

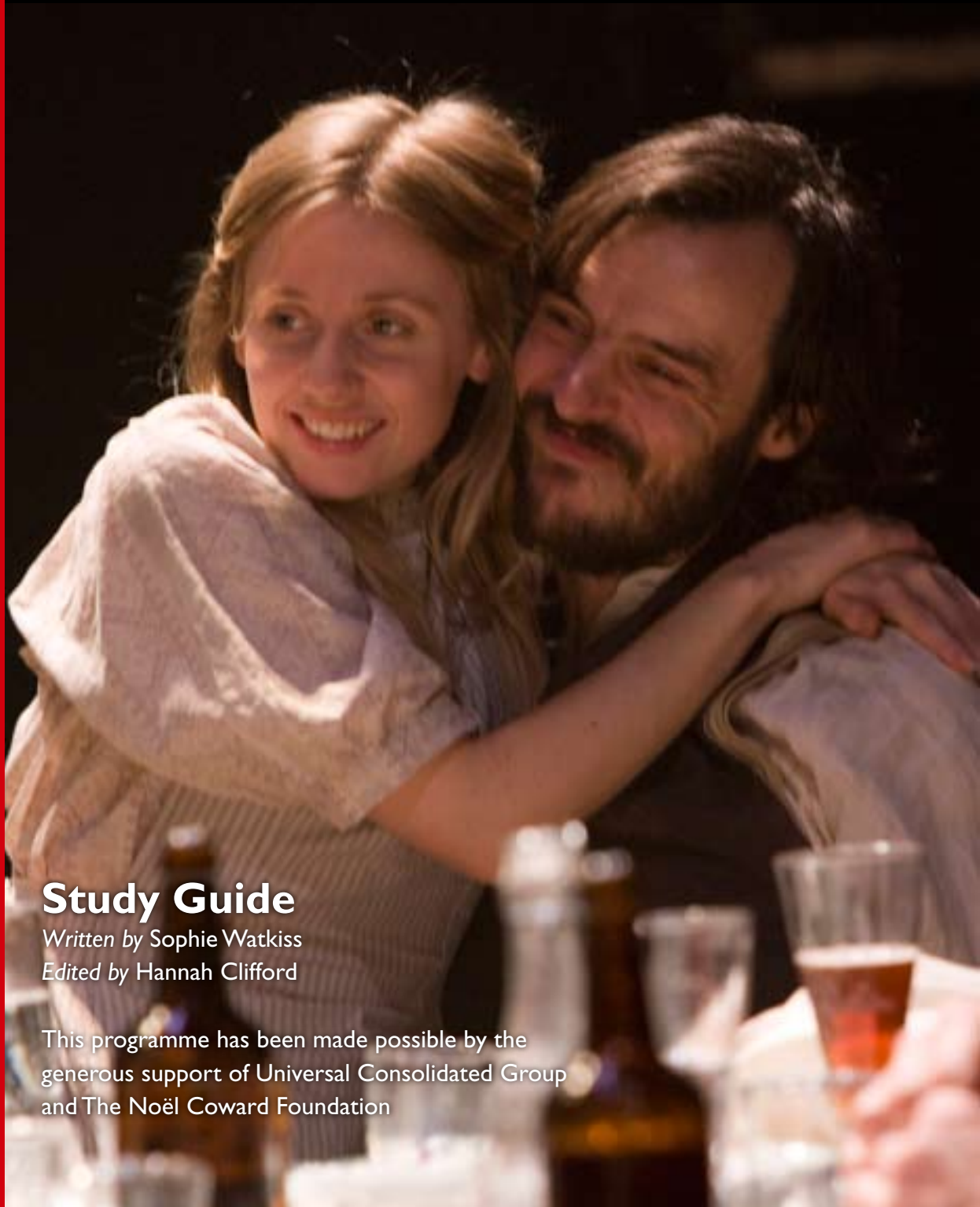
DOMMAR®

The Wild Duck

By Henrik Ibsen

A New Version by David Eldridge

From a Literal Translation by Charlotte Barslund



Study Guide

Written by Sophie Watkiss

Edited by Hannah Clifford

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Cast and Creative Team

Cast:

| | |
|----------------------------|------------------|
| John Atterbury | Petterson |
| Susan Brown | Mrs Sørby |
| Peter Caulfield | Jensen |
| Ben Daniels | Gregers Werle |
| Peter Eyre | Old Ekdal |
| Michelle Fairley | Gina Ekdal |
| William Gaunt | Håkon Werle |
| Paul Hilton | Hjalmar Ekdal |
| Sean Jackson | Molvik and Balle |
| Nicholas Le Prevost | Relling |
| Sinead Matthews | Hedvig |
| Richard Syms | Flor |

Creative Team:

| | |
|------------------------------|-------------------|
| Michael Grandage | Director |
| Vicki Mortimer | Designer |
| Neil Austin | Lighting Designer |
| Music and Sound Score | Adam Cork |

An introduction to Henrik Ibsen

Henrik Ibsen: a chronology of key events in the playwright's life

- 1828** Born in the town of Skien, Norway
- 1850** His first play, *Catilina*, is published under the pseudonym of Brynjolf Bjarme
- 1851** The staging of his second play, *The Warrior's Barrow* leads to his appointment as resident playwright with the newly formed Norwegian National Theatre at Bergen
- 1857** Takes up the post of Artistic Director of the Norwegian Theatre, Oslo
- 1858** Marries Suzannah Thoresen. A son, Sigurd, is born the following year
- 1864** *The Pretenders* is performed at the Norwegian National Theatre. The same year Ibsen is offered a scholarship and leaves Norway to live first in Italy and then Germany
- 1866** *Brand*, an early verse play, is published. Although not staged until 1885, it becomes his first major success, introducing him to a European audience
- 1867** *Peer Gynt*, now the best known of his verse plays, is written, but not produced until 1876
- 1877** *Pillars of Society*
- 1879** *A Doll's House*
- 1881** *Ghosts*
- 1882** *An Enemy of the People*
- 1884** ***The Wild Duck***. Ibsen's first experimentation with symbolism, which he develops further with *The Master Builder* in 1884
- 1886** *Rossersholm*
- 1888** *The Lady from the Sea*
- 1890** *Hedda Gabler*
- 1891** Ibsen returns to live in Norway
- 1892** *The Master Builder*
- 1894** *Little Eyolf*
- 1896** *John Gabriel Borkman*
- 1899** *When We Dead Awaken*. Ibsen's last play, written at the age of seventy, is often compared to Shakespeare's last play, *The Tempest*, in terms of its wisdom and maturity
- 1906** Ibsen dies. In recognition of his world wide reputation as a playwright, he is honoured with a state funeral in his native Norway

Background information

Henrik Ibsen wrote his tragicomedy, *The Wild Duck* in 1884 at the age of 56. At this stage in his career, Ibsen had become both highly praised and savagely denounced throughout Europe for his work. Performances of the play were staged in most European capital cities. These performances were accompanied, as usual, by heated discussion over Ibsen's unsettling, elusive meanings and, at the time, still revolutionary dramatic technique, which eschewed the tradition of the 'well-made play' and presented ambiguous as opposed to 'stock' characters.

Although Ibsen struggled for recognition for the bulk of his career, only the works of Shakespeare are more frequently performed on the international stage. Ibsen's early works, such as *Brand* and *Peer Gynt* are romantic and historical dramas, often centring on a rebel hero who destroys himself searching for an indefinable "truth". With *Pillars of Society* (1877), Ibsen entered his "modern" period, widely regarded as his most successful, in which he focused on the problems of contemporary society. The psychological depth of his later characters, combined with his constant questioning of moral and political conventions, have led to him being frequently hailed as the "father of modern drama".



 **Did you know that. . .**

Ibsen's first major success, *A Doll's House* (1879), so scandalised Victorian society with its sympathetic portrayal of a woman who abandons her family, that many theatres refused to stage it, pressuring Ibsen into writing an alternative ending. This artistic betrayal distressed the author so much, however, that he occasionally submitted a last minute "correction" to actors on the opening night, replacing the new ending with the original.

Ibsen's family was ruined when he was a child, and financial difficulty forms a backdrop to many of his works, while a number of his characters - the bitter Hjalmar Ekdal, for example, in *THE WILD DUCK* - bear distinct resemblances to his parents. Although Ibsen lived abroad for 27 years, nearly all his plays are set in Norway, and most in the kind of small, coastal town in which he grew up. Social and ideological conflicts were much more clearly exposed in these micro-communities than in large cities, making them ideal settings for Ibsen's drama.

Ibsen's most famous disciple was George Bernard Shaw, who shared his hero's unabashed intellectualism and concern with contemporary social issues. But Ibsen's influence can also be felt in most of the great 20th century dramatic realists, from Anton Chekhov to John Osborne, while it has been argued that his earlier, more impressionistic work, *Peer Gynt*, is one of the sources of both the surrealist and expressionist movements.

An introduction to THE WILD DUCK

'Much of the effectiveness of his radical social dramas derives from his refusal to allow idealism to cloud the realities of human nature.'

Robin Young¹

Like all of Ibsen's later plays, THE WILD DUCK is essentially a middle-class 'family drama'. It is about the impoverished Ekdal family: the ineffectual dreamer Hjalmar, his stolid wife Gina, their adolescent daughter Hedvig and Hjalmar's ageing defeated father. Their world is invaded by Gregers Werle, a brooding, guilt ridden idealist who sets out to redeem their family life from the spectres of the past, and, in so doing, destroy the props of illusion that hold together their existence, finally leading to the family's emotional destruction.



The milieu of the play

The milieu of the play, i.e. the environment which the characters inhabit and are influenced by, is what Ibsen would have identified as middle-class. During the preceding century, western civilisation had been transformed from an aristocratic to a predominantly democratic social order through political revolutions initiated by the fall of the Bastille in 1789. This is reflected in Act One, where the court Chamberlains, representative of the old aristocratic order, are now 'holding court' with the most influential man in the new order, the industrialist Håkon Werle.



Research tasks

- Divide the following research tasks up amongst the class:
- THE WILD DUCK was written in 1884. Find out about the demographics of Norway in the late nineteenth century.
- Who held political power in Norway at the time?
- When did the industrial revolution begin in Norway? How does this compare with the timing of the industrial revolution in England?

The symbolism in the play

From Act Two onwards the play is set in Hjalmar's studio which appears to be an attic room. What was once an artist's studio is now the place of business of a photographer, an operator of a machine. The photographic equipment and instruments are a visual metaphor for the exact images of reality, as opposed to the wild duck, representing the mysterious realm of fantasy within the loft upstairs. During the play, we come to see each member of the Ekdal family polarised between, and defined by, their affinities for the camera, producing its exact images of external reality in the studio. For example, Gina is the pragmatist who actually runs the studio: it is she, not Hjalmar who transpires to be the photographer. Hjalmar only 'retouches' the photographic prints. His fantasising is linked to the domain of the wild duck within the loft, the same environment that sustains old Ekdal's nostalgic dreams of the past. For Hedvig, the loft can be imaginatively transformed into 'the depths of the deep blue sea.'

The play as tragicomedy

The play contains characters and situations which are unmistakably comic. Hjalmar and Gregers are both absurd in their own ways: Hjalmar could be described as a weak, vain, self-deceiver, Gregers a fixated hero-worshipper whose awareness of other people and of his own inner motives is woefully distorted. Each character appears to operate in their own world – Gregers at the ironworks, brooding over his family's past and coercing the workers to accept his 'Claims of the Ideal';

Hjalmar presiding over his wife and daughter, basking in self-delusion which sustains him but traps Gina and Hedvig.

Did you know that. . .

The way in which Gina Ekdal conceals her seduction as a servant by the wealthy Werle by marrying Hjalmar Ekdal and leading him to believe that the child is his, has resonances in the subplot of Ibsen's play *Ghosts*. In this play Mrs Alving finds a husband for the maid her husband has made pregnant.

Characters in THE WILD DUCK

The Ekdal household

Old Ekdal.

Formerly a Lieutenant in the army and Håkon Werle's disgraced business partner. His life is sustained by the illusion he has created for himself in the loft above the attic room in which he lives with his son's family. He has made the loft into a toy forest with a number of old Christmas trees. Here he can play at bear-hunting the hobby of his youth. The loft is also full of rabbits and pigeons which he occasionally shoots and brings downstairs as bounty.

Hjalmar Ekdal.

Old Ekdal's son, a photographer, who believes he is constantly under pressure to support his family by putting food on the table – when in fact it is his wife, Gina, who is the breadwinner. Devotes his life to clearing his father's name from the disgrace brought on by imprisonment for breach of the forestry laws. He intends to do this by making himself famous as a great inventor.

Gina Ekdal.

Hjalmar's wife, the only member of the family who sees the reality of the impoverished situation in which the family live.

Hedvig.

Their 14 year old daughter, believes absolutely in her father and the promise of his invention. The wild duck, which lives in the loft along with her grandfather's menagerie of rabbits and pigeons, is her special possession.

Relling.

A doctor who lives downstairs. He is a passionate believer in what he calls 'the life lie': the necessity of illusion to sustain those who find the reality in which they live unbearable to tolerate.



Molvik.

A disgraced clergyman, a drunkard, who lives downstairs. He maintains respect for himself and his life through the illusion invented for him by Relling. Relling has made Molvik believe that he has to indulge in bouts of drinking as he is 'demonic' by nature, thus excusing his addiction to alcohol.

The Werle Household

Håkon Werle.

A successful and wealthy wholesale merchant, who holds a position of high status within the community.

Gregers Werle.

His son. A passionate idealist who makes it his mission in the play to bring Hjalmar and Gina to the state of the 'ideal marriage'. He achieves this by exposing the fact that the marriage is currently based on a lie: Hjalmar does not know that Gina was the mistress of Gregers' father, prior to her marriage. Gregers' mission is key to the action of the play.

Mrs Sørby.

Housekeeper to Håkon Werle and subsequently his fiancée.

Gråberg.

Werle's bookkeeper.

Preparation work prior to seeing THE WILD DUCK in performance

This section of the Study Guide highlights key elements of the play, act by act, for students to look out for in performance. It also suggests research tasks and practical exercises to gain an insight into the production either before or after they have seen it.

Act 1

Background to Old Ekdal

In Act 1 we learn about the shifts in status that have occurred in Ekdal's life. As a young man he was a Lieutenant in the army and then became Mr Werle's partner at the saw mill. A law suit against him for allegedly felling trees illegally led to bankruptcy and prison. At the start of the play he is described as having 'fallen on hard times', humbly earning a pittance from copying work given to him by the clerk of his former business partner.



Research Task

- Find out the seniority in status of a Lieutenant in the 1880s Norwegian and/or British army. Now find out about debtor's prisons during the period.
- What insight does this research give you about the background to Old Ekdal's character?

Thirteen at table

As dinner finishes, Werle enters. His opening lines express his unease at his son Gregers' invitation to Hjalmar to dine with them:

Werle: I don't think anyone noticed.

Gregers: What?

Werle: You didn't notice Gregers?

Gregers: What was there to notice?

Werle: We were thirteen.

Gregers: Really – Were we thirteen?

Werle glances at Hjalmar.

Werle: We're usually twelve...



Discussion Point

- What does Werle's reference to there being 'thirteen' at dinner allude to?
- What is the significance of there being thirteen guests at Werle's dinner table?
- How does the closing image of the production allude to this metaphor?



Practical Exercise

Read aloud the following extracts from the play. Extract 1 is taken from Act 1 as Mrs Sørby flirts and jokes with the Chamberlains after dinner; extract 2 is taken from Act 2 as Hjalmar recounts his evening at the Werle's dinner party.

Extract 1

Mrs Sørby: The old vintages are the finest.
Shortsighted Gentleman: Would you consider me one of the oldest vintages?
Mrs Sørby: Far from it.
Balding Gentleman: What about me Mrs Sørby?
Podgy Gentleman: And me! What vintage do you consider us?
Mrs Sørby: You are the sweetest vintages gentleman. Sweet and youthful.

She sips a glass of punch. The Chamberlains laugh.

Extract 2

Hjalmar: Well I told them one or two things.
Ekdal: Who the Chamberlains?
Hjalmar: I might have done. We exchanged a few words over the Tokai.
Ekdal: Tokai that's a fine wine take my word for it that's a fine wine.
Hjalmar: Not all the vintages are fine it depends on how much sunshine the grape gets.
Gina: Ekdal you know everything.
Ekdal: And did they take issue with you?
Hjalmar: They tried to but I told them Chamberlains were just the same and their vintages aren't all as fine as each other either.
Gina: The things you think of –
Ekdal: And you said that straight to their faces? He told them straight to their faces.
Gina: Imagine that.

What does Hjalmar's rendition of the story tell us about his character? What is the purpose of the story and to what extent do you think Hjalmar believes in it himself?



Act 2

The build up to Gregers' first entrance into the Ekdal household

In the first part of Act 2, Ibsen shows his audience the interaction between the members of the Ekdal household and cleverly crafts the moments prior to Gregers' first entrance into the home:

Hjalmar: No beer for me now. Go and get my flute.

Hedvig runs to the bookcase and gets it.

Hjalmar: Look at this. My flute and you two, Ah –

Hedvig sits with Gina. Hjalmar walks backwards and forwards very slowly; he breathes in deeply and plays a Bohemian folk dance. The pace is gentle and lyrical and his interpretation sensitive. He breaks off and stretches out his hand to Gina.

Hjalmar It might be humble but this is our home Gina.

He resumes playing. There is a knock at the front door. Gina stands.

Gina: I think there's someone at the door.

Hjalmar puts the flute back in the bookcase....Gina opens the door. Gregers stands in the hallway.



Discussion Point

- Why is Gregers' first entrance into the Ekdal household a significant moment in the play?
- How has Michael Grandage directed the section of the scene printed above in order to maximise the impact of Gregers' entrance?

Spiritual versus physical blindness

Hjalmar and Gina reveal to Gregers that Hedvig is going blind, but that they can't bring themselves to tell her because 'she's happy and carefree as a little bird.' On one level, this blindness is a metaphor for the state of self-deception in which the family lives. It also contributes to one of the key themes of the play: spiritual versus physical blindness. Spiritual blindness is attributed to Gregers by Relling, when he refers to Hjalmar as 'this idol who you're so blinded by'. (Act 5).





Discussion Point

- How is the theme of spiritual versus physical blindness highlighted in the Donmar's production of THE WILD DUCK?

The audience's introduction to the wild duck in the loft

Ekdal shows Gregers the loft and reveals the menagerie of pigeons, chickens, and rabbits that live there – and of course the wild duck:

Ekdal: A strange creature believe you me.

Gregers: But how did you catch it?

Ekdal: I didn't catch it. There's a certain man I have to thank for it.

Gregers: My father?

Ekdal: Yes your father – exactly. Hum.

Hjalmar: How strange that you guessed Gregers?

Gregers: You told me earlier that you owe my father a great deal –

Gina: We didn't get the duck from Mr Werle himself –

Ekdal: He was out in his boat and he shot her. But your father's sight's poor now. Hum. So he only winged her.

Gregers: I see he only hit her with a few pellets.

Hjalmar: A couple.

Hedvig: She was hit below her wing and she couldn't fly.

Gregers: Did she dive right to the bottom?

Ekdal: They always do. Right to the bottom down as far as they can and hold on to some seaweed and whatever else they can find with their beaks and they never surface again.

Gregers: But Lieutenant Ekdal she did.

Ekdal: Your father's got a ferocious dog and it dived in after it and fetched it back up again.



Discussion Point

- When the loft and its contents are revealed to Gregers – and the audience – in the Donmar's production of THE WILD DUCK, how is the moment staged to accentuate the importance of both the loft and the wild duck as symbols?

Gregers' use of language

Much of the language used by Gregers in the play is idiomatic, i.e. it has an underlying meaning other than the one deducible from the words that he uses. An example of this is printed below:

Hjalmar: If you weren't Gregers Werle what would you be then?
Gregers: I'd be a clever dog.
Gina: A dog?
Hedvig: Oh no!
Gregers: A really clever dog – one that dives right down to the bottom of the deep blue sea after wild ducks.

Through interpreting Gregers' idiomatic dialogue, the audience can detect that Gregers sees himself as the rescuer of the Ekdal household who his father, as the predator, has wounded and sent down into the depths. Hedvig, in conversation with her mother after Gregers' departure, recognises the complexity of Gregers' idiomatic language:

Gina: What a peculiar thing to say that he wanted to be a dog?
Hedvig: I think he meant something else by it.
Gina: What?
Hedvig: I think he meant something else by what he was saying all the time.
Gina: Do you think so?

This is the audience's first indication of Hedvig's awareness that everything Gregers' says is symbolic.

Act 3

Gregers' relationship with Hedvig

Gregers talks to Hedvig about the loft where the wild duck lives:

Hedvig: ...if I'd learnt to weave then I could've made a new basket for my duck.
Gregers: Yes you could. And you're the person to do it.
Hedvig: Well it's my duck.
Gregers: It is.
Hedvig: It's my duck but Papa and Grandpapa can borrow it whenever they like.
Gregers: Why what do they do with it?
Hedvig: They look after it and build things for it.
Gregers: Well it's the finest creature in there.
Hedvig: That's because she's from the wild. That's why I feel so sorry for her because she's not got any one to look after.
Gregers: Not like the rabbits.

Hedvig: No and the hens know so many other hens they used to be chickens with. That's what's strange about the duck. No one knows her and no one knows where she's from either.

Gregers: And she's been to the bottom of the deep blue sea.

Hedvig glances at him quickly and suppresses a smile.

Hedvig: Why did you say bottom of the deep blue sea?

Gregers: Why what should I have said then?

Hedvig: You could have said the bottom of the sea or – the seabed.

Gregers: Can't I say the bottom of the deep blue sea as well?

Hedvig: It sounds peculiar when other people say the bottom of the deep blue sea.

Gregers: Why? Tell me.

Hedvig: No it's silly.

Gregers: No – why did you smile?

Hedvig: Because whenever I think of everything in there I always think it's like the bottom of the deep blue sea. That is so silly.

Gregers: No it isn't.

Hedvig: It is it's only a loft.

Gregers: Are you sure about that?

Hedvig: That it's only a loft?

Gregers: Yes – Why are you so sure?

Hedvig is silent and looks at him with her mouth open.



Observation point

- When you see the Donmar's production of THE WILD DUCK, view the scenes between Gregers and Hedvig from Hedvig's perspective – the eyes of a fourteen year old young girl.
- How does she appear to respond to Gregers' behaviour and conversation, both in the scenes when they are alone and in the company of others?

Gregers' mission and his 'Claim of the Ideal.'

In the following scene we see Gregers' first attempt to confront Hjalmar with his mission to 'save' him from the deceit in which he believes he has been living:

Gregers: Don't you think all the things in the loft distract you too much?

Hjalmar: Listen I can't wander about the place bogged down by the same exhausting thoughts day after day. I've got to do something else to fill the time. Inspiration and the imaginative impulse comes when it comes.

Gregers: Hjalmar part of me thinks something of the wild duck's got in to you.

Hjalmar: How do you mean? Do you think the shot that winged my father nearly killed me as well?

Gregers: No I wouldn't say you were crippled by it. But you've ended up in a poisonous swamp Hjalmar. You've got a disease in your body and I think you've dived to the bottom to die in the dark.



Discussion Point

- In performance, how does Hjalmar initially respond to Gregers' interpretation of his life?
- Observe how Ben Daniels interprets the part of Gregers in performance. As an actor, what performance techniques does he employ to inveigle his way into the Ekdal household and carry out his mission to help Hjalmar realise the 'Claim of the Ideal'?



Act 4

The shift in the relationship between Hjalmar and his family

The Act begins with Gina having just finished a photographic session for a young couple. Hjalmar then returns to the studio. It is evident from his behaviour that Gregers has spoken to him about Gina's past. From now on he wants to do everything himself and get on with his work on his own:

- Hedvig: And what about the animals Papa?
- Hjalmar: Don't mention that nonsense to me ever again! From tomorrow I'm not going to set foot in that loft ever again.
- Hedvig: But you promised me tomorrow we'd have my party in there!
- Hjalmar: Well the day after then – That bloody wild duck I'd like to wring its neck!
- Gina: Ekdal!
- Hedvig: No Papa no it's my duck!
- Hjalmar: I haven't got the heart – for your sake Hedvig but I shouldn't have to suffer a creature under my roof which has been in those hands.

Left alone with Gina, Hjalmar confronts her with the 'swamp of deceit' in which they have been living. Gina defends herself by saying that she's had plenty to do with the day to day running of the house and business not to torment herself with remorse and doubts over her past.

Observation point

When you see the Donmar's production of THE WILD DUCK, consider how Hjalmar's entrance in Act 4 shows a shift in his relationship with Gina and Hedvig in comparison with his entrance in Act 2.

Practical Exercise

- In pairs, improvise the conversation that takes place between Gregers and Hjalmar, where Gregers reveals that Gina was Werle's mistress prior to her marriage to Hjalmar.
- How would this exercise help you to approach playing the part of Hjalmar during the opening of Act 4?

As Gina goes out to search for Hjalmar, Hedvig is left alone with Gregers. She is distraught by her father's behaviour and is at her most vulnerable:

Hedvig sits upright and dries her tears.

Hedvig: Why won't papa have anything to do with me anymore?

Gregers: You shouldn't ask about that until you've grown up.

Hedvig: I can't feel like this until I've grown up. I think I know what it is – I'm not Papa's real child.

Gregers: How could that be?

Hedvig: Mama found me and now papa's found out. I've read about things like that.

Gregers: Well if –

Hedvig: He can be fond of me just the same or even more. The wild duck too arrived as a present and I'm still fond of that.

Gregers: That's true. Let's talk about your duck Hedvig.

Hedvig: The poor thing. He can't bear to look at her either now. He wants to wring her neck.

Gregers: I don't think he'll do that.

Hedvig: He said it and I thought it was very nasty of papa to say that because I say a prayer for my duck every night to be preserved from dying and everything evil.

Gregers: Do you always say a prayer in the evening?

Hedvig: Yes.

Gregers: Who taught you that?

Hedvig: I did. Once papa was so ill he had leeches on his throat and he said that he was at death's door.

Gregers: Did he?

Hedvig: So I said a prayer for him when I was in bed. And I've done that ever since then. I thought it was a good idea to include the duck as well because she was so sick at the beginning.

Gregers: Do you say your prayers in the morning?

Hedvig: No.

Gregers: Why?

Hedvig: In the morning it is light and there is nothing to be frightened of.

Gregers: And your father wanted to wring its neck?

Hedvig: He said it'd be best if he did but he'd keep it for my sake.

Gregers: But what if you sacrificed the wild duck for your father's sake?

Hedvig gets up.

Hedvig: Do you think it would help him?

Gregers: Try it Hedvig.

Hedvig: Yes, I'll try it.

Gregers: Can you do it?

Hedvig: I'll ask Grandpapa to shoot her for me.

Gregers: Not a word of this to your mother.

Hedvig: Why not?
Gregers: She wouldn't understand.
Hedvig: I'll try it tomorrow morning.



Discussion Point

In this scene, Hedvig talks about seeing things differently depending on the time of day and the weather.

- When you have seen the Donmar's production of THE WILD DUCK, try and chart the time of day for each scene.
- How are production elements – such as lighting and sound - used to create the atmosphere of the outside world impinging on the Ekdal household?

Act 5

Ideals versus the illusion of the life lie

Gregers and Relling represent two opposing views of life: ideals versus the illusion of the life lie.

Relling's formula for survival is what he calls 'the life lie': the necessity of illusion to sustain those who find the reality of their lives unbearable to tolerate. He has sustained Hjalmar's emotional well being by encouraging him to fantasise about his 'invention' – an invention that he will never create, but keeps Hjalmar happy because Hedvig believes in both the invention and Hjalmar, 'with all the power of a child's imagination' (Hjalmar, Act 5). It is the same illusion/life lie that has sustained Old Ekdal:

Relling: What do you think about the bear hunter wandering around up in the loft hunting rabbits? There's no more content a hunter in the world than the old man when he's fooling around amongst the rubbish. The four or five old Christmas trees are the forest of Høydal. The hens are the game in the pine tree tops and the rabbits are the bears which he challenges. The mighty man of the outdoors!

Gregers: Poor, old lieutenant Ekdal he's certainly compromised the ideals of his youth.

Relling: Don't use that foreign word: ideals. We've our own good Norwegian word: lies.

Gregers: Do you think the two are related?

Relling: Like typhus and putrid fever.

Gregers: I won't give up until I've saved Hjalmar from your claws Dr Relling!

Relling: The worst thing for him – If you take the life lie from an ordinary man then you take away his happiness as well.

Gregers confronts Hedvig

Once again left on his own with Hedvig, Gregers confronts Hedvig physically and mentally. Having accepted the symbolism of his words last night, Hedvig now rejects it in the cold light of day. Gregers reads this as evidence that she has been ruined by her environment, as has her father and grandfather:

Gregers: I can tell from looking at you it's not been done.

Hedvig: No.

Gregers: You let yourself down when you started to do as I expect?

Hedvig: No but when I woke up early this morning and I remembered what we'd talked about I thought it was strange.

Gregers: Strange?

Hedvig: Yesterday when we talked about it I thought it was lovely but when I had had a sleep and remembered I didn't think much of it.

Gregers: You can't help being spoiled by growing up here.

Hedvig: I don't care if only Papa would come upstairs.

Gregers: If only you could see the things that make life worth living – the courageous sense of sacrifice – But I still believe in you Hedvig.





Discussion Point

This is the final exchange between Gregers and Hedvig in the play.

- How is it staged in the Donmar's production of THE WILD DUCK to emphasise the climax of the relationship between Hedvig and Gregers at this point? Pay particular attention to the stage picture created as Gregers delivers his final line in the scene.

In Act 2, Hedvig comes to the conclusion that Gregers means 'something else by what he is saying all the time'. By Act 5, Hedvig, confused and terrified by her father's harshness, thinks that she has finally grasped Gregers' symbolism and, presuming that she is the 'sacrifice' he alludes to towards the close of Act 4, goes into the loft with the pistol to carry out the fateful sacrifice.



Discussion Point

- Could it be said that the tragedy of THE WILD DUCK is partially brought about by Hedvig's mis-interpretation of the symbolism of Gregers' words?
- Are there any other factors that impact on the tragedy of Hedvig's suicide?
- How are these highlighted to the audience in the Donmar's production of the play?

Ideas for further practical work and reading



Practical Exercises

The Donmar commissioned a new version of *THE WILD DUCK* by David Eldridge, derived from a literal translation of Ibsen's original text written in Norwegian. Find another translation/version of the play. Compare some of the extracts printed in the Study Guide from David Eldridge's version of the play with the version that you find. In what ways do they differ? What do you notice about the way David Eldridge has put the language down on the page? Stylistically, how does this differ from the translation/version of the play that you have found? Experiment with reading the comparative extracts aloud.

- Write the brief (i.e., the outline) of a version of *THE WILD DUCK* located in a modern day setting. Consider some of the following to get you started:
- What job would your modern day Hjalmar do and how could you reflect this in the setting for Acts 2 to 4?
- What would Gregers' 'Claim of the Ideal' be in today's society?
- How would you deal with the symbolism of the loft and the wild duck?
- Consider some of the important events that have taken place before the start of the play that have had an impact on the characters. For example, the day when the wild duck was brought to the Ekdal's house; a day in Gregers' and Hjalmar's childhood when they were close friends; the day that Hjalmar's mother died; a meeting between Werle and Gina when he advised her to marry Hjalmar. Improvise the events. What discoveries do you make about the 'back story' of your character as a result?

Further Reading

| | |
|---|-----------------------|
| <i>Ibsen Plays 1 – 6</i> | Published by Methuen |
| <i>The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen</i> | James McFarlane (Ed) |
| <i>Drama from Ibsen to Brecht</i> | Raymond Williams |
| <i>Ibsen and Early Modernist Theatre</i> | Kirsten Shepherd-Barr |
| <i>Modern drama in theory and practice 1:</i> | |
| <i>Realism and Naturalism</i> | J L Styan |
| <i>Ibsen's Women</i> | Joan Templeton |

Footnote

- 1 Robin Young, 'Ibsen and Comedy' in James McFarlane (ed) *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p.66

Appendix



Photo courtesy of
Alan Brodie
Representation Ltd
6th Floor,
Fairgate House,
78 New Oxford Street,
London WC1A 1HB

Tel: 020 7079 7990
Fax: 020 7079 7999
info@alanbrodie.com
www.alanbrodie.com

NOËL COWARD

Noël Coward was born in Teddington on 16th December 1899. By the time he'd reached the age of 7½ he had made his first public appearance in an end-of-term concert at St Margaret's School in Sutton.

In January 1911 Noël made his professional debut in *The Goldfish*, a children's musical, which premièred at the Little Theatre followed by runs at the Royal Court Theatre and the Crystal Palace Theatre. His performance caught the attention of the great Charles Hawtrey who asked the boy actor to appear in his autumn production of *The Great Name* at the Prince of Wales Theatre. He went on to appear in the very first production of *Where The Rainbow Ends* at the Savoy Theatre, a fairytale show that was in demand almost every Christmas for the next 40 years. During this run, Hawtrey encouraged the children in the show to stage their own special matinees. It was at one of these that Coward discovered another talent – in 1912 he directed 11-year old Dot Temple's first play. From then on there was no stopping him.

By 1915 Coward played his first adult role in *Charley's Aunt* and had written both the music and lyrics to his first song, *Forbidden Fruit*. He made his cabaret debut in 1916, and by 1917 he had produced a play for the first time, *Ida Collaborates* by Esme Wynne.

"I'll Leave It To You", Coward's first play was produced in London's West End in 1920 in which he played one of the juvenile leads. By 1922 his first book, *A Withered Nosegay*, was published and the very next year he produced his first revue, *London's Calling!* starring Gertrude Lawrence.

In 1929 he completed and produced *Bitter-Sweet* and, whilst it was playing in Manchester, he wrote *Private Lives*, one of his most produced plays. This premièred in the West End starring Coward and Gertrude Lawrence and then went on to Broadway in 1931, once again with Noël and Gertie.

In 1932 Coward won an Oscar for Best Picture for *Cavalcade*, and a year later *Design For Living* was produced on Broadway featuring Coward and the Lunts.

During 1934 he appeared in his first major film role in *The Scoundrel*. He also formed *Transatlantic Productions* for the purpose of producing his plays (as well as others) along with the Lunts.

By 1937 the first volume of Noël Coward's autobiography, *Present Indicative*, was published and the second part, *Future Indefinite*, in 1954. The third part of this autobiography, *Past Conditional*, was worked on in 1967 but later abandoned.

During World War II, Coward had a post in the Enemy Propaganda Office in Paris. Whilst working there, from September 1939 to April 1940, he sang to the troops for the war effort, a role he took up again in 1944.

In 1941, another widely produced play, *Blithe Spirit*, began a long run in the West End before transferring to Broadway and by the end of the year, Coward had completed *In Which We Serve* for which he won an Oscar for Best Production the next year, when it was premièred.

Yet another very famous play of Coward's - *Present Laughter* - was produced in the West End in 1943, along with *This Happy Breed* with Coward in the leading role. The following year his film *Brief Encounter* premièred.

In 1948, sadly, Coward made his last appearance with Gertrude Lawrence as a replacement for Graham Payn in *Tonight At 8:30*. In 1951 he made his first cabaret appearance at the *Café de Paris*, London. His company, *Transatlantic Productions* produced their last play, *Quadrille*, in 1954 and in 1955 Noël made his television debut in *Together With Music* with Mary Martin.

In 1958 Noël made his last Broadway appearances in *Nude With Violin* and *Present Laughter* and in 1966 he made his final stage appearance in his last three plays, *Suite In Three Keys* in the West End.

In 1968 he was portrayed by Daniel Massey in a film about Gertrude Lawrence called *Star!* Coward's 70th birthday the following year was celebrated with many tributes on stage, screen, television and radio, and in 1970 he was knighted.

In 1972 two compilations of his work, *Oh Coward!* and *Cowardy Custard* were produced in New York and London respectively. Coward was last seen in public at a gala performance of *Oh Coward!*

He died on 26th March 1973 in Jamaica.

About the Donmar Warehouse –

a special insight into the theatre

The Donmar Warehouse is an intimate (not for profit) 251 seat theatre located in the heart of London's West End. The theatre attracts almost 100,000 people to its productions a year. Since 1992, under the Artistic Direction of Michael Grandage and his predecessor, Sam Mendes, the theatre has presented some of London's most memorable theatrical experiences as well as garnered critical acclaim at home and abroad. With a diverse artistic policy that includes new writing, contemporary reappraising of European classics, British and American drama and music theatre, the Donmar has created a reputation for artistic excellence over the last 12 years and has won 25 Olivier Awards, 12 Critics' Circle Awards, 10 Evening Standard Awards and 10 Tony Awards for Broadway transfers.

For more information about the Donmar's Education Activities, please contact:

Development Department,
Donmar Warehouse,
41 Earlham Street,
London WC2H 9LX.

T: 020 7845 5815,
F: 020 7240 4878,
E: friends@donmarwarehouse.com.