

Hedda Gabler on The Self-destructive Path of Abjection

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ABSTRACT:

Julia Kristeva in her book the Powers of horror: An Essay on Abjection sheds light upon the idea of abjection. She delineates abjection as a process by which we define ourselves by rejecting what we are not and this rejection of the abject is accompanied by repulsion, nausea and aversion. Kristeva states that the abjectifying process is necessary for setting a boundary between the self and the other and this process leads to self-recognition. Various interpretations have been provided to explain the main reason for the hostile behavior of Hedda in the play Hedda Gabler by Henrik Ibsen. In this paper, many of her antagonistic and negative behaviors, specially her suicide at the end of the play, are to be scrutinized through the lenses of abjection. This paper attempts to show that the main reason for the suicidal act of Hedda is her self-identification with the abject; which in this case is her middle class status. Thus, the writers of this article will clarify that Hedda tries to arrive at a lucid self-definition through the concept of abjection but her futile attempts encounter her with the abject middle class status at the end and this recognition of the abject leads her toward suicide.

Key words: Abjection, Henrik Ibsen, Heda Gabler, Julia Kristeva, Self-identification, Suicide

By defying the stereotypical character portrayals and disturbing the typical expectations of the audience, the plays with unusual characters arouse various responses in the audience. Thus, those works of literature with these ambiguous characters prove to be controversial. The play *Hedda Gabler* by Henrik Ibsen is no exception. As the name of the play suggests, it revolves around the main character, Hedda. Thus in order to understand the core idea of the play, there have been various interpretations regarding the motives and actions of the protagonist. As Herbert Blau in his article "Hedda Gabler: The irony of decadence" states "Hedda is repulsive and fascinating at once (an ambivalence which has attracted so many actresses to the part)" (Blau 113). The complex behavior of this character requires full dexterity of the actresses who play this role. Two different productions of the work endowed the audience with two antipodal reactions, for instance. Joan Templeton on a review of the play's production stated that the melodramatic appearance of Burton, the actress, surprised the audience about Hedda's suicide at the end of the play "Why did she kill herself? I heard perplexed audience members asking each other as they left the theatre" (Templeton 485). On the other hand, Yvonne Shafer commented on another production of the play saying that the performance of the Christin Weilkin was "with a predictable sameness: usually Hedda foreshadows her suicide from her first entrance by strolling about the stage, taking long anguished pauses and