

HEDDA GABLER

BY

HENRIK IBSEN

A NEW VERSION BY

PATRICK MARBER

FROM A LITERAL TRANSLATION BY

**KARIN AND ANN
BAMBOROUGH**



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This play is dedicated to Robert Fox

Hedda Gabler in this version was first presented in the Lyttelton Theatre of the National Theatre (Rufus Norris, Artistic Director; Lisa Burger, Executive Director), London, on December 5, 2016. It was directed by Ivo van Hove, the set and lighting designs were by Jan Versweyveld, the costume design was by An D’Huys, the sound design was by Tom Gibbons, and the stage manager was Andrew Speed. The cast was as follows:

TESMAN	Kyle Soller
HEDDA	Ruth Wilson
JULIANA	Kate Duchêne
BERTE	Éva Magyar
BRACK	Rafe Spall
LOVBORG	Chukwudi Iwuji
MRS. ELVSTED	Sinéad Matthews

Introduction

In the spring of 2016 I met with Ivo van Hove to discuss this version. He had directed *Hedda Gabler* twice before; in New York and Amsterdam. My version of the play would need to accord with his existent production. He sketched the set design on a scrap of paper and then asked me to write a script that could work for a modern-dress production in an almost empty space but that could, in theory, be performed in period costume on a realistic set.

I should not “update” the text nor use slang. I was permitted to edit the original and occasionally reorder lines of dialogue but no further liberties were encouraged. The meeting lasted twenty minutes.

The National Theatre provided a literal translation by Karin and Ann Bamborough which I used as my guide. I read versions by John Osborne, Christopher Hampton, Richard Eyre and Brian Friel for pleasure. A few months later I emailed Ivo my version. He responded with four pages of detailed notes. I did the ones I agreed with and we amiably discussed (by email) the ones I disagreed with. A week later I sent him my second draft. He said “thank you” and then sent the play to the actors. It was the most efficient creative dialogue I have ever had.

I am grateful and honoured to work with Ivo and his creative team. Equally so with the brilliant acting company he assembled, led by the phenomenal Ruth Wilson.

Finally, my thanks to Robert Fox to whom this version is dedicated. He introduced me to Ivo a few years ago. He has produced my work and been a close friend for twenty years. This playwright’s journey has been one of steep highs and deep lows. I don’t think I’d still be here without certain staunch allies. Thank you, Robert.

PM, November 2016

Dramatis Personae

TESMAN
an academic

HEDDA
his new wife

JULIANA
his aunt

BERTE
a maid

BRACK
a judge

LOVBORG
a writer

MRS. ELVSTED
a visitor

Time

Two days in September.

Place

The main room of the Tesmans' new home.
A city in Europe.

HEDDA GABLER

ACT ONE

A large, almost empty room. A piano, a fire, an old sofa, flowers.

Morning.

Berte and Juliana come in. They both listen for a while.

JULIANA. Are they asleep?

BERTE. *(Nods.)* They arrived well after midnight. And then Mrs. Tesman refused to go to bed till I'd unpacked every one of her bags.

JULIANA. We must let them rest.

She walks around.

It's stifling. They must always have air.

Berte nods. Juliana opens a window. Berte is holding some flowers.

BERTE. I'll put these here.

JULIANA. Mmm.

Berte sets the flowers down. Juliana watches her.

I'll miss you.

BERTE. *(Nods, sadly.)* It's been so many years.

JULIANA. Yes but now my nephew needs you. You were his nanny. You know his ways.

BERTE. Your sister's in such pain, I hate to think of it. What if the new maid can't make her comfortable?

JULIANA. I will manage. *(Before Berte can protest.)* Please don't fuss.

BERTE. Suppose the wife takes against me? Then what? She's very demanding.

JULIANA. She's the proud daughter of a dead general. (*Slight pause.*) Do you remember—she used to ride with him? All in black. A long riding coat. A feather in her hat. (*Gestures its length.*)

BERTE. I never thought Jorgen would marry her.

JULIANA. *Doctor* Jorgen Tesman. He's a doctor now.

BERTE. She told me last night, very firmly.

JULIANA. Isn't it wonderful?

BERTE. Yes—though I'm not surprised, he's always been clever. But he never said he wanted to go about healing people.

JULIANA. No. He's been awarded a *doctorate*. (*Explains as best she can.*) It's an academic term— (*Slight pause.*) Doctor of Letters...and... so on. Though soon he might acquire an even more prestigious title...

BERTE. Oh?

JULIANA. I don't want to curse it. (*Pause.*) I wish my brother could rise from the grave and see what's become of his little boy. (*Looking around.*) What exactly are they *doing* with this room?

BERTE. She said she's got big plans.

Tesman comes in with an empty suitcase.

JULIANA. Good morning, Doctor Tesman.

TESMAN. Hello! What a surprise!

They embrace, warmly.

JULIANA. I had to make sure you'd settled in.

BERTE. Should I go and ask if Mrs. Tesman needs anything?

TESMAN. Better not. She'll make her needs known. But perhaps you could put this somewhere?

Berte takes the suitcase and exits.

I filled that case. It was bulging. Documents, papers, artefacts. Extraordinary finds from far-flung archives. Treasures unseen for decades.

JULIANA. I'm glad your honeymoon was so productive.

TESMAN. Shall I take it?

JULIANA. (*Removes hat.*) I bought it for Hedda's sake.

TESMAN. It's quite the hat.

JULIANA. I want her to think of me as sophisticated.

TESMAN. How could she not?

He puts the hat down somewhere.

JULIANA. It's so lovely to see you alive and well. Your father would be so proud of you.

TESMAN. How's Aunt Rina?

JULIANA. No improvement. She can't leave her bed. It won't be long. What will I do once she's gone? And I no longer have you? No one to care for.

He comforts her.

TESMAN. I'm still here.

She recovers, gazes at him.

JULIANA. Hedda Gabler!

TESMAN. Yes!

JULIANA. She had so many admirers.

TESMAN. A swarm of suitors.

JULIANA. And she chose you.

TESMAN. It seems I'm the envy of my friends.

Pause.

JULIANA. You were away too long—almost six months!

TESMAN. It was a research trip and honeymoon combined.

JULIANA. And...do you have something to tell me?

TESMAN. About?

JULIANA. Do you have some news?

Tesman looks confused.

News of an imminence?

TESMAN. Oh, yes, I'm going to be made professor. But you knew that?

Slight pause.

JULIANA. Was it expensive? The trip.

TESMAN. Extremely. The grant was essential.

JULIANA. Even so, it must have stretched you?

TESMAN. Yes, but Hedda really needed it. We both did.

JULIANA. Have you looked round the apartment?

TESMAN. I've been up since dawn. It's colossal! Such space and light. Endless. And the smaller rooms next to Hedda's "boudoir." I don't know what we'll do with them.

JULIANA. You'll find a use, God willing.

TESMAN. Actually, they'd make a perfect library.

JULIANA. Mmm.

TESMAN. Hedda coveted this place. Before we got engaged she'd say, "That's the only building I can live in." Oh, thank you! You and Brack have worked miracles. He told Hedda the moment he secured it, he even arranged the mortgage. The terms are really quite reasonable.

JULIANA. Are you sure?

TESMAN. Well, it's daunting, but I knew that.

JULIANA. How will you furnish it? Carpets, curtains, *things*.

TESMAN. We'll furnish it slowly, as and when we can.

JULIANA. You can't live like that, she won't tolerate it. Let me take care of it, I have some savings you can use.

TESMAN. You can't, you and Aunt Rina live off the interest!

JULIANA. I'm sure Brack knows a finance man who can make it work. You're a poor boy without parents, I like to lavish you. Let me!

TESMAN. But dear Aunt—

JULIANA. It's my gift! Pay me back when you can. And if you can't then don't. Your parents were devoted to you and so am I.

TESMAN. (*Hugs her.*) You've made so many sacrifices for me.

JULIANA. Helping you to progress has been my great cause. And now you're so close to the summit.

TESMAN. I've been lucky.

JULIANA. I can feel it, this is *your* moment—you must take it. And those "people" who blocked your way, those sneerers—well look at you now! And that loathsome "man"—Eilert Lovborg—your supposed rival! Where is he now? In drunken squalor no doubt. Forgotten. A failure.

TESMAN. Have you heard anything of him? Since I went away?

JULIANA. No! Nothing. (*Slight pause.*) He's published a book.

TESMAN. When? What kind of book?

JULIANA. A book no one talks about. When your new work appears that will be the event.

TESMAN. (*To himself.*) A new book...

JULIANA. May I ask what you're working on?

TESMAN. Oh, it's an anthropological study.

JULIANA. Heaven.

TESMAN. Mainly focused on pre-industrial European culture.

JULIANA. Bliss.

TESMAN. Particularly, the role of domestic handicrafts in medieval Brabant.

Pause.

JULIANA. What a subject. What a mind you have.

TESMAN. I wish I could start but I've mountains of research to collate.

JULIANA. Like your father, always peering at paperwork.

TESMAN. Being here and feeling settled will help immensely.

JULIANA. And being here with the woman of your life.

TESMAN. Yes, of course. She's magnificent.

Hedda comes in.

JULIANA. Good morning, dear Hedda. A very good morning.

HEDDA. It's enchanting to see you so early.

JULIANA. I—I wanted to be sure that you'd slept peacefully in your new home.

HEDDA. I slept adequately.

TESMAN. Ha! You were dead to the world!

HEDDA. (*Of the window.*) The maid's left it open. The sun is oppressive.

JULIANA. I'll close it!

HEDDA. No! (*To Tesman.*) Please— (*Gestures for him to draw the blind.*) It softens the light.

TESMAN. There. You have shade and you have air.

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3 men, 4 women

Newlyweds George and Hedda Tesman return from their honeymoon to discover their marriage is already failing. In a desperate attempt to better her circumstances, Hedda takes control using the only tools she has: manipulation and sexual appeal. In this modern retelling of Ibsen's classic, power is fleeting and no one can be trusted.

"...a clear and vigorous interpretation. ...it provides the power, beauty and excitement that Hedda herself, sticking to her guns until the end, can never find."
—*The Irish Times*

"Patrick Marber's modern adaptation of Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen's 1890 morality play is as slick and streamlined as the minimalist setting. ...By bringing into sharp focus [Hedda's] cycle of abuse, Marber's script...is timely and affecting..." —*The List.co.uk*

"...[a] bold, austere and uncomfortably sensuous reimagining of Henrik Ibsen's classic drama."
—*The Hollywood Reporter*

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ISBN: 978-0-8222-4101-0

