Hedda Gabler as seen by Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, and Freud

Clarence Newman

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project

Part of the Philosophy Commons, and the Scandinavian Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project/219

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the John M. Pfau Library at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses Digitization Project by an authorized administrator of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@csusb.edu.
HEDDA GABLER AS SEEN BY
SCHOPENHAUER, KIERKEGAARD, AND FREUD

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State
College, San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
The Humanities
(Independent Studies)

by
Clarence Newman
June 1981
HEDDA GABLER AS SEEN BY
SCHOPENHAUER, KIERKEGAARD, AND FREUD

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State
College, San Bernardino

by
Clarence Newman
June 1981

Approved by:

Chairman

Date
ABSTRACT

Problem: Can Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* be explained equally credibly using the contradictory concepts of reality advocated by the contemporary philosophers Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard and the novel ideas of Freud? Is the artist equally capable of chronicling the history of intellectual thought as the historian?

Research method and design: Pertinent aspects of each philosopher's concepts of reality were minutely compared with the Characters in *Hedda Gabler* to determine the basic motivation for their acts. Each of the three philosophers' views were presented and reviewed in the chronological order of their works and used as a measuring device to determine the feasibility of the various characters' motivations for their acts.

Conclusions: The study shows conclusively that the artist is equally capable of recording the history of thought as the historian, even in his own milieu. Ibsen created a piece of art that not only meshed the contradictory concepts of Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard in a single dramatic portrait, but even anticipated the Freudian idea of reality. He was further able to present the dialectic antithesis of classicism and existentialism which became the new synthesis—modern realism.
CONTENTS

1. Abstract.................................................................
2. Title Page..................................................................
3. Signature Page............................................................
4. Table of Contents.........................................................
5. Main Text..................................................................
6. Bibliography...............................................................
After Peer Gynt (1867), Ibsen remarked that never again would drama be written in verse, and he turned to other modes; the publication of *Hedda Gabler* (1890) followed the death throes of the Romantic movement. This thesis will examine the dianoia (thought) of *Hedda Gabler* to determine whether it could be satisfactorily explicated according to the views of Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard and Freud. The philosophies of these three men all exhibit a similar sense of realism; Schopenhauer's biological naturalism contains the same inherent deromanticizing iconoclasm of Freud's psychological naturalism. Both views tend to reduce the transcendental possibilities exulted by Romanticism and present man as a severely proscribed creature who can only ponder his impotence to circumvent destiny. Their views differ from Kierkegaard's existentialism only to the extent that Kierkegaard's provided some latitude, under the yoke of determinism, where man might regain some of his lost nobility through his courage to choose--within his narrowly proscribed freedom--a line of action that disregards social pressures and might lead to an authentic "life."

The contrast between these predominantly pessimistic views and Romantic optimism is indicated in the name ascribed to them--Realism. It is generally agreed that

---

realism began in the mid-nineteenth century, and that its distinguishing characteristics are colloquial language, the use of the "common" man's psychology, and "natural" or plausible action deriving from cause and effect situations.\(^2\) Realism strained toward two tasks; to achieve an exciting dramatic effect without violating a feeling of "naturalness," and to achieve an elevation of the spirit of expression. This new and special kind of naturalness, derived from scientific theories of the day, claimed that men were deprived of free will and that characters reacted to situations rather than precipitating action. Man's future became a matter of the genetics of Darwin and the social pressures described by August Comte. Nietszche's Zarathustra had just recently pronounced God dead and Schopenhauer had earlier apotheosized the will in the same fell stroke that had rendered the intellect servant to instinct.\(^3\) Comte, predicting that social institutions develop along predictable patterns,\(^4\) Freud postulating his historic and naturalistic


paradigm of man, 5 Darwin, in his removal of that transcendentental ingredient of stardust as one of the basic constituents of man, all relegated men to impotent conclusions inherent in the vast and eternal premise or nature of things. 6 Emile Zola and the Goncourt brothers were busy reducing the artist to the level of mere chronicler of the deplorable human condition, a condition deriving from implacable social and psychological forces in the innate human predilection for bestiality.

The dream lay shattered, and Schopenhauer the misanthrope gloated over his apparent prescience, leaving it to the lone and introverted Kierkegaard to rescue from the shattered hopes of European man a way in which the individual might still escape the despair of impotence through existentialist freedom of duty with passion. Into this tangled web of conflicting thought Ibsen nursed into life the account of a woman beset with conflicting ideas that eventually destroyed her. It is a story of an anachronistic and aristocratic woman trapped in the time warp of incipient egalitarianism, a story of a natural


6 Charles Darwin, On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Fav-ored Races in the Struggle for Life (n. p.: n. p., 1859), n. pag.
woman seeking escape from the demanding daemons of her imperious and instinctual will through the therapy of marriage and generation, a story of a nineteen-century Persephone attempting to gather souls for Lord Dis.

Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Idea* (1819) was a frontal attack on the basic romantic idealism of Hegel's view that mankind might eventually attain the utopian perfection postulated centuries earlier by Christianity. But while Hegel's dialectical triads leaned heavily upon intellectual methodology, Schopenhauer derided the intellect as a mere instrument of desire, and asserted that the will is the *soul* vital of man. It was not, however, the free will the theologians spoke so approvingly of. It was rather a striving, persistent will of imperious desire which employed intellect to rationalize the propriety of possession of a thing desired. And when reason no longer served a man he could with impunity desert reason.

All life is strife, cried the pessimistic Schopenhauer; a clash of wills--except when man makes the two-backed beast. The reproductive organs are the proper

---


focus of the will and form the opposite pole to the brain which represents knowledge. This is why, he reasoned, the Greeks worshipped the phallus and the Hindus the lingam. Hesiod and Parmenides said that Eros is the first, the creator, and the principle from which all things proceed (Durant, p. 256). The principle matter is not the reciprocation of love, but possession. Nature is the best eugenics and love is a deception practiced by nature, a deception which must vanish after the attainment of the end of the species. If Petrarch's passion had been sated, his song would have been silenced. Lovborg's passion culminated in his aborted manuscript, Hedda's in death.

Yet, argues Schopenhauer, will defeats even death by the strategy and martyrdom of reproduction, observable in the spider who is eaten by the female he has just fertilized, the wasp who devotes itself to gathering food for the offspring it will never see and the man who wears himself to ruin in the effort to feed, clothe and educate his children (Durant, p. 258). There is something of nature perverted here, for Hedda does not demonstrate this dedication to progeny, though Thea does. Hedda, however, patently shows she possesses a ravening, yet perverted eros force, an irresistible urge to procreate that another generation would call the libido, its restless energy sublimated into art and architecture.
Ibsen was aware that the attraction of the sexes might manifest itself in astonishing garb. In masterful strokes this taciturn Scandinavian built with the glowing medium of symbol and irony a tale of perverse libido, where eros metamorphosed into thanatos. Hedda, incipient natural mother, beset with the strangling injunctions of a repressive society, was incapable of integrating the two opposite forces loosed within her. On the one hand, her élan vital, the Schopenhaueran indomitable will, raged in the cavern of her being like some Freudian Scylla whose only raison was the entrapment of masculine gametes. And on the other hand, her intellect—servant, said Schopenhauer, of desire—shaped by repressive social forces whose objective it was to preserve the many even at the expense of the few, cringed at the thought that appetite might defy society. Will and intellect, Scylla and Charybdis, parasites of the flesh, housed in the same host; here was a scenario for conflict.

But how is it that intellect, lately declared thrall to will, should find itself arrayed against its master? Enigmatically, Schopenhauer, the philosophical prestidigitator, pronounced intellect the Oedipus of father will, who rose up and slew his progenitor (Durant, p. 262). The trick is, said our misogynist, simply to defeat the desire to live, for who escapes back into timelessness escapes also the pain of living; it is a
view reminiscent of Ecclesiastes, and not unlike the Buddhists' Nirvana. Here the audacious philosopher offers his piece de résistance, suicide, although it was a solution Schopenhauer himself did not utilise. The philosopher, argued Schopenhauer, need not seek refuge in the land of shadows to escape the slavering appetite. In him reason has teamed with intelligence to cool the fires of desire and allow the man to live out his days in the contemplation of the despair inherent in the human condition. Nothing could have been further from Hedda's situation. No philosopher would have dallied tantalizingly with Judge Brack, would have toyed with the bird-like Mrs. Elvsted's fears, would have encouraged Eilert Lovborg to disregard his lust for liquor, would have denied the very existence of love.

No, Hedda's intellect was still thrall to will, and her fear of social repression was simply a declaration of subjection to a force that held the power of life and death over her (ostracism). But Hedda was cunning, and she found relief in the manipulation of those around her. It is a short step from Schopenhauer's "will to live" to Nietzsche's "will to power" and can be taken, I believe, without violating Schopenhauer's fundamental views. Hedda, admittedly an impotent coward, sought control over the members of the very group she feared. Aunt Julie and Berta were insignificant pawns in her power
game. Tesman seduced into a sterile marriage, Eilert, manipulated to the point of moribundity, and Thea, whose very namesake suggests innocence and faith, frightened by the envious Hedda’s threat to yank her passionate red hair—symbolic yearning for the courage that passion lends one’s acts.

Here is the Schopenhauerian tension between the will and the intellect, with will representing desire or instinct and intellect representing the forced imposition of social restraints upon the innocents of "Arcadia." Ibsen, polarizing this tension, creates multiple layers of conflict, and Hedda contains both polarities of this schism. She is, in fact, schizophrenic and the two personalities are locked in combat. The final "leap", her rejection of life, along with the circumspection with which she weighed all her acts—her caution, if you will—are indicators that the intellect has gained supremacy, a fact she frequently laments. One cannot disregard the supreme irony; the fact that she meets her death through the destruction of the organ of sapience, the brain, while Lovborg the sensual man, the man of appetites, the man whose will directs him, surrenders his

---

9 A green world of pastoral simplicity and happiness, such as Eden, where the innocents experience an idyllic and sequestered life.
life to an accidental (nonintellectualized) slug through the bowels, the organ of sentience. Hedda's death, with the hallmarks of ratiocination, and Lovborg's accidental death following surrender to his appetite for wine and women, obey with startling clarity the Schopenhaueran paradigm of "reality."

And yet, Hedda is not totally cerebral. Where every species fights for the matter space and time of others—in the Schopenhauer reality, homo homini lupis—man is wolf to man (Durant, p. 256). Hedda is certainly a wolf to Eilert, robbing him of life, and wolf to Tesman, wooing him into a sterile marriage. Her bite, not unlike that of the lycanthrope, transforms the bumbling Tesman into an equally unethical wolf condoning her destruction of Eilert's manuscript, since it will lead to his own appointment at the university. And Brack! Here is the quintessential wolf, hiding his lupine essence beneath the black robes of justice, as he cautiously insinuates himself into the sacrosanct area of Hedda's marriage.

Hedda's predominant intellectualism exorcises passion and transforms her into a coward fearful of exercising her will. It contrasts keenly with Thea's predominant élan vital. This woman of desires—wearing her mane of red hair as a badge—impetuously leaves her husband and his children to follow Lovborg, and tells Hedda she could not help what she did, that she did what
she had to do. Here is the Schopenhauer earth mother. "Woman is the culprit here; for when knowledge has reached to willlessness, her thoughtless charms allure man again into reproduction. Youth has not intelligence enough to see how brief these charms must be; and when the intelligence comes, it is too late." (Durant, p. 266)

Ibsen has inverted and distorted this Schopenhauaran utterance by presenting Eilert's manuscript as a product of his and Thea's sublimated erotic energy. The transformation of this symbolic child into a product of the intellect makes the manuscript no less a product of eros. Irony is piled upon irony, like Ossa upon Peliion, for it is Hedda—pregnant by the bumbling Tesman—who might have participated in such an intellectual birth. How she lamented her exclusion from this erotic congress!

Schopenhauer concurred with the ancient utterance that who increases knowledge increases sorrow, adding that the genius suffers most. Memory and foresight merely add to the misery (witness Prometheus' plight), and most of our suffering lies in retrospect and anticipation; and Hedda the circumspect, Hedda the intellectual, was born to suffer. Life is a pendulum that swings between the pain of want and the ennui of temporary satiation (Durant, p. 258). To combat the deadly ennui she plays an even more deadly game of manipulation.

Ironically she finds a confessor in Judge Brack.
She admits her ennui, admits her fatigue, admits she has married Tesman because it was the line of least resistance and because she had begun to fear for her social status. Trapped in the Schopenhaueran ennui, reduced to the role of incubator, conscious of her quintessential powerlessness, hoping, as she continues to test the power of her will against the chain of events which become increasingly impossible to control, she feels the parasite within her, and her rebellious intellect rejects that part of herself over which she has no control. Again ironically, it is the flesh which she would destroy that gives sustenance to the intellect.

The Schopenhaueran view emphasises Ibsen's use of irony, and the irony in this play is ubiquitous. Even as Hedda, with wilfull if shortsighted hubris, seeks the status of the classic heroine, her cowardice limits her to manipulations and vicarious participation in Eilert's success and failure, and the very fear of scandal suggests a sterile impotency as the fetus grows within her. The general's pistols, a traditional symbol of the phallus, are instruments of sterile death; Hedda, a woman biologically, has the aspirations of a man. The thanatos urge toward death is expressed by a woman who nurses new life

---

in her womb. She who seeks power so desperately is denied it because of a rationalized cowardice, while Thea is a powerful influence on Eilert and George because of her non-rationalized fearlessness. Judge Brack, the administrator of justice admits he has no objection to backways—translated as underhanded courses—and repudiates his social function of law and order. An upright ethical doctor of anthropology, George Tesman, conceals the burning of the manuscript, and his act leads indirectly to the death of Lovborg.

There is yet another view of Hedda's actions, appropriately described by Soren Kierkegaard, which provides some release from the unrelenting pessimism characteristic of Schopenhauer's views. Kierkegaard viewed the Schopenhaueran despair as only a response to the threat of meaninglessness. He viewed this despair as only an expression of the loss of hope; the answer to which he asserted, was neither in hedonism (which both Hedda and Lovborg had previously practiced) nor in speculative and abstract thought such as the writing of anthropological treatises (Ibsen, p. 518). One must turn inward, said Kierkegaard, into the subjective self, into the microcosm, where one finds earnestness, decision, passion

commitment, and the freedom to gain unification. Your own despair will direct you to your subjective self (MacIntyre, Kierkegaard, p. 509). Lovborg found earnestness and passion in his literary creation, and yet he was ambivalent, for, though he was a passionate man, he was also an intellectual, a scholar.

Man's despair, asserted Kierkegaard, intensifies his subjectivity—his turning within—and makes it a gateway to the authentic self, as Lovborg's despair, evident in his surrender to alcoholism, becomes a catalyst toward the discovery of his genuine self. In embracing that despair, the self gives birth to itself and passes from the Kierkegaardian esthetical (childish) stage of indecision to the ethical stage of decisive commitment. One is responsible only when he makes a choice, said Kierkegaard, and the ethicality of his choice depends upon the degree to which it is drawn from within, rather than from established standards (a criterionless choice) posited solely upon non-social aspects (MacIntyre, Kierkegaard, p. 509).

In 1843 Kierkegaard published the curious two volume Either/Or: A Fragment of Life, in which he expounded what has since been called the first statement of the existentialist idea. His father, urging him into theology for which Kierkegaard felt no affinity, was instrumental in his eventual rejection of all rationalized
12 Systems, he reasoned—and Hegel's was the quintessence of all that he deplored—forced the individual into a pre-formed mold, 13 forcing personal development along strict and inflexible lines with no consideration for the individuality of the person. 14

He rejected the construction of systems and concepts, laying the utility of any particular concepts upon the will of the individual. All hinges on choice, hence, responsibility is his. The inherent paradox led Kierkegaard to publish several contradictory treatises under various noms-de-plume; only in such a manner could he avoid the charge that he too was preaching a concept or system.

Kierkegaard maintains that every individual is

12 Whether Kierkegaard's father sought guilt with the gusto of the flagellant, his son, born old, shouldered the burden of his society, and sadly renounced his own marriage plans for a life of ethics and religion, even as he extolled the virtues of marriage for the ethical man.

13 Hegel's system was a closed system (even though it progressed toward Utopia) in that the intellectual concept gave his dialectic the very form that the existentialist decried. "I shall shape my own essence," said the existentialist. "And I shall do it with passion, not cold intellect."

14 The classical view encompassing Naturalism, Romanticism and Rationalism, positing essence before existence, is shattered by this existentialistic approach which stresses the freedom and uniqueness of the individual to move from class to class, profession to profession and hence to his own authenticity.
confronted with the choice of leading the aesthetic or the ethical life. The aesthetic way is a sophisticated and romantic hedonism, an ever-frustrating pursuit of diversion and pleasure in sexual libertinism, travel, or the arts. Each new experience draws him closer to the day when there are no new diversions and he has literally done it all. He is now thrown back upon nostalgia and sentimentality, as he attempts to relive those exciting first experiences. Just as Hedda becomes aware that she is jaded, "...danced myself tired." (Ibsen, p. 538), the aesthete comes to realize that his search for novelty has led him to the threshold of despair. 15 In *Purify Your Hearts!* Kierkegaard says, "See him in his season of pleasure. Did he not crave for one pleasure after another, variety his watchword?" (MacIntyre, *Kierkegaard*, p. 509), Desire has blunted the pain of self-awareness, but as the person is forced to turn more frequently toward reminiscence, he is forced back toward that same consciousness from which he sought escape. 16

Recoiling from the despair of aestheticism one

15 In *Either/Or* the young person who has chosen the aesthetic, "...has not chosen himself; like Narcissus he has only fallen in love with himself. Such a situation has certainly ended not infrequently in suicide." Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, I, p. 36.

16 Also in many pages of *Hedda Gabler*, Hedda reiterates again and again the failure of her headlong but failed flight into hedonism.
will eventually, and with total freedom of choice, elect the ethical way of life. Marriage, hints Kierkegaard, is an excellent institution in which one finds a satisfactory ethical way of life, for here lies the sphere of duty, universal rules, unconditional demands and tasks. The choice is made with passion and has no criterion, but, he adds paradoxically, were the choice wrong, the intensity of the passion will correct any error. The contradictory and paradoxical quality of Kierkegaard's views are patent—which is not to say that such views are inapplicable to the explication of Hedda Gabler; for one easily divines that the primary difference between Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard's views is the concept of freedom of choice. It is important to indicate that the Ibsen characters are not consciously Kierkegaardian and Schopenhaueran in thought. These paradigms are useful only in casting them in a more illuminating perspective. That is

17 It must be clear, however, that this does not approximate the confining system such as constructed by Hegel. Kierkegaard took extreme precautions by publishing many and contradictory views under various pen names so he might avoid the criticism surely to be provoked by his paradoxical statements; namely of the construction of a system concomitant with his repudiation of systems.

18 It would appear that, were one intellectually convinced of the error in a contemplated action, and one resolutely committed oneself to such an action, passion must be an absolutely necessary ingredient of such act. Hence, Kierkegaard's paradox of passion tends to weaken one's urge to charge Hedda with insufficient passion in her cerebrated suicide.
to say, for example, that Hedda does not lament her self-awareness as a source of anguish, but we the viewers suspect that were she perhaps less self-conscious, her despair would decrease correspondingly.

Using the degree of self-awareness as a criterion, one might hypothesize a hierarchy of anguish in the characters of Hedda Gabler. One might even determine which of the characters seeks, with the greatest urgency, surcease from pain. Permit me to tarry for a moment and contemplate the propriety of comparing the degree of individual anguish with the degree of this consciousness of self. Hedda is a cerebral individual, who admittedly finds pleasure in the repartee with Judge Brack. Consciousness increases with intelligence, and they may well be one and the same thing. This is the old paradoxical bugaboo of the existentialists; the organ of thought attempting to shape being into a concept or system. Being refuses to yield to system and absurdity is the result. To defeat absurdity is to repudiate consciousness; Hedda's answer to this paradox is self-annihilation.

Lovborg, however, cannot be so inextricably caught up in his anguish, for did he not (albeit under the inspiration of Thea) create the manuscript--symbol of cerebration? With the inspiration of sublimated eros he has created, and only by accident does he find death, ironically with the symbolic phallus, the dueling pistol. If
anguish is equal to cerebration, Hedda is the greater sufferer, for only the most desperate seek escape through suicide.

Thea is not cerebral, but the consummate female, whose raison is a catalyst by virtue of inspiration. Her anguish is minimal for two reasons: first, she gives her passions free rein, and no internal schisms tear her apart. She is thrall to her passions and ergo free in the Kierkegaardian sense. Secondly, she is so caught up in her commitment to duty—toward her child, the manuscript—that she has removed herself from the aesthetic phase of life in favor of the ethical stage.

Hedda finds herself in the aesthetic phase of development, immobilized there, it seems, in stasis. Kierkegaard's remark that these individuals not infrequently resort to suicide, is remarkably apropos. So also is Hedda's confession to Judge Brack, that she has grown tired, that she had married Tesman simply because it was the easiest thing to do and that she had begun to fear for her social status (Ibsen, p. 540). She is guilty of the very crime that led Kierkegaard to formulate his concepts—acquiescence and conformity to the values of others, and she is all that Kierkegaard has rejected, for not only does she conform to the community ethic—at least on the surface—but she then methodically attempts to dictate the acts of her peers.
Hedda's refusal to follow the pathway to her authenticity through the repudiation of social strictures is still a choice and the fact of this choice makes her responsible for her predicament. Unlike Schopenhauer's baited bear raging against the stings of unfeeling nature, Hedda cannot take strength in the knowledge that one more powerful than she has meted out this suffering. She is a coward, fearful of choosing the only path that can lead her to authenticity, for she does not know that sufficient passion would have neutralized any cause for fear. What a pity she had not read *Either/Or*!

Why, one muses, is Thea courageous and Hedda not courageous? Hedda remarks to her "Oh, if you could only understand how poor I am. And fate made you so rich... I have such a fear of scandal." (Ibsen, p. 558) The belief that Hedda's dilemma (her cowardice) can be corrected forms much of the dialectic tension in the play. One senses that her absence of courage is a matter of choice. She is "guilty" of cowardice--damning for a general's daughter. On the other hand, how can one beset by her biological limitations be deemed guilty? This paradox is the dramatic core of *Hedda Gabler*.

Kierkegaard has suggested that man can redeem himself through courage (MacIntyre, *Kierkegaard*, p. 338). In fact he made much of courage, though he spent precious little time identifying the source of the stuff.
It is implied that courage is innate, that it is present in the pre-essence stage of existence. Although carefully skirting the bogs of philosophical argument, I am compelled to remark that throughout *Hedda Gabler* there is the pervading sense that Hedda can find the courage she yearns for. "Ah, yes...courage. If only one had that!...Then life would perhaps be liveable after all." (Ibsen, p. 558) She has simply refused to apply Kierkegaard's antidote to despair, has refused to permit the despair to lead her to subjective discovery of self, of commitment, passion, and authenticity. In her attempt to manipulate Thea and Lovborg she functions as the instrument of social pressures, the very type of external pressure Kierkegaard warns against, the very source of her own fatal inability to make choices for herself.

Eilert's choice is not a product of his reason. On the contrary, he chooses with passion to dance about the flame of lust and, like a moth, he falls. Rescued from the fens of alcoholism through his symbolic marriage to Thea, through the application of his intellect in the creation of their mutual child, the manuscript, he is well along the road of the ethical vision of life, when he is swept away backward into the maelstrom of Hedda's destructive aestheticism. His "choice" is obviously wrong, and although Kierkegaard holds that there
can be no wrong choice, he adds, paradoxically that sufficient passion can correct any wrongness in choice. Was Eilert’s intensity insufficient? One senses here a weakness in the existential paradigm.

Thea’s character is perhaps more amenable. Walking away from her husband, she defies society as she throws herself at the feet of a man who has been a target of social criticism. Passion, symbolized by her red hair, is in her every act. She has inspired Lovborg to creativity and discovered her authentic self—which is the consummate woman, inspiring a man to create. Inspiration is her forte, and, promptly after Lovborg’s demise, she transfers her attention to Tesman, who has taken up the task of resurrecting the manuscript (Ibsen, p. 600). Though fear and timidity mark her personality, she makes her way cautiously through the play without regard for propriety.

Brack is simply an unauthenticated person, who makes no progress toward or away from any redeemable stance. Tesman, not a particularly multi-faceted personality, bumbles through all five acts in a state of semi-consciousness, either attempting to satiate Hedda’s insatiable discontent, or, in the end, to repair the damage caused by her devouring flame. To this extent, one would have to place Tesman also in the ranks of the unauthenticated, even though he sought, as Kierkegaard dictated,
the ethical life of marriage. One is tempted to place Miss Julie in the realm of the ethical vision. She nurses her other spinster sister toward as painless a death as she can manage.

A pattern begins to emerge, with Thea representing the positive expression of Kierkegaard's criterion-less choice drawn from within and not from social criteria. Bound in matrimony to the sheriff, she turns away from him toward Lovborg in an act that might (outside Kierkegaard's views) have been termed unethical or immoral. Her statement that she cannot live as though she had never known Eilert can, according to the Kierkegaardian paradigm, be interpreted as a measure of her courage (Ibsen, p. 525): it is an ethical choice, and, at the same time, it is contrary to established social standards of action. It is ethical because it is drawn from the essence of her being, and her symbolic child, the manuscript, is her raison d'être. Witness the nimbleness with which she switches her attention from the dead Eilert to the living George when she learns that the manuscript can be resurrected. Her courage is functional; it is the staying power that sustains the élan vital, the will to live and propagate the species.

It might appear that we have come full circle to the biological criteria inherent in Schopenhauer's views. Lovborg's alcoholism clouds the quality of his fateful
choice to attend the drinking party, and leaves the reader to decide whether his choice comes from the tyranny of his biology or from social pressures. His weakness for the grape and his vanity, exploited by Hedda's psychological manipulation, combine to create ambivalent causes for his choice to attend the party that leads directly to his death.

Hedda's choice of suicide is also not a clear command from her milieu, her society. In that sense it is ethical and appears to emanate from within. And yet, the dread of ostracization may be genetic in man the social creature. Lovborg's alcoholism, a hybrid creation of biology and social pressures, like Hedda's fear of scandal, another curious hybrid, assumes with her fear a thematic kinship in the Kierkegaardian-Schopenhaueran paradox. Each of these two philosophers has declared for the reality of subjectivism, one for a tyrannical one, the other for a subjective free will. While Schopenhauer might have applauded Hedda for her courage in the final suicidal act and muttered, "Lucky man," of Eilert's accidental death, Kierkegaard might have lamented them both. For he believed that man seeks to escape himself through his ceaseless becoming, and that the only subjective truth emerges from man's faithfulness to his own unique self; Lovborg, succumbing to her machinations, ignoring his own physical limitations, went proudly to
his own demise.

The two philosophers are fundamentally alike in that either view is capable of explicating Hedda Gabler in terms of will; Schopenhauer's biological determinism is bleak and repressive in its implication that escape lies only in suicide. Paradoxically Hedda appears entrapped between the Kierkegaardian aesthetic stage, where hedonism and boredom are the metaphors and the opposite extreme of Schopenhauer's philosophy, cognizant of her enslavement and planning escape through suicide.

The primary motive for Hedda's "leap" can be interpreted equally well from either philosophical stance. Schopenhauer, as the consummate egoist, has asserted that suicide is the best answer for the human dilemma, unless one is a philosopher able to reconcile appetite with intellect and escape the puppeteer nature. In this view, Hedda, not a philosopher, is excruciatingly aware of her overwhelming impotence and takes the recommended escape. If, however, one regards Hedda as the aesthete, beset with the angst of ennui and turned in on herself in a self-conscious and tautological nothingness, she exemplifies Kierkegaard's prophecy that the narcissistic individual must end in self destruction.

Hedda Gabler is lavish with allusions to death. It is suggested through characterization, as Hedda becomes death's minister; it is there in the movement of
the plot; it is present in the old house, pungent with an "odour of mortality." (Ibsen, p. 519) The house previously owned by now deceased aristocracy is now occupied by the motherless daughter of a death-dealing general (now also deceased) and bound in sterile matrimony to a man whose only relatives are sterile, spinster aunts, one of whom passes away during the play. Relevant too is the subject of George's creation (his own opus magnum) which, like Hedda's fetus, never reaches fruition; it is a look backward toward the Middle Ages, a disinterment of the dead industries of the ancient society of Brabant, a microcosmic representation of the play we are watching and the society we see disintegrating before us. The institutions represented by Judge Brack, by General Gabler, the university, even by Sheriff Elvsted are failing, its members sterile and impotent.

Hedda personifies the spector of death even as it closes about her. Ibsen describes her as pale of complexion, with steel gray eyes expressing a cold, unruffled repose; and with death's characteristic love of gloom, she carps about the sunlight (Ibsen, p. 511).

Oh--there the servant has gone and opened the veranda door and let in a whole flood of sunlight.

She is acutely conscious that this is the season of death (Ibsen, p. 514).

(...)calm and mistress of herself.)
I am looking at the leaves. They are so withered... to think of it!—Already in September.

Her interest in death transcends considerably an interest in just her own. Seen loading her father's dueling pistols at the beginning of Act II, she threatens to kill Judge Brack (Ibsen, p. 517). It is an oversimplification to suggest that justice shall die, for the Aristotelian "thought" of Hedda Gabler indicates that the angst associated with living—broached by both Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard—is beyond a matter of justice.

Hedda makes a heated denial of any interest in life, when Lovborg remarks that she has a craving for life. "Take care! Believe nothing of the sort." she responds (Ibsen, p. 583). She delights in the idea of death.

Now I am burning your child, Thea! Burning it curly locks!... Your child and Eilert Lovborg's... I am burning-- I am burning your child. (Ibsen, p. 583)

Her frustrated attempts to move Eilert to a glorious suicide is an attempt to impose over his eventual "casual" end a heroic but anacronistic defiance in the face of insuperable odds. Her view is essentially romantic and nonfunctional in light of the Schopenhaueran reality, for biological determinism reduces her dream to tragic irony. Defying the determinism inherent in Eilert's alcoholism, and failing to move him to conquer this irre-
sistible sequence of cause and effect, she retreats backward toward the final precipice. In a final spasm of despair and defiance, she attempts to wrest herself from the strait jacket of determinism with suicide even as she assumes the role of fate (the very nemesis she flees) and destroys the unborn child. The very rationalization that leads her to suicide and freedom dooms her fetus to the determinism she has sought to evade.

In the end her suicide leaves unanswered the existential question of free will. Though she defied fate with her own death, the taking of the life of her child—which has an existence of sorts, though perhaps not yet an essence—makes it a totally impotent cog in a totally deterministic reality. It may be that Ibsen cleverly left the final decision to the subjective and individual choice of the reader.

There are other manifestations of death in *Hedda Gabler*. Tesman also has a penchant for things dead. When he responds to Lovborg that he would never have thought of writing of the future, Hedda pointedly remarks, "H'm--I dare say not." (Ibsen, p. 548) And Aunt Julie discovers her raison d'être in nursing her sister to the end.

*Her death was so calm, so beautiful. And she had the unspeakable happiness of seeing George once more--and bidding him good-bye.* (Ibsen, p. 585)

and later:
I must prepare my dear one for her rest as well as I can. She shall go to her grave looking her best. (Ibsen, p. 585)

That one look one's best in death perhaps speaks for Hedda's social stratum. The splendid powdered corpse is a manifestation of the socially proper facade, of a penchant for propriety at least partially responsible for Hedda's flight into suicide.

Miss Julie needs the reality of impending death to provide her own life with meaning.

Oh, there's always some poor invalid or other in want of nursing, unfortunately...A burden! Heaven forgive you child--It is no burden to me. (Ibsen, p. 585)

She openly admits her need for the dying.

Oh, one soon makes friends with the sick; and its such an absolute necessity for me to have some one to live for. (Ibsen, p. 585)

Death for Hedda, arrives as the existentialist choice though it appears as the coward's choice. It is the only choice for one who yearns for the power of life and death over others, yet fears the consequences of social scandal. There is an odd mixture of the ridiculous (fear of scandal) and the sublime (love of death) tempting one to consider Hedda's destruction as a result of a psychotic frenzy induced by external forces, transforming what at first appears as a wilful suicide into cosmic cause and effect. One is also hard put to
accrredit Lovborg's death to anything except cosmic acci-
dent, but it might be easily seen as the Schopenhaueran
accident, the result of his biological trajectory. In
this sense, Lovborg's death is no more nor less accident-
al than was Hedda's. Ibsen's drama leaves the viewer to
decide.

In collecting philosophical thought useful in
the explication of *Hedda Gabler*, quite by happenstance,
I encountered a remarkably pertinent explication in
Freud's Thanatos myth. Freud postulates that the will
to death, thanatos, opposes and eventually defeats eros.
In this paradigm, eros vies with thanatos, and the po-
larization of these two psychic forces are lucidly pre-
sented in Hedda's characterization: The eros force is
evident in her pregnancy on the biological level, while
her suicide suggests the thanatos paradigm is at work.

It may be that a Freudian analysis is not appro-
priate because he is not coeval with Ibsen. There is
nonetheless a relevance here between this tragedy and
the Freudian reduction of the hitherto somewhat mystic
human spirit--capable, in earlier literature, of apo-
theosis or at least of a glorious heroism--to a psycho-
logical equation of predictable and ironic helplessness.
A severely circumscribed will operating within narrow
limits produces a self-willed suicide. In this Arist-
totelian tragedy, as Joseph Wood Krutch proclaimed, is
indeed dead. 19

The differences between Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard are not differences that would either move man back to a milieu where the old classic tragedy would again be possible, or provide him with total freedom, or even totally abandon him to fate. They are merely arguments as to whether man has even one little iota of freedom, in his choice of either enduring the despair of life or defying destiny through the existentialist leap (suicide). Because Freud's ideas continue the trend toward the increased circumscription of the human will I have included a Freudian explication of Hedda Gabler.

Freud discovered a syndrome of behavior traits common to the necrophile, and these characteristics are strikingly similar to Hedda's. He notes a retention of the anal stage of development, related to the way the child acted in the sphere of bowel movements as a response to demands by his trainers. During an early phase of childhood development, after the mouth is no longer the main organ of lust or satisfaction, the anus becomes an important erogenous zone, and most libidinal wishes

---

19 Krutch's funeral oration was not directed at the more modern type of ironic tragedy in which the victim has been deprived of volition and hence responsibility for his fall.
are centered around the retention of the excrements. 20 This anal hoarding character is orderly in a sterile and rigid manner and cannot endure insecurity (Fromm, p. 294). Hedda remarks: "It is this genteel poverty I have managed to drop into—! It makes life so pitiable! So utterly ridiculous!" (Ibsen, p. 544). Freud's reduction of Hedda's heroic ideals to an anal hoarding syndrome makes of her a defenseless heroine with a will no freer than the alcoholic Lovborg's, in fact, no freer than her own fetus.

The anal hoarding personality can only feel safe by possession and control, since it is incapable of relating through love and productivity. Hedda must also possess and control those around her (Fromm, p. 294). One of the most pivotal bits in the play occurs when Hedda manipulates Eilert into taking a drink against his judgment; at another time she cries, "I want for once in my life to have power to mould a human destiny." (Ibsen, p. 544) Later, "She drags Mrs. Elvsted almost by force toward the middle doorway." (Ibsen, p. 543) She admits to Brack: "...I made use of Tesman..." (Ibsen, p. 563). To Eilert she remarks that she does not love George, explaining that she broke off her former rela-

tionship with Eilert because it threatened to develop into something more serious (Ibsen, p. 555). When Brack suggests that Hedda loves George she responds, vehemently, "Faugh--don't use that sickening word!" (Ibsen, p. 533).

There is also a close relationship to sadism; Thea reminds Hedda that when they were in school she was always pulling Thea's hair, "...and once you said you would burn it off my head." (Ibsen, p. 521)

The necrophilous character is determined by an increase in narcissism, unrelatedness (or alienation) and destructiveness, which is the malignant form of the anal character, and the language of such a person is characterized by frequent use of words referring to destruction (Fromm, p. 294). Witness her threats to Thea; she threatens Brack, urges suicide upon Lovborg, and eventually destroys herself and her fetus. There is also a direct connection between destruction itself and the manner or technique of the process (Fromm, p. 344). Hedda is insistent that Eilert shoot himself in the temple, the organ of the intellect; she is wretched when she learns that he died of a visceral wound. Even suicide has technique.

If the necrophile is provided with a satisfactory solution, such as prestige and admiration, to an excessive narcissism, the contained destructiveness may never be overtly expressed in any significant way (Fromm, p.
While single Hedda enjoyed countless admirers, but after marriage, tradition required that her personality be subordinate to the somewhat insipid George Tesman. If the necrophile fails to obtain prestige, the malignant aspect will manifest itself in a craving for destruction (Fromm, p. 364), and the minimal recognition Hedda received was not sufficient. Necrophilia is the outcome of an unlived life or the failure to arrive at a stage beyond narcissism and indifference. If one cannot crack the shell of his total narcissism he can only escape the unbearable sense of vital impotence and nothingness by affirming himself in the act of destruction of the life that he has not been able to create (Fromm, p. 364). Ironically Hedda is impotently creating a new life in her womb. But these Freudian views are so pertinent to Hedda's dilemma that they are the basis for almost every modern interpretation of the role.

Other traits of the necrophile are boredom, schizophrenia, cold aloofness, a specific attitude toward the past and property, and a predilection for dark rooms.

Not the least dangerous result of insufficiently compensated boredom is violence and destructiveness...such persons have no interest in anything... or anybody except of the most superficial kind. (Fromm, p. 339)

They only see gray skies and have little zest for life. In fact they would often rather be dead. Severely necrophilous people are very dangerous. They are the haters
who favor bloodshed and destruction (Fromm, p. 339).

Ennui is a prime characteristic of Hedda. She admits she has the facility for "...boring myself to death." (Ibsen, p. 545) And she later remarks: "...oh, my dear Mr. Brack how mortally bored I have been." (Ibsen, p. 537) She also exhibits the necrophile's symptom of schizophrenia. When Tesman asks her why she is cruel to Aunt Julia, she answers: "(nervously crossing the room). Well, you see--these impulses come over me all of a sudden; and I cannot resist them." (Ibsen, p. 541)

Her reason for marrying Tesman when she did not love him is typical: "I had...danced myself tired...my day was done--(With a slight shudder), Oh, no--I won't say that, nor think it either," (Ibsen, p. 538) It is evident early on that her rational personality is in mortal combat with the necrophilous personality.

The necrophile's penchant for acquiring property is evident too. Hedda has so much luggage that there is no room on the carriage for Tesman's aunt. Later she remarks that the old piano no longer fits the decor, but when Tesman suggests they exchange it, she will not part with it: "No, no--no exchange. I don't want to part with it. Suppose we put it there in the inner room and then get another here in its place." (Ibsen, p. 515) The necrophilous person generally has a preference for colors
such as black or brown that absorb light, and a distaste for bright radiant colors. I have earlier pointed out Hedda's penchant for closed draperies and gloomy rooms.

Finally the Freudian concept of inversion explains Hedda's will to power. The general's portrait dominates the set over the sofa. She is a biological woman yearning for power in a milieu where power can only be seized by a man. Her will for power, rather than for progeny, suggests the mind of a man, a genetic anomaly imprisoned in the body of a woman in nineteenth-century Europe.

I have attempted to show how the advent of the realistic period was precipitated by the accumulating data from the various centers of philosophical thought prevalent in the nineteenth-century community of inquiry such as the Naturalists, Rationalists and the Psychologists. While aristocratic man, even omnipotent God, was debilitated, the common man--despite the excesses and failures of the French revolution--began to emerge on a higher level of the social status. The general consensus was that if aristocratic man could be reduced to the deterministic equation, that if science exposed man's inability to control his own destiny, then the proletariat was no less emasculate. Hence, the move toward egalitarianism continued apace.

Ibsen's dramatizing of the thoughts of these
three philosophers has put into perspective, in the historical period in which they wrote, the social and psychological implications of their observations. Though Schopenhauer slightly predated Ibsen's "golden period" and Freud succeeded it, their incisive scrutiny along with that of Kierkegaard, has aptly characterized this period as the last agony of an epoch.

Along with the debilitation of deity went the pessimistic realization that, with God so effete, man himself was without the power of self-determination, was without free will. Schopenhauer epitomized this totally unredeeming view; but man--unable to long endure such unremitting pessimism--began to turn toward the half-way house of Kierkegaardian existentialism, where humanity was provided at least with some degree of latitude in his power to determine his own destiny. And indeed Freud's inquiry into the human psyche, though postulating a universal equation in biology, stimulus and response, nevertheless, demonstrated as its own basic raison that to understand one's own constitution was to somehow re-acquire some of the lost magnificence of man. That is to say, when a man understands the working of his knee-joint, for example, the discovery of its mechanical principle does not render man any the more mechanical. The fact that the mind has the awesome power to contemplate itself contemplating itself, lends it a strength that cannot be de-
nied, if it is agreed that knowledge is power.

Into this cauldron came the chronicler Ibsen, with an ear to the nineteenth-century winds of change, hearing the still metamorphosing maelstrom of debate, conditioned by years of theater management and nearly half a century of successful playwrighting. Thus he wrote a masterful story of a group of people who were caught in a volatile social flux. Ibsen's masterpiece, catching these tragic figures in their struggles, accomplishes several objectives. It shows how the dramatist, perhaps before the historian, can discern with remarkable accuracy the historical significance of an era. It shows how Ibsen, with exemplary virtuosity, was able to correlate several conflicting philosophical views, and even anticipate the trajectory of history (Freud's opus magnum). It is exhibit "A" offered as proof that Ibsen was a playwright of classical proportions who could yet claim that same popularity with the masses as have all artists who have survived the test of time.

The demonstrated ease with which Hedda Gabler has been explicated through these different perspectives is impressive evidence to the multiplicity of Ibsen's vision, his skills as an observer, and his talent as a playwright of monumental capacity. The immediacy of his nineteenth century vision is apparent in his masterful dramatization of the existential reality and the irre-
sistibility with which the dilemma of freedom dawned in the affairs of man. 21 This "tragedy of freedom" is essentially a twentieth century phenomenon.

If one could characterize classical literature as literature depicting the synthesis of the whole man; as a composite of the head, the heart, and the body, each representing the rational, the romantic, and the naturalist view; if one could see the classical man as one who--by virtue of biological, religious, and social tyranny--has come by his "essence before existence," then one must classify Hedda Gabler as a classical drama. 22 But the prestidigitator Ibsen, who has been called, perhaps quite justifiably, the father of modern drama, bridged that gap that separates classical yesterday from contemporary today. And he performed this feat by blending two fundamentally alien philosophies; existentialism with its existence-before-essence, and the naturalistic essence-before-existence. Conceived on the classical soil of his own milieu, his art adhered to the classical dicta of determinism and form; but as his creation took wing it un-

21 A man is free, claim the existentialists, when he chooses his own will over the claims of others and accepts the fact of his own death.

22 Wesley Barnes, Existentialism (Woodbury, New York: Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 1968). The reader is referred to this enlightening book for a comparison of existentialistic and classical literature.
derwent transformation and somewhere in flight it became a manifesto of freedom, shaking loose the fetters of the classical form, unfurling the pinions of existentialism, and ushering in the era of modern drama.


Shafer, Robert, ed. **Beowulf to Thomas Hardy**, New York: Doubleday Doran and Co., Inc., 1940.


