuscript symbolizes creation, the redemption of the past, and hope for the future (the manuscript itself, after all, takes the future for its subject matter). Mrs. Elvsted inspired Lövborg in writing the manuscript, in what is virtually the only creative relationship between two people in the play. The manuscript itself promises to redeem Lövborg of his past disgrace, as well as to establish him with a bright reputation in the future. So important is the manuscript to Lövborg and Thea that they go so far as to consider it to be their very own child. However, Lövborg's lack of self-control, coupled with Hedda's destructive nature, lead to the loss and fiery death of this child. (Compare this with the fact that Hedda, who is pregnant from the beginning of the play, dreads the paltriness and boredom promised by motherhood, and takes her unborn child to death with her when she commits suicide.) Perhaps Mrs. Elvsted will inspire Jörgen to successfully reconstruct the Lövborg's manuscript—this is the only prospect of creative redemption that the play leaves us with when the curtain falls.

FIRE AND THE TESMANS' STOVE

In the Tesmans' drawing room is a dark porcelain stove which Ibsen invites us to pay attention to throughout the play. Hedda goes toward it when Tesman tries to show her his cherished old slippers, Hedda forces Mrs. Elvsted to sit next to it, and she sits next to it on several occasions herself. The fire in the stove also almost dies in Act III, only for Hedda to revive it. We learn that the stove is onstage to serve a treacherous purpose only at the end of Act III, when Hedda kneels beside it and feeds into its fire Ejlert Lövborg's precious, irreplaceable manuscript. The seeming innocuousness of the stove parallels Hedda's own seeming harmlessness—but of course this is an illusion of which we are disabused over the course of the play. Just as the stove conceals the fire in its belly, so too does Hedda conceal within her heart a fantastic, hateful violence. The stove and its fire, then, symbolize destruction—and how domestication can conceal but not contain destruction's powers. It should also be pointed out that when Hedda destroys Lövborg and Thea's manuscript, she refers to it as their "child." The image Ibsen is

evoking here is that of child sacrifice, specifically the ancient pagan practice of making children go into a furnace where they would be burned to death in honor of the god Moloch. The peoples who practiced this form of sacrifice must have been despairing indeed, to think that their god was so cruel as to require this act of them—and Hedda, it would seem, is similarly despairing.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Oxford University Press edition of *Four Major Plays: Doll's House; Ghosts; Hedda Gabler; and The Master Builder* published in 2008.

Act 1 Quotes

Berte: I'm really so scared I'll never give satisfaction to the young mistress.

Miss Tesman: Oh, Heavens…just to begin with of course there might be this and that…

Berte: Because she's ever so particular.

Related Characters: Miss Juliane Tesman (Aunt Julle), Berte (speaker), Hedda Gabler

Related Themes:

Page Number: 168

Explanation and Analysis

Miss Tesman and Berte are close friends from Berte's years of service in Miss Tesman's house, which came to an end recently when Miss Tesman sent Berte to work in her nephew Jorgen's house. They are discussing Hedda, Jorgen's new wife (and therefore Berte's new mistress), in a spare moment while Hedda is sleeping. Their voices are hushed. The scene has a sense of secrecy and haste, implying Hedda's power and ability to intimidate others even when she is not present. Additionally, Hedda's power and influence are felt in the portrait of her father, General Gabler, which looks out over the scene.

The quote also suggests the various concerns and motivations of the characters. Both Berte and Miss Tesman are invested in the happiness of Jorgen Tesman, which means maintaining the domestic sphere in a way that will please Hedda. But the fact that Hedda is "ever so particular" suggests a few things. First, Hedda has higher standards than both Tesman and his Aunt Julle, both of whom are more provincial in their tastes. But Berte's fearfulness and dismay also gives a hint of something that will become more evident as the play continues: the fact that Hedda despises the domestic sphere entirely, and that Hedda's capriciousness—her being "ever so particular"—is in fact a way for her to wield power over other people. Meanwhile, the fact that Hedda wields such domestic power over her servants while under the dead gaze of her general father's portrait also emphasizes the way that women are marginalized in this society. Hedda wields power, but she is nonetheless stuck in the domestic sphere she hates. She will never be a general.

Tesman: Oh, Auntie…you'll never stop sacrificing yourself for me!

Miss Tesman: Isn't it the only joy I have in the world, to help you along your road, my darling boy?

Related Characters: Jörgen Tesman, Miss Juliane Tesman (Aunt Julle) (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 174

Explanation and Analysis

Tesman and his aunt have been speaking about his extravagantly expensive honeymoon, as well as the huge cost of the villa he has bought, both of which expenses he was inspired to by Hedda. Now, Miss Tesman has just revealed that she's taken out a mortgage against the annuity (a fixed income) that supports her and Aunt Rina in order to purchase the household furnishings for Tesman's villa. This sacrifice, which puts her own income in jeopardy, is excessive, especially in light of the fact that she has already given him the services of her valued servant Berte. Tesman's lines reveal him to be grateful for these sacrifices, but also complacent—his aunt has always sacrificed herself for his benefit, and he accepts as fact that she will never stop. In fact, she *cannot* stop, as she herself goes on to say. Helping her nephew is the sole source of "joy" in her life.

Through all of the above, the quote portrays Miss Tesman as the unwitting victim of the patriarchal social conventions that compel her to put all of her energy and resources toward the men in her life, even to her and her sister's detriment. At the same time, her generosity and loyalty to Tesman stand in sharp contrast to Hedda, who continues to make demands of Tesman despite his limited resources, and

who purposefully humiliates Miss Tesman for her provincial tastes.

Tesman: What are you looking at, Hedda?

Hedda: I'm just looking at the leaves on the trees. They're so yellowed. And so withered.

Related Characters: Hedda Gabler, Jörgen Tesman (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 179

Explanation and Analysis

In the moments before this exchange, Tesman has embarrassed Hedda by hinting to Miss Tesman that Hedda is pregnant. Throughout the play, Hedda is at pains to deny her pregnancy, changing the topic or cutting Tesman off when he mentions it. After Tesman and his Aunt leave, Hedda is alone. She clenches her fists violently, revealing how aggravated she is by Miss Tesman's commonness, as well as Tesman's insistence on revealing her pregnancy. Hedda seemingly views the pregnancy as a burden, something shackling her to bourgeoisie domesticity, as well as a disgusting reminder that people might view her as a sexual being.

In these lines, Tesman returns and we see how bitterly Hedda feels towards him and the domestic, procreative world he represents. Tesman's question is blundering—he does not recognize how much his hints about the pregnancy to Miss Tesman upset Hedda. Hedda's answer then illuminates her resentment for him (although not *to*him), as well as for the child she's carrying and all that comes along with her pregnancy. In the early stages of her marriage and pregnancy, a time of beginnings, she notices only the yellow, "withered" leaves, which are symbolic of stale repetition, death, and rot. Although Hedda's body is fertile, in this moment we see that her mindset is barren and hostile.

Hedda: Frightened? Of me?

Mrs. Elvsted: Oh, dreadfully frightened. When we met on the steps you used to pull my hair.

Hedda: No, did I really?

Mrs. Elvsted: Yes, and once you said you were going to burn it off.

Related Characters: Hedda Gabler, Mrs. Thea Elvsted (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 186

Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Elvsted and Hedda have not seen one another in years. Their romantic histories have been intertwined, however, as Mrs. Elvsted used to be Tesman'ssweetheart, and Hedda had an intense friendship with Lovborg, the man that Mrs. Elvsted is currently in love with.Although these connections are largely unspoken at this point, they contextualize the play of power and sexual jealousy in this exchange between the two women.

Here,Mrs. Elvsted is recalling how she was frightened of Hedda when they were younger. Her fear recalls Berte's earlier confession of being "so scared" of her mistress. Hedda inspires fear in the women around herbecause she exerts power over them, which goes against provincial stereotypes of feminine delicacy and sisterhood. Hedda is, of course, aware of these stereotypes and exploits them for her own gain later in this conversation, gossiping with Mrs. Elvsted in order to gain control over her.

In her lines here, Hedda acts as if she has forgotten that she used to bully Mrs. Elvsted, although we suspect that she has not, and that she takes pleasure in hearing Mrs. Elvsted recount her earlier manipulations and cruelties. The fact that the young Hedda targeted Mrs. Elvsted's hair is telling, as herhair is widely acknowledgedas beautiful, and is attractive to men. Hedda's competitive social instincts were on display when she attacked it.

Finally, Mrs. Elvsted recalls a young Hedda's threat to burn her hair off. This foreshadows the coming moment in the play when Hedda burns Lovborg's cherished manuscript. We see that Hedda has long had an impulse to destroy, often by fire, those things that others love best.

Hedda: Oh, well...I've got one thing at least that I can pass the time with.

Tesman: Oh, thank the good Lord for that! And what might that be, Hedda? Eh?

Hedda: My pistols... Jörgen.

Related Characters: Hedda Gabler (speaker), Jörgen Tesman

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 197

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of the first act, we learn from Judge Brack that Tesman will have to compete with Lovborg for the academic position that was promised him. The new uncertainty about his employment, when coupled with their existing debt, leads Tesman to tell Hedda that she will not be immediately able to entertain guests or get the manservant and saddle-horse she wanted. Hedda's sphere of influence and power is getting smaller and smaller. Socializing is one of her primary methods of manipulation and control, and the saddle horse and manservant are objects over which she could have exerted power. Without these things available to her, Hedda says that she has only "one thing" to pass the time.

Tesman is delighted and responds with excitement. He incorrectly assumes that Hedda is speaking about their unborn childand that she is looking forward to being a mother.

In the context of Tesman's hope, Hedda's response is brutal. She has been referring to General Gabler's treasured pistols, not her unborn child. The pistols are symbols of male, phallic power and destruction, as well as of the aristocratic world in which Hedda was raised and now misses. They arethe polar opposite of a baby. They take life where a baby brings life. They are power embodied, while a baby is the embodiment of vulnerability.

Of course, the only thing one can do with pistols is shoot them, which foreshadows the violent ways in whichHedda actually will pass her time. This exchange is made more potent by Hedda's eventual suicide—she will literally pass her time with one of her father's pistols.

Act 2 Quotes

Hedda: Hullo again, Mr. Brack!

Brack: Good afternoon to you, Mrs. Tesman!

Hedda: I'm going to shoot you sir!

Related Characters: Hedda Gabler (speaker), Judge Brack

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 199

Explanation and Analysis

The second act opens with Hedda loading her father's pistols before Judge Brack arrives in her garden. This shocking moment between Hedda and Judge Brack reveals how dramatically Hedda can exert her power and influence, as well as how detached she is from the "normal" social norms of the bourgeoisie.

The first two lines are regular and even friendly. Hedda and Brack refer to one another politely, and they are operating well within their established social boundaries. Hedda's next line, "I'm going to shoot you sir!" is then a shocking satire of their earlier greeting. By calling him "sir" as she threatens to shoot him, she mocks their superficial politeness even as she reveals the brutality beneath it. Judge Brack and Hedda spend the length of the play trying to control one another, and it is telling that this darkly comic moment is the first time we have seen them alone with one another onstage.

This is not an idle threat, either, as Hedda does go on to shoot at (and purposefully miss) Judge Brack. In doing so, she further reveals how detached she is from the society that surrounds her. To joke about shooting at people is scandalous enough—to actually do it is astonishing. Hedda is a loose gunshot in a hushed,provincial world.

Brack: But my dearest lady, how could you do such a thing! To that harmless old soul!

Hedda: Oh, you know how it is...these things just suddenly come over me. And then I can't resist them. Oh, I don't know myself how to explain it.

Related Characters: Hedda Gabler (speaker), Judge Brack

Related Themes:

Page Number: 206

Explanation and Analysis

Hedda and Judge Brack have been speaking privately, and Hedda has told Brack that she was bored on her honeymoonand that she is not in love with Tesman. Brack propositions Hedda to begin an affair with him, but she turns him down, feeling that an affair would be sordid, unbeautiful, and limiting.

Here, she has just confessed that she mocked Miss Tesman's hat on purpose in Act One, and Brack is admonishing her for it. In this exchange, we see the tension between modern society and the individual, with Brack on the side of society, and Hedda expressing herself in radically individual terms.

Brack's surprise is dependent on social norms—Miss Tesman is "harmless" and "old," and therefore cruelty towards her is unwarranted. For Hedda, however, these considerations are not important. She is capriciously cruel and decided to hurt Miss Tesman simply because the opportunity presented itself.

In her lines, Hedda reveals her lack of motivation for the act. "These things just suddenly come over" her, she says. Hedda is desperately stifled by her life and the people surrounding her, and because of this, she takes every chance of exercising power, regardless of how petty or arbitrary it may be.

> Hedda: I've often thought there's only one thing in the world I'm any good at.

Brack: And what might that be, may I venture to ask?

Hedda: Boring myself to death.

Related Characters: Hedda Gabler (speaker), Judge Brack

Related Themes:

Page Number: 209

Explanation and Analysis

Later in her conversation with Judge Brack, Hedda laments how there is nothing to interest her in the future—no potential for excitement or intrigue. Brack says that she will soon have a new responsibility (presumably motherhood) which will fill her days. Here, we see her response to this allusion, which again reveals her animosity towards the role of motherhood.

The only talent Hedda has, according to Hedda, is boring herself "to death." We see that Hedda would prefer to die of boredom than to become a mother, which would entail a complete loss of power and agency to her child.

This line is especially interesting in the context of Hedda's suicide. We might wonder how much of a part boredom and frustration play into her eventual death.

> When I think back to that time, wasn't there something beautiful, something attractive...something courageous too, it seems to me...about this...this secret intimacy, this companionship that no one even dreamed of.

Related Characters: Hedda Gabler (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 218

Explanation and Analysis

Lovborg has arrived at the Tesman's villa, after being invited by Tesman earlier in the day. Judge Brack and Tesman have retired to drink alcoholic punch together in another room, leaving Hedda and Lovborg alone together. They fall to remembering their youthful relationship, which Hedda insists was merely friendly—they were "companions." Lovborg, however, asks Hedda repeatedly if she was not in love with him to some degree. These lines are her response.

This moment is as close as Hedda will come to admitting genuine feeling for someone, but she pulls up short of saying that she loved Lovborg. Her description of their relationship, however, can be seen as a kind of personal ideal. It is the opposite of her banal, public, sexual relationship with Tesman. It was "courageous," "beautiful," and secret from others. And as we know, beauty and courage are in short supply in Hedda's current life.

We see here that Hedda relished her relationship with Lovborg as something exceptional and different—beyond the stiflingbourgeoisie social norms of what is acceptable between men and women. And, after these lines, we can understand why Hedda goes to such extraordinary lengths to reestablish her control over Lovborg.

> For once in my life I want to feel that I control a human destiny.

Related Characters: Hedda Gabler (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 226

Explanation and Analysis

Hedda says this to Mrs. Elvsted after Lovborg has left the villa to join Brack and Tesman at the bachelor party. Originally, Lovborg had not been planning to go to the party, because he didn't want to be tempted by alcohol. However, Hedda induces him to drink some alcoholic punch by breaking Mrs. Elvsted's confidence and revealing that Mrs. Elvsted had been nervous about whether Lovborg would drink or not. Mrs. Elvsted's lack of faith in him shocks and upsets Lovborg, and he leaves for the party in defiance.

Alone with Hedda, Mrs. Elvsted accuses her of having ulterior motives for manipulating Lovborg into going to the party. Hedda admits that's she right—Hedda does want to "control a human destiny"—Lovborg's. This line is Hedda at her most clear and revealing. She wants power and influence over others above all else. She wants to orchestrate a beautiful and courageousact. The act she has in mind at this point is Lovborg's mastery of his own spirit in the face of great temptation (which will reflect her own mastery over him), but the particulars are not as important to her as the essence of beauty, courage, and manipulation.

It is also interesting that Hedda must look outside herself for a human destiny to control, which suggests that she feels she cannot control her own destiny in a way that would be rewarding.

Act 3 Quotes

❝ I don't want to look at sickness and death. I must be free of everything that's ugly.

Related Characters: Hedda Gabler (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 235

Explanation and Analysis

Lovborg failed to control himselfand went on a drinking spree, during which he lost his precious manuscript. Tesman found the manuscript in a gutter, and is now discussing the night with Hedda. He resolves to return the manuscript to Lovborg immediately. A letter then arrives from Miss Tesman, telling Tesman that his Aunt Rina is about to die—and this distracts him from the question of the manuscript. Here, Tesman has just asked Hedda to come with him to Aunt Rina's deathbed, and Hedda responds that she does not "want to look at sickness and death."

Her response illuminates her cruelty as well as her disdain for social norms. Hedda frames going to a family member's deathbed as a matter of "want," when most people, Tesman included, would consider it a necessary, humane duty. Hedda, however, is disgusted not only by the ugliness of death but by its commonness. Aunt Rina's death, particularly, which is caused by a long illness, is pathetic and disturbing to Hedda in its lack of agency. A woman who is obsessed with a "beautiful death" will not go and sit by a sick bed.

In terms of the plot, Hedda's refusal to go with Tesman then leaves her alone with Lovborg's cherished manuscript.

❝ Hedda: You're quite a formidable person…when it comes to the point.

Brack: You think so?

Hedda: Yes, I'm beginning to think so, now. And I'm content…so long as you don't have any sort of hold over me.

Related Characters: Hedda Gabler (speaker), Judge Brack

Related Themes:

Page Number: 239

Explanation and Analysis

Judge Brack has been telling Hedda the details of Lovborg's drinking spree the night before. In addition to drinking too much, Lovborg went to a brothel, started a fight, and was arrested. Hedda asks why Brack has been tracking Lovborg's movements so closely, and Brack responds that he wanted to ensure that Lovborg will not be invited to the Tesmanvilla again. He wants to the be the only other man in Hedda's life, and he will fight for the privilege.

Hedda and Judge Brack are the characters in the play with the most visible desire to exercise power and influence over other people, and in these lines we see them grappling with one another, trying to assert dominance.

In her lines, Hedda says that Brack is "formidable," and in this moment she realizes that he will not be satisfied until he

has exercised his power over her by compelling her to have an affair with him. Brack is not a worthy opponent for Hedda, as the very way in which he wants to break social norms—an extramarital affair—is common and sordid to Hedda. Hedda responds defensively by reminding him that he doesn't have power over her, and that she could never live with herself if he did.

I want you to know, Lövborg, what you've done to the book…. For the rest of my life it'll be for me as though you killed a little child.

Related Characters: Mrs. Thea Elvsted (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 243

Explanation and Analysis

After Judge Brack leaves, Lovborg bursts into the Tesman's sitting room and speaks to Hedda and Mrs. Elvsted. He omits the details of his drunken debaucheryand says only that Mrs. Elvsted is no longer of use to him, and that he has torn up his precious manuscript and thrown the pieces into the fjord (an inlet of sea bordered by cliffs). Mrs. Elvsted is horrified. Lovborg tells this lie to give the impression of self-control and artistic passion—tearing up the manuscript is much more impressive than the truth, which is that he lost it in a drunken stupor. Lovborg tries to make the scene tragic, but in reality it is farcical.

Here, Mrs. Elvsted tells Lovborg how terribly he has wounded her, referring to his act of tearing up the manuscript as the murder of a child—their child. She tells him that this is a permanent wound. She will resent him for "the rest of [her] life."

Before this point, Mrs. Elvsted's feelings for Lovborg have been veiled by propriety, but in this moment she reveals how close the two of them were. By calling the manuscript they created together achild, she implies that their relationship was as intimate as husband and wife. The life of the manuscript is over, and so too is Mrs. Elvsted's. In her mind, there is nothing to live for without Lovborg's manuscript.

Hedda: And what are you going to do, then?

Lövborg: Nothing. Just put an end to it all. The sooner the better.

Hedda: Ejlert Lövborg…listen to me…. Couldn't you let it happen… beautifully?

Related Characters: Hedda Gabler, Ejlert Lövborg (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 245

Explanation and Analysis

After Mrs. Elvsted leaves in tears, Lovborg confesses to Hedda that he has in fact lost the manuscript. Here, Hedda asks him what he will do now, and Lovborg replies that he will "put an end to it" by killing himself. Hedda, whose first plan to influence Lovborg's life has failed, encourages him towards a new path—a beautiful death. She sees suicide as the ultimate sign of control over one's life, and since Lovborg could not control his drinking or the fate of his manuscript, he must make his last action purposeful and beautiful.

Of course, this is Hedda's last chance to influence Lovborg's destiny, and she knows it. She tells him never to return to the Tesmanvilla, and gives him one of General Gabler's pistols before he goes, intending for it to be the instrument of his suicide. The pistol, a symbol of control and violence, is an extension of Hedda's influence. It is also a symbol for their youthful time together, where they use to meet in General Gabler's home. For all of its symbolic importance, however, the gift is poorly thought out, as it will directly link Hedda to Lovborg's death when he kills himself with it.

Now I'm burning your child, Thea! With your curly hair! Your child and Ejlert Lövborg's. I'm burning…burning your child.

Related Characters: Hedda Gabler (speaker), Ejlert Lövborg, Mrs. Thea Elvsted

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 246

Explanation and Analysis

After Lovborgleaves, Hedda feeds his manuscript into the fire and murmurs these lines to herself. She addresses her lines to Mrs. Elvsted (and again refers to her famously beautiful hair), revealing the part that jealousy plays in this action. By referring to the manuscript as their child, Hedda confirmsMrs. Elvsted's influence and intimacy with Lovborg. The fact that Mrs. Elvsted influenced Lovborg productively (as Hedda has not been able to) enrages Hedda, and she is compelled to destroy the product of their partnership.

Her investment in Lovborg's beautiful death also motivates her to burn the manuscript. Without the manuscript, Lovborg has nothing to live for, and Hedda wants to ensure that neither he nor anyone else has a way of discovering it.

Finally, this moment is one of Hedda's most desperate acts of control. She destroys the manuscript for many reasons, of course, but perhaps the primary reason is a yearning to destroy as a means of control. Since she cannot create anything beautiful, she must content herself with destroying something precious.

Act 4 Quotes

Hedda: Oh, it'll kill me...it'll kill me, all this!

Tesman: All what, Hedda? Eh?

Hedda: All this...this farce...Jörgen.

Related Characters: Hedda Gabler, Jörgen Tesman (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 251

Explanation and Analysis

Hedda has told Tesman that she destroyed the manuscript. He is angry with her, and she soothes him by telling him it was for his sake, because he had been jealous of Lovborg. Tesman is touched but still upset, and so Hedda must go further. She admits her pregnancy for the first time in the play, and Tesman is predictably delighted.

In these lines, Hedda reveals how much she despises the "farce" that she is trapped in. The farce is her life with Tesman, and the role of wife and now mother that she must play in it. It is disgusting to her that she has had to pretend to love Tesman in order to protect herself—so disgusting that she says that it will kill her.

Hedda is brilliant and violent, but after this moment she must submit her spirit to the banal, cliched role of the caring woman, the domesticated wife. She must live in the farce that she has spent her life mocking and denying, and the idea is hateful to her.

Hedda: He was shot in the breast?

Brack: Yes...as I said.

Hedda: Not in the temple?

Brack: In the breast, Mrs. Tesman.

Hedda: Well...the breast is good, too.

Related Characters: Hedda Gabler, Judge Brack (speaker), Ejlert Lövborg

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 255

Explanation and Analysis

Judge Brack and Mrs. Elvsted enter and Brack tells them that Lovborg is in the hospital after a self-inflicted gunshot wound, and is not expected to survive. Hedda's delight at this news is clouded by Brack's information that Lovborg was shot in the breast.

Here, Hedda confirms that he did not shoot himself in the temple. She is surprised and upset by this fact. The temple, she feels, would be the correct, most beautiful way to commit suicide. Presumably, because it would destroy the brain and be an instantaneous death, whereas the breast would target the more sentimental organ of the heart, and be a slower, more prolonged and less dignified death. Additionally, the fact that he shot himself in the breast undermines Hedda's control over Lovborg, which would have been total had he shot himself where she wanted him to. Brack, for his part, is growing suspicious of Hedda during this exchange.

After a moment, Hedda says nearly inaudibly that "the breast is good, too." The control of suicide itself is the most important part of the beautifuldeath, and shooting oneself

in the breast is still courageous and beautiful, she feels, if slightly less so than the temple. Hedda compromises here by accepting the breast into her plan for Lovborg, and in doing so reveals further how desperate she is to feel that she had control over Lovborg's final, fatal action.

> It's a liberation to know that an act of spontaneous courage is yet possible in this world. An act that has something of unconditional beauty.

Related Characters: Hedda Gabler (speaker), Ejlert Lövborg

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 258

Explanation and Analysis

To everyone's shock, Hedda says that she admires Lovborg's suicide. She describes it as an act of "spontaneous courage." Hedda's disconnect from the society around her is violently clear in this moment. Everyone else considers Lovborg's suicide to be motivated by temporary insanity. Hedda, however, sees it as the clearest sign of sanity and control, marked by "unconditional beauty." She is revealing her fiercely independent nature in this moment, and the people around her are horrified when she takes off her social mask and says what she really thinks.

Hedda is pleased with Lovborg, but also feeling her own absolute power here. If Lovborg achieved a moment of unconditional beauty, of grand tragedy, it was under her guidance. He was led by her influence, and guided by her hand. We see here how desperate Hedda has felt for beauty and tragedy up to this point in her life. Her admiration for Lovborg's act reveals just how petty and ugly everything else in her life has seemed to her.

> Everything I touch seems destined to turn into something mean and farcical.

Related Characters: Hedda Gabler (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 259

Explanation and Analysis

Hedda and Judge Brack continue discussing Lovborg's suicide with one another. Hedda is surprisingly open with Brack about how Lovborg's action has impressed her. Brack, however, disabuses Hedda of this beautiful illusion. He reveals to her that Lovborg was actually shot in a brothel trying to retrieve his lost manuscript, and that the pistol went off accidentally. The final revelation is that Lovborg was shot in the stomach, not the breast.

Here, Hedda's response reveals her horror and disgust at Brack's news about Lovborg. Lovborg's actions were far from being heroic or courageous. Instead of the beautiful suicide Hedda imagined for him, Lovborg died accidentally, scrambling with prostitutes, from a shot to the gut. Nothing could be more ugly. If one's temple is the most tragic and beautiful place to shoot oneself, then the stomach is the most disgusting, banal, and sordid.

Hedda has led Lovborg to a grimy, farcical death. In this line, she suggests that what has happened to Lovborg is symptomatic—"everything" she touches rots and becomes ugly. For a woman who wants nothing more than for her touch, her influence, to inspire tragedy, beauty, and courage, this is the most horrifying realization possible. She feels now that there is no chance for her to create or influence something beautiful in the world (as Mrs. Elvsted managed to do with Lovborg's manuscript).Hedda has lost her hope of controlling others or creating beauty, and with it she has lost her primary motivation to live.

> Hedda: And so I am in your power, Mr. Brack. From now on I am at your mercy.

Brack: Dearest Hedda…believe me…I shall not abuse the position.

Hedda: In your power, all the same. Subject to your will and your demands. No longer free! No! That's a thought that I'll never endure! Never.

Related Characters: Hedda Gabler, Judge Brack (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 262

Explanation and Analysis

General Gabler's pistol links Hedda to Lovborg's death. If it is discovered that the pistol was hers, she will be forced to testify in court that he either stole it, or that she gave it to him. In either case, it will be a terrible scandal. Judge Brack says, however, that no one need know that the pistol was hers—that he will not tell anyone.

Here, Hedda sees at what cost Brack's silence will come. She will have to subordinate her will to his. He has been attempting to gain control over her for the length of the play, and now, finally, he has found a way to trap her. Brack's falsely benevolent response that he will "not abuse the position" is disgusting to Hedda. It is a reminder that the position is his to abuse or not—he has complete control over her.

Hedda responds accordingly. The situation is unlivable. She cannot endure even the "thought" of being controlled by another person, much less the act of being in their power. This is the deciding moment for Hedda. She can either go along with Brack, and be "no longer free," or she can make a last free choice—to kill herself. Hedda's will is much stronger than that of Lovborg's, and her death will be as beautiful and courageous, as she can make it. She then excuses herself and shoots herself in the temple. Rather than spend a moment under the thumb of another human being, Hedda exercises her last, spectacular display of power. The question for us, then, is whether to view this suicide as Hedda intended—a beautiful tragedy—or as the cliched ending to a farcical attempt at manipulation and creation—or as both.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

ACT 1

The play opens on a September morning in Norway, in the spacious, handsome drawing room where guests are received in the Tesmans' villa. A portrait of General Gabler, a prominent military figure, hangs over a sofa. Miss Julianne Tesman, the old, benevolent aunt of the master of the house, enters, followed by Berte, the household maid, who is carrying a bunch of flowers.

September, as the beginning of autumn, is symbolic for decline and death— appropriate here, given Ibsen's subject (which is not only a tragedy, but also begins here with the signs of nobility in decline). General Gabler's aristocratic, warlike spirit presides over the action of the play, as every act opens in this same drawing room.

Miss Tesman observes in a quiet voice that her nephew Jörgen Tesman and his wife Hedda don't seem to be awake yet. Berte says that the couple returned from their honeymoon very late the night before, and that Hedda insisted on having many things unpacked despite the hour. Miss Tesman responds that they'll let the couple rest. She opens a glass door so that the master and mistress of the house will wake up to a breath of fresh air.

Hedda's insistence on unpacking her things late at night is an expression of her power and caprice: she gives commands not in accordance with need, but rather on a whim. Tellingly, we start to get a sense of Hedda's nature before she even appears in person, as the other characters' conversation revolves around her.

Berte searches for a place to set down the flowers she's carrying, but there's hardly room for them. She at last places them on the front of the piano. Miss Tesman, in whose household Berte served formerly, turns to the subject of Berte's new mistress, Hedda. Though it pained Miss Tesman to give up Berte, she had to do it so that her nephew Jörgen Tesman would have someone to look after his domestic needs. Berte, close to tears, is also pained that she had to leave. She misses Miss Tesman and Aunt Rina, Jörgen's other aunt—an invalid. The maid also admits that she fears she will not be able to accommodate her new mistress's grand ways—Hedda is "ever so particular."

The women in the world of Hedda Gabler *largely serve as caregivers, prioritizing the needs of men over their own needs. Miss Tesman, in particular, seems only fulfilled if she is taking care of someone else (particularly her nephew), and this is why she puts Berte into Tesman's service. Berte's difficulty in accommodating Hedda suggests just how different Hedda's past life was from her present one. As is represented by the portrait of General Gabler, Hedda is used to an aristocratic lifestyle and getting everything she wanted. Just as Tesman struggles to finance such a lifestyle, so too does Berte struggle to tend to her mistress's every whim.*

Miss Tesman says that it is a matter of course that Hedda should be so particular: she is, after all, the great General Gabler's daughter. Berte declares that she never dreamed of Hedda and Mr. Jörgen making a match—nor did Miss Tesman, for that matter. Miss Tesman reminds Berte that she must refer to Jörgen not as mister but as doctor, for while abroad on his honeymoon journey he was made one. Berte says that Hedda reminded her of the same thing the night before, and that she never thought Tesman would take to doctoring people. He's not that sort of doctor, Miss Tesman responds. Soon enough, though, Berte might have to call Dr. Tesman "something even finer."

Hedda is from a higher stratum of society than Tesman is, which is why their marriage seems improbable. Power and influence affect every facet of life in Hedda Gabler, *so much so that it is important even to Miss Tesman to remind Berte to call Tesman by his new, prestigious title. Hedda's preoccupation and even obsession with power are not unique in kind, only in degree—even the play's characters that seem the kindliest are still concerned with prestige and influence.*

Miss Tesman wishes that her brother could look up from the grave and see what's become of his son Jörgen. Just then, she notices that Berte has taken all the loose covers off of the furniture. Miss Tesman asks why, and Berte explains that Hedda insisted. Miss Tesman asks if the couple intends to use the drawing room every day. That's what it sounded like, Berte says.

Hedda clearly requires a vibrant, rich social life, and we will see that this is her usual way of killing time and exercising her intelligence. Having the covers removed from the furniture indicates her expectation of socializing often, an expectation later frustrated.

Jörgen Tesman enters, carrying an open empty suitcase and humming a tune, a cheerful expression on his face. He warmly greets his Aunt Julle (Miss Tesman), saying he hopes she got enough sleep the night before—she had greeted him and Hedda at the quay last night when they arrived. Tesman apologizes for having not been able to give his aunt a ride in their cab, but says Hedda had too many suitcases that had to come. Aunt Julle says it's quite all right—Judge Brack took her home. Berte asks if she should go into Miss Hedda's chambers and ask whether she wants anything. Better not, says Tesman—if she needs anything, she'll ring. He then gives Berte his suitcase to put away in the loft. Berte exits.

Tesman's beloved aunt has made many sacrifices on her nephew's behalf, but Tesman can be obliviously neglectful of her, particularly when Hedda is involved. Miss Tesman meekly accepts this, as if acknowledging that catering to Hedda's whims should be Tesman's main concern. The sheer quantity of Hedda's suitcases again suggests the lavish lifestyle she is intent on maintaining, even though Tesman's finances cannot maintain it. The Tesmans' power over Berte is a mundane instance of the kind of control Hedda later fantasizes about.

Tesman begins to tell Aunt Julle all about his and Hedda's honeymoon. He took enough research notes to fill a whole suitcase, he says, after managing to dig up fantastic old things in old archives—he wasted no time. He proceeds to suggest that Aunt Julle remove her hat, and he assists her in undoing the ribbon. The hat is fancy and seems new to Tesman. His aunt explains that she bought it so that Hedda wouldn't be ashamed of her if the two should happen to walk together in the street. Tesman pats his aunt's cheek and sets her hat on a chair by the table.

The Tesmans' honeymoon was clearly not very romantic, as Tesman is more interested in books, it would seem, than his wife's company. This might be one of the reasons why the (seemingly) sexually cold Hedda married him, but she also craves excitement and a more idealized kind of romance—and spending time at the library does not fulfill these desires. Aunt Julle, in buying her new hat, reveals the extent to which she feels socially inferior to Hedda. Is Hedda awake and overhearing this conversation? Later events suggest that this is quite likely.

Tesman and Aunt Julle sit, Aunt Julle puts her parasol in a corner by the sofa, and the two resume their little chat. They express their mutual love, and when Tesman asks about his Aunt Rina's health, he is saddened to learn that she has not improved at all. She is still very ill and bedridden, as she has been for many years. Aunt Julle says she doesn't know what she would do without Aunt Rina, especially now that she doesn't have Tesman himself to cope with any more. The nephew pats his aunt's back consolingly.

Ibsen writes thoroughly "modern" plays—that is, the characters all have to deal with what is seen as the malaise of modern life: a combination of boredom, depression, and alienation. Most of the characters find purpose in this environment through pursuing petty ambitions and maintaining the status quo. Aunt Julle, for her part, finds a sense of purpose and staves off boredom by constantly caring for others, like Aunt Rina or Tesman himself. (This will be contrasted to individuals like Hedda and Lövborg, who truly feel aimless and alienated in modern society.) The result of all this is that the play investigates a kind of "existentialism"—how we can create purpose for ourselves, and then both believe in and pursue that purpose. On another level, caregiving is a role primarily occupied by women (like Aunt Julle) in the society of Hedda Gabler.

Aunt Julle suddenly switches to another, more cheerful tone. Tesman is a married man now, and he is married to the lovely Hedda Gabler, who always had so many admirers around her! Tesman hums and smirks a bit smugly. And then you were able to honeymoon for five or six months, Aunt Julle exclaims. Her nephew explains that it was also an academic trip, full of old records and books to plough through. Aunt Julle asks if Tesman has any other news to tell her—she is wondering whether Hedda is pregnant—but Tesman misunderstands her and says that he has the best prospect in the world of becoming a professor, one of these days.

Aunt Julle lives for others (though not altogether in a healthy or authentic way): this is why, instead of dwelling on her troubles, she turns the conversation again and again back to her nephew's goings-on and prospects. In his inability to detect his aunt's allusions to Hedda's pregnancy, Tesman proves himself to be a bit inept socially, and single-mindedly focused on his work. He is portrayed as a kindly but also somewhat bumbling and self-absorbed figure—a poor match for the elegant, imposing, heartless Hedda.

Aunt Julle suppresses a smile and changes the subject: the trip must have been expensive, surely. Tesman explains that his big fellowship helped quite a bit, and that the genteel Hedda had to have that honeymoon trip despite the expenses. How do you like your new house? asks Aunt Julle. Very much, responds her nephew—though there are two empty rooms he doesn't know what to do with. Aunt Julle implies that they'll be useful when he and Hedda have children, but Tesman again misunderstands, and thinks that she's suggesting the rooms can be used to store his growing collection of books.

Aunt Julle is necessarily worried about her nephew's finances: after all, she is helping him pay off his mounting debts. It's suggested that it is because Hedda is so "out of his league" that Tesman felt pressured to provide her with a lavish honeymoon and home. Tesman's confusion of babies and books here foreshadows Ibsen's treatment of Lövborg's manuscript as his and Mrs. Elvsted's child.

As far as the house is concerned, Tesman is most pleased for Hedda's sake: even before they got engaged, she told him that she only wanted to live here, in what was formerly Lady Falk's villa—so it was lucky it came up for sale. But it must be terribly expensive, Aunt Julle suggests. Tesman admits that it is expensive, despite the fact that Judge Brack got very favorable financial terms on the house for the Tesmans—or at least the Judge said as much when he wrote to Hedda.

We later learn that Hedda was bored during her honeymoon and doesn't especially like her house, both of these facts suggesting that she pursues such things only to prove her power over Tesman. Judge Brack is very involved in the Tesmans' affairs, and seems likewise interested in having an influence on other people's lives. Even in this brief description, Tesman seems naïve about Brack's intentions.

Aunt Julle tells her nephew not to worry: with Judge Brack's help, she has taken out a mortgage on her and Aunt Rina's annuity to give security for the Tesmans' furniture and carpets. Tesman is grateful but shocked. Aunt Julle goes further and suggests she'd be only too happy to help the Tesmans further financially. "You'll never stop sacrificing yourself for me!" exclaims Tesman, but with some guilt in his voice. Aunt Julle explains that helping him is her only joy in the world.

Aunt Julle finds self-sacrifice to be so meaningful for her that she goes so far as to sacrifice the money she needs to live on for Tesman's sake. Not only is she coddling Tesman, but she's also doing so to her own detriment, almost pathologically so. This suggests the extent to which a patriarchal society is structured so that women undervalue themselves and are taught to instead focus on what's best for the men in their lives.

Moreover, says Aunt Julle, Tesman has proven himself worthy by overcoming all the people who stood in his way. Indeed, his most dangerous academic rival, Ejlert Lövborg, fell lower than all the others in his depravity. Tesman inquires about Lövborg, and his aunt tells him that Lövborg has published a new book recently—but it won't compare, she goes on, to Tesman's own forthcoming book about the domestic crafts of medieval Brabant! But the most wonderful thing of all, says Tesman, is that Hedda is his wife.

Aunt Julle seems to take great satisfaction in the fall of Tesman's enemies. She has been forced (or forced herself), to live vicariously through her nephew. Tesman condescendingly asks about Lövborg here, but no doubt his insecurities are inflamed when he learns that his old rival is publishing again. The very topic of Tesman's book suggests how small-minded and boring it probably is.

Just then, Hedda enters, dressed in a tasteful morning gown. After greeting Miss Tesman somewhat tartly, she complains that the maid has opened the verandah door, flooding the place with sunlight. Miss Tesman rises and moves to shut it, but Hedda tells her not to, and instead orders Tesman to draw the curtains. He does so. Hedda then asks Miss Tesman to take a seat, but Miss Tesman insists that she must be getting home.

The conversation between Tesman and his aunt gives us a brief but telling glimpse of the world that Hedda feels so bored and stifled by. Hedda finally enters in person, and immediately disrupts this world by ordering Tesman about. Bright light symbolically offends Hedda's sensibility: she prefers to hide her true nature in obscurity.

Before she goes, Miss Tesman extracts from her skirt pocket a flat object wrapped in newspaper, a gift for Tesman. Tesman opens it to find his old slippers, embroidered long ago by Aunt Rina despite her illness. Tesman himself is delighted and waxes sentimental, while Hedda implies that the gift has no significance to her and is, in fact, somewhat shabby.

The gift of the slippers represents everything Hedda loathes: humble domesticity, women providing for men, and vulgar, sappy sentimentality. By saying the slippers have no interest for her, Hedda also implies that Tesman's family has no interest for her.

Tesman persists in his sentimentality, but Hedda abruptly interrupts him to say that she cannot manage with Berte as the household's maid. Tesman asks why not, and Hedda points and says that Berte has left her old hat lying on the chair. Tesman is appalled and drops his slippers to the floor: Hedda is pointing to his Aunt Julle's new hat. Tesman manages to say as much, and Aunt Julle, wounded, explains that the hat is new. Hedda coolly apologizes.

The slippers also act as a plot device, giving Hedda a reason to change the subject and be purposefully nasty about Miss Tesman's hat. Hedda's cold snobbishness then further emphasizes just how socially superior she feels in relation to the family she's married into. It also reveals her capricious cruelty, and how she manipulates others (we get the sense that she knew it was Aunt Julle's hat, not Berte's) for no good reason other than because she can.

Miss Tesman collects her parasol. In an attempt to smooth things over, Tesman asks his aunt to take a good look at Hedda before she goes. Yes, she's always been lovely, Aunt Julle remarks. Tesman declares that Hedda has filled out beautifully on the trip—implying that she is pregnant. Hedda becomes irritable and interrupts her husband: "I'm exactly the same as when I left," she says—but this isn't true. Aunt Julle is delighted by this revelation, and she kisses Hedda's head. Hedda frees herself and says, "Leave me be!" Miss Tesman promises to visit every day, and with that she exits. Her nephew sees her out.

Hedda represses her pregnancy throughout the play, perhaps because the idea of sacrificing herself to the "common" state of motherhood is dismal to her—and so is the idea that having a child will bind her closer to the plodding Tesman. It might also be the case that Hedda is disgusted to think of other people thinking about her *in a sexual way of any kind. Aunt Julle probably looks forward to Hedda's pregnancy because then she'll have yet another person to care for.*

Alone, Hedda walks about the room, raises her arms, and clenches her fists as though in a frenzy. Then she draws the curtains from the verandah door and looks out. Tesman returns and asks his wife what she's looking at. The withered yellow leaves on the tree, Hedda responds.

When she doesn't have to wear a social mask, Hedda reveals herself to be violently frustrated with the pettiness of bourgeois life. The yellow leaves are images of endless repetition, decline, and death.

Tesman remarks that his Aunt Julle was behaving rather affectedly, but Hedda says she wouldn't know. She insists that it was socially inappropriate for Miss Tesman to fling her hat just anywhere in the drawing room, but assures her husband that in the future she'll do more to win his aunt's favor. This pleases him. Tesman also asks his wife to kiss Aunt Julle, but this Hedda refuses to do. You belong to the family, Tesman says. "I'm not at all sure," Hedda snaps back.

Aunt Julle behaves affectedly in Hedda's company because she feels socially inferior to her. Hedda's critique of Aunt Julle's behavior is mostly a power play on her part. Hedda is afraid that if she "stoops" to kissing Aunt Julle, she will indeed become a part of Tesman's undistinguished family.

Tesman asks his wife if anything is the matter. Hedda replies that her old piano doesn't go with the rest of the things in the room. Her husband promises to change it out as soon as he gets his first check, but Hedda says she doesn't want to part with her piano. She suggests that it be moved to the back room, and that the couple get another piano for the drawing room. Tesman is rather put out by all of this.

That Hedda wants her piano moved to the back room—which Aunt Julle has just suggested will become a nursery—is something of a psychological defense: she wants to block the space a child would otherwise occupy in her life.

At this point that Hedda takes the bunch of flowers from the piano and finds a card that reads: "Will come again later today." The card is from Mrs. Thea Elvsted. Hedda recalls that Mrs. Elvsted had hair that everyone made a fuss over once, and also that she was an old flame of Tesman's. Tesman laughs: "Oh, it didn't last long," he says. Neither of the two has seen Mrs. Elvsted in years, because she now lives many miles away. Hedda thinks a moment and then suddenly asks if where Mrs. Elvsted lives is also where Ejlert Lövborg went after his fall from social grace. It must be, Tesman responds.

Hedda is rather jealous, it would seem, of Mrs. Elvsted—even if she doesn't care much for Tesman herself. Hedda still remembers how men were attracted to Mrs. Elvsted's beautiful hair, and it angers her to think of another woman rivaling her in sexual influence over men. This is all about the power *of sexuality, of course, not any kind of real desire. Hedda seems sexually cold, but still enjoys manipulating others through her own sexuality. Notice the tightness of Ibsen's plotting: he introduced the flowers Mrs. Elvsted left at the beginning of the act to prepare us for Mrs. Elvsted's eventual entrance.*

Berte appears at the hall door and announces that Mrs. Elvsted is back for the second time that morning. Hedda asks that she be brought in. Mrs. Elvsted enters in a tasteful dress that is not quite in the latest fashion. She is nervous and apparently trying to control herself. Greetings and niceties are exchanged all around. Then Mrs. Elvsted, after at last being persuaded by Hedda to sit on the sofa, gets to the point: Ejlert Lövborg is back in town and has been for about a week, alone. Mrs. Elvsted fears that he will succumb to bad influences in the big city, as he has so much money in his pocket right now.

Mrs. Elvsted lives out of town, and so she is not able to keep up with the fashions as closely as someone like Hedda—hence her outdated dress (a very fine detail on Ibsen's part). Like Aunt Julle, Mrs. Elvsted has come to the Tesmans' villa in order to care for a man in her life: the recovering alcoholic Lövborg. The big city represents society at its most "modern," and these are the conditions that most suffocate nonconforming, sensitive individuals like Hedda and Lövborg.

"How can this possibly concern you," Hedda asks. Mrs. Elvsted gives a scared look, then quickly says that Lövborg is her stepchildren's tutor. Tesman awkwardly and with slight incoherence asks whether such a debauched man as Lövborg could be trusted as a tutor. Mrs. Elvsted responds that for the last two years the man's conduct has been irreproachable. Why didn't he stay where he was? asks Hedda. Mrs. Elvsted explains that after his book came out two weeks ago, he just couldn't contain himself.

Hedda has extraordinary social intuitions: she senses at once that Mrs. Elvsted is interested in Lövborg because she is scandalously in love with him. That being said, Hedda doesn't announce this intuition right away, because she wants Mrs. Elvsted to continue to confide in her and trust her. In this way, Hedda gains power over the seemingly hapless Mrs. Elvsted.

Tesman wonders whether Lövborg's new book, which has sold very well and which caused an enormous stir, was something his rival had tucked away during this "good" period Mrs. Elvsted speaks of. Mrs. Elvsted explains that the book was actually written within the last year. "Well, that really is good news," Tesman exclaims.

Tesman feels increasingly insecure about Lövborg's new book and, out of anxiety, he asks questions about it quite irrelevant to Mrs. Elvsted's reason for calling. He no doubt thinks it is bad news indeed that his old rival is publishing new material—especially because, as we come to see, Lövborg has a natural creativity that Tesman lacks.

Mrs. Elvsted proceeds to say that she's succeeded in finding Lövborg's address. Hedda gives her a searching glance and wonders aloud why Mrs. Elvsted's husband wouldn't come to town himself on this errand. With a nervous start, Mrs. Elvsted explains that her husband doesn't have time, and that she has shopping to do. Hedda smiles.

Hedda asks about Mr. Elvsted to confirm her intuition that Mrs. Elvsted is here without her husband's permission, and also just to play with Mrs. Elvsted, like a cat toying with a mouse.

Mrs. Elvsted at last begs Mr. Tesman, in the name of his old friendship with the man, to receive Lövborg if he comes to the Tesmans' villa—as he's sure to do—and to keep an eye on him. Tesman (who has been slipping up throughout and calling Mrs. Elvsted by her maiden name, Rysing) promises to do so. Hedda even suggests that Tesman write to Lövborg at once, a warm, friendly, long letter. Tesman agrees, picking up the packet with the slippers from the floor as he does so. But don't say I asked you to invite him here! says Mrs. Elvsted. "No, of course not," says Tesman, and he exits.

Mrs. Elvsted is so concerned about losing her good influence over Lövborg—and worried that he will fall back under the dangerous influence of alcohol—that she begs the Tesmans to help her control him. Hedda is interested in speaking to Mrs. Elvsted alone, and also in seeing Lövborg himself (her old flame, as we learn). Tesman's use of Mrs. Elvsted's maiden name implies too much familiarity for Hedda's jealousy to tolerate.

Hedda goes over to Mrs. Elvsted with a smile, and in a low voice says that she's killed two birds with one stone: she got Tesman out of the room, and now the women can speak together alone. Mrs. Elvsted doesn't understand. Hedda forces her to sit in an armchair by the stove, while she herself sits on one of the stools. Anxiously Mrs. Elvsted looks at her watch and insists she must be going, but Hedda says she mustn't be in too much of a hurry. Hedda begins to question her about her life at home.

Hedda wants to get Mrs. Elvsted alone so that she can interrogate her and extort information from her to use as leverage. Hedda seems to seek exploitative intimacy with people like this as a matter of course—instinctively, and as an aggressive social tactic. Notice that she forces Mrs. Elvsted to sit—Hedda is not above physically exerting power over people.

Mrs. Elvsted doesn't want to talk about her life at home at all, so Hedda tries to make her feel more comfortable by reminding her that the two used to be schoolmates together. Mrs. Elvsted remembers: she was frightened of Hedda, who used to pull her hair, and once threatened to burn it off.

Mrs. Elvsted seems to see through Hedda's tactics, but is still helpless to resist them—Hedda has always had a frightening kind of power over Elvsted. We also see that Hedda's coldness, cruelty, and jealousy were present even years earlier. The image of Hedda burning something precious to Mrs. Elvsted foreshadows her later burning of Lövborg's manuscript.

Hedda dismisses this, and insists that Mrs. Elvsted refer to her informally by her first name, as she claims was the girls' practice at school. Mrs. Elvsted says that "Mrs. Tesman" is wrong on this point, but Hedda says she remembers it perfectly. With an assurance of renewing their friendship, Hedda moves her chair closer and kisses Mrs. Elvsted on the cheek. Mrs. Elvsted presses and pats Hedda's hand: she says she's not used to such kind treatment.

Hedda lies even in the face of the facts in order to insinuate herself into another person's life. She can feign gentleness and imitate kindness in order to get the information she wants—and with information comes power. Mrs. Elvsted's marriage must be a deeply unhappy one for Hedda to seem kinder than Mr. Elvsted.

Hedda is pleased, and she promises to call Mrs. Elvsted by her first name, which she misremembers as being "Thora." "I'm called Thea," says Mrs. Elvsted. Hedda smoothly transitions from this error, and asks why Thea is not accustomed to kind treatment, even at home. Thea responds that she doesn't have a home, and has never had one. Hedda knew that something like this must be the case.

That Hedda doesn't know (or pretends not to know) Mrs. Elvsted's first name suggests the extent of her self-absorption, and seems like a similar act to her "confusion" about Aunt Julle's hat. Mrs. Elvsted's sense of homelessness is not unlike Hedda's absolute dissatisfaction with her marriage and domestic life.

Hedda presses Thea Elvsted for more of her life story. It all comes out: Thea went so far away to serve as a governess for Mr. Elvsted, whose wife was an invalid. After the wife died, some five years ago, Thea became the mistress of the household and married Mr. Elvsted. At one point in the conversation Thea slips and calls Hedda Mrs. Tesman, and Hedda hits her lightly on the hand and corrects her.

It is again emphasized that in the world of Hedda Gabler *women are forced into the role of caregiver, whether they be governesses or wives. Hedda keeps insisting on being called by her first name, because it is her developing intimacy with Thea that gives her power over her.*

Casually Hedda asks Thea about the fact that Ejlert Lövborg has been living near her for about three years. Yes, says Thea. She also tells Hedda, in answer to a question, that she hardly knew the man before, back when he lived in town. But in the country he became a daily visitor at the Elvsteds' house, reading to the children and the like, even when Mr. Elvsted was off traveling in his capacity as the district sheriff—a point Hedda is quick to draw out of Thea.

Hedda tries to seem casual about her interest in Lövborg, but we will soon see that she is very interested indeed. Hedda asks about Mr. Elvsted's travels to get a sense of how much time Lövborg and Mrs. Elvsted have spent alone with one another—that is, how much opportunity they've had for an affair.

Hedda then asks what Thea's husband is really like. After some evasive answers, Thea admits that she and Mr. Elvsted have nothing in common. He is egotistical, and only considers her to be useful, cheap property. He must be fond of Lövborg, though, says Hedda. "What gives you that idea?" asks Thea. Hedda reminds Thea that she told Mr. Tesman as much. Caught in something of an inconsistency in her story, Thea decides to confess everything: she never told her husband she was leaving because she couldn't bear another terribly lonely minute there. She never plans on going back, despite the scandal it will cause.

Mr. Elvsted takes advantage of Thea as a woman and as his wife. He has all the control in their relationship, and doesn't sacrifice anything of himself. Mrs. Elvsted might as well be his servant, for she is certainly not treated as his equal. Hedda at last wins the confession she has been hunting for: Mrs. Elvsted scandalously left her husband, without his permission, for the sake of another man. This confession fully places her under Hedda's power, if Hedda should choose to abuse Thea's trust.

Thea is depressed and exhausted by this point, but Hedda asks her how her "familiarity" with Ejlert Lövborg came about. Gradually, Thea says, "I got a sort of control over him." As a result of this "control," she says, Lövborg left off his old, debauched ways. Thea says that, for his part, Lövborg taught her to think and understand many things, and that he shared his work with her in what she remembers as a "beautiful, happy time." "Like two good companions," says Hedda. That's just what Ejlert used to say! exclaims Mrs. Elvsted.

Thea herself has apparently replaced alcohol as the outside force influencing Lövborg's soul. Hedda is no doubt jealous of just how much control Thea has over Lövborg, given that Hedda herself once wielded such power over him, long ago. Note that Hedda's familiarity with the word "companions" suggests her own past relationship with Lövborg. Hedda must feel as though Mrs. Elvsted has replaced her in Lövborg's heart.

Despite all this, Thea cannot be sure that Lövborg's irreproachable conduct, and her happiness with him, will last: the shadow of another woman stands between the two. Hedda is keenly interested to know who this other woman might be—but Thea only knows that the woman threatened to shoot Ejlert with a pistol when they parted. She thinks it must be a red-haired singer here in town (later identified as Mademoiselle Diana).

Hedda—who is, in fact, the other woman who threatened to shoot Lövborg when they parted—is presumably pleased to learn that she is still a prominent if shadowy presence in Lövborg's life. The reference to Diana (a woman who runs a brothel) foreshadows the debauchery and violence that will soon occur in her salon.

Hedda hears Tesman coming, and she and Thea agree to keep their discussion to themselves. Tesman enters with a letter for Lövborg, signed and sealed in his hand, which he asks Hedda to give to Berte. Hedda takes the letter, but just then Berte enters from the hall. Judge Brack is here, she announces. Hedda instructs Berte to ask him to step inside, and also to put the letter in the post box.

Hedda promises to keep her discussion with Thea a secret—but it is precisely this discussion that she brings up later to emotionally destabilize Lövborg. Hedda has no sense of loyalty or compassionate discretion—she remembers other people's words only to use them as weapons later.

Judge Brack enters, bowing with his hat in hand. Tesman introduces him to Mrs. Elvsted (whom he again calls Miss Rysing, to his wife's perturbation). Hedda says that it is charming to view Mr. Brack by daylight. Tesman begins to draw Brack's attention to Hedda's pregnancy by commenting on how "blossoming" she is, but Hedda interrupts him and tells her husband to thank Mr. Brack for all the trouble he's taken on behalf of the couple. After some mutual leave-taking, Hedda sees Mrs. Elvsted out.

Tesman again exhibits too much familiarity with Mrs. Elvsted in calling her by her maiden name. Based on Hedda's comment, we might infer that Mr. Brack visits the Tesmans mostly at night, which is vaguely suggestive of his devious, lecherous character. When Tesman boasts about Hedda's pregnancy, Hedda responds by reminding him of his debts—an attempt to emasculate him.

Tesman and Judge Brack sit down, and the Judge says he has a little matter to talk about with the master of the house. He wishes, in short, that they'd arranged the household's finances a little more modestly. Tesman protests that he couldn't have, for Hedda's sake. He asks Brack if there's been any news about the professorship he's counting on. The Judge hasn't heard anything in any way definite.

Judge Brack knows, as Tesman does not, that Tesman's appointment to the professorship is not a sure thing anymore. Brack's comment on the household's finances, then, is designed to prepare Tesman for this news, and also to suggest delicately that the Tesmans need to be more moderate from here on.

Brack does have some news for Tesman: his old friend Ejlert Lövborg is back in town—as Tesman has already learned from Mrs. Elvsted. Tesman thinks it's delightful that Lövborg is sober and making good on his extraordinary talents. Brack and Tesman agree that everyone thought Lövborg had gone to the dogs—but Tesman wonders what will he live on now.

Tesman says that it's wonderful that Lövborg is sober and working again—but his happiness is mostly social politeness. Tesman is really threatened by his rival's improbable resurgence, as he seems to recognize that he lacks Lövborg's creativity.

Hedda has come in from the hall during her husband's last speech. Laughing a little scornfully, she says that Tesman is forever worrying about what people are going to find to live on. Judge Brack suggests that Lövborg has influential relations who, despite disowning him long ago, may reclaim him now that he's published his highly-praised new book. Tesman says he's grateful for this, and assures Hedda that he's invited Lövborg over that very evening. Judge Brack reminds Tesman that last night on the quay he already promised to go to his, Brack's, bachelor party. Tesman had forgotten.

Hedda takes pleasure in subtly belittling her husband in the company of others. She herself feels above such trifles as professorships and finances, which don't fit her idealistic (yet terrifying) vision of beauty and drama. Ibsen introduces the bachelor party here so as to prepare us for the action of the play hinging on this very party.

Judge Brack then, with hesitation, reveals serious news: the appointment to the professorship which Tesman was counting on might well be contested—by none other than Ejlert Lövborg. Tesman is dismayed—the post was as good as promised to him—but Judge Brack assures him that he'll still most probably get it, after a bit of competition. Hedda thinks all this will turn out to be "quite a sporting event," and she says she awaits the results "with breathless expectation." In the meantime, she has no intention of curbing her lavish spending.

Tesman is genuinely worried about the state of his finances, and Hedda seems to look forward to watching her husband wrestle with Lövborg for the professorship. She is detached from the important matters in Tesman's life, and considers them entertainment for her, like a game. She is so selfish that she will keep spending no matter how much money Tesman actually has—she feels that she is above the necessities society imposes.

Judge Brack exits. Tesman confides in Hedda that it was "idiotically romantic" of him to get married and buy a house on expectations alone. This means that Hedda won't be able to live a social life or to entertain people, as she and her husband had agreed upon. This prospect tires her. Tesman says that this will only temporarily be the case.

It would be hell on earth for Hedda were she to be deprived of the stimulation and opportunity afforded by a rich social life. The prospect of having no one to confide in or gain control over is one possible motive for her outrageous, desperate last act (the plot of the play to come).

It also becomes clear to Hedda that now she won't be able to get either a manservant or a saddle-horse, as she had hoped. "No, God preserve us," says Tesman, appalled. Well, says Hedda, at least I've got one thing to pass the time with. Tesman ecstatically asks what it is. General Gabler's pistols, Hedda responds coldly, and exits. Tesman rushes to the doorway and, shouting, begs her not to "touch those dangerous contraptions!"

The manservant and horse Hedda wants have this in common: they are both things she could dominate and control (the horse in particular is associated with the aristocracy and warfare). General Gabler's pistols will be important symbols within the play, representing Hedda's aristocratic past, her desire for agency (something generally reserved only for men in her society), and her potential for destruction.

ACT 2

Act 2 opens on the drawing room featured in Act I—although the piano has been removed and a writing desk has been put in its place. It is afternoon. Hedda, dressed to receive visitors, stands alone in the room by the glass door, loading a pistol.

Hedda very promptly gets her way: in the last act she ordered that her piano be moved and now, only a few hours later, it is. Hedda's loading a pistol in her drawing room of all places speaks to how defiant she is of social conventions. It is also a dark foreshadowing of how she will soon arrange a man's death from the comforts of this same drawing room.

Hedda sees Judge Brack approaching the Tesmans' villa from the back, through the garden. She greets him, raises her pistol, takes aim, and playfully announces that she is going to shoot him. Judge Brack shouts at her, "No-no-no!" Nonetheless, Hedda fires (purposefully missing Brack). Brack cries out that Hedda must be quite mad, and insists that she stop fooling about. When he enters the drawing room, he eases the pistol out of Hedda's hand and returns it to its case.

Hedda and Judge Brack quietly seek to dominate one another throughout the play, in what is a very serious game to them. Whereas Brack plays by the rules, however, Hedda is willing to behave in a way nobody else would, and her extraordinarily dark sense of humor is on display here. Ibsen already prepares us for her suicide by showing just how detached she seems from how things are "normally done."

Hedda complains that she hasn't had any visitors. Judge Brack asks if Tesman is in, but Hedda says no, he ran off to his aunts' house. Brack wishes he had thought of that—then he could have come back to the Tesmans' earlier and have had more time alone with the mistress of the house. Hedda says that it wouldn't have done him any good to arrive earlier, because she's been in her room all morning changing.

Brack wants to be around Hedda, especially when her husband is out, because he is sexually interested in her. Hedda seems to encourage Brack only to have the pleasure of controlling and toying with his admittedly lecherous heart.

Hedda and Judge Brack sit down for a comfortable gossip. The two say they have missed talking together. Hedda confides in Brack that her honeymoon was a bore, spent mostly in archives and libraries so that her husband could conduct his research, and she anticipates that her marriage, being with the same person "everlastingly," will become unbearable. Tesman, as an academic, is not at all an amusing traveling companion.—he drones on sickeningly about history and medieval domestic crafts. Judge Brack mentions love, but Hedda tells him not to use "that glutinous word."

Hedda's candid intimacy with Brack is very similar to that which she shared with Lövborg many years ago. Indeed, she seems to cultivate such relationships with men so that she can exert influence, but also so that the men may provide her with a window into the male social world—which she envies because she is denied access to it. Finally, Hedda seems to relish the opportunity to vent some of her disgust with marriage and modern life. "Love" is only a clichéd word to Hedda, with no reality or feeling behind it.

Judge Brack wonders how it was that Tesman won Hedda's hand in marriage in the first place. She implies that she had "had her day" and needed to settle down—but then she shudders and takes this back at once. Besides, she goes on, Jörgen Tesman is a worthy, solid man who might attain to the highest social distinction—and he isn't "ridiculous" at least. Hedda also points out that Tesman was so pathetically eager to be allowed to support her, which is more than what her other gallant friends were prepared to do.

Why did Hedda marry Tesman? He indulges her demands, yes, and might become a powerful man in the future—but here Hedda also reveals a darker reason for her choice. She suggests that she had "had her day"—that is, that the best of her life was behind her, and it was time to "settle" and give in to society's demand that she marry. In a sense, Hedda's life is over before the play begins.

Judge Brack laughs and says that he respects the bonds of holy matrimony. Hedda banteringly says she never had high hopes of marrying him (Brack) anyway. For his part, Brack says, he demands no more than an intimate circle of acquaintances and trusted friends—and he suggests that he's especially keen to befriend the lady of the house (Hedda). Triangular relationships (between husband, wife, and Brack himself) are highly convenient for all concerned, he says.

Brack here makes relatively explicit his sexual desire for Hedda. For such a conventional man, we might think it strange that Brack should seek out an extramarital affair—but then love affairs are very conventional ways of breaking with social conventions. The clichéd and tawdry nature of an affair probably makes them especially unappealing to Hedda.

Hedda concedes that she would have been glad of a third person on her honeymoon trip. Brack says that passengers on the train of marriage can always jump out and move around a little—that is, engage in extramarital affairs. Hedda declares, "I'll never jump out." Brack suggests that if Hedda is unwilling to jump out, someone can always climb into the train compartment—a trusted, sympathetic, interesting friend, for example. Hedda sighs: that would be a relief, she says.

Brack's metaphor of the train gives him an opportunity to obliquely proposition Hedda, but she turns him down. Why? It's implied that she finds an extramarital love affair to be at once intolerably scandalous and also lacking in beauty. There is also the suggestion that, far from being liberating, a love affair would only bind Hedda to Brack in secrecy.

Tesman enters, bearing many academic books under his arms and in his pockets. He is surprised to find Brack there already, as Berte didn't mention anything about a guest. Tesman goes on to say that he has with him Ejlert Lövborg's book, which he praises as soberly argued, unlike anything Lövborg has done before. Then Tesman excuses himself to change out of his sweaty clothes—but not before informing Hedda that Aunt Julle *won't* be stopping by later. Hedda assumes this is because of the hat incident from earlier that day, but her husband says that it is because Aunt Rina is so very ill. "Oh, these everlasting aunts," Hedda murmurs, almost inaudibly.

As threatened as Tesman is by Lövborg, he is nevertheless honest in his evaluation of Lövborg's book. Tesman might be a mediocrity, but he is for the most part a decent and sincere man. Hedda cannot contain how oppressed she feels being surrounded by Tesman's aunts all the time. Just like her marriage, the aunts are "everlasting," Hedda fears. She clearly has no real concern for Rina's health, and only finds her perpetual illness boring.

Tesman exits. Judge Brack asks Hedda about the hat incident, and Hedda reveals that she only pretended to think Aunt Julle's hat was the maid's. These things just suddenly come over me, Hedda explains, and I can't resist them. Judge Brack thinks that this happens because Hedda is unhappy even though she has every reason to be happy—namely, she lives in her dream house. "Do you also believe that fairy story?" asks Hedda.

Hedda's capricious acts of cruelty—these things that irresistibly come over her—emerge from her hatred for the littleness of her life and from her desire to be stimulated and powerful. Brack clearly misunderstands Hedda's character: he thinks a house could satisfy her, when only a life of beauty and drama (basically, an impossible ideal) will do.

Hedda goes on to reveal that the villa she and Tesman now live in was never her dream house. One evening last summer, Tesman was escorting her home from a party, and he was floundering and dithering for lack of something to talk about. Hedda claims she felt sorry for him and on an impulse just happened to say she'd like to live in this villa, which belonged to Lady Falk at the time—even though she didn't really care for the place at all. This conversation then precipitated the couple's engagement, marriage, and honeymoon. Judge Brack finds the story "delicious."

It would be a mistake to think of Hedda as cruel through and through. She seems capable of taking pity on and being charitable to others, or at least her story about giving Tesman something to talk about suggests as much. What is instead cruel (but also quite ironic) on Hedda's part here is letting Tesman strain his finances to buy a grand house she doesn't even really like.

Hedda complains of the smell of lavender and potpourri in her house, which she suspects Aunt Julle of having wafted in. Judge Brack thinks the smell is a relic of Lady Falk. In any case, the house has the odor of death, to Hedda's mind.

The scent of lavender and potpourri—the odor of death—gives the Tesmans' villa a funereal cast that foreshadows the many deaths to come in the play.

Hedda leans back and tells Brack that he can't imagine how excruciatingly bored she will be here, with nothing inviting in her future—except, perhaps, the prospect of Tesman going into politics. Brack laughs—he doesn't think Tesman would be any good at that. Hedda nonetheless wonders whether her husband could become the Prime Minister, but Brack says he'd have to be quite a rich man. Hedda laments her situation again.

Hedda's only consolation in her unhappy marriage is that her husband might go into politics. This would give Hedda herself influence as the wife and manipulator of a socially important man, or at least would allow her to witness the "action" of politics. Alas, this seems like an unrealistic dream, given Tesman's finances and lack of social skill.

Judge Brack then suggests that Hedda might have to take on a new responsibility soon enough (presumably motherhood)—a suggestion which angers Hedda. She says she's good at only one thing in the world: boring herself to death.

Hedda fears that motherhood will be the end of her life: she will be totally bound to another's wellbeing if she were to have a child. Being bored to death as a free woman is preferable, to her mind.

Tesman enters. He expects Lövborg to arrive any moment, but he is as willing to wait as long as possible. Tesman is also confident that his old friend and rival will not compete with him for the professorship. Hedda suggests that if Lövborg decides not to go to Judge Brack's bachelor party later that night, she can always keep him company. Tesman doesn't know if this arrangement is quite appropriate, but his wife assures him that Mrs. Elvsted will join her and her guest. Judge Brack thinks it might be in Lövborg's best interests not to attend his wild drinking party anyway.

Tesman is willing to wait as long as possible for Lövborg because the suspense is killing him: will he get the professorship or not? (Note that Hedda hasn't even thought about the professorship, even though it directly affects her life.) Tesman is rather naïve as regards what's socially appropriate. He doesn't want Lövborg alone with Hedda, yet he trusts the lecherous and untrustworthy Judge Brack.

Berte enters and announces that Lövborg has arrived. He enters at once: he is both lean and somewhat haggard, but dressed in an elegant new suit. He bows and seems embarrassed. Greetings and niceties are exchanged all around. Tesman says he hasn't yet read Lövborg's new book, but Lövborg tells him not to bother: the book was enormously praised precisely because there's nothing much to it—it was written so that nobody could disagree with it. Lövborg explains that he's trying to build up a position for himself and start over again.

Lövborg's lean and haggard look reflects his years of alcoholism and how hard he's been working to reestablish himself—and it also fits the idealized image of the "artist," something Hedda finds appealing. That Lövborg can so readily dismiss his popular book gives us an indication of the man's vision as a scholar (it's implied that he's talented as well, but Ibsen never confirms or denies this fact). Lövborg designed his old book to confirm people's preexisting beliefs and so win him praise. His new book, however, will be more radical.

Lövborg pulls out a packet from his coat pocket: it is his new manuscript. He tells Tesman that he should read *this* when it comes out, because it's a book the author has poured his true self into. This book deals with the future, both the social forces involved and the future course of civilization. Tesman is surprised: we don't know anything about the future, he says. "No," says Lövborg. "But there are one or two things to be said about it, all the same."

Unlike Tesman's plodding, conventional book, one that didn't require any real spirit or creativity to write, Lövborg's book is a work distinctly his own, something true to his inmost self. There is something heroic in this, regardless of whether or not the book is a success. Ibsen then portrays this heroism both sincerely and ironically as the plot unfolds. In a telling contrast between the two men, Tesman can't imagine knowing anything about the future, but Lövborg is courageous enough to speculate.

Tesman observes that the handwriting isn't Lövborg's, and Lövborg explains he dictated the book (to Mrs. Elvsted, as we know). Tesman says he would never have thought to write such a book. Hedda quietly agrees with him.

Tesman's observation about the handwriting stems from his insecurity: he might unconsciously be hoping Lövborg didn't write the book at all.

Lövborg hopes to read a bit from his new manuscript to Tesman, but Tesman doesn't know if he can manage that. Judge Brack explains: he's hosting a bachelor party that night, more or less in honor of Tesman himself. Brack invites Lövborg along, but the former alcoholic declines, despite Brack and Tesman's encouragement. Hedda says that Lövborg would rather stay where he is and take supper with her, anyway—and also, of course, with Mrs. Elvsted. Lövborg agrees, and Hedda summons Berte to make the necessary arrangements.

In the world of Hedda Gabler, *wild drinking parties are an occasion for men to socialize uninhibitedly in a way that women can't. For a man not to attend such a party is looked down upon by his fellow men, which is Lövborg's situation here. Hedda protects his ego, though, by making it clear that she wants him to stay with her. Of course, she has ulterior motives: to reclaim her influence over Lövborg.*

Tesman begins to question Lövborg about the series of lectures he plans on giving during the coming autumn. Lövborg asks Tesman not to hold it against him, recognizing that this must be rather an embarrassment for Tesman. But Lövborg also announces that he does not plan on competing with Tesman for the professorship—he only wants to outshine his rival in reputation. Tesman is relieved, and he reiterates to Hedda that Lövborg won't stand in their way after all. Leave me out of it, says Hedda.

Tesman rather transparently begins probing Lövborg for his intention regarding the professorship. Unlike the bourgeois Tesman, however, Lövborg has no interest in pursuing an academic post for the sake of prestige—he only wants to produce world-shattering work. Hedda disassociates herself from her husband throughout the play, but most strongly in Lövborg's presence.

Hedda invites the gentlemen to partake of some cold (alcoholic) punch. Brack and the excited Tesman accept, but Lövborg declines. Hedda says that she will entertain him in the meantime. Tesman and Brack go into an inner room to drink, smoke, and talk. Still in the drawing room, Hedda produces an album of photos from her honeymoon trip. She and Lövborg sit down and in a slightly loud voice Hedda talks about various pictures of the Alps and the like.

Hedda's call for punch seems to be designed as a test for Lövborg—she wants to see whether he trusts himself to drink, which in turn will tell her what his weaknesses are. Hedda, always intent to avoid a scandal, pretends to innocently look at a photo album with Lövborg when she's really preparing for an intimate conversation.

Softly and slowly, Lövborg murmurs Hedda's name (including her maiden name, Gabler). Hedda hushes him, but he softly and slowly repeats the words. It becomes clear that the two knew each other well many years ago. Lövborg expresses his bitterness that Hedda has thrown herself away by marrying a man like Tesman. "None of that!" says Hedda.

It becomes clear at once that Lövborg has very strong feelings for Hedda. Just as Tesman referred to Mrs. Elvsted as Rysing, so too does Lövborg refer to Hedda familiarly, by her maiden name. Hedda hushes his "scandalous" words at once.

Tesman enters and Hedda pretends to be talking about the photos from her trip again. Tesman offers her some punch and cake and she accepts. He exits. Meanwhile, Judge Brack keeps an eye on Hedda and Lövborg from the inner room.

Judge Brack looks on from the other room in jealousy: he senses that Hedda and Lövborg are more to each other than they let on, and he wants to be the only "other" man in Hedda's life. It may also be the case that he's trying to get some "dirt" on Hedda so that he'll have something to hold over her head and give him power over her.

Lövborg again asks, quietly as before, how Hedda could throw herself away on Tesman. Hedda responds that she will not be spoken to so familiarly. Though Hedda declines to answer Lövborg's question of whether or not she loves Tesman, she insists that she'll have no kind of unfaithfulness.

Hedda insists on distance with Lövborg: just as with Brack, she feels that only tawdriness and ugliness could come of an affair. Hedda is not interested in having power over someone only so that it can be squandered like that—she longs for something more unique and beautiful.

Tesman returns with a tray. "Why don't you leave that to the maid?" asks Hedda. Because it's fun to wait on you, answers her husband. He fills two glasses with punch—one for Hedda and one for Mrs. Elvsted, who will arrive soon. Hedda asks Tesman about a photograph of a village in the album, and in response he reminds her that they spent the night there (implying that that was where he and Hedda first had sex), but Hedda tactfully cuts him off, and Tesman returns to the inner room with Judge Brack.

Tesman seems to regard Lövborg not only as a professional but also as something of a sexual rival—hence he repeatedly comes over to keep an eye on him and Hedda. Ironically, Tesman only emasculates himself in this by doing the maid's work for his wife. Tesman's allusion to his sexual relations with Hedda seems designed to rather crudely mark his territory, so to speak. Once again, Hedda is repulsed by any mention of sex as associated with herself.

Lövborg, alone again with Hedda, has a single question for her: was there no love, not even a trace, in her past relationship to him? Hedda recalls only that the two were good companions. They reminisce about the candid conversations they used to have in General Gabler's house, and about the wild confessions Lövborg used to make concerning his night of wild drunkenness, prompted by Hedda's roundabout yet somehow confident questions. Wasn't it love? Lövborg asks again. No, answers Hedda—is it really so hard to understand that a young girl should want to find out about a world that she isn't supposed to know anything about?

Hedda refuses to say whether or not she loved Lövborg, perhaps because doing so would render her vulnerable, or because she is ashamed of what she perceives as a past weakness. It may also be the case, however, that Hedda did not love Lövborg at all, and that she only loved the view he gave her of the world enjoyed only by men in this patriarchal society. Hedda's desire to find out about this world suggests that her huge, violent spirit longs for more scope to act.

Lövborg concludes that his relationship with Hedda was based on a common lust for life—so then, he asks, why didn't it last? Hedda suggests that she broke it off because there was an imminent danger that their relationship would develop a sexual dimension, that their game would become a reality. Lövborg reminds her that she threatened to shoot him with her father's pistols then—she didn't do so only because she was afraid of a scandal. "You're a coward," Lövborg says, and Hedda agrees—although she also suggests that her worst cowardice, that evening, was not acting on her desire for Lövborg. She warns her companion not to assume anything from this, however.

Lövborg's conclusion that Hedda lusts for life is a bit ironic, considering Hedda's preoccupation with a beautiful death. When she cannot courageously commit to love Lövborg, Hedda threatens to destroy him instead, to avoid being forever reminded of her cowardice. In this important scene Hedda comes as close as she ever will to expressing love for another person—but she immediately cuts short anything that might result from this moment of vulnerability.

It has started to get dark. Berte opens the hall door and Thea Elvsted enters, greeted by Hedda and all the gentlemen. Thea confirms that Lövborg will not be going out on the drinking spree with the others, and then makes to sit beside Lövborg—but Hedda insists that she sit in the middle. Lövborg compliments Thea, refers to her as his good companion, and praises her infinite courage to act on his behalf. He says that Thea inspired him in his work.

Hedda's insistence on sitting between Thea and Lövborg is Ibsen's most explicit stage picture for the love triangle motif featured throughout the play. Just as Hedda physically sits between the couple, so too does she try to break Thea's emotional influence on Lövborg and exert her own influence on him. Lövborg resists this by trying to make Hedda jealous.

Hedda offers Thea some cold punch, but she declines, as does Lövborg. Lövborg says he would not drink even if Hedda wanted him to. Hedda suggests, more seriously now, that he *should* drink, so that other people don't get the idea that he isn't really confident and sure of himself. Thea pleads with Hedda to stop pressuring Lövborg, but Hedda tells him nonetheless that Judge Brack looked at him contemptuously when he declined he punch and the invitation to the bachelor party—as though he didn't dare to do either.

When Lövborg tells Hedda he would not drink even for her sake, she forms for the first time in the play a concrete goal: to prove her influence over Lövborg by getting him to drink. Her first efforts center on socially shaming Lövborg and by casting doubts on what is so important to him: his courage. Lövborg is too much his own man, however, to give into merely social pressure.

Lövborg is steadfast: he will not drink or go out partying. Hedda smiles approvingly. She reminds Thea of earlier that morning, when she (Thea) came to the Tesmans in a state of desperation and mortal terror for Lövborg's sake—wasn't that needless? Thea panics when this information is revealed, and Lövborg is shocked and crushed. So this, he says, is his companion's confident belief in him.

Hedda succeeds in pressuring Lövborg to drink precisely by breaking her earlier promise to Thea—namely that she would not tell anyone about Thea's reason for coming to town. Lövborg can withstand social pressure, but he cannot withstand someone he trusts losing confidence in him.

Thea begs to explain, but Lövborg picks up a glass of punch, hoarsely toasts her, downs the glass, and then, after toasting Hedda's honesty, he downs another. That's enough, Hedda says as he begins to refill his glass—he must remember that he's going to the party. Lövborg asks Thea if she arranged to come to town with her husband. She doesn't answer. Again Lövborg makes to refill his glass, and again Hedda firmly stops him. Lövborg at once feels like a fool. He promises to show Thea and the others that, however worthless he was in the past, he's found his feet again.

Lövborg drinks, a sign that Hedda has reclaimed control over him and that he has lost control over himself. It especially wounds him that Thea didn't tell her husband that she was coming to town—which means that Thea loves Lövborg, but still doesn't have confidence in him, a bitter combination. Hedda practices her influence again by now actively controlling how much Lövborg consumes.

Tesman and Judge Brack enter—it's time to go. Lövborg announces, despite Thea's pleading, that he too is going to the drinking party, if only to read to Tesman from his manuscript. He also promises to pick Thea up from the Tesmans' at ten o'clock that night. Let the partying begin, says Judge Brack. Hedda says she wishes she could come to the party as an invisible onlooker, so as to hear of the revelers' liveliness uncensored. Brack and Tesman laugh.

Now that Lövborg has relapsed, he desperately wants to prove to himself that he has control over his drinking—hence his decision to go the party. Hedda's desire to go to the party as an invisible onlooker is akin to her confidential relationships with men like Lövborg and Brack: she wants to see a world she's otherwise locked out of.

The men exit. Thea, wandering about uneasily, wonders how the night will end. Hedda is confident that Lövborg will return at ten o'clock "with vine leaves in his hair," confidently the master of himself, and a free man. Thea hopes she's right—but what reason does she have to believe all this? Hedda says that she wants to feel like she controls a human destiny. Hedda says that she's so poor and that Thea is so rich—then she grips Thea in her arms and says, "I think I'll burn your hair off after all."

It is important to note that Hedda doesn't immediately or only desire Lövborg's destruction: it seems here that she really does hope that he will master himself, which would be both courageous and beautiful of him. She only wants to control another person, and to see something beautiful happen. The image of Lövborg with vine leaves in his hair suggests Hedda's first ideal for him—to be like a Greek god (particularly Dionysus, the god of both wine and tragedy) who is creative and liberated, but also master of himself. (It also becomes clear that she has held this image of Lövborg since their past relationship.) It's only when this first "plot" fails that Hedda moves on to manipulate Lövborg's destruction.

Thea cries out to be let go, frightened of Hedda. Berte enters and announces that everything is ready in the dining room. Hedda says that the two women are coming, but Thea insists on going home at once. Nonsense, says Hedda, again anticipating Lövborg's vine-crowned return at ten o'clock. And almost by force she pulls Mrs. Elvsted toward the doorway.

Hedda shows her frightening side once again, threatening Thea and violently forcing her to stay. This may be because Hedda is now "riled up" by her new influence over Lövborg, but it's also implied that she wants Thea to be present for Lövborg's triumphant return, which would prove that it is Hedda's influence, not Thea's, that has finally won out in Lövborg's soul.

ACT 3

Act 3 opens on the Tesmans' drawing room. It is early the next morning, and the fire in the stove has almost burnt itself out. Thea Elvsted is reclining in an armchair, anxiously waiting for Lövborg to return, as she has been sleeplessly all night. Hedda is sleeping quite well on the sofa.

The fire—symbolic of Hedda's destructive capacity—almost burns itself out here, just as Hedda is closest to achieving a beautiful triumph over Lövborg's soul. She sleeps confidently, in contrast to Thea's sleepless anxiety.

Berte enters with a letter, which Thea thinks concerns Lövborg—but it does not. It is from Aunt Julle and is addressed to Dr. Tesman. Berte suggests that she knew Lövborg would get drunk and stay out all night. She offers to put more kindling on the fire, but Thea says that this isn't necessary. Berte exits.

Berte seems to be a more objective judge of character in Lövborg's case than Hedda, who has romanticized him, for Lövborg did indeed get drunk. The letter is a plot device Ibsen uses to announce Aunt Rina's death and get Tesman out of the house.

Hedda is woken by the closing of the door. She asks Thea the time: it is past seven o'clock, and neither Tesman nor Lövborg has returned. Hedda suggests that, after getting drunk, Tesman went over to Aunt Julle's to sleep it off—but the letter Berte brought in suggests otherwise. Well, says Hedda, then both Tesman and Lövborg must be at Judge Brack's. There, she fantasizes, Ejlert Lövborg is even now reading from his manuscript.

Hedda seems very optimistic about Lövborg's mastery over his drinking, which of course she thinks of as an extension of her own mastery over Lövborg. This optimism, however, is ungrounded, as both Thea and even Berte can tell. There's also the sense, however, that Hedda does not believe what she's saying, and is just playing a game even with her own hopes and desires.

Thea says that not even Hedda herself believes what she's saying, and Hedda calls her "a little ninny"—"you look tired to death," Hedda says. She at last succeeds in persuading Thea to go into her room and lie down on the bed for a little while, promising to alert her when Tesman returns. Thea exits.

Hedda has extorted information from Thea and challenged her control over Lövborg. Now she has no more use for her, so Hedda casually insults Thea and dismisses her to the bedroom.

Hedda draws the curtains, inspects herself in a mirror, and arranges her hair. She then rings for Berte to come. Berte enters, and Hedda instructs her to put more wood on the fire. Before she can do so, Berte hears someone arrive at the front door. Hedda tells her to attend to that instead, and Hedda puts more wood in the stove herself.

It is symbolically significant that Hedda herself puts wood in the stove: this is domestic work she seems to tolerate only because it takes her near to the destructive element of fire, which is, in a sense, an image of Hedda's soul. The fire almost burned out overnight (when Lövborg was disappointing Hedda's ideals by getting drunk) but now she brings it back to life, along with a new plot for Lövborg's fate.

Tesman, tired and serious, creeps into the drawing room on tiptoe. Hedda greets him, and he is surprised that she is already up. Hedda asks her husband how his party went—she wouldn't dream of worrying about the fact that he didn't come home earlier—and he says that Lövborg read to him from his manuscript. It will be one of the most remarkable books ever written, Tesman announces. He also admits to his wife that an ugly jealousy came over him during the reading.

Hedda's claim that she wouldn't dream of worrying about Tesman suggests that she is truly indifferent to him. We see again that Hedda is not alone in her jealousy or desire for influence—all the characters are essentially jealous of each other and desire some kind of power. Hedda is only unique in the degree of her feelings, and in her willingness to flout society's standards and act upon them.

All the same, Tesman goes on, Lövborg is beyond reform. Because he's got more courage than the rest? asks Hedda. No, her husband responds: because he has no self-control. The party degenerated into something of a drunken orgy, he says, and Lövborg made a speech about the woman who had inspired him in his work. Tesman supposes he must have been talking about Mrs. Elvsted.

Hedda's illusion about Lövborg's capacity for self-mastery—or at least her illusion that his excesses are born of courage—is shattered at last. Lövborg is no Dionysus, but merely an alcoholic—something Hedda sees as boring and ugly. The woman Lövborg was inspired by is presumably Hedda.

Tesman then arrives at the saddest part of the story: while he and Brack and a few others were walking Lövborg home, Tesman fell back behind the others. While he was hurrying to catch up, he found Lövborg's precious, irreplaceable manuscript in a gutter of all places. Tesman picked it up and has it with him now—but he's ashamed on behalf of Lövborg, who dropped it without noticing. Tesman would have returned it then and there, but Lövborg was too drunk to be trusted with it. Tesman didn't tell anyone about finding the manuscript, either, for fear of publicly shaming Lövborg.

Lövborg's manuscript represents an attempt to control the whole world by means of understanding the future—but Lövborg, sadly, can't even control himself. He is so vulnerable to his alcoholism that during this spree he loses the only thing that can justify his time on earth (in his mind, at least). We might wonder whether Tesman himself has fantasized about destroying his rival's work after finding it in a gutter. But Tesman is, at last, decent on this point.

After the party broke up, Tesman lost contact with Lövborg and went with a few others to the home of one of the revelers for a cup of morning coffee—or night coffee, as the case may be. Now Tesman resolves to return Lövborg's manuscript to him as soon as possible. Please don't, asks Hedda—she wants to read it first. Tesman says he dare not do that, because this is Lövborg's only copy, and it's the kind of thing that can't be rewritten, because its composition depended so much on inspiration.

It is unclear why Hedda wants Lövborg's manuscript. Has she already considered destroying it? Or does she merely want to have in her control the last thing of value in Lövborg's life? Tesman very dutifully says that he must return it at once—although it is strange that he doesn't trust his wife enough even to leave the manuscript with her momentarily. He may have a better sense of Hedda's true nature than he seemed to.

Casually, Hedda tells Tesman that there's a letter for him from Aunt Julle. Tesman reads it: Aunt Rina, it says, is on the point of death. Tesman must rush over to see her, but Hedda says that she will not accompany him because she doesn't "want to look at sickness and death." Hedda advises her husband to rush nonetheless.

Ibsen uses Aunt Rina's death as a plot device to get Tesman out of the house, leaving Hedda alone with the manuscript. Death, being so common and involuntary a thing as it is, of course repulses Hedda.

Berte enters and announces that Judge Brack is outside. Hedda orders her to admit him. Hedda the snatches Lövborg's manuscript from the stool Tesman has laid it on. She promises to care for it, and puts it in the bookshelf. Tesman quietly allows this, and struggles to get his gloves on.

Overwhelmed by Aunt Rina's death, Tesman at once neglects the manuscript—which Hedda takes full advantage of.

Judge Brack enters just as Tesman rushes off to see Aunt Rina. Hedda and Brack sit in the drawing room, and Brack reveals that a few of his guests, including the madly drunk Lövborg, went to one Mademoiselle Diana's salon last night—that is, the brothel run by the red-haired Mademoiselle Diana. Lövborg was one of Diana's "most ardent champions…in the days of his glory," Brack says.

It is at once apt and ironic that Mademoiselle Diana is named after the Greek goddess Diana, who presides over hunting and chastity. After all, she runs a brothel, and Lövborg was anything but chaste in her company. In a sense, Mademoiselle Diana is Hedda's shadowy double in the play—what Hedda would be were she not so aristocratic and afraid of scandal.

Things went badly at Mademoiselle Diana's last night, however. Lövborg accused either the madam herself or one of the prostitutes in her employ of robbing him of his manuscript. He started a fight, which devolved into a large brawl, involving ladies and gentlemen both. When the police arrived, Lövborg went so far as to strike one of the officers over the head and tear his tunic. He had to go along to the police station, afterward, of course.

Lövborg, the visionary scholar, proves himself to be absolutely beyond reform when he succumbs to alcohol. The detail about gentlemen and ladies being involved in the fight lends an especially ugly, lurid touch. Fighting is the ugliest, most basic expression of power in the play, and it disgusts Hedda.

Hedda looks away, disappointed to hear that Lövborg, far from having the metaphorical vine leaves in his hair, behaved so squalidly the night before. Judge Brack concludes that he felt a duty to tell the Tesmans about Lövborg's disgraceful conduct, lest Lövborg should seek social refuge in the Tesman household. Every decent home will be closed to that man once again, he says. Besides, Brack would not be able to socialize with the Tesmans were they to receive Lövborg, and that would be like being homeless for him: he wants to be the only cock in the yard, as it were.

Judge Brack must sense that Hedda has strong feelings for Lövborg—otherwise he would likely assume that she would close her door to him as a matter of course. Brack seems pleased with the prospect of Lövborg no longer being a guest at the Tesmans' house, if only because that eliminates one of his rivals for intimacy with Hedda.

Brack goes a step further: he's willing to fight using every means at his disposal to keep Lövborg out of the Tesmans' house. Hedda, her smile fading, says that Brack is quite a formidable person, and she confesses to being grateful that he doesn't "have any sort of hold" over her. Brack laughs: she might be right about that, he says. Who knows what he might be capable of? "You sound almost as though you mean to threaten me," responds Hedda. Not at all, says Brack.

It is here that Brack makes most explicit his intention of being Hedda's lover. Hedda senses this and reminds him that he has no control over her whatsoever. Were he to have some hold over her, however, we are left to assume that he might coerce her into sleeping with him. Brack is as consumed with a desire for control and power over others as Hedda, it would seem—but he is less intelligent, less successful, and less desperate.

Brack rises to leave through the garden, saying that he has no objection to going around through the back way. Hedda reminds him that she conducts target practice with her pistols in the back, but Brack retorts, laughing, that nobody would shoot their own tame rooster. Not when they've only got one, Hedda says, also laughing. They nod farewell and Brack exits.

Brack and Hedda speak in innuendo because what they say to one another would be scandalous otherwise. Brack suggests he's willing to do devious things to sleep with Hedda, and Hedda jokes about murdering Brack. Neither of these seem to be idle threats.

Hedda goes to the bookshelf and is about to look at Lövborg's manuscript when she hears an altercation in the hall. Despite Berte's best efforts, a confused and excited Lövborg forces himself into the Tesmans' drawing room. You're late in calling for Thea, Hedda tells him. Hedda makes it clear to him that the scandal he has caused also threatens to affect Thea's reputation. Hedda also lies and says that all her husband told her when he came in very late was that Judge Brack's party had been very lively.

Lövborg comes back to the Tesmans' villa, it would seem, to inform Thea of his disgrace and also to see Hedda one last time. Note that, though Lövborg is desperate here, he is not altogether hopeless. Hedda lies to Lövborg perhaps so that she can be entertained by and live vicariously through his confession, but more clearly to conceal the fact that she has his manuscript.

Thea Elvsted enters. Lövborg announces to her, "I'm finished." He insists that Hedda stay in the room, and promises not to talk about the drunken debauchery of the night before. Lövborg then tells Thea that all is over between them, because he doesn't intend to do any more work, and consequently he has no use for her any more. Thea despairs: what will she do with her life? Lövborg tells her to return to her husband, but Thea refuses to do so—she wants to be with Lövborg when his manuscript is published.

Lövborg is purposefully blunt and severe with Thea so that she can more easily let go of him. Without her work with Lövborg, Thea fears having no purpose in life (note that this is already Hedda's condition). She is unhappy and bored with her husband, and only finds meaning through growing intellectually—and only Lövborg can support her in this. Society, after all, doesn't value Thea, or any other woman, for that matter, as a lifelong learner.

Lövborg then turns to the subject of the manuscript, which was his and Thea's brainchild together. It will never be published because, he lies, he tore it up, just like his life, and scattered the thousand pieces of it out into the fjord. No, no! shrieks Thea. Hedda involuntarily begins to call Lövborg out on his lie, but restrains herself from doing so. Thea says that for the rest of her life it will be for her as though Lövborg had killed a little child: her child and his own. With nothing but spiritual darkness before her, Thea exits. Lövborg can't walk her home lest he bring social shame upon on her.

Lövborg's lie about the manuscript is unfair to Thea, even though it's meant to protect her—shouldn't she know that the manuscript could possibly be recovered, or at the very least that Lövborg didn't purposefully kill their "child?" That Hedda almost calls out Lövborg on his lie means that she has not totally decided what to do with the manuscript yet. But her ultimate silence suggests that it is at this point that she begins hatching the suicide plot for Lövborg.

Lövborg confesses to Hedda that he knows now that he cannot reform his life, but also that he can't live as an alcoholic again for lack of courage and defiance. Hedda is bitter that so silly a fool as Thea has her hands in a man's destiny. Lövborg goes on to confess—under the condition that Hedda not tell Thea, ever—that he did not tear up his manuscript. In truth, he *lost* this metaphorical child.

Lövborg, like Hedda, considers courage to be incompatible with a lack of self-control. Hedda—in part motivated by the jealousy of Thea, but also by Lövborg's failure to master himself—is thinking of a way she can restore some "beauty" to this otherwise altogether squalid situation.

"What are you going to do?" asks Hedda. Lövborg says he's just going to put an end to it all—that is, commit suicide. Hedda steps closer to him: "Couldn't you let it happen…beautifully?" she asks. Crowned with vine leaves, Lövborg takes her to mean, "as you used to dream in the old days." But Hedda says she doesn't believe in those vine leaves anymore. She tells him to go and to never come back—but before he does, she has a memento for him: one of General Gabler's pistols. She tells him to use it, beautifully. Lövborg thanks her and exits.

Hedda sees deliberate, "honorable" suicide as a way for Lövborg to reclaim control of his own life, although it's important to note that, for Hedda, Lövborg's death is not as beautiful as the Dionysian self-mastery she first fantasized about for him. (It's also here that we learn that Hedda has been imagining Lövborg as a Dionysus-figure for years now.) Hedda increases the beauty of the suicide by giving Lövborg a pistol so important to both their lives. This is a logistical error, however, because it clearly connects her to the act.

Alone, Hedda retrieves Lövborg's manuscript, looks at some of the pages, and then sits down with it by the stove. After a while she opens the stove door and begins feeding pages into the fire. "Now I'm burning your child, Thea," she whispers to herself. "I'm burning…burning your child."

Hedda's destruction of Lövborg's manuscript seems like an encapsulation of her complex motives and character. In part, she burns the manuscript so that the man has no reason to live, no reason to put off the beautiful suicide that she has orchestrated. But she also destroys it out of jealousy—she can't stand the idea that Thea productively inspired Lövborg. Finally, she perhaps does it simply as a meaningless act of control—she feels she must do something, *and this is the act that will have the largest effect on the lives of others, and most relieve her boredom and sense of malaise.*

ACT 4

Act 4 opens on the Tesmans' drawing room. It is evening. Hedda, dressed in black, is walking aimlessly about the darkened room. She goes into the inner room, plays a few chords on the piano, and then reemerges. Berte quickly enters and exits, and her eyes show signs of weeping. After a while Aunt Julle enters also, dressed in mourning. Hedda goes out to meet her.

The characters' black clothing gives this final act a mournful, tragic atmosphere. Remember, also, that Hedda can't stand the "tawdriness" of death. She wanders from dark room to dark room, a stage picture for the state of her restless, purposeless soul.

Aunt Julle announces that her sister Rina has at last passed away. Hedda already knows this, as Tesman sent her a note. Miss Tesman felt obliged to deliver the tidings of death in person nonetheless. She must soon return home and attend to her sister's corpse and prepare it for the grave. Hedda asks if there's anything she can do, but Aunt Julle says that such work is not fit for Hedda Gabler's hands or thoughts.

Hedda only asks if there's "anything she can do" because of social requirement—she wants nothing to do with Tesman's everlasting aunts. It is ironic that Miss Tesman says the work of death is not fit for Hedda, given that Hedda has just sent a man off to die and will kill herself shortly.

Tesman enters. He is distraught after Aunt Rina's death, and somewhat scatterbrained, he says—he doesn't know how else to take such a loss. Be glad of what has come to pass, Aunt Julle advises him. Hedda supposes that Aunt Julle will be lonely now that her sister has died, but Aunt Julle responds that she will provide boarding and care to some poor invalid or other. Won't that be a burden? Hedda wonders. Aunt Julle says it is not a burden at all but the very reason for her life. She also looks forward to caring for the Tesmans' child. Aunt Julle exits.

Both Hedda and Thea, after Lövborg's death, are left in spiritual darkness. This is because, in very different ways, Lövborg's presence helped these women give meaning to their lives. Aunt Julle is the most purposeful woman in the play, if only because she so relentlessly sacrifices herself to help others. The play as a whole is sympathetically critical of Aunt Julle's way of giving meaning to her life—she is not her own person, wholly, but she seems satisfied with the meaning she has created for herself.

Tesman confides to Hedda that he's upset not only about Aunt Rina's death but also about Lövborg, to whom he has yet to return the manuscript. Tesman also mentions having met Thea Elvsted while out—did you tell her about the manuscript, Hedda asks quickly. Tesman says that he did not. At this point, Hedda reveals to her husband that she cast the manuscript into the fire.

If Tesman had mentioned the manuscript to Thea, it would be impossible to conceal the fact that Hedda destroyed it, and a scandal centering on Hedda would erupt. Hedda is honest with her husband because she can easily manipulate him into covering up the facts.

Tesman is outraged. He yells at Hedda, and says that she's committed a felony, as Judge Brack could inform her (don't tell Brack anything, Hedda advises)—how could she, Hedda Tesman, do something so utterly wicked? With an almost imperceptible smile, Hedda tells her husband that she put the manuscript in the fire for *his* sake, because he was so envious of Lövborg's work, and because she didn't want her husband to be outshone.

Tesman's indignation is understandable: his wife has committed a crime and has destroyed something of objective value. Hedda knows the most effective way of manipulating Tesman, however: she relents in her coldness towards him and professes to have burnt the manuscript because of a love she does not really feel.

Upon learning this, Tesman is torn between doubt and happiness—he never knew his wife loved him like that. Hedda then goes a step further, and suggests of her own volition (for the first time in the play) that she is in fact pregnant by Tesman. Tesman laughs with excessive joy. Be quiet, says Hedda, or the maid will hear. Tesman says that he'll tell Berte himself. Hedda clenches her hands and murmurs almost inaudibly, "Oh, it'll kill me." Tesman asks what will kill her. "This farce... Jörgen," she responds. Tesman decides at last not to tell Berte just yet, but is pleased that Hedda has started calling him by his first name.

To win Tesman's silence about the fate of the manuscript, Hedda substantiates his bourgeois hopes for domestic bliss and fatherhood. This must cost Hedda a great deal, spiritually—so much so that Hedda feels like she'll be killed by it all. What is ugliest to Hedda is the fact that she's condescended to play a role she despises—that of the loyal, subservient wife. This is the thing that's farcical, but Tesman, of course, misunderstands her.

Tesman becomes uneasy and thoughtful again when he remembers Lövborg's manuscript. Just then Thea Elvsted enters. She speaks in agitation: she fears that Lövborg may have met with an accident, given all the incredible rumors about him going around. Some people even say he is in the hospital. Hedda expresses surprise that Thea, as a married woman, could bring herself to go about town inquiring after a man other than her husband. Hedda also advises Tesman not to get mixed up in this business about Lövborg.

Hedda is surprised that Thea should act so courageously, despite all scandal, as to inquire after a man she's not married to. Thea, after all, is courageous in a way that Hedda could never be. Hedda tells Tesman to keep out of the Lövborg business—perhaps because she fears he'll implicate her in the man's death, or in his manuscript's destruction.

Judge Brack enters. He announces that Ejlert Lövborg has in fact been taken to the hospital, and he is not expected to live. Thea cries out and says that she must see him alive, but Brack tells her that no one is allowed to see him. Tesman wonders whether Lövborg could have killed himself, and Hedda says that she's certain he did (this makes Brack suspicious). Hedda even "guesses" that Lövborg shot himself. Right again, says Brack—and Lövborg did so at three or four o'clock that very afternoon.

Judge Brack, like Lövborg before him, lies to Thea rather patronizingly, so as not to offend her feminine sensibility. Hedda is so excited to think that Lövborg pulled off his beautiful suicide that she risks exposing her complicity. It is because Hedda "guesses" that Lövborg shot himself that Brack is able to deduce that the pistol Lövborg died by was given, not stolen.

Tesman asks where Lövborg shot himself, and Judge Brack responds uncertainly, "at his lodgings." Thea says that this isn't possible, because she was there herself at about half past six. "Somewhere else then," says Brack. He also reveals that Lövborg shot himself in the breast. Hedda is surprised: "Not in the temple?" she asks. "In the breast," Judge Brack repeats. "The breast is good, too," says Hedda, almost inaudibly. In response to a question from Tesman, Brack says that he learned of all this from the police.

Brack evades answering where Lövborg died because he is again protecting Thea from the ugly truth. Hedda is disappointed that Lövborg did not shoot himself in the temple, because doing so would have indicated absolute deliberation on his part, and, in Hedda's eyes, unconditional courage.

Hedda, for one, feels triumphant. To everyone's shock and alarm, she praises Lövborg for the courage and beauty of his deed: he did what had to be done. Tesman and Thea think that he must have been desperate and mad to do such a thing, but Hedda is certain he wasn't. He must have been, Thea insists, just like he was when he tore up his manuscript.

This moment in the play most clearly reveals how radically different Hedda's values are from those of the people around her. She thinks that a suicide can be beautiful, so long as it is a pure expression of one's own personality and will, while everyone else is scandalized by it, and considers it an act of temporary insanity.

The mention of the manuscript agitates Tesman's sense of guilt. He drifts about the stage, upset that his old friend should not leave behind him the one work that "would have made his name immortal." Thea wonders whether the manuscript could be put together again—she has all the notes he used when dictating it. On the spot, Tesman commits himself to the task of reconstructing the manuscript, even at the expense of his own work—and Thea agrees to be his companion in the task. The two exit to the inner room, there to eagerly examine the notes.

Tesman's conscience is not entirely free from defect—after all, he hides the fact that his own wife destroyed Lövborg's work—but he, unlike Hedda, does feel guilty and compelled to act on that guilt. Thea immediately redesigns her life around the purpose of reconstructing Lövborg's manuscripts, just as she redesigned her life in helping Lövborg to compose it in the first place.

Hedda sits in an armchair and after a while Judge Brack joins her. Hedda confides in him that Lövborg's death has relieved and liberated her, because it shows "that an act of spontaneous courage is yet possible in this world." Judge Brack suspects that Lövborg meant more to Hedda than she's willing to admit, but she refuses to answer such a question. Hedda is pleased that Lövborg had the courage to live his life on his own terms, and to so beautifully take his early leave of life.

Hedda is remarkably open with Judge Brack in sharing her wildly strange feelings about Lövborg's death. We might wonder whether, if only subconsciously, she is even now resolving to follow in Lövborg's footsteps. Either way, we now clearly see just how desperate Hedda has been feeling, and how stifled by what she sees as the commonness and ugliness of modern life. Brack is no doubt jealous that this dead man should have meant so much to Hedda, but is also pleased to be Hedda's sole confidant now.

Judge Brack feels compelled to disabuse Hedda of a beautiful illusion: Lövborg shot himself accidentally. Moreover, the Judge told a few lies to protect Thea's feelings: first, Lövborg is already dead. Moreover, Lövborg shot himself not at his lodgings, but rather at Mademoiselle Diana's salon, while attempting to recover "a child that had been lost." Brack assumed this to mean his manuscript, but then learned that Lövborg himself tore it up, so he takes it to mean his pocketbook or the like. Finally, Lövborg was found with the discharged pistol in his pocket—it had gone off accidentally, and the bullet struck him in the abdomen, not the breast.

Hedda is mistaken about the so-called beauty of Lövborg's death, and so her idealized vision of him is once again shattered. Brack's news reveals that Lövborg had not pledged himself firmly to death, as Hedda supposed—indeed, Lövborg was still trying to recover his manuscript, the one thing that would have made it possible for him to keep on living. The squalid circumstances of Lövborg's death are especially disgusting to Hedda in their petty, commonplace ugliness.

Hedda is disgusted: "Everything I touch seems destined to turn into something…farcical," she says. Brack has one final piece of news: he says that the pistol Lövborg died by must have been stolen.

Hedda now sees that she has led Lövborg from farcical disgrace to farcical death. She has gained control over him, but has been unable to use that control to inspire something beautiful and worthy (as Thea, her rival, did). Hedda thus loses hope of finding beauty in the world—or at least loses hope of creating or causing something beautiful (which is the only kind of beauty she cares about, seemingly).

Tesman and Thea come back into the drawing room. Tesman asks his wife if he can work at her desk, where the light is better. Hedda permits it, but says she must clear some things away first. She takes an object, covered with sheet music, and carries the whole pile to the left of the inner room (this object is presumably Hedda's remaining pistol). Tesman and Thea then sit and resume their work.

It is ironic that Hedda keeps her pistol at the desk, for the desk is usually a place of composition and creation. Hedda, however, can only be the author of destruction, whether for herself or for others. That she moves the pistol here suggests that she is already making arrangements for her suicide. She wants, as ever, to be discreet, even in her most desperate actions.

Hedda and Judge Brack whisperingly resume their conversation about the pistol that Lövborg died by. Brack knows the pistol to be one of Hedda's, which means that when the case goes to court Hedda must testify that Lövborg either stole the pistol or that she gave it to him. Either case entails a deep, ugly scandal for Hedda herself—the one thing she is afraid of. Furthermore, the great Hedda Gabler will have to share the witness box with Mademoiselle Diana.

Brack reveals that he finally has information with which he can blackmail Hedda: he knows she is complicit in Lövborg's murder. This may not be criminal, but it is certainly disgraceful. Especially vulgar is the fact that Hedda would have to stand on the same level as the other woman who held so prominent a place in Lövborg's sexual life.

No one will know who owns the pistol, Judge Brack goes on to say, if he himself holds his tongue. Hedda understands at once that this places her in the Judge's power, subject to his will and demands. Brack promises not to abuse the position, but Hedda cannot endure it. With a half taunting look, Brack says: "One generally acquiesces to what is inevitable." Hedda returns the look: he may be right.

Brack thinks it is inevitable for Hedda to at last acquiesce and grant him the sexual access he so strongly desires—in exchange for his silence. Hedda agrees that she must acquiesce to the inevitable, but "what is inevitable" means, for her, only death. Brack's conventional, lustful mind misses this altogether.

Hedda rises, and remarks that Thea is now sitting here with Tesman working just as she used to sit with Ejlert Lövborg. Thea says she just hopes she can similarly inspire Hedda's husband. It will come in time, Hedda says, and Tesman says that he is beginning to feel the same thing. Hedda asks if she can anything do to help, but Tesman says that she should just enjoy Judge Brack's company.

It is perhaps darkly amusing to Hedda that her husband and Thea have so seamlessly reconstructed the relationship Thea once forged with Lövborg. Hedda envisions them developing romantic feelings for one another soon, and Thea once again succeeding where Hedda failed—all the more reason for Hedda to leave this world.

Hedda says that she must go lie down on the sofa in the inner room. She exits behind the curtains, and after a short pause she is heard playing a wild dance tune on the piano. Tesman asks that she stop, out of respect for Aunt Rina and Ejlert Lövborg's deaths. Hedda puts her head out between the curtains, says she is thinking of Aunt Julle and the rest of them too, and promises to be silent in the future. She draws the curtains together again.

Hedda's wild music-making is socially inappropriate, as Tesman makes clear—but it is her last act of defiance against the littleness and bourgeois tameness of her world, and also perhaps the wild, meaningless final cry of a great soul that has found no outlet for its passions. Hedda ironically promises to be silent in the future, meaning, of course, the endless silence of death. In this poignant scene Hedda is essentially spitting in the world's face and playing herself out.

Back at the desk, Tesman tells Thea that it's probably not good for Hedda to see the two of them working together. He says that Thea will have to move into Aunt Julle's lodgings, where he can come up in the evenings to work instead. Form the inner room, Hedda lets he husband know that she can hear what he's saying. She also asks how she's supposed to survive her evenings alone here.

Tesman is already putting into place conditions that will make it all too easy for intimacy to develop between him and Mrs. Elvsted. Hedda makes it clear that she knows exactly what he's up to—but she finds his plotting boring and conventional. She seems to ask about her evenings alone knowing that the answer will be bleak, and give momentum to her death.

Tesman responds that Judge Brack will visit Hedda, and Brack confirms that he'll visit every single night—the two of them will have a fine time. Hedda supposes that Judge Brack would like that, to be the only cock in the yard.

Hedda's vision of the future certainly does seem hateful and bleak here: Tesman and Mrs. Elvsted will fall in love over their work, and Brack will blackmail Hedda into an affair during their long hours alone together.

A shot is then heard from the inner room. Everyone jumps to their feet—Hedda is playing with those pistols again, says Tesman. He pulls the curtain aside and runs in, followed by Thea. They find Hedda dead. Confusion and shouting ensue, and an alarmed Berte comes in from the right. Tesman cries that his wife has shot herself in the temple. Judge Brack, half prostrate in his armchair, is shocked: "People don't do such things," he exclaims.

On the shallowest level of interpretation, Hedda kills herself because it is the most radically unconventional and even mad response to her situation. But more importantly, she shoots herself in the temple so that she can have the beautiful death that Lövborg fell short of. Hedda has taken absolute control over her life—by taking her leave of it. Judge Brack's final words are then especially important in showing just how misunderstood and alone Hedda felt in her world of mundanity, cliché, and ugliness—to those around her, her suicide is not wrong, tragic, or beautiful, but only unconventional. Hedda's desire for drama and beauty was always contrasted with the farcical nature of her reality, and this ultimately leads Ibsen to ask: is Hedda's death a beautiful tragedy? Or else something farcical, sad, and meaningless? This ambiguity makes Hedda a thoroughly modern heroine, and makes the play's ending especially poignant and thought-provoking.

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