

## Comments on the character of Hedda

---

Read through the following statements made about Hedda Gabler and discuss whether you agree or disagree with the comments made. For each one that you agree with find evidence from the play to support the idea and for any that you disagree with explain why:

Many critics, whether European, British, or American, were horrified by Hedda Gabler. One appalled response was to deny that such a woman could exist in real life. A Norwegian critic called her a "monster created by the author in the form of a woman who has no counterpart in the real world." Another response was to classify Hedda as abnormal or perverted. The Danish critic George Brandes found her "a true type of degeneration" incapable "of yielding herself, body and soul, to the man she loves." For Hjalmer Boyeson she was "a complete perversion of womanhood." Others explained her as an example of the New Woman, a female character common in fiction in the 1890s, when women were actively demanding equality with men.

From: <http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/cs6/ibsen.html>

From Munich, on June 29, 1890, Ibsen wrote to the Swedish poet, Count Carl Soilsky: "The title of the play is 'Hedda Gabler'. My intention in giving it this name was to indicate that Hedda, as a personality, is to be regarded rather as her father's daughter than as her husband's wife. It was not my desire to deal in this play with so-called problems. What I principally wanted to do was to depict human beings, human emotions, and human destinies, upon a groundwork of certain of the social conditions and principles of the present day."

From: <http://classiclit.about.com/library/bl-etexts/hibsen/bl-hibsen-hedda-intro.htm>

The work reveals Hedda Gabler as a selfish, cynical woman bored by her marriage to the scholar Jorgen Tesman.

From: The Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia of Literature (extract on <http://2020ok.com/books/39/hedda-gabler-18639.htm>)

In the 1950s, Joseph Wood Krutch thought that Hedda Gabler was an evil woman. However, more recent critics explain her behavior in terms of the restrictive social conditions of nineteenth century Norway.

This view is well presented by Caroline Mayerson:

"...Hedda is a woman, not a monster; neurotic, but not psychotic. Thus she may be held accountable for her behavior. But she is spiritually sterile. Her yearning for self-realization through exercise of her natural endowments is in conflict with her enslavement to a narrow standard of conduct."(132)

From: <http://novaonline.nvcc.edu/eli/eng252/heddastudy.htm>

Krutch, Joseph Wood. "Modernism" in *Modern Drama: A Definition and an Estimate*. Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1953. Rpt. by Cornell University Paperbacks, 1966.

Mayerson, Caroline W. "Thematic Symbols in *Hedda Gabler*." In Rolf Fjelde, Ed. *Ibsen: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.:Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965, 131-138.