

## SYMBOLIC ANALYSIS OF CHARACTERS IN IBSEN'S THE WILD DUCK

By

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### ABSTRAK

*Sebuah karya sastra yang dibuat berdasarkan imajinasi penulis pada umumnya mencerminkan kehidupan manusia yang seringkali disampaikan melalui tulisannya berdasarkan lingkungan sosial di sekitarnya sebagai dasar acuan. Wellek dan Warren (1973:39) menyatakan bahwa karya sastra itu sendiri membenarkan semua kepentingan kita dalam kehidupan seorang penulis, dalam lingkungan sosial dan seluruh proses sastra.*

*Sedangkan untuk menganalisis sebuah karya sastra, mengidentifikasi bagian-bagian terpisah untuk menentukan hubungan antara bagian-bagiannya diperlukan. Hal ini untuk menemukan hubungan bagian tersebut dengan karya sastranya (Kenney, 1966:5).*

*Dalam studi ini, cerita drama yang berjudul *The Wild Duck* karya Hendrik Ibsen dipilih untuk dianalisis. Ibsen dalam caerita ini dihadapkan dengan hasil yang logis dari situasi di mana seorang idealis membawa pesan kepada orang yang berada pada dunia normal tetapi dalam kekosongan jiwa . *The Wild Duck* berisikan masalah-masalah hidup dan pemecahan dilema moral Ibsen sendiri pada saat dia berjuang diantara idealisme dan temperamen duniawinya sendiri . Dengan sudut pandang anti -romantis , drama ini menyajikan antara nilai-nilai yang berlawanan dari Idealis dan Realitas.*

*Dengan cerita dramanya *The Wild Duck* , Ibsen seorang dramawan yang luar biasa ingin menunjukkan minatnya dalam mengeksplorasi kepentingan dan keprihatinan manusia melalui karyanya .Hal yang memenuhi pikiran Ibsen adalah ia mengukur nilai masyarakat yang bisa membantu atau menghambat seorang untuk menjadi dirinya sendiri.*

Kata kunci: *perselingkuan, Kesedihan, kematian*

## 1. Background of Study

Literary work cannot be separated from human life. The expression of literary form is language. Literature is an act of language, it is inseparable from life because it presents and describes the events that can happen in real life in society. Through literary work, which usually reflects our life, we can experience through our imagination and also we learn about human being.

A literary work is created based on the imagination of the writer and it generally reflects the social condition, which uses the social surrounding as the foundation. Wellek Warren ( 1973:39 ) states that the works of literature themselves justify all our interests in the life of an author, in this social environment and the whole process of literature.

According to Wellek Warren ( 1973: 227 ) literary work can be divided into three genres. They are poetry, drama, and prose. The type of literary work that is analyzed in this study is drama. A drama is a work of literature or a composition, which delineates life and human activity by means of presenting various actions and dialogues between groups of character, and it is designed for theatrical performance and action stage.

Drama is able to show people going through some eventful period in their lives, seriously or humorously. The speech and action of a play recreate the flow of human life. A play comes fully to life only on the stage. On the stage it combines many arts those of the author, director, actor, designer, and others. Dramatic performance involves an intricate process of rehearsal based upon imagery inherent in the dramatic text ([www.britanica.com](http://www.britanica.com)).

In this study, the play entitled *The Wild Duck* is chosen to be analysed. Henrik Johan Ibsen, the playwright of *The Wild Duck* was a major 19th-century Norwegian playwright, theatre director, and poet. He is often referred to as "the father of realism" and is one of the founders of Modernism in theatre.

*The Wild Duck* gains further eminence in its issuance of Ibsen into a new era of writing, one in which symbolism and characterization- as opposed to social realism- gained prominence. With *The Wild Duck*, an already esteemed playwright showed his continued interest in exploring new interests and concerns through his work.

## **2. Problem of the Study**

Based on the background mentioned above, the focus of this study is limited to the following questions:

1. What is the symbolic analysis of the characters in Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*?
2. What message does the playwright want to tell to the readers?

## **3. Aims of Study**

This study is intended to fulfil three aims: the general, specific, and academic aims.

The general aim of this writing is to apply theories related to play in order to get better understanding of Hendrik Ibsen's work entitled *The Wild Duck*.

Meanwhile the specific aim of this writing is to find out what message the playwright actually wants to tell.

The last is an academic aim that is to apply the theory of literature studied in the English Department to write a scientific work which gives contribution to this department, so this writing can be used as a reference in literary analysis.

## **4. Research Method**

There are three aspect of the research of the study; they are consists of data source, data collection and data analysis.

### **4.1. Data Source**

The data is collected from the story entitled *The Wild Duck* by Hendrik Ibsen (cited in <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/modeng/modeng0.browse.html>)

## 4.2. Method and Technique of Collecting Data

The data is collected through reading the play intensively and make note all the information relevant to the discussion in this study and then the data is

identified in accordance with their type and descriptively presented. They are several types of collecting data :

1. Reading the play carefully, selecting and taking note the selected items based on the related topic.
2. Find out the symbolic analysis of the characters in the play, and what message the playwright wants to convey to the readers?

## 4.3. Method and Technique of Analysing Data

The analysis correlates to the problems that are formulated. The method for analyzing the data is descriptive. The data was collected from the data source and through the data collection, it was analyzed by using the theory of Reaske, Christopher Russell. 1966. *How to Analyze Drama* and Warren and Wellek. 1962. *Theory of Literature*, and other supporting theory of Knicbocker and Reninger. 1963. *Interpreting Literature*.

## 5. Analysis

### Play Summary

Gregers Werle has avoided his father, whom he detests, by spending fifteen years in the family mining concern. Gregers is so unattractive in appearance that he has given up all hope of marrying and having a family; instead, he has become an idealist and goes about advocating and preaching a theme of truth and purity. He calls his mission the "claim of the ideal."

His father, Old Werle, has allegedly driven his sick wife to her death by carrying on love affairs in his own home. He had once had his serving girl, Gina, as his mistress. Arranging her marriage with Hialmar Ekdal, the son of his former partner, Werle also

sets the couple up in the profession of photography. Hialmar is pleased with his marriage and believes that Gina's child is his own daughter. At present, Old Werle lives with his housekeeper and between them there are no secrets.

Lieutenant Ekdal, Werle's former partner, is now a broken old man. He does odd jobs for Werle. Earlier, the company had appropriated a large quantity of lumber from a government owned farm. Werle placed all the blame on Ekdal who was sentenced to prison. He is now living with Hialmar and Gina.

Gregers Werle comes to Hialmar and explains the claim of the ideal and tries to make Hialmar see that his marriage is based on a lie. But rather than making Hialmar happy by understanding the true nature of his marriage, Gregers only succeeds in turning Halmar against his daughter, Hedvig. The daughter, in order to prove her love for her father who is rejecting her, takes a pistol and kills herself. Hialmar then becomes bitterly remorseful about his behavior.

As in all of Ibsen's plays, the characters in *The Wild Duck* reflect each other, and by mutual comparison it expands the dramatic theme and hasten events to their conclusion. In this play, however, the characters are not only related among themselves; they each bear relation to the integral symbolism of the play, especially the image of the wild duck. Only old Werle and Mrs. Sorby are excepted. Facing realities in their past and present, these pragmatic individuals successfully begin to build a life based on mutual trust and truthfulness. Werle, in fact, desired that his servant get rid of the wounded bird: He has no need of a wild duck.

Hedvig, the most pathetic character and innocent victim of the tension between the two men who stand for the "lie" and the "truth" has much in common with the wild duck. Too inexperienced to recognize the shallow affection Hialmar reconcile with her, she is happy at home, for, like the wild duck who has forgotten the freedom of sky, sea, and woods in captivity. She has had no contrasting experience in life to provide her with perspective on those she lives with.

Moreover, since she is Gina's natural daughter, she, like the wounded bird, is an indirect present from old Werle to the Ekdals. When Hedvig realizes that her father rejects her, she plans to sacrifice the wild duck to show her love and recall his. This is her attempt to adjust to the new truth Gregers has revealed. Finding her free will offering insufficient, however, Hedvig goes one step further and kills herself. With this suicide, the wild duck and Hedvig become joined: She dies instead of the bird as if to prove Gregers' warning that the wild duck, after once glimpsing the blue sky, will pine for her former freedom.

In this play, Hedvig's doubling with the wild duck particularly distinguishes itself from that of the rest of the characters in that it takes the substitution of metaphor to a deadly conclusion. This shift occurs when the two figures both become the object of sacrifice. When Hialmar abandons Hedvig, Gregers will exhort her to sacrifice the duck, her most precious possession, to prove her love for her father. Hedvig will enter the garret to kill the duck but end by killing herself.

Gregers Werle, appearing as a bird of ill omen, tries to rescue the Ekdals from the swamp of their self-deception. He thinks Hialmar a wounded bird who will drown in the depths of the sea unless Gregers, like his father's "amazingly clever dog," will dive to retrieve him. However, he soon discovers his own self-deception. Encountering failure at proclaiming the truth, discovering his admired friend Hialmar to be a hollow-souled egotist, Gregers recognizes that lies are necessary to existence. Unwilling, however, to accept this pragmatic solution to life, Gregers himself becomes like the wild duck, who, when wounded, bites fast to the underwater seaweed and drowns: Despite the ruined dreams, he still clings to the illusory "claim of the ideal."

Where Gregers proves to be an unsuccessful retriever, Dr. Relling is successful. Like Werle's "amazingly clever dog" the physician rescues individuals from the "marsh poisons" of their unfulfilled desires. By providing these wounded "wild ducks" with a new environment in their imaginations, he encourages his friends to adjust to the unsatisfactory circumstances of life. His romanticism thus generates the very force for men of weak character to maintain their hold on reality.

Another significant symbolic idea in *The Wild Duck* is that of photography. That Hialmar Ekdal is a photographer underscores the imitative nature of his way of life. Taking ideas and ideals from other sources, Hialmar presents an image of nobility and an appearance of character depth he does not

really possess. In the course of the play, Hialmar is busy at retouching — we never see him take any pictures. By the same token, Ekdal retouches his own self-image, minimizing his character blemishes until his whole life is a distortion of the truth.

*The Wild Duck* is littered with weighty and heavy-handed symbolism. Certainly the play's chief symbol is the wild duck. The duck serves as a "quilting point" for the characters' fantasies of themselves and those around them. Thus Ekdal figures as the wild duck in having been betrayed and shot down by his old partner Werle. He has sunk into his reveries never to return. Gregers imagines Hialmar as the wild duck in his entrapment in the "poisonous marshes" of his household, the tangle of deceit that makes his marriage possible. In contrast, he imagines himself in the figure of the clever dog that would rescue the wounded bird. He also considers himself the wild duck in becoming the Ekdals' adopted tenant. Finally, Hedvig figures as the wild duck in that she loses her family and place of origin. She is in some sense her father's adopted child.

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## **6. Conclusion**

In this final chapter, Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* can be concluded as follows,

As people began to understand both Ibsen's notion of "tragic-comedy" as well as his insightful characterization, the play began to develop the fine reputation it still holds today. Now popularly regarded as one of Ibsen's more important works, *The Wild Duck* gains further eminence in its issuance of Ibsen into a new era of writing, one in which symbolism and characterization- as opposed to social realism-gained prominence. With *The Wild Duck*, an already

esteemed playwright showed his continued interest in exploring new interests and concerns through his work.

The thing which filled [Ibsen's] mind was the individual man, and he measured the worth of a community according as it helped or hindered a man in being himself. He had an ideal standard which he placed upon the community and it was from this measuring that his social criticism proceeded.

Second, Ibsen believed that the final personal tragedy comes from a denial of love. From this viewpoint we see that Torvald is an incomplete individual because he attaches more importance to a crime against society than a sin against love.

Hedvig's tragic suicide is the result of her pathetic attempt to recall her father's affections.

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