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*Dramatic Publishing*



HENRIK IBSEN'S

*Hedda Gabler*

adapted by  
JOHN OSBORNE



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY



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(HEDDA GABLER)

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## INTRODUCTION

I have been fascinated for a long time by *Hedda Gabler*. By this, I don't mean merely the character, but the play itself. For, like most great plays, the apparent central character exists only by the favor of the other characters in the play, however small. I have read the play many times and seen several productions in English, including the lamentable Scandinavian one by Ingmar Bergman.

The first production I saw was that of Glen Byam Shaw, with Peggy Ashcroft as Hedda. I only managed to get into the theatre by convincing my Pakistani lodger that we were, in fact, going into the Hammersmith Palais de Danse to pick up some girls.

Seeing the play then, and having seen it several times since, it seems clear to me, although this may be a glib assumption, that Ibsen did not set out to write one great part for an actress. Again, as in all good plays, all the parts are good and relevant and essential. Take, for instance, the tenacity of Mrs. Elvsted. Hedda Gabler cannot begin to cope with it. Hedda is a victim. She is not tragic but desperately needs to get the minimal rewards of life.

She is petty, puny, frigid and clearly unable to carry through any relationship.

The last straw is clearly Judge Brack, who uses her, or intends to. She is immediately aware of this situation and compounds it. She is indolently evil and lives off her own fantasies, absorbing from people better than herself.

The idea of being made pregnant -- by anyone, even Lövborg -- is repellent to her. Her tragedy, if it can be called one, is that of being born bored and that is what is fascinating about her in the annals of dramatic literature. The very concept was unique at the time. She is a loser, whereas Mrs. Elvsted is an odds-on favorite.

The important point about the adaptation and production of the play is very simple: the complexity of the character of Hedda Gabler is richer only if the other characters in the play are also seen to be made as rich as they are.

They are all, by any standards, a pretty shabby lot. Hedda is a born victim but she does have the gift of energy, while Mrs. Elvsted is a very cold cookie indeed.

What would happen after the last scene? These speculations are always intriguing but, of course, fruitless. The situation is not nearly as open as that of *The Doll's House*. But Nora is stronger and less distracted and commonplace and unable to create her own timing.

As I see it, Hedda Gabler has her fun at the expense of others. She has a sharp wit but no authentic sense of humor. She is a bourgeois snob and a walking waste of human personality. What, for instance, about her honeymoon? What did she really do? Of course, she was bored. But, tied to her timidity, she also chose to be bored and I think that outset of the play is the core of her tragedy, if that is what it is. Like many frigid people, her only true feelings are expressed in jealousy, possessiveness and acquisitive yearnings.

For instance, she is completely unable to initiate situations in her life. It seems quite clear, to me anyway, that the Gabler house would be furnished and decorated by Juliana and that the horses would be bought by Tesman himself.

She always has to be the center of attention, would like to be a great lady and would be bored whatever she did or whatever happened to her. A great, largely misused play.

JOHN OSBORNE

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**HEDDA GABLER**  
*A Full-Length Play*  
**For Three Men and Four Women**

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**CHARACTERS**

**JULIANA TESMAN**

**BERTHE**

**GEORGE TESMAN**

**HEDDA TESMAN**

**THEA ELVSTED**

**JUDGE BRACK**

**EILERT LÖVBORG**

**TIME:**       *Late Nineteenth Century.*

**PLACE:**     *The drawing room of the Tesman home.*



## HEDDA GABLER

The tact and skill with which John Osborne has employed his talents as a dramatist to bring out the greatness of this nineteenth century masterpiece for a twentieth century audience offer a new perspective on his gifts, and give the modern audience the benefits of his special professional insights into the playwright's craft.



## PROPERTIES

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### GENERAL PROPERTIES:

These rooms should have the appearance of having been furnished with great care.

Drawing room: sofa, chairs, end tables, coffee table, piano, shelves containing terra-cotta and majolica ornaments, dark-tiled stove, armchair, stool, log basket, poker, draw curtains at French windows, curtains at doorway to dining area, bell pull near hall door.

Act One: Flowers have been placed here and there about the room; a suitcase sits on the floor by the sofa.

Act Two: The piano has been removed (presumably to the dining alcove, where it is not visible during the remainder of the play) and replaced by an elegant little desk with a bookshelf and a drawer which can be locked.

On the desk is a pistol case containing two pistols; in a desk drawer is a photograph album. A small table is left of the sofa. All the flowers are gone, except for Mrs. Elvsted's. Act Three: Lamp on coffee table; hand mirror on desk.

Dining area: dining table with chairs, hanging lamp, portrait of Hedda's father (a general), cigarettes on table.

### PERSONAL PROPERTIES:

BERTHE: An aging servant girl.

Act One: Bunch of paper-wrapped flowers.

Act Two: Glasses and carafes of punch; lighted lamp.

Act Three: Letter.

Act Four: Lighted lamp; black armband for coat.

JULIANA: In her mid-sixties; handsome, kindly, simply but well dressed. Hat, parasol. In Act Four, mourning clothes.



Act One: Flat, newspaper-wrapped packet containing embroidered men's slippers.

**GEORGE TESMAN:** In his mid-thirties, untidy, cheerful, plumpish but young-looking; wears eye-glasses. In Act Two, gray walking suit and soft felt hat, later changing to evening wear, with hat and gloves.

Act One: Letter.

Act Two: Several unbound books and parcels; tray containing carafe of punch, glasses and a dish of biscuits.

Act Three: Wrapped package.

**HEDDA:** A beautiful and elegant young lady. In Act One, a fine-looking loose-fitting morning dress; Act Two, dressed to receive visitors; Act Four, in mourning clothes.

Act Three: Quilt.

**MRS. ELVSTED:** Fragile, intense, slightly younger than Hedda. The careful taste of her dress is less bold than Hedda's. Wears a wristwatch.

Act One: Piece of paper in her pocket.

Act Two: Dressed for company.

Act Three: Large shawl.

Act Four: Hat and coat over same outfit as in Act Two. Small sheets of paper in her skirt pocket.

**JUDGE BRACK:** In his mid-forties, short but athletic and stringy. Rather dandyish. In Act Two, dressed for a bachelor party, carries a light overcoat and a hat.

Act Two: Cigarettes; watch.

Act Four: Hat.

**EILERT LÖVBORG:** Slim and trim, in his mid-thirties. His face is pale with pinkish marks on his cheekbones. Dressed in an elegant black suit. Carries dark gloves and top hat.

Act Two: A wrapped package in his coat pocket.

Act Three: Overcoat, hat.

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# ACT ONE

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**SCENE:** The Tesman drawing room. Large, furnished carefully. R is a double door to the hall. Hanging near this door is a cord used for summoning a servant. L, opposite, a glass door /called French windows/ fitted with draw curtains. Through the panes of the door, we see a glass-roofed veranda and autumn trees. A piano is situated DL near the French windows. An armchair, a stool, a log basket containing logs, and a stoker iron are near a dark-tiled stove DR. URC and ULC are shelves containing terra-cotta and majolica ornaments. Next to the sofa C, on the floor, sits a suitcase. In front of the sofa is a coffee table. There may also be other furnishings as desired, tables, lamps, other chairs, etc. Upstage is a wide door opening with drawn back curtains leading to a smaller room used as a dining room, also furnished carefully, as desired. Among the furnishings should be a table and chairs, a lamp suspended from the ceiling over the table, and a portrait of Hedda's father, General Gabler, hanging on the UC wall.)

**AT RISE OF CURTAIN:** There are flowers everywhere and the morning sun shines through the windows. JULIANA TESMAN enters from the hall. She is in her mid-sixties, handsome, kindly, simply but well dressed. She is wearing a hat and carrying

a parasol. BERTHE, an aging country servant girl, follows her in carrying a bunch of paper-wrapped flowers.)

JULIANA (stops, listening). Do you know, I think they're still not up yet.

BERTHE. There you are. What did I say? But you just think what time that steamer came in last night. And then afterwards. Afterwards, that was just the beginning. The things that young lady wanted unpacked and put away and all before she'd even talk of going off to bed.

JULIANA. I'm sure. Well, let's just let them have a good rest. Relax and recover. Some good fresh air for them when they come down. (She opens the French windows wide.)

BERTHE. I don't think there's really a place left to put any of these. Perhaps here. I don't know. (Puts flowers on piano.)

JULIANA. You've got a new master now. And a new mistress. Dear Berthe, it's not easy to see you go.

BERTHE. Oh, Miss Juliana. What can I say? Looking after you and all. It's been so long.

JULIANA. You must adjust, Berthe. Nothing more. No worse than that. You see, George really does need to have you in the house. Just as when he was a little boy. And after all, you are used to him.

BERTHE. Oh, I know, miss, but I keep thinking about her.

JULIANA. My dear Berthe . . . now . . . you really mustn't worry too much on my sister's account.

BERTHE. But I do. Of course I do.

JULIANA. I can look after her.

BERTHE. Lying . . . helpless there. That new girl just won't know. What to do, I mean.

JULIANA. I can teach her. I'll have to do most of it myself, anyhow.

BERTHE. Well, yes, but the real thing is, miss, I mean, what I'm afraid of is that I won't be up to the young lady. . . .

JULIANA. Good heavens, there are certain to be odd things, here and there, to start with.

BERTHE. All her requirements . . . everything has to be exactly so-so.

JULIANA. Heavens, she'd be bound to. General Gabler's daughter! Think what she must have been used to when he was still alive. Do you remember that time we saw them riding along the road together? In her long black cloth skirt? And the feather in her hat?

BERTHE. Oh, I remember all right. But it never even struck me then that she and Master George would ever end up together, well, married.

JULIANA. No, I must confess it never occurred to me either. But there it is. And do try to remember not to keep calling him Master George. He's Doctor Tesman now.

BERTHE. I know. The young lady -- madam -- told me that last night, too. As soon as she got in the door. I can't quite get used to it.

JULIANA. Well, you must because that's what he is now. Since he's been on his travels. It was quite news to me. They were still getting off the boat. . . .

BERTHE. I should think he could do anything, that one. He's a clever one all right. But I can't say I ever thought of him looking after people's insides and things.

JULIANA. Oh, Berthe, he's not been made that kind of doctor at all. Besides, you'll probably find yourself having to call him something much more

grand and impressive later on.

BERTHE. No! Like what, miss?

JULIANA. Ah, yes. If everyone knew or guessed. (Moved.) If only his poor old father could look down and see how his little Georgie's turned out. Berthe, what have you been doing? Why are the covers off all the chairs?

BERTHE. Madam told me. "Can't stand that sort of thing." That's what she said.

JULIANA. But they're not going to use this room for everyday, are they?

BERTHE. That's what she said. He didn't say anything. I mean . . . Doctor Tesman.

(GEORGE TESMAN comes in. He is in his mid-thirties, untidy, cheerful, plumpish but young-looking.)

JULIANA. Well, good morning. Good morning, George.

TESMAN. Auntie! Dear Auntie! All the way here . . . at this time of the day. Um?

JULIANA. I thought I should just drop in on you.

TESMAN. But what about your sleep?

JULIANA. Oh, I can manage.

TESMAN. You got home all right then?

JULIANA. Judge Brack took me all the way to the door.

TESMAN. How kind of him. I was so worried about not giving you a lift ourselves. But, you could see, Hedda had so much baggage with her and she needed it all at once, I'm afraid.

JULIANA. There did seem rather a lot.

BERTHE. Should I go in and ask Madam if there's anything I can help her with?

TESMAN. No, thank you very much, Berthe. If there's anything, she told me, she'd call

BERTHE. Very well then . . .

TESMAN. Oh, you might take this suitcase.

BERTHE. It can go in the attic. (Picks up suitcase and carries it out through the hall door.)

TESMAN. Honestly, Auntie, can you imagine, that case is stuffed full of my papers? The things I've managed to collect -- unearthed, dug out all over the place. Extraordinary . . .

JULIANA. Yes. I didn't think your honeymoon would be exactly wasted, George.

TESMAN. Not a bit of it. Believe me. Come along, Auntie, let's have your hat off then. What's that!

JULIANA. Oh, my goodness, this is really just like old times. When we were all still together.

TESMAN. I say, what a really fine, elegant hat old Auntie's gone and got herself. (He twirls it around.)

JULIANA. It's for Hedda.

TESMAN. For Hedda? What's that?

JULIANA. That's right. We can't have her feeling ashamed of me when we're out walking together in the street.

TESMAN (pats JULIANA). Always one ahead, Auntie. (He puts the hat on a chair by the table.) Now . . . come on then. We're going to have a little sit-down on the sofa here and you and I can have a bit of a chat and gossip before Hedda comes down. (They sit. JULIANA leans her parasol against the sofa, then takes TESMAN's hand and looks at him.)

JULIANA. Oh, George, it's almost unbelievable seeing you again right here in front of me. If your father could have seen you, now, as you are.

TESMAN. What do you think it's like for me then? Seeing you -- oh, Auntie! You've been everything to me, you know.

JULIANA. Yes, I think I do know. You still like your old aunties. Both of them.

TESMAN. Auntie Rina -- no improvement then?

JULIANA. No, my dear. I don't think we can expect any now. The years don't change. She'll just go on lying there. I keep hoping she'll stay with us a bit longer. I don't quite know what I'd do without her, you see, George. Especially now, when I don't have you any more.

TESMAN. No, no. There now . . . (Pats JULIANA again. She rallies quickly.)

JULIANA. But when I think of it . . . you, George, a married man! And going off with Hedda Gabler, of all things! Beautiful Hedda Gabler. Just think of all those others who were after her!

TESMAN (happily). Uhum . . . I should think there are quite a few around these parts who wouldn't mind being in my place. What's that?

JULIANA. And you with your great, long honeymoon . . . five, what, no, six months.

TESMAN. Well, it's been a bit of a working holiday for me as well, you know. You should have seen the archives, let alone the books I managed to get through.

JULIANA. I dare say. (More intimately.) You've nothing else to tell me?

TESMAN. About the trip, you mean?

JULIANA. Well, yes.

TESMAN. Let's think. Not much, really, apart from what I already wrote to you. I told you all about actually getting my doctorate and all of that yesterday, didn't I?

JULIANA. Oh, yes. But you don't, I mean, have any other news?

TESMAN. News?

JULIANA. Oh, George, come along. You are talking



with your old auntie.

TESMAN. Well, I suppose I do have some news, yes.

JULIANA. Yes?

TESMAN. It seems there's a pretty good chance of my becoming a professor.

JULIANA. Oh . . . a professor. Really?

TESMAN. In fact, it's more or less a certainty. But, Auntie, you knew about that.

JULIANA (laughing). Naturally I did. (Changing mood.) But what about the trip itself? It must have set you back a great deal of money, George.

TESMAN. It did that! I couldn't have ever managed without my research grant.

JULIANA. I can't make out how on earth you managed to stretch it out for the two of you.

TESMAN. Well, it wasn't easy, now you mention it.

JULIANA. And even more so when you're traveling along with a young lady. Everything must surely become that much more expensive. That's what they tell me, anyway.

TESMAN. It certainly did add up on that account. But then, Hedda had to have a really proper honeymoon. She likes things done with style or not bother.

JULIANA. Oh, I see that. Trips abroad are obviously all the rage these days. Tell me now, have you managed to take a good look at everything in the house yet?

TESMAN. I certainly have. I was up very first thing.

JULIANA. And . . . what do you think?

TESMAN. Splendid. Absolutely splendid. Only thing I can't think is what we'll ever do with those two empty rooms between the little one at the back and Hedda's own bedroom.

JULIANA (slight laugh). My dear Georgie, I think

you'll find you've got a use for them before very long.

TESMAN. Yes, you're probably right there, Auntie. The way my book collection keeps piling up. Um?

JULIANA. Exactly, my dear. It was your books I was thinking of all along.

TESMAN. But it's Hedda I'm really happy about. As far as this house is concerned. She always said, before we were engaged, she couldn't bear the thought of dining anywhere else but in Mrs. Falk's house. The Prime Minister's place and nothing less.

JULIANA. And it actually coming on to the market just after you'd left.

TESMAN. Everything seemed to be on our side suddenly.

JULIANA. But such a lot of money, Georgie. There'll be such a lot, for all this, you'll have to pay out.

TESMAN (timidly). I suppose there really will.

JULIANA. Oh, dear heavens, I'm afraid there will.

TESMAN. What do you think? Roughly, I mean? Um?

JULIANA. I wouldn't like to think 'til we've seen all the bills come in.

TESMAN. Well, at least we were lucky to have Judge Brack do it for us on such favorable terms. He wrote and told Hedda he'd managed to get it all through jolly reasonably one way and another.

JULIANA. You're not to worry yourself about it, my dear. I stood as guarantor myself on the carpets and curtains.

TESMAN. You did? But, Auntie, what kind of security could you offer?

JULIANA. I managed a mortgage on the annuity.

TESMAN. On your annuity?

JULIANA. And your Auntie Rina's. There wasn't much alternative.

TESMAN. But you must be quite mad. That interest money is all the two of you have to live off.

JULIANA. Oh, come, it's nothing like as bad as all that. It's only really a formality. Judge Brack said that himself. If you must know, he was the one who was kind enough to arrange the whole thing. And, anyway, he told me it's no more than a formality.

TESMAN. That might be so, but all the same . . .

JULIANA. Besides, you've got your own earnings you can rely on now. Good heavens, if we can't be allowed to help out a bit, just at the beginning at least. What could be happier for us?

TESMAN. Oh, Auntie, you never seem to stop sacrificing yourself for me. (JULIANA gets up and places her hands on TESMAN's shoulders.)

JULIANA. Do you think I have any greater joy in this world than easing things a little for you, my dear? You've had neither father nor mother to turn to. But now, now look where you've got to. It's been hard, oh, yes, but that's past. It's past for you, Georgie. You're on your way!

TESMAN. Yes, it does seem to have somehow worked itself out.

JULIANA. It has. You remember all those who were up against you and trying to bring you down all the time. Don't tell me! Well, now they know where they are. And the worst of the lot, you know who I mean. He's had his comeuppance, like he wanted for you. Stupid fool.

TESMAN. Have you heard anything of Eilert? Since I went away?

JULIANA. No. Oh, I think he's supposed to have had

some new book published.

TESMAN. A book? Eilert Lövborg? What sort of a book? But when? I mean . . . lately? Um?

JULIANA. So I hear. Lord knows if there's anything special about that. When your new book comes out, now that really will be something, George. What's it going to be all about?

TESMAN. About? Oh, it will be about -- deal with -- domestic handicrafts as an industry in medieval Brabant.

JULIANA. When I think of it . . . what a mind you've got in there, writing about all these things.

TESMAN. There's a long way to go with it yet. I've got all these . . . oh . . . notes -- not just notes -- volumes of stuff. It's got to be all arranged and put together.

JULIANA. You're a great one for that. Arranging everything, putting it together properly. You're not your father's son for nothing.

TESMAN. I can't wait to get down to it properly. Especially now, when I've got everything -- my own house. Oh . . .

JULIANA. And, most important of all, the one person you wanted in the world most of all. Dear Georgie . . . (TESMAN hugs JULIANA.)

TESMAN. Oh, yes, Auntie. Yes, my dear Auntie. That's the very best thing of all -- Hedda. Wait a minute. I think that . . . yes . . . that's her. Now. Yes? It is.

(HEDDA enters. She is wearing a fine-looking, loose-fitting morning dress.)

JULIANA (going to meet HEDDA). Hedda, my dear! Good morning. A very good morning to you, my dear,