

Examining Disorders in Ibsen's Hedda Gabler

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Abstract



This study aims to investigate the trauma in Ibsen Hedda Gabler. It critically discusses the important aspects of trauma in Hedda Gabler. The application of trauma theories propagated by Caruth and LaCapra is at the center of the present research. Theorists claim that literature is a means of understanding traumatic situations in the best possible manner. This study explains character behavior patterns to show how they behave differently under traumatic conditions. The present study aimed to understand the effects of trauma on a character's life. The study is qualitative, with a special focus on antagonist analyses. The data are analyzed in light of Caruth's theory (1995) on the traumatic aftershocks that characters suffer. The term PTSD is used in the current study to outline and provide a detailed explanation of a character's post-traumatic behavior. This study highlights how traumatic characters suffer from physical and psychological shock. The textual analysis technique is used to employ in this research. The findings reveal that the antagonist of the play experiences a range of post-traumatic experiences, which lead to a very tragic end.

Keywords: PTSD, Caruth, Ibsen, Hedda Gabler, Trauma

Introduction

Caruth's theory of trauma was initiated by Freud's psychoanalytical theory. Psychoanalytical theory deals with mental disorders that highlight unconscious mental processes and is sometimes known as "depth psychology." Humans have different personality traits. These traits reflect the human psychology. In Ibsen's play, there is a tendency for psychological disorders in the protagonist, Hedda.

Styvendale stated that the traumatic event lay in the past preventing the recognition of what she calls 'historical trauma' that continues into the present or for a long time (Stepanian, 2019).

The background of psychological trauma paves the way for PTSD, as discussed in this study. This provides the basis for the current study by highlighting the concept portrayed in the literature. It is worth mentioning here that this study refers to the concept of a psychologically traumatic experience in addition to its effects.

Caruth argued about the study of trauma: She also declares that the inquiry, which is made with the help of other disciplines such as Sociology, Psychoanalysis, Psychiatry, etc., is indeed helpful to track trauma as they play a significant role in making up for the differences between known and unknown facts about a specific traumatic incident (Caruth, 1995).

According to Atwood, trauma is a state of mind that causes stress. Literature explains mental trauma through literary studies (Atwood, 2014).

The present study has been undertaken to highlight trauma in Ibsen's play "Hedda Gabler" in light of the Caruth Theory of Trauma. The male character, Lovborg, is a victim of trauma.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to understand the reflection of trauma in Ibsen's antagonist and the episodes of historical trauma that lead to suicide.

Significance of the study

There is an incline in the complexity of certain societies that suppress men's emotions as a way to strengthen the rigid stereotypical stance of masculinity. These stances ask men to mask their feelings, leading them to certain traumatic circumstances. Therefore, this study deals with men and their reflections on trauma in the play in question, which is Ibsen's Hedda Gabler.

Research Questions

This study provides the answers to the following Questions

1. What are the episodes of trauma that occur in Ibsen's antagonist?

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2. How do victims experience trauma through the hands of their abusers?

Literature Review

Literature is reflected as the imitation of society and life and portrays the trauma that follows. According to LaCapra, the occurrence of trauma is ironic and is not easy to be understood and captured by the human mind. This appears to be the main reason, the researchers studying trauma usually take help from other disciplines and subjects like psychoanalysis, sociology, and literature and try to understand the phenomenon of trauma in a way that is as actual and real as is felt by the victims in real life (LaCapra, 2001).

Trauma

Psychological trauma is defined by Reyes, Elhai, and Ford as an experience of terrible events in life like natural disasters, sexual assault, combat, etc. which is different from that of physical trauma. It is Trauma, in terms of physical trauma, is permanent damage caused due to illness or severe injury to the body (Reyes, Elhai, & Ford, 2008).

PTSD and Literature

According to Herman, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a type of response to traumatic incidents of the past that are experienced by a person. During inquiries on the after-effects of nineteenth-century railway accidents, an occurrence of trauma was observed by doctors. However, the fact remains that Freud's concept of woman's hysteria gives the idea in the nineteenth century provides a sound basis for the discovery of psychological trauma (Herman, 1992).

Stepanian discusses trauma theory in her work by analyzing two novels that confuse the dichotomy of victim and perpetrator, which can easily be found in trauma literature. Alexis' Indian Killer and Morrison's Beloved are novels that take up the experience of native people and the effect of slavery. It reflects various kinds of trauma that led some of the victims depicted in the novels to become perpetrators. Both novels represent the effects of trans-historical trauma. The novels demonstrate the trauma complication of the dichotomy between innocence and guilt. This study shows that trauma does not end after the original moments of the trauma; rather, it is reproduced by complicating subjects in the form of racial injustice and the spread of stereotypes (Stepanian, 2019).

Kaptein claims that the medical humanities field deals with literature, philosophy, ethics, history, etc. The researcher compares two novels and one autobiography and uses them to analyze the concept of hysteria in literary works. Madame Bovary, Hedda Gabler, and A Story in Almost the Classical Mode. It was Freud, who discussed in his psychoanalytic writings about 'hysteria' and why it should be regarded as a psychiatric, not a neurological disorder. Unconscious conflicts suppressed sexuality instincts, and incest dreams all rewarded the overview and preservation of 'hysteria.' The author explains the three concepts of hysteria. These elements are emotional behavior, dramatists, self-centered behavior, and flirtation (Kaptein, 2015).

Mark describes how Ibsen's play deals with the psychology of his characters and their interactions. The playwright is conscious of the structure of the playwright. He is also aware of the voices of their characters, and when, and how to deliver dialogue in the play. In this study, critics highlight the architectonics of the play while creating and citing his dialogue. Ibsen said that 'it was not my wish to deal with the problems in this play. I wanted to pay emphasis on human beings, human emotions, and human purposes, upon a groundwork of certain of the social circumstances and values of the existing day (Mark, 2014).

Prasada argued that Borderline Personality disorder is a personality disorder that depends on the attitudes, actions, and self-esteem of an individual. These symptoms can cause problems for relationships and society. These symptoms exist in Hedda's personality traits. This critic focuses on how she thinks, behaves, and feels. Hedda, the central character in Hedda Gabler, is a woman with the features and effects of her psychosis, such as unstable mood, high manipulation of others, and risk-taking behavior (Prasada, 1945).

Harris explains Hedda's depression is the main cause to commit suicide in Ibsen's play "Hedda Gabler". A psychological approach and a structural approach were used to analyze Hedda's motive to commit suicide through her behavior. In this study, critics find that Hedda's motive to commit suicide is to know whether she was depressed or not. She feels unhappy and believes that she never finds power and freedom; she does not want to live under someone's control. She then decided to commit suicide to end her problems (Hapsari, 2012).

Critics reflect different views on the character of Hedda Gabler. All authors focused on the main heroine, Hedda Gabler, as the title is regarded in the play. The present study has been undertaken to highlight trauma in the work of Ibsen's play "Hedda Gabler" in light of Caruth's Theory of Trauma. The male character of Lovborg can be seen as a victim of trauma. Even though Ibsen is widely considered a feminist writer, there is an incline in his writing that talks about the complexity of society that suppresses men's emotions as well and therefore includes the understanding of trauma reflection in men as well. Therefore, this analysis deals with the antagonist who happens to be a man in Ibsen's play, and the findings reveal an analysis of the male character Lovborg in the play.

Research Methodology

Textual analysis has been used to collect and analyze data from the text. This study analyzes Ibsen's play, Hedda Gabler, using Caruth's theory of trauma (1996). In a qualitative study, the data contained words and sentences. Therefore, no method other than textual analysis is more accurate for the present study.

The concept of traumatic experiences has been highlighted in the literature. The term PTSD was used in the present research. It describes the characteristics of the experience of post-traumatic disorder.

Theoretical Framework

Lovborg's character depicts the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Caruth Trauma

In 1990, researchers approached literature using the framework of trauma theory. It allows critics to investigate how these effects clarify victims in the years after traumatic events.

I applied Trauma's theory. Caruth was the first psychologist to write about trauma and its unclaimed experience. She presented her theory for the first time in the field of trauma. She explains traumatic incidents and their survivors, and this concept is based on Freud's idea in 1896. She talks about the experiences of trauma survivors who showcase two types of reactions: desire for survival and death. Her work plays a key role in investigating the trauma portrayed in the characters of the play selected for this study. Researchers are led by this study to understand why some survivors take time to inform others of what they suffered, and why some survivors could not tell about the incident suffered by them. Similarly, it helps to understand why survivors usually curse themselves or wish for death or suicide.

Her works play a key role in investigating the trauma portrayed in the characters of the male character, Lovborg, selected for this study. I applied this theory of trauma to investigate the cause of Lovborg in the play to commit suicide. Similarly, it helps us to understand why the character usually wishes to commit suicide or death. Moreover, Caruth's study helps understand trauma disorders in Ibsen's Hedda Gabler.

LaCapra's Trauma

LaCapra's work on trauma drawn from the book *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001), is used in this study. She explained that traumatic incidents disturb some survivors in a plain way that they live more in the world. She moves on to explain another fact: the flashbacks experienced by such survivors get them so stroked that they cannot differentiate between the moments of trauma they lived and the moments outside of that traumatic incident.

Findings and Discussions

Throughout the years women have suffered immensely and were juggling inner and outer life and now in recent years, the focus has shifted to their perspective. In this case, Ibsen as well as he was considered a feminist but in these layers of society, men have been out of the picture, and their mental health is still a taboo subject due to a lot of roar around so-called masculinity. Ibsen's play Hedda Gabler deals with the protagonist Hedda Gabler as presented in the play. But in this research, I analyze the Lovborg character. He passes through a lot of miseries. As Caruth states the human psyche in life can best be presented in the literature. He experiences some traumatic incidents. In Act II Ibsen portrays the character of Lovborg

Lovborg enters from the hall. He is smart and slim. He and Tesman have the same age but he looks older and tied. His hair color is dark brown. He wears an elegant suit, black, quite new, dark gloves, and a top hat. He stops just inside the doorway and bends fast. He seems fairly nervous (p.320)

His character appearance is somehow depressive. His pale color shows unhealthy conditions. His nervous problem highlights his psychological disorder. It means that the Ibsen antagonist has the symptoms of neurosis. He is different from other male characters in the play like Tesman and Lovborg.

In Act II Thea comes to the Tesman's because she is afraid that Lovborg would return to alcoholism after he achieved seriousness, and in addition, she helps him in his writing and research. When Mrs. Elvsted arrives at the Tesmans', Lovborg is shocked that she came after him because didn't trust him and accuses her of being a coward after manipulating Hedda, so in defiance, he raises a glass of punch to his lips, saying to her: "Your health, Thea!" His drinking ominously continues. Hedda is seen here as clearly manipulating Lovborg. (p.328)

This is a classic example of Hedda Gabler manipulating Lovborg and pressing him into drinking. Because he had a history of alcohol consumption, it was in a much-compromised position. Thea tried her level best to stop him from drinking as he had a history of substance abuse. However, Hedda Gabler almost forced him to drink and thus put him at high risk of making an irrational decision in a hazy, hallucinated, and distorted mindset. Lovborg's alcoholism indicates a mental disorder. When someone uses excessive alcohol, they try to escape reality. His mind did not work properly. Therefore, the symptoms of psychological illness are present in Lovborg's character. According to the psychological perspective, addiction makes a person senseless and behave abnormally.

In Act iii, as well, the discussion of Hedda, Lovborg, and Mrs. Elvsted was taking place. Thea –our books never come again Hedda AH!

Then what happens to manuscript..... (p.341)

Lovborg Yes Do you hear me? A thousand pieces. Distributed them..... Like murdering a child. (p.342)

He was already depressed and lost his manuscript, and Hedda knew him and his nervous situation well enough, thus playing a trick on him by offering him his father pistols. When he ends up in a brawl with courtesan Diana and demands his manuscript because he thinks he lost it on the roof of Diana whereas in reality it was taken away by Tesman as a mistake or jealousy on Tesman's part and debauchery on Hedda's part, (p. 344) he ended up committing suicide. His suicide was known to the audience by Judge Brack's comment 'I've to tell you ___ Eilert Lovborg was found shot in ___ Mrs. Diana's boudoir.' (p.352), which implies that in a fight, he used the gun and thus died.

Conclusion

His death, to us, can be seen as the height of a post-traumatic situation as per Caruth's view. We have seen his stress and flashbacks of trauma since he met Hedda. From the late-night meetup to a follow-up meetup in the morning, his trauma spiked through certain flashbacks including manipulating, abusing, and gaslighting, and with the classic reaction, he opted for suicide as a way out.

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