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"The Birth of a Research Animal: Ibsen's The Wild Duck and the Origin of a New Animal Science"

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What role does the wild duck play in Ibsen's famous drama? I argue that, besides mirroring the fate of the human cast members, the duck is acting as animal subject in a quasi-experiment, conducted in a private setting. Analysed from this perspective, the play allows us to discern the epistemological and ethical dimensions of the new scientific animal practice (systematic observation of animal behaviour under artificial conditions) emerging precesely at that time. Ibsen's play stages the clash between a scientific and a romantic understanding of animals that still constitutes the backdrop of most contemporary debates over animals in research. Whereas the scientific understanding reduces the animal's behaviour, as well as its environment, to discrete and modifiable elements, the romantic view regards animals as being at one with (or violently disconnected from) their natural surroundings.
— Text from The White Horse Press website

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