

# Week 2 Day 2: Women, Boredom, and Men

ENGL201: Introduction to Modernism



## Take-aways

- Realism is a movement that tries to develop *conventions* for representing real life
- Read plays as literature—individual productions are *interpretations*, and you still need to bring your reading back to the *text*

# Pronouncing names

- Thea → TAY-ah
- Ejlert Lövberg → EYE-lert LOVE-berg
- Jörgen Tesman → YOR-gen TEZ-mahn
- Julle → YU-luh

# Schedule

- Video Clips
- Boredom and Modernist Subjectivity
- Men in *Hedda Gabler*



National Theatre. Dir. Ivo van Hove; Perf. Ruth Wilson, Kyle Soller



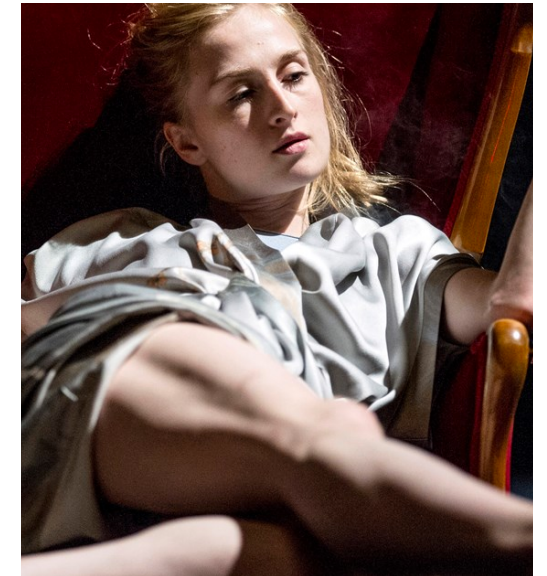
Dir. Waris Hussein. Perf. Janet Suzman, Ian McKellen.



Hedda [*over by the glass door*]. Oh, be quiet, I tell you! It often seems to me that I've only got a gift for one thing in the world.

Brack [*going nearer*]. And what is that, if I may ask?

Hedda [*stands looking out*]. For boring myself to death. (II.i. 307)





# Boredom

...boredom is the inability to find interest or meaning. As manifest in British representations and discussions of women in the early twentieth century, boredom can appear as emptiness or deadness, a lack, or simply passive dissatisfaction. From the final decades of the nineteenth century to the first few decades of the twentieth century, 'boredom' is used, sometimes interchangeably, with a number of other terms defining psychic, spiritual, moral, and physical states in which the self has difficulty accessing authenticity, productivity, and desire—all qualities attributed to one's **success as an individual**.

(Allison Pease, *Modernism, Feminism and the Culture of Boredom*, vii)

...and more boredom...

Boredom's constitutive role in modernism is a manifestation of broader social and cultural forces in which British women agitated for recognition as men's legal and social equals. Surprisingly, while suffragists were chanting in the streets, chaining themselves to railings and staging hunger strikes, popular and professional texts of the period described an epidemic of female boredom. Women's boredom was pathologized in medical literature, decried in political and feminist tracts, lamented in popular journalism, and elaborately theorized in the burgeoning field of psychoanalysis. (vii)

# What does this have to do with literature?

- In addition, literature attempted to explore and represent what it means to be a human *subject*
  - To have agency
  - To have interiority
- This combines with social movements that attempted to argue that women were full persons under the law....
- And with new medical and psychological developments that turned their attention to the mind (vs. the brain)
  - E.g. psychoanalysis (especially Sigmund Freud), William James
- These are all a *network* of influences

# Men in Hedda Gabler

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- Introducing Brack: pp. 297-301
- Introducing Ejlert Lövberg: pp. 315-18





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## Take-aways

- Boredom in literature sprung up at the same time as social and medical movements that concentrated on women's agency
- Men in the play act as foils to Hedda, flat characters in tension with her round character