

The Wild Duck's Hedvig: An Adolescent Dragged to Suicide

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Doi: [10.19044/esipreprint.5.2023.p477](https://doi.org/10.19044/esipreprint.5.2023.p477)

Approved: 27 May 2023

Posted: 29 May 2023

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Cite As:

Fahes S. (2023). *The Wild Duck's Hedvig: An Adolescent Dragged to Suicide*. ESI Preprints. <https://doi.org/10.19044/esipreprint.5.2023.p477>

Abstract

Adolescents predominantly experience fluctuations and turmoil during a stage that witnesses conflicts of multiple forms emanating from a wide variety of sources. Such individuals wallow in the mire of crises that start with quarrels within the family and self-harm, pass through drug abuse and end in suicide. It is the latter phenomenon that this paper seeks an investigation of, in particular as regards the suicide of Hedvig Ekdal in Henrik Ibsen's play, *The Wild Duck*. Controversy looms large in the critical interpretations of Hedvig's suicide, some construing it as an accidental fate, others accusing Gregers Werle, or blaming her father, Hjalmar, and still others seeing her mother, Gina, as the perpetrator. No matter who the culprit is, literature seems short of investigating the roots of this suicide from socio-psychological perspectives. This paper thus picks up the gap in existing literature so as to clarify why the sensitive adolescent girl, Hedvig, takes the matter of ending her life into her own hands.

Keywords: Suicide, adolescent, sacrifice, neglect, conflict, family

Introduction

The Wild Duck, issued in 1884 (Gosse, 1889/2003, p. 81) dramatizes suicide, which – being quite a recurrent theme in Ibsen's work – is seen as “his obsession” (“From a pseudonymous notice by ‘Mordred’, *referee*,” 1905, p. 430). In the play, the young girl, Hedvig, kills herself using a pistol as she enters the loft where the family keep the wild duck. Various interpretations analyze the motives that pushed Hedvig to commit suicide, some of them apparently contradicting each other.

Review of Literature

The Moral Value of Hedvig's Suicide

The first noteworthy split of opinions regarding Hedvig's suicide in the play is founded on its moral significance. McFarlane (1971) argues that the girl's self-sacrifice is pointless and her doom is worthy of "pity" (p. xiv). This attitude is countered by Viesland (2005), who basically contends that this suicide is a positive deed – a suicide effected by the will to die. He claims that although Hedvig is relatively blind, she manages to gain insight in the attic – an insight that takes the form of self-knowledge as Hedvig realizes her oneness with the duck and her separation from the material linguistic world, in a process of sublimation. In fact, Viesland relies on Freudian, Lacanian, Hegelian and Nietzschean philosophies that see the attic as a subject of fantasy and the wild duck "an object of desire" (p. 49). Hence, he invites the reader to view Hedvig, Gregers, Hjalmar, and Old Ekdal as the Others desiring the wild duck. He then compares Hedvig to the wild duck because she is also the object of Gregers's excessive desire, as Lacan's philosophy propagates (p.50). Hedvig herself says that the duck is like her because nobody knows her origin. The resemblance between the girl and the duck, claims Viesland, also pertains to their both being on the threshold of puberty and early adolescence, which signifies some kind of metamorphosis. This exaltation of Hedvig's suicide is quite reminiscent of the assumption that Hedvig is truly the "first tragic hero or heroine of Ibsen's" (Fulsas & Rem, 2018, p.127).

A Mysterious Cause of Suicide

Significantly, according to a pseudonymous notice by 'Mordred', *referee*," (1905), Ibsen's repeated event of having some "poor creature" seems confusing (p. 430). Thus, the instigator, Gregers – who produces much nonsense talk on what ideals are yet produces inadvertent mischief – could be mad since no benefit whatsoever may be harvested from his instigating such a violent act. Similarly, as claimed in an "Unsigned theatre comment, *referee*" (1905), it is quite incomprehensible why Gregers prompts Hedvig to kill herself. Neither is it explicable why, at the end of the play, upon being asked what his destiny is, he replies: "To be the thirteenth" man at table and transforms the ending to a riddle (p.433). Adding to the mystery is the fact that Hedvig never entertained the idea of suicide. Besides, it is so foolhardy to think of killing one's pet to show filial love – as Gregers tries convince Hedvig to do. The performance of the brutal act simply as a show of misery also sounds far-fetched, for it is illogical to put forth the suggestion that when Hedvig overhears her father's remark that she would never sacrifice herself for him, the girl commits suicide. By these standards, the act appears implausible and even idiotic, thereby making

Ibsen's play a work which classifies with the category of crazy and meaningless dramas (p.434).

A Death by Accident

On another scale, some critics acknowledge the scenario of accidental death. Viesland (2005) describes Hedvig's death as "an accident that overthrows determinism; for it is her *will* to die that makes her escape the status as object of the Other" (p.51). Østerud (1996) expounds that whereas her father is always playing a game where "real life is put on hold when the game is underway", Hedvig is oblivious as to the rules (p.165). Consequently, her sacrifice results in neither insight nor hamartia, making her no "tragic heroine". As Viesland contends, the suicidal act is an outcome of "factors totally beyond her control" – mainly the indiscretion of the adults around her and her "father's need to keep the truth at arm's length" – that cause her disorientation and victimization as "she is called upon to pull their chestnuts out of the fire" (p.166). Thus, her death is but an accidental act, not a tragic one.

Hedvig's suicide has also led to contention that handles her feminine nature. One of the interpretations claims that Hedvig represents female sacrifice. The "frightened, loving" girl who is trying to comprehend the world (Moi, 2002/2005, p. 422), as she is on the threshold of "womanhood", plays the role of females who sacrifice themselves while simultaneously wasting their human "potential" because they are women (Harad, 2005, p. 411).

Another more significant perspective takes into account the impact of the adult world on Hedvig, basically because she is still growing into womanhood. Northam (1973/1999) denies that Hedvig kills herself immediately after overhearing what Hjalmar says about self-sacrifice, for "the balance of evidence is against this". He takes into consideration the thickness of the doors of the attic that allow no sounds to be heard throughout the play (p. 80) and the inadequacy of timing –implausible as it is – since Hedvig needs to overhear, comprehend, decide, and then take action all at once. To Northam, the more credible explanation may be that the suicide is not born of an instant but is rather "the culmination of a process in keeping with her character", for she is "a thoughtful child" who finds out that there is discrepancy between what grown-ups say and what they mean, so she goes to the attic, with Gregor's words about shooting the duck on her mind, and she chooses to kill herself, instead, "for love" (p.81). McFarlane (1971) also classifies *The Wild Duck* as a dramatic portrayal of "the shock of growing up" – of Hedvig's rise from childhood, intimidated by her status at the "threshold of adulthood". Of such a critical age, Hedvig shows sensitiveness towards the moods of the adults she lives with, and she

perishes in effect to “emotional entanglements” and the confusion of loyalties as of her parents (p. xiv). Likewise, Østerud (1996), laying blame on the adults surrounding her – those adults that have failed to grow up and resumed their lives under the shadow of a lie – sees in Hedvig’s suicide a self-sacrifice of a daughter for the sake of her father (p.153). Østerud proffers the example of Hjalmar coming back home after being humiliated at the party. He starts to act as if on stage, and his reactions to Hedvig’s notes about his hair take the semblance of a photo session, with Hedvig becoming the photographer behind the camera who is ultimately dragged to concede to his own taste: “to what he *wants to be*, and what lies imagination tells him he is.” Noticeably, Østerud believes that the only character free of illusions in the play is Hedvig, so due to her inability to comprehend, she has to give in to the inclinations of the grown-ups, in the aftermath of which she cannot reach her future, trapped in the photography studio as she is (p.158).

Finney (1994), however, believes that Gina’s susceptibility plays a role in driving her daughter to the option of suicide. Insofar as she brings into being a “web of lies and deceit” when she remains reticent concerning her relationship with old Werle, Gina is a culprit. She seeks a purgation of this history by becoming totally and “compulsively obsessed with order, subordinating humaneness to neatness”, yet to no avail. The moment the truth is unveiled by Gregers, the child is driven to suicide instead of being saved, as is her mother’s wish (p. 99).

Nonetheless, the most analyses of *The Wild Duck* accuse Gregers of enticing Hedvig to commit suicide. Meyer (1967/ 1980) expounds how *The Wild Duck* diverges from his own creed in which he advocates ideals and denounces conciliation. That is because the moment Gregers ushers into the family with his holy mission of leading them to an ideal world where “illusions” are unveiled and truth is absolute, he triggers their demise (p.24). Sprinchorn (1980), also argues that Hedvig’s suicide is the outcome of Gregers’ dialogue. Describing him as “harmful” and “fool”, the writer decries his “pernicious” sway as he “blunders into the happy Ekdal home” and ends up annihilating it (p.127). Intensifying the blame, Sprinchorn compares Gregers to a “demon casting an evil spell on Hedvig” because of his own history of suffering and his miserable childhood (p.128).

Shaw (1891) debates that both Hjalmar and Gregers augment Hedvig’s predisposition to sacrifice herself. He explains that due to Hjalmar’s “theatrical repudiation” of his daughter in the wake of revealing doubt as to her descent, her “ideal” position in the home is shattered, hence becoming an origin of “discord”. Shaw contends that her suicide occurs after she hears the speech of Gregers, the “idealist mischief-maker”, on the “duty and beauty” of sacrificing oneself for the sake of others, even if he at that moment seems oblivious as to the fact “that he might be taken in mortal

earnest” (p.99). Macfall (1907) reckons, too, that both Gregers and Hjalmar have precipitated the death of the “sensitive noble-hearted girl”. The instructions Gregers gives her on self-sacrifice that make him “her sole guide in trouble” and the deep wound Hjalmar’s repudiation cuts into her combine to create in her a belief in the value of sacrificing the wild duck – “her most treasured belonging” – so as to make amends to her father (p. 256). However, as Macfall claims, being agonized by having to sacrifice the innocent duck in order to serve her own purpose with her father, the girl decides to kill herself instead (p. 257). Likewise, Jones (1891/2003), a champion of Hedvig’s, acclaims her “irresistibly touching image”. He defends her against her “humberging father”, Hjalmar Ekdal, “the seedy, selfish – subtly selfish and self-deceptive – photographer, in whom nothing is active but the tongue”, and against Gregers, the “transcendent meddler”, the males who bring about Hedvig’s ultimate fall (p. 243).

On the other hand, Clurman (1977) lays all the blame on Hjalmar who, upon discovering that Hedvig might not be his daughter because Gina refuses to admit to any facts, believes that Hedvig has shattered “the peace” in his life and accordingly treats her callously. This, Clurman argues, “indirectly precipitates” her suicide (p.136). Hence, describing Hjalmar as an “archetype of self-delusion and self-indulgence”, Clurman condemns the father and husband who plays the role of a spoiled man, doing things the easiest way by throwing the burden on Hedvig and Gina (p.138). On parallel ground, according to Østerud (1996), because Hedvig is far from being pretentious, upon hearing her father’s melodramatic skepticism concerning her genuine love to him, she sacrifices herself in the loft. By shooting herself, and opposite to Hjalmar’s suspicions, as Østerud, debates, Hedvig proves herself honest: that she means and says one and the same thing (p. 165).

Northam (1973/1999) sees the process of Hedvig’s fate as follows: After she is repudiated by Hjalmar, she sinks into “utter despair”, so much so that even Gregers tries to plead he “meant well”. Then, Hedvig finds him the only guide, the sole adult that she finds solace with because he shows “poetic sympathy”. Subsequently, she “delivers herself to him” and sees in his words the relief she badly desires. Because she is confused, the only way she can wipe away the turbulence is following Gregers’ example, like adopting the duck as a symbol (p.77). Giving the duck religious overtones and manipulating the rhetorical impact of “I still have faith in you”, Gregers manages to sway Hedvig to his side. As a result, she yields when she ultimately kills herself (Gosse, 1889/2003, p.79). Here, Gosse (1889/2003) describes Hedvig as a “morbid” girl led to her doom by the “neurotic” Gregers Werle, who is “weak and bloodless” (p.89).

Among this plethora of analyses, none can be detected that does bring to the open an assessment of Hedvig's suicide based on scientific studies and conducted research. The paper at hand will thereby attempt a bridging of the gap heretofore ignored, using various studies on adolescent suicide as demonstrated in a multiple of validated research works.

Methodology

In order to validate the argument in this paper, the methodology will rely on various investigations of teen suicide. By definition, an adolescent is an individual experiencing a transitional period of development that lies between childhood and adulthood, starting at 10 to 13 years of age, and ending between 18 and 22 (Santrock, 2001, p.17). In fact, suicide is a "fatal, self-inflicted act with the explicit or inferred intent to die" (Mazza, 2006, as cited in Miller, 2011, p.7). Miller (2011) describes suicide as the final stage in a process that involves suicidal behavior, this latter being divided into four "separate but frequently overlapping conditions that exist on a continuum" (p.3). The process commences with "suicidal ideation", passes through "suicidal-related communications" and "suicide attempts", and ends with suicide. However, it is ascertained that the suicidal process is variable and may not necessarily incorporate the four stages altogether for all suicidal adolescents (p. 4).

It is contended that teens are prone to commit suicide, not merely because adolescence incorporates change, but because this stage is indeed marked by "upheaval" (Jurich, 2008, p. 29). According to Jurich, teens, as opposed to adults, are apt to be suicidal even if they suffer no psychiatric ailments. He nominates ego identity as the major "developmental task" for an adolescent – a task they may fail at realizing when they are unable to achieve autonomy. Subsequently, they are entrapped in an area of ambiguity as regards their identity, in the wake of which their self-esteem is undermined and the risk of suicide is escalated (p.43).

An adolescent's inclination to suicide is also an outcome of cognitive development at such an age. Jurich (2008) asserts that while teens do comprehend the finality of death intellectually, they have a strong ego that prevents them from confirming that if they commit suicide they will never come back to life, to the extent that they imagine they will not really die but merely drive others to empathize. This opens the gate to doubt whether such teens are actually aware as to the implications of suicide (p.45). Remarkably, although it is shown that not one concept of death is adopted by all adolescents, Slaby and McGuire (1989) claim, based on some studies, that teens deem death "transient and pleasant" (p.24)

Despite the fact that its impact is "mixed and contradictory", suicide in youngsters is precipitated by numerous factors, socioeconomic status being

one (Berman et al., 2006, as cited in Miller, 2011, p.13). In fact, socioeconomic standing and suicide are inversely proportional: the deeper people's socioeconomic status plummets, the higher suicide rate soars. For instance, a survey conducted by Qin, Agerbo, and Mortenson in 2003 on Danish youth unveiled the fact that people who suffered on the socioeconomic were five times more prone to commit suicide than those who were more affluent (Miller, 2011, p.13).

Adolescents, just as children and adults, commit suicide essentially "because they can, and because they want to" (Joiner, 2009, cited in Miller, 2011, p. 20). This means that death by suicide is achieved in case two factors exist: capability and desire (Miller, 2011, p.20). Besides, "expendability", which means feeling oneself as a burden on others, is conducive to suicide (Joiner, 2005, as cited in Miller, 2011, p.110). Desire includes the overarching states of "perceived burdensomeness and failed belongingness" (Joiner, 2009, as cited in Miller, 2011, pp. 21-22), where the former relates to a feeling one is a burden on other family members while the latter means that "that one is alienated from others and not an integral part of a family, circle of friends, or other valued groups" (Joiner, 2009, as cited in Miller p. 23).

Wagner (2009) believes that poor self-image in teens is a great driver towards suicide. Cognitively speaking, Wagner presents analysis by Rudd (2000), which relies on Beck's cognitive triad of self, others and the future. In the first category, teens perceive themselves as "worthless, ineffective, unlovable"; in the second one, they think others are "critical, rejecting"; and in the last category teens are hopeless and governed by a feeling that they are overpowered, thus thinking, for example, that they have to please others so as to avoid being rejected. In order to cope, such adolescents relentlessly try to please others, neglecting their own needs in the process (p.48). Besides, if a teenager feels "ignored", "unwanted", "unloved" or even "unlovable" – a mark of dysfunction in the family – they resort to suicide so as to mask the fact of family instability (Jurich, 2008, p. 53).

Parental neglect and abuse may also contribute to suicidal behavior in adolescents, as Hawton (1986) affirms, even if this occurs only "occasionally" (p. 73). Braga (1989), too, sees that parental indifference and rejection place high among the familial factors of teen suicide (p.6).

Wagner (2009) assesses the impact of family discord, conflicts, and stressors in precipitating suicide in teens. While about 20% of adolescent completed suicides have been found as effected by a conflict with a parent occurring immediately before the violent act (p.81), Hoberman (1989) displays other findings that stressors lead to acts of self-killing, for 90% "of Schaffer's (1974) and 64% of Potteet's samples were identified as encountering a negative event prior to their deaths" (p.71). Similarly, Carr (2002) recognizes continuous clashes with parents – especially when child

abuse is involved – as roots of suicide in adolescents (p. 40). Diamond et al (2010) consent that family disintegration is a major reason behind suicide in teens, for they argue, referring to Wagner et al, that “family cohesion, emotional support, and appropriate supervision are protective factors in preventing suicide and depression” (p.123). Hoberman (1989) also pinpoints a particular conflict, quarrel or stressor in the family occurring just before the suicide as an act precipitating a teen’s ending his/her own life (p.71).

Hoberman (1989), furthermore, presents the results of studies arguing that psychiatric disorders in families are causes of suicide in specific members, among which they mention heavy drinking in parents as leading to 26% of suicide in a sample of teens and emotional problems as causing suicide of 60% of other adolescents in another sample (p. 73).

Why is it that teens are so motivated to put an end to their lives? Carr (2002), while admitting that several reasons lie at the core of such disposition, affirms that adolescents resort to suicide as “the only feasible solution” to any crisis portending to “loss or conflict”. Subsequently, they see an outlet via suicide so as to evade an intolerable emotional disturbance, penalize oneself, attain others’ attention and sacrifice the self “for a greater good”, among other purposes (p.41).

Family history may also raise the probability of suicide in adolescents. Carr (2002), for instance, lists the following problems in families: “suicide attempts, depression, drug and alcohol abuse, and assaultive behavior” (p. 43). Jurich (2008) states that adolescent suicidality may stem from a parent’s trauma and incapability, where studies show that childhood trauma, caused by abuse, poverty, divorce or other crises, renders a parent incapable of surpassing its implications and eventually creates depression in parents. As a result of the absence of an adult role-model to follow, an adolescent improvises ways to cope, one of which might be suicide (p.51).

Discussion and Analysis

To validate the argument that Hedvig’s suicide as a teenager is compounded by many factors, it is necessary that she be placed within the age group this paper has presented. Hedvig is “just about fourteen” as Gina mentions (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.27). Relling himself asserts her vulnerability as a teenager: “Hedvig is in a difficult age. She may do all sorts of crazy things” (p.58). This turbulent stage, marked by difficulties and fluctuations, is manifest in Hedvig’s inhibited identity where, after comparing herself to the duck, she admits that “Nobody knows her and nobody knows where she is from” (p. 40). Just as the wild duck lacks identity, so does Hedvig.

First, in harmony with the studies on teen suicide, Hedvig's self-killing is accomplished at home, particularly in the loft where they keep the animals. Hoberman (1989), in this light, provide study results that the majority of suicides by children take place at home (p.66). Second, the means by which Hedvig kills herself is commonly used by adolescents. Among the reasons that increase suicide rates, "the availability of firearms" looms large (Hendin et al., 2005, as cited in Miller, 2011, p.8). Berman (1991) agrees that the prevalence of "firearms and explosives, with handguns predominating" leads to the most suicides among teenagers (p.105). In *The Wild Duck*, Hedvig uses one very commonly used firearm, her grandfather's pistol, as befits the most suicides among teens. This weapon is available at the Ekdal home as old Ekdal is a retired Lieutenant who practices hunting in the attic as means of diversion from the frustration he was drowning in after imprisonment. Naturally, the availability of the pistol has increased the probability of the girl's suicide.

In addition to the aforementioned reasons that may have caused Hedvig's suicide, it is worthy of note that the girl has started to show some learning disability, the gradual impairment of vision, which "would most probably" (Ibsen, 1962, p.26) lead to her ultimate blindness, as Hjalmar says. This factor is mentioned by Leehey (1991), who states that learning disability compounded by vision impairment could cause a teenager to commit suicide (p. 42).

Furthermore, studies have found that teenagers who are not provided proper schooling or who do not attend a school show considerable predisposition towards suicide: "Youngsters who are 'drifting', affiliated with neither a school nor a work institution appear to be at substantial risk for completing suicide" (Gould et al., 2003, p.23). This factor is realized in the play, for Hjalmar tells Gregers that because of the deterioration of her eyesight, Hedvig doesn't go to school anymore (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.38).

In order to assess other factors effecting Hedvig's suicide, an investigation character traits of teens who complete suicide is a must. While Hoberman (1989) proffers study results which demonstrate that suicidal teens have not one particular trait, he states that the most common ones are introversion, loneliness, hypersensitivity, impulsiveness, traits that necessarily mean adolescents would not be able to manage emotionally in the face of predicaments (p.72).

Hedvig, as demonstrated in several events in the play, possesses traits of suicide candidates. First, being always at home, with none but the duck around to play with (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.38), Hedvig is most probably a lonely child. Based on her empathy with the wild duck when she expresses sorrow towards it "because she's all alone, poor thing" (p.40), we sense an indirect confession that she herself is lonely – a conclusion one can smoothly

arrive at as Hedvig in the play compares herself to the duck. Not only is Hedvig lonely, but also she is an introvert, thus displaying a character trait that a lot of suicidal teens share. In Act III, when Gregers asks whether she would like to travel and see the big world, she retorts that she wishes to remain at home “always” with her father and mother, and with the photographs, engraving pictures, away from people (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.39). Her desire to stay away from people is quite evident in Act IV, when she goes out for a walk. It is remarkable here that she is back very early because she doesn’t “feel like walking any farther” (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.63). Hedvig also suffers from low self-esteem. She is always seeking a confirmation of her worth through reactions from her father. Because she does not think highly of herself, she pleadingly asks why her father can stay away from home – from her who needs him around to prove her value. Crushed by confirmation of insignificance, she persists on asking: “Doesn’t he say anything at all?” and “He’s asleep? Can he sleep now?” (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.69). Besides, when she realizes that her father is abandoning them, she discloses a significantly poor sense of autonomy. Inasmuch as she is attached to him, she cannot endure his departure and starts sobbing, even desiring an end to her life: “I want to die” (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.66).

In addition to Hedvig’s character traits, the socio-economic status of her family may have augmented her desire to bring her life to an end. The poverty of the Ekdal family is conspicuously depicted in the shabby, worn coat of Old Ekdal (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.2) and in having to use an attic room as studio (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.17). Hjalmar himself complains of the dire economic conditions that prevented him from completing his studies. As he says, he had only “poverty”, and “there wasn’t any penny left” when he was still a younger man and wanted to attend a university (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.5). Such grim circumstances now drive Gina and Hedvig to calculate the expenses and check the bills with much worry (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.17). Hedvig is also eagerly waiting for her father because she expects “something good” Mrs. Sørby may send to her from the party (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.18). Hjalmar, too, in accordance with the financial scarcity he proclaims, says to Gina that their home is “mean and humble” (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.25). In fact, they seem to live in abject poverty since Gina and Hedvig chatter gleefully about the prospects of buying some new clothes: “pretty soon we might spend some money on clothes for ourselves” (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.56) – outspoken as this statement is concerning the economic crisis they suffer.

It is significant, too, that Hedvig, like so many suicidal adolescents, lives in a home where conflicts, quarrels and clashes exist in considerable abundance. Northam (1973/1999) expresses sympathy towards the girl, who, in Act II, sits in deprivation of privacy, unable to read, “hands shading her eyes, thumbs in her ears” (p. 63). Northam also studies the impact of the

parental atmosphere on Hedvig, for she has to cope with their moods and thus lives like an “old child”, in addition to her having to live with her grandfather’s drunkenness (p.64). Quite relevant, too, is the fact that in almost all the scenes Hjalmar communicates with his wife, some dispute erupts. Hjalmar hints at this by contrasts his home to that of the Werles when he is there at the party: “My home is a gloomy one, Gregers” (Ibsen, 1884/1965, p.11). Later on, this gloominess starts to crystalize in Hjalmar’s argument with Gina as to why only two portraits have been ordered so far in the studio: “Is that all? Well, if one doesn’t exert oneself, what can you expect?” (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p. 23). Dissatisfied with her advertising in the papers and blaming her for not finding anyone to let the room, he verbally lashes at her with evident grudge and haughtiness (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.24). Still later, they argue when Gina shows disapproval as concerns letting the room to Gregers. Hjalmar says, “First you wanted nothing more than to get a lodger, then when we do you don’t like it” (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.33). It seems that the turmoil between the spouses is rooted in their being of two different social backgrounds – a fact that drives Hjalmar to scorn his wife. For instance, when she is unable to pronounce the word “pistol” the right way, he ridicules her: “I believe I have told you that this kind of firearm is called a pistol”, not “pestol” (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.41). Living in such a family may be one of the basic factors impelling Hedvig at such a stage to release herself of the burden by committing suicide.

Exacerbating the surrounding conditions driving Hedvig to kill herself is her father’s depression, or – as he admits to his boyhood friend Gregers – the devastation of “the inner man” of himself because “everything has collapsed” for him (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.4). His case is so deplorable that he feels it is “so terribly difficult for [him] to talk about these things” (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.5). Hjalmar puts it to Gregers in clear words upon deciding to leave the party that he “has felt Fate’s crushing blow” (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.11) and to Gina and Hedvig just after he reaches home that he is “beset by a host of sorrows” (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.24). In Act III, Gregers evaluates Hjalmar’s despair by stating that his friend is settled “in a poisonous marsh” and “contracted an insidious disease and gone to the bottom to die in the dark” (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.45). Later on, he also confirms his desperation to his wife as he inquires of her: “What do you know about a man’s feelings when he sorrows and despairs?” (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.56).

Hjalmar’s depression links to Hedvig’s suicide insofar as it influences the attention he gives his teenage daughter and the way he deals with her. His absolute preoccupation with himself is revealed in neglecting his duties towards his wife, and more importantly here, towards Hedvig who is on the verge of ending her own life. This depression may be effected by the

traumatic experience Hjalmar had when his father was imprisoned. That is why he tells Gregers he can't help denying his father (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p. 10) – an action that he unscrupulously takes during the party at Werle's. This he bluntly admits to his wife, for he asks her, "Is it not humiliating for a man like me to see his gray-haired father treated like dirt?" (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.33). Moreover, he confesses to Gregers how wounded he still is because of his father's plight. Hjalmar is obviously dejected during the scene he has to witness his father's embarrassment in the wake of being seen wearing the lieutenant uniform. Distressing as this scene is to Hjalmar, he admits that it "lacerates [his] heart" (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.44).

Another factor may be added to the list that goads Hedvig to end her own life. According to studies, a lot of teenagers commit suicide because they reckon they are unlovable. In *The Wild Duck*, Hedvig performs the act after Gregers instigates her to sacrifice the best she has – a fact that he mentions to Hjalmar in the final act when he openly states that the girl did so in order that her father would "love her" again (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.80). Thus, since Hedvig deems herself unlovable, she chooses suicide as a means to regain love.

Furthermore, throughout the play, Hedvig persistently tries to please others – particularly her father – and ignores her own needs and desires in the process. For example, even when her father is rude to her when she offers to bring him the flute, she asks whether he wants a glass of beer, brushing aside her own dignity that Hjalmar callously stamps on (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.24). To please her father, she also disregards and forgives his carelessness concerning the studio. She does the work in his place so that he can accomplish his so-called mission. She exclaims: "Oh yes, father!" (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.33), even if she has hard time retouching pictures because of her poor eyesight. Later, when Werle sends her a letter, she does not feel upset that her father wants to read the letter one day earlier because her ultimate ambition is that her father will be in "good" mood and subsequently, to both him and her, "everything will be pleasant again" (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.64). Then after she knows that the letter speaks of money she may inherit, she unhesitatingly says to her father, seeking his contentment: "And of course you will get it anyway, father" (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.65). Finally, to please her father, she commits suicide immediately after she hears Hjalmar saying: "If then I were to ask her: Hedvig, are you willing to give your life for me? (. . .). Oh yes – you'd find out soon enough what answer I'd get!" (p.79). The girl sacrifices herself so as her father is not disappointed. These incidents echo an evaluation by Østerud (1996), who debates that Hedvig is deeply committed to the people around her (p.159), entertaining "naïvety" and "sensibility" that render her quite vulnerable in the context she inhabits (p.160).

To compound his daughter's inclination to suicide, Hjalmar relentlessly neglects her. First, he forgets to bring her something good from the party as he has promised (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p. 22), bringing her only the menu (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.23) – an incident that shows how negligent a father he is. Neither does he refrain from complaining that his daughter is upset. In order to create compunction in her, he slyly says “It is really unbelievable all the things a father is supposed to keep in mind. And if he forgets the smallest item –! Long faces right away” (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.23), thereby deterring her from complaining about being neglected.

This is augmented by the fact that Hedvig is a child abused, verbally and psychologically – a factor classified as root of suicide in teens. Goldman (1994/1999) speaks of child abuse in Ibsen and relates Gregers's “bungling efforts” to have Hjalmar live away from illusions and enjoy truth, thus causing the suicide of his “beloved, if carelessly exploited daughter”. Hedvig is “bewildered” when Gregers persistently lures her to sacrifice the wild duck so as to justify her filial love. Thus, “the fourteen-year-old turns the pistol on herself” (p.203). Socially speaking, Goldman sees that Hedvig is victimized and exploited just like other working children, in the wake of which she threatens her eyes, just for the sake of giving her father a chance to live in fewer hardships (p. 207). Indeed, after Hjalmar quarrels with Gina, he spots Hedvig moving close by. Instead of showing tenderness to his child for her deep attachment to him, he pitilessly reprimands her, accusing her of spying for her mother's interest: “Seems to me like you're snooping around. Have you been told to watch me, perhaps?” This pushes her later to express her frustration by asking him to stop talking in such a “horrid way” (Ibsen, 1884/1965, p.37). In a few pages, we witness a repetition of this abuse when Hjalmar chides Hedvig for not informing him that Gregers is there while they are in the attic: “And you – not letting us know – !” (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.41). What matters here is not the scolding itself, but the amount of contempt and the derision with which the father expresses his dissatisfaction and thus hurts his adolescent daughter. Further on in Act IV, in the aftermath of his staying out the home overnight because of discovering the truth of Gina's affair with Werle, both mother and daughter express enthusiasm at his coming back by rushing to help him in. To their disappointment, he turns them away (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.52).

To scrutinize the major cause of suicidal behavior in Hedvig, as the most literature claims, the girl faces some stressors just before the violent act. Finch & Poznanski (1971), ascertain that, most often, the suicide attempt is “a sudden, impulsive reaction” to some stressful events, one of which may be “a quarrel with a parent” (p.3). In *The Wild Duck*, there is a good number of fights in the home within merely a few pages. First, when Hjalmar expresses his desire to go away with Relling, Gina says that her husband doesn't go on

such “escapades”, (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.60) after which the tension escalates and her husband shouts: “For heaven’s sake! Keep your mouth shut!” (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.61). More significantly, the girl herself becomes the subject of disdain as Hjalmar indignantly states before her: “My house is ruins about me” and repudiates her by directly saying: “I have no child” and driving her away: “Don’t come near me, Hedvig!” (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.66). Such acceleration of tension in the home, mainly targeting the girl herself, aggravates her sense of guilt and entraps her in despair: “What if he never comes back!” (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.68). And the matter is not resolved even later in Act V, for he insists that she not come close to him: “Go away (. . .) get her away from me, I say!” (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.74). Shortly after, this series of stressors drives Hedvig motionless for a while. Afraid and suppressing her tears, she remembers Gregers’ speech on sacrifice and blurts out: “The wild duck!” (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.75) – the event that directly precedes the ultimate act of self-shooting.

Certainly, on a relevant scale, it is upon Gregers’ instigation that Hedvig eventually chooses the path of suicide, basically because it is for the greater good. Gregers tells Hedvig: “If only you possessed the true, joyful, brave, sacrificial spirit, then you’d see he’ll return” (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.72). The greater good in the young man’s argument is Hjalmar’s return home, and the path to achieving it is sacrifice. First, the sacrifice is supposed to be that of the duck’s, but later, because of being compassionate, Hedvig chooses self-sacrifice for this greater good. Gregers himself points out that the greater good has been achieved in the aftermath of Hedvig’s suicide, this good being the release of desirable feelings in Hjalmar: “Hedvig has not died in vain. Did you notice how grief released what is great in him?” (Ibsen, 1884/1962, p.83).

As Gregers explains to Hjalmar, Hedvig kills herself to regain her father’s love, so it seems, a young teenager as she still is, that she doesn’t understand love. Contrary to the claim by Northam (1973/1999) that Hedvig shows “heroic quality” and dies silently since no words can provide logical interpretation for a child’s suicide in an attempt to regain a father’s love (p.84), it seems, based on Gregers’s evaluation in the play, that Hedvig wants love back through death. But how can love be retaken after death? Either Hedvig does not know the meaning of death, or she thinks death is not the end of life. This defective character trait, one that a lot of teens share, eventually drives some adolescents to choose suicide as an outlet in conditions of distress.

Conclusion

Based on scientific analyses and findings on adolescent suicide, Hedvig, the adolescent daughter of Hjalmar and Gina Ekdal is impelled to destroy herself as reaction to a considerable set of factors, like turbulent age,

dire economic conditions, lack of schooling, learning disability, introversion, loneliness, feeling unlovable, parental neglect, conflicts in the home and instigation to sacrifice for the greater good. Because of these reasons combined, the girl feels enmeshed and finds her sole release in suicide, even if she mistakenly thinks that after her death she may regain her father's love.

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