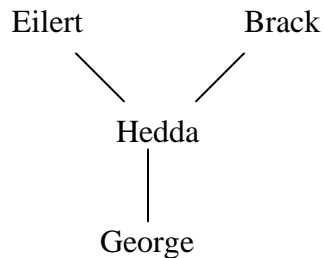


Ibsen's Triangles in *Hedda Gabler*

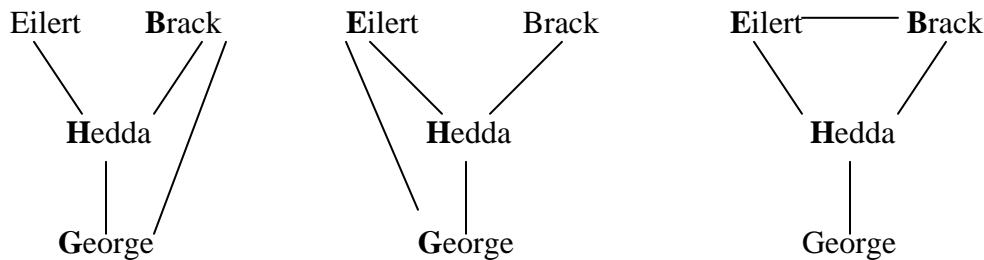
1. People Triangles

Part A

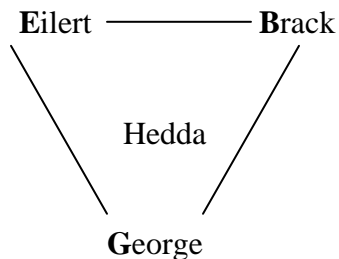
The play presents a succession of, among others, four people, namely Hedda and three men. One would doubtless expect that the basic side in the basic triangle is that between Hedda and George. Eilert is mentioned in Act 1 Scene e, and Brack participates in Act 1 Scene h, but all formally, and without connections. The side connecting Hedda with Brack presents itself in Act 2 Scene a, and the side connecting Hedda and Eilert presents itself in Act 2 Scene f. These three connections can be diagrammed thus:



This suggests three other connections, which create four triangles. One is between George and Brack, which creates the triangle (to the right in the diagram) which can be called HGB, for Hedda, George, Brack. Another is between George and Eilert (to the left in the diagram), which creates the triangle HGE. The third connection is between Eilert and Brack, which creates the triangle HEB.

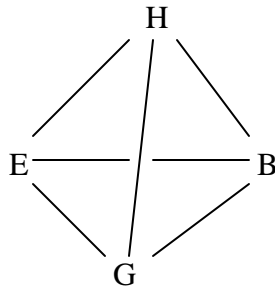


Each of these triangles 'centers on' Hedda, so to speak. The fourth triangle excludes Hedda, and consists of George Eilert Brack.



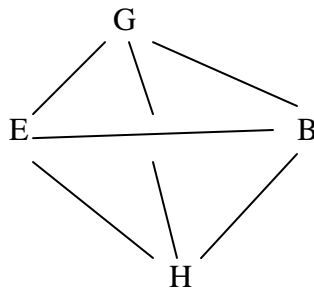
Part B

That one seems to ‘center around’ Hedda, only because, geometrically, all four names seem to be in the same plane; but if it be viewed as if looking down from above, it can be seen to be a tetrahedral pyramid, with Hedda at the apex and the three men at the corners of the base.

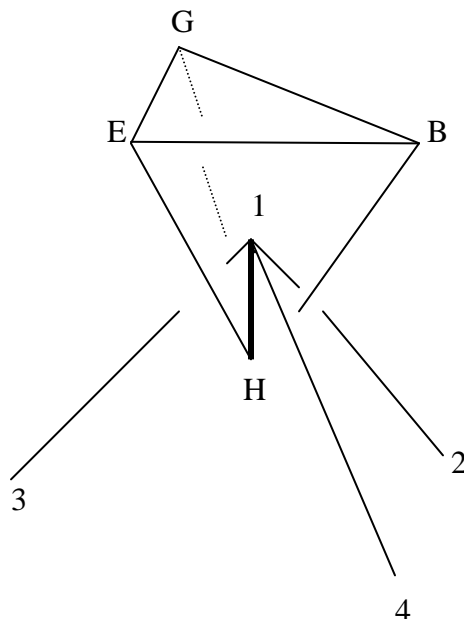


Part C

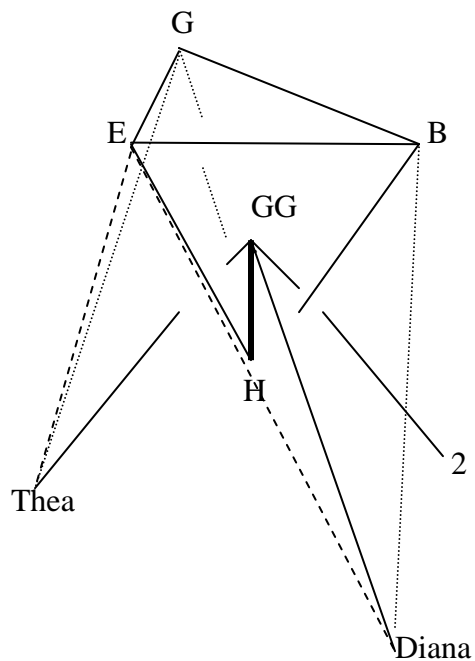
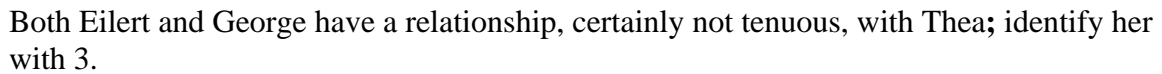
Now invert the pyramid so that the horizontal triangle containing the men is above the vertex where Hedda is,



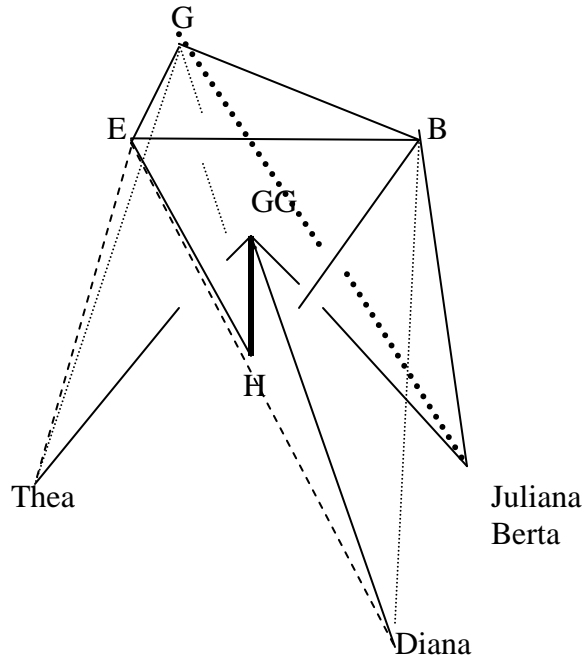
and furthermore so that the bottom vertex does not sit on the ground (or table top or wherever) but rather is suspended from the apex of another tetrahedron whose triangular base is on the ground.



Both Eilert and Brack have a relationship, albeit tenuous, with Diana; identify her with 4.



Finally, 2 represents the old world, Juliana and Berta. George's relationship with them is familial, as is Hedda's with the General. Brack's relationship with them is indeed tenuous, both being old world, but otherwise he a public person, they private.



The three triangles Thea Eilert George, Diana Eilert Brack, and Juliana/Berta George Brack lend stability to the inverted pyramid by keeping it from falling over; but considering five of the six connections between the women at the base and the men at the top to be ropes instead of firm members, they do not provide support. So when the firm connection between Hedda and her father ends, the structure collapses. Brack can get his money back by selling the house, and he and Diana can continue to compete for their complementary clients.

But with the creation of a new connection, Thea with Juliana and Berta, the structure collapses, not into chaos, but into a single triangle, George, Thea, Juliana/Berta, which is a quite good base on which to create a new family.

2. Theme Triangles

Part A

By Themes is meant, for example, love and hate, and the question arises 'are love and hate alike in some way?'. In other words, 'are they, strictly speaking, opposites?'. The answer to the first question is yes, because each of them is directed at an entity, that which is loved and that which is hated. This directedness makes each of them different from apathy, which lacks directedness. Furthermore, whereas the root *love* is a free

morpheme, from which the prefix *to* makes a verb, *to love*, and from which an article makes a noun, *a love* or *the love* or *my love*, and whereas the root *hate* has the same characteristics, *to hate*, *a hate*, *the hate*, *my hate*, the root *apathy* is only a noun. So the answer to the second question is no, because *love* and *hate* are no more opposite than are *love* and *apathy*, or than *hate* and *apathy*. Consequently, love, hate, and apathy constitute a triangular relationship. It coordinates nicely with the residual triangle.

In Act 1f, Thea is apathetic about what people might say about her leaving her husband: “they’ll say what they please”. For “the last two or three” years, she has hated living with her husband even though “he believes he does everything for the best”, because they “haven’t a single thought in common”, and she is “no more than useful to him”. Even his, not her, children don’t contribute any love to the household. What little love there was derived from the children’s tutor, until he left; but he had opened to her the thought of a love, of freedom or of escape, enough to give her the courage to “dare to do such a thing” as leave him. Of the three, love seems to dominate both hate and apathy.

Juliana probably doesn’t even know the word *apathy*, much less experience it. Her hatred is limited to anyone who tries to thwart her nephew, “those who stood against you, who wanted to bar your way”. But “they’ve fallen, George”. That leaves Juliana’s love, which only the blind cannot see. Berta is likewise. In the predominance of love, these three of the four women in the play are similar.

George probably doesn’t know the word *apathy* either, nor does he sense the apathy of others - to his bedroom slippers, to the “still more books in your special field”. And amazingly he fails to sense his own apathy in the act of welcoming Brack to visit with Hedda while he and Thea rework Eilert’s second book. Certainly he is not apathetic to Hedda - “he kept pressing and pleading to be allowed to take care of” her. His hatred is, like Juliana’s, limited, both in space and in time, to those who try to thwart him: in space, only Eilert’s probably competition for the professorship - (striking his hands together) “no, no, that’s completely unthinkable”; in space, because Eilert declines to compete. That leaves love. Hedda’s statement “I’m exactly as I was when I left” rules out physical love. Familial love, yes, certainly, for Juliana, who really is family, and for Berta, who is by adoption, has not prepared him for married life, at least, not for life married to Hedda. Intellectual love is all there is. And this takes a strange turn, away from his preliminary quaint subfield of cultural anthropology, to his appropriation of his late antagonist’s piecemeal notes for the putative new book which, if his judgement is correct, will bring him more academic honors than his own book would have. Furthermore, the turn brings a new companion.

Now for the eliminated parts of the structure.

Eilert’s apathy is broad, extending from the Elvsted children to the public reading his first book - “a book that everyone could agree with” even though “there’s very little to it”. He must hate his present life, because he wants to build up his “position again, and try to make a fresh start”. His love for his writing didn’t extend to Thea, who helped him, sadly in the expectation of more than comradeship.

Brack's apathy is even broader, including those into whose life he has intruded and those he hasn't. By inference he hates only those who won't let him intrude. And by inference he loves only himself.

Part B

Complementary to the apathy love hate triangle is the apathetic constructive destructive triangle.

