

Ibsen`s vision of the norwegian society

Society



Ibsen use of humor to present the superficiality of the 19th Norwegian Century Society.

" I want to feel that I control a human destiny"

The Norwegian society of the 19th century forced individuals to follow a " social code" eradicating to express themselves, as the dramaturg Michael Paller in " Worlds of Plays" (2007) stated how " there was one correct way to behave (...) and any antisocial behavior would be punished".

Through this, the play, Hedda Gabler, written in 1890 by Henrik Ibsen, was masked by controversy and criticism by the public's eye since it was first performed in 1891, entitled as " motiveless" and " meaningless as this play presents humor as a crucial device to reinforce the main challenge for individuals to succeed in a façade society. Likewise, Robert M. Adams (1957) declared that humor is configured to " present a radically critical commentary on the human condition", to demonstrate the ludicrous society by undermining Hedda's final act to mock both, society and the audiences themselves for follow this ridiculous " social code".

In Hedda Gabler, one of the ways that Ibsen displays the effect of humor to address the superficiality of the Norwegian society is by presenting the façade of marriage. Humor is created in the beginning of Act I through the conversation of Hedda's husband, George Tesman, and his aunt, Ms. Tesman, to emphasize the only importance for Tesman as any middle-class man was to increase his social image by focusing only in his " academicsubject", which Hedda found extremely boring:

" Miss Tesman- Haven't you any... as it were...any prospects of...?"

Tesman-Prospects?

Miss Tesman- Oh, good heaven, Jorgen...after all I'm your old aunt!

Tesman-Why certainly I can talk about prospects.

Miss Tesman-Oh!

Tesman-I have the best prospect in the world of becoming a professor

Miss Tesman-Oh, yes, professor..."

As it is stated, Tesman proves himself to be inept socially, self-absorbed and single-mindedly focused on his work by his inability to detect his aunt's allusions to Hedda's pregnancy which results in the audience laughter for how socially concern Tesman is for his job that he didn't even care for her wife in their honeymoon.

Therefore, Ibsen is mocking how the people's superficial, main worry was to have intellectual and not interest in the love union addressing the reality of society. This makes the audience empathize with Hedda for this unequal match that the social oppression forced her to live with to maintain her reputation and avoid " scandal". Furthermore, humor rises by the way Hedda teases his rather " boyish and ridiculous" husband for his enthusiasm for his " academic subject".

In a conversation with Brack in Act II, Hedda declares Tesman's company as unbearable induced through comments such as, " Ah yes, right enough! Here comes the professor", " Just you stay as long as...ever you like", making the

audience find these amusing and recognize how truly bored, miserably and trapped Hedda feels in her marriage.

Likewise, as Eugene Webb (p. 56) states how Hedda's marriage " became a permanent condemnation to a trivial bourgeois milieu", representing how people felt in terms of social oppression and how society destroyed whatever faith life could bring for them. Indeed, the audience is complicit in the teasing of Tesman by the way he is presented by using exaggerated futile articulations such as, " Think of that", " Good Heavens" or even his immature reaction at the reunion with his slippers, " My old house shoes Hedda!". This gift of the slippers which Hedda states that " they won't appeal to me" represents everything she loathes, women providing for men, humble domesticity and vulgar sentimentality.

Therefore, Ibsen uses the character of Tesman to as an easy target of laughter to reinforce the superficiality of the nineteenth Norwegian century society of how many times individuals were forced to marry others although they were unequal match, seen through the marriage of Hedda and Tesman, who he neither had the smartness nor the social class to provide a satisfying conversation with her and how his foolishness makes it easier to understand Hedda's acts and see her as a human rather than as a " monstrous specimen" (Franc, M. A, 1919, p. 40).

Moreover, Ibsen introduces humor by exploiting the thin line between tragedy and comedy to illustrate the " critical human condition" of the 19th century. It is firstly presented in a conversation between Lövborg and Hedda

in Act III how he had lost his manuscript and wouldn't support the idea of being scorn by society again:

" Hedda-And what are you going to do, then?

Lövborg-Just put an end to it all.

Hedda-...Couldn't you let it happen beautifully?"

By this, Hedda sees suicide as a " courageous" and " honorable" act for Lövborg to reclaim control of his own life and because she can finally attain power over a " human destiny", to retreat to her aesthetic world to avoid dealing with the harsh realities of her life. This evidences how Ibsen uses Hedda's way of thinking to address the need to attain control over her own fate and those who surrounds her, trying to demonstrate the desire to grasp such control and power to mask the failure to recognize one's own frailty and oppression to social forces.

That is why the discovery of Lövborg's death being shoot in the " breast" and not in the " temple" caused " an expression of revulsion" in Hedda, as the only control that she could apply over someone was completely failed and therefore, her own existence seemed meaningless. What causes vulgar humor is Hedda's exaggerated disgust, " Oh! Everything I touch seems destined to turn into something mean and farcical", Lövborg's death is not tragic nor " beautiful", it's ludicrously futile and hollow.

The audience realizes that the " lovely Hedda Gabler" without " beauty", her own life has become senseless because through " beauty" she yearns for freedom, an expression of a radical Romantic and Schillerian Utopia,

therefore, the loss of power is a symbol of mocking her noble purpose in life and how universally condemned she is by the futile society.

Lastly, humor is presented in the last scene of the play to make the audience understand Ibsen's message. It is the disillusionment of her purpose in life and the recognition that Judge Brack has control (sexual blackmail) over her, being " No longer free!", that compel Hedda that the only way out of this social oppression and " scandal" is doing something " beautiful" with her life, and that is the act of killing herself " beautifully". Likewise, Hedda's suicide is a way to prove herself and society that she is brave enough to do things that are considered untypical in society, rebelling against social expectations to endure her name in history.

Hedda's act of committing suicide goes alongside Jean-Paul Sartre thought. He stated that Hedda is a " character creating herself, the moment of choice, of the free decision which commits her to a moral code and a whole way of life", he introduces the definition of " moral code", the sense that we are responsible for creating our ethical structure of life, thus Hedda has the imagination to make other choices, yet, she doesn't take them as she lacks courage to become authentic-self by the community's narrowness and lack of imagination, that is why she married Tesman to achieve her role as a woman, although it implied misery and suffer.

Therefore, the act of taking her life implies Ibsen own revolutionary ideology to break free from the convention of moral thoughts, Hedda aspires for a life beyond the values of the cold conventions and narrow social aspiration.

Furthermore, the reaction of Brack by Hedda's suicide results in laughter of

the audience and reveals the superficiality of the Norwegian society. Brack is shocked by her suicide saying that " People don't do such things!"

Suggesting that Hedda's action is outside of the social behavior boundaries.

By creating humor in this scene, Ibsen makes the audience realize the noble response of society, how in the " real and ideal world" people are concerned with keeping up appearances, and how in reality the audience is laughing to themselves for their pointless actions. Ibsen is wanting to depict human beings, destinies and emotions to illustrate the criticism of society.

In conclusion, in Hedda Gabler, Ibsen use of humor rises due to the difficulty of the audience to accept Hedda's acts for being blinded by the rigorous 19th century society. He presents humor to demonstrate the ludicrousness and indifference of society which despises the ones that don't follow the " social norms".

Ibsen aspired to reveal to the audience the oppression of the 19th century Norwegian society by presenting Hedda as a " human", to feel sympathy for the life that she was forced to live in. Robert M. Adams (1957) stated how actually Ibsen was " a perfectly destructive author" who expressed a " discontent with the human condition itself", presenting Hedda Gabler as an ironic work, bitter criticism of life itself and society.

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