Tesman as failed patriarch

The economic framework that underpins aunt Julle's behavior toward Hedda centres on the tension between investing in one's self or giving of one's self to another. This issue is connected to the idea of having a purpose in life, in that living for someone else can be construed as having a vocation. A logic of investment is at work that involves children and adults, with Tesman being regarded by his aunt as both a child and an investment. The reasoning behind aunt Julle's decision to sacrifice her own resources for the sake of Tesman can be understood in terms of who sacrificies what, for whom, and why. Children are regarded as investments and their parents are expected to give of themselves in order for the child to prosper. Aunt Julle's prioritization of Tesman is the most obvious example of self-sacrifice in the play, and in this regard Hedda stands as her polar opposite. Aunt Julle's self-effacing impulse is also directed toward her invalid sister, but an important distinction should be made between investing in a child and nursing an adult. One invests in a child with the expectation that the child will come to achieve a higher station in life, which would in turn benefit one's own status. The idea of a return on investment is not readily apparent in relationships between adults; aunt Julle's caring for her sister will not improve anyone's standing. Aunt Julle's care-giving has more to do with a sense of fulfilment that Nantawan Soonthorndhai reads as essentially parasitic: "Aunt Julle takes care of the invalid, not to restore her to health, but to keep her in the state of invalidism, in other words, to preserve the quality of death-in-life. […] An obvious element of morbidity characterizes this guardian role she deems so necessary to her own survival." (Soonthorndhai 1985, 150) Following this line of reasoning, aunt Julle's caring for her sister is motivated by her own needs and provides her with a deep sense of satisfaction. A similar intent can be seen in the reasoning behind her investment in Tesman, which she also describes as giving her a purpose in life. Self-sacrifice is not always entirely altruistic, and may contain an element of self-interest.

Aunt Julle has invested in Tesman and Hedda by forsaking her own needs and contributing to the purchase of the Falk villa. During the first few scenes we are provided with clues indicating that Tesman, who has been coddled by his aunts and depends on their support, will turn out to be a bad investment. Aunt Julle is convinced that Tesman can not manage on his own and that the maid, Berte, must remain in his household. Aunt Julle appears to still regard Tesman as a child: "Jørgen *must* have you with him here in the house, you understand. He *must*. After all, you've been so used to looking after him ever since he was a

little boy." (Ibsen 2019, 292) Her insistence suggests that she has never stopped thinking of Tesman as a child, which alerts us to the possibility that Tesman is incapable of fulfilling the role assigned to him, that of a bourgeois patriarch. Berte's response is to think of aunt Rina and worry that a new maid will be unable to care for her: "Yes but, miss, I do think an awful lot about *her* that's lying there at home. Poor thing, so completely helpless." (Ibsen 2019, 292) Aunt Julle and Berte exemplify the ideal of self-sacrifice, consistently focusing their efforts on the needs of others. Their dialogue accentuates Tesman's status as a grown child in that both he and the invalid aunt Rina require the aid of others. Tesman's dependence indicates that his upbringing has deviated from the norm. Whereas Hedda embodies female masculinity, Tesman represents a male femininity. Lou Andreas-Salomé appropriately uses female imagery to describe Tesman: he is "receptively and reproductively inclined", we soon understand that he relishes the thought of "working unselfishly to promote and restore another's work", and when he does embark on his mission to restore Løvborg's manuscript, he shows that he is "better suited to working with other people's thoughts than creating independently […]."[302] Commenting on Tesman's unmanliness has since become a mainstay in the scholarship, and Andreas-Salomé's assessment can be compared to Birgitta Johansson's description of Tesman as "a man who is unproductive in the sense that he collects, catalogs and reconstructs other people's material instead of bringing about creative renewal himself."[303] In a similar vein, Jenny Björklund comments that "Tesman's masculinity is paradoxically characterized by a lack of conventional masculine traits; he is dependent on others rather than self-sufficient, and he is sexually ignorant and uncompetitive." (Björklund 2016, 10) Tesman thus conforms to the ideal of bourgeois domesticity, according to which women are regarded as the passive recipients of male initiative and energy.

Tesman has never known his father and has never had a male role model who could encourage him to go out into the world and assert himself. Jørgen Haugan argues that Tesman has grown up to become both feminine and sexless (Haugan 2014, 439). Tesman displays neither initiative, self-reliance, nor strength of will. Nantawan Soonthorndhai argues that Tesman's unmanliness is due to aunt Julle having destroyed his will: "If Tesman ever was a man of will and ever had a sense of his own personhood, Aunt Julle has long since destroyed that will. He has become a man without will and without creativity except for his specialized, rather mechanical ability to sort and collect data." (Soonthorndhai 1985, 151) I would rather argue that his lack of a father is to blame, in that it is the role of the father to impart willpower. The absence of paternal influence is highlighted in Tesman's greeting to aunt Julle: "You, who have been both father and mother to me." (Ibsen 2019, 295) Tesman's arrested development is accentuated by the repeated use of the verb "stelle", with its associations of caring for others but also of death. Berte has been "looking after" (*stelle for*) Tesman, and aunt Julle has done the same, as expressed in a comment on aunt Rina: "But, pray God I get to keep her a while longer! Otherwise I'll be lost for what to do with my life, Jørgen. Especially now, you see, when I no longer have you to look after [*stelle for*]." (Ibsen

[302] "receptiv og reproduktiv anlagt"; "gjennem uegennyttigt Arbeide at fremme og gjenoprette en Andens Verk"; "[b]edre skikket til at arbeide med andres Tanker, end til at skabe selvstændig […]." (Andreas-Salomé 1893, 163, 172)
[303] "en man som är improduktiv i den meningen, att han samlar, katalogiserar och rekonstruerar andras material istället för att själv åstadkomma kreativ förnyelse." (Johansson 2008, 254)

2019, 295) If aunt Julle lives to take care of others, her life would be circumscribed unless she can find someone else to care for. Following aunt Rina's death, aunt Julle again makes use of "stelle": "She must be tended to [*stelles*] and dressed nicely now, as best I can. She'll be so pretty when she is laid in her grave." (Ibsen 2019, 363) Through repetition and modification of meaning, "stelle" acquires connotations of wasting away. These connotations signal that there is something unwholesome attached to the act of care-giving, and that an individual who requires that others care for him can not be described as an autonomous person.

Tesman's dependence on others extends to the realm of finance. In conversation with aunt Julle, Tesman takes pride in the fact that he managed to pay for both himself and Hedda with the limited funds at his disposal. When aunt Julle says that she doesn't understand how he could afford the trip, Tesman replies with an evasive "Well, no, I don't suppose it's so easy to imagine?" (Ibsen 2019, 296) Aunt Julle belabors the point: "And especially when travelling with a lady. Because then, from what I have heard, it can get inordinately more costly." (Ibsen 2019, 297) It appears that Hedda has expensive tastes and that she has forced Tesman to pay for a honeymoon: "But Hedda *had* to have that trip, Auntie! She really *had* to. Nothing else would do." (Ibsen 2019, 297) Tesman's satisfaction at having been able to afford a trip for two can be read as a belated attempt at asserting his capacity to provide for his wife. His pride is undercut by aunt Julle's revelation that she has assisted with his finances. More importantly, his attempt at affirming his masculinity is undermined by the fact that Hedda demanded that he spend money in order to fulfill her needs. Ross Shideler notes the importance to Hedda of having access to luxury goods, referencing "her need for the expensive honeymoon, the house, the butler, horse, and so on" (Shideler 1993, 81), but her habits must be read in conjunction with Tesman's desire to satisfy them. When read in the context of Tesman being a grown-up child, this would be his first significant attempt at standing on his own two feet, thereby proving that he has emancipated himself from his aunts. The irony of the situation is that he has only been able to provide for Hedda by acting as a penny-pincher, which indicates that he is dangerously close to living beyond his means. If he were actually self-reliant in financial matters he would be able to entertain Hedda with a measure of largesse. Furthermore, his inability to deny Hedda's requests points to his weakness of will. Instead of saving his meagre funds, he is forced to act against his own interests by potentially overspending. As indicated by his reply to Brack's suggestion that Tesman should have settled for less expensive furniture, Hedda's needs compel him to overspend: "I could hardly present her with petit bourgeois surroundings!" (Ibsen 2019, 315) Tesman's spending mirrors that of aunt Julle in that he chooses to spend his resources on someone else. What Tesman fails to understand, however, is that the economic logic underlying aunt Julle's investment in him is predicated on an expectation that he will continue the Tesman line. By redirecting her resources from herself to Tesman, aunt Julle hopes to ensure the long-term growth of their family's social standing. This would be a constructive use of her resources, as opposed to Hedda's wasteful spending on her own pleasure. While Hedda does not want a child, Tesman fails to comprehend his duties as head of the family. Tesman remains an adult child, as indicated by his response to aunt Julle's hint that he should fill the empty rooms of the house with children: "Yes, you're absolutely right, Auntie Ju! As I expand [*forøger*] my book collection, then –." (Ibsen 2019, 297) The use of "forøge", which

means to increase but can also be used in the sense of having children, demonstrates that Tesman is incapable of living up to his obligation to carry on the family line, instead occupying himself with scholarly pursuits.

Tesman's tendencies toward overspending and bookishness further strengthen the impression that he is a poor investment. Tesman's choice to prioritize Hedda risks eliminating the benefit to aunt Julle of having diverted her own resources. Her hoped-for increase in stature of the Tesman name is based, as Nantawan Soonthorndhai observes, on "slippery ground because house and furnishings are heavily mortgaged and their ability to meet future payments is far from certain." (Soonthorndhai 1985, 148) Aunt Julle's admission that she has used the interest accruing from her savings to finance the purchase of the house elicits alarm from Tesman: "That interest money – it's all you and Rina have to live on." (Ibsen 2019, 298) Her attempt at calming him reveals the nature of the financial agreement they have entered into. She is willing to contribute to his finances because she believes that he will be able to obtain a position which will offer him financial stability. Tesman's description of her actions as a sacrifice – "Oh, Auntie – will you never tire of making sacrifices for me!" (Ibsen 2019, 298) – shows that he does not understand the rationale behind her decision. A sacrifice is not a sacrifice if one expects to be compensated for it, and aunt Julle identifies herself with Tesman's imagined success. Aunt Julle's actions are sensible within the context of bourgeois patriarchy, and it is in the same context that her expectations of Hedda should be understood. Ellen Mortensen considers aunt Julle's enthusiasm for Hedda's pregnancy to be a paradox in that aunt Julle is childless (Mortensen 2006, 390). But there is nothing paradoxical about aunt Julle having invested in the Tesman-Gabler marriage in the hopes that it will produce a child that would raise the status of the family to which she has dedicated her life. She has sought to realize a driving impulse of bourgeois patriarchy, which is that one must invest in one's children. Nantawan Soonthorndhai describes this impulse as an economization of the procreative urge: "Even sex has to be profitable, has to be placed at the service of procreation – the fruit of which Tesman and his aunts eagerly await." (Soonthorndhai 1985, 162)[304] A clear expression of this line of reasoning is aunt Julle's triumphant exclamation that Tesman's success is also her own: "And we are close to our goal now! Things may have looked dark at times. But, praise be, you've come out on top, Jørgen!" (Ibsen 2019, 298) The conflation of "we" and "you" illustrates that she views his achievements as the return on her investment.

What aunt Julle has failed to take into account, besides Tesman's careless indulgence of Hedda's appetites, is his incapacity for engaging in productive labor and his distaste for competition. Tesman intends to work from home, writing his book: "And I'm so looking forward to getting down to it. Especially now that I have my own lovely house and home to work in." (Ibsen 2019, 299) The topic of his book, "Brabantine domestic crafts [*husflid*] in the Middle Ages" (Ibsen 2019, 299), is revealing. "Husflid" simply means to produce items at home for use or sale, but "husflid" in general and Brabantine "husflid" in particular are gendered activities primarily associated with women working from home (*HIS* 9K:167-8). Married men would be expected to work in the office or another exterior locale. Tesman's

[304] I differ with Soonthorndhai on the issue of what Tesman expects. My argument is that Tesman is disinterested in becoming a father.

choice of topic and his decision to work from home are more indications of his impaired masculinity. As Bjørn Hemmer notes, the Tesman home is a typical bourgeois interior, inhabited by people who find contentment in everyday life and household matters such as career advancement and childbirth (Hemmer 2003, 414). Instead of going out into the world and competing with other men, Tesman will content himself with occupying a position similar to that of a Brabantine housewife. Jenny Björklund describes Tesman as a man in close proximity to the domain of women: "Thus, personally as well as professionally, Tesman is connected to the feminine and the domestic – which, of course, was coded as a feminine domain." (Björklund 2016, 11) Hedda, on the other hand, rejects precisely those symbols of femininity which offer Tesman comfort: "She refuses to go near his slippers, and she does not want to be associated with his aunts. Instead, she is associated with a masculine domain throughout the play – her father's." (Björklund 2016, 13) The connotations of femininity adhering to Tesman's preferred milieu are carried along throughout the play and culminate in his suggestion to Thea, in the final scene, that she should move in with aunt Julle in order to help him reassemble Løvborg's manuscript: "You know what, Mrs Elvsted – you should move in with Auntie Ju. Then I'll come up in the evenings. And we can sit and work *there*." (Ibsen 2019, 377) The future he envisions for himself is one in which he lives surrounded by women, having moved in with his *ersatz* mother and occupying himself with another form of "husflid" in reassembling Løvborg's manuscript.

Tesman's homebound labor suggests an inability to provide for his family. Embroidery is not a substitute for entering into a competitive workplace and earning a salary. This is what aunt Julle hopes for upon his obtaining a position as professor. When Tesman learns that he will have to compete with Løvborg for the professorship, however, he admits to Hedda that he has wagered their present on what he regarded as the promise of a position: "We were married on the basis of these prospects, Hedda and I. We've taken on a massive debt. And borrowed money from Auntie Ju as well. Good God – I was as good as promised that position." (Ibsen 2019, 317) Tesman's understanding of his financial situation does not appear grounded in reality. He makes use of an imagery of fantasy in conversation with Hedda when describing his financial prospects and their marriage: "Oh, Hedda – one should never venture into the land of fairy tales." (Ibsen 2019, 318) The phrasing of this comment is ironic in that it is precisely his lack of courage, manifesting in his avoidance of competition with other men, which has resulted in Tesman risking debt. In the context of bourgeois masculinity, higher value is ascribed to a man's achievements if they are attained with effort, in a competitive setting whereby he is given the opportunity to test his mettle against other men. Tesman has instead opted for a life of passivity and non-competition and only belatedly comes to understand that the consequence of refusing to compete is that he will be unable to achieve much of anything. Success requires effort, and it is this realization that causes him to worry about his future. There is one aspect of his life, on the other hand, that can be described as a victory over his rivals, and that is his marriage to Hedda. Even if he is loathe to compete for recognition and a well-paid position, he has been able to court and wed Hedda Gabler. Their marriage proves, to Tesman at least, that he can assert himself in competition with other men.

Tesman's treatment of Hedda as a valuable commodity with which to inspire envy in his male peers is a sign of weakness, and moreover self-defeating. Tesman has a habit of drawing

the attention of other men to Hedda's beauty, hoping that his success in marrying Hedda will impress his peers. In order for this to happen he must ensure that other men notice and acknowledge Hedda's beauty. What he fails to understand is that in doing so he is increasing the risk of other men choosing to compete with him for Hedda's favor. His instrumental use of Hedda is tied to a motif of seeing and being seen which is introduced by aunt Julle's recollection of how Hedda and her father were seen riding: "Can you remember when she rode along the road with her father? In that long black habit? And with a feather in her hat?" (Ibsen 2019, 293) Hedda's choice of attire was meant to attract attention, and her display served to display her status. In order to be admired, one must invite attention. This dynamic informs Tesman's habit of commenting on his wife's body. While he prefers to remain in the background, he must ensure that other men are appropriately jealous of him. When aunt Julle comments on his marriage to Hedda, "The one who was surrounded by so many admirers" (Ibsen 2019, 295), Tesman replies with satisfaction: "Yes, I do believe I've a few good friends around here in town who are rather envious of me." (Ibsen 2019, 296) Having strangers observe Hedda would give him no satisfaction, which explains his emphasis on "gode venner". He must be able to observe how his male acquaintances lust for Hedda. By involving men in proximity to his household in his efforts, he is trapping himself in his paradoxical need to both invite and avoid competition.

His attitude differs from that of aunt Julle, who conceives of individual achievement as the result of dominating one's opponents. In order for Tesman to rise in social standing, his competitors must fail, and she accordingly expresses satisfaction that Tesman's rivals have fallen to the wayside: "Yes – and those who opposed you – who wanted to bar your way – they are beneath you now. They are fallen, Jørgen! And the man who posed the greatest danger – he has taken the hardest fall. – And now he lies – poor misguided [*forvildede*] creature – in a bed of his own making." (Ibsen 2019, 298)[305] There are no indications that anyone has sought to bar Tesman's ascent, but she nonetheless regards any potential challenger to his position as actively ill-willed. Her comment indicates that she understands competition as a zero-sum game in which any one person's rise can only be achieved by way of someone else's defeat. Her joy at Løvborg's fall shows that she affords no sympathy to her nephew's rivals. While she blames Løvborg for his own failure, she readily admits that she has helped Tesman in his ascent: "Do I have any other pleasure in this world but to smooth your path, my dearest boy?" (Ibsen 2019, 298) Her willingness to aid Tesman and the pleasure she takes in Løvborg's misfortune stands in stark contrast to Tesman's reluctance to engage in competition, further underscoring his lack of male characteristics. He is happy enough to reap the rewards of aunt Julle's aid and of being married to Hedda, but he has not achieved these benefits through his own efforts.

Turning to Hedda, we can read her actions as a rejection both of Tesman's unmanliness, as well as his and by extension aunt Julle's proprietary claims to Hedda. As Frode Helland notes, the new hat aunt Julle has bought is intended to demonstrate her ownership over Hedda: "Julle has bought it so that she can walk with Hedda in the street. The hat is therefore

[305] The use of "forvildede" calls to mind Manders' description of Helene's attempt to flee Alving as "the wildest [*det mest forvildede*] moment of your life." (Ibsen 2016, 214) Løvborg's conduct has similarly placed him outside the bounds of civilization.

not just something that Julle wants to decorate herself with, it is a means that the aunt will use to be able to decorate herself with the 'lovely' Hedda Gabler."[306] Hedda finds her status as a showpiece to be used by the bourgeois Tesmans intolerable. She understands that she represents an investment in the future of the Tesman family, as indicated by Tesman's phrasing of how Hedda is "part of the family [*hører til familjen*]" (Ibsen 2019, 301), which in the original has connotations of ownership: "He says that she belongs to the family the way a house or a grand piano belongs to, and not that she belongs *in* the family, as an independent part of it or the like."[307] Hedda's entrance, however, immediately suggests that she will prove a poor investment for the Tesmans: "*Face and appearance noble and dignified. Her complexion has a matte pallor. Eyes are steely grey and express a cold, clear calm. Her hair is a beautiful mid-brown, but not particularly abundant.*" (Ibsen 2019, 299) Her dislike of sunlight and preference for "shade and fresh air" (Ibsen 2019, 300) makes her seem like a convalescent who must remain in a shaded and well-ventilated area. Tesman notices none of this and instead parades Hedda before aunt Julle: "But, Auntie, do take a good look at Hedda before you go! Look, how elegant and charming [*nydelig*] *she* is!" (Ibsen 2019, 301)[308] The use of "nydelig", which can mean charming but also pleasurable, as in enjoying a fine wine, shows how Tesman appropriates Hedda into his own desire. This comment would be Tesman complimenting himself on having obtained such a prize. Yet more disconcerting is his observation that Hedda has gained weight: "Yes, but have you noticed how plump and buxom she's got? How she's filled out during the trip." (Ibsen 2019, 301) Aunt Julle arriving at the possibly mistaken conclusion that Hedda is pregnant and kissing her on the forehead accords with aunt Julle's instrumental view of Hedda as a conduit for producing a new generation of Tesmans.[309] Frode Helland reads Tesman's comment as an attempt at asserting his primacy over her (Helland 1993, 71). While this is certainly the case, I wish to dwell on the question of why Tesman, who is not at this time aware that Hedda might be pregnant, takes such pride in her weight. He references Hedda's weight again when Brack enters: "But what do you say about Hedda! Doesn't she look buxom? What?" (Ibsen 2019, 314) I believe that Tesman's behavior is motivated by his need to have other men lust for his wife, while at the same time dreading the possibility that she may choose another mate. If Hedda were to become overweight, Tesman's fear of being out-competed would presumably lessen.

Unable to respond, Hedda expresses her frustration at being treated as an object to be admired or a vehicle for the continuation of the Tesman line through her gestures: "*Meanwhile, HEDDA walks across the floor, raises her arms, clenching her fists as in a rage.*

[306] "Julle har kjøpt den for at hun skal kunne spasere sammen med Hedda på gaten. Hatten er derfor ikke bare noe Julle ønsker å pynte seg med, den er et middel som tanten skal bruka for å kunne pynte seg med den 'dejlige' Hedda Gabler." (Helland 1993, 70)

[307] "Han sier at hun hører til familien slikt et hus eller et flygel hører til, og ikke at hun hører til *i* familien, som en selvstendig del av den eller lignende." (Helland 1993, 70; emphasis in original)

[308] It should be noted find the translation misleading, in that "nydelig" "But, Auntie, do take a good look at Hedda before you go! Look, how elegant and charming *she* is!" (Ibsen 2019, 301)

[309] Ane Hoel argues against a reading of Hedda as being pregnant, basing her interpretation on the supposed inability of Tesman to engage in intercourse with his wife (Hoel 1998, 277). I think that this reading is overstating the extent of Tesman's lack of masculine traits. I also find unconvincing Hoel's argument that Hedda knows that she is not pregnant, but decides not to tell the truth in the hopes that a pregnancy will secure her a protective husband (Hoel 1998, 282). I do not think that a pregnancy would increase Hedda's hold over Tesman, which is already absolute.

Pulls the curtains away from the glass door, remains standing there looking out." (Ibsen 2019, 203) To some extent her frustration is also due to her realization that Tesman, through every fault of his own, will not be able to provide her with the level of comfort she expected when agreeing to marry him. She has hoped to play the part of hostess and preside over social gatherings in their house. This sets the stage for her potential infidelity. As Patricia M. Troxel notes, Tesman's failure to deliver on his promises leads Hedda to feel that she is "entitled to break that contract in other ways." (Troxel 1986, 73) But too sharp a focus on financial matters obscures the essence of Hedda's criticism of Tesman. Part of the contract between them was that Hedda would be afforded the opportunity to have others admire her. This need on her part must be distinguished from expectations of material comfort. As for Tesman, social gatherings would have allowed him to show off Hedda to his peers: "Just think – seeing you as hostess to a select circle!" (Ibsen 2019, 318) Instead she will be confined to the company of the Tesmans, which would not satisfy her craving for attention. Tesman's failure to live up to his part of the deal clarifies significant aspects of Hedda's character. Hedda's longing for admiration is inextricably linked to her desire to dominate others. Her fantasies of a good life focus on having others serve her, for instance by employing a servant and owning a horse. Anne Marie Rekdal argues that these attributes are rooted in Hedda's past (Rekdal 2000, 241) and can be read as Hedda's attempt to recreate the past in the present. But a servant, in particular, would be someone who attended to Hedda's needs. This is precisely what Tesman does and finds great satisfaction in doing, as we see when he serves her drinks and cookies: "Well, because I think it's such fun to serve you, Hedda." (Ibsen 2019, 336) Tesman enjoys acting as Hedda's servant. She wants for others to serve her needs, all the while refusing to take their expectations and wishes into account. Her being waited on by Tesman does not provide her with any real satisfaction, however, for the simple reason that his assuming a subordinate position shows that he is not a worthy adversary whom she can take pleasure in dominating. She is happy enough to be served by Tesman, but his obeisance elicits her disgust. Her dismissive attitude toward him is the inevitable result of his unmanliness. Hedda's need for power extends specifically to men who can offer her a challenge. To this may be added her sexuality, which as noted can be read as characterized by same sex desire. When taken together with her rejection of the ideal of female self-sacrifice and her rivalry with males we can more clearly delineate the extent of Hedda's female masculinity. Tesman is lacking precisely those male qualities that Hedda exhibits.

Hedda's need for domination

Hedda's same sex desire not only marks her as a woman apart, it situates her in the position of a male. The erotic desire she subtly expresses toward Thea is interwoven with her desire to dominate others. I will argue that the latter element is the clearest manifestation of Hedda's female masculinity, in that the act of dominating rivals is gender-coded as a male prerogative.

Put simply, women are not supposed to dominate anyone. When examining her relationship to Thea, imagining Hedda as a male will help explain not only her attraction to Thea, but also her fascination with Løvborg's stories of erotic conquest, as well as Hedda's attempts at dominating him. Her behavior toward Thea is motivated by a dual jealousy of Thea as Løvborg's lover and of Thea's power over him. When Løvborg insists that Thea is the only woman who exerts power over him, Hedda takes this as a personal affront. Hedda's behavior is not that of an adulterous woman, and what at first appears as tentative promiscuity should rather be seen as an intricate effort at dominating Løvborg by lessening Thea's grip on him. Hedda does so by establishing dominion over Thea's body. Her transgressive behavior toward Thea, such as threatening to burn her hair, can certainly be interpreted as a sign of frustration at being unable to express her same sex desire. Ellen Mortensen's argument along these lines frames Hedda as a degenerate within the context of Ibsen's time:

> Her destructive conduct, which culminates in her own suicide, is outrageously scandalous. However, her character could appear less incomprehensible if we understand her actions in the context of this impossibility, that is, her homosexuality, which is both a cause and an effect of her internal battle. In this interpretation, the repression of this libidinal drive causes her to act erratically and sometimes aggressively. That does not make her less obnoxious, cruel and unpalatable, or to use the adjectives of the 1890s – incomprehensible, repulsive and degenerate – but it could help us explain the reasons for her odd behaviour. (Mortensen 2007, 180)

I concur with Mortensen's reading and will add that Hedda's same sex desire also entails a radical break with the logic of productivity which undergirds bourgeois patriarchy. Sexual desire that is not geared toward the propagation of the family necessarily constitutes a threat to the continuation of the family line. Mortensen is right to note that this type of desire will inevitably be consigned to the realm of the abnormal (Mortensen 2006, 395). That being said, the sexual component of Hedda same sex desire risks being overstated. Her behavior toward Thea has very little to do with eroticism and more to do with a lust for power.

Thea is presented as Hedda's contrast. As opposed to Hedda, she radiates vitality: "*MRS ELVSTED is of slight build, with beautiful, soft facial features. Her eyes are light blue, large, round and somewhat protruding, with an anxious, questioning expression. Her hair is strikingly blonde, almost yellowish-white, and exceptionally rich and wavy. She is a couple of years younger than HEDDA.*" (Ibsen 2019, 304) She has taken it upon herself to safeguard Løvborg from temptation and has followed him to the city, where she fears that Løvborg will find poor company. As an added risk, Løvborg has obtained a sum of money, although the source is unclear. While Thea appears to have successfully raised Løvborg from his state of degeneracy, her reentry into Hedda's life rekindles a rivalry which has remained unrecognized on Thea's part. Hedda's habit of pulling and threatening to burn Thea's hair during their school days can be understood as the young Hedda recognizing that Thea, who presumably already had a luxurious head of hair at the time, might one day come to compete with Hedda for the affection of men. Hedda's strategy in the present is to pretend to be Thea's confidante, calling her "du" instead of the formal "De" (*HIS* 9:47) and kissing her on the cheek. Unlike

Hedda, Thea has fully embraced an ideal of female self-sacrifice and lives to aid others. She has taken on the role of a servant to her husband, which may explain why she complains that she has never had a home of her own: “Oh, if only I had a home! But I don’t. Never did.” (Ibsen 2019, 309) Her living situation can be compared to that of Hedda, who also finds herself in a home that is not truly her own. Thea entered her husband’s household as governess, took on the role of house-keeper and cared for his ailing wife, and went on to marry him after his wife’s passing. Her caregiving establishes a link between her and aunt Julle. Joan Templeton argues that both women embody an ideal of service to others that inhibits the development of one’s self: “The selfless Miss Tesman and Thea Elvsted have no self; sentimentalists who have absorbed their culture’s ideal of woman as servant, they are domestic angels to Hedda’s devil.” (Templeton 1997, 230) Hedda, on the other hand, chooses differently, and wishes to live for herself. Hedda’s choice carries with it its own risks. Caring for others may provide the caregiver with a vocation in life, and in Thea’s case, her ministration of Løvborg leads to a growth of her self under his tutelage. Elizabeth Hardwick comments on the nature of Thea’s relationship to Løvborg: “But it is more than romance; it is a mission, a sacred trust, one of those dedications that challenge the very essence of a superior woman. Løvborg is more than a romantic man; he is the instrument through which Thea can find some purpose for her own intellectual possibilities.” (Hardwick 1974, 59) Thea’s willingness to care for others, combined with her lack of self, led her to marry Elvsted, but have also compelled her to abandon her husband and pursue Løvborg. One might even argue that Hedda admires Thea’s dedication. Thea denigrates herself, commenting that her husband only cares for her as a servant and that she does not cost much in upkeep: “And it doesn’t cost much to keep me. I’m cheap.” (Ibsen 2019, 310) Hedda’s response is significant: “That’s stupid of you.” (Ibsen 2019, 311) Even though Hedda does not care much for Thea, she recognizes the transactional nature of Thea’s marriage – and takes the unexpected step of criticizing Thea for selling herself cheaply. While Hedda’s reply highlights her mercenary attitude toward marriage, it is nonetheless an exhortation to Thea to think more highly of herself. In a roundabout manner, Hedda is counseling Thea to be more like her.

Thea’s dedication to being someone who can, to quote Andreas-Salomé, “give something and be something for others”[310] has left her with a curious lack of identity that is expressed as her not being a whole person unless she can live for someone else. She understands that she has a measure of power over Løvborg: “I almost got a sort of power over him.” (Ibsen 2019, 312) There is a reciprocal influence at work, and spending time with Løvborg causes a fundamental alteration of her self: “And he – for his part – has made a sort of real human being of me. Taught me to think – and to understand so many things.” (Ibsen 2019, 312) Her phrasing suggests that she did not consider herself a complete person until she met Løvborg. By investing herself in Løvborg’s rehabilitation, she not only finds a vociation in life but also becomes a fully-fledged person. If her previous state of incompleteness has been ameliorated by Løvborg’s influence, then it might be argued that she has not in fact assumed an identity of her own, but rather that she has adopted an identity fashioned for her by Løvborg. Her reliance on Løvborg belies her assertion of individuality, and she has merely exchanged one master for another. She in effect serves Løvborg, placing his needs above her

[310] “give noget og være noget for andre” (Andreas-Salomé 1893, 160)

own: “And then came that lovely, joyous moment when I came to share in his work! Was allowed to help him!” (Ibsen 2019, 312) Thea’s ideal of self-sacrifice has not diminished through association with Løvborg. Her dependence on Løvborg offers a contrast to Hedda, and highlights an important aspect of the idea of a vocation in life. Aunt Julle and Thea have a vocation in life, but only at the expense of their own selves. Judging by their examples, a woman can have a purpose in life or an identity of her own, but not both. Even if Hedda were to find a vocation, one might suspect that this would be accompanied by her self becoming diminished. By rejecting the ideal of female self-sacrifice Hedda avoids the risk of losing her identity. This would be a benefit, albeit a double-edged one, of her female masculinity.

The character of Thea can thus be read as an extended commentary on the consequences of the ideal of female self-sacrifice. Hedda’s desire for domination, on the other hand, is consistently associated with masculinity, most significantly in regard to the only male who is impervious to her manipulation. Judge Brack appears to recognize Hedda’s lust for power and deflects it with humorous banter and some manipulation of his own. Brack seems to possess an insight into Hedda’s personality that can perhaps be explained by their shared class background and common interests. Brack exhibits a tendency toward voyeurism that aligns thematically with Hedda’s need to be admired. Helena Forsås-Scott has highlighted the importance of the gaze to Brack, as exemplified by his use of a lorgnette and his repeated references to the importance of being seen (Forsås-Scott 2004, 36). One example is Brack’s off-hand comment that he would like to watch Hedda dress: “And there isn’t any sort of little crack in the door one could negotiate through?” (Ibsen 2019, 321) Hedda’s reply, “No, you’ve forgotten to arrange one of those” (Ibsen 2019, 321), suggests that she might not altogether object. Hedda allows Brack to peer into her household and learn how she feels about her marriage. His comment on acting as a friend to married women is a less than subtle indication that he wishes to gain access to Hedda’s sex: “My only desire is this, to have a good, trusting circle of acquaintances, where I can be of service in word and deed, and be allowed to come and go as – as a tried and tested friend –” (Ibsen 2019, 324) Equally unsubtle is his suggestion that such “three-way relationships – can in fact be hugely agreeable to all parties.” (Ibsen 2019, 324) His offer to act as a trusted friend to Hedda may appeal to her desire to be served. As long as his demands are limited to looking, Hedda appears amenable to such an arrangement. There is a transactional aspect to their discussion in that they both find some measure of satisfaction without too large a risk. Hedda reveals to Brack that her marriage was entered into on a similarly transactional basis. She had begun to worry that her time was running out, and had come to realize the benefits of Tesman’s proposal: “I was wearied of dancing, my dear judge. My time was over –” (Ibsen 2019, 323) I understand her comment as a realization that her beauty, perhaps the most important commodity she had to offer, would soon depreciate. Her class background does not save her from being subjected to the same obligation of marrying while young that Engstrand expounded to Regine in *Gengangere*. Hedda’s fear of ageing comes to the fore in her comments on the smell of flowers:

> HEDDA: Ugh – I think all the rooms smell of lavender and rose water. But perhaps Auntie Ju brought the smell in with her.

> BRACK [*laughs*]: No, I think that's likely to be a legacy from the late Right Honourable Mrs Falk.
>
> HEDDA: Yes, there is something deathlike about it. It reminds one of a posy – the day after the ball. (Ibsen 2019, 327-328)

Making the proposal more attractive was Tesman's insistence that he would provide more for her than his rivals were prepared to offer: "And when he came along in full battle mode [*med vold og magt*] determined to be allowed to provide for me –. I can't think why I shouldn't accept? […] It was certainly more than my other gallant friends were willing to offer, my dear judge." (Ibsen 2019, 324) Hedda's phrasing of "med vold og magt" demonstrates the intensity of Tesman's desire to serve her. Accustomed to being waited on, Hedda agreed to Tesman's offer to become her servant. Her description of how she "used Tesman last summer to accompany me home from evening events" (Ibsen 2019, 327) suggests that she was comfortable with using him at this early stage of the courtship. She chose Tesman because he, unlike his competitors such as Brack, was willing to serve her. This exchange illuminates an important aspect of her relationship to Brack. As long as he spies on her, fueling her sense of self-worth but without imposing any demands on her, he is useful to her. While Brack may be willing to please Hedda, however, he recoils at Hedda's need to dominate men.

Brack's answer to Hedda's complaints of boredom, for instance her comment on "how atrociously bored I'm going to be out here" (Ibsen 2019, 328), is his attempt at offering constructive guidance delivered from the perspective of patriarchy. Brack suggests that she needs to engage in a worthwhile task: "Mightn't life have some sort of task to offer you too, Mrs Hedda?" (Ibsen 2019, 328) He is counseling her to exert herself so that she may find a purpose in life, instead of resigning herself to inaction. Hedda's notion of manipulating Tesman into entering politics demonstrates how she envisions a worthwhile task as using others to advance her own aims. Brack fails to understand how Tesman's success would address her sense of futility: "Well – what satisfaction would there be in that for you?" (Ibsen 2019, 328) Hedda once again insists on her boredom, indicating that she does not grasp the point Brack is trying to make, which is that Hedda is responsible for her own happiness. She continues to deflect that responsibility onto others when Brack explains that Tesman lacks the necessary funds to enter politics, to which Hedda replies with complaints of "these frugal circumstances in which I find myself –!" (Ibsen 2019, 328) Instead of asking how she could find her own purpose in life she saddles Tesman with the obligation of providing one for her. Tesman's hypothetical success would only give her a vicarious satisfaction. Brack's argument hinges on the notion that she has never experienced something "to truly awaken you." (Ibsen 2019, 328) Showing little appetite for introspection, she does not ask if she might do anything to wake herself. Brack's final suggestion is for her to embrace the ideal of bourgeois domesticity. Having a child, which he frames as a womanly "calling" (Ibsen 2019, 329), might give her a sense of purpose. Hedda's response is to reject motherhood: "I've no talent for such things, judge. Nothing that makes any demand upon me!" (Ibsen 2019, 329)[311] Not

[311] In the original: "Jeg har ikke anlæg til sligt noget, herr assessor. Ikke noget med krav til mig!" (*HIS* 9:91) The translation of "anlæg" as "talent" misses the mark. "Anlæg" is used here in the sense of innate qualities that can

only does her sense of self prohibit her from giving of her self to another, she also believes that she has been born without the capacity to be a mother.

The exchange between Hedda and Brack allows us to determine how Hedda conceives of interpersonal relationships. She makes others responsible for her happiness and expects Tesman to apply himself in a manner that would benefit her. Her lack of interest in his professorship and her dismay at possibly bearing his child demonstrates her indifference to what want from her. Her treatment of Tesman is in part due to her class background, in that she effectively considers him a servant, but also derives from her desire for dominion over men. Hedda experiences a type of ennui that, when compared to the frustrated Alving and the lethargic Rosmer, appears as a specifically male condition. In the context of bourgeois patriarchy, men would be expected to take initiative, engage in competition, and expend their creative energies on worthy undertakings. Men such as Tesman who fail to live up to these ideals compromise their masculinity. Hedda's female masculinity, and her adopting the position of a man, should be understood in this context. She has sought to carve out a position for herself analogous to that of her father, but has failed to do so, having been relegated to a subservient role vis-à-vis the Tesmans. She is invariably treated as a woman while associating herself with male traits, a disjunction in terms of gender that is not acknowledged by others. We are dealing with a destabilizing of gender roles that is structurally similar to the effeminateness of Tesman, and which is also at play in the character of Løvborg. While Brack retains his position as a ruthless and successful male, Løvborg provides another instance of how tragedy may arise from a confusion of gendered norms of behavior. In this regard he offers an opportunity to further illuminate the nature of Hedda's female masculinity.

Løvborg's loss of manhood

Løvborg presents us with an example of a man whose masculinity, at first seemingly stable, gradually unravels until it collapses. While Hedda actively undermines Løvborg's masculinity, the process is aided by Brack, who considers Løvborg a rival. Brack's suggestion that Løvborg should remain with Hedda and Thea, drinking tea while Brack hosts a dinner party unsuitable for "gentlemen of anything but the strongest principle" (Ibsen 2019, 330) is characteristic of his attempts at emasculating Løvborg. Løvborg, like Alving and Brendel before him, is another case of wasted potential, or to borrow Tesman's phrasing: "A man with his unusual talents –. I was sadly convinced that he'd run aground for good." (Ibsen 2019, 316) Løvborg's class background is similar to that of Hedda and Brack. He has previously possessed an inheritance of money and still has influential relatives who may come to his aid. These pieces of information suggest that he is far from a self-sufficient person; despite his

be developed further. A better translation would be "disposition". Ellis-Fermor's "gift" (Ibsen 1964, 306) and Arup's "aptitude" (Ibsen 1998, 209) are similarly imprecise.

fall, he retains a safety net that someone with Thea's background would not have access to. Hedda wishes to deprive him of this safety net. Such protection runs counter to the ideal of competition which she comes to express and which can be summarized as the belief that a man should prevail through his own strength. If Løvborg were to regain his social standing with the help of others, this would make him into a man who cannot succeed on his own. This accounts for Hedda's excitement when she learns that Tesman and Løvborg may come to compete for a position: "Just think, Tesman – it'll almost be like a kind of sport." (Ibsen 2019, 317) If the two men were to compete on their own merits, without external aid, their struggle would allow for the most talented man to prevail. Having never seen Tesman engage in competition, she relishes the thought: "I'm truly excited about the outcome." (Ibsen 2019, 318) Her fascination with a struggle between males is an expression of her female masculinity; she values the male virtue of competition and wishes to see it enacted.

Løvborg arrived at his present circumstances due to his own failures. David R. Jones points to Løvborg's fascination with the lower echelons of society and weakness of will: "His family is one of influence, yet he has long been fascinated with the *demimonde*. He is brilliant but weak, as we see from his first entrance and his precarious hold on sobriety and self-control." (Jones 1977, 456)[312] Significantly, he is unable to drink with moderation and resorts to "bourgeois teetotalism […]." (Durbach 1982, 38) His background among the "haute bourgeoisie" (Lyons 1991, 63) accentuates his status as a fallen man. His disheveled appearance marks him as a degenerate: "*He is of slim build; the same age as TESMAN but looks older, with a wasted [udlevet] look about him. Very dark brown hair and beard, longish face, pale, only with a couple of red patches on his cheeks.*" (Ibsen 2019, 330) A key word here is "udlevet", which refers to something that is past its prime and lacking in vitality. He is unwilling to engage in competition with Tesman despite the latter being Løvborg's intellectual inferior. When Tesman asks if he does not want to compete with him, Løvborg gives a curiously phrased reply: "No. I just want to gain a victory over you. In the public's opinion." (Ibsen 2019, 333) Løvborg's belief in victory without conflict is seen as odd, as indicated by Brack's puzzlement: "Well, I'd say glory and victory – hm – they can be things of exceeding beauty –" (Ibsen 2019, 334) Løvborg's ideal of non-combative victory is a renunication of masculine ideals of competitiveness. His distaste for competition may be a source of regret, as suggested by his comment to Hedda that she chose poorly when settling for Tesman: "Oh Hedda, Hedda, my dearest – how could you throw yourself away like that!" (Ibsen 2019, 335) If he believed that Hedda was throwing her life away, one wonders why he did not pursue her more vigorously. While Løvborg believes that Tesman was a poor match for Hedda, it soon becomes apparent that Hedda was faced with a choice between two effeminate men. Hedda regarded Løvborg as a friend and uses an imagery of beauty and bravery when describing their friendship: "When I think back on it now, there was certainly something beautiful, something alluring – something daring about it, I suppose – about our secret sharing of confidences [*løndomsfulde fortrolighed*] – the comradeship that no living person had the least suspicion of." (Ibsen 2019, 337) This is an intertextual echo of Rosmer's

[312] Frode Helland commits to a reading of Løvborg as a fully autonomous man who embodies a modern ideal of self-control without repressing his natural urges (Helland 1993, 78). I am arguing the opposite, that Løvborg's lack of self-control means that he is governed by his urges.

description of his sexless friendship with Rebekka.[313] The situation is similar, with one party not daring to reveal their infatuation to the other. The pleasure Hedda derived from this friendship and from listening to Løvborg's stories is tied to her lust for power. Løvborg admits that he found himself in a humiliating position but could not break free of her spell. He uses religious imagery to depict himself as a sinner confessing his sins to her:

> Yes, Hedda – and when I confessed [*skrifted*] to you –! Told you things about myself that nobody else knew back then. Sat there and admitted that I'd been out on the rampage all day and night. For days on end. Oh, Hedda – what sort of power was it in you that drove me to confess such things? (Ibsen 2019, 337)

The verb "skrifte", often used in the sense of confessing one's sins to a priest, transforms the situation into one of confession and penitence, Hedda taking on the role of confessor. Løvborg invests Hedda with an almost supernatural quality, describing how she asked him questions about his exploits that enticed him to reveal more than he intended: "And all those – those oblique [*omsvøbsfulde*] questions you asked me. […] To think you could sit there and ask me such questions! So brazen, so bold!" (Ibsen 2019, 337)[314] Although he shifts the blame onto her by implying moral deficiency on her part, he is unable to explain why he continued talking. His asking her if she felt some affection toward him is an attempt to account for his actions: "But tell me, Hedda – was there really no love at the core of this relationship? Wasn't it, from your side, as though you somehow wanted to wash me clean – when I turned to you for confession?" (Ibsen 2019, 337) The religious imagery does not work in his favor, and he comes across as incapable of stopping himself. His questioning of Hedda's motives shows that he does not understand Hedda, or even himself. Løvborg displays neither self-understanding or self-control in conversation with Hedda.

Løvborg also fails to recognize Hedda's female masculinity or her same sex desire, which are further illuminated during their dialogue. A key point is why Hedda rejected Løvborg's advances. Joan Templeton argues that fear of scandal prevented Hedda from responding to Løvborg: "Why Hedda did not pass from forbidden thoughts to forbidden acts is understandable. While the violence with which she ended their relation suggests the force of her desire, Hedda has too much self-respect to become Løvborg's woman." (Templeton 1997, 222) I will argue that there are other and less immediately obvious factors at work. When asked to explain herself, she offers an explanation only to then contradict herself:

> HEDDA: That she might want to take a little peep into a world that –
>
> LØVBORG: That –?

[313] "If we really think about it, Rebekka – we began our union like two children falling secretly and sweetly in love [*som en sød, løndomsfuld barneforelskelse*]. Without demands, without dreams." (Ibsen 2019, 164)
[314] "Omsvøbsfulde" relates to "omsvøb", signifying actions or speech that does not get to the point, or engages in digression. Hedda's digressive questions were perhaps intended to keep Løvborg talking.

HEDDA: That she is not permitted to know anything about?

LØVBORG: So that's what it was?

HEDDA: [That too. That too, – I almost think.] (Ibsen 2019, 338)[315]

Her phrasing suggests that there is something else at play which she cannot mention. Løvborg fails to notice her omission and accepts her explanation that she simply sought "Comradeship in the lust for life." (Ibsen 2019, 338) To his question of why she discontinued their arrangement Hedda replies that he sought to change the nature of their relationship: "Shame on you, Eilert Løvborg, how could you want to take advantage of [*forgribe Dem på*] your – your brazen comrade [*kammerat*]!" (Ibsen 2019, 338) It should be noted that "kammerat" has connotations of male friendship.[316] It is worth remembering Helene's use of the word when describing Alving's lack of male companions.[317] This was not a simple case of Hedda declining Løvborg's advances; she positioned herself as his *male* comrade. Her phrasing of "forgribe", a word with strong overtones of sexual assault, is thus imbued with a subtext of same sex desire. Because she considers herself more a man than a woman, her rejection of Løvborg takes on a deeper meaning. Not only did she decline his entreaties, she upheld the stance of female masculinity she had carved out for herself. In her mind, she saw herself as a male companion to Løvborg, and her rejection of Løvborg thus conforms to a heteronormative sexual code. Hedda, through her identification with maleness, exhibits the erotic desire of a heterosexual man toward women. The episode with Løvborg can thereby be reconfigured as an instance of homosexual panic on Hedda's part, and an assertion of her sense of self as being more male than female.

Reading Hedda as a woman who to some degree thinks of herself as a man helps explain her fascination with Løvborg's stories. To reiterate, there is some other reason for her interest which she cannot articulate. Let us suppose that she harbors a same sex desire which she is similarly incapable of expressing. Løvborg's confessions would then have provided her with the vicarious thrill of listening while he narrated his sexual exploits. Charles R. Lyons highlights how Løvborg "functions as a substitute for Hedda herself in her imagination, a surrogate figure through whom she can experience the world." (Lyons 1991, 50) Her imagination is geared toward Løvborg's conquests rather than Løvborg himself. Her listening to him is another instance of the voyeurism motif which, as noted earlier, has a sexual component. As with Brack, a voyeur is someone who gains access to an object of erotic

[315] In the original: "Det også. Det også, – tror jeg næsten." (*HIS* 9:111)The translation by Dawkin and Skuggevik of the last line as "In part. In part – I rather think" (Ibsen 2019, 338) changes the content of what Hedda says. I have instead rendered a literal translation of the line.

[316] These connotations are common to the Scandinavian languages. *Ordbog over det danske Sprog* provides the definition "person, som er nært knyttet til en ell. flere andre ved fælles virksomhed", and provides a list of historical examples of how the word has been used which all tend toward male friendship. Similar examples focusing on brotherhood are provided by *Svenska Akademiens ordbok* ("kamrat"). In modern Norwegian these connotations are more pronounced, as in the definition given by *Det Norske Akademis ordbok*: "(mer eller mindre nær, især mannlig) omgangsfelle, venn".

[317] "Without one single friend [*kammerat*] capable of feeling what the joy of life might be; only layabouts and drinking companions –" (Ibsen 2016, 253)

desire. Hedda's same sex desire explains her reference to an unvoiced explanation and provides context to her calling herself "An appalling coward" (Ibsen 2019, 338) when Løvborg complains that it would have been better had she shot him. Hedda elaborates on the issue of cowardice, coming close to revealing some hidden truth about her motives:

> HEDDA: My not daring to shoot you –
>
> LØVBORG: Yes?!
>
> HEDDA: – *that* wasn't my worst act of cowardice – that night.
>
> LØVBORG [*looks at her for a moment, understands [begriber] and whispers passionately*]: Oh, Hedda! Hedda Gabler, my dearest! Now I glimpse a hidden depth to this comradeship! You and I –! There *was* that demand for life [*livskravet*] in you –
>
> HEDDA [*quietly, with a sharp glance*]: Careful now! Don't you believe it! (Ibsen 2019, 338-339)

These lines are often read as Hedda indirectly admitting that she did in fact desire Løvborg. Toril Moi provides an example: "In her confession to Løvborg, Hedda acknowledges that she grabbed the gun to hide the fact that she simply could not bring herself to respond to him, to express her feelings, to reveal herself. […] Løvborg's sexual advances demanded a passionate and spontaneous response, which she couldn't give." (Moi 2013, 446) I will suggest another reading, arguing on the basis of Hedda's same sex desire. The use of "*begriber*" is a sleight of hand. Løvborg believes that he understands why Hedda acted as she did, but this is a misreading on his part. He assumes that Hedda wanted but could not express her desire for him. This interpretation is immediately dismissed by Hedda, who insists that he should believe no such thing. On a prosaic level, her rebuttal could simply be read as another rejection of his advances. When read against the backdrop of Hedda's same sex desire, however, these lines can be interpreted more literally, as a statement that Løvborg has arrived at a faulty conclusion. Futhermore, the argument that Hedda's response validates Løvborg's assumption is difficult to support, given the lack of evidence that Hedda was ever attracted to Løvborg. I can find no indications in the text that Hedda wished to enter into a liaison with Løvborg but was unable to do so. This may well be Løvborg's preferred explanation, but it is an explanation predicated on the notion that Løvborg is correct in thinking that "livskravet" involved him. I find such a reading too generous of Løvborg's interpretative abilities, and I instead see this exchange as another instance of his habit of misunderstanding Hedda.

A queer reading of Hedda can be further supported by examining her behavior toward Thea while in Løvborg's company. Hedda's same sex desire and her lust for domination converge in a series of actions that Løvborg invariably fails to register as challenges to his hold over Thea. The scene in which Hedda and Løvborg discuss Thea in her presence and during which Hedda strokes Thea's hair is particularly telling. If Hedda is read as a man, the scene comes across as a competition between two males fighting over the same woman. The scene begins with Løvborg inviting Hedda to admire Thea's beauty:

> LØVBORG [*after a short pause, to HEDDA*]: Isn't she lovely to look at?
>
> HEDDA [*strokes her hair lightly*]: Just to look at?
>
> LØVBORG: Yes. Because *we* two – she and I – *we* are two solid comrades [*kammerater*]. We believe in each other unconditionally. And so we can sit and talk together quite candidly, almost brazenly – (Ibsen 2019, 339)

Løvborg's invitation to Hedda to regard Thea mirrors how Tesman drew Brack's attention to Hedda. Tesman sought to both entice and dissuade his competitors. While Løvborg's motivations are to inspire jealousy, Hedda instead accepts his challenge as though he were her rival. When Hedda strokes Thea's hair, she not only seeks to establish dominance over Thea, but also signals to Løvborg that she is violating the bodily integrity of his sexual partner. Hedda goes beyond merely looking by fondling Thea's hair, the symbol of her youth and beauty, thereby reducing Løvborg to the status of an onlooker. Hedda at once undermines Løvborg's masculinity and threatens to make him a cuckold. His use of "kammerater" – which inadvertently reduces Thea's status as a woman – underscores his lack of virility. When read in a context of sexual competition, his response signals to Hedda that he is incapable of keeping Thea to himself. Løvborg's praise of Thea's "courage [of action]" (Ibsen 2019, 340)[318] in coming to find him can be read as further self-emasculation. He means to indict Hedda, but he has yet to demonstrate the same level of courage as Thea. His attempts at making Hedda jealous instead situate him in the role of a lesser man than Hedda.

The dynamic of albeit one-sided competition between Hedda and Løvborg adds another dimension to her insistence that he shouldn't fear drinking. If he drinks and does not contain himself, he will have proven inferior to her; if he drinks and manages his drinking, he will have proven himself a worthy competitor. Hedda instigates this process by a seemingly innocuous joke about her power over him: "Do I really have no power over you? Poor me!" (Ibsen 2019, 340) When Løvborg refuses to drink, Hedda suggests that he might be unable to control his urges: "Otherwise people might get the idea that – that deep down – you didn't feel so bold and brazen – so absolutely sure of yourself." (Ibsen 2019, 340)[319] Leonardo F. Lisi argues that Hedda is using Løvborg's insecurities against him, undermining the image he presents of himself as a social reformer and public intellectual:

[318] In the original: "det handlingens mod" (*HIS* 9:115) The translation omits "handlingens". Løvborg is commending Thea for demonstrating courage through her actions. Ellis-Fermor's "she has the courage that leads to action" (Ibsen 1964, 319) and Arup's "courage to act" (Ibsen 1998, 221) are better, and I have amended the translation accordingly.

[319] Her line of criticism is ironic given her difficulty in mastering her own impulses. In her conversation with Brack regarding how she insulted aunt Julle by belittling her hat, Hedda explains how she at times is unable to withstand her own destructive urges: "Well, you know – these things come over me every so often. And then I *can't* stop myself. […] Oh, I don't know myself how to explain it." (Ibsen 2019, 326)

> The claim is that Løvborg's absolute abstinence shows that he does not actually have adequate confidence in his own commitment to the project of being a social prophet. If he were fully convinced that this project is the most important thing for him, then he would not be afraid to take the occasional drink. That fear only arises because he suspects there might be something in him that will be inclined to find the drinking more appealing than the future he has envisioned along with Thea. (Lisi 2018, 35)

Hedda turns the values of bourgeois patriarchy against Løvborg by focusing on the issue of self-control. Løvborg's rehabilitation was predicated on his ability to restrain his urges, but Hedda recognizes that this ability was imparted to him by Thea. When Thea mentions that Løvborg credits her for having inspired him, Hedda understands that his capacity for moderation is not due to his own strength of will. Hedda questions his self-discipline in front of Thea, using "turde", to dare, twice in conversation (Ibsen 2019, 340-1), thereby suggesting that Løvborg is afraid of temptation. Hedda goes on to sarcastically express her admiration for his refusal to attend Brack's dinner party: "Indeed, steady as a rock. Staunch in his principles. Yes, that's how a man should be!" (Ibsen 2019, 341) She involves Thea in her attack by assuring her that she shouldn't be concerned about Løvborg's sobriety: "There's no need at all for you to go about in such deadly fear –" (Ibsen 2019, 341) The implication of Løvborg being afraid further undermines his masculinity. His false sense of self-control begins to unravel after a few drinks, at which point he accuses Thea of acting on her husband's behalf to persuade Løvborg to return to him, which suggests that Løvborg's capacity for rational thought has been compromised.

Hedda's undermining of Løvborg's self-control is interwoven with her desire to exercise power over a forceful man. She is driven by a paradoxical urge to both belittle Løvborg and mold him according to her ideal of manhood. The Løvborg who depends on Thea and cannot contain his drink is not a worthy rival to Hedda. She wants Løvborg to become strong so that she can take pleasure in dominating him. This need on her part underlies her hope of seeing him return from the dinner party with "Vine leaves in his hair." (Ibsen 2019, 344) Hedda's vision of Løvborg is often read in conjunction with the vine leaves as the expression of the nietzschean dichotomy between the Dyonisian and the Apollonian, or between hedonism and self-control.[320] Leonardo F. Lisi argues that what Hedda wishes to see from Løvborg is a melding of these ideals: "What Hedda wants, in short, is the unity of transgression and normativity, precisely the sort of balance between conflicting elements that the aesthetic ideal of a beautiful life aims for." (Lisi 2018, 38) Hedda envisions a reformed Løvborg who is able to enjoy life without losing control. If Løvborg is able to exert self-control he will have regained power over his own self. Hedda clarifies this point to Thea: "And then, you see – he'll have reclaimed the power over himself. He will be a free man for the rest of his days." (Ibsen 2019, 344) While she wants for Løvborg to be free, she also wants

[320] For an in-depth discussion of this theme, which is not directly relevant to my argument, see (Lysell 2021). I would also note that Else Høst's argument that Hedda's fantasies of a rejuvenated Løvborg transport her to an earlier stage of her life (Høst 1958, 188) are at odds with my reading, as I do not believe that the young Hedda ever thought of Løvborg as an idealized male figure.

to dominate him. She abhors Løvborg's weakness of will because it makes him an inferior male. There is no satisfaction for her in gaining control over a weak man:

> HEDDA: I want, just once in my life, to have power over a person's destiny.
>
> FRU ELVSTED: But don't you already have that?
>
> HEDDA: Haven't – and never have.
>
> FRU ELVSTED: Over your husband's at least?
>
> HEDDA: Oh yes, that was worth the trouble. Oh, if only you knew how poor I am. Whilst *you* are allowed to be so rich! [*Throws her arms passionately around her*] I think I'll burn your hair off after all. (Ibsen 2019, 344)

This exchange reveals that Hedda's dominion over her husband is worthless for the simple reason that he is an unworthy rival; Tesman's willingness to cater to Hedda's every whim means that there is no prestige in subjugating him. If Hedda were to dominate the reformed Løvborg, on the other hand, this would provide her with a sense of satisfaction. She communicates this desire in financial terms: her marriage to Tesman makes her poor, whereas a victory over Løvborg would make her rich. Jens Arup argues that Hedda has no clear aim in mind when manipulating Løvborg: "Hedda's bid to control Løvborg is essentially predatory. She desires power over him for its own sake, and her purpose is largely uncomplicated by any very clear idea of an ultimate end to which she will apply her power once it is gained." (Arup 1957, 28) I am instead arguing that she does have a clear goal in mind, which is to transform Løvborg into a man whom she can take pride in defeating. Building on the imagery of rich versus poor, her domination of Løvborg would also mean that she could recuperate, on the level of metaphor, the wealth she lost following her descent into the bourgeoisie. For Hedda, wealth is synonymous with power, and her domination of Løvborg would rectify her own downfall. It is significant that Hedda at this point yet again threatens to burn Thea's hair. Thea's vitality and beauty are, if not the source, then at least part of her power over Løvborg. By burning Thea's hair, Hedda would deprive her of her influence over Løvborg. This would be another victory for Hedda over Thea, whose role is that of Hedda's rival – not for Løvborg's affection, but for the privilege of exerting power over him.

Sexual competition and gender confusion

Hedda's emasculation of Løvborg fits into a pattern of her engaging men in rivalry, a habit that falls short when faced with Brack's assertive and ruthless masculinity. Brack responds to Hedda's attempts at manipulation and emasculation by engaging her in a battle for domination

in which he ultimately prevails. His behavior toward Hedda fits into a pattern of rivalry and competition which is at first directed at Løvborg but which comes to include Hedda. Brack's willingness to engage in competition in order to achieve his goals, primarily that of obtaining exclusive access to Hedda's sex, sets him apart from the non-competitive males Løvborg and Tesman. By examining Brack's actions through a lens of sexual competition, his role as a patriarchal corrective to Hedda's female masculinity can be clarified. He comes across as a strong-willed male with no apparent signs of gender confusion. The obverse of his self-assured masculinity is an egotistical and destructive desire for self-satisfaction. His single-minded pursuit of Hedda leads him to identify Løvborg as a rival to be eliminated. He is above all motivated by a demand for exclusivity in that he can not stand the thought of having to share Hedda with a man whom he considers to some extent a worthy rival. The same consideration does not apply to his dealings with Tesman, who does not pose a threat to Brack's plans. An examination of how Brack deals with the challenge of Løvborg following the scandalous dinner party will not only illustrate the workings of the theme of sexual rivalry among males, but also highlight the limits of Hedda's talent for manipulation when faced with determined resistance.

At the dinner party Løvborg was unable to contain himself and drink in moderation. Curious to know more, Hedda inquires with Brack as to how Løvborg ended up in miss Diana's salon. Brack's description of the red-haired Diana indicates that she inhabits the *demimonde*. While her salon does afford bourgeois men the opportunity to express their desires, it should not be equated with a brothel (Østerud 2001, 131). Diana is said to have had a long list of conquests, including Løvborg when he was still a respectable bourgeois: "And also a formidable huntress – of gentlemen – Mrs Hedda. You've probably heard talk of her. Eilert Løvborg was one of her warmest patrons – when he was at the top of his game [*i sine velmagtsdage*]." (Ibsen 2019, 353) Brack's gendered phrasing suggests a reading of Diana as a counterpart to Hedda, which is to say a woman who comes to dominate men and who may similarly be suspected of exhibiting a female masculinity. This reading of Diana finds further support in Brack's account of the brawl that erupted when Løvborg accused Diana and her friends of stealing his manuscript: "Which led to a common cockfight [*hanekamp*] between the ladies and gentlemen both." (Ibsen 2019, 354) There is an obvious contrast between the Løvborg of his "velmagtsdage", a word with connotations of strength and vitality, and the Løvborg who engages in fisticuffs with men, but also and more importantly, with women. The manuscript represented his hopes of reclaiming his social standing and his position as a man whom others could respect. Having lost the means of his redemption, Løvborg becomes a wholly pathetic figure. As noted by Gail Finney, the process of writing the manuscript under Thea's benign influence is gender-coded as a male activity: "For what is actually being invoked here is the common metaphor of literary *paternity*, not maternity, coupled with the conventional topos of female inspiration." (Finney 1989, 153; emphasis in original) Løvborg's loss of his manuscript is thus also the loss of what little remained of his manhood.

The dismantling of Løvborg's masculinity is reflected in the recurring imagery of his manuscript as his and Thea's child. An emasculated man such as Løvborg will not be able to produce viable offspring; he is creatively sterile. His talent was always circumscribed by his

dependence on others, and the parasitic aspect of his and Thea's relationship comes to the fore in an exchange following his return:

> LØVBORG: Since I have no more use for you, Thea.
>
> FRU ELVSTED: And you can stand there and say that! No more use for me! But surely I'll help you now as before? Surely we'll continue working together?
>
> LØVBORG: I don't intend to work from now on. (Ibsen 2019, 357)

Thea has invested in Løvborg to such an extent that she can no longer conceive of living apart from him; she replies "But I can't do that!" (Ibsen 2019, 357) to his suggestion that she should live her own life. Løvborg, on the other hand, blames his dependency on Thea for his loss of masculinity: "It's life's courage and fighting spirit that she's crushed in me." (Ibsen 2019, 359) This is Løvborg's admission that he could not have produced a supposed work of genius without external assistance, and at this stage the manuscript comes to represent an existential failure on his part. Writing the manuscript provided his life with a meaningful purpose, and his loss causes him to fall into despondency. Calling to mind Brack's suggestion that a child might provide Hedda with a vocation in life, the metaphor of the manuscript as a child suggests that the manuscript could have provided the same benefit for Løvborg. Thea's extension of the metaphor to include child-murder indicates that Løvborg's loss of his creative ability is irreversible: "You must know, Løvborg, that what you've done to this book –. For the rest of my days, it'll be for me as though you'd killed a small child." (Ibsen 2019, 358) The metaphor of the manuscript as child, with its implications of Løvborg's sterility, contains within it an element of sexual competition between males which is perhaps not immediately noticeable. When telling Hedda how he imagines the manuscript being handled by others, Løvborg describes the manuscript as having become soiled:

> LØVBORG: Imagine, Hedda, that a man – you know, in the early hours – after a confused, liquor-soaked night came home to the mother of his child and said: listen now – I've been here and there. To this place and that. And I had our child with me. At this place and that. The child has gone missing. Completely gone. Damned if I know whose hands [*hvad hænder*] it's fallen into. Who's laid their fingers on it.
>
> HEDDA: Ah – but when it comes to it – it's still just a book –
>
> LØVBORG: Thea's pure [*rene*] soul was in that book.
>
> HEDDA: Yes, I understand that.
>
> LØVBORG: Then you'll also understand that there's no future for her and me. (Ibsen 2019, 360)[321]

[321] I would note that Ellis-Fermor omits "rene", meaning "pure" or "clean", in her "Thea's whole soul was in that book" (Ibsen 1964, 344), as does Arup in his "Thea's soul was in that book." (Ibsen 1998, 245)

Continuing the metaphor of the manuscript as child, Løvborg's complaint can be read as doubt having been cast on the manuscript's paternity. The image of fingers entering into his and Thea's child can be extended associatively to adulterous penetration. If the manuscript is a receptacle for Thea's *pure* or *clean* soul (which is to say untouched), and if others have had their figurative fingers in it, then Løvborg can no longer be sure that he is the father. The vagueness of "hvad hænder" should not be taken as indication that Løvborg imagines these nameless others as being anything other than men. In his mind, Thea has been spoilt through having had her soul, which was deposited in the manuscript, laid bare to others. If Løvborg were to continue their relationship, he would be entering into sexual proximity to the men who have despoiled Thea. Løvborg's fear of entering into liaisons with other men is the obverse of his distaste for competition with other men. In an ironic reversal Løvborg, the cause of Elvsted's cuckoldry, now thinks of himself as a cuckold.

Hedda's burning of the manuscript can similarly be understood in terms of sexual rivalry and exclusivity. When Hedda burns the manuscript she repeats the metaphor of the child-manuscript and her earlier threats of burning Thea's hair: "Now I am burning your child, Thea! – You and your curly hair! […] Your and Eilert Løvborg's child." (Ibsen 2019, 361) By touching and tearing the manuscript she is in a sense actualizing Løvborg's fear of Thea being fondled by other men. This scene is Hedda's triumph over Løvborg and puts an end to the latter's creativity and hopes for the future. Hedda's subjugation of Løvborg, as Jenny Björklund notes, places him in the same category as Tesman: "Tesman and Løvborg are dismissed; through their emasculation and femininity, they occupy subordinate masculine positions." (Björklund 2016, 14) Brack's efforts at eliminating Løvborg highlight an important difference between the two men when it comes to sexual competition. Whereas Løvborg appears devastated at the thought of other men figuratively fingering Thea, Brack does not seem to mind the prospect of sharing Hedda with Tesman. His efforts at diminishing Løvborg in Hedda's eyes demonstrates that he, much like Hedda, differentiates between worthy and unworthy male rivals. This dynamic of selective exclusivity is expressed in conversation between Brack and Hedda, in particular through the use of the word "hane", meaning cock or rooster.[322] Having first been used as part of "hanekamp", it reappears following Brack's statement that every decent home should remain closed to Løvborg:

> HEDDA: And you're suggesting mine should be too?
>
> BRACK: Well, yes. I confess it would be more than a little awkward if this gentleman were allowed access here. If he, as an outsider – an irrelevance [*en overflødig*] – should force his way into –

[322] The double entendre attaching to "cock" is not present in the Scandinavian languages. It is interesting to note, however, that the Scandinavian word for cuckold, "hanrej" (Danish and Swedish) or "hanrei" (Norwegian), is derived from "hane".

HEDDA: – into the triangle [*trekanten*]? (Ibsen 2019, 355)[323]

Hedda's response is a realization that Brack wants to gain exclusive access to her: "I see – the only rooster [*hane*] in the coop – that's your goal." (Ibsen 2019, 355) As opposed to the earlier use of "trekant" in connection with "three-way relationships" between a married couple and their male friend, this exchange centers on the elimination of a sexual rival. Now that Løvborg no longer stands in Brack's way, he is free to pursue his goal.

Hedda's reaction is in line with her appreciation for competition. She smiles, says that he is "a dangerous person" (Ibsen 2019, 355), and expresses admiration for his forcefulness: "And I'm thrilled – so long as I'm never at your mercy in any way [*ikke i nogen måde har hals og hånd over mig*]." (Ibsen 2019, 355)[324] Toril Moi notes that this line indicates that Hedda sees Brack as a potential threat: "The phrase at once transforms Hedda from aristocrat to serf and stresses her status as a woman confronted with a sexual predator against whom the ordinary law of the land offers no protection." (Moi 2013, 445) But the exchange can also be read as an effort by Hedda to deprive Brack of his manhood. She does so by likening him to a rooster, which is to say a domesticated animal. While she may appreciate Brack's willingness to engage in competition, her dismissive attitude indicates that she does not take the threat posed by him altogether seriously. Brack responds with a thinly veiled threat: "Well, well, Mrs Hedda – perhaps you're right. Who can tell if I may not be a man capable of any number of things?" (Ibsen 2019, 355) His insistence on being *man enough* to dominate her is a rejection of her attempt at emasculation. When he jokingly refers to himself as one of Hedda's "tame cockerels [*kurvhaner*]", Hedda replies: "Oh no. When one only has the one, then –" (Ibsen 2019, 356) What may at first seem a lighthearted reference to Hedda shooting aimlessly into the garden on his approach takes on a different meaning when read in a context of sexual competition. By reducing Hedda's threats of shooting him to the level of banter, Brack reclaims his masculinity and asserts his claim to her sex. His jokes and threats are intended to counteract Hedda's desire for domination. Rather than becoming another tame cockerel in her collection Brack uses his knowledge of Hedda having lent Løvborg the pistol as a means to achieve his goal. When Hedda realizes that Brack has come to dominate her, she calls out to him as "You, the only rooster in the coop –" (Ibsen 2019, 377) and turns her pistol on herself. While Brack may have asserted his primacy as a male by doing away with a rival and then subjugating Hedda, his is a pyrrhic victory. For Hedda, suicide is preferable to subjugation. Much like Løvborg, Brack fails to understand the woman he seeks to own.

[323] The translation of "en overflødig" as "an irrelevance" is misleading. "Superfluous" (Ibsen 1964, 337; Ibsen 1998, 239) is more appropriate, in that Brack is arguing that there is no use for Løvborg.
[324] Hedda's odd phrasing is difficult to translate. Arup opts for "so long as you don't have any sort of hold over me" (Ibsen 1998, 239), which also amounts to a rewriting.

Hedda's wasteful death

Hedda's suicide is possibly one of the most commented-upon scenes in Ibsen's oeuvre. A variety of factors have been highlighted as contributing to her decision.[325] One readily apparent factor is Hedda's realization of Brack's dominion over her, as Toril Moi notes: "Hedda dies in order to avoid scandal, to avoid lowering herself, to escape Judge Brack's sexual blackmail, and to preserve her freedom." (Moi 2013, 443) Equally important but not as obvious is Hedda's refusal to be subjected to public ridicule, which causes her to lie about the provenance of Løvborg's pistol in order not "to be turned into a public spectacle." (Moi 2013, 445) This reading accords with what we know of Hedda's idealism, which inhibits her freedom and is ultimately self-destructive. We can add to this the passage of time, which is often combined with a stress being placed on Hedda's (unconfirmed) pregnancy. Sandra Saari characterizes the plot of the play as "a series of attempts by Hedda to reinstate the past in her present life, a series that culminates in her suicide, her final recognition of the delusory nature of that project." (Saari 1977, 299) Unable to recreate the past, Hedda is finally confronted with the reality of a present in which the driving force of her personality, her lust for power, is stymied by Brack. If Brack is made out to represent bourgeois patriarchy, then her rejection of him, as well as of her potential motherhood, are a decisive rejection of a social order that has sought to impose its moral code on Hedda. Ross Shideler exemplifies this argument: "Hedda's action represents the complete rejection of the nuclear family and the patriarchy that first created a false set of expectations in her, then deprived her of an independent identity, and finally confined her in a household she hated." (Shideler 1999, 95) Hedda's fear of being "locked into conventional femininity" (Björklund 2016, 7), to borrow Jenny Björklund's phrasing, is in equal parts a fear of having demands such as an expectation of motherhood forced upon her, and an anger at having her desire for domination frustrated by Brack.

Which of the above factors is emphasized will vary from scholar to scholar. There is one line of interpretation which I will single out for criticism, however, and that is the tendency to depict Hedda's suicide as an act of heroism. John Northam reads the suicide as Hedda's victory over a society in which there is no room for idealism: "She dies for a vision of human potentiality superior to the reality to which life condemns her. Surround that statement with all the qualifications that Ibsen insists on, and we have one of the most impressive recreations in drama of the experience of what it means to have heroic aspirations in an age that almost, but not quite, denies all possibility of heroism." (Northam 1973, 185) In a similar vein but attaching greater importance to the gendered constraints imposed on Hedda by bourgeois patriarchy, Ellen Mortensen reads the suicide as a heroic act in the tradition of classical drama: "This suicide represents a heroic act, and must, according to contemporary conventions, be considered a very 'unfeminine' act. But at the moment she exceeds the limits

[325] Mary Kay Norseng argues that Hedda's decision is the culmination of the deterioration of her mental health: "I suggest that Hedda has suicide on her mind when the drama commences, and that she acts it out, as deeply depressed people do, bit by bit, as if she were rehearsing a play, or, filling in a sketch already begun, obsessed with images over which she has, paradoxically, all and no control […]." (Norseng 1999, 31) Norseng's argument is an example of reading the play backwards, using the final scene to explain the events leading up to it.

on her actions imposed by contemporary society, Hedda's suicide appears as an echo of the tragic world of classical drama. The suicide then stands as testimony to her magnificent, heroic pride […]."[326] Such readings fail to engage with the presence of female characters who are able to find contentment within the bounds of bourgeois patriarchy. Aunt Julle and Thea are perhaps less tragic figures than Hedda, but they are also better suited to their surroundings. To depict Hedda as a rebel against bourgeois patriarchy is to suggest that suicide is an adequate response to a system which can obviously accommodate some women. Vigid Ystad provides an example of this line of reasoning: "The pride of the general's daughter demands that defeat be countered by suicide. Hedda does not escape; she demonstrates her ideals of courage, beauty and order in the suicide. Concomitantly, the suicide is a speechless manifestation of her wild passion and drive, her at its pinnacle." (Ystad 2001, 271) Readings of Hedda as a heroic character also tend to disregard those aspects of her character which align her with death and the demonic. In order to arrive at a characterization of Hedda as a woman who, to quote Roland Lysell, "stands spiritually higher than the men around her",[327] one must ignore her thirst for power, her refusal to give of herself to others, her contempt for Tesman and expectations of obeisance, her habit of threatening and violating Thea, and her fatal manipulation of Løvborg.

To read the suicide as an act of heroism is also to invest the act with a meaning which it in my view quite simply lacks. My main objection to the argument of heroism is that such readings fail to recognize the essential futility of the suicide. My interpretation of the suicide as an instance of utter wastefulness is in line with Leonardo F. Lisi's (2018) reading of the suicide as a triumph of nihilism, and takes as its point of departure Hedda's recognition that she has become useless. Her desire for power prevented her from realizing her uselessness; having been subjugated by Brack, she now comes to experience the full weight of her lack of vocation in life. I thus concur with Nantawan Soonthorndhai's reading of the suicide as a waste: "But the calm, deliberate manner with which Hedda kills herself, by default, seems senseless, unproductive, and profoundly lacking in utility. She has not left any material wealth, and she has destroyed another kind of inheritance: her unborn child." (Soonthorndhai 1985, 168) Hedda's rejection of a logic of productivity which defines the worth of an individual according to his or her capacity to produce can be read as a critique of the capitalist underpinnings of bourgeois patriarchy. When faced with the realities of married life and the possibility of motherhood, Hedda responds by engaging in a manipulation of Løvborg which gratifies her own need for power. Her focus on her self is unproductive, and her final decision is predicated on her realization that she will neither be able to satisfy her lust for power or be of any use to others. In Hedda's case, narcissism and uselessness are intertwined.

Hedda's understanding of herself as useless grows stronger in the aftermath of Løvborg's death. Hedda can only experience happiness when exerting power over worthy men, and she is now left with Tesman and Brack. If at first she was merely bored, she comes

[326] "Dette selvmordet representerer en heroisk handling, og må, ifølge samtidens konvensjoner, kunne anses som en svært 'ukvinnelig' handling. Men i det øyeblikket hun overskrider grensene for sin samtids handlingsramme, framstår Heddas selvmord som et ekko av de antikke dramaers tragiske verden. Selvmordet står da som et vitnesbyrd over hennes storslåtte, heroiske stolthet […]." (Mortensen 1996, 33)
[327] "står andligt högre än männen i omgivningen" (Lysell 2021, 169)

to experience an altogether new feeling of existential despair, being deprived of an outlet for her need for domination. When Tesman turns his attention to Løvborg's manuscript and Thea, this signals the end of Hedda's power over him. As for Brack, she recognizes his strength and admits that "You have me at your mercy from now on." (Ibsen 2019, 375) She defines his power over her as being subjected to his demands and to his will: "In your power all the same. Dependent on your demands and your will. Unfree. Yes, unfree!" (Ibsen 2019, 376) This is a mirror image of her insistence on having others conform to her will. Whereas she was content to use Tesman, she cannot stand being used by Brack. Having refused to live for others, she finds that no one is prepared to live for her. Her awareness of having become ballast sets in motion the events leading to her suicide. The change in her situation is prefaced by death, aunt Rina having passed away. When aunt Rina was still alive, Hedda could not bear to accompany Tesman to his aunt's death bed. After aunt Rina's passing, Hedda plays the part of dutiful wife and offers to assist Tesman with the funeral: "Can't I help with anything?" (Ibsen 2019, 363) Tesman's negative reply has a deeper significance. Perhaps for the first time in her life, Hedda offers aid to another, only to be rebuffed. There is a hint of irony in her offer, in that she still seems incapable of understanding why anyone would choose the path of an aunt Julle and devote themselves to serving others. When aunt Julle says that "there's always some poor sick creature who needs care and succour, sadly" (Ibsen 2019, 364), Hedda's incredulous "Would you take such a cross upon you again?" (Ibsen 2019, 364) indicates that she still cannot fathom why anyone would want to subordinate their needs to those of another.

Løvborg's suicide provides another impetus to Hedda's decision by tearing down the last vestiges of her idealism. At first she idealizes his suicide, taking it as evidence that a life lacking purpose can be given meaning through an act of defiance. She sees his action as an exertion of willpower and a display of initiative which allowed him to regain a measure of control over his life: "He has had the courage to do what – what had to be done." (Ibsen 2019, 370) Hedda understands Løvborg as having succumbed to existential despair and then choosing to defy the circumstances in which he found himself. Hedda describes his defiance as a thing of beauty: "Something imbued with a glow of impulsive [*uvilkårlig*] beauty." (Ibsen 2019, 371)[328] Not only did Løvborg have "the courage to live life in accordance with his own self" (Ibsen 2019, 372), he also showed that "he had the strength and the will to break away from life's party – so early." (Ibsen 2019, 372) Hedda's view of Løvborg's suicide is based on her conception of an ideal masculinity. Her depiction of him as courageous and defiant is a vision of Løvborg as the revitalized man she sought to transform him into. Her sense of satisfaction at hearing the news of his death is derived from her belief that she has succeeded in her aim of rehabilitating and then dominating him. Brack's account of what happened reveals the extent of her failure. Brack offers two hypothetical explanations for why the pistol was fired, both of which serve to further belittle Løvborg's manhood. The first explanation is that Løvborg accidentally shot himself when drawing his pistol with the aim of threatening miss Diana into returning his manuscript. The second explanation is that miss Diana was responsible: "Or does she grab the pistol from his hand, shoot him, and stick the gun back in

[328] "Uvilkårlig" can indicate a lack of control, which would translate to "impulsive", but I believe the word is used here in the sense of something absolute or limitless, as in Arup's "unconditional beauty." (Ibsen 1998, 258) Ellis-Fermor's "spontaneous beauty" (Ibsen 1964, 357) is misleading.

his pocket again? That would certainly seem in character. After all, she's a handy [*håndfast*] sort of girl, that Miss Diana." (Ibsen 2019, 375)[329] The use of "håndfast", best translated as "forceful", accentuates Diana's female masculinity. In both scenarios Løvborg comes across as a failure. Either he was incapable of handling his pistol – which, if the pistol is read as a phallic symbol, means that he cannot handle his own member – or he was subdued by miss Diana, the huntress of men. The suicide thus becomes Løvborg's final humiliation and the end of Hedda's project of restorative masculinity.

Hedda's failure to transform Løvborg means that she no longer has any goal in life. Her lack of purpose can be contrasted with Tesman, who gladly embarks on a mission to reconstruct Løvborg's manuscript: "I'll put my life into it!" (Ibsen 2019, 371) Given the gendered connotations of the metaphor of the manuscript as Løvborg's and Thea's child, this would situate Tesman as the midwife to Løvborg's belated recognition. Tesman's task is tied to a theme of memory in that the manuscript ensures that Løvborg will be remembered after his death, as Tesman admits: "I owe this to Eilert's memory." (Ibsen 2019, 371) Hedda, on the other hand, understands that no one will remember her. Remembrance depends on the presence of tangible objects. Examples abound, such as Tesman's "Memories" (Ibsen 2019, 301) attached to the slippers aunt Rina has embroidered for him, Hedda's description of the pistol as a "memento" (Ibsen 2019, 360) when handing it to Løvborg, or her reference to the manuscript as "Løvborg's memorial" (Ibsen 2019, 374). If she is to be remembered she would have to leave something behind. Her only options are her piano, which she affectionately calls "my old piano" (Ibsen 2019, 303), and her sheets of music. Through these Hedda can express something of herself. When she clears a table of her sheet music so that Tesman and Thea can use it to reconstruct the manuscript, Hedda is discarding the last reminder of herself. She is clearing away herself, and her sudden playing of "*a wild dance tune*" (Ibsen 2019, 376) on the piano is a last attempt at reminding others of her existence. At this point Hedda barely seems to have a personality of her own, adopting Tesman's verbal tic of "No, just think [*tænk det*]!" (Ibsen 2019, 376) Her running her fingers through Thea's hair, acknowledging without complaint that Thea will soon come to inspire Tesman, is an admission of defeat. Her offer of assistance is her asking if there is any purpose to her life: "Is there nothing the two of you can use me for here?" (Ibsen 2019, 376) Tesman's reply, "No, nothing at all" (Ibsen 2019, 376), demonstrates that there is not. Faced with the realization that her death will mean nothing, Hedda gives in to her existential despair and commits a pointless act that underscores the uselessness of her life. Brack's pathetic exclamation of "But God have mercy – people don't actually *do* such things!" (Ibsen 2019, 377) simply undercuts the futility of her action; her life matters so little to others that she is not even afforded an appropriately horrified response. Having devoted her life to herself, she will be remembered for nothing and by no one.

[329] "Håndfast" can be used in the sense of someone who is strong and forceful or in the sense of action that is pursued purposefully.