A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

The Wild Duck

HENRIK IBSEN

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY
DOUNIA B. CHRISTIANI

A NEW TRANSLATION
THE WRITING OF THE PLAY
SOURCES

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W · W · NORTON & COMPANY
New York · London

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110

ISBN 0-393-09825-7

Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 68–10895

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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Preface

A first reading of *The Wild Duck* may well leave the student as perplexed as the play's earliest reviewers—more so, indeed, since he knows it to be an acknowledged masterpiece and cannot, like them, dismiss it as a failure. It should reassure him to learn that even a critic like Sarcey found it "obscure, incoherent, intolerable." Only Shaw and Rilke apprehended its magnificence from the start. Although *The Wild Duck* gained early recognition as the most masterfully constructed of Ibsen's prose dramas, its innovative combination of farce with tragedy and of realism with symbolism has only rather recently won the sort of appreciation that is based on acute critical analysis. Placing before the student the full range of background material and studies in criticism which represent every extant approach to the play, this edition aims to inform his judgment while furnishing both substance and models for independent essays in criticism.

The Note on Translation accounts for minor departures from the original text, while the Notes on Interpretation deal with the correspondence between various characters and their mode of expression, along with other problems of meaning.

The critical views cited in this volume reflect the full spectrum of opinion, from Strindberg's paranoid delusion that *The Wild Duck* was a personal attack on him—that it cast doubt on the paternity of his eldest child, for one thing—to its comparison by M. C. Bradbrook with *Hamlet*. However, as our intention is not to recapitulate a success story but to survey the progressive elucidation of *The Wild Duck*, the emphasis is on critical studies which, taken together, constitute an authoritative analysis of the play in the context of Ibsen's total production and its influence on the development of modern drama. Furthermore, these critiques are outstanding examples of the various critical approaches to literature, from Downs's leisurely explanation of the play to Reinert's detailed study of its sight imagery and Thompson's digest of extant psychoanalysis of its characters, from Forster's impressionistic response to the poetry in Ibsen to Valency's penetrating inquiry into the nature of his symbolism. Mary McCarthy's and Robert Adams' spirited essays, which attest to the abiding vitality of Ibsen, cannot fail to arouse a keen interest in all the master's work.

As to the selections from Ibsen's notes and drafts, there is hardly a point in debate among critics of *The Wild Duck* which they cannot illuminate in some way. What strikes one first of all is how remote the rudiments of the play are from the eventual finished work; vestiges of *A Doll's House* and *An Enemy of the People* and foretokens of *Rosmersholm*, *The Lady from the Sea*, and *Hedda Gabler* jostle the theme of the sybaritic do-gooder, the *Ur*-Gregers of *The Wild Duck*. Ibsen apparently started out to write another thesis play such as his public expected, but the slowness with which his materials fell into shape suggests how little the project inspired him. Then something happened. The self-congratulatory good Samaritan "K-d" modeled on Alexander Kielland turned into a demanding idealist resembling Kierkegaard* and, what is astonishing, into a caricature of the crusading playwright himself. Small wonder that Ibsen's contemporaries were nonplused when *The Wild Duck* appeared; far from rearranging his familiar ideas into a new configuration, he turned them topsy-turvy. Today, instructed by such scholars as Valency, we can see how Ibsen's early critics measured the play by what they anticipated and understood. But even for us the fairly complete drafts reprinted in this volume are an instructive index to the immense difference between standard playwriting and the genius of the achieved work of art that is *The Wild Duck*.

There is reason to suspect, too, that the "psychoanatomist" who is moved to assess the effect on Ibsen of his youthful transgression (see p. 176) will find his most pregnant clues in the genesis of *The Wild Duck*: the change in direction which theme and plot take from Ibsen's original intention, the personal elements of Ibsen not only in Gregers and Hjalmar but in Relling, Hedvig, and Molvik, Hedvig's death on her fourteenth birthday, and Gina, for whom Ibsen could not have encountered a model in all his years abroad. Even the literary critic who shuns psychoanalysis of authors or fictional characters cannot but be struck by Ibsen's unique attachment to this play, his joy in working on it once its characters came alive and his reluctance to part with it. Something in all this suggests the operation of a subconscious force in the creative process which, dis-

* Why does Gregers Werle think his name is hideous? True, it started out as *Walle*, which is cognate with English *wall-eyed*—an interesting variation on the play's theme of flawed vision, by the way. But there is nothing hideous about "Gregers Werle." The name Søren, however, is a euphemism for Satan popularly used as a mild swearword, while *Kierkegaard* means "Churchyard." Incidentally, Kierkegaard, whose ideas on marriage and on Christianity are echoed in Ibsen's jottings for *The Wild Duck*, was, like the character "K-d," the son of a wealthy father and indulged himself lavishly in the creature comforts.

cerningly traced, may provide the answer to why *The Wild Duck*, the most sordid and pessimistic of Ibsen's plays, is also the most genial.

I am deeply indebted to Mr. Erik J. Friis, editor of the American-Scandinavian Foundation publications, and to Professor Maurice J. Valency for their careful scrutiny of my translation and many valuable comments and suggestions. Mr. D. Austad, cultural attaché at the Royal Norwegian Embassy in London, and Mr. Erling Grønlund, Head Librarian of the Norwegian Department at Universitetsbiblioteket, Oslo, whom I bombarded with queries about Norway in the 1880's, responded with utmost generosity. Mrs. Evelyn Derouin and Mr. Maynard Bjorgo of the Wisconsin State University–Eau Claire library assisted me with unfailing good will and dispatch. To all of them, my thanks!

DOUNIA B. CHRISTIANI

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The Wild Duck

Translated by Dounia B. Christiani

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A FLABBY GENTLEMAN
A THIN-HAIRED GENTLEMAN
A NEARSIGHTED GENTLEMAN
SIX OTHER GENTLEMEN, *Håkon Werle's guests*
SEVERAL HIRED SERVANTS

The first act takes place at the home of HÅKON WERLE;
the four following acts at HJALMAR EKDAL'S

Act One

At HAKON WERLE*'s house. The study, expensively and comfortably appointed; bookcases and upholstered furniture; in the middle of the room a desk with papers and documents; subdued lighting from lamps with green shades. In the rear, open folding doors with portières drawn back reveal a large, elegant drawing room, brilliantly lit by lamps and candelabra. Front right in study, a small baize-covered door to the office wing. Front left, a fireplace with glowing coal fire. Farther back on left wall, double doors to the dining room.*

PETTERSEN, WERLE*'s servant, in livery, and the hired waiter* JENSEN, *in black, are putting the study in order. In the drawing room, two or three other hired waiters are busy arranging for the guests and lighting more candles. The hum of conversation and the laughter of many voices can be heard from the dining room. Somebody taps his wine glass with a knife to signal he is about to make a speech; silence follows; a toast is proposed; cheers, and again the hum of conversation.*

PETTERSEN [*lights a lamp on mantlepiece and sets shade on*]. Say, will you listen to them, Jensen. That's the old man on his feet now, making a long toast to Mrs. Sørby.

JENSEN [*moving an armchair forward*]. Do you think it's true, what they're saying—that there's something between them?

PETTERSEN. Devil knows.

JENSEN. I guess he must've been quite a lad in his day.

PETTERSEN. Could be.

JENSEN. They say he's giving this dinner for his son.

PETTERSEN. That's right. His son came home yesterday.

JENSEN. I never even knew old Werle had a son.

PETTERSEN. Oh, yes, he's got a son all right. But you can't budge him from the works up at Højdal. He's never once been to town in all the years I've worked in this house.

A HIRED WAITER [*in doorway to drawing room.*] Say, Pettersen, there's an old fellow here . . .

PETTERSEN [*grumbling*]. Oh damn. Who'd want to come at this time!

[OLD EKDAL *appears from the right in drawing room. He is dressed in a shabby overcoat with high collar, and woolen mittens. He has a stick and a fur cap in his hand; a parcel wrapped in brown paper under his arm. Wears a dirty reddish-brown wig and has a little gray mustache.*]

PETTERSEN [*going toward him*]. Good God! What are you doing here?

EKDAL [*in doorway*]. Absolutely must get into the office, Pettersen.

PETTERSEN. The office closed an hour ago, and . . .

EKDAL. They told me that at the gate, old man. But Gråberg's still in there. Be a good sport, Pettersen, and let me slip in through here. [*Points to baize door.*] Been this way before.

PETTERSEN. Well, all right then, go ahead. [*Opens door.*] But just be sure you go out the right way. We've got company.

EKDAL. Know that—hm! Thanks, Pettersen, old chap! Good old friend. Thanks. [*Mutters to himself.*] Ass! [*Exit into office.* PETTERSEN *shuts door after him.*]

JENSEN. Does he work in the office?

PETTERSEN. No, they just give him some copying to do at home when they're rushed. Not that he hasn't been a somebody in his day, old Ekdal.

JENSEN. Yes, he looked like there's something about him.

PETTERSEN. Yes, indeed. I want you to know he was once a lieutenant.

JENSEN. Go on—him a lieutenant!

PETTERSEN. So help me, he was. But then he switched over to the timber business, or whatever it was. They say he's supposed to have played a dirty low-down trick on Mr. Werle once. The two of them were in on the Højdal works together then, you see. Oh, I know old Ekdal well, I do. Many's the time we've had a bitters and beer together down at Ma Eriksen's place.

JENSEN. Him? He sure can't have much money to throw around?

PETTERSEN. Lord, Jensen, no. It's me that stands treat, naturally. Seems to me we owe a little respect to them that's come down in the world.

JENSEN. Oh, so he went bankrupt?

PETTERSEN. Worse than that. He was sentenced to hard labor.

JENSEN. Hard labor!

PETTERSEN. Anyway, he went to jail . . . [*Listening.*] Sh! They're getting up from the table now.

[The dining room doors are thrown open from within by two servants. MRS. SØRBY *comes out, in conversation with two gentlemen. The rest of the party, among them* HAKON WERLE, *follow shortly thereafter. Last come* HJALMAR EKDAL *and* GREGERS WERLE.]

MRS. SØRBY [*to the servant, in passing*]. Pettersen, will you have the coffee served in the music room, please.

PETTERSEN. Very good, Mrs. Sørby.

[*She and the two gentlemen exit into drawing room and thence off to right.* PETTERSEN *and* JENSEN *exit the same way.*]

A FLABBY GENTLEMAN [*to a* THIN-HAIRED ONE]. Whew! What a dinner! *That* was something to tuck away!

THE THIN-HAIRED ONE. Oh, with a little good will it's incredible what one can manage in three hours' time.

THE FLABBY GENTLEMAN. Yes, but afterwards, my dear sir, afterwards!

A THIRD GENTLEMAN. I hear the coffee and liqueurs are being served in the music room.

THE FLABBY GENTLEMAN. Splendid! Then perhaps Mrs. Sørby will play something for us.

THE THIN-HAIRED ONE [*in an undertone*]. As long as Mrs. Sørby doesn't play something *on* us, one of these days.

THE FLABBY GENTLEMAN. Oh, I hardly think so. Berta isn't the type to cast off her old friends. [*They laugh and exit into drawing room.*]

WERLE [*in a low, depressed tone*]. I don't think anybody noticed, Gregers.

GREGERS [*looks at him*]. Noticed what?

WERLE. Didn't you notice either?

GREGERS. What was I supposed to notice?

WERLE. We were thirteen at table.

GREGERS. Really? Were there thirteen?

WERLE. [*with a glance toward* HJALMAR EKDAL]. As a rule we are always twelve. [*To the others.*] In here if you please, Gentlemen!

[*He and the remaining guests, except* HJALMAR *and* GREGERS, *exit rear right.*]

HJALMAR [*who has heard what was said*]. You shouldn't have sent me that invitation, Gregers.

GREGERS. What! This party is supposed to be for *me*. And I'm not to invite my best, my only friend?

HJALMAR. But I don't think your father approves. I never come to this house any other time.

GREGERS. So I hear. But I had to see you and have a talk with you. Because I expect to be leaving again soon.—Yes, we two old school chums, we've certainly drifted far apart, haven't we. It must be sixteen-seventeen years since we saw each other.

HJALMAR. Is it as long as all that?

GREGERS. It is indeed. Well now, how are you getting along? You look fine. You've put on weight, you're even a bit stout.

HJALMAR. Hm, stout is hardly the word. But I suppose I do look a bit more of a man than I did in the old days.

GREGERS. Yes, you do. Outwardly you don't seem to have suffered much harm.

HJALMAR [*in a gloomy voice*]. But inwardly, Gregers! That's a different story, believe me. You know, of course, how terribly everything collapsed for me and mine since we last saw each other.

GREGERS [*more softly*]. How are things now with your father?

HJALMAR. Ah, let's not go into that. Naturally, my poor unfortunate father makes his home with me. He hasn't anyone else in the world to turn to. But look, it's so desperately hard for me to talk about this.—Tell me instead how you've been, up there at the works.

GREGERS. Delightfully lonely, that's how I've been. Plenty of opportunity to think about all sorts of things.—Come over here; let's make ourselves comfortable.

[*He sits down in an armchair by the fireplace and draws* HJALMAR *into another beside him.*]

HJALMAR [*with sentiment.*] I do want to thank you, all the same, Gregers, for asking me to your father's party. Because now I can see you don't have anything against me, any more.

GREGERS [*in surprise*]. Whatever gave you the idea I had anything against you?

HJALMAR. Why, you did have, you know, the first few years.

GREGERS. What first few years?

HJALMAR. After the great disaster. And it was only natural that you should. After all, it was only by a hair that your father himself missed being dragged into that . . . oh, that terrible business!

GREGERS. And because of that I'm supposed to have a grudge against you? Whoever gave you that idea?

HJALMAR. I *know* you did, Gregers. Your father told me himself.

GREGERS [*startled*]. My father! Oh, I see. Hm.—Was that the reason I never heard from you afterwards—not a single word?

HJALMAR. Yes.

GREGERS. Not even when you went and became a photographer.

HJALMAR. Your father said it would be better not to write you about anything at all.

GREGERS [*absently*]. Well, well, maybe he was right, at that. —But tell me, Hjalmar—are you pretty well satisfied now with things as they are?

HJALMAR [*with a light sigh*]. Why, yes, on the whole I can't complain, really. At first, as you can imagine, it was all pretty strange. My whole world shot to pieces. But then, so was everything else. That terrible calamity of Father's—the shame and disgrace, Gregers . . .

GREGERS [*shaken*]. I know. I know.

HJALMAR. Of course I couldn't possibly think of continuing my studies. There wasn't a penny left. On the contrary, there were debts—mostly to your father, I believe.

GREGERS. Hm . . .

HJALMAR. Well, so I thought it best to make a clean break, you know—drop my old life and all my connections. It was your father especially who advised me to do that; and since he put himself out to be so helpful to me . . .

GREGERS. My father did?

HJALMAR. Yes, surely you know that? Where could *I* have got the money to learn photography and equip a studio and set up in business? Things like that are expensive, let me tell you.

GREGERS. And my *father* paid for it all?

HJALMAR. Why sure, didn't you know? I understood him to say he'd written and told you.

GREGERS. Not a word about its being *him*. He must have forgotten. We've never exchanged anything but business letters. So it was my *father* . . . !

HJALMAR. It certainly was. He never wanted it to get around, but it was him, all right. And of course it was also he who put me in a position to get married. Or maybe you didn't know about that either?

GREGERS. No, I certainly did not. [*Clapping him on the arm.*] But my dear Hjalmar, I can't tell you how delighted I am to hear all this—and remorseful too. I may have been unjust to my father after all—on a few points. Because this does reveal a kind heart, doesn't it. It's as if, in a way, he had a conscience . . .

HJALMAR. A conscience . . . ?

GREGERS. Well, well, whatever you want to call it, then. No, I really can't tell you how glad I am to hear this about my father. —So you're a married man, Hjalmar. That's more than I'm ever likely to be. Well, I trust you are happy in your marriage?

HJALMAR. Yes, indeed I am. She's as capable and fine a wife as any man could ask for. And she's by no means without culture.

GREGERS [*a little surprised*]. Why no, I don't suppose she is.

HJALMAR. Life itself is an education, you see. Her daily contact with me . . . besides which there's a couple of very intelligent fellows we see regularly. I assure you, you wouldn't know Gina again.

GREGERS. Gina?

HJALMAR. Why yes, don't you remember her name is Gina?

GREGERS. Whose name is Gina? I haven't the faintest idea what . . .

HJALMAR. But don't you remember she was employed here in this house for a time?

GREGERS [*looking at him*]. You mean Gina Hansen . . . ?

HJALMAR. Yes, of course I mean Gina Hansen.

GREGERS. . . . who kept house for us the last year of my mother's illness?

HJALMAR. Well of course. But my dear fellow, I know for a fact that your father wrote and told you I had got married.

GREGERS [*who has risen*]. Yes, he did that, all right. But not that . . . [*Pacing floor.*] Wait a minute—perhaps after all—now that I think about it. But my father always writes me such short letters. [*Sits on arm of chair.*] Listen, Hjalmar, tell me—this is interesting—how did you happen to meet Gina—your wife, that is?

HJALMAR. Oh, quite simply. Gina didn't stay very long here in this house. There was so much trouble here at the time, what with your mother's illness . . . Gina couldn't take all that, so she gave notice and left. That was the year before your mother died—or maybe it was the same year.

GREGERS. It was the same year. I was up at the works at the time. But afterwards?

HJALMAR. Well, Gina went to live with her mother, a Mrs. Hansen, a most capable and hard-working woman who ran a little eating place. She also had a room for rent, a really nice, comfortable room.

GREGERS. And you, I suppose, were lucky enough to find it?

HJALMAR. Yes, as a matter of fact it was your father who gave me the lead. And it was there—you see—that's where I really got to know Gina.

GREGERS. And so you got engaged?

HJALMAR. Yes. You know how easily young people get to care for each other—Hm . . .

GREGERS [*rises and walks around*]. Tell me—when you had got engaged—was it then that my father got you to . . . I mean—was it then that you started to take up photography?

HJALMAR. Yes, exactly. Because I did so want to get settled and

have a home of my own, the sooner the better. And both your father and I felt that this photography business was the best idea. And Gina thought so too. Oh yes, there was another reason as well. It so happened that Gina had just taken up retouching.

GREGERS. *That* fitted in marvelously well.

HJALMAR [*pleased, rises*]. Yes, didn't it though? It *did* fit in marvelously well, don't you think?

GREGERS. Yes, I must say. Why, my father seems to have been a kind of Providence for you.

HJALMAR [*moved*]. He did not forsake his old friend's son in the hour of need. For he's a man with *heart,* you see.

MRS. SØRBY [*entering arm in arm with* HAKON WERLE]. Not another word, my dear Mr. Werle. You must not stay in there any longer staring at all those lights. It's not good for you.

WERLE [*letting go her arm and passing his hand over his eyes*]. I rather think you are right.

[PETTERSEN *and* JENSEN, *the hired waiter, enter with trays.*].

MRS. SØRBY [*to guests in other room*]. Punch is served, Gentlemen. If anybody wants some he'll have to come in here and get it.

THE FLABBY GENTLEMAN [walking over to Mrs. Sørby]. Good heavens, it is true you've annulled our precious right to smoke?

MRS. SØRBY. Yes, my dear Chamberlain, here in Mr. Werle's private domain it is forbidden.

THE THIN-HAIRED GENTLEMAN. And when did you introduce this harsh restriction into our cigar regulations, Mrs. Sørby?

MRS. SØRBY. After our last dinner, Chamberlain. I'm afraid certain persons allowed themselves to overstep the bounds.

THE THIN-HAIRED GENTLEMAN. And is one not allowed to overstep the bounds just a little, Madame Berta? Not even the least little bit?

MRS. SØRBY. Under no circumstances, Chamberlain Balle.

[*Most of the guests are now assembled in* WERLE*'s study; the waiters hand around glasses of punch.*]

WERLE [*to* HJALMAR, *standing over by a table*]. What's that you're so engrossed in, Ekdal?

HJALMAR. It's just an album, Mr. Werle.

THE THIN-HAIRED GENTLEMAN [*drifting about*]. Ah yes, photographs! That's in your line, of course.

THE FLABBY GENTLEMAN [*in an armchair*]. Haven't you brought along any of your own?

HJALMAR. No, I haven't.

THE FLABBY GENTLEMAN. You should have. It's so good for the digestion, don't you know, to sit and look at pictures.

THE THIN-HAIRED GENTLEMAN. Besides contributing a mite to the general entertainment, you know.

A NEARSIGHTED GENTLEMAN. And all contributions are gratefully accepted.

MRS. SØRBY. The gentlemen mean, when you're invited out, you're expected to work a little for your dinner, Ekdal.

THE FLABBY GENTLEMAN. With a cuisine like this, *that* is an absolute pleasure.

THE THIN-HAIRED GENTLEMAN. Good Lord, if it's a question of the struggle for existence . . .

MRS. SØRBY. You're so right!

[*They continue the conversation, laughing and joking.*]

GREGERS [*quietly*]. You must join in, Hjalmar.

HJALMAR [*with a squirm*]. What am I to talk about?

THE FLABBY GENTLEMAN. Don't you agree, Mr. Werle, that Tokay may be regarded as a relatively healthy wine for the stomach?

WERLE [*by the fireplace*]. I can vouch for the Tokay you had today, at any rate; it is one of the very finest vintages. But of course you must have noticed that yourself.

THE FLABBY GENTLEMAN. Yes, it had a remarkably delicate bouquet.

HJALMAR [*uncertainly*]. Does the vintage make a difference?

THE FLABBY GENTLEMAN [*laughs*]. That's a good one!

WERLE [*smiling*]. There's certainly no point in putting a noble wine in front of *you*.

THE THIN-HAIRED GENTLEMAN. It's the same with Tokay as with photographs, Mr. Ekdal. Both must have sunlight. Or am I mistaken?

HJALMAR. Oh no. In photography, the sun is everything.

MRS. SØRBY. Why, it's exactly the same with chamberlains. They also depend on sunshine, as the saying goes—royal sunshine.

THE THIN-HAIRED GENTLEMAN. Ouch! That's a tired old joke.

THE NEARSIGHTED GENTLEMAN. The lady is in great form . . .

THE FLABBY GENTLEMAN. . . . and at our expense, too. [*Wagging his finger.*] Madame Berta! Madame Berta!

MRS. SØRBY. Well, but it *is* perfectly true that vintages can differ enormously. The old vintages are the best.

THE NEARSIGHTED GENTLEMAN. Do you count *me* among the old ones?

MRS. SØRBY. Oh, far from it.

THE THIN-HAIRED ONE. Listen to that! But what about *me*, dear Mrs. Sørby?

THE FLABBY GENTLEMAN. Yes, and me! Where do you put us?

MRS. SØRBY. You, among the sweet vintages, Gentlemen.

[*She sips a glass of punch; the chamberlains laugh and flirt with her.*]

WERLE. Mrs. Sørby always finds a way out—when she wants to. But Gentlemen, you aren't drinking! Pettersen, see to . . . ! Gregers, I think we might take a glass together. [*Gregers does not move.*] Won't you join us, Ekdal? I didn't get a chance to have a toast with you at table.

[GRABERG, *the bookkeeper, looks in at baize door*].

GRABERG. Excuse me, Mr. Werle, but I can't get out.

WERLE. What, have they locked you in again?

GRABERG. Yes, and Flakstad's gone home with the keys . . .

WERLE. Well, just come through here, then.

GRABERG. But there's somebody else . . .