

Hedda gabler as artist of manipulation



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In the play Hedda Gabler by Ibsen, Hedda works as a type of artist of life. In an attempt to create a sense of beauty which she obsessively strives for, she creates her art by manipulating the lives and wills of the other characters around her. Through the character of Hedda the play offers a unique perspective on the definition of art, as she works as both the artist and part of the art that we are reading. As a work of art, it both critiques the cultural framework of love, marriage, and femininity, and offers a clear-cut escape from these repressive cultural restraints. Hedda creates beauty as an artist through the medium of manipulation of others. She seems to find joy and a sense of power in being able to control and manipulate those around her. Throughout the drama, she interferes in the lives of other characters, easily bending their wills to meet her own needs. Mrs. Elvsted states, "There's something behind what you're doing Hedda? To which she answers, "Yes there is. For once in my life I want to have power over another human being" (288). She manipulates others as if they were just puppets in a play that she has created making her both the creator and participant in a work of art. She is surrounded by puppet-like automatic characters who ventriloquize the patriarchal values of their society. Virtually all of these characters are easily manipulated and Hedda takes advantage of this, giving her a sense of control in her own life. Such characters are referred to as specialists. To Hedda, this is a description of these puppet-like characteristics, meaning they think only literally and mechanically without questioning the world around them. By manipulating them, Hedda creates a world outside of the ventriloquism that they practice and she escapes the social norms and constructs that the other characters are so wrapped up in. This allows her to think independently without regard to the societal

constructs that the drama critiques. Hedda refuses to conform to the traditional role of a submissive, domestic female that the characters around her try to impose on her. The aunt, Miss Tesman, reinforces the importance of what Brack calls her, "the most solemn responsibility" (256). She shows the cultural conviction that a woman's most important role in life is that of motherhood. The aunt reduces Hedda, as a woman, to a mode of producing children by focusing entirely on her stomach when addressing her. She constantly questions Hedda about her weight gain and stares at her stomach, hinting at the fact that she is possibly pregnant. Hedda actually defies the definition of what a woman should be: she is far from submissive, she manipulates all the men in her play for her own power and refuses to take on any domestic or mothering role. When Brack questions her about motherhood she responds, "Be quiet! You will never see me like that" and "I have no talent for such things, Judge. I won't have responsibilities!" (256). She defiantly refuses to ventriloquize the ideas that the other characters are forcing on her. To be free of responsibility is to be free of the role of motherhood and wife. By denying these she essentially no longer fits the definition of a woman and takes on the male role. The varying roles of men are shown in the three male characters in the novel. As Hedda's husband, Tesman would seem like the representative of the patriarchal society that she is attempting to escape from. Although he diminishes, never seeming to take her too seriously, he is a weak example of the male patriarchal values. He is easily manipulated by his wife and relinquishes control to her in an effort to please her. Although he seems unaware of it, Tesman maintains little power in the relationship, allowing Hedda to seize this power and explore the role of the man in the

relationship. The actual personification of patriarchy and social domination of women by men is seen in Brack. His profession as a judge declares all the oppressions of a patriarchal society; he acts as the law, a ruling force of judgment and a figure in a position of power. Hedda describes him in the final scene as "the one cock of the walk" (303) meaning the strong dominant and oppressive male force that has power over women. Finally he gains power over her in the end when he finds out she is involved in Lovborg's suicide; as a woman she is ultimately unable to escape the societal oppression that Brack comes to represent. Throughout the play Hedda attempts to rebel against representations of the feminine. The figure of Mrs. Elvsted seems to be a representation of the repressive femininity that Hedda attempts to escape from. She reacts to her violently at times, pulling her hair out as a child and deciding, "I think I'll burn your hair off after all" (272). She physically acts out against the role that others expect her to take by hurting someone who represents this feminine role. The destruction of Lovborg's paper is also representative of Hedda's refusal to accept the cultural narrative of what femininity should be. While burning it she says, "Now I'm burning your child, Thea! You, with your curly hair! Your child and Eilert Lovborg's. Now I'm burning " I'm burning the child. " The burning of the book as a representation of their child is Hedda's method of setting herself free from the role of motherhood. She wants to find a way out of her own pregnancy so that she will not have to face the results that motherhood would have on her as a powerful female. Her jealousy at the relationship between Lovborg and Mrs. Elvsted seems to have led her to the point of near insanity. It is something that she can not control and it is this loss of control

that seems to push her over the edge. The drama continually questions and critiques the idea of love and marriage and the position of male and female within this context. Despite this, there seems to be no actual love in the play. The relationship between Hedda and Tesman is one of convenience as they follow the normal narrative of a marriage, but there is clearly something lacking. Her disinterest in his beloved slippers in the first act shows that Hedda seems to care very little about Tesman. It seems as if she is with him for material gain and because he is easily manipulated by her. Tesman tries to keep her happy but treats her more like a possession that he has won than an individual. The play questions if there is such a thing as love in marriage at all. It critiques the idea of true love and marriage as something that is unattainable due to power relationships that exist within a marriage. It seems to suggest that marriage itself is a primitive desire endorsed by the idea of love in which the social domination of women by men is justified. Hedda seeks a marriage in which husband and wife would be equal but seems unable to find it. The social constructs of marriage work so that a male is in the position of power and a woman is submissive to him. Hedda seems to conclude that a true marriage would never exist because of the existence of this social narrative. She imagines a way around it but seems to conclude that it is something that could never exist in reality. The play Hedda Gabler works as art by questioning the cultural framework of femininity, marriage and love. It looks at the primitive motives behind marriage as a construct of a patriarchal society. Hedda concludes that a true marriage can never really exist but the character herself finds an escape by the end of the play. She escapes through her suicide, not only because of her death, but because she finally manages to break the cultural

narrative through the act itself. In the final line she says, "But good God! People don't do such things! Do they?" (304). She has finally managed to escape, to do what people just don't do.