

Free the role of women in the dinner parties of the wild duck and hedda gabler by...

[Health & Medicine](#), [Alcoholism](#)



In Henrik Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* and *Hedda Gabler*, the author creates a symposium of men's drinking parties that both excludes women but in turn, craftily controls the lives of women. In this paper, it will be argued that women have active and passive roles in the social world that becomes expressed in the activities of the men. In *The Wild Duck*, dinner parties are orchestrated outside of the sphere of women's influence, but the talk of the men drastically alter the lives of the women who are not present. In *Hedda Gabler*, dinner parties act in a similar way, but Hedda Gabler herself, plays a more integral part in the destruction of men's lives. In the plot of *The Wild Duck*, Greggers tries to insinuate himself in the life of the Ekdal family so he can free himself from the provincial pack of lies he finds rooted in the life of his family and the life of the small town's inhabitants. The plot of *Hedda Gabler* concerns the story of Hedda Gabler, who tries to manipulate her social standing in society, but her ill-conceived choices eventually lead to her suicide.

The first example of an active role of women is Mrs. Sorsby. The dinner party serves, as Mrs. Sorsby dryly concedes is to allow "certain persons here who let themselves exceed all limits" (88). Mrs. Sorsby does participate in the party's events, but she is part of the discussion of men's talk and is the love interest of Werle, who is the father of Greggers. Drinking is an important component of these parties, and the imbibing of liquor is a way to let the "sunshine is of the essence" effect of alcohol-free inhibitions (89). The men are the decision makers and the construct of the part is where their decisions are made; alcohol is a lubricant. It serves to loosens inhibitions so the men can remove themselves from the social reality and their implication

in affecting the lives of women. It is the men who drink, but it is the women who serve the drinks. The men drink Tokay, while the women drink punch. Ibsen makes clear in stage directions that punch is served, which is coupled with the laughter of guests.

The second example is that parties in Ibsen's plays serve a meeting place for the active and passive roles of women. The party serves a crucial elite social role. The women are excluded, but they lie on the outer perimeter of the party's proceedings. There is a point of hushed speaking, and "forced joviality" that Ibsen wants the actor who plays the role of the men to possess (90). Direct facts are never stated, but Greggers sees pass the veiled innuendo and is morally outraged about the quick "inferences" made about the women. Greggers bitterly tells his father the thesis of this paper that a man who "gives dinner parties" takes risks that affect the lives of the women (95). On the outside looking in, the party is supposed to give a domestic picture, a "tableau of father with son" (97). The idea of a party is to shape mores, and to conform to social conventions. In this case, it is the role of the son who is supposed to come home happy with his "aging father's wedding feast" (97).

The next example is that Greggers tries to play an active role to vouchsafe the role of Women, namely, Hedvig, but his active role is squashed. Greggers leaves the party disgusted, noting that the "gentleman friends are playing blindman's buff with Mrs. Sorby. The game is an infantile game where the person is blindfolded and must catch other participants. It is briefly mentioned at the end of Act One, but it is the theme of the play and how women are treated. The characters, both the women and the men, blindfold

their eyes from the truth of things, not aware of who is around them, controlling events. The player who is “ it” plays an active role in the proceedings, but since she is blind she does not know who she tags. It is also an allusion to the girl Hedvig, who is going blind, and who is also a pawn in the men’s games. She is naive and thinks it is exciting that her father is at a dinner party where “ lots of treats” are to be had (99). But the dinner party affects the family, for since the father is out partying, out on a social call, there was no hot meal for the family to enjoy. The absence of a male presence in the house has a detrimental effect. Greggers’ arrival serves as a mean to rectify the situation, but his insinuation only ends up having adversely affects on everyone involved despite his moral motivation to uncover the lies he thinks are better said that inferred.

At one point the darker insinuation of the play is revealed when Greggers says, “ you’ve gone to the bottom to die in the dark” (131). Greggers wants to raise people up to the light, but his desire to uplift only falls flat in his face. The play begins with a dinner party in the first action, but the rest of the play is in the home of the Ekdals. The game of blindman’s buff continues. Since Hedvig is going blind, she is stuck at home with only her books, and her favorite duck to entertain her, which was saved. The duck was tagged “ it,” just as much as Hedvig was tagged “ it.” Greggers insinuates himself in the life of Hedvig so completely that he convinces her to kill the Wild Duck. When Hedvig kills herself in the end, Greggers sees her act as a sacrifice, but at the end of the day, her death was in vain. She was still a prisoner in the same way her pet duck was a prisoner.

The next example of women’s social roles in Ibsen’s plays is the character of

Hedda who is more than Hedvig plays an active role in attempting to commandeer her life. But active roles are seen as aggressive in this hierarchical and oppressive society. In Hedda Gabler, the theme of parties is at a different social level than Ibsen's treatment of the subject in *The Wild Duck*. In this play, the talk of coffee parties bespeaks of social elitism and the way in which Hedda insinuates herself in the lives of others to increase her social standing (242). Hedda has scorn for the men who come home full of the party spirits, but she is also obsessed with this life and does not want to lose her luxurious lifestyle (237). Hedda prods Tesman to tell her about the party, but it only serves to underscore further her inimitable envy. In a similar way to the parties described in the *Wild Duck*, the parties go on for hours, and it is not expected for the women to worry about the goings and comings of their husbands. The lives of the men are allowed to be lived freely even though it serves to be a noose over the necks of the women. Hedda is entranced to regain the life of a hidden world, a glimpse into a world that is forbidden (227).

While Hedvig is the tagged woman in a blindman's buff, Hedda is a woman depicted as enthralled by a life that is just out of her reach. The promise of beauty that somehow becomes ensconced in the theme of the dinner parties that occur just outside her prescribed gender role motivate her inadvertently to self-sabotage her life. She cries ridiculous, this "curse," she says that "I touch" turns everything vile (261). The theme of the party is the pleasure, social, public view of life. It is a forced joyfulness that masks a desperation that sets out to choke the denizens within its grasp. Hedvig kills herself because she realizes she is trapped. Hedda kills herself, not because she is

trapped, but she lives in a world that will not sate her desires. Perhaps both women are manipulated in the same way. But it is Hedda who is more of a caged animal waiting to wreak havoc on those she wants to manipulate (362). But at the end of the day it is she who is manipulated, fallen icy dead. In conclusion, we see how the theme of the wedding, of parties, of drinking, of men's social games, are the outward appearance of a lifeworld that Ibsen tries to create in his plays. It is the world of manipulation where men feel like they can hold the strings, making women their "wild ducks." Behind the facade of the party is the life of the women who lead lives of "quiet desperation," to quote Henry David Thoreau. Hedvig's death is quiet, for a few beats in the play's dramaturgy the characters think it is a hunting shot they hear, and not a bullet blown through her chest. She dies of a broken heart. Can we call Hedda's death quiet? Hardly. She also kills herself, but it is a mean shot, full of vengeance, succumbed to the wild tiger, rather than the caged bird.

Works Cited

Ibsen, Henrik, Rolf Fjelde, Joan Templeton, *Four Major Plays: Volume I.*, 2006.

Signet Classics:

New York. Internet resource.