

Existential Crisis: *The Wild Duck* by Henrik Ibsen

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ABSTRACT

This research interpreted The Wild Duck by Henrik Ibsen under the perspective of existential crisis in almost all the major characters of play. Researcher made an effort to culminate all the problems, agony and extreme poignant which they are facing due to their existence. Characters analysis can be further studied under the main postulates of Existential Philosophy by Kierkegaard and Albert Camus, and these philosophical views arouse some questions related to existential crisis in the play The Wild Duck. It puts a question about complex issue of human existence and their identity in the world. There is another question; is suicide necessary to end up the long lasting struggle of human existence in the world? Hedvig and its suicide, a reading in comparison to 'The Myth of Sisyphus by Albert Camus'

Keywords: Existential, struggle, suicide

INTRODUCTION

The Wild Duck is written by *Henrik Ibsen* in 1884, one of *Ibsen's* later plays. After receiving much disagreement and a lot of discussion it has been recognized universally as one of the greatest modern dramatic work. *The Wild Duck* is "generally acknowledged as one of *Ibsen's* greatest play" (Moi, Toril. , 2006).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Henrik Ibsen a Norwegian playwright was an iconoclast, against the traditions and social factors that shape human lives. Infact he is the supporter of individualism. He was in favor of free will. We can observe through many of his plays that his characters do not accept their lives shaped by outsider forces; the forces that challenges their free will.

A Doll's House which is considered one of his greatest modern play. He evokes the idea of individualism, one's quest for oneself; one's own identity. Through the character of *Nora Ibsen* highlights the existential crisis of a woman in a society. *Nora* who spends her life firstly according to her father's wishes and secondly according to her husband's wishes. As she says in the play; "I have been treated most unjustly first by father than by you". It shows that she was unable to find her true identity and suffers with existentialistic crisis. She plays a role being for others rather than being for self. After realizing the issue that, she is just using as an object throughout her life. She starts to think about herself and we can observe when she says to her husband "I have to educate myself, and you are not the man to help me with it, I have to do it by myself. That's why I am leaving you". The act of leaving shows her struggle towards finding the meaning of her true existence. In the last act when *Torvald* asks her "You can't abandon your home, your husband, your children, this is your duty". She replies "I have another duty, my duty to myself". *Torvald* asks her that "Before anything else you are a mother" after listen this sentence from *Helmer*; *Nora* replies "I believe that before anything else I am a human being". Here *Henrik Ibsen* provides a choice of free will to his character and through this character he gives the concept of being for self is necessary to know the real meaning of one's life. He also paved a way to woman emancipation; gave them strength to

search their identity as at the end Nora takes an action in quest of her true existence and says “We both must be free”.

Another play *Hedda Gabbler* by *Henrik Ibsen* illustrates the tenets of existentialistic philosophy. In *The Myth of Sisyphus* by *Albert Camus*, the words “There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide” are directly related to the character of Hedda Gabbler. As she is a wonderful exploration of what is the meaning of truly live alive. Hedda uses her free will by committing suicide but she performs this act after a long delay and because of this she is also known as “Female Hamlet”. She fails to use her free will at the right time to perform right action to end up her struggle of existential crisis. Now we’ll discuss *The Wild Duck* by *Henrik Ibsen* under the theory of Existentialism.

FRAMEWORK

In philosophy, the term exists and existence denotes something active rather than passive. The term Existentialism means pertaining to existence or in logic predicting existence. “Existentialism is a humanism...” (Jean-Paul, S. 2007). Philosophically, it now applies to a vision of the conduction and existence of man, his place and function in the world and his relationship or lack of one with God. As Izenberg, G. N. (2015) defines Existentialism as *revelation which goes under the process of different stages that follows ones existence*. Under the title of Existentialism are grouped a number of philosophic doctrines which all lay stress upon the existence of the individual with his concrete experience and solidity as opposed to the theoretical abstractions. There are two kinds of Existentialism.

- i) According to Golomb, J. (2012) ; Christian Existentialism influenced by *Kierkegaard* stresses the idea that in God man may find freedom from tension.
- ii) Atheistic Existentialism by Sartre, J. P. (2002). and *Malton Heidegger* states that man is alone in a godless universe.

This movement is based on the assumption that reality as existence can be lived but can never become the object of thought. Existentialist stresses the fact that men are not determined “A priori” but exist in other words that they are in the state of becoming within the framework of a certain given situation and all in the long run what they make themselves. In this way, they escape from mechanical determination. Sartre at first shows us a set of characters all of whom are incapable of choice and spend their lives in a lamentable condition of grouping after a self which is somewhere in the future, but at least these men have the solitary conviction of their agonizing nothingness and are to the extent better than those who accept what society has made out of them, whom Sartre calls the salads or skunk. Truth exists in escaping from the state of anguish importance by means of an act of will called engagement.

The atheistic Existentialism is a philosophy of anguish but also of liberty and action. Since 1945 it has produced a number of powerful works and has won the support of large public. For the Christian Existentialism the act of engagement is religious and leads to God.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

In *The Wild Duck* by *Henrik Ibsen* there are some characters who suffered from identity crisis. As a realistic play *Ibsen* provides an opportunity of free will to the characters, through which characters can shape their lives. Idea of *Existentialism* by *Jean Paul Sartre* also contained same condition. Sartre seems that human beings are a kind of mud from their birth to death; now this is their own choice to remain like mud or move on in search of their true identity. As Sartre, J. P., & Mairret, P. (1965) talks about the real quest of one’s identity with reference to Dostoevsky’s saying “if God do not exist everything would be possible”. Man is

in quest of himself and he can explain his identity only when he separates himself from the domain of God. "Life is here shaped as a long parade of spectacular staging or tableaux, where the visual confrontations and conflicts between the characters can be described as an endless stream of clashes between the poser's self-image and the seeing eye's interpretation of the person on display" Osterud, E. (1996). In both cases, characters choice ultimately gives shape to their identity. We can observe the same situation in this play. Ibsen portrays his characters in this play in a way that they knew about their mission of life. We can analyze some of the characters in this play who are suffering from existential crisis.

Firstly, Gregers Werle who comes back after a long period of fifteen years from self-imposed exile because he had a grudge to his father Hakon Werle who belongs to allied class; a wealthy merchant and industrialist. On his returning from self-imposed exile he comes to familiar with the truth that his friend Hialmar Ekdal has married to a servant Gina. Greger finds that he should have to live in Hialmar's house and he leaves luxurious house of his father. In Hialmar's house he pays rent for a separate room. While living in Hialmar's house he realizes the more facts about an affair of his father Hakon Werle and Gina; previously their servant and now Hialmar's wife. He comes to know that Hedvig is suffering with the serious problem of eyesight same like his father, Hakon Werle. He eventually discovers that Werle is the biological father of Hedvig rather than Hialmar. Greger decides to tell the reality to his friend Hialmar; as he wants to do something better for Ekdal's family. He seems that reality can give them spiritual relaxation and ultimately this relaxation will transform into their happiness. So, to exposure reality in front of Ekdal's family became the mission of his life. We can interpret Greger's main objective to tell the reality from Existentialistic point of view; as his mother had a trivial relation with Hakon Werle and she was died considering that Gina and Werle had an affair.

Secondly, Existential Crisis can be observed in Hialmar's character but his identity crisis is different from Greger's identity. As Greger fixed his aim to expose reality whereas Hialmar is struggling to reach at that point because he had no aim in his life. While living with his family he usually spend his time to invent something lonely. But later in the play we come across the reality that the invention is nothing but only an illusion; that is playing the role of his partner in his loneliness. Here we can observe Hialmar's struggle to find his identity. He is living with his family but finds it as his wrong identity and makes a struggle to find true identity and due to this struggle Hialmar ultimately suffers with the meaning of true existence of his life.

Thirdly, Old Ekdal (father of Hialmar) is very sympathetic character throughout the play that rarely joins conversations and usually lives alone. He created his own world, his own false identity and lived within it throughout the play. He used to live alone while living with his family.

Greger, Hialmar and Old Ekdal are three characters in *The Wild Duck* who suffers from Existential Crisis. Greger suffers because of poignant experience of his mother's death. Hialmar and Old Ekdal lived in isolation while living with their families because they are unable to search their selves.

Kierkegaard's notion of Existentialism in The Wild Duck

Sæverot, H. (2011) explains Kierkegaardian perspective of acknowledging one's own existence always connected to the existence of another person. *Kierkegaard's* notion of Existentialism in *The Wild Duck* can be discussed through the focal matter of reality and illusion around which the whole play revolves. Greger seeks idealism of truth can provide the meaning of real life. Here Greger's view is related to Kierkegaard's philosophy of

existentialism that “In God Man may find freedom from tension” He glorifies God who is ultimate source of all being a Truth. Having this concept in his mind Greger wants to achieve his chief objective by telling truth to Ekdal’s family and then provide them a happy life. But it does not happen and he fails. Eventually Ekdal’s family suffered from identity crisis after his act of exposure reality.

Albert Camus and the Wild Duck

In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Albert Camus talks about the existence of life. He also talks about the necessity of suicide because he wants to quest whether suicide leads to the end of existential crisis or not.

In *The Wild Duck*, Hedvig’s suicide also deals with the same question. When Greger – son of Hakon Werle – *The Wild Duck*, asks her to sacrifice her most beloved thin wild duck in order to win her father’s heart. She agreed and asks her grandfather to kill the wild duck. Greger, who wants to kill wild duck in order to free Ekdal’s family from the debt of Hakon Werle. Here the duck symbolizes Werle’s interference in Ekdal’s family. But Hedvig by committing suicide proves her love. Hedvig’s sacrifice succeeded for proving her love but it failed to get rid them from their identity crisis. According to Albert Camus to end your existential crisis suicide is not necessary. Therefore suicide by Hedvig does not bring any fruit to her family. The struggle of her father and mother can be analyzed under the story of Sisyphus.

There are some similarities between and the existentialistic play *The Myth of Sisyphus*. We can interpret Ibsen’s *The Wild Duck* under the reading of existentialistic philosophy and also the character’s existential crisis which they face throughout the play. Attic in the play Wild duck is very useful place which provides temporary identity to some characters of the play. By the comparison of Hedvigs’s suicide to *The Myth of Sisyphus* we can observe that it is not suicide that is helpful to end the identity crisis rather it is absurdity of life which can provide us the meaning of our existence.

CONCLUSION

So, we can conclude that existential crisis can be found in almost all the major plays of Henrik Ibsen and that he is the advocator of individualism. He is in favor of freewill. Existentialistic crisis in *A Doll’s House* opens a way for women to speak and live their right of free will in order to find their existentialist. In *Hedda Gabbler* and *The Wild Duck* both the characters Hedda and Hedvig committed suicide to end up their struggle of finding their existential crisis. But according to Albert Camus suicide is not necessary to end up this long lasting struggle of identity crisis.

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