**GERTRUDE IN *HAMLET***

In *Hamlet*, Gertrude is a woman who means no harm but whose poor judgment contributes greatly to the terrible events that occur. There are only two female characters in the play, and neither one--Gertrude or Ophelia--is assertive. But the decisions Gertrude does make eventually lead to her death and the downfall of others as well.

We first realize in Act I, Scene 2 that poor judgment is her major character flaw. As the mother of a grieving son, Gertrude should have been more sensitive to Hamlet's feelings. Instead, less than two months after King Hamlet's death, Gertrude remarries Claudius, her dead husband's own brother. Gertrude should have realized how humiliated Hamlet would feel as a result, because at that time it was considered incestuous for a widow to marry her husband's brother. There is also jealousy on the part of a son, who feels that his mother should be giving him more attention during the mourning period. Gertrude is not in touch with her own son's feelings to see why he is angry. Hamlet expresses this outrage during his first soliloquy:

> O, most wicked speed, to post
> With such dexterity to incestuous sheets! (I.ii 156-157)

Gertrude is shown to be a loving mother but a parent who cannot read into her sons's behavior. When answering Hamlet, she says that it is common for all men to die, but this is not just any man who has died, she should realize; it's Hamlet's own father! Also, when Gertrude asks Hamlet:

> If it be,
> Why seems it so particular with thee? (I.ii 74-75)

she means to calm him down, but the word "seems" only makes Hamlet more suspicious. She fails to realize that in his sensitive mood, the word "seems" will give Hamlet the impression that she is hiding something. At this point, Gertrude has the opportunity to ask Hamlet what he is implying and face the issue, but she is the type of woman who just wants everything to be smoothed over without thinking too deeply. Someone might wonder whether Gertrude really is concealing some knowledge about a murder, but in Act II, scene 2, there is evidence that Gertrude really hasn't taken part in the plot. Hamlet suspects her of being an accomplice with Claudius in his father's murder. It's too bad, therefore, that Hamlet doesn't hear Gertrude's private conversation with Claudius in which she gives her theory about Hamlet's anger:

> I doubt it is no other but the main,

His father's death and our o'erhasty marriage.(II.ii 56-57)

Gertrude's conscience may finally be bothering her, but only about her quick marriage, not about anything worse. If Hamlet hadn't scolded her, the thought might never have occurred to her that the marriage took place too soon. Her comments show that Gertrude probably was not an accomplice. Up until now, we might have believed Hamlet. However, Claudius and Gertrude are talking privately and still Gertrude makes no reference to any plot. Her sincere reason for hoping that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern can provide clues to Hamlet's behavior is so that she can help Hamlet feel better (a strong contrast to Claudius' sinister motives). In other words, Gertrude's worst fault seems to be insensitivity towards her son. She shows no awareness of how her husband died and therefore no insight into what Hamlet suspects. The irony here is that Gertrude's motivation in watching Hamlet's behavior is genuine concern for his well-being, while Claudius' concern is with his own well-being.

Another example of Gertrude's lack of awareness is inability to realize that her second marriage can be seen as adultery by those around her. Her attitude is that if she and Claudius had simply waited longer before marrying to give Hamlet more time to grieve Hamlet might have reacted better. She doesn't face Hamlet's concept that perhaps the marriage shouldn't have happened at all. Love is the answer to all problems for Gertrude.

She shows this simple-minded thinking also in Act III, scene 1. She tells Ophelia about her hope that Hamlet's madness came from his love for Ophelia. If Gertrude keeps believing this, she won't have to face the marriage as the problem or feel guilty. Gertrude's romantic outlook again keeps her from seeing truth.

Because of Hamlet's powerful belief in his mother's guilt, he takes his anger out on Ophelia, who Hamlet may think is just another insincere woman like his mother. Hamlet is determined to use the play to get at his mother's conscience in addition to Claudius'. But Gertrude reacts casually after watching. Gertrude does not show guilt about her relationship with Claudius but instead, she has a very practical-approach to the Player Queen: "The lady doth protest too much, methinks" (III.ii 236). Gertrude is realistic enough to say that in real life, a widow would easily want to remarry, and that this is why the Player Queen is not a believable character. However, this is another example of how Gertrude can't or refuses to see how other people are affected by her. Even after Hamlet's questioning, Gertrude is not aware enough of her actions to make a connection between the play and her own life: "...true to her nature, she makes no application of the Player Queen's situation to herself. She does not take personally representations of sin and weakness"(Cohen, p. 86). Gertrude's reaction to the play shows also that she is unaware of Claudius's guilt. Even though Gertrude is described as being upset after Claudius leaves excitedly, she is anxious more about how Claudius feels than about anyone's guilt. If she had questioned Hamlet about why he put on the play, she would have faced the truth, but she makes the decision to worry about Claudius more than about the situation.

Finally, in Act III, scene 4, Hamlet forces Gertrude to see what he is accusing her of: murder, incest, adultery. He does reach her conscience, because she says:

Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul,
And there I see such black and grained spots
As will not leave their tinct. (III.iv.90-92)

She could be admitting a mistake in a too-early marriage to Claudius but not necessarily anything worse. Hamlet really wants to put Gertrude on a moral path when he tells her: "go not to my uncle's bed./Assume a virtue, if you have it not" (III. iv.160-161). But when Gertrude says: "What shall I do?" (III. iv 182) she is not really going to change her behavior even though she could decide to listen to Hamlet or be more cautious in trusting Claudius. Her question just reflects her conflict between son and husband and her wish to please both

of them at the same time - impossible at this point. If Gertrude had shown more sympathy for Hamlet, some of his anger might have died down.

At the same time, Gertrude should not be considered an unsympathetic mother. She does try to protect Hamlet from Claudius in Act IV, scene 1. When describing to Claudius Hamlet's killing of Polonius, Gertrude covers up Hamlet's indifferent attitude by saying that he cried afterwards. She knows that Hamlet did not show sorrow but as a mother, she wants to describe him in a way that will make things easier for him. Gertrude's comment could indicate that she finally realizes Claudius may not be what he seems. But if this is true, why couldn't she have seen this on her own, even before Hamlet's accusations. Again, the answer is that Gertrude does not have the insight to distinguish between sincerity and deception in people. Gertrude still can't see the truth about Claudius. He will send Hamlet away because of fear for his own life, but he tells Gertrude that he is concerned about her safety. If Gertrude's judgment was better, she would object to the idea out of fear for Hamlet's life. Throughout the play, she seems to be more concerned with being caught in the middle of the two men in her life than with the possibility she has done something immoral. Her aim in life is to keep everyone - including herself -happy, even though her actions caused many of the problems in the first place. She refuses to sacrifice her own happiness for Hamlet. Her reaction at Ophelia's funeral shows again that Gertrude is a romantic thinker more than a realist. She is superficial, not showing any great grief but more regret that Hamlet and Ophelia did not get married. Gertrude still wants to believe that their love would have made everything better. This is another case of Gertrude not facing reality and escaping into romantic fantasy. Her reaction in this case is a reminder of her reaction in the play scene in Act III. At that time, during Hamlet's sarcastic conversation with Ophelia, Gertrude wants to think that he has come back to Ophelia. "The belief at the bottom of her heart was that the world is a place constructed simply that people may be happy in it in a good-humored sensual fashion" (Bradley, p. 141).

It is only at the very end, when Gertrude realizes that the cup contains poison,that she faces the truth. Before this moment, the irony in this scene is that Gertrude actually offers the wine to her son to help and encourage him! But she finally has to admit to herself that Claudius is guilty of murdering old Hamlet and of trying to murder Hamlet. When she warns Hamlet not to drink the wine, she again is showing compassion for her son and her wish to protect him from danger.

In other words, the play's last scene summarizes Gertrude's two sides. As a mother, she means well and does have concern for her son but her bad decisions and failure to judge people correctly are a major cause of the tragedy. If Gertrude had been a different kind of person, many of the deaths might not have happened.

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## JANE EYRE: HER PERSONAL AND MORAL VICTORIES

All people live by their own codes of conduct. Everyone, be they male or female, young or old, has their own sets of values, which they adhere to and which are unchanging even in the face of personal or societal pressures and conflicts to give them up. In *Jane Eyre* by

Charlotte Bronte, Jane is tempted many times to acquiesce to others' wishes and, thereby, give up her own moral standards and beliefs. Yet Jane remains steadfast in adhering to her personal code of conduct, namely to maintain feelings of high self-esteem, not to let herself be used and abused by others, and never to give up her religious convictions. Through many disappointments that she is faced with and with her constant struggle to gain independence and love, Jane never loses her self of self, nor does she give up her moral and spiritual values. Jane Eyre, from the very beginning of the novel, shows courage and self-confidence when she stands up to Mrs. Reed for wrongly accusing her to Mr. Brocklehurst of being a liar. Jane, a quiet, pensive girl, who until now took her aunt and cousins' torment without saying a word, suddenly could no longer hold her tongue. She suddenly felt a need to tell her aunt that as much as she appreciated having her put a roof over her head and providing food for her, her existence in Gateshead was nothing less than abominable. She says that servants are treated better than she is, and that Mrs. Reed was not keeping her promise to her deceased husband to raise Jane as her own child. Mrs. Reed, unable to answer Jane's accusations, leaves the room immediately, thus allowing Jane to bask in the glory of victory for the first time in her life. This episode sets the foundation for Jane being able to stand up for herself and not to be trampled upon by others in the future. She learns through this that inner resolve is her best weapon in life and that she must not be afraid to voice her opinion or to stand up for what she feels is right. In Lowood, a boarding school for orphans, Jane meets Helen Burns, a fellow student is to have a more lasting effect on Jane than anyone else that she will ever meet in her life. Helen, more than anything else, instills in Jane religious faith and spirituality. Jane learns from Helen to bear the harshness and rigidness of Lowood and to accept the many injustices of life, whatever they may be, traits that Helen embodies to the full. Helen, who is even willing to die and bear torture for her religious convictions, teaches Jane to put religion first in her life. The combination of courage to stand up for what you believe in and religious faith enables Jane to do battle against injustice in the future. When Jane meets Edward Rochester, her employer at Thornfield whose age and status are well above Jane's own, she manages to keep her cool in the face of his surly and obnoxious questions. In fact, Jane shows confidence in front of her employer and answers his inquiries truthfully and openly, a trait which Rochester admires and eventually comes to love in Jane. At Thornfield, Jane displays strength of character by caring for Adele as a mother would, and by trying to bring Rochester to appreciate Adele, a feeling which Adele needs and wants in him, her only father figure. Jane, in addition, comes to rescue Rochester many a time from would be death and risks her own life in doing so. These character traits, which Jane displays, draw Rochester closer to her and enable him to truth her, rely upon her, and realize that she is who he needs in his life. Jane and Rochester's plans to marry could bring Jane no greater happiness, until those plans are shattered before her eyes. When Rochester admits that he is already married, yet pleads with Jane to remain at Thornfield and be his mistress, Jane boldly and courageously refuses to give in. Though her love for Rochester is deep and unswerving, her moral convictions are what ultimately guide her life and are what enable her to leave her life and love behind for an uncertain future. She has the strength to judge what is ethically and morally right, stand up to her convictions, and act on her judgement. She cannot degrade herself by being a married man's mistress, though she is very tempted to do so, and continually relies on faith to guide her decisions. When Jane is ultimately reunited with Rochester, she tells him of the Rivers family and, most notably, about St. John Rivers whom she refused to marry because of his lack of love or appreciation of her. Jane then marries Rochester realizing that he is who she wants. Jane has done a tremendous amount of soul searching while away from Thornfield and she now feels able to make the lifelong commitment of marriage as she has gained the moral, religious, and personal capabilities to differentiate between good and bad, right and wrong, in her many experiences throughout her life. Jane Eyre remains true to her own

personal code of conduct throughout the novel. Her strength and courage can be an inspiration to readers no matter what the age, gender, or generation in which they live. The morals to which Jane adheres to are what make *Jane Eyre* a timeless classic to be enjoyed and learned by every individual.

## JANE EYRE AND ROCHESTER: SOUL- MATES IN SEARCH OF THEIR ESSENTIAL SELVES

by Orah Rosenblatt

"Come Baby find me,
Come Baby remind me
Of where I once begun;
Come Baby show me,
Show me you know me,
Tell me you're the one....
It's like my whole life never happened
When I'm with you, as if I've never had a thought;
I know this dream It might be crazy,
But it's the only one I've got...."

(Bob Dylan, "Emotionally Yours")

Each of us carries within us the seed of a unique plant. When circumstances conspire to caringly nourish that seed in the manner most appropriate to its true nature-- circumstances which, sadly, are as rare as they are fortunate--the germ of our original selves is likely to flourish. When, however, this tender seed receives attention which is insufficient or antithetical to its essential inclination, growth is inevitably blighted in some way. Weaker or more sensitive seedlings may wither outright; others will be irreparably stunted. Stronger plants may yet grow to imposing heights, but they will be bent and twisted at the places where their needs were unmet, and may well feel eternally compelled to somehow loosen the knot of those deforming deprivations, so as to come closer to their originally intended shapes: Jane Eyre and Rochester are two such plants; driven by an indomitable will to find and follow their essential selves, they discover in each other a vital key to the realization of that end.

As every conscientious parent knows, a child needs both roots--love and security--and wings--belief in, and encouragement of, his autonomy--in order to mature. While gifted with the latter--the drive for self-realization previously mentioned--Jane and Rochester have been severely deprived of the foundation of the former. They are both outsiders. The identities they have succeeded in forging for themselves thus have a quality of rare integrity, for they primarily have come from within, not from the outer prompting to please and emulate others. At the same time, these characters lack the sense of security and connectedness which is the vital prop of such gifts. When the two meet, that "mysterious chemistry [which] usually links partners who are virtually psychological twins" (Napier and Whitaker, *The Family Crucible*, p. 116) enables them to quickly recognize their kinship, the great strength and intense neediness both share. The bond forged between them serves as a dual link for both--back to the sense of belonging which both lacked In their most

impressionable years, and forward to the recognition and realization of their individual true selves.

That one must frequently go back in order to move ahead is a principle well known in both religion and psychology. In Judaism, the word *teshavah* means both repentance and return. Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, an early nineteenth century sage, stresses the theme of "descents" and "ascents": Each time one wishes to rise to a new stage of spiritual development, one is generally forced to descend first, in order to reclaim the "lost sparks" of potential holiness buried in the "excrement" of prior confusion and misdeeds (Nachman of Breslov, *M'Shivath Hefesh*). The radical psychotherapist R. D. Laing calls this process "regression" and "progression": If the schizophrenic wishes to spend hours staring at a blank wall, well, then he should be encouraged to do so; he will eventually break through; after all, when Zen monks do it it's called the search for enlightenment (R. D, Laing, *The Voice of Experience*).

In many ways, Jane appears to be further advanced than Rochester in this inner work of regression/progression. In part, this may be due to the early spiritual guidance of the saintly Helen Burns. We see evidence of Jane's increased maturity and compassion in the objective, forgiving way she re-encounters, and masters, those demons of her childhood, the Reeds. Jane has apparently come far in healing the wounds of her old bitterness and anger; this letting go of old grievances is essential if she is to move on and grow. Other events and characters in this novel similarly test Jane's ability to confront situations reminiscent of childhood conflicts, where she must weather a threatened loss of self in order to emerge with that self chastened, strengthened and renewed. During the three days she spends homeless and hungry after fleeing from Rochester, she re-experiences the utter aloneness and rootlessness of her early years yet retains her faith in G-d's will; rescued by the Rivers family, she is rewarded by Providence with the elevating discovery of a true kinship--in blood as well as spirit such as she has always longed for but never before known.

Her relationships with both Rochester and St. John Rivers involve Jane in the regression of sexual self- surrender, threatening the immersion of her hard-won identity in theirs. Her refusal to be Rochester's pseudo-wife constitutes Jane's triumph in her most crucial spiritual test, as she makes the wrenching choice between her idolatrous love for him and her belief in G-d. Though her bond with Rochester provides her hardest trial, it also gives her the clarity and strength to successfully avoid what would have been another, probably fatal, snare to her self development--the marriage proposal of St. John Rivers. St. John, too, is stamped with an inviolate integrity of self, but he sees Jane solely as an instrument for his own ends and acknowledges only those parts of her nature which dovetail with his own designs. It is because she has experienced Rochester's sincere, if flawed, love and appreciation, that Jane is able to recognize the inadequacy and destructiveness of this proffered bond.

Rochester, while yearning for what is good, honest and pure, and attracted to those redemptive qualities in Jane, must overcome the hubris and narcissistic self-indulgence which has goaded him into self-idolatry, placing the gratification of his own desires above the will of G-d. In his regressive flirtation with Blanche Ingram, reminiscent of his initial attraction to Bertha and his various mistresses, he re-confirms his preference for inner, rather than outer, beauty in a mate. His desertion by Jane and the subsequent loss of his arm and eyesight return Rochester to a state of alienation and despair from which only

humility and belief in G-d can redeem him. In the end, by placing G-d first in their lives and accepting His chastisement, both Jane and Rochester are rewarded by reunion with one another, their separate salvations of self crowned by the redemption of re- unification on a higher level. The sense of acceptance and belonging which they experience with one another, and the recognition each feels for long-denied facets of the other's true nature--Rochester for Jane's passion, Jane for Rochester's yearning for honesty and goodness--has helped both to re-connect with their original essential selves.

Because the love between Jane and Rochester--despite its darker, inevitable element of power struggle--is rooted in this recognition of, and respect for, each other's true selves. I found the final felicitous resolution of their relationship to be satisfying and acceptable, and was even able to wink and overlook the improbable and melodramatic route that resolution took (though I do wish it could have been reached without the taint of Rochester's disempowerment). There is something moving and beautiful about these two people, indefatigably reaching for love: like two trees in a dense, dark forest, bending, twisting and inter-twining to reach an aperture of warm, bright sunlight, more beautiful to my mind than their unblemished brothers.

## JANE EYRE AND HEDDA GABLER

"If I were to marry you, you would kill me. You are killing me now." *Jane Eyre* p. 415)
"Oh, it is killing me, --it is killing me, all this!" *Hedda Gabler* p. 63)

Charlotte Bronte's novel *Jane Eyre* and Henrik Ibsen's play *Hedda Gabler* were written within fifty years of each other in the late 1800s. Both Jane and Hedda exist within the same social contexts. They are women of the middle class in European cultures. The fact Jane is penniless through much of the novel does not exclude her from the middle class. Jane and Hedda's experiences, education and values all belong to the middle class. Therefore it should be no surprise their words echo. In detail and outcome their stories are different. However, it is the constraints of the same social conventions which drive their different destinies. It is the same confusion of social convention with morality and spirituality that pains both their existences. Confusing social convention with legal, moral, and religious codes of conduct is a phenomena not confined to the 19th century. It is this same confusion that created Jim Crow Laws, anti-gay legislation and fuels the fire of the abortion rights debate.

Social conventions of the 1800's did not allow women of the middle class to live independently. With few exceptions women moved from father's household to husband's household. It was the father's prerogative to arrange a suitable marriage. In truth there might be a carefully selected few to choose from, but any unauthorized selection would hold severe consequences for both men and women.

Jane Eyre's mother was disowned because she chose to marry an "unapproved" man. Jane would suffer because of this transgression, which occurred before she was even born. After being orphaned, Jane lives with her Aunt Reed. She is continually reminded she is a dependent and is unloved by her relations. Although hurtful, these wounds are not mortal. Jane survives life with her Aunt Reed with self-esteem intact, confident her ill treatment was

undeserved. From this experience Jane learns a lack social status and funds can make you unlovable.

Banished to Lowood, a charity school, Jane befriends Helen Burns. Pious and self- disciplined, Helen becomes Jane's spiritual mentor. Helen's fundamentalist faith answers every question if not every prayer. From Helen, Jane learns not think too much of human love. Helen also advises "If all the world hated you, and believed you wicked, while your own conscience approved you, and absolved you from guilt, you would not be without friends" (*Jane Eyre* p. 72).

At Lowood Jane also learns she can be judged by her own merits. Mr. Brocklehurst, the administrator, announced to the entire school that by her Aunt Reed's assessment, Jane is a liar. The superintendent, Miss Temple, as well as Helen Burns, rally to Jane's support. They declare Jane, by the conduct they have observed, to be of good character. This opinion is collaborated and Jane is publicly cleared of any wrong doing.

There are codes of conduct determined by legal, moral or spiritual considerations and those determined by social convention. Jane's experiences in her Aunt Reeds house introduced her to social conventions. Helen Burns introduced her to religious and spiritual guidance. The Mr. Brocklehurst incident introduces her to the concept of an individual morality and integrity. For most, these codes of conduct become enmeshed. Jane Eyre and Hedda Gabler are no exception. Jane, faced with the crises of her life, relies on a blend of these codes to guide her actions.

Being the exception, Jane had not gone from her father's house to a husband's house. She became a governess, one of the few options available to a middle class young woman. She falls in love with her employer, Mr. Rochester, and agrees to marry him. The ceremony is stopped when it is revealed Mr. Rochester already has a wife. The law will not allow him to have two wives. The mostly widely accepted interpretations of the Bible will not allow him to have two wives. If she were to live with Mr. Rochester as his wife without legal and religious sanctions, social conventions would make Jane despised. Legal, religious, and social codes of conduct do not permit Jane and Rochester to be "together". Jane recognizes this saying: "I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man" (*Jane Eyre* p. 319). I can not say I doubt her sincerity, but Jane should also mention, that despite Helen's advice, she cares how people regard her. She despises being despised. Helen had warned Jane she cares too much for human love. But, it had been a warning more about Jane's concern for status than romantic love. Helen had meant the words as comfort after Mr. Brocklehurst had slandered Jane before her peers.

Confusing moral duty with social convention, Jane runs away from Rochester and herself. Yet, Rochester would defy all. Legal, religious and social laws are put aside. Secure in his love for Jane and hers for him, he has the courage (or, audacity) to create his own morality. His code of conduct is self-created. "It will expiate at God's tribunal. I know my Maker sanctions what I do. For the world's judgement--I wash my hands thereof. For man's opinion--I defy it" (*Jane Eyre* p. 258). I see this as an act of courage rather than audacity because, I believe, Rochester is sincere. He is not without his faults, nor is Jane, nor am I. Like Rochester I have defied the religious dogma of my schooling. I have defied the law. I have defied social convention. That is not to say I reject it altogether or go uninfluenced by it, but to say when sincere reflection leads to unsanctioned actions, they should be done. Wasn't that also Helen Burn's

advice? "if all the world hated you, and believed you wicked, while your own conscience approved you, and absolved you from guilt, you would not be without friends" (*Jane Eyre* p. 72). I would add "true" friends.

Jane and Rochester come to different conclusions, however; one is not right and the other wrong. Individual people must make individual choices. (Yes, my dear reader, this is a Romantic notion.) Legal, moral, religious and social guidelines should be just that, guidelines. If they are adhered to without honest reflection, they lead only to dead ends.

It is to one such dead end, personified by Mr. St. John Rivers that Jane utters,"If I were to marry you, you would kill me. You are killing me now" (*Jane Eyre* p. 415). It is from St. John that Jane learns to trust her own feelings and to ignore social and religious conventions. St. John before embarking on a life as a missionary in India has asked Jane to marry him. He admits he does not love her but needs her as his companion in God's work. He is killing Jane because he wishes to make his vocation hers. Jane has looked in her heart and did not see the vocation of a missionary. She believed it to be good and noble work, but not her work. As a missionary Jane's social status would have been elevated. Society would have esteemed her in principle, if not in fact. Jane was willing to become a missionary, however, but not to marry St. A loveless marriage was against her moral convictions. To marry St John was to kill Jane Eyre and to create a Mrs. St. John Rivers. She would lose her identity. She had already lost her pride when she had been reduced to begging after leaving Rochester. Pride gone, Jane became surer in herself, liberated from gratuitous concern for the opinions of others. It was this new found strength, this new blend of moral and spiritual considerations that allowed Jane to reject St. John. To reject the noble and pious life of a missionary as not Jane Eyre's.

Returning to Rochester Jane's new convictions are not tested. Every impediment is cleared and they are allowed to reunite within legal and religious laws'. They reject society and its conventions and live quietly in a remote location.

Hedda Gabler has no happy ever after ending. She has so confused social conventions with morality and spirituality as to replace the latter with the former. Social conventions become her religion.

Tired of single life Hedda enters a loveless marriage. She chooses her mate, George Tesman, for his malleability and his bright future as an academic. While Jane refused a loveless marriage, Hedda viewed it as inevitable. She chafed at the restrictions of social conventions. They were penance, yet there was no atonement. This penance inspired sin.

The sins at first are small, venial. Hedda insults Tesman's Aunt Juliana by pretending to mistake Aunt Juliana's hat for a servant's. Admitting this transgression, this meanness, she explains: "Well, you see--these impulses come over me all of a sudden; and I cannot resist them" (*Hedda Gabler* p. 30). Hedda can not resist because she is desperate for a release of her anger. Hedda is outraged at the lack of control she possesses over her life. She considers herself the intellectual, superior to her husband, yet he is the one able to have a career. She thinks she can be happy by manipulating Tesman. She seeks to live vicariously through him. But it is not enough. Hedda is bored, bored, bored!

Hedda's sins grow in size and number. She lies, she manipulates, she destroys. She is despicable. She traps an old suitor, Eilert Lovborg, an alcoholic, into drinking. To Mrs. Elvsted, Eilert's new romance, she uses "blockhead" and "you little stupid" as terms of endearment. Hedda destroys a

manuscript of Eilert's Tesman had deemed brilliant for her own entertainment. In truth Hedda is jealous of Mrs. Elvsted and Mr. Lovborg' relationship. But it is in saying, "I want for once in my life to have power to mold a human destiny" that Hedda reveals her true motivation.

As Hedda's cancer of the soul grows, she suggests Eilert commit suicide and provides him with her pistol as means to do it. Hedda is so consumed with bitterness and hate there is nothing left to sustain compassion. Hedda's plans fail to execute as she had anticipated. She might have survived this disappointment if Judge Brack did not have proof of her involvement. Judge Brack always tossed sexual advances towards Hedda. Before this she had been able to return his volleys. Now he was taking control of the ball. He threatens Hedda with scandal, of which she is "mortally afraid" (*Hedda Gabler* p. 70). Hedda falls into despair. She tells Judge Brack: "A slave, a slave then! No I cannot endure the thought of that! Never!" (*Hedda Gabler* p. 7l). Minutes later Hedda commits suicide.

Hedda's suicide is a true act of desperation. The social conventions of her time strangled her and killed her before her pistol ever touched her temples. It was before her final encounter with Judge Brack,that Hedda had said to her husband: "Oh, it is killing me,--it is killing me, all this!" (*Hedda Gabler* p. 63).

By "all this", Hedda means the powerlessness she feels in the face of social conventions. Hedda did not hate herself only her life. Why didn't she rebel against the restrictions she felt imposed on her by social conventions? Hedda had no other code of conduct. She lacked any spiritual or moral fortitude. Social convention was all she knew, even if it was all she hated. Hedda did try to push the envelope of social conventions but she did not even conceive of breaking out of it, because she knew nothing else. This was her "mortal" sin.

There can never be a last word on the correct code of conduct. The codes of 1993 are not the same codes of yesterday, nor the same as tomorrow. Social conventions change. Laws change. Interpretations of the Bible vary. But morality stays the same. Morality is that personal blend which creates an individual code of conduct. Looking outside yourself for morality is futile. It can only be attained by an internal synthesis of experiences, knowledge and honest introspection. Jane Eyre discovered this, Hedda Gabler never will.

## WHO'S TO BLAME? PAULINE BREEDLOVE OR SOCIETY?

A black child is born and twelve years later that same child asks, "How do you get someone to love you?" The answer can't be found in Mrs. MacTeer's songs or in the Maginot Line's description of eating fish together, and even Claudia doesn't know because that question had never entered her mind. If Claudia had thought about it, she would have been able to explain to Pecola that although she didn't know exactly how you made someone love you that somehow she knew that she was loved. That love was expressed on those cold autumn nights when Claudia was sick and loving hands would gently touch her forehead and readjust her quilt. Those were the same loving hands that told Claudia that they did not want her to die, and those were the loving hands of her mother, Mrs. MacTeer. Unfortunately, Pecola had no loving hands to comfort her.

In America, in the 1940's, white supremacy reigned and the values of the white dominant group were internalized by the black community in Toni

Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. These images were reinforced in children's literature, on billboards and even on the giant theater screens. Although the effects of this propaganda rippled throughout the black community, its most devastating consequences were inflicted by Pauline Williams. Perhaps it was because she had always been a dreamer and she had to fantasize in order to escape her daily grind that the silver screen was able to captivate her. Once her education was complete, and she had been indoctrinated by the standards of this medium, she could never look at the world the same way again. Everything was now assigned a category; there was good and evil, white and black, beauty and ugliness, and she would be its judge.

Prior to her instruction, Pauline Williams loved the colors of purple berries, yellow lemonade and the streaks of green the June bugs made in the trees at night. When she first met Cholly, she felt that her savior had come to take her home and to protect her from all the ravages of the impending storms. But Cholly was only a man, a man that carried the scars of abandonment on a trash heap by his mother and rejection at a crap game by his father. Cholly, who tried to anesthetize himself with booze, for the humiliation and degradation he experienced by sneering white men, with flashlights, who stole his manhood. In the beginning, filled with the promise of young love, things went well for Cholly and Pauline in the North. However, as time went by, the colors of Pauline's youth begin to fade as her loneliness consumes her, and she is forced into the picture show for her tutoring.

The giant screen allows her to escape her homesickness, Cholly's abandonment and the colored folks meanness. When the screen lights up, Pauline is transported into a world where she sees white men taking good care of their wives and where the women are dressed up and live in beautiful clean houses. The images are white, they are happy, and they are beautiful, and so Pauline devours these false portraits, and consequently coming home to Cholly becomes more and more difficult. Pauline tries to accept her circumstances, and begins to joyfully look forward to her second pregnancy. This time she convinces herself that things will be different, because she is not afraid and she has vowed to love it, no matter what it looks like. Pauline begins to lovingly talk to her child while it is still in her womb, and she feels good about this baby up until the end. But when the healthy, smart, baby girl is born, Pauline is repulsed by her looks, and tells the Lord how ugly she is.

It would be very easy at this time to blame society, White and Black, for Pauline's predicament, but I cannot accept this, and am unwilling to let Pauline off the hook so easily. Pauline, unlike Cholly, knew what it was like to grow up with a sense of family. She lived in a nice house with her sisters and brothers and both of her working parents. And even though Pauline had a feeling of separateness and worthlessness which she attributed to her foot, I still suspect that she had good family role models. For example, whenever someone in her family accidentally scattered one of her arrangements, they always stopped to retrieve them for her. Therefore, her complaints of not having a nickname or family anecdotes or a separate pot of rice and peas seem a little hollow. Instead, I think her family was attentive to her needs and considerate of her feelings. Because of her background, and the kin whom she stated she missed when she went up North, I think it was her responsibility to be the role model for Cholly, Sammy and Pecola.

Pauline also claimed to be a good God-fearing woman, yet she went to

Church and cloaked herself in her-self-righteousness, and used Cholly as her scapegoat. She became a martyr and held up Cholly as a model of sin and failure, but Cholly was easy, and she manipulated and used him for her own selfish sinful deeds. Pauline never looked into her own blackish heart, she never saw beyond Cholly to her own inequities. She seemed to be only interested in gaining approval and pity from the church women who had ridiculed and scorned her. Unfortunately, this single-mindedness caused her to abandon her children. Pauline was going to punish Cholly for not being her savior, but in her quest she denied her children, especially Pecola/ their savior.

Love has many facets, but children's needs from love are simple and are usually transmitted through a sense of being wanted and ultimately by being protected. These feelings were communicated by Mrs. MacTeer to Claudia when she was sick, to Frieda when she was molested by Mr. Henry, and even to Pecola when she begins to menstruate and soils her dress. Mrs. MacTeer lives in the same black community as Pauline, she is exposed to the same white propaganda, and she also is angry with her poverty, yet she does not blame the children, she blames the situation. Three quarts of milk have disappeared, and even though Mrs. MacTeer knows that Pecola drank it, she does not actually blame Pecola, she blames the circumstances and her mother, Pauline. What kind of a woman, a mother, would not check to make sure that her child is alive or dead, and whether or not she has enough food to eat. She was not Mrs. MacTeer's natural child In nor a relative, yet she treated Pecola better than Pauline ever had.

It would be very easy to portray Pauline as a weak, ignorant woman who didn't know any better, but that would be false. If she were weak, she would have succumbed to the white woman's wishes, and would have left Cholly in order to keep her job. But instead she proves just how strong and smart she is when she so cleverly tries to extract her pay from her employer. In addition, because of this incident, it was difficult for me to believe that she could have ever idolized white society, because she seemed to have such contempt, and seemed to view white folks as ignorant, lazy, and superficial people. Another example of how clever she was, is when she discovers how to win the admiration of not only her church members, but also her new white employees. Further, even in her lovemaking, she is in complete control. Pauline is able to subdue her passion, and to delay seeing the colors of her youth, until she is assured that Cholly is powerless to both mentally and physically separate from her. Additionally, Pauline was also capable of nurturing; of calming and comforting a scared crying child, but those feelings she willingly gave to the little white girl, and miserly refused to Pecola.

When Pauline Williams married Cholly, she became Mrs. Breedlove in name only. She did not breed love; instead she procreated shame, guilt, and ugliness. Although it is true that Cholly's behavior was ugly, and he was dangerously free to gorge his own appetite, I believe that it was Pauline who forced the family to wear their ugliness. Pauline cultivated her child, Pecola, with ridicule and shame, and so she ripened, and felt unworthy. Pauline, more than anyone else, knew Cholly's character, yet she refused to believe, and protect her child from his lustful advances. As a consequence, Pecola turned to Soaphead Church for her protection, and his path led her into insanity. However, Soaphead Church was just her guide, Pecola's road to

madness had already been paved the day she was born, by her mother!

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