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“People Don’t Do Such Things!”:

Contextualizing Representations of Gendered Violence through the Re-Scripting of
Aristotelean Tragic Devices in Fin-de-Siècle Drama

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INTRODUCTION

Fin-de-siècle drama saw a change in theatrical trends that reformed the way women were viewed on and off stage. This change would quickly evolve into Suffragette drama. These plays became a reflection of the social unrest between the sexes. Some of the drama could be considered proto-feminist theatre because while it may not have concerned itself with the right to vote, it was fighting a battle for moral and legal equality for both sexes. Until the end of the Victorian Era, women had little to no legal rights of their own. In Sir Matthew Hale's *The History of the Pleas of the Crown* (1736), he details what would later be known as the "marital rape exemption", which meant that by a woman entering a marriage contract, she is presumed to have granted lifelong sexual consent to her husband, effectively making forced sexual intercourse legal among married couples. This prevented women from being able to sue or prosecute their husbands if they had been sexual assaulted by them. The Custody of Infants Act of 1839 was the first law that granted a married woman legal rights to her children. Until The Married Woman's Property Act of 1882, married women were not legally permitted to possess property or wealth outside of their marriage. These laws revolve around married woman, signifying that women were meant to find happiness, or at least contentment, within domesticity. In "Sexual Violence, Martial Guidance, and Victorian Bodies: An Aesthesiology" Joanna Bourke argues that Victorian domesticity was a cage that terrorized women. In order to bring up their husbands on abuse charges, they must prove physical abuse because sexual abuse was covered under the "martial rape exemption."¹ She contends that abolition was popular with early feminists due to feeling a kinship because they felt enslaved to their marriages.² She argues that the theatre became one of the most useful tools for the Suffragettes in the United Kingdom

because it not only gave them artistic license, but it gave them a platform to expose themselves to audiences. These plays not only petitioned for women's rights to vote, but to oppose the hold domesticity and motherhood had on women's roles within society.³

While Suffrage plays gained great popularity in the early 20th century, the decades of theatre proceeding that did not look kindly on productions that questioned a woman's role as wife and mother. In his article, "The London West End Theatre in the 1890's" J.P. wearing notes that farces and musicals made up not only the majority of the plays that were produced, but they also had the longest running performances. Foreign plays or plays performed in a language other than English were generally not sustained by the public.⁴ Melodrama presented an idealized version of domesticity. While the women in melodramas were often stock characters and bore various similarities; most productions had two women pinned against each other. The pure, chaste maiden was juxtaposed against the vile, sexually devious shrew. The melodramatic fallen woman was the foil to the good woman. She would often be killed off as punishment for her sins, while her purer counterpart would be rewarded through an ascension into matrimony. Yet, despite this, female characters were not the main protagonists in melodramas and would often have the fewest lines. Even if the female characters in the drama wanted to speak out against marriage or motherhood, they simply were not given the dialogue to do so. By 1893, the previously popular melodrama occupied only 8.5% of new commercial productions and the 9.4% of the general performances.⁵ This turn allowed audiences to not only begin to see new types of drama performed, but a vast difference in the types of female characters presented on stage. These females were not only given more lines and more stage time, the actresses behind them began to hold greater roles within the theatre. Naturally with this, plays that brought up "women's" problems were now being regularly produced and sustained. These plays paved the

way for Suffrage theatre by beginning to question a woman's place within society and by re-scripting the fallen woman plot. Three plays that are exceptional case-studies of this are Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* (1891) and *Rosmersholm* (1886) and Oscar Wilde's *Salome* (1892). Ibsen and Wilde rescript their fallen women into the tragic heroines of their respective dramas, thus creating not only roles for women that held substantial amounts of the dialogue, but put women who would not conform to societal norms as the focal points for these plays.

In Aristotle's *Poetics* he defines tragedy as the mimesis of action and life. Character and morality are to come second to life and action as they are extensions of them; they move them forward.⁶ The aim of tragedy is to arouse pity and fear through the central character that carries out the action, thus in order to be effective, the hero must not offend the moral sensibilities of its spectators. Ibsen and Wilde take this notion and twist it by having their re-scripted tragic heroines not only outrage the fickle morality of the audience, but by putting the mimesis of action and life behind character. To begin to explore the impact re-scripted tragic heroines had on Victorian and fin-de-siècle theatre, we need to first understand exactly what they are. For the purpose of this thesis, a re-scripted tragic heroine is a woman with either a sexually illicit past that deviates from the sexual norms, who also pushes the social limit of feminine behavior. She must have a quest, although this can be loosely defined. While the tragic heroine may seem interchangeable with the antagonist of the drama, she will be set apart from her contemporaries by her ability to inflict violence on both herself and others. Finally, she must die before the end of the play and there must be no catharsis derived from her death. These criteria allowed those particular women to become more than just props used to further the plot of another male-centered melodrama. This allowed these women to not only have control over their lives, but their deaths when the world could not reconcile itself with the changes in society that would

allow these women to thrive. They may have aroused fear from some audiences, but these women could not and should not be pitied. Instead their existence on stage ignites a fire, that particularly female audiences would feel for them, that their Aristotelean counterparts simply could not.

Much like the fallen woman, violence is not a new concept for the Victorian stage. However, it is a definitively gendered act and is often done to the woman, not by her. The fallen woman had a sexually deviant past; usually she had a child out of wedlock or her past history of sexual partners was made public knowledge through vicious gossip. More often than not, the fallen woman was shunned from polite society. Usually, near the conclusion of the play, she would either be killed at the hands of another or she would commit suicide to atone for her sins. The fallen woman could not fulfill her function within the play if she was allowed to thrive. Her death was cathartic for the audience; the only way they could forgive her for desecrating their hallowed Victorian mores was through her death. These tropes haunted the Victorian stage. Audiences knew exactly what they would get when they sat for a performance of a melodrama. They expected blood for their money; they expected the “unjust” woman to be justly punished. While Hedda, Beata, and Salome do kill themselves, their respective playwrights reclaim the trope of the fallen woman through their ability to inflict violence on themselves and on others in their respective dramas. The difference between their suicides and the suicides of their predecessors comes down to intent. Hedda, Beata, and Salome do not die because they cannot reconcile themselves within the world that they exist, on the contrary, their world cannot reconcile itself with them so they choose to remove themselves from it. The violence they enact on themselves is not a form of punishment, instead it is an act of liberation.

Today, *Hedda Gabler*, *Rosmersholm*, and *Salome* are largely considered feminist plays and scholars who set out to observe and argue this fall into one of three camps: either the bulk of their arguments rely on the play text alone, the social circumstances around a specific performance, or they spend their time attempting to discern whether or not the playwright was a feminist. While the latter argument is irrelevant to understanding these plays as cultural phenomena, the former two must not be examined as two distinctly separate entities, lest they fall short of understanding the gravity of Ibsen and Wilde's efforts to reclaim Aristotelean devices and plots for Victorian audiences. In order to fully grasp the complexities of *Hedda*, *Beata*, and *Salome* as important figures in feminine and gender studies, we must examine both Ibsen and Wilde's use of the tragic heroine plot in their respective dramas and how the violent acts these women commit break down the melodramatic tropes of the damsel in distress and the loveless, lamenting old maid. However, this cannot be accomplished through the thematic aspect of Ibsen and Wilde's dramatic writing alone, but must be accompanied with an understanding of the first productions of these dramas and the types of audiences that early productions attracted. Understanding both the thematic and theatrical as one entity within this thesis is integral to understanding how *Hedda Gabler*, *Rosmersholm*, and *Salome* dismantled mass dramaturgical imprints from past dramas.

CHAPTER I

HEDDA GABLER

THE GENERAL'S DAUGHTER

When speaking of her relationship with Ibsen, and more specifically with *Hedda Gabler*, in *Ibsen and the Actress* Elizabeth Robins writes, “How should men understand Hedda on the stage when they didn’t understand her in the persons of their wives, their daughters, their woman friends?”⁷ What she is referring to is the force that is Hedda. More than 130 years after its original premiere, Hedda still remains one of the roles successful young actresses must play in their career. A mystery to Victorian male audiences, many scholars are still unsure of what to make of her. Typically read as a melodramatic-esque fallen woman, Hedda does have a well known sexual past, yet she is not shunned from society because of it. Up until her marriage to George Tesman, Hedda was still very much apart of polite society. It was his lack of status and money that pulled her away from her former life. Despite her supposed sexual past, Tesman and his aunts welcome her into their family with open arms. The audience still identifies her as the fallen woman, yet she is in total control of her own fate. Not only that, she but she also has the ability to play with others’ fates as well. Her ability to commit acts of violence on others is a revolutionary idea for women on stage; she is not subjected to others succeeding in their attempts to control her and her ability to hurt others without moral constraints makes her as powerful as her male counterparts. That is not something Victorian women saw on stage very often. Hedda was not a heathen-esque mistress with no morals, she just had a different set of morals and on that basis alone, made her someone for Victorian audiences to fear. Audiences would also be uncomfortable with Ibsen allowing Hedda’s suicide to not be driven by a need to atone for her sins; it is entirely done out of her own volition. Hedda’s agency over not only how she lives her

life, but how and why she ends it sets the stage for a kinship Victorian women could feel with her; they too were unhappy in their roles as wife and mother. They were being suffocated under the rigid expectations placed upon them for merely being women. Hedda represented a release for them.

For the purpose of this thesis, in an attempt to bridge the thematic and the theatrical, we will focus on one early production of the play. Hedda Gabler would premier on the stage of the Vaudeville Theatre on April 20th, 1891. After seeing a production of *A Doll's House* starring Janet Achurch and being in one herself, Elizabeth Robins was approached by Marion Lea with *Hedda Gabler*. Both of the American actresses had only been moderately successful in London, due mostly to the actor-manager system. The actor-managers had a monopoly over the London West End Theatre circuit, choosing what plays were produced and when they were produced. This led to similar, if not completely the same, types of productions being unceasingly staged. Thus Victorian stage was plagued with male-centric melodramas with endlessly similar plots. This continuous cycle is one of the main reasons why Victorian women had yet to see a role like Hedda represented on stage. Robins and Lea brought *Hedda Gabler* to these actor-managers and were turned down with responses similar to, "There's no part for me!" and "But this is a woman's play, and an uncommon bad one at that!"⁸ These encounters led Robins and Lea to take a loan on some personal belongings and rent out the Vaudeville Theatre. This gave the actresses complete artistic control over their production, while simultaneously undermining the actor-manager system. The actor-managers allowed the British stage to overflow with great roles for men, but the defiance of Robins and Lea⁹ paved a way for substantial roles for women to take center stage.

Originally performed in Munich on January 31st, 1891, *Hedda Gabler* received moderate reviews. Robin's and Lea's production that April did not receive critical acclaim. In fact, it was highly criticized for being unrealistic and against Victorian mores. Despite these statistics of what was sustained on the Victorian stage and the production's bad reviews, *Hedda Gabler*'s originally slated week of matinee performances was extended to a month of evening performances due to its popularity amongst largely female audiences. This is as important to the feminist and gendered integrity of the production as what occurred on stage. The matinee was a fairly new invention for Victorian audiences. According to Susan Torrey Bartsow in her article, "Hedda is All of Us": Late-Victorian Women at the Matinee," the matinee originated in the 1870s as a means to extend performances of popular plays and to encourage new playwrights to produce untried work. This encouraged new work, but because matinee audiences were mostly female, it also encouraged the development of a new feminine collective consciousness.¹⁰ This collective consciousness was the spark that ignited an effort that would not only place more women on stage, but behind the scenes in roles such as playwright and manager. Eventually this collective consciousness would expand to include other facets of women's lives, allowing them to find worth outside of their homes and families. It is fitting that this notion was birth from matinees, as they were one of the only places Victorian women were allowed unaccompanied. In "Ibsen and the Actress," Elizabeth Robins recalls one of female spectators shouting, "Hedda is all of us!"¹¹ This cry to the collective female consciousness was a troubling sentiment for critics and the matinee girls' male counterparts; one of Ibsen's biggest critiques was that his scripts desecrated the sanctity of Victorian marriage and motherhood. In "Ibsen and the Theatre 1877-1900" Simon Williams argues that, "Ibsen's plays were often accused of being too gloomy, his characters belonged to hospitals, dissecting rooms, even morgues, and all of them were

unpleasant people with whom it was impossible to sympathize.”¹² This sentiment is a valid description of what male audiences thought about Ibsen’s heroine. Hedda’s entire being is a direct assault on the exalted Victorian wife and mother. For her sins, she is expected to die. Hedda’s ability to simultaneously undermine her masculine counterparts while rejecting her perceived role as wife and mother left some enraged. Controlling women are not sympathetic. She needs to die for audiences, specifically male audiences, to not only understand her, but to accept her. She does not die in a way Victorian audiences are used to for a woman who conducts herself like she does. Her ability to die with dignity leaves men unable to comprehend her, but for the matinee girls, she was inspiring.

Many contemporary feminist scholars¹³ criticize Hedda and other women like her because they argue that Hedda’s death does not provide a solution to the problem *Hedda Gabler* proposes. They want these fallen women to escape from their oppressors; they want them to be able to create a life and identity outside of their domestic cages. Most argue that their suicides only admit defeat. Without a pragmatic resolution, these women must be succumbing to the social norms that were the driving forces behind their desire to take their lives. This argument often becomes the center of a discourse that attempts to determine whether or not Ibsen was trying to push a heavier feminist agenda. In his speech at the Festival of the Norwegian Women’s Rights League, Christiania, he claims, “Whatever I have written has been without any conscious thought of making propaganda. I have been more poet and less social philosopher than people generally seem inclined to believe.”¹⁴ He argues, “My task has been the *description of humanity*.”¹⁵ Through Hedda, Ibsen creates a mimesis of humanity. The Victorians were a society built on rigid class structures and moral absolutism, therefore Hedda’s suicide is a solution to a society that would not allow women to create a life outside of their home. Instead

of being trapped in an unhappy marriage that resulted in an unwanted child, Hedda is able to take control of her fate. Her suicide may seem like a consequence of not being able to complete her quest, in reality it is the ultimate fulfillment of the journey. If she wanted agency over herself, ending her life exerts the most autonomy she could have. We must remember that catastrophe in Ibsen's plays is never an accident. His dead bodies are those that are dramatically exhausted or destroyed. Hedda did not shoot herself to fulfill a punishment based in a flawed morality; she shot herself because she could no longer go on as she was. Further, the presentation of Hedda or other fallen women akin to her on stage ignited a collective feminine unconscious. The solution these plays present lie within the audience. If these productions created a discourse among women who begin to question how they can change their circumstances, is that not a more productive solution than a fictional character facing the mimesis of problems real women faced? Many Suffragettes, like Robins, note that the moment Hedda takes her father's pistol to end her life is a moment of awakening for female audiences. While suicide was not a practical solution to what these Victorian women felt within the oppression of domesticity and motherhood, it prompted an open public discussion into ways the problems *Hedda Gabler* and other works of Ibsen proposed could be mediated. Instead of resigning herself to a life she did not desire to live, Hedda took action. Her action sparked action within the female audience members.

Fate, or rather the disillusionment of it, is a major theme in *Hedda Gabler*. After her marriage to Tesman, Hedda seems fated to live the mundane life of a bourgeois house wife. Many attribute this "boredom" to all of Hedda's violent acts. While she is obviously bored, the more prominent matter is that she is constantly the smartest person in the room. This leads her to not only attempt to control her own fate, but allows her to play with the fates of those around her. Elizabeth Robins argues, "I was under no temptation to try to make her what is conventionally

known as ‘sympathetic’”¹⁶ and “...her strong need to put some meaning into her life, even at the cost of borrowing it, or stealing the meaning out of someone else’s.”¹⁷ All roads lead to Hedda. Every act of violence we will discuss is directly related to Hedda meddling in either her own or someone else’s fate. This cosmic ability makes Hedda the most powerful and dangerous person in the playing space, thus she is not only in control of her own life, she is also in control of everyone around her. The disillusionment of fate played a big role in why *Hedda Gabler* became popular with the matinee girls and why it was given an extended run. Even though the play ends in tragedy, Hedda was a glimmer of hope they were able to identify with. If Hedda had lived and continued on to become a mother her identity would have been dissolved into the myth of the angel in the house. The fetus inside her womb was consuming her and raping her of her autonomy and identity. She had to remove herself because the world she lived in could not reconcile itself with a woman who could not bear being a mother. For women in the audiences who felt they were destitute and stuck in a role someone else chose for them, Hedda represented a insurrection against that.

Through performances similar to those of Robins and Lea, Ibsen is widely considered the father of modern drama, yet what he does with Hedda is reminiscent of Aristotelian drama. Hedda, for Victorian audiences, is the modern female version of the tragic hero. She identifies a problem in her life and subsequently sets out on a quest to remedy it, beginning by marrying George Tesman. Hedda’s marriage to Tesman is a marriage of convenience. Lovborg even expresses shock that his glamorous Hedda would marry such a man. He pleads, “Ah, Hedda, Hedda- how could you have thrown yourself away like that?”¹⁸ At 29, the socialite was running out of suitors and was nearing an age where it was no longer acceptable for an aristocratic Victorian woman to be unmarried. George Tesman was the only one left. Her marriage to

George and her unwanted pregnancy are the trials she had to overcome, but when she cannot overcome them, it leads to the acts of violence against herself and others.

Further evidence that Hedda was plucked out of early Aristotelian theatre is the understanding that she is stuck between an Apollonian and Dionysian figure. Friedrich Nietzsche further expands on this, arguing that tragedy is broken into two camps¹⁹ that are each defined by their respective godly representation. Apollo represents measured restraint. Dionysus is the inability to discern appearance from reality. He is a break down of measured restraint, synonymous with drunkenness and forgetting one's self. An integral opposition between the two art deities creates the dramatic art we have now. It's unclear to scholars whether Ibsen read Nietzsche prior to writing *Hedda Gabler*, or at all, but these two concepts Nietzsche theorizes are mirrored in Hedda's two "love interests." Tesman is Apollonian; he sticks with social norms and is restrained by his emotions and work. Eilert Lovborg, Hedda's old lover, is Dionysian. An alcoholic with a penchant for brothels and prostitutes; he is erratic. He is further aligned with the god of theatre and wine when Hedda continually refers to him as having vines in his hair. Ibsen employs Aristotelian mimesis as a form of cognition and creation to mirror not only the nature of Victorian life, but the true nature of the Victorian woman. Hedda Gabler is the mimesis of the tragic woman, unhappy with the lot she has been given in life, surrounded by two sexual extremes that are suffocating her. According to Otto Reinert, in his article, "Ibsen and Mimesis,"

The downfall of the protagonist in Greek tragedy may not take us to whatever precise psychic effect Aristotle thought catharsis had, but it still speaks to our existential awareness of the abyss, of ironies, and paradoxes that turn back on themselves, of the perils of hubris, of the absence of certainty about everything, including uncertainty itself.²⁰

Ibsen's plays do not end in catharsis or the purging of emotions that Aristotle argued was integral to dramatic writing. Reinhart supposes this is to prevent the feeling of empathy we often experience for tragic heroes in order to deconstruct the notion of there being wisdom through suffering.²¹ This supposes that catharsis is an act of acceptance and submission to the disruption of life- to the Greek gods. To a Victorian audience influenced by secular disillusionment and religious skepticism, taking catharsis out of his tragedy allows Ibsen to give his heroine control of her own fate. By Ibsen reclaiming a classic dramatic formula and twisting it, we finally have female characters who are not damsels in distress or lamenting over a lost love.

Hedda is no damsel in distress. The audience gets a clear idea of her masculinized identity even before she enters the stage. During the time we see Hedda on stage, she is vastly characterized by vocal exaltations of her beauty. However, she is more harshly characterized by the violence she enacts on others and that others enact on her. The play opens with a portrait of General Gabler hanging over the stage. It's one of the very first stage directions written in the opening act, and the portrait will continue to hang there until the conclusion of the play. The war hero's continual looming over the space of the stage is a critical signifier of Hedda's identity. The play is entitled *Hedda Gabler* instead of Hedda Tesman, despite being Mrs. Hedda Tesman for a number of months before she awakens and enters the playing space. Some scholars surmise that this further breaks down the typical femininity expected of Victorian women by showcasing Hedda as a product of a masculine upbringing. Her mother is never mentioned; the audience is left to wonder if she died in child birth and by the end of the play they wonder if she too killed herself. While her gendered upbringing is important to Hedda, it is not necessarily because it breaks the feminine mold. Hedda's nurture and her relationship with her father is the first time we see her connected to violence. Hedda is plagued by acts of violence in the play and it all

begins with the portrait of her father. This is mirrored through her obsession with her father's pistols, an awfully violent memento to keep of a family member.

Aside from Tesman and the General, there is one other man in the playing space that Hedda has a deep connection with and who she tries to control. She has a long history of love and violence with Eilert Lovborg. An old lover, she ran him off by aiming one of her father's pistols towards his head. She was disgusted by his sexual inclinations and habits. His hands were dirtied by prostitutes and whores; she couldn't bare to have them touch her. In Act 2 Lovborg pleads with her, "Yes, yes. That's just what I don't understand anymore. But now tell me Hedda, wasn't it love underneath it all? Wasn't that part of it? You wanted to purify me, to cleanse me- when I'd seek you out to make my confessions. Wasn't it?"²² Her inability to purify him ruined them. He was no longer able to fulfill what she needed the most. Lovborg was her project; since he was unable to change, Hedda no longer had any use for him. This is why she pointed the gun at his head; if she could not change him, she had to end him. It would be a crime of passion. Hedda realized that he would not be the one to save her and remove her from her mundane life. She was the only one who could "rescue" her from the weight that was crushing her existence. In a moment of weakness, she draws her father's pistol back, sparing his life. Now, he reappears in her life and is not only romantically linked to an old enemy from her school days, but he is also about to steal her husband's job. For his sins she convinces him, a recovering alcoholic, to go off drinking and as a result he loses his precious manuscript. When Hedda feels like she is losing her grip over him, she gifts him one of her father's pistols.

HEDDA: No, wait! Take a souvenir to remember me by. *[She goes over to the writing table, opens the drawer and the pistol case. She returns to Lovborg with one of the pistols.]*

LOVBORG: *[Looks at her.]* That's the souvenir?

HEDDA: [*Nodding slowly.*] Do you recognize it? It was aimed at you once.

LOVBORG: You should have used it then.

HEDDA: Here, you use it now.²³

When Lovborg returns into Hedda's life, he is essentially the way she left him. This is proven even further to her after he loses his manuscript during a drunken rampage. She gifts him the pistol to finish what she started; she takes her weakness out of the equation. Of course this does not go exactly as she planned; when she finds out how he shoots himself, she is disgusted. Her weakness is replaced by his and it ruins the way she wants him to die. His inability to overcome his flaws, his inclinations towards the sexually devious, sets Hedda on the path to her last and her most violent of acts.

When many think of *Hedda Gabler*, they often envision Hedda with her pistols. It's also the image most used to promote contemporary productions of *Hedda Gabler*. It makes sense that General Gabler's pistols would be the image most associated with Hedda, after all she gifts one to Lovborg so that he may die beautifully and uses the other to take her own life. Before these two events happen, a conversation between Tesman and Hedda in Act I sets the audience up to understand how much the pistols forge a facet of her identity.

HEDDA: [*Walking across the floor.*] Well, at least I've got one thing to amuse myself with.

TESMAN: [*Beaming with pleasure.*] Ah, thank God for that, and what is that, Hedda?

HEDDA: [*In the center doorway looking at him with veiled scorn.*] My pistols, George.²⁴

These few lines of dialogue foreshadow the events that are to come; her pistols will not only distract her from her mundane life as a housewife, but they will free her from it. This allows for a erroneous misconception that her pistols grant her strength. If Ibsen held all of Hedda's

strength in the pistols, his work would read as a very different play. Hedda's strength lies with herself, an important gendered notion for this play and for the audiences watching Robins' performance. The pistols are just an extension of her, they are not the objects that allow her to escape. Her inner strength, as cliché as it may seem to modern audiences, is shown most not when she commits suicide, but when she destroys Lovborg's manuscript. As Hedda throws the pages into the fire she cries, "I'm burning your child, Thea- You with your curly hair. Your child and Eilert Lovborg's. Now I'm burning- burning the child."²⁵ At first her strength is masqueraded as jealousy and contempt; for Thea and Eilert's relationship, for her marriage to Tesman, for the life that she could have had. That changes as the façade burns away, she is no longer burning Thea and Lovborg's work; she is burning herself alive from the inside out. She is the victim of a trauma that is threatening her bodily autonomy; challenging her ability to control her fate. The unwanted child growing inside of her is tearing her in half. The pregnancy began threatening her in the first act. Between Tesman proclaiming, "how well she's filled out on our trip"²⁶ and Aunt Julie commenting on her healthy glow, Hedda is being driven insane. By burning the pages, she is ripping back her control. She is purging her weakness. By killing the baby, even if only figuratively, Hedda is reclaiming her power.

The final event we must examine in an attempt to understand *Hedda Gabler* as revolutionary play for Victorian theatre and Victorian women is Hedda's suicide. Many have tried to come to terms with Hedda's suicide through the lenses of the fallen woman and mental illness. We have already determined that Hedda is not a typical fallen woman due to the fact that aside from her past with Lovborg, her other sexual exploits are not mentioned in Ibsen's exposition. The only way to counter the lack of sexual exploits that are explicitly made known to the audience is to argue that Hedda suffers from a general moral corruption and that in itself

constitutes her as a fallen woman, but even that is a stretch. Is it well-known among characters in the play that she was a popular socialite with multiple suitors? Yes, but she was not ostracized from society nor does she have any secrets that are not already known by numerous other characters in the play, thus it makes no sense for Ibsen to purge his heroine from the play. Her only sin is exercising providence over herself. Hedda would be the last person to seek forgiveness from anyone, it was not in her nature.

Other scholars debate whether or not Hedda's suicide is a result of mental illness. In her article, "Suicide and Ibsen's 'Hedda Gabler' (The Seen and the Unseen, Sight and Site, In the Theater of the Mind)," Mary Kay Norseng argues,

There are undoubtedly a good many reasons for the reticence to suppose a suffering Hedda...discussion of a fictional character's emotional life is intellectually suspicious, if not incredible, particularly in this era of the discrediting of any notion of "the self"...Gender prejudice: controlling women do not suffer, they make others suffer...²⁷

Because audiences are unable to see Hedda as sympathetic due to gender biases, Norseng argues that the only way to understand her and to justify her acts of violence against herself and others around her is to examine them through a lens of mental illness. Trying to ascertain whether or not our heroine is mentally ill would be a fair argument, if it was not only being made for the sake of victimizing Hedda so she may be allowed to suffer. Norseng argues that Hedda's inability to reconcile her private and public lives left her severely depressed. This depression leads her to giving her pistol away and to "give away" the manuscript. According to Norseng, these are clear signs of Hedda's intent to commit suicide.²⁸ The flaw with this argument lies in the logistics; Hedda gives the pistol to Lovborg with the clear intent that he would shoot himself with it. She did not give away the manuscript; she destroyed it. These were acts of Hedda's

attempts of absolute control over anyone who enters the playing space, not signs of our heroine being mentally unstable.

If we were to argue that Hedda suffers from mental illness, perhaps her perceived depression stems from Judge Brack pushing himself into her life. Chengzhou He, in his article, “Hedda and Bailu: Portraits of two “Bored Women”,” argues, “Ironically, Hedda, who has had the desire and ambition to manipulate the fate of others, ends up living under someone else’s control.”²⁹ Both Norseng and Chengzhou argue that Hedda’s need for control and her subsequent loss of it was enough to make her depressed enough or temporarily insane enough to commit suicide. The core dilemma with these arguments is that these scholars feel the need to give a reason for Hedda’s suicide, other than her lack of ability to control her own fate, strips her of her bodily autonomy. The other acts of violence in the play can only stand as her capability to control fate if we do not try to impose false narratives on her suicide. Norseng argues “Myths of female suicide traditionally focus on the defeated love and ruined chastity – heteronormative assumption that women live for love, men live for themselves.”³⁰ By falsifying Hedda as a traditional fallen woman, we cannot destroy the myth that women only live for love. Allowing her to die for herself, even as a twisted act of self-preservation, makes her death an important statement to Victorian female audiences.

Returning to Aristotelian theatre, the need for Hedda to die is due to her not being able to fulfill the path of a hero. Hedda is trapped between two caricatures of Apollonian and Dionysian tragedy. She needs to kill herself because she cannot fulfill her quest; she can no longer control her own fate. The fetus brewing within her womb combined with Judge Brack’s advances threatened her bodily autonomy and her free will. Her suicide is last act of control she has over her own fate. In the last act of the play Hedda exclaims, “I mean, for me. It’s a liberation for me

to know that in this world an act of such courage, done in full, free will, is possible. Something bathed in a bright shaft of beauty.”³¹ She sees Lovborg’s death as an act of freedom. By giving him the pistol, she frees him from everything she is trying to escape from. Right before this she says, “Eilert Lovborg has come to terms with himself. He’s had the courage to do what had to be done.”³² She does not see suicide as a display of weakness or as punishment for wrong doing; it’s just pure freedom. By killing himself, Hedda believes Eilert has finally freed himself from his demons.

In an attempt to explain the absence of catharsis in Hedda’s death, it is tempting to defer to August Strindberg’s classification of fallen women as “half-women.”³³ In many of his naturalist plays, like in *Miss Julie* (1889), Strindberg depicts the sexes in an all out war with each other. His women are often portrayed as vampiric degenerates who secretly seek the subjugation of men. In the “Preface to *Miss Julie*,” Strindberg expresses his dissatisfaction of actor-managers incessantly producing endlessly similar farces. Much like Elizabeth Robins and Marion Lea, he was dissatisfied with the flat women presented on stage and the one dimensional reasons for their suicides.³⁴ His solution to the problem was his half-woman. He argues that, “Miss Julie is a modern character not because the man-hating half-woman has not always existed, but because she has now been brought out into the open, has taken the stage, and is making a noise about herself.”³⁵ Strindberg insists that playwrights are preachers who use popular ideas and notions to create a dialogue the bulk of the simpleminded masses could understand. He argues that both the battle of the sexes and the disparity of class are essentially timeless struggles that all audiences could relate to, despite their education or social standing. He argues that this not something that the audiences have not seen before. Strindberg’s analysis of the half-woman brings a new understanding of fallen women to the stage at the time, although

it is not an interpretation that emerging female playwrights and Suffragettes necessarily agreed with. Strindberg argues, “Neither with the help of equal education or equal voting rights- nor by universal disarmament and temperance of societies- any more than two parallel lines can ever meet. The half-woman is a type that forces itself on others, selling itself for power, medals, recognition, diplomas, as formerly it sold itself for money. It represents degradation.”³⁶ In an essence, this theory is used to explain that no amount of education or freedom could save women like Hedda. Like Strindberg’s half-woman, she is not satisfied with her life. She cannot find happiness in her marriage to Tesman. There is little satisfaction in her manipulation of Thea. She cannot find joy in a pregnancy that threatens to consume her. Her control over Lovborg lacks a feeling of lasting satisfaction. The lack of satisfaction, the endless pit of desire within her, is exactly what Strindberg would use as a catalyst to justify the suicides of Hedda and other women like her; this is why half women die for the sake of catharsis.

There are distinct similarities between Hedda and the half-woman, these similarities lack substance within her character. It is imperative for our understanding of Hedda to separate her from Strindberg’s classification of the half-woman because that label would negatively affect her trajectory as a fallen woman re-scripted as a tragic heroine. Strindberg’s explanation for the half-woman’s suicide is an over simplification of Hedda’s journey at best, but considering that *Hedda Gabler* succeeded *Miss Julie* and the preface by a mere two years it is important to distinguish them as two separate entities in our attempt to examine how the Victorian fallen woman is transformed into the re-scripted tragic heroine. It is easy to see why the two would be conflated; both women were raised by distant men and have moments of being hyper sexualized in their respective works, either through their own actions or through others’ gossip. Unlike *Miss Julie*, Hedda does not crumble to pieces at the will of a man. On the contrary, her suicide is

her way to escape from that fate. As soon as Jean confesses his “love” for Miss Julie through a fictitious account of a love sick attempt at suicide, she crumbles at his feet and is completely subject to his will. Hedda, on the other hand, may conform to societal norms by entering into a loveless marriage, but she balances that by shying away from the ability to feel any love at all. The only relationship she is apart of that could be considered love-like is with Lovborg. While it would not necessarily be considered traditional love, it is the closest Hedda comes to it. Despite this, she still attempts to kill him on two separate occasions. The entirety of the play entails Hedda fighting her way out of being subjugated by domesticity and masculinity. This does not change at the end of the play when Judge Brack blackmails her into being his pet. With Lovborg being newly deceased and Tesman preoccupied with recreating the manuscript with Thea, she realizes the only option she has left is to kill herself. It is her only opportunity to escape. Miss Julie’s death is cathartic, just as Strindberg insists it should be. Her suicide is her punishment for her indiscretions as a half-woman. Hedda is no such half-woman; to think anything else would diminish the social implications that come with finally having female characters like her presented on stage. Her death is freedom, not punishment.

The way Hedda kills herself is also crucial to our understanding of her as a tragic heroine. Having already established Hedda as the smartest person in the room, when Judge Brack tries to blackmail her into sexual complacency, she takes control of her fate once again. Hedda, for such a strong woman, is extremely timid around anything sexual. Instead of being a victim of Freud’s theory of penis envy, she suffers from penis fear. She ended her affair with Lovborg due to his penchant for prostitutes and brothels. She could not imagine him touching her with unclean hands. Her pregnancy is obviously a result of a sexual relationship with Tesman, but it torments her throughout the entire play. In Act 4, Hedda finds out that Lovborg’s death is a result of a

lethal wound to his groin and she cried out, “That too! Oh absurdity-! It hangs like a curse over everything I so much as touch!”³⁷ She is completely disgusted that he is unable to separate his sexual desires from an act that she considers completely rational. She is unable to reconcile the sexual and the intellectual. This is why she chooses to shoot herself in the temple. Sexuality would have trapped her. If she let her sexual desires rule her being, she would be complacent in the role of housewife and mother. This fear of giving into her sexuality is the reason why Hedda recoils from Brack’s sexual advances. Before she heads into the back room she cries, “But in your power. Totally subject to your demands- And your will. Not free. Not free at all. No, that’s one thought I just can’t stand. Never!”³⁸ By refusing his sexual advances, and the advances of other men, she refuses to be an object; she refuses to be meaningless. The sequence that leads up to her last moments is meta-theatrical; it’s a play within a play. Hedda puts on a performance as she closes herself off in the back room; she wants her last act to be a good one. As Judge Brack and Tesman hear the gun shot ring throughout the stage, Brack exclaims, “But God have mercy- People just don’t act that way!”³⁹ By shooting herself in the temple, not only does she break away from the gendered roles that suffocate her, she changes the script. She is the author, director, and actor of her life- and it’s her last performance.

Ibsen’s failure to conclude his play with an act that provokes Aristotelian catharsis is a crucial aspect to consider so that we can fully understand *Hedda Gabler* as a cultural phenomenon. Hedda’s inability to die for anyone other than herself fails to preserve the angel like image of the wife and mother. This is mirrored through the set of the original London production. Returning to Robins and Lea’s 1891 production, Barstow argues that their stage design gives vital insight to what the lack of catharsis means for Hedda her audiences, and for the two that painstakingly pulled the production together.

...in the Robins and Lea production of *Hedda Gabler*, the unchanging set (all the action takes place in the same room), heavy curtains, and close air must have emphasized Hedda's sense of claustrophobia and her desperate desire to escape marriage, motherhood, and domesticity, thus conveying to the late-Victorian audience precisely the sense of women's entrapment.⁴⁰

The stage design of Robins and Lea's production not only serves to physically trap Robins as she portrays Hedda, but it taps into the collective female consciousness and magnifies the social entrapment of women. With *Hedda Gabler*, Ibsen brings important gendered questions to the Victorian stage. Returning to the fallen woman trope, if the female on stage is not the angel in the house, they were often the villain. Critics may have tried to portray Robbins' Hedda as a deplorable antihero, however the feminist and gendered integrity of the production would not allow for that. The lack of catharsis allows Ibsen to reclaim both the tropes of the tragic heroine and the fallen woman. If Hedda's death was for the audience. The catharsis that comes from that would only serve to perpetuate this entrapment, but she did not die for their forgiveness. More heinous than not fulfilling the mass need for catharsis, Hedda does not only kill herself, but she kills her unborn child. She murders the Madonna and child. Ibsen allows Hedda the agency and bodily autonomy to refuse to conform to what society demanded of her. Much like Robins and Lea remove themselves from the grip of the male actor-manager, Hedda removes herself from the grasp of the desecrating masculine gaze. Using the classic form of the path of the hero, coupled with the popular trope of the fallen woman, Ibsen tricks his audience into assuming they know what path Hedda will take. Instead, in her last attempt of control, in her last attempt to free herself, Hedda takes her father's pistol and shoots herself in the temple. She brilliantly dies for no one other than herself. She dies in a revolt for a feminine freedom.

CHAPTER II

BEATA

THE WHITE HORSE

Henrik Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* is a drama concerned with social and political change, ideally in which the higher ruling class relinquishes their right to inflict their ideals on the rest of society. The entire play occurs in the historic estate of an equally historic and influential family. At the center of the political upheaval and the disintegration of the social hierarchy, Ibsen places two dissimilar women at odds with each other. Aside from residing within the same household for a short time, Beata and Rebecca's paths seem continuously intertwined. This allows Ibsen to trick his audience in order to introduce a tragic heroine that differs from the ones he presents us with in his other plays. By purposely never allowing Beata to physically enter the stage, Ibsen masquerades her under the veil of the angel in the house and as such, Rebecca assumes the role pseudo-fallen woman. Ibsen's trickery is impressive because he understands the imprinted memory from past productions the audiences holds; they assign labels to Beata and Rebecca before the play really has a change to begin. Through his dialogue and exposition Ibsen dismantles this memory because as the plot progresses the audience will realize that what they see before them is not really what they assume is happening. Therefore, to fully comprehend how a pious woman could truly be Ibsen's re-scripted tragic heroine, the archetype of melodramatic fallen woman that engulfs Rebecca must be dismantled. Because Beata never physically enters the stage or directly speaks any dialogue, we must use a combination of her exposition and Rebecca's shortcomings as a modern tragic heroine to understand Beata's place as one of Ibsen's re-scripted tragic heroines.

Rosmersholm begins a year after Beata Rosmer has committed suicide, presumably from a depression that was the result of not being able to conceive. In the wake of his wife's death, John Rosmer remains at Rosmersholm with Rebecca West, a servant that had become a close confidant. Rosmersholm is caught between the old and the new; while the halls of the estate are lined with portraits of the illustrious Rosmer line, outside of its walls there was a social and political movement that sought to eradicate aristocracy and the traditional ruling class. Rosmersholm and its residents are literally haunted by the past while simultaneously being surrounded by the promise of the future. At first, it may seem like Rebecca West could be the textbook fallen woman and as such, our tragic heroine. Coming from essentially unknown origins, she settles into a close friendship with Rosmer during her time at Rosmersholm. A single woman of marriageable age, it is assumed by multiple parties on stage that she is engaged in sexual relations with Rosmer, because of his wealth and influence. These disturbances, coupled with the political movement she is trying adamantly to win Rosmer's support, precipitately sets Rebecca up as the fallen woman. This prematurely assumes that Rebecca's tragic quest would involve amassing the Rosmer wealth and climbing the social ladder, consequentially looking past an equally significant, although distant, female role that surrounds the playing space.

Even though the audience is introduced to her ghost within the early lines of the play, the first indication of Beata and Rebecca's lives intertwining comes when Kroll, Rosmer's brother-in-law, addresses his interactions with Beata before her death. He confides in Rosmer, "And then, when I tried to distract her from such unhappy thoughts, she only answered: 'I have not much time left; for John must marry Rebecca immediately now.'"⁴¹ Initially this interaction does not seem incongruous, considering the audience is under the assumption that Beata killed

herself because she could not bear children and thus could not continue the illustrious Rosmer line. A notable sign of suicidal tendencies is giving away your belongings before taking your life and it seems like Beata is “giving” her husband away to Rebecca before she ends her life. This idea begins to change when Rosmer suggests that Rebecca literally take Beata’s place, not just figuratively. Rebecca questions, “I- in Beata’s place- ?”⁴² Rosmer responds, “It must be so! It must! I cannot- I will not- go through life with a dead body on my back. Help me to throw it off, Rebecca; and then let us stifle all memories in our sense of freedom, in joy, in passion. You shall be to me the only wife I have ever had.”⁴³ Rosmer has a slight admission of guilt in regards to his wife’s death, yet he is ready to hastily throw it off his conscience. He does not simply want to take Rebecca as his new wife; he wants her to replace Beata completely. He wants it to be as if he never had any other wife. If she replaces the wife he lost, perhaps his slate will be wiped clean. This leaves Rebecca as a replaceable entity. Rosmer does not desire to take her as a spouse because of any supposed romantic feelings towards her, he just wants someone who can alleviate his guilt. It does not matter who fills the hole that Beata left, as long as there is someone there to fill it and subsequently wipe Rosmer’s conscience clean. In speaking with Kroll Rosmer says, “I am not so entirely alone, even now. There are two of us to bear the solitude together here.”⁴⁴ This is the first time within *Rosmersholm* that Rebecca is effectively stripped of her agency. Rosmer uses Rebecca to alleviate some of his guilt, but he does not, at this point, give her a choice in whether or not she wants to share in his guilt. This occurrence complicates Rebecca’s ability to be a tragic heroine. If the tragic heroine is defined by her path, can Rebecca be a tragic heroine if being forced to be Beata’s replacement leaves her with no path of her own? The only way to reconcile this would be for Rebecca to give her consent to Rosmer, expressing even the slightest approval or concession, to help him ease the guilt that crippled him.

Having Rebecca aid him in a healing process, although terrifyingly disturbing one, could even assist her political aspirations. Yet, she does not give her consent and that is where the problem lies. Instead this idea of being Rosmer's replacement wife is forced upon her, essentially raping her of her of both her literal and metaphorical autonomy. Rosmer's proposition does not merely merge Rebecca's identity with Beata; it completely wipes Rebecca away as the play progresses.

Though the loss of her individual identity does complicate the ability to understand Rebecca's as a fallen woman, it is equally as crucial to note that the assumption that she could be Ibsen's fallen woman is cemented mostly through others' thoughts of her rather than through her own actions. Unlike Hedda, Rebecca's status is possibly accountable through some of her actions, however she is set up mostly through others' words, like those of Kroll, before she even has the opportunity to act against the social mores. As soon as we meet Kroll, he begins defaming Rebecca. He is leery of her intentions as Rosmersholm. He believes that she, as a hired help, is too comfortable with Rosmer. Naturally, that means she must have found her way into his bed. Within the first few pages of *Rosmersholm* Kroll finds himself discussing Rebecca's place within the Rosmersholm estate with her.

REBECCA: Dear Mr. Kroll, I really never think about it at all. The fact is that I have become so thoroughly domesticated here that I almost here that I almost feel as if I belong to the place too.

KROLL: You? I should think you did!

REBECCA: And as long as Mr. Rosmer finds I can be any comfort or any use to him, I will gladly remain here, undoubtedly.

KROLL: (*looking at her with some emotion*) You know, there is something splendid about a woman's sacrificing the whole of her youth to others.

REBECCA: What else have I had to live for?⁴⁵

This interaction, even though extremely early in the drama, is a defining moment for Rebecca as a “fallen” woman. Kroll’s previous comments to both Rebecca and Rosmer make it clear that he believes there is an unorthodox relationship brewing between the two and as such Rebecca’s lines can initially be interpreted as a sort of hostile rebuttal to Kroll. It is not inconceivable to think that when she says she belongs to Rosmersholm, she means that now it is more than just her dwelling as well and therefore she has a hold on both the estate and of Rosmer. If it was not for the mentioning of domesticity in the following lines, Rebecca’s statement could be read as quasi territorial. Upon the mention of domesticity, Kroll also momentarily softens up to Rebecca as well. While Rebecca has yet to give us a reason to trust her, the mention of domesticity is troubling to the argument that she could be Ibsen’s tragic heroine. Traditionally fallen women, and certainly the tragic heroines discussed within these chapters, tend to shy away from domesticity and the motherhood that follows. Yet, Rebecca is looking to remain within it. Further, the idea of maternity for Victorian audiences comes with an innate self-sacrifice. Kroll only softens his demeanor towards Rebecca when this revelation of self-sacrifice is mentioned. For a moment she is not this wretched woman trying to corrupt a good man, instead she becomes a young woman of marriageable age, who instead of seeking a suitable match for herself remains to care for and bring comfort to a man whose wife abruptly left. This once again returns to Rebecca’s path intertwining with Beata’s; she is filling the place that Beata vacated.

Through Rebecca’s exposition, we see that she only plays into the archetype of the fallen woman. She is from an unknown origin and thus, is a member of the lower social class. She came to Rosmersholm as a servant and quickly interjected herself between the master and mistress of the estate. Knowing Beata was unable to conceive children, Rebecca took advantage of that misfortune to secure her place with the Rosmers. During an altercation with Kroll, she

acknowledged, "I wanted to remain where I was. But I told her that it would be best for us all if I went away in time. I let her infer that if I remained here any longer I could not tell what- what might happen."⁴⁶ Rebecca's calculating and cold composure that seeps through this admission aligns her with the fallen women of melodrama that preceded her and it sets her up as the foil to the innocent and demure Beata. Much like the White Horse haunts Rosmersholm, the dynamic between Beata and Rebecca is ghosted⁴⁷ by what came before on the Victorian stage. Ghosting informs the traditional reading of Rosmersholm because audiences were conditioned to expect an innocent woman who would thrive within domesticity and motherhood and as such, her foil would be killed to restore the order she had robbed the play of. Shortly after this confession, Rebecca confides, "You know she had taken it into her head that she, a childless wife, had no right to be here. And so she persuaded herself that her duty to you was to give place to another."⁴⁸ This declaration contradicts this reading and instead sets up Beata as the fallen woman, and thus, our tragic heroine. While Rebecca's words and actions may have goaded her on, she makes it clear that the thoughts that lead to Beata's demise were entirely her own. Rebecca elucidates that while she was looking to increase her social standing, she was not looking to do it through marriage to Rosmer. After rejecting his proposals, or perhaps fervent urgings is a more suitable description, she reveals she had hoped to, instead, accomplish her desire to rise in social status through becoming Rosmer's confidant and by garnering his support for a movement that would result in a total upheaval of the class structure.

Rebecca wanted Rosmer as a front runner to the social movement so she could be by his side. There was no urgent need for any romantic involvement on her part to accomplish this goal, however, she did need to somehow rid Rosmersholm of Beata. As the angel in the house, Beata is a representation of elitism, classism, and rigid Victorian femininity; everything Rebecca

was fighting against. Her being represents Rosmer's old life and everything Rosmersholm stands for. She confessed to Rosmer,

REBECCA: Surely you do not think I acted with cold and calculating composure! I am a different woman now, when I am telling you this, from what I was then. And I believe two different kinds of will can exist at the same time in one person. I wanted Beata away- in one way or the other; but I never thought it would happen, all the same. At every step I ventured and risked, I seemed to hear a voice in me crying: "No further! Not a step further!" And yet, at the same time, I COULD not stop. I HAD to venture a little bit further- just one step. And then another- and always another- and at last it happened. That is how such things go of themselves.⁴⁹

Though this is a clear admission of guilt, it performs two imperative purposes that exonerate Rebecca from the tragic heroine trajectory. First, it places the responsibility on Beata for her death. Even though Rebecca continuously pushed, this illuminates that the suicide was a direct result of Beata's own thoughts and her own free will, not a part of some supposed master plan most of the other inhabitants of Rosmersholm seem to keep accusing Rebecca of. Second, this declaration confirms that Rebecca is missing a key character flaw that is essential to the fallen woman. Unlike Hedda or Salome, she experiences and expresses guilt over her involvement in Beata's demise. In "The Ancient Tragical Motive as Reflected in the Modern," Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, argues that while Aristotelean tragic determinations require the tragic hero to feel guilt, that guilt often stems from circumstances beyond their control.⁵⁰ He notes, "...our age is melancholy enough to realize that there is something which is called responsibility..."⁵¹ Kierkegaard argues that through the realization of personal responsibility instead of divine interventions in modern dramas, modern playwrights create a hero's destruction through their own actions, not through a "suffering" that is not a result of the hero's own deeds.⁵²

Guilt equates to an innate desire for catharsis and as such, is not necessary for the modern drama. Thus, in a world of secular disillusionment Rebecca becomes a scapegoat for Beata. While she may have had influence over Beata's suicide, she cannot claim full responsibility for Beata's suicide. Her guilt is a result of an event that she could not control; an event that is not entirely her own.

Despite Rebecca's projection of guilt preventing her from being classified as a re-scripted tragic heroine, the audience has no one else to place blame on since Beata never tangibly enters the playing space. In Raffella Colombo's article, "Will and Sacrifice: Victimary Representations in Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*," she also argues that Rebecca is merely a scapegoat. She claims, "Rebecca is crushed by the evidence that the world of bourgeois order, embodied by Kroll, hurls against her to regain control over John. She is, in short, a scapegoat to be branded with all the victimary symbols... and to be sacrificed in order to avoid the danger and to reestablish calm."⁵³ Colombo argues that Rebecca's death serves no other purpose than to give a grasping feeling of catharsis. It does not matter if her actions warrant death, the audience is meant to see her demise as an act of purification because there is no other woman physically on the stage that could be punished. This further aids the idea that Rebecca cannot be a re-scripting of a tragic heroine. Similarly, Kierkegaard argues that, "modern tragedy has no epic foreground, no epic heritage. The hero stands and falls entirely on his own acts."⁵⁴ Thus,

...our age strives to let the whole tragic destiny become transubstantiated in individuality and subjectivity. One would throw his whole life upon his own shoulders, as being the result of his own acts, would make him accountable for everything, but in so doing, one would also transform his esthetic guilt into an ethical one. The tragic hero thus becomes bad, the evil becomes precisely the tragic subject...⁵⁵

According to Kierkegaard, the basis for modern tragedies to have some form of catharsis is rooted in a moral obligation, not in the necessity of the play. Since the audience never sees Beata jump into the mill-race, her death cannot provide that release. By proxy, Rebecca's eerily similar death would be a cathartic stand-in and this idea is only driven further by her admission of guilt. Yet, if the modern heroine, as Kierkegaard demands, must stand and fall on her own acts, Rebecca is not guilty of anything. She took no action to directly affect Beata's death; she did not push her into the mill-race. Audiences still demand an act of purification. Her death becomes cathartic just for the sake of having catharsis. Because of the stringent social rules Rebecca has already been subject to, her guilt was not just for the aesthetic; it quickly became a moral conundrum. By having her go the same way Beata went, Rebecca merely mimics catharsis. Beata is truly the only one who can answer for her death, but Rebecca is the closest in proximity. She is just a substitute; a sacrifice to tip the scales back to the normal order.

The reviews of the original London production at Vaudeville Theatre in February of 1891 paint a portrait that is similar to the traditional reading of *Rosmersholm*; they portray Rebecca as an evil depraved woman. The critics and reviewers were not as outraged as they had been towards Ibsen's other works, perhaps because they were better prepared for a role like Rebecca West through their outrage over Ibsen's other "dangerous" women in *A Doll's House* (1879) and *Ghosts* (1882). Nevertheless, Rebecca was painted as a precarious woman who was not only the direct cause of Beata's suicide, but as the ruination of John Rosmer and Rosmersholm. In his review in *The Daily Telegraph*, Clement Scott falls into the ghosted trap and portrays Rebecca as a "pythoness" who ensnares a "simple" Rosmer, while Beata is a "poor creature, who has to suffer her agony in silence."⁵⁶ Scott praises Ibsen for being an "actress-maker," noting his roles, like Rebecca, gave actresses a chance to be more than just a part of the set. His only true

approval is that he applauds *Rosmersholm* for being an overall entertaining piece, yet his major grievance is that he finds the ending a bit unrealistic. Scott notes, “Many there must have been who wondered what an ordinary audience of “un-emancipated” playgoers would have thought of an apostate parson recommending a double suicide to the woman who had been a direct cause of his wife’s death.”⁵⁷ Scott and many other reviewers’ perceptions of *Rosmersholm* are haunted by not only Ibsen’s previous plays, but of imprint of the devious women in earlier theatrical events. While Scott notes the hysteria of excitement that surrounded the Vaudeville Theatre during performance, George Bernard Shaw questions whether this reaction is purely from what audiences expect to see on stage, rather than what they were actually seeing. In his essay “The Technical Novelty of Ibsen’s Plays” Shaw questions the criticism around Rosmer and Rebecca’s double suicide is a result of whether they “...die dramatically natural deaths, or are they slaughtered in the classic and Shakespearean manner, partly because the audience expects blood for its money...”⁵⁸ It is clear from Scott’s review that he expected Rebecca to die for her transgressions, but he did not expect Rosmer to readily and willingly follow her into the grave. Scott, like many other audience members, expected a character within the play to succumb to a tragic death if they desecrated a sacred societal rule or regulation because they were conditioned from earlier productions and theatre traditions to expect purgative justice. They needed someone to be accountable for Beata’s suicide, but a character who does not physically appear on stage cannot be punished.

The first moment we can truly begin to understand Beata as *Rosmersholm*’s tragic heroine is when her letter to Mortensgaard comes to light. The most problematic aspect of this speculation is that as a ghost, Beata never physically enters the playing space during the course of the play. Up until the moment of the letter, Beata’s exposition has been mainly narrated

through Rebecca. If a tragic heroine is marked by an active journey, does it count if Beata is orchestrating her quest from beyond the grave? While she may not enter the playing space physically, her presence arguably haunts the stage from the first pages of the play. Within the opening lines, Mrs. Helseth introduces the audience to the White Horse of Rosmersholm and the story intrigues Rebecca.

REBECCA: (*folding up her work*) They cling to their dead a long time at Rosmersholm.

MRS. HELSETH: If you ask me, miss, I should say it is the dead that cling to Rosmersholm a long time.

REBECCA: (*looking at her*) The dead?

MRS. HELSETH: Yes, one might almost say that they don't seem to be able to tear themselves away from those they have left behind.

REBECCA: What puts that idea in your head?

MRS. HELSETH: Well, otherwise I know the White Horses would not be seen here.⁵⁹

This dialogue, which occurs after the initial brief mention of Beata's suicide, is the first indication of her quest. Rebecca's continuation of her work indicates she believes that the White Horse is merely an old ghost story; nothing more than a story told to children. Rebecca's disposition on this is juxtaposed by Mrs. Helseth, who is fully committed to the narrative. Thus enters Beata. At first, the narrative Mrs. Helseth presents to Rebecca portrays the White Horse as a harmless entity, clinging to the living it left behind. Perhaps at first the audience perceives Beata's ghost as a foil to Rebecca: a hurdle she cannot overcome on her own quest. Or perhaps she is to serve as a cautionary tale of what happens when one gets too involved with the Rosmers, a foreshadowing of Rebecca's demise. The continuous mention of the White Horse is

overbearing; she is given too much time within other's dialogue to only serve as mere foreshadowing or exposition.

Even though the "legend" of the White Horse and of Beata's demise is continuously woven into the dialogue, it may still not be immediately clear how she could fall under the umbrella of a fallen woman, much less a re-scripted tragic heroine. From the exposition the other characters give of her, we know that Beata was a devout wife to an esteemed member of the clergy. She was not outwardly sexually deviant; there was no hearsay of her being unfaithful to Rosmer or any promiscuity before her marriage. Her only sin was that she could not bear children, but that was a biological mishap, not a direct reflection of her character or her actions. Not being able to continue the Rosmer line supposedly drove her mad, but could something she had no control over make her suicide an act of karmic retribution? In Carolyn Tilghman's article, "Staging Suffrage: Women, Politics, and the Edwardian Theatre," she argues, "If British mothers did not bear and raise strong, healthy, and morally upright sons, then Britain's preeminence in the world would be lost. This prospect haunted the political subconscious of the time..."⁶⁰ She argues that a popular belief during the late 19th and early 20th centuries was that maternity circumvented female criminality.⁶¹ If we follow this school of thought, it sets Beata up to be our fallen woman. Early in the first act, Kroll is trying to convince Rosmer to give his name to the cause that was in opposition to Mortensgaard's plight for the upheaval of the traditional ruling class. He pleads, "Rosmers of Rosmersholm- clergymen, soldiers, men who have filled high places in the state- men of scrupulous honor, every one of them- a family that has been rooted here, the most influential in the place, for nearly two centuries"⁶² The walls of Rosmersholm are lined with pictures, relics, of the Rosmer line. Beata's sterility rendered her essentially useless. To the eyes of the past that gazed down heavily upon her, as the wife of John

Rosmer her only job was to aid him in continuing his distinguished line. Even though her infertility was through no fault of her own, her home and centuries worth of reminders haunted her for what she biologically could not do.

Fallen women, due to the nature of the trope, are generally childless. There was a strict moral absolutism based around the false dilemma of an either / or mentality regarding women's roles within society. Much like Coventry Patmore's, "The Angel in the House," melodrama provided a reinforced model of women's roles as wife and mother. Tilghman argues, "Women were repeatedly portrayed either as angelic mothers, domestic goddesses, or blushing maidens, or superfluous spinsters, shrieking sisters, or fallen women. The ideology that held that a woman's sphere was different from but complementary to a man's sphere and that a woman who ventured beyond her appropriate sphere was an anomaly..."⁶³ She goes on to conclude that that due to this ideology women were urged to find personal security and value within domesticity. Women who stayed from this cultivated the fallen women trope. To prevent women from straying from this, on stage these demonic-like entities were cloaked in death or sleep. Domesticity haunted her. Her inability to be a biological mother corrupted her role as pious wife. Beata, while not sexually deviant, could not find fulfillment in a home that haunted her. To create the perfect trifecta, she observed her husband engaging in intimate relations with the new hired help. Even though she fits into the criteria Tilghman presents, because the audience does not see her crime or her suicide, her death does not serve the catharsis that is supposed to accompany the demise of a traditional fallen woman.

Beata is a fallen woman, even if she does not conform precisely to melodramatic tropes. According to Shaw the audience should not expect the traditional from Ibsen. Shaw notes that even though when Ibsen was first introduced to England he drew comparisons to Shakespeare

and his contemporaries, his dramatic conflict arises from unsettled ideas and it is not innately clear who is the villain and who is the hero. He argues,

Ibsen substituted a terrible art of sharp shooting at the audience, trapping them, fencing with them, aiming always at the sorest spot in their consciences. Never mislead an audience, was an old rule. But the new school with trick the spectator into forming a meanly false judgment, and then convict him of it in the next act, often to his grievous mortification.⁶⁴

Ibsen purposefully and masterfully misleads us with Beata. Unlike Rebeca's quest for social advancement, Beata's quest is for control over her own life. Between her body's inability to perform a basic function that was considered to be the cornerstone of womanhood and Rosmer's relationship with Rebecca, her life was spiraling out of control. While Rebecca may have psychologically manipulated Beata to an extent, her suicide was an attempt to take control over her life, not an act of a desperate woman who wanted to make way for her husband's new lover. She had tried to take control before by trying to regain Rosmer's attention and essentially his affection through "ungovernable, wild fits of passion,"⁶⁵ that he could not reciprocate because his thoughts were preoccupied with Rebecca. When that failed, her letter to Mortensgaard coupled with her suicide were the only way she could gain some semblance of control. The letter detailed everything from the relationship between Rebecca and Rosmer to his straying from Christianity. The letter could be seen as a suicide note, of course, but considering she sent it specifically to Mortensgaard and not to her brother or her husband allows the purpose to become exceedingly clear. Rosmer is too self centered to take the letter for what it is. Kroll would have swept it under the rug for his own political gain. Of course Mortensgaard would use the letter to raise his own political hand, but he did not need to conceal Beata's words. If anything, he would publish them in his newspaper for everyone to read. The letter allows her to

exert control from beyond the grave. Most importantly, Beata's letter is not an admission of guilt, it is a statement of fact. Even though Ibsen sets us up to believe Beata is a victim at the total mercy of Rebecca, we see at the last moments that everyone else is at her mercy. Beata could be an unreliable narrator, but it is unlikely as her rendition of the events matches up well with Rebecca's. By writing the letter to Mortensgaard, Beata is able to prevent her memory being misconstrued as an erroneous angel in the house. Her whole life is used as exposition in someone else's dialogue. Through the letter, she was able to further take control over her death by preventing others from misconstruing it for their own advantage. The letter allows Beata to have her own narrative, instead of belonging to someone else's.

Ibsen further misleads his audience with Rebecca's promise of suicide. When Rebecca fully commits to dying for Rosmer, he says, "Have you the courage- are you willing- gladly, as Ulrik Brendel said- for my sake, tonight- gladly- to go the same way- Beata went."⁶⁶ Once again the two become one. Wanting her to go the way Beata went has major implications for her suicide. It brings to question if Rebecca's death truly is a suicide at all. Is it her death her own or is it caused by some outside agent? Considering that earlier in the play Rosmer proposes the idea of her being a replacement for Beata, the idea that he wants Rebecca to not just die for him, but to die just as his wife did takes away her agency over her death. It is no longer her own. The White Horse of Rosmersholm rears her head to claim her victim. Even though it appears that Rebecca decides to jump from the mill-race to restore Rosmer's faith, it is a far stretch from what she intended to do. Upon the discovery of Beata's letter to Mortensgaard she muses, "I wanted to play my part in the new day that was dawning- to have a share in all the new ideas."⁶⁷ Ibsen may lead us to doubt whether or not Rebecca is a reliable narrator, but her mission remains the same until this precise moment in the play. She wanted to be apart of the forefront of

Mortensgaard's political revolution and she assumed Rosmer would be able to help her accomplish that. Even if everything did not work out according to her plans, Shaw argues, "If people's souls are tied up by law and public opinion, it is much more tragic to leave them to wither in these bonds than to end their misery and relieve the salutary compunction of the audience by outbreaks of violence."⁶⁸ It would have been exuberantly more tragic to leave Rebecca to fester in the consequences of her failed conquest. Thus, it is not her defeat that drives her to commit suicide, but some other existential force. Before Rebecca plunges downward into the mill-race she confesses to Rosmer, "Rosmersholm has broken me."⁶⁹ She was a woman who was strong in her convictions, but she admits she has changed since Beata's death. She utters, "But I am under the influence of the Rosmersholm view of Life- now. Whatever my offences are- it is right that I should expiate them."⁷⁰ In this moment Rebecca also becomes haunted by Rosmersholm and its history, but more importantly by the White Horse- by Beata.

The final flaw with Rebecca's death that prevents her from being a re-scripted tragic heroine is that the audience achieves catharsis through it. Colombo argues that most Victorian dramas revolve around "...a system that includes in order to justify itself, and excludes in order to found itself and to survive, creating enemies and boundaries against which to mold its very shape just as, in the tragedy, from the destruction of the hero, from his fall in Dionysian undifferentiation, the Apollonian social harmony comes back to life."⁷¹ For the audience Beata represents the Apollonian order that falls to Rebecca's Dionysian disorder. Through her death and her transformation into the White Horse of Rosmersholm, Beata "helps" restore the natural order to the world of *Rosmersholm*. Rebecca must die because she cannot affirm the Edenic vision she strived for in life. She restores nobility to the world by dying for it. Her death is cathartic by the nature of the mother and whore dichotomy. Noting Colombo's argument for a

system that needs justification, Rebecca once again becomes the scapegoat by default because the audience does not physically get to see Beata and as such, cannot place blame on her. To preserve the angel in the house image of Rosmer's poor tortured wife, the audience needs someone to punish. This again returns to Shaw's theory that the audience expects to see blood for their money simply because that was what they had been given before. This coincides with Carlson's theory of ghosting. Audiences are used to the Apollonian being restored from the Dionysian through retribution and thus, need someone to blame for the initial fall. They also need blood to be shed because it in a sense proves that justice was served. They want to see those who they deem to be morally corrupt suffer. Whether or not Rebecca's death is a cathartic event, it is set up as such because of the inability of the audience to accept the circumstances surrounding the play as they are.

We must also note the problematic nature of having Rebecca's death mirror Beata's through more more than just location, but through circumstance. While we do not get to see the relationship between Beata and Rosmer, we can certainly imagine it through the way he acts when she is brought up in conversation. His actions, such as avoiding the bridge over the mill-race, and his words make it extensively clear that he feels guilty about her death. However, his reactions are very central to his own being and his own emotions. Rosmer has a very egocentric view of himself and his relation to the rest of the world of *Rosmersholm*. We see it when he confesses he could not reciprocate Beata's moments of wild passion because his mind was consumed entirely by thoughts of Rebecca. When he claims that Beata "saw things truly after all," he quickly qualifies this as that she realized that he loved Rebecca after all (Ibsen 39). Rebecca quickly retorts, "Truly in THAT respect?"⁷² Even she is surprised he could come to such a conclusion after all of these horrible things she was accused of doing to Beata and the

accusations of how she tempted Rosmer to become an apostate. He lingers on his feelings for another woman despite the multitude of treacherous acts they could be accused of in relation to his late wife's death. Even in his marriage proposal to Rebecca he exclaims, "It was for love of me- in her own way that- she threw herself into the mill-race. That fact is certain, Rebecca."⁷³ He never contemplates her suicide further than this. Whenever someone on stage begins to speculate Beata's reasoning, it always comes back to him. This is culminated when he asks Rebecca to not only die as a symbol of her commitment to him, but to go the way Beata went. Even further, he decides to he wants to die with her. Their suicides resemble a strange marriage-in-death ritual. She drapes her white shawl over her head and for a moment before they jump their embrace joins them as one. This is the first time on stage that they put their arms around each other and simultaneously their "marriage" frees Rosmer from the ensnarement of the guilty memory of his dead wife. They fulfill Rosmer's prophecy of what he insisted Beata wished to accomplish with her death. Through their "marriage," Rebecca is not longer a mere substitute for Beata; she becomes her and thus loses her autonomy.

As Rebecca and Rosmer plunge into the mill-race *Rosmersholm* ends just as it began: with the White Horse. This reinforces that Beata, the White Horse, is a force lurking just outside of the playing space orchestrating all of the major actions. When Mrs. Helseth returns looking for Rebecca and Rosmer, she finds them about to jump into the mill-race. She proclaims, "What is that white thing-! As I am a living soul, they are both out on the foot bridge! God forgive the sinful creatures- if they are not in each other's arms! Ah!- they are over- both of them! Over into the mill-race! Help! Help! No, No help here. The dead woman has taken them."⁷⁴ While she did not have control over her own fate while she lived, she was able to take revenge on the two who prevented it. By having Beata as the re-scripted tragic heroine, Ibsen dismantles the angel in the

house archetype. Rebecca was not the foil to a demure innocent Beata. The revered wife of a supposedly faithful minister was the foil to an unmarried woman who yearned to be at the forefront of a political upheaval. This emphasizes the entrapment of the angel in the house archetype; before they were not allowed to be the unhappy ones because they followed all the rules. Before Ibsen, the stage was ghosted by the melodramas that put prim, almost doll like, women at odds with their wanton counterparts. The woman who chose marriage and motherhood always “won” by being able to live until the play’s close, while the other would meet her demise promptly to satisfy the mother and whore dichotomy that inflicted the women depicted on stage. Beata followed all of the rules and still ended up as the tragic heroine. Beata had to commit suicide because the world of *Rosmersholm* was unable to reconcile that a woman who was the ideal wife would not be able to perfectly fit into the mold of motherhood. In order to take revenge on a world she could not thrive in, she had to take those who had betrayed her in life with her in death. Having Beata as the unhappy tragic heroine not only dismantles the angel in the house fallacy, but deconstructs the melodramatic archetypes that haunt the stage.

CHAPTER III

SALOME

THE FEMME FATALE

In *Salome* Oscar Wilde casts his main female role as a hyper-sexualized young princess. Unlike the fallen women discussed in previous chapters, Salome fully uses her sexuality in her role as a fallen woman. Traditionally read as an infamous femme fatale that ultimately succumbs to a cathartic death as retribution for her attempt to usurp power from a king, Salome does not shy away from her eroticism and neither do the males that surround her. Instead she uses it to dismantle both the melodramatic fallen woman trope and the dangers around the legend of the femme fatale. In turn, she liberates herself from the chains that innately suppress the expression of female sexuality. Wilde is also the only playwright discussed in this thesis who is forthcoming with exactly how he plans to use his seductress as a re-scripted tragic heroine. Wilde opens *Salome* on an ominous tone as the Page of Herodias proclaims to his stage companion, “Look at the moon. How strange the moon seems! She is like a woman rising from a tomb. She is like a dead woman. One might fancy she was looking for dead things.”⁷⁵ This opening line is juxtaposed by the Young Syrian’s exaltation of the Princess Salome’s beauty, yet it clearly foretells not only her death, but her transformation into a re-scripted tragic heroine.

Salome is not only the fin de siècle version of an Aristotelean tragic heroine, Wilde’s *Salome* is a re-telling of a biblical story⁷⁶. There are important distinctions to make between the Biblical tale and Wilde’s drama that deepen the understanding of Salome as an Aristotelean tragic heroine. Found in both the Gospel of Matthew and Gospel of Mark, Salome is thought to be the unnamed dancing woman who performs for Herod and his high officials on his birthday in return for the head of John the Baptist, who Wilde renames Iokanaan. It is essential to note that

Salome is not named once in the biblical text and that she does not perform the dance of her own volition. After Herod hesitantly agrees to Salome's request, she presents the head to her mother revealing that the dance and the subsequent beheading of John the Baptist is entirely at the will of Herodias. Herodias's control over Salome coupled with her lack of identity sufficiently dehumanizes her enough that she becomes nothing more than a vessel for her mother's revenge. In Wilde's drama, Salome is her own person and is not subject to her mother's demands. Herodias enters soon after Herod begins his attempt to seduce Salome, demanding, "You must not look at her! You are always looking at her!"⁷⁷ Much like her first line, the majority of Herodias's lines are directly related to Herod's hyper sexualized gaze that is focused on Salome. There is a minuscule amount of dialogue that Herodias directs towards her daughter. There is an assumed closeness between mothers and daughters and scholars harp on that feminine connection, or the lack of it, as catalysts for the demises of fallen women. Herodias's remarks seem to be a result of jealousy, rather than out of concern for her daughter's well being. This lack of a maternal figure seems to be a commonality among wanton women⁷⁸. Even so, by refusing her mother's order, Wilde's *Salome* is not only giving a new interpretation of the biblical chronicle, but is also giving a new understanding of the fin-de-siècle fallen woman turned tragic heroine narrative. The turn from submissive daughter to rebellious princess allows Salome a great deal of agency. Of course possessing agency is a minimum requirement Salome would need to meet to be considered a re-scripted tragic heroine, but her agency allows her to remain in control of her sexuality throughout the entirety of the drama.

Even though Herodias uses most of her dialogue to object to the over sexualization of her daughter, Salome is still overtly hyper-sexualized by the men on stage. The first few pages of dialogue between the Page of Herodias and the Young Syrian are mainly concerned with her

image. They compare her to, "...the shadow of a white rose in a mirror of silver."⁷⁹ The Young Syrian also proclaims, "Her little white hands are fluttering like doves that fly to their dove-cots. They are like white butterflies. They are just like white butterflies."⁸⁰ The Young Syrian is obsessed with her appearance, while the Page of Herodias begs him to avert his gaze. This foreshadows Herod's gaze on Salome, but the way they describe her as either an inanimate object or an animal of prey is problematic, considering she is not only our tragic heroine, but she is also considerably higher than them in social standing. Both of these descriptions dehumanize Salome in an attempt to strip her of her autonomy; she is depicted as something vulnerable, something to be owned. This foreshadows the first part of Salome's quest; she wishes to be freed from her gazers. The male gaze in *Salome* is a pointedly oppressive power struggle between the sexes. It is used to dehumanize and devalue Salome in an attempt to portray her as a helpless object. However, it is not only done by the men on stage. Salome is also a target of the audience's gaze. There is a direct corporeal relationship between Salome and the audience throughout the drama, however, the fourth wall separates the audience from the actors and it is assumed that actress playing Salome cannot reciprocate their gaze. As such, the audience's gaze is the only one that truly has power over her.

Returning to those on stage, the Young Syrian is the first man the audience sees gaze upon Salome in the play and while his words are harmful enough, Herod, who is more powerful, is the next to focus his gaze on her. His gaze is reflective of his title. While the Young Syrian's gaze focuses on her beauty and her allure, Herod's is filled with lust for his step-daughter. Unlike the Syrian, Herod has the ability to sexually consume Salome with his gaze and he continually proposes that if she fulfills his sexual desire of dancing for him, he will shower her with jewels, wealth, and kingdoms. Herod was not only in a position of power over Salome

because he was a man, but because he was king. Despite offering to shower her in gifts if she satisfied his sexual cravings and Herodias's warnings to not dance, Salome did not have a choice in whether she would dance before Herod. Although she is powerless to refuse to dance, she uses the dance to dismantle Herod's gaze upon her and to usurp his power for something she desires.

Wilde doubles Herod's hyper sexualized gaze towards Salome through her borderline cannibalistic gaze towards Iokanaan. Herod's gaze does not leave her completely powerless; she is able to take power away from others with her gaze. Much like the Syrian and Herod's gazes that liken her to inanimate objects, Salome's gaze of Iokanaan equates him to things that are heteronormatively feminine. She cries out in despair, "I am amorous of your body, Iokanaan. Thy body is white, like the lilies of a field..."⁸¹ Her gaze is filled with cannibalistic desire; she even refers to his hair as, "...clusters of grapes, like the clusters of black grapes that hang from the vine-trees."⁸² While she may not necessarily want to physically devour his flesh, she does want consume him in her own right. Cannibalistic desire is a popular archetype in revenge tragedies⁸³, although the women are generally the gazed upon, not the gazers. The woman is typically gazed upon as a form of retribution, a punishment for something a male she is related to has done to the gazer. Not only is Salome the gazer, Wilde allows her to fully understand the power her gaze holds. Considering Herod is Salome's uncle, we can infer from Herodias's reputation of, "You must not look at her! You are always looking at her!"⁸⁴ that his lust for his niece began long before he married his brother's wife. From her entrance on stage, Salome ponders why she is the subject of Herod's gaze. She questions, "I will not stay. I cannot stay. Why does the Tetrarch look at me all the while with his mole's eyes under his shaking eyelids? It is strange that the husband of my mother looks at me like that. I know what not it means. Of a

truth I know it all too well.”⁸⁵ He even offers Salome the chance to usurp her mother, if she submits to his desires. He proclaims, “Salome, come and sit next to me. I will give thee the throne of thy mother.”⁸⁶ Salome wholly understands that the holder of this gaze is powerful. After all, Herod, being the Tetrarch and being a man, is a part of the aristocratic class. This is why he is able to offer her the throne of her mother at his mere whim, despite Herodias and Salome being born of a higher class than him. Salome’s understanding of the male gaze makes her dangerous. She twists the Syrian’s gaze to her advantage; she convinces him to bring Iokanaan into her view. By doing this, the Syrian has directly disobeyed Herod’s orders and thrusts himself upon his sword. By Salome realizing she can twist the male gaze upon its owner and use it to not only convince them to do her will, but to destroy them, she realizes what she must ask for in return for dancing for Herod. This realization sets her down the path of the tragic heroine trajectory and allows her to become the infamous stage seductress *Salome* is known for.

What would become the most notable and defining production of Wilde’s *Salome* never made it to the stage. In 1892 the production was in the full swings of rehearsal, but it was denied a license to be performed in London by the office of the Lord Chamberlain on the grounds of the Reformation ban on depicting Biblical characters on stage. In Sharon Marcus’s article “Salome!! Sarah Bernhardt, Oscar Wilde, and the Drama of Celebrity” she argues that the original purpose of the law was to denounce Catholicism’s theatrical approach to religion, but was continuously employed in the nineteenth century “to protect religion from theater’s profaning democracy and to prevent blasphemous views from gaining public influence”⁸⁷ Yet there was outrage in regards to this decision, which is evident in correspondence between Wilde and British journalists. Sharon Marcus notes that this abundance of outrage and fanfare was centered mostly around the production’s star, the internationally famed Sarah Bernhardt.

Receiving her agreement to play the title role made Wilde euphoric; he ecstatically proclaimed, “Sarah va jouer Salome!!”⁸⁸ in a letter to one of his peers. Marcus argues that Bernhardt was a perfect choice for Wilde’s young femme fatale, despite being close to fifty years old. Known for her distinct voice and incredible sinuosity, Bernhardt’s roles ranged from a nineteen-year-old Joan of Arc to a sensual incarnation of Cleopatra, she would later go on to blur the lines of masculinity and femininity in her scandalous rendition of the title role in *Hamlet*.⁸⁹ An unwed mother, her personal life seemed to be as scandalous and gossip inciting as the roles she portrayed. Having Bernhardt as *Salome*’s lead gave the production a reputation and a life of its own, even if it did not make it to the stage. Marcus notes that, “Wilde planned to make *Salome* an overwhelming sensory experience that would match the expressiveness of its star ...”⁹⁰ While one of the most verbally ornate plays of the nineteenth century, *Salome* is also one of the most physical; Wilde’s rhetoric draws constant, borderline obsessive, attention to parts of the body. Royal and religious figures were classically exemplary characters, yet the sexual and blasphemous conflicts in *Salome* transform them into depraved beings. This, coupled with casting Bernhardt as the production’s star, swayed the Lord Chamberlain to refuse the play a license for public performance. Their objection to Wilde’s portrayal of biblical figures as, “... carnal objects of erotic desire... described through biblical citations...”⁹¹ may have stopped the London production of the play, but left an air of sin and sensuality around it and its star. Although Bernhardt did not get to perform as Salome, due to the Lord Chamberlain’s ban and the publicity surrounding it, *Salome* and the image of Bernhardt became synonymous.

Wilde’s failed London production spawned the creation of a plethora of different reimaginings of *Salome*, from artistic renderings by Aubrey Beardsley that would accompany the printed English translation of the text to Richard Strauss’s theatrical opera. *Salome* eventually

premiered at the Comédie-Parisienne in February 1896, while Wilde was imprisoned on the conviction of sodomy. A more notable production, however, was Max Reinhardt's production in Berlin in November 1902. In his article, "Embodied Femmes Fatales: Performing Judith and Salome on the Modernist German Stage," S.E. Jackson argues that not only did Reinhardt's production of *Salome* not only enjoyed an extended run, but was in a glut of heated critical debate and media attention.⁹² The production's leading actress, Gertrud Eysoldt was the driving force behind the staging. She not only proposed the play to Hans Oberlander, the theatre's manager, Eysoldt also brought on Reinhardt as the director and was actively involved with the censorship proceedings.⁹³

Through *Salome*, Wilde is credited with re-envisioning the femme fatale. Jackson notes that most scholarship around femme fatales originates within art history and visual culture. The placement of this archetype on stage allowed the femme fatale to occupy the position of an overtly powerful woman and, "the figure inverted the accepted turn-of-the-century binary that defined male and female sexuality as active and passive, respectively."⁹⁴ The theatrical performance places the performers and the audience in a direct corporeal relationship to each other. This visceral encounter with the deadly seductress on stage was in reaction to male anxieties proximate to rapid and profound political and social upheavals in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries surrounding women, their bodies, and their presence outside of the home. Jackson argues that even though erotic and dangerous women are encountered through both fictional and real women in Judeo-Christian parables, historical narratives, and other classical traditions, they were still expected characters in the art and media of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The femme fatale, however, was a siren that was constructed explicitly by the fear and engagement of female sexuality in western European traditions. The notorious

archetype differed from the typical fallen woman who was often utilized as a moral guide in Victorian melodramas. The femme fatale was not just a degenerate woman with an illicit past, she was a deadly seductress who used her beauty, charm, and sexual allure to ensnare her male lover into deadly situations. They were often akin to enchantresses and had a specifically supernatural air around them; they were known for casting a “spell” to entrap vulnerable men. Salome not only directly threatened bodily harm to her target, her performance as a femme fatale threatened the heteronormative social hierarchy by usurping patriarchal sovereignty.

At this time styles of theatre criticism began to shift; the critiques were no longer based merely on the production’s ability to remain faithful to the dramatic text, instead considering modernist styles of performance and visceral experience. Jackson notes, “Reviews of their performances are marked by a notably heightened awareness of the visceral intensity of the modernist theatrical experience and, particularly, of the actresses’ physical presence... This analysis demonstrates that the specific corporeal complexity of stage performance created an awareness of the actress not only as an aesthetic object...”⁹⁵ In the 1903 review of *Salome* for *Tagliche Rundschau*, Karl Strecker notes, “... the Salome of the great Gertrud Eysoldt, a fiery, oriental intoxication of colors, captivating and exhaling heavy perfumes, with dark bushes in the background, through which animal eyes gleam.” While actresses discovered ways to defy the institutional censorship that attempted to regulate their bodies on stage, Salome’s dance was an act of sexual-self display. Considering most of the reviews responded to Salome’s dance similarly to Strecker’s, a new discourse was formed regardless if they were praising or condemning the play. Actresses were no longer an ornament of the sets, instead their performance was explored as a visceral, even carnal, experience. According to Jackson, the performances of these actresses as Salome incited an international obsession with the figure, now

referred to as “Salomania.”⁹⁶ Despite criticism that felt the need to intervene to impede the “unnatural” interest women showed in the “lurid” ideas presented in *Salome*, the actress portraying the femme fatale on stage retained visibly agency over her body in her performance and the female spectators remained free to discuss and interpret the performance apart from how their male critics instructed they should react. The illicit air that surrounded the drama only increased its popularity.

The erotic and dangerous women Jackson mentions were often killed before they were able to pose a real threat to heteronormative masculinity. Jackson argues,

The figure offered a fantasy projection in which the masculine subject ultimately maintained control over the construction and expression of sexuality and power, even when it was the deadly seductress who seemed to hold the power... As in the masochistic paradigm, the male imagination simultaneously occupies the role of the victim of the deadly seductress and of the authoring subject of that very danger.⁹⁷

Similar to the fallen woman, the femme fatale would often be killed in the name of catharsis. Once her male counterpart has killed the femme fatale, he has killed the fear that surrounded the idea of female sexuality compromising masculinity. However, Salome does not die before she greatly compromises heteronormative masculinity. Her gaze causes the death of one of Herod’s trusted soldiers and of a religious figure. This also occurs on the night of Herod’s birthday celebration so other powerful figures are bound to have witnessed it too. The damage to heteronormative masculinity and femininity does not end with just those contained within the playing space. The femme fatale falls under the umbrella of the fallen woman, but she is innately more sexual than the other fallen women we usually encounter, which grants different reactions to her presence on stage. Fallen women and femme fatales often were the more

interesting and coveted roles for actresses. Jackson notes that in the 1902 German production that, “Critics fixed on their encounters with the actresses in a tangibly fervid way, describing their bodies, movements, and voices and also outlining with sensual detail the eroticism conveyed through their performances.”⁹⁸ Despite male critics over sexualizing the actresses in these roles, they retain visible agency over themselves in their performances. Femme fatales who behaved like Salome took a stand against the heteronormative chains that condemned them to die. The femme fatale on stage gave a platform for the women in the audience to interpret and discuss sexually charged roles they had never seen other women play before. Jackson notes that in Tilla Duriex’s⁹⁹ autobiography that within roles like Salome female performers were cognizant of the restrictions censors put on feminine self-expression, but knew the possibility of resistance within them through the use of their bodies. For once, the women on stage were not sexual purely for the sake of a man’s desires. Because of plays like *Salome*, the portrayal of fallen women on stage not only offered actresses more substantial roles, but opened a dialogue amongst audience members in regards to the actresses’ performances, not just the actresses as ornaments of the set.

We can pinpoint the exact moment Salome becomes the infamous re-envisioning of the femme fatale as her performance of the Dance of the Seven Veils. In “Here’s Lookin’ at You, Kid”: The Empowering Gaze in ‘Salome’,” Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon argue that Wilde intended for his version of the nameless biblical character to be the embodiment of both virginity and sensuality, thus creating “everyone’s favorite fin-de-siècle dragon lady.”¹⁰⁰ The Salome we encounter in the beginning of the play may recognize the meaning of power, but this does not yet have any lethal ramifications because the Salome we first meet is an impulsive, spoiled princess who is very much constricted and anchored into her own world. Her entire

persona is suited for the narcissism of the young. The audience does not begin to see her as the hysterical necrophiliac with a penchant for violence until she performs the dance. Despite this being an instrumental action in defining her character and in her demise, Wilde gives a surprising lack of stage directions in the dramatic text. While Wilde's *mise-en-scene* generally lacks explicit stage directions as he seems to prefer entwining the directions within the dialogue in *Salome*, "Salome dances the dance of the seven veils" is the only direction he gives.¹⁰¹ The Dance of the Seven Veils is inherently Dionysian in nature and Salome merely uses it as a means to an end. Hutcheon and Hutcheon argue, "Though young, Salome knows the meaning of power. Her dance is a calculated move in a game of exchange with Herod in which she offers her body as a sensual, sexual spectacle to his eyes, in return for a promise that will fulfill both her childlike willful stubbornness and her consuming sexual obsession to kiss the mouth of the resistant prophet."¹⁰² As the Dance of the Seven Veils reveals Salome's body to the gazing audience, her character is unveiled. Wilde's lack of direction left the level of sensuality of the dance up to the actress, although the reviews and criticism of Gertrud Eysoldt's German production clearly showed that the Dance of the Seven Veils, and especially the actress's body, were the focal points for the male critics. The mere corporeal nature of the dance subjugated what had previously constituted women's roles within the theatre. The actress who performed the Dance of the Seven Veils was in no way a mere ornament of the set; she held power not only over her body, but over the gaze of the audience.

Through the Dance of the Seven Veils we can once again discuss Salome's doubling of the male gaze that is exerted upon her. Hutcheon and Hutcheon argue that ocularcentrism, the dominance of vision over the other senses, has a lengthy and complex history in Western antiquity and culture. The distance between the viewer and who is viewed, gives the observer

the power to dominate who is being observed. The connection between dominance and the act of seeing allows the seen to be objectified and as such, the privilege of sight has often been linked to sexual privilege. Thus, the male gaze becomes pointedly gendered and rooted within patriarchal dominance and leaves women the dehumanized objects of this gaze as passively displayed bodies. By performing the Dance of the Seven Veils, Salome becomes the spectacle and Herod the spectator. Yet, through her movements and the display of her body Salome holds the influence and convinces Herod to succumb to her demands. Hutcheon and Hutcheon argue that while the male gaze is tailored to benefit the male gazer, in *Salome* the power lies within the gazed upon. Thus, power of the male gaze has not been usurped, as it never held the power in the first place.¹⁰³ Ocularcentrism is prevalent within the various gazes in *Salome*, however the ideology Hutcheon and Hutcheon present would only be pertinent to Salome if the first time we saw her exhibit autonomy was in her performance. Returning to the biblical story, by Wilde providing the nameless dancer with an identity already instills Salome with an agency the original dancer was denied. Not only is she given a name, she is the only female within the play who is not named after their husband. Salome is a character who can think and make her own decisions. She may be an impulsive and spoiled princess when she first enters the stage, but she remains steadfast in her decision to dance for Herod, no matter many times her mother pleads for not to. Salome understands the male gaze, so she uses it against the men who gaze upon her. Whether it is through the Young Syrian who thrusts himself onto his sword after he brings Iokanaan into her view or through her ability to convince Herod to grant her the head of Iokanaan when he offered her up gifts of jewels and kingdoms, Salome remains in control. She usurps the power from Herod's gaze and uses it to fulfill the cannibalistic desires of her own gaze upon Iokanaan.

The culmination of Salome's infamous performance of the Dance of the Seven Veils is that in return, Herod orders his soldiers to bring Iokanaan's head to her. After she has been applauded for her act, Herod eagerly asks, "What is it that thou wouldst have, Salome?" and she replies simply, "The head of Iokanaan."¹⁰⁴ Despite Herod begging and pleading for Salome to rethink what he mistakenly assumes is her mother's request, she remains un-wavered. Unlike in the biblical narrative, Salome defends her prize as a choice of her own, "It is not my mother's voice that I heed. It is for mine own pleasure that I ask the head of Iokanaan in a silver charger."¹⁰⁵ It is in this moment that Salome transforms from a young, frivolous girl into a tragic heroine. By Salome remaining persistent in her desires and by refusing Herod's offers of jewels, wealth, and titles, she comes close to completing her quest. If she cannot have his love or lust, she demands Iokanaan's head. She wants to own him, to consume him in an attempt to exert complete control over him. This is not the entirety of what she had set out to do. Not only does she want to consume Iokanaan with her gaze; she wants to free herself from the gazes of the other men she shares the stage with.

Salome's role in Iokanaan's beheading has caused others to classify her as not a tragic heroine, but as a re-scripting of the Greek gorgon, Medusa. In Amanda Fernbach's article, "Wilde's "Salome" and the Ambiguous Fetish," she argues that the mythological man-killer had no power over women and, as a result, was conventionally depicted in confrontation with male characters.¹⁰⁶ The theory of Salome as Medusa is solidified by the warning of the Page of Herodias early on in the text. He warns the Young Syrian, "Why do you look at her? You must not look at her... Something terrible may happen,"¹⁰⁷ and "Do not look at her. I pray you not to look at her."¹⁰⁸ Much like Medusa, Salome's power lies within her gaze. When a man looked into Medusa's eyes, he would be turned to stone. The Young Syrian could not help but gaze

upon her, despite the Page warning him that, “It is dangerous to look at people in such fashion. Something terrible may happen.”¹⁰⁹ Notwithstanding the numerous warnings, he continues to gaze upon Salome and ultimately throws himself onto his sword because he is unable to disregard her requests. It is reasonable, perhaps even ideal, to then expect Herod to perish in a similar way as a result of his lustful gaze upon Salome, especially since he continuously rants about wicked omens and blood before he orders his soldiers to bring her the head of Iokanaan. Her command for the Young Syrian to bring Iokanaan out where she could gaze upon him made the soldier kill himself in fear because she made him disobey the Tetrarch’s orders. Once Herod brings her the head of Iokanaan, she has conquered his gaze; she seems free. Yet, unlike her Medusa-like effect on the Young Syrian and Iokanaan, Herod does not die.

Though these events bring our attention to the similarities between Salome and Medusa, her death does not rectify itself with the monster’s. Salome’s gaze allows her to take on an almost masculine role, which in turn, feminizes those who she gazes upon. Fernbach argues that Salome is a parody of Freud’s theory of castration anxiety, meaning that even though her ability to both indirectly and directly affect the deaths of the Syrian and Iokanaan allows her to assume a phallus as a feminized figure, the power she seeks is fetishized.¹¹⁰ Iokanaan’s feminization coupled with his head served on a platter, a mess of tangled hair and a bleeding orifice, evokes imagery of Medusa. Iokanaan’s bleeding orifice also provokes imagery of menstruation. The stigmas around female menstruation and in turn maternity are the epitome of why women were considered the weaker sex. When Salome has Iokanaan executed she kills the weakness. She fully grasps the power she seeks through the doubling of the male gaze. Fernbach argues,

Straight *fin de siècle* men who read or saw Wilde’s play performed may have been scandalized by Salome’s perverse, necrophiliac love for Iokanaan and her erotic handling of his body. They may have felt threatened by this woman who

takes Herod's power and uses it against his wished, and they may have identified with this patriarch who orders Salome's execution. For them this fantasy might have been fetishistic in the Freudian sense. When Salome takes Jokanaan's head, she takes they phallus and usurps Herod's power.¹¹¹

The audience, specifically male audiences, were enraged by Salome usurping the power from Herod. This returns to the stigma surrounding menstruation. Herodias proclaims, "My daughter and I come from a royal race. As for thee, thy father was a camel driver! He was a thief and a robber to boot!"¹¹² Despite Herodias continuously reminding Herod of this, he still remains higher than them in the class structure of the play simply because he is a man and thus, does not menstruate. He is of the stronger sex and therefore, can transcend the hierarchy of the aristocracy. Before Salome performs the Dance of the Seven Veils, Herod uses his position of power in an attempt to bribe her.

HEROD: ... Dance for me, Salome, I beseech thee. If thou dancest for me thou mayest ask of me what thou wilt, and I will give it thee. Yes, dance for me, Salome, and whatsoever thou shalt ask of me I will give it thee, even unto the half of my kingdom.

SALOME: Will you indeed give me whatsoever I shall ask of you, Tetrarch?

HERODIAS: Do not dance, my daughter.

HEROD: Whatever thou shalt ask of me, even unto the half of my kingdom.¹¹³

Even though Herod offers Salome whatever she could desire, even half of his kingdom and half of his power, audiences were still horrified of the result of this bribe. Iokanaan's tangled mess of hair coupled with his profusely bleeding orifice likens him to a women's menstruating genitals. By having his head cut off, Iokanaan is not just feminized, he physically becomes a woman. In that moment Salome assumes the role of the conquering male. She takes much more than Herod

offers. It is the end of female domesticity and maternity. Through this act not only does she usurp the power of the male gaze, she usurps the social and biological hierarchy that place Herod over two women of higher birth.

The moment that seals Salome's fate as a tragic heroine is her death. Herod has her killed after she performs the Dance of the Seven Veils and demands the head of Iokanaan be delivered to her. Naturally, her death is seen as cathartic; it is karmic retribution for her perverse subversion of the patriarchy and the signification of female power. Cradling Iokanaan's severed head Salome croons,

Thou wouldst have none of me, Iokanaan. Thou rejectedst me. Thou didst speak evil words against me. Thou didst bear thyself toward me as to a harlot, as to a woman that is a wanton, to me, Salome, daughter of Herodias, Princess of Judaea! Well, I still live, but thou art dead, and thy head belongs to me. I can do with it what I will. I can throw it to the dogs and to the birds of the air. That which the dogs leave, the birds of the air shall devour... Ah, Iokanaan, Iokanaan, thou wert the man that I loved alone among men! ... I saw thee, and I loved thee. Oh, how I loved thee...¹¹⁴

Salome uses terms to describe the way Iokanaan acted towards her that are traditionally associated with fallen women. Despite referring to herself a harlot and wanton woman, she makes it clear to the unconscious head that it may think or say what it likes, but she, a woman, came out on top. Salome is the one holding the truncated head and she may do whatever she pleases to it; she has the control. The execution may have freed her from Herod's controlling gaze, the repetition of how much she loved Iokanaan lets us know that her quest was not complete. While she may have metaphorically consumed Iokanaan by taking his head and thus separating him from his thoughts and prophecies, Salome wanted his thoughts to be consumed by her. She fully understood the power of the gaze, however, she did not initially intend to use it

to slay Iokanaan. When he would not bend to her will, she had to have him executed. His death means that half of her quest has failed and as such, Salome, like other tragic heroes must die. Her death may initially seem like it serves cathartic purposes as punishment for usurping three men and taking up feminine space in the masculine hierarchy. An idea that needs to be proposed, however, is that her death was not a suicide because she understood exactly what would become of her after Iokanaan's decapitation.

It may seem difficult to call Salome's death a suicide, as she was technically killed by Herod's henchmen, yet we must consider that Salome knew exactly what would become of her for demanding Iokanaan's head on a silver platter. Even though her lust consumes her whenever she is onstage, Salome's lust does not cripple her the way Herod's lust for her leaves him incapable of denying her what she demands of him. Before she begins her dance, Herod spews premonitions of what was to come, "'Tis well! Thy little feet will be like white doves. They will be like little white flowers that dance upon trees... No, no, she is going to dance on blood! There is blood spilt on the ground. She must not dance on blood. It were an evil omen."¹⁵ Previously Herod was begging Salome to dance; promising to gift her anything she could desire. Salome knew what these omens, which were similar to what Iokanaan had prophesized about her mother, meant. The blood Herod saw belonged to the young Syrian, whose death Salome indirectly caused when she had him bring Iokanaan into her view. The blood was not meant to be an presage for Herod; it was to warn Salome that she was not to take part in another's death and emerge unscathed. Her blatant "abuse" of her feminine sexuality to procure a masculine dominance would not go unpunished. Despite knowing this, she was staid in her decision. Herod incessantly begging and pleading with her, offering her all of his jewels, could not force Salome to waiver in her demand. This begs the inquiry into whether or not Salome's request for

Iokanaan's execution was a suicidal act. She was given multiple opportunities to change her mind. Between Herod's ranting and raving about bad omens and her blatant disregard of his wishes, she understood that her request would result in her death. Salome also received another omen earlier in the drama that is easily ignored. During one of her first verbal interactions with Iokanaan he foretells, "Did I not tell thee that I had heard in the palace the beating of the wings of the angel of death, and hath he not come, the angel of death?"¹¹⁶ This premonition was clear as day; it explicitly spells out what was to come for both of them. Instead of heeding his warning, Salome ignores him. Instead she speaks over him, crying out, "Suffer me to kiss thy mouth."¹¹⁷ The majority of Wilde's dialogue is disjointed; characters are often either speaking in third person or over each other, often ignoring the wishes and statements of those in front of them, in a simulated hysteria. The confusion that often accompanies this type of dialogue, coupled with Salome's unashamed display of sexual desire is enough to distract not only the audience, but the other characters on stage of Iokanaan's most important prophecy. The only one who heard this proclamation and understood what it meant was Salome. Yet, she continued on with her quest. The agency she exhibits with this decision renders her death an act of suicide, even though it Herod's soldiers are the ones who physically take her life. By this point Salome understands she will never be free of Herod's gaze and at the the same time, she would not be allowed to thrive under his rule with the excess of agency and sexuality she had just displayed. She received a portion of what she desired from her performance, but she understood that after her essentially giving into Herod's sexual desires she would never be free of him.

Examining Salome's death as a suicide dismantles the catharsis from Wilde's play. Determining Salome's level of agency in her death is a crucial piece of evidence in ruling whether or not it is a suicide, rather than an act of cathartic retribution. Salome not only exhibits

the ability to influence Iokanaan's execution, but by continuing on with it, despite knowing what would become of her, she exhibits control over her own death. Although she was not able to control Herod's gaze completely, she was able to control the Syrian's gaze. She could not control Iokanaan's desire, or lack thereof, for her, but she could control his death. Her decision to die may masquerade itself as cathartic because she not only usurped the patriarchal ties that bound her, she usurped a king. Unlike other fallen women characters that came before her, Salome does not decide to effectively commit suicide because she was ostracized from society for her sexual transgressions. She knew that the inability to complete her quests, to control Iokanaan's desire for her and to be able to control or free herself from the gazes that objectified her, would result in her death. Wilde's Salome was no longer a nameless means to an end. Knowing that disobeying Herod and demanding Iokanaan's head on a silver platter would result in her execution, Salome's suicide serves to fulfill a part of her quest. She is not killed with a sword or a spear, she is not beheaded in a similar fashion to Iokanaan. Instead, the tragic heroine is crushed under the shields of Herod's soldiers. As they crush her, Salome is rendered invisible by the shields and thus, freed from Herod's gaze and the audience's gaze. Reading her death as a suicide allows it to be a quasi-fulfillment of her quest; it is the ultimate act of agency. While she does not win Iokanaan's desire, she is freed from a male gaze that had tormented her for years. Salome's death assures that she is the only one in control of her sexuality. Instead of gazing upon a beautiful young princess, now those who wish to gaze will do so upon a decaying corpse. Her suicide removes the myth that female sexuality is for the sole purpose of masculine pleasure and in turn, dismantles the idea that femme fatales and fallen women must die for expressing sexuality that falls outside the realm of directly satisfying a male character on stage.

CONCLUSION

“PEOPLE DON’T DO SUCH THINGS”

Through the portrayal of women like Hedda, Beata, and Salome on stage as re-scripted tragic heroines, Ibsen and Wilde not only twist the Aristotelean device for shock value, but create lasting changes to theatre traditions. Depicting tragic heroines on stage as fallen women may have offended the moral sensibilities of their spectators, but by reinterpreting the typically melodramatic narrative Ibsen and Wilde changed the script for the types of women presented on the fin-de-siècle stage. The ability for Hedda, Beata, and Salome to inflict violence not only on themselves but on other people ignited a collective feminine consciousness that sparked a discourse amongst predominantly female audience members. The roles of the re-scripted tragic heroine not only created opportunities on stage for actresses, but off stage as well. *Hedda Gabler*, *Rosmersholm*, and *Salome* opened a theatrical discussion about not only women’s inequality in the home, but women’s inequality within the public that created a lasting discourse in both the commercial and independent theatre circuits. After the production of these dramas, there was a notable increase in actresses doubling as playwrights and theatre managers. This led to a shifting theatrical climate that would eventually welcome plays written by women that featured all female casts. While this may seem like a subtle change, by re-writing the melodramatic script of the fallen woman as women who are not only relatable, but as tragic heroines, Ibsen and Wilde dismantled the ghosting of theatrical tropes that haunted the stage as well as the constraints of domesticity, maternity, and sexuality female characters would be subjected to in dramas. The re-scripted tragic heroines paved the way for more substantial female roles to permanently take the stage as well as enticed more female audiences to the theatre by dismantling the myth of the angel in the house to fit more relevant roles.

NOTES AND CITATIONS

- ¹ Bourke 421.
- ² Bourke 423.
- ³ Bourke 430.
- ⁴ Wearing 324.
- ⁵ Wearing 324.
- ⁶ Aristotle 36.
- ⁷ Robins 18.
- ⁸ Robins 16.
- ⁹ For further reading on the effect of actress-managers, like Robins and Lea, had on the female roles put on stage see: Robinson, Jo, and John Stokes. "The Actress as Manager." *The Cambridge Companion to the Actress*, Ed. Maggie B. Gale. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007. 157–172. Web.
- ¹⁰ Barstow 387.
- ¹¹ Robins 18.
- ¹² Williams 170.
- ¹³ For further reading see: Finney, Gail. "Ibsen and Feminism." *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen*, Ed. James McFarlane, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994. 89–105. Web.
- ¹⁴ Ibsen 563.
- ¹⁵ Ibsen 563.
- ¹⁶ Robins 20.
- ¹⁷ Robins 21.
- ¹⁸ *Hedda Gabler* 275.
- ¹⁹ For further reading on Nietzsche's aesthetic theories on the concepts and their affect on tragedy see: Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy*. New York: Dover Publications, 1995. Print.
- ²⁰ Reinhart 218.
- ²¹ Reinhart 221.
- ²² *Hedda Gabler* 277.
- ²³ *Hedda Gabler* 292.
- ²⁴ *Hedda Gabler* 265.
- ²⁵ *Hedda Gabler* 292.
- ²⁶ *Hedda Gabler* 254.
- ²⁷ Norseng 10.
- ²⁸ Norseng 33.
- ²⁹ Chengzhou 452.
- ³⁰ Norseng 12.
- ³¹ *Hedda Gabler* 298.
- ³² *Hedda Gabler* 297.
- ³³ Strindberg 157.
- ³⁴ Strindberg 158.
- ³⁵ Strindberg 159.
- ³⁶ Strindberg 160.
- ³⁷ *Hedda Gabler* 300.
- ³⁸ *Hedda Gabler* 300.

³⁹ *Hedda Gabler* 300.

⁴⁰ Barstow 401.

⁴¹ *Rosmersholm* 22.

⁴² *Rosmersholm* 33.

⁴³ *Rosmersholm* 33.

⁴⁴ *Rosmersholm* 16.

⁴⁵ *Rosmersholm* 3.

⁴⁶ *Rosmersholm* 46.

⁴⁷ This refers to Marvin Carlson's theory of ghosting, in which every theatrical event is haunted by the events that came before and that haunting informs the interpretations of all the performance's participants. For further reading see Carlson's *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine*.

⁴⁸ *Rosmersholm* 47.

⁴⁹ *Rosmersholm* 47.

⁵⁰ Kierkegaard 553.

⁵¹ Kierkegaard 551.

⁵² Kierkegaard 553.

⁵³ Colombo 172.

⁵⁴ Kierkegaard 553.

⁵⁵ Kierkegaard 553.

⁵⁶ Scott 160.

⁵⁷ Scott 160.

⁵⁸ Shaw 644.

⁵⁹ *Rosmersholm* 1.

⁶⁰ Tilghman 345.

⁶¹ Tilghman 346.

⁶² *Rosmersholm* 8.

⁶³ Tilghman 345.

⁶⁴ Shaw 643.

⁶⁵ *Rosmersholm* 21.

⁶⁶ *Rosmersholm* 57.

⁶⁷ *Rosmersholm* 45.

⁶⁸ Shaw 645.

⁶⁹ *Rosmersholm* 50.

⁷⁰ *Rosmersholm* 58.

⁷¹ Colombo 175.

⁷² *Rosmersholm* 39.

⁷³ *Rosmersholm* 39.

⁷⁴ *Rosmersholm* 59.

⁷⁵ *Salome* 1.

⁷⁶ Salome appears as an unnamed dancer in Mark 6:21-2 and Matthew 14:6-11

⁷⁷ *Salome* 27.

⁷⁸ For further reading into the Victorian's link between maternity and female crime see: Lombroso, Caesar, and William Ferrero. *The Female Offender*. Edited by W. Douglas Morrison, New York: Appleton, 1895.

⁷⁹ *Salome* 3.

⁸⁰ *Salome* 7.

⁸¹ *Salome* 21.

⁸² *Salome* 22.

⁸³ Revenge tragedy is a dramatic drama popular in England during the 16th and 17th centuries.

The plot was centered around a quest for vengeance and vindication. Revenge tragedies typically contained scenes of mutilation and carnage.

⁸⁴ *Salome* 27.

⁸⁵ *Salome* 10.

⁸⁶ *Salome* 33.

⁸⁷ Marcus 1014.

⁸⁸ Translates as, "Sarah is going to play Salome!!" (Marcus 999).

⁸⁹ Marcus 1001.

⁹⁰ Marcus 1007.

⁹¹ Marcus 1014.

⁹² Jackson 51.

⁹³ Jackson 55.

⁹⁴ Jackson 50.

⁹⁵ Jackson 51.

⁹⁶ Jackson 53.

⁹⁷ Jackson 52.

⁹⁸ Jackson 57.

⁹⁹ Tilla Duriex was an Austrian film and stage actress who eventually shared the role of Salome with Eysoldt in Reinhardt's production (Jackson 58). Her autobiography is entitled *Meine ersten neunzig Jahre: Erinnerungen* (1971).

¹⁰⁰ Hutcheon and Hutcheon 13.

¹⁰¹ *Salome* 54.

¹⁰² Hutcheon and Hutcheon 14.

¹⁰³ Hutcheon and Hutcheon 16.

¹⁰⁴ *Salome* 55.

¹⁰⁵ *Salome* 56.

¹⁰⁶ Fernbach 201.

¹⁰⁷ *Salome* 8.

¹⁰⁸ Wilde 9.

¹⁰⁹ *Salome* 3.

¹¹⁰ Fernbach 197.

¹¹¹ Fernbach 210.

¹¹² *Salome* 33.

¹¹³ *Salome* 49.

¹¹⁴ *Salome* 65.

¹¹⁵ *Salome* 53.

¹¹⁶ *Salome* 25.

¹¹⁷ *Salome* 25.

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