

THE HEDDA GABLER CONJECTURE

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ABSTRACT

In contrast to previous studies conducted in recent years on the causal relationship between narcissism and self-destruction (*A. Strindberg, H. Ibsen, A. Chekov*), we have sought to produce a linear-time chart allowing for the groundwork of a general model. By subjecting several axioms to a sequence of increasingly complex control variables, we find latent inconsistencies inherent in the initial equation, resulting in a paradox.

Subject headings: Time, Fate, Will, Greed, Destiny, Prophecy, Power, Control, Future

1. Introduction

Set in the claustrophobic confines of a single, opulently decorated room, we are introduced to the given elements and their respective relationships. George Tesman (GT), an eager, scholarly nebbish, has recently married Hedda Gabler (HG), a sly and sinister general's daughter. Both are supported by GT's aunt, Miss Tesman (mT) and HG resents her for it^{1a}. Also on the chessboard are Brack (jB), the calculating judge with a fondness for HG^{2a}, Løvborg (L), HG's brilliant yet reckless ex-lover who has just returned from a journey abroad, and Mrs. Elvsted (mE), L's young assistant and current illicit lover.

2. Experiment

To properly follow the logic of the experiment, it is necessary to understand the equation in terms of its key suppositions and the dynamics of power-flow therein (*g*). GT desires a professorship and a child, making him dependant upon HG and the university^{1b}; jB ostensibly desires truth and justice, but secretly wishes to possess HG; L desires both the love of HG^{1c} and academic prestige; HG desires power over everyone.

The first series of conflicts arise when we introduce an element of competition (*c*). When L unexpectedly arrives, he brings along a copy of his new manuscript, a treatise on the future of culture, which, according to jB, represents a threat to GT's candidacy for professor^{1d}. This, in turn, puts HG's future in jeopardy, and she reacts destructively by encouraging L to drink^{2b}. L, once intoxicated, is moved to join a late-night party where he becomes further drunk, visits a brothel and loses his only copy of the manuscript. Dutifully, GT brings it home safely^{3a}, but makes the mistake of leaving it with HG^{3b}.

The next, more fateful complications are presented in the form of deceit (*d*). L stumbles in and lies to mE that he'd burned the draft, in order to spare her the unforgivable truth^{3c}. After mE exits in despair, L confesses his negligent behavior to HG. Acutely aware of his romantically self-destructive tendencies, she diabolically convinces him of the poetic symmetry of suicide, and L rushes off with one of the general's two pistols. HG, at the height of her deceptive powers, burns the manuscript^{3d}.

Finally, to bring each element to a critical mass, we employ the use of dramatic action (*a*) compounded with irony. When GT discovers that HG has burned the book, he becomes irate with her for the first time^{4a}, but HG is quick to turn it around with the promise of a child^{4b}. jB then enters with the news that L has shot himself, much to the dismay of everyone but HG. However, mE suddenly remembers L's *notes*, the notes to the manuscript he'd dictated to her, which she still has in her pockets. GT and mE anxiously agree to work together, and promptly begin resurrecting L's book^{4c}. jB then reveals to HG the incriminating details of L's death, that before shooting himself he had returned to the brothel desperate to find his lost manuscript, an action which stood in contradiction to L's earlier statement that he'd burned it. Furthermore, adds jB,

HG's gun was found at the scene of the suicide, and can be easily traced to her. This will undoubtedly usher a scandal and tarnish her precious future – unless jB agrees to keep quiet^{4d}. Unable to bare the thought of being held indefinitely in jB's checkmate, she takes the second of her father's pistols and shoots herself in the head.

3. Results

Plotting the various relationships in four successive time charts, we are able to measure the stages of manipulation. For our purposes, '→' indicates the flow of power, such that the symbol to its left 'is in a dominant position to' the symbol to its right, parentheses, '(...)', stand for 'as an indirect consequence', and 'u' stands for 'university post'.

STAGE 1: GIVENS (g)

a] $mT \rightarrow HG \bullet GT$	b] $u \rightarrow GT (\rightarrow HG)$
c] $HG \rightarrow mE$	d] $L \rightarrow GT (\rightarrow HG)$

STAGE 2: COMPETITION (c)

a] $HG \rightarrow jB$	b] $HG \rightarrow L$
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STAGE 3: DECEIT (d)

a] $GT \rightarrow L$	b] $HG \rightarrow GT (\rightarrow L)$
c] $L \rightarrow mE$	d] $HG (GT) \rightarrow L (\rightarrow u) \bullet jB \bullet mE \bullet mT$

STAGE 4: ACTION (a)

a] $GT \rightarrow HG$	b] $HG \rightarrow GT$
c] $mE (GT) \rightarrow HG$	d] $jB [mE \bullet GT (\rightarrow u) \bullet mT] \rightarrow HG$

EXPLANATION

Stage 1 is arranged to demonstrate HG's initial subservience to each element. In order to effectively chart her ill-fated steps towards dominance, we must first see her buckling under the pressure of dependency.

With the introduction of jB and L in Stage 2, we see HG flaunting her power as an object of desire.

In Stage 3, HG takes her first deliberately manipulative actions. First, she withholds information from L, then uses his ignorance of her possession of the book as a weapon towards his self-destruction. Her betrayal culminates with her burning the manuscript.

HG's subsequent confession to GT inaugurates Stage 4, and this places GT momentarily in power as the moral authority, the confidante. But this is just a device of HG to win GT's trust in order to manipulate him once again, which she does by insinuating that she is pregnant. However, when mE finds L's notes, she effectively steals HG's power over GT, and this blow penetrates her defences long enough for jB to lower the boom with the incriminating evidence. This final shift in power is, of course, fatal, as HG suffocates from beneath the weight of the entire cast.

4. Discussion

By tracing HG's actions backwards through the above table, it is logical to deduce that her fate was inscribed in her initial (Stage 1) condition, and that her subsequent self-destruction (Stage 4) may therefore be regarded as inevitable. Though barely mentioned, it may be inferred from a number of hints (such as the looming portrait in living room), that the epicenter of HG's psychological undoing lies in the absent general, her late father. This phantom presence motivates much of her actions, and ultimately determines her destiny.

Proceeding thusly, we may further assume that HG's unstoppable need to dominate the proverbial chessboard represents a hidden desire to replicate or re-enact her father's commanding position. She unconsciously believes that by doing so she will both bring her father back and exorcize him once and for all, thus freeing herself finally from his tyranny as well as his loss, and this immutable, if illogical, faith dictates each choice she makes in response to myriad influences. However, when these influences conflict with HG's *innately* narcissistic agenda, she lashes out in a series of increasingly destructive actions which culminate in the taking of her own life.

We may safely postulate then, that lurking dormant in HG's psychology is a fatal inconsistency, the implicit will towards self-negation. As she moves cunningly and greedily towards absolute power, she is ironically brought to face the one thing impossible to bare – inertia. From this final state of powerlessness, her tragic inconsistency is left to consume her, leaving only one willful action left in her arsenal, a self-negating paradox.

Further evidence is mirrored in the initial equation by various relationships. For instance, jB's impossible lust for HG and its symmetrical correlate, mE's impossible lust for L. These situations indicate a desire for the unattainable. The mysterious future, paradoxically both indeterminate and predestined, is symbolized by HG's unborn child, itself a subject of unresolvable conflict, and L's ingenious manuscript, whose subject is the future of civilization.

All of this is augmented by the doomed romance of L and HG. The two are psychological counterparts – both tormented spirits, yearning for the past yet desperate for the promise of the future – and their shared narcissism renders their love self-contradictive. However, once understood as twin identities, it becomes obvious in retrospect that HG will use the second of her father's pistols on herself, just as L had used the first. The symmetry of these selfish acts is unavoidable, given the axioms and their stated functions.

5. Conclusion

The above linear time chart allows us to propose a causal relationship between narcissism n and self-destruction s such that

$$Lc \rightarrow HGn \text{ becomes } HGn(d) \rightarrow Lc \text{ with respect to } u \rightarrow GT.$$

But this is not enough for HG, whose $n = \infty$. Therefore

$$HGn(d) \rightarrow Lc \text{ becomes } HGn(a).$$

The subsequent introduction of jB's evidence, however, prompts the reversal

$$jB [mE \bullet GT (\rightarrow u) \bullet mT] \rightarrow HG$$

necessarily causing HG to merge with ∞ .