

Now You See Her, Now You Don't?

Emma Gad and Modern Drama

◇Lynn R. Wilkinson*

Emma Gad's plays are mostly invisible today, unlike their author, who is remembered, not always with good will, as the author of the classic Danish etiquette book, *Takt og Tone* [*Tact and Good Manners*], first published in 1918, but still in print. In fact, the etiquette book is probably one of the reasons few people read her plays these days, for many editions feature as their frontispiece a photograph of Gad, three years before her death, as a heavyset older woman who looks out at the world with the forbidding gaze of a disapproving Victorian grandmother. But Gad and her texts bear little resemblance to the photograph.

Born in 1852 in Copenhagen, where she lived for almost all her life, Gad was the author of twenty-five plays, as well as several adaptations and translations, performed between 1886 and 1916, in theaters throughout Denmark, in Stockholm, and occasionally elsewhere. She enjoyed



Emma Gad, ca. 1918. Det Kgl. Biblioteks billedsamling, Billedsamlingen. Danske portrætter, 4^o, Gad, Emma (1852-1921). <<https://digitalesamlinger.kb.dk/images/billed/2010/okt/billeder/object43735/da/>>.

◇ Lynn R. Wilkinson, University of Texas at Austin.

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her greatest successes in Copenhagen, however, where audiences loved her wit, sparkling dialogue, and satirical representation of upper-class life in the capital. Gad was also the author of many articles in newspapers and magazines; the editor of the women's pages in the progressive Copenhagen daily newspaper *Politiken*; the principal organizer of the Women's Exhibition of 1895 in Copenhagen; a member or chair of many women's committees and professional organizations; the gracious and open-minded hostess of a salon that gathered together many of Copenhagen's notables; the mother of the pioneering filmmaker Urban Gad, with whom she occasionally collaborated; and, finally, the author of *Takt og Tone*.

Emma Gad was an important presence in Danish and Scandinavian culture during the decades surrounding 1900, and many aspects of her work deserve studies that situate them in this context. I chose to write a book on her work in the theater, however, because I believe that her plays are important contributions not only to Danish literary and theatrical history but also to the development of European drama at the turn of the twentieth century, as well as to film culture since then. They are remarkable, moreover, because they take up controversial issues and often treat them with a light hand in ways that appealed to distinct factions in her audiences. Gad's plays remind us that comedy and laughter can bring together people with diverse views, enabling them to laugh at themselves, as well as one another.

Not all of Gad's plays were comedies. *Gadens Børn* [*The Children of the Streets*] (1903), for example, portrays the plight of a young orphan who wants to become a singer, or at least find honest work, but fails at both and ends up as a prostitute. But most were, and many of them take up subjects that would seem more at home in one of the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen's social dramas: tainted money, the joylessness of many aspects of late nineteenth-century culture, gender roles that are at odds with human needs, religion and hypocrisy, and unsatisfactory marriages.

Her most famous play, *Et Sølvbryllup* [*A Silver Wedding Anniversary*] (1890), addresses issues that figured prominently in the so-called morality debate, the "*sædelighedsfejden*" or "*sedlighetsdebatten*", that preoccupied Scandinavian intellectuals in the 1880s.¹ Responding to Ibsen's



Emma Gad by photographer Julie Laurberg (between 1895 and 1907), published in *Billedsamlingen. Danske portrætter*, 2°, Gad, Emma (1852-1921), Det Kgl. Biblioteks billedsamling. <<https://digitalessamlinger.kb.dk/images/billed/2010/okt/billeder/object43749/da/>>.

¹ On the debate, see Elias Bredsdorff's pioneering survey (Bredsdorff 1973). More recently, David Gedin (2004) has argued that the debate, which initially engaged

*Gengangere*² [*Ghosts*] (1881), in which a wife characterizes her dead husband as a “fallen man,” and his fellow Norwegian Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson’s *En hanske*³ [*A Gauntlet*] (1883), in which a young woman refuses to marry a man who is sexually experienced, they called into question the sexual double standard, as well as the nature of sexuality and its relationship to morality. Should men and women both abstain from sex outside marriage, as Bjørnson’s play seemed to argue? Or should freedom for both sexes be the rule? *Et Sølvbryllup* portrays the situation in an upper-middle-class home after a husband spends the night on the town on the eve of his silver wedding anniversary. His wife is upset, and her unmarried sister, a dogmatic spinster with feminist views, urges her to leave her husband, who, in turn, offers a series of increasingly implausible lies about where he has been. In the end, however, the wife, suitably named Konstance, resolves not to leave her husband but instead to offer him a more comfortable and amusing life at home. Earlier in the play, during a quarrel, she asks a question that Ibsen’s Mrs. Alving might have wished she had asked her husband: “Do you call life together with your wife a pleasure?” (“*Kalder Du Samlivet med din Hustru for en Fornøjelse?*” (Gad 1890:180)). At the end of the play, the answer seems to be a resounding “Yes! It should be!”

Et Sølvbryllup seems to have pleased just about everyone, including both sides of the morality debate. It gave Emma Gad the reputation of a woman and playwright who was critical of late nineteenth-century feminism, a mask that allowed her to write plays in which women characters affirm their right to sexual freedom, to work outside the home, and to bear and raise children outside marriage.

Like the work of Ibsen and the Swedish playwright August Strindberg, then, Gad’s plays were an integral part of the cultural and political debate in Scandinavia during the decades surrounding 1900, a debate largely set off by the work of the Danish intellectual Georg Brandes, especially his famous lecture at the University of Copenhagen on November 3, 1871, in which he called for a new literature that addressed social and political issues and also transformed the conventions of everyday life, making it possible for individuals to live out their desires instead of denying them in the name of religious or political authority. The debates and the literature that Brandes helped spark have come to be called the Modern Breakthrough, a designation that may also have originated in the title of one of his books: *Det Moderne Gjennembruds Mænd* [*The men of the Modern Breakthrough*] (1883). By the time of its publication, Brandes had come to see the work of cultural renewal

women, served in the long run to silence them. Both writers present the debate as a phenomenon coupled above all to the politically charged and cosmopolitan culture of the 1880s in Scandinavia.

² *Les Revenants*, in French.

³ Translated into French by Corinne François-Denève as *Le Gant* (2023), Paris, Avant-Scène.

as increasingly a masculine affair, and he was often condescending or worse to women writers. Perhaps uniquely, however, Emma Gad remained on good terms with Georg Brandes, as well as his brother Edvard, a playwright and critic, throughout their lives. Georg attended the premieres of her plays and was a regular visitor to the salon she hosted in her apartment in Copenhagen, and Edvard advised her on playwriting and reviewed her plays positively and at length in *Politiken*, the newspaper the Brandes brothers founded in 1886.

Gad's civility and tact were reflected in many aspects of her work, including her plays. Thus, while it may at first seem odd that the most successful woman playwright in Scandinavia between 1886 and 1916 was also the author of a well-known etiquette book, manners and conventions were among Gad's ongoing interests. She published two little etiquette books in 1886, and her plays often refer to social conventions.⁴ But her interest in manners also reflects Georg Brandes's call for a thoroughgoing cultural renewal that would entail changing not only laws but also the conventions governing everyday life in ways that would free individuals to act according to their desires, rather than resigning themselves to inaction, despair, and reactionary political views. Like Georg Brandes, Gad often questioned conventions. But in her work, etiquette and conventions also foster civility in social and public life.

Gad's plays are also formally innovative. She knew how to juxtapose elements of farce and serious drama to bring into focus not only the absurdity of a situation but also the moral issues at stake. Like many late nineteenth-century playwrights, she produced works of varying lengths: her plays range from one to five acts. Her one-act plays, a genre that figured prominently in the avant-garde theater of the 1890s and early 1900s, are particularly interesting, sometimes presenting striking parallels to Symbolist literature at home and abroad, reflecting on the power of language and conversation to change ideas and lives, or pointing forward to performances in other media, such as radio and film. Gad's career in the theater overlaps with the emergence of film in Denmark and elsewhere in the 1890s and early 1900s. Her son Urban Gad's first film, the celebrated *Afgrunden* [*The Abyss*] (1910), not only starred Asta Nielsen, who had been one of Emma Gad's protégées, but also presents parallels to some of Gad's plays, most notably her early *Et Aftenbesøg* [*An Evening Visit*]

⁴ The first was *Man skal aldrig—Oversigt over de almindeligste Fejl og Misgreb i Omgang og Spog. Frit efter den engelske "Don't"* ("One should never—a survey over the most common errors and missteps in manners and speech. Freely after the English "Don't"; 1886). This was based on a series of texts published by the American Oliver Bell Bunce. The second was a parody of Gad's own *Man skal aldrig*, as well as the kind of etiquette book Bunce's forbidding title suggests. It was called *Man skal altid—Oversigt over de almindeligste Selfølgeligheder i Omgang og Sprøg. Frit efter den danske "Man Skal Aldrig"* ("One should always—An overview of the most common obvious things in society and language: Freely after the Danish "One Should Never"). On these early works, as well as *Takt og Tone*, see Chapter 2 of Wilkinson 2020.

(1886) and *Gadens Børn* [*The Children of the Street*] (1903), as well as the play on which Urban and Emma Gad had collaborated, *Fruens Politik* [*The Wife's Politics*] (1909). That play also starred Asta Nielsen in the role of a young woman who frequents artists and other cultural bohemians. Emma Gad also left one manuscript, "*Orientalta*," designated as a "pantomime" but possibly the scenario for a silent film.⁵

More generally, several of her plays are also important forerunners of a genre that would figure prominently in Hollywood films of the 1930s and 1940s, which Stanley Cavell has called "the Hollywood comedy of remarriage." In these films, couples played by actors such as Cary Grant, Spencer Tracy, Katherine Hepburn and Irene Dunne must renegotiate their relationships in response to changing gender roles and mores in early twentieth-century America. Cavell argues that the genre emerges from the first-wave feminism of the last decades of the nineteenth century. Ibsen's *Et Dukkehjem*⁶ [*A Doll's House*], he writes, is an important dramatic precedent, even though it is not a comedy. Cavell writes:

A Doll's House is a structure in which an apparently orderly life shatters into fragments which assemble with raging velocity an argument concerning the concepts of forgiveness, inhabitation, conversation, happiness, playtime, becoming human, fathers and husbands, brother and sister, education, scandal, fitness for teaching, honor, becoming strangers, the miracle of change, and the metaphysics of marriage. The argument of a comedy of remarriage requires, with others, each of these concepts. In *A Doll's House* a woman climactically discovers that her eminently legal marriage is not comprehensible as a marriage, and therefore, before her own conscience, that she is dishonored. She demands an education and leaves to seek one that she says her husband is not the man to provide. They could find a life together (and so perhaps find or create marriage between them) only on the condition that a miracle of change take place. I have described the genre of remarriage in effect as undertaking to show how the miracle of change may be brought about and hence life together between a pair seeking divorce become a marriage. *A Doll's House* thus establishes a problematic to which the genre of remarriage constitutes a particular direction of response, for which it establishes the conditions or costs of a solution. (Cavell 1981: 22-23)

Ibsen's *A Doll's House* was certainly an important play for women in late nineteenth-century Europe. When Nora walks out of the household at the end of the play and slams the door, the sound, it is often said, resounded throughout Europe, prompting many women to imagine lives for themselves

⁵ Julie Allen's *Icons of Danish Modernity: Georg Brandes and Asta Nielsen* (2012) focuses on two of the frequent guests at Gad's gatherings in the early twentieth century, Asta Nielsen and Georg Brandes, emphasizing the contributions of both to Danish culture and identity. For works in Danish on Nielsen's life, see Nielsen 1966); and Malmkjær 2000).

⁶ *Une maison de poupée*, in French.

outside conventional marriages. It also prompted some of them to imagine lives for themselves as writers. One survey of women's writing in Scandinavia at this time, Margareta Wirmark's *Noras Systrar* [*Nora's Sisters*] (2000), emphasizes the connection. Moreover, some women, most notably Elizabeth Robins, an American who lived primarily in England and worked as an actress before turning to writing, were prompted to imagine different styles of acting onstage, as well as playwriting.⁷

As a play that both contributes to the so-called morality debate and represents the reconciliation of a husband and wife in the face of challenges to traditional notions of marriage and gender roles, Emma Gad's *Et Sølvbryllup* is a quintessential comedy of remarriage within the limits of the genre as defined by Cavell. Subsequent plays by Gad also develop the genre. *Den mystiske Arv* [*The Mysterious Inheritance*] (1906), sometimes characterized as a pendant to *Et Sølvbryllup*, represents a household in which the wife has been unfaithful but manages nevertheless to preserve her marriage. And *Ægtestand* [*Marriage*] (1913) is a short three-act play that depicts a divorced couple who are reunited thanks to the skillful maneuvering of their wealthy relative, Mrs. Ulysses Patterson, who drops in for a visit from America. All of these plays would make excellent film scenarios. *Ægtestand* even makes an explicit connection to the United States.

One of the central concerns of Cavell's *Pursuits of Happiness*, as well as his work as a whole, is the role of language and language games in individuals' attempts to understand and communicate with one another. His model asks us to take a closer look at Gad's witticisms and the conversations in her play *Fælles Sag* [*Common Cause*] (1889). Significantly, one of her characters distinguishes between merely conversing and talking about what matters. The factory owner in *Fælles Sag*, Faber, tells his daughter:

Yes, of course—we have chatted and made conversation—one always can. But what I call talking to each other, allowing one's thoughts to come to one's lips from one's soul without reservation, because one knows that one is heard with sympathy, we haven't talked to each other in that way for a very long time; and if one can't do that, love dries up.⁸

⁷ The American actress and playwright Elizabeth Robins not only played the leads in Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* and *The Master Builder* but also wrote plays herself and argued in *Ibsen and the Actress* (1928) that Ibsen was the first playwright to write plays that enabled actors to create the characters they played. See also Cima 1993, esp.: 20-59; and Christian (2016).

⁸ "Ja, det forstaar sig—vi har passiaeret og konverseret—det kan man jo altid. Men det, jeg kalder at tale sammen, at lade sine Tanker lige fra Sjælen strømme En paa Læben uden Forbehold, fordi man ved, man bliver hørt paa med Sympathi, saaden har vi ikke talt sammen i lange Tider; og kan man ikke det, saa tørrer Kærligheden bort" (All translations: Lynn Wilkinson) (Gad 1889: 90).

The distinction echoes Nora's famous complaint that she and her husband had never really talked to each other. But issues related to languages and genuine communication run like a red thread through Gad's dramatic production. In some plays, characters' pretensions to speak foreign languages and inability to do so point up social aspirations that have no basis in the real world. In others, foreigners who speak Danish poorly nevertheless have a much better understanding of practical matters than native Danes do. Often, as in Sigmund Freud's discussion of jokes, witticisms and linguistic gaffes point to the material basis—or lack thereof—of characters' words. In fact, the title of one Gad play, *Det forløsende Ord* [*The Magic Word*] (1900), points up one function of language: to release us from our fixed ideas and obsessions. In this very short play, significantly enough published and performed the same year as Freud's *Traumdeutung* [*The Interpretation of Dreams*]⁹, a conversation with her father's fiancée enables a young woman to overcome her fixation on her father and to see that she has a younger suitor who genuinely loves her. Could it be that Gad's dialogue, like the conversation in *Det forløsende Ord*, works to undermine our obsessions and release us from at least some of our fixed ideas?

Certainly, like most comedies, Gad's works often poke fun at the pretensions and excesses of some characters. They free us from an excessive adherence to rules and the letter of the law, from a rigidity that separates us from other people and from interactions that might prove fertile in many senses of the word. It is sometimes said that comedy, like festivals of misrule in which overlords and servants change places for a day, is a conservative genre because comedies often end with marriages that return characters to the world of law and order, often after a series of antics in the wild. According to this view, Gad and her play *Et Sølvbryllup* are both conservative and antifeminist because the wife, Konstance, rejects the advice of her shrill and dogmatic sister, Frøken Knudsgaard, and elects to stay with her husband. But if one juxtaposes *Et Sølvbryllup* to *Den mystiske Arv*, one sees that marriage has afforded both wives a freedom and comfort they would scarcely have enjoyed outside the institution. In the second play, it is the wife who dallies but who is able to play her role so well that her husband accepts the child she has borne by her lover. Another play, *Rørt Vande* [*Troubled Waters*] (1895), is even more explicit on the subject. An older married woman tells a younger one, who is thinking of having an affair with a married man, that she should insist on marriage, because outside of marriage women have few or no rights, while the institution affords women considerable freedom to do as they please (Gad 1895, 10).

Because so many of Gad's plays are comedies, they have often been dismissed as popular entertainments, hence second-rate and not worth reading or staging. In fact, few people seem to have read them since her death in 1921. The exceptions are feminist scholars who have focused on the literary production

⁹ *L'interprétation des rêves* in French.

of women in Scandinavia during the decades surrounding 1900. Pil Dahlerup's *Det Moderne Gennembruds kvinder* [*The Women of the Modern Breakthrough*] (1983) included Gad among the title's "Women of the Modern Breakthrough", considering her plays in the context of the roles that Danish women writers chose to invent or replay during her lifetime.¹⁰ For Dahlerup, Gad was the quintessential lady of the house, the wife and mother concerned with the smooth running and preservation of the household. Her pages on Gad argue that the apparent conservatism of the endings of these plays is undermined by minor characters and other details in the plays, which highlight the many cracks in patriarchy. In contrast, Bjarne Kildegaard's *Fru Emma Gad* (1984) is an ethnographic study that considers Gad's interest in the home and domestic interiors as an example of the so-called fringe style of the late nineteenth century, the so-called Danish "*Klunketiden*", which featured cluttered and carpeted interiors during the years Americans sometimes refer to as the Gilded Age. In two recent histories of Danish literature, *Dansk litteraturhistorie* and *Dansk litteraturs historie*, Lise Busk-Jensen (1984 and 2009) has situated Gad in the context of the Gay Nineties in Copenhagen and identified her as a quintessential bourgeoisie who wrote popular entertainments. Also in *Dansk litteraturhistorie* Anne Birgitte Richard (2000) notes Gad's importance for the history of women's education in Denmark. *Nordisk kvinnolitteraturhistoria* [*Nordic history of literature by women*] does not give Gad a section of her own (in contrast to Minna Canth, Stella Kleve, Frida Stéenhoff, Ellen Key, and Victoria Benedictsson), but Inger-Lise Hjordt-Vetlesen and Birgit Mortensen (1993) include some perceptive pages on her in a chapter on Copenhagen at the end of the nineteenth century. Beth Juncker (1980), Mette Winge (2005), and the writers who have contributed to encyclopedias and biographical dictionaries have also offered valuable overviews of her work and its contexts. More recently, Winge and John Chr. Jørgensen (2013) have begun to look at Gad's journalism and contribution to debates about education and literacy. Oddly enough, none of these studies has attempted to situate Gad's plays in the context of European theater at the turn of the twentieth century.

In some ways, this is not surprising. Until recently, Ibsen's early social dramas, especially *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts*, dominated discussion of the emergence of so-called modern drama in the 1880s and 1890s. Accordingly, critics and historians emphasized plays and playwrights whose focus was realistic or at least somber. It is a perspective that tends to marginalize the comedies of George Bernard Shaw, despite his political engagement, admiration of Ibsen, and extensive work as a journalist and critic, as well as Oscar Wilde. Other playwrights, such as Strindberg, also never really fit the mold. Recently, however, this model has been superseded by a concern with the relationship of

¹⁰ See Dahlerup 1983: 439-470. The section on Gad is included in a chapter called "*Hustruerne*" [*The Wives*] that also discusses Axelline Lund. See also Dahlerup 1982.

Ibsen, Strindberg, and other playwrights of this time to European modernism across the genres. As Toril Moi points out in her *Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism* (2006), critics and historians have designated the work of certain writers and artists as distilling the concerns and formal experimentation of the aesthetic movement we often call modernism. Thus, in France, Gustave Flaubert, Charles Baudelaire and Édouard Manet all produced work that heralded a new style and set of concerns in the novel, poetry, and painting, respectively. For Moi, Ibsen represents such a figure in European drama: he is the founder of modernist, rather than modern, drama. Drawing on the work of Cavell, as well as Pierre Bourdieu, Moi also highlights the importance of language games in Ibsen's social dramas. Her chapter on Ibsen's lone comedy, *Kærlighedens Komedie* [*Love's Comedy*] (1862), however, emphasizes a young woman's wise rejection of a poet who can offer only rhetoric in favor of a more prosaic suitor who is willing to marry her and able to provide for her and her children.

Emma Gad's Danishness also stands in the way of her recognition as an important playwright. Neither she nor her plays traveled much outside Scandinavia during her lifetime. A translation of one, *Aabent Visir* [*Raised visor*] (1898), was licensed to Emil Jonas in Germany. Another, *Et Forspil* [*A Prelude*] (1894) was translated into French by the Vicomte de Colleville and Fritz de Zépelin as *Préludes*, performed once or twice in Paris, and published in the *Revue d'art dramatique*.¹¹ Several were staged with considerable success in Sweden, although I have not found any published versions of these Swedish productions. By far the overwhelming majority of the productions of her plays took place in Denmark, especially in Copenhagen. The wife of a naval officer who eventually became a rear admiral, Gad was a well-known presence in social and philanthropic circles in Copenhagen. Accordingly, many believed that the dialogue of her plays captures the speech of these milieus. She was, in other words, at least as much a Copenhagen as a Danish playwright.

It is true that theatrical productions are ephemeral and that plays often travel badly, if at all, if they are not published or translated. But nineteenth-century Danish drama is unusually insular. As Frederick J. and Lise-Lone Marker (1996) have shown, Danish theater of the nineteenth century has a remarkably rich performance tradition. In the first part of the century, it was distinguished above all by the Romantic plays of J. L. Heiberg and the performances of his wife, the actress Johanne Luise Heiberg. Hans Christian Andersen was also the author of some notable plays, including one about the fortunes of a mulatto character, although these plays are almost entirely unknown outside Denmark.¹² During the last decades of the century, Copenhagen also hosted some of the most important productions of Ibsen—

¹¹ Emma Gad, "Préludes," trans. Vicomte de Colleville and Fritz de Zépelin, pts. 1 and 2, *Revue d'art dramatique*, n.s., 1, n° 7 (May 1897): 490-507; n° 8 (June 1897): 584-597.

¹² On Andersen's theater, see Frederick J. Marker (1971).

most notably *A Doll's House* with the actress Betty Hennings in the title role—as well as plays by other Scandinavian playwrights, such as Bjørnson, Strindberg, and Anne Charlotte Leffler. But perhaps because of the nationalist focus of Heiberg's plays, Danes seem to regard their theater above all as a local affair, tied inexorably to Denmark or even a city or region, such as Copenhagen or Jutland.

Film is quite another matter. Danish silent films were marketed effectively throughout Europe and beyond from about 1906, when Nordisk Film was founded, to the outbreak of World War I, which made it far more difficult for any kind of aesthetic commodities to travel. I have not found any cinematic adaptations of Gad's plays, but through the work of her son Urban Gad and through her contributions to the genre of the comedy of remarriage, her work enters into a dialogue with the international film culture of the twentieth century.

It should also enter into dialogue with the plays of Ibsen and other playwrights of her time whose plays are often revived. Gad's short plays are as innovative as those of Strindberg and other fin-de-siècle playwrights. Her views on parenthood might serve to counterbalance the shrill views represented in Strindberg's *Fadren*¹³ [*The Father*] (1887-1890). And many of her plays suggest that some of the tragic individualistic conflicts in Ibsen's plays might find collective solutions, or at least solutions that take solitary characters out of themselves.

Finally, Gad's gender has made it difficult for many theatrical historians to understand or accept her work as part of the theatrical canon. Hers is the common fate of almost every woman playwright in the West. Like Gad, many women wrote plays that enjoyed considerable critical and popular success while they were alive—but were subsequently dismissed as insignificant after their deaths. One thinks, for example, of the plays of Aphra Behn or Joanna Baillie in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England. Closer to home, the Swedish writer and playwright Anne-Charlotte Leffler, several of whose plays served as models for Gad's work, enjoyed considerable success in Sweden, Denmark, and elsewhere, much to the consternation of Strindberg. In the wake of second-wave feminism, the studies of feminist literary and theatrical historians have attempted to revive interest in the theatrical works of many women playwrights and to resituate their plays in the context of a history constructed entirely around the works of male playwrights. These scholars have been moderately successful in Sweden, where there have been recent productions of plays by Leffler, Benedictsson, and Alfild Agrell, among others. Danish theater still awaits the revival of plays by Gad and other Danish women of her time.

As one of the most productive, successful, and talented playwrights in European drama of the decades surrounding 1900, Emma Gad deserves far

¹³ *Le Père*, or *Père*, in French.

more attention than she has received—both onstage and off. Gad was a skillful playwright with wide-ranging intellectual and cultural interests. She was also very funny, as audiences of her day recognized. Some also understood her gift for addressing diverse points of view, both during the difficult years of the Scandinavian morality debate and afterward. New performances might not only amuse us and help us better understand the decades surrounding 1900 but also help us recognize the possibility that drama and the theater can contribute to civility in public discourse.

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