

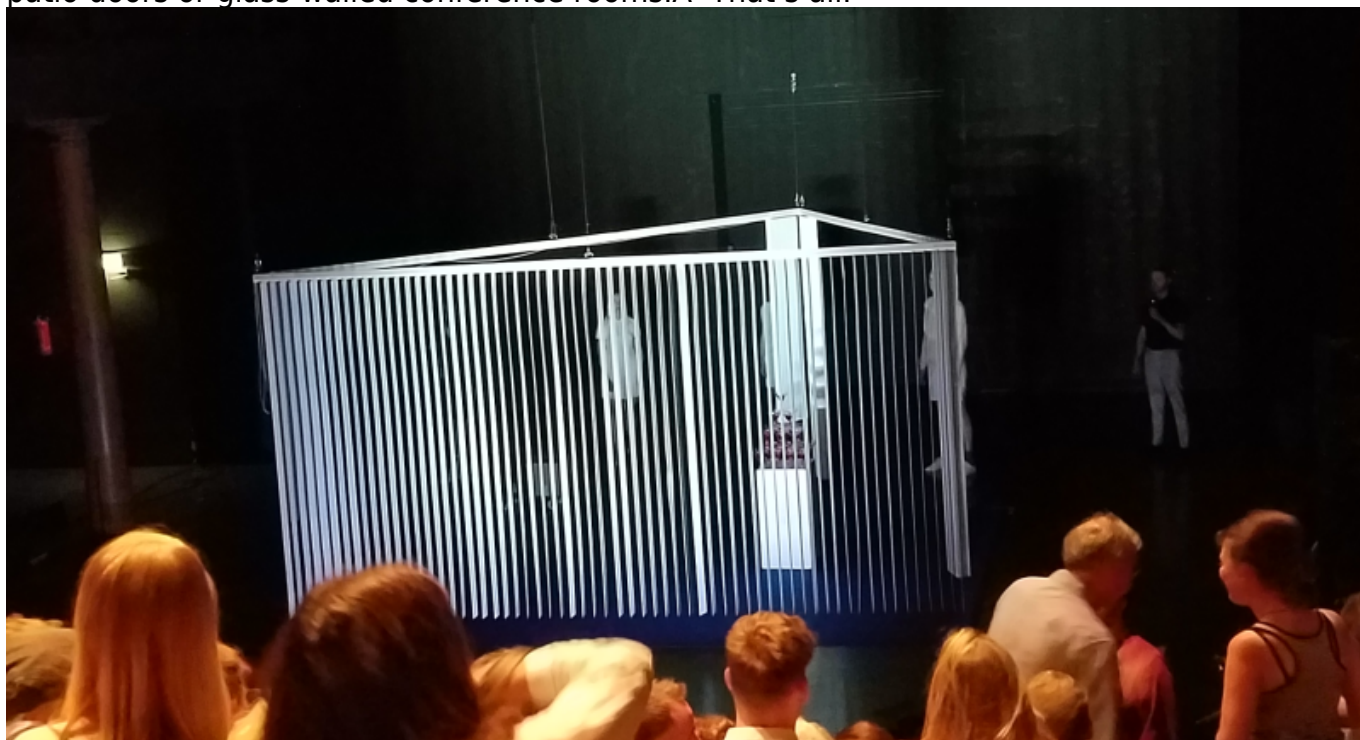
Pawn loves a good drama, especially something new and edgy, and if it's got a dark and funny aspect as well, more the better. No, this is not another Brexit article. That's tonight's performance of *Hedda* in spades!

Director Loek de Bakker has collaborated with fellow script writer Belle van Heerikhuizen and scenographers Studio Dennis Vanderbroeck to present a taut and suffocating take on Ibsen's classic drama.

The original *Hedda Gabler*, along with Ibsen's similar pieces, particularly *Doll's House*, are the very first "Modern" theatre productions, in that they had fully realized three-dimensional sets, not simply flats and drops. The script begins with a description of the single set, and tonight this was read aloud by the actress playing Hedda:

A spacious, handsome, and tastefully furnished drawing room, decorated in dark colours. In the back, a wide doorway with curtains drawn back, leading into a smaller room decorated in the same style as the drawing-room. In the right-hand wall of the front room, a folding door leading out to the hall. In the opposite wall, on the left, a glass door, also with curtains drawn back. Through the panes can be seen part of a verandah outside, and trees covered with autumn foliage. An oval table, with a cover on it, and surrounded by chairs, stands well forward...

Vanderbroeck turns this on its head, or perhaps more accurately on its side. The set could barely be simpler than it is. A white triangle, parallel to the stage, hangs 8 feet above it. From this strong horizontal element hang three pairs of "Vertical Blinds" of the kind found on patio doors or glass-walled conference rooms. That's all.



The device is brilliant, absolutely brilliant!! Throughout the play, various characters open and close one or more blinds, making windows, doors, archways. They lurk and listen on the other side, they draw a door and walk through it, or open a window and peer out it, or walk behind a wall and listen at it. They twist the panels from thin slats to opaque panels, sometimes to devastating effect.

The script is another wonder. **Pawn** has bridled at poor cuts of *Hedda Gabler* in the past, but cutting this otherwise 3 hours behemoth is not at all unusual. In this case the story is

modernized, a lot of historical referential cruft is tossed out (along with all minor characters), and along the way a bounty of hidden humor is uncovered, all to great ends.Â The show tonight came in at a tight 75 minutes, which is amazing, given that all of the bones of the story remain.

I would give nods to the performers, but without a cast list, that's hard to do.Â I will say this; there was not a weak performance in the lot.Â Here are the performers, I just cannot tell you who played whom: Sven Bijma, Yela de Koning, Marit Meijeren, David van Uuden and Abel de Vries.

Costumes by David Laport were spot on for a late '60s country club feel, with Hedda in a pale blue shift, Thea in a tight, short tennis outfit, Judge Brack in professorial-looking corduroy, Eilert Lovburg a disheveled mess and Tesman in a pale pink shirt and khaki shorts.

If there is a weak point in this production, that would be the lighting design, uncredited in the only guide I've got.Â The choice was made to use only low sources, mostly from oblique angles, which yields long shadows and poorly lit faces in many scenes.Â While I might be able to be convinced that there were valid artistic reasons for this, I'm at a loss to tell you what those might be.

I hope this production sees more life than just this single performance.Â It's a real gem, and all involved should be very **very** proud.Â I've spent about \$70 for tickets to five shows at ITS Festival 2016, and if this were all I were to see, it would be worth it.Â It's worth the visit here.Â Luckily, given how good *Een Lolita* was earlier today, I have no worry that it need be all there is.